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AN ULAMA GRANDEE AND HIS HOUSEHOLD

(Upon the occasion of new book concerning the
'Edirne Vak'ası) *

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Rifaat Abou-El-Haj's book on the rebellion of 1703, which cost Sultan Mustafa II his throne and led to his replacement by Ahmed III, is intended as a study of Ottoman politics in general. However, as the author rightly points out, the mechanisms of day-to-day Ottoman politics are usually very poorly documented. Thus it is only from what happened in periods of crisis that we can deduce who in the Ottoman ruling group was able to get what done by whom. The subtitle *The Structure of Ottoman Politics* points to this underlying reality.

The Rebellion of 1703 is built upon the premise that the crucial unit in seventeenth to nineteenth century Ottoman politics, and more particularly during the years which immediately preceded and followed the 1703 crisis, was the vizier and pasha household. An official high in the Ottoman administration was expected to train young men for office, who might be his former slaves, but also young relatives and others who relied upon his protection. It was of considerable importance to the patron that upon their entry into the state bureaucracy, these men be placed in strategic positions, for in a political system in which viziers and other highly placed personages

* Rifaat Abou-El-Haj *The 1703 Rebellion and the Structure of Ottoman Politics* Uitgaven van het Nederlands Historisch-Archeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, LII (Leiden, 1984).

not infrequently lost their lives, such protégés might be able to warn their patron of the dangers confronting him¹.

No doubt people grown to maturity and accustomed to the exercise of power in such a setting developed a specific outlook, which has occasionally been called the 'grandee mentality'². However, the 'grandee mentality' was not limited to that section of the Ottoman administration most immediately subject to the Sultan's will, that is the viziers and pashas. Certainly the Köprülü, whose actions have particularly interested Abou-El-Haj, or the equally ramified family of Nevşehirli Damad İbrahim Paşa, whose ascendancy after the 1703 rebellion has been analyzed by Münir Aktepe³, both contained a remarkable number of viziers and pashas. On the other hand, some of the period's major ulama behaved very similarly to their vizier counterparts. Among the former, the most remarkable is certainly Seyyid Feyzullah, the *şeyhülislam* and mentor of Mustafa II. After all, it was Feyzullah's monopolization of high *ilmiye* posts for members of his immediate family, his desire to acquire riches and his interference in matters beyond his competence as *şeyhülislam*, which precipitated the crisis of 1703.

To date, Seyyid Feyzullah's actions have been little analyzed, and the motives which the chroniclers have attributed to him have been accepted without further investigation. This is all the more surprising since it seems that alone among all the major political figures of the time, Seyyid Feyzullah has left two autobiographical accounts. One of them deals with his ancestors, and is available in a modern Turkish summary by Fahri Çetin Derin⁴. A second memoir, in which Seyyid Feyzullah recounts his own fortunes and those of his immediate family right down to 1113/1701-02 has been translated

1 Carter Findley, «Patrimonial Household Organization and Factional Activity in the Ottoman Ruling Class», in: *Türkiye'nin Sosyal ve Ekonomik Tarihi (1071-1920)*, ed. Osman Okyar, Halili Inalcık (Ankara, 1980), p. 232-233.

2 Findley, «Patrimonial Household», p. 230.

3 M. Münir Aktepe, *Patronna İsyanı (1730)*, İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları No. 808. (İstanbul, 1958).

4 Fahri Ç. Derin, «Şeyhülislam Feyzullah Efendi'nin Nesebi Hakkında bir Risâle», *Tarih Dergisi*, X, 14 (1959), 97-103.

from the original Arabic into modern Turkish⁵. Given the many details that Feyzullah Efendi tells us about his family life (not even omitting the names of his principal wives and the dates of their deaths, and the names of all his children, daughters included) we can assume that the text was intended for the edification of his family and household. Thus one can assume that, at the height of his influence, Feyzullah Efendi described himself in his memoirs in such a manner as he wished his family and followers to see him.

