

The Medieval History Journal

<http://mhj.sagepub.com>

Suftan, Dynasty and State in the Ottoman Empire: Political Institutions in the Sixteenth Century

I. Metin Kunt

The Medieval History Journal 2003; 6; 217

DOI: 10.1177/097194580300600203

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://mhj.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/6/2/217>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *The Medieval History Journal* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://mhj.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://mhj.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Sultan, Dynasty and State in the Ottoman Empire: Political Institutions in the Sixteenth Century

I. Metin Kunt*

From its inception around 1300, 'the House of Osman' maintained the ancient Eurasian steppe tradition which kept the system of succession open. At a sultan's death, the throne went to the best candidate to emerge in a contest. By the end of sixteenth century, dynastic struggles, amounting to civil war and the killing of all the brothers of a successful prince, had caused disquiet in Ottoman polity. Subsequently, rules of succession favoured seniority due to circumstances of the age and lifespan of sultans. Also in the sixteenth century, the grand vezir established a personal administration. By the end of the century, the sultan, though himself no longer a charismatic military leader, curtailed the emergence of a minister in charge of policy. Ottoman polity remained a dynastic empire to its end which deliberately curtailed the emergence of independent political institutions.

In the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire faced two major problems in terms of its political institutional arrangements. Its endemic dynastic problems flared up at the beginning, and again around the middle of the century, culminating in civil war in each case. Relations between the ruler and an emerging state apparatus was the second

* Graduate Programme in History, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Sabanci University, Tuzla, Istanbul, Turkey. Email: mkunt@sabanciuniv.edu

area of friction. There was no political will to deal with either of these problem areas in any deliberate or planned way, yet circumstances nudged the situation along, and by the end of the century, dynastic affairs moved on to a new arrangement. However, the political conception of a dynastic empire was too strong to allow other political institutions to develop fully. Sultanic authority versus ministerial and bureaucratic action remained an unresolved issue even into the constitutional reform period in the nineteenth century. Even at the very end of the empire in 1922, the personal interplay between sultans and their ministers still largely determined political action; forceful personalities weighed more than any ancient custom or written constitution. The fact that there was no resolution, however, should not keep us from acknowledging and addressing the problems.

That the Ottoman Empire was a dynastic empire is a truism worth repeating. This means, for one thing, that its realm was not a unit immediately recognisable in historical geography like China, India or Iran. It certainly was not 'Turkey': this term was used by Europeans to refer to Ottoman lands but it would have been baffling to Ottomans themselves. The Ottoman term for their empire was simply the 'domains of the House of Osman' (*memâlik-i âl-i Osmân*). Disparate lands in Europe, Asia, and Africa, wherever Ottoman power reached and conquered, were included in this realm. Its extent was in fact very similar to that of the Byzantine Roman Empire. Whereas the Byzantine Empire can be defined as the vast hinterland of the capital, where dynasties came and went but the political system endured, in the Ottoman case, empire remained synonymous with the dynasty. During its six centuries, it was suggested only once, that too halfheartedly, that a new political order could be established without the House of Osman, an elective sultanate and rule by committee of grand officers, in the manner of the old Mamluk sultanate, and as it then applied in the semi-autonomous north African territories of the empire. This suggestion was made in 1703 in the context of a coup d'état by the sultan's own janissaries supported by the leading *ulema*, the religious bureaucratic elite; it was not taken seriously and the leaders of the coup decided that they would change the sultan, as they had done on earlier occasions, but not the dynasty for it was needed to provide continuity.¹

¹ Mustafa Naï'mâ, *History*, 6 volumes, 3rd edn, Istanbul, 1864–66, ends in 1660. His analysis of the 1703 rebellion is in his second 'Preface' in vol. 6.

