



Provincial Powers: The Rise of Ottoman Local Notables (Ayan)

Eyalet Güçleri: Osmanlı Yerel İleri Gelenlerin Yükselişi (Ayan)

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Abstract: *The history of the ayan (local notables) is the socio-economic history of the Ottoman state from the late sixteenth until the nineteenth century. In recent years the ayan have been the subject of numerous studies; however, these works have either been very general in nature or micro-histories of individual ayan. This article studies the ayanlık as a whole by examining a variety of ayan in the Balkans during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, while comparing them to their Anatolian and Arab counterparts. The ayan's rise to power, sources of revenue, relationship with the central government and other provincial authorities, and their interaction with the local community are central to this comparative study. In doing so, the paper investigates the possibility of creating a model ayan that would supersede geographical boundaries within the Ottoman state.*

Keywords: *Ottoman Empire, eighteenth century, ayan, provinces, notables*

The history of the *ayan* (local notables) is the socio-economic history of the Ottoman state from the late sixteenth until the nineteenth century. In recent years the ayan have been the subject of numerous studies, however, these works have either been very general in nature or micro-histories of individual ayan.¹ This article studies the *ayanlık* (institution of the ayan)

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¹ General works on the ayans include: Yücel Özkaya, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Âyanlık* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1994); Avdo Sućesko, *Ajani: Prilog Izučavanju Lokalne Vlasti u Našim Zemljama za Vrijeme Turaka* (Sarajevo: Naučno Društvo SR Bosne i Hercegovine, 1965); Deena Sadat, "Urban Notables in the Ottoman Empire: The Ayan," (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1969); Albert Hourani, "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables," in William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers, eds. *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 41-68; idem, "Rumeli Ayanları: The Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Modern History* 44 (1972): 343-63; Yuzo Nagata, *Muhsin-zade Mehmed Paşa ve Ayanlık Müessesesi* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1976); Yaşar Yücel, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Desantralizasyona Dair Genel Gözlemler," *Belleten* 161-164 (1974): 657-704; Güçlü Tuluveli, "State and Classes in the Ottoman Empire: Local Notables in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 15:1 (2005): 121-47; Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 242-63. Suraiya Faroqhi (ed), *The Cambridge History of Turkey Volume 3: The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603-1839* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) contains several excellent studies of the ayan and Ottoman provincial administration in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, For an analysis of some of the existing literature on provincial elites, including ayan, see Dina Khoury, "The Ottoman Centre Versus Provincial Powerholders: An Analysis of the Historiography," 135-56; Fikret Adanir, "Semi-autonomous Forces in the Balkans and Anatolia," 157-85; Bruce Masters, "Semi-Autonomous

as a whole by examining a variety of ayan in the Balkans during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, while comparing them to their Anatolian and Middle Eastern counterparts. The ayan's rise to power, location, sources of revenue, relationship with the central government and other provincial authorities, and their interaction with the local community is central to this comparative study. In doing so, the article investigates the possibility of creating a model ayan which supersedes geographical boundaries within the Ottoman state. Such an approach has not been attempted due to the fact that existing studies of the ayan tend to maintain geographical distinctions since the ayan who have been studied are either exclusively from the Balkans, Anatolia or Arab provinces.

It is necessary to acknowledge from the outset that ayan came in all shapes and sizes. Although this study culminates in a discussion of individuals who controlled large amounts of territory in which they wielded absolute authority, and even dictated some domestic and foreign policy issues, the relatively modest origins of the ayan within the Ottoman state must be discussed. The term ayan is of Arabic origin (plural of *ayn*), and in its earliest Ottoman usage during the fifteenth century referred to a notable living in a city. These notables came from a variety of backgrounds such as high-ranking officials like *sancak beyis* (heads of a *sancak*/district) and retired *beylerbeyis* (provincial governors) to *kapıkulus* ("slaves of the gate," i.e., janissaries), janissary leaders, *kadis* (judges), *müderrises* (religious scholars), *muftis*, *mültezims* (tax revenue collectors), *mukataa emins* (tax farm holders), guild leaders and well-to-do merchants.² Their official title as an ayan was either *ayan-ı belde* (notable of the province), *ayan-ı vilayet* (notable of the city), or *ayan-ı memleket* (notable of the country). Initially the title of ayan was limited to the city or district in which they resided. This limitation on the nature of the *ayanlık* makes clear the fact that being an ayan prior to the late sixteenth century was largely honorific and had little, if any, impact on provincial administration.

By the early eighteenth century the term ayan became much more significant than its rather modest meaning in the prior centuries. It began to be applied to individuals who were much more than just notables in a given town or district, but rather people who exercised political influence and whose status, as such, was officially recognized.³ The transformation of the ayan in the early eighteenth century into a distinct social class, differing from both the government-appointed officials such as the *sancak beyis*, *valis* (governors), and *kadis* and the local elites such as wealthy merchants and cultivators, was a direct result of their growing economic position within the provinces due to the extension of the tax-farming and land tenure systems as well as the social responsibilities that came along with it.⁴ These latter responsibilities included regional administrative duties and protection of the people living within their realm of influence.

Regardless of the changes that occurred in the nature of the ayan, by the early eighteenth century two very different groups existed within the Ottoman state that both carried

Forces in the Arab Provinces," 186-206. For a comprehensive bibliography on ayan studies, see Robert Zens, "The *Ayanlık* and Pasvanoğlu Osman Paşa of Vidin in the Age of Ottoman Social Change, 1791-1815," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004); Ali Yaycıoğlu, "The Provincial Challenge: Regionalism, Crisis, and Integration in the Late Ottoman Empire (1792-1812)," (Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 2008).

² For examples of this in the context of Ottoman Cyprus, see Nuri Çevikel, "Ayâns in the Ottoman Cyprus in the Second Half of the 18th Century," *Belleten* 72:264 (2008): 575.

³ Harold Bowen, "Ayan," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-ROM ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

⁴ Yuzo Nagata, "The Role of the Ayans in Regional Development During the Pre-Tanzimat Period in Turkey: A Case Study of the Karaosmanoğlu Family," in *idem*, ed. *Studies on the Social and Economic History of the Ottoman Empire* (Izmir: Akademi Kitabevi, 1995), 119.

the title ayan. The first of these and, by far, the most widespread were small local notables who through their wealth and local influence were able to stand apart from the rest of the local population. The second group, and the one which is of most interest to this study, is the grand ayan who exerted influence over entire provinces and received official recognition from the state in terms of titles and honors.⁵ Both of these groups could be found throughout the empire and served an important role in the functioning of Ottoman provincial administration.

