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Love, Duty and Sacrifice: The Letters of Pargalı İbrāḥīm to Muḥsine Hanım

Aşk, Görev ve Fedākārlık: Pargalı İbrāhīm'in Muḥsine Hanım'a Mektupları

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Abstract

This paper examines eleven letters exchanged between Grand Vizier İbrāḥīm Pasha and his wife Muḥsine Hanım. The collection consists of ten letters from İbrāḥīm and one from his wife. The examination unfolds across three themes: political reporting, emotional support, and separation. The argument is put forward that, while the content of the letters is personal, they also serve a broader purpose. İbrāḥīm likely uses these letters to apprise his wife of military victories and to communicate with a broader audience, reflecting his dual role as a statesman and family man. The analysis demonstrates how these letters assert political legitimacy while concurrently strengthening emotional bonds, thus revealing the complex intersection of power, faith, and personal devotion in the life of a high-ranking Ottoman statesman. By foregrounding the emotional side of a Grand Vizier, this article contributes to the history of emotions in the early modern Ottoman world and offers a rare analysis of epistolary material that blends personal devotion with political self-fashioning.

Keywords

Love,
history of emotions,
early modern,
Ottoman history,
longing,
epistolary culture

Öz

Bu çalışma, Sadrazam Pargalı İbrāḥīm Paşa ile eşi Muḥsine Hanım arasında yazılmış on bir mektubu analiz etmektedir. Mektup koleksiyonu, İbrāḥīm Paşa'ya ait on mektup ve eşi Muḥsine Hanım'a ait bir mektuptan oluşmaktadır. Çalışma, üç temel tema etrafında şekillendirilmektedir: Siyasi raporlama, duygusal destek ve ayrılık. Mektupların içeriğinin kişisel bir nitelik taşımakla birlikte, aynı zamanda daha geniş bir amaç taşıdığı savunulmaktadır. İbrāḥīm Paşa, bu mektupları yalnızca eşiyle askeri zaferlerini paylaşmak için değil, aynı zamanda daha geniş bir kitleye hitap etmek amacıyla da kullanmaktadır. Bu durum, onun hem bir devlet adamı hem de bir aile reisi olarak iki farklı rolünü yansıtmaktadır. Çalışma, mektupların siyasi meşruiyetin pekiştirilmesi ve duygusal bağların güçlendirilmesi işlevlerini nasıl yerine getirdiğini göstererek, Osmanlı elitinin yaşamında güç, inanç ve kişisel bağlılık arasındaki karmaşık kesişimi ortaya koymaktadır. Bir sadrazamın duygusal yönünü ön plana çıkararak, bu makale erken modern Osmanlı dünyasında duyguların tarihine katkı sağlamakta ve kişisel bağlılık ile siyasi kendilik inşasını harmanlayan, az incelenmiş bir mektup kaynağını nadir bir analizle ele almaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Aşk,
duyguların tarihi,
erken modern dönemi
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Yet without you, my beloved, neither my day is a day nor my night is a night—Allah knows…

İbrāḥīm

Introduction

In 1533, the Ottoman army marches toward Safavid Persia. Grand Vizier, İbrāḥīm Pasha, rides at the head of the troops, surrounded by the dust and noise of the campaign. Yet amid the clanking of armor and the weight of state affairs, his thoughts drift elsewhere—to his wife in Constantinople. He reaches for ink and paper, pouring his thoughts and emotions into carefully composed letters that will travel for weeks before reaching her hands. His words, carried across vast distances, were not orders to generals or diplomatic instructions, but letters to his wife, Muḥsine Hanım. Preserved today in the Topkapı Palace Museum Archives (TSMK) in Istanbul[1], these letters offer a rare glimpse into the emotional world of one of the most powerful men of the Ottoman Empire. Written amid the turbulence of military campaigns, they intertwine personal longing with political duty, revealing how elite correspondence served not only as an intimate exchange but also as a medium of power and endurance.

Private letters can thus be viewed as a substitute for direct interaction, though they could never truly replace the experience of face-to-face conversation and genuine dialogue.[2] However, scholars suggest that letters could convey emotion.[3] The analysis of private correspondence

1 TSMAe_750-53, TSMAe_750-35

2 Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir, "Fragments of Lives—The Use of Private Letters in Historical Research," *NORA: Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 15, no. 1 (April 2007): 39, https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740701253551.

3 Xenia von Tippelskirch, "Reading, Interpreting and Historicizing: Letters as Historical Sources," in *Reading, Interpreting and Historicizing: Letters as Historical Sources*, ed. Regina Schulte (European University Institute, 2004), 74.

demands an understanding of letters as a social practice shaped by cultural and historical contexts. As Barton and Hall posit, letters serve as a reflection of societal norms and relationships, with emotional content providing insight into personal and social concerns.[4] Modern methodologies, such as discourse analysis and historical sociolinguistics, have been employed to examine letter writing as a dynamic, context-sensitive activity rather than a static product.[5] Pallotti and Del Lungo Camiciotti emphasize the flexibility of letter writing in the early modern period[6], while Walter highlights the complexity of letter collections, urging scholars to consider their multi-layered nature.[7] This methodological approach allows the broader social functions and meanings of letters to be uncovered.[8]

The letters in this study offer a rare glimpse into the personal life of one of the most powerful men in the Ottoman Empire. More than simple messages, they reflect the intricate world of sixteenth-century communication—where handwritten letters carried not just words, but longing, duty, and perhaps even political intent. This correspondence occurred during the Ottoman-Safavid conflict known as the *Irakeyn* Campaign (1534–1535), which was one of the most extensive and prolonged military endeavors in Ottoman history. Led by Grand Vizier Pargalı İbrāḥīm Pasha on behalf of Sultan Süleyman I, the campaign aimed to wrest control of Iraq from the Safavids, a key rival power in the region.[9] İbrāḥīm Pasha first secured Tabriz before marching towards Baghdad,

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4 David Barton and Nigel Hall, *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*, Studies in Written Language and Literacy 9 (John Benjamins, 2000).

5 Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Cornell University Press, 2007).

6 Gabriella Del Lungo Camiciotti and Donatella Pallotti, eds., Letter Writing in Early Modern Culture, 1500–1750, vol. 3 (Firenze University Press, 2014).

7 Walter Ysebaert, "Medieval Letters and Letter Collections as Historical Sources: Methodological Questions, Reflections, and Research Perspectives (Sixth–Fifteenth Centuries)," in *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy, vol. 33*, ed. Christian Høgel and Elisabetta Bartoli (Brepols Publishers, 2015), 33–62, https://doi.org/10.1484/M.USML-EB.5.105112.

8 For a more in-depth discussion on the methodology for analyzing private correspondence, please refer to the following sources: Liz Stanley, The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences," *Auto/Biography* 12, no. 3 (September 2004): 201–35, https://doi.org/10.1191/0967550704ab014oa; David A. Gerber, "Acts of Deceiving and Withholding in Immigrant Letters: Personal Identity and Self-Presentation in Personal Correspondence," *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 2 (Winter 2005): 315–30, https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh.2005.0136; Paul M. Dover, *The Information Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, *New Approaches to European History* (Cambridge University Press, 2021); Adrian Gully, *The Culture of Letter-Writing in Pre-Modern Islamic Society* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008); Martha Jane K. Zachert, "Personal Records as Historical Sources," *University of Texas* 4, no. 4 (1969): 337–40; Charles Bazerman, ed., *Textual Dynamics of the Professions: Historical and Contemporary Studies of Writing in Professional Communities*, Rhetoric on the Human Sciences (University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

9 For detailed account of this campaign, see, Nasuh-i Matrakī, *Beyān-ı Menāzil-i Sefer-i Irākeyn*, ed. Hüseyin Yurdaydın (1976); Faruk Sümer, *Safevi Devleti'nin Kuruluşu ve Gelişmesinde Anadolu Türklerinin Rolü* (Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1999); Sertaç Sarıçiçek, "Safeviler Döneminde İran'da Savaşlar" (MA thesis, Hacettepe University, 2016), https://acikbilim.yok.gov.tr/bitstream/handle/20.500.12812/463879/yokAcikBilim_10119485.pdf?sequence=-1&isAllowed=y; M. Tayyib Gökbilgin, "Arz ve Raporlarına Göre İbrahim Paşa'nın Irakeyn Seferindeki İlk Tedbirleri ve Fütuha," *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Velî Araştırma Dergisi* 21, no. 83 (1957): 449–82, https://doi.org/10.37879; Feridun Emecen, "Seferi Irakeyn," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (1999);

which was taken with little resistance. The campaign resulted in an Ottoman victory that solidified sovereignty over Baghdad, Basra, and surrounding territories, while also cementing İbrāḥīm Pasha's legacy as a capable military strategist and administrator.[10] Of the ten letters attributed to İbrāḥīm Pasha, four appear to have been personally penned by him, while the remaining ones were likely transcribed by a *kātib* (scribe) accompanying the Grand Vizier during the campaign. This assessment is based on a thorough analysis of handwriting styles, linguistic features, and formatting differences.[11] Furthermore, Claudia Römer and Gisela Procházka-Eisl suggest that İbrāhīm Pasha himself would probably not have been able to compose complicated texts in the *inşā* style[12], and that it took a great stylist like Celālzāde Muṣṭafā (d. 975/1567), most likely, to adapt the language and its metaphorical richness exactly to the thematic context, as is evident from a careful reading of high Ottoman prose.[13]

