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NAİMÂ, KÖPRÜLÜ, AND THE GRAND VEZİRATE

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One of the most famous stories in Ottoman history is the account of the appointment of Köprülü Mehmed Paşa in 1656.¹ This story, first told in the early eighteenth century by the historian Naimâ, relates that Köprülü entered into a contractual agreement with the sultan when he was appointed grand vezir. Naimâ's account has been repeated by most subsequent historians of the Ottoman Empire, both by such Ottomans as Mustafa Nuri Paşa, Alâ, and Ahmed Râsim, and also by European Ottomanists including von Hammer and Jorga.² More recently Naimâ's story has appeared in Uzunçarşılı's history and in the article on «Köprülüler» in the İslâm Ansiklopedisi,³ and has thus gained a very secure place in Ottoman historiography. The story is not only popular among scholars, but it is also one of the few «facts» of Ottoman history that Turkish students retain after their schooling. Yet, on a closer reading of Naimâ, there appear to be sufficient grounds on which to suspect the authenticity of this long accepted «fact».

In the following section I shall attempt to analyse Naimâ's account and submit that it should not be taken as the literal truth. In later sections this article also raises a more general question. For too long now the particular event or person has been overemphasized in Ottoman historiography. Consequently, our understanding of general trends and developments has suffered. Naimâ's story of Köprülü's appointment is an example of such particular events. The incident has generally been considered as the extraordinary beginning of Köprülü's extraordinary career as grand vezir, indeed of the whole Köprülü era. But even if the Naimâ story were to be accepted literally, it should be interpreted not as a unique event but as a part of a general seventeenth-century trend towards restoring the traditional authority of the grand vezir. There are significant precedents within this trend which cannot be overlooked in a consideration of Köprülü's term of office.

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Mehmed IV was seven years old when he came to the throne in 1648. His father, İbrahim I, had been deposed and murdered in a janissary uprising with the sanction of the *ulema*. Political chaos, both in the capital and in the provinces, plagued the first eight years of Mehmed IV's reign. This is usually attributed to the fact that the child-sultan was unable to take control of his empire. Theoretically, the Ottoman political system was capable of handling the situation if and when the sultan, the kingpin of the system, was unable to assume his full duties. The grand vezir, as his absolute deputy, and the

sultan's highly respected mother, the **valide sultan**, had the theoretical power to assure that the system functioned without an active kingpin.

It was not a novelty for the empire to have a child on the throne, especially in the seventeenth century--the novelty in 1648 was that there were two **valide sultans**. The child-sultan's mother, Turhan Sultan, was herself not more than twenty-one years old at the time of her son's accession. On the other hand, Mehmed IV's grandmother, Kösem Sultan, had been at the center of palace and government politics for decades. She may have assumed that the inexperienced Turhan would be easy to dominate, but instead an intense struggle developed between the two. Three years later the younger **valide**, supported by most palace members, emerged victorious.

While the child-sultan was growing up amidst these palace intrigues, the main problem of the empire remained the war with Venice over Crete. An immense strain on the empire's finances, the war dragged on through the inability of the Ottomans to match Venetian sea power. Over the years the Venetians had effected a fairly successful blockade of the Dardanelles, disrupting Ottoman lines of communication with Crete and preventing the passage of food supplies to Istanbul from Egypt and other Mediterranean provinces. Early in the summer of 1656, a few months before Köprülü was appointed, the Ottomans suffered their worst defeat of the war when their navy was completely routed at the Dardanelles in an attempt to break the Venetian blockade. Following up their victory, the Venetians captured the key Aegean islands of Lemnos (Limni) and Tenedos (Bozcaada), which, situated just outside the Dardanelles, gave them full command of the straits.

