

## **Ali Pasha Tepelena in the Turkish Historiography of Republican Era and Morean Uprising of 1821**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Ali Pasha Tepelena, who is known for his role in 1821 Morean uprising in addition to his identity as Pasha of Iannina in the Turkish Historiography of Republican era, has been mainly included in historical studies on the 19th century Greek nationalism. On the other hand political historiography of the 19th century Ottoman internal political developments includes limited amount of information about Ali Pasha under the topics relating to social order of the declining period as well as under those focusing on the era of Mahmud II, known for his efforts for strengthening central authority. These studies bring forward Ali Pasha both as a powerful noble of the period and as a rebellious character resisting to reforming efforts of Mahmud the Second. Role of such rebellious attitude of him in inciting the 1821 Morean uprising increases his importance in the Turkish historiography.

The fact that Ali Pasha Tepelena was dealt with predominantly in connection with the 1821 Morean uprising stirs up two problematic issues; one of them is that Ali Pasha gained increasing importance with his role in Morean uprising. This causes social, political and economic background of his power to be overlooked dramatically. Another issue is the praxis that 19th century separatist nationalist movements are read through a betrayal or loyalty perception. In many historical studies, this praxis confined Ali Pasha within a narrow point of view bordered by the questions asking if He was a betrayer or loyalist of the ottoman State due to his role in the 1821 Morean uprising.

Our starting point taken to draw attention into these two issues is the fact that Ali Pasha is a prominent historical figure beyond his known role in the 1821 Morean uprising, showing political, economic and social conditions of the period he lived in.

**Key Words:** *Ali Pasha Tepelena, 1821 Morean Uprising, Turkish Historiography, Ottoman Local Notables*

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### **Introduction**

Known for his role in 1821 Morean uprising in addition to his identity as Pasha of Iannina, Ali Pasha Tepelena has been mainly included in historical studies on the 19th century Greek Nationalism.

There has been no distinctive academic study of him until recently since 1955 when the book titled *Tepedelenli Ali Paşa (Ali Pasha Tepelena)*, composed as a novel by Ahmet Banoglu, was published. The most recent example is unpublished PhD dissertation of Hamiyet Sezer.<sup>1</sup> However, readers do not have access to it yet. Among

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<sup>1</sup>See, Hamiyet Sezer, "Tepedelenli Ali Paşa ve İsyanı", (*Ankara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 1995.*)

major resources to which we have access are there three articles Sezer published in relation to this dissertation<sup>2</sup> and a published article of Ahmet Uzun.<sup>3</sup>

Examination of historical studies conducted until recently reveals the fact that the broadest information about Ali Pasha Tepelena is found in the part of Turkish Historiography focusing on the 19th century Greek nationalism. These studies usually cover the following main or sub topics containing information on Ali Pasha Tepelena: “Etniki Hetaireira Society and Organization of Greek Insurrection”, “Beginning of 1821 Greek Riot”, “Instance of Ali Pasha Tepelena and How It was Related to Greek Riot”, “Ali Pasha Tepelena and Greeks”, “Challenge of Ali Pasha Tepelena”, etc. Whereas some of the said topics contained limited information about his role in the 1821 Morean Uprising, some others further provided information about his military and political background and personality.

On the other hand, political historiography of the 19th century Ottoman internal political developments includes a very limited amount of information about Ali Pasha under the topics relating to social order of the declining period as well as under those focusing on the era of Mahmud II, the Ottoman Sultan known for his efforts for strengthening central authority. These studies bring forward Ali Pasha Tepelena both as a powerful noble of the period and as a rebellious character resisting to reforming efforts of Mahmud II and challenging the sultan above and beyond. Role of such rebellious attitude of him in inciting the 1821 Morean insurgency increases his importance in the Turkish historiography.<sup>4</sup>

The fact that Ali Pasha Tepelena was dealt with predominantly in connection with the 1821 Morean insurgency stirs up two problematic issues from our point of view:

One is increasing importance of Ali Pasha in posing a threat or danger against central authority using his political, military and administrative power registered by the Ottoman state itself through delegation to him of high ranks. This causes social, political and economic background of his power to be overlooked dramatically.

Another issue is the praxis that 19th century separatist nationalist movements are read through a betrayal – loyalty perception with the influence of ideological conditioning brought by nationalist historiography. In many historical studies, this praxis confined Ali Pasha within a narrow point of view bordered by the questions asking if he was a betrayer or loyalist of the Ottoman State due to his role in the 1821 Morean uprising.

