

WHO SHOULD OBTAIN THE CASTLE OF  
PANKOTA (1565)?  
(INTEREST GROUPS AND SELF-PROMO-  
TION IN THE MID-SIXTEENTH-CENTURY  
OTTOMAN POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT)

**F**or external observers of conditions prevailing in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, the distinctive features of the Ottoman Empire might have been the peculiar extent of the sultan's power and the extremely centralized state apparatus. As the personal delegates of the ruler, members of the imperial council performed not only the supreme executive, legislative, and judicial functions; they also had the right to intervene in the everyday life of any subject or settlement, if the welfare of the empire so required. Promotion to a post in the imperial council represented a spectacular rise in the hierarchy and a large fortune; and those with vizierial rank could aspire to obtain the post of posts: the grand vizierate.

When, however, we consider the contemporary social values and the rules determining career opportunities, to our surprise we find that at the upper level of the hierarchy the routes led not to the centre, but on the contrary, from the centre to the provinces. The finance director of the empire (*defterdar*) regarded it as a serious advancement if he was assigned the post of governor-general (*beylerbeyi*); and similarly, the

Pál Fodor est chercheur à l'Institut d'Histoire de l'Académie Hongroise des Sciences, Budapest, Pf. 9, 1250 Hongrie.

commander of the janissary corps willingly abandoned the capital for the office of district governor (*sancakbeyi*). No wonder that they did so, because the central law code, compiled during the reign of Mehmed II and regulating the promotion of officials for a long time, stipulated that “*sancakbeyis* remain above all the commanders (*ağas*) of the outer services [in the palace]”<sup>1</sup>. This rule also implied that, according to the official view, a *sancakbeyi* of a Hungarian province preceded the commanders of the court salaried troops (janissaries, *sipahis*, etc.), the mainstay of the sultan’s authority.

This was inexplicitly acknowledgment in legal terms of the fact that for over 250 years the administration, military organization, and the finances of the empire were based on a network of districts called *sancak* in Ottoman-Turkish. It was according to *sancaks* that populations and economic capacities were measured, that basic taxes were assigned, and, even more importantly, that military benefices were allocated. The *sancak* (and the *beylerbeyilik* comprising several *sancaks*) constituted the basic unit of the empire’s military organization which is customarily labelled *timar* or (with a term borrowed from medieval Europe) the prebendal system. Above all, the *sancakbeyi* was the military commander of the *sipahis* possessing prebends in his district; at the same time, he supervised civil administration, public order, and economic life in the territory under his jurisdiction; therefore, he was regarded as the central figure in maintaining the social equilibrium<sup>2</sup>.

To be a district governor in the Ottoman Empire meant that the holder of the office approached or reached the top of the social ladder. The *sancakbeyi* was given a large prebend with a yearly income ranging from 150,000 (250,000 from the mid-sixteenth century on) to 600,000 *akçe*, depending on his term of office, rank and age<sup>3</sup>. Since according to some

<sup>1</sup> Ahmet AKGÜNDÜZ, *Osmanlı kanunnâmeleri ve hükûkî tahlilleri. I. Kitap. Osmanlı hukukuna giriş ve Fâtih devri kanunnâmeleri*, İstanbul, 1990, p. 321, 335; cf. Cornell H. FLEISCHER, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire. The Historian Mustafa Âli (1541-1600)*, Princeton, 1986, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> I. Metin KUNT, *The Sultan’s Servants. The Transformation of Ottoman Provincial Government, 1550-1650*, New York, 1983, p. 14-27. Cf. Géza DÁVID, “The *Sancak* as the Framework for Research on Ottoman Regional Studies”, *Türkische Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte von 1071 bis 1920*, Akten des IV. Internationalen Kongresses. Herausgegeben von Hans Georg Majer und Raoul Motika, Wiesbaden, 1995, p. 51-58.

<sup>3</sup> I.M. KUNT, *op. cit.*, p. 51; G. DÁVID, “Die Bege von Szigetvár im 16. Jahrhundert”, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, 82, 1992, p. 68; G. DÁVID, “A magyarországi török archontológiai kutatások lehetőségei (Arad-Gyulai szandzsákbégek)”,

calculations, people who had a minimum wealth of 100,000 *akçe* could be regarded as rich even in the inflationary seventeenth century<sup>4</sup>, it is evident that the *sancakbeyi*'s social importance was, especially in former times, matched by his high material reward.

Nevertheless, the *sancakbeyi* spent a considerable part of his revenues not on himself and his family, but on the expenditures pertaining to his tasks. He himself had to provide for the collection of incomes assigned to him and in proportion to the amount of the revenue, he had to maintain a large military retinue. With the passage of time, the payment of salaries to, and the provisioning and outfitting of his men, as well as the procurement of the arms and tents prescribed and participation in campaigns without interruption, consumed an ever growing part of his resources. Moreover, the spectre of losing his post was always before his eyes; while during the fifteenth century, he could stay in a given place for many years, by and by his terms of office shortened and the periods of dismissal (*mazul*) increased<sup>5</sup>. As a corollary to these changes, in the mid-sixteenth century an unpleasant new practice was introduced: from that time on, the *sancakbeyi* was officially and regularly required to pay large sums in exchange for his appointment to a new post, a rare occurrence formerly<sup>6</sup>. Consequently, the *sancakbeyi* was forced to grasp with tooth and nail the slightest opportunity of increasing revenues.

But neither the heavy burdens, nor the growing instability of the *sancakbeyi* and *beylerbeyi* posts reduced the number of applicants; on the contrary, more and more people entered the competition. Generally speaking, governors in the Ottoman Empire were recruited from two main sources of manpower: from those who were trained either in the palace schools of the sultans or the households of high-ranking officials including the *beylerbeyis* and *sancakbeyis*. For a long while, special emphasis was laid on the aptitude and administrative-military experiences of applicants, especially when the appointment to a frontier governorship was on the agenda. This is why the Ottoman polity was already seen by contemporaries as a kind of meritocratic system in which the ruler's grace above all rewarded the ability and effectiveness of officials,

*Történelmi Szemle*, 36: 1-2, 1994, 116 ff., 127; Klára HEGYI, *Török berendezkedés Magyarországon*, História Könyvtár, Monográfiák 7, Budapest, 1995, p. 168.