In the course of these events, as Naimâ relates, Köprülü came out of retirement in the provinces in May 1656 to join the train of Boynu Yaralı Mehmed Paşa, the newly appointed grand vezir who was travelling from his previous post in Aleppo to Istanbul.¹ The grand vezir's party arrived in the capital in early July; Boynu Yaralı promised Köprülü a new post and provided him with a residence while waiting for a suitable position to become available. In the meantime Köprülü contacted some of his old friends who had connections with the palace. The group began to meet secretly to listen to Köprülü's ideas on how he would handle the situation if he were in power and decided to work towards the appointment of Köprülü as grand vezir. It seems that in early September, following a special meeting of the imperial council which discussed the steps to be taken to counter the Venetian threat, Mehmed IV and Turhan Sultan lost all hope that the grand vezir, Boynu Yaralı Mehmed Paşa, would be able to cope with the situation. It seems also that they decided on Köprülü as the most likely candidate, for, according to Naimâ's account, on September 13 Köprülü asked for an audience with Turhan Sultan to state his conditions for accepting the grand vezirate. His request was granted; in the evening a palace official secretly took him to meet with the **valide sultan**.

The four conditions Köprülü specified were that all his requests be granted by the sultan, and that nothing contrary to such requests be sustained; that the grand vezir not be pressured by any source in the granting of any office, so that the most deserving men might be employed; that no vezir or other official (**vekil**) be allowed to rival or impinge upon the grand vezir's power and independence of action; that no gossip-mongers be allowed to slander the grand vezir. Turhan Sultan allowed Köprülü all his conditions and took a solemn oath that she would honor them. The next day Mehmed IV handed Köprülü the seal of office and repeated Köprülü's conditions one by one, declaring his intention to honor the agreement with his grand vezir.

Nāimā's description gives a formal, ceremonial atmosphere to the meeting between Köprülü and Turhan Sultan; a few pages later he refers to the *uhūd ü mevâsik*--oaths and compacts -- between the sultan and his mother on the one hand and the grand vezir on the other.⁵ Thus, the impression the reader receives is that this was a contractual and binding agreement.

Nāimā is the only source for this extraordinary «contract» between sovereign and grand vezir. No contemporary chronicler, neither Karaçelebizâde Abdülazîz Efendi, nor Vecîhî, nor Abdî Paşa, nor Mehmed Halife refer to it.⁶ Furthermore, not even Nāimā's contemporary Silahtar makes any mention of it.⁷

Is it all possible that Nāimā had information not available to other Ottoman chroniclers and historians? We know that the first part of Nāimā's history was dedicated to Amcazâde Hüseyin Paşa, Köprülü's nephew and the sixth member of the family to rise to the grand vezirate (1697-1702).⁸ It has been suggested that through this connection Nāimā had access to inside stories on Köprülü,⁹ and, in fact, Nāimā has many other details on Köprülü's term of office missing from the contemporary chronicles. One might be tempted to think, then, that only Nāimā knew the full story of Köprülü's compact with the sultan. Yet it is difficult to imagine that the contemporary chroniclers were unaware of this event if it was at all significant. It is true that Karaçelebizâde was in exile in 1656, and Vecîhî, not intimately connected with the palace, may not have been well-informed of the full details. On the other hand Abdî Paşa (then Ağa) and Mehmed Halife were in the palace inner service (*enderûn*) at the time Köprülü was appointed. One would certainly expect **them** to have known.

True, Nāimā states, in a different context, that there were people in the palace who, unaware of Köprülü's contract, attempted to plot against him soon after he was appointed.¹⁰ If one were to accept this it would seem to explain Abdî's and Mehmed Halife's ignorance of the situation, for their positions in the palace were not as high as that of the unsuccessful plotters. But how are we to reconcile this statement of Nāimā, that the contract was not publicly known, with the view that the Köprülü contract was the extraordinary beginning of Köprülü's term of office? One would think that had there been such a contractual agreement, it would most likely have been made public for all to hear and take notice of to prevent precisely the kind of plotting that Nāimā mentions. But for the sake of argument let us assume that there was no official announcement. Nāimā himself writes that just before giving Köprülü the seal of office the sultan repeated the conditions Köprülü had stated to Turhan Sultan the night before and expressed his consent. Word of this «contract» would have immediately spread all around the palace and the capital through the palace officials who would have been present at the appointment ceremony.

Perhaps, then, there is a simpler explanation for the fact that Nāimā is the sole source for Köprülü's contract. It seems to me that Nāimā's account is an embellishment of what really took place--an innocent attempt to dramatize the appointment of the illustrious ancestor of his patron, the event which marked the beginning of the Köprülü dynasty of grand vezirs.