Our starting point taken to draw attention into these two issues is the fact that Ali Pasha is a prominent historical figure beyond his known role in the 1821 Morean uprising, showing political, economic and social conditions of the period he lived in.

<sup>2</sup> Hamiyet Sezer, “19.Yüzyıl Başlarında Arnavutluk’ta İktidar Mücadelesi”, *A.Ü.D.T.C.F. Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Vol. XXVII/36, Ankara, 2004, p.103-116; Hamiyet Sezer, “Tepedelenli Ali paşa ve Oğullarının Çiftlik ve Gelirlerine İlişkin Yeni Bilgi ve Bulgular”, *A.Ü.D.T.C.F. Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 28 (1995), p.155-164.

<sup>3</sup> Ahmet Uzun, “Tepedelenli Ali Paşa ve Malvarlığı”, *Belleten*, LXV/244, p.1035-1077

<sup>4</sup> Murat Sarıca, *Siyasal Tarih*, Filiz Kitabevi, İstanbul, 1980, p.71-72; Özcan Mert, “II. Mahmut Döneminde Taşradaki Merkezîyetçilik Politikası”, *Türkler*, Celal H. Güzel – S. Koca – K. Çiçek (Eds.), Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 2001, p.720-729; Sina Akşin, “Siyasal Tarih” (1789-1908), *Türkiye Tarihi 3, Osmanlı Devleti 1600-1908*, Sina Akşin (Ed.), Cem Yayınları, İstanbul, 1995, p.102-107

In this article, we will not observe Ali Pasha Tepelena himself in a different historical context. However, this article intends to point out the necessity for dealing with him in a different historical context, considering the confusion generated by the dominant point of view in national historiography. In doing this, we will try to give some examples from academic and popular historical studies leading to such confusions .

### **Ali Pasha Tepelena in the Turkish Historiography of Republican Era**

The fact that Ali Pasha Tepelena has been examined in association with such a negatively perceived movement as the 1821 Greek insurrection did not necessarily generated a common negative perception of him. However, his role in this insurgency did necessarily lead him to sitting often in the dock before historians. In other words, some historians regard him as a loyal statesman who was aggrieved or victimized by wrong policies of Ottoman government whereas others see him as a seditionist having ambition for power, which incited the 1821 Morean insurrection and took part in the disintegration of Ottoman State. As shown in many historical studies, this tendency of “selective perception” leading to two different characterization of Ali Pasha was also applied retrospectively by necessity in describing the entire military, administrative and political career and activity of Ali Pasha, in which context the facts were used to support either of these characterizations. While there are certain examples of this tendency in academic historiography as well, exaggerated examples can be found particularly in the popular historiography.

First example of this in the republican historiography was included in the section “Disintegration Period of Ottoman State” composed by Yusuf Akçura, a renowned supporter of Turkism, and published in 1934 as part of the study titled *Türk Tarîhinin Ana Hatları* (*An Outline of Turkish History*). As the first example of official historiography, this study gives the message that being Turkish was the fundamental source of greatness and power of Ottoman Empire<sup>5</sup> and explains the disintegration of empire with two historical processes: one was foreign invasions while the second was secessionist efforts of non-Turkish and non-Muslim Ottomans from the Ottoman community<sup>6</sup> In this context, Akçura dealt with Ali Pasha Tepelena under the subtitle of “Beginning of secession of non-Turkish Muslim peoples”. Instead of enouncing ethnical origin of Ali Pasha, Akçura asserted that he was from Toskeria. Besides, rather than defining it as a nationalist movement in terms of the 19th century nationalisms, he preferred evaluating the Ali Pasha uprising as a movement under the influence of national sentiments of Albanians.<sup>7</sup>

Another early example of selective perception is found in the foreword added by the translator in the 1936 Turkish edition of the book of Gabriel Römeron titled *Tepedelenli Ali Paşa* (*Ali Pasha Tepelena*). The book's translator Ali Kemali Aksüt starts this foreword with the phrase that Ali Pasha Tepelena was originally Turkish but his nationality was changed by using the adjective “Tepelena”.<sup>8</sup> In order to understand

<sup>5</sup> Yusuf Akçura, *Osmanlı Devleti'nin Dağılma Devri*, TTK Yyn., VIII. Seri-No.1, Maarif Matbaası, İstanbul, 1940, p.9

