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Excerpt

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I

Ottoman Egypt, 1525–1609

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The period 1525–1609 covers approximately the first third of the history of Ottoman Egypt, and has distinct characteristics. It starts with the pacification of the country after the suppression of Ahmad Pasha al-Kha'in's revolt and of the serious disturbances by Bedouin tribes that followed it, and the promulgation of the code for the government of Egypt, *Qanun-name-i Misir* by the grand vizier Ibrahim Pasha. Egypt remained tranquil and passive under Ottoman rule that was firm and effective. Around the late 1580s, however, the army became unruly owing to economic difficulties and in the context of the general decline of the Ottoman empire. After that the viceroys had increasing difficulty maintaining their rule. The whole period, which can be described as the ascendancy of the viceroys (or pashas), ends in 1609 with suppression of a serious soldiers' rebellion by a strong viceroy. New political forces came to the fore, and the viceroys acted merely as formal representatives of the sultan.

The main sources

Historians attempting to describe the period face a dilemma of meager source materials. Egypt during the Mamluk period is unusually rich in historical sources – chronicles, biographical dictionaries, handbooks, and the like. The last decades before the Ottoman occupation, the conquest itself, and the next six years (until Dhu l-Hijja 928/November 1522) are superbly covered by Ibn Iyas, one of the best representatives of the great Egyptian historiographic tradition. 'Abd al-Samad al-Diyarbakri, an Ottoman judge who came to Egypt with Salim's army, stayed there to serve as a *qadi*. His chronicle is a translation into Turkish of Ibn Iyas's work, with significant changes, and then a detailed continuation of the chronicle for a period of two-and-a-half years (up to Shawwal 931/July 1525). Then the narrative coverage stops abruptly, and it is not resumed before the first half of the next century, and then by chronicles that, their importance notwith-

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standing, fall below the quality of Mamluk historiography. This means that the greater part of the sixteenth century, the crucial period of transition, when the Ottoman regime was finally established in Egypt, is not covered by local contemporary chronicles.

One can only speculate about the reasons for this dramatic interruption of historical writing in Ottoman Egypt. The fact that Egypt was relegated from imperial to provincial status must be a part of the explanation. Cairo no longer had a sultan, but a viceroy whose term was renewed on an annual basis. The new rulers were complete strangers to Egypt and its culture, much more so than the Mamluks, who were at home in Egypt, did not have a home anywhere else, and were accustomed to local society. Many historians belonged to the *awlad al-nas* class; Ibn Iyas is a notable example. As historians, they were in an ideal position: they maintained close ties with the ruling military elite, and had good inside information about state affairs. On the other hand, they already were assimilated into the Egyptian people, completely identified with the Egyptians, and were immersed in the local society, language, and culture. The Ottoman occupation naturally changed all that.

Another possible explanation for the paucity of Egyptian historiography during those times is political. Sultan Sulayman's era (1520–66) was glorious and eventful, with many wars and victories, but Egypt remained in the empire's backwater. Its inhabitants did not witness the drama of the center. For a long time no extraordinary political events took place that would excite chroniclers' imagination or an impulse to record them. The times were relatively quiet, and Egypt enjoyed stable and orderly rule.

Indeed, in the early seventeenth century stormy developments took place in Egypt and are recorded in detail by Muhammad ibn Abi l-Surur al-Bakri al-Siddiqi, the most important Egyptian chronicler in the seventeenth century.¹ He was a member of an aristocratic Sufi family and had connections in government circles. Arabic and Turkish historical works that provide information about the early seventeenth century are also available.²

The scarcity of local contemporary chronicles in Egypt in the sixteenth century is somewhat compensated for by other sources. Qutb al-Din al-Nahrawali, a resident of Mecca of Indian descent, wrote an important chronicle mainly describing the Ottomans' exploits in Yemen. Yet the work includes information about Egyptian affairs, since Egypt was the strategic and logistic base for operations in the Red Sea region. A book by 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaziri, who served for many years as secretary of the annual hajj

¹ On him, see Abdul Karim Rafeq, "Ibn Abi l-Surur and his Works," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 38/1 (1975), 24–31.

