

From Bajo to Sokullu Mehmed Pasha: An Analysis of a Devshirme's Networks^{*}

Beytullah Mısır

Abstract: Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's life, which began in a village near Višegrad, culminated in the highest position attainable by someone outside the Ottoman dynasty. Rooted in the gulâm tradition, the devshirme system transformed Bajo into Sokullu Mehmed Pasha, integrating him into the core structures of the state and providing the foundation for his rise as a statesman. While he was not the only prominent figure produced by this system, he possessed distinctive qualities that set him apart from other devshirmes. Among these, his uninterrupted fourteen-year tenure as grand vizier under three sultans -Suleiman the Magnificent, Selim II, and Murad III- stands out as particularly remarkable. This achievement cannot be attributed to a single factor; in addition to his personal abilities, the networks of relationships he cultivated and the experience he gained significantly contributed to his own advancement as well as that of his family. In this article analyze his interactions with various institutions and social groups in samples. The findings indicate that these networks were neither superficial nor incidental; they played a decisive role in

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✉ Dr., Marmara University, Istanbul - Türkiye, misirbeytullah@gmail.com

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3575-0018>

ROR <https://ror.org/02kswqa67>

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his ascent to the office of grand vizier, his stable maintenance of authority, and his effectiveness in action. Nevertheless, his success extended beyond these relationships, as his historical record demonstrates his capability as a crisis manager and a farsighted, stable statesman. Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's enduring legacy rests not only on his political position and personal talents but also on his charitable foundations and his engagement with scholarly and literary circles.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, Devshirme System, Grand Vizier, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha

Introduction

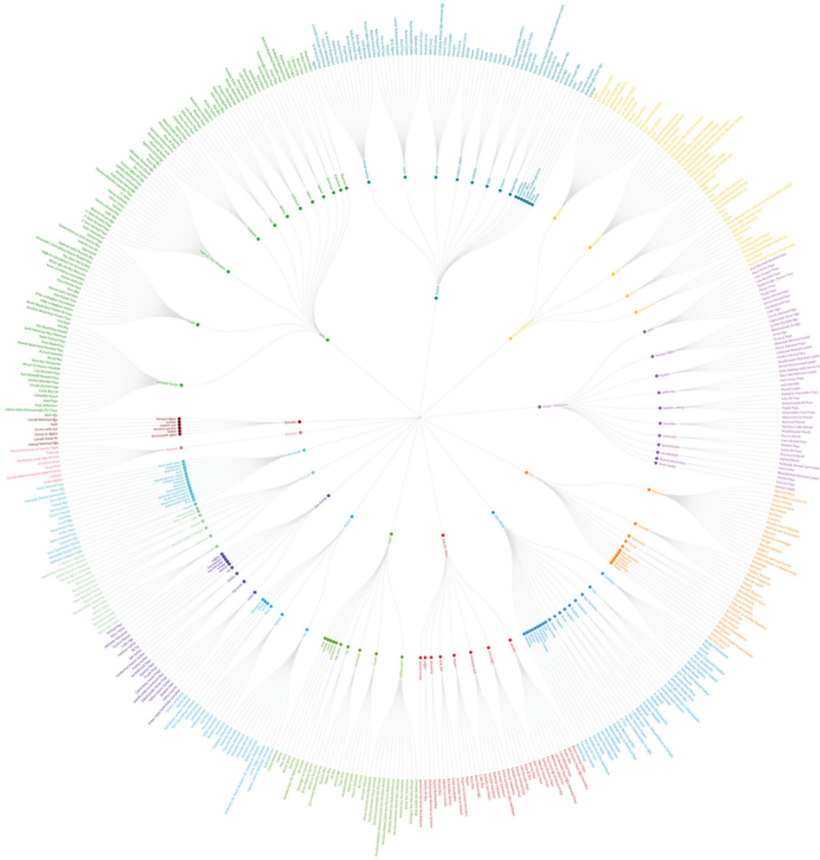
Among the two hundred and fifteen individuals who served as Grand Vizier in the Ottoman Empire, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha (d. 1579) occupies a distinctive position. His life, which began as a Christian boy in the village of Sokolovići, ultimately culminated at the highest office attainable by anyone outside the Ottoman dynasty. Born under the name Bajo in the village of Sokolovići near Višegrad, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha was recruited through the Ottoman *devshirme* system and went on to hold a series of prominent positions within the imperial administration. Following his education in the Enderun, he served in various capacities at the imperial court before being appointed *Kapudan Pasha*. After serving as *Beylerbeyi* of Rumelia and attaining the rank of vizier, he was elevated to the grand vizierate, becoming one of the most distinguished statesmen produced by the *devshirme* system.

Sokullu Mehmed Pasha served continuously as Grand Vizier for fourteen years during the reigns of Süleyman I (d. 1566), Selim II (d. 1574), and Murad III (d. 1595), an unprecedented tenure in Ottoman history. In addition to his personal abilities, several factors contributed to his political ascendancy, including his effective management of the succession crisis at Szigetvár following the death of Süleyman I, his marital alliance with the Ottoman dynasty, and the personal disposition of the reigning sultan. Consequently, throughout the eight-year reign of Selim II, he occupied an exceptionally influential position within the imperial decision-making apparatus. During the reign of Murad III, however, the changing dynamics of political authority and the emergence of new factions gradually eroded his influence, ultimately culminating in his assassination.

The emergence of such an eminent historical figure as Sokullu Mehmed Pasha cannot be attributed solely to the historical context in which he lived or to his individual talents. Throughout Islamic history, institutions and administrative structures generally functioned in close interaction with one another. In this regard, upward social and political mobility—from the lower strata of society to the highest levels of state administration—was a recurring phenomenon across many periods of Islamic history, notwithstanding certain exceptions. This pattern, which manifested itself particularly through the *gulām* system in the Turkic-Islamic states, acquired a distinctive and more institutionalized form in the Ottoman Empire through the *devshirme* system. Sokullu Mehmed Pasha emerged from this system. Nevertheless, the *devshirme* institution and the way of life it entailed profoundly shaped the course of his life.

One of the most effective ways to understand an individual's life, ideas, actions, career, and social environment is through the analysis of their networks of relationships. Network analysis not only provides valuable insights into an individual's social world but also contributes to a broader understanding of the historical context in which that individual operated. From this perspective, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha possessed an exceptionally extensive and diverse network of relationships. His life, which began as a member of the Sokullu family in Višegrad, assumed an entirely different trajectory after his recruitment by Yeşilce Mehmed Bey through the *devshirme* system. Over time, he established influential connections spanning a broad spectrum of Ottoman society, ranging from sultans and slaves to ambassadors, *sufis*, members of the *Dīvān-ı Hümāyūn*, and poets. Demonstrating remarkable skill in cultivating and maintaining such relationships, the Grand Vizier consolidated his political authority over an extended period. These networks, however, were not artificial constructs; rather, they developed organically through the natural course of his personal and political life.

Figure 1. *The Relationship Networks of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha*



Source: (MısıR, 2026, p. 270)

As shown in the graph above, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's contacts with approximately five hundred individuals from different social classes have been identified. However, examining all of these relationships is not the subject of this article. This article is derived from the author's PhD dissertation (MısıR, 2026). It has been revised, condensed, and reorganized to meet the scope and requirements of a journal article. The article presents the principal findings of the dissertation in a more concise and focused form, highlighting the depth and diversity of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's relationship networks. It highlights how

these networks evolved throughout his lifetime. Through this approach, the study demonstrates, using the example of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha, how the social relationships of a devshirme evolved, expanded, and transformed throughout the different stages of his life. His social network was both multidimensional and organically formed over time. Viewed from this perspective, it becomes evident that he possessed an extensive network of affiliations whose scope was far from being confined to a single social or political circle. Rather, his relationships encompassed a broad spectrum of Ottoman society, ranging from slaves and sultans to family members, diplomats, and numerous other actors. To illustrate this diversity more clearly, the article examines representative examples drawn from Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's social networks. It argues that these connections were neither random nor homogeneous; instead, their multidimensional nature played a decisive role in both his political ascent and his ability to preserve the office of grand vizier over an extended period.

Methodology

Social Network Analysis (SNA) has been defined as “an approach that seeks to reveal the social relationships among individuals and groups, the structure of these relationships, and their effects on social behavior, attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge” (Abacı, 2013, pp. 33–35). This methodological approach facilitates an understanding of the structures that emerge through interpersonal interactions and the various influences shaping them (Ağcasulu, 2018, p. 1916). Although the foundations of SNA were laid earlier, it began to be employed systematically within the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, and psychology during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rapid development of computer technologies subsequently led to the creation of analytical tools that significantly enhanced both the application and effectiveness of this method. As a result, Social Network Analysis has evolved into an interdisciplinary research methodology. Today, it is employed across a wide range of fields, including the study of disease transmission, product distribution and marketing, friendship networks, the diffusion of ideas and concepts, and even the transmission networks of *hadith* narrators (Abacı, 2013, pp. 36–37; Ünlü, 2020, pp. 5–6). Its

application to historical research became established after the mid-1970s. While initially implemented in studies concerning newspapers, journals, and provincial associations, Social Network Analysis has only more recently begun to be applied to Ottoman history (Abacı, 2013, pp. 39–40; Ünlü, 2020, pp. 5–6).

