

AGENTS OF CONQUEST:
FRONTIER LORDS' EXTENDED HOUSEHOLDS AS ACTORS
IN THE OTTOMAN CONQUEST OF THE BALKANS

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Throughout the period of the Ottoman territorial expansion in the Balkans, military commanders from the families of several frontier lords figured prominently during conquests and emerged as distinct frontier elites and sociopolitical entities in their own right. As hereditary leaders of the vanguard Ottoman forces the frontier lords were in an extremely advantageous position to staff their courts and armies with slaves acquired through conquests in non-Muslim territories. These captives were raised, trained, and acculturated as part of the military-administrative households of the frontier lords, and in turn contributed to conquest, becoming the spearhead of further military expeditions. This essay examines the composition of the extended military household of Mihaloğlu Mehmed Beg, a district governor of Niğbolu, as presented in an Ottoman register from the second decade of the 16th century and argues that his personal retainers became a reservoir for the military and the administration of the marcher district under his governance. It further maintains that the frontier lords' households, which represent a distinct group of power holders outside the sultanic dynasty, emerged as true loci of power that managed manpower along the bordering regions and should be studied in regards not only to their regional authority, but to their place in the Ottoman political establishment as well. By establishing stable patron–client relations with the members of their extended households, the frontier lords found themselves at the apex of a large web of networks entwined within social, military, administrative, political, and cultural life along the borders of the Ottoman state and should be regarded as an indispensable part of the Ottoman socio-political order in the region as a whole.

Keywords: Ottoman conquest, Balkans, frontier elites, household, Mihaloğlu family.

The Ottoman polity, as it appears in studies by some modern Ottomanists, was in essence a household-based political establishment ruled by the dynasty of Osman, whose own household stood at the apex of an extensive network of military, administrative, and elite political households encompassing a wide array of social actors, stretching from the highest Ottoman officials to the smallest fief holders in the provinces.¹ Thanks to the achievements of modern scholarship we

¹ Metin Kunt has repeatedly emphasized the central role of households in Ottoman society. See M. Kunt, *The Sultan's Servants: The Transformation of Ottoman Provincial Government, 1550–1650*, New York, 1983, p. 9–56; idem, “Royal and Other Households,” in Christine Woodhead (ed.), *The Ottoman World*, London – New York, 2012, p. 103–115.

are now more cognizant of the composition of the sultanic palace with its satellite princely and other grandee households.² Furthermore, the growing academic interest in other political households in the Ottoman realm has revealed the increasing importance of the pasha and vizier households, epitomized by the powerful Köprülü clan of viziers, as a primary source of the Ottoman ruling elite since the mid seventeenth century, a period which signaled a change in power relations and political authority in internal Ottoman affairs.³ Furthermore, households outside the Ottoman central government, located in the capital, were the backbone of the entire military elite on a provincial level, as observed in Ottoman Egypt and the district of Jerusalem during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴

The alteration in the power balance at a given time was neither a temporal nor a spatial phenomenon. Arguably, it was a rather omnipresent feature of the Ottoman societies throughout the empire's long history, and was tightly intertwined with the changing political, military, economic, and social conditions. The profound changes in these conditions brought about a deep transformation in the political system and opened the way to Ottoman modernity at the turn of the seventeenth century.⁵ During the first centuries of the Ottoman state's existence, the transformation of power, control, and political authority was linked primarily to the evolving Ottoman concept of state-building, incarnated in prolonged centralizing, bureaucratizing, and Sunnitising efforts, which reached high points during the reigns of Mehmed II (r. 1444–1446 and 1451–1481) and Süleyman I (r. 1520–1566).⁶ A change was certainly evident in the shifting pattern of provincial

² The most authoritative study on the composition of the sultanic household still remains İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin Saray Teşkilâtı*, Ankara, 1945; see also idem, *Çandarlı Vezir Ailesi*, Ankara, 1974. Cf. L.P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*, Oxford, 1993; R. Murphey, *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty: Tradition, Image and Practice in the Ottoman Imperial Household, 1400–1800*, London, 2008; Th. Stavrides, *The Sultan of Viziers: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelović (1453–1474)*, Leiden, 2001; H. W. Lowry, *Hersekzâde Ahmed Paşa: An Ottoman Statesman's Career & Pious Endowments*, Istanbul, 2011; H. Eroğlu, *Osmanlı Devletinde Şehzadelik Kurumu*, Ankara, 2004; İ. M. Kunt, "A Prince Goes Forth (Perchance to Return)", in B. Tezcan and K. Barbir (eds.), *Identity and Identity Formation in the Ottoman World: A Volume of Essays in Honor of Norman Itzkowitz*, Madison, Wisconsin, 2007, p. 63–71; M. Kunt, "Turks in the Ottoman Imperial Palace", in J. Duindam, T. Artan and M. Kunt (eds.), *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective*, Leiden–Boston, 2011, p. 289–312.

³ R.A. Abou-El-Haj, "The Ottoman Vezir and Paşa Households 1683–1703: A Preliminary Report", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94:4, 1974, p. 438–447; D. Ze'evi and I. Buke, "Banishment, Confiscation, and the Instability of the Ottoman Elite Household", in D. Ze'evi and E. Toledano (eds.), *Society, Law, and Culture in the Middle East: "Modernities" in the Making*, Berlin, Boston, 2015, p. 16–30.

⁴ D. Ze'evi, *An Ottoman Century: The District of Jerusalem in the 1600s*, Albany, 1996; J. Hathaway, *The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdaglis*, Cambridge, 2002; eadem, *Tale of Two Factions: A Myth, Memory, and Identity in Ottoman Egypt and Yemen*, Albany, 2003.

⁵ M. Kunt, *The Sultan's Servants...*; B. Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World*, Cambridge, 2010.

⁶ C. Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, Berkeley, 1995; C. Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300–1650: The Structure of Power*, Houndmills–New York, 2002;

appointments after the second half of the sixteenth century, when the ever-growing imperial military-administrative household of *kuls*, the sultan's own servitors, became the primary source for staffing most senior appointments in the provinces, hence ousting the local provincial nobility's household members.⁷ The new power elites of imperial palace graduates and their households became key loci of power that, through a web of relationships and to a great extent by exercising household patronage, oversaw the manpower in the empire, a change noticeable in the built environment as well.⁸ By focusing on members of these power elites and their clientelistic networks, recent scholarship has admittedly increased the general awareness that not all political power in the empire emanated from the sultan, hence shaking the understanding of all-embracing sultanic absolutism in a putative patrimonial empire, and bringing to the fore other socio-political actors who shaped the Ottoman socio-political order in their own right.⁹ Nevertheless, the growing corpus of studies on the Ottoman elite households and groups and individuals outside the Ottoman dynasty concentrates, as a rule, on the personal sultanic retinue and palace-bred elites, and hence by extension on the members of the extended Ottoman imperial household.¹⁰ There is still a palpable lack of scholarly interest in the patronage networks of the most distinct group of power holders outside the sultanic dynasty that held sway for the first three centuries of Ottoman history.

B. Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire...* The process of Ottoman Sunnitization has recently been comprehensively studied by T. Krstić, "State and Religion, 'Sunnitization' and 'Confessionalism' in Süleyman's Time", in Pál Fodor (ed.), *The Battle for Central Europe: The Siege of Szigetvár and the Death of Süleyman the Magnificent and Nicholas Zrínyi (1566)*, Leiden, Boston, 2019, p. 65–91; D. Terzioğlu, "How to Conceptualize Ottoman Sunnitization: A Historiographical Discussion", *Turcica* 44, 2012, p. 301–338; T. Krstić and Derin Terzioğlu, (eds.) *Historicizing Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1450–c. 1750*, Leiden, 2020.

⁷ M. Kunt, *The Sultan's Servants...*; Jane Hathaway, "Households in the Administration of the Ottoman Empire", *Journal of Turkish Studies* 40, 2013, p. 127–149.

⁸ G. İşıksel, "Ottoman Power Holders in the Balkans (1353–1580): A Case of Upward and Downward Elite Mobility", in D. Dautović, E. O. Filipović, and N. Isailović (eds.), *Medieval Bosnia and South-East European Relations: Political, Religious, and Cultural Life at the Adriatic Crossroads*, Amsterdam, 2019, p. 85–95. More generally: G. Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire*, London, 2005.

