

ZESZYTY NAUKOWE TOWARZYSTWA DOKTORANTÓW UJ  
NAUKI SPOŁECZNE, NR 24 (1/2019), s. 29–43  
E-ISSN 2082-9213 | P-ISSN 2299-2383  
WWW.DOKTORANCI.UJ.EDU.PL/ZESZYTY/NAUKI-SPOLECZNE  
DOI: 10.26361/ZNTDSP.10.2019.24.2  
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SUBMISSION: 31.03.2019  
ACCEPTANCE: 18.06.2019

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## **Rumeli in the Period of Dynastic Instability. Why Were the Ottoman Balkans So Important for the Dynasty in the First Half of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century?**

### ABSTRACT

As Peter Mentzel states, the Balkans (Rumeli) were not only a borderland but also the core province of the early Ottoman state. The Rumelian military aristocracy played one of the most important roles in the internal policy. It constituted an important factor, which was powerful enough to create the Ottoman policy. That is why Murad I forbade the Ottoman princes to lead the *akıncı* warriors in order to avoid the risk of a dynastic war. He also started *devshirme* among Christian families in the Balkans so as to build trustworthy groups of servants for the dynasty. Obviously, the province gained importance in the difficult times after the defeat at Ankara (1402). During the civil war (1402–1413, *fetret devri*) Rumeli was governed by one of the brothers who claimed power over the whole Ottoman territory. The deciding struggles between the sons of Bayezid I took place in the Balkans and their result depended mainly on the attitudes shown by the Rumelian warriors and their frontier lords. The rulers who lost the support of the Rumelian military class quickly lost the throne of Rumeli as well. It happened in the cases of Emir Süleyman, prince Musa, and Düzme Mustafa.

### KEYWORDS

Ottomans, Ottoman State, Fetret Devri, Rumeli, Balkans, Frontier Lords

Rumeli—the region ruined until the mid-fourteenth century by a series of calamities: wars, war-related plunders and the Black Death<sup>1</sup>—evolved into a kind of the Promised Land for the Turks. The depopulated former territories of the Byzantine Empire, Serbia and Bulgaria, the power over which was divided between magnate dynasties fighting against each other, were an excellent place to settle down.<sup>2</sup> Initially, these sites were perceived as the domain of war (*dār al-ḥarb*). In response to the situation faced on the European side of the Black Sea straits, the Turks established a comprehensive frontier system with gazis as its basic element.<sup>3</sup> Anatolia was a region where Christianity and Islam co-existed for hundreds of years. Meanwhile, the lack of such a tradition in the Balkans meant that local peoples were more inclined to fight against the Turks arriving from the east and south.<sup>4</sup> In a relatively short time, the Turkish element became significant in the Balkans, and the frontier moved north and west.<sup>5</sup> After the Battle of the Maritsa, which took place in 1371, the plains of Thrace and Macedonia were the place where the Anatolians settled in, especially during the devastating invasions led by Timur the Lame. It was then that a large influx of people arrived from different parts of the Ottoman lands in Asia, which was noted by the author of the *Ottoman Anonymous Chronicle*.<sup>6</sup> The second similar event occurred in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the Kalender Çelebi rebellion gave rise to civil unrest in Anatolia.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, one may say that the Ottoman rule brought peace in the south-eastern part of the Balkans although this is sometimes interpreted as a situation unfavourable for Rumeli, especially at the time when the gazis had to be held back for political reasons.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. E. Laiou-Thomadakis, *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire. A Social and Demographic Study*, Princeton 1977, pp. 7–8.

<sup>2</sup> M. M. Aktepe, *XIV. ve XV. Asırlarda Rumeli'nin Türkler Tarafından İskânına Dair*, „Türkiyat Mecmuası” 1953, 10, pp. 299–300.

<sup>3</sup> M. Kiel, *The Incorporation of the Balkans into the Ottoman Empire, 1353–1453*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, vol. I: *Byzantium to Turkey, 1071–1453*, ed. K. Fleet, Cambridge 2009, pp. 149–155.

<sup>4</sup> L. Darling, *Reformulating the Gazi Narrative: When was the Ottoman State a Gazi State?*, „Turcica” 2011, 43, p. 35; R. P. Lindner, *Nomads and Ottomans in Medieval Anatolia*, Bloomington 1983, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Evidence of this is the fact that Evrenos Bey changed his location three times. See for reference: A. Kılıç, *Gazi Evrenos Bey. Bir Osmanlı Akıncı Beyi*, İstanbul 2014, pp. 65, 67; R. P. Lindner, *Anatolia, 1300–1451*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of Turkey...*, vol. 1, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>6</sup> Anonymous, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*, hazır. N. Azamat, İstanbul 1992, pp. 48–49 [later in the text: Anonymous]; H. B. Karadeniz, *Osmanlılar ve Rumeli Uç Beyleri. Merkez ve Uç*, İstanbul 2015, p. 28; E. Zachariadou, *The Ottoman World*, [in:] *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 7: 1415–1453, ed. Ch. Allmand, Cambridge 1998, pp. 812, 814.