² For bibliographical surveys, see articles by P. M. Holt on Arabic sources and S. J. Shaw on Turkish sources in P. M. Holt (ed.), *Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt* (London, 1968).

caravan (he succeeded his father in that office), is an excellent source on the hajj. In addition, his book provides limited but interesting information about all the *umara' al-hajj*, commanders of the pilgrims' caravan, down to the year 957/1550.

The writings of 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rani (d. 1565), the most important Sufi of his time, throw light on the social and religious life of Egypt, although they are worthless for political history. There are also copious Hebrew sources, mainly the rabbinical responsa, which teach us a great deal about the Jewish community and the economy in general.

We have also a unique and fascinating description, in Turkish, of Cairo in 1599 by Mustafa 'Ali, a renowned Ottoman writer, intellectual, and traveler, whose account is too literary to be dependable but has many insightful and vivid observations on Egyptian society, including many important facts concerning the ruling class and the army.

The great advantage students of Ottoman history have over students of other pre-modern periods are the Ottoman archives. Yet, unfortunately, even the Ottoman archival sources concerning Egypt start to be abundant only toward the end of Sultan Sulayman's reign, leaving a gap of the crucial five decades following the conquest in 1517; several documents, mostly imperial decrees, provide some interesting information about earlier events. The best and richest corpus of documents for the period under study are the imperial decrees preserved in the Muhimme defterleri collection, located in the central Turkish archives of the Prime Minister's Bureau in Istanbul. One particularly valuable document from the Turkish archives is the detailed budget of Ottoman Egypt for 1005–06/1596–97, which has been published with an English translation.³

One kind of important archival source, available for many other Ottoman provinces, is missing. The Ottomans did not apply in Egypt the *timar* system, the typical fiscal and military organization of their territories. For the purpose of the *timar*, the Ottoman administration carried out detailed surveys of the provinces; these registers are gold mines of information for historians. The government's decision not to apply the system in Egypt, to avoid disrupting its time-honored and complex administrative and fiscal traditions, seems sound, but deprives historians of an extremely useful research tool.

Egypt as an Ottoman province

Egypt was the largest Ottoman province. It is hard to exaggerate its strategic and economic importance for the empire. True to their policy of pragmatism,

³ Stanford J. Shaw, *The Budget of Ottoman Egypt, 1005–1006/1596–1597* (The Hague and Paris, 1968).

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flexibility, and economy, the Ottomans clearly regarded Egypt as a special case. The *timar* system, which usually sealed the full integration of a province into the empire, was not applied to Egypt. The Ottomans must have understood that the prosperity of Egypt depended to a large extent on the complex and sensitive irrigation system of the water of the Nile. To ensure profits from agriculture, it made sense to refrain from interfering with local technical, administrative, and fiscal practices and traditions.

It should also be remembered that the *timar* was an administrative and fiscal system supporting a huge territorial army of cavalry, which would always be ready to be called up for campaigns. Considering the size of the country, Egypt's garrison was relatively small (about ten thousand men). Egypt was remote from the Ottoman center and from the main fronts in eastern Europe and Persia. Service in Egypt was usually considered by Ottoman soldiers as pleasant and tranquil compared with the rigors suffered in the heartland of the empire.⁴ The tasks assigned to the army in Egypt were mostly defensive – garrisoning the capital, the provinces, and the ports, protecting the hajj caravan, and guarding ports along the pilgrims' route. Occasionally an Egyptian contingent was sent to join the main imperial army in Europe or on the Persian front, but these expeditionary forces were rare and small during the period in question. The Ottomans' efforts to pacify Yemen were an exception: many soldiers were sent from Egypt to fight the Yemeni tribesmen, but these units were reinforced by soldiers who were sent to Egypt especially for the purpose.

