Introduction

Allahümme yâ müfettiha'l ebvâb iftah lenâ hayre'l bâb

O my Allah, the opener of all gates.

Let the most propitious gates be opened in front of us as well.'[1]

In 1799, a woman who signed her name as el-Hâcce *Sarayî* Fatma received a letter from the scribe of the Chief Black Eunuch. The letter informed her that due to the war against the infidels, her annual share of the *mukataa* (a fiscal unit administered as tax farm) would be reduced. el-Hâcce *Sarayî* Fatma Usta, who was previously the *çaşnigir usta* (mistress of the table service) in the imperial harem before moving to Medina, noted in the signed return letter that as female palace companions (*saraylı yoldaş*) living in Medina, she and other former harem residents had no other source of revenue apart from this share. This situation she considered to be a great injustice, especially since the women were living in the holy land. Fatma stated that the sultan was these women's sole source of support and that the money not given to them would not benefit anyone else. Fatma then demanded that the women's share be sent as usual. She noted that the women prayed to Allah that the Ottoman Empire should not need money assigned to the people of Medina. She also added that this share was not a protection (*himaye*); rather, the women had earned this share over their many years of serving several sultans (so long, in fact, that their hair had whitened). Because the women had also sold their jewelry and had saved through their hard work, this revenue could not be regarded "as apprenticeship or a freedom due, nor a gift" (*çıraklık değil, ihsan değil*). She finished her letter stating that the women wanted to spend

[1] This is an inscription on one of the gates of the imperial harem. This inscription not only sheds light on the state of mind of the inhabitants of the imperial harem but also reminds them of the fact that being affiliated with the prestigious and splendid imperial court provided them with access to various propitious gates.

the last days of their lives near Prophet Muhammed, and that they expected the state to show its generosity by helping them.[2]

Not long before Fatma's letter exchange, in 1791, another former palace slave named Sungur had written to Sultan Selim III (r. 1789–1807), indicating that she had been taken to the imperial palace at the age of five, that she had served three sultans, and that she had been manumitted by Hadice Sultan the elder.[3] Being blind for some time, she was now living in poverty and had nobody to look after her. This needy and apparently old woman added that since she had been trained at the palace and transferred from there, she could not beg for money to support herself: doing so would not be an appropriate reflection of the sultan's honor and reputation. However, due to her very desperate situation, she dared to demand an allowance that would allow her a modest livelihood. Upon receiving Sungur's request, Selim III issued an order to offer Sungur 20 *akçe* from the customs revenue.[4]

Fatma's and Sungur's demands may seem ordinary, considering the large number of archival documents revealing that the imperial court was always considered to be a permanent place of reference for the material and moral requests of people from various segments of Ottoman society. But the particular expressions that Fatma used in her letter, such as "this share is not a protection" or "this is not apprenticeship or a freedom due, nor a gift" hint at the fact that these women were directly affiliated with the palace, unlike many others who also made requests for support. Additionally, these expressions refer to the fact that affiliation with the imperial harem created a bond between palace women[5] and with the

[2] Republic of Turkey Presidency of State Archives – Ottoman Archives (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı – Osmanlı Arşivi), henceforth BOA, Sadâret Mektubî Kalemi (A.MKT) 520/75 (1214/1799).

[3] Hadice Sultan the elder should be the daughter of Mehmed IV (r. 1648–1687). The names of the three sultans that Sungur served were not mentioned. Yet, since she was manumitted by Hadice Sultan the elder (d. 1743), these three sultans might refer to Mustafa II (r. 1696–1703), Ahmed III (r. 1703–1730), and Mahmud I (r. 1730–1754).

[4] The case of Sungur was mentioned by Atilla Çetin (Atilla Çetin, "Muhtaç Bir Cariyenin Sultan III. Selim'e Arzuhali," *Türk Dünyası Tarih Dergisi* 27 (1989): 37–39).

[5] In this study "palace women" refers mainly to those manumitted female palace slaves who served in the imperial harem for a period of time, and who were later manumitted and transferred from the imperial palace and regarded as *sarayî*/*saraylı* in Ottoman society. In this study, the term "palace women" does not refer to the female members of the dynasty.

imperial court. These women were not just any women; they had reason to expect that their requests would be met.

