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The Road To The Seljuk Throne: Alâeddin Keykubad's Youth And Political Journey

Selçuklu Tahtına Giden Yol: Alâeddin Keykubad'ın Gençlik Dönemi ve Siyasi Serüveni

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Abstract

The youth and political career formation of Seljuk Sultan Alaeddin Keykubad hold a decisive significance for understanding the administration, diplomacy, and military strategies of the Anatolian Seljuk State. Spending his childhood and youth amidst exile, intrigue, and diplomatic rivalries, Keykubad gained early experience in governance, diplomacy, and military strategy following his father, I. Gıyaseddin Keyhüsrev's loss of the throne in 1196. His political acumen, observational skills, and military abilities enabled him to become an influential actor in subsequent succession struggles, strengthening his claim to the throne through strategic alliances and critical military victories. The challenges he faced during his youth shaped his vision, laying the foundation for the reforms that led the Seljuk State to its most prosperous period. This study highlights how Keykubad's early experiences influenced his leadership approach and long-term political strategies, providing deeper insights into the dynamics of Seljuk political life and contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of Anatolian Seljuk governance.

Keywords: Alâeddin Keykubad, Seljuk Empire, Struggle For The Throne, Diplomacy, Military Strategy.

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Özet

Selçuklu Sultanı Alâeddin Keykubad'ın gençlik dönemi ve siyasi kariyerinin şekillenme süreci, Türkiye Selçuklu Devleti'nin yönetim, diplomasi ve askeri stratejilerini anlamada belirleyici bir öneme sahiptir. Çocukluk ve gençlik yıllarını sürgün, entrika ve diplomatik hesaplaşmalar içinde geçiren Keykubad, babası I. Gıyaseddin Keyhüsrev'in 1196 yılında tahtı kaybetmesiyle başlayan dönemde yönetim, diplomasi ve askeri stratejiler konusunda erken yaşta deneyim kazanmıştır. Siyasi zekâsı, gözlem yeteneği ve askeri becerileri, ilerleyen yıllarda taht mücadelesinde etkin bir aktör hâline gelmesini sağlamış; stratejik ittifaklar kurarak ve kritik askeri zaferler elde ederek taht üzerindeki hak iddiasını güçlendirmiştir. Gençlik dönemindeki zorluklar, Selçuklu Devleti'ni en parlak dönemine taşıyan reformların temelini oluşturmuş ve Keykubad'ın liderlik anlayışı ile uzun vadeli siyasal stratejileri, Türkiye Selçuklu siyasetinde kalıcı etkiler bırakmıştır. Bu çalışma, Keykubad'ın gençlik deneyimlerinin devlet yönetimi ve liderlik vizyonu üzerindeki etkilerini ortaya koyarak, Selçuklu siyasetinin dinamiklerini daha derinlemesine anlamamıza katkı sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Alâeddin Keykubad, Selçuklu Devleti, Taht Mücadelesi, Diplomasi, Askeri Strateji.

Introduction.

Alâeddin Keykubad, who ruled from 1220 to 1237, distinguished himself not only through his political genius but also by his remarkable foresight, which carried the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum into one of the most brilliant periods of its history (Bingöl, & Çopur, 2025: 41-42; Köymen, 1993: 97-100; Çopur, 2012: 28-34). His reign has been characterized as the “golden age” of the Seljuks, remembered as an era in which justice was firmly established, security was maintained, social peace became deeply rooted, prosperity increased, and cultural life flourished at an extraordinary level. Under his leadership (Aksarayî, 1999: 25; İbn Bibi, 1996: 244), the state succeeded in consolidating internal stability and strengthening central authority, which not only enhanced economic welfare but also ensured social harmony across different segments of society. Keykubad’s ability to balance military might with diplomatic prudence demonstrating deterrence when necessary while at the same time pursuing peaceful relations with neighboring states created a lasting environment of stability within the Seljuk realm. His sensitivity to the needs of his subjects, his dedication to urban development, his policies aimed at securing trade routes, and his efforts to promote cultural production rendered his reign remarkable not only for political achievements but also for social welfare and cultural prosperity (Ahmed bin Mahmud, 1977: 152; İbn Bibi, 2007: 75-76; Çopur, 2012: 28-34). For these reasons, Sultan Alâeddin Keykubad stands out as one of the most powerful and esteemed rulers in the history of the Anatolian Seljuks.

Alâeddin Keykubad, the tenth Sultan of the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum, occupies a distinguished place in the political history of medieval Anatolia. His first recorded appearance in historical sources is associated with a critical turning point: the deposition of his father, Sultan Ghiyâth al-Dîn Kaykhusraw I, who was compelled to surrender his throne and sovereignty to his brother, Rukn al-Dîn Sulaymânshâh (1196-1204) (Ahmed bin Mahmud, 1977: 152; Köymen, 1993: 97-100; Çopur, 2012: 28-34). This dynastic struggle not only reshaped the course of the Seljuk succession but also initiated a prolonged and turbulent exile for Sultan Kaykhusraw and his family. During this difficult period, Alâeddin Keykubad, as one of the three sons of Kaykhusraw whose reigns spanned 1192-1196 and 1205-1211 remained close to his father and shared the hardships of displacement with his elder brother, ‘Izz al-Dîn Kaykâ’ûs. The identity of Keykubad’s mother, however, remains ambiguous in the primary sources, and the precise date of his birth has not been conclusively established. Most scholarly estimates, relying on both Muslim and Christian chronicles, suggest that he was born around 1190 or 1191 (Abu’l-Farac, 1999: 536; Zehebi, 1966: 139). This uncertain beginning, marked

by exile and political instability, would later contrast sharply with the era of prosperity and strength that characterized his reign as sultan.