<sup>7</sup> M. Kiel, op. cit., pp. 149–155.

<sup>8</sup> E. Zachariadou believes that on one hand, the Treaty of 1403 concluded between Emir Süleyman and the neighbouring Christian countries limited the capabilities of the *akıncı* while on the other hand, the invasion led by Timur the Lame and the defeat at Ankara

After the defeat at Ankara—suffered in 1402 and brought by Timur the Lame—when princes İsa and Mehmed were fighting against each other in Anatolia and Mehmed was leading battles with the less influential beys, the Ottoman Rumeli enjoyed peace under the reign of Emir Süleyman. The situation in Anatolia calmed down after prince Mehmed's victory and at the time when prince Süleyman seized a significant part of the Ottoman possessions in that region in 1404–1405. The period of relative peace in the Ottoman provinces lasted until the rise of Musa Çelebi in 1409.<sup>9</sup>

The situation in Rumeli deteriorated in 1409 when the Anatolian beys (prince Mehmed, the ruler of Germiyan, Yakub II and the bey of Karaman) united against Emir Süleyman as they were faced with the threat of his expansion.<sup>10</sup> Mehmed I, who ruled over the Ottoman territory of Rum, supported prince Musa, who was inclined to gain power in the European part of the Ottoman state. In the official Ottoman historiography, it was mentioned that prince Mehmed agreed to Musa's proposal to set out to Rumeli, gain its throne and rule over the territory on behalf of prince Mehmed.<sup>11</sup> As prince Musa began to rule over Rumeli on his own, he parted ways with the Rumelian military aristocracy, especially with the frontier lords. The ruling prince relied on the *kapıkulu* troops, which induced the Rumelians to seek the help of Mehmed I. Having defeated Musa in 1413, Mehmed united under his rule all the lands which remained in the hands of the Ottomans after the defeat at Ankara. The period of unrest in the Ottoman state lasted at least until 1425. It embraced problems faced by Mehmed I, which were solved at the time when Şeyh Bedreddin's rebellion was suppressed, and the first act of Düzme Mustafa's defiance, followed by the 5 year-long period of relative peace, and troubles that Murad II experienced with relation to Düzme Mustafa, the "little" Mustafa and İzmiroğlu Cüneyd Bey's revolt suppressed in 1425.<sup>12</sup>

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increased the number of warriors who were arriving to Rumeli, which must have resulted in a tense social situation. See for reference: E. A. Zachariadou, *The Ottoman World...*, op. cit., p. 815. However, D. Kastritsis emphasizes that the *akıncı* were dissatisfied with Süleyman's reign due to less marauding expeditions into the neighbouring Christian states as the plunders were one of the main sources of income for them. D. Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid. Empire Building and Representation in the Ottoman Civil War of 1402–1413*, Leiden–Boston 2007, pp. 136–137.

<sup>9</sup> D. Kastritsis, op. cit., pp. 111–112.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 111; İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı tarihi*, I. c., Ankara 1972, pp. 335–336.

<sup>11</sup> M. M. Neşri, *Cihânnümâ*, hazır. N. Öztürk, İstanbul 2013, pp. 202–203 [later in the text: Neşri-Öztürk]; M. Neşri, *Neşri Tarihi II*, hazır. M. A. Köymen, Ankara 1984, p. 36 [later in the text: Neşri-Köymen]; *Rûhî Târîhi*, hazır. H. E. Cengiz Y. Yücel, Ankara 1992 [later in the text: Pseudo-Ruhi], p. 424; D. Kastritsis, op. cit., 111.

<sup>12</sup> R. Murphey, *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty. Tradition, Image and Practice in the Ottoman Imperial Household 1400–1800*, London 2008, p. 45; D. Kastritsis, op. cit., p. 45; E. A. Zachariadou, *The Ottoman World...*, op. cit., p. 815.

The Rumelian lords had too great real military and political power to lose so they decided to participate in the struggle launched by the princes of the Ottoman dynasty. Indeed, they shared power in Rumeli with the frontier lords.<sup>13</sup> Heath Lowry states that there was a kind of customary division of power between the frontier lords who governed Rumeli and the Ottomans ruling over Anatolia.<sup>14</sup> Even if it is a far-reaching hypothesis, the benefits of such a solution were undeniable. With the relatively low involvement of military forces and resources on the part of the bey, it enabled the rapid expansion and gaining control over huge territories before the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup> However, after the defeat at Ankara, the high position of lords who governed Rumeli meant that the region was of key importance in the context of the struggle for the throne of the whole Ottoman territory and its unification under a single member of the dynasty.

