FACTIONS AND FAVORITES AT THE COURTS OF
SULTAN AHMED I (r. 1603-17) AND HIS IMMEDIATE PREDECESSORS

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the changing dynamics of power and patronage relations at the Ottoman sultan’s court in Istanbul between the 1570s and the 1610s. This was a crucial period that many scholars today consider the beginning of a long era of “crisis and transformation” in the dynastic, political, socio-economic, military and administrative structures of the early modern Ottoman Empire. The present study focuses on the politics of factionalism and favoritism at the higher echelons of the Ottoman ruling elite who were situated in and around Topkapı Palace, which served as both the sultan’s royal residence and the seat of his imperial government. It is an effort to shed light on the political problems of this period through the prism of the paramount ruling figure, the sultan, by illustrating how the Ottoman rulers of this era, namely, Murad III (r. 1574-95), Mehmed III (r. 1595-1603) and Ahmed I (r. 1603-17), repositioned themselves in practical politics vis-à-vis alternative foci of power and networks of patronage, and how they projected power in the context of a factional politics that was intertwined with the exigencies of prolonged wars and incessant military rebellions. My main contention is that, under new political circumstances, these three sultans employed new ruling strategies in order to impose their sovereign authority on the business of rule, an end which they achieved, with varying degrees of success, mainly through the mediation of their royal favorites and the court factions led by them.
To Meral
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ......................................................................................................................................... ii

Dedication ...................................................................................................................................... iii

Acknowledgments ....................................................................................................................... iv

Vita ............................................................................................................................................... ix

Table of Contents ....................................................................................................................... xi

Note on Transliteration and Dates ............................................................................................... xiv

Introduction ..................................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1: A Sultan and a Dynasty in Crisis: Sultan Mehmed III and His Short Reign
(1595-1603) ................................................................................................................................... 25

I.1. The Celâli Rebellions and Karayazıçı Abdülhalim ................................................................. 27

I.2. The Long War ......................................................................................................................... 41

I.3. Gazanfer Agha and the Sipahi Revolts of 1600 and 1601 .................................................. 48

I.4. The Sipahi Revolt of 1603 and Grand Vizier Yemişçi Hasan Pasha ..................................... 54

I.5. The Execution of Prince Mahmud and the Fate of His Mother .......................................... 63

I.6. Concluding Remarks: Dynastic Factionalism in Times of Crisis ....................................... 70
Chapter 2: A Young Sultan on the Throne: Ahmed I and his Early Reign ........................................... 77

An Unusual Succession........................................................................................................................................... 77

II.1. Ahmed I’s Accession in Historical Perspective .......................................................................................... 80

II.2. Princely Years and Education ................................................................................................................... 93

II.3. In the Image of a Warrior Sultan: Ahmed I’s Eagerness for War ......................................................... 107

II.3.1. The First Public Appearance as Sultan and a New Element in Ottoman Ceremonies of Accession ........................................................................................................................................... 111

II.3.2. Edirne and Bursa “Campaigns” (1605) .............................................................................................. 115

II.4. The Question of Ahmed’s Regents ............................................................................................................ 125

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................................... 140

Chapter 3: A Court of Factions and Favorites ................................................................................................. 148

Introduction .......................................................................................................................................................... 148

III.1. Sultans’ Agents of Power: A New Ottoman Court Order and the Emergence of Royal Favorites .......................................................................................................................................................... 155

III.2. A Royal Favorite at Work: The Faction of Şemsi Ahmed Pasha vs. the Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha .......................................................................................................................................................... 159

III.3. Doğancı Kara Mehmed Pasha and the Governor-General Incident of 1589

Revisited ............................................................................................................................................................. 172

III.3.1. The Rise of Kara Mehmed Agha ........................................................................................................ 175

III.3.2. The Making of Doğancı Mehmed Pasha ......................................................................................... 181
III.3.3. Murdering a Royal Favorite ................................................................. 190

Concluding Remarks ....................................................................................... 195

Chapter 4: Ahmed I and His Favorites ............................................................... 198

IV.1. A Power-Thirsty Guardian: Derviş Agha .................................................. 199

IV.1.2. The Making of a Brutal Vizier: Derviş Pasha ....................................... 209

IV.1.3. A Minister-Favorite at Work: The Alienating Power of Derviş Pasha ... 221

IV.2. A New Era, 1607-1617: Ahmed I’s Consolidation of His Imperial
Household and His New Sultanic Image .......................................................... 234

IV.3. A Chief Eunuch of Power, Wealth and Patronage: El-Hac Mustafa Agha as
Ahmed’s Royal Favorite Par Excellence ......................................................... 242

Concluding Remarks ....................................................................................... 249

Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 255

Bibliography .................................................................................................... 261
NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND DATES

The basis for the spelling of Ottoman Turkish words in the text is Sir James Redhouse’s *Turkish and English Lexicon* (Istanbul, 1890). Thus *silahdâr* and *musâhib*, but *ulema*. In the footnotes, Ottoman Turkish quotations from unpublished manuscripts are fully transliterated according to the transliteration system of the *Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, with some modifications to make the text more readable. Whenever possible, the Anglicized version of Ottoman Turkish words is used, as in the case of pasha, agha and bey.

For practical purposes, an effort is made to distinguish Ottoman Turkish names from Arabic and Persian ones while diacritical marks are applied minimally -- for instance, Cerrah Mehmed Pasha and Mansur ibn ‘Umar al-Furaykh. I preferred to use the Ottoman Turkish version of certain Arabic terms as they were written in primary sources, such as *vakîf* instead of *waqf*.

All *hijri* dates are converted into Common-Era dates. M., S., RE., R., CE., C., B., Ş., N., L., ZE., Z., are used as abbreviations for the lunar months of the *hijri* calendar starting with Muharram and ending with Dhû’l-Qa‘da.
INTRODUCTION

This dissertation offers an examination of the changing dynamics of power and patronage at the Ottoman imperial court in Istanbul in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It is an attempt to provide new perspectives on the question of how power was wielded within the institutional frameworks of the court between the 1570s and the 1610s. This was a crucial period that many scholars today consider the beginning of a long era of “crisis and change” in the dynastic, political, socio-economic, military and administrative structures of the early modern Ottoman Empire. The present study focuses on the politics of factionalism and favoritism at the higher echelons of the Ottoman ruling elite who were situated in and around Topkapı Palace, which served as both the sultan’s royal residence and the seat of his imperial government. My main objective is to shed light on the political problems of this period through the prism of the paramount ruling figure, the sultan, by illustrating how the Ottoman rulers of this era, namely, Murad III (r. 1574-95), Mehmed III (r. 1595-1603) and Ahmed I (r. 1603-17), repositioned themselves in practical politics vis-à-vis alternative foci of power and networks of patronage, and how they projected power in the context of a factional politics that was intertwined with the exigencies of prolonged wars and incessant military rebellions. I contend that, under these circumstances, these sultans employed new ruling strategies in order to impose their sovereign authority on the business of rule, an end
which they achieved, with varying degrees of success, mainly through the mediation of their royal favorites and the court factions led by them.

Although scholars of Ottoman history have long been aware of the centrality of the royal court in explaining the dynamics of the pre-modern Ottoman imperial establishment, there has been, surprisingly, very limited academic interest on the topic per se. A number of early twentieth-century scholars of Ottoman institutional history, such as Barnette Miller, İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi and Sedad Hakkı Eldem, made pioneering attempts to describe Topkapı Palace as a functioning court entity, and accordingly provided useful information on the historical evolution of its architectural and administrative structures in the centuries after its founding by Sultan Mehmed II (r. 1451-81). However, these studies typically fell short of offering a systematic analysis based on a critical reading of extensive corpus of primary sources.¹

Particularly since the 1980s, however, several prominent Ottomanists, notably İ. Metin Kunt, Rifa‘at A. Abou-el-Haj, Cornell H. Fleischer, Gülru Necipoğlu, Halil İnalcık, Leslie Peirce, Rhoads Murphey and Baki Tezcan, have offered new perspectives on various features of the early modern Ottoman court. These scholars have explored critical topics such as the historical roots and evolution of Ottoman kingship and its institutional, symbolic and ideological manifestations, court ceremonies and displays of sultanic power, continuity and discontinuity in the administrative structures of the Ottoman state.

apparatus, changes in the composition of the ruling classes, the imperial harem and the political roles played by royal women, imperial household formation, military rebellions that targeted the sultans, and alternative networks of patronage among the Ottoman ruling elite.2 Among their contributions, Necipoğlu’s path-breaking study on the Topkapı Palace has been especially important since she provided the first systematic examination of the complex symbolic language of architecture and ceremonial through which the sultan’s court conveyed its authority during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.3

However, despite this ever-expanding academic literature on the Ottoman court, there has been no in-depth study of the court under any pre-modern sultan.4 By the same token, in contrast to western European historiography, there is as yet no established

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tradition in modern Ottoman historiography of providing detailed and up-to-date biographical studies of sultans, their family members, courtiers and other members of the ruling elite in the early modern period. Indeed, there is virtually no scholarly monograph on any Ottoman sultan that incorporates a thematic discussion of his royal favorites and their roles in court politics during this era.

This dissertation aims to address this gap in Ottoman historiography by bringing the court back into the study of the early modern Ottoman Empire in a manner similar to recent scholarship on the courts of early modern Europe. As John H. Elliott, a prominent historian of the Spanish Habsburg Empire, notes, “the reassessment of the role of the court forms part of a wider reassessment of the character and functioning of the early

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5 For instance, one of the earliest scholarly biographies of a pre-modern Ottoman sultan is Franz Babinger’s monumental study of Mehmed II, which should be, however, read together with Halil İnalcık’s review as he had corrected Babinger on several important points. Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*, trans. Ralph Manheim and ed. with a preface by William C. Hickman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); and Halil İnalcık, “Mehmed the Conqueror (1432-1481) and His Time,” *Speculum* 35/3 (1960), pp. 408-427. In recent years, masterful biographies of the rulers of other pre-modern Islamic empires have appeared, notably Beatrice F. Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Stephen F. Dale, *The Garden of Eight Paradises: Bābur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan and India* (1483-1530) (Leiden: Brill, 2004). For a masterful biography of an early modern European monarch, see Geoffrey Parker, *Philip II*, 4th edition with a new bibliographical essay (Illinois: Open Court, 2002).


modern state.” The present study, informed by this same impetus, focuses on the court of Sultan Ahmed I, contending that a close scrutiny of power and patronage relations among the Ottoman sultan, his favorites and courtiers, the ministers (viziers) of the imperial council, the high-ranking members of the *ulema* (scholar-jurists), and the various court factions is essential to an understanding of the transformation in the Ottoman establishment between the 1550s and the 1650s.

The Ottoman Empire, which was one of the formidable imperial powers during the early modern period, ruling a territory stretching from the outskirts of Vienna to the Indian Ocean and from the northern coasts of the Black Sea to the first cataract of the Nile, underwent a series of interrelated political, economic, social and military transformations in the seventeenth century. Earlier scholars tended to portray this era of “crisis and change” as a period of “decline” or “collapse of the Ottoman world-order (*nizâm-i ‘âlem*).” According to “declinist” scholarship, the central institutions of the Ottoman socio-economic, political and military establishment reached their peak during the long reign of Sultan Süleyman I (r. 1520-66) and subsequently entered a steady process of deterioration or corruption.

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10 For representative examples of “declinist” scholarship in English, see Hamilton A. R. Gibb and Harold
During the reign of Sultan Murad III, so the argument goes, this “decline” began to manifest itself on several fronts: First, the military-administrative system based on grants of land revenue, or *timars*, was displaced by tax farming.\(^{11}\) In addition, a population boom coincided with a wave of inflation, chronic treasury deficits and revenue shortages. Military upheavals that deposed sultans and even resulted in their execution alternated with internal rebellions that paralyzed the provinces. The religious values of the Sunni Ottomans created resistance to adopting innovations in military technology and tactics; as a result, the Ottomans suffered repeated military defeats by their European rivals. Meanwhile, the throne was occupied by “weak” sultans who turned their rule over to imperial women and their palace cliques (the so-called “Sultanate of Women”). All these factors led to popular disaffection, corruption, disorder and chaos. In political-military terms, the period was characterized by the defense of established territories rather than the expansionist policy that had prevailed until the reign of Süleyman I. Hence, the main purpose of Ottoman military campaigns after 1566 was to defend the empire or to restore the *status quo ante*; they did not result in territorial gains. The conquests of the Köprülü viziers in the mid-seventeenth century were regarded as the only exception to this rule.


\(^{11}\) The *timar* was a grant of designated agricultural land revenue with an annual value between 3,000 and 20,000 *akçe*, made to a *sipahi* (cavalry soldier) in return for military and local policing services.
Against this negative depiction of the post-Süleymanic era, a new generation of historians has, in the last thirty years, challenged the “decline” paradigm for failing to grasp the Ottomans’ ability to transform and thus sustain their imperial system in an age of global crisis.\(^{12}\) Currently, an increasing number of scholars of the Ottoman Empire prefer to use “transformation” and “crisis and change” in their evaluation of the post-Süleymanic period because these terms, in Suraiya Faroqhi’s words, encompass “the variety of divergent trends and [do] not imply that any deviation from the standard of an idealized ‘Süleymanic age’ is equivalent to deterioration.”\(^{13}\) At the same time, these scholars advocate a new periodization of Ottoman history that allows for a more critical understanding of the changes in the Ottoman imperial system. Rather than conceptualizing the Süleymanic period as the “golden age,” this revisionist periodization emphasizes, in Jane Hathaway’s words, “that a massive empire that lasted for over six centuries cannot have had an ideal moment and an ideal permutation by which the entire chronological span of the empire can be judged.”\(^{14}\)

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The first group of revisionist scholars pointed out that “declinist” historiography and its widely accepted narrative of the degeneration of early modern Ottoman political institutions have relied far too much on an uncritical reading of a few archival and narrative sources.15 Thus, they criticized earlier scholars for glossing over the complexities of Ottoman society and of the Ottoman imperial establishment during these turbulent times and for perpetuating contemporary political writers’ biased views on the causes of the troubles that plagued the Ottoman Empire, as well as for putting too much emphasis on the deficiency of Ottoman military power against the empire’s European rivals. Another major criticism directed against traditional scholarship was that it perceived the Ottoman Empire as bearing no institutional resemblance to other pre-modern empires. The revisionist scholars have been developing new critical, comparative and sometimes conflicting frameworks of analysis that better explain the transformations undergone by the early modern Ottoman Empire. These include class conflict, state-society relations, the politics of household formation, privatization, monetarization, limited monarchy and even climate change.16


This paradigmatic shift in Ottoman studies owes much to the opening of the Ottoman state archives in the mid-1980s to the international scholarly community, and to the growing number of specialists bringing new research agendas to bear on this archival material, often inspired by current trends in other fields of historical study. Since the 1990s, an expanding literature has been unearthing data that refute the paradigms of “stagnation,” “degeneration,” and “decline” once advanced to explain developments in the Ottoman imperial system after 1580.17 For instance, Linda Darling has demonstrated that the expansion of tax farming actually enabled the Ottoman imperial government to use its agricultural and financial resources more effectively, particularly when prolonged wars required more and more cash to sustain large armies in the field.18

Likewise, on the question of Ottoman military decline, Gábor Ágoston’s research has demonstrated that during the seventeenth century, the Ottomans both updated their artillery technology and maintained self-sufficiency in raw materials and ammunition for their ordnance, allowing diffusion of military expertise between the Ottoman Empire and Europe to continue.19 Caroline Finkel and Rhoads Murphey have demonstrated that well-
developed logistics and (human and non-human) resource management made the Ottomans effective in projecting power, waging war and adopting the latest technology and tactics.\(^2^0\) Most scholars of Ottoman warfare now emphasize that the relative waning of Ottoman military power beginning in the 1680s resulted mainly from deteriorating logistical capability and military self-sufficiency during the long, multi-front wars that resulted from new patterns of diplomacy among the European powers.\(^2^1\)

Against the other notorious “decline” theme, the so-called “Sultanate of Women,” Leslie Peirce’s study of the Ottoman imperial harem has shown that the increased influence of royal women, especially the queen mother and the favorite concubine (haseki), by the late sixteenth century, was directly related to significant changes in the organization of the sultan’s household, as well as in the principles that defined the Ottoman dynastic system, between the reigns of Süleyman I and Murad III. Against the sexist vilification of these royal women as usurpers of political power, Peirce analyzes their new political roles over time, especially with respect to the critical issues of perpetuating the Ottoman dynasty, preserving the political order centered on the sultan

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and crown princes, and sustaining a powerful image of the House of Osman.\textsuperscript{22} More recently, Rhoads Murphey has explored the mechanisms of Ottoman kingship in what he calls the “‘high imperial age’ of 1480 to 1820, which constitutes the period when Ottoman traditions of sovereignty were formulated, elaborated and implemented as expressions of a unified and cohesive system of rule and political control.”\textsuperscript{23}

In short, this “new historiography” has succeeded in coming up with alternative frameworks in its approach to different problems in early modern Ottoman history, and has significantly advanced our understanding of archival and narrative materials while relocating the Ottoman Empire among its early modern imperial counterparts.\textsuperscript{24} However, neither the revisionist debate on the question of Ottoman decline nor the fast-growing literature on the Ottoman seventeenth-century crisis has attained the comprehensiveness, or the explanatory power, to fully replace the old “declinist” scholarship.\textsuperscript{25} In other words, there are still several crucial gaps in our perceptions of this period of crisis and change.

\textsuperscript{22} Peirce, \textit{The Imperial Harem}.

\textsuperscript{23} Murphey, \textit{Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty}, at p. 5.


\textsuperscript{25} For further discussion of recent accomplishments and desiderata in early modern Ottoman historiography, see Leslie Peirce, “Changing Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire,” and Jane Hathaway,
In particular, a key component of the decline paradigm, the stereotype of the “weak sultan” -- a young, inexperienced, and sometimes mentally challenged ruler who rarely leaves the palace and never leads armies -- has not yet been convincingly challenged. This dissertation seeks to recast the early seventeenth-century Ottoman royal court in the same way that post-“declinist” historians have recast the Ottoman imperial polity, economy and military. I argue that the sultan’s court weathered a period of crisis, marked by fear for the dynasty’s survival and a series of underage sultans who died in their twenties, not by retreating into passivity but by employing a new *modus operandi*.

Sultan Ahmed I’s reign was in several respects a watershed in this period of crisis and change. He acceded to the Ottoman throne in 1603 at the age of thirteen, upon the sudden death of his father, Mehmed III. Except for the short first reign of Mehmed II (r. 1444-46) some 150 years before, the Ottomans had never had such a young and inexperienced ruler, although several other underage sultans would take the throne before 1650. Ahmed was, furthermore, the first Ottoman sultan to come to the throne from within Topkapı Palace.

During the reigns of Selim II (r. 1566-74) and Murad III, the eldest prince of the royal family had typically held a provincial governorship before acceding to the throne.


26 At their accession to the Ottoman throne, Ahmed’s two sons, Osman II (r. 1618-22) and Murad IV (1623-40), were fourteenth and eleven years old, respectively, while his grandson, Mehmed IV (r. 1648-87), was only seven years old.
However, Ahmed I’s father was the last sultan in Ottoman history to serve as a provincial
governor so as to acquire training in practical politics and to establish his own retinue that
would form the nucleus of his government when he became sultan.27 When Mehmed III
died, Ahmed, by then his eldest son, took the throne with no opposition, but he had no
experience of statecraft and lacked a loyal princely retinue that could fill crucial
administrative posts. In fact, what differentiates Ahmed I’s reign from those of earlier
sultans is that the power struggles within the Ottoman polity had shifted from a larger
setting, which had included the provincial princely households, to the narrower domain of
Topkapı Palace and Istanbul.

Moreover, Ahmed was the first Ottoman ruler to assume the throne childless and
in questionable health. At the time, the only other male member of the dynasty, his
younger brother Prince Mustafa (the future Mustafa I, r. 1617-8; 1622-3) was barely four
years old. Though this reality is not yet recognized by the established historiography, the
House of Osman had never before faced such a serious threat of genealogical extinction.
Although Ahmed quickly demonstrated his ability to father children, the problem of
dynastic continuity remained a major concern for the dynasty for many years to come.

Ahmed inherited an empire that had been at war for nearly twenty years with the
Habsburg Empire in the West and the Shiite Safavid Empire of Iran in the East while
facing localized military uprisings in its central lands. The teenaged sultan thus needed

27 İ. Metin Kunt, “Sultan, Dynasty and State in the Ottoman Empire: Political Institutions in the Sixteenth
(Perchance to Return),” in Identity and Identity Formation in the Ottoman World: A Volume of Essays in
Honor of Norman Itzkowitz, eds. Baki Tezcan and Karl K. Barbir (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press,
guidance in the business of rule. Although there was no institutionalized tradition of regency at the Ottoman court, his mother, Handan Sultan, and the royal tutor, Mustafa Efendi, acted as *de facto* regents. These two powerful figures, until their deaths in 1605 and ca. 1608, respectively, were Ahmed’s chief mentors, guiding the inexperienced ruler in selecting and controlling his viziers and military officers. The *de facto* regency as practiced during Ahmed I’s early reign would set a precedent for all other underaged sultans’ reigns in the seventeenth century.

Ahmed’s reign illustrates another crucial development in court politics. Starting in latter part of the long reign of Süleyman I, the Ottoman ruling viziers had accumulated enormous power and wealth, which often imposed certain limitations on the sultan’s authority. In other words, the Ottoman sultans had lost ground to their viziers in the government of their empire, and above all to the grand vizier who, as the deputy of the sultan, assumed the role of the empire’s *de facto* ruler during this period, leading the centralized bureaucracy overseen by his council (*divân*). The empire-wide network of imperial servants (singular, *kul*) became attached to the ruling viziers and their households in the capital city through a complex web of patron-client relationships that came to overshadow the parallel network controlled by the sultan. By the mid-sixteenth century, these viziers, supported by their patronage networks, were practically running the empire while competing with each other for control of administrative posts and financial resources.

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28 See Kunt, *Sultan’s Servants*; and Tezcan, “The Second Empire.”
A similar development can be observed among the members of the Ottoman ulema who held the highest offices in the imperial capital, up to and including that of chief mufti, or şeyhü’l-islâm. As the ultimate decision-makers in religious affairs, these scholar-jurists gained tremendous power and prestige in the course of the sixteenth century while at the same time turning into a sort of nobility with the ability to pass their status on to their sons. By the end of the sixteenth century, several ulema families had established their own alternative networks of clients who connected them to religio-judicial posts and financial resources all over the empire. However, they still had to compete with each other for offices and clients even as rival court factions tried to appoint their own candidates to the top ulema positions. Beginning in the latter part of the sixteenth century, as a result, the top-ranking Ottoman ulema and their families became increasingly involved in the factional struggles at the imperial court. Under these circumstances, the chief mufti became the most influential alternative locus of power in this new imperial order, for his fetvâs (legal opinions) provided the justification for numerous social and economic measures, as well as important political decisions such as punishments and executions.29

These factional struggles also incorporated and shaped the endemic rivalry between the imperial Janissaries and the imperial cavalry soldiers (sipahis), the two main

groups of armed forces in the capital. In the face of prolonged wars and regional rebellions during the period in question, the imperial *sipahi* repeatedly rose in revolt against the sultan, protesting the mismanagement of imperial and military affairs by government viziers while demanding more and more privileges from the sultan, particularly with respect to their involvement in tax collection in various parts of the empire. Since, unlike the Janissaries, the *sipahi* drew their income from land revenues, augmentation of their income through tax collection at a time of rampant inflation and peasant flight was a key concern for them. The six military rebellions in Istanbul during these years (in 1589, 1593, 1595, 1600, 1601 and 1603, to be precise) received both support and leadership from the high-ranking members of the *ulema* and the rival ruling viziers, while the sultan and his court faction had to ally with the Janissaries in order to crush the mutinous *sipahi*. As a result, the *sipahi* rebellions of this era left the Janissaries more powerful than ever while increasing the alienation between the two main branches of the Ottoman army. In sum, by the early 1600s, the sultan’s armed forces had turned into an influential but divided political pressure group, constraining the sultan’s authority while forming strong ties with alternative factional formations in the imperial center.¹⁰

The emergence of such strong alternative foci of power at the imperial court forced the Ottoman rulers to initiate new means of imposing their will on the business of rule. I argue that these sultanic initiatives began during the reigns of Murad III and

Mehmed III, but crystallized under Ahmed I and continued without major changes throughout the seventeenth century. The most important feature of these royal initiatives was that they centered on a relatively new position at the imperial court, that of the royal favorite.

In contrast to their predecessors, the sultans of the post-Süleymanic era were almost totally secluded from public view, and access to the sultan’s person was limited to a favored entourage. Given this increased invisibility and inaccessibility, a favorite who managed to enter the sultan’s quarters consolidated his power against all challengers and obliged them to stay (literally) outside politics. Ottoman favorites were “creatures” of the sultan, empowered to act as his power brokers. The royal favorite’s rise to power led to bitter factional struggles among the other grandees of the court, whom the favorite could cut off from direct contact with the secluded sultan. Moreover, under Ahmed I, the sultan’s favorites were promoted to the highest positions in the government, either through circumvention of the traditional pattern of promotion according to attrition and seniority, or by being appointed directly to the imperial council so as to elevate them to critical ranks in the imperial administration in the shortest possible time.

In conventional historiography, however, the emergence of the favorite in the early modern Ottoman political order has typically been interpreted as a symptom of the waning power of the sultan and the grand vizier, and thus a key manifestation of Ottoman decline. According to this view, the interference of the sultan’s favorites in the business of rule disrupted the balance of power among the government officials as institutionalized under Süleyman I. One of the objectives of this study is to demonstrate that the royal
favorites were actually a direct consequence of the very transformations in Ottoman ruling institutions that took place during Süleyman’s long reign, and that they remained indispensable agents of power for the sultans in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.31

In four substantial, this dissertation discusses these interrelated topics with a focus on the reign of Ahmed I. The first chapter examines in detail the combined political, military and dynastic crises under Mehmed III and assesses their implications for his son Ahmed I’s sultanate. It aims to demonstrate that Sultan Mehmed’s reign was truly one of the most turbulent times in Ottoman history. In the violent military uprisings of 1600, 1601 and 1603 that targeted the sultan and his court faction, the rebellious sipahis and their supporters repeatedly threatened the sultan with deposition; in the last rebellion, they took the life of the sultan’s favorite, Gazanfer Agha, the chief eunuch of the palace, who, along with the queen mother Safiye Sultan, had been one of the prime political movers under Mehmed III. I argue that Gazanfer Agha’s death changed the balance of power within the sultan’s court and within the imperial harem; this in turn led to the execution of Prince Mahmud, by then the eldest prince of the royal family, who was suspected of plotting to take the throne. With Prince Mahmud’s execution, Ahmed was declared crown prince, and only seven months later, he succeeded his father as sultan.

Additionally, this chapter includes a discussion of the incessant military uprisings in Anatolia and northern Syria, known as the Celâli rebellions. While I provide

31 See Şefik Peksevgen, “Secrecy, Information Control and Power Building in the Ottoman Empire, 1566-1603,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 2004, for a similar approach to Ottoman royal favorites and for a discussion of their role in controlling information flow around the sultan.
information from hitherto unexamined archival sources on the impact of these rebellions on Ottoman society and government in the introductory parts of the chapter, I also look into the larger political context of the first great Anatolian rebellion led by the mercenary (segban) leader Karayazıçı Abdülhalim between 1600 and 1602. Building on Baki Tezcan’s new findings on Karayazıçı, I further explore some overlooked aspects of his uprising in order to show how the power struggles among the Ottoman ruling elite played out on an empire-wide scale while converging on the imperial center -- all in the context of a newly monetarized economy.

In the second chapter, the first years of Ahmed’s reign are analyzed in the context of how such a young and inexperienced sultan operated within the political framework constructed during his father’s reign. After a discussion of his succession and its historical significance, I look into Ahmed’s princely education. Then, I examine how Ahmed responded to the ongoing wars and rebellions, as well as to the deepening crisis of dynastic legitimacy, by trying to assume the role of a warrior sultan and by imitating his great-grandfather Süleyman I. My discussion notes the increasing tension between the young sultan and his regents regarding his eagerness to go to war and to take more independent action generally. I observe that Ahmed developed such a vigorous persona that it proved very difficult to control him in the business of rule.

The third and fourth chapters focus on the centrality of the royal favorites as the sultan’s agents of power in the new political culture that took shape at the Ottoman court between the 1570s and the 1610s. The third chapter examines the first two royal favorites created by Murad III -- Şemsi Ahmed Pasha (d. 1580), a retired vizier; and the governor-
general of Rumeli, Doğancı Mehmed Pasha (d. 1589) -- while re-evaluating their roles in running imperial affairs on behalf of the sultan. I argue that Şemsi Ahmed Pasha and his court faction were empowered by the sultan to take back the reins of the government from the all-powerful Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, who had been running the empire de facto since the death of Süleyman I in 1566. On the other hand, Doğancı Mehmed Pasha was arguably a new and more powerful type of favorite to whom Murad III gave unprecedented authority to allow him to control the imperial government after Sokollu’s assassination in 1579. Yet, by the late 1580s, Mehmed Pasha’s extraordinary position had alienated all rival viziers to the point that they used the monetary crisis of the period as a tool to instigate the first great military rebellion in Ottoman history in order to murder the powerful favorite. Known as the Governor-General Incident (Beylerbeyi Vakası) of 1589, this rebellion had hitherto unrecognized consequences with regard to the legacy of Doğancı Mehmed Pasha. In short, through a detailed discussion of these two favorites of Murad III, I aim to establish how they solidified the role of royal favorites in court politics by the late sixteenth century.

The fourth and final chapter focuses on Ahmed I’s chief favorites and how they functioned as both the young sultan’s alter-ego and his power brokers at the faction-ridden court. Ahmed’s reign witnessed the emergence of new political actors as royal favorites, most notably the chief gardener (bostâncibaşı) and the chief eunuch of the imperial harem (dârû’s-sa’âde ağası), who were empowered to help the young sultan establish his personal rule. I examine the cases of Derviş Pasha and El-Hac Mustafa Agha. Derviş Pasha, Ahmed’s first personal favorite, reached the grand vizierate in early
1606, only two years after being appointed chief gardener, circumventing traditional patterns of promotion. However, Derviş’s alienation of other ruling grandees enabled his rivals to persuade the sultan to execute him seven months later. Derviş Pasha’s rapid rise and fall illustrate the dynamics of factionalism and favoritism at the Ottoman court during Ahmed’s reign.

Next, I look into the case of El-Hac Mustafa Agha, who was chief eunuch of the imperial harem throughout Ahmed’s reign. When Queen Mother Handan died in late 1605, he became the highest authority in the harem, where the young sultan resided. His unequalled position allowed him to act as a “gate-keeper” to the sultan while dispensing patronage both in the sultan’s and in his own name. He exercised a degree of influence over Ahmed I similar to that exercised by Gazanfer Agha over Mehmed III. In a short time, Mustafa Agha became Ahmed’s chief advisor and power broker; several of his clients became powerful viziers. Considering all these points, I conceptualize Mustafa Agha as the Ottoman royal favorite \textit{par excellence} in the seventeenth century.

My study employs a broad spectrum of published and unpublished primary sources. Tens of thousands of documents from the reign of Ahmed I remain largely untouched while most of them are uncatalogued. Petitions submitted to the sultan and/or his grand vizier alone number approximately 16,000. Obviously, it is impossible for one researcher to tackle this massive body of information. Nonetheless, I utilize several different types of private correspondence, reports and registers housed in the Turkish Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives (BOA), the Topkapı Palace Museum Archives (TSMA) and the Venetian State Archives (Archivio di Stato di Venezia -- ASVe). The Ottoman
archival documents are pertinent to my discussion of the relationship between the sultan and the ruling elite, vizierial decision-making, the running of the court, the daily ceremonies of rule, and the distribution of wealth and patronage. The unpublished dispatches of the Venetian baili (singular, bailo), the ambassadors resident in Istanbul (ASVe, Senato, Dispacci Costantinopoli -- SDC) provide sometimes unique perspectives on the course of events and the major political figures of the era, thanks to these ambassadors’ wide network of informants in the Ottoman court. In order to demonstrate how critical these underutilized Italian reports are to a study of the Ottoman court during this period, I quote several relevant sections at length in English translation and provide the original Italian text in footnotes. Meanwhile, a critical reading of contemporary Ottoman narrative chronicles reveals the details of the newly (re)configured power and patronage relations at the court and in Istanbul at large. Last but not least, during my research in Turkish manuscript libraries, I was able to locate several works commissioned by Ahmed I that shed light on his personal education, literary inclinations and taste.

All these chapters include substantial narrative of events when the subject matter


33 I am grateful to my colleague Dr. Maurizio Arfaioli for his research assistance at the Venetian State Archives and for providing the transliterations of the Italian dispatches utilized in this study. I also sincerely thank my former fellow graduate student and friend Dr. John Hunt for helping me with English translations from Italian. Any shortcomings in these passages are solely mine.

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requires it. This strategy also allows me to fill in gaps in our knowledge of certain key aspects of Ottoman political culture during the period in question. In addition, Baki Tezcan’s doctoral dissertation on the regicide of Sultan Osman II in 1622 and his recent articles on different aspects of Ottoman politics and networks of power in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have proven indispensable for my own study of Ahmed I. I thus engage with Tezcan’s findings and arguments in order to further solidify our understanding of this critical period in Ottoman history.

As Rhoads Murphey aptly puts it, “By acknowledging the centrality of the figure of the sultan and the importance of the institution of the sultanate for understanding the dynamics of power in the high imperial era [1480-1820], we need not ascribe [sic] to the ‘great men’ theory of history or suggest that the ups and downs in imperial fortunes the dynasty experienced are entirely attributable to the character and competence of a single person, known by his Italian contemporaries in reverential terms as Il Gran Signor. On the other hand, no account of Ottoman realities which marginalizes or ignores the role of the sultan, appealing instead to irresistible historical forces or environmental causes, can claim to have accurately assessed the true extent of involvement in public affairs and the energetic activism which [sultans] delivered. The sultans were certainly much more than mere figureheads even when […] they performed a significant proportion of their duties of office by proxy.”

Indeed. It is also my contention that none of the three sultans discussed in this study -- Murad III, Mehmed III, Ahmed I -- was a “weak” sultan of the sort typically

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depicted in the conventional narratives of Ottoman history. Rather, all three represented a
new type of Ottoman ruler who employed new ruling strategies to counter-balance the
alternative foci of power within the state apparatus. As the first thorough analysis, based
on primary sources, of Ahmed I’s reign, my study aims to explain how Sultan Ahmed and
his immediate predecessors used these strategies to deal with the unfolding crisis of the
seventeenth century.
Sultan Mehmed III ascended to the Ottoman throne in 1595 upon the death of his father Murad III and reigned for only eight years. His short sultanate was a period of crisis in the true sense of the term in that it passed with multi-front wars, social disturbances, military revolts, financial difficulties and intense factionalism within the court and the royal family. Sultan Mehmed inherited from his late father an empire that had been engaged for two years in a war against the Habsburgs in Hungary. In the ensuing years, the Ottoman-Habsburg Long War of 1593-1606 intensified, and not a single year passed without a military confrontation between the two imperial rivals.

In the meantime, a new and much more serious problem beleaguered Mehmed III as numerous towns and villages in the Anatolian countryside fell under the ever-escalating attacks of the rebellious Celâli armies, which were composed mostly of mercenary soldiers, generally known as *segbans*. These irregular soldiers were recruited from the peasant population on a regular basis to meet the growing need for arms-bearing infantry in Ottoman military forces, then discharged after serving in a campaign or two. Yet, instead of returning to their villages, most of these soldiers became bandits or joined the uprisings already in progress in Anatolia. Around the turn of the seventeenth century,
the Celâli problem acquired a much more complex character since a number of Ottoman
district governors and officials, as well as an increasing number of rank-and-file soldiers
in the sultan’s military forces, now had similar recourse to either rebellious or unlawful
activities. As a result, the distinction between the legitimate and the illegitimate use of
force often blurred as the empire’s Asian provinces turned into a zone of violence and
devastation.

These multi-front and prolonged military engagements and this deepening social
turmoil created no small amount of financial and political problems for Mehmed III and
his court in Istanbul. By 1600, the coffers of the state were almost empty and the
campaign-weary soldiers turned their discontent into open rebellion. In 1600, 1601 and
1603, the palace cavalry (*sipahis*) and their supporters rose up against their sultan and his
court three times, in the last two cases threatening Mehmed III with deposition.
Furthermore, seven months before his death in December 1603, Sultan Mehmed ordered
the execution of his eldest son, Prince Mahmud, on the suspicion that he was plotting to
seize the throne. This act not only paved the way for Prince Ahmed to succeed his father
at the age of thirteen, but also suddenly brought the male line of the Ottoman dynasty to
the brink of extinction.

By utilizing some hitherto unexamined archival documents, this chapter examines
all of these critical developments in detail and assesses their repercussions for the reign of
Ahmed I. My main contention is that the reign of Mehmed III actually marks the
beginnings of the long seventeenth-century Ottoman political and dynastic crisis, which
was the major factor shaping the running of the royal court and the imperial government
during his son’s reign. The roots of the heightened factionalism that marked Ahmed’s reign can likewise be located in the sultanate of his father.

I.1. The Celâli Rebellions and Karayaızıcı Abdülhalim

At the turn of the seventeenth century, peasants and townspeople throughout the Ottoman Empire were suffering from severe weather conditions while enduring the ever-escalating attacks and plundering of the Celâli rebels.\(^1\) Recent studies indicate that the devastation wrought by the Celâlis, as well as the depopulation trend in Anatolia during these years, coincided with the abnormal climatic patterns known collectively as the Little Ice Age.\(^2\) For instance, Sam White’s study demonstrates that in the 1590s and 1600s, most regions of the Ottoman Empire were unusually dry and cold while agricultural productivity plummeted.\(^3\)


\(^3\) White, “Ecology, Climate and Crisis in the Ottoman Middle East,” pp. 171-373.
Meanwhile, as Oktay Özel explains in detail, the already overabundant urban and rural population in Anatolia began to exert much heavier demographic pressure on the region’s limited agricultural resources, resulting in subsistence crisis in the Anatolian countryside. As food shortages became more frequent, prices of staple products soared. The Long War only made the peasants’ precarious situation worse since the imperial government coerced them to pay extraordinary levies, which soon turned into regular, annual taxes, payable in cash.4

Under these worsening circumstances, numerous people left their homes, lands and animals, and fled to urban centers to seek relief. Due to the lack of detailed and comparative studies, it is hard to be precise as to the scale and effects of the depopulation and the military and economic devastation in the Anatolian countryside at this time; nonetheless, heretofore unexamined archival documentation suggests that there was indeed a significant loss of agricultural population and production in numerous localities.5 For instance, most villages and towns located in the vicinities of modern-day İznil, Manisa, Kütahya, Isparta, Konya and Antalya suffered a forty to eighty-five percent decrease in population compared to the number of households previously registered for various tax purposes.6 Furthermore, according to petitions submitted to the

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4 See Özel, “The Reign of Violence.”


6 Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri (BOA), D.MKF, Dosya: 3/18 (Kula/Manisa: 70 households deserted out of a total of 163 – 42% loss) [dated: H. 1011]; Dosya: 3/19 (Hotaz/Iznil[?]: 117 out of 258 – 45%) [dated: H. 1011]; Dosya: 3/46 (Yertut[?]: 150 out of 233 – 64%) [dated: H. 1 Ş 1012]; Dosya: 3/50 (Canik: 130 out of 150 – 86%) [dated: H. 1 Ş 1012]; Dosya: 3/72 (Canik: 570 out of 1020 – 55%) [dated: H. 1 Za
imperial council in Istanbul, numerous villages and small settlements in Kastamonu province were almost totally deserted. All of these recorded cases were directly related to the repeated Celâli attacks, during which many houses were burned, men killed, women and children kidnapped, livestock stolen and property plundered. As a result of the devastation of rural life in the core lands of the empire, the imperial treasury continuously suffered from tax arrears and thus shortages of cash, which it desperately needed, above all to fund the ongoing campaigns in Hungary.

Moreover, a hitherto overlooked governmental report preserved in the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives provides crucial information on the geographical and demographic ramifications of the Celâli rebellions. This document reveals that people not only fled or were uprooted from almost all major provinces in Anatolia (Anadolu, Karaman, Sivas, Maraş and Erzurum); many of them ended up settling in and around Istanbul and Rumeli. This migration, which increased in the early 1600s and came to be popularly known as the Great Flight (Büyük Kaçgun), was so vast that as late as 1611, three years after the successful suppression of the Celâlis by Grand Vizier Kuyucu Murad Pasha, the government in Istanbul was still struggling to return the migrants to their homelands and to register those who refused to return for taxation. Overall, the imperial

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7 Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi (TSMA), E. 2261 (Tosya/Kastamonu) [undated]; E. 4467 (Zile) [undated].
8 In addition to the above-mentioned cases, see BOA, MAD, D. 15615 [dated H. 1009] and D. 16596 [dated H. 1012-1016], for deserted houses in the provinces of Tokad and Rum, respectively, which were initially registered for avarız taxes.
9 BOA, D.MKF, Dosya: 4/122 [dated 5 CE 1020/16 July 1611]: “Kazıyye öldür ki vilâyet-i Anadolu ve
government during this period was overwhelmed by thousands of displaced and destitute people who flooded the capital with petitions for immediate action. Those whose grievances were not addressed by the government often turned to banditry and took part in rebellions.

Against this combined social, political, economic and military crisis, the imperial government’s inclination was to suppress the Celâlis by force and destroy them; however, all attempts to this end proved largely ineffective. The bands of various Celâli leaders, particularly those of Karayazıcı Abdülhalim and his brother Deli Hasan, successfully fought against the armies dispatched under several viziers from Istanbul while they continued to attack and plunder numerous towns and villages. By the spring of 1602, the Celâli problem in Anatolia had reached such a critical level that the ruling viziers admitted that they could not eliminate the rebels by military means alone. They therefore proposed a mixed policy of accommodation (istimâlet) and repression, to which the sultan acquiesced.


BOA, D.MKF, Dosya: 3/27 [the petition of the judge of Günyüzi town, dated 1 M 1012/11 June 1603] can be taken as a typical example of such petitions. For further examples of petitions submitted by town judges and the details of government action against the Celâli attacks, see Ayşe Huseyniklioglu, “Mühimme Defterlerine Osmanlı Devleti’nde Eskiyâlık Olayları, 1594-1607,” unpublished M.A. thesis, Fırat University, 2001; and Akdağ, Türk Halkının Dîrlık ve Düzünlük Kavgası, pp. 514-525.


Barkey, Bandits and Bureaucrats, pp. 141-188, discusses the significance of this new policy in terms of
According to an unpublished petition to the sultan, seemingly written by the deputy grand vizier, Saatçi Hasan Pasha, Mehmed III announced an amnesty for the crimes committed by the rebels and agreed to assign hundreds of them to various positions in the palace and in distant provinces. However, this attempt to co-opt them did not succeed. Though initially some Celâli groups were reported to have declared their loyalty to the sultan and joined the sultan’s imperial forces, the uprisings soon flared up again and even spread to eastern and southeastern Anatolia as well as northern Syria.

The rebellion of the aforementioned Celâli leader Karayazıçı Abdülhalim was the most challenging Anatolian uprising that Mehmed III had ever faced. It is therefore surprising that misperceptions are still widespread in the conventional historiography as to its origins and dynamics. According to Baki Tezcan’s findings, the uprising did not begin in the central Anatolian city of Sivas in 1598, as the established historiography has

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13 BOA, A.RSK, Dosya: 5/55 [dated 8 M 1011/28 June 1602]: “[...] Sa’âdetlü pâdişâhum, giçende suçları ‘afv olınmışdur diyü gönderilen hükm-i şerîfün çok fâ’idesi olub, bu husâs hüsnu-i tebdîre mukârin olmasıdır. Fi’l-vâki’i şimdilik ayağ üzerinde olan eşkıyayı bir uğurdan kılıç ile kırmak müşkildür. Bunları[n] ba’zılarını ri’âyet ve istimâlet ile getürtmek gerekdür. Ve ba’zıların el virdiğine göre krub sâ’ırlere mücib-i ‘ibret için hakârlardan gelinmek gerekdür. Hâlâ bu kulinuz böyle re’yi gördüm ki, bu eşkıyânın bellü başluları sâbihâ fermân olunduğu üze, iç ilde olmamak üzere Bağdad ve Tebrîz ve Gence ve Revân ve Şîrvan ve Gürçistan serhadilerinde kimine sancak kimine ağalak ve büyük nefsere varınca zikr olman serhadlerde düşenden bir gedik ve birkaç yüz nefere varınca düşenden ze’âmet ve timâra evâmir-i şerîfe ve yigirmi nefere varınca dergâh-i ‘âlî müteferrikağı ve kâr nefere varınca dergâh-i ‘âli cavûsluga virilmek için serdâr Hüsrev Paşa kulumuza hâkım-i şerîf gönderile [...]” The royal writ at the top of this document is partially destroyed, but a few sentence fragments are legible in which Mehmed III concurs with the proposal and orders his vizier to grant the positions as requested: “Aşağada yazılı üzre münâşibdür. Vech-i meşrûh üzre emr yazılıbl[...].” Between May 1602 and January 1603, Saatçi Hasan Pasha was the deputy of Grand Vizier Yemişçi Hasan Pasha, who at the time was commanding the imperial army in Hungary. Mehmed bin Mehmed, Ta’rîh-i Al-i Osmân, in Abdurrahman Sağırli, ed., “Mehmed b. Mehmed Er-Rumi (Edirne)’nin Nuhbetü’t-tevârîh ve l-ahbâr’i ile Ta’rîh-i Al-i Osmân’inn Metni ve Tahilleri,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Istanbul University, 2000, p. 69 [hereafter Mehmed bin Mehmed, Târîh].

long held. Instead, Karayazıçı started out as the commander of a segban force hired by Derviş Bey, the governor of Safed in northern Palestine. Derviş had been a sergeant/messenger (çavuş) at Murad III’s court in Istanbul and managed to secure his new office in late 1593, thanks to his personal allegiance to Şeyh Şüca (d. 996/1587-8), the sultan’s spiritual guide. As will be seen in the third chapter, Şeyh Şüca was one of the most prominent members of the court faction created by Murad III and led by his royal favorites. Especially after the assassination of the all-powerful Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha in 1579, several clients of this faction quickly rose to influential positions and remained in the imperial administration for many years to come. Clearly, Derviş Bey was one such client, and he seems to have hired Karayazıçı and his segban forces soon after he arrived in Safed in 1594.

Tezcan observes that Karayazıçı’s career was directly related to the power struggles in Greater Syria, where, since the early 1570s, a flourishing market-oriented economy had enabled Ottoman district governors and local magnates to make their fortunes in trans-regional trade and money-changing. They then used part of their wealth to hire segban armies so that they could compete for authority in the region. Indeed, when Derviş Bey received an imperial order from Istanbul replacing him with

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15 Karayazıçı’s background and career before ca. 1595 are shrouded in mystery; the only undeniable fact is that he was a trained segban. See Encyclopaedia of Islam, second edition [hereafter EI2], s.v. “Karayazıdji,” by Mustafa Akdağ.
17 For Şeyh Şüca’s political influence, see Fleischer, Bureaucrat and Intellectual, pp. 72, 74-75 and 296-297.
18 See Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” pp. 38-83, for a discussion of the monetarization of the Ottoman economy in different market zones and the arbitrage opportunities in greater Syria during the last quarter of the sixteenth century.
Çerkes Deli Ali, most probably one of the men of the Lebanese Bedouin chieftain Mansur ibn ‘Umar al-Furaykh (d. 1593), the former governor of Safed, it was Karayazıcı who persuaded his patron to fight to retain his post.

Thus, in 1596, as the commander of Derviş Bey’s 300-odd musket-bearing segban force, Karayazıcı took on the Ottoman forces under the governor-general of Damascus, Hadım Husrev Pasha, who had been ordered to execute the imperial orders. Unable to sustain their resistance, Derviş and Karayazıcı fled to Sidon in southern Lebanon, where the famous Druze emir Fakhr al-Din Ma’an (d. 1635) gave them provisions but would not let them stay in his domains. Karayazıcı lost his first patron when Derviş Bey, having returned to the capital, was beheaded in May-June 1597. He now took his segban regiment to Kilis in the far south of Anatolia, where he offered his services to the local governor, the Kurdish grandee Canbuladoğlu Hüseyin Pasha, who was at the time defending his post against a newly appointed governor from Istanbul, Dev Süleyman Pasha. With the help of Karayazıcı’s mercenary army, which in the meantime had grown with the defection of numerous segbans from Süleyman Pasha’s forces, Hüseyin Pasha managed to hold on to Kilis, a strategic town on the Aleppan trade route.

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that had been ruled by the Canbulad family since before the Ottoman conquest of the region in the early sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{21}

Afterward, Karayazıcı moved to Ruha, where he declared himself an independent ruler around 1598. He even began to issue orders with an imperial seal that read “Halim Shah, may he be victorious;” appointed judges; recruited a larger mercenary army and expanded his household and established a princely court with a rank hierarchy reminiscent of that of the Ottoman court. He even fabricated a genealogy going back to some unidentified ancient rulers of the region while claiming that the Prophet Muhammad had appeared to him in a dream and granted him the right to rule.\textsuperscript{22}

In the fall of 1599, the imperial government dispatched an army against Karayazıcı under the command of Hüseyin Pasha, the governor-general of Karaman, only to have Hüseyin Pasha join Karayazıcı’s cause, thus becoming the first high-ranking Ottoman official to turn rebel during this period. Karayazıcı made Hüseyin Pasha his grand vizier. Now the two rebels had an army which, according to one informed estimate, included some 8,000 well-trained and resolute soldiers.\textsuperscript{23}


The imperial government had no option but to send a new and larger force, for the Safavid shah of Iran, Abbas I (r. 1588-1629), could easily manipulate the situation in northern Syria to his advantage. Command of the army was given to the third-ranking vizier on the imperial council, Sinanpaşaoğlu Mehmed Pasha, the son of Koca Sinan Pasha, who had died in 1596 while holding his fifth grand vizierate. Mehmed Pasha besieged Ruha in October 1599 but reached an agreement with Karayazıcı two months later, according to which Karayazıcı handed over Hüseyin Pasha in return for the governorship of Ayntab. With Hüseyin Pasha headed for execution in Istanbul, the “rebel” Karayazıcı became an Ottoman “governor” in southeastern Anatolia.

The very next year, however, he was again labeled a rebel when he advanced toward Sivas. For the next two years, he roamed the countryside around the modern-day cities of Sivas, Malatya, Amasya, Tokat and Çorum, defeating Ottoman forces under the command of various field marshals. Meanwhile, an increasing number of disgruntled peasants, townsmen, Ottoman soldiers, and even former Ottoman officials gathered under his banner.

Karayazıcı died of natural causes in the mountains of Samsun in March 1602 after suffering his sole defeat by Ottoman forces under Hasan Pasha, the son of the aforementioned Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha. Despite Ottoman efforts to pacify

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24 Griswold, *The Great Anatolian Rebellion*, pp. 29 and 36. As Griswold notes, there was no shortage of rumors during this period about the shah’s discreet relations with the Celâli bands in Anatolia, as well as his plans to reclaim the territories lost to the Ottomans during the wars of 1578-90.


the rebel army by means of the above-mentioned amnesty, the rebellion continued under Karayazıcı’s brother Deli Hasan, whose forces devastated Anatolia. The following year, Deli Hasan accepted Mehmed III’s offer of the governorship of Bosnia, thus becoming the first rebel-turned-pasha, and took his segban forces to Hungary to fight the Habsburgs. Unable to adapt to the new style warfare in Hungary, however, Deli Hasan, along with Karakaş Ahmed Pasha, once governor of Sivas, turned rebel again. In 1606, both rebel-pashas were captured by Kuyucu Murad Pasha, then the commander on the Hungarian front, later Ahmed I’s grand vizier.

All of these details shed light on the larger context of the Celâli problem during the reigns of both Mehmed III and Ahmed I. First of all, as Tezcan notes, scholars have overlooked the significance of Karayazıcı’s debut as the head of a segban regiment in northern Syria, where local contenders for power, such as Canbuladoğlu Hüseyin Pasha, could take advantage of the region’s newly monetarized economy to hire mercenary armies. Tezcan convincingly argues that “the explanation according to which the increasing need for infantry troops during the Habsburg wars created the segbans, who in turn intensified the scale of the Celâli rebellions seems to be inadequate. The context in which the segbans are first noted in Syria suggests that the rise of this new military formation was related to competition for local political power…. All these leaders had funds to hire soldiers, as opposed to lands to allocate them. They were political leaders of varying degrees who could only arise in a monetary economy.”

Meanwhile, the Ottoman commanders who were sent to fight them similarly employed large numbers of

27 Ibid., pp. 208 and 215.
segban in their armies alongside the imperial Janissaries and sipahis. Indeed, some of these Ottoman forces themselves behaved like Celâlis in the Anatolian countryside, ruining villages and causing great distress to the peasantry.

Secondly, Karayazıci was made governor twice as part of the Ottoman government’s policy of accommodating Celâli leaders, a fact that prompts Tezcan to observe that “the imperial government was quite inconsistent in its dealing with the ‘rebels.’ While a certain vizier could conceive of employing Karayazıci as a district governor, his successor would send an army against him. The same inconsistency was displayed in dealing with Karayazıci’s brother, Deli Hasan.”28 On the other hand, this dubious co-optation policy points up the intermediary roles played by the leaders of different court factions in Istanbul in securing appointments for their clients who already had large military households or could recruit segban armies against the Celâlis. Tezcan demonstrates that the monetarized economy was also central to such arrangements as it enabled power contenders among the Ottoman ruling elite “to hire mercenaries and buy their administrative positions using their connections in the capital, including such personalities as Şeyh Şüca.”29

During this period, the grand vizier was running an empire-wide client network. As the de facto head of the Ottoman imperial administration, he handled the distribution of all sorts of offices while favoring his own household members and other clients. He was aided in this task by the deputy grand vizier. Since the grand vizier was regularly

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28 Ibid., p. 213.
29 Ibid., p. 209.
assigned to lead imperial campaigns against the Habsburgs during this period, his deputy in Istanbul had the chance to establish his own network of clients, which in turn often undermined the power base of the grand vizier as well as those of rival viziers in the imperial government. Most deputy grand viziers at this time, such as Saatçi Hasan Pasha, were allied with the leaders of the dominant court faction, namely, Safiye Sultan, the queen mother, and Gazanfer Agha, the royal favorite, as were other Ottoman grandees, as will be seen below.

A hitherto unexamined letter from the Topkapı Palace archives sheds light on Karayazıci’s intermediaries in Istanbul who made negotiations between him and the imperial government possible. Some contemporary chroniclers, notably Hasan Beyzade, claim that it was the mufti Sunullah Efendi who persuaded Mehmed III to pardon Karayazıci and grant him the province of Çorum. This letter, from Karayazıci to Sunullah, confirms these claims. It is undated, but it was evidently written soon after

30 A.RSK, Dosya 5/63 (dated 13 M 1011 / 3 July 1602), is Saatçi Hasan Pasha’s telhîş to Mehmed III, requesting permission (which was given) to grant the province of Kars as an additional revenue source to his client Gorgoroğlu Mahmud Pasha, the governor of Batumi. According to the document, Mahmud Pasha, who is described as a graduate of the palace school like Hasan Pasha himself, wrote a letter to the deputy grand vizier promising to lead 1,000 mounted soldiers and segbans against the Celâlis near his district but requesting extra tax revenues to feed his army. The document also reveals that Sokolluzade Hasan Pasha, who fought against Karayazıci, had previously granted Gorgoroğlu the province of Kangırı for fighting under his command, but Saatçi Hasan Pasha had taken over this province himself in order to fund his campaign in Rumeli.


