

Yours Sincerely, the Grand Vizier.

A Compendium of İbrāhīm Paşa's Letter Weaving Love and Longing

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Context

The term ‘vizier’ is the Romanized form of the Arabic word *wazīr* (rendered as *vezīr* in Turkish), which translates to ‘helper’ or ‘assistant’. The term’s etymology can be traced back to the root ‘vizr’, which translates as ‘heavy burden’. This reflects the role of the vizier in ‘bearing the heavy burden of the king’.¹

Among the most prominent figures to embody this title was İbrāhīm Ağa (d.1536), a longstanding companion and trusted confidant of Sultan Süleymān (d.1566). On 27 June 1523, İbrāhīm Ağa was elevated to the position of Grand Vizier, marking a significant moment in Ottoman history and his illustrious career.² His authority was further consolidated through his concurrent appointment as Governor-General of Rumelia.³ From an alternative perspective, İbrāhīm Paşa’s rapid ascent to the highest office in the empire represents an extraordinary and unparalleled event in Ottoman history, one that would not be replicated. Prior to İbrāhīm Paşa, no enslaved individual had ever been directly appointed to such a position on the basis of their master’s personal favor alone, without prior experience in military or administrative roles.⁴ İbrāhīm Paşa’s ascension to a prominent position was noteworthy, attracting considerable attention and criticism. Many within the capital considered him to be inexperien-

¹ Yasir Yılmaz, “‘From Theory to Practice’ Origins of the Ottoman Grand Vizierate and the Köprülü Restoration: A New Research Framework for the Office of the Grand Vizier,” *Review of Middle East Studies* 57, no. 1 (June 2023): 15, doi:10.1017/rms.2024.19.

² İbrāhīm Paşa, also known as Makbul and Pargalı in the context of the Ottoman Empire, is believed to have been born around 1487. It is thought that he was of Christian origin and entered the Ottoman imperial system as a slave. His ascension to a position of prominence was marked by his appointment as Grand Vizier by Sultan Süleymān in 1523, which placed him at the pinnacle of political authority within the empire. Despite his considerable achievements, İbrāhīm Paşa’s ascent also gave rise to feelings of envy and prompted a series of political manoeuvres. His close relationship with Sultan Süleymān, coupled with his growing influence, gave rise to suspicion among other court officials and nobles. In 1536, İbrāhīm Paşa was executed on the orders of Süleymān, most likely as a result of palace intrigue and concerns over his increasing power. For more see, Ebru Turan, “The Sultan’s Favorite: İbrahim Paşa and the Making of the Ottoman Universal Sovereignty in the Reign of Sultan Süleymān (1516-1526)” (Ph.D., University of Chicago, 2007).

³ Kaya Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleymān: Narrating the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman World*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 45–46.

⁴ Turan, “The Sultan’s Favorite,” 181.

ced and unsuitable for the role, which intensified tensions among the city's elite.⁵ In order to reinforce his position as the recently appointed and relatively inexperienced Grand Vizier, İbrāhīm Paşa was assigned specific tasks with the objective of modifying public opinion among those who were discontented with his appointment. His voyage to Egypt (1523-1524) served two interconnected purposes: firstly, to enhance his personal reputation; secondly, to stabilize a turbulent province that had recently experienced significant unrest and rebellion.⁶ İbrāhīm Paşa's involvement in the Hungarian campaign (1526) likewise served to reinforce his position, enhancing his prestige and solidifying his role as the new Grand Vizier.⁷

İbrāhīm Paşa's political career commenced in an unanticipated manner and reached its conclusion with equal swiftness. His tenure remains one of the most controversial and exceptional in the history of the Ottoman Empire. An individual lacking the requisite experience was elevated to the highest office in the empire, resulting in an immense burden of responsibility being placed upon his shoulders.

Süleymān's inaugural campaign against the Safavids is designated as *Sefer-i 'İrākeyn*, or the "Two Iraqs" campaign (1533-1535), within the Ottoman historical tradition. This designation emphasizes the dual focus of the campaign, which targeted both Arab Iraq and Persian Iraq, the latter corresponding to western Iran.⁸ The *Sefer-i 'İrākeyn* represented the final military campaign to be led by Grand Vizier İbrāhīm Paşa. In 1533, İbrāhīm Paşa successfully recaptured Bitlis. The following year, he achieved further victories, occupying Tabriz and facing no resistance from Şāh Ṭahmāsb (d.1576).⁹

Nevertheless, Sultan Süleymān was displeased with the result of the *'İrākeyn* campaign. Despite the successful conquest of Baghdad and its surrounding regions, Şāh Ṭahmāsb managed to evade capture and remained undefeated. This deficiency was

⁵ Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleymān*, 46.

