THE WEALTH AND INFLUENCE OF AN EXILED OTTOMAN EUNUCH IN EGYPT: THE WAQF INVENTORY OF ʾABBĀS AGHA*

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The Chief Black Eunuch of the Ottoman imperial harem (Kızlar Ağası or Darüşsaade Ağası) was by the late 17th century one of the most powerful figures in the Ottoman Empire. As sultans came to spend the years preceding their enthronements sequestered in the harem instead of being sent out to govern provinces, the authority of the harem women, in particular the sultan’s mother (Valide Sultan), increased markedly. Correspondingly, the Valide Sultan’s harem coterie, in particular the black harem eunuchs, attained unprecedented degrees of influence. By the mid-1600s, the Chief Black Eunuch rivalled the grand vezir for authority. Meanwhile, he controlled revenues and clients all over the Empire.

Egypt was without a doubt the province in which the Kızlar Ağası held the greatest sway. As supervisor (nâzir or mutawallî)1) of the complex of imperial waqfs established to service the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina (Awqaf al-Ḥaramayn), the Kızlar Ağası was ultimately responsible for the revenues of the many Egyptian villages and enterprises endowed to the Awqaf. On being removed from office, furthermore, he was typically exiled to Egypt,2) where he typically lived out what remained of his life. Thus, his interest in the province was a curious mix of imperial and personal.

A document from the Topkapi Palace archives3) exemplifies the duality

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2) This practice had begun in 1644, with the exile of Sünbül Agha (1640-1644).

3) Topkapi D 7657 (undated). The document cannot be earlier than 1694 since ʾAbbās Agha endowed his wakāla in Gamāliyya during that year; see André Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIIIe siècle* (Damascus, 1973-1974), 1: 332. He was dead by the end of 1697, however, when an imperial order was issued condemning the governor Ismāʿīl Pasha’s (1695-1697) attempts to sell off ʾAbbas’ waqf properties: Istanbul, Prime Ministry Archives, Mührümme Defteri 110, No. 947 (Evâl Cemâziyül’ahur 1109/December 1697).
of the Kızlar Ağası’s relationship to Egypt. It is the inventory of waqf properties endowed in Egypt by 'Abbās Agha, who was Kızlar Ağası from 1667 until his deposition in 1671, when, naturally, he was exiled to Egypt. Many of these properties were clearly endowed with the aim of producing revenues for the Holy Cities; most, in fact, were undoubtedly endowed while 'Abbās still held the office of Kızlar Ağası. Others, however, seem far more personal in character and, indeed, of little use to the Holy Cities: for instance, 'Abbās Agha’s 4-0-akçe stipend and allotment of grain, 4) his books, and his house. A Kızlar Ağası’s purpose in endowing his personal assets in this manner was no doubt to avoid having them confiscated by the state on his death. Such an endowment, moreover, enabled the Kızlar Ağası in effect to bequeath his properties as inheritances. In the absence of offspring, a eunuch typically named his agent(s) (wakil) beneficiary. But the vehicle of the waqf also gave the agha far more control over the eventual disposition of his property than the conventional will did. A case from the Cairo qādī court registers reveals that 'Abbās left his personal residence at Birkat al-Fīl to his wakil, Ahmed Agha the katkhudā of the Çavuşan corps, 5) and allowed Ahmed Agha to hand the property down to his own descendants. Once Ahmed’s line died out, however, the house was to revert to ‘whoever is nāṣir of the Awqaf al-Ḥaramayn’.

Yet 'Abbās Agha’s waqf inventory yields far more than just an example of the personal exploitation of an imperial institution. The list of properties, along with the intriguing book list, offers a clue to the range of 'Abbās’ interests in Egypt and to his personal affinities, as well. It can, furthermore, shed light on the manner in which an exiled Kızlar Ağası represented the Ottoman court in the largest of the Ottoman provinces. The Kızlar Ağası

(The months of all Ottoman documents will be rendered according to the usage of the Redhouse New Turkish-English Dictionary [Istanbul, 1968].) The order may, in fact, be connected to this waqf inventory. In that case, the inventory could date from the mid- to late 1690s.

4) These may have comprised his remittance from the Keşide corps, through which exiled Kızlar Ağaları and other former Ottoman officials received pensions after retiring to Egypt. If so, the stipend would have been paid monthly although the amount given here is almost certainly a daily allowance. On the Keşide, see Shaw, Financial and Administrative, pp. 202, 216, 396-397.

5) The Ottoman soldiery in Egypt consisted of seven corps (șeaks): the Janissaries (Mustahfîzân), 'Azeban, Müteferrika, Çavuşan, Gönülüyan, Tüfenkciyan, and Çerâkise. The rank of katkhudâ was second only to that of agha. The katkhudâ of the Çavuşan was closely linked to the governor’s council, or divan.

6) Topkapı E 7900, dated 24 Ramazan 1076 (March 1666), with the waqf ahli of the house to begin in Zilkade 1080/May 1670. Obviously this was an arrangement that 'Abbās had made while still in office.