The lesser ayan who could be found in cities and towns throughout the empire served as intermediaries between the *reaya* (peasants) and state officials, in the capacity of locals who held a position of respect and, hence, power within their community. There is not a great deal of information on individual lesser ayan, however, since they frequently were in the service of a more powerful ayan, the surest way to identify lesser ayan and examine the functions which they served in society is to investigate the grand ayan to which they were linked. Mention of their connection to the grand ayan is littered throughout Ottoman documents and chronicles where individuals such as Macar Ali, the *voyvoda* of Selvi and ayan of Plevne, is referred to as “Pasvanoğlu’s man,” or as “Pasvanoğlu’s ally.”⁶

These lesser ayan were often distinguished from the general population by the singular *nisba*, word denoting one’s ethnicity, family or geographic origin, occupation or personal trait, which they carried. Some examples of these would be Macar Ali (Ali the Magyar), Molla Idris Agha (Idris Agha the Mullah), Manav Ibrahim (Ibrahim the Fruit-seller), and the intriguing name of Gavur Imam (the infidel imam), all of whom were lesser ayan in the service of Pasvanoğlu Osman Pasha, the ayan of Vidin.

Unlike the lesser ayan, those who carried the patronymic titles of *-oğlu* and *-zâde* or, even more significantly, had the plural forms of these two endings could be categorized as being part of the grand ayan which often times were familial dynasties whose influence over a given region extended for at least a couple generations.⁷ Examples of this group include: Karaosmanoğlu of Saruhan, Çapanoğlu of Çorum-Yozgat, Canıklı-zâde of Trabzon, and Tirsinklioğlu of Rusçuk. These are the ayan who have received the greatest amount of attention from Ottoman researchers.⁸

⁵ Two recent works on these grand ayan, including those now dubbed Ottoman warlords, include Masters, “Semi-Autonomous Forces,” 186-206; Robert Zens, “Ottoman Provincial Notables in the Eighteenth Century: A Comparative Study,” in Ekrem Causevic & Nenad Moacanin, eds., *Ottoman Studies in Transformation* (Berlin: LIT Verlag).

⁶ Ahmet Cevdet Pasha, *Tarih-i Cevdet* (Istanbul: Üçdal Neşriyat, 1994), vol. 6, 333 (This edition of *Tarih-i Cevdet* includes the original twelve volumes in a six volume set.); Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Istanbul (B.O.A.) (Prime Ministry’s Ottoman Archives), Hatt-ı Hümayun, 2814.

⁷ In her unpublished study of the ayan, Nurhan Fatma Katırcıoğlu suggested that the *nisba* could be a factor in determining one’s rank within the *ayanlık*. Although she admits that more work is needed on this topic, I believe that it is a very interesting and possible conclusion and only future studies will be able to shed more light on this hypothesis. See Nurhan Fatma Katırcıoğlu, “The Ottoman Ayan, 1550-1812: A Struggle for Legitimacy,” (M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1984).

⁸ Some of these studies include: Çağaptay Uluçay, *XVIII. ve XIX. Yüzyıllarda Saruhan’da Eşkiyalık ve Halk Hareketleri* (Istanbul, 1995); Yuzo Nagata, *Tarihte Ayânler: Karaosmanoğulları Üzerinde bir İnceleme* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1997); idem, “Ayan in Anatolia and the Balkans During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Case Study of the Karaosmanoğlu Family,” *Provincial Elites in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Antonis Anastasopoulos (Rethymno: University of Crete Press, 2005): 269-94; Münir Aktepe, “Kara Osmanoğlu Mehmed Ağa bn. Hacı Ömer Ağa,” *Vakıflar Dergisi* 11 (1976); Rıza Karagöz, *Canıklı Ali Paşa* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2003); Canay Şahin, “The Rise and Fall of an Ayân Family in Eighteenth Century Anatolia: The Canıklı-zâdes (1737-1808),” (Ph.D. dissertation, Bilkent University, 2003); idem, “The Economic Power of Anatolian Ayans of the Late Eighteenth Century: The Case of the Canıklı-zâdes,” *International Journal of Turkish*

Despite the distinction between lesser and grand ayan, in reality one could rise rapidly from among the former or even a group outside the ayan rank to become a grand ayan. The easiest means by which this could be accomplished was through marriage. It was a frequent occurrence to have intermarriages between the sons and daughters of varying ayan ranks. A study of the ayan of Aleppo in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries showed that forty percent of all ayan marriages were to other ayan families. The number would be significantly higher if marriages within one's own family, such as cousin marriages, were considered.⁹ Such marriages were intended to elevate one's standing within the community and provide important political and economic alliances. Important trading centers witnessed a number of marriages between high-ranking ayan families and individuals from newly emerging Muslim merchant families, consolidating wealth and power in the most strategic regions of the Ottoman state.¹⁰

In addition to marriage, advancement in the ranks of the *ayanlık* was possible also through service and loyalty. Apart from the familial dynasties of Anatolia and parts of the Middle East, most of the grand ayan's successors were their chief lieutenants. Since many of the leading ayan were involved in continuous disputes with neighboring rivals, it was necessary to secure a strong successor to ensure an ayan's legacy. By the late eighteenth century, it was rare to see an ayan in the Balkans leaving all of his holdings to his son(s). Some examples to illustrate this point include two of the most illustrious ayans of the period, Tirsiniklioğlu İsmail Agha whose wealth and title fell to Alemdar Mustafa Pasha, and Pasvanoğlu Osman Pasha who willed his entire estate to Molla İdris Agha.¹¹

Despite the differences that existed between the lesser and the grand ayans, one of the most important questions to address is how an individual became officially recognized as an ayan at all. The problematic economic situation that plagued the Ottoman state off and on since the sixteenth century and the increase in banditry, forced the central government to seek the assistance of the increasingly powerful local notables in the provinces. This appeal was a *de facto* recognition of the ayan as representatives and spokesmen for their communities.¹² *De facto* recognition transformed into *de jure* recognition when rules were set for the election of an ayan within the provincial communities. Each community was allowed to elect a single individual to "represent" itself. The chosen individual would come from the various ayans in the community, however, only the elected ayan would carry the official title of *ayan-ı vilayeti*

Studies 11:1-2 (2005): 29-47; Yücel Özkaya, "Canikli Ali Paşa'nın Risalesi 'Tedâbirü'l-Gazâvat,'" *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 7 (1969): 12-3; *idem*, "Canikli Ali Paşa," *Belleten* 31 (1972): 141-44; Özcan Mert, *XVIII. ve XIX. Yüzyıllarda Çapanoğulları* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1980); İ. Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, "Çapanoğulları," *Belleten* 38 (1974); *idem*, *Meşhur Rumeli Ayânlarından Tirsinikli İsmail, Yilikoğlu Süleyman Ağalar ve Alemdar Mustafa Paşa* (İstanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1942). Meryam Kaçan and Kamil Çolak, *Rusçuk Ayanı: Tirsiniklizade İsmail Ağa ve Dönemi (1796-1806)* (İstanbul: Yeditepe Yayını, 2010). There are also numerous regional studies on ayans, some of which include major families.

