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SPECIAL FOCUS ROUNDTABLE: UNVEILING UNCHARTED REALMS: THE OTTOMAN GRAND VIZIERATE IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE AND THE KÖPRÜLÜ DYNASTY REVISITED

Introduction

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Abstract

The Third International Süleymaniye Symposium explored the Köprülü Era (1656-1710) in Ottoman history, emphasizing new sources and approaches. Scholars from Turkey, Europe, and the U.S. convened to examine the Köprülü grand viziers' careers and times. In the current special focus section, Yasir Yılmaz, Halef Cevrioğlu, Elizabeth Lobenwein, Georg B. Michels, and Christopher Whitehead offer innovative perspectives, drawing on brand new archival material. We advocate for a comparative approach to the Ottoman grand vizierate, highlight the significance of Habsburg archives in Ottomanist scholarship, debunk new short-term and long-term historical dimensions in the making of the family, and ask new questions about how we should interpret the Köprülü expansionism.

Keywords: Köprülü family; grand vizier; chief minister; Köprülü Mehmed Pasha; Köprülü Fazıl Ahmed Pasha; Kara Mustafa Pasha

On 24-26 September 2021, İbn Haldun University (Istanbul) and the Institute for Habsburg and Balkan Studies of the Austrian Academy and Sciences (Vienna) co-organized the Third International Süleymaniye Symposium, with the special theme of "The 'Köprülü Era' (1656–1710) in Ottoman History: New Sources, New Approaches." Organized at the Süleymaniye premises of İbn Haldun University in Istanbul, the conference brought together scholars from Turkey, Europe, and the U.S. whose research revolves around the lives, careers, and times of Köprülü grand viziers.

The historiography of the Köprülü era has the typical features of many other themes in Ottomanist scholarship. There are widely accepted, semi-established facts and perspectives concerning the family's history that are continuously reproduced in the broader scholarship. Yet, a close scrutiny reveals that much of our knowledge about the Köprülüs consists of reiterations and reinterpretations of what Ottoman chroniclers told us about them. In recent years, a large corpus of new research – articles, books, dissertations, and numerous

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other ongoing projects – has substantially deepened our understanding of the careers and promises to shed new light on the lives of the Köprülü family members. Drawing on previously untapped archival material, recent research enables a fresh evaluation of the broadly accepted facts concerning the family's history.

Considering these fresh contributions to the family's history and the unearthing of many new sources, my colleague Fatih Çalışır and I were convinced in 2020 that the time was ripe to bring together the international community of scholars who had recently completed new research about all conceivable aspects of the Köprülü age or are about to finish up their ongoing projects dealing with the Köprülü era, broadly defined. The conference was a great success. Participants presented many original findings on the Köprülü era and cast fresh insights into the family's broader significance in Ottoman and European history.

As the guest editor of this special focus section, I invited four colleagues who presented papers at that conference to contribute: Halef Cevrioğlu, Elizabeth Lobenwein, Georg B. Michels, and Christopher Whitehead. What unites their papers is the new perspectives they present, drawing on a large collection of previously untapped archival material. While Whitehead's article unearths a surprising dimension of Köprülü Mehmed Pasha's career relying on Ottoman sources, other papers are based on a wide array of sources from the Habsburg archives and show the international connections of the first three Köprülü grand viziers. Such extensive use of Habsburg sources is a significant contribution to the Ottomanist literature and the Köprülü era, because, so far, the use of Habsburg archives in Ottoman studies has lagged far behind the use of Venetian, French, and British archives.

In my article for the special focus section, I propose a brand-new framework for the examination of the Ottoman grand vizierate and the ascent of the Köprülü family to power in the seventeenth century through two distinct analytical lenses. First, I propose that we should undertake a diachronic exploration of the grand vizierate as an institution within the broader history of Islamic governance, tracing its theoretical and practical evolution from the early Islamic period to the Köprülü era. Such scrutiny of continuities and shifts in theory and practice over time provides us with significant insights for a better understanding of the modifications the grand vizierate went through as an institution. It also illustrates that the major achievement of the Köprülü regime was reviving a time-honored Islamic institution. The second lens I propose is to view the Köprülü grand vizierate as part of a synchronic "Eurasian age of the chief minister," situating the office in the political landscape stretching from the Mughal and Safavid worlds to Western European courts. This comparative approach should acknowledge major divergences between the traditions of the grand vizierate and chief ministry while seeking common threads across Eurasia. Through this dual examination of macro and micro perspectives, my article presents deeper insights into the Köprülüs' ascent, illuminating how they navigated their path to prominence while upholding an enduring Islamic institution.