The Family of Feyzullah Efendi

Under these circumstances, it is worth noting how the author reacted *vis à vis* the accusations of nepotism, undue enrichment and transgression of his prerogatives as *seyhülislam*, and how he described his ties to Sultan Mustafa II. After all, in Rifa'at Abou-El-Haj's view, this latter relationship, and particularly Sultan Mustafa's inability to separate himself from his former tutor, was one of the principal reasons why the rebellion took the course it did⁶.

Seyyid Feyzullah certainly does not deny his strong sense of family loyalty, quite to the contrary. On the one hand, he claims to be a descendant of Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi's mentor Şemseddin-i Tebrizî⁷. To claim an illustrious descent of this kind was common enough in ulama and dervish circles. Much more remarkable is his emphasis upon his family's Iranian descent—he must have known very well that fact did not exactly add to his popularity in Istanbul⁸. In Seyyid Feyzullah's view, filial piety seems to have constituted one of the principal virtues; thus he comments upon the fact

5 Ahmed Türek, F. Çetin Derin, «Feyzullah Efendi'nin kendi Kaleminden Hal Tercümesi», *Tarih Dergisi*, 23 (1969), 205-218; 24 (1970), 69-93. The last date mentioned in the text is the year 1113, which corresponds to 1701-02 (24, 72-73).

6 Abou-El-Haj, *The 1703 Rebellion* pp. 10, 18.

7 Derin, «Feyzullah Efendi'nin Nesebi», 98-99. One wonders whether Feyzullah may have emphasized this descent because he wished to compare his relationship to Sultan Mustafa to the relationship between Şemseddin Tebrizî and Mevlâna Celâleddin. Şemseddin was known to have aroused violent hostility in Mevlâna's entourage. But that is of course pure speculation.

8 Derin, «Feyzullah Efendi'nin Nesebi», 99-100.

that he was able to serve his maternal grandmother in her old age, and that his presence in Erzurum in 1693 allowed him to attend his father on his deathbed⁹.

Moreover Seyyid Feyzullah's filial piety was extended toward his patron and mentor Şeyh Mehmed Vanî Efendi, whose help permitted him to leave the narrow circle of Erzurum ulama and embark upon a career in the capital. In the years after 1666, Şeyh Vanî was one of the principal figures at the Ottoman court, although he limited himself to a function as the Sultan's preacher and would not let his followers accept *kadıships* either¹⁰. Feyzullah Efendi's account of the beginning of his relationship to Şeyh Vanî is in itself of interest, for Vanî Efendi is described as the brilliant protégé of Feyzullah's father. When Şeyh Vanî had made a career for himself in Istanbul, he brought the son of his former mentor to the capital and introduced the young man at court, while at the same time cementing family ties through successive marriages between two of his daughters and Seyyid Feyzullah. Feyzullah in his memoir never permits himself any overt criticism of the *şeyh*; however he does mention that he regretted having to turn down the offer of an *ilmiye* position at Vanî Efendi's behest¹¹. Later he recounts his own acceptance of high office, including the position of *şeyhülislam*; but glosses over Şeyh Vanî's reaction to his behaviour.

Feyzullah Efendi and Sultan Mustafa.

After having thus depicted himself as a filial son and dutiful protégé, Seyyid Feyzullah describes with some pride the careers of his sons. In no way does the author indicate any awareness of the fact that patronage may be overdone; quite to the contrary, he records without hesitation that a fifteen-year old son of his held

9 Derin, «Feyzullah Efendi'nin Nesebi», 102-103, 100. Feyzullah Efendi also mentions that his maternal grandmother was knowledgeable in *hadis* and *tefsir* (p. 102).

10 Türek, Derin, «Feyzullah Efendi», *Tarih Dergisi*, 23, 214; 24, 70. On the rise of Şeyh Vanî from a hostile (Mevlevî) point of view: Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, *Mevlâna'dan Sonra Mevlevîlik* (Istanbul, 1953), p. 166-167.

11 Türek, Derin, «Feyzullah Efendi», *Tarih Dergisi*, 23, 214.

a position of *müderris* in a coveted *medrese*¹². On the other hand, Feyzullah never tires of emphasizing that he owed his present position to the support of Mustafa II, whom he in turn attempted to serve by sound advice. In outlining his relationship to his former student and present protector, Feyzullah does not deny that under the previous rulers, when he was banished to Erzurum, he remained in affectionate correspondence with his former charge¹³. Certainly, the author does not *expressis verbis* admit to having fomented an intrigue in order to place Prince Mustafa upon the throne. But when reading between the lines, the twentieth-century reader does gain the impression that something of the sort probably happened.