The second aspect of the tradition of dynastic empire in its inner Asian roots was that male members of the dynasty assisted the ruling sultan in government, and any one of them could succeed to the throne. In the Ottoman case, this conception was modified in practice early on, both to limit the autonomous authority of princes and also to keep succession in a straight descent from father to son, not allowing uncles and nephews to be considered; in fact, Ottoman practice sanctioned the killing of brothers and nephews of the succeeding prince. During the lifetime of a reigning sultan, however, all his sons, and *their* sons if of age, were given provincial commands. There was no heir-apparent, neither by seniority nor by designation. The understanding was that when the sultan died, his sons would engage in a political contest until the most worthy prince emerged victorious. The struggle between the princes often went beyond mere mobilisation of supporters and troops for a show of force and progressed to armed clash, though the hope was to avoid a full-blown civil war. Beyond civil war, a further danger was that a defeated prince could take refuge with a neighbouring power and become an international pawn. The most famous case of this kind was that of Prince Jem, son of Mehmed II the Conqueror (of Constantinople), but in its time, Byzantium, and later European powers as well as Safavi Iran, all had an occasion to benefit diplomatically and financially from such an Ottoman embarrassment.²

Perhaps the most extreme case of a struggle for the throne occurred towards the end of the reign of Bayezid II in the first decade of the sixteenth century. Bayezid II had succeeded in 1481 after defeating his brother Jem, but was then hampered in the conduct of his European affairs and was forced to pay vast sums of money first to the Knights Hospitaller at Rhodes and later to the papacy. During his third decade on the throne, when he was in his fifties, his five sons, all of them serving as governors in various parts of Anatolia, started to become restive sensing that the elderly sultan might die anytime

² On Ottoman rule and dynasty in the sixteenth century, the most important work is by Halil İnalcık, 'Osmanlılar'da Saltanat Verâset Usûlü ve Türk Hakimiyet Telakkisiyle İlgisi', *SiyasalBilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, XIV, 1959; and 'Comments on "Sultanism": Max Weber's Typification of Ottoman Polity', *Princeton Papers in Near Eastern Studies*, 1, 1992; Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, Oxford, 1993; and most recently, Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire: The Structure of Power*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002: chapter 2. For the travails of Prince Jem, see Nicolas Vatin, *Sultan Djem: Un prince ottoman dans l'Europe*, Ankara, 1997.

soon. When a governor-prince had sons of age, these too were given district commands. The daughters of governor-princes were often married to other district governors. It was considered quite normal that a governor-prince had his sons and sons-in-law serving in districts adjacent to his own seat. In the circumstances, Bayezid's sons controlled large sections of Anatolia, where several governors had their primary allegiance to a particular prince. It was plain to see that when the sultan died, the resulting struggle would eclipse any that had gone before. Distance of a prince from the capital at the death of a sultan could be the decisive factor: he who reached the capital first had an enormous advantage in gaining the allegiance of the father's household and government. In the event, it was Prince Selim who succeeded even though he in fact was serving at Trebizond, the farthest from Istanbul of any of the brothers, and he pre-empted the looming struggle between the princes by moving against his father. From Trebizond, he was able to cross the Black Sea, avoiding his brothers in Anatolia, and rally support in the Balkans. He fought his father's troops twice in Thrace, dethroned him, then spent two years fighting his brothers. In two years, only Sultan Selim I and his son Süleyman remained of the House of Osman and the imperial cemetery in the old capital Bursa was filled with the fresh graves of the new sultan's brothers, nephews, and their supporters.

Circumstances again forced dynastic struggles in mid-century. As Sultan Süleyman went into his fourth decade on the throne and was ailing, he became suspicious that his eldest son, Prince Mustafa, might be plotting to dethrone him, and so had the prince strangled in 1553. Five years later, rivalry between his two surviving sons flared up. The younger, Prince Bayezid, uneasy that his elder brother might be favoured, forced the issue by conscripting troops and marching against Prince Selim. Bayezid thus being in open rebellion, the father had no choice but to aid Prince Selim by lending him imperial troops. The defeated Bayezid sought refuge with the Safavi Shah Tahmâsb but with enormous amounts paid to the shah by both Sultan Süleyman and Prince Selim, as well as to preserve the fragile peace between the two empires, the shah allowed Selim's envoys to murder Bayezid.

