

# Istanbul and Damascus: Officials and Soldiers in the Exercise of Imperial Power (C.1550-1575)

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What did it mean to be the capital of an empire? How did Istanbul relate to its own provinces? This paper investigates some of the vehicles of the governing relationship between Istanbul and one of its provincial centers, the city of Damascus in the province of Şam or Syria (for convenience I will use these terms interchangeably, even though they are not coextensive). Some aspects of this relationship have been previously examined. The identities and movements of important governors are known to us from the chronicles.<sup>1</sup> Scholars studying legal and literary texts have traced the journeys of ulema and intellectuals between the salons of sixteenth-century

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1 Henri Laoust, *Les Gouverneurs de Damas sous les Mamlouks et les premiers Ottomans (658-1156/1260-1744)* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1952); Franz Babinger, "Die osmanischen Statthalter von Damaskus," in *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen zur Geschichte Südosteuropas und der Levante*, v. I (Munich: Südosteuropa-Verlangsgesellschaft m.b.H., 1962), 396-405; Abdul-Rahim Abu-Husayn, *Provincial Leaderships in Syria, 1575-1650* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1985).

Cairo, Damascus, and Istanbul.<sup>2</sup> Here I draw attention instead to the lesser officials and soldiers who traveled from Istanbul to Damascus or between Damascus and elsewhere, knitting the capital to its territories and conveying people, funds, and information around the empire. In the sixteenth century, the officials and Janissaries raised through the *devşirme* were all still members of the sultan's household, and their activities were recorded fairly extensively in the *mühimme defterleri*. Using some of the earliest extant registers from the mid-sixteenth century, this paper inquires into some of the mechanisms of imperial control in this portion of the early modern period, recognizing that they differ both from the immediate aftermath of the conquest and from later conditions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup>

Syria was incorporated into the empire by a combination of force and cooperation, and both were employed in its subsequent administration.<sup>4</sup> What were the instruments of control or conne-

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2 Helen Pfeifer, "To Gather Together: Cultural Encounters in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Literary Salons" (Ph.D. Diss., Princeton University, 2014), and several chapters in *The Mamluk-Ottoman Transition: Continuity and Change in Egypt and Bilād al-Shām in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Gül Şen (Göttingen: V&R, University of Bonn Press, forthcoming).

3 These registers are: 3 *Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (966-968/1558-1560), Özet ve Transkripsiyon* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Bakanlığı, 1993); 5 *Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (973/1565-1566), Özet ve İndeks* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Bakanlığı, 1994); 6 *Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (972/1564-1565), Özet – Transkripsiyon ve İndeks* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Bakanlığı, 1995); 7 *Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (975-976/1567-1569), Özet – Transkripsiyon – İndeks* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Bakanlığı, 1998); 12 *Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (978-979/1570-1572), Özet – Transkripsiyon ve İndeks* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Bakanlığı, 1998). Parenthetical citations are to register number and entry number.

4 Compare the contrasting views of Abdul-Karim Rafeq, "Changes in the Relationship between the Ottoman Central Administration and the Syrian

ction that drew the imperial and provincial capitals into a single unit? Adnan Bakhit looked at some of them in his study of the sixteenth-century province of Damascus, including the governors, military forces, taxation, and legal officials, but he was concerned mainly with internal provincial affairs.<sup>5</sup> This paper highlights the province's external relations, particularly its links with the capital. This was also a period of Ottoman campaigns in Yemen and Cyprus, and Syria was the hinge of Istanbul's policies in more distant areas. This study draws attention to how Istanbul was able to extend its reach beyond its own walls, showing the capital in action, not simply as a location in which or to which things were done.<sup>6</sup>

The documents of the Ottoman central government not only provide details on Istanbul's relationship with the province but also illuminate the province's interactions with the wider empire and the international context. Research on sixteenth-century Ottoman Syria, however, is remarkably thin, especially when compared to the rich scholarship on later periods and other provinces. Modern scholarship on Syria in Western languages developed in the 1960s in a nationalist framework strongly emphasizing the use of Arabic rather than European or Ottoman sources. Other than Holt's political overview, this historiography focused mainly on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>7</sup> A few scholars in that era attempted to

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Provinces from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries," in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Islamic History*, ed. Thomas Naff and Roger Owen (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977), 53-73, and Halil İnalçık, "Arab-Turkish Relations in Historical Perspective (1260-1914)," *Studies on Turkish-Arab Relations* 1 (1986): 152.

5 Muhammad Adnan Bakhit, *The Ottoman Province of Damascus in the Sixteenth Century* (Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1982).

6 In this period of Selim II and grand vizier Mehmed Sokollu, the *mühimme* registers do not distinguish between sultanic absolutism and that of the imperial government or the bureaucracy, exercised in the sultan's name. Since this paper is not concerned with factional infighting in the capital, it attributes the initiative to Istanbul or the Porte as a whole.

7 P. M. Holt, *Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, 1516-1922: A Political History* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1966); Kamal S. Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965); A. L. Tibawi, *A*

introduce Ottoman archival sources for the sixteenth century, but while their work was widely cited, few followed them into the thickets of Ottoman documents at that time.<sup>8</sup> The 1980s saw another flowering of scholarship on Syria, again mostly on the later period but taking advantage of the greater accessibility of the Ottoman archives to emphasize the contributions of Ottoman documents.<sup>9</sup> Scholars in this period added social history to what had previously been primarily a political, military, and economic history of the region.<sup>10</sup> Since that time there has been a minor explosion of scholarly

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*Modern History of Syria, Including Lebanon and Palestine* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1969); and more specialized studies, Herbert L. Bodman, Jr., *Political Factions in Aleppo, 1760-1826* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963); William R. Polk, *The Opening of South Lebanon, 1788-1840: A Study of the Impact of the West on the Middle East* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963); Abdul-Karim Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus, 1723-1783* (Beirut: Khayats, 1966); Moshe Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine, 1840-1861* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); Albert Hourani, "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables," in *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. William R. Polk and Richard Chambers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 41-64.

