

PALACE POLITICS AND THE RISE OF THE CHIEF BLACK EUNUCH IN
THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Thesis Submitted to the
Institute for Graduate Studies in Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
History

by

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2005

Anneme ve babama

To my parents Gençay and İsmail Yılmaz

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not have been realized without the generous help of a variety of people. I am particularly grateful to my advisor, Assit. Prof. Derin Terzioğlu, without whose guidance and critical advice the completion of this thesis would not have been possible. During the course of this thesis, she helped me a lot with her thoughtful comments and constructive criticism. Secondly, I would like to thank Assit. Prof. Ahmet Ersoy and Assit. Prof. Hakan Erdem for their valuable criticism and for their kindly accepting to be a member of the committee. I am also indebted to Sevda Akyüz, who has proofread all the text in a short period of time. Last, but not least, my thanks go to all the staff of the library of İSAM and Boğaziçi University, Süleymaniye Library, Başbakanlık and Topkapı Palace Arşivi. All of them have been very helpful during my research.

Of course, I would like to express my feelings of gratitude to my friends who have helped me during this research process. First and foremost, I would like to extend my thanks to Ebru Sönmez, who not only edited all the text attentively, but also offered extremely critical comments on the chapters of the present study. Without her support and encouragement, this research could not have come to an end. I am also grateful to Özgür Oral, who taught me to read *divani* writing during my research at the Başbakanlık Arşivi. To Tariq M. Nour, I am deeply indebted for his help in the reading of the registers of *Mühimme-i Mısır* and the texts as well as documents in Arabic. I also wish to express my thanks to my friend Özlem Çavdar for her morale support.

Finally, my greatest debt of gratitude goes to all members of my family, who have supported and encouraged me as I worked on this study. In particular, I thank to my mother Gençay Yılmaz and my father İsmail Yılmaz for their endless patience, support and encouragement. I would also like to thank to my sisters Esra, Filiz, Mine, Ayşe and my brothers Cabbar, Mehmet, Ahmethan who have helped me in so many ways. Last but not the

least, my deep gratitude goes to my husband Oğün Karakoç for his patience and support throughout my graduate education at Boğaziçi University. Without his understanding and love, I could not have written this thesis.

ABSTRACT

Palace Politics and the Rise of the Chief Black Eunuch in the Ottoman Empire

by

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This study investigates the emergence of the chief black eunuch or the *dariüssaade* agha as a pivotal harem figure in the context of the transformation of the Ottoman state and royal household in the post-Süleymanic era. It is argued that the consolidation of the royal family in the Topkapı Palace and the increase in the number of palace residents and personnel, on the one hand, and the desire of the sultan and other members of the royal family to create new networks of patronage, on the other, necessitated the creation of the new office and created a suitable environment for black eunuchs to wield considerable power and influence in the Ottoman Empire. The rise of the chief black eunuchs, nevertheless, was not a smooth process, and involved a power struggle between them and the chief white eunuchs, who were formerly in charge of administering the entire palace, including the imperial harem.

Relying mainly on the chronicles of the period and selected archival documents, this study also discusses the important roles played by the *dariüssaade* aghas in Ottoman politics after the institutionalization of their office. To illustrate the ways in which the chief black eunuchs came to exercise great power and influence, it provides an overview of the career paths of the chief black eunuchs from their entry into the palace to their dismissal or retirement, and discusses the quarters in which they lived and the roles they played in royal ceremonies.

Finally, this study considers how the chief black eunuchs were perceived in Ottoman society at large as powerful officials who also happened to be slaves, black and castrated. While doing that it also shows how the power struggle between the white and black eunuchs was reflected in a series of texts written by their clients. Specifically, Mustafa Âlî's

Description of Cairo is analyzed as a text that was highly critical of these powerful officials and which sought to undermine their status by playing on society's negative stereotypes of blacks, while a number of treatises written in praise of the good qualities of the Ethiopians are discussed in relation to the efforts of the chief black eunuchs to answer to their critics.

ÖZET

Saray Politikaları ve *Darüssaade* Ağasının Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Yükselişi

Yıldız Karakoç

Bu çalışma *darüssaade* ağasının önemli bir harem figürü olarak ortaya çıkışını Osmanlı devletinin ve sarayının Süleyman sonrası dönemde geçirdiği dönüşüm bağlamında inceler. Bir yandan hanedan ailesinin Topkapı Sarayı'na yerleşmesiyle saray sakinleri ve personel sayısının artması, diğer taraftan sultanın ve hanedanın diğer üyelerinin yeni hamilik ağları yaratmak istemeleriyle sarayda yeni bir kurumun oluşumuna neden olduğunu tartışırken; bu durumun siyah hadımlara hatırı sayılır bir güç ve nüfuz kullanmaları için uygun bir ortam hazırladığını iddia eder. Bununla birlikte, *darüssaade* ağasının yükselişi pürüzsüz bir süreç değildi. Aksine, bu yükseliş *darüssaade* ağaları ve harem de dahil sarayın tüm idaresinden sorumlu olan beyaz hadım ağalar, *babüssaade* ağaları, arasında güç mücadelelerine neden olmuştu.

Bu çalışma *darüssaade* ağalığının kurumsallaşmasından sonra baş hadım ağalarının Osmanlı politikalarında oynadıkları önemli rolleri, esas itibariyle çağdaş kroniklere ve seçilmiş arşiv belgelerine dayanarak tartışır. *Darüssaade* ağalarının nasıl büyük güç ve nüfuz kazandıklarını izah etmek için, baş hadım ağalarının kariyer süreçlerini saraya girmelerinden görevden alınmalarına veya emekli olmalarına kadar değerlendiren kısa bir araştırma sunar. Ayrıca siyah hadımların sarayda yaşadıkları mekanları ve saray törenlerinde oynadıkları rolleri tartışır.

Son olarak, bu çalışma köle, siyah ve hadım olan *darüssaade* ağalarının güçlü saray yetkilileri olarak Osmanlı toplumunda nasıl algılandığıyla ilgilenir. Bu bağlamda bu çalışma bir taraftan hadım ağaların toplum tarafından algılanışının, diğer taraftan siyah ve beyaz hadım ağalar arasındaki güç mücadelesinin, bu ağaların tâbileri tarafından yazılan bir dizi metne nasıl yansdığını sorgular. Özellikle Mustafa Âlî'nin *Hâlâtü'l- Kâhire* adlı eserini, bu

güçlü ağaları ziyadesiyle eleştiren ve toplumun siyahlar hakkındaki olumsuz stereotipini kullanarak ağaların statüsünü zayıflatmaya çalışan bir metin olarak analiz ederken, Etiyopyalıların iyi niteliklerini yüceltmek için yazılan eserleri *darüssaade* ağalarının kendilerine yöneltilen eleştirilere cevap verme çabaları olarak değerlendirir.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	iv
Abstract.....	vi
Kısa Özet.....	viii
Table of Contents.....	x
List of Abbreviations.....	xii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter I The Changing Dynamics of the Ottoman Royal Household in the Late Sixteenth Century.....	9
I. The Development of the Ottoman Palace as a Center of Political Power.....	10
II. The Ascendancy of the Chief Black Eunuch as a Pivotal Harem Figure.....	18
Chapter II The Institutionalization of the Office of the <i>Dariüssaade</i> Agha at the Imperial Harem in the Late Sixteenth Century.....	29
I. The Development of the New Office at the Palace and the Empowerment of Black Eunuchs in the Imperial Harem.....	30
II. The Falling of the Power into the Hands of Black Eunuchs or the Withdrawing of White Eunuchs From the Imperial Harem.....	33
i. The Chief White Eunuch as the Old Head Gatekeeper of the Imperial Harem.....	34
ii. The Silent Strife Between the White and Black Eunuchs of the Imperial Harem.....	40
III. The <i>Dariüssaade</i> Agha as a New Ally and a New Political Force at the Harem.....	47

Chapter III The Chief Black Eunuch in Office.....	57
I. Hierarchy, Duties, and Careers of Black Eunuchs: A Brief Survey.....	58
II. The Quarters of the Black Eunuchs as a Reflection of Their Newly Gained Power and Prestige	71
III. The Splendid Appearance of the Chief Black Eunuch in the Ceremonies of the Ottoman Court	79
Chapter IV Towards A New Image of the Black Eunuchs of the Ottoman Palace.....	89
I. Habes Mehmed Agha (d. 1590), the First Chief Black Eunuch of the Imperial Harem.....	90
II. Gazanfer Agha (d. 1603), the Chief White Eunuch of Murad III and Mehmed III.....	95
III. The Black Eunuchs of the Ottoman Empire as Portrayed in Mustafa Âlî's <i>Description of Cairo of 1599</i>.....	101
IV. The Announcement of Black Eunuchs' "merits and excellence" or the manifestations of Black Eunuchs' "superiority".....	112
Conclusion.....	130
Bibliography.....	135

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BOA	Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi
CS	Cevdet Saray
D	Defter
D. BŞM. MHF	Bâb-1 Defteri Başmuhasebe Kalemi Muhallefât
	Halifesi
DİA	Diyanet İslam Ansiklopedisi
E	Evrak
EI	Encyclopedia of Islam
HH	Hatt-ı Hümayun
MM	Mühimme-i Mısır
TSA	Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi

INTRODUCTION

In 1599, the Ottoman intellectual Mustafa Âlî (d. 1600) vehemently criticized the recent domination of Egypt by black eunuchs in the appendix of his book, *Hâlâtü'l Kahire mine'l -Âdâtî'z-Zahire* (The Conditions of Cairo Concerning Its Actual Customs)¹. Although Âlî's virulent attitude towards the black eunuchs stemmed in part from his own grievances and in part from those of his benefactor and patron, the chief white eunuch Gazanfer Agha (d. 1603), to whom he dedicated his book, Mustafa Âlî was not unique in disapproving of the actions of the black eunuchs. Other Ottoman historians such as Hasan Beyzade (d. 1636) a member of the *kalemiye* who held the post of *reisülküttâb*² and Tûgî Çelebi (died in the reign of Murad IV [1623-1640]), a historian of Janissary background,³ shared similar views about the black eunuchs.

Whatever the attitudes adopted by the individual historians, the recurring appearance of black eunuchs as important figures in the Ottoman chronicles of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries indicate the growing political influence of black eunuchs in general and of the chief black eunuch in particular. This influence was the outcome of an important institutional change that occurred in the Ottoman palace in the last quarter of the sixteenth century: the creation of the office of the *dariüssaade* agha and the appointment of one of the black eunuchs as the chief officer of the new institution.

¹ Mustafa Âlî, *Hâlâtü'l Kâhire mine'l-âdâtîz'zâhire. Mustafa Âlî's Description of Cairo of 1599: text, transliteration, notes* (Vien, Verlag Der Österreichischen Akademie Der Wissenschaften, 1975) [hereafter Âlî/Tietze I], pp. 80-83 (tr.), 172-176 (ed.).

² Hasan Beyzâde Ahmed Pasha, *Hasan Beyzâde Tarihi*, ed. Şevket Nezihi Aykut, 3 vols. (Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2004) [hereafter Hasan Beyzâde].

³ Fahir İz, "Eski Düzyazının Gelişimi: XVII. Yüzyılda halk dili ile yazılmış bir tarih kitabı; Hüseyin Tûgî, Vak'a-ı Sultan Osman Han" *Türk Dili Araştırmaları Yıllığı- Belleten* (1967), 119-139 [hereafter Tûgî/ İz] .

The present study takes the creation of the office of the *darüssaade* agha as a turning point for the history of the black eunuchs, because with this institution the position of black eunuchs in the palace changed in a definitive way. Until 1574 the chief white eunuchs had been responsible for administering the whole palace, including the harem. With the creation of the office of the *darüssaade* agha in that year, the two functions were separated: while the chief black eunuch was put in charge of the imperial harem, the chief white eunuch remained responsible for the inner palace household. Thus, a new period began for the black eunuchs of the imperial harem. From the end of the sixteenth century until the late decades of the eighteenth century, those black eunuchs who reached the office of the *darüssaade* agha would play vital roles in the political, social, economic as well as cultural life of the Ottoman Empire thanks to their intimate knowledge of palace politics, their relations with members of the royal family and other high-ranking officials, their control over royal *vakfs* and their long-standing link with the crucial province of Egypt.

Despite the important roles played by the chief black eunuch in the imperial harem and the empire at large, there is no comprehensive study, to our knowledge, on the chief black eunuchs of the Ottoman palace. General information about them comes from the works of Norman Penzer⁴, İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı⁵ and Çağatay Uluçay⁶ on the Ottoman palace. While these studies are important for having introduced some of the basic sources on this institution from Ottoman chronicles to European travel accounts, they nevertheless tend to treat the rise of the chief black eunuchs as merely a symptom of

⁴ Norman Penzer, *The Harem. An Account Of The Institution As It Existed In The Palace Of The Turkish Sultans With A History Of Grand Seraglio From Its Foundation To The Present Time* (London, 1936).

⁵ İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin Saray Teşkilatı* (Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1945) [hereafter Uzunçarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı*].

⁶ Çağatay Uluçay, *Harem II* (Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1971).

Ottoman decline rather than as an institutional change that requires explanation in its own right. More recently, scholars such as Jane Hathaway⁷ and Ehud Toledano⁸ have examined the black eunuchs of the harem in a new light. In specific, Hathaway has shown the centrality of Egypt to the chief black eunuch's career by using the registers of *mühimme-i Mısır* and *waqf* documents, while Toledano has handled the biographies of the chief black eunuchs to show the structure of the Eunuchs' Corps in the light of the *Registers of the Biographies of the Imperial African Eunuchs*. Both of these historians, nevertheless, have been concerned with the eunuchs of later centuries, and do not answer questions concerning the reasons behind the creation of the office or the rise of the black eunuchs at the Ottoman court. The only study that addresses the latter issue, even if in brief, is Baki Tezcan's recently completed dissertation on the deposition of Sultan Osman II (r. 1618-1622)⁹. In his exploration of the structural changes in the Ottoman politics of the period, Tezcan mentions the establishment of the office of the chief black eunuch in the context of the "absolutist policies" of Sultan Murad¹⁰, an argument that will be further elaborated in this study.

Differently from all the abovementioned studies, this study focuses mainly on the early history of the office of the chief black eunuch and tries to understand how black eunuchs of the palace became the most important official of the harem from the reign of Sultan Murad III onwards. In specific, it seeks answers to the following three questions: What were the historical factors that enabled the black eunuchs to acquire great power

⁷ Jane Hathaway, "The Role of Kızlar Ağası in 17th-18th Century Ottoman Egypt" *Studia Islamica*, LXXV (1992), 141-158 [hereafter Hathaway "The Role of Kızlar Ağası"] .

⁸ Ehud R. Toledano "The Imperial Eunuchs of Istanbul: From Africa to the Hearth of Islam" *Middle Eastern Studies*, xxiii (1984), 379-390 [hereafter "The Imperial Eunuchs"] .

⁹ Baki Tezcan, *Searching For Osman: A Reassessment of The Deposition of The Ottoman Sultan Osman II (1618-1622)* (Ph. D. diss. , Princeton University, 2001) [hereafter Searching for Osman].

¹⁰ *Ibid.* , p. 159.

and prestige in the palace? What roles did the chief black eunuchs play in Ottoman politics at the end of this process? And how did they try to legitimate their newly gained power given their disadvantaged status as slaves, blacks and eunuchs?

To answer these questions, the present study uses a wide range of published and unpublished narrative sources as well as unpublished archival documents. Among the narrative sources chronicles of the late sixteenth century have special significance, as they offer rare clues into the institutionalization process of the office of *darüssaade* agha as well as into the actions and public image of both the white and black eunuchs of the imperial palace. The three principal chronicles utilized in this study were written by Mustafa Âlî, a bureaucrat and historian¹¹, Selânikî (d. after 1600), a financial scribe¹², and Peçevî (d. 1650), a higher-level official in the imperial administration.¹³

For information about the careers of the chief black eunuchs of the harem as well as about the structure of the wider institution, the present study utilizes several biographical sources. The first of these, *Hamîletü'l Küberâ*¹⁴ was written in the eighteenth century by the Ottoman bureaucrat and historian Ahmed Resmî (d. 1783), and covers the tenures of the chief black eunuchs from the beginning of their office until the second half of the eighteenth century. The other two biographical sources utilized in this study are two registers that date from the nineteenth century, and are entitled *Harem-i Hümayun Ağvâtı Kullarının Tercüme-i Halleri Defteri* (The Registers of the Biographies

¹¹ Mustafa Âlî, *Künhü'l Ahbâr* (İstanbul Üniversitesi, Y 5959) [hereafter Âlî/*Künh*] .

¹² Selânikî Mustafa Efendi, *Tarih-i Selânikî*, ed. Mehmet İpşirli, 2 vols. (İstanbul, Edebiyat Fakültesi Basımevi, 1989) [hereafter Selânikî] .

¹³ İbrahim Peçevî, *Tarih-i Peçevî*, 2 vols. (İstanbul, 1281-1283) [hereafter Peçevî] .

¹⁴ Ahmed Resmî Efendi, *Hâmîletü'l Küberâ*, ed. Ahmet Nezihi Turan (İstanbul, Kitabevi, 2000) [hereafter Turan/*Hâmîle*] .

of the Imperial Eunuchs).¹⁵ Although these registers are devoted exclusively to the black eunuchs of the nineteenth century, they also provide important information concerning the structure of the Eunuch's Corps. While using these later sources, by no means do we suggest that the structure of the corps remained the same until the nineteenth century. Yet due to the lack of comparable document for the earlier periods, we prefer to use them cautiously in the light of the information that comes from earlier sources such as contemporary chronicles, the registers of *mühimme-i Mısır*, and selected archival documents.

In addition to these sources, this thesis draws upon four texts that reveal important insights into how the black eunuchs were perceived in Ottoman society at large. The first of these texts is well known: Mustafa Âlî's abovementioned work on Egypt, *Hâlâtü'l Kahire mine'l-Âdâti'z-Zahire* (The Conditions of Cairo Concerning Its Actual Customs). While Âlî's text represents a highly negative view of the black eunuchs, the other three treatises examined in this study can be seen as direct or indirect efforts to rectify this view by discussing the good qualities of "the Ethiopians," the ethnic/racial group to which the chief black eunuchs belonged. They are: *et-Tirâzu'l-Menkûş fî Mehâsini'l-Hubûş* (The Colored Brocade Concerning the Good Qualities of the Ethiopians)¹⁶, written in Arabic in 1583, *Mir'atu'l Hubûş fî'l-usûl* (The Reflection of the Ethiopians in the Sources)¹⁷, written in Turkish in 1598, and *Râfiü'l-gubûş fî fezâili'l-Hubûş* (The Illumination of the Darkness on the Merits of the Ethiopians) written in Turkish in

¹⁵ *Harem-i Hümayun Ağvâtı Kullarının Tercüme-i Halleri Defteri*, İstanbul Üniversitesi, Y 9090 [hereafter The Register of 1895]; *Harem-i Hümayun Ağvâtı Kullarının Tercüme-i Halleri Defteri*, BOA Yıldız Koleksiyonu, XXI [hereafter The Register of 1903].

¹⁶ Alaaddin Muhammed bin Abdalbâkî el-kâdihânî (d. after 1589), *et-Tirâzu'l-Menkûş fî Mehâsini'l-Hubûş*, Süleymaniye Library, Aşir Efendi Bölümü, No: 311. [hereafter Alaaddin Muhammed, *Mehâsini'l Hubûş*]

¹⁷ Ali Efendi (d. after 1589), *Mirâtu'l Hubûş fî'l usûl*, Süleymaniye Library, Esat Efendi, 484 [hereafter Ali Efendi, *Mirâtu'l Hubûş*].

1612¹⁸. The *Mir'atu'l Hubûş fi'l-usûl* and *Râfiü'l-gubûş fi fezâili'l-Hubûş* were introduced to the scholarly community first by Cengiz Orhonlu¹⁹ and *et-Tirâzu'l-Menkûş fi Mehâsini'l-Hubûş* by Michael Winter²⁰ but none of these texts has so far been systematically analyzed anywhere except for a short article by Akbar Muhammad.²¹

Last but not least, this thesis draws on a large collection of archival materials. Above all, the first ten registers of the *mühimme-i Mısır*, covering the years 1707-1803, have been intensively utilized in this study. Although these registers do not date back before the eighteenth century, they still provide important clues about the chief black eunuchs who lived in previous centuries. Other archival sources used include edicts (*ferman*), decrees (*hüküm*), petitions (*arz*) and letters, preserved in the Başbakanlık and the Topkapı Palace Archives.

This thesis is organized in four chapters. The first chapter examines the historical context to illuminate the reasons behind the establishment of the office of the *darüssaade* agha. It is argued that the newly gained influence of the black eunuchs was actually part of a series of changes in the Ottoman state and royal household in the late sixteenth century. In specific, the importance of the rise of the Ottoman court as a center of political power is stressed to understand the dynamics behind the creation of the new office at the palace.

¹⁸ 'Ali bin 'Abdurra'uf el-Habeşi (d. 1623), *Râfiü'l-gubûş fi fezâili'l-Hubûş*, Süleymaniye Library, Fatih, 4360 [hereafter *Râfiü'l-gubûş*].

¹⁹ Cengiz Orhonlu, "Derviş Abdullah'ın Darüssaade Ağaları Hakkında Bir Eseri: Risale-i Teberdariyye Fî Ahvâl-ı Dâru's-saâde" [hereafter "Derviş Abdullah"] in *İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı'ya Armağan* (Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1988), pp. 225-249.

²⁰ Michael Winter, "'Ali Efendi's Anatolian Campaign Book': A Defence of the Egyptian Army in the Seventeenth Century" *Turcica* 15 (1983), pp. 267-307; at p. 275.

²¹ Akbar Muhammed, "The Image of Africans in Arabic Literature: Some Unpublished Manuscripts" in *Slaves and Slavery in Modern Africa*, ed. J. R. Wills, 2 vols. (London, 1985), vol. 2, pp. 47-74.

The second chapter looks more closely at the historical process in which the office came to be established. The first section of this chapter discusses how the responsibilities of the *dariissaade* agha were defined in the reign of Sultan Murad III. The second section draws attention to the office of the chief white eunuch, who was the principal officer from whom the chief black eunuch wrested power as well as his main rival at the palace. In specific, this section discusses how the chief white eunuchs responded to the change in their status and whether they made any attempt to regain the administration of the harem. Finally, the third and last section of this chapter demonstrates the rise of the chief black eunuchs as important political actors by examining the careers of four influential chief black eunuchs, Osman (d. 1603), Abdürrezzak (d. 1604), Süleyman (d. 1622), Mustafa (d. 1624) in the seventeenth century.

Adopting a more thematic approach, the third chapter examines the chief black eunuch as the head of an institutionalized office. To illustrate how the institution functioned, first a brief overview of the career path of the black eunuchs is given from a eunuch's entry to the harem to the rules and patterns of promotion and the duties of the chief black eunuch, the highest office that the black eunuchs could hold. The last two sections of this chapter trace the black eunuchs' growing importance at the palace as reflected in the changes that took place in the quarters of black eunuchs at the harem and in the position of chief black eunuchs in the ceremonies of the Ottoman court following the institutionalization of the office.

The fourth and last chapter of this study briefly considers how the chief black eunuchs were perceived in Ottoman society as powerful officials, who also happened to

be slaves, black and castrated, and how the chief black eunuchs themselves attempted to “talk back” to their critics by sponsoring books that praised their ethnic origins. Of course, the question of the perception of the chief black eunuchs and the societal prejudices from which they suffered are a vast issue that would be the topic of a study in its own right. In a more limited way, this chapter examines the debates in the context of the power struggle that took place between the white and black aghas of the palace during the period which witnessed the institutionalization of the office of the *dariüssaade* agha.

As a final remark, it has be noted that due to reasons of time limitation, this investigation into the institutionalization of the office of the *dariüssaade* agha will inevitably leave a number of critical issues unexplored. It would have been good, for instance, to include in this thesis a discussion of the wider patterns of patronage provided by the chief black eunuchs during this critical phase of their history, including the charitable foundations they established, and the scholars and artists they patronized. Likewise, the lives led by the chief black eunuchs after their dismissal or retirement and their connection with Egypt constitute vital dimensions of their existence that remain to be explored in future studies.

CHAPTER I

THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF THE OTTOMAN ROYAL HOUSEHOLD IN THE LATE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

In 1574, Habeş Mehmed Agha (d. 1590), who was one of the black eunuchs of the imperial harem, was appointed as the chief black eunuch, *dariüssaade ağası*, of the Topkapı Palace by Sultan Murad III (1574-1595). With this appointment, a new office was created for black eunuchs, and the chief black eunuch took on the administration of the harem, one of the more important tasks of the chief white eunuch, who had been the principal officer of the whole palace. Interestingly enough, from this time on, chief black eunuchs of the imperial harem began to appear as pivotal harem figures playing active roles in Ottoman political affairs. Although it is difficult to ascertain why the new office was created at the palace, one thing is certain: The establishment of the new office, or the ascendancy of the black eunuchs, was one of the results of a series of changes taking place in the royal household in this period, and the absolutist politics of Sultan Muarad.

For this reason, by using Leslie Peirce's groundbreaking study on the imperial harem²² as well as other relevant secondary literature, we will first look at the changes at the palace briefly to demonstrate the rise of the Ottoman court as a center of political power. While doing that, however, our aim is not to examine these changes in detail, but rather to provide a general background to support the hypothesis that the development of the office of *dariüssaade* agha as a separate institution at the end of the sixteenth century and the ascendancy of black eunuchs from that time were the results of the transformation

²² Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*.

of the royal household in this period. Secondly, taking into consideration the politics of Murad III, we will investigate whether the recent power of the chief black eunuchs within the royal palace was consciously intended by Sultan Murad or the other members of the royal family such as the *valide* sultan, the *haseki* sultan, and whether members of the royal household supported the eunuchs to create new alliances for themselves or to curb certain rival political forces.

I. The development of the Ottoman palace as a center of political power

To depict the period between the late sixteenth and mid-seventeenth century, popular historian Ahmed Refik (d. 1937) used, for the first time, the term “The Sultanate of Women (*Kadınlar Saltanatı*)”, which was the title of a four-volume history of the Ottoman royal women²³. Obviously, the writer had chosen this title to indicate the power and influence gained by the female members of the royal family in this period.

Undoubtedly, the prominence of the political power of royal women was one of the most remarkable features of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Until recently, the historical accounts covering this period tended to view this increasing participation of royal women as a result of “the weakening moral fiber and institutional integrity in Ottoman society”²⁴. While the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent was seen as the “Golden Age” of the Ottoman state, the period which was initiated by his death in 1566 was considered to be the beginning of the decline of Ottoman state²⁵.

²³ Ahmed Refik, *Kadınlar Saltanatı*, 4 vols (İstanbul, 1332). For its new version see *Kadınlar Saltanatı*, ed. İbrahim Delioğlu, 2 vols. (İstanbul, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2000).

²⁴ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, p. viii.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

This conceptualization of Ottoman history was based on a fairly literal reading of the Ottoman literature of reform, *nasihatnâme*²⁶, which was born in the sixteenth century to provide advice for the rulers. Starting in the late sixteenth century, the writers of this literature, who were usually drawn from among the bureaucrats, analyzed the causes of what they considered to be imperial decline, and prescribed remedies for it. In this connection, they frequently contrasted the “personal incapacity” of the present sultans with “the vigor and ability of their ancestors”, and condemned the harem women for taking advantage of their influence over “weak-minded sultans” to satisfy their “lust” for power and wealth, and for “meddling” in imperial politics²⁷. Many of these views were accepted at face value by modern scholars.

Recently, nevertheless, historians have started questioning both the denunciations of the *kadınlar saltanatı*²⁸ and the “Ottoman decline” paradigm.²⁹ In this connection, historians such as Rıfa’at Ali Abou-el-Haj, Cornell Fleischer and Cemal Kafadar have

²⁶ For discussion on Ottoman *nasihat* literature see Cornell Fleischer, “From Seyhzade Korkud to Mustafa Ali: Cultural Origins of the Ottoman *Nasihatname*” in *IIIrd Congress on the Social and Economic History of Turkey*, eds. Heath W. Lowry and Ralph S. Hattox (Istanbul, ISIS Press, 1990), pp. 67-77; Halil İnalcık, “Why Süleyman’s Reign Was Considered as “Golden Age””, added at the end of “Sultan Süleyman: The Man and Statesman” in *Soliman le Magnifique et son Temps*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris, 1992), [hereafter *Soliman le Magnifique*], pp. 89-103, at pp. 100-103; Baki Tezcan, *The Definition of Sultanatic Legitimacy in the Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire The Ahlâk-ı Alâ’î (1510-1572)*, (Unpublished master thesis, Princeton University, 1996); Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli (1541-1600)*, (Princeton, 1986) [hereafter Fleischer, *The Historian Mustafa Ali*]; Pal Fodor, “State and Society, Crisis and Reform in 15th -17th Century Ottoman Mirror For Princes” in *Quest of the Golden Apple Imperial Ideology, Politics, and Military Administration in the Ottoman Empire* (The Isis Press, Istanbul, 2000) [hereafter *Quest of the Golden Apple*], pp. 23-44; Linda T. Darling, *Revenue-Raising & Legitimacy Tax Collection & Finance Administration in the Ottoman Empire* (Leiden, New York, Köln, E. J. Brill, 1996), at. pp. 1-16; Suraiya Faroqhi, “Crisis and Change, 1590-1699” [hereafter “Crises and Change”] in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*, ed. by Halil İnalcık with Donald Quataert (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 413-623; at. pp. 552-556.

²⁷ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, p. viii, 156.

²⁸ For instance see Peirce, *The Imperial Harem; Women in the Ottoman Empire. Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Era*, ed., M. C. Zilfi (Leiden, 1997).

²⁹ For instance see Darling, *ibid.*; Faroqhi “Crisis and Change”; Rıfa’at Ali Abou-el-Haj, *Modern Devletin Doğası. 16. Yüzyıldan 18. Yüzyıla Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*, trs. Oktay Özel and Canay Şahin (Ankara, İmge Kitabevi, 2000), pp. 35-92.

argued that rather than as “objective” accounts of Ottoman decline, the *nasihatnâme* literature of the period should be read as a literary genre with its own topoi and literary constraints and in view of the tensions and frustrations the particular *nasihatnâme* experienced in their own professional lives³⁰.

However, rather than engaging in a critical analysis of the reform literature, in this section, we will be concerned with the important changes that took place in the Ottoman palace during the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent, and we will try to understand the new roles which were performed by royal women as well as other palace staff. Although the power of royal women became manifest in the post-Süleymanic period, the changes that resulted in giving clout and influence to the female members of the imperial family occurred in this period.