The value of Egypt to the empire was both strategic and economic. Egypt was an important base for operations in the Red Sea region, in Yemen, Ethiopia (Habesh), and the Hijaz. In the sixteenth century the port of Suez was expanded and included a considerable shipyard. In 1568 the Ottomans even attempted to construct a canal at the isthmus of Suez. The Mamluks had not been interested in having a navy, mainly because of a cultural bias against seafaring, but also because they did not think they needed it. Then the Portuguese surprised them and others by finding the sea route to India and disrupting the Indian spice trade through the Middle East. Consequently, the Mamluks turned for help to the Ottomans. After the annexation of Egypt, responsibility to resist the Portuguese passed to the Ottomans. The Portuguese were consolidating their base in India, attacking Muslim navigation in the Indian Ocean and penetrating the Red Sea, thereby threatening Islam's holiest places. The Ottomans were better prepared to face the challenge, since they had wide naval experience, rich resources, and, unlike the Mamluks, an offensive strategy. Nevertheless, the Ottomans were not successful in defeating the Portuguese convincingly. In 1538 they sent their

⁴ See M. Winter, "Ali Efendi's 'Anatolian Campaign Book': A Defense of the Egyptian Army in the Seventeenth Century," *Turcica*, 15 (1983), 267–309.

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navy to India under the command of Sulayman Pasha, viceroy of Egypt. En route, Sulayman captured Aden from an Arab ruler. In India the local Muslims betrayed him, and he was defeated by the Portuguese.

The Ottomans thereupon decided to consolidate control in the Red Sea. This strategy required establishment of bases in Yemen and Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, Imam Ahmad Gragn, a Muslim warrior for the faith, needed military aid. The Ottomans were busy fighting in Yemen against the Zaydi tribesmen, and their assistance was limited. The Christian Ethiopians, aided by a Portuguese force, put an end to Gragn's jihad (1543). Yet in 1555 the Ottomans from their base in Egypt established the Habesh Eyaleti, the province of Ethiopia, on the African Red Sea littoral and with its capital at Massawa. The man who acted for the Ottomans in Ethiopia, as previously in Nubia, was Özdemir Pasha, a former Circassian Mamluk and Ottoman governor of Yemen.⁵

Like conquerors before and after them, the Ottomans discovered that it was easier to invade Yemen than to control it. The Shi'i Zaydi imams revolted against the Ottomans and by 1567 the whole Yemen was lost except Zabid near the coast. It was during the reign of Sultan Salim II, Sulayman's son, that Yemen was reconquered (1569–70) by Sinan Pasha, viceroy of Egypt. Egypt's viceroys, and several of their ablest commanders, personally led the expeditions to Yemen, and Egyptian soldiers in large numbers were sent to conquer and hold this remote outpost of empire.

The acquisition of Egypt gave the Ottoman empire a huge economic and financial advantage. Revenues from land tax, urban taxes, and customs duties at sea and river ports financed the viceroy and his household, the army, and expenditures for operations overseas. In addition, the Egyptian treasury covered many expenditures of the annual hajj caravan, and supplied grain and financial support to inhabitants of the two holy cities in the Hijaz. Numerous religious and charitable projects in Egypt itself were supported by the treasury. The balance of Egypt's budget was sent each year as *irsaliyya Khazina* (Turkish *irsaliye-i hazine*; lit. remittance of the treasury) to Istanbul. The amount was fixed at 16 million *paras* a year after the conquest. At the end of the century, it rose to 20 million *paras*.⁶ Egypt also provided the Ottoman center with various products and foodstuffs. Sugar, rice, lentils, and coffee were sent to the imperial kitchens and pantries. Egypt's viceroy was often ordered to send military supplies for the army and navy, such as gunpowder, twine, and cord.

It would be wrong to assume that this obvious exploitation of Egypt meant greater economic hardship than before the conquest. The country was

⁵ On the Ottomans' policy in Ethiopia, see H. Erlich, *Ethiopia and the Middle East* (Boulder and London, 1994), 33–37.

⁶ The *para* was the principal coin in circulation in Ottoman Egypt. Forty *paras* were equal to one gold coin.

