

Amine Sueda Yilmaz

**FROM SULTANIC SHADOW TO CALIPHAL PARTNER:
RECONCEPTUALIZING *VEZARET* (VIZIERATE) DURING THE
REIGN OF SÜLEYMAN I (1520-1566)**

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

Central European University Private University

Vienna

February 2025

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by

Amine Sueda Yılmaz

(Turkey)

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requirements of the Master of Arts degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in

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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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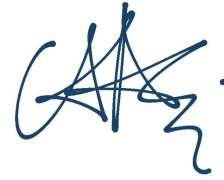
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Author's declaration

I, the undersigned, **Amine Sueda Yilmaz**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies, with a specialization in Interdisciplinary Medieval 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.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the transformation of the Ottoman vizierate during the reign of sultan Süleyman I (1520–1566), focusing on its evolution from a sultanic advisory role to a central governing authority. Through a close reading of key texts produced by scholar-bureaucrats, it demonstrates how concepts such as *meşveret* (consultation), *akl* (reasoning), and *tedbir* (good management) were reinterpreted from abstract ethical ideals into practical governance tools. The study is structured around three main arguments. First, it traces the institutionalization of the vizierate under Süleyman I, showing how the grand vizier was redefined as the sultan’s absolute deputy and the empire’s chief executive institution. Second, it explores the vizierate’s interaction with key Islamic governance concepts, emphasizing the Ottomans’ results-driven approach and their ability to adapt classical ideas to address the challenges of a diverse and dynamic empire. Third, it examines the relationship between *hilafet* (caliphate) and the vizierate, arguing that the redefinition of the caliphate as a sacred and symbolic institution facilitated its expansion into the empire’s de facto executive power. Together, these arguments reveal how the vizierate became a dynamic institution that balanced continuity with innovation, ensuring the empire’s stability during a period of profound transformation. By highlighting the Ottomans’ pragmatism, creative adaptations, and conscious awareness of their historical moment, this thesis contributes to a broader understanding of Ottoman political thought and its enduring relevance in the history of governance. It also opens avenues for further research into the vizierate’s evolution in later periods and its role in the empire’s interactions with other Islamic states.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As this scholarly odyssey finally concludes, I am humbled by the sheer magnitude of support, patience, and kindness that have carried me through what can only be described as an unexpectedly long, winding, and occasionally absurd journey. Much like a medieval quest, this thesis has been filled with unexpected detours, dramatic plot twists, and a fair share of *badireler* (mishaps)—yet, in every hardship, there was ease, often in the form of the incredible individuals who stood by me.

This thesis, which has developed a life of its own (and arguably overstayed its welcome), would not have been possible without your guidance and patience. To my advisors, Tijana Krstic and Günhan Börekçi, I am eternally grateful for your wisdom, encouragement, and the occasional gentle nudge when I needed it most. Your ability to balance scholarly rigor with genuine empathy has been nothing short of miraculous, and I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have learned from you. A heartfelt thanks also goes to dear Christopher Markiewicz, with whom I had the good fortune to collaborate on his project during my undergraduate studies last year. He was not only the external reader of this thesis but also provided invaluable tutoring that facilitated my development as an Ottomanist academic. I would also like to thank Arno Strohmayer at the Austrian Academy of Sciences for giving me the opportunity to participate in the QhoD project, placing his trust in me, and offering a pleasant working environment for a year.

In light of the unjust political circumstances resulting in the closure of Istanbul Şehir University, I am grateful for the invaluable education and mentorship this esteemed institution and its exceptional professors provide. Abdulhamit Kırmızı, Ayşe Başaran, Kahraman Şakul, Engin Deniz Akarlı, and Yunus Uğur, among others, have served as the foundation upon which countless academic journeys have been built.

This journey has not been without its trials. From navigating the challenges of living abroad to enduring economic crises, earthquakes, and the emotional toll of election results, it has been a rollercoaster of emotions. Yet, amidst the chaos, I have been blessed with a chosen family—my beloved “Viyâne.” Fatmanur, Günsu, and Hakan, you have been my sanctuary, my laughter, and my strength. I cannot imagine a future without you, and no words can capture the depth of my gratitude for the love and support you have given me over the years. To my dear friends in Istanbul, Rumeysa and Şevval, your support and our bond have been a source of immense comfort and joy. Life would have been far less colorful without your presence. In Vienna, and especially at CEU, I’ve been fortunate to find a community that feels like home. To Andrea, Andrei, Ataberk, Ayşe Sena, Damla, Gizem, Guillermo, Gulrano, Hazal, Huliya, Joshua, Kristina, Mansur, Merve, Muhammet, Mustafa Berat, Nazime, Nelya, Nurefşan, Rana, Titi, Yiğit, and Yuhao—your friendship has brought so much warmth and meaning to this journey. To the MEDS professors and coordinators, thank you for creating an environment that’s both inclusive and deeply supportive. In a Europe often shaped by monocultural academic networks, our university stands as a powerful example—institutionally and spiritually—of what’s possible.

Finally, to my family—my pillars of love and support—I owe everything. To my dad, whose unwavering belief in me has been a constant source of strength; to my dearest mom, whose warmth and wisdom have carried me through every challenge; to my brother, Ömer, whose steadfast faith and loving support have been a guiding light; and to my sister, Meryem (my very own Marry Potter), whose infectious laughter and ability to bring joy to every moment have been a balm for my soul. And last but certainly not least, to our cat, Poncheek Beg, my ride-or-die companion through countless writing sessions.

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To my dearest grandfather, *matbaacı duayeni* Kadir Ergöktaş,
whom I lost during the early days of my master's studies...

INTRODUCTION

In all realms of life we can identify phenomena of recurrence that secure the condition of possible singularity. But then a difficult question immediately emerges, namely, whether and how these structures of repetition themselves change. In light of this, long-lasting structures of repetition, too, take on the character of singularity by revealing themselves to be alterable, at least in certain situations. And here we encounter the phenomenon that makes history so exciting: not only does the singularity of sudden events seem to bring historical changes with it, but longer-lasting structures that enable changes, but initially appear to be more static, are themselves also subject to change.¹

Reinhart Koselleck's conceptualization of "sedimentations of time" offers a compelling way to understand this phenomenon. He shows that historical structures shift at different speeds, with moments of rapid transformation punctuating slower, subtler changes. This is particularly evident in early modern political literature, where texts that appear timeless adapt to their cultural and ideological surroundings. These works reveal how even deeply rooted ideas are reimagined in response to the time.

One such enduring structure is the vizierate, a cornerstone of Islamic governance. Its evolution exemplifies this interplay between continuity and transformation. Across Islamic empires, the vizierate evolved from a primarily advisory role into an office of significant authority. However, under the Ottoman Sultan Süleyman I (r. 1520–1566), the vizierate reached an unprecedented level of influence and responsibility. During this period, the Ottoman Empire underwent profound changes in political, military, intellectual, cultural, and religious spheres, marking the peak of its imperial maturity. Süleyman's reign signified a deliberate effort to redefine Ottoman sovereignty, blending continuity with innovation to align with the expectations of the sixteenth century.²

¹ Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2018), 6.

² Kaya Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman: Narrating the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman World* (Cambridge [UK] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3-8.

This study focuses on the transformation of the vizierate (*vezaret*) during the reign of sultan Süleyman I. Traditionally viewed as a subordinate advisory role, the vizierate under Süleyman became a central governing authority, a strategic partner to both the caliphate and the sultanate. This shift was not just an expansion of responsibilities but a deliberate reinterpretation of key Islamic principles like *meşveret* (consultation), *akl* (reason), and *tedbir* (strategic management). Süleyman's scholar-bureaucrats reimagined these principles to align the vizierate with the empire's broader imperial vision. By exploring this evolution, my thesis reveals how enduring ideas adapted to changing circumstances, positioning the vizierate as an active partner in shaping Ottoman sovereignty during a transformative era.

The transformation of the vizierate during Süleyman I's reign unfolded alongside significant intellectual and cultural shifts in the Ottoman Empire. One of the most striking developments was the "Ottomanization" of Islamic scholarship—adapting Arabic and Persian traditions into Ottoman Turkish.³ Termed the "century of translations" by Sariyanis, this period saw not only a surge in translated works but also a rise in original productions, including encyclopedic compilations, political treatises, and advice books.⁴ As Özgür Kavak notes, the structural transformation of intellectual activity during Süleyman's reign reflected the empire's broader imperial vision.⁵ In the same article, Kavak; categorizes the types of translations I examined in this thesis as free-style translations (*serbest tercümeler*).⁶ However, I am not entirely convinced that this classification fully captures the nature of these translations. Ottoman authors did not merely translate these works freely; rather, they enriched them with numerous additions, reinterpreted key points in a highly creative manner,

³ Hüseyin Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), 96.

⁴ Marinos Sariyannis, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought up to the Early Nineteenth Century* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019), 47.

⁵ Özgür Kavak, "Osmanlı Türkçesine Tercüme Edilen Siyaset Düşüncesi Eserlerinin Tercüme Usul ve Tasarrufları," *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 64, no. 64 (2023): 8–9, <https://doi.org/10.15370/maruiid.1289921>.

⁶ Kavak, "Osmanlı Türkçesine Tercüme Edilen Siyaset Düşüncesi Eserlerinin Tercüme Usul ve Tasarrufları," 13–14, 16, 18.

and, through this transformative process, granted the texts new identities. For this reason, instead of referring to these resulting texts as free-style translations, I find it more appropriate to define them as adaptation-translation. This term better reflects the fact that these texts were not merely transferred into Ottoman political thought but actively adapted, reshaped, and integrated into its intellectual landscape. By emphasizing adaptation over translation, I aim to highlight the dynamic and creative process through which these works became part of the Ottoman political thought tradition. Scholar-bureaucrats, described by Abdurrahman Atçıl, played a crucial role in this process, blending their administrative duties with intellectual contributions.⁷ Their writings and adaptation-translations provide a rich basis for understanding how governance concepts evolved in response to the empire's needs and ambitions.

Initially, my research focused on *meşveret* (consultation), where rulers sought advice from their advisors.⁸ However, further investigation revealed that *vezaret* (the vizierate) required more profound attention. Frequently associated with *meşveret*, the vizierate emerged as a central institution in early modern Ottoman governance, rivaling the sultanate and caliphate in importance. During Süleyman's reign, the vizierate underwent significant expansion, gaining both authority and responsibility.⁹ The growing sophistication of intellectual discourse surrounding the vizierate underscored its pivotal role in shaping Ottoman governance. This study addresses critical questions about the vizierate's transformation during Süleyman I's reign. How did the vizierate evolve from a sultanic advisory office into a central governing authority under Süleyman I, reflecting a unique Ottoman synthesis of Islamic political principles and imperial ambition? How was it

⁷ Abdurrahman Atçıl, *Scholars and Sultans in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: University Press, 2016), 5-8. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316819326>.

⁸ B. Lewis, "Mashwara," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill, 2012), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/mashwara-SIM_5010.

⁹ Hüseyin Yılmaz, "The Sultan and the Sultanate: Envisioning Rulership in the Age of Süleymân the Lawgiver (1520-1566)" (PhD., Boston, University of Harvard, 2005), 274.

discussed within the broader framework of Ottomanized Islamic political thought? What expectations did the Ottoman ruling elite have for the vizierate, and how did its role converge or diverge from that of the sultanate? By exploring these questions, this research aims to illuminate the evolving role of the vizierate in defining the political and administrative character of the Ottoman Empire during one of its most transformative periods.

State of the Art

The study of the early modern Ottoman vizierate has long been shaped by a rich but fragmented body of scholarship, with significant contributions focusing on individual grand viziers and their roles within the empire's political and administrative structures. However, a comprehensive conceptual analysis of the vizierate's transformation—particularly during the reign of Süleyman I—remains an underexplored area. To situate this research within the broader historiography, it is essential to begin with Marinos Sariyannis' *A History of Ottoman Political Thought up to the Early Nineteenth Century*. Although the vizierate itself is not the central focus of Sariyannis' work, I believe it is essential to begin with this study because it stands as the most comprehensive examination of the history of Ottoman political thought. Sariyannis' meticulous analysis of primary sources—from advice literature to philosophical treatises—provides a foundational framework for understanding Ottoman governance's intellectual and institutional evolution. By reconstructing the broader contours of political ideas and their transformations, his work offers critical insights into the conceptual underpinnings of Ottoman institutions, including the vizierate. This makes it an indispensable starting point for any study exploring the vizierate's role within the Ottoman political system.

When I began exploring the early modern Ottoman vizierate, it became clear that its transformation had yet to be thoroughly studied as a concept. While there are instances of Ottoman political thought being examined from a conceptual perspective, this approach is

still limited in scope.¹⁰ Hüseyin Yılmaz's Ph.D. thesis, *The Sultan and the Sultanate: Envisioning Rulership in the Age of Süleymân the Lawgiver (1520–1566)*, offers valuable insights into the vizierate's role during Süleyman I's reign. In particular, the fourth chapter, "The Vizierate and the Ottoman Government," stands out for its theoretical depth and use of diverse primary sources. Yılmaz explores the philosophical foundations of the vizierate and its evolving function within the Ottoman political structure, laying the necessary groundwork for conceptual studies in this field.¹¹

Beyond Yılmaz's contributions, studies on prominent grand viziers provide essential historical and contextual understanding. One such work is Theoharis Stavrides' *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelovic (1453–1474)*. Stavrides examines Mahmud Pasha's rise to prominence under Mehmed II, situating his career within the broader framework of Ottoman expansion following the conquest of Constantinople. By highlighting Mahmud Pasha's influence on governance and reforms, this study captures the complexities of the vizierate's role during a pivotal period in Ottoman history.¹² Ebru Turan's dissertation, *The Sultan's Favorite: İbrahim Pasha and the Making of Ottoman Universal Sovereignty in the Reign of Sultan Süleyman (1516–1526)*, shifts the focus to İbrahim Pasha, arguably the most influential vizier of Süleyman's reign. Turan explores İbrahim Pasha's ascent to power, diplomatic achievements, and role in defining Ottoman imperial ambitions. Her research not only details his contributions but also reflects on the challenges he faced, including the eventual decline that culminated in his execution. Turan's work underscores the intricate balance between personal ambition and

¹⁰ Alp Eren Topal and Einar Wigen, "Ottoman Conceptual History: Challenges and Prospects," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 14, no. 1 (2019): 93–114, <https://doi.org/10.3167/choc.2019.140105>; Einar Wigen, "Ottoman Concepts of Empire," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 8, no. 1 (2013): 44–66, <https://doi.org/10.3167/choc.2013.080103>; Hüseyin Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought*.

¹¹ Hüseyin Yılmaz, "The Sultan and the Sultanate: Envisioning Rulership in the Age of Süleymân the Lawgiver (1520–1566)" (PhD., Boston, University of Harvard, 2005), 274–383.

¹² Theoharis Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelović (1453–1474)* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2001).

institutional reform within the vizierate.¹³ Zahit Atçıl's dissertation, *State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire: The Grand Vizierates of Rüstem Pasha (1544–1561)*, extends the analysis to Rüstem Pasha's tenure. Atçıl focuses on Rüstem Pasha's administrative and diplomatic activities, providing detailed insights into the vizierate's development during this period.¹⁴ Although Atçıl does not directly compare Rüstem Pasha with İbrahim Pasha, the availability of comprehensive studies on both viziers offers a broader lens through which to analyze Süleyman's reign.

While these studies delve into individual viziers, Lütü Pasha (d. 1564) has received less comprehensive attention despite his significant contributions. His treatise, *Asafname* (The Book of Asaf), is a cornerstone of Ottoman political thought, offering practical and philosophical reflections on governance, specifically on the duties of viziers. Scholars have examined his role as both an intellectual and a statesman, emphasizing his influence on Sunni confession-building and his broader contributions to Ottoman administrative practices. Despite these valuable discussions, a full-fledged study dedicated to Lütü Pasha's life and intellectual legacy remains absent. Together, these works highlight the vizierate's dual role as a practical governing body and a site of scholarly production. They provide the foundation for this thesis, which aims to bridge the gap in understanding how the vizierate was redefined during Süleyman I's reign, transforming it from a sultanic tool into a caliphal partner and a central institution of Ottoman governance.¹⁵

¹³ Ebru Turan, "The Sultan's Favorite: İbrahim Pasha and Making of Ottoman Universal Sovereignty in the Reign of Sultan Süleyman (1516-1526)" (PhD., Chicago, The University of Chicago, 2007).

¹⁴ Zahit Atçıl, "State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire: The Grand Vizierates of Rüstem Pasha (1544-1561)" (PhD., Chicago, The, 2015).

¹⁵ Ebru Turan, "The Marriage of İbrahim Pasha (ca. 1495-1536)," *Turcica (Paris)* 41 (2009): 3–36, <https://doi.org/10.2143/TURC.41.0.2049287>; Asım Cüneyd Köksal, "Bir İslâm Âlimi Olarak Lütü Paşa," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 50, no. 50 (October 16, 2017): 29–72, <https://doi.org/10.18589/oa.591625>; Özgür Kavak, "Halâsü'l-ümme'den Necâtü'l-ümme'ye -Osmanlı Siyaset Düşüncesinin Süreklilik Arz Eden Meselelerine Dair Birkaç Not-," *Divan: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi* 27, no. 52 (2022): 27–70, <https://doi.org/10.20519/divan.1012117>; Tijana Krstic, "A Catechizing Grand Vizier-Lütü Pasha (d.1562/63) and the Politics of Sunni Confession Building in the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Empire," n.d.

Sources

The sources for this thesis were strategically selected to address the vizierate's transformation under Süleyman I, reflecting both theoretical and practical dimensions of governance in a well-rounded and comprehensive manner. Adaptation-translations of Arabic and Persian texts into Ottoman Turkish were included to explore the Ottomanization of Islamic political thought, while original treatises by scholar-bureaucrats provide firsthand insights into administrative practices. This study ensures a representative and nuanced perspective by incorporating works from various levels of the ruling elite. Practical considerations, such as the availability of modern editions and manuscript reliability, further guided the selection, enabling a balanced and thorough analysis.

One of the central sources of this study is *Mevahibü'l-hallak fî meratibi'l-ahlak* (*Talents Bestowed by the Creator in the Levels of Ethics*) by Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi (d. 1567).¹⁶ Having served as imperial chancellor for over two decades during Süleyman I's reign, Celalzade's firsthand proximity to imperial councils lends unique credibility to his work.¹⁷ This text, an adaptation-translation of Hüseyin Vaiz Kaşifi's *Ahlak-ı Muhsini* (*The Muhsinian Ethics*), exemplifies the Ottomanization of Islamic political thought.¹⁸ The availability of a modern edition of the Persian original enables comparative analysis, while portions of the Ottoman Turkish manuscript, transcribed for this research, further expand its relevance. In addition to Celalzade's work, *Lata'if al-afkar wa kashif al-asrar* (*Fine Thoughts and Revealer of Secrets*) by Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan (d. 1540?) provides an encyclopedic overview dedicated to Grand Vizier İbrahim Pasha. This text reflects the intellectual

¹⁶Celalzade Mustafa, *Mevâhibü'l- hallâk fî merâtibi'l-ahlâk*, MS, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Fatih 3521.

¹⁷ Christine Woodhead, "Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE* (Brill, November 1, 2017), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/celalzade-mustafa-celebi-COM_32041?lang=en.

¹⁸ Hüseyin Vaiz Kaşifi, *Ahlak-ı Muhsini*, trans. Murat Demirkol (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2019).

environment of Süleyman's early reign.¹⁹ Similarly, *Tercüme-i nasihat al-mülük* (*The Translation of Advices for Kings*)²⁰, a translation of Al-Ghazali's *Nasihat al-mülük* (*Advices for Kings*)²¹ by Muallimzade Ahmed Edhemi, offers perspectives relevant to Süleyman's later years. This work, dedicated to Rüstem Pasha, Süleyman's longest-serving grand vizier, provides valuable insights into governance philosophies tailored to the period's administrative realities.