<sup>4</sup> I.M. KUNT, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57-99; K. HEGYI, *op. cit.*, p. 167-177.

<sup>6</sup> Klaus RÖHRBORN, *Untersuchungen zur osmanischen Verwaltungsgeschichte*, Berlin-New York, 1973, 114 ff.

and which was for this reason defined as the “republic of slaves” by some observers<sup>7</sup>. Aptitude, however, was only one component in the career of Ottoman statesmen and was of decreasing importance. Within the Ottoman establishment there were — always present and in the seventeenth century of rising ascendancy — those interest groups which have been designated as “political families” or “political households”<sup>8</sup>. These terms are used to describe such “artificial” patrimonial clans that included the patron’s children, relatives, slaves, and free-born servicemen, the members of which — often allying themselves with kindred or friends’ families and protectors in the sultan’s palace — assisted one another in acquiring offices, promotion and in accumulating prebends. It is a generally held view that by the seventeenth century patronage — and in particular palace-relationships — had become the most important condition of eligibility for high state offices<sup>9</sup>. This assertion is based on the observation that in that century the cadres coming from the central apparatus gained predominance among the provincial district governors and governor-generals<sup>10</sup>.

There is no reason to suppose, however, that protectionism had played an insignificant role in earlier times. All the less, because the contemporary actors themselves did not deny its existence and indeed occasionally referred to personal interdependencies (called *intisab*) without any hesitation or shame. But on the whole, our information about this phenomenon is very limited, particularly in the period before the mid-sixteenth century, for which both the related Ottoman and Western sources are relatively few in number. The lack of private letters (*missiles*) can first of all be cited as a cause of our difficulties in uncovering such connections and in assessing their impact on contemporary social relations. For this reason we may consider ourselves fortunate that in the Vienna archives some private letters have been preserved. To this category belongs a sixteenth-century correspondence that was once in the possession of a certain *sancakbeyi* called Mehmed. The documents in question were written

<sup>7</sup> This expression was used by Gianfrancesco Morosini, the Venetian ambassador to Istanbul, in his *relazione* of 1585: *Le relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al senato durante il secolo decimosesto*, Edite da Eugenio ALBERI, s. III, vol. III, Firenze, 1855, p. 267.

<sup>8</sup> Suraiya FAROQHI, “Crisis and Change, 1590-1699”, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*, Halil İNALCIK with Donald QUATAERT (eds), Cambridge, 1994, p. 552.

<sup>9</sup> S. FAROQHI, *op. cit.*, p. 571.

<sup>10</sup> I. M. KUNT, *op. cit.*, p. 66-68.

in connection with the rivalry among three *beys* concerning the castle Pankota and the domain belonging to it (lying on the territory of the former Hungarian county of Zaránd); apparently, the letters fell prey to Hungarian soldiers during the Habsburg-Ottoman-Transylvanian clashes in 1565 and were taken to Vienna afterwards<sup>11</sup>. We may say without exaggeration that these documents supply unique data concerning the manoeuvring for positions, the methods applied, and the political morals of the élite groups in the mid-sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire. Moreover, from the same period we have the commands issued by the imperial council at our disposal, which makes the reconstruction in detail of an instructive story possible<sup>12</sup>.

Before embarking on the actual topic, it seems appropriate to dwell shortly on the institution which proved to be unavoidable for all the governors who sought to remain in office or wanted to be given a new post. Similarly to the main European powers and the vassal states, *beys* stationed in the provinces employed official representatives (*chargés d'affaires*, agents: *kapu kethüdası*) to the sultan's court in Istanbul. The need to create such a post arose from three considerations. First, the agent secured the flow of information between the centre and the *bey*. Second, the latest news about vacant offices could be heard there the

<sup>11</sup> The fragment of correspondence in which we are interested consists of 5 items: 1. Veli *kethüda's* report to his master, Mehmed, the *bey* of Arad (Wien, Haus-, Hof und Staatsarchiv, Türkische Urkunden und Staatsschreiben, 1565 Mai [?], fol. 1a-1b; cf. Ernst Dieter PETRITSCH, *Regesten der osmanischen Dokumente im Österreichischen Staatsarchiv*, Band 1 (1480-1574), [Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs. Ergänzungsband 10/1.], Wien, 1991, p. 161: No. 461); 2. a letter of Hızır, the *kapu kethüdası* of Mehmed, the pasha of Temesvár to his patron (HHStA, *Turcica* 20 Konv. 4, fol. 36a-36b; cf. E.D. PETRITSCH, *op. cit.*, p. 154: No. 439); 3. a letter by İskender, the commander of the gatekeepers of the grand vizier to Mehmed, the *bey* of Arad (*ibid.*, 37a-37b; E.D. Petritsch, *loc. cit.*); 4. a letter by Ferhad, the chief stable master to the pasha of Temesvár (*ibid.*, 38a-38b; E.D. PETRITSCH, *loc. cit.*); 5. a letter by Ferhad, the chief stable master to Mehmed, the *bey* of Vidin (*ibid.*, 39a-39b; E.D. PETRITSCH, *loc. cit.*). The Habsburg clerks added summaries in Italian of varied length to each of these letters.

