

**BETWEEN REBELLION AND OBEDIENCE:
THE RISE AND FALL OF BUSHATLI MAHMUD PASHA OF SHKODRA
(1752-1796)**

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
OF
İSTANBUL ŞEHİR UNIVERSITY



BY


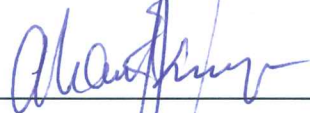
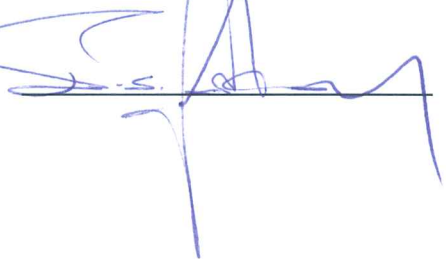
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
IN
HISTORY

AUGUST 2018

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Modern Turkish Studies.

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ABSTRACT

BETWEEN REBELLION AND OBEDIENCE: THE RISE AND FALL OF BUSHATLI MAHMUD PASHA OF SHKODRA (1752-1796)

Gjeli, Ardit.

MA in History

Thesis Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Kahraman Şakul

August 2018, 130 pages

This biography study on Mahmud Pasha of Shkodra (1752-1796), by revising its figure in the classic Albanian historiography and Ottoman historiography, tries to put him in the proper place in the studies on the Ottoman local notables. Emphasizing more on his rebellion and giving it some national nuance, the Albanian historiography tried to show it as a struggle of independence from Ottoman center. On the other hand, from a central point of view Ottoman chroniclers blamed these local notables for the disorder that was taking place in the provinces. But, both sides failed to capture the true picture of him. Therefore, this thesis, basing on a new reinterpretation of sources according to the revisionist works on ottoman local notables, challenges the two narratives.

Keywords: Albanian historiography, biography, *ayan*, provincial notables, 18th century, Ottoman Empire.

ÖZ

İSYAN VE İTAAT ARASINDA:
İŞKODRALI MAHMUD PAŞA'NIN YÜKSELİŞİ VE DÜŞÜŞÜ
(1752-1796)

Gjeli, Ardit

Tarih Yüksek Lisans Programı

Tez Danışmanı: Doç. Dr. Kahraman Şakul

Ağustos 2018, 130 sayfa

Bu biyografik çalışma İşkodralı Mahmud Paşayı (1752-1796), Arnavut ve Osmanlı tarih çalışmalarındaki figürünü revize ederek Osmanlı ayanları arasındaki münasip yerine oturtmaya çalışmaktadır. Arnavut ulusal tarihi isyancı kimliğine baskı yaparak ve biraz da milliyetçi bir nüans katarak, onun bu rollerini Osmanlı merkezine karşı olan savaşta bir milli mücadele olarak işlemiştir. Öte yandan Osmanlı ve Türk tarihçileri, o ve benzeri figürleri, taşrada düzensizlik yaratan kişiler olarak suçlamışlardır. İki taraf da Mahmud Paşa'nın doğru imajını yakalamakta başarısız olmuştur. Bu nedenle bu tez Osmanlı ayanlarının revizyonist çalışmalarına göre, kaynakların yeni bir şekilde yorumlanması yöntemine dayanarak bu iki anlatıya karşı çıkmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arnavut tarihyazımı, biyografi, ayan, yerel güçlüler, 18. yüzyıl, Osmanlı imparatorluğu.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I am very grateful to my advisor Professor Kahraman Şakul for his continued support over the course of this entire work and for laying the methodological groundwork without which this would not be possible. Also, I would like to thank Professor Abdulhamit Kırmızı and Professor Engin Akarlı, both of whom provided me with the feedback needed to improve the project and helped me despite their busy schedule. I also thank for the help and the care of all faculty members, and especially my friends to whom I feel deeply in dept. Finally, I would like to thank Professor Tufan Buzpınar, who so warmly welcomed me to the department and helped me for my academic preparation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.E.SABH.I.	Ali Emirî Tasnifi Sultan Abdülhamid I
A.S.V.	Archivio di Stato di Venezia
A.Q.SH.	Arkivi Qendror i Shtetit
BOA.	Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi
C.AL.	Cevdet Adliye
C.AS.	Cevdet Askeriye
C.DH.	Cevdet Dâhiliye
C.ML.	Cevdet Maliye
DİA	Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi
HAT	Hatt-ı Hümayun
IJMS	International Journal of Middle East Studies
L	Şevval
M	Muharrem
N	Ramazan
R	Rebiyülahir
Ra	Rebiyülevvel
Ş	Şaban
S	Safer
Z	Zilhicce
Za	Zilkade

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the 1960s, Albanian historiography, like its counterparts throughout the Balkans, began to write history according to the teachings of Marxist-Leninism while, of course, taking into consideration the nation-state framework. The first academics in the communist era were trained in Russia, thus being affected ideologically and, at the same time, adopting the anti-Ottoman trend of that time. One of the most important issues in this period was to find the first traces of the Albanian state, which could then be used evidence to extol the great age of the state from a nationalist perspective. For this, they relied on three important figures in two different periods. These key historical figures were Skanderbeg (1405-1468), the national hero of the Albanian state, and Mahmud Pasha of Shkodra and Ali Pasha of Tepelena (1740-1822), both representing the period of the Great Albanian pašaliks (1757-1831). With Mahmud Pasha representing northern and Ali Pasha southern Albania, scholars used these examples to trace the attempt to create the first modern state of Albania.

According to Albanian historiography, Mahmud Pasha of Shkodra and Ali Pasha of Tepelena tried to fight for the good of their people (the Albanians) and wanted to create independent states founded upon the rock of the Albanian people, as if there were a strong national consciousness already in place. For this purpose, these historians have relied heavily on the primary sources written by foreign travelers coming from Europe or reports issued by official consuls and works written during the second half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the majority of the population in areas to which the territorial authority of these two pashas extended, consisted of ethnic Albanians, helped the historians establish a link with contemporary Albania. So, why then did an Albanian state not arise? Regarding this, Albanian historians have emphasized that there was no unity among the Albanian pashas and that the external circumstances were not favorable at that moment.

If this is the general approach of Albanian historiography concerning these historical figures, how did Ottoman historiography judge them? Two of the most remarkable Ottoman chroniclers, Ahmet Cevdet Pasha (1822-1895) and Mehmed Süreyya (1845-1909), saw these provincial notables as responsible for the anarchy in the provinces. They depicted them as troublemakers who exploited the state's subjects and weakened its welfare. Their centrist point of view reflects the trends of that period, especially Ahmet Cevdet Pasha, who was a supporter of the Tanzimat reforms and thus of a centralized state.¹ This statist belief was even adopted by Turkish historians in the twentieth century. For them, and even for well-known scholars like Bruce McGowan, this shifting of power from central to provincial actors weakened the state and accelerated decline.² Halil İnalçık, like McGowan would emphasize the role of decentralization process for the weakening of the Ottoman state and its effect on the proto-nationalism in the Balkans during this period.³

The two conflicting points of view presented by Albanian and Ottomanist historiography raise several questions. What, in reality, was happening in Ottoman Empire, and what were provincial notables such as Mahmud Pasha of Shkodra doing in their regions? And, most importantly, what was the true story of this provincial notable, and what can we learn about it from outside the two dominant paradigms?

During the 1960s scholars like Albert Hourani invited researchers to employ a new method of interpreting local notables.⁴ It was not until later that a revisionist historiography related to the emergence of the provincial notables began to offer a

¹ Christoph K. Neumann, *Araç Tarih Amaç Tanzimat: Tarih-i Cevdet'in Siyasi Anlamı*, (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları 91, 2000), p. 188.

² Bruce McGowan, "The Age of the Ayans." In *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, vol. I, ed. Halil İnalçık and Donald Quataert, 637-758. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 639-645.

³ Halil İnalçık, "Centralization and Decentralization in Ottoman Administration." In *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History*, ed. Thomas Naff and Roger Owen, 27-52. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977).

⁴ Albert Hourani, "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables." In *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East*, ed. William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers, 41-68. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

more sophisticated approach to this debate. Scholars like Jane Hathaway, Avdo Suceka, Robert Zens, Frederick Anscombe, Engin D. Akarli, Fikret Adanir, Surayya Faroqhi and Ali Yaycioglu began to revise the general view of the eighteenth century as a time of decline and the provincial notables as “rebels without a cause.” They emphasized that, in looking at the dynamics then occurring in the Ottoman realm, we must also keep in mind the global context and study features of politics and economics present from the Americas to the Far East. So we must ask: what was happening in the world during this time?

The eighteenth century, in global perspective, is regarded by international scholarship as the starting point of the Age of Revolution (1760-1820), which brought fundamental socio-economic change and reshaped the politics of many countries around the world. In Europe, population growth and great wars were the main factors forcing the authorities to support production and to raise revenue through tax collection. Land was the main source of income and agriculture provided food and taxes to the state. This reality was true even in countries like England which, despite the Industrial Revolution in the second half of the eighteenth century, relied on great landowners. These lords, as they were called in England, were well aware of the importance of agriculture, and since most of the people worked on their lands, they tried to gain advantage at the expense of the central authority. With the population dependent on the landowners and their vast financial influence on the state economy, this landed gentry managed to force power-sharing with the center through representation in the policy-making institutions.

During this century, even the Ottomans were experiencing socio-economic changes, and the main cause for these was the long wars against the Russian and Austrian Empires. These shook the central authority in different regions of the empire and especially the Balkans, where the wars took place. The weakness of central authority created anarchy throughout the region, making it impossible for the empire to collect any kind of revenue or even to protect its own subjects. It was for these reasons that the Ottoman center, in order to once again benefit from its own resources, began to rely on local notables. As in all the countries in this period, for the Ottomans

land and agriculture were the main sources of income. Thus, these local notables, taking advantage of these political and fiscal circumstances, began to increase their wealth at the expense of the central state and its taxpayer subjects.

It was within this historical context that Mahmud Pasha, like all the other local notables or *ayans*, as they are called in Ottoman letters, began to emerge and influence the Ottoman polity. Revisionist historiography has emphasized the importance of using the Ottoman archives, which regarding this topic had previously been used in only a limited way, and this is something that I try to do in my study on Mahmud Pasha. First of all, these men were part of the Ottoman world. They were born and raised as Ottoman subjects and became part of the state apparatus by taking important posts in the provinces, so a failure to use Ottoman sources means neglecting their Ottoman context. However, there has been considerable work done on local notables based on this new approach and methodology, so what exactly can we determine to be different about Mahmud Pasha?

The weakening of central authority in the provinces aided the consolidation of the notables in the Ottoman realm. Moreover, they took on the functions of tax collection, military support, and the preservation of order. Yet the competition for revenues and for offices between them created anarchy. It was at this time, as recent studies have shown, that power magnates made their entrance by shaping an order which would serve their interests on the backs of other small notables and at the expense of the central government. Known as power magnates, men like Ali Pasha of Tepelena, Pasvanoglu Osman, and Mahmud Pasha of Shkodra caused a shift in power from the center to the provinces, driving a kind of decentralization. Additionally, their location in the frontier zones strengthened the influence and importance of these power magnates, not only in the eyes of the Ottoman center but also in those of the neighbor empires. That is why we have a great number of reports and correspondence both between these influential men and about them from different European representatives. But were they always obedient toward the center?

There were certainly conflicts and rebellions with these power magnates, not just with the center but even among one another. It was true that there was a provincial order, but it was fragile and built based on social networks, and members in it could shift their alliance to another faction quite easily. The Ottoman government, on the other hand, wanted to create order on its own terms, meaning a centralized one through institutions, but this meant restriction of the power magnates' influence in their own provinces which was, of course, unacceptable for them. It was the sharing of power between the center and these representatives of the provinces that caused opposition and rebellion.

Being of the faction of the local notables, the life of Mahmud Pasha can offer insight on important topics in modern scholarship. The history of the Balkans in the late eighteenth century, during the Age of Revolution, could at the same time contribute to our understanding of the rise of centralized political systems in the modern era. Furthermore, through the case of Mahmud Pasha, we can understand the transformation occurring in the Ottoman state and, what is more important, re-think the place that these important figures have in the historiographies of post-communist countries in the Balkans.

For this work, the main primary sources will be those from the archives of Albania and the archives of the Prime Ministry of Turkey. In the archives of Albania, there is the personal correspondence of Mahmud Pasha with other Albanian pashas, which can offer an understanding of the negotiations and relations between them.⁵ Furthermore, the documents of the Catholic Archbishopric of Shkodra should help to understand the point of view of the Catholic population of area, since they were given great importance by Mahmud's politics of religious tolerance.⁶ In this archive, I shall use the records collected by Albanian researchers at the beginning of the twentieth century. By visiting different places and meeting elderly people they gathered songs

⁵ A.Q.SH [Central State Archives], Fondi 79 (This collection includes all the documents related to the Bushatli household from Bushatli Mehmed Pasha to the Bushatlis of the nineteenth century).

⁶ A.Q.SH, Fondi 134, Arkivi i Arqipeshkvise Katolike te Shkodres [The archive of the Catholic Archbishopric of Shkodra].

and histories about the deeds of Mahmud. Although using folkloric materials is problematic, I will try to support them with the records of foreign travelers and writers since they show surprising similarities.

The Albanian Institute of History has published a considerable number of reports, which they found in the archives of Venice, of consuls and vice consuls and other Western travelers and officials. These Western primary sources offer us a different point of view towards Mahmud from the eyes of an important state, Venice, which not only had interests on the Albanian coast but also was an important commercial actor for the Ottomans at the same time. Yet the usage of Western sources is something that previous Albanian scholars have done extensively, leading them to conceptualize the activity of Mahmud as a struggle for independence, and thus a separatist movement. That is why we have to be careful and selective, as the writers had their own personal connection, or in some cases economic or politic interest, with the Pasha of Shkodra.⁷

For this reason, I will use primary sources from the Turkish Prime Ministry in order to gain a clear image of Mahmud in the eyes of the Ottoman center. The different correspondence of the central government with other regional notables and officials could lead us to re-think the figure of Mahmud Pasha in Ottoman/Turkish and Albanian historiography. Furthermore, the path blazed by revisionist historiography about provincial notables since the 1960s shows that it is impossible to recreate the life of a notable without placing it within the Ottoman context. But who were the revisionist historians of the Ottoman notables and how did they revise these notables' image?

⁷ Naçi, Stavri. *Shqipëria e Veriut në Shekullin e XVIII: Letra të zev. Konsujve Venedikas të Shkodres* [Northern Albania in the Eighteenth Century: The Letters of the Venetian vice consuls of Shkodra] 2 Vols. (1706-1800), (Tirane: Universiteti Shtetëror i Tiranës, Instituti i Historisë dhe i Gjuhësise, 1967); Shkodra, Zija. *Dokumente mbi Shqipërinë në shekullin XVIII: Letra të konsujve venedikas të Durrësit* [Document on Eighteenth Century Albania: Letters of the Venetians consuls of Durrës], (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave, 1975).

From the 1960s to now we have had numerous studies regarding provincial notables which I will use in my project as secondary sources and which will provide sufficient information about the characteristics of the notables. Bruce McGowan in his work on the Ottoman notables decided to name the period between 1699 and 1812 as the age of *ayans* underlining the importance of these mediators with center and taxpayer subjects. However, he emphasized the decentralization process that took part during this time as a factor that effected the decline of the Ottoman Empire.⁸ Yet, Surayya Faroqhi criticized the approaches of McGowan in her, *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, where with other writers like Adanir or Khoury, she analyzed this period as a time of transformation for the Ottoman empire. Also, the decentralization process that occurred during this period helped the empire to incorporate the regions that traditionally were out of reach for the state institutions.⁹

Regarding the central figure of Mahmud Pasha, in the Albanian literature the first works on the region of Shkodra under the Bushatlis were by Stavri Naci. Even though the Academy of Sciences of Albania was in its first years, Naci did a remarkable work, using different primary sources and such other secondary sources as he could reach. He wrote different articles relating to the Paşalık of Shkodra and its importance in Albanian history. This work remains the only one done on the paşalık of Shkodra under the Bushatlis. The use of Venetian reports and Ottoman documents together with other primary sources makes these works indispensable in helping us in this thesis relating to Mahmud Pasha and his relations with the Ottoman center.¹⁰ Stavri Naci was helped in this work by Injac Zamputi, an Italo-Albanian, whose works are on Ottoman Albania in the Italian sources.¹¹ Hamdi Bushati, a descendant and member of this family, wrote a monograph about the Bushatli household relying on the a

⁸ McGowan, "The Age of the *Ayans*, 1699-1812", p.637-758.

⁹ Surayya Faroqhi (ed), *The Cambridge History of Turkey: The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603-1839*, Vol. 3, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Stavri Naçi, *Pashalleku i Shkodres nen Sundimin e Bushatllijve [The Paşalık of Shkodra under the Bushatlis] (1757-1796)*, (Tirane: Instituti i Historise dhe Gjuhesise, 1964).

¹¹ Injac Zamputi, *Il settecento Veneziano e l'Albania*, Tesi di Laurea, (Trieste: Universita di Trieste, 1941).

considerable amount of documents regarding this family and the memoirs of older members about the deeds transmitted for generations.¹²

As for the central figure of Mahmud Pasha and his household, except for the Albanian literature, we have very few secondary sources that mention him, some being: Stanford Shaw, who is one of the first American scholars to mention Mahmud Pasha of Shkodra and give information about him and his actions.¹³ Dora D'Istria or Elena Ghika, princess of Albanian-Romanian descent, gives important information about his personal life in two of her articles, although based mainly on Venetian sources or Albanian folklore.¹⁴ Nicolae Iorga, another Romanian like Dora D'Istria while writing his famous work on the Ottoman Empire, was the first to mention Mahmud Pasha and his relations with the Sublime Porte using the Austrian sources.¹⁵ From the Turkish historians, Ismail Hakkı Uzuncarşılı wrote about Mahmud Pasha based on sources in the Ottoman archive.¹⁶ Süleyman Külçe, wrote a history of Albania on Fevzi Çakmak's request and in this work he gave importance to Albanian local notables. This work is significant because it is one of the first histories of Albania written in Republican Turkey and, like Uzuncarşılı's, used Ottoman primary sources.¹⁷

In the first chapter of the thesis, I will focus on the origins of Mahmud's family, their rise to the power as governors of Shkodra, and his early life according to the diary of his personal doctor, Pater (Friar) Balneo. Next, there will be a description of the socio-economic situation in Ottoman-Albania from a general point of view and of the

¹² Hamdi Bushati, *Bushatllinjte [The Bushatlis]*, (Shkoder: Shtepia Botuese Idromeno, 2003).

¹³ Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New: The Ottoman Empire under Selim III 1789-1807*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 230-5.

¹⁴ Dora D'Istria, "Gli Albanesi mussulmani, Scutari e i Bushatli, Berati e Janina [The Albanian Muslim, Scutari and the Bushatli, Berat and Janina]" in *Nuova Antologia di Scienze ed Arti*, 3, Vol. VIII, (Firenze: Universita di Firenze, 1868); "Gli Albanesi Musulmani, II, Berath e Janina", *Nuova Antologia*, Vol. XIV, (Firenze: Universita di Firenze, 1870).

¹⁵ Nicolae Iorga, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi: (1774-1912)*. Vol.5, (İstanbul: Yeditepe Yayınevi, 2005).

¹⁶ İsmail H. Uzuncarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi: Karlofça antlaşmasından XVIII. Yüzyılın sonlarına Kadar*, Vol.4, no.2 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1982), p. 465-9.

¹⁷ Süleyman Külçe, *Osmanlı Tarihinde Arnavutluk*, (İzmir: Ticaret Basımevi, 1944), p. 105-108.

emergence of Shkodra paşalık under Bushatli Mehmed as a political formation created through social networks. Moreover, the rise of Bushatli Mahmud to the position of an Ottoman official, his education, first duties, and his succession to the governance of Shkodra will be presented. For this part, I will rely on Venetian sources, which are later combined with Ottoman sources and current scholarship. Thus, this chapter informs us about the way in which an Albanian household could rise in an eighteenth-century Ottoman city and the methods used by its members to create a provincial order and their repercussions.

As for the second chapter, I will emphasize that the consolidation of Mahmud's power was effected by making proper use of the regional socio-economic and local circumstances politically offered to him. In addition to this, we shall witness the strong effects of commercialization during this period on the emergence of power magnates in the Ottoman Empire. Thus, beyond the classic labeling of these individual as mere anarchists or warlords, we see businessmen who amassed considerable capital through trade, which was then used for public buildings or infrastructure. Furthermore, there is the rise of the Albanian Muslim merchants who, according to Traian Stoianovich, began to compete with the Christian subjects; the same writer also underlines that during this period the Balkan economy became integrated into the European market. Thus, the continuous wars of Mahmud against the other pashas for the right of being the subcontractor of the imperial state are the proof that the iltizam (tax-farming) system issued by the center fundamentally changed the fiscal policy of the Ottoman state.

Next, in the third chapter I try to shed light on the negotiation process, taking as example the Podgorica crisis, which was fostered by the continuous military interference of Mahmud. Furthermore, in this case we see the fragility of the Ottoman military system, which in that period was experiencing a transformation, as the armed forces were provided by the localities through the intermediation of the notables. In this case I tend to oppose the nationalist approach of the Albanian historians, who would describe the conflict as a separatist movement of Mahmud. For this I rely on the remarkable work of Michael Robert Hickok on Ottoman Bosnia,

and also on the Imperial Decrees issued from the center about this matter.¹⁸ Hickok, criticizes the proto-nationalist approach of the Albanian and other Balkan historiographies and sees the developments of the eighteenth century as characteristics of the inter-Ottoman power negotiations.¹⁹ Despite the rebellious attitudes of Mahmud and other notables, the Ottoman center, through a sophisticated negotiation technique, would effectively intermediate between the two sides. This example also confirms that, although the official in the provinces were mostly natives or had won their posts through their own efforts, they were integrated effectively into the state apparatus, thus keeping pace with the administrative transformations.

