

## THE MARRIAGE OF İBRAHİM PASHA (CA. 1495–1536)

The rise of Sultan Süleyman’s favorite to  
the grand vizierate and the politics of  
the elites in the early sixteenth-century  
Ottoman Empire\*

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**A**mong all the colorful public personalities gracing the Süleymanic era (1520–1566), İbrahim Pasha, known as “*makbul* [favorite] and *maktul* [executed],” stands out as a particularly intriguing figure. In 1523 this childhood friend, favorite, and slave of Sultan Süleyman was most irregularly promoted to the highest office in the empire, the grand vizierate, directly from the sultan’s personal service, without having had any experience in government. For the following thirteen years, with the enormous power and authority that he assumed, Grand Vizier İbrahim Pasha ruled the empire like a second sultan. As the sultan’s chief advisor and commander, İbrahim Pasha not only was single-

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handedly in charge of the political and military administration of the empire but also acted as the sultan's alter ego and absolute representative in public. In this way İbrahim Pasha played a pivotal role in the promotion of the Ottoman sultan's image as the world ruler and in the consolidation of Ottoman claims to universal sovereignty both within and beyond the empire's borders — two crucial developments that defined the Ottoman Empire for centuries to come. İbrahim Pasha's career abruptly ended one night in March 1536, when he was mysteriously executed in the imperial palace on the orders of his beloved sultan.<sup>1</sup>

Although he presided over one of the most celebrated eras in early modern Ottoman history, İbrahim Pasha remains one of the least known Ottoman grand viziers.<sup>2</sup> The years preceding his elevation to the grand vizierate are particularly obscure. References to the pasha's origins, enslavement, and meeting with Süleyman found in secondary literature are inconsistent, blended with rumor and speculation, and not always supported by historical evidence.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the identity of İbrahim Pasha's wife has been the subject of an ongoing controversy: although historians generally tend to hold that the pasha was married to one of Süleyman's sisters, no evidence has been discovered to prove it. In this article my aim is first to reexamine the biographical information on

<sup>1</sup> Gülru NECİPOĞLU, "Süleyman the Magnificent and the Representation of Power in the Context of Ottoman-Habsburg-Papal Rivalry," *Art Bulletin* 71 (1989): 401-427; NECİPOĞLU, "A Kanun for the State, a Canon for the Arts: Conceptualizing the Classical Synthesis of Ottoman Art and Architecture," in *Soliman le Magnifique et son temps*, ed. G. Veinstein (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1992), 195-216; Cornell FLEISCHER, "The Lawgiver as Messiah: The Making of the Imperial Image in the Reign of Süleyman," in Veinstein, *Soliman le Magnifique et son temps*, 159-177; Ebru TURAN, "The Sultan's Favorite: İbrahim Pasha and the Making of the Ottoman Universal Sovereignty" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Two studies became standard accounts on İbrahim Pasha in the twentieth century: Hester Donaldson JENKINS, *İbrahim Pasha, Grandvizir of Suleiman the Magnificent* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1911); Tayyip GÖKBİLGİN, "İbrâhim Paşa," *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (hereafter İA).

<sup>3</sup> For the traditions on İbrahim Pasha's origins, see Joseph HAMMER-PURGSTALL, *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches*, 10 vols. (Pest: C. A. Hartleben, 1827), 3: 32; Nicolae IORGA, *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches*, 5 vols. (Gotha: F. A. Perthes, 1908), 2: 347-349; JENKINS, *İbrahim Pasha*, 18-19; İsmail Hakkı UZUNÇARŞILI, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, 4 vols. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1947), 2: 343-348; İsmail Hami DANIŞMEND, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi* (İstanbul, 1948), 2: 93-99; GÖKBİLGİN, "İbrâhim Paşa"; Roger BIGELOW MERRIMAN, *Suleiman the Magnificent, 1520-1566* (New York: Cooper Square, 1966), 76-77; J. M. ROGERS and R. M. WARD, *Süleyman the Magnificent* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1988), 9-11.

İbrahim Pasha as well as the debate on the identity of his wife in light of new Venetian and Ottoman documents, and then to explore the political meaning of the pasha's marriage in the context of his unconventional rise to the grand vizierate.

I contend that the pasha's swift promotion to the highest office in the empire was not a whimsical act on the part of a young sultan simply seeking to advance his favorite. Indeed, his ascension to the political stage must be understood within the matrix of the long-term political, institutional, and social developments that transpired in the empire following the conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Here the formation of an imperial center in Constantinople and the making of a new elite that derived its power from and justified its existence with the political, military, fiscal, and judicial institutions at the city were most significant. The relations between this imperial elite and the dynasty — ranging from mutual dependency to cooperation to tension to open conflict — set the parameters of Ottoman politics in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Through an analysis of the marriage arrangements between the elite and the Ottoman dynasty in this period, I will delineate the intricate web of interactions between the sultans and their officials. By discussing the ways in which the Ottoman elite contributed to the process of centralization, gained a distinct group consciousness through professionalization, and cultivated the means to reproduce itself politically as well as socially, I will demonstrate that the Ottoman elite after the conquest gradually increased its collective control over the monarchy at the expense of the dynasty. In this context, Süleyman's elevation of his slave from nothingness to the top of the empire was a carefully conceived and staged political act that aimed to harness the elite and establish the personal supremacy of the sultan in Ottoman polity. As my interpretation of İbrahim Pasha's marriage will show, however, Süleyman's intentions to elevate his own standing through his slave were contested both in political and in social spheres.

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#### İBRAHİM PASHA'S ORIGINS AND EARLY YEARS

İbrahim Pasha was born a Venetian subject about 1495 in Parga, a small port on the northwestern coast of Greece.<sup>4</sup> Originally, he probably

<sup>4</sup> Parga came under Venetian control in 1401; see Donald M. Nicol, *The Despotate*

spoke a Slavic dialect; sources mention that during the peace negotiations with the Habsburgs in 1533 he conversed in his mother tongue with Ferdinand I's representative Jerome of Zara, who was a Croatian.<sup>5</sup> Given that Epirus — the region in northwestern Greece where Parga is located — was invaded and dominated throughout the late Middle Ages by different Greek, Italian, Albanian, and Serbian peoples, this should not come as a surprise.<sup>6</sup> Very little is known of İbrahim's natural family, except that his father was a sailor or fisherman of very humble means.<sup>7</sup> After his rise to the grand vizierate, İbrahim brought his parents and two brothers to Istanbul. His family converted to Islam, and his father, who then assumed the Muslim name Yunus, ascended to the ranks of the military elite by becoming a governor in Epirus.<sup>8</sup>

According to one tradition, İbrahim was captured as a young boy by Turkish corsairs and then was sold to a widow in Manisa, who educated him and taught him to play a musical instrument resembling the violin. When Prince Süleyman arrived in Manisa as governor, he met İbrahim and, charmed by his musical as well as other talents, took him into his princely household.<sup>9</sup> According to another tradition, İbrahim was seized during the reign of Sultan Bayezid (1481–1512) in a raid by İskender Pasha, the Ottoman governor of Bosnia, who later presented him to Prince Süleyman.<sup>10</sup> Although the first story cannot be traced beyond the nineteenth-century historian Hammer's Ottoman history, the second one can be found in a contemporary account, namely the *Historia* of the famous sixteenth-century Italian historian Paolo Giovio (1483–

*of Epiros* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 184; JENKINS, *İbrahim Pasha*, 18; GÖKBİLGİN, "İbrâhim Paşa."

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth MEYER SETTON, *The Papacy and the Levant, 1204–1571*, 4 vols (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1976), 3: 383. Venetian sources indicate that the pasha could also speak Greek and Albanian, see Marino SANUDO, *I diarii*, 58 vols., eds. Rinaldo Fulin, Federico Stefani, Nicolò Barozzi, Guglielmo Berchet, Marco Allegri (Venezia, 1879-1903), vol. 41, col. 535 (hereafter Sanudo).

<sup>6</sup> NICOL, *Despotate of Epiros*, 217; Timothy E. GREGORY, "Epiros," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> JENKINS, *İbrahim Pasha*, 18.

<sup>8</sup> GÖKBİLGİN, "İbrâhim Paşa"; Ömer Luţfi BARKAN and Ekrem Hakkı AYVERDİ, *İstanbul Vakıfları Tahrîr Defteri 953 (1546) Târîhli* (İstanbul, 1970), 437.

<sup>9</sup> Different versions of this tradition can be found in HAMMER, *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches*, 3:32; JENKINS, *İbrahim Pasha*, 18; GÖKBİLGİN, "İbrâhim Paşa"; MER-RIMAN, *Suleiman the Magnificent*, 76; ROGERS and WARD, *Süleyman the Magnificent*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> GÖKBİLGİN, "İbrâhim Paşa"; İsmail Hakkı UZUNÇARŞILI, "Kanunî Sultan Süleyman'ın Vezir-i Âzamı Makhbûl ve Maktûl İbrahim Paşa Padişah Dâmadı Değildi," *Belleten* 29 (1965): 355.

1552).<sup>11</sup> Giovio, who never had any personal contact with the Ottomans, must have drawn his data from the Venetian sources.<sup>12</sup> Through their direct access to Ottoman lands as ambassadors, merchants, spies, residents, or visitors in the sixteenth century, the Venetians furnished Italy and the rest of Europe with immediate information on Turkish affairs.<sup>13</sup> Specifically about İbrahim Pasha himself, however, there was one particular Venetian gentleman who disseminated most of the news in the West; this was Pietro Zen, the Venetian *orator* (ambassador) to the Ottoman court in 1523–1524.<sup>14</sup>

Although historians have extensively cited Zen's correspondence from the Ottoman capital and his *Relazioni*, read before the Senate in 1524, another account attributed to him has remained little known.<sup>15</sup> Based on Zen's observations in Istanbul from June through August 1523, this second text contains some invaluable biographical details on İbrahim Pasha that allow one to critically assess the tradition related by Giovio:

<sup>11</sup> Hammer does not provide a citation for this information; it is unclear if he had come to this conclusion by himself or had drawn on other sources. As for the other tradition, Gökbilgin and Uzunçarşılı have cited Thomas Artus and Giovanni Sagredo as primary references, but it escaped their notice that both of these seventeenth century accounts had drawn largely on Giovio; see Thomas ARTUS, *L'histoire de la décadence de l'empire grec et établissement de celui des Turcs*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1629), 2:548; Giovanni SAGREDO, *Memorie istoriche de' monarchi ottomani* (Venetia: Presso Combi e La Nou, 1679), 214–215; Paolo GIOVIO, *La seconda parte dell'istorie del suo tempo*, trans. M. Lodovico Domenichi (Venice: Segno della virtù, 1555), 335–336.

<sup>12</sup> For instance, the famous Venetian historian Marino Sanudo was Giovio's friend and correspondent; see T. C. Price ZIMMERMANN, *Paolo Giovio: The Historian and the Crisis of Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 15, 50; V. J. PARRY, "Renaissance Historical Literature in Relation to the Near and Middle East (with Special Reference to Paolo Giovio)," in *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 288–289.

<sup>13</sup> Hans J. KISSLING, "Venezia come centro di informazione sui turchi," in *Venezia centro di mediazione tra Oriente e Occidente (secoli xv–xvi): aspetti e problemi*, ed. Manoussos Manoussacas, Hans-Georg Beck, and Agostino Pertusi (Florence: Olschki, 1977), 97–109; Peter BURKE, "Early Modern Venice as a Center of Information and Communication," in *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297–1797*, ed. Dennis Romano and John Martin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 389–419.

