PART III
CHAPTER FOUR

HONOR AND INFLUENCE: THE LEGAL PROCESS

Ki yani Ayıntab şehri rânâ
Arus-u âlem ü maşuk-u dünyâ1

The relationship between local elites and the common folk is one of the least explored aspects of Ottoman provincial life, and the little we know is informed by the idea of state-society duality and the broader question of the impact of the central state on provincial relations. Thus, in past scholarship, the rapprochement between the indigenous elites and the imperial center on the one hand and provincial representatives of the Ottoman officialdom on the other was seen as a landmark of the “defection of natural leadership” in provincial histories. Perhaps no historian reflecting on this question has ever been as emphatic as Bodman. Speaking of eighteenth-century Aleppo, he wrote: “[The a’yân were] bound . . . to the intrigues of the capital and divorced from consideration for local interests” through the “tentacles” of a system of venality of office and influence.2 In later studies, this process has been characterized as a reason for the divergence between the elite’s economic and political interests and those of the local people.3 Although recent scholarship has recast the question of center-periphery relations in less regionalist terms, the relationship between the a’yân and local commoners has not been taken up anew. The most important, if indirect, contribution to the topic has come from case studies of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political economy that focus rather on the impact of economic change on property and class relations.

1 “And that is Ayıntab, the city of grace/The bride of the universe and the beloved of the world.” From Balıoğlu Ibrahim’s Hikmetname in Solmaz, Gaziantep Övgü Antolojisi, 28.
2 Bodman, Political Factions, 142, also 35–36.