

Who Killed Sultan Osman?

Remembering What Tuđi Forgot

By
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Sultan Osman II was killed on May 20, 1622 (H.9 Receb,1031). It was a Friday. The crime scene was a small, clostrophobic room in one of the seven towers of Yedikule fortress. The heavily guarded fortress was used as a dungeon for high level captives like the future khans of the Krimean Tatars. But in the case of Osman II, the unimaginable had happened and the sovereign of the empire himself was brought into this dungeon like a prisoner of war, only to be slain by his *kul*, the servant-slaves. Following the evening prayer, his executioners determined to succeed in their enterprise had crowded into that small room with ropes, axes, and their barehands to finish the job. After a short and desperate struggle, unable to resist against the overwhelming power of his attackers, the eighteen year old sultan was suffocated to death. Until that point the execution seems to be performed in line with the unwritten Turco-Mongol rule which dictates that the men of noble blood should be suffocated to death without of letting their blood to drop. Yet, his murderers seem not to be bothered by this ancient tradition when they severed one of the ears of the dead body to be presented as the solid proof of their violent act.

What had happenned? Why had an emperor ended up in a room in Yedikule? What was the reason behind the ruthlessness and the determination of his murderers? What were the series

of events that led to such a tragic downfall? What had Sultan Osman done to deserve –if ever he did- such treatment by his subjects?

Indeed, the weirdity of the incident seems to have confused the few contemporary historians. They seem to have difficulties in grasping the meaning of the event let alone to give a perfect analysis. For instance, Katip Çelebi (b.1608-d.1656) expresses his surprise at the course of events with the words “*What was that rush of Davud Pasha’s to slay [Sultan Osman]? What was that cursing – swearing of the people in those three days? Such surprising things had never happened in history.*”¹ His main source of information Solak² Hüseyin bin Sefer (alive in 1622) in his eye- witness account of the event which he had written under the penname Tuğı, can not help but utter the same tone of surprise: “ *For God’s sake, what were those weird events which happened in these three days that caused his servants to dislike a shah of great valor, to turn their faces away [from him] and finally they slayed him.*”³ Unlike Katip Çelebi and Tuğı, another contemporary İbrahim Peçevi (b.1572-d.1650) choses to remain calm at the face of the unfolding events and tells that although it could have been better not to write about such a terrifying incident now that he had devoted his book to extraordinary events he had decided it would be more apt to include it. ⁴ Putting most of the blame on the victim himself, the writers on the issue share a view of inevitability strongly connected to the natural flow of fate.

¹ O.Ş.Gökyay, K.Çelebi’den Seçmeler c.I, (Istanbul, MEB, 1997),s.122-131; Katip Çelebi, Fezleke-i Katip Çelebi, c.II, (Istanbul, Ceride-i Havadis Matbaası, 1870),p.22

² Solak: Member of the sultan’s elite guards. Solak were chosen from among the janissaries and constituted the 60, 61, 62, and 63. squadrons of the Hearth of Janissaries.

³ Tuğı Çelebi (Hüseyin bin Sefer), Mithat Sertoğlu (ed.), Tuğı Tarihi -İbretnüma, Belleten 43, (1947), pp.489-514; Fahir İz (ed.), XII. Yüzyılda Halk Dili ile Yazılmış bir Tarih Kitabı, Hüseyin Tuğı, Vaka-i Sultan Osman Han, Türk Dili Araştırmaları Belleten (1967), pp.119-55

⁴ İbrahim Peçevi, Murat Uraz (ed.), Peçevi Tarihi, (Istanbul, Neşriyat Yurdu, 1968), p.464

With the exceptions of Peçevi and an anonymus Jewish diarist⁵; though their stances change in accordance with their political views, the narratives of the contemporary history writers basically follow the path of Tuği. Katip Çelebi openly declares he had borrowed Tuği's text⁶, while Hasan Beyzade Ahmed Paşa's (d.1636) text is almost a verbatim copy of Tuği's⁷; Solakzade Mehmet Hemdemi Efendi (d.1657) adding his valuable insight, also shares the general outline of the course of events with Tuği⁸ and Naima (b.1652-d.1715) who set the standard for the historical narratives of later historians, states that he borrowed the text on the incident from Katip Çelebi and Hasan Beyzade.⁹ An elaborate critical analysis of these texts is carried out masterfully by Gabriel Piterberg in his "An Ottoman Tragedy – History and Historiography at Play".¹⁰ The issue was taken up by Baki Tezcan in an unpublished manuscript "Searching for Osman: A Reassessment of the Deposition of the Ottoman Sultan Osman II (1618-1622)"¹¹ in which he argues that Kösem Mahpeyker Sultan had stakes in keeping Mustafa, uncle of Osman alive and changing the succession system to the advantage of her sons.¹² But then overlooking what he had noticed previously, he concludes that the incident was "a preemptive counterrevolution staged by the supporters of a 'limited monarchy' against the 'absolutists'".¹³ Though it is correct that the threat posed by his demand for innovation -as perceived by the established power groups in the capital- might have helped deposition of Osman, it does not explain the whole picture.

⁵ Aryeh Shmuelewitz , "MS Pococke No.31 Asa a source for the events in Istanbul in the years 1622-24", in Graciela de la Lama (ed.), Thirteenth International Congress of Human Sciences in Aisa and North Africa (Mexico City, 1976): Middle East I (Mexico City, 1982), pp.33-36

⁶ Fezleke, p.9

⁷ Piterberg, Gabriel, Osmanlı Trajedisi - Tarih-Yazımının Tarihle Oyunu, (Istanbul, Literatür, 2005), p.116

⁸ Solakzade Mehmet Hemdemi Çelebi, Vahid Çabuk (ed.), Solakzade Tarihi, c.II, (Ankara, Kültür Bakanlığı, 1989), pp. 470-91

⁹ Naima Mustafa Efendi, Mehmet İpşirli (ed.), Tarih-i Naima, c.II, (Ankara, TTK, 2007), pp. 475-93

¹⁰ Piterberg, Gabriel, An Ottoman Tragedy – History and Historiography at Play, (Berkeley, Univ. Of California Press, 2003)

¹¹ Tezcan Baki, Searching for Osman: A Reassessment of the Deposition of the Ottoman Sultan Osman II (1618-1622), V.1, (Ph.D. Dissertation, Dept.of Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University, 2001). In an article in 2002, Tezcan discusses how twentieth century history writers used the story of Osman to support their own political agendas retrospectively. [Baki Tezcan, "The 1622 Military Rebellion in Istanbul: A Historiographical Journey", International Journal of Turkish Studies, Vol.8, Nos. 1&2 (Spring 2002), pp.25-43]

¹² Ibid.,pp.93-98

¹³ Ibid.,p.267

Therefore by putting the bits and pieces of information together, we will try to reconstruct the course of events in those three days and try to get a full picture of what had happened. Then we will focus on the reasons put forward by the contemporary accounts, discuss how they fall short in explaining the phenomenon and try to figure out the mechanisms at work behind this otherwise simple murder story. A closer scrutiny on the information available promises to reveal a greater scheme behind the scenes, a greater will, an invisible hand involved in the killing of Osman –The Young. So much so, that the actors taking part in the event are eventually reduced to mere puppets puppeteered by a puppet-master, chessmen forced unconsciously to act in accordance with a strategy designed by their master. A game played masterfully by a mastermind, a showdown at the end of which “the King” has fallen and a clear check-mate was declared. “The King” being Sultan Osman II in this case was the victim of the forces beyond his control and what happened to him was indeed inevitable.

The tragedy of Osman lies in the fact that he was born at the critical juncture of the Ottoman Empire’s evolution from an expansionist to a bureaucratic state. The clique supporting the sultanate of an alternative line of succession, that is the sons of Kösem not Mahfiruz, was too overwhelmingly strong. Step by step Osman was stripped off all his possible allies, prevented from forming any sort of cliques of his own. This process of gradual isolation was to end up with the killing of the sultan and transfer of the right of accession to the rival clique.