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now integrated in a vast empire enjoying a long period of prosperity and good government by the standards of the day. The economy of Egypt before the Ottoman conquest had been in a sorry state, and Ottoman rule brought prosperity and development, at least in the early period. Cairo benefited from commerce, stimulated by the annual pilgrimage to Mecca; Ottoman power and prestige made the pilgrimage safer and more orderly than before. Egyptian merchants (and the government) made profits from the international coffee trade, which began in the early sixteenth century and eventually took the place formerly occupied by the spice trade. Ottoman Cairo was the seat of a pasha and a center with a large number of soldiers and bureaucrats who consumed great quantities of luxury goods.⁷

The construction of magnificent monuments, such as mosques and mausoleums, for which the Mamluk sultanate was famous, ceased with the Ottoman occupation. The explanation for this is simple: Mamluk sultans and high-ranking amirs saw Egypt as their only home, where they planned to live, die, and be buried. They wished to immortalize themselves by building imperial mosques and tombs. The Ottoman viceroys' term of office in Egypt was temporary, often very short, and they expected to go back to the center; the pashas did not have the time, motivation, or the funds to undertake construction of monuments. Besides, the Ottoman sultan would not have allowed his viceroy to build an "imperial" mosque for himself. Nevertheless, there is evidence that the viceroys contributed a great deal to the economic and religious life of Egypt, and to Cairo in particular. They established many *waqf* foundations, and constructed mosques, shrines, and Sufi cloisters. One (Mustafa Pasha, 1560–63) built residences in Old Cairo and used revenues from the project for a *waqf* to finance charity. Al-Azhar was renovated. The treasury paid for soup kitchens for the poor and water supplies for pilgrims.

In contrast to Ibn Iyas's extreme hostility toward the Ottomans at the time of the occupation, the next generation of Egyptian writers, and Arab writers generally, viewed the Ottomans much more favorably. The historians and men of religion who have been mentioned above, such as al-Sha'rani, al-Jaziri, al-Nahrawali, Ibn Abi l-Surur, and others, praise the Ottoman state, and especially its ruling dynasty, as impeccably Islamic. Sometimes flattery can explain these attitudes, but it cannot be the whole answer. There are indications that as the sixteenth century progressed, the empire was increasingly orthodox. There was a variety of reasons for this process, such as the empire's position between its adversaries, the Catholics in the west and the Shi'is in the east. The Ottoman occupation of the Arab lands with their venerated traditions of Sunni religiosity and learning certainly played a

⁷ A. Raymond, "The Ottoman Conquest and the Development of the Great Arab Towns," *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 1/1 (1979–80), 84–101.

major role, although the impact of those conquests on Ottoman Islam still awaits a thorough study.

Naturally, the Ottomans and their subjects in Egypt (and elsewhere) became accustomed to each other. Their rulers accommodated their interests to local needs and sensibilities. They acted as patrons of Islam in many ways – taking care of the Hajj and the holy cities, supporting religious institutions, ‘ulama’, and Sufis, and emphasizing their adherence to the Shari‘a. Yet all this did not preclude Egyptian–Turkish tensions and antipathies. Temperamental differences were too great to be overlooked, and stereotypes were created on both sides. Egyptians often saw the Turks as bad Muslims and people of harsh character. Turks questioned the Egyptians’ ability to rule and fight: they used pejorative terms, such as “fallahin,” “*Tat*,” or “*Miqlaji*,” in referring to Egyptians, and considered them socially inferior.

Salim was the only Ottoman sultan to visit Egypt until the nineteenth century. Egyptians regarded his successors as distant, though generally benevolent, figures. Chroniclers noted their accession to the throne and their deaths, but little else. In Cairo, celebration of the birth of a sultan’s son or an Ottoman victory in war was limited to decorating the shops and houses, and firing cannons.

It should be emphasized that before the end of the eighteenth century the Ottoman sultan did not claim the title of caliph, but by then political conditions had changed. When the empire was at its zenith in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the sultanate was strong enough not to need the historically loaded title “caliph.” Historians have shown that the claim that the last ‘Abbasid caliph of Cairo transferred his “rights” to Salim I after the Ottoman conquest of Egypt was a myth created in the late eighteenth century. Some panegyrists call the Ottomans “the inheritors of royalty and the caliphate,” but this was an honorary title devoid of political or religious significance.

The pashas

In Egypt, as in most Ottoman provinces, the governor or viceroy was the sultan’s representative and was personally responsible for protecting the state’s interests. He was the addressee of the sultan’s edicts dispatched to the province about almost all matters. He was supreme commander of the army in Egypt with the rank of pasha; several pashas also held the rank of vizier. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the viceroy was called *Misir beylerbeyi* (or in some financial documents *mirmiran*, the Persian equivalent) in the official language. The viceroy carried out administrative work through the Diwan, or council of state, which convened four times a week and was modeled on the sultan’s Diwan in Istanbul.