⁹ The patrimonial Ottoman empire of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries envisaged by some Ottomanists (and most recently by B. Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire...*, 89–90, 192–93) has been questioned by H. Erdem Çıpa. Based on his analysis of the succession struggle of the sultan-to-be Selim I (r. 1512–1520), and most importantly of the prominent role of different military-political fractions, notably the Balkan frontier commanders, the author suggests that not all political power in the Ottoman polity emanated from the sultan and hence it cannot be considered a patrimonial state. H. E. Çıpa, *The Making of Selim: Succession, Legitimacy, and Memory in the Early Modern Ottoman World*, Bloomington, 2017, p. 62–107.

¹⁰ J. Hathaway, *Beshir Agha: Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Imperial Harem*, Oxford, 2012); eadem, *The Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Harem: From African Slave to Power-Broker*, Cambridge, 2018; H. Reindl-Kiel, *Leisure, Pleasure and Duty: The Daily Life of Silahdar Mustafa, Éminence Grise in the Final Years of Murad IV (1635–1640)*, Berlin, 2016. A truly inspiring overview of various types of Ottoman households with a desideratum for their further integration within the broader Mediterranean context and households' network, is presented by Palmira Brummett, "Placing the Ottomans in the Mediterranean World: The Question of Notables and Households", *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 36, 2010, p. 77–96.

Throughout this period of territorial expansion, military commanders from the families of several frontier lords figured prominently during conquests as well as in domestic politics, emerging as influential power brokers in times of dynastic struggles. As hereditary leaders of the vanguard Ottoman forces moving across the Ottoman frontiers, the Evrenosoğlu, Mihaloğlu, Paşa Yiğitoğlu, Turahanoğlu, Malkoçoğlu, and other less prominent dynastic clans amassed enormous wealth and accumulated substantial military power, hence emerging as distinct frontier elites and sociopolitical entities in their own right. Thanks to increasing awareness within the scholarship on the formative Ottoman period that these frontier power holders played a prominent role in the early Ottoman conquests, we are now cognizant of their key involvement in the subsequent administration of the border regions brought under their governance, retaining relative autonomy vis-à-vis the central Ottoman administration.¹¹ Recent research has revealed that these lords possessed large hereditary estates in the areas under their control, which were transformed into ancestral residences and seats of power through vast architectural patronage.¹² It has also, to a great extent, unveiled the frontier lords families' pivotal role in internal Ottoman politics, especially during times of dynastic strife when the Ottoman pretenders relied heavily on the support of the Balkan *begs* to ascend the throne.¹³ Based on the preserved archival records of the raiders' (*akıncı*) troops, traditionally led by members of these distinguished lineages of raider commanders, current studies have given details of the numbers, recruitment patterns, and geographical spread of their soldiery as well.¹⁴

Yet even though recent scholarship is shedding more light on the frontier lords' families' role in the military invasions both in Europe and Asia, their regional power along the borders, and their involvement in factional politics in times of accession struggles, there is a notable deficiency in current research as

¹¹ C. Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300–1650...*, p. 186–188, 260–265; H. W. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State*, Albany, 2003, p. 45–94; H. W. Lowry, "Early Ottoman Period", in M. Heper and S. Sayarı (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Modern Turkey*, Abingdon–New York, 2012, p. 5–14; P. Fodor, "Ottoman Warfare, 1300–1453", in K. Fleet (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, vol. 1: *Byzantium to Turkey 1071–1453*, Cambridge, 2009, p. 192–226, esp. p. 204–205.

¹² Recent systematic studies on the Evrenosoğlu family of frontier lords and the territories under their direct control have demonstrated that convincingly. H. W. Lowry, *The Shaping of the Ottoman Balkans, 1350–1550: The Conquest, Settlement & Infrastructural Development of Northern Greece*, Istanbul, 2008; H.W. Lowry and İ. E. Erünsal, *The Evrenos Dynasty of Yenice-i Vardar: Notes & Documents*, Istanbul, 2010. An increased scholarly interest in the other marcher lords' families in the Balkans, among others by Levent and Ayşe Kayapınar, Orlin Sabev, Çetin Arslan, Mustafa Özer, Ayşegül Kılıç, and myself, is currently underway, but it seems unnecessary to cite all their studies here. A general assessment of the architectural heritage of members of the noble families in the Balkans has most recently been presented by M. Kiel, "The Incorporation of the Balkans into the Ottoman Empire, 1353–1453", in K. Fleet (ed.), *Byzantium to Turkey 1071–1453...*, p. 138–191.

¹³ D. Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid: Empire Building and Representation in the Ottoman Civil War of 1402–1413*, Leiden–Boston, 2007, p. 135–194; H. E. Çıpa, *The Making of Selim...*, p. 91–107.

¹⁴ A. Kayapınar and E. Erdoğan Özünlü, *Mihaloğulları'na ait 1586 tarihli akıncı defteri*, Ankara, 2015; E. Erdoğan Özünlü and A. Kayapınar, *1472 ve 1560 tarihli akıncı defterleri*, Ankara, 2017.

regards a comprehensive assessment of the patronage networks that they sustained and which undoubtedly constituted the backbone of their high socio-political standing both within and outside the confines of the empire. It is almost unimaginable that these powerful dynasties, whose longevity is comparable to the ruling Ottoman house, did not grow their own courts and large patronage households to uphold their authority throughout their long history.¹⁵ Indeed, one might suggest that it was precisely thanks to the patronage households they raised and to the family networks they created over time that their dynasties were so long-lived, enduring well until the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Despite the lack of specific interest in the extended households of the frontier lords' dynasties, current scholarship on Ottoman households acknowledge the existence, alongside those belonging to other military, administrative, and religious officials, of frontier lords' extended families which, as the studies suggest, must have been largely modeled on that of the sultan – yet the research seems to have contented itself with this bare assertion alone.¹⁶

Indeed, following the Muslim rulers' tradition, and the Ottoman *gulām* system in particular,¹⁷ of recruiting and training elite slaves (*mamlūk*) for the palace and state service, the frontier lords were in an extremely advantageous position to staff their courts and armies with slaves acquired through conquests in non-Muslim territories (*dār al-ḥarb* / abode of war). The successful raiding expeditions in Europe performed under the leadership of the frontier lords usually brought rich booty,¹⁸ the most valuable part of which was the captured slaves, who also became a primary source for the imperial palace servitors and the Janissary corps after the imposition of the one-fifth tax (*pençik*) enforced on war slaves by the Ottoman ruler.¹⁹ However, these captives also comprised the manpower supply for the

¹⁵ The Mihaloğlu and Evrenosoğlu families certainly survived the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, when their dynastic possessions remained within the territories of the newly born Balkan nation states. See H. W. Lowry and I. Erünsal, *The Evrenos Dynasty of Yenice-i Vardar...*; M. Kiprovská, "Power and Society in Pleven on the Verge of Two Epochs: The Fate of the Mihaloğlu Family and Its Pious Foundations (*Vakf*) during the Transitional Period from Imperial to National Governance", *Bulgarian Historical Review* 1–2, 2017, p. 172–204; V. Yančev and M. Kiprovská, "Povratni vremena: Ihtimanskijat vakāf na Mihaloğlu Mahmud bey ot negovoto sāzdavane prez XV do načaloto na XX v.", *Istorija* 27:6, 2019, p. 559–598.

¹⁶ M. Kunt, "Royal and Other Households..."; Hathaway, "Households in the Administration of the Ottoman Empire...", p. 128–129.

¹⁷ H. İnalcık, "Ghulām, IV: Ottoman Empire", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 2, Leiden, 1991, p. 1085–1091.

¹⁸ The disruption of life caused by these military raids across the border is clearly observable even in trade agreements, in which a force majeure clause, envisaging the real threat of Ottoman pillaging incursions, was included and stipulated exemption from contractual liability. These contracts and the evolution of the perception of the Ottoman menace, as well as the alteration in the sequence of military incursions, are discussed in detail in Emir Filipović's paper in this volume.