<sup>12</sup> 5 numaralı mühimme defteri (973/1565-1566) I. "Özet ve İndeks", II. "Tıpkıbasım". Ankara, 1994. 6 numaralı mühimme defteri (972/1564-1565) I-II. "Özet, Transkripsiyon ve İndeks", III. "Tıpkıbasım". Ankara, 1995. Anton C. SCHAENDLINGER, *Die Schreiben Süleymâns des Prächtigen an Karl V., Ferdinand I. und Maximilian II. Transkriptionen und Übersetzungen, Faksimile*, Unter Mitarbeit von Claudia Römer (Osmanisch-türkische Dokumente aus dem Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv zu Wien. Teil 1.), Wien, 1983; A.C. SCHAENDLINGER, *Die Schreiben Süleymâns des Prächtigen an Vasallen, Militärbeamte, Beamte und Richter. Transkriptionen und Übersetzungen, Faksimile*, Unter Mitarbeit von Claudia Römer, (Osmanisch-türkische Dokumente aus dem Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv zu Wien. Teil 2.), Wien, 1986.

most quickly. Third, recommendations for offices were deliberated in the imperial council and, in principle — on the basis of the grand vizier's statement — the final decision was made by the sultan. Much or sometimes everything depended on whether at some point the agent could intervene in this process; in such a manner that, for example, he submitted his patron's *defter* to the *divan* before the rival *bey*'s recommendation had arrived. As in modern ages, so at that time great importance was attached to valuable information, mainly if it was obtained by outmatching the competitors. This presupposed the presence of widespread connections (the friendship of powerful protectors and of the scribes in the imperial council), much time and much money. And because the rivals resorted to the same methods, and even the *beys* often came to the capital city personally to obtain a post for themselves, the sultan's court was constantly overwhelmed by a host of applicants and imbued with an air of corruption.

Late May – early June 1565 may have been a hectic period in Veli *kethüda*'s life. He received letters from his patron Mehmed, the governor of the *sancak* of Arad, one after the other. Among them there were reports and applications to the imperial council, and instructions to the *kethüda* alike.

In the final analysis, the amount of correspondence boomed because of the war that had broken out or more precisely had been renewed in Hungary in the previous year. The troops of the Transylvanian Prince John Sigismund and of the Hungarian King and Emperor Maximilian clashed again in order to decide by force of arms the territorial dispute which had remained unsolved after the Ottoman occupations of 1541 and 1551-52: the possession of the north-eastern uplands and the regions east of the river Tisza<sup>13</sup>. While in the autumn and winter of 1564 it was John Sigismund who had achieved the greater success, from February 1565 on the royal army had started a counter-attack, capturing the disputed forts one after the other, and threatening Transylvania proper. In this critical situation, John Sigismund adopted twofold tactics: on the one hand, he turned to the Porte for assistance; and on

<sup>13</sup> On the events in detail, see Imre LUKINICH, *Erdély területi változásai a török hódítás korában 1541-1711*, Budapest, 1918, 93 ff; cf. Béla KÖPECZI (ed.), *Erdély története I. A kezdetektől 1606-ig*. Makkai László and Mócsy András (eds.), Budapest, 1986, p. 437-446. On the rise of the Principality of Transylvania, see recently Cristina FENEȘAN, *Constituirea principatului autonom al Transilvaniei*, București, 1997.

the other, on March 13 in Szatmár he concluded a treaty with the deputies of Maximilian, in which he renounced a majority of his earlier claims. When, however, the sultan declared that, despite the peace agreement renewed with the Habsburgs in February 1565<sup>14</sup>, he would not look on with folded arms if the territorial integrity of the Principality (which he regarded as his own *vilayet* and as comprising also the regions east of the Tisza) was violated<sup>15</sup>, and ordered a large-scale mobilization, the Prince of Transylvania refused to implement the articles of the treaty of Szatmár. Indeed, he gathered a new army and — accompanied by Ottoman troops sent to his aid — set out to recapture his lost forts.

The auxiliary Ottoman troops were headed by the pasha of Temesvár (Timișoara/Temeșvar) who was given the rank of commander-in-chief (*serdar*). Apart from the military force of his *vilayet*, some troops of Buda led by Hasan, the *bey* of Szolnok (Solnok) and the *sipahis* of several Balkan *sancaks* were also ordered under his command (the number of districts mobilized grew month by month)<sup>16</sup>. In the considerably swollen army, Mehmed, the *bey* of Arad, marched at the head of his soldiers, too. The investigations of Géza Dávid have revealed that the prominent statesman was in charge of the *sancak* Arad from July 4, 1564. Previously he had held the post of district governor in Fülek (Filakovo/Filek)<sup>17</sup>. According to the Hungarian humanist historian, Miklós Istvánffy, before Mehmed became an Ottoman high ranking official, he had been a renegade: “Formerly he had been named Mihály Kunovics and escaped voluntarily from the service of Bálint Török, the excellent man to the Turks, and later on he fought a duel for the sake of Muslim religion with Balázs Székely, a mounted soldier in the castle of

<sup>14</sup> A.C. SCHÄNDLINGER, *Die Schreiben Süleymâns... an Karl V., Ferdinand I. und Maximilian II.*, p. 87-94: No. 32, E.D. PETRITSCH, *op. cit.*, p. 154-155: No. 440.

<sup>15</sup> Ferenc FORGÁCH, “Emlékirat Magyarország állapotáról Ferdinánd, János, Miksa királysága és II. János erdélyi fejedelemsége alatt” (translated by István Borzsák), *Humanista történetírók*, Budapest, 1977, p. 827. On the notion of “Erdel” in Ottoman sources, see also C. FENEŞAN, *op. cit.*, p. 48-50.

<sup>16</sup> *5 numaralı mühimme defteri* (hereinafter MD 5), Nos. 807, 808, 809, 811, 814, 816, 817, 823, 827, 837, 856, 859, 879, 921, 922, 923, 957, 958, 960, 1009, 1010, 1011, 1126, 1134, 1140, 1141, 1143, 1144, 1150, 1152, 1154, 1156, 1157, 1164, 1189, 1190, 1203. Characteristically, the pasha submitted the name of 39 soldiers for reward as early as March 11, though his army had hardly begun its march (İstanbul, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Kepeci 74, p. 479-480). Cf. *ibid.*, 544 (recommendations from April, 1565).

<sup>17</sup> G. DÁVID, *A magyarországi török archontológiai*, p. 115.

Várad and was defeated”<sup>18</sup>. This assertion has been questioned because it contradicts a remark made by the Ottoman chronicler İbrahim Peçevi who stated that the person at issue was called Yahyalu and Sofi Mehmed. Allegedly, this remark refers to a close relationship either with the Yahyalu tribe in Anatolia, or with the famous Yahya paşa family; moreover, the nickname Sofi (*sufi*) was rarely given to fresh renegades<sup>19</sup>.

