Before describing the succession wars between the sons of Bayezid, it is important to understand the overall situation in which the Ottoman princes found themselves after the disaster at Ankara. In the words of a contemporary Ottoman chronicle, after the Battle of Ankara “everyone longed for their own people and were scattered.”¹ Three of Bayezid’s sons were able to escape from the battlefield and establish rule over a province in the early stages of the civil war: Süleyman, İsa and Mehmed. Two others were captured by Timur: Musa and Mustafa. Of these, Mustafa was taken hostage to Samarkand, where he remained until he was released by Timur’s son Shahrukh in 1415. Musa was released in spring of 1403, whereupon he entered the custody of his brother Mehmed, since he was a minor. As we will see, Mehmed too eventually released his brother, who made his own bid for power in Rumeli at the end of the civil war.

Apart from these major players, there were several other sons of Bayezid who did not play an active role in the civil war. One was Yusuf, who ended up in Constantinople, converted to Christianity, taking the name Demetrios, and died of natural causes. Another was the young prince Kasım, whom Süleyman kept in his court and eventually handed over along with his sister Fatma to the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II as hostages.²

Of the three princes who took control of a province in 1402, Emir Süleyman was the one in the most advantageous position, at least initially. Süleyman was able to cross to Rumeli, the only part of Bayezid’s empire to have escaped entirely the depredations of Timur’s army. He was accompanied there by many soldiers and officials of Bayezid’s empire, for whom crossing the straits was the best way to escape from

¹ The Ahval: OA, 45a; Mz, 98.
² For a complete list of the sources and literature on Bayezid’s sons, see Zachariadou, “Süleyman Çelebi,” 269–270.
the chaos in Anatolia. Thus, at the beginning of the Ottoman succession struggle, Süleyman had on his side the bulk of his father’s army and administrative apparatus. According to an Ottoman chronicle tradition, Süleyman was rescued from the battlefield and taken to Rumeli by several of Bayezid’s highest ranking officials. These included Bayezid’s grand vizier Çandarlı Ali Paşa; Eyne Beg Subaşı, an important magnate who later joined Mehmed and was killed at Ulubad fighting against Isa; and Hasan Ağa, the commander of the janissaries. As we will see, the Janissary Corps, which had been enlarged by Bayezid to a sizeable standing army, seems to have been based in Rumeli during the civil war, where it fought first on the side of Emir Süleyman and then on that of Musa.

The fact that Bayezid’s magnates fleeing from the Battle of Ankara chose to take Süleyman with them to Rumeli suggests that Süleyman was probably viewed as the favorite candidate for the succession. As we will see in a moment, Isa also took the route to Rumeli, and was probably with Süleyman and his retinue all along. But by the time they reached Rumeli, it was clear to all that Süleyman was the most powerful of the two brothers. According to Doukas and other sources, Emir Süleyman was almost certainly the oldest of Bayezid I’s surviving sons. Moreover, as we will see in chapter 6, Süleyman’s seniority over his brothers and adversaries Mehmed and Musa became a constant preoccupation for contemporary Ottoman narratives, which make use of elaborate techniques to justify the eventual victory of Mehmed Çelebi.

Along these lines, it should also be noted that the same Ottoman chronicle tradition that describes Emir Süleyman’s crossing to Rumeli in the

3 Aşıkpaşazade, 72; Ottoman Anonymous Chronicles, 47. This passage is common to Aşıkpaşazade and the Ottoman Anonymous Chronicles. According to the Ahval, Eyne Beg was the governor of Balikesir, and was perhaps related to Yakub II of Germiyan (see below). See also Akdes Nimet Kurat, Die türkische Prosopographie bei Laonikos Chalkokondyles, 41–42.

4 In her article on Süleyman Çelebi, Elizabeth Zachariadou has argued that “according to both Ottoman and Byzantine tradition, Isa was the elder son of Bayezid.” In fact this claim is only made by the Byzantine chronicler Chalkokondyles. Zachariadou has misinterpreted Neşri (i.e. the Ahval) whose account only presents Isa as older than Mehmed. All other sources, including the Arabic chronicle of Ibn Arabshah, make it clear that in 1402 Emir Süleyman was the oldest of Bayezid’s surviving sons. See Zachariadou, “Süleyman Çelebi,” 286; Chalkokondyles, 159; OA, 67a; Mz, 115; Ahmad Ibn ‘Arabshah, Tamerlane, or Timur the Great Amir, tr. J.H. Sanders (London: Luzac, 1936), 186.

5 This is true of two contemporary texts, the Ahval and the Hâlibnâme.