⁹ Margaret L. Merriwether, *The Kin Who Count: Family and Society in Ottoman Aleppo, 1770-1840* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 141.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 141-44. For information on the effect of trade on the ayan, see Gilles Veinstein, "Ayan de la Région d'Izmir et le Commerce du Levant (Deuzième Moitié XVIIIe Siècle)," *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée* 20 (1975): 131-46.

¹¹ In a *ferman* dated 7 March 1814, seven years after the death of Pasvanoğlu, his will is discussed by the sultan. In the document it is stated that for an unknown reason Pasvanoğlu intentionally dismissed his own son as an heir. *Ferman* from Sultan Mahmud II to the authorities in Vidin, 7 March 1814, in D. İkhchiev, ed. *Turski D'rzhavni Dokumenti za Osman Pazvantoglu Vidinski* (Sofia: D'rzhavna Pечатnitsa, 1909), 125-28.

¹² Deena R. Sadat, "Urban Notables in the Ottoman Empire: The Ayans," 48.

ve işerleri (notable of the vilayet and elder of affairs) or *baş ayan/reis-i ayan* (head ayan).¹³ By the second half of the eighteenth century these elections were regulated by the central government in the person of the grand vizier, rather than by provincial *valis* who frequently accepted bribes, in order to ensure the “election” of suitable individuals.¹⁴ The elections were similar to those concerning the guilds. Voting was based on consensus, rather than individual ballots, thus, conforming with Islamic law and could be traced back to the 1680s.¹⁵ Hence, the individual who was usually elected was held in very high esteem within the community.

The seemingly democratic nature of the election of ayan was often dismissed in favor of a violent dispute between the leading contenders. Individuals would frequently use their wealth and personal militias to ensure their election to this rather significant position. However, for ayan the greatest conflicts involved the selection of the *mütesellim* (deputy) which had real meaning in terms of acquisition of wealth and power. But the *mütesellim*ships and becoming an elected ayan were often connected since in selecting a *mütesellim*, a governor or owner of a tax-farm would look to appoint the most respected person in the community so as to guarantee a profitable return on his investment and stability within the region. On the other hand, an elected ayan was chosen because they were respected within the community, a respect that generally came from their wealth and personal power. This is very similar to the question of the chicken and the egg; ayan are a result of the *mütesellim*ships and *mütesellim*ships were given to ayan.

This brief introduction into the differences between lesser and grand ayans as well as how one officially became recognized as an ayan by the central government leads to the central issue of this paper; what are the characteristics of an ayan? Although not all ayan had every characteristic discussed or only did so to a certain degree, it was the grand ayan, who clearly exhibited all of them and suffered greatly whenever any of these items were neglected.

The first, and arguably the most important trait of any ayan was his attachment to the land tenure and revenue raising system of the state. The prolonged wars in which the Ottomans were involved since the late-sixteenth century had a tremendous economic and social impact on the state. No longer was the *sipahi* cavalry which had served as the backbone of the Ottoman military able to compete against the firearms and the infantry-based armies, especially that of the Habsburgs, that began to dominate the battlefields. The establishment of a well-trained infantry required an increase in tax revenue in order for the central government to equip and train soldiers in this new mode of warfare.¹⁶ As with most early modern economies, land was the greatest generator of revenue for the state.¹⁷ Unfortunately for the Ottoman state, the land tenure system revolved around the *sipahi*-centered *timar* system. In

¹³ Hamilton Gibb and Harold Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West*, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 198.

¹⁴ For the 1765 decree removing ayan elections from the hands of the valis, see Bekir Sıtkı Baykal, “Ayanlık Müessesesinin Düzeni Hakkında Belgeler,” *Belgeler* 1:2 (1964): 222-24.

¹⁵ Yuzo Nagata, *Muhsinzade Mehmet Paşa ve Ayanlık Müessesesi* (Tokyo: Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia & Africa Monograph Series, 1976), 118, 122. For specific information regarding the various changes in ayan elections, see Yücel Özkaya, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğun'da Ayânlık*, 285-89.

¹⁶ Halil İnalcık, “Military and Fiscal Transformation in the Ottoman Empire, 1600-1700,” *Archivum Ottomanicum* 9 (1980): 283-337.

¹⁷ Ömer Lütfi Barkan, “Türk Toprak Hukuku Tarihinde Tanzimat ve 1274 (1858) Tarihli Arazi Kanunnamesi,” *Tanzimat* 1 (1940): 321; Haim Gerber, *The Social Origins of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1987), 1; Halil İnalcık, “The Emergence of Big Farms, Çiftlik: State, Landlords and Tenants,” in Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont and Paul Dumont, eds. *Contributions à l'histoire économique et sociale de l'Empire ottoman* (Louvain: Peeters, 1984), 105.

short, this system was intended to provide economic support for the *sipahi* cavalymen to enable them to carry out their military obligations by providing them with land and much of the revenue generated from that land.¹⁸ The revenues generated by the *timars* were insufficient to finance the equipment and training necessary to field a firearm-equipped infantry, especially due to the continual devaluation of the *akçe* in 1585-86, 1600, 1618, 1624 and 1641, making it difficult for the *sipahis* to meet even their basic needs.¹⁹ In addition, *timar* revenues were affected in the first half of the seventeenth century by the severe decline in grain prices in the Balkans. The decreasing grain prices encouraged many *reaya* to shift from land cultivation to livestock herding.²⁰ This shift towards shepherding was devastating to the *sipahis*, since the sheep tax was reserved for the central treasury and could not be used to fund the needs and activities of the *timar* holders.²¹

Despite the need to transform the existing revenue-raising system, the Ottoman state was not able to make the necessary reforms due to the internal problems that accompanied the prolonged wars with the Habsburgs and Safavids during the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. Revolts, such as the Jelali uprisings, and brigandage plagued Anatolia and the Balkans.²² One result of this unrest was the seizure of large tracts of land throughout the provinces by well-positioned military personnel, including members of the Janissary corps, who appropriated the land for their own benefit.²³ Similar land grabs were seen throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.²⁴ Many of these lands were ultimately transformed into *çiftlik*s.²⁵ By the late-sixteenth century, large *çiftlik* estates began to appear throughout the Balkans, Western Anatolia, and in the later part of the seventeenth century along the western coast of the Black Sea.²⁶ Despite the importance of the establishment of *çiftlik*s to the socio-

¹⁸ For detailed information on the *timar* system, see Douglas A. Howard, "The Ottoman *Timar* System and its Transformation, 1563-1656" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1987); Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*, trans. Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber (New York: Praeger, 1973), 104-118; Vera P. Moutafchieva, *Agrarian Relations in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th and 16th Centuries* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1988), 1-60; Mehmet Zeki Pakalin, "Timar," *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü*, vol. 3 (Istanbul: Mili Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1993), 500.