In 1566, when Sultan Süleyman died while on campaign in Hungary, Prince Selim was the only surviving son and therefore succeeded unopposed (though his accession was not without problems, as we shall see below). His son, Prince Murad, and grandson, Prince Mehmed, when they succeeded to the Ottoman throne in 1574 and

1595 respectively, had been the only princes to be given provincial governorships, both at Manisa, a favoured princely seat in west Anatolia. Their successions could not be assumed but were nevertheless expected. Each had numerous brothers, all under-age and still living in the imperial palace, at his accession; each had all brothers strangled and buried with their fathers. Thus, by the end of the sixteenth century, there seemed to emerge a 'Prince of Manisa', so to speak, an Ottoman Prince of Wales. This was not a deliberate change of practice, simply a result of circumstances involving the fathers' age at accession to the throne, their tenure as sultans, and number and age of sons. As it happened, Prince Mehmed who succeeded in 1595, was the last Ottoman prince ever to be sent forth to a provincial command and apprenticeship for rule. He had a son, Prince Mahmud, who was eager to hold a governorship. He was also heard to say that if given the chance, he would gladly lead his father's armies against the Anatolian rebels. Sultan Mehmed III feared that such talk indicated too much ambition and so had Mahmud strangled in 1603. When, a few months later he himself died, his other son, Prince Ahmed was not yet of age to hold a provincial command. Thereafter, the ancient custom, as the Ottomans said, of princes serving in provinces was abandoned, not by deliberate policy but by disuse due to circumstances. A 'Prince of Manisa', an heir-apparent, was never formalised. Yet, any prince remained a potential sultan, inexperienced in governmental affairs though he may be, even—as it happened from time to time—utterly uneducated.³

The accession of a new sultan was an occasion for renewal. International treaties or agreements, commercial privileges granted to foreigners, major—and even relatively minor—appointments were renewed; there might be a new census taken of population and production in preparation for a new distribution of revenues; new sets of laws and regulations might be promulgated. In this sense, each sultan was a unique ruler. The practice of renewing treaties and appointment certificates continued in later centuries, yet in the sixteenth century, there was a palpable sense of dynastic continuity: renewals came to be done as a matter of routine; existing laws and regulations

³ I have written on this issue at greater length in 'A Prince Goes Forth (Perchance to Return)' to be published in a collection of essays in honour of my mentor, Norman Itzkowitz, Karl Barbir and Baki Tezcan (eds), *Identity and Identity Formation in the Ottoman Balkans and Middle East*.

would be reaffirmed unchanged unless there was a specific need for change. Sultan Süleyman may have been 'the magnificent' to Europeans but Ottomans called him 'Kânûnî', usually translated as 'law-giver'; the term may properly be understood as 'law-abider' for it was during his long reign (1520–66) that the sense of ancient Ottoman law or practice, *kânûn-i kadîm-i Osmânî*, was fully established. The sultan made and promulgated *kânûn* law; he also obeyed the laws and precedent of his ancestors. The law was then truly above the legislator. The sultan became more of a link in a dynastic chain, rather than a distinct ruler.

Soon after Sultan Süleyman set out for his last campaign in 1566, news reached him from Manisa that his grandson, Prince Murad, had had a son. As patriarch of the House of Osman, he was asked to name the newborn baby. 'Let him be called "Mehmed"', he said, 'for in our family it has been the case that Mehmed has followed Murad'. This anecdote is reported in a history written three decades later by a bureaucrat-historian, Selânikî Mustafa, who was present at the campaign as a bright young man.⁴ Whether his account is accurate or not, not that there is any obvious need to doubt his veracity, it reflects a strong sense of family tradition. The supremacy of the dynasty over an individual sultan is also underlined by the flourishing of albums of dynastic portraits from the second half of the century.⁵ In matters of state, too, proper procedure and precedent, subsumed under the term *kânûn-i kadîm-i Osmânî*, became the most important considerations. Ottomans sought guidance from the precedent when organising major celebrations or political events. They consulted histories and bureaucratic registers to find out how previous events had been organised, how much expenditure was allowed, what the order of precedence was before preparing for weddings of royal women, circumcision ceremonies of princes, or sending princes out of the palace to take up provincial government. Some events were too frequent for books to be consulted: the army departing Istanbul or the imperial navy sailing away were events that did not require book knowledge, the ceremonies and routines associated with military campaigns were well known and repeated each time with great attention to detail. Weddings, circumcision feasts and princes leaving the

⁴ I have used Mehmet İpşirli's transcribed edition of Selânikî's *Tarih*, 2 volumes, Istanbul, 1989: 18.

