



OIC

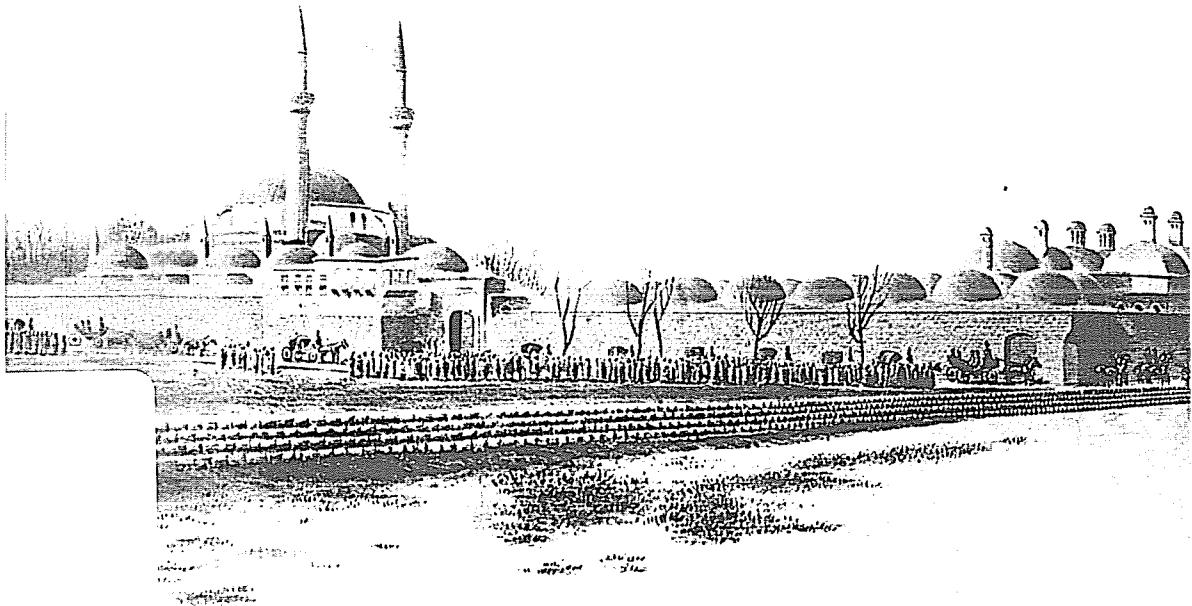
Research Centre for Islamic History,  
Art and Culture



Ministry of Culture  
Syrian Arab Republic

*Proceedings of the International Symposium on*  
**BILAD AL-SHAM DURING  
THE OTTOMAN ERA**

Damascus, 26-30 September 2005



Istanbul 2009

## **The Governors of Ottoman Bilad al-Sham and the Reconstruction of its History**

*Thomas Philipp\**

It has often been observed that historiography is not a “hard science” which offers clear rules and methods and provides us in the end with exact results. Our factual evidence remains always incomplete and much depends on the interpretation of these “facts” and the perspective from which we approach them. Even our personal motives for studying history will have an impact on how we see things. The historian, therefore, is always called upon to review not only the factual evidence but also his own intellectual history. The study of a particular period in history can never be finished because a final truth can never be established. Each generation of historians will have to deal with its own perspectives, motives and interpretations of history to make it meaningful.

Such observations, however, are not meant to cater to the idea that random subjectivity is the way to deal with history. Such an attitude leads not to scholarly historiography but to the use of individual pieces of historical evidence for ideological and political reasons. On the contrary, as scholars of history we are never released from the obligation – post modernity or not - to establish the “facts” of history, as far as we can; which leaves by necessity still a wide margin for interpretation and the creation of context for the historical evidence that we can gather.