¹⁹ İ.H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devleti Teşkilâtından Kapukulu Ocakları, I: Acemi Ocağı ve Yeniçeri Ocağı*, Ankara, 1943. There are reasons to believe that the *pençik* (one-fifth) tax on war captives was imposed to counterbalance the growing power of the Balkan frontier lords during the 1360s

households of the frontier lords themselves: their presence is attested in essentially all spheres of social life in the provinces under their governance. Hence, similar to the Ottoman rulers, the frontier lords evidently used slaves to repopulate desolate rural areas in their domains, so as to cultivate the landed estates.²⁰ The slaves of the marcher lords (already denoted in the sources as freedmen: *'ātīk, mu'taḳ, āzāde*) are sporadically mentioned in the tax records from all over the frontier nobility's landed properties, but mostly as town dwellers concentrated in the cities where the warlords established their power bases.²¹ Moreover, the frontier lords' own retainers of slave origin, as showcased by the preserved Ottoman tax registers from the fifteenth century, were the majority of the *tīmār*-holding military troops in the border districts (designated in the sources as *ta'allukāt, mensübān, merdümān, gilmānān, nökerān, hizmetkārān*).²² As hinted by the sporadic recordings of the offices they held, these must have constituted the elite retinues of the border commanders' followers, who were part of their masters' courtly households. Acquired in the course of the plundering expeditions led by the protagonists of the Ottoman conquest in the Balkans and further north in Europe, these captives were raised, trained, and acculturated as part of the military-administrative household of the frontier lords, and in turn contributed to conquest, becoming the spearhead of further military expeditions. What is more, as part of their master's household and

and 1370s, when they were acting rather independently from the sultan. I. Beldiceanu-Steinherr, "En marge d'un acte concernant le penğyek et les aqınđı", *Revue des études islamiques* 37, 1969, p. 21–47; C. Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, Berkeley, 1995, p. 112–113; V. Demetriades, "Some Thoughts on the Origins of the Devşirme", in E. Zachariadou (ed.), *The Ottoman Emirate (1300–1389)*, Rethymnon, 1993, p. 23–31.

²⁰ It was customary for the frontier lords to settle their war captives in the territories of their large pious foundations (*waqfs*). This was the case with many of the villages associated with the pious foundations of Timurtaş Beg, İshak Beg of Üsküb, and Evrenos Beg. Moreover, it appears that entire villages were created as a result of the resettling of prisoners of war on these noble families' landed estates. Ö.L. Barkan, "XV. ve XVI. Asırlarda Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Toprak İşçiliğinin Organizasyonu Şekilleri. I. Kulluklar ve Ortakçı Kullar", *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası* 1, 1939, p. 29–74. Similarly, members of the Mihaloğlu family also deported settlers from the conquered territories and relocated them on their own private lands. See Ö.L. Barkan, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Bir İskân ve Kolonizasyon Metodu Olarak Vakıflar ve Temlikler. İstila Devirlerinin Kolonizatör Türk Dervişleri ve Zâviyeler", *Vakıflar Dergisi* 2, 1942, p. 360–361; O. Sabev, "Osmanlıların Balkanları Fethi ve İdaresinde Mihaloğulları Ailesi (XIV.–XIX. Yüzyıllar): Mülkler, Vakıflar, Hizmetler", *OTAM (Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi)* 33, 2013, p. 236; A. Kayapınar, "Kuzey Bulgaristan'da Gazi Mihaloğulları Vakıfları (XV.–XVI. Yüzyıl)", *Abant İzzet Baysal Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 1:10, 2005, p. 174. See also Grigor Boykov's contribution to the present volume where he discusses, amongst others, the pious foundations of the frontier lords on the territory of present-day Bulgaria.

²¹ H. W. Lowry and I. Erünsal, *The Evrenos Dynasty of Yenice-i Vardar...*, p. 110, 119; M. Kiprovska, "Shaping the Ottoman Borderland: The Architectural Patronage of the Frontier Lords from the Mihaloğlu Family", in M. Baramova, G. Boykov, and I. Parvev (eds.), *Bordering Early Modern Europe*, Wiesbaden, 2015, p. 108–109.

²² H. İnalçık, *Fatih Devri Üzerinde Tetkikler ve Vesikalar*, Ankara, 1954, p. 149–150, 158–159; H. İnalçık, *Hicri 835 tarihli Süret-i defter-i sancak-i Arvanid*, Ankara, 1954; H. Šabanović, *Krajište Isabega Ishakovića: zbirni katastarski popis iz 1455 godine*, Sarajevo, 1964.

therefore entangled in a network of patron–client ties, they also became an indispensable element of the military, administrative, social, political, and cultural life along and across the Ottoman borders, where they grew their own smaller patronage networks of clientelistic ties and thus contributed to the fluidity of social life in the border zone as a whole.²³ Examining the composition of these households and possibly tracing the career paths of the frontier lords’ retainers has the potential to raise our awareness of several intertwined problems relevant to the process of military conquest itself, as well as the accompanying practices of cross-border diplomacy,²⁴ political alliances, kinship ties, and all sorts of other interactions between the border elites and the regional dynasties and their nobility.

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The paramount significance of these questions for the general theme of the Ottoman conquests in Europe notwithstanding, the objective of the present paper is much humbler – it aims to merely present some preliminary findings on the extended military-administrative households of the frontier lords, based exclusively on one particular source, which sheds extra light on its composition and on the basis of which some tentative assumptions could be advanced. In this short essay, I will only sketch some notes based on one specific Ottoman register. By providing several particular examples, I hope to illustrate that these noble families created networks of dependent loyalties and maintained a sizable group of dependent subjects, who were exclusively former Balkan Christians and who subsequently served as agents of Ottoman order in the region.

The source under scrutiny is a register that lists the military retinue of the fief (*dirlik*)-holders (*sancağbegis*, *za'ıms*, and timariots) in the Rumelian (European) provinces of the empire sometime in the mid 1520s.²⁵ The document

²³ The entanglement of the different political and spatial aspects of the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans, with a special emphasis on border zones, is addressed in the essay by Oliver Jens Schmitt in the present volume. See also his insightful thoughts on the manifold process of the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans in his “Introduction,” in O.J. Schmitt (ed.), *The Ottoman Conquest of the Balkans: Interpretations and Research Debates*, Wien, 2016, p. 7–45.

²⁴ M. Ivanović, “Cyrillic Correspondence Between the Commune of Ragusa and Ottomans from 1396 to 1458”, in S. Rudić and S. Aslantaş (eds.), *State and Society in the Balkans before and after Establishment of Ottoman Rule*, Belgrade 2017, p. 43–63; A. Krstić, ““Which Realm Will You Opt For?” – The Serbian Nobility between the Ottomans and the Hungarians in the 15th Century”, in *ibid.*, p. 129–163.

²⁵ The original register is housed in the Topkapı Palace Museum Archives (Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi, TSMA) under the call no. D. 2204. I am, however, using the digital copy kept in the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı – Osmanlı Arşivi, BOA) – TS. MA.d. 2204. The document is dated to the year 926/1520, but it seems to be from a slightly later date. A comparison with the *tevcih* registers containing the names of the appointed provincial governors from the 1520s (1521/2, 1522, 1526, 1527, and 1527–1531), as well as some of the well-established career paths of some of the frontier begs, strongly suggest that TS. MA.d 2204 was compiled when Yahyapaşaoğlu Bali Beg (d. 1527) was holding the post of a district-governor of Vidin in 1523/1524 and possibly slightly thereafter, before going back to his post as a *sancağbegi* of Semendire. For the career of Bali Beg, see Pál Fodor, “Wolf on the Border: Yahyapaşaoğlu Bali Bey (?–1527).

contains detailed information on nearly all military revenue grants,²⁶ i.e., *hāşşes*, *ze'āmet*s, and *īmārs* in the Ottoman Balkan provinces of Ağrıboz (Euboea), Silistre (Silistra), Ohri (Ohrid), Vuçitrin (Vuçitrn), Gelibolu (Gallipoli), Semendire (Smederevo), Niğbolu (Nikopol), Mora (Morea), Vidin, İskenderye (Shkodër), Yanya (Ioannina), Köstendil (Kyustendil), Çingene, aka. the administrative district of Gypsies around Vize and Kırkkilise (Kırklareli), Avlonya (Vlorë), and İlbasan (Elbasan). The parts that have been preserved present information on the sum of revenues allotted to the *dirlik*-holders and on the military retinue of most district-governors (*sancağbegi*), *za'ims* or timariots, listed along with their names and often with their place of origin and specific office or duty.

District (<i>livā/sancağ</i>)	District governor (<i>sancağbegi</i>)	Allotted revenue (in <i>ağçe</i>)	Supported household (<i>merdümān</i> , <i>hizmetkārān</i> , <i>gilmānān</i>)
Ohri	Mehmed Beg	340 000	200
Vuçitrin	'Alī Beg veled-i İskender Paşa	230 000	115
Gelibolu	Ahmed Beg, kapudan	450 000	---
Semendire	Mehmed Beg bin Yahyā Paşa	650 000	782
Silistre	Şücā' Beg	400 000	193
Niğbolu	Mehmed Beg bin 'Alī Beg	656 000	410
Mora	Süleymān Beg	504 000	254
Vidin	Bālī Beg	301 965	403
İskenderiyye	Ahmed Beg	475 000	273
Yanya	Luţfī Beg	503 629	230
Köstendil	Turgut Beg	350 000	167
İzvornik	Ahmed Beg bin Yahyā Paşa	220 000	---
Çingene	İskender Beg bin Yahyā Paşa	150 000	102
Avlonya	Ahmed Beg birader-i hāzret-i Ayās Paşa	350 000	235
İlbasan	Mehmed Beg	215 000	---

Ottoman provincial governors in Rumeli and their retainers (mid 1520s).

