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CENTRALIZATION AND DECENTRALIZATION IN OTTOMAN ADMINISTRATION

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In the seventeenth century the central government resorted to a variety of measures to curb the authority of provincial governors. Those measures, undertaken to prevent the abuse of state-delegated authority by governors, unwittingly prepared the ground for the rise of ayan (provincial notables) in provincial government. The era of the Köprülüs (four reforming grand vizirs of the latter half of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries) was a crucial period during which a vigorous effort was made to curb the power of governors, to restore central authority in the provinces, and to apply systematically a rational policy of protecting the reaya (tax-paying subjects) from abuses of authority. In the sixteenth century and earlier, vizirs, beylerbeyis (governors of a province), and sancakbeyis (governors of an administrative unit within a province) represented the sultan's authority in the provinces. To prevent the abuse of delegated authority by these officials, a kind of autonomy was granted to kadis (judges) in legal matters and to defterdars (chief treasury officers) in financial matters.[1] Apart from this system of checks and balances, the central government kept under vigilant control all situations which might have compromised its authority in the provinces. But from the end of the sixteenth century onward, the changes that occured in the attitude of provincial governors forced the central government to adopt a new policy. An entirely new situation was created when governors began to maintain sekban-sarica (Anatolian mercenaries) or levend (vagrant reaya) troops as part of their retinues.[2] Backed up by these mercenaries, they exacted illegal taxes called salgun from the reaya and challenged the central authority whenever necessary or advantageous. Faced with a situation which threatened its principal sources of income, the central government was forced to adopt new measures to protect the reaya from abuse and to prevent their dispersement. Moreover,

this policy had the blessing of the janissaries, whose interests were also threatened by the creation of such irregular armies.

The "rescript of justice" published in 1609, which reflects the grave circumstances of the time, states: "The object of appointing a beylerbeyi and a sancakbeyi for every province and of assigning khass [higher order of fief] to each, is not to have them descend upon a province to exact illegal taxes and lay to ruins the country and the province."[3] The official sources dating from the first half of the seventeenth century concede that sometimes such activities of governors were more destructive than outright banditry.[4] Indeed, the situation worsened gravely in the course of the seventeenth century. Ultimately, the struggle between the provincial governors and the central government emerges as the most significant development of the period.

Conditions in the Anatolian provinces motivated governors who commanded large sekban forces to resist the central authority. The governors, encouraged by the government to recruit large Anatolian sekban in times of war, often later became rebellious when they were dismissed or transferred to other posts. Moreover, having gained confidence from the presence of these troops but also under constant pressure from them for more revenues, these governors resorted to illegal exactions. The state, for its part, being reluctant to stir up further trouble and ever in need of troops, often pardoned the rebels and reappointed them as governors.[5]

To change the traditional Ottoman system in any radical manner was out of the question. In the Ottoman scheme, governors always constituted the corps of commanders who led the provincial armies in campaigns. Consequently, when in the seventeenth century the governors ceased to be the loyal instruments of the sultan's authority in the provinces, the sultan, lacking the power to alter the traditional system even if he had wanted to, was compelled instead to create countervailing forces to limit the governors' growing autonomy. Thus, in this period, the two remaining pillars of provincial government, namely the kadi and the defterdar, gained unprecedented importance. Because of abuses by governors, kadis turned to local ayan for assistance--indeed, the ayan sometimes forced the kadis' collaboration against the governors. They poured petitions of complaint into the central government or sent their representatives. Gradually, the kadis came to represent local interests and the ayan.[6]

More significantly, however, in the closing decades of the sixteenth century, muhassils (tax collectors) who assumed charge of finances began to acquire a wide

range of authority in provincial administration only somewhat less than that of governors. These muhassils, who performed the functions of former provincial defterdars but with a wider range of delegated authority, were responsible for the collection of state revenues directly controlled by the treasury--the miri mukataas.[7] In addition, certain revenues which were traditionally included in the khass of sancakbeyis were now assigned to the state treasury as mukataas and came under the control of muhassils. During the period of war and rebellion between 1593 and 1610 and the subsequent period of dislocation, this new policy of the state found large-scale application, resulting in an increase of the muhassils' powers and in the impoverishment and weakening of the governors. The post of muhassil was granted not only to former defterdars but also to some trustworthy military commanders who dispensed their duties through the agency of mütesellims (deputies) and mültezims (tax farmers). Those muhassils who were appointed with the title of paşa also assumed some of the responsibilities delegated to governors. Finally, it is known that in some areas, during the second half of the eighteenth century, muhassils were appointed from among the local ayan for whom this post served as a stepping stone to governorship.[8]

On the other hand, the central government was inclined to increase the governors' income in times of war because they were required to recruit troops for the army. In the seventeenth century the government already allowed the provincial governors to collect emergency levies called imdad-i seferiyye.[9] But in the eighteenth century the local ayan came to play a central role in the collection of this tax, thus rendering the governors dependent on them. At the same time those parts of sancaks which were converted into imperial khass were either administered by voyvodas (agents) or farmed out by iltizam (tax farming). Governors could not interfere in these domains. Similarly, lands assigned as pensions to governors (as arpalık) and to palace ladies (as paşmaklık) were administered by their appointed voyvodas or mütesellims. In the period of decline, the considerable expansion of imperial khass and pensions led to a reduction in governors' revenues and to limitations of their authority. Also the frequent shifting of governors from one post to another and the assigning of many sancaks as arpalıks were effective measures in limiting the authority of governors in the provinces. In the early seventeenth century, Ottoman pamphleteers such as Koçi Bey recalled that in former times sancakbeyis and beylerbeyis remained in their posts for twenty to thirty years and acquired

considerable power and authority, but, they noted, in their own day these officials were reduced to a wretched state as a result of frequent new postings.[10] Nevertheless, appointment of governors to an assigned post for no more than one or two years became an established rule.[11]

By the eighteenth century all officials were appointed for a year and their appointments were either renewed or new appointments were made.[12] Although a considerable increase in the number of candidates for government posts undoubtedly influenced the establishment of this system of rotation, other political and administrative considerations, especially the desire to check the power of the governors, was also an important contributing factor.[13]