¹⁹ Şevket Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 136.

²⁰ Ljuben Berov, *Dviženieto na cenite na Balkanite prez XVI-XIX vek I evropejskata revolucija na cenite* (Sofia: Bulgarska Akademija na Naukite, 1976), 289-91.

²¹ Fikret Adanır, "Tradition and Rural Change in Southeastern Europe During Ottoman Rule," in Daniel Chirot, ed. *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe: Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 146.

²² For information on the Jelali uprisings, see Mustafa Akdağ, *Celali İsyanları, 1550-1603* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1963), 85-108; William J. Griswold, *The Great Anatolian Rebellion, 1000-11020/1591-1611* (Berlin, 1983).

²³ Inalcik, "Adâletnâmeler," *Belgeler* 2:3-4 (1967): 126-127; *idem*, "The Emergence of Big Farms," 111.

²⁴ In Dimitris Dimitropoulos, "Aspects of the Working of the Fiscal Machinery in the Areas Ruled by Ali Paşa," in Antonis Anastasopoulos and Elias Kolovos (eds), *Ottoman Rule and the Balkans 1760-1850: Conflict, Transformation, Adaptation* (Rethymno: University of Crete Press, 2007), 61-72, a very interesting discussion of the acquisition and transformation of the land of Ali Pasha of Janina is presented.

²⁵ There are several meanings of the term *çiftlik*, such as a plot of land which could sustain one peasant household in terms of food and revenue to pay taxes, or, the one which is of concern to this study, a large estate. See Inalcik, "The Emergence of Big Farms," 106.

²⁶ Bruce McGowan, *Economic Life in Ottoman Europe: Taxation, Trade and the Struggle for Land, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 73-79; Yuzo Nagata, *Some Documents on the Big Farms of the Notables in Western Anatolia* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1976); Huri İslamoğlu-Inan, "State and Peasants in the Ottoman Empire: A Study of Peasant Economy in North-Central Anatolia During the Sixteenth Century," Huri İslamoğlu-Inan, ed. *The Ottoman Empire and the World-Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 101-59.

economic history of the Ottoman state, this study will limit itself to a brief discussion of its role in the formation of the ayan.

These early *çiftlik*s, unlike those in the mid-eighteenth century, were relatively small in size, however, they were absorbed or seized by individuals and became quasi-private property. The possessors of the *çiftlik*s were generally ayan, however, in time, the growing western demands for cotton, tobacco, livestock, etc., brought a great deal of wealth to numerous landholders, who continued to acquire or seize additional lands, leading to the development of plantation-like *çiftlik*s.²⁷ Since *çiftlik* holders were not encumbered by the same administrative and production restraints as the *sipahis* had been, they were able to produce according to the demands of the market and concentrate on accumulation, rather than be “enslaved” agriculturally by the state.²⁸ The location of the majority of *çiftlik*s in the Balkans, Western Anatolia and along the Black Sea coast was not a mere coincidence, but rather a result of their proximity to important trade routes, allowing for easy access to markets, be it Istanbul or one of many European cities.²⁹ However, it has been argued that demands for Ottoman agricultural products did not play a significant factor in *çiftlik* formation, rather the rents gathered from the tenants were sufficient to justify usurpation of the lands.³⁰ This latter statement, as will be seen by the emergence of the grand ayan, ignores the fact that the most powerful and, arguably the wealthiest, provincial notables in the Ottoman state in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries were located in the same “border” regions. Thus the first step in becoming a powerful ayan was the acquisition of a revenue-generating *çiftlik*.

The location of the *çiftlik*s was central to their value and ultimately to the power acquired by their possessor. The wealthiest and most powerful provincial notables of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries were located in the above-mentioned regions. The Ottoman borderlands,³¹ both those physically bordering foreign territory and those located near the Adriatic, Aegean, Black, and Mediterranean Seas enabled large landholders to reap the financial rewards of participating in international trade. The ayan who controlled these large farms ordered the cultivation of cash crops such as corn and cotton and sold them, oftentimes, against the wishes of the central government on the European market.³² The dramatic increase

²⁷ This term has been used to describe the size and operations of the large *çiftlik*s by Bruce McGowan, Halil Inalcik and Traian Stoianovich. See McGowan, *Economic Life*, 59; Inalcik, “The Emergence of Big Farms,” 114; Traian Stoianovich, “Land Tenure and Related Sectors of the Balkan Economy, 1600-1800,” *Journal of Economic History* 13 (1953): 398-411; *idem*, “The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant,” *Journal of Economic History* 20 (1960): 234-313.

²⁸ Immanuel Wallerstein, Hale Decdeli and Reşat Kasaba, “The Incorporation of the Ottoman Empire into the World-Economy,” in Huricihan İslamoğlu-Inan, ed. *The Ottoman Empire and the World-Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 90.

²⁹ For a detailed, although Marxist, account of the commercialization of Ottoman goods and the importance of the borderland territories, see Hristo Gandev, “L’apparition des rapports capitalistes dans l’économie rurale de la Bulgarie du Nord-Ouest au cours du XVIIIe siècle,” *Études Historiques* (Sofia) 1 (1960): 207-20.

³⁰ Gilles Veinstein, “On the Çiftlik Debate,” in Çağlar Keyder and Faruk Tabak, eds. *Landholding and Commercial Agriculture in the Middle East* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 47.

³¹ For a basic introduction to the subject of the Ottoman borderlands, see Kemal H. Karpat, “Comments on Contributions and the Borderlands,” in Kemal H. Karpat and Robert W. Zens (eds), *Ottoman Borderlands: Issues, Personalities and Political Changes* (Madison: Center of Turkish Studies, 2003), 1-14; A.C.S. Peacock, “Introduction: The Ottoman Empire and its Frontiers,” in A.C.S. Peacock (ed), *The Frontiers of the Ottoman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 1-27.