Source: BOA, TS. MA.d. 2204

Expansion and Provincial Elite in the European Confines of the Ottoman Empire in the Early Sixteenth Century”, in P. Fodor, N. E. Kovács, and B. Péri (eds.), *Şerefe: Studies in Honour of Prof. Géza Dávid on His Seventieth Birthday*, Budapest, 2019, p. 57–87, esp. p. 63. On the earliest appointment (*tevcih*) registers, their dating and contents, see Ö. L. Barkan, “H. 933–934 (M. 1527–1528) Malî Yılına Ait Bir Bütçe Örneği”, *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası* 15:1–4, 1953–1954, p. 251–329, esp. p. 303–307; E. Çakar, “Kanunî Sultan Süleyman Kanun-nâmesine Göre 1522 Yılında Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun İdarî Taksimatı”, *Fırat Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 12:1, 2002, p. 261–282; M. T. Gökbilgin, “Kanunî Sultan Süleyman Devri Başlarında Rumeli Eyaleti, Livaları, Şehir ve Kasabaları”, *Belleten* 20, 1956, 247–294; M. Kunt, *The Sultan's Servants...*, esp. p. 104–116.

²⁶ The defter consists of 201 folia. However, it has no beginning nor an end, hence it is incomplete (as some parts are missing). The register begins with certain *ze'āmet* (whose name is not readable because the upper part of the folio is torn) in the district of Ağrıboz. It is also obvious that the pages are bound erroneously, since f. 2^a starts by listing *ze'āmet*s in the Silistre province, but the latter's proper beginning is apparently on f. 56^b, preceded by a recapitulation of the troops in the district of Ağrıboz on f. 56^a.

Although at this point it is difficult to identify each of the mentioned district-governors (stemming notably from the fact that they are listed only with their personal names and lack a patronymic), the high amount of palace-fed retinue amongst them is nevertheless apparent. Being former sultanic pages and palace-graduates, a substantial number of the *sancağbegis* clearly belonged to the extended Ottoman household, as evidenced by the governors of Viçitrın, Gelibolu, Semendire, Vidin, İzvornik, Çingâne, and Avlonya. Relatives of former sultanic pages of Christian descent (İskender Paşa was of Genoese descent;²⁷ Yahya Paşa – an Albanian;²⁸ Ayas Paşa – likewise Albanian-born²⁹), and raised in the Ottoman palace, they indeed epitomize a change in provincial governance in which the sultan’s servitors gradually replaced the traditional local aristocratic families.³⁰

Another eye-catching observation that imposes itself from the presented list of governor-generals with their fiefs and servants is that there is tangible discrepancy between the amounts of the allotted revenue and the size of the district-governor’s retinue. The most striking difference, for instance, is observable in the cases of Semendire, Niğbolu, and Vidin districts. Although Mehmed Beg from the Mihaloğlu family (the *sancağbegi* of Nikopol) was allocated a revenue grant bigger than that of Yahyalı Mehmed Beg in Semendire, he actually sustained a much smaller household, almost half the size of the latter’s. Similarly, the district-governor of Vidin, another member of the Yahyalı family, had a revenue grant amounting to half of that allotted to Mihaloğlu Mehmed Beg, but supported an entourage almost as large as the district-governor of Nikopol. These kinds of discrepancies have already been noted in recent studies. The inconsistencies are accounted for by the military merits, social standing, and, especially in the border districts, the amount of booty collected by the *sancağ*-holders.³¹ This explanation might well be the case in point as regards our example. Originally an Albanian, and raised as Mehmed II’s palace page, Yahya Pasha served successively as governor, governor-general, and vizier under Mehmed II and his successor Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512), and also joined the royal family by marrying Bayezid’s daughter.³² From amongst his seven sons, Bali Beg and Mehmed Beg were the most illustrious.³³ Successfully leading vanguard forces into neighboring European soils,

²⁷ H. Reindl, *Männer um Bayezid: Eine prosopographische Studie über die Epoche Sultan Bayezids II (1481–1512)*, Berlin, 1983, p. 240–261.

²⁸ H. Reindl, *Männer um Bayezid...*, p. 336–345; A. Fotić, “Yahyapaşa-Oğlu Mehmed Pasha’s Evkaf in Belgrade,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 54:4, 2001, p. 437–452; P. Fodor, “Wolf on the Border...”.

²⁹ V.J. Parry, “Ayas Pasha”, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, vol. 1, Leiden, 1986, p. 779–780; B. Kütükoğlu, “Ayas Paşa”, in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 4, İstanbul, 1991, p. 202–203.

³⁰ M. Kunt, *The Sultan’s Servants...*

³¹ M. Kunt, “Royal and Other Households...”, p. 104.

³² H. Reindl, *Männer um Bayezid...*, p. 336–345.

³³ A. Fotić, “Yahyapaşa-Oğlu Mehmed Pasha’s Evkaf in Belgrade...”; P. Fodor, “Wolf on the Border...”.

they were among the most renowned frontier warriors of their time. Their consecutive appointments to the border districts of Vidin and Semendire put them in control of most of the Danubian border zone (*serhadd*). The district-governor of Niğbolu, Mehmed Beg, on the other hand, was a descendant of the Mihaloğlu family, whose eponymous founder was the Byzantine renegade Köse Mihal, one of the closest companions of Osman Beg in Bithynia.³⁴ Successive members of the Mihal family had led the Ottoman vanguard forces since the end of the thirteenth century, hence forming a hereditary family of frontier warriors (*uc begleri*) that was not directly linked to the royal palace and the sultanic household members who started their careers as palace graduates. Judging from the size of the revenue grant and the large military retinue that Mihaloğlu Mehmed Beg was able to sustain by the mid 1520s, it becomes apparent that he was amongst the most successful frontier lords of the time, surpassed only by the members of the Yahyalı family both in terms of revenue grant size and amount of retainers. The high standing and foremost position of the Yahyalı family amongst the district-governors and frontier leaders in Rumelia is signified also by the fact that at the time the register was compiled, no less than four of the sons of Yahya Pasha held the posts of district-governors in the Balkans. This paramount standing certainly deserves special attention, but remains outside the analysis of the present paper, since the founder of the family, Yahya Pasha, was indeed a palace graduate and thus might be considered part of the extended royal household.

In what follows, I therefore restrict myself to a closer examination of the military household of Mihaloğlu Mehmed Beg and several of his relatives, as this particular family represents in full the hereditary Ottoman frontier nobility which founded, raised, and sustained a dynasty of its own outside the Ottoman royal household. Mehmed Beg himself was a son of Mihaloğlu 'Ali Beg,³⁵ one of the most prominent frontier lords at the time of Mehmed II and Bayezid II, who established his permanent power base in the district of Niğbolu centered on Plevne (mod. Pleven),³⁶ hence founding the Plevne branch of the family. Among 'Ali Beg's sons, Mehmed Beg was the most distinguished, gaining fame in the Ottoman military expeditions against European territories during the first three decades of the sixteenth

³⁴ O. Sabev, "The Legend of Köse Mihal", *Turcica* 34, 2002, p. 241–252; M. Kiprovska, "Byzantine Renegade and Holy Warrior: Reassessing the Character of Köse Mihal, a Hero of the Byzantino-Ottoman Borderland", *Journal of Turkish Studies* 40, 2013, p. 245–269 (Special Issue: S. S. Kuru and B. Tezcan (eds.), *Defterology: Festschrift in Honor of Heath Lowry*, Cambridge, 2013).

³⁵ O. Zirojević, "Smederevski Sandjakbeg Ali Beg Mihaloglu", *Zbornik Za Istoriju Matitsa Srpska* 3, 1971, p. 9–27; A. S. Levend, *Gazavât-Nâmeler ve Mihaloğlu Ali Bey'in Gazavât-Nâmesi*, Ankara, 2000, p. 187–195.