<sup>6</sup> Akçura, *Ibid.*, p.10

<sup>7</sup> Akçura, *Ibid.*, p.32-33

<sup>8</sup> Gabriel Römeron, *Tepedelenli Ali Paşa*, Aksüt, A.Kemali (çev.), İkbâl kitabevi, 1936, p.3

why Aksüt was in such an attempt in the very beginning, looking through the following lines is enough. In those lines, Aksüt asks that significant question putting Ali Pasha in the dock before historians: “was he a traitor or public servant?” In answering his question in relation to the role of Ali Pasha in the Greek insurrection, Aksüt was in an attempt to prove that he was in fact a loyal Ottoman pasha for his state. According to Aksüt, Ali Pasha was a loyal statesman who should not be blamed for not setting the Greek rising back in a period when the nationalist stream was powerful, a victim suffered from intrigues of Halet Effendi and a patriot who brought Ipiros and Thessaly regions in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>9</sup> Thus, attempt to prove that Ali Pasha was a patriot was supported with the claim that he was of Turkish origin.

As can be found in the subsequent historiography, however, not ethnical origin but the role in the 1821 Morean uprising of Ali Pasha gained importance, in which context his activities before and after the Morean uprising were put under the scope. This was because it was commonly accepted that he was coming from an Anatolian family. However, as the attitude of selective perception was maintained, Ali Pasha could not escape from being tried by historians due to his role in the Morean rebellion.

Collaboration of Ali Pasha with Greek rebels on the eve of 1821 Morean uprising has been shown as evidence by the historians blaming Ali Pasha directly or indirectly for the disintegration of Ottoman Empire. In doing this, they tended to read Ali Pasha’s activities before and after the Morean uprising over a betrayal scenario. Accordingly, tendency of majority of nobles of the period for acting independently from the central government or rebellious attitudes and some other similar characteristics were attempted to be shown as evidence for betrayal of Ali Pasha. From time to time, this selectivity in perception appeared in the form of blaming characterizations and expressions against incidents and individuals whereas sometimes certain facts were presented or highlighted in a manner that will support such characterizations and expressions. For example, power of Ali Pasha is explained more with his ambition, intrigues, cruelty and disobedience to the Sultan. Real purpose behind this ambition for power is said to be his desire for establishing an autonomous government under his own rule in Albania and Greece. He is ready to use any means to reach this end. While central government was tolerating his seditionist attitudes and even upgrading his rank to make use of his power, it was also aware of the threat this power was posing and had the desire to get rid of him.<sup>10</sup> Majority of these claims may be somewhat true; but the attitude of “selective perception” here becomes evident with the effort of proving them through evidences.

In his work titled *Osmanlı Taribinde Arnavutluk (Albania in Ottoman History)* (1944), Süleyman Külçe attempted to prove as if Ali Pasha had been a betrayer from the very beginning. Although its academic value is questionable, this book remained for long as the only study made in Turkey about Albania and as a significant reference

<sup>9</sup> Römeron, *İbid.*, p.4-5

<sup>10</sup> Süleyman Külçe, *Osmanlı Taribinde Arnavutluk*, İzmir, 1944, p.168-177; İ.Hakkı Danişmed, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi*, 4, 1947, p.103-104; M. Cavid Baysun, “Tepedelenli Ali Paşa Maddesi”, *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, MEB Yayınevi, İstanbul 1965, p.346.; *Türk Ansiklopedisi*, “Tepedelenli Ali Paşa Maddesi”, İstanbul, 1966, p.94; Yılmaz Öztuna, *Başlangıcından Zamanımıza Kadar Büyük Türkiye Tarihi*, Cilt 6, Ötüken Yayınları, İstanbul 1978, p.438

for many researchers. According to Külçe, secret behind the power of Ali Pasha laid in the homogenous ruling he established on the basis of an Albanian and Christian majority. Külçe described it as a more “national and acceptable” ruling. Specifying that Ali Pasha did not grant similar privileges to Muslim Turks and many languages including Turkish were being spoken in his headquarters<sup>11</sup> Külçe seemed to be in an attempt to prove this argument with an implicit accusation. Real accusation Külçe directed to Ali Pasha is a result of the “interest-based relationship” that the latter established with Bektashi Sect. Külçe asserted that Ali Pasha intended to spread Bektashism among Albanians and Greeks so that he could increase his regional power and overthrow the reign of Mahmud II and even seize the power and state by using the hostility between Janissaries, who constituted the major power of Bektashi Sect, and Mahmud II.<sup>12</sup> Külçe thus presented Ali Pasha as somewhat the last act of this whole treason while attempting to prove that Ali Pasha had already been a betrayer before the 1821 Morean uprising. According to Külçe, Ali Pasha was a statesman who sowed discord that would lead to disintegration of the Ottoman state and thus received his deserts. It seems that it is because the author thought so, he touched briefly on the aspect of Bektashism - Mevleviyeh rivalry rather than focusing on various reasons and dimensions of the contention between Ali Pasha and Halet Effendi.<sup>13</sup> Yet, contention between Ali Pasha and Halet Effendi, private secretary of Mahmud II, occupies a considerable part in both academic and popular historiography about Ali Pasha.