Within the field of historical research, Social Network Analysis constitutes an effective methodological framework for interpreting interpersonal relationships and understanding historical processes. Indeed, relationships among individuals frequently influenced institutional developments as well as broader political and diplomatic interactions. The capacity of this method to map relationships provides historians with a valuable means of visualizing and interpreting complex social structures. Identifying the configuration and intensity of interpersonal ties, as well as recognizing central actors and loci of power, contributes significantly to a deeper understanding of a given historical period. Furthermore, when applied to long-term relationships, Social Network Analysis reveals the transformation of social connections over time. The present study adopts an ego network approach by placing Sokullu Mehmed Pasha at the center of the analysis and examining both the individuals connected to him and the nature of these relationships (Ağcasulu, 2018, p. 1917; Gürsakal, 2018, p. 21). In doing so, it employs a qualitative methodology, as qualitative data allow for a more nuanced interpretation of the meaning, character, and dynamics of interpersonal relationships (Demircioğlu, 2022, pp. 289–290).

Family

Family of Origin

Sokullu Mehmed Pasha was not the first member of the Sokullu family to be recruited through the *devshirme* system. Hüsrev Pasha (d. 1544), known by the sobriquets Dîvâne or Deli, who was born before 1495, was the first member of the Sokullu family to be recruited by the Ottoman administration and to rise to the highest ranks of state service. Although Deli Hüsrev Pasha belonged to the same family, two different views exist regarding his precise relationship with

Sokullu Mehmed Pasha (d. 1580). According to the first, he was Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's cousin, being the brother of Lala Mustafa Pasha. The second simply states that the two were relatives, without specifying the exact degree of kinship. Regardless of which interpretation is accepted, it is evident that Deli Hüsrev Pasha belonging to the Sokullu family, was the first member of that family to enter the Ottoman administration through the *devshirme* system, and was related to Sokullu Mehmed Pasha. Although Deli Hüsrev Pasha later arranged for the recruitment of his brother Lala Mustafa Pasha, there is no evidence of his direct involvement in Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's recruitment. Nevertheless, his status as the first member of the Sokullu family to enter Ottoman service through the *devshirme* system is significant. This demonstrates that the Sokullu family was by no means unfamiliar with the institution of *devshirme*; rather, both the family and the village had already experienced and become acquainted with the system before Sokullu Mehmed Pasha himself was recruited (Özcan, 1999, p. 40; Gelibolulu Mustafa Âli, 2019, p. 611; Danişmend, 1971, vol. 2, pp. 247, 310; Samarcic, 1995, pp. 3–4, 9; Zararsız, 2021, pp. 323–324; Peçevî, 1981, p. 23; Lütü Paşa, 2001, p. 300).

During the reign of Süleyman I, Yeşilce Mehmed Bey was dispatched to Bosnia to recruit capable boys from distinguished families to the *devshirme* system. Indeed, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha is reported to have claimed that he was descended from the Serbian despots (Samarcic, 1995, pp. 81, 200). When Yeşilce Mehmed Bey arrived at the village of Sokolovići on the banks of the Lim River, he recognized the exceptional potential of the young Bajo (Bajica) and decided to recruit him. According to the study conducted by Yılmaz, the average age of boys recruited between 1493 and 1502 was approximately 13.5 years, while the average had risen to 16.6 years by 1604–1605 (Yılmaz, 2021, pp. 249–250). Although Bajo, who was approximately sixteen to eighteen years old, was relatively older than the typical *devshirme*, it appears that Yeşilce Mehmed Bey was persuaded by his exceptional abilities and therefore selected him despite his age. The chronology also appears consistent when considered alongside the population survey conducted in Bosnia in 1519–1520 and the Ottoman campaign against Hungary in 1521. Furthermore, in 1576 Sokullu Mehmed

Pasha reportedly told the Venetian ambassador Marc-Antonio Tiepolo that he had been eighteen years old when recruited and had sung hymns during church services prior to his removal from his family (Samarctic, 1995, pp. 8–10).

Initially, Bajo's family resisted surrendering their son and even concealed him from the Ottoman officials. His maternal uncle reportedly attempted to bribe Yeşilce Mehmed Bey in an effort to prevent Bajo's recruitment. Yeşilce Mehmed Bey, however, appears to have been highly experienced in carrying out his duties. Explaining persuasively that boys recruited to the *devshirme* system could eventually attain high office and bring honor and benefit to their families, he ultimately convinced them that resistance was futile. Consequently, Bajo was brought out of hiding and entrusted to the Ottoman official (Nahîfî Mehmed Efendi, 2019, pp. 46, 145, 449; Samarctic, 1995, pp. 8–10).

Together with forty other boys selected for recruitment, Bajo was escorted under official supervision to Edirne, where they were presented before Sultan Süleyman I. After receiving preliminary training at the Edirne Palace, Mehmed—who would later become known by the epithets Tavil, Sokullu, and Şehid—was transferred to the Enderun Palace School within Topkapı Palace (Nahîfî Mehmed Efendi, 2019, pp. 46–47). Following the completion of his education, he successively served as *rikâbdar*, *çuhadar*, *silâhdar*, *çaşnigîrbaşı*, and *kapıcıbaşı*. In these positions, he held the stirrup of the sultan's horse, became responsible the ruler's garments, weapons, and meals, and served as chief gatekeeper. His administrative career subsequently continued with appointments as *Kapudan Pasha*, *Beylerbeyi* of Rumelia, vizier, and ultimately Grand Vizier. Throughout these successive stages of his career during the reign of Süleyman I, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha remained in close proximity to the sultan, owing to the responsibilities entrusted to him.

Regardless of whether the claim that he originated from a noble lineage is accepted, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha undoubtedly elevated the social standing of the Sokullu family. While serving as *silâhdar*, he summoned Ahmed Bey, who

was responsible for collecting the Bosnian tribute, and ask him to bring his family to Istanbul. Equally significant is the absence of any negative reaction to a *devshirme*-born statesman bringing his relatives to the imperial capital after attaining high office. This circumstance invites a reconsideration of the commonly held assumption that the *devshirme* system completely severed familial ties. Although Sokullu Mehmed Pasha appears to have had no contact with his family during his years of education, he later arranged for them to join him in Istanbul. Moreover, after presenting his newly arrived brothers before Sultan Süleyman I, he secured the sultan's approval for their admission to the *Galata Sarayı* (Nahîfî Mehmed Efendi, 2019, p. 48). Had such an action been prohibited by law or regarded as contrary to established Ottoman practice, it would undoubtedly have resulted in sanctions. Instead, the sultan explicitly approved the arrangement and issued favorable instructions concerning their education.

When Ahmed Bey travelled to the village of Sokolovići to carry out Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's request, Sokullu's mother declined the invitation to relocate to Istanbul. Consequently, his father departed for the capital accompanied by Sokullu's middle brother and, in place of his youngest son, Sokullu's paternal cousin. His mother remained in Bosnia with the youngest brother. Thus, the cousin effectively assumed the place of Sokullu's youngest brother and was introduced to him as though he were his own sibling (Zararsız, 2021, p. 325). After arriving in Istanbul, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's father, whose original name was Dimitrije, converted to Islam and adopted the name Cemaleddin Sinan. In the years that followed, he was granted land and appointed as the administrator (*mutawalli*) of one of the pious foundations (*waqfs*) established by Sokullu Mehmed Pasha in Bosnia. Following his death, Sokullu endowed an *imaret* in his native village and stipulated in its endowment deed that five individuals capable of reciting the Qur'an should each receive a daily wage of two *akçes* in return for reciting five *juz'* of the Qur'an every day and dedicating the spiritual reward to the soul of his father, Sinan Bey. Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's mother also came to Istanbul after her husband, embraced Islam, and was buried in accordance with Islamic rites (Veinstein, 2012, p. 1; Danişmend, 1971, vol. 2, p. 335; Samarcic,

1995, pp. 22, 389; Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü, 2016, vol. 4, pp. 1751, 1791). Viewed from this perspective, the family not only Islamization but also embraced and practiced religion in accordance with Ottoman interpretations and expressions of Islamic belief.

The exact number of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's siblings remains uncertain. Although some sources suggest that he had between two and four siblings, the available evidence most convincingly indicates that he had two brothers and one sister (Dakić, 2012, p. 36; Ahmed Refik, 2017, p. 7). These were his younger brother, who initially remained with their mother; another brother who travelled to Istanbul with their father; and his sister, Şemsa. The middle brother who accompanied Cemaleddin Sinan to Istanbul was named Mustafa. By order of Sultan Süleyman I, he began his education at the Galata Palace School but died before completing his studies. Subsequently, the name Mustafa was given to the individual whom Sokullu believed to be his younger brother but who was, in reality, his paternal cousin and would later become known as Sokullu Mustafa Pasha (d. 1578). Sokullu Mehmed Pasha also arranged for the younger brother who had remained in Bosnia with their mother to be brought to Istanbul and enrolled in the İbrahim Pasha Palace for his education. Like his elder brother, however, he died at a young age (Ahmed Refik, 2017, pp. 11–12; Samarcic, 1995, p. 23). According to Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's endowment deed, this brother's name was İbrahim. The deed further stipulates that, of the thirty *juz*' of the Qur'an to be recited in the mosque each morning after the dawn prayer, ten *juz*' were to be dedicated to the souls of his brothers Mustafa and İbrahim, who were buried in Kasımpaşa, as well as to their descendants (Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü, 2016, vol. 4, p. 1783).