During his formative years, Alâeddin Keykubad spent over eight years in a foreign exile, from the end of 1196 to early 1205, as a result of his father's forced departure from the Seljuk lands. It was during this time that Alâeddin Keykubad joined his father in exile, having been permitted by his uncle, Rükneddin Süleymanşah, to leave the Seljuk territories. This period of forced exile not only shaped his early experiences but also laid the foundation for the future Sultan's understanding of politics, diplomacy, and the challenges of leadership in times of adversity (İbn Bibi, 1996: 243; İbn Bibi, 2007: 75-76; Müneccimbaşı, 2000: 79; Köymen, 1993: 97-100).

During his formative years, Alâeddin Keykubad endured more than eight years in foreign exile, from the end of 1196 until the early months of 1205, as a consequence of his father's forced departure from the Seljuk dominions. Allowed by his uncle, Rükneddin Süleymanşah, to leave the sultanate's territories, the young prince joined his father in this uncertain journey into displacement. This prolonged period of exile constituted far more than a temporary dislocation; it became a formative crucible in which Keykubad acquired early lessons in resilience, adaptability, and the precarious nature of dynastic politics (İbn Bibi, 2007: 75-76). In exile, he was exposed to diverse cultural and political environments that sharpened his understanding of regional power dynamics and the necessity of forging pragmatic alliances for survival. Witnessing firsthand the instability of Seljuk succession struggles, he came to appreciate the delicate balance between loyalty and ambition, as well as the decisive role of diplomacy in preserving dynastic continuity. These experiences provided him not only with a keen awareness of the dangers posed by internal rivalries but also with an appreciation of the opportunities presented by adversity (Köymen, 1993: 97-100). For the young prince, exile was simultaneously a period of hardship and political apprenticeship. Removed from the ceremonial comfort of the palace, he encountered the realities of life outside the Seljuk court, which enabled him to cultivate empathy for his subjects and to understand the challenges faced by those beyond the aristocratic elite. More importantly, the experience instilled in him the ability to combine patience with strategic calculation, a quality that would later underpin his reputation as one of the most prudent and foresighted rulers of the Anatolian Seljuks (İbn Bibi, 1996: 243; Müneccimbaşı, 2000: 79).

In the summer of 1196, Rükneddin Süleymanşah, the ambitious ruler of Tokat and a key figure in the fractious Seljuk dynastic struggles, directed his ambitions toward the Seljuk throne

of Anatolia. Determined to assert his claim, he advanced with a formidable, well-equipped army and laid siege to the capital city of Konya. His objective was clear: to wrest sovereignty from his elder brother, Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn Kaykhusraw I, whose position had grown increasingly precarious amid factional rivalries and waning internal support (Baykara, 1997: 20-22). The siege, which endured for nearly four months, exerted immense pressure on Konya not only in military and logistical terms but also psychologically, as the inhabitants faced the uncertainties of famine, insecurity, and the looming threat of capitulation. Sultan Kaykhusraw, recognizing the futility of prolonged resistance against his brother's superior forces, ultimately made the difficult yet pragmatic decision to surrender the city. In a moment of profound political concession, he agreed to abdicate in favor of Rükneddin Süleymanşah and to vacate Konya, thereby ending his first tenure on the Seljuk throne (Niketas, 2004: 82). Nevertheless, his withdrawal was not entirely bereft of safeguards. In order to preserve his personal security and retain a semblance of dignity amidst defeat, Sultan Kaykhusraw was permitted to depart under the escort of three hundred loyal archers an arrangement that both ensured his immediate safety and symbolized his lingering prestige. Furthermore, he was granted the liberty to travel freely to a destination of his choosing, provisions that mitigated the humiliation of his displacement. This episode, which unfolded in October 1196, marked not only the end of his reign but also the beginning of a protracted period of exile that would profoundly shape his family's destiny and the future career of his son, the young Alâeddin Keykubad (Aksarayî, 1999: 23-24; İbn Bibi, 1996: 51-55; Çopur, 2012: 28-34; Köymen, 1993: 97-100).

