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

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CONCLUSION

This dissertation analyzes the dynamics of the Ottoman political system between 1656 and 1676. The analysis is carried out through a study of the influential vizierial family that came to power in 1656, the Köprülü. It focuses on the processes by which they gained and employed political power and unravels their relationship with the Ottoman dynasty. This study shows that Köprülü Mehmed Pasha and Fazıl Ahmed Pasha successfully restored the authority of the grand vizierate with support from the dynasty. They established the most efficient political network of the seventeenth century by the end of their twenty-year tenure.

The death of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha is generally acknowledged as a watershed that marked the end of the empire's "classical age". Unlike his grandfather Süleyman I and his father Selim I, who delegated enormous power to their grand viziers, the new sultan Murad III initiated a series of policies that aimed to reassert sultanic authority vis-à-vis the grand vizier. In this way, as Gülru Necipoğlu aptly observes, "the clear-cut pyramidal social hierarchy of the classical age, with the sultan and grand vizier occupying its summit, evolved into a fluid structure with competing factions dominated by royal women and palace eunuchs."⁶⁰¹ The recent literature provides substantial insights into these new political arrangements, such as the creation of the position of chief black eunuch and the rise of the power of the royal favorites and women at the expense of the grand vizier. But historians have not adequately explored the question of how these changes affected the political structure during the early seventeenth century. The personal rule of Murad IV and the rise of royal favoritism in the reign of Ibrahim I are little studied, and there is no scholarly work on the question of how the relationship between the sultan and grand vizier unfolded in that period. By the same token, modern scholarship has devoted very little

⁶⁰¹ Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan*, 46.

attention to the rise of Köprülü Mehmed Pasha and the succession of his son Fazıl Ahmed Pasha in the second part of the seventeenth century. Only the reestablishment of order and the expansion of the empire under the Köprülü viziers have attracted the attention of the scholars. They neglect important developments such as the moving of the court to Edirne, the emergence of a threefold administrative center, the new balance between the sultan and grand vizier, and the reduction of the inner-court servants-grand vizier rivalry in that period. Moreover, the literature has overlooked the connection between the emergence of the Köprülü household and the general political developments of the first part of the seventeenth century.⁶⁰²

I argue that the Köprülü household's long-lasting power was directly related to the political developments that took place between the enthronement of Murad III in 1574 and 1656. The first chapter showed in detail that the policies followed by Murad III deeply impacted the Ottoman political establishment. A new pattern of rule through royal favorites and harem eunuchs was perpetuated by Murad IV and Ibrahim. As a result of these novel policies, the influence of the inner-court members increased while the power of the grand vizier gradually decreased. In contrast to its role in the sixteenth century, the grand vizierate became an unstable position where the officeholders were frequently changed. The grand viziers were not able to deal effectively with the mounting uncertainties the empire faced during the first half of the seventeenth century. Accordingly, beginning in the early seventeenth century, Ottoman writers of advice literature started to place more emphasis on the need to minimize the influence of the inner-court circles, including the royal favorites and harem eunuchs, and to reestablish the authority of the grand vizierate. In addition to an intellectual climate favoring a return to a powerful grand vizier, Köprülü Mehmed Pasha's

⁶⁰² See the footnote 15th in the introduction.

appointment as grand vizier must be placed in the context of the severe crisis that plagued the Ottoman Empire in the 1650s. In 1651, the new power-holder Hadice Turhan Sultan, as her ten-year-old son's regent, was willing to grant power to a strong and capable man. After the unsuccessful one-year grand vizierate of Gürcü Mehmed Pasha, Hadice Turhan Sultan appointed Tarhuncu Ahmed Pasha as grand vizier and promised that she would not allow anybody to interfere with the actions of the grand vizier. As an indication of her support for the grand vizier, Hadice Turhan dismissed the chief black eunuch, Süleyman Aga, the most powerful figure at the court, upon Tarhuncu Ahmed's request. Tarhuncu Ahmed, however, failed to deal with the ongoing problems and was executed within one year. Tarhuncu Ahmed's successors could not manage to reverse the setbacks suffered by the empire, either. In the meantime, the long war with Venice and the growing disturbances in the provinces and factional struggles in the capital jeopardized the security of the throne. In March 1656, a coalition of the Janissaries and imperial cavalry regiments revolted against the dominance of the harem eunuchs, who had wielded enormous power since 1651. The uprising culminated in the execution of the leading palace officials, including the chief black eunuch. Faced with political chaos, Hadice Turhan Sultan engineered the appointment of Köprülü Mehmed Pasha as grand vizier with full powers over policy. In this manner, a new political configuration, which highlighted the independence of the grand vizier's authority and invested him with more influence, emerged in 1656.

