

# Anatomy of a Rebellion in Sixteenth-Century Egypt: A Case Study of Ahmed Pasha's Governorship, Revolt, Sultanate, and Critique of the Ottoman Imperial Enterprise

*Side Emre* \*

*On altıncı Yüzyıl Mısırı'nda Bir İsyanın Anatomisi: Ahmet Paşa'nın Valiliği, İsyanı, Saltanatı ve Osmanlı Emperyal Teşebbüsünün Bir Eleştirisi*

Öz ■ Bu makale Mısır'ın Osmanlı valisi Ahmed Paşa'nın (ölümü 1524) kısa süren valiliği, isyanı, ve saltanatının mikro-tarihsel bir çalışmasıdır. Çalışma isyanın Mısır ve Osmanlı'yı etkileyen içeriğini ve sonuçlarını araştırır. Bu isyan Mısır'ın Memlûklülerden 1517'de alınması sonrasında etkileri zaman içinde görülen Osmanlı idari sistemine karşı çıkışı göstermesi açısından önemlidir. Dönemin politik tarihi açısından önemi olmasına rağmen bugüne dek bu isyan on altıncı yüzyıl Osmanlı tarihsel çalışmalarında ele alınmamıştır. Ahmed Paşa'nın isyanı Osmanlı emperyal zihniyetine ve hâkimiyetine karşı bir duruşu temsil eder. Bu duruş Mısır'da Memlûk rejimi sonrasında görülen ve devletçe özellikle Mısır bürokrasisinde ve yerel hükümette uygulamaya sokulan "Osmanlılaşma" sorunsalını irdeleyerek alternatif bir yönetim biçimini öne sürer. Makalenin amaçlarından biri isyanın politik içeriğini yorumlamaktır. Bu içerik imparatorluğun merkezini periferisine bağlar ve Osmanlı egemenliği altında Mısır'ın sosyo-politik dinamiklerini tekrar gözden geçirmemize yardım eder. Bu makale, devlet tarafından çerçeveleri belirlenmiş hükümet yanlısı anlatıların yanı sıra Mısır'da yazılmış tarih metinlerinin de karşılaştırmalı analizinin yapılması sayesinde isyanla ilgili bilgilerimize nüans getirmektedir. Devlet odaklı anlatılar eskiden Memlûk hükmünde olan toprakların Osmanlı yönetimine hızlı ve kusursuz bir şekilde geçtiğini savunmaktadırlar. Bu makalede gösterilmiş olduğu üzere, Ahmed Paşa isyanı ve saltanatı Osmanlı'ya karşı güçlü bir muhalefet sesi, Osmanlı'nın Mısır hâkimiyetine ve Mısır'ın Osmanlılaştırılmasına karşı yapılmış olan ideolojik bir kritiği ve meydan okumayı teşkil eder.

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The tenure, rebellion, and sultanate of the Ottoman governor of Egypt, Ahmed Pasha (d.1524) – which occurred during the first decade following the region's 1517 Ottoman conquest – remains in the scholarly margins of historiography today despite its importance in showcasing a public and intense critique of, and challenge against, the Ottoman imperial enterprise in the Arab lands.<sup>1</sup> Ahmed Pasha's career in the Ottoman courts of Sultan Selim and Süleyman began as an illustrious one. Coming from Albanian origins, he was placed in the palace service and steadily rose through the inner palace ranks: first as an *iç-oğlanı* (foreign *devşirme* recruit, youths who served in the sultan's household) during Selim's tenure; then served as *büyük mîr-i âkhûr* (master of the great stable), to be appointed as the governor of Rumelia in 1519, thus becoming one of the highest-ranking officials serving the sultan in military and administrative capacities.<sup>2</sup> Later on he assisted in the Belgrade campaign of Sultan Süleyman, which resulted in his promotion to one of the vizierial positions of the imperial council in 1521. During the 1522 Rhodes campaign, he served as the commander in chief. As a reward for his military acumen and administrative success, he expected to become the first vizier of the imperial council, following the fall of Piri Pasha. However, he was deeply offended and frustrated when Süleyman appointed his *hâşş oda-başı*

- 1 Scholarship examining dissent and rebellions against the early modern Ottoman state – such as the Celâlî uprisings – is extensive and focuses on a variety of factors, such as demographic shifts/growth/crisis, socio-economic causes, and political developments that resulted in the devastation of Anatolia in the 16th-17th centuries. For an overview, see Oktay Özel, "Population Changes in Ottoman Anatolia during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries: The 'Demographic Crisis' Reconsidered", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 36, no: 2 (2004): 183-205. For the revolt, see Seyyid Muhammed es-Seyyid Mahmud, *XVI. Asırda Mısır Eyâleti* (Istanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Basımevi, 1990), 77-81 (*Mısır Eyaleti*.) Research on the early decades of Ottoman rule is scarce. See my forthcoming monograph (under review with a publisher) tentatively titled, *Power Brokers and Pious Entrepreneurs: The Halveti-Gülşeni Order of Dervishes in Mamluk Egypt and the Ottoman Empire, c. 1440-1650 (Power Brokers)*, Chapter Four.
- 2 For Ahmed Pasha's vitae and his revolt see Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, *Künhül-Abbâr*, Dördüncü Rûkn; Osmanlı Tarihi; Tıpkıbasım (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 2009), 276b-277b (*Künhül-Abbâr*.)

(head of the privy chamber in the palace) and *muṣāhib* (companion) İbrahim Pasha to the much-coveted position instead. His frustration was neither entirely baseless or misplaced. Apart from being a confidante to Süleyman, İbrahim Pasha had no prior experience in either administration or the military, nor did he have any credentials to be elevated to the highest appointed office in the government. Ahmed Pasha's career took a fateful turn after he left Istanbul to serve as Egypt's governor. He revolted against Süleyman and declared his own sultanate. His rule ended after he was caught and executed by men loyal to the Ottoman sultan.<sup>3</sup> In this article, I re-examine the controversial Ahmed Pasha episode to illuminate the overarching theme of opposition to the Ottoman imperial enterprise, with a focus on the challenges brought against the "Ottoman way" in the early sixteenth century.

One of my goals is to understand the political context that resulted in the revolt which connects the empire's "center" with its "periphery" and rethink Egypt's socio-political dynamics during the first decades of Ottoman rule. In doing so, I analyze several interrelated issues. First, to contextualize the revolt, I focus on the political events as well as the contemporaneous commentary on Ahmed Pasha's appointment to Egypt. Second, I examine the administrative changes he instituted there, with an emphasis on his accomplishments, agendas, and dialogues with different audiences in Egypt and İstanbul. Third, I propose a reconstruction of the revolt and its aftermath; this includes an analysis of the initial grey zone before the actual revolt was declared, during which the scope and impact of Ahmed Pasha's actions remained unclear; the revolt itself, with the groups that participated in it, and how it was put down. Lastly, I evaluate the political repercussions of the revolt and Ahmed Pasha's brief sultanate on the eve of Süleyman's grand vizier İbrahim Pasha's (d.1536) arrival in Egypt.

Revisiting Ahmed Pasha's revolt within two contexts – that of Süleyman's early rule and of the perceptions of observers in the newly conquered province of Egypt – will bring nuance to our understanding of the swift and seamless depictions of the Ottoman imperial success in former Mamluk-ruled territories. As I demonstrate in this article, Ahmed Pasha presented a powerful voice of dissent and critique of Ottoman claims of sovereignty, as well as the implementation of the "Ottoman way" in Egypt. As the sources depict, if it had not been for the pasha's escalating mental instability and loss of favorable public opinion, his 'alternative'

3 For his vitae, see Halil İnalçık, "Aḥmad Pasha Khāin." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, 2014 (*EF*).

sultanate might have had enough support to sustain itself, thus posing an even greater challenge to the house of Osman and its claims of legitimate sovereignty over former Mamluk and Muslim Arab/Egyptian populations.

### **A brief analysis of the primary sources**

One of the primary historical narratives I utilize for this article was authored by ‘Abdü’ş-Şamed bin Seyyidī ‘Alī ed-Diyārbekrī – an Ottoman judge and historian.<sup>4</sup> Diyarbekri got acquainted with members of the Ottoman administration while living and working in Cairo between 1517 and c.1540s. Writing at the time of the revolt and İbrahim Pasha’s 1525 expedition to Egypt, Diyarbekri details the revolt, its context, and Ahmed Pasha’s sultanate, but refrains from giving direct references to public opinion that might tarnish the image of Ahmed Pasha’s nemesis, İbrahim Pasha. Additionally, Diyarbekri had been a protégé and close ally of İbrahim Pasha’s treasurer, İskender Çelebi (d.1535), with whose patronage he traveled to and stayed in İstanbul as a guest post-1525. Nevertheless, despite its clear pro-Ottoman agendas, Diyarbekri penned a rare first-hand account of early sixteenth-century Ottoman-ruled Egypt that makes it an insightful source. While Diyarbekri’s text may fall into the chronicle genre, it also provides us with interesting storylines, ones which include not only detailed timelines, but also the mentalities and opinions of people who participated in the events, who were influenced by them, and who impacted their outcomes. As far as investigating the perspectives from the “periphery” goes, Diyarbekri’s chronicle is priceless.

To put Diyarbekri in perspective, I also consult hagiographical and other historical sources. The first of these belongs to the prolific author-dervish of the Cairene Halveti-Gülşenis, Muhyi (d.ca.1606), who wrote the definitive hagiography of the Gülşeniye founder İbrahim-i Gülşeni (d.1534).<sup>5</sup> Muhyi wrote decades after the revolt, but his perspective on Ahmed Pasha is also complex and complements that of Diyarbekri’s because it involved the participation of Gülşeni and

4 See Benjamin Lellouch’s article on Diyarbekri <http://web.archive.org/web/20121224174414/http://www.ottomanhistorians.com/database/index.htm>. I used two manuscript versions of Diyārbekrī’s chronicle: *Nevādirü’t-Tevārih*, İstanbul Ali Emiri KTP, Tarih 596 (Diyarbekri I) and *Tārih-i Hülefa’ el-Mısr (Kitab-i Tercüme en-nüzhe ez- seniyye fi zikr el-hülefa ve’l-müluk el-Misriyye)*, British Library, MS. Add. 7846, (Diyarbekri II.) The first version reads like an abridged version of the second. I noted the differences between the two versions where necessary.

5 See Side Emre, “Crafting Piety for Success: Gülşeniye Literature and Culture in the Sixteenth Century,” *Journal of Sufi Studies* 2012 (1:1): 35-39.

his dervishes in the revolt: Muhyi gathered information directly from people who survived the revolt and its aftermath. It is important to see how much of Muhyi's information can be corroborated with historical narratives.<sup>6</sup>

The other historical text I investigate here is the *Tarih-i Türkî İbtihâc* (*İbtihâcü't-Tevarîh*). This sixteenth-century narrative has detailed information on Ahmed Pasha's revolt and the events surrounding it. The *İbtihâc* represents an alternative voice when compared to the mainstream Ottoman chronicles in its critique of the forces that brought down the rebellion, and complements Diyarbekri's and Muhyi's viewpoints.<sup>7</sup> In the *İbtihâc* we have Ahmed Pasha's monologue of self-defense, which took place shortly before his execution – a one-of-a-kind declaration of his position. In a text that is openly pro-Ottoman, that monologue contributes to the discussion on the unlikely voices of the empire's critiques.

Here a reminder on the contents of these sources is also necessary. None of the chronicles I examined – except for Diyarbekri – relate what Ahmed Pasha did during his governorship and sultanate, and how he was received in Egypt by Arabic and Turkish-speaking audiences. This omission was one of the reasons why I did a cross-analysis of a variety of texts from the sixteenth and seventeenth century – composed within the parameters of distinct genres voicing uniquely positioned authorial concerns and viewpoints, and penned outside the Istanbul-based imperial discursive orbit. I believe that such an analysis allows us to revisit critical, and yet overlooked, episodes of Ottoman history – such as the revolt and the sultanate of Ahmed Pasha – and challenge our perceptions of them to, in turn, rethink our assumptions about the depictions of the Ottoman imperial project in the sixteenth century as a series of unilateral success stories.

### **A review of references or the revolt in primary sources and historiography**

Ahmed Pasha's promotion to Egypt's governorship and his subsequent revolt were explained in Ottoman historical sources with different perspectives. Some authors say that it was an impulsive act of personal frustration and a reaction against the unprecedented promotion of Sultan Süleyman's confidante and slave,

6 Muhyî-yi Gülşenî. *Menâkıb-i İbrâhîm-i Gülşenî ve Şemleli-Zâde Ahmed Efendi, Şive-i Tarîkat-i Gülşenîye*. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi,1982).

7 *İbtihâc*, Süleymaniye Manuscript Library, Hüsrev Paşa, 321 and 322 (*İbtihâc*.) This text is a *zeyl* to Hoca Sadeddin's *Tacü't-Tevarîh* and was penned by his elder son Mehmed Efendi (composition date is 1014/1605-6). See Münir Aktepe, "İbtihâcü't-Tevarîh," *İstanbul Üniversitesi Tarih Dergisi* (1959): 71-84.

İbrahim, to the grand vizierate in 1523.<sup>8</sup> Some argue that Süleyman consented to the assignment to prevent further dissent and in-fighting at court.<sup>9</sup> Others omit İbrahim Pasha's sudden promotion and its impact on Ahmed Pasha's psychology and simply give descriptive explanations of his assignment to Egypt's governorship and his rebellion.<sup>10</sup> Modern-day scholarship, in response to the biased nature of primary sources, argues several points. Es-Seyyid Mahmud says that Ahmed Pasha was devastated by the promotion of İbrahim Pasha to the grand vizierate and asked to be assigned Egypt's governorship. İbrahim Pasha agreed to his wish because he wanted to eliminate unrest in court.<sup>11</sup> Shaw says that following the death of Hayr Bey in 1522, Ahmed Pasha used the autocratic position of his predecessor to unite the potentially rebellious Ottoman military with the forces of Mamluk resistance, revolted against Ottoman rule, and established himself as the independent sultan of Egypt in 1524.<sup>12</sup> Hathaway says that the story of Ahmed

8 Anonymous history covering the rule of Sultan Süleyman up to c. 1640, Ankara Türk Tarih Kurumu Library, Y362, fols. 25b-25a. This entry details the frustration of Ahmed Pasha on not being given the grand vizierate and contextualizes his rebellion. The author devotes other entries to Ahmed Pasha: fol. 12a including a brief note on how following İbrahim Pasha's promotion to the grand vizierate, Ahmed Pasha sought Egypt, became a rebel, and was later executed; Celalzade Mustafa, *Ṭabakātü'l-memâlik ve derecâtü'l-mesâlik* (Wiesbaden, 1981), 112a (Celalzade.)

9 Matrakçı Nasuh, *Süleyman-nâme*, İstanbul Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi (TKS), Revan 1286, fol. 89a.

10 Anonymous short history of Cairo (1517-c. 1699), British Library, ADD 9972, fol. 3a; Abdü'l-Kerim b. 'Abdu'r-Raḥmân, *Tārîḫ-i Mısr*, İstanbul Süleymaniye Library, Hacı Mahmud Efendi, 4877 (*Tārîḫ-i Mısr*), fols. 6a-7a. Abdü'l-Kerim served as a *katip* under governor of Egypt Mehmed Pasha between 1699-c. 1704/05. He translated Arabic histories into Turkish. *Tārîḫ-i Mısr* is about the events between 1517-1682; Salih bin Celaledin, *Kitab-i Tevarîḫ-i Misr-i Kahire*, Bibliothéque Nationale, Supplement Turc 172, fols. 131b-131a. Salih bin Celaledin says that he arrived in Egypt in 1543 per orders of the Ottoman Sultan. At the time, Davud Pasha served as Egypt's governor. Salih reviewed and read the available histories of Egypt and translated them from Arabic to Turkish so that the Ottomans could read them and learn lessons from the past. His account focuses on the events between 1543-c.1581 (fol. 131a) and thus picks up where Diyarbekri stopped; *Künhü'l-Ahbâr*, fol. 361a. For a lengthy entry on İbrahim Pasha, see *Künhü'l-Ahbâr*, fol.357b-358b. Also see Kaya Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Sultan Süleyman* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 46 for Celalzade's references on the rebellion (Şahin.)

11 *Mısr Eyaleti*, 77.