Following the decay of the timar (fief) system in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many sancaks in Anatolia were assigned as arpalık to high officials in Istanbul or to commanders of a fortress on the frontiers.[14] A state official or a commander who held such a sancak did not usually reside in his province but instead appointed a deputy--a mütesellim or müsellim--to administer it in his stead. This practice derives from the classical period of the Ottoman Empire, that is, before 1600. Then, governors or beys, when appointed to a post in the provinces, normally appointed a deputy to take over officially the administration of the province in their names until they reached their posts, or to administer in their absence and especially to collect the khass revenues. Even when governors were resident in their provinces, deputies were appointed to collect khass revenues in remote areas, or taxes that were gathered irregularly, and deputies were particularly used to collect fines. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries these governors' deputies, who were responsible solely to the governors, were known as subaşı and voyvoda.[15] After the sixteenth century, however, deputies sent to sancaks came to be known as müsellim or mütesellim (one who takes charge). Beylerbeyis sent a mütesellim or a müsellim to each sancak in their province. It would appear that this practice of appointing surrogates became widely established because the beys were required to remain on the Hungarian front both summer and winter.[16]

The deputy of a bey, or governor, was appointed directly by an order (buyruldu) of that bey instead of by an imperial decree. In the eighteenth century the general formula used in such orders was as follows:

> The kadi, kethuda-yeri [high officer of the Porte's cavalry], serdar [commander] of the janissaries, the ayan, and işeris [agents] of --- province: You are informed that an order has been issued for one of our aghas to assume [de facto] administration in our name of the sancak which has been assigned to us on ---, and that --- Agha has been appointed mütesellim and sent to --- sancak. When he arrives it is essential that you assist him in establishing his authority, in the collection of tax revenues within the boundries of our province, and that you take care no injustice or wrong is inflicted on the reaya.[17]

Similar letters sent to voyvodas by fief-holders of various classes--khass, zeamet and timar--instructing them to collect revenues and deliver the remaining amount after expenses reveal the private character of the relationship between these government officials and their deputies.

From the seventeenth century onward, the expansion of the practice of arpalık, the consequent administration of sancaks by mütesellims, and finally the appointment of mütesellims from among the local ayan, appear to have been the most important operative factors which resulted in the rise to prominence of ayan in provincial administration. Governors and beys either chose to appoint or were forced to select their deputies from among the local ayan. These ayan-mütesellims gradually became more powerful than the sancakbeyis themselves. While the former often changed, the latter remained in place strengthening their positions by such means as obtaining as tax farms the state mukataa (lease) revenues of sancaks. They also played a crucial part in the preparation of registers of expenditure and allocation (tevzi defterleri) of local expenditures and in the collection of taxes for the treasury.[18] In addition, ayan-mütesellims were able to employ other ayan and kadis to serve their own purposes. Their riches enabled them to maintain significant sekban-levend forces, whom they employed to suppress bandits, thereby acquiring the support and the confidence of the people in their area. In the villages and counties (kazas) these ayan-deputies subjected the lesser ayan to themselves by leasing out portions of tax farms to them. While steadily making themselves indispensable to the government, especially in times of war, by providing revenues, men, provisions and animals, the ayan-deputies at the same time used (and often abused) their state-delegated authority to reinforce their influence in the provinces.

Because the post of the mütesellim was the principal means of acquiring provincial power and wealth, there

was a period of fierce rivalry in the latter seventeenth and eighteenth centuries among the ayan for the position. Prominent local families embarked on struggles to establish their supremacy as the sole instruments of authority in their area. To this end, they not only resorted to intrigue, bribery, and the use of force, but also formed factions of supporters and even sought alliances with bandits, derebeys (usurpers) and tribal chiefs. A common practice arising out of this competition was the usurpation of the office of the mütesellim by tyranny or subjugation--in Ottoman parlance, to become mütegallibe (usurper). Recent research on the topic of local strife at the provincial level provides detailed information on this development and indicates that the phenomenon exhibited certain common characteristics throughout the Empire.[19]

Nevertheless, the mütesellim always served as the official representative of the governor or of the muhassil, and in this capacity he officially represented the central authority. Thus, though originally a local ayan, he extended his authority and influence by taking advantage of his official title as mütesellim. As a result the interests of the ayan-mütesellim often clashed with those of other ayan. Intense political strife usually ensued when the other ayan opposed the mütesellim.

When in the eighteenth century the ayan and mütegallibe supplanted the governors and the central government in deciding who would be appointed mütesellim, the era of their power commenced. The exclusive control over the office of the mütesellim by the local ayan is reflected in the post's having become hereditary among certain families in many regions of the Empire. This development is one of the key characteristics which marks off the era of the ayan. Another important phase in the growth of ayan power was their assumption of both de facto and de jure authority formerly exercised exclusively by the governors who, it should be recalled, were counted among the sultan's kul (slaves). As mütesellim, an ayan possessed de facto indirect authority, but when, as frequently occured, he was appointed governor by the sultan, his powers were de jure and direct. However, in the latter instance, he would cease to be an ayan, because ayanship (ayanlık or ayanluk) at no time existed as an official post. Moreover, those who assumed the title of ayan by order of a governor or a kadi, or, after the reform edict of 1765, with the approval of the central government, were not considered as representing the public authority at large but only the interests of the local population.[20]

Mütesellims were obliged to perform their functions in cooperation with the council of ayan, which usually

convened in the courthouse at the sancak capital and was presided over by the kadi. This council included the most prominent men of the community, principally members of the military class, aghas responsible for security, local ulema, and wealthy or otherwise notable members of urban society such as guild masters and merchants. During the eighteenth century this council played an increasingly important role in matters of security, in the distribution of taxes and in the determination of local expenditures. The mütesellim himself originated from this group. Thus, if this council acted against the mütesellim and submitted a petition of complaints or sent its representatives to Istanbul to initiate an investigation against the mütesellim, such action could result in his dismissal and punishment. Local ayan in some of the Empire's remote cities were so powerful that "they were sometimes ordered to select their own mütesellim for any absent wali" (governor).[21] These local councils of ayan not only could determine who would become mütesellim by supporting or opposing a candidate, but they were instrumental in the appointment of other urban officials as well, such as the subaşı (police chief), muhzırbaşı (bailiff), dizdar (warden), mühtesib (market inspector), and serdar (commander) of the janissaries.

