The Deposition of Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha and the Rule of Law in Seventeenth-Century Egypt

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Defterdār Aḥmed Paşa'nın Azli ve XVII. Yüzyılda Mısır'da Hukuk Devleti

Öz ■ Bu makale Osmanlı politik hayatında 17. yüzyılda hukuğun ve hukuki kurumların gittikçe artan önemini göstermek amacıyla Kahire'deki askerlerin 1676'da Mısır Beylerbeyi'ni görevden uzaklaştırmalarını ve buna bağlı olarak yapılan bir mahkemeyi incelemektedir. Mahkemeyi incelerken askerlerin Osmanlı idarecilerinin otoritelerine hukuki sınırlar getirerek onların gelecekteki hareketlerini kısıtlamak istediklerini göstermeye çalıştım. Argümanım askerlerin 'anayasacı' bir hassasiyet gösterdikleridir. Bir başka deyişle hükümet etme işinin kurallara bağlı olduğuna ve bu kuralları yapma ve yürürlükte tutmanın mahkemelerin işi olduğuna dair bir inançları olduğunu ileri sürmekteyim. Bu yaklaşım bize Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda 17. yüzyıl boyunca sık görülen isyanları başka bir açıdan görme şansı verir: Bunlar imparatorluğun patrimonyal monarşiden erken modern bürokratik devlete dönüşümünde temel rol oynayan ve henüz oluşmakta olan hukuk devleti kavramıyla doğrudan ilişkilidirler.

Anahtar kelimeler: Osmanlı Mısırı, Şeriat Mahkemeleri, İsyan, Köprülü ıslahatları

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I would like to thank the Leverhulme Trust, the Harvard Islamic Legal Studies Program and the Koç University Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations for funding the research and writing of this article. I have benefited from the opportunity to present different versions of this research at several seminars and conferences, and I am grateful to organizers and audiences at: Harvard Law School, the Koç Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations, Zentrum Moderner Orient, the School of Oriental & African Studies, Michael Gilsenan's workshop on Islamic Law in Society at New York University, and Kent Schull and Safa Saraçoğlu's panel at the 2013 Middle East Studies Association meeting in New Orleans. I would also like to thank Baki Tezcan and Mark Philp for reading drafts of the final article.

On 18 February 1676, the Ottoman governor of Egypt Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha was deposed by a group of Cairene soldiers opposed to the fiscal and administrative reforms he had attempted. The soldiers, who were drawn from all seven of Cairo's regiments,[1] forcibly removed him from the citadel and placed him under house arrest before demanding that the Sultan appoint a new governor. Conflict between soldiers and governors was common during the seventeenth century in Egypt and throughout the Ottoman provinces, as was conflict between soldiers and the imperial government in the capital Constantinople. The event of February 1676 was only one of several depositions of governors of Egypt that took place during that century. It is, however, an unusually well-documented deposition. Among the surviving sources is a *ḥujja* (legal certificate) which shows that the soldiers began a legal action at a Cairo court seventeen days after the deposition. This legal action attempted to constrain the actions of future governors: it constituted a further act of resistance to Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha's reform program. The soldiers not only believed that they had a right of legitimate rebellion, they also believed that the Ottoman governor's authority was limited by law, and they were able to use Ottoman legal institutions to enforce these limits.

In this article I use a close reading of this rebellion and the subsequent court case to illustrate the increasing significance of law and legal institutions in Ottoman politics during the seventeenth century. The court ḥujja is a rare example of this type of document, because the registers of the institution that produced it have not survived from any period prior to 1741.[2] Reading this document together with several contemporary accounts of the deposition that

1 The seven regiments in Cairo were the Janissaries (usually called Mustaḥfiẓān in Arabic sources), the ʿAzebān, the Gönüllüyān, the Çerākise, the Çavuşān, the Müteferriḳa and the Tüfekçiyān.

2 Historians working on Ottoman court records almost exclusively use the registers containing copies of the ḥujjas issued by the courts, rather than the ḥujjas themselves. The register was the court's official archive and so was preserved by the institution; the ḥujjas issued to individuals were dispersed and so mostly lost. For reasons that are unclear, the registers of the court where this case took place, al-Dīwān al-ʿĀlī in the Cairo citadel, were almost all lost, probably long before the creation of the Egyptian National Archive where the few surviving registers now reside. The earliest surviving register dates from 1741-3, and only a handful of ḥujjas from dates earlier than this have survived: to my knowledge, seven in the Egyptian National Archive and five in the Prime Ministry Archive in Istanbul. The loss of these records is particularly unfortunate because on the basis of the surviving records it appears that the Dīwān al-ʿĀlī was where many of the contracts and disputes of the political elite were conducted.

preceded it provides a unique opportunity to see how one of Cairo's frequent political upheavals was played out within the courts. The court case allows us to see the rebellions that punctuated seventeenth-century Ottoman history in a new light: as part of the development of a concept of the rule of law in the early modern Ottoman Empire. The urban social groups represented by soldiers had long believed in their rights, and had often asserted them when they felt that the government threatened their interests. But traditionally, these rights had been understood in terms of a patrimonial bond of mutual obligation between the Sultan as master and the soldiers as his slaves. This bond was expressed symbolically, in particular through practices surrounding food. The Janissaries of Constantinople indicated their displeasure with the Sultan by turning over their soup-cups or by removing the cauldron from the regimental kitchen: by refusing the Sultan's food, they signaled that the tacit contract between them was broken.[3] The incident I discuss here demonstrates the rise of an alternative idiom of political negotiation that was legal rather than patrimonial. This legalistic political discourse suited the changed circumstances of the seventeenth-century empire, in which the social base of the ruling class had broadened and slavery was no longer central to political hierarchy.[4] The emergence of a rule of law was key to the transformation of the Ottoman Empire from a patrimonial monarchy into an early modern bureaucratic state.

The frequent rebellions of soldiers in Constantinople and provincial cities during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have played an important role in Ottoman historiography. Older works written within the "Ottoman decline" paradigm saw the rebellions as examples of the corruption of the once-mighty Janissary army and of the weakening of the Ottoman government's control of its

3 Cemal Kafadar, "Janissaries and Other Riffraff of Ottoman Istanbul: Rebels without a Cause?" in *Identity and Identity Formation in the Ottoman World: A Volume of Essays in Honor of Norman Itzkowitz*, ed. Baki Tezcan and Karl K. Barbir (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 132.

4 Slavery remained widespread within political society in Egypt and the central regions of the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth century: the imperial household and the households of notables included many slaves. But slavery was no longer the paradigmatic political relationship. Households consisted of diverse types of relationship, of which slavery was only one. This was true in Egypt as much as the central regions; on the inapplicability of the "Mamluk" label to Ottoman-Egyptian households, see Jane Hathaway, "The Military Household in Ottoman Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27 (1995), 39-52.

provinces.[5] More recent historians have dispensed with the discredited decline paradigm, and have examined rebellions as struggles between different elements of the ruling establishment over status and revenues.

In all cities of the Ottoman Empire, there was a great deal of overlap between the military and the commercial classes: from the mid-sixteenth century on, soldiers increasingly took up trades to supplement salaries that had been eroded by inflation, while urban merchants and artisans increasingly sought regimental affiliation in order to benefit from tax breaks and protection.[6] It is therefore misleading to understand the rebellions of soldiers as "mutinies," as the word suggests that the issue was one of military discipline.[7] Most of the rebellions by soldiers of this period, including the Cairo rebellion discussed here, had little to do with military concerns and instead centered on other aspects of government policy or on factional conflict. These rebellions were assertions of power by a particular social class: urbanites of moderate wealth.

While they cannot be called "mutinies," these rebellions by soldiers must be distinguished from the "popular" revolts of the urban masses, which have been studied by numerous historians in the context of Ottoman Egypt and Syria.[8] The

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5 Works on Egypt that follow the decline paradigm include P. M. Holt, *Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, 1516-1922: A Political History* (London: Longman, 1966); Michael Winter, *Egyptian Society under Ottoman Rule, 1517-1798* (London: Routledge, 1992). The critique of the decline paradigm has been a decades-long project and the literature is too extensive to summarize adequately here; for an overview of the main issues see Cemal Kafadar, "The Question of Ottoman Decline," *Harvard Middle Eastern & Islamic Review* 4 (1997-98), 30-75.

