

Why Did Süleyman the Magnificent Execute His Son Şehzade Mustafa in 1553?

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Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Oğlu Şehzade Mustafa'yı 1553'te Neden Boğdurttu?

Öz ■ Bu makalede Kanuni Sultan Süleyman'ın 1553 yılında Nahçıvan Seferi sırasında oğlu Şehzade Mustafa'yı neden boğdurttuğu incelenmektedir. Osmanlı kaynaklarında ve literatürde hakim olan görüşe göre, Süleyman'ın gözdesi ve sonra eşi Hürrem Sultan ve onunla işbirliği içinde olan damadı Sadrazam Rüstem Paşa'nın tahtı Hürrem'in oğullarından birisi için korumak amacıyla toplumun her kesimince çokça sevilen Şehzade Mustafa'yı babası nezdinde gözden düşürüp öldürtmüşlerdir. Sonrasında pişman olan Kanuni Sultan Süleyman, Sadrazam Rüstem Paşa'yı azletmiştir. Makalede Osmanlı, Venedik, Habsburg, Fransız ve Fars kaynakları ışığında Sultan Süleyman, Şehzade Mustafa, Hürrem Sultan ve Rüstem Paşa'nın oynadıkları roller incelenmekte ve Osmanlı veraset tecrübesi çerçevesinde sultanın şehzadeyi neden boğdurduğu sorgulanmaktadır. Buna göre, otoritesini şehzade lehine kaybeden sultan, şehzadeyi öldürterek hem kendi gücünü yeniden tesis etmek istemiş hem de Osmanlı hanedanını daha önceki veraset mücadelelerinde var olan toplumsal gruplar arası rekabetin dışına çıkarmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Şehzade Mustafa, veraset, kardeş katli, Hürrem Sultan, Kanuni Sultan Süleyman, Rüstem Paşa

In the summer of 1553, Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566) left Istanbul with the Ottoman army for his third campaign in the east against the Safavids—known as the Nahçıvan campaign. Before his departure, he had dispatched an order to the governor of Amasya, Şehzade (Prince) Mustafa (1515–1553), to prepare his forces to join this campaign. En route to Ereğli, Süleyman sent another messenger to his son indicating that the latter should join him there, where Süleyman's forces were scheduled to camp. Despite the warnings from within his

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entourage, particularly those of his mother, Mahidevran, Mustafa decided to join the sultan's army, telling advisers that he would not abstain from going "where destiny cast him."¹ It would not have been easy for Mustafa to decide whether to obey his father's orders, given that the sultan seemed to be accusing him of rebellion and of generating sedition.

On 6 October 1553 (27 Şevval 960), the prince arrived at the sultan's camp in order to kiss his father's hand; he dismounted his horse in front of the sultan's tent, leaving his steed with his *mirahûr* (stable master) and his sword with the sultan's guards. When he entered the fourth section of the imperial tent, he saw his father seated there with an arrow in his hand. He reverently saluted his father but received a shocking response: "Ah! Dog, do you still dare to salute me?" Then, at the sultan's order, three mutes caught Mustafa and began to strangle him. He nearly escaped their hands once, but ultimately he was overpowered and executed. His *mirahûr* and another *agha* who had been waiting outside were also killed. In the aftermath, the janissaries' mourning of their beloved prince was superseded by their fury, and the sultan dismissed Rüstem Pasha (d. 1561) from his position as grand vizier. It is perhaps for this reason that Rüstem has since been thought to bear principal responsibility for Mustafa's demise.

The death of Mustafa was a mournful event not only because he had been loved by janissaries, bureaucrats, religious scholars, and poets alike—in short, by almost every influential social group in the empire—but also because it was believed that he had been murdered in a plot staged by Süleyman's beloved wife Hürrem (d. 1558) and his grand vizier and son-in-law Rüstem Pasha. Hürrem and Rüstem knew that significant number of men loved and supported Süleyman's eldest son, Mustafa (thirty-eight years old at the time), and it would have been difficult for one of Hürrem's sons to ascend the throne as long as Mustafa was alive. For that reason, the commonly accepted story goes—in both major Ottoman historical accounts and the modern scholarly literature—Hürrem and Rüstem craftily planned to frame Mustafa as a rebel in the eyes of the sultan, who ultimately executed his innocent son.

While Hürrem and Rüstem have been seen as opposing the most talented

1 "Relazione Anonima della Guerra di Persia dell'anno 1553 e di Molti Altri Particolari," in *Relazioni degli Ambasciatori Veneti al Senato*, (Firenze: Tipografia e Calcografia all'Insegna di Clío, 1840), ser. III, v. 1, 208 [Hereafter "Relazione Anonima"]. Much of the details on the execution of Şehzade Mustafa is available in a Venetian source whose author is unknown. Although some information provided here is not present in other sources, the argument and certain details agree with others.

prince of their time, Süleyman has been criticized severely for allowing this faction to deceive him and for his selfish decisions to preserve his power that ultimately turned the Ottoman state from a “progressive” enterprise into a “stagnant” and “corrupt” one.² Writing in the late sixteenth century, historian Mustafa Ali, for example, pointed to the year 960/1553 in reference to Mustafa’s execution as the moment at which the Ottoman Empire began to decline.³ Based on this general belief, the dominant narrative recounting the death of Şehzade Mustafa holds that an innocent prince was executed by a naïve and credulous father who had been deceived by the prince’s stepmother and the sultan’s grand vizier, who wanted to guarantee the throne to one of Hürrem’s sons (Selim or Bayezid).⁴ Historians and poets even marked 960/1553 with the chronogram *mekr-i Rüstem* (Rüstem’s trick). This view, which has been accentuated in the Ottoman narrative and literary sources, as well as in modern scholarly literature,⁵ was not limited to the Otto-

- 2 The elegy (*mersiye*) of Şehzade Mustafa, composed by Yahya Bey immediately after the execution of the prince starts with “One side of this world was destroyed/The *celalis* of death took away Mustafa Khan” (Meded meded bu cihânun yıkıldı bir yanı/Ecel celâlileri aldı Mustafa Han’ı).
- 3 Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli (1541–1600)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 258–259.
- 4 Hürrem gave birth four sons who survived to adolescence. Her eldest son Mehmed died in 1543 and her youngest son Cihangir was gibbous. So these two were not considered as candidate for the throne in 1550s. See Alan Fisher, “Süleymân and His Sons,” in *Soliman le Magnifique et son Temps: Actes du Colloque de Paris, Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 7–10 Mars 1990*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris: Documentation française, 1992), 117–24.
- 5 See Ali Cevat Bey, *Tarihin kanlı sahifeleri: Şehzade Şehit Mustafa: tarihi bir varaka-i mühimme* (İstanbul: İtimat Kütüphanesi, n.d.); İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2011), v. II: 401–404; İsmail Hami Danişmend, *İzablı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1947), v. II: 278–287. The date marking with *mekr-i Rüstem*, for example, was immediately adopted in Persian historical sources. See Būdāq Munshī Qazvinī, *Javābir al-akbbār: bakhsh-i tārikh-i Īrān az Qarāqūyūnlū tā sāl-i 984 H.Q.* (Tehran: Āyene-ye Mīrās, 2000), 208; Qāzī Aḥmad Ghaffārī Qazvinī, *Tārikh-i jahān-ārā: bā muqābalah-i chandīn nuskhah-i mu’tabar-i qadīmī va nuskhah-i muḥashshā ‘allāmah Qazvinī* (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-i Ḥāfiz, 1343), 301. In European drama and literature, the subject has been treated as a tragedy of an innocent prince, parallel to the Ottoman sources. In Italy, the most popular tragedy on Süleyman and the execution of Mustafa, Prospero Bonarelli’s *Il Solimano*, was first performed in Ancona in 1618. In addition to Bonarelli’s drama, other important theatrical works on the subject were F. Cerone’s *Il Solimano* (1722), C. Federici’s *Solimano il Magnifico* (1800), Anton Maria Caspi’s *Il Mustafa* (1606), Guido Dezan’s *Solimano II* (1886) and Michel Angelo Valentini’s *Solimano* (1756) etc. See Metin And, *Türkiye’de İtalyan sahnesi, İtalyan sahnesinde Türkiye* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1989), 160–173; Nazan Aksoy, *Rönesans İngiltere’sinde Türkler* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2004), 68; Clarence Dana Rouillard, *The Turk in French History, Thought,*

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man lands but was also prevalent in neighboring countries. Although some recent studies have analyzed the subject from different perspectives,⁶ this view remains dominant in literature and media.⁷

Mustafa's execution still receives attention, however, and many aspects of it have led historians to continue asking questions. Even if one accepts the dominant narrative, it is difficult to fault Hürrem for desiring to eliminate Mustafa, considering her role as the mother of four princes and her responsibility for training, educating, and preparing them as prospective sultans.⁸ Moreover, every prince had the right to ascend the throne, while the land was indivisible; therefore, competition between surviving princes had in the past led to fratricide, which was even codified in the Lawbook of Mehmed II (r. 1451–1481).⁹ If fratricide was an expected and likely phenomenon after the death of each sultan, it is reasonable that Hürrem should act to save the lives of her own sons, given that Mustafa was generally considered the favorite to become the next sultan. In addition, the asymmetry in the sources with respect to the actions of Hürrem and Rüstem, on one hand, and those of Mustafa and his mother, Mahidevran, on the other, may have misled researchers seeking to understand what happened. Almost every act of Hürrem and Rüstem can be followed in archival documents because they were in Istanbul, the imperial center; however, the relations, activities, and connections of Mustafa and Mahidevran were beyond the realm of recording because they had been living in the provinces. However, I have found documents in the Venetian archives demonstrating that Mustafa was not quietly standing by; indeed, he was as crafty in

and Literature (1520–1660). (Paris: Boivin, 1941), 421–466; Linda. McJannet, *The Sultan Speaks: Dialogue in English Plays and Histories about the Ottoman Turks*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 141–168.

- 6 Şerafettin Turan, *Şehzade Bayezid Vakası* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1961) emphasized the role of displeased groups in Anatolia who supported first Mustafa and then another prince Bayezid. Leslie Peirce treats the issue in relation to the dynastic reproduction policies and argues that Süleyman followed a policy of open succession without explicitly favoring any prince. See Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 79–86. See also Feridun M. Emecen, *Osmanlı Klasik Çağında Siyaset* (Istanbul: Timaş, 2011), 181–186.
- 7 Recently, the Turkish TV serial, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (The Magnificent Century), reflected the dominant narrative on the execution of Şehzade Mustafa (Episode 123, 12 February 2014).
- 8 Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 42–44.
- 9 Halil İnalcık, “The Ottoman Succession and Its Relation to the Turkish Concept of Sovereignty,” in *The Middle East and the Balkans under the Ottoman Empire: Essays on Economy and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1993), 59–60.

consolidating power and recruiting supporters as his competitors in Istanbul were.