12 Stanford Shaw, *The Financial and Administrative Organization and Development of Egypt, 1517-1798* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), 4.

Pasha's rebellion was that of an autonomy-minded vizier versus the long arm of the imperial household.<sup>13</sup> Şahin, referencing Celalzade Mustafa's *Tabakātü'l-memālik ve derecātü'l-mesālik* and relying on the official pro-Ottoman narrative of the events, says that Celalzade did not think that Ahmed Pasha was a suitable candidate for the grand vizierate because he did not respect the Shari'a enough. Providing the context of why Ahmed Pasha rebelled, Şahin says that according to Celalzade, the pasha was not a learned man and also had negative personality traits. Relying on the impressions of Ahmed Pasha's personality, Celalzade omits İbrahim Pasha's promotion from the equation of the possible reasons for the rebellion.<sup>14</sup> Şahin concludes his analysis by saying that the pasha's execution resolved the conflicts in the imperial council, enabling Süleyman to assert his sultanic authority over his men.<sup>15</sup> Alternately, Turan argues that the promotion of İbrahim Pasha had in fact been opposed by numerous parties in court, but that these voices had been silenced in sixteenth-century Ottoman historical sources, such as Celalzade's, which promoted an impeccable and unchallenged image of Süleyman as the universal sovereign, to preclude the perception of the sultan's decision to promote his confidante as misguided.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, as subversive voices revealed, İbrahim Pasha's appointment was seen as the result of the sultan's favoritism and received criticism from a reactionary elite, causing irreversible power alignments in the system: unlucky members of the ruling elite, like Ferhad Pasha and later Ahmed Pasha, faced execution for their explicit rebuttal of and actions challenging the sultan's will.<sup>17</sup>

None of these modern-day studies focus on what Ahmed Pasha did during his tenure as a governor and the self-proclaimed sultan of Egypt, or how he was received by the people who were impacted by his actions in Egypt. Likewise, these studies do not cross-reference existing primary texts to examine the circumstances

13 Jane Hathaway, *The Arab Lands Under Ottoman Rule, 1516-1800* (Harlow: Pearson, 2008), 54-56.

14 See Şahin, 28-48 for Celalzade's early career path and its contextualization with the politics of the Ottoman courts of Sultan Selim and Süleyman.

15 Şahin, 46.

16 Ebru Turan, "The Sultan's Favorite: İbrahim Pasha and the Making of the Ottoman Universal Sovereignty in the Reign of Sultan Suleyman (1516-1526)." PhD. Diss., University of Chicago, 2007 (Turan), 179-192; 184-186.

17 For a synopsis of how İbrahim Pasha wrestled for power, see *İbtihāc*, fols. 122b-123b. Also see *Lütfi Paşa ve Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*, haz. Kayhan Atik (Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2001), 252-253 for a brief reference to Ahmed Pasha's revolt, reactions among Ottoman elites, and his death.

that paved the way for the revolt, and the contexts – provincial and imperial – in which it unfolded. Doing so illuminates the complex chain of events with participation of actors from different factions and locales – Egypt and İstanbul. These conditions paint a contentious picture of the early years of Süleyman’s rule and the scope of the Ottoman imperial enterprise, as well as its assumed swift success in the Arab lands. The story of Ahmed Pasha represents how Süleyman arduously established his personal authority and power in one of the empire’s most important provinces. We also have to keep in mind that Süleyman did not set foot in Egypt as the protector of the Muslims living in the realms. Instead he justified and legitimized his sovereignty in the eyes of his newly gained subjects by sending his grand vizier İbrahim Pasha to re-establish order. The inexperienced İbrahim Pasha undertook a mainly administrative mission with the goal to preserve order by introducing the Law Code of Egypt in 1525 – *after* the region was shaken by the revolt. In fact, Süleyman’s response to this particular crisis – almost a disaster for the Ottomans – demonstrates how the sultan relied heavily on his men to achieve military and administrative successes that defined the nature of his rulership for the first decades of his tenure.

Süleyman’s campaigns in Belgrade and Rhodes were regarded as definitive military victories that launched the young sultan’s bid for an imperial and universal agenda in the Mediterranean world.<sup>18</sup> As commander in chief, Ahmed Pasha had been an important factor in contributing to the sultan’s image. As the second vizier to Süleyman, he was seen by the Venetian commentators as the chief facilitator of Süleyman’s victories in Belgrade and Rhodes. Therefore for some observers, his sudden assignment to the governorship of Egypt might have been evaluated within the parameters of a larger military plan to attack Portuguese trading routes in the Indian Ocean – a naval campaign that Ahmed Pasha’s successor Süleyman Pasha was later officially tasked with. While Ahmed Pasha’s outstanding military expertise would have made him the rational choice for a logistical post in Egypt, Diyarbekri makes no references to any long-term plans to attack the Portuguese or connect such a plan with the pasha’s assignment to Egypt.<sup>19</sup> The Venetian

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18 Pınar Emiralioğlu, *Geographical Knowledge and Imperial Culture in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*, (Ashgate, 2014) Chapter One. Also see Şahin, 41-45. The chain of Süleyman’s military successes was sealed with the 1526 Hungarian campaign.

19 One of the readers inquired if there was information in the sources about a connection between Ahmed Pasha’s assignment to Egypt and the claim that a fleet was being formed in the Red Sea to prevent the Portuguese advances in the region. He also suggested that Ahmed Pasha could have used such a claim to bolster his claims of



sources, providing an alternative perspective on Ahmed Pasha's appointment, do not refer to Ottoman sources regarding his treachery and the specifics of internal politics at Süleyman's court at the time.<sup>20</sup> Other Ottoman commentators present pro-imperial agendas within which the sultan's will, as exemplified by the appointment of İbrahim Pasha first to the grand vizierate and then to the position of the commander in chief (*ser-asker*), was seen as, and later demonstrated to be, the manifestation of God's will.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, the mainstream and clear-cut storylines in the majority of Ottoman chronicles, which portrayed Ahmed Pasha as a disloyal, jealous, and treacherous man who betrayed his sultan while he was honored with a high office, present problems that I will respond in the coming sections.<sup>22</sup>

### **Ahmed Pasha's entanglement with the political dynamics in Egypt and with Süleyman's ruling elite**

A comparison of available evidence suggests that, contrary to what has been accepted so far, during the first three or four months of his tenure, which had started in 19 Şevval 929/31 August 1523, Ahmed Pasha was not planning definitively to start a revolt in Egypt.<sup>23</sup> Instead, he was preoccupied by investigating the existing local social and political dynamics, preparing to launch a program of administrative change within a short time, and taking necessary precautions to secure his hold on the region by dismissing some of the former administrative and military personnel. However, some of his actions, especially the hard line

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sultanhood emphasizing his willingness to wage holy war against Christians while highlighting that the Ottomans lacked the foresight and sense of duty in that context. I was not able to find evidence in the historical and hagiographical sources examined for this project that would allow for a further discussion of this suggestion.

20 Turan, 184-186; 194. For comparison with contemporaneous Ottoman sources, see an online version of Marino Sanudo's (d. 1536) *I Diarii*, vol. 36: <https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/ocm12325858>). I would like to express my sincere thanks to Zahit Atçıl for his guidance in locating the link and providing information about the contents of vol. 36. Sanudo was connected to Ottoman court and depicted events from a Venetian point of view between 1496 and 1533 – which complement or challenge the information presented in Ottoman sources.

21 Turan, 241-243.

22 In that context, the *İbtihâc* is a uniquely positioned text: it represents a subversive and critical voice regarding the career of İbrahim Pasha as well as Ahmed Pasha.

23 *İbtihâc*, fols. 121a-122b; *Tārīḫ-i Mısr*, fol. 6a; Muhyi, 387. I consulted <http://www.islamicfinder.org> for date conversions between Gregorian and Hijri calendars.

he assumed with the janissaries of Egypt, were read as proof of secret treachery and were interpreted by his suspicious audiences as preparations for revolt.<sup>24</sup> Diyarbekri says that the janissaries knew that ‘in his heart,’ the pasha wanted to rebel. The *İbtihāc* also reveals the same sentiment.<sup>25</sup> Diyarbekri says that the pasha also inherently understood that, if he were to cause mischief, the janissaries would not abandon their sultan (Süleyman), shift sides, and declare loyalty to him.<sup>26</sup> To establish who first instigated the atmosphere of distrust that resulted in the revolt, the *İbtihāc* departs from Diyarbekri’s viewpoint: it was the janissaries who first decided to rebel against Ahmed Pasha. When he learned of this intention, the pasha decided to confront and control the janissaries by creating a violent schism between his men and the janissaries of Egypt. Interestingly, at this juncture, the *İbtihāc*’s author notes that a popular and influential local Sufi master, Sheyh İbrahim (Gülşeni) was asked by the commanders and notables to interfere and rehabilitate the situation by reforming Ahmed Pasha’s behavior. The result was a temporary success. Sheyh İbrahim interceded and had a conversation with Ahmed Pasha with the goal of putting out the ongoing spark of the fire of harm and injury (“*şerāre-i şer.*”) The pasha agreed to abide by the orders of the sheyh (“*Paşa dahi kabul idub, emr-i şeyhe itā’at iyledi*”).<sup>27</sup> Beyond doubt, as historical and hagiographical evidence prove, the Gülşeniye dervish/authors had good reasons to focus on the role their *pīr* played during this critical time.

The circumstances that allowed for this participation found coverage in Muhyi. He commented on Ahmed Pasha’s appointment to Egypt and also devoted substantial space to the events related to him.<sup>28</sup> According to Muhyi, when Süleyman appointed his confidante İbrahim Pasha directly “from the inside,” meaning the inner court, and made him grand vizier over all the other viziers, Ahmed Pasha openly rejected the decision, protested, and left the imperial council; Süleyman then assigned him to Egypt and sent him away. The nature of their relationship was tense after that. Muhyi says that initially the pasha ruled with justice in Egypt and was a follower of Gülşeni.<sup>29</sup> The evil treachery and spirit of sedition in the pasha’s heart started at a later point, following several conversations with Gülşeni and his son Aḥmed-i Hıyalī – both of whom repeatedly tried to prevent

24 Diyarbekri I, fols. 402a-405b; Diyarbekri II, fol. 313b.

25 *İbtihāc*, fol. 124a.

26 Diyarbekri I, fol. 405b. The same viewpoint surfaces in the *İbtihāc*, fols. 124b-124a.

27 *İbtihāc*, fol. 124a.

28 Muhyi, 386-394.

29 Muhyi, 386-387.

the pasha from overstepping the boundaries of his authority, acting unjustly, and causing sedition.<sup>30</sup> Muhyi says that one time Gülşeni likened the imminent arrival of Ahmed Pasha and his men into the Cairo lodge as undesirable as the “arrival of a rotten smell that affected Cairo.” This incident found coverage in Muhyi because of its confrontational nature. The actual revolt was declared later and its circumstances, as well as its progression, were impacted by the participation of the Gülşeniye dervishes.<sup>31</sup>

The İstanbul-based Ottoman commentators are divided on the reasons for the revolt, the details of Ahmed Pasha’s appointment, and his actions during the earlier phases of his tenure. Celalzade says that Ahmed Pasha wanted the governorship<sup>32</sup>; Süheyli, referencing ‘Ibn Zunbul, says that Ahmed Pasha was assigned because of his previous services to Sultan Selim and that he had already proven himself a capable and knowledgeable commander. Süheyli depicts him as an able governor who suffered from the evil of sedition and ignorance later on<sup>33</sup>; Abdül-Kerim b. ‘Abdu’r-Rahman devotes an extensive section to Ahmed Pasha’s tenure and revolt in his *Tārīḥ-i Mısr*. His account is closer in detail to Diyarbekri’s since he also served in Egypt in an official capacity, albeit at a later date.<sup>34</sup> While *Tārīḥ-i Mısr* omits references to the circumstances of Ahmed Pasha’s promotion to the governorship, it says that in the initial days of his tenure, Ahmed Pasha ruled to maintain order. The declaration of the sultanate came after the pasha began losing his sanity.<sup>35</sup> Unlike *Tārīḥ-i Mısr*, Hadidi gives more details about the events that transpired in Süleyman’s court. He says that first Piri Pasha was relieved of the grand vizierate, after which Ferhad Pasha, who had been one of the respected viziers and senior members of the deceased Sultan Selim’s group of officials and one of the viziers of the dome under Süleyman, was dismissed, and given another post. Hadidi makes no mention of Ferhad Pasha’s execution. He adds that Sultan Süleyman, with divine inspiration, remembered “him” and made “him” the grand vizier and commander in chief to *Rūm*. The identity of “him” is not explained by Hadidi. It probably referred to İbrahim Pasha and in a deliberately ambiguous

30 Muhyi, 388-389.

31 Muhyi, 390. See ft. 24. Also see *Power Brokers*, Chapter Eight for a detailed discussion of Ahmed Pasha’s interactions with Gülşeni.

32 *Ṭabakāt*, 112a. Also 110a, 111b-111a.

33 Süheyli, Ahmed bin Hamdam, *Tārīḥ-i Mısr-ı Cedid*, İstanbul Süleymaniye Library, Halet Efendi 621, 53 (Süheyli.)

34 *Tārīḥ-i Mısr*, fols. 6a-10b. See ft. 8 for the author’s brief vitae.

35 *Tārīḥ-i Mısr*, fol. 6a.

manner, since Hadidi carefully omitted direct references to İbrahim Pasha during his narration of Ahmed Pasha's revolt.<sup>36</sup>

The majority of the İstanbul- and Cairo-based commentators considered Ahmed Pasha's appointment, revolt, and death in connection with İbrahim Pasha's promotion to be dangerous topics, and erred on the side of caution.<sup>37</sup> Except for the *İbtihāc*, they kept vows of silence. The *İbtihāc* departing from the narratives we have reviewed so far, says that Ahmed Pasha expected to be directly promoted to the grand vizierate following the retirement of Piri Pasha, behaving with pride and without considering the potentially bad consequences or critically evaluating the situation at hand.<sup>38</sup> The *İbtihāc* also adds that Ahmed Pasha, not being able to stomach İbrahim's invasion of and power in the *derün* and *bīrün*, with tears of envy, and seeing that his previous deeds were undervalued, chose to leave the court and asked to be given permission to govern Egypt. Without giving names of those involved in the process, the *İbtihāc* says that to get rid of him in İstanbul, Ahmed Pasha was given whatever he had asked for and was granted his wish to go to Egypt. The old and damaged condition of the ships that transported him and his retinue to Egypt is underlined – suggesting perhaps that speeding his departure from İstanbul was a top priority, rather than ensuring a safe arrival.<sup>39</sup>

According to Diyarbekri, before the dispatch on Ahmed Pasha's promotion reached Egypt, Mustafa Pasha received misleading news that he had been appointed to the grand vizierate; unaware of the real circumstances, Mustafa Pasha was ecstatic at the news.<sup>40</sup> This was around the same time as İbrahim Pasha's unexpected appointment to office, which Diyarbekri does not mention. However, shortly after the initial wave of auspicious tidings, another dispatch was sent saying that Ahmed Pasha had been appointed to govern Egypt and that Mustafa Pasha was to come back to İstanbul immediately. The dispatch, too, omitted any mention of İbrahim Pasha's appointment.<sup>41</sup> But despite the lack of official information, Mustafa Pasha must have known about İbrahim's appointment; Diyarbekri says that after the arrival of this second dispatch, Mustafa Pasha became increasingly

36 Hadidi, *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman (1299-1523)*. Ed. by Necdet Öztürk (İstanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Basımevi, 1991), 444 (Hadidi.)

37 See *Künhül-Abbār*, fol.357b-358b for a detailed treatment of İbrahim Pasha's career.

38 *İbtihāc*, fol. 122a.

39 *İbtihāc*, fols. 123b-123a.

40 Diyarbekri I, fol. 399a; *İbtihāc* omits this detail. See fol. 121a. For Mustafa and Kasım Pasha's joint tenures before the arrival of Ahmed Pasha, see *Mısır Eyaleti*, 72-76.

41 For the ideological reasons behind İbrahim Pasha's appointment, see Turan, 203-209.

pensive and withdrawn from the public eye and displayed an escalating depressive state.