33 See Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi (TSMK), MS Revan 1943, fols. 68b-69a. The Topkapı manuscript is a collection of Grand Vizier Koca Sinan Pasha’s telhîses (petitions) to Murad III, most of which have recently been transliterated and published in Halil Sahillioğlu, ed., Koca Sinan Paşa’nın
Karayazıci left Ruha in the spring of 1600, when he was labeled a rebel again. In it, Karayazıci concedes that he is sending this letter to Sunullah to seek his intercession in securing a pardon from the sultan. Soon after, he was indeed pardoned and given the governorship of Çorum. The imperial decree granting this governorship bears the date June-July 1600 (evâhir-i zi’l-hicce 1008), and a copy of it is recorded in the same manuscript with Karayazıci’s letter, attesting that the two documents are related. Thus, it seems safe to conclude that Karayazıci’s intermediary in the capital was Sunullah Efendi, one of the most powerful political actors at the Ottoman imperial center in the early 1600s. Since the mufti of Istanbul was the ultimate religious authority, who could rule on whether or not to execute a rebel, Karayazıci’s letter was also a calculated effort to avoid this fate. As we shall see Sunullah Efendi’s relationship with Karayazıci and his role in shaping the sultan’s decision on the rebel would form part of the accusations made against him during the sipahi rebellion of 1603.

The letter likewise clarifies how Karayazıci and Sinanpaşaoğlu came to reach an agreement and how that agreement was broken. Karayazıci asserts repeatedly that he has never oppressed the peasants and never intended to rebel against the sultan; on the contrary, he has always been a loyal servant of the padishah whose only concern was to work and pray for him so that he would be victorious against the “enemies of religion” (i.e., the Celâlis). But while he was in Ruha, Sinanpaşaoğlu sent an imperial order demanding “several hundred thousand akçes,” together with Hüseyin Pasha, in return for the province of Ayntab. Despite his compliance, Sinanpaşaoğlu besieged him, destroying

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Telhisleri (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2004). Karayazıci’s letter appears after the last telhis and before a copy of the imperial decree granting him Çorum (fols. 69a-69b). All partial quotations below are from fols. 68b-69a.
a fortified town, kidnapping women and children, and killing innocent Muslims. By Karayazıcı’s account, he demanded ten million akçe from the people of Ruha to lift the siege. After contributing to this sum, Karayazıcı decided to leave Ruha so as not to be named a Celâli rebel, but when Sinanpaşaoğlu continued to attack him, he had to fight back, and in this way defeated him, albeit at the cost of many lives. Karayazıcı even claims that his enemy has sent the sultan his own fallen soldiers’ heads, pretending that they were those of Karayazıcı’s commanders, so that he could capitalize on his fake victory.

In closing, Karayazıcı reiterates that he is just “an ordinary segban who had been serving governors and governor-generals [in the region],” but because of Sinanpaşaoğlu’s unjustified actions against him, he is now known as a Celâli. In fact, “that son of a pasha called Sinanpaşaoğlu is the real Celâli!” Karayazıcı asks Sunullah Efendi to “inform” the sultan of these details and persuade him to spare his life, which, he adds ominously, “is so sacred and so dear that it is hard to say, ‘Come, tie my hands and kill me!’” Clearly, Karayazıcı was ready to become a true “rebel” if he was not pardoned.

Karayazıcı’s letter shows that he knew how to walk the fine line between loyalty and rebellion and to contest the accusations made against him. Furthermore, his claims are couched in the political language of petitions of this period that were sent to the imperial government to complain about the misdeeds of governors, judges, tax-collectors, and ruling viziers.34 In any event, it is clear that his protestations of innocence were

found credible as he was immediately pardoned, albeit only to face the same accusations soon afterward. Meanwhile, Sinanaşaoğlu was dismissed from the command of his army and replaced with Hacı İbrahim Pasha, another client of Sunullah Efendi! I will return to this point in the next chapter.

1.2. The Long War

While the Celâli rebellions raged, the war against the Habsburgs dragged on. The nature of siege and field warfare on the Ottoman-Habsburg frontier in Hungary had changed significantly since the last major engagement between the two imperial rivals in the mid-sixteenth century. Following the truce of 1568, the Habsburgs and their allies had invested in state-of-the-art artillery fortifications (known as *trace italienne*) against enemy incursions; significantly increased the size of their armies, particularly by mobilizing more musketeers, gunners and pikemen; and experimented with new infantry and artillery tactics. Thus, the Ottoman army had to fight against numerically superior Habsburg regiments within which, compared to the number of pikemen, the proportion of infantry soldiers carrying firearms had increased, in some units amounting to seventy-five percent. Considering such novel and comprehensive developments in contemporary Habsburg warfare, some scholars have even argued that the Hungarian theatre of war was

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one of the earliest battle grounds -- and perhaps even the first battleground -- where the changes in the nature of field warfare amounted to a “military revolution.”

The Ottomans, for their part, took exactly the same military measures and followed up by refortifying their borders, raising the number of musket-bearing Janissaries and cavalry troops, and adopting, well before their enemies, the latest infantry firing techniques, such as volley fire. Accordingly, the most noticeable change in Ottoman warfare was the total number of salaried soldiers, which had increased several times since the last quarter of the sixteenth century. For instance, the numbers of Janissaries grew from 13,500 in 1574 to roughly 40,000 in 1609 while the six regiments of cavalry troops (altı bölük halkı) increased from 6,000 to 21,000. Furthermore, the Ottoman government attempted to counter-balance the numerical superiority of the Habsburg army by establishing formations of firearm-bearing infantry, generally known as segban. These mercenary soldiers, some of whom were peasants from the regions of Bosnia, were mostly employed as garrison guards, and their number by the late 1590s had risen to 20,000.

At the center of the Hungarian front stood the Habsburg fortresses of Nagykanizsa (Kanije), Győr (Yanık/Yanıkkale), Komárom (Komaran), Érsekújvár (Uyvar) and Eger (Eğri), facing the Ottoman fortresses of Szigetvár (Zigetvar), Székesfehérvár

37 Ibid., pp. 117-159.
39 Murphey, Ottoman Warfare, p. 45, table 3.5.
40 Finkel, The Administration of Warfare, pp. 36-46.
(Istolni Belgrad), Buda (Budin) and Esztergom (Estergon). In order to successfully besiege and capture each other’s fortresses, both imperial armies were now required to remain in the field for much longer periods, often over many abnormally cold winter days, as well as to mobilize more resources and soldiers, all due to the logistical and technical difficulties of breaching the new artillery-proof *trace italienne* fortresses. At the same time, field battles with decisive victories were becoming a rarity while engagements in the open field were carried out by means of a new type of positional warfare that demanded highly coordinated maneuvers by larger numbers of cavalry troops and infantrymen. In these new circumstances, the Ottoman-Habsburg military confrontation was minimal during the first two years of the Long War. After Mehmed III replaced his father Murad III on the throne in 1595, however, the imperial rivalry was suddenly transformed into full military engagement.

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41 Caroline Finkel, *Osman’s Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1922* (London: John Murray, 2005), p. 174. Since the Long War took place mainly in Hungary, I use the Hungarian forms of the place-names (except for those for which there are familiar English names) and give modern Turkish versions in parentheses at first mention. For the Ottoman defense system in Hungary, see Klára Hegyi, “The Ottoman Network of Fortresses in Hungary,” and Gábor Ágoston, “The Cost of the Ottoman Fortress-System in Hungary in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in Dávid and Fodor, eds., *Ottomans, Hungarians and Habsburgs in Central Europe*, pp. 163-193 and pp. 195-228, respectively.


44 Apart from numerous works by Hungarian scholars, the Long War and the details of its military engagements are understudied topics. The most detailed scholarly work on the actual engagements of the Long War thus far is Sándor László Tóth, *A mezőkeresztesi csata és a tizenöt éves háború* (Szeged: Belvedere, 2000). I thank Prof. Gábor Ágoston of Georgetown University for informing me about the contents of Tóth’s work.
Not since the last campaign of Süleyman I in 1566 had a sultan taken the field at the head of the imperial army. By early 1596, Mehmed III was convinced by his advisors and viziers that he had to lead the army in person in order to present a powerful image both as the sultan and as the embodiment of the Ottoman Empire, a task at which his father was thought to have failed, especially during the Ottomans’ first lengthy engagement against the Safavids between 1578 and 1590. As a result of these prolonged battles on the eastern frontier, the later years of Murad III’s reign had witnessed financial instability and military problems, which provoked direct criticism of the increasingly sedentary and secluded style of his rule, and thus instigated the first serious military uprising in the capital. On April 2, 1589, for the first time in Ottoman history, the imperial cavalry soldiers occupied the palace grounds to protest the payment of their salaries in debased coinage, then overtly rejected the sultan’s authority by executing his royal favorite (musâhib), the governor-general of Rumeli Doğancı Kara Mehmed Pasha, whom Murad had authorized to handle certain imperial affairs, including salary payments and currency devaluation.45

The ramifications of the so-called “Beylerbeyi [Governor-General] Incident” were so momentous in contemporary court politics that Murad III countered his unruly soldiers and their supporters among the viziers and the ulema by immediately removing the entire higher echelon of his government; he even thought of running the empire without a grand vizier, but this was simply an impossible idea to realize given the well-established

45 The soldiers also murdered the chief treasurer, Mahmud Efendi. According to recent scholarship, this tumultuous event marks a critical turning point in the operation of the sultan’s court and the wielding of political power. See Peksevg en “Secrecy, Information Control and Power Building.” I will return to this incident when discussing Doğançı Mehmed Pasha in the third chapter.
sixteenth-century Ottoman administrative practices. Overall, as Christine Woodhead aptly observes, when Mehmed III took the throne six years later, he knew that he had to make “a break with his father’s practices, not only by clearing the palace of Murad’s large domestic household and the dwarfs and mutes who had entertained him, but also by acquiescing in personal leadership of the 1596 Hungarian campaign, an action intended to signal the renewal of direct imperial authority.”

At the outset, Sultan Mehmed’s sole aim was to capture the fortress of Eger, situated between Austria and Transylvania, which, together with Moldavia and Wallachia, was under Habsburg suzerainty. The fortress fell to the Ottomans on October 12, 1596, after a siege of three weeks. Still, in order to secure Eger and its surroundings, the Ottomans had to stave off the Habsburg imperial army under the command of Archduke Maximilian, who had been sent to relieve the fortress. The climactic battle took place in the nearby plain of Mezőkeresztes (Haçova) on October 22-26, and the decisive moment came on the last day as the Habsburgs, thanks to their numerical superiority and better artillery and tactical organization, crushed the Ottoman forces and penetrated deep into the center of their camp. Seeking booty, the Habsburg soldiers started to plunder the Ottoman tents, but the fleeing Ottoman cavalry and

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48 See Tóth, A mezőkeresztesi csata és a tizenöt éves háború, pp. 186-199, for a detailed analysis of the fall of Eger.
infantry suddenly turned back and caught them off guard. The result was a devastating defeat for the Habsburgs and a decisive, if last-minute, victory for the Ottomans.49 Mehmed III now earned the honorific title of warrior sultan (gâzî sultân) and entered his capital in an elaborate ceremony celebrating his and his imperial army’s achievements.50

Yet, these Ottoman victories did not bring an end to the war. Peace overtures remained unfulfilled as border fortresses continued to change hands. By the early 1600s, the war on the Ottoman-Habsburg frontier was more or less static, logistically wearying and financially exhausting for both sides.51 For the Ottoman soldiers and commanders, however, the annual campaigns were turning into costly and hazardous adventures as they often had to fight in unfavorable weather without sufficient provisions or money.52

Most importantly, the financial burden of the Long War, which the Ottomans fought while simultaneously contending with the Celâlis, was so heavy for the Ottoman government that it had to impose new taxes on the peasant population and expand the

49 For the details of the battle, see ibid., pp. 223-261; and an overlooked eyewitness account by an Italian commander in the Habsburg imperial army in Ilario Rinieri, Clemente VIII e Sinan Bassă Cicala (Roma: Civiltà Cattolica, 1898), pp. 151-154.

50 The Ottoman successes at Eger and Mezőkerezstes, as well as Mehmed III’s entry into the capital, are covered in several contemporary victory missives (feth-nâmés), narratives and images. Inter alia, see Tallîkīzâde, Şehnâme-i Sultan-i Selâtîn-i Cihân or Eğri Fethi Ta’rîhi, TSMK, MS H. 1609; Ganîzâde Mehmed, Dîvân-ı Nâdirî, TSMK, MS H. 889, fols. 5a-7a; and Konya Bölge Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi, MS 3630 (a copy of Gazanfer Agha’s letter on the Ottoman victories).

51 A statistical study by another Hungarian historian, László Nagy, reveals that sixty-three of the eighty-three engagements between the two rivals during the Long War ended with Ottoman defeats --though most of these were small-scale skirmishes and did not produce “decisive” results in terms of uprooting the Ottoman presence in Hungary. Cited in Tibor Szalontay, “The Art of War during the Ottoman-Habsburg Long War (1593-1606) according to Narrative Sources,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 2004, p. 150, fn. 39.

system of tax-farming in order to control the budget deficits. However, by 1600, the gap between state revenues and state expenditures was still so large that the government once again decided to devalue the currency by decreasing the silver content of the Ottoman akçe from 0.38 gr. to 0.32 gr. (i.e., by 15%), with an accompanying change in the gold-silver ratio from 1:13.1 to 1:11. Thus, most soldiers and state officials received their salaries in debased coins in 1600.

Under these circumstances, disgruntled soldiers, particularly the imperial cavalry troops (sipahis), began raising their voices, both during and after the campaigns, against the mismanagement of their military and financial affairs by members of the government and the court. Soon, their discontent turned into open rebellion, which targeted Mehmed III and his court in general, and more particularly the sultan’s mother, Safiye Sultan, and her court faction, above all the powerful royal favorite, Gazanfer Agha, the chief eunuch of the palace (kapu ağası). These military revolts, which took place in the Ottoman capital in 1600, 1601 and 1603, and found critical support from various highest-ranking members of the ulema, reveal the complicated dynamics of practical politics while

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54 For a discussion of currency devaluations between 1585 and 1600, see Tezcan, “Searching for Osman”, pp. 62-83.

55 Finkel, Osman’s Dream, pp. 176-179.
pointing up the intensified factionalism within the court. Collectively, they mark the beginning of the long seventeenth-century Ottoman political and dynastic crisis.

I.3. Gazanfer Agha and the Sipahi Revolts of 1600 and 1601

The first major military uprising against Mehmed III, Saffiye Sultan and Gazanfer Agha occurred in late March 1600, when the imperial cavalry soldiers, upon returning to Istanbul from the campaigns, discovered that a certain number of allotments for the jizya (the poll tax paid by non-Muslims) and the sheep tax, which they had expected to receive as part of their income, had been excluded from the salary distribution and instead sold to grandees at the court. They rose in revolt, demanding the execution of Esperanza Malchi, the Jewish merchant woman, known as a kira, who supplied merchandise to the harem and who was an important financial broker in court circles and a member of Saffiye Sultan’s faction. Malchi had recently been assigned some lucrative tax-farm revenues, and the sipahis accused her of distributing their tax-farms to her own clients while at the same time holding her responsible for the debased coinage, which they argued came from her tax-farm payments. They asked the mufti, Sunullah Efendi, for a legal opinion (fetvâ) justifying the execution, but the mufti refused on the grounds that he was legally bound to protect the life of an Ottoman non-Muslim subject (zimmî); he did, however,

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56 As Maria Pia Pedani, “Saffiye’s Household and Venetian Diplomacy,” *Turcica* 32 (2000), pp. 9-32, explains in detail, Jewish kiras were important actors at the late sixteenth-century Ottoman court, serving as political and financial brokers for the queen mothers and other women in the imperial harem. It should also be noted that Esperanza Malchi was Saffiye Sultan’s second kira and thus is often confused with the first one, Esther Handali, who died in 1588. For further information on the kiras, see J. Heinrich Mordtmann, “Die Judischen Kira im Serai der Sultane,” *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen* 32 (1929), pp. 1-38. See Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” pp. 250-256, for a discussion of tax-farmers-turned-soldiers.
volunteer to intercede with the sultan if they wrote a petition. Dissatisfied with Sunullah Efendi’s response, the sipahis took matters into their own hands and brutally murdered the kira.\textsuperscript{57}

According to the historian Mustafa Selaniki, who witnessed this incident, the soldiers also intended to attack Gazanfer Agha and one of his important protégés, the chief gardener Ferhad Agha, whom they similarly accused of corruption and favoritism.\textsuperscript{58}

Gazanfer Agha had been a powerful actor in Ottoman court politics since the early years of Murad III’s reign. Most importantly, he was one of the royal favorites created by Sultan Murad, in which capacity, over the years, he assembled a large network of clients and protégés composed of his own family members, merchants, court officials, government ministers, artists and intellectuals.\textsuperscript{59} After serving as Murad III’s master of the turban (\textit{diülbend} \textit{gulâmi}) in the privy chamber for three years, he replaced his elder brother, Cafer Agha, as head of the privy chamber in 1577, when the latter was promoted to chief eunuch of the palace (\textit{kapu ağası}).\textsuperscript{60} In 1579, Cafer Agha retired, and Mahmud Agha took his office. Mahmud Agha died in 1581, whereupon Gazanfer Agha was

\textsuperscript{57} For more details of this so-called “Kira Incident,” see Selaniki, II, pp. 584-585; and Orhan Burian, ed., \textit{The Report of Lello, Third English Ambassador to the Sublime Porte} (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1952), pp. 5-7 [hereafter \textit{The Report of Lello}].

\textsuperscript{58} Selaniki, II, p. 856.


\textsuperscript{60} Pedani, “Safiye’s Household,” p. 14; and Eric Dursteler, “Fatima Hatun née Beatrice Michiel: Renegade Women in the Early Modern Mediterranean,” \textit{The Medieval History Journal} 12/2 (2009), pp. 355-382, shed light on the family background of Gazanfer Agha. Among other things, they have conclusively established that Cafer did not die as a result of the castration procedure.
promoted to chief eunuch.\textsuperscript{61} However, Murad III did not appoint a new head of the privy chamber but allowed Gazanfer to keep his former post together with the new one. By controlling these two most important offices, which enabled him to regulate access to the sultan, Gazanfer soon became one of the most prominent power-brokers at the courts of Murad III and Mehmed III. Prior to Gazanfer, no one had held both of these offices at once.

After Mehmed III’s enthronement, Gazanfer Agha not only continued as royal favorite but also became Safiye Sultan’s most important ally at court. He thus quickly accumulated even more wealth, power and prestige while acting as one of the prime movers of imperial politics in the capital together with the queen mother. His unique position is perhaps best attested by the theological college (\textit{medrese}) that he established in Istanbul in 1595. This college, which abuts the Aqueduct of Valens in a busy section of modern-day Istanbul, was granted the status of an imperial college, marking the first time in Ottoman history that a college founded by someone outside the Ottoman royal family had received such an honor.\textsuperscript{62} In light of all this, the soldiers’ plan to remove Gazanfer, along with his client Ferhad Agha, was apparently a calculated action to diminish the overwhelming power and prestige of the sultan’s royal favorite and that of the queen mother, and perhaps to dismantle their court faction.

\textsuperscript{61} Scholars are often confused as to the chronology of Gazanfer Agha’s early political career as it is poorly researched. An overlooked register of the sultan’s inner treasury from the Topkapi Palace Museum Archives sheds further light on several hitherto uncertain points on both Gazanfer’s and Cafer’s careers. See TSMA, D. 34, fols. between 22b and 43b. Also see Seyyid Lokmân, \textit{Zübdetü’i-tevârîh}, Türk İslam Eserleri Müzesi, MS 1973, fols. 92b, and 96a-96b and passim [hereafter Lokman, \textit{Zübde}], for Gazanfer’s appointments.

\textsuperscript{62} Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” p. 159.
Nonetheless, according to the chronicler Hasan Beyzade, it was widely rumored in the capital at the time that the secret ringleader behind this violent incident was in fact Sunullah Efendi the mufti, who was likewise a very powerful political actor, thanks to his religious authority and charisma. The rumor seems to have had some basis in fact, as Sunullah Efendi’s discreet relations with the cavalry soldiers are confirmed in one of the dispatches of the English ambassador Lello. The day after the revolt, in any case, the soldiers changed their minds after receiving their salaries in good coins. Furthermore, the sultan granted their request to rearrange the distribution of tax-farms. For the moment, the two aghas were saved, but the soldiers warned them not to get involved in imperial politics in any way. This was no doubt a message to the queen mother, as well.

Almost a year later, this scenario recurred. As soon as the sipahi returned from campaign, they staged another serious uprising on March 21, 1601. This time, Gazanfer Agha was their main target. Hasan Beyzade writes that the soldiers wanted to get rid of the agha and sent the sultan a delegation of some forty people to discuss the matter. At this extraordinary meeting, they complained about Gazanfer’s corruption, and threatened to depose the sultan if he did not get rid of him. Unable to face down such a threat, Mehmed complied with their wishes. However, the grand vizier, Damad İbrahim Pasha, and his deputy, Yemişci Hasan Pasha, both protégés of Safiye Sultan and Gazanfer Agha,

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63 Hasan Beyzade, III, p. 618.
65 Selaniki, II, p. 856.
interceded on the eunuch’s behalf, reminding the sultan that he was irreplaceable, and the sultan retained him.\textsuperscript{66}

In this episode, too, the mufti Sunullah Efendi is reported to have secretly conspired with the sipahis. However, he is also said to have intervened on behalf of Gazanfer Agha, though only after the first day of the revolt, and calmed the soldiers by claiming that the agha had personally promised to “remove his hands from bribery.”\textsuperscript{67}

According to Baki Tezcan, Grand Admiral Cığalazade Sinan Pasha, one of the most powerful viziers of the time, similarly interceded for the chief eunuch.\textsuperscript{68} On the other hand, according to Agostino Nani, the resident Venetian bailo, the soldiers had initially given Mehmed III a list of several additional officials whom they wanted removed from the palace together with Gazanfer; some of these were, in fact, dismissed.\textsuperscript{69}

The bailo notes that the soldiers claimed that the queen mother, the chief white eunuch, and their cronies were the real governors of state affairs while the sultan was

\textsuperscript{66} As Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” p. 348, n. 178, observes, contemporary Ottoman authors are silent on this major rebellion except for Hasan Beyzade, who briefly records the event but without giving a date. He does, however, include the details of Ibrahim Pasha’s letter to Mehmed III on why the sultan should keep his favorite: “Vezîr-i a’zam-i merkûm, âğa-yi mersûmu alikomağa hâ’is, ’harem-i muhteremde olan ağalarun ekseri hâdis olub, umûr-i din ü devlete ’ârîf-i selâtîn-i ma’dâlet-karînê vâkîf olmayub, iç-halkına sebeb-i ihtilal ve ağalar birbirlerine düşüb, sebeb-i teşviş-i ahvöl olduğundan mû’adda, taşradan ma’rûz olan mühimmân pâ’dişêh-i süûtûde-sûfûta gayrîlar kemê-yenbage téšfîm ve lâzım olan cevâb-i hikmet-nûse in irakî dîn-i muhâmama mu’tell olmak lâzım gelir. Ne hâl ise, sâ’a’îlerden ’âkl ve ahvöl-i ümêmendên gâfîl değildür. Muhassal, merkezinde karârî nâfî’ ve müsteclibi menâfî’dîr. Ve ana nisbet irîsê, ifîrê ve erbâb-i garaz tahrîkî ilâmî bi-şûbe vî mirâ’dur’ diyû, hâh u nâ-hâh makâminda ikbâ’ itdûrdi.” Hasan Beyzade, III, pp. 640-641. For Yemişçi Hasan Pasha’s letter on the same issue, see Cengiz Orhonlu, \textit{Osmanlı Tarihine Âid Belgeler: Telhîsler (1597-1606)} (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1970), p. 75, no. 84.

\textsuperscript{67} Hasan Beyzade, III, p. 618.

\textsuperscript{68} Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” p. 125.

\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Calendar State of Papers - Venetian}, vol. 9, p. 450; and Pedani, “Safiye’s Household,” p. 25. As will be discussed in the fourth chapter, the chief gardener Ferhad Agha was one of these officials dismissed upon sipahis’ demand.
only their representative (*mütevelli*).\textsuperscript{70} Mehmed III’s sovereign authority was clearly eroding fast before the eyes of his soldiers and their supporters, just as his father’s had a decade earlier. Hence, the soldiers seemingly saw no alternative to deposition as a means of diminishing Safiye Sultan’s power over her son and of eliminating Mehmed III’s powerful royal favorite, Gazanfer Agha. Yet, even though the soldiers blamed the sultan for acting like a puppet in the hands of what I would call the Safiye-Gazanfer faction, the opposite was rather the case in that the members of this faction were intentionally empowered by Mehmed III to act as his power and patronage brokers among the Ottoman ruling elite and thus to assert his sovereign will over the court. I will return to this point in the third chapter.

A few weeks after this second rebellion against the Safiye-Gazanfer faction, Nani observed that as long as the members of this faction were supported by the Janissaries, who were at that time under the command of Ali Agha, the brother-in-law of Gazanfer Agha, while the *ulema* and the *sipahis* remained divided, the faction would retain control of court politics. Only when the *sipahis*, the *ulema* and the Janissaries formed a united front against the faction would it lose its power.\textsuperscript{71} This was, in fact, what happened less than two years later, with devastating consequences for many.


\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
I.4. The Sipahi Revolt of 1603 and Grand Vizier Yemişci Hasan Pasha

In early January 1603, the political crisis in the capital reached its climax when the third and most violent military rebellion against Mehmed III broke out, once again among soldiers who had recently returned from an anti-Habsburg campaign. This rebellion had its roots in the campaign of 1602, which had promised success at the beginning but turned into a fiasco when the commander-in-chief, Grand Vizier Yemişci Hasan Pasha, made critical mistakes in calculating the movements of the Habsburg forces and lost two crucial fortresses to the enemy after six months of fighting. When the cavalry soldiers reached the capital after a long and miserable journey, they quickly joined forces with the Janissaries, who were likewise furious about the suffering, humiliation and casualties of the campaign.72

On January 4, 1603, the sipahis and Janissaries jointly rebelled and even took indirect control of the government, forcing the sultan to replace a number of key officials, including, naturally, Yemişci Hasan Pasha, and reinstate Sunullah Efendi, who had been deposed in August 1601, as mufti.73 Overall, the Venetian bailo’s prediction had come true: the sipahis, the Janissaries and the newly appointed top-ranking ulema had formed a united front against the sultan’s court, and the Safiye-Gazanfer faction in particular. Mehmed III had no choice but to confront his unruly soldiers in person. Two days later, he met with the leaders of the outraged sipahis who demanded the executions of Gazanfer


73 As a result of the sipahi rebellion in March 1601, Mufti Sunullah Efendi had been replaced with Hocazade Mehmed Efendi on August 2, 1601. For Sunullah Efendi and his political career, see Mehmet Ipşirli, “Şeyhülislâm Sun’ullah Efendi,” I.Ü. Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi 13 (1983-1987), pp. 209-256.
Agha; Osman Agha, the chief eunuch of the imperial harem (dârü’s-sa’âde ağası); and the aforementioned Saatçî Hasan Pasha, who was just dismissed from the deputy grand vizierate. They held them responsible for corrupting military affairs, intervening in the government decision-making process, and downplaying the threat posed by the Celâli rebels sweeping through Anatolia, in short, for the empire-wide disorder and devastation.74 They were particularly incensed by the sultan’s appointment, at the two eunuchs’ urging, of Ağa Husrev Pasha, the governor-general of Diyarbakır, as commander-in-chief of the army that was fighting the post-Karayazı Celâli leaders in central Anatolia. The two eunuchs, they claimed, had actually sold the post to Husrev Pasha because he was a eunuch like them. Husrev Pasha had failed to curb the Celâlis’ depredations, but the two chief eunuchs, abetted by Saatçî Hasan Pasha, had never informed the sultan of his inadequacy.75

To counter these accusations, Saatçî Hasan Pasha produced letters from the queen mother and the two chief eunuchs instructing him not to reveal to the sultan any bad news related to the military campaigns. Mehmed III therefore pardoned him. The Janissaries then interceded for their former agha, Tırnakçî Hasan Pasha, who was likewise spared. Even Safiye Sultan, now that her faction was incapacitated, was allowed to remain in


75 Hasan Beyzade, III, pp. 690-691; and Katip Çelebi, Fezleke, pp. 417-418.
Topkapi Palace. Gazanfer and Osman Aghas were not so lucky, however: they were taken from the inner court and decapitated before the sultan’s eyes on January 6, 1603.\textsuperscript{76}

Accounts vary as to whether the soldiers seriously considered deposing the sultan. According to Lello, they threatened to replace him with one of his sons, probably Prince Mahmud.\textsuperscript{77} Hasan Beyzade, however, repeatedly claims that the sipahis attempted to put the mufti, Sunullah Efendi, on the throne on the grounds that the leader of the Muslim community should be chosen for his virtues.\textsuperscript{78} The idea of replacing the sultan not with another member of the Ottoman dynasty but with a member of the ulema had never been put forward in the three centuries of the Ottoman Empire’s existence.

The implications of this alleged attempt to replace Mehmed III with the mufti are thus highly significant. First and foremost, it points to the criticism directed against the sedentary style of rule that the Ottoman sultans had adopted under Murad III, that is, against the sultan’s utilization of royal favorites and their court factions instead of being directly involved in the business of rule. Secondly, it suggests that the Ottoman sultan was no longer considered irreplaceable as a monarch and even that the Ottoman dynasty was no longer sacrosanct. Indeed, from this moment onwards, the search for an alternative to the rule of the House of Osman would resurface more often, particularly during similar large-scale military rebellions, such as in 1622 and 1703.\textsuperscript{79} Thirdly, it

\textsuperscript{76} The Report of Lello, pp. 11-12.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{79} See Feridun M. Emecen, “Osmanlı Hanedanına Alternatif Arayışlar Üzerine Bazı Örnekler ve
marks the beginnings of the “kul problem” that would plague the Ottoman capital and provinces, particularly Egypt, in the seventeenth century, as a result of which Ottoman rulers would face deposition and even execution, as in the cases of Osman II (r. 1618-22) and Sultan İbrahim (r. 1640-48). Last but not least, it shows the growing power and prestige of the mufti within the Ottoman body politic.  

The dénouement of the deposition plot shows the grand vizier allying with the Janissaries against the mufti and the sipahis. On hearing of the rebellion, the grand vizier, Yemişçi Hasan Pasha, had headed for Istanbul from his winter quarters in Belgrade, but because of the severe weather, it took him several weeks to arrive. Although the sipahis were lying in wait for him, he slipped through a gate in the city walls that the sultan had deliberately left open for him. In the face of a petition requesting his execution that the new deputy grand vizier, Güzelce Mahmud Pasha, had sent to Mehmed III, following a justificatory fetvâ from Sunullah Efendi, Hasan Pasha dictated the sultan’s response, as follows:

Whatever the grand vizier did [in the past], it happened with my knowledge. If he is guilty, I am capable of punishing him myself! Why do the soldiers interfere in my relationship with my vizier? I will never give my permission for their interference.

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80 For the origins of the kul problem in Egypt and the nature of rebellions in Ottoman Arab lands at the turn of the seventeenth century, see Jane Hathaway, “The ‘Mamluk Breaker’ Who Was Really a Kul Breaker: A Fresh Look at Kul Kiran Mehmed Pasha, Governor of Egypt 1607-1611,” in The Arab Lands in the Ottoman Era, ed. Jane Hathaway (Minneapolis: The Center for Early Modern History, University of Minnesota, 2009), pp. 93-109. For a detailed discussion of the increased political power of the mufti in the late 1590s and the early 1600s, see Tezcan, “The Ottoman Mevali.”

81 Hasan Beyzade, III, pp. 695-698.

Mahmud Pasha and the sipahis were shocked at this response and realized that they would have to kill Hasan Pasha themselves. They surrounded the palace where he was staying on the Hippodrome but were unable to break in.

Meanwhile, by dispensing large bribes, Yemişci Hasan Pasha secured the Janissaries’ support for the deposition of Sunullah Efendi, whom they accused of collusion with the leader of the Celâlis, Karayazıcı, and wrote to the sultan, recommending that he be exiled to Rhodes. In so doing, Hasan Pasha was attempting to rearrange the balance among the three main loci of power at the imperial court, namely, the sipahis, the Janissaries and the ulema. In brief, he sought to mobilize the entire city against the sipahis and Sunullah Efendi. Once he had gathered this armed force, Hasan Pasha obtained a fetvâ from the newly-appointed mufti, Ebülmeyamin Mustafa Efendi, authorizing an attack on the rebellious sipahis. Hasan Pasha’s forces hunted down many of them, and although their ringleaders initially melted into the city, they were found the following day and executed. Nevertheless, the deposed mufti, Sunullah Efendi, remained at large, along with his client, Güzelse Mahmud Pasha, the deposed deputy grand vizier. Sunullah’s disappearance was particularly worrisome since the sipahis still harbored the goal of making him the sultan.\(^3\)

Hasan Pasha had resolved this crisis without, however, breaking the alliance between the ulema, as represented by Sunullah, and the sipahis. Moreover, his success made him dictatorial. He apparently believed that because he had saved the sultan, he had his full support and thus could take any political action that he wished. As most

\(^3\) Hasan Beyzade, III, pp. 706-736.
contemporary authors aptly observe, his behavior was so authoritarian that he could not any more “tolerate anybody in the imperial council but himself.”84 Immediately after the meeting with Mehmed III described above, yet without any justification and without the sultan’s approval, he tried to replace several government officials and courtiers whom he deemed threats to his authority. Among his first victims were Ali Agha, Gazanfer Agha’s brother-in-law, and the aforementioned Tırnakçı Hasan Pasha, who were put to death, while Saatçi Hasan Pasha was exiled to Trabzon and Hadım Hafız Ahmed Pasha, another former deputy grand vizier, was arrested and all of his property confiscated. Many others shared similar fates. Yemişci Hasan Pasha even attempted to secure the execution of the grand admiral, Cıgalazade Sinan Pasha, who he believed was conspiring to obtain his position.85 In the end, Hasan Pasha alienated almost everyone in the Ottoman political body, including his own clients and “creatures.” Eventually, he was dismissed and then executed in October 1603.

Hasan Pasha’s actions to counter the military rebellion shed light on the complicated relations and intricate balances of power that shaped the patterns of practical politics in the Ottoman court and capital in the early 1600s and for many years thereafter. To begin with, the Janissaries and the sipahis formed the two main groups of armed forces in the capital; thus, each faction in the court had to ally with one of them. As a result, Mehmed III and Hasan Pasha, whose positions and even lives were seriously threatened by the ulema-sipahi alliance, had no other option other than regaining the

84 Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, p. 600.
85 Hasan Beyzade, III, pp. 737-741; and Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, pp. 600-601.
loyalty of the Janissaries and using them to crush the rebellion. In other words, they chose to neutralize one group of soldiers (the sipahis) and replace them as arbiters of power with another group (the Janissaries). This sort of solution did nothing to resolve or transcend the factionalism that plagued the court and capital, and was thus by its very nature temporary. Moreover, it created a serious problem by leaving the Janissaries more powerful than ever while increasing the alienation between the two main branches of the Ottoman army.

The roles that the highest-ranking members of the Ottoman ulema, the scholar-jurists, played in factional politics were equally critical. As the ultimate decision-makers in religious affairs, these jurists gained tremendous power and prestige throughout the sixteenth century while at the same time turning into a sort of nobility with the ability to pass their status onto their sons. The rise of ulema to such a prominent place in Ottoman society began during the reign of Süleyman I (1520-66), whose regime was defined by a strong adherence to Sunni Islam vis-à-vis the rival state of the Shiite Safavids in Iran. During this period, as Baki Tezcan aptly puts it, “the development of [a hierarchical] administrative-judicial apparatus in conjunction with the transformation of a feudal monarchy into a patrimonial empire created a political concern about the definition of the one and only right version of Islamic beliefs in parallel to the political need to unify the legal traditions of the empire under the rubric of the Sharī‘a, which I prefer to call the jurists’ law, emphasizing the interpretative role of the jurists in the transformation of Islamic sources into positive law.” 86 Accordingly, the Ottoman ulema not only

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functioned as the main agents of the state in systematizing Islamic law to establish a new empire-wide order, but they also played a crucial role in the political rivalry between the Sunni Ottomans and the Shiite Safavids by asserting the legitimacy of the former and the heresy of the latter by way of defining the right version of Islam and enforcing it.87

As the head of the Ottoman ulema, the mufti became an alternative locus of power in this new imperial order, for his fetvâs provided the justification for numerous social and economic measures, as well as important political decisions such as punishments, banishments and executions. In other words, although he was not a member of the imperial government, the Ottoman mufti was considered the final arbiter of Islamic law and thus the most prominent non-governmental opinion leader. Hence, by the end of the sixteenth century, the mufti was held up by interest groups such as the sipahis and Janissaries as a “more just” alternative to the sultan, whose legitimacy was seriously questioned.

In sum, since the Ottoman ulema were not part of the imperial household, like the courtiers and viziers, they functioned as a sort of “wild card” in factional politics, free to form ties with all parties. For this reason, as Tezcan demonstrates, the highest-ranking members of the Ottoman ulema, such as the aforementioned Sunullah Efendi, were particularly influential in shaping the dynamics of practical politics in the court and capital. Moreover, as noted above, families of ulema had their own alternative networks of power and patronage, most importantly those that they formed with the ruling viziers and other prominent grandees of the court through marriage alliances. At the same time,

87 See Markus Dressler, “Inventing Orthodoxy: Competing Claims for Authority and Legitimacy in the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict,” in Karateke and Reinkowski, eds., Legitimizing the Order, pp. 151-173.
they established networks of clients who connected them with financial resources all over the empire. Thus, they often supplemented their incomes with revenues generated by their clients, such as tax-collectors or administrators of cash vakıfs that they were able to register in the capital and provinces. However, they still had to compete with each other for offices and clients given that rival court factions typically tried to appoint their own candidates to the same positions. Beginning in the latter part of the sixteenth century, as a result, the top-ranking Ottoman ulema and their families became increasingly involved in the factional struggles at the imperial center.\textsuperscript{88}

These sipahi rebellions backed by the highest-ranking members of the ulema mark the beginning of a severe political crisis in the Ottoman Empire which would define most of the seventeenth century. Furthermore, these military rebellions during the last years of Mehmed III’s reign caused significant instability within the Ottoman polity as a result of Hasan Pasha’s frequent, and to a degree, successful attempts to reconfigure power relations to his own advantage. As a result, Ahmed I and his advisors, immediately after his succession, faced the challenge of re-stabilizing imperial affairs and re-establishing balance within the court and the government, as we shall see in the next chapter.

On the other hand, perhaps the most significant legacy of Mehmed III was a dynastic family so fragile that it would face extinction early in his son’s reign. The root

of this danger lay in the execution of Ahmed’s elder brother, Prince Mahmud, in the
turbulent final months of Mehmed III’s life.

I.5. The Execution of Prince Mahmud and the Fate of His Mother

For Mehmed III, the training of his sons for the sultanate, important as it was, was
probably a secondary concern relative to their health and well-being. In an age in which
infant and child mortality was quite high, having several healthy sons was a top priority
for any sultan as the Ottoman dynastic succession had hitherto been from father to son in
an unbroken male line. Against this backdrop, it is important to note that Mehmed III’s
family was much smaller and thus more fragile than those of previous sultans, notably
that of his own father, Murad III, who fathered at least twenty sons and eleven
daughters.  

Unlike his grandfather, Selim II (r. 1566-74), and his father, Murad III, both of
whom were succeeded by their first-born sons, Mehmed III had a tragic experience with
his sons. In 1597, his eldest son, Prince Selim, suddenly died at the age of thirteen, most
likely of illness. With Selim’s death, the issue of dynastic continuity should have
become a major concern for Mehmed as he was likely left with only two small sons, ten-
year-old Mahmud and seven-year-old Ahmed, at a time when, according to one rumor, he

89 Anthony D. Alderson, The Structure of the Ottoman Dynasty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956),
90 According to Katip Çelebi, Fezleke, p. 452, Prince Selim died on April 20, 1597. The report of the
Venetian bailo Girolamo Cappello, dated 1600, points to a suspicion regarding Safiye Sultan’s possible role
in accelerating the death of Prince Selim. According to Cappello, Selim was considered by many to be a
good replacement for Mehmed III because of his vigor and because he was expected to diminish the power
of Safiye Sultan. Maria Pedani-Fabris, ed., Relazioni di ambasciatori veneti al senato, vol. 14:
Costantinopoli, Relazioni inedite (1512-1789) (Padua: Bottega d’Erasmo, 1996), pp. 399-400. Also
had grown very fat and had health problems that curtailed his reproductive powers.\textsuperscript{91} Luckily, bad news about Mehmed III’s health soon proved wrong and he fathered another son, Mustafa (the future Mustafa I), born in Istanbul around 1601-1602.\textsuperscript{92} In 1602, however, the sultan lost another son, Cihangir, about whom we know only that he was born in Istanbul and died at a very young age.\textsuperscript{93}

Thus, barely a year before his death, Sultan Mehmed had only three sons left: Mahmud, Ahmed and Mustafa, none of whom had been sent to govern a province or even circumcised. The eldest, Prince Mahmud was probably anxiously awaiting his provincial assignment. However, according to Agostino Nani, the Venetian bailo resident in Istanbul between 1600 and 1603, this had to wait for the war in Hungary and the rebellions in Anatolia to come to an end.\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{91} Calendar of State Papers - Venetian, vol. IX, p. 269. It is certain that Mehmed III had grown very fat during these years. His contemporary images testify to this point. Compare, for instance, Pietro Bertelli, \textit{Vite Degl'imperatori de Turchi} ([NP], ca. 1596), p. 54; Talîkızade, \textit{Şehnâme-i Sultân-i Selatîn-i Cihân}, fols. 68b-69a; and Ganîzâde Mehmed, \textit{Dîvân-i Nâdirî}, fols. 7a and 8b.

\textsuperscript{92} According to the conventional Ottoman historiography, Mustafa I was born ca. 1592. See \textit{İslâm Ansiklopedisi} [hereafter \textit{IA}], s.v. “Mustafâ I,” by M. Münir Aktepe; \textit{EI}\textit{I}, s.v. “Mustafâ I,” by John H. Kramers; and \textit{Diyanaet Vakfi İslâm Ansiklopedisi} [hereafter \textit{DIA}], s.v. “Mustafâ I,” by Feridun Emecen. Among modern scholars, only Baki Tezcan has observed that a much later birthdate is given in published contemporary Ottoman and non-Ottoman narrative sources. Karacèzellikade Abdülaziz, \textit{Ravzatü'l-ebâr} (Bulaq: Al-Matba'a al-Amîriyya, H. 1248/1832), p. 494 [hereafter Karacèzellikade], mentions that he was born in H. 1011 (1602/1603), while the Venetian bailo Ottaviano Bon, in his report dated 1609, gives his age as ten: Pedani-Fabris, ed., \textit{Relazioni di ambasciatori veneti}, p. 514; also cited by Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” p. 330, n. 30. Whereas Tezcan (pp. 90-92) has cast serious doubt on Mustafa’s accepted age and is inclined to accept a later birthdate (ca. 1600), Peirce, \textit{The Imperial Harem}, p. 99, mentions Mustafa’s age as nine at the time of Ahmed I’s enthronement but provides no reference; on the basis of Peirce’s study, Piterberg, \textit{An Ottoman Tragedy}, p. 12, gives his age as eight. The later birthdate is upheld by the unpublished observations of the Venetian bailo Francesco Contarini; see my “İnkırâzın Eşiğinde Bir Hanedan: III. Mehmed, I. Ahmed, I. Mustafa ve 17. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Siyasî Krizi,” \textit{Çalışmalar Dergisi} 26 (2009), pp. 45-96.

\textsuperscript{93} Hasan Beyzade, III, p. 766; and \textit{EI}\textit{I}, s.v. “Mehemmed III,” by Susan Skilliter.

An anecdote related by Ahmed I to one of his favorite viziers, Hafiz Ahmed Pasha, is revealing in this regard. According to the chronicler Peçevi, who heard the story from Ahmed Pasha, Ahmed had occasionally witnessed his elder brother impatiently asking their father to send him to Anatolia with an army so that he could personally eliminate the Celâli rebels and bring relief to the sultan, whom he observed growing seriously demoralized by their ever-escalating attacks. Ironically, however, Mahmud’s importuning led Mehmed III to suspect that he actually sought to usurp the throne.  

On June 7, 1603, while Yemişci Hasan Pasha was still exercising unchecked vizierial power and the repercussions of the last sipahi rebellion were still unfolding in the capital, Mehmed III ordered Prince Mahmud’s execution. According to contemporary sources, this decision was triggered when the prince’s mother, Halime Sultan, asked a Sufi sheikh to tell her son’s fortune. The sheikh’s letter of reply predicted that Mahmud would succeed to the throne within six months, after unpleasant things happened to his father. However, the letter was intercepted by the new chief eunuch of the imperial

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96 As I will explain shortly, Prince Mahmud and Mustafa I were, in fact, full brothers, sons of a mother whose name has thus far remained unknown in Ottoman historiography. An overlooked dynastic genealogy preserved in a nineteenth-century manuscript reveals that her name was Halime: Millî Kütüphane, MS 06 Hk 11/3, fol. 5a: “Vâlide-i Sultan Mustafâ Han-ı evvel, Halîme Sultan, Ayasofya’da oğlının türbesinde medîfûndur.”
harem, Abdürrezzak Agha, who then gave it to Mehmed III and his mother Safiye Sultan instead of delivering it to the prince’s mother.\textsuperscript{97}

For a sultan who had faced three military revolts and been threatened with deposition twice in the past three years, such a letter would no doubt have raised suspicions of treason, particularly at a time when his son was so eager to leave the court for the battlefield and was said to have begun “[…] to grieve and murmur to see how his father was altogether led by the old Sultana his grandmother and the state went to ruin.”\textsuperscript{98} “Grown so fat and physically unfit that his doctors warned him against campaigning,” Peirce observes, “the sultan was particularly threatened by this augury because of Mahmud’s popularity with the Janissaries.”\textsuperscript{99} Moreover, the Venetian bailo Contarini heard rumors about a conspiracy to poison Mehmed III in order to “bring the Prince [Mahmud] to the command of the empire.”\textsuperscript{100} In the end, after a brief period of imprisonment, interrogation and even torture to make him confess, Prince Mahmud was strangled for plotting to seize the throne.\textsuperscript{101}

\begin{flushright}
97 Hasan Beyzade, III, p. 765. One of Contarini’s dispatches reveals the timing of these events. ASVe, SDC, filza 57, fols. 209v-210r (dated May 13, 1603): “Volendo la madre del Principe per curiosità sapere da certo astrologo qualche particolare che potesse occorrere al figliolo, mentre che un Negro eunuco portava il pronostico, per darglielo, le fu tolto di mano da un altro, et dato al Gran Signore, il quale si alterò grandemente, perché in esso si conteneva che il Principe doveva subentra presto al commando di questo Imperio.”

98 The Report of Lello, p. 14 [I have modernized the spelling].

99 Peirce, The Imperial Harem, p. 231.

100 ASVe, SDC, filza 57, fol. 314r (dated June 14, 1603).

101 Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, p. 595; Peçevi/TSMK, fols. 288a-289a; and İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, “Üçüncü Mehmed’in Oğlu Şehzade Mahmud’un Ölüümü,” Belleten 94 (1960), pp. 263-267. Contarini notes that four mutes executed Prince Mahmud in a harem room while Mehmed III waited outside. After his order was carried out, the sultan entered the room to make sure that the prince was dead. Ahmed should have been present in his own harem room at the time. ASVe, SDC, filza 57, fol. 313r (dated June 14, 1603): “Hoggi otto giorni il Gran Signore entrò nella camera dove di suo ordine stava ritirato il Principe Sultan Mamut primo genito senza poter partire, dopo il successo di haver mandato la madre di esso

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According to the established historiography, Mahmud’s mother was also executed at around the same time. However, Contarini’s dispatches and the chronicle of Karaçelebizade suggest otherwise. A week after Mahmud’s execution, Contarini wrote:

Rumors ran that likewise the mother of this prince had been killed, but this was not verified; in contrast, it is certain that a miserable butchery was made of the prince’s servants and of his mother’s slaves and eunuchs without leaving even a single person.\textsuperscript{102}

After investigating the problem for another week, Contarini informed the Doge:

I know with the firmest foundation that the mother of the former Prince Mahmud lives and stays in the Old Palace.\textsuperscript{103}

From the language of his latter dispatch, it is obvious that Contarini got this information from a reliable source. Moreover, an Ottoman source supports his claim while providing additional details about Mehmed III’s family and the politics of dynastic reproduction during his reign. Karaçelebizade Abdülaziz Efendi, a mufti and a celebrated intellectual and historian of the mid-seventeenth century, asserts in his chronicle that Prince Mahmud and Prince Mustafa were full brothers, sons of the same mother.\textsuperscript{104} We know, furthermore, that Mustafa’s mother was alive during her son’s short second reign

\textsuperscript{102} ASVe, SDC, filza 57, fol. 313v (dated June 14, 1603): “Corse fama che medesimamente fusse stata amazzata la madre di esso Principe, ma non si verificò, come all’incontro è sicurissimo che fu fatta una miserabil stragge delli servitori del principe, et delle schiave, et eunuchi di sua madre senza esservi restata pur una persona sola.”

\textsuperscript{103} ASVe, SDC, filza 57, fol. 358v (dated June 28, 1603): “Ho saputo con buonissimo fondamento, che la madre del già Principe Sultan Mamut vive et sta nel serraglio vecchio.”

\textsuperscript{104} Karaçelebizade, p. 494.
in 1622-23. Thus, in light of the information provided by Contarini and Karaçelebizade, there is no doubt that the mother of Prince Mahmud and the mother of Prince Mustafa were one and the same, and that she was kept alive to nurture her four-year-old son Mustafa, who was, after all, the only hope for dynastic reproduction besides Ahmed. This new information, in turn, points to the hitherto unknown fact that Sultan Mehmed had at least one favorite concubine (haseki) and that he followed the new policy of dynastic reproduction initiated by Süleyman I, namely, having more than one son by a single concubine. As Leslie Peirce observes, prior to Süleyman, each of the sultan’s concubines was allowed to produce only one son, although she could have daughters until the birth of a son curtailed her childbearing function. Süleyman broke this tradition, conventionally known as the one mother-one son policy, not only by having multiple sons by his favorite concubine, Hurrem Sultan, but also by contracting a legal marriage with her. Each of Süleyman’s immediate successors, Selim II and Murad III, continued this new policy by favoring only one concubine, Nurbanu Sultan and Safiye Sultan, respectively. Thus, as Peirce notes, under these two sultans, the position of the favorite concubine gained a kind of institutional logic in that only the eldest sons of these hasekis (the future Murad III and Mehmed III) were sent to govern provinces and thus singled out among the other princes as the most likely candidates for the throne, which they indeed eventually took.

106 Peirce, The Imperial Harem, pp. 57-97.
Because none of Mehmed III’s sons was assigned to a province during his father’s reign, scholars have assumed that Mehmed had no favorite concubine. But thanks to Contarini and Karaçelebizade, we know that he did have at least one, Halime Sultan, who bore him two princes, if not more. Moreover, as I will explain shortly, Mehmed’s viziers were by mid-1602 pressuring him to designate an heir apparent. Yet, since Prince Mahmud was neither assigned to a province nor officially named crown prince, his mother’s status as haseki was not fully established, in contrast to the cases of Nurbanu and Safiye Sultans in the past. In any case, the birth of her second son around 1602 cemented Halime Sultan’s status as the favorite concubine of Mehmed III.

Similarly, Ahmed I esteemed one of his concubines, Kösem Mahpeyker Sultan, from 1605 onwards; by the end of his life, he had at least three daughters and four sons by her. Hence, we can conclude that the new Ottoman policy of dynastic reproduction initiated under Süleyman I in the 1520s was well-established by the end of the sixteenth century.

107 Since the sultans’ concubines and sons are poorly documented during this period, there is no way to be precise on the total number of children mothered by any given haseki. Leonardo Donà, the Venetian extraordinary ambassador who came to Istanbul in 1596 to congratulate Mehmed III on his enthronement, claims that, Mehmed III had three sons (Selim, Ahmed and Süleyman) and two daughters, all by the same mother, i.e., Handan Sultan. Federico Seneca, Il Doge Leonardo Donà: la sua vita e la sua preparazione politica prima del dogado (Padova: Editrice Antenore, 1959), p. 286, reprinted in Firpo, ed., Relazioni di ambasciatori veneti, p. 334. If we assume that Donà’s indirect remark about Handan Sultan’s status as the mother of three princes is valid, it would indicate that she was actually Mehmed III’s first haseki, well before Halime Sultan, but only for a brief period since Prince Selim died in 1597, as noted above, while Prince Süleyman seems to have passed away at a young age at around the same time.

108 According to the established historiographical tradition, Kösem Sultan was the mother of Princes Murad (the future Murad IV, 1623-40), Kasim and Ibrahim (the future Sultan Ibrahim, 1640-48). However, Baki Tezcan, “The Debut of Kösem Sultan’s Political Career,” Turcica 40 (2008), pp. 350-351, convincingly demonstrates that she was also the mother of Prince Mehmed, the second son of Ahmed I, born in 1605. For the daughters of Ahmed I, see idem, “Searching for Osman,” p. 334, n. 58. For further information on Ahmed’s son, see the next chapter.
century and continued in force until the end of Ahmed I’s reign. Previously, the reign of Mehmed III was seen as a break with this pattern.\textsuperscript{109}

\textit{I.6. Concluding Remarks: Dynastic Factionalism in Times of Crisis}

As seen above, the political and military crisis that erupted in the Ottoman imperial capital in the early 1600s was a direct result of the Long War in Hungary and the ever-increasing Celâli rebellions in Anatolia, which took a heavy toll on the empire’s financial and human resources. One defining feature of this crisis during Mehmed III’s sultanate was the complex nature of factionalism and patron-client relations among the ruling elite in Istanbul and the provinces. The recurring sipahi rebellions of this period were clearly more than a violent clash between a sedentary, secluded sultan and his underpaid and campaign-weary soldiers. They reflected an intensified political-economic struggle among the rival factions entrenched at the court. Each of these factions comprised different members from all sectors of the Ottoman administration and from society at large. The incessant tug-of-war at the highest levels of the Ottoman military-administrative hierarchy at the turn of the seventeenth century continually tested and redrew the boundaries of each faction’s influence in the running of an empire in crisis while shaping factional politics in Istanbul for many years to come and determining the process of the empire-wide extraction and distribution of wealth and power central to each faction’s cohesion.

\textsuperscript{109} Compare Peirce, \textit{The Imperial Harem}, pp. 104-105.
Under such circumstances, the very foundations of the three-hundred-year-old Ottoman dynastic establishment suffered a serious blow. For the first time in Ottoman history, as we have seen, a figure from outside the royal family, the mufti Sunullah Efendi, became a viable candidate for the throne -- a measure of the depth of the legitimacy crisis that gripped the dynasty during this period. In early January 1603, the final violent encounter between Sunullah’s faction, composed largely of imperial soldiers, and the dominant Safiye-Gazanfer faction created such an unstable political environment that the sultan was forced to execute his eldest son so as to prevent his own deposition while allowing his grand vizier, Yemişci Hasan Pasha, to exercise unchecked authority in the imperial government.