The questions that I raise here are why Süleyman the Magnificent gave the order to execute Şehzade Mustafa and what implications this action had for dynastic legitimacy and succession thereafter. I treat the issue from the perspective that every actor was intentionally behaving according to the role he or she was expected to play in the system, as it existed. Thus, this study does not blame or exonerate anybody; rather, it considers the conditions the sultan faced, those he imagined for the future, and those under which he ultimately decided to execute his firstborn son. In other words, I explore how the sultan came to his decision and speculate about what might have occurred if the sultan had spared Mustafa's life. A bit of background on succession in Ottoman history leads into a discussion of each actor's position toward the mid-sixteenth century. Based on the available sources, I reconstruct the story of Mustafa's execution, providing a more nuanced account than the traditional narrative does. In addition, I identify some implications of the execution for later developments in Ottoman succession.

The Scene: Succession in Ottoman History

Ottoman succession was closely related to the Turco-Mongol steppe conception of political order, according to which, sovereignty was considered the purview of the whole dynastic family—that is, each male member of the reigning dynasty possessed the right to rule. In the Turco-Mongol tradition, the ruling sovereign had usually distributed the land as appanages among the living male members of dynasty (also known as the *ülüş* system).¹⁰ This arrangement led to competition and sometimes to civil war between princes who fought for supremacy that would keep the country united under a single ruler. The Ottoman experience did not include the division of the land into appanages, but it left the right of succession open to competition among princes. Having reached adolescence, then, the princes were sent to take up a provincial governorship and acquire political experience, as well as to prepare for the upcoming competition for the throne. On many occasions, unsuccessful brothers were executed by the ascending sultan, the one considered divinely blessed.¹¹

10 İsenbike Togan, *Flexibility and Limitation in Steppe Formations* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Abdülkadir İnan, ““Orun” ve “Ülüş” Meselesi” *Türk hukuk ve iktisat tarihi mecmuası*, v. 1 (1931): 121–133.

11 For example, When Murad I died on the Battle of Kosovo, his son Bayezid who was with his father at the time assumed the throne for himself and he commanded to kill his brother

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The question of Ottoman legitimacy also contributed from an early date to this deadly competition between princes. Because Ottoman sultans lacked outstanding sources of political legitimacy (such as a noble lineage like the Chingizid line or prophetic descent), the early Ottoman rulers had little to bolster their claims to legitimacy.¹² Although they supported and patronized some efforts to trace a noble lineage based on the Oghuzid line, together with the Aqqoyunlu clan, in the fifteenth century,¹³ the primary source of Ottoman legitimacy was their efficiency in *gaza*, the religious zeal to expand Islamdom and acquire booty that would benefit Muslims.¹⁴ The legitimacy of a sultan was to some extent based on his effectiveness as a *gazi* sultan—that is, in leading the army to victory in conquest. When a sultan died, the right to rule ideally passed to the prince who was most courageous and most capable of leading the army to further success. The competition between the princes was in a sense an arena in which each had the chance to demonstrate their competence and capacity to become a *gazi* sultan. While the competition was an open “game,” the one who overcame his brothers was considered to have received God’s dispensation (*kut*) and to be destined for

(Ya’kub) who was sent heroically to chase the retrieving enemies. Although Ya’kub may be more courageous and heroic, the God’s favor, from the perspective of the Turco-Mongol tradition, was on Bayezid and so the fate raised him to the throne. See Neşri, *Kitâb-ı Cihannümâ*, eds. Faik Reşit Unat and Mehmed A. Köymen (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014), v. I: 93a-b; Halil İnalçık, “The Ottoman Succession,” 58–59.

12 See İnalçık, “The Ottoman Succession”; Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, chap. 11.

13 Aldo Gallotta, “Il mito oguzo e le origini dello stato ottomano: Una riconsiderazione,” in *The Ottoman Emirate (1300–1389)*, ed. Elizabeth Zachariadou (Rethymnon: Crete University Press, 1993), 41–59; Colin Imber, “The Ottoman Dynastic Myth,” *Turcica* 19 (1987): 7–27; John E. Woods, *The Aqqoyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire*, Revised and expanded edition (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999), 1–10.

14 Paul Wittek argues that the rise of Ottomans from principality to the vast empire was a result of their engagement of *gaza* and their zeal for expanding the Islamdom. See Paul Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire: Studies in the History of Turkey, Thirteenth-Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. Colin Heywood, Royal Asiatic Society Books (New York: Routledge, 2012); Paul Wittek, “De la défaite d’ankara à la prise de Constantinople,” *Revue des études islamiques* xii (1938): 1–34. Rudi Paul Lindner criticizes Paul Wittek with his disregard of tribal conditions and inconsistency between *gaza* ethos and Ottoman conflicts with neighboring Muslim principalities. See Rudi Paul Lindner, *Nomads and Ottomans in Medieval Anatolia* (Bloomington: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1983). For a critique of Lindner and the venues for use of Ottoman sources on early Ottomans see Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

success.¹⁵ Şehzade Mustafa appeared more courageous and competitive than his brothers were, thanks to his military prowess and leadership, attracting extensive support from diverse segments of society at a time when his father, Sultan Süleyman, seemed content to settle down in Istanbul and less eager to expand Ottoman territories (more on this in a moment).

What made princely competition and fratricide more profound, as mentioned earlier, was their codification in dynastic law (*Kanunname-i Âl-i Osman*) by Mehmed II (r. 1451–1481).¹⁶ The law states, “For the welfare of the state, the one of my sons to whom God grants the sultanate may lawfully put his brothers to death. A majority of the ulema consider this permissible.”¹⁷ With this code, fratricide gained firmer ground as acceptable and customary, and Mehmed’s law attempted to entrench its permissibility vis-à-vis Islamic law. The dynastic law code, further, not only justified the practice of fratricide but also seems to have rendered it imperative for any would-be sultan. The first thing a new sultan was

15 İnalçık, “The Ottoman Succession,” 52–53; Nicolas Vatin and Gilles Veinstein, *Le Sérail ébranlé: essai sur les morts, dépositions et avènements des sultans ottomans (XIVe-XIXe siècle)* (France: Fayard, 2003), 91. For example, As the sons of Bayezid II, Ahmed, Korkud and Selim, began to compete for the throne in early sixteenth century, Ahmed was most probable candidate for the throne because of his strong network and support. Both Ahmed and Korkud lost their credit because of their inertia and failure to suppress the Shahquli/Şahkulu rebellion (1509–11). Selim effectively used the rhetoric that he could suppress the rebellion and solve the Safavid problem, thereby he attracted the support of the janissaries and Sipahis of Rumelia for they believed that Selim seemed to be more courageous and having more zeal to engage in *gaza* to expand the lands of Islam. See M. Çağatay Uluçay, “Yavuz Sultan Selim Nasıl Padişah Oldu?-I,” *Tarih Dergisi*, no. 9 (1953): 53–90; (II): no. 10 (1954): 117–142; (III): no. 11–12 (1955): 185–200; Feridun M. Emecen, *Yavuz Sultan Selim* (Istanbul: Yitik Hazine Yayınları, 2010), 45–86; H. Erdem Çıpa, *Yavuz’un Kavgası: I. Selim’in Saltanat Mücadelesi* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2013).

16 The time of the codification of the *Kânûnnâme* has been a point of dispute among historians. The existence of some anachronistic elements in the content of the codified law has led some historians to question its authenticity from the time of Mehmed II. However, the regulation on the succession has been usually considered as a reflection of a practice that had already been in practice. See Konrad Dilger, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des osmanischen Hofzeremoniells im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert*. (München: Trofenik, 1967), 5–36; Abdülkadir Özcan, ed., *Kanunname Âl-i Osman (Tahlil ve Karşılaştırmalı Metin)* (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2007); Ahmet Akgündüz, *Osmanlı Kanunnâmeleri ve Hukukî Tahlilleri* (Istanbul: Fey Vakfı Yayınları, 1990), I: 317–345; Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 197–200.

17 “[V]e her kimesneye evlâdımdan saltanat müyesser ola, karındaşların nizâm-ı âlem için katletmek münâsibdir, ekser ülemâ dahi tecvîz etmiştir, anınla âmil olalar.” See Özcan, ed., *Kanunname-i Âl-i Osman*. For a legal discussion of fratricide in Ottoman history, see Mehmet Akman, *Osmanlı Devletinde Kardeş Katli* (Istanbul: Eren, 1997).

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expected to do, then, was to chase after his brothers and execute both them and their children—even if no open crime or act of treason had been committed. The rationale was that leaving a potential contender for the throne might pave the way for sedition or give neighboring powers a means by which to interfere in Ottoman politics.¹⁸

After Selim I (r. 1512–1520), Süleyman ascended the throne without any competition: he was the deceased sultan's only son. As a result, he was able to direct his energy and capacity toward conquests and the consolidation of his power, marking his reign with glory and magnificence. As he grew old, however, competition among his surviving sons—Mustafa (b. 1515), Mehmed (b. 1521), Selim (b. 1524), Bayezid (b. 1525), and Cihangir (b. 1531)¹⁹—overshadowed this glory with bitter casualties and executions. The most striking of these was undoubtedly the execution of Şehzade Mustafa by Süleyman's order. What led the sultan to kill his own son, rather than leaving matters to take their course after his death?

18 False pretenders was a constant source of problem for the Ottoman sultanate. Two Düzmece Mustafa affairs in 1421 and 1555 show that these false pretenders could easily gather armed forces around themselves and they may be a stooge used by a foreign power. Besides, when Mehmed II died in 1481, Bayezid managed to ascend the throne before his brother Cem. Since the latter also asserted his claims for the throne and demanded from Bayezid the country be divided into two parts, the problem of succession grew first to be a civil war and then an international issue when Cem fled to Mamluk lands. Fearing an Ottoman attack, Mamluks sent Cem to Rhodes, which was the base of the knights of St. John. The issue became a pretext for a crusade, when he was transferred from Rhodes to Rome as a captive of the Papacy. Bayezid negotiated with Pope Innocent VIII to keep his brother safe in Rome. Ultimately, Cem died in 1495 and the succession problem was resolved. See Halil İnalcık, "A Case Study in Renaissance Diplomacy: The Agreement between Innocent VIII and Bayezid II on Djem Sultan," *Journal of Turkish Studies* III (1979): 209–30; Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, 1204–1571* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1976), II: 381–416. Similarly, when Selim I ascended the throne as his father, Bayezid II, abdicated in his favor, first thing he did was to chase after his brother Ahmed and Korkud who had supporters among the viziers and learned class. Their presence would pose continuous threats to Selim and made his rule fragile in the awaiting problems of the Safavids and *qizilbash* subjects. Selâhattin Tansel, *Yavuz Sultan Selim* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1969), 6–30; Emecen, *Yavuz Sultan Selim*, 71–86.

