

Heavenly Signs of Authority: A Horoscope for the Bestowal of the Imperial Seal*

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Context

From mighty monarchs to humble peasants, many people throughout history have gazed at the stars in wonder, seeking to understand the workings of the heavens. Some sought celestial guidance prior to making significant decisions, whereas others looked to the sky to discern when fortune might turn in their favor. One of the ways to satisfy this curiosity in human beings has been horoscopes. Like many other societies, the Ottomans frequently relied on astrological readings in various domains of life.¹ Whether it was the commencement of a military campaign, the sailing out of the imperial navy, the execution of an imperial relocation (*nakl-i hümâyûn*), the appointment to a provincial governorship, or the laying of a building's foundation, they employed horoscopic calculations to determine the most auspicious moment to initiate such undertakings.²

The horoscope examined here pertains to the determination of an auspicious hour for the bestowal of the imperial seal to the newly appointed grand vizier.³ Following the death of grand vizier Karavezir Mehmed Pasha in February 1781, İzzet Mehmed Pasha was summoned to Istanbul to assume the grand vizierate. At the time of his appointment—dated 25 Safer 1195 (corresponding to February 19, 1781)—he had been serving as the governor of Erzurum for six months. This appointment marked the beginning of his second tenure as grand vizier, prompting a long journey from the mountainous province of Erzurum to the imperial capital. At this juncture, the chief court astrologer was tasked with a crucial responsibility: to cast a horoscope in order to determine the most auspicious hour for the bestowal of the imperial seal (*mühr-i hümâyûn*). As a result of his calculations, he determined the auspicious hour as the

¹ Salim Aydüz, "Osmanlı Devleti'nde Müneccimbaşılık Müessesesi", *Belleten* 70, no. 257 (2006): 167-264.

² Ahmet Tunç Şen, "Astrology in the Service of the Empire: Knowledge, Prognostication, and Politics at the Ottoman Court, 1450s-1550s" (Ph.D diss., University of Chicago, 2016), 305.

³ BOA, TS.MA.e, 1293/18, 22 Rebiülâhir 1195 [April 16, 1781]. All calendar conversions were made using Yücel Dağlı - Cumhure Üçer, *Tarih Çevirme Kılavuzu IV* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1997).

moment when the hour hand reached 5 hours and 48 minutes⁴ on 22 Rebûlâhir 1195 (corresponding to April 16, 1781).⁵

Certain specific considerations were taken into account in the preparation of this horoscope. The chief court astrologer sought to determine a celestial configuration in which the four angular houses were favorably positioned, while the influence of malefic planets was minimized. Indeed, the four angular houses (*evtâd-ı erba‘a*) in this horoscope—namely the *ṭāli‘* (1st house—the Ascendant), *sābi‘* (7th house—the Descendant), *‘āṣir* (10th house—the Medium Coeli), and *rābi‘* (4th house—the Imum Coeli)⁶—are all positioned in fixed signs (Leo, Aquarius, Taurus, Scorpio) and are free from the harmful influences of the malefic planets. Traditionally, the two malefic planets, Saturn (*Zuḥal*) and Mars (*Merriḥ*), are positioned away from these houses, whereas the benefic planets, Jupiter (*Müşteri*) and Venus (*Zühre*), occupy favorable positions within the chart.⁷ Given that the horoscope was prepared for the Grand Vizier, particular attention is devoted to the 10th house—traditionally associated with worldly status, power, and career achievements.

It is known that in *iḥtiyārāt* horoscopes,⁸ such as the example examined here, the specified date was generally adhered to. But did the new Grand Vizier, Izzet Mehmed Pasha, actually receive the imperial seal at the exact time specified on the 22 Rebûlâhir 1195? Following the death of his predecessor, the pasha departed from Erzurum on the 25 Safer 1195, and an expense register was kept to document the expenditures incurred

⁴ The calculation of the *sā‘at-i muvāfaqa* in the timekeeping systems used by the Ottomans is a technical matter, and in this context, it likely corresponds to a moment occurring 5 hours and 48 minutes after sunrise. For technical details of the calculation, see Enes Güllü, “Mühendishanede Açı Ölçmek: Başhoca İshak Efendi’nin Aksü’l Merâyâ Fî Ahzi’z Zevâyâ Kitabı” (Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakıf Üniversitesi, 2021), 69-71.

⁵ The corresponding Gregorian date is Tuesday 17 April, but it is specifically stated in the document that the day in question was Monday (*yevm-i işneyn*). Therefore, this date actually corresponds to 16 April, possibly due to deviations in calendar calculations to determine the beginning of the month.