Depressed as he might have been, Mustafa Pasha met Ahmed Pasha en route from İstanbul to Cairo in Bulaq, on 17 Şevval 929/28-29 August 1523. Diyarbekri says that the two had a conversation and departed on good terms.<sup>42</sup> The *İbtihāc*, alternately, says that Mustafa Pasha avoided greeting Ahmed Pasha on his ship, adding that the latter might have sought to converse with him to pull Mustafa Pasha into his net [of conspiracy] (“*ağına düşürmek.*”)<sup>43</sup> Diyarbekri depicts an amicable interaction between the two pashas, while the *İbtihāc*, whose author wrote after the facts, demonstrates a hostile position vis-à-vis Ahmed Pasha before the revolt. The *İbtihāc* further emphasizes that Ahmed Pasha entered Egypt with the intention to rebel and his immediate actions proved that.<sup>44</sup>

The people of Egypt regarded the swift dismissal of Mustafa Pasha, and Kasım Pasha’s abrupt ejection from office after him, as strange events in a chain of extraordinary occurrences. Seen through their eyes, imperial orders arriving from İstanbul perpetuated the spirit of distrust toward the local Ottoman government in Egypt. The joint governments of Mustafa and Kasım Pashas had been received favorably. However, their dismissals were seen as further reminders of the instability and the ad hoc orders emanating from the seat of the empire. The existing Ottoman discourse on just and good government extolled the sultan as a wise and fair ruler thwarted by the perfidy and mismanagement of governors. To critics like Diyarbekri, the confusion of appointments and dismissals reflected the short-sightedness of the Sultan and the government’s lack of a coherent policy in its provinces.<sup>45</sup> A similar understanding about the short-sightedness of the Ottomans also provided Ahmed Pasha with his primary point of political leverage in Egypt during the revolt: the Ottoman Sultan had failed in his promises, so for the good and prosperity of the people of Egypt, a new and just order needed to be established. Ahmed Pasha’s role as the instigator of this new order depended also on his creation of a proper discourse appropriate to Egypt and its people exclusively. In 1523-24, the Ottoman imperial voice that represented the Ottoman sultan as the sole protector and benefactor of the Muslim people failed to make itself heard in Egypt; this lacuna would be filled by the preamble of

42 Diyarbekri I, fol. 402a-403b.

43 *İbtihāc*, fols.124b.

44 *İbtihāc*, fols. 124b.

45 Diyarbekri I, fols. 400b-400a.

the Law Code and its implementation. However, in c. 1520, Egypt, the former imperial seat of the Sunni and Shi'ite sultanates, lacked a leader who resided in the realms. Ahmed Pasha's actions demonstrated that he would open new horizons of independence from the imperial regulations for the people of Egypt. But his character and the events following his assumption of power gradually constituted a point of controversy among his sympathizers and foes alike.<sup>46</sup>

Ahmed Pasha's unruly and temperamental character, as his critics from İstanbul underlined, added to the negative tone in the literature regarding his capacity to govern well. Hadidi, complementing the Cairene perspective, gives an official Ottoman viewpoint: When Ahmed Pasha, probably upon hearing that his rival Mustafa Pasha had been made grand vizier, was wasted with envy of his felicity, and Süleyman, knowing Ahmed Pasha's genuine natural disposition, assigned him to Egypt.<sup>47</sup> The majority of the İstanbul-based sources agree on the impulsive, arrogant, and inherently seditious character of Ahmed Pasha prior to the rebellion, which justified his removal from İstanbul.<sup>48</sup> However, at the time of his arrival in Cairo on 17-19 Şevval 929/29-31 August 1523, that negative picture justified the feelings of a limited segment of the Cairene population, mainly the Ottoman officials, administrative personnel, and the military.<sup>49</sup> There were clashing viewpoints within the Cairene perspectives regarding Ahmed Pasha. While Diyarbekri, like the rest of the Ottoman military and judiciary attached to the sultan, was mostly against Ahmed Pasha, he also wrote that the Cairene communities were content and even happy with the immediate changes that he launched. Ahmed Pasha's apparent arrogance, reflected by an initial bad omen that had greeted his arrival, his harsh tactics to deal with the janissaries, as well as the first impressions he gave, were pushed aside.<sup>50</sup>

Despite his questionable character and ambiguous agenda, evidence suggests that Ahmed Pasha made several functional changes in the social, religious, and military spheres that were received with wonderment and awe. On the local level, the changes appeared to better the lives of the people of Egypt; viewed by Ottoman and Egyptian audiences outside of Cairo, they were read as preparations for a large-scale revolt with an agenda to secure public support and establish control

46 Diyarbekri I, fols. 403a-404b.

47 Hadidi, 444-445.

48 Celalzade, 83a, 86a, 88a, 110b; also Turan, 190-191.

49 Diyarbekri I, fols. 403a-404a. According to the *İbrihâc* (fol. 123a), the pasha departed from İstanbul on 20 Ramazan 929/ 2 August 1523.

50 Diyarbekri I, fols. 405b-405a.

over the city. So what did Ahmed Pasha do? When and how did his program of change turn into a manifest rebellion against the Ottoman Sultan?

**Program of genuine change or preparations for revolt?  
Ahmed Pasha's accomplishments, agendas, and dialogues in context**

The eight-year period of Ottoman experimentation and strategic maneuvering to keep the status quo in Egypt after the region's conquest under the tenures of Hayr Bey, Muṣṭafā, and Ḳāsım Pashas brought several crises. The rebellion of Ahmed Pasha (d. 1524) was the last large-scale revolt after Canberdi Ghazali's (governor of Damascus) rebellion in 1520 and constituted a serious challenge to the legitimacy of Sultan Süleyman's rule in Arab lands. However, in the three- to four-month period from the beginning of his tenure on 19 Şevval 929/30-31 August 1523 up until the declaration of his rebellion on 2 Safer 930/10-11 December 1523, Ahmed Pasha instigated a series of changes in Egypt's administration and military.

To better put these changes in context and compare what had changed with Ahmed Pasha's rule, let us briefly examine the career and tenure of Hayr Bey, Ahmed Pasha's predecessor first.<sup>51</sup> Born in Samsun, on the Black Sea coast of modern-day Turkey, Hayr Bey was the son of a Circassian *mamlūk*, Muslim Abaza. He was given to al- Ashraf Ḳā'it Bāy as a gift and was taken in as an emancipated Mamluk.<sup>52</sup> He belonged to the Mamluk ruling class and served in various military and administrative capacities during the reigns of six Mamluk sultans between 1468 and 1516. In 1504–1505, he was appointed governor of Aleppo. He formed a secret liaison with the Ottomans in 1516, allying himself with Sultan Selim against the Mamluk Sultan Ghawri. On 13 Şaban 923/24 August 1517 after the Ottoman victory against the Mamluks, Selim gave him the prestigious post of the governor of Egypt, a position that was reviewed annually until his death on 14 Zilkade 928/4 October 1522.<sup>53</sup> He was considered to be a logical yet risky

51 I thank one of the readers for his suggestion to include Hayr Bey's tenure to compare/contrast the continuities and breaks between the administrative agendas of Hayr Bey and Ahmed Pasha. Such an analysis situates the latter's accomplishments and shortcomings in its proper historical context. I am omitting the details for the brief tenures of Mustafa and Kasım Pashas preceeding Ahmed Pasha's governorship because of word count issues.

52 Diyarbekri I, fol. 360.

53 Holt, "Khāir Beg (Khāyir or Khayr Bey)," in *EI*<sup>2</sup>; Diyarbekri I, fol. 219.

choice to preserve and protect Ottoman interests and sovereignty in the region.<sup>54</sup> Selim's decision to choose Hayr Bey to the post, following Yunus Pasha's brief appointment and swift dismissal from the same position – due to his corruption and mismanagement – found commentary in the primary literature.<sup>55</sup> Hayr Bey held the Mamluk title of *mālik al-umarā* (the king of the emirs), and during his tenure the political position of the governor became the highest in the local provincial administration.<sup>56</sup>

According to Mustafa Ali, Selim appointed Hayr Bey against advice alerting him on the treacherous nature of Circassians. Ali relates that Hayr Bey was a munificent, generous, well-mannered, God-fearing and understanding person.<sup>57</sup>

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54 For a description of Hayr Bey's tenure, refer to *Mısır Eyaleti*, 66-71. For an analysis, see Michael Winter, "The Ottoman Occupation," 1: 507 in Carl Petry, ed., *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 1, *Islamic Egypt, 640-1517* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) (Winter, "Ottoman Occupation").

55 Hoca Sadeddin Efendi, *Tacü't-Tevārih*. (İstanbul 1279-1289) 2: 374.

56 The governor (*vali*) of Egypt was in charge of the province (*Mısır Eyaleti*, 101-115, 124-132). He was also the supervisor and representative of the Ottoman authority in the region. The governor followed the Ottoman system and had the right to convoke and dissolve the *divan*. After Hayr Bey's death, the governor of Egypt was appointed from among the *paşa* corps of viziers in İstanbul, *kubbe veziri*. Usually, second viziers were appointed. Later on the assignment was made by promotion to vizierate. The position of *nazirü'l-emval*, or *defterdār*, was the financial administrator of a province, and accompanied the *beylerbeyi* as the second most important government official. Responsible for the finances of the province, the *defterdār* also monitored the domestic matters that were not discussed in the *divān*. During the absence of the governor, the *defterdār* assumed the governorship in absentia until a new promotion was issued. This took effect after the 1525 Law Code. Beys were responsible for the operation of all provincial branches of the government and with the aid of the corps protected the leading magnets of power against potential rebellion threats. *Sheyhü'l-arabs* (*Mısır Eyaleti*, 165-172) and *kashifs* (157-165, *kashifs* were the freed slaves of the emirs) also held important positions in the sub-provinces of Egypt. The *kashifs* occupied minor administrative positions and performed functions in the Ottoman hierarchy. The Ottoman military and administrative hierarchy in Egypt was shared by governors, representing the Ottoman sultan, and by the officers of the pre-1517 Mamluk administration with the local Ottoman military. Refer to Seyyid Muhammed es-Seyyid Mahmud, "Mısır. Osmanlı Dönemi," 29:566 and Stanford J. Shaw, *The Financial and Administrative Organization and Development of Ottoman Egypt, 1517-1789* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1958).

57 Andreas Tietze, *Mustafa Ali's Description of Cairo of 1599* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1975) 69-70.



The exact opposite depiction can be observed in an earlier commentator, Ibn Iyas. Ibn Iyas depicted him as a tyrant and an ambitious man who manipulated politics for his personal gain, emphasizing the conflicts within the military. According to Ibn Iyas, Hayr Bey's summary executions, targeting particularly the potentially rebellious Mamluks and Egyptians from the civil population, were notorious.<sup>58</sup> Hadidi, an Ottoman chronicler writing in post-1524, on the other hand, praises Hayr Bey as a just *mīr-i mīrān* (a commander of commanders who rules over a province, usually a term for Ottoman pashas) who paid regular tributes to İstanbul.<sup>59</sup> Diyarbekri also criticized some of Hayr Bey's accommodating policies, especially the amnesties and gifts, with regard to the frequently insubordinate *sheyhül-'arab* (the Arab sheykhhs).<sup>60</sup> The viewpoints on Hayr Bey were as diverse as commentaries on his legacy and accomplishments.

As he had previously served as the governor of Aleppo, Hayr Bey was well informed in Mamluk bureaucracy. His extensive responsibilities in Egypt spanned the administrative and martial. He held regular *divans*,<sup>61</sup> had the Friday sermon delivered in Sultan Selim's and later on his successor Süleyman's names, and issued coins under the Ottoman sultan's name. He was an efficient administrator and an astute strategist well aware of the ascendancy of diplomacy, bribery, and the need for a firm military muscle to preserve Egypt under Ottoman rule. Egypt, under his authority, paid regular tribute to İstanbul, received gifts, sent Mamluk soldiers to İstanbul for military campaigns. One of his primary policies was to make treaties and negotiations with the leaders of the bedouin Arab tribes, who were appointed as local tribal governors of the conquered lands and were held responsible for the security and order.<sup>62</sup>

58 Winter, "The Ottoman Occupation," 507-508.

59 Hadidi, *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*, 442-443.

60 Diyarbekri I, fol. 236.

61 *Mısır Eyaleti*, 59-60. The provincial government was aided by the military corps, the waged officials of the Ottoman Empire. The key administrative and political positions were given to Ottoman *beys* (official rank given to Ottoman administrators in the provinces) who were recruited from the corps.

62 Ahmed Feridun Bey, *Munsha'at al-salatin* (İstanbul, 1857-8), 1:438-439; Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-Zuhūr fī Waqā'i' al-Duhūr*. Edited by Muḥammad Muṣṭafā (Leipzig and İstanbul: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1932) (*Badā'i' al-Zuhūr*). *Badā'i' al-Zuhūr* 5: 158-160, 166, 171, 180, 208, 210, 217-218, 226, 236, 256, 258, 266, 281, 290, 367, 373, 430-431. The leaders of these tribes would also deliver an annual tax to the imperial treasury in Cairo.

Despite being an astute strategist, Hayr Bey had two serious challenges during his five-year tenure. The management of the military in Egypt proved a difficult task – a pattern that his successors would have to confront as well. He had enlisted the services of former Mamluk officials, Circassian emirs, and *awlād al-nās* in return for their oaths of loyalty after the conquest. They were given amnesty and recruited as salaried troops. These officials formed a buffer zone between the potentially insurgent Mamluk soldiers and Bedouin Arab sheyhs. They also assisted the governor in controlling the local Ottoman troops as well.<sup>63</sup> However, the Ottoman troops were a constant source of trouble in the city. As Diyarbekri relates, in one instance, Hayr Bey had to seek assistance from an unlikely source, a well-known Anatolian Sufi sheyh, a *Rūm ereni* (holy man of the land of Rum, the Ottoman lands) whose identity remained undisclosed, to monitor and accommodate the needs of the Ottoman soldiery in 1518-1519. This tactic seemed to have been influential. On the whole, however, the secondary literature remains ambivalent with regard to the composition, size, and dynamics of the Ottoman military presence in Egypt during Hayr Bey's rule.<sup>64</sup> From Rumelia and Anatolia, several thousand cavalymen, including *gönüllüiyān* (volunteer cavalymen), were stationed under the supervision of Ottoman beys. In addition to that, *kapıkulu* soldiers, janissaries serving as infantry forces, and *çavuşes* (guards) were also garrisoned until 1525 when major changes to the local military structure were made as a result of İbrahim Pasha's Egypt expedition and the subsequent promulgation of the Law Code, following Ahmed Pasha's rebellion in 1524.

Hayr Bey's second challenge, the revolt of Canberdi Gazali, came after Sultan Selim's death on 8 Şevval 926/21 September 1520 and on the accension of Sultan Süleyman, as Selim's only son and successor to the Ottoman throne on 17 Şevval 926/30 September 1520. Hayr Bey's well-documented loyalty to the house of Osman was not contested with Canberdi Gazali's revolt.<sup>65</sup> Gazali, who had been appointed by Selim as the *beylerbeyi* (governor) of several cities including Damascus, Hama and Hims, Trablus, Jerusalem, Gazze and Ramla in 5 Safer 924/16 February 1518 (shortly before Selim's departure from Damascus in 10 Safer 924/21 February 1518), rebelled after the news of the Ottoman Sultan's

63 *Asırda Mısır Eyaleti*, 63-67. There are several references in Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-Zuhūr*, 5:328-329.

