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The rise of the Köprülü family: the reconfiguration of vizierial power in the seventeenth century

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CHAPTER 1: THE RIVALRY BETWEEN THE INNER-COURT SERVANTS-AND THE GRAND VIZIER IN THE LATE SIXTEENTH AND EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

1.1. Introduction

This chapter will examine the rivalry between the inner-court servants and grand vizier starting from the accession of Murad III in 1574 until the enthronement of Mehmed IV in 1648. The reign of Murad III was a turning point because Murad III altered the policy of his predecessors Süleyman I and Selim II, who had allowed their grand viziers enormous authority in the management of state affairs. Murad III resented the incumbent grand vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha's power and tried to empower servants of the inner court in order to "establish his personal control over the running of the state."²⁰ Murad III's initiatives created a clash between the grand viziers and the inner-court servants. More importantly, Murad III's rulership was adopted by his successors, leaving a lasting effect on Ottoman political life in the seventeenth century. This chapter will clarify the changing roles of political actors such as the grand vizier, the chief black eunuch and the sultan's favorite during the first part of the seventeenth century. In doing so, it will provide a better understanding of the new configuration of the power relationship between Mehmed IV and the Köprülü grand viziers, which constitutes the major theme of chapters II and III.

The chapter is divided into two main parts. In the first part, I will document the rise of the chief black eunuchs and royal favorites as new political actors. Firstly, I will examine the careers of the royal favorites as well as their relationship with the sultan and the grand

²⁰ Fetvacı, *Picturing History*, 149.

viziers. Secondly, I will dwell upon the ascendancy of the chief black eunuchs vis-à-vis white eunuchs in the harem. In the second part, I will discuss the monumental changes in the grand vizierate after the death of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha. I will explain the changes in the hierarchical pattern of the vizierate and in the communications between the sultan and grand vizier.

Like many other contemporary palaces, the Topkapı Palace consisted of an inner (*enderun*) and an outer (*birun*) court.²¹ “The inner court included separate male and female hierarchies in the palace school and the harem.”²² The youths in the palace school were educated under strict control of the white eunuchs. The most capable of the pages advanced in their education and served the sultan in the four “chambers” of the inner court. These chambers were the cellar (*kiler*), the treasury (*hazine*), the campaign (*seferli*) and the privy chamber (*has oda*). The most honorable officers of the privy chamber in descending order were the chief of the privy chamber (*has oda başı*), sword-bearer (*silahdar*), the keeper of the garments (*çuhadar*), the stirrup-holder (*rikabdar*) and the keeper of the linen (*tülbend gulamı*). The pages who graduated from the inner court were appointed to higher positions like that of the commander of the Janissaries, the provincial governor or even the vizier.

The harem housed sultan’s relatives and women. Alongside the sultan’s women, there was a large group of female servants in the harem. Like the male pages, these servants were subjected to a strict training at the hands of more experienced senior women (*kahya kadın*). The queen mother (*Valide Sultan*) had absolute authority within the harem and her most important aide was the chief black eunuch, a position that will be studied in detail below. In addition to these officials in the inner court, the sultan’s tutor, spiritual guide and the royal favorite (*musahib*) formed the close circle of the sultan.

²¹ For a comparative review of the inner-outer division in the early modern polities, see, Jeroen Duindam, *Dynasties, A Global History of Power* (Cambridge, 2016), 168-88.

²² *Ibid.*, 191.

There were a group of outer service holders who regulating the contact between the palace and the outside world. These officers were the gatekeepers, people of the stables, standard bearers, tent pitchers, keepers of the royal appurtenances for travel and keepers of the sultan's hunting birds. In the outer court, there were also the services for the government of the realm. The members of the imperial council including the grand vizier, the dome viziers, the chief treasurer, a keeper of the seal, two military judges, the grand admiral, the commander of the Janissaries and the governor of Rumelia gathered in the second courtyard. In addition, there were janissaries and the six regiments cavalry in the outer court. From the late sixteenth century, these two main groups of armed forces fought each other. The underlying clash point was the cavalry's extra privileges that resented the Janissaries. Each group could ally with the rival ruling viziers or the high-ranking members of the *ulema* in order to crush each other. However, these two rival groups sometimes formed a united front against the increasing power of the inner court servants. As I will show in the following pages, leading eunuchs and sultan's favorites were murdered by the coalition of the Janissaries and cavalry regiments during the first part of the seventeenth century.

The power of the chief black eunuch and the royal favorite became pronounced during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as the Ottoman imperial palace underwent several profound changes. The first great change was the moving of the sultan's family from the so-called Old Palace, which had previously been the residence for royal women and children, to the Topkapı Palace.²³ This move included the sultan's mother, wife, unmarried daughters and concubines as well as a large group of white and black eunuchs, causing a considerable expansion of the imperial harem. Murad III initiated architectural

²³ Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem, Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford, 1993).

adjustments to the harem, including new quarters for the queen mother and black eunuchs and new apartments for his numerous concubines.²⁴ This expanded harem differed from the more impersonal atmosphere of Mehmed II's harem, which had excluded the sultan's wives, children and mother.²⁵

This new arrangement was closely connected to the move towards a more secluded imperial image that developed under Murad III. Murad III was not the first sultan to withdraw from the public gaze. Mehmed II had introduced the policy of the seclusion as part of the enhancement of the sultan's status after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453.²⁶ This more hidden rulership contrasted with the early practices of the Ottoman sultans. This retreat became even more pronounced with the reign of Selim II, who was the first Ottoman sultan not to head a military campaign. However, seclusion reached a zenith in the reign of Murad III. Murad III did not leave the capital once during the twenty-one years of his reign. He even stooped attending Friday prayers, which had previously given people an opportunity to see and present petitions to their sultan.²⁷ According to Domenico Hierosolimitano, court physician to Murad III, for a long period between 1589 and 1591, the sultan did not even leave the palace.²⁸ As a result of the sultan's seclusion, the political clout of the imperial council was transferred to those people with whom the sultan had daily contact.

The demographic and architectural expansion of the imperial harem as well as the sultan's increasing seclusion enlarged the importance of the chief black eunuch and the

²⁴ Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial*, 164 and the sultan's private doctor Domenico Hierosolimitano points out that Murad III had forty wives, see, Domenico Hierosolimitano, *Domenico's Istanbul*, Ed. Geoffrey Lewis, trans. M.J.L. Austin, (Warminster, 2001), 28-32.

²⁵ Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial*, 164.

²⁶ For a general analysis of the seclusion of the Ottoman sultans in comparative perspective, see, Gülru Necipoğlu, 'Framing the Gaze in Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal Palaces,' *Ars Orientalis*, 23, (1993), 303-42.

²⁷ Woodhead, 'Poet, Patron', 233.

²⁸ Hierosolimitano, *Domenico's Istanbul*, 28-32.

sultan's favorite since they mediated between the royal family and the outer world. As the sultan's seclusion increased, so did the political power of those in the sultan's close circle.

After the reign of Murad III, two important changes further increased the power of the inner-court servants.²⁹ The first change was the abandonment of the tradition of sending princes out to govern provinces in order to learn statecraft. This practice ceased after the reign of Mehmed III, but the change was not the result of a deliberate policy shift. When Mehmed III died at the age thirty-seven in 1603, his sons had not yet reached the age to be sent out of the palace. Afterwards, all the male members of the dynasty were raised and educated in the harem section, making them more susceptible to the influence of women and of the eunuchs who were now in charge of their education.

The second change that increased the importance of the inner court was the renunciation of the practice of royal fratricide. It had been a custom since the reign of Mehmed II that when a new sultan ascended to the throne, he ordered his brothers to be executed in an attempt to avoid competition for the throne. When Ahmed I acceded to the throne at the age of thirteen in 1603, his brother Mustafa was not executed because the reigning sultan was still childless and, hence, Mustafa was the only living male member of the dynasty. Mustafa was allowed to live in case Ahmed died unexpectedly without an heir.³⁰ After Ahmed I passed away, it was not his son but his brother Mustafa who replaced the dead ruler. After that, the principle of succession from father to son was abandoned and fratricide gave way to seniority. All princes alive at the time of the enthronement of the new sultan became potential candidates for the throne. As a result, the power struggles within the Ottoman polity shifted from provincial princely households to Topkapı Palace. Under

²⁹ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 97-104.

³⁰ Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman*, 60-3.

these new circumstances, the inner-court servants emerged as important political actors because they established close relationships with young princes from early childhood.