This pivotal moment not only marked the end of Sultan I. Gıyaseddin Keyhüsrev's reign, but it also set in motion a complex period of political realignment within the Seljuk Empire, one that would influence the rise of his son, Alâeddin Keykubad, in the years to come. That evening, after reaching an agreement with his brother, Sultan I. Gıyaseddin Keyhüsrev fell into a deep state of despair and, in great sorrow, hastily left Konya, setting out for Istanbul via Akşehir (Niketas, 2004: 82). Not being able to take his children and the 300 archers as stated in the agreement with his brother, Sultan I. Gıyaseddin Keyhüsrev, when he reached Ladik, one of Konya's villages, was attacked by the villagers, who looted his belongings, insulted him, and beat his men. After this incident, Sultan I. Gıyaseddin Keyhüsrev changed his route from Ladik toward Larende and began traveling east. At this time, his children, İzzeddin Keykâvus and Alâeddin Keykubad, were under the guardianship of his brother, Sultan Rükneddin (Aksarayî, 1999: 24; İbn Bibi, 2007: 55-70). One day, Sultan Rükneddin called the nephews, who were separated from their fathers, to him, seated them on his throne, and gently said, "If you wish to

stay here, I will love you more than my own life. But if the longing for your father becomes too heavy, and you cannot bear the separation, I will send you to your father whenever you wish." At this time, İzzeddin Keykâvus and his brother Alâeddin Keykubad, believed to be around 5-6 years old, began to cry, having been advised by their tutor Seyfeddin Ayaba to ask their uncle to send them to their father (Çopur, 2012: 28-34; Koca, 1997: 13-15). Deeply affected by their crying, Sultan Rükneddin decided to send them to their father. Thus, İzzeddin Keykâvus and Alâeddin Keykubad, under the care of their uncle Sultan Rükneddin, reached their father, who was waiting on the Armenian Cilician border. After this event, the Keyhüsrev family's eastern expedition began. However, this campaign, which included the Seljuk lands of Malatya and Elbistan, the Ayyubid territories of Aleppo, and finally Ahlat and Diyarbakır, came to an end quickly. Having found neither the support nor the tranquility he was seeking, Sultan I. Gıyaseddin Keyhüsrev ended his eastern journey and set off for Istanbul with his children, aiming to seek support from the Byzantine Emperor (Abu'l-Farac, 1999: 474; Merçil, 1990: 715). Thus, Alâeddin Keykubad's forced exile adventure would continue in and around the Byzantine capital, Istanbul (Abu'l-Farac, 1999: 474; İbnü'l-Esir, 1987: 165; Niketas, 2004: 81).

Alâeddin Keykubad's life in exile, which began in late 1196, continued largely in Istanbul and its surrounding areas until 1205. There is only limited information in the sources regarding this period of exile in Byzantium (Abu'l-Farac, 1999: 474). One of these records states that Alâeddin Keykubad's father, Sultan I. Gıyaseddin Keyhüsrev, was warmly received by Byzantine Emperor Alexios III (1195-1203) (Abu'l-Farac, 1999: 474; Akropolites, 2008: 27). It also mentions that Sultan I. Gıyaseddin Keyhüsrev owned a house in Istanbul, but over time, he faced difficult social and economic conditions (İbn Bibi, 2007: 70-72). Undoubtedly, the passage of these days must have directly affected Alâeddin Keykubad and his brother İzzeddin Keykâvus. Another source supporting this information recounts a statement made by Emir Seyfeddin Ayaba, who served as the Atabeg to Alâeddin Keykubad and İzzeddin Keykâvus during their exile years in Byzantium and later became the chief commander during İzzeddin Keykâvus's reign (1211-1220) (Abu'l-Farac, 1999: 474; Çopur, 2012: 28-34). He threatened Alâeddin Keykubad in 1223, only to be later defeated. Before his death, Emir Seyfeddin Ayaba is said to have addressed Alâeddin Keykubad with the following words: "During your time of exile, I carried you and your brother on my shoulders and raised you. I combed your long hair. To provide you with food, I cut and sold my own hair. I traded in the Roman lands just to find you a piece of bread." (İbn Bibi, 1996: 287). These words shed light on an important chapter of Alâeddin Keykubad's childhood spent in Istanbul. Another piece of information regarding

Alâeddin Keykubad's exile life in Byzantium reveals that before the Latins took control of Istanbul, the capital of Byzantium, in 1203, Sultan I. Gıyaseddin Keyhüsrev, along with his entourage and children, sought refuge in the mansion of his father-in-law, Mavrozomes, a member of a noble family close to the Komnenos dynasty and one of the high-ranking military officials of Byzantium, located near an island specified in the sources (İbnü'l-Esir, 1987: 165).

At this stage of his youth, it is recorded that İzzeddin Keykâvus and his younger brother, Alâeddin Keykubad, took part in systematic training programs under the supervision of their Atabeg, Seyfeddin Ayaba. These programs not only emphasized martial discipline and military preparedness but also sought to instill the values of leadership, loyalty, and strategic thinking that were deemed essential for Seljuk princes. Outside these formal lessons, the brothers engaged in recreational activities that reinforced both their physical endurance and their familiarity with the landscape, such as exploring their surroundings and participating in organized land and sea hunts (İbn Bibi, 1996: 76). While the details of Alâeddin Keykubad's education during his subsequent exile in Byzantine territories remain obscure, the 13th-century chronicler İbn Bibi highlights in his account that the future sultan possessed remarkable technical proficiency and artistic aptitude across a wide range of fields. These included architecture, jewelry making, knife crafting, copperworking, painting, and leatherworking. Such skills, unusual for a prince of his stature, suggest an education that extended beyond the confines of the Seljuk court, integrating artisanal and practical disciplines with traditional princely training. Scholars have argued that these competencies were most likely cultivated during his years in Byzantium, where exposure to diverse cultural practices and crafts may have enriched his intellectual and technical repertoire (Turan, 2010: 412; Çopur, 2012: 28-34). By combining rigorous military instruction with exposure to artisanal and technical knowledge, Keykubad's formative education thus appears to have produced a ruler uniquely equipped with both the strategic acumen of a statesman and the practical creativity of a craftsman qualities that would later manifest in his architectural patronage and administrative reforms.