The reign of Süleyman witnessed important changes in several aspects of dynastic politics from the establishment of concubine status of royal mothers, and “the reproductive principle of one-mother-one-son”, which will be discussed soon, to the accompanying of a prince’s mother at her son’s provincial post.³¹ Süleyman’s greatest break with previous customs was to take a single consort, Hürrem, the concubine whom European sources mention as Roxelana, instead of taking a number of concubines³². After the death of two of his three sons in 1521, whose mothers are not known, Süleyman had only a single living son, Mustafa, whose mother was a slave concubine called

³⁰ Fleischer, *The Historian Mustafa Âli*; Faroqhi, “Crisis and Change”, pp. 553.

³¹ The account for the changes in dynastic politics of the Süleyman’s reign especially depends on Peirce, *The Imperial Harem.*, pp. 56-63; idem, “The Family as Faction: Dynastic Politics in the Reign of Süleyman”[hereafter “The Family as Faction”] in *Soliman le Magnifique*, pp. 105-117; and also Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650 The Structure of Power* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 87-96.

³² Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, pp. 58-59.

Mahidevran. In the same year, Hürrem and Süleyman's first child, Mehmed, was born. At this point, Süleyman broke the past custom of his ancestors that once a slave concubine had borne a son to the sultan, she was no longer eligible for his bed; and he continued to have sexual contact with Hürrem³³. As a result, between 1522 and 1531, Hürrem bore him six more children³⁴.

The preference of the policy of "one-mother-one-son", which had been followed since the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror, seems related to the politics of succession.³⁵ In the tradition of open succession, every son of a prince or sultan was equally eligible for the throne³⁶, and so became a political rival for his brothers; in this context, the princely governorate was very important in the contest for the throne³⁷. As was customary, a prince's mother accompanied him to his new post, and played an important role as moral guardian, political tutor and disciplinarian for the prince³⁸. In this way, as a crucial member of the princely household, the prince's mother became a vital political ally in the contest for the throne that would inevitably follow the death of the prince's father. At this point, "the one mother-one son policy" preserved parity among the princes in their competition for succession.³⁹

However, Hürrem did not follow this traditional pattern; and she never left the capital to accompany any of her sons to their provincial posts, except for several brief

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

³⁵ Peirce, "The Family as Faction" pp. 108-109.

³⁶ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, p. 22, 42.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-50.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-45; Imber, *ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

visits⁴⁰. Even though Cihangir's health problems were the compelling reason for not following this custom, the main reason must be related to "the abandonment of the one-mother-one-son principle": whichever son Hürrem might have accompanied would have a serious advantage over the others in the competition for the throne.⁴¹ Thus, she remained in Istanbul as the first mother, since at least the mid-fifteenth century, who did not accompany her sons to the governorship they were appointed to.

Süleyman's second breach with earlier tradition was to marry Hürrem; thus, presumably for the first time in Ottoman history, a slave woman was made a legal wife to an Ottoman sultan⁴². Ottoman dynasty's preference for reproducing heirs was through having slave concubines; however, royal marriages in the fourteenth and fifteenth century were contracted primarily with princesses of neighboring dynasties of both Christian powers of Rumelia and Muslim powers of Anatolia for political purposes⁴³. After the reign of Murad II (1420-1444, 1446-1451), who was the father of Mehmed the Conqueror, "the inter-dynastic marriages" started to disappear; since they were no longer politically expedient.⁴⁴

Besides such a break with past tradition, Hürrem made once again an innovation in Ottoman history when she moved from the old palace, which had been the residence for royal women and children, into the new palace, Topkapı, the principal residence of the sultan⁴⁵. Even if we are not certain about when Hürrem took up residence in the

⁴⁰ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, p. 61.

⁴¹ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, pp. 60-61.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴⁴ For the fullest account of these marriages see *ibid.*, pp. 28-42.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

imperial harem, the move might have been associated with her marriage.⁴⁶ All the innovations of Hürrem's career make more sense in view of her *haseki* title, the sultan's favorite⁴⁷; and indicates the new role of a prince's mother as not only the prince's most devoted ally but also as a political confidante to the sultan⁴⁸.

Peirce convincingly calls Süleyman's reign "the age of the *haseki*" due to the new intimate and intense bond between the sultan and his favorite.⁴⁹ While during the pre-Süleymanic period, political roles of women had been based on the issue of succession, during Süleyman's reign, royal women acquired new roles as major actors on the dynastic stage. On the one hand, Hürrem attempted to secure the succession of one of her sons at the expense of the execution of Mustafa, who was the son of Mahidevran, the other concubine of Süleyman. On the other hand, she acted as an "intimate and trusted adviser" to the sultan. Her position as the sultan's favorite and her closeness to the sultan helped Hürrem to gain access to the sources of power⁵⁰.

However, Hürrem was not the only ally of the sultan. The practice of linking the highest-ranking statesman of all, the grand vizier, to the dynastic household through marriage with a princess was a standard feature of Süleyman's reign even though the initiation of the practice is not attributed to him.⁵¹ During the reign of Süleyman, all the

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-113.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 63-65.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 65. Tülay Artan has showed that from the first half of the 18th century royal princess who were married with high-ranking officeholders began to have separate palaces independent from Topkapı and their own husbands' palaces, as a consequence of their role within a shifting system of political alliances, see Tülay Artan "From Charismatic Leadership to Collective Rule: Introducing Materials on The Wealth and Power of Ottoman Princesses in the Eighteenth Century", *Toplum ve Ekonomi* 4 (1993), pp. 53-91. Koçi Bey (d. after 1654) criticized Süleyman's practice of choosing his viziers from the royal damads, see

grand viziers (with three exceptions) were connected to the dynasty through marriage, which was made at “three generational levels: the sultan’s sisters, daughters, and granddaughters”⁵². Thus, by enhancing the authority and the status of the official, *damadhood* created strong personal loyalty to the sultan and to the whole dynastic family⁵³.

In the post-Süleymanic period, however, the position of *haseki*, which persisted for at least half a century after Süleyman’s death, began to lose its importance with the rise of the *valide* sultan. Parallel to the changes in the system of succession, the mother of princes and the sultan’s mother lived under the same roof; and the authority of the *valide* sultan bolstered, as Peirce claims, in congruence with “the structure of the dynastic family. Also, its reproductive arrangements yielded pride of place to the mother, not to the consort”.⁵⁴ By the end of the sixteenth century, the authority of the *valide* sultan became institutionalized while the prestige and the power of the *haseki* sultan decreased. Thus, in the period between 1566 and 1656, we witness genuinely effective *valide* sultans who seemed to be the center of a number of different factions and networks⁵⁵.

Consequently, beginning with Hürrem, the women of royal household, who formed effective factions within the shifting system of political alliances, started to play crucial roles in the politics of dynastic households, and their political influence certainly continued during the reigns of son and grandsons of the Süleyman the Magnificent.

Koçi Bey, *Risâle*, ed. Ali Kemal Aksüt (İstanbul, Vakıf Matbaası, 1939), [hereafter Koçi Bey/Aksüt], pp. 61-63.

⁵² Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, p. 67.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 65-66.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 110-112.

Undoubtedly, such a development should be reckoned with keeping in mind the moving of the haseki and her suite within the imperial residence during the reign of Süleyman, and later, with the incorporation of the suites of princes and their mothers by the end of the century. This meant that some of the most important members of the royal household, who probably had different and even conflicting interests, began to live under the same roof. ⁵⁶The contest for power was an inevitable outcome of the new process in which the Ottoman court developed as an important center of political power.

Actually, all of these changes indicate a more extensive and fundamental change: the consolidation of the dynastic family in the capital, and more importantly, the formation of new political networks based on the royal household. In this period, quite understandably, with his newly created office, the chief black eunuch of the imperial administration appeared as an important channel to create such networks after the last quarter of the sixteenth century.

Without doubt, the rise of the chief black eunuchs as powerful players in Ottoman politics during the reigns of the son and the grandson of Sultan Murad III supports this hypothesis. Most probably, both the lapse of the princely governorate and transition to seniority created a suitable environment for the chief black eunuch to be involved in political affairs, since these changes meant that: Instead of violent competitions for the throne, a silent strife would be carried out by important actors inside the walls of the palace.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* , p. 111.

It is a fact that as a result of the new arrangements, all the members of the sultan's family including princes, *valide* sultan, *haseki* sultan, together with other officials holding key positions in the Ottoman administration, began to establish alliances with the chief black eunuch to protect their interests. In this context, the next part of the current chapter discusses why the institution of the chief black eunuch was created at the end of 16th century. Bearing in mind the close link between the office of chief black eunuch and the royal family, it tries to understand why the chief black eunuchs of the royal harem suddenly appeared in this period as pivotal harem figures.

II. The ascendancy of the chief black eunuch as a pivotal harem figure

In March 1590, upon the death of Habeş Mehmed Agha, the first chief black eunuch of the imperial harem, the Imperial Council, according to Selânikî, was not assembled in the following day due to the funeral prayer, and the high-ranking officials of the state participated in the burial ceremony from beginning to end.⁵⁷

Although we do not have any details about the burial ceremony of the agha, even this piece of information clearly shows how greatly respected Mehmed Agha was by the high-ranking officials of the Ottoman imperial administration. Actually, the burial ceremony of the agha indicates something even more important: in the personality of Habeş Mehmed Agha, the acceptance of a newly created post at the imperial harem, that of the chief black eunuch. Until Mehmed Agha's appointment in 1574 as the head officer of the Ottoman Palace, the chief white eunuch had run the harem. Nevertheless, at this

⁵⁷ Selânikî, vol. II, pp. 229-230.

time, the new post was created for the administration of the harem and was handed over to the chief black eunuchs.

Actually, black eunuchs had been employed at the palace since the time of Mehmed the Conqueror. They had served under the authority of the chief white eunuch, the principal officer of the whole palace, until the end of the sixteenth century⁵⁸. Yet by the appointment of Habeş Mehmed Agha, black eunuchs were definitively removed from the chief white eunuch's responsibility. The reason behind such an important change could be related to the increase in the harem's population. The consolidation of the whole royal family into the imperial palace after the reigns of Süleyman I and his successors⁵⁹ might have necessitated more servants for the growing population of the harem. At this point, black eunuchs must have been preferred over white eunuchs for two reasons: First, while the chief white eunuch had been able to control the harem before the growth in its population, his office might have not sufficed to meet the growing needs of the harem, necessitating the creation of a separate office would be responsible for the whole of the harem. The second reason might have been related to the attempt to decrease the influence of the chief white eunuch. It must have suited the interests of the sultan to divide the influence among the palace officials instead of allowing a single official to maintain all power in his own hands.

In this context, in spite of the silence of the sources about the reasons behind this change at the palace, we think that the appointment of Habeş Mehmed Agha to the position of the chief black eunuch was not a simple coincidence or solely an

⁵⁸ Ülkü Altındağ, "Dârüssaâde" *DİA*, vol. IX, pp. 1-3, at p. 1; Orhonlu, "Derviş Abdullah", p. 225.

⁵⁹ The increase in the population of the harem between 1552 and 1652 has been documented by Peirce see *The Imperial Harem*, p. 122.

administrative arrangement. On the contrary, the creation of this office at the end of the 16th century was rooted to keep up with the changing role of the imperial palace. By his newly created office, the chief black eunuch, who closely served the members of the royal family, became the most suitable official to develop alternative political networks working on behalf of their interests, as will be seen in the second chapter.

On the other hand, the development of the office of *dariüssaade* agha in the reign of Sultan Murad should be evaluated within the context of the absolutist policies of this sultan. As has been argued by Baki Tezcan Sultan Murad made effort “to increase the political authority of the court in response to the other foci of political power, such as the households of the viziers, pashas, and the *mevalî*”⁶⁰. Although contemporary historians criticized the reign of Murad for the withdrawal of the sultan from the handling of public affairs and for the interference of the palace courtiers in state affairs,⁶¹ this view can hardly be maintained when we consider the interventions of Murad in the administration. In fact, in both the chronicles of Mustafa Âlî⁶² and Selânikî, Murad appeared as the sultan who did not allow any freedom to his viziers and made many appointments personally.⁶³

Interestingly enough, the words of these historians indicate the change in the relationship between the sultan and his grand vizier: Even though the grand vizier was the

⁶⁰ Tezcan, *Searching for Osman*, p. 164. Tezcan has argued that Sultan Mehmed III, the son of Murad, continued “the absolutist policies of Sultan Murad” during his reign see *ibid.*, p. 159.

⁶¹ For instance see Selânikî, vol. I, pp. 427-432; Mustafa Âlî, *Künhü'l-ahbâr*, ed. Faris Çerçi, *Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî ve Künhü'l Ahbâr'ında II. Selim, III. Murat ve III. Mehmet Devirleri*, 3 vols. (Kayseri, Erciyes Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2000)[hereafter Çerçi/*Künh*], vol. II, pp. 628-635. (For the first volumes of *Künh* we will use Âlî/*Künh*).

⁶² *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 241-243.

⁶³ Selânikî, vol. I, pp. 427-428, 431-432; Tezcan, *Searching for Osman*, p. 155.

“absolute deputy of the sultan”⁶⁴, the image of the grand vizier began to change as a result of the attempts of the sultan. This is why the anonymous author of *Kitab-ı Müstetâb* complained about the change in the position of the grand vizier in the following manner: “While formerly the whole world was in fear of grand viziers, now bearers of this dignity have been reduced to a position of fearing the whole world.”⁶⁵ That is also why, Sultan Murad objected to the grand vizier Mesih Pasha’s making appointments, saying “you should use the ones who were appointed by us”.⁶⁶ The decree of Sultan Murad III in 1580 shows more clearly the changing relationship between the sultan and his highest official: In this decree the sultan ordered that “the grand vizier would not be given the imperial seal”⁶⁷, which, until then, had symbolized the delegation of sultanic authority⁶⁸. Even though Murad later retracted his decree, his attempt to dispense with the office of grand vizier is still interesting.

At this point, we should also mention the sudden appearance of *telhis*, the petitions submitted by the grand vizier to the sultan, during the tenure of Murad III⁶⁹. A series of *telhis* that begin in the reign of Murad indicate the considerable change that took place in the nature of communication between these two important men: Instead of holding face-to-face meetings, the sultan and the grand vizier began to communicate

⁶⁴ Ahmed Akgündüz, *Osmanlı Kanûnnâmeleri Ve Hukuki Tahlilleri*, 9 vols. (İstanbul, 1990-1996) , vol. I, p. 318 ; *Kitâb-ı Müstetâb*, ed. Yaşar Yücel in *Osmanlı Devlet Teşkilatına Dair Kaynaklar: Kitâb-ı Müstetâb, Kitâbu Mesâlihi’l Müslimîn ve Menâfi’i’l Müminîn, Hurzû’l-Mülûk* (Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1988) [hereafter Yücel/ Kitâb-ı Müstetâb] p. 25

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶⁶ Çerçi/Kühn, vol. III, pp. 491-494.

⁶⁷ Selânikî, vol. I, p. 128.

⁶⁸ Pal Fodor, “Sultan, Imperial Council, Grand Vizier: Changes in the Ottoman Ruling Elite and the Formation of the Grand Vizierial *Telhis*” [hereafter “The Formation of Grand Vizierial *Telhis*”] in *In Quest of the Golden Apple*, pp. 207-226, at. p. 210. Moreover, for the brief discussion on the vizier’s position in the Ottoman administration see *ibid.*: Halil İnalcık, “Sultan Süleyman: The Man and the Statesman” [hereafter “The Man and the Statesman”] in *Soliman le Magnifique*, pp. 89-102.

⁶⁹ Fodor, “The Formation of Grand Vizierial *Telhis*”; Imber, *ibid.* , pp. 175-176.

mostly in writing at the end of the 16th century⁷⁰. When the grand vizier requested an audience with Ahmed I, the sultan refused, with the note: “You need to inform me in writing.”⁷¹

Probably, such a change in the relationship between the sultan and the grand vizier stemmed from the sultan’s goal to control the position of the grand vizier. The making of many appointments by the sultan himself⁷² and the frequent dismissal of grand viziers by Murad - nine appointments were made to this post within fifteen years⁷³ - can be taken as visible results of the sultan’s aforementioned goal.

When viewed from this angle, we can claim that the creation of the office of the chief black eunuch at the palace also suited the ambitions of Sultan Murad. As a sultan who tried to play a dominant role in the administration of the state, he needed new allies to create alternative networks and channels of patronage. Taking advantage of the chief black eunuch’s closeness to members of the royal family or to the other high-ranking officials, the sultan could be informed of their activities. Furthermore, thanks to the extensive functions of the chief black eunuch’s office, the sultan could create strong political networks working on behalf of his interests.

Even if we are not confident about the reasons that led Sultan Murad to appoint Habeş Mehmed Agha as the chief black eunuch, we believe that to a great extent the creation of this new office was related to the sultan’s effort to strengthen his hand in the administration and to create an alternative ally for himself and even for the members of

⁷⁰ Fodor, “The Formation of Grand Vizierial Telhis”, p. 226.

⁷¹ *Osmanlı Tarihine Aid Belgeler: Telhisler (1596-1607)*, Cengiz Orhonlu, ed., (İstanbul, İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayinevi, 1970), no. 118, 128.

⁷² Selânikî, vol. I, pp. 427-428, 431-432; Çerçi/Kühn, vol. II, p. 243; III, 630-631.

⁷³ Tezcan, *Searching for Osman*, p. 156.

the royal family. Following the assignment of Mehmed Agha to the position of chief black eunuch, the creation of the position of the supervisor of the *evkaf'ü-l haremeyn* in 1582, and more importantly the assignment of the agha to this new position were clear reflections of the sultan's aims. As supervisor of the *evkaf'ü-l haremeyn*, the agha could control the financial and administrative affairs of many important *vakfs*. Thus, the duties of the chief black eunuch not only within the palace, but also outside it, enabled the sultan to consolidate his absolute authority and to interfere with the state's affairs more directly.

In this context, although the empowerment of the chief black eunuch by the sultan appears to have been consciously intended change, it is hard to imagine that this was done “to undermine the standing of the viziers”⁷⁴ as is claimed by Baki Tezcan. According to Tezcan, from the reign of Murad III onwards, the sultan and his court tried to wrest back some of the powers that were delegated to the office of grand vizier⁷⁵. Parallel to this, the office was created as an alternative power⁷⁶ by Sultan Murad to “destabilize the position of the grand vizier”⁷⁷. When we take into consideration the changing nature of the relationship between the sultan and his grand vizier during the tenure of Sultan Murad III, this claim seems to be reasonable. On the other hand, if we look at the relationship between the chief black eunuch and the viziers more closely, we see that the situation was more complex. Above all, the chief black eunuchs and the viziers or the grand viziers of the end of the sixteenth and the early decades of the

⁷⁴ Tezcan, *Searching for Osman*, p. 136.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁷⁶ Baki Tezcan has argued that “while sultan destabilizing the position of the grand vizier” he created the office of the darussaade agha as an “alternative foci of stable power”. Through the chief official of the office, he could “develop alternative networks the loyalties of which would be to him, rather than to the grand vizier”. Although we believe that the chief black eunuchs were raised by the sultan to create new allies we do not accept that the sultan planned using the black eunuchs only against the grand viziers.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

seventeenth century seem to have been mostly allies rather than rivals. Especially, the men occupying two important positions appear to have established relations on the basis of patron-client networks. For instance, even if the writer of *Hamiletü'l Küberâ* is unhelpful for the identities of the clients of the first chief black eunuch Habeş Mehmed Agha, he says that most of them attained the position of vizier⁷⁸. Similarly, one of the most powerful eunuchs of the 17th century, Mustafa Agha, the latter (d. 1624), had sponsored the careers of certain men who occupied the position of the grand vizier⁷⁹. As an example, the future grand vizier İstanköylü Ali Pasha (d. 1621) can be given. He was appointed to very crucial positions including the governorship of Yemen, or the position of grand admiralty at the administration with the intermediacy of Mustafa Agha, the latter⁸⁰.

At this point, it should be added that this was a two-way relationship: Like the agha, viziers or grand viziers could sponsor the careers of the aghas. For instance, Mustafa Agha, the former (d. after 1596) who was the protégé of the governor of Yemen, Mahmud Pasha (d. 1568)⁸¹ was assigned to be the chief agha of the harem in 1592⁸². After his dismissal from office in 1602, Mustafa Agha the latter had been brought to office for the second time in 1623 with the attempts of the grand vizier Kemankeş Ali Pasha (d. 1624)⁸³.

⁷⁸ Turan/Hamîle, p.45.

⁷⁹ Tezcan, *Searching for Osman*, p. 158. For this information the writer uses the chronicle of Mehmed bin Mehmed (d. ca. 1640).

⁸⁰ Turan/Hamîle, pp. 48-49; Tezcan, *Searching for Osman*, pp. 168-169

⁸¹ Turan/Hamîle, p. 46. For information about Mahmud Pasha see Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmani*, ed. Nuri Akbayar (İstanbul, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1996) , 6 vols. [hereafter Akbayar/Sicill], vol. III, p. 922.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.* , pp. 48-49. Moreover for the brief information about the pasha see Akbayar/Sicill, vol. I, p. 290.

To further exemplify the alliance between the chief agha and the grand vizier, Uzun Süleyman Agha (d. 1676) and Gürcü Mehmed Agha (d. 1660) can be mentioned: The agha firstly brought about the deposing of the grand vizier Sivayuş Pasha and then handed over this position in 1651 to the Gürcü Mehmed Pasha⁸⁴ whom he addressed as “My Father” in his letters to the latter⁸⁵. Although it is not clear why the agha addressed the grand vizier this way or what kind of relation was there between the two, one thing is clear: After the appointment of Gürcü Mehmed Pasha to the position of grand vizier, the relation was continued by the agha and grand vizier. As can be seen in the agha’s letters⁸⁶, Süleyman Agha wrote the grand vizier about the shortages of the navy and the certain issues related to cavaliers (*sipahi*), and requested his zeal for the issues and even advised the grand vizier about what the best way to solve the problem was.

In the light of these examples, it is difficult to think that the chief black eunuchs of the imperial harem had risen against the expanding power of the grand viziers. As clearly seen from these examples, relations based on patron-client ties were not unusual among these men. On the contrary, they sponsored each other’s careers or supported each other against their rivals, as can be seen in the example of Gürcü Mehmed Pasha and Süleyman Agha. Especially, when we consider the importance of clientship (*intisab*) in the Ottoman system⁸⁷, the patron-client relations between two officers become more

⁸⁴ Turan/Hamîle, pp. 55-56. For Gürcü Mehmed Pasha see “Mehmed Pasha, Gürcü” *DİA*, vol. XXVIII, pp. 510-511.

⁸⁵ TSA, No. E: 4682, 9570/1,3. Moreover, in one of the documents, 9570/1, agha called himself “your son”. Even if it is not certain we think that probably such expressions indicate the patron-client ties or the very close relation between the two. At this point, it is useful to know that because of the his intimate relation with the chief white eunuch Gazanfer Agha (d. 1603), the grand vizier Lala Mehmed Pasha (d. 1606) called the agha as “my son” for the detail see Peçevî, vol. II, pp. 322-323.

⁸⁶ TSA, No. E: 4682, 9570/1-5.

⁸⁷ For brief discussion on the issue see İnalçık, “The Man and the Statesman”, p. 92; Tezcan, *Searching for Osman*, pp.145-146; Carter V. Findley, “Patrimonial Organization and Factional Activity in the Ottoman

meaningful. Probably, the existence and maintenance of such relations were useful for their personal interests as well. Since not only being assigned to a significant post, but also to keep a given post, were not easy when the court emerged as an important center of power relations. For this reason, the holders of the positions of the grand vizier and the chief black eunuch probably tried developing patronage ties for their personal interests.

However, it is not a rule that the chief black eunuchs and the viziers or grand viziers always collaborated in sustaining their favorable positions or always supported each other as reliable allies. Inevitably, when the interests of aghas and viziers clashed, the two officers became serious rivals as having underestimated power and authority. As a striking instance, the grand vizier İstanköylü Ali Pasha can be given: Although Ali Pasha was the protégé of the agha and was appointed to a certain important position thanks to the agha's attempts, the agha was later deposed and exiled to Egypt in 1602 by the endeavors of the grand vizier⁸⁸. According to Peçevî, the grand vizier caused the dismissal of certain men from their offices and thus did not let anyone other than himself to petition to the sultan⁸⁹. If we agree with the author's words, we can say that the deposition and the exile of the agha probably stemmed from the grand vizier's desire to have absolute authority⁹⁰. After witnessing the agha's power, especially during the

Ruling Class" in *Social and Economic History of Turkey (1071-1920)*, ed. Osman Okyar, Halil İnalcık (Ankara, 1980), pp. 227-235.

⁸⁸ Turan/Hamîle, p. 48; Peçevî, vol. II, p. 371.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

⁹⁰ In this context, one confusing point should be remembered. After Mustafa Agha's dismissing from the office by the grand vizier, the protégé of Mustafa Agha was assigned for this position see Turan/Hamîle, p. 48. If the grand vizier tried to prevent the influence of Mustafa Agha, why he provided the office the agha's man. The one reasonable explanation can be that after he lost the supports of Mustafa Agha he might want to create his own allies, and to accomplish such aim he might have supported Süleyman Agha. Of course, this does not go beyond assumption and the pasha's attitude seems to be more related to his desire to have absolute control at the palace.

deposing of Sultan Mustafa from the throne⁹¹, Ali Pasha might not have wanted such a powerful man at the palace. In this context, it seems reasonable to claim that if the interests of the two offices' men did not clash, it was in their own interest to collaborate with each other.

Actually, the same comment can be made about the relation of chief black eunuchs with royal women or with other high-ranking officials of the palace: The nature of their relationships was determined on the basis of personal interests. The cultivation of strict ties or networks clearly required to protect and support the interests of alliances' with each other. In the process of the contest for influence and power, if one of the allies refused to meet his/her partner's demands, collaboration would break down, and old partners would become serious rivals.

As a consequence, the creation of the new office should be evaluated in the context of the changes in the nature of the Ottoman royal household and the absolute politics of Sultan Murad developed parallel to these changes in the second half of the sixteenth century. With the growing importance of the imperial palace as a center of political power, black eunuchs of the imperial harem were probably consciously raised by the sultan and the members of royal family to create their own allies or their own network of patron-client relationships. Through the closeness of the chief black eunuch to the inhabitants of the imperial palace or the wide borders of the chief black eunuch's jurisdiction, the sultan and the members of the royal family could more directly control affairs inside and outside the palace. Actually, the political activities of the black eunuchs

⁹¹ For the collaboration of the two men in the deposing of the sultan Mustafa see Tezcan, *Searching for Osman*, pp. 169-172.

who lived at the beginning of the seventeenth century were a clear reflection of how the efforts of the royal family to create a pivotal harem figure became successful in a short time, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE OFFICE OF *DARÜSSAADE* AGHA AT THE IMPERIAL HAREM IN THE LATE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

With Habeş Mehmed Agha's appointment as the chief black eunuch of the harem, the position of both the white and black eunuchs changed in a definitive way at the palace, in the late sixteenth century. Interestingly enough, such an important change of the century did not occupy any place in contemporary chronicles as if neither Habeş Mehmed Agha was the first black official held the position of the chief eunuch of harem nor the institution was a newly created one. However, despite their silence, the same authors, for instance, Mustafa Âlî, Selânikî, and Peçevî, begin to mention the destructive activities of the chief black eunuchs no more than ten years after the death of the first chief black eunuch⁹².

In this context, the current chapter tries to answer the more difficult questions about the process of institutionalizing the office. Firstly, it handles the crucial arrangements during the reign of Sultan Murad III to show how the jurisdiction of the new office was enlarged and supported. Secondly, it focuses on the black eunuchs of the transitional period to understand how such a change was perceived by their white counterparts. The current chapter suggests that the transitional period in which black eunuchs took over the control of the harem from white eunuchs was not free of struggles.

⁹²Mustafa Âlî's comments about the destructive activities of the chief black eunuchs will be handled widely in the last section of the present study. For the other authors see for instance Selânikî, vol. I, p. 258; II, p. 471, 487; Peçevî, vol. II, pp. 255, 281, 354, 378-379.

On the contrary, the period witnessed disagreement between the two sides. Parallel to this, the third section of the chapter tries to depict the environment in which the struggles took place. To accomplish this aim, it will also inevitably handle the institution of the *babüssaade* agha who had been responsible for both the harem and the palace up to the time of Habeş Mehmed Agha. Lastly, this chapter will discuss how the chief black eunuchs appeared on the political stage of Ottoman palace following the institutionalization of the new office.

I. The development of the new office at the palace and the empowerment of black eunuchs in the imperial harem

In his book, *Hâlâtü'l-Kahire mine'l-'âdâti'z-zâhire*, Mustafa Âlî mentions the unprecedented increase in the number of black eunuchs in Cairo and reports that:

“... from the time when Sultan Selim succeeded in the conquest of Egypt until this moment, that is, until the days of the reign of Sultan Murad, there were never twenty or thirty eunuchs together in Egypt... Now, however, **the black aghas cannot be accounted any more**”.⁹³

Most probably, the author's observation on the growing number of black eunuchs was related to the changing position of black eunuchs at the harem during this sultan. Of course, not only the employment of black eunuchs under a separate institution but also the increasing population of the harem had been responsible for the increasing number of black eunuchs at the palace. Actually, as indicated before, black eunuchs under the command of the chief white eunuch had been employed at the Ottoman court since the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror, and their number had increased parallel to the conquest

⁹³ Âlî/Tietze I, p. 82 (tr.), 175-176 (ed.). In the same context, the records of Selânikî can be thought. Selânikî writes that after the death of Murad III, the eunuchs of the Murad were transferred to the Old Palace see Selânikî, vol. II, p. 436.

of the centers providing slaves Egypt (1517), Yemen (1539), and Ethiopia (1557) during the reigns of the subsequent sultans. Although the functions of black eunuchs at the harem until the reign of Sultan Murad were not clear, their position began to get clarified in the sultanate years of this sultan.

The first year of Murad III's reign, 1574-1575, was a turning point for the black eunuchs in the imperial harem. With respect to Murad III's appointment of Mehmed Agha, an Ethiopian eunuch, to the position of the chief eunuch of the harem, we suggest that a new favorable period started for black eunuchs in which they gradually grabbed power from the hands of white eunuchs. Although the chief officer of the Ottoman Palace was the chief white eunuch, and he was the gatekeeper of the "royal palace" (*devlethâne-i hass*) and of the "hidden palace of women" (*harem-sarây-i nihân*)⁹⁴ until the last quarter of the sixteenth century according to the account provided by a statesman at the court, İdris-i Bidlisî (d. 1520); the *babüssaade* agha lost his post as the senior officer of the harem at that time. Accordingly, two functions were separated; while the chief white eunuch became responsible for the inner palace household, the chief black eunuch was put in charge of the imperial harem.