The most important actor that paved the way for the establishment and application of this new configuration was the dynasty itself, contrary to what the present literature suggests. By providing the necessary ground for the grand vizier to act, Hadice Turhan Sultan and Mehmed IV aimed at creating stability in the empire. The main impetus behind this new political constellation was that the political crises, which stemmed from the rivalry

between the inner-court servants and grand vizier, threatened Mehmed IV's security on the throne. Moreover, the appointment of Köprülü Mehmed Pasha with extraordinary powers was not unique. As Metin Kunt rightly observes, the grand vizierate of Köprülü Mehmed Pasha "was not more than the culmination of a certain trend of his times."⁶⁰³ The main difference between Köprülü Mehmed Pasha and his predecessors was the former's achievement in establishing order. Within the first two years of his grand vizierate, Köprülü Mehmed Pasha suppressed the rebellious soldiers of the cavalry regiments in the capital, thanks to the power delegated to him by the dynasty. Later, Köprülü Mehmed succeeded in taking back the Limnos and Tenodos islands, ending the Venetian blockade of the Strait of the Dardanelles. As Köprülü Mehmed Pasha gained control over political factionalism and removed the Venetian threat, Hadice Turhan and Mehmed IV worked hand in hand to strengthen the power of the grand vizier.

The most significant indicator of the cooperation between the dynasty and Köprülü Mehmed Pasha was the moving of the dynasty to Edirne. This transfer, which was prompted by Köprülü Mehmed Pasha, kept the dynasty away from any rival factions, such as the Janissaries and cavalry regiments, which had caused tumult in Istanbul for years. At around this time, while Hadice Turhan's political involvement decreased, Mehmed IV began to assume the duties of the sultanate. Hadice Turhan now tried to reinvigorate the dynastic prestige that had been tarnished by political crises such as depositions and regicides of the sultans that had plagued the previous half-century.⁶⁰⁴ She initiated the construction of the Dardanelles fortresses and a great mosque in Istanbul. Hadice Turhan and Mehmed IV started the royal processions between Edirne and Istanbul and to Bursa, where they visited ancestral tombs. While the grand vizier was trying to end internal and

⁶⁰³ Kunt, *The Köprülü Years*, 136.

⁶⁰⁴ Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 257.

external threats to the empire's authority, the dynasty conveyed "broader messages about the enduring power and endurance of the House of Osman."⁶⁰⁵

In the meantime, Mehmed IV developed a close relationship with his grand vizier. Köprülü Mehmed's administration of state affairs made a strong impression on the sultan. The first considerable challenge for Mehmed IV was the rebellion of the Anatolian pashas under the leadership of Abaza Hasan Pasha, who demanded the execution of Köprülü Mehmed Pasha. Mehmed IV consistently rejected the demands of the rebels and stood by Köprülü Mehmed Pasha, giving support that played a crucial role in the suppression of the rebellion. By the end of his five years in office, Köprülü Mehmed Pasha had managed to establish the internal stability of the empire and to eliminate any possible opposition that could threaten the throne of Mehmed IV.

After the death of Köprülü Mehmed Pasha, Mehmed IV, contrary to all customs and rules, appointed Köprülü Mehmed's son Fazıl Ahmed Pasha to the grand vizierate. This extraordinary appointment can be explained by Mehmed IV's willingness to maintain the *status quo*, which had been established by Köprülü Mehmed Pasha.

With Fazıl Ahmed Pasha's grand vizierate a new phase began in the relationship between the grand vizier and sultan. Mehmed IV redesigned his inner circle by dismissing the incumbent chief black eunuch Solak Mehmed Aga and appointed his own man Musli Aga instead. He increasingly limited Hadice Turhan's connection to the outer world through the control of the chief black eunuch. Moreover, he appointed *Musahib* Mustafa Aga as his favorite and later promoted him to the second vizierate. Unlike his predecessors, however, Mehmed IV did not allow the members of his close circle, including his favorite and harem eunuchs, to interfere with the grand vizier's authority. During Fazıl Ahmed

⁶⁰⁵ Artan, 'Royal Weddings', 353.

Pasha's grand vizierate, the sultan's inner circle worked in great harmony with the grand vizier, which was actually encouraged by the sultan himself.