Despite the increasing volume of literature on women, slavery, and the imperial court in the Ottoman world, the importance of the female slaves of the Ottoman imperial court is still only dimly understood. The available literature has mainly focused on the female members of the dynastic family, rather than on the lower status female palace slaves. The lives and experiences of female palace slaves have been largely ignored. The absence of studies on the experiences of manumitted female palace slaves following their departure from the imperial harem has led to a false perception about this group of women. Generally, it is assumed that manumitted female palace slaves broke their ties completely with the imperial court following their departure from the palace, after which they simply disappeared from the scene. This assumption has led scholars to miss the continued roles and importance of manumitted female palace slaves, both within the imperial court and in Ottoman society more broadly.

Based on this fact, this book focuses on the female slaves of the Ottoman imperial court who lived in the imperial harem between the second half of the seventeenth and the end of the eighteenth centuries, and who were later manumitted and transferred from the palace. Through an analysis of a wide range of hitherto unexplored archival and historical sources, it aims to explore the various aspects of female palace slaves' lives, including the period following their manumission and transfer from the imperial palace. The book's main argument is that the manumission of female palace slaves and their departure from the palace did not mean the severing of their ties with the imperial court; rather, it signaled the beginning of a new kind of relationship that would continue in various ways until their death. This evolving relationship had implications for several parties, including the manumitted female palace slaves, the imperial court, and urban society.

This book evaluates the lives of female palace slaves from the perspective of patronage relationship with the imperial court. Patronage between palace members and the imperial court regulated the relationship between two parties both during their stay in the palace and following their transfer from the palace. This book studies the implications of the patronage relationships for both parties, namely the palace women as protégés and the imperial household as the patron (*hâmî*). By tracing these women's ongoing relations with the palace and

patronage networks after their time in the harem, it aims to reconstruct the lives of manumitted female palace slaves in an attempt to recapture what it meant to be a palace woman in the Ottoman world. It also explores the roles and places that palace women held in the imperial court. In doing so, it offers not just a new way of understanding the workings of the imperial court but also a new way of understanding the lives of the actors within it.

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In the Ottoman state, political power was centered in and exercised through the household, giving it a particular sociopolitical character. Powerful households, including but not limited to the imperial household, operated through patronage networks; these networks, in turn, not only legitimized and ensured the continuity of the household but also tied it to the broader political system. The actual authority of the household heads, including that of the sultan himself, depended heavily on the size of the household, on their ability to keep household members under control, on their capacity to provide material and moral protection to those members, and finally on the level of service, loyalty, and support that they received in return.[6]

Patronage relationships refer to an asymmetric, mutual, and reciprocal relationship between two parties. There is a master, benefactor, or patron on the one hand and a protégé or client on the other. In patronage relationships, the individual holding higher status and prestige (*hâmî*) uses his influence and resources to provide material and moral protection, assistance, and benefits to the person of lower status (*mahmî, protégé)* through the transmission of goods and services.

[6] For detailed information on the organization and functioning of households in the Ottoman State, see Rifa'at Ali Abou-El-Haj, "The Ottoman Vizier and Pasha Households 1683–1703: A Preliminary Report," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94 (1974): 438–447; Metin Kunt, "Kulların Kulları," *Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Dergisi: Beşeri Bilimler* 3 (1975): 27–42; M. Kunt, *The Sultan's Servant, The Transformation of the Ottoman Provincial Government, 1550–1650* (New York: Columbia Universtity Press, 1983); Carter Findley, "Political Culture and the Great Households," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey: The Later Ottoman Empire,* ed. Suraiya Faroqhi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), III, 65–80; Jane Hathaway, *The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdaglis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Jane Hathaway, "Eunuch Households in Istanbul, Medina, Cairo during the Ottoman Era," *Turcica* 41 (2009): 291–303.