Sokullu Mehmed Pasha eventually learned that Sokullu Mustafa Pasha was not his biological brother but rather his paternal cousin. He confronted him about why this fact had never been disclosed. At the conclusion of their conversation, Sokullu assured his cousin that he had always regarded him as a brother and that he would continue to protect and support him (Ahmed Refik, 2017, pp. 12–14). Subsequently, Sokullu Mustafa Pasha visited his native region and, taking

advantage of his official duty of collecting the *jizya* tax, invited his relatives to embrace Islam. They accepted his invitation and converted. Much like Sokullu Mehmed Pasha himself, Sokullu Mustafa Pasha's preservation of his familial origins and his efforts to facilitate the Islamization of his relatives are significant for understanding how the *devshirme* experience and familial identity effect to shape the Sokullu family across generations (Nahîfî, 2019, p. 50; Ahmed Refik, 2017, pp. 25–26, 144–145).

Sokullu Mustafa Pasha was one of the individuals serving within Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's household and among those in whom he placed the greatest confidence. Sokullu played a decisive role both in his recruitment to the *devshirme* system and in his subsequent advancement to prominent offices, most notably the governorship of Budin. Indeed, Sokullu Mustafa Pasha served as *Beylerbeyi* of Budin for approximately thirteen years, during which he defended and expanded the Ottoman frontier through military campaigns, participated in major expeditions, played a significant role in diplomatic relations with Austria, promoted commerce within the province, protected merchants, and made substantial contributions to the urban development of Budin (Peçevî, 1982, pp. 23–24; Özçelik, 2020, p. 15; Cezar, 2011, pp. 1164, 1201; Altaylı, 2009, p. 157; Feridun Ahmed Bey, 2012, p. 256). Their relationship was reciprocal. Sokullu Mustafa Pasha reportedly celebrated Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's appointment as Grand Vizier by distributing alms and sacrificing animals in thanksgiving. Furthermore, several pieces of advice offered by Sokullu Mehmed Pasha to Mustafa Pasha while serving first as Second Vizier and later as Grand Vizier have been preserved. These may also be interpreted as an instance of the transmission of experience and political wisdom within the family (Nahîfî, 2019, p. 62).

Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's sister was named Şemsa. Şemsa Hatun is chiefly known for the bridge she commissioned in Banja Luka and for her marriage to Sinan Bey Boljanić (d. 1582). Having served as *sanjak-bey* of Herzegovina between 1563 and 1567, Sinan Bey Boljanić enjoyed the patronage of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha. By marrying Sokullu's sister, he became the Grand Vizier's

brother-in-law and went on to establish one of the wealthiest *waqf* foundations in the Balkans. Through the construction of mosques, bridges, and madrasas, he contributed significantly to the architectural and charitable development of the region, much like other members of the Sokullu family. The mosque at Čajniče, in particular, acquired considerable symbolic significance. It was destroyed by Serbian forces in 1992, later reconstructed by the Turkish General Directorate of Foundations, and reopened for worship in 2024. The graves of Sinan Bey, Sokullu's sister Şemsa Hatun, and their descendants are located adjacent to the mosque (Korić, 2015, pp. 413–414; Kiel, 2009, p. 580; Dakić, 2012, p. 60; Dakić, 2018, p. 140; Korić, 2017, p. 70; Kapic & Özdemir, 2024; Özdemir, 2024; Balkan News, 2024b).

Nor was Sinan Pasha Boljanić the only member of the family to engage in charitable construction. His brother, Hüseyin Pasha Boljanić, also founded numerous *imarets* (Korić, 2015, p. 413). Better known as Bodur Hüseyin Pasha, he was recruited into the *devshirme* system at a young age and admitted to the *Enderun* through the patronage of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha, a privilege made possible by their kinship. During his career, he served successively as *sanjak-bey* of Herzegovina and as *Beylerbeyi* of Bosnia, Budin, Diyarbakır, Egypt, Baghdad, Anatolia, and Damascus, eventually attaining the rank of vizier. He also established several charitable foundations in Taşlıca (Keleş & Can, 2018, p. 1291; Mehmed Süreyya, 1996, p. 719).

Among the most prominent figures to emerge from the Sokullu family was Lala Mustafa Pasha. He was the younger brother of Deli Hüsrev Pasha—the first member of the Sokullu family to be recruited through the *devshirme* system and to attain the rank of vizier—and the paternal cousin of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha. Although Lala Mustafa Pasha and Sokullu Mehmed Pasha shared many common experiences, the nature of their relationship appears to have been complex and, at times, ambiguous. These two distinguished cousins lived during the same period, served under the same sultans, and both rose to the highest echelons of the Ottoman administration. Nevertheless, between Deli Hüsrev Pasha and Sokullu Mehmed Pasha the close familial bond one might expect is not readily

discernible at the outset. Rather, the available evidence suggests that their relationship evolved considerably over time.

Several scholars have argued that Sokullu Mehmed Pasha and Lala Mustafa Pasha regarded one another as political rivals and that many of their actions should be interpreted within the context of this rivalry. Thus, despite their kinship, they simultaneously viewed each other as competitors for influence within the Ottoman political elite (Danişmend, 1972, vol. 3, pp. 18, 264). It has been suggested that Sokullu Mehmed Pasha deliberately appointed Lala Mustafa Pasha as *serdar* (commander-in-chief) in order to remove him from the imperial center, fearing that a successful military campaign might strengthen his prospects for the grand vizierate (Lamartine, 1991, pp. 507–508, 526; Afyoncu, 2014, p. 214). When Selim II ascended the throne, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha, who had become the sultan's son-in-law, appointed Lala Mustafa Pasha—formerly the prince's tutor (*lala*)—as commander of the Yemen campaign, thereby seeking to distance him from the capital. During the preparations, however, Lala Mustafa Pasha was removed from this command following the intervention of influential advisers, and Koca Sinan Pasha was appointed in his place (Gelibolulu Mustafa Âli, 2019, pp. 857, 899; Hasanbeyzâde, vol. 2, p. 228; Kütükoğlu, 2003a, p. 73; Uzunçarşılı, 1988, vol. 3, pp. 28, 41). According to Mustafa Âli's well-known characterization, Sokullu sought to «kill two birds with one stone» by setting Koca Sinan Pasha and Lala Mustafa Pasha against one another (Demir, 2016, p. 46; Zararsız, 2021, p. 335). Contemporary Western sources portrayed the relationship in even stronger terms. According to Stephan Gerlach, Lala Mustafa Pasha was Sokullu's mortal enemy, while the Venetian *bailo* Antonio Tiepolo, in his report of 1576, described the capable Lala Mustafa Pasha as Sokullu's most dangerous rival among the viziers because of the special favor he enjoyed from the sultan (Gerlach, 2007, p. 252; Demir, 2016, p. 36; Samarcic, 1995, p. 304).

The relationship between Sokullu Mehmed Pasha and Lala Mustafa Pasha clearly demonstrates that kinship was not the sole determinant of interpersonal relations within the Ottoman ruling elite. Alongside the evidence of rivalry

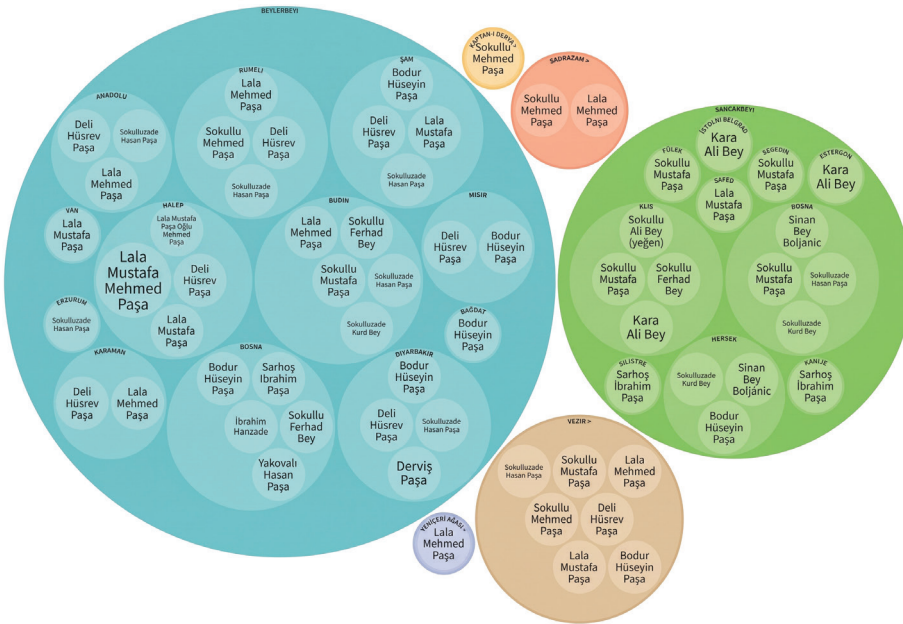
discussed above, there are also numerous indications of cooperation and mutual support. Consequently, it may be argued that what initially appears to have been a predominantly antagonistic relationship gradually evolved into a more constructive and collaborative one. The improvement in their relations became particularly evident after Lala Mustafa Pasha attained the rank of vizier. Upon his return to Istanbul, he strengthened his political position against Koca Sinan Pasha (d. 1596) with the support of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha. Indeed, some sources suggest that Sokullu came to regret his earlier support for Sinan Pasha and subsequently formed an alliance with Lala Mustafa Pasha (Kütükoğlu, 2003a, pp. 73–74; Demir, 2016, p. 102). Fleischer likewise argues that, because of Selim II's deep affection for Lala Mustafa Pasha, Sokullu deliberately cultivated amicable relations with him, while Lala Mustafa Pasha, for his part, accepted Sokullu's preeminent political position and refrained from challenging his authority, thereby paving the way for a political accommodation between the two (Demir, 2016, pp. 34–35).