This is illustrated by the example of the brothers who lost this battle: prince Süleyman and prince Musa, and their uncle—prince Mustafa, called “the False” (Ott. *Düzme*). In these three cases, it was essential that the princes were abandoned by the Rumelian military aristocracy.<sup>16</sup> The most important and accurate source of information about the events associated with the first two members of the Ottoman dynasty is *Ahvâl*—a chronicle written in the court of Mehmed I, the elements of which are presented in *Cihânnümâ* by Neşri and *Tevârîh-i Âl-i Osmân* by Pseudo-Ruhi,<sup>17</sup> also known as the *Oxford Anonymous*.<sup>18</sup> Further descriptions can also be found in the texts written by other Byzantine and Ottoman authors.<sup>19</sup>

The story of the rivalry between Emir Süleyman and Musa at a glance: Prince Musa was boarded on a ship at the port in Sinop and travelled to Wallachia from where Mircea the Elder helped him to get to Rumeli. Afterwards, he arrived in Silistria. He rapidly gained support from *tovica* and other Rumelian timariots.<sup>20</sup> Oruç Beğ is the only chronicler who reports that this

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<sup>13</sup> C. Finkel, *Osman's Dream. The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300–1923*, London 2006, pp. 18–19; H. B. Karadeniz, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> H. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State*, New York 2003, pp. 141–142.

<sup>15</sup> The frontier *akıncı* were not paid by the bey. See for reference: R. Murphey, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>16</sup> D. Kastritsis, op. cit., pp. 140–142.

<sup>17</sup> Pseudo-Ruhi.

<sup>18</sup> D. Kastritsis, op. cit., p. 28–33.

<sup>19</sup> *Laonici Chalcocondylae Athenensis Historiarum Libri Decem*, ed. I. Bekker, Bonae 1843, pp. 170–171; Doukas, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks*, trans. H. J. Magoulias, Detroit 1975 [later in the text: Doukas].

<sup>20</sup> For *tovica* and other timariots see: P. Fodor, *Ottoman Warfare 1300–1453*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of Turkey...*, vol. I, op. cit., pp. 198–205.

attitude was the result of news spread among *tovica* saying that prince Musa might have held the position of *akıncı beği*.<sup>21</sup> In that time, no prince could hold such a function in standard conditions. However, as H. B. Karadeniz suggests, Bayezid I could appoint his underage son as a commander of *akıncı*, which was an element of his centralisation policy. Probably, he aimed to make the dynasty members gain control over *akıncı* and therefore break the frontier lords' force.<sup>22</sup> According to the extensive narration of *Ahvâl*, Musa came from Wallachia and took control over the entire Rumeli shortly after he had revealed his intention.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, that source is very laconic when it comes to the descriptions of how prince Musa seized power in Rumeli.<sup>24</sup> However, it indicates that prince Süleyman was in Anatolia at that time.<sup>25</sup> Having heard that Musa had taken over Rumeli, Süleyman became strongly alarmed. When he arrived in Rumeli, first he went to Constantinople where he offered the emperor certain lands, most likely in exchange for his support in the fight. It was only after this step that he launched the struggle with Musa. The author of *Ahvâl* reports that during the fight a few Rumelian lords decided to support prince Süleyman again, which forced Musa to escape and hide in the mountains. At that time, prince Süleyman settled down in Edirne while prince Mehmed probably used this situation to defeat Süleyman's forces at Ankara.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile in Edirne, having drunk too much wine, Süleyman did not listen to his advisors who suggested starting the fight. As a result, the entire Rumeli started to perceive prince Musa as the ruler.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Oruç Beğ Tarihi. Giriş, Metin, Kronoloji, Dizin, Tıpkıbasım*, hazır. N. Öztürk, İstanbul 2008, p. 44 [later in the text: Oruç Beğ].

<sup>22</sup> H. B. Karadeniz, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

<sup>23</sup> İdris-i Bitlisî, *Hest Bihîst*. II. cilt, hazır. M. Karataş, S. Kaya, Y. Baş, Ankara 2008, p. 235 [later in the text: İdris-i Bitlisî]; Neşri-Öztürk, pp. 204–205; Neşri-Köymen, p. 37; Pseudo-Ruhi, p. 425.

<sup>24</sup> H. B. Karadeniz believes that actually Musa promised *tovica* to change his policy towards the neighbours and make it more aggressive, which met their expectations and enabled him to gain their support. H. B. Karadeniz, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>25</sup> Neşri-Öztürk, pp. 204–205; Neşri-Köymen, pp. 37–38; Pseudo-Ruhi, p. 425.

<sup>26</sup> İdris-i Bitlisî, pp. 233, 235–236; Neşri-Öztürk, pp. 205–206; Neşri-Köymen, pp. 38–39; Pseudo-Ruhi, pp. 425–426; H. B. Karadeniz, *op. cit.*, p. 167; D. Kastritsis, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

<sup>27</sup> Anonymous, pp. 52–53; Âsık Paşazâde, *Osmanoğulların tarihi. Tevârîh-i Âl-i Osmân*, hazır. K. Yavuz, M. A. Yekta Saraç, İstanbul 2010, 68 [later in the text: Âsık Paşazâde]; İdris-i Bitlisî, pp. 239–241; Neşri-Öztürk, pp. 206–208; Neşri-Köymen, pp. 39–40; Pseudo-Ruhi, pp. 425–427; D. Kastritsis, *op. cit.*, pp. 140–142. For the characteristics of the relationship between the oldest narrative sources see: H. İnalçık, *The Rise of Ottoman Historiography*, [in:] *Historians of the Middle East*, eds. B. Lewis, P. M. Holt, London–New York–Toronto 1962, p. 153.

