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Precarious privileges: glimpses into the post-Ottoman transition through the papers of a Salonican family

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ABSTRACT

As cousins, we discovered a treasure trove of family papers, revealing the intricate relationship between precarity and privilege of our family from Salonica navigating the post-Ottoman transition. Recognising the potential of family history to provide a more intimate and complex historiography, this article offers our initial study of these family papers. By highlighting the challenges posed by the scarcity of such documents in Middle Eastern studies, emphasising women's roles in preserving family memory and focussing on the interplay between personal and political domains, we identify the preparation of a family tree as a gendered and socioeconomic project of preserving the past and shaping the present. By tracing our family's origins, including unsettling discoveries, we address matters of identity and memory before embarking on our analysis. By reconstructing the biographies of two generations, we characterise the family's socioeconomic struggle to sustain their precarious privilege amid shifting frontiers and along their journey from Ottoman Salonica to Kemalist Turkey. Ultimately, this article underscores the significance of family history as a transnational, intergenerational, intersectional and social history that enriches our understanding of the post-Ottoman transition through the lives of ordinary (and some extraordinary) Ottomans.

KEYWORDS

Thessaloniki; family history; archives; Ottoman households; Turkey

Introduction: the precarity and privilege of family papers

In recent years, the potential of family history for a more 'intimate, complex, and complete' (Field 2022, p. 13) historiography has been widely recognised for people whose stories have been traditionally obfuscated by history's reliance on state-centric archives. 'Everybody does family history nowadays', observed British historian Light (2015, p. xxi), but she also underscored the challenge posed by the absence of family papers when attempting to compose family histories for ordinary individuals. As two historian cousins, we were both aware how privileged we were, when we learned of two separate collections of private papers from our family descending from Salonica (Thessaloniki) in the hands of distant family members. Sarah Abreveya Stein has already produced a family history tracing the lives of a Sephardic Jewish family from Salonica 'whose roots connect them to a place and community that no longer exist' (Stein 2019, p. 5). Our account complements and complicates her work by showing how a Muslim family navigated the post-Ottoman transition out of Salonica.

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Debates about archives in Middle Eastern studies particularly focus on abuses and absences of state archives, if not the prevailing state-centrism, within the context of decolonisation, nation-state formation, armed conflicts and contested memory politics (El Sharky 2015, Özok-Gündoğan 2017, Moustafa 2018, Bsheer 2020, Ferguson 2020, Özdemir and İçimsoy 2021). Historians have also used the Ottoman archives to reconstruct Ottoman and Turkish families during different centuries (Gerber 1989, Bouquet 2011), but understandably, bureaucratic records can allow only a limited glimpse into the private lives of families. Certainly, family history opens new directions for Ottoman historiography. Following Cornell Fleischer's path-breaking study on Mustafa Âli, scholar-bureaucrat families have been studied in further depth (Atçıl 2017), while the Sassoon family papers have shown how a family could navigate the opium trade to trace a path out of Baghdad, via India, to the heart of the British establishment (Sassoon 2022). Yet just as interesting would be to look at a major period of upheaval such as the end of the Ottoman Empire from the lens of its ordinary families. This period of rapid social change has mostly been told from the perspective of the painful recollections of non-Muslim families that were persecuted, displaced and alienated from their historical homelands (Ketsemanian 2022). For this period, most relevant studies on Turkey, especially since the 2000s, focus on questions of memory and identity (Özyürek 2007, Neyzi 2010). Alternatively, the history of the Turkish War of Independence, while one of the main master narratives of Turkey, still awaits to be fully brought down to the level of a broad societal experience, and explained as a culmination of larger historical processes that resulted in displacements for many families. Unfortunately, there is a general absence of institutions and traditions for archiving private ego-documents in post-Ottoman societies in the Middle East (Karahasanoğlu 2021). This gap is even more pronounced for Muslim refugees to Turkey from the Balkans and Caucasus, whose displacement and assimilation ruptured family histories (Özel 2024), and for Arab families who left Turkey (Minawi 2023). While research on the 1923 population exchange has thrived (Hirschon 2003, Bedlek 2016, Morack 2017, İğsız 2018, Alpan 2022), much remains to be uncovered on the micro-historical level.

As a category of historical sources, family papers suffer from precarious provenance, indicating the uncertain and fragile origin of these papers before reaching the shelves of archives. While governmental records commonly have clear regulations and procedures for archiving, family papers are not always preserved for documentary purposes. Instead, most private papers, if preserved at all, remain inaccessible in the possession of descendants over generations. Family members may discard or destroy documents for various reasons (Seikaly 2018, p. 17). In many countries in the Middle East, including Turkey, an additional challenge arises as state and nonprofit institutions responsible for archiving private papers are rarely able to acquire and process donations. Consequently, many family papers end up on the tables of flea markets and in the hands of collectors (Ryzova 2012), while endowed archives of famous families and personalities often remain inaccessible to the public (Rukancı *et al.* 2016, p. 32). The uprooting of many communities from their homelands, the despair and destruction of the wars of the final Ottoman decade and the triumphalist cultural hegemony of nationalism that created an epistemic rupture with the Ottoman past minimised the survival chances of family papers dating to Ottoman times and originating from places that lay beyond the borders of the nation-state. Illiteracy in the Ottoman Empire, especially among the Muslim population, and the language reforms that replaced the Perso-Arabic script of Ottoman Turkish with a modified Latin alphabet in 1928, are also major contributors to the overall absence of family papers. Certainly, it is a rare privilege not only to have access to such papers, but the papers themselves, in so far as they indicate a family with high degree of literacy and mobility, suggest that their creators too were relatively privileged.

This article is based on an initial inventory of our family papers, juxtaposed with complementary research in Ottoman archival documents, memoirs and other primary sources. First, we draw attention to the agency of women in collecting and curating family papers and provide a brief elaboration on the relationship between the personal and political in writing family history, while discussing the implications of studying a family tree. Second, we explore our family genealogy, not to unearth the

memory of a lost identity, but to illuminate the sociopolitical transformation of the Ottoman Empire through the trajectory of an Ottoman family. Third, we uncover some dark corners in our family tree, including our hitherto unknown kinship with some prominent perpetrators of demographic violence during the transformative period from empire to republic. Fourth, in a more in-depth case study, we discuss the complex interplay of precarity and privilege for a Muslim middle-class family with the emergence of a new frontier around Salonica after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. By studying the lives of our great-grandfather and his brother from the 1880s to the aftermath of World War I, we characterise the family's struggle to sustain social status in Salonica as one of precarious privilege. Lastly, against this backdrop, we trace the life trajectories of the generation that came of age during the very moment of post-Ottoman transition, with many settling for a bureaucratic career in the new Turkish Republic, discarding the entrepreneurial initiatives they had embarked on back in Salonica. By uncovering the history of our family, we have come to realise not only the burden of the family's memory on the descendants but also the immense potential of family history for a deeper understanding of the post-Ottoman transition from the perspective of ordinary (and some extraordinary) Ottomans who were shaping the world around them as much as reacting to its changes.

Exploring precarious privileges: family history as a gendered domain between the personal and the political

'Contrary to that historian's perception, a large part of the historiographical enterprise rests in the hands of those who curate collections', notes Hannah Holtschneider (2019, p. 336) and reminds us that 'access to "the past" is always curated and never direct'. Thus, Antoinette Burton (2003, p. 6) notes that family papers and memories preserved by women 'are useful reminders that the word "archive" derives from the Greek *arkheion*, that is, the house, residence, domicile of the archon (superior magistrate)', signifying 'the liminal space between public and private' and therefore always gendered. Exchanging correspondence, nurturing relationships and accumulating knowledge within the confines of their homes, women not only acted as central nodes in broader family networks, but also assumed the crucial role of 'caring' for the family's identity and memory from within (Hamlett 2020). There is no doubt that unravelling our family history would have been impossible without the pivotal role played by its women.