Halime Sultan’s status as Mehmed III’s favorite concubine points to another important problem which has not been fully investigated by scholars, namely, factionalism within the imperial harem at the turn of the seventeenth century, which in turn encourages us to focus on more complex factors behind the execution of Prince Mahmud and the eventual ascension of Ahmed. As Leslie Peirce has demonstrated, a series of institutional changes took place in the Ottoman dynastic establishment between the reigns of Süleyman I and Murad III, as a result of which the queen mother (vâlide sultân) became the head of the imperial harem whereas the favorite concubine of the sultan had to compete with her “for influence over the sultan and over factions in government.”110 “In the seventeenth century,” Peirce continues, “when princes and their mothers were resident in the imperial palace rather than in a distant province, they needed

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110 Ibid., p. 91.
to be extremely discreet. They were not under the watchful eye not only of the sultan, but of the valide sultan and of mothers and supporters of rival princes. The valide sultan was the most formidable challenge to a prince’s mother because she was equally intent on protecting the interests of her own son, the sultan.” According to Peirce, this type of clash between two generations of mothers in the royal family is best illustrated in the affair of Prince Mahmud, “whose mother was not sufficiently circumspect in her efforts to bolster the prince’s candidacy.”

It was indeed a clash between Safiye Sultan and Halime Sultan that led to execution of Prince Mahmud, but this conflict also drew in Halime’s rival Handan Sultan, the mother of Prince Ahmed. Furthermore, it occurred in the absence of Gazanfer Agha, the powerful chief eunuch of the palace. The conflict among the three royal women was not unrelated to the soldiery revolts described earlier. A year before Mahmud’s tragic end, a discussion took place among the viziers of the imperial council, apparently as a result of the sipahi rebellion in 1601, as to which of the sultan’s sons should be designated heir to the throne. According to an overlooked Venetian intelligence report, which was sent to the court of Queen Elizabeth I in late July 1602, the viziers were divided into two groups: one supporting Prince Mahmud since he was the eldest prince, the other favoring his younger brother Ahmed in the belief that Mahmud was unable to father children. No doubt the imperial Janissaries and sipahis took sides in this debate, as well.

111 Ibid., pp. 231-232, citing the incident of the Sufi sheikh’s letter and the rumors of a plot against Mehmed III, and quoting the report of the English ambassador Lello.
112 Edward Salisbury, ed., Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. the Marquis of Salisbury,
Against this backdrop, Halime Sultan tried to persuade her husband to single out their eldest son Mahmud as his heir and send him to a province, just as Mahmud himself had wished. Clearly, the favorite concubine and her son had their supporters among the viziers and soldiers. Meanwhile, Handan Sultan, as the mother of the only other viable candidate for the throne, must have been alarmed by Halime’s actions and would have sided with Queen Mother Safiye Sultan in order to protect her own son, Prince Ahmed, if not to promote him for the throne instead of his elder brother. Handan may well have been the source of the rumor about Prince Mahmud’s infertility, since she had every reason to undermine him before the sultan decided on a successor. Mehmed III’s response to these machinations remains unclear. While the succession debate dragged on, the third sipahi rebellion broke out, which, as noted above, not only threatened Mehmed’s throne but resulted in the murder of his favorite, Gazanfer Agha, and thus significantly reduced the power of his mother’s court faction. In the course of the tumult, Safiye Sultan reportedly became more and more suspicious of Halime Sultan and Prince Mahmud. According to another rumor circulating in the capital, if their conspiracy to assassinate the sultan failed, Mahmud would be secretly taken to a province, where he could easily gather an army and fight for the throne.  

In short, the main factor in Mahmud’s execution was not an innocent letter that his mother sent to a sheikh but rather the succession debate and the clouds of suspicion.

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Preserved at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1923), vol. XIV, pp. 226-227 (dated July 26, 1602): “[…] The Grand Signor becoming more silly every day, the Bassas have resolved to nominate his successor. He has only two sons, and part favour the first born, part the second, these latter alleging that the elder is incapable of having children, which has caused no small dissension amongst them.”

113 ASVe, SDC, filza 57, fols. 313r-v (dated June 14, 1603).
that had hung over the prince and his mother since the summer of 1602. Under these circumstances, Safiye Sultan had to take action. After all, as Peirce notes, in the Ottoman dynastic system, the queen mother’s foremost duty was to protect her sultan son from any potential threats. Indeed, the English ambassador Lello and the Venetian bailo Contarini both indicate that Safiye Sultan was the mastermind behind the execution of Prince Mahmud, a solution which she apparently put forward in order not only to relieve the sultan of deposition anxiety but also to eliminate Halime Sultan, of whom she was reportedly “very jealous” (read threatened). According to Contarini, the queen mother had the open support of Handan Sultan in this scheme.\textsuperscript{114}

In this context, the execution of Gazanfer Agha in early 1603 becomes the final condition for the tragic end of Prince Mahmud. Gazanfer Agha was not just a powerful royal favorite who controlled the business of rule during this period; he was equally the most important force for stability in dynastic affairs during the reign of Mehmed III. Contarini’s reports reveal that there had previously been similar rivalries among the women of the imperial harem, but the great authority of Gazanfer Agha had always prevented these struggles or, for that matter, any problem within the royal family from reaching dangerous levels, even when the stability of the empire had been threatened by the ongoing wars and rebellions. In contrast, according to the bailo, the new chief eunuch of the queen mother

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did not have enough spirit to mitigate this disdain, nor to put a little water on such a fire, as had formerly been done at other times by the beheaded Kapu Ağası [Gazanfer], who with his prudence and with his great
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{114} For details, see Börekçi, “İnkräzın Eşiğinde Bir Hanedan,” pp. 77 and 82-85.
authority avoided many disorders, even in similar situations inside the palace.\textsuperscript{115}

Gazanfer Agha’s execution not only altered the balance of power at the rebellion-weary imperial center but also changed the factional equation within the royal family. In the absence of Gazanfer Agha’s balancing authority, the rivalry between the party of Safiye Sultan and Handan Sultan, and that of Halime Sultan, spun out of control, resulting in the execution of the eldest prince of the dynastic family in mid-June 1603.

With Prince Mahmud’s death, his thirteen-year-old brother Ahmed attained the status of heir apparent as he was now the sole viable candidate for the throne. Soon after Mahmud’s execution, Safiye Sultan took Prince Ahmed with her to the Golden Horn to watch the state ceremony organized for the first sailing of the new galley constructed by Grand Admiral Cıgalazade Sinan Pasha. Hence, contrary to the established scholarly opinion, by exposing Ahmed in such an official occasion “to the sight of everyone because of the loss of the other son,” Safiye Sultan was officially declaring him the crown prince.\textsuperscript{116} In a similar vein, upon Mufti Mustafa Efendi’s advice, Mehmed III ordered proper arrangements to be made, “because he wanted his son, the Prince

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\textsuperscript{115} ASVe, SDC, filza 57, fols. 313v-314r (dated June 14, 1603): “[…] eunuchi di sua madre senza esservi restata pur una persona sola, non havendo bastato l’animo a chi si ha di mitigar questo sdegno né di metter un poco di acqua sopra tanto fuoco, come già fece altre volte il Cappiagà decapitato, il quale con la sua prudenza, et con la sua grande autorità, schivò molti disordini, anco in simili propositi dentro dal seraglio […]”.
\end{flushright}

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\textsuperscript{116} ASVe, SDC, filza 57, fols. 356v-357r (dated June 28, 1603): “Havendo il capitano del mare usato ogni maggiore diligentia né risparmiato a spesa alcuna per metter ad ordine la sua nuova Galeotta, acciò il Gran Signore vi andassi sopra, furono fatti diversi officii in contrario, et specialmente dal primo visir dove il Capo si ritrovò mezo disperato, ma in fine operò tanto in particolare con l’intercessione della Regina Madre, che se ben tardi, poiché eran passate tre hore de giorno, che vi andò et condusse in sua compagnia il Principe Sultan Acmet esponendolo con tale occasione alla vista di ogni uno stante la perdita dell’altro figliolo.”
\end{flushright}
[Ahmed], to always be with him in the mosque and other public places where it would be necessary for him to appear.”

In conclusion, Mehmed III made his tragic decision to execute Prince Mahmud only after he was persuaded by his mother, Safiye Sultan; the mufti, Ebülmeyamin Mustafa Efendi; and the grand vizier, Yemişci Hasan Pasha, who reportedly told the sultan that the only way to relieve his mind of the suspicion of a plot was to eliminate the prince. In other words, the highest grandees of the empire supported this decision, which arguably became the most critical one taken by Sultan Mehmed during his short and troubled reign. Mahmud’s execution not only opened the way for thirteen-year-old Ahmed to succeed his father seven months later but also put the continuation of the male line of the Ottoman dynasty in jeopardy in a time of challenging wars and rebellions. Ahmed had to assume the throne childless and at a time when there was no other adult male in the dynastic family as his younger brother was barely four years old.

\[^{117}\text{Ibid., fol. 358v: “Il Gran Signore ha commandato che se diano ordini necessarii et si faccino li debiti preparamenti perché vuole in Moschea, et in altro luogo publico, dove occorrerà di comparere, che sia sempre seco il Principe suo figliuolo, ma non so se lo essequirà, havendo di molti contrarii.”}^\]
CHAPTER 2

A YOUNG SULTAN ON THE THRONE:

AHMED I AND HIS EARLY REIGN

An Unusual Succession

Early in the morning on Sunday, December 21, 1603, while preparations were under way for an imperial council session at Topkapı Palace, the deputy grand vizier, Kasım Pasha, received a royal writ (hatt-i hümâyûn) that was dispatched for his immediate attention by the chief eunuch of the palace, Kayiş Mustafa Agha.\(^1\) Kasım Pasha looked at the letter, but he could not decipher the illegible handwriting. All he could figure out was the word babam, “my father,” which made him all the more suspicious as the father of the reigning sultan Mehmed III had passed away eight years ago. He thus turned to Hasan Beyzade, a senior secretary to the government viziers, and asked him whether he could read the letter. Being good at such tasks, Hasan Beyzade easily deciphered the handwriting and thanks to his chronicle, we know that he read:

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\(^1\) Hasan Beyzade, III, pp. 797-798. As will be discussed below, no new grand vizier had been appointed after Mehmed III’s last grand vizier, Yemişçi Hasan Pasha, was removed from the office in early October, 1603, although Kasım Pasha, then the agha of the Janissaries, was elevated to the rank of vizier on the same day and the retired grand vizier Cerrah Mehmed Pasha was called back and made deputy grand vizier. However, because of Mehmed Pasha’s worsening health, which prevented him from attending council meetings, Kasim Pasha was promoted to his position on November 13, 1603. Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, pp. 600-601.
You, Kasım Pasha! My father has gone by God’s will and I have taken my seat on the throne. You had better keep the city in good order. Should any sedition arise, I will behead you.²

The deputy grand vizier was stunned and confused since he had not been informed that Mehmed III was ill. He thus directly wrote to the chief eunuch of the imperial harem, Abdürrezzak Agha, and asked him whether this strange letter was a trick to test his loyalty to the sultan or whether it was, in fact, true. In response, he was ordered to come alone to the audience hall, where he saw Prince Ahmed, Mehmed III’s oldest surviving son, sitting on the throne. Assured that the sultan had actually died and that his son had safely taken his place, Kasım Pasha discreetly ordered a quick enthronement ceremony and asked everybody in the palace to remain in place. He also sent a messenger to the mufti, Ebülmeaymin Mustafâ Efendi, asking him to come to court immediately. As soon as Kasım Pasha returned to the imperial council hall, the royal throne was taken out and put in its traditional ceremonial place at the Gate of Felicity (Bâbü’s-sa’âdet), a clear sign that the sultan would appear soon.³

Still uninformed about the ongoing events, all those gathered at the court became curious and wondered why the sultan, whom they believed to be Mehmed III, was coming out of his chambers with such ceremony and no prior announcement. After a short while, the mufti arrived and everybody took his place around the throne for the impromptu ceremony. They were taken by surprise when they suddenly saw thirteen-


³ See Necipoğlu, Architecture, Ceremonial and Power, pp. 53-90, for a discussion of royal ceremonies in the second court of the Topkapı Palace.
year-old Prince Ahmed, dressed in purple cloth with a small turban on his head, coming out of the gate, saluting in all directions and ascending the throne instead of Mehmed III, whose body rested in a coffin nearby.⁴ Prince Ahmed was then declared the new sultan and the fourteenth ruler of the House of Osman.

All necessary rituals of enthronement were immediately carried out with great solemnity. After prayers were said, the new sultan received oaths of loyalty according to the hierarchy of contemporary Ottoman court protocol: starting with Mufti Mustafa Efendi, everybody in the court pledged allegiance to their new young monarch as they congratulated him on his succession on the throne.⁵ Next, they all put on dark mourning colors (şemle) and performed the last prayers for the deceased sultan, whose body was then carried to the precinct of Hagia Sophia for burial.⁶ Finally, Ahmed retreated into his privy chamber, to reappear only the next day in the audience hall to receive oaths of loyalty from those courtiers and members of the government who had not been present at the ceremonies the day before.⁷

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⁴ Hasan Beyzade, III, pp. 801-803; and ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fol. 231r (dated December 21, 1603): “et come all’improviso si vidde in prospettiva di tutti il novo Imperator il novo Sultan Acmat, sedendo nel solito luoco, vestito di panno pavonazzo, con un picciolo turbante in testa, et apppresso di lui era riposta la cassa col cadaver del patre.”

⁵ Hasan Beyzade, III, pp. 797-806. A unique contemporary miniature captures this moment in Ahmed’s enthronement ceremony: Terceme-i Miftâh-ı Cifru’l-Câmi, İstanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi, MS T. 6624, fols. 1b-2a. For a reproduction of this miniature, see Nurhan Atasoy, Hasbahçe: Osmanlı Kültüründe Bahçe ve Çiçek (İstanbul: Aygaz, 2003), pp. 252-253 and the appendix. Note here the lack of a crowd in the court and the impromptu nature of the ceremony, as well as the youthfulness of Ahmed’s face.

⁶ For a general discussion of the deaths and successions of Ottoman sultans, see Nicolas Vatin and Gilles Veinstein, Le Sérail ébranlé: Essai sur les morts, dépositions et évènements des sultans ottomans, XIVe-XIXe siècle (Paris: Fayard, 2003); and for sixteenth-century rituals of enthronement and royal funeral, see Zeynep Tarım Ertuğ, XVI. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Devleti’nde Cülüs ve Cenaze Törenleri (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 1999).

⁷ Ahmed I’s enthronement definitely took place on Sunday, December 21, 1603 (H. 17 Receb 1012), not on the next day, as the established historiography still holds. For example, see İA, s.v. “Ahmed I,” by Cavid
Ahmed I’s accession to the Ottoman throne in such an impromptu and unexpected manner was truly unusual in many respects and marks a critical point of transformation in the early modern Ottoman dynastic and imperial establishment. To begin with, for the first time in Ottoman history, the issue of dynastic succession was resolved within the confines of the palace harem immediately after the death of a sultan yet before any high-ranking government official, such as the grand vizier, or any non-government opinion leader, such as the mufti, had been informed of or consulted on the matter. In other words, a faction in the inner palace established a *fait accompli* by arranging the
succession of Prince Ahmed. However, as I argued in the previous chapter, Ahmed’s enthronement was actually an expected outcome after the execution of his brother, Prince Mahmud, in June 1603. Immediately after this tragic event, he was presented as the heir apparent by being occasionally exposed to public view during the last months of his father’s reign, when there were serious concerns about the future of the sultan and the dynasty.

Even more importantly, Ahmed had to take the throne at all costs since the only other surviving male member of the dynasty, his brother Mustafa, was only four years old and thus too young to be considered a viable alternative. Thus, Ahmed I’s enthronement stemmed from the need to retain the traditional pattern of father-to-son sequential succession while sustaining hope that the Ottoman dynasty could survive. However, being the first sultan to assume the throne childless at a time when there was no other adult male in the dynastic family, Ahmed had to quickly prove his biological ability to father a child and, most critically, had to have at least one healthy son in order to secure the unbroken 300-year-old male line of dynastic succession.9

This extraordinary situation helps to explain why Ahmed I did not apply the Ottoman custom of fratricide (kardeş katli), which allowed a new sultan to order the execution of all his living brothers.10 Unlike his grandfather Murad III and his father

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9 The dynasty had never faced such a problem of continuity because of an under-aged sultan succeeding to the throne. The closest example is that of Mehmed II (r. 1444-46; 1451-81), who was similarly twelve years old and childless in 1444, when his father Murad II (r. 1421-44; 1446-51) abdicated in his favor. Though Mehmed II had no known living or mature brothers during his short first reign, his father was alive and in his early forties, still capable of fathering a child. Thus, Mehmed’s childlessness did not create a potential dynastic crisis as in Ahmed’s case. For details, see Alderson, *The Structure of the Ottoman Dynasty*, tables I-XXVII.

10 On the Ottoman custom of fratricide, see, e.g., Halil İnalcık, “Osmanlılarda Saltanat Veraset Usulü ve
Mehmed III, who had been free to engage in fratricide immediately upon their enthronements since they each had several sons, Ahmed had to keep his brother alive so as not to risk the extinction of the dynasty.\(^\text{11}\) Moreover, given the extraordinary political circumstances, Mustafa was apparently not considered a potential threat to Ahmed’s sovereign power, and the young sultan was accordingly advised not to take any action against him. The unpublished observations of Francesco Contarini, the Venetian bailo resident in Istanbul at the time, are very telling in this respect:

He has not otherwise had to have his only brother put to death, because the Sultan has said that he wishes to keep and cherish him like a son, but one must suppose that, for that purpose, he might have been persuaded by those who advise him. Since he does not yet have any children, they have considered it opportune for the continuation of the House of Osman not to rest solely in him in the face of such danger [i.e., of accidental death], especially since his brother is about four years old, so that little is to be feared from him, but it is best to wait some length of time for this eventuality, until the Sultan can secure his posterity.\(^\text{12}\)

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\(^{11}\) Murad III had five brothers and Mehmed III nineteen brothers killed at their successions. Ahmed I, on the other hand, would never apply the custom, a decision which would eventually change the pattern of Ottoman dynastic succession: when Ahmed died in 1617, he left several sons, the eldest being thirteen-year-old Osman, who, along with Ahmed’s brother Mustafa, was eligible to rule. This was a situation unprecedented in Ottoman history. A court faction then secured the enthronement of Mustafa instead of Osman, thus further solidifying the end of royal fratricide and confirming a new principle of seniority in succession.

\(^{12}\) ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fol. 255v (dated January 3, 1604): “Non è stato altrimenti fatto morir l’unico fratello perché il Gran Signore ha detto che vuol tenerlo come figliolo, et lo accarezza, ma si deve supponere che a ciò sia stato persuaso da chi lo consiglia poiché non havendo ancora figlioli haveranno giudicato conveniente di non tenire in lui solo con tanto pericolo la continuazione della casa Ottomana, massimamente che il fratello è in età di circa quattro anni, onde non si può di lui dubitar tanto, ma ben aspettare questa effettuazione, per qualche spatio di tempo, poiché in tanto il Gran Signore potria assicurare la sua posterità” [emphasis is mine]. Ten months later, Contarini personally observed Prince Mustafa as a little child traveling in the company of the queen mother. He observed that the prince “was
By the time of Ahmed’s enthronement, then, the reproduction of the dynasty rested solely on the health and virility of a pubescent sultan. Though this reality is not yet recognized by the established historiography, the House of Osman had never before faced such a serious threat of genealogical extinction. Contemporary evidence suggests that Ahmed I was in poor health at the time of his enthronement and may have been unwell for some time. For instance, Contarini reported that Ahmed was “thirteen years old, of white complexion and displayed a weak constitution, as was also understood to be true.”

Furthermore, the fear of dynastic extinction reached a climax when Ahmed and his brother contracted smallpox three months later, in March 1604. Fortunately, both recovered, but it later became publicly known that Ahmed’s condition had been so grave that some observed certain indications that “pointed to him dying or at least to his being dangerously ill.” The prospect was so horrifying that, according to the contemporary chronicler Hasan Beyzade, the members of the government and the court altogether “lost their minds and were near death from fear and anxiety.” The death of the childless sultan would have easily thrown the imperial system into chaos since the only possible

nurtured like an innocent little sheep [who] must soon go to the butcher’s, and he showed the most handsome countenance.” ASVe, SDC, filza 60, fol. 11r (dated September 18, 1604): “[…] et nel ritorno a casa essendomi accostato al serraglio del Gran Signore in tempo che si ritrovava al chiosco la Regina madre con le donne, hebbi occasione di vedere il fratello di Sua Maestà che viene nodrito, come innocente pecorella, per dover fra poco tempo andar al macello, et demostra bellissima facie.” Here, the bailo is undoubtedly referring to Mustafa’s young age once again, while voicing the public expectation of imminent fratricide.

13 ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fols. 231r-231v (dated December 21, 1603): “È di età di anni tredecì, di color bianco, et mostra debole complessione, come anco si intende che sia veramente.”
14 ASVe, SDC, filza 59, fol. 68r (dated March 27, 1604): “Si è susurrato non poco li giorni passati intorno la persona del Gran Signore, essendosi osservati certi inditi li quali denotavano la sua morte, o almeno pericolosissima infermità.”

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successor was his four-year-old brother; moreover, the Habsburgs could have mobilized a larger force and pushed for a full invasion at a time when the Ottomans were preoccupied with the resilient Celâli armies.\(^{15}\)

Naturally enough, speculations about Ahmed I’s health started to circulate throughout the capital, since the sultan had not been seen in public for a while. Hence, as soon as the young sultan felt better, he had to make a public appearance in order to stop the rumors. Once again, Contarini provides us with a detailed account:

> On account of so much discussion and continuous whispers […] concerning the health and life of the Sultan, who truly had been in some danger, it was necessary for his Majesty to allow himself to be seen in the audience chamber. He planned this in advance; on that occasion, inside the palace were seen and heard several times signs of joy, with fires and the playing of castanets and trumpets. His first departure from the palace had been to the Mosque of Hagia Sophia, and on the following day [he went] through Constantinople to visit some mosques where some of their saints were buried, and there was seen on his face some signs of the pox.\(^{16}\)

If Ahmed’s health was an issue of deep concern for the continuity and stability of the Ottoman dynastic establishment, his age was just as serious a concern for the functioning of the royal court and the imperial government. He was barely fourteen years old, and except for the short first reign of Mehmed II some 150 years before, the


\(^{16}\) ASVe, SDC, filza 59, fol. 81r (dated April 13, 1604): “per li molti discorsi et per le continue mormorationi che si facevano da più condizioni di persone intorno la salute, et la vita del Gran Signore, che veramente è stata in qualche pericolo, ha convenuto sua Maestà lasciarsi vedere nella camera dell’audienza anticipatamente da quello si haveva disegnato, con la qual occasione dentro al serraglio si sono più volte veduti, et sentiti segni di allegrezza, con fuochi, et suoni di gnacchere, et di trombette. La prima uscita sua del serraglio è stata alla Moschea di Santa Soffia, et il giorno seguente per Constantinopoli a visitare alcune Moschee, dove sono sepolti alcuni loro santi, et si è veduto alquanto segnata la faccia dalle varole.”
Ottomans had never had such a young and inexperienced ruler. Ahmed I was the first Ottoman sultan to come to the throne from within Topkapı Palace, rather than from a provincial court. In this respect, his enthronement marked the crystallization of the changes that took place in the Ottoman patterns of dynastic succession during the second half of the sixteenth century.

In the past, an Ottoman prince had been appointed governor of a province at around the age of fifteen so as to acquire training for the sultanate and the business of rule while establishing his own court and household, which would form the nucleus of his government when he acceded to the throne. Such a provincial appointment was typically arranged soon after the prince was circumcised at a festival organized by the royal family and celebrated by the public in the capital. Apart from the fact that male circumcision was a religious obligation for all Muslims, the circumcision of an Ottoman prince marked the beginning of the sexual and political maturity of a potential future Ottoman ruler. Moreover, Ottoman royal circumcision festivals, and thus the celebration of a prince’s political coming of age, had important symbolic functions, particularly with

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17 Although there are some conflicting accounts about the actual date of Ahmed’s birth, it is most likely that he was born in April 1590. Whereas the majority of the contemporary sources agree on this date, Mehem bin Mehem claims that his birthday was on 12 C. 996 (May 9, 1588), whereas Safi writes that he was born in C. 996 (April-May 1588). Compare Mehem bin Mehem, *Tarih*, p. 11 and Safi, *Zübde*, I, pp. 22-24, with Hasan Beyzade, III, p. 803; Karaçelebizade, p. 470; Peçevi/TSMK, fol. 311b; and Katip Çelebi, *Fezleke*, p. 455. On the other hand, Contarini revises his above-quoted earlier remark about Ahmed’s age and writes that he was assured that the sultan was fourteen years old. He also mentions an interesting detail about how Ahmed’s age was previously rumored to be sixteen while he was only twelve. ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fol. 256r (dated January 3, 1604): “et si sparge voce che sia di sedici fino de disotto anni il Signore per apportarle maggior riputazione, et per avvantaggiar il beneficio dell’Imperio, ma per quello che tocca all’età mi viene affirmato assicurantemente che habbia finito li quattordici anni.” In sum, Ahmed was definitely in his fourteenth year at the time of his enthronement; thus he must have been born in 1590.

respect to sustaining powerful dynastic and imperial imagery. As Rhoads Murphey observes, “the level of attention lavished by the Ottomans on staging these events is a clear indication of the importance which they themselves attached to these celebrations of the life, power and potential of the sovereign figure, both the present ruler, who acted as host, and the future king -- or sometimes kings -- in whose honour the celebrations were planned and executed. The extended and multifaceted pageants organized on behalf of the young, still immature and not yet sovereign princes paradoxically provided a unique opportunity for the material display of the power, might and richness inherent both in the dynasty and in the lands and empire over which it reigned.”

For their part, the provincial courts and households of these princes formed and sustained the very foundations of the Ottoman dynastic and imperial order, which had its roots in ancient Turco-Mongolian/Central Asian steppe tradition. In this system, when a sultan died or fell seriously ill, his sons in the provinces had to fight each other in order to claim the throne. These open wars of succession among Ottoman princes, which were relatively frequent up to the beginning of the sixteenth century, often took the form of civil wars as they provided an arena for different social groups to articulate their grievances by supporting one prince against the other. The last princely war of succession of this type took place in 1558-59, when Selim and Bayezid, the two surviving sons of

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19 Murphey, Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty, p. 177. For Murphey’s discussion of Ottoman royal circumcision festivals, see chapter 7, “Celebrating the Coming of Age of an Ottoman Prince: Exclusivity versus Inclusiveness in Ottoman Court Ceremony,” at pp. 175-205.

Süleyman I, fought to determine who would take the throne when their ailing father passed away. Selim ultimately won the war, thanks to the support of the imperial army, while Bayezid fled to the court of the Safavid shah Tahmasb (r.1524-76), who eventually turned Bayezid over to the Ottoman envoy who had been sent to execute the prince.\(^2\)

After the war between Selim and Bayezid, the Ottoman family gradually withdrew its princes and their households from the provinces. During the reigns of Selim II and Murad III, only one prince was assigned a provincial governorship as a prelude to taking the throne. It is not clear that this was a measure decided to avoid another civil war and its related crises since a series of demographic accidents within the dynastic family also played a crucial role in this process and eventually brought Ahmed to the throne.

The demographic accidents began with Selim II. When he acceded to the throne in 1566 at the age of forty-three, one of his adult sons, twenty-one-year-old Murad, was already serving as a provincial governor in Manisa. Although it is not certain whether Selim fathered other sons during his princely years, he did have six more sons during his eight-year reign.\(^2\) When he died in 1574, Prince Murad came to Istanbul from his provincial post and, in a certain sense, automatically inherited the throne as his brothers were all underage and were still living in the palace. In other words, we do not know whether Selim II would have sent another son to a provincial post had he lived longer.

A similar case can be observed in Murad III’s reign. At the time of his enthronement, Sultan Murad had two sons, Mehmed and Mahmud. It seems that he did

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\(^2\) *İA*, s.v. “Selim II,” by Şerafettin Turan.
not have any additional sons until 1581, when Prince Mahmud died unexpectedly. Left with only one prince, Murad quickly fathered more children so that by the end of his reign, he had nineteen more sons. However, at the time of his death in 1595, his second-eldest son was only nine years old. In the end, Prince Mehmed, who had been sent to Manisa in 1583, ascended the throne with no opposition. Again, it is not known whether Murad III would have assigned another prince to a provincial governorship had he had the chance to do so. In sum, neither Murad III nor Mehmed III had to fight against any brothers as each was the sole viable candidate for the throne at the time of his father’s death.

During the entire eight-year reign of Mehmed III, on the other hand, no prince was circumcised and sent to a province, most probably due to the incessant Celâlí rebellions all over Anatolia and the political turmoil in the capital city in the late 1590s and early 1600s, as discussed in detail in the previous chapter. In other words, the chaotic political, social and economic circumstances apparently made it inconvenient, if not impossible, for a prince to assume a governorship. In the meantime, it is quite clear that the Ottomans had never expected Mehmed III to pass away so soon. By 1603, Mehmed III was only thirty-seven years old and had no apparent health problems, apart from obesity. His sudden death on December 20, 1603, was thus among the most critical demographic accidents to hit the House of Osman in the latter part of the sixteenth century.


24 Though there was no concept of a crown prince in the Ottoman dynastic system, the fact that both Murad III and Mehmed III were first-born sons who eventually succeeded to the throne curiously begs the question of whether they could be considered *de facto* crown princes: Kunt, “A Prince Goes Forth,” pp. 69-71.
century.\textsuperscript{25} While he was the first Ottoman sultan to die at such a young age, his son Ahmed was the youngest prince to succeed to the throne.\textsuperscript{26}

In this context, Ahmed I’s enthronement created another dynastic precedent: he became the first Ottoman ruler to be circumcised after assuming the sultanate. His circumcision took place more than a month after his accession, on Friday, January 23, 1604.\textsuperscript{27} However, no direct evidence has thus far surfaced as to whether this royal event was officially announced in advance or whether there was any plan to celebrate it with a public festival similar to the one organized for his father’s circumcision in 1582.\textsuperscript{28} Such a public spectacle was probably deemed unsuitable, if not financially impossible, at a time when the ramifications of the dynastic, military and political crises that had erupted at the end of Mehmed III’s reign were still fresh in the public consciousness. On the other hand,

\textsuperscript{25} See Calendar of State Papers - Venetian, vol. 9, p. 269, for a dispatch dated May 10, 1597, which notes that Mehmed III has grown very fat. Shortly after his death, the doctors had second thoughts as to why the sultan had suddenly died. According to the Venetian bailo’s intelligence, some doctors believed he died from the plague, but for most, the cause was a stroke: “[…] sono li medici discordi tra di loro di opinione secondo il solito circa la infirmità che ha condotto a morte il Re, alcuni hanno affirmato che sia stato di Peste, rispetto alle petecchie che dopo si sono vedute: raccontano che che (…) habbia maneggiato cierte robbe che le furono donate. Altri dicono altri mali, ma la maggior parte acconsente che sia stata di apoplessia”: ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fol. 254r (dated January 3, 1604). Also see a brief excerpt from this dispatch in Calendar of State Papers - Venetian, vol. 10, p. 127.

\textsuperscript{26} Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” p. 92.

\textsuperscript{27} Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, p. 617 and Saﬁ, Zübde, I, p. 19. The Venetian bailo’s dispatch, ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fol. 336r (dated February 3, 1604), confirms that Ahmed’s circumcision took place on a Friday.

\textsuperscript{28} For instance, the dispatches of the Venetian bailo Contarini, whose intelligence network was designed exclusively to collect information about the events taking place at the Ottoman court, do not contain any information pertaining to these events. For a discussion of the circumcision festival of 1582, see Derin Terzioglu, “The Imperial Circumcision Festival of 1582: An Interpretation,” Muqarnas 12 (1995), pp. 84-100; and Gülsum Ezgi Korkmaz, “Sûrnâmelerde 1582 Şenliği,” unpublished M.A. thesis, Bilkent University, 2004.
I would speculate that even if there were plans to hold public celebrations of Ahmed’s circumcision, they were probably cancelled due to the unusually cold winter of 1603.²⁹

In any case, it is reported that a royal household party was instead held in the palace harem to mark this auspicious event and that the young sultan was entertained with some staged plays.³⁰ Interestingly, one of the themes chosen for these performances was designed to boost Ahmed’s confidence and to emphasize that despite his youthfulness and inexperience, he would be a great warrior ruler of an empire which had been at war with the Habsburgs since the early 1590s:

On the occasion of the circumcision, many celebrations and parties were held by the pages inside the palace with fireworks, bell-tolling, and other things; in particular, they represented the acquisition of a city, giving it the name of Vienna, first sending the king of the Tartars to despoil the surrounding [territory] and similar things, until at the end, the Sultan entered [Vienna] in victory and triumph.³¹

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²⁹ Recent climatological analyses confirm that winters in the Marmara region in the early 1600s were extremely cold, marking the onset of the Little Ice Age. For instance, the winter of 1607-08 was probably the driest and certainly one of the coldest in the last millennium. For details, see J. Luterbacher and E. Xoplaki, “500-Year Winter Temperature and Precipitation Variability over the Mediterranean Area and Its Connection to the Large-Scale Atmospheric Circulation,” in Mediterranean Climate: Variability and Trends, ed. H.-J. Bolle (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2003), pp. 133-153.


³¹ ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fol. 336v (dated February 3, 1604): “Con l’occasione della circoncisione sono state fatte allegrezze, et feste da quei giovini dentro al seraglio con fuochi, suoni, et altro in particolare hanno rappresentato l’acquisto di una città dandole il nome di quella di Viena con diverse circonstanze di haver prima mandato il Re dei Tartaria dar il guasto all’intorno, et cose simili, con far all’ultimo entrar dentro il Gran Signore con vittoria, et trionfante.” Particularly since the reign of Süleyman I, the Ottomans had had an imperial ambition to conquer Vienna, to which they occasionally referred as the Red (or Golden) Apple (Kızıl Elma). Thus, while this particular play staged at Ahmed’s circumcision party can be read within the context of contemporary political events, it can also be taken as an indication of Ottomans’ never-ending expectation of a warrior sultan who could continue the imperial territorial expansion. As I will discuss below, Ahmed responded to such expectations by attempting to personally lead a military campaign, as well as by emulating the ruling style of his great-grandfather, Süleyman I. For a discussion of the centrality of Vienna/Red Apple in early modern Ottoman imperial imagination, see Orhan Şaik Gökyay, “Kızıl Elma Üzerine,” Tarih ve Toplum 23 (1986), pp. 425-430; 26, pp. 84-89; 27, pp. 137-141; 28, pp. 201-205; and Pál Fodor, “The View of the Turk in Hungary: The Apocalyptic Tradition and the Legend of the Red Apple in Ottoman-Hungarian Context,” in Les traditions apocalyptiques au tournant de la chute de Constantinople: Actes de la Table Ronde d’Istanbul (13-14 avril 1996), eds. Benjamin Lellouch and Stéphane Yerasimos (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999), pp. 99-131; reprinted in Pál Fodor, In Quest of the
Overall, Ahmed I lacked crucial political background and, for the first time, a prince assumed the sultanate without a household of his own that could provide a pool of loyal servants to replace the existing court and government functionaries. Instead, he inherited his father’s household and government as they were. As a result, Ahmed I found himself with a royal court divided by intense factionalism, as well as an empire engaged in wars with the Habsburgs in the west and the Safavids in the east while preoccupied and stretched thin by military and peasant rebellions in its central lands. The young sultan thus needed guidance in ruling and in running his court. Although there was no institutionalized tradition of regency in the Ottoman dynastic establishment, both his mother and his tutor would act as de facto regents early in his reign. The Venetian bailo immediately informed his senate exactly of the problems confronting the new sultan:

Concerning future affairs, I cannot write with exact knowledge, because it reposes in the infinite Divine wisdom, but for that which I understood of these things that happen daily […], I cannot say other than that the death of Sultan Mehméd will be extremely damaging to Christendom and, particularly, to Your Serenity [the Doge], to which I am certain that he had the best inclination, and the reason for this was that, when living, he saw clearly the deterioration of this empire due to the important disorders that through his fault arose, as I could recount at length. And yet one can expect the same thing also from this new Sultan for different reasons, and in particular due to his age as he is not capable of either commanding or ruling by himself, so that it is necessary for him to depend on others.32


32 ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fols. 231v-232r (dated December 21, 1603): “Delle cose future non si può scrivere certa notizia, perché ciò sta riposto nell’infinita sapientia Divina ma per quello che io comprendevo delle cose che giornalmente accadevano, et da quella poca esperientia acquistata […] non posso se non dire, che la morte di Sultan Meemet sia s ommamente dannosa alla Christianità et in particolar a Vostra Serenità, alla quale sono certo che esso haveva buonissima inclinazione, et la ragion è questa, perché vivendo lui, si vedeva manifestamente la declinatione di questo imperio, per li importanti disordini, che per sua causa nascevan, come potria lungamente raccontare, et sebene si può sperare il medesimo anco di questo novo Signore per diversi rispetti, et in particolare per l’età sua, che non atta a commandare, né bastante a reggersi per sé stesso, dovendo per necessità dipendere da altri.”
All these novel developments and pressing issues immediately tested the young sultan’s ability to rule and reign at the most difficult moments. Though he was young, inexperienced, in questionable health, childless and without a princely household of his own, Sultan Ahmed quickly learned how to exercise his sovereign authority and, within a few years, he fathered several sons and started to establish a more personal rule. Therefore, his personal history is crucial to understanding and contextualizing developments in early seventeenth-century Ottoman dynastic and court politics, as well as to properly locating his reign within the larger context of the early modern Ottoman dynastic crisis and imperial transformation. Hence, the following discussion will first focus on Ahmed’s princely years and education, and then look into his early reign to examine the question of how such a young Ottoman sultan operated within the contingencies and dynamics of an empire in crisis that he inherited from his father. As Murphey insightfully points out, each sultan’s reign entailed recreating and re-establishing the institutions of the sultanate from the ground up, and this process of Ottoman institutional rebirth began in the family and the imperial household.  

As we shall see, Ahmed I’s case was quite unusual from the beginning.

II. 2. Princely Years and Education

Ahmed I was born in Manisa, the capital of the province of Saruhan in southwestern Anatolia, where his father, then Prince Mehmed, was serving as governor in preparation to succeed his father, Murad III. His mother was Handan Sultan, who seems

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to have joined the harem of Prince Mehmed as a concubine sometime between the ostentatious fifty-two-day festival held in Istanbul in May-June 1582 in honor of the prince’s circumcision (at the age of sixteen) and his departure for Manisa in December 1583. Writing in January 1604, Contarini notes that Handan was a Bosnian slave in the household of the governor-general of Rumeli, Mehmed Pasha, who happened to be the surgeon (hence his nickname, Cerrah) who had circumcised Prince Mehmed. On account of her beauty, the pasha gave Handan to the prince on his departure for Manisa.

At the time, Cerrah Mehmed Pasha was a new imperial son-in-law, having recently married Gevherhan Sultan, a sister of Murad III and thus an aunt of Prince Mehmed. There can be no doubt that such a “gift” by a middle-ranking vizier to the departing prince was intended to solidify the former’s political alliance with the dynasty. In fact, most people believed that Mehmed Pasha’s promotion from agha of the Janissaries to governor-general of Rumeli in 1580 was due to the political power of his wife at the court of Murad III. During Mehmed III’s reign, Mehmed Pasha would serve

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34 As the only prince governing a province during the reign of Selim II, Murad III had around 1,800 people in his retinue, whereas Mehmed III had around 2,000 people together with an income totaling 3,200,000 akçes (the equivalent of 40,000 Venetian gold ducats), an amount much larger than the official revenue of any vizier in the government. Kunt, “A Prince Goes Forth,” p. 69.

35 ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fol. 269v (dated January 17, 1604): “La presente Regina è di natione Bossinese, fu prima schiava di Mehemet Girà quando era Begleirbei della Grecia et poi donata per la sua gran bellezza a Sultan Mehemet quando andò al Sanzaccato di Amasia [i.e., Manisa].” According to Seyyid Lokman, the court historiographer during the reign of Murad III, Cerrah Mehmed Pasha was not the governor-general of Rumeli at this time but the deputy of Piyale Pasha, the captain of the navy, while the governor-general of Rumeli was Damad İbrahim Pasha, who would later become grand vizier three times under Mehmed III: Lokman, Zübde, fol. 98a. Another contemporary author, Selaniki, has Mehmed Pasha as a vizier at the court and Ibrahim Pasha as the governor-general of Rumeli: Selaniki, I, pp. 134-135. Mehmed Pasha’s appointment to the governor-generalship in question occurred the following year in 1584, when İbrahim Pasha was sent to Egypt as governor (vâli).

36 Tezcan, “Searching from Osman,” p. 343, n. 132, discusses both Mehmed Pasha’s marriage to Gevherhan Sultan and, at some length, his ethnic origins, which remain an enigma.
as the highest-ranking vizier in the government, and Gevherhan Sultan would remain an influential political figure in court circles, a position which apparently enabled her to keep in touch with Mehmed III’s sons and their mothers as well.37

Soon after his succession, young Ahmed wanted to express his gratitude to Mehmed Pasha and Gevherhan Sultan for the role they had played in bringing his parents together, a generous act which turned out to be a blessing for him. By then, however, Cerrah Mehmed Pasha was old and ailing; he died on January 9, 1604.38 Ahmed therefore honored the late pasha’s wife. Contarini further records that “having remembered this [i.e., his mother’s background], he sent the sultana [Gevherhan] a thousand gold coins and a sable robe with many other gifts as a sign of welcome, since she had been the origin of his good fortune and of the greatness in which at present he found himself.”39 Ahmed would later name his firstborn daughter Gevherhan to further mark his great-great-aunt’s role in his life.

37 See Mehmed bin Mehmed, Tarih, p. 31, for a brief biography of Cerrah Mehmed Pasha.

38 Upon Mehmed Pasha’s death, Contarini, ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fol. 269v (dated January 17, 1604), says that the vizier had always favored the Venetians: “Non ha potuto esso Girà far più resistenza al male, che già alquanti mesi lo travagliava, essendo morto la settimana passata. Questa casa ha perduto un soggetto che favoriva grandemente li negoci di Vostra Serenità.”

39 ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fol. 269v (dated January 17, 1604): “[…] però essendo ella ricordevole di questo ha mandato a donare in segno di benivolentia mille cechini, et una veste di zebelini alla sultana moglie del prefato Bassà con molte offerte, come a quella che è stata origine della sua buona fortuna et della grandezza nella quale [al presente] si ritrova.” A register preserved in the Topkapı Palace Archives gives further details of the gifts Gevherhan Sultan received from her great-grand-cousin. At the beginning of this register, there are records of the furs and robes of honor sent by the new sultan to his larger family right after his enthronement on December 27, 1603. Here, Gevherhan Sultan is listed as a recipient of a sable robe (semmûr kaplu nimtâne) and recorded as the third female member of the dynasty after the retiring queen mother, Safiye Sultan, and the new queen mother, Handan Sultan, and before all other living sisters and daughters of Murad III and Mehmed III -- a clear indication of her privileged position. Later, on February 6, 1604, she again appears in the register, this time as the only female family member apart from Handan Sultan to receive a fur-trimmed silk robe (eyüce semmûr kaplu uzun yenlû serâser nimtâne). TSMA, D. 2025, fols. 2a and 4b.

94
Ahmed likewise showed his gratitude to several other people from his father’s household who had played similar roles when he was a young boy, including Mustafa Efendi, his preceptor since early childhood. Before Ahmed was born in 1590, Prince Mehmed had fathered at least two sons, Selim and Mahmud, who were born in Manisa in 1585 and 1587, respectively. In late 1592, Mehmed appointed Mustafa Efendi to educate his sons. Yet Mustafa Efendi was not an ordinary person at the court of Mehmed III, or for that matter, of Ahmed I. He was born and raised in Aydın in western Anatolia, then moved to Istanbul and, in the mid-1560s, became a student of Ahizade Mehmed Efendi at the Şehzade Mehmed College (Medrese), founded by Süleyman I in honor of his deceased son. In 1570, Mustafa Efendi received his license to teach, but instead of remaining a madrasa professor, he decided to pursue a career as a judge and served in several small-town judgeships. By 1592, he had retired and moved back to his

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40 The exact number of sons fathered by Mehmed III is hard to figure out due to conflicting accounts. Almost all early modern Ottoman sources that list Mehmed III’s descendants typically agree on five sons at the most: Selim (d. 1597), Mahmud (d. 1603), Ahmed, Cihangir (d. 1602) and Mustafa. See Hasan Beyzade, III, pp. 765-766; Peçevi/TSMK, fols. 288a-289a; Katip Çelebi, Fezleke, pp. 452-453; and Anonymous, Silsilenâmė, Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi, MS 3695, scroll manuscript. As for his other sons born in Manisa, an Italian source published in 1599 but apparently written during the first year of Mehmed III’s reign, Bertelli, Vite Degl’imperatori de Turchi, p. 55, mentions five sons, but provides only the name of eleven-year-old Selim as his eldest son. On the other hand, Leonardo Donà, the Venetian extraordinary ambassador to Mehmed III’s court in 1596, does not mention Mahmud at all but names three sons: twelve-year-old Selim, Ahmed, and Süleyman. Firpo, ed., Relazioni di ambasciatori veneti, p. 334. According to a report in Italian, dated February 1595 and written by Salomón Usque, Mehmed III had six or seven children. Yet, Usque gives only the names of eleven-year-old Selim as his eldest son and Süleyman as his second-born. For a critical edition of this report, see Jordi Canals, “Un informe otomano de Salomón Usque (1595),” Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie IV, H.4 Moderna 16 (2003), pp. 153-181 [Mehmed’s children are given at p. 169]; for its English translation and a facsimile, see Honyel G. Rosedale, Queen Elizabeth and the Levant Company (London: Henry Frowde, 1904), pp. 19-33. Overall, it seems that Mehmed III had other sons, including Süleyman, who apparently died young. Also see Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” p. 330, n. 29, for a detailed discussion of these princes’ names and the sources that mention them.

41 For Mustafa Efendi’s short biography, see also Mehmed bin Mehmed, Tarih, p. 114.
hometown when his life took an unexpected turn thanks to his old acquaintance Mekkeli Mehmed, who came from the same region of southwestern Anatolia.\footnote{Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” pp. 183-184.}

Originally from the town of Saruhan in the vicinity of Aydın, Mekkeli Mehmed served as a çavuş (messenger) at the princely court of Murad III in Manisa. In the mid-1570s, he was appointed inspector of the waterworks in the Hijaz for at least two years (hence his epithet Mekkeli) but later returned to the capital. In 1583, he accompanied Prince Mehmed to his provincial governorship in Manisa, serving as his standard-bearer (mîr-i 'alem) during the journey. Once in Manisa, he forged an even closer bond to the prince by marrying the daughter of his milk mother. Thanks to his new connections at the Manisa court, he quickly rose through the ranks and attained important offices, notably those of chancellor (nişâncı) and treasurer (defterdâr).\footnote{Ibid., p. 184.} When Ahmed I was born, Mekkeli Mehmed marked the date by writing a chronogram, “hâkân-i rûm” (“Ruler of Rûm,” referring to former Byzantine territory), in which the numerical values of the letters add up to 998 (i.e., 1590).\footnote{Katip Çelebi, \textit{Fezleke}, p. 455. Also mentioned by Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” p. 332, n. 41.} Finally, in September 1592, he was promoted to one of the most powerful and prestigious positions one could acquire at a princely court: that of tutor (lala) to Prince Mehmed. Around this time, he asked his old friend, Mustafa Efendi from Aydın, to tutor the prince’s sons.

When Prince Mehmed acceded to the throne in January 1595 and moved his family into Topkapı Palace, Mekkeli Mehmed and Mustafa Efendi both followed their prince to the capital. While Mekkeli Mehmed became a vizier of the imperial council.
(thus henceforth known as Lala Mehmed Pasha) and even held the grand vizierate for a few days before his death in November 1595, Mustafa Efendi continued to serve as preceptor to Prince Ahmed and his siblings in the inner palace. Mustafa Efendi remained very close to Ahmed up until his death in about 1608, and after Ahmed’s succession in 1603, he assumed the position of royal tutor (hâce-i sultân), in which capacity he acted not only as an advisor to the young sultan, but also as de facto regent.

Though not much is known about the education, training and personal lives of Ottoman princes in the late sixteenth century, evidence indicates that Ahmed first took lessons in basic reading and writing as well as in basic skills essential for a prince, such as horseback-riding and handling weapons such as swords and bows. It seems that Ahmed gradually acquired a fairly good education under Mustafa Efendi and that he developed a particular interest in history, religious and mystical studies, martial arts and his life-long passion, hunting. Both his own poetry, though somewhat mediocre, and the book manuscripts he commissioned during his reign testify to his personality, favorite topics, artistic talents and taste.

Ahmed wrote his poems under the pen name Bahtî (an unusual adjective-noun derived from baht, destiny or fortune), which reflects his fascination with multiple unexpected turn of events, as a result of which he found himself sitting on the Ottoman throne. After all, Ahmed was the third, if not the fourth, son of Mehmed III, and given

45 For a little-known biography of Lala Mehmed Pasha by Abdülkerim Efendi, a celebrated seventeenth-century Ottoman bureaucrat and intellectual, see Münşe’ât-i ’Abdülkerîm Efendi, İstanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi, MS T. 1526, fols. 178a-179a.

46 Safi, Zübde, 1, p. 8, explains that Ahmed took his pen name soon after his enthronement and that it referred to his good fortune and fate in acceding to the Ottoman throne: “Bahtî ‘nin ma’nâsi se’âdet-i tâli’ u baht ve mubahek-i serîr-i saltanat u tahta delâlet i’dâdi gibi lafz u ‘ibâreti târîh-i cülüs-i hümâyûn-i

97
the above-mentioned patterns of Ottoman dynastic succession, he could not have had any real prospect or expectation of becoming sultan since his elder brothers were likely to succeed to the throne well before he could. But the unexpected deaths of his older brothers in 1597 and 1603, followed by that of his father, led to his surprising enthronement, shortly after which, as noted above, he survived a near-fatal bout of smallpox.

All of these tragic and near-tragic developments clearly solidified Ahmed’s belief that he was unusually fortunate and gave him a strong sense that his sultanate was ordained by God. Several poems in his poetry collection reflect his thoughts and feelings in this particular respect. For instance, he wrote,

When it was not in my mind, You bestowed a devlet on me, this Bahtî.
I thus put my personal affairs, my whole fears, in your hands, my God!  

Ahmed also considered himself very fortunate in that, at the time of his enthronement, he had neither needed to shed the blood of his relatives, nor encountered a major obstacle. As observed above, he spared his brother’s life in order to assure the continuation of the dynastic lineage, and he was able to claim the throne the day after his

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47 Ahmed I’s full poetry collection (divan) is preserved in a single manuscript copy in Istanbul’s Millet Kütüphanesi, MS Ali Emiri Efendi Manzum 53. An edition of this manuscript has been prepared by Isa Kayaalp, Sultan Ahmed Divanı’nın Tahlili (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 1999).

48 Kayaalp, Sultan Ahmed Divanı’nın Tahlili, p. 199: “Çu ben Bahtî’ye virdün hâtırumda yoğ-iken devlet / Sana ısmarladum yâ Rab umûrum cümlé ahvâlüm.” The word devlet has multiple connotations in Ottoman parlance. Here, it mainly means sovereignty and rule.
father’s death without having to travel to Istanbul from a province. Ahmed is reported to have openly expressed his feelings about these issues, as well. According to Contarini,

They report that he has a lively spirit and shows himself very ready, riding and walking in the gardens of the Palace almost every day and [they] announce that he has said that he is happy because of three things. The first is that his father did not die several months earlier since his older brother was still living and would still have had to die. The second is that he did not have to shed the blood of his relatives. And the third is that he found himself inside the palace at the time of his father’s death, instead of far away. [Because of all this] many dangers and disorders are avoided.49

As reported by the Venetian bailo, Ahmed did indeed have a very lively personality, which manifested itself mainly in his hunts and in the public appearances that he staged at every opportunity. From the beginning of his reign, Ahmed was very much interested in riding his horse in the streets and markets, sailing on his royal barge on the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus, and traveling to the hunting grounds in the vicinity of the capital. Among these activities, his royal hunts were particularly critical, for they served two crucial purposes. First, since he did not have the chance to perfect his training in statecraft and military arts by serving as a provincial governor, the hunts provided him the perfect opportunity not only to improve his horse-riding and other martial skills, but also to travel and observe the conditions of his subjects in the capital and its environs. Secondly, and more importantly, it helped him to cultivate the public image of a warrior

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49 ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fols. 256r-v (dated January 3, 1604): “et referiscono che sia di viveza di spirito et che mostri molta prontezza cavalcando et caminando per li giardini del Serraglio quasi tutto il giorno, et pubblicano che habbi detto di esser stato felice in tre cose, la prima che suo padre non sia mancato già pochi mesi, perchè vivendo il frate maggiore bisognava morire, la 2a che non habbia occasione di far sangue con li suoi congiunti, et la 3a di ritrovarsi dentro al serraglio alla morte del padre, et non luntano; con che si sono schivati molti pericoli, et disordini.”
sultan and to express his eagerness to lead an imperial campaign, a point which I will return shortly.

The importance Ahmed attached to hunting is attested by the production at his court of one of the most beautiful illustrated manuscripts ever produced in the Ottoman Empire, namely, *The Gift of Rulers and Sultans (Tuḥfetūʾl-mūlūk veʾs-selāṭīn).* The *Gift* is actually an expanded Ottoman Turkish translation of a now lost medieval Arabic text entitled *The Main Principle of Rulers (ʿUmdat al-mulūk)* by one Amir Aşık Timur. Commissioned upon the direct orders of Ahmed I, the work consists of three parts: a) hippiatry and hippology; b) horsemanship and c) hunting. Unfortunately, the *Gift* has not survived in full. While some pages of text and miniatures are missing and some are in disarray, a large section of the last chapter is lost, together with the epilogue and the colophon. Thus, translator and miniature artists remain unknown, as does its production date. Nevertheless, the surviving 164 illustrations and detailed discussion of these topics in more than 250 folios make it a truly impressive work. As Tülay Artan has argued, it may be superior to any such work in the whole early modern world. Ahmed probably commissioned this impressive work early in his reign and must truly have enjoyed reading it.