Who is Halet Effendi? Halet Effendi was a statesman who was upgraded up to the position of private secretary of Mahmud II and influenced Mahmud II substantially.<sup>14</sup> What brings forward Halet Effendi in the historiography of Morean Insurrection is the great role he played in the Ali Pasha uprising. However, hostility of Halet Effendi against Ali Pasha despite his known sympathy for Phanariot Greeks and even the interest-based relationship he established with them doubled his importance in the Turkish historiography. Now historians had two personalities to be scrutinized for their significant roles in the Morean uprising. One of them was Halet Effendi, who ignored any warning received from Ali Pasha in relation to secret activities of Greek rebels and eventually propelled him to revolt by making him fall from the sultan’s grace and be deprived of all of his ranks despite his all appeals for mercy. The other is Ali Pasha, who revolted and eventually cooperated with Greek rebels because he was deprived of all his powers and ranks. In fact, here are two Ali Pashas depending on the point of view. One Ali Pasha is the one who seemed to come out as victim of the Halet Effendi – Ali Pasha contention, whereas the other is someone who showed the red flag and ventured to cooperate with Greek insurgents. Thus, in studies conducted under the influence of dominant perspective in the national historiography, an Ali Pasha uprising caused by Halet Effendi and the 1821 Morean insurrection incited by the collaboration between seditionist Ali Pasha and Greek insurgents seemed to be necessarily transformed into the narration questioning who, i.e. if Halet Effendi or Ali

<sup>11</sup> Külçe, *İbid.*, p.168

<sup>12</sup> *İbid.*, p.174-175

<sup>13</sup> *İbid.*, p.177

<sup>14</sup> Abdurrahman Şeref Efendi, *Tarih Musababeleri*, Enver Koray(sadeleştiren), Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yyn.:639, Kültür Eserleri Dizisi:47, Ankara,1985, p.24-31

Pasha, was more betrayer. This put forward certain facts with the purpose of proving one of these arguments.

Although historians such as İ. Hami Danişmend and M. Cavid Baysun well discussed the reasons of contention between Halet Effendi and Ali Pasha and subsequent developments in relation thereof and found both statesman equally “evil”, perhaps because they found Ali Pasha more guilty, Danişmend accused him of being “considered as the Boss of Greek uprising” while Baysun described him as a greedy and revanchist person, who was responsible for the disintegration of Ottoman Empire<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore both authors, as if they wished to show severity of the collaboration between “seditionist” Ali Pasha and Greek insurgents, mentioned about a meeting dated 23 May 1820, held among both parties in Iannina and details of the alliance agreed upon in that meeting. In that meeting, Ali Pasha proposed principality and direct ruling of Toskeria and Thessaly regions as well as establishment of a privileged Greek province in Morea and Acarnania, which was to be incorporated therein, under his patronage.<sup>16</sup> This detail, which Danişmend defined as “a terrible alliance”, was not found in any other historical studies we have observed. Whereas some studies content with briefly touching the collaboration between Ali Pasha and Greek insurgents or that Ali Pasha incited them, some others did not mention about it at all. Without referring to these detailed information, those studies that support similar arguments with Baysun and Danişmend somewhat accused Ali Pasha of collaborating with Greek insurgents while the role of Halet Effendi in the Ali Pasha uprising was explained as no more than the hostility of the former to Ali Pasha without going into further details.<sup>17</sup>