Over the last twenty years or so we have seen an enormous development of serious historical studies of Bilad al-Sham under Ottoman rule. This has not always been like this. The reasons for the long negligence from which the historiography of this epoch suffered are various. Arab national historiography considered the period for a long time the worst of all in Arab history – better

---

\* Prof., The University of Erlangen-Nürnberg.

forgotten than studied. The demonization of the Ottomans as the oppressors of the Arabs since 1517 found its first major but already fully developed expression in 1916 in *al-Hilal*.<sup>1</sup> This was, of course, not the apex of a long experience and a developing mood but, rather an abrupt change in attitude thanks to the rise of nationalism. Turkish historians were much more concerned with the study of the central lands of the Empire and what seemed from a centre point of view to be on the periphery remained peripheral with the exception, perhaps, of the Balkan region. German Orientalists, with rare exceptions, denied that there was any historical development in the Middle East after the classical age of Islam. But even those who studied the Ottoman Empire, dealt with its centre or its western periphery but never with the Arab provinces.

Eventually a profound rethinking of concepts such as the “continuity of history,” “centre – periphery relations,” “empire,” “modernity,” “European penetration” and especially the shift away from political history to social history helped to stir a new interest in Bilad al-Sham under Ottoman rule. This has led to a multitude of monographs on the subject, with a special interest in urban and social history, but also in economic and intellectual history.

Perhaps the time has come to write a general historical survey of Ottoman Bilad al-Sham. Considering this question I realized that many of the basic “facts” of that history had never been critically researched and established. Especially striking is the lack of a critically researched listing of all Ottoman governors who ever ruled the provinces of Bilad al-Sham. Pedantic as such a study might appear it is very much needed. It would help to structure and confirm the general time frame for the history of the region. Knowledge about the governors and the times and sequences of their rule would not only help us to reconstruct the political history of the region, or the policies of the imperial centre in this provincial region but it would also help in the above mentioned branches of urban, economic and intellectual history.

A number of sources offer themselves for such a critical reconstruction of the rule of Ottoman governors over time:

---

<sup>1</sup> “al-Dawla al-‘Uthmāniyya fī Lubnān wa Sūriyya. Hukm arba ‘a qurūn” in *al-Hilāl* XV (1916-1917), serialized between Dec. 1916 and July 1917.

(A) Salāh al-Dīn al-Munajjid, ed. *Wulāt Dimashq fī al-‘ahd al-‘uthmānī*, Damascus, 1949, is a first attempt to compile lists of governors but it is rather haphazard and completely uncritical.

(B) An older Ottoman work, Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmani*, Istanbul (?), 1890/1899, has been reedited ten years ago in a Latinized version by Nuri Akbayar and Seyit Ali Kahraman: “*Sicill-i Osmani: Osman Ünlüleri*,” 4 vols., Istanbul 1996. It is an enormously helpful work and probably the largest biographical dictionary ever with more than 10.000 biographies. Here we find not only dates but biographical background and information on the career of governors. (C) There exists a number of local Arab chronicles of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries which provide a wealth of dates, personal background and political context for the governors of their time.<sup>2</sup>

D) Finally, any sort of pertinent Arabic Tabaqāt literature provides material to add to, verify, or correct information from the other sources.<sup>3</sup>

The actual compiling, collating and critical editing of these materials is a huge task and has only barely begun. But some results have become already evident: Obviously we are dealing with much more than simply fixing precise dates of governorship. The information we are gathering about the background and the