⁵ *The Sultan's Portrait: Picturing the House of Osman*, Istanbul, 2000.

palace, were not simply dynastic or family affairs but state occasions, with the grand vezirs and all state dignitaries leading royal princesses at their weddings, supervising arrangements for feasts, accompanying princes on their way out of the palace and through the capital. Family, dynasty and polity were fully intertwined.⁶

The search for precedent became an urgent matter at Sultan Süleyman's death. Although only Prince Selim survived of his five sons, and there was no question but that he would succeed, *how* he was to accede to the throne was still a question. The problem was that Süleyman died on campaign, his armies besieging the Habsburg stronghold Szigetvar in south-western Hungary. For fear of masterless household troops rioting and looting, as happened at the death of Mehmed II in 1481, royal deaths would be kept secret until a smooth succession could be assured. In this particular case, the fear was much greater since the household troops were part of the army in what was still enemy territory although Szigetvar itself was soon captured. The grand vezir, Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, sent a secret message to Prince Selim at his seat in Kütahya asking him to come to the army camp as soon as possible to take over his father's household, and the command of the army. The prince's own advisors counselled otherwise: the prince should simply proceed to the capital and sit on his throne at the palace. 'True', they said, 'it is an old saying that "No Ottoman ascends the throne without first passing under the swords of his household troops" but that is for contested right of succession and does not apply in your case'. The advisors also thought that the grand vezir had an ulterior motive to make the prince come to him and the army, rather than bringing the army back to the prince at the capital, thereby establishing his own political influence.

Either because of this counsel or simply to avoid the hardships of fast travel to the Hungarian frontier, Selim proceeded to Istanbul where he was surprised that there was no official welcome which shows that he obviously did not believe that the grand vezir had truly kept Süleyman's death secret. But in fact, the pasha left in charge of the capital had no word from the army camp and, mindful of 'ancient Ottoman custom' that no governor-prince should be allowed in the capital without the permission of the sultan (otherwise he might attempt to dethrone the father), remonstrated at first with the prince's

⁶ The bureaucrat-historian Selânikî served at times in his career in the protocol department; his interest and expertise come through in his writings.

messenger that 'such unseemly behaviour never benefited anybody' but was convinced only when he was shown the grand vezir's letter to Prince Selim. Selim then proceeded to the palace but still with no ceremony, ascended the throne, and accepted the submission of the reduced personnel of the palace. Thus, he thought, he became sultan. Yet, he must have had his suspicions, despite the encouragement of his princely advisors, that he was not properly the sultan, for rather than breaking his father's seal at the treasury door, he borrowed funds from his extremely rich sister to pay the customary accession gratuity to palace people.

At Szigetvar, the sultan's preserved body was put in a coffin and his inner organs buried under the imperial tent. Only the chief ministers and a few of the sultan's personal attendants knew of his death. An elderly courtier who resembled the late sultan was dressed in the sultan's kaftans and appeared every once in a while to greet his victorious troops from a distance. Everyday, the grand vezir went into the imperial tent ostensibly to receive the sultan's instructions and announced these orders to the officers. In any case, all the army knew the sultan was ailing and did not expect to see him riding through the camp. The troops were busy rebuilding Szigetvar's formidable walls destroyed during the siege; commanders and troops were given awards for valiant service. While the routines of a victorious army were kept up, the grand vezir expected Prince Selim to arrive soon. Instead, he received the message that the prince was in the palace, awaiting the return of the army. Further messages from the grand vezir beseeching Selim to come to the army camp acted on Selim's own doubts and so he finally decided to make his way towards Hungary. Many weeks had passed since Süleyman's death; the army had finished work on Szigetvar's fortifications; frontier security was left to regional commanders; the army started its stately march back. Although the courtier who acted as the sultan's double appeared now and again through the curtains of his carriage and waved at the troops, suspicion grew in the camp that something was amiss. Rumours of the sultan's demise grew in intensity and, back in Ottoman territory proper, the grand vezir publicly announced what everyone suspected. Mourning robes of sombre colours were donned; household troops as well as the rest of the army wailed the passing of the great Süleyman. Selim reached the army just west of Belgrade; it was there, in front of the imperial tent that he sat on his father's throne and was proclaimed sultan. While Ottoman histories, anxious