64 Compare *Mısır Eyaleti*, 66 to Winter, "Ottoman Occupation," 510-511.

65 Diyarbekri cites Hayr Bey's loyalty, services, and honors he received from Selim. Diyarbekri I, fols. 147, 150-152, 155, 157, 160-162, 218-219.

death.<sup>66</sup> Diyarbekri wrote extensive sections criticizing the revolt.<sup>67</sup> According to him, Gazali had been a tactless and ignorant Circassian who was not content with his tenure in Damascus and made a pact with the devil.<sup>68</sup> Contrarily, Gazali was also known to be a very popular figure among the Syrian and Egyptian elites and the local populations of Damascus. He was seen as a hero who would eventually reinstate Mamluk rule in Syria and Egypt. Gazali, during different stages of his revolt, sought the aid of several European powers as well as Shah Isma‘il and Hayr Bey. Hayr Bey did not follow Gazali or give him support. Hayr Bey kept his pledge of loyalty to the house of Osman and refrained from taking harsh actions against Gazali, instead waiting for the orders of Sultan Süleyman before attacking Gazali. In the meantime, he sent gifts and promises to the Arab sheyhs who had been under Gazali’s suzerainty and who were strategically located on Gazali’s route to Egypt, to stop him from advancing.<sup>69</sup> When rumors surfaced that Hayr Bey, like Gazali, had in reality secretly wished to overthrow the Ottoman rule in Egypt, he defended himself vehemently against these claims.<sup>70</sup> In fact when Sultan Süleyman had sent his *hüküm-i şerif* (*fermân*, imperial edict) to Egypt on 19 Şevval 926/2 October 1520, Hayr Bey followed the protocol and after having read the edict, he prayed for the longevity and prosperity of Sultan Süleyman, whom he referred to with respect as *gazâlerin sultanı* (the sultan of the holy warriors).<sup>71</sup>

When Canberdi Gazali’s revolt was put down and he was executed in 17 Safer 927/27 January 1521, Egypt was far from being stable. During this period, Hayr Bey was also sick and had a difficult time dealing with domestic troubles in Cairo, including the endless skirmishes within the Ottoman military. Regardless of his errors in government, Hayr Bey was regarded as the most successful survivor of the old Mamluk regime<sup>72</sup> and was praised at his death as a loyal Ottoman governor.<sup>73</sup> Hayr Bey was largely known as the preserver of the *nizâm-ı âlem* (world order) in Egypt. When he died on 14 Zilkade 928/4-5 October 1522, eight months after Canberdi Gazali’s execution, the situation in Cairo had been

66 Diyarbekri I, fols. 220-221.

67 Diyarbekri I, fols. 303-308.

68 Diyarbekri I, fols. 200, 314-315.

69 Diyarbekri I, fol. 308.

70 Diyarbekri I, fol. 309.

71 Diyarbekri I, fol. 296.

72 P. M. Holt, “*Khâir Beg*,” in *EI*<sup>2</sup>.

73 Maṭrakçı Naşuh, *Tarih-i Al-i Osman: Dastan-ı Sultan Süleyman*, revan 1286, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul, fols. 74-75.

intensely chaotic. The conquest of Egypt was an important victory in the Ottoman imperial enterprise on the eastern front, but during Hayr Bey's reign its fruits were still immature. Diyarbekri's message regarding Hayr Bey's tenure are clear: the new conquerors of Egypt and their governors had yet to establish an enduring system of local government that would accommodate and satisfy the religiously and culturally diversified communities into the larger Ottoman polity – a goal that was aimed at by Ahmed Pasha during his short tenure as a governor and his subsequent rebellion.

Ahmed Pasha's changes in management were received warily by observers such as Diyarbekri because they mostly aimed at sending some of the current military and mid-to-high level administrative personnel back to Istanbul.<sup>74</sup> Historical evidence makes it clear that as soon as Ahmed Pasha set foot in Egypt, he began a swift regime change and micro-managed the process. His agenda was to change what he believed to be dysfunctional in the Ottoman system, and what he labeled as disrespectful toward the former Mamluk establishment – a complete reversal of Hayr Bey's policies.<sup>75</sup>

His primary goal was to promote the idea that he was different in mentality from the Ottoman sultan and Hayr Bey, and that his tenure would be more just. Above all, he sought to receive the support of the people of Egypt. In forming an idiosyncratic discourse, adapting and responding to what he perceived to be the unfulfilled needs of the people of Egypt, Ahmed Pasha first sought to publicize his respect for the established customs and laws of the people of Egypt. Going against the policies implemented by his predecessor Hayr Bey, he first reinstated the four judges of Cairo in their duties and publicly received their opinions regarding a private petition. His actions were perceived as suspicious by the Ottoman authorities: treasurer Derviş Çelebi and Seyyidi Çelebi, a judge of Egypt, left Egypt when Ahmed Pasha started his program of reform. Despite this, the reception by the Egyptian audiences was more than favorable.<sup>76</sup> Alternately, the *İbtihâc* omits any reference to Ahmed Pasha's program of judicial reform upon his arrival to Egypt, but emphasizes instead how he immediately began preparations for rebellion by pitting his janissaries, *kapu yeniçerisi*, against *Mısr yeniçerisi*—the latter of which

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74 Diyarbekri I, fol. 403a-405b.

75 Diyarbekri I, fol. 403a.

76 Diyarbekri I, fols. 403a-405b; Diyarbekri II, fol. 312a.

had their hearts disturbed by the pasha's behaviors and eventually decided that his actions were demonstrating betrayal.<sup>77</sup>

### **I. Reinstatement of the four judges: A definitive statement for a new Egypt**

On 26 Şevval 929/6-7 September 1523, barely a week after his arrival in Cairo and following his first *dīvān*, Ahmed Pasha reinstated the four Egyptian judges, with the Shāfi'ī judge as the chief, into office, during a public session in the castle.<sup>78</sup> Ahmed Pasha wanted to purchase a piece of high-value real estate with a fee. To facilitate the transaction, he strategically refrained from issuing any orders to confiscate the property. This humble action was the first of its kind by an Ottoman governor. Diyarbekri saw his action as a display of justice and noted the happiness among the people of Egypt.<sup>79</sup> Ahmed Pasha invited the judges and presented them with a petition for a legal transaction that he wished to be processed through customary religious and judicial channels. Ahmed Pasha asked, in good faith, for the accurate legal opinion and approval of the judges. He was careful to posit his petition in accordance with the established religious customs. While he received accommodating feedback from his audience, his actions also raised some questions as well as a sense of wonderment. His petition regarded the legal acquisition of a lucrative commercial property in Cairo that had previously belonged to a certain well-reputed local luminary, a rich *hoca* (teacher, professor) who had legally acquired the building from Sultan Ghawrī's son. The transaction was completed, witnessed by the judges, after the *hoca* agreed to sell his property to Ahmed Pasha in return for a fair purchase fee.<sup>80</sup> Ahmed Pasha eventually turned this acquisition into a pious endowment for his descendants and continued to be a patron of the property. If he lacked inheritors, it would go to the poor people and current inhabitants of the *han* (commercial building, khan). He again executed his wishes by consulting the judges, furthermore declaring that, if no one else was available, the supervisor of the endowment would be the chief Ḥanefī judge.<sup>81</sup> The whole transaction and its aftermath were staged for the Cairene audiences to witness Ahmed Pasha's fairness in the delicate issue of property ownership

77 *İbtihāc*, fols. 124b-124a.

78 Diyarbekri I, fols. 405b-405a.

79 Diyarbekri I, fol. 405b.

80 Diyarbekri I, fol. 405b.

81 Diyarbekri I, fol. 410a.

and to demonstrate his just approach to one of the significant problems of the previous governments. The message and the example were clear: even the richest and most politically powerful people were not exempt from the binding laws of the land, the judiciary procedures of the courts, and the customary practices of the people. Ahmed Pasha's idealism thus initially found an approving audience. This picture, however, was eventually tainted by a wave of extensive abuse during the confiscation of the incarcerated ex-Circassian commander in chief Canım Hamzavi's properties under the supervision of the same judges.<sup>82</sup>

Ahmed Pasha, during his lifetime and after his death, was considered by some to be a talented and efficient commander and administrator who excelled in governance, yet simultaneously condemned by others as a treacherous tyrant, a madman who had abandoned Islamic laws and customs in his ambition for power. It all depended on where and in what context one examined and interpreted his actions. His actions that were criticized in Egypt by non-Egyptian observers, such as Diyarbekri, were largely connected to his efforts to finance his self-protection, or, as his critics claimed, his effective attempts to seize power at the expense of the imperial center.

Despite the confluence of clashing evidence, in the beginning of his tenure in Egypt, Ahmed Pasha received positive public feedback as far as Diyarbekri was concerned. However, his later actions in the six-month period following his promotion demolished that image, causing widespread distrust and suspicion among audiences in İstanbul, Egyptian communities, the local Ottoman administration in Egypt, the military, and the Circassians. In that framework, in the following sections I will examine his declaration of political independence from Sultan Süleyman by assigning a vizier for himself; the evasive nature of his communications with İstanbul; the abrupt measures to dislocate, confuse, and eliminate the local janissaries loyal to the Ottoman Sultan – which resulted in a janissary riot; and finally, his recruitment, use, and betrayal of the Circassians whom he had tried to incorporate into his military. These actions raised suspicions in Egypt and İstanbul as to what he was planning and where his true loyalties lay, and prompted pre-emptive measures by Süleyman and İbrahim Pasha which, according to some, resulted in Ahmed Pasha's defense and the actual revolt.

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82 Diyarbekri I, fol. 411a.

## II. One or three viziers for a pasha? Building tensions with İstanbul

Ahmed Pasha's motivations in hastily appointing a vizier approximately two months into his tenure find limited reference in Diyarbekri. While declaring that the post of vizierate had been a prestigious and highly respected one during the Mamluk sultanate, Diyarbekri nevertheless does not hesitate to communicate his disapproval of the appointment of Bayezid Çelebi, Ahmed Pasha's *kethüdā* (steward, housekeeper) to the position on 12 Zi'l-hicce 929/21-22 October 1523.<sup>83</sup> According to him, the main problem was the choice of the man and not the *bid'at* (innovation, new and unlawful practice) that Ahmed Pasha introduced; he does not comment on the fact that Ahmed Pasha's assigning of a vizier had no precedent in former Ottoman administrations in Egypt: Hayr Bey and Mustafa and Kasım Pashas did not have viziers. For Diyarbekri the problem lay elsewhere: Bayezid Çelebi did not deserve such a high position, and the decision had been a random and hasty choice on Ahmed Pasha's part. Interestingly, Diyarbekri, in adding, "In these times, the post of the vizier is given to whomever comes by" ("*Bu zamanda her kime olursa vezirlik virilür oldı*"),<sup>84</sup> also voiced a subtle criticism of the assignment outside its context in Egypt. His succinct remark, while not mentioning İbrahim Pasha, nevertheless pointed in that direction. Since he was a protégé of İbrahim Pasha's treasurer and private secretary İskender Çelebi, his comments needed to be very subtle. Diyarbekri was also supportive of Ottoman administration and regulations in Egypt. However, he also realized that Egypt was not an administratively well-integrated province in c. 1523, and different, more flexible venues of governance were needed, as long as the persons assigned had the proper qualifications.

Alternately, the *İbtihāc* details that after declaring his sultanhood, Ahmed Pasha appointed Kadızade Muhammed Bey as his *vezir-i a'zam* (grand vizier), İskender – one of his *kethüdās* – as the second vizier, and İlyas – another *kethüdā* – as his third vizier.<sup>85</sup> Among the three viziers, Muhammed Bey and İskender began plotting Ahmed Pasha's downfall almost immediately, a scheme which

83 Diyarbekri I, fol. 406b; Diyarbekri II, fol. 314b-314a. The *İbtihāc* names Kara Mustafa as the *kapu kethüda* of Ahmed Pasha ( fol. 125b). For a background on the Circassian Mamluk system of government and the Mamluk state, see Jean-Claude Garcin, "The Regime of the Circassian Mamlüks," in Petry, *Cambridge History of Egypt*, 1:290-317; *Mısır Eyaleti*, 33-46.

84 Diyarbekri I, fol. 406b.

85 *İbtihāc*, fols. 128a-129b. For information on Muhammed Bey, see Celalzade, 114a.

culminated in the famous scene in the bath house.<sup>86</sup> While different points of view disagreed about what Ahmed Pasha was trying to achieve and with whose aid, sources provide us with detailed storylines that complement one another in their descriptions of the progression of events.

While not intending to persuade his readers that Ahmed Pasha was an innocent victim or a scapegoat of political intrigues that were hatched in Istanbul, Diyarbekri convinces us that from the beginning of his tenure, Ahmed Pasha tried to change and provide flexibility to the dysfunctional and deficient Ottoman administration in Egypt. His appointment of a vizier may, on first inspection, thus seem rational and useful. However, since no further commentary exists as to what Bayezid Çelebi did or how the governor and his vizier functioned as a team, a more viable suggestion for why he designated a vizier becomes necessary. I propose that by this unprecedented appointment, Ahmed Pasha was mimicking Sultan Süleyman, who had given a prestigious position to, by all visible criteria, an undeserving member of his personal retinue, an inexperienced confidante. In Ahmed Pasha's situation, as Diyarbekri relates, this undeserving member, Bayezid Çelebi, was also a coward. Three months after his promotion to the vizierate, on 18 Rebiü'l-evvel 930/24-25 January 1524, at the apex of Ahmed Pasha's revolt, Bayezid Çelebi escaped from Egypt, abandoning his sultan, causing Ahmed Pasha intense distress and panic. This may explain why the *İbtihâc* omits mention of Bayezid Çelebi's appointment and focuses instead on his replacement, Muhammed Bey. Muhammed Bey was a well-respected man of whom Diyarbekri approved. He was a religious scholar, a Sufi, and an able commander with Turkish origins who not only fit perfectly into the ideals of the "warrior of faith" (*ğāzi*) paradigm that Diyarbekri repeatedly eulogized in his chronicle, but who also represented the voice of common sense.<sup>87</sup> Of course, it should be noted that after the declaration of Ahmed Pasha's sultanate, Diyarbekri and Muhammed Bey cooperated in a plot to initiate the fall of Ahmed Pasha.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, Diyarbekri justifies the promotion of Muhammed Bey, as he was instrumental in eliminating the Ahmed Pasha problem. Despite the hasty appointment of Bayezid Çelebi, Ahmed Pasha failed to duplicate the closeness of Sultan Süleyman and İbrahim Pasha; the message and

86 *İbtihâc*, fols. 129a-131a.

87 Unlike the *İbtihâc*, Diyarbekri doesn't address Muhammed Bey as "Kadızaade Muhammed Bey" and this omission creates confusion about whether there were two beys named Muhammed. The beys that are mentioned in the *İbtihâc* and Diyarbekri are identical.

88 Diyarbekri I, fols. 421a-422b.



declaration of his political autonomy to İstanbul did not get through, but raised a visible red flag regarding his intentions.

Another incident that raised suspicions about Ahmed Pasha was the evasive chain of communications he conducted with İstanbul. On 28 Zi'l-hicce 929/6-7 November 1523, two weeks after appointing a vizier, Ahmed Pasha sent the *subaşı* (police superintendant) of Egypt to İstanbul with an alarming dispatch saying that news had reached him from Syria about Shah Isma'il's imminent surge for Anatolia.<sup>89</sup> He installed one of his own followers in the vacated position. The response dispatch from İstanbul, dated 15 Muharrem 930/23-24 November 1523, instead of bringing relief, created a wave of panic in the governor as it did not reveal the anticipated response. The letter confirmed knowledge of the shah's movements from Baghdad to the Arab lands and included a cautionary note for Ahmed Pasha; but the dispatch made no references to the shah's movement toward Anatolia, a point that Ahmed Pasha had specifically underlined. Ahmed Pasha might have sent the *subaşı* on a reconnaissance mission with the possible intention of getting him out of the way. We do not know the real motivation. Whatever its undeclared purpose had been, this chain of communication with İstanbul distressed Ahmed Pasha, especially since it came after the appointment of Bayezid Çelebi to the vizierate. Ahmed Pasha did not know the political climate in İstanbul well enough to determine his position. His mismanagement in tackling the unrest and eventual riot of the Cairene janissaries loyal to the sultan, which had started in Muharrem 930/November 1523, led to violence and bloodshed that pushed Egypt one step closer towards anarchy.

### **III. The gray zone on the eve of the revolt: Ahmed Pasha's predicament and confrontation with Cairo-based janissaries and the unruly Circassians**

From the day of his appointment, through the first weeks of Şevval 929/ August 1523 until the open declaration of his rebellion on 2 Safer 930/10-11 December 1523, Ahmed Pasha refrained from revealing his true intentions to İstanbul or in Egypt. I suggest that this was partly because Ahmed Pasha himself was not fully certain about how to proceed in Egypt and how to position himself with İstanbul. Evidence from Diyarbekri suggests that premeditated rebellion had not been his ultimate goal in the first few months of his tenure. He attempted to divert attention to Shah Isma'il and to the threat of possible insurgency in

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89 Diyarbekri I, fols. 406a-407b.