In the eighteenth century, major ayan families who ruled in Anatolia--Karaosman-ogulları in Manisa and the surrounding area; Capan-ogulları in Bozok; Kalaycı-ogulları, Emiraga-zadeler, and Zenneci-zadeler in Kayseri; Müderris-zadeler and Nakkaş-zadeler in Ankara; Cagfar-zadeler and Mühürdar-zadeler in Konya; and Kalyoncu Ali in Bilecik--all established their power and influence by means of the office of the mütesellim.[22] They engaged in an incessant struggle against their rivals to maintain this post and usually they were able to hold it on a hereditary basis. The principal goal of the ayan-mütesellims was to hold permanently in their hands the mukataas or the sources of revenue which the state had farmed out by iltizam and to consolidate their control and usufruct on these resources located in their districts. The realization of these objectives was facilitated by the conversion of mukataas into malikanes, that is, life-time leases on the revenue sources of the tax farm.[23] The fundamental issue underlying the political strife among the provincial ayan was invariably the matter of collecting, in the name of the state, the revenues of mukataas and such other taxes as cizye (poll tax) and avariz (emergency tax).

In addition, and especially in times of war, commercial transactions undertaken in the name of the government, as well as the recruitment of paid sekban or miri

levend troops, constituted major sources of income for ayan-mütesellims. On the other hand, they were also adversely affected in times of crisis when the government demanded that the ayan perform these services at their own expense. They then attempted to pass on to the reaya these expenses by entering them in the registers of allocation, thus coming into conflict with the reaya as well as the government and often as a consequence losing the office of the mütesellim to their rivals. However, conditions in the provinces and certain local interests coupled with those of the state, provided most of them with ample opportunity for struggle to regain this post. In the eighteenth century what was observed as the strife among the provincial ayan was, in fact, the struggle for mütesellimships with a view to gaining control over mukataas. The fact that some of these mütesellims were appointed governors with titles of paşa and vizir in no way changed this real situation. However, because such promotions in the status of mütesellims enabled them to exercise directly the authority which had been previously delegated to them as deputies, this change should perhaps be viewed as a new stage of development.[24]

In its legal character the appointment of a mütesellim was the same as the appointment of surrogate judges (naibs) by kadis who had full authority either to appoint or dismiss assistants. It should be stressed again that the certificates of appointment presented to mütesellims or to voyvodas especially emphasized the fact that no injustice be committed against the reaya, that is, the delegated power should not be abused. Because the misuse of authority became so commonplace, particularly when mütesellims or voyvodas entered into iltizam contracts, the sultan was compelled occasionally to curb their appointment. In the eighteenth century, the direct control of the central government over mütesellims seems to have increased. The mütesellim was appointed by a firman (imperial edict) upon the submission of a petition by the sancakbeyi. Each such appointment was subject to annual renewal. Yet this firman, which was, in fact, confirmatory in nature, not only contained the buyruldu of the governor but it also required the approval of local groups. Sanction was especially needed when the renewal of a mütesellim's appointment was in question. Then, it was essential that the local notables testified to his good standing. Generally, mütesellims were dismissed upon complaints from the local population, or more accurately, from the local ayan. Consequently, the mütesellim was obliged to maintain good relations with local ayan and not oppose their interests.

As verification of their delegated authority, mütesellims were given a seal of the governor's office. The basic duty of the mütesellim was the collection of revenues belonging to his master. But he was also responsible for the maintenance of security in the sancak. He was given as part of his retinue troops (kapıkulları) and militia (nefir-i am) from under the local janissary commanders. He led these forces in pursuit of bandits and acted under the command of the beylerbeyi or vizir in such undertakings.[25] It is known that as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century the retinue of a mütesellim included sekban-sarica (Anatolian or provincial mercenaries) or levend troops, that is, mercenaries paid and maintained from his own pocket.[26] So it was natural that complaints were made against these mütesellims for their unlawful exactions (takalif-i şakka) and levies.[27] Generally speaking, the mütesellim carried the major responsibilities of the sancakbeyis. While in the seventeenth century governors chose their mütesellims from among their most trustworthy household personnel, such as kethudas or aghas in their retinues, in the eighteenth century, it will be recalled, mütesellims were usually selected from the ranks of the local ayan. Experience has shown that the surest and the easiest way of collecting state revenues, avariz or imdadiye (war or emergency) taxes, as well as the revenues due to governors, was through the employment of local ayan as mütesellims. And once the iltizam system was well established, it was no longer possible to dispense with their intermediary services. Moreover, the local ayan had at their disposal various instruments of pressure to prevent the obtainment of the post of the mütesellim by an outsider.

The voyvoda represented in most ways the stereotype of the ayan who, in the eighteenth century, rose to prominence in the counties. Consequently, it is necessary to discuss in some detail the voyvodas and their origin. A sancak was divided into kazas, which were under the jurisdiction of kadis. The administrative center of a kaza was usually a city or a town. Within the towns the voyvoda performed the functions of the mütesellim who, upon obtaining the mukataas in a sancak by iltizam, either employed his own men, called ilkethudası or vilayet kethudası, in the collection of revenues from those mukataas or farmed them out by iltizam to voyvodas. The mütesellim tried to maintain his control over these voyvodas by choosing them from among the men who were dependent on himself in one way or another--a practice prevalent throughout the Empire since the end of the sixteenth century.

The office of the voyvoda was known as early as the

fifteenth century and had already, in the course of the sixteenth century, become an important factor in provincial government.[28] By the end of the latter century it was common practice for paşas and beys to farm out their khass by iltizam to voyvodas. The growing utility of the voyvoda is evidenced by the units he administered within a sancak: the khass belonging to the treasury or which were assigned to palace ladies; zeamets or timars assigned to palace and government officials; and villages belonging to awkaf (endowments). Because they were responsible for local security as well as the collection of revenues, voyvodas maintained sekban troops.[29] Finally, it is noteworthy that the voyvoda was free from supervision by provincial authorities.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was common practice for every kaza to have a voyvoda, and in the imperial edicts the top provincial administrators were cited in the following order: vüzera and mırmıran (governors-general), ümera (sancakbeyis), and mütesellims and voyvodas. However, the real transformation of the post occured when voyvodas, like mütesellims, no longer belonged to the retinues of those they represented, but were selected from among the local ayan. It is evident that as a result of the employment of local ayan or the claimants to ayanship (mütegallibe) as voyvodas and mütesellims, some ayan acquired a special status in the provinces. As deputies of those who represented governmental authority, such ayan attained a semi-official status which they adroitly manipulated to enhance their personal wealth and to establish the influence and control of their families in a given area. Moreover, under the new conditions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the voyvoda's mediation was becoming indispensable to the central government in its dealings with the reaya. Thus, in this respect, the posts of the mütesellim and the voyvoda played a determining role in the rise of the ayan. The terms ayan and voyvoda began to be used interchangably. Many mütesellims acquired their posts after having served as voyvodas and when they were no longer mütesellims, they usually reassumed their duties as voyvodas in the same district.[30] Finally, voyvodas, like the mütesellims, often over-stated their expenses in registers of allocation and employed their own men in the collection of taxes.[31]

Which stratum of Ottoman society provided the mütesellims and voyvodas, or, in other words, what were the social origins of the ayan and eşraf (nobles) in the cities, towns, and villages, is a question of major historical proportions.[32] Apart from the fact that a

voyvoda or mütesellim belonged to the ayan class, this group had always played an important role in Ottoman provincial administration. But the particular conditions of the eighteenth century gave the ayan unprecedented significance.