19 Three sons of Süleyman, Murad and Mahmud (d. 1521) and Abdullah (1522), died in infancy. See Fisher, "Süleymân and His Sons"; A. D. Alderson, *The Structure of the Ottoman Dynasty* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1956), Talbe XXX; M. Çağatay Uluçay, *Padişahların Kadınları ve Kızları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1980), 34–38; Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 58–63.

The Actors: Süleyman and His Family

Having inherited a vast empire from his father, Süleyman continued to expand the lands of Ottoman dominion. In his first ten years as ruler, he consolidated the newly conquered Arab lands, captured Belgrade and Rhodes, and destroyed the medieval Hungarian kingdom. The rivalry between Süleyman and Habsburg Emperor Charles V grew into a competition for ideological innovations, erupting in heated battles in Europe and the Mediterranean. Amid the raging currents of apocalypticism in the first half of the sixteenth century, Süleyman was portrayed not only as “the master of the conjunction” (*sahib-qıran*) but also even as the messiah.²⁰ Süleyman’s enterprise was believed to have ushered in a universal monarchy, something that was expected to occur in the year 960/1553, when great astral planets (namely, Jupiter and Saturn) would align in a special conjunction.

After completing these ambitious ventures, however, Süleyman began to favor less bellicose foreign policy starting in the 1540s. In connection with this, his public image shifted from universal king to regional emperor; tired of waging war on the eastern or the western front almost every year, he preferred to stay in Istanbul for most of the year and to spend winters in Edirne, where he could rest better than he could in the imperial capital. Adopting a modest lifestyle in his domicile, he increasingly withdrew from politics and abstained from sumptuous exhibitions and ventures. Because of his chronic illnesses—particularly, gout and dropsy—Süleyman came to pass his days resting or hunting in the imperial gardens.²¹

In addition, seeing the growing tension between his sons, the sultan grew fearful that he would witness their conflict during his lifetime; for this reason, he did not wish to leave the capital long enough for any of his sons to supplant him,

20 Cornell H. Fleischer, “The Lawgiver as Messiah: The Making of the Imperial Image in the Reign of Süleymân,” in *Soliman le Magnifique et son Temps: Actes du Colloque de Paris, Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 7–10 Mars 1990*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris: Documentation française, 1992), 159–77; Cornell H. Fleischer, “Shadows of Shadows: Prophecy and Politics in 1530s Istanbul,” *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 13, no. 1–2 (2007): 51–62; Robert Finlay, “Prophecy and Politics in Istanbul: Charles V, Sultan Süleyman and the Habsburg Embassy of 1533–1534,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 2, no. 1 (1998): 1–31.

21 Navagero reports that Süleyman adopted a sober diet, rejecting to drink wine unlike he used to do during the time of Ibrahim Pasha (1523–1536). See Bernardo Navagero, “Relazione dell’Impero Ottomano del Clarissimo Bernardo Navagero, Stato Bailo a Costantinopoli Fatta in Pregadi nel Mese di Febbrajo del 1553,” in *Relazioni degli Ambasciatori Veneti al Senato*, ed. Eugenio Albèri, III, v.1 (Firenze: Tipografia e Calcografia all’Insegna di Clio, 1840), 72–73 [Hereafter: Navagero, “Relazione”].

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and he was well aware of Mustafa's prestige and stature, as well as of the people's support for him. The sultan's noticeable absence from the public role of military commander and his leaving administration to Rüstem provoked many soldiers who had preferred a conquering sultan. In fact, as Venetian *bailo* Bernardo Navagero attests, the idea of the sultan's inclination to peace can be attributed to a large extent to Rüstem:

Because of age and the many accomplishments that made him a worthy successor by virtue of his past—having seized Rhodes and Belgrade, having driven the unlucky king of Hungary from rule and from life, and having won many regions in the Persian borders—Süleyman chose, not without good reason, to maintain peace.... [Rüstem] pasha who is inclined to tranquility ... in peacetime is safe to always keep the reputation he has now and to enjoy the grandeur of the whole empire.... It clear that in this last war in Transylvania with the most serene king of the Romans [i.e., Ferdinand of Austria], the sultan several times admitted with regret that things had gone too far. In sum, it is reasonably believed, as I say, that the sultan from now on will abhor war and will not resort to it unless he is forced, and then [will do so] neither by his hand nor by his person, but by the hand of others—just as this year [1552], though he had announced the desire to go in person to Hungary, he decided to send Achmet Pasha.²²

Süleyman's eldest son, Mustafa, was born in 1515 to the Circassian concubine Mahidevran,²³ who had been Süleyman's consort from the time of his governorship in Manisa when he was still a prince. However, Mahidevran fell from favor when Süleyman turned his attentions to Hürrem; therefore, Mustafa does not seem to have been the sultan's first choice as a successor. Initially, the eldest prince was appointed governor of Manisa (1534), his father's former seat, but he was transferred to Amasya (1540) just as the time came for Hürrem's eldest son, Mehmed, to take up a provincial princely governorate. The greater distance from

22 See Ibid., 79–80.

23 The ethnic origin of Mahidevran is not firmly established. Although most of the sources (Ibid., 74; Domenico Trevisano, "Relazione dell'Impero Ottomano del Clarissimo Domenico Trevisano, Tornato Bailo da Costantinopoli sulla fine del 1554," in *Relazioni degli Ambasciatori Veneti al Senato*, ed. Eugenio Albèri, III, v.1 (Firenze: Tipografia e Calcografia all'Insegna di Clio, 1840), 115 [Hereafter: Trevisano, "Relazione"]) state that she was Circassian; there are a few sources indicating that she was Albanian. Compare in Daniello de' Ludovisi, "Relazione dell'Impero Ottomano Riferita in Senato dal Secretario Daniello de' Ludovisi, a dì 3 Giugno del 1534," in *Relazioni degli Ambasciatori Veneti al Senato*, ed. Eugenio Albèri, III, v.1 (Firenze: Tipografia e Calcografia all'Insegna di Clio, 1840), 28–29 [Hereafter: Ludovisi, "Relazione"].

Amasya to Istanbul, relative to that from the capital to Manisa, now home to Mehmed's court, seems to have put Mustafa at a disadvantage in the competition for succession. On the other hand, however, while Manisa was the first provincial post for the princes in their youth, Amasya was a strategically important location along the route to the east; thus, moving from Manisa to Amasya was actually a promotion.²⁴ It seems that overall Mustafa did perceive himself to be at any disadvantage, even when Mehmed's sudden death (1543) escalated the silent competition into an overt war among the brothers. Mustafa's candidacy continued, and, according to a report from Navagero, even the sultan expected him to succeed, for he told his youngest son, Cihangir, "My son Mustafa will become the sultan and will deprive you all of your lives."²⁵

Mustafa held considerable power and great deal of credibility among various powerful social groups. He earned the goodwill of the janissaries; he also attained a considerable reputation as a patron of scholars and poets.²⁶ Navagero records his image as follows:

One cannot describe how much he is loved and desired by all in the empire to succeed. The janissaries want him, and they let this be known manifestly. There is no Turk or slave of the Gran-Signor who does not have the same opinion or desire, because in addition to primogeniture, which should rightfully give him the empire, his reputation as courageous, generous, and fair makes everybody yearn for him.²⁷

It was not easy to compete with a prince like Mustafa when so many hoped to see him become sultan. The janissaries, especially, who considered Sultan Süleyman aged and unable to lead military campaigns, wished Mustafa to ascend the throne even before the sultan's death. They hoped to see a Sultan Mustafa resume conquests in the west and decisively defeat the Safavids.²⁸ In this respect, the janissaries' preference recalls the accession of Selim I, Süleyman's father. Though Bayezid I (r. 1481–1512) and his viziers had preferred the oldest prince, Ahmed,

²⁴ Peirce, *Imperial Harem*, 80.

²⁵ Navagero, "Relazione," 77.

²⁶ Hüseyin Hüsameddin, *Amasya Tarihi* (Istanbul: Hikmet Matbaa-i İslâmiyesi, 1910), III: 306.

²⁷ Navagero, "Relazione," 77–78.

²⁸ Such an expectation can be followed with the observations of Trevisano who stated that if Mustafa had become sultan, he could have channeled the enthusiasm and the love of his supporters to another expedition against the Christians. See Trevisano, "Relazione," 173.

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Selim—despite his distant governorship in Trabzon—had challenged his father by attaining the support of the janissaries and the *sipahis* in Rumeli. Under pressure, Bayezid finally surrendered the throne to Selim in 1512 and left Istanbul for Dimetoka (though he died on the way).²⁹ The janissaries' extensive support of Mustafa must certainly have reminded Süleyman of his father's success and of his grandfather's fate. As I discuss below, however, it was the janissaries' love for Mustafa that led to the prince's demise when the sultan's authority was put to the test.

Mustafa, for his part, did not ignore the enthusiasm of the janissaries. He wanted his rights to the throne respected and gathered important people around him. He disclosed his ambitions in a letter to Ayas Pasha, the governor of Erzurum, expressing his desire for the throne—although he clearly stated that he would not overthrow his father and wished to be sultan only after Süleyman's death. He requested the help of Ayas Pasha, who at the time was a promising bureaucrat.³⁰ Ayas Pasha responded positively, assuring the prince that he was worthier of the throne than his brothers were.³¹

In addition, Mustafa had been in communication with the Venetian *bailo* in Istanbul, Domenico Trevisano, and with the Venetian senate. A dispatch Trevisano sent to the Venetian Council of Ten written on 15 October 1553 indicates that Mustafa had sent a messenger, Nebi Bey, to the *bailo* asking for his help gaining the throne; this man had also traveled to Venice to negotiate with the senate.³² The *bailo* had received word on 6 October that Nebi Bey had arrived in Venice on the first of the month and was scheduled for an audience with the Venetian Collegio the following day. According to the rumors circulating in Venice, the mission of Mustafa's man was to broker a deal with Venetian authorities, who were willing to support Mustafa with Venetian intelligence and technical services if he would return to them the former Venetian strongholds in Morea (the Peloponnese).³³

29 See Uluçay, "Yavuz Sultan Selim Nasıl Padişah Oldu?"; Emecen, *Yavuz Sultan Selim*, 64–70

30 Şerafettin Turan, *Şehzâde Bayezid Vak'ası*, 24 and 181–183. For Mustafa's plan to ascend the throne after the death of Süleyman, see Hans Dernschwam, *Hans Dernschwam's Tagebuch einer Reise nach Konstantinopel und Kleinasien (1553/55)*, ed. Franz Babinger (München and Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1923), 55.