Two sixteenth-century Ottoman translations of the Mamluk treatise *al-Durra al-gharra fi nasiha al-salatin wa al-qudat wa al-umara* (*The White Pearl of Advice to the Sultans, Judges, and Governors*) also play a significant role in this research.²² Abdüsselam El-Amasi's *Tuhfetü'l-Ümera ve Minhätü'l-Vüzera* (*A Gift for Statesmen and an Offering for Viziers*) introduces the treatise to the Ottoman intellectual milieu, reflecting early conceptualizations of governance during Süleyman's reign.²³ Later, İbn-i Firuz's translation, *Gurretü'l beyzâ* (*In the Light of Justice*), written by a scholar closely connected to the Ottoman ulema and central bureaucracy, demonstrates evolving administrative and ideological perspectives within the empire.²⁴

Grand Vizier Lütü Pasha's *Asafname* (*Asaf's Book*) is another foundational source in this study. This treatise provides a practical and philosophical reflection on governance, capturing both the time's administrative principles and political ethos.²⁵ Additionally, Fevri Ahmed Efendi's *Ahlak-ı Süleymani* (*The Moral Qualities of Süleyman*) offers a unique

¹⁹ Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan, *Leta'ifu'l-Efkar: Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan'ın Siyasetnamesi*, trans. Özgür Kavak (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2018).

²⁰ Muallimzade Ahmed Efendi, *Tercüme-i Nasihatü'l-Mülük: Gazali'nin Siyasetnamesinin Osmanlı Dönemi Tercümesi*, trans. Göker İnan (Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2022).

²¹ İmam-ı Gazali, *Nasihatü'l-Mülük: Mülkün Sultanlarına...*, trans. Osman Şekerci (Istanbul: Büyüyenay Yayınları, 2020).

²² Mahmud b. İsmail El-Hayrbeyti, *ed-Dürretü'l-Garra fi Nasihati's-Selatin ve'l-Kudat ve'l-Ümera: Adalet Gerdanlığı; Sultan, Kadı ve Emirlere Nasihatler*, trans. Müddesir Emir and Ümit Döngel (Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2022).

²³ Abdüsselam El-Amasi, *Tuhfetü'l-Ümera ve Minhätü'l-Vüzera* (Istanbul: Büyüyenay Yayınları, 2012).

²⁴ İbn-i Firuz, *Gurretü'l-Beyzâ: Adaletin Aydınlığında*, ed. Mücahit Kaçar (Istanbul: Büyüyenay Yayınları, 2012).

²⁵ Lütü Paşa, *Lütü Paşa Asafnamesi*, trans. Mübahat Kütükoğlu (Istanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Basımevi, 1991).

perspective on the moral and administrative ideals associated with Süleyman I's rule, further contextualizing the vizierate's evolving role.²⁶

Finally, *Adab al-khilafa wa asbab al-hisafa* (*Manners of the Caliphate and Reasons of Good Judgement*), a treatise commissioned directly by Süleyman I, provides critical insights into the ideological framework of the caliphate and vizierate during one of the Ottoman Empire's most transformative periods.²⁷

By including adaptation-translations of Arabic and Persian texts, such as *Mevahibü'l-hallak fi meratibi'l-ahlak* and *Tercüme-i nasihat al-mülük*, the study highlights the Ottomanization of Islamic political thought, demonstrating how traditional concepts were reinterpreted to suit the empire's imperial vision. Original treatises like *Asafname* and *Ahlak-ı Süleymani* offer firsthand reflections on governance, capturing the vizierate's evolving role as both a governing body and a site of intellectual production. Works commissioned by Süleyman I, such as *Adab al-khilafa wa Asbab al-hisafa*, provide critical insights into the ideological framework of the caliphate and vizierate, emphasizing their interconnectedness. These primary sources, spanning Süleyman's reign and representing diverse voices—from scholar-bureaucrats to grand viziers—ensure a comprehensive analysis of the vizierate's transformation.

Methodology

In this thesis, I employ a dual methodological framework that combines Reinhart Koselleck's conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*) with Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism to examine the transformation of the Ottoman *vezaret* (vizierate) during Süleyman

²⁶ Büşra Topuz, "Fevri Ahmed Efendi, *Ahlak-ı Süleymani* (38b-135a) (İnceleme-Metin)" (Master Thesis, Edirne, Trakya Üniversitesi, 2019).

²⁷ İbrahim b. Muhammed, *Adabu'l-Hilafe ve Esbabu'l-Hisafe: Devlet ve İnsan, Siyasetin İlkeleri, Yöneticilerin Vasıfları*, trans. Hayrullah Acar (İstanbul: Büyüyenay Yayınları, 2016).

I's reign. These approaches provide valuable tools for understanding the dynamic interplay between concepts and institutions in early modern governance.

Reinhart Koselleck's conceptual history focuses on how concepts evolve over time, acting as "sedimentations of history" that accumulate layers of meaning. By applying this perspective, I analyze the vizierate as a concept deeply rooted in Islamic political tradition yet reshaped during Süleyman's reign by the era's unique political and intellectual challenges. Koselleck's notion of "threshold periods" (*Schwellenzeiten*) is particularly useful for framing Süleyman's reign as a transformative moment—a time when foundational ideas such as *meşveret* (consultation), *tedbir* (strategic management), and *vezaret* (vizierate) itself acquired new ideological significance. These concepts were not merely passive reflections of historical changes; they actively influenced the structures and practices of Ottoman imperial governance.

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism complements Koselleck's historical approach by emphasizing the relational and multi-voiced nature of meaning-making. Through this lens, I view the vizierate not as a fixed institution but as a dynamic and contested space where various voices—scholar-bureaucrats, political elites, and imperial ideologues—converged and debated its role. This perspective enables me to consider the vizierate as a site of dialogue, where competing visions of governance were articulated and negotiated. Bakhtin's concept of "polyphony" is particularly relevant for analyzing my primary sources, such as Celalzade's writings and translated mirrors for princes. These texts are far from monolithic; they embody a rich interplay of voices and ideas, each contributing to a broader conversation about governance during Süleyman's reign. By engaging with these sources through a dialogic framework, I uncover the layers of ideological and practical tensions that shaped the Ottoman vizierate.

Structure

Chapter I traces the historical and conceptual foundations of the vizierate, arguing that its institutionalization under Süleyman I was a deliberate reimagining of Islamic political traditions to meet the administrative and ideological needs of an expanding empire. By elevating the grand vizier to an autonomous and centralized position within the bureaucracy, Süleyman I redefined him as the sultan's absolute deputy, effectively transforming the vizierate into the empire's chief executive institution. This shift reflected the practical demands of governing a vast and diverse empire. It marked a significant departure from earlier Islamic governance models, as the vizierate became a complement to the sultanate and caliphate.

Chapter II explores the vizierate's interaction with key Islamic governance concepts—*meşveret* (consultation), *akl* (reasoning), and *tedbir* (good management)—demonstrating how these ideas were adapted from abstract ethical ideals into practical tools for governance. These concepts became integral to the vizierate's function through scholar-bureaucrats' writings, ensuring stability and legitimacy in a diverse and dynamic empire. The chapter highlights the pragmatism of Ottoman authors, who reinterpreted classical Islamic ideas to address the empire's administrative challenges, reflecting a shift from theoretical ethics to actionable statecraft.

Finally, Chapter III examines the relationship between the caliphate and the vizierate, arguing that the redefinition of the caliphate under Süleyman I facilitated the vizierate's expansion into the empire's de facto executive power. By positioning himself as a sacred and symbolic caliph, Süleyman I delegated practical governance to the grand vizierate, creating a dual structure of authority that ensured the empire's stability and continuity. The chapter emphasizes the practicality of this arrangement, showing how the caliphate-vizierate relationship was not just an ideological construct but a functional mechanism for managing

the empire's vast and diverse territories. These chapters reveal how the vizierate became a dynamic institution that balanced continuity with innovation, shaping Ottoman governance during one of its most transformative periods.

CHAPTER I: TRACING THE HISTORICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE OTTOMAN *VEZARET* (VIZIERATE) IN THE SULEYMANIC ERA (1520-1566)

After the sultanate and caliphate, *vezaret*²⁸ (vizierate) emerged as one of Islamic governance's most conceptually and practically significant elements. Its intellectual depth and political relevance have been extensively debated from the early Islamic period to the twentieth century. However, the role and influence of the vizier have varied widely depending on historical and political contexts. This chapter begins by tracing the origins and foundational development of the vizierate within early Islamic governance, examining its theoretical and practical underpinnings. It then explores the key turning points in the vizierate's evolution, leading to its institutionalization and adaptation in the Ottoman Empire. Finally, the chapter focuses on how the concept of the vizierate transformed during the reign of Süleyman I, a period marked by significant Ottomanization and the reinterpretation of Islamic political ideology, while situating these changes within the broader scholarly discourse.

1.1. Origins and Foundations of *Vezaret* (Vizierate) in Early Islamic Governance

The term *vezir* (vizier)²⁹ has several proposed origins. One theory traces its roots to the Persian Sassanid administrative system, which was later adapted and Arabicized. Another

²⁸ The title for the position is *vezir* (vizier) in Turkish, while the office of vezir is called *vezaret* (vizierate).

²⁹ Turkish form of *wazir*

theory suggests that the term is inherently Arabic, as it appears in the Quran. Specifically, the thirty-fifth verse of Surah al-Furqan refers to Aaron as Moses' "wazir,"³⁰ which comes from the Arabic root "v-z-r," meaning "one who is burdened"³¹ or "an assistant."³² In the context of the Quran, the vizier is depicted as a supportive figure. However, during the Abbasid Caliphate, the term's meaning evolved to signify a role that contained executive and representative authority, combining the functions of a counselor and an administrator.³³ Fatih Yahya Ayaz further emphasizes that the term is documented in early Arabic dictionaries and sources on institutional history. These lexicons indicate that the word originates from the Arabic roots "vezer" (which means place of refuge), "vizr" (referring to a heavy burden or sin), and "ezr" (denoting strength or power). These linguistic nuances capture the various meanings associated with the vizier's role, reflecting the significant responsibilities and authority that the position has historically embodied.³⁴ Scholars like Zahit Atçıl argue that while the vizierate was rooted in early Islamic principles, its administrative and financial duties were influenced by pre-Islamic Persian traditions.³⁵

Beyond its meanings and origins, the historical evolution of the term "vizier" into a political institution is a complex process. While the position was first formalized within the Abbasid bureaucracy, administrative practices resembling the vizierate can be traced back to the Prophet Muhammad's (d. 632) era.³⁶ Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) observes that Abu Bakr acted as a vizier to the Prophet, and during the Rashidun Caliphate, each successor served as a vizier in a political sense for the preceding caliph. However, these roles lacked formal

³⁰ "Surah Al-Furqan - 35," Quran.com, accessed May 18, 2024, <https://quran.com/al-furqan>.

³¹ Mehmet Fuat Köprülü, "Vezir," in *İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1986), 314-315.

³² "We certainly gave Moses the Book and appointed his brother Aaron as his helper / وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَجَعَلْنَا مَعَهُ أَخَاهُ هَارُونَ وَزِيرًا" from "Surah Al-Furqan - 35."

³³ Fatih Yahya Ayaz, "Abbasier'den Mısır'da Kurulan Hanedanlara Vezirlik Müessesesi," *İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 28 (2012): 118.

³⁴ Fatih Yahya Ayaz, "Vezir," in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, accessed March 12, 2024, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/vezir>.

³⁵ Zahit Atçıl, "State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire: The Grand Vizierates of Rüstem Pasha (1544-1561)" (PhD., Chicago, The, 2015), 187-188.

³⁶ Köprülü, "Vezir."

institutionalization, and the vizierate as a structured office did not emerge until the Abbasid period.³⁷

The transformation of the vizierate into a political institution occurred during the reign of Caliph Mahdi (r. 775–785), when Yaq'ub b. Dawud (d. 803) became the first to officially hold the title of vizier.³⁸ From this point, the vizierate was established as the highest-ranking position after the caliph or sultan, becoming a cornerstone of Islamic political governance.³⁹ Ayaz's article also includes an evaluation by Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406). Ibn Khaldun was a 14th-century Tunisian historian and political theorist, widely recognized as a pioneer of historiography and social theory.⁴⁰ Ibn Khaldun attributes this institutionalization to the Abbasids' shift from a traditional caliphate to a monarchy. Fatih Yahya Ayaz, however, argues that the Abbasids transformed the caliphate into a more symbolic and religious office, delegating the practical aspects of governance to the vizierate.⁴¹ In this framework, the vizier took critical executive responsibilities, allowing the caliph to embody a spiritual and symbolic role while the vizier became the central figure in managing state affairs. This transformation is exemplified by the Abbasid viziers, especially the Barmakids, who played a crucial role in political governance while also serving as patrons of culture and intellectual life and regulating religious affairs.⁴² At certain points in the Abbasid era, the vizierate became so influential that caliphs relied on it to secure their positions, firmly establishing the institution as a fully organized and sanctioned political authority rather than a mere advisory role. The 11th-century political thinker Abu al-Hasan Al-Mawardi (d. 1058) further explores the significance of the vizierate in his treatise *al-Ahkam as-sultaniyyah* (The Laws of Islamic

³⁷ Ayaz, "Vezir."

³⁸ S. D. Goitein, "The Origin Of The Vizierate And Its True Character," *Islamic Culture* 16, no. 4 (1942): 382.

³⁹ Matthew B. Ingalls, "Vizier," in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, ed. Gerhard Bowering (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013).

⁴⁰ Süleyman Uludağ, "İbn Haldun," in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı), accessed January 16, 2025, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ibn-haldun>.

⁴¹ Ayaz, "Abbasier'den Mısır'da Kurulan Hanedanlara Vezirlik Müessesesi."

⁴² Anne-Marie Eddé et al., "Wazīr," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill, April 24, 2012), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/wazir-COM_1346?lang=de.

Governance). Al-Mawardi categorizes the office into two types: viziers of delegation, who possessed extensive authority and acted as deputies to the ruler, and viziers of execution, whose duties were limited to specific administrative tasks.⁴³ Although this distinction was not consistently applied, it provides an important framework for understanding viziers' varying roles and influence across Islamic states.

Following the Abbasid period, the vizierate evolved across different Islamic states, although, in some cases, its influence diminished. Under the Tulunids and Ikhshidids in Egypt, viziers held bureaucratic roles but wielded limited power, as these states remained tributary to the Abbasids.⁴⁴ In contrast, the Fatimids expanded the vizierate by dividing it into two branches: the *vezaret*, which conferred broad, nearly sultanic powers, and the *vesata*, which restricted the vizier's role to more limited administrative functions.⁴⁵ This structure closely mirrors Al-Mawardi's classification of delegation and execution.⁴⁶ During the later Fatimid era, some viziers held extraordinary authority, often surpassing the caliphs in power. Notably, non-Muslims were frequently appointed to these positions, demonstrating the Fatimids' pragmatic approach to governance. However, this concentration of power led to tensions, as seen with Saladin Ayyubi (r. 1171–1193), who abolished the vizierate entirely in the Ayyubid state he established in Egypt. The Mamluks, who succeeded the Ayyubids, retained the vizierate but significantly limited its political influence.⁴⁷ Consequently, during the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods, the vizierate did not regain the same level of authority it had enjoyed under the Abbasids and Fatimids, except in rare instances.

Viziers played vital administrative and advisory roles in Muslim Turkic states, including the Karahanids, Ghaznavids, Great Seljuks, and Seljuks of Rum. They oversaw

⁴³ Ali b. Muhammed Mawardi, *Al-Ahkam as-Sultaniyyah: The Laws of Islamic Governance* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1996), 37, 41-42.

⁴⁴ Ayaz, "Abbasier'den Mısır'da Kurulan Hanedanlara Vezirlik Müessesesi," 129, 131-132; Ayaz, *Memlükler Döneminde Vezirlik (1250-1517)*, 29-32.

⁴⁵ Ayaz, "Abbasier'den Mısır'da Kurulan Hanedanlara Vezirlik Müessesesi," 134.

⁴⁶ Mawardi, *Al-Ahkam as-Sultaniyyah*, 41-42.

⁴⁷ Fatih Yahya Ayaz, *Memlükler Döneminde Vezirlik (1250-1517)* (Istanbul: İSAM Yayınları, 2017), 231-235; Eddé et al., "Wazir,"

councils, supervised government departments, represented the sultan in diplomatic matters, and managed military and judicial affairs. Viziers were appointed for their merit or noble lineage, and ceremonial regalia, like seals, symbolized their authority. Many came from established Persian families known for their vizierial roles.⁴⁸ Despite challenges from ambitious nobles, they played a crucial role in governance and maintained significant influence.⁴⁹ S. D. Goitein notes that Turkish and Mongol rulers, who were often unfamiliar with the language and culture of their subjects, heavily relied on qualified viziers to govern effectively.⁵⁰ For instance, Nizam Al-Mulk (d. 1092), the renowned Seljuk vizier, warned against rulers completely withdrawing from political involvement, advocating for a collaborative relationship between rulers and viziers to ensure efficient administration.⁵¹

The vizierate experienced significant changes during the Ilkhanid and Timurid periods. Under the Ilkhanids, power was often shared among multiple viziers, including Iranian bureaucrats and Mongol emirs, which led to internal rivalries and corruption. By the Timurid era, the focus of the vizierate had shifted more towards financial administration, although it lost much of its earlier influence. In contrast, the Safavid vizierate regained prominence during Shah Abbas I's reign (r. 1587–1629), with viziers occupying key administrative positions and represented by symbols like the gold seal. However, their authority was frequently undermined by corruption, internal discord, and periodic executions.⁵²

This chapter has so far traced the vizierate's development before the Ottoman period, highlighting its transformation across various Islamic states. The discussion now turns to the duties and qualifications of viziers, drawing insights from two key medieval Islamic texts:

⁴⁸ Atçıl, "State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire," 193.

⁴⁹ Özeydin, "Müslüman Türk Devletlerinde Vezirlik."

⁵⁰ Goitein, "The Origin Of The Vizierate And Its True Character," 392.

⁵¹ Goitein, "The Origin Of The Vizierate And Its True Character," 392; Ingalls, "Vizier," 590.

⁵² Osman Gazi Özgüdenli, "Vezir: İlhanlılar, Timurlular, Safeviler," in TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı), accessed March 13, 2024, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/vezir>.

Al-Mawardi's *al-Ahkam as-sultaniyyah* (The Laws of Islamic Governance)⁵³ and Nizam Al-Mulk's *Siyasetname* (Book of Politics).⁵⁴ Nizam Al-Mulk's *Siyasetname* emphasizes the importance of harmony, transparency, and collaboration between the ruler and vizier, presenting parables and advice that underscore these themes. While examining the vizierate, the text serves as a cautionary guide for rulers, warning of the risks of detachment from governance, indulgence in pleasure, and the over-delegation of responsibilities to viziers. Nizam Al-Mulk argues that effective governance relies on an active and engaged ruler who works closely with the vizier in a balanced and cooperative relationship.⁵⁵ Al-Mawardi complements this perspective by categorizing viziers into two types: viziers of delegation, who wield extensive authority and act as deputies to the ruler, and viziers of execution, whose responsibilities are confined to specific administrative tasks.⁵⁶ These texts provide a theoretical framework for understanding the vizierate's evolving role.