The last three days before the killing of Osman

On the Wednesday of May 18, 1622 , in the morning while the tents of the sultan and the ones appointed to accompany him in his journey to Hijaz were loaded into the galleons at the port¹⁴, a rebellion was brewing at another spot in the city. The sipahi and the janissary corps dissatisfied with the determination of the sultan to travel to Haj for pilgrimage had decided to resist his decision. They gathered at the Sultan Mehmed Mosque¹⁵ and marched to At Meydanı, the Byzantine Hyppodrome near Yeni Camii, that is the then newly built Sultan Ahmed Mosque¹⁶. On the way, they came across Çavuşbaşı¹⁷ Halıcızade who was sent by the sadrazam to stop them but by throwing stones they forced him to escape.¹⁸ Soon some of the elderly took leadership and advised them to choose a committee, send it to the sheikhulislam and request and receive a fetva in order to obtain a legal base for their mutinous acts. At this point, Sheikhulislam Esad Efendi had made a mysterious move and promptly supplied the rebels with the legitimacy they needed. On a plain piece of paper, the rebels had phrased a self-proving question: “ What is necessary for the ones who cause wasting of the treasury by deceiving the sultan of Islam, and who cause such vice and mischief though it is not a must for the Sultan to go to Haj?” Mufti’s answer was brisk and crystal clear: “Mischief-makers shall be slain!”¹⁹ This surprising response of Esad Efendi has to be underlined because the rebellion was an obvious act of disobedience against the will of the Sultan who happened to be his son-in-law and it was the first step in the escalation of the turmoil which laid the stones of the path to Osman’s destruction. Whether Esad Efendi knew the possible consequences of his act or not, the rebels now had what they wanted and had grown more confident. By this time, the imperial armada had anchored in the viccitudes of Yedikule and the crew had

¹⁴ Peçevi, p. 462

¹⁵ Fatih Mosque

¹⁶ It was also called Ahmediye. Popular as “the Blue Mosque”.

¹⁷ Çavuşbaşı: The Chief Sergeant. The chief of the sergants of the Council of Ministers [Divan Çavuşları]. Not to be confused with the Yeniçeri Çavuşları, the Janissary Sergeants working under the command of Başçavuş, the Head Sergeant.

¹⁸ Tuğı, p.494

¹⁹ Op.cit.

disembarked their galleons and rushed to join the rebels in At Meydanı. When the committee returned with the fetva to the crowd, Ağa, the Commander-General of the janissaries had arrived with the a number of officers in an attempt to silence them but they also were stoned and fled.

The crowd then headed towards the residence of Hoca Ömer Efendi, the imperial tutor whom they blamed for persuading the sultan for his Haj plans. Tuği insists that the purpose of this “visit” was peaceful and they simply would want Hoca to relate their wishes to the sultan. Ömer Efendi managed to escape in time. Katip Çelebi informs us about a fact which Tuği prefers to forget. The crowd had poured into Hoca’s house and looted whatever they could find.²⁰ Next stop for the crowd was the residence of the sadrazam Dilaver Pasha but the guards of the Grand Vizier were waiting all armed. A few rebels were killed or wounded with the arrows they shot. The first blood in the incident had dropped. The crowd, realizing they had no weapons to fight rushed to the Sipahi Bazaar²¹ but the shopowners persuaded them not to loot the weapons’ shops in the bazaar. It was almost sunset therefore they agreed to meet the next day.

At night rumours were spread on both sides. Among the janissaries and sipahis it was rumoured that the sultan had prepared the *bostancı*, the imperial gardeners and *iç halkı*, inner palace servants for a clash the next day. Among the *bostancı* it was said that the armada had laid siege from the sea and the rebels were to attack from the Imperial Gate.

²⁰ Katip Çelebi, Fezleke, Cild-i Sani, (Istanbul, Ceride-i Havadis Matbaası, 1871), p.13 [...*Gördiler olmadı Hevace Efendi tebdil-i came ile dar-ı çardan fîrar idüib hizmetkarları efendi saraya getdi dimeğle kapuyı yıkub memalikin garet itdiler.*]

²¹ Modern day Arasta Bazaar behind the Sultan Ahmed Mosque.

On Thursday, May 19, 1622 with the sunrise, all the sipahi from their inns and the janissaries from their barracks in the New Chambers and the Old Chambers gathered at the Sultan Mehmed Mosque. Weapons were also transported to the courtyard of the mosque and troops made their preparations for a possible clash. Then the members of the two hearths marched to the At Meydanı where they were met by the sheikhulislam and the ulema elite.²² The leaders of the crowd submitted a list of names of whom they thought were responsible for the mischief and wanted to be executed. The names and their crimes were as follows:

- 1- Kızlarağası Süleyman Ağa, the Chief of Black Eunuchs of the Harem ; his crime to encourage the sultan to go to Haj,
- 2- Hoca Ömer Efendi, Tutor of the Sultan; his crime to encourage the sultan to go to Haj,
- 3- Sadrazam Dilaver Pasha; his crime to cause the deaths of some Kapıkulu, servants of the Gate, the day before,
- 4- Defterdar Baki Paşa, Minister of Finance; his crime to mix low-rated akçe into the *ulufe*, tri-monthly salaries,
- 5- Ahmed Pasha, Former Kaim makam of Istanbul; his crime not to give the salaries of the *oturak*, retired veterans while the army was in expedition to Khotyn²³,
- 6- Sekbanbaşı Nasuh Ağa, Commander of the Regiment of Sekban Squadrons²⁴; his crime to do injustice to the *oturak* and the *korucu*, guards of the janissary headquarters.²⁵

²² Members of the ulema committee: SheikhuIslam Esad Efendi, Nakibüleşraf Gubari Şerif Efendi, Kazasker of Rumelia, Kazasker of Anatolia, Sheikh Ömer Efendi [Preacher of Aya Sophia Mosque, also known as Tercüman Şeyhi], Sheikh Sivasi Efendi, Sheikh Derviş Efendi, Kadızade Efendi [Tuğı, p. 496] Katip Çelebi adds Zekeriyyazade Yahya Efendi, Kafzade Faizi Efendi, Bostanzade Yahya Efendi, Kethüda Mustafa Efendi to Tuğı's list. (Fezleke, c.II, p.13)

²³ Expedition of Khotyn: Battle fought between Ottoman forces led by Osman II and the Polish army led by Jan Karol Chodkiewicz (1560-Sept 24, 1621), the grand hetman of Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth. The Ottoman army had left Istanbul on May 21, 1621; reached battlefield on Aug 21, 1621; Treaty of Khotyn signed on Sept. 9, 1621.

²⁴ Sekban Bölükleri Ortası: 65th Orta/Regiment of the Janissary Hearth. Composed of 35 squadrons, 1 cavalry and 34 infantry bölük/squadrons. Established originally as a separate organization for hunts, this orta was later incorporated into the Hearth as an exceptionally large regiment. Their commander Sekbanbaşı Ağa kept his superior rank [though symbolically] and ranked second only to the Yeniçeri Ağası, Commander General.

The ulema committee went to the palace to submit the wishes of the rebel group. Tuđi relates us the content of the conversation between the sultan and the ulema with an emphasis on how stubborn the sultan was:

When the sultan insisted in not giving the persons they wanted, the ulema and the sheikhs altogether said 'It is not good to oppose the public'²⁶. Such things have occurred since the times of your grand ancestors. These [the public] do whatever they want, [if you don't comply] then it [the situation] will become dire.' And in response the sultan said 'You may relieve [yourselves]. They are soldiers without a leader. They will soon disintegrate.' When they [the ulema] advised him once again he got furious [and said] 'Their job is done. After destroying them, I indeed know the ones to be destroyed among you.' When ulema heard this from the sultan they got out without a word. Because the sultan did not let them to go out [of the palace] they stayed there just like that.'²⁷

During the conversation Osman seems to have kept his confidence on his own way of dealing with the problem. He seems to think that he had an alternative solution plan than the one proposed by the ulema. Katip Çelebi conveys that the sultan had even blamed the scholars of being personally involved in the plot against him. Osman's accusation and his attitude in uttering it, had frightened them: "You talk like *you* have arranged all this!"²⁸

Tuđi's narrative from this point on -against his insistence on the opposite-leaves scarcely any room for coincidentalness of the unfolding events. The sultan's army of his personal guards was attacking himself in a coordinated fashion. Soldiers were acting in accordance with a battle plan rather than divine fate as implied by Tuđi and other writers. They first assigned a few troops to climb up the minarets of the Aya Sophia Mosque to see if there was a preparation on

Sekbanbaşı Ađa would stay in the capital while the army left for expeditions in order to protect and keep the security in the capital city, Istanbul.

²⁵ Interestingly, Tuđi forgets to mention the sixth person in the list, Nasuh Ađa. Katip Çelebi had realized this missing part and corrected it. (Fezleke, c.II, p.13)

²⁶ Public: *Cumhur*. This word is frequently used within the text for the united group of sipahi and janissary rebels.