- 8 Uriel Heyd, *Ottoman Documents on Palestine, 1552-1615: A Study of the Firman According to the Muhimme Defteri* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960); Bernard Lewis, *Notes and Documents from the Turkish Archives* (Jerusalem: Israel Oriental Society, 1952); idem, "Studies in the Ottoman Archives-I," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 16 (1954): 469-501; idem, "Nazareth in the Sixteenth Century, According to the Ottoman *Tapu* Registers," in *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb*, ed. George Makdisi (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures, 1965), 416-25; idem, "Jaffa in the Sixteenth Century, According to the Ottoman *Tabrir* Registers," in *Necatî Lugal Armağanı* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1968), 435-46.
- 9 Karl K. Barbir, *Ottoman Rule in Damascus, 1708-1758* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Bakhit, *Ottoman Province of Damascus* (1982); Abdul-Rahim Abu-Husayn, *Provincial Leaderships in Syria, 1575-1650* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1985).
- 10 Antoine Abdel-Nour, *Introduction à l'histoire urbaine de la Syrie ottoman (XVIe-XVIIIe siècle)* (Beirut: Université libanaise, 1982); André Raymond, *Grandes villes arabes à l'époque ottoman* (Paris: Sindbad, 1985); Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, *Families in Politics: Damascene Factions and Estates of the 18<sup>th</sup> and*

writing on Syria, gradually incorporating a wider variety of Ottoman sources, but again focusing primarily on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and on Syria more as an individual entity than as a province of an empire governed from Istanbul and stretching from Budapest to Basra. Exceptionally, a few studies look at earlier periods, including a discussion of Aleppo's administration and society in the seventeenth century, an examination of the Shiites of Lebanon in the imperial context, an extended study of a Damascus neighborhood over time, and recent dissertations on Syrian administration and culture.<sup>11</sup> Architectural sources on the Ottomanization of the Syrian cities have also begun to be examined.<sup>12</sup> A 2015 conference

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- 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1985); Margaret L. Meriwether, *The Kin Who Count: Family and Society in Ottoman Aleppo, 1770-1840* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990; dissertation 1981); Bruce Masters, *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance in the Middle East: Mercantilism and the Islamic Economy in Aleppo, 1600-1750* (New York: New York University Press, 1988).
- 11 Stefan Winter, *The Shiites of Lebanon under Ottoman rule, 1516-1788* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Charles Wilkins, *Forging Urban Solidarities: Ottoman Aleppo, 1640-1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Miura, Toru, *Dynamism in the Urban Society of Damascus: The Salihyya Quarter from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill 2016); Timothy J. Fitzgerald, "Ottoman Methods of Conquest: Legal Imperialism and the City of Aleppo, 1480-1570" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2008); Malissa Taylor, "Fragrant Gardens and Converging Waters: Ottoman Governance in Seventeenth-Century Damascus" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011); Pfeifer, "To Gather Together" (2014).
- 12 On Aleppo see Heinz Gaube and Eugen Wirth, *Aleppo: historische und geographische Beiträge zur baulichen Gestaltung, zur sozialen Organisation und zur wirtschaftlichen Dynamik einer vorderasiatischen Fernhandelsmetropole* (Wiesbaden: L. Reichert, 1984); Heghnar Watenpaugh, *The Image of an Ottoman City: Imperial Architecture and Urban Experience in Aleppo in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). On Damascus see Stefan Weber, "The Creation of Ottoman Damascus: Architecture and Urban Development of Damascus in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries," *ARAM* 9-10 (1997-98): 431-70, and Çiğdem Kafescioğlu, "In the Image of Rum': Ottoman Architectural Patronage in Sixteenth-Century Aleppo and Damascus," *Muqarnas* 16 (1999): 70-96. See also Bakhit, *Ottoman Province of Damascus*, 115-18; Alev Masarwa, "Performing the Occasion: The Chronograms of Māmiyya ar-Rūmī," in *The Mamluk-Ottoman Transition: Continuity and Change in Egypt and Bilād*



on the transition from Mamluk to Ottoman rule produced an edited volume with articles on social, economic, intellectual, and cultural aspects of Syrian history in the sixteenth century; even there, however, the presentations on Syria were relatively few in number and had to be supplemented by work on Egypt.<sup>13</sup> Still less have studies on Istanbul examined its relationship with the Arab provinces on issues other than the caliphate and the legal system. This paper, then, must be considered as a preliminary work.

### Control through Officials and Taxation

An empire is usually conceptualized as a center controlling peripheral areas, including areas that were joined to the empire by force and remain subordinate to it. Imperial control is pictured as resulting from the imposition of governors, taxes, and military forces. In the Ottoman case, these controlling elements are better studied from sources other than *mühimme* registers. Here I will only mention the main sources and studies concerning them.

The primary agents of the Ottoman capital's control over the provinces were undoubtedly the governors sent from Istanbul, but their appointments are concentrated in the unpublished *buyuruldu defterleri* rather than the *mühimme* registers.<sup>14</sup> The chronicles mention them frequently as well, and a study of Syria's image in several Ottoman chronicles showed that the authors in question viewed the province primarily as a rung on the official career ladder; the majority of times that they mentioned Syria they related appointments to or dismissals from provincial offices and forces or referred to offices

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*al-Shām in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Gül Şen (Göttingen: V&R, University of Bonn Press, forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup> Conermann and Şen, eds., *The Mamluk-Ottoman Transition* (see above n. 2).

<sup>14</sup> In our period the *buyuruldu defterleri*, which are in the *mühimme* collection, include MD I, 2, 4, 8, II, 15; Heyd, *Ottoman Documents on Palestine*, 36. In the *mühimme defterleri* themselves, entry 3-1464 only notes that "formerly" Lala Mustafa Paşa was appointed as governor of Damascus and entry 7-2071 does not command but merely reports his removal due to popular demand.

formerly held in Syria.<sup>15</sup> Nor do the *mühimme* registers reveal the impressive incomes attached to these offices, although they enabled the officials to support large retinues and military forces, pay fees for office, and repay loans. The monuments and public works with which governors sought to immortalize their impact on their places of office are similarly not listed in the *mühimmes*. Every top official, moreover, depended for his success on a host of lower-level officials and notables, both in his own retinue and in the province, and the registers do not clarify these links. Nevertheless, since many of these men, such as Lala Mustafa Paşa and Koca Sinan Paşa, became high imperial officials, there are other sources on their lives and careers, and some of them have been the objects of individual studies and biographies. Just as the sultan's choices and acts are spoken of as those of the empire, so what happens in the province is attributed to the governor. Although the identities of the governors and the circumstances of their appointment are not part of this investigation, their influence should not be forgotten.