The chapter also considers the broader historical shifts in the vizierate's structure and influence. Zahir Atçıl notes that as Abbasid authority declined, the power of the vizierate shifted to Turkic and Mongol states, where it adapted to new political contexts.⁵⁷ Hüseyin Yılmaz highlights the institutional diversity of the vizierate among early-modern Muslim dynasties, noting significant variations in its organization. For example, the Safavid vizierate lacked the structural clarity of its Ottoman counterpart.⁵⁸ These differences illustrate the adaptability of the vizierate and its capacity to evolve in response to changing political and administrative demands throughout Islamic history.

⁵³ Mawardi, *Al-Ahkam as-Sultaniyyah*.

⁵⁴ Nizamü'l-Mülk, *Siyasetname*, trans. Mehmet Taha Ayar (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2009), 29-39.

⁵⁵ Nizamü'l-Mülk, *Siyasetname*, 29-39.

⁵⁶ Mawardi, *Al-Ahkam as-Sultaniyyah*, 37-?.

⁵⁷ Atçıl, "State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire," 191-192.

⁵⁸ Hüseyin Yılmaz, "The Sultan and the Sultanate: Envisioning Rulership in the Age of Süleymân the Lawgiver (1520-1566)" (PhD., Boston, University of Harvard, 2005), 282.

1.2. Early Modern History of the Ottoman *Vezaret* (Vizierate)

The history of the vizierate in the Ottoman Empire is almost as old as the history of the empire itself. Orhan Bey (r. 1324–1362), the second ruler of the Ottoman state and the son of Osman Bey (r. 1302–1324), made the first appointments to the office of vizierate. Alaaddin Pasha (d. 1333) became the first Ottoman vizier under Orhan Bey, marking the beginning of an institution that would evolve into the administrative backbone of the empire.⁵⁹ Over time, the grand vizierate absorbed influences from Islamic political thought, such as Al-Mawardi's and Nizam al-Mulk's frameworks, adapting them to Ottoman governance.⁶⁰ Most viziers came from the *ulema* class during this early period and shared similarities with their predecessors in earlier Islamic states. Educated in the pre-Ottoman madrasa tradition, many viziers had backgrounds as *kadis* (judges) and *kadiaskers* (military judges). This scholarly foundation not only indicates their administrative competence but also aligned with Islamic ideals of justice and accountability, which were integral to the institution's legitimacy. Their association with a respected and learned class helped enhance the legitimacy of the Ottoman dynasty in the eyes of their subjects and neighboring Turcoman principalities.⁶¹ In what follows, unless otherwise specified, the term “vizierate” will refer specifically to the Ottoman institution of the grand vizierate. This distinction is essential for maintaining clarity when discussing the role of the highest-ranking official in the bureaucracy after the sultan, both in pre-Ottoman and Ottoman contexts.⁶²

⁵⁹ Stavrides, “Ottoman Imperial Ideology and the Office of Vezir,” 51.

⁶⁰ Yasir Yılmaz, “‘From Theory to Practice’ Origins of the Ottoman Grand Vizierate and the Köprülü Restoration: A New Research Framework for the Office of the Grand Vizier,” *Review of Middle East Studies* 57, no. 1 (2023): 23, <https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2024.19>.

⁶¹ Cenk Reyhan, “Osmanlı Devleti’nde Siyasal İktidar Ve Seyfiyye Sınıfı: Vezir-i A’zamlık Örneği,” *OTAM Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi* 31 (2012): 214-215, https://doi.org/10.1501/OTAM_0000000595; Atçıl, “State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire,” 196, 198-200.

⁶² Stavrides, “Ottoman Imperial Ideology and the Office of Vezir,” in *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelović (1453-1474)* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001), 52-53.

Before the Ottoman Empire, the title of vizier was held by a single individual who served as the highest-ranking bureaucrat after the sultan or caliph, assisting the ruler in state administration. The Ottomans introduced an innovation by appointing multiple viziers simultaneously, each with specific responsibilities, setting the stage for the grand vizierate as a central Ottoman institution.⁶³ This adaptation reflected a blend of pre-Ottoman Islamic traditions and the administrative needs of a rapidly expanding state, distinguishing the Ottoman vizierate from its predecessors. This development led to the transformation of the title of vizier into “grand vizier,” with the institution referred to as *vezir-i azam*. Unlike other Islamic empires, such as the Safavids and Mughals, the Ottoman grand vizierate demonstrated a higher degree of institutional centralization and autonomy, especially under later figures like the Köprülü family, who exemplified its potential as the executive center of governance.⁶⁴ While the exact origins of this practice remain unclear, Stavrides suggests that it was likely first implemented by the Ottomans. Murad II (r. 1421–1451) is the earliest sultan known to have appointed three or four viziers concurrently.⁶⁵

The structural shift in the Ottoman vizierate did not occur in isolation; rather, it built upon existing pre-Ottoman Islamic administrative traditions, adapting them to the needs of an expanding empire.⁶⁶ Mehmed II’s reforms were pivotal in this respect.⁶⁷ During his reign, the empire fundamentally changed from a loosely structured polity into a centralized bureaucratic state.⁶⁸ The sweeping reforms he implemented after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 were not merely administrative adjustments; they represented a redefinition of sultanic

⁶³ Gabor Agoston, “Grand Vizier,” in *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Gabor Agoston and Bruce Masters (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2009), 235-236.

⁶⁴ Yılmaz, “From Theory to Practice,” 16-17.

⁶⁵ Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs*, 51-52.

⁶⁶ Yılmaz, “From Theory to Practice,” 9, 12-13; Atçıl, “State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire,” 198.

⁶⁷ Abdülkadir Özcan, “Fatih’in Teşkilat Kanûnamesi ve Nizam-ı Âlem İçin Kardeş Katli Meselesi,” *Tarih Dergisi*, no. 33 (2011): 30-31.

⁶⁸ Vera Flatz, “The Beginnings of an Empire. The Transformation of the Ottoman State into an Empire, demonstrated at the example of Grand Vizier Mahmud Pasha’s life and accomplishments,” *historia.scribere*, no. 13 (2021): 266, <https://doi.org/10.15203/historia.scribere.13.623>.

authority and the restructuring of key institutions to ensure effective long-term imperial administration.⁶⁹

One of the most crucial changes was the reorganization of the grand vizierate (*vezir-i azam*), which emerged as the highest executive authority after the sultan. The grand vizier assumed broad responsibilities, overseeing military, financial, and legal affairs while presiding over *divan-ı hümayun* (imperial council), now institutionalized as the empire's principal decision-making body.⁷⁰ Zahir Atçıl emphasizes that this shift marked the transition from a patrimonial system to a bureaucratic administration, ensuring state autonomy from hereditary aristocrats and provincial factions.⁷¹ The elimination of the Çandarlı family, which had dominated the vizierate for generations, symbolized this change. The execution of Çandarlı Halil Pasha in 1453 demonstrated Mehmed II's intent to dismantle the influence of hereditary elites, replacing them with a meritocratic bureaucracy directly loyal to the sultan. To further consolidate his control, Mehmed II integrated the vizierate into the imperial household, selecting viziers from the palace-trained administrative elite rather than traditional military or noble backgrounds. The Enderun school played a crucial role in this process, systematically training future officials under direct sultanic supervision. By centralizing recruitment, he eliminated alternative power bases that could challenge imperial authority and established a structured bureaucratic system distinct from earlier practices reliant on personal relationships and factional allegiances.⁷²

Legal reforms also played a fundamental role in shaping this new governance model.⁷³ The introduction of *Kanunname-i Al-i Osman* formalized the administrative

⁶⁹ Barbara Flemming, "Political Genealogies in the Sixteenth Century," *The Journal of Ottoman Studies* 7 (1988): 126-127.

⁷⁰ Atçıl, "State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire," 231-232.

⁷¹ Atçıl, "State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire," 292-293.

⁷² Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 162; Atçıl, "State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire," 206-207; Abdurrahman Atçıl, *Scholars and Sultans in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 52.

⁷³ Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs*, 32.

framework, codifying the grand vizier's role as the absolute deputy of the sultan. The *Kanunname* explicitly states:

Know that the Grand Vezir is, above all, the head of the vezirs and commanders. He is the greatest of all. He is the absolute deputy in all matters. The defterdar is deputy for my Treasury, and he [the Grand Vezir] is the supervisor. In all meetings and in all ceremonies the Grand Vezir takes his place before all others.⁷⁴

This decree cemented the grand vizier's supremacy in state administration and reinforced the bureaucratic hierarchy established under Mehmed II. At the core of this centralized and more meritocratic system lay the *devşirme*, or *kul* system, which became the empire's primary method for recruiting and training administrative and military elites. The *devşirme* process, which conscripted Christian boys from the Balkans and other conquered regions, ensured that the highest offices in the empire were occupied by individuals who owed their entire careers to the sultan.⁷⁵ Heath Lowry emphasizes that this system was not merely a recruitment strategy but a crucial state-building mechanism, integrating conquered populations into the Ottoman framework while ensuring a loyal and efficient ruling class.⁷⁶ These officials, often of Byzantine and Serbian noble origins in the earlier period, played a key role in governance, particularly in legitimizing Ottoman rule in newly acquired territories. Mehmed II's rise as an emperor and the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 marked a turning point in the conceptualization of empire-building.⁷⁷ However, as Ebru Turan argues, during his reign, the Ottoman dynasty was still in the process of solidifying its legitimacy as an imperial power.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ "Bilgil ki, evvelâ vüzerâ ve ümerânın vezîr-i a'zam başıdır. Cümlemin ulusudur. Cümle umûrun vekîl-i mutlakıdır. Ve malın vekîli defterdârdır, ve ol nâzırıdır. Ve oturmada ve durmada ve mertebede vezîr-i azam cümleden mukaddemdir." Özcan, "Fatih'in Teşkilat Kanûnamesi," 30-31. For translation see Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs*, 56.

⁷⁵ Heath W. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 118-119, 128-129; Christine Isom-Verhaaren, "Constructing Ottoman Identity in the Reigns of Mehmed II and Bayezid II," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 1, no. 1-2 (2014): 113-114., <https://doi.org/10.2979/jotturstuass.1.1-2.111>.

⁷⁶ Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State*, 77.

⁷⁷ Dimitris J. Kastritsis, "Ottoman Urbanism and Capital Cities Before the Conquest of Constantinople (1453)," in *Responses to Antiquity in Eastern Mediterranean Urbanism* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2022), 288.

⁷⁸ Ebru Turan, "The Sultan's Favorite: İbrahim Pasha and Making of Ottoman Universal Sovereignty in the Reign of Sultan Süleyman (1516-1526)" (PhD., Chicago, The University of Chicago, 2007), 2-3, 9-10.

To address this, grand viziers from Byzantine and Serbian noble families were appointed to key administrative positions, fostering legitimacy in newly conquered regions. However, as the state matured and its authority became unquestioned, the need for external validation diminished, leading to a complete shift toward *kul* appointees.⁷⁹

The transformation of the vizierate was not just an administrative change but also profoundly connected to evolving political thought.⁸⁰ In the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, Ottoman political treatises focused more on broader themes of rulership, justice, and military governance. However, by the sixteenth century, the grand vizierate had become a focal point in political discourse, reflecting its increasing institutional significance.⁸¹ İdris-i Bitlisi's *Qanun-i Shahanshahi*⁸² illustrates this evolution by emphasizing the vizierate's growing role in governance, administration, and statecraft.⁸³ The text, reflecting Persianate and Islamic political ideals, framed the grand vizier as an indispensable extension of the sultan, responsible for executing imperial policies and ensuring stability.⁸⁴ Given the reverence İdris-i Bitlisi received during the reigns of both Bayezid II (r.1581-1512) and Selim I (r.1512-1520) and the critical role he played in the integration of the newly conquered lands into the Ottoman Empire,⁸⁵ I believe it would not be an exaggeration to say that his writings had an impact on the shaping of political literature.

⁷⁹ Isom-Verhaaren, "Constructing Ottoman Identity in the Reigns of Mehmed II and Bayezid II," 113, 128.

⁸⁰ Yılmaz, "The Sultan and the Sultanate," 279.

⁸¹ Hüseyin Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), 58, 216, 220.

⁸² İdris-i Bitlisi, *Kanun-i Şahenshahi*, trans. Pelin Seval Esen and Esengül Uzunoğlu Sayın (Istanbul: Timaş Akademi, 2022).

⁸³ Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined*, 43-44; Marinos Sariyannis, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought up to the Early Nineteenth Century* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019), 35-36.

⁸⁴ İdris-i Bitlisi, *Kanun-i Şahenshahi*, 64-71; Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined*, 283.

⁸⁵ Abdülkadir Özcan, "İdris-i Bitlisi," in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, accessed May 24, 2024, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/idris-i-bitlisi>.

1.3. *Vezaret* During the Süleymanic Period (1520-1566)

During Süleyman I's reign, the grand vizierate evolved into an indispensable and autonomous governing institution, expanding its authority and institutional depth. While Mehmed II had laid the foundation for a centralized bureaucracy, it was under Süleyman I that the grand vizierate became a stable and powerful executive office. This period saw not only the rise of exceptionally influential grand viziers but also a shift in the political and ideological role of the office, as reflected in contemporary political thought and statecraft. The grand viziers of Süleyman's reign did not merely execute the sultan's orders; they actively shaped policy, legal administration, and military strategy, departing from their earlier, more limited advisory role.⁸⁶

At the beginning of Süleyman's reign, the office of the grand vizier was still occupied by Piri Mehmed Pasha (d. 1533), a conservative figure with a background in the *ulema* class. His tenure provided continuity from Selim I's administration, but his eventual dismissal reflected Süleyman's ambitions to transform the vizierate into a more dynamic institution.⁸⁷ According to Emecen, Süleyman's frequent consultations with his Grand Vizier, Piri Mehmed Pasha, on critical matters from the early years of his reign demonstrate that he actively fostered the Grand Vizier's growing influence in the decision-making process. This trend began the Grand Vizierate's rise to a central and increasingly influential role in Ottoman administration.⁸⁸ However, with the appointment of İbrahim Pasha to this position, the transformation of the Grand Vizierate truly solidified and became fully apparent. The appointment of İbrahim Pasha (d. 1536) as grand vizier marked a decisive shift, as he was neither a *kul* in the traditional sense—having been a Greek convert raised in the palace through personal proximity to Süleyman rather than the standard *devşirme* process—nor an

⁸⁶ Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined*, 79-80; Turan, "The Sultan's Favorite," 2-3, 360.

⁸⁷ Feridun M. Emecen, *Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Ve Zamanı* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2022), 49.

⁸⁸ Emecen, *Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Ve Zamanı*, 88.

experienced statesman before assuming office.⁸⁹ Unlike other grand viziers of *devşirme* origin, who were systematically trained for administrative roles, İbrahim Pasha's career trajectory was shaped by his close personal bond with the sultan, making his position unique in the institutional development of the vizierate. His unprecedented rise was due to his personal relationship with Süleyman, who trusted him beyond formal bureaucratic training. This favoritism allowed İbrahim Pasha to wield enormous authority, overseeing military campaigns, reorganizing the imperial administrative system, and managing foreign diplomacy, earning the honorary title of *serasker* sultan.⁹⁰ His power was further reinforced through his appointment as governor of Egypt. This position placed him at the center of Ottoman expansionist policies and demonstrated the growing administrative role of grand viziers beyond the imperial court.⁹¹ To secure the agreement with the Habsburgs in 1533, İbrahim Pasha played a highly active role in negotiating with envoys and managing the diplomatic process. In a letter directly addressed to Charles V, he declared: "I, İbrahim Pasha, Grand Vizier of the exalted Caliphate, supreme commander of the army, and deputy of His Majesty Sultan Süleyman's sovereignty." This statement reveals İbrahim Pasha's deep awareness of the confidence and authority his position afforded him, reflecting his self-assuredness in wielding such power. These negotiations ultimately led to a peace settlement, and in subsequent correspondence, the position granted to İbrahim Pasha by Süleyman was widely praised.⁹² İbrahim Pasha's role in these diplomatic efforts is a prime example of the vizierate's growing power, which was intertwined with the prestige of the

⁸⁹ Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined*, 71; Ebru Turan, "The Marriage of İbrahim Pasha (ca. 1495-1536)," *Turcica (Paris)* 41 (2009): 4-5, <https://doi.org/10.2143/TURC.41.0.2049287>.

⁹⁰ Turan, "The Sultan's Favorite," 110-114; Feridun M. Emecen, "İbrahim Paşa, Makbul," TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi, accessed February 23, 2025, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ibrahim-pasa-makbul>; Yılmaz, "'From Theory to Practice'," 30; Atçıl, "State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire," 233-234; Emecen, *Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Ve Zamanı*, 257.

⁹¹ Emecen, *Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Ve Zamanı*, 112-113; Emecen, "İbrahim Paşa, Makbul," TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi, accessed February 23, 2025, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ibrahim-pasa-makbul>.

⁹² Emecen, *Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Ve Zamanı*, 211-213.

sultan's office and integral to Süleyman's imperial strategy.⁹³ However, his increasing self-assertion and accumulation of power, combined with political rivalries at court, ultimately led to his execution in 1536.⁹⁴

Following İbrahim Pasha's downfall, Süleyman appointed Ayas Mehmed Pasha (d. 1539), a cautious and competent administrator who was well-versed in military affairs but lacked the political ambition of his predecessor. He played a key role in stabilizing governance after İbrahim's execution, reinforcing the vizierate as an institution of state administration rather than personal power. In 1539, following the death of Ayas Mehmed Pasha from the plague, Lütü Pasha was appointed to the position of Grand Vizier.⁹⁵ He was also a son-in-law of the Ottoman dynasty, having married Şah Sultan, the sister of Sultan Süleyman. This marriage further strengthened Lütü Pasha's position within the Ottoman court and solidified his ties to the royal family. However, his tenure as Grand Vizier was marked by political conflicts and a controversial legal decision, which led to his dismissal in 1541.⁹⁶ Though brief, his tenure as Grand Vizier (1539–1541) was marked by significant diplomatic and military achievements. He played a key role in the Ottoman-Venetian peace negotiations of 1540, which solidified Ottoman dominance in the eastern Mediterranean, and he was involved in the Boğdan (Moldavia) campaign of 1538, which expanded the empire's influence in the region.⁹⁷ After his removal from office, Lütü Paşa retired to his estate in Dimetoka, where he devoted the remainder of his life to writing and scholarship.⁹⁸ During this period, he produced several influential works, including his history of the Ottoman dynasty (*Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*) and a treatise defending the Ottoman sultan's claim to the

⁹³ Nevin Zeynep Yelçe. "Friends and Foes: Ambassadorial Receptions at the Ottoman Camp in Niš and Belgrade (1532)." In *Culture and Diplomacy*. Hollitzer Verlag, 2023.

⁹⁴ Emecen, *Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Ve Zamanı*, 258.

⁹⁵ Atıl, "State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire," 223-224; Bekir Kütükoğlu, "Ayas Paşa," TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi, accessed February 23, 2025, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ayas-pasa>.

⁹⁶ Mehmet İpşirli, "Lütü Paşa," in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, accessed May 25, 2024, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/lutfi-pasa>.

⁹⁷ Emecen, *Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Ve Zamanı*, 302-303.

⁹⁸ Tijana Krstic, "A Catechizing Grand Vizier-Lütü Pasha (d.1562/63) and the Politics of Sunni Confession Building in the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Empire," n.d., 6.

caliphate. However, his most enduring contribution is *Asafname* (The Book of Asaf), a practical guide to the duties and responsibilities of the Grand Vizier. Lütü Paşa's *Asafname* (The Book of Asaf) is a cornerstone of Ottoman political literature and one of the primary sources for my thesis. Unlike traditional "mirror for princes" texts, which often focus on moral or abstract theories, *Asafname* (The Book of Asaf) takes a pragmatic approach, emphasizing the practical functioning of state institutions and the role of the vizierate.⁹⁹ Lütü Paşa's emphasis on the practical responsibilities and challenges of the Grand Vizier highlights the evolving political dynamics of the time, where the role of the vizierate was gaining unprecedented significance.