²⁷ Tuđi, pp.496-97

²⁸ Fezleke, c.II, p. 14

the side of the *bostancı* to resist the assault. Relieved by the news that there was no one to defend the palace walls, they got into a battle formation before starting to advance towards the first gate of the palace. Janissaries with rifles were on the front lines while the *sipahi* followed with their swords in their hands. This kind of disciplined behaviour brings into mind that they were led by Kethüda Bey and Başçavuş with Orta Çavuş, Küçük Çavuş and the 130 ordinary sergeants under their command since they were the ones both responsible and able to organize the battle formations of the janissary army.²⁹ If they were a group of soldiers without leadership as Osman thought, in the absence of a command-and-control system, they would not be able to manoeuvre as they had done. Osman had done his initial mistake on the chessboard by undermining his enemy. Letting his opponent to take his castle easily was to cause him irrecoverable damage for the rest of the game.

“Surprisingly” Bab-1 Hümayun, the first imperial gate was open. The army swiftly moved into the first courtyard. Some five hundred soldier were assigned to secure the gate. After a period of hesitation the group consolidated the ease of its initial victory, order was re-established. Meanwhile a crowd of citizens had joined the army possibly out of curiosity but Tuğî’s mentioning of it can as well be seen as yet another of his attempts to legitimize the rebellion. He implicitly implies that the soldiers were not alone and had the support of the ordinary citizens of Istanbul. He also mentions that the ones who did not have a weapon in their hands went into the wood storage and took logs in their hands.³⁰ But this bit of information just doesn’t make sense since we know that the weapons of the palace was stored in *cebehane*³¹, the ex-church of St. Irene located right in the first courtyard. Tuğî choice of mentioning wooden logs and not weapons of the palace can not simply be out of naievity. He wants us to see how spontaneously the events were developing.

²⁹ Uzunçarşılı, İsmail Hakkı, *Kapıkulu Ocakları – v.I-II*, (Ankara, TTK, 1988), pp.206-08

³⁰ Tuğî, p.497

³¹ *Cebhane*: Weapons’ store.

When ready to advance the army “tried” the second gate, and as a matter of fact they found it open too. Now in normal circumstances, these gates were heavily guarded by a garrison of Kapıcı or Bevvaban, Gate-Keepers commanded by a Kapıcıbaşı, Chief of Gate Keepers. The *Bevvaban-ı Bab-ı Hümayun*, the unit of the guards of the first gate consisted of 8 bölük/squadrons of 50 personel each, that is 400 guards. In addition, *Bevvaban-ı Dergah-ı A’li*, Guards of the Second Gate were 40 bölüks and around 2.000 personnel.³² The rebels had passed these two gates easily.

Divided into three groups, one secured the royal kitchens on the right, one secured the divanhane on the left and a third group advanced to the *Babüssaade*, the Gate of Felicity. This third and final gate opening into Enderun was the red line. Beyond that red line there was the living quarters of the sultan and crossing it would be out of question for a janissary or sipahi unless he wanted to commit suicide. But alas, they found it open too and poured in. Tuği shows he was aware of the severity of the sin by saying “No one from the kul had ever stepped in there since the conquest of the city of Constantinopolis.”³³

Once inside, the crowd started shouting “We want Sultan Mustafa!” Now, finally inside the private quarters of the palace, the crowd had suddenly changed its target from resisting Osman’s will to go to Haj or wanting some bureaucrats to be beheaded to dethroning the sultan himself. None of the inner palace boys said anything to the intruders but one pointed his finger towards a dome. The place where Mustafa, uncle of Osman was kept, was found. Tuği’s joy in describing the scene is obvious. Three sipahis and three janissaries – showing how equally meritorious the two components of the uprising were – climbed up the roof of

³² Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Saray Teşkilatı*, (Ankara, TTK), p.406

³³ Tuği, p. 498

Harem. A few weak attempts by the black eunuchs to stop them were quickly eliminated by their comrades. Then the dome was broken, and soldiers went down into the chamber.

Mustafa was waiting there with two concubines around him. Tuđi increases the dramatic tone in his narrative by making him to utter faintly to his rescue team: “Please water!” After drinking Mustafa continues: “Thank God! They haven’t given me water for two days. They want to kill me with hunger and thirst. They are not capable of killing me by sword. That’s not the will of God.”³⁴ The narration reaches a crescendo with a poem implying subtly that Tuđi was one of the janissaries who climbed up the Harem’s roof. He compels his readers to appreciate the heroic deed which in his eyes is at an epic scale.³⁵

In the meantime, Osman had missed his chance for yet another strategic move. While the intruders were desperately trying to get into Mustafa’s room, Osman was inside the Harem. He could easily have Mustafa killed before the rebels reached him. Such a move would have left Osman without an alternative but he did not do it.

Thus Mustafa was taken out of his room and brought down in front of the Arz Odası, Reception Hall to rest. SheikhuIslam Esad Efendi’s horse was brought but he was too weak to get on. Suddenly the door of the Harem opened and Sadrazam Dilaver Pasha and Chief Black Eunuch Süleyman Ađa were pushed out. Dilaver Pasha had escaped to Üsküdarı Mahmud Efendi convent but was brought back by the Bostancıbaşı. The two poor fellows were slain instantly. They took Prince Mustafa into the chamber of imperial council and had him seated. Next they asked the ulema to subjugate to the new sultan. Ulema’s resistance to declare their obediances lasted until swords were drawn out of their scabbards. The troops had the final say: “In short, do subjugate!” Terrorized by the perils of the situation Kafzade Faizi

³⁴ Op.cit.

³⁵ Katip Çelebi says for four times the crowd was frightened for some reason and were stopped by their officers when they tried to run away.

Efendi had a heart attack and died on the spot. Kethüda Mustafa Efendi was the first to kiss the robe of the new sultan, the others followed. Sheikhulislam, being the father-in-law of Sultan Osman, was the last in the row but –though reluctantly- he also obeyed the general consensus. The rebels had taken what they wanted. They quickly brought a cart and took Mustafa to the Old Palace.³⁶ Here Tuği mentions the two concubines (who were with him in the chamber he was found), a servant named Derviş (this is the same inner palace boy who showed the place of the chamber Mustafa was kept) and his mother as the ones who accompanied the new sultan to the Old Palace. The presence of his mother is mysterious because as a rule she had to be in the Old Palace and not the New.

The news of the enthronement of the new sultan was spread throughout the city and the prisoners in the dungeons were released free. Osman was gradually being ripped his tactical tools off, his maneuvering capability was fading away with each step his opponents were taking.

Then irritated by the rumours that Sultan Osman would attack the Old Palace with the *bostancı*, the leaders of the *cumhur* decided to move Mustafa to the safest place in town, the janissary headquarters. The new sultan was once again put on a horse cart and taken to the Orta Camii, The Mid Mosque in the New Barracks.³⁷ Here Tuği wants his reader to believe that Sultan Mustafa after entering into the mosque, had opened his hands to God and sent this prayer: “O the sultan of the sultans [God]! My wish is to see Sultan Osman who did injustice to me in this mosque!” By including these scenes in retrospect, he is desperately trying to bind

³⁶ The first imperial palace built by Mehmed II in Istanbul. Starting with the reign of Suleyman II the Harem was gradually moved into the New Palace, later known as the Topkapı Palace, and the Old Palace was reserved for the wives, mothers, concubines and servants of the former sultans.

³⁷ Compared with the Old Barracks in the Şehzadebaşı district, the New Barracks (Yeni Odalar) in Aksaray region was a colossal building with a large area in front for military training. The Mid Mosque was right at the center of this area called Et Meydanı, The Meat Arena. The Meat Arena was also under the strict control of the Başçavuş. The workshops of the Christian butchers of the Hearth called “tomruk”, rifle training areas and a Bektashi convent were also located in the Meat Arena.

the tragic end of Osman to a divine plan and show how –due to his injustices - he deserved what happened to him. A few lines later he expresses his stance via a poem:

*If ever in a matter, there occurs the divine will of the All-Sovereign
Not the choice nor the precaution of the wise can change a thing*³⁸

The Ağa of the janissaries visited the new sultan and celebrated his accession. But when he returned to his residence he found the dethroned sultan waiting for him. Sultan Osman had done the worst chess move imaginable. He had taken refuge in the hornet's nest. He was convinced by Ohrili Hüseyin Pasha³⁹ and Bostancıbaşı Biber Mehmed Ağa to leave the security of his palace and go to the office-residence of the commander-general of janissaries⁴⁰. They had taken ten sacks of golden flori coins with them hoping to bribe the janissaries and the sipahi and trade the throne back with it.