31 Turan, *Şehzâde Bayezid Vak'ası*, 26.

32 Archivio di Stati di Venezia, *Consiglio di Dieci, Dispacci Costantinopoli*, Busta 2, 37r-v.

33 See the letter of M. de Selve to the French king Henri II in Ernest Charrière, *Négociations de la France dans le Levant* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1848), II: 288–289.

Mustafa had sent Nebi Bey with precious gifts to Venice in order to guarantee Venetian support in his struggle for the throne. His messenger delivered the prince's letters and those of Mustafa's *emiralem* (standard-bearer), Thomas Michiel, the son of a Venetian nobleman who had been captured in the battle of Preveza. Nebi Bey was welcomed and hosted well in Venice; when he set out for Istanbul, the Venetians accompanied him as far as Ragusa in order to protect him from Uskok raids. He was carrying two letters from Venice, one for Mustafa and one for his *emiralem*, Thomas Michiel.³⁴

However, Mustafa never lived to see his messenger return; he was executed the same day Nebi Bey set out from Venice, 6 October 1553. The *bailo's* 15 October dispatch reported Mustafa's death to the Venetian senators.³⁵ The news was a shock for them, and they lost hope of regaining the old fortresses in Morea.³⁶ This abortive episode in princely diplomacy, however, demonstrates that just as Hürrem (probably in collaboration with Rüstem) did for her sons, Mustafa likewise was acting to bolster his claim to the throne; moreover, he was more successful than his half-brothers in gaining valuable support. Forming coalitions and seeking allies were perfectly legitimate moves for a candidate to the throne, and supporting a particular claimant constituted a way for various social groups (e.g., janissaries, viziers, scholars, middle-class citizens) to participate in imperial politics.

Süleyman's favorite concubine, Hürrem, gave birth to many children; of these, four sons, Mehmed (b. 1521), Selim (b. 1524), Bayezid (b. 1525), and Cihangir (b. 1531), and one daughter, Mihrimah (b. 1522), reached adolescence. Despite the tradition of "one concubine, one son,"³⁷ Süleyman's continued favoring of Hürrem and her bearing multiple sons show that she obtained incredible power and prestige within the imperial family. Naturally, she desired to retain this power even after Süleyman's death; the obvious way to achieve this was for one of her sons ascend the throne, making her the queen mother (*vâlîde sultan*)

34 Copies of the letters are in Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Senato, Deliberazioni Secreti*, Reg. 68, 184v-185v.

35 Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Senato, Deliberazioni Secreti*, Reg. 68, 184r-v

36 Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Senato, Deliberazioni Secreti*, Reg. 68, 200r-201r. For the disappointment, see Charrière, *Négociations*, II: 288–289.

37 In principle, one concubine was allowed to give birth only to one son, Hürrem as being an exception gave birth to more than one son, and we know four of them who lived relatively long. Each concubine, according to the principle, was expected to exert her effort to educate her son and invest him to be best candidate for the throne. For the working of the 'single-son concubine' principle see Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 42–50.

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and the most powerful woman in the empire. Hürrem also broke the principle of a concubine's accompanying her son to the province, instead remaining in the capital (close to the center of power) to care for her three younger sons. Hürrem wished to secure the throne for one of her sons, as any concubine would have,³⁸ but Mehmed's sudden death in 1543 placed her in a more desperate position because it rendered Mustafa, the son of Mahidevran, the most powerful candidate for the sultanate.

Toward the late 1540s and into the early 1550s, the silent competition between Mustafa and the sons of Hürrem became more apparent and more public. The aged sultan, who was struggling with illnesses, preferred to rest, sending his viziers to conduct military campaigns; he may have been reluctant to leave the capital, again, because he also feared a war of succession even before his death. The Habsburg ambassador Gerhard Veltwyck reported near the end of 1545 that Rüstem and the other viziers were ready for a peace agreement because of the discord among Süleyman's sons.³⁹ Both Veltwyck (in February 1547) and Habsburg ambassador in Istanbul, Malvezzi, (in February 1550) reported that Rüstem wanted to eliminate Mustafa in order to secure the throne for Selim.⁴⁰ In fact, Hürrem, Mihrimah, and Rüstem collaborated to facilitate the accession of either Selim or Bayezid to the throne.⁴¹

Süleyman's grand vizier and son-in-law, Rüstem Pasha, had been taken as a *devşirme* boy and trained with an Ottoman palace education. Having acquired the sultan's favor, Rüstem quickly climbed the steps of various positions, rising to the

38 The concubines were supposed to accompany their sons, when they leave the capital for provincial governorship. Mustafa was sent to the governorship of Manisa in 1533 and his mother Mahidevran accompanied him. When Hürrem's oldest son Mehmed was of the age for provincial governorship in 1542, he went to Manisa alone and his mother Hürrem stayed in Istanbul.

39 Srecko M Dzaja, Karl Nehring, and Günter Weiß, eds., *Austro-Turcica, 1541–1552: diplomatische Akten des habsburgischen Gesandtschaftsverkehrs mit der Hohen Pforte im Zeitalter Süleymans des Prächtigen* (München: Oldenbourg, 1995), 89.

40 Ibid., 139 and 398.

41 For some sources, Hürrem and Rüstem preferred Selim whereas according to some other sources they were inclined to Bayezid. The other son Cihangir was gibbous and tacitly not considered as a candidate for the throne. In either case, they want to prevent Mustafa from accession and save the throne for Selim or Bayezid after the death of Süleyman. Danişmend calls them as 'palace party' (*saray partisi*). See Danişmend, *Kronoloji*, II: 279–281; Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 79–86; Turan, *Şehzâde Bayezid Vak'ası*, 18–21.

grand vizierate in 1544.⁴² His marriage with Mihrimah Sultan, the only surviving daughter of Süleyman and Hürrem, made him part of the palace network headed by Hürrem. Like his mother-in-law, he desired that the aged sultan be succeeded by one of Hürrem's sons. It was also to his advantage to prevent Mustafa from becoming sultan: Rüstem fell outside Mustafa's network by virtue of his proximity to Hürrem. Rüstem hoped that if the throne was occupied by one of Hürrem's sons, he could maintain his power as grand vizier and control the government. Therefore, Mustafa's demise would serve Rüstem's interests.

It is generally accepted that Rüstem tried to damage Mustafa's reputation, at least in the sultan's eyes. For example, in 1549, when the Georgians killed the governor of Erzurum, Mustafa, from his post in Amasya, requested help from Istanbul to attack the Georgians. However, Rüstem did not send assistance to the prince, calculating that Mustafa would gain still more prestige if he defeated the Georgians. In 957/1550, some highway robbers from Iran crossed Ottoman borders and looted several villages in eastern Anatolia. Mustafa again petitioned for help, and Rüstem again responded negatively. Being disturbed with constant appeals from Mustafa, Rüstem recalled Mustafa's vizier, Lala Cafer Pasha, to Istanbul and sent the Bosnian Ahmed Pasha to replace him and apparently to act as a spy. However, this plan disintegrated when Ahmed Pasha earned Mustafa's trust and married one of his daughters.⁴³ According to a document in the Topkapı Palace Museum Archives, a notice was sent to the sultan informing him that Rüstem had plotted against Mustafa in an attempt to frame him as a Safavid ally. The notice claims that Rüstem had forged Mustafa's seal and sent a letter of friendship, purportedly from Mustafa, to the Safavid ruler, Tahmasb, who did not know this was a ploy by Rüstem, responded positively to the invitation. Rüstem's men found the letter and delivered it to Rüstem.⁴⁴ Again, such behavior aligns with the grand vizier's ambitions to protect himself and his career interests in a volatile political environment.

42 See the career of Rüstem Pasha in Şinasi Altundağ and Şerafettin Turan, "Rüstem Paşa," *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1940–1987); Zahit Atçıl, "State and Government in the Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire: The Grand Vizierates of Rüstem Pasha (1544–1561)" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 2015).

43 These allegations are mentioned in *Amasya Tarihi* of Hüseyin Hüsameddin (III: 307–309) who does not cite any source.

44 Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi, E. 5103. See the transcription of the document in M. Tayyib Gökbilgin, "Rüstem Paşa ve Hakkındaki İthamlar," *Tarih Dergisi* VIII, no. 11–12 (1955): s. 24–26 and 38–43. The author of the document seems to be Remmal Haydar. See more about Remmal Haydar in Cornell H. Fleischer, "Seer to the Sultan: Haydar-ı Remmal and Sultan Süleyman,"

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Mustafa was executed during the Nahçıvan campaign against the Safavids; indeed, the execution somewhat overshadowed the campaign. After the Ottoman army withdrew from eastern Anatolia in 1549, *kızılbaş/qızılbaş* forces began to disturb locales around Lake Van; it therefore seemed necessary to fortify Ottoman holdings in the region.⁴⁵ The question was who would lead the campaign to the east this time. The sultan had not headed an expedition for three years; after the eastern campaign in 1548–1549, he had grown severely ill, as mentioned earlier.⁴⁶ At Rüstem's urging, he sent Ahmed Pasha to head the Transylvanian campaign in 1552. This time he again remained in the capital, appointing Rüstem Pasha commander in chief for this campaign in the fall of 1552.⁴⁷ Süleyman's plan was probably this: as in the Two Iraqs campaign (1533–1536), the army would go east with the grand vizier (Rüstem Pasha) for the winter, and if necessary, the sultan would join him in the spring. Rüstem was likely meant to oversee only the mustering and organization of the soldiers coming from Rumeli.

Rüstem departed from Istanbul with fifty thousand soldiers in about September 1552.⁴⁸ He was supposed to proceed as far as Kayseri, but the grand vizier did not want to travel too far from the capital, fearing that Şehzade Mustafa would attempt to ascend the throne with the janissaries' assistance if the sultan's health deteriorated.⁴⁹ The ambassadorial reports and contemporary sources reflect that

in *Cultural Horizons: A Festschrift in Honor of Talat S. Halman*, ed. Jayne L. Warner (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 296–297.