Three facts should be noted here: firstly, Emir Süleyman was outside Rumeli at the time when prince Musa arrived there. Secondly, the entire Rumeli instinctively succumbed to Musa's reign right after he had appeared on the Ottoman territory. Thirdly, some Rumelians changed their mind and showed loyalty towards Süleyman after he had come to Rumeli. Therefore, one can assume that at least a few beys surrendered to Musa in order to avoid problems in case it turned out that he would become the ruler of Rumeli. When Süleyman returned, they behaved loyally towards him in the critical moment—at the time when the armed confrontation between brothers' troops was likely to happen.

To understand why certain beys rejected Süleyman's reign, it is worth taking a glance at the way he was presented in the source material. It must be admitted that the texts were written after the events described above yet it seems that the prince's image is not only the fruit of his defeat. He is portrayed as a man who cannot deal with difficulties. It can be clearly seen if one analyzes Musa's second approach to gain power in Rumeli. Emir Süleyman seems to be completely not interested in fighting—we can see a person who entertains oneself in a hamam and enjoys conversations while obviously drinking wine.<sup>28</sup> The chroniclers stemming from the gazi environment presented the same image of the ruler, which indicates that his behaviour was remarkably unacceptable for the gazis.<sup>29</sup> In the chronicles of the early Ottoman state, only three rulers were portrayed this way: Bayezid the Thunderbolt, Emir Süleyman and Bayezid II.<sup>30</sup> It seems that this biased image served to convince the audience that Emir Süleyman was not worthy to have the supreme power because of the lack of necessary predispositions.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps, it was also aimed to discredit him in the eyes of those who could attribute the responsibility for his death to prince Mehmed who was responsible for the Musa's actions. Nevertheless, this perception of prince Süleyman might have been the reason for rejecting him as a candidate for the throne.

Musa's rule quickly proved to be very oppressive.<sup>32</sup> Despite the different levels of detail, the narration in the majority of source texts has a negative con-

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<sup>28</sup> Anonymous, p. 51; Âsık Paşazâde, 67; *Fatih Devri Kaynaklarından Düstûrnâme-i Enverî Osmanlı Tarihi Kısmı (1299–1466)*, hazırl. N. Öztürk, İstanbul 2003, p. 42; Müneccimbaşı Ahmed ibn Lütfullah, *Osmanlı Devletinin Kuruluş Tarihi. Câmîü'd-düvel (1299–1481)*, çev. A. Ağırakça, İstanbul 2014, p. 189; Neşri-Öztürk, p. 206; Neşri-Köymen, p. 39; Pseudo-Ruhi, pp. 425–426.

<sup>29</sup> H. B. Karadeniz, op. cit., pp. 162–163, 169–170.

<sup>30</sup> N. Öztürk, 14–15. *Asır Osmanlı Kültür Tarihi. Devlet Düzeni – Sosyal Hayatı*, İstanbul 2014, pp. 247–251.

<sup>31</sup> D. Kastritsis, op. cit., p. 156.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 159–160.

notation. Aşık Paşazade notes that all sanjaks were given to Musa's people.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the author of the *Ottoman Anonymous Chronicle* writes that Musa favoured his people and deprived the Rumelians of their posts.<sup>34</sup> It might not have been something strange—anything but an ordinary attempt to centralize the power. Previously, Rumeli had experienced such attempts, for instance under the reign of Bayezid the Thunderbolt.<sup>35</sup> Neşri's *Ahvâl* is the most comprehensive source of information here. The author writes explicitly that the most important reason for the reluctance shown by the Rumelian beys towards Musa was the completely arbitrary confiscation of assets, which was organised by the ruler.<sup>36</sup> Somewhat milder comments can be found in the *Oxford Anonymous*.<sup>37</sup> The confiscations are said to be carried out in an impertinent way: The prince chose those beys who seemed to be the richest and not only did he rob them of their wealth but also often killed them. That is why none of the Rumelian lords could be certain what their future would bring.<sup>38</sup> The chronicles written by the Byzantine and Serbian authors also report prince Musa's aggressive politics. These include the significant text by Constantine the Philosopher, who drew attention to the fact that initially, Musa seemed to act peacefully and fairly liberally but later he became harsh even to his servants.<sup>39</sup> Doukas was one of the Byzantine chroniclers who spoke about Musa in a similar tone.<sup>40</sup> Sphrantzes mentions only that Emperor Manuel II was engaged in the fight against Musa.<sup>41</sup>