Until our discovery of our family papers, our knowledge of our family's past in Salonica was limited. Our mutual grandfather, Mithat Yenen (1908–1987), was born in Ottoman Salonica but he had spent his university years studying architecture at the Technical University of Stuttgart in Weimar Germany and made a career as a bureaucrat in the Ministry of Development and Housing in Turkey. His wife, our grandmother Anneliese Rupp (1908–1993), who adopted the name Aliye Yenen after marriage and naturalisation, hailed from Germany. The last name was chosen by Mithat's elder brother, İsmet, who, having arrived in Turkey as the family head, decided on the surname Yenen (meaning 'the winner'). Our grandparents had six children, including Alp's late father, Kaya Yenen (1930–2004), and Funda's late mother, the famous Turkish novelist Sevgi Soysal (1936–1976). In her 1973 novel *Noontime in Yenişehir* (2016) – Yenişehir being the Turkish name of today's Larissa in Greece as well as the Republican name of Ankara's central district – Sevgi had fictionalised a prosperous, patriarchal family with farms on the outskirts of Salonica. They experienced a significant decline in wealth due to the decadent habits of the oldest brother who squandered his mother's jar full of gold coins. Something we always considered a close version of truth. In a separate memoir, our other aunt, art historian Gönül Öney (1933–), narrated growing up as model citizens of the new Turkish Republic while being the children of a mixed marriage (Öney and Gök 2018). Although there was a vast collection of photographs taken by our grandfather, we had no family papers.

Our discovery of family papers unfolded when a previously unknown relative named Aslı reached out to us. Amid the soul-searching atmosphere of the COVID-19 pandemic, Aslı had been exploring

the contents of an old chest at her home, revealing a cache of letters, postcards, albums and notebooks. This chest belonged to Naciye, an elderly great-aunt, who resided with Aslı's family during her childhood, and who had died without any descendants of her own. Through these documents, Aslı discovered that she was related to our family, prompting her to get in touch with us. Pakize, the mother of Naciye, was a sister of İzzet, Mithat and İsmet's father, who had died in Salonica just on the eve of the population exchange. Having settled in the Black Sea city of Ordu after the exchange, Aslı's side of the family had had no contact with İzzet's descendants' side of the family.

With this unexpected acquaintance, we sought out another family member, Zuhall, the granddaughter of Muazzez, İzzet's eldest child, who was known for collecting our family papers. Since our grandparents passed away, our families had lost touch on that side as well. Zuhall's collection of family papers proved to be even more impressive. These two collections combined offered a treasure trove of historical documents, including a vast collection of letters, documents, family trees, diaries, postcards, notebooks and photos, chronicling the transition of our family from Ottoman Salonica to Kemalist Turkey, with detours to the Kaiserreich and Weimar Germany. Letters and postcards authored by our male relatives living or travelling abroad were addressed to their more settled female family members in Salonica and later Istanbul, who preserved these letters over their own lifetimes and handed them on to the next generation of women in the family. Across the generations and up to Aslı and Zuhall, women served as protectors, collectors and curators of the family archive, and by so doing, they resisted the family's loss of its tangible capital by creating an intangible asset.

As a gendered domain, family history opens new perspectives on the interplay between the political and the personal during periods of societal change. The scale of the family allows historians to better understand how individual experiences and political structures are inherently interlinked. Reversing Carol Hanisch's famous feminist slogan 'the personal is political' as 'the political is personal' marks our approach to family history as it intimately shows how individuals internalise socio-political processes and attempt to influence them.

Like their global counterparts, many Ottoman families were mobile across empires, witnessed the conquests or liberation of their homelands and changed citizenship throughout their lives (Blumi 2013). Family papers capture the making of the nation-state-society triad in a far more intimate setting. For example, a red bound notebook from 1917, when Salonica was under Greek rule, belonged to the youngest sibling of our grandfather, Mukaddes, and contained a poem in her own handwriting, titled '*Türkün Süngüsü*' (Bayonet of the Turk), in which the bayonet was praised for opening the doors of paradise and secure a place for the Turk in history. While Mukaddes had copied the poem in her notebook, her sister found it noteworthy to report to her brother in Germany that their younger sister had learned 'beautiful poems'. The same notebook also included Mukaddes' scribbles, trying out writing in the Latin alphabet. As such, the family archive reflects how the political resonated in the realm of the personal in this most brutal conjuncture. The same is also true of economic hardships. By reading these letters against the broader context, we were able to get a sense of how macro-economic issues manifested in the micro-setting of the family.

But first and foremost, who was this family? One of the most intriguing documents among the papers was a four-page family tree in Ottoman script, centred around our great grandparents, Muzaffer and İzzet. Each page traced the family on the maternal and paternal side of both, going back as far as ten generations. We were curious as to why such a tree existed in the first place. We knew that after marrying young and raising five children, Muzaffer had lost her husband shortly before the Turkish-Greek population exchange in 1923. Zuhall's archive included the draft versions of this tree, in the handwriting of Muazzez, who had married off out of the family house before the population exchange and before the death of her father. Naciye's mother, Pakize, had died even earlier, during the war while in Salonica. Perhaps, the family tree was prepared as a road map for the fragmented family to eventually restore the connections broken during the post-Ottoman transition. Perhaps it was the Law on Family Names, passed in 1934, that prompted the family tree. We knew that our grandfather wanted to adopt the surname of Tekelioğlu (literally meaning, sons of those from Teke) and both of us had listened from Alp's father that the family's origins went back to

the Tekeli dynasty from Antalya that had been exiled to Salonica in the early nineteenth century. Indeed, the family papers only made sense when read together with one another. For example, Naciye, who remained unmarried her whole life, appears to have become kind of a confidante for male members of the family. Thus, our grandfather's elder brother İsmet's private notebook during his student years in Germany surfaced in Naciye's chest, including notes of a youthful life of leisure and liaisons, while the entire correspondence between him and his wife, Sabiha, including almost daily letters sent between Ankara and Istanbul during 1920s and 1930s was in Zuhul's collection. It seems like İsmet had passed on his cousin Naciye the papers containing evidence of his bachelor life from a past that was left to be forgotten, while the papers he left his wife Sabiha had passed on to Zuhul, documenting a more settled life in the Republican period.