Similarly, Muḥsine Hanım's letter was not written in her own hand but was likely dictated to a palace scribe. Despite this, as the following analysis will demonstrate, the language of her letter—marked by its intimacy and non-standard orthography—suggests her direct influence, even if not her handwriting. In contrast to the traditional focus on the literal content of the letters, scholars have increasingly directed their attention towards the performance of correspondence. This involves examining not only the interaction between the writer and recipient, but also how the writing may reflect the social context and relationships within which it was produced.[14] In this study, the focus will be on analyzing these letters with a particular emphasis on their emotional and political dimensions. The letters penned by İbrāḥīm Pasha himself are characterized by their directness and personal nature, which may suggest an emotional connection with his wife. However, it is important to consider that such expressions could also align with the rhetorical conventions of elite correspondence, where emotional language often served to reinforce social roles and political ties. Conversely, the letters transcribed by a scribe adopt a more formal tone and

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Sabri Ates-Vural Genç, "Ottoman-Safavid Relations: A Religious or Political Rivalry," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, by Sabri Ateş-Vural Genç (Oxford University Press, 2024), doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.769; Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600*, trans. Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber (Phoenix, 2013).

10 M. Tayyib Gökbilgin, "Arz ve Raporlarına Göre İbrahim Paşa'nın Irakeyn Seferindeki İlk Tedbirleri ve Fütuha," *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Velî Araştırma Dergisi* 21, no. 83 (1957): 449–82, https://doi.org/10.37879.

11 Despite the fact that the letters were first published in 1950, no previous scholarly analysis has been conducted regarding their authorship or the involvement of a scribe. See, M. Çağatay Uluçay, *Osmanlı Sultanlarına Aşk Mektupları* (Türk Dünyası Mecmuası Yayınlarından, 1950).

12 *Inşâ* in Ottoman and classical Islamic literature refers to a refined prose style used for composing official documents, diplomatic correspondence, petitions, and literary prose. It represents the art of eloquent and sophisticated writing, often employed in administrative and scholarly contexts. See, İsmail Durmuş, "inşa," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (2000).

13 Gisela Procházka-Eisl and Claudia Römer*, Osmanische Beamtenschreiben und Privatbriefe der Zeit Süleymāns des Prächtigen aus dem Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv zu Wien, Denkschriften* / Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Bd. 357 (Verl. d. Österreich. Akad. d. Wissenschaften, 2007), 19.

14 Margaretta Jolly and Liz Stanley, "Letters as / Not a Genre," *Life Writing* 2, No. 2 (January 2005): 95, doi:10.1080/10408340308518291.

convey political messaging, suggesting that İbrāḥīm Pasha, while writing to his wife, was cognizant of the potential for his correspondence to be accessed by others, thereby integrating personal sentiment with political strategy.

A private letter is a deeply personal source in which people, events, and emotions are described in an immediate and intimate manner. The opinions expressed and the experiences recounted in private correspondence belong to individuals, and as such, they must be used with caution.[15] Emotion is a complex and intangible concept; as such, its analysis requires a multidisciplinary approach.[16] Historians, therefore, must approach private letters carefully, striving to do justice to those who once lived and left these personal accounts for posterity. Despite their complexities, letters remain invaluable sources for historical research. One key reason is their inherently relational nature—letters are written to "significant others," such as close relatives or friends. This makes them particularly useful for understanding how relationships were negotiated and maintained through written communication. Unlike court records or memoirs, which often present broad generalizations or retrospective narratives, letters capture personal thoughts and experiences in real-time. Memoirs, for instance, are typically written long after the events they describe and may be shaped by hindsight, selective memory, or external influences. In contrast, letters reflect what was happening in the moment, preserving an immediate and often unfiltered perspective. Once sent, they cannot be revised or reinterpreted. Private letters can, to some extent, be compared to photographs—they capture a particular moment in time, preserving memories like "flies in amber."[17]

The identity of İbrāḥīm Pasha's wife has been a subject of scholarly debate, with many historians traditionally asserting that he was married to one of Sultan Süleyman's sisters. However, no definitive evidence has been found to substantiate this claim. This assumption largely stems from the elaborate wedding celebrations held in May 1524, which lasted for two weeks in the Hippodrome and were attended by the Sultan, who observed the festivities from a specially constructed kiosk within İbrāḥīm Pasha's palace. The presence of the Sultan and the grandeur of the event led many scholars to conclude that İbrāḥīm Pasha's wife was likely an Ottoman princess.[18]

Ismail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı was among the historians who initially identified İbrāḥīm Pasha's wife as Hatice Sultan, a presumed sister of Süleyman.[19] However, he later revised his position,

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15 Walter Ysebaert, "Medieval Letters and Letter Collections as Historical Sources: Methodological Questions, Reflections, and Research Perspectives (Sixth-Fifteenth Centuries)," in *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy*, vol. 33, ed. Christian Høgel and Elisabetta Bartoli (Brepols Publishers, 2015), 1.

16 Nil Tekgül, *Emotions in the Ottoman Empire: Politics, Society, and Family in the Early Modern Era* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2024), 6.

17 Liz Stanley, "The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences," *Auto/Biography* 12, no. 3 (September 2004): 208, https://doi.org/10.1191/0967550704ab014oa.

18 Ebru Turan, "The Marriage of Ibrahim Pasha (ca. 1495-1536)," *Turcica 41*, no. 0 (2009): 10, https://doi.org/10.2143/TURC.41.0.2049287.

19 İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, vol. 2 (Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1988), 356.

acknowledging that this identification was erroneous and that İbrāḥīm Pasha's wife was, in fact, named Muḥsine Hanım.[20] This identification is further supported by Ebru Turan, who, drawing upon Venetian sources in her dissertation, confirms that İbrāḥīm Pasha was married to Muḥsine Hanım.[21] Unlike earlier assumptions of a dynastic marriage, Muḥsine Hanım was not an Ottoman princess but the granddaughter of İskender Pasha.[22] This standpoint is at odds with the predominant perspective held by certain Ottoman historians. These historians have posited that marital unions during this era were predominantly driven by social, economic, and reproductive factors, perceiving the advent of love marriages as a more contemporary occurrence. While it is conceivable that İbrāḥīm Pasha's matrimony to Muḥsine Hanım was also propelled by pragmatic considerations, such as political alignments and social status, the personal nature of their correspondence indicates that emotional intimacy played a substantial role in their relationship. This distinguishes their union from the typical, purely pragmatic marriages that were prevalent during that period. However, Nil Tekgül challenges this assertion by proposing that individual fulfilment and emotional bonds were indeed present within early modern Ottoman families, albeit expressed in different forms.[23]

İbrāḥīm Pasha, a key figure in the early sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire, was born in Greece and brought to the imperial court as a slave. In 1523, he eventually became the Grand Vizier under Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent, and for the next thirteen years, he governed the empire with authority comparable to that of a second sultan.[24] The role of the grand vizier was to assume the substantial responsibilities of the king's duties.[25] These letters offer a rare glimpse into both the personal and political world of him as an Ottoman Grand Vizier.

Emotions are not universal but are deeply rooted in social and historical contexts, shaped by cultural norms and societal structures. Barbara H. Rosenwein emphasizes that emotional

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20 İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, "Kanuni Sultan Süleyman'ın Vezir-i Azami Makbül ve Maktül İbrahim Paşa Padişah Damadı Değildi," *Belleten* 29, no. 114 (April 1965): 355–62, https://doi.org/10.37879/ttkbelleten.1204192.

21 Ebru Turan, "The Marriage of Ibrahim Pasha (ca. 1495-1536)," *Turcica 41*, no. 0 (2009): 12.

22 Ebru Turan, "The Sultan's Favorite: İbrahim Paşa and the Making of the Ottoman Universal Sovereignty in the Reign of Sultan Süleyman (1516-1526)" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2007), 214.