In the book titled *Osmanlı Tarihi ( Ottoman History )* by Enver Ziya Karal, one of the leading historians of the republican era, there comes out a different Ali Pasha profile compared to those historical studies that blame Ali Pasha either explicitly or implicitly. Mentioning Ali Pasha under the subtitle of “Ali Pasha Tepelena and his Role in the Greek Insurrections”, Karal described Ali Pasha in an introductory short paragraph as a smart, skillful and loyal statesman, who together with his sons had been rewarded with high ranks for their service and achievements. These complimentary descriptions of Ali Pasha’s career seem to be highly consistent with the author’s assessments in relation to Ali Pasha’s role in the Morean insurrection. In interrelating between the Ali Pasha revolt and the Morean insurrection, Karal – without an attempt for explicitly defend or blame one side - showed Halet Effendi as somewhat villain of the piece for subsequent developments as he led Ali Pasha to revolt. This was because Karal believed that the Morean uprising would not happen if Ali Pasha, who had strict control over Greeks, was not incited. As a matter of fact, Karal did not mention about the aftermath, i.e. collaboration of Ali Pasha with Greek insurgents, although he touched the Ali Pasha – Halet Effendi contention, where Ali Pasha was shown as the victim<sup>18</sup> Besides, we cannot find in this study why Karal did not mention about this collaboration although he used the same resources of reference with Baysun and

<sup>15</sup> Danişmend, *İbid.*, p.103-104; Baysun, *İbid.*, p.346

<sup>16</sup> Danişmend, *İbid.*, p.104; Baysun, *İbid.*, p.346

<sup>17</sup> *Türk Ansiklopedisi*, p.94; Öztuna, *İbid.* P. 348

<sup>18</sup> E.Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Cilt 5, TTK Yyn., Ankara, 1983, p.110

Danişmend. We find in other historical works similar choices with the one Karal made intentionally or unintentionally. Despite no explicit defense or accusation, in discussing the Halet Effendi - Ali Pasha contention, it is inevitable to recognize that these studies did not mention at all about the alleged collaboration that Ali Pasha made with Greek insurgents after the uprising. Moreover, again like Karal, these studies used no negative words in presenting the military and political career of Ali Pasha as a general result of his successful services for the Ottoman state<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, in studies of those historians who came to the forefront with their historian-researcher-author identity despite no academic value and reached a broad audience and are sometimes used as reference in academic historical studies, “Innocence” or “Victimhood” of Ali Pasha against “evilness” or “betrayal” of Halet Effendi was narrated through a dramatic language. Majority of such studies that may be examined under the category of popular history presented military and political career of Ali Pasha as a reward for his successful services and loyalty while highlighting his success in ensuring public order and tranquility particularly in his own area<sup>20</sup> In some of them, we also find expressions such as “brave, powerful Turkish pasha”<sup>21</sup> Thus, role of Ali Pasha in the Morean insurrection turned to be the story of inciting such a successful statesman to revolt eventually. In this context, either the collaboration of “seditionist” Ali Pasha with Greek rebels was given no place<sup>22</sup> or the studies specifying that this collaboration was a big mistake emphasized particularly that Ali Pasha had no ambition for independence and attempted to support this argument with a number of facts. Loyalty of Ali Pasha was attempted to be proved through explanations such as “The biggest contribution of Ali Pasha to the Ottoman state was his ability to give Greeks besotted with the idea of independence no respite”.<sup>23</sup> Or “Alleged request of Ali Pasha for help from Russians was not true”.<sup>24</sup> Or “If he liked, Ali Pasha would show the red flag against the Ottomans long before with a huge force under his command”.<sup>25</sup> Also, all these studies were based on the “evilness” of Halet Effendi as the center of main events leading to the Morean uprising, and Halet Effendi was sometimes strongly criticized even by using the title “traitor”. Having a big popularity among Turkish audience with a large number of historical works he conducted, Kutay asserted that the Greek uprising was influenced more by Halet Effendi than the activities of Etniki Hetaireira, and did not even mention about the collaboration between Ali Pasha and Greek insurgents. Notwithstanding, some of the historians who evaluated the said collaboration as a big mistake claimed that Ali Pasha

<sup>19</sup> Aşkın Koyuncu, “Yunanistan’da Bağımsız Devlet”, *Balkanlar El Kitabı I*, Karam&Vadi Yyn., Ankara, 2006, p.498; Yaşar Yücel – Ali Sevim, *Türkiye Tarihi IV, Osmanlı Dönemi*, TTK Yyn., Ankara, 1992, p.189; Yücel Özkaya, “1821 Yunan (Eflak-Boğdan) İsyanları ve Avrupalıların İsyan Karşısındaki Tutumları”, *Üçüncü Askeri Tarih Semineri Bildiriler*, Gen.Kur.Basimevi, Ankara, 1986, p.117