³² Immanuel Wallerstein, Hale Decdeli and Reşat Kasaba, “The Incorporation of the Ottoman Empire into the World Economy,” *The Ottoman Empire and the World-Economy*, Huri İslamoğlu-Inan, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 91-2.

in Ottoman foreign trade beginning in the year 1783 coincided with the rise of very wealthy and politically influential ayan in these borderland territories.³³

The physical distance of an ayan's landholdings from Istanbul frequently allowed them to disregard the central government. A quick glance at the peripheral territories of the Ottoman Maghreb, Balkan frontiers along the Adriatic and Danube, eastern Anatolia, and the Arab lands of Baghdad and Egypt, to name but a few, reveal a series of semi-autonomous provincial notables who frequently operated independently of the central government. Included among them are the *deys* (janissary commanders) of Tunis and Algiers, the Buşatlı family of Scutari, Tepedelenli Ali Pasha of Janina, Pasvanoğlu Osman Pasha of Vidin, Tirsiniklizade Ismail Agha of Ruschuk, the Caniklizade family in eastern Anatolia, Suleyman Pasha of Baghdad, and the Mamluk leaders in Cairo. Those named above and their chosen successors dominated the said regions for several decades, generally from the late eighteenth into the nineteenth centuries. Although these individuals never sought independence from the Ottoman state, they were rather selective in their obedience to the sultan. An example of this can be seen in the actions of Ali Pasha, the Lion of Janina, who responded to the sultan's call for assistance in the 1798 attack on Pasvanoğlu in Vidin, only to be followed by his flirtation with the French forces in the Adriatic.³⁴

Arguably the most important aspect of these borderland locations was that the holders of these territories became indispensable as the front line of defense for the state, namely in the Balkans, northeastern Anatolia and along the border with Persia.³⁵ To cite just two examples: the Jalilis dominated Mosul for about a century starting in 1726 due to their invaluable role as protectors of this key border area with Persia;³⁶ while from the Mediterranean fortress city of Acre, a series of Ottoman strongmen dominated the Palestinian coastal region, frequently ignoring the sultan's orders. However, their value was seen when Ahmet Djezzar Pasha stopped the French advance towards Syria in 1799.³⁷

Closely tied with the change in land tenure were the revenue-raising reforms of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Ottoman state's need to finance the necessary military reforms led to widespread tax farming (*iltizam*).³⁸ Although tax farming had existed in urban areas almost since the inception of the Ottoman state, it was unknown in the rural, agricultural regions which represented the greatest portion of the Ottoman tax base.³⁹ Just as with the emergence of *çiftliks*, the *iltizam* system expanded as the *timar* system became increasingly obsolete and inefficient.

³³ Bruce McGowan, "The Study of Land and Agriculture in the Ottoman Provinces within the Context of an Expanding World Economy in the 17th and 18th Centuries," *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 2:1 (1981): 57-63.

³⁴ Auguste Boppe, *L'Albanie et Napoleon, 1797-1814* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1914), 1-9.

³⁵ *The Frontiers of the Ottoman World* contains numerous articles in support of this statement, including Kahraman Şakul, "Ottoman Attempts to Control the Adriatic Frontier in the Napoleonic Wars," 253-70; Rossitsa Gradeva, "Between Hinterland and Frontier: Ottoman Vidin, Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries," 33-51.

³⁶ Dina Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul, 1540-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

³⁷ Thomas Philipp, *Acre: The Rise and Fall of a Palestinian City, 1730-1831* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 48-78.

³⁸ The term tax farm does not refer to any agricultural endeavor, but rather it is a fiscal estate in which revenue was raised. *İltizam* referred purely to the method of collection and not the kind of revenue it generated, thus, it involved the collection of a variety of different taxes. See Mehmet Genç, "İltizam," *İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2000), 154-58.

³⁹ Linda Darling, *Revenue Raising and Legitimacy: Tax Collection and Finance Administration in the Ottoman Empire, 1560-1660* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 27.

The tax farms which were known as *mukataas* were either assigned to a centrally appointed and funded individual, an *emin*, or they were acquired through an auction, the holder of which was called a *mültezim*. The majority of the holders of tax farming privileges resided in Istanbul or possibly some other major city. Since they were responsible for making regular payments of a predetermined amount to the central government, they needed to devise a way to gather the necessary revenue from their region to meet the required payments. In order to ensure that sufficient funds were collected, *mültezims* appointed a *mütesellim* to administer their investment. Most often this job was given to some local notable who had the means to acquire physically the necessary tax revenue as well as someone who had the respect of the community, thus requiring minimal effort and expense. The acquisition of tax farming served as the economic basis for most of the *ayan*. Its significance can be seen in the competition that arose among local notables vying for the position of *mütesellim*. It was not uncommon to see factions formed within each province whereby one powerful *ayan* would form a coalition of lesser *ayan*, including members of the *ulema* and other locally influential people, and government officials, such as *kadıs* and *aghas* from the local janissary garrison, who would support the “candidacy” of their “patron” either by means of issuing recommendations or by use of physical pressure. Oftentimes it did not matter who was selected officially to act as the *mütesellim* since the most powerful and well-placed individual in the region would usurp the post, becoming both the *mütesellim* and a *mütegalibe* (usurper). Although these duties initially were merely administrative in nature, in time they developed into greater economic and military endeavors, allowing for the emergence of a new class of individuals who were not dependent upon the central government for their position of prominence, but rather upon the province in which they resided.

Through the sub-leasing of tax farms, local notables were able to acquire, even with an initial modest investment, considerable wealth and power. Since they were required to deliver a set sum of money for the tax farm lease holder to the central government, the *mütesellim* was free to keep any excess funds which were collected. As the *ayan* serving as *mütesellims* accumulated greater wealth, they used this income to surround themselves with ever expanding militias in order to strengthen their position both as tax collectors and as local power holders. In time as the central government required more revenue to fund the various activities of the state, tax farming privileges were rescinded and sold to individuals who offered more money. Despite the fact that tax farming rights were to be honored for a three year period, most leases rarely lasted longer than eighteen months.⁴⁰ This tremendous overturn in lease holders resulted in numerous abuses in order to maximize investments which in turn led to the flight of peasants from the land. In the end, the only ones to profit besides the central government were the local notables who were asked continually to serve as *mütesellims* and collect the taxes in their region.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Suraiya Faroqhi, “Crisis and Change, 1590-1699,” in Inalcik and Quataert, eds. *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*, 537-538; Darling, 179.

⁴¹ There are many excellent studies on tax farming, for a more detailed study, see Mehmet Genç, “Osmanlı Maliyesinde Malikane sistemi,” in Osman Okyar and Ünal Nalbantoğlu, eds. *Türkiye İktisat Semineri, Metinler Tartışmalar 8-10 Haziran 1973* (Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1975), 231-91; *idem*, “XVIII. Yüzyıla Ait Osmanlı Mali Verilerinin İktisadi Faaliyetin Göstergesi Olarak Kullanılabilirliği Üzerinde bir Çalışma,” *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Dergisi* 10 (1981); Ariel C. Salzmann, “Measures of Empire: Tax Farmers and the Ottoman Ancien Régim, 1695-1807,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1995); Yuzo Nagata and Abdul Rahim Abdul Rahman, “The İltizam System in Egypt and Turkey: A Comparative Study,” in Yuzo Nagata, ed. *Studies on the Social and Economic History of the Ottoman Empire* (İzmir: Akademi Kitabevi, 1995).