⁶ Şen, “Astrology in the Service of the Empire”, 126.

⁷ The two malefic planets, known as *naḥseyn*, are Saturn (*naḥs-i ekber*, the greater malefic) and Mars (*naḥs-i aṣḡar*, the lesser malefic); likewise, the benefic planets, called *şa‘deyn*, are Jupiter (*şa‘d-i ekber*, the greater benefic) and Venus (*şa‘d-i aṣḡar*, the lesser benefic).

⁸ This refers to the astrological judgments derived from the stars as to whether a particular action should or should not be undertaken at a specific moment, a practice also known as electional astrology or hemerology.

during the journey.⁹ According to these records, expenses continued to be recorded until the 13 Rebûlâhir. Since the pasha traveled with his retinue during the winter months, he was only able to reach Istanbul toward the final week of the month.¹⁰ On the 20 Rebûlâhir, regalia such as sable fur, *aṭlas*, and *serāser* brocade were purchased for the robe of honour ceremony.¹¹ Moreover, an inscription on the reverse side of the document bears the exact date of the horoscope—22 Rebûlâhir 1195. Whether the “auspicious” imperial seal truly contributed to the grand vizier’s success remains a matter of debate; nonetheless, his tenure of a year and a half concluded amid a series of devastating fires that severely afflicted the imperial capital.

Transcription

*Ṭāli ‘-i vaḳt-i muḥtār berāy-ı iḥsān-ı mühr-i hümāyün be-şadr-ı a ‘zam fî 22 yevm-i işneyn
Rebî ‘ül-âḥir sene [1]195*

[Zāyiçe]

*İnşā`allāhu’l-mu`în işbu māh-ı mübārek-i Rebî ‘ül-âḥirüñ yigirmi ikinci işneyn günü
sā`at-i muvāfaḳa ‘akrebi beş sā`at kırk sekiz daḳıka olduḳda
şadr-ı a ‘zam ḥazretleri bendelerine mühr-i hümāyün-ı meymenet-maḳrûn i ‘ṭā`
ve iḥsān buyurılırsa vaḳt-i mezkûr ṭāli ‘inde evtād-ı erba`a
burûc-ı şābiteden ve kamer burc-ı şābitde ve şāhib-i ṭāli ‘şerefi burcında
ve evtād nazar-ı ‘adāvet-i nuḥûsdan sālīm ve beyt-i ‘āşir sehmü’s-sa`āde
ve re’s ile mes`ūd bulunur inşā`allāh müddet-i medīde ḥidmet-i
hümāyünlerinde rızā-yı yümn-iḳtizā-yı ḥüsrevānelerine muṭābıḳ ḥarekâta
sa`y ve iḳdām buyururlar ḥaḳḳ subḥānehu ve te`ālā cümle umûrlarında
muvaffaḳ bi’l-ḥayr eyleyüb her ḥâlde tevfiḳāt-ı ‘alīyyesine maḫhar eyleye
āmin bi-cāhi’n-nebiyyi’l-‘arabiyyi’l-emîn*

⁹ BOA, TS.MA.d, 5344.

¹⁰ According to the *Sicill-i Osmanî*, the new Grand Vizier reached Istanbul in fifty-five days. Based on this calculation, the Pasha arrived in the capital just one day prior to the date specified in the horoscope, when the imperial seal was conferred. Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmânî III* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2006), 849.

¹¹ BOA, C.DH., 334/16664, 24 Rebûlâhir 1195 [April 18, 1781].

Translation

The ascendant of the designated time for the bestowal of the imperial seal to the Grand Vizier, on Monday, the 22nd of Rebiülâhir, [1]195

[Horoscope Chart]

With the will and help of God, on Monday, the twenty-second of this blessed month of Rebiülâhir, at the hour deemed auspicious—specifically when the hour hand reaches five hours and forty-eight minutes—if His Excellency the Grand Vizier is granted and honoured with the imperial seal of felicity and auspiciousness, then at that mentioned moment, the four angular houses shall be positioned in fixed signs, the Moon shall also be in a fixed sign, the ruler of the ascendant shall be in its sign of exaltation, and the angular houses shall be safe from the malevolent gaze of the malefic planets. The tenth house shall coincide with the Lot of Fortune and Midheaven, thereby making the time fortunate. God willing, in the long course of service to the exalted state, [the vizier] shall act in accordance with the propitious favor and royal will. May the Almighty grant him success in all affairs and make him ever worthy of divine favor and support. Amen, through the intercession of the trustworthy Arab prophet.

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BOA, TS.MA.d, 5344.

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