Taxes likewise formed an important control mechanism. Stereotypes of Ottoman domination always complain about the government's "extortionate" taxation; the empire has been pictured as a giant revenue extraction machine. The details of tax collection were the province of the finance bureaucracy, the *maliye*, and for later years we have registers full of detailed orders concerning taxation issued by the finance department.<sup>16</sup> No separate finance registers exist for the mid-sixteenth century, yet that was not because such detailed taxation orders appear in the *mühimme* registers; perhaps *maliye ahkam* registers were compiled for this period but have been lost, or perhaps such orders were not recorded in registers at this period. What we find instead in the *mühimme defterleri* are orders on the expenditure or transfer of tax revenues, mainly for salaries and

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15 Linda T. Darling, "The Syrian Provinces in Ottoman Eyes: Three Historians' Representations of Bilad al-Sham," in *ARAM: The Mamluks and the Early Ottoman Period in Bilad al-Sham: History and Archaeology* 9-10 (1997-1998): 347-55.

16 See Darling, *Revenue-Raising and Legitimacy*; for a study of a finance order register see pp. 259-67.

fortification repairs. Some orders do exist regarding tax collection in Syria, but the majority deal not with the details of collection but with policy issues, such as the disposition of revenues from unregistered lands (3-397, 3-2201, 3-2202), extension of tax-collecting assistance across provincial lines (3-347, 3-619), proposals for a new tax (7-1295), or adjustments in the particular tax being levied in an area (7-2256, 7-2684). Other taxation orders in the *mühimmes* refer to arrears, money that could not be collected due to rebellion, unrest, refusal to pay, population decrease, or collector default (3-1395; 5-510, 5-521, 5-522, 5-565; 6-78; 7-2064, 7-2587). While Ottoman taxation was inexorable, we know from later finance registers that it could be negotiated, and the court registers and finance registers show that Ottoman subjects negotiated their tax burdens early and often.<sup>17</sup> “Central control” of taxation is not apparent from the *mühimme* registers and more often than not seems to have consisted in arranging for people to be willing or able to pay their taxes—not without grumbling or the occasional tax revolt, but without dissolving their ties to the empire.

Another instrument of central control was the *timar tahrir*, the survey of revenues (primarily land revenues) awarded to cavalymen who were, initially at least, sent from Istanbul as an occupying military force. That situation did not last; a study of seventeenth-century Jerusalem shows that by that time the *timar*-holding cavalry had settled down, married into local elite families, and become indigenized.<sup>18</sup> The *timar* system of course had its own records, but it is frequently mentioned in the *mühimme* registers. The Ottomans

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 17 Amy Singer, *Palestinian Peasants and Ottoman Officials: Rural Administration around Sixteenth-Century Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Darling, *Revenue-Raising and Legitimacy*.

18 Dror Ze'evi, *An Ottoman Century: The District of Jerusalem in the 1600s* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); for men in other positions settling down in Syria as well see Karl K. Barbir, “From Pasha to Efendi: the Assimilation of Ottomans into Damascene Society, 1516-1783,” *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 1.1 (Winter 1979-80): 68-83. Provinces without the *timar* system were mostly far from the capital with little scope for horsemen and a limited amount of agricultural land to support them; they were therefore more loosely integrated into the empire.



installed the *timar* system in Syria after the conquest and performed regular surveys of revenue sources.<sup>19</sup> The *mühimmes* contain an order from 1560 stating that the capital had approved the registers of a *tahrir* of four *sancaks* in Şam, was returning sealed copies of it to Damascus, and required that henceforth the provincial authorities act in conformity with these registers (3-889). What that implied was the rewarding of obedient and skillful warriors possessing documents from the central government and the disciplining or deprivation of those who were not or who possessed fraudulent documents, as well as the collection of the provincial surplus and the pursuit of those who did not pay. Officials performed another *tahrir* of Şam less than a decade later, at the beginning of February 1568; an order regarding it chided the surveyor, the *kadı* of Trablus, for not yet having awarded the *timars*. Time was pressing, it said, since the *timar* cavalry of Syria had received orders to go on campaign to Yemen. A month later came another order saying no, postpone the distribution. A month was just enough time for the *kadı* to have written back to Istanbul to say he could not finish in the allotted time, and for the decision to be made and communicated back to Syria to send the cavalymen with their current *timars* and put off the redistribution of *timars* until the campaign was finished (7-821, 7-952).

In the event, however, that was not what happened. The soldiers went as far as Cairo under the command of the former governor of Damascus, Lala Mustafa Pasa, but he delayed in Cairo for nine months waiting for support (7-1913).<sup>20</sup> Istanbul replaced him

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19 For the *tahrirs* of Damascus see Bakhit, *Ottoman Province of Damascus*, 35-90; for the *tahrirs* of Sayda see M. A. Bakhit, "Sidon in Mamluk and Early Ottoman Times," *Osmanli Arastirmalari* 3 (1982): 53-68; for the *tahrirs* of Trablus see Ralph S. Hattox, "Some Ottoman Tapu Defters for Tripoli in the Sixteenth Century," *al-Abhath* 29 (1981): 65-90; and for the *tahrirs* of Palestine see Amnon Cohen and Bernard Lewis, *Population and Revenue in the Towns of Palestine in the Sixteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Wolf-Dieter Hütteroth and Kamal Abdulfattah, *Historical Geography of Palestine, Transjordan and Southern Syria in the Late Sixteenth Century* (Erlangen: Palm und Enke, 1977).

20 Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923* (London: John Murray, 2005), 155.

and recalled him to Damascus, but the people of Syria did not want him back (7-2011, 7-2071). They complained so loudly about his corruption and injustice that he was dismissed from office and put on trial. The capital ordered an entirely new *tahrir* of the province and selected the *bey* of Bursa, an impartial outsider, to perform it. On the first of August 1568, Istanbul appointed the Bursa *bey* as surveyor and the *kadı* of Kestel as his assistant (7-1965, 7-1979). They performed the *tahrir* over the next couple of months, and by early October the *timar* registrar of Şam was allocating the *timars* (7-2267).<sup>21</sup>

In the process of allocation, the governor of Damascus contacted the Porte with an interesting problem that had arisen concerning the governor's *has*, his revenue sources. Apparently Lala Mustafa Paşa, when he was governor, had kept part of the *has* for himself, had awarded some to his own men (which might be expected), had given some in a lump sum to the foundation (*vakıf*) of Sultan Ghawri, and some he gave to the holders of *timars* in exchange for their *timar* lands.<sup>22</sup> The new governor's unspoken question was, "What should be done about this?" Istanbul commanded that the governor should return the *has* lands to his own budget, despite an imperial order permitting the initial transfers, and should allocate them the same way that the registers indicated they had customarily been awarded. Somebody in authority was clearly unwilling to allow Lala Mustafa's special arrangements to continue under anyone else (7-2267, 7-2512).