Osman had moved his King [in his case himself] away from protection, into his opponent's lines. It was such an awkward move that the contemporary chroniclers also were trying to rationalize it. İbrahim Peçevi relates an eye-witness account he had listened from Sıdkı Çelebi⁴¹ who came across Hüseyin Pasha heading towards Ağa's residence from the New Palace:

....I came across Hüseyin Pasha and said: 'I do not know what the result of your deed will be. All the janissaries declare in unison that they have made Sultan Mustafa the ruler. You are taking the poor sultan whom they want to them.' He didn't respond. I thought it [his silence] was because of his surprise and I repeated. Still he wouldn't reply. For a third time while getting out of the Royal Gardens I approached him and said once again. Despising my words he said 'What do you suggest? How should it be? Should the world fall in turmoil and apocalypse happen? Whichever [of the two sultans] deserves the state shall

³⁸ Tuği, p.500

³⁹ Whom Osman had appointed as sadrazam right after Dilaver Pasha was slain in the palace.

⁴⁰ A palace like building in the Suleymaniye district. It was located to the north of Suleymaniye mosque. Modern day office of the Istanbul Branch of the Directorate of Religious Affairs.

⁴¹ Sıdkı Çelebi was the *tezkireci*, petitioner of Hüseyin Pasha.

*become the sultan and the world order shall be re-established. That night before the evening prayer we reached Ağa's Gate.*⁴²

The convincing of Osman into getting out of the palace was also another mysterious scene. After the rebel crowd had taken Sultan Mustafa away to the New Palace, the ulema had also left and the Topkapı Palace was in silence once again. In the Harem section, Osman was with Ohrili Hüseyin Pasha and Bostancıbaşı Biber Mehmed Ağa consulting on the next move. Osman had made a wise proposal and said that they should take whatever portion of the treasury they could take with them, get on the boats, cross the straits over to the Anatolian side and take refuge in the ancient capital, Bursa. His plan was to wait until the situation settled. He was sure that his uncle Mustafa was incapable of reigning and that fact would soon be understood. After all he was enthroned four years ago in 1617 following Ahmed I's death, an act Osman saw correctly as the usurpation of his rights to the throne. But the other two came up with a genius idea of going to Ağa's Gate. They were obstinate. When Osman refused to comply with their request and asked Bostancıbaşı to prepare the boats, Biber Mehmed came up with a startling answer. There was no single person and no boat in the palace. All were gone. Osman had lost his means to escape and was left without a choice. It was the same Bostancıbaşı who had ordered his bostancı personnel to bring Dilaver Pasha from Mahmud Hüdayi Efendi's convent in Üsküdar and had him found and brought into the palace only to be given to the rebels. A short while ago boats were used in carrying out his orders but now there was none. When Osman gave in and agreed to take refuge in Ağa's Gate, Biber Mehmed came up with the brilliant idea of taking ten sacks of flori with them. Having lost his wits, the young sultan accepted that request too. Slowly but decisively he was being drawn into a trap.

⁴² Peçevi, p.464

Sultan Mustafa spent the night at the Mid Mosque in the New Barracks and Sultan Osman with his aides in the Ağa's Gate. They were trying desperately talk Ali Ağa into persuading the sipahi and the janissaries to put Mustafa back to his chamber. Ali Ağa promised to cooperate and try to buy the sultanate for Osman.

In the morning of May 20, 1622, Friday, that is the third day of the turbulence, the Ağa called the *odabaşı*, chamber masters and held a meeting with them. He conveyed the proposal of Osman promising rewards and valuable clothes to the janissaries and an increase in the salaries of the sipahi. He must have mentioned about the ten sacks of flori, too. The junior officers seemed convinced but requested the Ağa to tell the proposal to the troops themselves. Thus Ali Ağa seeing a probability for success headed towards the New Barracks. After saluting Sultan Mustafa in the Mid Mosque he came out, stood in front of the main entrance on the stairway and read a *gülbang* prayer loudly before addressing the crowd. But before being able to declare that Sultan Osman was ready to give generous rewards to the soldiers, suddenly someone pulled him down from the platform he was standing and within seconds he was killed by a group who had obviously prepared themselves for this assassination. Another chesspiece of Osman was taken away. While he was waiting for a good news from the Barracks, the tumult caused by the crowd storming into the Ağa's Gate searching for him and Hüseyin Pasha and of course the sacks of flori must have shattered his dreams. Hüseyin Pasha was slain while trying to escape. Only a single sack of gold was found and pillaged instantly. The rest was never to be seen. Osman was captured. But interestingly, Bostancıbaşı Biber Mehmed Ağa who had persuaded Osman to go to Ağa's Gate, who had said there were no boats to escape, who had come up with the idea of taking ten sacks of gold with them, one of the two closest aides of Osman was saved from the violent anarchy of the day.

Tuđi also realizes the oddity of Bostancıbaşı's survival and feels an urge to explain the reason why he was rescued. His life was saved because whenever Sultan Osman caught a sipahi or a janissary in one of the bars in town he used to beat them up and hand them to Bostancıbaşı to be executed. Mehmed Ađa used to save the lives of those soldiers secretly but tell the sultan that they were executed as he demanded.⁴³ On the one hand this explanation may show how good hearted Mehmed Ađa was and how he was trying his best to cover some of the injustices caused by Sultan Osman, but on the other hand it also shows us that Bostancıbaşı was one of the persons whom Osman trusted most but at the same time by whose lies he was deceived. Furthermore, by definition *kol gezmek* that is to perform systematic police patrols at night was the duty of the Ađa of janissaries but due to his rivalry with the Ađa of the janissaries Bostancıbaşı Mehmed Ađa had managed to be favored by Sultan Osman and to replace him in night patrols.⁴⁴ Katip Çelebi supports this view by stating that the kul was mistreated by Osman who favoured the black eunuchs and the bostancı during his reign.⁴⁵ Thus Tuđi seems to have forgotten what he had said at the beginning of his testimony. He was well aware that Mehmed Ađa was at least partially responsible for the maltreatment of the janissaries in the first place. The contradiction in his text arises when he declares Bostancıbaşı as a saintly figure, a saviour of the kul who deserved to be rescued.

In fact right after the execution of Osman, Mehmed Ađa was to be promoted to viceroyalty of Egypt, one of the most prestigious posts in the empire.⁴⁶ His short term of duty in Egypt appears in the list of viceroys.⁴⁷

⁴³ Tuđi, p. 502

⁴⁴ Tuđi, İz version, p. 125 [...Bostancıbaşı Biber Mehmed Ađa Yeniçeri Ađası Yusuf Ađa ile mabeyn olduđundan padişahı her bar tebdil-i came ile gezdürüb meyhaneleri ve yasakçı odaların basdurub sipah ve yeniçeriden çođun ahz eyleyüb ve çođuna dahi deđnek urdurb ve taş gemilerine koydurub bu ahvalden kul taifesi ziyade müteellim idiler.] It is necessary here to note that Sertođlu had made a mistake in interpreting the phrase "mabeyn olmak" which means to become odds and not to be united as he suggests. Such interpretation distorts the actual situation.

⁴⁵ Fezleke, c.II, p. 20

⁴⁶ Altınay, Ahmet Refik, Kadınlar Saltanatı, c.1, (Istanbul, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yay., 2000), p.151

In any case, Osman was all alone now. Stripped off all his privileges as a ruler, he was at the mercy of a crowd of rioters, no doubt including the prisoners freed from the dungeons the day before. Later in the day, in a final attempt to regain the support of his kul, and speaking to the crowd, he was to summarize his situation with these words: “Yesterday morning I was a sultan, now I am naked. Pity me, learn a lesson from my misfortune! This world shall not stay yours forever!”⁴⁸ He was not to find any ears to listen to his side of the story, not then not while he was transported from the Ağa’s Gate to the New Barracks. He was put on a mule, not let to dress properly and exposed to all sorts of humiliation to a level that the story-tellers of the day hesistate to write. İbrahim Peçevi had witnessed the procession of the crowd in anarchy from a distance from his house nearby.

...Again we could see these [the course of events after Osman was captured] from the window of our house. They found a despicable man on the way, took him down his horse and put the sultan on it. On his back there was a white, worn out nightshirt, on his head a still old velvet cap and a dirty turban around it which they had taken from a man on the street and had him [Osman] to wear it. All the mischief-makers and bad people of the world had surrounded him. Their strange behaviours, the curses and the words they uttered can neither be written nor said.⁴⁹

He was thus brought to the Mid Mosque in the Meat Arena. Now there were two sultans under one roof but only one could leave with the right to the throne. Haseki⁵⁰ Mihaliçli Mehmed Ağa⁵¹ was assigned as guardian over Osman. Davud Pasha was appointed as sadrazam and a servant of Mustafa named Derviş [possibly the inner palace boy who had

⁴⁷ P.M. Holt, The Beylicate in Ottoman Egypt during the Seventeenth Century, Bulletin of SOAS, University of London, Vol.24, No.2 (1961), pp.214-248 [The record for the start of his term of viceroyship Apr 1622 has to be corrected to some time at the end of May 1622 since he was present during the incident in Istanbul. The end of his term seems to be July 1622.]

