

Halit Serkan Simen

**THE GRAND VIZIERATE(S) OF KOCA SINAN PASHA:  
A REASSESSMENT OF THE OTTOMAN COURT POLITICS AND  
INTRA-ELITE RIVALRY IN THE LATE SIXTEENTH CENTURY**

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization  
in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies.

Central European University

Budapest

June 2020

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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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Chair, Examination Committee

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Thesis Supervisor

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Examiner

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External Reader

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External Supervisor

I, the undersigned, **Halit Serkan Simen**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 02 June 2020

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Halit Serkan Simen

# Abstract

This thesis examines Koca Sinan Pasha (d. 1596) and his five-time grand vizierate in the context of the crises and changes that took place within the Ottoman imperial-political system during the late sixteenth century. After the assassination of the all-powerful Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha in 1579 during the reign of Murad III (r. 1574-95), the Ottoman imperial court witnessed an ever-increasing factionalism among the governing ministers, complicating the decision-making processes at the sultan's government. Sinan Pasha was one of the most important figures in this new political setting as a wealthy and powerful grand vizier. This thesis offers a new perspective on Sinan Pasha through a detailed analysis of his grand vizieral petitions to Murad III, known as *telhises*, and aims to shed light on the critical question of how Sinan Pasha managed to sustain his political standing and influence as grand vizier when he was constantly challenged by a number of rival viziers and courtiers.

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# Introduction

In early modern Eurasian dynastic states, ruling elite composed a fundamental group within the larger body politic. As agents of power acting on behalf of their dynasts, they played a number of important roles in the business of state. The Ottomans were no exception to this observation. However, unlike their western European counterparts which depended on hereditary aristocracy in the medieval and early modern eras, the Ottoman rulers utilized different methods for “creating” their own elite, such as syncretizing the former Byzantine aristocratic families into their emerging political system, recruiting for the army and civil service young Christian children from the Balkans and Caucasia through the so-called *devşirme* system, and co-opting the members of the prominent Muslim/Turkish families of Anatolia by granting them certain positions in the provincial-military governance.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the sixteenth century, the Ottoman ruling elite underwent some radical changes due to a number of new political and socio-economic conjunctures which ultimately transformed the existing institutional structures of power and administration in the Ottoman Empire. Although interest groups and factional struggles did exist since the foundation of the Ottoman dynastic state in the 1300s, the second half of the sixteenth century witnessed a divided ruling elite much more concretely than it used to be. In this respect, the assassination of the all-powerful Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, who held the grand vizierate between 1565 and 1579, was a turning point in that it marked a new era in the political transformation of the Ottoman ruling elite.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, during the sultanate of Murad III (r. 1574-95), the rivalries between different court factions or power groups not only became a constant feature of high

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<sup>1</sup> On these points, see Heath Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (New York: SUNY, 2003), 115–31 and Colin Imber, “Government, Administration and Law,” in *Cambridge History of Turkey, Vol. II: 1451-1603*, eds. Suraiya Faroqhi and Kate Fleet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 205–40, at 212–13.

<sup>2</sup> For further remarks on the importance of Sokollu’s assassination, see *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* [henceforth, *DİA*], s.v. “Sokollu Mehmed Paşa” by Erhan Afyoncu.

politics, but also critically affected the administration of the empire from the core provinces to the borderlands. In this new political setting, Koca Sinan Pasha (d. 1596), the main subject of the thesis, successfully sustained as well as expanded his power and influence despite the machinations of his rivals, whose factionalist struggle against him is well-attested in contemporary sources.

In this thesis, I seek a re-assessment of these changes in the Ottoman imperial-political system during the late sixteenth century through the lenses of Sinan Pasha. I argue that the 1580s and 1590s were a critical period of political crisis and transformation in the Ottoman Empire, when a new type of factionalism emerged among the Ottoman ruling elite under Murad III, and this factionalism reconfigured the dynamics and actors in the decision-making processes at the sultan's court. Sinan Pasha was one of the main political actors of this period, who, I would further argue, actually represents a 'transitional' figure between the "old" and "new" political orders, especially in terms of his personal methods of power accumulation as grand vizier. In other words, Sinan Pasha was a key agent of power at the top echelons of the Ottoman imperial system, whose five-time grand vizierate between 1580 and 1596 informs us about the transformative changes observed in the central administrative institutions of the Ottoman Empire during the period in question.

In this context, this thesis focuses on the written communication between Sinan Pasha and Murad III, known as the *telhis*. These documents were essentially petitions submitted to the sultan by the grand vizier on a regular basis pertaining to diverse topics in the state affairs. The *telhis* collection of Sinan Pasha, which is fully edited and published by the prominent Ottomanist historian Halil Sahillioğlu, reveal different aspects of the decision-making mechanisms within the central Ottoman imperial-administrative system as well as the pasha's personal relationship with the sultan, while pointing out to some novel features of the faction-ridden court politics of the time. However, thus far, no scholar has offered a detailed

examination of Sinan Pasha's *telhises* in this particular historical context. My thesis thus aims to fill this gap in modern Ottoman historiography, by analyzing the multiple grand vizierates of Koca Sinan Pasha in the light of some 200 *telhis* letters written by him in order to re-assess his role, actions, aspirations, and factional struggles in relation to the new dynamics of practical politics at the Ottoman imperial court in the late sixteenth century. Furthermore, this thesis also aims to show how the long-debated transformations coincide with the actual daily politics in the court.

Since the early 1980s, a new generation of historians has offered a new revisionist framework for analyzing the early modern Ottoman political history that forcefully defied the long-prevalent 'declinist' paradigms and perspectives in the conventional historiography regarding the era after the reign of Süleyman I (1520-66). According to this revisionist scholarship, the so-called post-Süleymanic period should be reconsidered within the context of an imperial "crisis and change," which started in the 1580s during the Ottoman-Safavid War of 1578-90 and continued throughout the seventeenth century and even into the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Sinan Pasha held the office grand vizierate five times during the early stages of this long crisis and change period. Hence, concentrating on Sinan Pasha and his tenure as grand vizier would contribute to the new studies of this post-Süleymanic era in several respects, particularly in delineating the historical problems and factors behind the new

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<sup>3</sup>See Halil İnalcık, "Military and Fiscal Transformation in the Ottoman Empire, 1600-1700," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 6 (1980): 283-333; Douglas Howard, "Ottoman Historiography and the Literature of 'Decline' of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 22/1 (1988): 52-77; Rifa'at Ali Abou El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State: The Ottoman Empire, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991); Suraiya Faroqhi, "Crisis and Change," in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*, eds. Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 411-636; Linda T. Darling, "Ottoman Fiscal Administration: Decline or Adaptation?," *Journal of European Economic History* 26 (1997): 157-179; Cemal Kafadar, "The Question of Ottoman Decline," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 4/1-2 (1997-98): 30-75; Donald Quataert, "Ottoman History Writing and Changing Attitudes Towards the Notion of 'Decline'," *History Compass* 1 (2003): 1-9; and Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

type of pasha-households, intra-elite factionalism, and rise of royal favorites.<sup>4</sup> In all these respects, the *telhis* collection of Sinan Pasha provides us highly important and sometimes unique perspectives.

The first studies on Sinan Pasha's *telhises* were done by Suraiya Faroqhi and Halil Sahillioğlu in the late 1960s.<sup>5</sup> In her doctoral dissertation, Faroqhi has mainly analyzed the pasha's *telhises* in terms of diplomatics and the problem of dating these undated letters, as well as about the official activities of the pasha. Sahillioğlu, on the other hand, has provided a critical edition of the *telhis* collection of Sinan Pasha based on three manuscript copies, which I utilize throughout my thesis.<sup>6</sup> In addition to these initial studies, several scholars have examined different aspects of Sinan Pasha's political career, undertakings, factional struggles, as well as his pious endowments (*vakıfs*) spread all around the Ottoman Empire.<sup>7</sup> Among them, especially Ahmet Önal's doctoral dissertation on Sinan Pasha has provided a much-needed detailed study of the pasha's life and career trajectory as well as his political undertakings as grand vizier.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, with the notable exception of Pál Fodor, no

<sup>4</sup> Among the studies related to these issue, see especially Rifa'at Ali Abou El-Haj, "The Ottoman Vezir and Paşa Households, 1683-1703: A Preliminary Report," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94/4 (1974): 438-447; Jane Hathaway, *The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdağlıs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Metin Kunt, "Royal and Other Households," in *The Ottoman World*, ed. Christine Woodhead (London, New York: Routledge, 2012): 103-115; Günhan Börekçi, "Factions and Favorites at the Courts of Sultan Ahmed I (r.1603-17) and His Immediate Predecessors," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, (The Ohio State University, 2010); Günhan Börekçi and Şefik Peksevgen, "Court and Favorites," in *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, eds. Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters (Facts on File, 2009), 151-154; Maria Pia Pedani, "Safiye's Household and Venetian Diplomacy," *Turcica* 32 (2000): 9-32; Palmira Brummet, "Placing the Ottomans in the Mediterranean World: The Question of Notables and Households," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 36 (2010): 77-96; and Pál Fodor, *The Business of State: Ottoman Finance Administration and Ruling Elites in Transition (1580s-1615)* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Suraiya Faroqhi, "Die Vorlagen -Telhise- Des Grosswesirs Siñan Paşa an Sultan Murād III," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (Hamburg University, 1967); Halil Sahillioğlu, ed., *Koca Sinan Paşa'nın Telhisleri* (İstanbul: IRCICA, 2004) [henceforth, *Telhisler*]; and eadem, "Koca Sinan Paşa'nın Telhisleri I: 1591 Lehistan Sulhunda İngilizler ve Yahudiler," *Belgelerle Türk Tarihi Dergisi* 20 (1969): 29-33.

<sup>6</sup> For other archival documents related to Sinan Pasha, see Tahsin Öz, "Topkapı Sarayı Müzesinde Yemen Fatihî Sinan Paşa Arşivi," *Belleten* 10/37 (1946): 171-93.

<sup>7</sup> Hasan Basri Öcalan, "Koca Sinan Paşa Vakıfları: Kuruluş Amaçları, İşlevselliği ve İstihdam Yönünden Analizi," *Uludağ Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 19/35 (2018): 723-741; Sadi Bayram, "Yemen Fatihî Gazi Sinan Paşa'nın Kahire ve Şam Vakıfları," in *Asya ve Kuzey Afrika Çalışmaları Milletlerarası Kongresi* (Ankara: Atatürk Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu Yayınları, 2007), 705-711; Erdal Çinpolat, "Endowments of Sinan Pasha," Unpublished M.A. Thesis (Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Ahmet Önal, "Koca Sinan Paşa'nın Hayatı ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri (1520?-1596)," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (Marmara University, 2012).

scholar has thus far utilized the pasha's *telhises* in a detailed manner so as to explain his quite unique standing and struggle among the contemporary Ottoman ruling elite divided by factional rivalries, a gap which I hope to fill in by this study.<sup>9</sup> Hence, my thesis is designed to contribute to the ever-growing studies on early modern Ottoman political history in general, and the emerging new Ottoman royal court studies in particular, through a content analysis of Sinan Pasha's *telhis* records with the context of the late sixteenth-century Ottoman imperial crisis.

### *Sources and Methods*

Sinan Pasha's *telhises* prove a very important type of primary source pertaining to the political, diplomatic, military, economic, and social problems of the period. In this thesis, besides these *telhises*, I use various published primary sources such as contemporary Ottoman chronicles, European ambassadorial reports (*relazioni*), traveler accounts, and the private letters of Murad III. And in my analysis of these sources, I follow a comparative methodology and a close reading while paying attention to the particular historical contexts and personal agencies behind their composition.

The word *telhis*, meaning 'summary' or 'abstract' in Arabic, connotes a specific type of document in the Ottoman administrative practice, in addition to other forms of petitions addressed to the sultan in person, such as *arzuhâl*, *kağid*, *rik'a*, and *takrîr*, all of which formed the main mode of written communication between the sultan and his grandees by the late sixteenth century. In these official letters to the sultan, the subject of the missive typically appears in the first lines, followed by the grand vizier's remarks and suggestions, ending with a request, asking the sultan to give his royal opinion or order about the problem in question. In his petitions, however, Sinan Pasha sometimes raises his personal complaints or concerns

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<sup>9</sup> Pál Fodor, "Sultan, Imperial Council, Grand Vizier: Changes in the Ottoman Ruling Elite and the Formation off the Grand Vizieral 'Telhis,'" *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 47/1-2 (1994): 67-85.

about particular issues and people in a self-defensive manner, as well. His general style and language are mostly plain and engaging. However, one can also read some implications or insinuations hidden in-between his sentences, especially when he refers to his personal enemies and other rival viziers, and their factional interests and activities.

Sinan Pasha's *telhis* collection can be divided into two broad categories by their content. In the first category, the pasha directly broaches and explains to a subject to the sultan; and in the other one, he mentions a royal order by the sultan either in verbatim or in summary so as to explain his related action or remarks. It is in this second category that we also see Sinan Pasha writes for self-defense purposes against a warning by the sultan or an accusation by his enemies.

Most of the times, his *telhises* end with the phrases common in the Ottoman petitioning culture, such as “the ultimate decision belongs to my auspicious sultan” (*bâki fermân sa‘âdetlü pâdişâhımdur*) or “whatever his royal orders are, let it be known so that I could act accordingly” (*emr-i şerîfleri ne ise işâret-i ‘aliyye buyurular ki ana göre ‘amel oluna*), denoting that he is a loyal and attentive chief deputy of the sultan.<sup>10</sup>

As the recipient of these petitions, Murad III responded to them (but not every single one) by writing on the top of the page a reply, known as *hatt-ı hümayûn*, *hatt-ı şerîf* or *işâret-i ‘aliyye*. These royal writs are generally short phrases, even at times just an affirmative or negative few words to confirm or decline a suggestion made by the grand vizier, or sometimes to ask a further question related to the topic under discussion. In some examples, the sultan also makes a remark in order to either reprimand or celebrate Sinan Pasha depending on his actions.

The head of the court scribes (*re‘isü’l-küttâb*) was responsible in composing the most important *telhises* addressed to the sultan, whereas the personal secretary (*tezkiireci*) of the

<sup>10</sup> For further stylistic aspects of the grand vizieral *telhises*, see Fodor, “Sultan, Imperial Council, Grand Vizier.”

grand vizier wrote the less significant ones. All these petitions were collected in a small sack called *kese* and then presented to the sultan by the grand vizier or his deputy in the Chamber of Audience, also known as the Chamber of Petitions (*Arzodası*), located in the third courtyard of the Topkapı Palace. If the sultan happened to be absent in the court or if he did not give an audience to his government ministers, then these petitions were delivered to him by intermediary court officials, such as the head of the gate-keepers (*kapiğası*), deputy of the gate-keepers (*kapıcılar kethüdâsı*) and the sword-bearer (*silâhdar ağa*). In the later decades, due to the increased number of petitions and other bureaucratic correspondence with the sultan, a new post called *telhisçi* was introduced.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, the Ottoman grand vizieral *telhis* collections have certain problematic components that make them harder to study. First and foremost, they often lack a date and place of composition, which in turn creates much confusion as to their chronological order. Although it is possible to date some *telhises* of Sinan Pasha, as have been meticulously done by Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor through an examination of the historical figures, events, incidents and appointments mentioned in the letters vis-à-vis available information from other sources, it is still hard to come up with an exact timing of these letters.<sup>12</sup> In this regard, another problem is that the available *telhis* collections are not organized in an orderly fashion. That is to say, we sometimes find two or more related *telhises* copied on different pages. In addition to these problems, there are references to many individuals yet without any further indicative titles or positions. Given that personal names such as Mehmed, Hasan, Mustafa and İbrahim were quite common among the ruling elite of the time, it is sometimes impossible or quite challenging to identify the persons mentioned in the *telhises*.

<sup>11</sup> See *DİA*, s.v. “*Telhis*” by Pál Fodor.

<sup>12</sup> On the dating of some of Sinan Pasha *telhises*, see Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor, “Magyar Vonatkozású Török Allamiratok A Tizenötéves Háború Korából,” *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 30/2 (1983): 278-295 and 30/3 (1983): 451-467. Also see Faroqi, “Die Vorlagen -*Telhise*- Des Grosswesirs Siñan Paşa.”



In his study of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century grand vizieral *telhises*, Fodor underlines seven main reasons behind the writing of a *telhis*. Briefly, these are related to 1) the assignments of *timars* (prebends) and other similar types of revenue appointments in Ottoman administrative-military system; 2) the financial affairs or problems that the grand vizier is obliged to report; 3) informing the sultan about important political, military and economic developments as well as making proposals in connection with the operation of the central administration; 4) diplomatic relations; 5) the reports of a grand vizier when he was acting as the commander-in-chief of a campaign; 6) reporting on the royal foundations and possessions; and 7) any official affair for which the grand vizier needed a decree issued in the name of the Ottoman sultan.<sup>13</sup>

Based on these reasons of composition, Fodor offers to categorize the grand vizieral *telhises* into two main categories as follows:

The first would be the so-called “independent” (written at the demand of the sultan or on the Grand Vizier’s own decision) *telhises*, the second would include those which I labelled as “accompanying-summarizing” *telhises*, referring to their functional origin, to the fact that their composition was due to the mediator role of the Grand Vizier.<sup>14</sup>

I think Fodor’s categorization is quite general; hence a more specific classification is needed. Below, I tabulate the published 224 *telhises* of Sinan Pasha according to 21 sub-categories correlated with each other based on more specific topics. In my analysis, I omitted 10 out of this total number as they repeat each other. But before giving further details, let me note that, according to Fodor’s above-noted criteria, 79 petitions (35.25%) can be categorized as independent *telhis*.

<sup>13</sup> Pál Fodor, “The Grand Vizieral *Telhis*: A Study in the Ottoman Central Administration 1566-1656,” *Archivum Ottomanicum* 15 (1997): 137-188, at 154-62.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

Table 1: A General Content Analysis of Sinan Pasha's *Telhise* Collection

Category	Number	Category	Number
Administrative	67	Administrative + Economic	19
Economic	12	Administrative + Military	6
Military	6	Administrative + Factionalism + Self-defense	2
Diplomatic	17	Military + Diplomatic	6
Factionalism	7	Economic + Self-defense	7
Self-defense	8	Economic + Factionalism	5
Social	5	Economic + Military	5
Administrative + Economic + Military	3	Economic + Diplomatic	3
Administrative + Self-defense	6	Diplomatic + Factionalism	3
Administrative + Military + Factionalism	2	Other	15
Administrative + Factionalism	20	Total	224

As can be seen from this table, the *telhises* touch upon various topics and problems although the administrative related ones are in the majority. 125 *telhises* (55.8% of the total) are directly or indirectly about the administration, whereas 60 *telhises* (27%) mention a self-defensive point or an issue related to factionalism at the court, on which I will further elaborate throughout my discussions below. Next comes 54 *telhises* (24.1%) on matters related to the economic problems. On the other hand, the military and diplomatic affairs are covered only in 28 and 29 *telhises*, respectively (roughly 25%). Very few *telhises* are directly related to social issues (2.2%). And under the last category titled “other,” I have considered those *telhises* which are either about a more mundane matter such as a personal issue, or a topic which cannot be categorized under other noted topics.

This thesis consists of three chapters. In the first chapter, I discuss Sinan Pasha's political career within the outlines of the sixteenth-century Ottoman imperial-political

system, which underwent some significant changes in the 1580s and 1590s. In this respect, my analysis focuses on the grand viziers appointed by Murad III and compare each grand vizier in terms of his career trajectory so as to demonstrate that Sinan Pasha was actually quite a unique political actor vis-à-vis most of his peers during this period. In the second chapter, I examine Sinan Pasha as a grand vizier in action, and more specifically, consider him as a very wealthy and powerful political actor while explaining the historical and personal factors behind his success in these terms. In this chapter, I also give a brief historical framework concerning the *telhis* mechanism between the sultan and his grand vizier in order to emphasize the critical role these letters played in Sinan Pasha's career and various undertakings, particularly when he tried to accumulate more power and influence that enabled him to survive at the faction-ridden imperial court. In this context, the third and final chapter deals with the question of Sinan Pasha's relations with other prominent members of the Ottoman ruling elite of the time, including Murad III, in the context of an ever-increasing rivalry and factionalism at the sultan's court. As we shall see, as Sinan Pasha rose to prominence under Murad III, he had created several powerful rivals, such as his archenemy Serdar Ferhad Pasha (d. 1595), who held the office of grand vizierate three times in the early 1590s.<sup>15</sup> In the second and third chapters, I exclusively use the *telhises* of Sinan Pasha since they provide much important insights and details about the pasha's actions and motivations as the chief deputy of the sultan, and most importantly, how he responded to the existing political, military, and economic problems of the Ottoman Empire. To note, since the *telhises* mostly cover the pasha's second and third grand vizierate terms (1588-91, and 1593-95), I will not focus on the pasha's first and last grand vizierates. Overall, this thesis aims to offer some fresh critical perspectives on Sinan Pasha and his multiple grand vizierates through a detailed analysis of his *telhis* collection in a manner hitherto undertaken by scholars.

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<sup>15</sup> Also see Rhoads Murphey, *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty Tradition, Image and Practice in the Ottoman Imperial Household, 1400–1800* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 131–39.

# Chapter I - Comparative Perspectives on the Political Career of Koca Sinan Pasha

This chapter aims to provide a comparative analysis of Koca Sinan Pasha's political life and career in relation to other grand viziers appointed by Murad III between 1574 and 1595. More specifically, I examine the general patterns of grand vizieral appointments under Murad III so as to emphasize Sinan Pasha's relatively unusual case. Indeed, for a proper understanding of Koca Sinan Pasha and his standing among his peers at the higher echelons of power, one needs to consider all the major stages and factors that shaped the careers of each of the seven incumbent grand viziers in this period. In this respect, I also discuss the important political, socio-economic and military problems of the period as 'external' factors which not only shaped Koca Sinan Pasha's multiple grand vizierates, but also turned him into an indispensable political figure for Murad III.

Accordingly, in the first section of this chapter, I will discuss Sinan Pasha's long political life and career, which started under Sultan Süleyman I (r. 1520-1566) and ended with his death during the early reign of Mehmed III (r. 1593-1603). Afterwards, I will examine some transformative changes that took place in the office of grand vizierate under Murad III, which directly affected Sinan Pasha's tenures, actions, and motivations. Lastly, within these two contexts, I will compare and contrast each grand vizier's political career with that of Sinan Pasha. In this regard, my comparison will be based on the following criteria: 1) whether the pasha in question was a product of the Ottoman *devşirme*; 2) his inner (*enderun*) and outer (*birun*) court services before being appointed as a government vizier; his vizierates and their durations; any period of expectancy (*ma'zûliyet*); and his last position before grand vizierate. Apart from these details, which effectively defined a pasha's career trajectory during the period in question, I will also provide necessary information on his

ethnic-regional origin (known as *cins*), patron-client relations, and networks of power at the Ottoman imperial court in Istanbul in order to offer a more complete profile. My essential sources for this chapter are the contemporary Ottoman chronicles, biographical works on grand viziers, petitions, and European ambassadorial reports, all available in published form.