6 The classic study of this process in the context of Cairo is André Raymond, "Soldiers in Trade: The Case of Ottoman Cairo," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 18 (1991), 16-37. Important studies of this process in other parts of the Ottoman Empire include Cemal Kafadar, "Yeniçeri – Esnaf Relations: Solidarity and Conflict," MA Thesis, McGill University, 1981; Charles Wilkins, *Forging Urban Solidarities: Ottoman Aleppo, 1640-1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

7 Nevertheless the word "mutiny" has frequently been used in modern scholarship to describe these events: e.g. Jane Hathaway (ed.), *Mutiny and Rebellion in the Ottoman Empire*; Marinos Sariyannis, "Rebellious Janissaries: Two Military Mutinies in Candia (1688, 1762) and their Aftermaths," in *The Eastern Mediterranean under Ottoman Rule: Crete 1645-1840*, ed. A. Anastasopoulos (Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2008), 255-74.

8 For example: André Raymond, "Quartiers et mouvements populaires au Caire au XVIIIème siècle," in *Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt: Historical Studies from the Ottoman Conquest to the United Arab Republic*, ed. P. M. Holt (London: Oxford

popular revolts were not organized by or around the military class and its institutions, although some lower-ranking soldiers may have participated in them as individuals. The urban crowd that led the typical popular revolt did not represent the interests of the military class; indeed it often protested against the military class's abuse of its privileges. And the language used by contemporary chroniclers to narrate popular revolts was different. Terms such as *al-ʿāmma* (the masses), with their condescending overtones, were not applied to rebellions by soldiers, who were called *al-ʿaskar* (the military), the *ehl-i Mıṣır* (people of Egypt) or *Mıṣırluyān* (Egyptians).[9]

Cemal Kafadar and Baki Tezcan have analyzed Janissary rebellions as social movements.[10] Focusing on the rebellions that took place in Constantinople over the course of the seventeenth century, both have portrayed the rebellions as the assertion of the rights of the social group that the Janissaries represented: a group which increasingly converged with the middling merchant and artisan class. The Janissaries believed that the Sultan's authority over them was governed by norms, and they rebelled when they thought that the Sultan or his ministers had violated these norms. Kafadar portrays the Janissaries' understanding of their relationship with the Sultan as a contract of allegiance which imposed rights and duties on both parties: an image which fits with the patrimonial model of Ottoman governance. Either side would use violence if it felt the contract had been breached: this led to a cycle of revolt and repression throughout the seventeenth century. Tezcan argues that the seventeenth century saw the Ottoman Empire transform from a patrimonial system into a limited monarchy governed by law. He claims that the Janissaries came to believe that there were legal limitations on the authority of

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University Press, 1968), 104-116; Gabriel Baer, "Popular Revolt in Ottoman Cairo," *Der Islam* 54 (1977), 213-242; Edmund Burke III, "Understanding Arab Protest Movements," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 8 (1986), 333-345; André Raymond, "Urban Networks and Popular Movements in Cairo and Aleppo (End of the Eighteenth – Beginning of the Nineteenth Centuries)," in idem, *Arab Cities in the Ottoman Period: Cairo, Syria and the Maghreb* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 57-81; James Grehan, "Street Violence and Social Imagination in Late-Mamluk and Ottoman Damascus, ca. 1500-1800," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35 (2003), 215-236.

9 The Turkish adjective *Mıṣırlu* (Egyptian), in a similar way to *Osmanlı* (Ottoman), was reserved for members of the military class, and excluded the civilian population of Egypt.

10 Kafadar, "Janissaries and Other Riffraff," 113-34; Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

the Sultan: that they were constitutionalists. Tezcan's emphasis on law is intriguing, but it rests on Tezcan's analysis of seventeenth-century chronicles and the prominent role in the rebellions that they accord to the ulema; he does not use any legal treatises or documents.

The deposition of Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha in 1676 lends support to Tezcan's claim that law became central to relations between the imperial government and the military class during the seventeenth century. The surviving ḥujja provides documentary evidence that disputes about the nature of the relationship between the imperial government and the military class, and about the limits of the government's authority, were fought and negotiated in the empire's courts. This ḥujja allows us to begin to examine the contours of this emerging conception of the rule of law. The document is not a constitution: it is not a foundational document setting out a comprehensive set of norms for the conduct of government. Rather, it is a snapshot of a particular moment when certain such norms were being asserted. Although there was no formal constitution, the soldiers who participated in this court case displayed a *constitutional sensibility*: they believed that there were rules for the conduct of government, and that courts were the place to assert and enforce these rules. Law, for my purposes here, consisted primarily of legal institutions and procedures rather than legal doctrine. The soldiers turned to a court of law and used legal procedures to assert their rights. They did not refer directly to legal doctrine; rather, as we shall see, they used legal procedures to create legal doctrines, by giving legal authority to particular customs.

At the same time, the patrimonial model of a tacit contract between Sultan and soldiers described by Kafadar was still current in the late seventeenth century. The emergence of the rule of law did not immediately eclipse older modes of political engagement. Rather, both political idioms coexisted: the disgruntled soldiers of Cairo resorted to patrimonial and legalistic claims on a pragmatic basis in order to pursue their interests.[11]

The idea of the rule of law has played a prominent role in recent Ottoman historiography. As historians have rejected Oriental despotism as a model for the Ottoman state, they have focused on how Ottoman courts were a key resource for Ottoman subjects seeking to resist abusive behavior by government

11 The patrimonial idiom was also very much alive in the popular revolts described by Raymond, Baer, Burke and Grehan. Although the demand for "justice" was at the center of such revolts, the protesters conceived justice as emanating from the goodwill of the Sultan, rather than as embedded in legal procedures.

officials.[12] What has emerged from this body of scholarship is, however, a weak version of the rule of law. In this model, abuse is committed by provincial officials who exceed the authority granted to them, and the law is a mechanism that allows the imperial government to monitor and discipline these officials. In other words, law is a solution to the classic principal-agent problem inherent in any complex polity: officials do not always follow the commands of the government, and so the government must create mechanisms to correct the resulting injustices and to encourage compliance with its orders.[13] The model assumes that while provincial officials are corruptible, the imperial government is essentially just. This understanding of the role of law in Ottoman governance reflects the state-centric bias in Ottoman historiography, and replicates the concept found in Ottoman-Islamic political theory of the "circle of justice," according to which all justice emanates from the Sultan who must cultivate it in order to preserve his rule.[14] The model also assumes that the divide between *ʿaskerī* and *reʿāyā*, the ruling class and the subject class, was as salient in social life as it was in Ottoman political discourse.

The archival evidence establishes beyond doubt that Ottoman subjects used the courts to bring abuses committed by officials to the government's attention. But as a paradigm for the rule of law in the Ottoman Empire, I find it limited, for two main reasons. First, within this model the imperial government sets the rules

12 For example: Haim Gerber, *State, Society and Law in Islam: Ottoman Law in Comparative Perspective* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Amy Singer, *Palestinian Peasants and Ottoman Officials: Rural Administration around Sixteenth-Century Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For a critique of this paradigm see Boğaç Ergene, *Local Court, Provincial Society and Justice in the Ottoman Empire: Legal Practice and Dispute Resolution in* Çankırı and Kastamonu*, 1652-1744* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 100-8.

13 This principal-agent problem can be particularly acute in authoritarian regimes, hence the corruption endemic in many modern states in the Arab world. It can lead to rule of law institutions being fostered and supported, if less than whole-heartedly, by these authoritarian regimes. For a fascinating account of the relationship between courts and the Mubarak regime in Egypt, see Tamir Moustafa, *The Struggle for Constitutional Power: Law, Politics and Economic Development in Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

14 On the antiquity of this concept in the Middle East see Linda Darling, *A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East: The Circle of Justice from Mesopotamia to Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

and remains above scrutiny. The legal system is the government's tool, and there is nothing external to the government that can constrain its actions: this is a weak version of the rule of law. Second, it ignores a crucial component of the history of the rule of law in other societies. In other historiographies, relations between the monarch and the elites, rather than relations between the state and ordinary subjects, are central to the story: in English historiography it is the barons, not the peasants, who force Magna Carta on King John. This aspect of the rule of law has been neglected by Ottoman historiography, due to the enduring allure of the classical paradigm of Ottoman governance in which the ruling class were the Sultan's slaves: slaves who did not receive the full protection of the law. It is this aspect of the rule of law that interests me.