³⁶ M. Kiel, "Urban Development in Bulgaria in the Turkish Period: The Place of Turkish Architecture in the Process", *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 4:2, 1989, p. 108–112; M. Kiel, "Plevna", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 8, new edition, Leiden, 1995, p. 317–320; A. Kayapınar, "Kuzey Bulgaristan'da Gazi Mihaloğulları Vakıfları..."; O. Sabev, "Osmanlıların Balkanları Fethi ve İdaresinde Mihaloğulları Ailesi..."; M. Kiprovska, "Power and Society in Plevne on the Verge of Two Epochs...".

century and holding several border district governorships. Mehmed Beg participated in all the major military expeditions of Selim I (r. 1512–1520) and Süleyman I (r. 1520–1566): he led the raiders' troops in the campaign against the Safavids in 1514; and he fought at the siege of Belgrade (1521), at the battle of Mohács (1526), as well as during the Hungarian (1529) and the so-called German campaigns (1532) of Süleyman I.³⁷ He was a district-governor Vidin (1515)³⁸ of Bosnia (1517?)³⁹ and Hersek (1520),⁴⁰ a governor of two infantry (*piyāde*) recruitment districts in the province of Sultanönü in Anatolia (1520),⁴¹ the birthplace of the dynasty, and most notably the district-governor of Niğbolu, where the Plevne branch of the family had its large domains,⁴² a post which he held almost uninterruptedly from the early 1520s.⁴³

In the mid 1520s Mihaloğlu Mehmed Beg held the governorship of the Danubian border province of Niğbolu with an annual income of 656 000 *akçe*, as attested by the register examined in this essay.⁴⁴ Unlike the provincial governors' appointment (*tevcih*) registers scholars have employed thus far, which disclose information only on the name of the district-governor, the place of his appointment, and allotted revenue in a given year, the register of the fief-holding soldiery in Rumeli from the mid 1520s offers invaluable details on the supported retinue of the listed *dirlik*-holders as well. The register under scrutiny lists no less than 410 people from Niğbolu district-governor Mehmed Beg's retinue.⁴⁵ All of his retainers are listed under the heading *gilmānān*. In Ottoman usage, *gulām* (pl. *gilmān*) was a

³⁷ M. Nüzhet Paşa, *Ahvāl-i Gazi Mihal*, Der Sa'adet, 1315, p. 78–82; İ.H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi. II. cilt: İstanbul'un Fethinden Kanunî Sultan Süleyman'ın Ölümüne Kadar*, Ankara, 1998⁸, p. 262, 471, 573; M.T. Gökbilgin, "Mihaloğulları", in *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 8, 1960, p. 288; A.S. Levend, *Gazavât-Nâmeler...*, p. 195–196.

³⁸ BOA, Maliyeden, Müdevver (MAD) 70, f. 1b.

³⁹ M. Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmanî*, ed. Nuri Akbayar, vol. 3, İstanbul, 1996, p. 965; V. Bišćević, *Bosanski namjesnici Osmankog doba (1463–1878)*, Sarajevo, 2006, p. 82–83; M.T. Gökbilgin, "Mihaloğulları", p. 288.

⁴⁰ 91, 164, MAD 540 ve 173 Numaralı Hersek, Bosna ve İzvornik Livâları İcmâl Tahrîr Defterleri (926-939 / 1520–1533), Ankara, 2005, p. 43.

⁴¹ The military-administrative province of "Piyâdegân-i Sultanönü" was further divided into smaller units, two of which – both with the geographic name Harmanakaya – were under the military governance of Mehmed Beg, who inherited the position from his father 'Ali Beg. See H. Doğru, *XV. ve XVI. Yüzyılda Sultanönü Sancağında Yaya ve Müsellem Teşkilatı*, İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi, 1990, p. 88, 91; M. Kiprovska, "Byzantine Renegade and Holy Warrior...", p. 257–258.

⁴² See also Grigor Boykov's contribution to this volume.

⁴³ In the appointment registers of the 1520s he is listed as a district-governor of Niğbolu in 1521/22 (TSMA, D. 9772), 1526 (TSMA, D.10057), and 1527 (TSMA, D.5246). Cf. Ö. L. Barkan, "H. 933–934 (M. 1527–1528) Malî Yılına Ait Bir Bütçe Örneği...", p. 303–307; M. T. Gökbilgin, "Kanunî Sultan Süleyman Devri Başlarında Rumeli...", p. 247–294; M. Kunt, *The Sultan's Servants...*, p. 104–116. In a *tahrîr* register from 1530 (BOA, TD 370) he still holds the post of Niğbolu *sancağbegi*. 370 Numaralı Muhâsebe-i Vilâyet-i Rûm-İli Defteri (937/1530), vol. 2. Çirmen, Müsellemân-ı Çingâne, Müsellemân-ı Kızılca, Silistre, Keefe, Niğbolu ve Vidin Livâları, Çirmen ve Vize Müsellemeleri, Yörük ve Tatar Cemâatleri ile Voynuşan-ı İstabl-ı Âmire ve Kıbtıyân-ı Vilâyet-i Rûm-ili, Ankara, 2001, p. 512.

⁴⁴ BOA, TS. MA.d. 2204, f. 69^b: *Livâ-i Niğbolu, der taşarruf-i Mehmed Beg bin 'Alî Beg, hâşıl: 656 000.*

⁴⁵ BOA, TS. MA.d. 2204, ff. 69^b–70^b: *yekün-i merdümân-i müşârün-ileyh: 410.*

term used to designate a young slave who went through special training in a respected *kapı*, i.e., a household.⁴⁶ Engaged in constant warfare on the Ottoman borders, the marcher lords, including those from the house of Mihal, could easily staff their military households with the needed manpower supply, as they were able to accumulate a great many slaves and prisoners of war whom they later trained in various duties in their courts, and hence produced and maintained a sizable elite troop of soldiers and loyal subjects. Plausibly, the process of training these *kapı-kulları* (household servitors) employed by the frontier lords mirrored the educational and military training that the sultan's slaves went through in the royal Ottoman palace – first in the inner service (*enderün* section) and then in the outer service (*birün* section) of the palace. Such a hypothesis is substantiated by the data enclosed in the register from the mid 1520s, which contains the names of each of the dependents of Mihaloğlu Mehmed Beg, specifying a particular place of origin for many of his retainers, as well as their occupation or responsibility as employees at the *beg's* household. Hence, besides the armed retainers (*cebelü*) who rendered military service, one may identify particular regiments that were an integral part of his entourage and palace pages. Although not grouped under specific headings, the additional information for each individual allows us to determine the following detachments:

- commanders of military divisions
18 *voyvoda* (commanders of a military division)
- cavalry regiment
8 *çāvūş* (envoys to deliver and carry out orders, court heralds)
- regiment of the life-guards of the *beg*
1 *silāhdār* (arms-bearer and personal life-guard of the *beg*)
- household soldiery
257 *cebelü* (armed retainers)
- regiment of gate-keepers
1 *kethüdā-i bevvābīn* (chief of the gate-keepers guarding the central gate of the *beg's* palace)
2 *ser-bevvābīn* (heads of the gate-keepers)
- regiment of scribes
5 *kātib* (scribes)
- regiment of the *beg's* kitchen
1 *ser-ḥabbāzīn* (head of the cooks)
4 *ḥabbāz* (bakers)
2 *kilārī* (keeper of the larder)
- regiment of tailors
1 *ser-ḥayyāṭīn* (chief of the tailors)
7 *ḥayyāṭ* (tailors)

⁴⁶ H. İnalçık, “Ghulām, IV: Ottoman Empire...”.

- regiment of shoemakers
1 *ser-kaḡafīn* (chief of the shoe makers)
6 *kaḡaf* (shoe makers)
- regiment in charge of campaign tents
1 *ser-mehterān-i ḡayme* (chief of the tent-makers)
21 *mehter* (tent-makers)
- regiment of *beg*'s stables
1 *emīr-āḡūr* (lord of the stables)
1 *keḡūdā-i āḡūr* (chief of the stables)
5 *ḡarbende* (pack animals' grooms)
- regiment of falconers
1 *ser-bāzdārān* (chief of raptor breeders)
9 *bāzdār* (raptor breeders)
- regiment of physicians
1 *cerrāḡ* (physician)

The composition of Mihaloğlu Mehmed Beg's palace employees and military entourage implies that the *beg*'s personal retinue and extended household mirrored the structure of the sultanic household and sultanic palace personnel, where we see representatives of the same contingents.⁴⁷ In turn, this suggests that the raider commanders had in all probability fashioned their power bases and especially their residential mansions through analogy with the sultanic palaces. The presence of gate-keepers, for instance, clearly points to the physical appearance of the mansion. Obviously it was surrounded by walls, and access to the inner parts was only possible via the guarded gates. This assumption is corroborated by the physical remains of part of the enclosing walls of the Mihaloğlu "castle" in Plevne, the family's most significant power base and residence in the Danubian plain.⁴⁸ Remnants of the dwelling still existed at the beginning of the twentieth century and were known until the 1930s as the "*saray*" (palace).⁴⁹ It is possible that the abode was built by Mihaloğlu 'Ali Beg at the end of the fifteenth century concurrently with all the other buildings he commissioned, and around which the town of Plevne grew. In the mid seventeenth century, Evliya Çelebi recounted that the *saray* was a quadrangular fortification, with a palace of many stories inside the walls, where the