We see, then, that the *timar* system was a means of exercising Istanbul's control over provincial governors and officials as much as over *timar* holders or peasants. It reinforced the capital's right to interfere in the province and oversee its governors and military

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<sup>21</sup> A *tahrir* of Aleppo province (Haleb) was finished two months later (7-2381).

<sup>22</sup> Were the *timar* lands perhaps more productive or more advantageously situated? Notations in the *tahrir* registers, especially the *icmals*, could tell us more about this situation, giving (for instance) the names of Lala Mustafa's retainers who were granted *timars* in the governor's *has*. The fact that the *paşa's* wife was related to Sultan Ghawri might explain his interest in the former ruler's foundation.

personnel, but at the same time it forced the capital to pay attention to the province and become informed about provincial conditions. And not only the capital; authorities from other provinces, like the Bursa *bey* and the *kadı*s of Kestel and Trablus, also became intimately familiar with, and had some influence over, conditions in the province of Sam. This cross-fertilization served to homogenize administrative practice across local differences. Along with the transfer of governors from province to province, it also worked to unify the empire under Istanbul's headship.

### Connection through Messengers

If the center extended control, however incomplete, over the province through its governance and taxation systems, the transfer of orders and messengers interconnected the capital and the province. Ottoman ideology made the sultan the head of the body politic, so to speak, and Istanbul his threshold, the embodiment of his preeminence over the rest of the empire. But how was that dominance exercised? What were, in figurative language, the sinews holding the parts of the body together, and the nerves through which the head commanded the extremities? What first strikes the eye in the *mühimme* registers is the issuance of sultanic orders, which would imply some sort of absolute central control. Next, however, is the fact that the vast majority of those orders responded to reports and petitions from officials and subjects in the provinces. The imperial government was in active two-way correspondence with the provinces at all times. "Ruling the provinces" may have meant controlling their elites and extracting their resources, but it also meant hearing their complaints, solving their problems, and meeting their needs.

The next question, then, is how the connections were made, how Istanbul received provincial reports and petitions from Damascus and how it conveyed orders, responses, and assistance to their recipients. The *mühimme* registers of the sixteenth century describe in great detail official movements and the conveyance of men, materials, and communications around the empire. Notations above each entry that we usually ignore tell us who received the finished orders

and who was responsible for their delivery. We can find five groups of men at the Porte responsible for bringing these messages back and forth from the capital to officials in the province. The first, of course, are the *çavuşlar*, and there were many. The salary registers report only 20 of them in 1535 but 840 by 1645.<sup>23</sup> The increase in *çavuş* numbers and the growth of the road network resulted directly, at least in part, from the expansion of the empire. *Çavuşlar* had many functions besides carrying messages, but that was their most basic task. Most of them were stationed in Istanbul itself, but some were also attached to every provincial capital, or rather, to the *beylerbey*. They performed a vital function in linking the capital with the provinces and the provinces with each other.

The second group is the *kethüdas* (deputies) of the *beys* and *beylerbeys* in the province. Pakalın defines the *kethüda* as a man who sees to the business of the great men of state, but he does not say what that entails.<sup>24</sup> The many notations in the *mühimme* registers, however, indicate that one of the *kethüda*'s main functions was to present the petitions and reports of the *beys* and *beylerbeys* to the *divan* and receive the replies. Such a note reveals, for example, that in 1558 the *kethüda* of the governor of Damascus was named Ahmed, and that he was handed an order for the governor on 30 December (3-8). There were times when, according to these notations, some of the *kethüdas* appeared before the *divan* every few days, so they must have been known to the viziers and other council members. The *kethüda* usually remained in Istanbul while his employer went away on campaign or to a provincial post. As his employer's repre-

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 23 They are listed in the monthly salary registers, the *müşaberehoran defterleri*, and a relatively small number of them received *timars* and can be found in the *icmal defterleri*. See Linda T. Darling, *Revenue-Raising and Legitimacy: Tax Collection and Finance Administration in the Ottoman Empire, 1560-1660* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 45; eadem, "Nasihatnâmeler, İcmal Defterleri, and the Ottoman *Timar*-Holding Elite in the Late Sixteenth Century," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 43 (2013): 193-226; eadem, "Nasihatnâmeler, İcmal Defterleri, and the Ottoman *Timar*-Holding Elite in the Late Sixteenth Century: Part II, Including the Seventeenth Century," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 45 (2015): 13-35.

24 Mehmet Zeki Pakalın, *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü*, İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1983?), II, 251.

sentative, he received messages from his master, brought them to the palace, and picked up the answers. Another group is the *kethüda*'s men, whom he could send to the palace in his place to collect the responses to the governors' reports and petitions. They were probably the ones who most often carried these responses from Istanbul to the governors in the provinces. The fourth group, appearing less frequently, consists of scribes and other functionaries, such as the Janissary *ağa*, a *reis*, or the *bostancı başı*. They were employed especially for orders addressed to palace or naval personnel, whether they were actually at the capital or not. An order for a *tahrir*, for example, was given to the *defter emini* (3-889). A last group is the retainers (or "men") of officials and governors other than the *kethüda*. Who these "men" are is usually undefined, but occasionally we are told that one of them is a soldier or a *kapıcı*, and the name is frequently given. All these messengers traveled along the post (*menzil*) system, which the Ottomans restored and kept in good repair.<sup>25</sup>

How did these people carry out their task? The great traveler Evliya Çelebi gives a vivid description of how he journeyed as the messenger or "man" of the vizier and governor Melek Ahmed Paşa, who was recovering from a serious illness:

Now the foresightful pasha had his secretary (*divan efendisi*) summoned. "Ali Efendi," he said, "draw up letters immediately to the grand vizier and to the chief black eunuch, also to Kaya Sultan and to my agent at court, Zühdi Efendi, informing them that I have recovered. And write an order for post-horses for six stages for my Evliya." The letters were written at once. I, too, armed myself and was ready to go. . . . The pasha gave me the letters, plus 300 goldpieces for travel expenses, and I kissed his hand. . . . So I kissed his hand and—*stages of my journey by forced march from Mangalia to Istanbul*—setting out by forced march with post-horses and my three *gulams*, we traversed the villages of Sarigül, Gelincikli, and Hasılıklı. While we were changing horses at the walled town of Pravadi, rumors were flying that Melek Pasha had died, and I informed