⁴⁸ Fezleke, c.II, p.21; Gökyay, O.Ş., Katip Çelebi’den Seçmeler C1, (Istanbul, MEB, 1997), pp.122-131

⁴⁹ İbrahim Peçevi, (ed.)Uraz, Murad, Peçevi Tarihi, (Istanbul, Neşriyat Yurdu, 1968), p.464

⁵⁰ Haseki Ortaları: 14., 49., 66., 67th Orta/Regiments of the Hearth. Their duty was to raise dogs for hunting purposes. Close bodyguards of the sultan. The commanders of these ortas would escort the sultan to the Friday prayers –two on the left, two on the right. A rank between Başçavuş and Turnacıbaşı .

⁵¹ He was the commander of the 14th Haseki regiment. To be executed in 1626 following a turmoil.

shown the dome under which Mustafa was kept] became the new Ağa for janissaries. Then the silsile, the promotion mechanism was operated, that is every officer was promoted to a higher rank. There is an eye-witness account of what had happened inside the Mid Mosque then. The account told by Kara Mezak Ahmed Ağa⁵² was kept within the chronicle of Peçevi:

When Sultan Osman was brought to the Mid Mosque, mother of Sultan Mustafa [finally] was convinced that his son had become the sultan. Officers of the Hearth, Kethüda Bey and Zağarcıbaşı also arrived. Other than them we were 7 or 8 officers including me. Sultan's Mother started discussing with us on who should be the vezir-i azam. We understood that she wanted Davud Pasha since he was her son-in-law. We said "It is reasonable." And she said "Is there anyone among you who can write?" The [other] officers meaning me, said "There is." They soon brought an ink-holder and a pen. Firstly, I scribed the hatt-ı şerif, imperial order for the vezir-i azam. Then in accordance with the rules and the path [of promotion] 18 ranks were written by me. I even wrote the hatt-ı şerif of Başçavuş for myself.

In the meantime, his mother had Sultan Mustafa seated in the mihrab. She had his daye seated on the skirts of his robe and hold his hands. Whenever the crowd and the noise outside increased he would free himself from the hands of his daye and rush to the window of the mosque and tried to see the tumult. His mother would [then] run towards him and saying "My lion, my tiger" with the help of his daye she would pull him away from the window, bring him back to the mihrab and had him seated. And he would do that frequently.⁵³

Osman seeing how insane his uncle's acts were, made an attempt to gain the support of both the officers present and the crowd outside. For a moment he must have thought he had a solid chance because the officers inside the mosque had agreed to let him address the crowd outside. Using that final opportunity he admitted that he had done many wrongs to his kul, apologized, begged to be forgiven. But learning that his subjects were determined not to accept him as their sultan anymore, he fell in despair. Turning to the officers inside, he said "Then don't kill me. Imprison me in the room Sultan Mustafa was."

⁵² Peçevi refers to this man as Kara Mezak. But later in the reign of Murad IV we see him as the Turnacıbaşı showing he kept on being promoted after the incident and we learn his full name was "Kara Mezak Ahmed Ağa". He was killed in 1626 by the janissaries in Haleppo on the way back from Bagdad.

⁵³ Peçevi, pp.464-65

Then with the entry of Davud Pasha accompanied by Cebecibaşı⁵⁴ into the scene, a startling thing happened. Cebecibaşı suddenly swindled his noose over the neck of Osman trying to kill him on the spot. Kara Mezak was there:

In the meantime Davud Pasha came. With him was that irreligious Cebecibaşı and he had a noose ready in his hand. As soon as he came he swindled it. Sultan Osman trying to save his life grasped the noose and pushed that cursed man away from himself. We on this side said [to the Cebecibaşı] “Hey my sultan! If this [what you just tried] is heard outside, we will all be cut into pieces” and tried to prevent them. Sultan Osman told to Davud Pasha “You cruel man! What have I done to you? Two or three times you had deeds that deserved your execution but I did not have you killed, I gave you high office, I respected you. What is the reason for this level of enmity and your betrayal of yours to me?” He said such things and then turning to us he said, “This heartless man will not let me live. He will kill me.” We tried to calm him down by saying, “Oh our sultan! How can it be possible? Please relieve yourself. Let the situation calm down. Then you will still be our sultan, our sovereign. How on earth may your slave-servants kill or betray you?” But on the other side Sultan Mustafa’s mother was whispering, secretly uttering “Oh Ağas! You never know what a snake this man is. If ever he survives this, he never will let anyone of us live.” Davud Pasha signaled Cebecibaşı the cursed and had him throw his noose. This time we went in between and saved him with countless hardships. It was around afternoon prayer. They took Sultan Mustafa to the Imperial Palace. Sultan Osman was left in the mosque in tears.⁵⁵

After a while Davud Pasha returned to the Mid Mosque. He had the new commander general of janissaries Derviş Ağa with him. A man called Kelender Uğrusu⁵⁶ was there, too. They put Osman on a market-cart and among an enormous crowd they took him to Yedikule. There, after the evening prayer Davud Pasha, Derviş Ağa, Kelender Uğrusu, Cebecibaşı, Ömer Ağa – the kethüda of Davud Pasha murdered Osman. Cebecibaşı severed his ear and took it to the Mother Sultan. Sultan Osman had reigned for four years, four months and seven days.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ The name of this Cebecibaşı [Commander of the Hearth of Weapons] was obviously omitted on purpose. The chroniclers chose not to mention the names of some personalities in order to push them into oblivion. This rather conscious act can be seen in the case of the Mother of Sultan Mustafa or “Kelender Uğrusu” one of the murderers of Sultan Osman etc.

⁵⁵ Peçevi, p.465

⁵⁶ Kelender Uğrusu was the Subaşı Kethüdası.

⁵⁷ Tuğı, p. 504

Until here it was story story of the three days leading to the destruction of Osman II. The main line of the story is set by the testimony of Hüseyin bin Sefer, penname Tuği. We tried to complete the story from the other two contemporary sources Katip Çelebi and Peçevi and the information they had gathered from the eye-witnesses. Putting all the details and action aside, these three days may be summarized as follows: The kapıkulu army rebelled against the will of their master to got Haj. They soon received a fetva from the mufti which legitimized the execution of anybody they deemed responsible of what they called “mischief”. They came up with the names of six high bureaucrats. Ulema related those names to the sultan who refused to give theri heads to the rebels. The rebel army attacked the Imperial Palace in a coordinated manner and found the first, the second and the third gates open. They found and declared Mustafa, the uncle of Osman as the new sultan. Osman gave two of the men on the death list to the rebels, they were killed instantly but the rebels did not stop. They took Mustafa first to the Old Palace, then to the New Barracks of the janissaries. Osman tried to escape but was persuaded by the new sadrazam he appointed Hüseyin Pasha and Bostancıbaşı Mehmed Ağa to take ten sacks of golden flori and go to the Ağa’s Gate. Yeniçeri Ağası Ali Ağa tended to cooperate with him but was killed. Hüseyin Pasha was killed and Osman himself was taken captive by the rebels. He was taken to the New Barracks into the Mid Mosque. Finally Sultan Mustafa was taken to the Palace while Osman was taken to Yedikule to be killed.

Now what was the reason for this tragedy? Can this traumatic event in Ottoman history simply be a spontaneous reaction to the unjust attitude of a ruler or was there something bigger in it? Can it be possible that the actors on stage were acting consciously or unconsciously according to a pre-planned conspiratory scenario designed to eliminate the young sultan? Why was he killed so ruthlessly? Why didn’t anyone pity on him? Why didn’t

his murderers satisfy by killing him but had to cut his ear? Who benefited from this crime anyway?

Tuđi's reasons for the crime

Tuđi comes up with a number of reasons which he obviously thought were the causes of what happened to Osman. In fact, other history writers also seem to yearn for a rational explanation. For instance Katip Çelebi starts his narrative on the incident with several reasons which possibly were spread widely in his time. As a learned scholar who values rationality, he also seems troubled with the explanations he heard.

1- He had disturbed the janissaries by doing a roll call during the Khotyn expedition,

2- He had gotten angry at and blamed the sipahi for the death of Karakaş Pasha during the Khotyn battle,

Note that Katip Çelebi invalidates these two reasons saying that such things may always happen between the sultan and his kul.