Essentially, the urban social structure in the Ottoman state conformed to the tradition of Near Eastern Islamic cities, and Ottoman urban institutions, under different names, followed closely this traditional pattern.[33] The population in a Near Eastern city, in contrast to the rural population, was divided into the following groups in descending hierarchical order: (1) military-administrative class or those to whom state authority was delegated; (2) the ulema, as religious authorities, and the heads of tarikats (mystic orders and brotherhoods); (3) the bourgeoisie engaged in interregional and international trade and finance; (4) guildsmen engaged in local trade and in handicrafts.

Eventual economic and political instability caused the merchants and artisans to create organizations of mutual cooperation. Each group selected a member to act as its representative (kethuda or kahya). For its part, the central government encouraged such organizations because they facilitated administrative processes. In the new era, owing to the weakness of the central authority, the trend toward communalization among various provincial elements gained momentum. Imperial edicts relating to public services were more and more frequently addressed to community representatives. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whenever local affairs were involved, the persons to whom imperial edicts were addressed generally appeared in the following order: kadi, kethuda-yeri, yeniçeri serdarı (janissary commander), ayan-i vilayet (local notables) and işeris.[34]

It is possible to learn more about the specific composition of the class of urban ayan and eşraf from the various documents in the kadi's records (sicill) and from the accounts of Evliya Çelebi, who often mentions by name the ayan and the eşraf in the cities he visited. In matters directly concerning the local population, kadis normally "invited to the courthouse all the ayan and the eşraf, the imams [prayer leaders], and the hatibs [leaders of Friday prayer]" in town. The distribution of certain taxes, on the other hand, was determined solely by the consensus of "all the ayan and eşraf." Finally, we find the names and the titles of ayan in a given locality, with their signatures on the petitions (mahzars) or similar documents.[35] It is possible to classify the ayan and the eşraf cited in these documents under the following categories: (1) ulema

which includes mollas (higher ulema), kadis, nakibs (head of the seyyids [city-dwelling descendants of the Prophet]), muftis (doctors of law), and müderrises (professors); (2) kapıkulları (servants and soldiery of the Porte) who carried the title of agha such as the kethuda-yeri, serdar of the janissaries, çavuş (messengers), kapıcıbaşı (head gatekeeper), and müteferrika (an elite group in the palace). In addition there were former kapıkulları who performed certain administrative functions in urban centers; these included the muhzirbaşı, mühtesib, pasbanbaşı (head watchman), asesbaşı (chief of night patrols), dizdar (warden), retired kethudas of governors; or the paşas, beys, fiefholders, janissaries, kapıkulu sipahis (cavalry of the Porte), and katıbs (scribes), who settled in cities where they enriched themselves; (3) those who traded in precious goods: bezzaz (textile dealers), attar (druggists), çuhacı (drapers), kemhacı (brocade dealers), kuyumcu (jewelers) and sarraf (money-changers); or wealthy persons and mültezims who were engaged in caravan trade, financial transactions and the purveyance of provisions; (4) leading guildsmen, such as kethudas, kasabbaşıs (chief butcher), bakkalbaşıs (chief grocer), pazarbaşı (market-head), and şehir kethudası (intendent of the city).

Seyyids of ulema origin occupied a foremost position in Ottoman urban life, and they always assumed the role of arbitrator in important matters. In the words of a famous Ottoman chronicler, the ulema "was the noblest of all social classes" and occupied the highest social and economic positions in all Ottoman cities.[36] While the ulema, who belonged to the class of urban ayan, were limited in number, they were nevertheless among the wealthiest urban bourgeoisie.[37] Although in the eighteenth century a number of typical ayan rose from among the ulema, it was in fact the second generation ulema families who, thanks to the great influence and wealth of their fathers, swelled the ranks of the ayan. In the Anatolian cities there were innumerable ayan with such names as kadizade (son of kadi), muftizade müderriszade, and hatıbzade. The frequent use of such titles clearly signify the importance of belonging to the ulema class for its social and material advantages.

In this context the important role in urban society of imams who headed city quarters, which in themselves constituted social administrative units, should never be neglected.[38] We learn from the kadi records that imams, representing their quarters in matters concerning the city, often participated in the council convened at the kadi's court. Hatıbs or vaizes (preachers), who not only expressed the public opinion but

also played an important part in its shaping and channeling, were also often cited together with the imams of city quarters as belonging to the urban ayan. Generally hatıbs and vaizes took a conformist stand and supported the status quo maintained by the ayan in the city. But, when confronted with the tyranny and abuses of local ayan, they were the first to voice criticism of such practices when preaching to their congregations in the mosques.

In Ottoman urban society, where one means of achieving social distinction was membership in the religious institution, another was belonging to the kapıkulu class. The latter was made up of those officials and military men who were raised and educated in the sultan's household and were then sent as the kuls of the sultan to the provinces to represent his authority. The kapıkulları were distinguished in society by their special titles--paşa, bey, agha, yeniçeri, çavuş, etc.--as well as by their special dress. Others were prohibited from wearing such clothing and carrying these titles. One of the major changes that took place in the new era was the opening of entry into this class to those who were not kuls, raised in the sultan's palace service. In other words, those of reaya origins, Turkish peasants, and city folk could actually acquire the titles of janissary, sipahi, agha and later even those of bey and paşa.