23 Tekgül, *Emotions in the Ottoman Empire*, 111.

24 For a detailed account of İbrahim Pasha's life and career, see, Hester Donaldson Jenkins, *Ibrahim Pasha: Grand Vizir of Suleiman the Magnificent,* ed. Faculty of Political Science of Columbia University, vol. XLVI, Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law, II (Columbia University Press, 1911), https://archive.org/details/ibrahimpashagran00jenkiala/page/n7/mode/2up?view=theater; Feridun Emecen, "Makbul İbrahim Paşa," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (2000); Aykut Can, *Pargalı'nın Ölümü*, 1st ed. (Yeditepe Yayınevi, 2013), 159; Ebru Turan, "The Sultan's Favorite"; M. Tayyib Gökbilgin, "Arz ve Raporlarına Göre İbrahim Paşa'nın Irakeyn Seferindeki İlk Tedbirleri ve Fütuha"; Kaya Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman: Narrating the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman World*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge University Press, 2013); Kaya Şahin, *Peerless among Princes: The Life and Times of Sultan Süleyman* (Oxford University Press, 2023), doi:10.1093/oso/9780197531631.001.0001; Ayşegül Aydın, "Kanuni Döneminde Bir Veziriazam: Pargalı İbrahim Paşa" (MA thesis, Bursa Uludağ University, 2019).

25 Yasir Yılmaz, "'From Theory to Practice' Origins of the Ottoman Grand Vizierate and the Köprülü Restoration: A New Research Framework for the Office of the Grand Vizier," *Review of Middle East Studies* 57, no. 1 (June 2023): 15, https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2024.19.

expression is influenced by the communities to which individuals belong, thereby challenging the notion of emotions as purely biological.[26] Building upon this, William Reddy introduces the concept of emotive, which posits that the act of expressing emotions actively shapes them rather than merely reflecting internal states. He also explores emotional regimes, the societal norms that govern emotional expression, and emotional refuge, spaces where individuals can express feelings more freely, such as in private letters.[27] Rob Boddice further elaborates on these concepts by contending that emotions are historically dependent, constructed through language, practices, and institutions, rather than existing as fixed psychological states.[28] Collectively, these scholars demonstrate that emotions are not merely personal experiences but are also the result of their historical period, being shaped by the world in which they are expressed.[29] Seen through this lens, emotions, including love and devotion, are historically constructed and vary significantly depending on the context in which they are expressed. In the early modern Ottoman Empire, emotional expressions such as those found in İbrāḥīm Pasha's letters were shaped by specific political, social, and religious frameworks. The present paper historicises these emotional expressions by examining them within the cultural and political realities of the time, thereby revealing emotions to be not only a personal experience but also a performative tool for negotiating power, legitimacy, and familial duty. Given that emotions in elite correspondence were often rhetorical and designed to fulfil social and political purposes, this study adopts a critical approach that considers their performative nature. The study thus demonstrates how the emotions of the Ottoman elite were shaped by the prevailing societal structures and expectations of the era. However, it is important to note the limitations of interpreting these emotions as purely sincere or unmediated expressions.

This study provides a detailed analysis of the eleven letters exchanged between İbrāḥīm Pasha and Muḥsine Hanım. By closely analyzing the language and tone of these letters, this article argues that they were not merely intimate exchanges but also instruments of political and emotional negotiation. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the emotional and political dimensions of sixteenth-century Ottoman elite life, demonstrating how personal relationships were shaped by—and, in turn, influenced—imperial structures. By bridging the gap between personal sentiment and political obligation, these letters illuminate the intricate balance between love, faith, and power within the ruling class of the Ottoman Empire.

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26 Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Cornell University Press, 2007).

27 William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

28 Rob Boddice, *The History of Emotions: Historical Approaches* (Manchester University Press, 2018).

29 For further exploration of the history of emotions, see, Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600-1700* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); Keith Oatley, ed., *Emotions: A Brief History*, Blackwell Brief Histories of Psychology (Blackwell Publishing, 2008); Catherine A. Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod, *Language and the Politics of Emotion*, Studies in Emotion and Social Interaction (Cambridge University Press; Éd. de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1990); Walton, Stuart. *A Natural History of Human Emotions.* Dean Street Press, 2016; Richard Firth-Godbehere, *A Human History of Emotion: How the Way We Feel Built the World We Know*, 1st ed. (Brown Spark, 2021).

The Letters

Letters are embedded within noble culture, emphasizing the significance of literacy, as well as the act of delivering and receiving them. A letter can only fulfill its purpose once it has been read by its intended recipient.[30]

Four of the eleven letters were directly written by İbrāḥīm Pasha himself, as evidenced by differences in handwriting and linguistic features. The letters penned by a *kātib* exhibit neater, more legible handwriting, reflecting the formal training received in Ottoman madrasas. In contrast, the four letters attributed to İbrāḥīm Pasha display less refined handwriting, suggesting they were personally written rather than dictated to a scribe. Beyond the evident differences in handwriting, İbrāḥīm Pasha's formal correspondence exemplifies a unique type of document, exclusive to his tenure as Grand Vizier and a format not adopted by any of his successors. This distinctive style serves to emphasize the unparalleled nature of his position, which remains unmatched by any other Grand Vizier in the history of the Ottoman Empire.[31]

A key distinguishing feature of İbrāḥīm Pasha's personally penned letters is his use of diacritics (vowel marks).[32] In Ottoman Turkish, diacritics were often omitted, particularly by professional scribes, in standard written communication, as the meaning of words could generally be inferred from context.[33] However, İbrāḥīm Pasha's inclusion of diacritics suggests a deliberate effort to distinguish his personal letters from those transcribed by scribes. This stylistic choice may indicate a more intimate and personal tone, reinforcing the notion that these letters were written directly by him rather than dictated. The presence of diacritics could also suggest İbrāḥīm Pasha's desire for precision in conveying his emotions. Letter writers were aware that others beyond the intended recipient might see or hear the contents of their letters. It was not uncommon for private letters, or parts of them, to be read aloud to entire households. Additionally, letters were sometimes opened during the long journey from the writer to the receiver, which often resulted in their privacy being compromised.[34] Given that his letters to Muḥsine Hanım express deep longing and affection,

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30 Von Tippelskirch, *Reading, Interpreting and Historicizing: Letters as Historical Sources*, 74.

31 Gisela Procházka-Eisl and Claudia Römer, *Osmanische Beamtenschreiben und Privatbriefe der Zeit Süleymāns des Prächtigen aus dem Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv zu Wien*, *Denkschriften /* Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Bd. 357 (Verl. d. Österreich. Akad. d. Wissenschaften, 2007), 11.

32 "TSMAe_750-35," November 7, 1535, BOA.

33 Yavuz Kartallıoğlu, "The Relation of Vowel Points and Pronunciation in the Texts of Ottoman Turkish," *Türkoloji Araştırmaları Dergisi* 11, no. 9 (2010): 139; for a detailed account of this topic, see also: Talat Dinar, "Türkçe Yazılmış Arap Harfli Metinlerde Bir İmla Arayışı: Çift Hareke Kullanımı," n.d.; Alper Günaydin, "Harekeli Bir Mi Râciye Nin Dîbâcesi ve Osmanlı Türkçesinin İmlası ve Telaffuzu Hakkında Düşündürdükleri," *Turk Dünyası Dergisi* Bahar 2020, no. 49 (March 16, 2020): 161–84, https://doi.org/10.24155/tdk.2020.133.

34 Klaus Hachmeier, "Private Letters, Official Correspondence: Buyid Insha As Historical Source," *Oxford Center for Islamic Studies* 13, no. 2 (2002): 146.

the use of vowel marks may have been an attempt to ensure his words were read exactly as intended, enhancing their emotional resonance.

This contrasts with the more formal, standardized style of scribe-written letters, where diacritics were omitted as part of conventional bureaucratic practice. Additionally, İbrāḥīm Pasha's use of diacritics may be linked to his multilingual background. As Ottoman Turkish was not his first language, diacritics may have served as an aid for clarity and pronunciation.[35] While professional scribes assumed a high level of linguistic fluency among officials and administrators, İbrāḥīm Pasha's personal writing choices suggest a greater concern for readability and accuracy. Ultimately, İbrāḥīm Pasha's use of diacritics serves as an important indicator of authorship, suggesting both his personal engagement with the act of writing and his emotional investment in the content of these letters. Private letters are more likely to reveal how relationships are shaped and negotiated through written communication.[36] This small but significant detail offers deeper insight into his character—not only as a statesman but also as a devoted husband seeking to express his emotions with precision and sincerity—even though, in the Ottoman context, restraining the excessive display of emotion, particularly by men, appears to have been a significant social norm. Within this framework, emotions were expected to be moderated, with both over-expression and under-expression of feelings considered moral shortcomings.[37]

The language of the letters exchanged between İbrāḥīm Pasha and his wife, Muḥsine Hanım, reveals significant differences between those written by İbrāḥīm Pasha himself and those composed by his *kātib*. The letters penned by the scribe employ a formal, standardized Ottoman official language, adhering to the conventions of elite correspondence. A clear instance of this can be found in the salutation of the scribe-written letters, which begins with **"***Ḥażret-i ḫātūn'ul-mua'ẓẓame***"** (To Her Majesty, the Most Honorable Lady)[38], a conventional and respectful address used for elite Ottoman women.