1.2. The Rise of the Royal Favorites at the Ottoman Court

One of the most significant features of Ottoman politics in the seventeenth century was the tension between the royal favorite and the grand vizier. Friction emerged between Şemsi Ahmed Pasha, the favorite of Murad III, and the grand vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha in the 1570s. Such tensions continued even after the death of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, since Murad III continued to empower his favorites at the expense of his grand viziers. In this section, I will survey the emergence of royal favorites and their relationship with grand viziers.

The Ottoman Turkish counterpart of the royal favorite is a *musahib*. The *musahib* is an Arabic word by origin and signifies “a person capable of pleasant conversation.”³¹ In Ottoman political terminology, the *musahib* comes to mean both a boon companion and a consultant who engages in conversations with the sultan about important issues and state affairs. The sultan may appoint anyone he wishes as his *musahib*. The *musahibs* were selected from “among a wide range of office-holders and courtiers, including viziers and *agas* as well as dwarfs, mutes and eunuchs.”³² The *musahibs* were later promoted to important positions. For instance, Murad IV’s *musahib* Silahdar Mustafa Pasha was appointed as the governor of Damascus while Mehmed IV’s *musahib* Mustafa Pasha was vested with the office of the second vizierate. It should also be pointed out that once appointed, they could still bear the title *musahib* and could send their proxies to their designated posts while they would preserve their presence at the sultan’s side. As the close

³¹ Ayşe Ezgi Dikici, ‘Imperfect Bodies, Perfect Companions? Dwarfs and Mutes at the Ottoman Court in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries’, MA thesis, Sabancı University (2006), 32.

³² Ibid., 32

confidants of the sultan, the *musahibs* were allocated considerable gifts and revenue sources. Their real power, however, lay in their ability to influence the sultan's decisions in important matters and in controlling all petitions (*telhises*) and information addressed to the sultan.

There was only one reference to the political role of favorites in the historical and political corpus before the late sixteenth century. In his treatise on the vizierate, Lütfi Pasha, the exiled grand vizier of Süleyman I, warned,

The sultans should not mingle too much with the favorites. The rulers would of course have favorites; however, the favorites should only enjoy his gifts and vests of honor. They must not be allowed to interfere with public affairs. This is a crucial issue.³³

Mustafa Ali emphasizes that the *musahib* should be witty and knowledgeable and act as an advisor to the sultan.³⁴ The *musahib*, according to Mustafa Ali, “should not seek a regular government office and should be chosen from the ulema, poets, or dervishes.”³⁵ A treatise titled *Hırzû'l- müluk* (Castle of Kings), presumably penned by a member of the anti-Sokollu Mehmed Pasha group during Murad III's reign, emphasized that the sultan was supposed to have a powerful *musahib*.³⁶ However, toward the end of the second part of the seventeenth century, the image of the royal favorite became more negative. The favorites' interference in the business of state turned into one of the main themes of the advice literature. The anonymous writer of *Kitab-ı Müstetab* written between 1618 and 1622,

³³ Lütfi Paşa, *Lütfi Paşa Asafnamesi (Yeni Bir Metin Tesisi Denemesi)*, ed. Mübahat Kütükoğlu, (İstanbul, 1991), 7.

³⁴ Mustafa Ali, *Mustafa Ali's Counsel for Sultans of 1581: Edition, Translation, Notes*, ed. Andreas Tietze, (Vienna, 1979 - 1982), 2 vols, I, 41-7.

³⁵ Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 159.

³⁶ Anonymous, 'Hırzû'l- müluk,' in *Osmanlı Devlet Teşkilatına Dair Kaynaklar*, ed. Yaşar Yücel (Ankara, 1988), 143-207.

points out that *musahibs* should be kept away from state affairs.³⁷ Koçi Bey, who penned a treatise for Murad IV around 1630, states that until the beginning of Murad III's reign, boon companions and favorites had been experienced, skillful and wise people; after that they began to interfere in state affairs, particularly in the promotions of grand viziers. He states,

They began to propose many unacceptable things to those who became grand vizier.

When the latters did not permit, they would join in one tongue and one mind, and use every opportunity to slander them in the sultan's presence. By provoking the sultan's wrath, they used to cause their assassination or exile, or the confiscation of their property, and defamation.³⁸

How did these tensions summarized by Koçi Bey start?

1.2.1. Favorites of Murad III, Mehmed III and Ahmed I

The first *musahib* of Murad III was Şemsi Ahmed Pasha. He was a former governor-general of Rumelia and a scion of the princely İsfendiyaroğlu family.³⁹ He graduated from the inner court and then took several positions in the outer services in the reign of Süleyman I, such as chief falconer and commander of the imperial cavalry troops. In 1551, he was appointed as governor of Damascus in 1551. In 1569, during the reign of Selim II, he retired from his governorship. Afterwards, he was appointed as *musahib* of Selim II.⁴⁰ Toward the end of the reign of Selim II, he returned to his hometown of Bolu.

With Murad III's accession, Şemsi Ahmed Pasha's second career as *musahib* began. The close circle of Murad III, particularly Üveys Pasha, the chief treasurer and close

³⁷ Anonymous, 'Kitab-ı Müstetab', in *Osmanlı Devlet Teşkilatına Dair Kaynaklar*, ed. Yaşar Yücel (Ankara, 1988) 18-9.

³⁸ Ayşe Ezgi Dikici, 'Imperfect Bodies, Perfect Companions?', quotation at 102.

³⁹ For the life of Şemsi Ahmed Pasha, see, Şemsi Ahmed Paşa, *Şeh-name-i Sultan Murad*, Günay Kut and Nimet Bayraktar (eds.), (Cambridge, 2003).

⁴⁰ Şefik Peksevgen, 'Secrecy, Information Control and Power Building in the Ottoman Empire, 1566 - 1603', PhD Thesis, McGill University (2004), 187.

confidant of Murad III, recommended that Şemsi Ahmed Pasha be appointed *musahib* because he was known as an enemy of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha.⁴¹ Apparently, Şemsi Ahmed's animosity toward Sokollu played an important role in his appointment.⁴²

Şemsi Ahmed Pasha's second term as *musahib* differed greatly from his first one. While the contemporary sources remain silent over the political activities of Şemsi Ahmed Pasha as the royal favorite of Selim II, he still proved to be one of the most authoritative political figures of Murad III's reign.⁴³ In particular, Şemsi Ahmed Pasha's proximity to Murad III and the time he was allowed to spend with the now very secluded sultan were key points in this respect. Stephen Gerlach, the Lutheran chaplain who accompanied the Habsburg ambassador David Ungnad in Istanbul from 1573 to 1578, wrote about Şemsi Ahmed Pasha's close relationship with Murad III:

This Pasha's mansion is in Üsküdar (on the Bosphorus), right across the sultan's palace. Whenever he wants, he can go to the court from there...; He is a very close friend of the sultan. However, neither is he appointed to any apparent office, nor does he carries out any official responsibility. Nonetheless, he has an easier life than that of other Ottoman grandees, because he almost never leaves the company of the sultan, and he can talk to him in an intimate manner, as no other pasha would dare to do. Whatever he says (to him), it is accepted. That is why all the pashas and grandees show him much respect and are afraid of him. Whenever Şemsi Pasha visits (Sokollu) Mehmed Pasha on the sultan's business, everybody runs to greet him and pays homage to him as if the sultan himself had come.⁴⁴

⁴¹ İbrahim Peçevi, *Tarih-i Peçevi*, (İstanbul, 1281 - 1283), II, 6.

⁴² Börekçi, 'Factions and Favorites', 165.

⁴³ Ibid., 167-69.

⁴⁴ Ibid., quotation at 166.

Şemsi Ahmed Pasha, in his bid to undermine Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, constantly complained to Murad III about the pasha's misdeeds and encouraged the sultan to assume more political responsibility.⁴⁵ The struggle between Sokollu Mehmed and Şemsi Ahmed Pasha came to an end in 1579 with the assassination of Sokollu. The following year, Şemsi Ahmed Pasha passed away, too.