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Questioning the authenticity of Nāimā's story is of relatively minor importance in and of itself; the more significant task is to place this incident in its proper historical

framework. Even when we reject Naimâ's story of a contract as an exaggeration, there remains the fact that Köprülü enjoyed the full trust and confidence of the sultan and the valide, and that the grand vezirate regained its traditional prominence during Köprülü's five years in office. How extraordinary was this success of Köprülü's? Is it to be explained only in terms of personalities? What, if any, are the circumstances that aided Köprülü's success? To be able to answer these questions we have to return once again to the historical background, this time to note those aspects of the political climate which had a bearing on the office of the grand vezir.

Following long established Islamic precedent, the grand vezir had always occupied highest position in the political and administrative structure of the Ottoman Empire. In the *Kanunnâme* of Mehmet II, which codified most of the practices and precedents of earlier sultans, the grand vezir was referred to as *vekil-i mutlak*, absolute deputy of the sultan.¹¹ Ottoman political writers, too, always stressed the significance of the grand vezirate.¹² Lütü Paşa, who himself had been Asaph to Süleyman I, centered his political views on the grand vezirate in his *Asâf-nâme*. In the mid-sixteenth century Lütü Paşa was concerned with sustaining the greatness the empire had achieved. For the seventeenth century writers the situation was very different: Koçi Bey and Kâtip Çelebi faced the much more immediate problem of arresting a downward trend and regaining the glories of a past «golden age». In the interval between Lütü Paşa and Koçi Bey the empire had experienced a violent upheaval. The system had yet to adjust itself to the new conditions accompanying that upheaval.

Ottomans themselves felt that lack of effective leadership was one of the main causes of their troubles. The sultans of the seventeenth century lacked the grooming and the experience that their predecessors had had by the time they came to the throne. Furthermore, by a strange coincidence, of the six sultans in the first half of the seventeenth century, four were mere children at the time they ascended the throne.¹³ Another, Mustafa I, suffered from a severe mental disorder; and the remaining sultan, Ibrahim I, was enough of an eccentric, if not a psychotic, to be nicknamed «the Mad» in Ottoman historiography. It was a natural consequence that when the sultan was impressionable, the importance of those who were closest to him--the people of the place -- grew immensely. Palace officials gained a far greater measure of influence than their offices traditionally had accorded them. What became important in terms of power was not necessarily the office one held, but one's proximity to the source of power, that is, the person of the sultan. The authority of the grand vezirate had eroded with the rise of the palace cliques and influences beyond the control of the vezir.

Koçi Bey's memorandum to Murad IV¹⁴ encompasses many aspects of the Ottoman system but stresses throughout the importance of strong leadership. The author's essential point is that «the sultan is the heart of the world; when the heart is strong the body too will be strong»;¹⁵ that the sultan should interest himself in the affairs of the empire; and that the grand vezir, his deputy, should regain his paramount position, free from any interference.¹⁶ In the last decade of Murad IV's reign Koçi Bey must have had the satisfaction of witnessing his master's vigorous and successful rule in accordance with his own Machiavellian adage that «mankind is ruled by subjugation, not by leniency.»¹⁷

Kâtip Çelebi's treatise,¹⁸ as its title *Dustûr el-amel li-islâh el-halel* (*The Guide to Action for the Rectification of Defects*) indicates, was written with the purpose of diagnosing the ills in the Ottoman system and suggesting ways of curing them. It is

similar to Koçi Bey's memorandum of 1630 both in intent and in conclusion; Kâtip Çelebi calls for a strong leader--whether it be sultan or grand vezir, a *sâhib es-sayf* (master of the sword) to pull the empire out of its difficulties. However, unlike Koçi Bey, Kâtip Çelebi had no immediate audience. In spite of the fact that he enjoyed the respect of some of the highest Ottoman officials, Kâtip Çelebi did not even make his study public when he wrote it in 1653.¹⁹ It may be significant that only a few months before Köprülü was brought to power, this treatise was finally brought to the attention of Mehmed IV -- and probably also of his mother--when one of Kâtip Çelebi's patrons, Hüsamzâde Abdurrahman Efendi, was *şeyh ül-İslâm* (May 1655 - March 1656).²⁰

In addition to the intellectual climate favoring a return to a powerful grand vezir, we must note certain developments of the 1650's which indicate a genuine desire on the part of Turhan Sultan and her young son to achieve that result. The first grand vezir to be appointed after Turhan Sultan eliminated her rival, Kösem Sultan, was Gürcü Mehmed Paşa. He was very old, and it was thought that with all his experience he would be the right man for the office. It was soon obvious, however, that Gürcü Mehmed Paşa was not what Turhan Sultan was looking for.