Sokullu Mehmed Pasha provided Lala Mustafa Pasha with all the necessary support during the Cyprus campaign, ensuring that logistical and strategic assistance was delivered in a timely manner. An often-cited episode illustrates the nature of this cooperation. When Lala Mustafa Pasha was to be invested with a *hil'at* in recognition of the conquest, he reportedly declared before the sultan: «*My glorious sovereign, although I carried out the conquest, these victories were achieved through the prudence and assistance of His Excellency the Grand Vizier. Therefore, it is only fitting that he should first be invested with the robe of honor.*» (Demir, 2016, p. 36). Similarly, following the great fire in Istanbul, when the sultan directed criticism toward Sokullu Mehmed Pasha, Lala Mustafa Pasha defended him by explaining that the densely built Jewish quarter and the strength of the wind had rendered extinguishing the fire exceedingly difficult, thereby accounting for the delay in bringing it under control (Demir, 2016, p. 35; Özçelik, 2020, p. 35).

Lala Mustafa Pasha died approximately ten months after Sokullu Mehmed Pasha. Like his cousin, he was buried in the vicinity of the Eyüp Sultan Mosque.

In a symbolic sense, two members of the Sokullu family who had been born in the same village of Sokolovići and had risen to the highest offices of the Ottoman Empire ultimately came to rest in the same sacred quarter of Istanbul.

Numerous other members of the Sokullu family also occupied important positions within the Ottoman administration, and many of them maintained direct personal or familial ties with Sokullu Mehmed Pasha. A comprehensive examination of each individual, however, lies beyond the scope of the present study. Nevertheless, while Sokullu Mehmed Pasha undoubtedly represented the family's most influential figure, an overview of the offices held by his relatives is sufficient to demonstrate the remarkable political prominence achieved by the family as a whole. Based on the available evidence, seventeen individuals who belonged to the Sokullu family either by blood or through marriage collectively occupied thirty-five major state offices. In compiling these figures, palace appointments such as *çaşnigîrbaşı* , *berberbaşı* , and *kapıcıbaşı* have intentionally been excluded. Among these seventeen individuals, ten served as *sanjak-beys*, fourteen as *beylerbeyis*, one as Agha of the Janissaries, one as *Kapudan Pasha* , seven attained the rank of vizier, and two ultimately became Grand Viziers. The accompanying table records the successive offices occupied by these individuals as they advanced through the Ottoman administrative hierarchy. Thus, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha appears separately under the offices of *Kapudan Pasha*, *beylerbeyi*, vizier, and Grand Vizier, while Sokullu Mustafa Pasha is listed under the ranks of *sanjak-bey*, *beylerbeyi*, and vizier. Although Sokullu Mustafa Pasha served as *sanjak-bey* in four different provinces, these appointments are counted as a single office for the purposes of this analysis. It should also be emphasized that the members of the Sokullu family discussed here do not constitute an exhaustive list. Undoubtedly, other relatives whose careers have not survived in the available sources or whose identities remain unknown also held positions within the Ottoman administrative system.

Figure 2. Offices Held by Seventeen Members of the Sokullu Family

Sources Used in Preparing Figure 2: (Afyoncu, 2009, pp. 354–357; Özcan, 1999, pp. 40–41; Kütükoğlu, 2003a, pp. 73–74; Peçevî, 1982, pp. 23–24; Afyoncu, 2009a, pp. 366–368; Şahin, 2020, pp. 252–253; Zararsız, 2021, pp. 321–354; Emecen, 2000, pp. 316–317; Samarcic, 1995, pp. 261–262; Sezer, 2022, pp. 352–379; Dakić, 2012, p. 140; Ak, 2003, pp. 71–73; Şahin, 2019, p. 268; Keleş & Can, 2018, pp. 1289–1296; Hammer, vol. 7, p. 29)

When the classical Ottoman chronicles are examined, particularly with respect to their assessments and criticisms of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha, the observations of Gelibolulu Mustafa Âli (d. 1600) and Peçevî (d. 1645) deserve special attention. The former was a contemporary of Sokullu, while the latter, writing in the following generation, was also related to the Sokullu family. Concerning Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's appointment of his relatives to high office, Gelibolulu Mustafa Âli states: “akraba ve taallukatını menasib-ı aliye nasb itdi. Lakin ekseri müstehakk-i riayet olmagla ol vaz-ı uluvvi himmetine haml olunup ma'zur tutuldu.” (Gelibolulu, 2019, p. 897). In other words, Gelibolulu acknowledged that although Sokullu promoted

members of his family and personal network, those individuals were generally considered competent and deserving of the positions they received.

Peçevî likewise describes Sokullu Mehmed Pasha as «just and equitable,» asserting that even his political adversaries «could find no fault in him other than elevating his own relatives and close associates to high office.» Accordingly, Sokullu was criticized for favoring «his own men» and for «depriving many deserving individuals of the positions to which they were entitled.» Nevertheless, Peçevî ultimately reaches a conclusion consistent with that of Gelibolulu Mustafa Âli, arguing that those appointed to public office were, in terms of both their personal abilities and the conditions of the period, genuinely qualified individuals who adequately fulfilled the responsibilities entrusted to them. Indeed, he maintains that even Sokullu's opponents would have acknowledged this fact (Peçevî, 1981, pp. 7, 308).

The Christian Branch of the Sokullu Family

Not all members of the Sokullu family embraced Islam. A branch of the family remained Christian and came to occupy an influential position within the Orthodox Christian communities of the Balkans. Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's maternal uncle, for example, was a priest renowned for both his learning and his wealth. Serving at the Mileševa Monastery, he took his nephew—who had previously worked as a shepherd—into the monastery under his supervision (Gökbilgin, 1957). When Yeşilce Mehmed Bey sought to recruit the young Bajo through the *devshirme* system, this uncle reportedly attempted to prevent his removal by offering the Ottoman official a bribe, an offer that was firmly rejected (Nahîfî, 2021, pp. 46, 146; Samarcic, 1995, p. 11).

One of the principal ways in which Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's relationship with his familial origins has been interpreted is through his connection with the re-establishment of the Serbian Patriarchate (Nazlar, 2017, p. 57). The central figure in this context was Makarije Sokolović, who has variously been identified as Sokullu's brother, cousin (Dakić, 2017, p. 138), or nephew (Gerlach, 2007, pp.

41–42). According to a note recorded by Stephan Gerlach on 27 November 1575, Makarije was the brother of the vizier responsible for restoring the Patriarchate. At a much later date, the chronicler of the Tronoša Monastery likewise described him as the brother of the contemporary Grand Vizier, whereas the Venetian diplomat Cavalli identified him as Mehmed Pasha's nephew. Makarije is portrayed as a physically imposing man who carried a mace, rode horses skillfully, and wore a distinctive «camel-hair coat» (Dakić, 2018, pp. 33–34).

There is no evidence that Makarije Sokolović visited Istanbul before the restoration of the Patriarchate. It has, however, been suggested that he later travelled to the imperial capital in connection with ecclesiastical ceremonies or matters relating to the Patriarchate and met with Sokullu Mehmed Pasha during these visits (Gerlach, 2007, pp. 553–555; Samarcic, 1995, pp. 75–76). By contrast, the frequently repeated claim that whenever Makarije came to Istanbul he and Sokullu Mehmed Pasha would visit the Patriarchate in the Phanar together to pray appears historically implausible (Goffman, 2004, p. 76). Nevertheless, the available evidence indicates that the doors of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's household remained open to his Christian relatives and that he never compelled them to convert to Islam (Samarcic, 1995, p. 78).

Makarije Sokolović was not the only member of the Sokullu family to occupy the patriarchal throne. Following his tenure as Serbian Patriarch (1557–1571), he was succeeded successively by his nephew Antonije Sokolović (1571–1575), Gerasim Sokolović (1575–1586)—who had previously served, most probably, as Archbishop of Ohrid and Metropolitan of Herzegovina—and finally by Savatije Sokolović (1586–1587), Makarije's cousin and Metropolitan of Herzegovina. Each served as Serbian Patriarch at Peć and exercised ecclesiastical authority over the churches of the region. Stephan Gerlach also notes that Adelfopes, whom he identifies as Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's nephew, was appointed Archbishop of Ohrid (Gerlach, 2007, p. 149). The fact that the patriarchs who succeeded Makarije simultaneously occupied prominent ecclesiastical offices such as the Metropolitanate of Herzegovina and the Archbishopric of Ohrid suggests that the Christian branch of the Sokullu family likewise established a strong

institutional presence within the Orthodox Church (Dakić, 2018, p. 30; Jorga, p. 1021; Samarcic, 1995, p. 78).

Although two visits by Gerasim Sokolović to Istanbul are mentioned in the sources, no direct evidence confirms that he met with Sokullu Mehmed Pasha. Some scholars have argued that the visitor referred to in the relevant accounts was in fact Makarije rather than Gerasim, while others maintain the opposite interpretation (Dakić, 2018, p. 31; Gerlach, 2007, pp. 553–555). Regardless of these uncertainties, it is evident that the Serbian Patriarchate remained under the leadership of members of the Sokullu family, with the support of the Ottoman state, for approximately thirty years (Dakić, 2018, p. 32). The family's dominance over the Patriarchate came to an end shortly after the accession of Savatije Sokolović, whose death soon after becoming patriarch brought the Sokolović era within the Serbian Patriarchate to a close (Samarcic, 1995, p. 78).