Several factors led to this development--two major ones were the use of bribery and joining the retinue of higher state officials--but in the final analysis the basic cause lies in the state's new policy toward its kapıkulu: the employment of local elements in the service of the central government. However, this policy was not effected without resistance or consequences. The old kapıkulu class and most of the bureaucrats who clung to the traditional order resisted this new direction. One of the results was to increase the trend towards hereditary office-holding and also, from time to time, to introduce reforms aimed at eliminating from kapıkulu status those of reaya origin. Thus, in the seventeenth century, the rivalry between the kapıkulları and the so-called "upstarts" (türedi) emerged as one of the most important internal political issues.[39]

In the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth centuries persons with reaya origins rarely took the titles of bey or paşa. As previously noted, in this period the local elements participated in the administration as the deputies of paşas, beys, or of palace officials who were of kapıkulu origin, and they were given the titles of voyvoda, subaşı, and müteselim. We also see them in the retinues of governors, filling

such military posts as that of the bölükbaşı (commander) or agha of the serdengeçti (special group among the janissaries). The highest title they acquired in the seventeenth century was that of agha. In the eighteenth century, however, ayan who served as mütesellims, were given the high titles of kapıcıbaşı and later that of mirmiran (beylerbeyi), placing them in the upper echelons of the military class.

The most significant development, which, with few exceptions in the seventeenth century, occurred in the eighteenth century, was the granting of the actual posts of bey and paşa to these aghas of reaya origin, that is, the direct delegation of the sultan's authority.[40] As a result, paşas of ayan origin and their families rose to prominence in the provinces, while the centralized Ottoman regime, based on the sultan's absolute authority, was breaking down.[41] But, in the situation of the eighteenth century, it is wrong to confuse these high officials of ayan origin with those ayan who represented the local population before the government. Though the rise of the ayan in the provinces paved the way for the entry of some into the ranks of officialdom, once ayan families acquired the positions of bey and paşa, they could no longer be specifically considered to be ayan and consequently they cannot be studied in the same context. It is only because of the latter's origins that they are referred to as ayan in the literature. At the lower levels of official posts the distinction between ayan proper and officials of ayan origin is less clear and the confusion of the two is more common and widespread in the sources. It is known that among the latter, starting from the end of the sixteenth century, the janissaries occupied an important place. In urban centers the number of those who obtained the title of janissary in one way or another steadily increased. In the eighteenth century, their numbers reached into the thousands in large cities, while in some cities with special status these kinds of janissaries constituted the majority of the population.[42] Naturally, among them the serdars of the janissaries and those who had settled in cities and who had acquired influence and wealth carried the title of ayan and played a dominant role in urban administration.

Whatever the significance of the military and religious titles for inclusion in the ayan class, it appears that the fundamental criterion was the possession of wealth. Being wealthy, especially in terms of hard cash, not only placed a person in a privileged position in regard to matters of credit and the collection of taxes, but wealth also singled him out in the eyes of the government and of the local population. Moreover,

it was not difficult for a wealthy citizen to purchase titles to reinforce his social position. When seventeenth and eighteenth century Ottoman texts referred to ayan within the urban setting, they usually meant men of wealth.[43] It should not be forgotten that the ayan and the eşraf of religious and military backgrounds--the aghas, zaims, timar-holders, seyyids, and ulema--were also wealthy men who acquired their riches through various means.[44] Thus in the Ottoman city the religious and military upper class and the class of merchants and financiers consisted largely of the same persons.[45] The following activities were, from early times, the primary means among the ayan for accumulating wealth: iltizam, mukataa matters, the collection of the salma or salgun tax (emergency levies), the performance of such functions as the recruitment of troops and the collection of provisions and livestock for the government, profitable credit transactions and usury, and the establishment of çiftliks (large estate-farms).[46] Naturally one or the other of these activities became more prominent than the rest at certain times. In all of these activities, however, the religious-military class possessed the greatest opportunities for enrichment as a result of their positions and various privileges.

These new developments placed Ottoman kadis, especially those located in urban centers, in a predicament. The kadi's primary duty was to enforce observance of the şeriat (Islamic law), which transcended all other authority. But in the performance of this duty he had to rely on the local ulema who by virtue of their positions were prominent in urban politics and society and exercised considerable influence over the kadi. The kadi's position was further complicated by the fact that he constituted the official link between the central government and the people. He was to ensure the implementation of the sultan's orders and to act on the people's complaints of abuses by local administrators and military officials. These functions were carried out largely through the provincial council, over which he presided, which included the ayan who dominated the local scene, official and religious. The council decided on carrying out government orders pertaining to taxes and requisitions and acted on its own initiative in regard to security and such municipal services as fixing prices in the market place and inspecting charitable institutions.

Because the kadi's court was the official center of local administration, and because of his position as head of the provincial council, the kadi had steadily gained in importance as the process of decentralization in the Empire accelerated. However, in the eighteenth

century his situation underwent change in the opposite direction. Certain functions previously entirely under the kadi's jurisdiction were gradually assumed by the ayan, making the kadi dependant on the local notables.

The old government policy, dating from the sixteenth century, of responding to the misuse of authority by limiting the authority delegated to the offending official, did not exclude the kadis, who were guilty of many abuses.[47] Thus, for political considerations the kadis' term of office was, like that of the governors, reduced.[48] As a result, kadis who were insecure in their posts and impoverished were generally incapacitated vis-a-vis the ayan.[49] Yet without the kadi's signature no register of distribution could go into effect, so the ayan were forced to add in these registers numerous service fees for the kadis in addition to those for themselves.[50] A community of interests and cooperation between the ayan and the kadis was only natural. There are instances when the people, protesting exorbitant additions to the tax registers, rebelled and attacked the kadi's court.[51] On the other hand, there were also in the eighteenth century usurper-ayan who prepared the registers of distribution as they wished, totally ignoring the kadis. In conflicts between the ayan and kadis, the government generally tended to side with the ayan.

As regards the kadi's relations with the members of the military class in the provinces, the kadi, who held an independent post overseeing these officials in the name of the central government, sometimes came into conflict with them. During the eighteenth century, the firm posture of kadis in matters pertaining to the military class seems to have been strengthened by the kadis' increasing dependence on ayan.[52]

It should be added that, aside from the kadis who performed official duties in towns and cities, there were retired or discharged kadis or their descendants who settled in urban centers and were included, together with the ulema, among the local ayan and the esraf. In the eighteenth century not a few kadis and their descendants claimed to be ayan or were, in fact, ayan.[53]