In the first summary register (*icmal defteri*) of the *sancak* Lippa (Lipova) of 1555, however, we find a *ziamet*-holder with the semi-Southern Slav name Mehmed Kunoviç who possessed by far the largest prebend among his comrades, yielding 30,320 *akçe* a year<sup>20</sup>. Though we hear of another Mihály Kunovics in another context in the sixteenth century, too<sup>21</sup>, on the basis of the summary register the possibility cannot be excluded that Istvánffy did correctly ascertain the past of the *bey* concerned<sup>22</sup>. If the incontestably renegade Kunoviç was indeed a highly esteemed *ziamet*-holder in the *vilayet* of Temesvár in 1555, then, by the early 1560s, he could have risen into the rank of *sancakbeyi*, because at that time such a career was not unimaginable on the frontiers<sup>23</sup>.

The transformation of Kunoviç into Mehmed *bey* — for the time being let us accept that the two persons are identical — might have been facilitated not only by his apostasy and excellent services, but to a great extent by personal connections. From the letters which we will trace below it is evident that in 1565 Ferhad *ağa*, the chief stable master (*miraħor-i kebir*) and the commander of the gatekeepers (*ser-i bevva-ban, kapucu başı*) in the sultan’s court counted him among his clients. Also it is clear that Kunoviç was linked either by kinship or by political ties with the *bey* of Vidin, also bearing the name Mehmed, for

<sup>18</sup> N. ISTVÁNFY, *Regni Hungarici historia*, Coloniae Agrippinae, 1724, 292. In Hungarian: Miklós ISTVÁNFY, *A magyarok történetéből*, (translated by László Juhász. Selected, introduced and commented by György Székely), Budapest, 1962, p. 331.

<sup>19</sup> G. DÁVID, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>20</sup> İstanbul, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, *Tapu defterleri* No. 356, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> Mihály SZTÁRAI, *História Perényi Ferenc kiszabadulásáról. Perényi Péter élete és halála*, Selected, introduced and commented by Imre Téglásy, Budapest, 1985, p. 180. Similarly to his brother Ferenc, this Mihály “Kunowith” must have served Péter Perényi. He was killed sometime between 1543 and 1550.

<sup>22</sup> In the meantime, G. DÁVID has also noted this piece of information (*Török közigazgatás Magyarországon*, Doctoral thesis. Budapest, 1995), but nevertheless maintains his previous opinion.

<sup>23</sup> True, this did not happen frequently. For some examples of *ziamet*-holders becoming *sancakbeyis*, see G. DÁVID, *op. cit.*

Kunoviç's agent at the Porte always mentioned him with great reverence as "our lord, the *bey* of Vidin (*Vidin beyi efendümüz*)"<sup>24</sup>. Mehmed of Vidin and Ferhad *ağa* were also acquaintances; on the basis of a half-sentence in a document we can even suppose that for a period they had been in close relationship with one another. At any rate, Ferhad *ağa* never tired of emphasizing his respect for his fellow. Apart from these, Kunoviç was in touch and had good connections with İskender, the commander of the gatekeepers of the grand vizier Semiz Ali pasha. Yahya paşa-zade Arslan, who was appointed the pasha of Buda in the spring of 1565, must also have been among his intimates, if Arslan's chargé d'affaires in Istanbul, in the absence of his messengers, asked Kunoviç's *kethüda*, Veli, to forward some confidential letters to Buda through his patron.

Probably, Ferhad was of slave origin (*devşirme*) and began his career in the palace school, because the high offices he held were usually granted to such persons. Consequently, it cannot be excluded that the shared past with Mehmed of Vidin can be traced back to their childhood and as regards its place, to the sultan's court. If this supposition is true, then the two friends and the renegade Kunoviç were linked by common origin. However it may have been, it can safely be stated that the two Mehmed (of Vidin and Kunoviç), Ferhad, and possibly İskender (and very hypothetically Yahya paşa-zade Arslan) belonged to the same "political household". In the spring of 1565, the interest group was headed by Ferhad; at any rate, by virtue of his posts it was Ferhad who could most easily approach and influence the ruler. And as we will see, he did not hesitate to make the best of this opportunity. The sultan favoured him, and shortly after our incident he even allowed him to lead a well-defined amount of water to his house from the sources supplying Istanbul<sup>25</sup>.

This was the network of patronage based on which Mehmed Kunoviç went into action for the extension of his *sancak* in the middle of May 1565. Namely it occurred that when the Ottoman army marching north through Lippa reached Pankota (at that time in the possession of the widow of the late István Losonczy, who had been the heroic defender of

<sup>24</sup> This second Mehmed probably was identical to that person who had been transferred to Vidin from the office of the Anatolian "*timar kethüdası*" on December 21, 1563. İstanbul, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Kepeci 218, 58. I am grateful to Géza Dávid for this piece of information.

<sup>25</sup> 6 numaralı mühimme defteri (hereinafter MD 6), No. 1325.

Temesvár in 1552), Mustafa pasha, the *beylerbeyi* of Temesvár, decided to capture the fort, so that it should not endanger the communication lines of his troops. The siege proved less than exhausting for the soldiers, because the defenders quickly deserted the fort<sup>26</sup>. Immediately, the *beylerbeyi* nominated a captain to the castle, started to recruit its guard, and then asked the Porte to confirm his measures taken<sup>27</sup>. It must have been at this point that Kunoviç, who was present in the army and probably fought valiantly, set his eyes on Pankota which was an insignificant castle, but had a smart estate attached<sup>28</sup>. He had good reasons to do so as the fiscus still owed him a part of his *hasses*, and it had been no real compensation when in the middle of May he was granted the small prebend of a deceased *timar*-holder in Smederevo (Semendire)<sup>29</sup>. Therefore he sent a letter to the Porte submitting that if he were to be placed at the head of the guard to be commanded in Pankota, the castle would be able to contain the incursions of the Heyducks of Gyula, public security would considerably improve, and the construction of the *palank* planned at Erdöhegy would not be needed (the command to this end had already been issued previously)<sup>30</sup>. For tactical reasons, Kunoviç did not allude to his actual purposes, merely referring to public welfare. But he knew very well that all this was not worth much in the imperial court. Therefore he additionally sent two “letters of intercession” (*şefa-at-name*) to his *kethüda*; one to İskender, the commander of the grand vizieral gatekeepers, and one to Ferhad *ağa*, his last resort; then he waited impatiently for Veli *kethüda* to further his cause.