The last chapter presents a direct confrontation between the center and Mahmud that, to the contrary of the depiction of an “Independence War” from the invader in Albanian historiography, is an example of the effort by the Sublime Porte to try to link up its distant provinces with the central institutions. Following his confrontation with the center, Mahmud was still an Ottoman official, protecting his interests against those who tried to eliminate him. Thus, his contributions on the Austrian frontier and the forgiveness he was given were both based on offers and counter-offers, for the simple reason that both sides had their own interests on the table. For this, I have relied on different primary sources followed by the current scholarship and especially on the approach of Ali Yaycioglu. In his masterpiece, *Partners of the Empire*, he emphasized the importance of the provincial notables for the operation of the administrative mechanism, calling them the partners of the state.

Even though the topic of this work is the life of Mahmud Pasha of Shkodra beyond the nationalist and statist narratives of Albanian and Turkish historiography, it also offers us a perspective on that period worldwide through the lens of an Ottoman official. In addition, other than the growing scholarship on the Ottoman notables, I try to use the Venetian and Ottoman primary sources in a different way to yield

¹⁸ Michael R Hickok, *Ottoman Military Administration in Eighteenth-Century Bosnia*, (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 152-175.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 154.

different perspectives while writing the life of the notable of Shkodra. Furthermore, through this biography I intend to give Mahmud the place he deserves among the notables which, truth be told, has until recently overshadowed by the figure of Ali Pasha of Tepelena and other Ottoman notables.



CHAPTER II

THE RISE TO THE POWER

In the first and second parts of this chapter, I try to shed light on the origins of the Bushatli household by going accordingly to the genealogical family tree and while in the second part there is the description of the socio-economic changes occurring in the Ottoman state. As for the third part, I focus on the rise of the Bushatlis as well on the socio-political situation in the city of Shkodra. Furthermore, in the third and the fourth parts, there is described the youth of Mahmud, his relation with families and friends, as well the formation that he gets as a member in an Ottoman household. Finally, in the last parts I turn my attention in the formation of Shkodra paşalık under Bushatli Mehmed, the contribution of Mahmud as an Ottoman official and in the end his succession as the new governor of Shkodra.

2.1. Origins of the Bushatli Family

Mahmud was a member of the family known as Bushatli,¹ one of the oldest households in northern Albania. There have been many hypotheses in many works concerning the origins of this family. Some scholars of the early twentieth century described them as of Italian origin, and others as of Slavic. In fact, based on Ottoman and Venetian sources, we came to the conclusion that the family of Bushatli was an Islamized Albanian household with local roots in the region of Shkodra.² This house, since the conquest of the city of Shkodra in 1478 by Mehmed II, had been the leading family in the city. They held the post of *sandjak-beg* (governor), and their long

¹ The suffix –li –lı –lu or lü in the Ottoman-Turkish and modern Turkish language are used to point out someone's origin. In this case, since this family was from the village of Bushat, they were called by the locals as *Bushatli*, but the central authority refers to the member of the household as *İşkodrali* or *İskenderiyyeli*. It is interesting that the naming of households and provincial notables differs according to the local and the central point of view. Furthermore, another power magnate as famous as Mahmud, Ali Pasha of Tepelena, was known by central authorities even as Ali Pasha of Ioannina.

² Stavri Naçi, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 59-62; Ahmet Cevdet Paşa. *Tarih-i Cevdet: Tertib-i cedit*, Vol. 3, (Istanbul: Matbaa-yı Osmaniye, 1309 [1893]), p. 275.

occupation of this office for more than two centuries transformed the family into an important *ocak*.³

One of the reasons for the selection as sandjak-begs from this family was their noble origins, as a branch of the Dukagjini household,⁴ which since late medieval times had absolute influence and power in northern Albania. The prestige that they had, along with their local roots, was another important factor, since the Ottomans in the newly conquered regions used a pragmatic approach in appointing office-holders. It was in this context that many Christian Albanian noble families first served as timar-holders, and then, by embracing the religion of the conqueror, began to be enrolled in the military system, so becoming part of the sultan's household.⁵ Becoming part of the Imperial Household was a great privilege and being *a kapi-kulu* [slave of the Porte] was a kind of system that helped the sultan to preserve the power inside his household, and in some cases to revoke the positions or even to execute office holders.⁶

The first person to be mentioned as the sandjak-beg of Shkodra is Yusuf Pasha, and the one who informs us about this important detail is the famous Ottoman traveler of the seventeenth century, Evliya Çelebi. During his travels in the city of Shkodra, Evliya Çelebi was the guest of the governor of Shkodra, Mehmed Pasha. In his memoirs, the Ottoman traveler tells about the appointment of Yusuf Beg as the first

³ For more information regarding *Ocaklık*, see: Orhan Kılıç, "Ocaklık" *DIA*, Vol. 33, (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2007), p. 317-318.

⁴ A letter of Mahmud Pasha of Bushatli (another Mahmud who lived in the first half of the nineteenth century) mentions this important detail regarding the Bushatli family's connections with the Dukagjini Household and was published in: Stavri Naçi, "Te Dhena te Reja rreth Prejardhjes se Familjes se Bushatllijve te Shkodres" [New Evidences relating the origin of Bushatli Family of Shkodra], (Tirane: *Buletini i Universitetit Shtetëror të Tiranës, seria për Shkenca Shoqërore*, Vol. 3, 1961), p. 82. This family is also known for their members who served as grandvizier and as important military figures. The Ottoman sources refer to them as the Dukakin family and their member as Dukakin-zade.

⁵ Halil İnalçık, "Stefan Duşan'dan Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na: XV. asırda Rumeli'de Hıristiyan sipahiler ve menşeleri." In *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu: Toplum ve Ekonomi*, 2nd ed. (Istanbul: Eren Yayıncılık, 1993), p. 72.

⁶ Yaycioglu, Ali. *Partners of the Empire: The crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2016), p. 25.

sandjak-beg of Shkodra by Mehmed the Conqueror, also emphasizing that it was still his family who was ruling at the time.⁷ Furthermore, the traveler, while mentioning the governor, refers to him as Yusuf-Beg-Zade Mehmed Pasha and mentioning that their residence was in the village of Bushat.⁸ This important information recorded by Evliya Çelebi helps us to create the genealogy from the first Bushatlis to those of the second half of the eighteenth century. But since the evidence given by the Ottoman traveler is from the year 1662, we have to trace the other missing part of the family tree through other sources.

The next person who we encounter in the lineage is Koca Suleiman Pasha. According to calculations made by the Albanian historians and thanks to a genealogy tree in the Albanian archives, Koca Suleiman Pasha was probably the nephew of the Yusuf-Beg-Zade Mehmed Pasha that Evliya Çelebi mentioned in his accounts.⁹ Koca Suleiman Pasha, according to the sources, was active between 1685 and 1699, during which years he struggled against the Montenegrins, who back then were the allies of the Venetian Republic on the Adriatic shore. In his work, the Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga also emphasizes his heritage by pointing out his house as the *Bouchatlia*.¹⁰ Moreover, Süleyman Külçe, in his work on Albanians and their history, points out that the pasha also received the rank of vizier in 1689, probably due to Shkodra being a frontier zone in the wars against Venetians and Austrians. The pasha had a great impact in these wars and was known for his good management of military resources, and effective use of the local Albanian troops. For his outstanding services, the Sublime Porte awarded him the title governor of Rumeli in 1695 and *muhafiz* of Temeşvar and Niş.¹¹ After the retirement of Suleiman Pasha in 1699 and the

⁷ Robert Dankoff and Robert Elsie, *Evliya Çelebi in Albania and Adjacent Regions (Kosovo, Montenegro, Ohrid)*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), p. 29.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁹ AQSH [Central State Archives], Fondi 79 Dosja nr. 39.

¹⁰ Nicolae Iorga, *Breve Historie de l'Albanie et du peuple Albanais*, (Bucarest: Impr. Cultura Neamului Românesc: [Institut pour l'étude de l'Europe sud-orientale], 1919), p. 59-60.

¹¹ Temeşvar or Timoşoara is a city in western Romania and Niş is situated in southern Serbia.

appointment of Üsküplü Ali Pasha by the center as governor of Shkodra,¹² the house of Yusuf-Beg-Zade, latter known by the name Bushatli, lost its power and also the privilege of being the heads of the district as governors.

Despite this, the house of Bushatli continued to play an important role, because even though they lost the post of governor, they ruled in the region of Shkodra for more than two hundred years and were part of the sultan's household. Nevertheless, they created strong ties with the central government in Istanbul and over the years probably established connections with many other Albanian notable families. In fact, the monopolization of an official administrative post by the local household across multiple generations like this family had been doing, created the perfect opportunities for a promising career for its members.¹³ Moreover, they had accumulated great wealth not only as timar holders but also by means of trade and other profitable activities. Still, there is a crucial gap regarding the situation of this household in the first half of the eighteenth century, and for that reason, I will try to shed light on this matter by analyzing the socio-economic and administrative characteristics in the region during that period.

2.2. Ottoman Albania in the Early Eighteenth Century

The Albanian lands¹⁴ from the late seventeenth century on: were divided into seven administrative units the *sandjaks* of Shkodra (Scutari), Prizren, Dukagjin (Dukakin), Delvina, Vlore (Aulona), Elbasan and Ohri. All of these were part of the *vilayet* (province) of Rumelia.¹⁵ Despite their common language and ethnicity, the Albanian population, due to geographical barriers, was divided by cultural and dialectic differences. Therefore, the Albanian-speaking population was divided in two main

¹² Süleyman Külçe, *Osmanlı Tarihinde Arnavutluk*, (Izmir: Ticaret Basımevi, 1944), p. 107.

¹³ Yaycioglu, *Partners of Empire*, p. 23.

¹⁴ The word Albanian here does not have a modern national meaning, but is being used to name the lands which were inhabited by the Albanian-speaking population and for which Ottoman and Western sources sometimes use the same term.

¹⁵ Stefanaq Pollo and Arben Puto, *The History of Albania: From its Origins to the Present Days*, translation by Carol Wiseman, Gennie Hole, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 88.

cultural and linguistic groups – in the north were the *Ghegs*¹⁶ and in the south the *Tosks* whose symbolic separation point was River Shkumbini. Compared to the Geghs, who were a much more closed society and isolated from central authority, the Tosks were integrated successfully in the Ottoman society, thus creating strong intellectual-cultural relations with the center, and moreover a considerable political influence in the Ottoman state.¹⁷

Since the fifteenth century, these lands and the Albanian speaking-population were well integrated into the Ottoman state structure, becoming an important factor in the Balkans. In the Ottoman empire, the military and fiscal organization were mainly based on the land tenure or timar system. The timar holders, known in the Ottoman world as *sipahi*, was generally military class members who distinguished themselves in war and were granted *miri*¹⁸ land by the central authority. They had the right to lease the land to a peasant for cultivation, but the cultivator could not sell it and to transfer it another or to leave it fallow. Thus, the main responsibility of the *sipahi* was to make possible the cultivation of the land, which would provide agricultural production. From this, the peasant had to give one-tenth of the products to the timar holder, who would use them to maintain his troops. Yet, in order to prevent a high accumulation of authority under the sipahi, the center would appoint its higher-level representatives like the kadi or sandjakbeg to oversee his activities.¹⁹

The land, in fact, was not given as a personal possession of the sipahi, but only the rights over it. Thus, the *sipahi* had the right to execute the authority given by the center in a defined area and only for specific tasks. In general, the sipahi had an

¹⁶ Even though the meaning of *Tosk* is not known yet, the name Gegh derives from the Hellenic word *Gigas*, meaning giants, probably given due to their body stature.

¹⁷ Isa Blumi, *Rethinking the Late Ottoman Empire: A Comparative Social and Political History of Albania and Yemen 1878-1918*, (Istanbul: The ISIS Press, 2003), p. 27-29.

¹⁸ *Miri* was the general term which was used to refer to all agricultural lands which officially belonged to the the Sultan, who could give a part of it to different military class members for use.

¹⁹ Immanuel Wallerstein, Hale Decdeli and Resat Kasaba, "The Incorporation of the Ottoman Empire into the World-Economy", *The Ottoman Empire and the World-Economy*, ed. Huri Islamoğlu-Inan, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 89.

administrative and fiscal duty. He had to take care of the cultivation, collecting taxes, and recruitment of soldiers during wars.²⁰ However, in the late seventeenth century the territorial expansion of the Ottoman empire stopped and later began the loss of lands at the hands of European states. This was a serious problem, since the system was based on the distribution of new land to the military class. Furthermore, as a consequence, the loss of lands triggered a great displacement of population. All these factors would weaken and change the whole military and fiscal-administrative system of the state.²¹ Moreover, the long wars consumed the state treasury, thus creating an economic crisis for the financial institutions. The shortness of silver in the Ottoman realm was another main problem that the government had to deal with, because the empire's shortage of silver increased prices drastically.²²

The fiscal problems which were depleting the Ottoman treasury led the government in 1695 to launch a new form of tax-farming known as *malikane*.²³ This new fiscal scheme, alongside commercialization, was according to some scholars one of the two main factors which changed the fiscal and administrative structure of the Ottoman state.²⁴ Now, alongside the central officials, new provincial actors began to compete over the exploitation of state resources. Furthermore, these provincial power-holders thanks to their local roots, played an important role in the tax-farming mechanism, proving that without their assistance neither the governors of their regions nor the centrally appointed official could benefit from the new system.

²⁰ Halil Inalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*, translated by Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber, (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), p. 110.

²¹ Immanuel Wallerstein and Resat Kasaba. "Incorporation into The World-Economy: Change in the Structure of the Ottoman Empire, 1750-1839", *Economie et Societes dans l'Empire Ottoman (fin du xviii-debut du xx siècle)*, publies par Jean-Louis Bacque-Grammont et Paul Dumont, (Paris: CNRS, 1983), p. 340.

²² Şevket Pamuk, "The price revolution in the Ottoman Empire reconsidered", *IJMES*, Vol. 33, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 70-73.

²³ For a more detailed explanation on the *Malikane* system, see: Mehmet Genç, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Devlet ve Ekonomi*, (İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2009), p. 101-155.

²⁴ Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 226.

In fact, these local power-holders also mentioned as *ayans* in the Islamic-Turkish literature,²⁵ were originally intermediaries of the community and central government, but later, by effectively using the local resources and through networks with other actors, they strengthened their status at the expense of centrally appointed officials. These local notables in the first half of the eighteenth century, following the commercialization process, began to acquire a great amount of farmlands or chiftliks,²⁶ thus enhancing their incomes. The main difference between the earlier *ayans* and those of the eighteenth century or early nineteenth century lies in the fact that for the first ones the title had an honorific meaning while for the second group that acquired political and social power, they were officially recognized by the central government.²⁷ In Ottoman Albania, due to its geographical position on the Adriatic Sea and having traditional commercial links with Europe, the new economic dynamics, alongside the fading central authority, brought about a serious clash between these new socio-politic actors.

There were two kinds of local notables present in this confrontations. The first was normal *ayans*, whose power derived from the wealth achieved thanks to the new

²⁵ The *ayans* emerged as an important socio-economic factor in the Ottoman empire from the late sixteenth century till the nineteenth century. However, these intermediaries between the center and the local community, according to Marshall Hodgson, were mentioned in Islamic historiography after the Mongol invasion of the 1258 with name of *a'ayn* or *a'yan-amir*. See, Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, V. 2 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 64-66, 91-105. *Ayans* or notables have also been a popular topic in the revisionist historiography beginning after the 1960s with Albert Hourani and continuing today. Some of the main works on the *ayans* or provincial notables are: 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; Deena Sadat, "Urban Notables in the Ottoman Empire: The Ayan," (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1969); Yuzo Nagata, *Muhsin-zade Mehmed Paşa ve Ayanlık Müessesesi* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1976); idem, *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; Yücel Özkaya, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Âyânlık* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1994).

²⁶ On the Ottoman chiftlik system and its relation with the provincial power-holders, see: Halil Inalcik, "The Emergence of Big Farms, Çiftliks: State, Landlords, and Tenants." *In Contributions à l'histoire économique et sociale de l'Empire ottoman*, ed. Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont and Paul Dumont, 105–26. (Louvain: Peeters, 1983).

²⁷ Robert Zens, "Provincial Powers: The Rise of Ottoman Local Notables (Ayan)", *History Studies* 3 (3), 2011, p. 434.

fiscal opportunities launched by the center. In order to protect their sources of wealth, these lesser ayans had to rely on different kinds of military troops. Thanks to the harsh geography in Albania access to mercenaries was easy and moreover, they were well “trained” for these kind of jobs.²⁸ The second kind of notable household was the old households of military backgrounds like the Begoğlus in Pec (Ipek)²⁹, the Çavușoğlus and Bushatlis in Shkodra, the Toptanzades in Kruja (Akçahisar), the Asllani and Alizoti in Ioannina (Yanya) or the Moutzohoussates³⁰ of Tepelena. All these households and other lesser *ayans* in the first half of the eighteenth century caused an anarchy in the region due to their confrontations for official posts, *chiftliks*, and tax revenues. Like in other places of the empire, these competitions between power-holders made the life of the tax-paying population very hard, thus lowering the production and state revenues.

This situation of anarchy is evident in both Ottoman and Western sources. In the district of Shkodra, battles between the households were very frequent, as the Çavușoğlus of Shkodra had to protect the post of the governor from the Begoğlus of Pec (Ipek) and other lesser notables. In these battles, the house of the Bushatlis with its member Suleiman Pasha, who took part in a battle against a certain Yusuf Pasha, was recorded in a report of the Venetian vice consul of Shkodra.³¹ It was only in the second half of the eighteenth century that the household of Bushatlis would reclaim

²⁸ Antonis Anastasopoulos, “Albanians in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Balkans.” In *The Ottoman Empire, the Balkans, the Greek Lands: Toward a Social and Economic History. Studies in Honor of John C. Alexander*, ed. Elias Kolovos, Phokion Kotzageorgis, Sophia Laiou, and Marinos Sariyannis. (Istanbul: Isis, 2007), p. 38-39.

²⁹ While in Turkish the region is called Ipek in Albanian it is called Peja. Mere Hüseyin Pasha was a famous member of this household, as he became Grandvizier of the Ottoman Empire (1622-1623) and also known for his nickname (Mere – Take it!) given for ordering the executions in Albanian language.

³⁰ The famous power magnate Ali Pasha of Tepelena was from this household. For more, see: Dennis Skiotis, “From Bandit to Pasha: First Steps in the Rise to Power of Ali of Tepelena, 1750-1784”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.2 No.3, (Cambridge: Cambridge Publishing Press, 1971), p. 225-226.

³¹ These confrontations and relationships between the provincial notables were recorded by the Venetian vice consuls of Shkodra in their reports sent to the senate and which were collected by Stavri Naci in his work *Shqipëria e Veriut në Shekullin e XVIII: Letra të zev. Konsujve Venedikas të Shkodres* [Northern Albania in the Eighteenth Century: The Letters of the Venetian v/Consuls of Shkodra] V. I (1706-1756), (Tirane: Universiteti Shtetëror i Tiranës, Instituti i Historisë dhe i Gjuhësive, 1967): A.S.V. Cons. di Scutari let. di Andrea Duoda, Dat. 02/II/1747.

the post of *mutasarrif*, thus creating an order of their own under Mehmed Pasha and latter under his son Mahmud.

2.3. Early Life of Mahmud

Mahmud was born in the year 1752 in Shkodra as the second son of Mehmed Beg of the Bushatli household.³² His father was a notable from the village of Bushat, an owner of *chifliks* and fisheries³³, and after a certain time he moved to the city of Shkodra and settled in the neighborhood of the tanners.³⁴ Thanks to the diary of his Franciscan doctor, who at the same time became an important guest in his house, we can have access to important information relating to the childhood of Mahmud.³⁵ In his youth, Mahmud suffered from a potentially fatal bone disease. Fearing for his son, Mehmed Beg asked Pater Erasmo Balneo to look after his son and to use his medical knowledge to heal the child's bones. So, from that moment on, Pater Balneo started to play an important role in the Bushatli household and he also became the mentor of the child for the Latin language.³⁶

Alongside the Franciscan friar, there were Catholics from the northern clans of Albania, who were entrusted to accompany Balneo in his new office. To aid him in his

³² In his book, Stavri Naci states that Mahmud was born between the years 1749 and 1754 by relying to the correspondence of the Russian consul, who mention that in 1794 he was 45 years old. On the other side, a French consul, when speaking of Mahmud's journey in Ragusa (Dubrovnik) in 1782, says that the pasha was around 28 years old. See: Naci, *Pashallek i Shkodres Nen Sundimin e Bushatllinjeve*, p. 126. Furthermore, based on Ottoman documents, the father of Mahmud, Mehmed Pasha, took the vizierate grade in 1771, and Mahmud was given the pasha title when he was approximately 19 years old. See: Arta Mandro-Balili. "Pashalleqet Feudale Shqiptare ne Kendveshtimin e Shtetit dhe te se Drejtes: Rasti i Pashallekut te Shkodres dhe Janines" [Albanian Feudal Pashalleks in the Perspective of State and Justice: The case of Paşalık of Shkodra and Ioannina], (Tirane: Mediaprint, 2008), p. 77.

³³ Since the city of Shkodra was situated between a lake and the sea, one of the main tax-farming sources were the fisheries (*dalyanlar*), which are mentioned in some of the primary sources found in the B.O.A and in the books published by Albanian authors. See, Hamdi Bushati, *Bushatllinjte* [The Bushatlis], p. 81.

³⁴ Naci, *ibid.*, p. 66.