---

<sup>2</sup> For instance: Na‘ūm Bakhkhāsh, *Akhbār Halab*, 3 vols., Aleppo, 1985; Ibn Kannān (al-Salihī al-Dimashqī), Muhammad b. ‘Īsā, *Yawmiyyāt Shāmiyya (al-Hawādith al-yawmiyya)*, ed. Akram Ahmad al-‘Ulābī, Damascus, 1994 (Dar al-Tabā‘); Ibn Tūlūn: Henri Laoust: *Les Gouverneurs de Damas sous les Mamlouks et les premiers Ottomans 1260-1744, Traduction des Annales d’Ibn Tulun et d’Ibn Gum‘a*, Damas, 1952, IFEAD, Gibb 7398.3.24; Ibn Tūlūn, Muhammad al-Sālihī al-Dimashqī, *A‘lām al-warā biman wulyā nā‘ibān min al-Atrāk bidimashq*, Damascus, 1964; Al-Sabbāgh, ‘Abbūd al-Rawd al-zāhir fī tārikh al-zāhir, ed. Muhammad ‘Abd al-Karīm Mahāfaza, Irbid, 1999; Sharaf al-Dīn Mūsā ibn Yūsuf al-Ansārī *Nuzha al-khātir ve bahja al-nāzir*, 2 vols., Damascus, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Baytār, ‘Abd al-Razzāq (1837-1917) *Hilyat al-bashar fī tārikh al-qarn al-thālith ‘ashar*, Damascus, 1961-63, 3 vols., [negative biography of al-Jazzār]; Al-Būrīnī, al-Hasan ibn Mu‘ammad, *Tarājim al-a ‘yān min abnā’ al-zamān*, 2 vols., Damascus, 1959; Al-Ghazzī, Najm al-Dīn, *al-Kawākib al-sā‘ira bi‘a ‘yān al-m’a al-‘ashira*, 3 vols., Beirut, 1979; Ibn Hanbalī, Radī al-Dīn Mu‘ammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Yūsuf al-Halabī, *Durr al-Habab fī tārikh a ‘yān Halab*, 2 parts (4 vols.), Damascus, 1972; Muhammad al-Mahba (?), *Tārikh khulāsa al-athar fī a ‘yān al-qarn al-‘ashar* 4vols. N.d. n.p.; Muhammad Rāghib ibn Mahmūd al-Tabbākh, *A ‘lām al-nubalā’ bitārikh Īalab al-shuhabā’*, Aleppo, 1923, 7 vols. (plus index); Al-Murādī, Mu‘ammad Khalīl ibn ‘Alī, *Silk al-durar fī a ‘yan al-qarn al-thānī ‘ashar*, Beirut, 1997, Dar al-Kutub al-‘ilmi, 4 vols. in two; and many others.

careers of governors becomes in itself an important source of information. We learn from this source about the origin of governors, their training, their family relations, the rhythm of career moves, and the relations of the centre to the periphery. Over time, we can trace how these components change in the careers of governors.

Developing the sequences of governors in all the administrative provinces of Bilād al-Shām simultaneously we also can trace how power spread horizontally, either in the fashion that a governor would be in rapid sequence appointed to Aleppo, Damascus, Tripoli or Sidon or, more importantly, how a governor could succeed in having his relatives or members of his “Household”<sup>4</sup> be appointed to the other governorships, while himself controlling one of them.

By just using some first statistical results for those who held the position of governor in Damascus we can arrive already at some important conclusions:<sup>5</sup>

The century between 1724 and 1822 crystallizes a very remarkable and statistically significantly different century from the periods before and after. Most obvious is the average duration of appointments: two to three times as long as in the periods before and after. Many more of the governors of Damascus were during this century also governors of Aleppo and Tripoli than in the centuries before. But perhaps most striking are the qualifications governors brought with them to the job: in the century 1629-1724 13 governors had been trained in the Internal Palace Service (IPS), or a fifth of all whose biography we know; in the century thereafter 12 governors belonged to the ‘Azm household, or more than one third; in the half century between 1823 to 1877 13 governors had been ministers in the central government, or half of all. The century between 1724 and 1822 was also a century of great weakness in the centre of power and a time were local dynasties flourished. It is certainly no accident that the ‘Azm clan looms so large in the statistics of that century, although, other local clans took their share of power, too.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> I am using the term in the way Jane Hathaway *the politics of households in Ottoman Egypt* Cambridge 1997, is using it.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix Table 1, Ottoman Governors of Damascus:

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix Table 2, The ‘Azm Clan – Genealogy.