⁴⁷ İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin Saray Teşkilâtı...*

⁴⁸ M. Kiprovska, "Shaping the Ottoman Borderland...", p. 207, 217–218; M. Kiprovska, "Plunder and Appropriation at the Borderland: Representation, Legitimacy, and Ideological Use of *Spolia* by Members of the Ottoman Frontier Nobility", in I. Jevtić and S. Yalman (eds.), *Spolia Reincarnated – Afterlives of Objects, Materials, and Spaces in Anatolia from Antiquity to the Ottoman Era*, Istanbul, 2018, p. 66–68. The existence of another palace of the family in its Harmanakaya domain in Anatolia is also attested in the Ottoman fiscal records of the region. See M. Kiprovska, "Byzantine Renegade and Holy Warrior...", p. 262–263.

⁴⁹ Y. Trifonov, *Istoriya na grada Plevne do Osvoboditelna voyna*, Sofia, 1933, p. 61 (plan of the walled part of the palace), p. 62–63.

Mihaloğulları lived and from where they governed the area.⁵⁰ Whether the inner space was strictly partitioned into successive courtyards, like the Topkapı Sarayı in İstanbul, is hard to determine. But what can be firmly ascertained about the Mihaloğlu palace in Plevne in particular, judging again from the retainers of Mihaloğlu Mehmed Beg, is that it clearly integrated different structures, such as the palace kitchens and bakeries, supervised by the head of the cooks (*ser-ḥabbāzīn*), and the associated cellars and depots managed by the keeper of the larder (*kilārī*); the armory, which was managed by the chief sword bearer (*silāḥdār*); the palace stables, overseen by the chief of the stables (*emīr-āḥūr*); certain facilities where the *beg*'s birds of prey were raised and trained (as suggested by the presence of a chief falconer, *ser-bāzdārān*); tailoring ateliers (as suggested by the presence of both tent-makers and tailors – *mehterān*, *ḥayyāṭīn*); a scribes' chamber (as suggested by the presence of several scribes, *kātib*); and in all certainty it also possessed a distinct council hall (*dīvān-ḥāne*) where the councils, summoning the highest military commanders of the *beg*'s military forces (such as *voynodas*) and his envoys (*çāvüşes*), were held and where military decisions and subsequent orders were carefully recorded by the secretaries (*kātib*s). In all probability, it also included dormitories for all palace employees. When Evliya Çelebi described the palace in the second half of the seventeenth century, he only mentioned that it resembled a fortification. Still, one can suppose that behind his wording, “many-storeyed palace,”⁵¹ actually hide all the edifices described above.

The assumption that the Mihaloğlu retainers went through educational and military training in the palace facilities in the city of Plevne is likewise corroborated by further information obtainable from the register under scrutiny. A closer look at the retinue of some *ze'āmet*-holders (large fief holders) who were offspring of the Mihaloğlu family allows an interesting observation. A substantial part of their retainers were registered as originating from Plevne, implying that they were Plevne palace-graduates. These individuals were part of the extended Mihaloğlu military household, who, in turn, became the backbone of the satellite households of less prominent or simply younger – and therefore still less experienced – military leaders from the family. It suffices to look at the households of two of Mihaloğlu Mehmed Beg's sons to substantiate this assumption. His son Hızır, who held a *ze'āmet* in the district of Niğbolu with an income of 70 000 *aḳçe*, sustained an entourage of 100 men. Not less than 57 of them, more than half, came from Plevne.⁵² The same is true for the retinue of another son of Mehmed Beg, Ahmed Beg, who held another fief (*ze'āmet*) in the district of Niğbolu, yielding an income of 25 000 *aḳçe*. Yet again, half of the retinue of Ahmed Beg were from

⁵⁰ Evliyâ Çelebi b. Derviş Mehmed Zillî, *Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi. 6. Kitap: Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi Revan 1457 Numaralı Yazmanın Transkripsiyonu – Dizini*, ed. S. A. Kahraman and Y. Dağlı, İstanbul, 2002, p. 95.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² BOA, TS. MA.d. 2204, f. 71^a.

Plevne.⁵³ And if the proximity of the palace-center of Plevne to the holdings of the two sons of the district-governor of Niğbolu might well have been a leading factor in the formation of their households, another example from the district of Semendire definitely showcases how the offspring of a frontier lords' family formed his household. A case in point is a *tīmār*-holding, indeed a rather large one (15 380 *aḳçe*), of Maḥmūd bin Meḥmed Beg bin İḥtimānī.⁵⁴ İhtiman, a town to the south-east of Sofia, was the place of residence of another branch of the Mihaloğlu family, whose members are referred to in the sources with the nobility predicate İḥtimānī (marking the place of their seat of power and family domain) to distinguish them from the Plevne family line.⁵⁵ The said Mahmud Beg at the time supported a household of 36 people, 12 of whom are recorded as İḥtimānī (from İhtiman), indicating their place of origin. Apparently, the core of his military household was formed by people from his father's courtly household (represented by the 12 retainers from İhtiman) who came along with their young master to the place of his new appointment – in this case, a *tīmār* in the province of Semendire.

fief-holding, its holder and allotted revenue	number of supported retainers	origin of the retainers' bulk
ze'āmet-i be-nām-i Hızır Beg bin Meḥmed Beg bin Miḥāl Beg hāşıl: 70 000 [aḳçe]	cebelüyān-i mezbūr: 100	Plevne: 57
ze'āmet-i be-nām-i Ahmed Beg bin Meḥmed Beg bin 'Alī Beg hāşıl: 25 000 [aḳçe]	cebelüyān-i mezbūr: 18	Plevne: 9
tīmār-i Maḥmūd bin Meḥmed Beg bin İḥtimānī hāşıl: 15 380 [aḳçe]	cebelüyān: 36	İḥtimān: 12

Number and place of origin of some of the Mihaloğlu family members' retinue.
Source: BOA, TS. MA.d. 2204.

The three cases cited above illustrate how the marcher lords' progeny formed their military-administrative households – the backbone of their retinues were graduates of their fathers' courts, later enlarged by their own slave recruits who were further trained into their newly formed households. Moreover, the cited examples also bear striking similarities with how the Ottoman princely household was formed. It was a well-established custom before the seventeenth century for an Ottoman prince (*şehzāde*) to leave the sultan's household and to receive an appointment as

⁵³ BOA, TS. MA.d. 2204, f. 72^b.

⁵⁴ BOA, TS. MA.d. 2204, f. 45^a.

⁵⁵ For the establishment of the family in İhtiman and the town's further development see: M. Kiel, "Four Provincial İmaret's in the Balkans and the Sources about Them", in N. Ergin, Ch. K. Neumann, and A. Singer (eds.), *Feeding People, Feeding Power: İmaret's in the Ottoman Empire*, Istanbul, 2007, p. 106–109; O. Sabev, "Osmanlıların Balkanları Fethi ve İdaresinde Mihaloğulları Ailesi ...", p. 239–240; M. Kiprovska, "Shaping the Ottoman Borderland...", p. 198–202.

governor in an Anatolian district (*sancak*). Upon leaving for the province, the prince was given some palace servitors from the sultanic household to staff his own household. At his provincial post, the prince's household grew with his own recruits, and upon succession to the throne the successful prince brought his entourage to be reincorporated into the royal household.⁵⁶ This practice seems to have been applied in full by the hereditary raider commanders as well, and ought to be accounted as among the principal reasons for the sustainability and longevity of their dynasties.

Apart from how the household was formed, the names of the *beg*'s retinues also provide an opportunity to substantiate the supposition that the marcher lords initially drew household members from slaves acquired as a result of their military expeditions in the Christian territories in the Balkans or Anatolia. For instance, a substantial part of the household attendants of the Niğbolu *sancakbegi* Mehmed Beg were specifically recorded with a toponymy-based label, such as Bosna (33), Arnavud (23), Hersek (12), Eflâk (4), Belgrad (2), Macar (1), Rus (1), therefore marking the actual places from where they had been taken and brought to his residential palace in Plevne for training. The same holds for some of his sons' households' entourage, amongst whom certain individuals are likewise listed as Bosna, Eflâk, Arnavud, Hırvat, and Macar, clearly indicating the territories of the military excursions from where the frontier lords levied the bulk of their future retainers and household affiliates.