In contrast, the four letters attributed to İbrāḥīm Pasha himself exhibit a distinctly different tone. These letters eschew the formalities typical of official correspondence, with İbrāḥīm Pasha using intimate and affectionate terms to address Muḥsine Hanım. He writes **"***Ḥażret-i Cānūme daḫī sevdigüme***"** (To my dear one and beloved) and **"***Ḥażret-i Cānum ve Sevdigüm Gözleri Güzel"* (My dear one, my beloved, the [one with] beautiful eyes), signaling a more personal, heartfelt connection. Letters are composed with consideration of the recipient's identity, shaped by the intimacy between the writer and recipient, the foundation of their relationship, and the means by which it is maintained. These factors influence both the content of the letter and the manner in

35 For further details on Ibrahim Pasha's origins and career, refer to; Ebru Turan, "The Sultan's Favorite"; Ebru Turan, "The Marriage of Ibrahim Pasha (ca. 1495-1536)"; M. Tayyib Gökbilgin, "Arz ve Raporlarına Göre İbrahim Paşa'nın Irakeyn Seferindeki İlk Tedbirleri ve Fütuha."

36 Gerber, "Acts of Deceiving and Withholding in Immigrant Letters: Personal Identity and Self Presentation in Personal Correspondence," 315.

37 Tekgül, *Emotions in the Ottoman Empire*, 116.

38 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Ottoman Turkish are the author's own.

which it is expressed.[39] These expressions also suggest that İbrāḥīm Pasha took great care to ensure his letters conveyed intimacy, reinforcing the idea that these were personally written by him, not dictated to a scribe. Letter writers often described their writing as a conversation, while also recognizing the inherent limitations of this form of exchange.[40]

This contrast in language might also reflect İbrāḥīm Pasha's desire to break free from the formal conventions of elite communication when corresponding with his wife. In his official letters, he adheres to the rigid bureaucratic norms of Ottoman statecraft, referring to himself in highly elaborate terms such as *"I am İbrāḥīm Pasha, the deputy of the sultanate and the commander-in-chief of exalted rank, the Grand Vizier, honored with the dignity of the Caliphate."*[41] These official designations emphasize his role as Grand Vizier and his submission to imperial authority. In contrast, İbrāḥīm Pasha's own writing might reflect a more direct, emotional approach. The simultaneous use of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish emotion words may be regarded as the source of this rich vocabulary, highlighting the Ottomans' deep concern with emotions.[42] For instance, İbrāḥīm Pasha refers to longing with *müştāḳ-ı ʿaẓīm* (greatly yearning), affection with *muḥibüküm el-Müştāḳ İbrāhīm* (your loving and longing İbrāḥīm), and sorrow with *köşe-yi ḥicrānda giryān* (weeping in the corner of separation). By using affectionate and informal language, İbrāḥīm Pasha created a more intimate space in his correspondence, where he could express his emotional vulnerability and longing without the constraints of official protocol. *Notably, this marks a striking departure from his official letters, where he refers to himself in highly formalized terms such as* **"** *I am İbrāhīm Pasha, the Grand Vizier and the commander-in-chief of all the imperial provinces, belonging to His Majesty's exalted rank"*[43] *or " I am İbrāhīm Pasha, the deputy of the sultanate and the commander-in-chief of exalted rank, among the grand viziers."*[44] *These official designations emphasize his role as Grand Vizier and his submission to*

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39 Gully, *The Culture of Letter-Writing in Pre-Modern Islamic Society*, 125.

40 Halldórsdóttir, "Fragments of Lives—The Use of Private Letters in Historical Research," 41.

41 *Ben ki kāymaḳām-ı salṭanat ve ser-ʿasker-i sāmī-mertebeti vezīr-i aʿẓam cenāb-ḫilāfet menḳabetleri İbrāhīm Paşayım*"Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha to King Zygmunt" (Letter, 1534), Karton 68 teczka 41 No. 93-94, Archiwum Koronne Warszawskie.

42 Ottoman Turkish, shaped by Arabic and Persian, possesses a rich and nuanced emotional lexicon that defies simple translation. Terms such as *fuʾād* (the innermost heart, denoting intense emotion), *meserret* (refined joy), and *şādmān* (cheerful delight) reflect layered expressions of happiness. For sorrow and pain, *ġuṣṣa* conveys emotional burden or anxiety, while *ḥazīn* suggests deep, melancholic grief. Even words like *kader* (fate or destiny) carry emotional weight, often expressing resignation, divine submission, or spiritual reflection. These terms reveal how emotional states in the Ottoman world were linguistically varied and culturally encoded, and as such, they demand close contextual and lexicographical attention to fully capture their meaning and significance., Nil Tekgül, "Early Modern Ottoman Politics of Emotion: What Has Love Got to Do With It?," *Turkish Historical Review* 10, no. 02–03 (March 16, 2020): 137, https://doi.org/10.1163/18775462-01002006.

43 *Ben ki vezīr-i aʿẓamları ve külliyen memālīk-i maḥrūselerinde cenāb-ı celāletmeʾābları ḳabilinden ʿumemen ser-askerleri olan İbrāhīm Paşayım* "Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha to King Zygmunt I" (Letter, 1531), Karton 67, Teczka 32, No. 72, Archiwum Koronne Warszawskie.

44 *Ben ki kāymakām-ı salṭanat ve ser-ʿasker sāmī-mertebi vüzerāy-ı aʿẓamları İbrāhīm Paşayım* "Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha to King Zygmunt" 1533, Tureckie (1455–1796), Archiwum Koronne Warszawskie.

imperial authority. In contrast, in his letters to Muḥsine Hanım, he abandons such titles in favor of deeply personal and emotional self-references, such as "your loving and longing İbrāḥīm".

Another distinctive feature in the letters written by the *kātib*, as compared to those penned by İbrāḥīm Pasha, is the inclusion of prayers for Muḥsine Hanım, a feature notably absent in İbrāḥīm Pasha's personal correspondence. The scribe often incorporates prayers, such as **"***Edāme'llāhu teʿālī ʿizzetühā ve Zādet'ü ʿişmetühā***"** ("May God Almighty continue to bestow honor upon you and increase your virtues") and *"Zīdetüʿiffetühā ilā yevmi'l-ḥisāb"* ("May her chastity be ever-increasing until the Day of Judgment"). These prayers present the formal and reverential tone characteristic of scribal convention rather than İbrāḥīm Pasha's personal style. It is unlikely that he dictated them directly; rather, the scribe followed established formulas to frame his message in the expected official language —invocations that were common in elite Ottoman correspondence and suggestive of conventions rather than İbrāḥīm Pasha's personal style.[45] In contrast, the letters written by İbrāḥīm Pasha himself lack such religious invocations, emphasizing instead personal expressions of love and longing. The idea of love can be seen as describing one, possibly central, aspect of the Ottoman emotional landscape.[46]

This distinction between scribe-written and personally written letters highlights the dual nature of İbrāḥīm Pasha's identity—as a statesman bound by the formality of his public role, and as a husband seeking emotional connection through more personal communication. The use of diacritics, along with the affectionate language, reinforces the notion that İbrāḥīm Pasha was deeply invested in ensuring his message was conveyed with the precision and emotional weight he intended. In doing so, his letters reveal not only his public persona but also a more intimate and vulnerable side, illustrating the complex intersection of political authority and personal affection in the life of an Ottoman grand vizier. Consequently, correspondence can be understood as a performative act through which the writer constructs and presents a version of the self.[47]

Although the letter written by Muḥsine Hanım is preserved in the archive as a copy rather than the original, the original may have been penned by her own hand. While the handwriting in the extant version is not hers, the language used is notably more personal and intimate than the formal tone typically found in official correspondence. This emotional and affectionate tone can be compared to other letters written by elite Ottoman women, such as Hürrem Sultan's letters to Sultan Süleyman, which convey deep emotions and personal longings.[48] However, it is also

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45 Mübahat S. Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı Belgelerinin Dili: Diplomatik* (Kubbealtı Akademisi Kültür ve San'at Vakfı, 1994), 152.

46 Tekgül, "Early Modern Ottoman Politics of Emotion," 136.

47 Gerber, "Acts of Deceiving and Withholding in Immigrant Letters: Personal Identity and Self Presentation in Personal Correspondence," 320.

48 "TSMA No: 5426/1" (Istanbul, February 21, 974), 745 - 9, TS.MA.e; For further details on the exchange of love letters between Süleyman and Hürrem, see, Christiane Czygan, "Depicting Imperial Love: Love Songs and Letters between Sultan Süleyman (Muhibbi) and Hürrem," in *Suleyman the Lawgiver and His Reign: New Sources, New Approaches*, ed. Mehmet Şakir Yılmaz, Suraiya Faroqhi, and M. Fatih Çalışır (Ibn Haldun Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2021), 247–65.

important to note that the style of women's letters was often subject to variation depending on the recipient. Official correspondence from women to those in positions of power, such as the sultans or viziers, exhibited a more formal and respectful language style, adhering to the expectations of hierarchical communication.[49] Even in personal letters, the power dynamics between men and women, especially in the context of the Ottoman elite, were often reflected in the language used. While personal letters between Muḥsine Hanım and İbrāḥīm Pasha may contain emotional language, they still maintain hierarchical structures that underscore the gender and power divide. İbrāḥīm Pasha, despite the intimacy of the correspondence, uses language that reaffirms his authority and dominance in the relationship. For example, his statement advising "For the sake of your blessed self, I hope you will refrain from attending any feasts or invitations in my absence, as long as it aligns with my desires"[50] might reflect his superior position in both the personal and social hierarchy. This highlights how power dynamics were ingrained in even the most intimate forms of communication.