For the study of families and the institution of the “Ottoman household” two points should be noticed about the ‘Azm clan: First, their extensive genealogy shows that matrilineal descent was of great importance and several family branches were formed in this way.<sup>7</sup> Second, the full extent of their power can only be appreciated when the political role of their Mamluks and clients is considered, too. Both points need further study.

Only by looking at the ‘Azm clan in a synchronic way, seeing where else they held governorships at the same time we can appreciate the impact this clan had during the century on the politics in Bilad al-Sham. Between 1724 and 1810 its members held the governorship of Damascus for at least 67 years, that of Tripoli 32 years, that of Aleppo for 11 years and that of Sidon for at least 9 years and probably more.<sup>8</sup> Often we do not know when governorships were ended. Therefore it is likely that especially in Tripoli and Sidon the ‘Azms governed longer than is estimated here. In addition they occupied controlling positions in Homs, Hama, Rakka but also in Ghaza, Ramla, and Jerusalem. With the Tanzimat their political engagement focused especially on the administration of Damascus, later mandatory and independent Syria. It ended only in 1963 when the last minister of the al- ‘Azm was forced to leave the government.

The ‘Azm clan’s rise to power corresponded with the period of great weakness at the centre of the Ottoman Empire and increasing European influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Tendencies toward political autonomy at the imperial periphery proliferated. In Egypt the Mamluks came close to independence and in Acre a completely new centre of economic and political power came into existence. This is probably also the reason why the ethnic origins of the ‘Azm clan are intensely debated until today. Claims for their Turkish, Arab and Kurdish origin abound. In such arguments the developments of local autonomy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century are mistaken for the beginnings of national movements (of various sorts) toward independence. The ‘Azm clan was, indeed, a local dynasty which gained considerable control over the appointments of Ottoman governors in Bilad al-Sham, i.e. Greater Syria. It probably originated from the

---

<sup>7</sup> A point that Schatkowski-Schilcher, *Linda Families in Politics*, Stuttgart, 1985, completely overlooks.

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix Table 3, Members of ‘Azm Clan as Governors of Tripoli, Damascus, Sidon and Aleppo.

surroundings of Aleppo and had a first power base in Hama. But its members neither claimed an ethnic identity nor ever challenged the ultimate sovereignty of the Ottoman sultan. Power and wealth went together and the 'Azm clan acquired huge landholdings around Hama, Homs, the Hawran and the Ghuta, and owned considerable property in Damascus.

Heretofore the al- 'Azms have always been discussed in terms of the unusual power they were able to accumulate during a century. Quite correctly this has been seen as part of a more general phenomenon, caused by weakness at the imperial centre.<sup>9</sup> It also had been noted that the final step toward open rebellion neither they, nor the Mamluks or the rulers of Acre dared to take. The Ottoman Empire remained – and be it only for a lack of choice – the only political frame of reference. A comparison of the careers of governors, however, leads here to very new insights. It certainly remains true that the first generation of al- 'Azm governors made their careers and consolidated their power exclusively in Bilad al-Sham. But the careers of the second and third generation<sup>10</sup> show how the Ottoman government succeeded very subtly to incorporate the 'Azms into the imperial elite: They began to be appointed as governors in various regions of the Ottoman Empire. Though it is also noticeable that all appointments were in the East of the Empire, keeping the 'Azms at a healthy distance – Kayseri was the closest the came - from the capital. During the same period of the rise of the 'Azms a certain Ali Pasha Gülec, for instance, who was appointed governor of Damascus for one year in 1740, was much more part of the imperial elite. He was son of a certain Koca Abd Pasha and married to a lady of the court in Istanbul. He was also appointed Muhafiz of Belgrad, governor of Rumeli and of Diyarbekir.