<sup>14</sup> For a short biography of Zen, see Francesca LUCCHETTA, "L'Affare Zen' in Levante nel primo Cinquecento," *Studi Veneziani* 10 (1968): 109–110.

<sup>15</sup> Most of Zen's reports from Istanbul are included in summaries in Sanudo, see vol. 34, cols. 359–360; vol. 35, cols. 258–260, 273–274, 342; vol. 36, cols. 366, 445; Pietro ZEN, "Sommaro della relazione [1524]," in *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato durante il XVI secolo*, ed. Eugenio Albèri, ser. 3, vols. 1–3 (Florence, 1842–1855), 3:95–97 (hereafter ZEN [1524]); R. FULIN, "Itinerario di ser Piero Zeno oratore a Costantinopoli nel MDXXIII," *Archivio Veneto* 22 (1881): 106–136 (hereafter ZEN [1523]).

“The second day that Zen arrived, the magnificent İbrahim, who was *ağa*, came out of the palace as pasha. He came out with great pomp, and to everybody’s great astonishment, was given camels, beautiful horses, jewels, and slaves by the sultan. This İbrahim was from Parga, the castle under Corfu on the mainland, where a constable with some soldiers would be sent for custody every two months. Called Pietro, İbrahim was Christian. When the Turks had Santa Maura, he was taken at a young age by Turkish corsairs to the sea and was sold to a widowed daughter of that magnificent İskender who raided in Friuli. That woman lived near Edirne, which the present sultan, Süleyman, held for his father, Selim. When Süleyman came to the house of this woman, since she did not have anything else to present him, she gave him this slave named İbrahim, who played and sang and was of the same age as the sultan.”<sup>16</sup>

The passage indicates that İbrahim, or rather Pietro, must have been enslaved sometime between 1499 and 1502. The Ottomans conquered the island of Santa Maura in 1479 and held it until 1502, when the Venetians retook it during the Ottoman-Venetian war (1499–1503); their justification was that the Ottomans, using the island as a base, were constantly raiding the other Venetian holdings in the area, such as Parga, İbrahim’s hometown.<sup>17</sup> It is very probable that İbrahim was captured on one of these raids that provoked the Venetian assault on the island.

İbrahim’s first master was the widowed daughter of İskender Pasha, the Ottoman dignitary whose name was also mentioned by Giovio. One of the most prominent political figures of Bayezid II’s reign, İskender Pasha was born in Byzantine Constantinople to a Genovese father and a Greek mother around 1434.<sup>18</sup> Following the Ottoman conquest of the

<sup>16</sup> ZEN [1523], 108–109.

<sup>17</sup> Santa Maura is the Venetian name given to the Greek island Levkás in the Ionian Sea. The Republic restored the island to the Ottomans in 1503 as part of the truce; see NICOL, *Despotate of Epiros*, 213; Sydney Nettleton FISHER, *The Foreign Relations of Turkey, 1481–1512* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1948), 75; SANUDO, vol. 4, cols. 390–391. Cf. FISHER, *Foreign Relations of Turkey*, 76n124.

<sup>18</sup> Several famous personalities named İskender populated the Ottoman elite in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries: Mihaloğlu İskender Bey (d. 1496), İskender Pasha (d. 1504), Bostancıbaşı İskender Pasha (d. 1515); a certain İskender who was Bayezid’s confidant and slave, and who was charged with executing the son of Bayezid’s rival, Cem, in 1482; and İskender Çelebi (d. 1534), Süleyman’s *defterdar*. For the literature on these individuals, see Hans J. KISSLING, “Zur Personalpolitik Sultan Bayezid’s II” (paper presented at the Internationalen Balkanologenkongresses, Athens, 1970), 108; KISSLING, “Quelques problèmes concernant İskender-Pasa, vizir de Bayezid II,” *Turcica* 2 (1970): 130–137; İsmail Hakkı UZUNÇARŞILI, “Yavuz Sultan Selim’in Kızı Hanım Sultan ve Torunu Kara Osman Şah Bey Vakfiyeleri,” *Bellekten* 40, no. 159 (1976): 467–478. For the particular one who raided Friuli, see Hedda REINDL’s prosopographic study on Bayezid

city, İskender converted to Islam and entered Mehmed II's service. When the sultan died, İskender sided with Mehmed's elder son, Bayezid, in the struggle for succession against his brother, Cem. Upon Bayezid's accession, İskender Pasha's fortunes began to thrive: he assumed several times the governorship of Bosnia, served as governor-general (*Beğlerbey*) of Rumelia and Anatolia, and was the fourth vizier in the imperial council between 1489 and 1496. He became famous for the raids that he undertook in Croatia during the Ottoman-Venetian war, and he died in 1504 in Bosnia.<sup>19</sup> As a distinguished member of the Ottoman political and military elite, İskender Pasha was also in possession of a great fortune, with which he built a mosque in Fatih and established the first hospice of the Mevlevi order of Istanbul on his estate in Galata. For the maintenance of these buildings he endowed the income of his several properties in Istanbul, which included many houses, stores, gardens, fountains, as well as a guesthouse. In addition, he also owned four villages in Vize, where he built another mosque, next to which he was later buried.<sup>20</sup>

It was at the estate of İskender Pasha's daughter near Edirne that Süleyman and İbrahim first met. During the reign of his father, Selim, Süleyman was sent to Edirne twice, each time to guard the western borders of the empire while the sultan was campaigning in the east: first in 1514–1515, and then in 1516–1518.<sup>21</sup> Since references in both the Italian and the Ottoman period sources attest to the fact that Süleyman and İbrahim had grown up together, it seems more likely that they met at the earlier date, namely 1514.<sup>22</sup> As we shall see, however, İbrahim's connection with İskender Pasha's family did not dissolve after he was given to Prince Süleyman. On the contrary, it was yet to become even more intimate.

II's elite, *Männer um Bâyezîd: Eine prosopographische Studie über die Epoche Sultan Bayezids II (1481–1512)* (Berlin: K. Schwarz, 1983), 240–261.

<sup>19</sup> REINDL, *Männer um Bâyezîd*, 240–261.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 261; M. Tayyip GÖKBİLGİN, *XV–XVI: Asırlarda Edirne ve Paşa Livâsı; Vakıflar, Mülkler, Mukataaalar* (İstanbul, 1952), 432–433; BARKAN and AYVERDİ, *İstanbul Vakıfları Tahrîr Defteri*, 222; İ. Aydın YÜKSEL, *Osmanlı Mimârisinde II: Bâyezid Yavuz Selim Devri (886–926/1481–1520)* (İstanbul: İstanbul Fetih Cemiyeti, 1983), 89, 257, 299, 300; Vize is a small town in northwestern Turkey, approximately ninety miles from İstanbul.

<sup>21</sup> GÖKBİLGİN, "Süleymân I," *İA*.

<sup>22</sup> ZEN [1523], 109; Celâlzâde Mustafâ, *Geschichte Sultan Süleymân Kânûnîs von 1520 bis 1557, oder Tabakât ül-Memâlik ve Derecât ül-Mesâlik*, ed. Petra Kappert (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1981), 110b.

İbrahim Pasha married in May 1524 in a sumptuous wedding celebrated in the Hippodrome for two weeks. The event was honored by the sultan, who personally attended the festivities, watching them from the kiosk built for him in İbrahim Pasha's palace at the Hippodrome.<sup>23</sup> Bringing the sultan, his grandees, his court, and the Janissaries together with the entire urban populace of Constantinople, İbrahim Pasha's wedding was the first of the grand-scale dynastic festivities to be organized at the Hippodrome throughout the sixteenth century to celebrate the circumcisions of princes and the marriages of princesses to high-ranking Ottoman officials.<sup>24</sup> Impressed by the pomp and the sultan's involvement in the pasha's wedding, modern historians starting with Hammer have often assumed that İbrahim Pasha's wife was one of Süleyman's sisters.<sup>25</sup> This claim gained even more supporters in the mid-twentieth century after the famous Turkish historian İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı stated in his history of the Ottoman Empire that the name of the princess whose hand was supposedly given in marriage to İbrahim Pasha was Hatice Sultan.<sup>26</sup>

As a matter of fact, in 1965 Uzunçarşılı published an article that acknowledged that he had previously been mistaken, and İbrahim Pasha's wife was not an Ottoman princess. Uzunçarşılı justified his new stance by asserting that the pasha's wife was a certain Muhsine Hatun, who had built a small mosque in the Kumkapı district of Istanbul, known also as "The Mosque of İbrahim Pasha's Wife," around which a neighborhood

<sup>23</sup> For İbrahim Pasha's wedding, see SANUDO, vol. 36, cols. 505–507; CELÄLZÄDE, *Geschichte Sultan Süleymän*, 115b–121a; JENKINS, *İbrahim Pasha*, 37–41; Metin AND, "Eski Osmanlı Şenlikleri Üzerine Üç İtalyan Kaynağı," *Forum* 14, no. 184 (December 1961): 14–16; Leslie P. PEIRCE, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 68; TURAN, "The Sultan's Favorite," 221–223.

<sup>24</sup> TURAN, "The Sultan's Favorite," 152–155.

<sup>25</sup> Hammer probably drew on Dimitrie Cantemir's work, the most comprehensive history written on the Ottomans in a European language before his own; see Demetrius CANTEMİR, *Histoire de l'Empire othoman*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1743), 2:292; HAMMER, *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches*, 3:38; UZUNÇARŞILI, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, 2:356; DANIŞMEND, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi*, 103; GÖKBİLGİN, "İbrahîm Paşa"; A. D. ALDERSON, *The Structure of the Ottoman Dynasty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), table XXIX; MERRIMAN, *Suleiman the Magnificent*, 77; Stanford J. SHAW, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 1:90; Çağatay ULUÇAY, *Padişahların Kadınları ve Kızları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1980), 32; PEIRCE, *Imperial Harem*, 66; Caroline FINKEL, *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1923* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 120.

<sup>26</sup> UZUNÇARŞILI, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, 2:356.



later developed named after her.<sup>27</sup> A year later, in 1966, Nigar Anafarta produced additional evidence endorsing Uzunçarşılı's new argument when she published a letter written to the pasha by his wife signed "Muhsine."<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, despite the contrary evidence, the belief that İbrahim Pasha was married to Süleyman's sister Hatice Sultan continued to have many adherents among historians.<sup>29</sup> The main reason behind this persistence was that no information other than her name was ever discovered about İbrahim Pasha's wife. If not a sister of Süleyman, who was she? The answer is once again found among Pietro Zen's papers from Istanbul. In a four-page letter dated 20 October 1523 and written to the Council of Ten, Zen reported:<sup>30</sup>

"On the 13th of this month, a person came to see me, who was around 35 years old, not well dressed, making himself in his report by name and practice the nephew of the mother of the wife of the magnificent İbrahim Pasha.... Let it be first known to your Signori that as to the relations with whom he associated himself was İskender Pasha who raided in Friuli and to whom *Zerbo* was later sent by your Excellency to save him from his sickness. This one [İskender] had initially as wife a noble woman from Pera who had already died many years ago, leaving him two daughters. One of them was married to that Yakub Ağa who died, leaving his wife childless. She being a widow at the time when the sultan had San Maura, some Turks bought İbrahim Pasha, who was very young, to him [İskender Pasha], who later gave him [İbrahim] to this Madonna, as she was still held by her father near Edirne. The other real daughter of that İskender had two daughters with a *sancak beğ* [governor of a sub-province] and one of them married before a *çavuş başı* [head of palace officials] of this sultan, and the other one is at the moment being married to the aforementioned Magnificent İbrahim Pasha. At the beginning she did not want to take him as husband, saying that he was her slave, but she was persuaded to consent as she has done and

<sup>27</sup> UZUNÇARŞILI, "İbrahim Paşa Padişah Damadı Değildi," 355–361.