As part of Ahmed’s princely education, his tutor no doubt gave him lessons on the lives and times of his ancestors. Although we do not know how Mustafa Efendi imparted

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50 TSMK, MS H. 415.
51 Tülay Artan is the only scholar to have examined this work in detail; see her “A Book of Kings Produced and Presented as a Treatise on Hunting,” *Muqarnas* 25 (2008), pp. 299-330.
this information, it is not hard to imagine that Ahmed particularly enjoyed looking at the illustrated manuscripts on Ottoman dynastic history preserved in the palace library.\(^{53}\) We know that from very early on he was especially interested in reading about the life and campaigns of his great-grandfather, Süleyman I, whose reign by then was not only still so fresh in people’s memory, but also considered a “golden age.”\(^{54}\) As we shall see, Ahmed’s fascination with Sultan Süleyman would soon take the form of an obsession with emulating and even surpassing him.\(^{55}\)

Books figured prominently in young Ahmed’s intellectual development and were the object of much of his royal patronage. As he regularly commissioned manuscripts on different topics and in different styles for his personal education and interests, he became a generous patron of the arts for whom many writers, poets, artists, intellectuals, bureaucrats and religious leaders produced works in order to fulfill his wishes, to satisfy his tastes, to give him political and/or religious advice, or simply to impress him and receive his favor. Corresponding to his fascination with his own dynasty’s history and literary production, Ahmed had a profound interest in the literary heritage of earlier

\(^{53}\) Ahmed and Mustafa Efendi had access to many such manuscripts, particularly those produced in the palace workshops under the supervision of the royal chroniclers (sing. şehnâmeçi) since the reign of Süleyman I, such as ‘Arîfî, Süleymânnâme, TSMK, MS H. 1517; Seyyid Lokmân, Hûnernâme, 2 vols., TSMK, MSS H. 1523 and H. 1524; and Telâkızâde, Şemâ’ilnâme-i Âl-i ‘Osmân, TSMK, MS III. Ahmed 3592. See Christine Woodhead, “An Experiment in Official Historiography: The Post of Şehnâmeçi in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1555-1605,” Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 75 (1983), pp. 157-182, for a discussion of the contents, iconographic features and political-ideological significance of these works.

\(^{54}\) ASVe, SDC, filza 60, fol. 223r (dated December 13, 1604): “Legge anche alcune volte la vita di Sultan Suliman.” For a discussion of the Ottoman perception of Süleyman I and his times, see Kafadar, “The Myth of the Golden Age.”

Muslim dynasties. He seems to have been particularly attracted to works produced under
the Timurid rulers, such as Sultan Husayn Bayqara (r. 1469-1506), whose court at Herat
was regarded by Ottoman literati as one of the most beneficent political and cultural
environments ever established.\textsuperscript{56} However, since Ahmed could read neither Persian nor
Arabic, he had to depend on translations into Ottoman Turkish to appreciate these highly
celebrated literary productions.

An Ottoman translation of a fifteenth-century Timurid text commissioned by
Ahmed I around 1607 illustrates these points and helps us uncover how manuscript
patronage operated in his court. The text in question is \textit{Dastân-ı Jamâl u Jalâl} (\textit{The Story
of Cemâl and Celâl}), a Persian “mirror for princes” written in verse in the form of a lyric
romance by Muhammad Āsafî (d. ca. 1510), a distinguished poet at the court of Husayn
Bayqara.\textsuperscript{57} Āsafî was a pupil of Jâmî (d. 1492), the prominent mystical poet of Timurid
Iran, and a close friend of ‘Alî Shîr Nevâyî (d. 1501), the royal favorite and minister of
Sultan Husayn who was arguably the most renowned poet and author of his time.\textsuperscript{58}

According to Mustafa Safî, who was ultimately charged with the Ottoman
translation of the \textit{Story}, Ahmed selected this particular work in his usual manner.\textsuperscript{59} First,

\textsuperscript{56} Fleischer, \textit{Bureaucrat and Intellectual}, p. 71.

\textsuperscript{57} A single illustrated Persian copy of this work is preserved in the library of Uppsala University in
Sweden. See Karl V. Zetterstêen and Carl J. Lamm, \textit{The Story of Jamâl and Jalâl: An Illuminated
Manuscript in the Library of Uppsala University} (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1948).

\textsuperscript{58} On literary life at the court of Husayn Bayqara and the above-mentioned authors, see Thomas W. Lentz
and Glenn D. Lowry, eds., \textit{The Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century} (Los
Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1998); Beatrice Manz, \textit{Power, Politics and Religion in
Timurid Iran} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Maria E. Subtelny, \textit{Timurids in
Transition: Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran} (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

\textsuperscript{59} The following information comes from two main texts by Mustafa Safî: the invocation and conclusion
(\textit{sebeb-i te’lîf} and \textit{hatîme}) in two copies of his translation, \textit{Terceme-i Celâl ü Cemâl}, TSMK, MS H. 1304,
fols. 160a-160b [hereafter TSMK/Celal-Cemal]; and Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, MS Hamidiye 1068, fols.
a set of books from the palace library was brought to him. Ahmed began examining them one by one while his advisors summarized the contents of each work, explaining how useful he might find them. They regarded *The Story of Cemâl and Celâl* as especially noteworthy, for it not only included anecdotes about the virtues of kingship; it was also written in a very elaborate style for a prominent Timurid sultan. According to Safi, Ahmed valued histories and other works pertaining to past rulers because he could extract lessons from them on how to become a just and virtuous ruler. He therefore asked for the *Story* to be translated quickly.

Ahmed I’s former chief falconer, Hafız Ahmed Pasha, a favorite of the sultan who had recently been promoted to the vizierate, recommended one of his protégés, Mustafa Safi Efendi, for this task. Safi was a long-time member of the Ottoman *ulema* and a preacher (*vâiz*) renowned for his beautiful voice as well as for his knowledge of Arabic and Persian. At the time, however, he held neither an official *ilmiye* position nor a teaching post in one of Istanbul’s many theological schools; instead, he was giving the Friday sermons at the mosque founded by Cerrah Mehmed Pasha, whom Ahmed esteemed for bringing his mother and father together, as noted above. Thus, Ahmed

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60 According to Safi (TSMK/Celal-Cemal, fol. 160a; Süleymaniye/Celal-Cemal, fol. 3a), the *Story* was written by Âsafî and dedicated to Mirza Shahrurkh (d. 1447), the fourth son of Timur (d. 1405). Given that Âsafî died around 1510, however, the sultan in question should be Husayn Bayqara, as explained above.

might actually have known Safi Efendi previously. In any event, he charged him with the translation. This was a great chance for Safi to curry the young sultan’s favor.

By October 1608, after working for an entire year, Safi had completed a translation in prose, which he felt would make the work easier to understand. He added two long eulogies of Ahmed I, one in the invocation and the other at the end of his translation, where he noted in passing that he wished to be employed in the inner palace service if the sultan deemed him worthy of it -- a typical way for Ottoman literati to ask for royal favor.63

Safi’s rendition of the Story was not a verbatim translation but rather a largely rewritten text, if not a hybrid work, into which he also inserted a good deal of his own poems. Not surprisingly, he calls his work not a terceme (translation) but a te’lîf (authentic work).64 In almost every section that deals with the book’s core theme of “ideal kingship,” Safi inserts a poem or comment exalting his sultan for his kingly virtues

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62 Information about Mustafa Safi’s early career is limited and sometimes confusing. He was known to be a student of Kâtibzâde Zeynî Efendi (d. 1602), the former chief secretary of Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha and a prominent judge and madrasa professor. After receiving his teaching diploma (mülâzemet) from Kâtibzâde, seemingly during the reign of Murad III, he could not find a vacant teaching position in Istanbul and so returned to his hometown, Hrupişta/Kastoria in Macedonia. He is said to have held a timar there in return for serving as a preacher in military campaigns. In 1600, he served in the Hungarian campaign of Grand Vizier Damad İbrahim Pasha, in which capacity he read the first hutbe after the Ottoman conquest of Kanisza. He was probably appointed to preach at the Mosque of Cerrah Mehmed Pasha the following year. For further information on Mustafa Safi Efendi’s life and works, see İbrahim Hakkı İnal, “Mustafa Sâfi ve Vesîletü’l-vusûl ilâ Mahabbeti’r-resûl adlı Risalesi,” unpublished M.A. thesis, Marmara University, 1993; Mehmet Sait Çalka, “Mustafa Sâfi Efendi ve Gülşen-i Pend Mesnevisi,” unpublished M.A. thesis, Celal Bayar University, 2007; and Safi, Zübde, I, pp. XIX-XXIX.

63 TSMK/Celal-Cemal, fol. 225b, bears the date 10 B 1017 (20 October 1608). This copy seems to be the autograph, yet clearly not the one submitted to the sultan, as it has several corrections, omissions and additions. Thus, another clean copy, which I could not identify, should have been presented to the sultan.

64 Süleymaniye/Celal-Cemal, fol. 119b: “Ol kitâb-ı şerîfun le’le-i manzîmesinden ekser-i nisâr-i kabûl-âsr-î padişâhi olmak ümîdi ile bisâr-i vesi’-i nesre ’arz ve cevâhir-i nefîse-i mergûbesinden ba’zî suh ha-i dest-i teveccüh ve ikbûl-i şehinşâ’i olmak recâsî ile silk-i bedî’-i nazmanda ref’ olunmak irâdesi ile takrîben bir yıl sa’y ve gâşît ve vehn-i alîl ve tab’à kelil-i âzmâyış olnub bi-fazlîlîhî te’âlâ bir kitâb-ı latîf ve bir te’lîf-ı şerîf olmuşdur.”

104
with respect to sultanic justice, choosing favorites, and so forth. Clearly, these addenda were designed to advertise Safi’s literary talents to the young sultan with the aim of acquiring the inner court position he coveted. Overall, Safi’s work gives the impression that Ahmed I was already the embodiment of the “ideal” Muslim ruler portrayed in The Story of Cemâl and Celâl, that is, a powerful, active, just, law-abiding and pious sultan -- the very image that Ahmed always worked to cultivate in the minds of his people, as I will discuss shortly.65

The young sultan was so impressed with the result that, shortly afterwards, he not only fulfilled Safi’s wish by making him his personal prayer leader (imâm-ı sultânî); he also ordered him to write the chronicle of his reign in a style similar to that of the Story. In 1609, Ahmed made him the judge of Edirne, a prestigious post, after Safi complained about his lack of official ulema status, which prevented him from attending court ceremonies and thus from personally witnessing these events he was supposed to chronicle. Until his death in late 1616, Mustafa Safi worked as a court chronicler, in which capacity he also acted as advisor and confidant to the sultan. Between 1609 and 1615, he completed two volumes of his chronicle, titled Zübdetü ’t-tevârîh (Quintessence of Histories), but his sudden death prevented him from adding a planned third volume.

65 Another important fifteenth-century Timurid work, which was similarly written by a distinguished author at the court of Husayn Bayqara and then translated into Turkish for Ahmed I, was Husayn Vâiz Kashifî’s Ahlâk-ı Muhsini, one of the most popular works on ethics and a celebrated example of the “Mirror for Princes” genre. Kaşifî was a Nakşibendi preacher and poet who, like Âsafî, was a pupil of Jâmî. His Ahlâk was commissioned by Bayqara in 1495 for the education of his son, Ebu al-Muhsin Mirza. In 1616, Hocazade Mehmed Efendi, the chief mufti under Ahmed I, produced a translation and expansion of this work under the title Ahlâk-ı Sultan Ahmedî (The Morals of Sultan Ahmed): Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, MS Fatih 3467. See Hüseyin Altınpay, “Hocazâde Abdülaziz Efendi Ahlâk-ı Muhsini Tercümesi,” unpublished M.A. thesis, Celal Bayar University, 2008.
With its unusually detailed account of Ahmed’s private life in more than 650 folios, his work remains the most important Ottoman narrative source on Ahmed I and his reign.  

Ahmed’s affinity for books opened up opportunities for people like Mustafa Safi Efendi to rise in power and prestige, and for numerous important works, such as the *Gift of Rulers and Sultans*, the *Story of Cemâl and Celâl* and Safi’s *Quintessence*, to be produced under his patronage. His court represents one of the liveliest cultural environments in early modern Ottoman history, thanks in part to the young sultan’s fascination with all sorts of books, and in part to his obsession with emulating Süleyman I. As Nebahat Avcıoğlu notes, part of Ahmed’s imitation of his great-grandfather consisted of trying to “revive the literary corpus Süleyman initiated by ordering a new edition and translation of the works commissioned by him.”

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68 Avcıoğlu, “Ahmed I and the Allegories of Tyranny,” p. 220. Ahmed’s patronage of the arts was not limited to books. As I will discuss in the last chapter, he later undertook large-scale architectural projects in order to present himself as a pious ruler, such as the construction of an imperial mosque complex in the capital and the restoration of the Ka’ba in Mecca.
doubt a calculated move to cultivate an image as a virtuous ruler by invoking these great rulers of the past.

**II.3. In the Image of a Warrior Sultan: Ahmed I’s Eagerness for War**

Ahmed’s main preoccupation at this point, however, was war. He had grown up in an environment shaped by the Long War, the Celâli and sipahi rebellions, and the factional power struggles within the court. In the year before his succession, he had witnessed not only the most violent sipahi rebellion, which shook the throne of his father and threatened to eliminate the Ottoman dynasty, but also the execution of his elder brother, Prince Mahmud, who was strangled in a room in the imperial harem that was probably very close to where Ahmed resided with his mother, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Along with his princely education, these tumultuous and bloody events appear to have deeply affected young Ahmed and shaped his emotions, ideas, character and actions in the coming years. He would pursue a very different path from that of his father, and in so doing, he would become a religious, hot-tempered, intolerant and rigorous ruler devoted to justice and order.

Ahmed’s first actions after his accession suggest that he was trying to portray himself as the opposite of his father, whose legitimacy and power, as Ahmed had observed, had suffered from his sedentary and secluded style of rule when imperial affairs demanded his direct and active involvement. In contrast, Ahmed cultivated the qualities of a dynamic, active and warlike sultan. To this end, for instance, despite the cold winter weather, he left the palace almost every day to appear in public, traversed the
city on horseback, inspected the markets while in disguise, and chased game in the
hunting grounds of Istanbul. He also several times announced his eagerness to go to
war.69 There is no doubt that Ahmed’s regents, Mustafa Efendi and Handan Sultan,
advised him to behave in this manner in order to give the public the impression that he
was capable of ruling at such a young age and in such difficult times.

Two sections from the Venetian bailo Contarini’s dispatches are worth quoting at
length as they are very revealing with regard to Ahmed’s personality, actions and image
at the outset of his sultanate:

[In the first two weeks of January 1604], he almost always left the palace
for the Kiosk [on the waterfront of Topkapı Palace], where he had the
artillery fired and in the Royal barge; and when at barge, [he was]
claiming that he was eager for War, yet it was not well attested if this was
from the ardor of youth or if he were only excited by others to talk and act
in the way I have described in order to gain praise and fame, both from his
subjects and from other nations.70

The Sultan continued to leave the palace every day, going hunting, and in
the Barge, he was spared with everyone from the rains and bad weather.
He affirmed to me that so Sultan Mehmed, his father, had done on his
assumption of the throne; therefore, I was conjecturing that these could be
affectations and that he was urged and exhorted to proceed in such a way
in order to make a good impression in the hearts of the people and to form
a good image of his person in each one [of them]. In this way, he was
lively in spirit and [had] great success, which suits a lord, a great prince
worthy of ruling the entire empire, but just as one cannot speak with
certainty about the quality of his mind, so as to [the qualities of] his body,
one cannot deny what one sees, because he had the most handsome
physiognomy and a very pleasant face.71

70 ASVe, SDC, filza 57, fol. 294v (dated January 17, 1604): “Li giorni seguenti è uscito quasi sempre di
saraglio hora al Chiosco, dove ha fatto tirare delle artiglierie, et in Caichio, et quando alla Cacia,
raggionando che sia desideroso di Guerra, ma per ancora son ben certificato se questo sia per ardore
della gioventù, o pure ecitato da altri a parlare, et procedere di modo che ho raccontato per acquistarle
credito et reputatione, così apresso li sudditi, come apresso le altre nationi…”
71 ASVe, SDC, filza 57, fol. 336r (dated February 3, 1604): “Il Gran Signore ha continuato a uscire ogni
On the other hand, as Ahmed attempted to distance himself from his father’s much damaged reputation and legacy, he concurrently started to model himself in the image of his great-grandfather, Süleyman I, whom he admired and deemed the ideal warrior and the most powerful, just and pious ruler among all of his ancestors. According to a contemporary European account, at the commencement of his reign, Ahmed promised his people that he would create an empire more prosperous than ever before, “by imitating the virtues of his predecessor Süleyman.”72 Similarly, a foreign author in Istanbul remarked in a letter to a Jesuit priest that Ahmed wanted to become the next Süleyman the Magnificent.73 In this context, the above-mentioned reenactment of the conquest of Vienna at his circumcision festival can be interpreted as one of the earliest signs of this young sultan’s eagerness to lead a campaign in person as well as his dream of doing what Sultan Süleyman could not do. Overall, Ahmed’s choice of Süleyman I as his model was not a coincidence. After all, Sultan Süleyman was the last Ottoman ruler to create a lasting impression of a powerful and majestic emperor in the minds of both the Europeans and the Ottomans.74

73 Ibid., p. 219.

109
Moreover, Ahmed seemingly shared the view with many others that the empire-wide political disorder resulted from a deviation from the principles that had defined the early modern Ottoman imperial and dynastic establishment. According to this traditional understanding, which is reflected both in the writings of several contemporary intellectuals and bureaucrats as well as in the “advice to kings” literature written or translated for Ahmed I, a strong, warlike and just ruler was the pillar of the whole imperial system. The presence of a sultan with these virtues at the helm of the empire would establish a balance among all social, economic and political elements that sustained the order of the empire, that is to say, the Ottoman world order (nizâm-ı ʿālem). It is exactly this balance that Ahmed wanted to re-establish by cultivating the image of a warrior and dynamic sultan.

75 Several works presented to Ahmed I were practical guides on good administration, whereas others were general treatises on kingly virtues or sultanic justice, as seen above. The aforementioned anonymous treatise Gencine-i ʿAdâlet (The Treasury of Justice) belongs to the second group, whereas the famous Risâle of Ayn Ali belongs to the former. For a detailed discussion of Ayn Ali’s work, see Douglas Howard, “Genre and Myth in the Ottoman Advice for Kings Literature,” in Aksan and Goffman, eds., The Early Modern Ottomans, pp. 137-166.

II.3.1. The First Public Appearance as Sultan and a New Element in Ottoman Ceremonies of Accession

On January 3, 1604, Ahmed made his first ceremonial public appearance in the capital after visiting the shrine of Abu Ayyub Al-Ansarî on the Golden Horn, in what is now the district of Eyüp. In the Islamic hagiographical tradition, Abu Ayyub is a companion of the Prophet Muhammad, who fell during the first Arab siege of Constantinople in the late seventh century C.E. According to an Ottoman legend, after the city was taken over by Sultan Mehmed II in 1453, the sultan asked his spiritual guide, Akşemseddin, to find the tomb of Abu Ayyub and the spot that Akşemseddin indicated became the site of the shrine (hence the name of the district, Eyüp). In short order, the tomb of Abu Ayyub became the most important pilgrimage site in the capital for Muslims, linking the city with the Prophet and locating its conquest by Mehmed II within the Islamic apocalyptic tradition.77 During the first half of the sixteenth century, sultans visited the shrine before setting out on campaign in order to seek blessing from the soul of Abu Ayyub. Afterward, the sultans typically visited the tombs of their ancestors in the city for the same purpose.78

From the accession of Selim II in 1566 onwards, however, these royal visits to Eyüp, which previously had been occasional events, became an essential element in the Ottoman ceremonies of accession, providing the main opportunity for the people of the capital to see and acclaim their new sultan, who by then had increasingly withdrawn from

77 See Stefanos Yerasimos, Türk Metinlerinde Konstantiniye ve Ayasofya Efsaneleri, trans. Şirin Tekeli (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1998).
public view, so that the oath of allegiance to him had ceased to be a public event. Henceforth, almost all newly enthroned Ottoman sultans traveled to this shrine by boat and then returned to the palace on horseback, passing through the Edirne Gate in the city walls and visiting the mausolea of previous sultans buried in the capital. As Colin Imber aptly observes, these tomb visits “served to emphasize both the dynasty’s link with the Prophet through Abu Ayyub and, through the visit to the ancestral tombs which, with their associated royal mosques, dominated the Istanbul skyline, the continuity of Ottoman rule.”

Ahmed I, too, followed this relatively new ceremonial tradition and went to the shrine in his royal barge. However, at a time when the future of the Ottoman dynasty was very uncertain and the ongoing wars and rebellions were undermining the political stability of the empire, this childless and still uncircumcised sultan’s visit to Eyüp was more than just a symbolic expression of the continuity of Ottoman dynastic rule. It was also designed to fulfill the public expectation of a warrior sultan in a time of war, an expectation which Ahmed’s father had mostly failed to fulfill after his sole campaign in 1596. Now, though he was very young and inexperienced, Ahmed was very eager to take up this traditional role of the Ottoman sultan as well as to give the signal that he was ready to lead an imperial campaign in person, just as his great-grandfather, Sultan Süleyman, and his father, Mehmed III, had done soon after their successions.

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80 Imber, The Ottoman Empire, p. 117.
Thus, Ahmed arrived at the shrine in the company of his viziers and palace soldiers, who were dressed in their military costumes. After he had prayed at the tomb of Abu Ayyub, the Mufti Ebülmeeyamin Mustafa Efendi girded him with a sword which, according the chronicle of Mustafa Safi, bore the “sign of victory” (nusret-nişân). The royal visit to the shrine was completed with prayers for the young sultan and his armies to be victorious against the enemies of “state and religion.”

Afterwards, Ahmed visited his ancestors’ tombs and returned to the palace on horseback, carrying himself “with dignity and decorum proportionate to the eminence of his rank.” As this was his first public appearance, the people of the capital crowded the streets to see and acclaim their new ruler. During this royal procession, whose ceremonial details were codified by the end of the reign of Süleyman I, the soldiers and officers of the court marched in front of the young sultan while his viziers accompanied him on horseback. En route, just as in an imperial campaign march, Ahmed summoned his viziers to approach him one at a time in order to discuss the current state of governmental affairs. After this council (dîvân) meeting on horseback, according to the Venetian bailo, it was “decided that it would be proclaimed in the following days by the ministers delegated to the four usual places of the city that the same Grand Seigneur would go to Hungary and that he would declare war against the King of Persia.”

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81 Safi, Zübde, I, pp.15-16.
82 ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fol. 294v (dated January 17, 1604): “il suo portamento era con gravità, et decoro proportionato all’eminentia del suo grado.”
84ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fol. 294r (dated January 17, 1604): “[...] quel giorno divano a cavallo, cioè il Gran
At a time when expectation was mixed with uncertainty and centered on the young sultan’s ability to continue the dynastic rule at a most difficult time, Ahmed’s first public appearance was clearly designed to emphasize that he possessed the martial and religious virtues of his ancestors; that he was eager to go to war and determined to eliminate the Celâli rebels; and that the Islamic and dynastic legitimacy of the new sultan was fully established.

On the other hand, what appears to have begun as Ahmed’s attempt to portray himself as a warrior sultan would set a precedent and create the last essential element in the Ottoman ceremonies of accession, as almost all future Ottoman sultans would be girded with a sword at the shrine of Abu Ayyub. It should be noted, however, that some scholars still mistakenly believe that this ceremony first took place not at Ahmed’s enthronement but at that of his successor, his brother Mustafa I (r. 1617-18; 1622-23). Notwithstanding, Mustafa Safi’s, Abdülkadir Efendi’s and Mehmed bin Mehmed’s contemporary chronicles, as well as one of the unpublished dispatches of the Venetian bailo, and above all an unexamined Ottoman archival register, leave no doubt that it was inaugurated by Ahmed I, as described above.

Signore intese il parere delli Visiri, chiamati a dirlo uno alla volta, secondo l’antico costume, et fu deliberato quello che si publicò li giorni seguenti dalli ministri deputati nelli quattro luoghi soliti della città, che il Gran Signore istesso anderà in Ongaria et che si dichiarava la guerra contra il Re di Persia.”

See DİA, s.v. “Kılıç Alayı,” by Abdülkadir Özcan, for the historical evolution of this ceremony in the Islamic and Ottoman traditions.

For instance, see Colin Imber, “Frozen Legitimacy,” in Karateke and Reinkowski, eds., Legitimizing the Order, p. 104.

In addition to Mustafa Safi’s above-mentioned account, Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, pp. 615-616, and Abdülkadir Efendi, I, p. 374, describe Ahmed’s sword-girding ceremony at Abu Ayyub, as does Contarini in ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fol. 256r (dated January 3, 1604): “La prima uscita che ha fatto il Gran Signore fuori del Serraglio dopo il donativo dato alle militie, del quale dirò nelle seguenti, è stato alla sepoltura del padre, et hoggi è andato a Invasteri [i.e., El-Ansari] luoco poco discosto dalle Mura di Constantinopoli.
II.3.2. Edirne and Bursa “Campaigns” (1605)

In the coming months, Ahmed’s eagerness to play the role of a warrior sultan never diminished, yet it was interrupted twice: first by his circumcision in late January 1604, then by his serious illness in late March and April 1604. After recovering from both, he raised the issue again with his viziers while continuing to make frequent public appearances. In early March 1604, an official announcement was made in the capital that the sultan would go to war in Hungary. At the time, the viziers were divided into those supporting the idea that the young sultan should lead a campaign against the Habsburgs and those opposing it. In any case, young sultan’s illness, which triggered fears of dynastic extinction, halted this debate for some time.

Concerns about the future of the dynasty were finally allayed by the birth of Ahmed’s first son on November 3, 1604. The birth of a prince naturally created much joy and excitement in the court and capital as it proved that the young sultan was able to father children. Ahmed named his son Osman, after eponymous founder of the Ottoman

*dove è un corpo honorato da Turchi, et dove ha cinto la spada secondo l’uso de suoi processori.* The archival register in question, TSMA, D. 34, fol. 234a, mentions the event in passing: “[el-vâki’ fi sene 1012… ta’rîhün bin onikisinde] mân-ı şa’banü’l-mu’azzamun gurresinde [4 January 1604] sa’adetli pâdişâh Eyyüb-i Ensâri’ye kılıç kuşanmağa buyurduklarnda [...].” This register (originally titled *filori defteri*) provides convincing evidence that Ahmed I inaugurated this tradition of sword girding at Abu Ayyub. From the reign of Selim II to that of Ahmed I, the register was used to record the gold florins distributed from the sultan’s personal treasury at various court ceremonies. Murad III, Mehmed III, and Ahmed I took the register with them wherever they went. The register notes details of all these sultans’ enthronement ceremonies but mentions sword-girding only in the case of Ahmed’s. There is a one-day discrepancy between all these Ottoman sources and the Venetian bailo’s report regarding the date of Ahmed’s sword-girding ceremony, as in the case of Ahmed’s enthronement.

88 ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fols. 399r-v (dated February 20, 1604): “Dopo che il Gran Signore fu guarito per la circoncisione fatta secondo la sua legge ha cominciato di nuovo a lasciarsi vedere frequentemente come prima, et di più ha cavalcato per Costantinopoli nelle strade più principali con quelli solamente che per ordinario sono soliti di assistere alla sua persona. Attendite alle caccie, et nel suo caicchio ha condotto trombette e gnacchere[?], che non è cosa solita.”

89 ASVe, SDC, filza 59, fol. 3r (dated March 9, 1604).
dynasty, and ordered public celebrations for seven days and nights in all corners of the empire. The birth of Prince Osman (later Osman II, r. 1618-22) was such an important event that Ahmed appeared on the throne the next day so that the members of his government and other grandees of the court could kiss his hands and congratulate him, just as they would on a religious holiday. The birth of the prince was immediately announced to the representatives of foreign states resident in the capital.90

Now feeling much more confident about himself and his posterity, Ahmed resumed his project to campaign in person. Because he was still so inexperienced in warfare, he continued to sharpen his martial skills through frequent hunts. He also studied military tactics by means of model fortresses erected in his harem quarters. Not surprisingly, Ahmed named these fortresses after Rome, Vienna, Prague and several other European cities. In the meantime, he read books on the life and campaigns of Süleyman the Magnificent with the desire of emulating him.91

90 Safi, Zübbe, II, pp. 23-24; and ASVe, SDC, filza 60, fol. 151r (dated November 14, 1604): “È nato alli 3 del presente un figliolo al Gran Signore, il quale in dimostrazione del contento ricevuto ha ordinato pubbliche feste da farsi per 7 giorni continui in Constantinopoli et in Pera, il che si è immediate esseguito con solene aparato di tutte le botteghe adornate di panni d’oro, et altri abbandamenti che per la varietà et ricchezza loro renderanno bella et sontuosa vista in particolare nel tempo di note secondo venivano tenute aperte con quantità di lumi accesi essendo anco il Gran Signore medesimo uscito frequentemente a riveder la città. Il giorno susseguenti al parto comparve Sua Maestà in pubblico nel proprio seraglio dove è solito sedere al tempo del Bairano, et andero a baciarli la mano li Visiri, Cadileschieri et altri grandi contra quello che si sia più accustumato di fare per simile occasione. Et ci fu mandato medesimamente una polizza dal Cheslaragassi cioè Agà maggiore della Regina Madre, che sera acclusa nella presente con la traduttione per dar conto di questo nascimento, havendo anco fatto il medesimo il Bassà luogotenente con un suo huomo particolare.” The name of Prince Osman’s mother is still not certain, though later Ottoman sources refer to her as Mahfiruz Hadice Sultan (d. 1610). See Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” p. 335, n. 64, for details.

91 ASVe, SDC, filza 60, fols. 223v-r (dated December 13, 1604): “Va anco la Maestà Sua a caccia spesso e ogni giorno quando va in seraglio si trattiene con rappresentazioni continue di espugnazioni di fortezze finte, facendole nominare Roma, Viena, Praga, et simili, facendo vestire li defensori più simili all’uso che può, e difendere et combattere fortemente con archibugi carichi senza palla, samitarie et bastoni adoperandosi come generale, et rallegrandosi quando vede nel sforzo restar feriti li combatenti. Legge anco alcune volte la vita di Sultan Suliman, et procura di imitarlo[...]”
After his second son, Prince Mehmed, was born on March 11, 1605, Ahmed took some concrete steps towards joining the ongoing war in Hungary. In early October 1605, he made a spontaneous trip to Edirne, the former Ottoman capital. This was his first long journey outside the capital, by means of which he apparently wanted to test his readiness for a campaign march as Edirne was the first major Ottoman military halting station (menzil) on the imperial campaign route westwards. Moreover, Ahmed was personally very attracted to Edirne, not only because of its famous royal hunting preserves replete with all kinds of game, but also because the city was a favorite destination of Süleyman I, who had frequently spent his winters there, hunting and preparing for campaigns. Most importantly, while in Edirne, Ahmed could more quickly receive news about the ongoing siege of the fortress of Esztergom (Estergon) by his grand vizier, Lala Mehmed Pasha, to whom he had recently explained that the conquest of this strategically critical fortress was his “most important purpose.”

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92 According to the Venetian bailo Bon, Prince Mehmed was born on March 11, whereas Safi, Zübde, II, pp. 24-25, claims that he was born on March 8. Bon’s date should be credited here as he was in the capital at that time and had a wide network of informants inside the palace, whereas Safi had no such personal knowledge of harem events during this period. Bon further reveals that in-between his two sons’ births, that is between November 1604 and March 1605, Ahmed had his firstborn daughter. ASVe, SDC. Filza 61, fol. 19v (dated March 14, 1605): “È nato un figliolo a sua Maestà già 3 giorni, et fin hora sono doi maschi, et una femina.” Although the names of two of Ahmed’s (at least) five daughters, Ayşe and Gevherhan, are known, their birth dates remain unclear. Kösem Sultan was the mother of both Prince Mehmed and Ayşe Sultan. For further information on Ahmed’s daughters and their marriages to high-ranking viziers, see Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” p. 334, n. 58.


94 When Ahmed I and Lala Mehmed Pasha met in Istanbul in February 1605, they discussed the ongoing war in Hungary. According to Safi, Zübde, II, p. 9: “Vezîr-i a’зам[a]... Üstürgon fethi ehemm-i makâsîd-i pâdişâhi îdûği tebyin olundukdan sonra...”
Overall, according to Ottaviano Bon, who replaced Contarini as bailo in late 1604, Ahmed’s original plan was to spend part of the winter of 1605-1606 in Edirne hunting like Süleyman I. He would then gather an army and proceed to Belgrade, where he would join the imperial army under Lala Mehmed Pasha. With this larger army, he could put pressure on the Habsburgs to sign a peace treaty. For young Ahmed, who wished to be constantly on the move and who had already expressed his desire to fight the Habsburgs, Edirne represented all the things he valued.

Ahmed undertook this trip in a very unusual and even dangerous way. According to contemporary sources, while he was hunting in Çatalca, a menzil town close to Istanbul, he secretly gathered a few of his servants and, without informing anybody in the government or palace, headed to Edirne, a ride of at least five or six days. This impromptu departure naturally worried the sultan’s regents, viziers and other grandees back in the capital, who were concerned about the young sultan’s safety since he was traveling without sufficient guards or logistical support. Notwithstanding, Ahmed completed the journey in only three days without any problem and was welcomed by the townspeople.

95 ASVe, SDC, filza 62, fols. 90v-91r (dated October 8, 1605): “Quello che più si crede è che il Re come giovine disegni di goder parte di questo verno la campagna di Andrinopoli abbondantissimo di caccie de tutte le sorti, come faceva Sultan Suliman, né che hora ha per ritornarsene. Questi dicono che havendo mandato a pigliar li padiglioni da campagna sia per passare sino a Belgrado per chiarirsi nel ritorno che farà lo essercito di Ongaria del numero et della qualità di esso con pensiero quando non segua pace di fermarlo per ingrossarlo, et esser l’anno venturo molto per tempo et potente in campagna.”

96 Ahmed I’s arrival in Edirne is depicted in a unique miniature included in the poetry collection of Ganizade Nadiri, who was the judge of Edirne during Ahmed’s visit: Divan-ı Nâdirî, TSMK, MS H. 889, fol. 10a. Noteworthy here are Ahmed’s youthful, beardless face, the small number of attendants surrounding him, and his extra horse apparently for speed, as well as the presence in the crowd of numerous people waving petitions.
In Edirne, Ahmed held court mostly in person in order to deliver sultanic justice and redress the complaints of the people. For instance, he ordered the execution of a number of bandits, such as Aynacı Hasan, and punished several other wrongdoers in and around the city. Eight days after his arrival, however, he received a message from Istanbul urging him to return: Nasuh Pasha, who was recently entrusted with the command of the government forces against the Celâlis under the leadership of Tavil Halil, had just suffered a crushing defeat near Bolvadin close to Bursa.\textsuperscript{97} Furious, Ahmed cancelled his war plans and started back. Although he ordered an ostentatious military procession to accompany his re-entry into the capital, as if he had been on a real campaign, the number of soldiers present in Istanbul was, as the Venetian bailo Bon reports, insufficient since most were deployed to various fronts.\textsuperscript{98} Hence Ahmed re-entered the capital with only a limited number of troops on October 17, 1605.\textsuperscript{99}

Watching this rather unimpressive procession, Bon noticed that Ahmed had matured: he had gained weight and wore a more serious expression, which the bailo interpreted as a reflection of his rigorous nature.\textsuperscript{100} Here, the bailo seems to be alluding to

\textsuperscript{97} Mehmed bin Mehmed, \textit{Nuhbe}, p. 644.

\textsuperscript{98} Interestingly, both Ottoman and Venetian sources refer to this impromptu trip as a campaign. See Safi, \textit{Zübde}, II, pp. 148-149; and ASVe, SDC, filza 62, fols. 90r-91r (dated October 8, 1605).

\textsuperscript{99} Mehmed bin Mehmed, \textit{Nuhbe}, p. 644; and ASVe, SDC, filza 62, fol. 104r (dated October 20, 1605): \textit{“Il Re allì 17 il lunedì fu di ritorno nella città et volse far l’intrata sollene, perciò due giorni prima fu pubblicato che tutti li stipendiati et ogni altro dovesse uscire della porta di Andrinopoli ad incontrarlo con le loro armi et ben all’ordine, così l’entrauta principiò da terza, et durò fino a mezo giorno, perché entrorno prima le cucine, li padiglioni, le cacie, et la guardaroba, ma perché la Città è vuota di militia, non è riuscita questa entranza né pomposa né frequente.”}

\textsuperscript{100} ASVe, SDC, filza 62, fol. 104r (dated October 20, 1605): \textit{“et io che sono stato a vederla non saperei che altro refferire a Vostra Serenità se non che il Re di già si è fatto si può dir huomo, essendosi fatto grosso, et grande, et mostrando età sopra li 20 anni, con una facia molto grave et guardatura fiera, che dinotta apunto la severità della sua natura. Suà Maestà in questi giorni che è stato fuori ha atteso alla cacia, et a castigare molti tristi in quei contorni, si che non si raggiona se non di quelli a’ quali ha fatto levar la vita}
Ahmed’s recent decision in August 1605 to execute the governor-general of Aleppo, Sinanpaşaoğlu Mehmed Pasha, who appeared in the first chapter as a controversial figure connected to Karayazıçı’s rebellion. This decision marked a turning point in the young sultan’s character development as well as in his attempts to free himself from the overwhelming control of his mother, Handan Sultan, who had been acting as co-regent together with the royal tutor, Mustafa Efendi, as will be illustrated below. Hence, a brief discussion of this episode is in order.

The field marshal of the eastern front, Cıgalazade Sinan Pasha, had Sinanpaşaoğlu imprisoned in the citadel of Aleppo on the grounds that he and his army were acting like Celâlis against the townspeople and peasants, as discussed in detail in the previous chapter. However, once news of his imprisonment reached the court, the queen mother interceded on his behalf and secured his release. He was immediately recalled to the capital to resume his post as third-ranking vizier on the imperial council -- further proof that he was the queen mother’s client.

No sooner had he taken his seat in the imperial council, however, than he was summoned to the Chamber of Petitions by Ahmed, who ordered him decapitated before his eyes, explaining, “My pardon permitted him to return to his place in the council; he returned and received his punishment!” Handan Sultan, already ill at the time, was so...

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et la robba con spavento de molti, che si sono allontantati dalla sua presenza.”

101 Quoted by Peirce, The Imperial Harem, p. 243. However, Peirce is mistaken when she claims that Sinanpaşaoğlu was executed in 1603.
shocked by this turn of events that her condition reportedly worsened, and she died a few months later.\textsuperscript{102}

Unmentioned in the available sources is the role in this incident of the mufti Sunullah Efendi, who appeared in the previous chapter as the secret ringleader of the \textit{sipahi} rebellions under Mehmed III and the main intermediary for Karayazıci, and who was even mentioned as a possible candidate for the throne. At the time of Sinanpașaoğlu’s execution, he was holding the office of the mufti for a third time after two dismissals.\textsuperscript{103} Considering that Ahmed habitually sought the mufti’s advice before making such important decisions, and considering Sunullah Efendi’s animosity toward Sinanpașaoğlu in the Karayazıci affair, it seems likely that he supported, and perhaps influenced, the sultan’s decision. Ahmed’s personal initiative in executing one of his mother’s important clients was a clear sign of not only his rigorous nature but also of his efforts to rule by his own discretion instead of being guided by \textit{de facto} regents. A year earlier, he had ordered the executions of the aforementioned deputy grand vizier, Kasım Pasha, and his successor Sarıkçı Mustafa Pasha, but in both cases his decision was approved -- and even encouraged -- by Handan Sultan and Mustafa Efendi, who were trying to rid the court of clients of the former queen mother, Safiye Sultan, as will be further discussed below.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{102} Mehmed bin Mehmed, \textit{Nuhbe}, pp. 643-644; and Hasan Beyzade, III, p. 873.

\textsuperscript{103} Sunullah Efendi was reappointed mufti in June 1604 but dismissed again in September 1606. He returned to office for the last time in November 1606 but was forced to retire two years later, in September 1608. For further details of his appointments and dismissals, see İpşirli, “Şeyhülislâm Sun’ullah Efendi.”

\textsuperscript{104} Kasım and Mustafa Pashas were executed in August 1604 and January 1605, respectively. See Mehmed bin Mehmed, \textit{Nuhbe}, pp. 629 and 631.
Ahmed’s actions, together with the Venetian bailo’s observations, indicate that the young sultan had grown comfortable with the business of rule over the past two years, while at the same time developing a harsh, hot-tempered and intolerant personality. His sudden trip to Edirne seems to have been calculated to make it publicly known that he had also attained the speed, bravery and determination of an ideal warrior and active sultan -- qualities he had been honing since the commencement of his sultanate. In sum, at barely sixteen years of age, Ahmed believed that he was ready to go to war. He had to wait only a few more weeks to realize his dream, only to have it end in fiasco.

On the day of his return from Edirne, Ahmed received word that Lala Mehmed Pasha had taken Esztergom and adjacent towns. This development increased the chances for a peace treaty with the Habsburgs. At the same time, the recent defeat of Nasuh Pasha refueled Ahmed’s eagerness to fight the Celâlis in person. As the Venetian bailo reports, for some time, there was “no lack of speculations to the effect that suddenly he might cross the Sea [of Marmara] and go to Bursa in order to assail the rebels.”

In early November 1605, Nasuh Pasha returned to the capital unannounced and sought to meet with the sultan in person. As Hasan Beyzade notes, Nasuh knew very well that his actions as commander of the effort against the Celâlis -- notably fleeing the


106 ASVe, SDC, filza, 62, fol. 91r (dated October 8, 1605): “Non mancano di più speculativi che dicono che d’improviso potria passare il Mare, et andarsene in Burtia per dar adosso alli Ribeli [...].” Two weeks later, the bailo observed that Ahmed was frustrated with the news of the Celâlis’ unending attacks in Anatolia. ASVe, SDC, filza, 62, fol. 104v (dated October 20, 1605): “Con tutto ciò intendo che il Re sta molto travagliato per li mali successi di Asia.”
battlefield and executing the leader of an auxiliary force sent to assist him --, could not go unpunished. The public expected Ahmed to execute him, just as he had executed Sinanpaşaoğlu Mehmed Pasha.

At his meeting with the sultan, however, Nasuh explained the reasons for his defeat, which, he argued, stemmed mainly not from his own actions but from those of his sub-commanders. Furthermore, he insisted that the Celâlis were plundering Bursa and approaching the capital; and that the sultan’s presence was required to deal with these rebels, for they could give up their struggle only if they saw the sultan at the head of an imperial army. Easily persuaded by these manipulative claims, Ahmed announced his departure in two days for Bursa and, if necessary, points east. However, the royal tutor, the mufti and other viziers opposed this idea, insisting that

It is certain that there is no harm or usefulness in your going [to war]. In addition, the sea is not pleasant after the Day of November.

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107 Hasan Beyzade, III, p. 866.
108 Nasuh Pasha’s execution was actually expected both before and after his arrival in Istanbul. See the French ambassador Salignac’s report (dated November 24, 1605), in Ambassade en Turquie de Jean de Gontaut Biron, Baron de Salignac, 1605 à 1610: Correspondance diplomatique & documents inédits, ed. Comte Théodore de Gontaut Biron (Paris: [NP], 1889), p. 5 [hereafter Salignac/Correspondance]; and ASVe, SDC, filza 62, fol. 161r (dated November 6, 1605): “perciò [il Re] ha fatto masul Nasuf, et con la spedizione di diversi Capigi alcuni dicono che lo ha mandato a strangolare, altri a far venir alla Porta come soggetto che essendo stato due volte sotto la spada del nemico non meriti più la gratia sua.”
109 Hasan Beyzade, III, p. 867.
110 Ibid.: “Elbette mahmiyye-i Burusa’ya bi’z-zât gidüp, andan öte lâzım gelen mahalle değin varmağa şitâb iderin.” See also ASVe, SDC, filza 62, fol. 170r-v (dated November 7, 1605).
111 Ibid.: “Gitmenüzde zarar ve nef’i olmaduğı mukarrerdür. Hususâ ki, Kâsim güni geçüp min -ba’d deryâ mülâyim değildir.” Kasım Günü, literally “November Day,” was used as a marker in the Ottoman fiscal calendar; it corresponds to the feast of St. Demetrius, which falls on October 26 in the Gregorian calendar and November 8 in the Julian.
But Ahmed was so determined to go to war that even his mother’s death on November 9, 1605, could not stop him.\(^{112}\) Without waiting for the end of the traditional seven-day mourning period, he re-issued his order for swift preparations for the campaign. On short notice, he sailed to Mudanya on a war galley (baştarda) owned by Grand Admiral Cıgalazade Sinan Pasha, then he traveled to Bursa on horseback in the cold, accompanied only by his court and a small army. However, a few days later, he once again fell ill, probably either from the cold or from drinking contaminated water, and was forced to cancel his campaign when it had barely begun.\(^{113}\) Ahmed thus had no choice but to compromise with the Celâlis, just as his father had done a few years earlier. Before he returned to the capital in early December 1605, he allowed some of the most prominent rebel leaders and their followers to enter the ranks of the Ottoman army.\(^{114}\)

Ahmed’s second illness at a critical moment rekindled concerns about the health and actions of the sultan, thus the future of the dynasty. He found it difficult, however, to come to terms with his delicate health and the issues of dynastic continuity. In a short time, he aspired to go to war again, this time against Shah Abbas I, his Shiite archenemy, but his regent Mustafa Efendi managed to change his mind, as will be discussed in the fourth chapter. His Bursa campaign would remain his sole official military undertaking, yet he never gave up the idea of campaigning in person as long as his empire was at war.

\(^{112}\) Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, p. 645; and Salignac/Correspondance, p. 6.

\(^{113}\) Ahmed’s Bursa campaign lasted only two weeks. For details, see Safi, Zübde, II, pp. 41-44; Abdulkadir Efendi, I, pp. 425-427; and ASVe, SDC, filza 62, fols. 174r-178r (dated November 25, 1605) and fols. 196r-197v (dated December 12, 1605).

\(^{114}\) Griswold, The Great Anatolian Rebellion, pp. 53-55; and Finkel, Osman’s Dream, pp. 184-185.
In the following years, he would instead keep up the image of the warrior and active sultan by frequently going on hunts and trying to emulate Süleyman I in other ways.

II.4. The Question of Ahmed’s Regents

No discussion of the first two years of Ahmed’s reign can ignore the question of regents. Despite the fact that there were quite a number of Ottoman sultans who took the throne when they were underage, no scholarly monograph exists on the issue of regency, or lack thereof, in the Ottoman dynastic establishment over its 600-year history. This gap in Ottoman historiography has been noted by Baki Tezcan in a recent article that provides an introductory but highly perceptive examination of the Ottoman regency problem in the context of sultanic decision-making during the early reign of Ahmed I.115 According to Tezcan, Ahmed’s tutor Mustafa Efendi played a critical role in politically significant decisions during this period. In other words, Tezcan suggests that Mustafa Efendi acted as de facto regent for Ahmed I before any other person, such as Ahmed’s mother, Handan Sultan, or his first grand vizier, Yavuz Ali Pasha, could fill that role. While I agree with Tezcan on this point, I question his assertion that Handan Sultan had no visible or significant political role. Rather, I contend that Handan Sultan should be considered a coregent with Mustafa Efendi from the beginning of Ahmed’s reign until her death in 1605. I would further argue that Yavuz Ali Pasha was Handan Sultan’s client and that, as grand vizier, he was empowered to act on her and her son’s behalf. In short, a reevaluation of

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the question of Ahmed’s regents and of the political roles played by Handan Sultan and Mustafa Efendi is in order here.

Ahmed I was not the first minor sultan to take the Ottoman throne. A century and a half earlier, Mehmed II (r. 1444-46; 1451-81) was enthroned at the age of twelve during the lifetime of his father, Murad II (r. 1421-44; 1446-51), who had surprisingly decided to abdicate in favor of his only surviving son. Mehmed’s first reign, which appears to have been little more than an introduction to the business of rule under the guidance of his father’s powerful grand vizier, Çandarlı Halil Pasha, did not last long, because Murad II was soon called back to the throne as a result of political pressures instigated by Halil Pasha.116 Thus, as Tezcan also observes, Ahmed’s reign was the first to begin during the monarch’s minority and continued uninterruptedly into his adult years. In the absence of a tradition of institutionalized regency in the Ottoman dynastic establishment, Handan Sultan and Mustafa Efendi, as the only figures physically close to the sultan in the palace, became de facto regents and helped Ahmed I gradually to construct his personal rule, which he was quite restless to assert, as seen above.

Handan Sultan’s role as regent can be seen in her actions immediately after her son’s enthronement, notably in the expulsion of Safiye Sultan from the palace on January 9, 1604. As seen in the previous chapter, Safiye Sultan was a powerful political actor who exercised overwhelming control over court and dynastic politics throughout the reign of her son, Mehmed III. As a result, she became the target of the sipahis and their

116 For the reasons behind Murad II’s retirement from the throne and for Mehmed II’s first sultanate under the guidance of Halil Pasha, see Halil İnalcık’s seminal work, Fatih Devri Üzerinde Tetkikler ve Vesikalar I (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1995; third edition), pp. 1-136.
supporters, whose rebellions in the early 1600s aimed at minimizing or eliminating her faction’s political dominance. Although the last sipahi rebellion in January 1603 had significantly curbed the power of Safiye’s faction by taking the life of Gazanfer Agha, she soon regained her influence and wielded it until the end of her son’s reign. One of the Contarini’s unpublished reports reveals that as of December 20, 1603, a day before Mehmed III’s unexpected death, the sipahis and their supporters were preparing another rebellion against the sultan and his mother. According to the Venetian bailo,

> The sipahis, who continually return from Hungary, comport themselves poorly, and as poor wretches, it appears almost impossible that this winter will pass without some great uprising, since they keep murmuring against the Queen Mother, and [this grumbling] also began to spread further, mentioning the person of the Sultan.  

Hence, when Ahmed ascended to the throne, it was obvious to both him and his mother that as long as Safiye Sultan remained such an alternative focus of power at the court, they would run the risk of a sipahi rebellion or some equally serious problem. Immediately after his enthronement, therefore, Ahmed sent Safiye to the Old Palace, along with all of her servants. Contarini vividly captures the scene:

> The Queen mother of Sultan Mehmed left the harem, not to return any more, to the indescribable consolation of everyone, but with infinite tears and wailing from her, which were heard through the streets while she went to the Old Palace in a coach, cursing the sultan and auguring every evil. At the same time, with her left all the other ladies in a great number, who, before leaving, out of disdain, broke all the windows of the rooms where they lived and committed several other serious acts of damage, in such a

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117 ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fols. 216r-v (dated December 20, 1603): “Li spai che continuamente ritornano di Ongaria compaiono male ad ordine, et come disperati, parendo quasi impossibile che passi questa invernata senza qualche gran solevatone, poiché vano mormorando contra la Regina, et si è anco in cominciato a passar più oltre, nominandosi la persona del Gran Signore.”

118 Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, p. 617.
way that the Grand Vizier entered alone, it being such an unusual occurrence, in order to give orders for repairs. The new Queen alone remained in the harem with a few women [...]. Truly this woman [Safiye Sultan] was the origin and cause of not a few troubles, and if her son had lived for some years, she might have continued in this way, putting this Empire in complete disorder.  

At the same time, seemingly upon his mother’s demand, Ahmed I replaced the incumbent chief eunuch of the harem, Abdürezzak Agha, with Cevher Agha. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Abdürezzak was an important member of Safiye

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119 ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fols. 295v-296r (dated January 17, 1604): “È uscita di seraglio per non ritornare mai più la Regina madre di Sultan Mehemet, con indecibile consolatione di tutti ma con infinite lacrime et lamentationsi di lei, che si sono sentite fino per le strade mentre era in cochio andando al seraglio vechio, maledicendo il Gran Signore et augurando ogni male. Con essa medesimamente uscirono tutte le altre signore in gran numero, le quali prima di partire per sdegno hanno rotto tute le finestre delle stanze dove abitavano, et fatti diversi altri danni importanti, di modo che il Primo Visir è entrato dentro lui solo, che è stata cosa insolita, per dar ordine alla reparatione. È restata solamente in seraglio la nova Regina, con alcune poche donne [...]. Veramente questa donna è stata origine et causa di non pochi inconvenienti, et se il figliuolo viveva per qualche anno, et ella havesse continuato di quel modo poneva in compito disordine questo Imperio.”

120 Tezcan, “The Question of Regency,” p. 187, writes that the name of Abdürezzak Agha’s successor cannot be ascertained due to conflicting accounts in narrative sources, which refer to him only at the time of his replacement by El-Hac Mustafa Agha in November 1605. For instance, Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, p. 645 and Ahmed Resmi Efendi, Hamîletü’l-küberâ, ed. Ahmet Nezihî Turan (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2000), p. 47, both refer to him as Reyhan Agha, while Safi, Zübde, I, p. 81, calls him Cevher Agha. On the other hand, several archival documents, which apparently escaped Tezcan’s attention, indicate that the chief eunuch in question was Cevher Agha, not Reyhan. For instance, the aforementioned filori defteri mentions Cevher Agha’s appointment as the kizlar ağası (i.e., the chief eunuch of the imperial harem) happened before January 17, 1604. TSMA, D. 34, fol. 235a (entry dated 14 Ş 1012): “[E]vvel emirde Cevher Ağa kızlar ağası oldukda…. Inded, two petitions, TSMA, E. 7737/5 (dated 11 C 1013 / 5 October 1604) and E. 7737/7 (dated evâsıt-ı Rebi’ü’l-evvel 1014 / mid-August 1605), and a register on the huss revenues of the queen mother, TSMA, D. 4124, p. 2 (dated evâsıt-ı Muharrem 1014 / May-June 1605), bear his signature, which reads “bende-i Cevher ağa-yi dârü’s-sa’âde.” Similarly, a record in one of the registers on the revenues of imperial foundations (evkâf-ı hümâyûn) dated H. 1013 (1604) records Cevher Agha as the chief eunuch of the harem (ağa-yi dârü’s-sa’âde) and the overseer (nâzur) of the foundations. BOA, MAD, D. 169, p. 2. Finally, a register that records the furs given by Ahmed I to his household members and government viziers between December 21, 1603 and April 5, 1608, continuously refers to Cevher Agha as the kizlar ağası from early 1604 until he was replaced by El-Hac Mustafa Agha (“Kizlar Ağası Cevher çıkub virine Musâhib [El-Hac] Mustafa Ağa kizlar ağası oldukda...”). TSMA, D. 2025, fols. 6b, 7a, 7b, and 8a; the quotation is at fol. 8b. Reyhan Agha is not mentioned in either of these sources, and it is certain that Cevher was appointed as the chief eunuch of the harem and the overseer of the imperial foundations after Abdürezzak Agha’s dismissal and that he served in this position until El-Hac Mustafa replaced him. Ahmed Resmi’s collection of biographies of chief harem eunuchs should be used with caution, particularly for the period before the eighteenth century.

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Sultan’s faction and played a critical role in the execution of Ahmed’s elder brother, Prince Mahmud, in the absence of his predecessor Gazanfer Agha. The young sultan also dismissed Kayiş Mustafa Agha, the aforementioned kapu ağası, or chief of the eunuchs who guarded the entrance to the palace’s third court, from his complementary post of hâsodabaşı (chief of the privy chamber), replacing him with Hadım Gürcü Mehmed Agha. Contarini reports that Mustafa Agha was in fact secretly following the orders of Safiye Sultan. The night before Ahmed visited the shrine of Abu Ayyub, as described above, two important members of the privy chamber, the silahdâr (sword-bearer) and rikâbdâr (stirrup-holder), were expelled from their positions under the pretext of fomenting disorder, and many harem women were sent away, as well. In sum, in Tezcan’s words, “all of these dismissals and appointments mark a break with the previous personnel at the palace and the court politics of the reign of Mehmed III, in which Ahmed’s grandmother Safiye Sultan exercised considerable control.”