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<sup>25</sup> Bakhit, *Ottoman Province of Damascus*, 97; Colin Heywood has studied the late seventeenth-century reform of this system in several articles, of which the latest is Colin Heywood, "Two Firmans of Mustafâ II on the Reorganisation of the Ottoman Courier System (1108/1696)," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 54.4 (2001): 485-96.



everyone that he was alive and well. We pressed on past the village of Çenge, Aydos castle, and the villages of Fakiler and Kovanlı. Again we changed horses at the city of Kırk-kilise, and there, too, announced that the pasha had recovered. We continued thence past the towns of Buñar-hisar, Uzun-haciler, Kösdemir, and Çatalca: and arrived in the district of Topçular on the third day after leaving Mangalia. I presented the pasha's letters to Kaya Sultan and informed her that he was recovered. . . . Having remounted and ridden over with the Pasha's court agent to Köprülü Mehmed Pasha, I kissed his hand. . . . He took the letter and read it. . . . He sent me with the letters, attended by the memorandum writer Ramazan Agha, to the felicitous Pahishah. Arriving in the imperial presence at Yalı Köşkü, I kissed the ground and conveyed the news. The wise Padishah was pleased to hear that the pasha was recovered, and gave me a present of 110 goldpieces. As I went out I also handed over the chief eunuch's letters, then returned to Kaya Sultan at her palace in Topçular. Conversing from behind the lattice, she asked me what words the felicitous Padishah had uttered, and then inquired into the pasha's lamentable condition.<sup>26</sup>

In a similar fashion, the *kethüdas* and messengers of Ottoman officials in sixteenth-century Damascus brought important reports and orders to their destinations, conveyed letters and messages among acquaintances and family members, and spread news to all along their route. The fact that people in Evliya's story had already heard rumors of what was happening a day's hard ride away or more indicates that people were concerned about distant events and that Evliya was by no means the only bringer of news along his route. His story also reveals that the conveyance of messages was not necessarily confined to those to whom they were addressed, and that the connecting function performed by these *kethüdas* and messengers linked more than the state elites. Through the dissemination of news, people at all levels of society, townsmen and sometimes even villagers, could feel themselves to belong to a single extended unit, the Ottoman Empire. Even in an empire like the Ottoman, with people of multiple linguistic and religious groups and loyalties

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Dankoff, *The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman: Melek Ahmed Pasha (1588-1662) as Portrayed in Evliya Çelebi's Book of Travels* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 211-13.

focused mainly on the local area, a wider imperial identity, perhaps weak but perceptible, could be formed below the official level.

### Janissaries: Agents of Control and Connection

The Janissaries served the empire as both a control mechanism and a connective device. The conquest of the Arab lands must have been one of the main reasons for the expansion of their duties beyond guarding the sultan and garrisoning the capital. Istanbul sent Janissaries to fortify Damascus and Cairo and exert control over a newly conquered province with its potential for rebellion. Both Egypt and Syria did rebel in the first few years after the conquest, and rebellious elites continued to stir up provincial politics in the following decades.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, one order called Syria “the frontier of the rebellious Bedouins.”<sup>28</sup> One thousand Janissaries arrived in Damascus in 1521 to staff the garrison and assist in administration.<sup>29</sup> From Damascus, Istanbul assigned Janissaries to other positions throughout the province and beyond, although they were still counted as Janissaries of Damascus and their pay arrived from Istanbul via Damascus. In 1568, for example, the district governor of Safed requested a troop of Janissaries from Damascus to do “an important task” (7-1983), probably hunting down rebels or bandits, and another order in the same year described a situation of widespread village and tribal rebellion in Safed, Leccun, Nablus, and

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27 Bakhit, *Ottoman Province of Damascus*, 27-34, 165-81, 218-25. Many in Egypt saw Ottoman rule as not only unwelcome but illegitimate, although that seems to have been less true in Syria; Side Emre, “Anatomy of a Rebellion in Sixteenth-Century Egypt: A Case Study of Ahmed Pasha’s Governorship, Revolt, Sultanate, and Critique of the Ottoman Imperial Enterprise,” *Osmanii Araştırmaları* 46 (2015): 77-129. Some of the rebelliousness was due to economic causes, particularly the fall in the value of the silver coinage; Rafeq, “Changes in the Relationship,” 53-73.

28 Heyd, *Ottoman Documents on Palestine*, 40 & n.1, quoted in Moshe Sharon, “The Political Role of the Bedouins in Palestine in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in *Studies on Palestine during the Ottoman Period*, ed. Moshe Ma’oz (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 11-30, at 17.

29 Bakhit, *Ottoman Province of Damascus*, 34.

other districts (7-2010). In response to these problems, Istanbul ordered the governor of Damascus to dispatch sixty Janissaries to Safed (7-1983) and another troop to Nablus (7-2487), but not to send them where they were not needed. Farther afield, the Janissaries of Damascus accompanied its governor to Erzurum in 1578 for the Persian campaign; the Porte replaced them in Damascus with soldiers recruited from Egypt to guard the province of Şam.<sup>30</sup> Janissaries also escorted the annual pilgrimage caravan and tried to control the tribes along the route.<sup>31</sup>

Istanbul also ordered Janissaries to deploy from Damascus on long-term garrison duty to various locations in the province. The Ottomans repaired and restored the existing fortresses and built many new ones, especially along the pilgrimage route.<sup>32</sup> At the request of the governor of Kerek, the Porte sent 60 Damascus Janissaries to garrison the fortress of Kerek for a year; before the year was over, the governor demanded reinforcements, and the Porte sent forty more Janissaries (3-1436, 3-1437).<sup>33</sup> The governor of Aclun also requested Janissaries, and his request stated that they had always had a garrison of 200 Janissaries of Damascus (12-88, 12-423). In 1571, the capital ordered Damascus to select 100 Janissaries for garrison duty in Baalbek as a result of a rebellion there, and the order stated that putting down Arab rebellion in Şam was one of the important affairs of the state (12-509). The governor of Damascus was the recipient of a notice that the salaries of the Janissaries who garrisoned the road between Homs and Damascus were on the way; thus, these forces must also have been Janissaries of Damascus (12-

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<sup>30</sup> Heyd, *Ottoman Documents on Palestine*, 72-75.