A distinctly partisan interpretation of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha has been constructed around the restoration of the Serbian Patriarchate of Peć and the question of his ethnic origins. According to this perspective, Sokullu, whose ties to the Orthodox Church were allegedly strong prior to his recruitment to the *devshirme* system, preserved his original identity after entering Ottoman service, remained emotionally attached to his Christian roots, and manifested this attachment by restoring the Serbian Patriarchate. The re-established Patriarchate is consequently portrayed as having played a decisive role in preserving Serbian national identity (Dakić, 2012, p. 46; Öztürk Yılmaz, 2019, vol. I, p. 133; Samarcic, 1995, p. 81). Within this framework, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha has been incorporated into a national historiographical narrative, emphasizing accounts of his alleged forced recruitment, his enduring loyalty to his Christian heritage, and his purported contribution to the future of the Serbian nation. His political power and extraordinary success have further reinforced attempts to appropriate him as a national historical figure.

Such an interpretation, however, appears to be both one-sided and historically problematic. In the case of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha, the restoration of the

Serbian Patriarchate can be explained not only through questions of personal identity but also within the broader political and social realities of the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire (Samarctic, 1995, p. 74).

The Serbian Patriarchate was restored in 1557, while Sokullu Mehmed Pasha was serving as Third Vizier (Dakić, 2012, p. 46). Implemented during the reign of Süleyman I, this measure primarily aimed at pacifying the Serbian population (Kia, 2011, p. 115). At a time when Ottoman warfare against the Habsburg Monarchy remained particularly intense, securing the loyalty of the Serbian population and appointing a trustworthy ecclesiastical leader significantly enhanced the security of the strategic corridor between Istanbul and Budin. Indeed, just as Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's Christian relative Makarije was appointed Patriarch of Peć, his Muslim cousin Sokullu Mustafa Pasha was appointed Governor-General of Budin, where he played a crucial role in defending the Ottoman frontier against the Christian Habsburgs (Anscombe, 2014, p. 151). Serbian support likewise contributed to Ottoman military campaigns conducted throughout the region (Veinstein, 2012, p. 2; Samarctic, 1995, p. 38). Consequently, interpreting these appointments solely through the lens of ethnic or familial solidarity produces an incomplete and potentially misleading understanding of the issue.

The restoration of the Patriarchate strengthened the integration of the Serbian Orthodox population into the Ottoman administrative system by recognizing them as a distinct *reaya* community rather than leaving them entirely under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. At the same time, the limited success of Ottoman settlement policies in the region provided an additional incentive for cultivating Serbian loyalty. Beyond demonstrating the empire's policy of religious accommodation, the restoration also contributed to the economic revitalization of the Peć region (Öztürk Yılmaz, 2019, pp. 33, 133). Furthermore, the gradual demographic decline of the Muslim population in territories acquired through the Ottoman advance toward Central Europe increased the military and political importance of granting such religious privileges to the Serbian population (Samarctic, 1995, p. 80).

More broadly, the Ottoman Empire consistently sought to integrate local elites and institutions into the imperial structure in both its eastern and western provinces, whether through religious institutions or influential families. The restoration of the Serbian Patriarchate should therefore be understood within this broader administrative strategy. When considered alongside policies of Islamization, the *devshirme* system, and various fiscal and economic measures, the privileges granted to the Serbian Orthodox community clearly served the overarching objective of consolidating Ottoman authority in the Balkans. To attribute such a significant imperial concession—implemented by means of a sultanic decree—solely to the personal preferences or ethnic background of the Third Vizier would overlook the institutional logic of the Ottoman state. Indeed, the contemporary *Şeyhülislâm* Ebussuud Efendi (d. 1574) is also reported to have supported the restoration of the Patriarchate at Peć. Moreover, the establishment of the Serbian Patriarchate diminished the ecclesiastical monopoly previously exercised by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate (Samaric, 1995, pp. 80–82). Although the restored Patriarchate undoubtedly contributed to the preservation of Serbian identity in the long term, this outcome should not be interpreted as evidence that such preservation constituted Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's primary objective. Rather, the incorporation of peripheral communities into the imperial system should be regarded as a deliberate policy of the Ottoman state.

Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's Marriage and Children

Sokullu Mehmed Pasha married İsmihan Sultan (d. 1585), the daughter of Selim II. The earliest clear indication of his close relationship with his future father-in-law dates to the period when he was dispatched as an adviser to *Şehzade* Selim. During the dynastic conflict between *Şehzade* Selim and *Şehzade* Bayezid, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha, then serving as Third Vizier, was assigned to counsel *Şehzade* Selim, while the Fourth Vizier Pertev Pasha (d. 1572) was sent to advise *Şehzade* Bayezid (Peçevî, 1981, p. 243; Seyyid Lokmân, 2022, pp. 248–249). Whereas *Şehzade* Selim accepted Sokullu's counsel, the advice offered to Bayezid proved unsuccessful. The dispute ultimately culminated in the decisive Battle of Konya between the two princes.

During this conflict, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha participated with a force of three thousand Janissaries and ten thousand provincial troops, playing a decisive role in securing Şehzade Selim's victory (Seyyid Lokmân, 2022, pp. 255–256). Following the defeat, Prince Bayezid fled to Safavid Iran. By order of Süleyman I, Şehzade Selim and Sokullu Mehmed Pasha subsequently spent the winter together in Aleppo (TS.MA.e, 967, 749-34; Peçevî, 1981, p. 278). Sharing the same residence for an extended period undoubtedly enabled the prince and his trusted adviser to develop a closer personal relationship.

Following his prominent role in the War of the Şehzade, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha married Şehzade Selim's daughter, İsmihan Sultan, in 1562, upon returning from Konya, thereby becoming a member of the Ottoman dynasty through marriage. The victory of the faction he had supported during the dynastic struggle, followed by this prestigious dynastic alliance, significantly accelerated his political ascent. In conjunction with his successful management of the succession crisis following the Siege of Szigetvár and Selim II's accession to the throne, these developments elevated Sokullu Mehmed Pasha to an exceptionally influential position within the Ottoman government (Kızılkaya, 2024, pp. 6–10; Seyyid Lokmân, 2022, p. 263; Danişmend, 1972, vol. 3, p. 46).

According to Ottoman dynastic custom, individuals who married women of the imperial family were required to divorce any existing wives (Peirce, 1993, p. 69). Nevertheless, the available sources provide no explicit information regarding Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's wife or concubines prior to his marriage to İsmihan Sultan. His son Sokulluzâde Hasan Pasha (d. 1602) was born to an earlier wife (Afyoncu, 2009, p. 357). Hammer, by contrast, states that two of Sokullu's children were born to two different concubines. His account notes that, following the death of one son who had been appointed governor of Aleppo, another son—then serving as *sanjak-bey* of Bosnia—was appointed to succeed him in Aleppo. From this information, it may be inferred that these two sons were Kurd Kasım Bey and Hasan Pasha. Uluçay, on the other hand, argues that Sokullu Mehmed Pasha had two wives before his marriage to İsmihan Sultan and divorced them in accordance with dynastic protocol upon entering the imperial family (Uluçay,

2011, p. 69; Parlaz, 2013, p. 83). Regardless of these differing interpretations, it is evident that Sokullu Mehmed Pasha had established a family and had children prior to his marriage to İsmihan Sultan. However, the identities of the mother—or mothers—of these children remain unknown.

Marriage alliances with members of the Ottoman dynasty constituted one of the mechanisms through which *devshirme*-origin statesmen advanced within the imperial hierarchy and consolidated their political positions (İpşirli Argıt, 2017, p. 165). Such marriages were generally arranged as rewards for distinguished service or in anticipation of future contributions to the state. From this perspective, the War of the Şehzade represented a decisive turning point in Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's career. His success during this conflict considerably strengthened Sultan Süleyman's confidence in him. His appointment as adviser to Prince Selim enabled him to establish a close personal relationship with the future sultan, who gradually came to trust him. Their prolonged stay together in Aleppo further reinforced this relationship, allowing Sokullu to become intimately acquainted with the şehzade. As the culmination of these developments, he married Şehzade Selim's daughter, İsmihan Sultan (Seyyid Lokmân, 2022, p. 263; Samarcic, 1995, p. 70). Collectively, these developments greatly facilitated Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's political advancement and, upon Selim II's accession to the throne, secured his position at the center of imperial government.

The children born to Sokullu Mehmed Pasha and İsmihan Sultan who survived into adulthood were İbrahim Han (d. 1622), Safiye Hanım Sultan, and Fatma Hanım. However, Sokulluzâde Hasan Pasha, who rose until the rank of vizier, and Kurd Kasım Bey were both born before with İsmihan Sultan marriage. The precise number of children who died in infancy or childhood remains uncertain. Some sources indicate that six children died at an early age and further relate that, following these successive bereavements, the family abandoned their palace residence at Kadirga, believing it to be associated with these tragedies (Kızılkaya, 2024, pp. 10–11).