The Political Structure of Ottoman Egypt

Here I give a brief overview of the political structure of Ottoman Egypt in the late seventeenth century, so that non-specialists may make sense of the dispute between Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha and the soldiers.[15] The imperial government was represented in Egypt by a governor, who held the rank of Pasha. Governors were appointed from among the imperial elite and generally served terms of one to three years before being rotated to another province or to a position in the capital. The governorship of Egypt was a prestigious position within the imperial hierarchy, and several governors also served as Grand Vizier before or after their postings to Egypt. The governor of Egypt was therefore an outsider: unlike in some other provinces, local or localized elites did not manage to take control of this post during the seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries. The governor was based in the citadel, which sits atop the Muqaṭṭam hill that was then at the southeastern boundary of the city of Cairo. He brought with him only a small personal entourage, and he could govern effectively only by cooperating with the other two centers of power in Egypt: the military households and the regiments.

The households were patronage networks formed through military slavery (the mamlūk system), kinship and other types of patron-client relations. They were headed by powerful men, some of whom were manumitted mamlūks. Many,

15 For more on political society in Ottoman Egypt, see Jane Hathaway, *The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdağlıs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Stanford Shaw, *The Financial and Administrative Organization and Development of Ottoman Egypt, 1517-1798* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962).

but not all, household heads held the rank of bey.[16] The beys monopolized the high offices in the provincial administration, including the posts of *amīr al-ḥājj* (commander of the pilgrimage) and *defterdār* (treasurer), and the governorships of the sub-provinces. They also controlled the major rural tax-farms and many of the large *awqāf* (endowments). These positions were the main sources of their wealth.

There were seven regiments in Egypt, the largest of which were the Janissaries and the ʿAzebān. The regiments were institutions that had been implanted by the Ottomans. However, by the late seventeenth century, in connection with their interpenetration with the merchant and artisan communities, the regiments had developed strong corporate identities and would mobilize to defend their corporate interests. Although they took part in Ottoman wars, provided police functions within Cairo, and assisted in the pacification of the Egyptian countryside, the regiments cannot be regarded solely as military organizations: they were also entitlement groups that existed to defend their members' privileges and interests.[17] The regiments controlled the sources of wealth that the beys did not – the urban tax-farms and the customs-farms at the ports – and regimental officers profited greatly from the coffee trade. The households and regiments should not be seen as separate groups; rather, they were different loci around which power coalesced, and they overlapped with one another. Many regimental soldiers were affiliated with a household; some regimental officers led their own households; beys sought to influence the regiments by placing their protégés in key positions.

Before proceeding it is also worth reflecting briefly on the "local" nature of this military society in Egypt. The beys and soldiers identified as Egyptians, or *Mıṣırluyān.* But this word did not correspond with either ethnic identity or geographical origin. This society was diverse and included slaves from Georgia and Abkhazia, mercenaries and officials from Anatolia and the Balkans, and even the odd European renegade, as well as people born in Egypt. There was a lot of money to be made in seventeenth-century Egypt, due to its agricultural wealth and its position on the coffee and spice trade routes: this made it a magnet for ambitious immigrants. Members of this military society identified as Egyptians because Egypt was where they made their careers. Their use of this marker did not imply any particular identification with the wider population of the province,

16 The title bey was a short form of *ṣancaḳbeyi*. Unlike in most other regions of the Ottoman Empire, in Egypt the title did not correspond to control of any particular territory. The number of beys in Egypt was, however, limited to 24 at any one time.

17 See Wilkins, *Forging Urban Solidarities*, for a detailed analysis of how the Janissaries of seventeenth-century Aleppo operated as an entitlement group.

and it certainly did not indicate any commitment to autonomy or independence. The ongoing struggles between Egypt's soldiers and Ottoman governors were over apportioning rights and resources within the Ottoman imperial system.

Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha's Reform Program

Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha was a protégé of Köprülü Fāẓıl Aḥmed Pasha, the second of the Köprülü dynasty of reforming Grand Viziers who dominated Ottoman politics in the second half of the seventeenth century. The Köprülü reform program has been discussed elsewhere; here I will summarize its main objectives.[18] These were to rein in the power of provincial elites by placing protégés in key positions; to increase central government revenues by preventing provincial elites from skimming the taxes they collected; and to prune the regimental payrolls of men with dubious military function – i.e. the merchants and artisans who had joined the ranks for the economic benefits that membership offered. The overall goal of the Köprülü reformers was to centralize power in the imperial bureaucracy in Constantinople, and so to reverse the trend of the seventeenth century.

Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha was sent by Köprülü Fāẓıl Aḥmed Pasha to implement this reform program in Cairo. He was not the first governor to pursue the Köprülü agenda in Egypt: this had been Ḳara Ibrāhīm Pasha, the personal lieutenant of Köprülü Fāẓıl Aḥmed Pasha, who served as governor of Egypt from 1670 to 1672. Ḳara Ibrāhīm Pasha had arrested two leading beys, Yūsuf Bey Ṣahr al-Naqīb and Kan'ān Bey, for embezzling several categories of revenue, including the annual tribute to the imperial government (*irsāliyye*), the Dashīsha endowments and the Ḥaramayn endowments.[19] Yūsuf Bey and Kan'ān Bey had been sent to Constantinople, while their property in Cairo was seized and sold to repay the missing revenues. Ḳara Ibrāhīm Pasha had then appointed the *āğā* (commander) and the *başçavuş* (senior officer) of the Janissary regiment – soldiers who were

18 On the Köprülü dynasty of Grand Viziers see M. Tayyib Gökbilgin and R. C. Repp, "Köprülü," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition. Jane Hathaway summarizes the impact of the Köprülü reforms on the Arab provinces in *The Arab Lands under Ottoman Rule, 1516-1800* (Harlow: Pearson, 2008), 76-8.

19 The Dashīsha endowments were a bloc of endowments founded by the Mamluk Sultans Jaqmaq and Qā'itbāy and added to by the Ottoman Sultans Selim I and Suleyman the Magnificent. Their revenues supported the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. The Ḥaramayn endowments were another bloc of endowments that supported the holy cities.

closely connected to the governor and who did not have local power bases – as supervisors of the Dashīsha and Ḥaramayn endowments respectively.[20]

Ḳara Ibrāhīm Pasha's focus on preventing fiscal corruption by the Egyptian elite and cultivating reliable clients within the Egyptian administration was continued by Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha, the next governor but one. Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha arrived in Cairo on 6 Shawwāl 1086 (24 December 1675), and attempted a more ambitious set of reforms that targeted the upper echelons of the financial administration and the regiments. He lasted only a couple of months and failed to push through his reforms. His attempted reforms and subsequent deposition were covered in a rich variety of chronicles: not only the local Egyptian chronicles but also in the imperial court chronicles (*veḳāyiʿnāmes*) and in unofficial chronicles written in the capital. Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha's tenure was the subject of gossip in Constantinople, as it was an embarrassing failure.[21]

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20 On Kara Ibrāhīm Pasha's tenure as governor see Hathaway, *Politics of Households*, 148-50.