## 1.1 The Life and Career Trajectory of Sinan Pasha

Koca Sinan Pasha was probably born either in the village of Topojan, located in the province of Lure/Luma, or in Delvine.<sup>16</sup> According to most contemporary authors, he was from Albania, but the Venetian ambassador Matteo Zane attributes him a Greek origin.<sup>17</sup> As for the authors who claim that Sinan Pasha had Italian roots, they are clearly confusing him with his contemporary peer, Cigalazade Sinan Pasha, who indeed came from an Italian family.<sup>18</sup>

According to the deeds of his pious endowments, Sinan Pasha's father was named Ali, and his grandfather Abdurrahim. This information raises the question of whether the pasha was a *devşirme* recruit like most viziers of the time, or he was born to a Muslim family. In his doctoral dissertation on the life and career of Sinan Pasha, Ahmet Önal suggests that Sinan was not a recruit but belonged to an already "Ottomanized" family, who were Muslim for some generations.<sup>19</sup> However, a Ragusan document of 1571 which lists all renegades in the imperial council describes Sinan Pasha as a Catholic Albanian by origin.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Önal, "Koca Sinan Paşa'nın Hayatı ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri," 1.

<sup>17</sup> Erhan Afyoncu and Ahmet Önal, eds., *Venedik Elçilik Raporlarına Göre Osmanlı'nın İhtişamlı Yılları* (İstanbul: Yeditepe Yayınevi, 2017), 178 [henceforth Afyoncu and Önal, *Venedik Elçilik Raporlarına Göre*].

<sup>18</sup> See *DİA*, s.v. "Cigalazâde Sinan Paşa" by Mahmut H. Şakiroğlu.

<sup>19</sup> Önal, "Koca Sinan Paşa'nın Hayatı ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri," 3.

<sup>20</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Agents of Empire: Knights, Corsairs, Jesuits and Spies in the Sixteenth-Century Mediterranean World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 266.

Sinan Pasha had four known brothers, namely, Ayas, Mahmud, Süleyman, and Kasım.<sup>21</sup> Each of these brothers had his own career in the Ottoman administration. As for his own family, Sinan Pasha had at least three daughters (Emine, Hatice and Hümâ)<sup>22</sup> and a son, Mehmed Pasha, who would later become a governor-general and vizier.

Sinan Pasha's date of birth is uncertain due to conflicting accounts. For instance, according to the Venetian ambassador Giovanni Moro, he was 70 by 1590, whereas *bailo* Lorenzo Bernardo claims he was 64 in 1592, and Matheo Zane, another *bailo*, says 80 for the year 1594. However, most scholars estimate that Sinan Pasha was born ca. 1520.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, in his *telhises* to Murad III, Sinan Pasha mentions his age many times within the context of the time he spent in the Ottoman administration, but he gives different numbers almost each time.<sup>24</sup> Probably, he wanted to impress Murad III by slightly exaggerating his experience in statesmanship. Considering these *telhises* together with other related primary sources, we can assume that the pasha was most likely born in the 1520s but no later than 1530.

Sinan Pasha's career before his first grand vizierate is actually hard to follow. It is reported that, thanks to his elder brother Ayas Pasha (d. 1539), he entered the Topkapı Palace School (*enderun*) at a young age during the reign of Süleyman I. After he served as the chief taster (*çaşnigîrbaşı*) of the sultan for several years, he is said to have become the district governor (*sancakbeyi*) of Malatya.<sup>25</sup> However, according to the findings of Franz Babinger and Géza Dávid, Sinan was not the governor of Malatya but of Trablus at first.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Although Grand Vizier Ayas Pasha (d. 1539) is mentioned as Sinan Pasha's brother in various contemporary sources and secondary literature, according to Ayas Pasha's *vakfiye* records, he does not have a brother named Sinan, Mahmud, Süleyman and Kasım, but Ferhad, Ahmed, and Mustafa. See H. Ahmet Arslantürk "Sadrazam Ayas Paşa'nın Vakfiyeleri ve Bir Sınırnâmesi," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 37 (2011): 165-180, at 166.

<sup>22</sup> Erdal Çinpolat, "Endowments of Sinan Pasha," 30 and 59-60.

<sup>23</sup> Önal, "Koca Sinan Paşa'nın Hayatı ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri," 136-39.

<sup>24</sup> *Telhisler*, 65, 79, 89, 91, 100, 122, and 195 [*telhis* #45, 54, 61, 62, 68, 84, 151].

<sup>25</sup> See *DİA*, s.v. "Koca Sinan Paşa" by Mehmet İpşirli.

<sup>26</sup> See *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition [henceforth EI<sup>2</sup>], s.v. "Sinan Pasha, Khodja" by Franz Babinger and Géza Dávid.

After this first governorship, Sinan held a number of provincial-military positions: he became the governor of Gazze in 1560 and then of Malatya in 1561. He was then made governor-general (*beylerbeyi*) of Karaman in 1564, of Erzurum and then of Aleppo in 1565, and of Egypt in 1567. Afterwards, he was appointed commander-in-chief (*serdar*) of the Yemen campaign in August 1568.

During his provincial governorship in Egypt, he was sent to Yemen as commander-in-chief to suppress the revolt of Imam Mutahhar in 1569. This successful military expedition gave him the honorific title of “Conqueror of Yemen” (*Yemen Fâtihi*). This success earned him a government viziership (*kubbealtı vezîri*) in the sixth degree. A few years later, he was again appointed as a governor-general of Egypt in 1571. However, the pasha was not happy with this assignment since he was expecting to finally return to Istanbul.<sup>27</sup> In 1574, Sinan Pasha assigned as a commander-in-chief to recapture Tunis. As a consequence, he added to the title of “Conqueror of Tunis” (*Tunus fâtihi*) and his ranking in vizierate has promoted to the fourth place. For the campaign against the Safavids, both Sinan Pasha and Lala Mustafa Pasha were assigned as chief commanders (*serdar-ı ekrem*). However, Mustafa Pasha managed to dismiss Sinan Pasha and became the sole commander of the army. Nevertheless, Sinan Pasha’s supporters in the court frequently put forward his name for the post, and eventually Mustafa Pasha was sent to the capital and Sinan Pasha was assigned as a commander in October 1579<sup>28</sup> or April 1580.<sup>29</sup> After the death of grand vizier Ahmed Semiz Pasha, the Sultan appointed Lala Mustafa Pasha as a deputy without granting the seal to him for three months. And in August 1580, he finally managed to become the grand vizier, a few months after the death of Semiz Ahmed Pasha.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Önal, “Koca Sinan Paşa’nın Hayatı ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri,” 42.

<sup>28</sup> İpşirli, “Koca Sinan Paşa”.

<sup>29</sup> Bekir Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı-İran Siyasi Münasebetleri* (İstanbul: İstanbul Fetih Cemiyeti, 1993), 108–9.

<sup>30</sup> See *DİA*, s.v. “Semiz Ahmed Paşa” by Feridun Emecen; Babinger and David, “Sinan Pasha, Khodja,” Mehmet İpşirli, “Koca Sinan Paşa;” and Önal, “Koca Sinan Paşa’nın Hayatı ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri,” 4–125. Also

Sinan Pasha received the seal of the grand vizierate (*sadâret mühri*) while he was marching towards Tbilisi. At the time, Murad III's decision to choose Sinan Pasha for this top position in the imperial government was quite unexpected for many, especially Lala Mustafa Pasha, who was acting as the deputy grand vizier in Istanbul and thus anticipating being the successor of Semiz Ahmed Pasha as the second-highest ranking vizier. Similarly, the elevation of Sinan Pasha to the grand vizierate by Murad III received some critiques from the Ottoman authors, such as the chronicler Hasan Beyzade who considered Murad III's decision against the "old laws."<sup>31</sup> Likewise, the famous sixteenth-century intellectual and bureaucrat Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî, who was once under the patronage of Sinan Pasha, remarked that "the grand vizierate came to his feet," implying the pasha had done nothing significant during the above mentioned campaign against the Safavids.<sup>32</sup>

But Sinan Pasha's grand vizierate lasted only two years. He was dismissed in 1582, after which he did not receive any posts for four years. During this interim period, he lived in Malkara. Then, in 1586, he was sent to Damascus as governor-general, but only to be dismissed the same year. This time, the pasha returned to Istanbul instead of retiring to Malkara and began waiting for a new appointment. In 1589, right after a major military rebellion that shook the throne of Murad III, Sinan Pasha was called back and made grand vizier for a second time. Murad III would dismiss him in 1591 and then re-appoint as grand vizier in 1593. Sinan Pasha's next two relatively short grand vizierates would be under Mehmed III. Overall, his five-time grand vizierate is a unique case in entire Ottoman history.<sup>33</sup>

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see Elif Özgen, "Grand Vizier Koca Sinan Paşa and Factional Politics in the Court of Murad III," Unpublished M.A. Thesis (İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2010), 29–67.

<sup>31</sup> Hasan Beyzade Ahmed Paşa, *Hasan Beyzade Tarihi*, ed. Ş. Nezihi Aykut (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 2004), 280.

<sup>32</sup> Önal, "Koca Sinan Paşa'nın Hayatı ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri," 70.

<sup>33</sup> To be more precise, the years of Sinan Pasha's five grand viziers are as follows: 1) August 1580 – December 1582; 2) April 1589 – August 1591; 3) January 1593 – February 1595; 4) July 1595 – November 1595; and 5) December 1595 – 4 April 1596. See "Sinan Pasha, Khodja" by Babinger and David; "Koca Sinan Paşa" by İpşirli; Önal, "Koca Sinan Paşa'nın Hayatı ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri," 4-125; Abdurrahman Sağırılı, "Mehmed B.



While he was away from the capital, Sinan Pasha expanded his political influence and wealth that finally made him a proper candidate for the ultimate position that one can achieve in the empire: grand vizierate (*vezîriâzam/sadrâzam*). For instance, as Seyyid Lokman reports, when he returned to Istanbul, he brought his large retinue to Istanbul.<sup>34</sup> In other words, the pasha maintained his network relations and kept his political and economic capacity with him. Önal explains the success of Sinan Pasha during his vizierate career with two factors. The first one was his administrative and military success. Secondly, the objective circumstances and luck of the pasha enabled him to bright swiftly since the previous pashas were unsuccessful or unexpectedly passed away.<sup>35</sup> The Pasha's methods of accumulating wealth and power accumulation will be examined in the next chapter in a more nuanced way.

#### *Koca Sinan Pasha in the Eyes of his Contemporaries*

Koca Sinan Pasha was one of the most experienced statesmen and military commanders of the time. Indeed, several Ottoman and European sources describe his achievements with flattering phrases. However, some Ottoman authors present a more critical stance against the pasha, complicating our understanding of his character and intentions. As Emine Fetvacı suggests, Sinan Pasha differed from Sokollu Mehmed Pasha in several respects, especially in the way he acted as grand vizier and as a patron of arts and literature.<sup>36</sup> Sokollu Mehmed Pasha commissioned many literary and historical works which praised not only him but also the sultans to whom he served, namely Süleyman I, Selim II and Murad III. Sinan Pasha, on the other hand, sponsored authors to write about his own heroic actions and

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Mehmed Er-Rûmî (Edirneli)'nin *Nuhbtetü't-Tevârih ve'l-Ahbâr'ı ve Târîh-i Âl-i Osman'ı* (Metinleri, Tahlilleri)," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (İstanbul University, 2000), 18–21.

<sup>34</sup> Durmuş Kandıra, "Seyyid Lokmân, Zübdet'üt-Tevârih (Tahlil-Metin)," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (İstanbul University, 2001), 444.

<sup>35</sup> Önal, "Koca Sinan Paşa'nın Hayatı ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri," 66–67.

<sup>36</sup> Emine Fetvacı, *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 22.

achievements during his numerous campaigns. Thus, as many works exaggeratedly praised him, many others condemned him or described his character in a negative light.

For instance, the aforementioned Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî appraised the pasha in his earlier works, but then drastically changed his tone towards him after he lost his patronage. In his work, *Fursatnâme*, Gelibolulu reports the immense trust that the sultan had shown towards to the pasha, and how the pasha was worthy of such royal favor.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, in his treatise *Nushâtü's-Selâtin*, he emphasizes on the great military achievements of the pasha in the anti-Safavid campaigns.<sup>38</sup> However, in his *opus magnum* on history, *Künhü'l-ahbâr*, completed after Sinan Pasha's death in 1596, he uses dismissive adjectives about the pasha to the extent that he basically singles him out for the main reasons behind the empire-wide problems. Another contemporary historian, Mustafa Selânikî, likewise mentions the pasha's weakness to bribery and "gifts," while the seventeenth-century chronicler Abdülkadir Efendi defines him as a great ghazi commander.<sup>39</sup> However, contrary to these remarks, a late sixteenth-century author Ebubekir bin Abdullah tells that the pasha was a rational, intelligent and cautious statesman.<sup>40</sup>

Contemporary European authors similarly depict Sinan Pasha in a mixed manner. Indeed, while some ambassadors note Sinan's character and actions as grand vizier in good terms, others sharply differentiate and emphasize his stubbornness or bad temperament. For example, Salomon Schweiger, the chaplain of the Habsburg ambassador Joachim von Sintendorff, tells a notorious story between the pasha and the ambassador. According to Schweiger, the ambassador brought golden plates and various other valuable gifts to the

<sup>37</sup> Önal, "Koca Sinan Paşa'nın Hayatı ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri," 69.

<sup>38</sup> Saadettin Eğri, "Koca Sina Paşa Hakkında Övgü ve Yergi İkilemi," *Uludağ Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 18/33 (2017): 587-607, at 590.

<sup>39</sup> Selaniki Mustafa Efendi, *Tarihi Selaniki (1003-1008/1595-1600)*, ed. Mehmet İpşirli, 2 vols. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1999), vol. II, 582; *Topçular Katibi Abdülkadir (Kadri) Efendi Tarihi*, ed. Ziya Yılmaz, 2 vols. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 2003), vol. I, 109; Önal, "Koca Sinan Paşa'nın Hayatı ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri," 137.

<sup>40</sup> Ebubekir bin Abdullah, *Şark Seferleri*, ed. Süleyman Lokmacı (İstanbul: Akıl Fikir Yayınları, 2018), 118.

pasha; however, when these gifts were presented, Sinan mocked with him and said that he would prefer weapons so that he could beat the infidels like him.<sup>41</sup> Schweiger thus uses the words ‘impudent’ and ‘cruel’ for describing the pasha’s main character. Richard Knolles, the English historian, similarly defines Sinan’s character as proud and haughty. According to Knolles, for instance, when Murad III assembled all government pashas to ask them the reasons for the unsuccessful siege of Tbilisi, Sinan Pasha took a step forward and said that he did his best and that the sultan should have listened to his advises rather than hearing Lala Mustafa Pasha.<sup>42</sup>

Two other contemporary European authors, Friedrich Siedel and Baron Wratislaw, had a much more negative image of the pasha, since they were held captive for several years in the Ottoman capital until the pasha died. Siedel thus defines him as heretic and deviant, and he further remarks that everything would have been much better if the sultan had removed him from the world, since Sinan Pasha, in his eyes, was masterminded behind the war launched against the Habsburgs in 1593.<sup>43</sup> The Venetian ambassadors (single, *bailo*) resident in Istanbul also negatively describe Sinan Pasha in their reports, which they read before their Senate after they completed their service at the sultan’s court. Moreover, the *bailo* Giovanni Moro refers to Sinan Pasha’s Albanian origin and takes it as the main reason for his rude and impertinent character. According to Moro, no one was favoring Sinan Pasha and actually most of the people were thinking that he was a mad man.<sup>44</sup> Another *bailo*, Lorenzo Bernardo, also points out to the pasha being a mad man as well as a pretentious

<sup>41</sup> Salomon Schweigger, *Sultanlar Kentine Yolculuk, 1578-1581*, trans. *Türkis Noyan* (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2004), 76.

<sup>42</sup> Richard Knolles, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1687), 678.

<sup>43</sup> Friedrich Siedel, *Sultanın Zindanında: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’na Gönderilen Bir Elçilik Heyetinin İbret Verici Öyküsü (1591-1596)*, trans. *Türkis Noyan* (İstanbul: Kitapyayınevi, 2010), 34. However, Sinan Pasha conducted a 8-year peace treaty with the Habsburgs in 1591, see Robyn Dora Radway, “Vernacular Diplomacy in Central Europe: Statesmen and Soldiers Between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, 1543-1593,” Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (Princeton University, 2017), 259.

<sup>44</sup> Afyoncu and Önal, *Venedik Elçilik Raporlarına Göre*, 63.

person.<sup>45</sup> According to the extraordinary Venetian ambassador Leanordo Dona, who came to Istanbul to congratulate Mehmed III upon his succession in 1595, Sinan Pasha was an indolent man. His testimony is important, because Dona also says that the pasha is successful at introducing new political measures in order to govern like in the “old times.”<sup>46</sup> And finally, according to the *bailo* Matteo Zane, Sinan Pasha was extremely impolite and impatient which was one of the main reasons of why the Venetians could not conduct healthy diplomatic relations with him.<sup>47</sup>

Apart from his personality, most contemporary observers saw Sinan Pasha as a ruthless enemy of Christendom in his foreign policies and management of related diplomatic relations. On the other hand, Sinan Pasha seems to have intentionally embraced such a personal stance or image. For instance, it is reported that during a meetings with the Habsburg ambassador, Sinan Pasha told him, “Do not be happy since I am grand vizier again, because I am the one who will hurt all infidels.”<sup>48</sup> Earlier in 1574, the Bishop of Dax defined him as a very severe and anti-Christian man. Only two years later, the *bailo* Antonio Tiepolo was warning his Doge by stating Sinan was “utterly hostile to all Christians.”<sup>49</sup>

Yet still, Sinan Pasha was seen as one of the best military commanders in the empire and the skills he demonstrated in the battlefields sharpened this image of him. In 1578, *bailo* Giovanni Corner advises everyone to pray together for the quick death of Sinan Pasha as he can easily defeat any of his enemies. The *bailo* Paolo Contarini was enthusiastically writing to his Doge in Venice that the pasha was deposed and hence this was great news for all Christendom, not only for Venetians.<sup>50</sup> A contemporary traveler Reinhold Lubenau, a pharmacist in the Habsburg envoy, is among the ones who described the pasha as an

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 101–6.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 267.

<sup>47</sup> Önal, “Koca Sinan Paşa’nın Hayatı ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri,” 138.

<sup>48</sup> Wenceslaw Wratislaw, *Baron Wratislaw’ın Anıları*, trans. M. Süreyya Dilmen (Istanbul: Ad Yayıncılık, 1996), 88.

<sup>49</sup> Malcolm, *Agents of Empire*, 266.

<sup>50</sup> Önal, “Koca Sinan Paşa’nın Hayatı ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri” 137.

archenemy of Christendom, right after he observed the pasha leading the Ottoman imperial army against the Habsburgs in 1593.<sup>51</sup> Overall, Sinan Pasha's thought waging a "holy war" was to reinforce his fearful image in the eyes of the Europeans, especially those whom he deemed enemies. In his own words, "the treasury is [collected] exclusively for war [*jihad*]. Specifically, the jihad against the infidels is blessed [by God] out of which come much joy unlike anything else. [Accordingly] it both covers the expenses (of the campaign) and brings various benefits."<sup>52</sup>

Even he was a captive for several years, Baron Wratislaw states that the pasha was a great commander that proved himself in Famagusta in 1571.<sup>53</sup> Considering that Sinan Pasha was quite successful in battlefields, except the Wallachian campaign of 1595, many of his contemporaries praised him and his abilities. Actually, Gianfrancesco Morosini, a Venetian Catholic cardinal, suggests that the pasha was so similar to Cardinal Granvella –who was one of the most influential, powerful, and wealthy statesman in the Habsburgs- because of his wealth, rational behaviors, physical appearance and other dignities. For him, Koca Sinan was so brave and a worthy enemy of the Christians.<sup>54</sup> The *bailo* Zane even confesses that if Sinan Pasha was not that old and did stop being so arrogant, he would be the greatest menace for Christian Europe given his unmatched personal military skills and tactics.<sup>55</sup>

Koca Sinan Pasha followed an interesting career trajectory due to his fluctuating status especially after 1589. His gradual promotion from rural administrative duties to the vizierate, commander-in-chief and grand vizier was constantly intervened by deposals and expels. After his second term of grand vizierate, the factionalist rivalry and competition reached its peak point and even extended beyond the capital. As it will be shown in the next

<sup>51</sup> Reinhold Lubenau *Seyahatnamesi: Osmanlı Ülkesinde, 1587-1589*, trans. Türkis Noyan, 2 vols. (İstanbul: Kitapyayınevi, 2016, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), vol. I, 251.

<sup>52</sup> *Telhisler*, 5 [*telhis* #3].

<sup>53</sup> Wratislaw, *Baron Wratislaw'ın Anıları*, 51–52.

<sup>54</sup> Önal, "Koca Sinan Paşa'nın Hayatı ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri," 137–38.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

chapters, the pashas were trying their best to track down and undermine the rival pashas through various methods.

To conclude, Sinan Pasha always found an alternative way to return to the office of grand vizierate in any circumstances without losing his political and economic power. Therefore, I believe that analyzing his actions and strategies may provide a further understanding for the post-Sokollu period Ottoman politics and the transformation of the ruling elite. As Mustafa Âlî reported, persistent return of Sinan Pasha to his post resulted in rising factionalism, military disintegration, political instability, warfare, and economic disruption which constituted the cornerstones of the political discourse of the period.<sup>56</sup> In other words, Sinan's actions and their consequences were both the reasons and symptoms of the political transformation that he was a strong participant of it.

## 1.2 The Office of Grand Vizierate and the Outlines of Ottoman System in the Late Sixteenth Century

### *A Historical Background on the Office of Grand Vizierate*

The post of vizierate had existed throughout many centuries in the Near/Middle Eastern states, caliphates, and empires. Classical Muslim thinkers considered the vizierate as one of the most crucial duties in state administration in that the holders of these posts were the deputies of a sovereign ruler, who was generally taken as the reflection of divinity on the earth. These viziers were essentially empowered by the ruler to help him in dispensing justice and providing welfare to his subjects. According to el-Mâverdi, the tenth-century Muslim intellectual-scholar, a vizier should divide his mind into two equal parts; one belongs to the ruler and the other to the people. In his work *Adab al-Vezîr (The Conduct of Vizier)*, Mâverdi lists five necessary features that a chief minister had to have, that is, he must be just, honest,

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<sup>56</sup> Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541-1600)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 301.

devout, act according to the right religious ways, and believe in meritocracy.<sup>57</sup> These five essential features were later adopted by successor Islamic polities including the Ottomans.

No doubt, the most celebrated work on the grand vizierate in the sixteenth-century Ottoman context is the *Asafnâme* written by Lütfi Pasha, who served as Süleyman I's grand vizier between 1539 and 1541.<sup>58</sup> *Asafnâme* is actually more than a manual written for Ottoman viziers, it also carries the characteristics of a typical *nasihatnâme* (book of advice). In his work, Lütfi Pasha's describes the duties and manners of an ideal Ottoman grand vizier while at the same time criticizing some new practices that he observed among the contemporary Ottoman ruling elite in the 1520s and 1530s. Most importantly, he underlines that the grand vizier should be fully independent in his governing position as the chief deputy of the sultan.

After Lütfi Pasha's book, the late sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries witnessed a wave of new works which specifically discussed the office of grand vizierate in the Ottoman imperial system as for the authors of these work the office losing its significance or in constant "decline." Indeed, as Marinos Sariyannis has shown, the political discourse of this time in championing "the old order" (*kânûn-i kâdîm*) was not copying the exact manners or mechanisms from the previous times, but the renewal of the old laws according to the changing nature of the things.<sup>59</sup> For instance, in his *Hırzû'l-Mülûk* (*The Stronghold of Rulers*) dedicated to Murad III during his early reign, the anonymous author criticizes Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha and other government pashas of accumulating their wealth and power through corruption, favoritism, and venality. Besides, he refers to the "foreigners" (*ecnebi*) who were admitted in court and administrative positions through their

<sup>57</sup> Ebü'l-Hasen El-Mâverdî, *Bilge Yöneticinin Elkitabı Edebü'l-Vezîr*, ed. İbrahim Barca (İstanbul: Klasik, 2014), 29–30.