In return, the lower-status party is expected to reciprocate by offering his or her personal service, loyalty, and affection. Patronage activities thus not only displayed the power and the generosity of *hâmî* but also contributed to its legitimacy.[7]

Loyalty was the main building block in these political households. As a matter of fact, Ottoman chronicles offer valuable information

[7] Claude Cahen, "Himâya," *EI*^{2}, III, 394–397. For studies evaluating the functioning of patronage relationships, see J. Boissevin, "Patronage in Sicily," *Man* 1 (1966): 18–33; R. R. Kaufman, "*The Patron-Client Concept and Macro-Politics: Prospects and Problems," Comparative Studies of Society and History* 16 (1974): 284–308; Verena Burkolter, *The Patronage System, Theoretical Remarks* (Basle: Social Strategies Publishers Co-operative Society, 1976); Ernest Gellner-John Waterbury ed., *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (London: Duckworth, 1977); Samuel Eisenstadt-Louis Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984). In the Islamic tradition, the practice of patronage relationships was related to concepts of benevolence, charity, and generosity (*sadaqa*, *khayr, ihsân*), which all refer to doing good voluntarily for some person(s) in need. Additionally, the practice of patronage might be linked to the concept of gift giving (*hîbe*), which had been employed for centuries by members of the imperial court in various ways. Gifts given in the name of *in'âm*, *'atıyye-i hümâyûn*, and *ihsân*, more specifically donations and largesse, referred to financial subsidies and presents of various types. At this point, the theory of anthropologist Marcel Mauss is important. According to him, gift giving aimed to cement the bonds of obligation and dependence. He regards gift giving as "in theory voluntary, in reality given and returned obligatorily" (Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (London, New York: Routledge, 1990). In Ottoman society, patronage relationships formed the basis of many relationships in bureaucracy, in the military, and in religious institutions (*ilmiye*). For several examples, see Gabriel Baer, "Patrons and Clients in Ottoman Cairo," in *Mémorial Ömer Lûtfi Barkan* (Paris: Institut Français d'Istanbul, 1980), 11–18. For the observation of a sixteenth-century Ottoman bureaucrat from the perspective of a patron–client relationship, see Cornell H. Fleicher, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). Within the *ilmiye* class, patronage relationships played an important role for those seeking to embark on a religious career; Suraiya Faroqhi, "Social Mobility among the Ottoman Ulema in the Late Sixteenth Century," *IJMES* 4 (1973): 204–218. Patronage relationships were also developed by women who were members of political households; Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem, Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Jane Hathaway, "Marriage Alliances Among the Military Households of Ottoman Egypt," *Annales Islamologiques* 29 (1995): 133–149; Mary Ann Fay, "The Ties That Bound: Women and Households in Eighteenth Century Egypt," in *The Family and Divorce Laws in Islamic History*, ed. Amira Sonbol (Syracuse: State University of New York Press, 1996), 155–172.

about the functioning of patronage relationships in the imperial court, about the expectation of loyalty in return for the patronage given to the household members, and also about how loyalty was defined.[8] In fact, the primary aim of education in the imperial palace for both men and women was to teach and impart Ottoman loyalty throughout all levels of the imperial household. In this context, male and female slaves were important in the household structure: it was believed that those slaves who effectively broke their ties with their own relatives and with their own cultural roots would serve more faithfully and effectively than would members of established families. The presence of slaves in the imperial palace, in the political households, and in the military establishment thus played an important role that was perhaps peculiar to the Ottoman State and the previous Islamic states.

Manumission of the slave members of the households and their transfer from the household did not signal the end of their household membership, but rather referred to the transformation of that relationship. According to Islamic law, manumission was not a severance of the master–slave relationship; instead, it created an even deeper bond between the two parties through a special relationship called *velâ,* or patronage, between the manumitter and the manumitted person. Manumitted slaves thus became connected to their former masters by means of patronage. Such patronage relationships within a political household gained another meaning as far as protégé were slaves. Classical experts on Islamic law interpret *velâ* as a type of fictitious kinship tie, more precisely an agnatic one. The *velâ* relationship thus functioned as a system that regulated rights and duties, including the inheritance relationship between manumitter and the manumitted person. In this case, both patron and client were named *"mevlâ,"* and the *velâ* relationship survived the death of each. In this way, the families of the freed person and the patron were, in effect, bound together in perpetuity.[9]

[8] For instance, during the dethronement attempt, Sultan Ibrahim (r. 1640–1648) reacted to those people who came to take him by stating "you traitors what are you doing, did I not offer you many benefactions ("*bre hâinler bu nasıl iştir, ben her birinize nice ihsan etmedim mi?*") (Na'îmâ Mustafa Efendi, *Tarih-i Na'îmâ*, ed. M. İpşirli [Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2007, III, 1165]). For a similar expression, pronounced by Kösem Sultan, see Na'îmâ, *Tarih*, III, 1163. Ottoman sources also provide numerous examples concerning how disloyalty was punished in the Ottoman Empire.