Although it is hard to ascertain with any precision whether this break with the past was solely the work of Handan Sultan, there is no doubt that she was heavily implicated in it, given that she had vested interests in the reconfiguration of these positions of

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121 Tezcan, “The Question of Regency,” p. 187; and TSMA, D. 34, fol. 234b. Once Gürcü Mehmed Agha was appointed chief of the privy chamber, Kayiş Mustafa Agha served only as chief eunuch of the palace, as indicated by TSMA, D. 34, fol. 235b: “Mâh-i mezbûrun fî 22 [25 January 1604] Galata ve Paşa sarayı ve Edirne ağalarına ellişer filori in ‘âm olunub Kapu Ağası Kayiş Mustafâ Ağa’ya teslîm.”

122 ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fol. 280r (dated January 17, 1604).

123 ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fol. 255r (dated January 3, 1604): “Sono stati scacciati di notte il Silictar et il Rechiptar… sotto pretesto di alcuni piccoli disordini, che hanno commesso, essendosi mandate anco fuori molte donne.” I was not able to ascertain the name of Ahmed’s new stirrup-holder, but his new sword-bearer was Hüseyin Agha, the brother of Nahînî Hasan Pasha, who was executed together with Gazanfer and Osman Aghas in January 1603. See TSMA, D. 34, fol. 234a; and Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, p. 630.

influence in the imperial harem, where her son resided. Most importantly, considering the fact that Ahmed did not have a princely household of his own, Handan Sultan needed trustworthy and capable men of service to create a “shield” around Ahmed in order to curb attempts to influence him contrary to her wishes. The first months of Ahmed’s sultanate were critical in this respect as any member of the alternative power groupings in the inner circles of the palace could easily manipulate him with a view toward winning appointment to the newly emerging court. As the co-regent for an underage sultan who had succeeded to the throne without a household, Handan Sultan took it upon herself to shape the nucleus of the royal household by appointing loyal and able men. The above-mentioned changes in palace personnel in the immediate aftermath of Ahmed’s succession should be considered in this context.

Accordingly, Handan Sultan immediately began building up her network of clients, just as Safiye Sultan had done in the recent past. As co-regent, moreover, Handan was actively involved in the running of dynastic and imperial affairs together with Mustafa Efendi. Furthermore, she favored her fellow Bosnians in appointments to her son’s new court.

The appointment of Yavuz Ali Pasha to the grand vizierate sheds light on Handan’s political role and influence as regent. Like Handan Sultan, Ali Pasha was of Bosnian origin. As a boy, he was recruited through the devşirme and trained in the palace school, ultimately becoming Mehmed III’s sword-bearer. In 1601, he graduated from the palace with one of the most prestigious appointments, that of governor of Egypt, which he held for just over two years. He then succeeded Yemişci Hasan Pasha as grand vizier.
Yemişci Hasan, as noted in the previous chapter, was dismissed and executed in October 1603. Although the majority of contemporary Ottoman chronicles claim that Ali Pasha was appointed to the grand vizierate by Mehmed III around this time, there is credible evidence that the sultan did not, in fact, fill the post. This problem has been discussed at some length by Tezcan, who reaches the tentative conclusion that it was actually Ahmed I who appointed Ali Pasha. In other words, Tezcan is of the opinion that, at the time of Ahmed’s enthronement, there was no acting grand vizier. I would second Tezcan’s conclusion by presenting more concrete evidence to this effect while arguing that Handan Sultan had a critical role in Ali Pasha’s selection.

First of all, as Tezcan meticulously delineates, Ali Pasha left Egypt for Istanbul on September 13, 1603, before Yemişci Hasan’s dismissal, in order to deliver Egypt’s tribute, which for the previous two years could not be sent to Istanbul because of the Celâli turmoil in Anatolia. The tribute amounted to 1,200,000 gold ducats, approximately £450,000 at the time, which is equivalent to the total revenue of James I, the King of England and Scotland in 1617. He took the land route via Damascus, accompanied by some 4,000 soldiers, as well as fifteen cannons. As Tezcan aptly notes, had Ali Pasha received the seal of the grand vizierate while on the road, as some contemporary sources claimed, he could have hurried to the capital, leaving the tribute and his retinue behind.

Indeed, according to the Venetian bailo’s dispatch of December 20, 1603, the day Mehmed III died, Ali Pasha was intentionally delaying his arrival in the capital for fear

125 Ibid., pp. 189-195.
126 Ibid., pp. 191-193.
he might be forced to accept the grand vizierate, a dangerous position given the ongoing political, military, social and financial crisis in the empire. Grand Admiral Çıgalazade Sinan Pasha, who was sailing back to Istanbul from Alexandria, avoided the capital for the same reason, preferring to stop on the Aegean island of Chios.  In fact, the bailo reports that of all the viziers in Istanbul, only Kasım Pasha, who had recently been promoted to the office of deputy grand vizier as a result of Safiye Sultan’s favor, was willing to assume the grand vizierate:

Thus Kasım Pasha, most dependent on the Queen with her favor, aspires and agitates greatly in order to obtain this honor. [However], everything remains more than ever uncertain and I believe that […] the well-founded judgment will [soon] regulate this election.

Contarini’s observations prove that there was no grand vizier during the last months of Mehmed III, who had been apparently searching for a better candidate than Kasım Pasha for this important position. On the day of Ahmed’s enthronement, Kasım Pasha, still hopeful, requested a private audience with the young sultan. Yet, his request was refused, most probably because he was known to be a protégé of Safiye Sultan.

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127 ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fol. 215r (dated December 20, 1603): “Sono venute sei galee mandate dal Capitano del Mare con alcune robe, et schiave del Bassà del Cairo, levate in Alessandria, et riferiscono di haver lasciato esso Capitano a Scio […] egli procura di star lontano, dubitando di essere astretto ad accettare il carrio de Primo Visir, abborrito da esso in estremo come li suoi agenti referiscono, et perciò anderà differendo la sua venuta sotto diversi colori. La medesima intencion de schivar il grado de Primo Visir si comincia a parlare che habbia anco il Bassà del Cairo, tanto viene stimata pericolosa questa dignità ne i presenti tempi.”

128 Ibid.: “però Cassin Bassà dipendentissimo della Regina col favore di lei vi aspira, et si agita grandemente per conseguir quello honore. Di modo che tutto resta piú che mai incerto, et credo che piú tosto il caso, che ben fondato giudizio regolerá questa elezione.”

129 As Tezcan, “The Question of Regency,” p. 191, aptly notes, such a long delay in appointing a new grand vizier was not unprecedented in Ottoman history: In 1580, after the death of the grand vizier Semiz Ahmed Pasha, Murad III refused for over three months to name a replacement, eventually appointing Koca Sinan Pasha. I will return to this problem in the next chapter in relation to Murad III’s favorites.
According to Hasan Beyzade, however, Kasım Pasha was rejected because he failed to acknowledge the high standing of Mustafa Efendi at Ahmed’s court. As Tezcan notes, “Kasıım Pasha did not think of paying his respects to Mustafa Efendi on the day of the enthronement. Later, when he heard that Mustafa Efendi was ‘respected, honored, and esteemed’ by the sultan, and that Ali Pasha was about to reach the capital, Kasım Pasha regretted his initial failure to recognize Mustafa Efendi and tried to make up for it - but it was too late.”

Meanwhile, the chief gardener, Bayram Agha, had been dispatched to find Ali Pasha en route and inform him of Ahmed’s succession. He found him in a location roughly two days from Istanbul and told him to leave the Egyptian tribute behind and hurry to the capital. According to Mehmed bin Mehmed and Contarini, it was at this point that Ali Pasha was offered the seal of the grand vizierate. He entered Istanbul on December 28, 1603, a week after Ahmed’s enthronement, and assumed the grand vizierate. The Janissaries and the imperial cavalry soldiers received their accession

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131 The name of the chief gardener at the time of Ahmed’s enthronement should be Bayram Agha, not Behram, as argued by Murat Yıldız, “Osmanlı Devlet Teşkilâtında Bostancı Ocağı,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Marmara University, 2008, pp. 274, 276 and 287, based on the salary register BOA, MAD D. 16332, p. 91. Yıldız misreads the name Bayram, which in siyâqat script is almost identical to Behram. Bayram Agha is mentioned as Ahmed’s first chief gardener in TSMA, D. 2025, fol. 4b (February 1604) and in BOA, A.DVN, Dosya: 19/55 (dated M 1015 / May-June 1606).

132 According to Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, p. 613, Ali Pasha was two menzils away from the capital, camping near a place called Dil. Generally speaking, a one-day trip was required to go from one menzil to another in the early modern Ottoman road system.

133 Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, p. 613; and ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fol. 232r (dated December 21, 1603).
donations (cülüs bahşişi), which amounted to a little more than 1,400,000 gold coins, the same day. The tribute of Egypt arrived a week later, on January 4, 1604.

Why did Yavuz Ali Pasha change his mind and accept the grand vizierate? The root cause, I believe, was ethnic-regional solidarity, and perhaps even ties of clientage, between Handan Sultan and Ali Pasha. As Metin Kunt pointed out in a seminal article, one of the defining features of seventeenth-century Ottoman court politics was solidarity among people from the same ethnic-regional background, generally known as cins. According to Kunt, a major factor in shaping the career of an individual who joined the Ottoman court was his ethnic and/or regional origin and his relations with others of the same background in the Ottoman administrative hierarchy. Kunt also insightfully observed that this sort of solidarity bred a bipolar antagonism within the Ottoman military-administrative elite between “westerners,” such as Bosnians, Albanians and other Balkan peoples, and “easterners,” such as Abkhazians, Circassians, Georgians and other people from the Caucasus. Jane Hathaway has more recently demonstrated that this kind of east-west antagonism was not limited to court circles in Istanbul but can be observed in Ottoman Egypt and Yemen in the seventeenth century.

134 Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, pp. 613-616, claims that a total of 700,000 gold coins were distributed to the soldiers as their accession bonus, whereas the register of the sultan’s personal treasury gives the exact amount as 1,410,000 (141 kise). See TSMA, D. 34, fol. 234a. For a discussion of the accesion donatives between 1574 and 1687, see Murphey, Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty, pp. 126-139.


137 Ibid., pp. 237-238.

In short, when Ali Pasha came back to the capital, he found not only a thirteen-year-old sultan on the throne, but also a new queen mother/co-regent who was of Bosnian origin, as he was. This fact most probably encouraged Ali Pasha to accept the grand vizierate, for he could rely on the support of his fellow Bosnian in influencing the decisions of the young sultan, who desperately needed a competent grand vizier to manage the crisis in imperial affairs until he could acquire a personal grasp of the business of rule. Likewise, it seems that both Handan Sultan and Mustafa Efendi considered Ali Pasha the best candidate to fill the vacuum in the imperial government and that they advised Ahmed to appoint him. Contarini writes that Ahmed followed the inclination not only of his late father, but also “of the greater part of those in the palace” in choosing Ali Pasha as his first grand vizier.139

Ali Pasha was a promising candidate in this respect as he had proved himself a rigorous and successful administrator in Egypt.140 He had similarly proved himself a loyal and brave servant of the sultan by safely bringing the tribute of Egypt through Celâli-infested Anatolia. Ali Pasha thus began his grand vizierate with the full support of Ahmed I and his regents. One of his first acts was to rid the administration of office-

181-184.

139 ASVe, SDC, filzâ 58, fol. 266v (dated January 3, 1604): “ha accelerato il camino, essendo restato adietro il Casnà [i.e., the tribute] si dichiarò la sua elettione di Primo Visir, a che è condisceso il Gran Signore, perché così era anco l’inclinatione del Padre, et della maggior parte di quelli del serraglio.”

140 For a detailed account of Ali Pasha’s administration in Egypt, see the illustrated chronicle co-authored by Kelâmî and Muhî, Vekâyi’-i Ali Paşa, Süleymanîye Kütüphanesi, MS Halet Efendi 612, in particular, fols. 14b-147a. This chronicle was long thought to be entirely the work of one Kelâmî, but a recent study finds that the second half (from fol. 61b onwards) was written by one Muhî. Both authors remain to be identified conclusively as these names were pen names. See Selçuk Seçkin, “17. Yüzyılın Önemli Minyatürlü Yazması: Vekayi-i ‘Ali Paşa,” Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi 21 (2009), pp. 95-122.
holders appointed by Safiye Sultan. Indeed, according to the Venetian bailo, “for there being so many elections, it is understood that the Grand Vizier [Ali Pasha] kept changing everything because everything depended on him and it appears that he kept demoting those who were dependents of the Queen mother of Sultan Mehmed.” However, Ali Pasha’s vizierate was short-lived: he died in Belgrade in July 1604 while on his way to resume command of the imperial army against the Habsburgs.

Apart from her probable role in the appointment of her son’s first grand vizier, Handan Sultan took an active part in the management of governmental affairs. Unlike contemporary Ottoman sources, which hardly mention Handan Sultan before her death in November 1605, the Venetian bailo’s reports often describe her political actions in some detail. For instance, some of Contarini’s reports indicate that Handan maintained a close relationship with Yavuz Ali Pasha, especially during the first critical months of Ahmed’s sultanate. According to the report dated February 3, 1604, for example, she summoned him to her harem quarters at midnight to discuss current affairs at length. At this secret meeting, Handan Sultan stood behind shutters while Ahmed spoke to the grand vizier face-to-face. As Contarini notes, this was an unprecedented arrangement that touched off a scandal in court circles. Such close contact strongly suggests that Ali Pasha was in fact Handan’s client.

141 ASVe, SDC, filza 59, fol. 69v (dated March 27, 1604): “per queste tante elettioni si comprende che il primo Visir va mutando ogni cosa perché tutto depende da lui, et pare che vada abbassando quelli che erano dipendenti della Regina madre di Sultan Mehemet.”

142 For a biography of Yavuz Ali Pasha, see Mehmed bin Mehmed, Tarih, pp. 36-37; and Abdülkerim Efendi, Münsce ’ât, fols. 180a-181b.

143 ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fols. 338v-339r: “il Gran Signore come giovine ha riposto nella persona del Bassà tutta l’autorità sua et l’assoluto mando dell’Imperio, et si vede in lui quello che mai si è accostumato
Similarly, Derviş Agha, who replaced the above-mentioned Bayram Agha as chief gardener in the summer of 1604, was a prominent Bosnian protégé of Handan Sultan. Thanks to Handan’s continuous support, he managed not only to become the first royal favorite of Ahmed I but also to circumvent the traditional patterns of promotion through court ranks and quickly rise to the grand vizierate in 1606. However, Handan’s early death deprived Derviş of his chief royal patron and led eventually to the dissolution of his own faction in the imperial government. He was executed in December 1606 after holding the grand vizierate for only a few months. I will discuss his case in detail within the context of factionalism and favoritism in the fourth chapter. At this point, suffice it to say that Handan Sultan’s network of clients and patronage was critical in shaping practical politics during Ahmed’s early reign.

Handan Sultan also acted as an intermediary between her son and other government viziers. According to the Venetian bailo Bon, as of December 1604, any vizier who wanted to communicate with Ahmed I had to submit his petition first to the queen mother. It is thus clear that by this time, Handan Sultan had significantly increased her authority over her son as well as her power at court. Still, she was aware of the possible repercussions of such political actions. In Bon’s words,

The Queen mother is growing in authority with the Sultan every day, for which one often sees of being with His Majesty, and the Pashas and other grandees who refer to her in all the things that they want from the Sultan. But she became aware and was instructed of the evil of the Former Queen

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_in alcun Primo Visir, poiché a meza note è stato chiamato in seraglio dove li altri non sono mai soliti di entrare, ma quello che importa grandemente et causa gran meraviglia che sia entrato fino nelle stantie delle donne cosa che fin hora non è stata permessa ad alcuno, et in una camera dove stava la Regina Madre dietro ad alcune gelosie parlò con lei, et col Gran Signore soli per lungo spazio di tempo.” Here, also note that Ahmed is reported to have shown his sovereign will through the person of Ali Pasha._
[mother] that she went embracing the favor little by little in order to establish herself greatly and did not hear well of being new in this concept, because of the tender age of the Sultan, but one believes that one could be successful as any, and perhaps superior to the other. 144

In sum, Handan Sultan was an important political actor at the Ottoman royal court in the early seventeenth century. Contrary to the established scholarly opinion, she played a critical political role during her son’s early reign and acted as co-regent together with Mustafa Efendi until her death in 1605. Furthermore, her network of clients and viziers remained an important component in factional struggles in the court well after her death. With her death, the primary role of controlling the affairs of the imperial harem passed to the new chief harem eunuch, El-Hac Mustafa Agha, who would shape court politics as the most powerful favorite of Ahmed I in the coming years.

Handan Sultan’s actions solidified the political power of the queen mother within Ottoman court politics. In one sense, her regency set an example for future queen mothers, particularly during the first half of the seventeenth century, when several more underage sultans took the throne. 145 For instance, Kösem Sultan’s active involvement in politics early in the reigns of her son Murad IV and her grandson Mehmed IV can easily be compared to Handan Sultan’s role as regent. 146 Further comparative studies on the

144 ASVe, SDC, filza 60, fols. 240v-241r (dated December 24, 1604): “La Regina madre ogni dì va crescendo di autorità con il Re per che si vede spesso esser con la Maestà Sua, et li Bassà et altri grandi fanno capo con lei in tutte le cose che vogliono dal Re, ma lei accorta, et instrutta dal male della Regina Vecchia va abbracciando il favore a poco a poco per maggiormente stabilirsi et non sente bene di esser adesso in questo concetto per la tenera età del Re, ma si crede che possi reusire al pari, et forsi superiore alle altre.”

145 As noted before, at their accessions, Ahmed’s two sons, Osman II (r. 1618-22) and Murad IV (r. 1623-40), were fourteen and eleven years old, respectively, while his grandson, Mehmed IV (r. 1648-87), was only seven years old.

146 For a discussion of the question of regency in the context of the political roles played by queen mothers,
question of regency would no doubt reveal more similarities in the political roles of the queen mothers during this period.

As for Handan’s co-regent, Mustafa Efendi, his influence on significant political decisions made by Ahmed I early in his reign is more visible than that of the queen mother. Contemporary sources typically portray Mustafa Efendi as an advisor to the young sultan, who frequently heeded his tutor’s counsel. According to Contarini, Mustafa Efendi assumed his role as regent immediately after Ahmed’s enthronement while attempting to hold sway over him:

> It appears that his Coza [Hoca], or tutor, keeps regulating and advising him in all his actions. This Coza was present when the Mufti and the Viziers were summoned to the Kiosk for a certain consultation called by him so that he might have great authority over this prince, being an old man and reputed to be prudent.147

Indeed, Mustafa Efendi’s position and power grew bolder every day. As Tezcan also observes, he had a more profound influence on the young sultan, notably prompting Ahmed’s decisions to force Yavuz Ali Pasha to lead the army to the Hungarian front in person, despite the pasha’s desire to remain in Istanbul; to appoint Hadım Hafız Ahmed Pasha to the deputy grand vizierate instead of Sofu Sinan Pasha, who was Yavuz Ali’s choice; to dismiss the mufti Ebülmeysamin Mustafa Efendi, the royal tutor’s chief rival; to appoint Lala Mehmed Pasha to the grand vizierate in August 1604; to execute the Deputy

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147 ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fol. 256v (dated January 3, 1604): “Pare che sin qui il suo Coza, a precettore, lo vada regolando, et consigliando in tutte le sue attioni, il qual Coza è stato presente quando furono chiamati al Chiosco il Mufti et li Visiri a certa consultazione, che si è fatta da che si cava che sia per haver autorità grande appresso questo principe, essendo huomo vecchio, et riputato prudente.”
Grand Vizier Sarıkçı Mustafa Pasha in January 1605, as noted above; and to recall the Grand Vizier Lala Mehmed Pasha from Belgrade to Istanbul in the first months of 1606.\textsuperscript{148}

Mustafa Efendi’s influence was not limited to such decisions, however. He was equally involved in the shaping of Ottoman foreign policy during Ahmed’s early reign. For instance, the Venetian bailo Bon reports that Mustafa Efendi convinced the sultan to continue diplomatic relations with England in January 1606, at a time when Ahmed was thinking of breaking them off as a result of increasing English piracy in the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{149} By the time Mustafa Efendi died in around 1608, however, Ahmed no longer needed a regent since he had managed to establish his personal rule.

\textit{Conclusion}

In several respects, Ahmed I’s enthronement in December 1603 marked the beginning of a new period in seventeenth-century Ottoman dynastic history. Most importantly, with the succession of this inexperienced, childless teenager in questionable health came the threat of genealogical extinction that would loom over the House of Osman for many years to come. Although the Ottoman custom of fratricide was not applied to Ahmed’s only surviving brother, four-year-old Prince Mustafa, lest the dynasty’s continuity be thrown into jeopardy, the fragility of the Ottoman male line was soon demonstrated when both Sultan Ahmed and Prince Mustafa contracted smallpox in

\textsuperscript{148} Tezcan, “The Question of Regency,” p. 197.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.
March-April 1604, just when multi-front wars and rebellions were shaking the empire’s military and financial foundations.

Scholars of early modern Ottoman history typically emphasize that the Ottoman male line faced such a threat of extinction only during the last years of Murad IV’s reign and the early years of İbrahim’s.150 Towards the end of his reign, as is well-known, Murad IV ordered the execution of all of his living brothers except İbrahim, who succeeded to the throne in 1640 as the childless sole male member of the dynasty. It was two years before Sultan İbrahim managed to father a child, and during this period, the Ottomans came perilously close to stepping over what I have elsewhere called the “threshold of extinction.”151 The birth of Prince Mehmed (the future Mehmed IV, 1648-87) in early January 1642 finally lifted the pall of uncertainty that surrounded the Ottoman throne in the early 1640s.152 However, as seen above, the threat of dynastic extinction actually emerged decades earlier, immediately after Ahmed’s enthronement.153

Although Ahmed quickly demonstrated his ability to father children, the problem of dynastic continuity remained a major concern. At the beginning of his reign, his brother and his two small sons, Osman and Mehmed, were all underage and were therefore not viable candidates for the throne. Throughout Ahmed’s fourteen-year reign,

150 For instance, see Finkel, *Osman’s Dream*, p. 202. Also see EI², s.v. “Murād IV,” by Alexander H. de Groot; and IA, s.v. “İbârîm,” by M. Tayyib Gökbulğin.

151 Börekçi, “İnkîrâzın Eşiğinde Bir Hanedan.”

152 As Derin Terzioğlu, “Sufi and Dissident in the Ottoman Empire: Niyâzî-i Mısırî (1618-1694),” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1999, pp. 346-354, aptly notes, “the uncertainty about the future of the Ottoman throne [under Sultan İbrahim] gave rise to speculations about a possible transfer of the throne to the Girays [i.e., the Crimean khan family descended from the line of Chingiz Khan].”

153 With Ahmed’s early death in 1617, the threat to the House of Osman would become a decisive factor in the two separate enthronements of his brother Mustafa I (r. 1617-8; 1622-3) and in the introduction of a principle of seniority to the Ottoman succession. Börekçi, “İnkîrâzın Eşiğinde Bir Hanedan.”
in fact, none of his ten known sons reached an age at which he could be considered out of danger from illnesses such as smallpox.154 By the time of Ahmed’s death in November 1617, for instance, his two eldest sons, Osman and Mehmed, were barely thirteen and twelve years old, respectively, while the third prince, Murad, was only five. Not only the sultan’s sons but virtually all members of the dynasty lived under the constant threat of diseases, particularly epidemic diseases such as the plague, which frequently afflicted the capital, including the palace, during this period.

The Venetian bailo Bon recorded the details of one such plague outbreak in the capital between early October 1607 and late January 1608. According to his reports, in its initial phases, the plague killed thousands of people in the capital proper and in Galata, and at least one-third of the residents of Topkapı and the Old Palace, which should have meant hundreds, if not thousands. Several grandee households also fell victim; for instance, the Mufti Hocazade Mehmed Efendi lost his son, while Nakkaş Hasan Pasha’s sixty servants vanished. The danger posed by the plague was such that the sultan and the royal household had to reside elsewhere during this four-month period.155

All these circumstances posed a dilemma for the young sultan, who was very restless to campaign in person. As seen above, from early on, Ahmed wanted to take the field in order both to distance himself from his late father and to re-establish the empire-

154 Baki Tezcan provides the birth order of Ahmed’s known sons as follows: Osman (November 1604), Mehmed (March 1605), Selim (June 1611), Murad (July 1612), Bayezid (ca. September-October 1612), Hüseyin (November 1613), Hasan (ca. 1615), Süleyman (?), Kasım (?) and İbrahim (ca. October 1617). For details, see Tezcan, “The Debut of Kösem Sultan’s Political Career,” pp. 347-359; and idem, “The Question of Regency,” pp. 185-198.

155 See ASVe, SDC, filza 65, fol. 39r (dated October 4, 1607); fol. 59r (dated October 20, 1607); fol. 79v (dated November 4, 1607); fols. 132r and 144r (dated December 6, 1607); fol. 160r (dated December 23, 1607); and fol. 218v (dated January 28, 1608).
wide order. However, when he fell ill during his Bursa campaign, he was once again reminded that, as long as he had minor sons growing up in the harem while he himself was in such unpredictable health, he risked the dynasty’s stability by joining the ongoing wars in person.

Meanwhile, the young sultan’s de facto regents, Handan Sultan and Mustafa Efendi, were having a hard time controlling his attempts to play the role of an active sultan. Had Ahmed been killed or injured during one of his incessant hunts or during his impromptu trip to Edirne, the whole imperial system would have descended into chaos. Therefore, as I will explain in the fourth chapter, while the regents were busy reconfiguring power relations at the imperial court, as seen above, they arranged for Ahmed’s intimate servants to keep an eye on him while he was out of their sight.

The sultan developed such a brutal, intolerant and hot-tempered personality that, on the one hand, it proved all the more difficult to control him while, on the other, he became susceptible to manipulations. Ahmed believed that he was destined to rule a great empire, just as his illustrious great-grandfather Süleyman I had. Two years into his sultanate, however, the Ottomans had enjoyed no successes in the costly wars against the Habsburgs and Safavids, nor had the incessant Celâli rebellions in Anatolia ceased. Ahmed’s personal attempt to suppress the Celâlis was nothing short of a fiasco. As these multi-front wars were exhausting his empire’s revenues and manpower while taking a staggering toll on his subjects, news arrived from Egypt that rebellious kuls had murdered the governor Hacı İbrahim Pasha. The factional struggles among Ahmed’s ruling viziers only exacerbated the general political instability. In these precarious circumstances, the
young sultan became increasingly intolerant of any mishandling of affairs by his ruling grandees, as seen in the case of Sinanpaşaoğlu Mehmed Pasha above.

The aforementioned execution of Sarıkçı Mustafa Pasha exemplifies this intolerance. On August 18, 1604, as the second-ranking vizier on the imperial council, Mustafa Pasha was appointed the deputy of the new grand vizier, Lala Mehmed Pasha, who was by then in charge of the imperial army in Hungary. The sultan warned him to be cautious so as not to share the fate of former deputy grand vizier Kasım Pasha, who had been executed for mismanaging imperial affairs and disobeying the sultan’s orders.156 Knowing that the sultan was agitated by the financial difficulties caused by the ongoing wars, Mustafa Pasha began sending him and his mother gifts and money in order to curry favor while creating the illusion that he was procuring the necessary funds. In reality, he was selling offices for half what they were worth and taking short-term loans, which he never repaid, from Istanbul’s wealthy merchants.157 Meanwhile, like many viziers before him, he got his clients promoted to high positions in the government, often at the expense of more experienced officials. When he petitioned the sultan to replace Mufti Sunullah Efendi with Hocazade Mehmed Efendi, however, both the mufti and the royal tutor complained to the sultan, who had Mustafa Pasha summarily decapitated.158

Reflecting on this incident, which took place on January 11, 1605, the Venetian bailo Bon observed:

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156 Mehmed bin Mehmed, *Tarih*, p. 71; and Hasan Beyzade, III, p. 831.  
157 See ASVe, SDC, filza 60, fols. 288r-v (dated January 20, 1605).  
158 Ibid., fol. 288r; Mehmed bin Mehmed, *Tarih*, p. 71; and Hasan Beyzade, III, pp. 833-834.
One clearly sees that the Grandees who nowadays rule this gate [i.e.,
imperial government] will always remain with death on their lips [i.e., at
their throats], as they are subject to the will of a young Sultan who is
impressionable, hot-tempered, bloodthirsty and reckless, and who does not
know anything of the world. And he believes himself to be the sole
Monarch and that the other Princes [in the world] are lordlings of little
account and little property, because there is no one who dares to speak
with and tell him of the situation and conditions. Instead, everyone fawns
upon him and takes him for a God on earth.\footnote{ASVe, SDC, filza 60, fols. 289v-290r (dated January 20, 1605): “si vede chiaro, che li Grandi che
oggidi governano a questa porta hanno le teste di vetro, perché stanno sempre con la morte alla gola,
sottoposti alla volontà di un Re giovane di gran impressione, collerico, sanguinolente, et precipitoso, che
non sa cosa alcuna del mondo, et crede esser Monarca solo, et che gli altri Principi siano come signorotti
di poco conto, et di poco havere, perché non è chi ardisca parlar con lui, et li dica ‘l stato, et le conditioni
d’altri, ma tutti l’adulano, et lo pongono per un Dio in terra.”}

Bon’s remarks actually touch on a conundrum that informs the entire reign of Ahmed I,
namely, the tension between Ahmed’s personal ideals and the Ottoman political paradigm
of universal dominion and an ever-expanding empire headed by a warrior sultan who
enforced Sunni orthodoxy -- a paradigm codified during the later reign of Süleyman I and
Grand Palais, 7-10 mars 1990, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1992), pp. 159-
177.}

Despite his age and lack of political experience, Ahmed was determined to meet such
public expectations while rescuing his subjects from the turmoil that had marked the
reign of his late father. Hence, he took a visible role in the business of rule. At the same
time, he did not hesitate to make brutal, sometimes unjustified, decisions for the sake of
restoring the Ottoman Empire’s stability and power to what they had been under
Süleyman I. Eventually, Ahmed would thrive, and his style of rule would shape his
ultimate sultanic image as an active, just and pious ruler devoted to law and order, as will be discussed later.

Under these circumstances, it was a great relief to members of the imperial court that the military rebellions that had troubled Mehmed III ceased, except for a minor one in early 1606 when Ahmed personally confronted and punished its ringleaders, even as the wars against the Habsburgs, Safavids and Celâlis dragged on.\textsuperscript{161} Three key reasons can be adduced for this lack of military uprisings in the imperial capital.\textsuperscript{162} At Ahmed’s accession, first of all, the soldiers received a cash bonus known as the \textit{cülüs bahşişi}, which relieved their financial problems for the moment. Secondly, Ahmed’s regents were successful in reconfiguring power relations at court and among the broader Ottoman ruling elite. The banishment of Safiye Sultan from the court made a big difference in this respect. The soldiers were evidently pleased with her removal and that of the members of her faction from power. Thirdly, the ongoing wars provided the perfect opportunity for Ahmed’s regents to keep the potentially troublesome soldiers and their supporters away from the capital. Accordingly, the grand viziers and viziers, despite their resistance, were assigned to lead campaigns on all imperial fronts.

Paradoxically, however, the absence of viziers at court obliged the sultan to create new ones, often by circumventing traditional patterns of promotion through government ranks. The first new candidates for vizier, selected by Ahmed’s regents, came from a pool

\textsuperscript{161} Safi, \textit{Zühde}, II, pp. 44-45, notes an uprising of the imperial Janissaries and sipahis against Ahmed I and his favorite-minister Derviş Pasha over delays in the payment of their three-month salaries.

\textsuperscript{162} While the capital remained relatively free of such \textit{kul} uprisings during Ahmed’s reign, Egypt witnessed a series of uprisings between 1604 and 1607. Hathaway, “The ‘Mamluk Breaker’ Who Was Really a \textit{Kul} Breaker,” points out that the \textit{kul} problem in Egypt should be seen as a forerunner of what Istanbul would experience after Ahmed died in 1617.
of palace servants who remained from his father’s reign. For instance, the aforementioned
Hadım Gürçü Mehmed Agha, who became head of the privy chamber at the time of
Safiye Sultan’s expulsion from the palace, was promoted directly to third-ranking vizier
in the imperial government only eight months later, in late August 1604. At the time, the
chief of the palace gate-keepers (kapucibaşı), Davud Agha, and the master of the royal
stables (mîrâhûr-i evvel), Mustafa Agha, similarly received the rank of vizier.\footnote{Mehmed bin Mehmed, \textit{Nuhbe}, p. 630.} In short
order, though, Ahmed began to assert himself and create his own favorites, the subject of
the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3

A COURT OF FACTIONS AND FAVORITES

Introduction

In the fall of 1605, at around the same time that Grand Vizier Lala Mehmed Pasha captured Vác, Pest and Esztergom, another commander on the Hungarian frontier, Tiryaki Hasan Pasha, entered Veszprém (Pesprim) and Vár-Palota (Polata), while Stephan Bosckay of Transylvania, who had sided with the Ottomans against the Habsburgs, took Érsekújvár (Uyvar). Following these Ottoman victories, the grand vizier, on Ahmed I’s orders, crowned Bosckay ruler of the principalities of Transylvania and Hungary. These were the last major events of the Long War in Hungary, which came to an end with the Treaty of Zsitvatorok in 1606.¹

As for the eastern front, Ahmed had dispatched an army under the command of Grand Admiral Cıgalazade Sinan Pasha in the spring of 1604. In the following eighteenth months, Sinan Pasha’s forces were repeatedly routed by the newly reorganized Safavid troops of Shah Abbas I (r. 1588-1629), defeats which led to further territorial losses, including Gence and Shirvan. By 1606, Shah Abbas had regained all the territory lost to

the Ottomans during the war of 1578-90. In 1612, the Ottomans and the Safavids agreed to sign a peace treaty which fixed the frontier at the line stipulated in the Treaty of Amasya in 1555; nonetheless, hostilities were resumed three years later.

The suppression of the Celâli rebels, finally, was left to Kuyucu Murad Pasha, who assumed the grand vizierate in December 1606. By the end of 1608, he had eliminated the Celâli threat, relieving the Ottomans of an endemic source of conflict that had devastated Anatolia for years. The combined social and economic burden of these wars on three fronts was truly colossal for many people in the empire, who required many years to recover from the devastation and displacement resulting from continuous military action in and around their hometowns. Once peace had returned, the imperial government launched a series of comprehensive tax surveys (singular, tahrîr) all over the empire in order to determine both the total number of displaced peasant households and the overall damage done to the state’s financial resources during these conflicts.

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5 For instance, see BOA, A.NŞT, D. 1212, pp. 164-168, for an imperial decree dated 14 C 1022 (1 August 1613), ordering a new survey of all the provinces in Rumeli. BOA, D.MNS, Dosya: 1/61 (dated H. 1022) is a summary of a new survey of poll taxes on non-Muslims carried out in the province of Vize in Thrace the same year. Out of a total of 13,686 households listed in this summary, 763 (5%) were newly settled and
The political impact of these wars was equally profound for viziers serving in the military-administrative hierarchy. The wars not only provided opportunities for them to enrich themselves and expand their military households, but also allowed them to settle scores with each other in their struggles for power and prestige in the government of Ahmed I. As the wars went on, factional strife, particularly among the highest-ranking viziers in the capital continuously reasserted itself, usually before a major campaign or after a crushing defeat. The Janissaries, sipahis, and ulema continued to play their parts in these struggles, just as they had in the latter part of the reign of Mehmed III. Overall, the palace soldiery and high-ranking members of the Ottoman ulema were deeply involved in factional court politics during this period and formed strong alternative foci of power with which the government viziers sought alliance.

While such factional struggles define most of Ahmed’s reign, his sultanate constitutes a watershed in the historical development of the Ottoman royal court and the institutional structures within which power was exercised. As seen in the last chapter, Ahmed was the first sultan in Ottoman history to come to the throne from within the palace without having first served as governor of a princely province. Thus, he had virtually no pool of servants of his own from which he could select the nucleus of his imperial household and court. With Ahmed’s reign, then, power struggles and political

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patronage networks shifted from a larger setting which included the provincial princely households to a narrower domain comprising Topkapı Palace and Istanbul. At the same time, the young and inexperienced sultan had to operate within the political framework put in place during his father’s reign, as discussed in the previous chapters. In this challenging setting, Ahmed was one contender for power among all the members of his court and the imperial government, which were divided by complicated networks of factionalism and favoritism.

This chapter will focus on how power -- royal, ministerial, official, extra-legal or personal -- was wielded within the faction-ridden late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Ottoman imperial court. I contend that, during the second half of the sixteenth century, the sultans initiated new means of asserting their sovereign authority vis-à-vis alternative foci of power, particularly among the Ottoman ruling elite in Istanbul. These initiatives began during the reigns of Murad III and Mehmed III, but crystallized under Ahmed I and continued without major changes throughout the seventeenth century.

These initiatives centered on a relatively new position at the imperial court, that of the royal favorite. By definition, an Ottoman royal favorite (generally called musâhib, mukarreb or makbûl) was a courtier or minister who enjoyed unparalleled royal favor as well as unequalled regular access to the person of the sultan, who had become increasingly secluded during this period. Most royal favorites were the sultan’s

7 Ottoman terminology pertaining to the sultan’s favorites presents a very complicated semantic problem. Certain terms, such as musâhib-i sultânî, mukarreb-i pâdişâhî or makbûl-i şehr-yârî, clearly refer to a royal favorite within the context of the late sixteenth-century Ottoman court, as opposed to their traditional meaning of royal companion. See, for instance, DİA, s.v. “Musâhib,” by Mehmet İpşirli. Also see EI², s.v. “Nadîm,” by Joseph Sadan. I try to illustrate this terminology problem throughout both this chapter and the next one.
deliberate ‘creatures,’ whose influence was intended to curb the authority of the viziers, who were practically ruling the empire by the 1560s. That is to say, favorites resembled the sultan’s alter ego; they were empowered to act as power-brokers within the Ottoman ruling body, just as in contemporary royal courts in other parts of Eurasia.⁸ On the one hand, they connected the sedentary Ottoman sultan to the larger political world that lay beyond the gates of his palace; on the other hand, they typically tried to fill key positions in the central and provincial administrations with their own creatures while building up an extensive network of clients within the state apparatus and acquiring huge personal fortunes.

The royal favorite’s rise to power at the end of the sixteenth century led to bitter factional struggles among other grandees of the court and government whom the favorite could cut off from direct contact with the secluded sultan. Given the increased invisibility and inaccessibility of the Ottoman sultan during this period, anyone who managed to enter the sultan’s private quarters or, for that matter, formed an intimate relationship with the sultan could solidify his power against all challengers and make them stay (literally) outside politics while, at the same time, legitimizing his own power. If a favorite became too strong, however, he risked polarizing the sultan’s court and alienating the Ottoman political elite.

This was exactly what troubled both Murad III and Mehmed III, as well as their royal favorites, notably Doğancı Kara Mehmed Pasha, the governor-general of Rumeli, and Gazanfer Agha, the chief eunuch of the palace. As seen in the first chapter, one fixed

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⁸ For instance, see Asch and Birke, eds., Princes, Patronage, and the Nobility; and Feros, Kingship and Favoritism in the Spain of Philip III.
target of the *sipahi* rebellions of the early 1600s was Gazanfer Agha, whom the *sipahis* repeatedly attempted to banish from the court because he, together with the queen mother, Safiye Sultan, had overwhelming control over the sultan and the business of rule. In early January 1603, as we have seen, they achieved their goal by decapitating him in front of Mehmed III.

Such an end was not unique to Gazanfer Agha. Doğancı Mehmed Pasha suffered a similar fate in 1589, when he was brutally murdered during the massive military uprising known as the Governor-General Incident (*Beylerbeyi Vakası*). From 1584 until his murder, Mehmed Pasha was the powerful *musâhib* of Murad III, whose reign witnessed the true emergence of royal favorites in the Ottoman imperial establishment, particularly after the assassination of Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha in 1579. Indeed, the career of each of these early royal favorites reveals critical details about the exercise of power at the Ottoman imperial center while shedding light on the evolution of factional politics both before and during the reign of Ahmed I, who continued the practice of using favorites to strengthen his personal rule.

Another important tool that the Ottoman rulers used to control the imperial government was the *telhîs*, the summary petition submitted by grand viziers or their deputies to the sultan. Particularly during the last quarter of the sixteenth century, as Caroline Finkel aptly puts it, “the grand vizier’s independent decision-making authority was curtailed, even in routine administrative matters, while direct contact between sultan and grand vizier became less usual, replaced by written correspondence in which the sultan indicated his decisions on a range of state affairs -- appointments, salary payments,
bureaucratic administration -- decisions based on summaries of the issue in question presented to him in the form of petitions.” The favorites took full advantage of this new mode of communication with the sultan. They not only had the privilege of submitting their own petitions to the sultan, but could also control which vizierial telhîses the sultan saw.

Ahmed I’s reign witnessed the emergence of new political actors as royal favorites, notably the chief gardener (bostâncıbaşı) and chief eunuch of the imperial harem (dârü’s-sa’âde ağası), as well as the re-emergence of specific grand viziers as minister-favorites, following the precedent of İbrahim Pasha under Süleyman I, some eighty years earlier. All of these offices, together with that of the queen mother, attained unprecedented importance in court politics during the reign of Ahmed I, especially in terms of access to the sultan, construction of power bases, distribution of royal favor, management of sultan’s piety, and control of the information network.

This chapter and the following one will examine the power exercised by favorites holding different offices at the court of Ahmed I while trying to map out patterns of factionalism and favoritism among the Ottoman ruling elite in the imperial center since the last quarter of the sixteenth century. In this chapter, by way of providing background for Ahmed’s reign, I will discuss the rise and power of royal favorites in the Ottoman imperial establishment during the second half of the sixteenth century and then examine

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Murad III’s two most powerful royal favorites, Şemsi Ahmed Pasha and Doğancı Kara Mehmed Pasha. I will also explore the beginnings of Gazanfer Agha’s remarkably long political career as a royal favorite created by Murad III, during whose reign he began to construct his power base and political network. In the next chapter, I will focus on Ahmed I and his favorites within the larger context of the Ottoman imperial and political transformation in the early seventeenth century.

III.1. Sultans’ Agents of Power: A New Ottoman Court Order and the Emergence of Royal Favorites

The conditions that set the stage for the emergence of royal favorites in the Ottoman political order were established during the three-decade-long second reign of Mehmed II (1451-81). From the beginning of the sultanate in the early 1300s until the beginning of Mehmed II’s reign, Ottoman rule had been characterized by frequent military campaigns that required the ruler and the political-military elite to be constantly on the move. Throughout this so-called formative period in Ottoman history, the court’s location shifted in accordance with new military conquests; thus, after the conquest of Edirne in 1361, the court moved there from Bursa. For the problem of when Edirne was taken by the Ottomans, see Halil İnalcık, “The Conquest of Edirne (1361),” Archivum Ottomanicum 3 (1971), pp. 185-210. Constant warfare and the correspondingly itinerant character of the Ottoman court necessitated the sultan’s active engagement with the world outside the palace. Since favorites could function only in a milieu in which the sultan had relinquished at least some of this contact, the lack of a permanent seat for the court prevented their emergence.
This era came to an end with the conquest of Constantinople by Mehmed II in 1453. Mehmed made Constantinople the empire’s permanent capital and established the court permanently at his new palace of Topkapı. Despite the empire’s unprecedented territorial expansion under Selim I (r. 1512-20) and Süleyman I (r. 1520-66), capital and court remained stationary. One critical consequence of this expansion was the tripling of the bureaucracy by the early years of Süleyman’s reign; this in turn necessitated the rationalization of the administrative structures along with the hierarchical reclassification and professionalization of court and government ranks according to function and salary.11

At the same time, during the so-called imperial maturation process that culminated in Süleyman’s forty-six-year reign, new emphasis was placed on the sultan’s visible dignity and kingship charisma; as a result, an elaborate, well-regulated court ceremonial was established to emphasize his majestic eminence, to inculcate rules of behavior in his presence, and to accentuate his claim to universal sovereignty as the most powerful Sunni Muslim ruler.12 These changes, which mostly took place in the late 1530s and 1540s, were manifested in the increasing remoteness of the sultan from the day-to-day business of rule -- a remoteness that had already been codified in a law code promulgated by Mehmed II in the late 1470s. The most noticeable aspects of this sultanic seclusion were that the Ottoman ruler ceased to attend the meetings of the imperial council; gave audiences to his viziers or other grandees of the royal court only on

designated days of the week; and appeared in public only on religious holidays or politically significant days. On the increasingly rare occasions when he rode out in public, furthermore, he always appeared on a richly caparisoned horse in a carefully choreographed, slowly moving procession, surrounded by hundreds of servants and courtiers.\textsuperscript{13}

Süleyman himself made three critical innovations that linked the empire’s new administrative hierarchy to the sultan’s royal household. First, he filled the empire’s highest administrative offices with his former privy chamber servants and members of the inner palace service, while promoting his sons-in-law (singular, \textit{dâmâd}) to the rank of vizier and selecting the majority of the other high imperial office-holders from his own household. As a result, the sultan’s retinue grew enormously while his reliance on palace \textit{kuls} (servants) recruited through the Christian child-levy (\textit{devşirme}) to effect government centralization increased. During his sultanate, palace-educated pages infiltrated the upper ranks of the Ottoman ruling elite to an unprecedented degree.\textsuperscript{14}

Secondly, Süleyman allowed his grand vizier near-autonomous power in the management of imperial affairs. Prior to Süleyman’s reign, the administration of state had been a relatively \textit{ad hoc} affair. From his reign onwards, the grand vizier, as the deputy of the sultan, became the empire’s \textit{de facto} ruler, leading the centralized bureaucracy overseen by his council (\textit{divân}), which met four times a week in the imperial council

\textsuperscript{13} For a discussion of imperial processions during the reign of Süleyman I, see Necipoğlu, \textit{Age of Sinan}, pp. 27-46.

\textsuperscript{14} On the appointment of \textit{kuls} to the highest administrative posts during the reign of Süleyman I, see Kunt, \textit{Sultan’s Servants}, esp. pp. 31-56. For Ottoman imperial sons-in-law during the same period, see Peirce, \textit{The Imperial Harem}, pp. 65-79.
chamber at Topkapı Palace. Until the end of Süleyman’s reign, the grand vizier’s council was composed of four viziers who handled the political and military affairs; the chief judges (singular, kadi’asker) of Anatolia and Rumeli, who decided on judicial matters; a chief treasurer (başdefterdâr) for book-keeping and financial affairs; and a chancellor (nişâncı) whose main duty was to issue and authenticate documents prepared in the name of the sultan. After deliberating on imperial affairs, the council members reported their decisions to the sultan either in person in the sultan’s Chamber of Petitions ('Arz Odası), located in the exclusively private third courtyard of the palace, or in the form of written petitions.

Finally, Sultan Süleyman transferred all members of his royal household from the Old Palace to the Topkapı Palace, which resulted in the convergence of the sultan’s household and the business of rule under one roof. The accommodation of both the bureaucratic-military administration headed by grand vizier and the royal household in Topkapı Palace marked the last step in the establishment of the early modern Ottoman court as the central stage for imperial politics and the display of sultanic power.

By the end of Süleyman’s reign, then, the Ottoman imperial court had acquired new palace-based manifestations of power and hierarchy. While the major consequence of these developments was the emergence of a new type of sultan who tried to rule a vast empire in seclusion, two interrelated factors became crucial to the exercise of political power in this new setting: a) controlling the points of access to the person of the sultan; and b) establishing and sustaining intimacy with the sultan and with other powerful

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15 See Imber, *The Ottoman Empire*, pp. 154-176, for further details of the historical evolution of the Ottoman imperial council until the end of the sixteenth century.
figures at the court. Overall, while this new political framework dictated specific rules for attaining and wielding power, it also created agents -- namely, the favorites -- to bridge the gaps among the Ottoman ruler, his court, and the outside world. In short, the rise of favorites as agents of power politics was a direct consequence of the emergence of a new Ottoman imperial court under Süleyman I, which completed its maturation by the 1550s.16

III.2. A Royal Favorite at Work: The Faction of Şemsi Ahmed Pasha vs. the Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha

Although Selim II (r. 1566-74) was the first Ottoman sultan whose reign began in this new political setting, the overwhelming control of Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha over the business of rule delayed the true emergence of favorites until the beginning of the reign of his son, Murad III. In fact, Murad III’s twenty-one-year reign introduced a newly assertive style of sultanic rule whereby the sultan used a select group of favorites to limit the authority of the viziers. This shift in ruling strategy provoked a five-year power struggle between Sokollu’s court faction and that of Murad’s chief counselor, Şemsi Ahmed Pasha.

Sokollu was a truly remarkable Ottoman statesman who held the grand vizierate uninterrupted for fourteen years under three sultans, namely, Süleyman I, Selim II and Murad III. He belonged to a minor Bosnian-Serbian aristocratic family, the Sokolović,

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and was a product of the Ottoman devşirme, though he was probably recruited at the relatively late age of fifteen or sixteen. During Süleyman’s reign, he graduated from the palace school and began to move up through the ranks of the imperial administration. His first major appointment was as admiral of the imperial fleet (kapudan paşa), which he took upon the death of the famous Hayreddin Barbarossa in 1546. Süleyman appointed him grand vizier in 1565.\textsuperscript{17}

In the intervening twenty years, Sokollu had held a number of important provincial governorships and military commands, proving himself a valuable statesman who was able to prevent conflicts related to dynastic succession. In 1555, he suppressed the revolt of the pretender known as pseudo-Mustafa, and in 1559, he commanded the imperial army that Süleyman sent to support Prince Selim in his battle against his brother Prince Bayezid, as mentioned in the last chapter. Selim’s victory created a bond between him and Sokollu which Süleyman strengthened by marrying Sokollu to Selim’s daughter, İsmihan Sultan, in 1562.\textsuperscript{18}

In 1566, the ailing Süleyman, now over seventy, appointed Sokollu commander-in-chief of the imperial army in his last campaign against the Habsburgs. When Süleyman died during the siege of the Hungarian town of Szigetvár, Sokollu handled the transfer of the sultanate to Selim, who was by now the deceased sultan’s only surviving son.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} For summaries of Sokollu’s life and political career, see İA, s.v. “Mehmed Paşa, Sokollu,” by Tayyib Gökbilgin; and EI\textsuperscript{2}, s.v. “Sokollu Mehmed Pasha,” by Gilles Veinstein.

\textsuperscript{18} Finkel, \textit{Osman’s Dream}, p. 154; and Necipoğlu, \textit{Age of Sinan}, p. 331.

\textsuperscript{19} For an invaluable eyewitness account of Süleyman I’s last campaign, Selim II’s succession and the actions of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha with respect to these events, see Feridun Ahmed Bey, \textit{Nüzhet-i Eşrâû’l-ahyâr der Akbâr-i Sefer-i Sigevar}, TSMK, MS H. 1339, fols. 55a-110a [henceforth Feridun Ahmed, \textit{Nüzhet}].
During the entire eight-year reign of Selim II, Sokollu kept his office while the sultan preferred to stay aloof from the decision-making process. It was during this period that Sokollu managed to establish himself as the ultimate authority in the government, running the empire through a vast network of family members and clients in the central and provincial administrations which resembled, in Cornell Fleischer’s words, “an empire of clientage” (intisâb imparatorluğu). In the meantime, he accumulated enormous personal wealth, thanks to a continuous stream of “gifts” from his clients, viziers, provincial administrators, court officials and ambassadors. Marcantonio Barbaro, the Venetian bailo resident in Istanbul between 1567 and 1573, describes in his relazione how Sokollu, for all practical purposes, ruled the Ottoman Empire under Selim II:

The responsibility for the government of the Ottoman Empire rests, in its totality, in the hands of its grand vizier, [Sokollu] Mehmed Pasha…. There is no other ear but his which hears all of the proposals and petitions, the notices and announcements, the news flowing in and out of the vast number of kingdoms which lie subject to that Empire. Besides this, he alone distributes all the military postings, ranks, offices, and honors of state, the number of which one could say is infinite. He alone listens to, consults with, and responds to the ambassadors of virtually all the princes of the world, and to the countless ministers of various nations who all ask him for satisfaction on some point, and to whom an audience is never denied. He alone organizes and administers all military preparations, and all the civil and criminal affairs of state also pass through his hands…and throughout all this, the Pasha is patient, impervious to fatigue, never missing from his post. He responds to everyone graciously, never displaying any arrogance on account of the supreme dignity which he holds.

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When Sultan Selim died and the throne passed to his son Murad III in 1574, Sokollu managed to remain in office, once again thanks to his canny management of the dynastic succession, but his all-powerful grand vizierate, as well as his empire-wide client network, soon became the target of an anti-Sokollu court faction created by the new sultan. Unlike his father, Sultan Murad was determined to establish his authority over Sokollu, though he respected him and relied on his experience in the management of imperial affairs during his early reign.\textsuperscript{22}

Well before Murad III’s enthronement, according to some contemporary sources, his chief servants at the princely court in Manisa, where he had served as governor since 1565, had been preparing the ground for Sokollu’s removal from office. According to the chronicler Peçevi, for instance, they told Murad that they did not want him to ascend the throne while Sokollu was alive, believing that they would all be exiled from the royal court if he remained grand vizier.\textsuperscript{23} Soon after Murad’s enthronement, according to Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, a contemporary historian and bureaucrat who had briefly served at Murad’s princely court in Manisa, the sultan’s courtiers tried to persuade him that Sokollu would ruin them just as he had ruined several of his late father’s royal

\textsuperscript{22} One of the most important contemporary sources on Sokollu and his grand vizierate under Murad III is the diary of Stephan Gerlach, the Lutheran chaplain who accompanied the Habsburg imperial ambassador David Ungnad during his embassy in Istanbul from 1573 to 1578: \textit{Stephen Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tagebuch, der von zween glorwürdigsten Römischen Käysern, Maximiliano und Rudolpho beyderseits den Andern dieses Nahmens, höchstseeligster Gedächtnüß, an die Ottomannische Pforte zu Constantinopel abgeferigtten, und durch den wohlgebohrnen Herrn Hn. David Ungnad… mit würcklicher Erhalt- und Verlängerung deß Friedens, zwischen dem Ottomanischen und Römischen Käyserthum … glücklichst-vollbrachter Gesandtschaft aüß denen Gerlachischen … nachgelassenen Schrifften, herfür gegeben durch seinen Enckel Samuelem Gerlachium} (Franckfurt am Mayn: Zunners, 1674); now published in Turkish translation as Stephan Gerlach, \textit{Türkiye Günlüğü}, trans. Türüs Noyan and ed. Kemal Beydilli, 2 vols. (İstanbul: Kitapyaynevi, 2006) [hereafter Gerlach, \textit{Türkiye Günlüğü}, I-II].

\textsuperscript{23} Peçevi/TSMK, fols. 190a-b. Also noted by Peksevgen, “Secrecy, Information Control and Power Building,” p. 185.
companions, such as the executed Ömer and Ferhad Aghas. Thus, even though they expected posts at court and in the government, they would end up “traveling the road to oblivion.” For some time, then, Murad had been receiving warnings to be wary of Sokollu’s great power and authority, which indeed changed the course of many grandees’ political careers and lives under Selim II.

Moreover, an anonymous political treatise, clearly written by a member of this anti-Sokollu faction and submitted to Murad III early in his reign, urged the sultan to have one or, even better, two musâhibs so that they could keep an eye on imperial affairs under the grand vizier’s management. This way, the anonymous author claimed, the sultan could not only learn how his grand vizier was actually taking bribes in return for favors or how he had manipulated his office for personal enrichment; he could also circumvent Sokollu’s authority and thus impose his sovereign will in the business of rule as a vigilant sultan dedicated to justice. For the critical post of musâhib, Murad’s advisors recommended the retired vizier, Şemsi Ahmed Pasha, whose animosity toward Sokollu was well-known. Both before and after Murad’s succession, then, his royal companions indulged in verbal propaganda against Sokollu; after his enthronement, they took action by bringing Sokollu’s rivals into the service of the new sultan.