Alâeddin Keykubad's forced exile, lasting more than eight years, continued peacefully and securely at the residence of the Byzantine noble Mavrozomes until it came to an end with news reaching his father. This news concerned the sudden death of Sultan Rükneddin Süleymanşah on 6 July 1204. The ascension of Süleymanşah's young son, III. Kılıç Arslan, to the throne displeased the Seljuk frontier Turkoman leaders, particularly those in the west. In response to this, the sons of the Danişmendids, Zahirreddin İli, Muzaffereddin Mahmud, and Bedreddin Yusuf, took action to reinstate Gıyaseddin Keyhüsrev as sultan (Aksarayi, 1999: 24;

Çopur, 2012: 28-34). To this end, Hacib Zekeriya, who was proficient in five languages, disguised himself as a monk and secretly crossed into the Byzantine borders to reach Mavrozomes' residence (Turan, 2010: 295). Zekeriya successfully communicated with Gıyaseddin Keyhüsrev and informed him of the situation. Sultan Gıyaseddin Keyhüsrev, accepting this development with resignation, mourned for three days following his brother's death and then set out with his children and entourage toward Seljuk lands. This period marked the beginning of a new era for Alâeddin Keykubad, and in the following years, it would unexpectedly lead him to the throne (İbn Bibi, 1996: 96-101).

When Gıyaseddin Keyhüsrev's caravan reached İznik on its way to the capital, Konya, they encountered an issue: the transition from the region controlled by Theodore Laskaris, the founder of the Byzantine Empire of Nicaea, into Seljuk territory was blocked (Ostrogorsky, 2006: 393-394). Laskaris had prohibited the passage based on the peace treaty he had made with III. Kılıç Arslan after Süleymanşah's death. However, this prohibition could be lifted if a certain fee was paid. After several days of negotiations, Keyhüsrev reached an agreement with Laskaris to allow passage through İznik on the condition that he would relinquish the regions of Honas and Lâdik to Laskaris's deputy. However, as part of the agreement, he had to leave his sons, İzzeddin Keykâvus and Alâeddin Keykubad, as hostages. The release of the two brothers, held as hostages in İznik, was secured by the clever plans of Hacib Zekeriya. Initially, Keykubad and Keykâvus were given permission to go on walks in the morning and evening. During these excursions, Zekeriya managed to persuade the guards with promises of money and luxury, winning them over to his side. When the opportunity arose, the two brothers fled toward Seljuk territory while on their walk. Thus, their captivity in İznik came to an end, and Alâeddin Keykubad and İzzeddin Keykâvus safely reached Seljuk lands (İbn Bibi, 1996: 104).

Alâeddin Keykubad's first appearance in the historical record is directly connected with the dramatic events surrounding the siege of Konya. Following his father, Sultan Ghiyâth al-Dîn Kaykhusraw I's successful reclamation of the Seljuk throne, Keykubad, together with his elder brother 'İzz al-Dîn Kaykâ'ūs, was entrusted with the ceremonial duty of receiving Sultan Kılıç Arslan III. This act was part of the negotiated settlement that secured Kılıç Arslan's departure from the fortress of Konya and his formal abdication of the throne. The delegation of such a sensitive responsibility to the young princes was not merely symbolic; it reflected both their integration into the political life of the dynasty and their recognition as legitimate heirs in the eyes of the court elite. This event, which occurred in February-March 1205, thus constitutes

the first officially documented action of Alâeddin Keykubad and provides an early indication of his involvement in the affairs of state (Koca, 1997: 17-19; Çopur, 2012: 28-34).

During the second reign of Sultan Ghiyâth al-Dîn Kaykhusraw I, one of the most consequential measures in domestic governance concerned the preparation and future roles of his sons. Seeking to consolidate dynastic authority and to cultivate competent successors, Sultan Kaykhusraw deliberately provided his sons with early administrative responsibilities. Within this framework, his eldest son, 'Izz al-Dîn Keykâ'ūs, was appointed as the governor of Malatya, while his younger son, Alâeddin Keykubad, was assigned the administration of Tokat. These strategic appointments served multiple purposes: they reinforced the centralization of Seljuk authority, ensured loyalty and control across key provincial regions, and furnished the princes with practical experience in governance, fiscal management, and local political affairs. By involving his heirs directly in the administration of significant urban centers, Sultan Kaykhusraw laid the groundwork for a smoother dynastic succession while simultaneously enhancing the visibility and influence of his sons throughout the Seljuk realm (Turan, 2010: 298).