The formation of a permanent council of urban ayan and the kadi was a significant factor not only in the strengthening of local administration but in advancing the process of decentralization. In the second half of the eighteenth century, foreign observers in important Rumelian cities described the council of ayan as a kind of oligarchy which directly controlled the administration, thereby reducing the governors to total ineffectiveness.[54] It had also been determined that this council, which was permanently in session, was composed of the local kadi, the serdar of the janissaries, the dizdar, and six ayan.[55] Generally, the council was presided over by the kadi, but at provincial centers where the governors were allowed to participate, it merged with the governor's divan.[56] In 1840 when, as part of the reform program introduced by the Tanzimat, a provincial council was created at each provincial center, it seemed to be only a continuation of this divan. It was composed of the muhassil, his two secretaries, the local kadi, the mufti, the chief of the security force and the representatives of the local population. If the province had a mixed population of Muslims and Christians, the representatives consisted of four Muslims, two Christians, and the religious head of the latter community. The system of election was such that only the notables could be elected to the council.[57] In towns the council consisted of the local kadi, the chief of the security force, the agent of the finance department, and two elected notables. Thus this system of decentralized administration during the Tanzimat period can be traced back to eighteenth century practices.[58]

It appears that the process through which the ayan were elected to the council was in total conformity with the methods of election conducted by guilds and other similar bodies. The consensus of the leading members of the community, as practiced in Islamic tradition, was the normal procedure for electing respresentatives until the ballot system was adopted from the West after the Tanzimat.[59] Previously, it was not possible for members of the lower class or persons without wealth or influence to become candidates in an election. Ayan were regarded as the natural representatives of the community. But even among the ayan the community leaders or representatives were determined before hand, according to certain defined criteria. When rival ayan contested such elections, a bitter struggle ensued among the notables, often resulting in usurpation of power.[60]

Even before the eighteenth century, ayan and esraf, under the kadi's supervision, performed a number of public and municipal services. These services can be summed up in three categories.

First, ayan looked after the economic welfare of the city as a whole. Their activities in this direction clearly demonstrate the role of the ayan as the representatives of the local population. In the Ottoman city, because guildsmen and their dependents constituted the majority of the population, the central issue was safeguarding guild regulations and preserving economic conditions beneficial to guilds. Hence, a steady supply

of provisions and raw materials and measures to determine fair prices were among the principal concerns of the ayan.[61] Ayan were always involved in the process of determining the quality of manufactured goods and their prices. In these matters, the sources mention the ayan, in conjunction with the representatives of the guilds, as being in the presence of the kadi, and also as having a hand in the subsequent preparation of the official price lists.[62] Ayan are also cited as attempting to prevent shortages in the exported and imported goods essential to the city. Finally, when the guilds raised their prices without justification or when it was necessary to lower prices due to the increase in the supply of raw materials and provisions, a committee of "the imams, hatibs, and the ayan of the city" went to the kadi and initiated measures to deal with the problem.

Second, ayan took the initiative in the maintenance of public buildings within the city and in the performance of related public services. In these matters the kadi always acted in conjunction with the ayan and with their consent. For example, whenever it was necessary to build a mosque or a caravanserai or to repair the same, the kadi employed a committee of ayan to determine the site and acted in accordance with their judgment.

Third, the ayan used their power to influence the decisions of the central government by expressing their opinions on the appointment of urban public officials and of religious functionaries, including the kadi, or by expressing their grievances against these officials during their term in office, causing their dismissal. They also sent petitions to the government on matters relating to all aspects of public life in the city and the provinces.[63] Clearly, urban ayan and eşraf consistently played an important role in public affairs, and in the course of the seventeenth century, their control over public affairs steadily increased.

Beginning in the decade of 1680, the sources indicate the presence in each kaza of a single ayan who was its representative and who was elected to his position by his local peers. To distinguish this type of ayan from others, such terms as baş-ayan, reis-i ayan and ayn al-ayan (all meaning head or chief ayan) were used.[64] How did one ayan come to be differentiated from the others and represent a specific kaza? From an earlier time, especially during military campaigns, a başbuğ or başbey (chief, leader) was chosen to collect and deliver from the kaza its share of avariz demanded by the government. These levies normally were in the form of provisions, livestock, and troops. However, when the

government ordered an immediate lump sum payment of the avariz, a wealthy ayan sometimes came forward with the funds on behalf of the local citizens and later collected from them. In addition, an ayan with military resources and experience was usually appointed başbey to run down bandits in the region. In brief, there were persons who served first as de facto leaders in local affairs and subsequently assumed leadership of the community. Finally, it should be recalled that in Ottoman society the concept of representation for professional and socio-religious bodies was well established.

On the other hand the employment of a kethuda, elected or appointed, as the representative of a community, group, or an individual, is encountered throughout Ottoman history, but became particularly commonplace after the end of the sixteenth century. The kethuda was in no way a free agent. He was the instrument of the body that chose him. If, for example, a community no longer wanted a particular kethuda, not even the government could maintain him in office. This principle applied in the Ottoman guild system and was also observed by some official institutions such as the janissary corps.[65] Tribes and non-Muslim urban communities used a kethuda (the tribal post was called aşiret kethudası) to mediate their relations with the government and collect taxes.

More significant for this study was the existence of the office of the şehir kethudası (city or urban kethuda), who was elected to perform certain public services in the city. There were also village kethudas and kethudas of provinces (vilayet kethudası) who represented either the smaller or larger units outside the cities and assisted local authorities in tax collection and security matters. In the seventeenth century, an urban kethuda was elected from among the wealthy elements in the city.[66] This kethuda, who was ranked among the ayan, could be chosen not only from among the merchants or distinguished guildsmen but also from among the members of the military class, who settled in the city and were included among the urban ayan.[67]

In 1786, when ayanship was abolished, the central government decided on the election of city kethudas to perform the duties of the baş-ayan (see below). This action indicates that ayanship and the post of the city kethuda were regarded as related institutions because both represented the urban population. Generally, in Near Eastern cities, the main function of the city official who performed the duties of the kethuda (the reis or şeyh ül-meşayih [principal şeyh]) was to look

after the interests of the urban population as a whole, as well as arbitrate in disputes among the guilds.[68] On the functions of kethudas in the Ottoman cities, we have more explicit information. The Ottoman urban kethuda was always mentioned first in the determination of official prices. He was always present at the court of law and acted as a witness for the city in such matters as taxes, iltizam, and the appointment of officials. When a kadi decided the court would take over some goods, he entrusted them to the kethuda. As the representative of the entire city, the kethuda was responsible for entertaining visiting state officials and attending to their accomodations and other needs. The firing of cannon during public festivities and religious holidays was among his duties. In brief, most services which today are the responsibility of the municipality were performed by the kethuda. It can also be argued that the city kethuda had semiofficial status. The fees known as kethudaiyye or kethudalık resmi, recorded in the registers of distribution, belonged to them.[69] However, urban kethudas were not usually members of the upper level urban ayan, that is, the ulema and aghas.