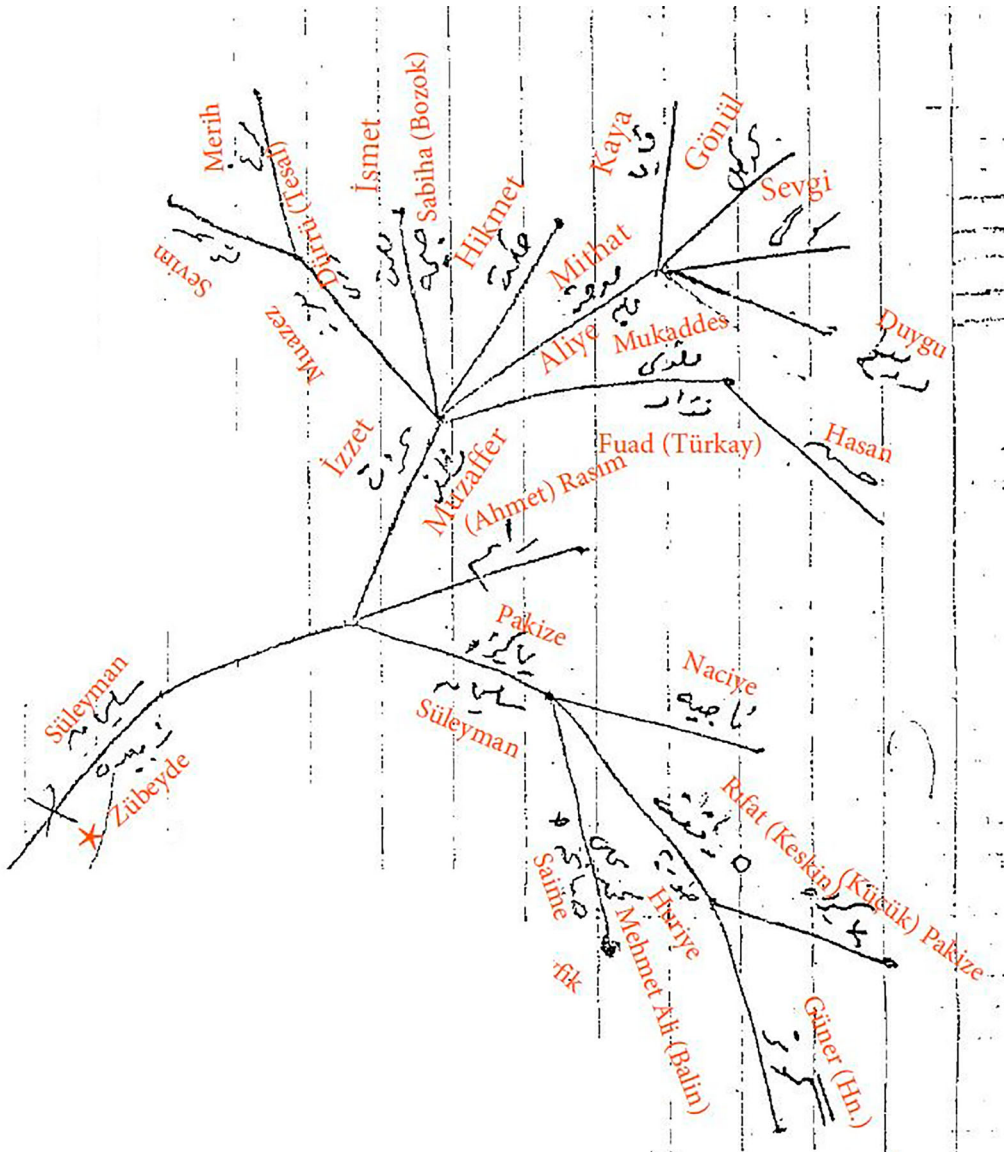


Figure 1. Excerpt from the paternal family tree of İzzet, son of Süleyman, depicting his direct descendants.

Hence, we regard the preparation of the family tree as a means to conserve or revive past privileges that came about with the post-Ottoman transition. We claim that by the turn of the nineteenth century, many Ottoman families operated with the notion of precarious privilege in an empire that had literally become a liminal space in a changing world (Figure 1).

Genealogy beyond identity: towards a socio-economic history of Salonica's transformation

Genealogy is commonly a quest for identity (Weil 2013, Bottero 2015). Being from Salonica is both a prestigious and a stigmatised identity for Turkish families. On the one hand, many among the leading cadres of the Kemalist Republic, including Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself, originated from this cosmopolitan city. Many secular Turks consider that their Salonican heritage makes them inherently more 'progressive' than their fellow citizens from Anatolia. On the other hand, the expression *Selanikli* (meaning 'being from Salonica' or 'being a Salonican') also carries a stigma, as it has become a synonym for so-called *dönme*, or Sabbatean, ancestry, which in Turkish-Islamist discourse serves as an anti-Semitic defamation of the Kemalist elites hailing from Salonica, accusing them of being secret Jews oppressing the Muslim traditions of Anatolian Turks (Neyzi 2002, Bali 2008). The derogatory term *dönme* (literally meaning either a convert or a renegade) refers in the context of Salonicans to belonging to the community of Sephardic-Jewish converts to Islam who followed the seventeenth-century Jewish mystic Sabbatai Zevi. While they remained devoted to a cult of Judaic messianism, they were considered as renegades by the Jewish community already in the seventeenth century (Şişman 2015). While a few families in Turkey seem to have maintained their Sabbatean identities and practices (including endogamy), most Sabbatean converts fully assimilated under Turkish secular nationalism to the extent that they silenced and forgot their Sabbatean origins within a few generations.

To our surprise, on popular conspiracy-theory homepages, publishing alleged revelations about Sabbateans and framing them as the secret elite of the Turkish Republic, our grandparent Mithat Yenen was listed (<https://sabetayciavcisi.blogspot.com/search?q=Yenen>). As a family, we have no memory or evidence of being Sabbateans. On the contrary, we knew that older generations, especially the matriarch of the family, Muzaffer, had discursively othered themselves from fellow Salonican immigrants whom they knew to be Sabbateans. In *Noontime in Yenişehir*, Funda's mother Sevgi Soysal captures the Salonican emigré Necip's unease at being asked whether he was a *dönme* as follows:

As to prove that he wasn't, and indeed he really wasn't, Necip Bey went to such great lengths that he always got the feeling that the other person never believed him, and that all of his efforts only served to reinforce the other person's belief that he was Jewish (2016, p. 62).

Today, discovering one's non-Turkish and non-Muslim ancestries has lost much of its earlier stigma. Indeed, a further incentive emerged when Spain and Portugal began granting citizenship not only to Sephardic Jews but also to Sabbateans. Certain practices considered indicative of a Sabbatean identity, such as the preparation of a detailed family tree or the children of the family attending progressive educational institutions in Salonica, initially led us to consider this as a possibility.

Salonica at the turn of the twentieth century was a city without a parallel. Either Sephardic or more recent immigrant Ashkenazi Jews constituted a clear majority in its late Ottoman urban population (Mazower 2005, pp. 303–304), followed by Muslims, with 29% of the population, of which as much as one-third might have been Sabbatean (Baer 2007, p. 146). According to Dilek Akyalçın Kaya's excellent but unpublished dissertation, in late-nineteenth-century Salonica, 'the economic bonds of the Sabbateans made for a dense network of relationships between them and others, be they Muslims or Jews' (Aymes 2014). As ambiguous as Sabbateans may have been, as Malte Fuhrmann argues, self-fashioning one's identity was clearly in vogue in this time of fluidity of modernity

(2020, pp. 212–213). Sevgi Soysal captured beautifully how the Salonican identity became a Republican hodgepodge in *Noontime in Yenişehir*:

Atatürk was a refined man with impeccable taste. Perhaps it was because he was from Salonica. After all, Salonica qualified as Europe. But it shouldn't be said that he was from Salonica. Necip Bey's mother got very upset at the mention that they were from Salonica. What was that supposed to mean, 'from Salonica'? Of course there were *dönmes*, *palikaryas*, Bulgarians, and other immigrants who were from Salonica. But we, we hail from the gentry [eşraf] of Salonica (Soysal 2016, p. 46).

Once uprooted and resettled, the social standing that had taken centuries to establish was hard to recreate. One family anecdote that came down to us stated that 'Mustafa Kemal was not a good enough groom for us back in Salonica; but in Turkey, we were not good enough brides for him'.

According to the family tree in our hands, the paternal ancestry of Muzaffer originates from a Lütfullah followed by an Abdullah. These names are commonly taken by converts to Islam, but we can't tell for sure. The next name in this branch of the family tree is an İbrahim, whose name is qualified as *hazinedar* (treasurer-in-chief) of Sultan Mehmed IV (reign, 1648–1687), which is confirmed by Ottoman archival documents (T:MA.d 143, 29 /5 /10). The family tree continues with his son, Uzun Ali, who seems to have been quite an entrepreneur during the reign of Sultan Mustafa II (1695–1703). As of May 1696, he was in the lucrative business of collecting Christian and Jewish poll taxes (*cizye*) in Plovdiv and Pazarcık in today's Bulgaria to finance the Ottoman war effort against the Habsburgs (AE.SMST.II 68/7175, H-02-11-1107/3 June 1696; AE.SMST.II 127/13947, H-09-09-1108/ 1 April 1697; IE.AS. 39/3583, H-11-07-1109/23 January 1698), and eventually he was advancing cash to the Tophane cannon foundry in return for the right to collect the Christian and Jewish poll taxes of greater Istanbul (AE. SMST.II./ 55-5596-0, H-29-12-1110/ 28 June 1699). In this crucial conjuncture at the turn of the eighteenth century, the closure of the Ottoman frontier in Europe ('Abou-el-Hajj 1969) was coupled with the transformation of the fiscal structure through the granting of life-long tax farms. After the signing of the Peace of Karlowitz 1699, Uzun Ali seized the opportunity to acquire the *mukataa* (tax farm) of Antalya customs (AE. SMST. II 70/7411, H-12-02-1111/9 August 1699). A descendant of Uzun Ali was customs officer (*gümrük emini*) Mustafa Paşa, while a descendant in the line leading to Muzaffer, another Lütfullah, married a woman who was simply referred to as belonging to the 'Tekeli' household. Thus, our study of the family tree, together with historical and archival evidence, affirmed the family lore of belonging to the Tekeli household, controlling the greater region around Antalya in the late eighteenth century.