to avoid the appearance of a hiatus, start Selim's reign with his accession in Istanbul, this was the real beginning of his rule when he took over the imperial household, the army, and the whole government apparatus from the grand vezir to all the ministers and the lowliest scribes.

Selim's accession deserves scrutiny for it brings out different political conceptions current at the time. In a sense, Selim was justified in thinking that going to the capital was sufficient to become sultan since Istanbul, as much as Rome or Byzantine Constantinople, was the supreme city of the empire. Yet, his Kütahya advisors failed to grasp both the proper significance of the imperial household, its people not the palace, and the relatively recent evolution of institutions of government. Continuity in dynastic rule and government had become paramount over the new dispensation of the succeeding sultan; the dynastic chain was much more important than a new sultanic era. Unlike the case in the Mamluk sultanate, in Ottoman tradition, there was no question of the household of the successor replacing the imperial household. Until Selim's accession, princely households had been of limited size, not more than 500–600 retainers. At the accession of a new sultan, all members of the imperial household would be promoted, some to higher chambers or offices in the palace, some to outside offices with independent sources of income in the form of a revenue grant rather than the per diem given in palace service. This would open up sufficient space in the palace for the prince to bring in some of his princely retinue. Selim, however, had recruited thousands of troops during the fight against his brother Bayezid in 1558 who were still on his payroll. At Selim's accession, Süleyman's palace people and officials around the realm were worried that the plum posts would go to advisors, officials and troops who came from the prince's seat at Kütahya. Friction between Selim's entourage and members of the imperial household escalated to outright clashes as the army returned to Istanbul from Belgrade. Once in his capital, the new sultan secured the loyalty of the imperial household by announcing appropriate accession gratuities and proper promotions. His princely household members were allowed lesser ranks and pay increases.⁷

⁷ This pattern was repeated eight years later, at the accession of Selim's son Murad III. I follow Selânikî and Feridun Bey (*Nüzhet ül-esrâr*, Topkapi Palace Library, MS 1339) for the events of Selim's accession. Household affairs at Murad's accession

As for the more important offices of the empire, by then, promotion patterns had long been established, certainly during Sultan Süleyman's 'law-abiding' years. In the imperial council (*dîvân-i humâyûn*), there were seven ministers, ranked in order of promotion to the council. The first minister was the grand vezir (*vezîr-i a'zâm*), the others were simply styled second-to-seventh vezirs. The new sultan might dismiss the grand vezir, but then each of the others would be promoted by one step so that the second vezir automatically became the grand vezir. Wholesale change of ministers was not done, nor did Selim attempt such a change. Despite the original misgivings of his Kütahya advisors, he kept Sokollu Mehmed Pasha as his grand vezir not only at his accession but for the rest of his eight-year reign. At Selim's death, Sokollu Mehmed Pasha was such a respected figure, and his men so well-entrenched in the highest offices, that Murad III, too, retained him in office. The old grand vezir was assassinated, by a 'madman' it was said, five years later, still in office. Ottoman commentators felt that Murad III resented his grand vezir's power and influence; speculation grew that the 'mad' assassin might have been acting for 'higher circles'. Certainly, during the rest of his reign, Murad III deliberately changed his grand vezirs much more rapidly and, breaking with 'ancient Ottoman custom', switched the office among two or three candidates. Quite obviously, he did not want another Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, in office for 15 years and the effective ruler of the realm. Murad III was not interested in active rule; the role of exalted and distant ruler above daily affairs quite suited him, but he certainly wanted to keep his ministers on a short leash. What seemed, in the course of the sixteenth century, to be a full-fledged development of the office of first minister was thus reversed.