In the context of Feyzullah Efendi's attitude toward patrons and protégés it is worth reconsidering the behaviour of Sultan Mustafa. If we take into account the loyalty which Feyzullah Efendi prided himself upon having shown his own mentor, it may be assumed that he tried with some success to instil similar feelings in his royal protégé. Rifa'at Abou-El-Haj attempts to explain Sultan Mustafa's attachment to Feyzullah Efendi by reference to modern views of personality development¹⁴. There may of course be some truth in this assumption. But looking at the matter from a different angle, one might also assume that Sultan Mustafa had been brought up in the view, probably common enough especially among high-ranking ulame, that loyalty toward a former teacher-mentor was one of the chief virtues in an Ottoman gentleman. What was unusual in Sultan Mustafa was the fact that throughout his career as a ruler, he never adopted the «Machiavellian» view that a ruler should treat human relationships as purely a means and never as an end¹⁵. Maybe his failure to make this transition, for which the

12 Türek, Derin, «Feyzullah Efendi», *Tarih Dergisi*, 24, 73.

13 Türek, Derin, «Feyzullah Efendi», *Tarih Dergisi* 24, 81.

14 Abou-El-Haj, *The 1703 Rebellion*, p. 10-12.

15 In this context, the following anecdote is maybe of interest: After Mustafa II's deposition, the reigning Sultan Ahmed III, as a polite gesture, supposedly sent a shara from one of his festive meals to his brother in the *kafes*. In reply, Sultan Mustafa is recorded to have sent a message that he would rather his brother concern himself with Şeyh Feyzullah's fate, who at that time was being ignominiously paraded about Rumeli. This story was related by Georg of Balat, an Armenian scholar writing in 1783, and since his sources are not known, we can not say whether there is any truth to the story. But even if

rites de passage of his ascension to the throne should have prepared him, can be explained by the reasons given by Rifa'at Abou-El-Haj; that we will never know.

Wealth and the Abuse of Position.

Through family ties, Seyyid Feyzullah belonged to the Halveti order of dervishes; although, if Abou-El-Haj's interpretation is correct, at a certain stage of the 1703 rebellion at least the Istanbul Halvetis may have dissociated themselves from their most compromising member¹⁶. Affiliation with a dervish order, and his scholarly training, were important in determining the discourse used by Seyyid Feyzullah when referring to wealth and worldly honours. Particularly during the period of disgrace which followed his first tenure of office as a *şeyhülislam*, but during his times of prosperity as well, Seyyid Feyzullah claims to have devoted himself to study and teaching, including the composition of supercommentaries to well-known scholarly works.

This scholarly interest might be taken to indicate a certain indifference toward the affairs of this world¹⁷. But it does not seem that Feyzullah Efendi saw it quite this way. Not only does he refer with some satisfaction to the large house which he built in Erzurum¹⁸. At a suitable occasion, he also claims that he is cutting short a list of honours showered upon him by the Sultan, for fear of seeming presumptuous and boring the reader¹⁹. Moreover when listing the blessings which he hopes his sons and daughters will enjoy during their lifetimes, wealth and the corresponding generosity are listed after long life, knowledge, good character, and piety²⁰. Thus it would appear that the accumulation of wealth did not to Feyzul-

the anecdote is totally invented, it would still be useful as an indicator of the image that Sultan Mustafa projected, presumably in Palace circles. Compare Hrand D. Andreasyan, «Balathı Georg'a göre Edirne Vak'ası», *Tarih Dergisi*, XI, 15 (1960), 47-64.