The presentation of descendants of Bajo, who was brought to Istanbul as a *devshirme*, as an alternative to the Ottoman dynasty is a significant indicator of the transformation in Sokullu's world. Following the deposition of Mustafa II (d. 1703), the Crimean Khan and the Ibrahim Hanzade family were mentioned as alternatives to the dynasty. In 1703, the forces sent from Istanbul to Edirne to overthrow the Sultan proposed the Crimean Khan and the Ibrahim Hanzade family as candidates for the throne at a meeting held in Silivri. Indeed, this meeting and the discussions lasted more than thirty days. This shows that the matter was seriously debated for days (Emecen, 2001, pp. 73-74). The nomination of the Hanzades 124 years after the death of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha is clear proof that the family strongly maintained its influence. Of course, there are specific reasons for mentioning them as alternatives. The fact that the Hanzades, descendants of İbrahim Han, the son of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha and İsmihan Sultan (daughter of Selim II), are directly related to the dynasty, and their wealth and influence, seem to have been influential in their being mentioned as alternatives (Emecen, 2000, pp. 316-317; Emecen, 2001, pp. 73-74).

Sokullu Mehmed Pasha rewarded and protected those who demonstrated loyalty during periods of political crisis. A notable example is Cafer Ağa, who played a crucial role in concealing the death of Sultan Süleyman during the Siege of Szigetvár and facilitating the accession of the new sultan. In recognition of these services, Sokullu married one of his daughters to Cafer Ağa. The latter's support during the succession crisis also contributed significantly to his own advancement, ultimately leading to his appointment as Agha of the Janissaries. Yet the reverse was equally true: negligence or incompetence was not tolerated, even among Sokullu's closest associates. While Cafer Ağa was serving as Janissary Agha, a devastating fire broke out in Istanbul. Beginning in the Jewish quarter of Eminönü on 19 September 1569, the fire raged for seven days, destroying thousands of houses and shops in one of the greatest urban disasters in the city's history. Sokullu Mehmed Pasha personally participated in the firefighting efforts, narrowly escaping death, and played an important role in bringing the blaze under control (Samarcic, 1995, pp. 226-228; Lamartine, p. 494; Solak & Doğan, 2017, p. 14; Peçevî, 1981, p. 342). Following this catastrophe, however, he

dismissed his own son-in-law, Cafer Ağa—one of his closest confidants—from the office of Janissary Agha. This episode clearly demonstrates that, where affairs of state were concerned, Sokullu approached his responsibilities with uncompromising seriousness and showed little tolerance for negligence or inadequate performance, even on the part of members of his own family.

Patronage Relationships of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha

Political

Sokullu Mehmed Pasha became a member of the *Dīvān-ı Hümāyūn* upon his appointment as *Beylerbeyi* of Rumelia in 956/1549 and remained a member continuously until his death in 987/1579, serving within the council for a total of thirty years. He was promoted to the rank of Fourth Vizier in 1554 and became grand vizier in 1565. Consequently, he served actively in the *Dīvān-ı Hümāyūn* for five years as beylerbeyi of Rumelia, eleven years as vizier, and fourteen years as grand vizier. This remarkable career demonstrates the extraordinary administrative and political experience he accumulated over three decades at the very center of Ottoman governance. No other statesman in Ottoman history occupied a comparable position: Sokullu Mehmed Pasha remained continuously within the *Dīvān-ı Hümāyūn* for thirty years and held the office of Grand Vizier for fourteen years, exercising what may be described as near-absolute political authority for approximately eight of those years. In this respect, his career remains unparalleled in Ottoman history. The following table is therefore particularly valuable, as it identifies the principal statesmen with whom he served throughout his tenure as Grand Vizier.

Sokullu Mehmed Pasha began establishing his patronage network during his tenure as *Silâhdar*, when he brought members of his family to Istanbul and introduced his brothers into the palace system. Throughout his subsequent career, this evolved into a comprehensive network of patronage (*intisap*), which not only facilitated the advancement of individuals loyal to him but also consolidated his own political position within the Ottoman administration

Table 1. Members of the *Dîvân-ı Hümayûn*, 1565–1578.

	Sadrâzam	2. Vezir	3. Vezir	4. Vezir	5. Vezir	6. Vezir	7. Vezir	Yeniçeri Ağası	Defterdar	Nişancı	Şeyhişlâm
1565-67	Sokullu Mehmed Paşa	Pertev Paşa	Ferhad Paşa	Ahmed Paşa	Kızıl Ahmedli Mustafa Paşa	-	-	Ali Ağa	Abdîzâde Muhammed Çelebi	Celâlzâde Mustafa Çelebi	Ebussuud Efendi
1568	Sokullu Mehmed Paşa	Pertev Paşa	Piyâle Paşa	Ahmed Paşa	Zal Mahmud Paşa	Lala Mustafa Paşa	-	Câfer Ağa	Abdîzâde Muhammed Çelebi	Boyalı Mehmed Paşa	Ebussuud Efendi
1570-71	Sokullu Mehmed Paşa	Pertev Paşa	Piyâle Paşa	Ahmed Paşa	Zal Mahmud Paşa	Lala Mustafa Paşa	Sinan Paşa	Siyâvuş Ağa	Baba Nakkaş-zâde Dervîş Çelebi	-	Ebussuud Efendi
1574	Sokullu Mehmed Paşa	Piyâle Paşa	Ahmed Paşa	Zal Mahmud Paşa	Lala Mustafa Paşa	Sinan Paşa	-	Hasan Ağa-Mustafa Ağa	Lala İzzâde	Feridun Ahmed Bey	Hamid Efendi
1577	Sokullu Mehmed Paşa	Ahmed Paşa	Zal Mahmud Paşa	Lala Mustafa Paşa	Şemsi Paşa	Sinan Paşa	Siyavuş Paşa?	Cigalâzâde Sinan Ağa	Kara Üveys Paşa	Muallimzâde Mahmud Çelebi, Murad Çelebi	Kadırzâde Ahmed Şemseddin

Source: Mehmed Süreyya, 1996, p. 1743; Gelibolulu, 2019, p. 697; Danişmend, 1971, vol. 2, p. 378; Peçevî, 1981, p. 342; Kaplan, 1998, p. 45; Çevik, 2024, pp. 198–199.

(Veinstein, 2012, p. 4). Consideration of the points of connection between Sokullu Mehmed Pasha and those within his immediate circle reveals a discernible historical pattern. In particular, periods of political crisis played a crucial role in the formation and strengthening of these personal and political relationships.

By virtue of the authority vested in the office of the grand vizierate, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha naturally exercised considerable influence over appointments and dismissals. Although it is impossible to identify every appointment in which he played a decisive role or to establish the precise nature of his relationship with every officeholder, the issue can be examined through the careers of several prominent individuals whose advancement was closely associated with their affiliation to him. In particular, an analysis of appointments and dismissals within the framework of patronage provides valuable insight into the operation of Sokullu's political network.

One such figure was Derviş Ali Pasha, beylerbeyi of Basra, who was initially described as "*a common sailor from among the populace (avamdan bir levent)*". After serving under several provincial governors, he rose through the ranks of the Ottoman administration by entering Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's patronage network. During his career he served successively as Governor-General of Lahsa, Basra, and Baghdad (Gelibolulu, 2019, p. 902; Feridun Ahmed Bey, 2012, pp. 383- 403; Ahmed Refik, 2017, p. 141). Similarly, Botur Hüseyin Pasha, who originated from Herzegovina near Sokullu's native region, advanced through Sokullu's patronage after attaining the office of Çaşnigâr, subsequently serving as Governor-General of Van, Baghdad, Egypt, and Damascus (Ahmed Refik, 2017, p. 141).

The significance of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's political relationships became evident not only in appointments but also during the purge that unfolded under Murad III. Following the death of Selim II and the accession of Murad III, the balance of power shifted decisively against Sokullu Mehmed Pasha. Feridun Ahmed Bey (d. 1583) was dismissed from the office of Nişancı; Sokullu's cousin, Sokullu Mustafa Pasha, beylerbeyi of Budin, was executed on the pretext that he had

been responsible for an explosion caused by lightning striking a gunpowder magazine; Arab Ahmed Pasha (d. 1578), who had served under Sokullu's patronage as beylerbeyi of Rhodes, Algiers, and Cyprus, was killed and dismembered by soldiers who stormed his residence; and Cıġalazâde Yusuf Sinan Pasha (d. 1606), then serving as Janissary Agha, was dismissed on the grounds that his close association with Sokullu (Nahîfî Mehmed Efendi, 2019, pp. 13, 62, 82, 99–100; Peçevî, 1982, p. 24; Samarcic, 1995, pp. 386, 390; Cezar, 1959, p. 1258; Gerlach, 2007, pp. 771–772; Hammer, vol. 7, p. 43; Ahmed Refik, 2017, pp. 361–362).

A similar process unfolded within the palace itself, where Sokullu's immediate entourage was systematically dismantled. Sultan Murad III ordered Sokullu to dismiss Hüsrev Kethüdâ and his *kapıcıbaşı* Sinan Ağa from the grand vizier's household, and the revenues from their estates were transferred to the sultan's own domain. According to Gerlach, these two close associates of Sokullu were subsequently arrested and imprisoned in the Yedikule Fortress. Kaytas Kethüdâ, the steward of Feridun Ahmed Bey, was executed, while the revenues of twenty-four individuals closely associated with Sokullu were confiscated and in return, they were assigned less productive lands (Gelibolulu Mustafa Âli, 2019, pp. 960–961; Peçevî, 1981, pp. 6, 20; Uzunçarşılı, 1988, vol. 3, p. 53; Hasanbeyzâde, 2004, vol. 2, pp. 253–259; Gerlach, 2007, pp. 598–599; Zararsız, 2021, p. 331).

