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Dāmād

A Persian word meaning son-in-law, dāmād was a title given to high-ranking officials married to princesses of the Ottoman dynasty. The practice of marrying sisters, daughters, and granddaughters of the reigning sultan to statesmen began in earnest in the late ninth/fifteenth century, as dynastic marriages with other ruling houses waned. Sultans of the tenth/sixteenth century drew many of their viziers from among the dynasty's dāmāds; six of the grand viziers of Sulțān Süleymān I (r. 926-74/1520-66) were dāmāds. Emerg-

ing during the empire's high imperial phase (1453 to 1566), dāmād-princess marriages were politically useful to the dynastic state because they cemented the loyalty of key officials to the dynasty, and they curbed centrifugal tendencies among the official class, who could use marital politics to build their own coalitions. While many dāmāds never rose to vizierial office, the phenomenon of the dāmād vizier continued until the empire's end: Ferīd Pasha (d. 1342/1923), who served as grand vizier to Sulțăn Mehmed Wahīd al-Dīn (Vahdeddin, r. 1336-42/1918-22), was married to the sultan's elder sister Mediha (d. 1346/1928).

Dāmād-princess marriages ranged from very happy to termination in divorce (of the husband by the higher-status wife). In the eleventh/seventeenth century, the growing habit of remarrying princesses upon the death of their spouses, often considerably older, exacerbated the potential for misalliance. Such was the unwanted fourth (but not last) marriage in 1072/1662 of the fifty-five-year old Fatma, a daughter of Sultān Ahmed I (r. 1012-26/1603-17), to the equally dismayed vizier Melek Ahmed (d. 1073/1662); two years earlier Melek had lost his first, deeply beloved, princess wife in childbirth.

Advantages accrued to the royal dāmād. He might enjoy great prestige, power, and wealth, especially if his wife enjoyed a particularly high status. Exemplifying the princess-dāmād "power couple" were Süleymān's only and much favoured daughter Mihrimāh (d. 985/1578) and her husband Rüstem (d. 968/1561), grand vizier for fourteen years. Numerous dāmād viziers used their wealth to enhance their reputations as patrons of religious and commercial foundations and to build large household establishments, although, their palatial residence might

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The Sultan's Sons-in-Law: Analysing Ottoman Imperial Damads

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Abstract

Studies of imperial courts tend to focus on the ruler and the direct line of succession, which was crucial for the survival of the dynasty. Where succession was patrilineal, princes therefore generally received more attention than their sisters. A group that is invariably overlooked altogether consists of the husbands of these princesses, despite the fact that they too were part of the extended imperial household. The Ottoman Empire was no exception. This article attempts to redress that imbalance by examining various aspects of the Ottoman son-in-law, including recruitment, social status, reputations, careers, and reception history.

Keywords

household – marriage – gender – affinity – Ottoman Empire

Introduction

In the Ottoman imperial order, dynastic ideology focused on the agnatic and patrilineal continuity of the House of Osman, and the sultans do not seem to have been concerned with delimiting the imperial household (Turk. hanedan).

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