³⁵ At Zef Pllumi, *Frati i Pashallareve Bushatli te Shkodres (At Erasmo Balneo)* [The Friar of the Bushatli Pashas of Shkodra (Pater Erasmo Balneo)], (Shkoder: Botimet Franceskane, 2017), *passim*. The pater after saving the life of a girl who was accidentally buried alive (she had a kind of catalepsy), was introduced to Mehmed Beg, who was a close friend of the girl's father.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34-35.

feuds with other households and factions, Mehmed Beg tried to take advantage of these local clansmen, since at that time they were the strongest warriors, a perfect asset that every magnate would like to have behind his back and who could turn the situation in Shkodra in favor of the Bushatlis. For this reason, he tried to convince Pater Balneo to dwell in the vicinity of his palace, and to achieve this he used his connections and persuaded the archbishop of Shkodra. After succeeding in this task, he built a small church on the other side of the river Buna, so the priest could take care of his ill son and at the same time help him to have access to the “mountain warriors” by showing them his religious tolerance. Furthermore, he asked the priest to serve as an intermediary with the Latin (Italian) merchants in order to sell the agricultural production that he had obtained from the *chiftliks*.³⁷

The main problem regarding the commercial and social activities in Shkodra was the several years of anarchy that had been fostered by the confrontations between the main households of Shkodra over the post of *mutasarrif*.³⁸ These local households, especially till 1756, were taking every kind of measures in order to weaken and later to eliminate the rivals. In the city of Shkodra, there were two main belligerents: The Çavuşoğlus and the Begoğlu family of Pec (Ipek). Added to this were the pirates of Ulcinj (Ülgün), who would not let through any commercial ship from Venice, which was the main trade actor in the Adriatic Sea, thus making the life in the city of Shkodra even more difficult. Even though these local households would compete and battle each other, they preferred to fight “behind the scenes,” thus conducting this race through different actors, in the case of Shkodra via artisan guilds.³⁹

The Guilds Factions and Civil War in Shkodra

While dealing with the health problems of Mahmud, at the same time Bushatli Mehmed had to deal with the confrontations in the bazaar of Shkodra between the

³⁷ Ibid., p. 36-38.

³⁸ The governor who was in charge of the fiscal, military and administrative duties in the *sandjak* (district).

³⁹ See: Naci, “Pashalleku i Shkodres nen Sundimin e Bushatllinjeve”, p. 47-58; François Lenormant, *Turcs et Montenegrins*, (Paris: Didier, 1866), p. 211.

guilds of tanners and tailors. Previously, the guilds were inspected by state representatives like *kadis* and by an intermediary known as *kethüda*, who generally also acted as an agent of the state.⁴⁰ Confrontations between these two guilds in the city of Shkodra showed that the guilds had begun to act more independently from the center, thus creating connections with local households and other important local actors. Behind the tailor faction, there were the merchants and the Çavușoğlu household. Comparing to the tanners, they had a stronger position thanks to their dwelling in the city center. Furthermore, since the Çavușoğlus were supported by the center, the tailor faction, normally benefiting from this connection was in a stronger position vis-à-vis the tanners and their supporters.⁴¹

The tanners, like most of their counterparts in other Ottoman realm were situated outside the city.⁴² In Shkodra, they had a strategic position because their neighborhood lay next to the castle where the office of the *mutasarrıf* was located. When Mehmed moved from his village Bushat to Shkodra, he built a palace in the tanner's neighborhood becoming a member and later the leader of this faction against the tailors and the household of the Çavușoğlus. Mostly, the clashes and the fights between these factions would not occur in the city center but around the *bedestan* or bazaar, revealing the socio-economic features of this factionalism alongside the political.⁴³ For the city to recover, these disastrous conflicts had to end, and the only way for that to happen was the establishment of order. However, the factionalism in Shkodra was mostly a result of the socio-economic and political

⁴⁰ İnalçık, "The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age", p. 152-53; Immanuel Wallerstein and Resat Kasaba, "Incorporation into The World-Economy", p. 339.

⁴¹ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 49.

⁴² Ergenç Özer, *Şehir, Toplum, Devlet: Osmanlı Tarihi Yazıları*, (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 2013), p. 87.

⁴³ The involvement of merchants and artisans in these faction shows the importance of the *bedesten* in the economic life of a city. Furthermore, since any agricultural or manufactured good would be traded or sold in this covered bazaar, which the merchants would even use as a dwelling place, the capture of this important spot would ensure prominent influence in the city. For a more detailed account of the importance of *bedesten* in an Ottoman city see: Özer, *ibid.*, p. 88.

changes that were taking place in the region in the first half of the eighteenth century, thus creating a new socio-political culture in these provinces.⁴⁴

Following the developments in the city, Bushatli Mehmed decided to take strong measures and in 1757⁴⁵ he joined the faction of the Catholic clansmen, who gave a decisive victory to the tanners faction and usurped the city for three days. During this time, these highlanders, known for their ferocity, attacked the leaders of the tailor faction, by killing them and burning down their houses. Even though he was not yet officially recognized by the central government, with the elimination of the other side, Mehmed became the de facto leader of Shkodra. After the victory over the faction of the tailors, he began to impose strict rule securing religion freedom and trade activities, thus creating the desired order.⁴⁶

There are different accounts of how Bushatli Mehmed came to be appointed *mutasarrif* of Shkodra. The first one, based on local folklore and relied on by Albanian and Western historians, says that an official appointed by the center quit his post because of certain difficulties and was then replaced by Mehmed.⁴⁷ In another account, that of Pater Balneo, the centrally appointed official would congratulate Bushatli Mehmed for the order that he had achieved and inform the central government that Bushatli Mehmed was the right man to head the Shkodra *sandjak*.⁴⁸ This event would not only change the life of Bushatli Mehmed, but that of all his

⁴⁴ Jane Hathaway's article on bilateral factionalism could help us understand better the dynamics of this political culture in the Ottoman provinces. See: Jane Hathaway, "Bilateral Factionalism in the Ottoman Provinces" In *Provincial Elites in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Antonis Anastasopoulos, 31-38. (Rethymon: Crete University Press, 2005).

⁴⁵ Even though there is not any evidence to prove Bushatli Mehmed overcame the other faction on this date, we can assume that since he became pasha and *mutasarrif* of Shkodra in that year, the only way to get the post was through restoring order.

⁴⁶ Pllumi, *Fрати i Pashallareve Bushatli*, p. 44-45.

⁴⁷ The history tells about a centrally appointed pasha to Shkodra, when he came Bushatli Mehmed went to welcome him accompanied by half-naked highlanders, thus intimidating him. In his first days, the highlanders would throw stone at his roof during the nights expressing their requests for the payments. See: Naci, "Pashalleku i Shkodres", p.66; Lenormant, *Turcs et Montenegrins*, p. 212.

⁴⁸ Pllumi, *ibid.*, p. 53-55.

household and allies who helped him in this venture, especially the Catholics. For the young Mahmud, the appointment of his father as a governor would be a turning point in his life, since from that moment on, he was the son of an Ottoman official.

2.4. Son of a Pasha

Mehmed Pasha, after moving to the offices of the castle, gave a priority to the education of Mahmud. Thanks to the medicine procured by the Franciscan Pater, Mahmud's illness began to disappear and the boy began to live as normally as his peers. For this reason, he had to be educated as a son of an Ottoman Pasha. First of all, Pater Balneo would take care of his Latin and Italian lessons given in the same way as those in other aristocratic families. Secondly, Molla Salih and Molla Husain⁴⁹ would teach the young Mahmud Ottoman-Turkish, followed by the Persian and Arabic languages, and of course even military training.⁵⁰

Following the different courses that he took from his advisors, Mahmud had to learn the regional customs and traditions of Shkodra. Even though there was a religious diversity, the local tradition and customs were an important factor in the relationships between persons of different backgrounds and religious affiliations.⁵¹ According to Pater Balneo, Mehmed Pasha was a tolerant person, not only in terms of his emphasis on religious equality, which helped secure his alliance with the Catholics, but even with his children. Mustafa, the eldest son, represented him on varied occasions when visiting the chieftains of northern tribes and allowed Mahmud to socialize with children of lower status or of a different religion.⁵² Despite these tolerant behaviors, as an Ottoman pasha, Mehmed gave importance to the discipline

⁴⁹ This period is known in Albanian literature as the time of *beyitecis* (beyteci). Molla Husain was a famous poet in this period. These poets would use their knowledge in eastern poetry and would write poems dedicated to their masters in an Albanian-Ottoman mixed language, thus becoming provincial court poets. See: Naci, "Pashalleku i Shkodres", p. 16.

⁵⁰ Pllumi, *Frati i Pashallareve Bushatli*, p. 61-62.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 72-73.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 74.

of his sons, and due to the traditionalism of the region, he was especially attentive towards the reputation of the household.

It was Mahmud himself who would one day put the prestige of the household at risk by killing the *kahya*⁵³ of his father. This incident was mentioned in different sources and is likely true, though there are variants accounts of how it took place. Pater Balneo says that Mahmud was fourteen years old when he stabbed Murteza Efendi the assistant of his father with a knife, and he says the reason behind this was that Murteza was swindling Mehmed Pasha. He, by deceiving the pasha accumulated unfairly high amounts of money and goods from the treasury which was entrusted to him.⁵⁴ In another version, the daughter of Mehmed Pasha, Kayo Hanım, who was married to Ibrahim Pasha of the Alltuni household,⁵⁵ heard rumors about her father being swindled by Murteza Efendi and decided to step in. Kayo Hanım visited the wife of the assistant and cunningly began to express her pity towards them, saying that she had heard about the difficulties that they were facing and donated some money to them. The wife of Murteza Efendi, irritated by the attitude of the daughter of Mehmed Pasha, exposed all the goods they had at home, thus confirming the rumors about the fraud done to the pasha.⁵⁶

In the end, it was Mahmud who, by killing Murteza Efendi, managed to “save” the honor of his household. Mahmud, after committing the murder, escaped from the palace. Fearing the punishment of his father, he went to the house of his sister in Kavaje, an action which points to the implication of Kayo Hanım in the incident. Ibrahim Pasha of the Alltuni household helped the young boy by giving him large amounts of money and warning him about escaping from his father. Since Mehmed

⁵³ A semi-official tittle given to an assistant of an official.

⁵⁴ Pllumi, *Fрати i Pashallareve Bushatlj*, p. 76.

⁵⁵ The Alltuni household was the ruling family in the region of Kavaja. Mehmed Pasha tried to make alliances with other households and married his daughter to Ibrahim Pasha, who was at the same time responsible for the tax-farming of Drac (Durres).

⁵⁶ Dora D’Istria, “Gli Albanesi mussulmani, Scutari e i Bushatli, Berati e Janina [The Albanian Muslim, Scutari and the Bushatli, Berat and Janina]” in *Nuova Antologia di Scienze ed Arti*, 3, Vol. VIII, (Firenze: Universita di Firenze, 1868), p. 228; Bushati, Hamdi. *Bushatllinjte* [The Bushatli], p. 81.

Pasha was an Ottoman official, he had a strong network of communication in the region and in Istanbul. Thus Mahmud was warned even by the husband of his sister, set off for Filibe (Plovdiv).⁵⁷

It was in Filibe that the life of Mahmud underwent a fundamental turning point, since during this time, he met or was introduced to Cezayirli (Algerian) Hasan Pasha.⁵⁸ According to a letter sent to Balneo, the Kapudan Pasha took Mahmud under his wing in Istanbul and sent him to the royal school in Istanbul near the sultan himself. Pater Balneo and other close friends of Mehmed Pasha tried to reconcile him with Mahmud but did not succeed, since the crime made by the young compromised the prestige of the house.⁵⁹ However, the father expressed his congratulation to his young son, since Mahmud too, like him, made it to the royal school in Istanbul.⁶⁰ Despite the gravity of the crime committed by the son, after two years of intermediation by close friends and Pater Balneo and at the insistence of many prestigious men in Shkodra, Mehmed Pasha decided to forgive the mistake made by Mahmud.⁶¹ Moreover, in 1768 the center gave the title of pasha to Mustafa, the eldest son of Mehmed Pasha, and appointed him to an administrative position, an event which softened the pasha

⁵⁷ Pllumi, *Frati i Pashallareve Bushatli*, p. 77. The Ottoman name Filibe derives from the ancient city of Philippopolis, which now in Bulgaria under the name Plodiv.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79. Pater Balneo mentions a letter written in Italian by Mahmud which was given to him by one of his guards in which Mahmud explains the reasons behind his actions and says that he made a powerful friend known as Kapudan Pasha the Algerian.

⁵⁹ The reconciliation issue was a sacred process in the traditional and clannish society of the northern Albania. Since the crime compromised the name of the family, only persons close to Mehmed Pasha could discuss this matter and submit strong evidence of his innocence; otherwise, the conciliation would fail.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 80. From the dialogue between Mehmed Pasha and Pater Balneo, we can assume that the royal school he meant the *Enderun*, even though we do not have other sources which could help us identify it. Furthermore, the pasha mentioned the fact that he too had studied there and that there was not any other school which could match it in the empire.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 81-82. In the reconciliation process, the intermediators of high prestige also bear a crucial importance. The more famous they are, the more impact they have in the negotiations or in the verdicts.

of Shkodra.⁶² Following the news about his forgiveness, Mahmud returned to Shkodra after three years at the age of seventeen years.⁶³

After being reconciled with the father, Mahmud readapted to the life he had before escaping from the palace. Aside from the Latin courses, he began to read different Western works. According to Balneo, one of Mahmud's favorite books was about the life of Scanderbeg.⁶⁴ Furthermore, Mehmed Pasha assigned him different tasks related to the administration of the district to prepare his son as a surrogate in the district of Shkodra. The reason behind this could be probably the engagement of Mehmed Pasha and Mustafa Pasha in the war against the Russians. Here, the governor of Shkodra together with his eldest son distinguished himself. In the front was present even the head of the Dukakin district, Kahraman of Begoğlu household, who was an enemy of the Bushatlis.

While Mahmud was dealing with fiscal and administrative tasks related to the district, Mehmed Pasha took care of issues on the frontier. He took advantage of the mistakes made by Kahraman Pasha, who was later executed by the Ottoman grand vizier, and obtained the Dukakin district. Secondly, to his eldest son was given the district of Üsküp (Skopje), thus making possible the creation of vast influence zone under the house of the Bushatli.⁶⁵ Mehmed Pasha had a strong feud with the Begoğlu

⁶² Mandro-Balili, *Pashalleqet Feudale*, p. 77.

⁶³ If we take in the consideration the fact that he probable was born in 1752, it means that he returned to Shkodra in 1769.

⁶⁴ Scanderbeg is regarded by the Albanian nationalist as the founder of the first Albanian state in 1444. He was an Ottoman commandant, who after being in the service of the Ottomans rebelled and created his own state on today central Albania. Supported by the Catholic states, even though sometimes they let him down, Scanderbeg managed to protect Kruja (Akcáhisar) three times against Murat II and Mehmed the Conqueror. Several books printed in Europe in many languages tell how a man like Scanderbeg defeated the Ottomans, thus protecting the Christendom. This detail mentioned by Balneo is quite astonishing since it could have affected the life of Mahmud. For Scanderbeg and his relations with the Ottomans, see: Halil İnalçık, "Arnavutluk'ta Osmanlı Hakimiyetinin Yerleşmesi ve İskender Bey İsyanının Menşei." *Fatih ve İstanbul* (İstanbul: Fetih Derneği) 1, no. 2 (1953), p. 153-175.

⁶⁵ Ahmed Vasif Efendi, *Mehâsinü'l-âsâr ve hakâikü'l-ahbâr*, Vol.1, (İstanbul: Dârü't-tıbâati'l-âmire, 1804), p. 26; Naci, *Pashalleku I Shkodres*, p. 95.

household in March of 1669 over Zadrima⁶⁶ and Leş (Alessio),⁶⁷ but at that time he could not eliminate the notables of that region. However, after Kahraman Pasha was executed, the central government granted to Mehmed Pasha the control over the district of Dukakin. After the Bushatli officially took whole district under his authority, he then got the chances to eliminate the notables of Leş.⁶⁸ These were only some of the accomplishments that the governor of Shkodra would achieve in this time of war. Nevertheless, these circumstances were a good opportunity for the provincial notables to negotiate with the center and the bureaucrats for promotions, offices, tax-farming, and other revenue sources, since in this period the Ottoman army consisted of troops provided by these regional entrepreneurs.⁶⁹

After returning from the front with Mustafa, Mehmed Pasha in 1770, sent Mahmud to Dubrovnik on the advice of Pater Balneo. The reason behind this was his previous disease and the fear of its returning. Pater Balneo feared that Mahmud's body would sicken after a certain age, so they departed to the famous old city. According to the Pater, the ceremonial welcome Mahmud received there was worthy of a European prince, and the council of the city showed great respect to him.⁷⁰ The reason behind this was the great economic influence that his father had in the Adriatic Sea and, since the merchants of the Dubrovnik regularly visited the seacoast and the ports under the custody of Mehmed Pasha, these ceremonies were to be expected. After the ceremonies, Mahmud went to the Franciscan pharmacy of Dubrovnik⁷¹ to get examined by the competent friar doctors there. Regarding the previous disease of Mahmud, the doctors emphasized the risk of him being sterile, something which was

⁶⁶ A fertile region to the south of Shkodra and part of the Dukakin district, which Mehmed Pasha would attack and take from the other notables.

⁶⁷ A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazo, let. di A. Simoneti dt. 28/III/1769.

⁶⁸ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 94-95.

⁶⁹ Yaycioglu, *Partners of the Empire*, p. 67.

⁷⁰ Pllumi, *Frati i Pashallareve Bushatli*, p. 85-87.

⁷¹ This pharmacy, founded in 1317, was one of the oldest in the Europe and belonged to the order of Franciscan friars. It was from here that Pater Balneo used to get the medicine for the disease of Mahmud and consult with more experienced doctors.

common for people who experienced the same illness. Despite being an important issue in the life of the young boy, they decided to keep this detail from him.⁷²

2.5. The Efforts of a Father

While the war against the Russians was becoming inconvenient for the center, Mehmed Pasha, as provincial notable in a frontier zone, could turn this situation in his favor. During this time, the region of Montenegro, which was inhabited by semi-autonomous clans living in the highlands, began to fall under the influence of Russia, thus constituting a major problem for the security of this region. The tribesmen of these harsh regions would engage with banditry, thus creating disorder in the region, and due to their pugnacious characteristics, it was difficult to deal with them.⁷³ Following this, the center decided to build a navy in Shkodra, which could stop any hostile activity in the Adriatic and, more importantly, prevent any attack from the Russian navy. In fact, the fear of an offensive from the west coast was always present, and in order to prevent this from happening, the Ottoman central authorities supported Mehmed Pasha with goods and pecuniary aid, following the start of war and later on.⁷⁴

The primary task of this navy was to defend the western coastline from the enemy of the Sublime Porte, but at the same time to protect the commercial activities that the governor of Shkodra was undertaking with his personal fleet in Ulcinj.⁷⁵ In fact, the protection of the sea routes and commercial subjects, Ottoman or non-Ottoman from piracy was of crucial importance, since during times of war certain corsair would benefit from the lack of authority to plunder ships. For this reason, Mehmed Pasha on 26th of March 1770 was entrusted with the protection of the Adriatic Sea from the

⁷² Pllumi, *Ibid.*, p .94-95.

⁷³ B.O.A. TS.MA.e 529, 2 [29 Z 1183 (25 Nisan 1770)]. In order to neutralize the banditry activities of the Montenegrins supported by the Russians, the Sublime Porte asked Mehmed Pasha to assist the governor of Bosnia.

⁷⁴ B.O.A. C.AS. 1220, 54762 [11 M 1182 (28 May 1768)].

⁷⁵ Pllumi, *Frati i Pashallareve Bushatli*, p. 98.

attacks of the pirates towards the commercial ships, and especially those belonging to Venetian subjects.⁷⁶

These efforts by the governor of Shkodra on behalf of the center were beyond his position as Ottoman pasha or government official because Mehmed Pasha had interests that he would reveal later. Furthermore, in addition to his naval services in the Adriatic, Mehmed Pasha had his son Mustafa Pasha sent with ten ships to assist the Ottoman *Kapudan*⁷⁷ (Captain) during the maritime campaign against the Morea (Peloponnese),⁷⁸ even though he failed miserably.⁷⁹ Due to the participation of him and his family in these different tasks given by the center, and since the district of Shkodra had a crucial role in the wars against the Russians and Austrians, Mehmed Pasha began to negotiate for more privileges. Furthermore, considering the circumstances in which the Ottoman center found itself, they had no other choice but to grant the “noble” requests of their own governor.

On 27 August 1770, the governor of Shkodra informed the center that he received the imperial decree together with money, and stated that twenty warships were on their way to the front. In addition to this, by taking advantage of the delicate situation of the Ottoman center, especially after the battle of Chesma (Çeşme),⁸⁰ Mehmed Pasha demanded the title of vizier, the command of the navy that was planned to be created on the Albanian seashore and, for Mahmud, the *mutesarıflık* (governorship)

⁷⁶ B.O.A. C.BH. 238, 11057 [29 Z 1183 (26 Mart 1770)]. Moreover, as we understand from this document the center organized the protection of the sea coast altogether with regional actors, and would support them with weaponry or money.

⁷⁷ This title was normally used for the captains of ships, but at the same time, as in this context, may mean the supreme commander of the Ottoman navy.

⁷⁸ B.O.A. C.BH. 8, 364 [20 Z 1183 (17 Mart 1770)]; Yuzo Nagata, *Muhsin-zade Mehmed Paşa ve Ayanlık Müessesesi*, Study of Languages & Cultures of Asia & Africa, Tokyo Shupan: Tokyo, 1976, p.52.

⁷⁹ Pllumi, *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Virginia H. Aksan, *Ottoman Wars 1700-1870: An Empire Besieged*, (London: Pearson Longman, 2007), p. 154. Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New: The Ottoman Empire under Selim III 1789-1807*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 10. In this naval war, the Ottomans suffered a heavy defeat against the Russians between 5 and 7 July, and the fact that the navy had to be rebuilt favored the interest of Mehmed Pasha.

of Shkodra. Yet, despite the young age of his son, the pasha went beyond by asking for Mahmud even the title of *mir-i miran*,⁸¹ and for his youngest son Ahmed, a district like Elbasan.⁸²

Regarding the promotions of the three Bushatlis, the Venetian authorities, due to their regional politico-economic interests, tried closely observe these matters. The influence of the governor of Shkodra included the port towns from which they were supplied with corn, leathers, and tobacco. With his last move, however Mehmed Pasha was becoming most powerful man in northern Albanian and exerting his influence from Adriatic seashore to Serbia and Macedonia.⁸³ Also, neutralizing rival households by force⁸⁴ or by interfering in their internal affairs, Mehmed Pasha's purpose was to make sure that his authority would not be questioned by any one.⁸⁵ In fact, these political movements were to ensure the authority of Bushatlis in the region, and at the same time to strengthen the operation of their network of alliances with other households.