As part of their tax collecting duties, the *mütesellims* were required to safeguard the region and economic resources from bandits which plagued Anatolia, the Balkans, and the Middle East. To do so, they assembled large *sekban-levend* (irregular) forces which formed their personal militia.⁴² The acquisition and maintenance of a sizeable militia is another major ayan trait; without military strength it was impossible for an individual to become a successful ayan. These ayan militias acted as safeguards for the ayan's personal interests as well as to maintain regional stability and, ultimately, serve the state in time of war. As the responsibilities of the militias extended beyond their function as a personal army or, in many cases, set of thugs or bandits acting on behalf of an ayan, the status of ayans greatly improved within the Ottoman state.

The successful outcome of the 1736-1739 struggle with the Habsburgs which saw the return of Belgrade and the reversal of the losses suffered in 1718, made the Ottomans overly confident in the state of their military.⁴³ However, when Sultan Mustafa III declared war on Russia in response to Empress Catherine's interference in the election of the Polish king and the Cossack violation of the Ottoman border in pursuit of a band of Poles from the Bar Confederation in July 1768, the Ottomans were faced with a very daunting task, opposing the state with the world's largest standing army. In a war which was described by Fredrick the Great of Prussia as "one-eyed men who have given blind men a thorough beating,"⁴⁴ both the Russian and Ottoman armies showed their tremendous inadequacies; while the Russians suffered in the areas of leadership and provisioning of the troops, the Ottoman military showed deficiency at almost every level. The components of the classical Ottoman army, the *sipahi* cavalymen and janissaries, exhibited little desire to join the Ottoman military in combat.⁴⁵ Thus, the state was forced to recruit soldiers from the provinces. Although there was nothing new with the use of irregular soldiers in Ottoman campaigns,⁴⁶ the 1768-74 conflict with Russia marked the point in Ottoman history where irregular troops composed, by far, the largest segment of the army and those responsible for supplying them assumed a very important role in Ottoman wartime politics. Most estimates place the number of irregular

⁴² Halil Inalcik, "Centralization and Decentralization in Ottoman Administration," in Thomas Naff and Roger Owen, eds. *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977), 31.

⁴³ For information on the war of 1736-1739, see Virginia H. Aksan, *Ottoman Wars, 1700-1870: An Empire Besieged* (Harlow: Longman, 2007), 102-118; Karl A. Roeder, Jr. *The Reluctant Ally: Austria's Policy in the Austro-Turkish War, 1737-1739* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972); Lavender Cassels, *The Struggle for the Ottoman Empire, 1717-1740* (London: John Murray, 1966). Although the war also included the Russians, the Ottomans were able to prevent the loss of any territory despite the Russian advances into the Crimean Peninsula and the Danubian Principalities due to the early peace signed with the Habsburgs and the overextension of the Russian supply lines.

⁴⁴ A. Sorel, *The Eastern Question in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1898), 54.

⁴⁵ For information on Ottoman military the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774, see Virginia H. Aksan, *Ottoman Wars*, 129-60; *idem*, "The One-Eyed Fighting the Blind: Mobilization, Supply, and Command in the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774," *International History Review* 15:2 (1993): 221-38; *idem*, "Whatever Happened to the Janissaries? Mobilization for the 1768-1774 Russo-Ottoman War," *War in History* 5:1 (1998): 23-36; *idem*, "Ottoman Military Recruitment Strategies in the Late Eighteenth Century," in Erik J. Zürcher, ed. *Arming the State: Military Conscription in the Middle East and Central Asia, 1775-1925* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999); Richard Ungermann, *Der Russisch-türkische Krieg, 1768-1774* (Vienna, 1906).

⁴⁶ Irregulars had been used since the earliest Ottoman campaigns in the fourteenth century. Sultan Ahmet I (1603-17) and his Grand Vezir Nasuh Paşa (1611-14) have been credited with incorporating irregulars, *sekban* and *sarıca* troops, into the regular army in order to enhance its size. Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 203.

soldiers, known by various names such as *miri levend* (state-paid), *kapılı levend* (paid by provincial governor), *sekban*, and *sarıca*, at around 100,000.⁴⁷

The recruitment of the irregular troops was in the hands of provincial officials in Anatolia, both those who were state-appointed such as *valis* and *kadis*, and the *ayan*. The state gave the *ayan* and others in the provinces the freedom to recruit anyone able to fight. Thus, to encourage the recruitment effort, the state issued formulaic orders which offered recruits a sign-on bonus (*bahşiş*) which was significant enough to pay off much of an individual's debt,⁴⁸ a monthly salary (*ulufe*) in six-month lump sums, daily rations, and the ability to reenlist for additional two-month service periods. Officers were also allotted a ten percent commission (*ondalık*).⁴⁹ All salaries were paid by the central government and guaranteed by the notables who recruited them. *Ayan*, or other recruiters, were fined double the amount which they were advanced by the government for any desertions in order to ensure morally sound soldiers as well as to prevent provincial authorities from merely pocketing the large sums of money passing through their hands. However, these fines were rarely imposed.⁵⁰

In addition to supplying the state with men to fight in the war, using the term soldier here may not be appropriate since most of the recruits were not trained in combat or the use of a firearm, the recruiters often served as commanders of the companies they recruited, and thus were an essential component in the success of the war on the battlefield. With the wars of the late-eighteenth century the role of the *ayan* shifted from merely a local administrative and tax collecting one to one which included a prestigious and increasingly important military role.⁵¹ Since many of the *ayans* and provincial officials had a military background, their leadership role in battle was not a major issue. However, what was of great importance was the fact that with recruiters serving as commanders, it hopefully ensured the recruitment of competent individuals who would not abandon their commander in battle. The *levends* generally resided in the same district as did their recruiter, hence, if an individual abandoned his post, he could be punished in his home village by the local *ayan* who had recruited him.

Having the right to recruit and possibly lead troops into battle gave the *ayan* a tremendous amount of power. The *ayan's* new military responsibility gave them greater legitimacy in the eyes of the central government and more power within the provinces, since loyalties created on the battlefield usually did not wane with the ceasefire. The power which the provincial leaders acquired within the state did not extend to the battlefield where the Ottoman army was soundly defeated by the Russians under the very able leadership of Field Marshal Petr Rumiantsev, an individual who instituted many of the innovations and reforms in the Russian military which were necessary in the Ottoman military as well.

Despite the sound beating that the Ottomans received during this war, many *ayan* were rewarded for their military service with titles such as vizier and *mirmiran* (provincial governor), very rare honors for *ayan* prior to the war.⁵² Thus, from 1768 until Sultan Mahmud II for all intents and purposes eradicated them in the second decade of the nineteenth century,

⁴⁷ Aksan, "The One-Eyed Fighting the Blind," 229. Ignatius Mouradgea d'Ohsson stated that in 1769 there were 97 regiments of 1,000 soldiers, totaling 97,000 irregulars. d'Ohsson, *Tableau general de l'Empire othman* (Paris, 1788-1824), 7:381-82.