<sup>31</sup> For details see Bakhit, *Ottoman Province of Damascus*, 105-15; also Suraiya Faroqhi, *Pilgrims and Sultans: The Hajj under the Ottomans* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> Muhammad Adnan al-Bakhit, "The Arab Provinces at the Age of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent," *Studies on Turkish-Arab Relations* 4 (1989): 1-16; Heyd, *Ottoman Documents on Palestine*, 103-16, 190-91.

<sup>33</sup> That brought their numbers up to 100, but the *bey* was instructed to let the first sixty go when their year was up and to send a list of the forty new ones to the Porte so that their salaries could be sent.

532). Some Janissaries of Damascus were even added to Egypt's forces (7-2269). This exercise of force was only to be expected from an empire with a newly conquered and restless province, but the Janissaries of Syria had other responsibilities as well.

In their linking function, Janissaries were given responsibility for collecting and transporting money—taxes, salaries, and the like—within or beyond the province's boundaries. The Porte ordered the governor of Egypt to send that province's annual *salyane* revenues with 700 to 800 of Egypt's 1000 Janissaries to the treasury at Aleppo under the governance of the vizier Mehmed Paşa. Three days later, the Porte informed Mehmed Paşa of this arrangement via his *kethüda*, and eighteen days after that authorized the governor of Egypt, via the companion of Mehmed Paşa's *kethüda* (who may have already departed with the earlier order), to pay the escort, as was customary (3-564, 3-565, 3-566). Forty Janissaries carried the revenue of the imperial *has* collected in Şam to the treasury of Aleppo in August of 1566, the smaller number of Janissaries reflecting the lesser size and significance of the sums being carried (7-33). Janissaries of Damascus also carried the revenue of Hurrem Sultan's *evkaf* to the central treasury in Istanbul (7-2386). Within Damascus, Istanbul assigned Janissaries to guard the Imaret of Şam and collect the revenue (7-1638) and to accompany the governor of Hüdavendigâr when he was ordered to inspect Şam's former governor Mustafa Paşa (7-2012). Janissaries also collected the back taxes of Şam (7-2587). Arabs involved in provincial finances, in turn, made it a condition that they receive Janissary positions (7-2198). Finance and Janissary service went naturally together; the Janissaries were more mobile than most and provided security for the funds they transported.

As a connective device, the Janissaries themselves were transferred from place to place. The Porte transferred a number of the Damascus Janissaries to Aleppo, some to the garrison of the citadel and 100 others to secure the transportation of revenues under the direction of Aleppo's treasurer (3-164, 3-165). They served in rotation, and in 1558 their rotation period, which was supposedly three months but had stretched to three to four years as they had not been replaced in a long time, was stabilized at one year (3-190).

The capital also posted Janissaries from Van and Bitlis to Damascus to fill vacancies there, and from Baghdad and Şehrizol to Lahsa to serve in rotation (7-791, 7-1773). By the same token, the Porte appointed Janissaries of Damascus to serve in Hurrem Sultan's foundations in Jerusalem (7-2385), and dispatched some to Busra and Şehbe to repair the fortifications there (7-814). The governor of Damascus led the pilgrimage caravan, and the Janissaries of Damascus had responsibilities in it, in particular escorting the covering for the Kaaba, the *mahmal* (7-2328; 12-78; 7-1170, 7-1171). They were also sent around the province to Aleppo, Hama, and Rumkale to collect nightingales for the sultan's gardens (12-631). Beyond the force they could apply, they brought to all these jobs their knowledge of other places and their experience in other provinces, as well as their origins and upbringing in the core regions of the empire. They represented the identity and culture of the empire and its capital, and they embodied Istanbul's attempt to control provincial revenues, interconnect the provinces, and preserve the hierarchy of officialdom in distant lands.

One of the Janissaries' most important roles has already been noted, their service to the treasury of Aleppo, which superseded even the needs of the Yemen campaign. They replaced a group of "translators and Samaritans" who had formerly worked with the tax collectors and were fired for corruption and oppression of the poor (5-470, 7-1294). An order from 1572 related that some of the Damascus Janissaries in service to the Aleppo treasury petitioned for *timars*, but they still wanted to remain in treasury service in Aleppo. They had to go back to Damascus to register this situation, however, and the order relates that when they did, they found that because they had not been present for inspection, their positions had been given to others and they had to obtain an imperial order to get them back (12-837). A later set of orders reveals that this situation was more complex than earlier related, and that these men were not victims but manipulators. Some time earlier, several Janissary positions in Aleppo had become vacant and the Janissary *ağa* in Damascus had appointed new Janissaries to fill them. These Janissaries were not experienced in treasury service and saw the jobs merely as steps



on the career ladder; shortly after gaining them they had requested *timars*. They had duly received *timar tezkires* and, without registering them, had gone around for several months collecting *timar* revenues on the strength of these documents. These men, according to the entry, were not Balkan *devşirme* recruits but the doorkeepers and retainers of great men. When officials examined the registers, “they were not found in place”; either they had not yet registered their *timars* or they were not present in person. Various petitions must have gone to Istanbul about this situation, because the Porte’s response commanded that when Janissary positions in Aleppo fell vacant, they should be awarded by the governor of Damascus with the concurrence of the Aleppo treasurer, and not by the Janissary *ağa*, who had no cognizance of the needs of the treasury. The appointment of people with no treasury experience would “cause harm to the *miri*.” In addition, these positions were not to be awarded to doorkeepers or retainers of great men or locals, but to suitable young men of Rumi origin. The Porte required, moreover, that these positions be registered from the starting date, that no documents be given without registration, and that the recipients not receive salaries after the starting date of the *timars* (12-914, 12-915, 12-919).<sup>34</sup> It also appears that the Janissaries farmed the taxes, which led in time to such abuses that in 1604 they were ousted from treasury service in Aleppo and joined the factional fighting among the Janissaries in Damascus.<sup>35</sup> By that time the Janissaries were a very different corps from those who had originally gone to Syria after the conquest, and the empire was a different empire.

The Janissaries, like the *kethüdas* and messengers, were among those who stitched this far-flung empire together. Records in the *mühimmes* of Janissaries throughout the empire reveal that in this period they interacted with townspeople and peasants, sometimes married and sometimes lived in villages, and were victims of crime

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<sup>34</sup> For the later history of these Janissaries see Muhammad Adnan Bakhit, “Aleppo and the Ottoman Military in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century: Two Case Studies,” *al-Abhath* 27 (1978/79): 27-38; Bakhit, *Ottoman Province of Damascus*, 107.