⁶ Ibid., 54.

⁷ Turan, "The Sultan's Favorite," 240.

⁸ Kaya Şahin, *Peerless among Princes: The Life and Times of Sultan Süleymān* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2023), 184, doi:10.1093/oso/9780197531631.001.0001.

⁹ Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 51.

attributed to the Grand Vizier's inability to implement the requisite strategic measures.¹⁰ This final military campaign by İbrâhîm Paşa was one in which his reputation underwent a notable decline. In their writings shortly after the conclusion of the campaign, several Ottoman historians censured İbrâhîm Paşa for prioritizing a march on Tabriz over the initial objective of capturing Baghdad. Although the majority of historians attributed this strategic misstep to the influence of ambitious individuals within his inner circle, many of whom were former Safavids, the underlying critique of İbrâhîm Paşa's decision-making was unmistakable. Ultimately, on the night of 14–15 March 1536, İbrâhîm Paşa was executed by order of Sultan Süleymân while residing at the Sultan's palace.¹¹

Despite his status as the second most influential figure in the Ottoman Empire during the sixteenth century, İbrâhîm Paşa was not solely a Grand Vizier or Governor-General; he was also a husband and father. In the course of the *Sefer-i 'İrakeyn*, İbrâhîm Paşa dispatched approximately 11 missives to his wife and family, wherein he articulated his ardent longing and affection for them.¹² Gaining an understanding of the emotional experiences of warriors or statesmen on duty is a challenging undertaking. How did such figures manage and regulate their emotional states? Historical chronicles indicate that, in lieu of mathematical or logical reasoning, members of the ruling elite frequently situated their emotions within the framework of duties and obligations, underscoring their roles and responsibilities over personal

¹⁰ Mehmet Şakir Yılmaz, “‘Koca Nişancı’ Of Kanuni: Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi, Bureaucracy And ‘Kanun’ In The Reign Of Suleyman The Magnificent (1520–1566)” (Ph.D., Bilkent University, 2006), 123.

¹¹ Şahin, *Peerless among Princes*, 186.

¹² The letter under discussion in this paper constitutes a segment of a more extensive research article that is currently being prepared for publication. The article focuses on eleven letters written by İbrâhîm Paşa to his wife during the *Sefer-i İrakeyn* campaign. The primary objective of this study is to analyze the emotional dimension of İbrâhîm Paşa's character, with particular emphasis on the manner in which his personal feelings and attachments are expressed through these letters. Furthermore, the article seeks to analyze the language of the letters to determine whether they were authored by the Grand Vizier himself. By undertaking this comprehensive analysis, the study aims to provide a unique perspective on the emotional dimensions of the Grand Vizier's character.

sentiment.¹³ Furthermore, historical records seldom provide direct access to personal emotions. Instead, they primarily reveal the prescriptive practices of cultivating and regulating emotions, which often function as expressions of power.¹⁴

The correspondence of İbrāhīm Paşa provides a unique insight into his personal sentiments, elucidating the difficulties of reconciling obligations with individual feelings. It is highly probable that the letter was composed by İbrāhīm Paşa himself, as indicated by the linguistic and scriptural characteristics of the text. The presence of multiple misspellings would be an unusual feature for a scribe of the Ottoman court, thereby indicating that the document serves as a reliable exemplar of İbrāhīm Paşa's personal written command of the language. In these letters, İbrāhīm Paşa is not merely a Grand Vizier; he is also a man separated from his wife and child, expressing profound longing and intense love for them. He explicitly states that his achievements and successes are devoid of significance in the absence of his cherished wife. This correspondence illuminates the emotional intricacies of a prominent figure striving to harmonise individual attachment with public accountability. This challenges the assumption that political leaders are emotionally detached, demonstrating that even those in positions of power experience difficulties in balancing their personal lives with their professional obligations. The emotional vulnerability evident in İbrāhīm Paşa's letters indicates that leadership entails not only the fulfilment of duties but also the management and expression of emotions.