45 Tahmasb and his *qızılbaş* armies looted the countryside and subdued the towns around Lake Van (particularly, Ahlat, Erciş and Adilcevaz). The quarrel between the governor of Erzurum, İskender Pasha and the Safavid prince Ismail Mirza alarmed the government in Istanbul to have another campaign against the Safavids. Compare in Mustafa Çelebi Celâlzâde, *Geschichte Sultan Süleymân Kânûnîs von 1520 bis 1557, oder, Tabakâtü'l-Memâlik ve Derecâtü'l-Mesâlik*, ed. Petra Kappert (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1981), 426a–431b1; Mustafa Âli, *Künhü'l-Abbâr: Dördüncü Rûkn, Osmanlı Tarihi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2009), 323a–b; M. Fahrettin Kırzioğlu, *Osmanlılar'ın Kafkas-Elleri'ni Fethi (1451–1590)* (Ankara: Sevinç Matbaası, 1976), 211–216; Remzi Kılıç, *Kânunî Devri Osmanlı-İran Münâsebetleri (1520–1566)* (İstanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2006), 297–301.

46 Navagero, “Relazione,” 72–73.

47 Celâlzâde, *Tabakât*, 432a; Mustafa Âli, *Künhü'l-Abbâr*, 324a. We see that Rüstem's commandership had been announced to the provincial governors in Anatolia by early November. See Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, AE.SÜLI, 2/131.

48 Celâlzâde, *Tabakât*, 432a; “Relazione Anonima,” 202–203. [

49 See “Relazione Anonima,” 203.

the primary mission of Rüstem (and of the sultan) was not to fight the Safavids but to force them to seek peace with the Ottoman government. As I discuss below, Rüstem and the sultan anticipated that the threat of war would position the Ottomans advantageously in negotiations, as it had during peace negotiations with the Habsburgs.⁵⁰ For this reason, too, Rüstem was less eager to progress farther east.

It seems that the critical episode deciding the fate of Mustafa took place while Rüstem was in Anatolia with the army. Hürrem and Rüstem's angling to eliminate Mustafa, like Mustafa's negotiating international alliances and his positive response to the soldiers' affection, align with the roles each was expected to play in the existing political system. It has been accepted in the literature that Rüstem's true intention was to expose Mustafa as a rebellious prince who wanted to overthrow his father and beat his brothers to the throne. Rüstem allegedly manipulated the rumor circulated among the soldiers that the aged sultan was poised to voluntarily give the throne to Mustafa but that Rüstem had prevented it. The campaign to the east thus became a perfect opportunity for Mustafa to eliminate Rüstem on his way to power. If Mustafa made a move against Rüstem, the absolute representative of the sultan, this could display Mustafa disloyal to his father, as he would disregard the sultan's appointment of Rüstem for the position of commander-in-chief.⁵¹

In the winter of 960/1553, Mustafa made a reckless move that gave his rivals an invaluable opportunity. I contend that the sultan considered his soldiers' show of extreme loyalty to Mustafa and his acceptance of this honor tantamount to rebellion because it could have altered the source of legitimacy and loyalty in Ottoman society. What happened when Rüstem was in Anatolia? The narrative penned by historian Âlî indicates that although it was soldiers who had turned Mustafa's head, the prince would ultimately be portrayed as the rebel:

At that time, the grand vizier and glorious royal son-in-law Rüstem Pasha was appointed commander in chief of the victorious soldiers. This way, they arrived in Aksaray, a district of the province of Karaman. God knows how [it began],

50 For negotiations see Dzaja, Nehring, and Weiß, *Austro-Turcica*, 48–179. For war preparations, see Halil Sahillioğlu, *Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi H.951–952 Tarihli ve E-12321 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri* (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2002), *passim*.

51 The view that Rüstem manipulated the circulating rumors among the soldiers to display Mustafa as rebel to his father is the dominant one in the secondary literature. See Danişmend, *Kronoloji*, II: 278–280; Turan, *Şehzâde Bayezid Vak'ası*, 26–29; Kırzioğlu, *Osmanlılar'ın Kafkas-Elleri'ni Fethi*, 217; Kılıç, *Kânunî Devri Osmanlı-İran Münâsebetleri*, 306–307.

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but some news began to circulate in the imperial army. Gloomy consequences returned to Sultan Mustafa. Somehow, some stupid men among the soldiers offered obedience to the şehzade and altogether perverted him by saying, “Your magnificent father has grown old; he is unable to move and lead the campaign. That is why he appointed Rüstem Pasha as commander in chief and sent him into Anatolia. This pasha is malicious to you. But now, if you come to the camp and cut off his head, this will mark the realization of your aim.” Thus although the şehzade was true, they drove him to futile ambition. By sending continuous messages in this manner, they prompted the unfortunate prince to the path of rebellion and lured him to realize his ambition by going to the encampment.⁵²

In this account, it appears that Mustafa believed the words of some “stupid” soldiers, rebelling against his father by attempting to kill the sultan’s grand vizier because he knew that Rüstem did not want him to succeed Süleyman. Why should he not thus remove the principal impediment to his ascending the throne? Âlî seems to have thought that Mustafa was innocent, albeit deceived or misled.

Another source, the *Relazione Anonima*, whose Venetian author apparently observed closely the stages of the campaign, elaborates in detail what Âlî presented as Mustafa’s temptation to rebel:

Two days ahead of Iconio [Konya] on the way from Constantinople, they arrived at a passage in which there was a route leading to Amasya, the city of Cappadocia, where prince Mustafa, the primogenitor of Turco [i.e., Süleyman] had his residence. As [Rüstem P]asha arrived at this passage, most of the army having already moved on toward Iconio, the janissaries who were with him said that they wanted to go to pay respects to Mustafa, their future sultan. The pasha immediately understood the situation, and suspecting some threat to himself, issued a command that no one would leave him but that all the troops would accompany him in the direction of Iconio. The janissaries, however, did not want to be prevented from doing what they had decided [only] because of this command, so they all set out along the path toward Amasya. The pasha continued toward Iconio with the agha of the janissaries and with those others who had remained.

The janissaries who arrived in Amasya and went to kiss Mustafa’s hand were welcomed and fêted by him; they received abundant food and one ducat each. Then the next day, they were sent to Iconia, where they found the grand vizier with the rest of people; he had arrived some time earlier. At that time, he [Rüstem]

52 Mustafa Âlî, *Künhül-Abbâr*, 324a. For a slightly different version see *Künhül-Abbâr*, MS (Nuruosmaniye, 3409), 76b.

had a letter from Istanbul with the news that Sultan Süleyman was seriously ill and had little hope of recovering. Mustafa, too, received this news, immediately understood the situation, and prepared himself to ride [to Istanbul] in case [news of] the sultan's death should follow. It was said that he had a hundred thousand men ready who would mount horses to follow him at the sound of a trumpet. Actually, this was not so much the truth as a rumor circulated at the direction of Rüstem Pasha, who took this opportunity to procure the death of the unlucky prince. [With Mustafa] no more than five thousand men were found at that time, but all of them were well chosen and counted as three men [in prowess]. It is also true that the army would not have followed either Rüstem Pasha or the agha of the janissaries, no matter what they offered as present or promise to keep the troops together, because Mustafa was so loved by all the imperial soldiers, and everyone impatiently awaited the moment he would become emperor.⁵³

From this passage, it appears that the sultan almost lost control of the janissaries and indeed no longer stood as legitimate ruler. Even though he sent the army headed by his absolute deputy, the grand vizier, who had authority equal to his own, the janissaries disregarded this delegation of authority and stood ready to follow the prince. Rüstem warned those who were determined to visit Mustafa, but his words apparently bore no weight with them. What made the problem more profound was Mustafa's acceptance of their allegiance by allowing them to kiss his hand. If he had rejected this obeisance right away as a display due only the sultan himself, he could never have been portrayed as a rebel to his father; rejection of the soldiers' advances would have communicated that the legitimate sultan was alive in Istanbul and that he, as his son, by no means disregarded the authority of the sultan.

Mustafa probably did not intend to undermine Süleyman's power and prestige, but he almost certainly did not foresee that embracing the people's love would result in his demise. In fact, he did not trust Rüstem Pasha at all, believing that he was in collaboration with Hürrem to bring him down. He was evidently seeking alliances, as in his correspondence with Ayas Pasha and the Venetians, so he welcomed and offered his generosity to those who visited him by giving them each a ducat. Then the soldier's loyalty to Rüstem as the sultan's deputy ceased to exist and was transferred to the man they considered their future sultan, Mustafa.

The author of *Relazione Anonima* reports that the tension between Rüstem and the soldiers increased when news of the sultan's illness arrived in the camp.

53 "Relazione Anonima," 203–204.

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The same news also reached Mustafa, who realized that he might need to depart immediately for the capital in order to reach it before his brothers did. He ordered his men to prepare to move quickly, for they would depart at the sound of a trumpet.⁵⁴ In addition, when the army reached Aksaray in central Anatolia, the heavy snow impeded the soldiers who were with Rüstem. Fatigued by Rüstem's slow and reluctant movement eastward, they petitioned the grand vizier: "If there is an enemy, let us go defeat him; if there is not, let us return to Istanbul." Rüstem responded that this was not his decision to make; they would go and winter in Konya, therefore, and he would tell them when he received other orders from the sultan.⁵⁵ The soldiers were infuriated by this; Rüstem believed he had lost the ability to command them. He knew that any move by Mustafa would draw all the soldiers to the prince, leaving Rüstem alone and defenseless.

The actions of Mustafa and the attitude of the army ultimately benefited Rüstem and Hürrem. Seeing the state the janissaries were in, Rüstem worried that a sinister accident might befall him, costing him his life. He refused to move farther and decided to remain at Konya. He secretly sent Sipahilerâğası Şemsi Agha and Çavuşbaşı Ali Agha to Istanbul to inform the sultan of the stalemate he faced.⁵⁶ When the sultan heard about the janissaries' inclination toward Mustafa and about Mustafa's ambition, he was extremely grieved, though he did not believe that Mustafa would plot against his father. As Âlî records, Süleyman told the aghas sent from Rüstem this:

God forbid that my Mustafa Khan should dare such insolence, and for the love of the sultanate during my lifetime should extend his foot from the quilt! It must be the idea of some troublemakers. They slander him in order to obtain the rule for the prince they support. See that you never let similar rumors appear and never again repeat such a thing.⁵⁷

54 Ibid., 204.

55 Göker İnan, "Rüstem Paşa Tarihi (H.699–968/M. 1299–1561): İnceleme-Metin, Vr. 120b-vr.293b" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Marmara University, 2011), 277a-b.