After Lütü Pasha, Hadım Süleyman Pasha (d. 1547), an experienced governor and eunuch official, briefly held the position, emphasizing the sultan's preference for trusted bureaucratic figures over personal confidants following İbrahim's fate. His relatively uneventful tenure underscored the grand vizierate's increasing role in maintaining stability within the imperial administration.¹⁰⁰ However, it was under Rüstem Pasha (d. 1561) that the office regained the level of power and influence seen during İbrahim Pasha's tenure, but in a different manner. Unlike İbrahim Pasha, whose authority derived from his personal closeness to the sultan, Rüstem Pasha built his power on a strong bureaucratic foundation, emphasizing administrative efficiency, record-keeping, and financial reforms.¹⁰¹ Rüstem Pasha was also the sultan's son-in-law, and marrying Mihrimah Sultan further cemented his influence in court politics.¹⁰² As Atçıl notes, his careful documentation of imperial decision-making reflects the increasing institutionalization of the grand vizierate. He was also instrumental in

⁹⁹ Sariyannis, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought*, 55-56.

¹⁰⁰ Mehmet Şakir Yılmaz, "Koca Nişancı of Kanuni: Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi, Bureaucracy and Kanun in the Reign of Suleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566)" (PhD., Ankara, İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, 2006), 111; Atçıl, "State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire," 224-225.

¹⁰¹ Zahir Atçıl, "The Foundation of Peace Oriented Foreign Policy in the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Empire: Rüstem Pasha's Vision of Diplomacy," in *Diplomatic Cultures at the Ottoman Court c.1500-1630* (New York : London: Routledge, 2021), 147.

¹⁰² Erhan Afyoncu, "Rüstem Paşa," TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi, accessed February 23, 2025, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/rustem-pasa>; Atçıl, "State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire," 7.

suppressing opposition factions at court and restructuring the empire's financial policies, solidifying his role as one of the most politically resilient viziers of Süleyman's reign. During the later years of Süleyman's reign, Rüstem Pasha oversaw the empire's vast financial networks, implementing reforms that shaped economic policy for years.¹⁰³

The mid-to-late Süleymanic period saw further evolution in the grand vizierate's function, with Semiz Ali Pasha (d. 1565) succeeding Rüstem. Ali Pasha, a skilled military strategist, helped oversee the later military campaigns of Süleyman's reign, particularly in the eastern provinces.¹⁰⁴ Finally, Sokollu Mehmed Pasha (d. 1579) emerged as one of the most significant grand viziers in Ottoman history, serving under Süleyman and continuing into the reigns of Selim II and Murad III. His tenure marked the culmination of the grand vizierate's institutional authority, with the office assuming near-autonomous power in imperial administration.¹⁰⁵ Sokollu Mehmed Pasha was deeply involved in major infrastructural and geopolitical projects, including the planned Don-Volga Canal project and the fortification of Ottoman naval supremacy.¹⁰⁶

During Süleyman's reign, a total of seven individuals held the position of grand vizier. Three of these—Lütfi Pasha, Rüstem Pasha, and Sokollu Mehmed Pasha—were married into the imperial family, demonstrating the increasing political significance of the vizierate within the ruling elite. Furthermore, five of seven grand viziers were of *devşirme* background, emphasizing the continued reliance on palace-trained officials rather than hereditary aristocrats. This shift underscores Süleyman's strategy of ensuring loyalty to the throne through controlled appointments and personal ties to the dynasty.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Atçıl, "State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire," 257-269.

¹⁰⁴ Emecen, *Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Ve Zamanı*, 568-569; Erhan Afyoncu, "Semiz Ali Paşa," TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi, accessed February 23, 2025, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/semiz-ali-pasa>.

¹⁰⁵ Emine Fetvacı, "The Production of the Şehnâme-i Selīm Hân," *Muqarnas* (Leiden • Boston) 26, no. 1 (2009): 264, https://doi.org/10.1163/22118993_02601012.

¹⁰⁶ Rhoads Murphey, *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty: Tradition, Image and Practice in the Ottoman Imperial Household, 1400-1800* (London ; New York: Continuum, 2008), 123, 130; Erhan Afyoncu, "Sokollu Mehmed Paşa," TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi, accessed February 23, 2025, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/sokullu-mehmed-pasa>;

¹⁰⁷ see also Appendix p.86.

The prominence of the grand vizierate in Süleyman's reign is reflected in the political treatises of the period. In the next chapter, I will turn towards exploration of these texts. Works such as Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi's *Mevâhibü'l-hallak fî merâtibi'l-ahlak* (Talents bestowed by the Creator in the Levels of Ethics), which portrays the vizier as the "eyes, ears, and hands" of the sultan, emphasize how the office had become inseparable from the structure of governance.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, delving into the content of Celalzade Mustafa's work is crucial for bolstering this portrayal, mainly through examining the example provided. *Mevâhibü'l-hallak* is noteworthy as it represents a sixteenth-century Ottoman translation of the Persian ethics book *Ahlak-ı Muhsini* (The Muhsinian Ethics), authored by Hüseyin Vaiz Kaşifi in the fifteenth century.¹⁰⁹ However, rather than a direct translation, it takes on the form of a free-style translation or, as I would term it, an adaptation translation aimed at capturing the spirit of the time.¹¹⁰ Celalzade Mustafa introduced titles of chapters such as *vezaret* (vizierate)¹¹¹, *meşveret* (consultation)¹¹², and *saltanat* (sultanate)¹¹³, which are absent in the work's original version. This alteration indicates a shift towards a more political treatise, with the ethical-philosophical tone receding into the background. I will further explore this transformation in the subsequent chapter. Moreover, as I mentioned above, Lütü Pasha's *Asafname* (The Book of Asaf) occupies a unique position, not only for its exploration of the vizierate but also for its enduring influence as one of the most cited treatises on political thought in subsequent decades and centuries.¹¹⁴ The title *Asaf* refers to the mystically wise

¹⁰⁸ Celalzade Mustafa, *Mevâhibü'l-hallâk fî merâtibi'l-ahlâk*, MS, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Fatih 3521, 197a; "Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi," in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, accessed April 15, 2021, [/celalzade-mustafa-celebi](https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/celalzade-mustafa-celebi).

¹⁰⁹ Hüseyin Vaiz Kaşifi, *Ahlak-ı Muhsini*, trans. Murat Demirkol (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2019); Sariyannis, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought*, 51-52.

¹¹⁰ Özgür Kavak, "Osmanlı Türkçesine Tercüme Edilen Siyaset Düşüncesi Eserlerinin Tercüme Usul ve Tasarrufları," *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 64, no. 64 (2023): 13-15, <https://doi.org/10.15370/maruiid.1289921>.

¹¹¹ Celalzade Mustafa, "Bab-ı Mertebe-i Vezaret," in *Mevâhibü'l-hallâk fî merâtibi'l-ahlâk*, MS, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Fatih 3521, 197a-232a.

¹¹² Celalzade Mustafa, "Bab-ı Mertebe-i Meşveret," in *Mevâhibü'l-hallâk fî merâtibi'l-ahlâk*, 246a-250a.

¹¹³ Celalzade Mustafa, "Bab-ı Mertebe-i Saltanat," in *Mevâhibü'l-hallâk fî merâtibi'l-ahlâk*, 162a-197a.

¹¹⁴ Lütü Paşa, *Lütü Paşa Asafnamesi*, trans. Mübahat Kütükoğlu (İstanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Basımevi, 1991); Mehmet İpşirli, "Lütü Paşa," in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, accessed May 25, 2024, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/lutfi-pasa>.

vizier of the prophet Solomon, and Lütü Pasha's deliberate selection of this name for his book carries profound symbolism.¹¹⁵ The treatise focuses on the vizier's moral qualities rather than solely on the sultan, positioning the grand vizier as the ultimate proxy figure addressed within the political context. *Lata'if al-afkar wa kashif al-asrar* (Fine Thoughts and Revealer of Secrets), was an encyclopedic masterpiece by Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan.¹¹⁶ Despite having separate chapters on *vezaret* (vizierate), *meşveret* (consultation), and *siyaset* (politics), this work is dedicated to the deceased grand vizier İbrahim Pasha. Another notable work is *Nasihat al-mülük* (Advices for Kings) by Al-Ghazali, one of the most significant works of Islamic political thought.¹¹⁷ This text was translated into Ottoman Turkish many times during the sixteenth century. Two notable translations of this work were completed by Muallimzade Ahmed Edhemi and Aşık Çelebi (d.1572), dedicated to Sultan Süleyman and presented to Grand Vizier Rüstem Pasha, respectively.¹¹⁸

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the historical and conceptual foundations of the vizierate, focusing on its evolution during the Süleymanic era (1520–1566). Originating in early Islamic governance, the vizierate transformed from an advisory role into a formal political institution under the Abbasids and adapted across Islamic states like the Seljuks and Fatimids. By the Ottoman period, it became a centralized and institutionalized office, reflecting the empire's unique administrative needs. The pivotal transformation occurred under Mehmed II (r. 1451–1481), who centralized power and redefined the vizierate as the empire's chief

¹¹⁵ Sariyannis, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought*, 54.

¹¹⁶ Özgür Kavak, "Bir Osmanlı Kadısının Gözüyle Siyaset: Letâifü'l-efkâr ve kâşifü'l-esrâr Yahut Osmanlı Saltanatını Fıkıh Diliyle Temellendirmek," *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, no. 42 (March 5, 2014): 95–120, <https://doi.org/10.15370/muifd.13643>; Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan, *Leta'ifü'l-Efkar: Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan'ın Siyasetnamesi*, trans. Özgür Kavak (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2018); Sariyannis, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought*, 50.

¹¹⁷ İmam-ı Gazali, *Nasihatü'l-Mülük: Mülkün Sultanlarına...*, trans. Osman Şekerci (İstanbul: Büyüyenay Yayınları, 2020).

¹¹⁸ Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined*, 58-59; Muallimzade Ahmed Efendi, *Tercüme-i Nasihatü'l-Mülük: Gazali'nin Siyasetnamesinin Osmanlı Dönemi Tercümesi*, trans. Göker İnan (İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2022).

executive institution. His reforms, codified in the *Kanunname-i Al-i Osman*, established the grand vizier as the sultan's absolute deputy, overseeing military, financial, and legal affairs. Mehmed II dismantled hereditary elites like the Çandarlı family and introduced the *devşirme* system, creating a meritocratic bureaucracy loyal to the sultan. Under Süleyman I, the vizierate reached its zenith, with grand viziers like İbrahim Pasha, Rüstem Pasha, and Sokollu Mehmed Pasha shaping policy and administration. The office became deeply embedded in the empire's political fabric, supported by political treatises like Lütfi Pasha's *Âsafnâme* and Celalzade Mustafa's *Mevahibü'l-hallak fi meratibi'l-ahlak* (Talents bestowed by the Creator in the Levels of Ethics). In conclusion, the Süleymanic era marked the culmination of the vizierate's institutionalization, building on Mehmed II's reforms. This evolution highlights the vizierate's adaptability and centrality to Ottoman governance, leaving a lasting legacy that shaped the empire for centuries.

CHAPTER II: THE *VEZARET*'S (VIZIERATE)

INTERACTION WITH ISLAMIC

GOVERNMENTAL CONCEPTS: *MEŞVERET*

(CONSULTATION), *AKL* (REASONING) AND

TEDBİR (GOOD MANAGEMENT)

Understanding Ottoman political thought requires recognizing its conceptual complexity and historical adaptability. Unlike modern bureaucratic systems with fixed structures, the Ottoman administrative framework evolved over time, shaped by both internal changes and external influences.¹¹⁹ Governance in the Ottoman Empire was not just about laws and institutions; it was deeply rooted in a broader intellectual tradition that blended Islamic, Persian, and Mediterranean political ideas.¹²⁰ As a result, Ottoman political discourse was multilayered and constantly redefined to address shifting political realities.¹²¹ Studying these concepts is crucial because Ottoman power was exercised through flexible frameworks of legitimacy rather than rigid structures.¹²² Political vocabulary served not only as a descriptive tool but also as a means of legitimizing and negotiating power. This makes analyzing key terms essential for understanding Ottoman political thought. Many of the important texts were written by individuals directly involved in governance, meaning their ideas reflect both theoretical principles and practical statecraft.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Alp Eren Topal and Einar Wigen, "Ottoman Conceptual History: Challenges and Prospects," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 14, no. 1 (2019): 98, <https://doi.org/10.3167/choc.2019.140105>.

¹²⁰ Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Early Modern Islamicate Empire," in *The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2018), 355, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118527719.ch17>.

¹²¹ Topal and Wigen, "Ottoman Conceptual History," 108-109.

¹²² Topal and Wigen, "Ottoman Conceptual History," 107.

¹²³ Abdurrahman Atçıl, *Scholars and Sultans in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 131-133.

A helpful framework for understanding these figures comes from Abdurrahman Atçıl's concept of "scholar-bureaucrats." This distinct class within the Ottoman system wielded influence beyond the traditional roles of the *ulema* (religious scholars). While the *ulema* focused primarily on religious scholarship, scholar-bureaucrats combined expertise in Islamic jurisprudence with administrative duties, acting as key intermediaries between the sultan and the state apparatus. This dual role made them central to both the ideological and practical aspects of governance. Their writings, informed by their direct involvement in administration, provide valuable insights into how Ottoman political structures functioned in practice. For this reason, their perspectives are particularly relevant to my thesis, as they shed light on both the theoretical foundations and the day-to-day execution of governance.¹²⁴

In analyzing the writings of scholar-bureaucrats—the primary sources for my thesis—I observed that their discussions on *vezaret* (vizierate) and governance were frequently intertwined with concepts like *meşveret* (consultation), *akl* (reasoning), and *tedbir* (good management). These concepts were not treated in isolation but formed an interconnected framework, reflecting the holistic nature of Ottoman political thought. These authors' dual roles as scholars and administrators likely created an intellectual environment where theoretical ideas were continually tested and refined through practical governance.

This interconnectedness became especially clear in my examination of *vezaret*. Its close association with *meşveret* (meşveret) and *tedbir* (good management) points to a broader discourse on effective governance and decision-making. *Vezaret* (vizierate), as the highest executive office, defined the grand vizier's role as the sultan's chief advisor, responsible for overseeing imperial decisions through structured consultation.¹²⁵ *Meşveret* (consultation) reinforced the importance of collective deliberation, emphasizing collaboration among

¹²⁴ Atçıl, *Scholars and Sultans*, 6-8.

¹²⁵ Fatih Yahya Ayaz, "Vezir," in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, accessed March 12, 2024, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/vezir>.

knowledgeable officials.¹²⁶ Meanwhile, *tadbir* (good management) complemented these ideas by focusing on strategic foresight and long-term planning.¹²⁷ Together, these concepts illustrate how scholar-bureaucrats bridged theory and practice, ensuring that governance principles were not only debated but also effectively implemented.

2.1. Interaction of *Meşveret* (Consultation) and *Vezaret* (Vizierate)

The relationship between *vezaret* (vizierate) and *meşveret* (consultation) lies at the heart of Ottoman political thought, as evidenced by the literature I examined for this thesis. Far from being a mere supplementary practice, consultation emerges as an indispensable element of the vizierate, deeply embedded in the governance structure. The grand vizier's role as the sultan's chief advisor was intrinsically tied to the principle of *meşveret* (consultation), reflecting the understanding that effective rule required collective deliberation and the integration of diverse perspectives. At its core, the connection between these two concepts highlights the complexity of Ottoman governance. The grand vizier was not merely an executor of the sultan's will but a key figure whose authority was legitimized through consultation.¹²⁸

A passage from İbn Firuz's (d. 1609) *Gurretü'l beyzā* (In the Light of Justice), written shortly after Sultan Süleyman's death, encapsulates the central role of the grand vizier as the sultan's chief advisor and highlights the importance of *meşveret* (consultation) in Ottoman governance. İbn Firuz, a member of the *ulema* class educated in Istanbul's madrasas, was deeply connected to the Ottoman court through his father, who served as the grand vizier's

¹²⁶ Bernard Lewis, "Mashwara," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill, 2012), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/mashwara-SIM_5010?lang=fr.

¹²⁷ Mehmet Harmanlı, "Anatolian Practice with Islamic Political Theory -from Ilm Tadbir al-Manzil to Baciyan-i Rum-," *Research on Education and Psychology* 3, no. 1 (2019): 24.

¹²⁸ Marinos Sariyannis, "Ottoman Ideas on Monarchy Before the Tanzimat Reforms: Toward a Conceptual History of Ottoman Political Notions," *Turcica*, no. 47 (2016): 56-57.

chamberlain.¹²⁹ His work is a creative adaptation of Mahmud b. İsmail al-Khayrbaytī's *al-Durra al-gharrā fī nasiha al-salatin wa al-qudat wa al-umara* (The White Pearl of Advice to the Sultans, Judges, and Governors) and reflects the Ottoman synthesis of Persian, Mamluk, and Islamic political traditions.¹³⁰

The passage recounts a story from the Persian tradition:

It is recounted that Ardashir Babakan was asked, ‘Which companion is most suitable for the king?’ Ardashir replied, ‘A wise, compassionate, trustworthy, righteous, and capable vizier is most suitable, for the king manages the affairs of the realm with him and consults with him in governing the state, confiding in him his innermost thoughts.’¹³¹

The quote attributed to Ardashir Babakan, a legendary Persian ruler and founder of the Sassanian Empire, highlights the ideal qualities of a vizier—wisdom, compassion, trustworthiness, righteousness, and capability—and underscores their dual role as both administrators and confidants to the ruler. This reflects enduring principles of governance, emphasizing trust, consultation, and ethical leadership. In the original text, Mahmud b. İsmail al-Khayrbaytī's *al-Durra al-gharrā*, there is a greater emphasis on the concept of *tadbir* (good management) rather than directly on the term *müşavere/meşveret* (consultation).¹³² However, in İbn Firuz's translation, there is a noticeable emphasis on the idea that the legitimacy of the vizier is derived from his consultation with the sultan.¹³³

Alongside İbn Firuz's *Gurretü'l beyzâ* (In the Light of Justice), there is also an earlier translation of the same text, and this translation was entitled *Tuhfetü'l-Ümera ve Minhatü'l-Vüzera* (A Gift for Statesmen and an Offering for Viziers) written by Abdüsselam

¹²⁹ Mücahit Kaçar, “İbn-i Firuz, Mehmed b. Firuz Ağa,” Ahmet Yesevi Üniversitesi, Türk Edebiyatı İsimler Sözlüğü, 2020, <https://teis.yesevi.edu.tr/madde-detay/ibni-firuz-mehmed-firuz-aga>.

¹³⁰ Mahmud b. İsmail El-Hayrbeyti, *ed-Dürretü'l-Garra fī Nasihati's-Selatin ve'l-Kudat ve'l-Ümera: Adalet Gerdanlığı; Sultan, Kadı ve Emirlere Nasihatler*, trans. Müddesir Emir and Ümit Döngel (Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2022).

¹³¹ “Hikâyet Erdeşir Bâbekden su‘âl olundu ki kangı ashâb pâdişâh’a salihdür. Erdeşir eyitdi ‘akıl vezîr müşfik emîn sâlih müdebbir sâlihdür ki pâdişâh anunla tedbîr idüb emr-i vilâyetde anunla müşavere kıla ve nefsinde olan ol vezîre isrâr ve izhâr ide.” İbn-i Firuz, *Gurretü'l-Beyzâ: Adaletin Aydınlığında*, ed. Mücahit Kaçar (Istanbul: Büyüyenay Yayınları, 2012), 347.

¹³² El-Hayrbeyti, *ed-Dürretü'l-Garra*, 118.