Actually, it is not absolutely clear whether this office was really created by Murad III, since none of the contemporary chronicles provides such information even though some of them mention Habeş Mehmed Agha as the senior officer of the harem⁹⁵. Even though we are aware of the possibility that this institution might have existed earlier, we are unfortunately deprived of the necessary evidence supporting this hypothesis.

⁹⁴Gülru Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power. The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, MA, 1991) [hereafter Necipoğlu, *The Topkapı Palace*], p. 161.

⁹⁵ Âlî/Kühn, f. 94b; Selânikî, vol. I, p. 230.

However, with the reign of Murad III, we can see the change in the relationship between these two groups of palace eunuchs by following the changing mode of their duties.

Above all, with the appointment of Habeş Mehmed Agha in 1574, this official post became independent of the *kapı ağası*. The chief white eunuch not only lost his most important position as the senior officer of the sultan's harem but also his high position as the inspector of *vakfs*, or religious endowments of the imperial mosques, as well as those of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, *haremeynü'l-şerifeyn*. Even in the reign of Süleyman I, the superintendence of the *evkâf* of the Mecca and Medina, and later of about 70 large mosques was under the chief white eunuch's control⁹⁶; in the reign of Murad III, in 1588, the chief black eunuch took over the control of *evkâf* of the Mecca and Medina. As a consequence, the chief black eunuch Habeş Mehmed Agha was appointed as the first supervisor of the *evkâf* of the *haremeynü'l-şerifeyn* by Murad III's decree⁹⁷, which showed both the creation of the new institution, the appointment thereupon, and also the duties of Habeş Mehmed Agha as the supervisor of the *evkâf* of the *haremeyn*.

The chief black eunuchs also acquired the administration of some of the *evkâf* of Ottoman sultans, the *evkâfu's-selâtin* and the responsibility of certain sultans' mosques in 1598⁹⁸. Moreover, from that time onwards, the official duties of the chief black eunuch were expanded to include not only the supervision of the *evkâf* for which the sultans were

⁹⁶ R. Wiksman, "Kapu Aghasi" *EI*, IV (Leiden, 1978), pp. 570-571; Mahmud Kemâl İnal-Hüseyin Hüsameddin, *Evkâf-ı hümayûn nezaretinin tarihçe-i teşkilâtı ve nüzzarın terâcim-i ahvali* (İstanbul, 1335) [hereafter İnal and Hüsameddin], pp. 13-14.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15; Mustafa Güler, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Haremeyn Vakıfları ve Ehemmiyeti (XVI. XVII Yüzyıllar)* (İstanbul, Tarih ve Tabiat Vakfı, 2002), pp. 212-217.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 219-220.

responsible in 1716,⁹⁹ but also the supervision of the halberdiers (*baltacı*)¹⁰⁰ of the Old Palace. Thus, he again usurped one of the important duties of the chief white eunuch who had been the head of *baltacı* until the seventeenth century.

Consequently, parallel to the creation of the new office, the black eunuchs of the imperial harem began to perform the duties of the white eunuchs. With the new arrangements, not only the borders of the chief black eunuch's office were clearly expanded, but also he again continued to capture some of the privileges of the chief white eunuch, as seen in the case of *evkâf*. Of course, while these changes turned the chief black eunuch into the most important officer of the Ottoman imperial harem, they also made him, to a certain extent, a rival for the chief white eunuch. In the process following the establishment of the office, the position of the head of the harem obviously became the reason for struggle between the white and black agha, as will seen in the following section.

II. The falling of power into the hands of black eunuchs or the withdrawing of white eunuchs from the imperial harem

Nearly up to the end of the sixteenth century, the chief white eunuch, as indicated above, was the senior officer in the Ottoman Palace who was responsible for the harem as well as the whole palace. Nevertheless, starting from this period, his clout began to wither with the shift of the harem's control to the chief black eunuch. Even though this

⁹⁹ Hamza 'Abd Al-'Aziz Badr and Daniel Crecelius, "The Waqfs of Shahin Ahmad Agha" *Annales Islamologiques*, 27(1993), pp. 291-308 [hereafter Badr and Crecelius "Shahin Ahmed Agha"], at p. 292.

¹⁰⁰ *Baltacı* a name given to men composing various companies of the palace guards, see H. Bowen, "Baltadji" *EI*, I, pp. 1003-1004; Abdülkadir Özcan, "Baltacı" *DİA*, V (İstanbul, 1992), pp. 34-35; Tayyazâde Ahmed Atâ, *Tarih-i Atâ*, 5 vols (İstanbul, 1297) [hereafter Atâ], vol. I, pp. 290-293, 305-307; Uzunçarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı*, pp. 432-438.

control reverted to white eunuchs for a while, after 1623, it finally passed to the black eunuchs. Thus, the chief black eunuch became independent of the chief white eunuch, and eventually rose to the position of the senior officer of the imperial harem.

In this section, in order to get acquainted with the rival of the chief black eunuch, we will firstly handle the chief white eunuch within the jurisdiction of his office. Secondly, we will look at the aghas of the harem and put under scrutiny the intervals of appointments of black eunuchs as the senior agha of the harem, during the institutionalization process of this office. It is argued that the appointment of two subsequent white eunuchs to the position of the chief officer of the harem after the black eunuchs took over control of the harem indicates the contention between these two sides for one of the most prestigious offices of the Ottoman palace.

i. The chief white eunuch as the old head gatekeeper of the imperial harem

Before the chief black eunuchs got hold of the harem service in the late sixteenth century, the chief white eunuch occupied a very important position at the palace as the principal officer of the Ottoman palace. The clear emphasis on the chief white eunuch's privilege to petition the sultan in the *Kanûnnâme* of Mehmed the Conqueror is surely a strong evidence to understand the importance of this official at the palace: According to the *kanûnnâme*, from among the service staff inside, the chief of chamber (*odabaşı*), the chief of treasurer (*hazinedarbaşı*), the head of the food storehouse (*kilercibaşı*) and the agha of the imperial palace (*saray ağası*) were authorized to petition the sultan. However, the chief white eunuch was the “senior officer (*ihitiyar baş*)”; and his petition and chief of

chamber's petition "generally (*ekseriya*)" seemed necessary.¹⁰¹ The *kanûnnâme* also stated that for certain "affairs (*mesâlih*)" when the delivery of information to the "provinces (*taşra*)" was necessary, it had to be told by the chief white eunuch to the steward of the doorkeepers (*kapıcılar kethüdası*) who informed the viziers, the chief judges (*kadiasker*), and the finance directors (*defterdar*) about current affairs.¹⁰² These rules obviously reflected the chief white eunuch's role as mediator between the sultan and the other officials of the palace. It was similar to the experience of the chief black eunuch. The senior agha of the palace, too, enjoyed the privilege of direct access to the sultan and of indirect access to other members of the royal family. Thanks to this privilege, he must have had the opportunity to build strong relationships with the aforementioned personalities, and thereby to consolidate his power and influence at the palace.

No doubt, a white eunuch who was appointed as the senior agha of the palace was aware of the importance of such a privileged position: The unwillingness of the chief white eunuch of Selim II to be appointed as the governor of Egypt effectively demonstrates this awareness: after the fire of the imperial food storehouse in 1573, the palace aghas, as mentioned before, tried to convince Selim II to appoint one of the palace aghas who was familiar with the conditions of a storehouse as the governor of Egypt, since most of the supplies were imported from there. After taking the aghas' recommendation favorably, the sultan gave the government of Egypt first to his chief white eunuch Mahmud Agha whom Mustafa Âlî described as "a wise old man".¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Akgündüz, *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 320.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 326

¹⁰³ Âlî/Tietze I, p. 73 (tr.), 162 (ed.).

However, Mahmud Agha begged to be excused saying “I am an old man. **I shall not voluntarily absent myself from the Sublime Threshold.**”¹⁰⁴ Thereupon, the order was transferred to the head of the storehouse Mesih Agha and this chief white eunuch held his position until the end of reign of Selim II¹⁰⁵ despite his old age. In fact, agha’s words were so obvious: he did not want to move away from the center of the empire and lose his close position to members of the royal family, with whom he could develop strong relationships working for his own interests at the palace.

Strikingly, the same example illuminates another aspect of the palace aghas: how a white eunuch climbed the hierarchical ladder at the palace. According to Âlî, when the chief white eunuch was appointed to a position in the imperial administration, he was sent to Egypt with the title of “vizier”.¹⁰⁶ If we look at the governors of Egypt in the century following the Ottoman conquest (1517-1598), we see that six of the twenty-nine governors were eunuchs.¹⁰⁷ The words that the palace aghas used to convince Selim II clearly indicate the practice of their appointment as the governor of Egypt: “... it had been customary at the time of their great forebears to give the governorship of Egypt to persons of eunuch class whenever it became vacant.”¹⁰⁸ Among the palace eunuchs, both black and white, departure from the imperial palace with a high position in the imperial

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73 (tr.), 163 (ed.).

¹⁰⁵ Yücel, *Kitâb-ı Müstetâb*, p. 26. Although Mehmed Süreyya suggests that Mahmud Agha died at the beginning of Selim II’s reign this information is probably not correct see Akbayan/*Sicill*, vol. III, p. 907. Because of the fact that like the author of *Kitâb-ı Müstetâb* Selânikî mentioned the appointment of certain Mahmud Agha as the chief white eunuch at the beginning of Selim II’s reign, see Selânikî, vol. I, pp. 39, 64-65.

¹⁰⁶ It depends on Uzunçarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı*, p. 355. Uzunçarşılı quoted this information from another copy of *Künh*. But we cannot reach this copy during our research.

¹⁰⁷ Âlî/Tietze I, pp. 69-80 (tr.), 156-167 (ed.).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73 (tr.), 162 (ed.).

administration was the privilege of white eunuchs;¹⁰⁹ and none of the black eunuchs left the imperial palace for such posts. This preference had to do with the eunuchs' education. The office of the chief white eunuch was appertaining to the chief treasurer (*hazinedarbaşı*) and the chief agha of the palace (*saray ağası*), both of whom had passed through the strict discipline and education of the Palace School (*Enderun*).¹¹⁰ Thus, as the head of the "inner service," chief white eunuchs had the opportunity to be appointed for provincial governorships.

Just like the chief black eunuch, the chief white eunuch, too, had important assets to create his own clients thanks to his various offices at the palace or outside the palace. At this point, the tenure of Mesih Agha as grand vizier is instructive: when Murad III did not accept Mesih Agha's desire to appoint Hasan Beg, who was an aging servant at the imperial harem, to the position of *reisülküttâb*, Mesih Agha expressed his wish to retire and his wish was accepted by the sultan.¹¹¹ Hasan Beg, as a servant in the harem, might have met Mesih Agha during his service at the palace, or he might have been a client of the agha, or else, the agha's patron. Of course, it is also possible that he had served the agha prior to his entry to the palace, or subsequent to his exit, since we know that certain chief white eunuchs had their own slaves. Two archival documents dating from the mid-sixteenth century demonstrate this possibility: the documents show that some slaves of the chief white eunuch were already employed at the palace by the time the agha died, and that other slaves of his were taken into the palace by the order of the sultan

¹⁰⁹ In *Kânûnnâme* of Mehmed the Conqueror the appointment of the white eunuchs to position in the imperial administration was written, see Akgündüz, *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 321.

¹¹⁰ Uzunçarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı*, pp. 356, 340-342. Moreover, for the detailed information about the chief white eunuchs see *ibid.*, pp. 354-357; Aksüt, *Koçi Bey*, pp. 79-83; Atâ, vol. I, pp. 159-164.

¹¹¹ Çerçi/Kühn, vol. III, pp. 492-494; Peçevî, vol. II, p. 16.

immediately following the agha's death.¹¹² Even though we do not know which of the two alternatives was correct, we think that, in either case, Mesih Agha's aspiration to appoint Hasan Beg was most probably related to his existing or future interests.

However, the chief white eunuch was not able to continue his preferential position at the palace. It is certain that starting from the creation of this office by Murad II (1420-1444, 1446-1451)¹¹³ the authority of the agha had increased especially when he was conferred the superintendence of the *vakfs* of Mecca and Medine during the reign of Süleyman I (1520-1566) and later with the transfer of certain imperial mosques to his control¹¹⁴. Nevertheless, the chief white eunuch's influence began to diminish at the end of the sixteenth century. The words of the anonymous author of the *Kitâb-ı Müstetâb*, probably written at the beginning of the seventeenth century, indicate this change: The author, who compares the chief white eunuch's power to that of the grand vizier, designates the grand vizier as the right hand of the sultan and the chief white eunuch as his left hand.¹¹⁵ Yet as the book advances, the author writes that although "the chief white eunuch had been the left hand of the sultan" in the *kânûn-i Âl-i Osmân* "...the state of the chief white eunuch was put aside..." and "...the previous law was changed with the new one at the imperial harem..." after the period of the chief white eunuch Mahmud Agha.¹¹⁶ These words clearly reflected the change in the chief white eunuch's position at the palace. At this point, the contemporary treatise on the palace written in 1657 by Bobovi, a Polish slave at the court, declared the chief black eunuch's accepted

¹¹² İbrahim Metin Kunt, "Kulların Kulları" *Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Dergisi*, 3 (1975), pp. 27-41.

¹¹³ Atâ, vol. I, p. 34.

¹¹⁴ R. Wiksman, *ibid.*, p. 571; İnal-Hüsameddin, *ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

¹¹⁵ Aksüt, *Koçi Bey*, p. 25.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26. This Mahmud Agha was the same person mentioned above see p. 35.

ascendancy. The chief white eunuch was no longer drawn as the most important officer of the Ottoman sultan's palace. Bobovi wrote that "... this officer (chief black eunuch) is more important than the *kapı ağası* because, in addition to his greater income, he has easier access to the prince and has more occasion to approach him at any hour, even when he was retired or was with his mistresses ..."¹¹⁷ Actually, Bobovi's comments show that along with the new privileges that the chief black eunuch took over from the senior white agha, the latter had lost control of the harem in 1595.

In the following years, with the decreasing influence of his office at the palace, the chief white eunuch lost control of the pages in the Inner Service at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Firstly, the management of the Inner Service was taken out of his hands and was handed over to the sword-bearer in 1704.¹¹⁸ With this change, except for the Harem, all the affairs of the Inner Service were put under the authority of the sword-bearer. Secondly, the position of the chief of the palace agha was taken away from the chief white eunuch and handed over to the sword-bearer in the reign of Ahmed III (1703-1730)¹¹⁹. Similarly, while the *baltacı*s of the Old Palace had been under the responsibility of the chief white eunuch up to the seventeenth century, they came under the authority of the chief black eunuch thereafter.¹²⁰

Even though we do not know to what extent the transfer of the superintendence of the harem to the chief black eunuch affected the decline of his white counterpart, it can

¹¹⁷ C. G. Fisher-A. Fisher "Topkapı Sarayı in the Mid-Seventeenth Century: Bobovi's Description" *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 10(1885-1987), pp. 5-81 [hereafter Fisher, Bobovi], at pp. 26-27.

¹¹⁸ According to Atâ this change was related to the efforts of Çorlulu Ali Pasha see Atâ, vol. I, pp. 161-162; for the information about Çorlulu Ali Pasha see Münir Aktepe, "Çorlulu Ali Paşa" *DİA*, vol. VIII, pp. 370-371.

¹¹⁹ Uzunçarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı*, p. 356.

¹²⁰ See above fn. 100.

be said that the transfer of power commenced a new period both for the white and black eunuchs: while the former began to disappear from the harem, the latter began to play more vital roles at the central stage of politics as the most important official of the palace.

ii. The silent strife between white and black eunuchs of the imperial harem

Even though Ahmed Refik mentions the dissatisfaction of the white eunuchs with the passing of the harem's administration to the hands of black eunuchs in his book *Kızlar Ağası*¹²¹, we do not encounter any information to consolidate the words of Ahmed Refik in the contemporary sources. Despite the silence of these sources about the institutionalization process of this office, we think that this process also witnessed the attempts of white eunuchs to regain their lost superiority in the harem. At this point, even though contemporary sources do not provide direct answers to the question of how this shift of power was accepted by the white eunuchs, certain clues can be gleaned from them to understand at least whether there was any effort of the white eunuchs to take back this post under their own monopoly. In this respect, the most illuminating information comes from the appointments to the position of the senior agha after the black eunuchs were empowered.

As mentioned before, the first black eunuch appointed to this office was Habes Mehmed Agha. As the first superintendent of the harem, Mehmed Agha, who will be handled later, drew a very successful profile during his office between the years 1574 and 1590. With the death of Mehmed Agha in 1590,¹²² the agha of the Old Place, Server

¹²¹ Ahmed Refik, *Kızlar Ağası* (İstanbul, 1926), pp. 10-11.

¹²² Selânikî, vol. I, p. 229.

Agha, was appointed as the chief black eunuch.¹²³ Nevertheless, he did not succeed in remaining in office for many years as his predecessor had; and in just nineteenth months, he was removed from office (1592) and exiled to Egypt with his three slaves. According to the author of *Hamiletü'l- Küberâ*, the reason for his dismissal was related to the agha's efforts to prevent communication between the servitors (*kapı oğlanı*) and the people of provinces (*taşra halkı*). The writer said that Server Agha, who had not paid enough attention to "the administration of the people", was dismissed from office as a result of the alliance of the eunuch aghas.¹²⁴

Although the author of the *Hamiletü'l- Küberâ* did not indicate by which of the two group's efforts, white or black, Server Agha was discharged from office, it is not difficult to guess, because Server Agha's efforts were directed to *kapı oğlans*, all of whom were *white* eunuchs under the responsibility of the lieutenant servitor (*kapı oğlanı kethüdâsı*).¹²⁵ Probably, Server Agha had tried both to consolidate his authority on white eunuchs and to force the acceptance by the white eunuchs of the superiority of their black counterparts. Note that Server Agha did not bring a new rule in preventing communication between the servitors and the people of provinces, since that sort of communication was already seen as a breach of the old Ottoman *kânûn* and was also widely criticized by contemporary authors such as Mustafa Âlî and the anonymous writer of the *Kitâb-ı Müstetâb*.¹²⁶ In this respect, the dismissal of Server Agha seems related more to the prevailing of the power and influence of the white eunuchs at the palace. The

¹²³ Atâ, vol. I, p. 160; Turan /Hamîle, pp. 45-46.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹²⁵ M. Z. Pakalın, *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü*, 3 vols (İstanbul, 1946) , vol. II, pp. 175-176.

¹²⁶ Çerçi/Kühn, vol. III, p. 627; Mustafa Âlî, *Mevâ'idü'n-nefâis fî-kavâ'idü'l- mecâlis*, ed. by Mehmet Şeker (Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 1997) [hereafter Âlî/Şeker], pp. 156-159; Yücel, *Kitâb-ı Müstetâb*, pp. 26-27.

words of Selânikî, too, verify our hypothesis: "...The position of the chief black eunuch was given to the white eunuch, the agha of Old Palace, Mustafa Agha, and it was ordered to the white aghas to dominate the black eunuchs with compulsion and force."¹²⁷ Thus, the control of the harem reverted to the white eunuchs as a result of indistinguishable reasons: We do not know which one was more important: the efforts of Server Agha to decrease the power of white eunuchs, or the attempts of white eunuchs to regain their recently lost authority at the imperial harem.

Furthermore, we should take into consideration that Server Agha was brought to office while the most influential and powerful white eunuch, Gazanfer Agha, was at the position of the chief white eunuch. Though Gazanfer Agha was in office when Mehmed Agha became the senior agha of the harem, seemingly, the former enjoyed a high degree of power especially in the period from Mehmed Agha's death.¹²⁸ For this reason, we think that there might have been considerable influence of Gazanfer Agha in both the dismissal of Server Agha from his office and the appointment of a white eunuch to the position of the chief agha of the harem. Especially, Gazanfer's attempts to create his own allies, thanks to his relatives and slaves at the imperial palace,¹²⁹ causes us to consider the possibility of his goals to eliminate his rivals, one of whom was surely the chief black eunuch, at the imperial palace. However, this is just a speculation because contemporary sources do not contain any information to support Gazanfer Agha's influence in the appointment of Mustafa Agha as the senior agha of the harem.

¹²⁷ "Dârüssa 'âde ağalığı sarây-ı Âmiresi ağası Hacı Mustafa Ağ'a 'ya fermân olunub, kara ağalara ak ağa zecr u kahr ile hâkim olmak buyruldu.", see Selânikî, vol. I, p. 281.

¹²⁸ Maria Pia Pedani, "Safiye's Household and Venetian Diplomacy" *Turcica*, 32 (2000), pp. 9-31.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-17, 25-28.

Unfortunately, our knowledge about the white eunuch Mustafa Agha does not help us to explain the whole story behind his appointment. The information provided by the sources about the agha is ambiguous: Before Mustafa Agha had entered into the harem he was a slave of the governor of Yemen, Mahmud Pasha. The agha was taken into harem service in 1562 when the Pasha was at the capital at the request of Egypt's governor. With the dismissal of Server Agha in 1592, Mustafa Agha was appointed as the chief agha of the harem from the position of the agha of the Old Palace. Nevertheless, he held this office for only four years; and due to his illness, he was retired in 1596 at his own will and was sent to Egypt.¹³⁰

Even though contemporary sources emphasize the blindness of Mustafa Agha for his retirement, the consequences of Murad III's death should also be considered. Both Mustafa Âlî and Selânikî mention that the harem servants of Sultan Murad were replaced with new ones following the accession of the new sultan.¹³¹ This was surely related to the desires of the new sultan and of the people who shared power with him in the administration to create their own allies. Perhaps, this desire brought about the end of agha's office. On the other hand, in his retirement, Gazanfer Agha's indirect influence could also have been decisive; because the removal of Mustafa Agha from office coincided with the period in which the power of Gazanfer Agha triggered both the attention and the uneasiness of certain palace officials. Âlî, for instance, writes that among the persons whom grand vizier Lala Mehmed Pasha (d. 1596) wanted to expel

¹³⁰ Turan/Hamîle, p. 46; Akbayar/Sicill, vol. IV, p. 1130. Selânikî, too, mentioned the agha's illnesses, see Selânikî, vol. II, p. 568.

¹³¹ Çerçi/Kühn, vol. III, pp. 657-658; Selânikî, vol. II, pp. 436, 441, 485-487. Similarly, Peçevî mentioned the dismissal of sultan Murad III's courtier, the dwarf Cafer Agha, from the office following the new sultan's accession to throne, see Peçevî, vol. II, p. 22.

from palace was the chief white eunuch Gazanfer Agha.¹³² Similarly, the janissaries and *sipahis* demanded the execution of Gazanfer Agha during the rebellion of 1599, and this shows how much Gazanfer Agha's clout bothered soldiers.¹³³ Both of these might have been the reflections of Gazanfer Agha's diminishing power. If our hypothesis about Gazanfer Agha's influence on the appointments was true, in such a difficult statement he might not have used his power to keep the office in the hands of white eunuchs.

Of course, the illnesses of Mustafa Agha might have been the real reason for his dismissal. Yet the changing balances of power, and the new forces gaining power should be taken into consideration while this office was once again entrusted to one of the black eunuchs. For instance, the *haseki* of Murad III, Safiye Sultan enjoyed great power as the *valide* sultan during the reign of his son Mehmed III (1595-1603).¹³⁴ Parallel to this, it is interesting to see the chief agha of the *valide* sultan at the position of senior agha of the harem. Probably, in this period, Safiye Sultan, as the most powerful woman of the palace, had great influence over the process that resulted in the appointment of the new owner of this post. The contemporary historian Selânikî informs us of this possibility. According to him, Safiye Sultan sent the Sultan a letter requesting the assignment of İbrahim Pasha to the position of grand vizier and the promotion of certain harem servants.¹³⁵ The accommodation of all the requests made by the *valide* sultan by the sultan surely indicates her effectiveness over the appointments taking place at the Palace. Thus, even

¹³² Çerçi/Kühn, vol. III, p. 695.

¹³³ Selânikî, vol. II, p. 854-857.

¹³⁴ Pedani, *ibid.*, pp. 9-31; moreover for Safiye Sultan see Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, pp. 92-99.

¹³⁵ Selânikî, vol. II, pp. 649-650. Similarly, Safiye sultan seemed to be effective in the retirements of the aghas. According to Selânikî "with the intercession (*şefâ'at*) of the *valide* sultan" *mirahur* Nuh Agha was retired in 1594, see Selânikî, vol. II, p. 441.

though we are not certain, it can be assumed a considerable influence of Safiye Sultan in the assignment of her chief agha, Osman Agha, to the most prestigious office of the imperial harem in 1596.¹³⁶ In a similar way, she might have been responsible to considerable extent for the bestowal of the royal *vakfs* under the authority of Osman Agha¹³⁷; since she might have wanted the assignment of her chief agha to this position not only for the desire to use a great deal of power that stemmed from the office of the agha, but also for her potential interest in charitable activities as the *valide* sultan.¹³⁸ Thus, as the old chief black eunuch of the *valide* sultan, Osman Agha continued to hold this office until 1603, the year in which he was assassinated along with the chief eunuch Gazanfer Agha by the janissaries and the *sipahis* as a punishment for interference in state affairs.¹³⁹

After Osman Agha, the position of the chief black eunuch was occupied by five black aghas until 1621. However, at this time, one of the white aghas, İsmail Agha, was designated as the senior agha of the harem. Interestingly, the author of the *Hamîle* does not list him among the chief aghas of the harem, though he is identified in the *Sicill-i Osmanî* as the last chief white eunuch who held the position of the senior agha of the harem.¹⁴⁰ Unfortunately, except for his charitable activities and exile in 1622, after his short tenure¹⁴¹, we do not have any information about him. From that date onwards, white eunuchs lost control of the harem in a certain way, and it became the exclusive preserve of the black eunuchs until the end of the Ottoman Empire.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 568.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 740-742.

¹³⁸ For the charitable activities of Safiye Sultan, for instance, see *ibid.*, pp. 621, 638, 723, 761, 790.

¹³⁹ Peçevî, vol. II, pp. 255-256.

¹⁴⁰ Akbayar/ Sicill, vol. III, p. 811.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*; for his charitable activities also see Ayvansarâyî Hüseyîn Efendi (d. 1787), *Hadikatü'l-Cevâmî*, ed. by Ali Satı, 2 vols. (İstanbul, Matbaa-i Amire, 1281) [hereafter Ayvansarâyî /Satı], vol. II, p. 214.

Consequently, even if we do not encounter any information explicitly showing the tiff between white and black eunuchs during the institutionalization of the new office, we believe that there was a silent strife between these two sides in this period. When we consider the importance of the duties that the white eunuchs carried out until the rise of the chief black eunuch, it is reasonable to think that they might have attempted to regain control of the harem. Without doubt, after the creation of the office at the palace, the intervals of the appointment of black eunuchs to the position of the chief agha of the harem suggest such a tiff between the white and black eunuchs.

In this context, it is certain that the passing of the administration of the harem, in a definitive way, to the hands of the chief black eunuch was linked to his increased political influence in the palace, because no more than twenty years after the creation of the office, the chief black eunuchs of the imperial harem had become the closest political allies of members of the royal family as well as of other high-ranking officials of the palace. Thus, as a result of newly gained political influence at the palace, the chief black eunuchs both consolidated their position at the harem and succeeded to guarantee that this office would pass to their own kindred. Parallel to this, the following section suggests that the great political power of the chief black eunuchs, which was seen from the beginning of the seventeenth century, actually indicated the completion of the institutionalization process, and in a certain sense the consolidated position and power of the chief black eunuch at the palace.

III. The *dariüssaade* agha as a new ally and a new political force at the harem

By the first years of the seventeenth century, the chief black eunuchs of the imperial harem began to appear as important actors at the political stage. Even though the activities of the first three officers of the institution¹⁴² do not occupy a lot of room in the contemporary chronicles by Mustafa Âlî, Selânikî, and Peçevî, the picture suddenly changes in the period beginning with the tenure of Osman Agha (d. 1603)¹⁴³. Interestingly enough, from this time to the end of the eighteenth century, most of the aghas' names are frequently mentioned in the discussion of political affairs of the state by Ottoman chroniclers.

Actually, the role played by the chief black eunuchs in the political stage can give us clues about the reasons for the rise of the chief black eunuchs in the palace in the late sixteenth century. While black eunuchs were actively involved in the political affairs of the palace, they played the roles expected from them: being political allies to the members of the royal family and of other high-ranking officials of the palace. Quite understandably, their visible influence at the palace can be seen during the tenure of the four aghas of the harem, Osman, Abdürreezzak, Mustafa, and Süleyman Agha, all of whom occupied this position at the beginning of the seventeenth century. To more explicitly show how these aghas were involved in court politics, we want to briefly touch upon the affairs in which the four aghas appeared as main actors.

¹⁴² For the information for these men see Turan/Hamîle, pp. 45-46.

¹⁴³ For Osman Agha see *ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

With his tragic death in 1603, the chief black eunuch Osman Agha¹⁴⁴ appears as the first agha who was executed due to his intervention in state affairs. Interestingly, the name of Osman Agha is mentioned in the chronicles of Peçevî and Hasan Beyzâde (d. after 1635) together with the name of the chief white eunuch Gazanfer Agha. Both officers were blamed by the cavalry of the Porte for the deposition of the grand vizier Sinan Pasha and for misinforming the sultan about the rebels in Anatolia¹⁴⁵. Although the authors do not clearly explain the acts of the chief black eunuch, they indicate that the agha, who interfered in “*umur-i mulk*”¹⁴⁶, was seen by the soldiers “as the cause for the existing disorder” with the others, and was killed to “eliminate trouble (*fitne*) and intrigue (*fesad*)”¹⁴⁷.

Interestingly enough, neither Peçevî nor Hasan Beyzâde mentions the relationship between the two aghas and the *valide* Safiye Sultan that is mentioned in the report of an English ambassador at the Ottoman palace, Henry Lello.¹⁴⁸ According to Lello, the soldiers had rebelled against the favorites of the *valide* sultan. While they wanted the expulsion of the *valide* sultan from the palace, they also demanded the heads of “the men of the *valide* sultan”, who were the chief white eunuch, the chief gardener, and the chief black eunuch¹⁴⁹. In spite of bribery by the *valide* sultan and the chief white and black eunuchs, the rebellions were not appeased, and the sultan, Lello says, felt obliged to accept the execution of the aghas, although he liked them¹⁵⁰. Similarly, another

¹⁴⁴ Hasan Beyzâde, vol. III, pp. 682-692; Turan/Hamîle, pp. 46-47.

¹⁴⁵ Hasan Beyzâde, vol. III, pp. 690-691.