The viceroy’s appointment was for one year, but it was usually renewed

for another two or three years. It also happened that a pasha was recalled after only a few months in office. The typical incumbency during the period under study was two or three years. Exceptions were the long terms of the vizier Sulayman Pasha (1525–38 including an interval of less than two years, when he was sent on a naval expedition to the Indian Ocean), and his successor Da'ud Pasha, who died in office after eleven years (1538–49).

The majority of the viceroys are not identifiable by ethnicity: it seems that they were recruited and trained through the Ottoman *devshirme* system, i.e., they were military slaves born as Christians in the Balkans. Three viceroys are described as a Bosnian, an Albanian, and a Circassian. One (Muhammad Pasha, 1596–98) was called *sharif*, as if a descendant of the Prophet; what is certain is that he was a Muslim from birth.

Several viceroys arrived in Egypt directly from the sultan's household. In the sixteenth century no fewer than six pashas were given the title of *hadim* (Arabic: *khadim*), "servant," a euphemism for eunuch, i.e., they were eunuchs who started their careers in the sultan's household. Mustafa 'Ali, a well-known Ottoman historian, writer, and poet, who visited Egypt at the end of the sixteenth century, explains: "It was the custom at the time . . . that the governorship of Egypt was given to persons of the eunuch class whenever it became vacant, because they are free of the care for wives and children, and all their possessions revert in the end to the sultan."⁸ Five of those who came from the sultan's palace had been officials in charge of the sultan's finances (as *daftardar* or *khazindar*); they must have had the expertise to manage a big budget and had, of course, the sultan's trust. Two viceroys, Uveys Pasha (1587–91) and Ibrahim Pasha (1604) had been *qadis*, then *daftardars*. Two came from military service at the imperial court. The governorship of Egypt was given to several governors of lesser provinces as a promotion. Thus, viceroys of Egypt had previously been governors in Yemen (two viceroys), Erzerum, Diyarbakr, Baghdad, and Cyprus. One viceroy had previously held the lower rank of *sanjaq beyi*, and on his appointment to Egypt was promoted to *beylerbeyi*.

The career of Mustafa Pasha is an exceptional case of a man who rose from the humblest origins to become governor of Egypt from 1561 until 1565. After serving as a saddler for the army, he became rich by looting the treasury of Ahmad Pasha "the traitor." He managed to be appointed as *kashif* and later became *amir al-hajj*. As such he earned the nickname *al-nashshar*, "the sawyer," for executing bandits along the pilgrim route by sawing them in half. After serving as *amir al-hajj* for nine years from 938/1532, he was eventually made governor of Yemen and finally of Egypt itself.

The ruler's religious attitudes were crucial to his public image. Several pashas were known by epithets that indicated religious inclinations. *Khadim*

⁸ *Mustafa Ali's Description of Cairo of 1599*, ed. A. Tietze (Vienna, 1975), 73.

Hafiz Muhammad Pasha (1591–95) knew the Qur'an by heart (as his epithet indicates) and read it every Friday. Iskander Pasha (appointed in 1568) was known as *al-Faqih*, "the jurisconsult." In the period under study, two pashas were known as "the Sufi": Sufi 'Ali Pasha (1563–65) reportedly wore only coarse woolen clothes and paid many visits to tombs of saints in the Qarafa (Cairo's famous cemetery). Ibrahim Pasha (who was killed in 1604 by rebellious soldiers) had been a Mevlevi dervish in Konya.

Most of the pashas were reportedly pious men who adhered to the Shari'a. However, there was an exception. Dugakin-Oglu Muhammad Pasha (1554–56) was described as a wanton man; he was recalled at Sultan Sulayman's order on charges of violating the Shari'a and was executed. There were a few pashas who cut the 'ulama's pensions, according to Ibn Abi l-Surur, the historian who expresses the sentiments and interests of men of religion.

Chroniclers usually distinguish popular and good rulers from cruel and hated ones. Some were generous and benevolent, others selfish, oppressive, and rapacious. Some pashas failed to deal efficiently with gangs of criminals, others were notorious for the ease with which they put people to death for the slightest offense.