[9] Detailed information in this issue will be given in Chapter 2.

Therefore, household affiliation comprised free, slave, and manumitted persons, both residents of the household and nonresidents. Physically leaving the household did not necessarily refer to the end of household affiliation. The former slaves' service and loyalty to the household continued, and manumitted persons retained their protection against social and economic realities. While their household duties may have ended, these people took on other important functions to ensure the permanency of the political household. For instance, they could play an effective role in developing or sustaining networks of outside political relationships. At the same time, with their intimate familiarity with the particular the culture and life style of the household, these people actively represented their households to the outside world. The marriages of members of Ottoman political households also held strategic and symbolic importance, in terms of their role in strengthening existing relationships, establishing new bonds, and enlarging networks. Marriage among household members was also important for securing loyalty and for increasing the household's strength. Especially in the case of the marriages among members of the imperial court, these relationships and networks significantly affected the formation and expansion of a ruling elite loyal to the sultan. Just as important was the household's ability to establish strong connections with the public and to ensure its allegiance. In this context, the charitable activities of members of the political households, including endowments and architectural patronage, functioned as a tool that strengthened the household's position and contributed to its power and prestige in the eyes of the public.

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In a state structure in which political households and patronage relationships prevailed, female palace slaves held an important place in the functioning of the imperial court, as important to the Ottoman Empire's political functioning as the male members of the Enderun. Due to the reciprocal character of the patronage relations based on mutual obligation and interest between patron and protégé, palace-affiliated people were protected and provided with material and moral benefits by the household; in exchange, they offered their personal service, loyalty, and affection, both during their service period and following their departure from the palace.

As will be discussed throughout the book, affiliation with the imperial court until death and beyond had implications for both parties.

From the perspective of the manumitted female palace slaves, affiliation with the imperial court and patronage relationship impacted their marriage prospects, residential locations, material world, network of relationships, and charitable activities. Even though affiliation with the imperial court entailed some obligations, it also provided a social identity, privileges, prestige, and opportunities to climb the social ladder.

From the perspective of the imperial court, manumitted female palace slaves carried their "palace identity" with them into local communities, established social and communal relationships, especially with members of their neighborhoods, represented the court culture outside of the palace, established ties through marriage between the imperial household and members of the ruling class, and engaged in charitable activities for the benefit of society and the imperial court. Thus, no picture of the imperial court is complete without taking into account the role of these former slave women.

These factors were important in every period, even during the eighteenth century as many socioeconomic, political, and cultural changes unfolded. To properly evaluate the place of palace women both in the imperial court and in society, it thus is important to take into account the socioeconomic, political, and cultural context of the eighteenth century.

A Brief Overview of the Eighteenth Century

From the last quarter of the sixteenth century, several developments deeply affected the administrative, social, and economic structure of the Ottoman Empire. In this period, during which the authority of the sultan was shaken and the power balances changed, deep political struggles emerged between different sections of society, such as palace members, *kapıkulu* corps, and *ulema*. Six dethronement incidents occurred between 1618 and 1703, highlighting the instability of this troubled period.[10] As a result of long-standing changes taking place in the Ottoman state and society, by the eighteenth century there existed a state structure that was fundamentally different from that

[10] For evaluations concerning the impact of the developments realized in this period on the power and authority of the imperial dynasty, see Baki Tezcan, "The Second Empire: The Transformation of the Ottoman Polity in the Early Modern Era," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29/3 (2009): 559–572.

of the sixteenth century. The *devshirme* system (the recruitment of non-Muslim boys into state service), which had been the main characteristic of the Ottoman military and administrative organization, began to lose its importance. In time, as an alternative to *devshirme*-origin people, the administrative and military structures began to incorporate children and household members of *askeri* class members,[11] and even some *reaya* (tax-paying subjects) who were included in the *askeri* class.[12] Social transformation gradually blurred the marks of distinction that had long separated the ruling elite from society at large.[13]

In addition, and as a result of the extensive transformation that had begun at the end of the sixteenth century, the importance of establishing households that each represented a social, political, and economic unit increased, both in the capital and in the provinces. In the seventeenth century, members of the vizier and the pasha households were able to obtain important positions, taking the places previously occupied by graduates of the Enderun and those who had been trained in the military organization.[14] The appointment of Köprülü Mehmed Pasha as grand vizier in 1656, and his acquisition of political authority, reveals the effectiveness of the vizier and pasha households in the Ottoman political administration. The households as political, economic, sociocultural units maintained their importance until the end of the nineteenth century.