The Vizier of Shkodra

⁸¹ For the meaning of the title *mir-i miran* see: Mehmet İpşirli, "Beylerbeyi", *DİA*, Vol. 6, (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1992), p. 69-73. A governor with the title of *mir-i miran*, had two ranks, and if he received the title of vizier, as in the case of Mehmed Pasha, he would have three ranks. In the military hierarchy, the number of ranks signified at the same time the limits of one's of jurisdiction and authority in a given area.

⁸² B.O.A. TS.MA.e. 670, 24 [5 Ca 1184(27 August 1770)]; A document in the National Library of Bulgaria and which in the book of Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 202-3, speaks of the arrival of the letter of Mehmed Pasha at the office of the grand vizier, and the demand for the promotion of Mehmed Pasha and his sons.

⁸³ A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazo, let. di Alfonso Penco Dt. 10/X/1771.

⁸⁴ The most problematic family for the Bushatlis were the Toptanis or, as they are called in the Ottoman sources the Topdan-zades of Kruja. The main reason for this hostility between the two household was the continuous fight of the Topdan-zades against Ibrahim Bargjini of Tirana, an ally of the Bushatlis in central Albania. Nevertheless, Mehmed Pasha cunningly would eliminate their leadership, while they were guests in the house of Ibrahim, in Tirana. See: A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazo, let. di Alfonso Penco Dt. 04/X/1771.

⁸⁵ On another occasion regarding the house of Alltuni in Kavaje, his son-in-law Ibrahim Pasha while returning from the war in Mora died leaving his place as the leader of the city, and the office in the mukataa of Durres vacant. For this reason, Mehmed Pasha immediately wed his widow daughter with Suleiman Beg, brother of deceased Ibrahim Pasha. See: A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazo, let. di Dt. 13/II/1772.

The exact date Mehmed Pasha officially took the rank of vizier and Mahmud became the new governor of Shkodra is not given precisely in the Ottoman sources, though they give the year, H 1185, which for the Gregorian calendar is between the years 1771 and 1772. However, we know from the Venetian consuls of Durres that the promotion of the Bushatlis was certain by January 1772 even though the imperial decrees announcing it had not yet arrived. According to the rumors recorded in the region, the appointment of Mehmed Pasha as head of the Ottoman fleet in the Adriatic and of Mahmud as governor of Shkodra was something to be expected. Furthermore, the letters containing the congratulations and greeting for the promotions had already been sent to the Bushatli household.⁸⁶

It was on 29 March 1772 that the official decrees reached the Bushatlis. They carried not only confirmation of the promotions but also promises to provide the new vizier with the necessary pecuniary funds to provide nearly six thousands of men for the navy that was to be created. Moreover, the Venetians, as understood from their correspondence, began to be worried about Mehmed and his households because now not only he was given the official title vizier, but his political influence now reached their dominions and included a vast region up to the city of Manastir.⁸⁷ The main concern for the state of Venice was that now there was no one who could rival with “old man”⁸⁸ of the Bushatlis, because now he was in a class of his own, or at least for the moment.⁸⁹

Before the arrival of the Bushatlis, Shkodra was a district which suffered from the anarchy caused by the clash between different households. In addition to this, production and manufacturing were negatively affected by these tremendous

⁸⁶ A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazo, let. di Alfonso Peco Dt. 13/II/1772.

⁸⁷ The city of Manastir as it is called in the Ottoman and Albanian, sources was an important administrative center for the Ottoman government in the Balkans. Moreover, the seat of the governor of Rumelia was in this city, which today is known by the name Bitola.

⁸⁸ In the Albanian sources and folklore, Mehmed Pasha was called “Plaku,” meaning “old man,” in order to distinguish him from the other descendants of the household who would bear his name.

⁸⁹ A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazo, let. Dt. 29/III/1772.

confrontations, which ruined the economy and made the life of the people miserable. Following the problems on the ground, the piracy with the corsairs of the Ulcinj made the flourishing of the city and maritime commerce impossible. On the other hand, the Catholics were marginalized and prejudiced by the previous leadership of Shkodra. After fifteen years of ruling the Shkodra district, the Bushatlis managed to bring “order” to the region. As seen from their policy, they tried to eliminate any kind of troublemaker or obstacle that would hamper the stabilization process. Yet, the question is how did they manage to achieve the order and what was this stabilization process about?

Following the appointment of Mahmud as the new governor of Shkodra, there was a conversation between father and son that helps us to understand the question above, and which was present in the memoirs of friar Balneo:

Always remember that the people want to live in peace, prosperity, and fairness. That is why I have tried not to take sides, thus being unbiased for both religious and faction [Tanners and Tailors] issues. For me they are all equal be them rich or poor, townsmen, peasants or highlanders, Christians or Muslims. I have fought the merciless and the households supporting them. I secured roads and the sea routes because through them circulates the life and the wealth. From the taxes levied from the people, I did not deliver anything to the Sultan and the Sublime Porte, nevertheless, I received from them because I succeeded in convincing them, that here in this part of the Empire, bordered with Venice was necessary to have a navy for the war. But do you know what’s building a navy is about? ...Shkodra has developed so much that only Istanbul can surpass it! Of course, our household has had great incomes, and at the same time the merchants of Shkodra too, and as I understand now the army of the Christian highlanders is necessary for the peacefulness of this commercial city...⁹⁰

The dialogue between Mahmud and his father summarizes perfectly the fifteen years of Bushatli leadership in Shkodra, emphasizing the importance of the economy and commercial activities in the development of the city. Furthermore, the necessity of having a military force to protect the order and the strong influence over other

⁹⁰ Pllumi, *Frati i Pashallareve Bushatli*, p. 100-101.

households made Bushatli Mehmed a power magnate,⁹¹ whose authority in Northern Albanian was beyond dispute. In addition to this, by obtaining the vizierate, Mehmed Pasha was at the same time a representative of the sultan's authority in his provinces and had the right to collect revenues.⁹² Moreover, he could issue imperial decrees for the provinces, and considering that Mahmud and his brothers had official titles, too made the Bushatli household in the eyes of the central government the reference point about north Albania.

2.6. The Paşalık of Shkodra after the Death of Mehmed Pasha

In a period of two years (1770-1772), the "Old" Pasha of the Bushatlis managed to spread his authority by force and to manipulate the central government through negotiations on different occasions. As a consequence, the Bushatlis obtained and were "de facto" rulers of the districts of Shkodra, Dukakin, Ohrid, and Üsküp (Skopje). All these districts combined together would form the Paşalık of Shkodra⁹³, which acted as a unitary administrative body under Mehmed Pasha. The paşalık, rather than the seat of a random Ottoman pasha, starting from the second half of the eighteenth century till the centralization process of Mahmud II, was a semi-autonomous politico-administrative formation that emerged as a result of the transformation Ottoman state was going through at that time.⁹⁴ This formation, which differs from the classical Ottoman division unit of *sandjak*, represented the interests of the provincial notables

⁹¹ On the conditions and characteristics of the power magnates, see: Engin D. Akarlı, "Provincial Power Magnates in Ottoman Bilad al-Sham and Egypt, 1740–1840." In *La vie sociale dans les provinces arabes à l'époque ottomane*, ed. Abdeljelil Temimi, 3: p. 41–56, (Tunisia: Centre d'études et de recherches ottomanes, morisques, de documentation et d'information), 1988.

⁹² Yaycıoğlu, *Partners of the Empire*, p. 23-24.

⁹³ The word pashallek in Albanian or paşalık in Turkish and, as it is used in English, paşalık is used in Western and Balkan historiography to name the administrative division of the Ottoman state. Yet, power magnates like the Bushatlis, Osman Pasvantoglu or Ali Pasha of Tepelena created a new unofficial division by bringing together other districts through official appointments or by force.

⁹⁴ This phenomenon, which was started by Mehmed Pasha, would spread to other Balkan territories, where famous figures like Ali Pasha of Tepelena or Osman Pasvanoglu of Vidin would create the same formation known in historiography as the Paşaliks of Ioannina and Belgrade. See: Rossitsa Gradeva, "Osman Pazvantoglu of Vidin: Between Old and New." In *The Ottoman Balkans, 1750–1830*, ed. Frederick F. Anscombe, 115–61. Princeton, (NJ: Markus Wiener, 2006); Robert Zens, "Pasvanoğlu Osman Paşa and the Paşalık of Belgrade, 1791–1807." *IJTS* 8, nos. 1–2 (2002), p. 89–104; Fleming, Katherine Elizabeth. *The Muslim Bonaparte: Diplomacy and Orientalism in Ali Pasha's Greece*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

in conjunction with those of other local actors like merchants, guilds, landowners, or the clerical class.⁹⁵

Problems with the Center

After becoming a vizier, Mehmed Pasha began to ignore the duties that the Sublime Porte entrusted to him. He devoted all his energy to consolidate order, thus carefully addressing any kind of issue that might create problems in the future. Reconciliation with the Toptanis of Kruja was essential due to their position on the trade route that connected Shkodra with the port of Durres. Because this route had vital importance for the merchants of Shkodra, the vizier on 25 June 1772 made peace with the notables of Kruja.⁹⁶

As for the assistance that he should provide to the center against the Albanian rebels in Morea,⁹⁷ the Bushatli vizier began on purpose to delay the preparation as much as he could. These kinds of actions were common among provincial notables, who tended to reserve resources against a rival that could to attack him while he was carrying out a task elsewhere. Even the Venetian officials were aware of the actions of the vizier, also noting the impatience of the Grand Vizier Muhsin-zade towards Mehmed Pasha.⁹⁸ Sending his sons instead of accomplishing the duties by himself was another issue that was driving a wedge between the center and the vizier. Thus, even though he began the preparations for assisting the center in the campaign in Greece, it was his son Mustafa who was in charge of the operation.⁹⁹ This stance of Mehmed Pasha and his independent attitudes posed a problem for the authority of the central government in the region. Moreover, while Mahmud was serving in

⁹⁵ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 5-6.

⁹⁶ A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazo, let. Dt. 25/VI/1772.

⁹⁷ After the suppression of the Rebellion in Morea in 1770, a considerable number of Albanian mercenaries who were incorporated in the Ottoman army refused to leave the place and began to plunder everything, thus creating an anarchy in the peninsula. See: Aziz Berker, "Mora ihtilali tarihçesi veya Penah Efendi mecmuası, 1769." *TV 2*, no. 7 (1942): 63–80; no. 8 (1942): 153–60; no. 9 (1942): 228–40; no. 10 (1942): 309–20; no. 11 (1943): 385–400; no. 12 (1943): p. 473–80.

⁹⁸ A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazo, let. e A. Albergheti Dt. 25/VI/1772.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, Dt. 6/X/1772.

Silistre in 1774, the central government sent a letter to the vizier by reminding him that the governance of Shkodra belonged to his son and that Mehmed should abdicate the post.¹⁰⁰

This reckless behavior of Mehmed Pasha towards the center would draw a harsh response, as the sister of sultan would take the right of Durres¹⁰¹ tax-farming (*mukataa*) and giving it to Kurd Ahmed Pasha, a notable of Berat. Thus, for the year 1775, this notable of southern origin would have the possibility to take possession of the wealthy region of Durres. Noting the power which the Bushatlis had obtained, the center government tried to re-balance the power in the region, thus provoking a confrontation between the two pashas.¹⁰² Following the first skirmishes between the two belligerents, where Mahmud and Mustafa lead the troops victoriously, the tax-farming of Durres remained inside the paşalık of Shkodra.¹⁰³

Despite this, new problems began to arise in the Paşalık with the death of Mehmed Pasha on 14 July 1775¹⁰⁴. The first who tried to take advantage of this was the Sublime Porte, which immediately sent Köstendil Mehmed Pasha as the new vizier in Shkodra.¹⁰⁵ Following his arrival, the new vizier faced a strong opposition from the local actors and of course from the Bushatli family, too. Even though the governorship of Shkodra officially belonged to Mahmud, due to Albanian customs,

¹⁰⁰ B.O.A. C.AS 556, 23335 [14 Z 1187(26 February 1774)].

¹⁰¹ Esmâ Sultan the Elder was the owner of this fertile land, which had high incomes and important ports for commercial activities. For more information regarding her, see: Tülay Artan, "From Charismatic Leadership to Collective Rule: Introducing Materials on the Wealth and Power of Ottoman Princesses in the Eighteenth Century" *Dünü ve Bugünüyle TOPLUM ve EKONOMİ*, Sayı 4, Nisan 1993, p.64-66.

¹⁰² B.O.A. AE. SABH.I 316, 21256 [26 S 1189 (28 April 1775)]. As we understand from this document, Esmâ Sultan tried to stop the dispute of the Albanian pashas that was occurring in her estate.

¹⁰³ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 106-109.

¹⁰⁴ A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazo, let. di Alfonso Penco Dt. 25/VII/1775. There are many opinions about the cause of his death. Some to poisoning, and others to natural causes. Pater Balneo would explain in his memoirs, that it would have been impossible task to poison someone as clever as Mehmed Pasha, instead stating that the cause of his death was acute appendicitis.

¹⁰⁵ A.S.V. Cons. di Scutari, let. di Andrea Duoda Dt. 10/XI/1775; Naci, *ibid*, p. 116.

the eldest child of the family had the right to take the leadership of the household. Thus the authority in the Paşalık now belonged to Mustafa Pasha. In addition to this, the new vizier was deprived of any authority, since all the allies of the Bushatli household had sworn to support only Mustafa Pasha.¹⁰⁶

It was for this reason that Hasan Pasha the Algerian had to come and negotiate matters with Mahmud and Mustafa Pashas. His presence probably was due to his close relations with Bushatli Mahmud, but he ultimately decided to let Mustafa become governor of Shkodra.¹⁰⁷ Considering the importance of the tax-farming of Durrës for the merchants of Shkodra and for the paşalık itself, Bushatli Mustafa began preparations for the war against Kurd Ahmed Pasha. For the Sublime Porte, this was a chance to balance the powers in the difficult region of Albania, thus the classical method of *divide et impera* was giving its fruits.¹⁰⁸

On 13 September 1775, the two armies clashed at the city of Peqini,¹⁰⁹ which resulted in the decisive victory of Kurd Ahmed Pasha, who dealt the Bushatlis a hard blow by destroying their army.¹¹⁰ The Bushatlis in a single battle lost almost all the southern regions of the paşalık, including ports and tax-farms, thus diminishing the area of influence. Moreover, other enemies, taking advantage of the situation, began to conspire against the Bushatlis, making their situation even worse.¹¹¹ In the aftermath of the battle, Mustafa Pasha began to have more collaborative relations with Köstendil Mehmed Pasha. The main reason behind this was to obtain the

¹⁰⁶ A.S.V., Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Pllumi, *Frati i Pashallareve Bushatli*, p. 106-107.

¹⁰⁸ Putting two strong notables against each other was more convenient for the central government than trying to eliminate them using its own resources.

¹⁰⁹ Situated in the middle of the western region of Albania, this city in the Ottoman sources is called Peklin and in the Italian ones as Pechino.

¹¹⁰ A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazzo, let. di Alfonso Penco Dt. 13/IX/ 1775.

¹¹¹ Ibid., let. di Dt. 20/IX/1775.

intermediation of the vizier with the center, thus avoiding a punishment from the Ottoman government.¹¹²

Though he delayed the punishment from the center, the same thing could not be said for the other provincial notables, who would reunite forces with Kurd Ahmed Pasha against the Bushatlis a month after the defeat of Peqini. However, this time the victory was on the side of Bushatlis, who managed to stop the coalition of the other local notables in the vicinity of Zadrime.¹¹³ Despite this, the loss of Durres had a tremendous effect on the economy of the paşalık of Shkodra, denying the access to the Adriatic port to the merchants of the city. In addition, the rebellion of the pasha of İşbuzi,¹¹⁴ in the northern part of paşalık where Mahmud himself failed to suppress it, made the situation for his brother more problematic.¹¹⁵

The End of Mustafa Pasha

In desperate attempt to receive forgiveness from the Sublime Porte, the governor of Shkodra sent his emissaries to Istanbul and ordered them to spend whatever sum required.¹¹⁶ Soon thereafter, the vizier decided to join forces with the notable of Berat, who in less than two years had demolished the paşalık of Shkodra, that “Old” Bushatli had put so much effort into creating. When an army led by Köstendil Mehmed Pasha was about to attack Lezha (Leş), an envoy appeared and presented an imperial decree forgiving the Bushatlis. In return, the Sublime Porte demanded from the Bushatlis a payment of some two thousand sacks of money, which, considering their delicate position, was for them a sum worthy of spending.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 120.

¹¹³ A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazo let. di Alfonso Penco Dt. 29/I/1776.

¹¹⁴ It is located in Montenegro under the name of Spuž while in Albanian is called Shpuza.

¹¹⁵ Naci, *ibid*, p. 122.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁷ A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazo let. di Alfonso Penco Dt. 08/IX/1776. In this period, ties with the center were essential for the provincial notable, firstly, for economical profits, and secondly, to create an influence by attracting bureaucrats, members of sultan’s household, and other central figures, so they could intermediate to the sultan in their name.

After forgiveness was granted to Mustafa Pasha, he remained governor of Shkodra. Though we do not have exact information about the date when he left the governorship of Shkodra, we know that he still occupied the position as late as 1778. Then, he was asked to assist the Ottoman army in Morea by recruiting two thousand soldiers.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, in the memoirs of Pater Balneo, too, we see that Mustafa did really go to Morea, where he ruled for two years.¹¹⁹ His career as an Ottoman pasha, ended in southern Albanian, where he was appointed governor of the Delvine district. It is difficult to know what happened to Mustafa following his participation in the campaign of Mora, yet according to Mehmed Süreyya, he was murdered by the bandits while serving in the district of Delvine.¹²⁰ The veracity of this version is hard to prove since neither Pater Balneo nor the other Italian sources mention such an event and the Ottoman sources show us that he was already dead in a document written on July 1784.¹²¹ However, even though Mustafa remained alive as governor of Shkodra during his military assistance in Morea until 1784, it was Mahmud who was the de facto ruler in the district. Nevertheless, it was Mahmud who had to lead and remedy the situation of the paşalık, which, due to the failures caused by his brother, had been brought to the brink of disintegration in less than two years.

Conclusion

The rise of the Bushatlis, as we understand from this chapter was made possible in a conjuncture of different socio-economic and political factors that appeared in the Ottoman eighteenth century. These changes were fostered by the decision-making mechanism of the central government, which created the necessary conditions for the emergence of the provincial notables like Bushatli Mehmed Pasha. He used his local roots to take advantage of the socio-political circumstances in the problematic city of Shkodra, and through a *social-network* created a semi-autonomous formation

¹¹⁸ B.O.A. C.AS 1180, 52627 [28 ZA 1191 (28 December 1777)].

¹¹⁹ Pllumi, *Fрати i Pashallareve Bushatli*, p. 109.

¹²⁰ Mehmed Süreyya Bey, *Sicill-i Osmanî: Yahud tezkire-i meşahir-i Osmaniye* ([Istanbul] Matbaa-i Âmire, 1308–1311 [1890–1893]); new ed. by Nuri Akbayar and Seyit Ali Kahraman, Vol. 5/2, (Istanbul: Kültür Bakanlığı ile Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1996), p. 24.

¹²¹ B.O.A. TS. MA.e 430, 5 [11 Ca 1193 (27 May 1779)].

known as Paşalık. This social-network system tended to replace the classical method of central appointing officials since it nullified the exertion of the authority for the officials coming from outside. Furthermore, in the Paşalık formation, we have many local actors and allies who had common interests with the Bushatlis. Thus, after the death of Mehmed Pasha, his sons, Mustafa and Mahmud were able to rule and benefit from the support of the allies of the household, as long as their interests were protected.



CHAPTER III

THE RE-EMERGENCE OF THE PAŞALIK UNDER BUSHATLI MAHMUD

Composed of six parts, in this chapter I focus on the activities and the measures taken by Mahmud, after replacing his elder brother to revive the Paşalık for which his father dedicated all this life. In the first and the second parts, there is the description of the politics issued by the Bushatli, who after a passive stance began to impose through force his authority on the regions which were seized by the Pasha of Berat, thus by taking them back. As for the third part, I try to shed light on the approach and methods used by the central government to restrain its provincial notables who were challenging the authority by causing disorder and turmoil. The next part shows the opposition of Mahmud as he was to be appointed in a different region far from Shkodra and following his refuse, we see a military punishment charged to him which, however, failed. Lastly, the fifth and sixth parts tell about the economic policies and commercialist activities of Mahmud and his relation with the neighbor maritime powers like Dubrovnik and Venice.

3.1. The New Governor of Shkodra

Mahmud took the title of pasha and the governorship of Shkodra in the year 1771, when he was just around nineteen years old. However, it was his father who, as the head of the household and representative of the local actors of Shkodra, actually administered the district of Shkodra, as well as those of Dukakin, Üsküp and Ohri. Despite the complaints of the center, he managed to create a zone of influence through marriages, alliances and agreements, where his household would lead over the other rival families. The misguided policies and incompetence of his eldest son, Mustafa Pasha, led to the disintegration of the paşalık, and in addition to this the Sublime Porte began to pursue the activities of the Bushatlis with suspicion. Furthermore, the main policy of the center towards this “problematic” household was to send them away from Shkodra, since their elimination would have been difficult, given the distant and harsh geography in which they were located.

However, the biggest difficulty for the center in dealing with the leader of Shkodra was the Bushatli's strong local roots. They had many alliances and supporters from socio-economic and armed groups, who made the Bushatlis representatives of their interests and intermediaries with the Porte. It was for this reason that after the death of "Old" Mehmed Pasha, it was his sons who succeeded him as administrators of the district of Shkodra. Despite the appointment of other individuals to the post of governor, the district and its local actors would support and deal only with the Bushatlis heirs, who in their eyes were the only ones fit to protect their interests and integrity against outside rivals. Even though Mustafa Pasha failed in this task and lost almost all of what his father had gained in twenty years, they still supported Mahmud and consequently in 1778, he became officially and legitimately the governor of Shkodra.¹

The first task was to restore the old zone of influence that his father created through alliances and to act carefully towards the center. Mahmud Pasha also, had to take care of the old enemy of his predecessors, Ahmed Kurd Pasha who was trying with all kind of tools to hold the Bushatlis away from his dominions. However, in some cases these two rivals would find themselves fighting together in the Ottoman war campaigns, like in July 1778, where they were present with their troops in northern Black Sea region under the command of Abdi Pasha. Strangely, in a document issued on 25 July 1778 there is recorded the desertion of the soldiers who belonged to the two Albanian pashas.²

¹ The support of the local actors was not something guaranteed and did not always work out. There were opposition groups within Shkodra who were not happy with the politics of the Bushatlis, and in 1776, after the confrontation between the Bushatlis and Kurd Ahmed Pasha, the *kullukçubaşı* of Shkodra rebelled against Mustafa Pasha. *Kullukçu*, as a word, was used to name the Janissaries or other officials who were part of the central government and used to take care of the order in the provinces. See: Mehmet Z. Pakalın, *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü*, C.2, (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1983), p. 250. This incident in Shkodra shows that the presence of the Ottoman center was not limited only to high-ranking officials, but also included lesser officials. However, Mustafa Pasha managed to eliminate them and others who would oppose the Bushatlis, see: Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 123.