It seems that Turhan Sultan wanted to review several candidates for the grand vezirate before she dismissed Gürcü Mehmed Paşa. Since the latter made a practice of banishing all potential rivals to provincial posts, Turhan asked him to recall all banished paşas in the spring of 1652. The grand vezir complied reluctantly, and even so it was only under persistent pressure from the young *valide* that he finally recalled Tarhuncu Ahmed and Köprülü Mehmed Paşas sometime later than the other banished paşas. Gürcü Mehmed must have considered Tarhuncu and Köprülü as his most formidable rivals (which, incidentally, runs against the old supposition that Köprülü remained an obscure figure in Ottoman politics right up to his appointment). Events proved that the old grand vezir was justified in his fears, for he was replaced by Tarhuncu Ahmed Paşa only a few days after the latter's return to the capital.²¹

Whether Köprülü had been considered as an alternative and, if so, why Tarhuncu was preferred we cannot say with any degree of certainty. But it is significant for our purposes that upon his appointment, Tarhuncu had an audience with the sultan which foreshadowed Köprülü's appointment four years later. At this audience Tarhuncu submitted requests relating to the collection of government revenues and the discontinuation of certain perquisites granted by his predecessor. Tarhuncu was promptly given two imperial decrees supporting his requests.²² Naimâ relates the story of Tarhuncu's agreement with the sultan without the aura of solemnity and ceremony that he accords to that of Köprülü; nevertheless it provides a striking precedent.

Tarhuncu's requests seem much more specific and therefore less dramatic than those of Köprülü. Yet it appears that these requests, which seem to have been simple measures of economy, were in fact designed to curb the power of palace officials. Tarhuncu's predecessor, Gürcü Mehmed Paşa, had come to office after Turhan Sultan, with the support of the palace personnel, had defeated the coalition of Kösem Sultan and the janissary commanders in September 1651. Owing his position to palace officials, Gürcü was reluctant to press them for funds some of them owed the imperial treasury and was willing to create sumptuously paid new positions at their behest. Tarhuncu aimed at breaking up this partnership, and Turhan Sultan supported him to the point of dismissing the chief black eunuch, Lala Süleyman Ağa, who had been her main ally in her struggle against Kösem. Tarhuncu, then, started his term of office enjoying the

full backing of the sultan. But he lost this backing and was executed less than a year later.

A development which took place in 1654 can be regarded as another manifestation of Turhan Sultan's concern in restoring authority to the office of grand vezir. In this year the sultan gave Tarhuncu's successor a building which was to serve both as a residence and an office. This was the first time that a grand vezir had his offices separate from the imperial palace, and therefore it has been seen as the formalization of the «transfer of the effective control and conduct of affairs from the palace to the Grand Vizierate.»²³

Prior to 1656, then, there were both political treatises which urged the strengthening of the position of the grand vezir, and also specific steps taken in that direction. The existence of a tacit if not public contract is the more plausible when we consider the sultan's personal insecurity in 1656-57. In July 1656, after the worst setback in the war with Venice, there were rumors of a plot to depose him.²⁴ A foreign observer of the Ottoman political scene provides further information: Nicholas Rålamb, the Swedish ambassador to Istanbul from May 1657 to February 1658, records that at the time of his arrival in Istanbul the public ascribed all setbacks and troubles to the sultan's personal ill fortune, «so that upon the least unlucky turn and new disgrace in their public affairs he stood in great hazard of a revolution.»²⁵ In the face of such a threat the young sultan and his mother did not have much choice but to tie all their hopes to the success of a new grand vezir.