Muḥsine Hanım, on the other hand, concludes her letter with a signature— "*Muḥibbe el-faḳīr Muḥsine*" ("The humble and lover, Muḥsine")—which further underscores its personal and affectionate nature. In contrast to the official letters penned by scribes, which often featured elaborate blessings, Muḥsine Hanım's letter addresses her husband simply as *"Sulṭānum"* ("My Sultan")—a much more personal and informal salutation.

In conclusion, although İbrāḥīm Pasha's letters to his wife may appear to be personal correspondence, they offer a unique perspective on his emotional state and his relationships. The way he expresses affection and offers advice, while also asserting his authority, illustrates the complexity of balancing personal and political responsibilities. These letters provide a rare glimpse into how İbrāḥīm Pasha navigated his roles as both a statesman and a family member, revealing the emotional labor involved in maintaining his position while upholding family ties. This also suggests that İbrāḥīm Pasha's personal letters were intended solely for Muḥsine Hanım, whereas the scribe-written letters may have been meant for a broader audience, including household members or intermediaries. They also highlight the dual nature of his personality, showcasing how he communicated with his loved ones while simultaneously fulfilling the roles and duties expected of him as a high-ranking official in the Ottoman Empire.

Personal Correspondence as a Medium for Military and Political Updates

Letters were the sole form of communication, where written exchanges had to take the place of face-to-face conversation.[51] In analyzing İbrāḥīm Pasha's correspondence, it is essential to

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49 Jerry Brotton, *The Sultan and the Queen: The Untold Story of Elizabeth and Islam* (Viking, 2016), 187.

50 *saʿādetlü başıñuz içün min baʿd daḥı bizüm rıżāmuz üzere olub biz anda degilken żiyāfet ü daʿvete varmayasız.* "TSMAe_750-35," 1.

51 Liz Williams, *Kind Regards: The Lost Art of Letter-Writing* (Michael O'Mara Books Limited, 2012),

recognize that the emotions conveyed are not merely personal expressions but are shaped by a combination of biological factors and cultural influences. The letters under study are not merely personal expressions of longing and affection but also serve as significant historical documents that provide insight into Ottoman military and political affairs. Beyond their intimate nature, they function as a form of reporting, with personal correspondence doubling as a medium for political and military communication. The act of informing Muḥsine Hanım was an act with clear political implications, as the news she received would be shared within the palace, thereby shaping perceptions of İbrāḥīm Pasha's achievements beyond the scope of official court reports. Furthermore, some of these letters, particularly those written by the scribe, were likely intended for public display, thus allowing İbrāḥīm Pasha to further disseminate his successes and reinforce his image within the imperial court. In this section, I will analyze key extracts from İbrāḥīm Pasha's letters that detail his military progress and strategic decisions. By examining these passages, I will demonstrate how his personal correspondence functioned as a tool for political and military reporting, blurring the lines between personal devotion and statecraft.

In a letter penned by İbrāḥīm Pasha's scribe, we find the following passage:

> Should you wish to ascertain the status of our campaign, it is worth noting that the defeated King (Shah Ismail) was unable to confront the armies of Islam. He was compelled to seek refuge in the city of Hamadan, stripped of his treasures and other possessions, and subsequently fled, humiliated and defeated. As winter set in, the supreme ruler of the world—may his reign be eternal—made the decision to advance towards the conquest of Baghdad. Upon arriving at the destination, with the assistance and grace of the Almighty, the city was successfully conquered, along with its surrounding territories. Several shrines dedicated to various saints and imams were visited and honored, and it has been decided that we shall remain here for the time being. We must acknowledge the role of divine providence in our recent victories, which have allowed us to conquer numerous provinces and lands without any casualties. This success is noteworthy, as it has not been achieved by any other force in quite some time.[52]

In this extract, İbrāḥīm Pasha provides an update on the military campaign, describing the defeat of Shah Ismail (d.1524), the capture of Baghdad, and the strategic success of the Ottoman forces. This portion of the letter functions as a report on the military status, outlining the geographical and political significance of the campaign. İbrāḥīm's use of terms like "*the defeated King*" and the depiction of Shah Ismail's flight paint a picture of the Ottoman victory, while the mention of divine providence underscores the framing of the military success as both an act of faith and conquest. In consideration of the formal tone and content, it can be posited that this

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[52] *...sefer aḥvālından ṣorulursa Şāh-ı maḳhūr ʿasākir-i İslām ile muḳābele eylemege ḳudreti olmamaġın ḳaçub Hemedān nām şehre degin ḳovulub cebeḫānesin ve sāir esbābların döküb gendüsi çıḳub başın alub gidüb maḳhūr ü münhezim oldı bu eṣnāda ḳış irmişken devletlü pādişāh-ı ʿālem-medār ḥażretlerinüñ öñlerüne düşüb ol maḥaldan Baġdād fetḥine ʿazīmet eyleyüb üzerine varılduḳda ol-daḥı ḥaḳḳ celle ve ʿālānuñ ʿavn u ʿināyeti ile tevābiʿ ü levāhiḳı ile fetḥ olınub bunca evliyālaruñ ve imāmlaruñ mezārları ziyāret ü iḥyā olınub şimdilik anda sākin olmaḳ üzerindeyüz el-ḥamdulillāhi ve'l minnetühü ki bu defʿa bizüm elimüzden bunca vilāyetleri vü memleketler fetḥ olınub bir kimesnenüñ daḥı yüzi ḳınamayub bir vechle yüz aḳlıḳları ḥāṣıl oldı ki bir zamānda bir kimesne müyesser olmış degildür…* "TSMAe_750-35," 2.

passage was intended for a more extensive audience than solely his wife, with her serving as a symbolic recipient of the news. It is conceivable that the wife, as a recipient, was more of a literary or 'fictional' construct, reflecting the customary practice in such correspondence to convey significant updates through a private channel, while also ensuring that they could circulate publicly within the palace or court.

This letter serves the dual function of being both an intimate message to his wife and a political report on the progress of the campaign. While Kınalızāde ʿAli (d. 1572), an influential Ottoman scholar and thinker known for his works on ethics and governance, asserts that a husband should refrain from sharing all significant matters with his wife and keep his secrets from her, İbrāhīm's letters reveal a notable exception.[53] In his letters, particularly when he states, "*our location has not been communicated to anyone, and even His Majesty the World-Protecting Sultan remains unaware of our presence*," İbrāḥīm's practice of disclosing military information to his wife, although no longer classified by the time it reaches her, exemplifies a style of communication characterized by intimacy and transparency. This practice unveils the deeply personal nature of his correspondence, wherein matters of strategic importance are entrusted to Muḥsine. While the timing of the letter might have rendered the information no longer confidential, the act of sharing such details underscores the level of trust and emotional intimacy İbrāḥīm had with his wife.

It is evident that İbrāḥīm's incorporation of military triumphs in his correspondence to Muḥsine serves a dual purpose, both informing his wife and acting as a conduit for the dissemination of significant news within the imperial household. The formal nature of certain sections of the letter suggests that it was intended for a broader audience. This framing of his military actions not only reassures Muḥsine of his safety but also underscores the fulfillment of his political and military duties, reinforcing his authority and status in the imperial court.

Several of İbrāḥīm Pasha's letters frame military victories within a religious context. In another letter, again penned by a scribe, he reports:

> Since our arrival, our location has not been communicated to anyone, and even His Majesty the World-Protecting Sultan remains unaware of our presence, as we are still believed to be in Diyarbakır. By the grace of God Almighty and the auspicious prayers of our Sultan, we have successfully captured numerous fortresses from the Qizilbash. However, our dedication to the honor of Islam drives us to seek further conquests. We are committed to offering our lives and resources in service to the Pride of the Two Worlds and to the path of our fortunate Sultan, advancing steadily each day. Currently, we have only a few stops remaining before we reach Tabriz, as the accursed Qizilbash has already retreated to Khurasan.[54]

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53 Ali Efendi, *Ahlâk-ı alâî*, ed. Mustafa Koç, 1st ed., Düşünce Ahlâk Metinleri 1 (Klasik, 2007), 344.