² B.O.A. C.AS. 1203, 53867 [29 C 1192(25 July 1778)].

Even though there is not mention of why the troops deserted, it is possible to assume that the rivalry between provincial notables may have been a factor in these kinds of incidents during the preparations for war. Furthermore, the Ottoman army on the European front during this period was composed mainly of mercenary troops provided by these provincial notable.³ For these notables the main focus lay on the other rival, who might try to seize their estates or positions. Thus holding armed troops in reserve for local fights had a major importance for them. In addition to this, Mahmud and Ahmed Kurd Pasha's competition over the tax-farming of Durres caused a general mobilization and wariness on the part of both pashas.

A Wolf for Enemy

Kurd Ahmed Pasha⁴ was a member of the Ngurza household. They were a wealthy notable family whose activities were focused mainly in the district of Vlora.⁵ The Ngurza family was an ally of the Velabishti household, which under Ismail Pasha became the leader of the Vlora district. Like the Bushatlis, Ismail Pasha succeeded in creating a great zone of influence, the center of which was the city of Berat. After being married to someone from the Ngurza, he gave his sister in marriage to Kurd Ahmed Pasha, who from that moment on became the second most-powerful man in Berat. Following problems with the center and the Vlora family,⁶ Ismail Pasha died, and Kurd Ahmed Pasha took his place as leader in the district.⁷

³ Virginia H. Aksan, "Mobilization of warrior population in the Ottoman context 1750-1850", *Fighting for a Living: A Comparative Study of Military Labour 1500-200*, ed. Erich-Jan Zürcher, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), p. 347-348.

⁴ The word *Kurd* or *Kurt* in Turkish has the meaning of wolf and was also used as a nickname by many Ottoman figures.

⁵ Petrika Thengjilli, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar [The History of the Albanian Nation] 395-1875*, (Tirane: Botimet Toena, 2000), p. 271.

⁶ Not to be confused with the city of Vlora or Avlonya as mentioned in Ottoman sources. They were an old household with a military background, whose origins date back to the fifteenth century. Later, the members of this household took the name of city and were called as *Avlonyali* in Ottoman sources and Vlora in Albanian ones. For more information on the origins of the family, see: Abdulhamit Kirmızı, *Avlonyalı Ferid Paşa: Bir Ömür Devlet*, (İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2014), p. 19-21.

⁷ Thengjilli, *ibid*, p. 280.

One of the greatest achievement in the career of the pasha of Berat was probably his appointment as *derbendler başbuğu*⁸ (guardian of passes), which was an important post that allowed him to maintain strict control over southern Albania. After Kurd Ahmed took the post in March 1775, later he began to deal with the Albanian bandits who were causing anarchy in the Balkans. Moreover, thanks to this position he could had favorable access to Albanian mercenary troops, whose main duty was to fight the bandits who were responsible for the disorder.⁹ However, for a provincial notable like Kurd Ahmed Pasha, the positions granted by the center were important since through them he could fulfill his personal interests. Thus, in this case the leader of Berat could easily mobilize military troops to protect his estates or, as in the case of the Bushatlis, eliminate his opponents.

Aware of this fact, Mahmud tried to avoid any direct confrontation with the Pasha of Berat. The reason for this was not only that Kurd Ahmed could rely on a considerable number of armed troops, but also that the situation between Bushatlis and the Sublime Porte was strained. Hence, any kind of attack that might disrupt the balances in the region would have been crushed severely by the central government, which in two years managed somehow to put an end to the conflict between these two rivals. On the other hand, even the leader of Berat followed a passive policy. Despite losing the right over the tax-farming of Durres to Hasan Aga from Istanbul and Adem Aga of Toptanis, Kurd Pasha was put in charge of the security in the region and remained again the main actor in the estate of the Ottoman Princess. Furthermore, considering that the incomes for both sides derived mainly from trade, the two pashas gave permission for commercial activities for all merchants.¹⁰

However, relations between the Mahmud and Kurd Ahmed would worsen, and in the end of 1778 the pasha of Berat would re-open an old matter which had first arisen

⁸ The holder of this post was responsible for the security of the mountain passes and roads, mainly in less-inhabited areas or near trade crossroads. See: Cengiz Orhunlu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Derbend Teşkilatı*, (İstanbul: Eren Yayınları, 1990), p. 9-10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 143-5.

¹⁰ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 128.

during the governorship of “Old” Mehmed in 1775. At that time, when Esma Sultan decided to give the right over her tax-farming of Durres to Kurd Ahmed Pasha, the leader of Bushatlis tried to oppose this decision on his own way by confiscating the merchandise of Mitro Berati, who was, according to Venetian sources, close to the pasha of Berat.¹¹ It was for this reason that after defeating the Bushatlis in the end of 1775, Kurd Ahmed demanded compensation for the loss that his subject had suffered.¹² However, Mahmud Pasha opposed the request of the pasha of Berat since, following the death of his father, the goods and money belonging to him were delivered, according to state protocol, to the central treasury. Hence, the sum of 16,000 piasters claimed by the rival of the Bushatlis went away with the rest of Mehmed’s fortune.¹³

Consequently, the pasha of Berat decided to act in the same way as Mahmud’s father had, arresting all the merchants of Shkodra that were present in his zone of influence. According to a report of the Venetian consuls, in Tirana and Durres alone were twelve merchants under arrest; moreover, the wool and the leather which were destined for Venice were seized by Kurd Ahmed Pasha. The merchants of Shkodra, due to these unexpected occurrences, had to quit going to the fair of Struga and also to abandon the port of Durres, with their down payments confiscated by the commanders.¹⁴

Mahmud Pasha reacted to these actions by the pasha of Berat in the same way, arresting more than fifty merchants of Tirana and Kruja who were trading livestock in Shkodra. These incidents signified the beginning of a new regional conflict between the most influential pashas that would re-define the balances in Ottoman Albania. Considering the vital importance of Durres for the subjects of Shkodra, for Mahmud,

¹¹ A.S.V. Cons. di Scutari let. di Andrea Duoda Dt. 10/XI/1775.

¹² In this case, Mitro Berati was not just a random merchant, but an agent who traded under the protection and on behalf of Kurd Ahmed Pasha. This kind of practice was something normal for the period, where many provincial notables would use these agents in order to get profits and incomes, and they would be protected in any way possible.

¹³ A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo, let. Dt 17/X/1778.

¹⁴ Ibid.

this was a chance to regain what had been and to restore the old zone of influence that his father had created. In this case, since it was the pasha of Berat who had started the conflict, the young Bushatli had the right to complain to the center, and while dealing with this, he began the preparations for the inevitable clash that would decide the new fate of the paşalık of Shkodra.¹⁵

3.2. Mahmud and the Albanian Pashas

The Pasha of Shkodra, aware of the importance of this war for the future of his household, decided to act carefully and not to be hasty like his brother or everything may be lost. His adversary was someone with much more experience who could rely on great number of soldiers thanks to his official posts. Furthermore, Ahmet Kurd Pasha also had strong alliances with other Albanian households, and by supporting them, he tried to weaken the influence of the Bushatlis and the families supporting them. In the upcoming confrontation for the city of Durres there were three main actors: the Alltuni family of Kavaja, to which Mahmud's sister was married; the Bargjinis of Tirana, with Ibrahim Beg, father-in-law of Mahmud,¹⁶ who had been exiled to Shkodra after Islam Beg took his place; and finally the Toptani family of Kruje. In the city of Kavaje, the brother-in-law of Mahmud lost his position to Halil Pasha, who, together with Islam Beg of Tirana and the Toptanis of Kruja, was one of the three pillars of the pasha of Berat in the central Albania.

The right moment for Mahmud Pasha came just after the pasha of Berat was dismissed from his position as the governor of the Vlora district and from the post of *derbendler başbuğu*. With his dismissal from the post of the guardian of the passes, Kurd Ahmed lost a great source of power and influence in the region. In addition to this, he had to deal with a tenacious young pasha from the Moutzohoussates of Tepelena, who was gaining power at the expense of Kurd Pasha. Ali, son of Veli Beg was creating his own influence in the southern Albania, thus making things even

¹⁵ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 129.

¹⁶ We do not know the exact year when he married the daughter of Ibrahim Beg of Tirana, but according to the records of Pater Balneo, they wed after Mahmud became the governor, thus meaning between the years 1778 and 1779, see: Pllumi, *Frati i Pashallareve Bushatli*, p. 111.

more difficult for the pasha of Berat.¹⁷ Furthermore, the district of Vlora was given to the son of Abdullah Pasha; ruler of Prizren. And as for Durres, it was again handed over to Hasan Aga from Istanbul and to Adem Aga.¹⁸ Now, Mahmud could confront his opponent from a more advantageous position, but nonetheless he avoided direct war and firstly tried to eliminate the allies of Kurd Ahmed Pasha in the vicinity of Durres.

Anarchy in Central Albania

After the battle of Peqini in 1775, where Mustafa Pasha and Bushatlis were defeated, the Pasha of Berat following the escape of Ibrahim Beg Bargjini to Shkodra, took the city of Tirana under his authority by appointing Islam Beg.¹⁹ However, Bushatli Mahmud, by taking advantage of the dispute between Kurd Ahmed and the center, sent Ibrahim Beg back to Tirana, so he could reclaim the city again. Considering the importance of this city near Durres, the new pasha of Shkodra tried with one move to break the influence of Kurd Pasha and to eliminate one of his partisan in central Albania. Mahmud deployed five hundred soldiers under the command of Zenel Aga Melika of Lezha (Leş) to ensure his father-in-law could retake the city easily. Ibrahim Aga and the troops faced little resistance, and the notables of city welcomed and accompanied him to the office with great homage.²⁰

As Ibrahim Beg became again the leader of the city, people of his faction attacked and pillaged the estates of Islam Beg and in the end they set fire to his palace.²¹ The subcontractor of Esmâ Sultan for the tax-farming of Durres, Hasan Aga, whose seat was in Tirana, did not made any kind of resistance nor oppose the reclaiming of the city by Ibrahim Beg. According to the Venetian consuls, probably the agent of the

¹⁷ Skiotis, "From Bandit to Pasha", p. 231-2.

¹⁸ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 129.

¹⁹ A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazo let. Dt. 20/IX/1775.

²⁰ Ibid., let. Dt. 22/IV/1779.

²¹ This kind of situation, where one faction would overthrow a rival one, was a common thing during the period. Following the overthrowing, the winning group would target the belongings and the supporters of the defeated group to eliminate them.

Ottoman princess may have been bribed by the father-in-law of Mahmud, and the report says the relations between these two were quite good at the time. The other subcontractor of the tax-farming, Adem Aga of the Toptani household, fled to Kruja, and barely saved himself from the wrath of the angry masses who saw him as responsible for the heavy taxes that they had been paying till that time.²² However, the main reason for the neutrality of Hasan Aga over the reclaiming of the city by Ibrahim Beg was likely his need for the support of Bushatli Mahmud and his allies. As the Pasha of Berat was having problems with the central government and had lost almost all his posts, Hasan Aga would likely have found it difficult to protect the interests and the incomes from the tax-farming of Durres by himself.²³

In Kavaja, the situation escalated quickly following the reconfirmation of Ibrahim Beg as the new ruler of Tirana. Halil Pasha began to take measures against Suleiman Pasha of the Bushatli faction, fearing that after the overthrow of Islam Beg the turn might come for him as well.²⁴ Following the appointment of Hasan Aga as the subcontractor for the estates of Esma Sultan in Durres, he then later tried to put an end to the anarchy by asking for support from Mahmud Pasha, who apparently acted as if he had nothing to do with the occurrences in central Albania. After the official request, the young Bushatli got the opportunity to reinstate the lost influence over Durres and central Albania. Therefore, he immediately deployed an army of six thousand troops and on 8 May, the pasha of Shkodra entered Kavaja. There, after reading decrees which blamed Halil Pasha and Sali Beg for the oppression of the population, Mahmud Pasha set fire to the palaces of the oppressors and pillaged their estates. Furthermore, after eliminating the dissidents in Kavaja, he reappointed Suleiman Beg as ruler of Kavaja,²⁵ thus taking the region under his influence again.²⁶

²² A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazo let. Dt. 22/IV/1779.

²³ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 130.

²⁴ A.S.V. Ibid.

²⁵ He would stay loyal to Mahmud of Shkodra and serve as the ahead of the district of Kavaja till 12 May 1784, when he died from a chronic disease.

²⁶ A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazo let. di Albergeti Dt. 22/05/1779.

Following the action of Kavaja, Mahmud set off for Kruja to remove once and for all the Toptanis, who continually constituted a threat to the interests of Bushatli. He arrived to Kruja without resistance and set fire to more than one hundred houses in the outskirts of the castle, where the Toptanis were, well-protected from any kind of attack. Moreover, the partisans of the Toptanis were molesting Ibrahim of Tirana by pillaging his estates and attacking his palace. Aware of the situation, Mahmud Pasha avoided a general attack on the castle of Kruja, fearing this could cause a conflict between him and the central government. For this reason, he withdrew and moved to Shkodra with his troops waiting for an official decree that could permit him to eliminate of this problematic household, thus putting an end to the anarchy and to the influence of Kurd Ahmed Pasha in central Albania.²⁷

3.3. The Relations with the Central Government

Despite the successful campaign of Mahmud Pasha in the central Albania and the inclusion of Durres under his influence, the anarchy was far from over. The main reason for this was the policy of the central government, which tried to impede the accumulation of regional power under a single individual. In addition to this, the Sublime Porte would support one notable against another one and if the supported notable would start being a problem then the same method will be applied to him, too. Furthermore, the provincial notables had their own agents in the center who would lobby in their name for a post or other privileges.²⁸ In the case of the Toptanis, they used their representatives in Istanbul to fight and to provoke a dispute between the pasha of Shkodra and the center.²⁹

On the other side, Kurd Ahmed Pasha had to struggle a lot before retaking his previous post as the governor of Vlora. The center appointed the son of Abdullah Pasha of Prizren as head of the Vlora district, thus punishing the troublesome actions of the pasha of Berat and his men. However, the pasha of Prizren, aware that he could

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Yaycioglu, *Partners of the Empire*, p. 79.

²⁹ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 130.

not held the position while Kurd Pasha was there, decided to negotiate with him. At the end, the pasha of Berat paid all the expenditures for the escort of the pasha of Prizren and in addition, gave him fifteen thousand piasters, which was the sum of his income as governor of Vlora. In turn, Ahmed Pasha managed to obtain the forgiveness from the center and to reclaim his post and titles.³⁰ Even though this occurrence might have caused a new confrontation between Mahmud Pasha and the ruler of Berat, the two power-holders of Ottoman Albania decided to temporarily to end the battles with each other.

Questioning the Order

Although the armed confrontation seemed as if it was temporarily ended, in the diplomatic scene, the enemies of the Bushatli pasha remained active. They tried to apply pressure on the center through their own agents so that Mahmud Pasha would fall from the government's grace and the other Albanian could remove him easily from the scene. After the Toptanis, it was Kurd Ahmed Pasha who sent his complains about the activities of Mahmud, even mentioning the damage caused by the previous governor of Shkodra, Bushatli Mustafa during his campaign in central Albania. Furthermore, the guardian of the passes tried to make the situation to look more "dangerous" than it was cause of Mahmud Pasha and his supporters.³¹

Despite the delicate situation, Mahmud made an intervention in the royal estate, presumably on the mukataa of Durres, thus provoking a conflict with the center, which in this case ordered Kurd Ahmed and Gazi Hasan Pasha to intercept the pasha of Shkodra.³² In addition to this, Hasan Aga; the subcontractor of the tax-farming of Durres, wrote a petition in the name of all the notables of the city to complain about the intrusion carried out by Mahmud Pasha.³³ The motive of this hazardous move by

³⁰ A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazzo let. Dt. 22/IV/1779.

³¹ B.O.A. TS. MA.e 430, 5 [11 Ca 1193 (27 May 1779)]. The sum requested by the pasha of Berat was of 1,500 sacks of money, an amount that Mahmud probably did not pay and was more like a justification to alienate him from the center.

³² B.O.A. AE.SABH.I. 22, 1827 [29 Ca 1193(14 June 1779)].

³³ B.O.A. C.DH. 200, 9969 [9 § 1193(22 August 1779)].

the leader of Shkodra, more than geopolitical interests, had mainly socio-economic background.

Generally, the northern regions of the Shkodra district had to rely in case of famine on the grain cultivated and imported from the central Albania. However, due to the continuously war between the Albanian notables and lack of rains in the first four months of 1779, there was a shortage of grain in almost every region.³⁴ Furthermore, some merchants, due to the shortage of grain and its cheap price in the ports of Durres and its vicinity, were trying to sell it in the port of Salonica for a higher price.³⁵ In order to prevent the escalation of the famine in the pašalik of Shkodra, Mahmud interfered by raising the prices of grain and collaborating with the merchants of Ulcinj³⁶ to make possible the recirculation of the agricultural goods. This successful operation from the pasha of Shkodra was made possible by the discharge of Kurd Ahmed Pasha from the position he had in the tax-farming of Durres. But regardless of the reasons for it, this kind of intervention on a royal estate would have consequences.³⁷

A Threat to Be Removed

The Sublime Porte used different mechanisms and methods to check those who might rival the authority of the central government in the provinces. Although the local notables became essential for the functioning of newly transformed fiscal system of the Ottoman state, the center would not allow powerful individuals to emerge who could question the power of the Sublime Porte. Bushatli Mahmud was one of these power magnates, who, like in the case of Durres was imposing his own order at the expense of the central authority. Aware of this fact, the Ottoman center tried to remove him by offering him a new governorship away from Shkodra, where

³⁴ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 131.

³⁵ A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazo let. Dt. 22/IV/1779.

³⁶ During this period, the merchants of Ulcinj possessed approximately more than two hundred ships for commerce, and some of these belonged to the Bushatli household.

³⁷ Naci, *Pashallaku i Shkodres*, p. 132-3.

he was difficult to handle.³⁸ Therefore, after the end of the disorder in central Albania, and by bringing Kurd Ahmed Pasha back to the place, the center decided to appoint Mahmud, as the head of the Izvornik³⁹ district as protector of the castle.⁴⁰

3.4. Protecting the Legacy

Sending Mahmud Pasha as a governor in a distant district from Shkodra, would helped the center to restrain his actions. Away from his native region, the young Bushatli would have been without any kind of support against the center or local rivals, thus making it easier for the center or for the Bosnian *kapudans* to eliminate him.⁴¹ However, aware of the situation, Mahmud Pasha opposed to this offer of “bona fides” from the central government, because he knew that outside of Shkodra his chances of surviving would be low. To make Mahmud more suspicious was the appointment of Çavușoğlu Mehmed, one of his main rivals as the new governor of Shkodra.⁴²

In fact, the Çavușoğlu household, native to Shkodra, had been the opponent of the Bushatlis for the governorship of the city since the time of “Old” Bushatli Mehmed, and they had strong supporters in the region. The center was to weaken the Bushatlis from inside Shkodra by reviving the faction of the Çavușoğlu family, thus making

³⁸ Although the main difficulty of dealing with these notables was their distance from the center, another important issue was the influence they had in the given region and the alliances they created with other families or socio-economic groups, thus making them strong opponents for the government.

³⁹ The Sandjak of Izvornik was located in the province of Bosnia, and it is named after its jurisdiction center. Today it is known as Zvornik and is situated in western Bosnia.

⁴⁰ B.O.A. C.DH. 250, 12458 [29 Ş 1193 (11 September 1779)].

⁴¹ The word *kapudan* was used mainly for Bosnian notables, who during the eighteenth century ruled the province of Bosnia and transformed great estates into private holdings, see: Justin McCarthy, “Ottoman Bosnia, 1800-1878”, *The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina: Their Historic Development from the Middle Ages to the Dissolution of Yugoslavia*, ed. Mark Pinson, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 74.

⁴² Naci, *Pashallaku i Shkodres*, p. 134.

possible an attack on the Bushatlis from both sides.⁴³ And the first spark for a new conflict came from the Toptanis, who, encouraged by Kurd Ahmed Pasha attacked Ibrahim Beg of Tirana the ally of Mahmud. The pasha of Shkodra responded to this assault by sending his most valuable commander, Zenel Aga of Lezha (Leş), who quickly defeated the forces of the Toptanis. However, this act provided a good excuse for the enemies of the Bushatlis. They complained to the center, which ordered the immediate departure of Çavușoğlu Mehmed and other Albanian Pashas to Shkodra.⁴⁴

The Albanian Pashas gathered in Elbasan at the end of 1779 to accompany Çavușoğlu Mehmed to take his post as the governor of Shkodra that winter.⁴⁵ They aimed, if not to eliminate Bushatli Mahmud, then at least to force him to go to his new post in the district of Izvornik. In the meeting at Elbasan Kurd Pasha of Berat was in charge and the Toptanis of Kruja, Suleiman Pasha of Elbasan, and even the deputy of the governor of Rumeli were all present to join the campaign alongside him. As the leader of the expedition against Shkodra, Kurd Pasha aimed to advance during the winter to the river Mat to the south of Lezha and, in order to protect the flanks, he decided to neutralize the allies of the Bushatlis in the central Albania.⁴⁶

Ibrahim Beg of Tirana and Suleiman Beg of Kavaja were the two pillars upon which the authority and the influence of Mahmud Pasha were based. Removing them meant the end of the Bushatlis in that region. Hasan Aga decided to protect the lands of his official authority by supporting the two allies of Mahmud. In addition to this, the families of Ibrahim and Suleiman Beg were sent to the fortified castle of Durres. In the meantime, both of them started preparing to encounter the troops of the other Albanian pashas. During this campaign, Kurd Ahmed Pasha decided to assault the leader of Kavaja with eight hundred soldiers, half of them cavalrymen. As he moved

⁴³ In fact, the policy of religious tolerance of Mahmud toward the Catholic element in Shkodra and his continuous opposition to the central government caused discontent between him and the Muslim clerics or believers.