24 Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, Künhü’l-Ahbâr, İstanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi (İÜK), MS TY 5959, fol. 507a [hereafter Künhü’l-Ahbâr/İÜK]. On the retinue that Murad brought with him from Manisa and the promotions they received, see BOA, MAD, D. 1324.


 Şemsi Ahmed Pasha was indeed an all-competent servant with the credentials necessary for a royal favorite. He was of noble descent on both sides: his mother was a princess from the family of Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512) while his father was Mirza Mehmed Beğ of the Kızıl Ahmedli İsfandiyaroğlu dynasty, whose long rule over the Kastamonu-Sinop region had been brought to an end by Mehmed II. Şemsi Ahmed himself fabricated a genealogy going back to Khalid ibn al-Walid (d. 641-642 C.E.), the celebrated early Muslim commander who conquered Syria. Şemsi Ahmed’s forefathers had been kuls in Mehmed II’s administration. In a history dedicated to Murad III, Şemsi Pasha explains that he is proud of his ancestors as they proved themselves great hunters, especially in hawking and falconry, and brave fighters like Khalid ibn al-Walid whenever they accompanied the sultans on hunts and military campaigns.27

Şemsi Ahmed Pasha was known to be a witty conversationalist, a celebrated poet in Persian and Turkish, a skilled hunter like his ancestors, and an experienced, knowledgeable advisor. He was raised at the court of Süleyman I. After graduating from the palace school, he held posts such as chief falconer (şahincibaşı), master of hunt (şikâr ağası) and commander of the imperial cavalry troops (sipahiler ağası), after which he was appointed governor-general of Damascus in 1551. Later, he held the same office in Sivas, Anatolia and Rumeli. As governor-general of Rumeli, he left the capital in 1565 for Sofia, the capital of the province, in greater pomp than the people of Istanbul had ever witnessed from a grandee of his rank.28 The following year, he joined and successfully

27 Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, p. 492.
served at Süleyman’s final campaign in Hungary, together with his older brother, Mustafa Pasha, who was by then the fifth-ranking vizier in the imperial government.29

His political career took a sudden turn for the worse with the enthronement of Selim II. In February 1569, Sokollu got him reappointed governor-general of Sivas, a far less prestigious office than governor of Rumeli. After only three months, he was removed and sent to govern Damascus again. In October 1569, less than seven months later, he was ordered to retire.30 Though retired, he was soon appointed Selim II’s royal companion (musâhib) by Sokollu and Ebussuud Efendi, the celebrated reformist chief mufti.31 As a retired governor-general, he continued to hold the honorary title of vizier and retained the hass revenues associated with his former post, worth 200,000 akçes, but he was not allowed to advance beyond the rank of sultan’s companion.32 He clearly regarded his new position as another demotion and, after serving Selim as a royal companion for a few years, finally decided to return to his hometown of Bolu. This change in his political fortunes was the main reason behind his animosity toward Sokollu.

29 See Feridun Ahmed, Nüzhet, fols. 24a-79b.
30 Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, p. 492, is mistaken when she says that Şemsi Ahmed Pasha was ordered to retire from the governor-generalship of Rumeli immediately after Selim II’s enthronement in 1566. The court historiographer Lokman actually records his subsequent appointments as governor-general of Sivas and Damascus before his ultimate retirement in late 1569. Lokman, Zübde, fols. 79a-b.
31 On Ebussuud Efendi, see Imber, Ebu’s-su’ud.
32 An overlooked revenue register, TSMA, D. 5430, records the details of Şemsi Ahmed Pasha’s retirement salary: From the hass lands located in the provinces of Anatolia and Rumeli, he was assigned a total of 199,599 akçes, while at the same time receiving an extra cash amount of 125,600 akçes that was collected annually from a tax farm (mukāta’a) associated with an unspecified custom duty. Altogether it makes 325,199 akçes (approximately equal to 5,500 gold ducats), whereas Necipoğlu, Age of Sinan, p. 492, claims, based on narrative sources, that his salary was worth 250,000 akçes.
The tide turned in Şemsi Pasha’s favor again with the enthronement of Murad III in December 1574. He was recalled from Bolu and presented to the new sultan by Kara Üveys Çelebi (later Pasha), an important member of Murad’s princely court at Manisa whom the new sultan had just appointed imperial financial director (başdefterdâr) while retaining him as a royal counselor. On Üveys Çelebi’s recommendation, Murad made Şemsi Ahmed his own musâhib with full access to his person.33

In a short time, Şemsi Ahmed Pasha turned into the chief royal counselor and began to function as the new sultan’s alter ego while enjoying great power and prestige at court. In the meantime, he became Murad’s regular companion when he left the palace, notably for hunting. Gerlach vividly describes Şemsi Ahmed’s prominent position:

This pasha’s mansion is in Üsküdar [on the Bosphorus], right across the sultan’s palace. Whenever he wants, he can go to the court from there…; He is a very close friend of the sultan. However, neither is he appointed to any apparent office, nor does he carry out any official responsibility. Nonetheless, he has an easier life than that of other Ottoman grandees, because he almost never leaves the company of the sultan, and he can talk to him in an intimate manner as no other pasha would dare to do. Whatever he says [to him], it is accepted. That is why all the pashas and grandees show him much respect and are afraid of him. Whenever Şemsi Pasha visits [Sokollu] Mehmed Pasha on the sultan’s business, everybody runs to greet him and pays homage to him as if the sultan himself had come.34

In this uniquely advantageous position, Şemsi Pasha led a court faction with the goal of curbing the power of Sokollu and his faction. Mustafa Ali even asserts that the

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33 Ali, Künhü’l-Ahbâr/İÜK, fols. 503b-504a; and Peçevi/TSMK, fols. 190b. Ottoman narrative sources are silent as to when exactly Şemsi Ahmed Pasha was recalled from Bolu and presented to Murad III. He apparently rejoined the royal court a few months after Murad III’s enthronement, as a treasury register reveals that he received a personal gift of 300 gold ducats from the sultan during a royal hunt on September 12, 1575. TSMA, D. 34, fol. 26b.

34 Gerlach, Türkiye Günlüğü, I, p. 523.
royal favorite’s ultimate plan was to get Sokollu not only removed from office, but also executed.\textsuperscript{35} Besides Şemsi Ahmed and Üveys Çelebi, this anti-Sokollu faction included several prominent figures of the time, such as Hoca Sadeddin Efendi, the royal tutor; Lala Mustafa Pasha, a vizier and a sworn enemy of Sokollu; Cafer Agha, the chief eunuch of the palace; Cafer Agha’s younger brother, Gazanfer Agha, the head of the privy chamber as of 1577;\textsuperscript{36} Nurbanu Sultan, the queen mother; Can Feda Hatun, the mistress housekeeper in the imperial harem; Razıye Hatun, the sultan’s favorite female companion (\textit{musâhibe}); Kadızade Ahmed Efendi, the chief judge of Rumeli; and Şeyh Şüca, a Sufi sheikh and Murad III’s spiritual guide.\textsuperscript{37} It ultimately took five years for Şemsi Ahmed Pasha and his faction to succeed in significantly reducing Sokollu’s power. Yet, one by one, they got rid of the most important relatives and clients of Sokollu who were entrenched in the court and imperial administration, and replaced them with their own.\textsuperscript{38}

The case of Feridun Ahmed Bey illustrates how this five-year battle between the rival factions of Sokollu and Şemsi Ahmed actually played out. For many years, Feridun Ahmed served as Sokollu’s confidant and personal secretary, in which capacity, according to Mustafa Ali, he became “the seeing eye and supporting hand of Sokollu.”\textsuperscript{39} Sokollu elevated Feridun to higher and higher positions at court, finally rewarding him

\textsuperscript{35} Ali, \textit{Künhü’l-Ahbâr}/İÜK, fol. 507b.

\textsuperscript{36} As noted in the first chapter, during the first three years of Murad III’s reign, Cafer Agha was the head of the privy chamber, while his brother Gazanfer Agha served as the sultan’s master of the turban (\textit{dülbend gulâmu}). In 1577, Cafer became the chief eunuch of the palace and Gazanfer replaced him as the head of the privy chamber.

\textsuperscript{37} Fleischer, \textit{Bureaucrat and Intellectual}, pp. 71-74.

\textsuperscript{38} Hasan Beyzade, II, pp. 252-259; and TSMK/Peçevi, fols. 190b-191b.

\textsuperscript{39} Quoted by Peksevgen, “Secrecy, Information Control and Power Building,” p. 190.
with two prestigious offices in the imperial government: first, in 1570, he appointed him reîsü’l-küttâb (chief government secretary); then, in 1574, chancellor of the imperial council (nişâncı). In the meantime, according to Gerlach’s diary, he had amassed a huge personal fortune, estimated to be worth more than 200,000 gold ducats. In sum, by the time Murad III ascended to the throne, Feridun Ahmed was enjoying great prestige, power and wealth not only as a chancellor, but also as a prominent member of Sokollu’s government and court faction.

The anti-Sokollu court faction targeted Feridun in order to strip the grand vizier of one of his most loyal men. Feridun received the first hint of their scheme from the sultan himself when he wanted to dedicate his magnum opus to him, apparently with the aim of persuading Murad to keep him as chancellor. In this monumental single-volume work, entitled Münşeâtü’s-selâtîn (The Writings of the Sultans), Feridun compiled, under more than 250 headings, royal letters, imperial decrees, victory missives and other official documents that had been preserved in the imperial chancery since the beginning of the Ottoman dynasty. Contemporary Ottoman literati considered Feridun’s work a unique and invaluable collection. However, in January 1575, when Sokollu presented it to Murad III, the sultan, to everyone’s surprise, refused to take it and offered no explanation.

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40 For Feridun Ahmed’s life, career and works, see Abdülkadir Özcan, “Feridun Ahmed Bey: Hayatı, Eserleri ve Miftâh-ı Cennet’i,” in Prof. Dr. Ramazan Şeşen Armağanı, eds. Emine Uyumaz and Süleyman Kızıltoprak (İstanbul: ISAR Vakfı, 2005), pp. 51-66.
41 Gerlach, Türkiye Günlüğü, I, p. 312.
42 The numerical value of the letters in the title of Feridun’s work corresponds to the year of its completion (982/1574). See DİA, s.v. “Münšeâtü’s-selâtîn,” by Abdülkadir Özcan.
43 Selaniki, I, p. 110.
Clearly, his advisors had already persuaded Murad III not to honor any of Sokollu’s men once he took the throne.

As for Şemsi Ahmed Pasha, once he had solidified his position as royal favorite, he lost no time in getting rid of Feridun, for whom he is reported to have had a particular hatred. In early April 1576, he asked the sultan to dismiss him from office and replace him with one of his own relatives, Muallimzade Mahmud Efendi, who was by then a senior madrasa professor in Istanbul.44 Murad not only complied with his favorite’s request; he exiled Feridun from Istanbul. According to Gerlach, he even forbade him to dwell in Bursa or Edirne, the former seats of Ottoman throne. On the night of April 10, therefore, Feridun left the capital in disgrace and went to reside in his mansion in Küçük Çekmece, the ancient Ponte Grande, near Istanbul.

At the same time, Murad III ordered Üveys Çelebi to confiscate all of Feridun’s revenues from the hāss lands assigned to him as chancellor. His household also took a serious blow. His steward, Husrev Agha, was executed and his chief gate-keeper, Sinan Agha, was dismissed, while both aghas’ possessions were similarly confiscated.45 In short, Feridun’s dismissal marks the beginning of open warfare between the rival factions of the grand vizier and the royal favorite. Gerlach captured the onset of hostilities in his diary:

It is guessed that the person who directs the sultan on every issue and who tells the court officials how to do their jobs is him [Şemsi Ahmed]…. On April 11, the former chancellor Feridun Bey was called back to the city for interrogation. Upon this matter, our sergeant (çavuş) made a comment by

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44 Hasan Beyzade, II, p. 255; and Lokman, Zübde, fol. 90b.
45 Ali, Künhü ’l-Ahbâr/İÜK, fol. 507a; Hasan Beyzade, II, pp. 255-256; and Lokman, Zübde, fol. 91b.
saying, “The fish stinks from the head.” Thus, he meant to say, they are finally starting to ask those at the top [of the government] some questions. Then he added, “They are now going to expose, pardon my words, the asses of many high-ranking people.” Because of this situation, Mehmed Pasha seems to be very much saddened.46

Nonetheless, Feridun managed to escape a much worse fate. Apparently as a result of Sokollu’s intervention, he was appointed governor of Semendire in Serbia in September 1577, a much lower rank than that of his former post but far preferable to permanent exile or execution.47

Overall, the number of such prominent Sokollu-affiliated officials on whom Şemsi Pasha and his faction inflicted similar fates amounted to more than thirty.48 Not all were as lucky as Feridun, however. Some, such as Sokollu’s paternal cousin Mustafa Pasha, the long-time successful governor-general of Buda, were executed upon Murad’s orders after being accused of wrongdoing.49 As for Sokollu himself, his grand vizierate did not end with official dismissal or public execution. In October 1579, he was assassinated by a disgruntled petitioner during an afternoon audience (ikindi divâni) at his palace. According to Salomon Schweigger, a Protestant preacher who came to Istanbul in January 1578 with the Habsburg ambassador von Sintzendorff, it was widely rumored in the capital at the time that Sokollu’s murder was actually the work of the sultan.50 Yet, it

46 Gerlach, Türkiye Günlüğü, I, pp. 312-313.
48 Fleischer, Bureaucrat and Intellectual, p. 73.
50 Salomon Schweigger, Sultanlar Kentine Yolculuk, 1578-1581, trans. Türkis Noyan (Istanbul: 170
is still not known for sure whether the assassin acted on his own or upon secret orders from Murad III or, for that matter, Şemsi Ahmed Pasha, who himself died of natural causes a year later, in 1580.51

Sokollu Mehmed Pasha’s death enabled Murad III to incorporate agents such as Şemsi Ahmed Pasha into practical politics while giving them more official authority. In other words, Sokollu’s assassination marked the ascendancy of royal favorites in the Ottoman imperial establishment and, consequently, a redrawing of the boundaries of power at the court. After this date, the power of the grand vizierate diminished as the holders of this office came to be subject to the sultan’s whim, to be replaced whenever they proved unable to satisfy their master’s demands. In the sixteen years of Murad III’s reign following Sokollu’s death, the grand vizierate changed hands ten times among six viziers. During the eight-year reign of his successor, Mehmed III, the office changed hands eleven times among eight viziers. In this period, several grand viziers were appointed more than once; for instance, Koca Sinan Pasha, Siyavuş Pasha and Damad İbrahim Pasha held the office three times.

Furthermore, both Murad III and Mehmed III altered the hierarchical pattern of vizierial promotion established during the second half of Süleyman’s reign. No longer was the second vizier routinely elevated to the grand vizierate while the third vizier moved up to second vizier. Instead, any vizier might be named to the grand vizierate. At

51 Two years after Sokollu’s assassination, Feridun Ahmed was called back to court and reappointed chancellor, thanks to Queen Mother Nurbanu Sultan’s intercession on his behalf. See Hasan Beyzade, II, p. 285. In 1582, he married Ayşe Sultan, daughter of Süleyman’s daughter Mihrimah Sultan and her husband Grand Vizier Rüstem Pasha. After losing his powerful patron, Feridun apparently managed to ally himself with the dominant court faction. This is another good example of shifting political alliances in this period.
the same time, Murad and Mehmed frequently promoted other court grandees and privy chamber officials to the rank of vizier and married them to royal women, thus cementing a political alliance with their favorite ministers. Not surprisingly, Sultan Murad raised the number of the viziers in the imperial government from five to seven. Finally, particularly from the latter part of Murad III’s reign onwards, the telhis became the main mode of communication between the ruling viziers and the sultan, as noted above. All of these sultanic initiatives had the aim of strengthening the sultan’s control over his court.

III.3. Doğancı Kara Mehmed Pasha and the Governor-General Incident of 1589 Revisited

These significant alterations in the Ottoman governmental system took place during the two prolonged wars that the Ottomans waged against the Safavids in 1578-90 and the Habsburgs in 1593-1606. Hence, the contingencies of these wars often defined the sultan’s attempts to control the business of rule through his favorites, and accordingly the reactions to these favorites’ extraordinary influence.

By April 1589, the Ottoman-Safavid conflict had exacted an intolerable toll in manpower and revenues. As a result, a rebellion broke out in the faction-ridden capital. Known as the Governor-General Incident, it was engineered by the ruling viziers and their cronies, who targeted Murad III and his favorite, Rumeli governor-general Doğancı Mehmed Pasha, and used the imperial cavalry soldiers as instruments of violence.

The few scholars who have analyzed this first massive military rebellion in Ottoman history have properly located its underlying cause in the monetary crisis of the
mid-1580s, when the akçe was devalued by half and the sultan’s soldiers were paid in debased coins. Yet a closer look at the rebellion’s political context reveals the central role of Doğancı Mehmed Pasha, who was responsible for the debasement. In the end, the mutinous soldiers demanded and received his head; hence the name by which the rebellion is popularly known.

Mehmed Pasha was a new, more powerful type of royal favorite deliberately created by the sultan after the deaths of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha in 1579 and Şemsi Ahmed Pasha in 1580. I would argue, in fact, that Mehmed Pasha’s career marked the high point of Murad III’s assertive style of rule vis-à-vis his viziers, who were jockeying for position in the government emerging after Sokollu’s assassination. In general, Murad’s initiatives in the aftermath of Sokollu’s death mark the beginning of a new period in his sultanate. He immediately promoted one of Sokollu’s long-time rivals, the second-ranking vizier Semiz Ahmed Pasha, to take his place. The new grand vizier lost no time in naming his political allies to his divân, while finding excuses to banish his enemies from the capital. He recalled the commander of the Safavid campaign, Lala Mustafa Pasha, the aforementioned sworn enemy of Sokollu, to assume the second-ranking vizierate, while Lala Mustafa Pasha’s own sworn enemy, the third-ranking vizier Koca Sinan Pasha, was appointed commander in his place.

Yet just a few months later, in April 1580, Semiz Ahmed Pasha died in office before these changes could take effect. Lala Mustafa Pasha, newly arrived in Istanbul,

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now expected to become grand vizier according to the pattern of government appointments established under Süleyman I. The sultan, however, to everybody’s surprise, appointed neither him nor Koca Sinan Pasha, who had managed to avoid the campaign and remain in the capital. In fact, for the first time in Ottoman history, the sultan refused to fill the grand vizierate for three months! During this hiatus, Murad is reported to have favored abolishing the grand vizierate and running the government himself by means of viziers whom he had created.\footnote{Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” p. 156; and Finkel, \textit{Osman’s Dream}, pp. 170-171.}

Evidently, by instituting such a radical change at the top of the imperial administration, Murad wanted to take full control of the government and prevent any of his viziers from becoming another Sokollu. However, his attempt to alter the administrative hierarchy in place since the days of Süleyman proved impossible to sustain. For one thing, the war against the Safavids demanded a grand vizier in the field; Murad tried to fill the gap with Koca Sinan Pasha, who had been named vizier under Selim II. At the same time, he began to promote his inner palace servants to various high positions in the administration. In sum, what really defined the 1580s was the sultan’s creation of favorites who served as his instruments of rule in the fluid political environment of the imperial capital. Earlier, Şemsi Ahmed had succeeded to a certain extent in curtailing Sokollu’s power as seen above. But now that both men were gone, Murad needed more power-brokers who could help him keep the reins of government that he had finally retrieved from Sokollu.

In the last two decades of the sixteenth century, the sultans’ favorites quickly
solidified their roles in running court affairs, albeit at the risk of inciting bitter factional struggles, rebellions or even executions. Doğuç Kara Mehmed Pasha became the first official royal favorite when Murad III named him *musâhib* with extraordinary privileges in an imperial decree dated 28 October 1584.\(^{54}\) His official favorite status, which has thus far not attracted attention in the scholarly literature, is critical for two reasons: a) it signifies a major turning point in Murad III’s style of rule via his favorites; and b) it embodies almost all the major dynamics of a new period in Ottoman political history, to which I would refer as the first era of favorites (ca. 1580 – ca. 1650). Hence, a fresh look at his political career and at the tumultuous events surrounding his murder is in order here.

**III.3.1. The Rise of Kara Mehmed Agha**

Mehmed Pasha was Armenian by origin, born around the middle of the sixteenth century in Kayseri in central Anatolia. Unlike most favorites, he was not a *devşirme* recruit raised and educated in the palace school (*enderûn*). According to Mustafa Ali and Peçevi, he was a servant (*gilmân*) of Beşoğlu Kaya Bey, one of the district governors of Maraş province and a renowned hawker himself.\(^{55}\) From his master, Mehmed learned the

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\(^{54}\) Selaniki, I, p. 150.

\(^{55}\) Peçevi/TSMK, fol. 195a; and Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, *Künhü’l-Ahbâr*, İÜK, MS TY 5961, fol. 439a [hereafter *Künhü’l-Ahbâr* (İÜK-2)]. Scholars are often mistaken about Doğuç Mehmed Pasha’s early life and training, claiming that he was a *devşirme* graduate of the palace school (*enderûn*). For instance, see Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” p. 163. Mustafa Ali and Peçevi are the only contemporary authors who note his true background. Faris Çerçi’s critical edition of the fourth volume of Mustafa Ali’s, *Künhü’l-ahbâr* should be used with extreme caution, for he uses manuscripts of questionable reliability and occasionally misreads personal names, for example reading Kaya as Kubad. Faris Çerçi, ed., *Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî ve Künhü‘l-ahbâr‘inda II. Selim, III. Murat ve III. Mehmet Devirleri*, 3 vols. (Kayseri: Erciyes Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2000), vol. III, p. 547. See Jan Schmidt, *Pure Water for Thirsty Scholars: A Study of Mustafâ ‘Ali of*
art of hunting with birds of prey, above all hawks (Turkish singular doğan), whence his nickname Doğancı.\footnote{Mehmed Pasha is typically known as only Doğancı Mehmed Pasha in modern Ottoman historiography, whereas his contemporaries and near contemporaries generally called him Kara Mehmed Agha during his early political career, and Musâhib Mehmed Pasha after he became Murad III’s royal favorite and governor-general of Rumeli in 1584. Upon his brutal murder in 1589, he came to be known as Maktûl Beylerbeyi (the Murdered Governor-General). See, for instance, Ali, Künhü’l-Ahbâr/İÜK-2, fol. 475a. Here, I have tried to follow this chronological order when referring to Mehmed Pasha by his nicknames.}

Kaya Bey sent young Mehmed as a gift to the newly enthroned Selim II, hoping to curry favor. Sultan Selim in turn presented him to his eldest son Murad, by then serving as governor of Manisa, for he knew that Murad was a passionate huntsman. In Manisa, Mehmed became Prince Murad’s favorite hunting companion, acquiring the nickname Kara (“strong” in this context).\footnote{Ali, Künhü’l-Ahbâr/İÜK-2, fol. 439a; and Peçevî/TSMK, fol. 195a. Indeed, some archival sources also refer to him as Kara Mehmed Agha. See, for instance, TSMA, D. 34, fols. 37a, 38a, 42a and 48a. The Turkish word kara (literally, “black”) has a great many metaphorical meanings, often pejorative, and thus it is often very hard to be precise on its intended meaning as a nickname. For dictionary definitions, see Sir James W. Redhouse, A Turkish and English Lexicon Shewing the English Significations of the Turkish Terms (Constantinople: Printed for the American Mission by A.H. Boyajian, 1890), pp. 1448-1450; and Sir Gerard Clauson, An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 643-644. In Ottoman personal names, it may refer to dark hair or complexion, whereas in certain cases, as here, it should be interpreted in the sense of strong or powerful, as indicated by John H. Kramers in EF, s.v. “Kara.”}

Peçevi/TSMK emphasizes that Mehmed was a very charming personality, renowned for his sweet talk, and that he always knew how to entertain his prince. As in the case of Şemsi Ahmed Pasha, Kara Mehmed’s expertise in hunting, combined with his other personal merits, must have played a critical role in his rise to power under Murad III, who is reported to have had a deep affection for him from early on.\footnote{Peçevî/TSMK, fols. 195a-b.}

Following his accession, Murad III appointed Kara Mehmed chief hawker

\textit{Gallipoli’s Künhü l-Ahbâr} (Leiden: Het Oosters Institut, 1991), for a detailed analysis of Mustafa Ali’s work, including an annotated list of manuscript copies and their reliability.

\footnote{56 Mehem Pasha is typically known as only Doğancı Mehmed Pasha in modern Ottoman historiography, whereas his contemporaries and near contemporaries generally called him Kara Mehmed Agha during his early political career, and Musâhib Mehmed Pasha after he became Murad III’s royal favorite and governor-general of Rumeli in 1584. Upon his brutal murder in 1589, he came to be known as Maktûl Beylerbeyi (the Murdered Governor-General). See, for instance, Ali, Künhü’l-Ahbâr/İÜK-2, fol. 475a. Here, I have tried to follow this chronological order when referring to Mehmed Pasha by his nicknames.}

57 Peçevi/TSMK, fols. 195a-b.
(doğancıbaşı), thus including him among the highest-ranking officials of his inner court service. According to contemporary archival sources, the chief hawker was the sixth highest-ranking official serving in the inner palace at this time, preceded only by the top five members of the sultan’s privy chamber, that is, the chief of the privy chamber (häsodabaşı), sword bearer (silahdâr), master of the wardrobe (çukadâr), stirrup holder (rikâbdâr) and master of the turban (dülbend gulâmi). Moreover, the chief hawker worked in a now-vanished free-standing building, located between the Privy Chamber and the Chamber of Petitions in the exclusively private third courtyard of the Topkapı Palace, where he trained and took care of the sultan’s most precious hawks alongside some twenty hawkers under his command. During royal hunts, he was the sultan’s closest companion and responsible for presenting the quarry to him.

A hitherto unexamined register of the sultan’s personal treasury reveals that the chief hawker, together with the above-mentioned members of the privy chamber and the chief eunuchs of the palace and the imperial harem, distributed the royal largesse (ihsân-ı hümâyûn) -- that is, the gifts presented from the sultan’s personal treasury on various occasions, such as upon an official’s promotion, on religious holidays, or after a royal

59 According to an entry in TSMA, D. 34, fol. 25b, Kara Mehmed was already serving as chief hawker in September 1575; thus Murad III must have appointed him soon after his enthronement.

60 See, for example, TSMA, D. 34, fols. 17a, 26a, 29b and 32a, where the chief hawker is listed right after these privy chamber officials at the reception of their traditional cash bonuses on religious holidays or other significant days.

61 See Necipoğlu, Architecture, Ceremonial and Power, pp. 123-124. According to TSMA, D. 34, fol. 41b (entry dated 6 N 986 / 6 November 1578), the total number of hawkers serving under the chief hawker was twenty-four.

hunts. The most common form of largesse was gold florins; other gifts included luxurious silk and/or fur-trimmed kaftans, arms and armor, horses, and horse accouterments. Once these items were taken from the sultan’s personal treasury, they were typically handed over to the recipients by one of the above-mentioned intermediaries, including Mehmed Agha, or occasionally by the sultan himself in a royal ceremony.

For five years, Kara Mehmed held this important office which enabled him to further cement his personal bond with his master. Meanwhile, thanks to his combination of official and non-official duties, he not only established himself as an important member of Murad III’s personal household but also enjoyed what would prove to be far-reaching relationships with several prominent court figures of the time, most crucially with the members of the aforementioned anti-Sokollu faction led by Şemsi Ahmed Pasha. As an experienced hunter and a witty conversationalist, Şemsi Ahmed Pasha should have held the sultan’s talented and charming chief hawker in high esteem.

Among Kara Mehmed’s influential court contacts, Murad III’s first sword-bearer, Bosnavi (Bosnian) İbrahim Agha, would play a definitive role in his rise and fall. İbrahim had actually been Selim II’s last stirrup-holder; Murad promoted him to sword-bearer

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64 See TSMA, D. 34, fols. 31a, 32a, 32b, 33b, 37b, 43a and 48a, for random cases about Kara Mehmed’s intermediary role in the distribution of cash bonuses.

65 Towards the end of Kara Mehmed Agha’s tenure, the chief hawker surpassed the master of the turban in rank to become the fifth-ranking official in the inner palace hierarchy; this points to his heightened status even before Murad III. See TSMA, D. 34, fols. 44b and 46b.
upon his accession. In a short time, he became one of Murad’s most intimate inner palace servants (*mukarreb ve makhûl*, as Selaniki calls him).\(^{66}\) After Sokollu’s murder, Murad quickly promoted him through the ranks of his imperial administration. He was appointed agha of the Janissaries in 1579, governor-general of Rumeli in 1582, governor-general of Egypt in 1583, and government vizier in 1585. In 1582, as governor-general of Rumeli, he was charged with overseeing the circumcision festival organized for Prince Mehmed in the capital, as mentioned in the last chapter. Following the celebrations, he was betrothed to one of Murad III’s daughters, Ayşe Sultan, whom he married after he returned to Istanbul from Egypt, hence his nickname Damad (Son-in-Law) İbrahim Pasha.\(^{67}\)

As İbrahim ascended the military-administrative hierarchy, he is reported to have considered Kara Mehmed his apprentice (*şagird*), for he personally educated him in the courtly manners required of a favorite.\(^{68}\) It seems that Mehmed was already İbrahim’s protégé when the above-mentioned battle between the rival factions of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha and Şemsi Ahmed Pasha took place.\(^{69}\) Nonetheless, as we shall see shortly, once Damad İbrahim Pasha had returned from Egypt and solidified his position in the imperial government, and once Doğancı Mehmed Pasha had solidified his status as royal favorite, their friendship degenerated into a bitter rivalry, ultimately leading to Mehmed’s

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\(^{66}\) Selaniki, I, p. 127.


\(^{68}\) Ali, *Künhü‘l-Ahbâr* / İÜK-2, fol. 439a; and Peçevi/TSMK, folos. 195a-b.

\(^{69}\) Aykut, “Damad İbrahim Paşa,” p. 195, notes that Ibrahim Agha was briefly imprisoned in Yedikule fortress in late 1575, which suggests Sokollu’s intention to get rid of him at the beginning of Murad III’s reign.
execution and İbrahim’s banishment from the court for four years.\textsuperscript{70}

Like İbrahim, Kara Mehmed followed a relatively fast track in his career. In early February 1580, he became the chief falconer (çakırcıbaşı) and accordingly left the inner palace grounds. Sultan Murad marked the occasion by giving him 2,000 gold ducats, a Persian-style jeweled dagger, a total of eight top-quality silk robes and a pair of baggy silk trousers (şalvar).\textsuperscript{71} Since the beginning of Murad III’s reign, only two of his personal servants had received such high-value gifts: Husrev Agha, the master of the wardrobe, and İbrahim Agha himself received gifts of similar value when they were appointed chief of the palace gate-keepers (kapucıbaşı) and agha of the Janissaries, in March and December 1579, respectively.\textsuperscript{72}

On October 9, 1583, after having briefly served as master of the royal stables (mîrâhûr), Kara Mehmed was promoted to agha of the Janissaries, a post which had been a gateway for the sultan’s kuls to the highest ranks in the military-administrative hierarchy, as seen in the case of İbrahim Pasha above.\textsuperscript{73} As a special mark of his favor, Murad III married him to a concubine from his harem.\textsuperscript{74} The sultan even allowed him to

\textsuperscript{70} In 1593, İbrahim Pasha was reinstated as the third-ranking vizier in the imperial council during the grand vizierate of Koca Sinan Pasha. Later, he served three times as grand vizier under Mehmed III; in 1601, during his last term, he died at Eszék (Ösek) while commanding the imperial army in Hungary. See Aykut, “Damad İbrahim Paşa,” pp. 202-218, for details.

\textsuperscript{71} TSMA, D. 34, fol. 48a (entry dated 20 ZE 987 / 7 February 1580).

\textsuperscript{72} See TSMA, D. 34, fols. 43b and 47b, for details. The number of promotions of inner court servants to outer posts significantly increased in the months before and after Sokollu’s assassination, which testifies to Murad III’s plan to rid his court of Sokollu’s clients and relatives. See, fols. 44a-60a.

\textsuperscript{73} Selaniki, I, p. 140. The day after his appointment, Kara Mehmed received his promotion gifts from the sultan via Gazanfer Agha. See TSMA, D. 34, fol. 76a (entry dated 23 N 991), for details. For the historical evolution of Ottoman military-administrative career lines between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, see Kunt, Sultan’s Servants, esp. p. 34 [table 3.1] and p. 68 [table 4.1].

\textsuperscript{74} Ali, Künhü ’l-Ahbâr/İÜK-2, fol. 439a; and Peçevi/TSMK, fols. 195a-b.
recruit certain family members and bring them to Istanbul, where they were employed in
the inner palace service. His younger brother Halil joined the corps of hawkers and
ultimately became an influential official. As Kayserili Halil Pasha, he served as admiral
of the imperial fleet and grand vizier under Ahmed I, Osman II and Murad IV.75

III.3.2. The Making of Doğancı Mehmed Pasha

In October 1584, Kara Mehmed reached the zenith of his career. Early that month,
he petitioned Murad to make him governor-general of Rumeli and replace him as agha of
the Janissaries with one of his own protégés from the privy chamber, Bosnavî Halil Agha,
Murad III’s sword-bearer after İbrahim. According to Mehmed bin Mehmed, “since
Musâhib Mehmed Agha’s wishes and petitions [always] received acceptance before the
padishah,” Murad immediately granted both offices “without any reservation.”76 Only
two weeks later, this time with the backing of Damad İbrahim Pasha, Kara Mehmed was
officially appointed a court favorite (he received the rank of vizier in 1587), with
extraordinary privileges that bypassed all the established court hierarchy and the imperial

75 See Mehmed bin Mehmed, Tarih, pp. 44-46; Alexander H. de Groot, “A Seventeenth-century Ottoman
Statesman: Kayserili Halil Pasha (1565-1629) and His Policy Towards European Powers,” Islam 54 (1977),
p. 305-308; and Victor Ostapchuk, “An Ottoman Gazanîme on Halîl Paşa’s Naval Campaign against the
Cossacks (1621),” Harvard Ukrainian Studies 14/3-4 (1990), pp. 482-506. The agha of the Janissaries
during this period oversaw the devşirme recruitment process. See Serdar Özdemir, Osmanlı Devleti’nde
Devşirme Sistemi (Istanbul: Rağbet Yayınları, 2008), pp. 116-200 and passim. Thus, it seems very likely
that Kara Mehmed personally recruited his younger brother as a devşirme boy from their hometown of
Kayseri.

76 Mehmed bin Mehmed, Tarih, p. 64: “Musâhib Mehmed Ağaf’nun... recâ ve arzı huzûr-ı pâdişähide
mehbûl olmaqa bila-tereddüdî mezûr Mehmed Ağâ’ya Rumeli eyâleti ve mezûr Halîl Ağâ’ya yeniçeriler
ağalığı tevcîh veünsân olundı.” The exact date of Kara Mehmed’s appointment as governor-general of
Rumeli is unclear, but Halil Agha was promoted to agha of the Janissaries on October 16, 1584. TSMA, D.
34, fol. 85a (entry dated 11 L 992). Based on Mehmed bin Mehmed’s account, we can assume that Kara
Mehmed’s appointment occurred on the same day.
bureaucracy. For instance, he not only enjoyed the privilege of submitting petitions to and seeing the sultan in person on a regular basis; he was also assigned to supervise the preparations for Grand Vizier Özdemiroğlu Osman Pasha’s campaign of 1584-85 in the Caucasus and the distribution of three-month salaries to the palace soldiers, two important tasks which had traditionally been carried out by the grand vizier and his office. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, he oversaw the first significant devaluation of the Ottoman *akçe*, which was necessitated by a severe monetary crisis in the mid-1580s, as noted above.

Interestingly, Doğancı Mehmed Pasha’s extra-official authority with respect to military affairs and his regular access to the sultan were likewise demanded by Özdemiroğlu Osman Pasha, whose appointment to the grand vizierate in July 1584, as Cornell Fleischer explains, was in fact the work of the court faction led by Gazanfer Agha, by then both the chief eunuch of the palace and the head of the privy chamber. Mustafa Ali, who was in the capital at this time, notes that before his departure for war in mid-October, Osman Pasha petitioned the sultan to appoint Mehmed Pasha as his “private deputy” (*vekil-i ğâss*) so that he could discuss any affair related to his office with

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77 Selaniki, I, pp. 150 and 180, mentions the privileges granted to Mehmed Pasha, whereas Ali, *Künhû’l-Ahbâr* /ÜK-2, fols. 439a and 475a, notes the critical role of Damad İbrahim Pasha in his appointment as royal favorite.


the royal favorite in private. These interrelated appointments and intermingling political alliances not only signify another reconfiguration of power relations under Murad III but also reflect the sultan’s new, more assertive court faction jointly led by Doğancı Mehmed Pasha and Gazanfer Agha.

This picture becomes all the more intriguing when we consider Osman Pasha’s political background and how he was chosen as grand vizier, as well as why he wanted Doğancı Mehmed to be appointed his deputy. Osman Pasha was not a devşirme recruit like the rest of the members of his dîvân. Born in Cairo in 1527/28, he was the son of the famous Özdemir Pasha (d. 1561), a Circassian mamluk and former official of the Mamluk sultanate who had served as Ottoman governor of Yemen and conquered Abyssinia (Habesh) for Süleyman I. In time, like his father, Osman Pasha became a successful governor and a tireless commander, serving first in the distant provinces of the empire, such as Habesh, Yemen, al-Hasâ, and Basra. In 1572/3, he attained his first governor-generalship in Diyarbakır, thanks to his close friend and vizier ally, Lala Mustafa Pasha (d. 1580), the former tutor of Selim II and conqueror of Cyprus. However, four years later, Osman lost his post due to his connection to Lala Mustafa, whose archenemy, Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, managed to dismiss him for being one of his rival’s adherents and appointed one of his own relatives in Osman Pasha’s place. After his dismissal Osman Pasha remained in Diyarbakır in order to evade further machinations.

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81 Holt, Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, pp. 52-54.
by Sokollu. In 1578, Sokollu, as part of his typical strategy to keep his rivals away from the capital, assigned Lala Mustafa Pasha to command the Ottoman campaign against the Safavids in the Caucasus; Lala Mustafa in turn invited Osman Pasha to assist him.

Five years into the Ottoman-Safavid war, Osman Pasha shone as a brilliant commander and governor-general, rightfully so after his resounding victories, which helped the Ottomans to capture Georgia, Gence, Shirvan and Daghistan, entrenching themselves in the region for the next twenty-five years. In 1583-4, Murad sent Osman, who now held the rank of second vizier, to quell the rebellion of the Crimean khan, the Ottoman vassal Mehmed Giray, who refused to logistically support the war in the Caucasus. After successfully carrying out the sultan’s orders, he was invited to Istanbul by Gazanfer Agha.

Osman Pasha arrived in Istanbul to a hero’s welcome in the early summer of 1584. Following an unusually long, four-hour private audience with Murad III, he was appointed grand vizier, replacing Siyavuş Pasha, the client of the late queen mother, Nurbanu Sultan (d. 1583).82 As Fleischer notes, this turn of events attracted the hostility of his fellow viziers in Istanbul, particularly the dismissed Siyavuş Pasha.83 Unlike these viziers, Osman Pasha was not a participant in intrigues, nor a palace-educated grandee, nor yet a sedentary courtier; rather, he was a great warrior and man of action. In him, Murad found the ideal grand vizier to lead his war against the Safavids. Perhaps most importantly, Osman Pasha did not have a factional network entrenched in the imperial

82 See Peksevgen, “Secrecy, Information Control and Power Building,” pp. 211-214, for a discussion of the significance of this long private meeting between Murad III and Osman Pasha.
83 Fleischer, Bureaucrat and Intellectual, p. 114.
administration and the royal court like the rest of ruling viziers.

On the other hand, Osman Pasha knew very well that he was not experienced enough to survive the power struggles at court and that losing the game of factional politics often had serious repercussions. Besides the lesson he had learned from his dismissal from the governorship of Diyarbakır by Sokollu, he had barely survived the wrath of Koca Sinan Pasha, who at one point even advertised his execution to Sokollu when Osman was preparing to return to Istanbul after his successful service in Yemen. These details help explain why Osman Pasha volunteered at the first opportunity to leave the capital in order to launch a new campaign against the Safavids, along with the fractious Nogay Tartars.

It is in this context that Osman Pasha’s request to have Doğancı Mehmed Pasha appointed as his private deputy should be considered. Although such a request was contradictory to the tradition of appointing the second-ranking vizier to be the grand vizier’s deputy in his absence, Osman Pasha now had enough political capital to get his request approved for the sake of his campaign, which might otherwise be jeopardized by the rival viziers he left behind. His request ultimately paid off in the capture of Tabriz, the former Safavid capital, which would remain in the hands of the Ottomans for the next twenty years.84

But there was another reason behind Osman Pasha’s request, related to what I would call the “dilemma of the Ottoman grand vizier” -- a conundrum that emerged as a

84 However, Osman Pasha did not get a second chance to return to the capital. He died on his way back from Tabriz and was buried in Diyarbakır as he wished. For his political career, see EI², s.v. “Öthmān Pasha, Özdemir-Oghh,” by J. Richard Blackburn.
result of both the long Ottoman-Safavid war and Murad III’s sedentary style of rule, and
that recurred during the reigns of Mehmed III and Ahmed I. As the deputy of the sultan
and the commander-in-chief of the imperial army (*serdâr-i ekrem*), Osman Pasha had two
options in time of war: a) he would remain in the capital and risk losing his post to one of
the rival viziers, who were eager to take him down, not just because of his prestige in the
eyes of the sultan, but also because of he was an “outsider;” b) he would take the field
and leave a deputy behind, traditionally the second-ranking vizier, a tactic that entailed
the same risk of being undermined by rival viziers during his absence. There was only
one way to solve this problem: by shielding the sultan from the malicious insinuations of
his rivals. And the only people who could accomplish this task in the absence of the
grand vizier were the sultan’s favorites, above all Mehmed Pasha, whose influence over
the business of rule was now critical to the political survival of virtually all courtiers.

Thus, from 1584 until his murder in 1589, Doğuç Mehmed Pasha was Murad
III’s most trusted associate and chief power-broker, if not his face, in running court
affairs. Moreover, like all chief favorites, he began to accumulate great wealth -- in his
case, thanks to Sultan Murad, who kept showering him with royal largesse, most
noticeably by granting him large landholdings as private property (*mülk*). The favorite
no doubt also received his share from the ever-increasing sales of offices and tax farms.
Besides creating a large network of clients, Mehmed Pasha used his wealth to patronize
the arts and literature, modeling himself on the sultan, who was a renowned poet and man

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85 See TSMA, D. 1630, D. 3416 and D. 3582, for Mehmed Pasha’s *mülk* lands in Anatolia and Rumeli and
the annual income that they produced.
of letters himself. For instance, Mehmed Pasha’s thus far overlooked personal library housed several rare and precious manuscripts, such as an illustrated and richly ornamented copy of the *Shâhnâmeh* (*Book of Kings*), the *magnum opus* of the celebrated Persian poet Firdawsî (935-1020). These expensive books and works of art -- no less valuable than those in the royal library -- were no doubt produced by the leading contemporary artists and literati. Although the true scope of Mehmed Pasha’s artistic patronage remains to be studied, his regular commissioning of such works for himself and his royal patron surely contributed to the reputation of Murad III’s court as one of the most vibrant cultural environments in Ottoman history.

Not surprisingly, news of Mehmed Pasha’s elevation to royal favorite status quickly traveled to all corners of the empire, as his sometime client, Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, testifies in a letter he sent him from Baghdad around late 1585. This letter merits a close look as it provides a rare example of how a royal favorite was perceived by his contemporaries, while illustrating how patron-client relations worked at the imperial court during this period.

Mustafa Ali opens his letter by praising Mehmed Pasha’s newly attained position as the sultan’s *musâhib*, a development which, according to the writer, has already

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87 See TSMA, D. 4057, for the probate inventory (*tereke*) of Mehmed Pasha’s books, which were confiscated for the royal library upon his murder in 1589. See Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, pp. 126-127, for the literary works written by Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali under Doğancı Mehmed Pasha’s patronage.

88 See Fetvaci, “Viziers to Eunuchs,” pp. 140-256, for a discussion of manuscript patronage and patrons during the reign of Murad III.
become well-known among the people of Egypt, Damascus and Aleppo, and very likely Iraq. He then reminds Mehmed Pasha that in his new capacity he should not fail to inform the sultan of the problems pertaining to administrative affairs, especially the empire-wide corruption and sale of offices, because the viziers in Istanbul apparently never raise these problems out of fear of punishment; Ali emphasizes that such unjust practices damage both the functioning and the reputation of the Ottoman sultanate; hence it is among the favorite’s most important duties to rectify them and save the sultan from the “sins” of these wrongdoings.

After this prologue, Ali comes to the gist of his plea. He explains how until recently, he had excelled as the finance director of the province of Erzurum, upon which achievements Özdemiroğlu Osman Pasha, who stopped in Erzurum during his campaign, rewarded him with the lucrative finance directorate of Baghdad, even though Ali had asked for a much higher office. As noted previously, at the time, grand viziers and military commanders had the authority to make such appointments in the field on the sultan’s behalf. Ali had recently become a client of Osman Pasha, for whom he composed the victory missive after the above-mentioned Crimean campaign in 1584. In any event, Ali gladly accepted his new patron’s reward and travelled to Baghdad to assume his new post, only to find that he had already been dismissed from it. Yet, what really frustrated Ali, was the fact that his office had been sold to another grandee as a tax farm (iltizâm) by officials at the court in Istanbul, suggesting that his dismissal was the work of the favorite and his cronies.89 Accordingly, Ali ends his letter by begging Doğancı Mehmed

89 See, Fleischer, Bureaucrat and Intellectual, pp. 115-123, for further details of Ali’s appointment and
Pasha to secure him a new, preferably a higher, office in the finance department.\textsuperscript{90}

However, Ali’s appeal to the royal favorite went unanswered. It is possible that Mehmed Pasha did not receive his letter in the first place. Only after Ali had returned to the capital in late 1586 and bombarded Mehmed Pasha and his cronies at court, above all Gazanfer Agha, Hoca Sadeddin Efendi and Üveys Pasha, with plea letters, did he finally manage to attain the office of finance director of the province of Rum (Sivas); it was a much lower and less lucrative office than finance director of Erzurum but far preferable to being unemployed.\textsuperscript{91}

Clearly, during the first decade of the post-Sokollu era, Doğancı Mehmed Pasha’s role as chief royal favorite was central to the reconfiguration of power and patronage relations within the Ottoman administration, both in the capital and in the provinces. Together with his powerful allies at the court, he dominated the distribution of offices, in addition to his above-mentioned duties. Hence, more and more people of every rank and background turned to him, seeking his intercession, especially in reaching the secluded sultan to secure royal favor.

\textsuperscript{90} See Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî, \textit{Menşeü’l-insâ}, ed. İ. Hakkı Aksoyak (Ankara: Bizimbüro, 2009), pp. 109-111, for a critical edition of the letter in question. Doğancı Mehmed and Mustafa Ali had met at Murad III’s princely court in Manisa. For their long-time patron-client relationship and Ali’s repeated appeals to Mehmed Pasha and other prominent court figures for higher office during this period, see Fleischer, \textit{Bureaucrat and Intellectual}, pp. 54-55, 118-120, 125-130 and 133. Ali emphasizes at one point in his letter that he had successfully served the late Lala Mustafa Pasha during his campaign in the Caucasus in 1578, about which he later composed a work, titled \textit{The Book of Victory (Nusretnâme)}, dedicated to Murad III. Hence, by alluding to the bitter rivalry between Lala Mustafa Pasha and Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, Ali tries to strengthen his appeal before the sultan and his favorite by reminding them of his real political allegiance. For further discussion of the sultan’s musâhibs as royal favorites by Mustafa Ali, see Andreas Tietze, ed., \textit{Mustafâ ’Âlî’s Counsel for Sultans of 1381}, 2 vols. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1979), especially vol. I, pp. 42-43. See Fleischer, \textit{Bureaucrat and Intellectual}, pp. 95-104, for a detailed analysis of Ali’s work.

\textsuperscript{91} See Fleischer, \textit{Bureaucrat and Intellectual}, pp. 124-130.
III.3.3. Murdering a Royal Favorite

Inevitably, Mehmed Pasha’s privileged position created resentment among other office-holders, including his former tutor and ally Damad İbrahim Pasha, now the third-ranking vizier in the imperial government. Their hostility escalated when Mehmed Pasha began to subvert communication with the secluded sultan. According to Peçevi, for instance, whenever the grand vizier or another member of the imperial council submitted a telhis to the sultan, Mehmed Pasha cast aspersions on it, thus influencing the sultan’s reply.92 Thus, according to Mustafa Ali, all of the ruling viziers “united their words and efforts” (“yek-dil ve yek-cihet oldılar”) towards persuading the sultan to get rid of his favorite, but to no avail. Mehmed Pasha’s position was so firmly established that it proved impossible to undermine him by non-violent means alone.93

Eventually, Mehmed Pasha’s enemies got their chance for revenge in early April 1589, when the above-mentioned monetary crisis reached its climax just as the protracted war against the Safavids had entered its eleventh year.94 On April 1, the Janissaries and the sipahis received their overdue three-month salaries, but some of the sipahis were paid in the debased akçe that Mehmed Pasha had introduced.95 Enraged, the alienated cavalry soldiers marched on Mehmed Pasha’s mansion, shouting:

Our sultan’s coins have taken this shape! For three hundred years, did the sultans of the House of Osman ever give the soldier[s] of victory such three-month money? Then you came, became a favorite (mukarreb) and

92 Peçevi/TSMK, fol. 195b.
94 For the Ottoman-Safavid War of 1578-1590, see Kütükoğlu, Osmanlı-İran Siyâsî Münâsebetleri, pp. 83-200.
95 Kafadar, “When Coins Turned into Drops of Dew,” pp. 77-78.
imposed [new] taxes all over the country. Do you think you can correct the coins by making such innovations?96

The following day, after Mehmed Pasha failed to respond, the sipahis took their protest to Topkapı Palace, where it quickly mushroomed into a fundamental challenge to Murad III’s practice of ruling via his favorite. Dissatisfied with the sultan’s repeated attempts to placate them via the mediation of Gazanfer Agha, the soldiers, for the first time in Ottoman history, broke into the second courtyard of the palace and demanded the heads of Doğancı Mehmed Pasha and his client, Mahmud Efendi, the chief treasurer, threatening the sultan to invade the imperial harem if their demands were not met.97 An anonymous contemporary report continues:

With tears in his eyes… [the sultan] was forced to decide or declare: he commanded both [men] to be decapitated before the soldiers. This was immediately put into effect…. Thereafter the soldiers praised the sultan highly and left with great satisfaction, taking the governor-general’s head with them. They practiced all kinds of mischief with it: throwing balls at it, hitting the mouth with their fists, tramping through the most important streets with the head set on a high pole so that everyone could see it. They mocked, cursed, and spoke all kinds of evil against him. As soon as all this had been done, the houses of the governor-general and chief treasurer were plundered, and many others who depended on them were taken captive.98

Most contemporary authors agree that this violent tumult was staged by the rival


98 Warhafttige und gar auszfierliche Newer Zeyttung, Ausz Constantinopel, Welcher massen die Türckische Kriegsleut ein Erschröckliche Auffruhr angerichtet halben. Auch fast die halbe Statt Angezündet und in Brand gestecket (Augsburg: Wöhrlin, 1589), pp. 4-6. I thank my colleague Alison Anderson for providing an English translation of the quotations from this report.
viziers in order to get rid of the sultan’s powerful favorite.\textsuperscript{99} Peçevi even asserts that Mahmud Efendi’s execution was meant to avoid the impression that they were targeting only Mehmed Pasha.\textsuperscript{100} Mustafa Ali, meanwhile, categorizes these sipahis as interlopers in the imperial cavalry regiments. To the three groups of soldiers that had traditionally comprised these regiments -- graduates (çikma) of the sultan’s household, former Janissaries, and sons of former sipahis -- a fourth group had been added, composed of soldiers recently promoted from the artillery and armorer regiments, as well as former kuls (servants, soldiers) of ruling grandees, or kuls from cavalry regiments stationed in distant provinces such as Egypt, Damascus and central Iraq.\textsuperscript{101} Mustafa Ali’s remarks suggest that Doğancı Mehmed Pasha had intentionally paid the three-month salaries of the sipahis in this fourth group with debased coins in order to undermine his rivals and their supporters among the cavalry troops, while using the good coins to pay the Janissaries and the rest of the sipahis to reward them for being loyal to him. This scenario actually helps explain the second wave of military uprising immediately after Doğancı’s murder, as will be seen shortly.

Nonetheless, Murad III soon learned the true nature of the rebellion and dismissed its ringleaders:


\textsuperscript{100} Peçevi/TSMK, fol. 196a. According to Ali, \textit{Künhü’l-Ahbâr}/İÜK-2, fol. 439b, Mehmed Pasha’s chief steward Piri Hüseyn later managed to retrieve his patron’s severed head from the rebels in return for 400 gold coins and buried it with Mehmed Pasha’s body, which was placed in his mausoleum near the shrine of Abu Ayyub. The mausoleum still stands, and according to its gate inscription, it also houses the body of Mahmud Efendi, indicating that the two figures may have been related. Yet, what is striking is that Mehmed Pasha was the only executed royal favorite during this period to receive a proper funeral and burial in such a prestigious cemetery. In contrast, Süleyman I’s favorite Ibrahim Pasha and Ahmed I’s favorites Derviş and Nasuh Pashas were buried in public cemeteries, probably without tombstones.