<sup>28</sup> Anafarta found this letter in the Topkapı Palace Archives. NIGAR ANAFARTA, "Makbul İbrahim Paşa Kanunî'nin Damadı Mıydı?" *Hayat Tarih Mecmuası*, 1 September 1966, 74–76.

<sup>29</sup> Uzunçarşılı's chief critic was Çağatay Uluçay, who responded to Uzunçarşılı in his article "Kanunî Sultan Süleyman ve Ailesi ile İlgili Bazı Notlar Vesikalar," in *Kanunî Armağanı* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1970), 227–258. However, most of Uluçay's references lack proper citation, and he also quotes from popular works of dubious scholarship, such as Cemal KUTAY's article entitled "Makbûl İbrahim Paşa Nasıl Maktûl İbrahim Paşa Olmuştur?" *Tarih Konuşuyor* 3 (1965): 1181–1186.

<sup>30</sup> Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Lettere degli ambasciatori a Costantinopoli (1504–1550), Capi del Consiglio di Dieci, Reg. 1, 20 October 1523. Although the letter lacks a signature, Zen must have authored it, as he served in Istanbul between June 1523 and May 1524 as vice bailo, replacing the bailo Andrea Priuli, who died of plague in July 1523.

condescend to the wish of the sultan who wished it that way. And being these things true...”<sup>31</sup>

Zen’s letter not only confirms the information given in the account of 1523 on İbrahim’s origins but also establishes that his wife was a granddaughter of İskender Pasha. İbrahim Pasha’s relationship by marriage to İskender Pasha’s family can also be verified through a late sixteenth-century Ottoman chronicle, *İbtihâcü’-t-tevârîh*. In the section describing İbrahim Pasha’s expedition to Egypt in 1524, *İbtihâc* notes, “He [İbrahim Pasha] left Aleppo on the third of *Rebiyülahir* and turned toward Damascus. The governor of Damascus, Hürrem Pasha, was son of İskender Pasha, and he was one of the relatives of the [İbrahim] Pasha’s honorable wife.”<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, other details about İbrahim Pasha and his wife can also be brought to light that build on Zen’s letter, including the identity of İbrahim Pasha’s first owner. The registers detailing the disbursements made from the imperial treasury name Mihrişah and Hafsa as İskender Pasha’s daughters, and Fatma as his granddaughter.<sup>33</sup> İbrahim Pasha’s first owner, it seems, was this Mihrişah Hatun, who was better known by her epithet, Hacı Hatun, which denotes that she had become a pilgrim after undertaking the required rites at Mecca.<sup>34</sup> In his letter to Muhsine, İbrahim Pasha also refers to her by this name, while

<sup>31</sup> “Alli 13 del presente vene à me una persona de eta de anni circa 35 non ben vestito del nome et exercitio che in la sua relatione ha deposto facendosi nepote della madre de la sposa del magnifico Ybrayn bassa... perche saperano primo le signorie vostre circa el parente de chi lui si fa che è Scanderbassa che fu quello che corse in Friul et al quale poi dalle Excelentie Vostre è sta mandato el Zerbo per liberarlo dalla egritudine sua el qual inatamente have per moglier una nobile perota la qual sonno molti anni che manchò de questa lui lassate doe figliole luna maridata in el qual Jacob Aga el qual lassò la moglie senza figliolo alchuno et lei essendo vedoa al tempo che’l Signor hebbe Sancta Maura comproli alcuni Turchi el Magnifico Imbrayn Bassa allora piccolo el qual poi dono à questa Madonna essendo lei allora tenuta dal padre verso Andernopoli. L’altra veramente fiola del qual Scander ha avute do fiole cum uno sanzacco et una de esse per inanti fu maridata in el chiaus Bassi de questa Maestà et dell’altra è sta fatto matrimonio al presente in el prefato Magnifico Ibrayn Bassa la qual inanti non voleva consentir à tuorlo per marito cum dir che era sta suo schiavo Ma è stata persuasa à consentar come lha fato et condescender alla voluta del Signor che cosi ha voluto : et essendo queste cose vere...”

<sup>32</sup> *İbtihâcü’-tevârîh*, Süleymaniye Hüsrev Paşa, 321, 142a; for Hürrem Paşa’s being İskender Pasha’s son, see Franz BABINGER, “Fatih Sultan Mehmet ve İtalya,” *Belleten* 65 (1958): 74; *Rebiyülahir* is the fourth month in the Islamic calendar.

<sup>33</sup> İstanbul Başbakanlık Arşivi (BBA), Kamil Kepeci (KK) 7097, 8–9; 78; BBA Malîyeden Müdevver 17884, 5–6. İbrahim Pasha’s wife is mentioned separately; see KK 1764, 40, 143, 196.

<sup>34</sup> BARKAN and AYVERDİ, *İstanbul Vakıfları Tahrîr Defteri*, 370/foundation nr. 2175: Vakf-1 Hacı Mihrişah Hatun binti İskender Paşa.

sending his best regards to Her Excellency Hacı Hatun (*Hacı Hatun Hazretlerine*) and his mother-in-law (*kayın anama*).<sup>35</sup> It is obvious that Mihrişah Hatun was held in great esteem by İbrahim Pasha, who refers to her in the same letter as “the crown of good deeds and the ultimate in great things, may her chastity increase until the Day of Judgment.”<sup>36</sup> Like her father, İskender Pasha, Mihrişah Hatun was very wealthy, a fact documented by the numerous properties whose income she endowed for the maintenance of her mosque in the Kocamustafapaşa quarter of Istanbul.<sup>37</sup> Mihrişah must have died before 1527 because İbrahim Pasha’s endowment deed drawn up in that year stipulates that the Quran be recited daily for her soul.<sup>38</sup>

As Mihrişah Hatun was married to Yakup Ağa, İskender Pasha’s other daughter, Hafsa — İbrahim’s mother-in-law, to whom he never failed to send greetings in his letters — was married to the governor of Niğbolu (Nikopol), Mustafa Bey.<sup>39</sup> Since the Ottoman military elite in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries abounds with Mustafa Beys, it is very difficult to fully identify the particular one who was Muhsine’s father. It is known only that Mustafa Bey had a school built in Nish (Serbia) and a mosque in Stara Zagora (Bulgaria), for whose maintenance he established a foundation to be supported by several villages he owned in Bulgaria.<sup>40</sup> İbrahim Pasha’s endowment deed shows that Mustafa Bey was dead by 1527.<sup>41</sup> Lastly, Zen’s letter states that İbrahim Pasha’s sister-in-law, Fatma, whose name is mentioned in İbrahim’s letters in abbreviated form, Fati, was married to a *Çavuş Başı* at the court. In the Venetian

<sup>35</sup> İbrahim Pasha’s letters to Muhsine are currently found in Topkapı Palace Archives, catalogued as E 5860/2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11. These letters are also published by Uluçay; see ÇAĞATAY ULUÇAY, *Osmanlı Sultanlarına Aşk Mektupları* (İstanbul, 1950), 64–76; for the pasha’s reference to Mihrişah Hatun, see ULUÇAY, *Osmanlı Sultanlarına Aşk Mektupları*, 64.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> BARKAN and AYVERDİ, *İstanbul Vakıfları Tahrîr Defteri*, 370–371.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 437–438; there must be a mistake with the note in *Hadiqatü’l-cevâmi*, which states that Mihrişah Hatun’s gravestone, located near her mosque, is dated 947/1540–41; see Hafız Hüseyin AYYANSARAYI, *The Garden of the Mosques: Hafiz Hüseyin al-Ayyansarayî’s Guide to the Muslim Monuments of Ottoman Istanbul*, trans. and annot. Howard Crane (Boston: Brill, 2000), 100.

<sup>39</sup> Reindl notes that in 1494 İskender Pasha undertook great festivities to celebrate his sons’ circumcisions and his daughter’s marriage to Yakub Ağa; see REINDL, *Männer um Bâyezîd*, 250–251n47; for İskender Pasha’s son-in-law Mustafa Bey’s properties and foundations, see GÖKBİLGİN, *XV–XVI: Asırlarda Edirne ve Paşa Livası*, 440–441.

<sup>40</sup> YÜKSEL, *Osmanlı Mimârisinde*, 443–444.

<sup>41</sup> BARKAN and AYVERDİ, *İstanbul Vakıfları Tahrîr Defteri*, 438.

sources, İbrahim Pasha's brother-in-law appears as Zemath Bey, who was the commander of the *sipahis* (the sultan's standing cavalry corps) in 1523 and who was entrusted with the commandship of the Ottoman armada in 1532.<sup>42</sup>

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THE POLITICS OF İBRAHİM PASHA AND MUHSİNE'S MARRIAGE

Although it reveals invaluable information about İbrahim Pasha and his wife, Zen's letter also raises intriguing questions for the Ottoman historian. It is known that during the Süleymanic era it was a common practice for the highest-ranking military and administrative officials of the empire, the viziers, to marry into the dynasty and become the sultan's brothers- or sons-in-law.<sup>43</sup> For example, three of Süleyman's sisters were given in marriage to Ferhad, Mustafa, and Lutfi Pashas, his only daughter was married to his famous grand vizier Rüstem, and his two granddaughters wed his last two grand viziers, Semiz Ali and Sokollu Mehmed.<sup>44</sup> As Leslie Peirce has pointed out, marrying into the royal family elevated the official's position by creating a unique personal bond with the monarch and, as such, was a sign of being in the special favor of the sultan.<sup>45</sup> Among all the viziers and servants of Süleyman, no one ever enjoyed the sultan's favor as much as İbrahim. From the moment that he mounted the throne, Süleyman presented İbrahim in public as his beloved friend with whom he wanted to share all that he had, including his royal prerogatives.<sup>46</sup> Described by the Venetians as the sultan's "breath and heart," İbrahim was showered with myriad favors, including the most beautiful palaces, horses, jewels, robes, slaves, and camels, which in splendor and magnificence matched only the sultan's own.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> SANUDO, vol. 39, col. 368; vol. 56, cols. 105, 402, 469, 655, 736.

<sup>43</sup> PEIRCE, *Imperial Harem*, 65.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 66; ULUÇAY, *Padişahların Kadınları ve Kızları*, 31–34.

<sup>45</sup> Peirce, *Imperial Harem*, 65.

<sup>46</sup> For example, Süleyman not only granted a palace for İbrahim at the Hippodrome, which in several respects mirrored his own, but also bestowed on him the privilege to hold *divân* (imperial council) meetings at his own residence. The distribution of justice was considered a duty and prerogative of the sovereign, which was traditionally executed at the sultan's threshold. It seems that, with İbrahim Pasha, this later became the norm for the grand vizier; see ZEN [1523], 109; Halil İNALCIK, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300–1600* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 89–90, 95.

<sup>47</sup> Pietro BRAGADIN, "Sommaro della relazione [1526]," in Albèri, *Relazioni*, 3:103 (hereafter Bragadin [1526]); ZEN [1523], 115–116; SANUDO, vol. 34, cols. 359–360.

One wonders, then, why Süleyman, who was not known for withholding the highest honors from his favorite, did not also make him his brother-in-law.