Thus the 'Azms widened their political horizon, shifted probably to a degree their interests and submitted to the typical rotations of high officials. Even in a time of weakness the central government still had the skills to integrate

---

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Schatkowski-Schilcher; Shamir, Shimon "As 'ad Pasha al- 'Azm and Ottoman Rule in Damascus", *Bulletin of SOAS XXVI*, 1963, 1- 28; Philipp, Thomas, *The Syrians in Egypt 1725-1975*, Stuttgart, 1985.

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix Table 4, Governorships held in the Ottoman Empire by 'Azms of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation.

provincial newcomers and local upstarts into the imperial elite without, however, letting them become too powerful.

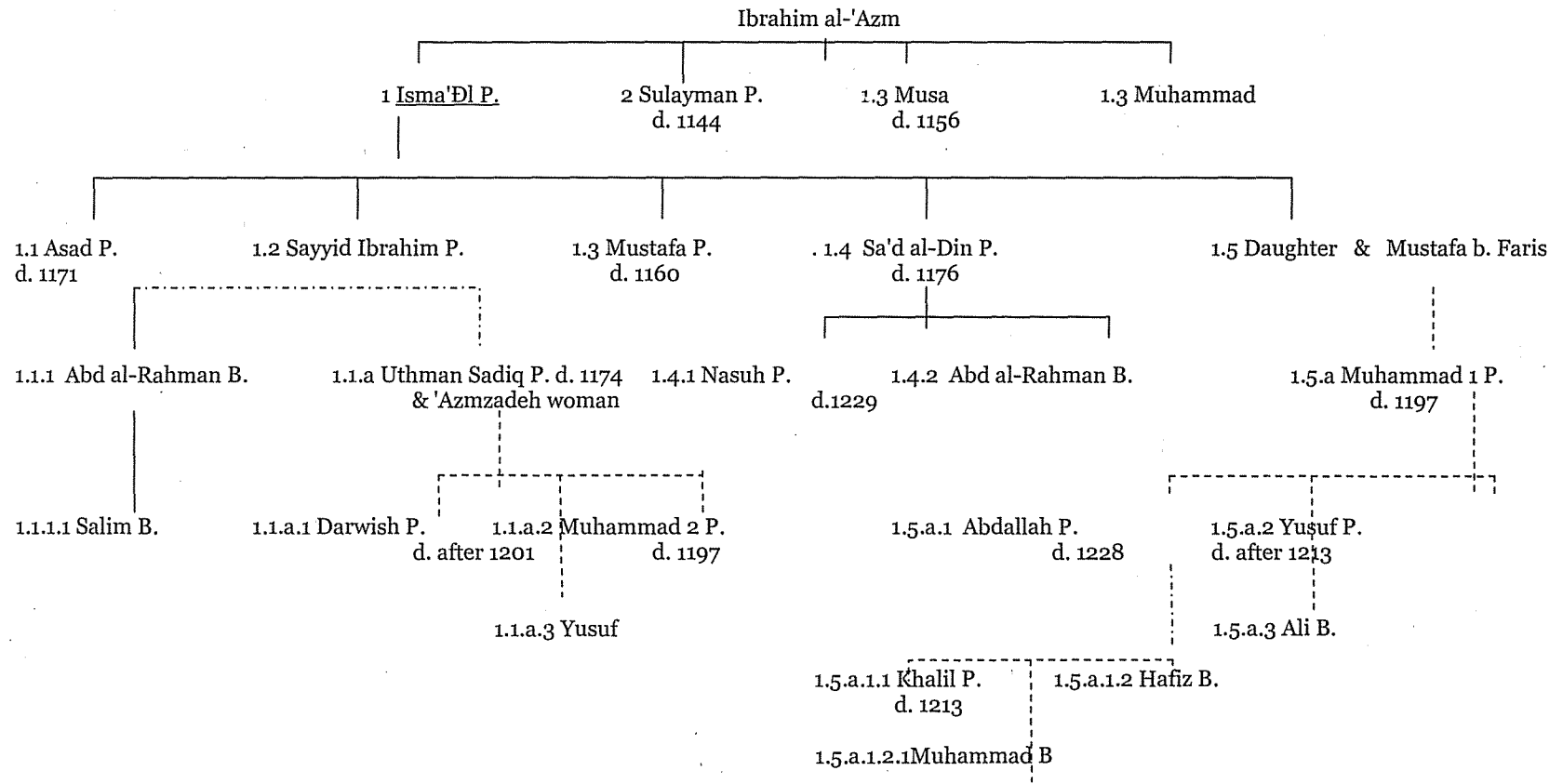
## Appendix

**Table 1**

Ottoman Governors of Damascus / Statistics / general

Period	927-1038 1517-1628	1039-1136 1629-1723	1137- 1238 1724- 1822	1239- 1288 1823- 1871	1288- 1336 1889- 1918	TOTALS 927- 1336
Appointments	87	106	47	39	30	309
average length	15 mo.	10,5 mo.	30 mo.	16 mo.	23 mo.	16 mo.
Persons	69	91	35	36	24	255
Known cv	31	63	32	26		152
Also Vali in Aleppo	2	17	12	9		
Also Vali in Tripoli/Sidon		2	15	2		
Imperial palace service	5	13	-	3		
Sadrizam	4	6	2	1		
Azm Clan	-	-	12	-		
Ministries	-	-	-	13		

The 'Azm clan - genealogy