Alâeddin Keykubad commenced his rule over Tokat as a delegated authority of his father, Sultan Ghiyâth al-Dîn Kaykhusraw I, from 1205 to 1211. Although historical sources do not provide detailed records of specific administrative or military activities undertaken by Keykubad during this period, it is plausible that he dedicated this time to consolidating his administrative capabilities and military expertise. Such preparation would have been crucial for cultivating the political acumen and strategic resolve necessary for his future role as Sultan. Moreover, evidence from numismatic sources indicates Keykubad's active assertion of authority in Tokat during the succession struggles that followed his father's death. A series of silver coins minted in his name, dated 608 AH (1211-1212) and 609 AH (1212-1213), bear the formal title: "el-Melikü'l-Mansur Alâüddeve ve'ddin Ebû'l-Muzaffer Keykubad b. Keyhüsrev Nâsıru Emirü'l-Mü'mininîn." These coins not only attest to his recognized authority in Tokat but also suggest that he maintained administrative control of the region until 1213, demonstrating both his political legitimacy and his emerging sovereign identity (Artuk, 1980: 265-273; Çopur, 2012: 28-34).

1. The Struggle for the Throne between Alâeddin Keykubad and İzzeddin Keykâvus

Following the death of his father, Sultan Ghiyâth al-Dîn Kaykhusraw I, in the battle near Alaşehir on June 7, 1211, against the forces of the Nicaean Byzantine Empire, Alâeddin

Keykubad, then governor of Tokat, openly contested the established line of succession. Despite the consensus of the Seljuk statesmen, who had intended for the throne to pass to his elder brother, 'Izz al-Dīn Keykâ'ūs I, Keykubad asserted his own claim to the sultanate. This decisive action marked the beginning of a critical period of dynastic rivalry and political maneuvering, reflecting both his ambition and his readiness to assert authority independently of traditional seniority norms (Turan, 2010: 316).

To achieve his goal of taking his father's place on the throne, Alâeddin Keykubad formed an alliance with his father's frontier bey, Zaireddin İli of the Danişmendids, his uncle, Mugiseddin Tuğrulşah, the ruler of Erzurum, and the Armenian King II. Leon. He then moved to Kayseri and laid siege to his brother. With the support of state officials and commanders, Alâeddin Keykubad put his brother, who had taken the throne in Kayseri, in a difficult position. Keykâvus, who had been in a defensive position for a long time, considered leaving Kayseri to continue the struggle in the capital, Konya. However, his experienced statesmen advised him that this decision would be risky and recommended that he continue the defense in Kayseri. In the meantime, the governor of Kayseri, Celaledin Kayser, developed a plan to end the siege and suggested to Keykâvus that Alâeddin Keykubad's alliance should be divided. Following this advice, Emir Celaledin Kayser, whom Keykâvus had appointed, managed to persuade Armenian King II. Leon to break away from the alliance by offering valuable jewels and a written guarantee that the sultan would not abandon the throne (İbn Bibi, 1996: 134-139; Çopur, 2012: 28-34).

When Alâeddin Keykubad realized that his ally, II. Leon, was negotiating with his brother for personal gain and abandoning the siege, he was shocked and became concerned that his brother might be trying to trap him. Just as he was on the verge of victory, the Kayseri siege ended with this development. The next day, due to II. Leon's departure, Mugiseddin Tuğrulşah, the ruler of Erzurum, also withdrew from Kayseri. This changed the course of the siege, and the advantage shifted to Keykâvus, who was in the defensive position. The soldiers in Kayseri realized that Alâeddin Keykubad had lost strength and launched an attack. As a result, Alâeddin Keykubad abandoned the siege and retreated to the Ankara Fortress with his loyal men (late 1211). (İbn Bibi, 1996: 134-139; Çopur, 2012: 28-34; Köymen, 1993: 112-117).

After the defeat of his brother's siege on Kayseri with the support of state officials, Sultan İzzeddin Keykâvus went to the capital Konya to strengthen his rule and stabilize the state's administration. However, his rule was still threatened by his ambitious and powerful brother, Alâeddin Keykubad, who had taken refuge in Ankara. Therefore, İzzeddin Keykâvus,

feeling insecure and without complete peace, did not consider starting any new endeavors until he had neutralized his powerful brother. He issued orders stating, “Our peace and security depend on Alâeddin Keykubad being removed from Ankara.” With this thought in mind, İzzeddin Keykâvus completed his siege preparations and set out from Konya with his army towards Ankara. Upon learning that his brother was coming with a grand army, Alâeddin Keykubad began to reinforce his fortress, organize his military, and prepare the citizens for a siege. İzzeddin Keykâvus reached Ankara in a short time and completely surrounded the city. However, since the Ankara Fortress was situated on a steep hill, it was not easy to conquer. Despite the closure of the supply routes, Alâeddin Keykubad and the citizens of the city continued their resistance for a year (from spring 1212 to spring 1213). However, with the emergence of food shortages, the resolve of the city’s inhabitants began to weaken. Without food supplies or reinforcements, (Köymen, 1993: 112-117; İnan, 1968: 311-334). Alâeddin Keykubad decided that further resistance was futile and sent an envoy to his brother, stating that he would surrender if his and the citizens’ safety was ensured, no plundering would take place, and he and his entourage would be sent to a fortress of the sultan’s choosing. Through the mediation of Seyfeddin Ayaba, a statesman who had served both brothers as an atabeg during their exile years, Sultan İzzeddin Keykâvus accepted the conditions that his brother Alâeddin Keykubad proposed (Çopur, 2012: 28-34; Turan, 2010: 646).