<sup>20</sup> Cemal Kutay, *Bilinmeyen Taribimiz*, Dizerkonca Matbaası, İstanbul, 1974, p.393; Süleyman Kocabaş, *Taribte ve Günümüzde Türk-Yunan Mücadelesi*, İstanbul, 1984, p.56

<sup>21</sup> Osman Yavuz Saral, *Kaybettiğimiz Rumeli*, Boğaziçi Yyn., no.26, İstanbul 1975, p.110

<sup>22</sup> Kutay, *İbid.*, p.393

<sup>23</sup> Kocabaş, *İbid.*, p.56

<sup>24</sup> Selahattin Salıslık, *Tarib Boyunca Türk-Yunan İlişkileri ve Etniki Eteryu*, Kıtış Yayınları, İstanbul, 1966, p.153

<sup>25</sup> Saral, *İbid.*, p.111

should be forgiven nonetheless, and considered Halet Effendi as the source of trouble in the Morean uprising.

In addition to the above examples leading to confusion about Ali Pasha, there are undoubtedly certain academic studies drawn up under the title of Morean uprising with a more objective outlook or at least leading to no such confusions as we discussed above.<sup>26</sup> These studies either gave Ali Pasha a little space or presented the Halet Effendi - Ali Pasha contention and Ali Pasha - Greek insurgents collaboration on the basis of facts without causing any confusion in mind. One example can be recently published book of Ali Fuat Öreñ. Primary part we are interested in this book on the Morean Uprising is its tendency for emphasizing the aspect of Ali Pasha - Morean uprising connection that Ali Pasha uprising literally changed the balances in Morea<sup>27</sup> Indeed, this fact is mentioned in all abovementioned historical studies in different forms; but importance of this aspect was reduced both because it was not directly related with the topics discussing Ali Pasha (topics that were specified at the beginning of this article) and as persons were overemphasized. As it was not the primary concern of his book, Öreñ, too, did not attempt discussing historical background of how this balance destroyed with the Morean insurrection was established before. Yet, at least he did not bring forward persons in a manner that would cause this aspect go unnoticed.

As a matter of course, this aspect that we consider as really important in terms of examining Ali Pasha within a different historical context is a subject of broader study that is quite beyond the historical period and place of the 1821 Morean uprising. In other words, an analysis, starting with questions on how balances destroyed by Ali Pasha had been established before and what weaknesses and strengths this balance had in terms of relations with both central authority and other local rulers (nobles) as well as local people, will move us to a broader historical period and space where we could see and evaluate the events within the course of a broader political, economic and social system.

Such an effort would primarily bring in to show us how fragile was in fact the celebrated power of Ali Pasha, considering that the deep rooted Greek movement gained speed with the revolt of Ali Pasha. Indeed, this fragility increasing in proportion to power was commonly seen and increasingly apparent among Ottoman nobles as from the middle 18<sup>th</sup> century, as we also see in a study made on the nobles in Anatolia.<sup>28</sup> That is, the more power one has, the bigger the risk for losing it becomes. Being aware of this brings us much more important information about what makes this power more solid or fragile. Fragility or solidity of the said powers of nobles was in fact determined by their style of seizing and using power. What determines this change in the style includes internal economic and social conditions that led Ottoman state gradually to losing its central character and changes brought by

<sup>26</sup> Necla Günay, "Filiki Eteryä Cemiyeti", *Karşehir Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 2005, 6 (1), p.263-287; Zeki Arıkan, "1821 Yunan İşyanının Başlangıcı", *Askeri Tarih Bütteni*, yıl;12, Şubat 1987, No.22, Gen.Kur. Basımevi, Ankara, 1987, p.98-112; Erhan Afyoncu, *Sorularla Osmanlı İmparatorluğu I*, Yeditepe Yın., İstanbul, 2008; Ali Fuat Öreñ, *Balkanlarda İlk Dram, Mora Türkleri ve Eyaletten Bağımsızlığa Yunanistan*, Babıali Kültür Yın., İstanbul, 2009, p.28

<sup>27</sup> Öreñ, *Ibid.*, p.28

<sup>28</sup> Işık Tamdoğan, "Büyükleri Saymak, Küçükleri Sevmek", *Tarih ve Toplum*, (Bahar, 2005), sayı:1, p.93-94

external developments. Depending on such a change, characteristics of nobles were also varied in the nobility system that became quite apparent in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### **An Attempt to Understand Ali Pasha Tepelena in a Different Historical Context; The Rise of Ottoman Local Notables (*Ayan*)**