The author of the *Ottoman Anonymous Chronicle* is the single historian who attempts to defend Musa and skips the problem of arbitrarily organised confiscations while focusing on the Rumelians' behaviour. He talks about the reasons for which Musa hated the Rumelian lords, describes how Musa tested Evrenos's loyalty but also presented the prince's generosity towards his own *kapıkulu* troops. Finally, the chronicler deals in detail with the Kör Şah Melik's escape to Constantinople and his getting into prince Mehmed's camp.<sup>42</sup> This is a unique

<sup>33</sup> Âsık Paşazâde, 69; D. Kastritsis, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>34</sup> Anonymous, p. 54; D. Kastritsis, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>35</sup> H. B. Karadeniz, op. cit., pp. 173–174, 182, 224–227.

<sup>36</sup> Neşri-Öztürk, p. 209, n. 2928; Neşri-Köymen, p. 41.

<sup>37</sup> Pseudo-Ruhi, p. 427.

<sup>38</sup> Neşri-Öztürk, p. 209, n. 2928; Neşri-Köymen, p. 41.

<sup>39</sup> *Lebensbeschreibung des Despoten Stefan Lazarević von Konstantin dem Philosophen*, hrsg. u. übers. von M. Braun, Wiesbaden 1956, 31; D. Kastritsis, op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>40</sup> Doukas, XIX, 7–10.

<sup>41</sup> *The Fall of the Byzantine Empire. A Chronicle by George Sphrantzes*, trans. M. Philipides, Amherst 1980, III 1 [later in the text: Sphrantzes].

<sup>42</sup> Anonymous, pp. 54–55; R. Murphey, op. cit., p. 45; H. B. Karadeniz, op. cit., pp. 184–189; D. Kastritsis, op. cit., p. 160; A. Kılıç, op. cit., pp. 91–92.

fragment that might have been written by someone from Musa's environment, for example, a member of the *kapıkulu*. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that there can be heard the voice of the supporters of the defeated prince although usually it is the winner who writes the history.<sup>43</sup>

The description of Musa's fall looks somewhat different. Before Mehmed arrived in Rumeli, the beys had informed him about their reluctance towards prince Musa. There also appeared high-rank fugitives who escaped from Musa. Due to the fact that Musa based his rule on the *kapıkulu* troops, fighting against him turned out to be an ordeal. Mehmed undertook his struggle for Rumeli three times. His first invasion in Rumeli was prepared by an arrangement with the Byzantine emperor, whom he promised peace after the conquest of the territory. Already during the first battle of Çatalca, the influential frontier lord—Mihaloğlu Mehmed Bey—supported Mehmed and encouraged the prince to continue the fight against Musa. Although the Rumelian beys left Musa, he was still backed by remarkable *kapıkulu* forces. It was the janissaries who convinced Musa not to escape as they were afraid of revenge which the potential winners could take (*sen gidicek bizi dahı helâk iderler*).<sup>44</sup> They also forced prince Mehmed to flee from the battlefield. Musa did not kill Mehmed's captured people, which seems to somehow defy the story about favoring the *kapıkulu* troops only.<sup>45</sup> It also shows that, perhaps, the author of the *Oxford Anonymous* was right when pointing to the fact that loyalty was the reason for which Musa either disliked people or accepted them.<sup>46</sup> Mehmed returned to Anatolia but shortly after that, he managed to prepare the second expedition to Rumeli, during which he suffered a defeat again. To organize the third expedition, he sought help from his father-in-law—the bey of Dulkadir—and asked for more warriors. Having got support from the bey and from Constantinople, Mehmed set out to fight against Musa. Near Vize Mehmed received a letter from Evrenos Bey, in which he, as an experienced gazi, advised Mehmed on what to do, and also reported that frontier lords supported him. Edirne did not succumb to Mehmed's rule and decided to unconditionally accept the prince who would win the fight. Prince Mehmed followed Evrenos's advice and headed for Serbia and then for Bulgaria but Musa avoided a clash. Finally, the clash took place near Sofia—at Çamurlu. A big part of the Rumelian beys had fled to prince Mehmed before. The author of *Ahvâl* mentions that before the battle started,

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<sup>43</sup> Âsık Paşazâde, 70.

<sup>44</sup> Pseudo-Ruhi, p. 428; H. B. Karadeniz, op. cit., pp. 190–191.

<sup>45</sup> Neşri-Öztürk, p. 212; Neşri-Köymen, p. 44; H. B. Karadeniz, op. cit., p. 191.

<sup>46</sup> Pseudo-Ruhi, p. 427.