¹³³ İbn-i Firuz, *Gurretü'l-Beyzâ*, 347.

el-Amasi, a distinguished Ottoman scholar and jurist from Amasya.¹³⁴ The title itself is revealing: by framing the work as a “gift” (*tuhfe*) for statesmen and an “offering” (*minha*) for viziers, El-Amasi underscores the centrality of the *vezaret* (vizierate) in Ottoman governance. This choice reflects the elevated status of the grand vizier as the sultan’s chief advisor and the key figure in managing the affairs of the realm (*tedbir idüp*). While Khayrbayti’s original work was rooted in a classical Sunni legal perspective, El-Amasi’s adaptation shifts the focus toward ethical advice for rulers and viziers. His translation is not a literal rendering of the original text but a creative reinterpretation emphasizing justice, ethical leadership, and the necessity of consultation. He frequently draws on Islamic jurisprudential principles to underscore rulers’ moral and legal obligations. For example, he argues that the legitimacy of a ruler depends on their adherence to divine justice and their willingness to seek counsel from knowledgeable advisors.¹³⁵ El-Amasi’s treatise is particularly notable for its focus on the ethical dimensions of governance, presenting leadership as a moral duty rather than merely a political function. This shift from a legal framework to ethical advice reflects the broader Ottoman emphasis on integrating Islamic principles into statecraft.

Together, these works illustrate how Ottoman scholar-bureaucrats adapted classical political ideas to address the practical needs of a rapidly expanding empire. However, our knowledge of El-Amasi and his work is limited. Only a single copy of *Tuhfetü’l-Ümera ve Minhatü’l-Vüzera* (A Gift for Statesmen and an Offering for Viziers) survives, and there is no definitive evidence that İbn-i Firuz had access to or was influenced by this translation.¹³⁶ Despite these limitations, el-Amasi’s contribution remains significant as the first attempt to

¹³⁴ Abdüsselam El-Amasi, *Tuhfetü’l-Ümera ve Minhatü’l-Vüzera* (Istanbul: Büyüyenay Yayınları, 2012).

¹³⁵ El-Amasi, *Tuhfetü’l-Ümera*, 199.

¹³⁶ Arif Erbil, “Translation and the Growth of Juristic Discourse in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Political Writing” (Master Thesis, Istanbul, Bogazici University, 2021), 110; Hüseyin Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), 61.

introduce Khayrbayti's ideas to the Ottoman intellectual milieu. His work laid the groundwork for later adaptations, even if its direct impact is difficult to trace.

In contrast to el-Amâsî's ethical focus, İbn-i Firuz's *Gurretü'l beyzâ* (In the Light of Justice) reflects a more pragmatic approach to governance. While both translators drew on Khayrbayti's original text, İbn-i Firuz's adaptation is tailored to the specific needs of the Ottoman administration during the late sixteenth century. His work emphasizes the practical aspects of governance, such as the roles of officials and military leaders. It includes anecdotes and stories illustrating the importance of *meşveret* (consultation) in decision-making. For instance, İbn-i Firuz recounts numerous stories and advice, particularly from the Persian Shah Nushirevan and prophetic stories from the Quran, advocating for consultation in governance, especially in times of difficulty or to achieve better rulership. These tales, often directed at sultans or caliphs, emphasize the importance of seeking wise counsel to navigate challenges and make informed decisions.¹³⁷ This narrative style makes *Gurretü'l beyzâ* more accessible and engaging, reflecting İbn-i Firuz's aim to provide practical advice for Ottoman statesmen.¹³⁸ His adaptation also highlights the evolving role of the grand vizier as both a scholar and an administrator, underscoring the dual responsibilities of scholar-bureaucrats in the Ottoman system. Moving beyond ethical advice to address concrete governance challenges, İbn-i Firuz's work represents a further step in the evolution of Ottoman political literature.

The Vizier as the Sultan's Chief Advisor

To return to the main point of this chapter, as the quote above suggests, the vizier is the first and most important person the sultan relies on to effectively manage (*tedbir idüp*) the

¹³⁷ İbn-i Firuz, *Gurretü'l-Beyzâ*, 263-265.

¹³⁸ Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined*, 61.

state through consultation (*müşavere kılmak*).¹³⁹ This brief statement stresses that the grand vizier serves as the critical intermediary between the sultan and all matters related to state affairs and the administration of the empire. The grand vizier's influence on the course and management of state matters often surpasses the sultan's, primarily due to his specialized knowledge and expertise. From a nuanced perspective, the sultan's role in maintaining the *nizam-ı alem* (order of the world) within his realm necessitated consultation with his vizier and other competent individuals.¹⁴⁰ While twentieth-century historiography often portrays the Ottoman sultan as wielding absolute power over his territories, sixteenth-century political advice works repeatedly emphasize the importance of the sultan seeking counsel despite the potential constraints on his decision-making authority.¹⁴¹

An exemplar of this perspective is found within Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan es-Semerkandi's political-encyclopedic work, *Lata'if al-afkar wa kashif al-asrar* (Fine Thoughts and Revealer of Secrets), which he dedicates to Grand Vizier İbrahim Pasha, as noted in the previous chapter.¹⁴² Entitled "*Siyaset Ahkamına Dair*," (On the Provisions of Politics) the initial subchapter of the work serves as a concise treatise on political norms and governance dynamics, particularly concerning the rulers of the state, notably the sultan and the vizier. Systematically organized, the first subchapter delves into the intricacies of the sultanate, followed by an examination of the roles of viziers, a discourse on the significance

¹³⁹ İbn-i Firuz, *Gurretü'l-Beyzâ*, 347.

¹⁴⁰ *nizam-ı alem*: Sovereignty, justice, and a compartmentalized social order together defined the *nizam-ı alem*, or the "well-founded world order," which the Ottomans inherited. From Heather L. Ferguson, *The Proper Order of Things: Language, Power, and Law in Ottoman Administrative Discourses* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2018), 252.

¹⁴¹ Christine Isom-Verhaaren, "Constructing Ottoman Identity in the Reigns of Mehmed II and Bayezid II," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 1, no. 1–2 (2014): 126, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jotturstuass.1.1-2.111>; Hüseyin Yılmaz, "Containing Sultanly Authority: Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire Before Modernity," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 45, no. 45 (2015): 232, <https://doi.org/10.18589/oa.570012>.

¹⁴² Özgür Kavak, "Bir Osmanlı Kadısının Gözüyle Siyaset: Letaifü'l-efkar ve kaşifü'l-esrar Yahut Osmanlı Saltanatını Fıkıh Diliyle Temellendirmek," *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, no. 42 (March 5, 2014): 95–120, <https://doi.org/10.15370/muifd.13643>; Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan, *Leta'ifü'l-Efkar: Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan'ın Siyasetnamesi*, trans. Özgür Kavak (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2018).

of *meşveret* (consultation), and a scholarly exploration of *adalet* (justice).¹⁴³ Within this framework, consultation emerges as a pivotal aspect of political governance alongside the vizierate and the sultanate, challenging prevailing conceptions of political authority. The author highlights the sultan's duty to regularly consult with competent advisors, not limited to his viziers but also other qualified individuals, to gather diverse opinions. In light of such advice, the sultan is advised to act based on the wisest idea among the opinions received or to follow a consensus if one emerges.¹⁴⁴ This approach underscores the collaborative nature of governance in the Ottoman Empire, where consultation and consensus-building were valued as essential components of practical administration.

Despite the ultimate authority resting with the sultan, the decision-making process in the Ottoman Empire adhered to a structured consultation mechanism advocated by the Ottoman ruling elite. As highlighted by Hüseyin Yılmaz, Ottoman political treatises consistently emphasized the indispensability of *meşveret* (consultation), whether viewed as a religious obligation or a pragmatic necessity.¹⁴⁵ This consensus underlines the significance attributed to consultation in the governance framework. Over time, particularly during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this concept evolved from a theoretical principle into a pragmatic necessity, as articulated by the scholar-bureaucrats of the era.¹⁴⁶ Baki Tezcan suggests that the Ottoman Empire evolved due to the emergence of what he calls “proto-democratization.” This term refers to a historical process characterized by the gradual expansion of political participation and the rise of new elites representing diverse social and economic interests. This led to changes in the Ottoman political system, including the increased use of consultation mechanisms like *meşveret*.¹⁴⁷ Unlike Baki Tezcan, Sariyannis

¹⁴³ Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan, *Leta'ifü'l-Efkar: Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan'ın Siyasetnamesi*, 60-81.

¹⁴⁴ Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan, *Leta'ifü'l-Efkar: Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan'ın Siyasetnamesi*, 62.

¹⁴⁵ Hüseyin Yılmaz, “Containing Sultanlic Authority: Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire Before Modernity,” *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 45, no. 45 (2015): 256, <https://doi.org/10.18589/oa.570012>.

¹⁴⁶ Hüseyin Yılmaz, “Kurultaydan Meclise Osmanlı Meşveret Geleneği,” in *100. Yıl Perspektifiyle 1921 Teşkilat-ı Esasiye Kanunu ve Milli Egemenlik*, ed. Haluk Alkan and Ahmet Köroğlu (Ankara: TBMM Basımevi, 2022), 25-26.

¹⁴⁷ Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 9-10.

focuses on including diverse groups and individuals in decision-making processes. This trend significantly impacted theoretical discussions and political practices, reflecting a broader diversification and political participation within the Ottoman state with criticism of using terms like proto-democratization.¹⁴⁸ However, during the Süleymanic era, the Sultan often relied on the grand vizier for advice and governance. While *meşveret* (consultation) was present, it did not imply proto-democratization or power-sharing, as the sultan's authority remained supreme. Concerning that, Hüseyin Yılmaz's perspective on the *Divan-ı Hümayun* (The Imperial Council) as an embodiment of the institutionalization of *meşveret* (consultation) can be seen in this light.¹⁴⁹ *Divan-ı Hümayun* (The Imperial Council) formalized consultation within the Ottoman administration, providing a structured venue for officials to offer input. While *Divan-ı Hümayun* (The Imperial Council) did not have a standardized structure and function as expected from a modern institution, the grand vizier's private meetings and consultations with the sultan highlight the ad-hoc nature of the empire's daily politics.¹⁵⁰ Even within these ad-hoc situations, researchers should focus on deconstructing this structure's essential elements and political notions to make sense of the whole picture rather than making anachronistic diagnoses.

Having briefly touched upon the positioning of *meşveret* about the administration of the empire and *vezaret*, I would like to highlight a change in the approach to sixteenth-century political literature, a shift that Marinos Sariyannis rightly identifies. This transformation resulted from adapting Arabic and Persian political knowledge into Ottoman Turkish thanks to the creative translations of Ottoman scholar-bureaucrats, serving as a form of self-fashioning during the empire's period of imperial maturation. The significance of this shift lies in the convergence of the concepts of *vezaret* (vizierate) and *meşveret* (consultation).

¹⁴⁸ Marinos Sariyannis, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought up to the Early Nineteenth Century*, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019), 35.

¹⁴⁹ Yılmaz, "Containing Sultanlic Authority," 256.

¹⁵⁰ Ahmet Mumcu, "Divan-ı Hümayun," in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı), accessed May 26, 2024, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/divan-i-humayun>.

The genre of translated works and contemporary political treatises evolved from their fifteenth-century roots in ethics or moral philosophy into a form of adab-styled political advice literature. This transformation aligns with the medieval political genre known as the “mirror for princes.”¹⁵¹ Initially more theoretical and comprehensive, these works were adapted to meet the practical needs of governance and administration in the maturing Ottoman Empire. In summary, the sixteenth-century political literature reflects a shift from a theoretical and ethical focus to a more practical and advisory role. This change illustrates how the concepts of *meşveret* and *vezaret* were integrated and adapted to serve the empire’s evolving political and administrative needs, highlighting the pragmatic approach of Ottoman scholar-bureaucrats in this period.

To elaborate on the phenomenon as mentioned earlier, Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi, who served as imperial chancellor in Süleyman I’s court for more than twenty years, provides a valuable panorama of the period through his life and works. His adaptation of the fifteenth-century Persian ethics book *Ahlak-ı Muhsini* (Muhsinian Ethics) by Hüseyin Vaiz Kaşifi exemplifies the abovementioned shift from a theoretical to a more practical, political-advice perspective.¹⁵² This adaptation-translation, titled *Mevahibü’l-hallak fi meratibi’l-ahlak* (Talents Bestowed by the Creator in the Levels of Ethics), can be classified as a freestyle translation according to Özgür Kavak.¹⁵³ Originally, Kaşifi’s work had a much more ethical-philosophical framework. However, Celalzade’s addition of a separate chapter called “*Bab-ı Mertebe-i Meşveret* (The Chapter on the Degree of Consultation)” and his reinterpretation of this chapter by incorporating stories about caliphs averting disasters through consultation with their advisors shifts the work towards political advice. These

¹⁵¹ Sariyannis, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought*,” 51, 54-56.

¹⁵² Hüseyin Vaiz Kaşifi, *Ahlak-ı Muhsini*, trans. Murat Demirkol (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2019).

¹⁵³ Celalzade Mustafa, *Mevâhibü’l- hallâk fi merâtibi’l-ahlâk*, MS, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Fatih 3521; Özgür Kavak, “Osmanlı Türkçesine Tercüme Edilen Siyaset Düşüncesi Eserlerinin Tercüme Usul ve Tasarrufları,” *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 64, no. 64 (2023): 13-15, <https://doi.org/10.15370/maruiid.1289921>.

stories are not found in Kaşifi's original work, but according to Mehmet Şakir Yılmaz, they were political advice stories circulating in the sixteenth century, enhanced by Celalzade's novelistic style.¹⁵⁴ The fact that the caliph or the sultan's closest advisors served as guides to salvation in critical situations is a significant focus for this thesis. The adaptation of *meşveret* as a more political-practical mechanism in response to the various situations faced by viziers and caliphs, as seen in Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi's work, exemplifies the pragmatic perspective of the ruling elite. This approach departs from the original intent of works like Kaşifi's, which addressed a wider public and recommended *meşveret* as a form of moral maturity.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, Celalzade did not limit his revisions to the subject of *meşveret* (consultation). He extensively rewrote Kaşifi's work to include similar tendencies on topics such as *vezaret* (vizierate), *akl* (reasoning), and *siyaset* (governance). The chapters on vizierate and sultanate are particularly noteworthy, as they are the most extended sections in his adaptation.

Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi's *Bab-ı mertebe-i meşveret* (The Chapter on the Degree of Consultation) is a distinct addition to his adaptation of Kaşifi's *Ahlak-ı Muhsini*. In Kaşifi's original work, *meşveret* is paired with *tedbir*, but here *tedbir* is framed more as personal prudence or precaution—qualities tied to virtuous living—rather than the political concept of governance, which will be addressed later.¹⁵⁶ Kaşifi explores these ideas through poetic verses, emphasizing moral virtues essential for a righteous life. Celalzade, however, takes a different approach, using narratives to directly address rulers and their advisors. Through stories, he illustrates the risks of neglecting consultation or relying on unqualified or self-serving individuals, showing how such errors can lead to catastrophic outcomes. Often

¹⁵⁴ Celalzade Mustafa, “Bab-ı Mertebe-i Meşveret,” in *Mevahib*, 246a-250a; Mehmet Şakir Yılmaz, “‘Koca Nişancı’ of Kanuni: Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi, Bureaucracy and ‘Kanun’ in the Reign of Süleyman The Magnificent (1520–1566)” (PhD., Ankara, Bilkent University, 2006), 159, <http://www.thesis.bilkent.edu.tr/0003213.pdf>.

¹⁵⁵ Hüseyin Vaiz Kaşifi, *Ahlak-ı Muhsini*, 302-313.

¹⁵⁶ Hüseyin Vaiz Kaşifi, *Ahlak-ı Muhsini*, 302.

rooted in historical or allegorical examples, these tales combine Quranic and Hadith principles with Celalzade's practical experience as a *nişancı* (imperial chancellor), offering ethically grounded and politically astute advice. According to Mehmet Şakir Yılmaz, the stories in Celalzade's work align with the "mirror for princes" genre, though pinpointing his exact sources remains challenging. Yılmaz also notes that the style and content of *Mevahib* strongly resemble Ghazali's *Nasihat al-muluk*, suggesting a possible influence or shared thematic focus on ethical and practical advice for rulers.¹⁵⁷

A notable aspect of Celalzade's work is his focus on scribes as ideal bureaucrats and advisors. In his narratives, rulers frequently seek counsel from wise and capable scribes, reflecting his own professional background and the high value he places on the scribal class¹⁵⁸. Through these stories, Celalzade redefines *meşveret* from a moral ideal into a practical governance tool. His narratives serve as both warnings and guides, demonstrating how consultation helps rulers navigate the complexities of empire while upholding Islamic principles of justice and accountability. In this way, he bridges the gap between ethical theory and political practice, showing how consultation could ensure stability and legitimacy in a diverse and dynamic empire.

2.2. The Place of *Akl* (Reasoning) in the Dialogical Framework of *Meşveret* (Consultation) and *Vezaret* (Vizierate)

In Islamic philosophy, *aql* (reason) is a fundamental concept rooted in the Arabic notion of "restraint." It serves as a tool to curb impulsive actions and is not merely a secular idea but a comprehensive one with profound philosophical implications. Unlike sensory perception, which deals with particulars, *akl* grasps universal truths, making it essential for

¹⁵⁷ Mehmet Şakir Yılmaz, "'Koca Nişancı' of Kanuni," 158.

¹⁵⁸ Celalzade Mustafa, *Mevahib*, 249b-250a.

sound judgment and decision-making.¹⁵⁹ Within the political discourse of the Ottoman Empire, *akl* was deeply intertwined with *meşveret* (consultation) and *vezaret* (vizierate). When examining sources on these concepts, it becomes evident that *akl* is frequently mentioned alongside them, highlighting its critical role in governance. Discussions on the qualities of the ideal vizier or whom caliphs and sultans should consult consistently prioritize *akl* (reasoning) as the foremost attribute.¹⁶⁰ As the sultan's most consulted person, the vizier was expected to possess exceptional reasoning abilities, as the consequences of their decisions directly impacted the stability and success of the empire. This emphasis on *akl* (reasoning) reflects a broader understanding that governance requires moral integrity and intellectual acuity. The interplay between *meşveret* (consultation) and *akl* (reasoning) underscores the belief that collective reasoning leads to superior outcomes, as it combines diverse perspectives and mitigates the risks of unilateral decision-making.

One of the stories transmitted by Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi (d. 1567) recounts a *kadı* (judge) investigating a case involving a man who married his daughter. Surprisingly, the *kadı* sought counsel from a non-Muslim individual on this matter. When questioned about his decision to consult someone outside the faith, the non-Muslim individual responded, “Why do you consult with me since I am not blessed with Islam’s light?” The *kadı* replied, “You are an intelligent and trustworthy man, even though you are not Muslim.”¹⁶¹ According to Şahin, Celalzade’s emphasis on reason as the essential characteristic for consultation cannot be strictly interpreted through a religious or secular lens.¹⁶² Despite being the wisest of men, he points out that even Prophet Muhammad was commanded to conduct his affairs through

¹⁵⁹ Rahman, F., and W. C. Chittick. “Aql,” In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2011, <https://iranicaonline.org>; “Al- Aql,” Oxford Reference, accessed May 27, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095420615>.

¹⁶⁰ Lütü Paşa, *Lütü Paşa Asafnamesi*, 6, 11, 30; İbn-i Firuz, *Gurretü'l-Beyzâ*, 343.

¹⁶¹ “Ekabir ve esagirden her kim emin ve mutemed aliyye-i evla belki kafirden belli ki akl ve efer sahibi ola meşveret olunsa caizdir.” Celalzade Mustafa, *Mevahib*, 246a.