Anatolia to gain time to make up his mind, to test the audiences in İstanbul and in Egypt, and to receive information on İbrahim Pasha's tenure. Ahmed Pasha's agendas and actions in Egypt were shaped mainly by the course of events in İstanbul. His efforts also aimed to channel the janissaries and Palace personnel (*kapu halkı*) away from Egypt, to recruit Circassians, and to put members of his retinue in strategic military positions in case of an unexpected attack from İstanbul.<sup>90</sup> Again, all of these could be read as either preparations for a revolt or as preparations for self-defense in case of a strike from İstanbul. In either case, Ahmed Pasha's interactions with the military – both men loyal to him and local personnel – as well as with the Circassians provide the key to understanding the events of the rebellion.

As I examined earlier, the *İbtihâc* details Ahmed Pasha's agenda to provoke conflict between his own janissaries and the local ones immediately upon his arrival in Egypt. Alternately, Diyarbekri says that instead of a carefully laid plan to eliminate the military (*Osmanlı leşkeri*) all at once, Ahmed Pasha resorted to a series of restrictions: First, he enforced a strict curfew after dark. Second, he gave orders to relocate the janissaries, cavalymen and palace personnel to İstanbul – by force if they were not willing. He threatened to incarcerate those who did not obey his orders. However, we have to note that not only the janissaries or the palace personnel but other people, including the *fellahin* and Jews, were also harassed and incarcerated at that time because they allegedly failed to obey Ahmed Pasha's orders regarding the curfew. The only two parties who were not affected badly were the Circassians and Canim Kaşif – both of whom the pasha pardoned. All of these actions caused suspicions among the janissaries about the intentions of the pasha.<sup>91</sup> Ahmed Pasha's precautions regarding the military and administrative personnel were pursued swiftly, since loyalties shifted too rapidly to allow for hesitation and maintaining control over them remained an arduous task.<sup>92</sup>

At this juncture, were Ahmed Pasha and the janissaries deadlocked in a clash that signified a calculated confrontation between “İstanbul's appointed governor” and “local autonomous forces?”<sup>93</sup> Diyarbekri emphasizes the loyalty of

90 Diyarbekri I, fols. 406a-407b; Diyarbekri II, fol. 312b; Hadidi, 445.

91 Diyarbekri I, fols. 403a-404b. Diyarbekri II, fols. 312a-313b; 313a; 316b-316a. These orders were implemented in September 1523 (Sevval 28, 929/ September 9-Zi'l-kade 929.) Kaşif's unruly and seditious actions are also noted in Diyarbekri.

92 See Diyarbekri I, fols. 403a and 406a for the controls regarding the salaries of the janissaries aimed to limit their mobility and actions.

93 I thank one of my readers for raising this important question.

the janissaries to the Ottoman sultan as they suspect betrayal in Ahmed Pasha's heart and actions while also underlining how difficult it had been to draw clear lines of loyalty or betrayal among their ranks to the situation they were facing in Cairo. However, Diyarbekri does not say that the janissaries were "autonomous" in their opposition to Ahmed Pasha to eventually actualize a calculated motivation of self-autonomy (or independence) from the Ottoman sultan during Ahmed Pasha's successor Güzelce Kasım Pasha's second governorship (2 Cemaziye'l-ahir 930-Rebiü'l-evvel 931/6 April 1524-December/January 1524). As such, we cannot attribute a certain pattern of hostile behavior by the janissaries directed exclusively against Ahmed Pasha: they would have reacted in the same way if Kasım Pasha had instigated a revolt against the Ottoman sultan as well. The janissaries, as far as Diyarbekri was concerned, do not carry the agenda to break free from either government – Cairo and/or Istanbul.

Kasım Pasha's stipulations during the seven-eight month governorship undid nearly all of Ahmed Pasha's rehabilitations in Egypt. However, despite all efforts, Kasım Pasha's success to maintain law and order, following the chaos instigated by Ahmed Pasha, was limited. The forces of opposition and their range of activities against the local Ottoman government, and Sultan Suleyman's imported military, such as the Arab sheikhs, were fierce. These forces aimed to curb out the local Ottoman forces – imported or local. However, the Bedouin Arab forces failed not because of Kasım Pasha's success in establishing a rapport with the local (and imported) military including janissaries, and forming a unified front of attack against them but because of the sheer numbers in the military contingency that arrived from Istanbul. These forces created fear in the ranks of the anti-Ottoman opposition forces and resulted with their withdrawal from further attempts to control Egypt. The imported military was loyal to the Ottoman Sultan according to Diyarbekri – and not to Kasım Pasha.

Hadidi's perspective, departing from Diyarbekri's and paralleling the *İbtihâc*, connects the displacement and exile of people to Ahmed Pasha's immediate agenda to revolt; in this view, since the pasha had been a traitor from the beginning, he lied about Süleyman's orders regarding the janissaries.<sup>94</sup> Diyarbekri, alternately, notes the cacophony of opinions about Ahmed Pasha's actions against the janissaries, saying that no one knew exactly what was going on.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, obedience

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94 Hadidi, 446.

95 Diyarbekri I, fols. 407a-407b.

and loyalty problems, especially among the different groups of local military, had risen consistently since 1517, and little had changed by 1523.<sup>96</sup>

Diyarbakri says that a number of additional factors also contributed to the deteriorating relations between Ahmed Pasha and the local military personnel. First on the list was Ahmed Pasha's pardon of the Circassians – which triggered suspicion among the janissaries – and second was the confiscation of the muskets belonging to the local military. Deciding that these acts demanded caution on their part, the janissaries found ways to acquire muskets and waited, knowing that Ahmed Pasha was treacherous. As Diyarbakri relates, Ahmed Pasha also knew that if he were to do something (meaning rebelling or acting violently), the janissaries would likely desert him and disobey his orders. Thus, as a preemptive measure, Ahmed Pasha sent an order to the bey of Sa'id, Ali Bin Omar, saying that the bey should immediately send him one thousand trained black slaves. Explaining that the pasha wished to give the confiscated muskets to the slaves in order to secure their loyalties, Diyarbakri notes the frustration and disapproval of the janissaries, with whom Ahmed Pasha's act did not sit well at all.<sup>97</sup>

By Muharrem 930/November 1523, Ahmed Pasha faced a full-fledged janissary riot instigated with the explicit intention to kill him. Disbanding, hanging, and other severe punishment of the janissaries had fierce repercussions in the city as Ahmed Pasha gave orders to quarantine the citadel, passed orders to execute anyone found in its vicinity, moved the janissaries out from the castle, and opened up the arsenal for inspection.<sup>98</sup> Here the sources conflict on some of the events. Judging from Diyarbakri's timeline, this particular riot took place after Ahmed Pasha sent the *subaşı* of Egypt to İstanbul – 28 Zi'l-hicce 929/6 November 1523. In the *İbtihâc*, a similar riot is referenced after 17 Sevval 929/29 August 1523, following Ahmed Pasha's arrival in Egypt. Unlike the *İbtihâc*, Diyarbakri does not mention the involvement of Gülşeni in placating the pasha before or during this particular riot. However, a number of specific references in both sources suggest

96 For a comparison with the immediate post-1517 period, refer to Diyarbakri, fols. 164, 167-168, 261-262.

97 Diyarbakri I, fol. 405b; Diyarbakri II, fol. 313b.

98 Diyarbakri I, fols. 407a-408b. Also see Diyarbakri I, fol. 409b: Ahmed Pasha introduced novel methods to control the rioting janissaries, one of which was to determine the identity of soldiers by restricting the usage of the proper attires of *kul*, *kuloğlu*, *kullukçu*, and 'abd populations. By 20 Muharrem 930/28-29 November 1523, he ordered them not to wear dark red attire so as to differentiate them from the Circassian soldiers.

that this riot was triggered because the janissaries knew about the treachery in Ahmed Pasha's heart in addition to his suspicious actions.

Ahmed Pasha, in times of crisis, used the motto that precaution in all matters was an indispensable condition.<sup>99</sup> Based on this motto, he did two things in the beginning of his tenure: first, he disbanded and eliminated a substantial segment of the Cairo-based janissaries who had started a riot, and second, he began his systematic manipulation of the Circassians into joining his ranks, keeping a close watch on them, and sacrificing them when he deemed it necessary to put down the rioting janissaries. As his later actions demonstrate, he meant to establish a powerful military base loyal only to him. If he could not trust the janissaries, he would try the Circassians and the Arab tribes.<sup>100</sup>

Going back to the particulars of the grey zone on the eve of the revolt, we see that Ahmed Pasha, in addition to his measures against the janissaries, also secured the Circassian constituency as an alternative force. According to Diyarbekri, his strategies of pardoning, inviting, and subsequently recruiting the alienated Circassian military were based on this agenda of mutual profit, but he did not couch his appeal in pragmatic terms, instead using a manipulative, ethnicity-oriented, and emotionally charged tone to secure their allegiance. He repeatedly said that the Ottomans did nothing but violate their rights and persecute and eliminate the Circassians. In the beginning, he tried to recruit the ex-Mamluk soldiers with hopes of establishing a military base he could rely on. However, he also distrusted them, thinking that they could double-cross him for a better deal. In the end, Ahmed Pasha manipulated the Circassians, recruited them, and also persecuted them as per his oft-repeated motto.<sup>101</sup> While the Circassians (or ex-Mamluk soldiers) and the Arab tribal constituencies were the two principal human engines Ahmed Pasha used to recruit and feed his military in the earlier and final phases of his revolt, they were dispensable if proven inobedient. The Circassians served the pasha mostly in the urban areas, the Arabs in the rural geography. The Circassians constituted the core of the military force in the city and embodied a prevalent anti-Ottoman spirit. During Ahmed Pasha's tenure, this spirit of Circassian insurgency assumed a more radical and vibrant identity, since the Circassians received permission to kill Ottoman soldiers.<sup>102</sup> Two other units were comprised of aghas

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99 Diyarbekri I, fol. 409a.

100 Also see the *Ībtihāc*, fol. 124b.

101 Diyarbekri I, fols. 409a; 407b; 417a.

102 Diyarbekri I, fols. 416a; 417b; Diyarbekri II, fol. 320b.

of Egypt, Arab sheikhs, and groups of *Rūmī* soldiers, additional forces who made a limited impact on the outcome of the revolt.<sup>103</sup>

As Diyarbekri relates, Ahmed Pasha, in his speech to the Circassians, made an anti-Ottoman declaration which stood out as his main argument. He revealed to his recruits that he, in fact, had originally been a Circassian and did not hold the Ottomans close to his heart. Ignoring his Albanian origins, Ahmed Pasha emphasized that he had been coerced into becoming a member of joining the Ottoman military for fear of his life. He also revealed that, in Egypt, an epiphany, had revealed the innermost purpose of his life – to unite with the Circassians and become the Sultan of Egypt. While he did not openly state this ambition in his speech, Ahmed Pasha told his audiences that he would reward their allegiance by promoting them. In his speech, Ahmed Pasha not only asked to be unified with his “true” origins and to eliminate the Ottomans, but also carefully manipulated the frustrations of the Circassians to further nurture the anti-Ottoman spirit, which he considered the ultimate driving force of his war.<sup>104</sup> The Circassians, confronted with such an appeal, were in a rather ambiguous position. Despite their acceptance of favors, including wages, attire, food, and rank, they still doubted whether or not they should go forward with the new leader. Even among themselves they were seditious and untrustworthy.<sup>105</sup>

#### IV. Conspiracy staged in İstanbul or not?

As we have seen so far, primary sources have various perspectives about why Ahmed Pasha rebelled. There was also a great deal of ambiguity in Egypt about when the revolt began and how different audiences interpreted the pasha’s actions preceding any open declaration of rebellion. Did the events that led to the revolt give evidence of a conspiracy plot that forced the pasha’s hand? In this section I will examine the chronology of events after the janissary riots of Muharrem 930/ November 1523 and analyze Ahmed Pasha’s declaration of the revolt and the events surrounding it.<sup>106</sup>

When did Ahmed Pasha declare his revolt? According to Diyarbekri, he announced it openly after finding out about the secret plans made in İstanbul to

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103 Diyarbekri I, fol. 412a; Diyarbekri II, fols. 320b; 322a.

104 Diyarbekri I, fols. 415b-415a; Diyarbekri II, fol. 322a.

105 Diyarbekri I, fols. 415b-415a; Diyarbekri II, fols. 323b-323a.

106 Diyarbekri I, fols. 407b-409b.

have him killed by Kara Musa, a high-ranking Ottoman commander in Egypt.<sup>107</sup> However, it still remains uncertain whether Ahmed Pasha had plotted to rebel as he set foot to Egypt, or whether the sultan's order to have him executed pushed the pasha to revolt as a last resort to have a fair fight for his life. My findings indicate that Ahmed Pasha's initial actions, which looked like preparations for a rebellion, might have been part of a defense against a possible plot against his life and an effort to evaluate whether Süleyman's janissaries would follow his own. As I examined earlier, a sense of mistrust festered between the pasha and the Cairo-based janissaries following his arrival in Cairo. While the available evidence makes it difficult to reach a definitive conclusion about what prompted Ahmed Pasha's sedition, we can argue that the Egyptian and Cairo-based Ottoman audiences read his actions, following the riots of 1523, as reflecting one reality: treachery against the Ottoman sultan and revolt, either voluntary or not.

Despite the scope of evidence, to pinpoint exactly when the revolt began is difficult. According to the Ottoman chronicles (Celalzade, Hadidi, the *İbtihâc*), Ahmed Pasha began preparing to rebel as soon as he arrived in Egypt in Shawwal 929/August 1523. Diyarbekri has a different perspective. According to his timeline, Ahmed Pasha's revolt became manifest to his Egyptian audiences around the time of the janissary riots, as coins bearing his title as *Sultan Ahmed* appeared around 12 Muharrem 930/20-21 November 1523.<sup>108</sup> The janissaries interpreted this as a declaration of his revolt. As Diyarbekri notes, in an effort to save his reputation, Ahmed Pasha denied any connection with the event and incarcerated the minting officials, reprimanding them by saying that they had forced his hand to rebel by falsely painting him as a traitor. Diyarbekri criticized the pasha's denials as a ruse. When the pasha asked the minters why they had committed such a serious

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107 Diyarbekri I, fols. 411a-412a. Kara Musa, commissioned directly from İstanbul, arrived in Egypt around Muharrem 928/December 1521, during the tenure of Hayr Bey and intense chaos among the local Cairene Ottoman military. He was initially known as the head of the artillery unit but gradually took over as the head of the janissaries, replacing a certain İskender Bey. Diyarbekri notes Kara Musa's power and control over the local military units and his harsh measures against any transgression: Diyarbekri, fols. 262a-263b. The details on Kara Musa, who had been a key figure in the revolt, are related in the coming sections. Kara Musa was also a disciple of Gülşeni. For the connection, see Muhyi, 388; 394. For a detailed analysis of Gülşeni and Ahmed Pasha, see the forthcoming monograph *Power Brokers*, Chapter Eight.

108 Diyarbekri I, fol. 408a; Diyarbekri II, fol. 316a. The minting of coins was not referenced in the *İbtihâc*, Süheyli, alternately, refers to the minting of coins as a direct order from Ahmed Pasha (Süheyli, 53.)

crime, their response sounded as if it had been intended primarily for audiences in İstanbul: Sultan Süleyman's honor, might, and dignity, as the Sultan of Egypt, was found lacking in Egypt; the exact word used by Diyarbekri can be translated as "miserly" – thus the appearance of the Ottoman sultan's name and title on the mint was deemed improper.<sup>109</sup> Was this event a calculated result of Ahmed Pasha's own initiative and planning? Or was he being framed by his enemies?

Let us consider here two possible – and not necessarily mutually exclusive – scenarios to explore the minting of the coins as a crime under Ahmed Pasha's tenure. First, if he had been unaware of such a transgression, his initial impulsive reaction aside, the less-than-severe punishment of the guilty parties revealed that he was not unprepared or severely alarmed by the act: he merely asked the parties involved to amend the situation. Diyarbekri notes the brief incarceration of the culprits, saying that Ahmed Pasha's "rage" was an act.