As of late eighteenth century, the head of the Tekeli household had become the *mütesellim* (deputy-governor) of the prosperous town of Antalya and its extensive hinterland (Dayar 2022). On a naval mission to chart southern Anatolia, hydrographer Francis Beaufort met the head of the family, Hacı Mehmed Ağa, in person, and reported him as a Pasha commanding military power over the Antalya port, commercially connected with Egypt, Cyprus, Crete and Palestine (Faroqhi 2005, pp. 300–302). The Antalya customs was still in the hands of the Tekeli household in 1814, when they were taken over by the central mint (Değerli Velet 2019, p. 343). In Fatma Müge Göçek's account, Tekelioğlu figure as a case of how revenues were diverted from the sultan's treasury by way of religious endowments (Göçek 1996, p. 29). The properties of the household were confiscated after the so-called Tekelioğlu rebellion of 1812–1814 that ended with the bombardment of Antalya's castle by the Ottoman navy. The causes behind Mehmed Ağa's son İbrahim's 'rebellion' stemmed from the high amount of cash demanded of him take over his father's inheritance (Turner 1820, pp. 386–387). Once the rebellion was suppressed and İbrahim and his two direct descendants executed, the remainder of the 50-person household was resettled in Salonica, with those in need granted allowances out of Salonica's various taxes (C.ML. 128-5614, H-3-9-1234/29 May 1819). The only trace in the family lore of this move to Salonica is the story that a large, precious ruby was lost at sea.

The practice of establishing endowments continued in Salonica. There, the endowment, designed to sustain and maintain an extended family network, was attached to a mosque. Among the

relocated members of the Tekeli household, one notices a Hacı Ahmet Ağa (Sivrikaya 1965–6, pp. 49–51), and that same name also appears as the father of Hasan Ağa, the father of Muzaffer's maternal grandmother at the other side of her family tree. Meanwhile, the head of the lineage of Zübeyde, İzzet's mother, goes back to a Hüseyin, the imam of the Hasan Ağa Mosque. İzzet and Muzaffer's families were thus connected through the endowment of Hacı Hasan Ağa. Despite the rebellion, the Tekeli household remained within the Ottoman framework: a family member would show up in Istanbul with 99 soldiers of his own, during the Russian war of 1828–1829 (HAT 1069 43770, 4–8-1244, 9 February 1829), and the Salonica *mutasarrıf* continued to keep a separate account for tax revenues allocated to the Tekeli descendants as late as 1897.

However, a modern legal framework was soon to replace these relics of a patrimonial empire. In the aftermath of the disastrous Ottoman defeat by Russia in 1877–1878, Thessaly was turned over to Greece, opening a new chapter for the region's Muslims. The Constantinople Convention, signed between the Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of Greece on 24 May 1881, became the blueprint for many future post-Ottoman population settlements, although its implementation caused much frustration on the part of local Muslims. According to Article IX of the Convention, a mixed Turkish-Greek commission was to compensate the Ottoman state for its property and indemnify those with tax claims, but the commission expired before any settlement could be reached (ŞD. 2470-7, 17 October 1883). According to Article VIII, the autonomous and hierarchical organisations of Muslim communities, as well as the administration of funds and buildings belonging to them, was to be safeguarded. The article was based on the Article 111 of the 1876 Constitution, which had prescribed a communal council for each religious community (*millet*) in every district of the country to oversee local endowments. With the constitution suspended, the word hierarchical was also inserted upon the request of the Hamidian administration, and in 1882, Greece unilaterally declared the *müftüs* as the official representative of the community, disregarding the councils. Furthermore, it drafted a regulation that made property matters, such as the register of a deceased person's property or appointment of guardians, conditional upon approval of the Greek courts (HR. TH. 47/90, 18 September 1883).

Upon protests from the locals, the Ottoman Ministry of Endowments issued a new regulation, allocating the revenues of endowments to a new official body called the *Cemaat-i İslamiye* (Islamic Community) under the leadership of local *müftüs* (EV.d. 35671, 31 October 1883). In 1884, the Greek state passed a law that rendered property ownership completely unconditional upon either nationality or residency requirements. Muslims who remained Ottoman citizens could thus avoid being subject to new regulations by moving elsewhere, but reciprocally, Greek citizens were to enjoy the same rights within the Ottoman Empire. Şerif Bey, the Muslim deputy, raised the question in Greek Parliament (HR.TO 311-07, 14 April 1884), and 30 Muslims of Thessaly signed and sent a petition to the Ottoman Foreign Ministry, stating that the regulation was contrary to both religious law and the Convention of 1881 (HR. SYS. 1714-35, 4, 14 April 1884), but to no avail. As of 1893, the Ottoman Foreign Ministry was still insisting that amending Articles 2 and 4 of the Greek law was of 'capital interest for the Muslims who inhabit in ceded territories' (HR.SYS 1715/72, 22 March 1893). Nonetheless, relations between the Christian and Muslim populations in Thessaly remained relatively civil until the aftermath of the 1897 war. When the Ottoman Army occupying the region banned the return of male Christians, the local Muslims objected, stating both their need for labour power in the approaching harvest and their fear of eventual reprisals, but their warnings were unheeded. Thus, the landowning, privileged Ottomans in Thessaly found their interests trampled upon by both states at once, and their experience reverberated across the region as *Cemaat-i İslamiyes* were organised across Ottoman Rumelia.

After the Ottoman defeat in the Balkan War, Greece occupied Salonica, now filled with Muslim refugees fleeing Bulgaria and desperately waiting to be relocated to Anatolia. The Ottoman Ministry of Endowments, in charge of the *Cemaat-i İslamiyes* in accordance with the 1881 Regulation, was overwhelmed with the extraordinary expenses and required assistance from the Ministry of Finance (BEO, 4214-316000, 26 December 1912; BEO 422-315087, 3 August 1913). In the meantime,

the Ottoman government passed a new law reorganising the *Cemaat-i İslamiyes* (BEO 4167-312459, 26 April 1913, and ŞD. 2821-40, 30 April 1913). With this law, the Şeyh-ül-İslam in Istanbul was empowered to appoint the *müftüs* in Greece and Bulgaria; henceforth, the organisation served also as a conduit to elect Istanbul's desired candidates to the Greek parliament (HR. SYS. 288-38. 28 December 1915). A Greek law went into effect on 11 January 1914, abolishing the transaction rights of farm owners in all territories acquired in 1897 and the Balkan Wars (Serbestoğlu 2014, p. 1085). In the end, the 1881 Constantinople Convention only provided a degree of legality to the liquidation process of Muslims in Greece, a practice that reached its apogee with the population exchange of 1923. Thus, the post-Ottoman transition was a protracted process extending over decades; for the gentry of the region, it entailed losing privileges that had the sanctity of religious law and that had secured generations of continuity.

The population exchange archives list numerous liquidation documents belonging to our family. The claims of our grandfather's siblings, their close relatives, and the Hacı Hasan Ağa Endowment show not only the dispersed claims of an extended Ottoman household, but also how the different legal systems conflicted with one another. For example, a liquidation document belonging to Pakize's son shows that he had a claim on a farm in the Leskova village in the district of Vodina in Central Macedonia. As the heirs of İzzet, our grandfather and his siblings had claims on a farm called Pişona within the province of Salonica itself, in the district today called Kalamarya. They also had claims arising from their paternal grandfather in the Yenice-i Vardar, the largest city in Central Macedonia, as well as from their father's mother, Zübeyde, the daughter of Imam Hüseyin, but these claims did not extend to Pakize's children. Yet in the case of our grandfather's eldest sister, Muazzez, the situation was quite the opposite, as she was entitled to not one but numerous liquidation documents solely in her own name, besides sharing in most of her father's claims as his heir. These properties may have been part of her dowry, as only a year before, she was married to a well-to-do man, Dürrü (Tesar), originally from Volos in Thessaly (Tesar 1998), who must have taken up Greek citizenship before the loss of Salonica in 1912. Muazzez's husband also served in the population exchange commission, and thus he was well-placed to secure his wife's best interests. The family was thus entangled in a complex web of international and civil law and laws of nationality and property, as well as family feuds.

From revolution to republic: uncovering dark paths

Studying the family tree also unveiled other, more unsettling, discoveries regarding the political identities of some of our relatives. A comparison between the names on the family tree and those in obituaries of deceased family members revealed surnames not noted in the family tree. For example, the obituary of our great-grandmother Muzaffer disclosed that her brother Nafiz carried the family name Kurfal (sometimes Kurfalı) due to the farmlands they owned in the village of Kurfalı (Koufalia) in the Langaza (Lagkadas) district of Salonica. In his memoir, Kâzım Nami Duru details the merger of the Parisian and Macedonian Young Turk committees during the transformative reorganisation of the Committee of Union and Progress (hereafter CUP) as a revolutionary organisation in 1907:

Dr. Nazım, a member of the former Ottoman Union Society in Paris, arrived in Salonica via Athens with a turban on his head, a robe on his back, a beard on his chin, under the false name of Hoca Mehmet Efendi. After settling in at the house of Nafiz Kurfalı, a member of the Ottoman Freedom Society, in Yenikapı [district], he proposed that our society be renamed 'Union and Progress' (1957, p. 16).