These recruits, most of them certainly slaves captured during the raids, joined the households of the frontier warriors and, after going through special military and educational training, became either their palace servitors or part of their elite military retinue. They are recorded in the register only with a Muslim name, preventing any further observations as to their background prior to joining the Mihaloğlu household. It is plausible, nevertheless, that among their ranks there were also sons of local magnates in regions occupied by the frontier lords; others might have been taken as hostages from the neighboring noble courts; or there might have been some high-profile voluntary converts, former courtiers and retinue of the frontier nobility across the border, who switched sides and joined the court of the noble clan of Mehmed Beg.⁵⁷

In spite of the obscurity shrouding the origins of these retainers, it is possible to trace out the military advancement of some. After graduation from the frontier lord's palace, the most distinguished ones were further awarded revenue grants

⁵⁶ M. Kunt, "Royal and Other Households..."

⁵⁷ Movement of higher and lesser nobility for military and official service across the border between the neighboring royal and noble courts was not uncommon. On the contrary, such movements from Serbia and Croatia to the north in Banat, Transylvania and in the service of the Hungarian king and nobles were rather frequent, as showcased by the studies of Neven Isailović and Aleksandar Krstić/Adrian Magina in the present volume. Moreover, as exemplified by the career path of the Serbian voivode Miloš Belmužević (Krstić and Magina's text in this volume), who for a short time was an Ottoman *sipāhī*, switching allegiance was not always a permanent decision.

(*tīmārs*) in their master's governing districts⁵⁸. They raised smaller military households of their own, hence becoming an indispensable part of the military and the administrative structure of the respected regions. One can safely identify members of the Mihaloğlu extended household as *tīmār*-holders in the *sancağ* of Niğbolu in the mid 1520s. Three timariots are listed as the *sancağbegi* Mehmed Beg's associates (*merdüm*), one being explicitly recorded as his scribe (*kātib*).⁵⁹ Four more *sipāhīs* can likewise be identified as part of the Mihaloğlu family members' retinue: three men (*merdüm*) of Mustafa Beg and one attendant (*merdüm*) of Hasan Beg's household, the latter two being brothers of the then district-governor Mehmed Beg.⁶⁰

Fief-holdings of Mihaloğlu Mehmed Beg's household retinue members (*merdüm*):

tīmār-i Yūnus Çelebi, merdüm-i Mehmed Beg	hāşıl: 9 501 [akçe]
tīmār-i kātib Ca'fer, merdüm-i Mehmed Beg	hāşıl: 9 071 [akçe]
tīmār-i Kāşım, merdüm-i Mehmed Beg	hāşıl: 5 289 [akçe]

Fief-holdings of Mihaloğlu Mehmed Beg's brothers' households retinue members (*merdüm*):

tīmār-i Alagöz, merdüm-i Muşafā Beg	hāşıl: 10 771 [akçe]
tīmār-i Hüsrev Dīvāne, merdüm-i Muşafā Beg	hāşıl: 7 708 [akçe]
tīmār-i İdrīs voyvoda, merdüm-i Muşafā Beg	hāşıl: 17 000 [akçe]
tīmār-i Mehmed, merdüm-i Hasan Beg	hāşıl: 6 250 [akçe]

Fief-holders from the Mihaloğlu family household retinue members.

Source: BOA, TS. MA.d. 2204.

The number of *sipāhī*-cavalrymen who were members of the military household of the frontier lord's district-governor, as presented in the register from the mid 1520s, might seem truly negligible as compared to the situation half a century earlier when, for example, the *tīmār*-holders in the province of Üsküp were all but a few represented by the servants of the marcher lords of Paşa Yiğit clan (most notably İshakoğlu 'İsa beg) – their *gulāms* or *hizmetkār*s.⁶¹ However, the significance of the Mihaloğlu family members' entourage in the Niğbolu district's military forces should not be underestimated. Indeed, when one adds to the substantial retinue of the *sancağbegi*, amounting to 410 men, the number of the supported military escort of five more Mihaloğlu family members who held

⁵⁸ The most trusted men and distinguished voyvodas from the closest entourage of the *beg* were even allotted by their patron with private properties (*mülk*). Such was the case with several elite soldiers in the district of Plevne, who were granted private lands by Ali Beg and his son Mehmed Beg. Cf. A. Kayapınar, "Kuzey Bulgaristan'da Gazi Mihaloğulları Vakıfları...", p. 174; O. Sabev, "Osmanlıların Balkanları Fethi ve İdaresinde Mihaloğulları Ailesi...", p. 236; V. Turgut, "Vakıf Belgelerinde Osmanlı Devleti'nin Kuruluş Dönemi Aileleri: Malkoçoğulları ve Mihallüler", *Yeni Türkiye* 66, 2015, p. 573–583, esp. p. 581–582.

⁵⁹ BOA, TS. MA.d. 2204, f. 75^a, 75^b, 77^a.

⁶⁰ BOA, TS. MA.d. 2204, f. 75^b, 76^a, 76^b.

⁶¹ H. Šabanović, *Krajište Isa-bega Ishakovića...*

*ze'āmet*s in the province (three of his sons and two of his cousins), and the *tīmār*-holding men affiliated with the dynasty (*merdūms* of Mehmed Beg and two of his brothers) as well, it becomes clear that the extended Mihaloğlu household and its associates supported no less than 589 retainers, which made up nearly 40% (37.58%) of the whole military strength of the province, consisting of 1 567 soldiers in total.⁶² Assuming that a number of the timariots with unspecified or unidentifiable affiliation were also the Mihaloğulları's close associates, these figures could prove to be higher still. Even these numbers, however, are instructive concerning the dominant authority of the warlords from the family in the Danubian frontier district of Niğbolu in the second decade of the sixteenth century.

fief-holder	allotted revenue	number of supported retainers
ze'āmet-i be-nām-i Hızır Beg bin Mehmed Beg bin Miḥāl Beg	hāşıl: 70 000 [ağçe]	cebelüyān-i mezbūr: 100
ze'āmet-i be-nām-i Ahmed Beg bin Mehmed Beg bin 'Alī Beg	hāşıl: 25 000 [ağçe]	cebelüyān-i mezbūr: 18
ze'āmet-i be-nām-i 'Alī Beg [bin] Mehmed Beg	hāşıl: 25 000 [ağçe]	cebelüyān-i mezbūr: 10
ze'āmet-i be-nām-i Seyyidi bin Balī Beg	hāşıl: 22 598 [ağçe]	cebelüyān-i mezbūr: 8
ze'āmet-i be-nām-i Çalış bin Hızır Beg bin Miḥāl – maḥlūl	hāşıl: 26 137 [ağçe]	--- ⁶³
tīmār-i Yūnus Çelebi, merdüm-i Mehmed Beg	hāşıl: 9 501 [ağçe]	cebelüyān-i mezbūr: 7
tīmār-i kātib Ca'fer, merdüm-i Mehmed Beg	hāşıl: 9 071 [ağçe]	cebelüyān-i mezbūr: 10
tīmār-i Kāsım, merdüm-i Mehmed Beg	hāşıl: 5 289 [ağçe]	cebelüyān-i mezbūr: 6
tīmār-i Alagöz, merdüm-i Muştafā Beg	hāşıl: 10 771 [ağçe]	cebelüyān-i mezbūr: 2
tīmār-i Hüsrev Dīvāne, merdüm-i Muştafā Beg	hāşıl: 7 708 [ağçe]	cebelüyān-i mezbūr: 5
tīmār-i İdrīs voyvoda, merdüm-i Muştafā Beg	hāşıl: 17 000 [ağçe]	cebelüyān-i mezbūr: 10
tīmār-i Mehmed, merdüm-i Hasan Beg	hāşıl: 6 250 [ağçe]	cebelüyān-i mezbūr: 3

Military retinue supported by Mihaloğlu family members and their associates.

Source: BOA, TS. MA.d. 2204.

⁶² BOA, TS. MA.d. 2204, f. 82^a.

⁶³ Since the revenue-raising fief was vacant at the time of the registration (*maḥlūl*), there were no retainers listed. Çalış Beg should be regarded as the previous *ze'āmet* holder, as it is possible that he was either dead at that time or had received another fief-holding somewhere else.