As Diyarbekri says, two Ottoman beys, Musa (Kara Musa) and Muhammed Beys, who were with him during the interrogation of the culprits, restrained and placated Ahmed Pasha with great difficulty. Ahmed Pasha, with his now manifest public image as a traitor (*hāin*) against the Ottoman sultan, and in a fit of rage because his hand was forced, and might have decided to march to İstanbul – an idea that he brought up several times again after he declared his sultanate. An alternative interpretation of the episode may point to Ahmed Pasha's "expectation" of the possible consequences of the minting of the coins and what that signified – open rebellion against the sultan. The pasha's reasons behind the decision to march to Istanbul are not elaborated. Diyarbekri relates a snide insult by a Rumi mystic<sup>110</sup> prompted by the pasha's declaration: "As [Ahmed Pasha] declared his intention to march forward [to İstanbul] one of the *Rūmī* mystics ("Rūm rindlerinden biri") said "God forbid! You are behaving like Fāṭima Ḥātūn! ("Hāṣā senden Fāṭima Ḥātūn dimiş.")<sup>111</sup> This derogatory remark reflects how ridiculous his wish must have sounded to the people present at the time. In sum, while Ahmed Pasha's reactions for, or against, the minting of the coins or his outburst to attempt to conquer the seat of the empire do not provide definitive proof of

109 Diyarbekri I, fol. 408a; Diyarbekri II, fol. 316a. Two versions follow the same storyline with variations.

110 This insult was censored in the British Library manuscript and it surfaced in the Süleymaniye manuscript.

111 Diyarbekri II, fol. 316a. I suggest that Fāṭima *hātūn* could be a contemporary reference to a famed prostitute in Cairo.



treachery or declaration of his revolt, they constitute evidence about his ambitions and mental state.

Secondly, if he had indeed ordered the minting of coins and pretended otherwise, as Diyarbekri suspected, at this time Ahmed Pasha either knew of or suspected a plot on his life. The ambivalent tone of a dispatch from İstanbul on 15 Muharrem 930/23-24 November 1523 made matters worse. The dispatch related that the movements of the Safavid Shah roused suspicions of a possible march from Baghdad to the Arabian Peninsula and asked Ahmed Pasha to be vigilant in case of an attack. Arriving after the coin incident, this dispatch prompted Ahmed Pasha into a fit of paranoia. He sent one hundred gold coins to one of his Circassian allies, İnal Bāy, and ordered him to leave for İstanbul. İnal Bāy was threatened with death if he refused to leave Egypt. He was chained and sent to İstanbul with a number of janissaries 16 Muharrem 930/24-25 November 1523. Why did the pasha send him? Was İnal Bāy labeled as the main culprit in the minting episode and sent to İstanbul for punishment? If so, why was he sent with money? Or was he accused of being an insurgent? Was he sent as a messenger? If so, why a Circassian bey and not an Ottoman official? Diyarbekri does not provide answers. He says that when the people of Egypt saw this, they were flabbergasted. For them, this act gave evidence of the pasha's craziness ("*aklinin ziyade noksanın virür.*") Whatever the reasoning behind this act, expelling İnal Bāy with force alienated a large segment of ex-Mamluk and Circassian military backup and sharply decreased public support for Ahmed Pasha on the eve of the declaration of his revolt and sultanate.<sup>112</sup>

After İnal Bāy was sent away, Ahmed Pasha announced his intentions to "travel and discover the lands in the East and the West" and urged his military – Circassians and janissaries – to get ready. Following that, he tried to send two more Circassians to İstanbul on 29 Muharrem 930/7 December 1523. Diyarbekri explains his reasoning, which may also reveal why he sent away İnal Bāy as well – to exonerate himself from accusations and, perhaps, to gain time:

He [Ahmed Pasha] escaped from the promise he pledged to the Ottomans and cultivated the Circassians ("*kendüye yakin itdi*".) The pasha thus put a distance between himself and one of them [Ottomans] ("*biri kendüden irak iyledi.*") As such, it was said that the pasha was true to himself. People cast false accusations against him. To be able to absolve himself from those accusations, he called out

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112 Diyarbekri I, fol. 409b; Diyarbekri II, fol. 316a-317b.

to the Circassians begs with the intention to send them to Istanbul. But they escaped and hid themselves.

Eventually, when news about his actions started reaching İstanbul, İbrahim Pasha sent a secret order to Kara Musa to eliminate Ahmed Pasha and assume control of Egypt. When Ahmed Pasha discovered the order, he had Kara Musa killed as well as the agha of the janissaries, waged a siege to take control of the citadel, and when he succeeded, declared himself the Sultan of Egypt. Was the revolt declared after the pasha discovered the orders to execute him? Did İbrahim Pasha influence the course of events? If so, how?<sup>113</sup>

Here, relying on Diyarbekri, I argue that Ahmed Pasha declared his revolt *before* Kara Musa was sent a secret order to eliminate him and after the attempt to send the two Circassian beys to Istanbul. On 2 Safer 930/9 December 1523, Ahmed Pasha, “with a strong desire in his mind, becoming defiant and power-drunk, and with his head in the clouds,” said: “Here in Egypt I command a large body of the military. Why wouldn’t I be independent? Why wouldn’t I have the *huṭba* (sermon performed in the Friday service) read and the *sikke* (currency) cut in my name? Why would I be oppressed and imprisoned under their [the Ottoman dynasty’s] yoke?”<sup>114</sup> This statement was an open declaration of his ambitions to become the sole ruler of Egypt. Another visible sign was his shaving of his head and face in the manner and style of the *kalenderî meşreb*. This was seen by the people (“*Arab ṭā’ifesi*”) as a foolish declaration of arrogance and pride. They insulted his decision to shave in such a style with contempt (“*Her kim gördü ise yuf bunun aklına didiler.*”) References to Ahmed Pasha’s *kalenderî*-style shaving went hand in hand with the depiction of his most treacherous acts and with his gradually declining mental stability, as evidence that carried the rebellion to a new level in the eyes of his audiences.<sup>115</sup>

113 For an alternative discussion, see Turan, 192-200. Also Celalzade, 113a-113b; Hadidi, 445-446.

114 Diyarbekri I, fol. 410b; Diyarbekri II, fol. 317a.

115 Diyarbekri, fol. 411a; Diyarbekri II, fol. 319b. For an analysis of the meanings and history of the term *kalender* and *kalenderîs* see Tahsin Yazıcı, “Kalandar,” in *EP*. Also, see Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Marjinal Sufilik: Kalenderiler, XIV-XVII. Yüzyıllar* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1992). Being a *kalender* surfaces in the poetry of Gulshenis and Mevlevis frequently. It referenced a sense of rebellion vis-à-vis established social order, controversiality, a critique of accepted social norms, and potentially subversive behavior. It is also examined in connection with Alid tendencies. Regarding the usage of sword-shaped headgear in the Mevlevi *meşreb* and

According to Diyarbekri, Ahmed Pasha became aware of a secret imperial decree which ordered his death on 2 Rebiyu'l-evvel 930/8 January 1524 – approximately one month after he first declared his ambitions to rule Egypt independently – and during a conversation with an unnamed messenger (*ulāk*) who had traveled to Istanbul and returned to Cairo. Around the same time, Kara Musa, who had suspected an attempt on his own life, anxiously also traveled back to Cairo.<sup>116</sup> After this point, the storylines in Diyarbekri and the *İbtihāc* diverge. First, I will examine Diyarbekri to demonstrate the subtle pro-Ahmed Pasha tone of the text convincing us to think that his rebellion took full force *after* the discovery of a conspiracy staged by İbrahim Pasha in Istanbul, thus partially justifying Ahmed Pasha's actions. Next, I will introduce the *İbtihāc's* version to demonstrate a pro-imperial agenda.

Diyarbekri says that Ahmed Pasha ordered the prompt execution of Kara Musa upon the unsettling discovery of the contents of the secret decree, which said “...when my decree [sultanic decree drawn and sealed by İbrahim Pasha] reaches you, you [Kara Musa], without a moment's delay, and by all means necessary, execute him [Ahmed Pasha] and replace him as the next governor.”<sup>117</sup> Ahmed Pasha, after rewarding the messenger, and with intense panic (“*can başına sıçrayub*”), read the decree to some of his trusted men. Promptly, he ordered the beheading of Kara Musa (*İmdi binüb tiz girub varub ol kara yüzlü ve eğri sözlü Kara Musa'nın başın*

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*mezheb*, Gölpınarlı says: “Çhar-darb olan, Kalenderiliği benimseyen, kendisine intisab edenleri çhar-darb tıraş ettiren, bazen Mevlevi külahı, bazen Kalenderilerin Bektaşilere geçen ve Mevlevilerce Şems'e nisbet edilen on iki terkli (dilimli) Huseyni tac, bazen de külahının tepesini iki yandan ezip üstüne keskin bir hale getirerek adeta Bektaşilerin elifi tacına benzeten ve o tarzda giyen, müridlerine de 'seyfi' denen bu çeşit külahı giydiren...” (Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, *Mevlanadan sonra Mevlevilik*, 114-115). The Kalenderiye, a socially non-conformist mystical tradition emerged with Melametiye in the ninth century, had the principle of shunning outward worldly concerns and public approval. However, its followers had a decisively inward orientation of piety with an ascetic bent. One of their most significant signs was the shaving off of the beard, moustache, eyebrows and the head. Theoretically under the influence of the Buddhist and Hindu traditions, members of *kalenderiye* diverged from other Sufis. Their coarse clothing and shawls, black or yellow, woven hats, their clean-shaven appearance, and iron rings worn around their necks, wrists etc.; their musical instruments such as drums; their standards and principles such as refusing to settle down, not performing communal prayers, and living off of charity; as well as their scandalous and obscene behaviors in public, all exemplified their extraordinary orientation and nonconformist way of life.

116 Diyarbekri I, fol. 411a.

117 Diyarbekri I, fol. 412b; Diyarbekri II, fol. 319a.

*kesüb getirün*”).<sup>118</sup> The affirmative response from his men also pointed to a violent purge of other people that Ahmed Pasha had not thought necessary before: “*Paşa sağ olsun, anun [Kara Musa] başın kesmek kati kolaydır... amma yalnız anun yalnız başın kesmekle işin bitmez. İş ulaşır işe bırakur. Eldeki düğümü dişe kerem iyle, eyü mü? didi.*”<sup>119</sup> In accordance with the suggestion that it was best to put a definitive end to all potential deceit, and plots, Kara Musa – to whom the pasha referred in contempt as the one with the black face and crooked words – was killed by Kara Ferhad.<sup>120</sup> Diyarbekri is sympathetic to Kara Musa. He says that despite engaging in some kind of business affair with the disciples of Sheyh İbrahim-i Gülşeni (of the Mu’ayyadıya Mosque) and thus becoming a heretic like them, Kara Musa was a plain-spoken and pleasant person (“*sade dil bir hoşca kişi idi.*”)<sup>121</sup>

After the elimination of his intended executor Musa Bey, Ahmed Pasha’s purge began. He executed large numbers of janissaries and cavalrymen (4 Rebiü’l-evvel 930/10 January 1524) while ordering the rest into exile in Istanbul to avoid more executions of those who would not fight for his cause. He also simultaneously invited the Circassians to his side to eliminate the remaining military loyal to the house of Osman. In fact, his speech to the Circassians stoked the already existing hatred between them and the Ottomans, emphasizing the atrocities inflicted on them, and giving an open license to the Circassians to kill the enemy that Ahmed Pasha designated.<sup>122</sup> These orders brought an intense period of brewing anarchy, chaos, and fighting in Egypt that would last until after Ahmed Pasha’s short-lived capture of the citadel and declaration of his sultanate.

To complement Diyarbekri’s perspective, the *İbtihâc* provides another vantage point to understand when the revolt began and whether it was prompted by a conspiracy plot staged in Istanbul: Detailed evidence from the *İbtihâc* strongly suggests that Ahmed Pasha’s enemies in İstanbul actively worked to frame him as a traitor. The *İbtihâc*, omitting information on the minting incident and following the episode about the intercession of Sheyh İbrahim-i Gülşeni to placate Ahmed Pasha’s harsh treatment of janissaries upon his arrival in Egypt, relates that İbrahim

118 Diyarbekri II, fol. 319a. The content and choice of words differ from Diyarbekri I, fol. 412b. The overall meaning is similar in both versions.

119 Diyarbekri II, fol. 319a: “*Paşa ana eytdi: ‘Herçi yare bad yarıkladığı gün tozar didi (Whenever the wound is forked [thus aired], it [its infection] spreads around.)’*” Diyarbekri I has a different metaphor: fol. 412b.

120 Diyarbekri I, fol. 413b; Diyarbekri II, fol. 319a.

121 Diyarbekri I, fol. 412a; Diyarbekri II, fol. 320b.

122 Diyarbekri I, fol. 412a-413b; Diyarbekri II, fol. 320b.

Pasha was personally involved in setting up a trap for Ahmed Pasha. First, İbrahim Pasha sent a secret letter to Kara Musa asking about Ahmed Pasha's actions. After receiving Kara Musa's response detailing the preparations for a revolt, İbrahim Pasha sent another dispatch to Kara Musa with an imperial decree intended for Kara Musa's eyes only:

The Sublime Porte appointed Kara Musa as the governor of Egypt and conferred the governorship of Aleppo to Ahmed Pasha. One chavush, as fast as the wind, delivered the secret decree to Kara Musa. This decree ordered him to execute Ahmed Pasha who, in accordance with the saying "every pharaoh has his Moses" ("li kulli firavunin Musa"), had become pharaoh-like in his pride and obstinacy ("tefer'un iden.")<sup>123</sup>

The contents of this decree and the subsequent events reveal the depth of İbrahim Pasha's schemes to have Ahmed Pasha killed and how his conniving opened a can of worms in Egypt. According to the *İbtihâc*, upon hearing about a secret decree, Ahmed Pasha's *kapu kethüda* Kara Mustafa immediately traveled to Istanbul – unknown to the pasha – to meet with Iskender Çelebi and inquire after the order. Kara Mustafa chose to meet with Iskender Çelebi – İbrahim Pasha's boon companion, secretary, and treasurer<sup>124</sup> – because he knew about İskender Çelebi's old and trusting friendship with Ahmed Pasha. Kara Mustafa asked İskender Çelebi whether there was any truth to the reports of this decree. When İskender Çelebi denied its existence, Kara Mustafa consulted *hükem-nüvîs* Evliya Mehmed Çelebi to be sure. When he could not get a straight and truthful answer from him, Kara Mustafa suspected the worst and without further delay went to Üsküdar to travel to Egypt as soon as possible. After their conversation, Iskender Çelebi realized that word had gotten out about İbrahim Pasha's secret decree to have Ahmed Pasha killed. To suppress the leak, he rushed to Beykoz to find İbrahim Pasha and produced a letter explaining to him that Kara Mustafa was aware of such a decree and that it was necessary to capture him. İskender Çelebi's timely intervention resulted in İbrahim Pasha's urgent order to send another *çavuş* to capture Kara Mustafa. In Antalya, Kara Mustafa met with the *çavuş*, but instead of returning back to Istanbul, the two traveled to Dimyat by sea. After they reached Dimyat, Kara Mustafa tricked and murdered the *çavuş*, stole the decree, reached

123 *İbtihâc*, fol. 125b. See *Tārîh-i Mısr*, fols. 7a-9a for an extended account of İbrahim Pasha's emotional outburst against Ahmed Pasha's actions.

124 See *Tevarîh-i Al-i Osman*, Ankara Türk Tarih Kurumu Kütüphanesi Y362, fols. 16a-17b for İskender Çelebi's vitae. This *tabakât*-type chronicle was composed in 1640.