3- In the year 1620, persuaded by Bostancıbaşı Mehmed Ağa (who was in rivalry with the Yeniçeri Ağası Yusuf Ağa) that it is necessary, he participated in the patrols and punished janissaries he found in bars,

4- The amount of rewards he gave to the soldiers who fought well was so small that he had attracted the troops' dislike,

5- When the proceeding of a battle was not as successful as he wished, he accused the troops for being negligent and unconcerned, and showed his feelings with his attitude,

6- Influenced by the black eunuchs around him, he had started thinking of recruiting Egyptian troops,

7- He was trying to put into practice the meaningless suggestions of some idiots around him,

8- He intended to go to Hijaz seemingly to do pilgrimage but in fact to realize his formerly mentioned purposes.⁵⁸

Katip Çelebi thinks that the real reason was the last one that is the sultan was killed because he wanted to go to recruit new troops from Egypt while pretending to visit Haj. Tuğî's text on which Katip Çelebi's text is based, also mentions this pilgrimage issue of the sultan as a means to disguise his real intention. They seem to have no doubt that Osman was determined to go to Anatolia, Egypt and Hijaz regions in order to collect new troops to replace the kapıkulu army which he hated and thought insufficient for his ambitious plans of conquest.

Indeed sultan's decision to go to Hijaz was suspicious. Tuğî states that all the ulema, the sheikhs and even Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi of Üsküdar had tried all their power in their disposal but could not succeed in changing sultan's mind. They were saying it is more important for a sultan to solve the problems of the needy than to become haji himself. None of his ancestors had gone to Mecca so he shouldn't, too. But he was stubborn and he wouldn't listen. He had even seen a dream Tuğî relates in which Prophet Muhammed warned him to behave properly, Osman would not listen to him either. In a dream Osman had seen a few days before his planned departure, he was sitting on his throne reading Qur'an suddenly the prophet had appeared and pulled Osman down from his throne to the floor. There he tried desperately to kiss the feet of the prophet but he was not able to do so. According to Tuğî, the sultan had told this nightmare to three persons: his tutor Hoca Ömer Efendi, his imam and Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi of Üsküdar. For a moment let us assume that he indeed had seen such a dream and told it to these three people, then how could this story leak to public and reach Tuğî if the those three persons had deserved his trust and loyal to him. On the other side of the coin, if

⁵⁸ Gökyay Orhan Şaik, *Katip Çelebi'den Seçmeler*, (Istanbul, MEB, 1997), pp. 123-24; Fezleke, c.II, p.9

the story was not real then it is rational to think that it was created retrospectively to show how stubborn Osman was, how he would not listen to wise men's advices and how he deserved what happened to him. Tuđi of course wants us to believe that it was his own sins and God's will that killed Osman. Peęevi does not have a different stance. He goes a step further and tells us a story about Muneccimbaşı, the imperial oracle. On May 18, Wednesday morning while the tents of the high bureaucrats were being loaded to the galleons Muneccimbaşı had appeared and spoken mysteriously. He was saying that neither the tents of the sultan had passed to the Anatolian side nor anyone's would. Peęevi and his son-in-law Ramazan avuş were surprised to hear that and asked why he thought so. He wouldn't say his secret but he said Sultan Osman would not be able to see the next Ramadan. Soon they heard that an uprising did start at Süleymaniye area and a huge crowd had gathered around the Ađa's Gate. Later Peęevi says he had learnt from Muneccimbaşı that according to his astrological calculations what had happened was Osman's destiny.⁵⁹ Now, if this story is correct and not a product of Peęevi's fantasy, then one can not help but wonder why Muneccimbaşı would not tell this fact to his direct master, the sultan and warn him of the perils of the coming days. Say he had told it and Osman wouldn't listen to him either then why wouldn't he mention it in his boastful conversation with Peęevi. On the other hand, to assume that Peęevi was making his contribution to the myth that Osman was the victim of his own destiny, it was no one's crime, is yet another possibility.

Tuđi was aware of the inconsistencies in the story he was telling. He openly disapproves the killing of Osman and expresses his repentance by criticising his own comrades for letting Osman to be taken to Yedikule. He says that the kul knew Osman was put into Yedikule to be killed. For him, the kul should have prevented him to be taken to the fortress in the first

⁵⁹ Peęevi, p. 462

place.⁶⁰ It is conscientious of him to confess that but it would be more conscientious if he told it together with the fact that he was a “Solak” that is a member of the left-handed guards, who happen to be the closest bodyguards of the Ottoman sultan. The Solak constituted the 60-61-62-63rd Orta of the janissary Hearth. Only the most athletic, strong-looking and handsome janissaries could be chosen to be solaks. They were trained to use the bow with both their hands. The total number of personnel of these ortas was 400. So as a solak, who was more responsible for the security of the sultan than any janissary in the Hearth, Hüseyin bin Sefer owes his reader an explanation why he keeps on blaming everyone else but himself. A group 400 strong could easily have changed the equation in those three days.

Instead, he says Osman had broken the hearts of the kul by punishing them by himself though according to the olden rule of janissaries he should have given the criminals to the Ağa to be punished. Osman also had broken the hearts of the ulema since he had placed Hoca Ömer on top of all the scholarly hierarchy.⁶¹ This is yet another piece of information which when taken at its face value, may mislead the reader and imply that what Osman had done was a bid’at [a new practice considered to be a violation of olden law] which certainly was not. In fact, he had corrected the practice and tuned it back to Kanunname-i Al’i Osman, the Book of Law of Mehmed II. Which states “... Also the tutor of the sultan is the commander of scholars. It is correct for vezir-i azam to take them above himself. But Mufti and Hoca is way higher than the rest of the viziers, they are superior.”⁶² Kanunname also states that Mufti was the chief of the ulema⁶³ but this does not give the upper hand to one or the other. If hierarchy is concerned state ceremonies and bayram celebrations are decisive venues and there sultan’s tutor was definitely the very first person to kiss the hand of the sultan who would then stand up and

⁶⁰ Tuğı, p.505

⁶¹ Tuğı, p.504

⁶² Uzunçarşılı, İ.H., Saray Teşkilatı, (Ankara, TTK, 1998), p. 363

⁶³ Özcan, Abdulkadir (ed.), Kanunname-i Al’i Osman, (Istanbul, Kitabevi, 2003), p. 5

applause his tutor with the rest of his subjects.⁶⁴ The real problem between Sheikhulislam Esad Efendi and Hoca Ömer Efendi was that Osman had taken the right to promote the scholars from Esad Efendi and given it to Ömer Efendi. The known reason for his decision was the involvement of Esad in the enthroning of his uncle Mustafa instead of him. In fact Osman's grandfather Mehmed III was quoted to say: "In the times of the old rulers hocas and the muftis did not interfere with the ulema promotion. Kazaskers would chose and submit the kadis of the kaza and the rest of the ulema promotion was handled and appointments were done by vezir-i azam."⁶⁵ Interference in the ulema promotion had started with Esad Efendi's father, Sheikhulislam Mufti Hoca Saadeddin. During the reign of Ahmed I, Osman's father Esad Efendi was able to interfere even in the promotion of viziers.⁶⁶ With the reign of Osman, Esad Efendi was stripped off his powers and his rights were limited to giving legal fetva. If Tuđi had given us this information then we could have the chance to evaluate the speed with which Esad Efendi had produced his fetva against his rival Ömer Efendi. Thus the insistence of Esad Efendi and the rest of ulema in giving what the rebels wanted might as well have a secondary meaning: elimination of political rivals.

For Tuđi, the killing of Prince Mehmed was another reason why Osman was doomed to his tragic fate. When he left with the army towards Khotyn, Osman had ordered his brother to be executed. Before being suffocated to death Prince Mehmed had found a way to utter his final words: "As I die without fulfilling my desires on this earth, I pray to God that you also be deprived of your throne and your life."⁶⁷ Prince Mehmed's words would not be any better fitted to the course of Tuđi's text. Osman was cursed by his dieing brother for his injustice.

⁶⁴ Saray Teşkilatı, p. 363

⁶⁵ Uzunçarşılı, İ.H., *Osmanlı Devletinin İlmiye Teşkilatı*, (Ankara, TTK, 1988), pp.180-81

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 188 [Kaptan-ı Derya, Commander of the Imperial Navy Halil Pasha was appointed as sadrazam instead of Öküz Mehmed Pasha as Esad Efendi advised.]

⁶⁷ Tuđi, p.504

Again, Tuđi choses not to mention that innumerable princes were executed by their brothers or even fathers throughout the Ottoman history without being doomed to tragic ends.

Thus, the general picture of Osman drawn by contemporary chroniclers is the portrait of a stubborn, unwitting, unjust, miserly, cursed, disrespectful [to laws and tradition], coward⁶⁸ man.