As a consequence of the siege and the ensuing power struggle, Sultan ‘Izz al-Dīn Keykâ’ūs, upon consolidating his control over the fortress, promptly ordered his younger brother, Alâeddin Keykubad, to be confined in the dungeon of Minşar Castle near Malatya, under the strict supervision of Seyfeddin Ayaba (İbn Bibi, 1996: 160, 223). This marked the commencement of a prolonged and psychologically taxing period of captivity, during which Keykubad lived under the constant threat of assassination and political marginalization at the hands of his elder sibling (Aksarayî, 1999: 25). The years of imprisonment, spanning approximately seven years from 1213 to 1220, proved to be formative in multiple respects. Beyond the evident physical and emotional hardships, this confinement cultivated in Keykubad a remarkable resilience, patience, and strategic foresight qualities that would later define his approach to governance and statecraft. Isolated from the corridors of power yet acutely aware of the political currents surrounding him, Keykubad used this period to observe the intricacies of Seljuk dynastic politics, internal rivalries, and the delicate balance between loyalty and ambition. Such experiences not only strengthened his personal resolve but also honed his

understanding of leadership, diplomacy, and the mechanisms of power, laying the groundwork for his eventual ascent to the sultanate (Köymen, 1993: 112-117).

2. **Alâeddin Keykubad's Ascension to the Throne After His Years of Captivity**

In the summer of 1218, after a failed campaign to strengthen his rule in Northern Syria, Sultan İzzeddin Keykâvus was severely weakened both physically and mentally. As he was planning a new campaign for Northern Syria and Upper Mesopotamia at the end of 1219, his health deteriorated further, and he passed away in January 1220. Following his death, senior Seljuk commanders and officials gathered in Sivas to discuss who would succeed him as Sultan. During this meeting, in order to avoid internal unrest and prevent external powers from taking advantage of the situation, the death of Sultan Keykâvus was kept secret, and three potential candidates were presented: Sultan Keykâvus's uncle, Erzurum Emir Mugiseddin Tuğrulşah; his imprisoned brother Alâeddin Keykubad, who was held at the Kezirpert Castle near Malatya; and his other brother, Celaleddin Keyferidun, who was detained at Koyluhisar (Abu'l-Farac, 1999: 505; Çopur, 2012: 28-34; Koca, 2009: 9; Arık, 1999: 43-93).

At this stage, certain officials, influenced by Alâeddin Keykubad's previous failure to secure the throne against his elder brother, 'Izz al-Dîn Keykâ'ūs, and by the seven years he had spent in captivity, initially favored one of the other two potential claimants. Nevertheless, prominent figures such as Emir-i Meclis Mübarizeddin Behramşah and the chief commander Seyfeddin Ayaba recognized Keykubad's exceptional qualifications, integrity, and leadership potential, and they voiced their unequivocal support for his ascension. Their advocacy played a decisive role in shaping the opinions of the court and military elites. Following careful deliberation and consultation, the Seljuk officials and commanders ultimately resolved to enthrone Alâeddin Keykubad, thereby affirming both his legitimacy and the confidence of the central administration in his capacity to govern (İbn Bibi, 1996: 218-222; Çopur, 2012: 28-34; Safran, 1988: 97-103).

Meanwhile, Seyfeddin Ayaba, who had played a central role as mediator in the decision regarding Alâeddin Keykubad's accession, embarked on a mission to deliver the news of the new sultan's rise. He explained his rationale for undertaking this task in personal terms: "When Melik Alâeddin Keykubad was taken from Ankara to Malatya to be imprisoned, he was displeased with me. Now, I must go to him, reconcile, and preserve my own life." Bearing the symbolic tokens of Sultan Keykâvus's death a ring and a handkerchief Seyfeddin Ayaba set out with a small contingent of horsemen toward Kezirpert Castle to convey the message and secure the young sultan's acceptance (İbn Bibi, 1996: 218-228; Koca, 2009: 8-11; Gökyay, 1973: 245).

However, one morning while watching the horizon from his room window after the dawn prayer, Alâeddin Keykubad saw soldiers approaching the castle and, fearing for his life, assumed they had come to kill him. He thought that the soldiers might have been sent by his brother Sultan İzzeddin Keykâvus as executioners. Realizing that his years of captivity might be coming to an end, he asked the castle guards to delay the visitors. He said, "Entertain them for a while, let me refresh my ablution, and then I will be alone when they come to finish me off." But things were not as he expected. Seyfeddin Ayaba entered and, telling him that his brother had passed away and that the nobles and leaders of the country had chosen him to be Sultan, he delivered the joyful news. Alâeddin Keykubad then realized that his brother's death wasn't the cause of his fear, but rather the fulfillment of his long-awaited dream. The throne he had desired was now his, and he thanked Allah. After pardoning Seyfeddin Ayaba, he set out for Sivas (İbn Bibi, 1996: 218-228; Çopur, 2012: 28-34).