Musa gave the order to imprison certain Rumelian beys, which intensified the lords' hatred towards him.<sup>47</sup> Eventually, Musa's janissaries did not manage to stand the attack launched by Mehmed's troops. Musa, who escaped from the battlefield, was stopped in the muddy area of Çamurlu where he was captured by Mehmed's warriors and then strangled by one of them.<sup>48</sup>

There are several noteworthy facts here: Right from the beginning, prince Musa stood in opposition to the military aristocracy in Rumeli and invested primarily in the *kapikulu* troops and people showing loyalty towards him. What is more, he treated the Rumelian beys harshly. Secondly, Mehmed I lost the struggle with Musa twice. Thirdly, Mehmed's defeats did not prevent the Rumelian beys from supporting him. The reluctance towards Musa provoked their decision to change the ruler of Rumeli to such an extent that they wanted to give the throne to Mehmed despite his initial failure.

Historiography presents prince Musa's reign as a period of aggressive policy against the neighbouring states. He is considered a ruthless ruler whose character resembles Bayezid the Thunderbolt and who continues his policy.<sup>49</sup> Undoubtedly, he continued Bayezid's approach as far as the centralization of power is concerned. However, the Rumelian beys could perceive him as an untrustworthy continuator of the conquest policy. As noted by many authors, Mircea the Elder was said to help Musa in order to draw the *akıncı* away from Wallachia.<sup>50</sup>

According to the source materials, his reign was not a period of internal peace in his state as well. This is why Mehmed gained support on the part of the frontier lords and, as a result, of the whole Rumeli. However, one may venture to say that if Musa had been behaving in a different way, the division of the Ottoman state into the Rumelian and the Anatolian part would have been more permanent.

A situation similar to that when Emir Süleyman lost his power happened in 1421. The entire Rumeli sided with Düzme Mustafa during his second rebellion and then quite easily transferred its loyalty to Murad II. The reports on those events can be found in the Ottoman and Byzantine sources and are quite extensive. It should be taken into account that the Ottoman sources do not men-

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<sup>47</sup> Neşri-Öztürk, p. 219; Neşri-Köymen, p. 52; Pseudo-Ruhi, p. 432; H. B. Karadeniz, op. cit., pp. 192–193; A. Kılıç, op. cit., p. 93.

<sup>48</sup> İdris-i Bitlisî, pp. 251–262; Neşri-Öztürk, pp. 215–221; Neşri-Köymen, pp. 47–54; Pseudo-Ruhi, pp. 429–433; H. B. Karadeniz, op. cit., pp. 192–195; A. Kılıç, op. cit., pp. 93–94.

<sup>49</sup> D. Kastritsis, op. cit., p. 159.

<sup>50</sup> Neşri-Öztürk, p. 206; Neşri-Köymen, p. 37; Pseudo-Ruhi, p. 424; D. Kastritsis, op. cit., pp. 136–137; H. B. Karadeniz, op. cit., p. 166; A. Kılıç, op. cit., p. 88.

tion his first attempt to seize power in Rumeli but it is well-documented in the Byzantine historiography and actually there is no doubt that it happened.<sup>51</sup>

The narration is as follows: At first, Mustafa won support on the part of certain members of Evrenos's family (Evrenos died a few years earlier). As a result, the entire Rumeli turned against Mustafa. Following the advice of İzmiroğlu Cüneyd Bey, the prince decided to attack and conquer Anatolia in order to unite all Ottoman lands under his sceptre. Having crossed the straits, the Rumelians moved in the direction of Bursa. The battle took place at Ulubad where Mustafa arrived together with the Rumelian army. It was also then that some warriors decided to leave prince Mustafa's camp and sided with Murad II. The Ottoman texts mention for instance the members of Gümlüoğlu, Evrenosoğlu and Turahan families.<sup>52</sup>

The following facts should be noted here: During his uncle's rebellion, Murad II stayed in Anatolia. Secondly, the entire Rumeli supported prince Mustafa. Thirdly, in the crucial point of the struggle, that is during the Battle of Ulubad, the greater part of the Rumelian forces decided to show their loyalty towards Murad II again.

The aforementioned facts lead to the conclusion that there is a certain analogy between the Rumelian lords' approach presented during the first Musa's attempt to seize power in Rumeli in 1409 and the second Mustafa's rebellion in 1421. It is remarkable that at first, all the beys supported the new candidate for the throne and then, in the crucial moment for the struggle between two members of the dynasty, some of them returned to the one that had held power before.<sup>53</sup> According to R. Murphey, it resulted from the fact that the lords felt highly responsible for the state. Their aim was to ensure that in the difficult time for the state when its future was uncertain, the throne would belong to a competent ruler who could guarantee the continuation of the dynasty and the statehood.<sup>54</sup> Without any doubt, this argumentation is true. However, it seems that there were also more down-to-earth motives, such as simply to survive. The lords wanted to survive in case the rulers who had been sitting on the throne so far were defeated. Such motivation seems to be true to some extent

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<sup>51</sup> A comprehensive report on the events of 1416 can be found in the chronicles by Doukas, Chalkokondyles and Sphrantzes. See: Doukas, XXII, 3–5; *Laonici Chalcocondylae Athenensis Historiarum Libri Decem*, ed. I. Bekker, Bonae 1843, pp. 203–204; Sphrantzes, IV 4. See also: N. Jorga, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, Gotha 1908, pp. 366–376; H. B. Karadeniz, op. cit., pp. 204–212.