21 I have used the following accounts of Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha's tenure. The three main Arabic chronicles covering late seventeenth-century Egypt: Aḥmad Shalabī ibn ʿAbd al-Ghanī, *Awḍaḥ al-ishārāt fī man tawallā Miṣr al-Qāhira min al-wuzarāʾ waʾl-bāshāt*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿAbd al-Raḥīm (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1978), 174-5; ʿĀlī ibn Riḍwān (attrib.), *Zubdat ikhtiṣār tārīkh mulūk Miṣr al-maḥrūsa*, ed. Bashīr Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (Cairo: Dār al-Faḍīla, 2006), 156-7 (Note: This is an edition of British Library MS Add. 9972. The edition gives the author as ʿĀlī ibn Riḍwān based on an inscription on the title page. However both the British Library catalog and P. M. Holt claim that Ibn Riḍwān was the copyist and the author is unknown.); Anon., untitled fragment, Bibliothéque nationale de France, MS arabe 1855 (referred to henceforth as Paris Fragment), fos. 57b-58a. Four Turkish chronicles written in Egypt by officials working there: Meḥmed ibn Yūsuf el-Ḥallāḳ, *Tārīh-i Mıṣır*, Bibliothéque nationale de France, MS suppl. turc 512, fos. 122a-123a; Anon., *Tevārīh-i Mıṣr-ı Kāhire haṭṭ-ı Ḥasan Paşa*, Süleymaniye Library, MS Hacı Mahmut Efendi 4877, fos. 106a-109a; Maḥmūd ibn ʿAbdullāh ibn Meḥmed al-Baghdādī, *İntihāb-i Ḥusnü'l-muḥāzare*, Süleymaniye Library, MS Esad Efendi 2215, fos. 87a-87b; ʿAbdülkerīm ibn ʿAbdurraḥmān, *Tārīh-i Mıṣr-ı Ḳāhire*, British Library, MS Add. 7878, fos. 79b-80b. Three chronicles written in Constantinople: Defterdar Ṣarı Meḥmed Paşa, *Zübde-yi Vekayiât: Tahlil ve Metin (1066-1116 / 1656-1704)*, ed. Abdülkadir Özcan (Ankara: Türk Tarihi Kurumu, 1995), 71; Abdurrahman Abdi Paşa, *Abdurrahman Abdi Paşa Vekâyiʿ-nâmesi (Osmanlı Tarihi 1648-1682): Tahlil ve Metin Tenkidi*, ed. Fahri Ç. Derin (Istanbul: Çamlıca, 2008), 447; ʿÎsâ-zâde, *ʿÎsâ-zâde Târîhi (Metin ve Tahlil)*, ed. Ziya Yılmazer (Istanbul: Fetih Cemiyeti, 1996), 151-2.

The various chronicles give slightly different accounts of Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha's actions, but the principal features of his reform program were as follows. First, he made a series of promotions and reappointments to reward his allies and prepare the ground for reform. This in itself was not unusual and incoming governors often marked their arrival in this way. Second, he attempted an investigation of regimental payrolls, in order to prune them of people who did not fulfill a useful military function, and so deprive them of the salaries and tax exemptions that came with military status. Third, he attempted to impose new taxes on houses and shops, extending the *ʿavārıż* tax regime that had long been regularized in Syria and Anatolia.[22] Fourth, he dismissed the Jewish financial officials working in the Egyptian administration.

The place of the regimental payroll investigation and the new tax regime within the Köprülü agenda is clear. Both reforms aimed to improve the imperial government's finances by increasing revenues, through the levying of new taxes and the cancelation of tax exemptions, and by cutting government spending on military salaries. The dismissal of the Jewish financial officials requires a little more explanation. The motives for this act were likely mixed. The incident came at the height of the influence in Constantinople of the militant pietist Kadızadeli movement, and the dismissal of Jews from public office fits the Kadızadeli religious agenda.[23] Some of the chronicles describe the move in confessional terms: they talk of the replacement of Jews by Muslims.[24] But at the same time, the removal of these officials was also an instrumental move to prepare the way for a crackdown on revenue diversion. The senior financial positions in Egypt had long been held by Jews: by convention the *ṣarrāfbaşı* (head financial official) was the formal representative of Cairo's Jewish community, in contrast to the situation in Constantinople where this role was played by the chief rabbi.[25] In other words, the

22 For the *ʿavārıż* tax regime in Aleppo, see Wilkins, *Forging Urban Solidarities*, 19-112.

23 On the Kadızadeli movement, see Madeline Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulema in the Postclassical Age, 1600-1800* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988). On the Kadızadelis' attitude to non-Muslims, see Marc Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

24 Aḥmad Shalabī, *Awḍaḥ al-ishārāt*, 174; Paris Fragment, 57b; *Zubdat ikhtiṣār*, 156. The author of *Tevārīh-i Mıṣr-ı Kāhire haṭṭ-ı Ḥasan Paşa* also uses anti-Jewish rhetoric, accusing the Jewish officials of treachery and theft (*hıyānet ve serīke* [sic]), 107a-107b.

25 On the organization and leadership of the Jewish community in Egypt see Jane Hathaway, "The Grand Vizier and the False Messiah: The Sabbatai Sevi Controvery and the Ottoman Reform in Egypt," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117 (1997), 668.

Jewish financial officials were an integral part of the Egyptian establishment, and they were in a position to frustrate Aḥmed Pasha's fiscal reforms. He replaced them with the former *köy dellāli* Ibrāhīm Jāwīsh and the *kātib al-ḥawāla* Ṣāliḥ Efendī: allies from within the Egyptian bureaucracy whom he trusted to cooperate.[26] This was a pragmatic as much as an ideological move.

Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha's reform program offended both the regiments and the beys by threatening their incomes and entitlements. As mentioned previously, there was considerable overlap between the regiments and the commercial classes. The payroll investigation and the new taxes hit this group from two sides. Aḥmed Pasha attempted to reduce or cut off their military salaries, while simultaneously increasing taxes on their businesses. Meanwhile, the dismissal of the Jewish financial officials constituted an indirect attack on the beys. The beys controlled the major tax-farms and endowments that were the target of the fiscal reforms of Aḥmed Pasha and his predecessor Ḳara Ibrāhīm Pasha. The reformers hoped to prevent the beys from siphoning off funds into their own pockets, and so to increase the proportion of revenue that reached the imperial government in the case of tax-farms, and the holy cities and various public institutions in the case of the endowments. The Jewish officials were the beys' accomplices within the financial administration: their dismissal signaled Aḥmed Pasha's intentions and undermined the beys' ability to carry on as before.

The Deposition

Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha's plans became known on 3 Dhū'l-Ḥijja 1086 (18 February 1676). Given the far-reaching implications of the proposed reforms for the interests of Egypt's elites, it is not surprising that Aḥmed Pasha encountered determined opposition. Immediately, a crowd of soldiers gathered in Rumayla Square, at the foot of the Muqaṭṭam hill on which stood the citadel, and demanded that Aḥmed Pasha stand down.[27] The demonstration quickly turned violent when the soldiers noticed a treasury official called 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Efendī al-Muqāṭa'jī

26 The *köy dellāli* or *dallāl al-bilād* was the official responsible for recording the title and boundaries of plots of agricultural land. The *kātib al-ḥawāla* was the official responsible for registering *iltizām* (tax-farm) transactions.

27 The dating in Hallāḳ is slightly different: he claims the soldiers learned of Aḥmed Pasha's reforms on 5 Dhū'l-Ḥijja, and assembled at Rumayla Square the following morning. Hallāḳ, *Tārīh-i Mıṣır*, fos. 122a-122b.

descending from the citadel.[28] The soldiers believed that ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Efendī was an advocate of the reforms, on the basis that he had traveled to Constantinople with a delegation but had not returned with the group, instead arriving later in the entourage of the new governor: they attacked him and cut off his head. Envoys traveled back and forth between the soldiers and the governor trying to negotiate a resolution.[29] But Aḥmed Pasha continued to hold out, and eventually the rebels entered the citadel and deposed him by force, placing him under arrest in the house of a local notable. They then appointed Ramaḍān Bey, one of Egypt's leading beys, to serve as *qāʾimmaqām* (acting governor), until a new governor arrived. According to the chronicler ʿĪsāzāde, they forced Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha to sign a *buyuruldu* (order) appointing Ramaḍān Bey to this post.[30]

The soldiers then sent a petition to Constantinople demanding a new governor. The petition was carried to the capital by a delegation consisting of two members of each regiment, led by Cundī Meḥmed Bey and Delī Süleymān Āğā, the former chief eunuch of the imperial harem who had retired to Cairo, and who was presumably chosen because of his connections at the palace.[31] The petition insisted that the soldiers' had not rejected the authority of the Sultan, but had simply responded to the illegitimate actions of Aḥmed Pasha. The petition employed the idiom of patrimonial monarchy: the soldiers claimed that Aḥmed Pasha had violated the implicit contract between the military and the dynasty, but protested their loyalty and appealed to the beneficence of their Sultan. In this case, the Grand Vizier was not impressed by their entreaty. Cundī Meḥmed Bey and Delī Süleymān Āğā were both exiled to the Aegean island of Limnos, where the latter would die the following year; the soldiers in the delegation were allowed to return to Cairo. However, the imperial government had little choice but to comply with

28 Hallāḳ specifies that ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Efendī was the muqāṭaʿjī of the imperial granary (*enbār-i ʿāmire* or *enbār-i gilāl*). In other words, he was in charge of the granary that received the tax paid in kind from Egypt's rural provinces and forwarded it to Istanbul and the holy cities. The position was farmed out as a muqāṭaʿa, hence its holder was called a muqāṭaʿajī. Hallāḳ, *Tārīh-i Mıṣır*, fo. 122b.