⁴⁴ Naci, *Ibid.*

⁴⁵B.O.A. C.A.S. 931, 40323 [29 L 1193 (9 November 1779)].

⁴⁶ A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazo let. di Alfonso Penco, Dt. 09/I/1780.

to Peqin, which was near Kavaja, the pasha of Berat ordered the other Pashas to deal with Ibrahim Beg of Tirana. Kurd Ahmed Pasha planned to quickly eliminate the head of Kavaja, and after that to join his allies in Tirana.⁴⁷

However, the pasha of Berat faced a strong opposition from Suleiman Beg when he was entering Kavaja. Though Kurd Pasha offered him a safe retirement, Suleiman Beg refused the offer, declaring that he was under the authority of the center as a subcontractor in the royal estate of the Ottoman princess until 11 March 1780. In addition to this, he took shelter in the fortified palace with six hundred soldiers to face the pasha of Berat and his men. Aware of the difficult situation, Kurd Pasha called on the troops of the other pashas, who were situated near Tirana for assistance and, he also invited the previous leaders of Kavaja, Halil Pasha and Sali Beg, both of whom had been thrown out by Mahmud. As the troops from Tirana came, and alongside them the siege canons, Suleiman Beg was able to resist for only twenty days. Then he retreated to the castle of Durres.⁴⁸

Although the situation was not in his advantage, Bushatli Mahmud decided to resist until the end, despite the pressure from the center to leave the post and to move to Izvornik.⁴⁹ His father-in-law Ibrahim Beg used carefully the time provided by Suleiman Beg during his resistance in Kavaja. When Kurd Pasha and the other Albanian pashas moved toward Tirana, Ibrahim Beg had already mobilized more than six thousand troops to protect himself and the city. This caused difficulties for the pasha of Berat and the other belligerents, thus impeding the remove of Ibrahim Beg, the last Bushatli ally in the central Albania. Furthermore, it gave the desired time for Mahmud, who tried with the intermediation of Hasan Aga to get forgiveness for his acts before the other punitive army from Kosovo could reach Shkodra.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Naci, *Pashallaku i Shkodres*, p. 135.

⁴⁹ B.O.A. C.DH. 258, 12869 [25 Z 1193(3 January 1780)].

⁵⁰ Naci, Ibid.

The siege of Tirana began in February and lasted for two months. Due to a shortage of provisions, Ibrahim Beg had to surrender and leave the city with his men. Following this, on 13 April 1780, Kurd Pasha announced a royal decree which made him again the subcontractor of the tax-farming of Durres responsible for the order in the region and moved against Shkodra.⁵¹ Despite all the efforts by the pasha of Berat and his supporters, the campaign to overthrow Mahmud and remove him from the political scene once and for all failed, as a Tatar sent from the center brought a letter which informed the parties that the center government had forgiven Bushatli Mahmud for his previous actions.⁵² Moreover, Çavuşoğlu Mehmed was appointed as governor in the district of Shkup (Üsküp) and Mahmud as governor of the districts of Shkodra and Dukakin. As for Kurd Ahmed Pasha, he was confirmed the as subcontractor and administrator in Durres and was ordered to permit the return of both Suleiman Beg and Ibrahim Beg to their respective locations.⁵³

There are many reasons underlying the decision of the Sublime Porte to forgive the rebellious actions of Mahmud. One of them was maintain the balance between the provincial power-holders and preventing the accumulation of power in the region under only one individual. When the center saw that Kurd Pasha was becoming immensely powerful after he defeated the Bushatlis in 1775, it gave priority to Bushatli Mahmud to rival him by taking away the titles and the post which the pasha of Berat possessed. Following the rise of the authority of Mahmud in 1778-1779, the central government tried to appoint him away from Shkodra, but faced the opposition of Mahmud and of the population of Shkodra.

In a letter sent to center, the writer of a petition underlines the fact the people of Shkodra were threatening a general migration that would cause the depopulation of

⁵¹ A.S.V. Cons. di Durrazo let. di Alessandro Albergetit, Dt. 22/IV/1780.

⁵² In this period the Tatars, due to their abilities as cavalrymen were widely used in the Ottoman postal system as letter carriers.

⁵³ A.S.V. Ibid.

the city if the governorship would not turned over again to Bushatli Mahmud.⁵⁴ In addition to this, the word “people” (*ahali*) in the document probably included the socio-economic groups of Shkodra, like the merchants, guildsmen, landowners, and the clergy. These groups of different backgrounds used all the power they had in order to assist Mahmud Pasha, since he was their representative and protector of their interests. Thus, all the efforts and the military campaigns of Mahmud were done by taking in consideration the mutual interests of him and of the other actors in Shkodra. For this reason, it would be illogical to describe the policies of Mahmud as simply expansion of territory and of political influence without considering them in an economic context.

The exaltation and satisfaction of the people of Shkodra about the forgiveness granted to Bushatli Mahmud was recorded by Başçuhadar Mustafa,⁵⁵ who was assigned to bring the official decree to Shkodra. He mentioned that even the governor of Rumeli province was glad for the decision taken by the central government, and alongside him even the people of Prizren, who under their leader Tahir Pasha were ordered to fight Mahmud Pasha expressed their joy at this news. Furthermore, he mentioned that the people of Shkodra who welcomed him expressed the importance of Mahmud for them and how his execution would had brought serious problems to them.⁵⁶ Probably even the center was aware of the situation due to its widespread network of information through agents; the money and other gifts sent by Mahmud also had their own effect in this issue. On 4 June 1780, Mahmud was reconfirmed again as the governor of Shkodra instead of Izvornik, and his rival Mehmed of the Çavușoğlu household was sent to the district of Shkup (Üsküp), “coincidentally” close to his countryman.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ B.O.A. C.DH. 322, 16100 (The date of this petition seems absent, but it was presumably sent right after the beginning of the military campaign against Mahmud Pasha).

⁵⁵ *Çuhadar* was a person who used take care of the daily issues of the sultan in the palace, thus fulfilling different tasks that were assigned to him.

⁵⁶ A.Q.SH [The Central Archives of the State] Fondi nr. 79, D. 11.

⁵⁷ B.O.A. AE.SABH.I. 197, 13203 [1 R 1194 (4 June 1780)].

3.5. A Merchant Pasha

During this period, Mahmud Pasha began to take care of the economy of the district of Shkodra, and also that of the regions under his influence or direct authority. In fact, as mentioned above, his wars against other Albanian Pashas were in part for economic reasons, mostly for control of chiftliks or tax-farming. The coastal plain of Albania, due to its rich soil, was perfect for the creation of the chiftliks and, since the most important trade routes passed through there, the pasha of Shkodra had to take it under his possession. By following the demands of the growing European market, he began to introduce new agricultural products in his dominions. Taking advantage of the chiftlik system, Mahmud cultivated colonial products like cotton and maize, which were highly requested in the West.⁵⁸

However, in these regions, the main agricultural product was grain, not only for the daily consume of the population but also as an important export product for the foreign market. Although the central authorities would allow the exportation of grain only in times of plenty, provincial notables like Mahmud, in collaboration with customs officials, began to smuggle large quantities of this product.⁵⁹ As a matter of fact, there was a high production of these agricultural goods in this period, but this high volume was due to the widespread chiftlik system in the coastal Albania and to the exploitation of the peasants by the landholders.⁶⁰

The owner of the chiftlik gave importance to the protection of this source of wealth from any outside threat and for this reason hired large number of mercenaries. The Bushatlis had easy access to armed men and since the time of "Old" Mehmed Pasha, had encouraged the Catholic tribesmen to settle on their lands in southern Shkodra.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Zija Shkodra, "Problemi i Tregut Shqiptar ne Shek. XVIII [The Problem of the Albanian Market in the XVIII Century]", *Studime Historike*, Nr. 3, (Tirane: Universiteti i Tiranes, 1966), p. 70.

⁵⁹ Traian Stoianovich, "Land Tenure and Related Sectors of the Balkan Economy, 1600-1800", *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 13, No. 4, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 406.

⁶⁰ Stavri Naci, "Pashalleku i Shkodres i Pare ne Kuadrin e Zhvillimit te Tij Ekonomik e Shoqeror ne Shek. XVIII [The Paşalık of Shkodra in the XVIII Century Seen in Socio-Economic Framework]", *Studime Historike*, Nr. 2, (Tirane: Universiteti i Tiranes, 1967), p. 60.

⁶¹ Pllumi, *Frati i Pashallareve Bushatli*, p. 52.

Furthermore, promise of land attracted many of these warlike highlanders, who, by moving from the mountains had the possibility for a better life and began to integrate to the Ottoman world. In fact, the difference of the Ottoman-Balkan land tenure lies in the fact that the protection of the agricultural domain by the landholder would be ensured through the hiring of the mercenaries, in this case Albanian tribesman.⁶²

Flirtations with Venetian Republic

The maritime Republic of Venice, once the dominant power in the eastern Mediterranean Sea and Europe, lost most of its splendor after the second half the eighteenth century. Furthermore, its commercial influence was at that time limited to the western coastal ports of the Balkan like Durres, Shkodra, Split, and Vlora; which became the main trading center for Venice.⁶³ However, during the period of famine in northern Albania, Mahmud Pasha collaborated with Venice and also sent letters in which he ensured protection and free shipment in the ports under his authority.⁶⁴ After Kurd Ahmed Pasha blocked the trade routes to the merchants of Shkodra in 1779, it was the commercial relations with Venice that saved the day for the Bushatlis.⁶⁵

Although grain was one of the most desired agricultural goods, there were a variety of Albanian export products that were very popular in the Venetian markets. Thanks to the shipment reports written by the Venetian consuls of Durres and vice consuls of Shkodra, we are able to know exactly what products were exported and in what quantity.⁶⁶ These goods consisted of wool, wax, different kinds and models of leather, silk fabrics, tobacco, and, later of cotton. Regarding the grain exportation, the

⁶² Stoianovich, "Land Tenure...", p. 409.

⁶³ Shkodra, "Problemi i Tregut Shqiptar...", p. 63.

⁶⁴ A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo, let. di Alfonso Penco, Dt. 17/X/1779.

⁶⁵ The blockade of the trade routes at the same time would affect the incomes not only of the merchants but even of Mahmud, who at that time had a confrontation with the Albanian Pashas.

⁶⁶ Stavri Naci, *Shqiperia e Veriut ne Shekullin e XVIII: Letra te zev. Konsujve Venedikas te Shkodres* [Northern Albania in the Eighteenth Century: The Letters of the Venetian vice consuls of Shkodra] V. I (1706-1756), (Tirane: Universiteti Shteteror i Tiranës, Instituti i Historisë dhe i Gjuhësise, 1967), passim.

warranty of Mahmud toward Venice lasted till the end of the problems with the other pashas, after which he changed his economic policies. Thus, Mahmud began to see the Venetians as the same as all other foreign merchants and for this reason he began to apply the *ronda* system even for them.⁶⁷ Furthermore, by using his authority, he even monopolized the port of Kavaja and reason behind this was to take possession of the grain of this rich region and sell it after the harvest season for a higher price.⁶⁸

The Rise of the Albanian Merchants

In the eighteenth century the commerce in the Balkans began to shift into the hands of the native merchants, while before it was a profession mainly operated by Jewish, Armenian, and Greek subjects. In addition, due to the socio-economic dynamics of eighteenth-century Ottoman Albania, we see the emergence of the Muslim-Albanian element in commercial activities.⁶⁹ However, from a general point of view among the Albanian merchants, those of Shkodra had a special place in the commercial activities. Having access to both sea and overland routes due to the geostrategic position of Shkodra, they began conquering the regional markets of Albania and also widening their activities even in European lands.⁷⁰

Mahmud supported them by using his diplomatic connections and jurisdictional authority in the regions controlled by him or his allies. Furthermore, most of these merchants were in fact agents of Mahmud and they traded using his capital. Their number in Venice for example was approximately 804, of which 676 were Muslims and 128 Christians.⁷¹ However, if we consider even merchants from the other

⁶⁷ The method of *ronda*, or rolling, consisted in the loading of the ships according to a certain sequence, and the quantity of the shipment was decided by the local authorities.

⁶⁸ A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo let. di Albergeti, Dt. 26/IV/1781.

⁶⁹ Traian Stoianovich, "The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant", *The Journal of Economic History*, V.20, No.2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 234; Shkodra, "Problemi i Tregut Shqiptar", p. 77.

⁷⁰ Shkodra, *ibid.*, p. 81.

⁷¹ These number show in the fact how much powerful was the Muslim factor in commercial affairs, thus invalidate the general thought that the Albanian merchants were mostly Christian in Shkodra. For more, see: Stoianovich, "The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant", *passim*.

locations of the Shkodra district, we come to the conclusion that there were more than thousand such subjects of Mahmud Pasha.⁷² These merchants became so powerful that they started to influence the economy of Venice itself. As we see in many most of them created or had contracts with many commercial agencies in the city.⁷³

From Venice the merchants of Shkodra used to import velvet, glass products, silk manufactured in many colors, and paper. In addition to these, the presence of other luxury items in the reports shows the frequent demand by the new emerged bourgeois class in the cities of Ottoman Albania. Moreover, the merchants would take part in different fairs in Europe, thus being always informed about the demands in the enormous Western markets. In order to have a certain idea about the economic power of the merchants of Shkodra, according to some Albanian researchers, it is worth noting that the annual monetary circulation was for about 10 million ducats per year, thus proving the great influence that the subjects of Mahmud Pasha had created with their immense trade capital.⁷⁴

Despite the importance of the merchants of Shkodra, the famous fleet of Ulcinj, which created a strong zone of commerce in the Adriatic, was the most surprising factor in this period. Regarded generally as dangerous corsairs and plunderers, under the Bushatli house and due to the influence of its wealth, they were transformed from a simple fleet into a commercial maritime power.⁷⁵ In the time of “Old” they were taken under control and were put in the service of the governorship of Shkodra for securing the Adriatic Sea from any threat that might rise. It was only during the time of Mahmud that the marine fleet began to show its real potential by rivaling both the Venetian and Ragusa fleets regarding matters of commerce in the Adriatic Sea. The main activity of this merchant fleet was related to the demand of the market

⁷² See the graphic provided by Shkodra, *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁷³ Stavri Naci, *Shqipëria e Veriut në Shekullin e XVIII*, passim.

⁷⁴ Shkodra, “Problemi i Tregut Shiptar”, p. 82.

⁷⁵ Stoianovich, “The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant”, p. 273.

for grains. Thus, it was the transport of grains the coastal Albania to other ports which consolidated its formation.⁷⁶

Before the 1779, the trade in the port of Durres was done mainly by Venetian subjects, and the reason for the was the policy of Kurd Pasha, who tried to put an end to the influence of the merchants of Shkodra and to the fleet of Ulcinj by forbidding them any commercial activity.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, with the end of the conflict in 1780, Mahmud changed his approach to the foreign merchants, focusing his efforts and trade policies on the fleet of Ulcinj. Consequently, as recorded in a venetian report of 1781, the Agas of Ulcinj demanded the abolishment of the *ronda* system from the Albanian seacoast by the September of the next year. Not only did Mahmud grant them their request, he employed Osman Reis, an aga from the fleet of Ulcinj, who with two ships was to protect the seashore from Kavaja to Vlora with a special decree issued by the pasha himself.⁷⁸

These commercial activities of the subjects under the authority of Mahmud began to draw attention of both domestic and foreign actors, because his lucrative activity in the Adriatic and Balkans created in Shkodra an interregional market.⁷⁹ All the conflicts and the struggles of the Bushatlis⁸⁰ against numerous rivals was to create a socio-economic order that would operate beyond the borders of the district of Shkodra. Hence, the reason for this necessity lied on the expansion of the authority of Mahmud or, as mentioned above in the consolidation of the *paşalık*. All the socio-economic dynamics of the period in the Balkans and Adriatic Sea, and of course the distance from the central government, were important factors that fostered the emergence of the *paşalık* under Bushatli Mahmud.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 275.

⁷⁷ A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo, let. Dt. 17/X/1778.

⁷⁸ Ibid., let. di Albergeti, Dt. 26/IV/1781.

⁷⁹ Shkodra, *Problemi i Tregut Shiptar*, p. 67.

⁸⁰ The word Bushatlis is not only used as the name of the household, but also refers to the faction as a whole.

3.6. Competition among Neighbors

The commercial activities of Mahmud Pasha created discontent among the foreign merchant marines of Venice and Ragusa, which were like neighbors due to their permanent commercial activities on the Ottoman Albania coast. Furthermore, these old republic, once ruling the seas of the Mediterranean, now had to endure the restriction issued by Mahmud and his allies of Ulcinj. Formerly as corsairs, the sailors of Ulcinj used to cause considerable damage to Venice by plundering its ships in the Adriatic until the Bushatli household became the head of the Shkodra district.⁸¹ In addition to this, the Venetians were suffering monetary damage, as Mahmud gave the official right for the fleet of Ulcinj to guard and monopolize the grain from the ports of Albania,⁸² thus quoting a higher price to the foreign merchants than the normal. Furthermore, the system of *ronda* issued by the aga of Ulcinj would limit the quantity of the loadings according to his own desire. As for the pasha of Shkodra, he was free to sell as much grain as he pleased.⁸³

Worsening the situation for the Venetian trade in the Adriatic, Mahmud obtained by a royal decree the right over the mukataa on the bitumen mines in Vlora.⁸⁴ He also sent one of his representatives to Vlora to assist Abdul Aga and Mahmud Beg in the extraction of bitumen. A product whose acquisition had mainly been done by the Venetians was, from that moment on, monopolized by Mahmud Pasha, who set a high price for this product, thus removing it from the merchants of Venice.⁸⁵ These policies of Mahmud helped the merchants of Shkodra and the fleet of Ulcinj to make great fortune, and of course a considerable part of it belonged to him too, but he also created discontent among the old maritime republics.

⁸¹ According to the reports issued by the vice consuls of Venice in Shkodra, we witness a high number of complaints sent to the respective judicial organs, see: Naci, *Shqiperia e Veriut ne Shekullin e XVIII: Letra te zev. Konsujve Venedikas te Shkodres* [Northern Albania in the Eighteenth Century: The Letters of the Venetian v/Consuls of Shkodra] V. I (1706-1756), passim.

⁸² A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo, let. Dt. 26/IV/1781.

⁸³ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 139.

⁸⁴ The bitumen of Vlora was exploited for a long time and it was famous due to its high quality. Even today, it is regarded as some of the highest quality in Europe.

⁸⁵ A.S.V. Ibid.

The Matter of Durres

The main conflicts of Mahmud and the other Albanian Pashas were over control of the tax-farming of Durres and its port, which was one of the main Ottoman ports on the Adriatic. Despite the forgiveness and reappointment of Mahmud as governor of Shkodra in June 1780, Durres, with its port and tax-farming, remained under the authority of Kurd Ahmed Pasha. However, in the reports of the venetian consuls of 1782, we see that Mahmud had taken possession of Durres, but neither them nor Pater Balneo mention the way in which the mukataa was taken by Mahmud.

The Pasha of Shkodra due to the political and economic interests of the Paşalık, that this region had for the commerce, right after being forgiven by the center decided to attack Durres. During the campaign he pillaged the northern part of the region, causing great damage and killing many subject who were under the pasha of Berat.⁸⁶ Assisted by Ibrahim Beg of Tirana and Suleiman Beg of Kavaja, Mahmud attacked from the north with an army of ten thousand troops. The damage of this campaign and was the destabilization it caused in central Albania was calculated as ten thousand *kuruş* by the Ottoman authorities. Information about these occurrences was provided by the judiciary organs situated in the vicinity of Durres.⁸⁷ The exact date when Mahmud took the possession of Durres remains unresolved, but at the end of 1782 we find him in this city participating in a ceremony attended by local and Venetian authorities.⁸⁸

After the incursions on Durres against Kurd Pasha, Bushatli Mahmud paid attention to the northern borders of the district where the troublesome Pasha of İşbuzi was causing problems for subject of Shkodra.⁸⁹ This pasha had defeated Mahmud in 1776, and according to the venetian reports the main reason for the opposition of the pasha of İşbuzi was the murdering of his father at the hands of the Bushatlis. However, one of problems may be the continuous displacement of Podgorica region between the district of Shkodra and the province of Bosnia. Although in a decree issue in 11

⁸⁶ B.O.A. C.DH. 90, 4496 [22 B 1194(24 July 1780)], p. 1.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

⁸⁸ A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo, let. di Capriata, Dt. 21/X/1782.

⁸⁹ Pllumi, *Fрати Pashallareve Bushatlli*, p. 119.

February 1778 it was added to Shkodra,⁹⁰ its proximity with Bosnia caused problems and the center probably gave it back to the province of Bosnia. This in fact, was a move made by the central government to ensure that the pasha of Shkodra would had always someone to be busy with.

Mahmud Pasha decided to extend his authority over the region of Montenegro, which was near Podgorica and Işbuzi. The banditry caused by the Montenegrins damaged the commerce and endangered the life of the subjects passing through those places. Despite the difficult terrain, Mahmud managed to punish some bandits in Montenegro and focused his next move on the province of Bosnia.⁹¹ First, he attacked the pasha of Işbuzi defeating him and pillaging the region. This intervention of Mahmud in another province caused the protest of the council of Bosnia with all its members.⁹² Next, the young Bushatli moved to the Castel-Novo,⁹³ the conquest of which would create an overland connection between his paşalık with the Republic of Venice through the region of Pastrovich. However, this military intervention caused discontent not only among the Bosnian notable,⁹⁴ but also among the Venetians who did not appreciate the arrival of a “new neighbor” on the border of their domain.