<sup>52</sup> Anonymous, p. 63; Âsık Paşazâde, 83; Oruç Beğ, pp. 27–28; Neşri-Öztürk, pp. 236–237; Neşri-Köymen, p. 74.

<sup>53</sup> Neşri-Öztürk, p. 237; Neşri-Köymen, p. 73.

<sup>54</sup> R. Murphey, op. cit., p. 23.

in the light of George Sfrantzes's passage describing the moment when the grand vizier of Mehmed I—Bayezid Pasha—decided to side with Düzme Mustafa: „[...] his mission was to keep the West under Murad's authority, if possible.”<sup>55</sup> Generally, it is also compatible with the image shown in the most extensive description by Doukas.<sup>56</sup> Mustafa's attempt also shows that having the limited support of the frontier lords, one could gain power in Rumeli, especially if the opponent was a member of *kapıkulu* and not a member of the dynasty.<sup>57</sup> The Rumelian lords created a system which helped them survive in the uncertain times, regardless of the fact who would become the ruler of Rumeli. The Rumelian lords' activity was an important factor which influenced the outcome of the competition. Indeed, they constituted a strong and quite unified military factor.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, it was not obvious whom they would give their support. First, they somehow led to Emir Süleyman's fall, then to prince Musa's failure, and after all, they must have been responsible, to some extent, for Sheikh Bedreddin's rebellion and Mustafa's victory in 1421. The activity on the part of the lords from the Ottoman Anatolia, which suffered a great loss due to Timur the Lame's invasion, stood in contrast with the Rumelian lords' behaviour. This contrast can also be seen with regard to fights against the Anatolian beys. The Anatolian lords showed quite unwavering support for Mehmed I and then Murad II. The influential frontier lords somehow managed the Rumelian beys—it was clear when the Evrenos's family changed their mind and decided to support Mustafa, as well as at the time when the lords were persuaded by Mihaloğlu Mehmed Bey to leave Mustafa.<sup>59</sup>

Let us ask a reversed question: when did a candidate for the throne lose the beys' trust? To answer this question, it may be helpful to take a glance at the cases of prince İsa, who tried to seize power in Anatolia three times, and Düzme Mustafa, who also attempted to take power more than once. As far as İsa's example is concerned, his initial defeat diminished his credibility in the eyes of his serfs. Although İsa's struggle with prince Mehmed was not directly related to Rumeli as it took place in Anatolia, it is worth taking a brief look at its course of action. Prince İsa had a great starting position since after the Battle of Ankara he took control over the important Ottoman territory—Bithynia—and an extremely notable city of Bursa.<sup>60</sup> He was involved in a struggle with

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<sup>55</sup> Sphrantzes, IX 2.

<sup>56</sup> Doukas, XXIV 8.

<sup>57</sup> H. B. Karadeniz, op. cit., p. 210.

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem, p. 160; A. Kılıç, op. cit., p. 84.

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>60</sup> D. Kastritsis, op. cit., p. 79.

Mehmed, who gathered his forces in Amasya and Tokat and—which was crucial in shifting the balance of power—received support from Eyne Bey Subaşı—the governor of Balıkesir, who had been cooperating with Emir Süleyman before.<sup>61</sup> Despite this, the part of the Ottoman territory which İsa conquered after the Battle of Ankara sided with him during the first conflict with prince Mehmed. During the second attempt to seize the lands which he previously possessed, he was always asked to prove his friendship with prince Mehmed. Next time, no one wanted to be subordinate to him in any way. The same might have happened in the case of the “false” Mustafa, who carried the stigma of failure during his second approach to seize power. Furthermore, the unfavourable atmosphere after the execution of Bayezid Pasha could also play a role here. Perhaps, that context reminded the Rumelian lords of Musa’s reign and made them fearful of losing their lives as Bayezid Pasha was executed despite the fact that he had sworn to be obedient to Prince Mustafa.

One more issue should be noted here. In both cases, the rulers of Rumeli stayed in Anatolia. The fact is that almost from the very beginning, the members of the Ottoman dynasty manifested their presence in Rumeli. The first conquests were controlled by the oldest son of Orhan—prince Süleyman. However, the ruler’s people knew that the gazis are too dangerous and should be under their direct control. For this reason, already during the reign of the third Ottoman ruler, Murad I, the princes were ousted from the Rumelian frontier.<sup>62</sup> As a result, the ruler’s direct control over the Rumelian frontier meant that his highest dignitaries took part in expeditions and military projects organized in Rumeli. Hence, Gazi Evrenos most often acted in cooperation with Lala Şahin, Kara Halil Pasha, and after his death, with his son and the new grand vizier—Ali Pasha.<sup>63</sup> P. Metzler demonstrates that Rumeli was not only a borderland but also the core of the Ottoman state.<sup>64</sup>

L. Darling emphasized the correlation between the ruler’s presence in Rumeli and the instability of the dynasty caused by the disloyalty among its serfs, especially among the frontier lords. The researcher notes that both Süleyman Pasha’s death and the occupation of Gallipoli by Amadeo VI of Savoy in 1366 took place at the moment when Murad I was outside Rumeli. At that time, he stayed in Anatolia.<sup>65</sup> He was forced to do so as he was faced with the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibidem, pp. 87–90.

<sup>62</sup> L. P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem. Woman and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*, New York–Oxford 1993, p. 20.

<sup>63</sup> Oruç Beğ, pp. 27–28.

<sup>64</sup> P. Metzler, *The Ottoman Balkans as Frontier, Borderland and Core*, [in:] *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilisation*, vol. I, ed. H. İnalcık, Ankara 2000, pp. 130–137.

<sup>65</sup> L. Darling, op. cit., p. 37.

threat posed by the Anatolian beyliks—Karaman and Eretna.<sup>66</sup> These inspiring observations made by the American researcher are worth applying to the next decades involving the civil war (*fetret devri*) and the transitional period during the reign of Mehmed I and Murad II, which may help us draw conclusions with regard to the correlation between the ruler's presence in Rumeli and the loyalty among the local lords.

During the civil war (1403–1413), the first Musa's attempt to capture Rumeli was made at the time when Emir Süleyman was in Anatolia.<sup>67</sup> The situation looked similar in the case of prince Mustafa, called Düzme. When he appeared in Rumeli in 1421, Murad II stayed in Anatolia. Rumeli fell into Mustafa's hands easily but then he was betrayed in the crucial moment of the struggle. Competing with his rival Musa, who was residing in Rumeli, prince Mehmed had to organize three expeditions to Rumeli and despite the local beys' support, he was considered the ruler of the territory only after his siege in the battle. As seen on the example of prince Mehmed (including his previous struggle with Emir Süleyman), it was much easier to try to seize power when he was in Rumeli rather than when he started from Anatolia. Most likely, the influence of the *akıncı* and their commanders was the deciding factor here. It was better to gain their support first rather than to be afraid of an attack coming from Rumeli.

It seems that the Rumelian lords sided with that member of the dynasty who resided in Rumeli. This was also pointed out by L. Chalkokondyles in his description of Musa's attempt to seize power there.<sup>68</sup> Having heard the news about Musa's arrival, Süleyman, who was in Anatolia at that time, was in a hurry to arrive in Rumeli as soon as possible because the one who appears on a given territory first becomes its ruler.<sup>69</sup> When the ruler did not reside in the European part of the Ottoman state, he had to be aware that he could lose support in favour of his brother or uncle. The similar situation could be observed in the period of Mehmed I's autonomous reign and after his death. However, it can be assumed that the Rumelian lords followed a survival strategy: They did not want to lose the possibility to function in case a candidate for the throne would win a struggle. At the same time, they left room for the return to loyalty towards the former ruler in case a candidate would be defeated. The lords could calculate which approach was the most profitable for them.

<sup>66</sup> H. İnalçık, *Kuruluş Dönemi Osmanlı Sultanları*, İstanbul 2010, p. 83.

<sup>67</sup> Neşri-Öztürk, pp. 204–205; Neşri-Köymen, pp. 37–38; Pseudo-Ruhi, p. 425. It is strongly emphasized by the representative of the Byzantine historiography—Laonikos Chalkokondyles, *Laonici Chalcocondylae...*, op. cit., pp. 171–172.

<sup>68</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>69</sup> Ibidem.

They knew that if a candidate managed to seize power, they would not create the impression that they had not wanted to accept him before. Otherwise, they would return to loyalty towards the previous ruler. Prince Musa's attitude seems to confirm this reasoning as he did not want to agree with it and perceived the Rumelian lords as traitors—this image emerges from the *Ottoman Anonymous Chronicle* whose author tries to stand up for the prince.<sup>70</sup> It seems that such a behaviour was acceptable to some extent, which can be seen in the case of Bayezid Pasha. Assuming that after the first lost struggle in Rumeli Bayezid Pasha could side with Murad II again,<sup>71</sup> İzmiroğlu Cüneyd Bey persuaded Mustafa to execute him.

Rumeli, and especially its eastern part, which was ruled by the Ottomans for several decades and enjoyed a period of peace, could attempt to choose between the members of the dynasty. The fate changed during the reign of Prince Musa, who observed the steps taken especially by the aristocracy and could not accept their actions. One may draw a conclusion that Rumeli started to encounter difficulties at that time. However, if the territory had not been faced with them, the period of the division of the state—and, in turn, the instability in the entire Ottoman state—would have lasted longer.

*Translated by Karolina Gajowiec*

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<sup>70</sup> Anonymous, pp. 54–55.

<sup>71</sup> Viziers used to act this way; the escape of Kôr Şah Melik and İbrahim Pasha to prince Mehmed can be an example of this. D. Kastritsis, op. cit., pp. 165–166.

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