The first explanation that immediately comes to mind suggests an earlier romantic attachment on İbrahim's part, although his feelings, it seems, were initially hardly reciprocated. Had this been the case, however, the marriage would have happened earlier, at least sometime between October 1521 and May 1522, when Süleyman granted İbrahim a private palace at the Hippodrome, where he could start a family.<sup>48</sup> Another explanation would be the lack of an Ottoman princess who could be given to the pasha in marriage. Although three of Süleyman's sisters — Hanim, Beyhan, and Şah Sultans — were already married in 1524 and were thus not eligible, it would certainly have been possible to find a suitable match for İbrahim within the extended royal family.<sup>49</sup>

Circumstantial evidence suggests, however, that Muhsine was specifically chosen as İbrahim's bride and that İbrahim Pasha's marriage was primarily a political arrangement related to his unusual rise to the grand vizierate. Zen's letter shows that although İbrahim Pasha's wedding was celebrated in May 1524, the marriage had already legally taken place and had publicly been known before October 1523, only a few months after İbrahim's promotion. Furthermore, the Venetian sources indicate that immediately after the marriage took place, Süleyman ordered vast amounts of sugar from Cyprus for the celebrations.<sup>50</sup> It seems that from the very beginning the wedding was conceived as a grand-scale public event and was therefore deliberately postponed until the spring, when the weather would allow outside festivities in which all the people in the city could take part. The preoccupation with receiving public recognition for the pasha's marriage, the unprecedented pomp surrounding the wedding, and the full dynastic commitment to the event all show that İbrahim's marriage to Muhsine was considered a matter of the utmost political importance. To be able to decipher the political meaning underlying this marriage, however, one has first to explore why İbrahim Pasha did not

<sup>48</sup> Nurhan ATASOY, *İbrahim Paşa Sarayı* (İstanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Basımevi, 1972), 15; TURAN, "The Sultan's Favorite," 143.

<sup>49</sup> In 1517 Mustafa Pasha married the widow of Bostancıbaşı İskender Pasha, whom Selim had executed in 1515; SANUDO, vol. 25, col. 615; Ferhad Pasha married Beyhan Sultan after the Belgrade campaign; SANUDO, vol. 33, cols. 37, 43–44; and Lutfi Pasha seems to have married Şah Sultan by April 1524; ULUÇAY, *Padişahların Kadınları Kızları*, 33n2.

<sup>50</sup> SANUDO, vol. 35, col. 259.

conform to the common practice of the time and marry a woman from the dynasty. This task calls for an analysis of the marriage alliances between the Ottoman dynasty and the slave elite that originated in the second half of the fifteenth century.

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MARRIAGES BETWEEN THE OTTOMAN DYNASTY AND  
THE RULING ELITE

Leslie Peirce has rightly argued that the primary objective of such marriages was to boost the bonds of loyalty between the dynasty and the members of the slave elite (*kul*), who had come to occupy the most prominent posts in the empire since the time of Mehmed the Conqueror. Through the enormous power they wielded over the military administration and the political apparatus, *kuls* were a potential threat to the autocracy of the sultan. Therefore, to ensure their long-term attachment to the dynasty, the sultans began to tie more closely the most powerful members of the slave institution through marriages to the imperial family.<sup>51</sup> Peirce's keen observation notwithstanding, the evolution of the practice has to be contextualized within the broader political, institutional, and social developments that the empire had undergone from the time of Mehmed II through the first decades of the sixteenth century. Only in this way can it be understood why, for example, much-trusted slave viziers like Rüstem and Sokollu Mehmed were given the honor of marrying into the imperial family, whereas Sultan's favorite, İbrahim, was not.

First and foremost, the rise of the marriage alliances between the Ottoman dynasty and the ruling elite was related to the centralizing reforms that Mehmed II introduced into the Ottoman polity after the conquest of Constantinople (1453). Mehmed claimed to be the successor to Roman emperors, and his imperial ambitions involved rebuilding Constantinople as the new center of the Ottoman monarchy, which would pronounce the new imperial image of the sultan as well as his supreme power.<sup>52</sup> For this purpose Mehmed launched a grand architectural program in the city to

<sup>51</sup> PEIRCE, *Imperial Harem*, 70–71.

<sup>52</sup> Halil İNALCIK, "Mehmed II," *İA*; Gülru NECİPOĞLU, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 10–21; Çiğdem KAFESÇİOĞLU, "The Ottoman Capital in the Making: The Reconstruction of Constantinople in the Fifteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1996), 3–6.

build new military, administrative, and religious institutions that concentrated political, military, financial, and ideological resources at unprecedented levels in one place under the command of the sultan.<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, what really gave life to Mehmed's imperial project was the making of a new imperial elite recruited primarily from slaves of Christian background. Mehmed relied on his new elite, trained and acculturated in the imperial palace under the sultan's personal supervision, to articulate his new political and ideological order.<sup>54</sup> This elite ran the military and administrative institutions that embodied his supreme authority; this elite celebrated his imperial majesty by performing assigned roles in court ceremonials; this elite helped him rebuild the city by simultaneously undertaking construction of its own; and this elite delineated the new hierarchies in Ottoman society by participating in the monumentalization of the capital with projects that, compared to those of the sultan, communicated a sense of humility and thereby reinforced the sultan's most magnificent status.<sup>55</sup> Employing the members of this new elite in all the military and administrative positions across the empire, at high levels and at low, and at the center as well as in the provinces, Mehmed's centralized empire functioned through a web of personal networks, connected with personal loyalties and patron-client relations that converged on the sultan, rather than through bureaucratic institutions.<sup>56</sup>

Historians have explained how Mehmed used his expanded power, materialized in the hands of his new elite, to emasculate the traditional forces in the Ottoman polity with which the sultans usually had had to contend for power, namely the frontier warlords and the landed Turkish nobility.<sup>57</sup> However, they have not examined the effects of this new political configuration on the dynasty, especially on the crown princes holding

<sup>53</sup> İNALCIK, "Mehmed II"; NECİPOĞLU, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power*, 21; KAFESÇİOĞLU, "Ottoman Capital in the Making," 3–6, 26–163.

<sup>54</sup> İNALCIK, "Mehmed II"; NECİPOĞLU, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power*, 256.

<sup>55</sup> İNALCIK, "Mehmed II"; NECİPOĞLU, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power*, 250; KAFESÇİOĞLU, "Ottoman Capital in the Making," 87–100, 173–178, 201–204, 321–324.

<sup>56</sup> Although it is generally assumed that the Ottoman Empire took on a bureaucratic character after Mehmed II, Cornell Fleischer's work has demonstrated that the expansion and consolidation of the bureaucratic bodies were a product of Süleyman's reign; see Cornell FLEISCHER, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 201–231; FLEISCHER, "Preliminaries to the Study of Ottoman Bureaucracy," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 10 (1986): 135–141.

<sup>57</sup> İNALCIK, "Mehmed II"; Cemal KAFADAR, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 146–150.

court in the provinces and on the process of dynastic succession. Mehmed's centralizing reforms immensely increased the power of the sultan's household, now permanently located in Istanbul, and as such partly dwarfed and peripheralized the princely households, yet the Ottoman sovereignty remained fragmented along the collateral male lines of the dynasty.<sup>58</sup> Theoretically, each crown prince continued to have an equal claim on the throne, and the imperial center, despite its supreme power, did not have the legitimacy to choose the next sultan. Be that as it may, from Mehmed on, no prince could remain indifferent to the immense power that the center wielded through its unmatched military, financial, and political resources. It was obvious that to gain the throne, a prince had to win the support of those who controlled the center or of those who were connected to it through personal networks. This required the establishment of political alliances between princes and members of the centralized elite, and dynastic marriage turned out to be the key means by which such alliances came to be cemented.

For example, during Mehmed's time, Prince Bayezid, then governor of Amasya, married two of his daughters to his father's prominent men, (Kara) Mustafa Pasha and (Arnavud) Sinan Pasha, in order to gain the advantage over his brother, Cem, whose court was in Konya.<sup>59</sup> Eventually, both connections proved extremely useful for Bayezid: when Mehmed died, Mustafa Pasha was the governor of Bolu, and Sinan the governor-general of Anatolia, and in these capacities the pashas effectively blocked the roads between Konya and Istanbul, which enabled their father-in-law to arrive in Istanbul first and ascend the throne.<sup>60</sup> In a similar fashion, Bayezid's sons during their princehood also engaged in marriage alliances with the centripetal ruling elite in order to develop a following on which they hoped to rely in the future. Bayezid's favorite son, Ahmed, for instance, married three of his daughters to Mustafa Bey, the governor of Midilli, *Silahdar* (keeper of the sword) Süleyman Bey,

<sup>58</sup> The sovereignty of the princes, albeit limited, is evident in the fact that the princely courts were located in the capitals of the old Turkish principalities in Anatolia that had been conquered by the Ottomans; see İsmail Hakkı UZUNÇARŞILI, "Sancağa Çıkarılan Osmanlı Şehzadeleri," *Belleten* 39 (1975): 667–668.

<sup>59</sup> REINDL, *Männer um Bāyezīd*, 294, 319; Çağatay ULUÇAY, "Bayezid II. nin Âilesi," *Tarih Dergisi* 10 (1959): 119.

<sup>60</sup> REINDL, *Männer um Bāyezīd*, 294–295, 320–325. It is also worth mentioning that Sinan Pasha was a friend and an ally of İshak Pasha, the leader of the pro-Bayezid faction in the capital; see REINDL, *Männer um Bāyezīd*, 38, 321.



and *Ser-ulufeciyan* (head of the Janissary Cavalry Corps) Mehmed Bey.<sup>61</sup> Likewise, Selim chose as his son-in-law his father's trusted servant Bostancıbaşı İskender, who later in Bayezid's reign became the commander of the Ottoman fleet. While holding this post, İskender delivered great help to his father-in-law in 1512 by imposing a blockade on the Bosphorus and preventing his chief rival, Prince Ahmed, from crossing from Üsküdar to Istanbul.<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, these marriage arrangements were symbiotic, beneficial to both parties. For the ruling elite, forging political alliances by marriage was a strategy to retain position in a political culture in which there was no security of tenure from one reign to another. Although the Ottomans were one of the first among early modern states to develop a class of state servants defined by office rather than family, noble birth, or wealth, the central government continued to be an extension of the sultan's household, inseparable from his person.<sup>63</sup> Officials thus remained essentially the sultan's personal servants, deriving their power from the service they rendered to him. Nothing can demonstrate this point more forcefully than Mehmed's legal code, or *kanunname*. In it the sultan not only defined the chief military, administrative, and religious officials of the empire and outlined the hierarchies regulating their promotions, ranks, salaries, and ceremonial positions at court, but also referred to the officeholders and their assigned tasks by using the first-person possessive pronoun, such as "my viziers, my financial directors, my military judges," or "in my imperial council, my estate, my imperial signet." In this way he stressed the personal nature of Ottoman rule and showed that no formal distinction existed between the person of the monarch and the state.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> The governor of Midilli, Mustafa Bey, was İskender Paşa's son, in other words Muhsine's maternal uncle; see ULUÇAY, "Bayezid II. nin Ailesi," 110–111; on *ulufeciyan*, see İsmail Hakkı UZUNÇARŞILI, *Osmanlı Devleti Teşkilâtından Kapukulu Ocakları*, 2 vols. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1943), 2:137.

<sup>62</sup> FISHER, *Foreign Relations of Turkey*, 98, 100; ULUÇAY, "Bayezid II. nin Ailesi," 116n83; UZUNÇARŞILI, "Yavuz Sultan Selim'in Kızı Hanım Sultan," 469–471; Reindl thinks that this İskender was the one whom Bayezid entrusted with the execution of Sultan Cem's son Oğuz (ex. 1482); see REINDL, *Männer um Bâyezid*, 124, 245–246n26.

<sup>63</sup> Heath Lowry indicates that the noble birth to some degree remained an important factor among the chief Ottoman elite between 1453 and 1516, as many of the Ottoman grand viziers came from the old Byzantine and Balkan noble houses; see Heath LOWRY, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 115–130; İNALCIK, *Classical Age*, 77; FLEISCHER, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 196; NECİPOĞLU, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power*, 21.