This means that our great uncle Nafiz was a founding member of the reconstituted CUP in Salonica on the path to the constitutional revolution of 1908. Until then, we were not aware of our family's ties to any revolutionary politics, but upon research in the archive, we were able to piece together Nafiz's extraordinary career as a typical military officer affiliated with the CUP. Osman Nafiz first figures in the Ottoman archive as a Hamidiye cavalry officer from Ohrid, accused of incendiary propaganda

among Albanians (TFR.I.AS. 39-3849, 1 October 1906). But rather than facing trial in Istanbul, he was made commander of the gendarmerie company in Salonica city (TFR. I. AS. 42 4159, 6 October 1906), serving under the Salonica Regiment until after the 1908 Revolution (TFR. I. AS 70 6991, 11 March 1909).

Nafiz made a career out of population engineering measures by the state security apparatus of the Young Turk regime, serving alternatively in the army and the gendarmerie of the Interior Ministry. In October 1909, he carried out the first implementation of Article 31 of the Regulation against Brigandage (*Çeteler Nizamnamesi*), which mandated special inquiry commissions to decide the expulsion (*teb'id*) of entire villages for supporting brigands. Nafiz, as a member of such a commission in Yenice and having already implemented a forced displacement of Christian villagers across the border into Bulgaria, requested funding for the transfer of Muslim villagers to Anatolia (DH.MUI, 24-10, 50, 28 November 1909). In 1911, Nafiz must have been in Istanbul. One entry in the itinerary kept by our grandfather's older sister Muazzez, during her visit to Istanbul in 1911, as a teenager travelling with her mother, read as follows: 'on a Friday, uncle took us to Beykoz to visit Saint Yusha. Taking a gendarme with us, we began climbing up the hill. As a flood damaged the road, the car could not go up ...'. On the eve of the Balkan War, Nafiz resigned from his duty as member of the Intelligence Commission of Salonica and returned to the army (DH. ID. 19-49, 10 October 1912). During the Balkan Wars, we assume that Nafiz participated in the armed resistance in Western Thrace. When the CUP regime forcibly expelled the Greek population from Western Anatolia in 1914, Nafiz was once again on the ground as gendarmerie commander in Çeşme (DH.EUM.6.Şb 1-7, 3; DH.EUM. 6. Şub. 1-8).

During World War I, Nafiz worked with Süleyman Askerî, director of the Special Organisation (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*) and Commander of the Mesopotamian Front, in special operations related to Iran and the mobilisation of Kurdish tribes against the British army advancing from Basra (DH.ŞFR. 454-23 and DH. ŞFR. 48-86, 17 December 1914, DH.ŞFR. 458-27, 15 January 1915, DH.ŞFR. 49-215, 6 February 1915, DH. ŞFR. 462-75 and DH.EUM.2. şub.4-84, 23 February 1915). As that campaign floundered when the British brought in a 30,000-strong Indian army, Nafiz returned to his cavalry division in the Ottoman Army and chaired the Military Court Martial in Istanbul. Late in 1915, he was appointed commander of the Gendarmerie Regiment of Istanbul (DH:EUM. 6 Şub. 5-1, 9 November 1915). A postcard sent from İstanbul, signed by İsmet, our grandfather's older brother, to his paternal uncle Ahmed Rasim in late 1915, had a scribble on one corner, stating that it was sent by 'Major Nafiz, serving on the *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfi* [Military Court Martial]'. Family members certainly enjoyed the privileges Nafiz granted them during wartime.

After the war, Nafiz was imprisoned in spring 1919 because of Allied demands for the prosecution of war criminals. However, the underground CUP networks within the bureaucracy secured his release from prison (HR.SYS 2708-10, 7/8, 5 July 1919). During the War of Independence, he was operating as a gendarmerie commander in Tekirdağ. He was released from his duty for terrorising the Christian population in the area, according to the conclusions of a French investigation (DH. KMS. 59-43, 12 July 1920). A month later, the Greeks occupied Eastern Thrace.

After the foundation of the Republic, Nafiz returned to Anatolia as an ordinary exchangee, filing two liquidation documents in his name, one from the city of Salonica and another for the Hızırılı farm in Vardar. In 1929, his request for an expansion of the land granted to him and his siblings in Bafra, Samsun, was finally approved (C.A., 272-0-0-11 / İskan, 24-129-9). Of all places, he had been settled in an old Greek village called Teke Hristiyani, which was completely burned down during the War of Independence (C.A., 272-0-0-11 / İskan, 21- 107- 23, 15 August 1925). Towards the end of his life, after the death of Atatürk, Nafiz was appointed to the board of Sümerbank, the bank of a state-owned textile industry holding (C.A., 30-18-1-2, 96 93 19, 16 November 1941).

There was, however, a more unsettling discovery on the way. Aslı's comparison of name and relationship patterns on MyHeritage.com with our family tree led us realise that the aforementioned Dr Nazım, who had stayed at the home of Nafiz during the refoundation of the CUP, and who was one of the CUP leaders who would later mastermind the persecution of Armenians, was a cousin of

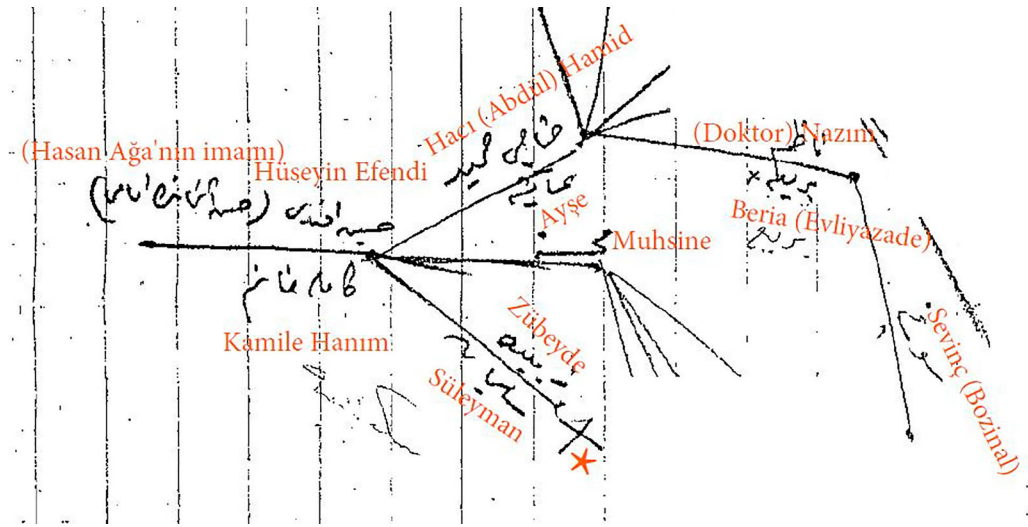


Figure 2. From the maternal family tree of İzzet, son of Zübeyde, depicting his kinship with Dr Nazım.

our great-grandfather İzzet on his mother's side (Figure 2). Nazım had been a medical student in Istanbul when he fled to Paris in 1893 and had been sentenced to death in absentia by the Hamidian regime.

Commonly referred as an *éminence grise* of the CUP, Nazım exercised great influence on the regime's policies (Hanioglu 2001, p. 140). Many contemporaries referred to him as a radical revolutionary who was at the head of the state terror apparatus that inflicted horrors on the Armenians using death squads recruited from prison convicts and nationalist fanatics (Dadrian 1986). Although there is little research devoted to tracing Dr Nazım's role in the genocidal persecutions of Armenians in 1915 in greater detail, his complicity in the CUP regime's wartime policies is beyond doubt. When the question of non-Turkish minorities of the empire was on the agenda in a meeting of the central committee of the CUP in 1916, Dr Nazım said: 'Anatolia is the Turkish homeland. [...] I would like to have the application of the method implemented by Greece to the Anatolian part [of the empire]' (Aslanmirza 2021, p. 63). Erik Jan Zürcher has already argued that the frontier experience of those Young Turks hailing from Ottoman Macedonia, such as Nazım, shaped their demographic policies in Anatolia (Zürcher 2014). In Nazım's case, the Greek model informed the Young Turk policies of homogenising nation-building in the heartlands that deprived, displaced and destroyed minority communities. In spring 1919, Nazım was again sentenced to death in absentia, this time by the postwar military tribunals in Allied-occupied Istanbul (Dadrian and Akçam 2011, pp. 271–282). During the war of independence, he was in exile in Germany and Soviet Russia, working with fellow CUP leaders to mobilise Muslim resistance against European imperialism. He returned to Turkey and settled in İzmir after the Turkish victory.