Halef Cevrioğlu analyzes the foreign policy of Grand Vizier Köprülü Ahmed Pasha through the lens of neoclassical realism, a method of foreign policy

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analysis that assesses policy- and decision-making processes in the context of the surrounding international system. Such an approach to Ottoman foreign policy is remarkably innovative and important. Many existing studies assume that religion and religious motivations were the main catalysts of Ottoman expansionism and that the Ottomans actively pursued a deliberate expansion policy fueled by religious fervor. Cevrioğlu believes that ascribing a religious intentionality to Ahmed Pasha's major military undertakings is not so easy. Drawing mainly on European diplomatic reports, he illuminates the political developments in the months and years preceding the major campaigns of Ahmed Pasha in Hungary, Crete, and Poland. He concludes that the Köprülü foreign policy was not always proactive, as is often assumed. Rather, Köprülü Ahmed Pasha reacted to political conjunctures as a rational decision-maker.

Elizabeth Lobenwein's article examines the reports of the Habsburg resident envoy Giovanni Battista Casanova (1665–1672), who wrote some 187 letters to Vienna, to shed new light on the career of Köprülü Ahmed Pasha. Lobenwein's contribution represents a new level of depth and breadth in the study of the Köprülü era. Among the themes Lobenwein discusses are the uneasy relationship between Ahmed Pasha and the sultan during the grand vizier's first years in office, Casanova's information network that included two of the most influential men in the Ottoman court in the 1660s and 1670s, namely, Nikousios Panagiotis and Ali Ufki Bey (born Wojciech Bobowski), and the exchanges between the envoy and the grand vizier about the release of prisoners of war.

Following Elizabeth Lobenwein's analysis, Georg B. Michels turns our attention to the outer frontiers of the Köprülü regime. Following the footsteps of the Upper Hungarian Calvinist noble Pál Szepessy and his travels to the Ottoman capital, Michels unearths so far little-explored details about Grand Vizier Ahmed Pasha's role in the Hungarian revolt. Out of fear of losing his Upper Hungarian properties, Pál Szepessy established contact with Ahmed Pasha, an act that would have been interpreted as treason for earlier generations. Michels rebuilds the story of Szepessy utilizing a rich collection of archival sources, including the Hungarian exiles' correspondence, their appeals, and memoranda to the office of the grand vizier, reports by Habsburg spies, and other sources from Hungarian and Austrian archives. Based on the archival evidence he unearthed, Michels believes that Köprülü Ahmed Pasha had originally made a commitment to support the Hungarians but deferred his plan due to other considerations in Ukraine and Poland in the latter years of his career. Even after the grand vizier did not fulfill his promises and allowed the Habsburg army to invade eastern Hungary, Szepessy continued lobbying relentlessly to attract the Ottoman government. Indeed, Szepessy's ambition to achieve Upper Hungarian independence from Hungary lived until the failed Ottoman siege of Vienna and the revolt of Imre Thököly, to whom Szepessy became a principal adviser.

While the articles above rely mainly on European primary sources, Christopher Whitehead's paper takes us to the Ottoman archives and charts new and hitherto unknown dimensions in Köprülü Mehmed Pasha's career. The traditional narrative tells us that the elder Köprülü was inactive during the first half of the 1650s. Whitehead discovered, however, that he was active

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as governor in Karaman and the Sanjak of Beyşehir. Moreover, during his governorship in Anatolia, he was involved in the looting of local Boz Ulus Türkmens, who submitted complaints to the government about Mehmed Pasha's actions. Besides, Whitehead shows that the elder Köprülü was an associate of İbşir Mustafa Pasha, a Celali leader-cum-grand vizier. The latter, after becoming the grand vizier, appointed Mehmed Pasha as governor to Beyşehir. These are significant findings. Most Ottoman chronicles depict the founder of the Köprülü dynasty as a staunch defender of order and a restorer of stability. Whitehead's findings about Köprülü Mehmed Pasha's actions before his time in office and his cooperation with Celali supporters of İbşir Pasha create a completely different image of the famous grand vizier.

I hope that the several phenomena these articles collectively delineate will serve as a template for future exploration of the Köprülüs and the office of the grand vizier. Future research should concurrently develop a synchronic and diachronic comparative approach to the policies and careers of Ottoman grand viziers as well as the grand vizierate as an institution. Such comparative analysis will crystallize long-term secular dynamics that shaped the evolution of the office. The second issue is that European – and in particular, Habsburg – archives hold a plethora of previously unexplored data about the Ottoman grand vizierate. Prospective studies about the Ottoman grand vizierate should make much better use of European archives, especially the diplomatic series that contain insights unattested in Ottoman archives for a given period. Finally, the finer details of Ottoman archival evidence may still contain facts that could force us to modify our convictions. We hope that this special focus dossier will be interpreted as one such contribution to the field.

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