56 Celâlzâde, *Tabakât*, 432b; Mustafa Âlî, *Künhül-Abbâr*, 324a; "Relazione Anonima," 205; İnan, "Rüstem Paşa Tarihi," 277b.

57 "Hâşâ ki Mustafa Han'ım bu makule küstahlığı irtikâb ede, ve benim zaman-ı hayatımda sevda-yi mulke payını lihâfından taşra uzada. Nihayet ba'zı muüfsidiînin peydâlarıdır. Kendüler mâyl olduğu şehzâdeye verâset-i mülk münhasır olsun deyu iftiralarıdır. Zinhâr bu makule musâvilere vücûd verilmesin, bu def'a tezekkür olunduğu gibi kerreten ba'de uhrâ zikr olunmasın." See Mustafa Âlî, *Künhül-Abbâr*, 324a.

Nevertheless, the sultan apparently wanted to squelch this rumor, which might increase support for Mustafa at the expense of his own sultanate. He immediately sent the messengers back and recalled Rüstem and the armies, announcing that he himself would lead the campaign later⁵⁸ When Rüstem returned to Istanbul, he was relieved to find the sultan in better health. Preparations were completed, and the sultan left Istanbul with the army on 28 August 1553 (18 Ramazan 960).⁵⁹ Rüstem Pasha's brother Sinan Pasha was appointed deputy (*saltanat kaymakamı*) in Istanbul, and Şehzade Bayezid was charged with guarding Rumeli in Edirne.⁶⁰ The Venetian *bailo* Navagero wrote that Rüstem had appointed Sinan (who was not experienced in maritime affairs) as grand admiral of the navy in part so as to prevent Şehzade Mustafa from crossing the straits of Istanbul if he arrived in the capital before one of Hürrem's sons did. In his words, "There was no more secure way to prohibit the crossing than with the navy."⁶¹

According to *Relazione Anonima*, when the sultan and his army arrived at the passage where the route to Amasya lay, he sent several *ciaus* (*çavuş*, messengers) to Mustafa asking him to join him in Ereğli. The same source recounts that Mustafa discussed the sultan's call with his counselors, who unanimously advised him not to go to his father's camp, insisting that he would probably lose his life if he went. His mother, Mahidevran, who had left the harem and accompanied him in his appointments to provincial government, shared the same opinion.⁶² Obviously, then, this could not have been an easy decision for Mustafa to make. The Habsburg ambassador Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq explained the prince's dilemma briefly:

Mustafa hesitated between two choices: if he entered the presence of his father and found him angry and offended, he would certainly be at risk. But if he

58 Celâlzâde, *Ṭabaḳât*, 432a–b; Mustafa Âli, *Künhü'l-Abbâr*, 324a; "Relazione Anonima," 205; İnan, "Rüstem Paşa Tarihi," 277b–278a.

59 Celâlzâde, *Ṭabaḳât*, 433b; Mustafa Âli, *Künhü'l-Abbâr*, 324b; "Relazione Anonima," 207; İnan, "Rüstem Paşa Tarihi," 278a. Mehmet İpçioğlu argues that according to a *Râzname* register (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Kamil Kepeci 1696, 1a), the sultan departed Istanbul on 16 Ramazan 960 (26 August 1553). It is probable however that the register might imply that the departure of the sultan was planned on 16 Ramazan but it delayed two days. See Mehmet İpçioğlu, *Kanuni Sultan Süleyman'ın Nahçıvan Seferi* (Ankara: Nobel Yayın Dağıtım, 2003), 62.

60 See, Navagero, "Relazione," 78–79. For Sinan Pasha's appointment for the government of Istanbul, see Cristóbal de Villalón, *Viaje de Turquía* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S. A., 1919), I: 138. Kırzioğlu, *Osmanlılar'ın Kafkas-Elleri'ni Fethi*, 218; Turan, *Şehzâde Bayezid Vak'ası*, 31.

61 Navagero, "Relazione," 78–79.

62 "Relazione Anonima," 207–208.

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avoided him, he would publicly admit that he had contemplated an act of treason. The decision he took is the one that required more courage and risk. Leaving Amasya, the seat of his government, he headed to his father's camp, which lay not far off, relying on his innocence; he was probably also confident that no harm could come to him in the presence of the army. Be that as it may, he went to meet an inevitable death.⁶³

Mustafa finally decided to obey his father and join the sultan's army, reportedly telling his advisers that he did not want to resist going "where destiny cast him."⁶⁴ The sultan's army had arrived in Ereğli on 5 October 1553 (26 Şevval 960);⁶⁵ Şehzade Mustafa's entourage camped about two miles away. First, all the viziers and governors visited Mustafa in his camp, and the next day the prince was scheduled to appear before his father.⁶⁶ According to *Relazione Anonima*, an arrow was thrown from the sultan's camp into Mustafa's to warn him that he would die if he visited his father. Mustafa, however, thought that this was another trick of Rüstem's and ignored it entirely.⁶⁷ On 6 October (27 Şevval), he arrived in the sultan's camp. As he entered to kiss his father's hand, he was attacked and strangled to death.⁶⁸

According to Celalzâde's account, after Mustafa's execution but while the viziers were still waiting in the divan room, the chief gatekeeper (*kapıcılar kethüdası*) demanded the grand vizieral seal from Rüstem Pasha and told him and the third vizier, Haydar Pasha, to return to their tents. The *kapıcılar kethüdası* went again to the divan room and handed the seal to the second vizier, Ahmed Pasha, announcing his appointment to the grand vizierate.⁶⁹ So Rüstem and Haydar were dismissed. Regarding the latter, it was rumored that Haydar was the one who had sent warning to Mustafa about the sultan's decision to execute him, but the author

63 Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq, *Les Lettres Turques*, trans. Dominique Arrighi (Paris: Champion, 2010), 76–77.

64 "Relazione Anonima," 208.

65 Celalzâde, *Tabakât*, 436b; Mustafa Âli, *Künhü'l-Ahbâr*, 324b. The date appears in *Rûznameçe* register 25 Şevval 960 (4 October 1553). See İpçioğlu, *Nahçıvan Seferi*, 67.

66 Celalzâde, *Tabakât*, 436b; Mustafa Âli, *Künhü'l-Ahbâr*, 324b.

67 "Relazione Anonima," 208–209.

68 Ibid., 209–211. Also see Celalzâde, *Tabakât*, 436b; Mustafa Âli, *Künhü'l-Ahbâr*, 324b; İpçioğlu, *Nahçıvan Seferi*, 68.

69 Celalzâde, *Tabakât*, 436b–437a; Mustafa Âli, *Künhü'l-Ahbâr*, 324b; "Relazione Anonima," 211–212.

of *Relazione Anonima* doubted the veracity of this “because if he had fallen in such a suspicion, his head would have been gone [already].”⁷⁰

The Expedition's Target: Mustafa or the Safavids?

Did the sultan intend to crush the Safavid shah or to execute Mustafa? For what purpose did he lead the army out once more? Despite the accounts of Ottoman chroniclers, particularly Celalzâde and Mustafa Âlî, outlining several reasons for a campaign to the east, there was never an intention to *fight* the Safavids. I contend that when the army first left Istanbul under the command of Rüstem Pasha, the expedition's purpose was to force the Safavid shah to seek peace with the Ottoman government. Again, when the army departed from the capital a second time under Sultan Süleyman himself, the intention to force the Safavids to plead for peace remained in place, but the secret and perhaps more important aim in this case was to execute Mustafa. The sultan understood that his authority was threatened considerably if janissaries openly or secretly wanted to see Mustafa elevated as sultan even before Süleyman's death. He knew that they might ask him to abdicate in favor of Mustafa, just as his grandfather, Bayezid II, had been forced to abdicate to his father, Selim I, in 1512. Therefore, Süleyman intended to eliminate Mustafa as a focus of sedition (and thus a cause of internal instability for the empire), while Süleyman and Rüstem Pasha both hoped at the same time that the Safavid shah, Tahmasb, would ask for peace. This argument can be substantiated with some facts that have not attracted much attention from historians.

First, expeditions against the Safavids had always been difficult and painful while producing fewer gains than expected. The Ottoman armies had been unable to destroy the Safavid state in any of their campaigns since the 1514 Çaldıran campaign, and Ottoman conquests rang hollow because the Safavid forces routinely evacuated the regions and burned the crops behind them. Whenever the Ottoman army captured Tabriz and other cities in the region, Safavid forces regained those locales as soon as the Ottoman army withdrew. This proved true once more in the last campaign of 1548–1549, after which Shah Tahmasb regained some of the territory Ottoman forces had occupied and began disturbing Ottoman frontiers. As contemporary observer Hans Dernschwam stated, the Ottoman army marched against the Safavids reluctantly because of the difficult, mountainous

70 “Relazione Anonima,” 212. The explanation of Haydar's dismissal based on his alleged attempt to warn Mustafa exists in Trevisano, “Relazione,” 175.

terrain and because of the provisioning problem along the way caused by the Safavids' scorched-earth tactics. These hardships made imperial soldiers less eager to fight the Safavids than they were to fight in Hungary.⁷¹ Therefore, it was in the best interests of the Ottoman government to make peace with the Safavids in order to establish stable borders; peace would also have allowed the empire to allocate funds to other, more productive campaigns. The army's departure under Rüstem Pasha was thus intended to force Shah Tahmasb to seek peace.

It seems that the bluff initially worked well. Having learned that the Ottoman army had left Istanbul with Rüstem at its head, Tahmasb released a captive, Biga Sancakbeyi Mahmud Bey, carrying a letter seeking peace with the Ottoman sultan.⁷² As both the sultan and his grand vizier were inclined to peace, they replied that the Safavid shah should send an authorized representative to negotiate terms. Accordingly, Tahmasb sent as his ambassador Sayyid Shams al-Din Dilijānī, who arrived in Istanbul on 19 August 1553,⁷³ after all of the Ottoman war preparations had been completed. The sultan and the army left Istanbul on 28 August, and the ambassador was told that he would receive the sultan's response during the expedition.⁷⁴ On the way, Rüstem and Shams al-Din Dilijānī continued to negotiate the terms of peace.⁷⁵ The Safavid ambassador was then released to inform Tahmasb of Ottoman requests—but not before Mustafa was executed.⁷⁶

The sultan's actions clearly demonstrate that he was not inclined to fight the Safavids; if he had wanted war, he would have rejected outright both the letter and the ambassador sent by Shah Tahmasb. If there was a target when the army left Istanbul under Süleyman, it was Mustafa. The Venetian *bailo* Domenico Trevisano

71 Hans Dernschwam, *Tagebuch*, 31.

72 Charrière, *Négociations*, II: 255; "Relazione Anonima," 206–207; Celâlzâde, *Ṭabakât*, 432b–433b; Mustafa Âli, *Künhü'l-Abbâr*, 324a–b; Kırzioğlu, *Osmanlılar'ın Kafkas-Ellesi'ni Fethi*, 217–218.