An examination of the deaths that occurred during the purge of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha and his supporters further reveals that this period witnessed not merely political dismissals but a broader transformation of the Ottoman ruling elite. The years 1577–1580 were characterized by a remarkable succession of deaths among leading statesmen. Zal Mahmud Pasha, Third Vizier and Sokullu's brother-in-law, died in 1577, followed by Piyâle Pasha, the Second Vizier, early in 1578. Sokullu's cousin Lala Mustafa Pasha, Semiz Ahmed Pasha, who succeeded Sokullu as Grand Vizier, both died in 1580. Derviş Pasha, another cousin of the grand vizier and former beylerbeyi of Diyarbakır, was killed during the Persian Campaign, while his nephew Ali Bey also lost his life in the same conflict. Beyond the members of the Imperial Council, Hamid Efendi, son-in-law of Şeyhülislâm Çivizâde and a close associate of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha,

died on 16 October 1577, after which the office of *Şeyhülislâm* passed to Kadızâde, a known opponent of Sokullu. Even Şemsi Ahmed Pasha, one of Sokullu's most political adversaries, died in 1580 (Ahmed Refik, 2017, pp. 290, 333; Cezar, 1959, p. 1311; Bostan, 2007b, vol. 34, pp. 296–297; Baltacı, 1997, pp. 460–461; Emecen, 2009, p. 494; Kütükoğlu, 2003a, pp. 73–74; Afyoncu, 2010, pp. 527–529; Hammer, 2007, vol. 7, p. 29; Samarcic, 1995, pp. 388, 394).

Accordingly, the transformation that took place between 1577 and 1580 cannot be explained solely by the accession of Murad III in 1574 or by the activities of factions opposed to Sokullu Mehmed Pasha. The deaths of numerous senior statesmen significantly accelerated the reconfiguration of the Ottoman political elite, while the assassination of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha in 1579 constituted the clearest indication that an era in Ottoman politics had come to an end.

The changing nature of political circumstances may also give rise to different interpretations when reconstructing networks of relationships. Regardless of personal loyalties, however, the primary allegiance of *devshirme*-origin statesmen and senior Ottoman officials remained directed toward the Ottoman dynasty and the state. Accordingly, the purge of those associated with Sokullu Mehmed Pasha unfolded in different ways for different individuals. His cousin Sokullu Mustafa Pasha was executed under the pretext of the explosion of a gunpowder magazine, whereas Feridun Ahmed Bey, the renowned *nişancı* and Sokullu's confidential secretary, was merely dismissed from office and subsequently reinstated once the influence of the Sokullu faction had diminished. At the same time, Sokulluzâde Hasan Pasha, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's son, continued to serve as a beylerbeyi following his father's assassination and was later promoted to the rank of vizier.

Historians, Poets, and Sufis

Sokullu Mehmed Pasha cultivated significant relationships not only with members of his family and the Ottoman ruling elite but also with scholars, poets, and Sufi figures. The following examples illustrate the diversity and breadth of these intellectual and spiritual networks.

Seyyid Lokmân (d. 1601) entered Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's patronage through Feridun Ahmed Bey, making the grand vizier his principal patron. After serving in Diyarbakır, he was appointed as the imperial *şehnâmeçi*. Having participated in the Sigetvár Campaign, Seyyid Lokmân composed a work on the expedition and presented it to Feridun Ahmed Bey, whose scholarly circle received it favorably. His subsequent works likewise enjoyed the support of the grand vizier. *Şehnâme-i Selim Han* contains both depictions of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha and a section offering prayers for him, while the text and miniatures of the *Zafernâme* portray the grand vizier as one of the central figures. Benefiting from Sokullu's patronage and the support of the palace milieu, Seyyid Lokmân collaborated closely with Nakkaş Osman and the imperial painters, whose miniatures became an integral part of his works. By contrast, although the *Hünernâme*—commissioned during the final years of Sokullu's life and completed approximately a decade after his death—still includes representations of the grand vizier, he no longer occupies the central position. Rather than appearing as the *padişah-ı manevî*, he is depicted as an official fulfilling his duties within a broader imperial framework. This transformation may be interpreted as a reflection of the changing balance of political power. Seyyid Lokmân also served as *serkâtip* alongside the grand vizier during the reception of Sultan Murad III. During the political purges, Seyyid Lokmân's close association with Sokullu adversely affected his career, and he fell from favor following the grand vizier's assassination. (Seyyid Lokmân, 2022, pp. 11–12, 26–31, 38–40; Woodhead, 2010, p. 457; Özçelik, 2020, p. 22; Ahadi, 2019, pp. 13–15, 44, 105–106; Kütükoğlu, 2003b, pp. 208–209; Kars, 2020, p. 976; Fetvacı, 2013, pp. 165–167, 171, 181–183, 193).

Sokullu Mehmed Pasha likewise supported the astronomical studies of Takiyüddin (d. 1585), introduced him to Sultan Murad III, and played a crucial role in the establishment of the imperial observatory. He endorsed Takiyüddin's proposal to found an observatory and facilitated its construction. Nevertheless, mounting opposition and subsequent political developments ultimately led to its destruction. Historians have frequently interpreted the demolition of the observatory as having had adverse consequences for the development of the positive sciences within the Ottoman Empire. (Topdemir, 2010, vol. 39, p. 455; Goodwin, 2008, p. 104).

Fevrî (d. 1571) was the author of *Ahlâk-ı Mehmed Paşa*, a work devoted entirely to Sokullu Mehmed Pasha. Structured into forty chapters, the text praises the grand vizier while highlighting his personal virtues. Combining moral reflection with panegyric, it represents an early example of monographic writing. Each chapter first defines a particular virtue, then discusses its significance through exemplary historical figures, and finally illustrates how Sokullu Mehmed Pasha embodied that quality. Written during the grand vizier's lifetime, the work was composed by Fevrî, a Croatian-born *devşirme* who maintained close connections with Sokullu. A *müderris* by profession, Fevrî regularly appeared before the grand vizier and enjoyed his favor. The work is generally believed to have been written during the final years of the author's life, between 1566 and 1571. (Fevrî, 2019, pp. 9, 40, 42–43, 61–71; Karavelioğlu, 2019, pp. 207–210).

Bâkî (d. 1600) was another distinguished figure who benefited from Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's patronage, having entered his circle through Feridun Ahmed Bey. (Çavuşoğlu, 1991, p. 538). At the grand vizier's request, he translated *Me'âlimü'l-Yakîn fî Sîreti Seyyîdi'l-Mürselîn (al-Mawâhib al-Ladunniyya)* and *Fezâ'il-i Mekke* from Arabic into elegant Ottoman Turkish. In the introduction to *Fezâ'il-i Mekke*, completed while serving as the judge of Mecca, Bâkî offered extensive praise of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha (Kandemir, 2008, pp. 4, 12; Çavuşoğlu, 1991, p. 538; Algül, 2004, p. 421; Özmen, 2020, pp. 72–73). Following his poem celebrating the conquest of Sigetvár, Bâkî composed ten verses under the heading *Der-du'â-yı devlet-i hazret-i Vezîr-i a'zam Muhammed Paşa ebbeda'llâhu te'âlâ 'ömrühû ve devletühû*, praising the grand vizier. As has been noted, «Bâkî initially presented the elegy to Selim II; when he failed to obtain the desired reward, he added another stanza and rededicated it to Sokullu Mehmed Pasha.» (Aköz & Demireğen, 2019, p. 142). Feridun Ahmed Bey also records that Bâkî recited a *qasida* during Selim II's accession ceremony. (Feridun Ahmed Bey, 2012, p. 167). Likewise, the *Sigetvarnâme* incorporated into his translation *Fezâ'il-i Cihâd* contains further praise of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha (see Kaçar, 2015, pp. 27–46). Although Bâkî does not appear to have enjoyed as intimate a relationship with Sokullu as did Feridun Ahmed Bey or Seyyid Lokmân, it is evident that the grand vizier acted as his patron, commissioned his translations, and received favorable treatment in his literary works.

Beyond scholarly and literary circles, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha also maintained close connections with Sufi communities. He founded *tekkes* at Kadirga, Sigetvár, Havsa, and Hatay and became a *mürîd* of Nureddinzâde Mustafa Muslihuddin (d. 1574). These relationships demonstrate that the grand vizier cultivated extensive intellectual, literary, and spiritual networks extending well beyond the sphere of politics and administration.

Born in Filibe, the Halveti-Cemali shaykh Nureddinzâde Mustafa Muslihuddin (d. 1574) became Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's *sheikh*. Nureddinzâde's disciples included not only prominent political figures such as Sultan Süleyman I and Sokullu Mehmed Pasha but also influential Sufis of the following generation, most notably Aziz Mahmud Hüdâyî (d. 1628). (Öngören, 2019, pp. 360–361; Öztürk, 2017, pp. 83, 86). The fact that the lodges established by Sokullu at Kadirga and Sigetvár belonged to the Halveti order appears closely connected to his affiliation with Nureddinzâde. (Bölükbaşı, 2014, pp. 73–76, 85). It is also possible that Sultan Süleyman's own attachment to the order influenced Sokullu's decision to become his disciple. Nureddinzâde accompanied the funeral procession of Sultan Süleyman from Sigetvár to Istanbul. (Hasanbeyzâde, 2004, vol. 2, p. 154; Uzunçarşılı, 1988, vol. 3, p. 348; Öngören, 2019, pp. 360–361). Gelibolulu Mustafa Âli presented his *Heft Meclis* to the grand vizier through Nureddinzâde. (Eravcı, 2010). The Grand Vizier had the tekke in Kadirga built for him, but he passed away before the construction was completed, so according to his will, Kurd Mehmed Efendi (d. 1588) was became as the sheikh of the tekke in Kadirga. (Öngören, 2015, p. 76; Öngören, 2019, pp. 360–361; Öztürk, 2017, pp. 83, 86).