The Ottoman army in Egypt in the sixteenth century

The Ottoman garrison in Egypt consisted of seven corps (*ojaqs*). The Janissaries, an elite infantry corps, had as their main task guarding Cairo and the Citadel, hence their other title, *Mustahfizan*, "Guardians." This was the largest and most important unit. The 'Azab infantry corps was less important than the Janissaries regiment, and was smaller in number. They were also guards, but on a subordinate level to the Janissaries, and were stationed at the approaches to the Citadel and to the seaports of Egypt. The *Mutafarriqa* and the *Chavush* (pursuivants) were two small units of both infantry and cavalry, who served as the viceroy's guards. The *Chavush* corps was created in 1524 and the *Mutafarriqa* in 1554. These were elite corps whose members were ranked above regular soldiers, although they were not amirs. The authorities trusted them even as general discipline declined. Members of these corps were often appointed as provincial governors and financial agents for the treasury (*kashifs* and *amins*) and this increased their chances of promotion to the beylicate. Some added to their income by serving as directors or trustees of *waqf* foundations or by tax-farming. There were also three cavalry (*sipahi*) corps, the *Gonulluyan* ("volunteers"), and *Tufenkjiyan* (Riflemen). The *Qanun-name* makes it clear that the former were armed with javelins and bows and arrows, while the latter used handguns, as their name indicates. The fact that the Mamluks were

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organized as a separate regiment, given the name *Cherakise ojagi*, the Circassian corps, is stated in the *Qanun-name*. In addition, there were units of soldiers who manned the forts in Egypt and along the hajj route, corps of armorers (*jebejiyan*) and cannoneers (*topchiyan*).

The seven corps of which the army consisted remained the official framework of Egypt's military organization throughout the Ottoman period, although, as will be seen in the following chapters, their importance would undergo profound fluctuations, and finally decline.

A soldier's income consisted of basic pay, *ibtida* (lit. start) according to his regiment or rank, plus bonuses, *teraqqi* (lit. a raise). A soldier was entitled to additional pay if he went on a campaign or was especially recommended. Also, when a new pasha took up his appointment, the troops demanded, and usually received, a special payment. In 1606–07, when a pasha refused to give this money, the rebellious troops collapsed his tent over his head.

Soldiers' pay was calculated in *aqchas* on a daily basis, and usually ranged from about six to twelve, according to the corps. The highest paid were the small elite guards units of the Mutafarriqa and Chavush, then the cavalry – Gonullu, Tufenkji, and Circassians, in that order, and finally the Janissaries and the 'Azab. The latter two were large and strong; they were stationed in the capital, and had means – often illegal – of increasing their income. In addition to salaries, soldiers were entitled to grain rations from the imperial granaries in Cairo and fodder for their animals. Retired soldiers, soldiers' widows, and orphans were given pensions.

The viceroy and highest-ranking amirs received yearly salaries (*salyane*). The viceroy's salary in the sixteenth century was 2 million *osmanis*, which equaled 20 million *aqchas*. The viceroy was assisted by high-ranking amirs called bey, or variably *sanjaq beyi*, or in the terminology of the financial documents, *mirliva* (the Persian form) or *Muhafaza beyi*. Unlike the situation in other Ottoman provinces, where *sanjaq* (lit. a standard, flag) meant a district under the jurisdiction of a *sanjaq beyi*, in Egypt the term did not have a territorial connotation (since the *timar* system was not applied there). Beys were given various assignments, such as *daftardar* (financial superintendent), *amir al-hajj* (commander of the pilgrims' caravan), captains of Egypt's ports, governors of rural provinces, *sirdars* (commanders of task forces to fight Bedouin or to lead the Egyptian contingent to the European or Persian fronts), or *amir khazna* (commander of the guard that conveyed overland the annual tribute of Egypt to Istanbul).

Several beys could remain without a specific assignment, awaiting an appointment. Some had previously been commanders (*aghas*) of one of the seven corps, and were promoted to the beylicate.

The beys' annual salaries ranged from 200,000 *osmanis* (or 2 million *aqchas*), mostly given to those who did not have specific assignments in that