29 Most of the chroniclers are silent on the identity of these envoys, but Hallāḳ identifies them as the *Müteferriḳabaşı*, the lieutenant (*katkhudā*) of the Çavuşān and the translator (*tarjumān*). I discuss the significance of this below in the section on the court case.

30 *ʿÎsâ-zâde Târîhi*, 151.

31 On the role of retired imperial harem eunuchs in Ottoman Cairo, see Jane Hathaway's numerous publications. In particular: *Politics of Households*, 139-64; *Beshir Agha: Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Imperial Harem* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005); "The Role of the Kızlar Ağası in 17th/18th-century Ottoman Egypt," *Studia Islamica* 75 (1992), 141-58.

the petitioners' demand for a new governor, appointing ʿAbdurraḥmān Pasha, at that time serving as governor of Baghdad. Ramaḍān Bey was confirmed as acting governor by ʿAbdurraḥmān Pasha's *musallim* (representative), who arrived in Cairo on 17 Ṣafar 1087 (1 May 1676),[32] and he remained in office until ʿAbdurraḥmān Pasha himself arrived on 6 Jumādā'l-ākhar (16 August 1676).

The Court Case

During the interim period between the deposition of Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha and the arrival of ʿAbdurraḥmān Pasha, the soldiers, in alliance with several beys, pursued a legal strategy in order to limit the actions of future governors. The soldiers and beys did not simply use violence to protect their interests, and nor did they rely solely on an appeal to the Sultan rooted in the patrimonial notion of reciprocal rights and duties.[33] They conceived of the governor's authority as limited by law, and used Ottoman legal institutions to try to enforce this.

The soldiers and beys used a legal action in al-Dīwān al-ʿĀlī, one of Cairo's main courts, to set a precedent about how future governors should behave. The ḥujja (legal certificate) issued by the qāḍī at the conclusion of this legal action has survived at the Prime Ministry Archive in Istanbul.[34] It is written in Arabic, as was usual for the vast majority of the Dīwān al-ʿĀlī's records.[35] This ḥujja is

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32 *Zubdat ikhtiṣār*, 157; ʿAbdurraḥmān ibn ʿAbdülkerīm, *Tārīh-i Mıṣr-ı Ḳāhire*, 80a.

33 Fortunately for them, as their petition failed to convince the Sultan. The soldiers' legal strategy commenced a mere seventeen days after the deposition of Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha, which was just about long enough for the petition-bearing delegation to have reached Constantinople, but not long enough for news of the exile of Cundī Meḥmed Bey and Delī Suleymān Āğā to have made it back to Cairo. When launching their legal strategy, the soldiers did not know the outcome of their petition: rather, they were using multiple strategies simultaneously.

34 BOA, A.DVN, nr. 76/29, 20 Dhu'l-Hijja 1086 (6 March 1676). The corresponding entry in the court register cannot be traced because, as mentioned above, the registers of the Dīwān al-ʿĀlī have not survived for this period. The earliest surviving register of the Dīwān al-ʿĀlī dates from 1741-3: Egyptian National Archive, Sijillāt al-Dīwān al-ʿĀlī, register 1.

35 In the earliest surviving register of the Dīwān al-ʿĀlī, which dates from the later period of 1741-3, the majority of cases are recorded in Arabic with only a handful of entries in Turkish. The three other seventeenth-century *ḥujjas* from the Dīwān that I have discovered are also in Arabic: Egyptian National Archive, Ḥujaj sharʿiyya ṣādira min maḥkamat al-Dīwān al-ʿĀlī min sana 1030 ilā 1272, document 1, 23 Dhū'l-Ḥijja 1030

a certified copy of the original: the document is signed and sealed at the top by ʿAbd al-Bāqī, the chief qāḍī of Cairo, and ʿAbdullāh, another qāḍī who held the post of *khilāfa bi'l-Dīwān*. The fact that a certified copy of this ḥujja ended up in the archives of the Dīvān-i Hümāyūn (the Imperial Council) in Constantinople shows that the results of this legal action were communicated to the imperial government.

The Dīwān al-ʿĀlī was located within the citadel compound and was presided over by both a qāḍī and the governor. In this case, there was no governor because the soldiers had recently deposed him. Therefore, Ramaḍān Bey, the acting governor, presided over the case, alongside the judge known as the Qāḍī al-Dīwān. This was the normal procedure: whenever there was no governor present in Cairo, an acting governor chosen from among Egypt's beys would fulfill his duties including presiding over the Dīwān. In this case, Ramaḍān Bey had been appointed in an unorthodox fashion: not by the *musallim* of the incoming governor but by the soldiers who had forcibly deposed the previous governor and who were now the plaintiffs in this legal action. Ramaḍān Bey was an ally of the plaintiffs and this raises justifiable suspicions about the integrity of the process. I discuss this issue in more detail below.

The plaintiffs in the legal action consisted of five beys leading a large group of regimental officers and other officials. The beys were Muḥammad Bey, the former governor of the sub-province of Jirja in Upper Egypt, Azbak Bey, the *defterdār* (treasurer), Qānṣūḥ Bey, the former acting governor,[36] Muḥammad Bey, the former governor of Jidda,[37] and ʿĀlī Bey, who held no particular office but instead held

(8 November 1621); Prime Ministry Archive, Istanbul, Cevdet Maliye 26058, 18 Rajab 1081 (1 December 1670); BOA, A.DVN, nr. 65/34, 28 Jumādā'l-Ūlā 1083 (21 September 1672).

36 Qānṣūh Bey had served as acting governor in 1675 in between the governorships of Ḥusayn Pasha ibn Janbulāṭ and Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha: Aḥmad Shalabī, *Awḍaḥ al-ishārāt*, 173; Paris Fragment, 57b; *Zubdat ikhtiṣār*, 155; *Tevārīh-i Mısr-ı Ḳāhire Haṭṭ-ı Ḥasan Paşa*, 106b. In 1669 he had led a force of 1000 from Egypt to take part in the final days of the siege of Candia, earning the sobriquet *Fātiḥ Jarīd* (Conqueror of Crete). See P. M. Holt, "The Beylicate in Ottoman Egypt during the Seventeenth Century," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies* 24 (1961), 242.

37 This may be the Muḥammad Bey identified by Holt as Muhammad Abū Qūra, who led an expeditionary force to the Ḥijāz against the rebellious *sharīf* Ḥammūda in 1668, and was appointed governor of Jidda for the occasion. Holt, "Beylicate," 238.

the generic title *mīr al-liwā al-sharīf al-sulṭānī*. The group of regimental officers and officials included twenty-one identified by name, along with a further group of "the great and the small from among the āğās of the Müteferriḳa and the senior officers of the seven regiments."[38]

The plaintiffs declared that according to the ancient custom of Egypt – *al-ʿāda wa'l-qānūn al-qadīm* – no one should meet with the governor, nor with any of his aides, unless he was accompanied by a group of three officials: the lieutenant (*katkhudā*) of the Çavuşān regiment, the official translator (*tarjumān*) and the head of the Müteferriḳa regiment (*Müteferriḳabaşı*). The current holders of all three of these posts were among the plaintiffs. They went on to emphasize that no one should enter the Dīwān (i.e. the presence of the governor) before these three officials, nor remain behind after they had left.