16 Abou-El-Haj, *The 1703 Rebellion*, p. 35.

17 Türek, Derin, «Feyzullah Efendi», *Tarih Dergisi*, 24, 80.

18 Türek, Derin, «Feyzullah Efendi», *Tarih Dergisi*, 24, 80.

19 Türek, Derin, «Feyzullah Efendi», *Tarih Dergisi*, 24, 75.

20 Türek, Derin «Feyzullah Efendi», *Tarih Dergisi*, 24, 91.

lah appear as something that might be defended openly, for instance as a source of political power. This fact is worth noting, since Mustafa II's brother and successor Ahmed III was at least during the early years of his reign, sometimes credited with taking just that approach to wealth²¹. Feyzullah Efendi often justifies his acceptance of wealth with the symbolic connotation that certain items may carry; thus they may be valued as gifts coming from the ruler. But in spite of these hesitations, it does not seem that his affiliation with ulama and dervishes made it impossible for Feyzullah Efendi to admit that he enjoyed the satisfaction which worldly goods can bring.

In other sections of his memoirs, Feyzullah refers to the manner in which he used his official position and influence with the Sultan. One of the kinds of discourse he employs is, predictably, the claim that his actions have been misrepresented by people who envied his power and influence. One conflict, only marginally political in its origins, is worth citing in this respect: Seyyid Feyzullah's horse is found grazing close to the Palace, on a lawn which the Sultan had specifically ordered was not to be used in this fashion²². Seyyid Feyzullah places the blame on the gardener, and denies any responsibility for the infraction, while his enemies were able to convince the Sultan of Feyzullah's overestimation of his own importance and bring about his momentary disgrace. If the stories related by Balath Georg eighty years after the event can be taken seriously even in part, it would seem that Seyyid Feyzullah was considered capable of much more serious offenses than the one cited above, but the accusations all boil down to the claim that he was usurping Sultanic prerogatives. Supposedly, Feyzullah was even accused, whether seriously or not is unknown, of attempting to place his own family upon the throne²³. Thus Feyzullah, in the sections of his memoirs that deal with his political activity, again uses the technique that we have already observed when discussing his attitude toward riches: He does not deny what might be considered the 'hard core' of the charge, but recounts events as if they were in a

21 Aktepe, *Patrona Isyanı*, p. 3.

22 Türek, Derin, «Feyzullah Efendi», *Tarih Dergisi*, 24, 73.

23 Andreasyan, «Balath Georg», 49.

minor key, while claiming that he acted out of motives very different from those attributed to him by his accusers.

In this context, it is worth dwelling upon the image which Seyyid Feyzullah tries to project with respect to his own political activity. When on his way back to the capital after his temporary exile in Erzurum, he describes himself as assieged by *reaya* who present to him their grievances concerning injustices suffered under the previous régime, and to whom he promises redress. Thus one might say that in spite of being a member of the ulama, he proposes to act in the role of a vizier²⁴. A similar conclusion can be drawn from Feyzullah's accounts of the campaign of Sultan Mustafa. First of all, Feyzullah Efendi's account is notable for its realism; thus he describes the battle of Zenta as a major defeat, while other Ottoman chroniclers tend to gloss over this uncomfortable fact as best they can²⁵. Feyzullah Efendi also voices his opinion that Ottoman army movements prior to the battle had been very badly planned, and seems to imply that the incumbent Grand Vizier, who got himself cut off and killed, had done something to deserve his fate. Moreover, Şeyhülislam Feyzullah describes himself as suggesting alternative campaign plans, encouraging the soldiers, and threatening those who seemed about to flee. Feyzullah also emphasizes that he performed these actions sword in hand, thus assuming an explicitly military role. Possibly he wished to recall the warrior dervishes active during the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans, although his memoirs make no reference to such an intention. But given the division of functions which Ottoman ulama of the later seventeenth century considered appropriate²⁶, it is very probable that Sultan Mustafa's commanders resented the 'vizier-like' pose of the *şeyhülislam*.