54 *...bizüm bu yerlere geldügümüzden kimesne ḫaberdār degildür devletlü Pādişāh-ı ʿālem-penāh ḥażretlerinüñ daḫı maʿlūm-ı şerīfleri olmayub bizi henüz Diyābakırda taşavvur iderler biz ḫūd ḥaḳḳ ü cell ü ʿālānuñ ʿavn-ı ʿināyetiyle ve Pādişāhımuz ḥażretlerinüñ yümn-i himmetleri ve ḫayr duʿāları berekātıyla Ḳızılbaş-ı laʿīn elinden niçe ḳalʿalar feṭḥ idüb dīn-i İslām ġayretünden anlaruñla daḫı ḳanāʿat gelmeyüb iki cihān faḫrinüñ yüzi ṣevbüne ve ġayretüne ve saʿādetlü Pādişāhımuz ḥażretlerinüñ yoline başımuz u mālımuz fedā eyleyüb günden güne daḫı*

This strategic use of emotions is evident in İbrāḥīm Pasha's correspondence, where he not only expresses personal sentiments but also frames political and military events through emotional language. In reporting military success, he presents the defeat and retreat of Shah Ismail not merely as a tactical achievement but as a humiliating blow to the enemy, reinforcing a narrative of dominance and subjugation. His choice of words— "*compelled to seek refuge*," "*stripped of his treasures*," and "*fled, humiliated, and defeated*"—suggests the narrative of Ottoman superiority, bolstering the image of the Ottoman Empire as an unstoppable force in the region.

More importantly, İbrāḥīm Pasha seamlessly integrates religious legitimacy into the narrative. By attributing the success of the campaign to "*the grace of God Almighty*," he reinforces the idea that Ottoman military expansion was not merely driven by political ambition but also by divine will. İbrāḥīm Pasha's reference to honoring "*several shrines dedicated to various saints and imams*" ties his military success to a form of religious piety. This act of devotion, while deeply personal in tone, also carries political significance. Yet such emotional language must be approached with caution: as elite correspondence, these letters likely include performative elements designed to project loyalty, piety, and devotion to the Sultan, rather than offer unmediated glimpses into İbrāḥīm's genuine private self.

As argued earlier, letters written by scribes were often intended for broader circulation, especially within the court. By including details of his military successes and framing them in the context of divine favor and the Sultan's blessings, İbrāḥīm would have been careful to convey that these victories were not solely his own doing. Instead, they were achieved with the help of Allah and the Sultan's prayers and support. This framing not only demonstrates his humility and piety but also solidifies his loyalty to the Sultan, ensuring that his public image remains one of devotion, not arrogance. He may claim ownership of these victories, but in a way that acknowledges the higher powers involved, reinforcing his place within the political and religious hierarchy.

İbrāḥīm Pasha also offers detailed descriptions of battlefield encounters, as seen in the following extract from a formal letter penned by his scribe:

> If you inquire about our current situation, it should be mentioned that previously, when we marched against the Qizilbash from the direction of Baghdad, by the grace of the Almighty, we encountered no opposition and safely reached Tabriz. After arriving in Tabriz, we then proceeded towards the city of Hamedan, where a battleground lay between us. Among our brave men, many distinguished themselves, engaging in battle and severing the heads of several lords, but the enemy, having lost their resolve, fled to the Serb mountains, taking their heads with them. Indeed, the grace of Almighty God and the support of the saints has accompanied us, causing our enemies to become weak and despicable, abandoning their crowns and thrones, and fleeing like thieves from one mountain to another. We, too, have placed our complete trust in the Almighty and, on the seventh day of the month of Safar, returned from the city of Dargazin to the city of Tabriz. From Tabriz, on the twenty-seventh day of the month of Safar, we set out, traveling day and night, intending to reach our homeland and city.[55]

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ilerüye yüriyüb şimdiki-ḫālde Tebrīze bir iki menzil ḳalmışdur Ḳızılbaş-ı laʿīn ḫūd Ḫorsāsāna çıḳub gidüb başı kapusı olmışdur… "TSMAe_750-35," 1.

55 *...şimdiki-ḫālde ḳanda olduġımuzdan istifṣar buyurılursa muḳaddemā Baġdād cānibünden ḳalḳub Ḳızılbaşuñ üzerine yürüdigümüzde ḥaḳḳ teʿālānuñ ʿināyeti ile ḳarşumuza ṭurmayub Tebrīz[e] çıḳub biz daḫı Tebrīz şehrine*

This communication serves as a progress report for İbrāḥīm's wife, yet it also carries a broader public dimension, particularly when one considers the letters dictated to the scribe. İbrāḥīm's statement about the fleeing enemy—described as "*weak and despicable*"—further strengthens his public persona by framing his military leadership as both victorious and decisive. Moreover, the use of specific details about the battle, *"engaging in battle and severing the heads of several lords,"* not only underscores the severity and scale of the conflict but also emphasizes İbrāḥīm's control over the situation. Additionally, the detailed descriptions of military victories, the movement of the army, and the reference to the enemy's humiliation make the letter a form of political reporting. Therefore, the expressions of love and compassion by Ottoman delegates appear to reflect the emotional dynamics of statecraft in the early modern Ottoman political context, demonstrating that emotions were not separate from governance but were actively employed as tools of power and persuasion.[56]

Unlike the formal letters, this passage comes from a personally penned note by İbrāḥīm, where he writes:

> If you wish to know where we are at present, we are currently in the protected city of Baghdad. By the grace of Allah, these lands have been conquered as intended: the territories of Persia and Iraq, especially the throne of Baghdad, along with its cities, castles, settlements, and surrounding regions, have all been captured. With Allah's help, may success continue to accompany us and may further victories follow.[57]

İbrāḥīm reports that he is 'currently in the protected city of Baghdad' and mentions territorial conquests in 'Persia and Iraq, especially the throne of Baghdad'—a message that serves both as a personal update to Muḥsine and as a strategic communication likely intended for broader circulation within the court. This paragraph from his letter does more than provide location details—it asserts the permanence and legitimacy of Ottoman rule over the newly conquered lands.[58] While the letters are addressed to his wife, their content was likely intended to be shared or circulated within the palace, using her as a conduit to influence broader perceptions of his success. The blending of personal concerns with military achievements in these letters serves two functions: firstly, it demonstrates İbrāḥīm's strategic communication with his wife; and secondly,

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geldügimüzden ṣoñra ardunca İlġār ile ḳuduḳ Hemedān şehrine vardı aramızda bir meydān bir ḳalçıḳ ādemlerimüzden niçe bahādırlar irişüb ceng idüb niçe beglerinüñ başların kesüb getürdiler arṭuḳ ṭurmaġa ṭaḳatı ḳalmayub ḳaçub Ṣırp ṭaġlara düşüb başın alub gitdi çünki Allāh teʿālānuñ ʿināyeti ve evliyālaruñ himmetleri bize yoldaş oldı düşmenimüz ḫōr u ḥaḳīr olub ṭac u taḫtın bıraġub ḥarāmī gibi ṭaġdan ṭaġa düşüb gitdi biz daḫı ḥaḳḳ cell üʿālāya tevekkül idüb şefer āyınuñ yedinci güni Dergüzīn şehrinden dönüb yine şehr-i Tebrīze geldük Tebrīzden daḫı şefer āyınuñ yigirmi yedinci güni göçüb gece ü gündüz yüriyüb memleketimüze ve şehrimüze irişmek üzereyüz... Ibid., 5.

56 Tekgül, "Early Modern Ottoman Politics of Emotion," 146.

57 *...ḳanda olduġumuzdan istifsār olınursa şimdilik maḥrūse-yi Baġdādda olub ḥaḳḳ ü cell üʿālānuñ ʿavn uʿināyeti ile bu diyārlar murād üzere olub diyār-ıʿAcem üʿIrāḳ-ıʿArab ḫuṣūṣen Baġdād taḫtıʿumūmen şehirleri ü ḳalʿaları u tevābiʿ ü livācıḳı ile feṭḥ olınub inşāllahu'l-ʿizz min baʿd daḫı envāʿ-ı yüz aḳlıḳları ḥāṣıl olmuş ola...* "TSMAe_750-35," 11.

58 For the concept of legitimizing the Ottoman state, see, Hakan T. Karateke, "Legitimizing the Ottoman Sultanate: A Framework for Historical Analysis," in *Legitimizing the Order: The Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, ed. Hakan T. Karateke and Maurus Reinkowski (Brill, 2005), 13–52.

it reinforces his political standing. This delicate balancing act might reflect the intricate interweaving of personal relationships with political strategies, thereby suggesting that İbrāḥīm Pasha's personal letters also functioned as a tool for political reporting, thereby shaping perceptions of his power and influence within the imperial court.

Faith, Spiritual Bond, and Emotional Support

In examining the letters between İbrāḥīm Pasha and Muḥsine Hanım, one of the most striking aspects is the profound spiritual and emotional bond that transcends their physical separation. While these letters certainly serve as channels for military updates and political communication, they also reveal a deeper layer of emotional connection rooted in faith. Prayer, in particular, emerges as a central element of their relationship, acting not only as a religious duty but also as a means of providing emotional comfort and spiritual support.[59] Prayer constitutes a pivotal aspect of Muslim life, with the Quran and Sunnah underscoring its benefits in enhancing well-being, mitigating stress, and augmenting productivity.[60] In the absence of physical closeness, religious practices like prayer provide both a means of comfort and a way of sustaining their emotional connection. This section explores how faith, prayer, and spiritual devotion serve as conduits for emotional connection in İbrāḥīm and Muḥsine's relationship. Through these letters, we see how faith becomes a source of emotional support, a way to nurture their connection, and a reflection of the deeply personal and emotional ties that define their relationship.