They then claimed that five individuals had repeatedly flouted this rule and consulted with the governor alone. The people they accused were the former *kātib al-aytām* Ibrāhīm Efendī,[39] the former commander of the Çerākise regiment Muḥammad, the former *miʿmārbaşı* Ḥasan Āghā,[40] the former *qāḍī al-Dīwān* Meḥmed Efendī Ṭuruḳçizāde, and a man called Muḥammad al-Iskandarānī. The plaintiffs claimed that these five men had been warned about their conduct but had continued regardless; they therefore demanded that they be banished from Cairo and that Meḥmed Efendī Ṭuruḳçizāde be barred from serving as qāḍī at the Dīwān.

The officers and beys were anxious that people might meet with the governor in secret in order to collude with him against their interests. They had recently decapitated the unfortunate ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Efendī after accusing him of just such collusion. The five men whom the plaintiffs accused of violating the established

38 The officers and officials identified by name were: the *rūznāmjī*, the *tarjumān* (translator) of the Dīwān, the *Müteferriḳabaşı* (the head of the Müteferriḳa regiment), the āğās of the Gönüllüyān, Tüfekçiyān, Çerākise, Janissary and ʿAzebān regiments, the *katkhudās* (lieutenants) of the Gönüllüyān, Tüfekçiyān, Çerākise, Janissary, ʿAzebān and Çavuşān regiments, the *başçavuş* (head of the lower-ranking officers) of the Janissary, ʿAzebān and Çavuşān regiments, two former *katkhudās* of the Janissaries, and two former chief scribes (*kātib kabīr*) of the Janissaries.

39 The *kātib al-aytām* (scribe of the orphans) was responsible for distributing the pensions paid to the orphans of deceased soldiers and officials.

40 The *miʿmārbaşı* (head architect) was responsible for the supervision and taxation of construction in Cairo.

custom were allies of Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha: Ḥasan Āghā had been promoted to the position of Müteferriḳabaşı by Aḥmed Pasha on his arrival.[41]

The officers and beys were attempting to limit the interactions of future governors with the Egyptian establishment, essentially confining the governor to his own entourage at all times except when supervised by the three officials the plaintiffs named. These were officials whom the soldiers and beys hoped they could rely on to stand up for their interests, report back on anything threatening, and to prevent the governor from hatching intrigues with a small clique of his own choosing.[42] It is notable that one of the three named officials was the official translator: he may have been included to ensure that the governor could not avoid full transparency by conversing in Turkish.[43]

The plaintiffs did not mention the specific reforms that Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha had attempted, nor did they mention any other potential reforms that might affect their interests. The officers and beys sought to control not what policies future governors might enact, but the processes that governors should follow in arriving at policies. They had a constitutional sensibility: they believed that there were rules by which government should function, and they expected to be represented within the policy-making process.

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41 *Tevārīḫ-i Mıṣr-ı Ḳāhire haṭṭ-ı Ḥasan Paşa*, 107a.

42 When they were founded in the sixteenth century, the Müteferriḳa and Çavuşān were the regiments most closely connected to the Ottoman governor: recruits for the former were drawn from the imperial palace, while the latter was originally formed from members of the defeated Mamluk army who swore allegiance to the Ottoman Sultan and were assigned to serve the governor. However, by the late seventeenth century this connection had weakened considerably: the Müteferriḳa had grown powerful enough during the century to assert its independence, and both regiments were thoroughly integrated into the patronage networks and household-based politics of Cairo. See Hathaway, *Politics of Households*, 36-8; Shaw, *Financial and Administrative Organization*, 193-6. If the tradition claimed by the plaintiffs was genuine, then its implications may have changed over time, as it became more likely that the holders of the three posts would identify with the local political culture rather than with the governor's entourage.

43 Many members of the Egyptian political class were Turcophone, but Arabic was more widely spoken. Of course, the members of this class were of diverse backgrounds, and their native languages included Georgian, Abkhazian, Serbo-Croat and Kurdish in addition to Arabic and Turkish. But Arabic was the lingua franca of this society. In any case, the presence of the tarjumān would have ensured that neither Turkish- nor Arabic-speakers would be disadvantaged in any discussions.

The procedure that the soldiers and beys performed was a common legal procedure in Ottoman and other pre-modern sharīʿa courts. This procedure was called a declaration: *ishhād* or *ikhbār* in Arabic, according to which type of evidence was used. A person or group attended court to make a declaration and have it recorded, thereby establishing a fact. The act of making the declaration with corroborating testimony before witnesses in court, and the qāḍī's acceptance and recording of the declaration, established legally the truth of the fact. The ḥujja resulting from this procedure could then be used as evidence in any future dispute. This procedure was typically used in the courts of Ottoman Cairo to establish that a transaction had taken place, that a debt existed, that someone had appointed a person as his or her agent, or that an artisanal guild had certain accepted practices.

The issue at stake in this case was the accepted practices of Egyptian politics: the correct mode of relationship between the Ottoman governor and the provincial military class. The evidence provided was the testimony of a large group of officers and beys: the practitioners of Egyptian politics.[44] The authority to which the officers and beys appealed was custom: *al-ʿāda wa'l-qānūn al-qadīm*. The officers and beys testified that the requirement that the three named officials supervise all meetings involving the governor was the ancient custom of Egypt. Established custom was considered authoritative and enforceable in Ottoman

44 The statement of the officers and beys is described in the ḥujja as *khabar* (report) rather than *shahāda* (testimony): they *akhbarū* rather than *ashhadū*. According to Islamic legal theory a statement had to meet certain criteria to be considered *shahāda*. In addition to certain formal qualities regarding the words used, the statement had to be a first-hand report of something the witness had seen with his own eyes or heard with his own ears: not something that he supposed or deduced based on other evidence. The object of *shahāda* therefore had to be a specific event that involved specific people and occurred at a specific time and place: it could not be a state of affairs or an opinion. A statement concerning the ancient customs of Egypt could not meet these criteria and so was considered *khabar* rather than *shahāda*. *Khabar* did not carry the same conclusive weight as evidence as *shahāda*, but it was still influential. When a *khabar* statement was introduced in courts in Ottoman Cairo, it was usually made by a large group of people to give it added weight, as opposed to the two adult Muslim witnesses that were necessary for *shahāda* to be effective. For the criteria applicable to *shahāda* according to an Ottoman manual of Ḥanafī law and its commentary, see ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad Shaykhzādah, *Majmaʿ al-anhur sharḥ Multaqā'l-abḥur* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1998), III: 257-66. This edition includes the text of the manual that was the subject of Shaykhzādah's commentary: Ibrāhīm al-Ḥalabī's *Multaqā al-abḥur*.

legal practice, as long as it did not contravene Islamic legal doctrine. Indeed, the theoretical justification for the imperial law promulgated by the Ottoman Sultans, in a context where Islamic law was held to be supreme, was that it codified customary practice. This was reflected in the word used for imperial law: *qānūn*, which, as the phrase used by the plaintiffs in the case discussed here shows, also meant custom. The ambiguity between these two meanings of qānūn is significant and will be discussed in more detail below.

Aftermath

As this court case was a declaration (*ikhbār*) rather than a lawsuit (*daʿwā*), the five officials accused by the officers and beys of breaking the rule were not called to defend themselves, nor did the qāḍī order any punishment of them. Rather, the ḥujja simply states that the proceedings were written up and preserved in order that they may be referred to when necessary: *kutiba dhālika ḍabṭan li'l-wāqiʿ li yurjaʿ ʿind al-iḥtiyāj ilayh*. The purpose of the court case was to establish the fact that, according to the law, the governor could only conduct government business when supervised by the lieutenant of the Çavuşān, the Müteferriḳabaşı and the translator. The ḥujja produced by the court case was to serve as evidence of this fact. The document states that a copy was made in the official register of the Dīwān al-ʿĀlī, to ensure that it was publicly available for reference. The existence of a certified copy of the ḥujja in the archives of the Dīvān-i Hümāyūn (Imperial Council) reflects its dissemination to the imperial government in the Ottoman capital.