After the death of Şemsi Ahmed Pasha, Doğançlı Mehmed Pasha became the *musahib* of Murad III. He was raised in Murad's court and started to receive his favor at an early age. When Murad III acceded to the throne, Mehmed was appointed as the chief hawker, one of the highest-ranking officials of inner-court service. During royal hunts, he was the sultan's closest companion.⁴⁶ In this position, Mehmed increased his personal bond with his master. After five years in this position, Mehmed was promoted to be the chief falconer and then to *mirahur*, the head of the imperial stables. More importantly, he was promoted to be the chief commander of the janissaries. In 1584, he was appointed as the general-governor of Rumelia. From 1584 until his murder in 1589, Doğançlı Mehmed Pasha exerted great influence over court affairs. Moreover, he controlled the petitions (*telhises*) submitted by the grand vizier and the viziers to the sultan and dominated the distribution of offices. Pecevi points out that whenever the grand vizier submitted a *telhis* to the sultan, Mehmed Pasha cast aspersions on it, thus influencing the sultan's reply.⁴⁷

The enormous power of Doğançlı Mehmed Pasha displeased other political actors including the Janissaries and cavalry regiments. As Jeroen Duindam aptly points out, "the dominance of a single person or faction raised doubts about the ruler's powers and inevitably triggered conflict at court, with the outsiders using every opportunity to

⁴⁵ Peksevgen, 'Secrecy, Information Control', 197.

⁴⁶ Börekcü, 'Factions and Favorites', 172-78.

⁴⁷ Pecevi, *Tarih-i Pecevi*, II, 38.

overthrow the favourite or the faction in power.”⁴⁸ All of the viziers asked the sultan to dismiss Doğancı Mehmed Pasha, but the sultan refused. In April 1589, when the palace cavalry protested about having been paid with debased coinage, the rival viziers saw an opportunity to overthrow Doğancı Mehmed Pasha. They incited the cavalry against Doğancı Mehmed, and the cavalry indeed eventually assassinated him. This bloody end suggests the potentially very negative consequences of giving near-absolute power to one favorite.

Still after the death of Murad III in 1595, the new sultan Mehmed III maintained his father’s policy of giving favorites absolute power. In this era, it was Gazanfer Aga who emerged as the new royal favorite. Gazanfer Aga was a Venetian convert who had entered the court of Selim several decades earlier.⁴⁹ Later, he was castrated so that he could join Selim’s inner household.⁵⁰ In 1574, a few years after the accession of Selim II to the imperial throne, Gazanfer became head of the privy chamber in 1574. In 1584, Gazanfer Aga was also promoted to position of the chief white eunuch, holding both posts simultaneously. Gazanfer Aga held these two offices for more than thirty years, under the reigns of Selim II, Murad III and Mehmed III. By controlling these two significant positions, Gazanfer Aga exercised enormous power and control over palace politics. However, as in the case of Doğancı Mehmed Pasha, Gazanfer Aga’s immense power created great resentment among other political actors, such as cavalry regiments, *ulema* and Janissaries. In 1603, the imperial cavalry soldiers revolted against the hegemony of the

⁴⁸ Jeroen Duindam, *Dynasties*, 73

⁴⁹ Maria Pia Pedani, ‘Safiye’s Household and Venetian Diplomacy’, *Turcica*, 32, (2000), 9-32 and Levent Kaya Ocakaçan, ‘The Changing dynamics of the Ottoman patronage networks (late 16th and early 17th centuries)’, *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 34, (2017), 12.

⁵⁰ Ezgi Dikici, ‘The making of Ottoman court eunuchs: origins, recruitment paths, family ties, and “domestic production”’, *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 30 (2013), 110–14.

alliance between Safiye Sultan, the mother of Mehmed III and Gazanfer Aga.⁵¹ The soldiers demanded the banishment of Gazanfer Aga, citing his overwhelming control over the sultan and imperial affairs. Mehmed III reluctantly surrendered his *musahib* to the rebellious soldiers in order to prevent his own dethronement. Gazanfer Aga was executed in front of Mehmed III in January 1603. Once again, the sultan yielded his *musahib* to the soldiers and their alliances.

As pointed out above, Ahmed I was the first Ottoman sultan to be raised in the harem and not sent out to govern a province. This meant that he lacked a princely household that could fill crucial administrative posts.⁵² Therefore, he appointed people in his close circle to influential positions, one of whom was Derviş Pasha, the chief gardener. The seclusion of the sultans inside the palace had brought about an increase in the importance of the chief gardeners, who could establish close contact with the young sultans.⁵³ In an act that had no precedent, Ahmed appointed Derviş Pasha first as the grand admiral and then as grand vizier. Derviş Pasha's meteoric rise to offices in the uppermost echelons of Ottoman administration distinguished him from Şemsi Ahmed Pasha and Doğanlı Mehmed Pasha. Doğanlı Mehmed Pasha, for example, had been a long-time favorite of Murad III but did not receive the rank of vizier until he had served as three years as governor of Rumelia.

During his tenure as grand vizier, Derviş Pasha alienated other members of the ruling elite. He held a strict control over each and every sort of *telhis*, addressed to the

⁵¹ Börekçi, 'Factions and Favorites', 48-54.

⁵² An insightful analysis of the incorporation of a prince's household into imperial household, see, Metin Kunt, 'A Prince Goes Forth (Perchance to Return),' in Karl Barbir and Baki Tezcan (eds.), *Identity and Identity Formation in the Ottoman World, A Volume of Essays in Honor of Norman Itzkowitz*, (Madison, 2007) 63-71.

⁵³ Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman*, 104 and see, Murat Yıldız, *Bostancı Ocağı (Bahçıvanlıktan Saray Muhafızlığına)* (İstanbul, 2011).

sultan, causing great tension between the members of the upper administration.⁵⁴ In face of the increasing divide between the pasha and other members of the court, Ahmed I had his favorite grand vizier executed. Contemporary accounts suggest that this action won the young sultan immense prestige. From then on, he took great care to appoint more experienced figures as grand vizier.⁵⁵

1.2.2. The Favorites of Murad IV and Ibrahim I

From a political point of view, Murad IV's reign can be divided into two periods. The first period (1623-1632), which started from his accession in 1623 until 1632, was dominated by the queen mother Kösem Sultan and her initiatives. The second period, spanning from 1632 to 1640, was marked by the consolidation of the personal rule of Murad IV through his strong and brutal governance.

Unlike his predecessors, Murad IV developed a more outgoing rulership style. Especially after 1632, he took to strolling through Istanbul in disguise or in the company of his Janissaries in order to search out and punish criminals. The contemporary historian Mehmed Halife observed that the people of Istanbul were afraid of going out at night in Istanbul because Murad IV patrolled the city and ordered the execution of those caught committing wrongs.⁵⁶

Despite this more outgoing style, Murad IV did not abstain from investing his favorite with great power. Silahdar Mustafa Pasha was the most influential royal favorite of the time.⁵⁷ Silahdar Mustafa had attracted the attention of Murad IV as a royal page (*gılman-ı hassa*) at the court. The sultan later accepted him into the privy chamber. Silahdar

⁵⁴ Börekçi, 'Factions and Favorites', 209-32.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 232.

⁵⁶ Ertuğrul Oral, 'Mehmed Halife, Tarih-i Gılmani', PhD thesis, Marmara University (2000), 52

⁵⁷ Hedda Reindl-Kiel, *Leisure, Pleasure and Duty. The Daily Life of Silahdar Mustafa, Eminence Grise in the final years of Murad IV (1635 - 1640)* (Berlin, 2016).

Mustafa became *silahdar* (sword-bearer) in 1634 and after one year was promoted to the second vizierate. Thereafter Silahdar Mustafa Pasha's political authority became apparent, and he made great use of his proximity to the sultan to interfere frequently in imperial affairs. This, however, spurred a rivalry between himself and grand vizier Kemankeş Kara Mustafa Pasha.

When Kemankeş Kara Mustafa Pasha sought to circumvent Silahdar Mustafa Pasha by reporting directly to the sultan about state affairs, the Silahdar is said to have complained to the sultan:

Silahdar Mustafa said "Kara Mustafa Pasha does not respect me and keeps his correspondence with you secret. What's my fault?" The Sultan, addressing Silahdar Pasha, demanded an answer from the grand vizier: "Why do you neglect Silahdar Pasha and not write to him about the affairs?" to which Kara Mustafa Pasha responded: "My all-powerful Sultan, please tell me if your servant Silahdar Pasha has any share in your reign, or not? If this be the case, your will be done and I'll have to refer everything to him, too. But if not, I recognize only you as the Sultan and hence inform only you about the state affairs! Moreover, it is most appropriate that the correspondence between the Sultan and me remain a secret, which is not supposed to be exposed to either Silahdar Pasha or anyone else. Otherwise, I can neither govern, nor act as a Grand Vizier."⁵⁸

This conversation, recorded by the historian Naima, suggests that even under the outgoing and powerful Murad IV the inner-outer balance was still precarious. The sultan continued to use inner-court power to offset outer-court dignitaries. The rivalry between

⁵⁸ Naima, *Tarih-i Naima*, III, 984.