Other Examples of the Diversity of Relationships

Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's relationships extended far beyond the sultan, members of the Imperial Council, and matters of appointment. His extensive charitable foundations (*waqfs*) and architectural patronage likewise generated a broad network of direct and indirect relationships. The individual most closely associated with Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's architectural patronage is

undoubtedly Mimar Sinan. The külliyes at Kadirga, Eyüp, Lüleburgaz, Hava, and Payas, together with the mosques at Azapkapı and Büyükçekmece, as well as the bridges at Višegrad, Lüleburgaz, and Ergene, were all designed and constructed by Sinan. It may therefore be concluded that the majority of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's charitable and architectural foundations were executed under the direction of the empire's chief architect.

Numerous other individuals likewise formed part of this network of construction and patronage, including Hüsrev Kethüdâ, Mustafa Kethüdâ, Mihail Çelebi, Taşçı Miço, road builders, carpenters, masons, water carriers, and the laborers employed on the Drina Bridge. One illustrative example concerns the procurement of stone for the Tomb of Selim II, Hagia Sophia, and the Sokullu Mehmed Pasha Mosque. For this purpose, an agreement was concluded with Taşçı Miço, a stonemason from the village of Levan near Belgrade. Although Miço received an advance payment of 5,000 akçes, he died before quarrying and delivering the promised stone. When the value of his estate in Istanbul proved insufficient to cover the outstanding debt, Ahmed Çavuş was dispatched to recover the remaining amount, and official decrees were subsequently issued to the Governor of Avlonya and the judge of Albanian Belgrade concerning the matter (Mühimme Defteri No. 31, h. 15).

The individuals within Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's own household likewise illustrate the diversity of his social network. One particularly striking example is his slave-at-arms (*silahşor*), whose public demonstrations in the At Meydanı impressed members of the Austrian diplomatic mission between 10 and 14 October 1576. According to contemporary accounts, he successfully shot an arrow through an iron ring approximately three fingers in thickness and demonstrated extraordinary balance by standing barefoot upon the sharpened edges of two swords.

Another noteworthy figure was one of Sokullu's learned slaves, described as being of German origin. This individual initially belonged to Hüsrev Pasha before entering Sokullu's household. After receiving a scholarly

education, he was manumitted and subsequently became a müderris. Although later dismissed from one of his appointments, he served as molla of Baghdad in 1575–1576 and died in 1589. Contemporary sources characterize him as stubborn by temperament, while one of his descendants later served as a *kadı* in Egypt (Mehmed Süreyya, 1996, p. 909).

Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's relationships with foreign diplomats provide another important perspective on the breadth of his social and political connections. Among these, his interaction with the Venetian Bailo over the question of imperial portraiture is particularly significant. Sokullu commissioned Seyyid Lokmân and Nakkaş Osman to prepare an illustrated history of the Ottoman sultans incorporating both historical accounts and their portraits. During the preparation of this work, the authors encountered difficulties because no authentic likenesses of the early Ottoman rulers were available. Their research eventually revealed that European artists had previously produced portraits of the early sultans, prompting them to request that Sokullu obtain copies. In response, Sokullu contacted the Venetian Bailo Niccolò Barbarigo, who arranged for copies of these Venetian portraits to be brought to Istanbul. Most of these portraits remain today in the collections of Topkapı Palace Museum (Tamcan, 2005, p. 20; İnalçık & Renda, 2004, pp. 905, 1101).

Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's artistic connection with the Venetian bailo Barbarigo is reflected in his request for an artist «to paint and decorate his new palace.» It has even been claimed that this artist induced Sokullu to have an oil portrait of himself painted. However, the artist subsequently returned to Venice and never came back. Thereupon, Barbarigo sought to appease the grand vizier by having «a young painter in his service paint Sokullu's portrait.» (Tamcan, 2005, p. 21) Among all foreign diplomatic missions, the one that most intrigued Sokullu Mehmed Pasha was the embassy from Muscovy. Contemporary accounts attribute to him the following remark: «Since I became pasha, ambassadors have arrived from every country. Only no one had come from Moscow. Now Allah has allowed me to see and hear the ambassador of Moscow as well.» (See Kamalov, 2011, pp. 40–65.)

Conclusion

The Ottoman Empire possessed a systematic administrative approach that enabled it to make efficient use of its human resources. The state developed mechanisms to transform individuals, utilize their abilities in accordance with imperial objectives, and integrate them into the central administrative structure. As long as this system functioned effectively, it ensured that capable individuals were placed in appropriate positions within the state apparatus, thereby maintaining institutional balance and political stability. The devshirme system and the career of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha constitute clear examples of this process. His rise to power and long-lasting political authority were shaped by the offices he held, his connection with the Ottoman dynasty, his family, the patronage network he established, and his personal qualities.

The single most influential figure in Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's political career was Sultan Selim II. During the conflict between the Ottoman princes, Sokullu was first dispatched as an advisor to Prince Selim and subsequently played a decisive role in securing his victory. This brought him into close proximity with the dynasty, while his marriage to Selim's daughter, İsmihan Sultan, further strengthened this relationship. His dynastic marriage consolidated both his political position and his capacity to exercise authority. His successful management of the succession crisis following Sultan Süleyman's death during the Sigetvár Campaign and his role in securing the accession of his father-in-law further reinforced his power. Moreover, Selim II's governing style, characterized by delegating a significant portion of state affairs to the grand vizier, substantially enhanced Sokullu's authority. Despite wielding extraordinary influence, however, Sokullu never presented himself as an alternative sovereign; as a product of the devshirme system, he remained conscious of the limits of his office and acted within the established framework of Ottoman political culture.

One of the principal features distinguishing Sokullu Mehmed Pasha from other devshirme statesmen was the position of his family. Following the conquest of Constantinople, the increasing political prominence of devshirme

administrators as a counterweight within the governing elite eventually enabled them to establish their own patronage networks. The Sokullu family represents perhaps the clearest example of this development. According to Peçevî, the Sokullu family produced two grand viziers, five viziers, and ten *beylerbeyi*, in addition to numerous other figures who held military and administrative offices. Whereas the *devshirme* system generally weakened or severed recruits' ties with their families of origin, Sokullu brought his relatives to Istanbul, facilitated their conversion to Islam, and elevated his family to an exceptional position within the Ottoman elite.

The Christian branch of the Sokullu family likewise established a significant presence within the Serbian Patriarchate, with members of the family occupying the patriarchal office for an extended period. Nevertheless, interpretations that disregard the historical context and instead portray this development as evidence of Sokullu's enduring Christian identity are reductionist and misleading. Some nationalist narratives have suggested that Sokullu preserved his pre-*devshirme* religious and ethnic identity and subsequently re-established the Serbian Patriarchate when the opportunity arose. Such interpretations overlook the broader political and social circumstances of the period. The restoration of the Serbian Patriarchate in 1557, during Sokullu's tenure as third vizier, should instead be understood within the framework of Ottoman imperial policy, which sought to pacify the Serbian population, secure their loyalty, and reinforce state authority in strategically important frontier regions.

The extensive network of relationships that Sokullu Mehmed Pasha cultivated across different social groups significantly contributed to both his rise to the grand vizierate and his ability to preserve his position with remarkable stability and authority. These networks were not artificial constructions but developed gradually throughout the course of his life. His family background, recruitment through the *devshirme* system, administrative experience, personal character, and appointments all shaped the formation and expansion of his connections. This study has examined numerous individuals within the framework of their relationships with Sokullu Mehmed Pasha, demonstrating the breadth and

multidimensional nature of his social and political networks. One of the defining characteristics of Sokullu was his remarkable ability to manage these networks effectively. Rather than reinforcing only a single sphere of influence, he cultivated relationships extending from his family and military-administrative circles to scholars, historians, poets, and religious figures. By successfully translating the experience gained through these diverse relationships into state administration, he established himself as one of the most capable, farsighted, and influential statesmen in Ottoman history.

The emergence of a new political center during the reign of Murad III, accompanied by changing power dynamics and the formation of new patronage networks, appears to have been the principal factor behind the gradual decline of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha's influence. A sustained campaign against him, while many of his close associates were removed from office, paving the way for a new administrative elite. Ultimately, after serving as grand vizier under three successive sultans for fourteen years -eight of which were marked by exceptional political authority- Sokullu Mehmed Pasha died as the victim of an assassination whose instigators have never been conclusively identified.

In addition to cultivating close ties with political and military circles, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha established strong connections with scholarly, literary, and Sufi milieus. As a grand vizier who patronized intellectual and literary circles and supported their production, he was presented with numerous works, while poems in his praise were composed. These works, together with the writings devoted to him, contributed to the formation of his reputation among subsequent generations. Likewise, the numerous waqfs and charitable complexes (*imarets*) that Sokullu Mehmed Pasha founded in various parts of the empire, from Bosnia to the Hejaz, may be understood in a similar light, as they likewise ensured the perpetuation of his memory. The name of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha continues to survive through his distinguished achievements recorded, the continuation of his family line, and the charitable institutions he founded.

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