One of the chronicles tells us that the five officials whom the soldiers and beys accused of breaking the rule they described were banished to Ibrīm in Nubia.[45] But this was an executive action: according to the chronicle it was accomplished through the issuance of a *buyuruldu* by the acting governor, rather than a qāḍī's judgment. The role of the court in the case studied here was to make law, not to enforce law.

We don't know whether future governors obeyed the rule laid out in this ḥujja. It would be surprising if all did: the tensions between governors and soldiers that this incident illustrates continued. We know that the imperial government in Constantinople was not happy with the outcome of this dispute. As mentioned above, when Cundī Meḥmed Bey and Deli Süleymān Āğā arrived bearing the

45 *Tevārīh-i Mıṣr-ı Ḳāhire haṭṭ-ı Ḥasan Paşa*, 108b.

soldiers' petition, they were promptly exiled to Limnos. A couple of years later, Ramaḍān Bey, the acting governor appointed by the soldiers who presided over the Dīwān in the court case, was appointed to accompany the *irsāliyye*, the annual transfer of tax revenues, to the capital. Protecting the convoy on its journey was an important job that was usually assigned to an Egyptian bey. In this case, however, the selection of Ramaḍān Bey served an ulterior motive: upon arrival in Constantinople he too was exiled to Limnos, and a ferman was sent to Egypt ordering the seizure of his property.[46] In this way, the imperial government sought revenge for his crucial enabling role in the deposition and subsequent legal action.

The Rule of Law

We can justifiably wonder whether the legal process in this case was fair. One of the men presiding over the Dīwān al-ʿĀlī – the acting governor Ramaḍān Bey – had been put there by the officers and beys who brought the case. Alongside Ramaḍān Bey sat a qāḍī, and it was this qāḍī who was responsible for evaluating the evidence presented and for issuing the ḥujja. But in the presence of a large group of armed and powerful men who had recently violently deposed the governor and murdered one of his allies, and in the temporary absence from Cairo of representatives of the imperial government, would the qāḍī have felt able to follow procedure and perform his role objectively? This is a valid question, for which there is no conclusive answer. The ḥujja itself does not betray any coercion or intimidation, but that, of course, is the nature of legal documents, which necessarily present whatever took place as if it happened in accordance with legal procedure.

Given these uncertainties, in what sense does this incident illustrate an emerging rule of law? It does not demonstrate that a robust rule of law had been established at that point in time: no single incident could demonstrate that. What the incident illustrates is the emergence of a concept of the rule of law which saw the relationship between the imperial government and its provincial servants as governed by law, and which consequently made law central to political struggles. The first point is that legal institutions and legal procedures were the means by which this stage of the dispute was conducted. An Ottoman court allowed a challenge to the governor's authority to be brought before it, and its procedures, derived from the manuals of *fiqh* that structured legal practice throughout the

46 Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa, *Zübde-yi Vekayiât*, 87.

early modern Muslim world, enabled the complainants to assert their conception of correct governance.

The second, important point is that the law was the focus of attention. The soldiers had already demonstrated their ability to defy the governor's wishes, and to effect gubernatorial change, through brute force. They did not, however, think that violence was sufficient to protect their interests on a lasting basis. In the court case, the soldiers and beys sought to ground the justification for their actions and their privileges in law. The terrain on which the negotiation over the governor's powers was carried out, and the language in which it was articulated, was that of law.

The legal domain that was being contested in this case was that of qānūn. As mentioned previously, the word qānūn meant custom as well as imperial law, and the phrase employed by the officers and beys, which paired qānūn with the synonym for custom *ʿāda*, appears to indicate the former usage. But the ambiguity between these two meanings was central both to the historical understanding of qānūn-as-law and to the issue at stake in this court case. Historically, qānūn-as-law had been conceptualized as the codification or legitimization of accumulated custom. But how, in practice, did custom become qānūn-as-law? In other words, what gave a particular custom the authority of law? Changes in the mechanism by which custom became law are central to the emergence of the rule of law I am tracking here.

Meanwhile, the subject of this dispute – the correct relationship between the Ottoman governor and his provincial servants – was an issue of public law. Public law fell squarely within the domain of Ottoman qānūn-as-law. The provincial *ḳānūnnāmes* issued by the conquering Sultans of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were compendiums of public law: they laid out in detail the duties and responsibilities of governors, regiments and other officials in particular provinces, alongside provisions for taxation.[47]

47 Public law was not a term used in the seventeenth-century Ottoman Empire, but is useful here as an analytical category. I do not intend it to correspond exactly the scope of public law today; but only to identify the aspects of government and administrative law mentioned in this paragraph. The example of the scope of qānūn most relevant to this article is the Egyptian ḳānūnnāme of 1524, published in Ömer Lûtfi Barkan, *XV. ve XVIncı Asırlarda Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Ziraî Ekonominin Hukukî ve Malî Esasları* (Istanbul: Bürhaneddin Matbaası, 1943), 355-87.

The officers' and beys' claim that the customs of Egyptian politics dictated that the governor should only conduct business when supervised by the lieutenant of the Çavuşān, the Müteferriḳabaşı and the translator was an attempt to define an aspect of public law. Their claim was an assertion that they had the right to determine what qānūn-as-law was, if they could provide evidence. This case, then, illustrates a significant shift in the conception of where lay the authority behind public law and qānūn-as-law. Tezcan argues that the late sixteenth century saw the Sultan's authority to issue qānūn weaken. In the era of the great ḳānūnnāmes, the Sultan's word was law: despite the theoretical fiction that the ḳānūnnāmes codified custom, it was their promulgation by the Sultan that gave them authority.[48] By the late sixteenth century, however, many writers argued that the Sultan was bound by the qānūn of previous Sultans, in particular by the qānūn of Meḥmed the Conqueror. Such writers held that existing ḳānūnnāmes could be embellished or developed, but not reversed. Tradition now had genuine authority to constrain the actions of the Sultan, to the extent that it had been written in the form of a ḳānūnnāme.[49]

Our case suggests that by the late seventeenth century conceptions of qānūn had moved further along the trajectory suggested by Tezcan. Provincial political figures could now assert what qānūn-as-law was based on their understanding of tradition and custom, regardless of whether what they asserted had ever been formally promulgated by a Sultan.[50] This took place in a broader seventeenth-century

48 This does not imply that the Ottoman ḳānūnnāmes were not really based on custom. Customary practice was a vast field, which included many mutually contradictory customs. It was promulgation by the Sultan which gave a particular custom the authority of law.

49 Tezcan, *Second Ottoman Empire*, 49-59; for the relationship between Ottoman qānūn and custom see also Tezcan, "The Kanunname of Mehmed II: A Different Perspective," in *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilization*, ed. Kemal Çiçek et al. (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye, 2000), III: 657-65.

50 It is not clear whether the tradition cited by the plaintiffs in this case had ever been formally promulgated. It was not in the Egyptian ḳānūnnāme of 1524; indeed the Müteferriḳa corps was not established until the year 964 AH (1554-5). It could have been promulgated at a later date through a ferman, or it could have been a practice that emerged organically at some point. It is noteworthy that in Hallāḳ's account of the deposition of Aḥmed Pasha it is these three officials who shuttle back and forth between the governor in the citadel and the crowd of soldiers in Rumayla Square, suggesting that they did have a recognized role as intermediaries. The question whether or not this tradition had been formally recognized previously is not of vital importance to the

context in which texts labeled ḳānūnnāmes were written by bureaucrats and scholars, rather than in the name of the Sultan.[51] Qānūn was becoming a legal literature rather than a set of statutes, and its authority no longer depended on official promulgation. It was becoming a common law, the authority of which was not doubted but the content of which was subject to ongoing debate. In this sense, although its sources and texts were very different, the field of qānūn was beginning to resemble fiqh, which was also an ongoing debate about the correct interpretation of a law with unquestioned authority.