Sometime after June 11, Veli compiled a long report summarizing the results of his efforts and forming a judgement of the further prospects<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> F. FORGÁCH, *op. cit.*, p. 824. N. ISTVÁNYFY, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

<sup>27</sup> MD 6, No. 1202. The reply to his report was dispatched on Mai 30, 1565.

<sup>28</sup> On the estate, see Ferenc MAKSAY, *Magyarország birtokviszonyai a 16. század közepén*. II. Budapest, 1990, p. 1011, 1028.

<sup>29</sup> G. DÁVID, *op. cit.*, p. 116. We know from the order of assignment (published by A.C. SCHAENDLINGER, *Die Schreiben Süleymâns des Prächtigen an Vasallen*, p. 59-60: No. 41.) that he had an estate (*çiftlik*) in the sub-district Valpovo of the *sancak* Semendire. This fact again points to his relationships with the Yahya paşa-zades, for the latter had a considerable base in Semendire. It was also there that Arslan served as *bey* before being elevated to the governorship of Buda.

<sup>30</sup> MD 6, No. 1233. A.C. SCHAENDLINGER, *op. cit.*, p. 62-63: No. 43. Cf. G. DÁVID, *op. cit.*, p. 116: 27. j.

<sup>31</sup> HHStA, Türkische Urkunden und Staatsschreiben, 1565 Mai (?), fol. 1a. The *terminus post quem* is deduced from the date Zilkade 12 figuring in the letter. Thus the date with question-mark here and in Petritsch (*op. cit.*, p. 161: No. 461) should be modified accordingly.

In the following, we have to do nothing else than recapitulate this document in which Veli comments on every incident of the previous days — the statements of which are fully corroborated by the letters originating from the protectors.

The messenger, who had brought Kunoviç's petition and letters, arrived in Istanbul on ca. June 4<sup>32</sup>. Veli took the petition to the *divan* without delay; the grand vizier promised to submit it to the sultan. In the course of the audience held after the session of the council this did indeed happen but not with the expected result. Since the ruler's command decreed that the future status of Pankota should be decided by the pasha of Temesvár, he was permitted to give it either to the *bey* of Arad or the *bey* of Lippa, depending on whose rule he deemed more advantageous for the tax-payers and public order (according to the text of the command, the governor of Lippa was also mentioned because the inhabitants of Pankota had already been paying him a certain amount of tax for a long time)<sup>33</sup>. After having taken over the decision and having learned its content, Veli *kethüda* again ran over to the grand vizier and expressed his disappointment with the decision to invest the *beylerbeyi* of Temesvár with full power. He noticed that the governor-general would have written to the imperial council if he had wished to intervene in this matter. However, his efforts to have the grand vizier withdraw the command were unsuccessful. Semiz Ali pasha refused him flatly, saying that he was not able to change the sultan's will.

At this stage Veli considered rather gloomily the prospects of his patron. Particularly because the new rival, who had appeared suddenly and unexpectedly, possessed a hinterland that was as strong as that of Kunoviç. This second person was none other than Abdalbaki (called Baki by Veli and the Hungarian contemporaries), who had been dismissed from his service place in Delvine and transferred to the *sancak* of

<sup>32</sup> This can be concluded from the command replying to the petition dated June 4, 1565. See in note 30.

<sup>33</sup> MD 6, No. 1233. A.C. SCHÄNDLINGER, *op. cit.*, p. 62-63: No. 43. Indeed, Pankota figures in the cadastral survey of the *sancak* Lippa in 1554 (once designated as "village", then as "town"); its inhabitants were carefully registered, as though they were living in Ottoman territory. The number of *cizye*-payers in the town amounted to 100, but their tithes could not be collected due to the nearby Christian castle; for this reason they paid in three instalments 20,000 *akçe* a year substituting their *cizye* (5,000) and tithes (15,000). *Tapu defterleri*, No. 292, p. 104-106.

Lippa on May 6, 1565<sup>34</sup>. There he had replaced Malkoç *bey*, who was appointed the governor of the district Ohri on May 12<sup>35</sup>. And it was here that the shoe pinched; whereas according to Veli, Malkoç *bey* was not a rival of equal weight, Baki was backed to the hilt by such prominent personalities as the grand vizier, a certain — and evidently influential — Ferruh *kethüda* (who was of the same age as Baki and always spoke of the latter in high terms), and the secretary-in-chief of the imperial council (*reisülküttab*) who “was at a loss as how to serve his excellency Baki *bey*; to such a degree that he became Baki’s eyes to see and arms to hold...”. Evidently, it was due to this group of promoters (who would have most readily given Baki the castle of Pankota) that in the sultan’s command the formula “either... or...” was used. Veli *kethüda* even thought that the grand vizier was supporting with the following consideration that the matter be transferred to the *beylerbeyi* of Temesvár: if the pasha happened not to decide in favour of Baki, he, the grand vizier, could decline responsibility. In order to give comfort to Kunoviç, Veli added, there were few who would dare to pick a quarrel with Baki; and the commission given to the pasha of Temesvár itself was to be understood as a token of the grand vizier’s respect towards Kunoviç (since by doing so he hindered the direct refusal of Kunoviç’s petition).

Under these circumstances Veli *kethüda* saw a single solution possible: to outmatch Baki. He advised his patron to try to have the pasha of Temesvár issue a recommendation letter on his behalf before Baki arrived at his new seat in Lippa. If Mustafa pasha was reluctant to do this, there was nothing left but to seek to win the confidence of the pasha in the presence of Baki. Should Baki insist on receiving Pankota, Kunoviç would do better to renounce his claim, because “that ramshackle *palank*” was not worth inducing the grand vizier’s resentment. Finally, he added with wise comprehension that after all Arad was not the property of Kunoviç, and later on he would be able to acquire another *sancak* of greater importance if the grand vizier remained well disposed towards him.

<sup>34</sup> İstanbul, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Ali Emirî, Süleyman, 292. I am thankful to Géza Dávid for this piece of information.