⁴⁸ Mustafa Cezar believed that the bonus was intended to enable the recruits to purchase a gun and horse, if they did not already possess one. M. Cezar, *Osmanlı Tarihinde Levendler* (Istanbul: Çelikcilt Matbası, 1965), 353-54.

⁴⁹ Aksan, "Ottoman Recruitment," 28. An example of a recruitment order is reproduced in M. Cezar, 443-44.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Özkaya, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Âyânlık*, 156.

⁵² Cevdet, vol. 7, 181-83; Uzunçalışlı, *Meşhur Rumeli Ayanlarından*, 1.

the ayan were involved legitimately in almost every facet of the government. The Ottoman wars of the late-eighteenth century completely transformed the leading ayan, who were able to heed the call of the state, from mere local notables into wielders of provincial power. The role of the ayan in the provinces soon overlapped that of state-appointed officials. In fact, a number of ayan who had enriched themselves previously as *mütesellims* and through questionable land acquisition received duties and privileges reserved for Istanbul insiders.

When one examines the participation of individual ayan during the wars of the late-eighteenth century, data is limited to the handful of studies available on the leading ayan families of Anatolia. Canikli Ali Bey, who, with the title of *mutasarrıf* (governor of a district/*sancak*), controlled tax farms in Trabzon and Amasya, rose to prominence as a result of his participation in the 1768-74 war with Russia. He actively recruited 1,500 cavalymen and 1,500 infantrymen to send to the front, in addition to many supplies.⁵³ He also actively participated in the war and was even ordered to execute Abaza Mehmed Pasha, his former commander in Hotin, who had ignored the sultan's orders.⁵⁴ Because Ali Bey carried out the imperial decree and executed the man who had saved his life in battle two years previous, he was rewarded with the *sancak* of Amasya as his *malikane* (life-term tax farm) in 1772 and a year later was elevated to the rank of vizier and appointed *serasker* (commander-in-chief) for the 1773 Crimean campaign.⁵⁵ Although Canikli Ali Pasha was an influential and wealthy individual prior to the war with Russia, his participation in the war effort gave him and his family legitimacy and extensive power over northern and eastern Anatolia, establishing the Caniklizades as one of the leading powers in all of the empire.

Just as easily as one may obtain an important position during the wars, one may also lose everything. During the 1787-92 campaign, the Caniklizades who were still extremely powerful, despite a conflict which emerged between Ali Pasha and the Porte in 1779, did not provide the sultan with the level of aid and personnel that was requested. Their failure to carry out the will of the sultan resulted in executions and the stripping away of all posts and offices. The Caniklizades would not hold another office until 1799, and in the meantime some members of the family offered their services to the Russians.⁵⁶ The Caniklizades are an excellent example of the benefits which could be gleaned from the state during wartime. Their rise to power through a combination of tax farming privileges and landholdings and, ultimately, a demonstration of their physical and financial might during wartime was rather typical of the ayan dynasties that existed in Anatolia.

Similar information on troop deployment is available for the Karaosmanoğlu family which was asked to supply 1,500 men to defend the island of Sakız (Chios) in 1771. In addition to supplying men the wealthy ayan family sold foodstuff to the army.⁵⁷ The family received the same request during the 1787-92 war as well, where Ömer Agha, the *voyvoda* of Bergama, and Hacı Ahmed Agha, the *mütesellim* of Saruhan, led 2,500 men, for which Ahmed Agha was presented with a sable coatby Sultan Selim III.⁵⁸

Just as the ayan benefited from the needs of the central government during times of war in the late-eighteenth century, the ayan enhanced their position at home during times of

⁵³ Rıza Karagöz, *Canikli Ali Paşa*, 31.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵⁵ Şahin, 51-2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 68-9.

⁵⁷ Nagata, *Tarihte Ayanlar*, 35; Uluçay, *XVIII. ve XIX. Yüzyıllarda Saruhan'da Eşkıyalık*, 19.

⁵⁸ Nagata, *Tarihte Ayanlar*, 35.

chaos and crisis. Since the late-sixteenth-century brigandage was widespread in the Ottoman state.⁵⁹ Unless the sultan or a provincial governor dispatched troops to quell the problem, the *reaya* were left to defend themselves against booty-seeking bandits. However, as *ayan* emerged during the course of the eighteenth century with increased wealth and personal militias, they became the safeguards of regional security. These bandits adversely affected their investment as tax collectors. As *ayan* protected the local inhabitants from brigandage, their prestige and standing in the local community increased even further.

As great as the threat of banditry was to the revenue-raising efforts of the *ayan*, it also became an important source of their power. Bandits were frequently employed by *ayan* in both the Balkans and Anatolia to attack the villages and towns of their *ayan* rivals. Continual raids oftentimes resulted in the *reaya* appealing to their *ayan* for greater protection against future raids or they shifted their “allegiance” to another *ayan*, usually the one responsible for the raids. Arguably the greatest *ayan* employer of brigands was Pasvanoğlu Osman Pasha of Vidin. From 1792 until his death in 1807, Pasvanoğlu conducted raids continuously extending from Varna to Belgrade in order to both weaken his rivals and enrich himself on the extensive loot obtained during these expeditions. Although the total number of bandits employed by Pasvanoglu is not known,⁶⁰ he frequently sent out raiding parties of up to several hundred men which required larger organized campaigns to counter his assaults.⁶¹

The relationship between the *ayan* and brigandage has been exploited greatly to present the *ayan* as oppressors of Ottoman society. This representation can be largely attributed to the fact that most information on the *ayan* is taken from chronicles written by the court’s official historians or from *kadı* court proceedings and imperial decrees which tend to be responses to injustices committed by an *ayan*. It is difficult to dispute many of these claims brought against the *ayan*, especially with an individual like Pasvanoğlu Osman Pasha, however, it is necessary to understand that the basis of *ayan* power and authority was the support they received from the local population. Thus, the employment of brigands generally served as a means of personal protection for *ayan* and prevented rivals from using those same soldiers for hire against them.⁶²

Despite their depiction as oppressors, *ayan* generally endeared themselves to the local population. The first way in which this was accomplished was by ensuring just administration and providing security. Although the *kadı* was in charge of the judiciary in the provinces, the *ayan* had the right to voice their opinion over the *kadı*’s decision. Being a prominent and respected person in society, an *ayan* was expected and encouraged by the local inhabitants to stand up against the abuse of the *reaya* and denounce unpopular appointments, such as local officials or the *kadı*. Within the courts, *ayan* had the ability to influence verdicts by serving as

⁵⁹ The subject of banditry has been approached in several different ways. Eric Hobsbawm presents it as a rather romantic notion, while Karen Barkey encouraged a move from the idea of “primitive rebels” to “status-seeking rebels” who desired positions within the administration and were “real malefactors of rural society.” See Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 18, 21; Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1965); *idem*, *Bandits* (London: Abacus, 2001).