Following the defeat of Ottoman forces at Vienna in 1683, the Ottoman state entered into a new period in which they encountered

[11] In Ottoman technical usage, *askeri* refers to the members of the ruling class as distinct from *reaya*. The term *askeri* included retired or unemployed *askeri*s, the wives and children of *askeri*s, and manumitted slaves of the Sultan and of the *askeri*s (Bernard Lewis, "Askari," *EI²*, I, 712).

[12] The *devshirme* system was abandoned gradually (Tayyar-Zâde Atâ, *Osmanlı Saray Tarihi, Târih-i Enderûn*, ed. Mehmet Arslan [Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2010], I, 235). Especially in the eighteenth century, children of many notable families entered the Enderun (İsmail H. Baykal, *Enderun Mektebi Tarihi* [Istanbul: İstanbul Fetih Derneği, 1953], 70).

[13] Several archival documents from the eighteenth century reveal that the rule of wearing distinctive clothes according to rank, status, profession, and religious affiliation was violated: some lower-class men in particular no longer dressed in accordance with their status (Betül İpşirli Argıt, "Clothing Habits, Regulations, and Non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire," *Journal of Academic Studies* 24 [2005]: 82).

[14] Abou-El-Haj, "The Ottoman Vizier and Pasha Households 1683–1703," 438–447.

problems in various areas.[15] In this period, even the authority of the Ottoman dynasty was questioned. Following the deposition of Mustafa II after the Edirne incident of 1703,[16] there was even a search for an alternative to the rule of the House of Osman.[17] During this period of change, transformation, and intense political crisis, Ahmed III ascended to the throne (1703) and transferred the imperial court back to Istanbul. He endeavored to strengthen the sovereign authority of the sultan that had been shaken during the seventeenth century, and his efforts (and their impacts) can be seen in different forms throughout the century.[18] Conflict with Iran in the first half of the eighteenth century and with Russia in the second half led to troubles in the military, political, financial, and social structures of the Ottoman Empire. In response, from the second half of the eighteenth century, the central authority turned toward reforms to regain its strength.

Parallel to these developments, the capital's environment was evolving. Following the transfer of the imperial court from Edirne back to Istanbul in 1703, tremendous changes took place in the fabric and architecture of the city. Urban development increased, social spaces expanded,[19] and people from various segments of society appeared in these spaces.[20] In a period in which the boundaries between *askeri* class and *reaya* gradually loosened, changes also occurred in consumption habits along with changing economic relations.[21]

[15] For a study evaluating this period in the context of Ottoman Venetian relations, see Güner Doğan, *"Venediklü ile Dahi Sulh Oluna" 17. ve 18. Yüzyıllarda Osmanlı Venedik İlişkileri* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2017).

[16] For detailed information about Edirne Incident of 1703, see Rıfa'at Ali Abou-El-Haj, *The 1703 Rebellion and the Structure of Ottoman Politics* (Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1984).

[17] Feridun Emecen, "Osmanlı Hanedanına Alternatif Arayışlar Üzerine Bazı Örnekler ve Mülahazalar," *İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi* 6 (2001): 63–76.

[18] For information about the period, see Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300–1923* (London: John Murray, 2005).

[19] Shirine Hamadeh, "Public Spaces and the Garden Culture of Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Early Modern Ottomans, Remapping the Empires*, ed. Virginia Aksan-Daniel Goffman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 283, 287.

[20] For instance, Ignatius Mouradgea d'Ohsson notes that in the good season citizens of all orders, men and women take pleasure in walking, and women are always veiled and separated from men (Mouradgea D'Ohsson, *Tableau Général de L'Empire Othoman* (Paris, 1788–1824), IV, 186).

[21] Donald Quataert, "Introduction," in *Consumption Studies and the History of the Ottoman Empire, 1550–1922*, ed. D. Quataert (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 10.