İbrāḥīm's own handwriting appears in this letter, where he conveys his steadfast prayers for Muḥsine, signifying his profound concern and unwavering devotion to her from a distance. *"Night and day, we are devoted to praying for your well-being."*[61]

As stated by Ottoman scholar of the sixteenth-century, Kınalızāde, an ideal wife should serve as a companion, assistant, and partner in establishing and maintaining order within the family. In her husband's absence, she should take on the role of head and protector of the household, and when he is present, she should be his advisor and confidant.[62] This dynamic can also be observed in the relationship between İbrāḥīm and Muḥsine, in which emotional connection is sustained despite physical separation. Prayer, in this context, serves as a means of reaffirming their bond, both as an expression of care and a way to remain spiritually and emotionally connected across

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59 Firth-Godbehere, *A Human History of Emotion*, 100.

60 M. Ashraf Al-Haq et al., "Islamic Prayer, Spirituality, And Productivity: An Exploratory Conceptual Analysis," *8*, no. 2 (July 2016): 271–86.

61 *...gece ü gündüz ol cānibün ḫayr duʿāsı işṭiġāl[ın]dayuz...* "TSMAe_750-35," 3. For the full version of this specific letter, including transcription and English translation, see Nilab Saeedi, "Yours Sincerely, the Grand Vizier: A Compendium of İbrāhīm Paşa's Letter Weaving Love and Longing," *Keshif* 3, no. 1 (2025): 77–85, https://doi.org/10.25365/kshf-25-01-10.

62 Ali Efendi, *Ahlâk-ı alâî*, 344.

distance. For İbrāḥīm, prayer is a consistent source of emotional support, knowing that he is spiritually cared for, regardless of the physical distance, as he writes:

> It is expected of your esteemed presence that you will not forget us, and from time to time, we are delighted to receive news from you that brings joy to our hearts. Your kindness and good wishes make us happy and content, filling our lives with various forms of happiness, admiration, and all kinds of pleasure and joy.[63]

In a context where physical touch and presence are impossible, prayer becomes the medium through which intimacy is expressed and felt. By emphasizing this constant devotion to prayer, the letter shows that their emotional dependency on one another is rooted in their shared faith. The more distant they become physically, the more they seem to rely on prayer as the primary means of sustaining their intimacy. In one of his more intimate letters drafted by his scribe, İbrāḥīm poignantly expresses his longing for Muḥsine's presence, writing:

> We sincerely hope that we may always behold your countenance. From the sublime presence of the Almighty, we beseech Him to grant us the grace of beholding your radiant visage (liḳāʾ-ı ṣafā baḫşıñuz), so that it may bestow upon this sorrowful heart (ḳalb-ı ḥazīnımuza)[64] a variety of joys and blessings. Amen, O merciful.[65]

İbrāḥīm's hope to "*always behold your countenance*" reveals a sense of longing for Muḥsine's presence, emphasizing how her absence weighs on him emotionally, though such language may also reflect the performative conventions of elite epistolary expression rather than unmediated emotional weight. The phrase "*sorrowful heart*" conveys a sense of emotional vulnerability, suggesting that the physical distance between them causes him distress. However, by turning to faith and invoking God's help to grant him the joy of seeing her again, İbrāḥīm transforms his emotional longing into a spiritual act of hope and devotion.

In another letter, İbrāḥīm Pasha emphasizes the critical role of mutual prayer in both his military endeavors and his personal connection with Muḥsine. He writes: "I hope you will remember to pray for us, and with God's will, we will achieve further victories, enabling us to return safely and be honored by your blessed presence."[66]

İbrāḥīm's request for Muḥsine to pray for him and his forces may signal emotional vulnerability and reliance—but it also aligns with the rhetorical norms of the period, in which such

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63 *cenāb-i mükerremet-niṣābıñuzdan mercūdür ki bu cānib-i ferāmūş buyurmayub gāh gāh iḫbār-ı messeret-āṣārger ile iʿlām olınub envāʿ-ı behcet ü ġıbṭa ve eṣnāf-ı ferḥan u meserret ile şādmān ü mesrūr eyleyesüz* "TSMAe_750-35," 11.

64 *ḥazīn*" is a powerful Arabic term that goes beyond simple sadness. It can be translated as sad, sorrowful, melancholic, grief-stricken, and it conveys a profound emotional weight. Unlike everyday sadness, ḥazīn implies a deep, often overwhelming sorrow, accompanied by a sense of heaviness and emotional burden. It reflects an intense feeling of grief, often with a visible or palpable sense of loss or longing, making it a much stronger and more enduring emotion than ordinary sadness.

65 *...cenāb-ı ḥaḳḳ ü cell ü ʿālā dergāhından teżarruʿ u niyāzımuz budur ki müşāhede-i liḳāʾ-ı ṣafā baḫşıñuz ḫayrle muḳadder ü müyesser olub bu ḳalb-ı ḥazīnımuza envāʿ-ı surūr u ḫubūrler ḥāṣıl ola āmīn yā muʿīn...* Ibid., 2.

66 *...dāimā bu cānibe ḫayr duʿādan ferāmūş buyurmayasız ki inşāllahu'l-ʿizz min baʿd daḥı envāʿ-ı fetḥ ü fütūhler ve yüz aḳlıḳları ḥāṣıl olub...* Ibid., 1.

appeals reinforced piety and mutual duty within elite relationships. By specifically linking his hope for victory and safe return to Muḥsine's prayers, he is expressing that her spiritual support is integral to his well-being and success. In a personal letter written in his own hand, İbrāḥīm Pasha reinforces his commitment to spiritual protection and emotional reassurance, stating: "Night and day, our deepest need before Allah is that He protect you from all calamities and grant you eternal peace and stability, as long as this world endures. Amen, O Lord of the Worlds."[67]

In the Islamic tradition, *duʿā* (prayer) occupies a central role not only in religious practice but also in personal and family bonds. It is a common practice to pray for the well-being of loved ones, especially in times of need. Such acts may reflect care, support, and emotional attachment.[68] In the context of the Ottoman Empire, this practice assumed a central role in maintaining connections during periods of physical separation, as in the case of İbrāḥīm Pasha and Muḥsine Hanım. Their shared faith and prayer in their correspondence serve to show how prayer functioned as a means of maintaining emotional closeness despite distance, turning prayer requests into intimate expressions of emotional dependence.

Power and Separation: The Physical and Emotional Distance

In the classical world, letters served a variety of purposes, initially created to facilitate communication across long distances.[69] This theme of physical separation is particularly evident in the letters exchanged between İbrāḥīm Pasha and his wife, Muḥsine, where both physical and emotional distance are strongly emphasized.[70] Despite İbrāḥīm's high-ranking position as the Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire, which necessitated his absence for political and military duties, the letters suggest his emotional vulnerability and yearning for his wife's presence. Muḥsine, on her part, is equally affected by the absence of her husband, expressing deep sorrow and longing in her correspondence. This passage comes from an intimate letter, handwritten by İbrāḥīm himself, he expresses the anguish caused by his physical separation from his beloved wife, Muḥsine, writing:

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67 *...gece ü gündüz dergāh-ı ḥaḳḳdan ḥācetimüz budur ki sizleri cemʿī āfetlerden ṣaḳlayub dünyā durduḳça dāim ü ber-ḳarār eyleye āmīn yā rabb'ul-ʿālemīn...* Ibid., 9.

68 Gully, *The Culture of Letter-Writing in Pre-Modern Islamic Society*, 167.

69 Charles Bazerman, "Letters and the Social Grounding of Differentiated Genres," in *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*, ed. Nigel Hall and David Barton (John Benjamins Publishing Co, 2000), 19.

70 Before analyzing the emotional content of these letters, it is important to consider their rhetorical nature. In elite Ottoman correspondence, expressions of emotion—such as longing, sorrow, or devotion—often followed stylized conventions. Rather than offering unfiltered insight into İbrāḥīm's or Muḥsine's interior lives, such language may have served political or social purposes, including the reinforcement of loyalty, piety, and elite identity. This section therefore approaches these emotional statements with critical attention to their possible performative functions.