<sup>35</sup> MD 6, No. 1140. Accordingly, it seems that Baki was nominated the *bey* of Lippa before the dismissal from the post of Malkoç *bey*. If this is true, then Lippa had two governors for a week, a fact from which supposedly a dispute arose between the two *bey*s over the incomes due in that week.

Veli himself, however, had not the slightest intention of giving up the struggle. He visited Ferhad *ağa* again; for the first time he had gone to see him before the sultan's command was issued, and it was then that he had handed over his patron's letter, demanding mediation, to the *ağa*. On that occasion Ferhad had received him most kindly; he had interrogated Veli about the capture of Pankota and had expressed his special respect for Kunoviç and Mehmed of Vidin. What is more, he had asked both of them through Veli to keep submitting the names of worthy frontier *beys* so that he could recommend them to sultan Süleyman, when the latter received him and the conversation turned to the situation on the borders (like when, during recent talks, Ferhad had drawn the ruler's attention to Arslan, Hasan, Hamza and Mehmed *beys*)<sup>36</sup>. Encouraged by these utterances, Veli now asked Ferhad to send a *şefaatname* to Mustafa, the *beylerbeyi* of Temesvár. The stable master willingly fulfilled his request and among other things he wrote the following to Mustafa:

“... it should not be concealed from your excellency that your sincere follower, Mehmed, the present *bey* of Arad, is related to us, your sincere friend by complete connection and attachment (*intisab-i tammla mensub ve ihtisas-i tamam birle mahsus olub*); we ask you not to deny him your abundant grace and endless benevolence... No doubt, your gracious willingness towards the mentioned will be returned to your excellency, too...”<sup>37</sup>

Ferhad *ağa*'s readiness to help was not confined to this. He sent the commander of his gatekeepers together with Veli to Hızır, the court representative of the pasha of Temesvár, with the message that he considered the goodwill towards the *bey* of Arad as a sign of benevolence toward himself; he expected the pasha to demand Pankota for Kunoviç for his (Ferhad's) sake. Hızır promised to do his utmost and to inform

<sup>36</sup> The persons mentioned (the first three at least) were indeed among the most prominent and famous *beys* serving in Hungarian territories. Cf. Antal GÉVAY, *A' budai pasák*, Bécs, 1841, p. 10-11 (Arslan); Markus KÖHBACH, *Die Eroberung von Füleek durch die Osmanen 1554. Eine historisch-quellenkritische Studie zur osmanischen Expansion im östlichen Mitteleuropa*, Wien-Köln-Weimar, 1994, p. 48-59: note 48 (Hamza); MD 6, Nos. 797, 798, etc. (Hasan); Mehmed can probably be identified with Ferhad's friend, Mehmed of Vidin. On the basis of the above-mentioned it cannot be excluded that Ferhad also had something to do with the appointment of Arslan as the *beylerbeyi* of Buda on Mai 10, 1565 (on this, see MD 6, No. 1164).

<sup>37</sup> HHStA, Turcica 20 Konv. 4, 38a. E.D. PETRITSCH, *op. cit.*, p. 154: No. 439.

his boss to this effect. He composed a letter without delay the most interesting parts of which read as follows :

“It should be noble knowledge to my sultan that both his excellency, our felicitous grand vizier and his excellency, the felicitous Ferhad *ağa*, desire that preference be given to the mentioned *bey* [of Arad]... We wrote this letter to the noble dust under your foot, because Ferhad *ağa* gave the following order: “You should report... to his excellency the pasha of Temesvár that we wish Pankota [to be given] to the *bey* of Arad. It should be known to my sultan that both his excellency the grand vizier and your sincere friend, Ferhad *ağa*, desire emphatically that the *bey* of Arad be preferred. In any case, such a report should be sent [to the Porte] according to which it is appropriate to grant the castle to his excellency the *bey* [of Arad]. Do not have any doubt that the respect for his excellency the *bey* will bring about his excellency the grand vizier’s gratitude...”<sup>38</sup>

Hızır seems to have been frightened by the resolute behaviour of Ferhad, because he talked through his hat by letting Mustafa know that the grand vizier had supported Kunoviç. Apparently, the grand vizier Semiz Ali pasha assumed the role of impartial statesman towards the “camp” of Kunoviç. This is clear from the attempt at mediation made by İskender, the commander of Semiz Ali’s gatekeepers. İskender, who served Kunoviç but tried to hide their connection for unknown reasons, asked Semiz Ali for a secret appointment where he forwarded Kunoviç’s request concerning Pankota. But he made a big mistake; he started the action with a delay of several days, thus the grand vizier could easily refuse him by saying “why did you not submit it some days before the messenger’s leaving [i.e. the handing over on June 6 of the command issued on June 4]; at that point the matter could have been settled”. After having received this answer, İskender came to the same conclusion as Veli: the solution could be hoped for from Mustafa pasha of Temesvár, who should be softened up for a favourable decision<sup>39</sup>.

While İskender was engaged with the grand vizier, Veli *kethüda* sought to win the support of another “big gun”, Mehmed pasha. He can be identified as Sokollu Mehmed, the following great steersman of the empire (in three weeks time he was to take up the grand vizieral post from Semiz Ali). Sokollu, however, did not want to risk his career for

<sup>38</sup> HHSStA, Turcica 20 Konv. 4, 36a. E.D. PETRITSCH, *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> HHSStA, Turcica 20 Konv. 4, 37a. E.D. PETRITSCH, *ibid.* In addition, İskender made apologies for the malicious news that was spread about him by certain persons; he asked Kunoviç not to believe them at all.

the sake of Kunoviç. Therefore, he openly told Veli that he would not write the *şefaatname* requested to Mustafa pasha of Temesvár, because the grand vizier, who considered Baki as his own man, would be annoyed about it. Sokollu's opinion was similar to that of İskender (and, in the final analysis, of Veli): somehow Kunoviç should come to an understanding with Mustafa.