Kemankeş Kara Mustafa Pasha and Silahdar Mustafa Pasha was ended only with death of the Sultan Murad IV in 1640.

Sultan Ibrahim ascended to the Ottoman throne in 1640 upon the death of his brother Murad IV. Ibrahim has been regarded as a mentally unstable ruler, earning the epithet *Deli* (mad) in modern Ottoman historiography.⁵⁹ It is true that Ibrahim suffered from mental illness. He spent all his early life in close confinement, in constant fear of execution by his brother Murad IV, who had had four of his elder brothers executed. Ibrahim was unable to believe that Murad was dead and assumed that the announcement of his death was a trick. It was obvious that these eerie and stressful years had profoundly affected Ibrahim's mental health. It also affected his ability to rule: Koçi Bey presented two treaties, one to the Sultan Murad IV in 1632 and one to Ibrahim in 1640. The first one included rather sophisticated details, while, the second by comparison was written almost as if addressing to a child.⁶⁰ This may be regarded as a sign of both the sultan's mental weakness and his lack of a proper education.

Under Ibrahim, the grand vizier Kemankeş Kara Mustafa Pasha was kept in his office. The vizier could now go about eliminating his rivals, since they were no longer under the protection of Murad IV. Silahdar Mustafa Pasha, once the most powerful figure in the palace, was first banished and then executed. In the first years of Ibrahim I, Kemankeş Pasha performed quite effectively as grand vizier and conducted his business independently. However, he later encountered a more serious threat posed by the close confidants of the sultan. The historian Mehmed Halife reveals tensions that arose between the sultan and his grand vizier upon the sultan's expression of his desire to have *musahibs*.

⁵⁹ Feridun Emecen, "İbrahim" *Diyanet İşleri İslam Ansiklopedisi*, (Hereafter *DİA*), XXI, 274-81.

⁶⁰ I would like to thank Metin Kunt who suggested the comparison. See, Koci Bey, *Koçi Bey Risalesi*, ed. Yılmaz Kurt, (Ankara, 1998) and Çağatay Uluçay, 'Koçi Bey'in Sultan İbrahim'e Takdim Ettiği Risale ve Arzları', in Tertip Heyeti (ed.), *Zeki Velid Togan'a Armağan*, (Ankara, 1950), 177-199.

Sultan Ibrahim asked: “My brother Sultan Murad is said to have had a fine and distinguished *Silahdar*. Why shouldn’t I also have one?” When, the sultan designated Yusuf Pasha of Bosnia, the conqueror of Crete, as his *Silahdar*, Kemankeş Mustafa Pasha reacted:

The presence of the people of this sort in the close company of the Sultan is surely damaging and detrimental for the affairs of the Sultanate. Even though it is true that Sultan Murad had *musahib*, everybody disliked him since he meddled with all the affairs of the state; and the viziers, the other statesmen and especially the Grand Vizier were all subjugated and paid respect to him. Now, under my authority, it is neither permissible nor appropriate for any such person to be in the company of the Sultan.⁶¹

To be sure, as an experienced vizier, Kemankeş Pasha was aware of the imminent danger such an appointment posed. He faced two prominent royal favorite rivals in the period. The first was *Cinci* (Sorcerer) Hüseyin Hoca. He came to Istanbul from Anatolia and entered one of the *medreses* (religious schools) of Süleymaniye.⁶² His sorceries became so famous in the city that he drew the attention of the palace. He was called in and gained the confidence of Kösem Sultan and Sultan Ibrahim himself. *Cinci* Hoca seems to have cured Ibrahim’s sexual impotence, since in the remaining years the sultan would have several children, including four future sultans. He was also appointed tutor to the sultan. In that position, he exerted an enormous influence over Sultan Ibrahim.⁶³

The second favorite of Sultan Ibrahim and another serious threat to Kemankeş Pasha was *Silahdar* Yusuf Pasha.⁶⁴ He was a Dalmatian renegade and a convert to Islam. While

⁶¹ Oral, ‘Tarih-i Gılmani’, 34.

⁶² Cengiz Orhonlu, ‘Husayn Efendi, known as Djindji Khodja’, in P. Bearman et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Brill Online Reference Works (Leiden, 1954 - 2005).

⁶³ Oral, ‘Tarih-i Gılmani’, 36.

⁶⁴ Zeynep Aycibin, ‘Katip Çelebi, Fezleke: Tahlil ve Metin’, PhD Thesis, Mimar Sinan University (2007), 567.

rikabdar (stirrup-holder) in the palace, he was promoted to the second vizierate and became *musahib* of the sultan. Silahdar Yusuf Pasha allied with Cinci Hoca to secure Kemankeş Pasha's fall. Firstly, they removed the protégés of the grand vizier from their positions. When the grand vizier responded by attempting to incite the Janissaries to revolt outside the palace gates in 1644, the sultan had him seized and executed. The death of Kemankeş Pasha marked a turning point in the history of the early seventeenth-century grand vizierate. From Kemankeş Pasha's death to Köprülü Mehmed Pasha's rise to power in 1656 no grand vizier's tenure lasted more than two years.

The execution of Kemankeş Pasha suggests how a weak sultan and his close circle could be dangerous to a powerful grand vizier. Under the influence of this circle, Ibrahim first restricted the grand vizier's authority and then had him executed.

Favorites and concubines exerted enormous influence on the appointments and dismissal of all the grand viziers following the death of Kemankeş Pasha. Moreover, they controlled and assigned huge estates and lucrative revenues to themselves and their clients.

It comes as no surprise that the rule of Ibrahim and the enormous influence of favorites and concubines on politics aroused opposition. The Janissaries, cavalry regiments and *ulema* assembled in the Hippodrome in 1648. They held the sultan himself responsible for the ills of the empire. The Seyhulislam issued a *fetva*, authorizing the sultan's deposition. Ibrahim was seized and put into close confinement in the palace. Ten days after the accession of Mehmed IV, fearing that attempts might be made to restore Ibrahim, another *fetwa* authorized the strangling of the deposed sultan on the grounds that there

could not be two sultans at once.⁶⁵ This time, the sultan's reliance on his favorites had resulted in his own deposition.

1.3. The Creation of the Office of the Chief Black Eunuch in the Harem

One of the most important developments in the reign of Murad III was the creation of the office of the chief black eunuch in 1574. Eunuchs had been employed as guardians of the harem and palace administrators since the reign of the second sultan, Orhan (1326-1362).⁶⁶ However, most of these were white eunuchs who had been selected from the *devsirme* recruits and slaves. Black eunuchs, instead, had worked under supervision of white eunuchs. When Murad III inaugurated the post in 1574, he conferred part of the power of the white eunuchs on the black eunuchs. The most important transfer was that of the supervision of the imperial pious foundations for the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina. At the same time, harem eunuchs began to be selected mostly from among Africans. They took on the administration of the harem and served as the tutors of young princes, while white eunuchs remained responsible for the training of palace pages in the inner court. From the reign of Murad III onwards, black eunuchs gradually gained prominence over white eunuchs in the palace. How did this balance affect power at the court? How did harem eunuchs exert influence on the political stage?

Before examining the office of the chief black eunuch, it would be useful to pinpoint the role of white eunuchs in the harem. The chief white eunuch was officially titled “Commander of the Gate of Felicity” (*Babüssaade Ağası*).⁶⁷ They were supervisors and tutors of the pages in the inner court. In the *kanunname* (code of law), which was

⁶⁵ Naima, *Tarih-i Naima*, III, 1168 and Ebubekir Yücel, ‘İki Halifenin Bir Arada Bulunmaması Anlayışı ve Osmanlı Hükümdarı Sultan İbrahim’in Siyaseten Katli’, *İslami Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 12/1, (1999), 40-57.

⁶⁶ Jane Hathaway, *Beshir Agha, Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Imperial Harem* (Oxford, 2006) 11-17.

⁶⁷ Metin Kunt, ‘Royal and Other Households’, in Woodhead (ed), *The Ottoman World*, 111.

supposedly written in the reign of Mehmed II, white eunuchs were defined as the mediators between the sultan and other officials of the palace.⁶⁸ The chief white eunuch thus enjoyed the privilege of access to the sultan. During the reign of Süleyman I, the superintendence of the imperial pious foundation for Mecca and Medina was conferred upon the chief white eunuch, which increased the authority of his position considerably. As has been mentioned before, the last influential chief white eunuch was Gazanfer Aga. With the death of Gazanfer Aga in an uprising 1602, white eunuchs lost their influence to the black eunuchs.