According to Evliya Çelebi, in the mid-seventeenth century the kethuda was a very important urban functionary.[70] He observed that in Saraybosna "the city emin (superintendent) and the city kethuda were influential upon guildsmen, merchants, ayan, and eşraf." The post of the kethuda and the election of an ayan to mediate between the government and the urban population may have set the precedent for the establishment of the institution of the ayan. But as we have already indicated, in the eighteenth century the new military, administrative, and financial conditions required that the representative of a community be the wealthiest and most influential member of that community. For this reason the ayan was elected from among the most powerful urban notables, while the city kethuda did not necessarily become an ayan.

The election of an ayan as the representative of a kaza from among other local notables and his recognition by the central government was certainly the most significant stage in the development of ayanlık. Research has shown that the practice of electing a reis-i ayan from among other ayan dates back to the 1680s. By the decade of 1710, the person who got himself elected as the ayan of a kaza had a document drawn and signed by all other ayan and then recorded in the sicill defteri by the kadi. This practice, dating back to an earlier period, was used in the election of guild kethudas. It appears that bitter struggles took place among

ayan for the post of the chief ayan because this position paved the way for the attainment of the posts of mütesellim and of voyvoda, and the consequent control of mukataas and iltizams.[71]

On the other hand, the practice of holding a single ayan, elected by local ayan, responsible for the conduct of local affairs had obvious practical advantages for the government officials concerned. The governor by issuing a buyruldu (certificate) to the elected ayan, officially recognized his role in the relations between the government and the local population. The practice of issuing buyruldus was an old one, applied since former times in the appointment of voyvodas and mütesellims. Thus it appears that the official acts of the governors, of entrusting the office of voyvoda to a person elected by the local notables, constituted a definite step towards the establishment of ayanlık. That in the eighteenth century the terms ayan and voyvoda were used interchangably confirms this fact. In most of the large cities, however, instead of a chief ayan there was a mütesellim, together with an oligarchy of local ayan who participated in local administration.

Following the reforms of 1784, the ayan in kazas were elected in the following manner: When the post of the ayan was vacated, the governor sent a buyruldu to the kadi of that kaza, requesting the election of a new ayan. Upon receiving this order, the kadi summoned to the courthouse the local notables and asked them to elect as ayan an experienced, righteous and just person capable of conducting local affairs. The notables were allowed three hours to carry out a secret and open inquiry in search of a candidate. At the end of three hours, they presented to the kadi a petition containing the name of the person they elected for the post with their testimony as to his suitability and membership in an old and respected family (hanedan). The notables then requested that the kadi send an official notification (ilam) to the governor, ratifying the petition.[72] Although this selection was actually made by the local notables, it was considered to have been done in the name of all the inhabitants of the kaza. That the person who was elected ayan was desired and chosen by all the inhabitants of the kaza, notables and commons alike, was not only stressed in the governor's order, but also in the petition presented by the notables subsequent to the election. It was pointed out that the election of such an ayan was essential to the welfare and peaceful existence of the people. Later, both the petition and the official notification were presented to the government.

The government attached great significance to the

fact that the ayan was a representative who had the approval of the local population. The principal concerns of the government were the ability of the elected ayan to fulfill obligations imposed by the state and his skill in making them acceptable to the people. For these reasons, the government wanted to be assured that the local population supported and was satisfied with the ayan. Although these latter considerations were responsible in the eighteenth century for giving local politics special prominence, they also created conditions for internal strife and, sometimes, for total anarchy. On the other hand, even those ayan who usurped power usually tried to gain the support of the people by striving to maintain security and ease the tax burden. Because complaints from the local citizenry often led to the dismissal, exile, confiscation of property, or even execution of ayan, they always lived in the shadow of this threat. Nevertheless, despite all its abuses and shortcomings, this system of Ottoman provincial government was a viable one. In the face of the difficult conditions of the eighteenth century, the system operated to safeguard the interests of the people as far as possible. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to regard this system as a kind of decentralized home rule which provided the people with a say in government.

The ayan discussed thus far were those in kazas. The situation of the most powerful ayan, who dominated a sancak or a vilayet, constituted the last stage of development in ayanship and presented the central government with a new set of problems. In the eighteenth century excesses committed by ayan led to a series of governmental reforms which began with the lists of local expenditures and allocations (tevzi defterleri) and resulted in changing somewhat the nature of ayanship. Modern students of the institution of ayan, not viewing these reforms within the context of general seventeenth and eighteenth century developments, attributed an entirely special meaning to them and so reached misleading conclusions. It is necessary at this juncture to analyze the documents relating to these reform measures.

In 1765 the power to confirm the election of the ayan was removed from governors and given to the grand vizir. The decree concerning this matter stated: "An ayan in a kaza, by means of bribery and for the sole purpose of personal gain, applies to the governor for a certificate of ayanship . . . [then] by bribing the kadi, he recoups from the taxpayers twice what he paid in bribes by including them in the registers of annual tax allocation [salyane defterleri]."[73] Recognizing the ruinous effects of these widespread malpractices in the

provinces, the sultan forbade the conferring of ayanships by the governor's buyruldu alone. Instead, it was provided that when representatives of the population of a kaza nominated a candidate for the post of ayan, the governor was first to investigate the candidate's qualifications and probity, and then present his recommendations to the central government for authorization. The final appointment of the ayan was made by the grand vizir (not by means of the sultan's berat, or patent which was used only for the appointment of state officials), who issued a special document (mektub or kaime-i icazet).

However, a few years later, during the Ottoman-Russian war, this reform was apparently abandoned because of the delays it caused in the appointment of ayan, who, it will be recalled, were responsible for fulfilling the government's wartime requisitions.[74] According to this new decision, when an ayan of a kaza died or was dismissed, the people of the kaza were to elect a new ayan without outside interference. The local kadi was to certify the election by recording it in his register of official acts. But in all such reform decisions it was stressed that an ayan was always a representative of a local population, elected without outside interference. The decrees stated that the principal qualities required in an ayan were his concern for the wellbeing of the local population and his trustworthiness. These documents also pointed out that ayanship lost its true function when the principle of popular election was abused, as when ayanship was attained through the bribery of governors and kadis.