This situation in itself helps explain the difference between the fortunes of Tarhuncu and Köprülü. One must certainly take into consideration differences in personality as well, especially since personal relations were so crucial in the Ottoman system. Köprülü seems to have been a much better politician than Tarhuncu. He knew when to compromise and when to stand his ground, how to gain allies and how to eliminate potential rivals. Probably the most important factor that aided him, however, was neither the sultan's firm support nor his own political cunning. The palace establishment, which had dominated Ottoman politics since 1651, was violently uprooted in March 1656 in a revolt directed specifically against them. The revolt, known as *Vak'a-i Vakvâkiye* in Ottoman historiography, was not put down until many of the most powerful palace officials were murdered by the rebels. It was this palace establishment which Tarhuncu had fought but had been unable fully to subdue, and which had in fact worked for his downfall in 1653. However, since this most important political group in the capital had been destroyed only a few months before Köprülü came to power, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Köprülü took over in a political vacuum.

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The Naimâ story of Köprülü's appointment presents a curious problem in Ottoman historiography. The account itself appears on close scrutiny to be an embellishment not to be taken literally; it is, on the other hand, a story which gains in plausibility as it is placed in the context of the developments of mid-seventeenth century Ottoman history.

The paradox is only apparent. We do not need to accept the notion of an extraordinary contract to be able to assume that Köprülü was granted those powers which any nominee to the office of grand vezir would traditionally have expected. The treatment that Naimâ's story of the Köprülü contract has received in Ottoman historiography seems to have been a case of missing the forest for the tree.

NAİMÂ, KÖPRÜLÜ, VE VEZÂRET-İ UZMÂ

ÖZET

Osmanlı tarihinin en meşhur olaylarından biri Köprülü Mehmed Paşa'nın 1656'da vezir-i âzamlığa getirildiği zaman bazı şartlar ileri sürmesi ve padişah Mehmed IV.'ün bu şartları «uhûd ü mevâsık» ile kabul etmesidir. Makalede bu olayın Osmanlı tarihçiliğindeki ve Osmanlı siyasal tarihinin gelişimi içindeki yeri incelenmektedir. Osmanlı tarihleri arasında bu olayın tek kaynağı Naîmâdır. Köprülü'nün tayini yıllarında hattâ bazıları saray çevresinde yaşayan ve olayları kaydeden yazarların tarihlerinde bu önemli olaydan bahsetmemeleri şaşırtıcıdır. Makalenin birinci bölümü Köprülü'nün padişahla anlaşmasını tarihçilik bakımından ele alarak Naîmâ'nın bu olayı mübalağalı bir önemle işlediği sonucuna varıyor .

Konuya diğer bir şekilde baktığımızda ise, 1648 yılında yedi yaşında tahta çıkan Mehmed IV.'ün saltanatının 1656 da Köprülü'nün tayinine kadar karışıklıklarla geçen ilk sekiz yılında küçük padişahın annesi Turhan Sultan'ın, belki de Koçi Bey ve Katip Çelebi'nin siyasal görüşlerinin de tesiriyle, idareyi sağlam bir şekilde ele alacak kuvvetli bir vezir-i âzam aradığı, bu devir olaylarının incelenmesinden anlaşılıyor.

Köprülü Mehmed Paşa'nın sultan ile bağlayıcı bir sözleşmeye girdiği görüşü mübalağalı olduğu gibi, bir tek olaya gereğinden fazla önem vermek aslında daha genel bir siyasal gelişmeyi, vezir-i âzamlık makamının kuvvetlendirilmesi çabasını gözden kaçırmamıza da sebep oluyor.