Cairo alone, and returned the document to Ahmed Pasha. This decree bestowed the governorship of Aleppo on Ahmed Pasha and the governorship of Egypt to Kara Musa. After learning that his capture was tasked to Kara Musa, Ahmed Pasha had a decree written to have Kara Musa promptly executed and sealed it with his own *tuğrā* (seal, insignia.) He gathered the *dīvān* (imperial council) the next day (“*Kara Musā'nin katli fermānına müstemil hük-m-i sulṭāni inṣā itdirüb kendisi tuğrāsın çekub, irtesi dīvān itdi.*”)<sup>125</sup>

According to the *İbtihāc* Ahmed Pasha planned to have Kara Musa arrive at the *dīvān*, whereupon he would have the decree read. However, Kara Musa, frightened by the arrival of Kara Mustafa in Cairo, and sensing trouble afoot, escaped. His plans thwarted, Ahmed Pasha sent the agha of the Circassians, Çerkez Ferhad and others, in Kara Musa's pursuit. Kara Musa, wounded by these assailants, took refuge at his house as a last resort, and was finally caught and beheaded there.<sup>126</sup> Learning of a janissary plot to raid the imperial council, Ahmed Pasha next had the agha of the janissaries brought to him and executed. Not wishing to pursue other executions, the pasha had another decree drawn which said: “I have a big campaign ahead of me. Those who learn about this must send my *kuls* (slaves, servants) to Cairo.” The decree also asked for the purchase by Ahmed Pasha of horses belonging to the cavalry. Those who did not obey his orders escaped to the Iskenderiye fort. With a plan to evacuate the rebels from the fort, Ahmed Pasha strategically asked the janissaries of Cairo to leave the citadel and travel to Iskenderiye, aid the siege, and recapture the fort. Sensing that this was a ploy to have them leave the citadel unprotected, the janissaries decided to stay and defend the citadel against Ahmed Pasha's forces at all costs. In the end, the extended and bloody siege resulted favorably for Ahmed Pasha: he seized the citadel and declared his sultanate.<sup>127</sup>

## V. The sultanate and debates over its legitimacy

In the first week of Rebiü'l-ahir 930/February 1524, Ahmed Pasha, with the aid of the Circassians, seized the city fortress from the janissaries and declared his sultanate (*devr-i Sulṭān Ahmed*). He chose the home of Mamluk Tura Bāy as his residence and invited the four judges alongside the descendant of the Abbasid caliph to receive blessings. In his ascension speech, he said that the Sultan of

125 *İbtihāc*, fols. 125b-126b.

126 *İbtihāc*, fols. 126b-126a.

127 *İbtihāc*, fol. 127b-128a.

Egypt had to reside in Egypt or else the realms would fall to ruins – perhaps creating a parallel between Tura Bāy’s house and the land of Egypt, both of which he seized by illegitimate means for the better end. Ahmed Pasha said that the ruler ought to be an independent person (*müstakil kişi*) who could monitor and protect the rights and well-being of the Muslim populations. He also argued that the house of Osman could not govern and control Egypt since the sultan ought to be physically present. Accordingly, he questioned the legitimacy of the claims of the Ottoman dynasty to rulership in Egypt.<sup>128</sup> In the *Ibtihac*, different details emerge. According to its account, Ahmed Pasha established his rule with the titular declaration: “O god, may your slave Sultan Ahmed be victorious, *es-sultān Aḥmed bin Üveys el-bahādur*.” *El-bahādur* here refers to the bravery and the heroic character of Ahmed Pasha – a self-eulogizing title that emphasized his courage and bold actions. Following this, Kadızade Muhammed Bey gave him ascension gifts from the Khan of Crimea, Mengli Giray.<sup>129</sup>

However, the legitimacy of Ahmed Pasha’s sultanate was a problematic issue. According to Diyarbekri, a Persian confidante of the pasha named Kadızade (who became the pasha’s chief treasurer), in the presence of the four judges and the Abbasid caliph figurehead, and *without* referring explicitly to any *berāts* (sultan’s order or a deed given for appointment to an office) issued and sent by Sultan Süleyman or displaying one as physical proof, declared that the sultan had handed over the region of Egypt in return for Ahmed Pasha’s services. Muhyi also references a similar incident. However, in his version, Ahmed Pasha produces a *berāt* that effectively stated that whoever ruled Egypt had to do so with an independent hand, or else the affairs of the realms would not be in good order. According to this, Süleyman willingly bestowed independent rulership of Egypt on Ahmed

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128 Diyarbekri I, fol. 419b-419a; Diyarbekri II, fol. 328b-328a.

129 *İbtihāc*, fols. 128a-129b. One of the readers commented that since Ahmed Pasha’s father was not a sultan, not even a Muslim, the way he depicted his lineage could speak volumes as to how a renegade from nowhere could attain legitimacy. The reader also inquired what kinds of political symbols the pasha could use – given that the Mamluks had sultans from among the ranks of recruits with no privileged backgrounds. As I explained earlier, Ahmed Pasha used *kalenderi* type of shaving to demonstrate his seditious intent. This can be interpreted as a subtle political symbol. Unlike the usage of the term, *el-bahādur*, which neither Diyarbekri nor Ibn Iyas elaborates, this shaving style was instantly deciphered by his Egyptian and Ottoman audiences as proof of his rebellious position – a visible political statement. Other symbols were to assign a vizier to himself as the Sultan of Egypt and the reinstatement of the four judges.

Pasha.<sup>130</sup> In Muhyi, the four judges consented to the contents of the order and accepted Ahmed Pasha's sultanate – with the exception of Gülşeni, who happened to be in the audience and who challenged the validity of the order despite potential harm to his person.<sup>131</sup> In Diyarbekri, similar reasons were cited but without information on Gülşeni's interference. Among the reasons that justified a strong and independent hand were the unstable condition of Egypt and the utter necessity to ameliorate the current circumstances. Kadızade added that, as per the dictates of the current dire situation, Ahmed Pasha had become the holder of *hüküm* (decree, in Turkish usage denoting rule, dominion, authority, and command) and *hükümet* (government, sovereignty, jurisdiction, and power), henceforth becoming the Sultan of Egypt.<sup>132</sup> This declaration encapsulated what Ahmed Pasha, according to Celalzade, had initially wanted from Süleyman after having been dismissed and humiliated by İbrahim Pasha's promotion to the grand vizierate in his place.<sup>133</sup>

However, the process of his ascension as well as the flow of the accompanying argumentation delivered to the audience was regarded with suspicion by the judges. The first voice of objection to Ahmed Pasha's claims to the sultanate came from the chief *Shāfi'ī* judge on the grounds that the current sultan, Süleyman, was still alive; hence Ahmed Pasha's claims and position remained void. The *Shāfi'ī* judge added that there had been two legitimate and lawful conditions upon which a person could claim rightful rule: either the death of the residing sultan or his willful abandonment and subsequent vacation of office. Therefore, the claims of Ahmed Pasha had been illegitimate since the position was already occupied by another person. The judge also stressed the Mamluk tradition of inheritance of sovereign rule and succession, which says that the new ruler should be one from among the foreign ones (*yabandan bir kişi olmak lazım gele*). In an ensuing argument, Kadızade sealed the issue by saying that Ahmed Pasha became the sultan by virtue of a forceful hand, the might of the sword, and his conquest of the land. Here, the principle of military superiority and forceful domination over an unjust government were emphasized. There was no mention of or justification for rebellion against the Ottoman sultan or usurpation of his authority. The judge, after this point, dared not oppose Ahmed Pasha and kissed his robes in submission. The elites of Egypt in the audience, following the judge, did likewise, saying that what had been done was done and now the future needed to be taken care of.

130 Muhyi, 391-392.

131 Muhyi, 392-393.

132 Diyarbekri I, fol. 419a; Diyarbekri II, fol. 328a.

133 Celalzade, 112a.



Henceforth they celebrated Ahmed Pasha's sultanate, gave their blessings, and had the coins and the prayers issued under the name of the new sultan. Ahmed Pasha was referred to as *el-melikü'l-manşūr Sultān Ahmed*: Sultan Ahmed, the sovereign ruler who is aided by God, in the Friday sermons.<sup>134</sup>

In declaring his sultanate, usurping the position by all accepted Sunni Islamic criteria, Ahmed Pasha did not operate alone. He utilized the knowledge and arguments of his Persian confidante, who had not read the order from Sultan Süleyman (as it was not sent in the first place, according to Diyarbekri), but also referred to it in the passive voice. The judges had been coerced into giving their favorable feedback, since, from their viewpoints, the situation was illegal. They saw the situation as a violation of Islamic law, and Ahmed Pasha's claims thus entirely void. Furthermore, despite his required presence in the gathering, the descendant of the Abbasid caliph was referred to neither symbolically or directly.

While receiving the beys and aghas of Egypt at the citadel, Ahmed Pasha followed the Ottoman rules of conduct and ceremony, including giving ascension tips (*cülüs bahşisi*) to his soldiers, duplicating the format of the *divāns* in which he had participated in İstanbul. He also appointed Muhammed Bey, who alongside Musa Bey had been one of his chief commanders, as his grand vizier. Ahmed Pasha's actions after the declaration of his sultanate found detailed coverage in Diyarbekri. For instance, while the author criticized Ahmed Pasha's *kalenderī* style shaving for official occasions, he also favorably noted his just deeds: in one council meeting, the pasha, to encourage an honest work ethic, assigned and increased wages appropriately for his personnel.<sup>135</sup>

On other occasions, the pasha gave evidence of his deteriorating mental stability. In particular, Ahmed Pasha's desire to conquer İstanbul was seen as final proof of his now publicly acknowledged insanity. In Rebiü'l-ahir 930/January 1524, Ahmed Pasha's *kethüdā* İskender Bey returned from İstanbul with news on the weakness of the Ottoman government. According to his news, which, Diyarbekri says, was a trap set up to reveal Ahmed Pasha's real intentions, Süleyman was pictured in distress, having been encircled by the joint forces of the Shah and Christians, a situation that kindled Ahmed Pasha's obsession to conquer İstanbul. When his intention became public once again, it provoked disbelief and ridicule in the people of Egypt. Diyarbekri relates that one *Rūmī* mystic, upon hearing the pasha's ideas, mocked and insulted him. His comments were censored in

134 Diyarbekri I, fol. 420b; Diyarbekri II, fol. 328a.

135 Diyarbekri I, *ibid*; Diyarbekri II, fol. 329a.

the Süleymaniye manuscript. In the British Library manuscript, they were not: “ [He said] Instead of [having dreams to conquer] İstanbul, first you better lie with a donkey. Those who heard this had an amused laugh and said ‘Well put!’” (“*İslambol yerine meğer eşek karnına vurdukin ilahi*” *dimiş. İşidenler sefa sürüb aferin itmişler.*)<sup>136</sup> While his folly was apparent to the people surrounding him, Ahmed Pasha was determined. Saying that delaying the conquest further would be a disaster, and putting absolute faith in his men (“The miraculous zeal of men of God surely would uproot mountains!”<sup>137</sup>) he readied arms and other necessities for his march. Diyarberkri filters Ahmed Pasha’s actions through the lens of his escalating insanity and a sure conviction that one day, such madness would cause his death. To wit, the pasha’s observers noted that, while he was swiftly losing public support, his escape to the ranks of the *Kızılbaş* had been imminent since he had *Kızılbaş* agents among his followers and retinue.<sup>138</sup> From this point onwards, Diyarbekri narrates the events in an involved tone since he was himself taking part in the plot that would lead to Ahmed Pasha’s fall.

## VI. Conspiracy plot legitimized by divinations: Diyarbekri’s manipulation of *‘ilm-i cifr* for the sake of holy war against the Sultan of Egypt

The first conspiracy plot to remove Ahmed Pasha from power took place after the secret decree to have him executed surfaced and before the declaration of his sultanate. Diyarbekri relates that one of the pasha’s *kethüdās*, Bayezid Çelebi, with the help of his men, tried to recruit *levends* to have the pasha eliminated.<sup>139</sup> While this move did not provide any results, Diyarbekri relates at length another one that did.

According to Diyarbekri, he and Muhammed Bey, Ahmed Pasha’s disgruntled vizier, who had referred to the pasha as “*hāin, ‘āṣī, kāfir, dinsüz ve İslāmsız*” (traitor, rebel, infidel, irreligious, also meaning without belief in Islam) in a private conversation, had secretly designed the primary conspiracy plot to overthrow Ahmed Pasha’s sultanate.<sup>140</sup> However, in the beginning, Diyarbekri says that it was

136 For the censored section, see Diyarbekri I, fol. 420a; for the uncensored section see Diyarbekri II, fol. 330b.

137 Ibid.

138 Diyarbekri I, fol. 421b, 421a; Diyarbekri II, fol. 330b, 330a, 331b, 331a, 332b.

139 Diyarbekri II, fol. 321a-322b.

140 Diyarbekri I, fol. 421a-422b; Diyarbekri, II fols. 332b-333b.

not easy to convince Muhammed Bey. To set the stage for discussion and to build the courage to introduce the idea, Diyarbekri strategically argued for the direness of the situation in Egypt and its only possible solution – the elimination of Ahmed Pasha – by consulting an unorthodox medium: an unidentified *cifr* text.<sup>141</sup> To legitimize the information in the *cifr* text, Diyarbekri referred to it as *el 'ilm-i indul'llāh* (knowledge that exists within God), and presented the textual proof of Muhammed Bey's central role in the history of Egypt. Diyarbekri's presentation of the relevant section was encoded in ciphers and abbreviations:

In such and such year, the ruler of Egypt, who had *elif* as the initial letter of his name, would betray his *padişah* and rebel against him. To put an end to his treacherous rebellion, the one who had *mim* as the initial letter of his name would kill him. That person is a *gāzī* and *mücāhid*.<sup>142</sup>

Muhammed Bey received the news from Diyarbekri with awe and fear. After having considered the situation and the prophecy revealed to him, he said that taking action was far too great a responsibility and a burden on his shoulders. The rest of the episode unravels rapidly. Muhammed Bey, despite hesitations, believed in Diyarbekri's commentary about his own prophesized role in ending Ahmed Pasha's sultanate and took action. Alternately in the *İbtihāc*, there is no mention of Diyarbekri in the plot that overthrew the pasha or any references to a *cifr* text: Instead Muhammed Bey and İskender *kethüdā* are the main protagonists.<sup>143</sup>

The preeminence of prophecy and its connection to politics and religion in early modern Christian and Islamic history has been investigated in modern scholarship.<sup>144</sup> Studies on the proliferation of apocalyptic excitement and prophetic texts in circulation, and on the ways that prophecy was utilized as

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141 Any text pertaining to the world of the unseen, including onomancy, that gives information on hidden truths and encompasses knowledge of events past, present, and future.

142 Diyarbekri I, fol. 422b; Diyarbekri II, fol. 332a.

143 *İbtihāc*, fol. 129a-130b.

144 Ottavia Niccoli, *Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Cornell Fleischer, "The Lawgiver as Messiah: The Making of the Imperial Image in the Reign of Suleyman," in *Soliman le Magnifique et son temps*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris, 1992), 159-177; Cornell Fleischer, "Shadows of Shadows: Prophecy and Politics in 1530s Istanbul," in *Identity and Identity Formation in the Ottoman World*, ed. by Baki Tezcan and Karl K. Barbir, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 51-62.

an effective medium for political action, provided the field with a novel venue of investigation by uniting the Christian and Islamic worlds, in early modern history of culture, religion, and politics, on the axis of prophecy.<sup>145</sup> Within that framework, the events that transpired during a critical stage of Ahmed Pasha's sultanate in Egypt bear further witness to the relevancy and importance of prophetic texts, specifically texts of *cifr* to determine the future events and provide legitimacy to justify controversial political action.<sup>146</sup> As evidence from Diyarbekri demonstrates, onomancy texts that were in circulation in Egypt in c. 1520s guided the decision-making processes of the elites in the local Ottoman administration and military. Reference to these texts also provided mid-ranking servants of the government, such as Diyarbekri and Muhammed Bey, wisdom and justification for unprecedented political action – and in this case, a *coup*.

In the folios detailing the end of Ahmed Pasha's sultanate, Diyarbekri focuses on how the pasha ended up outside the citadel in a public bath and, after his presence was discovered he realized that he was going to be killed, how he hid in a cowardly manner, taking refuge once again in the castle.<sup>147</sup> Understanding that he faced a sure execution if he had stayed in the city, Ahmed Pasha finally fled for his life, leaving Cairo on 18 Rebiülahir 930/23-24 February 1524 to take refuge with one of the Arab tribes – *Şarkıyya* sheyhs, Bakr-oğlu.<sup>148</sup> Ahmed Pasha's desertion of Cairo ended his twelve-day sultanate. After his escape, the remaining military personnel pledged their allegiance to Muhammed Bey – whose temporary rule began with a public declaration of loyalty to Süleyman. His oath emphasized that Ahmed Pasha had been cruel and unjust to the Muslims of Egypt and that all would be amended now that the Ottoman rule was to be reestablished.<sup>149</sup> Diyarbekri says that Muhammed Bey had the support of the public. The city's daily life slowly returned to normal while Ahmed Pasha remained missing.