In 1779 the reforms of 1765 were reinstated. In 1784 the reform had to be reconfirmed by the enlightened grand vizir, Halil Hamid Paşa, because rivalries for the post of ayan led to long, ruinous feuds and divided the population.[75] Such feuds, in fact, characterized Ottoman urban politics in the era of ayan ascendency. Acrimonious petitions, pouring in daily from contending ayan, kept the government fully informed of the situation. The governors tended for the most part to avoid involvement in these local struggles. However, by the decree of 1784, if the grand vizir was dissatisfied with a candidate, he could directly appoint someone of his own choice should he deem it in the best interests of the citizens concerned.[76]

By establishing governmental control over the election of provincial ayan, this reform measure was intended to put an end to abuses and the resulting disorders of the former system. Contrary to the claim often made, this reform edict did not transform ayanship into an official and public institution.[77] The new

regulation did not abolish local popular elections; rather it aimed at applying some sort of government control to ensure that elections did occur. In those instances where an ayan was centrally appointed rather than locally elected, that act was little more than an expediency dictated by a specific set of circumstances. The record shows that when such measures were previously tried, they met with little success.

Like its predecessors, the regulation of 1784 was ignored in the provinces and most ayan continued to acquire their posts by means of the governors' buyruldu. It was practically impossible to replace them or to alter the established practices. Among other things the lack of a regular effective system of election was responsible for the situation. Apparently the election of ayan was patterned after the old system employed in the election of guild representatives. In general, the choice was made by consensus of the few ayan and nobody of lower status dared to object. In conformity with the patrimonial ethics and hierarchical nature of the Ottoman society, this practice is also reminiscent of the Islamic institution of bayʿa by which the leading personages acted in behalf of the community to elect the caliph.[78] But sometimes, subsequent to the election, opponents of the incumbent who were his peers tried to overturn his election by using all available means--bribery, intimidation, or outright violence. This occurred even when the rival represented only a small minority.

In an effort to put an end to the disorders stemming from this system and to restore the authority of the central government in the provinces, the government, under grand vizir Koca Yusef Paşa (1785-88), finally took a radical step and abolished ayanship altogether by a firman issued in April 1786.[79] All functions previously performed by ayan were now assigned to the şehir-kethudası. Under the new regulation, the local population was to elect freely a city kethuda to conduct local affairs, and this elected kethuda did not have to obtain a certificate from the local kadi or from the governor. The decree made it clear that anybody seeking ayanship would be prosecuted for violation of the law. By this reform measure, the government once more recognized and confirmed the original principle of popular election of persons conducting local affairs; more precisely, the government reaffirmed the concept of obtaining the people's consent in the conduct of relations between the people and the government. On the other hand, by attempting to eliminate the domination of the ayan families in provincial administration and by replacing them with kethudas of humble

origins and little power, the government also sought to restore central authority in the provinces.

By a new decree in 1792, Selim III ordered that the registers of annual tax assessment for local expenditures kept by the kadis were to be drawn up by the notables of each region. These registers were to be officially certified by local kadis and a copy was to be submitted to the Porte for inspection and approval.[80] Only after such a register was ratified by a firman from the sultan were the ayan authorized to collect the impositions specified in the register. If any unjustifiable levy or expenditure was found in the register, the ayan and the local kadi who certified it had to reimburse the people. But only a few kazas complied with this regulation. Three years later, in a new decree, the local notables ("ayan ve vucuh-i memleket") were accused of continuing the old abuses in the drawing of registers and in exacting levies without the knowledge and the approval of the central government. Also though prohibited by law, the practice of exacting levies at times other than the regular interval of six months, as specified in the registers, continued as before. However, by 1838 the inspection of salyane defteris by the central government became an established practice.[81]

The role of the ayan in Ottoman history has so far been studied in the light of two contradicting views. The first and the essentially negative approach, which dominated the official Ottoman historiography, reflected Ottoman centralist policies. The second and the positive approach became current following the establishment of nation states in former Ottoman lands. From 1812, during the reign of Mahmud II, when the centralized system of government began to be restored and when the suppression of great ayan who had established their hereditary rule over extensive territories was underway, the ayan were considered not only to have usurped the authority of the central government but also to have exploited the reaya through illicit means. In fact, in this period the ayan in general began to be called by such names as mütegallibe or derebey, terms which had previously been applied to a separate category of ayan. Subsequently, however, the lesser ayan continued to enjoy an important position in Ottoman social and administrative life; for a long time they were referred to as müteayyinan and as vucuh-u ahalı (both meaning notables).[82]

Turkish historiography, mostly under the influence of the attitude reflected in the state papers and official chronicles, views the period of ayan ascendency in the eighteenth century as one of violence and anarchy. Recently, with the development of regional and national

historiographies, the historical role of ayan in Ottoman state and society has begun to receive a more favorable treatment. It has been acknowledged that the era of the ayan was, in fact, a period that paved the way for local autonomy and even for national sovereignty. Today, research undertaken in this direction has opened new and fruitful vistas of inquiry, but again not without exaggerations.[83]

3

CHANGES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE OTTOMAN CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION AND THE SYRIAN PROVINCES FROM THE SIXTEENTH TO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Abdul-Karim Rafeq

When Ottoman authority was at its peak during the sixteenth century, the Ottoman-occupied Arab lands were compelled to submit to the power of the sultan. Later in the century, as symptoms of weakness became apparent, defiance to Ottoman authority in the Arab provinces first appeared within the ranks of the governing body. The janissaries, angered by the adverse effects the debasement of the currency had on their salaries, responded with a series of armed mutinies, beginning in the provinces on the periphery of the Arab lands, in the Yemen; then, gathering strength, the disturbances engulfed Egypt in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, spreading into Syria in the early seventeenth century, and from there into Iraq, where they culminated in the Safavid occupation of Baghdad in the early 1620s. The term "Syria" in this study refers to classical bilad al-sham, extending between Taurus and Sinai, and the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia.

Local amirs (governors or local leaders) soon followed the example of the janissaries in defying Ottoman authority. In Syria, ᶜAli Pasha Janbulad, a chieftain of Kurdish origin based in the Aleppo-Killis region, and Fakhr al-Din Maᶜn II, the hereditary Druze amir of Mount Lebanon, joined forces against Ottoman authority during the first decade of the seventeenth century, but they were soon suppressed. However, local self-assertion continued to manifest itself as local people, especially in Damascus, started to penetrate the ranks of the janissary corps, until they often came to dominate the janissary troops stationed among them. In the province of Aleppo, where the citizens do not seem to have been able to control the janissary corps, an alternative power concentration was found in the local ashraf (notables alleged to be descended from the Prophet Muhammad).