Can there be another picture and an alternative interpretation of the course of events which may help us understand what really happened to Osman?

Who was sitting on the other side of the chessboard?

In any crime there is a beneficiary. If we can find that real beneficiary in this incident then we may find the real killer. Then who was the one to benefit most from the death of Osman?

In order to find the answer to that critical question we have to focus on the larger picture of the change in the imperial succession policy.

When Ahmed I died November 22, 1617, he had left a number of princes behind. Osman, Mehmed, Süleyman, and Bayezid from his first haseki Mahfiruz; and Murad, Süleyman, İbrahim, Kasım from his second haseki Kösem Mahpeyker.⁶⁹ The rightful heir of Ahmed I was Osman, but with a violation of the olden rule he was deprived of his right and his uncle Mustafa was enthroned. This act marks a major shift in the Ottoman succession policy, a revolution that was to replace seniority instead of patrilineality as the new system of succession. The reason the King makers had put forward was the age of Osman but as a matter of fact he was almost at the same age, 14, as his father Ahmed I at the time of his

⁶⁸ When the crowd came looking for him in the Ađa's Gate he was hiding among the women. [...though they searched so much, they couldn't find. Seems he was near the women.... They found and took Sultan Osman from among the women...], (Tuđi, p.501),

⁶⁹ Uluçay, Çaçatay, *Harem I*, (Ankara, TTK, 1992), pp.47-48

accession.⁷⁰ Darüssade Ağası Mustafa Ağa, Sadrazam Sofu Mehmed Pasha, and Esad Efendi were instrumental in this revolution which must have deeply affected Osman. In a letter he sent to King James I of England Osman expresses his feeling of resentment to the violation of his rights. After declaring that his uncle was dethroned because he was embarrassingly out of his mind and continued:

This patriarchal empire and monarchic sultanate until this holy moment, almost always, had in this way passed from grandfather to father, from father to son. Nonetheless, our grand and noble uncle was preferred due to his age and years and has reached the honour of sitting on the throne...⁷¹

In an imperial order he sent to his army in the eastern frontier, he was calling his uncle's enthronement as a "bid'at", an invention against the olden tradition.⁷² His initial decisions as sultan shows the level of reaction he felt against the one who he thought were responsible for the violation of his rights. Right after his accession he first had deposed and sent the kaim makam of Istanbul, Sofu Mehmed Paşa to Sivas. Osman blamed Mehmed Paşa with causing the excess usage of treasury in vain in order to enthrone Sultan Mustafa.⁷³ He dismissed the grand vizier Halil Paşa when he turned back from the Iran expedition. Halil Paşa took refuge in the convent of Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi of Uskudar and was only forgiven upon his request.⁷⁴ He also directly attacked the authority of Mufti Esad Efendi by taking his rights to appoint or promote kadı, judges away from his jurisdiction. Esad Efendi was virtually ripped off all his powers but to give fetva. He had taken part in the plot.⁷⁵ This must have been a major blow to Esad Efendi since it is well-known that he had been merrily interfering in the affairs of the state during the reign of Ahmed I in which he was at a position to designate sadrazams.⁷⁶ So

⁷⁰ Peirce, Leslie P., *Harem-i Hümayun*, (Istanbul, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2002), p.133

⁷¹ Ibid., p.134

⁷² Op.cit.

⁷³ Hasan Beyzade Ahmed Paşa, Ş.N.Aykut (ed.), *Hasan Beyzade Tarihi, 1595-1635, c.III*, (Ankara, TTK,2004), p.922; [..."Sultan Mustafa nasbında sui tedbir idüp bu denli bahşişlere mal-i kesir zayi etdiniz."]

⁷⁴ Hammer, J. Von, *Osmanlı Tarihi, c.II*, (Istanbul, MEB, 2005), p.298

⁷⁵ Op.cit., [..."İclas-ı Sultan Mustafa itmekde say-i kesir-i bi-kıyas eyledin idi" diyü münkesirü'l hatır olup...]

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.889 [Esad Efendi during his conversation with Sultan Ahmed I, had accused the strongest candidate to office, Etmekçizade to be "unjust and liar". Halil Paşa was appointed as grand vizier in his stead.]

Esad Efendi had reasons to give the fetva the rebels wanted at the first day of the uprising. Maybe he was thinking that the incident might help him eliminate his political rivals, starting with sultan's tutor Hoca Ömer and give a good lesson to the sultan. But the unfolding events proved out to be somewhat larger than what he anticipated which in turn may explain why he had not shown up at the funeral of Osman.⁷⁷

During his four years of reign, Osman was never short of enemies. He was at odds with each of the power houses in the state and it seems he had unsurpassable difficulties in finding allies to support him. In fact for a short while, he almost got lucky for once and was able to gain the full support of a strong character who shared the sultan's ambitions. It was Istanböylü Güzelce Ali Paşa (d.1620). After he became the grand vizier in December 1619, he expelled Darüssaade Ağası Mustafa Ağa to Egypt, the ex-sadrazam Damat Mehmed Paşa to Haleppo, Defterdar Baki Paşa to the Aegean islands, and finally the sultan's tutor Hoca Ömer to Egypt.⁷⁸ He was trying open space both for himself and the sultan. But after 14 months in power and having almost finished the preparations for the Khotyn expedition, he suddenly and mysteriously died as soon as Hoca Ömer had reached Uskudar heading towards his destination of exile.⁷⁹ Hoca returned back.

Power holders in the capital were determined not to let the sultan do as he wanted. In her comparison of the Mongolian and Ottoman polities, Togan argues that in this era of the "Sultanate of Women", "power is not monopolised by the Sultan alone" and that "it was a

⁷⁷ Hasanbeyzade, p. 949; Peçevi, p.466; Solakzade, p. 490; [Fezleke, p. 24: Katip Çelebi's sentence is contradictory. He says Esad Efendi had retired from his post and came to the funeral. It is possible that there is a mistranscription. It must be "He got retired and he didn't come."]

⁷⁸ Solakzade, pp. 465-66

⁷⁹ Hasan Beyzade, p.926-27

group of power-holders who counted.”⁸⁰ While the empire was evolving from an expansionist to a more bureaucratic state, “the system of lateral succession was enabling the share-holders of power to compete by putting forward their own candidates among the imperial princes”⁸¹.

She points out to the enlargement of the ruling circles and the formation of cliques.

At this point, in her mind-opening book devoted to the Imperial Harem, Peirce draws our attention to one of the icons of power in the Sultanate of Women, who might possibly have stakes in changing the system of succession and forming a clique to do so: Kösem Mahpeyker Sultan. Kösem Sultan had virtually reigned over the Ottoman Empire during her regencies to her sons Murad IV., İbrahim and her grandson Mehmed IV for about 28 years.⁸²

Kösem, was a very influential haseki at a critical juncture in Ottoman dynastic history where seniority became possible. If after having a crown-prince, Ahmed had executed his brother Mustafa in accordance with the tradition, his eldest son Osman would succeed him. Patrilineality method in succession commanded it. And probably once having a son of his own, the new sultan would then execute all his brothers including Kösem’s sons Murad, Kasım and İbrahim. In 1612, the Venetian ambassadour Simon Contarini had reported that Kösem had persuaded Ahmed –who had accessed to throne by a twist of fate though he was not the eldest son of his father- to save the life of his brother Mustafa even if it was against the Ottoman tradition. According to Contarini’s report what motivated Kösem to act this way was ‘the possibility of receiving the same sort of compassion which she now showed for a brother, from the first born prince for her sons.’

Kösem’s lobbying activities may have helped Mustafa to survive and to succeed to the throne after Ahmed’s death. But not having a mother to lobby for him, did have a share in Osman’s inability to keep the throne.⁸³

Indeed, where was Osman’s mother? Considering the power of the Valide Sultan in the “Sultanate of Women”, Mahfiruz, at least until her son was able to rule by himself, could have supported him against the harsh opposition he faced from all sides. But she was not around. It seems she was eliminated as a threat long before her son’s reign. Uluçay believes her happy days were over as early as 1609, the year which Kösem entered Ahmed I’s life.⁸⁴ In fact,

⁸⁰ Togan, Isenbike, Ottoman History by Inner Asian Norms [New Approaches to State and Peasant in Ottoman History, (ed.) Halil Berktaş, Suraiya Faroqhi], (London, Frank Cass, 1992),pp. 185-210

⁸¹ Op.cit.