“Noble” is a semi-official title granted to powerful families in the upcountry of Ottoman Empire. Main factor that led to the emergence of nobility was total corruption of *timar* (Ottoman land tenure) system by the end of 17<sup>th</sup> century. This deterioration started with submission of duty of land tax collection to bidding (*İltizam*/farming) initially for a short period of time but later for lifetime, a practice intended to be a solution for meeting cash need of the Ottoman treasury. Being awarded with this tender (farming), those generally high rank government officials resorted to the help of influential families of the region not only to collect taxes but also for providing public order, sending soldiers to the front and mediating between central authority and local people. Sometimes, particularly in wartime periods, being assigned with duties such as substituting the governor, these families prospered both through winning a tender and becoming a *multezim* (tax farmer), and forming armed mercenary forces consisting of the unemployed, by which they established a hereditary influence in the region. Beginning to exert more influence than official administrators in the region, these families were also assigned with government posts such as governorship as from the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the course of time, central authority became more dependent on the power of these families to meet ever-increasing need for money and soldiers and secure public order in rural areas. Thus, “virtual” mediation role of these families between the rural areas and central authority were recognized under a “semi-official” status named “noble” in 1765. The most powerful among these nobles were accepted as “official nobles” and delegated with certain administrative, financial, military and security services.<sup>29</sup> Nobles thereby joined in the classical Ottoman system as a new element of power with this official status. As Mustafa Akdağ, a leading socioeconomic historian of Turkey, also expressed, official nobles often resorted to despotic means to fulfill increasing amount of demands received from the central authority.<sup>30</sup>

That is why nobles started to become a serious trouble both for local population and in terms of central authority in the second half of 18<sup>th</sup> century. Here are the visible characteristics of this change in nobles that emerged in the second half of 18<sup>th</sup> century. Compared to those before 1750, nobles in the subsequent period gained more military, economic and administrative power while they neglected their duties more such as protection and service for local people. This strengthened their power and came up evidently in their style of relations with central authority, other nobles and local people. That is, nobles were more ambitious for power as from the middle 18<sup>th</sup> century. For example, they acquired more *iltizam* (farming) and seized some posts and positions by force. Thus, they became wealthy and powerful much

<sup>29</sup> Yücel Özkaya, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Ayanlık*, A.Ü., D.T.C.F. Yyn., No.273, Ankara, 1977, p.129-174

<sup>30</sup> Mustafa Akdağ, “Osmanlı Tarihinde Ayanlık Düzeni Devri, 1730-1839”, D.T.C.F., *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, C.VIII-XII, (1970-74), p.14-23

sooner.<sup>31</sup> Powerful nobles, who were called “feudal lord”, or even as “junior sultan” or “sultan without coin” among public because they were powerful enough to revolt against central authority, had 20-30 thousand mercenaries under their command. They were using vast lands as a hereditary private property. While they were paying part of the share they received from the land as tax to the state, they were using another part for commercial purposes and became enriched. For example, Hamiyet Sezer’s work on the wealth of Ali Pasha and his sons provided crucial information in terms of showing the economic power behind that enormous power of the nobles.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, however, they had to run the risk of losing anything they had, including their lives, as they paid less regard to local people, which was one of the important bases of their power; they entered in more struggle for power with other nobles; and their relations with the central authority deteriorated. Actual reason behind this change in the nature of nobility was the increasing dependency of central authority on them, i.e. increasing demand of central authority for soldiers, money, security, etc..

This sensitive balance based on dependency-compromise between the nobles and central authority contained major risks for both sides. From the perspective of central authority, power that this increasing dependency of the central authority delegated on the nobles started to be a serious threat. For example, in addition to nobles’ attitudes that put central authority in trouble such as refusing from time to time to send soldiers for war or pay tax, despotic means they used as semi-official representatives of the center in administration, taxation, etc. issues necessarily abused the trust of local people in the government. Intending from time to time to struggle against them, more often than not the central authority had to compromise with the nobles. From the noble point of view, nobles were officials of government and as a matter of fact, they acquired this devastating economic, military and administrative power by virtue of the semi-nobility status enfranchised by the state.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the long-established Ottoman practice of condemning civil servants to death for both political and economic reasons (political execution) and then transferring their property into the treasury (confiscation) was also applicable for these nobles. That is, central authority may at any time take their ranks and lives and confiscate their properties.<sup>34</sup> That is why holding such a power that central authority depends on was perhaps the biggest insurance for the nobles. However, security of their lives and properties was under increasing threat because they were posing greater danger for the center as long as they gained power. Because ideological and political connection with the central government was not severed despite the partition in economic structure brought by the nobility system<sup>35</sup> this feudal class, i.e. nobles, was in fact neither feudal nor bourgeois. Therefore, consolidation of the central government was the greatest danger for nobles. Nevertheless, the central authority had another instrument that may be used against nobles: using a powerful noble against another powerful noble.