* * *

Taken as a whole, the information from the mid 1520s register offers an insight into the marcher lords' extended households. Even the sketchy examples from the province of Niğbolu and the household of its district-governor presented here reveal that these lords of the marches were rightfully called so not only because they led the Ottoman expansion into Europe in command of numerous troops of raiders, or because they established their lordships (massive landed estates) in the regions under their governance, but also because they sustained a large entourage of personal devotees, who manned their noble courts and were part of the military-administrative organization of their provinces. What is more, the composition and the size of their courtly households reveal striking similarities with the Ottoman imperial and princely households, which hence adds to the proper evaluation of the active role they played in all levels of the Ottoman socio-political establishment. It is noteworthy that the personal retainers maintained by Mihaloğlu Mehmed Beg, for instance, could be compared in size to the princely households of the time. Süleyman I, for example, when he was a princely governor in 1511, and his son prince Mehmed in 1540, had each approximately 500 men in their households.⁶⁴ Likewise, again in comparison with the Ottoman ruler, taking advantage of their leadership in foreign conquests and thereby obtaining substantial numbers of slaves (possibly including also members of the local higher or lesser nobility), the frontier lords were able to staff their households with slave recruits, who were raised, educated, and further socialized in their courts to become their loyal servitors, skillful courtiers, and elite military retainers. The courtly households of the frontier lords formed their elite entourage, whose members were arguably also physically attached to their master, living within the confines of the frontier lords' palatial homes, which, again in parallel to the sultanic palace, combined the family quarters of the *begs* and the training and lodging facilities for the pages. Furthermore, mirroring the formation of the Ottoman princely households, the frontier lords' palace servitors formed the core of smaller satellite households of other noble families. In turn, the latter were further enlarged by the respective household head with his own slave recruits. Trained in different duties, the most skillful palace graduates of the marcher lords could find their way to the imperial household as well, as testified, for example, by the presence of several associates (*merdüm*) of Balkan raider commanders among the royal retinue of Selim I in 1512.⁶⁵ However, the frontier lords' palace graduates were most visible in the provinces they governed, as they became a true reservoir for the military and

⁶⁴ Kunt, "A Prince Goes Forth...", p. 69.

⁶⁵ The first salary register (*mevacib defteri*) of Selim's royal retinue of 1512 and the individuals who were members of certain noble households, including the ones of the Balkan frontier lords, is analyzed in detail by H.E. Çıpa, *Yavuz'un Kavgası: I. Selim'in Saltanat Mücadelesi*, İstanbul, 2013, p. 181–211; H.E. Çıpa, "Bir Defterin Anlattıkları: I. Selim döneminin (1512–1520) İlk Mevacib Defteri," in A. Erdoğan, Z. Atbaş, and A. Çöteliöğlü (eds.), *Filiz Çağman'a Armağan*, İstanbul, 2018, p. 207–210.

the administration of the marcher districts, just like the imperial palace graduates became the pool for the military and administrative posts in the imperial center and throughout the provinces of the empire.

The households of the Ottoman frontier magnates emerged as true loci of power that managed manpower along the bordering regions. By establishing stable patron–client relations with the members of their extended households, the frontier lords found themselves at the apex of a large web of networks entwined within social, military, administrative, political, and cultural life along the borders of the Ottoman state. Moreover, it is notable that at their highest level these networks were also supported by a web of kinship relationships within and outside the Ottoman domains, which in turn positioned the household heads as active participants in domestic and foreign affairs at the time. A notable network of this type, not addressed in the present paper but which should undoubtedly not be overlooked, was created through the dynastic marriage politics that the frontier dynasties of warlords followed. The Plevne house of the Mihaloğlu knotted relations with the neighboring elites. Mihaloğlu ‘Ali Beg, the founding father of the Danubian (Plevne) line of the prominent dynasty and one of the most celebrated Ottoman frontier lords at the end of the fifteenth century, established putative kinship ties with the Hungarian court when he married king Mathias Corvinus’s daughter, whom he allegedly captured in one of his Transylvanian raids.⁶⁶ Hasan Beg, the eldest son of ‘Ali Beg, who was possibly born to this noble lady, established kinship ties with the powerful neighboring Ottoman frontier household of the Yahyalı family by marrying the daughter of Yahya Pasha himself.⁶⁷ Undoubtedly the most distinguished son of ‘Ali Beg, Mihaloğlu Mehmed Beg, whose household was discussed in the present paper, sealed an alliance with the Bosnian noble dynasty of Kosaçi when he married into the Hersekoğlu family by joining in matrimony the daughter of Ahmed Pasha.⁶⁸ Arguably, it was this alliance that secured him the post of district-governor of Hersek for some time. The political pact of union with one of the most influential houses of the Wallachian nobility, however, was the one that marked the career of Mehmed Beg.⁶⁹ Bonded to

⁶⁶ M. Nüzhet Paşa, *Ahvâl-i Gazi Mihal...*, p. 61.

⁶⁷ BOA, Tapu Tahrir Defteri (TD) 382, p. 733, 743; TD 713, f. 216. Cf. A. Kayapınar, “Kuzey Bulgaristan’da Gazi Mihaloğulları Vakıfları...”, p. 175.

⁶⁸ В. Атанасовски, *Пад Херцеговине*, Београд, 1979, p. 216. In a register of benefactions (*in ‘âmât defteri*) from 1507 Mehmed Beg appears as the husband of an unnamed daughter of Hersezkade Ahmed Pasha and the Ottoman princess Hundi Sultan (daughter of Bayezid II). See H. Reindl-Kiel, “Some Notes on Hersezkade Ahmed Pasha, His Family, and His Books”, *Journal of Turkish Studies* 40, 2013, 315–326 (Special Issue: S. S. Kuru and B. Tezcan (eds.), *Defterology: Festschrift in Honor of Heath Lowry*, Cambridge, 2013). In 1511 the wife of Mehmed Beg presented really generous gifts to Bayezid II. İlhan Gök, “Atatürk Kitaplığı M. C. O.71 Numaralı 909–933/1503–1527 Tarihli İn‘âmât Defteri (Transkripsiyon-Değerlendirme)”, Unpublished PhD dissertation, Istanbul, Marmara University, 2014, p. 1217.

⁶⁹ The love story between Mihaloğlu ‘Ali Beg and the daughter of the Wallachian ban is at the center of Suzi Çelebi’s epic poem, dedicated to the heroic deeds of ‘Ali Beg. A. S. Levend, *Gazavât-Nâmeler...*

the boyar family of the Craiovești (the bans of Oltenia or Craiova) through his father's marriage to a daughter of Neagoe of Strehaia, Mehmed Beg remained closely linked to the Wallachian internal struggles, and his support was vital for the promoting of virtually all Wallachian voivodes in the period 1508–1532.⁷⁰

Revealing further details about the dynastic marriages of the regional dynasties of frontier lords, as well as the members of their courtly households, and the impact they had on the socio-political dynamics along and across the Ottoman borders, would undoubtedly illuminate the history of the Ottoman conquest and subsequent permanent presence in the Balkans, a story of entanglement which is yet to be told. It remains a desiderata for future research to delve into the complicated matter of these families' prosopographic history. Only then will we be able to reconstruct the intricate kinship and clientele ties that formed multiple networks of dependencies and thus shaped the affairs of the bordering regions.

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⁷⁰ The kinship ties of the Mihaloğlu to the Craiovești boyars were supported by documentary evidence published by M. A. Mehmet, "Două documente turcești despre Neagoe Basarab...", *Studii* 21:5, 1968, 921–930. It was Cristina Feneșan who proposed that the mother of Mihaloğlu Mehmed Beg, the heroine from Suzi Çelebi's poem, must be a daughter of Neagoe of Strehaia, whom his father 'Ali Beg married and who later adopted the Muslim name Selimşah. See Cristina Feneșan, "Mihaloğlu Mehmed Beg et la principauté de Valachie (1508–1532)", *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 15, 1995, p. 137–155. Feneșan's study is by now the most comprehensive historical overview of Mihaloğlu Mehmed Beg's interference in Wallachian politics, which goes far beyond the establishment of simple kinship relationships. Cf. her recent book, *Convertire la Islam în spațiul carpato-dunărean: (secolele XV-XIX)*, București, 2020, p. 243–248. On the wider phenomenon of creation of multiple webs of social connections and group solidarities with marked political dimensions, that informed the actions of "trans-border actors," among whom Mehmed Beg and his kin had a central role, see R. Păun, "Calling for Justice and Protection: Sixteenth-Century Wallachian and Moldavian Tributaries as Petitioners to the Imperial Stirrup", in G. Kármán (ed.), *Tributaries and Peripheries of the Ottoman Empire*, Leiden; Boston, 2020, 65–116.

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