That same evening the sultan removed the mufti, the grand vizier, Siyavuğ Pasha, the viziers [Damad] Ibrahim Pasha and [Cerrah] Mehmed Pasha, the treasurers, and the chancellor, all officers of the sipahis and other lesser officials from their offices with disgrace, mostly to pour out his ire and to show that great violence had been used against him by his soldiers to force him to remove and hand over his beloved and most trusted man to death.\textsuperscript{102}

Although some contemporary sources assert that the sultan now once again considered running imperial affairs personally, without a grand vizier, this was clearly impossible given the administrative practice established under Süleyman I. Murad did, however, look outside the capital for a new grand vizier, calling Koca Sinan Pasha, his grand vizier from 1580 to 1582, who was in Üsküdar, waiting to be reappointed after his dismissal from the governor-generalship of Damascus.\textsuperscript{103} Following his new grand vizier’s recommendations, the sultan quickly filled other vacant offices, as well, and ordered the soldiers’ salaries to be paid in good coins from his personal treasury.\textsuperscript{104} However, some of the sipahis were still not satisfied but wanted key tax farms to be granted to them instead of to Jewish bankers or other clients of the sultan and the late Doğançı Mehmed Pasha. Yet, Murad refused to grant them these privileges.\textsuperscript{105}

The repercussions of the so-called Governor-General Incident were not limited to

\textsuperscript{102} Warhaftige und gar auszfielerliche Newer Zeytung auss Constantinopel, p. 6. \\
\textsuperscript{103} Hasan Beyzade, II, pp. 353-354. \\
\textsuperscript{104} For details, see Selaniki, I, pp. 211-213; and Ali, Künhü‘l-Ahbâr/İÜK-2, fols. 439b-440a. Immediately after he was reappointed as grand vizier, Sinan Pasha asked Murad III to give him full authority and accordingly to remove all royal agents interfering in government affairs. Given the scale of the turmoil in the city, the sultan had no option but to comply with this request. However, once the rebellion was over, Murad resumed his former style of rule and continued to use his power-brokers until the end of his reign. See Warhaftige und gar auszfielerliche Newer Zeytung auss Constantinopel, pp. 6-7. \\
\textsuperscript{105} Warhaftige und gar auszfielerliche Newer Zeytung auss Constantinopel, p. 8. As Baki Tezcan notes, most of these troublemaker sipahis that participated in the Governor-General Incident were actually part of the enlarged households of the ruling viziers.
these details, however. What is often overlooked in modern scholarship is the extreme reaction of Mehmed Pasha’s dependents to their master’s execution. According to some contemporary sources, they sought to settle scores with those who had staged the rebellion by plotting a literally incendiary course of action that quickly found many supporters among the disgruntled sipahis and the Janissaries. The result of this joint scheme was a devastating fire and widespread looting all over the capital in early April 1589. It is worth quoting a lengthy passage from the above-mentioned report as it vividly captures the details of the mayhem that they created in the city, threatening the sultan’s person:

_The sultan was reportedly in fear and distress and uncertain not only if he would be robbed in his palace but even if he would lose his government, if not his life. His gate-keepers were sent, one after another, to the grand vizier, to the agha of the Janissaries, to the admiral pasha, and to other officers, and he commanded them strongly that in order to save themselves from such a big tumult, they should satisfy all soldiers who looked for nothing other than allowing the whole country to be set on fire and ruined— not only with better pay but also with all other mercies, with money, and with the distribution all kinds of positions. But these measures unfortunately took place too late._

Matters showed themselves to be more vexed the longer they continued and went so far that no one was safe any longer from fire and violence in his house. _Such a conspiracy was sworn among the servants of the beheaded governor-general and those who depended on him, as well as among many ruined sipahis, to raze the whole city to the ground and [even to attack] the sultan himself in his palace with fire and violence._ So, a day later, they started fires in many more places, which were soon put out through good planning. Balls of fire were thrown into the houses of Nişancı Mehmed Pasha, the master of the sultan’s stable, of the new chancellor and of other excellent lords; but the same perpetrators were found and brought to Sinan Pasha and then to the sultan himself.106

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106 Ibid., pp. 12-13 [emphasis is mine]. Selaniki, I, p. 213, also witnessed these fires and lootings, which he describes as “unimaginable” in his chronicle.
Sultan Murad learned that giving royal favorites near-absolute power could have serious repercussions. In the end, he sacrificed his long-time, beloved favorite to the rebels and their ringleaders in the government so as to avoid deposition. Meanwhile, the fire that Doğancı Mehmed Pasha’s men had started reportedly destroyed half of the capital, burning some 20,000 houses, shops and workshops, and killing thousands of people. According to another anonymous report, “the damage that occurred through this fire has been estimated at over a hundred million gold coins.” Indeed, the fire of 1589 was one of the most devastating disasters in the history of the city.

**Concluding Remarks**

These tumultuous events were not the last ones that Murad III and his court witnessed. Four years later, when the sultan had almost totally withdrawn from the public eye, the sipahis once again rose in revolt upon not receiving their salaries in full. They similarly occupied the palace grounds and demanded the head of the chief treasurer, at the time Şerif Mehmed Efendi, the successor of the above-mentioned Mahmud Efendi. On this occasion, however, Murad III did not bargain with his unruly soldiers, but

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108 Warhaftige und eigentliche Zeitttung auss Constantinopel des grawlichen wmd unerhörnten Brandt, darinn viel tausentd Heuser, sampt grossem Gut verbrandt, welches nicht wol auss zusprechen ist, und wie es sich begeben und zugetragen hat in diesem 1589 Jahr (Cöllen: Niclas Schreiber, 1589), p. 4. I thank Alison Anderson for the translation of the quoted sentence.

109 Interestingly, this fire is not listed in the history of the fires of Istanbul written by the famous seventeenth-century Armenian historian Eremya Çelebi Kömürçiyyan (d. 1695). See Hrand D. Andreasyan, “Eremya Çelebi’nin Yangmlar Tarihi,” I.Ü. Tarih Dergisi 27 (1973), pp. 59-84, for a Turkish translation of this work.
responded with blunt force: in a violent encounter at the second gate of the palace, the rebellious sipahi were massacred to the last man at the hands of the Janissaries and armed court officials. The sultan then dismissed Siyavuş Pasha, whom he had reappointed grand vizier a year before, and entrusted Koca Sinan Pasha with the seal of the office for the third time. Yet, as Tezcan notes, it was Sinan Pasha who had secretly orchestrated this rebellion in order to undermine his rival Siyavuş.

From 1589 until his death in 1595, Murad III did not attempt to create another royal favorite similar to Şemsi Ahmed or Doğancı Kara Mehmed; instead, he relied on his experienced viziers to manage imperial affairs while keeping them under close watch, as Koca Sinan Pasha’s several telhîses testify. Moreover, he changed his grand viziers frequently, not only because he was highly suspicious of them, as contemporary historian Selaniki notes, but also to prevent any of them from becoming another Sokollu. The rebellion-weary sultan could easily observe that as soon as a new grand vizier received the seal of office, he lost no time in promoting his relatives and clients to various positions in central and provincial administration while clearing out those appointed by his predecessor. By making such frequent changes at the top of the imperial administration, Murad III no doubt sought to balance the rival factions of his powerful

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110 Selaniki, I, pp. 301-305. After this sipahi rebellion, Murad III became all the more paranoid about his soldiers. For instance, according to Selaniki, I, p. 416, when a fire accidentally began in the Ayasofya market area near the palace in 1594, the sultan believed that it had been set by cavalry soldiers and declared that “this is an ominous sign on our doorstep.” Also quoted by Woodhead, “Murad III and the Historians,” p. 95, fn. 19, in a similar context.


112 For instance, see Sahillioğlu, Koca Sinan Paşa’nın Telhîsleri, pp. 2, 6 and 8-16. In these petitions, Sinan Pasha complains about the misinformation given to the sultan by royal companions or agents regarding his actions.

113 Selaniki, I, pp. 427-428.
ministers, notably Sinan Pasha and his nemesis Ferhad Pasha, who exchanged the grand vizierate in the early 1590s. During the reign of Murad III’s successor, Mehmed III, this vizierial rivalry reasserted itself at higher levels when the Ottoman-Habsburg conflict that had started under Koca Sinan grew into the Long War. As a result, more open rebellions began to target the sultan and his court favorites; these in turn intensified political instability at the imperial center, as discussed in detail in the first chapter.

In conclusion, as the favorites’ roles at the Ottoman court became fixed during the latter part of the sixteenth century, the sultan ceased to be personally involved in the running of the empire and instead ruled through his favorites, albeit at the risk of facing major rebellions and even deposition. Gazanfer Agha fulfilled the role of royal favorite during the reign of Mehmed III while exercising much more power, authority and control over the business of rule, as well as in dynastic affairs, than those of Şemsi Ahmed Pasha and Doğancı Mehmed Pasha could under Murad III. This background now allows us to examine how Ahmed I and his favorites functioned within a court divided by more complicated networks of factions.

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114 The appointment sequence of grand viziers during the last years of Murad III is as follows: Koca Sinan Pasha (1589-91); Ferhad Pasha (1591-92); Siyavuş Pasha (1592-93); and Koca Sinan Pasha (1593-95). For the details of the intense rivalry between the factions of Sinan Pasha and Ferhad Pasha, see Selaniki, I, pp. 214-425. Also see Murphey, Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty, pp. 132-134. Eventually, Sinan Pasha succeeded in eliminating his long-time rival for good: in August 1595, he secured a royal order for Ferhad Pasha’s execution.
CHAPTER 4

AHMED I AND HIS FAVORITES

Against the historical background established in the preceding chapters, this final chapter will focus on Ahmed I and his two chief favorites, Derviş Pasha and El-Hac Mustafa Agha. It aims to illustrate three critical points. First, Ahmed’s royal favorites had several features in common with those of Murad III and Mehmed III, most noticeably in their influence on the business of rule, and in their control over the court patronage machinery on behalf of the Ottoman ruler. Secondly, Ahmed I’s relative lack of experience in statecraft, his hot temper and unpredictable behavior, his religiosity and devotion to justice, and above all his efforts to model himself after Süleyman I -- all discussed in the second chapter -- often defined how his favorites operated as power-brokers at his court. Finally, Ahmed I and his favorites not only helped to shape the political, dynastic, social, economic and military crisis that the Ottoman imperial system suffered in the early seventeenth century; they were products of it. My main contention is that Ahmed’s favorites played critical roles in establishing and then enhancing the sultan’s personal rule vis-à-vis his faction-ridden court.
IV.1. A Power-Thirsty Guardian: Derviş Agha

Ahmed I’s first personal favorite was his chief gardener, Derviş Agha. Like Grand Vizier Yavuz Ali Pasha, discussed in the second chapter, Derviş Agha was an important Bosnian client of Ahmed’s mother, Handan Sultan. No information has thus far surfaced on his family background, childhood or education. His early career in the palace similarly remains obscure, but we know that he was a devşirme recruit and that he served in the corps of gardeners (bostancı ocağı) during the reign of Mehmed III. In 1602, he became the superintendent (kethüda) of the corps and then replaced Bayram Agha as chief gardener in early June of 1604.1

On January 18, 1606, Ahmed appointed Derviş Agha grand admiral, reportedly at his personal request, after dismissing Cıgalazade Sinan Pasha.2 At the same time, the young sultan conferred the rank of vizier upon him, together with his predecessor’s hass revenues, amounting to 1,200,000 akçes.3 Only five months later, on the suspiciously sudden death of Lala Mehmed Pasha, Ahmed elevated him to the grand vizierate -- an unusual demonstration of royal favor to a vizier of his status.4 A newly discovered

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1 See Yıldız, “Osmanlı Devlet Teşkilâtında Bostancı Ocağı,” pp. 276 and 287; and ASVe, SDC, filza 59, fols. 163v-164r (dated June 5, 1604).

2 Hasan Beyzade, III, pp. 836-837; and Mehmet İpşirli, ed., Târih-i Na‘îmâ, 4 vols. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2007), vol. I, p. 311 [hereafter Târih-i Na‘îmâ, I-II-III-IV]. At the time of his dismissal, Cıgalazade Sinan Pasha was the field marshal on the eastern front, a post he had held since the summer of 1604. In February/March 1606, he died in Diyarbakir, reportedly in despair over his crushing defeats by the Safavids, the like of which he had never experienced before. See Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, pp. 642-643; and ASVe, SDC, filza 63, fols. 33r-v (dated March 29, 1606), on his death. For further discussion of Sinan Pasha, see below.


4 BOA, MAD, D. 4665, p. 120; Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, p. 647; and Abdülkadir Efendi, I, p. 428. According to Peçevi, who was Lala Mehmed Pasha’s long-time confidant and personal secretary, it was widely rumored at the time that Derviş Pasha actually poisoned the grand vizier with the help of a Portuguese physician, then got himself appointed in his place. Peçevi/TSMK, fols. 301b-302b.
register of imperial affairs (mühimme defteri)\(^5\) in the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives reveals that Ahmed allowed his favorite to retain the revenues associated with the admiralty even while collecting those attached to his new office.\(^6\) Derviş Pasha had served only eight months, however, when Ahmed ordered his execution on December 9, 1606, on the grounds that he had mismanaged imperial affairs and oppressed numerous viziers, grandees and common people.\(^7\) In short, from mid-1604 until his death in late 1606, Derviş wielded great power and influence as a royal favorite while creating much factionalism and alienation among the Ottoman ruling elite at the imperial center.

Derviş Pasha’s quick rise and fall presents an intriguing case vis-à-vis those of Şemsi Ahmed Pasha, Doğancı Mehmed Pasha and Gazanfer Agha. Most strikingly, he was the first Ottoman chief gardener to be appointed grand admiral, then elevated to the grand vizierate shortly afterward.\(^8\) Under the established pattern of promotions for court and government offices, a person of his background could expect this kind of success only after serving in the provincial and central administrations for many years. As seen in


\(^6\) In the first two decades of the seventeenth century, the official annual income of a grand vizier from his hass revenues was between 1,500,000 and 1,750,000 akçe, while other government viziers received a little over 1,200,000 akçe. Compare BOA, MAD, D. 3727; D. 6259; KK, D. 3065; and D.HSC, Dosya: 2/26, p. 1, which record hass revenues of the highest-ranking viziers at different times during the reign of Ahmed I.

\(^7\) Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, p. 652; Mehmed bin Mehmed, Tarih, p. 37; and Tarih-i Na‘îmâ, I, pp. 318-319.

\(^8\) Ahmed I’s sons Osman II and Murad IV also rewarded their favorite chief gardeners, notably Recep Agha (Ahmed I’s last chief gardener) in 1621 and Cafer Agha in 1632, with this prestigious office. The dates of their appointments are given by Yıldız, “Osmanlı Devlet Teşkilâtında Bostancı Ocağı,” pp. 277 and 310. However, these sultanic initiatives seem to be limited to the first half of the seventeenth century and thus did not establish a new pattern for the promotion of chief gardeners. Other chief gardeners became grand viziers during the same period but only after holding other offices.
the last chapter, even a long-time favorite like Doğancı Mehmed Pasha did not receive the rank of vizier until he had served three years as governor-general of Rumeli. In other words, instead of taking small steps, Derviş made big leaps in his political career, a feature which increasingly came to define the careers of minister-favorites during this era, not only in the Ottoman Empire but also in contemporary European courts.9

Prior to Derviş Pasha, no servant of the sultan had been empowered as grand vizier in this way, with two notable exceptions. In 1523, Süleyman I became the only sultan in Ottoman history to promote a member of his inner court service directly to the grand vizierate when he appointed his beloved friend (refik) and head of the privy chamber, Îbrahim Agha. For the next thirteen years, until he was secretly strangled in his bedchamber in 1536, Îbrahim Pasha acted as a co-ruler and enjoyed power and prestige almost equal to the sultan’s. In his unique career, recently analyzed by Ebru Turan, he made critical contributions to both the sedentarization of Ottoman imperial power and the redefinition of sultanic sovereignty under Süleyman I.10 Upon his enthronement in 1595, Mehmed III appointed his ailing tutor, Mehmed Efendi, government vizier, then, shortly afterwards, grand vizier. However, Lala Mehmed Pasha died ten days later and thus did not have a real political career as a minister-favorite. Nonetheless, he represents another key example of the promotion of inner-service favorites to the grand vizierate.11

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10 Turan, “The Sultan’s Favorite.”
11 See Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” pp. 163 and 184, for a brief discussion of Lala Mehmed Pasha in this context.
Hence, the main questions that need to be answered at this point are what led Ahmed I to promote his chief gardener so quickly to the top position in the imperial administration, and what led him to execute him shortly thereafter. I maintain that a critical combination of institutional and personal factors shaped Derviş Pasha’s unusual political career and that he was a critical part of the reconfiguration of power relations at the faction-ridden Ottoman court during the early reign of Ahmed I. Hence, his case needs to be examined in detail against the background of Ahmed’s early sultanate and with respect to each major player’s pursuit of power in a highly fluid political setting.

To begin with, by the late 1590s, the office of chief gardener had become one of the most important positions at the Ottoman court as it gave its holder the opportunity to cultivate an intimate relationship with the sultan and thus to influence him. The chief gardener was responsible for the sultan’s safety and, in this capacity, accompanied him wherever he went outside the palace, riding alongside him in the royal barge and overland on horseback. As a result, he had ample opportunity to talk with the sultan in private. Moreover, he was typically charged with carrying out secret royal orders, such as apprehending, imprisoning or executing viziers or other high-ranking officials. In a similar vein, he occasionally functioned as the private messenger between the sultan and the grand vizier. In sum, by the turn of the seventeenth century, the chief gardener not only enjoyed an intimate relationship with the secluded Ottoman ruler but had become a new power-broker based in the palace. Thus, as most seventeenth-century observers of

the Ottoman court pointed out, he created either fear or hope in other grandees as his mediating role with the sultan increased.\textsuperscript{14}

Some chief gardeners during this period actually refused promotion so as not to lose their privileged positions at the court and their contact with the sultan. For instance, when Murad III died in 1595, his long-time chief gardener Arnavut (Albanian) Ferhad Agha carried the news to Prince Mehmed, who had been serving as governor of Manisa since 1583, and invited him to the throne.\textsuperscript{15} After his enthronement, Mehmed III wanted to reward Ferhad Agha with one of the most prestigious and lucrative offices in the empire, namely, the governorship of Egypt, but the agha declined this offer and instead asked the new sultan to keep him as chief gardener for life, to which request Mehmed III acquiesced.\textsuperscript{16} Over the next six years, Ferhad remained in office as an important client of Gazanfer Agha, with whom he managed court affairs while controlling access to the sultan. After serving as chief gardener for a total of fifteen years -- arguably the longest term in this post in Ottoman history -- he was finally dismissed by Mehmed III as a result of the 1601 sipahi rebellion, described in the first chapter.\textsuperscript{17} He gradually re-ascended the


\textsuperscript{15} Ferhad Agha was appointed chief gardener in June 1585. See TSMA, D. 34, fol. 97a. Thus Yildiz, “Osmanlı Devlet Teşkilâtında Bostancı Ocağı,” p. 223, is mistaken when he asserts that he was appointed in June 1586.

\textsuperscript{16} Ali, Künhü’l-Ahbâr/IÜK-2, fol. 463b.

\textsuperscript{17} The Venetian bailo’s dispatch, dated April 1, 1601, mentions the dismissal of the chief gardener in the context of the sipahi rebellion, but without giving a name. See Calendar of State Papers - Venetian, vol. 9, p. 450; see also Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” pp. 160 and 348, n. 178. Although Yildiz, “Osmanlı Devlet Teşkilâtında Bostancı Ocağı,” p. 273, identifies Ferhad as chief gardener, he fails to mention his
ladder of power, receiving the governorship of Damascus, then, with the help of his fellow former chief gardener Derviş Pasha, even higher positions in the imperial administration, as we shall see.

Personal character, merit, ambition, political experience and factional alliances were the qualities necessary for an intimate servant of the sultan to receive such unparalleled royal favor and then to wield the power that came with it, as seen in the earlier cases of Şemsi Ahmed Pasha and Doğancı Mehmed Pasha. In Derviş Pasha’s case, it is commonly reported that Yavuz Ali Pasha appointed him chief gardener to replace Bayram Agha, who had failed to execute the deputy grand vizier, Kasım Pasha, whom Ali Pasha suspected of working to undermine him.\textsuperscript{18} The Venetian bailo Contarini notes that Ali Pasha chose Derviş Agha because he was a fellow Bosnian.\textsuperscript{19} In general terms, there was nothing unusual in this choice since Derviş was already the second-highest-ranking gardener in the corps. Moreover, given the pattern of promotions by the end of sixteenth century and the ethno-regional solidarity among Ottoman grandees, discussed in the second chapter, it was natural for Ali Pasha to replace the dismissed chief gardener with his fellow Bosnian.\textsuperscript{20}

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\begin{itemize}
  \item Peçevi/TSMK, fol. 292b; and Hasan Beyzade, III, p. 813.
  \item ASVe, SDC, filza 59, fols. 163v-164r (dated June 5, 1604). Ottoman palace gardeners were often selected from among Bosnian devşirme recruits because of their height and physical strength. Özcan, “Bostancı,” DİA.
  \item Until the turn of the seventeenth century, a chief gardener was typically promoted to the post of master of the stables, agha of the janissaries or head of the palace gate-keepers (kapucibaş). He might then serve in
\end{itemize}
The operative question, then, is not how Derviş Pasha became chief gardener but how he managed to keep this position while becoming a royal favorite during a politically unstable period in which frequent dismissals, resulting from factional struggles or simply from personal enmities, were the norm. His resilience is all the more remarkable when we consider that he soon lost his initial patron, Ali Pasha, who died in Belgrade a month later, in July 1604. The grand vizierate then passed to Lala Mehmed Pasha, an experienced vizier known for his successes during the Long War, whom Derviş reportedly disliked.

The queen mother now emerges as the main force behind the solidification of Derviş Agha’s status. Contemporary sources reveal that Handan Sultan had also encouraged her son to appoint Derviş Agha chief gardener while urging him to rely on Derviş’s guidance in the business of rule. Peçevi relates a story that he heard from Derviş’s younger brother, Civan Bey, who was a gardener in the palace at that time. According to Civan, whenever Handan Sultan, Ahmed I and Derviş Agha got together in the palace gardens, the queen mother “would get her son to swear, by her right as a mother and the milk of her breast, that he would not do anything contrary to [Derviş Agha’s] words and thoughts.”

21 Immediately after his elevation to the grand vizierate, Derviş Pasha rewarded his brother with the governorship of Eğriboz, where Peçevi worked with him on a tax survey.

22 Peçevi/TSMK, fol. 300b: “Vâlide sultân hazretleri her zemân sa’âdetli pâdişâha anun sözine ve re’yine muhâlefet ınımemeye válidelik hakkına ve şîr-i pistânına yemîn virür imiş.” Also quoted by Peirce, The Imperial Harem, p. 237, from Ta’rîh-i Peçevî, 2 vols. (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Amire, 1281-1283/1864-1866), vol. II, p. 316. Peirce cites this story to illustrate Handan Sultan’s role as regent, but she implies that these
For a young and inexperienced sultan like Ahmed, such strong words were no doubt persuasive. Indeed, when contemporary Ottoman authors refer to Derviş Agha, they typically call him the sultan’s *mukarreb* (derived from the Arabic root *q-r-b*, “to be close to”) to emphasize his position as favorite. They likewise stress that his proximity to the sultan quickly reached such a degree that whatever he told Ahmed, it was always accepted, “even if the whole world thought the opposite.” Indeed, only six months after Derviş’s appointment, the Venetian bailo testifies to the fact he was “very tight with and always at the ear of the sultan” -- thanks to his official duty of controlling the rudder of the royal barge whenever the young sultan rode in it. Overall, Handan Sultan’s role in Derviş’s rise and fall was quite decisive: it was during her lifetime that he firmly established himself as the sultan’s first royal favorite, and it was soon after her death that he reached the apogee of his political power as a minister-favorite, but then suddenly fell from favor and was executed.

It seems that Handan Sultan initially expected Derviş Agha to act as a personal guardian for the young sultan, whose actions and health alarmed his regents, particularly during the first months of his sultanate. As illustrated in the second chapter, thirteen-year-old Ahmed was a highly energetic character who, as soon as he took the throne, began spending a great deal of time outside the palace, notably hunting or conducting incognito gatherings occurred during Derviş Pasha’s admiralty, that is, after January 1606. Since Handan Sultan died in November 1605, it is clear from Peçevi’s account that these gatherings took place when Derviş was still chief gardener.

23 Peçevi/TSMK, fol. 292b; and Mehmed bin Mehmed, *Nuhbe*, p. 647.
24 ASVe, SDC, filza 60, fol. 143r (dated November 14, 1604): “*il Bostangi Bassì del Gran Signor [...] così havendo l’orechia di Sua Mastà le disse che non doveva comportare che esse barche andassero di quel modo adornate a concorrenza delli Caichi della Maestà Sua.*” See also ASVe, SDC, filza 60, fol. 254r (dated January 8, 1605); and Salignac/Correspondence, p. 25, fn. 3.
inspections, regardless of the weather. Handan Sultan quickly realized that her son could easily put himself in danger and thus needed to be closely watched, for there was no real alternative for the sultanate except Ahmed’s four-year-old brother, Prince Mustafa. In this respect, an incident reported by Contarini is highly revealing and helps us further contextualize the beginnings of the intimate relationship between Ahmed I and Derviş Agha. According to the bailo, in early March 1604, Ahmed spent a full day hunting in cold weather. Late in the day, the young sultan wanted to pursue more game on a nearby mountain, but his companions opposed him:

On account of the distance and the late hour, and with the weather threatening to turn bad, [the sultan] was advised against this [idea] by his head horseman and chief falconer, who agreed that they should not keep him out at night to his great inconvenience and discomfort. They pointed out these difficulties. His Majesty did not respond with any words; rather he immediately turned his horse and returned to the Barge. Upon reaching the Palace, he immediately sent an order to the Grand Vizier [Ali Pasha] to replace the two aforementioned men with other servants, showing with this act the greatest change of heart, so that he displeased many, appearing through this to give some indication of not wanting so easily to accept the opinion or advice of another. He was all the more displeased since the words of these two [servants] were on the order of the Grand Vizier, who had given a command that was to have been made known to the sultan whenever he encountered some similar difficulty that could have a detrimental effect, such as going at night to a mountain with a great retinue where there was neither lodging nor provision of any kind and where there was no time to make preparations, with other circumstances that threatened inconvenience.25

25 ASVe, SDC, filza 59, fols. 4r-5r (dated March 9, 1604): “Attendendo il Gran Signore continuamente et con molto suo gusto di andar alla caccia è occorso che li giorni passati voleva transferirsì a certa montagna, ma per esser discosta et l’hora molto tarda, minacciando anco il tempo di dover riuscir cattivo, fu avvertito di questo dal suo Cavallarizzo maggiore, et dal Falconiero maggiore, li quali d’accordo per non tenerlo fuori di notte con molto suo incommodo, et patimento, gli proposero queste difficoltà. Non rispose sua Maestà alcuna parola, ma subito rivolto il cavallo ritornando al Caichio, e giunto al Serraglio mandò immediate ordine al Primo Visir che provedesse di altri suoggetti in luogo de’ due nominati, mostrando con questa attione grandissima alteratione d’animo, così che ha dispiaciuto a molti, parendo che per essa dia qualche indizio di non voler così facilmente ammettere il parere, o consiglio di alcuno, et tanto più ha dispiaciuto quanto si tiene che le parole dette de questi fussero per ordine del Primo Visir, il quale haveva dato commissione che dovessero far saper al Gran Signore quando s’incontrasse in alcuna
By “detrimental effect,” Ali Pasha was surely alluding to the precarious situation of the dynasty. Had something happened to the young sultan during these hunts, such as serious injury or accidental death, not only the dynasty but the whole political order, which was already under considerable pressure because of the ongoing wars and rebellions, would have fallen into chaos. We can assume, in any case, that Handan Sultan was ultimately responsible for this order. As illustrated in the second chapter, during this early period in Ahmed’s sultanate, Yavuz Ali Pasha was working closely with the queen mother and the co-regent, Mustafa Efendi, and no doubt they had discussed the best course of action to prevent Ahmed from harming himself so long as they could not stop him from spending so much time outside the palace.

A few weeks later, in late March 1604, when Ahmed and his brother Mustafa barely survived smallpox, as noted in the second chapter, ensuring the young sultan’s safety and well-being should have become all the more critical to dynastic continuity. Yet, as soon as Ahmed recovered, he resumed hunting as vigorously as ever. Handan Sultan now desperately needed a trustworthy, able and vigilant servant who could keep an eye on her son whenever he was out of her sight. As the sultan’s personal safety during his outings was among the responsibilities of the chief gardener, Derviş Agha was the perfect candidate for this duty. Accordingly, he began to accompany his teenaged master like a shadow, if not like an “outdoor regent.” The Venetian bailo observes that

_difìcilità simile che potesse apportar pregìudicio, come era lo andar di notte ad una montagna con grosso seguito dove non era alloggiamento né viveri di alcuna sorte, et dove non era tempo di far provisione, con altre circostanze che minacciavano qualche inconveniente.”_ The bailo further notes that the chief falconer in question was none other than the above-mentioned Halil Agha, the younger brother of Doğancı Mehmed Pasha, and that he quickly returned to favor, thanks to the intercession of his patrons, Yavuz Ali Pasha and Cıgalazade Sinan Pasha.
Ahmed and Derviş regularly made inspections together in the markets and streets of the capital, punished the wrongdoers whenever they found them, sailed together in the royal barge, and, above all, frequently left the capital to go hunting together. The queen mother’s above-mentioned insistence that her son always follow Derviş’s advice should also be considered in this context.

These joint ventures provided the perfect opportunity for Derviş to both solidify his privileged position with the sultan and observe his young master’s personal character, tastes and inclinations. Yet, as Ahmed spent more and more time on hunting, travel and public appearances, Derviş reportedly became bored with his duties, complaining about how his master’s outdoor activities keep him away from more important “court business” that required his personal attention. Coincidentally enough, a series of events that took place in the final months of 1605 and in early 1606 offered Derviş the chance to not only extricate himself from his boring duties, but also to acquire more power and official authority to the detriment of other ruling grandees.

IV.1.2. The Making of a Brutal Vizier: Derviş Pasha

In early November 1605, Handan Sultan passed away after a brief illness. Handan Sultan’s death, in a certain sense, freed Derviş from the guardian role she had assigned him. However, at the same time, it meant the removal of a protective shield from around Derviş, thus exposing him to more risks in intra-elite rivalries during the prevailing crisis.

26 For example, see ASVe, SDC, filza 60, fol. 224r (dated December 13, 1604); and filza 61, fol. 19r (dated March 14, 1605).
27 ASVe, SDC, filza 60, fol. 254r (dated January 8, 1605).
Moreover, control of the imperial harem and its network of clients now passed to El-Hac Mustafa Agha, who had been appointed chief harem eunuch just a few days before the valide’s death.

Mustafa Agha, whom Derviş must have known for years, was no ordinary eunuch. He had served as a harem eunuch under Murad III and Mehmed III but was exiled to Egypt in 1011 (1602-3) for unspecified reasons. However, he was invited back to the palace upon Ahmed I’s enthronement, most likely by Handan Sultan, and given the official status of royal companion (musâhib), in which capacity he had been intimate with Ahmed I within the confines of the palace, just as Derviş had been the sultan’s close companion in outdoor settings.28 Under these circumstances, Derviş should immediately have proffered his allegiance to the new chief harem eunuch, for not only was Mustafa Agha now the sole authority over the inner sanctum of Topkapı Palace, where the royal family resided; he could also easily form his own court faction in the absence of the late queen mother. As we shall see later, Mustafa Agha would do exactly this and use his unequalled position to gradually become one of the prime movers of court politics, just as Gazanfer Agha had done under Mehmed III.

For the moment, however, Derviş had the chance to manipulate Handan Sultan’s absence to his advantage. However, despite the fact that he had been in such high royal favor and that he had enjoyed regular access to Ahmed, he now had to be very cautious in his pursuit of power among his rivals and enemies at the faction-ridden court -- who were surely not few in number -- but above all in his personal relationship with the energetic,

28 See Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” p. 168; and TSMA, D. 2025, fol. 8b. As noted in the second chapter, Mustafa Agha was appointed chief eunuch of the imperial harem on November 5, 1605.
hot-tempered and intolerant fifteen-year-old sultan, who he could observe was moving quickly to establish his personal rule.

Indeed, Ahmed had been recently taking more independent action, sometimes in direct opposition to the will of his regents, especially his mother, as seen in the case of his execution of her client Sinanpaşaoğlu Mehmed Pasha in August 1605. The archival documentation surviving from this early period in Ahmed’s reign also indicates that the young sultan had remarkably increased his direct involvement in the governmental decision-making process. Judging from these documents, as of mid-1605, Ahmed was holding audiences with his government viziers on a regular basis and had clearly attained a more personal grasp on the business of rule.

For instance, over the eleven-month period between May 19, 1605, and April 12, 1606, Ahmed personally approved approximately fifty-five percent of all appointments, dismissals, and promotions made by the office of the grand vizier, according to one of the two surviving “registers of appointments” (ruûs defterleri) from his reign.29 Most of these were made in response to petitions by government viziers, district governors, local judges, court officials, holders of revenue grants, and soldiers. Especially after June 1605, the percentage of the requests that Ahmed approved increased significantly, even hitting

29 KK, Ruûs, D. 256. There are approximately 680 legible entries in this heavily damaged register; 380 of them bear the phrase bâ-hatt-ı hümâyûn (“with a royal decree”) over the first line, indicating the sultan’s personal approval. Most entries record individual appointments, but several entries record appointments for a group of individuals, such as palace gardeners, gatekeepers or cavalry soldiers. The other ruûs register from Ahmed’s reign is BOA, Bâb-ı Asafî, Ruûs Kalemi, D. 1481, from 1018 (1609-10). For a discussion of sixteenth-century ruûs registers, see Nejat Göyûnç, “XVI. Yüzyılda Ruûs ve Önemi,” İ.Ü. Tarih Dergisi 22 (1967), pp. 17-34. For ruûs registers from the early seventeenth century preserved at the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives in Istanbul, see Yusuf İhsan Genç, Haçi Osman Yıldırım and Nazım Yılmaz, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi Rehberi, 2nd ed. (İstanbul: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2000), pp. 119-123.
one hundred percent at one point. For instance, from July 19-25, 1605, he approved thirty of thirty-two appointment requests (94%); from July 26-27, nine out of nine (100%); from July 28-30, nine out of twelve (75%); from September 8-9, four out of five (80%); from October 14-25, six out of seven (86%); and from October 25-30; sixteen out of nineteen (84%). Clearly, at the time of his mother’s death, Ahmed was showing every sign of a firm personal style of rule.

In short, Handan Sultan’s death gave the young sultan an opportunity to pursue his ideal of becoming the active ruler of a prosperous and stable empire, since he had thus far struggled to assert himself against his two co-regents’ combined influence, as well as their network of clients, to say nothing of his faction-riven grandees. Ahmed had the energy of an ambitious teenaged ruler, with Süleyman I as his model. However, in order to fully realize such a scheme, he first had to resolve the crisis that gripped his empire and the suffering of his subjects from the prolonged wars and rebellions.

To tackle these problems, the young sultan had at his disposal Mustafa Efendi as his chief counselor and now sole regent, as well as the mufti of the time, whose ideas Ahmed, as a devout Sunni Muslim, respected; whenever he needed personal advice, he could approach them. Meanwhile, his incumbent grand vizier Lala Mehmed Pasha, one of the active members of the Sokollu “dynasty,” had been very successful in the Hungarian theater of war and was now concluding a much desired peace treaty with the

30 KK, Ruûs, D. 256, pp. 9-11, 15 and 18-19. There are also hundreds of individual petitions that were submitted to Ahmed during this period; he wrote a brief verdict in the upper left corner of the document, following traditional sultanic practice: “virdüm” (“I granted”), “mucibince ‘amel oluna” (“do it as required”) or “şer’ ile hıfz oluna” (“save it according to the law”) for affirmative decisions; olmaz (“no” or “not permissible”) for negative ones. See, inter alia, BOA, Ali Emiri, I. Ahmed, no.16, 39, 45, 46, 58, 59, 90, 342, 368 and 376/1-2; and A.RSK, Dosya: 8, no. 26, 27, 29 and 51 (all 1014 [1605-6]).
Habsburgs. The only other major problems still troubling the sultan and his government were the incessant Celâli rebellions in Anatolia and the unsuccessful war against the Safavids under Shah Abbas I. Under these circumstances, Ahmed not only needed wise advisors, able ruling viziers and tireless field commanders, but also his own agents who could handle the business of rule in a faction-ridden court. It is in this context that Derviş’s unusual rise to the grand vizierate as Ahmed’s minister-favorite should be considered.

For Derviş, Ahmed’s intentions should have been clear since he had been unusually close to him for the last two years and was no doubt ready to take a more active role. However, he soon received a reminder that his position as favorite was precarious at such a time of crisis. As noted in the second chapter, immediately after his mother’s death, Ahmed launched his campaign against the Celâlis in the region of Bursa over the objections of his advisors and ruling viziers. When he departed for war, Derviş was initially charged with safeguarding the capital and given authority equal to a deputy grand vizier’s. However, the sultan revoked this assignment and gave it to Mustafa Pasha, one of the viziers who was with him in Bursa, upon hearing that Derviş had revealed state secrets, apparently details of the ongoing negotiations in Bursa between the sultan and the leader of the Celâlis, by then Tavil Halil.31

If anything, such a sudden withdrawal of his vizierial authority should have reminded Derviş of the limits of his power as chief gardener/royal favorite. After all, his real power rested in his regular access to the sultan, as well as in protecting the royal ears

from harmful insinuations. His position as chief gardener and protégé of Handan Sultan had thus far enabled him to realize both ends, but now that the queen mother was gone and Ahmed was on campaign, he risked being undermined by his rivals who were traveling with the sultan. Derviş’s official duties required him to remain in the capital, particularly when the sultan was away on campaign. Thus, unlike Şemsi Ahmed Pasha, Doğancı Mehmed Pasha and Gazanfer Agha, who were chief favorites under more sedentary sultans, or whose positions enabled them to accompany their masters, Derviş began to suffer from Ahmed’s determination to campaign in person.

Handan Sultan’s death made Derviş’s position precarious, as she could have acted as a shield for him or helped him remain in her son’s favor. Instead, Derviş had no option but to wait for an opportune time to approach Ahmed for a new position that could give him more solid authority while at the same time enabling him to remain in the company of the sultan in case he again left the capital for war. That time came sooner than he might have hoped.

In early January 1606, a report arrived in the capital on the defeat of Cigalazade Sinan Pasha by Shah Abbas near Lake Urmie the previous November. The report, which we now know to have been flawed,\(^{32}\) claimed that the experienced field marshal had fled the battlefield, as a result of which the Safavids were able to lay siege to Shirvan and Gence. This meant that Shah Abbas was close to reclaiming all the territory lost to the

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\(^{32}\) As Griswold, *The Great Anatolian Rebellion*, pp. 106-107, notes, there was a misunderstanding among the Ottoman soldiers as to Sinan Pasha’s whereabouts in the camp as he was preparing a counter-attack against the Safavids. Once the rumor started to circulate that their commander had fled, the Ottoman troops began a chaotic retreat which Sinan Pasha had no choice but to follow while allowing Shah Abbas to seize his camp. Compare Hasan Beyzade, III, p. 835.
Ottomans during the war of 1578-90. When Sinan Pasha arrived in Van, the base of Ottoman military operations in eastern Anatolia, he found his friend and political ally, Canbuladoğlu Hüseyin Pasha, the governor-general of Aleppo and now the most powerful commander in northern Syria, waiting for him with his segban troops. Seeing his ally’s late arrival for the campaign, the defeated Sinan Pasha exploded in wrath and ordered Canbuladoğlu’s execution along with several of his commanders.33

Sinan Pasha’s rash action proved a grave mistake as it sparked a major rebellion in Syria, where the intricate balance of power among the Ottoman district governors and local tribal chieftains was central to the functioning of the region’s economy, as well as to Ottoman control of the region, as seen in the first chapter. Upon the return of Canbuladoğlu’s segban soldiers to their home base in Aleppo, Ali Pasha, Hüseyin Pasha’s nephew and unofficial deputy, rose in revolt to protest his uncle’s execution. In a short time, Canbuladoğlu’s rebellion turned into a major challenge to the sultan and his government. He declared an independent kingdom in the region with a coalition of other prominent regional political leaders, such as the Druze emir Fakhr al-Din ibn Ma’an, as noted in the first chapter.34

On the other hand, for Derviş, the defeat of Cıgalazade meant an opportunity to take action against him and perhaps acquire his office. After all, the grand admiral had been one of his most powerful rivals, if not his chief enemy, once associated with the

33 Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, p. 647. See Griswold, The Great Anatolian Rebellion, pp. 99-109, for the details of Shah Abbas’ victories over Sinan Pasha and its aftermath. For Canbuladoğlu Hüseyin Pasha, see Holt, Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, pp. 103-105.

34 See Holt, Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, pp.112-117; and Hathaway, The Arab Lands under Ottoman Rule, pp. 70-72.
Safiye-Gazanfer faction.\(^{35}\) Since the day Derviş became chief gardener and began to rise in Ahmed I’s esteem, he had been at odds with Sinan Pasha. Their rivalry manifested itself most visibly in political matters, such as the issue of commercial privileges granted to European trading nations. Traditionally, these privileges, popularly known as capitulations, had to be confirmed by every new sultan upon his accession to the throne. Thus, soon after Ahmed’s enthronement, the representatives of France, England and Venice requested that their privileges be renewed as soon as possible. Meanwhile, the Venetians, via their resident bailo, asked for additional protective commercial measures. Sinan Pasha favored the Venetian cause, if not because of his Italian roots then because he benefited from the rich Ottoman-Venetian commerce in the Mediterranean. Derviş, on the other hand, was notoriously anti-Venetian, instead favoring the English, as did the royal tutor, Mustafa Efendi. In the end, despite Derviş’s counter-actions, the Venetians had their capitulations renewed in November 1604, while receiving an imperial decree (\(nîşân-ı hümâyûn\)) granting the extra protective measures.\(^{36}\)

\(^{35}\) According to the Venetian bailo Contarini, during the first months of Ahmed’s reign, the government was divided between the factions of Grand Vizier Yavuz Ali Pasha and Grand Admiral Cıgalazade Sinan Pasha. Hence, in the spring of 1604, when Ahmed’s regents, Handan Sultan and Mustafa Efendi, ordered Ali Pasha to take command of the imperial army in Hungary, the grand vizier tried to have Cıgalazade assigned to a similar command before his own departure on campaign, lest Cıgalazade acquire the grand vizierate in his absence. As seen in the first chapter, Yemişçi Hasan Pasha faced the same threat after he quelled the sipahi rebellion in 1603. Derviş most probably sided with Ali Pasha in his effort against Cıgalazade. See ASVe, SDC, filza 58, fol. 400v (dated February 20, 1604). See also below.

While Derviş was angling for Sinan Pasha’s lucrative office, Ahmed was indecisive in the face of the worsening political-military situation on the eastern front and in northern Syria. Although the young sultan was enraged at his field marshal’s failures against Shah Abbas, which meant nothing but humiliation before his chief Muslim rival, he was not sure whether it would be the right decision to dismiss Sinan Pasha, who was, after all, a very powerful vizier, a highly respected Ottoman grandee and a seasoned field commander whom he had even considered making grand vizier at the time of his enthronement. As discussed before, since Ahmed did not have a princely household prior to his succession, he and his regents during this early period had to rely on such experienced viziers, especially when it came to filling high offices when the empire was at war.

At the same time, Abbas I’s victory at Lake Urmiye elicited a desire for revenge in Ahmed and refueled his eagerness to go to war. His recent Bursa campaign had been an annoying fiasco and damaged his attempts to cultivate the image of a warrior sultan similar to that of his illustrious ancestors, notably Selim I and Süleyman I, who had been ever-victorious against their enemies, including the Safavids. Ahmed now had an

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37 Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” pp. 180-181. Born in Messina around 1545, Sinan Pasha came from an aristocratic Genoese family, the Cicala, which had been in the service of various Italian states. He was reportedly captured by the Ottomans together with his father, a corsair in the service of Spain, at the battle of Djerba, off the coast of Tunisia, in 1560. He was then sold and trained in the palace school. After his graduation, he began his ascend in the Ottoman administration and became a vizier under Murad III. He served as grand admiral between 1591 and 1595. In 1596, in the aftermath of the battle of Mezőkerezstes, he managed to replace the aforementioned Damad Ibrahim Pasha as grand vizier by exaggerating his role in the decisive assault on the Habsburgs, as related in the first chapter. However, he had served for only forty days when Ibrahim Pasha was reinstated upon Safiye Sultan’s intervention. Sinan Pasha was appointed governor-general of Damascus but returned to Istanbul in 1599 and reassumed the post of grand admiral, thanks to his renewed allegiance to the Safiye-Gazanfer faction. He successfully carried out his duties until he was appointed field marshal for the eastern front. See Mehmed bin Mehmed, Tarih, pp. 30-31; and EI², s.v. “Čighāla-zāde Yūsuf Sinān Pasha,” by Vernon J. Parry.
opportunity to repair his recently damaged image and become a real gâzi sultan at last. He began to advertise the idea of campaigning in person by referring to an old Near Eastern/Ottoman political maxim, “Şâha şâh gerek” (“Kings must face kings [in battle]”). However, he needed help to decide on all these important political matters before he could take action. Hence, as he had done since the beginning of his sultanate, he asked his tutor’s advice on the best course of action vis-à-vis all these troubling military problems, as well as his renewed intention to go to war.

Seeing that the energetic sultan was again aspiring to take the field, which would mean great risks to his questionable health and thus to political stability, Mustafa Efendi told Ahmed that a grand vizier of Lala Mehmed Pasha’s experience, caliber and prestige would suffice to face the Safavid ruler and reclaim the lost territories, while at the same time taking revenge on the shah on his behalf. Thus, he advised the sultan to recall his successful grand vizier from the Hungarian theater and ask him to take the command of the eastern front from Sinan Pasha. If Mehmed Pasha refused to return, then he should agree to serve as the second highest-ranking government vizier, commanding the imperial army in Hungary, and send back the seal of his office so that the sultan could give it to the vizier who would assume the eastern command.

Ahmed half-heartedly acquiesced to his regent’s ideas and ordered an imperial decree along these lines to be rushed to Lala Mehmed Pasha, who was wintering in Belgrade after conquering Vác, Pest and Esztergom, crowning Stephan Bosckay of Transylvania king of the principalities of Transylvania and Hungary on Ahmed’s behalf, and negotiating a peace settlement with the Habsburgs to end the Long War. Yet, the
campaign-weary grand vizier had been impatiently waiting to return to the capital. That is why, according to Hasan Beyzade, as soon as he received the sultan’s letter, he appointed Kuyucu Murad Pasha his deputy and “flew to the capital.”

All these developments should have meant one thing to Derviş: he had to act quickly. For one thing, Sinan Pasha had not been removed from office or punished by the sultan. More importantly, Lala Mehmed Pasha now posed a serious threat to his standing. Derviş could anticipate that the grand vizier would immediately return to Istanbul, and that once he had resumed his seat in the imperial council, he would use his political capital to prevent a new campaign and instead reconfigure the power balances at court to his advantage. He had attempted the same thing a year earlier, when Ahmed recalled him from Belgrade after his unsuccessful siege of Esztergom to discuss strategy for a new Hungarian campaign. At that time, Lala Mehmed Pasha had claimed that his presence in the imperial council would facilitate coordination of the campaigns on three fronts, but he could not convince Ahmed, who ordered him to return to Hungary and take Esztergom as soon as possible. Now, Lala Mehmed Pasha was returning to the capital with his mission accomplished and with much greater political capital.

Under these circumstances, it is not hard to imagine that Derviş felt threatened by Mehmed Pasha’s increasingly privileged status in the eyes of the sultan and his tutor. The Venetian bailo Bon would later testify that the news of Mehmed Pasha’s conquests in Hungary had indeed much impressed the young sultan. On the other hand, Mehmed

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38 Hasan Beyzade, III, pp. 835-836 and 872-873; and Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, p. 647.
39 Safi, Zübde, II, p. 9; Abdülkadir Efendi, I, p. 423; and Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, pp. 631-632.
40 ASVe, SDC, filza 63, fol. 53r. (dated April 13, 1606).
Pasha must have perceived Derviş as a potential threat to his standing, since he had enough political experience to realize that the royal favorites had recently become important power-brokers at court and that they were empowered by their masters to act against ruling viziers like him. He had witnessed how Cıgalazade Sinan Pasha had been appointed grand vizier and deposed in only forty days in the wake of the battle of Mezőkerezstes as a result of the intervention of Gazanfer Agha and Safiye Sultan.41

In any event, Derviş had the upper hand, that is, he had something neither Lala Mehmed Pasha nor Cıgalazade Sinan Pasha had: the ear of the sultan. Thus, he lost no time in persuading his young master to appoint him grand admiral instead of Sinan Pasha and even conferred upon himself the rank of vizier at the same time. Now, Derviş was a true pasha and he was equipped to defend himself against any rival at court.

For his part, Ahmed must have recognized a certain merit or potential in Derviş. In contemporary Ottoman depictions, Derviş appears as an arrogant and power-hungry man with a harsh personality who liked to act alone. As his star rose, he reportedly became increasingly oppressive and intolerant, ruining several people’s careers and even their lives.42 However, as the English ambassador Lello testifies, he was equally a hard-working man, meticulous in his planning and careful in dealing with political problems.43 In a certain sense, Derviş acted as the young sultan’s ruthless alter-ego. Hence, Derviş Agha’s appointment as grand admiral in January 1606 marks not only the beginning of

41 See above, footnote no. 37.
42 For a typical short contemporary Ottoman biography of Derviş Pasha, see Mehmed bin Mehmed, Tarih, p. 37.
his rise to the status of minister-favorite but also Ahmed’s ultimate attempt to establish his personal rule free of his regents’ guidance.

IV.I.3. A Minister-Favorite at Work: The Alienating Power of Derviş Pasha

A few cases suffice to illustrate how Derviş operated at the faction-ridden court and why he faced execution in the end. First of all, thanks to his ready access to the sultan and the sultan’s trust in him, he was able to undermine many high-ranking viziers and other grandees whom he deemed threats to his survival. His first act as grand admiral was to send his rivals to war or get them appointed to distant provinces. Not surprisingly, the returning grand vizier and his loyal men were the first victims on Derviş’s list.

Once Lala Mehmed Pasha had arrived in Istanbul from Belgrade in mid-March 1606, receiving a hero’s welcome, he delayed departing for the eastern front, just as Derviş Pasha had anticipated. Like most successful grand viziers before him, Mehmed Pasha now faced what I earlier called “the dilemma of the Ottoman grand vizier.” If he immediately left the capital for war, as commanded by the young sultan, then his powerful rivals, such as Derviş Pasha, could easily undermine him in his absence. If, on the other hand, he stayed in the capital, even if he managed to reconfigure the power balances within the imperial council to his advantage, he would still face the same type of rivalry from the alternative foci of power entrenched in the court. For example, his vizierial telhises to the sultan could easily be intercepted by Derviş or by the favorite’s agents.

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44 See Abdülkadir Efendi, I, p. 455; and ASVe, SDC, filza 63, fol. 33r (dated March 29, 1606). Mehmed Pasha arrived in Istanbul on March 16.
At the same time, staying in Istanbul would mean getting involved in the vicious power struggles among the court factions, similar to what Özdemiroğlu Osman Pasha had experienced in 1584. Mehmed Pasha had never truly taken part in these struggles because he had spent the previous ten years fighting the Habsburgs in Hungary. Yet, unlike Osman Pasha, he did not enjoy the patronage of a royal favorite like Doğancı Mehmed Pasha, on whose extraordinary powers and intimate relationship with the sultan he could rely during his absence. The only rational move Lala Mehmed Pasha could thus make in his precarious situation was to gain the support of the members of the existing imperial council, of which Derviş was not a full member, as well as that of the chief mufti, Sunullah Efendi, whose alternative network of clients, especially among the imperial cavalry soldiers, was equally crucial for a vizier’s survival, as seen before.

Hence, the day after his arrival, Mehmed Pasha convened an advisory council (meşveret meclisi) to discuss the situation on all three battlefronts while at the same time seeking approval for his stay in the capital. He opened the session by raising the question of whether it was more important for him to take personal command of the eastern front or to stay in the capital and coordinate the wars. The members of the council, which was composed of ruling viziers, treasurers, chief judges and the mufti, unanimously agreed

45 Lala Mehmed Pasha had assisted at the capture of Eger (1596); commanded the right wing of the army (the Rumeli troops) at the battle of Mezőkeresztes (1596); served in the army of the grand vizier İbrahim Pasha against Érsekújvár (1599); fought at Nagy-kánizsa (1600); participated in the thirty-four-day siege and capture of Székesfehérvár (1602); and successfully fought against the army of Archduke Matthias near Buda (1603). He also organized the defenses of Buda and the bridges at Eszék in 1603 but received a serious blow at the battle of Csepel Szigeth (Kovun Adasi) the same year. For further details on Mehmed Pasha’s life and career, see EI², s.v. “Mehmed Pasha, Lala,” by Alexander H. de Groot; DİA, s.v. “Lala Mehmed Paşa,” by Mahmut Ak; and İA, s.v. “Mehmed Paşa, Lala,” by Şehabettiin Tekindağ.
that Mehmed Pasha’s presence was required at the court in light of the gravity of the challenges.

The grand vizier then raised the issue of Sinan Pasha’s costly defeats. According to the members of the council, these problems resulted both from Sinan Pasha’s failure as field marshal and from his alienation of the Kurdish tribal leaders in the region by his execution of Canbuladoğlu Hüseyin Pasha, whose mercenary soldiers had been central to any military operation in the East. Thus, the council favored replacing Cıgalazade with Nasuh Pasha, then serving in Anatolia, as the commander-in-chief of the armies fighting the Celâlis in Anatolia and the Safavids in the East. Nasuh Pasha not only had a large *segban* army; he was also the son-in-law of Mîr Şeref Bey, the chief of the most prominent Kurdish tribe in eastern Anatolia.\(^{46}\) Thus, he would be more effective than any other ruling vizier in regaining the support of the Kurdish leaders in the region, and accordingly suppressing the two increasingly dangerous rebellions, namely, that of Canbuladoğlu Ali Pasha in Syria and that of the aforementioned Celâli leader Tavil Halil, who was reported to have been in communication with Abbas I.

Turning to the western front and the Long War, the council decided that Lala Mehmed Pasha’s current deputy in Hungary, Kuyucu Murad Pasha, should remain in place and continue the peace negotiations. The grand vizier would coordinate all these government efforts from Istanbul, just as he had planned. Once a *telhîs* along these lines was prepared, Lala Mehmed Pasha submitted it to Ahmed and got his approval.\(^{47}\)

\(^{46}\) According to Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” p. 387, n. 179, Nasuh Pasha was controlling an army of 7,000 men at around this time.

\(^{47}\) Hasan Beyzade, III, p. 836; and ASVe, SDC, filza 63, fols. 13r-v (dated March 14, 1606).
Before Lala Mehmed could relax, however, Derviş communicated privately with the sultan, casting aspersions on the grand vizier’s telhîs and convincing Ahmed that he was avoiding the war. As a result, the sultan revoked his approval of Mehmed Pasha’s strategy and ordered him to leave immediately for the eastern front, threatening him with dismissal if he failed to obey. He refused to receive Mehmed Pasha to discuss his change of heart, and Mehmed Pasha was obliged to prepare for campaign. A few days later, however, he petitioned the sultan to reassign him to the Hungarian theater so that he could wrap up his earlier efforts to conclude the Long War. The sultan refused, this time threatening him with execution.48

Meanwhile, Derviş Pasha lost no time reconfiguring important administrative positions to his advantage while continuing to undermine the grand vizier. For instance, Mehmed Pasha had wanted to reward the agha of the Janissaries, Tırnakçı-kardeşî Hüseyin Agha, with the governor-generalship of Rumeli for his services during the reconquest of Esztergom, but Derviş got him appointed to Damascus and made his own client, Maryol Hüseyn, the new agha of the Janissaries. Similarly, when Nasuh Pasha arrived in the capital and, on the recommendation of Mehmed Pasha’s telhîs, was to receive the rank of third vizier in the imperial council, Derviş managed to send him to Baghdad as governor-general. The grand admiral had a role in several other appointments

48 Ibid., pp. 838-840; Tarih-i Naʿımâ, I, p. 312; and Peçevi/TSMK, fol. 302. For Lala Mehmed Pasha’s telhîs communications with Ahmed and the problems he experienced in seeing him in person during his grand vizierate, see Orhonlu, Osmanlı Tarihine Ait Belgeler, pp. 94-118.
in the spring of 1606. Typically, he either petitioned the sultan to favor his own clients or saw him in private to discuss the distribution of offices.⁵⁹

As for Lala Mehmed Pasha, he never got a chance to leave the capital. Derviş reportedly managed to poison him, which might well have been the case, considering the fact that it did not take long for Derviş to assume the grand vizierate. Immediately after the funeral of Lala Mehmed Pasha, on May 24, 1606, Ahmed sent the seal of the office to his favorite.⁵⁰ Now Derviş could pursue his rivals even more recklessly, while rewarding his allies more easily. He bombarded the sultan with a series of telhis on appointments, and Ahmed accepted them all. This way, for instance, Derviş got one of his clients, Frenk Cafer Pasha, the governor-general of Cyprus, appointed grand admiral in his place.