> But alas, my beloved, if news of blessings does not reach us, it brings great sorrow (eyü degüldür)[71]. I dreamt of an unpleasant day for your sake, and I endured that grief (ġūṣṣa)[72] for you, my beloved, as you had penned. Yet, without you, neither my day is a day nor my night is a night—Allah knows.[73]

There is a temporal gap between the act of writing and the moment of reception, as well as differences in discursive style compared to face-to-face communication, including the absence of facial expressions in letters.[74] Given these limitations, letters become powerful vessels for emotional longing. In the Ottoman elite, extreme displays of grief were seen as dishonorable. The importance of emotional restraint, particularly in a man's expression of love for a woman, was so significant that mourning for a beloved wife through tears was considered shameful. Crying for a woman was viewed not as a verbal expression of emotion, but as a physical act of emotional display.[75] In contrast, İbrāḥīm Pasha, for instance, vividly expresses the deep sorrow he feels in the absence of positive news from his wife, with the emotional weight intensified by the medium. The physical distance between them becomes a powerful symbol of the emotional void and personal sacrifice that accompany his public duties.

The extract in question appears to express İbrāḥīm Pasha's emotional sorrow, potentially revealing the deep bond he sought to portray with his wife—though such expressions may also reflect the rhetorical conventions of elite correspondence. Ali Anooshahr raises the question of how warriors and administrators managed their emotional impulses within the framework of governance and military leadership. The chronicles illustrate that, rather than relying on mathematics or logic, it was often a set of duties and obligations that governed discussions of emotions within the ruling elite.[76] In this context, İbrāḥīm's intense emotional longing—articulated through a poignant expression of sorrow and incomplete existence—might be presented as reflecting the heavy price of his political and military obligations. Through this lens, İbrāḥīm Pasha's personal correspondence becomes a dual narrative: one that documents both his public duty and the personal, emotional toll that such duty exacts. It can be argued that İbrāḥīm Pasha expressed different aspects of himself through his letters. The question thus arises of whether

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71 *Eyü degüldür*" literally translates to "it is not good" or "it is not pleasant." While this phrase does not directly mean "sorrow," in this context, it implies that the absence of good news or blessings will bring about emotional distress. İbrāḥīm Paşa suggests that the lack of pleasant news will lead to sorrow, making the emotional impact clear through the underlying connection between discomfort and the anticipated feeling of sorrow.

72 "*ġūṣṣa*" can encompass various emotional states, including sorrow, grief, sadness, or anxiety. In this context, the word signifies a profound emotional pain, and while it could encompass all these meanings, "grief" most accurately captures the intensity of the sorrow that İbrāḥīm Paşa expresses. The term here emphasizes not just a fleeting emotion, but a deep, enduring heartache, reflecting the significant personal cost of the suffering endured.

73 *...ammā āh benüm çoḳ sevdigüm eger bereket ḫāberi gelmezse eyü degüldür ben bir düş gördüm sevdicegüm içün ḫoş olmadügüñüze ol ġūṣṣaya çekerdüm şu diyü da yazmışsız ammā ne günüm gündür ne gecem gecedür Allāh bilür...* "TSMAe_750-35," 3.

74 Stanley, "The Epistolarium," 213.

75 Tekgül, *Emotions in the Ottoman Empire*, 116.

76 Ali Anooshahr, "Letter-Writing and Emotional Communities in Early Mughal India: A Note on the *Badāyi' al-Inshā*," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 44, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 3, https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2021.1857573.

certain letters reveal İbrāḥīm Pasha's true feelings and personal struggles, or whether they are shaped by his political role and obligations, blurring the line between genuine emotion and the fulfilment of duty. This is a crucial topic, particularly given İbrāḥīm Pasha's eventual downfall. His excessive arrogance, resulting from the immense power he gained, ultimately led to his execution by Sultan Süleymān. The accounts of his execution, as conveyed by his close associates Celālzāde Muṣṭafā and later Gelibolulu Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī, support the idea that İbrāḥīm's growing arrogance contributed to his fate. [77]

In light of this, we can argue that İbrāḥīm Pasha may have sought to strengthen his image as a sincere servant of the Sultan while he was still alive, attempting to present himself as humble despite his rising power Additionally, it is crucial to recognize letters not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for self-reflection and identity construction.[78]

Meanwhile, Muḥsine's letters reveal the emotional emptiness left by İbrāḥīm's absence, heightening the sense of separation she feels. "However, my spirit trembles, unsure of what to do in this moment of distance. My only wish is for your well-being, in this life."[79]

Mushine's trembling spirit is a powerful metaphor for the anxiety and helplessness she experiences due to their enforced separation. İbrāḥīm's role as a military leader requires his prolonged absence, which in turn causes such emotional distress for his loved ones. The extract thus illuminates how the separation necessitated by political obligations not only weakens physical proximity but also exacts a heavy emotional toll on those left behind. Muḥsine further elaborates on the toll of separation in another passage:

> The peace of my heart (ciger-güşe)[80], Mehmed Shah, prays endlessly for you and sends his longing. Allah knows this well. Since you have left, Mehmed Shah misses you dearly and is greatly troubled by your absence.[81]

Muḥsine conveys that the pain of separation is not confined solely to herself but is shared across the family. This shared longing highlights how physical separation profoundly affects not just the individual but the entire familial unit. It suggests that the emotional suffering, while deeply personal, is recognized as part of the broader burden carried by those who serve the empire. From

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77 Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî, *Künhü'l-Ahbâr 4. Rükün*, ed. Derya Örs, vol. 5 (Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2024), 338.

78 Janet Maybin, "Death Row Penfriends: Some Efects of Letter Writing on Identity and Relationships," in *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*, ed. Nigel Hall and David Barton (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co, 2000), 152.

79 *...ḫavf iderüz elden ne gelür hemān murādımuz dünyāda ṣıḥḥatıñuzdur...*"TSMAe_750-53," November 7, 1534, BOA.

80 "*Ciger-güşe*" is a Persian phrase that literally translates to "the side of the liver", with "liver" being a metaphor for the heart in many cultures, symbolizing the emotional core of a person. The term is often used to refer to a child or a loved one, conveying immense love and affection. It signifies someone who holds a special place in the heart, emphasizing a deep emotional attachment and care.

81 *...ciger-güşe Meḥmed Şāh bī-ḥadd duʿālar idüb iştiyāḳlar ʿarż ider ḥaḳḳ ʿalīmdür ḫażretiñüz devletle gidilden berü Meḥmed Şāh sizleri özlenüb bī-ḫużūr olur...* Ibid.

a brain chemistry standpoint, it is evident that bonding and separation are fundamental components of human emotional experience.[82] The repeated expressions of sorrow, longing, and the desire for reunion in their letters are written to reflect not only personal affection but also the deeper emotional and psychological toll that distance places on their relationship. From the outset, İbrāḥīm's power was vast; his appointment as the Grand Vizier, along with the governorship of Rumelia, established his clear monopoly on authority.[83] In this context, the emotional distance portrayed in these letters is not just a matter of personal longing but a reflection of the political and military sacrifices that come with power.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the letters exchanged between İbrāḥīm Pasha and Muḥsine Hanım offer a rare and complex insight into the dual nature of elite life in the Ottoman Empire. Beyond their emotional expressions of love and longing, these letters serve as vital documents that illustrate the intersection of personal sentiment with political and military obligations. The affectionate language used by İbrāḥīm Pasha is not simply a reflection of personal devotion but likely also strategically demonstrates his reliance on Muḥsine Hanım's prayers and spiritual support, which he sees as central to his sense of legitimacy and well-being. These letters were not just private exchanges—they also functioned as important political tools. Through the detailed updates on military campaigns, governance, and personal matters, İbrāḥīm navigates the delicate balance between fulfilling his high-ranking responsibilities and maintaining a strong emotional connection with his wife. The correspondence illustrates how elite Ottoman relationships were shaped by political and military duties, where separation from loved ones was often framed as a necessary sacrifice for the state. The analysis of these letters deepens our understanding of how the personal lives of Ottoman officials were intertwined with the political, military, and religious systems within which they operated. It reveals how emotional bonds, faith, and duty were inseparable in the lives of those in power. Ultimately, the letters between İbrāḥīm Pasha and Muḥsine Hanım offer a powerful example of how love, faith, and political power coexisted within the elite circles of the Ottoman Empire, demonstrating that personal relationships were not only shaped by imperial structures but also had the potential to influence them. This study contributes to the history of emotions in the early modern Ottoman Empire by offering a rare close reading of elite correspondence that reveals how emotional expression was deeply embedded in imperial structures. The originality of this

82 Andrews and Dalyan, "Poetry, Culture, Neuroscience, Emotions, and the Case of Bonding, Separation, and Separation Anxiety in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Culture: A Theoretical Preface," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 7, no. 2 (2020): 153, https://doi.org/10.2979/jottturstuass.7.2.10.

83 Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire,* Studies in Middle Eastern History (Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 74.

article lies in its analysis of a little-known set of letters, which illuminate the emotional strategies and spiritual dependencies of a Grand Vizier—an angle rarely explored in Ottoman studies.

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In this work, AI-assisted tools were used to a limited extent, exclusively to assist in rephrasing certain sentences, within the acceptable boundaries specified in the *Nesir: Journal of Literary Studies* Artificial Intelligence Usage Policy. All content was carefully reviewed and finalized by the author, ensuring the accuracy and integrity of the work.

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