¹⁶² Kaya Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman: The Sixteenth-Century Ottoman World*, (Cambridge [UK] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 234.

consultation.¹⁶³ This implies that decisions reached through a consensus of intellects are deemed superior in their practical consequences. Also, in the same chapter, Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi writes: “Patience and consultation in difficult matters are like impassable waters. Reason (*akl*) and consultation (*meşveret*) are like ships and bridges.”¹⁶⁴ This metaphor, together with the story above, illustrates how reason and collective deliberation serve as essential tools for navigating challenges, emphasizing their practical role in overcoming obstacles and ensuring effective governance.

Grand Vizier Lütü Pasha (d.1563), in his political treatise *Asafname* (The Book of Asaf), echoes this emphasis on reasoning. He stresses the importance of appointing viziers based on their intellect and perceptiveness, arguing that individuals with high reasoning ability should be prioritized for state affairs.¹⁶⁵ Lütü Pasha’s perspective reflects the practical realities of governance: as the administrator of the empire, the vizier bore direct responsibility for its affairs and was held accountable by the sultan. Therefore, surrounding oneself with wise and quick-witted advisors was not only prudent but essential to avoid fatal errors in decision-making. Lütü Pasha’s insights highlight the pragmatic dimension of *akl*, showing how it served as a safeguard against poor governance and political instability.

Fevri Ahmed Efendi (d. 1571), a prominent scholar and poet, further underscores the centrality of reason in governance. Brought to Istanbul at a young age through the *devşirme* system during the reign of Süleyman I, he received education from distinguished scholars of the era, including Taşköprizade Ahmed Efendi (d. 1561). Fevri Ahmed Efendi also worked alongside Grand Vizier Lütü Pasha before pursuing his scholarly training. His work, *Ahlak-ı Süleymani* (The Moral Qualities of Süleyman I), also known as *Münşeat-ı Süleymani*, is

¹⁶³ “Yani her hususda ashabın ile müşavere ile hazret-i peygamber aleyhi efdalüs salavat cümle enamdan akıl ve feraset * berter ve hayy-ı ilahi-i birle müstesad/mütesid ve namver iken müşavere ile mamur oldular.” Celalzade, *Mevahib*, 246a.

¹⁶⁴ “Sab ve müşkül olan kazaya geçit virmez sular gibidir. Akl ile meşveret gemilere ve köprülere benzer.” Celalzade, *Mevahib*, 246b.

¹⁶⁵ Lütü Paşa, *Lütü Paşa Asafnamesi*, 6, 8, 10, 19, 21, 30.

written in a selective style. This work discusses Süleyman I's virtues and qualities, and his poems are explained to elucidate his worldview.¹⁶⁶ For instance, Fevri Ahmed Efendi lauds Süleyman I for consulting viziers with solid reasoning skills and the highest-ranking *ulema* during his reign.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan attributes Süleyman I's appointment of İbrahim Pasha as grand vizier to his wisdom, righteousness, bravery, and generosity. While other character traits such as adherence to shari'ah, honesty, effective communication, and experience are also valued, reasoning holds hierarchical precedence due to its practical implications in governance and maintaining a favorable relationship with the sultan.¹⁶⁸ Additionally, the phrase *rey-i feraset* (discernment), often emphasized in sources, also encompasses reasoning ability. While discernment involves insight and mental acuity, it is fundamentally rooted in *akl*. The expression *sahib-i rey-i feraset* (possessor of discernment) within the context of *meşveret* and *vezaret* warrants deeper examination, highlighting the integration of reasoning into the decision-making process.¹⁶⁹ This concept reflects the Ottoman understanding that effective governance requires moral integrity and the intellectual capacity to navigate complex political and administrative challenges.

Examining various works reveals that the primary and most crucial criterion sought in both *meşveret* (consultation) and *vezaret* (vezaret) is the ability to reason comprehensively. This emphasis on reasoning has practical benefits: it enhances the accuracy of collective decision-making involving two or more intelligent and insightful individuals and facilitates the distribution of responsibility, particularly when compared to unilateral decision-making. In essence, *akl* served as the cornerstone of effective consultation and the vizierate, ensuring both moral and practical success in the administration of the empire. The Ottoman

¹⁶⁶ Mehmed Kalpaklı, "Fevri," in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, 1995, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/fevri>.

¹⁶⁷ Büşra Topuz, "Fevri Ahmed Efendi, Ahlak- Süleymani (38b-135a) (İnceleme-Metin)" (Master Thesis, Edirne, Trakya Üniversitesi, 2019), 109.

¹⁶⁸ Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan, *Leta'ifü'l-Efkar: Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan'ın Siyasetnamesi*, 266.

¹⁶⁹ İbn-i Firuz, *Gurretü'l-Beyzâ: Adaletin Aydınlığında*, 357; Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan, *Leta'ifü'l-Efkar: Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan'ın Siyasetnamesi*, 64.

scholar-bureaucrats articulated a governance model that balanced intellectual rigor with ethical principles by prioritizing reasoning above other traits, fostering stability and legitimacy in a diverse and ever-changing political landscape.

2.3. An Ambivalent Notion: *Tedbir* (Good Management and/or Organization) and the Grand Vizier's Governance

In this conceptual exploration of *meşveret* (consultation) and *vezaret* (vizierate), the term *tedbir* (good management) emerges as a complex and multifaceted concept that defies straightforward translation into modern Turkish. In early modern texts, *tedbir* appears both within chapters and as standalone section, highlighting its central role in political discourse. While contemporary usage often links *tedbir* to caution or prudence, its historical application was much broader, serving as a foundational principle of governance that encompasses strategic foresight, administrative skill, and long-term statecraft. This raises critical questions: How was governance conceptualized through *tedbir* in Ottoman political thought? How did it intersect with *meşveret* and *vezaret*? And how did the Ottoman ruling elite operationalize this notion of "good management" as a cornerstone of imperial administration?

The Arabic root d-b-r, from which *tedbir* (or *tadbir*) derives, conveys ideas of foresight, calculated planning, and governance that prioritize long-term outcomes over immediate gains. In his study, "Conceptualising Tadbir as a Constituent of Governance in Islam," Mohd Zaidi Ismail explains that *tedbir* is not merely a passive act of caution but an active governance mechanism aimed at achieving tangible results. Within Islamic political thought, *tedbir* functions as both an intellectual process and an administrative tool, requiring rulers to balance moral responsibility with strategic action. Ismail argues that, in its ultimate sense, *tedbir* belongs to Allah as the supreme governor (*al-mudabbir*), while human rulers

and viziers exercise it in a derivative and relative capacity.¹⁷⁰ Governance, therefore, is fundamentally about foresight: rulers must assess risks, anticipate crises, and craft policies that ensure stability and justice.

This concept of *tedbir* as an active governance principle became deeply institutionalized within the Ottoman bureaucracy, where the grand vizier was tasked with its implementation. Their role extended beyond crisis management to proactive planning, ensuring that imperial policies were deliberate, calculated, and aligned with the state's enduring interests. The integration of *tedbir* (good management) into Ottoman governance is evident in political treatises, emphasizing the importance of combining *meşveret* (consultation) with structured decision making to sustain effective and stable administration. A compelling example of *tedbir* in action is the tenure of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, the last grand vizier under Süleyman I, who continued to serve under Selim II and Murad III. His leadership during this transitional period was instrumental in maintaining the empire's stability. Sokollu's governance extended beyond military campaigns, including economic planning, infrastructural development, and strategic diplomacy.¹⁷¹ One of his most ambitious initiatives, the Don-Volga Canal Project, aimed to connect the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, enhancing Ottoman control over trade routes and limiting Russian expansion in the Caucasus. Although the project was never completed, it exemplifies *tedbir* as a mechanism of forward-thinking statecraft, ensuring long-term imperial dominance.¹⁷² His ability to maintain composure and focus on recovery efforts highlights *tedbir* as a form of crisis management, demonstrating how strategic leadership could preserve stability even in adversity.

In his adaptation-translation, İbn-i Firuz likens the state to a tent, with the vizier as its central pillar. Just as a tent pole must embody righteousness, loftiness, steadfastness, and

¹⁷⁰ Mohd Zaidi Ismail, "Conceptualising Tadbir as a Constituent of Governance in Islam," *TAFHIM: IKIM Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World* 3 (2010): 31-32, 47 <https://doi.org/10.56389/tafhim.vol3no1.2>.

¹⁷¹ Zahit Atçıl, "State and Government," 226-228.

¹⁷² Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 61-64.

durability, the vizier must possess these qualities to navigate politics (*tedbir idüp*) with insight (*rey-i feraset ile*).¹⁷³ Mücahit Kaçar's modern Turkish translation of İbn-i Firuz's work uses *tedbir* in its contemporary sense, which I argue is somewhat misleading. While modern usage often equates *tedbir* with "taking precautions," in the Islamic governance tradition, it refers to the prudent management and organization of state affairs.¹⁷⁴ This distinction is echoed in Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan es-Semerkandi's *Lata'if al-Afkar wa Kashif al-Asrar* (Fine Thoughts and Revealer of Secrets), where the sultan is described as relying on the opinion (*re'yine*) and foresight (*tedbirine*) of his vizier.¹⁷⁵ This reliance on *meşveret* (consultation) underscores the interplay between *tedbir* and collective decision making.

Similarly, Abdüsselam el-Amasi's *Tuhfetü'l-Ümera ve Minhatü'l-Vüzera* (A Gift for Statesmen and an Offering for Viziers) emphasizes the qualities a vizier should possess, using terms like *ehl-i rey* (wise and intelligent) and *sahib-i tedbir* (capable of good management). These terms highlight the importance of wisdom, intelligence, and effective governance in the vizier's role.¹⁷⁶ "It is the grand vizier who is essentially capable of governing well and should make his decisions based on this."¹⁷⁷ In other words, by being wise and consulting with intelligent and competent individuals, the grand vizier effectively governs the state on behalf of the Sultan. Lütfi Paşa's *Asafname* (The Book of Asaf) further elaborates that the vizier should employ wisdom and reasoning to govern on the sultan's behalf, ensuring the best possible outcomes.¹⁷⁸ This emphasis on *tedbir* connects the theoretical discussions of *meşveret* (consultation) and *vezaret* (vizierate) to their practical applications, demonstrating how reason and deliberation lead to effective governance. Although not a primary source in

¹⁷³ İbn-i Firuz, *Gurretü'l-Beyzâ: Adaletin Aydınlığında*, 357.

¹⁷⁴ Wilhelm Heffening and G. Endress, "Tadbir," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill, n.d.), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/tadbir-COM_1139?lang=de.

¹⁷⁵ Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan, *Leta'ifü'l-Efkar: Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan'ın Siyasetnamesi*, 64.

¹⁷⁶ Abdüsselam el-Amasi, *Tuhfetü'l-Ümera ve Minhatü'l-Vüzera*, 343.

¹⁷⁷ "Vezir-i azam manen hakim-i sahib-i tedbir gibidir. Vezir-i azam hükmünde sahib-i tedbir gerekdür." Lütfi Paşa, *Lütfi Paşa Asafnamesi*, 8.

¹⁷⁸ "Vezir-i azam manen hakim-i sahib-i tedbir gibidir. Vezir-i azam hükmünde sahib-i tedbir gerekdür." Lütfi Paşa, *Lütfi Paşa Asafnamesi*, 8.

this thesis, Celalzade Mustafa's chronicle, *Tabakatü'l-memalik ve derecatü'l-mesalik* (Echelons of the Dominions and Hierarchies of the Professions), also reflects the interconnectedness of *meşveret*, *tedbir*, and *vezaret*. The text frequently pairs *meşveret* with *tedbir*, illustrating how consultation was integral to good management and state administration.¹⁷⁹ For instance, Celalzade portrays Piri Mehmet Pasha, Süleyman I's first grand vizier, as a *sahib-i tedbir*, highlighting his exceptional reasoning abilities and governance skills.¹⁸⁰

The economic and administrative dimensions of *tedbir* are evident in Rüstem Pasha's policies. His rigorous tax collection, financial restructuring, and prudent resource allocation ensured steady state revenues even during costly military campaigns. By curbing unnecessary expenditures and avoiding reckless expansion, Rüstem Pasha demonstrated that *tedbir* was as much about economic sustainability as it was about political decision-making.¹⁸¹ Notably, his approach reveals a profound intersection between *tedbir* and *akl* (reasoning) in the realm of strategic planning. This synergy highlights how effective governance relies on practical management and rational foresight to anticipate challenges and align immediate actions with long-term goals. Therefore, the Ottoman application of *tedbir*, rooted in classical Islamic models yet adapted to early modern statecraft, reinforces Ismail's assertion that effective governance is not defined by rigid authority but by a leader's ability to combine wisdom, strategy, and calculated decision-making.¹⁸² This perspective offers a nuanced understanding of the grand vizier's role, showing that their success lay not merely in policy execution but in navigating the empire's complexities to balance immediate needs with long-term resilience.

The examples of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, Rüstem Pasha, and others illustrate that *tedbir* was

¹⁷⁹ Funda Demirtaş, "Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi, *Tabakatü'l-Memalik ve Derecatü'l-Mesalik*" (PhD., Kayseri, Erciyes University, 2009), 231, 233-234.

¹⁸⁰ Kaya Şahin, "Imperialism, Bureaucratic Consciousness, and the Historian's Craft: A Reading of Celālzāde Muştafa's *Tabakatü'l-Memalik ve Derecatü'l-Mesalik*," in *Writing History at the Ottoman Court*, ed. H. Erdem Çıpa and Emine Fetvacı, Editing the Past, Fashioning the Future (Indiana University Press, 2013), 53; Demirtaş, "Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi, *Tabakatü'l-Memalik ve Derecatü'l-Mesalik*," 69.

¹⁸¹ Zahit Atçıl, "State and Government," 254-289.

¹⁸² Ismail, "Conceptualising Tadbir," 47.

not just a reactive tool but a proactive mechanism for shaping enduring stability and prosperity, underpinned by the rational and strategic use of *akl* (reasoning).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the *vezaret*'s (vizierate) interaction with *meşveret* (consultation), *akl* (reasoning), and *tedbir* (good management) reveals a sophisticated governance framework that prioritizes collaboration, rationality, and strategic foresight.¹⁸³ Ottoman scholar-bureaucrats, many of whom held high-ranking positions, adapted these Islamic governmental concepts to address the practical demands of an expanding and increasingly complex empire. Their treatises, enriched with storytelling techniques, illustrate this shift from abstract ethical ideals to actionable, result-oriented strategies. The narratives often depict rulers or caliphs who, failing to adhere to the norms of *meşveret* (consultation), *akl* (reasoning), and *tedbir* (good management), face catastrophic consequences. These stories serve as cautionary tales, emphasizing the hierarchical superiority of reasoning and the necessity of consultation and strategic planning in governance. By highlighting the severe outcomes of neglecting these principles, the scholar-bureaucrats reinforced the practical importance of these concepts, transforming them from theoretical ideals into essential tools for effective administration. This narrative-driven approach not only justified their roles within the bureaucratic hierarchy but also addressed the empire's need for pragmatic solutions to governance challenges. Through these stories, Ottoman thinkers demonstrated how the interplay of *meşveret*, *akl*, and *tedbir* ensured stability and resilience, offering

¹⁸³ “It is a well-known ancient saying: Consultation with seven types of people is forbidden. The ignorant, the envious, the hypocrite, the coward, the greedy, the self-indulgent, and the follower of base desires. For the ignorant is astray, having lost his way; he does not know the straight path. The envious is inclined toward destruction; he does not show the path of righteousness. The hypocrite seeks the disappearance of blessings. The coward is ready to flee. The greedy is eager to amass wealth; he has no sound opinion or thought. The self-indulgent is a slave to his desires and incapable of opposition.” Celalzade Mustafa, *Mevahib*, 248b.

enduring insights into the dynamic balance between theory and practice in early modern statecraft.

CHAPTER III

THE PILLARS OF POWER IN THE SÜLEYMANIC ERA (1520-1566): CALIPHATE AND VIZIERATE

Simultaneously Chingizid and Persian, Islamic and post-Islamic, the imperial ideologies developed in the early-modern Turko-Mongol, Perso-Islamic world attained an unprecedented level of complexity and multivalency as ambitious dynasts jockeyed with one another in laying claim to religiopolitical legitimacy and primacy in Islamdom.¹⁸⁴

The Ottoman expansion into the Balkans necessitated a quest for legitimacy inherited from the Byzantine Empire, particularly since Sultan Mehmed II's claim as a Roman Emperor. This quest aligned with the need for consolidation in newly conquered Muslim lands with multiconfessional backgrounds following Selim I's conquests of Syria, Egypt, and the Holy Lands in 1516-1517. Melvin-Koushki rightly highlights the multivalency in the early modern Islamic empires' pursuit of religiopolitical legitimacy through various ideologies, such as Turco-Mongol, Islamic, and Perso-Islamic. However, the Ottoman Empire's unique position in Europe further complicated this dynamic. In his book *Crisis in Kingship in Late Medieval Islam*, Christopher Markiewicz asserts that Ottoman sultans in the first half of the sixteenth century shaped their rule in grander, more universalizing ways, incorporating sacred and cosmic terms.¹⁸⁵ Building on this idea, Sanjay Subrahmanyam's *Empires Between Islam and Christianity* emphasizes the interconnected strategies of early modern empires in navigating

¹⁸⁴Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Early Modern Islamicate Empire: New Forms of Religiopolitical Legitimacy," in *The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2018), 355, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118527719.ch17>.

¹⁸⁵ Christopher Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship in Late Medieval Islam: Persian Emigres and the Making of Ottoman Sovereignty*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1.

legitimacy across cultural and political landscapes. Like their Safavid and Mughal counterparts, the Ottomans relied on a synthesis of religious, imperial, and dynastic traditions, balancing Islamic authority with claims rooted in pre-Islamic and non-Muslim traditions.¹⁸⁶ Additionally, Subrahmanyam highlights the fluidity of imperial legitimacy, demonstrating how the Ottomans, rather than existing in isolation, engaged in an evolving dialogue with both Christian Europe and rival Muslim empires. Therefore, their claim to universal sovereignty was not only an internal projection of power but also an externally mediated one, shaped by diplomatic exchanges, military conflicts, and ideological borrowings across Eurasia.¹⁸⁷

During Süleyman I's reign, characterized by extensive imperial self-fashioning, Ottoman scholar-bureaucrats sought to integrate Islamic governance concepts into the corpus of Ottoman political thought, leading to the Ottomanization of traditional Islamic scholarship. Hüseyin Yılmaz notes that "the full corpus of political theory in Arabic and Persian languages was integrated into mainstream Ottoman thought."¹⁸⁸ Along with *vezaret* (vizierate) and *meşveret* (consultation), examined in the previous chapters, the concept of the caliphate was continuously reinterpreted throughout the Süleymanic era to solidify the legitimacy of Ottoman rule in Muslim-majority lands. Süleyman's identification as the caliph of Islam further solidified his universal monarchy. Traditionally, the title of the caliph was reserved for descendants of Prophet Muhammad, but during Süleyman's reign, it was reinterpreted and mystified to enhance his religious sanctity and supreme status. As Hüseyin Yılmaz points out, this reification of the caliphate increased the Sultan's sacredness and

¹⁸⁶ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Empires Between Islam and Christianity, 1500-1800*, SUNY Series in Hindu Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019), 3-4, 171-175; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 2, no. 3 (1997): 741-745, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00017133>.

¹⁸⁷ Subrahmanyam, *Empires Between Islam and Christianity*, 158, 166-168, 759-760; Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories," 759-760.