In the meantime, Ferhad *ağa* gave Veli another useful piece of advice, which sounds rather strange. He revealed to the *kethüda* that the siege of the Hungarian border fortress of Gyula had been ordered, which, in his opinion, would be a good occasion for Kunoviç to show his valiancy again. But instead of waiting for the castle to be captured, the moment its fall seemed imminent, he should immediately send one of his men to Istanbul with reports on the victory. To put it in other words: the stable master, the commander of the gatekeepers and confidant of the sultan, and one of the pillars of the state, encouraged his client of *sancakbeyi* rank to ask reward for a heroic deed still undone, and to have an advantage over his rivals based on pure fabrication<sup>40</sup>.

On June 8 or 9, an unforeseen incident broke the deadlock. A messenger of Malkoç *bey*, who had been dismissed from Lippa hardly a month earlier, arrived at the court bringing the petition and recommendation *defter* of his patron along. Malkoç claimed that the commandship of Pankota should be given to Hüsrev, the officer of his mounted troops (*beşlü ağası*). At this point, the grand vizier got fed up with the whole case. He shook the third rival off by resorting to lies; he stated that upon his submission the sultan had already granted the fort to the *bey* of Arad. We do not know how, but Veli *kethüda* was immediately informed about the refusal and its reasoning. Therefore, he suddenly called on the grand vizier and asked him to give the statement made to Malkoç's man in writing. Thereupon Semiz Ali pasha called the *reisülküttab* and instructed him to compile a command to the pasha of Temesvár ordering that if the construction of the *palank* at Erdöhegy was not needed, the fort of Pankota should be annexed to the territory of the *sancak* of Arad, and the town and the villages belonging to it to the sultan's domain. Following this, Veli *kethüda* went to the secretary-in-chief who handed him the final document in a sealed bag. As Veli, how-

<sup>40</sup> By the way, even the information concerning the decree to the siege of Gyula was not true in this form. The operation was proposed by the pasha of Temesvár as early as the beginning of May, but the sultan or the *divan* deemed the undertaking too risky, and therefore gave him an evasive answer. MD 6, No. 1134.

ever, did not like the look of it, he went back to the grand vizier where (in Veli's presentation) the following conversation took place :

“— My felicitous sultan, I was given a command in a sealed bag, but I don't know what it really contains.

— You need not know it. I know its content.

— My felicitous sultan, I have no idea of what to report to your servant, my master. Will you show mercy upon me, open and take a good look at what has been written in it? It differs from what you have ordered — I replied.

— I know what it contains. Whatever the command may decree, dispatch it — [his excellency] ordered.

The reason for my persistence was that I had got word from the scribes in the imperial council that the content of the command I would be given did not prove very profitable to them; because they simply had to put onto paper that in accordance with the previous order, the pasha of Temesvár should grant the castle of Pankota to whom he wanted while he should attach the villages belonging to it to the imperial domains. I insisted as I could, but I was not able to persuade his excellency the pasha to break the command. On the contrary, he was offended by me. This case was surrounded by much secrecy as the secretary-in-chief assisted Baki *bey*.”

Veli's suspicion and the information acquired from the scribes proved to be true. The grand vizier Semiz Ali pasha had deceived not only Malkoç's man but also him. The command sent to Temesvár, which has been preserved both in original and in copy, contained almost the same provisions that Veli heard from the scribes; the pasha of Temesvár was ordered to claim the total income of the castle of Pankota and the villages belonging to it for the treasury, and it was left at his discretion to annex the fort itself to one of the *sancaks* mentioned<sup>41</sup>. Supposedly, this arrangement made each of the rivals disinterested in any further competition for Pankota. There was no point in possessing a fort which had been completely deprived of its revenues and yielded only the glory and the expenditures of its guarding to its owner.

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For the time being there is no data at our disposal as to whose (Kunoviç's or Baki's) district the castle of Pankota was attached. No matter which of the two gained it, not much later the sultan — possibly

<sup>41</sup> MD 6, No. 1257. A.C. SCHAEIDLINGER, *op. cit.*, p. 64: No. 44. E.D. PETRITSCH, *op. cit.*, p. 162: No. 463.

on the initiative of Sokollu who had come to power — revised his former decision and created a new *sancak* with Pankota as its seat. This must have occurred in the autumn of 1565, sometime after the campaign in the region east of the Tisza had been brought to an end. One (the first?) of its *beys*, Mahmud, was mentioned as deceased as early as January 21, 1566<sup>42</sup>. Thus, in the spring – summer of 1566, Kunoviç still had to be content with the *sancak* of Arad which did not satisfy his ambitions at all<sup>43</sup>. Mehmed of Vidin, the other member of the “political family”, also remained in his place; it was from there that he was ordered to attend the Hungarian campaign in 1566<sup>44</sup>. But the person who fared worst was Baki *bey*, the favourite of the mighty at the court before Sokollu’s ascendancy. After the district of Lippa was placed under his command, he joined with his soldiers the Transylvanian–Ottoman armies on the march, aiming to recapture the castles seized by the Habsburg troops<sup>45</sup>. He took part in the occupation of Erdöd (August, 2); then in the strange “static warfare” during which, instead of attacking each other, both the troops of Lazarus Schwendi entrenched near the Tisza and the Szamos and the Ottomans circulating around the enemy’s camp were engaged in plundering systematically the surrounding settlements. As the anonymous author of the so-called Verancsics-Annals wrote: “Sometimes it happened that the Germans and Ottomans, going out to loot, would encounter each other but the Turks did not harm the Germans and the Germans did not harm the Turks”<sup>46</sup>. In early October, however, after a truce had been concluded between Schwendi and

<sup>42</sup> MD 5, No. 841.

<sup>43</sup> Later on he might have changed his mind; after the capture of Gyula in 1566 his *sancak* — assuming the name Gyula — considerably grew and came to the first place within the hierarchy of districts in the *vilayet* of Temesvár. See G. DÁVID, *A magyarországi*, p. 125-126.

<sup>44</sup> As early as May 1565 he wrote to Ferhad that during the upcoming military campaign he aimed to capture castles and change his *sancak* and requested the good friend’s aid to this end. Ferhad promised (in vain, as it appeared later) that “when the opportunity arises, we spare no pains and strive [to assist] in every way”. At the same time, he expected detailed news from Mehmed on the campaign’s events. HHStA, Turcica 20 Konv. 4, 39a. E.D. PETRITSCH, *ibid.* As the last sentence reveals, the “political families” supplied and assisted their members with information as well.