<sup>64</sup> Abdülkadir ÖZCAN, "Fâtih'in Teşkilât Kanunnamesi ve Nizam-ı Âlem İçin Kardeş Katli Meselesi," *Tarih Dergisi* 33 (1980–1981): 6–48.

Partly as a consequence of the new imperial image that Mehmed cultivated, which endowed the sultan with a previously unknown majesty, dignity, and even sacredness, the Ottoman sultans after the conquest largely refrained from contact with the outside world and secluded themselves in the private quarters of the palace.<sup>65</sup> As a result, they had to delegate most of the routine tasks of everyday government to their principal officials. Indeed, it was a great privilege to be entrusted with carrying out the sultan's public responsibilities, as it meant having a share of the tremendous power and authority that the sultan possessed. For the sultan, however, delegation of power involved great risk because it implied granting multiple individuals access to royal prerogative. Although most of the military officials were slaves and thus could not be an alternative to the sultan, they might still use their immense power primarily to advance their own interests rather than his. Thus, the most important virtue that the sultan sought from his officials was faithful service. Not surprisingly, only a close personal relationship, based on ties of loyalty, would ensure such dedication. Therefore, sultans usually appointed to key positions those who had first served them privately in the inner court and demonstrated absolute commitment to their cause.<sup>66</sup>

Since all power devolved from the monarch and was exercised in his name, performance of office depended purely on his consent. As a corollary, appointments of the chief officials remained effective only as long as such consent could be manifest, that is, as long as the sultan was alive. Just as all treaties signed and all concessions and privileges granted by the sultan became void at his death, so too did officials lose their claim to an office once the sultan whom they personally had served was gone.<sup>67</sup> In theory, the successor could, and often did, discharge all his father's men and replace them with people from his own household, with whom he had close personal ties and on whose loyalties he fully relied.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, to perpetuate power as well as secure upward advancement, the ruling elite often sought to cultivate personal connections with the crown princes to win their trust. As kinship ties were the most effective means of forging personal bonds, marriage became the most popular method of doing so.

<sup>65</sup> NECİPOĞLU, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power*, 10–16, 250.

<sup>66</sup> İNALCIK, *Classical Age*, 77–79.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>68</sup> For examples, see my discussion below of Selim's and Süleyman's relations with the elite that they found in government when they first mounted the throne.

In the post-Mehmed era, the sultans also engaged in marriage alliances with the elite to manipulate politics, especially with respect to promotions. Although personal relations based on ties of loyalty remained paramount in Ottoman politics, the Ottoman military and civil administration was at the same time growing more professional. Besides the sultan's trust and grace, know-how, capability, and experience became factors in acquiring and holding an office.<sup>69</sup> Undoubtedly, Mehmed's project to create a new imperial elite composed of slaves was central to this process. Making the quality of service to the ruler the most important criterion for upward mobility, Mehmed indirectly promoted the importance of acquiring skills and gaining expertise for performing a job. In the constantly expanding early sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire, where on the one hand there was a growing demand for qualified manpower in administration, and on the other wars, executions, epidemics, and primitive medical skills made early death a common phenomenon, the professional elite was in terribly short supply.<sup>70</sup> Their insufficient number in fact greatly enhanced their political leverage against the sultan, whom they could easily manipulate or even patronize with their knowledge of and experience in government. This was especially the case in the first years of each reign, when the sultan, as a novice in central government, had no other choice but to rely on the advice and expertise of the chief officials.<sup>71</sup> For instance, even a true autocrat like Selim I (r. 1512–1520) had to bend to the power of his father's able officials when he first came to the throne. Although he had become sultan against their wishes, Selim initially kept most of his father's grandees in office: the pool of experienced and skillful officials needed to run the empire was very small in the early sixteenth century.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Ebru TURAN, "Voices of Opposition in the Reign of Sultan Süleyman: The Case of İbrahim Paşa (1523–36)," in *Studies on Istanbul and Beyond: The Freely Papers*, Volume I, ed. Robert G. Ousterhout (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, 2007), 32.

<sup>70</sup> FLEISCHER, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 211.

<sup>71</sup> Venetian reports from the early years of Süleyman's reign attest that Grand Vizier Piri Pasha, whom Süleyman inherited from his father, was in charge of all government affairs; see Sanudo, vol. 29, cols. 390–392; vol. 33, col. 37.

<sup>72</sup> Çağatay ULUÇAY, "Yavuz Sultan Selim Nasıl Padişah Oldu?" *Tarih Dergisi* 9 (1954): 53–90; for Selim maintaining his father's men in office, see Erdem ÇİPA, "The Centrality of the Periphery: The Rise to Power of Selim I, 1487–1512" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2007), 136; the Venetian ambassadors Alvise Mocenigo and Bartolomeo Contarini noted in 1517 that after eliminating all his father's men, Selim had no senior and experienced pashas around him; see MOCENIGO and CONTARINI, "Sommario delle relazioni di Alvise Mocenigo e di Bartolomeo Contarini," in Albèri, *Relazioni*, 56.

In this respect, accepting the elite in the imperial family as sons-in-law was to some degree the dynasty's acknowledgment of the elite's increasing political importance and power. Otherwise, as they were mostly slaves, it was socially unacceptable, if not legally forbidden, for the *kuls* to marry freeborn women, much less those of royal blood.<sup>73</sup> A passage in Aşıkpaşazade's history indicates that Sultan Bayezid's innovation in choosing his sons-in-law from among his slave elite gave rise at that time to a public debate questioning the legitimacy of the practice. In an alleged conversation between Hersekzade Ahmed Pasha, Bayezid's son-in-law and governor-general (later also grand vizier), and the Mameluke Sultan, who was himself a slave, the latter inquired about the pasha's recent marriage into the dynasty by asking him how a slave could take the sultan's daughter as his wife. In response, Ahmed Pasha justified Bayezid's action by stating that his master has shown him grace in acknowledgment of his loyal service.<sup>74</sup>

Professionalization not only increased the slave elite's power but also led them to develop a new self-perception that allowed them to justify their existence and authority separately from the person of the sultan. After Mehmed, and especially from the early decades of the sixteenth century on, the members of the Ottoman imperial elite came to define themselves by the jobs they performed; they asked for professional recognition and advancement on the basis of their achievements and capabilities. They even began to see themselves as entitled to superior office, status, or authority on the basis of merit, independent of, and sometimes even in opposition to, the sultan's discretion.<sup>75</sup> In these circumstances, as professionalization began to diminish the sultan's personal control over the state apparatus, the sultans introduced dynastic marriages as a strategy to maintain a firm grip on the elite, especially at the higher echelons,

<sup>73</sup> R. BRUNSCHVIG, "Abd," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (hereafter *EI2*); J. SCHAET, "Nikāh," *EI2*.

<sup>74</sup> "Aşıkpaşazāde," *Tevārīḫ-i Âl-i 'Osmān'*, ed. Âli Bey (İstanbul: Maṭba'a-yı Âmiri, 1914 [1332], 234; Gülru Necipoğlu shows that even in the later sixteenth century, when the slave elite reached the height of its power, the princesses married to high-ranking officials would still look down on their husbands because of their status as slaves; see Gülru NECİPOĞLU, *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 43–44.

<sup>75</sup> Both Ferhad Pasha's (ex. 1524) and (Hain) Ahmed Pasha's (ex. 1524) disappointment with and protest against İbrahim's elevation to the grand vizierate, which eventually led to their executions, should be interpreted in this framework; see TURAN, "The Sultan's Favorite," 184–191.

in order to keep a tight rein on decision making. Bestowing on certain favored individuals the honor of marrying into the dynasty and having them promoted rapidly to higher posts on the basis of this personal connection, the sultans forced the elite to compete for their favor and made them understand that regardless of how competent or proficient they were, they still had to court the favor of the sultan to reach the top of the pyramid.<sup>76</sup>

Not surprisingly, a sultan's willingness to place his kin by marriage in key positions was considered a blatant disregard of the elite's sensibilities that could easily backfire. A good example in this regard from the late fifteenth century is the case of the aforementioned Hersekzade Ahmed Pasha. Originally a descendant of Bosnian nobility, Ahmed Pasha was the governor of Hamidili — a relatively minor post in the political hierarchy — when Bayezid II ascended the throne in 1481. Shortly after his rapid nomination to the governor-generalship of Anatolia in 1483, Ahmed Pasha not only married Bayezid's daughter Hundi Sultan (1484) but also assumed the commandership of the imperial campaign against the Mamelukes in 1486, probably as the surrogate for his father-in-law, who did not participate in the campaign.<sup>77</sup> Being several years junior to the experienced generals in the army, however, Ahmed Pasha was not fully acknowledged as the commander in chief. Senior commanders, such as Karagöz Pasha and Hızıroğlu Mehmed Bey, flatly refused to take orders from him and broke ranks. Ahmed Pasha not only lost the battle but also fell captive to the Mamelukes.<sup>78</sup> This early incident, it seems, did little to deter Bayezid in the future from establishing marriage alliances with

<sup>76</sup> This trend among the professionalized elite gained a new momentum in the later decades of the sixteenth century with the rise of a bureaucratic consciousness. Associating the legitimacy of the state with its commitment to universalist principles, such as meritocracy, seniority, and capability, the elite came to denounce the sultan's personal interference in state affairs — particularly in the case of nominating people to government positions on the basis of mere personal favor — as illegitimate and even detrimental to the interest of the Ottoman commonwealth; see FLEISCHER, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 214–231, 293–307; and FLEISHER, “The Lawgiver as Messiah,” 159, 172–173.

<sup>77</sup> On Hersekzade Ahmed Pasha, see Erdmute HELLER, *Venedische Quellen zur Lebensgeschichte des Ahmed Pasa Hersek-Oghlu* (Munich: Uni-Druck, 1961); REINDL, *Männer um Bâyezîd*, 129–146.

<sup>78</sup> Selâhattin TANSEL, *Sultan II: Bâyezît'in Siyasî Hayatı* (İstanbul: Millî Eğitim Basımevi, 1966), 102n57; Richard Franz KREUTEL, *Der fromme Sultan Bayezid: Die Geschichte seiner Herrschaft (1481–1512) nach den altosmanischen Chroniken des Oruç und des Anonymus Hanivaldanus* (Graz: Verl. Styria, 1978), 204; REINDL, *Männer um Bâyezîd*, 133–134; 265–266.

the elite. Throughout his thirty-one-year reign, he continued to marry his numerous daughters and granddaughters to those among the elite who were in his good graces.<sup>79</sup>

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THE CHIEF OTTOMAN ELITE FROM BAYEZİD II TO SÜLEYMAN

Only a few of Bayezid's sons-in-law, however, reached the highest-ranking office, the vizierate.<sup>80</sup> Many of Bayezid's favorites either fell slain on the battlefield during the campaigns led by his warlike successor, Selim, or were executed or at best slighted by the new sultan, who had no trust in his father's grandees after they collectively opposed his accession.<sup>81</sup> Although Selim was eager to replace them as soon as possible with his own men, it took him several years to develop a set of chief officials whom he had personally chosen. More specifically, it was in the period following the Mameluke Campaign in 1517 that the upper strata of the Ottoman elite came to be completely recast. Piri Pasha ascended to the grand vizierate (1517), Mustafa Pasha to the post of the second vizier (1519), and Ferhad Pasha to that of the third vizier (1519), and Ahmed Pasha became governor-general of Rumelia (1519).<sup>82</sup> Apart from their joint dedication to the sultan, however, Selim's new elite was a factionalized one, divided by a fierce competition for office and power.

The intra-elite rivalry was related mostly to the different professional backgrounds of these individuals. Piri Mehmed Pasha was originally a financial bureaucrat during the time of Bayezid; he was raised in 1514 by Selim to the vizierate mainly to curb the influence of his father's

<sup>79</sup> A. D. ALDERSON, *The Structure of the Ottoman Dynasty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), table XXVIII; ULUÇAY, "Bayezid II. nin Ailesi," 109–124.

<sup>80</sup> PEIRCE, *Imperial Harem*, 66.

<sup>81</sup> For example, Bayezid's favorite, Hasan Pasha, fell in the Battle of Çaldıran in 1514; see Selâhattin TANSEL, *Yavuz Sultan Selim* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1969), 61; REINDL, *Männer um Bâyezîd*, 205n3; Dukaginzade Ahmed Pasha, who was married to one of Bayezid's granddaughters, was executed by Selim in 1515; see TANSEL, *Yavuz Sultan Selim*, 73; Yunus Pasha, who was very dear to Bayezid and was also married to one of his granddaughters, was executed in 1517; see TANSEL, *Yavuz Sultan Selim*, 203; REINDL, *Männer um Bâyezîd*, 210n23; KREUTEL, *Der fromme Sultan Bayezid*, 277; SANUDO, vol. 19, col. 225: "E se dice che ditto Signor non vol con lui gran maistri, et vol far zente nova."

<sup>82</sup> Yusuf KÜÇÜKDAĞ, *Vezîr-i Âzam Pîri Mehmed Paşa (1463 ?–1532)* (Konya: Hayra Hizmet Vakfı, 1994), 39; Celâl-zâde Mustafa Çelebi, *Selim-nâme*, ed. Ahmet Uğur and Mustafa Çuhadar (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1997), 343–344; SANUDO, vol. 27, col. 280; vol. 28, col. 409.

astute advisors. A senior official, Piri Pasha had sufficient experience in the affairs of central government, yet he did not belong to the core military elite surrounding Bayezid.<sup>83</sup> Mustafa Pasha, on the other hand, was a junior governor during Bayezid's reign, and he was rapidly promoted first to the governor-generalship of Anatolia (1516) and then immediately to that of Rumelia (1517).<sup>84</sup> He must have caught Selim's eye for his political skills as well as loyalty, for in 1517 he was also given the honor of marrying Selim's daughter Hanım Sultan, the widow of Bostancıbaşı İskender Pasha, whom Selim had earlier executed.<sup>85</sup> In contrast to Piri and Mustafa Pashas, who started their careers during Bayezid's reign and rose mainly through the ranks —indeed, notwithstanding the touch of the sultan's favor — Ferhad and Ahmed were Selim's slaves and favorites from his own household, whom he had kept by his side constantly since his princely years.<sup>86</sup> Nurtured and instructed by the sultan, having attended to him for years and fought alongside him in all his wars, Ferhad and Ahmed each saw himself entitled to the highest office, the grand vizierate, and detested the others, especially Piri and Mustafa Pashas, who not only stood in their way but were also originally men of another master.<sup>87</sup>

This was the elite that Süleyman inherited in 1520, when Selim suddenly died after ruling for only eight years. In fact, Süleyman's accession amplified the polarization at the top of the empire. With the disappearance from the political scene of Selim's autocratic person, which was the

<sup>83</sup> On Piri Pasha's appointment to the grand vizierate, see CELÂL-ZÂDE, *Selim-nâme*, 251; KÜÇÜKDAĞ, *Vezîr-i Âzam Pîri Mehmed Paşa*, 19–28.

<sup>84</sup> Selim had two viziers called Mustafa, and secondary sources have confused one with the other. The confusion comes from the fact that both once held the governorship of Morea. The first, known also as Mustafa Jurisevic, was raised to the vizierate upon Selim's accession (1512), and dismissed in 1514; he died in 1519. The second, who became vizier in 1519, is also known as Çoban Mustafa Pasha; he died in 1529. See REINDL, *Männer um Bâyezîd*, 76n177; YÜKSEL, *Osmanlı Mimârisinde II*, 393–397; for the confusion of the two, see GÖKBİLGİN, *Edirne ve Paşa Livası*, 524–525; for Çoban Mustafa Pasha's appointments, see FERİDÜN BEY, *Münşe'âtü's-selâîin*, 2 vols. (İstanbul, 1857 [1274], 1:451, 453; for his death, see SANUDO, vol. 50, cols. 471–472.

<sup>85</sup> TANSEL, *Yavuz Sultan Selim*, 74; for Mustafa's marriage to Selim's daughter, see SANUDO, vol. 25, col. 615.

<sup>86</sup> ZEN [1523], 110; HADİDİ, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman (1299–1523)*, ed. Necdet Öztürk (İstanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Basımevi, 1991), 429; KEMALPAŞAZÂDE, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman X. Defter*, ed. Şerafettin Severcan (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1996), 12; HÖCA ŞADE'DDİN, *Tâcü't-tevârih*, 2 vols. (İstanbul: Tabhane-yi Âmire, 1862–1864 [1279–1280], 2:604; ÇİPA, "The Centrality of the Periphery," 212.

<sup>87</sup> For the rivalry and enmity among the pashas, see CELÂLZÂDE, *Geschichte Sultan Süleymân*, 24b, 46a–57a, 83a; HADİDİ, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*, 443–444; Zen [1523], 111, 125; SANUDO, vol. 29, col. 490; vol. 36, col. 99.

only force unifying the elite, the pashas gained free rein to start a ferocious war with each other by manipulating the new sultan. For his own part, Süleyman was far too young and inexperienced to insulate himself from their manipulations. Compared to his grandfather Bayezid, who was thirty-four when he assumed the throne, and his father, Selim, who was forty-two, Süleyman was just twenty-six.<sup>88</sup> More than his relatively young age, however, his limited acquaintance with warfare and politics made Süleyman a complete novice in state affairs. Although Ottoman princes would occasionally accompany their fathers in their campaigns and take active part in battles by commanding troops, Süleyman never attended any of his father's wars.<sup>89</sup> As the only son, he was always left behind to guard the western borders of the empire while his father was campaigning in the east.<sup>90</sup> His status as heir apparent thus significantly reduced the chances of his gaining experience and legitimacy on the battlefield. Civil war routinely broke out among princes after the death of a sultan, the victor of which would succeed as the new sultan.<sup>91</sup> As Selim's only son, however, Süleyman had no competitors for the throne. Although this point is often cited as Süleyman's great advantage, it also left him unproven in the eyes of his officials, servants, subjects, and enemies.<sup>92</sup> The revolt that broke out in Syria immediately following his accession, the relief and joy that the Christian powers in the West showed upon hearing of Selim's death, the pope's immediate call for a joint crusade to take advantage of the "lamb" that had replaced a "wolf" on the Ottoman throne, the reluctance on the part of Hungary and Venice to renew the peace treaties they had with the Ottoman sultan all clearly demonstrate that Süleyman paid dearly for his advantage.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>88</sup> V. J. PARRY, "Bâyazîd," *EI2*; Halil İNALCIK, "Selîm," *EI2*; Franz BABINGER, "Sulejman's des Prächtigen Geburstag," *Mitteilungen zur osmanischen Geschichte*, no. 2 (1923–1926): 165.

<sup>89</sup> Haldun EROĞLU, *Osmanlı Devletinde Şehzadelik Kurumu* (Ankara: Akçağ, 2004), 147–158.

<sup>90</sup> GÖKBİLGİN, "Süleymân I."

<sup>91</sup> İNALCIK, *Classical Age*, 59–60; PEIRCE, *Imperial Harem*, 18–27.

<sup>92</sup> Contemporary Ottoman historians mention Süleyman's extraordinary fortune and cherish his auspicious accession, which did not lead to any bloodshed in the family; see HADİDİ, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*, 422; Maṭraḫçı NAŞŪḦ, *Süleymânâme*, Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi Revan 1286, 11a.

<sup>93</sup> Paolo GIOVIO, *Commentario de le cose de' turchi* (Rome, 1531), 33r: "et certamente pareo a tutti che che un' leon' arrabbiato havesse lasciato un' mansueto agnello per successore"; for the first reactions to Süleyman's accession, see TURAN, "The Sultan's Favorite," 22–52.



Naturally, the internal and external threats that Süleyman as an unproven and insecure ruler encountered at the beginning of his reign greatly increased his dependency on his grandees. Yet he was deeply alienated from them. That mutual distrust between the new sultan and the old guard was present in the extreme, and Süleyman's experience was more difficult than those of his predecessors. Since there were no other contenders for the throne, during his princehood neither Süleyman nor the members of the elite had felt an urge to make connections or alliances with one another. More than anything else, however, what made Süleyman an easy prey to his pashas' manipulations was his lack of experience in imperial politics. This too was linked to the fact that he was Selim's only son. After Selim had eliminated all his brothers and nephews, Süleyman remained his sole alternative. Selim knew well that sons could be as dangerous as brothers — his own revolt that had dethroned his father, Bayezid, proved that.<sup>94</sup> Most interestingly, although contemporary Ottoman accounts prefer to remain silent on the subject, European sources indicate that during 1514–1515, while Selim dragged his army off to a long, harsh, and uncertain eastern campaign against his archrival, Shah Ismail Safavi, the raging Janissaries threatened to depose Selim and bring his son to the throne. According to the Venetian sources, Selim, intimidated by the Janissaries' threats, sent a poisoned robe to Süleyman. Suspicious of his father's motives, Süleyman had one of his slaves wear it first, upon which the slave immediately died.<sup>95</sup> Even though it is hard to verify the truth of the anecdote, it implies that a certain degree of distrust existed between the father and the son.<sup>96</sup> Hence, it is reasonable to think that Süleyman was aware of the rumors that the Janissaries wanted to depose his father and make him the sultan, and therefore was very careful not to provoke his father's wrath. Thus, he preferred to keep a low public profile by secluding himself in his princely court in Manisa and showing no interest in politics.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>94</sup> ULUÇAY, "Yavuz Sultan Selim Nasıl Padişah Oldu?".

<sup>95</sup> SANUDO, vol. 19, cols. 86–87; vol. 20, col. 225.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 21, cols. 142–143: "contra sò fiol ha mal animo."

<sup>97</sup> In this regard Guillaume Postel, who came to the Ottoman Empire first in 1535–1537 and again in 1549–1550, gives an interesting anecdote that he heard in Istanbul. Allegedly, a few years before his death, Selim asked his sons who would be the sultan after him; and those who said "me" died immediately. Only Süleyman, advised by his mother, who knew the sultan well, completely refused the throne and said he was not his father's son but a slave — even to accept the sultanate after his death would give him great pain. This story further strengthens the idea that Süleyman owed his survival to his lack of interest in poli-

Under these circumstances, Süleyman sought first to exploit the conflicts and rivalries among the elite to enhance his standing. To this end, he appeared bent on diminishing the governmental influence of his experienced and in some respects overbearing grand vizier, Piri Pasha, and his protégé, the second vizier, Mustafa Pasha, by supporting their chief rivals, Ferhad and Ahmed.<sup>98</sup> For example, he married his sister Beyhan Sultan to Ferhad, who was craftily excluded by Piri Pasha from the first two imperial campaigns in Hungary and Rhodes with tasks in eastern Anatolia that kept him far away from the action.<sup>99</sup> More than Ferhad, however, it was Ahmed who enjoyed Süleyman's favor and regard at the expense of the grand vizier. Following the Hungarian campaign in 1521, which resulted in the conquest of Belgrade, Süleyman raised Ahmed to the vizierate in recognition of his superb performance, even though it was well known that during the siege the pasha frequently clashed with the grand vizier on many issues.<sup>100</sup> In a similar fashion, a year later, at the Rhodes campaign, Süleyman, dissatisfied with his conduct in the siege, removed Mustafa Pasha from the general commandership and appointed Ahmed Pasha in his place.<sup>101</sup>

When in June 1523 Süleyman dismissed Piri Pasha and sent him to retirement, many expected that Ahmed Pasha would succeed him in office.<sup>102</sup> To everyone's surprise, however, Süleyman instead chose his

tics. Cited in PEIRCE, *Imperial Harem*, 230; see also Guillaume POSTEL, *Des histoires orientales: Et principalement des turkes ou turchikes et schitiques ou tartaresques et aultres qui en sont descendues*, ed. Jacques Rollet (Istanbul: Editions Isis, 1999), 196.