¹⁸⁸ Hüseyin Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), 96.

perceived role as the supreme leader of the Muslim world.¹⁸⁹ Cornell Fleischer emphasized that Süleyman also used the *sahib-kiran* title, “Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction.” Drawing from Persian and Turko-Mongol traditions, this title was a concept in Süleyman’s reign, implying that his rule was divinely favored and cosmically aligned. By embracing such a title, Süleyman aimed to enhance his authority and legitimacy, presenting himself as a ruler whose sovereignty was intertwined with the cosmos. Combining the cosmic title *sahib-kiran* and the sacred title of caliph in Süleyman’s rule created an image of him as a universal monarch. Fleischer locates the invocation of the *sahib-kiran* motif particularly in the formative and mid-periods of Süleyman’s rule, noting that its appearance was not incidental but aligned with episodes of large-scale imperial expansion and a rising tide of eschatological and messianic expectations centered on the sovereign.¹⁹⁰

Central to this redefinition was the mutually reinforcing dynamic between the caliphate and the vizierate. The caliphate was reimagined not only as a spiritual and ideological tool but also as a mechanism for delegating governance to the vizierate. This mirrored the Abbasid model, where caliphs served as symbolic figureheads while viziers executed administrative functions. In the Ottoman context, the role of the sultan-caliph as a “lawgiver” rather than a direct administrator led to the emergence of grand viziers as de facto rulers, a transformation that was both ideological and practical.¹⁹¹ This shift was not merely theoretical but manifested in concrete historical instances. For example, Süleyman’s increasing identification with the caliphate created a space for Ibrahim Pasha to preside over imperial council meetings without the sultan’s presence, acting as a co-ruler and leading campaigns himself.¹⁹² Similarly, Rüstem Pasha demonstrated the growing executive authority

¹⁸⁹ Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined*,” 79.

¹⁹⁰ Cornell H. Fleischer, “The Lawgiver as Messiah: The Making of the Imperial Image in the Reign of Süleymân,” in *Soliman Le Magnifique et Son Temps*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1992), 166-167, 170.

¹⁹¹ Atçıl, “State and Government,” 232.

¹⁹² Atçıl, “State and Government,” 198.

of the vizierate by halting a public works project in Kağıthane and arresting the architect responsible, showcasing how financial and administrative matters increasingly fell within the vizier's jurisdiction.¹⁹³ These examples underscore how Süleyman's sacred status as caliph facilitated the expansion of the vizierate's political domain, transforming it into a cornerstone of Ottoman governance. Consequently, due to his sanctity, the sultan's untouchable and otherworldly status expanded the grand vizier's political domain, aligning with the political history of Süleyman's era and beyond.¹⁹⁴ This chapter will focus on how this sacred office was reified for the Ottoman sultan and how the position of the grand vizier, appointed as the sultan's absolute deputy, evolved accordingly.

3.1. The Ottoman Caliphate without Quraysh Lineage

The ascendance of the Mongols and the subsequent decline of the Abbasids marked a pivotal moment in the history of the caliphate. The institution, initially tasked with safeguarding the “unity of Muslims,” yielded to the emergence of a universal monarchy under the Chingissid lineage. Conversely, the Ottomans, despite lacking lineage ties to both the Chingissid dynasty and the Prophet Muhammad, ingeniously merged these two orientations within the persona of the sultan through their own theoretical framework. This legitimacy endeavor, particularly honed during the Süleymanic era, capitalized on the presence of the ailing Abbasid caliph in Istanbul. Simultaneously, Sultan Süleyman's endeavors to emphasize titles such as *Hadimü'l-Haremeyn* (Protector of the Holy Sanctuaries) and *Halifetullah* (Caliph of Allah) as integral to his imperial project solidified his reign within a robust theoretical framework.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Atçıl, “State and Government,” 250.

¹⁹⁴ Zahit Atçıl, “State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire: The Grand Vizierates of Rüstem Pasha (1544-1561)” (PhD., Chicago, The, 2015), 194; Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined*,” 79.

¹⁹⁵ Feridun M. Emecen, *Osmanlı Klasik Çağında Hilafet ve Saltanat* (Istanbul: Kapı Yayınları, 2020), 49-50; Atçıl, “State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire,” 194.

The term *hilafet* (caliphate), which in the dictionary means “to succeed someone, to take their place, to follow after, to fill their position, to act as a representative or deputy,” refers in Islamic states to the institution of state leadership following the Prophet Muhammad. Another term for this leadership is “imamate.” The head of state is called a caliph because he governs society as the deputy of the Prophet, and he is also called an imam due to his role as a leader.¹⁹⁶ The qualifications for becoming the caliph/imam in the Islamic tradition, have been a subject of extensive debate. While the consensus is that the leader should be a free, mature, capable, brave, and wise man, the issue of descent from the Quraysh tribe has been a particularly prominent aspect of this discourse, especially in the late medieval and early-modern periods. This debate gained further traction following the Abbasid Caliphate’s dissolution with Baghdad’s fall in 1258.¹⁹⁷ Different dynasties, including the Ottomans, approached the Quraysh lineage criterion in various ways, depending on their legitimacy needs. Notably, none of the principal rulers of the central Islamic lands, including the Ottomans, could credibly claim descent from the Quraysh.¹⁹⁸

One of the most striking examples of how the Ottoman caliphate took shape conceptually is found in *Lata’if al-afkar wa kashif al-asrar* (Fine Thoughts and Revealer of Secrets), an encyclopedic work by Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan es-Semerikandi.¹⁹⁹ This work, presented to İbrahim Pasha, the grand vizier of Süleyman I, combines historical narrative with encyclopedic content, making it challenging to categorize within a single genre. The second part of the work, titled “History of the Caliphs who ruled in Mecca and Medina from Adam to 1529,” details the historical narrative.²⁰⁰ Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan es-Semerikandi began the transition of the caliphate to the Ottomans with Selim I’s conquest of Mecca and

¹⁹⁶ Casim Avcı and Azmi Özcan, “Hilafet,” in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1998), <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/hilafet>.

¹⁹⁷ Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined*,” 1-2; Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship*,” 6-7.

¹⁹⁸ Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship*,” 7.

¹⁹⁹ Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan, *Leta’ifu’l-Efkar: Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan’ın Siyasetnamesi*, trans. Özgür Kavak (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2018).

²⁰⁰ Kadı Hüseyin b. Hasan, *Leta’ifu’l-Efkar*, 82.

Medina, culminating in the reign of Süleyman I as the last caliph. According to the author, the fundamental prerequisite for being a caliph is not descent from the Prophet but the ability to dominate Mecca and Medina, thereby legitimizing the Ottoman sultan as the caliph.

In the ensuing discussion, I will delve into Abdüsselam El-Amâsî's adaptation-translation *Tuhfetü'l-ümera ve minhatü'l-vüzerâ* (A Gift for Statesmen and an Offering for Viziers) concerning the broader and more intricate context of the caliphate/imamate.²⁰¹ Despite the limited surviving copies of El-Amâsî's work, it remains uncertain to what extent his translation influenced mainstream discourse during that era.²⁰² However, the original work, *al-Durra al-gharra fi nasihat al-salatin wa'l-qudat wa'l-umara* (The White Pearl of Advice to the Sultans, Judges, and Governors) by the fifteenth-century Mamluk scholar Al-Khayrabayti, was translated twice during the sixteenth century.²⁰³ Additionally, İbn-i Firuz, a figure closely associated with the central bureaucracy during Selim II's reign, translated this political treatise after El-Amâsî, resulting in numerous copies housed in the Süleymaniye Library and other repositories across the Republic of Turkey.²⁰⁴ El-Amâsî himself underlines his translation of this text into Ottoman Turkish specifically for the benefit of sultans, viziers, and bureaucrats.²⁰⁵ While information about El-Amâsî's proximity to the central administration is scarce, considering his target audience and the interest surrounding this Mamluk source during the period, El-Amâsî's adaptation-translation emerges as a pivotal resource for comprehending the amalgamation of Arabic-Mamluk

²⁰¹ Abdüsselâm El-Amâsî, *Tuhfetü'l-Ümerâ ve Minhatü'l-Vüzerâ* (Istanbul: Büyüyenay Yayınları, 2012), 49-56.

²⁰² Arif Erbil, "Translation and the Growth of Juristic Discourse in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Political Writing" (Master Thesis, Istanbul, Bogazici University, 2021), 111.

²⁰³ Erbil, "Translation and the Growth of Juristic Discourse in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Political Writing," 100-101.

²⁰⁴ Mücahit Kaçar, "İbn-i Fîrûz, Mehmed b. Fîrûz Ağa," accessed January 15, 2023, <http://teis.yesevi.edu.tr/madde-detay/ibni-firuz-mehmed-firuz-aga>.

²⁰⁵ ... elüme ed-Dürretü'l-Garra nam bir kitab-ı dil-aram girüp mütala'a ve mülâhaza idüp enva'-ı me'ani-i latife ve asnaf-ı nesayih-i şerifesine mittali' olup has u 'amma 'ayide ve 'amme-i inama fayidesi fehm olunup hususan müluk u ümeraya ve selatin ü vüzeraya nef'i ziyade olduğu eelden 'Arab dilinden Türki dile döndürdüm." Abdüsselâm El-Amâsî, *Tuhfetü'l-Ümerâ ve Minhatü'l-Vüzerâ*, 145.

political literature within the Ottoman framework of the caliphate, grounded in Hanafî-Sunni Islam.

El-Amasi undertook the translation of Al-Khayrabayti's work into Ottoman Turkish during the reign of Süleyman I (r.1520-1566), as discerned from the initial chapter "On the Imamate" of *Tuhfetü'l-Ümerâ ve Minhatü'l-Vüzerâ* (A Gift for Statesmen and an Offering for Viziers). Originally crafted as a mirror for princes,²⁰⁶ Al-Khayrabayti's composition was presented to the Mamluk ruler Sayf Al-Din Chaqmaq (r.1438-1453).²⁰⁷ Hüseyin Yılmaz elucidates that Al-Khayrabayti, a Hanafi jurist, authored the work as a guide outlining the shared foundations for governance and politics of Muslim rulers. Yılmaz further notes that "the treatise was penned from a strictly Hanafî perspective, refuting the views of other major schools of law on rulership, particularly Shiite perspectives."²⁰⁸ Despite the juristic tone pervading the text, it traverses a broad spectrum of governance ethics, delineating the duties of rulers and the responsibilities incumbent upon viziers and administrators while drawing references from specific Kalam classics and hadith.²⁰⁹ Concerning the reception of this Mamluk-era text in sixteenth-century Ottoman scholarship, Arif Erbil underscores the scarcity of biographical data on Abdüsselam El-Amasi and the absence of substantial information regarding his translation beyond obscure manuscript notes. Against the backdrop of Süleyman I's Hanafî-Sunni Islamic policies,²¹⁰ El-Amasi's decision to translate a treatise by a Hanafi jurist aligns with the scholarly inclination to provide relevant and reliable

²⁰⁶ Erbil, "Translation and the Growth of Juristic Discourse in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Political Writing," 105.

²⁰⁷ A. Mevhibe Coşar, "Giriş," in *Tuhfetü'l-Ümerâ ve Minhatü'l-Vüzerâ* (Istanbul: Büyüyenay Yayınları, 2011), 29.

²⁰⁸ Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined*, 61.

²⁰⁹ Özgür Kavak, "Memlûkler Dönemi Siyaset Düşüncesine Giriş: Ahkâm-ı Sultânîye Geleneğinin İhyası ve Meşruiyet Problemini Aşma Çabaları," *İslam Tetkikleri Dergisi* 10, no. 1 (2020): 208, <https://doi.org/10.26650/iuitd.2020.686093>.

²¹⁰ Tijana Krstić, "State and Religion, 'Sunnitization' and 'Confessionalism' in Süleyman's Time," in *The Battle for Central Europe: The Siege of Szigetvár and the Death of Süleyman the Magnificent and Nicholas Zrínyi (1566)* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 65–66, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004396234_005.

guidance to politicians, shaping the original text to meet the evolving needs of the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire in both political and intellectual spheres.²¹¹

To elaborate on the concept of the caliphate, the term caliphate denotes the political leadership of the *ümme* (*umma*), serving as the representative of Prophet Muhammad.²¹² Within Al-Khayrabayti's treatise and its Ottoman rendition by Abdüsselam El-Amasi, the term caliphate is used interchangeably with imamate. El-Amasi clarifies that "Imamate means caliphate. Caliphate is to be an overseer of the people in religious and temporal matters without any claim of prophethood."²¹³ In subsequent chapters of El-Amasi's adaptation-translation, alongside the Islamic mandate of *emir bi'l-ma'ruf nehiy ani'l-münker* (commanding right and forbidding wrong), the caliph's responsibilities encompass taxation, organization, security, and justice, to be executed for his people in an exemplary manner.²¹⁴ Hence, El-Amasi's conception of Islamic rulership underscores the societal emphasis on politics and order inherent in the caliph's duties. This perspective aligns closely with Lütüfi Pasha's definition of the caliphate in his work *Khalas al-umma fi ma'rifat al-a'imma*, which equates the caliphate with the sultanate and the imamate, as observed by Erbil.²¹⁵

When it comes to the issue of belonging to the Quraysh lineage, this tension between historical lineage and political authority is evident in the works of Al-Khayrabayti and El-Amasi, each presenting different perspectives. Al-Khayrabayti firmly asserts that descent from the Quraysh is an indispensable condition for leadership, citing a hadith to support his

²¹¹ Erbil, "Translation and the Growth of Juristic Discourse in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Political Writing," 115.

²¹² James Sowerwine, "Caliph and Caliphate," obo, 2009, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0013.xml>.

²¹³ This translation is done by Arif Erbil: Erbil, "Translation and the Growth of Juristic Discourse in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Political Writing," 115; It's originally placed here: El-Amâsî, *Tuhfetü'l-Ümerâ ve Minhâtü'l-Vüzerâ*, 140.

²¹⁴ This translation is done by Arif Erbil: Erbil, "Translation and the Growth of Juristic Discourse in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Political Writing," 115; It's originally placed here: El-Amâsî, *Tuhfetü'l-Ümerâ ve Minhâtü'l-Vüzerâ*, 140.

²¹⁵ Erbil, "Translation and the Growth of Juristic Discourse in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Political Writing," 115-116.

view.²¹⁶ In contrast, El-Amasi takes a more nuanced stance, considering this condition as a matter of dispute and not strictly necessary, thereby acknowledging the existence of varying opinions.²¹⁷ In his work, after a thorough discussion on the Prophet Muhammad and the Rashidun Caliphate, El-Amasi presents Süleyman I as a continuation of *ehl-i sünnet ve'l-cemaat* (the people of Sunna and Community), thereby legitimizing him as the rightful caliph of Muslims. He underscores the importance of adhering to the Sunni madhab under Süleyman I's leadership.²¹⁸ Erbil suggests that El-Amasi aims to bolster the legitimacy of the Ottoman caliphate by downplaying the contentious issue of Quraysh lineage and highlighting Sultan Süleyman's adherence to the Sunni creed.²¹⁹ El-Amasi's stance appears to navigate between the strictly traditional view, which mandates Quraysh descent, and Lütfi Pasha's outright rejection of this requirement for valid caliphate leadership.²²⁰ By promoting the Ottoman caliphate, El-Amasi delicately balances maintaining mainstream Sunni views on the caliphate while recognizing ongoing debates. My analysis of El-Amasi's adaptation-translation from Al-Khayrbayti's treatise suggests that his work uniquely contributes to the discourse on the necessity of Quraysh lineage for the caliphate. El-Amasi masterfully supports the Ottoman caliphate, even acknowledging the inherent ambivalence in the issue. Additionally, his choice to translate a Hanafi jurist's treatise, emphasizing justice and law, reflects the realpolitik of Süleyman I's reign and his aspiration towards a universal monarchy characterized by justice and peace.

²¹⁶ Mahmud b. İsmail El-Hayrbeyti, *Adaletin Gerdanlığı: Sultan, Kadı ve Emirlere Nasihatler (ed-Dürretü'l-Garra fî Nasihati's-Selatin ve'l-Kudat ve'l-Ümera)*, trans. Müddesir Emir and Ümit Döngel (İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2022), 47.

²¹⁷ Erbil, "Translation and the Growth of Juristic Discourse in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Political Writing," 123-124.

²¹⁸ El-Amâsî, *Tuhfetü'l-Ümerâ ve Minhatü'l-Vüzerâ*, 145.

²¹⁹ Erbil, "Translation and the Growth of Juristic Discourse in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Political Writing," 125.

²²⁰ Özgür Kavak, "Halâsü'l-ümme'den Necâtü'l-ümme'ye -Osmanlı Siyaset Düşüncesinin Süreklilik Arz Eden Meselelerine Dair Birkaç Not-," *Divan: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi* 27, no. 52 (2022): 29-30, <https://doi.org/10.20519/divan.1012117>.

The endeavor to legitimize the Ottoman sultan as the contemporary caliph is evident through another translation of political work written by Mamluk jurists. Notably, in 1542, Mahmud b. Ahmed El-Kayseri (d.16th cent.) presented Süleyman with a Persian juristic treatise titled *Adab al-khilafa wa asbab al-hisafa* (Manners of the Caliphate and Reasons of Good Judgement), initially penned in 1464 by İbrahim b. Muhammed (d.?). This comprehensive work, dedicated to the Shirwanshah ruler Farrukh Yasar I (r.1462-1501), addresses crucial questions regarding the caliphate's status after the Abbasids.²²¹ İbrahim's treatise depicts the caliphate as a historical institution and emphasizes its lineage as a succession to the Prophet. Notably, it refutes the title *khilafat Allah* (God's caliph), which had underpinned Sufistic conceptions of the caliphate, arguing that Qurayshi descent is not a prerequisite for its legitimacy and positing various pathways, including domination (*istila*), to attain caliphal authority.²²² Mahmud b. Ahmed Al-Kayseri commissioned this work to be copied for Sultan Süleyman I in 1545. I consider it a highly significant source for understanding the nature of legitimacy sought during the Süleymanic era through the caliphate. This significance is evident from the copy of the work housed in the Revan Pavilion of Topkapı Palace, accompanied by a gold-embroidered plate on the first page indicating its commission for Süleyman I.²²³ This work notably diverges from the traditional

²²¹ Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined*,” 167.

²²² İbrahim b. Muhammed, *Adabu'l-Hilafe ve Esbabu'l-Hisafe: Devlet ve İnsan, Siyasetin İlkeleri, Yöneticilerin Vasıfları*, trans. Hayrullah Acar (İstanbul: Büyüyenay Yayınları, 2016), 156-157.

²²³“Bu kitap, insanların sultanı, cihanın padişahı, inanların üzerinde Allah'ın gölgesi, emniyet ve güven bahşeden, adalet ve iyilik dağıtan, din ve dünyayı şereflendiren, İslam ve Müslümanların imdadına kogan, zayıfların ve düşkünlerin sığınağı, küfür ve inadi ezen, zulüm ve fesadı yok eden, Allah'ın beldelerinin koruyucusu, Allah'ın kullarına yardım eden, dünyanın işlerini düzenleyen, nimetlerin sahibi, cömertlik ve iyilik kaynağı, ilahi yardım ve desteklerin mazhar, sultan ve hakanların en büyüğü, milletlerin dizginlerini elinde olan, Arap ve Acem padişahlarının efendisi, yani Sultan Selim Şah Han'ın oğlu Sultan Süleyman Şah Han'ın-Allah hükümranlığını ebedileştirsün ve onun görüşü üzerekainatı yürütsün-has hazinesine ait Adab'ul-Hilafe kitabıdır: (This book is about the sultan of mankind, the sultan of the world, the shadow of Allah over the believers, the bestower of safety and security, the dispenser of justice and goodness, the honorer of religion and the world, the rescuer of Islam and Muslims, the refuge of the weak and the fallen, the crusher of disbelief and stubbornness, the destroyer of oppression and mischief, the protector of the lands of Allah, the helper of the servants of Allah, the one who regulates the affairs of the world, the owner of blessings, the source of generosity and goodness, the recipient of divine help and support, the greatest of sultans and kings, the one who holds the reins of nations in his hands, the master of the sultans of Arabia and Persia, namely Sultan Süleyman Shah Khan, the son of Sultan Selim Shah Khan - may Allah perpetuate his reign and follow his vision May He walk the universe - is the book of Adabu'l-Hilafa, which belongs to His treasure).” İbrahim b. Muhammed, *Adabu'l-Hilafe ve Esbabu'l-Hisafe*, 118, 126.

requirement of Quraysh lineage for the caliphate, emphasizing the linkage between the vizierate and the caliphate.²²⁴ In the subsequent section, I will delve into the pivotal aspects of this connection.