73 Ghaffārī Qazvinī, *Tārikh-i jahān-ārā*, 301; Hasan Rūmlū, *Aḥsanu't-Tawārikh*, 373; Tahmāsp, *Tazkirah-i Shāh Tahmāsb* (Qum: Maṭbū'at-i Dīnī, 1383), 141.

74 Celâlzâde, *Ṭabakât*, 433a–b; Mustafa Âli, *Künhü'l-Abbâr*, 324a–b; "Relazione Anonima," 207; Charrière, *Négociations*, II: 277; İnan, "Rüstem Paşa Tarihi," 278a.

75 Charrière, *Négociations*, II: 280–281.

76 Although Celalzade and other Ottoman sources relying on him tell that the ambassador was released with the message of war, the Venetian and other European sources whose authors were also present on the army camp state that the ambassador went to Tahmasb with Ottoman terms for peace. Compare in Celâlzâde, *Ṭabakât*, 438b; Mustafa Âli, *Künhü'l-Abbâr*, 326a; "Relazione Anonima," 214; Antal Verancsics, *Összes Munkái*, ed. Szalay László (Pest: Eggenberger Ferdinánd, 1857), III: 127–128.

agreed: the principal goal of this undertaking was to kill Mustafa; the sultan made peace with the Safavids on his way to this final objective. If the ambassador had been sent back immediately after arriving in Istanbul, Süleyman's reluctance to fight would have been apparent and his secret plan to kill his son might have been thwarted.⁷⁷ In that case, Mustafa would not have gone to his father's camp, and the sultan would have lost control of the army forever.

If the target of the campaign was Mustafa, when did the sultan actually decide to execute his son? The sources provide no hint as to the time of this decision. Busbecq reports that Süleyman had received the legal opinion (*fetva*) of the *şeyhulislam* (chief jurist-consult) Ebussuud Efendi, though no other source verifies this information.⁷⁸ In fact, even if the sultan had decided to execute Mustafa very early on, either he did not mention this decision until the last minute, or those who knew about it faithfully kept the sultan's secret. That no one knew or that they were very effectively keeping up appearances of normalcy is attested by the ordinary processes of salutation followed when the viziers visited Mustafa; even Mustafa's salutation of his father and the regular gift exchanges had nothing extraordinary about to them. According to the Rûzname register, on the day Mustafa visited his father, the gifts the sultan had been planned on presenting to him were registered; only after the execution was a note added that the gifts "remained in the imperial treasury" (*hızâne-i âmire mânde*).⁷⁹ Therefore, it seems that the sultan's decision was certainly kept secret until the moment it was implemented.

Who Was Responsible: Rüstem Pasha or Süleyman?

News of Mustafa's execution came as an extreme shock to the soldiers who had longed to see him as their sultan and had expected his accession very soon. The soldiers' affection for Mustafa had been even greater than that for the sultan, and grief in the camp continued for a long time. At the center of the criticism stood the sultan and especially Rüstem, whom the soldiers widely blamed for Mustafa's demise. It is reported that the grand vizier secretly escaped from the camp at night; had he remained there, he would almost certainly have lost his life when the janissaries attacked his tent the following day.⁸⁰ The sorrow of the

⁷⁷ Trevisano, "Relazione," 166.

⁷⁸ Busbecq, *Les Lettres Turques*, 77–78.

⁷⁹ İpçioğlu, *Nahçıvan Seferi*, 67.

⁸⁰ "Relazione Anonima," 213; Busbecq, *Les Lettres Turques*, 79.

janissaries was alleviated by Rüstem's dismissal, which they supposed indicated the sultan's awareness of the grand vizier's "crimes."

But the change in the grand vizierate could calm the popular anger only to a degree, and emotions surrounding Mustafa's death soon found a voice in poetry. Many *mersiyes* (elegies) were composed openly criticizing the sultan and Rüstem; among them, the most famous and perhaps most severe is the *mersiye* of Yahya Bey.⁸¹ The poet blames Rüstem Pasha for the prince's death, claiming that all of his intrigues depicted Şehzade Mustafa as evil and disloyal, and that these eventually brought death to him in the year of "Rüstem's trick." Yahya calls Rüstem a conspiring devil, and he refers to the story of the forged letters sent to Shah Tahmasb in Şehzade Mustafa's name, a ploy that only intensified the negative image of the *şehzade* in the sultan's eyes.

Busbecq mentions, however, the possibility that Rüstem himself asked the sultan dismiss him in order to preserve his life from the janissaries' fury.⁸² It is unknown exactly whose idea it was to remove the grand vizier, but contemporary accounts imply that Süleyman and Rüstem may have made a deal that would serve them both. Since the soldiers were extremely grieved at the loss, they were angry with the sultan; the author of *Relazione Anonima* relates that the men in the army began to curse and criticize Süleyman so loudly that the sultan could hear them

81 Yahya Bey was of Albanian origin and joined, following his father, the janissary army where he became a pupil of the janissary clerk/scribe Şahabeddin Bey, who exempted him from the regular duties and obligations of other janissaries. He participated in numerous campaigns starting with the Çaldıran (1514) and ending with the Nahçıvan campaign (1553). The historian Âlî reports that Yahya Bey composed the poem during the campaign, which began to circulate in the army very quickly though he tried to hide it. Yet, the satire to Rüstem was so harsh that Rüstem grew grudge on Yahya Bey and wanted to punish him with death but the sultan urged to forgive him. Later he was forced to retire in Izvornik. For Yahya Bey's life and *mersiye* see Mustafa Âlî, *Künhül-Abbâr*, 325a–326a; KA, 78a–79a; Mustafa Âlî, *Künhül-Abbâr'ın Tezkire Kısım*, ed. Mustafa İsen (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi, 1994), 286; Âşık Çelebi, *Meşâ'irü's-Şu'arâ*, ed. G. M Meredith-Owens, E. J. W. Gibb Memorial New Series, XXIV (London: Luzac, 1971), 95b; A. Atillâ Şentürk, *Yahya Beğ'in Şehzâde Mustafa Mersiyesi Yahut Kanuni Hicviyesi* (İstanbul: Enderun Kitabevi, 1998). In fact, the number of *mersiyes* composed on the death of Şehzade Mustafa exceeds that of *mersiyes* composed for others in the Turkish literature. For the *mersiyes* on the tragedy of Mustafa composed by other poets see Mehmed Çavuşoğlu, "Şehzade Mustafa Mersiyeleleri," *Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi*, no. 12 (1982): 641–96; Ayhan Gültaş, "Bilinmeyen Şehzade Mustafa Mersiyeleleri," *Kubbealtı Akademisi Mecmuası* 18, no. 3 (1989): 37–49; Mustafa İsen, *Acıyı Bal Eylemek: Türk Edebiyatında Mersiye* (Ankara: Akçağ, 1993), 79–88 and 283–320.

82 Busbecq, *Les Lettres Turques*, 79–80.

from his pavilion.⁸³ However, in a historical moment when the sultan was officially at war with the Safavids, he needed the loyalty of his army more than at any other time. Dismissing Rüstem transferred the criticisms from the sultan to the deposed grand vizier, allowing Süleyman to consolidate his control over the army once more, as the soldiers interpreted this action as indicating that the sultan had finally realized Rüstem's "wickedness" and regretted giving the command for execution.⁸⁴

The possibility of a secret agreement between Süleyman and Rüstem is also supported by some sources that depict Rüstem's days following these events. He arrived in Istanbul on 31 October 1553, and although he had no official title at the time, he maintained his grand lifestyle, living much as he had done during his grand vizierate. According to the Venetian *bailo* Trevisano, Rüstem continued to grant audiences to the ambassadors and others, went to the mosque with the same pomp as before, and received visitors at his residence in Üsküdar.⁸⁵ Rüstem also told many in the capital that he would be restored to his position very soon.⁸⁶ This news circulated rapidly in Istanbul, and the new Habsburg ambassador Busbecq, who arrived in Istanbul on 20 January 1554, wrote that he needed to make an official visit to Rüstem's mansion "owing to his previous authority and the hope of a rapid restoration."⁸⁷ Similarly, the Venetian *bailo* Trevisano recommended in a dispatch to the Venetian senate dated 16 March 1554 that the newly elected Antonio Erizzo, who was to succeed him as *bailo* in Istanbul, should demonstrate great reverence to the former official and even bring with him two letters of credence—one of which he should submit to Rüstem.⁸⁸ Indeed, Rüstem was reappointed as grand vizier almost immediately, when the sultan returned from his campaign on 29 September 1555.⁸⁹

83 "Relazione Anonima," 212–213.

84 Celâlzâde, *Tabakât*, 437a–b; Mustafa Âlî, *Künhü'l-Abbâr*, 325a.

85 Trevisano, "Relazione," 175–176.

86 Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, *Decifrazioni dei Dispacci da Costantinopoli*, Reg. 1, fol. 30–31 and 138–140. Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, *Deliberazioni Secreti*, Reg. 69, fol. 35v.

87 Busbecq, *Les Lettres Turques*, 72.

88 Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, *Dispacci Costantinopoli*, Filza 1-A, n. 8, fol. 14r and also in Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, *Decifrazioni dei Dispacci da Costantinopoli*, Reg. 1, fol. 7. The Venetian Senate took the advice of Trevisano and issued two copies of letters of credence for Antonio Erizzo to show his new position as *bailo* in Istanbul, and Erizzo too presented his letter on his first visit to Rüstem Pasha in his residence. See Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, *Deliberazioni Secreti*, Reg. 69, fol. 46r and Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato, *Dispacci Costantinopoli*, Filza 1-A, n. 15, fol. 49r.

89 Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, A.RSK 1455, fol. 7. Celâlzâde, *Tabakât*, 501b; Mustafa Âlî, *Künhü'l-Abbâr*, 337a.

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If the sultan had been angry about Rüstem's alleged deceptions and had dismissed him as punishment, how could Rüstem have been so sure of his restoration to the office? Did he not fear the anger of the sultan who had recently executed his own son? It is much more likely that Süleyman, needing the janissaries' loyalty, deliberately diverted their anger to his grand vizier in order to regain their support in the wake of a war with the Safavids. Though Rüstem became the main target of criticism, the sultan would have promised to reinstate him once conditions normalized.