Upon his arrival in Sivas, Alâeddin Keykubad paid his first respects at the tomb of his late brother before formally ascending to the Seljuk throne. In a demonstration of loyalty and recognition of his legitimacy, state officials and military commanders swore allegiance to him. Following a period of mourning lasting three days, during which condolences were received from various dignitaries and provincial representatives, Keykubad commenced the active organization of his administration on the fourth day. The news of Sultan Keykâvus's death and Alâeddin Keykubad's accession to the throne was simultaneously proclaimed across all major cities of the Seljuk realm, symbolizing the consolidation of central authority and the seamless transmission of sovereignty within the dynasty (İbn Bibi, 1996: 218-228).

After completing his duties in Sivas, Alâeddin Keykubad, along with his beylerbeys (governors) and commanders, set out for the capital, Konya. During the journey, he was warmly welcomed by the people of Kayseri and Aksaray, where he had the opportunity to rest for several days in both cities. As he approached Konya, the most magnificent and grand reception ceremony took place in the Obruk region. Here, the prominent citizens and people of Konya slaughtered decorated oxen and rams in honor of the Sultan's arrival. In accordance with traditional Turkish customs, gold and silver coins were scattered on the Sultan, and various valuable gifts were presented. After this grand ceremony in Obruk, the procession continued towards Konya, reaching the Ruzbe plain, where they rested for a while (İbn Bibi, 1996: 228-238). After enjoying a pleasant day in the Ruzbe plain, the Sultan made preparations to depart for Konya the following day. Upon his arrival in the city, he was met with a massive ceremony organized with strict security measures. At the center of the procession, Alâeddin Keykubad,

adorned with his crown and the black turban bearing an eagle emblem, rode his horse until he reached his palace on Alâeddin Hill, where he resumed his rule. After the allegiance ceremonies, welcoming, celebrating, and farewelling events in Kayseri, Sivas, Aksaray, and Konya, a new era began in which he would bring prosperity and justice to his people, focus on charitable works, and fulfill the responsibilities required of his governance. The beginning of Alâeddin Keykubad's rule was marked by the people's great enthusiasm and celebrations, and promises of prosperity and justice under the new Sultan's reign. (February 1220) (Koca, 2007:12-15; Çopur, 2012: 28-34).

Sultan I. Alâeddin Keykubad's path to the throne was truly a difficult process. This path was marked by painful stages such as exile, defeat, and captivity. One of the most dramatic moments was when Alâeddin Keykubad, in a state of fear for his life, learned of his ascent to the throne. After years of captivity, he received the news one morning that, instead of the feared end, his dream of ascending the throne had become a reality (Jansky, 2010: 119). After more than seven years of captivity, the Sultanate period (1220-1237) marked a golden era for the Seljuk State of Turkey, characterized by justice, prosperity, security, peace, and tranquility. During this period, Sultan Alâeddin Keykubad's leadership shaped a governance approach that consolidated the Seljuk State, satisfied the people, and ensured the stability of the state. He fought successful battles against both internal and external threats and expanded the state's borders. This period is considered one of the brightest eras in the history of the Seljuks. (Bayrakal and Acar, 2017: 3; Çopur, 2012: 28-34).

3. The Personality of Alâeddin Keykubad

Sultan Alâeddin Keykubad was a leader with profound political intelligence and foresight. He acted with high wisdom in matters concerning the state and his people, making decisions with the future in mind and taking necessary measures for the security and interests of his country. He never neglected to consult on important issues that affected his people and the state, ultimately acting based on his faith in reliance on God. He prioritized peace but did not shy away from war when border security was at risk. He opened his arms to those fleeing oppression, providing them with protection, while showing great respect and support for scholars and artists. He considered his kingdom and power as a gift from God. (Zehebi, 1966:139).

Due to his high character and achievements, Alâeddin Keykubad was known by titles such as "Sultanü'l-Alem," and "Sultanü'l-Muazzam." He became a historical figure recognized as intelligent, wise, strong, just, and capable of making sound judgments and decisions. The

historian Zehebi describes Alâeddin Keykubad as "honorable, valuable, sharp-witted, brave, courageous, extremely intelligent, and a ruler of vast lands," emphasizing his justice and good governance (Zehebi, 1966: 139). The Malatyan Syriac writer Abu'l-Farac portrays Sultan Alâeddin Keykubad as a unique and distinguished figure among the rulers of his time. He describes him as quick-witted, strong-minded, and of pure character. Keykubad, avoiding base ambitions, exhibited a stern attitude toward criminals and upheld justice in his rulings and decisions. By conquering many cities and strategic locations, he successfully expanded his sultanate and increased his power (Abu'l-Farac, 1999: 536-537; Çopur, 2012: 28-34). The Seljuk court historian Ibn Bibi describes Sultan Alâeddin Keykubad as a ruler who enhanced the welfare of his people, elevated their honor, expanded knowledge, and protected the banner of Islam. He ensured the safety of those in fear and need, providing them with aid, and showed hospitality to foreign envoys. He disliked falsehood and punished those who lied. He meticulously supervised the treasury, was frugal, but avoided excessive stinginess. He held accountable those deputies who were inclined to personal wealth and ensured happiness throughout the corners of his realm (Çopur, 2012: 28-34). During his reign, the Hanafî sect reached its highest power. His name spread far and wide, from Georgia to the Hejaz, from Cilicia to the Kipchak lands. The emirs of Damascus considered themselves his vassals and took orders from his court. Coins were minted in his name, and the khutbah (sermon) was read in his name. Alâeddin Keykubad showed great interest in artists, scholars, mystics, and those in need, protecting them and providing them with favors. His ethics, justice, intelligence, virtue, and spirituality were highly esteemed. The rulers of Syria, Jazira, Yemen, Damascus, Diyarbakir, Mosul, and Sis reported on the situation of their lands every year and made efforts to renew his decrees (İbn Bibi, 1996: 239-247).

Kerimüddin Mahmud-i Aksarayî characterizes Sultan Alâeddin Keykubad as a ruler of exemplary morals, endowed with the capacity to make sound decisions and implement appropriate measures. Under his just and equitable governance, the sultan secured the submission of key regional powers, including the rulers of Damascus and Diyarbakır, reflecting the effective consolidation of Seljuk authority. His reign is further noted for significant territorial expansion and the strengthening of central control (Aksarayî, 1999: 25). Similarly, Sibî b. al-Jawzî portrays Alâeddin Keykubad as a sovereign deeply committed to upholding the rights of the oppressed, demonstrating a conscientious approach to social justice and the welfare of his subjects (Turan, 2010: 658). Ahmed b. Mahmud emphasizes the sultan's intelligence and strategic acumen, highlighting his successful territorial expansion and noting that he was

conferred the honorific title “Sultan-ı Âlem,” reflecting his elevated status and recognition across the Islamic world (Ahmed bin Mahmud, 1966: 152-153; Bingöl, 2023: 15-17).

Sultan Alâeddin Keykubad demonstrated a profound interest in historical figures and frequently reflected on the achievements of renowned rulers, including Mahmud of Ghazni. His intellectual pursuits extended to the study of seminal works which informed his understanding of governance, ethics, and statecraft. Beyond his scholarly inclinations, Keykubad cultivated an appreciation for poetry and music, evidencing a well-rounded cultural education. In addition to his intellectual and artistic pursuits, he excelled in a variety of physical and strategic activities. He was highly skilled in backgammon and chess, and distinguished himself in javelin throwing and archery, outperforming his contemporaries in these martial disciplines. Complementing his intellectual and athletic abilities, Keykubad possessed practical expertise in a range of crafts, including architecture, jewelry-making, knife making, copperworking, painting, and leatherworking. These combined talents reflect a prince whose education was both comprehensive and multifaceted, equipping him with the cultural, strategic, and technical acumen that would later underpin his successful reign (İbn Bibi, 1996: 246-247; Çopur, 2012: 28-34).

Conclusion

Sultan Alâeddin Keykubad's youth played a critical role in the development of his political and military abilities and shaped his future understanding of kingship. Growing up in the midst of a throne struggle, Keykubad was not only prepared as a potential ruler but also as a leader who learned the art of state governance, diplomacy, and military strategies. The political environment shaped by his father, Sultan I. Gıyaseddin Keyhüsrev's throne struggle, led to Keykubad gaining a strong sense of responsibility from a young age. Especially his years in exile marked an important turning point in Alâeddin Keykubad's life. His time spent in Byzantine lands provided him with the opportunity to develop diplomatic skills, learn about different cultures, and gain experience in political intrigues. Moreover, during his exile, he observed the outside world and had the chance to learn alternative methods of state governance. This experience laid the foundation for the reforms he would later implement to strengthen the Seljuk State both internally and externally. The process of Alâeddin Keykubad's ascension to the throne reveals how turbulent Seljuk internal politics were. His struggle with his brother İzzeddin Keykâvus demonstrated that claiming the Seljuk throne required not only being a member of the dynasty but also making the right strategic moves at the right time. During this period, Keykubad wisely chose his supporters, strengthened his political alliances, and

enhanced his military capacity, solidifying his claim to the throne. Furthermore, Alâeddin Keykubad's education and experiences during his youth directly influenced the reforms he carried out in his later years. The innovations he made in architecture, trade, and the military were not only the result of his personal experiences but also of the different governance models he observed during his exile. In this context, his reign should be considered not only a period of military victories but also a time of cultural and economic growth. One of the most important lessons from Sultan Alâeddin Keykubad's youth is that leadership qualities are not merely innate but are, rather, developed and refined through challenges and experiences. His maturation through exile, struggle, and the fight for the throne directly influenced his future approach to governance. This shows that to be a successful ruler, it is not enough to be the heir to the throne; one must also be knowledgeable about state governance, think strategically, and quickly adapt to changing circumstances.

Sultan Alâeddin Keykubad's youth and political journey should be considered one of the most significant periods in Seljuk history. The experiences he lived through affected not only his personal journey but also the political and cultural development of the Seljuk State. The knowledge and experiences Alâeddin Keykubad gained during his childhood and youth enabled him to be remembered as a great statesman and powerful sultan in the years to come. This article, by deeply examining his youth, provides valuable insights into the Seljuk State's leadership philosophy and governance mechanisms.

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