3.2. Sultan Süleyman I's Caliphate and the Grand Vizierate

Knowing that vizier means helper, this is how he helps because the work of the Imamate and the Caliphate is great and heavy. It is tough to do it alone. However, if the vizier sets out to complete the affairs correctly and righteously, and if he has borne some of the heavy burdens of the emir and has been able to give him lightness and relief in his affairs, then this is the very definition of help.²²⁵

İbrahim b. Muhammad initiated the fourth chapter of his work, titled “About Viziership and Emirship,” (*Vezirlik ve Emirlik Hakkındadır*) by referencing the verse concerning Aaron’s appointment as vizier to Moses and the hadith regarding the qualities of a good vizier. Following this introduction, he underscores that if the vizierate effectively assists the caliph in managing the weighty responsibilities of governance, then the vizier can genuinely serve as a “helper,” as outlined in the Qur'an and Hadith.²²⁶ This alignment is particularly notable in the context of Süleyman’s increasingly sacred persona, as he distanced himself from public and court affairs, contrasting with the grand viziers’ burgeoning responsibilities and authority, making them the public face of the sultan. Hence, the caliphate expanded the scope of governance for viziers, empowering them to act as representatives of the sultan in broader spheres of administration. This transformation is evident in the way foreign powers interacted with the Ottoman state. For instance, Venetian envoys frequently negotiated directly with İbrahim Pasha rather than Süleyman, a clear indication that the grand vizier functioned as the

²²⁴ İbrahim b. Muhammed, *Adabu'l-Hilafe ve Esbabu'l-Hisafe*, 156-157.

²²⁵ “*Bil ki vezir, yardımcı anlamındadır ve yardımı da bu şekildedir. Çünkü imametın ve hilafetin işleri büyük ve ağır bir iştir. Bu işlerin yalnız yapılması oldukça zordur. Fakat eğer vezir de işleri doğru ve dürüst bir tarzda tamama erdirmek için yola koyulursa, emirin bazı ağır yüklerini yüklenmiş ve ona işlerinde bir hafiflik ve ferahlık gösterebilmişse şüphe yok ki bu, yardımcılığın ta kendisidir.*” İbrahim b. Muhammed, *Adabu'l-Hilafe ve Esbabu'l-Hisafe*, 172.

²²⁶ İbrahim b. Muhammed, *Adabu'l-Hilafe ve Esbabu'l-Hisafe*, 171-172.

de facto head of government.²²⁷ The Ottoman chancery further reinforced this dynamic by systematically framing viziers as “absolute deputies,” echoing Abbasid practices where the caliph served as a spiritual figurehead while viziers governed.²²⁸ In addition to this point, rather than treating the caliphate as a distant religious ideal, Ebussuud Efendi reimagined it as a concrete instrument of Ottoman imperial governance—anchored in law, enacted through bureaucracy, and legitimized by theology. As Shaykh al-Islam from 1545 to 1574, Ebussuud redefined the role of the mufti from an independent legal voice to a central agent of state ideology, issuing fatwas that consistently legitimated sultanic authority and actions.²²⁹ His jurisprudence subordinated judicial discretion to the sultan’s law codes, effectively binding religious scholars and judges to imperial policy.²³⁰ By applying exalted religious language to Süleyman’s rule—depicting him as both caliph and protector of the faith—Ebussuud provided theological weight to imperial sovereignty.²³¹ In effect, he recast the caliphate not as a relic of prophetic legacy but as the living legal and ideological framework through which Ottoman state power was both exercised and sanctified.²³² Consequently, the caliphate expanded the scope of governance for viziers, empowering them to act as representatives of the sultan in broader spheres of administration.

Hüseyin Yılmaz delves into the portrayal of attitudes within the political literature of the era regarding Sultan Süleyman I’s caliphate thus far and its repercussions on the role of the vizier’s office. Süleyman emerged as the epitome of Ottoman rulership, embodying a mystical interpretation of the caliphate with fervent messianic zeal. The ruling elite perceived the sultan as a symbol of temporal and spiritual authority, detached from day-to-day governance. Governed by Ottoman law, the grand vizier assumed the mantle of the sultan’s

²²⁷ Turan, “The Sultan’s Favorite: İbrahim Pasha and Making of Ottoman Universal Sovereignty in the Reign of Sultan Süleyman (1516-1526),” 101.

²²⁸ Atçıl, “State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire,” 232.

²²⁹ Colin Imber, *Ebu’s-Su’ud: The Islamic Legal Tradition, Jurists-- Profiles in Legal Theory* (Stanford University Press, 1997), 10-11, 83.

²³⁰ Imber, *Ebu’s-Su’ud*, 82-84, 112-113.

²³¹ Imber, *Ebu’s-Su’ud*, 113.

²³² Imber, *Ebu’s-Su’ud*, 98-115.

chief administrator. This shift towards vizier-centric governance signified a departure from traditional ruler-centric political theories. A myriad of factors, such as the sultan's withdrawal from direct governance, the ascendancy of Ottoman law, and the institutionalization of governmental functions, elevated the vizierate to a pivotal role in political theory. Bureaucratic writers now enjoyed greater latitude in delineating the ideal vizier, who often overshadowed the ruler in practical governance. This paradigm shift marginalized the significance of the ruler's persona, redirecting attention toward the grand vizier's qualifications and capabilities for effective governance.²³³ In alignment with this perspective, Atçıl contends that particularly from the latter half of the sixteenth century onwards, the grand vizier assumed a central role in imperial policies, overshadowing the visibility of the sultan himself. As the primary embodiment of power, symbolically representing the sultan, the grand vizier adeptly navigated public demands while effectively managing the court. Consequently, for the Ottoman intelligentsia, the personal identity of the grand vizier gained prominence, eclipsing that of the sultan during this period.²³⁴

In addition to the revered status of the caliphate, we observe that the political role of the vizier, who embodies the public persona of the caliph, finds legitimacy through the prophetic tradition embraced by Ottoman scholar-bureaucrats. Referencing the famous hadith, which posits that when Allah desires good for a ruler, He grants them a righteous vizier, Hüseyin Yılmaz emphasizes that the vizierate was an integral component of prophetic governance.²³⁵ Just as Abu Bakr (r.632-634), Umar (r.634-644), and Uthman (r.644-656) served as righteous viziers to Prophet Muhammad, the administration of Ottoman grand viziers within the state apparatus assumes an unquestionable significance.²³⁶

²³³ Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined*, 79.

²³⁴ Zahir Atçıl, "Why Did Süleyman the Magnificent Execute His Son Şehzade Mustafa in 1553?," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 48, no. 48 (2016): 97, <https://doi.org/10.18589/oa.586488>.

²³⁵ İbrahim b. Muhammed, *Adabu'l-Hilafe ve Esbabu'l-Hisafe*, 171; Celalzade Mustafa, *Mevâhibü'l-hallâk fi merâtibi'l-ahlâk*, MS, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Fatih 3521, 197b-198a.

²³⁶ Hüseyin Yılmaz, "The Sultan and the Sultanate: Envisioning Rulership in the Age of Süleymân the Lawgiver (1520-1566)" (PhD., Boston, University of Harvard, 2005), 284.

As a tangible manifestation of the theoretical expansion of both the caliphate and the vizierate, whose authority was validated within the prophetic tradition associated with the caliphate, we find the letter directly addressed to Karl V (r.1519-1556) by Süleyman's grand vizier, Makbul İbrahim Pasha. In this correspondence, İbrahim Pasha commences his address as “*Sultan Süleyman hazretlerinin ben ki kaimmakam-ı saltanat, serasker-i sami-mertebe, vezir-i a'zam-ı cenab-ı hilafet menkabetleri İbrahim paşayım* (I, İbrahim Pasha, Grand Vizier of the exalted Caliphate, supreme commander of the army, and deputy of His Majesty Sultan Süleyman's sovereignty).”²³⁷ In this context, the ability of the vizier to compose a letter directly aimed at a sovereign, representing the caliphate, and commencing his address from such an assertive position exemplifies the core tenets of the Ottoman administrative mentality outlined above.

Conclusion

The relationship between the caliphate and the vizierate was not just a theoretical construct but a practical mechanism that shaped Ottoman governance across political, military, legal, and economic spheres. Central to this dynamic was the mutually reinforcing bond between the caliphate and the vizierate. The caliphate was redefined as both a spiritual and ideological tool but also as a mechanism for delegating governance to the vizierate.²³⁸ By legitimizing the vizier's rule as an extension of divine governance, the Ottoman caliphate transformed sultanic authority, elevating the vizierate as the empire's de facto executive power. This dynamic ensured the empire's stability and continuity, even as the sultan-caliph remained a symbolic and sacred figurehead. The practical implications of this shift were evident in the vizierate's growing control over key aspects of governance. For instance, in 1551, Rüstem Pasha dismissed two military judges, Sinan Çelebi and Bostan Çelebi, without

²³⁷ Feridun M. Emecen, *Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Ve Zamanı* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2022), 212.

²³⁸ Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined*, 147.

the sultan's consultation, demonstrating the vizierate's increasing autonomy in managing religious-legal institutions.²³⁹ Similarly, most state decrees bore the vizier's seal rather than the sultan's, consolidating the bureaucratic supremacy of the vizierate and highlighting its central role in the administration of the empire.²⁴⁰

Thus, the caliphate not only provided ideological legitimacy but also created a political structure in which grand viziers governed in nearly sovereign terms, a legacy that endured long after Süleyman's reign. These developments highlight how the vizierate's authority extended beyond mere administrative duties, encompassing military, legal, and bureaucratic domains, all under the caliphate's legitimizing framework. This transformation ensured the Ottoman Empire could maintain its vast and diverse territories while adapting to the evolving demands of early-modern governance.

²³⁹ Atçıl, "State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire," 291.

²⁴⁰ Atçıl, "State and Government in the Mid-Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire," 278.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of the Ottoman vizierate during the reign of Süleyman I (1520–1566) represents a remarkable synthesis of Islamic political thought and practical statecraft, driven by the empire's evolving administrative needs and the Ottomans' conscious adaptation to their historical context. This thesis has explored this transformation through three interconnected lenses: the historical and conceptual foundations of the vizierate, its interaction with key Islamic governance concepts, and its relationship with the caliphate. These chapters reveal how the vizierate became a dynamic institution that balanced continuity with innovation, reflecting the Ottomans' result oriented approach and their ability to creatively reinterpret classical ideas to address the demands of a rapidly expanding empire.

Chapter I outlines the historical and conceptual foundations of the Ottoman vizierate, emphasizing its transformation during the Süleymanic era (1520–1566). It begins by examining the vizierate's origins in early Islamic governance. However, the Ottoman Vizierate marked a significant departure from previous models. Under Mehmed II, the grand vizierate was institutionalized as the empire's chief executive authority, codified in the *Kanunname-i Al-i Osman*. During Süleyman I's reign, the grand vizierate reached its peak, becoming a stable and powerful executive institution. This period saw the emergence of influential grand viziers such as İbrahim Pasha, Rüstem Pasha, and Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, who not only executed the sultan's orders but also actively shaped policy, legal administration, and military strategy, leaving a lasting impact on the empire. This era transitioned from the vizierate's earlier advisory role to a more autonomous and dynamic institution deeply embedded in the empire's political fabric.

Chapter II examined the vizierate's interaction with essential Islamic governance concepts—*meşveret* (consultation), *akl* (reasoning), and *tedbir* (good management)—showing

how these ideas were transformed from abstract ethical ideals into practical governance tools. Through the writings of scholar-bureaucrats like Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi and Lütü Pasha, these concepts were creatively reinterpreted to tackle the administrative challenges of an expanding empire. The chapter emphasized the Ottomans' pragmatism and their capacity to adapt classical Islamic ideas to meet the empire's changing needs, reflecting a transition from theoretical ethics to actionable statecraft. This Ottomanization of Islamic governance concepts highlights the empire's distinctive ability to blend intellectual rigor with practical necessity, ensuring stability and legitimacy in a diverse and dynamic political landscape.

Chapter III examined the relationship between the caliphate and the vizierate, arguing that the redefinition of the caliphate under Süleyman I facilitated the vizierate's expansion into the empire's de facto executive power. By positioning himself as a sacred and symbolic caliph, Süleyman I delegated practical governance to the grand vizierate, establishing a dual structure of authority that mirrored the Abbasid model. This shift was not merely theoretical but had concrete implications for Ottoman governance, as grand viziers like İbrahim Pasha and Rüstem Pasha assumed near-sovereign authority in military, legal, and bureaucratic matters. The caliphate's ideological legitimacy thus enabled the vizierate to function as a co-governing institution, ensuring the empire's stability and continuity while allowing the sultan to remain a distant, otherworldly figure. The chapter emphasized the practicality of this arrangement, demonstrating how the caliphate-vizierate relationship was not just an ideological construct but a functional mechanism for managing the empire's vast and diverse territories.

This thesis enhances the broader understanding of Ottoman political thought by emphasizing the interplay between continuity and innovation in transforming the vizierate. It illustrates how the Ottomans creatively adapted concepts of Islamic governance to meet the practical demands of empire-building while redefining the ideological foundations of their

rule. The study highlights the central role of the vizierate in Ottoman governance, not just as an administrative institution but as a hub of intellectual and political innovation. The Ottomans' approach of seeking for result and their capacity to adapt classical ideas to their context—through creative reinterpretations and pragmatic translations—demonstrate a deep awareness of their era and the needs of their empire.

However, this research has its limitations. While necessary for depth, relying on a select corpus of primary sources may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives within the Ottoman ruling elite. Although illuminating, the focus on the Süleymanic era leaves room for further exploration of how the vizierate evolved in later periods, particularly during the empire's decentralization in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Future research could also examine the vizierate's role in the empire's interactions with other Islamic states, such as the Safavids and Mughals, to better understand its position within the broader early modern Islamic world. Furthermore, a deeper analysis of the adaptation-translation process—how Ottoman authors selectively reinterpreted Arabic and Persian texts—could shed light on the intellectual dynamics of Ottomanization and its impact on governance.

In conclusion, the transformation of the Ottoman vizierate under Süleyman I represents a unique synthesis of Islamic political thought and practical statecraft. By reimagining the vizierate as a central governing authority, the Ottomans established a governance model that balanced intellectual rigor with administrative flexibility, ensuring the empire's stability and continuity during a time of profound transformation. The Ottoman scholar-bureaucrats' pragmatism, their creative adaptations, and their ability to respond to the needs of their era serve as a testament to their innovative spirit and lasting legacy in the history of governance.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: The Ottoman Grand Viziers (1451–1579)

Sultan	Date	Period	Name	Execution	Noble Background	Devsime	Royal Marriage	Notes
Mehmed II (1451–1481)	1451–1453	2 years	Çandarlı Halil Paşa	yes		no	no	
	1453–1456	3 years	Zâgânos Paşa	yes		yes	Mürad II's son in law and Mehmed II's father in law	vezir-i <i>hümâzâzân</i> (the mighty vizier)
	1456–1468	12 years (1st term)	Mahmud Paşa Angelovic	yes	yes	yes	no	
	1468–1471	3 years (1st term)	İshak Paşa	no		no	no	vezir-i <i>hâkîm</i> (the great vizier)
Mehmed II (1471–1477)	1471–1472	1 year	Rum Mehmed Paşa	no		yes	no	
	1472–1474	2 years (2nd term)	Mahmud Paşa Angelovic	yes	yes	yes	no	
	1474–1477	3 years	Gedik Ahmed Paşa	no	yes	yes	no	İshak Paşa's son in law
	1477	1 year	Sünni Paşa	no		no	no	
	1477–1481	4 years	Karaman Mehmed Paşa	yes		no	no	<i>hâceti sultânî</i> (teacher of sultans)
	1481–1483	2 years (2nd term)	İshak Paşa	no	yes	no	no	a descendant of Mevlânâ Celâleddin Rûmî
	1483–1497	14 years	Koca Davud Paşa	no		yes	no	vezir-i <i>lâ'ibîr</i> (the great vizier)
Bayezid II (1411–1512)	1497–1498	1 year (1st term)	Hersekzade Ahmed Paşa	no	yes	yes	yes	
	1498–1499	1 year	Çandarlı İbrahim Paşa	no		no	no	
	1499–1501	2 years	Mesilî Paşa Palaiologos	no	yes	yes	no	nephew of the last Byzantine emperor Constantine IX Palaeologus
	1501–1503	2 years (1st term)	Atik Ali Paşa / Hadım Ali Paşa	no	yes	yes	yes	
Bayezid II (1503–1506)	1503–1506	3 years (2nd term)	Hersekzade Ahmed Paşa	no	yes	yes	yes	
	1506–1511	5 years (2nd term)	Atik Ali Paşa / Hadım Ali Paşa	no	yes	yes	yes	
	1511	3 months (3rd term)	Hersekzade Ahmed Paşa	no	yes	yes	yes	İdris-i Bîlîsî dedicated his historical work <i>Hegî Bîlîsî</i> to Atik Ali Paşa.
	1511–1512	1 year	Koca Mustafa Paşa	yes		yes		
Selim I (1512–1520)	1512–1514	almost 3 years (4th term)	Hersekzade Ahmed Paşa	no	yes	yes	yes	
	1514–1515	almost 1 year	Dilekizade Ahmed Paşa	yes	yes	yes	yes	
	1515–1516	almost 1 year (5th term)	Hersekzade Ahmed Paşa	no	yes	yes	yes	
	1516–1517	almost 1 year	Hadım Sinan Paşa Benovic	no	yes	yes		
Selim I (1517–1517)	1517	almost 1 year	Yunus Paşa	yes		yes	yes indirectly	
Süleyman I (1520–1566)	1518–1523	5 years	Piri Mehmed Paşa	no	yes	no	no	a descendant of Mevlânâ Celâleddin Rûmî
	1523–1536	almost 13 years	Pargalı İbrahim Paşa, Makbul	yes		yes	yes	<i>kaimmakam-ı sultanî</i> , <i>senmek-i sını</i> , <i>avretbet</i> , <i>vezir-i a zâma-i cema-i ilâhî</i> (Grand Vizier of the exalted Caliphate, supreme commander of the army, and deputy of His Majesty Sultan Süleyman's sovereignty)
	1536–1539	3 years	Ayaz Ahmed Paşa	no		no	no	
	1539–1541	almost 2 years	Lutfî Paşa	no		yes	yes	
Süleyman I (1541–1544)	1541–1544	almost 3 years	Hadım Süleyman Paşa	no		yes	no	
	1544–1553	almost 9 years (1st term)	Damat Rüstem Paşa	no		yes	yes	The imperial chancellor Feridun Ahmed Bey became the son in law of Rüstem Paşa.
	1553–1555	2 years	Kara Ahmed Paşa	yes		yes	yes	He was married with Süleyman's sister, Fatma Sultan.
	1555–1561	almost 6 years	Damat Rüstem Paşa	no		yes	yes	
Selim II (1561–1574)	1561–1565	4 years	Semiz Ali Paşa	no		yes	no	
	1565–1579	14 years	Sokollu Mehmed Paşa	yes		yes	yes	He was the son in law of Selim II through marrying his daughter İsmihan Sultan.