Like other *devsirme* recruits in the inner court, white eunuchs were sent out as provincial governors, including to great provinces such as Egypt. Between 1517 and 1598, for example, six of the twenty-nine governors of Egypt were white eunuchs.⁶⁹ Some of them even rose to the grand vizierate.⁷⁰ The prominent example of such a eunuch-turned-grand-vizier was Hadım Süleyman Pasha (r.1541-1544). Hadım Süleyman Pasha entered the palace during the reign of Selim I. After serving as chief treasurer of the inner court, he went out as governor of Damascus in 1535, and transferred to the governorship of Egypt in the following year. In 1541, Süleyman Pasha was called to Istanbul and made the second vizier. After the dismissal of grand vizier Lütfi Pasha, he became the grand vizier, a post he held until his dismissal in 1544. Black eunuchs, in contrast, stayed in the palace and did not leave for such posts, probably preferring to remain in the palace rather than getting an appointment in the imperial administration.

The year 1574 was a turning point for black eunuchs. After 1574, black eunuchs took over the control of the harem, taking charge of the other eunuchs and servants in the

⁶⁸ Abdülkadir Özcan (ed.), *Kanunname-i Al-i Osman, (Tahlil ve Karşılaştırmalı Metin)*, (İstanbul, 2007), 7.

⁶⁹ Mustafa Ali, *Mustafa Ali's Description of Cairo of 1599*, ed. Andreas Tietze, (Vienna, 1975), 69-80, Mustafa Ali states "it had been customary at the time of their great forebears to give the governorship of Egypt to persons of eunuch class whatever it became vacant." 73.

⁷⁰ The eunuchs-turned grand viziers in the late sixteenth century were: Ali Pasha, Sinan Pasha, Süleyman Pasha, Mesih Pasha and Hasan Pasha.

harem. Accordingly, black eunuchs had ready access to the female members of the Ottoman dynasty such as the mother and wife of the sultan; they controlled “the traffic into and out of the harem quarters.”⁷¹ This close connection empowered black eunuchs as representatives of and mediators for these influential figures in the harem.

Why did Murad III create the office of the chief black eunuch in 1574? The Ottoman sources are silent on the reasons for this new arrangement. It may be speculated that the enlargement of the palace in terms of both population and space necessitated the division of the authority of the white eunuch, in order to decrease his workload.⁷² Baki Tezcan, for his part, suggests that the office was created as a result of the inability of even a strong white eunuch to rival the grand vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha. Nevertheless, he does not offer any detailed explanation of why the black eunuchs came to command a more influential position than the white ones, a question that remains unanswered.⁷³

The first chief black eunuch was Habeş Mehmed Aga, who was of Abyssinian or Ethiopian origin. As the first chief black eunuch and supervisor of the pious endowments of Mecca and Medina, Mehmed Aga attained great power and wealth. He exerted great influence because of his close alliance with Murad III, with Murad’s mother Nurbanu Sultan and Safiye Sultan, Murad III’s consort. Perhaps the most striking example of Mehmed Aga’s influence is his extensive patronage of illustrated manuscripts. Emine Fetvacı shows that Mehmed Aga fashioned himself in the books as an indispensable agent for the sultan, “a role previously fulfilled by the grand vizier.”⁷⁴

⁷¹ Fetvacı, *Picturing History*, 149.

⁷² Ayşe Ezgi Dikici, ‘Obscure Roots, Solid Foundations: A Comparative Study on the Architectural Patronage of Ottoman Court Eunuchs’, MA Thesis, Koç University (2009), 22.

⁷³ Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman*, 102.

⁷⁴ Emine Fetvacı, ‘Viziers to Eunuchs: Transitions in Ottoman Manuscript Patronage, 1566-1617’, PhD Thesis, Harvard University (2005). 208.

After the death of Habeş Mehmed Aga, chief black eunuchs became increasingly involved in state affairs.⁷⁵ Mustafa Aga, the chief black eunuch of Ahmed I and Osman II, emerged as one of the most powerful political actors in that period.⁷⁶ Holding his office for nearly fifteen years, Mustafa Aga played a key role in two pivotal events: the accession of Mustafa I and the enthronement of Osman II. Following Ahmed I's death, Mustafa Aga took it upon himself to convince the senior officials of the empire that Prince Mustafa had no mental ailments and was fit to rule. Thus, the system of Ottoman dynastic succession system was modified so that Ahmed's brother Mustafa could take the throne instead of Ahmed's son. Peçevi remarked "the change in the law of succession was engineered by the chief black eunuch Mustafa Aga, to whose management all affairs of state had been committed during the reign of Ahmed I."⁷⁷ However, it was again Mustafa Aga, who notified deputy grand vizier Sofu Mehmed Pasha and the seyhulislam Esad Efendi about the worsening mental condition of Sultan Mustafa, before using his influence to incarcerate Mustafa and enthrone Osman II instead. Although Mustafa Aga was instrumental in the accession of Osman II, he was exiled to Egypt in that sultan's later period. What rendered Mustafa Aga so special was that he was brought back to the capital from his exile to serve as chief black eunuch for a second time in 1624. He remained in the office until his death a few months later in 1624.

Mustafa Aga's exile opened up an opportunity for Süleyman Aga, who had formerly been his apprentice.⁷⁸ Süleyman Aga would go on to prove himself as one of the most

⁷⁵ Yıldız Karakoç, 'Palace politics and the rise of the chief black eunuch in the Ottoman empire', MA thesis, Boğaziçi University (2005).

⁷⁶ Tülün Değirmenci, *İktidar Oyunları ve Resimli Kitaplar: II. Osman Devrinde Değişen Güç Simgeleri*, (İstanbul, 2012), 59- 73.

⁷⁷ George Junne, *The Black Eunuchs of the Ottoman Empire, Networks of Power in the Court of the Sultan*, (London, New York, 2016), quotation at 166.

⁷⁸ Ahmed Resmi Efendi, *Hamiletü'l Kübera*, ed. Ahmet Nezihi Turan (İstanbul, 2000), 49.

important supporters of Osman II. This tight relationship was to lead to his murder along with that of the sultan in the 1622 rebellion.

During the reign of Murad IV, however, we come across no influential chief black eunuch. Idris Aga, who was invested with the office in 1624, served for sixteen years until 1640. Despite his long tenure, he seems never to have become an important political figure, a fact supported by the taciturnity of the chronicles. The reason for this might be that Murad IV chose to empower his *musahib* Silahdar Mustafa Pasha.⁷⁹ Similarly, *musahibs* became more influential during Ibrahim I's reign, when again the black eunuchs do not appear as significant political actors.

One of the most important roles of the chief black eunuch in early seventeenth century was their patronage in the administrative system. We know that the chief black eunuchs sponsored the careers of viziers and grand viziers. For instance, Nasuh Pasha, who served as grand vizier from 1611 to 1614, had been a client of Habes Mehmed Aga, as a halberdier at the court.⁸⁰ Thanks to Mehmed Aga and his patron Safiye Sultan's influence, Nasuh Aga was promoted to the governorship of Aleppo and later became the grand vizier. Another striking example of the patronage of the chief black eunuch can be seen in the career of İstanköylü Ali Pasha, who was a protégé of Mustafa Aga. Ali Pasha rose to the power thanks to Mustafa Aga's support. However, the partnership was ended after Ali Pasha became the grand vizier, and Ali Pasha played an instrumental role in having Mustafa Aga deposed.⁸¹ Peçevi explains that the grand vizier desired absolute power and convinced the sultan to send Mustafa Aga into exile. Mustafa had also acted as a patron for other

⁷⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁸⁰ Jane Hathaway, 'Habesi Mehmed Agha: The First Chief Harem Eunuch (Darussaade Agasi) of the Ottoman Empire', in Asad Q. Ahmed, Behnam Sadeghi, and Michael Bonner, (eds.), *The Islamic Scholarly Tradition: Studies in History, Law and Thought in Honor of Professor Michael Allen Cook*, (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2011) 184 and Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman*, 160.