Nazım was totally forgotten in the family. Aslı's cousin remembered Naciye saying 'Ah, Nazım, Ah Nazım ...', but the young children were not told who this Nazım was. The silence and forgetting of Dr Nazım were probably not because of his complicity in the crimes committed against Armenians, which many Turks justify or deny. The fact that Nazım was hanged in 1926 for plotting the assassination of Mustafa Kemal is probably the real reason why our family preferred to forget about this notorious cousin while they were trying to find ways to participate in the Kemalist project.

Nazım's name brought us back to the question of Sabbatean genealogy because he is occasionally identified as a *dönme* in both popular conspiracy theories (as documented in Bali 2008) and even in some academic works about Sabbateans (Baer 2010, p. 91, Şişman 2015, p. 245). However, most historians of the period consider him a Muslim Turk. The description of his family background in

other sources corroborates the information we have from the family tree and other findings that exclude a Sabbatean ancestry (Kemal 1968, pp. 110–120, Eycil 2021, pp. 25–27). With Nafiz from Muzaffer's side, and Dr Nazım from İzzet's side, we had to confront the fact that dark episodes of Turkey's demographic making from empire to republic were part of our family's heritage.

Making the ends meet at the end of empire: losing privileges in Greek Salonica

Only if we put the history of Salonica, commonly studied as a globalised and cosmopolitan urban city at the 'corner of Europe' (Mazower 2005, p. 10, Fuhrmann 2020), into its regional context of a contested frontier region between the Ottoman Empire, the Greek Kingdom and Bulgaria, can we understand the socioeconomic concerns of people like our family, who were landowners with ties to agricultural production and commerce in this volatile environment. Fully participating in Salonica's rise, they also seem like they were doing their best to weather an approaching calamity.

Our great-grandfather İzzet, born in 1862, entered service in the municipal administration in 1896, at the age of 34, possibly after marrying well-connected Muzaffer. In documents he usually carried the honorary title of 'Hafız', distinguishing him for having memorised the entire Quran. Late-nineteenth-century Salonica was a city with exemplary municipal services, under the Sabbatean mayor, Hamdi Bey. In 1900, the Ottoman Ministry of Interior commended İzzet, the chief secretary of the Salonican Municipal Council, 'for his good work in his official duty', and he duly received a decoration from the palace two years later (DH.MKT. 2595-102, 25-11-1319). Muzaffer was quite young when they married; and the couple was busy procreating in a home on Kassandrou street, adjacent to the house where Pakize and her children lived. By the outbreak of the First Balkan War, they had five children. The eldest, a girl, was named Muazzez, then came İsmet, then Hikmet. That İzzet too harboured sympathy for constitutionalism is indicated by the fact that he named his third-born son, our grandfather, born in March 1908, after Midhat Pasha, the architect of the Ottoman constitution. Lastly, they had a girl, Mukaddes. İzzet's younger brother, Ahmed Rasim (1868–1931), was working at a bank in Salonica. He seem to have become a banker on his own name as there is a stamp printed, bearing his picture, name, and date of birth.

Late in 1912, when Salonica was taken over by Greece in the First Balkan War, İzzet was dismissed by the new municipal council along with four other Turkish employees. The council's decision was categorical, citing not only the reduction of municipal documentation in Ottoman Turkish and the financial situation of the municipality, but specifically, 'the engagement of new employees who know the Hellenic language'. The family had been affiliated with the *Cemaat-i İslamiye* from an early date. A Mevlevi Sheikh, Salahaddin Efendi, whose father Eşref had been the sheikh of the Mevlevi *tekke* of Salonica and whose mother came from the same Hacı Hasan line as Muzaffer's mother, was the head of the Edirne branch of the *Cemaat-i İslamiye* in 1904 (DH. MKT 841/51, 12 April 1904). Possibly, the reason why the family attained this position was because of the rich endowments it held, as the organisation primarily channelled income from the endowments to educational institutions for the Muslim community. By Sultan Reşad's coronation, *Cemaat-i İslamiyes* had been organised in Anatolian cities with large non-Muslim populations as well.

Although Salonica had changed hands after the Balkan Wars, the change in the family's life was not immediate. İzzet and Ahmed Rasim continued to be busy administering family business and communal affairs in Salonica. On the fifth anniversary of the 1908 revolution, Ahmed Rasim had his picture taken (Figure 3), sitting at a desk, with an English-made vault with an open lid full of documents and an advertising poster for Singer sewing machines bearing the date 10 July 1913 hanging on the wall. Three million of these Singers were sold globally that year. It is a defiant picture, capturing a status and an ordered existence that was still standing, taken at his office at 'Émniète Han, No. 7, Odos Edessio a Salonique'.

Ahmed Rasim appears to have considered the impending war as an opportunity. Documents in the family archive indicate that he borrowed 2000 gold liras from his brother İzzet and, according to İsmet's postcard from Istanbul in late 1915, Ahmed Rasim was sending instructions to his nephew in



Figure 3. Ahmed Rasim in his office in Salonica. Image courtesy of Zühal Dönmezer-Çakıroğlu.

Istanbul via Paris. In the meantime, other members of the extended household, already settled in Istanbul, were anxious about the impending Greek law curtailing the transaction rights of Muslims. In March 1914, Mehmed Hasan, Muzaffer and Nafiz's paternal cousin, who worked as logistics officer at the new post office in Istanbul, gave power of attorney to a Salonican resident to represent them regarding the affairs of the family farm in Kurfalı.

Ahmed Rasim's mysterious financial undertakings continued into the armistice period. In July 1921, he was in Vienna, lunching with his nephew İsmet at a Turkish restaurant. Ahmed Rasim stayed in Vienna until September 1921; that is, until the aftermath of the crucial Battle of Sakarya, when the Turks turned the tide in the Greco-Turkish War in their favour. However, the family's position in Salonica was getting more precarious at this point. As of late 1921, İzzet's letters from Salonica to his other two sons studying in Istanbul clearly express his anxiety regarding financial matters. The Greek government was confiscating the urban properties from which they were receiving rents, with the promise of only questionable compensation. Nonetheless, İzzet tried to comfort his sons in Istanbul, expressing faith in God's benevolence and the necessity of patience and perseverance.

Yet the hardships did take their toll, and İzzet died in Salonica in 1923, when a cutaneous leishmaniasis lesion on his back became infected after an operation to remove it. Ahmed Rasim had paid half of his debt in gold back to his brother in Greek currency at a fixed exchange rate while still in Salonica, and the other half, he paid back to İzzet's sons in Turkish liras. İzzet's eldest son would recall years later that although they did not protest at the time, they made a significant loss in this conversion of gold into paper money. We know little about Ahmed Rasim's activities once relocated in Istanbul. In summer 1932, our grandfather Mithat wrote to his elder brother İsmet regarding the share in a family rental flat owned by Ahmed Rasim, who had died the year before. The farms and shops that the family owned in Salonica were replaced by a single fin-de-siècle mansion-house in Pangaltı which the siblings divided into flats to generate income. This older generation lost more at the end of the empire than it could ever gain in the 'new' Turkey.