Another important topic between Mahmud and the Republic of Venice regarded the appointment of a new vice consul to the city of Shkodra. The pasha of Shkodra asked the Venetian consul of Durres the for resignation of Andrea Duoda because of his non-fulfilment of his duties and the debts that he had accumulated. For this post Mahmud suggested Jak Mark Suma, who was among his closest and loyal men. However, the venetian authorities tried to resist this proposal of Mahmud, since the vice consul was to inform Venice about political events and secrets related to the

⁹⁰ B.O.A. C.DH. 297, 14816 [13 M 1192(11 February 1778)].

⁹¹ Pllumi, Ibid.

⁹² B.O.A. C.DH. 333, 16631 [29 S 1195(24 February 1781)].

⁹³ Castel-Novo is situated in the northern shore of Montenegro with the name Herceg-Novi and as for the Ottomans they refer it as Bakiye-Nova.

⁹⁴ B.O.A. AE.SABH.I. 78, 5449 [9 Za 1195 (27 October 1781)].

governor of Shkodra. Despite their disfavor of Ottoman official interference in their internal affairs, their interests in the Ottoman Albania seashore led them to accept the suggestion of Bushatli.⁹⁵

Married for seven years but still not able to father a child, in 1783 Mahmud Pasha decided to take a second journey to Dubrovnik to see if the Franciscan friars would help him. Pater Balneo took care of the preparation of his departure and went to announce the arrival of Mahmud to the authorities of Dubrovnik. However, when the pasha arrived, the new leader of the city did not pay him homage like in the first journey of Mahmud there. Furthermore, they violated protocol by welcoming him outside the city of Dubrovnik even though the friar doctors were sent to look after him. As we understand from the memoirs of Pater Balneo, nothing was mentioned to Mahmud about the possibility of sterility caused by his previous disease.⁹⁶

The pasha of Shkodra was upset by his disrespectful welcome by the authorities in Dubrovnik and immediately returned to Shkodra. Mahmud then decided to cancel his commercial treaties with them. Shkodra used to supply the city of Dubrovnik with construction materials, cutting of this supply was viewed as a harsh response by the authorities.⁹⁷ With the political and economic consolidation of his paşalık, Mahmud began to expand his authority more and more at the expense of the other regional actors. Moreover, as we saw in some cases, he began to rival the old maritime republics in the Adriatic Sea with his conquering fleet of merchants.

Conclusion

The emergence of provincial notables brought a continuous fight over public offices or tax-farming, thus bring disorder and anarchy in many regions of the empire. However, they were an important factor for the central government since without them it would have impossible to collect different revenues being them normal taxes

⁹⁵ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p.142-143.

⁹⁶ Pllumi, *Fрати i Pashallareve Bushatli*, p. 113-118.

⁹⁷ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 143.

or from tax-farming. Yet, the Sublime Porte tried used the classical method of *divide et impera* or would make the balance of the power between the two strongest notables by supporting the weak against the strongest and vice-versa. Nevertheless, by using these methods even the central government became the cause for the start of many confrontations which caused disorder, thus in a way or another becoming accomplice. These fights caused not only chaos but in most cases even robbery and pillaging, thus becoming a source of income for the notables. Despite this, their main source of wealth was from the commerce, that during this period saw the rise of the Albanian-Muslim merchants especially those of Shkodra.



CHAPTER IV

THREE FACES OF MAHMUD PASHA

After the confirmation of Mahmud as the head of Shkodra, in this chapter I try to describe his measures to bring Montenegro, which was part of the Shkodra district, under his authority. Thus, in the first part I focus on the methods used by the Bushatli to achieve his goal; as for the consequences of these actions, they are described in the second part where we witness a civil war between the Bosnians and Bushatlis over the region of Podgorica. In the third part, I analyze the characteristics of this clash, its consequences and the ways in which it proceeded. Moreover, I try to describe the role of the Pasha of Shkodra in the crisis and the depiction of his image from different perspectives. Since in the Albanian historiography, this campaign of Mahmud was depicted as a struggle for independence from the Turkish oppressors, and his goal was to unite the Albanians under a state. Even the meeting of Podgorica between the Bushatlis and the Bosnians was depicted by the nationalist historiography of Albania as a union against the Turks.¹ However, as we shall see Bushatli Mahmud collaborated continuously with the center and despite his action he was seen always as an Ottoman official.

4.1. Crisis in the North

Right after consolidating his position as the head of the Shkodra district, Mahmud Pasha succeeded in making possible the re-emergence of the *paşalık*, thus carrying on the project initiated by his father. In addition to this, the headman of the Bushatli household and his allies began an expansionist policy, sometimes through political means by appointing his own men in neighboring regions and sometimes by attacking his rivals directly with military force. However, the consequences of these risky activities would make Mahmud Pasha a target for both the center and other regional

¹ Ligor Mile, "Rreth Veprimtarise Politiko-Ushtarake te Kara Mahmud Shkodres ne Vitet 1782-1791 [Regarding the Politico-Military Activities of Kara Mahmud of Shkodra during the Years 1782-1791]", *Studime Historike* Vol.I, (Tirane: Universiteti i Tiranes, 1964), p. 183. In their works, many Albanian scholars would use the names Turkey and Turks instead for Ottoman.

actors, who tried to eliminate him or at least restrain his movements as much as possible.

The military campaigns launched by Mahmud Pasha created instability in western Rumeli while challenging the central authority there. However, the Ottoman government was busy at this time, having a hard time in negotiations with Russia and Austria which, after the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774), had almost invaded the northern lands of the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the Russian occupation of Crimea, the problems of the Venetians with Ottoman-Algerian corsairs in 1783, and the plans of Austria and France for a possible share of the Ottoman lands, forced Istanbul to focus mainly on its foreign affairs.² For this reason, the central government would tolerate sharing its authority with its own officials, rather than sharing its territory with its foreign enemies.

Aware of the opportunities that were possible because of the international situation, Mahmud Pasha of Shkodra decided to continue with his plans, that is, to spread his authority in the neighboring regions. After his victory over the Albanian pashas in the south, between the years 1780 and 1783, the governor of Shkodra brought under his control almost all of northern Ottoman Albania³ and he imposed his own jurisdiction at the expense of the central government. Yet despite his great achievements and led by strong ambition, Bushatli decided to aim for a final attack in the north of his district.⁴ These regions, even though they were part of Shkodra district, were inhabited by Orthodox Christian Slavic or Albanian-speaking tribesmen who, thanks to the harsh geography, enjoyed a kind of semi-autonomy.

An Austrian Colonel and Deserter

² İsmail H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi: Karlofça antlaşmasından XVIII. Yüzyılın sonlarına Kadar*, p. 467-8.

³ In the text, northern Ottoman Albania means the lands which were predominantly inhabited by a majority Albanian-speaking population of the Gegh ethno-cultural background.

⁴ Mile, "Rreth Veprimtarisë Politiko-Ushtarake", pp. 183-185.

At the beginning of 1784, an Austrian colonel deserted from Vienna and approached Mahmud Pasha in Shkoder asking for his protection and safe passage to Istanbul. According to the letters of the Venetian consul at Durres, the deserter fled from the Austrian court due to a dispute with Emperor Joseph II and wanted to give the sultan information about the plans of Austria relating to the Ottoman Empire. Through conversation with the deserter, Mahmud Pasha came to learn of some important issues about the lands of Montenegro that officially were under his administration, and which according to the plans were to be taken under the protection of the Austrian Empire.⁵

The key player in this particular situation was Petar I Petrovic-Njegos, the vladika⁶ of Montenegro, who went to Vienna to negotiate about the future of Montenegro and demand incorporation of the country into the Habsburg Empire. This plan, if realized, would have threatened the personal interests of Mahmud Pasha and, what is more, would have brought the Habsburg empire into his borders. During the conversation, Bushatli was accompanied by his personal friar-doctor⁷ and by Jak Mark Suma, vice consul of Venice in Shkodra, who at the same time served as his dragoman. According to the information sent by Jak Mark Suma to his superior in Durres, the Bushatli pasha dispatched a letter to the center informing it about the things revealed by the colonel but, of course suiting the content to fit his needs.⁸

In the end, Mahmud Pasha decided to take measures against the Montenegrins, who despised the authority of Shkodra and, taking advantage of the Russo-Ottoman War (1768-1774) refused to pay taxes they once had. Furthermore, the banditry of the people in that region was harming the economy and the lives of his subjects in the

⁵ Naci, "*Pashalleku i Shkodres*", p. 144. On this matter, the writer relied on: A.S.V. cons. di Durazzo, let. di Capriata, Dt. 9/II/1784.

⁶ Vladika or prince-bishopric was a title held by the Petrovic-Njegos dynasty. It was through this hereditary title that they exerted political and religious authority in Montenegro. In fact, this kind of *de facto* theocracy would play an important role in the unification of Montenegro.

⁷ The report thus underlines that Pater Balneo had always present in the important issues of Bushatli Mahmud.

⁸ A.S.V. cons. di Durazzo, let. di Capriata, Dt. 9/II/1784.

district, thus obliging him to take strong action. However, this task had its own risks considering the mountainous geography in which the confrontation was to be held. In addition to this, there was the Veneto-Montenegrin cooperation through the Albania-Veneta⁹ region which would put in danger the authority of the Bushatli. On the other hand, there was the sub-district of Podgorica with its strong Işbuzi castle, which was contested region between the governor of Bosnia and Mahmud Pasha of Shkodra.¹⁰

As a matter of fact, Mahmud had organized several expeditions on both of these places, but without taking them permanently. As for the last one in 1781, Mahmud succeeded only in pillaging the region and attracting the attention of the Bosnia Council, which immediately protested to the center this violation of the territorial integrity of Bosnia province.¹¹ However, the next attack on the contested area would cause a profound impact on the Ottoman frontier zone of northern Bosnia province, which was dealing with the Habsburg and at the same time was to keep an eye on the banditry activities in its southern regions.

4.2. The Podgorica Issue

Podgorica sub-district, in the Ottoman system of provincial administration, was traditionally part of Shkodra district but, during the second half of the eighteenth century, there was a continuous shift in this region due to political circumstances. The population of this sub-district was mainly Bosnian,¹² and what was more important, the garrisons were manned by Bosnian militia, thus giving the governor of Bosnia the right of supervising the tax revenues used to pay the soldiers. Yet, except

⁹ This term was used for the Venetian possessions on the Balkan coast from the bay of Kotor to the enclave of Budua.

¹⁰ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 145.

¹¹ B.O.A. C.DH. 333, 16631 [29 S 1195(24 February 1781)].

¹² Naci, *Ibid.*

for supervising the tax revenues, the administration was left to the governor of Shkodra, causing a dichotomy that led to a confrontation between the two sides.¹³

In order to preserve balance in the region, the Ottoman government transferred the sub-district of Podgorica to the district of Herceg, which was part of Bosnia province.¹⁴ Mahmud, on the other hand, tried every kind of method to persuade the center to return it to him, even using military intervention in 1781 by attacking Niksic (Bakiyye-Nova).¹⁵ On the other hand, according to the Bushatli governor, Podgorica was much closer to the market of Shkodra, thus making it economically dependent on Shkodra, but this aspect of the issue was not quite convincing to the center, which left the contested sub-district under the authority of the Bosnian governor in the end. However, Mahmud Pasha took advantage of the information revealed by the Austrian colonel, and decided to use it against the Montenegrins as a pretext to dispatch an army. In addition to this, as an “obedient” Ottoman official, he would do his duty by eliminating the enemies of the central authority and retake Podgorica for his administration, thus killing two birds with one stone.¹⁶

A Zealous Bosnian Governor

In this crisis the governor of Bosnia province, Defterzade Abdullah, was one of the main actors in addition to being one of the most remarkable Ottoman officials of that period. Born as the son of Bosnian Ismail Ağa, a member of Hekimoğlu Ali’s household, Abdullah was educated in the inner service of the imperial palace, becoming a skillful financier and an accomplished official. Following this, he was promoted to Silahdar Ağa, therefore close to and a favorite of the sultan.¹⁷ Later on, in 1780 Abdullah was appointed as the new governor of Bosnia province and was given the duty of restoring the military strength of this frontier back to its previous

¹³ Michael R Hickok, *Ottoman Military Administration in Eighteenth-Century Bosnia*, p. 153.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ B.O.A. AE.SABH.I. 78, 5449[09 Za 1195(27 October 1781)].

¹⁶ Naci, Ibid, p. 146.

¹⁷ Ahmed Vasıf Efendi, *Mehâsinü'l-Âsâr ve Hakaikü'l-Ahbâr*, p. 217.

status. Despite the difficulty of the task, he was successful and managed to restore the old Bosnia militia to his command and consolidate his authority by appointing his own men; however, in the end, he came face-to-face with Bushatli Mahmud.

The protection of the territorial integrity of Bosnia province was essential to reinforcing the authority of the government and to collect the tax revenues, which were used to maintain the Bosnian militia companies. Although new to the post of governor, Defterzade Abdullah immediately showed great progress by appointing, on 16 March 1781, his own man Ibrahim Pasha as deputy-governor in the contested sub-district of Podgorica. He also managed to restore order by eliminating the bandits and other troublemakers in the district of Herceg, who, according to an investigations done by both the central government and Abdullah Pasha, were men of Mahmud Pasha. However, due to the threats of war from both Russia and Austria, the two parties decided not to move immediately against Mahmud.¹⁸

The central government decided, probably in the beginning of 1784, in order to find a permanent solution for the Podgorica issue, to move the contested sub-district from the jurisdiction of Shkodra and join it to Herceg, thus putting it under the authority of the Bosnian governor. As a matter of fact, the mobilization of Austrian troops just a couple of kilometers away from the border alerted the Ottoman government, which chose to strengthen the Bosnian frontier by any necessity. Furthermore, the zealous governor Defterzade was vigorously surveilling the frontier, thus obstructing a military invasion from the Austrian side. However, Bushatli Mahmud immediately opposed the decision of the center by removing Abdullah Pasha and his son Ibrahim, who were both clients of the governor Defterzade Abdullah, and appointing as new deputy-governor his own man, Husain Pasha of Izvornik.¹⁹

¹⁸ Hickok, *Ottoman Military Administration*, p. 158-159.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 162-163. Ibrahim Pasha, according to Hickok, was probably the same official who was appointed by Defterzade Abdullah as deputy-governor of Podgorica in 1781, and we can assume that he was administering the office together with his father Abdullah Pasha.

The Assault on Podgorica

Following the transfer of Podgorica to Bosnia, Mahmud Pasha and his younger brother Ahmed entered Podgorica in February 1784 and invaded it with their troops. As told by Ibrahim Pasha, who was the only one of the people inside the castle of Podgorica to escape, the pasha of Shkodra, after pillaging the region, moved to the castle İşbuzi. Furthermore, Ibrahim Pasha, as the legitimately appointed deputy-governor of the sub-district, demanded the punishment of Mahmud Pasha by the center. In addition to this, he decided to gather troops in Bosnia so he could stop Mahmud and his men's advance before they could reach İşbuzi.²⁰ Regarding the assault on Podgorica by Mahmud and his men, aside from Ibrahim, we can also rely on reports sent by Naip (regent) Ahmed of Podgorica and Defterzade Abdullah Pasha.

In his report sent to the center, Naip Ahmed condemned the disastrous activities of the Shkodra governor, who had killed many innocent people and pillaged the region of Podgorica. He also appealed for the punishment of Mahmud Pasha, who according to Naip Ahmed ruined the peace formerly present under Ibrahim Pasha and annexed the sub-district, transferring it again to Shkodra. In addition to this, Ahmed underlined the fact the Bushatli had previously infiltrated his men, which leads us to think that Mahmud had planned the assault on Podgorica right after Defterzade Abdullah appointed Ibrahim Pasha in 1781. Moreover, according to the letter sent to the center, Ahmed was also representing a group of the pious and notables of the localities in Podgorica.²¹

Ibrahim Pasha, in one of his many letters sent to the center, also gave information about the journey to Austria of the Montenegrin governor, Radovan Radonjic, who applied for military support to the Austrian emperor for a general rebellion against the Ottomans. Consequently, the Austrians mobilized five thousand troops and the supplies needed for the campaign and sent them to Kotor. According to Ibrahim, the leader of this campaign against the Sublime Porte would have been Bushatli

²⁰ B.O.A. HAT 21, 1200-A [25 R 1198(18 March 1784)].

²¹ B.O.A. HAT 21, 1200-D [21 R 1198(14 March 1784)]; Hickok, *Ottoman Military Administration*, p. 166-167.

Mahmud, and for this reason, he wanted to attack İşbuži in order to avenge his family's murdered by the governor of Shkodra.²² From this, we also understand that even the Venice may have been indirectly supporting this plan, or perhaps they were forced to, since these activities were taking place in its territorial possessions.

4.3. The Role and the Image of Mahmud in Podgorica

Following the report sent by Ibrahim Pasha, which stressed the danger that might come and the negative role of Mahmud on this issue, it was Defterzade Abdullah Pasha who would contradict the analysis of his own man. In his report issued on 22 April, the governor of Bosnia agreed with the report of Ibrahim on the Montenegrin governor's journey to Austria and the mobilization of their troops in Kotor. However, Mahmud had informed Abdullah about the mobilization of the Montenegrins for a rebellion, which undermined the version of Ibrahim that the troops were being commanded by the official of Shkodra.²³ As we see from the letter of Defterzade Abdullah, the danger of a united assault from Austria and the Montenegrins was much more important than a dispute between Ottoman officials.

The central government decided to act upon this report presented by their zealous governor who was doing remarkable work in protecting the frontier of Bosnia. Thus, the imperial council had both Defterzade Abdullah and Ibrahim Pasha, warned about making a move against Mahmud and instructed them to monitor the movements of the Austrians. Yet, the actions of Mahmud were not forgiven, but any decision regarding them was postponed due to the threat that the Austrians and Montenegrins posed to the territorial integrity of the Ottoman realm.²⁴ Furthermore, the center received a petition signed by the military companies in the region in which they confirmed the atrocities carried at by the governor of Shkodra but stated that,

²² Ibid, p.168. In this report sent by Ibrahim Pasha, we learn that his father and all the members of his household were killed during the seizure of Podgorica, see: B.O.A. HAT 29, 1372[12 C 1198(3 May 1784)].

²³ B.O.A. HAT 21, 1003-B [1 C 1198(22 April 1784)].

²⁴ B.O.A. HAT 21, 1002 [11 C 1198(2 May 1784)].

due to the dangerous situation that the state was in, however the Bosnian officers stated that they would accept serving under the command of Mahmud.²⁵

In order to maintain security in the northern frontier, the Imperial Council decided to give to the Bushatli Ahmed, younger brother of Mahmud, the title of pasha and the governorship of the Ohrid district.²⁶ From all these reports issued the Imperial Council, we come to the conclusion that despite Mahmud's continued attacks and atrocities in Podgorica, he was still a key player in this crisis. Moreover, due to his large military potential, he could easily handle at least Montenegro, which freed Defterzade Abdullah to organize the northern frontier of Bosnia without being caught in a war on two fronts. In order to make Mahmud collaborate fully, the central government even restored Podgorica to Shkodra district.²⁷ Thus, by making this move, it was assumed that regions under the threat of invasion could be protected more efficiently by the Bushatli, who ironically pillaged those places more than any foreign enemy.

Meanwhile the zealous governor Defterzade was organizing the northern defense in an exceptional way, leaving no openings for the Austrians to attack. Moreover, the collaboration of Mahmud made it possible for him to transfer the Bosnian companies from Podgorica region to the north, where the Austrians, taking advantage of the dispute between the Ottoman governors, had their army stationed just across the border. In addition, Abdullah Pasha, supported intensively by the center, began to mobilize militia from the localities while at the same time giving priority to the furnish the fortress tower at the point where ever the Austrians were likely to attack.²⁸

²⁵ Hickok, *Ottoman Military Administration*, p. 170.

²⁶ Ahmed Vasif Efendi, *Mehâsinü'l-Âsâr ve Hakaikü'l-Ahbâr*, p. 215-216.

²⁷ B.O.A. HAT 29, 1372[12 C 1198(3 May 1784)].

²⁸ Hickok, *Ottoman Military Administration*, p. 171-172.

Problems at Home

The long duration of the Podgorica crisis forced Mahmud to emphasize his military resources and to concentrate on protecting his interests in the region. However, this also was an opportunity for his enemies in Ottoman-Albania to strike and create disorder in his zone of influence. Due to the death on the 12 May of his brother-in-law, Suleiman Beg of Kavaja, Mahmud left the northern frontier and travelled to express his condolences to his sister. Taking advantage of the temporary stabilization reached by Defterzade Abdullah, he immediately began to take measures to preserve order and to strengthen his authority in the paşalık. Due to the death of Suleiman Beg, the Bushatli pasha feared an internal dispute in the Alltuni household for control of Kavaje, which might consequently give the southern Albanian pashas the opportunity to attack him. This being the case, he intervened by appointing his nephew Mahmud Beg, who was the son of his sister in her first marriage with Ibrahim Beg.²⁹

Following this, Mahmud Pasha returned to Shkodra and within a short time mobilized an army of more than twenty thousand troops, to which Mahmud Beg of Kavaja contributed 1,500 additional soldiers. This large army was to move in the direction of Dibra (Debre), which was part of Ohrid district administrated by Bushatli Ahmed Pasha. The reason for this campaign was to punish the commander of Dibra castle, who refused to recognize Ahmed as the new governor or to pay his dues. However, logistical difficulties due to the mountainous area in which Dibra castle was situated made it almost impossible to conquer. Aware of this fact, Mahmud decided to bring along the Austrian colonel in order to try the Habsburg techniques of siege-craft on the castle and, in consequence, the governor of Shkodra was victorious. After putting an end to the problems in his paşalık, Bushatli Mahmud turned his attention to the north again and, for this, he re-mobilized his army, now equipped with war materiel brought from Ragusa.³⁰

²⁹ A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo, let. di Capriata Dt. 09/June/1784.

³⁰ Ibid.