Conclusion and Implications for Ottoman Succession

The most obvious observation to be made about the context in which Mustafa was executed is that Sultan Süleyman had lost control of the Ottoman army; the legitimacy of his sultanate was being questioned by those with the power to end it. In the majority view, Mustafa was superior to his brothers in leadership capacity, and he was even considered preferable to the aging and ill sultan. Mustafa had apparently gained the favor of janissaries, scholars, poets, and many others who wanted to see him take the throne—perhaps even before Süleyman's death. Dernschwam asserts that if the sultan had not acted when he did, Mustafa would have taken the initiative to dethrone his father; he certainly had the military support needed to do so, and the janissaries would have installed him as sultan.⁹⁰ Popular love for Mustafa grew to the extent that troops could disregard the reigning sultan's command when the interests of Mustafa (and their own) were threatened. The author of *Relazione Anonima* describes the janissaries' devotion to Mustafa in such a way that they could defend Mustafa even against the sultan himself:

Some important men in this army ... assured me that if poor Mustafa had left his father's tent alive when he escaped from the hand of the mutes who wanted to murder him, the majority of the army would have run to his aid against the sultan, his father.⁹¹

Some might argue that the army would naturally shift its devotion to the promising prince, perhaps especially considering that he had once been the ill sultan's own favorite. However, were not the janissaries supposedly the most loyal

90 Dernschwam, *Tagebuch*, 59.

91 "Relazione Anonima," 213.

of the sultan's soldiers? How did they dare to ignore the command of the ruler to whom they owed absolute obedience? Even before the prince's execution, when Rüstem Pasha was in command of the army, a group of soldiers set out despite warnings to salute Mustafa, whom they considered the future sultan. They blatantly disregarded the command of the sultan's absolute deputy in order to pay respects to a prince who had not yet become sultan. All these actions might be considered simple errors of judgment committed by janissaries and other soldiers who had lost touch with the empire's hierarchical authority, but Mustafa himself welcomed these men and allowed them to kiss his hand. Did he consider himself to be sultan at the time? Or was he not aware that these soldiers had disobeyed their legitimate sultan's deputy by coming to greet him?

On the other hand, it seems unlikely that Süleyman was oblivious to the possible succession scenarios, including one in which Mustafa, backed by unequivocal military support, could overthrow the sultan, ascend the throne, and send his father into retirement or perhaps even to death. From either perspective, it seems that the sultan was convinced that Mustafa was a threat to his authority. Even if the prince never openly rebelled against his father, events positioned him as the potential leader of a rebellion, at least from the sultan's perspective. It is also worth remembering that the memory of Selim I's succession through the support of the janissaries and the provincial cavalry would still have been vivid in the 1550s. Even though Mustafa underlined, in his letter to Ayas Pasha, that he had no intention of overthrowing his father but hoped to ascend the throne when the sultan died, conditions appeared strikingly similar to those surrounding Selim's rise to power.

Like his courageous grandfather, Mustafa appeared to be the prince who could satisfy the various groups with a stake in choosing the next emperor. Given the importance of *gaza* and its role in Ottoman legitimacy, Mustafa's military prowess and leadership abilities were virtues seen necessary to a sultan's legitimacy. But while courage and enthusiasm for *gaza* fit the ideology of the Ottoman state in the early sixteenth century, when Selim had ascended the throne,⁹² in the mid-

92 Selim during his principality displayed a figure of war leader (*gazi*) who could resume the conquests, which had been mostly stopped during the reign of Bayezid II (1481–1512). Since the other claimants, Ahmed and Korkud, seemed pacifist to the provincial cavalry forces and the janissaries, the rhetoric of resuming conquests and ambitious policy against the Safavids propagated by Selim raised him to the status of most able candidate. This led to the abdication of Bayezid who had to leave the throne for Selim thanks to his popularity in the army. Then, on his way to the retirement resorts, Bayezid became sick and died, due to a poisonous meal

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sixteenth century those virtues seemed to conflict with an emerging state ideology and an Ottoman foreign policy characterized by peace agreements with foreign powers (including the Habsburgs, France, Venice, and even the Safavids).⁹³ How could Mustafa's willingness to engage in *gaza* be reconciled with this new reality, in which the sultan and his grand vizier were attempting to end hostilities and to sign treaties with rivals in both the west and the east?

If Mustafa had survived to sit on the imperial throne, he would have satisfied a wide spectrum of Ottoman society. The role of social groups in a prince's success cannot be denied, and various stakeholders (e.g., janissaries, governing elites, religious scholars) were involved in the accession of each sultan. For example, toward the end of Bayezid II's reign (1481–1512), while the governing elite and viziers supported Şehzade Ahmed, the janissaries and provincial forces supported Şehzade Selim. In this competition, Selim's triumph was also the triumph of the janissaries and the provincial forces. Similarly, Şehzade Mustafa's success would have paralleled the success of the social groups that supported him and marked the failure of the harem-palace faction.

It is worth asking whether by this time an Ottoman prince still needed support from outside sources. Given all of its military conquests and victories, had the Ottoman dynasty not yet achieved political legitimacy beyond competition between social groups? Recent historiography shows that the dynastic legitimacy of the Ottoman household had gained full legitimacy by the middle of the sixteenth century, when the focus of politics shifted from the identity of the sultan to that of viziers and bureaucrats—that is, by the end of Süleyman's reign.⁹⁴ Such full dynastic legitimacy can largely be attributed to Süleyman's lifting the Ottoman dynasty out of the realm of competition by executing Mustafa, who had in some ways been used by politically active janissaries, bureaucrats, and scholars. Süleyman's message may have been this: the dynasty would no longer tolerate investment in a princely enterprise that tested the legitimacy of the reigning sultan.

according to some rumors. See Emecen, *Yavuz Sultan Selim*, 69–70; M. C. Şahabeddin Tekindağ, "Bayezid'in Ölümü Meselesi," *Tarih Dergisi*, no. 24 (1970): 1–16.

93 For a discussion on the emerging "peace consciousness" in international relations, see Zahit Atçıl, "State and Government in the Sixteenth Century Ottoman Empire," chap. 2, especially pp. 176–184.

94 Fleischer, "The Lawgiver as Messiah"; Hüseyin Yılmaz, "The Sultan and the Sultanate: Envisioning Rulership in the Age of Süleyman the Lawgiver (1520–1566)" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 2005).

If a prince intended to increase his power, or if any social group encouraged a prince, his chances of rule would only decrease because of his threat to the reigning sultan. Süleyman thus established the dynasty's absolute legitimacy, shifting the competition for power away from members of the imperial family and onto other social groups.

Indeed, the sultan's attitude in the following period, especially toward Şehzade Bayezid in the late 1550s, suggests that he wished to reassert his authority as well as to remove the dynasty from social competition. The sultan probably would not have begrudged Mustafa the throne, for he was the most capable and most talented of Süleyman's sons, but the problem of authority would not then have been resolved. If Mustafa had ascended the throne by overthrowing Süleyman, this would have strengthened the precedent, rendering it a standard course of action in every succession. How then could a sultan have secured his power against socially aggrieved groups who supported one of his children in a claim to the throne, even before his own death? Any person or any group that was disenchanted with the reigning sultan or his viziers would then gather around a promising prince and convince him to oust the current sultan and his court.

Beginning in the second half of the sixteenth century, the sultan gradually withdrew from daily politics and delegated his power to the imperial court, headed by the grand vizier: thus, the focus of politics shifted from the sultan to the ruling elite. The viziers came to control imperial politics, taking on full power and responsibility, while the sultan came to hold a symbolically lofty place. Related to this, books on politics written during this period increasingly focused on the qualities and responsibilities of the viziers rather than on those of the sultan.⁹⁵ Describing the age of Rüstem Pasha in the 1550s, Mustafa Âlî wrote that "at that time, the only point of recourse and refuge was the grand vizier's gate, and those who were in need had only to have his dispensation."⁹⁶ Thus, for Ottoman intellectuals, the identity of the grand vizier became more important than the identity of the sultan; the latter was no longer a question.

Could Mustafa have revived the image of the *gazi* sultan and resumed successful military conquests? It seems unlikely. Given the difficulties of provisioning the army and the slim returns that recent conquests had yielded, the empire's zeal for territorial gains was waning by his time, and conquest was growing marginal

95 Yılmaz, "The Sultan and the Sultanate," chap. 4.

96 Mustafa Âlî, *Künhü'l-Abbâr*, 359a.

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to the Ottoman enterprise as its ideological contribution faded. By the middle of the sixteenth century, peace treaties with the Habsburgs, Venetians, and Safavids were signed in order to avoid wasting funds on extravagant, unrealistic ambitions. Even if Mustafa had ascended the throne, it would have been very difficult for him to expand Ottoman lands farther east or west without technological or strategic innovations. In addition, it is clear that by the time of his death, controlling the government and a growing Ottoman bureaucracy had become a task well beyond the capacity of one individual, be he powerful sultan or vizier. If he had overthrown his father, sealing the precedent of deathly fraternal competition for rule, Mustafa himself could hardly have guarded his authority against socially aggrieved groups backing one of his own children. Although the execution of Mustafa was a bitter and tragic event, it resolved these questions for the Ottoman dynasty forever.

Why Did Süleyman the Magnificent Execute His Son Şehzade Mustafa in 1553?

Abstract ■ This article examines the reasons why Süleyman the Magnificent executed his son Şehzade Mustafa during the Nahçıvan military campaign of 1553. According to the dominant narrative in both Ottoman sources and academic literature, Süleyman's concubine and later wife Hürrem Sultan and her closest ally, Süleyman's son-in-law Rüstem Pasha, plotted against Mustafa in order to save the throne for one of Hürrem's own sons. Though the latter was widely beloved, this scheme cost him his father's favor. Afterward, however, the sultan regretted the decision and dismissed Rüstem Pasha from his position as grand vizier. This article examines the roles of Sultan Süleyman, Şehzade Mustafa, Hürrem Sultan, and Rüstem Pasha in the Ottoman, Venetian, Habsburg, French, and Persian sources, investigating why the sultan executed the prince in the context of the Ottoman succession experience. Adding complexity to the common narrative, this article concludes that the sultan, who was losing his authority to the prince, desired to consolidate his power and to remove his dynasty from the competition between social groups that had characterized earlier succession struggles.

Keywords: Şehzade Mustafa, succession, fratricide, Hürrem Sultan, Kanuni Sultan Süleyman, Rüstem Paşa

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