Such a policy of reassertion of sultanic power was in keeping with the original conception and institutions of dynastic empire. A sixteenth-century Ottoman compilation of sultanic laws and regulations has a most curious article on bride-tax (*resm-i 'arûsâne*).⁸ This was a medieval relic, a fee peasants paid their landlords (revenue-grant holders). Usually, Ottoman regional codes of regulations mention the rates to be paid, distinguishing between first

are documented in a register detailing members of his princely retinue and the positions given to them (Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives, MAD 1324).

⁸ Selâmi Pulaha and Yasar Yücel (eds), *Le code de Selim 1^{er} et certaines autres lois de la deuxième moitié du XVII^e siècle*, Ankara, 1988: 29.

marriages (about a ducat) and marriages of widows or divorcees (half ducat), specifying that a virgin bride's fee was paid to her father's landlord whereas in a later marriage, the fee was payable wherever the marriage took place. In this particular compilation, the scribe went much further. After the usual formulae on peasant brides, fee rates, and which authority collected the fee, he goes on to say:

when a revenue-grant (*timar*) holder's daughter is married, the fee is payable either to a commander (*subashi*) or to the district-governor (*sancakbeyi*), depending on who the superior officer is; when a district-governor's daughter is married the fee is payable to the governor-general (*beylerbeyi*); when a governor-general's daughter is married the fee goes to the imperial treasury.

The curious thing about this article is that it gives a false impression of a hierarchical society and polity. The amount of the bride-tax would be a considerable sum for a peasant family: about the same as the annual ground-tax that all peasants paid and the equivalent of the annual per capita tax levied on adult non-Muslim males. For the recipients, it would not have amounted to much. What is significant about the article is the implied chain of authority which is not at all an accurate picture of Ottoman political reality. Regional or district codes of regulations would normally include a section on bride-tax but only for peasants and the revenue-grant holders authorised to collect it. Why did the author of this particular code feel the need to include this imagined hierarchy? Perhaps he wanted this to flourish, this flight of fancy, precisely because he was drawing up a general code and he wanted to distinguish it from district regulations by providing this generalised picture, however fanciful.

In effect, the Ottoman polity was composed of the ruler and all the revenue-grant holders from the highest grandee to the lowliest cavalryman. All revenue-grant holders (apart from those at a minimum level) were required to keep official retinues commensurate with their income. The sultan, princes, vezirs were no different in this respect than other revenue-grant holders. The imperial household might have thousands of retainers; vezirs and princes, a few thousand; governors-general and district governors, a few hundred. Town commanders and village-dwelling *timar*-holders might have retinues of several dozen or just a few people. Each of these revenue-grant holders was an independent office-holder of the realm. A district

governor might have supervisory authority over the *timar*-holders, and the governor-general was the leader of all the district governors in his province, but none of these relationships was hierarchical. The sultan alone had the right to appoint and dismiss *all* revenue-grant holders, sometimes on the proposal of higher officers and, to be sure, according to established rules and procedures. As Sultan Süleyman put it once in a promulgation, 'all officials are my servitors'.⁹ The *beylerbeyi* may have collected the bride-tax from the *sancakbeyi* in his province and so on down the line, as the code of regulations stated, but he was not their overlord; the only overlord, of all office holders, was the sultan.

The Ottoman terms for property (*mülk*) and realm (*memâlik*) are from the same root, implying the ruler's proprietary position in his realm. Ministers and officers served at his will; revenue-grants could be bestowed, changed, augmented or taken away. In the sixteenth century, a third of all taxes, duties, fees payable to political authority were allowed by specific permission of the sultan to be put in endowments for pious, educational, or social purposes; a third was given as revenue-grants to princes, pashas, commanders, and cavalrymen; the last third was kept for the ruler's own income, as imperial reserves (*havass-i humâyûn*). In one sense, Ottoman government as a concept was a collective responsibility of all the higher revenue holders, but in a real sense and as a phenomenon, Ottoman government grew out of the sultan's household, supported by his income. In Ottomanist discourse, 'Ottoman budgets' really means the income and expenditure statements of imperial household accounts; equally the 'bureaucracy' is composed of household scribes. Matters of state or public policy were funded out of *havass-i humâyûn* accounts. The Ottoman 'gunpowder empire' was literally located in the imperial household with the musket-bearing janissaries and the artillery corps. Most of the grand navy, too, was constructed with imperial funds. Frontier strongholds and their armaments were supplied by imperial accounts; increasingly, the sultan's own janissaries were stationed in garrisons throughout the realm. All this increased expenditure was made possible by increased cash revenues in the course of the sixteenth century, especially with the conquest of Egypt and southern ports and commercial centres from Aleppo to Aden. The Mamluk