<sup>98</sup> Celälzâde mentions that Piri Pasha personally requested Selim to raise another vizier who would support him in every matter. Upon this request, Selim promoted Mustafa Pasha to the vizierate; see CELÄL-ZÂDE, *Selîm-nâme*, 343. Likewise, Piri Pasha recommended Mustafa Pasha as the general commander of the Rhodes campaign in 1522, although Ahmed Pasha volunteered for it; see Hüseyin G. YURDAYDIN, *Kanuni'nin Cülusu ve İlk Seferleri* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1961), 36.

<sup>99</sup> SANUDO, vol. 33, cols. 37, 43–44; YURDAYDIN, *Kanuni'nin Cülusu ve İlk Seferleri*, 13, 38; ULUÇAY, *Padişahların Kadınları ve Kızları*, 31.

<sup>100</sup> Süleyman appreciated Ahmed Pasha's courage and dedication during the Belgrade campaign, and he honored him with a caftan, an ornate sword, and two thousand gold coins; see Ferîdün BEY, *Münşe'âtü's-selâtin*, 1:512; CELÄLZÂDE, *Geschichte Sultan Süleymân*, 46a–46b; YURDAYDIN, *Kanuni'nin Cülusu ve İlk Seferleri*, 33–34.

<sup>101</sup> YURDAYDIN, *Kanuni'nin Cülusu ve İlk Seferleri*, 40.

<sup>102</sup> Ahmed Pasha was considered the hero of the Rhodes campaign; see Sanudo, vol. 34, cols. 13, 16; Ferîdün BEY, *Münşe'âtü's-selâtin*, 1:533. It seems that Ahmed had many supporters who wanted to see him in the grand vizierate. Celälzâde notes that Ahmed Pasha and his supporters plotted against Piri Pasha and thus made Piri Pasha fall, see CELÄLZÂDE, *Geschichte Sultan Süleymân*, 110a; for Ahmed Pasha's disappointment after İbrahim's rise to office, see NEŞRİ, *Cihännümâ*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Y 45, 197b.

favorite and the head of the Privy Chamber, İbrahim Ağa, as his new grand vizier. İbrahim was an intimate friend and confidant of Süleyman from his princely household, and his rise to the grand vizierate signified Süleyman's determination to free himself from the tutelage of his father's grandees and assume personal rule.<sup>103</sup> In 1523 Süleyman as a ruler was much different from the young, ill-prepared, obscure man who mounted the Ottoman throne in 1520. After successfully suppressing the revolt led by the Mameluke Canberdi Gazali in Syria and triumphantly seizing Belgrade and Rhodes, he recast his image as a terrifying ruler who inspired awe and reverence both at home and abroad, and he gained the self-confidence to take the government under his control by appointing a grand vizier who fully represented his own will.<sup>104</sup>

In addition to establishing the sultan's personal rule over the political apparatus, İbrahim's elevation to the grand vizierate was meant to neutralize the destructive competition for office among the elite. Torn between his pashas vying for his ear, Süleyman had seen how the rivalries and conflicts among them had ruined the coordination within the Ottoman high command during the campaigns and, as a result, had jeopardized the effectiveness of the military operations, exposing the troops to unnecessary danger, increasing casualties, and wasting time and resources.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, İbrahim's rise to office significantly curtailed the elite's chances of having direct access to and influence with the sultan. Not only did each pasha suddenly lose any favored status he had previously enjoyed at the sultan's side and find himself equal to the others in the sultan's eyes, but he now also had to communicate his views, wishes, or complaints first to İbrahim, who had immediate access to the sultan.<sup>106</sup> Having İbrahim act as an intermediary between himself and his chief officials, Süleyman hoped to insulate himself from intra-elite poli-

<sup>103</sup> The seventeenth-century historian Peçevî remarks that Süleyman would later say that when Piri Pasha was in office, he could not enjoy his sultanate. He would always feel inadequate in front of the experienced grand vizier; see İbrahim PEÇEVİ, *Tarih-i Peçevî*, 2 vols. (İstanbul: Enderun Kitabevi, 1980), 1:20.

<sup>104</sup> Marco MINIO, "Relazione di Marco Minio alla porta ottomana [1522]," in Albèri, *Relazioni*, 74; Kenneth MEYER SETTON, *The Papacy and the Levant, 1204–1571*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1976–1984), 3:208, 213n57.

<sup>105</sup> TURAN, "The Sultan's Favorite," 88–89, 96–97.

<sup>106</sup> Both Ahmed and Ferhad fell from Süleyman's favor after İbrahim's rise to the grand vizierate. Ahmed Pasha was distanced from the capital and sent to Cairo as governor; Ferhad Pasha was dismissed from the vizierate and appointed to a frontier post in the Balkans (Semendire); see ZEN [1523], 110, 112; HADİDİ, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*, 443–444; CELÂLZÂDE, *Geschichte Sultan Süleymân*, 130a–130b.

tics and at the same time transform the competition for office into one for the favor of his grand vizier, whose mediating role rendered the sultan even more formidable and distant.

Nevertheless, in many ways İbrahim was an unconventional grand vizier. First, the grand vizier's relationship and interaction with the sultan had assumed a formal character since Mehmed's time, especially with the construction of a new imperial palace and the development of its ceremonial. Designed along several outer and inner spaces dividing the court physically as well as functionally, Mehmed's new palace delineated the boundaries between the sultan's public and private domains. The second courtyard was dedicated to his public affairs, discussed in the imperial council, which consisted of the chief officeholders of the empire and met under the leadership of the grand vizier; the inner court comprised the third courtyard and spaces beyond and was designated as the sultan's private realm.<sup>107</sup> No official from the imperial council, not even the grand vizier, was allowed to enter the sultan's private quarters. The council members were, rather, received by the sultan in the Chamber of the Petitions — a separate room built between the second and third courtyards — on certain days each week, following the council meetings.<sup>108</sup> İbrahim, however, continued to have immediate access to the sultan in the inner court, even after his elevation to the grand vizierate. The Venetian bailo (a representative and diplomat) Pietro Bragadin in 1526 noted that Süleyman and İbrahim would sleep together in the same bed, their heads touching.<sup>109</sup> A slave intimately attached to his master both physically and sentimentally, İbrahim straddled the border between the public realm and the private body of the sultan. As such, his rise to the highest office in the empire was meant to bring the government, which had been politically and institutionally slipping away from the ruler's personal control, again within the sultan's orbit.

Second, and more important, İbrahim had never held any military or administrative office before his rise to the highest office of the empire. He attended Süleyman's first two campaigns, but he never assumed any responsibility in them, be it logistic, strategic, or military — he just stayed at Süleyman's side as his intimate friend.<sup>110</sup> Given that by the

<sup>107</sup> NECİPOĞLU, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power*, 15-30, 88-90.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-110.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 257; BRAGADIN [1526], 103.

<sup>110</sup> Although no direct evidence showing İbrahim's presence at the Hungarian campaign has been found, Kemalpaşazâde's history notes that İbrahim was with the sultan at

early sixteenth century the Ottoman political apparatus had been highly professionalized, and competence and experience had already become the necessary criteria for success in office, İbrahim's abrupt rise from the personal service of the sultan to the grand vizierate came as a shock to his contemporaries. Although, as already discussed, the Ottoman sultans often tried to manipulate elite promotions by bestowing their favor on a select few, especially through marriage, İbrahim's swift rise was still exceptional: no Ottoman grand vizier had ever before been created solely on the basis of a sultan's favor. As a matter of fact, İbrahim's rise was widely resented and criticized both by the general public and in elite circles, and it was considered an ill omen heralding the ruin of the House of Osman.<sup>111</sup>

Indeed, to question the legitimacy and soundness of İbrahim's promotion meant an implicit challenge to the authority that stood behind it: the sultan. Removing the doubts surrounding İbrahim's credentials and justifying his elevation to the office thus bore great political significance for Süleyman.<sup>112</sup> This, however, was quite a difficult task in the early sixteenth-century Ottoman context, in which the person of the officeholder was more important than the office itself. The sultan might bring whom-ever he wished to the highest office in the empire, but he could not immediately endow this person with the respectability and authority that the office commanded. For many, despite his status as grand vizier, İbrahim was still not considered part of the ruling elite, in charge of the empire's military and civil administration, but a mere domestic slave whose job was to amuse his master in his bedchamber.<sup>113</sup> Hence, transforming İbrahim from a private slave in the inner court into a public figure inspiring awe and reverence called for a meticulously designed

the Rhodes campaign and had influence over Süleyman's decisions; see KEMALPAŞAZÂDE, *Tevarih-i Âl-i Osman X. Defter*, 161-162. Considering Süleyman's emotional dependency on him, it is plausible to assume that İbrahim accompanied the sultan in his first military adventure as well; see BRAGADIN [1526], 103: "è il fiao dil Signor, qual non pol star un hora si pol dir senza dil lui."

<sup>111</sup> ZEN [1523], 117; TURAN, "Voices of Opposition," 30.

<sup>112</sup> TURAN, "Voices of Opposition," 31-34.

<sup>113</sup> Bragadin in his *relazioni* describes Ferhad Pasha's last meeting with the sultan, at which he was executed. Narrated in a highly dramatic tone, the passage probably reflects more the rumor circulating in the Ottoman capital about İbrahim Pasha's promotion than a literal representation of the actual meeting between Ferhad and the sultan. Ferhad Pasha blamed İbrahim for his demotion and expulsion from the threshold of the sultan by declaring, "That whore Embram is the reason for this"; see BRAGADIN [1526], 108.

program geared toward enhancing the pasha's political and social standing.

At the center of this project was İbrahim's marriage to İskender Pasha's granddaughter Muhsine. Disregarding the custom of the time, Süleyman did not choose an Ottoman princess as a wife for the pasha. In 1523, in the aftermath of his unusual rise to the grand vizierate, İbrahim was by no means in need of the sultan's additional favor; his whole being was, after all, the embodiment of it. What Süleyman and İbrahim wished to obtain was, rather, the public's recognition and confirmation of the sultan's power to override the social and political norms regulating the public order, and to bestow rank and status through his own will to such an extent that he could transform overnight an obscure slave into the greatest man of the empire.<sup>114</sup> Because İbrahim was originally a slave of theirs, the İskender Pasha family's acceptance of him as a son-in-law implied that the patriarchs of the household recognized İbrahim's new position in society and considered him socially their equal. It was indeed of utmost importance that a family such as İskender Pasha's acknowledge İbrahim's metamorphosis. One of the most prominent families of early sixteenth-century Istanbul, İskender Pasha, his sons, and his sons-in-law had been in the service of the dynasty for more than three generations since the time of the conquest. The family wielded such great power and prestige that they offered political patronage to others.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, through their lavishly endowed foundations scattered in different parts of Istanbul, which provided charity and other social services to various segments of the society, and through their generous architectural, religious, and literary patronage, the family had close connections with the larger fabric of the city as well.<sup>116</sup> As a result, İskender Pasha's family's consent

<sup>114</sup> TURAN, "Voices of Opposition," 32.