⁸² Peirce, P. Leslie, Harem-i Hümayun, (Istanbul, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yay., 2002), p.141

⁸³ Peirce, p.310

⁸⁴ Uluçay, p.47

although she was alive when her son accessed to throne, there is not a single mentioning of her name in the harc-ı hassa defterleri, ledgers showing Harem data.⁸⁵ An information proving she never lived in the Imperial Palace in the first place. And after two years of his son's reign, she silently passed away on 28 November, 1620. She was buried in the cemetery of the Eyup el Ensari Mosque and mysteriously, unlike Kösem, not in the tomb of her husband Ahmed I.⁸⁶ The decision for her burial site is quite strange especially when the fact that she was officially the Valide Sultan and at the time of her death her son was the sovereign. Obviously, at some point Osman had become at odds with his mother, but interestingly he was very good with Mahfiruz' arch-rival Kösem. He even had paid an exceptional visit to the Old Palace and for three days he participated in the festivities held by Kösem Sultan.⁸⁷ He also had given the income of eight villages to the north-west of Athens as present to Kösem who in turn had integrated the annual sum into her waqf providing services to the pilgrims travelling from Damascus to Mecca.⁸⁸ The close relationship of Kösem with Osman since his childhood had attracted the attention of the public causing Ahmed I to prohibit the two to go out and pass time together. According to ambassador Valier (in his report in 1616), the sultan had two reasons to forbid Kösem to approach the crown-prince: One was to protect the prince from the well-known plans of Kösem, and second to prevent rumours about the indecency of a grown-up prince to socialize with a woman who was neither his mother nor his sister.⁸⁹

If having a Valide Sultan who would have stake in the reign of her son (if not out of maternal compassion then out of personal ambition) was the first prerequisite to have the upper-hand in the continuously growing power of Darüssaade; having hasekis was the second and having

⁸⁵ Peirce, op.cit.

⁸⁶ Uluçay, op.cit., [Gurre-i Zilhicce Sene 1029 (28.X.1620): "... merkad-i merhum ve mağfurunleha Sultan Osman Han halledi hilafetuhu valide-i saltanatahu der civar-ı Hazret-i Eba Eyyub-i Ensari..." Top. Arş. E. No: 8365]

⁸⁷ Hammer, p. 300; Peirce, p.311

⁸⁸ Güler, Mustafa, Osmanlı Devleti'nde Haremeyn Vakıfları, (Istanbul, Tarih ve Tabiat Vakfi, 2002), p. 60

⁸⁹ Peirce, p. 311

successors was the third. Osman had somehow had lost the possibility of a supporting mother in the process, but he also had failed in the other two.

He had married with a Russian woman⁹⁰ at an uncertain date before he went to Khotyn expedition. On his way back he had received the news that he had a son born. Now as a father, he had a successor and posed a threat against his brothers. He called his “nameless” haseki to Edirne where the two met and Osman had the chance to see his son, Ömer. To celebrate the auspicious moment and possibly to impress his haseki, he ordered a festivity to be held. In the celebrations, imitation of the battle scenes was a part of the show. Yet the unimaginable happened and the baby suddenly died. Some history writers explain this event by the shock the infant had due to noises of the fired cannons.⁹¹ Hammer gives a more striking reason for the baby’s death: “To increase her (Russian haseki) joy festivities were held and some scenes of the Polish war were staged. The prince was present in these games and by the sudden shot from a rifle [by coincidence] he was wounded and died.”⁹² If this information Hammer brings without telling its source is true, then it means we are expected to believe that the baby, the existence of whom was so critical for Osman, was shot “accidentally”. His only heir had disappeared.

Later, in 1622, a few months before his death, Osman had made yet another radical move and decided to marry Mufti Esad Efendi’s daughter, Akile⁹³. This was a strategic mistake on

⁹⁰ Peirce mentions a certain Haseki Ayşe Sultan who apparently had lived in the palace during most of Osman’s reign and later. It is possible but not certain that this is the same woman with Ömer’s mother, the Russian. (Peirce, p.142)

⁹¹ Altınay, Ahmet Refik, *Kadınlar Saltanatı*, c.1, (Istanbul, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yay., 2000), p.103

⁹² Hammer, p.309

⁹³ After Osman’s death, she got married to Ganizade Nadiri.

Osman's side because it was not possible for a free and noble woman as Akile was, to enter into the Harem full with servant-slaves.⁹⁴ Indeed, she never lived in the palace.⁹⁵

Having lost his mother, his heir and getting married to a free woman, Osman was never able to get hold in the Harem, Kösem was establishing strong alliances by her daughters' marriages. For instance, about a month before the tragic incident, Bayram Ağa⁹⁶, the Turnacıbaşı officer of janissaries, was wed to Hanzade Sultan. Interestingly the same Bayram Ağa was appointed to the armada to go to Egypt, which during the incident had stopped near Yedikule and the personnel in the ships had left to join the uprising. No doubt he was a prominent figure during the rebellion.

If the succession was left to its natural flow, there was no way that a son of Kösem would become sultan. The sons of Mahfiruz; Osman (b. 1604), Mehmed (b.1611), and Süleyman (b.1611) were all older than the eldest son of Kösem, Murad who was born on 27 July, 1612. Mehmed was killed while Osman had departed for Khotyn with a mysterious fetva from Kemaleddin Efendi, the Rumeli Kazaskeri⁹⁷. But strikingly all the historians for centuries have ignored that when Osman died, his brother, son of Mahfiruz, Süleyman was alive and if somebody had to be enthroned it had to be him.

The period of turmoil continued with Abaza Paşa, governor of Erzurum, uprising, the Sultan Mehmed Mosque incident and the continuous changing of grand viziers. In this age of chaos between the killing of Osman on 20 May, 1622 and the date when Kemankeş Kara Ali Paşa was assigned as grand vizier on 30 August, 1623 the kapıkulu army had rebelled for three times demanding the punishment of the executors of Osman. Finally on 8 January, 1623, the Grand Vizier Gürcü Mehmed Paşa managed to have Davud Paşa, Kelender Uğrusu,

⁹⁴ Peirce, p.142

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.143

⁹⁶ Who later during the reign of Kösem would become Kethüda Bey, Chief-of-staff of janissaries and then vizier.

⁹⁷ This fetva is mysterious because no other sultan, but Osman is told to have requested such fetva for executing on of his brothers.

Cebecibaşı, and Derviş Ağa were caught and executed but within a month he was also dismissed from office.

When Kemankeş Kara Ali became the grand vizier he started preparations for the enthronement of Murad, eldest son of Kösem. As a matter of fact, ex-bostanbıbaşı Biber Mehmed and ex-tutor of the sultan Hoca Ömer had also appeared in the city and started lobbying for Murad. Kemankeş succeeded to enthrone Murad in ten days (10 September, 1622) following his appointment. Soon he brought ex-Darüssaade Ağası Mustafa Ağa who was sent to exile to Egypt by Osman back to the Palace. Ex-mufti Esad also gained his title back and became Seikhulislam. The main figures of Vaka-i Haile-i Osmaniyye had gathered back.

When we look at the general outlook of the events between the death of Ahmed I and the enthronement of Murad we see that Osman's right to the throne was usurped, he was declared unsuccessful in each and every enterprise he tried, his ally Güzelce Ali Paşa suddenly died, his mother Mahfiruz suddenly died, his son Ömer suddenly died, he could not take roots in the Harem since he married a non-slave, daughter of Esad Efendi, and finally he himself was killed. After a year following his death, Murad was enthroned instead of Osman's younger brother Süleyman.

When eventually the mist cleared and Murad IV sat on the throne, he was twelve years old. Kösem entered the Topkapı Palace with a grandiose ceremonial procession in front of which a thousand dervishes were marching with prayers to celebrate her forthcoming twenty eight years of reign.⁹⁸ English ambassadour Sir Thomas Roe described the atmosphere in Istanbul at the time of Murad IV's accession:

⁹⁸ Koçu, R.E., Kösem Sultan, c. I, (Istanbul, Doğan, 2002), p.202

For the timebeing everything seems calm and peaceful. If it is not fake, such big change which dominates even the emotions was never witnessed. Even the unruliest people have an air of obedience which I thought had left this city long ago.⁹⁹

Osman was the losing side of a carefully planned and masterfully played chess game, which probably he never had a clue. He was the King in this check-mate.

*Niyetim hizmet idi saltanat ve devletime,
Çalışır hasid ü bedhah aceb nekbetime.¹⁰⁰
Farisi¹⁰¹*

⁹⁹ Peirce, p.331

¹⁰⁰ Intent to serve my state and my kingdom I was

Strangely for my disaster, work the vicious and the envious

For further information on Osman II as a poet see [İspirli, Serhan Alkan & Ferdi Kiremitçi, 'Sultan II. Osman ve şiiri', EJOS, VII (2004), No.15, 1-20]

¹⁰¹ Farisi, the penname of Sultan Osman.