<sup>35</sup> Bakhit, *Ottoman Province of Damascus*, 107, 169.

more often than perpetrators.<sup>36</sup> They represented far more about the empire than its power; they loved, they fought, they had personal relationships with slaves or with men from other military groups. As officers they participated in cultural events such as poetry parties, while their men drank in taverns. They seeded their own cultures—that of their birth society in the Balkans or Anatolia and that of Istanbul and the palace—into their places of assignment in the province of Damascus. They were widely imitated; there was a special crime called “pretending to be a Janissary” (*saplamak*). They also provided protection on the frontiers, in the cities, to traveling caravans and transmitted funds, or wherever in the province they were posted. The Janissaries were one of the elements—for better or worse—that made the empire real to its inhabitants throughout the province of Şam.

### Damascus, Hinge of Istanbul’s Policy in Yemen and Cyprus

Central to the Ottoman campaign of 1568 to put down a rebellion in Yemen were the military forces of Damascus. Istanbul made Egypt the staging ground for launching the action, but drew much of the manpower, including its commander, from Syria. Although the Arab provinces were administratively separate, the Ottomans clearly saw the former Mamluk Empire as in some ways still a unit. The Porte appointed Damascus governor Lala Mustafa Paşa as the expedition’s head and posted him at the end of December 1567 to Egypt to assemble the forces there, accompanied by timariots and by Janissaries of Damascus whose wages came from the Damascus and Aleppo treasuries (7-593).<sup>37</sup> Istanbul then appointed

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36 Linda T. Darling, “Crime among the Janissaries in the Ottoman Golden Age,” in *A Historian of Ottoman War, Peace, and Empire: A Festschrift in Honor of Virginia Aksan*, ed. Frank Castiglione (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

37 For details of the intrigues around Lala Mustafa Paşa’s appointment and dismissal, see Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli (1541-1600)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 47-54. The Yemen campaign is detailed in Şerafettin Turan, “Lala Mustafa Paşa Hakkında Notlar ve Vesikalar,” *Bellekten* 22 (1958): 551-93. Blackburn’s studies of Ottoman Yemen do not include the preparations

the governor of Karaman as the new governor of Damascus and told him to bring a group of Janissaries of Karaman to replace those of Damascus who had gone on campaign with the former governor (7-602). An order two weeks later commanded Lala Mustafa Paşa to embark for Yemen and specified that the number of Janissaries going on campaign from Damascus was 2,500, together with massive amounts of stores and gunpowder (7-695). Three months later, the Porte authorized the recruitment of 1,000 additional archers from Şam, to be recruited by the new governor of Damascus and sent whenever Lala Mustafa Paşa asked for them. Mustafa Paşa must have immediately sent a second request, because an entry two weeks later stated that he was requesting not 1,000 but 3,000 more men, of whom 1,500 had already been enrolled and the other 1,500 were to be drafted by the *kadı*s of the province (7-1256). This order authorized Mustafa Paşa to allocate *timars* and Janissary salaries as appropriate, and he asked for the *timar* registers to be sent to him (7-1174).

Lala Mustafa Paşa's request for the registers seems to have created a number of problems in Damascus, allowing soldiers to evade their duties because their assignments could not be checked. An order to the governor of Damascus described how, when Mustafa Paşa in Cairo wanted someone for a job, he was told, "He must be with the *sipahis* and Janissaries who remained in Şam," while when the soldiers of Şam in Damascus were appointed to some service they replied, "We are assigned to Yemen" (7-2015). In this order Istanbul reiterated the importance of filling the *gediks* ("slots" or positions) of the Janissaries who had embarked for Yemen. The Janissary *ağa* was in Şam, and he was well aware of who had gone and who had remained, who had died and who was still available. The order commanded the governor, in consultation with the *ağa*, to fill the vacant places with *kuls* who were there, no matter whose retinue they belonged to, or with sons and brothers of Janissaries. If there were not enough in the province, he should not enlist local people but should petition to the Porte for reinforcements.

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in Syria for this campaign; e.g., J. Richard Blackburn, "The Collapse of Ottoman Authority in Yemen," *Die Welt des Islams* 19 (1979): 119-76.

A month later, a *mühimme* entry noted that out of 500 Janissaries ordered to go to Egypt, only 330 had arrived. Istanbul ordered the governor of Damascus to find out why and to send the missing number plus 100 more. He should report to Istanbul how many Janissaries were left in Şam, and if less than 500, petition for an order to recruit (7-2251). The Porte also noted that instead of enrolling archers, the *alaybeys* had collected a substitute price in cash, and ordered them to give the money back (7-2026).<sup>38</sup> Another order expressed concern that 500 archers would not be enough and commanded the governor of Damascus to recruit sons and brothers of Janissaries as well as anyone capable of shooting a gun, as 5,000 firearms were being sent to Egypt. The Porte also ordered the governor of Egypt to recruit more soldiers, and if he could not find enough in Cairo, to request more men from Istanbul (7-2100). In August 1568 the Porte replaced Lala Mustafa Paşa as commander of the Yemen expedition with his rival Koca Sinan Paşa (7-1913). Sinan received renewed orders to recruit enough soldiers for the campaign from the troops of Egypt and Şam (7-2356).

This depletion of the soldiers of Damascus was sorely felt when the Cyprus campaign opened less than two years later. The Janissaries of Damascus and Aleppo were ordered to Cyprus in 1570, along with much of Syria's military force and a shipment of archers and gunpowder (12-c.60).<sup>39</sup> Once again, Lala Mustafa Paşa was in command of the army of conquest (12-16). A long series of orders records the amassing of men and materiel from all corners of the empire, and especially from various locations in Syria (12-32, 33, 35, 36, 39, 40, 41, 42, 46, 47, 48, 51, 55, 67, 68, 69, 72, 153, 187, 188,

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<sup>38</sup> According to Bakhit, the initiative for these payments came from the population, but it was doubtless being called on for military service for the first time in centuries; see Bakhit, *Ottoman Province of Damascus*, 102.

<sup>39</sup> Bakhit, *Ottoman Province of Damascus*, 102-3; Turan, "Lala Mustafa Paşa," 574-81; Eftihios Gavriel, "The Expedition for the Conquest of Cyprus in the Work of Kâtib Çelebi," in *Ottoman Cyprus: A Collection of Studies on History and Culture*, ed. Michalis N. Michael, Matthias Kappler and Eftihios Gavriel (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 25-36, at 32.