In the meantime, Derviş Pasha made and unmade several important high-ranking ulema, once again according to whom he deemed a potential threat or a useful ally. He forged a critical alliance with the powerful Hocazades, the ulema “dynasty” of Hoca Sadeddin Efendi (d. 1599), the imperial tutor under Murad III and Mehmed III.⁵¹ In early June 1606, Derviş petitioned Ahmed to replace the two chief military-judges of the imperial council (sing., kadı’asker), Yahya Efendi and Kemal Efendi, with two Hocazade brothers, Esad Efendi and Abdülaziz Efendi, the second and third eldest sons of Sadeddin Efendi. In the same way, the mufti, Sunullah Efendi, who, as seen earlier, was one of the

⁴⁹ See, for instance, Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, p. 647-648; Abdülkadir Efendi, I, p. 448; and BOA, Ali Emiri, I. Ahmed, no. 46, 58, 59.
⁵⁰ Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, p. 649.
⁵¹ Hoca Sadeddin Efendi (b. 1536/7) fathered at least five sons, all of whom received their teaching licenses (mülazemet) from their father in a relatively short time, probably without following the usual path of madrasa education. He then created a very powerful web of alliances by marrying his sons to women from other prominent ulema families of the sixteenth century. For further details, see Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” pp. 117-118; and idem, “The Ottoman Mevali.”
most powerful political actors of the early seventeenth century, was dismissed on July 27, 1606, and replaced with Ebülmeysmin Mustafa Efendi, the former mufti at the time of Ahmed’s enthronement. Not surprisingly, Ebülmeysmin Efendi was also connected to the Hocazades. He was a former protégé of Sadeddin Efendi, under whose protection he had bypassed the normal career track through multiple positions in the provincial judiciary. The sons of Sadeddin Efendi came to dominate the top ranks of the ulema hierarchy while becoming important actors in factional politics from the middle of Ahmed’s reign onwards and Derviş Pasha was instrumental in their rise to prominence.

It is also important to note that the reason for the dismissal of Sunullah Efendi on Derviş’s request was that the powerful mufti had argued against the sultan during a consultative meeting that Derviş had organized a few days after his elevation to the grand vizierate to discuss Safavid campaign, which had been halted by the “unexpected” death of Lala Mehmed Pasha. Ahmed expressed the opinion that it would be best to postpone the campaign preparations for a year, because it was too late in the campaigning season and, more importantly, the imperial treasury lacked the funds to pay for an immediate campaign. The members of the council were surprised since they were expecting the sultan to send his new grand vizier to war. Sunullah Efendi, as the chief non-governmental opinion leader, suggested that the army should at least leave the capital and winter in Aleppo, where it could complete its logistical preparations and then move

52 Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, p. 651.
against the Safavids, while at the same time eliminating as many Celâli rebels as possible en route.

This intervention triggered a heated debate between the sultan and the mufti over the benefits of such military planning and the serious financial problems. On the latter issue, Sunullah Efendi dared to ask the young sultan why he did not draw on his private treasury, enriched by the annual tribute of Egypt, as his great-grandfather Süleyman I had done in similar situations. (Sunullah obviously knew that the young sultan was trying to imitate his illustrious ancestor in every possible way.) Infuriated, Ahmed retorted, “You cannot comprehend my words! That time and this time do not correspond to each other, nor are the conditions of that era congruent with those of today!” The meeting adjourned after this outburst.54

In the following days, though, Ahmed decided to send a large force to Anatolia under the command of the aforementioned former chief gardener, Ferhad Pasha, who was at the time unemployed after his dismissal from the governor-generalship of Damascus. But the sultan did not change his earlier decision to postpone the eastern campaign for a year.55 Derviş, meanwhile, interpreted Sunullah Efendi’s insistence on resuming the campaign as a sign that the mufti was trying to have him sent off to war. Thus, he convinced the sultan to remove the outspoken mufti at once so that he could not broach the subject to the sultan again.

54 Mehmed bin Mehmed, p. 652; and Hasan Beyzade, III, p. 851: “Sen benüm kelâmımı fehm idemiyorsun! Ol zamân ile bu zamân birbirine muvâfık ve ol asrun ahvâli bu hâle mutâbîk değildir!”

55 Abdülkadir Efendi, I, p. 461.
The new mufti, Ebülmeyamin Efendi, was known to be a rival of the royal tutor, Mustafa Efendi. Thus, Derviş seems to have risked alienating the sultan’s surviving regent, who was not only a very powerful courtier himself but, like Derviş, he had the ear and trust of the sultan. According to Hasan Beyzade, the only viable alternative to Ebülmeyamin Efendi was Hocazade Mehmed Efendi, the eldest son of Sadeddin Efendi, but Derviş Pasha intentionally avoided appointing him to avoid the possibility that he and his two brothers, newly-appointed chief military judges on the imperial council, would unite to undermine Derviş’s influence with the sultan. Clearly, Derviş was calculating the risks that every possible alternative focus of power at the imperial center could pose to his authority.

In a short time, Derviş had completed his reconfiguration of the power balances among the Ottoman ruling elite, and could focus on solving the problems troubling Ahmed and his empire. For instance, he quickly eliminated the troublemakers in the capital and punished many others for wrongdoing, such as counterfeiters. He also continued the peace negotiations with the Habsburgs via Kuyucu Murad Pasha, and the text of the Treaty of Zsitvatorok was finalized during his tenure of office. In the meantime, he worked particularly hard to coordinate the attacks on the Celâlis, whom he identified as the most urgent problem to be handled. He sent a large army into Anatolia

56 Ibid., pp. 851-852: “Hâcezâde’lerden Mevlânâ Es’ad ve Mevlâna Azîz kadh’askerler iken büyük birâderleri Mevlânâ Mehmed Efendi’yê fêvâyê tevêçîh itdürürsem, üç nefer karîndaş itîfâk idîp kemâl-i vifâk île beni söylemez olurlar.”

57 See Bayerle, “The Compromise at Zsitvatorok.”
under the command of his old friend Ferhad Pasha, on whom the sultan bestowed the rank of vizier, required for field marshals.⁵⁸

In the meantime, Sunullah Efendi was reinstated as mufti upon the death of Ebül żywam Efendi. Ahmed took this decision because he superstitiously believed that the dismissed Sunullah had wished ill for Ebül żywam Efendi, who died of illness less than three months after taking office. According to Hasan Beyzade, Ahmed was so terrified of such bad omens that he decided to make Sunullah Efendi mufti again so that if he had wished similarly bad things for him, they would go away.⁵⁹ Ironically, Sunullah Efendi’s return to office would prove critical in the fall of Derviş, now his arch-enemy, who was at the zenith of his power.

For the powerful minister-favorite, raising money to fund these costly campaigns became his most challenging task. It was impossible to squeeze the various regions of the empire to produce additional revenue. The Anatolian economy had been suffering from the Celâli devastation for many years, while the western provinces were under economic duress due to the Long War, as noted in the first chapter. Moreover, as Griswold aptly notes, “the Syrian revolt of Canbuladoğlu Ali denied millions in gold to the central treasury.”⁶⁰ Meanwhile, the young sultan was using his personal treasury to make huge

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⁵⁸ See Orhonlu, Osmanlı Tarihine Âid Belgeler, pp. 118-126, for Derviş Pasha’s telhîses to Ahmed on various policy matters and on domestic and international affairs, and the actions he took to handle them.

⁵⁹ Hasan Beyzade, III, p. 853.

investments in the Muslim pilgrimage sites of Mecca and Medina so as to project an image of piety similar to that of his great-grandfather.\textsuperscript{61}

Hence, Derviş Pasha decided to use one of the very last resources at his disposal: he would tax the wealthy residents of the capital. This decision ultimately prepared his end, just as the monetary crisis of the mid-1580s had doomed Doğancı Mehmed Pasha. When Derviş imposed a 1,000-akçe annual balcony tax on every house in Istanbul, he alienated a large sector of the capital’s rich population, including several prominent ulema and vizierial households.\textsuperscript{62} In a short time, the sultan started to hear more and more complaints about his favorite-minister’s unceasing tax inspections, confiscations, excessive demands, involvement in bribery, and even execution of those merchants who failed to pay him. In addition, the sultan was informed about the recent failures of Ferhad Pasha, whom seemed not to be the superb commander Derviş had described.\textsuperscript{63} Derviş was apparently so preoccupied with procuring money for wars in unconventional ways that he failed to keep such problems from reaching his master’s ears. At one point, Ahmed summoned his tutor, Mustafa Efendi, and the latter’s political ally, the mufti Sunullah Efendi, to discuss these accumulating complaints about his favorite-minister and the unsuccessful campaigns against the Celâlis. For Sunullah, this was the moment to take his revenge on Derviş. Both advisors recommended that the sultan “get rid of” his grand vizier and appoint Kuyucu Murad Pasha, for he was both a very experienced vizier

\textsuperscript{61} See, for instance, the registers, TSMA, D. 1170, D. 1171 and D. 1191, which record Ahmed’s donations and traditional annual sultanic gifts (surre) to these cities during this period.

\textsuperscript{62} Tārīh-i Na‘ımā, I, p. 319.

\textsuperscript{63} For Ferhad Pasha’s Celâli campaign, see Griswold, The Great Anatolian Rebellion, pp. 162-168. Ferhad Pasha was executed by Ahmed after he failed in his command position.
and a seasoned, tireless commander. However, so as not to rouse suspicion among Derviş and his dependants, which could easily result in a violent rebellion like the Governor-General Incident of 1589, both men advised the sultan to wait a few days before taking action. Apparently, Sunullah Efendi also gave a fetvâ for Derviş’s execution on the grounds that he had oppressed many people and ruined many innocent lives.

As recommended, a few days later, Ahmed called Derviş to a private audience and then ordered his favorite-minister to be decapitated before him. Afterwards, reportedly upon Ahmed’s orders, Derviş’s body and severed head were taken out of the palace and mutilated in the streets of Istanbul, just as Doğancı Mehmed Pasha’s had been in 1589. However, unlike Doğancı Mehmed Pasha, who was buried in his own mausoleum once the turbulent 1589 rebellion was over, Derviş was buried in one of the public cemeteries outside proper Istanbul, most probably without a marker stone. The whereabouts of his grave remains unknown.

In sum, like all powerful royal/minister favorites, Derviş was a very controversial figure in his day. Most people hated him, first and foremost because of his unchecked power and his alienating character and actions. Several unfounded accusations or rumors had circulated in the capital during his grand vizierate, designed to convince the sultan to get rid of his favorite: for example, that Derviş was in fact a crypto-Christian, or that he had built a subterranean tunnel from his mansion to Topkapı Palace so that he could one day kill the sultan and princes and claim the Ottoman throne. On the other hand, his

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64 Hasan Beyzade, III, pp. 853-854; Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, p. 652; Peçevi/TSMK, fols. 303a-304b; and Salignac/Correspondence, pp. 108-110.
clients flattered him to win his favor. For instance, one of his *ulema* clients likened him to the shadow of God, an official title used only by the sultans.  

As complaints about Derviṣ Pasha’s wrongdoings piled up and reached the ears of the sultan, the favorite’s days were numbered. While Sunullah Efendi and Mustafa Efendi together advertised the death sentence for Derviṣ, it was the hot-tempered sultan who had to make the ultimate decision. As seen in several earlier incidents, Ahmed had his own principle of no tolerance for such high degrees of mismanagement by his ruling grandees. Hence, he did not hesitate to make an example of his first favorite-minister, though he reportedly regretted his decision two days later.

Ahmed’s execution of Derviṣ Pasha naturally caused much joy and relief among the alienated ruling grandees and the oppressed people of Istanbul, while at the same time garnering respect for the young sultan for being such a strong-willed ruler. In contrast to his father, Mehmed III, whose sultanate was remembered in negative terms because of the tumultuous events that had resulted from Gazanfer Agha’s and Safiye Sultan’s overwhelming control over the sultan, Ahmed was now credited with removing his minister-favorite from the arena of politics before Derviṣ’s unchecked powers could trigger a catastrophe on the order of the military rebellions that had broken out repeatedly under Mehmed III.

Like his father and grandfather, Ahmed had learned a lesson about the possible repercussions of giving near-absolute power to one favorite. This is probably why he

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Salignac/Correspondence, p. 110; and Griswold, *The Great Anatolian Rebellion*, p. 161;

66 *Tāriḥ-i Naʿīmā*, I, p. 316.
never created another favorite as powerful as Derviş, who was in effect a new type of favorite born out of the special circumstances of Ahmed’s early sultanate as examined in detail above. Nonetheless, given that the early seventeenth-century Ottoman sultan was only one contender for power among all the members of his factionalized court, Ahmed had no option but to continue relying on his intimate servants so as to successfully impose his sovereign will on the business of rule. Moreover, his youth and personal aspirations forced him to surround himself with other types of powerful favorites, as we shall see shortly. Still, his experience with Derviş appears to have helped him redesign his strategy of ruling by favorite ministers, particularly in the sense that he would now keep his government viziers under control and not let them alienate the entire population of the imperial capital, regardless of how important they were to his authority.

After Derviş Pasha, Ahmed appointed Kuyucu Murad Pasha, as recommended by his chief advisors. It is interesting to observe that Ahmed needed to openly declare to Murad Pasha, who was at the time in Hungary, that he had chosen him solely upon his own discretion, which suggests that he was trying to avoid giving the impression that he was still under the influence of his advisors and not in charge. In any event, Murad Pasha proved to be the right choice. He remained in office for five years, until his death, and passed almost all of his tenure on the battlefield, tirelessly fighting against the Celâlis and the Safavids despite his advancing age. As noted in the previous chapter, he eliminated the Celâli threat in Anatolia and relieved the young sultan and his subjects from an endemic source of conflict that had devastated the core lands of the Ottoman

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67 Abdülkadir Efendi, I, p. 461.
Empire for close to a decade. In the meantime, he quelled the troubling Canbuladoğlu rebellion in Syria and gave Ahmed the chance to settle scores with his archenemy Shah Abbas. In the face of Kuyucu Murad Pasha’s military success, Shah Abbas agreed to sign a peace treaty so as to keep the territory he had won during the exhausting war before the Ottomans, now free of their internal problems and the Long War, could reclaim them.

It was during Murad Pasha’s grand vizierate that Ahmed began to realize his aforementioned larger scheme of plans, among which the recovery and stabilization of his empire and the solidification of his image as a powerful, just and pious ruler occupied center stage. Until his untimely death in 1617, Ahmed worked hard to achieve these goals, and he created several new agents of power to help him do so. The next section will briefly examine the main dynamics of court politics during this period and then focus on Ahmed’s prime royal favorite, El-Hac Mustafa Agha, the aforementioned chief eunuch of the imperial harem, who left as deep an impression as Ahmed did during the remaining decade of the latter’s reign.

III.2. A New Era, 1607-1617: Ahmed I’s Consolidation of His Imperial Household and His New Sultanic Image

If we had to pick a date to signify the beginning of a new phase in Ahmed’s sultanate, it could well be March 30, 1607, seven weeks before Kuyucu Murad Pasha arrived in the capital from Hungary. On this date, a large number of Ahmed’s personal servants began graduating from the inner court services to salaried positions in the outer service of the state administration, a process known as the büyük çıkma (literally “large
setting out”). As is well-known, after the restructuring of the patterns of promotions for these personal servants of the sultans under Süleyman I, these large çıkmas occurred at regular intervals, but the one at the beginning of each new sultan’s reign was the most critical, as it was carried out in order to open up places for the incoming hundreds of members from the provincial princely household and to fill the most important court and government positions with the new sultan’s own loyal servants as part of the consolidation of the larger imperial household, as noted above. This way, the servants of the former sultan also started their career advancement towards higher-ranking positions in imperial service.

Since Sultan Ahmed came to the throne from within Topkapı Palace, without a princely household, such a large graduation was simply not an option at the time. In the following weeks and months, the only major change in the inner court was the banishment of Şafiye Sultan and her household from the palace, and the reconfiguration of power and patronage relations within the remaining cadres -- a task carried out by the new queen mother, Handan Sultan; the royal tutor, Mustafa Efendi; and Grand Vizier Ali Pasha, as explained in the second chapter.

During the first year of Ahmed’s reign, there was a small graduation that resulted in the appointment of some inner court servants from the reign of Mehmed III to higher

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68 TSMA, D. 34, fol. 237b (entry dated 1 Z 1015); and Safi, Zübde, II, p. 51-52. According to Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, p. 656, Kuyucu Murad Pasha arrived in Istanbul in mid-February 1606. On the other hand, the Venetian bailo records Murad Pasha’s entry into the capital on May 20, 1606: ASVe, SDC, filza 64, fol. 127r (dated May 30, 1606). Katip Çelebi, Fezleke, p. 528, similarly gives mid-May for Murad Pasha’s arrival but without any specific day.

69 See Kunt, Sultan’s Servants; idem, “A Prince Goes Forth;” and Murphey, Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty, pp. 117-174.
positions in the administration so as to compensate for the absence of ruling grandees due to the ongoing wars and rebellions. By the same token, Ahmed and his regents quickly promoted some servitors associated with Mehmed III and married them to available royal women from the preceding sultans’ families in order to solidify their relationship with them as they were now serving the new young sultan. For instance, Nakkaş Hasan Pasha, the master of the wardrobe under Mehmed III and a renowned miniature painter, became agha of the Janissaries in April 1604, the governor-general of Rumeli in December 1604 and a government vizier in March 1605. In-between the two latter dates he was married to an unidentified daughter of Murad III. After successfully fighting the Celâlis following Ahmed’s failed Bursa campaign in 1605, he came back to court and began serving as deputy grand vizier, waiting for Kuyucu Murad Pasha’s arrival together with Ahmed, who considered Nakkaş Hasan among his most talented and able viziers.

Likewise, in February 1608, Hafız Ahmed Agha, who was Ahmed’s beloved chief hawker and was admired by the sultan for his beautiful voice when reciting the Quran, was appointed grand admiral instead of Çafer Pasha, the aforementioned client of Derviş Pasha. Just as in Derviş’s case two years before, Ahmed bestowed the rank of full vizier on Hafız Ahmed. As we saw in the second chapter, Hafız Ahmed Pasha was the initial patron of Mustafa Safi Efendi, for whom he arranged the job of translating The Story of

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70 On Nakkaş Hasan Pasha, see Tezcan, “Search for Osman,” p. 351, n. 203; and Artan, “Arts and Architecture,” in Faroqhi, ed., The Cambridge History of Turkey, vol. III, pp. 411-412. Similarly, in December 1604, Ahmed betrothed Fatma Sultan, a daughter of Murad III and the widow of Halil Pasha, to Hızır Pasha, who was then in charge of securing the passes on the Danube. In order to consummate his marriage, Hızır Pasha was immediately called back to the capital and given a seat in the imperial council with the rank of full vizier. See Mehmed bin Mehmed, Nuhbe, pp. 630 and 643.

71 TSMA, D. 34, fol. 237b; and Safi, Zübde, II, p. 76.
Cemâl and Celâl for the young sultan, which then opened the way for Mustafa Efendi to climb the ladder of power. In the following years, Ahmed Pasha was elevated to the imperial council, in which capacity he remained a generous patron of art and literature. He also acted as one of Ahmed’s patronage managers. Five years into his reign, the sultan began inserting the new inner palace servants, with whom he was now well-acquainted, into different networks of power and patronage, once again by circumventing the traditional schemes of rank promotion. In doing so, the young sultan was not only continuing the ruling strategy of his father and grandfather; he was also “cleaning” the court circles of the clients of the executed Derviş Pasha, whom Derviş had inserted in numerous posts during his grand vizierate. Ahmed then ordered another graduation, in mid-February 1609, which was much smaller compared to the earlier one. It was limited to low-ranking servants of the privy chamber, who were, however, similarly appointed to various critical administrative posts. Ahmed’s promotion choices in these 1607 and 1609 graduations created a pool of high-ranking new grandees, who remained in court politics and in larger networks of patronage and power until the end of his reign, together with numerous grandees created earlier, such as Nakkaş Hasan Pasha.

In October 1609, Ahmed launched his most expensive and ambitious project, the Ahmediyye, the monumental imperial mosque complex he had built in Istanbul, today popularly known as the Blue Mosque. His project was modeled on the imperial mosques sponsored by Süleyman I and built by Mimar Sinan, the most celebrated Ottoman royal architect. Scholars of Ottoman architecture particularly emphasize the similarity in design

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72 For details, see BOA, MAD, D. 16074 (first entry dated 11 ZE 1017/16 February 1609 and last entry dated 2 Z 1017/9 March 1609).
between the Ahmediyye and the Mosque of Şehzade Mehmed, which Süleyman erected in 1548 to honor his lost son. As the Ahmediyye was being constructed by the royal architect Sedefkâr Mehmed Agha, a student of Mimar Sinan, the pious sultan ordered the extensive restoration of the Ka'ba in 1611, after the aforementioned retired mufti, Sunullah Efendi, returned to the capital from his pilgrimage and reported that repairs were urgently needed. As will be elaborated below, neither of these two projects of Ahmed went uncontested. On the contrary, the high-ranking members of the ulema strongly opposed them at first. Nonetheless, Ahmed’s personal devotion to his religion, as well as his obsession with imitating Süleyman I, quickly overcame these objections and eventually resulted in the realization of both projects, which marked the final stages in Ahmed’s presentation of himself in the image of his great-grandfather.

In the early 1610s, immediately after Kuyucu Murad’s military achievements on the eastern front, Ahmed married his two underage daughters to his two favorite ministers, whom he deemed wealthy and powerful enough to fit his new sultanic image of the most illustrious ruler; at the same time, he clearly aimed foster their loyalty to him. Not coincidentally, these two viziers, Nasuh Pasha and Öküz Kara Mehmed Pasha, were Ahmed’s next two grand viziers after Kuyucu Murad Pasha’s death in 1611. Nasuh Pasha was married to Ayşe Sultan, Ahmed’s daughter by his favorite concubine, Kösem Sultan. He held the grand vizierate as Ahmed’s second minister-favorite for three years and enjoyed great power and prestige during his tenure. However, he was executed in 1614

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73 For the construction of the Ahmediyye, see Zeynep Nayır, Osmanlı Mimarlığında Sultan Ahmet Külliyesi ve Sonrası (1609-1690) (Istanbul: İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi Mimarlık Fakültesi Yayınları, 1975). See also below.

for the very same reasons that had led to Derviș Pasha’s downfall: alienating the ruling grandees and oppressing the people. Once again, Ahmed showed his determination to eliminate such manipulation of his trust even if, this time, he had to execute his own son-in-law and the most important political ally of Kösem Sultan, who tried hard to stop her husband from taking such action. Ahmed then appointed Kara Mehmed Pasha as his next grand vizier.

In 1612, Kara Mehmed Pasha, whom Ahmed had long held in high esteem, was married to Gevherhan Sultan, Ahmed’s eldest daughter by an unidentified concubine. Kara Mehmed was Ahmed’s former sword-bearer and was rewarded with the governorship of Egypt, with the rank of vizier, at the aforementioned 1607 graduation. Ahmed recalled Kara Mehmed Pasha from Egypt in the summer of 1611, after the governor had successfully suppressed a serious kul rebellion in the province. At this time, the Venetian bailo Simone Contarini notes that Mehmed Pasha was “in high opinion with the Sultan…. His Majesty did not want his son-in-law to remain at the gate without an office worthy of him.” Hence, while Mehmed Pasha was on his way to Istanbul together with the annual tribute of Egypt, which had not been sent to the capital

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75 For Nasuh Pasha’s life and career, see Mehmed bin Mehmed, Tarih, pp. 40-42; and Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” pp. 97-98, 120-123, 214-215, and passim. Tezcan (p. 121) also notes that when Nasuh Pasha wanted to get rid of one of his chief rivals, the Mufti Hocazade Mehmed Efendi, the mufti asked the sultan to execute his grand vizier. This is a plausible explanation given that Ahmed previously took his decision to execute Derviș Pasha upon Sunullah Efendi’s encouragement. These two examples point to the great influence of the mufti.

76 For Kara Mehmed Pasha’s governorship in Egypt, see Hathaway, “The ‘Mamluk Breaker’ Who Was Really a Kul Breaker.”

77 ASVe, SDC, filza 72, fol. 206r (dated December 13, 1611).
in several years due to the wars on the eastern front, Ahmed appointed him grand admiral in December 1611 and then second-ranking vizier on the imperial council in 1614.

However, once Kara Mehmed Pasha was grand vizier, Ahmed did not allow him to remain at court in the way that he had allowed Derviş and Nasuh. Instead, in the spring of 1615, when Ahmed resumed the Ottoman-Safavid conflict on the pretext that Shah Abbas had not sent the 200 loads of raw silk to which he had agreed in the peace treaty of 1612, he dispatched Mehmed Pasha at the command of the imperial army to reclaim the territories lost to the Safavids. However, Mehmed Pasha’s siege of Erevan failed, as a result of which Ahmed dismissed him in November 1616 and appointed another favorite vizier, Kayserili Halil Pasha, the younger brother of Doğancı Mehmed Pasha. At the time of Ahmed’s death, Halil Pasha was similarly away from the capital, engaged with the Safavids.78

The engagement and wedding ceremonies of Nasuh Pasha-Ayşe Sultan and Mehmed Pasha-Gevherhan Sultan took place in succession in the imperial capital over a number of months during 1611 and 1612. These celebrations were sponsored by Ahmed, and they were so elaborate and extravagant that they were observed by the public as if they were festivals marking the end of wars and the beginning of prosperous days, just as their young sultan had promised at the commencement of his sultanate, as noted in the second chapter. For instance, according to an expense register for the festivities of Mehmed and Gevherhan, the total cost of the bread, rice and lamb distributed to the wedding guests and the people of the capital over a seven-month period was close to

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78 On Kara Mehmed Pasha’s career, see Mehmed bin Mehmed, *Tarih*, pp. 42-44; and Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” p. 337, n. 81.
Similarly, an anonymous French gentleman present in Istanbul at the time of these celebrations witnessed Gevherhan Sultan’s rich dowry (ceyiz), which included items such as a bride-crown made of solid gold, a huge chest of precious stones and jewels, and tens of rolls of silk. According to this gentleman, the dowry in question was slowly carried by 240 mules from Topkapi Palace to the Ibrahim Pasha Palace on the Hippodrome, which Ahmed presented to the couple as a residence.

During this same period, Ahmed undertook two prolonged hunting trips in and around Edirne, in 1613 and 1614. For his departures from and returns to the capital, Ahmed ordered spectacular military processions with the aim of awing every observer, particularly the foreign dignitaries present. And not surprisingly, he did impress all. A year earlier, in October 1612, Ahmed had asked for a military procession for his re-entry to the capital from Davudpaşa, one of the royal hunting preserves and military stations on the western campaign route. This one was specifically designed to impress the ambassadors of Shah Abbas, who were in Istanbul at the time to finalize the peace treaty between the two empires. Each of these military processions included his ruling viziers,

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79 See, BOA, D.BSM, D. 135. The register records the beginning and end of the festivities as 12 L 1020 (18 December 1611) and 21 RE 1021 (21 June 1612), respectively. Some pages of the register are damaged; thus it is not possible to give an exact total for the expenses.

80 See Les Magnificences faites à Constantinople, aux Nopces d'une soeur du grand Turc et de deux de ses filles (Paris: Charles Chappellain, 1613). For an Ottoman account of the festivals organized in honor of Gevherhan Sultan and Kara Mehmed Pasha, see Abdülkadir Efendi, I, pp. 596-598.

81 See the remarks by Thomas Coryate, a member of the British embassy, on Ahmed’s military procession in 1613, in Samuel Purchas, Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes (Glasgow: John MacLehose and His Sons, 1905-1907), vol. X, pp. 422-424.

82 See Les Ceremonies de l’entrée faite par le grand Seigneur SOLTAM AMET ... à Constantinople, à cause de la venue de l’Ambassadeur de Perse, pour y faire voir sa grandeur et puissance le xi. Octobre 1612 (Paris: P. Durand, 1613). Also see Abdülkadir Efendi, I, pp. 606-608; and Safi, Zübde, II, pp. 142-143.
their military households and soldiers, the regiments of the sultan’s imperial forces, the members of the court, and even occasionally with Ahmed’s two eldest sons, Osman and Mehmed. In sum, the beginning of the Ahmediyye project in 1609, the restoration of the Ka'ba in 1611-12, the wedding celebrations in 1612, and the prolonged hunting trips and their accompanying military processions in 1612-14 were all designed as a series of auspicious events to help Ahmed fully imitate Süleyman I and, accordingly, to enable him to advertise the larger public vision that he was now as powerful, illustrious, rich, respected, obeyed and pious as Süleyman I. Indeed, Ahmed was such a replica of his great-grandfather that the European bookmakers who wanted to publish an image of him simply used the same image that had once been used to depict Süleyman, with few modifications.83


While all these changes were made with the aim of enhancing the sultan’s sovereign authority and consolidating his imperial household, one man gradually rose to prominence above all other influential political figures serving under Ahmed, namely, El-Hac Mustafa Agha. I would argue that Mustafa Agha (d. 1624) became the keystone of Ahmed’s post-1607 sultanate in the sense that he functioned as the young sultan’s chief advisor, as his religious alter-ego and as his chief patronage broker. Given that Mustafa Agha has recently received considerable scholarly attention with respect to his political

influence and his wide patronage relations during the reigns of Ahmed I and Osman II, I will try to underline his centrality to Ahmed’s reign, particularly in the 1610s.84

I should re-emphasize that an accurate depiction of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Ottoman court politics must include multiple foci of power enmeshed in a complex web of relations. While some favorites during this period were deliberate creations of the sultans, empowered to function as his agents in practical politics, others had gendered political roles that similarly endowed them with unprecedented power, particularly as a result of their ability to control the points of access to the person of the secluded sultan. The two most illustrious examples of these favorites with gendered functions were the chief eunuch of the palace and the chief eunuch of the imperial harem (bâbû’s-sâ‘âde ağası and dârû’s-sa‘âde ağası, respectively).

Both chief eunuchs had attained greater power, prestige and wealth by the end of the sixteenth century as a result of three principal factors: their physical proximity to the sultan, the queen mother and the mothers of princes; their official duties, which enabled them to control the gates leading to the most secluded quarters of the palace and thus the information that flowed through them; and their roles as supervisors of hundreds of royal and non-royal pious foundations located all over the empire.85 With such unequalled

84 Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” and Tülün Değirmenci, “Resmedilen Siyaset: II. Osman Devri (1618-1622) Resimli Elyazmalarında Değişen İktidar Sembolleri,” unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Hacettepe University, 2007, provide the most recent and detailed discussions of Mustafa Agha’s power and patronage network. See also below.

85 There is an enormous amount of archival documentation on the Ottoman chief eunuchs’ supervision of numerous large-scale pious foundations. For instance, see TSMA, D. 1436, 1448, 1508, 1564, 3517, 3527, 3528, 3550, 3558, 3610, 3611, 3614, 3634, 3651, 3663, 3705, 3748/2, 4591, 7024/4, 7137, 7233 and 7301, for the foundations administered by Gazanfer Agha and his agents in the late 1590s and early 1600s. Most
political and financial authority, these two chief eunuchs often acted in concert as power brokers on behalf of the sultan and the queen mother while establishing their own empire-wide network of clients and protégés, which included numerous grandees, courtiers, officials, members of the **ulema**, merchants, and soldiers-turned-tax-farmers.

Accordingly, from the 1580s onwards, the sultan, his mother, his male and female favorites, and the two chief eunuchs headed a court faction ranged against the alternative foci of power created by government viziers and/or high-ranking members of the **ulema**, as seen in the previous chapters. In these circumstances, certain chief eunuchs became royal favorites and functioned as prime political movers, just as Gazanfer Agha did under Mehmed III. In the first decades of the seventeenth century, El-Hac Mustafa Agha established himself as just such a power broker.

Mustafa Agha’s early life and career remain obscure, except for the fact that he was a harem eunuch during the reigns of Murad III and Mehmed III, and that he was called back to Istanbul after a brief period of exile in Egypt, during which time he made his pilgrimage, hence his nickname, El-Hac. Although some scholars claim that he was not of African descent like most other harem eunuchs, his depictions in Ottoman miniatures from the early 1620s clearly suggest otherwise.86 On the other hand, Machiel

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86 For instance, Fetvaci, “Viziers to Eunuchs,” p. 310, claims that Mustafa Agha was white. For Mustafa Agha’s depiction in miniatures, see Ganîzâde Mehmed, Șehnâme-i Nâdirî, TSMK, MS Hazine 1174, fols. 46a, 70b-71a; and Değirmenci, “Resmedilen Siyaset,” pp. 350, 360 and 362. I thank my friend and
Kiel, a leading scholar of early modern Ottoman urban architectural history, has recently suggested that Mustafa Agha may have been connected to Ljubinje, a small town in modern-day Bosnia-Herzegovina. According to Kiel’s research, Mustafa Agha established a medium-sized pious foundation in this town, consisting of a mosque and auxiliary buildings, and the local people today still remember the founder as “a native of the nearby hamlet of Žabica, a son of the Kozlić family.” It would be worthwhile to pursue this possible connection between Mustafa Agha and the larger Adriatic network of families, as another powerful Ottoman chief eunuch, Gazanfer Agha, also came from this region.

Following Handan Sultan’s and Mustafa Efendi’s deaths in 1605 and 1608, respectively, their roles in court politics were assumed by Mustafa Agha. He enjoyed regular access to the sultan since he was now the unchallenged authority in the inner sanctum of the royal palace, where the sultan resided. By 1608, Ahmed had become more sedentary, largely because the wars had ceased. In these circumstances, Mustafa Agha controlled almost all the information that reached the sultan while also distributing wealth and patronage both in the sultan’s and in his own name.

For instance, from 1607 onwards, Ahmed began to increase the amounts of the annual sultanic gifts to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, known as surre-i hümâyûn,

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while Mustafa Agha managed their collection and distribution through his wide network of agents, which included several retired chief eunuchs serving as guardians of the pilgrimage sites located in these cities. These annual donations, worth hundreds of thousands of akçes, benefited not only the thousands of pilgrims, but also a large number of local ulema and prominent sheikhs, mystics and members of other religious groups, as well as various officials in the larger region. Apart from the sultan himself, furthermore, Mustafa Agha was arguably the driving force behind the Ahmediyye, one of the largest royal foundations in Ottoman history, which was completed between 1609 and 1616. He was not only the chief supervisor and the manager of funds for the project; he also defended it against the criticisms of the leading ulema, as I will explain shortly.

Mustafa Agha also functioned as Ahmed’s chief patronage broker for arts and literature, in which capacity he sponsored several talents of the era, just as Hafiz Ahmed Pasha had sponsored for Mustafa Safi Efendi. For example, when one of Mustafa Agha’s protégés, Kalender Efendi, the finance director of the second rank (defterdâr-ı şîkk-ı sânî) in the early 1600s, asked the sultan to appoint him construction supervisor of the Ahmediyye, Mustafa Agha personally vouched for his protégé, although the sultan insisted that he demonstrate his skills by preparing an album of calligraphy and illumination before he would give him the job. In 1616, when the Ahmediyye was close to completion, Ahmed rewarded Kalender for his services with the rank of vizier; sadly,

Kalender died shortly afterward. 

An important factor in Mustafa Agha’s great power was the fact that, particularly in the mid-1610s, he endowed a series of large pious foundations especially in Istanbul and Egypt, to whose administration he appointed his clients, including numerous ruling viziers, palace eunuchs, court officials, local administrators, members of the Ottoman *ulema*, and well-known Sufi preachers and spiritual guides. Mustafa Agha’s endowments were the largest ever founded by any chief harem eunuch; they set an example for his successors in office.

Mustafa Agha likewise used his personal pious foundations to cultivate the loyalty of specific corps of servants at Topkapı and at the Old Palace. For instance, and quite unusually, he endowed his Beşiktaş garden-estate in Istanbul to meet the firewood needs of the Topkapı gardeners. Likewise, he endowed two cash *vakıfs* for the sweet-makers (*helvacılar*), cooks, gate-keepers and tutors (*hevâce*) of the Old Palace, where Safiye Sultan and several other royal women associated with former sultans lived together under the supervision of hundreds of eunuchs.

The results of this sort of patronage were evident by the later years of Ahmed’s reign, as Mustafa Agha’s clients increasingly filled key positions in the imperial

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89 See Kalender’s preface to his album, TSMK, MS Hazine 2171, fols. 17a-23b. Also discussed by Fetvacı, “Viziers to Eunuchs,” pp. 310-313, in the same context.

90 For instance, the witnesses (*şühüdül-hâl*) listed in the foundation deeds of Mustafa Agha’s *vakıfs* testify to his wide network of clients and allies. See, *inter alia*, TSMK, MSS Emanet Hazinesi 2993 (Istanbul and Egypt); 2994 (Egypt); 2995 (Egypt); 2997 (Egypt); and AVGM, D. 733, no. 79 and 80 (two foundations in Istanbul).

91 TSMK, MS E.H. 3053. Historically, the palace gardeners were close to the chief eunuch of harem eunuchs, both literally and figuratively, since their barracks were right outside the imperial harem complex.

92 TSMK, MSS E.H. 3002 and 3004.
administration. One of his protégés, the chief gardener Hüseyin Agha, attained positions of considerable influence after faithfully serving the sultan, the chief eunuch and their court faction for several years. Apart from his official duties, Mustafa Agha made Hüseyin his deputy (vekîl) in charge of inspecting the Ahmediyye construction site. In 1614, Ahmed appointed Hüseyin Agha to execute Grand Vizier Nasuh Pasha. Once the chief gardener had carried out this order, he was rewarded with the office of agha of the Janissaries and then the governor-generalship of Rumeli.

Several viziers of the imperial government, notably Nasuh Pasha, Öküz Kara Mehmed Pasha, Kayserili Halil Pasha, Gürçü Mehmed Pasha, and Hafiz Ahmed Pasha, were in fact clients of Mustafa Agha, upon whose patronage their lives and positions depended. Baki Tezcan likewise notes that Mustafa Agha “sponsored the careers of such men as the future grand vizier[s] Tabanyassı Mehmed Pasha [and Ali Pasha], the vizier and finance minister Hasan Pasha, and two other viziers, Sarrac Hasan Pasha and Hamidi Mustafa Pasha.” Like Gazanfer Agha before him, furthermore, Mustafa Agha served as a channel for the influence of the imperial women. Ahmed’s favorite concubine (haseki), Kösem Mahpeyker Sultan, was able to use her close alliance with El-Hac Mustafa and his client Nasuh Pasha to wield influence over the sultan. Truly, as one contemporary Ottoman author wrote, “during the time of Ahmed I, all affairs of the state were subject to

93 TSMA, D. 10748, fols. 5a-b and in passim.
95 Ibid., p. 159.
96 Ibid., pp. 158, 172-178, 188, 201 and in passim.
Mustafa Agha’s personal judgment.”

Mustafa Agha’s unique position as well as his centrality for Ahmed and his sultanate are perhaps best attested by a 16-couplet Turkish foundation inscription of the Ahmediyye. This marble inscription, which is distinguished from the Arabic one located on two sides and above the main entrance gate of the mosque proper in three parts, is over the eastern gate of the inner courtyard of the Ahmediyye, still facing the Topkapı Palace on the outer side in its original location. Its first 8-couplet is devoted to exalt Ahmed’s piety and religiosity; whereas the other 8-couplet is similarly on Mustafa Agha as if he was the co-founder of the Ahmediyye! There is no other example of this kind of a foundation inscription in any Ottoman imperial mosque which includes the name of a non-royal person together with its founder sultan. In light of these considerations, I submit that Mustafa Agha was the Ottoman royal favorite par excellence in the seventeenth century.

Concluding Remarks

By the end of 1608, Ahmed was eighteen years old, grown up and relatively balanced in his emotions and actions. He had firmly established his own personal style of rule, while El-Hac Mustafa Agha was in effect acting as a co-ruler and helping the sultan to control the faction-ridden court. He was the father of two princes, Osman and Mehmed, who were growing up in the imperial harem under Mustafa Agha’s supervision without any apparent health problems. The future of the dynasty was still precarious, but

97 Peçevi/TSMK, fol. 316b.
at least the royal family had survived the plague of 1607, mentioned in the second chapter. Meanwhile, the empire was slowly recovering from the Long War and the Celâli rebellions despite the ongoing military operations on the Safavid front. Again imitating Süleyman I, Ahmed promulgated a law-code (kanunnâme) and issued a series of imperial edicts that he hoped would end the malfeasance that had troubled his subjects during the tumultuous years of wars and rebellions. At the same time, he issued an imperial decree to reform the ulema hierarchy and restore its trajectory of promotion to what had prevailed under his great-grandfather. He also ordered comprehensive tax surveys so as to resettle the people who had migrated during the Great Flight, as noted in the previous chapter.

It seemed like the perfect time for the young sultan to finally capitalize on these achievements with a series of commemorations and projects that would not only enable him to realize his dream of re-embodying Süleyman the Magnificent, but would reinforce his own sultanic legitimacy and that of the House of Osman, which had been threatened in recent years. More than the above-mentioned festivals, hunting trips and military processions, the Ahmediyye mosque complex was designed to achieve this end. As Howard Crane explains in an enlightening article, such dynastic mosque complexes had

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98 For Ahmed’s law code and imperial edicts, see Ahmet Akgündüz, Osmanlı Kanunnâmeleri ve Hukûkî Tahlileri, 9 vols. (İstanbul: Osmanlı Araştırmaları Vakfı, 1996), vol. IX, pp. 1-589. For a discussion and other examples of sultanic edicts during this period, see Halil İnalcık, “Adâletnâmeler,” Belgeler 2/3-4 (1965), pp. 49-165.

functioned as one of the most important emblems of Ottoman royal authority and legitimacy since the founding of the House of Osman.100

Ahmed would build his mosque in the imperial capital, where no sultan had erected a mosque since the reign of Süleyman I. Selim II (r. 1566-74) had sponsored a similarly monumental mosque, the Selimiyye, but it was built in Edirne. Murad III (r. 1574-95) was content with a much smaller mosque complex, the Muradiyye, in Manisa.101 As for Mehmed III, he did not found an imperial mosque at all. His mother, Safiye Sultan, started a controversial one in Istanbul’s Eminönü commercial district, but her project was halted with the succession of Ahmed, to be completed only sixty years later by Turhan Sultan, the mother of Mehmed IV.102

However, there were some problems with this ambitious agenda. First of all, the Ottoman learned classes, especially the *ulema*, expected their sultans to build their imperial mosques with the booty from new conquests; otherwise, these royal buildings were regarded as acts of personal extravagance contrary to the divine law, which sanctioned only the building of charitable establishments with the taxes of the sultan’s subjects. This objection had been raised with regard to the projects of Selim II, Murad III and Safiye Sultan.103 Not surprisingly, Ahmed faced the same type of criticism, coupled with...

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103 Crane, “The Ottoman Sultan’s Mosque,” p. 204; and Thys-Şenocak, “The Yeni Valide Mosque
with concerns that his project could further drain the imperial treasury at a time of severe financial crisis. Moreover, after personally inspecting a few alternative sites in the city, Ahmed decided to have his mosque built alongside the Hippodrome, the ceremonial-social center of the capital, surrounded by several large grandee palaces and gardens with their auxiliary buildings, such as the complex built by the late Sokollu Mehmed Pasha. In addition to these, there was already a monumental and symbolically important mosque nearby: Hagia Sophia, the former Byzantine imperial basilica. Although Hagia Sophia escaped unscathed, all the grandee mansions, together with adjacent Roman remains, were demolished to clear the site for the new mosque after Ahmed had purchased their founders’ estates.\footnote{For the structures demolished for the Ahmediyye, see Orhan Şaik Gökyay, “Risale-i Mimariyye, Mimar Mehmet Ağa, Eserleri,” in İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı’ya Armağan, pp. 113-215, at pp. 158-161. Also see TSMA, D. 10748, for a detailed description of the neighborhoods and the grandee mansions before demolition.} El-Hac Mustafa, in his capacity as vekîl, overcame any objections to these operations.

Once detailed construction plans were finalized, by early 1609, Ahmed dispatched Mustafa Agha together with the deputy grand vizier, Gürcü Hadım Mehmed Pasha, to Hocazade Mehmed Efendi, who had become mufti upon Sunullah Efendi’s forced retirement in September 1608, to get his legal opinion (fetvâ) approving the project. At the meeting, Mehmed Efendi alluded to the illicit nature of the project by raising the concern that there was no large Muslim community in the area to fill the mosque -- a concern that Gürcü Mehmed Pasha apparently shared. However, El-Hac Mustafa Agha angrily retorted that it was easy to create such a community by establishing a new...
neighborhood around the mosque; he advised the mufti to stop stonewalling and produce
the fetvä, which he did.\textsuperscript{105}

Thus, in the fall of 1609, the expensive Ahmediyye project started with Mustafa
Agha at the helm of it. Ahmed used his personal treasury to pay for the demolished
private estates, which amounted to some 100,000 gold ducats (12 million \textit{akçes} at 120
\textit{akçes} per ducat, according to the contemporary ratio).\textsuperscript{106} Ahmed visited the construction
site at every opportunity and spent hours watching the erection of the mosque that would
crown his efforts to imitate Süleyman I. It boasted six minarets, the most ever to
embellish an Ottoman imperial mosque complex. Seven years later, in October 1616,
when the Ahmediyye finally opened for prayers, the total construction cost had exceeded
1,500,000 ducats, roughly equal to 180 million \textit{akçes}.\textsuperscript{107}

Ahmed was no doubt proud of his mosque, which completed the long road he had
followed in the footsteps of his illustrious ancestor, Süleyman the Magnificent. An
elaborate state ceremony was organized to mark this important occasion. Ahmed brought
his two eldest princes, thirteen-year-old Osman and twelve-year-old Mehmed, who stood
at his right side.\textsuperscript{108} Clearly, this was the moment to emphasize that he was a successful,
powerful, just and pious ruler of a great dynasty, just as his great-grandfather had been.

\textsuperscript{105} Safi, \textit{Zübsde}, I, pp. 50-51.

\textsuperscript{106} See TSMA, D. 10748, fols. 1a-5b.

\textsuperscript{107} According to registers of construction expenses, the total cost was over 180 million \textit{akçes}. See TSMA,
and colleague Ahmet Arslantürk for sharing his detailed calculations from these registers.

\textsuperscript{108} For details, see Mehmed b. Mehmed, \textit{Nuhbe}, s. 718; and Safi, \textit{Zübsde}, II, pp. 50-51.
However, Ahmed did not get a chance to further enhance his Süleymanic image. He died of a stomach ailment on November 22, 1617.

Ahmed’s death created an unprecedented situation with respect to the thus-far-unbroken Ottoman tradition of father-to-son succession. Though he had several sons, Ahmed never threatened the life of his brother -- a decision which he had to take, to a certain extent, as a result of the threat of genealogical extinction that had loomed over the House of Osman since the early 1600s. Hence, at the time of his death, both his eldest son, thirteen-year-old Osman, and his brother Mustafa were eligible to rule. A court faction secured the enthronement of Mustafa in preference to Osman, thus solidifying the end of royal fratricide and confirming a new principle of seniority in succession.

However, with the help of El-Hac Mustafa Agha and his network, Prince Osman would claim the throne from his uncle in eight months. His sultanate, which he began at the age of fourteen, would last for only four years, after which he would become the victim of the first regicide in Ottoman history in 1622. During this brief period, Osman continued his father’s efforts to play the role of warrior sultan as well as his strategy of ruling through favorites. He even cultivated a more assertive style so as to strengthen his personal rule vis-à-vis alternative foci of power within his court which would, as Baki Tezcan has shown, ultimately claim his life after another massive military rebellion. The rest of the seventeenth century would witness the same patterns of factional politics, sultanic initiatives, succession problems, power struggles and military rebellions that had begun under Mehmed III and his young son, Ahmed I.
CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have tried to demonstrate that, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the Ottoman imperial court in Istanbul was a faction-ridden entity within which alternative foci of power and networks of political patronage imposed certain practical limitations on the sultan’s ruling capabilities. To counter these limitations and to reconfigure the power relations to their advantage, Murad III (r. 1574-95) and Mehmed III (r. 1595-1603) initiated a new set of ruling strategies. Most notably, they altered the hierarchical pattern of vizierial promotion; used the telhîs as the main mode of communication in order to control the grand vizier’s independent decision-making authority; frequently promoted inner court grandees and privy chamber officials to the rank of vizier; and married their favorite viziers to royal women. Above all, they empowered their royal favorites and the court factions run by them.

These new ruling strategies acquired unexpected importance during the reign of Ahmed I (r. 1603-17) because of the abandonment of the institution of the princely household. Like all Ottoman sultans before them, Murad III and Mehmed III, while still princes, had been sent to govern Anatolian provinces; there, they built up households whose members followed them to the imperial court once the princes took the throne, and filled key government offices there. Ahmed I, in contrast, was raised in the harem of Topkapı Palace and thus had no princely household on which to draw when he came to
the throne. Under these circumstances, his favorites’ role in controlling the government became all the more important, so that, in a sense, the favorite and his faction came to act as a substitute for the princely household.

In addition, this new political culture took shape in the context of prolonged and costly wars on several fronts, which inevitably colored the struggles among alternative networks of power within the Ottoman court and the imperial capital. The reigns of Murad III and Mehmed III were periodically rocked by rebellions of soldiery who had a vested interest in the conduct of the conflicts with the Habsburgs, Safavids, and Celâlis. These rebellions in turn point up the ongoing rivalry between the Janissaries and the imperial cavalry, or sipahis, who tended to side with the major political players at the court. In this way, the factional rivalries at court and the struggles of the sultan’s favorites to control the government became intertwined with the soldiery revolts. Both Murad III and Mehmed III were obliged to sacrifice their favorites to the rebellious soldiers -- usually sipahis since the favorites tended to ally with the Janissaries -- so as to avoid deposition.

Ahmed’s reign witnessed an interesting turn with respect to the influence of the sipahis and the Janissaries, whose numbers continued to increase due to the demanding conditions of a new style of warfare in Hungary and the widespread Celâli bands. Despite the fact that both groups of soldiers were paid a salary every three months from the sultan’s treasury, the sipahis, unlike the Janissaries, appear to have become more dependent on income from land revenues; thus augmentation of their income through tax collection at a time of rampant inflation, chronic budget deficits, worsening climate
conditions and peasant flight was a key concern for them. Once they saw that they were excluded from the distribution of lucrative tax-farms among court circles and that they were not being paid properly in return for their services during exhausting campaigns, they revolted against their sultan so as to re-negotiate their positions at the court. This was a particular danger just after they had been demobilized. The Janissaries, in contrast, were favored by the sultan and his favorites, and were rewarded for crushing the sipahi rebellions. This endemic sipahi discontent, along with rivalry between the Janissaries and sipahis, becomes noticeable in the late 1580s, under Murad III.

During Ahmed’s reign, the sipahi problem ceased to trouble the imperial capital mainly as a result of the resolution of the major wars and Kuyucu Murad Pasha’s ruthless suppression of the Celâlis and all other prospective rebels between 1606 and 1608. Initially, Ahmed’s regents were successful in reconfiguring power relations at court and among the broader Ottoman ruling elite. The banishment of Safiye Sultan from the court made a big difference in this respect. The soldiers were evidently pleased with her removal and that of the members of her faction from power. Perhaps more importantly, the ongoing wars provided the perfect opportunity for Ahmed’s regents and favorites to keep the potentially troublesome soldiers and their supporters away from the capital. Accordingly, the viziers, despite their resistance, were assigned to lead campaigns on all fronts with large armies. Once the wars were over, the campaign-weary sipahis and Janissaries were seemingly incorporated into the reconfigured networks of power. The Janissaries emerged newly empowered from this tumultuous period and, in the years following Ahmed’s reign, would displace the sipahis as the chief force for rebellion in
the capital. When Ahmed’s son Osman II (r. 1618-22) decided to recruit a new army mainly composed of segban (mercenary) soldiers in 1621, the Janissaries, threatened by this move, combined with the high-ranking ulema -- just as the sipahis had done under Mehmed III -- to thwart the sultan’s venture. They ultimately rebelled in 1622 and killed him, thus ensuring their new position in court politics. This sort of rebellion, though without the regicidal results, would recur throughout the first half of the seventeenth century.

To a great extent, the rebellious soldiers were reacting against the new style of sultanic rule, whereby the sultan was increasingly secluded within the inner compounds of Topkapi Palace, where only a limited entourage had access to him. Meanwhile, his favorites acted on his behalf at a time when, in the soldiers’ view, the pressing problems of their vast empire demanded their direct involvement. Nonetheless, despite these repeated attacks, Murad III and Mehmed III presided over a permanent change in Ottoman political culture, featuring a secluded ruler who asserted his will mainly through the agency of his favorites and their networks while, at the same time, perpetuating the imperial court order, the ceremonies of rule, and the sultanic image established under Süleyman I.

Ahmed I’s reign represented the crystallization of these changes in the mechanisms of the early modern Ottoman sultanate, as I have explained in detail. With the enthronement of this young and inexperienced sultan, power struggles within the Ottoman court shifted from a broad setting which included the provincial princely households to a narrower domain comprising Topkapi Palace and Istanbul. Moreover, his
father’s reign was a period of crisis that directly shaped court politics during the first part of Ahmed’s reign. Ahmed was only one contender for power among all the members of his court and government in this new and unstable political setting. Yet, he soon adopted and further solidified the ruling strategies of his immediate predecessors, while attaining a firm personal grasp on the business of rule by 1608.

The new circumstances of Ahmed I’s reign also contributed to the crucial role played in court politics by royal favorites, a phenomenon observed in early modern European court politics yet previously unstudied in the Ottoman context. I hope that I have at least partially filled this gap in Ottoman historiography with my extensive discussion of the Ottoman royal favorites in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Ahmed I’s reign witnessed the emergence of new political actors as royal favorites, most noticeably the chief gardener and the chief eunuch of the imperial harem. I have tried to illustrate the role his favorites played in redrawing the boundaries of power relations at the court so as to enhance the standing of the sultan against other power contenders. In this respect, we have seen that El-Hac Mustafa Agha functioned as Ahmed’s prime favorite and power broker, helping him not only to control the imperial court in the post-1607 period, but also to advertise a new powerful sultanic image mirroring that of his great-grandfather, Süleyman I, who was Ahmed’s ideal model of kingship throughout his reign. Despite all the problems he faced during his sultanate, Ahmed thrived as a successful Ottoman ruler in his pursuit of power and in his emulation of Süleyman the Magnificent.

In conclusion, I have attempted to establish that the Ottoman imperial court
during the reign of Ahmed I was not simply an embarrassment that astute grand viziers, military officers, bureaucrats, and merchants sought to overcome; rather, the court itself responded to the challenges of the global crisis by adopting innovative strategies that repositioned the sultan and his favorites in the Ottoman imperial establishment. My project has tried to fill a crucial gap in Ottoman historiography while remedying the widespread misperception of the post-Süleymanic Ottoman court as a quagmire of incompetence and intrigue. I hope that more studies, based on more unexamined primary sources such as the Venetian ambassadors’ dispatches, will soon appear on particular sultans and their favorites within the context of the changing dynamics of Ottoman court culture and politics in the early modern period, thus contributing to our understanding of how the Ottoman court, along with the Ottoman military, economy, and society, adapted to a prolonged period of crisis.
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283