Later on, news reached Cairo that he had taken refuge with the Bakr-oğlu tribe, the leader of which pledged his alliance to his cause and promised to keep him safe (“*Hiç gam yeme Mısır senindir...Biz sağ oldukça senun bir kılına zarar*

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145 Fleischer, “Shadows”, 52.

146 For instance, see *Evlıya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi*, 10. Kitap, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Yücel Dağlı, Robert Dankoff (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2007), 66 for Sultan Selim's reading of *cifr* texts to determine success of Egypt's conquest.

147 Diyarbekri I, fols. 422b-422a.

148 Diyarbekri I, fol. 423b.

149 Diyarbekri I, fol. 423b; Diyarbekri II, fol. 333a-334b.

*degmez.*”)<sup>150</sup> While the tribe elders eventually agreed to turn Ahmed Pasha in, they nevertheless refused to kill him while he was under their protection, as it would have been a defiance of their customs: “He is but like a bird who took refuge [with us.] We are responsible for his well-being. It is not our way to capture and kill him. It is commonly said: Do not make law with blood. Thus we can not break our custom and do as you say.”<sup>151</sup> Instead they suggested that Muhammed Bey should prepare to capture the renegade sultan. In the end, Muhammed Bey put down the continuing in-fighting caused by Ahmed Pasha’s men, secured the lives of the ones who gave up fighting on the pasha’s behalf, and marched on towards Ahmed Pasha to put an end to the chaos once and for all.<sup>152</sup>

The final confrontation between Muhammed Bey’s forces and the Arab tribes – most of which were Yemenī – found detailed coverage in Diyarbekri. While this speech could well have been an embellishment by Diyarbekri, its tone is significant in its emphasis of honorable fighting for victory on behalf of the Ottoman sultan. When Ahmed Pasha’s speeches to his forces are considered, this particular one stands out for its clear and forceful imperial message – a feature that cannot be found in the pasha’s discourse.

When the *Rūmī* warriors were somewhat scared by the multitude of the ‘Arab forces (“*Rūm erenleri ‘Arab t̄a’ifesine nazar idüb gördiler ki t̄ağ ve t̄aş dolu ‘Arab olmuş. Rūm serverleri anların kesretin görüb bir miqdār kendülere korku geldi*”), Muhammed Bey gave them a speech urging a fearless holy war in the name of the Ottoman sultan: “Alas *ğāzi mücāhid* brothers! Open your eyes! It is commonly said: fear does not help change your destiny. Abandon fear as it is harmful. This is not a place for fear. It is commonly said: the male lamb is for sacrifice. Give your lives for the sake of our padisah and the zeal of religion [for the sake of Islam’s zeal and for the sake of our sultan.” (“*Hāy ğāzi mücāhid kardaşlar! Açun gözünüz bu korku mekanı değildir. Meşhūr misaldir korkunun ecele fā’idesi yokdur. Korkuyu terk idün ziyāde zararı çokdur. Meşhūr misaldir erkek kuzu kurban içündür. Padişahımız uğruna ve din gayretine evvel önünüzde [Islam hamiyetine sultanımız yoluna] can verin.*”)<sup>153</sup>

150 Diyarbekri I, fol. 424b; Diyarbekri II, fol. 334a-335b.

151 Diyarbekri I, fol. 424b-425a; Diyarbekri II, fol. 335a. The two versions have a few divergences but the overall meaning is the same.

152 Diyarbekri I, fols. 425b-426b; Diyarbekri II, fol. 335a-336a.

153 Diyarbekri I, fol. 426b-426a; Diyarbekri II, fols. 335a-337b. The two versions have different wording. My translations are from Diyarbekri I.

While the ensuing clash was intense and caused losses on both sides, it resulted in a victory for Muhammed Bey's forces. Ahmed Pasha was captured.<sup>154</sup> The below quotation voices his thoughts and self-defense in a speech that reads like a soliloquy. In this speech, we hear the voice of Ahmed Pasha for the first time in an unlikely source – a pro-Ottoman imperial text designed primarily to vilify the pasha. Surprisingly, the text provides a previously unknown perspective of the pasha's explanations for his actions – none of which portray him as the “enemy of the Ottoman Sultan or the state.” Not showing remorse for his actual revolt, Ahmed Pasha blames İbrahim Pasha's murderous intentions and plans for his annexation preceding the seditious actions he was blamed for. Relying on the fairness of the system of the four judges he had reestablished in Egypt, Ahmed Pasha explains that when his rebellion failed, he ran for his life. Furthermore, he wanted his fate to be determined by the judges in Cairo and not by the Ottoman forces who captured him. Such a wish – included in a text that clearly has the agenda to depict him as the villain – and when facing certain death no matter what he said or did, shows his determination and faith in what he thought, or hoped, he had achieved: a return to the established ways that honored the customs and laws of the land and the people of Egypt, and not the judicial and administrative innovations brought by the Ottomans. According to the *İbtihāc*, after being handed over as a captive to Mirza Bey, a man loyal to Kasım Pasha, and fearing the worst, Ahmed Pasha said:

It is true that people attributed me the foulness of treachery and I was accused of deserting the path of obedience to the *pādiṣāh* and ascending the peaks of dissent and rebellion. However, I never touched his treasury. I never took one grain, or confiscated, from his property and possessions. Those forsaken ones who pursued the agenda of looting are the ones who afflicted me with this situation. They are the ones who darkened this bright day and obscured my vision which saw the world as it was. Was not the abundant amount of treasure I amassed not enough for those senseless brigands [to plunder]? And did not the unlimited amount of possessions that they took from the city folk at the time of the interregnum suffice that they went ahead and wasted the public treasury, and spread their shameless acts? It is necessary that those unfortunate ones should receive severe punishment. Their chests should be cut into pieces with the daggers that have a hero's wrath. My perseverance in this behavior was not because of treachery or ingratitude. I took this path perhaps because Ibrahim Pasha attempted to kill me. He considered my annexation. And since execution was not allowed according to the opinions of the four judges, I took this path to find a way to escape death

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154 Diyarbekri I, fol. 426a-427b; Diyarbekri II, fol. 337b.

and to reach the path of salvation. I entrusted my freedom and left the decision to determine my fate in the hands of the judges. My life has a conclusion, an expected death penned by the fate God had written for me. I do not choose to face death fallen on my hands like this. I do not choose to go to them in this degraded position. If you [Mirza Bey] are pleased to complete the task with a respectful treatment, then take my head, and release my head from my body by severing it.' Mirza Bey kept the word of the pasha and cut off his head.<sup>155</sup>

The central role of Muhammed Bey in putting an end to Ahmed Pasha's sultanate remains mostly omitted in Istanbul-based chronicles. Diyarbekri details the violent events during Muhammed Bey's brief tenure, saying that after the arrival of Kasım Pasha (who briefly served as Egypt's governor between Cemazie'l-ahir 930/April 1524-Rebiü'l-evvel 931/December 1524),<sup>156</sup> he promoted Muhammed Bey to serve as the treasurer. Eventually Muhammed Bey was hanged by the pasha's orders – an unjustified execution which caused intense hatred among the people of Egypt against the new Ottoman regime and its supposed claims of justice.<sup>157</sup>

### **The “Ottoman way” and its critique: a conclusion**

The tenure of Ahmed Pasha as the governor and subsequently the Sultan of Egypt lasted nine months and twelve days. His rebellion and rule were both defined as controversial and found mixed coverage in sources penned in Istanbul and Cairo. None of these sources dared to openly question or critique aspects of Ottoman rulership and governance in Egypt. A historical contextualization of this revolt, Ahmed Pasha's attempt to establish an alternative rulership independent from the Ottomans, and the records of the reactions of the people of Egypt, demonstrate that while he had many enemies in Istanbul and Egypt, some of his policies that attempted to change “the Ottoman way” in administration found positive feedback, as did his critique of Ottoman governance in the post-1517 period.

The “Ottoman way” within the context of Egypt denotes a series of administrative-religious/judicial changes introduced to the existing system that marked departures from the customary and religious laws in practice under Mamluk rule. These departures were criticized intensely. Ibn Iyās, for instance, as the famed Arabic-speaking chronicler of Mamluk-Ottoman Egypt in the sixteenth century,

<sup>155</sup> *İbtihāc*, fol. 133b.

<sup>156</sup> Diyarbekri I, fols. 427b-431b.

<sup>157</sup> Diyarbekri I, fol. 431b.

did not comment favorably on the Ottomans in his *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr* mainly because they implemented changes he saw as ill-suited to the people of Egypt.<sup>158</sup> While Ibn Iyās does not distinguish between Ottoman customary and religious law in his analysis, he finds fault in the applications of both in Egypt, which he sums up as the “Ottoman way.” In fact, both Ibn Iyās and Diyārbekrī repeatedly underline how the people of Egypt reacted to the “Ottoman way” in administration and government, and how public opinion towards the new rulers of Egypt was consistently negative because of the unwelcome changes they brought.<sup>159</sup> Evidence on these changes – which created frustrations, resentment, and confrontations, at times, pitting the inhabitants of cities against one another, and against representatives of the provincial government, causing social tension, confrontations, and judicial disputes – is too profuse to cite here.<sup>160</sup> We can interpret Ahmed Pasha’s critique of the Ottoman imperial enterprise as a direct challenge to the “Ottoman way” being established in the newly conquered region. Ahmed Pasha was aware of the frustrations of the people and used them to bolster his message for a new rulership in Egypt.

As I discussed, one of the main policy shifts he implemented – the reinstatement of the four judges – was a revoking of the “Ottoman way” in the judiciary and a return to customary and traditional applications compatible with Islam as *ehl-i Mısr* practiced it. Despite clear evidence that some of the changes were well-received, the Istanbul-based sources focus only on the rebellion, citing it as a short-lived nuisance, or as yet another insignificant attempt to challenge the authority of the Ottomans – the architect of which was a madman. However, the duration of the revolt, the factions that were involved, and the scope of violent confrontations between Ahmed Pasha’s men and those loyal to Süleyman, as well as some of the policies implemented, depicts a more complex case. While the revolt was not a success story for the supporters of Ahmed Pasha, it created

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158 Gaston Wiet, *Journal d'un bourgeois du Caire* (Paris: Libraire Armand Colin, 1955-60) (Ibn Iyās.) Ibn Iyās, v. 5, 464.

159 For a detailed examination of the “Ottoman way,” see the forthcoming *Power Brokers*, Chapter Seven.

160 There are numerous entries in Ibn Iyās about waqf property-related policy after the Ottoman conquest: for waqf policies under Ḥā'ir Bey, Ibn Iyās, III, v. 5, 211-212; v. 5, 268-269; waqf exploitation and how civil functionaries in Cairo became administrative kings, v. 5, 221-222; waqf exploitation: v. 5, 280-281. Ibn Iyās’s references on waqf-related issues visibly diminish after the accession of Süleymān. A similar tone can be observed in Ibn Iyās regarding the land grants registries and pension payments in the province of Charkieh: Ibn Iyās, III, v. 5, 184.



enough of a reaction that Diyarbekri – as the only source that reflects public opinion – detailed the criticism voiced against the members of the local Ottoman government, especially after the demise of the pasha.

In conclusion, interpreting the transition from Mamluk to Ottoman rule in the years following 1517 from as many contemporaneous viewpoints as possible – Cairene and Ottoman – not only gives the readers a more nuanced understanding of the scope of the Ottoman imperial enterprise in the Arab lands, but also its limits and hidden critiques made by unexpected figures such as Ahmed Pasha – which has remained in the margins of Ottoman historical studies.

Despite its pitfalls, scholarship argues that the post-Ahmed Pasha period in Egypt gives evidence of change in two instances, both of which can be considered as benchmarks not only in the history of Ottoman Egypt, but in the history of the Ottoman Empire as well.<sup>161</sup> İbrahim Pasha's Egypt expedition and the subsequent promulgation of the Law Code in 1524-1525 demonstrate how the empire launched a brand-new project for the "Ottomanization of Egypt" after the revolt, simultaneously establishing a powerful imperial ideology of Sultan Süleyman and his ruling elite.

The preamble to the Law Code revealed that a new political and legal discourse for the empire had been laid out for the first time. The mentality behind the formation of this Law Code, which had been conceived as an experiment, would be developed and proliferated in political, cultural, and artistic arenas by Süleyman's intellectual and administrative elite throughout the first three decades of his rule, a move that would pave the way for novel interpretations in a matured imperial identity in the 1550s.<sup>162</sup> Recently, it has also been argued that the preamble developed a novel "political theology" in response to the ideological challenges of early modern Eurasia.<sup>163</sup> As the textual evidence found in the law code also concurs, contrary to the accepted view of the province as a passive backwater territory that merely served to finance the Ottoman imperial enterprise in the west, Egypt compelled the Ottomans to find new methods and adapt the empire to the province, as well as the reverse.

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161 See also Snejana Buzov, *The Lawgiver and His Lawmakers: The Role of Legal Discourse in the Change of Ottoman Imperial Culture*, (Ph.D. Diss. University of Chicago, 2005); Rifaat Abou-El-Haj, "Aspects of the Legitimization of Ottoman Rule as Reflected in the Preambles of Two Early Liva Kanunnameler," *Turcica*, 21-23 (1991): 371-383.

162 For the most recent analysis of the preamble of the law code, see Şahin, 56-58; for the first analysis of the preamble and its translation, see Buzov, 29-45, 197-232.

163 Şahin, 56-57.

While new adjustments and shifts in policy certainly resulted with changes in Egypt in the aftermath of Ahmed Pasha's revolt and his demise, it is also important to note again that not all public opinion was favorable with respect to those changes. Diyarbekri, for instance, talks about the limited scope and success of Egypt's Law Code in addressing the needs of the people of Egypt.<sup>164</sup> Given the expansive scope of complex evidence that both supports and criticizes efforts of Ottomans to allow for a smooth transition from Mamluk to Ottoman rule, critics of the "Ottoman way," such as Ahmed Pasha, find their brief moments of glory before being crushed by the iron hand of the empire which justified and defended Ottoman imperialism and its strong discourse arguing for the punishment of all its challengers in the early sixteenth century.

*Anatomy of a Rebellion in Sixteenth-Century Egypt: A Case Study of Ahmed Pasha's Governorship, Revolt, Sultanate, and Critique of the Ottoman Imperial Enterprise*

Abstract ■ This article is a study of the brief tenure, rebellion, and sultanate of Egypt's Ottoman governor Ahmed Pasha (d.1524). It investigates the context of the rebellion, its aftermath and impact in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire as an event that showcases a critique of and challenge against the Ottoman imperial enterprise in the Arab lands following the region's conquest from the Mamluks in 1517. Despite its historical significance, the rebellion has remained in the scholarly margins in sixteenth century Ottoman historical studies. This episode illuminates the theme of opposition to Ottoman imperialism with a focus on the opposition against the administrative implementation of the "Ottoman way" in Egypt following the demise of the Mamluk Sultanate. One of the goals here is to interpret the complex political context that resulted with the revolt. This context connects the empire's "center" to its "periphery," allowing us to revisit the socio-political dynamics of Egypt during the first decades of Ottoman rule. A case study of Ahmed Pasha's revolt thus brings nuance to the state/"center"-oriented narratives that obfuscate the socio-political dynamics of the province/"periphery" by doing a comparative analysis of histories written in Egypt. State-centered narratives typically voice a swift and seamless transition into Ottoman rulership in former Mamluk-ruled territories. As demonstrated in this article, Ahmed Pasha presented a powerful voice of dissent and an ideological critique of, and challenge against, Ottoman sovereignty as well as the implementation of the "Ottoman way" in Egypt.

Keywords: Rebellion, Sixteenth-Century, Egypt, Ahmed Pasha, Sultanate, Ottoman history, Diyarbekri, Ibn Iyas, Muhyi, Sultan Süleyman, Sultan Selim, İbrahim Pasha, Hayr Bey, Kasim Pasha, Kara Musa, İbrahim-i Gulsheni, Mamluk, Divination, Ottoman way, Ottomanization of Egypt, Circassian, Imperial ideology, Egypt's Law Code, Canberdi Gazali, Bakr-oğlu tribe, Arab sheikhs

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164 For a discussion, see *Power Brokers*, Chapter Eight.

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