⁹ The text of this ferman is in Tayyib Gökbilgin, 'Kanunî Sultan Süleyman'ın Timar ve Zeamet tevcihi ile ilgili fermanları', *Tarih Dergisi*, vol. 17, 1967.

loss of the Red Sea spice trade was soon recovered; the Mesopotamian and Persian Gulf alternative of intercontinental trade too was wrested from the emerging Safavi Empire. Conquest of trade routes and encouragement of trade increased receipts of the imperial treasury, brought a greater proportion both of revenue and expenditure under imperial household accounts, and further augmented sultanic power in his realm.

Endowments and revenue-grant holders collected their own revenues through their own officers and agents or tax-farmers. Imperial revenues, too, were collected through tax-farms equally as by imperial superintendents.¹⁰ Large cash revenue sources, such as customs revenues of important trade centres might be left to specialists in international trade as tax-farmers or agents; but the *havass-i humâyûn* also included many smaller revenue sources scattered throughout the realm, some rural/agrarian, some commercial and industrial. Household cavalry members increasingly came to be employed as collectors at such smaller sources, though some of them increasingly built up their operations to bid for larger sources, sometimes in partnership with merchants. This development, mixing essential military duties with fiscal enterprise, might seem surprising but the elite imperial cavalymen were considered loyal and trustworthy servants of the sultan, and allowing them to make money out of revenue collection, either as agents or as tax-farmers, made it possible to keep their regular per diem low. By this method, the household could be expanded at no extra cost.

The privileged position of the household cavalry caused resentment among the sultan's janissary infantry. Their daily pay in silver *akches*, too, was kept low but with the severe inflation at the end of the century, caused mainly by the decline of silver in relation to gold. The janissaries felt their position as the elite force in the imperial household was eroding rapidly. The friction and clashes between the household cavalry and infantry remained constant in Ottoman politics for the next half century. Because of their greater numbers, the janissaries eventually got the upper hand and reached the height of their power in the mid-seventeenth century when only candidates approved by the janissary corps could be appointed grand vezir. The old Ottoman

¹⁰ Linda Darling, *Revenue-Raising and Legitimacy: Tax Collection and Finance Administration in the Ottoman Empire, 1560–1660*, Leiden, 1996. Despite the title, the work covers imperial household revenues only.

political adage 'the soldiery should be on campaign', that is, concerned with their primary military function and not dabbling in political affairs, failed until an astute and forceful grand vezir, Köprülü Mehmed Pasha managed to discipline the two main branches of the imperial household in the 1650s. Even he, however, was forced to concede that the janissaries too, had to find ways to supplement their daily pay, in their case by going into trades and crafts in the capital. The imperial household, their numbers approaching 100,000 in the seventeenth century, with both the cavalry and the infantry intimately involved in the business of empire both in the capital and in the provinces, gradually lost its formidable military prowess. The further civilianisation of Ottoman politics and administration in the eighteenth century is a fascinating topic which needs to be explored in other studies.

After a century of political evolution, dynastic affairs changed almost beyond recognition. Instead of princes seasoned in provincial government fighting it out among themselves for the right to rule, a literal case of the 'survival of the fittest', king-makers of the palace, officials in coalition with troops, chose one from among princes languishing in ignorant, indolent palace life. Yet, no institutionalised alternative to sultanic power emerged, not in the form of government under grand vezirs nor even through parliaments in the constitutional monarchy at the very end of empire. The sultanate disappeared with the empire in the aftermath of the Great War. Even then it took the victorious republicans a full year from the abolition of the sultanate in late 1922 before they could finally declare the nature of the new political system as a republic on 29 October 1923.