NOTES

- ¹ This article is based on portions of my unpublished Ph. D. dissertation (Princeton, 1971). An earlier draft was presented at the 1971 Annual Meeting of the American Oriental Society.
- ² *Târih-i Naimâ*, 3rd ed. (İstanbul: 1280), Vol. VI, pp. 213-4; Mustafa Nuri Paşa, *Nezâic ül-Yukuât*, 2nd ed. (İstanbul: 1327), Vol. I, p. 67; Ahmed Râsım, *Osmanlı Tarihi* (İstanbul: 1333-5), Vol. II, p. 195; Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, *Histoire de l'Empire Ottoman*, trans. J.—J. Hellert (Paris: 1835-43), Vol. X, pp. 399—400; Nicola Jorga, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches* (Gotha: 1911), Vol. IV, pp. 74-6.
- ³ İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi* (Ankara: 1941, (Vol. III/1, pp. 313-4; «Köprülüler» (T. Gök-bilgin), *İA*.
- ⁴ *Naimâ*, VI: 186-212.
- ⁵ *Naimâ*, VI: 238.
- ⁶ Karaçelebizâde Abdülaziz, *Ravzat ül-Ebrâr Zeyli*, Süleymaniye Library Esad Efendi MSS 2163, fol 104/b; *Târih-i Vecihî*, Köprülü Library MS II. K. 225, fol. 69/a-b; Abdurrahman Abdî Paşa, *Vakâinâme*, Türk Tarih Kurumu MS, pp. 100-1; Mehmed Halife, *Târih-i Gilmânî*, ed. Ahmed Refik [Altınay], supplement to *Türk Tarih Encümeni Mecmuası*, 1924, new series, 1-6, p. 44.
- ⁷ Silâhtar Fındıklılı Mehmed Ağa, *Zeyl-i Fezleke* (İstanbul: 1928), Vol. I, p. 57.
- ⁸ 1. Köprülü Mehmed Paşa, grand vezir in 1656-61; 2. Köprülü's elder son Fazıl Ahmed Paşa, 1661-76; 3. Köprülü's protégé and son-in-law Merzifonlu Kara Mustafa Paşa, 1676-83; 4. Köprülü's slave, protégé, and son-in-law Siyâvuş Paşa, 1687-88; 5. Köprülü's younger son Fazıl Mustafa Paşa, 1689-91; 6. Amcazâde Hüseyin Paşa. The list continues into the eighteenth century. «Family» here is taken to mean «household» rather than the natural family—as it should be in the Ottoman socio-political context.
- ⁹ Lewis V. Thomas, *A Study of Naimâ*, unpublished Ph. D. dissertations, Brussels, 1947, edited by Norman Itzkowitz for publication in 1972.
- ¹⁰ *Naimâ*, VI: 235-8.
- ¹¹ *Kanunnâme-i Âli-i Osman*, ed. Mehmed Arif, supplement to *Târih-i Osmanî Encümeni Mecmuası*, 1330, p. 10. For a discussion of the office of the grand vezir in the Ottoman Empire see H.A.R. Gibb and Harold Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West* (Oxford: 1950), Vol. I/1, pp. 107-15.
- ¹² See Bernard Lewis, «Ottoman Observers of Ottoman Decline», *Islamic Studies*, I, 1 (March, 1962), pp. 71—87. Also see A.S. Tveritinova, «Social ideas in Turkish Didactic Politico-Economic Treatises of the XVI-XVII Centuries», *XXV. International Congress of Orientalists, Paper Presented by the USSR Delegation* (Moscow, 1960), an analysis from the Marxist viewpoint.
- ¹³ Ahmed I (r. 1603-18) and Osman II (r. 1618-22) were fourteen when they ascended the throne, Murad IV (r. 1623-40) was not quite twelve, Mehmed IV (r. 1648-88) was only seven.
- ¹⁴ *Koçi Bey Risâlesi*, ed. Ali Kemal Aksüt (İstanbul: 1939).
- ¹⁵ *Risâle*, section XV.
- ¹⁶ *Risâle*, sections II, V, and XVI.
- ¹⁷ *Risâle*, section XII.
- ¹⁸ *Dustûr el-amel li-İslâh el-halel* (İstanbul: 1863).
- ¹⁹ Kâtip Çelebi, *Fezleke* (İstanbul: 1286), Vol. II, pp. 384-5.
- ²⁰ *ibid.*
- ²¹ *Naimâ*, V: 213-23. Also see Topkapı Palace Archives, E 5948, an exchange between the *valide sultan* and the grand vezir, wrongly attributed to Kösem Sultan; internal evidence indicates Turhan Sultan and Gürcü Mehmed Paşa as the correspondents and dates the document to the spring of 1652.
- ²² *Naimâ*, V: 221-2.
- ²³ «*Diwân-i Humâyûn*» (Bernard Lewis), *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.
- ²⁴ *Silâhtar*, I: 53.
- ²⁵ Nicholas Rälamb, *A Relation of a Journey to Constantinople* in A. and C. Churchill, eds., *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (London: 1732), Vol. V, p. 699.