⁶⁰ It was estimated that in 1798 that he had as many as 40,000 to 50,000 men in his Vidin-based militia, see G.A. Olivier, *Voyage dans L’empire Othoman, l’Égypte, et la Perse...* (Paris: H. Agasse, 1801-7), 211-218; Letter from d’Ohsson to King Gustav IV Adolph, 10 February 1798, in Veniamin Ciobanu, ed. *Europe and the Porte: New Documents on the Eastern Question* (Iași: Center for Romanian Studies, 2001), 2:22.

⁶¹ B.O.A., Cevdet Tasnifi Askeriye, 12166, 26595.

⁶² Adanir, “Semi-Autonmous Forces,” 157-85.

“instrumental witnesses, as auxiliary investigators, and as mediators.”⁶³ In this capacity, the ayan could win the favor of the population and greatly enhance their authority and wealth by using their influence within the *kaza* (district) or even the province by undermining the position of their competitors.

In a similar manner, the ayan oftentimes vocalized their community’s opposition to new and unpopular reforms enacted by the central government in Istanbul. This was most notably seen in the massive opposition by many ayan towards Sultan Selim III’s *Nizam-ı Cedid* (New Force), the modern, westernized military unit. The ayan’s opposition to the *Nizam-ı Cedid* was clearly due to the sultan’s attempt to centralize his power at the expense of the ayan. However, the ayan championed the *reaya*’s opposition to the new tax burden that was needed to support the new unit.⁶⁴ While the ayan opposition was depicted in many sources, such as Ahmet Cevdet Pasha, the Ottoman chronicler of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as a sign of the conservative nature of the ayan and their resistance to modernization, it, in fact, was an ingenious attempt to increase their legitimacy in the eyes of the local community and strengthen their position against the central government.⁶⁵

Additionally, ayan courted the support of the local population by endowing *vakıfs* (pious foundations) which funded various buildings and public works in the region.⁶⁶ Among the many projects commissioned by ayan were mosques, schools, libraries, bridges, fountains, and roads. There were two very different reasons for the establishment of *vakıfs* by ayan. Firstly, for well established families these endowments not only enhanced the position of the family within the community, but it also provided a source of revenue which could not be touched by the central government. The revenues generated by *vakıfs* were administered by an individual chosen by the endower. Frequently this individual was a relative or close associate who received an annual stipend from the endowment for their services. Additionally, *vakıfs* were the means by which recent usurpers of power, individuals like Pasvanoğlu Osman Pasha and Tepedelenli Ali Pasha of Janina, were able to show the local population that they had the best interest of the people in mind. Pasvanoğlu established several schools, mosques, a library or two, fountains, roads, and bridges.⁶⁷ All of which helped create a cultural legacy for Pasvanoğlu.

Another important service, which the ayan provided for the local population, was moneylending. Although this could result in financial gain for the lenders, the main goal in offering this service was create or strengthen the bonds between the ayan (lenders) and the peasants (debtors).⁶⁸

The important relationship, which existed between the ayan and the local community, should not be underestimated. Since there was no hereditary status or nobility of any kind in the Empire, individuals and families generally had two means of maintaining personal power:

⁶³ Ronald C. Jennings, “Kadi, Court and Legal Procedures in 17th Century Kayseri,” *Studia Islamica* 48 (1978): 148.

⁶⁴ Sipahi Çataltepe, *19. Yüzyıl Başlarında Avrupa Dengesi v ‘Nizam-ı Cedid’ Ordusu* (Istanbul: Göçebe Yayınları, 1997).

⁶⁵ Contrary to the claims of being anti-modern, many ayan, including Pasvanoğlu and Tepedelenli Ali Pasha of Janina, among others, actively sought out Western, namely French, aides to train and equip their men in a modern, western style.

⁶⁶ For a discussion of *vakıfs* established by various Anatolian ayan, see Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu, “Architectural Patronage of Ayan Families in Anatolia,” *Provincial Elites in the Ottoman Empire*, 321-39

⁶⁷ Grégoire Yakichitch, “Documents et Mémoires: Notes sur Passvan-oglou, 1758-1807,” *La Revue slave* 5:3 (1907): 286-87.

⁶⁸ Barkey, 250.

either a close relationship with the central government or the support of the local community. The most successful ayan families/dynasties, such as the Karaosmanoğlu, successfully combined both of these. However, many ayan, in order to advance their agenda, relied on the latter to stay in power. In doing so they promoted local interests at the expense of the central government or other provincial notables. This was frequently seen in negotiations with foreign merchants.⁶⁹ Without strong local support, even if they had solid backing from Istanbul, an ayan could not stay in power for long. Rogue ayan like Pasvanoğlu, who appeared to show little respect for others, were beholden to the local community for revenue raising and military support. This aspect of the *ayanlık* has been largely ignored by scholars of Ottoman history. One could venture to state that the ayan were the precursors to the democratically elected representatives of the Ottoman and later Turkish parliaments.

The major exception to the two above-mentioned means for maintaining personal power were the military households of Egypt which depended on a complex system of incorporating new slaves from the Caucasus in order to reinforce continually the position of the Mamluk elites.⁷⁰

Returning to the question posed at the beginning of the paper of whether it is possible to create a model ayan, one must conclude that it is definitely possible, although an addendum must be added that the model comes with optional accessories. All ayan, with few exceptions, are notable members of their community; come to dominate tax collection in a given region; control large tracts of land generally at the peripheries of the Empire; have a sizeable personal militia; act as an intermediary between the central government and the local community; maintain a close, amicable relationship with the local population.

The threat that the ayan posed to the central government was great enough that it led to their eventual eradication. This threat was not in terms of the sultan's fear of a massive rebellion or coup, but rather as a decentralizing force. With the infamous assault on Tepedelenli Ali Pasha of Janina in 1820, all major ayan in the empire had either died, had their lands seized or were absorbed into the state structure. The end of the ayan acts as a very important turning point in Ottoman history, the renewal of centralized control and the enactment of a major reform program under Sultan Mahmud II (1808-39). Ironically, similar programs had been carried out or attempted on a much smaller scale by several ayan over the previous four decades.

⁶⁹ An excellent example of this is seen in Baghdad where Süleyman the Great who dominated the province from 1780 to 1802 was able to obtain and maintain his position with the financial and political support of the British. Additionally, the Karaosmanoğlu family was added by foreign merchants in helping them rise to power.

⁷⁰ Jane Hathaway, *The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdağlıs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); idem, "The Military Household in Ottoman Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27 (1995): 39-52; Gabriel Piterberg, "The Formation of the Ottoman Egyptian Elite in the Eighteenth Century," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22 (1990): 275-89.