194, etc.). At the same time, the Janissaries of the Porte stationed in Egypt were also ordered to Cyprus, and 3,000 Janissaries of Egypt and/or newly enrolled men were ordered to Yemen as a garrison (12-c.54, 12-73). On top of these demands came the annual pilgrimage, for which Janissary guards from Damascus were necessary (12-78). Soon afterward, more archers and volunteers from Damascus were enlisted for Cyprus (12-195). These obligations drained the supply of soldiers in Syria, even with recruitment from segments of the local population.

Difficulties in recruiting enough soldiers for the army of conquest led its commander to begin offering incentives. In May of 1571 the governor of Damascus complained that recently 200 Janissaries had been ordered to Cyprus, but 50 more had gone to seek their fortunes there after a proclamation arrived from Cyprus that anyone who came to fight would receive land or salary increases. When 100 Janissaries were sent to Baalbek to quell a rebellion, 30 of them failed to arrive because they went off to Cyprus as well. At last the Porte commanded that soldiers who went to Cyprus without orders would not receive anything, because they left the province empty of defense and Bedouin Arab rebels rose up with impunity (12-508, 12-509). Even so, the governor reported that by this time the count of Janissaries of Damascus was down by 150-200 men. He had been ordered to fill the vacancies with brothers of Janissaries from the unit by that name at the Porte. But, he responded, it would be better to recruit local men of Rumi extraction who had frequently volunteered and were experienced in the ways of the area's rebels and tribes, and that when promised Janissary *gediks* they would be steadfast and loyal. Many of the Damascus Janissaries were in service in Cyprus, others were in Yemen, some were attached to the Aleppo treasury, and some had grown old in tax collection and conveyance. He therefore requested that he be permitted to recruit locally, as was formerly allowed (see 7-2100, 7-2356, 7-2621 above). The center granted permission only to recruit Janissaries in private service, Janissaries living outside the barracks and garrisons, and local Rumis up to a number of ten beyond the Janissaries sent from the Porte (12-597).



In these orders Istanbul appears as the imperial chess player, moving its pieces around on the board and deploying its forces to achieve its purposes. Not yet trusting the recently-conquered Arabs, the Porte turned for its military needs to the men recruited and trained in its well-established *timar* and Janissary systems. Some of the orders suggest, however, that the chess pieces of the metaphor were not inert but had minds and wills of their own. Istanbul's control over its agents was imperfect; in pursuit of their own agendas or constrained by forces beyond their control, the agents sometimes failed to carry out the orders of the Porte. Istanbul could only reiterate the orders, accompanied by direr threats and occasionally followed by punishment.

Despite all of its top-down absolutist ideology, an empire was really a structure held together by persuasion and affinity. Since the exertion of real force over such a wide area was as fallible as even this brief examination of the *timar* and Janissary systems has shown it to be, the Porte was dependent for the accomplishment of its purposes on incentives and rewards, punishments for disobedience, and the ties forged among the men of its cadres and units and between them and their commanders and overlords. The Ottoman training system for its elites must be judged remarkably successful in creating those affinities and linking their bearers to each other and to the throne to an extent that successfully perpetuated the dynasty's rule.

### Conclusion

In the end, the only thing Istanbul was able to control, in any real sense, was its own people, and that control was dubious at times. It sent those people out into the far corners of the empire in the hope that they would be able to control the inhabitants there. Only for a while were they successful in controlling even the men that Istanbul sent with them. Within just a few decades, we can see people from the center localizing themselves in the province, striking out for their own benefit, and engaging in competition and factionalism. They were interconnected with other provincial groups, but not at this point strongly enough to create separate provincial interest groups

or factions; instead they belonged to those created by great men of state at the capital. Their own passages to and fro, their disseminations of news and transfers of culture, would eventually contribute to making provincial politics possible, but not yet.

Istanbul utilized the province of Şam as a seemingly limitless reservoir of men to be assigned to its various military endeavors to the south. Syria was a key province with a large garrison, and its governors were important men. Although it had been a frontier province of the Mamluks, under the Ottomans it gained a more central position as a staging ground for more distant efforts. Istanbul wanted to control its resources of men and money, but there were definitely moments when it had to negotiate and conciliate. At the same time, it did not treat Syria independently from the other provinces of the empire, sending Janissaries and other resources from one province to another at need. (It would also be interesting to learn who gained the *timars* held by the Syrian timariots killed in Yemen, Cyprus, Lepanto, and the war with Iran.) Imperial rule, then, was not solely a matter of a top-down vertical hierarchy. The flow went both ways and always had a bottom-up element.<sup>40</sup> There were also lateral flows, province to province. All these complicate the superficial picture of the capital of the empire issuing orders to its subordinate officials in the boondocks. Equally, they make it impossible to treat the province as an isolated entity unconnected to the rest of the empire. Contributions to Syria's population, economy, and culture came not only from the Arab provinces, but also from others, especially from Istanbul and eastern Anatolia.

At the same time, Damascus was clearly a tool in the hand of Istanbul, a proxy for its aspirations in the south, much as Hungary/Budin was to the west and Erzurum to the east. All three of these important defensive and offensive hubs were in large, relatively unproductive areas on the way to more rewarding goals. Did the Ottomans conquer Hungary simply to eliminate an obstacle on the path to Rome or Vienna, given that the province was not valuable in itself and always cost far more to protect than any revenue it

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<sup>40</sup> Challenging the idea of sultanic absolutism has become the standard approach of specialists; see Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire*.

could produce?<sup>41</sup> Did the conquest of Anatolia amount to swallowing a lot of unproductive territory in order to bridge the gap to the silk-producing region of Iran? Certainly the occupation of Syria was only a stage in the conquest of Egypt. Egypt provided an enormous boost to Istanbul's economy and advanced its intellectual and religious life. The prizes of Vienna (or Rome) and Gilan/Mazandaran, however, remained just out of reach. Could it be that one reason for the Ottomans' diminishing success in the early modern period was not precisely that they failed to obtain these rich prizes, but rather, that the distances over which they had to acquire and govern relatively infertile, underpopulated, and contentious territory before they came into reach of the really lucrative conquests were just too great? Counted in the costs of conquest must be the protection and governance of the intervening provinces, however problematic or unprofitable they might prove to be. Had the Middle East been configured differently, with the prize regions adjacent to the Ottomans' core areas, how different would their history have been?

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41 According to Hans Georg Majer (personal communication), Hungary's contribution to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, whose capital was immediately adjacent, was much greater and allowed Austria to become a major power in the eighteenth century; the comparison is worth studying in detail.