<sup>115</sup> Like İskender Pasha's sons-in-law, Yakub Ağa and Mustafa Bey, his sons Hürrem and Mustafa were members of the Ottoman ruling elite. For his son Mustafa Pasha's buildings and endowments, see YÜKSEL, *Osmanlı Mimârisinde*, 428, 445-446, 432-433. Latîfî notes that Mustafa Bey was also a poet with the penname Şun'î and was made the governor of Tablus (Tripoli) during the reign of Sultan Selim; see LATİFİ, *Tezkiretü's-su'arâ ve tabsiratü'n-nuzamâ*, ed. Rıdvan Canım (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Başkanlığı, 2000), 360-361. It seems that İskender Pasha, in the manner of the patriarchs of the Ottoman dynasty, chose his sons-in-law for political reasons, indicating his protection over these lower-ranking members of the elite. It is no surprise that his son-in-law Mustafa is called in the sources after his father-in-law İskender (*İskender Paşa damadı*); see GÖKBİLGİN, *Edirne ve Paşa Livası*, 440-441. In addition, the Bayezid's famous vizier (Hadım) Yakup Pasha was İskender's protégé; see REINDL, *Männer um Bâyezid*, 352-353.

<sup>116</sup> For İskender Pasha's family's pious foundations in the city, see the biographical

to İbrahim's elevated status was crucial in realizing the new power and authority that Süleyman claimed over the entire Ottoman polity, from the very top to the bottom.

In this context, Muhsine's initial refusal to marry İbrahim Pasha, who had just been promoted to the highest office in the empire, because he had been her slave, should not be dismissed as a girlish caprice. Considering İbrahim Pasha's position in society in 1523, her concern that such a marriage would degrade her social status was well justified. More important, however, Muhsine's reaction points to the existence of an urban-based social elite in the early sixteenth century Ottoman capital, one possessing a certain degree of cohesiveness that set its members apart from the rest of the society. Although a social history of the metropolitan Ottoman elite in the early modern period is yet to be written, one may tentatively suggest that its formations lie in the reign of Sultan Bayezid. Having come to the throne with the support of his father's men, a sign of his indebtedness, Bayezid retained most of them in power.<sup>117</sup> As a result, many of Mehmed's elite continued to thrive during the time of Bayezid, and they could carve out a social base in the city through the means of patronage supported by their expanding political and economic power.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, an ideological affinity connected Bayezid with those who had brought him to power. Sensitive to the political criticisms accusing Mehmed of disregarding the Islamic law for the sake of his own selfish interests, the elite in the post-Mehmed era, as much as Bayezid, was committed to seeking reconciliation between the Ottoman monarchy and Islamic principles.<sup>119</sup> As Istanbul became the main site to refashion

sections on İskender Pasha and Mihrişah Hatun; Aşık Çelebi notes, for example, that İskender Pasha gave patronage to Şafâyî, a poet originally from Sinop; see 'AŞIK ÇELEBİ, *Meşâ'irü's-şu'arâ*, ed. G. M. Meredith-Owens (London: Lowe and Brydone, 1971), 219b; for the relationship between patronage and establishing a power base among the city population, see Edward MITCHELL, "Institution and Destitution: Patronage Tales of Old Stamboul" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1993), 280; KAFESÇİ-OĞLU, "Ottoman Capital in the Making," 200-201, 208.

<sup>117</sup> On Bayezid having come to the throne with the help of his father's grandees, see TANSEL, *Sultan II. Bâyezid'in Siyasî Hayatı*, 15; for example, Davud Pasha (d. 1498), Mesih Pasha (d. 1501), İskender Pasha (d. 1504), and Sinan Pasha (d. 1504) had all started their careers during Mehmed's time and remained in power during Bayezid's reign.

<sup>118</sup> For the pious foundations and the socioreligious complexes that these grandees founded in the city, see YÜKSEL, *Osmanlı Mimârisinde*, 221, 227-231, 234-243, 257-258, 299-300; BARKAN and AYVERDİ, *İstanbul Vakıfları Tahrîr Defteri*, 82, 142, 222, 345-347.

<sup>119</sup> For the critics of Mehmed and the place of the city of Constantinople in their arguments, see İNALCIK, "Mehmed II"; Stéphane YERASIMOS, *La fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie dans les traditions turques: Légendes d'empire* (Paris: Institut

the Ottoman sultan as a law-abiding Muslim ruler, Bayezid relied on his elite not only to rule but also to create a city that would lend ideological justification to the political and social order that the Ottoman rule represented. Even in the later years of his reign, when he finally managed to develop a new set of elite primarily from his own household, Bayezid continued to rule collectively, and he depended on his chief officials to extend his power beyond the second courtyard of the imperial palace to the broader urban context.<sup>120</sup> At the heart of turning Istanbul into the stronghold of the Ottoman imperial order was fashioning it as a place where a Turkish-speaking Muslim population would find peace and comfort; and Bayezid's political elite played a pivotal role in this context: they were the ones who converted most of the remaining Byzantine churches to mosques, welcomed the Sufi brotherhoods, and built new mosques and other socio-religious complexes, in addition to providing various social services, employment, support, and protection to the residents of the city, which experienced rapid growth in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, all these factors significantly promoted the elite's distinguished position among the city's population.

Muhsine, as a member of this Constantinopolitan elite, in her initial refusal to recognize İbrahim's new status, created overnight by the sultan, indicates that the Ottoman urban elite in the early sixteenth century assumed the liberty to determine independently the constituents of high status and set the criteria to include or exclude outsiders. In this respect, it is possible to interpret Muhsine's reaction as an attempt to defy the royal authority that transgressed the unwritten rules ensuring the cohesiveness and continuity of the elite. That said, İbrahim's elevation to the grand vizierate was also meant to subdue the nascent Ottoman patriciate,

français d'études anatoliennes, 1990); KAFESÇIOĞLU, "Ottoman Capital in the Making," 273-283; TURAN, "The Sultan's Favorite," 162-164, 173-176.

<sup>120</sup> For Bayezid's reliance on his elite to rule, see REINDL, *Männer um Bāyezīd*, 65-68. Three figures among Bayezid's later elite particularly stand out as social and cultural patrons: his famous grand vizier Hadım Ali Pasha (d. 1511), chancellor Tacizade Cafer Çelebi (ex. 1515), and chief judge of Rumelia, Müeyyedzade Abdurrahman Çelebi (d. 1516); see BARKAN and AYVERDİ, *İstanbul Vakıfları Tahrîr Defteri*, 67-72, 298, 340; YÜKSEL, *Osmanlı Mimârisinde*, 162-177, 223-224, 286; HALÛK İPEKTEN, *Divan Edebiyatında Edebî Muhitler* (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1996), 44-59, 138-143.

<sup>121</sup> For the Byzantine churches that Bayezid's elite converted to mosques, see YÜKSEL, *Osmanlı Mimârisinde II*, 177, 221, 249-250, 255, 259, 273, 281, 291; for the dervish convents that the elite built in Istanbul during this time, see *ibid.*, 174, 226, 232, 248, 299, 279, 265, 291, 294, 299; İNALCIK, "İstanbul," *EI2*.



which, through its role of representing the sultan’s power and protection to the broader urban milieu in the previous decades, had established itself as a corporate body of considerable importance in society. Capitalizing partly on the political and social vacuum that Selim’s ferocious reign brought about, Süleyman and İbrahim worked together in later years as a team to flatten the top of the social pyramid and establish the sultan’s authority as the ultimate source of power, rank, and status. Especially through the medium of the pasha’s palace at the Hippodrome, where İbrahim as the sultan’s alter ego opened up the fountain of royal patronage to anyone and everyone in the city, Süleyman turned himself into an absolute monarch par excellence whose presence came to be felt at once by both the highest and the lowest in society.<sup>122</sup>

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Despite the bride’s initial reluctance, which probably cast a shadow over the union at first, İbrahim and Muhsine’s relationship seems to have improved over the years. Featuring such expressions of endearment as “my darling, my beloved,” and “your lover İbrahim who is longing for you,” the pasha’s letters to his wife reveal a genuine and tender affection.<sup>123</sup> The couple remained married until the pasha’s execution in 1536; and they had a son, Mehmedşah, who died very young in 1539.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>122</sup> For İbrahim Pasha’s extensive patronage, see İPEKTEN, *Divan Edebiyatında Edebi Muhitler*, 143-146.

<sup>123</sup> For these letters and expressions, see ULUÇAY, *Osmanlı Sultanlarına Aşk Mektupları*, 65-76.

<sup>124</sup> Kemal ÖZERGİN, *Sultan Süleyman Han Çağına Ait Tarih Kayıtları* (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi, 1971), 13.

Ebru TURAN, *The Marriage of İbrahim Pasha (ca. 1495–1536). The Rise of Sultan Süleyman's Favorite to the Grand Vizierate and the Politics of the Elites in the Early Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Empire*

Sultan Süleyman's childhood friend, favorite, and grand vizier, İbrahim Pasha, is one of the most intriguing characters of Ottoman history. From his swift rise directly from the personal service of Süleyman to the highest office of the empire in 1523 until his sudden execution in 1536, İbrahim Pasha ruled the empire with unprecedented power and authority as a virtual sultan. Although recent studies have celebrated the pasha as the key political figure who crafted and promulgated Süleyman's image as world emperor at home and abroad, İbrahim Pasha remains one of the least known of the Ottoman grand viziers. The primary purpose of this study is to illuminate the early years of the pasha's career by focusing particularly on the historiographical debate on the identity of his bride, whom he married in 1524. Introducing newly discovered material from Ottoman and Venetian accounts, the article not only establishes the identity of the pasha's wife but also interprets his marriage in relation to his unusual promotion to office. By engaging issues of elite formation, centralization, and professionalization in state administration, the paper discusses İbrahim Pasha's rise to power within the context of the long-term political, social, and institutional developments that the empire had undergone after the conquest of Constantinople.

Ebru TURAN, *Le mariage d'İbrahim Pacha (ca. 1495–1536). L'ascension du favori du sultan Süleyman jusqu'au grand vizirat, et la politique des élites dans l'Empire ottoman au début du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle.*

L'ami d'enfance, favori et grand vizir du sultan Süleyman, İbrahim Pacha, est l'un des personnages les plus fascinants de l'histoire ottomane. Entre son ascension rapide, passant directement du service personnel de Süleyman aux plus hautes fonctions de l'empire en 1523, jusqu'à son exécution inattendue en 1536, İbrahim Pacha gouverna l'empire avec un pouvoir sans précédent et l'autorité d'un sultan. Bien que des études récentes aient célébré le pacha comme la figure politique clé, qui façonna et promulgua l'image de Süleyman en tant qu'empereur universel aussi bien à l'intérieur qu'à l'étranger, İbrahim Pacha reste l'un des grand vizirs de l'Empire ottoman les moins connus. Cette étude a pour principal but d'éclairer les premières années de sa carrière en se concentrant particulièrement sur le débat historiographique portant sur l'identité de sa femme, qu'il épousa en 1524. Présentant des documents récemment découverts provenant de récits ottomans et vénitiens, cet article établit non seulement l'identité de la femme du pacha, mais interprète aussi son mariage en relation avec son étrange promotion au pouvoir. Abordant des questions de formation des élites, de centralisation et de professionnalisation de l'administration d'État, cet article discute l'ascension au pouvoir d'İbrahim Pacha dans le contexte des développements politiques, sociaux et institutionnels de long terme que l'Empire a subi après la conquête de Constantinople.