<sup>45</sup> Although he was ordered to join the *beylerbeyi* of Buda on July 9, this instruction must have been immediately withdrawn, as finally he appeared in Mustafa pasha’s army. MD 6, No. 1375.

<sup>46</sup> 1504-1566. *Memoria rerum. A Magyarországon legutóbbi László király fiának, legutóbbi Lajos királynak születése óta esett dolgok emlékezete (Verancsics-évkönyv)*. Edited, commented and annotated by József BESSENYEI, Budapest, 1981, p. 117.

Mustafa pasha and the only remaining dispute concerned which side should start the withdrawal, the Ottomans, by breaking both the formal and the tacit agreement, captured several hundred German carts carrying foodstuff. The furious Christians “followed them and began fighting a battle not far away from the Turkish camp, on the bridge spanning the marshy inundation area of the Tisza. They were in a great danger when, at the proper time, Menyhárt Balassa and László Kerecsényi ran to help them with their lightly armed Hungarian soldiers. During the savage fight the *bey* of Lippa was slain; therefore the battle was renewed late in the evening”<sup>47</sup>. According to Istvánffy, Baki was knocked down together with his horse and was killed following a blow to his head. Mustafa pasha asked Schwendi to return Baki’s mortal remains, then had them buried in Lippa with great respect<sup>48</sup>.

Thus the struggle for Pankota ended in a complete failure for each of the participants. Neither the friendship of the grand vizier, nor that of the secretary-in-chief and the stable master had helped; neither the unflagging zeal of the court agents, nor the gifts and bribes, which cannot be proved but can be supposed, bore fruit (the payment and allotment of the *kapu kethüdasıs* must also have consumed large amounts). Even if they had been successful in their attempts to enlarge their respective *sancaks*, it would have taken them a long time to recover their expenses. Overall, each suffered a negative balance; indeed, Baki even paid with his life. Yet, their rivalry for the “ramshackle *palank*” offers us a unique opportunity to have an insight into the power struggles between the various Ottoman “political families” and to see that in the mid-sixteenth century *intisab* and court relationships constituted a decisive element in the political system in the same manner as they continued to do so in subsequent periods.

<sup>47</sup> F. FORGÁCH, *op. cit.*, p. 828. Cf. *Memoria rerum*, p. 118.

<sup>48</sup> N. ISTVÁNFY, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

Pál FODOR, *Who Should Obtain the Castle of Pankota (1565)? (Interest Groups and Self-Promotion in the Mid-Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Political Establishment)*

Recent scholarship on the Ottoman military-administrative establishment have attributed a great importance to those interest groups which have been designated as “political families” or “political households”. These terms are used to describe such “artificial” patrimonial clans that included the patron’s children, relatives, slaves, and free-born servicemen, the members of which — often allying themselves with kindred or friends’ families and protectors in the sultan’s palace — assisted one another in acquiring offices, promotion and in accumulating prebends. It is a generally held view that by the seventeenth century patronage — and in particular palace-relationships — had become the most important condition of eligibility for high state offices.

This article endeavours to demonstrate that protectionism and the “political families” had played a crucial role in earlier times, too. On the basis of a private correspondence of 1565, written in connection with the rivalry among two *sancakbeyis* concerning the castle Pankota (lying on the territory of the former Hungarian county of Zaránd), the struggle of two “political family” is described here. One of them was composed of two Mehmeds (*sancakbeyis* of Arad and Vidin respectively), Ferhad *ağa*, the stable master of the court, İskender, the commander of the gatekeepers of the grand vizier, and Yahya pasha-zade Arslan, the *beylerbeyi* of Buda. The other “family” included Abdülbaki, the *bey* of Lipova, the grand vizier Semiz Ali pasha, a certain Ferruh *kethüda*, and the secretary-in-chief of the imperial council (*reisülküttab*). The story provides a unique insight into the manoeuvring for positions, the methods applied, and the political morals of the élite groups in the mid-sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire.

Pál FODOR, *À qui donner la forteresse de Pankota (1565)? (Familles politiques et mise en œuvre de leurs intérêts dans l’élite politique ottomane au milieu du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle)*

Les recherches récentes traitant de l’élite administrativo-militaire ottomane attachent une grande importance aux groupes d’intérêts désignés comme «familles politiques» ou «foyers politiques». Ces termes sont utilisés pour définir des clans patrimoniaux artificiels (comprenant des enfants, des proches, des esclaves et des serviteurs libres du patron) et dont les membres —s’associant souvent avec des familles alliées ou amies ainsi qu’avec des protecteurs de haut rang du palais royal — s’entraidaient afin d’obtenir charges et promotions et pour accumuler des bénéfices. Il est généralement admis qu’à partir du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle le parrainage — et particulièrement les relations avec le palais royal — est devenu la condition la plus importante pour pouvoir être élu aux plus hautes fonctions de la hiérarchie d’État.

Cet article a pour objectif de démontrer que les protections et les «familles politiques» ont joué aussi un rôle déterminant à l’époque antérieure. La lutte

entre deux « familles politiques » apparaît clairement dans une correspondance privée datée de 1565, à propos de la rivalité de deux *sancakbeyi* concernant la forteresse de Pankota (située dans l'ancien département hongrois de Zaránd). L'une de ces familles se composait de deux Mehmed (*sancakbeyis* d'Arad et de Vidin), de Ferhad *ağa*, grand écuyer de la cour royale, d'İskender, commandant des portiers du grand vizir, et de Yahya-pacha-zade Arslan, *beylerbeyi* de Buda. Abdülbaki, *bey* de Lipova, le grand vizir Semiz Ali pacha, un certain Ferruh *kethüda*, et le chef des secrétaires du divan (*reisülküttab*) appartenaient à une autre famille. Cette histoire nous permet de suivre de près les manœuvres en vue d'obtenir des positions, les méthodes utilisées pour cela et les mœurs politiques des groupes dirigeants ottomans au milieu du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle.