Ottoman Reform and Muslim Regeneration

Studies in Honour of Butrus Abu-Manneh

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Who is the Next Ottoman Sultan?
Attempts to Change the Rule of Succession during the Nineteenth Century

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The ridiculous custom of Venetians is that kingship is not by hereditary right, but they become doge by accidental merit. (Mustafa Na’ima).¹

The Unbearable Responsibility of Being Ottoman

Fu’ad Paşa, Minister of the Exterior during the 1850s and one of the prominent proponents of Westernization in the Ottoman bureaucracy, told Sir Stratford Canning, the British Ambassador to Istanbul, that one of the four pillars of the Ottoman state was the Ottoman dynasty.² Having ruled the Ottoman lands for over 600 years, it was the definitive feature of the state and critical for its subjects’ sense of identity. As Philip Mansel remarks, the fact that the Ottoman subjects were referred to as ‘Osmanlı’ (Ottoman) was ipso facto an indication of this intertwined relationship.³ We do not refer to eighteenth-century Austrian subjects as ‘Habsburgs’ or Habsburgians’, or to nineteenth-century Russians as ‘Romanovs’ or ‘Romanovians’!

Fu’ad Paşa’s words, although possibly expressing a certain strategy, emphasise an important fact. The Ottoman state and the Ottoman dynasty were very much interdependent. If one were to perish, the other would as well. David Urquhart, a British diplomat in Istanbul, observed astutely in 1830s, at a time when European travelers’ Hellenophile sentiments were at their peak, and many wished, as did Stratford Canning, that ‘the Sultan were driven bag and baggage into the heart of Asia’,⁴ that,

Whoever has opened the history of the Ottoman Empire, must have been struck by the fact of the supremacy of a single
family through thirty generations, and during six centuries. We will not venture to trace the cause of this fact, but we may be permitted to infer from it, first, the great probability of breaking up the empire by displacing this family; and secondly, the deep demoralization that must ensue from destroying throughout a whole people, a principle which is not only their sole political bond, but which is so interwoven with their habits, their feelings of duty and religion, that it cannot be separated from them.  5

Despite this fundamental identity of dynasty and state, there is no doubt that both Ottoman political thought and the popular perception of the political authority were influenced by the process of secularization and the developing political awareness of nineteenth-century Europe. Kings ruling by divine right, as well as monarchic regimes in general, along with all kinds of magical elements in the government, were gradually losing their prestige. The Ottoman dynasty steadily lost its ‘sacred’ prestige during the course of the nineteenth century. Fu’ad Paşa’s politically intelligent statement thus reflected a habitual thought that could not easily be discarded. Even if we know today that a change of dynasty was not going to happen, many candidates for the throne in Istanbul had in fact already lined up.

This article explores the attempts to change the rule of Ottoman succession in the nineteenth century, as well as the efforts made to replace the Ottoman dynasty altogether. I believe, as Friedrich Giese argued in 1927, that initial attempts to change the rule of succession undertaken by Abdülmeclid can be seen as a part of his greater project of bringing the Ottoman monarchy closer to that of the European monarchies.  6 None of the Sultans after him kept to the modernization program with the same scope and vision. On the other hand, a belief that the cause of many problems and general disorderliness was the passing of power to the oldest member of the dynasty became popular during this particular period. The idea that such type of power transfer was an obstacle to modernization became widespread, especially among the Westernizing literati. Ahmed Sa’îb, for example, an opposition member in exile, wrote at the turn of the twentieth century that he desired a rule of succession that was in accordance with ‘the modern times, the shari’a, and reason’.  7 Although the attempts to change the dynasty and transfer the Caliphate to another family may appear to be a slightly different story, as we shall see they are clearly connected to the change in mentality described above. That the
Ottoman dynasty was losing its prestige was a fact that the Sultans had to cope with. Many of the occurrences narrated here were the direct results of this confrontation.

A Short History of Succession until the Nineteenth Century

In the first centuries of Ottoman rule, until 1617, succession to the Ottoman throne was maintained through filial descent, that is, from father to son. Although the practice seems to have favoured the oldest son alive (or not captive, as in the case of Murad II's son Orhan), there are so many exceptions that, as Giese argued, it is difficult to speak of concrete rules such as primogeniture. After 1617 the rule of seniority was truly adopted: the oldest male member of the dynasty became the legitimate heir apparent. When Ahmed I died, his brother Mustafa I ascended the throne as the oldest member of the House of Osman. Mustafa, however, was dethroned after three months because of his mental instability, and Ahmed's son, Osman II, was made the Sultan. Nevertheless, the new rule of succession was established without notice being taken of this early drawback. Now princes were no longer murdered, but kept in seclusion until it was time for them to ascend the throne. This practice, although not codified, became a strong tradition that endured until the nineteenth century. Only in that final century of the empire did some of the Sultans attempt to change the rule of succession once again, to that of a son following the father.

Murad Instead of Abdülaziz?

The first endeavours to change the rule of succession in the nineteenth century can be traced to Abdülmecid's reign. During that time articles on the modes of succession in the European monarchies began to appear in the semi-official newspapers. Abdülmecid intended to have his eldest son Murad succeed to the throne instead of his brother, Abdülaziz, the official heir according to custom. The Sultan's complaints to Dr. Siegmund Spitzer, the Viennese imperial physician in Istanbul, about his concerns that Abdülaziz might not treat his sons properly if he were to succeed the throne, and his taking Murad along on a trip to Iraklion contrary to protocol, are only some of the indications that he was preparing the ground for this change. According to Ahmed Cevdet, he even wanted to keep Abdülaziz away from Istanbul by appointing him governor of Tripoli, though this was never realized. Moreover, Abdülmecid openly told Sir Stratford
Canning about his plans, as he wanted to ascertain how the European powers would react to such a modification. Sir Stratford intimated that Britain would not support such a change, asserting that other princes who would lose their right to the Ottoman throne would not give up their claims, and that would cause chaos. Receiving this response, Ahmed Cevdet informs us, Abdülmecid temporarily suspended his plans.\textsuperscript{14} The French Ambassador, with whom the Sultan was on better terms, supported the change in the rule of succession.

Rumours that the rule of succession would be modified in favour of the Sultan’s son became widespread at the time. It was said that Abdülaçiz ate nothing except what his mother prepared for him and did not leave his room in the Palace for fear of possible assassination.\textsuperscript{15} Sultan Abdülmecid’s early and sudden death left his plan unrealized. However, the rumours were so pervasive that by the time of the enthronement of the new Sultan, uncertainty arose among the bureaucrats as to whether the rule of succession had been changed or not. Consequently, tension arose between two groups, one led by the Minister of War Rıza Paşa, who supported Murad’s accession to the throne, and the other by the Grand Vizier, Qibrınlı Mehmed Paşa, and the Grand Admiral Mehmed ‘Ali Paşa.

The conflict was reflected in the official invitations sent out by the Office of Ceremonies: the place where the name of the new Sultan was to be written on the invitation to the ceremony of allegiance was initially left blank. The other ministers also felt uncertain. The Grand Vizier pressured in favour of Abdülaçiz and lobbied among some ulemas who came to perform the funeral prayer for Abdülmecid. With their insistence on Abdülaçiz, whose world view was known to be closer to theirs than that of Murad, who had been raised like a European prince, the blanks in the invitations were filled in with Abdülaçiz’s name.\textsuperscript{16} Similarly, the first official correspondence after Abdülmecid’s death did not include the new Sultan’s name; the blank was again subsequently filled in.\textsuperscript{17} As soon as he came to power Abdülaçiz understandably dismissed his principal opponent, the long-standing Minister of War, Rıza Paşa. In consequence of his uncle’s restrictions on him, Murad is said to have secretly sought protection from the French government in the first years of Abdülaçiz’s reign. Outrey, the premier dragoman of the French embassy in Istanbul, informed Emperor Napoléon of the precarious nature of the situation when in Paris in late 1864. The Emperor instructed Outrey on his return to Istanbul to offer official protection to the Prince – should it become necessary.\textsuperscript{18}
... Or Yusuf İzzeddin instead of Six Other Princes?

With Abdülaziz’s ascent to power Murad became the legitimate heir to the throne. Once in power, and with the issue already on the political agenda, Abdülaziz sought to capitalize on it and began considering changing the rule of succession in favour of his son, Yusuf İzzeddin. Alas, six princes older than Yusuf were eligible as successors ahead of him (Fig. 1), so that opposition was very likely to develop. Abdülaziz acted judiciously, and before openly proposing a modification of the rule he set out to mollify different pressure groups and have his son gain popularity among them. First of all, to have the military people get used to the anticipated heir, Yusuf İzzeddin, then a child of six, was enlisted in the army and quickly promoted. At the age of nine, he was screaming commands to his battalion in his child’s voice during a parade at Pangaltı when Prince Karl von Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen visited Istanbul in October 1866.19 That same year a fountain was constructed in Tophane in his name.20 The next year, aged ten, Yusuf received the rank of lieutenant-colonel,21 and the Sultan took him along on a trip to the European capitals. Later rumours spread that contrary to the rules of protocol Abdülaziz had arranged Yusuf İzzeddin’s reception in Paris and London before the official heir Murad, then aged twenty-seven, had been presented.

A new propaganda strategy was employed as pictures of Yusuf İzzeddin appeared in the weekly journal Ayine-i Vatan (The Mirror of the Fatherland) in 1867, some of the first pictures to be printed in the Ottoman press. It was rumoured that Mehmed 'Arif, the editor, received a huge grant in return for his beau geste.22 Unsurprisingly, in one of these pictures the ten-year-old prince was shown wearing a military uniform.23 At the age of fourteen, İzzeddin was made commander of the Fourth Army (Anatolian Army) with the rank of marshal, and soon after was appointed commander of the First Army, the Imperial Army. Yusuf spent most of his teenage in barracks, and many high ranking military men and higher level bureaucrats were given gifts in return for their support for this situation.24

When the conservative Mahmud Nedin Paşa became Grand Vizier in September 1871 he lent his support to Abdülaziz’s plans. A whispering campaign was generated in the first months of 1872 to the effect that the Sultan had obtained the verbal approval of the Şeyhülislam and that the latter would give a fetva in favour of filial succession. By now many were expecting a change by fait accompli at
any time. Although the Palace denied the rumours, and Mahmud Nedim Paşa asserted to the ambassadors that such a change was not on the agenda, Yusuf İzzeddin was still being favoured in the protocol. An order sent by Vittorio Emanuele, the King of Italy, to the official heir of the Ottoman throne was presented to Yusuf İzzeddin. In 1874 his portrait and biography appeared on the front page of *L'Orient illustré*, a French-language weekly published in Istanbul. Heretofoe, only the portrait of the reigning Sultan had been published by that journal. The prince was only seventeen when he appeared with the Sultan right after the Grand Vizier, the Şeyhülislam, and the ministers, at the awards ceremonies for graduates of the imperial, medical, and military schools. Yusuf delivered the congratulatory speech to the graduates.

**Opposition to Abdülaziz Grows**

Abdülaziz’s plans to modify the rule of succession did not go unchallenged. On 30 September 1868 about sixty people were arrested, among them officials who had worked in Abdülmeid’s Palace, and accused of plotting to assassinate the Sultan. The group, which had met regularly at Madame Theresa’s house in Pera to escape attention, wanted nothing less than to have Murad ascend the throne. In the 1870s, as rumours about the Sultan’s plans became widespread, opposition voices were reported from the Anatolian provinces. Couched in religious terms, the major argument was that a change in the rule of succession would be ‘against the principles of the Qur’an’. The British Ambassador, Sir Henry Elliot, reported to London that he had not met anyone who supported the anticipated change. Severely critical articles also appeared in newspapers printed outside Ottoman lands, such as *İnşslab (Revolution)*, which had been founded in Geneva in 1870 by the activists Hüseyin Vasfi and Mehmed Bey. Brunswick’s *La Succession au trône de la Turquie*, which was harshly critical of Abdülaziz, went into a second printing only a couple of months after being banned by the Ottoman authorities. The book was translated into Turkish shortly after its publication, and was circulated among the Ottoman literati in manuscript form.

One could argue that plots in support of Murad only increased Abdülaziz’s resolve, or at least considerably narrowed his options concerning the planned change in favour of his own son. From this point of view, promoting Yusuf İzzeddin to the position of official heir would not only avert the threats of deposition against Abdülaziz,
but also leave no legal ground to Murad’s supporters were he de-throned. On the other hand, bypassing six princes eligible for the post of Sultan was bound to generate dismaying among them. But the most important obstacle holding Abdülaziz back was undoubtedly the opposition he met from influential officials, especially the leading Tanzimat statesmen Áli Paşa and Fu’ad Paşa. On this issue they were confronted by Es’ad Paşa, the Minister of War, who backed Abdülaziz.

The Sultan’s intention to change the rule of succession triggered a political struggle among the ambassadors as well, each seeking to enhance his country’s influence with the Ottoman government. For example, Britain and Austria originally tended to confirm Abdülaziz’s scheme in order to get closer to him. They changed their minds upon learning that the most ardent supporter of the Sultan was Russia, which employed Mahmud Nedim Paşa as a liaison. Around that time an American delegation, which included the son of President Ulysses S. Grant, visited the Sultan. The interpreter for the delegation made a speech in favour of the Sultan’s plans to change the rule of succession, but it was later understood that the speech did not reflect the opinion of the delegation and that the interpreter had been enticed into the intrigue at the instigation of the Russian Embassy. Mr. Brown was interrogated on the issue, but died soon after. It was said that his heart could not bear the tension. Yet, according to another version, he committed suicide by taking poison.

To further legitimize his plans, Abdülaziz tactically supported a change to primogeniture in the Khedival dynasty of Egypt. Occupied since 1841 by the progeny of Muhammad ‘Alī, the governorship of Egypt had been handed on in the same manner as the Sultanate in Istanbul, from father to the oldest male member of the family. Abdülaziz and Isma‘îl Paşa of Egypt must have agreed on a common policy during the Sultan’s visit to Cairo in 1863, as he initiated a highly concentrated form of propaganda on the issue after his return. A ferman allowing primogeniture was promulgated on 27 May 1866, though it was never seriously implemented in Egypt and was abrogated after two successions. But by granting primogeniture to Isma‘îl, Abdülaziz was clearly seeking to create a positive climate of opinion about a change in favour of his own son. Significantly, at this time the newspapers reported that a ship very much like the one owned by the Khedive was to be constructed for Yusuf İzzedîn.

Fuelled by the disputes surrounding the Ottoman throne, the opposition to Abdülaziz steadily grew. Particularly vociferous were the New Ottomans, an opposition group of intellectuals and bureaucrats
in exile who vigorously supported Murad as the only candidate capable of fulfilling the ideal of a modern European monarch. Not surprisingly, they were financed by Mustafa Fazıl, brother of Isma'il Paşa, who was bypassed as heir in Egypt as a result of Abdülaziz's firman. On 1 April 1873 the throng emerging from the first performance of the play Vaian (Fatherland) by the New Ottomans' ideologue Namık Kemal shouted 'Allah muradımızı versin', 'God grant us our desire' - murad (desire) standing for the prince's name. The play was banned and Kemal was exiled. In another play by Namık Kemal published in 1875, entitled Gül nibal (the name of one of the characters), a certain Kaplan Paşa is characterized as causing quarrels in the family, even killing his relatives, through his despotic rule. He is also depicted as trying to usurp the right to rule from Muhtar, the hero of the play. The choice of the name Muhtar, meaning 'chosen, elected', was certainly not fortuitous. According to contemporary observers, Kaplan Paşa was easily identified by readers with the ruling Sultan. Two letters written by Ziya Bey, another ideologue of the New Ottomans, which explicitly criticized the plans to change the rule of succession, had been formerly published as a pamphlet.

Abdülaziz was overthrown in 1876 before he could realize his scheme, but the vast amounts of propaganda in favour of Yusuf Izzeddin made its impact. As Murad V was known to favour Western manners, rumours circulated even during his short three-month reign that religious bigots were conspireing to have Yusuf Izzeddin ascend the throne, even though he was not the legitimate heir. Subsequently, during the reign of Abdülhamid II, secret reports were submitted to the Palace about factions working to ensure Yusuf Izzeddin's ascent to the Ottoman throne. Finally, as the closing episode in this string of events, gossip began to circulate after 1905 to the effect that Abdülhamid II intended to leave the throne to his son Burhaneddin, talk that caused a fresh round of opposition.

The rule of seniority was finally codified with the third article of the Constitution in 1876. It read: 'The exalted Ottoman Sultanate, along with the supreme Islamic Caliphate, belongs by way of ancient custom to the oldest son of the Ottoman dynasty.' The codification of seniority can in fact be viewed as directly related to the spread of ideas in the nineteenth century suggesting that a ruler who was not from the Ottoman dynasty could assume power in Istanbul. A glance at the succession of rulers in Ottoman history shows that many Sultans had been deposed in Istanbul, some in particularly brutal ways, but only to ensure that other members of the same dynasty would succeed them.
Such an end was regarded as a possible fate that each Sultan had to reckon with, one way or another. However, opinions stating that a person who was not a member of Osman’s line could ascend the throne in Istanbul found considerable acceptance only in the nineteenth century. Adolphus Slade, a British naval officer who travelled in Turkey from 1829 to 1831, made the following remarkable observation: ‘Ten years ago, the idea even of another than the house of Othman reigning over Turkey would have been heresy: the question is now openly broached.’

And How about another Dynasty instead of the Ottomans?

When Mahmud II had his brother Mustafa IV murdered during the turmoil of 1808 in order to remain the only surviving member of the dynasty, a very unusual buzz is said to have arisen from the Janissaries, who did not want to see him on the throne. The chronically fractious military corps is believed to have shouted, ‘Is the Sultan also not only a human being? Anyone would do! The shaykh in Konya (i.e. the Mevlevi şelbî) shall become the Sultan!’ Presumably, if such words were really uttered, it was at a moment of tumult. Even so, the increase in the number of non-dynastic contenders for the office of Caliph and even of Sultan in the following decades implies that such ideas gained popularity at the beginning of the nineteenth century, if not earlier. MacFarlane reports with great astonishment his observations in the late 1820s concerning the widespread conviction that the şelbî possessed a legitimate right to the Ottoman throne:

[O]n my arrival at Constantinople, I was much surprised to hear asserted by many (Osmanlis as well as molla) that this priest-king [i.e. the şelbî] descended like the reigning dynasty from Osman, that it was a collateral branch of the same family, and that its members were legitimately eligible to the throne. ... All the Turks from whom I had inquiries made (and they were many, and among them some pretenders to literature and historical erudition), agreed on the brilliant origin of the family of this molla, and even on the rights that it had to the throne.

The şelbîs had never claimed the right to the Ottoman throne, but rumours were widespread that Midhat Paşa, twice a short-term Grand Vizier in 1872 and 1876, conspired to seize the Ottoman throne. According to these rumours Midhat went so far as to ask: ‘If there is
an Ottoman dynasty, why would there not be a Midhat dynasty? Even if meant seriously, this intention seems hardly realizable. On the other hand, the Paşa’s alternative plan, to overthrow the Ottomans and proclaim a republic, was probably more feasible. On one of the days following Murad’s accession in 1876, talking openly about his ideas of a republic, he had locked and sealed the chamber of the Topkapı Ottoman family were kept. According to a document in the Ottoman Archives, when Midhat Paşa came to the Palace with the ministers at his side, he turned, pointing at the objects in the chamber, and said to them, ‘These were all acquired with the taxpayers’ money. They all should be confiscated.’ These words of Midhat can well be regarded as foreshadowing the laws that were to be enacted in 1922 regarding the Ottoman dynasty. Abdülhamid’s reign represented a backlash against opposition to the Ottoman family, or to a monarchical regime in general, which had swollen throughout the nineteenth century.

Other attempts were made to dethrone the Ottomans. One widely circulated plot was to dispossess the Ottomans of the office of the Caliph and to appoint Sharif ‘Abd al-Muttalib, the former Amir of Mecca and a descendent of the Prophet, to it. This conspiracy was uncovered when a letter was found in the wardrobe of ‘Ali Nazmi, a cadet at the military academy and a follower of Namık Kemal. During the 1870s, the British too proved supportive of such a plot. At that time British officials who had served in India published articles stating that the Indian Muslims were closely attached to the Ottoman Sultan as Caliph and that England, in her own interests, should support a Caliph with whom easier collaboration could be maintained.

The Muhammad ‘Ali dynasty in Egypt, though no more qualified than the Ottoman for the Caliphate, also regarded itself as a candidate for the office, and even for the throne in Istanbul. It is no secret that during the 1830s both Britain and France had weighed the candidacy of Muhammad ‘Ali himself to that throne. After all, he had provided aid to people going on the pilgrimage and assisted tribal chiefs and the provincial notables. People were so impressed by his success in crushing the Wahhabi uprising that some started to believe that he was the only person who could save Crimea from the Russians. Nor did the rivalry between Istanbul and Cairo fade following Muhammad ‘Ali’s death. His successors attained almost exclusive rights to Egypt with the firman of Succession of 1873, and it was almost only natural to think about acquiring the throne in Istanbul next.

Among the pieces of information that Sultan Abdülhamid II
obtained through his wide intelligence network was that young 'Abbas Hilmi Paşa, who became the Khedive of Egypt in 1892, considered himself a likely candidate for the office of the Caliph, undoubtedly counting on England's assistance with this move. At the Sultan's request, the Russian Ambassador, Neüidov, tried to confirm this information by sounding out the Khedive himself sometime during the first months of 1895. The Khedive found encouragement from among the New Ottomans, some of whom were living in exile in Egypt, where they published articles against Abdülhamid and the Ottoman Caliphate. As another manoeuvre in the power game, the Khedive endeavoured to bring the 'ulama of al-Azhar to his side and to have the Sultan's name omitted from the Friday sermons. Cairo was becoming a difficult place for the officials appointed by Istanbul. 'Abbas Hilmi intended to make a trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina and Crimea in 1900 to gain the sympathy and support of the Muslims living there. Eventually, the trip had to be cancelled because of the Sultan's opposition. While the Khedive was employing these tactics to realize his plans, pamphlets against him were being distributed on the streets of Istanbul — an act obviously impossible without Abdülhamid's knowledge. Petitions were also submitted to the Yıldız Palace by Muslims from the Arab provinces, asserting that they would prefer an 'Ottoman' governor in Egypt to one from the Muhammad 'Ali dynasty.

Threats on the lives of members of the Ottoman dynasty spread in reaction to the power of the Palace and the ruling elite during this time. The opposition to Abdülhamid's autocratic regime tried to injure his reputation through a propaganda campaign in which it was claimed that his mother was an Armenian concubine. This tactic was partially effective at a time when the Ottoman state was experiencing problems with its Armenian population. Numerous contemporary authors, Ottomans and others, who were not particularly sympathetic to the Sultan, mention in their works how much Abdülhamid looked like an Armenian. To counteract this, the Sultan had the memorandum written by his father at his birth (veladet hattı) inserted into the first pages of the State's official almanacs (Salname), right after the list of the previous Ottoman Sultans. He wished to prove thereby that he was the legitimate heir to the throne, both by heredity and by merit (bi'l-irs ve'l-istihkâk). During the last years of Abdülhamid's reign soldiers too openly dared to reject the Ottoman dynasty. The following words, taken from a secret report written by a Palace official visiting Edirne demonstrate the extent to which the Ottoman dynasty was losing the
support of its subjects: ‘From now on’, said one soldier, ‘it will be bad for [the heir apparent] Reşad Efendi and all the members of the dynasty. As there will emerge no good from this family anymore, we are going to let a white dove fly and elect the one on whose head the bird chooses to land.’

Other rumours are known to have circulated about transferring the Caliphate from the Ottomans to the Sharifs of Mecca, to Amir ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza’iri, and even to Jamaladdin ‘Afghani’. The loss of the Caliphate would have certainly brought the Ottoman dynasty to an end at the same time. Rumours of plots to depose the dynasty in favour of the Crimean Khans or the offspring of what came to be known as the İbrahim Han line (İbrahim Han-zade) were also heard. İbrahim Han was the son of Princess İsmihan, daughter of Sultan Selim II (d. 1574) and Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Paşa. The sons of princesses were traditionally not considered legitimate heirs to the Ottoman throne.

Why Did all this Happen in the Nineteenth Century?

On many occasions, the Ottoman throne found its incumbent through bloody events, during which political tensions reached their peak. One could theoretically expect that such times of turmoil might cause instabilities in the system of the transfer of power and make the dynasty and the system vulnerable to change. But the decisive factor influencing change was without doubt the extent to which political rule found acceptance among the people, that is, how legitimate the rulers were perceived to be.

That all candidates for the office of Caliph during the nineteenth century, and their supporters, found the courage to pursue their plans and actions, was indicative of the weakening of the Ottoman dynasty’s authority and how questionable its legitimacy had become. Doubts grew around the indisputability and unchanging nature of the Ottoman dynasty. The debates about changing the rule of succession unveiled existing sentiments against the Ottoman dynasty, a natural outcome of the process of secularization in the Ottoman world. Even though the fifth article of the 1876 Constitution stated that the personality of the Sultan was ‘sacred’ (mukaddes) and ‘not to be questioned’ (gayr-i mes’ul), that is, he was not answerable to any higher authority, the Ottoman dynasty had already begun to sustain criticism. Once the door was opened it was easy for many to enter. The weakening of the Ottoman dynasty, and the proportionally rising number of challengers for the office they occupied, should be seen in this context.
On the other hand, periods in which political authorities strive unrelentingly to acquire or fortify their legitimacy are precisely those in which their positions are most challenged or abundant alternatives are proposed. Conversely, their actions may be seen as a reaction to the challenges. Threats from various sides to the Ottoman dynasty must have accelerated the codification of established practice regarding the succession of the oldest male member of the dynasty to the Sultanate. As we have seen, however firmly a custom may have been established, it could also be bypassed. The inherently unstable and contested process of succession made it always the most likely moment for the final blow to the Ottoman dynasty, and a likely occasion for such a blow might have been when another dispute erupted.

Following the restoration of the Constitution in 1909 additional measures were taken to prevent potential disputes concerning the succession. The heir apparent was given a more privileged place in the protocol, and Grand Viziers were required to call upon him when they assumed office. Furthermore, a protocol title for the 'second heir' was created, and photo albums arranged according to the ranks of the members of the dynasty were prepared. Mass media were also used to influence opinion among the populace about the princes who might ascend the throne in the future. Such measures were designed to avoid potential problems concerning the successions, although the princes continued to distrust each other, probably as a centuries-old heritage of disagreements observed during successions.

Friedrich Giese regarded Abdülmeci'd's desire to bring the Ottoman monarchy closer to the European models as the principal reason for the popularity of primogeniture during his reign. This was in keeping with his other modernizing projects. Abdülmeci'd's standpoint certainly initiated a discussion concerning the established rule. The subsequent endeavours of Abdülaziz and the Royal Mother to change the rule in favour of their own offspring kept the issue on the political agenda. Concomitantly, the rule of seniority came to be regarded as an obstacle to modernization, as it made it likely that rather elderly members of the dynasty would become Sultans. This was yet another incompatibility between the progressive program of the Young Turks and a monarchical tradition that favoured elders. Khedive Isma'il Paşa managed to change the rule of succession in Egypt after his two predecessors, Abbas Paşa and Sa'id Paşa, had both striven to receive the Sultan's firman permitting primogeniture. The fact that Istanbul's close rival in the modernization contest struggled to achieve the same changes in the succession arrangement may be regarded as part of the same grand
picture.

The rule of seniority usually prevented the possibility of a youngster
coming to the throne. At the same time, it was the cause of many
intrigues by the ruler against his heirs, and vice versa. We know that
brothers and cousins within the Ottoman family were not particularly
fond of each other, and conflict was not uncommon among the scions
of different lines within the family. Still, a Sultan and father is scarcely
acting contrary to human nature when he envisions passing his rule on
to his own son.

(1) Mahmud II (r. 1808-39)

(2) Abdülmecid (r. 1839-61)  (3) Abdülaziz (r. 1861-76)

(4) Murad V (b. 1840; r. 1876)  Yusuf Izzeddin (b. 1857; heir:
1909-16)

(5) Abdülahmid II (b. 1842; r. 1876-1909)
(6) Mehmed Reşad (b. 1844; r. 1909-18)
    Ahmed Kemaleddin (b. 1848; d. 1905)
    Mehmed Burhaneddin (b. 1849; d. 1876)
    Nurreddin (b. 1852; d. 1885)
(7) Vahideddin (b. 1861; r. 1918-22)

Figure 1: Abdülaziz’s plans to change the rule of succession in favour of his
son Yusuf Izzeddin would have deprived six princes older than Yusuf and
eligible for the position of Sultan ahead of him. The numbers in parenthesis
before the names show the order of the Sultans.

Notes
Cevdet himself made the same statement, see Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Istanbul
(hereafter BOA), YEE 1858/18/93/39. The other three pillars were “Turkish”
government, the religion of Islam, and the capital of Istanbul.
4 From a letter Stratford Canning wrote to George Canning on 29 September 1821,
quoted in Stanley Lane-Poole, The Life of the Right Honorable Stratford Canning Viscount
7 Ahmed Sa‘ib, Refünuma-yi İnkılâb (Cairo, 1318/1900-1), pp. 51ff.
8 Ottoman terms for primogeniture: bekârîyet, nakbat-ı zade, 'umud-ı müebî.
9 Ottoman term: elbîret.
11 Ceride-i Havadi 35 (1 Ramazan 1257/ 22 May 1841); Ceride-i Havadi 38 (22 Rebi‘ül-ahir 1257/ 12 June 1841).
13 Cevdet: Təzəkər 13-20, p. 133.
16 Cevdet: Təzəkər 13-20, pp. 140-1.
20 BOA, A.MKT.MHM, no. 365/71 (13 Cemaziye‘l-ahir 1283/ 22 October 1866).
21 BOA, A.MKT.MHM, no. 390/44 (5 Cemaziye‘l-evvel 1284/ 4 September 1867).
23 Aşşen‘i Vatan, no. 1 (8 Ramazan 1283/ 14 January 1867).
25 PRO, FO 78/2215, Horace Rumbolt to Earl Granville (3 February 1872).
27 L’Orient Illustré, no. 86 (10 October 1874). I thank Professor Edhem Eldem for drawing my attention to this journal.
28 Ceride-i Havadis, no. 2521 (2 Cemaziye‘l-ahir 1291/ 16 July 1874); see also nos. 2530 and 2531.
29 The Times, no. 26259 (19 October 1868); no. 26247 (5 October 1868); and no. 26249 (7 October 1868).
31 PRO, FO 78/2217, Henry Elliot to Earl Granville (16 May 1872).
33 Benoit Brunswik, La Succession au Trône de la Turquie (Paris, 1872), Preface to the second printing.
34 PRO, FO 78/2217, Henry Elliot to Earl Granville (8 June 1872); FO 78/2218, Henry Elliot to Earl Granville (8 July 1872).
37 For a complete record of Isma'il's efforts leading to the ferman, see Georges Douin, Histoire du Régne du Khédive Isma'il (3 vols., Rome and Cairo, 1934-6), vol. 1, pp. 205ff; for the text of the ferman, see pp. 218ff.
38 Mevzu'ât Mu'aven, no. 167 (6 Recceb 1285/ 22 October 1868).
40 To Muhtar's question 'What have I done that someone would want to kill me?' Gûlnâhâ Kalfa, a servant and one of the main characters of the play, answers: 'What have you done? Your father ruled the country before. And you can rule it from now on. The people want you! Why would the Paşa not want to kill you?' Namuk Kemal, Gûlnâhâ, Kenan Akşüz, ed. (Ankara, 1960), pp. 15-16.
43 Djemaleddin Bey, Sultan Murad V, p. 103.
46 Selâmre-i Devlet-i 'Ahiye-i Osmaniye (1294/1876), p. 4. After the proclamation of the 1909 Constitution, an amendment about the Sultan's obligation to take an oath in parliament was made to this article, see Selâmre-i Devlet-i 'Ahiye-i Osmaniye (1327/1909), p. 16.
48 Ilber Ortaylı, İmparatorluğu En Uzun Yüzyıllı (Istanbul, 1987), pp. 18-19. Unfortunately no contemporary reference is given for this incident.
50 BOA, YEE no. 141/60 (n.d., from 'Abdülhamid II's reigning period).
52 J. W. Redhouse, A Vindication of Ottoman Sultan's Title of 'Caliph'; Shewing its Antiquity, Validity, and Universal Acceptance (London, 1877), p. 1; see further Neil Baillie, Is the Sultan of the Turks the Caliph of the Mussulmans and Successor of the Prophet? (London, 1877). See also the contribution of Tufan Buzpınar in this volume.
53 Urquhart: The Sultan Mahmud, pp. 41, 45.
For the text, see Douin, *Khâdîw Isma‘îl*, vol. 2, pp. 723ff.
57 According to one document, the Sultan’s name was not read in the sermons for a few Fridays, see: BOA, YEE, 123/19 (7 Safar 1317/ 15 June 1899); but according to another this did not happen, see BOA, YEE, 15/28 (27 Kanun-ı sani 1319/ 9 February 1904).
58 BOA, YEE, 123/19 (7 Safar 1317/ 15 June 1899).
61 BOA, YEE 14-1265 (n.d.; ca. 1908).
66 As the constant pawn in the succession rule scenarios, Yusuf İzzeddin suffered grievously from this obviously stressful role and lived his later years in a kind of paranoia, until he committed suicide in 1916. See Türkdeli: *Göürüp İstiklallerim*, pp. 132-3: ‘Because of his surmises that he was going to be dropped as heir, Yusuf İzzeddin demanded that everyone, and even the Sultan Mehmed V, swear to God that he would not be removed from the position. The Sultan, due to his compassionate character, wrote a note with his very own hand assuring him that he was still the heir. But the effect of assurances in this matter was momentary; his suspicions returned after a couple of hours again’.
68 Douin: *Khâdîw Isma‘îl*, vol. 1, p. 205.