One of the most notable examples of the close collaboration was the emergence of a multipolar administrative system. In this system, the deputy grand vizier in Edirne forged a close relationship with the sultan and protected the interests of the grand vizier at the court, while the latter was on campaign. Another deputy in Istanbul was charged with responsibility for the security and administrative control of the city. Mehmed IV indeed worked in harmony with Merzifonlu Mustafa Pasha, who was the confidant of Fazıl Ahmed Pasha in Edirne and did not permit any intrigues against the grand vizier. More importantly, he demanded that Merzifonlu Mustafa Pasha and his own favorite *Musahib* Mustafa Pasha collaborate. In this manner, Merzifonlu was able to find his place within the close circle of the sultan, while the sultan's favorite could also become a confidant of the grand vizier. The fact that *Musahib* Mustafa Pasha assumed the post of the deputy in Edirne during the 1674 Polish campaign is emblematic of this rapprochement. This close collaboration created a power balance and prevented clashes such as those between Sokollu Mehmed Pasha and Murad III.

In this new political configuration set up by Mehmed IV's appointments, the grand viziers exercised undisputed power and created a period of relative political stability. Fazıl Ahmed Pasha conducted successful campaigns, stretching the empire's borders to their largest extent, which increased both the imperial and Köprülü families' legitimacy. In this period of stability, the dynasty was no longer in jeopardy and had the opportunity to strengthen its public image. Mehmed IV encouraged the preparations of symbols of legitimacy such as "a book of imperial festivities, a dynastic genealogy and new codes of

law.”⁶⁰⁶ The dynasty’s renewed interest in such activities and its efforts to increase its legitimacy were made possible by close collaboration between Mehmed IV and the Köprülü grand viziers.

The most conspicuous result of the era of the Köprülü grand viziers was the restoration of the grand vizierial authority. A symbolic example in this respect is the related passages in the *kanunname* (code of law) of Abdi Pasha, the chancellor and the private historian of the sultan, which was written soon after the death of Fazıl Ahmed Pasha in 1676.⁶⁰⁷ The definition of the grand vizierate in this *kanunname* is quite detailed in comparison to the one in the *kanunname* of Mehmed II, produced some two centuries earlier. The lengthy explanation of the functions and responsibilities of the grand vizierate in the *kanunname* of Abdi Pasha is a clear indication of the increased authority enjoyed by the grand vizier during the Köprülü period.⁶⁰⁸

This dissertation also examined the function of the Köprülü household, the most powerful vizierial household in the seventeenth century. By exploring the roles of the *kethüda*, *agas* and scribes in the household and by examining the clients of the Köprülü household in the military and administrative systems, this study sheds light on the efficiency of the Köprülü household. Thanks to their long-lasting incumbency, the Köprülü grand viziers managed to establish a large network stretching from the provinces to the central bureaucracy. Most of the key positions held by Köprülü clients had formerly been controlled by the imperial household. This was a sign of the decline of the sultan’s household as an institution of recruitment vis-à-vis the vizier household. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, clients and family members of vizier’s household rose to prominence over the palace graduates as far as official appointments were concerned.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., 351.

⁶⁰⁷ Tevki’i Abdurrahman Pasa, *Osmanlı Devleti’nde Teşrifat*, 3-18.

⁶⁰⁸ Metin Kunt, ‘Sadr-i A’zam’, in Bearman et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

Between 1683 and 1703, only three of the fourteen grand viziers were of imperial palace origin, while seven of the remaining eleven were members of the Köprülü household. The Köprülü household can hence be regarded as the most important agent in this transformation.

Overall, the vulnerability of the dynasty convinced first Hadice Turhan and then Mehmed IV about the need to unreservedly support the Köprülü grand viziers. The “working arrangement” emerging gradually then consolidated into a “system”, accepted and supported by both the Köprülü grand viziers and Mehmed IV. The “system” was broken up as result of Merzifonlu Mustafa Pasha’s failure in Vienna in 1683. The execution of Merzifonlu Mustafa Pasha and dismissal of the Köprülü clients, however, decreased the power of Mehmed IV, who was forced to abdicate the throne only four years later. The tension between the sultan and grand viziers continued to make a mark in political life after the deposition of Mehmed IV. Sultan Mustafa II, who was enthroned in 1695, attempted to regain the sultanic authority and dominate the grand vizier with the close collaboration of the seyhulislam Feyzullah Efendi. Their attempts resulted in another deposition of the sultan, Mustafa II, and execution of the seyhulislam in 1703. The rise of the provincial elites and civilian bureaucracy add new components to the power struggle, and their relationship with the sultanate and grand vizierate contribute a further complexity to the political structure of Ottoman history in the eighteenth century, which needs to be explored in other studies.