⁸¹ Resmi Efendi, *Hamiletü'l Kübera*, 48 and Peçevi, *Tarih-i Peçevi*, II, 371.

viziers appointed to important positions during the first half of the seventeenth century, including Tabaniyassi Mehmed Pasha, one of the influential grand viziers of Murad IV.⁸²

By the end of the middle seventeenth century, the chief black eunuch had consolidated his power and gained precedence over the white eunuch in the harem. Wojciech Bobowski, a Polish renegade, who worked in the Topkapi Palace for ten years, wrote in 1657:

This officer (chief black eunuch) is more important than the Kapi agasi (chief white eunuch) because, in addition to his greater income, he has easier access to the prince and has more occasion to approach him at any hour, even when he was retired or was with his mistress...⁸³

The power of the black eunuch reached its apex in the period following Kösem Sultan's murder in 1651. The office was one of the most important in the empire from 1651 until the grand vizierate of Köprülü Mehmed Pasha. The next chapter will focus on the developments surrounding the office during that period.

1.4. The Demise of the Power of the Grand Vizierate

While the chief black eunuch and royal favorite increased their power, the authority of the grand vizier waned dramatically following the assassination of grand vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha in 1579. In the ensuing years, Murad III and his successors "did not want another Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, in office for 15 years and the effective ruler of the realm."⁸⁴ Furthermore, Murad III changed two important features of the grand vizierate that ultimately culminated in the demise of the authority of the grand vizier. The first was a

⁸² Metin Kunt, 'Derviş Mehmed Paşa, 'Vezir and Entrepreneur: A Study in Ottoman Political-Economic Theory and Practice', *Turcica*, 19/1, 1977, 199.

⁸³ C.G Fisher-A.Fisher 'Topkapi Sarayı in the Mid-Seventeenth Century: Bobovi's Description', *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 10 (1985 - 1987), 26-7.

⁸⁴ Metin Kunt, 'Sultan, Dynasty and State in the Ottoman Empire: Political Institutions in the Sixteenth Century', *The Medieval History Journal*, 6/2, (2003), 226.

change in the pattern of vizierial promotion. With the breaking up of the pattern established by Süleyman I, grand viziers were appointed and dismissed with increasing frequency. The second was a change in practices of communication between the sultan and the grand vizier. Here, daily face-to-face meetings gave way to less frequent written communication. Before scrutinizing these two changes in detail, I will offer a brief survey of the grand vizierate from Mehmed II until the accession of Murad III in 1574.

The grand vizier was the highest-ranking administrative officer in the Ottoman Empire, head of the government and the deputy of the sultan. The code of law (*kanunname*) of Mehmed II described the grand vizier in the following manner:

Know that the grand vizier is, above all, the head of viziers and commanders. He is greater than all men: he (the grand vizier) is in all matters the sultan's absolute deputy. The *Defterdar* (the chief treasurer) is deputy from my treasurer, and he (the grand vizier) is the supervisor. In all meetings and in all ceremonies the grand vizier takes his place before all others.⁸⁵

This paragraph legally established the precedence of the grand vizier over all other Ottoman officials. Also, the delegation of sultanic power was sanctioned legally by the description of the grand vizier as the sultan's absolute deputy (*vekil-i mutlak*). The grand vizier was responsible for appointing officials, overseeing the treasury and the supervising the regulation of the prices in the market.

Despite this definition of grand vizierial authority in the code of law, the power and influence of the grand viziers varied in accordance with each sultan's style of rule. For instance, Mehmed II had an authoritarian rulership style and actively participated in

⁸⁵ Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire, the Classical Age 1300-1600* (New York, 1994), quotation at 94.

decision-making.⁸⁶ Bayezid II, unlike his father, assumed a more passive attitude and did not intervene in his grand viziers' affairs. His successor Selim I, by contrast, played a more assertive part in the decision-making process and took the lead in imperial council meetings. He also deliberately kept the office of the grand vizierate vacant through delays in appointment. For example, he waited for three months to appoint Herzekzade Ahmed Pasha in 1515 after having personally executed the grand vizier Dukaginzade Ahmed Pasha.⁸⁷

The most important change regarding the grand vizierate took place in the reign of Süleyman I. Having started with the appointment of Ibrahim Pasha as the grand vizier, Süleyman I delegated nearly autonomous power to his grand viziers.⁸⁸ Ibrahim Pasha's elevation from gatekeeper to the grand vizierate without holding any intermediary position was an unprecedented move that was never to be repeated.⁸⁹ Kaya Şahin rightly points out "this was Süleyman's ultimate assertion of his own authority at the expense of any notions of merit or hierarchy that may have existed in 1523."⁹⁰ Ibrahim Pasha's decisions were consistently put into action, and even the sultan did not interfere with the grand vizier's spheres of authority.⁹¹ After Ibrahim Pasha's sudden execution in 1536, after thirteen years as grand vizier, his successors Ayas Pasha, Lütfi Pasha and Hadim Süleyman Pasha remained in their positions for only two or three years. It was only Rüstem Pasha, the son-

⁸⁶ Zahit Atıl, 'State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire: The Grand Vizirates of Rüstem Pasha (1544 - 1561)', PhD Thesis, University of Chicago (2015), 233.

⁸⁷ Feridun Emecen, *Yavuz Sultan Selim* (Istanbul, 2010), 353-56.

⁸⁸ Gülru Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan, Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (London, 2005), 38.

⁸⁹ Ebru Turan, 'The Sultan's Favorite: İbrahim Pasha and the Making of the Ottoman Universal Sovereignty in the Reign of Sultan Süleyman' PhD Thesis, University of Chicago (2007).

⁹⁰ Kaya Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman, Narrating the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman World* (Cambridge, 2013) 46.

⁹¹ Atıl, 'State and Government', 236.

in-law of Süleyman I and the next grand vizier, who enjoyed the same favor from the sultan that Ibrahim Pasha had.

Towards the end of Süleyman's reign, the grand vizier had become the main political authority of the state rather than merely a representative of the sultan.⁹² Hüseyin Yılmaz convincingly argues that there was a change from a sultan-centric tradition set down by Mehmed II to a vizier-centric tradition in the Ottoman political literature of the sixteenth century.⁹³ In this new constellation, the sultan maintained his place as the main source of legitimacy but was less visible in the day-to-day workings of the empire. Such day-to-day workings were managed more and more by the grand vizier.

Without a doubt, Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, who came to power towards the end of Süleyman's reign, turned out to be the emblematic figure of this new political configuration. Sokollu Mehmed followed same career path as Rüstem Pasha.⁹⁴ He was a *devsirme* recruit and was raised in the Topkapı Palace. After serving in the sultan's privy chamber as a sword-bearer, he held the offices of head taster and chief gatekeeper in the outer service. He was sent out for provincial service as governor-general and was then appointed as grand admiral. After serving as the governor-general of Rumelia, he joined the imperial council, where he rose through the ranks of viziers until he reached the top. He became grand vizier in 1565 and served until his assassination in 1579. Sokollu Mehmed was also a royal groom, married to the Sultan Selim II's daughter İsmihan. Particularly in the reign of his father-in-law, Sokollu Mehmed wielded enormous power.

⁹² Metin Kunt and Nevin Yelçe, 'Divan-ı Hümayun: le Conseil imperial Ottoman et ses Conseillers (1450 - 1580)', in Cedric Michon (ed.), *Conseils Conseillers, dans l'Europe de la Renaissance*, v. 1450-v.1550, (Rennes, 2012), 309.

⁹³ Hüseyin Yılmaz, 'The Sultan and the Sultanate: Envisioning Rulership in the Age of Suleyman the Lawgiver (1520 - 1566)', PhD Thesis, Harvard University, (2005).

⁹⁴ Gilles Veinstein, 'Sokollu Mehmed Pasha', in Bearman et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* and Uros Dakic, 'The Sokollu Family Clan and The Politics of Vizierial Households in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century', MA Thesis, Central European University (2012).

Everything changed with the accession of the new sultan Murad III in 1574. As noted, Murad III resented the immense power Sokollu Mehmed had accumulated during his long service. Sokollu Mehmed Pasha had monopolized the most important nominations, and his clients were entrenched in the highest offices. Murad III increasingly tried to regain the control of nominations.⁹⁵ In the first years of his sultanate, he was directly involved in making appointments and frequently dismissed Sokollu Mehmed Pasha's protégés. For example, the chancellor of the imperial council Feridun Ahmed Bey, a client of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, was dismissed and exiled from Istanbul.⁹⁶ He also ordered the execution of Sokollu's paternal cousin Mustafa Pasha, governor of Buda.⁹⁷ And when Sokollu Mehmed Pasha was assassinated in 1579, it was suspected that the sultan had had a hand in it.⁹⁸

After the death of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, Murad III continued his control over nominations. When the grand vizier Mesih Pasha requested the appointment of Hasan Aga as chief scribe, Murad III denied his request and wrote to the grand vizier: "You are obliged to employ the people we assign."⁹⁹ These words expressed the close control of the sultan over nominations, formerly managed by the grand vizier. In response, Mesih Pasha indicated his wish to retire.¹⁰⁰ In his *telhises*, Sinan Pasha, who served as grand vizier in the reign of Murad III for the sixth time, continuously complained about the intervention of the

⁹⁵ As Jeroen Duindam suggests, "the control of nominations was a key instrument of any ruler", see, Duindam, *Dynasties*, 218.

⁹⁶ Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 72-3, Börekçi, 'Factions and Favorites', 167-69.

⁹⁷ Mustafa Pasha was accused of wrongdoing in his governorship, Yasemin Altaylı, 'Macarca Mektuplarıyla Budin Beylerbeyi Sokullu Mustafa Paşa (1566-1578), *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi*, 49/2, (2009), 157-71.

⁹⁸ Salomon Schweigger, a Protestant preacher at that time, remarks "it was widely rumored in the capital at the time that Sokollu's murder was actually the work of the sultan", see, Börekçi, 'Factions and Favorites', quotation at 170.

⁹⁹ Mustafa Ali, *Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali ve Künhü'l Ahbar'ında II.Selim, III.Murad ve III.Mehmed Devirleri*, Ed. Faris Çerçi 3 vols. (Kayseri, 2000), III, 493.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 492-94.

sultan and his companions over appointments.¹⁰¹ As noted above, these were often made by royal favorites without advice from the grand viziers. This challenge to the power of the grand viziers continued throughout the first half of the seventeenth century. At the same time, two other novelties placed restrictions on the grand viziers. Let us now study those in more detail.

1.4.1. The changes in the hierarchical pattern of vizierial promotion

From the execution of Ibrahim Pasha in 1536 to the accession of Murad III in 1574, a regular pattern of vizierial promotion was followed. There were eight grand viziers in that period, and their career patterns were almost identical.¹⁰² After being trained in the palace, they moved on to serve in the outer palace in positions such as gatekeeper (*kapicibasi*), standard-bearer (*emir-i alem*) and the head of the imperial stables.¹⁰³ Later, they were promoted to provincial postings such as the governorship of Egypt or Rumelia. Finally, they were elevated to the imperial council, which included six viziers. They all served on the imperial council before being promoted to the grand vizierate, a position they held for two or three years, until their retirement, dismissal or natural death or execution.¹⁰⁴

During the reign of Süleyman I, following the death or dismissal of a grand vizier, the second vizier became grand vizier; the third was promoted to second, and so on. With the exception of Ibrahim Pasha, all the grand viziers advanced from the second vizierate. Thus, vizierial promotion was almost systematic. The key aspect of this system was that the sultan's intervention was minimal.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Sinan Paşa, *Koca Sinan Paşa'nın Telhisleri*, Ed. Halil Sahillioğlu (İstanbul, 2004) 2, 6, 8-16

¹⁰² Kunt and Yelçe, 'Divan-ı Hümayun', 313.

¹⁰³ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 72.

¹⁰⁴ Kunt and Yelçe, 'Divan-ı Hümayun', 313

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 313.

Murad III discontinued this almost automatic promotion ladder. After Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, Murad III changed his grand viziers much more rapidly, and grand viziers were dismissed only to be brought back after a time. In this new political order, any vizier could be elevated to the grand vizierate. At the same time, Murad III encouraged rivalry between viziers by holding out the possibility of reinvesting them with the grand vizierate. The reason for rotating the office among a pool of possible candidates was to prevent them from holding long tenures during which the grand vizier could appoint people who belonged to his faction to all key positions. The sultan now resumed his role in the appointment of the grand vizier.

In the sixteen years of Murad III's reign (1574-1595) following Sokollu's death, the grand vizierate changed hands ten times among six viziers. During the eight-year reign of his successor, Mehmed III, the office changed hands eleven times among eight viziers. In this period, several grand viziers were appointed more than once, including Koca Sinan Pasha, Siyavuş Pasha and Damad İbrahim Pasha, each of whom held the office three times.

The Grand Viziers After Sokollu Mehmed Pasha			
1	Semiz Ahmed Pasha	13.10.1579-28.4.1580	6.5 months
2	Lala Mustafa Pasha	28.4.1580-7.8.1580	3 monts
3	Koca Sinan Pasha (1)	25.8.1580-6.12.1582	2.5 years
4	Siyavuş Pasha (1)	24.12.1582-25.7.1584	1.5 years
5	Osman Pasha	28.7.1584-29.10.1585	1.5 years
6	Hadım Mesih Pasha	1.11.1585-14.4.1586	4.5 months
7	Siyavuş Pasha (2)	15.4.1586-2.4.1589	3 years
8	Koca Sinan Pasha (2)	2.4.1589-1.8.1591	2.5 years
9	Ferhad Pasha (1)	1.8.1591-4.4.1592	8 months

10	Siyavuş Pasha (3)	4.4.1592-28.1.1593	10 months
11	Koca Sinan Pasha (3)	28.1.1593-16.2.1595	2 years
The Grand Viziers of Mehmed III			
1	Ferhad Pasha (2)	16.2.1595-7.7.1595	5 months
2	Koca Sinan Pasha (4)	7.7.1595-28.11.1595	4.5 months
3	Lala Mehmed Pasha	19.11.1595-28.11.1595	9 days
4	Koca Sinan Pasha (5)	1.12.1595-3.4.1596	4 months
5	Damad Ibrahim Pasha	4.4.1596-27.10.1596	7 months
6	Yusuf Sinan Pasha	27.10.1596-5.12.1596	1.5 months
7	Damad Ibrahim Pasha (2)	5.12.1596-3.11.1597	11 months
8	Hadım Hasan Pasha	3.10.1597-9.4.1598	5.5 months
9	Cerrah Mehmed Pasha	9.4.1598-6.1.1599	9 months
10	Damad Ibrahim Pasha (3)	6.1.1599-10.7.1601	2.5 years
11	Hasan Pasha	22.7.1601-4.10.1603	2 years

Table 1: The Grand Viziers of Murad III and Mehmed III

Table 1 clearly shows that no grand vizier maintained his position for more than two years. As Christine Woodhead points out, “Murad III succeeded in forestalling any further dominance of the office by one individual.”¹⁰⁶ During Murad III’s reign, the average length in office was 1.74 years. Mehmed III’s grand viziers held even shorter terms; the average time in office was 0.6 year during his eight-year reign. The shortening of grand vizier’s terms constituted one of the most significant aspects of the grand vizierate in the early seventeenth century. The table below illustrates the situation:

	1323-1579	1579-1656
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¹⁰⁶ Woodhead, ‘*Poet, Patron*’, 235.

The Length of Tenure	Alâüddin-Sokollu	Sokollu-Köprülü
Less than 1 year	1	19
Around 1 year	3	19
Around 2 years	4	4
Around 3 years	4	3
Around 4 years	2	-
Between 5 and 10 years	8	3
10 years and over	13	-

Table 2: Length of Tenure of the Grand Viziers

We can observe the same pattern in the first half of the seventeenth century. With the exception of men like Kuyucu Murad Pasha, Tabanıyassı Mehmed Pasha and Kemankeş Kara Mustafa Pasha, the grand viziers of the period all had short terms in office.

No	Grand Viziers of Ahmed I	Dates	Length of Tenure
1	Malkoç Ali Pasha	16.10.1603-26.7.1604	Ten months
2	Lala Mehmed Pasha	5.8.1604-21.6.1606	Two years
3	Derviş Mehmed Pasha	21.6.1606-5.8.1611.	6 months
4	Kuyucu Murad Pasha	11.12.1606-5.8.1611	5 years
5	Nasuh Pasha	22.8.1611-17.10.1614	3 years
6	Kara Mehmed Pasha	17.10.1614-17.11.1616	2 years
No	Grand Viziers of Mustafa I	Dates	Length of Tenure
1	Halil Pasha	17.11.1616-26.2.1618	3 months
No	Grand Viziers of Osman II	Dates	Length of Tenure
1	Halil Pasha (1)	26.2.1618-18.1.1619	2 years

2	Kara Mehmed Pasha (2)	18.1.1619-23.12.1619	1 year
3	İstanköylü Ali Pasha	23.12.1619-9.3.1621	1 year
4	Ohrili Hüseyin Pasha	9.3.1621-17.9.1621	6.5 months
5	Dilaver Pasha	17.9.1621-13.6.1622	8 months
No	Grand Viziers of Mustafa I (2)	Dates	Length of Tenure
1	Kara Davud Pasha	20.5.1622-13.6.1622	24 days
2	Mere Hüseyin Pasha (1)	13.6.1622-8.7.1622	25 days
3	Lefkeli Mustafa Pasha	8.7.1622-21.9.1622	2.5 months
4	Hadım Mehmed Pasha	21.9.1622-5.2.1623	4.5 months
5	Mere Hüseyin Pasha	5.2.1623-30.8.1623	7 months
No	Grand Viziers of Murad IV	Dates	Length of Tenure
1	Kemankeş Ali Pasha	30.8.1623-3.4.1624	7 months
2	Çerkes Mehmed Pasha	3.4.1624-28.1.1625	10 months
3	Hafız Ahmed Pasha (1)	8.2.1625-1.12.1626	2 years
4	Halil Pasha (2)	1.12.1626-6.4.1628	1.5 years
5	Hüsrev Pasha	6.4.1628-25.10.1631	3 years
6	Hafız Ahmed Pasha (2)	25.10.1631-10.2.1632	3.5 months
7	Recep Pasha	10.2.1632-18.5.1632	3 months
8	Tabanıyassı Mehmed Pasha	18.5.1632-2.2.1637	5 years
9	Bayram Pasha	2.2.1637-26.8.1638	1,5 months
10	Tayyar Mehmed Pasha	27.8.1638-23.12.1638	4 months
11	Kemankeş Kara Mustafa Pasha	23.12.1638-8.2.1640	1 year
No	Grand Viziers of Ibrahim I	Dates	Length of Tenure
1	Kemankeş Kara Mustafa Pasha	8.2.1640-31.1.1644	4 years
2	Sultanzade Mehmed Pasha	31.1.1644-17.12.1645	2 years
3	Salih Pasha	17.12.1645-16.9.1647	2 years

4	Kara Musa Pasha	16.9.1647-21.9.1647	5 days
5	Hezarpare Ahmed Pasha	21.9.1647-7.8.1648	10 months

Table 3: The Grand Viziers in the early 17th Century

1.4.2. The emergence of the *telhis* as the main mode of communication

One of the essential changes introduced by Murad III was a shift from face-to-face contact between the grand vizier and the sultan to written contact.¹⁰⁷ This was carried out through a piece of paper issued by the grand vizier and presented to the sultan, called *telhis*. In this new form of communication, the grand vizier submitted each question to the sultan in writing, and the sultan issued a hand-written answer on top of the original query. This meant that the sultan withdrew from direct contact with the grand vizier. How did this novelty affect this key relationship?

During the reign of Sultan Süleyman, the meetings between the sultan and the grand vizier became more procedural and standardized.¹⁰⁸ When Rüstem Pasha occupied the grand vizierate, he conveyed the state affairs discussed in the imperial council to the sultan verbally. According to Antonio Erizzo, the Venetian bailo of the time, “the reporting to the sultan was not more than a customary insignificant procedure, because the whole operation of government was functionally run by Rüstem Pasha whose report of an affair to the sultan did not change the outcome.”¹⁰⁹ Under this system, Süleyman delegated responsibility for state affairs to the grand vizier and the imperial council. The grand vizier formed the key connection between the imperial council and the sultan with the members of the council

¹⁰⁷ Pal Fodor, ‘Sultan, imperial council, grand vizier: changes in the Ottoman ruling elite and the formation of the grand vizieral *Telhis*’, *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 47 (1994), 67–85.

¹⁰⁸ Atıl, ‘State and Government’, 239.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 239.

rarely exchanging words with the sultan. The grand vizier thus enjoyed not only a certain level of independence in conducting state affairs, but also easy access to the sultan.

Starting with the accession of Murad III, the connection between the sultan and the grand vizier increasingly assumed a written form. Although it is hard to pinpoint the exact beginning of the process, the *telhis* collections of Sinan Pasha suggests that the mechanism started at least after Sokollu Mehmed's death.¹¹⁰ In the *telhises*, Sinan Pasha summarizes all of the state affairs for the sultan and asks for his approval.¹¹¹ As Pal Fodor has shown, most of these *telhises* consisted of appointments though many others concerned the assignment of prebends (*dirliks*).¹¹² Financial issues, bureaucratic administration and diplomatic relations constituted the remaining subjects of the *telhises*.¹¹³ This suggests that the grand vizier lost much of his independence and was obliged to request the sultan's confirmation for every important appointment and decision.

At the same time, the period saw an increase in the number of royal rescripts (*hatt-i hümayun*).¹¹⁴ Before the reign of Murad III, the number of royal rescripts was negligible.¹¹⁵ Murad III began to write a rescript for every piece of government business. Contemporary observer Mustafa Ali condemns "the innovative proliferation of royal rescripts" in the reign of Murad III. Mustafa Ali pointed out that while formerly appointments necessitated no more than the approval of the grand vizier, "sultan Murad required that he see and sign most documents of appointment."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Pal Fodor, 'The Grand Vizieral Telhis, A Study in the Ottoman Central Administration 1566 - 1656' *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 15, (1997), 138

¹¹¹ Sinan Paşa, *Koca Sinan Paşa'nın*,

¹¹² Pal Fodor, 'The Grand Vizieral Telhis', 154.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 156-58.

¹¹⁴ Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 95.

¹¹⁵ Pal Fodor, 'The Grand Vizieral Telhis', 139 and Josef Matuz, *Das Kanzleiwesen Sultan Süleymans des Practigen* (Wiesbaden, 1974) 68-9.

¹¹⁶ Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 295.

Black eunuchs and *musahibs* benefited most from this new mode of communication. As Günhan Börekçi points out, “they not only had the privilege of submitting their own petitions to the sultan, but could also control which vizierial *telhises* the sultan saw.”¹¹⁷ This constituted one of the main sources of tension between the inner-court servants and the grand viziers.

The use of *telhises* continued after Sinan Pasha.¹¹⁸ The collection of *telhises* of Yemişçi Hasan Pasha, who served as a grand vizier to Ahmed I, reveals that the sultan and the pasha frequently employed *telhises* as well. In one of these, Ahmed I refused the grand vizier’s request to meet personally, with the handwritten note: “You should inform me on paper,”¹¹⁹ suggesting that face-to-face meetings between sultan and grand vizier had become rare.¹²⁰ During the minority of Sultan Murad IV, his mother Kösem Sultan carried out conversations with the grand viziers via *telhises*.¹²¹ Murad IV also made use of a high number of royal rescripts after he established his own authority in 1632. As Rhoads Murphey has shown, more than three hundred of such royal rescripts were put together in a manuscript, now kept in Istanbul University.¹²²

Overall, short terms, reappointments, written communication and the intervention of royal favorites and harem eunuchs profoundly weakened the grand vizierate during the first part of the seventeenth century. The grand viziers lost their independence. The anonymous writer of *Kitab-ı Müstetab* described the demise of the power of the grand vizier: “Whereas before the whole world was afraid of the grand vizier, now those who occupy this post have

¹¹⁷ Börekçi, ‘Factions and Favorites’, 154.

¹¹⁸ *Osmanlı Tarihine Aid Belgeler: Telhisler (1596 - 1607)*, Ed. Cengiz Orhonlu, (İstanbul, 1970).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹²⁰ Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power* (London, 2009), 162.

¹²¹ Halil İnalcık, *Devlet-i Aliyye: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Üzerine Araştırmalar II. Tagayyür ve Fesad (1603 - 1656), Bozuluş ve Kargaşa Dönemi* (İstanbul, 2014), 371-429.

¹²² *Sultan Dördüncü Murad’ın Hatt-ı Hümayunları, Suver-ı Hutut-ı Hümayun*, Ed. Önder Bayır, (İstanbul, 2014) and Rhoads Murphey, ‘An Ottoman View from the top and rumblings from below: The Sultan’s writs (hatt-i Humayun) of Murad IV (R.1623 - 1640)’, *Turcica*, 28, (1996), 319-38.

come to fear even people who are not worth fearing.”¹²³ The phenomenon of the decreasing vizierial authority would come to a halt with appointment of Köprülü Mehmed Pasha as grand vizier in 1656. He would manage to restore the authority of the office of the grand vizierate. But how did Köprülü Mehmed Pasha achieve success? The next chapter will look for an answer to this question.

¹²³ Anonymous, ‘Kitab-ı Müstetab’, 19