¹⁴⁶ Peçevî, vol. II, p. 256.

¹⁴⁷ Hasan Beyzâde, vol. III, p. 690.

¹⁴⁸ Henry Lello, *The Report of Lello*, ed. by Orhan Burian (Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1952) [hereafter Lello/Burian].

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

ambassador from Venice describes the precautions taken by the *valide* sultan to quell suspicions about herself and the chief agha of the harem, and he clearly indicates the collaboration of the two and says that by taking precautions they aimed to obviate the danger facing them¹⁵¹.

Even though the Ottoman sources are silent about the relationship between the agha and the *valide* sultan, it does not seem unreasonable to think that there was an intimate relation between the two. In fact, as seen in the reports of Venetian and English ambassadors, the chief black eunuch was perceived by the rebels as the “favorite” and the “man” of the *valide* sultan. Most probably, the silence of the Ottoman sources about both the *valide* sultan’s political activities and her collaboration with the chief black eunuch stemmed from the writers’ conscious preference not to show the *valide* sultan together with the people causing “trouble” and “intrigue” at the administration. In this context, we think that the *valide* sultan Safiye and the chief black eunuch collaborated considerably in political affairs.

Without doubt, Osman Agha was not the only chief black eunuch who collaborated with the *valide* sultan. Abdürrezzak Agha (d. 1604), who occupied the position of the black chief following Osman Agha, also seems to have established a close relationship with the *valide* sultan. Like his predecessor, he interfered in the politics of the palace. The involvement of the agha’s name in the affair of the execution of Prince Mahmud, who was the eldest son of sultan Mehmed III, should be a clear reflection of his political activities. The hand of the agha in the killing of the prince is clearly shown by

¹⁵¹ Peirce’s *The Imperial Harem*, p. 243.

Hasan Beyzâde. Even though Peçevî does not give the name of the chief black eunuch¹⁵² his words are consistent with Hasan Beyzâde's account¹⁵³. According to these chroniclers, the chief black eunuch informed Sultan Mehmed about a letter sent to Mahmud's mother by a sheikh outside the palace, whom she had consulted about her son's future. After the chief agha showed the letter to the sultan, the latter, who worried about the prince's popularity among the janissaries¹⁵⁴, ordered the execution of his son as well as his mother, and the sheikh.

Unfortunately, the sources are not helpful about the later career of the agha, except *Hamiletü'l Küberâ*. The author of this source states in some marginal notes of the sources he read that Abdürrezzak Agha was noted to have been executed in October 1604¹⁵⁵. If the writer's words are true, the execution of the agha was surely related to his role in this story, since a Venetian dispatch dated October 1604 notes the execution of Safiye Sultan's agha and steward¹⁵⁶. This report not only supports the account of *Hamile*'s writer but also points to the possible role of the *valide* sultan in the execution of Prince Mahmud. In a similar way, concerning the *valide* sultan's role in this affair, we should take into consideration the report of an English ambassador, which showed the *valide* sultan as the person who informed Sultan Mehmed about the letter¹⁵⁷.

In this context, if Abdürrezzak was the old agha of the *valide* sultan Safiye or he followed Safiye after her expulsion from the palace, the reason behind the execution of the agha can be clear: Most probably, following his accession to the throne in 1603,

¹⁵² Peçevî, vol. II, p. 281.

¹⁵³ Hasan Beyzâde, vol. III, p. 765.

¹⁵⁴ Peçevî, vol. II, p. 281.

¹⁵⁵ Turan/Hamile, p. 47.

¹⁵⁶ Tezcan's *Searching for Osman*, p. 364, fn. 8.

¹⁵⁷ Lello/Burian, pp. 57-59.

Sultan Ahmed I wanted to take revenge for his brother's death or to eliminate the influence of both his grandmother Safiye Sultan and the chief black eunuch Abdürrezzak Agha. Hence he first sent the agha and his *valide sultan* to the old palace¹⁵⁸, and then ordered the execution of the agha. Actually, both the relation between the agha and the *valide* sultan and the collaboration of these two important people at the execution of Prince Mahmud would also be in keeping with the changing structure of the palace.

An even clearer case demonstrating the relation between the agha and other inhabitants of the palace and the agha's influence in court politics concerns the tenure of Mustafa Agha (d. 1624). Differently from the previous chief black eunuchs, Mustafa Agha occupied the position of the chief black eunuch twice¹⁵⁹. Although, as the chief black eunuch of Sultan Ahmed, he succeeded in holding on to his office during the accession of Mustafa to the throne, he was dismissed after two years and exiled to Egypt in 1619. For the second appointment he waited for four years. In any case, his last assignment in 1623 did not last long, as the agha died in the same year. Thus, Mustafa Agha held the position of the chief black eunuch for nearly sixteen years in the three sultans' tenures.

Although the longest of Mustafa Agha's tenure as chief black eunuch coincides with the reign of Sultan Ahmed, the agha attracts our attention with his political activities in three important affairs of the Ottoman palace that took place after this period: the first accession of Mustafa I, his temporary removal after three months, and the enthronement of Osman II. Interestingly enough, Mustafa Agha played very important roles in all three

¹⁵⁸ Tezcan, *Searching for Osman*, p. 177.

¹⁵⁹ For the detailed information about the tenure of the chief black eunuch Mustafa Agha see Turan/Hamile, pp. 48-49.

affairs. In the first one, he appeared as the official who tried to convince the leading statesmen about the suitability of Mustafa for the throne¹⁶⁰. Interestingly, the agha also played a role in Mustafa's first deposition in 1618. Although the historians of the seventeenth century differ about "whether Mustafa Agha acted as villain or loyal servant in the deposition of Mustafa",¹⁶¹ they agree that the agha played an important role in the affair. However, the success of Mustafa Agha did not bring him luck, but rather cost him his position.¹⁶²

While the sources are silent about the real reasons behind the deposition of the agha, it is likely that the agha's dismissal had something to do with his role in the deposition of Mustafa. Even if the *ulema* headed by the chief jurist consult did not convince the *valide* sultan to banish Mustafa Agha¹⁶³, later these people or the supporters of Sultan Mustafa might have succeeded in expelling Mustafa Agha from the palace. Of course, the deposition of the chief agha might have also stemmed from the conflict of interest between the agha and his old protégé, İstanköylü Ali Pasha. The rise of the agha's protégé to the position of grand vizier and the latter's proximity to the new sultan Osman¹⁶⁴ probably transformed the holders of the two offices into serious rivals. Lastly, we should reckon with the young sultan Osman's feeling towards the agha who had initially worked to enthrone his uncle Mustafa instead of him. Even though Mustafa Agha afterwards attempted to depose Mustafa from the throne, the young sultan probably had

¹⁶⁰ Peçevî, vol. II, p. 360.

¹⁶¹ In his pathbreaking study on Ottoman historiography, Gabriel Piterberg has shown that how differently the chief black eunuch Mustafa Agha was depicted by the historians of the 17th century see Gabriel Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy. History and Historiography at Play* (London, University of California Press, 2003), pp. 93-98. For detailed information about the first deposition of the sultan Mustafa and the role of Mustafa Agha in this affair see Peçevî, vol II, pp. 362-363; Hasan Beyzâde, vol. III, pp. 917-920.

¹⁶² Turan/Hamîle, p. 48; Peçevî, vol. II, p. 371.

¹⁶³ Hasan Beyzâde, vol. III, p. 919.

¹⁶⁴ Peçevî mention the proximity of the grand vizier to the sultan Osman, see Peçevî, vol. II, p. 371.

not forgotten the agha's role in the unusual succession of his uncle to the Ottoman throne¹⁶⁵. Especially, when we take into consideration that the young sultan dismissed the lieutenant grand vizier and limited the prerogatives of the chief jurist consult, both of whom the sultan held responsible for his uncle's enthronement¹⁶⁶, the agha's deposition from the office might have been related to his role in Mustafa's first accession in 1617.

In any event, Mustafa Agha, who enjoyed visible power and influence in the reigns of Sultan Ahmed and Mustafa, succeeded in holding the office for nearly fifteen years. Most probably, the agha's deposition from the office or his exile to Egypt did not put an end to his power at the palace. On the contrary, his second appointment to the position of the chief black eunuch in the reign of the sultan Murad IV or following his dismissal from the office, the assignment of one of his protégés, Süleyman Agha, to this position indicate his continuing power and influence at the palace.

At this point, we should ask how the agha gained such power in the reigns of Ahmed and Mustafa. Most probably, the agha's absolute control stemmed from the absence of a female power in the harem. As indicated before, the *valide* sultan Safiye was sent to the old palace at the beginning of Sultan Ahmed's tenure. Although Ahmed's *haseki*, Kösem, was at the palace during the agha's term in office, she was not yet as active in politics as she would be during the reign of her sons, Murad IV and Ibrahim.¹⁶⁷ In the reign of Sultan Mustafa, too, the picture does not change, and powerful women do

¹⁶⁵ In his book, Peirce has indicated very interesting letter of the young Osman to the English king James, in which the sultan's thoughts related the interpolation of his uncle into the line of succession, see Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, p. 100.

¹⁶⁶ İsmail Hami Danismend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi*, 4 vols. (İstanbul, Türkiye Yayınevi, 1972), vol. III, p. 274.

¹⁶⁷ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, p. 105; Piterberg, *ibid.*, pp. 13-14. Moreover, for the information about Kösem Sultan see Mücteba İlgürel, "Kösem Sultan", *DİA*, vol. XVI, pp. 273-275.

not appear at the imperial harem.¹⁶⁸ Thus Mustafa Agha, who benefited from the suitability of circumstances, developed a strong relation with the sultan and exercised extensive influence on the politics of the palace, as emphasized by Peçevî¹⁶⁹.

In a similar way, the power of his protégé, Süleyman Agha, too, was the result of similar circumstances.¹⁷⁰ Like his patron Mustafa Agha, Süleyman Agha too had been involved actively in the affairs of the court. Without doubt, the murder of Sultan Osman in the May of 1622¹⁷¹ was the best affair exemplifying the agha's great influence on both the sultan and the matters of the state. The contemporary historians Tûgî, and Bostanzâde Yahya Efendi mention the agha among the closest advisers of the young sultan who brought about the regicide of Osman by misguiding him¹⁷². According to them, it was Süleyman Agha together with other advisers who had encouraged the sultan to use the pilgrimage as a pretext to recruit a new army in Anatolia, Syria, and Egypt. Tûgî' claims that Süleyman Agha agitated the sultan against *kul* and tried to convince Osman to conscript Turcoman horseman and *sekbans* instead of existing body of *kul*¹⁷³.

Although we do not know to what extent the claims of the historians related to the agha were true, it is clear that such rumors led to demands for the execution of the agha by the soldiers in the uprising on May 18 1622¹⁷⁴. At this point, the sultan's attitude

¹⁶⁸ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, pp. 142-143; Piterberg, *ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁶⁹ The agha was depicted by Peçevî as the official "...to whose judgment the charge of the state affairs had been totally entrusted" at the time of Sultan Ahmed's reign, Peçevî, vol. II, p. 360.

¹⁷⁰ Turan/Hamile, pp. 48-49.

¹⁷¹ For the regicide of the young Osman see Bostanzâde Yahya (d. 1639), *Vak'a-ı Sultan Osman Han* (the author himself does not actually give a title to his work) ed. Orhan Şaik Gökyay, in *Atsız Armağanı*, ed. Erol Güngör (İstanbul, 1976) [hereafter Bostanzâde/Gökyay], pp. 187-256, at pp. 190-256; Tûgî/İz, pp. 124-155; Peçevi, vol. II, pp. 380-388; Hasan Beyzâde, vol. III, pp. 931-950; Aryeh Shmuelevitz, "Ms Pocecke no. 31 as a source for the events in İstanbul in the years 1622-1624," *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 3/2 (1985-1986) [hereafter Shmuelevitz/Pocecke], pp. 107-121, at pp. 107-121.

¹⁷² Tûgî/İz, pp. 124-125; Bostanzâde/Gökyay, p. 199.

¹⁷³ Tûgî/İz, pp. 124-125.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-130; Bostanzâde/Gökyay, p. 199; Hasan Beyzâde, vol. III, p. 940; Peçevî, vol. II, p. 382.

towards his chief black eunuch was most interesting. Even when Osman agreed to cancel the pilgrimage and bowed to other demands of the soldiers, he refused to abandon his chief black eunuch Süleyman Agha until the last moment. Only when the rebellious crowd entered the harem, he was finally convinced to give up on his chief black eunuch, and surrendered Süleyman Agha to the rebels¹⁷⁵.

Without doubt, the resistance of Osman to the soldiers' demand to execute Süleyman Agha gives us an idea about the close relation between the chief black eunuch and the young sultan. The agha, who is depicted by Bostanzâde Yahya Efendi as "the guide (*çakmak*) of the sultan,"¹⁷⁶ seems to have become his most intimate and trusted man¹⁷⁷. Even though we must be cautious with the accounts of the contemporary writers about the great influence of the chief black eunuch on Osman, we believe that to a certain extent the agha was effective on the young sultan's decision. Probably, the absence of the *valide* or *haseki* sultan at the palace helped the chief black eunuch to exercise greater control on the young sultan. Most probably, neither Bostanzâde Yahya Efendi nor Hüseyin Tûgî was wrong when they mentioned the agha's impact on the affairs; on the contrary, they might have indicated the underestimated political role of the agha at the palace. However, it should be emphasized that while we point out the correlation between the power of both of Süleyman and Mustafa Aghas and the absence of the *valide* sultan or *haseki* at the palace in this period, we do not mean that the existence of the two important women was an obstacle for the chief black eunuchs to gain power. The alliance between

¹⁷⁵ Tûgî/Îz, pp. 129-132; Bostanzâde/Gökyay, pp. 211-219; Peçevî, vol. II, pp. 382-383; Hasan Beyzâde, vol. III, pp. 943-945; Shmuelewitz/Pococke, p. 109.

¹⁷⁶ Bostanzâde/Gökyay, p. 195.

¹⁷⁷ The words of Peçevî, at this point, seem to be important. According to him, the agha was the closest person to the sultan Osman, see Peçevî, vol. II., pp. 378-379.

the chief black eunuchs and the women of royal family was surely common at the imperial palace, and more importantly, such alliances brought the two sides great advantages. On the other hand, the power or influence of the *haseki* or *valide* sultan must have decreased or, at least, checked the power of the chief black eunuch. In this regard, the great influence of Mustafa and Süleyman Aghas should be evaluated as the result of *haseki* and *valide* sultans' absence at the palace.

Consequently, the political activities of all four chief black eunuchs indicate how the newly created office was integrated into the Ottoman administration. Quite understandably, the influence of the chief black eunuchs on political matters stemmed from their central position at the harem. As the superintendent of the harem, the chief black eunuch, not only had access to all members of the royal family and the opportunity to develop close relationships with them, but he also had a chance to follow all kinds of affairs at the palace. In addition, thanks to the extensive responsibilities of his office, the chief black eunuch could create alternative networks and forge powerful connections with the people who belonged to different circles. In the same way, both the office and the people who held the office were surely important for members of the royal family and the ruling elite as allies and as part of their efforts to create alternative networks working on behalf of their interests. All these reasons explain why we encounter the records showing the alliance of the chief black eunuchs with the members of royal family and the ruling elite. They also explain a more important question: how in a short period of time such a great power was acquired by the chief black eunuchs. In this connection, the next chapter will handle the chief black eunuch as the head of the institution of the office of *dariüssaade* agha.

CHAPTER III

THE CHIEF BLACK EUNUCH IN OFFICE

By the time of Sultan Murad III, black eunuchs had been taken away from the jurisdiction of the chief white eunuch and had been structured into a hierarchy of offices under the chief black eunuch. With this change, black eunuchs of the imperial harem had their own institution, which would raise some of them to the most important position of the court. During the institutionalization process, the position of black eunuchs ranging from hierarchy to duties began to get clarified within the harem.

The present chapter aims to present the institution with its officials. Firstly, we survey the black eunuchs within the borders of the Ottoman palace, where they appeared not only as the chief black eunuch but also as possible candidates for the office. In this context, the present chapter will show generally which stages were passed by a black eunuch prior or subsequent to his entry into the palace that prepared him for his new position at the imperial harem. Then, it will briefly describe the duties of the chief black eunuch that consolidated his position as the senior of the imperial household. Secondly, the present chapter will open a window to the living quarters of black eunuchs, which clearly indicate their growing importance. Finally, the role of the chief black eunuchs in the Ottoman ceremonies will be discussed in order to show the growing importance of their position in the court hierarchy.

I. Hierarchy, Duties, and Careers of Black Eunuchs: a brief survey

An important source, *the Register of the Chief Black Eunuchs*, which belongs to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, provides valuable information about the biographies of the black eunuchs who served between the years 1590 and 1817. While on the first page of the *Register* it is written that the white and black eunuchs were used for “the affairs and matters of the imperial harem (*harem-i hümayûnun vâsita-i umûr ve husûsâtı için*)” from the beginning of the Ottoman Empire, the change beginning with the appointment of Habeş Mehmed Agha as the senior officer of the harem is also indicated.¹⁷⁸ After praising the black eunuchs, the register lists the dates of appointment and removal from the post of chief black eunuchs together with their date of death, and provinces in which they were buried in the following pages. However, it does not include any information about their place of origin. Actually, this is not so surprising since most of the crucial questions about the arrival of the black eunuchs to the Topkapı Palace remain unanswered especially for the centuries before the nineteenth century.

However, even though the sources do not help us to determine the exact places of origins of black eunuchs, we at least know that black eunuchs were usually recruited from sub-Saharan Africa. They were brought as slaves to Egypt by slave traders, and the selected ones were castrated at a place that is not clearly known.¹⁷⁹ However, Egypt

¹⁷⁸ The *Register of the Chief Black Eunuchs*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Y 86. The register is transliterated by Ahmet Nezihi Turan in Turan/ Hamile, pp. 163-175. For the Register, we use this transliteration.

¹⁷⁹ Hamza ‘Abd Al-‘Aziz Badr and Daniel Crecelius, “The Awqaf of Al-Hajj Bashir Agha in Cario” *Annales Islamologiques*, 27 (1993), pp. 291-308 [hereafter Badr and Crecelius “Al-Hajj Bashir Agha], at p. 292; Fanny Davis, *The Palace of Topkapı in Istanbul* (New York, 1970), p. 190; Toledano, “The Imperial Eunuchs”, pp. 379-382.

seems one of the probable locations where the castration operation took place. According to an eighteenth century chronicle, the grand vizier Şehid Ali Pasha ordered the governor of Egypt in 1715 to put an end to the castration of Ethiopians in Egypt and in the surrounding area.¹⁸⁰ Even though the order was not executed due to the death of the vizier shortly afterwards, it indicates the significance of Egypt for the castration operation. At this point, the palace eunuchs' connection with Egypt must be considered. In general, the harem eunuchs were presented to the Ottoman sultan by the governor of Egypt¹⁸¹, who might have purchased them from such slave traders or from the caravans of Sennar and Darfur who annually brought five-six thousand slaves.¹⁸² The *Mühimme-i Mısır* registers dating from the eighteenth century document the role of Ottoman governors of Egypt in providing black eunuchs for the imperial harem. At different dates, the governors of Egypt were ordered to send a varying number of eunuchs to the harem of the Topkapı Palace.¹⁸³ From these edicts, we also learn that the eunuchs of the harem were castrated before they reached the Ottoman palace.

However, purchasing was not the only way to acquire eunuchs for the harem. The eunuchs could also be given as presents to various members of the imperial household. We are well-informed about the presentation of eunuchs to the imperial family as gifts by high ranking officials. Interesting information in this regard comes from two important registers dating from the nineteenth century.¹⁸⁴ These registers, which seem to be of a

¹⁸⁰ Raşid Mehmed Efendi, *Tarih-i Raşid*, 4 vols. (Matbaa-i Amire, 1282), vol. IV, p. 175.

¹⁸¹ Hathaway, "The Role of Kızlar Ağası", p. 141; Uzunçarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı*, p. 172.

¹⁸² H. A. R. Gibb and Harold Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West*, I Vol, II Parts (Oxford, 1969), at vol. I, pt. I, p. 305.

¹⁸³ The *Mühimme-i Mısır* Registers will be shown as *MM*. *MM* I: 235; *MM* III: 273, 516, 699; *MM* IV: 142; *MM* V: 254, 391; *MM* VI: 371.

¹⁸⁴ One of the register, dates 1903, is located the Prime Ministry Archive (Yıldız Koleksiyonu, XXI). This register is analyzed by Ehud Toledano in his article "The Imperial Eunuchs". For the statistical

similar kind, include the biographies of the eunuchs, owned by the imperial family, who were either serving or had retired at the time. The biographies, which vary in length and detail, contain information about how each eunuch entered the harem, that is, whether he was given as a present or was purchased¹⁸⁵. Both registers indicate that, at this point in time, the vast majority of the eunuchs were not purchased, but rather given as presents. Only ten of the eighty-two eunuchs included in the register of 1903, listing the number of one hundred ninety-four eunuchs, were actually purchased by the Palace; the rest were given as presents to various members of the imperial family.¹⁸⁶ The register of 1895 consisting of two hundred nineteen eunuchs, similarly, includes the biographies of the twenty eunuchs who were given as gifts to the royal family.¹⁸⁷

Admittedly, it is risky to use nineteenth century sources in drawing conclusions about the ways of acquiring eunuchs for the harem in previous centuries. Yet, there is no comparable document for the earlier periods. At this point, instead of disregarding such important sources, it is preferable to use them with caution. Moreover, there are a few indications for the practice of gift-giving in the sixteenth century: According to Selânikî, Vizier İbrahim Pasha, who was appointed to bestow valuable gifts (*pişkeş*) after the celebrations of Holy Day (*bayram*), gave one hundred eunuchs with other precious gifts to the sultan in 1585.¹⁸⁸ Similarly, a document dating from the eighteenth century indicates that four eunuchs were given as gifts by the local governor of Darfur to the

information, infers from this register, we depend on Toledano's article see "The Imperial Eunuchs", p. 386.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 386.

¹⁸⁷ *The Register of 1895*, for instance can be looked ff. 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11.

¹⁸⁸ Selânikî, vol. I, p. 159.

Ottoman Sultan in 1791.¹⁸⁹ In conclusion, it is certain that some of the harem eunuchs were not purchased but given as gifts by high ranking officials.

The use of eunuchs as gifts should be related to their special conditions: eunuchs were not only expensive¹⁹⁰ but also difficult to obtain. The decrees sent to the governors of Egypt give us clues about the anxiety of the palace about the provisioning of eunuchs. The governors were ordered to send urgently a definite number eunuchs “in any case (*bi-eyyi-hal*)” to Istanbul.¹⁹¹ For this reason, a eunuch might have been a suitable present for the people who wanted to gain the favors of the royal family. If we look at the two registers mentioned above, we see that most of the people who presented eunuchs to members of the imperial family were grand viziers, viziers, governors, and pashas. The presenting of eunuchs must have also served a more important purpose: that of establishing of possible patronage ties between the black eunuchs and their ex-owners, as will be shown later. Thus, the black eunuchs who were acquired in different ways entered the Palace and began their long education in the *Corps of the Aghas* (*Ağalar Ocağı*), which was a school for eunuchs.

¹⁸⁹ BOA, Hatt-ı Hümayun 4735 A.

¹⁹⁰ It is not a simple coincidence to see that the governors had been appointed to provide the eunuchs from the people who “had wealth” or the “*beghs*” and “*aghas*” of the Egypt. That is surely connected with the eunuchs’ price. Probably, only people who had a high level of income could afford to buy eunuchs. Unfortunately, there is no detailed study to our knowledge on the price and owners of eunuchs in the 16th and 17th centuries. However, certain ideas can be gained from Ehud R. Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression 1840-1890* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1982), pp. 62-72; Halil Sahillioğlu, “Slaves in the Social and Economic Life of Bursa in the Late 15th and Early 16th Centuries” *Turcica* xvii (1985), 109-177, at pp. 156-163.

¹⁹¹ MM III: 273; MM IV: 142.

Even though we are informed about the rules of the Corps that had to be obeyed by harem eunuchs,¹⁹² we do not find have any date for its establishment. However, we are lucky to have information provided about the structure of the Corps of Eunuchs. According to Tayyarzâde Ahmed Atâ, who was a bureaucrat and historian in the nineteenth century, when a eunuch arrived at the palace, his career began with the rank of the Lowest (*En aşâğı*), and in the presence of the principal officer of the eunuchs' guard (*baş kapı gulâmı*), his name was registered in the Corp's register (*defter*).¹⁹³ The eunuch, who had already entered the corps, passed through the grades of novice (*acemi*), members of the guard (*nöbet kalfası*), middle grade (*ortanca*), and the highest rank (*hasıllı*) from there onwards¹⁹⁴. When a vacancy occurred, the senior *hasıllı* became the chief of guard (*baş kapı gulâmı*), and later, he became the chief of guard of the New Palace (*Yeni Saray baş kapı gulâmı*).¹⁹⁵ The offices of the two *baş kapı gulâms* were the highest offices that a eunuch could obtain via the hierarchy in the Corps, where the promotions from rank to rank came as they opened up¹⁹⁶. Thus, the chief black eunuch was appointed by the sultan himself among the chief of the guards of the New Palace who had been assigned lastly as the chief guard of the Old Palace.

It is of interest to note that there were certain posts that were conferred by favor, not by seniority. For instance, the head agha (*baş ağa*) of the *valide* sultan and the chief

¹⁹²Sedad Hakkı Eldem and Feridun Akozan, *Topkapı Sarayı Bir Mimari Araştırma* (Ankara, Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Eski Eserler ve Müzeler Genel Müdürlüğü, without date) [hereafter Eldem and Akozan] pp. 34-35 ; Atâ, vol. I, pp. 260-262.

¹⁹³ In the light of such information it can be thought that the two *registers* of the 19th century, which are dated 1895 and 1903, were compiled for the *Corps of Eunuchs*. But there is any clue to support this in the registers.

¹⁹⁴Davis, *ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁹⁵ It must be noted that this section is not organized to handle the institution of the *Corps of Aghas* in a detailed way. Rather, it attempts showing the key ranks and their possible relations with the chief black eunuchs and the other important people of the harem. For this reason, to the detailed information about all the ranks and their actual functions see Atâ, vol. I, pp. 257-269.

¹⁹⁶Davis, *ibid.*, p. 190.

black eunuch's tutor (*oda lâlası*) were appointed in a different way: According to Atâ, while the head agha of the *valide* sultan was chosen among the aghas according to their "suitability and capacity (*liyâkat ve dirâyet*)" the tutor of the chief black eunuch was chosen by the chief agha himself. The chief black eunuch who had observed the "capability and competence (*iktidar and ehliyet*)" of a eunuch would appoint him to this office.¹⁹⁷ At this point, the aforementioned two most important positions seemed eligible to create his/her protégés from the anonymous black eunuchs of the harem. In such a case, it can be expected that the loyalty of the eunuch to the persons that appointed him to one of the most important offices of the harem, was not limited to this office only. This loyalty was to be there through the eunuch's whole career.

In a similar way, while the appointment to the position of the chief black eunuch was also supposed to take place according to the hierarchy of the *Corps*, this was not a strict rule. On the contrary, the appointments of the certain chief black eunuchs show that hierarchy was frequently not taken into consideration, and chief black eunuchs were appointed based solely on the sultan's personal "confidence (*i'timâd*)".¹⁹⁸ The biographies of the chief black eunuchs who served between the years 1574 and 1807 indicate that the tutor (*lâla*), the treasurer (*hazinedâr*), and the courtier (*musâhib*) of the sultan, as well as the chief aghas of the *valide* sultans and the *haseki* sultans could be appointed as the chief black eunuch.¹⁹⁹ The proportion of such appointments can be seen in the biographies of these chief black eunuchs: while 19 out of 48 eunuchs had

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 260-262.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

¹⁹⁹ Turan/Hamile, pp. 45-74; see also Akbayan/ Sicill , for some instances see vol. I, p. 47; vol. III, p. 953; vol. IV, pp.1088, 1281, vol. V, pp. 1528, 1686. For the detailed information about the functions of chief agha of the *valide* and *haseki*; also the tutor see Atâ, vol. I, pp. 257-266.

followed the established hierarchy; the remaining had previously been treasurer (14), the chief agha of the *valide* sultan (4), courtier (4), the chief agha of the *haseki* (2), or tutor (2).²⁰⁰ The duties of these officers enable us to understand how the eunuchs could establish relations with members of the royal family, and more importantly, how they could gain the confidence of the sultan to be appointed to such an important office: The duty of the chief agha of the *valide* sultan and *haseki*, as will be shown later, was the same: they were responsible for all matters pertaining to the *valide* and *haseki*'s living quarters; and the tutor was, in fact, in charge of the prince. However, the remaining posts, the courtier and the treasurer were more important than the others: the courtier, above all, personally served the sultan; he waited and accompanied the sultan when he was in the harem.²⁰¹ The importance of this officer is also attested to by the sixteenth century historian and bureaucrat, Mustafa Âlî: The writer lists the courtier, who was an “eloquent, educated companion of rare qualities”, among the necessary requirements for the sultan.²⁰² The treasurer, on the other hand, dealt with all the financial affairs of the harem. Thanks to their duties, all these officials would have been in perpetual contact with members of the royal family; and more importantly, all of them were, as we have mentioned before, under the authority of the chief black eunuch. Considering the strategic importance of these alliances, it is not difficult to understand why the hierarchy was not followed in most appointments of chief black eunuchs. All these cases also illustrate the importance of prior acquaintances with the imperial family. In fact, it was reasonable to

²⁰⁰ See above, fn. 124.

²⁰¹ For the detailed information see Uzunçarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı*, p. 75. One point should be added all courtiers were not eunuchs. But we have informed the powerful courtier eunuchs at the Ottoman Palace, see Uzunçarşılı, *ibid.*

²⁰² Mustafa Âlî, *Nushatü's-selâtîn*, ed. and trans. Andreas Tietze, *Mustafa 'Âlî's Counsel For Sultans of 1581: edition, translation, notes*, 2 vols. (Vien, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1982) [hereafter Âlî/ Tietze II], vol I, pp. 41-46 (tr.), pp. 127-135 (ed.); moreover the same writer mentioned the harmful activities of the black courtier of Murad III see Âlî/Şeker, pp. 159-150.

choose the chief black eunuch from among the servants who remained in perpetual attendance on the sultan while he was in the harem. In this context, not only the sultan but also the chief black eunuch would have had great opportunity to create alternative networks working on behalf of their own interests in the palace.

At this point, it must be noted that the chief black eunuch, too, by being the master of all eunuchs of the harem, had great opportunity and power to establish relations and participate in the politics of the palace. This was because not only the eunuchs who were employed in various apartments of the New Palace's harem, but also the ones in the Old Palace were under the authority of the chief black eunuch. The meaning of this is clear: As the commander of all the black eunuchs, the chief black eunuch was placed at the center of the harems of the two palaces. If we look at the functions of certain ranks, this point will become clearer. For instance, while the chief agha of the *valide* sultan was responsible for supervising all "the matters (*mu'âmelât*)" of her apartments, the tutor (*lâla*) of a prince was in charge of the fulfillment of the latter's chores and more importantly, of following the latter everywhere he went.²⁰³ Parallel to this, it can be thought that the chief black eunuch watched every move inside the apartments of *valide* sultan and of the princes. However, the extent of authority of the chief black eunuch was not limited to the harem of the New Palace. Thanks to the chief guard of the Old Palace (*Eski Saray baş kapı gulâmı*), who was commander of all the eunuchs at the Old Palace,²⁰⁴ he again followed the most important affairs of this palace because this officer had to act according to the chief black eunuch's orders.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

In this context, the concubines (*cariye*) of the chief black eunuch must be noted, since the agha was the only one among the palace aghas who was allowed to have concubines for his own service.²⁰⁵ Although it is not clear what the duties of the agha's concubines were, these concubines might be considered as the agha's mediators who provided communication between himself and both the inhabitants of the harem and the outsiders, since even the chief black eunuch did not ordinarily enter the harem. In this respect, the strict rules governing entrance into the harem provide further support for this hypothesis.²⁰⁶ Especially the new arrangements made by Turhan Sultan, who was the mother of Sultan Mehmed IV (1648-1687), in the harem clearly show how these concubines were used by the black eunuch aghas as mediators. Just as she strictly forbade the communication between the agha and individuals in the outside world, Turhan Sultan did not neglect to throw out the concubines of the aghas from the harem.²⁰⁷ Most probably, the *valide* sultan's act was related to the aghas' attempts to develop links with people of the harem and the outside world.

No doubt, the extent of his official responsibilities also helped the chief black eunuch while he developed such relations and acquired the power. As the supervisor of the whole harem, he had direct access to the sultan whenever necessary, irrespective of

²⁰⁵ Uzunçarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı*, p. 174. Moreover, the information depending on the Pierce's book should be noted that according to the one archival document, apart from the chief black eunuch the second agha in rank and the agha of treasury (*hazinedâr*) had eunuchs. But, the document, as Peirce said, belongs to the middle of the eighteenth century see, Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, p. 136. The having of concubines by other important eunuchs might be related to the institutional change. Due to the lack of similar documents for the early centuries, at least to our knowledge, we cannot evaluate the probable changes in such case. Also, the document showing the objects given by the sultan to the *concubines* of the senior eunuch proves the permission given the chief black eunuchs to have concubines see BOA, DBŞM. MHF: 12401.

²⁰⁶ Atâ, vol. I, pp. 259-260; Eldem and Akozan, *ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

²⁰⁷ Derviş Abdullah, *Risale-i Teberdariyye fî Ahvâl-i Ağa-i Darüssaade*, between the pages 53a-76a ed. Hızır Ali Telatar (Senior thesis, İstanbul Üniversitesi, 1973-1974), p. 13. Moreover, for the pages between 76b-90b see Derviş Abdullah, *Risale-i Teberdariyye fî Ahvâl-i Ağa-i Darüssaade*, ed. Reşat Karpuzcu (Senior thesis, İstanbul Üniversitesi, 1973-1974).

day and time; he not only presented the matters of the harem to the sultan, but also took imperial decrees from him. In addition, the chief black eunuch carried on correspondence between the sultan and the high-ranking officers; and not less importantly, he sent letters, connected with political, military, and administrative matters, to high ranking officials of the state and even received such official writings from them.²⁰⁸ His official duties also required close relations with the *valide* sultans. As the chief officer of the harem, he could speak to her; and supervise the *valide* sultan's estates. He was also assigned as *vekil* by the *valide* sultan in religious matters.²⁰⁹ Consequently, all of these duties surely indicate the chief black eunuch's vital role in the imperial harem; and the advantages of his position to build relationships with the sultan, the *valide* sultan, as well as the high ranking officials of the state.

In this context, a eunuch's previous services might have been effective in the establishment of such relationships. If a eunuch had not reached the harem directly after entering the Ottoman lands, he might have served in other grandees' households. Related to this issue, the registers of 1895 and 1903 provide striking information: Just as the biographies of 21 chief black eunuchs recorded in the first register make clear the influence of previous service before joining the imperial harem, the biographies of 126 chief black eunuchs recorded in the second register also demonstrate the importance of previous service.²¹⁰ These eunuchs served in other households before entering the imperial harem. Among these households, there were those of grand viziers, pashas,

²⁰⁸ Altındağ, *ibid.*, p. 2. For the documents showing the writing between the chief black eunuch and the grand vizier see TSA, No. E: 4682, 9570/1,2,3; also for the letter of *Naib* of *Harem-i Nebevî* to the chief black eunuch, dated 1639, see TSA, No. E: 722/1.

²⁰⁹ Altındağ, *ibid.*

²¹⁰ *The register of 1895*; Toledano, "The Imperial Eunuchs..", pp. 386-387.

governors, *şerifs* of Mecca, and other high-ranking officers. Although these results concern the services of the nineteenth century eunuchs, and we do not have comparable information about the eunuchs of earlier centuries, we can still talk with some certainty that at least some of the harem eunuchs were similarly employed in various households before entering the palace. The biographies of five eunuchs from the seventeenth century and that of four chief eunuchs from the eighteenth century support this thesis and indicate the previous services of the chief black eunuchs.²¹¹ Actually, all of these biographies denote the eunuchs' previous owners, and in a way, their relations with their owners prior to the entry into the harem.

At this point, it is necessary to think about the probable continuation of the connection between the palace eunuchs and their old masters and mistresses. In other words, a eunuch who was taken into one's household and later offered to the sultan's palace would not have forgotten the patronage that he had received previously; and would continue his allegiance to his ex-owner because of his significant post in the imperial harem and maintain his relation with him/her. In this connection, el Hajj Beşir Agha (d. 1746) and Beşir Agha III (d.1759) can be given as suitable examples: Both of them were powerful and well-known chief black eunuchs of the eighteenth century, and they seemed to have contacts with their ex-owners' households. Even though we do not have information about how Beşir Agha III's owner benefited from his relation with his former eunuch, at least we know that such a relation created a suitable environment for

²¹¹ Turan/Hamîle, pp. 46, 48, 53, 54, 57, 63, 64; Akbayan/Sicill, vol. I, p. 241; vol. II, pp. 265, 373; vol. III, p. 739.

Beşir Agha to attain power when he returned to Cairo after his deposition in 1755.²¹² On the other hand, el-Hajj Beşir's example explains more about the importance of patron-client networks: when el-Hajj Beşir became the chief black eunuch, he remembered his ex-owner patronage and served the interests of the latter's household.²¹³ No doubt, these two eunuchs were not an exception; and the other eunuchs who were employed at the imperial harem must also have retained relationships with their ex-owners. Probably, both the eunuchs and their former owners tried to maintain such relations for their personal interests after these eunuchs entered the service of another man²¹⁴. In fact, from the beginning of their relationship, both sides would have been aware of each other's importance to gain power and status: Just as service at a governor or another influential man's household could help a eunuch to enter into the sultan's household, where he could rise to the position of the chief black eunuch, his owner, as the person who provided the eunuch's entrance to the palace, could receive the equivalent of his patronage both during and after his eunuch's term in office.

In this context, two crucial questions should be answered: did the chief agha enjoy power and prestige only during his office or did he continue to do so also after his retirement? What was the meaning of retirement for the chief black eunuch, and even for his patron and for his own clients? Firstly, it is crucial to know that the chief black eunuch had to abandon his post for two reasons: deposition and exile. Above all, there was no rule for the duration of service of a chief black eunuch. The duration of service of the imperial black eunuchs shows clearly that while some of them occupied the office for

²¹² Jane Hathaway, *The politics of households in Ottoman Egypt. The rise of Qazdağlıs* (Cambridge University Press, 1997) [hereafter *The Rise of Qazdağlıs*], p. 162.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 162-166.

many years, others were dismissed in a short while.²¹⁵ The changing duration of their services indicates that just like their appointments, the black eunuchs' dismissals also depended on the sultan's will. A eunuch who was removed from office was usually exiled to Egypt²¹⁶, sometimes to Gallipoli,²¹⁷ Hijaz, Damascus, Cyprus,²¹⁸ Limni,²¹⁹ or Malatya.²²⁰ However, neither deposition nor exile meant the end of agha's career. To the contrary, it mostly became the prelude to a new period in his life, since he could be appointed for various imperial duties, including the position of guard at the Prophet's tomb in Medina (*şeyhü'l harem-î nebevî*)²²¹ or the supervision of certain *evkâf* of the royal family.²²²

Consequently, since the reign of Sultan Murad III, black eunuchs who were taken to the service of the harem entered the institution of the *dariüssaade* agha which was created as a separate office for black eunuchs. Within this institution, no doubt, the position of the chief black eunuch was the highest office that a eunuch could occupy in the official hierarchy of the harem. Apparently, following the completion of the institutionalization of the office, the rules arranging the working of the institution of *dariüssaade* agha were clarified. Thanks to this institution, black eunuchs who went through the long training of the Corps became the officials of a newly institutionalized office. Undoubtedly, the renovations made to their quarters were the best signs of their

²¹⁵ Turan/Hamile, pp. 164-175.

²¹⁶ For some instances see BOA, CS: 5638, 6486; DBŞM. MHF: 12672.

²¹⁷ BOA, CS, 24999.

²¹⁸ Altındağ, *ibid.*, p. 2.

²¹⁹ Turan/Hamile, p. 60.

²²⁰ Akbayan /Sicill, vol III, p. 811.

²²¹ Turan/Hamile, p. 59.

²²² Hathaway, *The Rise of Qazdağlıs*, p. 150.

position empowered into already an institutionalized structure, as will be seen in the second section.

II. The quarters of the black eunuchs as a reflection of their newly gained power and prestige

The late sixteenth-century historians Mustafa Âlî and Selânikî mention the unprecedented expansion of the harem by new constructions accomplished in the reign of Murad III.²²³ The extensive renovation and expansion of the harem during the twenty-one years reign of Murad III's were probably related to the consolidation of the dynastic family into the imperial palace after the reigns of Süleyman I and his successors²²⁴. Until the rule of Süleyman, the primary residence of the sultan's family, including the princes, princesses, their mothers and the *valide* sultan was the Old Palace, (*saray-i 'atîk* or *Eski Saray*) constructed by Mehmed II following the conquest of Istanbul.²²⁵ After the construction of this palace, a second palace, called the New Palace (*saray-i cedid* or *yeni saray*), the present day Topkapı, was built by Mehmed II in 1459²²⁶, but the harem remained in the Old Palace and the sultan paid frequent visits there. It is known that Topkapı always contained quarters for women, but it housed only the sultan's current concubines and staff to serve them; not the royal family.²²⁷ However, the harem began to be incorporated into the New Palace with the unprecedented move of Hürrem and her children to the harem of imperial palace.²²⁸ Following Hürrem's example, the members

²²³ Âlî/ Tietze II, vol. I, p. 59 (tr.), pp. 153-154 (ed.); Selânikî, vol. I, p. 193; Necipoğlu, *The Topkapı Palace*, p. 174.

²²⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 163-165.

²²⁵ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, p. 119; see also Davis, *ibid.*, p. 7.

²²⁶ Necipoğlu, *The Topkapı Palace*, p. 8.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

²²⁸ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, pp. 61-62.

of the reigning sultan's family began to live in the imperial residence. Thus, as the sixteenth century progressed, the harem of the New Palace gained a new role "as a principal division of the imperial residence".²²⁹

Consequently, after the reign of Süleyman I, the population of the imperial harem grew rapidly which necessitated adding service staff to accommodate the needs of the greater number of inhabitants²³⁰. It is in this context that black eunuchs of the imperial harem became one of the most important groups of service staff in the harem. To examine the effects of such a change on the position of eunuchs in the harem, we should firstly ascertain whether there was an increase in their numbers. However, this is not an easy task to realize, since the information inferred from contemporary sources is not very helpful for our questions about this issue. Although we are informed about the employment of black eunuchs in the imperial palace from the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror,²³¹ we do not know their exact number in the court until the reign of Selim I. It is certain that, in 1513, there were ten white and black eunuchs at the sultan's palace.

Most probably, the construction of a Chamber for the eunuchs of the imperial harem in the time of Süleyman the Magnificent²³² was an indication of the growing number of black eunuchs. Even if we do not know to which group of eunuchs this construction belonged, white or black or to both of them, to a certain extent, the blacks'

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

²³¹ Orhonlu, "Derviş Abdullah", p. 225; Altındağ, *ibid.*, p. 1.

²³² Necipoğlu, *The Topkapı Palace*, p. 159; Evliyâ Çelebi, *Seyâhatnâme*, 10 vols. (İstanbul, 1318), vol I, p. 116. However, Necipoğlu claims that Evliyâ's information about the construction of a harem in the reign of Süleyman cannot be correct because archival documents show Süleyman I renovated a harem that already exist in the Topkapı Palace. For this reason, she indicates that, such remarks refer to this sultan's extensive renovation of the harem and its services, see Necipoğlu, *The Topkapı Palace*, p. 159. Moreover, Mualla Anhegger-Eyüboğlu shows this chamber belonged to the black eunuchs but she does not indicate the source of such information see Mualla Anhegger-Eyüboğlu, *Topkapı Sarayı'nda Padişah Evi (Harem)* (İstanbul, 1986), p. 22.

increasing number must have been effective on the building of this chamber.²³³ In this context, the reign of Sultan Murad seems to be crucial for the issue, because we can follow both the black eunuchs, and those who were under the chief black eunuch's service by that time. For instance, thanks to the archival materials, we know that, between 1577 and 1772, the chief black eunuch had fifty officials under his command.²³⁴ It is a fact that in the reign of Sultan Murad, not only the number of black eunuchs increased in an unprecedented way as shown by Mustafa Âlî²³⁵, but also new quarters were built for them.²³⁶

However, it is not easy to reconstruct the new quarters for the black eunuchs, since the buildings in their quarters were burnt in the great palace fire of 1665/1666²³⁷, and were rebuilt by Mehmed IV (1648-1687) around 1667-1669.²³⁸ Similarly, the continual expansion, restructuring, and reorganization of the harem in the following decades and centuries²³⁹ also make it difficult to reconstruct the place that the black eunuchs occupied in the imperial harem. Nevertheless thanks to a variety of sources, we can draw some conclusion about the part inhabited by black eunuchs in the harem area.

²³³ In this context, it is crucial to add that there were black eunuchs in Hürrem's personal guard, see Penzer, *ibid.*, p. 135. Furthermore, although Penzer shows the number of the black eunuchs of the harem in this century between 300 and 500 by depending on D'ohsson's estimate this number should be taken cautiously see Penzer, *ibid.*, p. 132. Davis does not accept the number of the back eunuchs which showed as six hundred and she indicates their quarters could not have accommodated nearly that many see Davis, *ibid.*, p. 191. No doubt, to know total number of the black eunuchs employed in the harem the new research should be done on the population of the imperial harem in general, and the number of imperial harem's eunuchs in particular.

²³⁴ Altındağ, *ibid.*, p.1. The writer, also, indicates that in he reign of Selim III (1789-1803) such number including the officials of the Old Palace was approximately between 129 and 155, see *ibid.* Moreover, Peirce shows the number of eunuchs assigned to the chief black eunuchs' service see, idem, *The Imperial Harem*, p. 136.

²³⁵ Âlî/Tietze I, p. 82 (tr.), pp. 175-176 (ed.).

²³⁶ Necipoğlu, *The Topkapı Palace*, pp. 164, 174.

²³⁷ Davis, *ibid.*, p. 185.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*; see also Eldem and Akozan, *ibid.*, p. 32.

²³⁹ Davis, *ibid.*, pp. 185-198.

The black eunuchs' quarters lay in a separate courtyard between the public Council Hall in the second court and the Court of Concubines²⁴⁰. To reach there, two anterooms had to be passed: The first, into which a gate opened, was the Dome with Closet (*dolap kubbesi*), which was lined with large cupboards, some of which were used to store the documents related to the royal *vakfs* administered by the chief black eunuch.²⁴¹ The second anteroom was the Place of the Attendant's Guard at the Tower Door (*kule kapısı hademe-i nöbet mahali*), which was the first guard of the harem. As Davis has shown, the guard room had multiple doors, which enabled the eunuchs to go from there in various directions: "... to the tower that rose behind the *divânhâne* and houses the sultan's lodge; to the small court that gives ingress to their chapel; to the eunuchs' court; and to an Exit Door (*çıkış kapısı*) that leads down a long, uncovered corridor to the Curtain Gate (*perde kapısı*)."²⁴² This architectural feature, no doubt, provides a glimpse into the relationship between the functional divisions of the eunuchs' quarters and the personnel's duties there.

The second vestibule opened into a narrow open court, with a chapel, three-storey dormitory, and the chief black eunuch's apartment on the left side²⁴³. The eunuchs' chapel (*mescit*) was lined with seventeenth century tiles that were built after the great fire of 1665.²⁴⁴ Interestingly, the marble tablets "recording gifts of various eunuchs towards the up-keeping and beautifying of the rooms"²⁴⁵ gives an idea about the eunuchs' approach to one of their own places in the harem. This little chapel sometimes entertained

²⁴⁰ Necipoğlu, *The Topkapı Palace*, p. 180.

²⁴¹ Eldem and Akozan., pp. 31-32; Davis, *ibid.*, pp. 185-186.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 189; Penzer, *ibid.*, p. 126. For *divânhâne* and *curtain gate* see respectively Davis, *ibid.*, pp. 45-46, 189.

²⁴³ Necipoğlu, *The Topkapı Palace*, p. 180.

²⁴⁴ Davis, *ibid.*, p. 193; Eldem and Akozan, *ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁴⁵ Penzer, *ibid.*, p. 126.

very important personalities: the *şeyhülislâm*, leader of the religious hierarchy, was sometimes received by the sultan when he was assigned to the post²⁴⁶, or the young princes sometimes were taught to chant the Koran there.²⁴⁷ Even though we do not know what roles black eunuchs played on such unusual days, it can be conjectured that the chief black eunuch played a crucial role in the preparation of the chapel for the visit of the sultan, or the instruction of princes.

The dormitories of the black eunuchs were situated behind seven pillars²⁴⁸, and they included four floors on which black eunuchs were housed in hierarchical order; the lowest up through the chief of the guard (*baş kapı gulâmı*).²⁴⁹ Even though we cannot be certain about the functions, and the identity of the actual residents of the rooms, it seems likely that the chief of the guard had most of the ground floor to himself²⁵⁰. However, the information about the smaller rooms in the chief guard's suite is uncertain and conflicting: since it is not clear whether they were used as bedchambers or as living rooms; or for other purposes.²⁵¹ In spite of these questions that remain unanswered, the room which was on one side of the hearth (*ocak başı*) was probably the sitting room for eunuchs.²⁵² Apparently, the upper floors were designated in accordance with the ranks of the eunuchs²⁵³: while the second floor belonged to middle grade (*ortanca*) and next floor

²⁴⁶ Davis, *ibid.*, p. 193.

²⁴⁷ Davis, *ibid.*, p. 193.

²⁴⁸ Penzer, *ibid.*, p. 126-127.

²⁴⁹ Davis, *ibid.*, p. 192; Altındağ, *ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

²⁵¹ Davis, *ibid.*; Penzer, *ibid.*, p. 127. Moreover, the detailed description of the chief guard's suite see Eldem and Akozan, *ibid.*, pp. 35-37.

²⁵² Davis, *ibid.*, p. 192; Penzer thinks the same place as bedroom of the chief guard see Penzer, *ibid.*, p. 127.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

to the highest rank (*hasıllı*), the last floor housed the novices (*acemi*).²⁵⁴ What is the most striking point about these dormitories is the dissimilarity of the bricks used in the rooms of the retired and novice eunuchs.²⁵⁵ From the size and quality of the bricks to the presence of a window and the views from the windows, everything, in a way, indicates the hierarchical differences among eunuchs.

Undoubtedly, the suite of the chief black eunuch which clearly reflected the importance of its inhabitant, also exemplifies this hierarchical principle. The suite took up two floors, each of which consisted of several rooms which were modest in size but highly decorated²⁵⁶. According to Abdurrahman Şeref Bey, most of the space was ornamented with beautiful and precious tiles in the apartment of the chief black eunuch.²⁵⁷ On the ground-floor of the building, which was built of stone, there were two rooms, plus corridors and a bath²⁵⁸. Except for the windows and the fireplace, all the walls of the first room were decorated with tiles²⁵⁹; and this was the only room in the harem, apart from the bedroom of the *valide* sultan, where tiles were used to cover the ceiling.²⁶⁰ A door led up to the next room of the ground-floor, which was again tiled and had a small tiled fireplace similar to the one in the first room, but had no daylight except what came from a secret passage in a closet that joined the two rooms²⁶¹. Even though the existence of the fireplace suggests that this room was the bedroom of the chief black

²⁵⁴ Altındağ, *ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁵⁵ Eyüboğlu, *ibid.*, p. 59.

²⁵⁶ Davis, *ibid.*, p. 194.

²⁵⁷ Eldem and Akozan, *ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁵⁸ Davis, *ibid.*, p. 194.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁶⁰ Zeynep M. Durukan, *The Harem of The Topkapı Palace* (İstanbul, 1973), p. 34.

²⁶¹ Davis, *ibid.*, p. 194.

eunuch, it could also be his prayer room.²⁶² Moreover, there were other rooms which belonged to the eunuch treasurer and to the head courtier (*baş musâhib*) of the sultan on that floor.²⁶³

The princes' school, of which the chief black eunuch was in charge, was on the second floor of his apartment. The princes' school consisted of several rooms one of which perhaps belonged to the *hocas*, teachers of the princes²⁶⁴, who were conducted each day by the black eunuchs there²⁶⁵. The domed schoolroom was the principal room on this floor, and was decorated with seventeenth century tiles and gilded wooden panels.²⁶⁶ Interestingly, among the tiles and wooden sections of its walls, runs the frieze of calligraphy written in 1748 by Beşir Agha, who was the famous chief black eunuch of Mahmud I (1730-1754); and it lists the attributes of God and gives two deeds of the Prophet Muhammad.²⁶⁷ We must note, moreover, that the room was occasionally used for secret meetings.²⁶⁸ Selânikî mentions the meeting between Mehmed III (1595-1603) and the *Şeyhülislâm* Sunullâh Efendi to discuss the turmoil caused by a military revolt. The more interesting information on the meeting was given by Selânikî about the *valide* sultan, Safiye Sultan. According to this writer, she had listened to the meeting "from behind a curtain" (*verâ-i hicâbdan*).²⁶⁹ The question we cannot unfortunately answer is whether the chief black eunuch had helped the *valide* sultan to on the meeting by

²⁶² Davis, *ibid.*, p. 194; Eldem and Akozan, *ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁶³ Penzer, *ibid.*, p. 129.

²⁶⁴ Davis, *ibid.*, p. 196; Eldem and Akozan, *ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁶⁵ Necipoğlu, *The Topkapı Palace*, p. 180.

²⁶⁶ Eldem and Akozan, p. 38.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38; Davis, *ibid.*, pp. 195-196.

²⁶⁸ Necipoğlu, *The Topkapı Palace*, p. 181.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 180; Selânikî, vol. II, p. 858.

scheduling the meeting in the schoolroom, which was placed on the second floor of the chief black eunuch's suite or not.

To sum up, in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the black eunuchs who progressively usurped the power of the white eunuchs gained a special quarter in the newly constructed and expanded harem of the Topkapı Palace. Even though most of the buildings of the black eunuchs' quarters carry inscriptions from 1667-1669 and these indicate that they were rebuilt extensively by Mehmed IV after the fire of 1665²⁷⁰, it can be inferred that the black eunuchs began having new places at the New Palace²⁷¹ in accordance with their increasing importance. In this context, the central and commanding position of their quarter not only manifested the new power of *kızlar* agha and the subordinate eunuchs, but also gave opportunities to access the most important places and inhabitants of the palace. For instance, the chief black eunuch's quarter was adjacent to the main gate of the harem, which provided access to the Court of the *valide* sultan; and its physical proximity must have played an important role in establishing an intimate relationship between the chief black eunuchs and *valide* sultans which is clearly reflected by contemporary sources. Similarly, the existence of the princes' school in the quarter of the chief black eunuch enabled the chief black eunuch to effectively perform his role as the superintendent of the princes' education. To a certain extent, it must also have helped to establish a relationship among the princesses, their teachers and the chief black eunuchs. Undoubtedly, the change in "the policy of the education of princes" after the end of the sixteenth century²⁷² facilitated the establishing of such relationships. The

²⁷⁰ Davis, *ibid.*, p. 184; Necipoğlu, *The Topkapı Palace*, p. 181.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 175.

princes were no longer sent to govern provinces, but were instead confined to the women's quarters where they could find potential allies in chief black eunuchs, who began to be involved in the palace factions. In this context, the wide jurisdiction of the chief black eunuch's office should be remembered: As the gatekeeper of the harem, he was responsible for all who entered into the harem or who left.²⁷³ That means the chief black eunuch had a key position not only for the inhabitants of the harem but also for the people from the outside world who tried to establish contacts with the women of the imperial harem.

As a result, with the first years of Murad III, not only the new quarters were built for the "black eunuchs" but also certain borders of white and black eunuchs' offices were drawn thanks to their new residence. While as the head gatekeeper, the chief white eunuch resided at the Gate of Felicity, the chief black eunuch not only began to run the harem but also had wide quarters there as the senior officer of the harem. Even if the quarters of black eunuchs were important indicators of the changing position of the white and black eunuchs at the palace, there were more visible signs of this change: the ceremonies of the Ottoman palace.

²⁷³ It must be noted that the high-ranking women of the imperial harem could live from the harem under the surveillance of the black eunuchs. This situation appeared among the rules which the black eunuchs had to obey. The second and fourth of the nine rules, which were posted in the guard room of the black eunuchs, shows that effectively "when the harem women went out they had to be attended by a harem agha..." and "if the women who had valid reasons to go out had to have the permission of the chief black eunuch...". Although such rules posted in 1907 the similar rules were repeated in the reign of each sultan, see Eldem and Akozan, *ibid.*, p. 34; Davis, *ibid.*, p. 198. As Peirce has shown that even if the *valide* sultan appears to have had mobility outside the confines of the harem she did not have face-to-face contact with men, Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, p. 143. At this point, the central position of the chief black eunuch should be thought in developing the links between the women of harem and the people of the outside world.

III. The splendid appearance of the chief black eunuch in the ceremonies of the Ottoman court

Parallel to the recent ascendancy of the black eunuchs at the palace, the chief black eunuch began to appear in court ceremonies, manifesting and augmenting his newly gained power and prestige. The chief black eunuch's recurring appearance in court ceremonies in the last quarter of the 16th century was inextricably linked with his new office, since he took on very important duties both during the preparations and in the course of the ceremonies at the imperial court.

To precisely evaluate the shift in the white and black eunuchs' role in the ceremonies, we certainly need to know their previous place and duties before the reign of Murad III. Yet, we do not have any source, at least to our knowledge, which directly reflects the position of either the white or black eunuchs in the official ceremonies of the court in this period. An essential source for this purpose is no doubt the registers of protocol (*teşrifât defterleri*) which indicate the rules governing court ceremonies in detail²⁷⁴, but the earliest known detailed register of protocol dates back to the late seventeenth century.²⁷⁵ Even if we have information for earlier periods through certain registers in the archives, unfortunately most of them similarly were dated after the sixteenth century. While information about this issue can be gleaned from contemporary narrative accounts, the latter are helpful for the black eunuchs especially after the last quarter of the 16th century, when eunuchs began to appear in such sources parallel to their

²⁷⁴ For the general information about the registers of protocol (*teşrifât defterleri*) see Filiz Çalışkan, *Osmanlı Devletinde Teşrifatçılık ve Teşrifat Kalemi* (Unpublished master thesis, İstanbul Üniversitesi, 1989).

²⁷⁵ Zeynep Tarım Ertuğ, *Osmanlı Devletinde XVI. Yüzyıl Cülûs ve Cenaze Törenleri* (Ph. D. diss., İstanbul Üniversitesi, 1995), p. 7; also about this register see Filiz Çalışkan, "Defter-i Teşrifat", *DİA*, vol. IX, p. 94.

newly gained position as a superintendent. Despite the scarcity of information about the black eunuchs' position in court protocol before that date, the accounts from later centuries still enable us to see the chief black eunuch's privileged position in court ceremonies. While relying on these sources, by no means would we like to suggest that the chief black eunuch's duties and place in the official ceremonies remained the same throughout the centuries; on the contrary, a careful evaluation of the sources probably would demonstrate gradual but interesting changes in their positions.²⁷⁶ Yet such an attempt is beyond the scope of the present study. Our aim here is only to examine how after the institutionalization of the office the chief black eunuch appeared in official ceremonies. While the chief black eunuch was involved in many ceremonies of the Ottoman sultans and their courts, we will limit this discussion to the duties he performed during the accession (*cülûs*) and sword-girding (*taklîd-i seyf* or *kılıç alayı*) ceremonies as well as royal weddings.

The ceremonies of accession and sword-girding are particularly important to show the chief black eunuch's preferential position among the palace officials in court ceremonies. However, before mentioning these ceremonies, it is necessary to remember the changes in the succession mechanism from fratricide to seniority, since that shift brought about changes in the accession ceremony²⁷⁷. As known, Murad III was the last

²⁷⁶ For instance, while the grand vizier and the chief jurisconsult (*şeyhülislâm*) waited at the chief white eunuch's room when they received by the sultan, later that changed by the decree of the sultan; and they stayed at the chief black eunuch's room, see Atâ, vol. I, p. 266. Another example, can be given for the chief white eunuch: In the accession ceremony firstly the chief white eunuch was on the left of the sultan when the sultan emerged from the Third Courtyard to the his throne, later the agha abandoned his place to the sword bearer of the sultan (*silahdâr*) (Uzunçarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı*, p. 188).

²⁷⁷ Piterberg, *ibid.*, p. 10.

sultan to dispatch a son to a provincial governorate²⁷⁸. Hereafter, princes did not leave the imperial palace, and they were totally confined to the imperial harem²⁷⁹. As linked with the demise of the princely governorate, there was no violent competition among the candidates for the throne in the following years; the practice of dynastic fratricide was abandoned although it intermittently appeared²⁸⁰; and thus a radical break occurred in the succession mechanism as seniority rather than fratricide became the general rule for succession to the Ottoman throne²⁸¹. Parallel to these changes, the accession ceremonies of the post-fratricide era also changed²⁸²: Above all, it was no longer necessary to have a tense interval between the death of the reigning sultan and the announcement of his successor, since all the possible candidates for the throne were in the palace²⁸³. This meant that, soon after a sultan died, his heir could be proclaimed and subsequently the ceremonies could be arranged for the new sultan²⁸⁴.

Before the lapse of the princely governorate, when a sultan died, a confidant among the court officials would be sent to proclaim the death of the reigning sultan to the prince who would succeed him while preparations were made for both the funeral and the accession ceremony in the city where the throne had been vacated²⁸⁵. As soon as the

²⁷⁸ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, p. 43-45; on the princely governorate see also A. D. Alderson, *The Structure of the Ottoman Dynasty* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 17-24; Feridun Emecen, *XVI. Asırda Manisa Kazası* (Ankara, TTK Basımevi, 1989), pp. 26-42; Adnan Gürbüz, *XV. XVI. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Sancak Çalışmaları Değerlendirme ve Bibliyografik Bir Deneme* (İstanbul, Dergah Yayınları, 2001); Mustafa İsen, "The Ottoman Shahzadah (Princes) Sanjaks" in *Great Ottoman Turkish Civilization*, ed-in-chief Kemal Çiçek, 4 vols. (Ankara, Yeni Türkiye, 2000), [hereafter *Turkish Civilization*], vol. IV pp. 19-29.

²⁷⁹ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, p. 97.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 101-103.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-101.

²⁸² Piterberg, *ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 10. "Ceremony and Protocol at the Ottoman Court" in *A Cultural Atlas of the Turkish World The Ottoman Period*, Metin Eriş, 5 vols. (İstanbul, 1999), vol I, pp. 428-479, at pp. 431-432

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*; Ertuğ, *ibid.*, pp. 40-45.

²⁸⁵ Eriş, *ibid.* p. 431.

official arrived, the prince set out with his entourage for the city in which the sultan had died. During this time, the sultan's death was kept secret until the prince-regent arrived at the city in order to prevent the possibility of civil turmoil²⁸⁶. Parallel to this, the funeral of a sultan was held after the accession of his successor²⁸⁷. For this reason, from Mehmed the Conqueror to Selim II, when sultans died outside Istanbul or during a military expedition, their corpses were brought to the capital²⁸⁸ and the new sultans took part in the funeral ceremonies of their predecessors whenever possible. However, from the end of the sixteenth century, paralleling the sedentarization of the Ottoman sultans who rarely left their palace in the capital, when a sultan died, one of the princes confined to the palace was invited for the throne and the preparations for the ceremonies were completed as quickly as possible.²⁸⁹

In this context, Selim II's death is important for us to see the duties of the palace officials in the funeral ceremony, as Selim was the first sultan who died at the Topkapı Palace.²⁹⁰ If there was enough information on the issue, which would indicate at least the chief white eunuch's role, it would be more sensible to mention the tasks of the chief black eunuch when a sultan died. Despite the scarcity of evidence, we are informed that in such cases the senior eunuch of the harem was responsible for two crucial missions: Firstly, the chief black eunuch declared the death of the reigning sultan to the prince and the grand vizier. The prince, who was taken out of the *kafes* (the chamber of the Ottoman princes in the harem) by the chief agha to be shown the corpse of the sultan, and was

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 473.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 437.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 475.

²⁸⁹ "Ceremony and Protocol at the Ottoman Court" in *A Cultural Atlas of the Turkish World*, ed. Metin Eriş, 5 vols. (İstanbul, 1999), vol I, pp. 428-479, at pp. 431-432; Ertuğ, *ibid.*, pp. 40-45.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 113; for the description of Selim II's funeral, for instance, see Selânikî, vol. I, p. 101.

brought to the Chamber of Petitions (*'Arz Odası*) by the same official and the sword bearer to receive the homage of the empire's highest officials. Either there or at the apartment of the Blessed Mantle (*Hırka-i Şerif Dairesi*), the new sultan received the oath of allegiance (*bi'at*) from the grand vizier, the chief jurist consult, and subsequently the chief black eunuch and the personnel of the Privy Chamber (*Has Oda*). After the first ceremony, the chief eunuch took on an important duty in the second accession ceremony that took place at the palace's third gate, *Babüssaâde* (Gate of Felicity) where the new sultan's throne was set up for the ceremony. While everyone was waiting for the new sultan to present their homage, the sultan came with his chief black eunuchs on his right and his sword bearer on his left.²⁹¹ During the ceremony, the new sultan received the oath of allegiance from the imperial officials in hierarchical order; and the ceremony ended with the sultan's withdrawing into the Inner Palace with his grand vizier on his right and the chief white eunuch on his left, near the Gate of Felicity, where the grand vizier abandoned his place to the chief black eunuch.²⁹²

These two tasks indicate both the prestige and the importance of the chief black eunuch's office. Above all, the chief black eunuch was the official who accompanied the new sultan at the ruler's first meeting with the imperial officials. Among the officials who escorted the sultan, he appeared as one of the closest to the royal figure, since he was placed on sultan's right side during the accession ceremony. It is especially striking that he took the grand vizier's place while the sultan left the ceremony; in other words,

²⁹¹ Abdülkadir Özcan, "Cülûs" *DİA*, vol. VIII, pp. 108-114, at p. 111; Uzunçarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı*, pp. 184-188; Dündar Alikılıç, *Osmanlı'da Devlet Protokolü ve Törenler İmparatorluk Seremonisi* (İstanbul, 2004), pp. 39-48; Eriş, *ibid.*, pp. 433-439.

²⁹² Alikılıç, *ibid.*, p. 48.

the agha replaced the sultan's "absolute deputy (*mutlak vekil*)"²⁹³. In short, it appears that next to the grand vizier, the chief black eunuch occupied one of the most prestigious places in the ceremony.

Furthermore, as the official who invited the prince to take the throne, the chief black eunuch would have had great opportunity to establish sound relations with the new sultan or to increase his power and influence at the palace. The fact that officials who performed the task of inviting the sultan to the throne before the lapse of the princely governorate were later appointed to high positions, indicate the importance of that task.²⁹⁴ However, with the confinement of the princes to the palace, this duty was carried out by the chief black eunuch, and parallel to this it can be inferred that he benefited from the advantageous atmosphere of such important and good news.

The chief black eunuch also had a privileged position in the sword-girding ceremony. Shortly after the new sultan's accession (it could be five to fifteen days later), the sultan went by boat (and sometimes by land) to the tomb of Ebu Eyyûb el-Ensârî (a companion of the Prophet Muhammed) in Eyüp, outside the ancient Byzantine walls, to be girded with the sword of either the Prophet, Halid bin Velid, the Caliph 'Omer, or Selim I. Firstly, the sultan left the palace in a great procession and boarded the imperial

²⁹³ Akgündüz, *ibid.*, vol. I, p.318.

²⁹⁴ Ertuğ, *ibid.* For instance, Hasan Çavuş, who invited prince Murad, the future sultan Murad III (1574-1595) to the throne, was appointed as the chief pursuivant (*çavuş başı*) by the new sultan in 1574, see Selânikî, vol. I, pp. 104-105. Similarly the chief gardener (*bostancıbaşı*) Ferhad Agha was appointed as the governor of Egypt after inviting of prince Mehmed, future sultan Mehmed III (1595-1603), see Peçevî, vol. II, p. 163; Çerçi/Kühn, vol III, pp. 656-657. For information about pursuivants and gardeners see Uzunçarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı*, pp. 408-417, 465-487. Moreover, the requests of the aghas of prince Selim, future sultan Selim II (1566-1574) showed the suitability of the atmosphere to propose new assignments: When prince Selim was invited to the throne, his aghas proposed their advancement, see Selânikî, vol. I, p. 41.

boat, which was steered by the chief gardener²⁹⁵. The sultan was accompanied by his sword-bearer, stirrup-holder (*rikâbdâr*), and other courtiers on his boat, while the white and chief black eunuchs followed him on boats of their own²⁹⁶. At the port, the sultan was greeted by the viziers and other officials of the court, who had arrived at Eyüp on horseback.²⁹⁷ The greeting of the sultan has great importance with respect to the agha's position in the ceremony: When the sultan came to the port, he put his right arm on the grand vizier's arm and his left arm on the chief black eunuch's. Thus, the agha appeared once again as the official who greeted the sultan along with the grand vizier. This was surely not the sole case that indicated the prominent status of the black eunuch. The custom performed during this ceremony shows such similar status of the black eunuch: On the journey back, as was "customary (*mû'tâd-ı kadime*)", the sultan passed the Janissary Barracks (*Eski Odalar*) and drank the sherbet that was offered by the chief of the chamber (*odabaşı*).²⁹⁸ The most striking dimension of this visit was the offering of the same sherbet to the chief black eunuch by the steward (*vekîl –i harc*) of the chief of chamber. On the other hand, there is no reference to the sherbet being offered to any members of the sultan's entourage in any of the sources.²⁹⁹ Admittedly, it is not clear whether other officials were indeed excluded or whether the offering to the other members was omitted by the sources. No matter which alternative is true, it is clear that

²⁹⁵ Eriş, *ibid.*, p. 440.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ Alikılıç, *ibid.*, pp. 52-58; Uzunçarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı*, pp. 189-195; Abdülkadir Özcan, "Kılıç Alayı" *DİA*, vol. XXV, pp. 408-410.

²⁹⁸ Uzunçarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı*, p. 196; Özcan, *ibid.*, p. 409; Alikılıç, *ibid.*, p. 58.

²⁹⁹ Uzunçarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı*, p. 197. Actually, the two chronicles containing the information about the sword-girding ceremony does not mention the offering of the *şerbet* to the chief black eunuch see Ahmed Vasıf Efendi, *Mehâsinü'l-Âsâr ve Hakaikü'l Ahbâr*, 2 vols. (İstanbul, 1219), vol I, pp. 94-95; Mütercim Asım Efendi, *Asım Tarihi*, 2 vols. (İstanbul, 1235), vol II, p. 63. This shortage again might have sprung from the chronicles. However, the source contains the information about the offering of sherbet to the chief black eunuch was the register of protocol which showed the rules governing court ceremonies in detail. For this reason, its information seems more reliable than the other sources.

the chief black eunuch not only accompanied the sultan during the ceremony, but also drank sherbet, and granted gifts and largess to the official who offered the *şerbet* like the sultan did. The prestige and privileged position of the agha can be better understood if we think about the significance of the ceremony³⁰⁰: While this ceremony presented the new sultan to the public, it created an opportunity for his subjects to see the new sultan. Thus, the chief black eunuch accompanied the new sultan when he was at two crucial meetings: first with his officials and second with the people of the capital.

Apart from these ceremonies, the chief black eunuch also performed crucial duties at the royal weddings. All the affairs of the wedding appertaining to the royal family were handled by the chief black eunuch.³⁰¹ Among his duties, the most striking one was surely to represent the imperial bride at the wedding ceremony³⁰² in which the grand vizier or one of the viziers appeared as the deputy of the groom. It is meaningful that as the senior agha of the imperial harem, the privilege to represent the women of royal family at their marriage ceremonies was given not to the grand vizier, but to the chief black eunuch. Similarly, the place where the wedding ceremony took place reveals another privileged position of the chief black eunuch: While the weddings of the higher-ranking princesses, whose father or brother was on the throne, took place at the *Kubbealtı*, others were wedded in the apartment of the chief black eunuch.³⁰³ Thus, the prestige of the chief

³⁰⁰ For the meanings of the sword-girding ceremony with respect to Ottoman policy see Cemal Kafadar, "Eyüp'te Kılıç Kuşanma Törenleri" in *Eyüp: Dün Bugün: Sempozyum 11-12 Aralık 1993*, ed. Tülay Artan (İstanbul, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1994), pp. 50-61; also see Gülru Necipoğlu, "Dynastic Imprints on the Cityspace: The Collective Message of Imperial Funerary Mosque Complexes in Istanbul" in *İslâm Dünyasında Mezarlıklar ve Defin Gelenekleri*, ed. by Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont and Aksel Tibet, 2 vols. (Ankara, 1996, Türk Tarih Kurumu), vol. II, pp. 23-36.

³⁰¹ For the detailed information see Eriş, *ibid.*, pp. 17-18; Alikılıç, *ibid.*, pp. 190-194.

³⁰² For instance, Habeş Mehmed Agha (d. 1590) represented Ayşe Sultan, who was sister of Murad III's aunt Mihrimah, at her wedding ceremony in 1582 see Selânikî, vol. I, p. 130; Refik, *Kızlar Ağası* pp. 1-4.

³⁰³ See above fn. 301.

black eunuch was not only manifested by his responsibility for the handling of all the sultans' weddings but also by hosting certain royal ceremonies at his apartment.

Besides these ceremonies, the chief black eunuch also performed various duties in other official ceremonies of the court ceremonies such as the birth of royal children (*vilâdet-i hümayun*), the procession of cradle (*beşik alayı*), the procession of the *valide* sultan (*valide alayı*), and the prince's first reading-lesson (*bed-i besmele töreni*).³⁰⁴ No doubt, all these tasks, which reflected the privileged position of the agha among the palace officials, created avenues for the chief black eunuch to express his prestige in a number of ways.

Consequently, although we can not show how the position and duties of the white eunuch changed at the court ceremonies as a result of the rise of chief black eunuch one thing is clear: after the institutionalization of this office, the chief black eunuch began to fulfill crucial tasks in the court's ceremonies as the senior agha of the imperial harem. Without doubt, his splendid appearance in these ceremonies was a clear reflection of the integration of the office of *darüssaade* agha as the highest institution into the palace. In this context, in the following chapter we will try to answer a very crucial question: whether the chief black eunuchs made any effort to consolidate their newly gained prestigious position at the palace.

³⁰⁴ For detailed information about these ceremonies see Alikılıç, *ibid.*, pp. 167-181; Uzunçarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı*, pp. 167-172.

CHAPTER IV

TOWARDS A NEW IMAGE OF THE BLACK EUNUCHS OF THE OTTOMAN PALACE

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the power and influence enjoyed by the chief black eunuchs of the imperial harem had become a foregone conclusion. Far from being the “vile” eunuchs Mustafa Alî described as “naked from head to toe,”³⁰⁵ they possessed visible wealth and “grandeur.”³⁰⁶ Still, it must not have been easy for the black aghas to acquire and keep their new office, since despite their newly gained power, they continued to be vulnerable due to their disadvantageous status as slaves, blacks, and eunuchs. In this connection, it can be presumed that the black eunuchs of the imperial harem not only had to struggle against their rivals, the white eunuchs, but also deal with the societal prejudices stemming from these three handicaps, as will be discussed in the present chapter.

This chapter briefly analyzes four important texts written during the institutionalization of the office of the *dariüssaade agha* to show how the strife between the white and black eunuchs was played out in the literary medium and how the chief black eunuchs attempted to rectify the negative views current in certain sectors of Ottoman society about the racial group to which they belonged.

Firstly, it is argued that the aghas of both the white and black eunuchs who held office during the institutionalization of the office of the *dariüssaade agha* played an important role in the creation of an embellished image for the eunuchs of their own sides.

³⁰⁵ Alî/Tietze I, p. 43(tr.), 118(ed.).

³⁰⁶ Winter, *ibid.*, p. 279.

In particular, the chief black eunuch Habeş Mehmed Agha and the chief white eunuch Gazanfer Agha appear to have been important figures in this process. For this reason, after presenting a brief biography of the two aghas, we will investigate how the black eunuchs were portrayed by Mustafa Ali, who was the protégé of Gazanfer Agha, in his book *Hâlâtü'l Kahire mine'l -Âdâti'z-Zahire*. While the author's slanderous comments about black eunuchs are discussed in relation to his personal worries and motives as well as his patron Gazanfer Agha they are also evaluated in the larger context of the societal prejudices against black eunuchs.

Secondly, we shall focus on three texts, *Mir'atu'l Hubûş fi'l-usûl*, *et-Tirâzu'l-Menkûş fi Mehâsini'l-Hubûş*, and *Râfiü'l-gubûş fi fezâili'l-Hubûş* all of which were written in praise of the good qualities of the Ethiopians. While discussing the nature of the relationships between the black aghas and the authors of these books, we will attempt to understand why the black eunuchs supported the writing of such books. In this context, these texts are examined as the reflection of the chief black eunuchs' efforts to consolidate their newly gained position at the palace and to deal with racial and gender prejudices from which they suffered.

I. Habeş Mehmed Agha (d. 1590), the first chief black eunuch of the imperial harem

As the harem's first superintendent black eunuch, Mehmed Agha does not occupy a great place in contemporary sources. While there is not any mention of the time of his appointment as the chief black eunuch of the harem in the chronicle of Selânikî, another contemporary historian, Mustafa Âlî, states that Mehmed Agha kept his office during the

reign of Sultan Murad III until the former died in 1590. Since he served office for sixteen years, this means that Mehmed Agha was appointed to this position in 1574.³⁰⁷

The most interesting information about him comes from *Râfi'ü'l-gubûş fi fezâyili'l-hubûş* which was written in 1621 by Ali bin Abdurrauf. One of the marginal notes in this book gives information about the early life of Mehmed Agha.³⁰⁸ According to this information, which is based on Mehmed Agha's own account, he was bought as a slave by a Frank ("European") Beg who came to the port of Habeş. In this port, Mehmed Agha was bought by the Beg along with two other aghas, and they set out to Europe ("Frengistan"). However, the journey did not continue for a long time, and this commercial ship was obtained by the crew of a Muslim ship. At the end of this exciting journey, Mehmed Agha, was firstly given to the Pasha of Egypt, and then he was sent to the court of Prince Selim by the Pasha when Selim was acting as governor in a provincial post. Unfortunately, we cannot infer from the agha's account how long he stayed in the court of Selim, or which position he took up there. Despite the lack of answers to these important questions, Mehmed Agha continued his adventure until he entered the palace. According to his own account, for a while he was retained by the chief white eunuch, Turc Hüseyin Agha, who was impressed with Mehmed Agha's intelligence and perceptiveness. Nevertheless, the latter's service ended with the execution of Hüseyin Agha, and he was taken to the imperial palace in accordance with the sultan's decree.³⁰⁹

Even though the story does not extensively cover the life of Habeş Mehmed Agha at the imperial palace, it at least shows how the agha was bought as a slave and how he

³⁰⁷ Âlî/Kühn, fol. 94b.

³⁰⁸ *Râfiü'l-gubûş*, fol. 9b .

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

came to the palace. However, the late sixteenth sources, Selânikî and Âlî, provide crucial information about the first chief black eunuch of the harem parallel to his assignment in 1574.

Habeş Mehmed Agha succeeded in keeping the office until his death, drew a successful career during his office and obtained crucial privileges for himself. Taking over the supervision of *evkafî'l-haremeyn* was no doubt Mehmed Agha's most important accomplishment.³¹⁰ The decree that announced the assignment of Mehmed Agha as the superintendent of the *evkafî'l-haremeyn* emphasized the agha's suitability for the duty: he was chosen by the sultan due to his "trustworthiness, devotion, and intelligence". Thus, only twelve years after his appointment to the position of the senior agha of the harem, Mehmed Agha gained important financial responsibilities thanks to his new duty.

Even though it is not clear how the agha rose so rapidly at the palace, we think that Mehmed Agha's success was related to his sound relation with Sultan Murad III. Undoubtedly, the two offices of Mehmed Agha were clear signs of the sultan's confidence in him. Certain clues indicating the importance of the relation between the agha and the sultan should be regarded in this context. For instance, the old residence of the chief white eunuch Sünbül Agha was given by the sultan to Mehmed Agha as an imperial land grant (*temlik*) in 1586.³¹¹ In the title deed, the borders of the house were carefully delimited and Mehmed Agha's loyalty and distinguished service was confirmed as the reason for this conferment. With this important *temlik*, Mehmed Agha not only

³¹⁰ Güler, *ibid.*, pp. 212-217; İnal-Hüsameddin, *ibid.*, pp. 14-15; Âlî/Küh, ff. 94b-95a.

³¹¹ TSA E: 7777. Moreover, for the information about the imperial land grant (*temlik*) see Halil İnalçık, "Land Possession Outside the *Miri System*" in İnalçık and Quataert, *ibid.*, pp. 120-132.

gained a residence in Istanbul, but also achieved the privilege of keeping a house outside the imperial palace just like the chief white eunuch.³¹²

Similarly, the sultan's favorable recognition of the agha's proposals for the two new buildings at the imperial palace shows Mehmed Agha's influence on Sultan Murad. Following the suggestion of Mehmed Agha, Sultan Murad built the "Audience Gate" (*bâb-ı divân*) in 1587.³¹³ Again, the dormitory of Halberdiers with Tresses (*Zülüflü Baltacılar*) was expanded around the same time following the request addressed to the sultan by Mehmed Agha.³¹⁴

Apparently, Mehmed Agha used the advantages of his position not only to build a relationship with the sultan, but also to create his own clients. As Baki Tezcan argues, he developed strong connections with the *ulema*. Thanks to the *medrese* he endowed in 1582, the agha secured teaching positions for the *müderrisin* in this *medrese*.³¹⁵ Thus, the *müderrisin* of the *medrese* of Mehmed Agha, who were given the opportunity to attain high ranks in the Ottoman educational-judicial hierarchy, entered agha's network. Yet this was not the only method used by the agha to create his own protégés. According to the author of *Hamîle*, and Mustafa Âlî, most of Mehmed Agha's apprentices achieved the position of vizier.³¹⁶ Mehmed Agha, who sponsored the careers of these men, wanted to include them in his own network.

³¹² The giving of this privilege to the chief black eunuch was criticized by the contemporary historian Mustafa Âlî see Çerçi/Kühn, vol. III, pp. 629-631; Âlî/ Şeker, p. 160.

³¹³ Necipoğlu, *Topkapı Palace*, p. 174. Moreover, for this gate see Eldem and Akozan, p. 31.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³¹⁵ Tezcan, *Searching for Osman*, p. 158.

³¹⁶ Turan/ Hamîle, p. 45; Âlî/ Kühn, fol. 94b.

Although we do not know to what extent Mehmed Agha used the advantage of his network during the seventeen years of office, it is clear that this first black eunuch of the harem became a highly esteemed official in the Ottoman Palace. As indicated previously the participation of high-ranking officials in the agha's burial ceremony³¹⁷ was a clear indication of the respect shown to the agha in high circles. The memory of Mehmed Agha was especially honored by the black eunuchs of the harem, since he had started a new epoch for them. All the black eunuchs who entered the imperial harem affirmed the special position of Mehmed Agha among the black eunuchs: when a black eunuch rose from the position of *acemî* to *ortanca* he went to visit the tomb of Mehmed Agha in the quarter of Çarşamba.³¹⁸

For all the respect shown to him both during his lifetime and after his death, nevertheless, Mehmed Agha had also made plenty of enemies. According to the contemporary historian Selânikî, the populace referred to the agha's death as “**the departure of black disaster from the universe**”.³¹⁹ While Selânikî does not give the reason behind this enmity for the agha, another contemporary historian Mustafa Âlî claims that the people suffered a lot from the agha's injustice in matters related to the *vakfs*. The officials of the agha, he said, oppressed the people with the claim that “they were working for the *evkafü'l- haremeyn*”.³²⁰ Probably, the public discomfort mentioned in Selânikî's chronicle about the agha's castle and village near the Tuna River stemmed from the unjust process of the land acquisition.³²¹ Of course, the people who had stood

³¹⁷ *Ibid.* ; Turan/Hamîle, p. 45; Selânikî, vol. 1, p. 230.

³¹⁸ Uzunçarşılı, *Saray Teşkilatı*, p. 35.

³¹⁹ Selânikî, vol. I, p. 230.

³²⁰ Âlî/ Kûnh, f. 94b, 95a.

³²¹ Selânikî, vol. I, p. 230.

to lose from the appearance of the agha as the owner of these lands must have also been an important element behind the public annoyance.

Regardless of the reasons for the public annoyance at Habeş Mehmed Agha, nevertheless, the story related by Selânikî also goes to show that even at the height of his power the chief black eunuch could not escape being singled out and maligned for the color of his skin. No doubt, in his lifetime, Habeş Mehmed Agha himself would also have been aware that even if he or another black eunuch was put in charge of the imperial harem, as black eunuchs they would still have been firstly defined by their origin. For this reason, Mehmed Agha chose a meaningful path: to praise the origin of the black eunuchs with books on the good qualities of the Ethiopians.

II. Gazanfer Agha (d. 1603), the chief white eunuch of Murad III's and Mehmed III's

Gazanfer Agha, who occupied the position of the chief of privy chamber and the chief white eunuch during the reigns of probably Selim II, and surely of Murad III, and Mehmed III,³²² came to the land of the Ottomans in 1559. He was captured with his mother, two sisters and brothers while they were traveling to Buda, a Venetian town in Albania. Even though his mother succeeded in ransoming herself and her two daughters, she could not do anything for her two sons. Thus, the two brothers were brought to the capital and after converting to Islam, took the names of Cafer and Gazanfer and were appointed to the service of prince Selim.³²³ According to Mustafa Âlî, when Selim ascended to the throne in 1566, he invited these two brothers to join his inner household,

³²² Fleischer, *The Historian Mustafa Âli*, p. 72; Çerçi/Künh, vol. II, p. 234.

³²³ Pedani, *ibid.*, p. 14.

on account of “their company and loyalty”. To attend the sultan in his private apartments, the two brothers were castrated by the chief surgeon Abdülgâni. Although the author said that Cafer did not survive the operation,³²⁴ Venetian sources claim that he lived and became the chief of privy chamber in 1577. Again according to later sources, Gazanfer Agha became first the chief white eunuch, and after his brother’s death, the chief of privy chamber.³²⁵ Even if we do not know which of the stories about Cafer is true, it is certain that his brother, Gazanfer Agha, held the two most important offices of the inner service as the head of privy chamber and as the chief white eunuch for more than thirty years.

Unfortunately, contemporary sources do not indicate when Gazanfer Agha started to occupy the position of the chief white eunuch. Even so, it can be estimated that his appointment to this office was realized by Murad III, since we are informed about a certain Mahmud Agha who occupied this position at the beginning of Murad III’s reign.³²⁶ Although Mustafa Âlî lists Gazanfer Agha among the four advisors of Sultan Murad³²⁷ he seemed to gain great power and influence especially in the reign of Mehmed III thanks to his links with the *valide* sultan Safiye. Until 1603, Gazanfer Agha, who had close ties with the *valide* sultan, played a vital role in Ottoman politics. This probably explains why the name of Gazanfer Agha was frequently included in the black list of rebels. The head of Gazanfer Agha was firstly demanded in 1599 by the cavalry soldiers who revolted against debased coins, but he was saved by the lynching of the Jewish kira, and son, who were held responsible by the rebels for the debased coins.³²⁸ A year later, in

³²⁴ Çerçi/Kühn, vol. II, p. 233.

³²⁵ Pedani, *ibid.*, p. 14.

³²⁶ Yücel, *Kitâb-ı Müstetâb*, p. 26; Âlî/Tietze I, p. 73 (tr.), p. 162 (ed.).

³²⁷ Çerçi/Kühn, vol. II, pp. 232-233.

³²⁸ Selânikî, vol. II, pp. 854-857.

1600, the cavalry soldiers wanted the execution of Gazanfer Agha along with the chief gardener. Although he was saved again by the appeasing of the soldiers,³²⁹ he could not manage to save himself from the rebellion of 1603, and as indicated before, was killed together with the chief black eunuch Osman Agha, by the cavalry soldiers.³³⁰ The interferences of the chief white eunuch in Ottoman politics were the reason for the demand made for his execution in all three of these rebellions.

Evidently, to keep his privileged position at the palace and also to increase his political influence, Gazanfer Agha had to maintain links with people who held important positions in the imperial administration. Above all, he attempted to bring his own relatives, clients or apprentices to crucial positions at the palace. In 1590, Gazanfer Agha invited his mother and sister to the capital. Though his mother died on December 27, 1591, Gazanfer's sister arrived in Istanbul on the same day and converted to Islam and took the name of Fatma Hatun.³³¹

As indicated by Pedani, after her first husband died - with whom she had two sons - Gazanfer's sister got married to another Venetian man. Although her second husband traveled to Istanbul, he ultimately chose to return to Venice. However, he sent his wife to Istanbul, and for this favor, he was rewarded by Gazanfer with money.³³² Gazanfer's generosity must have been related to his plans about the future of Fatma Hatun. As his

³²⁹ The information about this rebellion was taken from the thesis of Baki Tezcan, because as indicated by the author, it was not recorded in Ottoman chronicles. For this reason, the author depends on the dispatch of English ambassador see Tezcan, *Searching for Osman*, p. 125, fn. 178. Moreover, this particular rebellion seemed recorded in the reports of Venetian baylos see Pedani, *ibid.*, p. 15.

³³⁰ Peçevî, vol. II, p. 255; Turan/Hamile, pp. 46-47.

³³¹ Our information about the relatives of Gazanfer Agha depends on Pedani, *ibid.*, p. 25. Unfortunately we have not across, except to one, any reference about the agha's relatives in Ottoman chronicles. But the certain knowledge comes from the contemporary chronicles about the agha's attitudes towards the people belonged the same origin with him. But it will be handled in the later lines.

³³² *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

sister's third husband, Gazanfer Agha chose a Circassian cavalryman, Ali Agha. He would later rise to the position of the Janissary Agha with the help of Gazanfer Agha.³³³

Probably, Ali Agha and the chief doorkeeper (*kapıcıbaşı*) Ali Agha was the same person who was a relative of Gazanfer Agha that was appointed as the lieutenant of the doorkeepers (*kapıcılar kethüdâsı*) in 1596 by the request of the agha.³³⁴ Similarly, one of the sons of Fatma Hatun that lived in Venice at the time was kidnapped by Gazanfer's orders in 1600.³³⁵ This boy later converted to Islam, took the name of Mehmed and was trained in Topkapı Palace. Even though we do not know to what extent Gazanfer fulfilled his plans concerning his relatives in Istanbul, we are informed that his brother-in-law, Ali Agha, was killed because of his hidden money three months after Gazanfer's death, and his nephew, Mehmed, managed to become one of the four favorite boon companions (*nedim*) of Sultan Murad IV.³³⁶

Gazanfer Agha's political influence and power is seen by the role he played in the appointments for crucial positions at the palace. He supported the appointment of Özdemiroğlu Osman Pasha (d. 1585) as grand vizier in 1584³³⁷ and of Cigalizâde Sinan Pasha (d. 1606) to the same post in 1596.³³⁸ Similarly, in 1588, thanks to the chief white

³³³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³³⁴ Selânikî, vol. II, p. 672. Moreover, it should be added that Baki Tezcan seems as wrong about this Ali Agha, since he has thought him as the husband of Gazanfer's daughter due to the other seventeenth century chronicle in which Ali Agha was referred as Gazanfer's son-in-law. Even though the author thought that Gazanfer was castrated late in his life and for this reason he had a daughter before this practice, it does not seem to be as correct, because, Mustafa Âlî mentioned the youngness of the two boys when the sultan invited them to join his inner household see Çerçi/Künh, vol. II, p. 233; for Tezcan's claim see *Seraching for Osman*, p. 358, fn. 79.

³³⁵ Pedani, *ibid.*, p. 26.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³³⁷ Fleischer, *The Historian Mustafa Âli*, p. 114.

³³⁸ Peçevî, vol. II, p. 204. According to the author, Gazanfer Agha supported Cigalizâde because of his origin see *ibid.* For information about Cigalizâde see Mahmut H. Şakiroğlu, "Cigalizâde Sinan Paşa" *DİA*, vol. 7, pp. 525-526. Moreover, the importance of bonds of ethnic-regional solidarity in military-

eunuch's initiatives, the position of finance director was given to Şerif Muhammed, who was retired from the treasury of Temeshvar. The agha must also have been behind the appointment of one of his apprentices as the trustee of palace kitchen (*matbah emini*) in 1593, even though his influence in this particular case is not explicitly mentioned.³³⁹

The prestige of the chief white eunuch Gazanfer Agha can be seen in the status of his *medrese*.³⁴⁰ Even though it was the rule for the *müderrisin* at the *medrese* of Mehmed the Conqueror that they first had to teach at a lower ranking imperial *medrese*³⁴¹ the rule, as Baki Tezcan has shown, was broken for the *müderrisin* of Gazanfer's *medrese*,³⁴² and the *müderrisin* teaching there were promoted to the *medrese* of Mehmed II. For instance, Abdülaziz Efendi, the son of Hoca Sâdeddin, previously assigned to the professorship at the *medrese* of the agha in 1595, was promoted to a professorship at the *medrese* of Mehmed II in 1596.³⁴³ Similarly, Abdülganî-zâde Mevlânâ Mehmed Çelebi, who was the *müderris* at the agha's *medrese* was appointed to Sultan Mehmed's *medrese* in 1596.³⁴⁴ Thus, the prestigious position of Gazanfer Agha was reflected onto his own *medrese* and provided an opportunity of rapid advancement for the professors who taught there.

administrative establishment see Metin Kunt, "Ethnic-Regional (Cins) Solidarity in the Seventeenth Century Establishment" *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* V (1974) [hereafter "Ethnic-Regional (Cins) Solidarity"], pp. 233-239. Also, Mustafa Âlî's ethnic approach towards Albanians partly exemplifies the issue see Fleischer, *The Historian Mustafa Âlî*, pp. 163-165.

³³⁹ Selânikî, vol. 1, p. 387.

³⁴⁰ For the detailed information about the *medrese* of Gazanfer Agha see Semavi Eyice, "Gazanfer Ağa Külliyesi" *DİA*, vol. 13, pp. 432-433; Ayvansarâyî/Satı, pp. 369-370. For the other *vakfs* of Gazanfer Agha see Semavi Eyice, "İstanbul-Şam-Bağdad Yolu Üzerindeki Mimari Eserler" *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi*, XIII (1958), pp. 81-110, at pp. 90-93.

³⁴¹ İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin İlmiye Teşkilatı* (Ankara, 1965, Türk Tarih Kurumu), pp. 11-12. Moreover, for the detailed information about the *medreses* and the degree of them see *ibid.*, pp. 11-17.

³⁴² Tezcan, *Searching for Osman*, p. 159.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 359, fn. 81. For information about Abdülaziz Efendi see Akbayar/Sicill, vol. I, p. 99.

³⁴⁴ Selânikî, vol. II, p. 694.

To sum up, the chief white eunuch Gazanfer Agha, who enjoyed a high degree of political power during his office, was effectively involved in Ottoman politics until his tragic death in 1603. We believe that Gazanfer Agha's great power and influence stemmed from his strong relations with members of the royal family, especially the *valide* sultan Safiye. As a young slave, Gazanfer Agha, who had started his career at the court of prince Selim, succeeded in acquiring the confidence of this prince during his service. With the accession of Selim to throne in 1566, the doors of the imperial palace were opened for Gazanfer Agha, and he progressively became one of the most influential persons in the government. Gazanfer Agha's power and influence gained particular importance in the context of the change in the position of the chief white eunuch at the imperial palace.

No doubt aware of the implications of this institutional change, Gazanfer Agha must have attempted to maintain the prestige of his office. For instance, the portrayal of Gazanfer Agha with the reigning sultans in the miniatures of certain books at the end of the sixteenth century was probably the outcome of the agha's efforts to be a celebrated figure at the palace. In all these miniatures he was depicted as the closest official to the sultan along with the grand vizier and the royal tutor. Considering that Gazanfer Agha had close relations with the authors of these books, it is likely that he also had some influence in the selection of illustrations for these books.³⁴⁵

Significantly, Gazanfer Agha was not the only one who chose to demonstrate his high status and degree of authority in this manner. The chief black eunuch Habes

³⁴⁵ Zeren Tanındı, "Bibliophile Aghas (Eunuchs) At The Topkapı Saray" *Muqarnas* XXI (2004), pp. 333-343.

Mehmed Agha was also depicted in proximity to the reigning sultan in the miniatures of certain books of this period. Not surprisingly, two of these books were prepared with the instigation of the agha, and it is certain that the illustrations of one book were altered in accordance with the agha's wishes.³⁴⁶

Similar to these examples, the books that will be discussed below were also written by the clients of these two aghas' clients, and in all likelihood, were affected by the sentiments of their patrons. While the client of Gazanfer Agha denigrated the black eunuchs of the imperial harem in his book, Habeş Mehmed Agha's client wrote a book praising the Ethiopians, as will be seen in the following sections.

III. The black eunuchs of the Ottoman Empire as portrayed in Mustafa Âlî's *Description of Cairo of 1599*

The well-known historian of the sixteenth century, Mustafa Âlî, is known to have curried favor with high-ranking Ottoman officials and members of the royal family to acquire prestigious and profitable positions at the Ottoman court in Istanbul³⁴⁷. Among the high-ranking officials he courted was the chief white eunuch Gazanfer Agha. Mustafa Âlî had first met the agha at the court of Prince Selim in Kütahya and in 1582 he renewed his friendship with him.³⁴⁸ It was with the help of Gazanfer Agha that he succeeded in presenting the illustrated *Nusretname* (Book of Victory) to Sultan Murad III in the

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 333-334. For the agha's influence on the selection of the illustration of the other book of the sixteenth century see Günsel Renda "Chester Beatty Kitaplığındaki Zübdetü't-Tevarih Minyatürleri" in *Prof. Dr. Bekir Kütükoğlu'na Armağan* (İstanbul, 1991), pp. 485-506.

³⁴⁷ Fleischer, *The Historian Mustafa Âlî*, pp. 40, 74. For the detailed accounts of Âlî's patronage relations see *ibid.*, pp. 140-187.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 72-110.

following year.³⁴⁹ He also continued to address appeals to Gazanfer Agha to use his influence to be appointed as the finance director (*defterdar*) of Egypt in 1587.³⁵⁰ Even though the agha was not able to secure this appointment for Mustafa Âlî, the author did not relinquish his requests for his help to new positions such as the directorship of finance in Damascus or the trusteeship and governorship of Jidda in 1588.³⁵¹

The patron-client relation between Mustafa Âlî and Gazanfer Agha was effectively reflected in the words of author: When he was dismissed from the directorship of finance in Sivas in 1589, Mustafa Âlî complained that although he was a favorite protégé of Gazanfer Agha, he had received an unworthy post.³⁵² The section of his history, *Künhü'l-ahbâr*, in which he mentions the virtues of Gazanfer Agha as a patron,³⁵³ reveals the material and political side of the relationship of patronage between them. In a number of short poems Mustafa Âlî wrote while requesting the agha's patronage and assistance for the intercession of the sultan³⁵⁴, he praised of Gazanfer Agha "as a patron and upholder of both scholarly and administrative standards."³⁵⁵ Indeed, Âlî appears as a client who did not relinquish his patron, Gazanfer Agha, until his death in 1600. Although his protector helped him solely on financial matters he was not so effective about Âlî's demands for various positions at the palace, or in provincial governments.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 110.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 125.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 130.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 132, fn. 7.

³⁵³ Çerçi/Künh, vol. II, pp. 232-235.

³⁵⁴ Fleischer, *The Historian Mustafa Âli*, pp. 170-171; also see *ibid.*, p. 176, fn. 110.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

It is important to keep this patron-client relation between the agha and Mustafa Âlî in mind when reading Âlî's *Description of Cairo*. This book was written during Âlî's short visit to Cairo in 1599.³⁵⁶ Âlî, who had left Istanbul in 1599 for his new appointment to the governorship of Damascus, was actually dismissed before taking up this post; and was subsequently appointed as *sancakbeyi* and trustee of Jidda, the port of Mecca. Before reaching Jidda, Mustafa Âlî, who had sailed from Istanbul to Egypt, remained in Cairo for "one or two months" and towards the end of his journey wrote the book.³⁵⁷ In fact, this was his second visit to Cairo. The first visit had taken place in 1568 when the author was in the service of Lala Mustafa Pasha.³⁵⁸ In *Description of Cairo*, Mustafa Âlî compared the Cairo of 1568 with that of 1599 and discussed Egypt under Ottoman administration in an appendix.

Description of Cairo is particularly important for us with respect to the author's comments about the black eunuchs of the country. Before the author's comments concerning the black eunuchs of the Empire, we want to talk about a satirical poem that appears in the second chapter of the book.³⁵⁹ The poem reveals Mustafa Âlî's thoughts about the black eunuchs of the empire as well as the recent change in their positions:

[Poem] by the author

Under these conditions many true-believers were made slaves and sold.
 They found themselves in the Palace and became at once happy.
 They made a career by belonging to the eunuchs that do not reproduce,
 By being given the opportunity of entering [into the quarters] of women
 All those black-faced ones put on sumptuous clothes,
 The robes of gold brocade and moiré antique became several hundred.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 181; Âlî/Tietze I, pp. 7-8; Fleischer, *The Historian Mustafa Âli*, p. 181.

³⁵⁷ Âlî/Tietze I, p. 25(tr.), p. 91 (ed.); Âlî/Şeker, p. 290.

³⁵⁸ Âlî/Tietze I, p. 7; Fleischer, *The Historian Mustafa Âli*, p. 181.

³⁵⁹ Âlî/Tietze I, p. 43 (tr.), p. 118(ed.).

Those vile Arabs of Egypt once ran around naked from head to toe
Had now become men of high respect
Look at Destiny's commands, at its erroneous acts!
It makes known through them its aim and its confusion.
It is not kind to angel-faced servants,
It provides success and permanence to every one that has a devilish character.
His apparent defect becomes an asset to him
Everyone who has "poor sight" becomes filthy rich.
Had the glorious Kings of previous generations
Ever shown that much honor to the black-faced eunuchs?
Shame on that hare-brained one that accepts their patronage!
Shame on that vile and abject scum, seized of worldly greed!

As this poem makes it quite clear, Mustafa Âlî's approach towards black eunuchs was extremely negative. Above all, their position was viewed by the author as "the erroneous act of the Destiny"; since they were naked from head to foot before they rose to a life of luxury. Yet, they eventually were dressed with "sumptuous clothes" thanks to their new position as "men of high respect", even though they did not deserve such an honor. According to the writer, their shortcoming, which was basically having been castrated, was transformed into a valuable property for them. Thus, these men with "devilish character" began to receive "success and permanence" even if kindness was not given to "angel-faced servants". At this point, the identity of these servants gained importance in terms of giving clues about who were preferred by the author instead of black eunuchs for "kindness (*iltifât*)". Unfortunately, the poem does not say who these "angel-faced servants" were. However, another poem of Mustafa Âlî gives us a clue about the identity of the favorable ones, because in this poem he describes Gazanfer Agha as "a good man with an angel's face."³⁶⁰ It is likely that Mustafa Âlî had used the same description in the poem, for the white eunuchs of the palace.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28 (tr.), p. 96 (ed.); Çerçi/Kühn, vol. II, p. 234.

Actually, the poem seems to address the change that occurred in the position of black eunuchs. While the author questions whether the old sultans showed respect to the black eunuchs, he gives the signal of difference in treatment of black eunuchs between the centuries before the end of 16th century and the time in which the book was written. Furthermore, Mustafa Âlî condemns the people who accept the patronage of black eunuchs. Curiously, he objected to the patrons being eunuchs even though the writer himself had a eunuch patron, Gazanfer Agha.

Certainly, we face Mustafa Âlî's more obvious comments about the black and white eunuchs of the empire in the appendix of the book. The writer, who handles widely the recent domination of Egypt by the eunuchs,³⁶¹ above all, complains the increase in the number of black aghas in the imperial administration³⁶². Actually, Mustafa Âlî, who repeatedly stressed the high salaries of black eunuchs, gives us clues about why he was worried about black eunuchs. According to Mustafa Âlî, these men not only obtained excellent salaries under the protection and patronage of the governors, but also succeeded in rising to high and lucrative positions.³⁶³ For instance, they appropriated the administration of the rich *Deşişe vakfs*, pious foundations established for the benefit of the Holy Places, Mecca and Madina. However, the black eunuchs themselves, as Mustafa Âlî says, "... are ignorant of the collection of revenues and of the science of accounting, and since the services and scribes whom they employ are eager to embezzle and steal..." For this reason, the author thinks that the black eunuchs, who used their income to enrich themselves, brought about the ruin of these pious foundations. Interestingly, Mustafa Âlî

³⁶¹ Âlî/Tietze I, pp. 80-83 (tr.), pp. 172-177 (ed.).

³⁶² *Ibid.* p. 82 (tr.), pp. 175-176 (ed.).

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 82 (tr.), p. 176 (ed.).

again puts emphasis on the situation of these *vakfs* before their administration passed into the hands of the black eunuchs. According to him, in the reign of Sultan Süleyman the *Deşişe* foundations had been given “to able and experienced men”, and “every office was committed to the right person, no trace of disintegration was seen in the conditions of the Holy Places”.³⁶⁴ To evaluate the author’s words correctly, we need to remember that the administration of these *vakfs* was under the authority of white eunuchs until the reign of Murad III.³⁶⁵ However, at this time, it was put under the responsibility of the chief black eunuch of the imperial harem. Thus, while the author was comparing the administration of black and white eunuchs of the empire, he attempted to show how wrong it was to appoint the chief black eunuch for this office.

Besides these, Mustafa Âlî quotes prophecies which foretell the decline of Egypt when black-faced eunuchs rise to power. These prophecies were attributed to the fourth caliph Ali, and to Hâkim bi-Emrillâh, one of the Fatimid caliphs who died in 1021.³⁶⁶ In the first one, Mustafa Âlî gives the caliph’s saying with its commentary, and writes that the caliph had proclaimed that “... when the black-faced eunuchs obtain Egyptian pensions, mount animals and behave publicly with the prestige of dignity and honor, then you had better report to the minister, who is the governor of Egypt, that Egypt is going to fall.” After that, Mustafa Âlî continues with the other caliph’s verses:

When eunuchs settle in a city (or, in Egypt)
They bring destruction to its master.
Its two sides (two banks) are devoid of people;
There is no house, no wall,
Neither a tree nor a fruit is there to be seen

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 83 (tr.), p. 176 (ed.).

²⁵⁰ İnâl-Hüsâmeddin, *ibid.*, pp. 13-14; Güler, *ibid.*, pp. 213-215.

³⁶⁶ Âlî/Tietze I, pp. 81-82 (tr.), pp. 174-175 (ed.).

Except tamarisks, [but] their leaves are puny.

Both of these quotations reflect the author's worries about the black eunuchs of Egypt, in other words, his unease about the recently enhanced status and position of the black eunuchs in the Empire.

Interestingly, in the up-coming forty-eight years, another writer, Alî Efendi (d. after 1649), who was clerk in the Egyptian military bureaucracy³⁶⁷, would repeat the same complaints about the black eunuchs and criticize them bitterly due to their high income and their exaggerated ostentation.³⁶⁸ Similarly negative statements about the black eunuchs were also expressed by other Ottoman literati, including Bostanzâde Yahya Efendi (d. 1639), the chief military judge of Anatolian, and Hasan Beyzâde (d.1636), a member of *kalemiye* holding important posts in the imperial administration. Quite strikingly, while these writers criticized the actions of the chief black eunuchs they stressed the race and physiological “defect” of the black aghas. In his short chronicle on the deposition of Osman II and the reign of Sultan Mustafa I, for instance, Yahya Efendi described the chief black eunuch as “**a eunuch with a dark and repulsive face (*kara ve iğrenç suratlı*)**”³⁶⁹ **whose race (*soy*) was defective (*bozuk*)**³⁷⁰”. In a similar way, Hasan Beyzâde used the expression “**black-faced eunuch**” to portray the *dariüssaade* aghas³⁷¹.

³⁶⁷ Winter, *ibid.* , p. 267.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.* , pp. 278-279, 284, 293.

³⁶⁹ Bostanzâde/Gökyay, p. 211-212 , 217.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. , p. 195.

³⁷¹ Piterberg, *ibid.* , p. 98.

Even though we do not know the specific reasons behind each of these writers' animosity towards the black aghas, taken as a whole, their accounts indicate the presence of a more broad-based antipathy against this group. In this regard, we may assume that when Alî Efendi curses the black aghas at the end of his treatise³⁷² or when Mustafa Âlî launches his attack against the "black-faced eunuchs" in his *Description of Cairo* they also give an idea about how the black eunuchs were perceived in certain segments of Ottoman society. Most probably, their negative statements about the black eunuchs were informed by the societal prejudices about this group.

Similarly, the words used by these authors to depict the chief black eunuchs do not seem coincidental. Although Piterberg writes that we do not know for certain whether the authors used such terms as "black-faced eunuch" "literally or figuratively,"³⁷³ one thing is clear: while attacking the power of the chief black eunuchs these authors drew on the widespread prejudices in Ottoman society against the black eunuchs. Without doubt, the chronicle of Yahya Efendi displays such prejudices the most openly. Indeed the author who held the post of the chief military judgeship of Anatolia exhibited strong prejudices towards blacks. While complaining of the indifference of the chief military judge of Rumelia, Sünbül Zenci Efendi towards the events that occurred during the deposition of Osman II, he not only treats him with contempt because of the color of his skin,³⁷⁴ but also makes the following wish: **"May God not show mercy to**

³⁷² *Ibid.* , p. 293.

³⁷³ Piterberg, *ibid.* , p. 98.

³⁷⁴ For instance see Bostanzâde/Gökyay, pp. 196, 203, 205, 212, 214.

him and may He raise him up (*haşretsini*) together with the black-faced ones on the Day of Judgment”³⁷⁵

Of course, the hostility of these authors towards the black aghas cannot be explained only by the presence of antipathy against the black eunuchs in Ottoman society. On the contrary, their judgment on the black aghas must have also been determined by the personal motives of the authors. To go back then to the case of Mustafa Âlî, beyond the widespread prejudices in Ottoman society this particular writer’s criticism of the black eunuchs should be analyzed in two connections: the “Ottoman identity” of the author and his patron-client relationship with Gazanfer Agha.

Cornell Fleischer writes that Mustafa Âlî, who identified Ottomanism with the geographical hinterland of Rum³⁷⁶, portrayed “the human backbone of the Ottoman state as a product of *devşirme*, of education, and of several generations of breeding among the sultan’s servitors”³⁷⁷. In this respect, his thoughts about the black eunuchs seem to be meaningful because of the fact that as entirely different from white eunuchs, black eunuchs of the harem were neither *devşirmes* nor trained within the palace school, Enderûn, or the Ottoman *medreses*. They were brought to the palace as slaves and were trained within their *ocak*. In other words, like “foreign upstarts”³⁷⁸ about which Mustafa Âlî complained, these eunuchs were raised to positions of prominence and even acquired

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

³⁷⁶ Fleischer, *The Historian Mustafa Âli*, p. 157.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

³⁷⁸ Fleischer pointed out that Âlî asserted that in Murad’s time people coming from the former Safavi territories of Sirvan and Azerbaijan were favored over Palace- trained *devşirme* slaves and thus “the ranks of palace forces were swelled with untrained, undisciplined, and rapacious newcomers from the east see *ibid.*, pp. 155-156.

“posts formerly reserved for the products of the Palace education system”³⁷⁹ without having qualified education or without spending lifetimes to build careers.

Most probably, Âlî's thoughts about black eunuchs were a result of his concern to protect the integrity of the Ottoman system and his personal sense of grievance stemming from not being promoted to a high post in the government system despite his efforts. Without doubt, the destructive influence of black aghas on the career of the author also affected his criticism. In this respect, an interesting clue comes from his book *Künhü'l-ahbâr*. Although Sultan Mehmed III had accepted his appointment for the position of finance director of Egypt in 1595, he says, he was not appointed to this office due to certain “powerful aberrant (*kavi vu gavi*)” officials of the harem.³⁸⁰ The writer, who frequently complains about the influence of black eunuchs in appointments for crucial positions³⁸¹, might have been negatively affected by the agha's endeavors.

On the other hand, Mustafa Ali's intimate relation with the chief black eunuch Gazanfer Agha should be remembered. In the preface of the book, Âlî writes “I found it appropriate to donate and dedicate this precious jewel ...to my benefactor, the great agha, to the noble master who is the builder of my luck. In other words, I made a clean copy and sent it... to His Excellency Gazanfer Agha ...who is the Agha of the Gate of Happiness... ”.³⁸² In this context, it can be thought that as the benefactor and patron of the author, Gazanfer Agha probably affected the author's thought about black eunuchs, or he stimulated the agha to add such comments about them.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

³⁸⁰ Çerçi/Künh, vol. III, pp. 653-654.

³⁸¹ For instance see *ibid.*, vol. III, p. 630; Âlî/Şeker, pp. 315-316.

³⁸² Âlî/Tietze I, p. 28 (tr.), pp. 95-96 (ed).

As indicated before, throughout his life Mustafa Âlî attempted to acquire protectors to reach high positions at the Ottoman court or administration, and Gazanfer Agha had been one of his principal patrons at the court. After he obtained the protection of Gazanfer Agha, he tried to cultivate relationship with the people whom the agha favored. For instance, he cultivated a relationship with the new vizier Cigalioğlu Sinan Pasha in 1596 and added a few laudatory pages to the final section of *Künhü'l Ahbar* since he knew that this vizier was supported by his two patrons, Gazanfer Agha and Hoca Sadeddin Efendi (d. 1599).³⁸³ Similarly, he relinquished praising people who were disfavored by the agha in his books. He rededicated the *Mahâsin*, which he had written in 1596 and had initially dedicated to Sultan Mehmed III and grand vizier Damad İbrahim Pasha (d. 1601),³⁸⁴ to Gazanfer Agha in 1597, and obliterated all mentions of İbrahim Pasha due to the fact that Gazanfer Agha had worked to dislodge the pasha.³⁸⁵ As these instances make clear, Mustafa Âlî took the agha's opinion into consideration when he treated people in his writing. In this context, it is reasonable to think that in all probability, when Mustafa Âlî vehemently criticized and slandered these "black-faced eunuchs", Gazanfer Agha did not oppose these words, and might have even stimulated the author.

Consequently, both the personal worries and motives of the author as well as his principal patron seem to be effective on the author's antagonism towards black eunuchs. Quite understandably, the author dedicated the book to chief white eunuch Gazanfer

³⁸³ Fleischer, *The Historian Mustafa Âli*, p. 166. For information about Hoca Sadeddin Efendi see Şerafettin Turan, "Hoca Sadeddin Efendi" *DİA*, vol. XVIII, pp. 196-198.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 166. For detailed information about the book see *ibid.* pp. 166-167; also for Damad İbrahim Pasha see Nezihi Aykut "Damad İbrahim Paşa" *DİA*, vol. VIII, pp. 440-441.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 170-171.

Agha and after its completion sent a clean copy of it to the agha in 1599. Although the book does not contain clear information about what the author thought and aimed while sending a copy to his patron, this must surely have been related to the agha's position, because Gazanfer Agha belonged to the class of white eunuchs.

In this context, the preparation of the other copy of the book in 1746 for the grand vizier Ragıp Pasha (d. 1763)³⁸⁶ is striking, because of the fact that during his service, the grand vizier had struggled for absolute authority in Ottoman politics with two powerful chief black eunuchs, Second (Moralı) Beşir Agha (d. 1759)³⁸⁷ and Ebukuf Ahmed Agha (d. 1757).³⁸⁸ Similarly, the preparation of one of the copies of *Hamîletü'l Küberâ* containing the biographies of chief black eunuchs of the harem nearly until 1746 by the Ahmed Resmî to the grand vizier³⁸⁹ should not be a simple coincidence. Since the author had added a special section to this copy about the harmful actions and the tragic death of the grand vizier's main rival, Beşir Agha.³⁹⁰

IV. The announcement of black eunuchs' "merits and excellence" or the manifestations of black eunuchs' "superiority"

Among the writers whose works are the chief concern of this section, Ali bin Abdurrauf el-Habeşi (d. 1623) seems more attractive than the other two, Mekki Ali Efendi (d. after 1598), and Alaaddin Muhammed bin Aldulbaki el-Buhari (after 1589) with respect to the personal life of the writer that manifests his sound relation with the

³⁸⁶ Âli/Tietze I, p. 9.

³⁸⁷ For information about the agha see Abdülkadir Özcan, "Beşir Ağa, Moralı" *DİA*, vol. V, pp. 555-556.

³⁸⁸ For information about the agha see Akbayar/Sicil, vol. I, p. 150.

³⁸⁹ Turan/Hamîle, p. 18.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-74.

first chief black eunuch of the harem, Habeş Mehmed Agha, and also other black aghas of the imperial palace.

Our information about Ali bin Abdurrauf comes mainly from the writer's own book, *Râfîü'l-gubûş*³⁹¹, and Atâ'î's biographical dictionary of the Ottoman *ulema*, the *Hadâi'kü'l- hakâ'ik fî tekmileti's- şakâ'ik*, which was written in 1633-1634³⁹². Although both of these sources provide us with vital information regarding Abdurrauf's professional career, they do not include any information about his family.

According to the information provided in these books, Ali bin Abdurrauf first entered into the service of Aydınzâde, who was a *dergâh-ı âlî çavuşu*, and then of the chief black eunuch Habeş Mehmed Agha after arriving at the capital. Even though Abdurrauf highlights his relation with the agha in his book, he does not mention when or how he met him. Despite that, Abdurrauf clearly reveals that he was brought up by the agha who showed him “great kindness and benevolence”.³⁹³ Following this information, the writer begins discussing his education. After receiving “the education of advanced studies” Abdurrauf started to attend the classes of “well-qualified scholars”.³⁹⁴ The author, who studied with the Sunullah Efendi- the *müderres* at the *valide* sultan's *medrese* in Üsküdar, entered the lodge of Hoca Sadeddin Efendi in 1587.³⁹⁵ In the book, Abdurrauf unfortunately passes over the years 1587-1609 and jumps his assignment in

³⁹¹ *Râfîü'l-gubûş*, ff. 9a-11b.

³⁹² Nev'izâde Atâ'î (d. 1635), *Hadâ'ikü'l-hakâ'ik fî tekmileti's-şakâ'ik* (Istanbul, 1268); reprinted with indices in *Şakaik-i Nu'maniye ve Zeyilleri*, ed., Abdülkadir Özcan, 5 vols. (Istanbul, 1989) [hereafter Atâ'î] vol. II, pp. 684-686.

³⁹³ *Râfîü'l-gubûş*, ff. 9b-10a.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*; for the information about Sunullah Efendi (d. 1725) see , pp. 552-557, and also see Akbayan/Sicil, vol. V, p. 1522; for Hoca Sadeddin Efendi (d. 1599) see Turan, *Ibid.*, pp. 196-198. Lastly, for the information about the *medrese* of the *valide* sultan see Cahid Baltacı, *XV. ve XVI. Asırlarda Osmanlı Medreseleri* (İstanbul, 1976), p. 585.

the *medreses* of Süleymaniye. Fortunately, we learn from Atâ'î about the posts held by the writer during these years: When he was retired (*ma'zul*) from the *medrese* of forty he was first appointed to Habeş Mehmed Agha's *medrese*, which belonged to the *medreses* of fifty as a *müderris* in 1599³⁹⁶, and then to another *medrese* of fifty, the *medrese* of Şah Sultan, in 1604. Two years following this recurrent appointment, in 1606, he was appointed to a *medreses* of sixty, which was the *medrese* of Haseki built by the wife of Süleyman the Magnificent. Following these appointments, he reached one of the highest educational premises of his time, the *medrese* of Mehmed the Conqueror, *Sahn-i seman* in 1607. At the beginning of 1609, the author was appointed to another *medrese* of sixty, which was the *medrese* of the prince (*şehzâde*) in the capital. The author's next appointment was for the *medreses* of the Süleymaniye which was the pinnacle of the professional ladder for scholars in 1609.³⁹⁷ At this point, we should return to the author's own accounts, since Abdurrauf provides important information about his professional life. According to him, even if his distinct success annoyed his colleges and also the people who do not appreciate him, the resentment and envy of these people did not curtail his success, and Abdurrauf was able to keep his office³⁹⁸. Unfortunately, the writer does not utter more things about himself, because the book, which was finished in August 1612³⁹⁹, was probably written while the author kept his office at the Süleymaniye⁴⁰⁰. Thanks to Atâ'î, however, we are able to follow the later course of the writer's

³⁹⁶ Atâ'î, p. 684. For the *medrese* of Habeş Mehmed Agha see Baltacı, *ibid.*, pp. 299-301.

³⁹⁷ Atâ'î, vol. II, p. 684. To take information about the *medrese* of *haseki* sultan and the prince see *ibid.* pp. 496-500, 513-518; for the *medreses* of *Sahn-ı seman* and Süleymaniye see Uzunçarşılı, *İlmiye Teşkilatı*, pp. 5-11, 33-39.

³⁹⁸ *Râfiü'l-gubûş*, ff. 11a-11b.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 240b.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 10b.

professional life⁴⁰¹: Ali bin Abdurrauf, who had entered those upper levels of the educational system, had risen firstly to the position of the judge (*kadı*) of Galata in 1612, and the judge of Bursa in 1615. However, in the same year he resigned from this office, and after two years, in 1617, the judgeship of Galata was offered to him for the second time though he did not accept it. Subsequent to this, Abdurrauf was allocated the office of judge in Edirne in 1617, then he was promoted to the judgeship (*kadıhk*) of Istanbul in 1619. Yet this last office did not last long and he was eventually brought to the post of the chief military judge (*kadıasker*) of Anatolia in June 1620, and shortly after that, the chief judgeship of Rumelia in October 1620. Although he succeeded in keeping both these offices for a while, he firstly lost the chief judgeship of Anatolia in 1621 and of Rumelia in 1621. After these posts, he became the judge of Mecca in 1622; however, he was dismissed from his office in 1622 due to unclear reasons, and died a year later, in 1623.

As seen, after holding the most prestigious professorships and judgeships of the empire, Abdurrauf had succeeded acquiring the posts of the chief military judge of Anatolia and Rumelia, which were two of the highest positions available to members of *ulema*.⁴⁰² It is likely that the writer's successful career was closely related to his connections. Above all, Abdurrauf was lucky in choosing his professors because two of whom occupied the most important positions in the Ottoman judicial hierarchy as the chief jurist- consultants of the Empire, the *şeyhulislâm*. While Sunullah Efendi (d. 1612) was brought to this position four times in 1599, 1603, 1604, and 1606, Hoca Sadeddin Efendi

⁴⁰¹ Atâ'î, pp. 684-685.

⁴⁰² For the information about the chief military judge of Anatolia and Rumelia see Uzunçarşılı, *İlmiye Teşkilatı*, pp. 151-161. Furthermore, as related to the judgeships of the Ottoman Empire the same source can be used for general information see *ibid.*, pp. 83-145.

(d. 1599) was not only appointed to this post, but also acquired the title of “*câmi’u’r-riyâseteyn*” because of his position as the royal tutor of the sultan and the chief jurist consult⁴⁰³. Considering the importance of personal bond between student and teacher in the *ilmiye* system, it is likely that these people were influential in Abdurrauf’s professional life.⁴⁰⁴ When a *müderris* was promoted to higher positions, he could help his students to hold more elevated positions.⁴⁰⁵ In this context, it can be thought that Abdurrauf’s acquaintance with these people had probably helped him while he was climbing up the professional ladder.

As for the author’s professional career, his relationship with the chief black eunuch Habeş Mehmed Agha as well as with other black eunuchs of the palace should be remembered. Both Abdurrauf and Atâ’î’s accounts give clues indicating the influence of such a link over the author’s education, and later achievements as an office holder. As indicated before, Abdurrauf grew up under the “... protection, and great benevolence and munificence...” of the agha⁴⁰⁶. Though he did not give any reason for the agha’s affection for himself, made Atâ’î very interesting and important notes for the care of agha towards him: According to him, the agha, who accepted the principle that “there was not any other color higher than the black color”, had included Abdurrauf in the council of the contemporary scholars, since the agha took pains for the “... good

⁴⁰³ For information see fn. 393.

⁴⁰⁴ For the importance of *intisab* system in the *ilmiye* system see Fleischer, *The Historian Mustafa Âli*, pp. 27-28; on the basis of Mustafa Âlî, Fleischer, also, gives the examples highlighting this issue see *ibid.*, pp. 28-33. Furthermore, for the significance of *intisab* relations in the *ulema* career see Baki Tezcan, *The Definition of Sultanatic Legitimacy*, pp. 10-24. The importance of the relation between the teacher and student was showed by Kınalızâde Ali Efendi (d. 1566) who occupied the position of the chief military judgeship of Anatolia in his book, *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*. For the author and his book see Ayşe Sıdika Okay, *Kınalızâde Ali Efendi ve Ahlâk-ı Alâî* (Ph. Diss. Marmara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Felsefe ve Din Bilimleri Ana Bilim Dalı, 2002).

⁴⁰⁵ At this point, we can say that the writer’s professional career seems as parallel to his teachers’ promotion at the *ilmiye* hierarchy see again fn. 395.

⁴⁰⁶ See fn. 393.

blackness...” of Abdurrauf⁴⁰⁷. Undoubtedly, these accounts are more meaningful when we remember that both Abdurrauf and Mehmed Agha came from Habeş, and both of them were of black origin. In all probability, the author’s place of origin and color were decisive for his relation with the agha. However, this does not mean that the agha chose Abdurrauf only because of these features. As indicated before, Habeş Mehmed Agha had sponsored the careers of certain members of the Ottoman *ulema* to create his own clientele. In this context, Abdurrauf should be seen as one of the protégés of Mehmed Agha who entered his network at an early age. As a consequence, while we do not know what the purpose of Mehmed Agha was when he patronized the author, we believe that Abdurrauf was favored by the agha because of his origin⁴⁰⁸ and color.

Actually, the later stages of Abdurrauf’s life further support this hypothesis. Above all, Abdurrauf seems to have taken advantage of his connection with the aghas during his life, because he was able to continue his relations with the other black eunuchs of the imperial harem.⁴⁰⁹ For this reason, like Habeş Mehmed “**aghas of the same color**” (i. e. the other black aghas), as Atâ’î notes, favored him⁴¹⁰. The professional career of the writer, of course, was affected by his relation with the aghas. For instance, Atâ’î mentions the influence of these aghas on the writer’s appointment as the chief military judge of Anatolia⁴¹¹. Parallel to this, we believe that the chief black eunuch Habeş Mehmed Agha

⁴⁰⁷ Atâ’î, p. 684.

⁴⁰⁸ Like Gazanfer Agha, Habeş Mehmed Agha might have supported the author because of his origin. In this context, the ethnic identity should be reckoned while evaluating the relationships within the Ottoman power elite. On the issue, İbrahim Metin Kunt’s study can give an idea see “Ethnic-Regional (Cins) Solidarity” pp. 233-239. Moreover, Mustafa Âlî’s ethnic approach towards Albanians partly exemplifies the issue see Fleischer, *The Historian Mustafa Âli*, pp. 163-165.

⁴⁰⁹ *Râfîü’l-gubûş*, fol. 13a.

⁴¹⁰ Atâ’î, p. 685.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 684-685.

as well as the black eunuchs of the palace provided Abdurrauf great assistance in climbing up the steps of the *ulema* hierarchy.

Bearing in mind this aspect of Abdurrauf's life, now, let us examine Abdurrauf's book entitled as *Râfiü'l- gubûş fî fezâili'l- hubûş*.⁴¹² Fortunately, we have the autograph that provides valuable information about the preparation process of the book. Before mentioning such process, it is useful to give a brief summary of the work. *Râfiü'l- gubûş* consists of a preamble, an introduction; four sections and an epilogue (*hatime*) which are as follows:

I. Preamble: Ali bin Abdurrauf begins his work with a discussion of the creation of humankind and their dispersion throughout the regions of the world. Among them, he widely mentions the *taife* of Habeş and emphasizes the way they worked for Islam after converting to it. Next, he praises the Ottoman sultans, and also prays that he be able to write this book thereupon. In this section, the author provides the full title of his main sources. Among the works he mentions *Ezharu'l 'Uruş fî Ahbâru'l Hubûş* and *Ref' Şan el-Hubûşan* of Celâleddin el-Suyuti (d. 1505)⁴¹³; *Fazlu'l huddâm ve'l hadim* of Ebu el- Abbas Ahmed bin Abdülmelik; *Menâkibü'l huddâm ve'l hisyân* of Hasan Ali bin Muhammed; *Tenvirü'l Gâbuş fî Fazl el-Sudan ve'l Habeş* of Ebu el-Ferrâc ibn el-Cevzi (d. ca. 1200)⁴¹⁴

II. Introduction: This part attempts to answer the question where Ethiopians came from and who their ancestors were. It is also enquired in this section why the color

⁴¹² *Râfiü'l-gubûş*, fol. 15a.

⁴¹³ For the information on Suyuti and his books see Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East An Historical Enquiry* (New York Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990) , p. 33; Muhammad, *ibid.* , p. 57-60.

⁴¹⁴ For the information on Cevzi and his book see *ibid.* , p. 51-56.

of Ethiopians was different from others, in other words, why Ethiopians were black. Furthermore, he emphasizes that there is no superiority of white-skinned peoples over dark-skinned peoples and the preference is based only piety. Finally, the author tries to give reasons for the deep affection and kindness of Habeşî people.

III. First Chapter: This section deals with the sources indicating the merits of “this high and exalted taife”. The first chapter consists of nine sections, each of which states quotations from the Qur’an and *hadiths* to demonstrate the virtues of Ethiopians. Besides that, the prophets who came from Ethiopia and certain Ethiopian saints in the time of the Prophet are discussed by the author. Furthermore, Ali bin Abdurrauf points out certain *hadiths* criticizing people who performed the castration of Ethiopians though he talked about the superiority of the castrated Ethiopians with respect to others in terms of their virtue.

IV. Second Chapter: This chapter includes four separate sections, each of which is related with the sultan of Ethiopia, Necaşî. For this reason, it gives certain references from the Kuran and the *hadiths* for this sultan, and his relation with the Prophet.

V. Third Chapter: This part again consists of four sections indicating people of Ethiopians belonging to the companions of Prophet Muhammad. Besides that, it shows the scholars and poets of this *taife*.

VI. Fourth Chapter: In this part, Ali bin Abdurrauf presents couplets and sayings of the poets and orators about the features and merits of the people of Ethiopia. Furthermore, the author strongly warns his readers to treat Ethiopian slaves and *jariyes*

kindly and also makes the related quotations from various sources about the issue. Finally, he inserts the tales to bring about praising to Ethiopians.

VI. Epilogue (*Hatime*): Couplets and verses of the Quran related to the marks on the faces of Ethiopians are given in this last part.

As seen, Ali bin Abdurrauf devotes entirety of the book to the “virtuous Ethiopians”. From beginning to end, the author seems to keep the purpose of praising the people of Ethiopia among other human beings. While doing that a number of quotations from the Qur’an, the traditions of the Prophet as well as earlier books on the Ethiopians are given to support the writer’s claims. In the light of such quotations, the people of Ethiopia are redefined by an Ethiopian writer who occupied very prestigious positions in the Ottoman judicial hierarchy during his life.

At this point, the motives of the author in composing *Râfîü’l- gubûş* gain importance to accurately evaluate why this book was written by such a person. In the preamble, the author explicitly explains his reasons to write this book: “...the author of the book who was colored with the color and named with the name of this high and exalted *taife* (Ethiopian)...”⁴¹⁵ wished to show the virtues and merits of the people of Ethiopia to the other people in order to compare such superiority with other human beings.⁴¹⁶ Thus, as the author says, all the people who read these verses from the Kuran and the *hadiths* were able to understand “...their excellence (*fazilet*) and superiority (*serafrâz*) to other kinds (*cinsler*)...”⁴¹⁷ If we believe the author’s words, this book was written to introduce

⁴¹⁵ *Râfîü’l- gubûş*, fol. 9a.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 11b.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Ethiopians to other people. At this point, it can also be asked whether Abdurrauf did not have any other purpose while composing such a book. Even if we are not certain about the answer to this question, we consider that the book itself has clues indicating the author's probable aim to exalt and praise the people of Ethiopia. In this context, the author's approach towards his own kind is illuminating, because he tries to tie his *taife* to Arabs who are enthusiastically praised in his book as people who were superior to "other kinds (*cinsler*)".⁴¹⁸ Parallel to this, he attempts to show Ethiopians as Arabs although they were certainly African.⁴¹⁹ According to him, people of Ethiopia were very close to the *taife* of Arab and they were also mixed with them especially as a result of marriages between Arabs and Ethiopians.⁴²⁰ In this context, it can be thought that by making such a link between Arabs and Ethiopians, Ali bin Abdurrauf probably attempts to exalt the people of Ethiopia.

In fact, not only the author's efforts to praise Ethiopians but also the very activity of compiling such a book should be evaluated in conjunction with the increased power of black eunuchs. We believe that it cannot be a simple coincidence that this book was written when black eunuchs gained unprecedented power in the Ottoman palace. On the contrary, it should be directly related to the new power of black eunuchs most of whom came from Ethiopia. At this point, the date of commencement to the preparation of this work is significant; though the book was finally completed in 1612⁴²¹, Abdurrauf reports in the preamble section that he began to collect the necessary sources, and prepared his

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 11b-12a.

⁴¹⁹ At this point we should remember that in his book *Description of Cairo* while Mustafa Âlî defines black eunuchs as the "vile Arabs" at the one of his poem, he emphasizes their Nubian and Ethiopian origins in the later lines, see Âlî/Tietze I, pp. 43, 81 (tr.), pp. 118, 174 (ed.).

⁴²⁰ *Râfiü'l-gubûş*, fol. 11b.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 240b.

first draft back in 1582.⁴²² This date is quite meaningful since the writer had already entered the service of Habeş Mehmed Agha and was under his protection at this time in all probability. In this context, it is reasonable to think that both of these men's interests necessitated each other's help. As a student who had completed his basic instruction, Abdurrauf probably attempted to acquire a prestigious position within the *ilmiye* hierarchy; and without doubt, he must have known that such a goal would not be easily attained without connections. Fortunately, Ali bin Abdurrauf had succeeded in obtaining the protection and support of powerful persons certainly including the chief black eunuch Habeş Mehmed Agha, and other black eunuchs of the Empire. On the other hand, as the first black person assigned to the position of the senior officer of the harem, Mehmed Agha had to prove his ability, and more importantly, the suitability of black eunuchs to this office. Starting with the praising of black eunuchs, in this context, does seem to be a suitable choice, especially when we consider that Ali bin Abdurrauf, who was skilled in using both Persian and Arabic languages, was the protégé of the agha. Parallel to these, it can easily be concluded that Habeş Mehmed Agha and other black eunuchs encouraged and even supported the writing of such a book.

Actually, the account of the author shows clearly how effective the author's relation with these black eunuchs upon the writing of this book. In the preamble, Ali bin Abdurrauf states that he wrote this book to express his gratitude for the aghas of the time all of whom had showed him great kindness all the way from his childhood to his wetness.⁴²³ According to the author, "it is incumbent upon the beneficiary to show his

⁴²² *Ibid.*, fol. 12b.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, ff.13b-14a.

gratefulness to the benefactor”⁴²⁴; and as the person “who had been drowned in the benevolence of the agha” he began to write such a book. It appears that the protégé of black eunuchs chose to write a book which praised them to show his gratitude for everything the black aghas did for him. Along with the author’s own words, it is also possible that both Mehmed Agha and the other black aghas commissioned Abdurrauf to write such a book.

In the context of patron-client relations, Mehmed Agha or the other aghas might have wanted their protégé to support themselves with a book showing how “honored and distinguished” they were. Perhaps, this can explain why the author added a section addressing the question of whether white eunuchs were superior to their black counterparts.⁴²⁵ Interestingly, the author says that even though the white eunuchs did not have superiority over the blacks, the superiority of the latter over the former was certain. The author claims that, in the presence of God, this superiority was in the piety (*takvâ*) of black eunuchs.⁴²⁶ Thus, in 1612, not only the inequality of black and white eunuchs was declared, but also the superiority of black eunuchs in piety was certainly proclaimed by a high-ranking member of the *ulema*. Most probably, while the black aghas must have accepted these words favorably, their white counterparts must have had, at the least, a feeling of discomfort.

In this respect, the author’s complaint about the writing process of the book might have been related to the discomfort of the white aghas. In the preamble, the author mentions that although he began to prepare a draft of the book some twenty five years

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 13b.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 27b-32b.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 27b.

ago, he did not succeed in finishing writing it until 1612.⁴²⁷ The reason for the delay was explained by the author as the torture of some high-ranking officials of the time because of the research that he had conducted for the book, as well as some unspecified disasters.⁴²⁸ According to the author, the writing of the book was obstructed by such men for a while. Of course, the author's words might have stemmed from his desire to show the difficulty of writing such a book. At this point, even though we are not certain about the accuracy of the writer's words, we prefer to believe him because of the starting and finishing dates of the book, which are 1590 and 1612, respectively. As indicated before, the writer began to collect the necessary document for his book when Mehmed Agha occupied the position of chief black eunuch for eight years and acquired great power and prestige at the palace during these years.⁴²⁹ Yet the fragility of the chief black eunuch's position at the harem, within the context of the strife that continued between the white and black eunuchs, should be remembered. Habeş Mehmed Agha was definitely aware of this situation, and to strengthen his position, he attempted to create his own network of patron-client relationships in which his interests as well as the interests of the other black eunuchs were taken care of.

Without doubt, Mehmed Agha had not accepted in vain the principle that "there was no other color higher than the black color"⁴³⁰. On the contrary, he assumed this principle, and because of his blackness⁴³¹ he had taken Ali bin Abdurrauf under his own protection. After securing a good education for Ali bin Abdurrauf and necessary

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 13b.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁹ In this connection, we should remember that the construction of Mehmed Agha's *medrese* in Istanbul was finished in 1590 see Baltacı, *ibid.*, pp. 299.

⁴³⁰ Atâ'î, p. 684.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

connections for his professional career, Mehmed Agha might have wanted the helping hand of the author to create an attractive image for the black eunuchs of the Empire. Yet, if this assumption is correct, we can say that the agha did not attain his goal during his lifetime, and the book was finished in 1612, after his death. It is interesting that Ali bin Abdurrauf finished the book during the tenure of the chief black eunuch Mustafa Agha (d. 1624)⁴³² who sponsored the careers of certain important men at the Ottoman administration.⁴³³

Consequently, “the merits and excellence” of the people of Ethiopia was shown by the protégé of the chief black eunuch in an exciting way. Unfortunately, we do not exactly know either how the book was viewed by the white and black eunuchs or to what extent the book was read by black eunuchs. If we consider that there was a parallel between the author’s professional career and the completion of the book, we can say that black eunuchs took the book favorably. While Abdurrauf completed the book in the middle of August in 1612⁴³⁴ he was appointed to the judgeship of Galata, which was one of the most prestigious ones, in September of the same year.⁴³⁵ It does not seem unreasonable to think the influence of the agha for this assignment, since it is certain that the black aghas were secured the position of chief military judgeship of Anatolia as the author only eight years later, in 1620.⁴³⁶

⁴³² For information about Mustafa Agha see Turan/Hamîle, pp. 48-49.

⁴³³ Tezcan, *Searching for Osman*, p. 158. Tezcan uses the chronicle of Mehmed bin Mehmed (d. ca. 1640), for these information see ff. 41a, 6a, 64a, 67b. Also the chronicle is located Süleymaniye Library, Lala İsmail Efendi, nr. 300.

⁴³⁴ This date was given by the author’s himself at the end of the book see *Râfiü’l- gubûş*, fol. 240b.

⁴³⁵ Atayi, p. 684.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 685-686.

Actually, *Râfiü'l- gubûş* of Ali bin Abdurrauf should be evaluated bearing in mind the other two contemporary books, *el-Tirâzu'l-menkûş fî mehâsini'l-Hubûş* and *Mir'âtu'l Hubûş fî'l usûl*. Interestingly enough, neither the Turkish nor the Arabic literature of the period was devoid of books praising black eunuchs. On the contrary, before Ali bin Abdurrauf, at the end of the sixteenth century, 1591 to be exact, *Mehâsini'l Hubûş* was written in Arabic by Alaaddin Muhammed bin Abdülbâkî el-kâdhânî, a Meccain preacher. Nearly six years later, another book, *Mir'âtu'l Hubûş*, which was composed by Ali Efendi, appeared in Turkish. Not surprisingly, these two books had nearly the same structure as the book of Ali bin Abdurrauf; and in a similar way attempted to show the goodness and the excellence of the people of Ethiopia.

In contrast to Ali bin Abdurrauf, we do not have a great deal of information about the writers of these books, and for this reason, we must rely on the information provided in their books. The book of Alaaddin Muhammed gives us only the writer's name and the completion date of the book. Accordingly, the author began to write his book in 1583⁴³⁷ and finished it in 1591.⁴³⁸

On the other hand, we are lucky to have information about the *Mir'âtu'l Hubûş*'s writer. In his preamble, Ali Efendi, whose origin is Bursa, briefly mentions how he came to the capital.⁴³⁹ Accordingly, while the author was a *müderris* in Bursa, even though he was happy and complacent, he emigrated from Bursa to Mecca with his twenty-seven relatives in 1586. Actually, the deep affection of the author for Mecca and Medina as well as other Arab cities led him to think of emigrating to one of these places between the

⁴³⁷ *Mehâsini'l Hubûş*, fol. 2b.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 111a.

⁴³⁹ *Mir'âtu'l Hubûş*, ff. 4b-7b.

years 1572 and 1586⁴⁴⁰; and he eventually decided to move to Mecca to please (*rıza*) of God and the Prophet. Following his arrival in Mecca, Ali Efendi spent his time observing the Kaaba and worshipping. At this point, the author begins to talk about his bewilderment about the great affection and respect shown by the people of Mecca to the people of Ethiopia.⁴⁴¹ To understand the reason for such esteem, Ali Efendi tells, he consults with professors and teachers and eventually recognizes why Ethiopians were so favorably treated by all the people of Mecca. However, the author's research seemingly brought about the cruelty of some people and the torturing of others, and he had to go to the capital in 1598 to recourse to the sultan.⁴⁴²

Instead of explaining the reason for his complaint, the author begins to mention the black aghas of the imperial harem. According to him these aghas, who were honored by the service of the sultan, were very exalted and in peace. As in Mecca, he was bewildered by the situation of Ethiopian aghas and decided to examine the reasons for their high esteem.⁴⁴³ However, the author did not begin his work since he could not find any patron to support his endeavor.⁴⁴⁴ Until he encountered “the most distinguished and merciful chief black eunuch Mustafa Agha”, who generously bestowed his slaves (*kullar*), he had delayed its writing. Nevertheless, this generous agha responded favorably to the author's requests for patronage, and Ali Efendi began to prepare this text⁴⁴⁵.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 4b-5a.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 5a, 6a.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, fol. 6b.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, fol. 6b-7a.

⁴⁴⁴ The author's such complaint can have stemmed from the strife between the white and black eunuchs. It should be remembered that when the author came to the capital the control of the harem newly passed into the hands of black eunuchs. The white eunuch el-Hajj Mustafa Agha hold this position until 1596. In this process, it does not seem to be so unusual not to be founded any patron among black eunuchs.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 7a-7b.

In the preamble, Ali Efendi explains why he wrote such a book. Like Ali bin Abdurrauf, he wanted to show how honored and distinguished black eunuchs were.⁴⁴⁶ However, differently from Ali bin Abdurrauf, he gives the impression that he wrote the book with the aim of increasing black eunuchs' awareness of themselves. The author says that "the eunuchs who read and know this book understand the greatness of their dignity and honor (*şeref ve izzet*)."⁴⁴⁷

Unfortunately, even if we do not know to what extent the book helped the Ethiopians to be aware of "their quality (*keyfiyyet*)", we can say that the author had acquired the support of one of the black eunuchs, that of, the chief black eunuch Mustafa Agha. Even though Ali bin Abdurrauf does not give the name of Mustafa Agha, it is reasonable to think that he took considerable assistance from the agha.

As a consequence, when we think all of the three books within the context of the newly gained power and prestige of the black eunuchs at the palace we come to the conclusion that the writing of such books around the same years could not be merely a coincidence. On the contrary, they appeared in the literature of this period as a result of black eunuchs' attempts. Most probably, while sponsoring the books praised the Ethiopians, the chief black eunuchs aimed to eliminate their disadvantageous status as slaves, black, and castrated both at the palace and society, and even attempted to transform their "apparent defect" to "asset"⁴⁴⁸ for their own kindred. In a certain sense, these books were the respond of the chief black eunuchs to people who vehemently criticized the new position of the black eunuchs at the palace.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 9a.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁸ Âli/Tietze I, p. 43 (tr.), p. 118 (ed.).

If we take into consideration Mustafa Âlî's virulent disapproval of black eunuchs we can understand why the aghas needed the books praising the black eunuchs. Above all, Mustafa Âlî was not unique representing the negative view of the black eunuchs. As clearly has been shown in this chapter, the authors like Hasan Beyzâde and Bostanzâde Yahya Efendi not only disapproved the actions of the chief black eunuchs but also treated them with indignity in their texts. In this context, it is reasonable to claim that although the extent to which these authors' views about black eunuchs stemmed from their personal motives and worries or conflicting interests, they at the same time were the reflections of the societal prejudices against black eunuchs. Although it is not possible which of the reason was more effective on these authors' thoughts about the black eunuchs one thing is clear: their accounts convey the traces of racial and gender prejudices.

Parallel to this, it is conceivable that black aghas patronized the authors of the texts discussing good qualities of Ethiopians in order to consolidate their newly gained prestigious at the society and to rectify society's negative view of black eunuchs. For this reason, although the authors of *Mehâsini'l Hubûş*, *Râfiü'l- gubûş*, and *Mir'âtu'l Hubûş* do not mention agha's influence on the writing of these books we believe that in a way black aghas were indirectly responsible for the appearance of such books in the land of the Ottomans. Without doubt, except for the author of *Mehâsini'l Hubûş*, the other two authors' close relationship with the black aghas seems to supports our hypothesis. Furthermore, the dates of the books are interesting enough: All of them were written during the institutionalization of the office of the *darüssaade* agha at the palace. The meaning of that is clear: After acquiring the most important and prestigious position of

the imperial harem the black eunuchs of the imperial harem, on the one hand attempted to legitimize their newly gained power at the palace they tried to get rid of their three handicaps, on the other. Most probably, the expanding jurisdiction of the chief black eunuch provides enough opportunity the aghas of this official to create desirable image for themselves and their kindred.

CONCLUSION

The present study has examined the rise of the chief black eunuch, the *dariüssaade* agha, as a pivotal harem figure at the end of the sixteenth century within the context of the changing dynamics of the Ottoman royal household and the absolutist politics of Murad III. Even though the contemporary sources do not mention the creation of the office of the *dariüssaade* agha, it is certain that the office came into existence with the appointment of Habeş Mehmed Agha as the chief officer of the imperial harem in 1574. With this appointment the black eunuchs were taken from under the responsibility of the chief white eunuch, who had previously been in charge of the whole palace, including the harem. The responsibilities of the *dariüssaade* agha were further expanded when the same Habeş Mehmed Agha was made the superintendent of the *evkâf* of the *haremeyn* in 1588.

A major factor behind these important institutional changes was the transformation of the royal household in the second half of the sixteenth century. As a result of the transfer of the living quarters of the *haseki* and her attendants to the imperial court during the reign of Süleyman, and of the suites of the princes and their mothers by the end of the sixteenth century, the Ottoman court gained new significance as a center of political power. In this context, the creation of the office of the chief black eunuch was not only necessitated by the growing complexity of the administration of the imperial harem, but also provided the members of the royal family with a new channel through which to build alliances. The strategic importance of the new officer increased further with the abandonment of the princely governorate and with the gradual transition from a

system of open competition between the sons of the reigning sultan to succession based on the principle of seniority in subsequent decades.

A second factor behind the rise of the chief black eunuch as the principal officer of the harem was the absolutist policies of Murad III, who tried to strengthen his hand in the administration. In this connection, he not only tried to decrease the power of the grand vizier but also attempted to find new allies. Most probably, Sultan Murad established the office of the chief black eunuch to attain this goal. Thanks to the chief official of the new office, the sultan not only found a new political ally, but was also able to control the affairs inside and outside the palace more closely.

The period that saw the rise of the black eunuchs, also witnessed a power struggle between the white and black eunuchs. Although the contemporary sources do not mention how the white eunuchs responded to the creation of the office of the chief black eunuch, this study has argued that the appointment of two successive white eunuchs to the office of the *dariissaade* agha after the black eunuchs had taken control of the harem probably signified a contention between the black and white eunuchs. Likewise, it has been suggested that the intervals of the assignments of black eunuchs for this position stemmed from the prevailing power of the white eunuchs at the palace. Most probably, the powerful *babüssaade* aghas of the last quarter of the sixteenth century such as Gazanfer Agha were effective on the reversion of the post to the white eunuchs. Yet the efforts of the white eunuchs were not ultimately successful, and the control of the harem passed into the hands of black eunuchs in a definitive way.

Ultimately, however, the success of the black eunuchs was a result of their political influence at the palace. The chief black eunuchs of the seventeenth century, who

enjoyed a high degree of political power, succeeded to guarantee the office for their own kindred. Without doubt, the political activities of the four aghas, Abdürrezzak, Osman, Süleyman, and Mustafa, all of whom occupied the position of the chief black eunuch following the institutionalization of the office, show us the integration of the institution into the palace. Parallel to their institutionalized position, these chief black eunuchs, who developed close relationships with the members of the royal family and with other high-ranking officials of the palace, acquired the opportunity to be actively involved in court politics.

To understand and evaluate the power of the chief black eunuch, the third chapter of this study has examined the duties and privileges of the chief black eunuch and his subordinates in office. It has been pointed out that as the master of the black eunuchs, the *dariüssaade* agha had a great opportunity to establish relationships with the most influential figures of the palace and to participate in the politics of the court. It is clear that both the advantages of his position and the extent of his official responsibilities helped transform the chief black eunuch into one of the most important officials of the palace.

Furthermore, this study has traced the consolidation of the new office through a discussion of the living quarters of the black eunuchs as well as of the relative position of the chief black eunuch in court ceremonies. The renovations made to the quarters of the black eunuchs were the best signs of the accepted position of black eunuchs at the palace. It is certain that from the end of the sixteenth century onwards, the black eunuchs had new quarters at the harem, which was consistent with their growing number and importance at the palace. Likewise, paralleling his growing importance in the Ottoman

court, the chief black eunuch took on very important duties both during the preparations for and in the course of Ottoman court ceremonies, such as the ceremonies of accession and sword-girding as well as royal weddings.

Despite the tremendous power and prestige of the chief black eunuch, nevertheless, the holders of the office continued to be vulnerable in society at large due to their slave status, their racial origins as well as the fact of their having been castrated. In this connection, the power struggle between the white and black eunuchs provided an immediate context for the wider discussions on the black eunuchs. A vivid example of the highly negative views that were current in some Ottoman circles vis à vis the black eunuchs was the *Description of Cairo*, written by the Ottoman bureaucrat and historian Mustafa Âlî and dedicated to the powerful chief white eunuch Gazanfer Agha. It has been argued that Mustafa Âlî's negative views of the black eunuchs was related, on the one hand, to his personal motives and worries as well as to those of his patron; on the other hand, they also reflected more widespread prejudices in Ottoman society. Indeed the black eunuchs were also maligned on grounds of their color and their physiological "defect" by other writers in this period, such as the clerk Ali Efendi, the historian Hasan Beyzâde, and the chief military judge of Anatolian Bostanzâde Yahya Efendi. Significantly, however, the chief black eunuchs did not remain silent in the face of these attacks. Rather, they sought to create a desirable image for the group to which they belonged by sponsoring a number of treatises written in praise of the good qualities of Ethiopians. While these treatises require a much closer study than has been possible in this study, they have been discussed here as texts that provide important clues about the societal prejudices against the black eunuchs as well as their response to these prejudices.

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