**Table 3**

**Members of 'Azm Clan as Governors of Tripoli, Damascus, Sidon and Aleppo (For family relations see Table 2)**

<b>Years</b>	<b>Tripoli</b>	<b>Damascus</b>	<b>Sidon</b>	<b>Aleppo</b>
1137-1143		Ismā'īl		
1140-1146			Sulaymān	
1146-1151		Sulaymān		
1154		Sulaymān		
1160-1170	Mustafā			
1163-1165				Sa'd al-Dīn
1165			Sa'd al-Dīn	
1156-1169		As'ad		
1171			Sa'd al-Dīn	
1172-1174	'Uthmān Sādiq			
1176	Muhammad I			
1177-1178				Muhammad I
1179			Muhammad I	
1174-1185	Muhammad II (Beylerbey)	'Uthmān Sādiq		
1185	'Abd al-Rahmān	Muhammad I		
1188	Muhammad II			
1189				Muhammad II
1187-1197		Muhammad I		
1197		Muhammad II		
1195-1200				Yūsuf
1197-1199	Darwīsh (1197)	Darwīsh		
1201-1205		Uzūn		
1205-1212		'Abdallah		
1208-1210				'Abdallah
1211-1213	Khalīl			
1213	Yūsuf			
1214	'Abd al-Rahmān			
1215				Nasūh
1214-1217		'Abdallah		
1219		'Abdallah		
1222-1225		Yūsuf Genc		
Minimum years of 'Azm rule	32	67	9	11

**Table 4**  
**Governorships held in the Ottoman Empire by 'Azms of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation outside Bilad al-Sham**

Mustafa Pasha: Adana, Baghdad.

Said al-Din Pasha: Egypt, Marash, Jidda, Konya, Baghdad.

Uthmān Sādiq Pasha: Diyarbekir, Konya.

Muhammad II Pasha: Urfa, Sivas, Diyarbekir, İçel (region of today's Mersin), Marash, Adana.

Nasūh Pasha: Diyarbekir, İçel, Egypt.

Muhammad I Pasha: Urfa, Konya.

Abdullah Pasha: Sivas, Diyarbekir, Adana, Konya, İçel, Anadolu, Marash, Egypt.

Yusuf Pasha: Adana, İçel.

Ibrahim Pasha Uzun: Urfa, Adana, Niğde (region of today's Mersin), Kayseri, Sivas.