<sup>58</sup> Mübahat S. Kütükoğlu, *Lütfi Paşa Âsafnâmesi (Yeni Bir Metin Tesisi Denemesi)* (İstanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Basımevi, 1991).

<sup>59</sup> Marinos Sariyannis, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought up to the Early Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 443.

network relations.<sup>60</sup> Another contemporary writer Hasan Beyzâde emphasizes on importance of justice and consultation in running the business of state under the care of the grand vizier as well as choosing administrative and military servants (*kuls*) of the sultan based on their merits not by favor.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, in his short treatise on the grand vizierate, the famous sixteenth-century poet and judge (*kadı*), Nev'î, summarizes the ideal manners of the chief vizier similar to el-Mâverdi, while emphasizing that he has to be the mirror of the sultan in his every action since he is the main pillar of the state.<sup>62</sup> Overall, all these late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Ottoman authors point out to the increased power of the grand vizier in the Ottoman imperial system, and thus underline their greater responsibilities in running the empire which, if not properly carried out, could easily harm the entire imperial order and harmony.

As Şefik Peksevgen aptly notes, one of the most important aspects of early modern Ottoman court politics was the control of information flow between the sultan and his ruling elite as well as the so-called secrets of the empire (*arcana imperii*), which were directly related to holding power. Indeed, according to Peksevgen, both Sokollu Mehmed Pasha and Koca Sinan Pasha owed their great power and influence in contemporary politics to their ability to exert such control.<sup>63</sup> Hence, some contemporary authors warned Murad III to have at least one or two favorites (*musâhîb*) to keep an eye on the state affairs supervised by the grand vizier, if not prevent them from becoming more powerful.<sup>64</sup> In short, by the late sixteenth century, the grand viziers and their greater power became much debated within the

<sup>60</sup> See Yaşar Yücel, ed., *Osmanlı Devlet Teşkilatına Dair Kaynaklar: Kitâb-i Müstetâb - Kitabu Mesâlihi'l Müslimîn ve Menâfi'i'l-Mü'mininin - Hırzû'l-Mülûk* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1988), 183–87.

<sup>61</sup> Hasan Beyzade Ahmed Paşa, *Devlet Yönetimi İçin Bilgelik Kılavuzu Usûli'l-Hikem Fî Nizâmi'l-Âlem*, ed. Ensar Köse (İstanbul: Büyüyenay Yayınları, 2017), 82–86.

<sup>62</sup> Fatih Koyuncu, “Nev'î'nin Siyâsetnâme Tûründeki Eseri: Fezâ'ilül-Vüzerâ ve Hasâ'ilü'l-Ümerâ,” *Divan Edebiyatı Araştırmaları Dergisi* 17 (2016): 215–242.

<sup>63</sup> Şefik Peksevgen, “Secrecy, Information Control and Power Building in the Ottoman Empire, 1566–1603,” Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (Montreal, McGill University, 2004).

<sup>64</sup> Börekçi, “Factions and Favorites,” 163.



political circles and among intellectuals, whose observations were depended on the actual events.

To give a telling example, in one of this *telhises*, Sinan Pasha describes the perfect vizier and his responsibilities by locating himself into the center of the narrative. A day before, the pasha received a response from the sultan telling him, “If the vizier is loyal, then everyone is. If the vizier acts on his own behalf, then everyone does.” According to the pasha, the grand vizier should never consider himself but only the sultan and his state. No decision should be taken and executed without the consent of the sultan. Imperial decrees are the ultimate orders for all servants that cannot be neglected. To illustrate his ideas, Sinan Pasha stresses that he did not achieve his success with the help of someone or a group (*arka yardımı*) but only the will of the sultan and because of being just and loyal to his master. The pasha continues by stating that he never assigned a vacant *timar* (*düşen timâr*) to his own follower nor kept any records to himself but sent everything to the capital.<sup>65</sup>

### *The Outlines of Ottoman Political, Economic and Military System*

The long reign of Sultan Süleyman I was the crucial period in Ottoman history in that the entire imperial institutions and related administrative mechanisms were re-consolidated while the boundaries between the ruler and his servants were drawn more clearly. Throughout the sixteenth century, most government viziers were *devşirme* recruits and educated in the palace school. Thus, the sultan chose and appointed his ruling grandees from a dynamic and large pool of servants. Appointed as governors, military commanders and viziers, these elites represented the sultan’s sovereign power in the provinces and campaigns.<sup>66</sup> Süleyman I also created his grand viziers from his royal household. İbrahim Pasha (d. 1536) was quite

<sup>65</sup> *Telhisler*, 99–100 [*telhis* #68].

<sup>66</sup> Metin Kunt, “Sultan and State up to the Age of Süleyman: Frontier Principality to World Empire,” in *Süleyman the Magnificent and His Age: The Ottoman Empire in the Early Modern World*, eds. Metin Kunt and Christine Woodhead (London and New York: Longman, 1995): 3-33, at 26.

significant in this regard in that he was appointed as grand vizier directly from the inner court service of the sultan. The sultans indeed bestowed upon him such great authority and power that İbrahim Pasha quickly turned into the sultan's alter ego, if not a co-ruler with Süleyman. Yet, exactly because of his tremendous powers, he suddenly fell from royal favor and got secretly executed after serving as grand vizier for thirteen years in 1536.<sup>67</sup>

Süleyman's long reign also witnessed significant territorial expansion of the Ottoman Empire in all directions, which in turned demanded an enlarged bureaucracy and created more difficulties for provisioning the fighting army. These were among the most important factors that later shaped the dynamics of Ottoman imperial finances in the 1580s. According to Linda Darling, the Ottomans managed to respond to these challenges by successfully adapting themselves to newly emerging situations.<sup>68</sup> The Ottoman imperial system did not merely aim to raise the revenues, but also needed to find new methods to redistribute the wealth.<sup>69</sup> In 1581, during the third year of the Ottoman-Safavid War, the central budget showed a deficit for the first time. As Baki Tezcan notes, the Ottomans tried to overcome this deficit by controlling the value of different currencies used in the markets and thus reduce the harming effects of arbitrage opportunities.<sup>70</sup> Yet, as wars went on and accordingly budget deficits continue to grow, the currency debasement was inevitable.<sup>71</sup> However, the repeated debasements of *akçe* in the period of 1585-89 caused great disturbance among the imperial cavalry (*sipahis*) and the Janissaries, especially when they received their due salaries in debased coins. Hence, in 1589, they revolted against Murad III and demanded the heads of Doğancı Mehmed Pasha, the governor-general of Rumeli, and Mahmud Efendi, the chief

<sup>67</sup>See Ebru Turan, "Voices of Opposition in the Reign of Sultan Süleyman: The Case of İbrahim Paşa (1523-1536)," in *Studies on Istanbul and Beyond: The Freely Papers*, ed. Robert Ousterhout (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, Incorporated, 2007): 23-37.

<sup>68</sup> Darling, "Ottoman Fiscal Administration: Decline or Adaptation?"

<sup>69</sup> Linda T. Darling, *Revenue-Raising and Legitimacy: Tax Collection and Finance Administration in the Ottoman Empire, 1560-1660* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 1-16.

<sup>70</sup> Baki Tezcan, "The Ottoman Monetary Crisis of 1585 Revisited," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 52/3 (2009): 460-504.

<sup>71</sup> Also see Halil Sahillioğlu, "Sıvış Yılı Buhranları," *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası* 27/1-2, (1967): 89-100, at 92.

treasurer, whom they held responsible for their problem. This military revolt, known as the Governor-General Incident, was so momentous in contemporary politics.<sup>72</sup>

In the meantime, the late sixteenth century witnessed the emergence of alternative foci of power against the sultan and his court faction. The sultans of this period, namely Murad III and Mehmed III, thus tried to balance these new powerful grandees, including the grand vizier and the chief jurisprudent (*müfîi*), who had run large networks of power and patronage with each other as well as many other political-military groups. Accordingly, a new administrative bureaucracy of the empire, formed around personal networks and alliances, emerged within the empire and beyond. The rise of royal favorites was a result of these trends in politics. The favorites were in fact “creatures” of the sultans and they were empowered to act as power brokers on behalf of the sultan. Often, they also became the alter ego of their masters similar to their counterparts in other Eurasian royal courts.<sup>73</sup> Baki Tezcan defines this whole new configuration of the early modern Ottoman political system as the “Second Empire” in the sense that the old Ottoman political system was patrimonial dynastic state with the sultan at its helm, whereas the Second Empire functioned like a spider web in which the sultan was relocated in the middle and all networks composed of households became connected to him through various patron-client relations.<sup>74</sup> This phenomenon was also the result of the increased seclusion of the sultan and the full implementation of imperial institutionalization.<sup>75</sup> However, the sedentary sultan figure did not mean a passive ruler. For instance, as also European writers observed, the sultans were effectively using the sovereign authority in confiscation as an effective tool to control his ruling elite.<sup>76</sup> During the reign of Murad III, such confiscations became almost an everyday measure, with which the sultan

<sup>72</sup> See Börekcî, “Factions and Favorites,” 172–75.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 17 and 152.

<sup>74</sup> Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire*, 80 and idem., “The Second Empire: The Transformation of the Ottoman Polity in the Early Modern Era,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29/3 (2009): 556–572, at 561.

<sup>75</sup> Fodor, *The Business of State*, 51.

<sup>76</sup> Schweigger, *Sultanlar Kentine Yolculuk*, 179–80.

often cut the transfer of the wealth of a pasha to his family by confiscating all of his properties and valuables after they died. The new favorites in the court, however, tried to utilize this decisive weapon for the sake of their individual or factionalist benefits by influencing the sultan against their rivals. For instance, Feridun Ahmed Bey, who was once the private secretary of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha and then became the chancellor, was expelled from the capital in the late 1570s while his revenue lands were confiscated, as well as his close two men Sinan Agha and Hüsrev Agha were executed.<sup>77</sup>

As recent scholarship underlines, the emergence of royal favorites was not unrelated to these changes in the Ottoman imperial system. Indeed, these proxy political figures empowered by the sultans enjoyed great degree of independence in their actions as they could access to the person of the sultan in person without any intermediary mode, such a writing a *telhis*. During the reigns of Murad III and Mehmed III, the norms and patterns of hierarchical assignment of the grand viziers as institutionalized under Süleyman I significantly changed. Under these sultans, no more the second-ranking vizier was automatically elevated to the grand vizierate as done under Süleyman I. Instead, both sultans promoted to the top position of their government whomever they deemed worthy. In the meantime, they married these favored ministers with royal princesses to solidify their loyalty to the dynasty. However, there were also the sultan's royal favorites, who similarly enjoyed a privileged position at the imperial court. As Günhan Börekçi explains, the favorites "not only had the privilege of submitting their own petitions to the sultan, but could also control which vizierial *telhîses* the sultan saw."<sup>78</sup> In sum, this new political configuration in the higher echelons of the Ottoman imperial system created a highly complex form of communication and interaction between different actors, while the sultan used his royal favorites and their court factions to counter-balance the alternative foci of power by other grandees.

<sup>77</sup> Börekçi, "Factions and Favorites," 169.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 154 and 171–72.

Compared to the previous times, the rotations in the office of grand vizierate also accelerated in this period. The modern scholarship remarks the most important factor behind this problem. As Fodor notes, the main criterion of eligibility for becoming a grand vizier was to have enough personal finances so that he could pay for the deficits.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, due to the monetization of economy and the constant need for cash to finance the ongoing long wars, the issue of revenue-raising was the top priority in the eyes of the ruling elite and the sultan. As the Italian diplomat Giovanni Moro reports, Koca Sinan Pasha once thrust himself forward by claiming that he could double the incomes of the state treasury, but only if no one intervenes in his policies.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, according to Metin Kunt, Murad III avoided creating another “Sokollu” type of vizier and hence he tried to block the power of grand viziers before they became too powerful. Salomon Schweiger and Lorenzo Bernardo testify to this point in that Murad III often plotted against his top-ranking pashas to eliminate them in the power vacuum.<sup>81</sup>

Long wars were also another major problem of this period in which Sinan Pasha held his grand vizierates. These wars directly affected the political, economic, and military mechanisms and stability of the Ottoman Empire. Previously, the Ottomans launched seasonal or annual campaigns against their enemies and cautiously avoided any longer war that would drain their financial and military sources, such as the Ottoman-Safavid War of 1578-1590. Led by Sokollu and his court faction, this first long war of the sixteenth century had some serious consequences. As Caroline Finkel illustrates, the empire had to spend 180 million *akçes* for the campaigns between 1586 and 1590, which corresponds roughly to the

<sup>79</sup> Fodor, “Sultan, Imperial Council, Grand Vizier,” 76.

<sup>80</sup> Afyoncu and Önal, *Venedik Elçilik Raporlarına Göre*, 25.

<sup>81</sup> Schweigger, *Sultanlar Kentine Yolculuk*, 161 and Eric R. Dursteler, ed., *In the Sultan's Realm: Two Venetian Ambassadorial Reports on the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2018), 61.

entire annual income of the state treasury.<sup>82</sup> The ever-increasing demands of the state to employ more soldiers in the field also impacted the rural areas, as these areas suffered from security problems and resulted in a drastic reduction in the volume of agricultural production.

The commissioning of new fortresses and castles also indicate the economic burden the war imposed on the Ottoman Empire. The immense amount of money spent on frontier zones with a small economic return was always questioned both by contemporaries and in modern historiography. Sinan Pasha expressed his confusion about why they were investing so much money in fortifications, particularly in the newly conquered lands in Georgia and around Shirvan although they would yield even a single *akçe*.<sup>83</sup> The maintenance of frontier troops and castles constituted a great economic burden over the Ottomans. Fodor argues that the Hungarian frontier of the Ottoman Empire caused a great black hole in the Ottoman economy and busied the Ottoman administrators with solving intensified economic challenges.<sup>84</sup> The Habsburgs and the Safavids were not only powers that the Ottomans had as enemies. Unceasing Cossack raids, under Lithuanian-Polish military apparatus operated in the northern frontier, challenging the Ottoman hegemony frequently in these years.

In fact, one of the most significant effects of the war against the Safavids was that most high-ranking pashas participated in the annual campaigns and accordingly endeavored to accumulate their wealth and power through exploiting their military successes or undermining the rival pashas. Firstly, the war was a great opportunity for many pashas to flourish by expanding their household and economic power. For instance, as commander-in-chief (*serdar*), Ferhad Pasha apparently assigned many *timars* (prebends) to his household men who were not worthy. Eventually, when was accused of his action, he accepted to only

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<sup>82</sup> Caroline Finkel, *The Administration of Warfare: The Ottoman Military Campaigns in Hungary, 1593–1606* (Vienna: Verband der wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaften Österreichs, 1988), 297–30.

<sup>83</sup> Fodor, *The Business of State*, 45.

<sup>84</sup> See Pál Fodor, *The Unbearable Weight of Empire: The Ottomans in Central Europe: A Failed Attempt at Universal Monarchy (1390-1566)* (Budapest: Research Centre for the Humanities of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2016).

grant the one-third of the *timars* and leave the rest.<sup>85</sup> And secondly, all the commanders-in-chief who served during the Safavid wars became grand vizier and often more than once: Lala Mustafa Pasha, Özdemiroğlu Osman Pasha, Koca Sinan Pasha, Ferhad Pasha and, Cigalazade Sinan Pasha.<sup>86</sup>

Being a commander-in-chief was a risky duty and had its own dilemmas. On the one hand, being *serdar* made these pashas much visible in Ottoman politics. In other words, being successful in the war or getting military/diplomatic achievements made pashas a better candidate for the grand vizierate. Furthermore, the state apparatus managed to control the retired (*mâzûl*) ruling elite by sending them away from the capital. On the other hand, this war ignited the factional competition between the pashas. For instance, Thomas Minadoi, an Italian historian, argues that Lala Mustafa Pasha was the old archenemy of Sinan Pasha. Because of his greed, he notes, Sinan Pasha exploited Mustafa Pasha's successes at the Yemen campaign and presented them as his own achievements. Minadoi further notes that Sinan Pasha utilized his power of slander to diminish the influence of Mustafa Pasha at the court and how Mustafa Pasha in turn responded by accusing Sinan of pocketing state revenues.<sup>87</sup> Cornell Fleischer points out that, as the grand vizier of the time, Sokollu Mehmed Pasha was aware of the rivalry between these two pashas and accordingly he deliberately assigned both pashas for the Yemen campaign so as to get rid of them from the capital, thus reduce their political influence.<sup>88</sup>

Sinan Pasha himself also testifies to the impact of these wars in this context. For instance, in one of his *telhises*, the pasha says that he has checked the appointment register

<sup>85</sup> Metin Kunt, *The Sultan's Servants: The Transformation of Ottoman Provincial Government: 1550-1650* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 85.

<sup>86</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the Ottoman-Safavid War of 1578-1590, see Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı-İran Siyasi Münasebetleri*, 83-200.

<sup>87</sup> Giovanni-Tommaso Minadoi, *The War Between the Turks and the Persians: Conflict and Religion in the Safavid and Ottoman Worlds*, Introduction by Rudi Matthee and trans. Abraham Hartwell (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019), 98-99.

<sup>88</sup> Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 48-49.

(*ruûs*) that Ferhad Pasha sent during his campaign and that, after a close inspection, he has found an immense difference between the expense and incomes, and most importantly how many men Ferhad Pasha assigned to important positions in total. According to Sinan, Ferhad's great wealth was coming from the venality, that is, sale of offices. Additionally, in the same *telhis*, he lists the total income Ferhad Pasha had collected from the assignments during the last two campaigns: 280,000 gold pieces from 28 governors-general (*beylerbeyi*); 66,200,000 *akçes* from 331 district governors (*sancakbeyi*); 7,200,000 *akçes* from 36 treasurers; and a total of 44,700,000 *akçes* from 18 imperial tasters (*çâşnigâr*), 140 *müteferrikas* (court gentlement), 249 sergeants (*çavuş*), and 35 scribes (*kâtib*).<sup>89</sup> If these numbers are true, which indeed seems to be so, a grand vizier of this period could easily make tens of times of more money from venality than the income procured by his *hass* revenue lands.

To conclude, the office of grand vizierate was in transformation by the late sixteenth century, due to the ongoing long wars, political strife among the ruling elite and related economic problems. Hence, the holders of this office tried to adapt to these circumstances as much as they struggled to find solutions. Indeed, on the one hand, these transformations nurtured some new characteristics of the Ottoman ruling elite, and on the other hand, the actions of the grand viziers had a major role in shaping the dynamics of court politics for many years to come.

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<sup>89</sup> *Telhisler*, 11-12 [*telhis* #7].



### 1.3 An Overview of Post-Sokollu Grand Vizier Profiles<sup>90</sup>

The profiles of the grand viziers of the late sixteenth century share certain features with respect to their ethno-regional origins, courtly relations and their factional places. Also, except Tekeli Lala Mehmed Pasha, all grand viziers came to power after serving many years in provinces. If it is possible to draw some generalizations, one could suggest that being a governor-general in richer provinces increased the chances of becoming grand vizier, since the eligibility of holding this post, as noted above, required a good amount of wealth in cash, as well as having a large pasha household.

In some cases, a pasha's previous service in the inner court may facilitate his promotion to higher positions, like in the case of Hadım Mesih Pasha, who was once a eunuch in the privy chamber of the sultan. But most grand viziers were appointed based on their long service in different positions. Six of these grand viziers under Murad III were already cabinet viziers at the time of their appointment, where two of them were also *serdars* led anti-Safavid campaigns. The only exception to this pattern was the tutor of the sultan, Tekeli Lala Mehmed Pasha, who was elevated to the grand vizierate without any previous experience in ministry or military command.

These grand vizier profiles under Murad III can also be examined by the criteria of whether they were warrior-like, with diplomatic skills, or having both characteristics. Siyavuş Sinan, and Ferhad pashas, although they were great commanders, had also great diplomatic skills. Their attitude towards both their rivals and foreign ambassadors were more strategic and rational. European observers considered Ferhad Pasha as a man with a peaceful mind, especially compared to Sinan Pasha. On the other hand, both Ottoman and European observers saw Sinan Pasha as a cunning, clever, ruthless and dangerous man to everyone. Among all these grand viziers, perhaps the most warrior-like pasha was Özdemiroğlu Osman.

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<sup>90</sup> This subchapter uses the data from Appendix 1.

Whenever other pashas tried to avoid leading the campaigns and instead staying in the capital, Osman Pasha was eager to fight. Speaking of avoiding campaigns, the pasha's connection with the members of the imperial harem could be significant too. That is to say, most of these pashas aspired to be married to royal women and thus become a royal son-in-law (*damad*) in order to be privileged and guarantee their life and properties.<sup>91</sup>

Moreover, all grand viziers under Murad III came from a Southeast European or Balkan origin, as opposed to the ones from eastern regions, such as Abkhazians, Georgians and Circassians, who would dominate court politics in the later part of the seventeenth century. However, sharing the same ethno-regional identity did not mean an automatic solidarity among these elites. On the contrary, both Sinan and Ferhad were of Albanian origin, yet they tried to literally eliminate each other for many years in a fierce rivalry. On the other hand, the viziers like Sinan Pasha were more successful in utilizing the ethnic-regional (*cins*) solidarity than his rivals. For instance, Safiye Sultan, the Albanian favorite concubine of Murad III, helped Sinan Pasha return to his grand vizierate post in 1595.<sup>92</sup> The Venetian *bailo* Lorenzo Bernardo notes that, as of 1590, Sinan also had cultivated a good relationship with Prince Mehmed (III), the son of Safiye Sultan, during his princely governorship in Manisa.<sup>93</sup>

The duration of these pashas' holding of the grand vizierate varied greatly. When we consider the entire careers of all the eight grand viziers under Murad III, the average time a pasha spent as grand vizier in his entire career corresponds to only 7.5%. I can suggest three reasons for this. Firstly, all these men were in their advanced ages. Except Ferhad Pasha, none of them was executed but died of natural causes. This explains the natural reasons for circulation. Secondly, a severe factional competition among them became the essence of the

<sup>91</sup> Evrim Türkçelik, "Meritocracy, Factionalism and Ottoman Grand Admirals in the Context of Mediterranean Politics," in *A Europe of Courts, a Europe of Factions Political Groups at Early Modern Centres of Power (1550-1700)*, eds. Ruben Gonzalez Cuerva and Alexander Koller (Leiden: Brill, 2017): 88-108, at 94-95.

<sup>92</sup> Malcolm, *Agents of Empire*, 267-68.

<sup>93</sup> Dursteler, *In the Sultan's Realm*, 65.

everyday politics at the imperial court. These pashas either continuously worked to undermine their rivals or joined forces against others' court faction. Therefore, the changing power relations could quickly affect or change their positions. As Fodor aptly notes, "in the Ottoman world, everyone seeking self-promotion and enrichment had to compromise and do business with the state."<sup>94</sup> Thirdly, Murad III deployed new ruling strategies in order to preserve his sovereign authority over the ruling elite while aiming to prevent the emergence of another Sokollu-type of all-powerful grand vizier. The sultan was indeed quite successful in this scheme, thanks to his aforementioned power of confiscation. As I will discuss below, in the case of Koca Sinan Pasha, the total confiscated amount of personal assets was so high that it could be enough to feed his entire pasha household for years. And another and last reason behind the frequent rotations in grand vizierate under Murad III was that the sultan did not eliminate his grantees by execution, which was another royal prerogative of his, but instead consciously allowed a competition among the rival pasha so that they spent their power and energy on each other rather than constituting a direct threat to his sultanic authority as it happened in the aforementioned Governor-General Incident of 1589.

The period of expectancy (*ma'zûliyet*) constituted another great problem for the pashas. Since all candidates, *ma'zûls*, were coming to the capital with the hope of being granted a new position, this situation began to paralyze the running of the state.<sup>95</sup> The main reason was the alliance networks between the non-serving elites against the dominant court faction and the grand vizier himself. Thus, it caused great turmoil within the capital and in the peripheral zones. Furthermore, this problem was not only limited to the high-ranking viziers but all officials in the empire. In his *telhises*, for instance, Sinan Pasha refers to some *ma'zûls* as provocateurs and igniters of factionalist struggles within the empire.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Fodor, *The Business of State*, 345.

<sup>95</sup> Murphey, *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty*, 131–34.

<sup>96</sup> *Telhiser*, 36 [*telhis* #27].

The grand viziers spent many years as retired as well. Considering that some of the pashas were spending a reasonable time during the period of expectancy, they tried their best to regain the positions and power. However, in the cases of more influential pashas like Sinan and Siyavuş Pashas, we can discern a higher percentage in the period of their expectancy. Specifically, in Sinan's case, both his total years in expectancy and the number of dismissal surpass all others by far.

Overall, Murad III appointed eight different names as his grand vizier during his 21-year-long reign. In the end, he made a total of thirteen appointments for this post. Out of these appointments, eight were done after a dismissal (three for Sinan Pasha, three for Siyavuş Pasha, one for Ferhad Pasha, and one for Hadım Mesih Pasha), whereas four were made after a death of natural causes (as in the cases of Semiz Ahmed Pasha, Lala Mustafa Pasha, Özdemiroğlu Osman Pasha and Tekeli Lala Mehmed Pasha). Only once, the sultan filled the post upon an execution, which was Ferhad Pasha's. When we compare Murad III with his immediate predecessors, it is possible to spot some differences in his style. For instance, in 46-year-reign, his grandfather Süleyman I appointed a total of ten grand viziers, two of whom eventually got executed; three were deposed and the rest died of natural causes. His father Selim II, on the other hand, did not appoint any grand vizier since Süleyman's last grand vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha continued in his post throughout his eight-year short reign. Accordingly, it can be suggested that the reign of Murad III clearly marks instability in the higher offices of the Ottoman state. Furthermore, his ruling style which depended on controlling his governing elite by making frequent changes in the grand vizierate and other important posts was a novelty at the time, which would though set an example for his successors.

Yet, like most of his peers, Koca Sinan Pasha's career trajectory was a traditional one in that it started in the palace services and continued with several provincial assignments and

eventually ended in ministerial duties. He first left the court with a low-ranking district governorship; then held a number of higher ranking governorships; afterwards he became a commander-in-chief which gave him a great credibility and notoriety; and finally ended up holding the grand vizierate five times. In terms of his career pattern, the pasha represents a transitory character. On the one hand, he followed the established patterns of promotion in ranks and offices under Süleyman I. On the other hand, the pasha remarkably returned to his post five times by using his relationship with the sultan based on a new kind of information and communication channel, the *telhis*.

In this part of the chapter, I have tried to list some commensurable features of the Ottoman top ruling elite during the post-Sokollu era in order to understand the profile of the grand viziers. Of course, one needs to check archival sources like appointment and revenue registers to see the full picture. However, with these results, it is possible to draw some conclusions. Firstly, the Ottoman ruling elite faced each other in a fiercer factional struggle for getting an office through venalities or favoritism. Thus, these dynamics of a changing empire directly shaped the motivations and strategies of the ruling grandees. Secondly, the required experience in getting a provincial assignment was equally a must for being eligible for a vizierate in the government. Except two short-lived grand viziers under Murad III, all other six names clearly show that one needs to serve as a governor-general in prominent provinces in order to be powerful and rich enough for being a proper grand vizier candidate. Lastly, the high circulation in the office of grand vizierate was a great change under Murad III especially after the Sokollu period which lasted for an uninterrupted period of 14 years.

In conclusion, the Ottoman top ruling elite in the late sixteenth century was both the symptoms and the consequences of an emerging political transformation in the Ottoman Empire which would become much visible in the next century. At the grand vizierate level, under Murad III, most of the pashas followed similar career trajectories that did not radically

differ from their predecessors. However, some novel dynamics and career options can also be observed during this time. In parallel to the monetization of the imperial economy, for instance, those viziers who had an expertise on finances and money-making could rise in ranks quickly and even hold much political power and wealth such as Kara Üveys Pasha, the *homo novus* of this period, according to Fodor.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Fodor, *The Business of State*, 168.

## Chapter II - The Making of Koca Sinan Pasha

This chapter examines the factors behind Sinan Pasha's relative success in holding the grand vizierate five times and accordingly focuses on his personal methods of accumulating and holding power within the existing institutional structures of Ottoman imperial regime, which underwent some significant modifications in the 1580s and 1590s. However, to understand the essence of the pasha's success, it is principally needed to analyze the most effective measure of the pasha, which is the mechanism of the *telhis* writing. My main aim is thus to delineate and underline more specific reasons in the making of Sinan Pasha such a unique political actor during this period, as well as to re-locate him within the so-called late sixteenth-century crisis in the Ottoman Empire. I would argue that the pasha's personal pursuit of power was largely akin to those of his predecessors, yet it was shaped under the exigencies of the political, socio-economic and military developments of the period, in which he himself contributed to the unfolding of these transformative problems directly.

The current chapter consists of two parts. I first analyze the political reflection of the *telhis* in the Ottoman administrative practices and discuss its meaning for the court and the pasha. In the second part I will investigate the methods of power accumulation by Sinan Pasha. Overall, this chapter is aimed to show the political communication, expectations, and discourse of a grand vizier in his pursuit of holding his power position in a faction-ridden court under Murad III.

## 2.1 Standardization of the Courtly Communication: Emergence of the Grand Vizieral Petitions

In this introductory part, I will concern with the *telhis* form and its standardization process by considering the political transformations and the sultanic initiatives. Furthermore, I will continue with how the pasha adapted this new measure of communication to successfully execute his strategies and methods. I aim to draw a theoretical framework here about the *telhis* accounts that I will use throughout my narrative.

According to the basic notions of early modern Ottoman political understanding as reflected by contemporary authors, the communication between the ruler and his vizier should be tight, well-organized, and regular. Both oral and written modes of communication between the sultan and his grand viziers had existed since the early stages of the Ottoman dynastic state in the 1300s. The late sixteenth century, however, witnessed a more standardized, complicated, private, and intense channel of communication which did exist before. With the enthronement of Sultan Murad III, particularly, not only grand vizieral but all kinds of petitions (such as ‘*arz*, *kağid*, *rik’a*, *takrîr*’) turned into political communication tools that connected the patrimonial head of the Ottoman dynastic state to his subjects and servants stretching from the common people up to the grand vizier. Having alternative modes of communication was a necessity in all imperial or dynastic polities of this era, especially due to the large-scale political, economic and military transformations taking place, to which the Ottomans adapted skillfully. In other words, it can be suggested that the Ottoman grand vizieral *telhis* was a consequence of several interrelated developments in the sixteenth century. In this section, I will analyze these developments and accordingly the emergence of the *telhis* mechanism by focusing on how it played an essential role in the strategies of Sinan Pasha



The “sudden” appearance of the *telhis* accounts cannot be minimalized to the individual choices that neglect some transformative dynamics in the Ottoman imperial system. Throughout the sixteenth century, the changing patrimonial nature of the empire in general, and the rise of minister-favorites in particular resulted in some radical shifts in the existing institutional mechanisms of sultanic rule. Such shifts, however, were not peculiar to the Ottomans but also can be observed as a larger Eurasian trend. Indeed, many dynastic states or imperial courts experienced similar changes in that a new and more sophisticated type of the relation between the rulers and their ruling grandees came into being by the late sixteenth century. To quote a prominent scholar of early modern European history, John H. Elliott:

If the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were notable for the development of new and more sophisticated forms of bureaucratic organization, it has become increasingly apparent that the effective working of governmental institutions, old and new, was heavily dependent on the skill of princes and their ministers in manipulating to the advantage of the crown a system of social relationships tied together by family and personal loyalties, and informed by a strong sense of the hierarchy of authority.<sup>98</sup>

In the Ottoman case, one of the main reasons for such dramatic expansion of bureaucracy was the continuous growth of the empire during the reigns of Selim I and Süleyman I which naturally demanded more agents to govern more territories as part of the sultan’s domain. In this regard, the *telhis* critically helped the Ottoman ruler in running the state affairs while at the same time providing a kind of checks and balances over the expanding number of the administrators. Overall, the regular written correspondence provided both the sultan and his grand vizier an effective tool to deal with numerous topics

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<sup>98</sup> John H. Elliott, “Introduction,” in *The World of Favourites*, eds. John H. Elliott and L. W. B. Brockliss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999): 1-12, at 6.

and problems ranging from appointments, salary payments, and administrative problems to the military actions and diplomatic negotiations.<sup>99</sup>

In this context, all forms of petitions functioned as an important tool in dispensing the sultanic justice to his subjects. The tradition of petitioning was a core principle of Ottoman rulership influenced by the ancient Near Eastern concepts on state.<sup>100</sup> As Linda Darling aptly puts it, the practice of receiving petition was beyond than to consolidate the sultanic image but the perennial administrative function of a bureaucratic state.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, the *telhis* served to the Ottoman sultans in strengthening the main essences of his empire, namely, redistribution and patrimonialism.

In the meantime, the changes in the functions of the imperial council and the grand vizierate were another reason for the introduction of the *telhis*. As both Murad III and Mehmed both preferred a more secluded style of rulership while empowering their favorites to act on their behalf, the decision-making processes in the imperial council led by the grand vizier also transformed.<sup>102</sup> Thus, while on the one hand the increased administrative responsibility of the grand vizier demanded a regular communication with the sultan, his grand vizieral authority was curtailed by alternative groups of power at the court. Yet, the grand vizier tried to carve out and sustain a ground on which he could continue to have a direct influence on the appointments and dismissals, most of which still needed to be confirmed by the sultan in a written form.

Murad III was a crucial sultan in all these respects noted above. Right after his succession, according to Mustafa Âlî, the sultan preferred to answer the *telhises* in his private chamber (*‘arz odası*) instead of attending the meetings of the imperial council. Furthermore,

<sup>99</sup> Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1922* (London: John Murray, 2005), 165.

<sup>100</sup> Fodor, "Sultan, Imperial Council, Grand Vizier," 71 and Darling, *Revenue-Raising and Legitimacy*, 248.

<sup>101</sup> Linda Darling, *A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East The Circle of Justice from Mesopotamia to Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2013), 144.

<sup>102</sup> Fodor, "Sultan, Imperial Council, Grand Vizier," 72.

the seventeenth-century historian Peçevi notes that conducting the business of state via the royal writs (*hatt-i hümayûn*) was rare until Murad's sultanate.<sup>103</sup> The anonymous author of *Hürzû'l-mülûk*, a mirror of princes addressed to Murad III, warned the sultan to receive the petitions in person and regularly, an advice which the sultan seems to have followed.<sup>104</sup>

It was not only the grand vizier that was sending petitions to the sultan. The sultan was receiving different petitions from other pashas and officers. The sultan had different channels of information to track down the activities and wealth of his servants. For instance, in his *telhis*, Sinan Pasha reported about the preparations for the navy and the salaries. Murad replied to him as "However it is "heard" that you have used the 8,000,000 *akçe* from the granted budget to pay the salaries of the troops. If it is true, it will not be good (for you)."<sup>105</sup> It is understood that the sultan received this information from an "anonymous" petition. It should be noted that it was hard to keep the confidentiality of the other correspondences since the pasha's power was, for most of the time, sufficient to reach them.

The *telhis*, on the other hand, was a miraculous measure in the hands of the pasha most of times. First and foremost, he was able to undermine the rival faction's power and promote his household. The pasha was fighting against the *tezvîr kâğıds*, meaning false papers that were designed by the rivals of pashas with intriguing purposes.<sup>106</sup> By doing this, Sinan Pasha was cutting the relation of the sultan with the outer world and diminishing the influence of other factions. Furthermore, he was boosting the trust of the sultan towards him by praising himself through the reports of what he achieved or the consequences of the investigations against other pashas. This freedom of communication, on the one hand, enabled the pasha to tighten his relationship with the sultan. On the other hand, it increased

<sup>103</sup> Fodor, "The Grand Vizieral *Telhis*," 138-39.

<sup>104</sup> Yücel, ed., *Hürzû'l-Mülûk*, 182 and Zeynep Aycibin, *Manevi Dünyası Ile Sultan III. Murad* (İstanbul: Türk Dünyası Araştırma Vakfı, 2016), 23-30.

<sup>105</sup> *Telhisler*, 81 [*telhis* #56].

<sup>106</sup> Fodor, "Sultan, Imperial Council, Grand Vizier," 83.

the burden on the pasha since the sultan might ask for various reports or jobs to be done until the very next day.

Sinan Pasha was quite successful to use the *telhis* as a “weapon.” As it will be analyzed in the following chapter, the pasha managed to remove many from their offices by demeaning them or promoting his own man for the positions. Thus, he was both able to defend his achievements and gain new ones by utilizing the *telhis* mechanism in his favor. Although there were challenging situations derived from the petitions of his rivals, Sinan Pasha succeeded to develop his own strategies to stay in power for many years.

To conclude this section, the *telhis* is one of the clearest and direct sources to show the decision-making mechanism in the court. Its direct language and themes, as well as its implication on daily politics, made it an efficient instrument in Ottoman politics not only for the sultan but also for the ruling elite. Furthermore, the *telhis* accounts are also the ultimate records that show the relationship between the sultan and the grand vizier since it reflects the language, discourse, responsibilities, and limits of the grand vizier, and the topics that the sultan intervenes, asks or comments on. Thus, its standardization by Murad III and Sinan Pasha left a legacy for the successor sultans and their grand viziers.

## 2.2 The Pasha's Methods of Power Accumulation

Sinan Pasha actually differs from other members of the Ottoman imperial court in the post-Sokollu period, mainly because of his unconventional methods in accumulating political power. Although he can be considered a 'typical' grand vizier who had followed a similar career trajectory like many of his predecessors, the methods he developed and used after he inherited the office of grand vizierate made him a 'transitional' figure in the sense that his grand vizierate set an example for his successors. Thanks to his skillful strategies, he repeatedly returned to the grand vizierate five times, only to further enhance his power and position in the administration of the empire. In this respect, Sinan Pasha seems to have followed in the footsteps of his two immediate predecessors, namely, Rüstem Pasha and Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, who were both known for their great wealth and power during the reigns of Süleyman I and Selim II, respectively. Sinan no doubt knew how Sokollu and Rüstem worked their ways in accumulating such power and wealth, as well as their mechanizations in networking among the larger groups of power and influence.<sup>107</sup> However, the pasha seems to have comprehended, in a sense, the political *zeitgeist* of the time better than any other member of the ruling elite, and hence his 'transitory' grand vizierate soon became a model for his successor in the ensuing decades of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in terms of how to sustain a good personal relation with the sultan, while dealing with the business of state in more complex ways, as well as expanding his own network of power and patronage as part of sustaining his large pasha household, and above all in competing against rival viziers at the top echelons of Ottoman imperial administration.

In this context, Sinan Pasha did indeed manage to be so powerful and influential throughout his career. His success can be observed in four areas of activity, that is, personal

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<sup>107</sup> Uroš Dakić, "The Sokollu Family Clan and the Politics of Vizierial Households in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century," Unpublished M.A. Thesis (Central European University, 2012), 43–52.

enrichment, the policy-making, diplomacy and intelligence-gathering, political patronage and self-fashioning.

### *The Revenue Sources of the Pasha*

All contemporary authors agree that Sinan Pasha had an excessive wealth by the end of his long life. Both Ottoman chroniclers and European diplomats were amazed with such personal fortune of a vizier and hence they specifically mentioned it in their writings. For instance, Leanordo Dona, the extraordinary Venetian ambassador who came to Istanbul in 1596 to congratulate Mehmed III on his enthronement, claims that the pasha's total annual revenue from his wages, rental properties, and workplaces was more than 200,000 *scudo* (Italian large silver coins) and it was more than enough to maintain his large pasha household. Dona also notes that "although he does have sons, only God knows what will happen to all of these," alluding to a possible official confiscation of his entire assets for the sultan's treasury, as has been traditionally done by the Ottoman ruler after a servant (*kul*) of his imperial administration passed away or dismissed.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, when Sinan Pasha died, his money and personal items were immediately confiscated by Mehmed III. The late pasha had a total wealth of 1,100,000 in gold coins<sup>109</sup>, out of which 624,166 was in cash and the rest was the value of many luxury items such as pearls, furs, and jewels.<sup>110</sup> İbrahim Hakki Uzunçarşılı provides more details of his probate inventory: 600,000 pieces of gold coins, 2,100,000 silver *akçes*, 20 small boxes of chrysolite, 15 prayer beads made of pearl, 30 diamonds, 100 grams of gold dust, 20 pitchers, 1 chessboard, 7 tablecloths decorated with diamonds, 140 helmets, 16 precious stone bracelets, 600 sables, 600 caracal furs, 30 black fox furs, 1075 pieces of brocades, 900 other kinds of furs, 61 *ölçek* pearls, 2 diamond collars,

<sup>108</sup> Afyoncu and Önal, *Venedik Elçilik Raporlarına Göre*, 273.

<sup>109</sup> In the early 1580s, one Venetian *ducat* was equal to 60 *akçes*. After the currency reforms of the mid-1580s, the *akçe* lost its value by half and accordingly one *ducat* became equal to 120 *akçes* in 1587. See *DİA*, s.v. "Akçe" by Halil Sahillioğlu.

<sup>110</sup> Fodor, *The Business of State*, 142.

2 precious stones decorated covers, and 32 saddles with pearls.<sup>111</sup> A seventeenth-century Ottoman historian Peçevi writes that people used to refer to Sinan Pasha as an alchemist, because he could not have otherwise had such an excessive amount of gold.<sup>112</sup> Since the approximate annual income of the grand viziers in the late sixteenth century was around 2,000,000 *akçes*, mostly coming from their *hass* revenue assignments, this drastic gap in Sinan Pasha's wealth should be explained by other reasons.

As Pál Fodor explains, venality or sale of offices had become a common practice in the Ottoman Empire by the late sixteenth-century.<sup>113</sup> The practice basically based on paying an already determined sum of money for a certain post. According to *Kânûn-i 'Âl-i 'Osmân*, a law code dated to the reign of Mehmed II, a grand vizier could have assigned a person a land revenue up to 6000 *akçes* without the permission of the sultan, while all higher revenue assignments were subject to royal approval. However, in the latter part of the sixteenth century, the grand viziers started to take a fee, later known as *makam vergisi*,<sup>114</sup> especially when a higher value post was assigned. According to Fodor, the venality was conducted through different categories such as *pîşkeş* (gift, tribute), *hediye* (present), *câize* (reward, grant), and *hizmet* (service).<sup>115</sup> This, was, however, not merely beneficial to the grand vizier, but also to the sultan, since he also received a handsome payment at each case.

In one of his *telhises* to Murad III, Koca Sinan Pasha writes that Saatçi Hasan Pasha, the governor-general of Anatolia, should pay 40,000 to 50,000 *akçes* in fees so as to become the governor-general of Rumeli, a higher office than his current position. At the same time, the grand vizier explains that his one brother also bid for this Rumeli governor-general

<sup>111</sup> İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin Merkez ve Bahriye Teşkilatı*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1988, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), 167. To give a better sense of how rich Sinan Pasha was, let me note that Sinan's archenemy, Ferhad Pasha, had only had around 50.000 gold ducats worth of cash when his assets were confiscated.

<sup>112</sup> Peçevi İbrahim Efendi, *Peçevi Tarihi*, ed. Bekir Sıtkı Baykal, 2 vols. (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1981), vol. II, 14..

<sup>113</sup> Fodor, *The Business of State*, 73.

<sup>114</sup> For detailed information on *makam vergisi*, see Muzaffer Doğan, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Makam Vergisi: Caize," *Türk Kültürü İncelemeleri Dergisi* 8 (2002): 34-74.

<sup>115</sup> Fodor, *The Business of State*, 75-78.

position at the same time and but could only offer 10,000 *akçes*, which the sultan refused.<sup>116</sup>

In another example, the pasha forwards the sultan the petition of his son-in-law Abdullah Pasha, who proposed to give 20,000 gold coins right away if the sultan accepts to assign him as governor of Gence province.<sup>117</sup> Therefore, it can be inferred that it was not only the pasha who was expanding his wealth through the sums from venality, but also the sultan.

Such examples of venality were not limited to higher positions in the Ottoman administrative system, but done also for lesser *timar* and *zeamet* revenue assignments, which had increased in numbers in the late sixteenth century due to the new territorial acquisitions by the Ottomans during their wars against the Safavids between 1578 and 1590. As a grand vizier, Sinan Pasha was involved in the decision-making processes of many such *timar* and *zeamet* assignments. However, it is hard to know the exact number of the assignments that he made for these newly conquered areas, particularly to his own benefit or his household soldiers and allies. Indeed, in a related *telhis*, Sinan Pasha defends himself against a serious complaint sent to Murad III accusing him of arranging numerous appointments along these lines. In his defense, the pasha compares the number of revenue assignments he made with that of Ferhad Pasha, his archenemy and the commander-in-chief of the Safavid campaigns for many years, to show the sultan that whereas he distributed a total of 70 *timars* and *zeamets*, Ferhad Pasha gave his followers more than four hundred. Accordingly, he implicitly states that if there anyone to blame for sale of new offices, it was Ferhad Pasha not himself.<sup>118</sup>

Earlier, during his governorship of Egypt, Sinan Pasha owned some commercial buildings, such as khans and caravanserais. In a *telhis*, the pasha mentions his involvement in the rice and sugar trade in Egypt, a lucrative business of the time.<sup>119</sup> Although he downgrades

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<sup>116</sup> *Telhisler*, 56-57 [*telhis* #39].

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 253 [*telhis* #215].

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 247 [*telhis* #210].

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-60 [*telhis* #119].



to the degree of his involvement in this business, by saying he does “some rice and sugar trade”, he certainly earned quite a good amount of cash considering how the consumption value of these products in the capital and their cost to ship them from Egypt. Furthermore, the commercial buildings owned by the pasha were equally significant for generating cash, besides their importance for his networking and intelligence gathering. As Elif Özgen suggests, the firms he established on the banks of the Nile close to Bulaq seem to be a series of commercial hubs in which the merchants from Yemen and Egypt brought in spice for trading.<sup>120</sup> Hence, Sinan’s financial and political power had actually had strong ties with the vibrant Indian Ocean trade at the time, which in turn made him to expand his business capacity to Europe. As Giancarlo Casale points out, Sinan Pasha communicated with the duke of Brabant in the fall of 1582, hoping to establish a great entrepot at Antwerp for conducting mercantile activities from India once the Portuguese and Habsburgs had been permanently eclipsed.<sup>121</sup>

Sinan Pasha also owned many shops in different parts of the empire. Like Rüstem Pasha, he was an entrepreneur-vizier who looked for the best options when launching a new business.<sup>122</sup> Once, he purchased a ruined building in the Tophane district in Istanbul and then got it repaired at a cost of a few million *akçes*. Afterwards, he set up and rented several shops there as part of a pious endowment. This way he not only covered his initial cost of establishing a new business, but also a continuous flow of cash for his pocket.<sup>123</sup> A similar case is found for Egypt where he bought a disused building once belonged by Hasan Pasha and initiated a new business therein.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, the pasha took on cash credits from the

<sup>120</sup> Özgen, “Grand Vizier Koca Sinan Paşa,” 38–39.

<sup>121</sup> Giancarlo Casale, “Global Politics in the 1580s: One Canal, Twenty Thousand Cannibals, and an Ottoman Plot to Rule the World,” *Journal of World History* 18/3 (2007): 267–296, at 284.

<sup>122</sup> For Rüstem Paşa’s career and entrepreneurship, see H. Ahmet Arslantürk, “Bir Bürokrat ve Yatırımcı Olarak Kanuni Sultan Süleyman’ın Veziriazamı Rüstem Paşa,” Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (Marmara University, 2011).

<sup>123</sup> *Telhisler*, 85–86 [*telhis* #58].

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 211 [*telhis* #167].

imperial treasury valued at 50,000,000 *akçes*. Indeed, in a related *telhis*, he explains Murad III that he had paid back one-fifth of this amount, affirming the rest will come later.<sup>125</sup> Overall, Sinan Pasha's vast incomes did not merely depend on his *hass* revenues or miscellaneous fees he received in sales of offices. He was also actively engaged in lucrative trades all around the empire and used the credit options from the imperial treasury.

Furthermore, like all other high-ranking ruling elite of the time, he received valuable gifts, some of which were in the form of cash donations. It is important to note that the difference between a "gift" and a "bribe" in the early modern Ottoman political culture could be sometimes very vague. For instance, Baron Wenceslaw Wlatislaw, a captive figure in Istanbul, claims that from the lowest-ranking functionaries to the grand vizier get a bribe to act on or conclude even a small business at the imperial court. He says that gift-giving plays a critical role to gain the attention, support or sympathy of Ottoman bureaucrats. For instance, he mentions that Sinan Pasha would even accept a lamb as a "gift" from a man who does not want to wait in line for submitting a petition to the grand vizier.<sup>126</sup> Similarly, the European ambassadors sent to the sultan's court had to bring with them valuable items so as to present the government pashas as gifts. Hence, the Venetian ambassador Matteo Zane, recommended his Senate that in order to have a good strong relationship with Sinan Pasha, they had to constantly feed him with "gifts" via his most trustworthy secretaries, Kethüda Yusuf and Kurd Aghas.<sup>127</sup>

All these points underline an emerging new monetary economy in the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the sixteenth century, as Baki Tezcan and Pál Fodor have shown. As the Ottoman ruling was adapting to this new financial work, they used both old and innovative methods for personal enrichment. In the case of Sinan Pasha, one may notice that he followed more traditional methods. However, the main difference between him and

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 249 [*telhis* # 212].

<sup>126</sup> Wlatislaw, *Baron Wlatislaw'ın Anıları*, 40.

<sup>127</sup> Afyoncu and Önal, *Venedik Elçilik Raporlarına Göre*, 214–15.

earlier grand viziers is the available amount of hard currency in the monetary circulation all around the empire. By the late sixteenth century, as Tezcan shows, more business was conducted in cash, based on the standardized currency of the empire, the silver *akçe*.<sup>128</sup> Indeed, the cases of venality I noted above significantly increased in this period compared to earlier decades. In sum, thanks to all these political and financial/commercial opportunities in an increasingly monetarized economy, Sinan Pasha managed to accumulate substantial amount of wealth through different means, as testified by his probably inventory noted above.

### *The Political Power of the Grand Vizier*

During the last decades of the sixteenth century, the political standing of the Ottoman ruling elite was fluctuating due to unusual circumstances. In order to survive in their power positions, most pashas had to face a fierce factional rivalry at the imperial court. Sinan Pasha owed his success and career in this fluid political setting to three main factors: 1) his immediate relationship with Murad III and the members of the sultan's court faction; 2) following a Sokollu-type of political leadership; and 3) his own alternative network of power and patronage.

The rise of alternative foci of power at the sultan's court as well as the emergence of rival pasha households in the capital in the late sixteenth century triggered a series of new political mechanisms and requisites. As Metin Kunt notes, a pasha's household was essentially modeled on the sultan's royal household but on a smaller scale. According to his estimations, the royal household could contain 15,000 men at the same time in the sixteenth century while the district governor's ruled close to 200, and governor-generals had 1000 under their command.<sup>129</sup> On the one hand, there were economically and politically waxing pashas, on the other the sultanic household made an effort to maintain its central power. As

<sup>128</sup> Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire*, 14–19.

<sup>129</sup> Kunt, "Royal and Other Households," 104.

Kunt convincingly points out: “Greater revenues meant larger households; larger households meant greater influence and political power; concentration of the largest revenues and households in the center, in vizierial establishments as well as the imperial palace, meant greater centralization in the polity.”<sup>130</sup> Thus, such viziers as Sinan Pasha kept their relations tight and steady with the court through establishing a personal, political, and economic relationship.

It is possible to consider Sinan Pasha as one of the most successful grand viziers in terms of conducting a regular daily personal relation with the sultan, which was on the other hand, also a symbiotic one. Through the petitioning mechanism, Sinan Pasha managed to expand, protect, and consolidate his political power as much as possible.

In 1580, when Murad III made Sinan Pasha grand vizier, the relationship between the two quickly gained a special character. Sinan Pasha started to establish some important personal relations with the new powerful figures at Murad’s court in the post-Sokollu period, such as Safiye Sultan, the sultan’s favorite concubine of Albanian origins and the mother of Prince Mehmed (the future Mehmed III). These initial relations that Sinan managed to establish in the early 1580s during his first grand vizierate would prove critical in the ensuing years. For instance, Safiye Sultan would help her fellow Albanian Sinan in returning to his grand vizierate post in 1595.<sup>131</sup> The relationship between Safiye Sultan and Sinan Pasha actually informs us about the so-called ethnic-regional (*cins*) solidarity among the Ottoman ruling elite which, according to modern scholars, did not yet play as much a major role in this period as it would do throughout the seventeenth century.<sup>132</sup>

Contemporary European observers of the Ottoman imperial court considered Sinan Pasha an experienced statesman who knew the dynamics and mechanisms of the court, and

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>131</sup> Malcolm, *Agents of Empire*, 267–68.

<sup>132</sup> Metin Kunt, “Ethnic-Regional (Cins) Solidarity in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Establishment,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5/3 (1974): 233-239.

who was well aware of the increased influence of the royal woman.<sup>133</sup> For instance, the abovementioned Baron Wratislaw states that the pasha was carefully balancing his relations with each royal woman at Murad III's court, since he had already seen that they could easily undermine him and even cause his dismissal.<sup>134</sup> Indeed, the *bailo* Bernardo testifies that Sinan Pasha was deposed from his post in the early 1590s due to influence of a steward in the imperial harem (*kahya kadın*).<sup>135</sup> Thus, the pasha had to conduct a good relation with the royal women or other influential women in the palace.

After the death of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha in 1579, Sinan Pasha reconfigured what Giancarlo Casale has called the “Indian Ocean Faction” at the imperial court in Istanbul. In Casale's words:

Taking a cue from Sokollu Mehmed, Koja Sinan went to great lengths to cultivate a reputation as the special patron of Indian Ocean merchants, investing large sums of money (both from his own pockets and from the state treasury) toward construction of warehouses, rest houses, and other merchant facilities all along the commercial route from Egypt to Yemen, as well as the pilgrimage routes from Aleppo and Damascus to the holy cities.<sup>136</sup>

Sinan Pasha thus inherited not only the policies of Sokollu related to the Indian Ocean, but also to the Mediterranean. Unlike Grand Vizier Siyavuş Pasha, who pursued a peace treaty with the Spanish Habsburgs in 1586, Sinan Pasha favored an anti-Spanish policy and instead followed a pro-Venetian one.<sup>137</sup> In one of his *telhises*, the pasha informed the sultan that France and Spain were currently in a state of total upheaval (*tamam ihtilâl*) and

<sup>133</sup> Leslie P. Pierce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 91–112.

<sup>134</sup> Wratislaw, *Baron Wratislaw'ın Anıları*, 97.

<sup>135</sup> Önal, “Koca Sinan Paşa'nın Hayatı ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri,” 106.

<sup>136</sup> Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 156.

<sup>137</sup> Elif Özgen, “The Connected World of Intrigues: The Disgrace of Murad III's Favorite David Passi in 1591,” *Leidschrift* 27/1 (2012): 75-100.

thus vulnerable to any offensive action from the sea.<sup>138</sup> To forge an alliance against Spain, moreover, he had corresponded with the queen of England, a point which I will return below.

It was not only such imperial grand strategies that Sinan Pasha inherited from Sokollu but also the factionalist type of power play that the latter had with other government pashas. Sokollu faced a fierce opposition during his grand vizierate soon after Murad III's enthronement. Previously, as the sole grand vizier of Selim II, he ruled like a *de facto* sultan. But with Murad's succession, an anti-Sokollu faction was quickly formed under the leadership of Şemsi Ahmed Pasha.<sup>139</sup> This faction included some prominent figures of the time, such as Lala Mustafa Pasha, Üveys Pasha, Şeyh Şüca and Gazanfer Agha,<sup>140</sup> who actually maintained their hostility towards Sinan Pasha even before his first term of grand vizierate. Moreover, Sinan Pasha's rivalry with Lala Mustafa Pasha impacted his later career, which was marked by a deadly competition between him and Ferhad Pasha in the early 1590s. In the late 1570s and 1580s, Sinan Pasha was cooperating with the ruling grandees of Bosnian origin, whereas Mustafa Pasha had a coalition with the known enemies of the pasha, such as Özdemiroğlu Osman Pasha (the governor-general of Sana), Gazalgüveği Mustafa Bey, Kuyruklu Yıldız Mehmed Bey and Güllizade Mehmed (district governors), Acem Menla Agha (the supply master).<sup>141</sup>

Sinan's factional moves and political actions can be thus summarized in two general categories: offensive and defensive. His offensive actions included the measures aiming to prevent the emergence of powerful rival factions against him, thus eliminating the most important members of these factions from their positions or conducting investigations to expose their corruption, or inciting the sultan to take action against them. As for his defensive strategy, the pasha frequently submitted *telhises* to the sultan, especially to dismiss any doubt

<sup>138</sup> *Telhisler*, 4, [telhis # 3].

<sup>139</sup> Börekçi, "Factions and Favorites," 159.

<sup>140</sup> Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 71–75.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 48–51.

or accusation raised against himself before the sultan or to protect his power position in politics. Moreover, he was quite active in assigning his relatives, household servants, and soldiers some important administrative posts and duties, as well as in protecting or enhancing his already existing network relations within and beyond the empire. In the next section I will further elaborate on the competition between Sinan Pasha and the ruling elite.

### *Sinan Pasha's Diplomatic and Intelligence Network*

Sinan Pasha's power and influence in the field of diplomacy originates not only from his close conducts with foreign (mostly European) representative agents but also from his wide intelligence network that made his court faction a hub for information flow. The factionalism among the contemporary ruling elite also divided the Ottoman foreign policy, or imperial strategies that the government pashas were following. As noted above, Sinan Pasha followed a similar policy vis-a-vis the Ottoman-Polish (peaceful) and the Ottoman-Spanish (hostile) relations like Sokollu Mehmed Pasha had done earlier. Concerning the Ottoman-Safavid relations, the pasha actually favored peace, unlike Ferhad Pasha.

Like every Ottoman grand vizier, Sinan Pasha was the chief representative of the sultan in directing and conducting the empire's diplomacy with foreign powers, but he seemingly liked to emphasize how successful he was in this particular field. According to a *telhis*, Sinan Pasha set an agreement with Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in that the commonwealth would now annually send 100 *destes* (piles) of sable skin rather than the previous amount of 50 *destes* while at the same time continuing their operations against the troubling Cossacks attacking the Ottoman Crimea and adjacent regions. In return, the Ottomans agreed to continue their peaceful relations with the Commonwealth as before. In the last parts of this *telhis*, however, the pasha specifically mentions his correspondence with the queen of England, Elizabeth I, and informs the sultan that he will soon write a letter to her

reporting that the agreement between the Ottomans and the Commonwealth was made for her sake, and hence England should continue their hostilities against Spain.<sup>142</sup>

The pasha also gave much importance to the stately ceremonies/occasions and those related procedures of hosting foreign envoys which he frequently welcomed as grand vizier. To illustrate, in two of his *telhises*, we see him complaining to the sultan about the lack of a proper army in Sofia to meet the Polish envoy during his expected stop en route to Istanbul. Accordingly, he mentions that he has ordered Hızır Pasha, the governor-general of Rumeli, to muster some troops and soldiers so as to impress the Polish ambassador, en route to stop in Sofia, with the Ottoman military might even before his arrival in the capital.<sup>143</sup> In another example, the sultan asks Sinan whether it is proper to give an audience in the presence of the viziers to the Safavid ambassador Mirza Haydar, the son of Shah Tahmasb I, who is coming to Istanbul for negotiating a peace treaty. In his reply, Sinan Pasha tells Murad III that such a royal reception would not be proper and hence he advises the sultan to follow the example of Süleyman I and accordingly send a ranking court official with enough soldiers to greet the Safavid envoy.<sup>144</sup> However, factionalism appears even in such matters of diplomacy. Sinan Pasha, referring to his “men” in the army, reports that some provocateurs try to ignite the imperial soldiers to demand an increase in their salaries and say that they would otherwise not let Mirza Haydar cross the Bosphorus from Asia. Murad III responds in an outrage stating that if this is the case, then the ones who are in charge shall be beheaded.<sup>145</sup>

The pasha’s network of intelligence was quite active and widespread. His close relationship with the Albanian/Venetian Bruti family, whose members were notorious for spying activities, is already known. Like Sokollu, Sinan Pasha utilized such family-based intelligence-gathering networks centered in different capitals of Europe and Istanbul for

<sup>142</sup> *Telhisler*, 259 [*telhis* #224]. For the royal letter sent by Murad III to Queen Elizabeth I, see Mehmet Sait Sütçü, “III. Sultan Murad’ın İngiltere Kraliçesi Elizabet’e Bir Namesi,” *Tarih Okulu* 7 (2010): 71-75.

<sup>143</sup> *Telhisler*, 17–18, 258 [*telhis* #10, 224] and Sahillioğlu, “Koca Sinan Paşa’nın *Telhisleri* I.”

<sup>144</sup> *Telhisler*, 164–65 [*telhis* #124].

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 166–67 [*telhis* #126].



tracking both domestic and international affairs. As Noel Malcolm has recently demonstrated, Sinan Pasha's Albanian ethno-regional background was particularly important in this regard, as it enabled him to benefit from these networks more fluidly and effectively.<sup>146</sup> The pasha successfully utilized Bruti and Bartolomeo for arranging the intrigues in Moldavia that to depose the current Voivode Iancu and appoint Petru to his position.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, according to Malcolm, it was not only Sinan Pasha who was into these relations but also his sister who arranged the release of Bartolomeo that was arrested in Lezhë by sending a squadron of 25 men to rescue him in 1579.<sup>148</sup>

A case in point is revealed in one of Sinan's *telhises*. The pasha receives a report from the governors in Wallachia and Moldavia, based on which he informs the sultan that the rebellious voivode Petro is seeking to gather more Christian soldiers and that for this purpose, he has wandered through the Hungarian, Polish, German, Russian, Spanish, and Roman lands, so as to convince their rulers to form an alliance and attack against the Ottomans both from the land and the sea. Apparently, based on this intelligence report, the pasha wanted to emphasize the level of threat posed by voivode Petro and accordingly asks the sultan to urgently send some troops to capture him before he takes further action with "the infidel monarchs."<sup>149</sup> Similarly, in another *telhis* which I noted above, the pasha's intelligence gathering agents informed him about the developments in Spain and France.<sup>150</sup>

Sinan Pasha's efforts in counter-espionage were also working quite well. For instance, he cautiously tried to conceal the preparations of the Ottoman imperial navy for an attack against the Habsburgs in the Mediterranean. However, he figured out that this plan was already exposed for which he blamed David Passi, the sultan's favorite and an important power-broker of the time, who had close relations with the resident European ambassadors

<sup>146</sup> Malcolm, *Agents of Empire*, 261–78.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 335.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 272.

<sup>149</sup> *Telhisler*, 59–61 [*telhis* #41].

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 4–5 [#3].

and other trans-imperial figures in Istanbul. Furious, the pasha wrote to Murad III that the “Jewish David” plants seeds of evil and hence deserves to die.<sup>151</sup> He also notes that if the sultan does not wish to issue an order to execute him, he should at least banish him to the Aegean island of Rhodes. In a related *telhis*, the grand vizier further remarks that he finally figured out from whom Passi had learned the plans in question in the first place: they were among the imperial court scribes.<sup>152</sup>

Indeed, Sinan Pasha was quite skillful in finding such information channels of his rivals. He exposed the source of a slandering against him and expressed his gratitude to the sultan as Murad III imprisoned one of them: Hüseyin, the secretary of Vizier İbrahim Pasha. Moreover, he reports another “informer” called İbrahim Agha, who was secretly writing letters to İbrahim Pasha about the court affairs, and thus he asks for the imprisonment of this İbrahim Agha as well.<sup>153</sup>

#### *A Rich Patron and Benefactor*

Sinan Pasha comprehended the importance of the politics of patronage, piety and self-fashioning since the early stages of his career. Therefore, he invested most of his wealth in pious endowments (*vakıfs*) for public usage. His *vakıfs* included bridges, mosques and schools scattered all around the empire.<sup>154</sup> The seventeenth-century Ottoman chronicler Topçular Kâtibi calls the pasha as “*sâhibü’l-hayrât ve’l-hasenât*,” which means “the owner of charities and good works.” Likewise, Hasan Beyzâde emphasizes that the late Sokollu

<sup>151</sup> For further discussion of Sinan Pasha’s attitude towards David Passi, see Pál Fodor, “An Anti-Semite Grand Vizier? The Crisis in Ottoman-Jewish Relations in 1589-91 and Its Consequences,” in idem., *In Quest of the Golden Apple: Imperial Ideology, Politics, and Military Administration in the Ottoman Empire* (Isis Press: İstanbul, 2000): 191-206. Also see Emrah Safa Gürkan, “Mediating Boundaries: Mediterranean Go-Betweens and Cross-Confessional Diplomacy in Constantinople, 1560-1600,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 19 (2015): 107-128.

<sup>152</sup> *Telhisler*, 90-91 and 181-183 [*telhis* #62, 142, 143].

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 161. [*telhis* #120].

<sup>154</sup> See Nurcan Yazıcı, “Osmanlı Mimarlığında XVI. Yüzyılın Önemli Bir Banisi: Yemen Fatihisi Sinan Paşa ve Camileri,” *Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 4/17 (2011): 437-456.

Mehmed Pasha's level of piety can only be compared to that of Sinan Pasha.<sup>155</sup> Indeed, both pashas came to be known among their contemporaries as a great patron of charity, art and learning. As for Sinan Pasha, he commissioned various literary works that praised him along these lines, as well as helped him to create and sustain his image of a powerful and pious grand vizier. Furthermore, according to the *bailo* Matteo Zane, Sinan Pasha's image as a good administrator rested on his regular holding of his own pasha court (known as *ikindi divanı*), during which he personally received and decided on the petitions and complaints submitted by ordinary people such as peasants and townspeople, which indeed gave the pasha greater credibility and fame in the public opinion.<sup>156</sup>

The pasha was a patron of many literary figures and artists of his time, whom he sponsored to write down his heroic exploits and successes during his Yemen, Tunisian, Iranian and Habsburg campaigns, mentioned in the previous chapter. Among these works are the anonymous *Târih-i Yemen*, Mustafa Rumûzî's *Nâme-i Fütûh-ı Yemen*, Kutbeddin Mekki's *Gazavâtü'l-Çerâkise ve'l-Etrâk fî Cenûbi'l-Cezîre, el-Müsemma el-Berku'l-Yemânî fî Fethi'l-Osmânî* (all on his Yemen campaigns); Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî's *Fursatnâme* that depicted his Tunisian campaign; Talikîzâde's *Şehnâme-i Hümayûn* and the *Tevârih-i Cedîd-i Vilâyet-i Üngürüs* of Cafer İyânî (about his Hungarian campaign); and an anonymous geography work named *Tarih-i Hind-i Garbî*, Seyyid Lokman's chronicle *Zübdet'üt-Tevârih* and *Fursatnâme* of Gelibolulu (on his Safavids campaigns).<sup>157</sup> One clear reason why Sinan Pasha commissioned such extensive works was to present himself before the sultan as a proper candidate for a higher position in the state apparatus.

In the late sixteenth century, the factional struggles at the imperial court had an impact on the field of arts and science as well. For instance, the above-mentioned anti-Sokollu

<sup>155</sup> See *Topçular Katibi Abdülkadir (Kadri) Efendi Tarihi*, 109; *Hasan Beyzade Tarihi*, 225–26; and Önal, “Koca Sinan Paşa'nın Hayatı ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri,” 471.

<sup>156</sup> Afyoncu and Önal, *Venedik Elçilik Raporlarına Göre*, 213.

<sup>157</sup> See Erhan Afyoncu, *Tanzimat Öncesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma Rehberi* (İstanbul: Yeditepe Yayınevi, 2009), 47–54, for a description of these works.

faction convicted Takiyyüddin Muhammed, a prominent astronomer who was under the patronage of Sokollu, soon after the pasha's assassination in 1579. Actually, some high-ranking *ulema* connected to this faction even mongered for the astronomer's execution since the knowledge production and science turned to a political confrontation in 1580s lead by the *şeyhülislam*.<sup>158</sup> As we learn from his *telhis* records, in this affair, Sinan Pasha tried to save Takiyyüddin, by recommending his exile to Egypt, where no one can recognize and harm him.<sup>159</sup>

Being a patron of arts, science and literature, however, did not mean Sinan was untouchable or exempt from being criticized. Because of his often rude behaviors, some famous poets targeted the pasha with their quite harsh words. For instance, when poet Nev'î appeared before Sinan one day, the pasha said to his face, "A poet cannot be a man of knowledge" (*şair ehl-i ilm olmaz*). Offended by this remark, Nev'î wrote a long letter to Sinan Pasha describing him as an arrogant and pretentious figure. This letter later became popular among the Ottoman literati as evinced by the large number of its copies found in different manuscript compilations.<sup>160</sup>

The pious endowments of Sinan Pasha were, in a sense, the strongholds of his political and economic power which allowed him to sustain a critical position and influence in the imperial court as well as the provinces. According to a calculation, his endowments employed a total of 958 people from 83 different professions.<sup>161</sup> The geographical span of these *vakıfs* were equally extensive, for instance, he had built 13 mosques and masjids in the cities and towns stretching from Thessalonica to Egypt, 7 hospices (*imârethâne*) located in Anatolia and northern Syria, 5 madrasas in İstanbul and its surroundings, a total of 6 schools,

<sup>158</sup> Baki Tezcan, "Some Thoughts on the Politics of Early Modern Ottoman Science," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 36 (2010): 136-156, at 141.

<sup>159</sup> *Telhisler*, 215–16, [*telhis* #172].

<sup>160</sup> See Tunca Kortantamer, "Nevî Efendi'nin Sadrazam Sinan Paşa'ya Ders Veren Bir Mektubu," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 11 (1991): 215-228, at 217.

<sup>161</sup> Öcalan, "Koca Sinan Paşa Vakıfları," 736.

libraries/reading houses and public fountains in the Balkans and Anatolia, and 11 baths and 22 commercial hubs in various places.<sup>162</sup>

Since his extensive endowment activity was one of his main sources of political power, Sinan Pasha came constantly under attack by his rivals. For instance, when he was dismissed from the governorship of Egypt, Damad İbrahim Pasha, Murad III's favorite son-in-law and a rival of Sinan Pasha, was sent there as an inspector, who then gave the property/revenue rights of Sinan's endowments and business firms in Egypt, Medina, and Mecca to someone else.<sup>163</sup> In his defense, Sinan Pasha wrote and explained to the sultan that he had legitimize businesses in these locations, carefully using his manipulation skills before the sultan. Similarly, when he was accused of improperly assigning his men numerous *zeamet* posts, he defended himself by saying that he did not spend "a dime from the state treasury" and instead "bought" a small number of villages for the endowment purposes, noting that in all these arrangements, the good deeds (*sevâb*) are accounted essentially as the sultan's since they are done in his sultanic realm.<sup>164</sup>

#### *A Case Study: Sinan Pasha's Ambition on Building a New Navy*

Sinan Pasha's distinguishable character is especially much visible when he conducts grand plans.<sup>165</sup> The pasha's economic, political, military, and diplomatic mind works in a coherence that approaches the question in entangled ways. Here in this small section, I will analyze a case study on the pasha's ambition on constructing a new imperial navy which is far from being only a military issue but stretches from diplomacy to fiscal affairs.

<sup>162</sup> Bayram, "Yemen Fatihi Gazi Sinan Paşa'nın Kahire ve Şam Vakıfları."

<sup>163</sup> *Telhisler*, 159–60, [*telhis* #119].

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 203–4 [*telhis* #156].

<sup>165</sup> Also see Mehmet Yaşar Ertaş and Ümmügülsüm Kaygusuz, "Rekabet ve İhtirasın Gölgesinde Başarısız Bir Kanal Projesi: 1591'de Koca Sinan Paşa'nın Sakarya Nehri'ni Marmara'ya Bağlama Teşebbüsü," in *Uluslararası Sakarya Sempozyumu*, eds. Mehmet Yaşar Ertaş et al. (Sakarya: Sakarya Belediyesi Yayınları, 2018): 203-230.

In 1590, Sinan Pasha devised a plan for constructing a new imperial navy based on the fact that new war ships were required after Ottoman-Venetian War in the early 1570s.<sup>166</sup> However, the total budget required for this project was one and a half times more than the entire income of the imperial treasury, hence Sinan Pasha suggested that all the governing pashas and the sultan himself should cover the cost, in addition to the contribution that would come from the tributary states, such as Wallachia whose voivode would send 1,500,000 *akçes*.<sup>167</sup> According to Sinan Pasha's calculations, if they order 100 new full-fledged ships, each ship would cost between 260,000<sup>168</sup> and 300,000<sup>169</sup> *akçes*. However, if the pashas could not provide the ships which fall into their share, then the imperial government uses the unpaid amount of taxes (*bakaya*) as credit.<sup>170</sup> On his part, the grand vizier would pay for six ships, whereas other government pashas only one or two.<sup>171</sup> However, as Fodor points out, despite this was an attempt to lessen the burden on the imperial treasury, when the numbers are examined, the %61 of the cost was distributed among the provincial and district governors.<sup>172</sup> In other words, Sinan Pasha dealt a blow to the economic power of the other political elites.

To lower the costs of this new navy, Sinan Pasha also recommended selecting someone wealthy and with expertise and assign him as the grand admiral (*kapudân paşa*). Thus, he proposed to choose between Silahdâr Halil Agha and Mustafa Agha, who were his protégés. The pasha further notes that there are some corsairs whom they could appoint as navy commanders. In his reply to this plan, however, Murad III specifies that he still needs skillful corsairs rather than inexperienced commanders like these aghas.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Emrah Safa Gürkan, "Espionage in the 16th Century Mediterranean: Secret Diplomacy, Mediterranean Go-Betweens and the Ottoman Habsburg Rivalry," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (Georgetown University, 2012), 363; and Telhisler, 120 [telhis #83].

<sup>167</sup> Telhisler, 119-20 and 235 [telhis #83, 195].

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 213 [telhis #169].

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 4 [telhis #3].

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 118 [telhis #82].

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 95 [telhis #65].

<sup>172</sup> Pál Fodor, "Between Two Continental Wars: The Ottoman Naval Preparations in 1590–1592," in *In Quest of the Golden Apple*, 171-190, at 186.

<sup>173</sup> Telhisler, 240 [telhis #201].

While working on this grand project, a major concern for Sinan was to conceal it from their rivals in Europe, particularly the Spanish Habsburgs. But to his great dismay, as I also mentioned above, the pasha found out that David Passi has shared some information regarding the preparations of the new navy with the Habsburgs and Venetians. Accordingly, he repeatedly asked the sultan to get rid of Passi since he constituted a great threat to their ambitious plans.<sup>174</sup>

However, when Ferhad Pasha became a grand vizier again, the plan unfortunately fell through. In sum, this incident shows how economic, diplomatic, political, and military issues are entangled to each other especially when the factionalist divisions were at the peak. Sinan Pasha knew that the sultan would accept this offer since there will not be any outcome from the imperial treasury. Therefore, the pasha utilized the economic excuses to achieve his political and military aims by draining the economic power of the ruling elite and steering the imperial strategy in the Mediterranean.

### *Conclusion*

To conclude, Sinan Pasha was a seasoned commander and a very experienced statesman, who used every feasible opportunity to accumulate more power and wealth. His entrepreneurial spirit and business mind allowed him to quickly adopt and benefit from the newly emerging economic and financial opportunities in all corners of the Ottoman Empire as well as from the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean-European trade networks. In this context, he learned much from the examples of his predecessors, most notably Rüstem Pasha and Sokollu Mehmed Pasha. However, Sinan Pasha followed a more realistic, practical and effective approach that enabled him to become one of the powerful and wealthiest grand viziers of this era in Ottoman history. To note, my intention in this subchapter was to show how the pasha was increasing and consolidating his power and influence rather than

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 12–15 [*telhis* #8].

examining his offensive methods against the rival pashas which will be elaborated in the next part.



## Chapter III - Sinan Pasha in Action: The Daily Politics at the Imperial Court

This chapter deals with the problem of how the pasha did conduct the daily politics, and maintained his tumultuous relations with other pashas and the sultan. In the preceding chapter, I focused on the methods of Sinan Pasha that made him particular compared to other members of the ruling elite. In this chapter, I will delve into the factionalist rivalry and the pasha's relationship with the sultan through using the *telhises*.

This chapter consists of two main parts. In the first part, I examine Sinan's personal relations with other contemporary members of the top ruling elite, most of whom were actually his rivals, and even archenemies. In this regard, I would argue that Sinan Pasha had followed a factionalist type of policy in order to undermine his rivals while strengthening the positions of his allies with the larger body politic. In the second part, I turn my attention to a more specific relationship, that is, between Sinan Pasha and Sultan Murad III, as reflected in a number of *telhises* exchanged between the two ruling figures. I also use the so-called dream letters of Murad III addressed to his spiritual master, Şeyh Şüca, who was one of important figures at the sultan's court working against Sinan Pasha.

### 3.1 The Factionalist Rivalry from the Point of Sinan Pasha

In this section, I will analyze the political strife between Sinan Pasha and his chief rivals among the contemporary Ottoman ruling elite. To do so, I will focus on the question of how the pasha expanded, consolidated, and protected his household against constant attacks or undermining efforts from different factional groups at the sultan's court and beyond. More specifically, I will examine a select set of incidents to demonstrate how Sinan Pasha strengthened his power and influence at court, as well as how he managed to undermine his rivals by tactical appointments, denunciations, and investigations. Besides, throughout my discussion, I will try to show a specific defense mechanism utilized by the pasha especially when he faced attacks from his enemies who used the so-called *tezvîr kağıdı* (fake or false document) to undermine him.

#### *The Pasha's Maneuvers in the Factional Rivalry*

As discussed above, arranging different types of revenue appointments and some significant posts based on factional interests was one of the most prevalent features of power accumulation among the contemporary Ottoman high-ranking ruling elite. As a matter of fact, the emergence of new interest groups and households in the Ottoman imperial administration, and eventually their increased strife with each other when they jockeyed for more power or offices can be better observed in the 1580s and 1590s. Factions or factional rivalries were always peculiar characteristics of early modern royal courts.<sup>175</sup> And the sultan's court was no exemption to this observation. As Fodor illustrated, for instance, in 1565, different interest groups challenged each other to obtain posts at the newly conquered frontier castles in the

<sup>175</sup> See Jeroen Duindam, Tülay Artan, and Metin Kunt, eds., *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires* (Leiden: Brill, 2011) and Ruben Gonzalez Cuerva and Alexander Koller, eds., *A Europe of Courts, a Europe of Factions: Political Groups at Early Modern Centres of Power (1550-1700)* (London, Boston: Brill, 2017).

western front of the empire, such as Pankota.<sup>176</sup> However, during the post-Sokollu period, the rank and office appointments became an area of much fiercer conflict among the ruling elite since it now constituted a necessity for enhancing and consolidating the power.

The land-assignment records (*tevcîh defterleri*) from 1578 and 1588 illustrate this problem. For example, an appointment made on December 6, 1584 shows that the Safed region was given to Mehmed Bey, the son of Vizier Zal Pasha, upon the request of Ferhad Pasha, by then the commander-in-chief of the Safavid campaign. Similarly, the appointment of Hüseyin Bey to the governorship of Karesi was made on July 5, 1580, but this time upon the request of Sinan Pasha, just before he became grand vizier for the first time.<sup>177</sup> Appointments for court positions were as significant as such provincial posts. Sinan Pasha asked the sultan to depose the *küçük defterdar* (secondary treasurer) Mahmud for he was “a traitor and thief” and instead recommended Yaş Hasan, one of his men, to be appointed to this important post.<sup>178</sup> In a similar case, the pasha wrote to Murad III so as to denounce the chief eunuch of the imperial harem, the famous Habeşi Mehmed Agha, saying “this servant of yours is untrustworthy” while emphasizing that Ferhad Pasha was actually the agha’s patron.<sup>179</sup>

At times, the newly conquered territories witnessed a ferocious struggle among the ruling elite than the core regions of the empire. As I have mentioned in the first chapter, the Ottoman-Safavid War of 1578-90 was in effect entwined or unfolded with two major factions at play from the Ottoman side. On the one hand, some ruling pashas willfully participated in the annual campaigns so as to enrich themselves as they were assigned huge sums of campaign money. On the other, some viziers were stationed in the capital, such as Sinan Pasha, who tracked their peers in the field, reporting to the sultan about their actions on the

<sup>176</sup> Pál Fodor, “Who Should Obtain the Castle of Pankota (1565)? (Interest Groups and Self-Promotion in the Mid-Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Political Establishment),” *Turcica* 31 (1999): 67-86.

<sup>177</sup> See Kunt, *The Sultan’s Servants*, 130–31.

<sup>178</sup> *Telhisler*, 20–21 [*telhis* #12].

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 65–66 [*telhis* #45].

frontier, while at the same time trying to prevent them from becoming more powerful in both financially and politically. To illustrate, in one of his *telhises*, the pasha asked Murad III to urgently dismiss the three provincial governors of Revan, Tebriz and Gence, since they apparently pocketed so much money from the revenues collected in these newly conquered lands instead of sending the amounts owed to the state treasury. The pasha wrote: “My illustrious sultan, there will be no good unless [these governors] are removed from their posts. As there are many newly conquered lands, they [now] learned how to eat [i.e. exploit the resources].”<sup>180</sup> This particular *telhis* thus shows two problems. On one hand, more wealth could be accumulated by the regional pashas in a regularized fashion and under the financial opportunities of the going wars, while on the other, Sinan Pasha remained vigilant about the actions of these distant pashas who could quickly become more powerful through such methods and at one point potentially undermine his grand vizierate.

Recommendations were a strong factor in one’s political career or standing at the time. A good or bad reference could change the sultan’s mind regarding the appointments and dismissals, especially if they concerned multiple appointments (*silsile*) at the same time. In this regard, Sinan Pasha’s personal suggestions for the critical appointments allowed him to enlarge his power network at the expense of rival court factions. In his *telhis* collection, we see him making recommendations to the sultan in relation to the numerous high posts, such as the grand admiral (*kapudan*), the governor-generalship (*beylerbeyilik*) and the agha of the Janissaries (*yeniçeri ağası*),.<sup>181</sup>

And in this respect, Sinan Pasha favored not just his son and brothers, but also other family members for various posts. A very interesting example is that he recommended his nephew Mehmed, the grandson of Sinan’s elder brother Ayas Pasha, as a suitable candidate for replacing the deceased agha of the Janissaries stationed in Damascus. But Sinan Pasha

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 252-53 [*telhis* #215]: “İmdi sa’âdetlu pâdişâhım, bunlar yerinden tahrik olunmayınca bu kadar menâfi’ zuhur eylemez. Bir alay memleketdir, yeni fetholunmuşdur. Bunlar yimesini öğrendiler.”

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 30-31 [*telhis* #20].

refers to this nephew as someone unknown to him. Still, the pasha says that he “heard of him” as being a poet using “Hâkanî” as his sobriquet as well as a good servant of the sultan, who gave him a gift in return for his much acclaimed works.<sup>182</sup> Clearly, for Sinan Pasha, having a family member as the agha of the Janissaries in Damascus was very important, regardless of how this poet nephew fits for such an important military duty.

As mentioned before, such rank and office assignments formed a crucial part of the factional rivalries at the sultan’s court. In this regard, another method utilized by Sinan Pasha was to send away his rivals from the capital by assigning them distant posts. In a *telhis*, the pasha responds to a question by the sultan regarding the former governor-general, Hasan Pasha, and the agha of imperial Janissaries, Mahmud Agha, stating that these two men should be assigned to a post outside Istanbul since they bring trouble wherever they go.<sup>183</sup> In any case, another example is that Sinan Pasha recommended Hüseyin Bey, the governor of the Mezistre district, for the governor-generalship of Trablus for he was a worthy and competent administrator. At first sight, this looks like Sinan favors a client of his to rise in the provincial administrative hierarchy. However, in a sentence, the pasha remarks, “if [Hüseyin] does not comply, then he should be forced [to accept this post].”<sup>184</sup> Apparently, Sinan was trying to “neutralize” a member of a rival faction by getting him out of his influence zone.

The pasha also used denunciation as a method for undermining the rival pashas. In order to support his claims, he carried out detailed investigations to check the tax incomes and land assignments. For instance, in a *telhis*, we once again see him complaining to the sultan about the huge expenses made by Ferhad Pasha during one of his campaigns against the Safavids. The pasha actually accuses Ferhad Pasha and his allies Üveys and Hasan Pashas for corruption by stating, “the money that [they] embezzled in the last two three years is incalculable.” He further claims that these pashas will eventually transfer their wealth to their

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 244 [*telhis* #205].

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 242–43 [*telhis* #203].

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 126–27 [*telhis* #87].

sons as well as get their household members exploit many revenue sources. In his response, the sultan congratulates the grand vizier and orders him to do further investigation about this matter, especially since Ferhad Pasha acquired huge sums of money.<sup>185</sup>

Another example for Sinan Pasha's investigations is the one he conducted for the province of Gence. The pasha found out that Davud Pasha, the governor-general of Gence at the time, reported that he sent 8,700,000 *akçes* to the state treasury and 50 *yüks* (loads) of silk to be sold in Aleppo and Damascus, but Davud Pasha's treasurer forged the documents although the actual numbers were 4,600,000 *akçe* and 20 loads of silk, which is way lower than the actual number he supposed to send.<sup>186</sup>

Sending the pashas away from the capital was another tactic that the pasha used deliberately to cut their personal and political network from the body politic. To give an example, the pasha reports to Murad III that Georgia, a newly conquered land, is needed to be supervised by a commander who is currently close to the area. Thus, he proposes three names among his foes: Cafer Pasha, Cigalazade Sinan Pasha, and Hadım Hasan Pasha. Eventually, he offers Cigalazade to be chosen for this duty since he is the closest one to the region. However, the pasha adds that they should not grant him the title of commander-in-chief and hence send him funds for a campaign by any means.<sup>187</sup>

However, the pasha had to occasionally compromise on some issues in that he agreed to assign his rivals' cronies to some posts. For instance, Hızır Beğ, probably a follower of Sinan Pasha, was assigned as the treasurer of Revan province after he guaranteed to collect 100,000,000 *akçe* per year. However, Ferhad Pasha managed to get him dismissed by asserting that this was a new province and hence it was impossible to generate such huge revenue in a year. As a response, Sinan Pasha put forward the fact that Ferhad Pasha and Hızır Pasha, the governor-general of Revan, shared the valuable villages to assign their own

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 112 [*telhis* #77].

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 214 [*telhis* #170].

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 62–63 [*telhis* #43].

men. In turn, these two pashas offered Sinan Pasha to assign someone ‘neutral’. Sinan Pasha, on the other hand, suggested to the sultan that the current governor of Çıldır, Mustafa Pasha, an old trustworthy man, should be assigned to Revan, and Hızır Pasha to Çıldır. Besides, he noted, Hızır Pasha wanted to keep his valuable revenue sources -otherwise they were going to be confiscated-, and offered a considerable amount of money to the treasury. Sinan Pasha sounds like he liked this offer of Hızır and accordingly tried to convince the sultan to accept it since “this much cash should not be wasted.” However, in another related *telhis*, it is seen that Ferhad Pasha managed to undermine this entire deal by simply submitting a petition to the sultan. Offended, Sinan in turn claims that the province of Revan may yield 120,000,000 *akçes* in revenues, but because of this cancelled deal, Ferhad and Hızır Pashas are now able to pocket much money as well as appoint their followers there or even anyone who bribes them to the same effect.<sup>188</sup>

It was not only the political elites but the judges (*kuzât*) and the members of the learned hierarchy (*ulemâ*) gained power and expanded their influence through the household formation similar to the pashas’ in the late sixteenth century parallel to the political and socio-economic transformations in the empire.<sup>189</sup> As seen, to reinforce his network power, Sinan Pasha also had conflicts or problematic relations with other grandees of the time, such as the judges or the members of the learned hierarchy. In his petitions to the sultan, Sinan Pasha mentions several such men in a complaining or discrediting manner or often implies that they belong to factional politics or simply acting for an individual interest.<sup>190</sup> For instance, when the famous scholar-jurist Zekeriyya Efendi wanted to become the chief military judge (*kadiasker*) in the imperial council, but the pasha discredited him by stating

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 152–54 [*telhises* #109 and 110].

<sup>189</sup> Baki Tezcan, “The Ottoman Mevali as ‘Lord of the Law,’” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 20/3 (2009): 383-407 and Michael Nizri, *Ottoman High Politics and the Ulema Household* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 57.

<sup>190</sup> *Telhisler*, 31 [*telhis* #21].

that “neither him nor his household is clean.”<sup>191</sup> Otherwise, Zekeriyya Efendi will bring no good to the court according to the pasha and he further continues by stating the current judges are not into bribery or any kind of corrupted activities which he attributes with Zekeriyya Efendi and his household. Moreover, the pasha sometimes reports to the sultan about an investigation he asked to be conducted on local judges for they were apparently causing unrest in their districts or for complaining about him before other viziers.<sup>192</sup> For him, some *ulema* were acting outside their boundaries of action, hence he outcries: “it is not good to allow everyone involved in the affairs of state.”<sup>193</sup>

The sultan could be an obstacle for Sinan Pasha especially when he tried to expand his influence through these rank and office appointments. To illustrate, Sinan asked for the promotion of his man, Süleyman Agha, a *bölük ağası* (a troop commander), to the rank of *çavuşbaşı* (the head of court heralds) since he could not attend the council meetings because of health problems. However, the sultan declined his grand vizier’s wish, stating no troop commander can be made a *çavuşbaşı* according to the customary laws. Here, Murad III might have had another motivation as well, that is, he wanted to limit the growing number of men attached Sinan Pasha in important court positions.<sup>194</sup>

### *The Pasha in Defense*

As part of the growing factionalism and personal rivalries at the imperial court, other grandees often targeted Sinan Pasha and the members of his faction, against which the pasha developed strategies to protect his interests under these constant attacks. Again, the battle over the important posts was one of the main fronts of this struggle. For example, Hasan Pasha, the governor-general of Bosna, petitioned to the sultan asking to replace the governor

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 228-29 [*telhis* #186].

<sup>192</sup> See, for instance, *ibid.*, 47-48 [*telhis* #35].

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 72 [*telhis* #49].

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 109 [*telhis* #75].



of Zaçisne, one Hasan Beğ, with a *levend* (mercenary) soldier, since Hasan Beğ was physically disabled. However, Sinan Pasha got involved in the issue and reported that Hasan Beğ was actually an experienced statesman in the frontier regions and his services were of utmost needed. Besides, the grand vizier noted that that *levend* did not even have “more than five men” as his retinue. This case also constitutes a good example of how an ordinary soldier can become a governor at this time through factionalist decisions.<sup>195</sup> Another example is that Hızır Beğ, the district governor of İspir, was imprisoned at one point and Sinan Pasha tried to rescue him by claiming that Hızır previously sent 1,200,000 *akçes* to the treasury when no one did, and that his rivals, especially Hüseyin Ağa, were avenging him by false accusations. In another *telhis*, Sinan Pasha defends himself against the accusations in that he assigned his men to *timar* and *zeamet* lands, and even did not obey the sultan’s orders which asked him to give a *zeamet* land to the “mute Circassian” (*Çerkez dilsüz*). It is important to mention how Sinan Pasha legitimizes assignments such as these. He approaches the issue through a kind of tautological view in that he says his men are equally the servants of the sultan (indeed) and hence they deserve their positions if he, as grand vizier, is to be trusted as the top delegate of the sultan. Besides, he typically claims that he has never assigned an undeserving person to any salaried position unlike “other viziers.”<sup>196</sup>

In one of his oral correspondences (*ağız cevâbı*), Sinan Pasha denies the accusation that he favors and promotes his men: “I do not protect anyone by saying he is my man.” It can be inferred that, on the one hand, Sinan Pasha tried to undermine his rival factions as always pointing out their factional interests and actions, and on the other, he denies that he does the same while running his court faction or keep extending his larger network of clients tied to his pasha household.<sup>197</sup>

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 257 [*telhis* #222].

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 121–23 [*telhises* #83a and 84].

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 192 [*telhis* #151].

In another account, Sinan Pasha reminds the sultan that he has already decreed that no revenue will be distributed without the royal consent, pointing out a case in which the pasha was accused of granting four *zeamets* to his men. Accordingly, the pasha vows that, since that decree, he has not granted any single village without first having the approval of the sultan, and if anything is proven otherwise, he would not object to the confiscation of his men's prebendal villages by the imperial treasury. Sinan Pasha also notes that he tasked his man, Kurd Agha, to investigate who holds these villages, who in turn found out that Kaytas Kethudâ, the scribe of Üveys Pasha, as well as a man named Hasan Agha together with a follower of Ferhad Pasha are actually holding the revenue rights of the villages instead of the pasha's men.<sup>198</sup>

Speaking about the royal decrees of Murad III, Sinan Pasha always tried to emphasize his "legal" or proper conduct of affairs. For instance, in a *telhis*, he responds to an anonymous letter accusing him of (once again) assigning *zeamets* to his three men repeatedly, hence he defends himself by pointing out to the royal decree issued by the sultan himself. Though it is not clear whether Murad III personally authenticated these documents, or the pasha simply tries to manipulate sultan in this matter. In any case, he considers such accusations as slanders against him.<sup>199</sup>

In this respect, the pasha himself accused the actions of previous grand viziers for creating the chronic problems of the empire, such as appointments without the sultan's consent or forged documents. Sinan Pasha refers to such actions as 'innovations' and blames the grand vizierate of Siyavuş Pasha for their emergence. Since Siyavuş Pasha held grand vizierate three times, that is, between 1582-84, 1586-89 and 1592-93, Sinan seems to single out him for this recurring problem or corruption. Furthermore, the pasha claims that the

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 57–59 [*telhises* #40 and 40a].

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 159 [*telhis* #119].

“scribes who did this evil belong to different places [*read as pashas*].”<sup>200</sup> In a related *telhis*, he further explains that the government scribes has been actually forging documents for assignments for quite some time. He says, “more than fifteen years, it has been like this.” Since this last *telhis* can be dated to Sinan Pasha’s second grand vizierate between 1589 and 1591, he implicitly refers to the times of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha.<sup>201</sup>

In his *telhises*, Sinan Pasha generally appears to be neutral or non-aggressive with regard to most pashas. However, his tone changes when the pasha is offended or being attacked by his rivals such as Ferhad Pasha. Often, his choice of words about these rival pashas connote that they are liars, selfish, corrupt, gossipers, agitators, etc. (*kizb, hazz-ı nefis, garaz, iftirâ, bühtân, güft u gû/kıyl u kâl/taliku’l-mecâl/dedikodu, muharrik, müzevver*). Indeed, Sinan Pasha’s aggressive character and derogatory language become more visible when he feels that Murad III implies a personal mistrust about him vis-à-vis other grandees of his court. In these cases, the pasha does not hesitate to make similar counter-accusations, claiming any denouncements against him are the mechanizations of his enemies who cannot stand him because he is the only loyal and honest servant of the sultan and whose sole purpose is to serve his sublime state.

The struggle did not cease during the period of expectancies (*ma’zûliyet*). The change of a grand vizier referred to the change of the “government.” The pashas immediately reassigned their men to the prominent positions since this pinnacle position was an unguaranteed gift. At the end of the second grand vizierate term of Sinan Pasha in 1591, the sultan assigned Ferhad Pasha to the post and he began his duty by removing Sinan Pasha’s son Mehmed Pasha from Budin governor-generalship and Mustafa Pasha, nephew of Sinan, from Sivas governorate, and changed fourteen more positions in the high level of administration. These political duels continued for four more years and when the pasha got

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 79–81 [*telhis* #55].

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 106 [*telhis* #73].

his post back, he reinstated his power as Ferhad Pasha did before. Rhoads Murphey explains this circulation as; “This succession of intervals of promotion and dismissal, destitution and restitution and uplifting and dejection was a natural and repeated occurrence in the life of almost all who rose to the senior ranks of the Ottoman administration.”<sup>202</sup> Similarly it also cased when the pashas were out of the capital for commander-in-chief duties. For instance, Baron Wratislaw and Leanordo Dona report that Sinan Pasha lost a great amount of influence since he could not get any military or diplomatic achievements during the Wallachian campaign, and other pashas in the capital started to undermine his power and eventually cause his deposal or execution.<sup>203</sup>

To conclude, the political, socio-economic and military conjuncture of the 1580s and 1590s necessitated the Ottoman ruling elite to arm themselves with new measures to survive in a faction-ridden and highly fluid politics. Denouncements, accusations, gossips, slanders, forged documents and false papers were, in a sense, the norm of the day, and they were frequently used by the ruling pashas against those whom they considered their enemies. Moreover, it is interesting to see that Sinan Pasha constantly denies that he rules a household with a huge number of men and in the *telhis*, suddenly, the size of the household appears as a criteria rather than the merit which the pasha always emphasized on. Under these circumstances, I think Sinan Pasha was quite successful compared to his peers, especially in sustaining his great power and position to a large extent, even though he had to occasionally fall from power and reclaim it multiple times.

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<sup>202</sup> Murphey, *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty*, 131–33.

<sup>203</sup> Wratislaw, *Baron Wratislaw'in Anıları*, 145 and Önal, “Koca Sinan Paşa'nın Hayatı ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri,” 149.

### 3.2 The Relationship between the Pasha and the Sultan

The most important political legacy of Sinan Pasha was his *telhis* collection which sheds light on his relatively unique kind of communication with Murad III. However, these *telhises* give us mostly his side of this communication, since the sultan typically makes only brief remarks in writing regarding the problem presented to him by the grand vizier. In any case, Sinan Pasha's some hundreds of *telhises* and the related sultanic responses by Murad III are one of the most unfiltered and direct documents that show the relationship between a sultan and his chief deputy in the business of state. Accordingly, this chapter will focus on this relationship based on a select number of accounts so as to show both how Sinan Pasha established a close relationship with Murad III and how the sultan responded to the pasha according to a balanced strategy of power.

#### *Sinan Pasha's Approach to the Sultan*

As noted earlier, Murad III was known for his sedentary style of rule, which became more visible particularly after the death of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha in 1579. During this period, the sultan preferred to use proxies in order to reflect his sovereign authority over the state affairs. Among these proxy figures, the grand viziers continued their traditional position and power in leading the sultan's imperial government by ministers, whereas his royal favorites were empowered in some novel ways so as to balance the actions of all the ruling viziers. Accordingly, a particular form of political communication in writing came into being between the sedentary sultan and his grand vizier, while the royal favorites have more direct access to the person of the Ottoman ruler.

In this new political setting, Sinan Pasha tried to maintain a regular dialogue with the sultan, which was actually subject to the interference by his royal favorites and other important members of the inner court. Hence, Sinan's both official and personal relationship

with Murad III continued under the close surveillance of the sultan and his court faction, while he sought more independence in the decision-making processes of the government. It should be also noted that the pasha's communication with Murad III during his grand vizierates was based on a dialogue, not a monologue by the pasha. In other words, the grand vizier wrote his petitions assuming the sultan would soon reply them in writing.

Written correspondence with the sultan was not an original innovation during the reign of Murad III. On the other hand, previously, there was a lack of standard *telhis* form in Ottoman administrative tradition, which, in a sense, allowed Sinan Pasha to create his own style based on the existing conventional elements of political discourse. Although the general political discourse of his period was heavily imbued with emphases on the divine/absolute kingship of the Ottoman sultans, Sinan Pasha's invocations and epilogues in his *telhises* are clearly less "ideological" and more practical in this respect.<sup>204</sup>

Indeed, the pasha used a direct style especially when he needed to explain himself. In other words, without any prolonged introductions, he straightforwardly presented the subject that needs the attention of the sultan. However, a change in his style becomes visible when the pasha is offended or being attacked by his rivals, as exemplified before. In such moments, he not only denied any accusations, but also his language became more aggressive in that he used often words like *kizb*, *hazz-ı nefis*, *garaz*, *iftirâ*, *bühtân*, *güft u gû/kıyl u kâl/taliku'l-mecâl/dedikodu*, *muharrik*, *müzevver* (spleen, desire, despise, slander, accusation, rumors, provocateur, instigation) to describe the actions of his enemies.

For the pasha, it was essential to represent himself as the most loyal and competent servant of the sultan. Reading some of his *telhises*, the modern reader may get the idea that Sinan was actually trying to self-fashion himself as an irreplaceable vizier. Indeed, he once

<sup>204</sup> See Baki Tezcan, "The Multiple Faces of the One: The Invocation Section of Ottoman Literary Introductions as a Locus for the Central Argument of the Text," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 12 (2009): 27-41, at 28.

said, “I try to fix things that others have disarrayed.”<sup>205</sup> In a similar fashion, the pasha used the term “enemies of the state and the sultan,” by which he implied real persons working against him. Furthermore, Sinan Pasha typically rejected any apparent failure in his handling of the state affairs; instead he attributed the pressing problems of the time to the policies or actions of the previous grand viziers. For instance, according to the pasha, the notorious *ecnebi* (outsider/infiltrator) problem in the military ranks started well before his tenure as grand vizier and only turned into a greater threat for the proper functioning of the imperial administration and army. He thus once claimed: “This servant of yours has never sold any post or rank, nor allowed any outsider in the imperial army.” Similarly, he said, “Who knows and protects the old laws better than me?” According to Sinan, it was one Halil Pasha initiated the practice of recruiting the Muslim Turks for the military.<sup>206</sup>

In many of the *telhises*, Sinan Pasha refers to the petitions accusing him as he saw them before the sultan. When the pasha was accused of something or informed by an “anonymous” petition, he refers to the time of Süleyman I by stating it was not possible to submit anonymous petitions and complains to the sultan since they were full of slander and grudge. The pasha obviously had problems with this practice and suggested to modify it. For him, the petitions should be done in person, so that no one can blame each other without any proofs and evil thoughts.<sup>207</sup>

Sinan Pasha’s another method of self-fashioning was to depict his every action done on proper terms and good faith. When an anonymous letter blamed him for seizing the unfinished building of Hasan Pasha, for exaple, he defended himself by pointing out that he did it for good deeds since no one in the city would like to purchase that building because of thieves living inside the building: “Being a vizier did not make me to lose my humanity”

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<sup>205</sup> *Telhisler*, 7 [*telhis* #4].

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-86 [*telhis* #58].

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 37, 84, 94–95, 183, and 247 [*telhises* #27, 58, 64, 143 and 210].

(*Vezîr olduksa insâniyetden çıkmadık*). This particular example well illustrates the personal discourse of self-defense he often used.<sup>208</sup>

In this regard, a case sheds further light on Sinan Pasha's more personal sensitivities in his relationship with Murad III. When the sultan received a petition which apparently accused Sinan of taking bribes, the pasha sincerely asked the sultan:

“In that petition it is said that the illustrious sultan received 3,000,000 *akçes* and I received 1,000,000 from the agha of the Janissaries [to give him this post]. Is this true? Did my sultan receive anything?”<sup>209</sup>

But the sultan dodged these questions and instead said that he could not leave the palace because of a health issue. In another similar case, Sinan Pasha wrote to the sultan, investing an anonymous denouncing letter about him, which was secretly given to the sultan at midnight:

“Who left the letter there at midnight? Why not finding him? Who gave it to my sultan? Who comes there? Who was the guard? This is negligence!”

This time, the sultan calmly replied to his grand vizier:

“They left the petition on Saturday, the council day, at the gate. They delivered another one yesterday. However, the persons (who wrote these) are to be found as soon as possible.”<sup>210</sup>

It is also possible to read some of Sinan Pasha's *telhises* as part of the contemporary political advice literature,<sup>211</sup> given that he mostly tried to defend or legitimize his actions based on the same conceptual-political framework which underlined the prime duty of the

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 248 [*telhis* #210].

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 83–86 [*telhis* #58].

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 83–84 [*telhis* #58].

<sup>211</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the Ottoman advice literature, see Howard, “Ottoman Historiography and the Literature of 'Decline'”; Mehmet Öz, *Kanun-i Kadimin Peşinde: Osmanlı'da Çözülme ve Gelenekçi Yorumcuları* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2015, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.); and Heather Ferguson, “Genres of Power: Constructing a Discourse of Decline in Ottoman Nasihatname,” *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 35 (2010): 81–116. Also see Pál Fodor, “Bir Nasihat-Name Olarak Kavanin-i Yeniçeriyân,” in *Beşinci Milletler Arası Türkoloji Kongresi, Tebliğler* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Basımevi, 1985), 217–24.



sultan in that all of his subjects (*re'âyâ vü berâyâ*] were entrusted to him by God. Hence, the sultan was expected to fulfill this duty by maintaining the political order based on the principles of justice. And since the grand vizier was the sultan's chief deputy, the sultan must trust him and his fair conduct of state affairs; otherwise unjust viziers may run the government.<sup>212</sup>

On the other hand, such an advisory role on the essential duties of the sultan was always expected from the Ottoman grand viziers and Sinan Pasha was no exception. However, occasionally, he could not stop himself from making more critical or arrogant remarks about the sultan's actions. After giving his due apologies, for instance, the pasha blamed the sultan for ruthlessly seizing the granted lands of some deceased pashas although they all had some young children now left as orphans. To illustrate this point with another example, Murad III ordered Sinan Pasha to confiscate all the personal treasury and property of the murdered by his servants Frenk Yusuf Pasha in 1590, who was a janissary agha in 1583 and governor-general of Budin between 1586 and 1587, Sinan followed this royal order and accordingly prepared and submitted a list on Yusuf Pasha's confiscated wealth. In his related *telhis*, the grand vizier reminded the sultan about the late pasha's orphans, to which remark Murad III responded by saying that he would consider giving these children some of Yusuf Pasha's wealth but only if necessary.<sup>213</sup>

Writing *telhises* was not the sole method that the pasha utilized to have a strong relationship with the sultan. Gifting was another tool. To give an example, during his second grand vizierate, Sinan had two pavilions (*köşks*) built for Murad III, which were located in the gardens of the Topkapı Palace overlooking the Marmara Sea named Çayır Köşkü/Sinan Paşa Köşkü and Cebeciler Köşkü/Yalı Köşkü.<sup>214</sup> These pavilions were quite expensive projects and Murad III enjoyed them. Even, they functioned in a political way as well. For

<sup>212</sup> *Telhisler*, 9 [*telhis* #5].

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid*, 176, 215 and 260 [*telhises* #136, 172 and 226].

<sup>214</sup> Önal, "Koca Sinan Paşa'nın Hayatı ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri," 129.

instance, the sultan honored Damat İbrahim Pasha with *hil'at* (ceremonial robe) deliberately in Sinan Paşa Köşkü as trying to ignite the rivalry among the pashas.<sup>215</sup>

Sinan Pasha similarly presented valuable gifts to Murad III during the famous circumcision festival of his son, Prince Mehmed (III) in 1582. By these gifts, Sinan Pasha exhibited his power and wealth not just to the sultan, but also the entire ruling elite of the time present during the festivities. Ottoman royal circumcision ceremonies were important events which accentuated the dynastic legitimization and political consolidation of the House of Osman.<sup>216</sup> Furthermore, they functioned as a political arena on which the factional rivalries played out among the ruling elites through the display of wealth, influence and prestige.<sup>217</sup> In the invitation list, for instance, Grand Vizier Sinan Pasha was ranked after the Crimean Khan.<sup>218</sup> According to Ferâhi, the author of a recently found book of ceremonies (*Surnâme*) on Prince Mehmed's circumcision, Sinan Pasha submitted a total of 228 items as gifts to the sultan, whereas his son Mehmed Pasha gave 108 items, which was quite impressive compared to other elites in his stature. Besides, Sinan Pasha personally gifted 20 items to Prince Mehmed.<sup>219</sup> To conclude, Sinan Pasha managed to utilize anything that can help him to increase his influence including his great presence on the festival and large set of gifts that exhibits the magnificence of his wealth.

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>216</sup> Kaya Şahin, "Staging an Empire: An Ottoman Circumcision Ceremony as Cultural Performance," *The American Historical Review* 123/2 (2018): 462-492.

<sup>217</sup> Levent Kaya Ocakaçan, "Festivities of Curfew Centralization and Mechanisms of Opposition in Ottoman Politics, 1582-1583," in *Venetians and Ottomans in the Early Modern Age: Essays on Economic and Social Connected History*, ed. Anna Valerio (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2018): 57-76, 58.

<sup>218</sup> Ferâhî, *Sûrnâme: Bir Özge Alem Osmanlı Payitahtında 1582 Şenliği*, ed. Mehmet Özdemir (Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2016), 47.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 71 and 91-93.

### *The other end of the telhis: Sultan Murad III*

Many of his contemporaries depicted Murad III as a character who could be easily influenced or manipulated, especially by his favorite dwarfs and mutes, as well as a person who was “physically inactive, but having a great interest in art and knowledge.”<sup>220</sup> The personality of the sultan thus played a major role in his decisions and attitudes, which can be also observed in his correspondence with Sinan Pasha and other people. In order to present himself as a just ruler, Sultan Murad initially declared that everyone with a complaint may submit a petition to his sublime threshold. However, after some time, he abandoned this idea as more and more complaints piled; instead, he preferred petitions from his grand vizier and royal favorites, which summarized them the problems that he needed to attend personally. Therefore, it is important to analyze the sultan’s responses to the *telhises* Sinan Pasha submitted along these lines.

Sultan Murad’s usage of *telhis* method had both practical and political meanings. In one of his responses to Sinan, for instance, Murad briefly summarizes what he expects from a grand vizier in that the pasha should serve well and without hesitation while at the same time enriching the imperial treasury by compensating the budget deficits.<sup>221</sup> Sinan Pasha, on the other side, expects trust and protection from the sultan: “My illustrious sultan should protect the dignity of the vizierate.”<sup>222</sup> In another *telhis*, Sinan Pasha reminds the sultan that once the sultan told him in what conditions he should write a *telhis* to him: if a revenue of livelihood (*dirlik*) was claimed or vacant; and if it was given, then whether the person was worthy to receive it.<sup>223</sup> However, from some of his responses to the pasha, it is quite clear to see the disappointment of the sultan. In the aforementioned examples on the pasha’s defense against accusations of bribery, the sultan reveals his despondency by saying that the household of the

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<sup>220</sup> Aycibin, *Manevi Dünyası ile Sultan III. Murad*, 15–22.

<sup>221</sup> *Telhisler*, 104 [*telhis* #72].

<sup>222</sup> Ibid, 121 [*telhis* #83a]: “Vezâret ‘ırzını devletlu pâdişâh siyânet itmek gerekdir.”

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 99–100 [*telhis* #68].

pasha was once known as the cleanest among the others, that is, free of bribery or any corruption. The royal disappointment can also be seen when the sultan accuses Sinan Pasha by claiming he already knew he was complicit in some illicit actions with others.<sup>224</sup>

The ruling discourse of the sultan was quite conservative in terms of following the laws. When the sultan rejects an offer or any suggestion, he used the traditional political terminology of “old law” (*kânûn-i kadîm*) to legitimize his decision. For example, in his response to a *telhis*, the sultan does not accept Sinan Pasha’s proposal which suggests the chief jurisprudent (*şeyhülislam*), who has financial difficulties, might be assigned to Egypt to recover from his financial problems. In his response, Murad III states that such an appointment is against the old laws.<sup>225</sup>

The sultan’s responses were laconic answers most of the time.<sup>226</sup> And they can be categorized under three characteristics: 1) his very short answers, typically a single word expressing his decision in the affirmative or negative, such as “verilsün” (let it be given), “buyurdum” (I ordered as such) or “hemân” (immediately); 2) his replies in the form of suggestions, such as “would not it be better to assign him as provincial governor in rural places? Or perhaps a district governorate may be an option?” too.<sup>227</sup> 3) his threatening or advising remarks which actually directly targets the pasha, such as “however it is heard that you have used the 8,000,000 *akçes* from the granted budget to pay the salaries of the troops. If this is true, then it will not be good (for you!).”<sup>228</sup>

Although most of Murad III’s answers belong to the first category, this does not mean that he did naively believe whatever Sinan Pasha presented to him. For instance, when Sinan Pasha defended himself by pledging all accusations are baseless slanders coming from his

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 93–94 [*telhis* #64]: “Rikâb-ı hümayûna sunulan bir kağıdın üzerinde, hâlen Sinan Paşa’nın’ evvelden kapusu irtişâdan pâk idi şimdi mürteşi olmak ziyâde ‘acebdür.”

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 171 [*telhis* #131].

<sup>226</sup> Fodor, “The Grand Vizieral *Telhis*” 148.

<sup>227</sup> *Telhisler*, 56 [*telhis* #39].

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 81 [*telhis* #56].

rivals, who cannot accept his great achievements and loyalty to the sultan, the sultan responds harshly, saying that one of the pasha's man, Hüsam Beğ, was previously a ship captain, then promoted to a district governorship. Hence, the sultan asks, "Is this how you serve [me] auspiciously?"<sup>229</sup>

The sultan's opinions about Sinan Pasha naturally changed from time to time. Based on his responses, it is not easy to figure out when Murad wanted to appease, ignore, warn or threaten his grand vizier. On the other hand, he generally accepted Sinan's recommendation on a given policy or problem. That is to say, Sinan Pasha's letters had critical influence on the sultan. A good example is as follows:

At one point, the sultan asks Sinan whether he should appoint Hasan Pasha, son of Mehmed Pasha or Saatçi Hasan Pasha to the governor-generalship of Anadolu. In his response, Sinan Pasha first notes that Hasan Pasha is notorious for his being cruel and corrupt. Then, about Saatçi Hasan Pasha, the grand vizier gives a positive remark, noting that Saatçi is an experienced and rich vizier, the kind of man whom the sultan needed in these "difficult times." Indeed, as Sinan also notes, Hasan Pasha has already offered 25,000 ducats for acquiring this position.<sup>230</sup> Unfortunately the sultan's response is not available for this *telhis*.

On such important matters or decisions, Murad III also sought the advice of his spiritual master, Şeyh Şüca Efendi, who was an influential figure in the court circles as well. In one of his so-called dream letters to his şeyh, Murad asks what Şüca thinks of Sinan Pasha and whether the pasha sincerely acts for the sake of his faith.<sup>231</sup> In a similar example, the sultan expresses his discontent about Sinan and hence asks whether he should punish the

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 187–88 [*telhis* #146].

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 223 [*telhis* #179].

<sup>231</sup> See Özgen Felek, ed., *Kitabü'l Menamat: Sultan III Murad'ın Rüya Defterleri* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2014), 264. Unfortunately, this collection of Murad III's dreams does not include their interpretations by Şeyh Süca.

pasha.<sup>232</sup> Given that Şeyh Süca was known to be an adversary of the grand vizier, he most likely denounced or blamed Sinan Pasha in the face of such questions.

The sultan had a close relation with his spiritual master as evinced by the corpus of Murad III's dream letters to Şeyh Şüca. And in a rare case, we can actually observe how Sinan Pasha was discussed between the two figures. In the letter, Murad asks Şüca Efendi that what he should do with Sinan Pasha since he does not agree to send Lala Mustafa Pasha as the secondary commander-in-chief against the Safavids.<sup>233</sup> In another letter, the sultan wonders whether he should give the grand vizierate to Sinan Pasha or Mustafa Pasha.<sup>234</sup> Clearly, before making his decisions on crucial matters, Murad III needed the help of his master.

Sinan Pasha probably did not know the details of any such personal communication between the sultan and his şeyh. Yet, he was most likely aware about the machinations by the şeyh against himself. Indeed, in a long *telhis*, he alludes to the role of Şeyh Şüca in the politically significant decisions made by the sultan as well as how Sufis were provoking the sultan against him. After repeating a poetic sentence in Persian, "from the deceiver Sufis" (*Ah ezîn sûfiyân-ı ezrak puş*), he writes, "my illustrious sultan, what can I do? My illustrious sultan immediately believes those people who claim to follow the true path [of mysticism]."<sup>235</sup> Overall, throughout these examples, one can observe that the late sixteenth-century Ottoman politics involved multiple agencies from the members of the ruling elite to the mystics.

Sinan Pasha and Sultan Murad maintained equilibrium in their mutual relationship to a certain point. Sinan utilized his privileged position as grand vizier to directly communicate with the sultan in writing, in which he successfully expanded his influence while protecting

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 267, 273.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>235</sup> *Telhisler*, 199 [*telhis* #153].

his interests and undermining his rivals. Sultan Murad, on the other end, kept his suspicious attitude towards Sinan, but did not hesitate to seek the support and suggestions of the pasha, and occasionally supported him against the other pashas or vice-versa. In this sense, these two top ruling figures had a political-symbiotic relationship which benefited, to a large extent, both side in the political arena of the faction-ridden royal court. However, the factional strife among the contemporary ruling elite helped Murad III more than Sinan Pasha. As the sultan frequently changed his grand viziers, as part of his sedentary style of rule by proxies, Sinan Pasha had to constantly struggle to sustain his position with all the available methods at his disposal.

To conclude, by the late sixteenth century, Ottoman grand vizierial *telhises* came to be written in a particular official format and language regardless of the topic. In this respect, Sinan Pasha's petitions to Murad III reveal highly complex methods of communication as they are connected and consecutive that proceeded to depend on the sultan's responses/extra questions and Sinan's replies or alternative suggestions. However, the emphasis and tone in language differed according to the topics. Sinan Pasha used pompous language while he was defending himself against the accusations, or repeated certain words when he denounced his rivals. In contrast to the occasional word choices of the pasha, Murad used a laconic language in his answers. Nevertheless, it is not possible to conclude that these documents had a concrete form in terms of language.

## Conclusion

With his enormous personal wealth, great political power, experience in statesmanship and military affairs, as well as his extensive network of allies and clients, Koca Sinan Pasha was no doubt an indispensable figure of the early modern Ottoman state machinery. His long career witnessed many critical maneuvers to survive in a faction-ridden imperial court during a crisis-ridden period under the exigencies of long wars and chronic financial difficulties. In his factional struggles, the pasha both endeavored to expand and consolidate his household, and to undermine his rivals. In pursuit of his personal interests, Sinan Pasha did not only fight against his rivals but also conducted a balance strategy with Sultan Murad III. Besides, his diplomatic relations and commercial activities were far superior to those of his peers. As many contemporary observers write in their testimonies, the pasha was a highly important if not a towering figure in Ottoman court politics.

Sinan Pasha, in a sense, successfully adopted himself to a newly emerging imperial system. His actions and aspirations intertwined with the socio-economic and political changes from which he personally utilized and benefited very much. Accordingly, I would argue that Sinan Pasha was a transitional grand vizier in that he represented a newly emerging type of Ottoman ruling elite type that would become more visible in the seventeenth century.

In the preceding chapters, I have focused on several aspects of Sinan Pasha's career, grand vizierates and his *telhis* collection. In the first chapter, I tried to locate the pasha among the other grand viziers appointed by Murad III and examined the question of what made him more successful and powerful than his peers. After a short biography of the pasha, I continued with the outlines of the Ottoman system in the late sixteenth century, and finished the chapter with the comparative analysis of the grand viziers of Murad III. In my discussion,



I tried to underline the changing political dynamics of the time as well as some external factors which played a significant role in Sinan Pasha's political life and career.

In the second chapter, I first examined the pasha's *telhises* in a more structural way. I discussed the emergence of these accounts from the point of the sultan and Sinan Pasha by considering the political milieu as well. Then, I analyzed the pasha's methods for accumulating political, economic and diplomatic power by concentrating on several cases. Ultimately, I tried to explain the factors that made Sinan Pasha a unique figure in this period.

In the last chapter, I focused on the factionalism from Sinan Pasha's point of view, by examining his relations and struggles with other ruling grandees, and finally his relationship with the sultan. In this chapter, I mainly utilized his *telhis* letters to substantiate my arguments as well as to illustrate how the most recent and revisionist scholarship on the early modern Ottoman imperial history can actually greatly benefit from them. In other words, I have proposed that the political events, problems and discourses found in Sinan Pasha's *telhis* collection are quite critical in analyzing the changing character of the Ottoman ruling elite by the late sixteenth century. Throughout my chapters, accordingly, I tried to give or mirror the voice of Sinan Pasha so as to reflect on the mindset of a contemporary grand vizier as well as to understand the motivations behind his actions. Overall, I tried to demonstrate the dynamics and actors of the daily politics in the Ottoman court more vividly.

In my thesis, I reached five important conclusions that enable a re-assessment of the late sixteenth-century Ottoman imperial politics:

- 1) The 1580s and 1590s were a period marked with chronic financial crisis, political turmoil and constant warfare. These problems overlapped with the changing nature of the sultanate, which in turn resulted in several reconfigurations pertaining to the composition of the existing ruling elite divided by intense factionalism. Therefore, these structural changes took place concurrently with the emergence of alternative

foci of power in the Ottoman body politic, from which Sinan Pasha arose and established his own pasha household.

- 2) In this period, the ruling elite was more divided than before. All power and influence originally derived from the sultan's court but still highly contested. In order to wield and exercise political power, the top ruling elite competed with each other in an increasingly aggressive manner, a problem which forced them to utilize various old and new methods for strengthening their political position as well as their network of power and clients at the expense of their rivals. This factionalism also became a decisive factor in the decision-making mechanisms of the Ottoman imperial court.
- 3) Sinan Pasha learned a great deal from his predecessors like Sokollu Mehmed Pasha as well as inherited some their policies and personal methods in statesmanship. But Sinan Pasha also created his standing in politics. His success came from his advanced adaptation skills to different occasions or challenges. At a political discourse level, Sinan Pasha followed a more traditional type of grand vizier with constant references the reign of Sultan Süleyman I. However, in practice, the pasha's motivations behind his actions reflected the realities of his times. Moreover, his political legacy influenced his successors in the next century and the methods he used became the standard tools of the Ottoman ruling elite. In this sense, Sinan Pasha had a transitional character placed between the Süleymanic period and the crisis-ridden seventeenth century.
- 4) The *telhis* became a very critical means of communication between the sultan and the grand vizier by the late sixteenth century. Political conjecture, the character and strategy of the sultan, and a number of administrative problems necessitated a more frequent use of the *telhis* under Murad III. It is possible to say, both sides, Murad III and Sinan Pasha, utilized this petitioning method to their favor. On the one hand,

Murad III managed to follow the administrative affairs regularly and be able to intervene in the business of state led by the grand vizier. On the other hand, Sinan Pasha could favor his court faction, denounce his rivals and praise himself through the petitions that gave him credibility as well as responsibility. In this regard, the *telhis* became, in one sense, a dangerous weapon at the hands of the grand vizier that could cause much trouble to other pashas.

- 5) Contrary to the conventional historiography, Sultan Murad III was not a passive sultan in the business of state. He created a number of proxies, most importantly royal favorites, acting as power brokers on his behalf. Indeed, the reign of Murad III witnessed the activities and the growing influence of several new pashas favored by the sultan. The sultan, though, conducted a balance strategy among all his grandees to prevent them turning into another Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, from whom Murad III tried to take back the reins of the empire during the first five years of his sultanate. In other words, the sultan has seen the shadow of Sokollu on himself and politics. Thus, he widely used his sovereign power for confiscation, exiles and depositions especially when a pasha showed the sign of getting more and more powerful.

In conclusion, in this thesis, I have re-examined the multiple grand vizierates of Sinan Pasha under Murad III, through a detailed examination of his *telhis* records in the context of the late sixteenth-century Ottoman imperial crisis. Previously, no scholar has undertaken such an approach on Sinan Pasha, his vizierates and his *telhis* letters. I hope I have succeeded in this endeavor, especially in demonstrating the critical significance of Sinan Pasha's *telhises* for a study of this important period in general, and the contemporary Ottoman ruling elite and practical politics at the imperial court in particular.

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# Appendices

## I - The Profiles of the Grand Viziers Appointed during the Reign of Murad III (1579 – 1595)

### 1) Semiz Ahmed Pasha (1492 - March 5, 1580)

**Ethnicity and Origin:** Albanian in Ottoman sources,<sup>236</sup> German according to Stephan Gerlach<sup>237</sup>

**Inner Service (Enderun):** First known duty is *kapucıbaşı* (steward).

**Outer Service (Birun):** *Yeniçeri ağası* (agha of the Janissaries) (1558 – 1561), *beylerbeyi* (Governor-general) of Rumeli (1561 – 1563), sixth rank vizier (1563), fourth rank vizier (1566), second rank vizier (1578), grand vizier (October 13, 1579)<sup>238</sup>

**Position before the grand vizierate:** Second rank vizier

**Period of Expectancy (*Ma'zûliyet*):** one month

**Courtly Relation:** Married with Ayşe Sultan (granddaughter of Süleyman I)

**Rival Faction:** Sokollu Mehmed Pasha

**Patron:** Lala Mustafa Pasha

<sup>236</sup> İsmail Hami Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi*, 6 vols. (İstanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1971), vol. V, 19.

<sup>237</sup> Stephan Gerlach, *Türkiye Günlüğü 1573-1576*, trans. Türkis Noyan, 2 vols. (İstanbul: Kitapyayınevi, 2006), vol. I, 486.

<sup>238</sup> See *DİA*, s.v. “Semiz Ahmed Paşa” by Feridun Emecen

## 2) Lala Mustafa Pasha (1500 – August 7, 1580)

**Ethnicity and Origin:** Bosnian, coming from Sokolovic family

**Inner Service (Enderun):** *Berberbaşılık* (sultan's hairdresser), *çaşnigirlik* (taster) and *küçük imrahorluk* (supervisor of the horses) (1544) during Suleiman I.

**Outer Service (Birun):** He left Istanbul as *sancakbeyi* (governor) at Safed (1555). Then he was assigned as *lala* (tutor of a prince) for Selim II in 1556. He was Projega governor for a short term in 1560 and Van governor-general in November 1560. His other governor-generalships are: Erzurum in 1562 and Halep-Şam in 1563. He was assigned as a *serdar* (commander-in-chief) to suppress the Yemen revolt in 1567-68. Sokollu Mehmed Pasha appointed him as commander against the Safavids in 1578. In 1580, he was appointed as the grand vizier.<sup>239</sup>

**Position before the grand vizierate:** Second rank vizier in *kubbealtı* (ministerial vizier)

**Period of Expectancy (*Ma'zûliyet*):** 2 years between 1568 and 1570. He was deposed from commandership because of Koca Sinan Pasha's influence, then again appointed as a commander for the Venetian war in 1570. 3 months of idleness after January 1580.

**Courtly Relation:** The pasha has married to Hümaşah Sultan, a daughter of prince Mehmed, son of Suleiman I.

**Rival Faction:** Koca Sinan Pasha's faction

**Patron:** Deli Rüstem Pasha, Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, Sultan Selim II

**Titles:** Kıbrıs Fatihi (Conqueror of Cyprus), Şirvan ve Gürcistan Fatihi (Conqueror of Shirvan and Georgia)

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<sup>239</sup> See *DİA*, s.v. "Lala Mustafa Paşa" by Bekir Kütükoğlu.



### 3) Koca Sinan Pasha (1520? – April 3, 1596)

**Ethnicity and Origin:** Albanian. However, there is one source that mentions him as Greek.<sup>240</sup> Although most of the sources estimate the Pasha's birth year as 1520, since he tells that he passed his 70<sup>th</sup> year with Islam in his *telhis*,<sup>241</sup> Italian ambassador Lorenzo Bernardo claims the pasha was 64 years old in 1592.<sup>242</sup>

**Inner Service (Enderun):** He was *çaşnigirbaşı* (taster to the sultan) in the palace during reign of Suleiman I.

**Outer Service (Birun):** Some sources suggest that he left the palace as the governor of Malatya<sup>243</sup>, however, Franz Babinger and Géza Dávid found out that there is only one Sinan who appeared in records as *sancakbeyi* after being *çaşnigir*, in Trablus district, March 1556.<sup>244</sup> His provincial and military positions continued as being Gazze *sancakbeyi* in 1560, Malatya *sancakbeyi* in 1561, the governor-general of Karaman in 1564, Erzurum *beylerbeyi* in 1565, Halep (Aleppo) *beylerbeyi* in 1565, Mısır (Egypt) *beylerbeyi* in 1567, *serdar* of Yemen campaign in August 1568, second time of governor-generalship in Egypt in 1571, commander-in-chief of Tunisian and Iranian campaigns between 1572 and 1580, which he first promoted to sixth degree, then to the second degree of vizierate. Finally, he managed to become a grand vizier in August 1580. After his first deposal, he was appointed as Şam (Damascus) *beylerbeyi* in 1586. His five times grand vizierates are: August 1580 – December 1582, April 1589 – August 1591, January 1593 – February 1595, July 1595 – November 1595, December 1595 – 4 April 1596.

**Position before the grand vizierate:** Second rank of *kubbealtı* vizier and *serdar*

<sup>240</sup> Afyoncu and Önal, *Venedik Elçilik Raporları*, 178.

<sup>241</sup> *Telhisler*, 196 [*telhis* #152].

<sup>242</sup> Afyoncu and Önal, *Venedik Elçilik Raporları*, 106.

<sup>243</sup> See *DİA*, s.v. "Koca Sinan Paşa" by Mehmet İpşirli

<sup>244</sup> *EI* "Sinan Pasha, Khodja." by Babinger and David.

**Period of Expectancy (*Ma'zûliyet*):** After he was deposed from the grand vizierate, he was expelled to Malkara three times. His *ma'zûliyet* periods were December 1582 – December 1586, 1587 – April 1589 (after deposal from the beylerbeyi post of Damascus), August-July 1591 – January 1593, February 1595 – July 1595, November 1595,

**Courtly Relation:** Married with the daughter of Selim II, Esmihan/İsmihan.

**Rival Factions:** Lala Mustafa Pasha, Siyavuş Pasha, Özdemiroğlu Osman Pasha, Ferhad Pasha

**Patron:** Ayas Pasha (brother), Sokollu Mehmed Pasha (until 1569), Safiye Sultan

**Titles:** Yemen Fatihi (Conqueror of Yemen), Koca (great, elder)

**Amount of property confiscated upon their death:** 624,166 gold pieces in cash plus luxury articles, pearls, jewels, fur that make 1,100,000 gold pieces in total<sup>245</sup>

#### 4) Kanijeli Siyavuş Pasha (1538 – 1602)

**Ethnicity and Origin:** Sources speculate about his origins. While some of them list him as Croatian<sup>246</sup>, others refer him as Hungarian.<sup>247</sup> Lorenzo Bernardo, in his *relazioni* from 1592, mentions the pasha's age as 54. Thus, we can estimate the pasha's birth year as 1538.

**Inner Service (Enderun):** He was *hazine kethüdâsı* (general deputy of the treasure) during the reign of Selim II.

**Outer Service (Birun):** He left the palace service as *mirahor* (master of the horses) and *silahdâr* (armbearer) in 1568, and then became *Yeniçeriağası* (head of the janissaries) in 1569-70. Later, he was appointed to the governor-general post of Rumeli around 1574. Soon, he got the rank of *kubbe* vizier in 1580. His first grand vizierate lasted for 1 year 7 months

<sup>245</sup> Fodor, *The Business of State*, 142; Yılmaz, *Topçular Katibi Abdülkadir (Kadrî) Efendi Tarihi (Metin ve Tahlil) I*, 110; Selaniki Mustafa Efendi, *Tarihi Selaniki (1003-1008/1595-1600) II*, 583–84.

<sup>246</sup> Afyoncu and Önal, *Venedik Elçilik Raporları*, 105; Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmani (6 Cilt)* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1996), 1517.

<sup>247</sup> Sağır, "Mehmed B. Mehmed Er-Rûmî" 22; Erzurum Çoban, "Hadikatü'l Vüzerâ Adlı Eserin Tenkitli Transkripsiyonu" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Erzurum, Atatürk University, 2005), 36.

between January 1583 and 1584. His rank was decreased to the second rank vizier. Then his second term took place between 1586 and 1589, and the third term of grand vizierate was from March 1592 to January 1593.<sup>248</sup>

**Position before the grand vizierate:** *Kubbe* vizier

**Period of Expectancy (*Ma'zûliyet*):** He was out of service between his grand vizierate terms, 1584 to 1586, and 1589 to 1592. After his disposal from the grand vizierate for the third time, he was retired from his duty and idled for 9 more years. Total 14 years of *ma'zûliyet*.

**Courtly Relations:** He married with Fatma Sultan, the daughter of Selim II.

**Rival Faction:** Koca Sinan Pasha's faction

**Patron:** Sultan Selim II<sup>249</sup>

## 5) Özdemiroğlu Osman Pasha (1526 – October 29, 1585)

**Ethnicity and Origin:** Most probably he was a Turk from Dagestan.<sup>250</sup> Some sources refer to him as a Mamluk Circassian.<sup>251</sup>

**Inner Service (Enderun):** He was not a palace recruit. However, we see that he was recorded as an Egyptian *müteferrikâ* and had some small positions in the administration.<sup>252</sup>

**Outer Service (Birun):** Between 1560 and 1563, he was *sancakbeyi* and *hac emini* (supervisor of the pilgrimage) in Egypt to supervise the pilgrimage and their security. Then, he became the governor of Habeş for 7 years. In 1568, he was the governor-general of San'a. Because of factionalist policies he had to return to Istanbul in 1570. In 1571, he was

<sup>248</sup> See *DİA*, s.v. “Siyavuş Paşa, Kanijeli” by Mehmet Ak.

<sup>249</sup> Sağırılı, “Mehmed B. Mehmed Er-Rûmî (Edirneli)'nin Nuhbtetü't-Tevârih ve'l-Ahbâr'ı ve Târîh-i Âl-i Osman'ı (Metinleri, Tahlilleri),” 22.

<sup>250</sup> Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi Cilt 5*, 22.

<sup>251</sup> Selaniki Mustafa Efendi, *Tarihi Selaniki (971-1003/1563-1595) I*, ed. Mehmet İpşirli (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1999), 74; Sağırılı, “Mehmed B. Mehmed Er-Rûmî (Edirneli)'nin Nuhbtetü't-Tevârih ve'l-Ahbâr'ı ve Târîh-i Âl-i Osman'ı (Metinleri, Tahlilleri),” 22.

<sup>252</sup> See *DİA*, s.v. “Osman Paşa, Özdemiroğlu” by Kemal Çiçek.

appointed as the governor-general of Lahsa, and in August 1573 he became Basra *beylerbeyi* for 3 years, and continued his governor-general post in Diyarbekir between June 1576 and mid-1578. Lala Mustafa Pasha asked him to lead the campaign against the Safavids in 1578. Eventually he became commander-in-chief and vizier. He fought on the front for 5 years, until October 1583. On 28 July 1584, he became the grand vizier until his death, 29 October 1585).

**Position before the grand vizierate:** Vizier

**Period of Expectancy (*Ma'zûliyet*):** In 1570, he stayed one year for another position. Total 1 year.

**Rival Faction:** Koca Sinan Pasha's faction

**Patron:** Lala Mustafa Pasha

**Title:** Kafkasya Fatihi (Conqueror of Caucasia)

**Estimated number of his household members:** 1000

#### 6) Hadım Mesih Mehmed Pasha ( ? – 1592)

**Ethnicity and Origin:** His origin is not clear but probably a Slavic recruit. Although some sources suggest that he was 90 years old when he was a grand vizier, which is 1584, it is obviously highly exaggerated.<sup>253</sup>

**Inner Service (Enderun):** He was white eunuch, *akağa*, and *Hazinedarbaşı* (chief of the treasurer) until 1574.

**Outer Service (Birun):** He was assigned as governor-general to Egypt province until 1580. He returned to Istanbul with the rank of *kubbe veziri*. He became a grand vizier on 1

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<sup>253</sup> Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi Cilt 5*, 22.

December 1584 and deposed in 15 Nisan 1586. His deposition was issued by a *Şeyhü'l-islam* Çivizade Mehmed Efendi.<sup>254</sup>

**Position before the grand vizierate:** Fourth rank vizier

**Period of Expectancy (*Ma'zûliyet*):** After his deposal, he did not hold any offices until his death.

**Rival:** *Şeyhü'l-islam* Çivizade Mehmed Efendi

## 7) Serdar Ferhad Pasha (1527 – October 9, 1595)

**Ethnicity and Origin:** Albanian, although Matteo Zane, an Italian diplomat, refers to him as German<sup>255</sup> and Giovonni Moro says the pasha is Serbian.<sup>256</sup> Besides, Lorenzo Bernardo tells he is 65 years old in his reports from 1592. Thus, it is possible to set the birth year as 1527.

**Outer Service (*Birun*):** He left the palace as *kapıcıbaşı* (commander of the doorkeepers) during the last years of Suleiman I. He became *çaşnigir* and *müteferrika* under the patronage of Afife Nurbanu Valide Sultan, mother of Murad III. Later, he was promoted to *büyük imrahorluk* (head of hostlers) position. Then in February 1582, he became the Agha of Janissaries. In the same year, he was appointed as governor-general of Rumeli for a short-term and was promoted to the fourth rank of vizier. Lala Mustafa Pasha assigned him as commander-in-chief for the Safavid campaign around the late 1582 or early 1583. Until 1591, he continued his rank of serdar. In August 1591, he was promoted as a grand vizier but was deposed in a short time, April 1592. After spending two years as *sadaret kaymakamı* (deputy of the grand vizier in his absence), he returned to his grand vizierate post again in February

<sup>254</sup> Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmani (6 Cilt)*, 1087; See *DİA*, s.v. “Mesih Paşa, Hadım” by Şefaattin Deniz.

<sup>255</sup> Afyoncu and Önal, *Venedik Elçilik Raporları*, 178.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

1595. However, it did not last long and he was deposed in July 1595, and soon was executed.<sup>257</sup>

**Position before the grand vizierate:** Serdar as a fourth rank vizier.

**Period of Expectancy (*Ma'zûliyet*):** Ferhad Pasha only idled for a short time after the first deposition from the grand vizierate.

**Rival Faction:** Koca Sinan Pasha's faction

**Patron:** Safiye Sultan

**Amount of property confiscated upon his death:** 50,500 gold coins plus valuables and luxury goods.<sup>258</sup>

**Title:** Fatih-i Memalik-i Acem (Conqueror of the Iranian Realms)

#### 8) Tekeli Lala Mehmed Pasha (? – November 28, 1595)<sup>259</sup>

**Ethnicity and Origin:** Turkish, son of a zeamet owner from Manisa region

**Inner Service (Enderun):** Lala (Murad III and Mehmed III), *divan çavuşu* (member of the staff who were responsible for running the imperial council) of Murad III

**Outer Service (Birun):** Grand vizier (18 November 1595 – 29 November 1595)

**Position before the grand vizierate:** *Divan çavuşu*

**Period of Expectancy (*Ma'zûliyet*):** No idleness was mentioned

**Patron Grand Vizier or Sultan:** Murad III and Mehmed III

<sup>257</sup> See *DİA*, s.v. “Ferhad Paşa” by Mehmet İpşirli.

<sup>258</sup> Fodor, *The Business of State*, 142; Selaniki Mustafa Efendi, *Tarihi Selaniki (1003-1008/1595-1600) II*, 529–30.

<sup>259</sup> Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi Cilt 5*, 25.

## II – Two Portraits of Sinan Pasha<sup>260</sup>



The portrait of Koca Sinan Pasha “Krakow, Biblioteka Jagiellońska (Libri picturati A 15). fol. 6a — copy of the ONB album”

<sup>260</sup> I am very grateful to Prof. Robyn Dora Radway for providing me these two images.





The portrait of Koca Sinan Pasha (right) "Dresden, Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, No. Ca 114 suppl., fol. 1"