Feyzullah's Household : The Long View

Thus if one considers that the Ottoman political system of the later seventeenth century was in fact based upon a division of func-

24 Türek, Derin, «Feyzullah Efendi», *Tarih Dergisi*, 24, 83. Abou-El-Haj, *The 1703 Rebellion*, p. 57.

25 Abou-El-Haj, *The 1703 Rebellion*, p. 54.

26 Abou-El-Haj, *The 1703 Rebellion*, p. 28.

tions, one might conclude that Feyzullah's attempt to establish himself as *şeyhülislam* plus vizier was what principally led to his downfall. Moreover after Feyzullah and his eldest son, the *nakibülleşraf* Fethullah, had been killed in the aftermath of the 1703 rebellion, one would expect the late *şeyhülislam*'s household to have disappeared from the political scene. In the short run, that was what did in fact happen. The family was banished to Bursa—the distance from its original power base in Erzurum is worth noting. But in the course of the 1730 rebellion, we find the descendants of Seyyid Feyzullah again taking an active role, establishing contact with members of the Köprülü household, and holding important *ilmiye* positions in Istanbul²⁷. Thus it would appear that Seyyid Feyzullah, even though he failed to realize his ambitions to function as a combination of vizier *cum şeyhülislam*, did in fact succeed in establishing his family at the centre of Ottoman power. Or to put it in a slightly different fashion, one might say that he managed to retain for his descendants positions not unworthy of those gained by his own father-in-law Şeyh Mehmed Vanî.

At present not many monographs exist concerning the major ulama families of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. One would need a close study of, for instance, the household and family of Sadeddin Efendi, another Iranian who made a brilliant career at the Ottoman court, and one of whose descendants was to marry Sultan Osman II²⁸. Only when several such studies have been undertaken will it be possible to determine in what ways the major ulama households functioned in the same manner as vizier and pasha households, and in what way the two differed.

Conclusion.

Abou-El-Haj's work, as well as Münir Aktepe's study of the 1730 (Patrona) rebellion, suggests that one might view Istanbul politics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a struggle for influence among the major households, whether ulama or vizier-pasha in character. Moreover while a comparison between the rebellion of 1687, which cost Mehmed IV his throne, and the events of 1703

²⁷ Aktepe, *Patrona Isyanı*, p. 111.

²⁸ *IA*, article Osman II (by Şinasi Altundağ)

has already been attempted by Abou-El-Haj, one might go much further in this direction²⁹. Particularly a comparison between 1703 and 1730 might tell us a great deal about the structure of Ottoman politics, and hopefully someone will undertake this task in the near future.

At the same time, it must be kept in mind that Ottoman upper-class politics did not take place in a vacuum. Rank-and-file ulama or janissaries, as well as Istanbul craftsmen and under certain circumstances even villagers, were able to make use of factional disputes within the ruling group to voice their own complaints, while in other cases the rank and file might become a pawn in Ottoman upper-class politics. Feyzullah Efendi was quite aware of this relationship, when he refers to the petitions of the *reaya* as one of his motives for reentering the Istanbul political arena. In his 1958 monograph, Münir Aktepe has devoted much of the available space to the context of the rebellion, that is the economic and social discontents that accompanied the 'Tulip' period, and the political problems generated by the war in Iran³⁰. In comparison the actual events of 1730 recede into the background. More recently Ahmet Tabakoğlu, and on a more sophisticated level Yavuz Cezar, have laid bare the workings of eighteenth-century Ottoman financial administration, and in so doing, have permitted a clearer view of how the 'great households' acquired their wealth³¹. Moreover it would seem that we need a picture of Ottoman politics which takes into account that the 'great households' of viziers, paşas, and high-level ulama operated in the capital at the same time that the *ayan* established their influence in the provinces. As a result of all this preliminary work, a far more comprehensive view of the structure of Ottoman politics has become possible, than could be obtained while the Palace chroniclers remained the major source material. Now the time has come to produce such a synthesis.

29. Abou-El-Haj, *The 1703 Rebellion*, p. 44-49.

30. Abou-El-Haj, *The 1703 Rebellion*, p. 2 also mentions the possibility that Ottoman choices in foreign policies were sometimes influenced by factional struggles at the centre.

31. Ahmet Tabakoğlu, *Gerileme Dönemine Girerken Osmanlı Maliyesi* (Istanbul, 1985).

Yavuz Cezar, *Osmanlı Maliyesinde Bunalım ve Değişim Dönemi (XVIII. yy.dan Tanzimat'a Mali Tarih)* (Istanbul, 1986).