<sup>31</sup> Tamdoğan, *İbid.*, p.93-94

<sup>32</sup> See, Sezer, “Tepedelenli Ali Paşa ve Oğullarının....”,

<sup>33</sup> Özkaya, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda...*p.133

<sup>34</sup> *İbid.*, p.261

<sup>35</sup> Çağlar Keyder, *Toplumsal Tarih Çalışmaları*, İletişim Yyn., İstanbul, 2009, p.211

This in fact subjected the nobles to the central authority on the one hand, and accelerated the competition for power among them on the other. Meanwhile, sensitive balance of local power grounds of the nobles started to be shaken as they resorted to more despotic methods, conflicted more with other nobles and paid less regard to the needs of local people with the desire of gaining more power. In this sense, one should try to understand the known conflicts among nobles, their despotic treatments to the people, seditionist attitudes or otherwise against the central rule not as their “benevolence” or “evilness”, “loyalty” or “infidelity” to the state but over the abovementioned sensitive balances established on the basis of dependency-compromise. Or in other words, the most powerful, most ambitious and those who best kept up with the conditions came to the front within this balance game.

In this regard, it is understandable why Rumelian nobles, who were the most powerful of the Empire during the reign of Selim III, did not allow Sultan for forming a branch of *Nizâm-i Cedid* (the New Order) army in Rumelia in return for all those broad authorities they acquired from the Sultan. This was because Selim III was in strong need of the help of nobles to overcome the heavy load brought by external wars in that period. (For example, it was in this period that Ali Pasha was delegated with positions of vizier and Rumelian governor). As a matter of fact, it was natural that nobles did not allow for formation of the *Nizâm-i Cedid*, an army to constitute the core of new and stronger central army planned by Selim III, in their region in a period when the balance was in favor of nobles. However, the same Rumelian noble deposed Selim III from the throne and enthroned Mahmud II as a third coercive power against the Ulema-Janissary coalition opposing to military reforms or *Nizâm-i Cedid*, and made a deal with him.<sup>36</sup> However, the biggest objective of the same Mahmud II, who concluded an agreement defining mutual duties and rights with these nobles (Charter of Alliance), was reduce power of Janissaries and nobles for the purpose of consolidating the central authority. As usual, however, the state of war required to act with deliberation for a while against the nobility. Indeed, the 1815 Peace of Bucharest provided the state of peace that Mahmud II needed. However, it should be noted that Ottoman State, particularly after the 1774 Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji, became dependent on the support of other Western powers against Russian threats or open Russian activities in the Balkans. On the other hand, there was also an economic dependency caused by commercialization of agriculture. Besides, nationalist ideas spread with the influence of the French Revolution were highly influential especially among Ottoman Christian subjects, who gained wealth from trade. Therefore, one also needs to look through the aspect of dependency on foreign states caused primarily by economic and then military and administrative weakness of the Ottoman state, in addition to that of dependency-compromise it generated between the central authority and nobles. More importantly, one should also focus on how new weaknesses resulted from such a dual-aspect dependency were used by foreign states as well as nobles to maintain this relation of dependency.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the nobility grew stronger by making use of economic, military and administrative weakness of the central rule. However, this power also contained a

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<sup>36</sup> Akdağ, *Ibid.*, p.23

set of weaknesses inside. On the other hand, foreign dependency of the Ottoman state brought about certain new weaknesses for the Ottoman state. In this regard, how effort of Mahmud II to get rid of internal dependency on nobles in an environment of weaknesses brought by external dependency affected the attitudes of nobles and which weaknesses they chose to use in order to maintain their power is important to understand its prospective consequences as well. We believe that dealing with the process - from empowerment of Ali Pasha as the most powerful noble of the Balkans to the time he lost this power - from this perspective will be useful first and foremost for evaluating the regional developments more properly and within a broader time and spatial aspect. It is therefore doubtless that socioeconomic historical studies based on reliable archives will also enrich the studies of political history.

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