Making careers in Kemalist Turkey: financial concerns and political opportunities

For the younger generation who grew up in Salonica as Turkish nationalists, living under Greek rule was unbearable. The Ottoman entry into World War I turned the lives of non-Greek Salonicans into those of a captive population. The Ottoman consul-general sent a detailed report of a demonstration that took place in Salonica on the third anniversary of Janina's fall on 11 March 1915, just as the Allied Navy was attacking the Dardanelles. As in every previous year, a special service was held in the Salonican Hagia Sophia to commemorate the 'liberation' of Janina in the Balkan War, but this time, no consul was invited, and the sermon was about how the Sultan was about to flee and turn over the keys of Constantinople to the Greek Patriarch, and that the time had come for the Greeks to reestablish the Byzantine Empire. The crowds heading out from the church insulted local Muslims and Jews, 'even those from the gentry', by taking the fezzes off their heads and beating at least four. The consul reported that not a day passed without the local newspapers discussing the division of Turkey. The local *Cemaat-i İslamiye* sent a protest telegram to King Constantine and the leader of the Greek Parliament. Salonica was at this time full of Greek refugees from Anatolia, contributing to intercommunal tensions between Greeks and Turks (DH. EUm. 3. Şb 4 54, 1, 11 March 1915). A blank postcard in Aslı's archive depicts the Greek army marching into the city on the anniversary of Greek liberation, on 25 March 1915, most likely to enforce a degree of order in the city.

Under such circumstances, each family had to fend for itself, as it best saw fit. Living off rents, İzzet only had his children to invest in. The family was enlightened enough that the girls had not been denied an education. Zuhul recalls that her grandmother did not speak Greek but knew French. The diaries that Muazzez kept are a unique source giving us a view into the family's ordeals in Greek Salonica during the First World War. In her notebook, Muazzez copied a news piece about the bombing of the city by German zeppelin in 1916. In December, strangers broke down the door and they had to live with refugees interned in their house. Their furniture was sequestered, and then came the disastrous fire of 1917 that destroyed large swaths of the Jewish quarters of Salonica. İzzet rented the upstairs of his house to a certain Menahem Efendi. Muazzez expressed relief that her father, uncle and Menahem returned safely after being taken into custody by the Greek police.

This was not a time for a young woman to be left unmarried. Accordingly, once the decade of wars was over, in spring 1922, Muazzez was married to Dürrü, in a legendary wedding that İzzet reported in detail to his sons studying in Istanbul. It was Dürrü's second marriage: he had two teenage sons from his first. Yet, his connections made him a good match, nonetheless. Dürrü was among the six members of parliament elected from Kavala to the Greek Parliament in the 1915 elections, thanks to the consolidation of the Muslim vote by the *Cemaat-i İslamiye* (HR. SYS. 288-38. 28 December 1915). Dürrü intervened to help secure Greek passports for İzzet's two younger sons, studying in Istanbul, so that they could travel back to Salonica in the summer of 1922. Most prominently, Dürrü served on Salonica's population exchange commission, although this may have become a mixed blessing once İzzet passed away in 1923. Dürrü secured his wife's rightful share, which appears to have permanently prejudiced his wife's oldest brother İsmet against him. We suspect that Dürrü enforced Greek civil law against the family's adherence to the Islamic law that would have given daughters half the share of the sons. During his stay in Istanbul in 1932, while studying in Germany, Mithat went over the accounts prepared by Dürrü and reported to his brother İsmet, distrustful of Dürrü, that he could see no wrongdoing.

Despite the hardship of the population exchange and property disputes, the family was lucky to have been in Greece during these war years when many other young boys of their generation with Ottoman citizenship perished in the frontlines. A noteworthy personality from this younger generation was Mehmed Ali (Balın), the son of Pakize, the sister of İzzet and Ahmed Rasim. Mehmed Ali, like his cousin İsmet, began his studies at Salonica's Terakki Mektebi, a private school popular for its progressive and secular education. Yet, with the outbreak of World War I, the school was closed when Greek refugees from Anatolia were settled in the school building, and the family sent both Mehmed and İsmet to Europe to study. We do not know where Mehmed Ali went, but the postcards in Naciye's

chest indicate that he was educated in Germany, like his cousin İsmet. In July 1915, Mehmed Ali received a postcard bearing lines from 'Die Macht am Rhein', the unofficial national hymn of the German Empire after 1871, from an old classmate, now studying in İzmir, who addressed him as a friend interested in German. As of March 1917, Mehmet Ali sent a postcard to İsmet from Liegnitz (Legnica), capital of the Prussian province of Silesia. Throughout 1917, İzzet was sending 300 francs each to Mehmed Ali and İsmet in three-monthly instalments. Mehmed Ali entered Ottoman diplomatic service to serve in the legation at Berne as of spring 1919 (HR.SYS. 2708-10, 33, 20 March 1919).

According to the postcards in our hands, however, Mehmed Ali had a change of heart and entered business. In January 1920, as the last Ottoman parliament met in Istanbul, he was in Eskişehir, purchasing barley and wheat to sell in Istanbul. In a postcard depicting the Mevlevi lodge in Eskişehir that he sent to his sister Naciye, still in Salonica, Mehmed Ali yearned for his brother Rifat, Aslı's grandfather, to join him, since together they could make a quick profit. In the same postcard, Mehmed Ali indicated that he had read in the newspaper that Greece had issued a new law, which gave six months to Muslims who chose to remain as Ottoman citizens to leave Greece. Mehmed Ali inquired whether his brother would take up Greek citizenship. Making a choice himself, he entered Ankara's new diplomatic service by August 1920, just as the rapid Greek advances in Anatolia that summer rendered any future speculation in the grain trade impossible. Mehmed Ali first served as a secretary to Yusuf Kemal (Tengirşenk), sent to Moscow in December 1920 to negotiate a friendship treaty with Soviet Russia that was signed on 16 March 1921 (Harris 2010, p. 266). Among the collection of postcards which came to Aslı from Naciye's chest, a few curious ones depict desolated villages and villagers with corpses next to them. The inscription Tekederesi on one postcard led us to conclude that the pictures refer to the aftermath of Armenian reprisals against the Muslim population around Erzurum, in late February 1918 (Tverdokhlebov 2007, pp. 35–36). Just how these postcards ended up in Naciye's chest is unknown, but they might have been related to Mehmed Ali's diplomatic trip to Russia, when Moscow and Ankara reached a final settlement over Transcaucasia and ended the independent Armenian Republic. After diplomatic activities in Rome during the San Stefano negotiations in May 1922, Mehmed Ali served as secretary to the Turkish delegation to the Lausanne Conference. The postcards he sent to his sister during this trip to Europe are filled with worry, as he was receiving no reply from Salonica.

Mehmed Ali Balin then held diplomatic posts in Rome, Warsaw, Berne, Paris, Beirut and Cyprus until his career ended after serving as consul-general in his birthplace, Salonica, during the infamous events of 6/7 September 1955. After a Turkish agent provocateur threw a bomb at Atatürk's birthplace, located in the compound of the Turkish Consulate, a wave of organised mob violence swept across Istanbul, where mobs desecrated monasteries and churches, ransacked shops belonging to Greek and other non-Muslim businesses, and brutally raped and assaulted hundreds of non-Muslims. Based on a Greek intelligence report, Balin was charged during the military tribunals after the coup d'état of 1960 for smuggling the bomb with diplomatic dispatches to Salonica and telegraphing from Istanbul the signal for its detonation. Balin rejected the charge and was eventually acquitted.

This story of İzzet's three sons, the youngest of whom was our grandfather, reads as a testament to the break in memory that came with the Republic. With the death of his father, İsmet found himself, as the eldest son, responsible for his high-maintenance mother and three younger siblings. Until then, İsmet's life had been one of privilege, even during a time of war and upheaval. He had also began his studies at Salonica's Terakki School of Commerce, and then, after spending a couple of years in Istanbul during the war years, continued his education at a school of commerce in Jena. In letters to his son informing him of money transfers, all that İzzet asked of his eldest son was to inform his family of the date when his studies were due to finish, which İsmet was hesitant to do. A small silver notebook that came down to Aslı and which appears to have been İsmet's personal notebook during his Jena years, also opens a window into İsmet's inner world, full of *joie de vivre*. İsmet was the prodigal son who grew up believing that whatever happened to the world at large, he just needed to be rich enough to enjoy life, and hardly seemed interested in politics. Neither Muazzez nor her father wrote a word expressing their distress to İsmet. İsmet imagined himself as an international businessman of the future.