Transcription¹⁵

Yā Allāh Yā Muḥammed

Ḥazret-i cānum daḥı sevdigüm

Selām-ı muḥabbet i 'lām ü peyām-ı meveddet-encām ki iştıyāk u farṭ-i eşvāḳdan nāşī

¹³ Ali Anooshahr, "Letter-Writing and Emotional Communities in Early Mughal India: A Note on the *Badāyi' al-Inshā*," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 44, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 4, doi:10.1080/00856401.2021.1857573.

¹⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵ The letter, presumably authored by the grand vizier himself, contains occasional misspellings. The accurate spellings of these words are presented in the footnote.

olur kâfile-sālār-ı muḥabbet-şi ‘ār u rāḥile-yi ihtisās-disārla ithāf
 u ihdā kılındukdan soñra zamīr-i münirñüze ma ‘rüz-ı muḥibbāne budur ki ḥāliyā
 eger bu cānibüñ ḥāl u aḥvālinden lutfiñuz mücebince fi’l-cümle
 istifsār mā? olunursa yümn-i himmetiñüzle selāmet [ü]
 şıḥhatda olub gice ve gündüz ol cānibüñ ḥayr-du ‘āsına
 iştigāldeyüz ve şimdikiḥālde¹⁶ İnöñi dimekle ma ‘rūf
 maḥalle gelinüb andan ilerü muttaşıl gidilmek üzredür
 cem ī ümmet-i Muḥammede ḥayrlar müyesser olmış ola ümizimüz budur ki
 bu taraftan gūşe-yi ḥātırdan çıkarmayub şıḥhatiñuz haberlerin
 mektüb-ı dürrer-bārñuzla yād idüb şād idesiz
 ki selāmetiñüz haberlerinüñ istimā ‘-ı sermāye-yi iftiḥārımızdur bākī
 ed-du ‘ā ammā ā benüm çok sevdigüm eger bereket? ḥāberi¹⁷ gelmez-
 se eyü degüldür ben bir düş gördüm sevdicegüm içün
 hoş olmadügüñüz¹⁸ ol gūşşaya¹⁹ çekerdüm şu digü da
 yazmışsınız ammā ne günüm gündür ne gecem gecedür Allāh bilür
 el-fakīr İbrāhīm

Marginilia

ve yenge kaduna selām iderün
 Hafşa kadun ḥazretlerine selām iderün
 ve Faṭma kaduna selām iderün
 ve nūr-ı dīde sürür-i sīne ciger-gūşem Meḥemmed Şāhuñ
 gözlerinden öperin cem ḥālī nicedür
 cem devletlü ḥünkār Meḥemmed Şāhuma yüz akçe daḥı arturmuş üç yüz
 oldı

Translation

¹⁶ Şimdiki-ḥālde

¹⁷ ḥaber [خبر]

¹⁸ Olmadügüñüz

¹⁹ gūşşaa [غصه]

O Allah, O Muhammad,

To my dear one and beloved,

I extend heartfelt greetings and a message filled with affectionate words, born from profound longing and deep yearning. This offering is made with sincere dedication, guided by love, and embellished with tokens of affection. I humbly present this to your esteemed conscience, filled with warmth, and should you graciously inquire about the state and condition of this side, rest assured we are safe and sound, thanks to your benevolence. Night and day, we are devoted to praying for your well-being

We are presently located in an area known as İnönü, from which we aim to advance further. As it is widely acknowledged that goodness and blessings have been bestowed upon the entire Ummah of Muhammad. Our heartfelt desire is that you keep us in your thoughts and, in doing so, send a letter adorned with precious news of your health, bringing us joy. For receiving tidings of your well-being is a source of great pride for us

Endless prayers.

But alas, my beloved, if news of blessings does not reach us, it brings great sorrow. I dreamt of an unpleasant day for your sake, and I endured that heartache for you, my beloved, as you had penned. Yet, without you, neither my day is a day nor my night is a night—Allah knows.

The Humble İbrahim,

Marginalia

Send my greetings to Lady sister-in-law.

Send my greetings to (the) presence of Lady Hafsa.

And send my greetings to Lady Fatma.

And kiss the eyes of the light of my eyes, the joy of my heart, the piece of my soul

Mehmed Şâh, and, how is he? And my sovereign, has added an additional one hundred *akçe* for my Mehmed Şâh, and [now it is three hundred].

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Facsimile