The fact that the officers and beys were able to prove what qānūn was in an Ottoman-Islamic court also suggests a different way of thinking about the relationship between qānūn and sharīʿa. Theoretically, in any pre-modern Muslim context, the sharīʿa was supreme. Historians have demonstrated that the Ottomans conceptualized qānūn as subordinate to the sharīʿa, in the sense that qānūn supplemented and developed the provisions of the sharīʿa, but did not contradict its core principles and doctrines.[52] In this case, qānūn was subordinate to the sharīʿa in a different sense. The officers and beys were able to prove what qānūn was by relying on the procedures of the sharīʿa. These were legal procedures that served to evaluate claims and to establish what was legally true, which were drawn from the procedural chapters of fiqh texts, and which defined the practice of courts across the Ottoman Empire and in the pre-modern Muslim world in general. The epistemology of the sharīʿa determined what qānūn was; or, more precisely, when somebody made a claim about what the qānūn said about a particular matter, he or she had to do so within the epistemological framework provided by the sharīʿa.[53]

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argument here, because the important point is that in March 1676 it was the soldiers' and beys' court action that gave the tradition its authority.

51 For example, the ḳānūnnāme written by Tevḳīʿī ʿAbdurraḥmān Pasha in 1087 AH (1676-7). This has been published: "Osmanlı ḳānūnnāmeleri," *Millī Tetebbuʿlar Mecmūʿası* 1 (1331 AH), 497-544.

52 For example: Uriel Heyd, "Kanun and Shariʿa in Old Ottoman Criminal Justice," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 3 (1969), 1-18; Richard Repp, "Qānūn and Sharīʿa in the Ottoman Context," in *Islamic Law: Social and Historical Contexts*, ed. Aziz al-Azmeh (London: Routledge, 1988), 124-45; Colin Imber, *Ebu's-suʿud: The Islamic Legal Tradition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Boğaç Ergene, "Qanun and Sharia," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Islamic Law*, ed. Rudolph Peters and Peri Bearman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 109-20.

53 We can put this and the previous observation together to suggest that qānūn was increasingly approached and understood using the intellectual framework and tools of the

This court case does not represent an established rule of law: it is neither a final nor a comprehensive statement of the bounds of government. What it illustrates is a constitutional sensibility: a consciousness that law constrained the actions of the government and an understanding of public law as external to the government. Events elsewhere in the seventeenth-century Ottoman Empire suggest a similar consciousness: Tezcan shows that the Janissaries involved in the deposition of Sultans sought fatwas (legal opinions) from prominent ulema justifying the depositions on the grounds that the deposed Sultans had deviated from the law.[54] The case discussed here demonstrates the role of courts and legal procedures, rather than the legal opinions of jurists, in this emerging constitutional mode of political engagement.

This constitutional sensibility put law at the center of the struggle between the governor and the soldiers. The officers and beys wanted to mold the law to their political advantage: they were self-interested users of the law rather than objective legal thinkers. The context of political violence was immediately below the surface during the court case, which took place only seventeen days after the deposition of Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha and the murder of ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Efendī al-Muqāṭaʿjī. The same was true of the fatwas accompanying the depositions of Sultans discussed by Tezcan. With the political stakes high and the potential for violence ever present, it would be naïve to imagine that the muftis issuing fatwas and the qāḍīs issuing judgments in such situations were guided by legal principles alone and were not affected by political calculations and an instinct for self-preservation.

The officers' and beys' determination to bend the law to their purposes demonstrates the law's significance: while it was not robust enough to be immune to political manipulation, it was too important to be ignored and so was necessarily politicized. The right way to understand the extra-legal maneuvering around the court case by both sides – the soldiers' placing of their ally Ramaḍān Bey on the bench before launching their court case; the possible intimidation of the qāḍī; and the imperial government's later punishment of Ramaḍān Bey – is as a form of judicial politics. Judicial politics are a familiar feature of systems where the law plays an important role in structuring and constraining

jurist; a consequence of the increasing prominence of jurists and of what Tezcan calls jurists' law during the seventeenth century. For Tezcan's account of the rise of jurists' law, see *Second Ottoman Empire*, 14-45.

54 Tezcan, *Second Ottoman Empire*, 6, 220. For a broader discussion of the role of law in seventeenth-century political discourse in the Ottoman capital, see ibid., 59-78, 156-75.

government. The salience of the liberal/conservative divide on the US supreme court bench is only the most prominent modern example; others include the Mubarak regime's manipulation of the Egyptian Supreme Constitutional Court, and the reorganization of Turkey's state prosecution service in response to the 2013 corruption inquiry targeting members of the previous government. In the USA, the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Republic of Turkey the law constrains government, albeit to very different degrees, and is a central component of political discourse. The reason that judicial politics are significant in these countries is that the law cannot be ignored: it must be manipulated. Egypt in 1676 saw a similar process: a struggle over the meaning and interpretation of the law that was fought by both the government and other social actors both within the courts through legal procedures and outside the courts through less scrupulous means. A crude judicial politics was the inevitable accompaniment of the emerging rule of law.

Conclusion

The seventeenth century saw a transition in which Ottoman government was increasingly subjected to legal checks and oversight: a conception of the rule of law emerged as a model for the relationship between the Sultan and the ruling class that exercised his power. This change accompanied the growing power and assertiveness of certain sections of the ruling class – the military regiments and provincial notables. These groups pushed a legal idiom of governance as a means of consolidating their rising status and protecting their interests and privileges. It coexisted with a patrimonial idiom, which assumed an unwritten contract between the Sultan and his servants, and which had a longer history. While Tezcan portrayed this legal idiom through an analysis of the historiographical and political writing of the period, this article has used court records to analyze the role of legal institutions and legal procedures in brokering political struggle, showing how the courts were involved in the interpretation of public law.

The rise of the legal idiom as an alternative to the patrimonial idiom reflected the broadening of the ruling class. The more distant the make-up of the military regiments became from the sixteenth-century model of a corps of the Sultan's palace-trained slaves, the less relevant the patrimonial notion of a contract of allegiance seemed. Many of the soldiers in Cairo's regiments in the late seventeenth century had never been trained in any imperial institution, let alone the schools of the palace. Most were free-born; many of those who were slaves were not

ḳapı ḳulu (slaves of the Porte) but rather belonged to the leaders of Egypt's great households. They had bought their way into the ranks using their own or their patrons' capital. The legal idiom suited the impersonal nature of their relationship with the imperial government better than the fiction of a personal bond of fealty.

The increasing role of law in structuring the relationship between the imperial government and its provincial servants was therefore a key aspect of the transformation of the Ottoman Empire from a patrimonial monarchy into an early modern bureaucratic state. The process involved not only the recognition that the Sultan's authority over his provincial servants was governed by rules. It also involved a new understanding of who had the authority to create and interpret those rules. A public law emerged which, unlike the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century ḳānūnnāmes, was external to the Sultanate. The legitimacy of this public law was still rooted in custom, but the authority to define it no longer rested with the Sultan, and was instead claimed by other sections of the ruling class. This process also involved the political empowerment of courts: the sharīʿa courts whose qāḍīs had long adjudicated disputes among Ottoman subjects. The procedures of these courts became the arbiters of disputes over the interpretation of public law, and enabled provincial soldiers, officers and notables to assert and validate their understanding of their relationship with the imperial government.

The Deposition of Defterdār Aḥmed Pasha and the Rule of Law in Seventeenth-Century Egypt

Abstract ■ This article examines the deposition of the Ottoman governor of Egypt by Cairo's soldiers in 1676, and a subsequent court case, in order to illustrate the increasing importance of law and legal institutions in Ottoman politics during the seventeenth century. I show that in the court case, the soldiers sought to constrain the actions of future Ottoman governors by establishing legal limits on their authority. I argue that the soldiers displayed a constitutional sensibility: a belief that the conduct of government was bound by rules, and that courts were the place to establish and enforce these rules. This allows us to see the frequent rebellions in the seventeenth-century Ottoman Empire in a new light: as part of an emerging concept of the rule of law that was central to the empire's transformation from a patrimonial monarchy into an early modern bureaucratic state.

Keywords: Ottoman Egypt, Sharīʿa Courts, Rebellion, Köprülü reforms

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