In contrast, the younger brothers Mithat and Hikmet were eyewitnesses to the troubled years in Salonica. Of the two, Mithat had a more obvious talent, as İsmet addressed him as the ‘painter’ in several postcards. After an adventurous trip which he would make a point of telling his grandchildren about, Mithat travelled to Istanbul on a refugee boat in 1917 to study at the prestigious German-language Istanbul Lisesi, which promised a qualification that could grant him access to a German higher education. İsmet was willing to pay for his younger brother Mithat’s study in Germany in 1928 with his first business earnings, so that he could complete a degree in architecture from Stuttgart Technical University (Kocabaş 2023). The few surviving postcards Mithat sent from Istanbul to his family in Salonica, which survived in Aslı’s archive, were British cards printed in Egypt, and included dutiful reports of a boarding school child, recounting mundane information such as his vaccination. İzzet’s middle son Hikmet, who seems to have fallen for the attractions of the big city, dropped out of the School of Commerce in Istanbul in 1921, and began working at a shop upon his father’s instruction. İzzet spared no details about his predicaments in Salonica by this time and blamed his sons for not being aware of the seriousness of the situation and falling for the allure of the big city. Mithat’s letters to İsmet from Germany in later years show that he also harboured a similar impression of their middle brother, as he often complained of Hikmet’s laxity in helping him with his bureaucratic requests.

That İsmet squandered the gold coins that Muzafer gave to him on renting the expensive flats he inhabited in Germany and Istanbul has been the standard family explanation that came down to us for the family’s loss of status in Republican Turkey. In the late 1930s, İsmet wrote a curious document that offers us not only another glimpse into his inner world, but also a retrospective glance at what had become of the brothers after fifteen years as citizens of the Republic. This document appears to have been a draft letter prepared by him to justify to his siblings why he was now going to register the new flat he had bought solely in the name of his wife, Sabiha, the daughter of Atatürk’s right-hand man, Salih Bozok (1881–1941). İsmet began his account from Salonica, which to him was the place where the family had lost fortunes in the population exchange, due to inadequate compensation for the properties left behind. The gold that his father had lent to his uncle was returned in paper. His mother had not listened to him and with her dowry deed from the Kurfalı farms had acquired a farm in Samsun with her brother, which was yet to provide any income. İsmet explained to his siblings that, together with some leading Muslims of Salonica, he had invested most of the money he received from his mother in a vessel, called *İsmet Paşa* after the military commander and statesman İsmet İnönü, which was used to transfer refugees during the population exchange. As of 1929, the vessel was still working the line between İzmir and Istanbul, but for İsmet, this first entrepreneurial initiative appears to have ended with disappointment. He defended himself, saying that ‘such commercial initiatives entered in good faith do not constitute a fault. It was intended to make a profit, to save our future, the money was not lost in vain. If it ended in disappointment, the reason must be sought for in our [bad] luck’. According to İsmet’s account, the family’s fortune turned when, in May 1925, he became the agent of the German aviation firm Rohrbach. İsmet probably owed the opportunity to his father-in-law, but this initiative would not turn out as he had hoped, either. After a test flight of the two newly purchased Ro-III Rodra flying boats crashed in front of Turkish Air Force observers in the summer of 1927, the contract was cancelled (Staalman 2014, pp. 16–18). İsmet appears to have been on the plane and is said to have acquired a fear of flight that would last until the end of his life. Nonetheless, the relation between İsmet and his younger brother Mithat was very close, as İsmet financed Mithat’s education in Germany. When Mithat experienced a fear the he had contracted venereal disease in Germany during his first year of university, he shared his anxiety with İsmet but was too embarrassed to do so with the rest of his family. In 1930, Mithat was sending İsmet catalogues of new radios that appeared on the market with a view to importing them to Turkey, and the brothers shared a common passion for photography.

The New York Stock Exchange crash in October 1929 hit Germany with the great banking crisis of July 1931, briefly halting all foreign currency transfers and severely tested the bonds of solidarity between the brothers. Mithat in Stuttgart, now the married father of a year-old son, did not

receive any money from Turkey for three months, prompting him to write bitter letters full of resentment to his brother. In one, he wrote, in a blatant blow aimed at his brother, 'I am not here at a Commercial School, free to act smart or not, I am taking a heavy load of classes at one of the most difficult schools in the world, having completed the first year of study which some of my friends took six years to complete. I have no time to run after money'. İsmet replied criticising Mithat's ungratefulness, since he as the elder brother had been doing 'what a father would not do'.

That same year, İsmet decided that the family, including his mother and younger sister Mukaddes, would have to settle in Ankara. Hikmet remained in Istanbul. In July 1931, Hikmet delivered a six-page account of his revenues and expenses for the period August 1929 – July 1931 to his elder brother. In later life, Hikmet became estranged from the family, making a living as a teacher and living in an extra-marital relationship with an Armenian woman. In 1934, he also addressed a resentful letter to İsmet, stating that the debt that he was now failing to pay was because the family had emigrated to Ankara when he had no job or income in Istanbul. Mukaddes married the pianist Fuat Turkey (1907–2000), the head of Ankara State Conservatory as of 1948.

During the roaring twenties, Mithat imagined himself becoming the director of a German construction firm in Turkey, but in the statist economy of the 1930s he had to be satisfied with becoming a bureaucrat, taking up a job as a city planner at the Ministry of Public Works and Settlement in 1939, and serving as the Ministry's undersecretary at the height of his career. He also played a role in inviting his former professors and university colleagues from Germany to Turkey during World War II, among them architect Paul Bonatz (1877–1956). His death notice listed him as ex-vice-director of İller Bank, founder and ex-director of Greater Istanbul Planning Bureau, and a former member of the High



Figure 4. Mithat Yenel, his wife Aliye, their children Gönül, Sevgi, Duygu, İzzet and Mine and his old neighbours in front of the house he was born in Salonica, early 1950s during a trip to Germany to visit their son Kaya. Image courtesy of İzzet Yenel.

Council of Immovable Monuments and Antiquities. During World War II, İsmet opened a flour factory that bore the name of Yenen, but in effect, the financial links connecting the family were long broken, and only occasional gatherings brought the family together. The generation of İzzet's sons born in Salonica disappeared when Hikmet died in 1966, Mithat in 1987, and İsmet in 1990 (Figure 4).

Conclusions

In one of the first letters sent from Ankara to his wife in Istanbul, dated 4 February 1925, İsmet addressed his wife as 'my dear Ottoman'. Was he being critical of Sabiha's ongoing reluctance to move to Ankara and insistence on remaining in the old imperial capital? Or did he use Ottoman as a self-identity to be preserved even if the Empire itself was no more? Either way, the quotation shows how the political had seeped into even the most intimate personal relationships during the early Republican period.

Family papers are invaluable treasures for history writing, offering direct access to the personal experiences, thoughts, feelings, memories, relationships and everyday lives of past generations. They represent a precarious privilege for historians unearthing hitherto unknown perspectives, while their archival preservation and accessibility rest on inadequate institutions and the whims of family affairs. The significance of family history for the historiography of the post-Ottoman transition remains indisputable, as the family papers of 'ordinary' Ottomans provide bottom-up, non-state, intersectional and transnational perspectives on societal changes and political crises.

In this paper, we provided the first glimpses into our investigation of our genealogy, not for the sake of uncovering a lost identity, but rather to weave a family history across centuries and geographies that shows how an Ottoman household negotiated changing political and economic dynamics. Moreover, the family tree helped us reveal some dark truths about the history of our family as part of the Ottoman government's violent uprooting of its own citizenry during the crisis and collapse of the empire. We framed a broader geographical picture and chronological timeline for the post-Ottoman transition of ordinary Muslim gentry families living in the cosmopolitan port city of Salonica. We argue that in the aftermath of the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877–1878 and the Ottoman-Greek War of 1897, the Muslim population of the region found their interests repeatedly undermined by both the Ottoman and Greek states. We think that this context is crucial for understanding, but in no way justifying, the transgressive paths chosen by members of our family in measures of nation-building. Various family members opted for different strategies to safeguard their precious privileges in the face of the struggles of the post-Ottoman transition. In the Republican Turkey of the 1930s, the new regime building in Ankara and the economic hardships of the Great Depression forced a new contraction.

In conclusion, the exploration of our own family records unveils intricate intersections of privilege and precarity in writing family histories. In a time when men were eager to make history, women remained committed to the production and protection of family papers, contributing significantly to the family's resilience and continuity. These papers hold the promise of a full microhistory once catalogued in their entirety. Through the lens of family papers, our initial explorations not only shed light on our own familial roots but also offer a nuanced perspective on the broader historical processes that shaped the post-Ottoman world we still live in.

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