The Cost of Greed

As much as Defterzade tried to hold back an offensive of the Austrians supported by the Montenegrin tribes, a definitive end to this crisis was still hard to achieve. The greed of Mahmud for the region of Podgorica was the catalyst to unite the Montenegrins, who before that had been fighting amongst factions and clanship affiliations. On the other hand, he gave the Austrians the opportunity to assault from a different position, thus weakening the Bosnian frontier and putting the Ottoman interests in the region in jeopardy. Furthermore, the possibility of a war against Russia at that moment could have made the situation worse, since it would have created the chance of an alliance between Austria and the Montenegrins. As for the Bosnians, they were displeased because the Podgorica issue was left in the hands of Mahmud Pasha. To make the situation yet more worse, Defterzade Abdullah died in January 1785.³¹

Therefore, in order to maintain the situation as much as possible in its favor, the central government gave authority over Podgorica and İşbuži to Mahmud Pasha.³² In fact, this might be seen as a success from Mahmud's point of view, although the consequences of his assault on Podgorica would last for a long time. During this time, even though Mahmud faced confrontations with the center, he was always seen as an Ottoman official by his peers and even by the Montenegrins. Based on different primary and secondary sources we see that, driven by greed and ambition, Mahmud was fighting in Podgorica for his own personal interests and that his main goal there was to establish his authority by any means necessary. Furthermore, in Podgorica there was collaboration between the center, the governor of Bosnia, and Mahmud. In fact, the Bushatli helped the central government to maintain order with his own troops in many cases as well.³³

³¹ Hickok, *Ottoman Military Administration*, p. 173.

³² Ahmed Vasıf Efendi, *Mehâsinü'l-Âsâr ve Hakaikü'l-Ahbâr*, p. 262.

³³ Pater Balneo, who was Mahmud's right-hand man, also depicted the meeting of Mahmud in Podgorica as step toward independence. Michael Robert Hickok has masterfully criticized the nationalist point view on Mahmud and other Balkan provincial notables. To understand better this situation, we can find a similar example from the activities of Ali Pasha of Tepelena during the Ottoman

4.4. Military Campaign on Montenegro and Venice

After the death of Defterzade in January 1785, the whole operation against the Montenegrins was in the hands of Mahmud, who began to organize a campaign which had been ordered by the center. As mentioned before, the greed of the Bushatli may have weakened the southern frontier and created disputes with the Bosnians there; however, the governor of Shkodra was much more capable to handle the Montenegrins than the Bosnians since the Bushatli household had historically had this problematic region under strict and continuous observation since the time of Bushatli Mehmed Pasha.³⁴ In addition, Mahmud had had his men infiltrated in Montenegro for a long time and was inciting disputes between the two main groups, the prince-bishop vladika, Petar Petrovic, who wanted religious and political authority to be in his hands, and the Montenegrin notables represented by Jovan Radonjic.³⁵

In late February 1785, Mahmud began to gather his allies in Zadrima and to mobilize his army for an offensive. However, the death of Mahmud's wife by his pistol became a serious problem, since she was the daughter of Ibrahim Beg of Tirana, this threatened to cause a crisis in their alliance. In order to avoid this, Mahmud announced his second marriage with the sister of his deceased wife and managed somehow to maintain his authority in central Albania. Furthermore, due to the long and difficult effort in the Podgorica crisis, some Albanian pashas began to challenge him, for instance Suleiman Pasha of Elbasan. An ally of Kurd Ahmed Pasha, he threw out his wife, who was the sister of Mahmud, thus provoking a new war in central Albania.³⁶

war against the French Empire. See: Şakul, Kahraman. "An Ottoman Global Moment: War of Second Coalition in the Levant", unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Georgetown University, 2009), pp. 310-318.

³⁴ In fact, according to some researchers, due to the problems that Stephan the Little, an illegitimate leader of Montenegrins, was causing problems for the Ottoman authorities. It was Bushatli Mehmed Pasha, the old, who eliminated him by bribing a doctor who poisoned Stephan, see: Elizabeth Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro*, (New York: Cornell University, 2007), p. 158.

³⁵ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 149.

³⁶ A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo, let. di Albergheti, Dt. 01/III/1785. Regarding the death of Mahmud's wife, Pater Balneo believed that it was an accident. See: Pllumi, *Fрати i Pashallareve Bushatli*, p. 113. However, the Venetian official believed that Mahmud killed her on purpose and married her sister just

The provocations toward Mahmud from the southern pashas were no mere coincidence of the moment; behind this, the central government played its own role. Aware of Mahmud's strength, Istanbul decided to balance out the regional powers by giving wide authority to his old rival, Kurd Ahmed Pasha of Berat. For this reason, following the crisis of Podgorica, the center reconfirmed Kurd Pasha as the guardian of passes for Rumeli province (*derbendat başbuğluğu Rumeli*).³⁷ Despite being the brother-in-law of Bushatli Mahmud, Suleiman Pasha of Elbasan decided to turn against him; the reason behind this may be the previous provocative activities of the Pasha of Shkodra and his allies against him in the vicinity of Elbasan.³⁸ Although the situation in the south of his domains was not favorable, Mahmud decided to move to the north; but before he dealt with the Montenegrins, there was someone else settle with.

Ibrahim Pasha of İşbuzi, even though Mahmud took the region of Podgorica into his custody, was left as commandant of İşbuzi castle. In order to prevent an ambush from the east while moving to Cetinje,³⁹ the Bushatli attacked and removed the commandant from the castle, occasioning a dispute with the central government.⁴⁰ By securing the flanks, Mahmud could easily invade the Montenegrins from many sides, and to assure everything he even came to terms with the Bosnian Pashas of Herceg district at a meeting in Podgorica.⁴¹ After securing the Podgorica district and his Bosnian alliances, in April he returned to Shkodra in order to make the final preparations for war.

The rumors about an assault on Montenegro had reached all the corners of the region, causing anxiety among even those living near to them such as the Pastrovici

to avoid a dispute with her household. The absence of an heir may have led Mahmud to think that his wife was not able to give birth, causing him to kill her.

³⁷ B.O.A. AE. SABH.I. 31, 2330[29 Z 1198(13 November 1784)].

³⁸ B.O.A. C.DH. 312, 15564[29 Z 1198(13 November 1784)].

³⁹ The city of Cetinje used to be the capital of the Montenegrins, and the seat of Vladikas.

⁴⁰ B.O.A. C.DH. 95, 4728[20 Ca 1199(31 March 1785)]; Pllumi, *ibid.*, p. 114.

who, despite being Venetian citizens, were afraid that Mahmud might attack them as well. Hence, before the governor of Shkodra started his march toward Montenegro, the notables of Pastrovici went to Shkodra to ask him to make them citizens of the Ottoman Empire as part of his district. However, Mahmud laughed in refusing this offer, probably as attacking a region of Venice would exacerbate things.⁴² Instead, the pasha demanded that, in the name of the good friendship between him and the Republic of Venice, no help would be given to the Montenegrins.⁴³

After gathering an army of approximately thirty thousand troops, Mahmud Pasha on the 13 June departed toward Cetinje, capital of Montenegro. He attacked from both sea and land and divided his army into three parts, consequently forcing the Montenegrins to do the same. A large number of soldiers, Mahmud's remarkable tactical plans, and the absence of Vladika Petar made the sack of Cetinje easier even than it had been expected by the governor himself. In fact, the siege of the Montenegrin capital, which started on the 18 June, lasted for only four days, and on the 22 June, the conquest was accomplished.⁴⁴

Following the conquest of Montenegro by Bushatli Mahmud, an imperial decree coming from Istanbul pardoned him and his brother for their capture of İşbuzi castle and Ahmed Pasha was once again confirmed governor of Ohrid. Hence, it is possible to say that the attack on Montenegro was an extension of the Podgorica crisis, considering that the capture of İşbuzi castle meant was to ensure the success of the campaign. In addition to this, the burning of Cetinje by an Ottoman official can be judged as a punishment on the Montenegrins set by Istanbul in retaliation for their collaboration with the Austrians.⁴⁵ After the great victory that even his earliest

⁴² A.S.V. Cons. di Scutari, part of the letter Dt. 19/IV/1785.

⁴³ Dora D'Istria, "Scutari e i Buchatli", p. 233.

⁴⁴ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 158; Dora D'Istria, *Ibid.*; Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, p. 163-164.

⁴⁵ A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo, let. di Alberghetti, Dt. 28/VI/1785. Albanian historians depict the attack on Montenegrins as an individual move by Mahmud and his allies, thus negating the order given by the central government. In addition to this, the pardoning of Mahmud and his brother just before the attack on the Montenegrins was a plan prepared by the center, in which it forgave his official in

predecessors had not achieved, during his return, Mahmud made his most debatable move: an attack on a Venetian territory.

The Disaster of Pastrovici

After finishing the campaign against Cetinje, the governor of Shkodra decided to return to his capital by sea, from the port-city of Tivar (Bar). He departed from the capital of Montenegro and on 27 June, he asked the Venetian governor of Kotor, who was also responsible for the Pastrovici region, for permission to pass through the lands of the republic. At the same time, even the notables were informed of this request, and after a long consultation they accepted the request of Mahmud to pass through their lands; however, due to mistrust, they moved the population to the islands. On 29 June, Mahmud entered Pastrovici and asked them to honor the word that they had given to him in Shkodra to recognize his authority. However, this time they refused, arguing that they had pledged fealty to Venice, which was their patron.⁴⁶

Following their answer, Mahmud immediately gave the order to pillage and burn the region as punishment for their insolence. He committed many atrocities in the locality, with some scholars estimating casualties of more than two hundred casualties. Furthermore, the pasha even destroyed monasteries and burnt many houses to ashes, leaving the place in misery on 30 June when he departed. After decapitating the notables of Pastrovici Mahmud moved to Tivar (Bar) and with his waiting fleet returned to Shkodra.⁴⁷ The sacking of Pastrovici, whose tribes had been recognized as Venetian citizens since the sixteenth century, caused a serious diplomatic problem, not only with Mahmud Pasha but, at the same time, even with

exchange for his assistance in the war. Relating to his pardon, see: B.O.A. AE.SABH.I. 80, 5573[19 B 1199(28 May 1785). Even, Hickok, in his work, mentions the fact that the Sublime Porte sent Mahmud in June to punish them, thus proving to us that Mahmud was always part of the plans in the region as he was a governor for that region. See: Hickok, *Ottoman Military Administration*, p. 173.

⁴⁶ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 158-159; Dora D'Istria, "Scutari e i Buchatli", p. 233.

⁴⁷ Johann W. Zinkeisen, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Tarihi Vol.6*, ed. Erhan Afyoncu, (İstanbul: Yeditepe Yayınları, 2011), p. 373; Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain*, p.164; Mile, "Rreth Veprimtarise Politiko-Ushtarake", p. 184.

the Ottoman government. So what was the true reason for Mahmud to take the risky decision to attack Venice itself?

The scholar Dora D'Istria has used a large number of primary sources in researching this issue, and has even found reports of Venetian ambassadors which summarize the correspondence of Mahmud with the center. In these letters, the Ottoman official justifies the pillaging of the Venetian territory as a punishment for their attack on his army while moving to Pastrovici. Furthermore, he even said that his troops acted on their own will to protect themselves, and they did it all without receiving any orders from him. In addition, the Ottoman official implores the center not to listen to the foreign liars and asks for the central authorities to protect of his name.⁴⁸ However, this appears a total excuse for Mahmud to protect himself from an attack by both the central government and Venice.

The most logical reason for the attack and at the same time a hypothesis mentioned by many scholars, is the incitement of Mahmud Pasha by his "old" friend and protector, Gazi Hasan Pasha. Furthermore, the problems that the Venetians had with Tunisian and Algerian pirates had caused a grave diplomatic crisis between the center and the Republic of Venice. As much as Hasan Pasha tried to negotiate the peace between Venice and the Ottomans of North Africa, the Venetians turned down his offer, offending him.⁴⁹ In addition to this, Dora D'Istria and Zinkeisen, using primary sources written by the Western consuls, support the hypothesis that behind the attack of Mahmud Pasha lay Gazi Hasan Pasha.⁵⁰ In fact, even in his previous pardon which Ahmed Cevdet mentions in his work, we see that Hasan Pasha offered himself as a guarantor for Mahmud Pasha in many cases, a fact that shows the clientele relations in this period between the central figures and the provincial notables were very common.

⁴⁸ Dora D'Istria. "Gli Albanesi Musulmani, II, Berath e Janina", Nuova Antologia, Vol. XIV, (Firenze: Universita di Firenze, 1870), p. 28.

⁴⁹ Since the beginning of the crisis between Venice and the Ottoman seamen of Northern Africa Venice always feared an attack from both sides due to the close relations of Mahmud and Gazi Hasan Pasha, admiral of the Ottoman navy. See: Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 146, 155.

⁵⁰ Dora D'Istria, *Ibid.*, p.29.

After a long negotiation between Mahmud, Venice, and the Ottoman government peace was restored in the end thanks to the efforts of Istanbul to avoid problems with both its official and Venice. Moreover, the international situation with the Austrians moving in the north and the death of Defterzade Abdullah gave Mahmud a central role, which the central government could not do without. Despite the possibility of this dispute being caused by the Austrians to turn the Venetians against the Ottomans, they ultimately failed because the diplomacy of Istanbul acted very skillfully to avoid this kind of a problem.⁵¹

As for the role of Mahmud in all this issue and his activities, the Albanian historians would depict them as individual acts without the center's approval or support. Naçi tries to defend this approach about the campaign of Pastrovici basing on a document used by Dora D'Istria. In this document sent by an Albanian enemy of Mahmud on 27 July 1785 to his friend in Istanbul, he informs that the Bosnians and the other regional notables would beg Mahmud to continue his march against Castelnuovo and Ragusa. Even if we consider the hypothesis of an individual attack by Mahmud, the presence of the Bosnians in his army shows that probably it was the center who ordered them to join the army led by the governor of Shkodra.⁵² This fact proves that the center was always present in the provinces and there was no such thing as center-periphery dichotomy. As Yaycioglu stress out, the provincial power-holder would perform their governorship on their own way.⁵³

4.5. Expedition in Southern Albania

Right after the assault on Montenegro, Bushatli Mahmud turned his attention to the south as Kurd Ahmed Pasha and Suleiman Pasha of Elbasan had begun to create problems in the region. The first sparks for an another flare-up between the two

⁵¹ Zinkeisen, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Tarihi*, p. 374-376.

⁵² Naci, *Ibid*, p. 160.

⁵³ Ali Yaycioglu, "The Provincial Challenge: Regionalism, Crisis, and Integration in the Late Ottoman Empire (1792-1812)," Harvard University, unpublished Ph.D dissertation, 2008, p. 266.

Albanian pashas took place in March 1785 when Mahmud arrested two Venetian captains of the Ivanovich-Dabinovich company, which used to import tobacco from the port of Durres. However, due to their violation of the *ronda* (turn) system, and since they had begun to import wheat too, they were punished by the governor of Shkodra. Furthermore, Kurd Ahmed Pasha was a partner in the company and for this reason decided to react by closing the ports under his authority to the Dulcignote fleet, thus openly challenging Mahmud.⁵⁴

On the other hand, there was the disrespectful way in which the pasha of Elbasan separated Mahmud's sister from her newborn child. In fact, the preparation for the Montenegro campaign had forced Mahmud to postpone these issues until later, and after returning he immediately started to plan the attack on these two pashas. The influence of Kurd Ahmed Pasha in the region of Berat had diminished considerably. Thus, even in the eyes of the population, he was not the same pasha who had defeated the Bushatlis in 1775. A separatist faction was taking shape in Berat, created by Mahmud and his sympathizers, who were weakening the district from inside because they planned to attack it from outside.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Mahmud negotiated with a new provincial notable, who after being appointed as governor of Delvine would have taken charge of the strategic district of Ioannina if Kurd Pasha had not interfere with the center. He was known as Ali Pasha of Tepelena, and in Bushatli Mahmud he saw the right man to could give him the necessary support to take revenge on the pasha of Berat.⁵⁶

Following the plans in southern Albania, the governor of Shkodra received another decree of forgiveness, this time related to his actions in the Venetian territories. He and his brother were pardoned on the condition that they not interfere with the appointments in Podgorica and Işbuzi.⁵⁷ That Mahmud and his peers in the Ottoman

⁵⁴ A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo, let. di Alberghetti, Dt. 14/III/1785.

⁵⁵ Dora D'Istria, "Berath e Janina", p. 30-31.

⁵⁶ Zinkeisen, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Tarihi*, p. 374; Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 164.

⁵⁷ B.O.A. C.DH. 339, 16936[02 N 1199(09 July 1785)].

Empire may have taken advantage of the difficult interstate position of the central government to negotiate for privileges or offices is something that we encounter a lot. However, it is also obvious that even the center itself did the same thing, as when it put Kurd Ahmed Pasha back into the game and began to negotiate for the offices of Podgorica and İşbuži, leaving the Bushatli without any choice but to accept the “generous offer” of Istanbul.

Defeating the Wolf

Kurd Pasha had defeated the Bushatlis in 1775, when the head of the family was Mustafa, but with Mahmud it was another story. Not only did the governor of Shkodra consolidate his power in Ottoman Albania, he also spread his influence beyond the Paşalık of Shkodra by creating alliances with the Bosnian pashas of Herceg and in southern Albania with Ali Pasha of Tepelena. Aware of this risky situation, the pasha of Berat mobilized about fifteen thousand troops inside the city.⁵⁸ As for the Bushatlis, they immediately dispatched the army and, before arriving at Berat, Mahmud decided to neutralize his allies and the “wolf” from all sides. Thus, he besieged the castle of Peqin and, without waiting for its surrender, together with Ahmed attacked Elbasan and defeated Suleiman Pasha, who instantly apologized and accepted the authority of Mahmud. After winning over other allies of Kurd Pasha in Elbasan, the governor of Shkodra restored order in the region and directed his forces to Berat.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Stavri Naci, “Shenimet Kronikale te Doreshkimit te Kostandin Beratit [The Chronicle Notes in the Manuscript of Kostandin of Berat]”, *Studime Historike Nr. III*, (Tirane: Universiteti i Tiranës, 1964), p. 162-163. This special manuscript written by an Orthodox priest is an important primary source that talks about the problems and the features of the order of provincial notables. During the mobilization of the army inside the city there were many atrocities committed by the Pasha’s own men.

⁵⁹ Naci, *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Next, the Bushatlis decided to divide the army and the roles. Thus Ahmed moved to Myzeqe,⁶⁰ while Mahmud decided to neutralize the notables of Korça⁶¹ and then to join Ali Pasha of Tepelena, who was attacking the region of Kurd Pasha from the southeast. Despite some resistance, the Bushatlis managed to surround the Pasha of Berat in his castle. However, due to the importance of Peqin, Kurd Pasha decided to come out of the city with his army and moved in direction of the besieged castle, where he would try to help his ally. Nevertheless, the governor of Shkodra, moving fast from south, reached the army of Kurd Pasha before his arrival in Peqin and dealt him a decisive blow. From this moment on, the Bushatli governor would take the title “Kara”, and become very famous even among the southern Albanians or Tosks.⁶²

A Taste of Venetian Diplomacy

Even though the southern campaign was a success, Kara Mahmud now had to turn his attention to the northern front where the Venetians, aware of his influence in Albania-Veneta had decided to respond in like manner. After making peace with the Montenegrins, Venice militarized its domains and began to send war materiel to its subjects in Montenegro. Furthermore, as masters of diplomacy, they began to pressure Istanbul by depicting the activities of Mahmud as a challenge to the central government and his actions as separatist moves. In addition to this, the Venetians could benefit from the petitions sent to Istanbul by the various rivals of the Bushatlis, thus manipulating the situation in their favor.⁶³

⁶⁰ The Plain of Myzeqe is located in the center of western Albania. It is a fertile land where many notables had their farms (chiftliks). Also, it was a main source of wheat for both the population of the region and for export through smuggle.

⁶¹ The city of Korça or Gorice, as it is known in Ottoman letters is located in the southeast of Albania. It was built by Imrahor Ilyas Pasha, commander and governor during the reign of Bayezid II. It is also the birthplace of the famous Ottoman grand vizier, Koçu Bey.

⁶² Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 164-166. In his work, Stavri Naci tries to show these activities as the efforts of Mahmud to unite all Albanians (“Albanian” in his work is used with nationalist nuances) under one state with him as leader. Even Dora D’Istria would depict the activities of Mahmud as a struggle to unite the Albanians.

⁶³ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 167.

On the other hand, Mahmud sent letters to the center from different places in order to justify his actions during the assault on Pastrovici. He would underline that there was an ambush by the local people and that his troops had reacted only to protect themselves.⁶⁴ The interference of Gazi Hasan Pasha saved Mahmud from all the accusations directed at him for the moment, but the central government had other plans for the governor of Shkodra. In fact, the Sublime Porte had secretly been mobilizing officials in the vicinity to attack Mahmud and administer a decisive punishment for his actions.⁶⁵ In November, the governor of Rumeli was ordered to mobilize troops against Mahmud. This task was entrusted to Ali Pasha of Tepelena, who also would get the support of Abdurrahman Pasha of Ipek.⁶⁶

Mahmud was aware of these occurrences and so had himself prepared for an attack from both the center and the Venetians, whose diplomacy had till that moment had proved to be successful. Thus, the governor of Shkodra responded to both parties by attacking and capturing the castle of Peqin, which could impede an assault from the south due to its strategic position. It was on 4 December that the castle at last was taken and as head of it, Bushatli appointed his nephew, Mahmud Beg of Kavaja. In addition to this, he even married the daughter of Kahraman Pasha of Ipek, thus creating an alliance with his son Abdullah Pasha and Begoğlus.⁶⁷ These countermeasures of Bushatli proved to be very useful as the Bushatlis strengthened their positions against their rivals. However, in return, the Sublime Porte decided to cut the funds for its officials who supported the Bushatlis and ordered Abdi Pasha, governor of Rumeli, to mobilize all the pashas under his authority against Mahmud Pasha.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ B.O.A. C.DH. 65, 3207 and C.HR. 58, 2895[05 M 1200(8 November 1785)]. These two letters sent by Ulcinj and Shkodra were issued on the same day and we see that the attack by Mahmud was just a reciprocation (mukabele-i Bilmisil).

⁶⁵ Dora, D'Istria. "Berath e Janina", p. 30. Based on the reports of the Venetian embassy in Istanbul, she underlines that the plans for a campaign against Mahmud began on October 1785.

⁶⁶ B.O.A. HAT 21, 1008[29 Z 1199(2 November 1785)].

⁶⁷ A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo, let. di Albergheti, Dt. 24/I/1786.

⁶⁸ B.O.A. C.AS. 113,50503[29 M 1200(2 December 1785)]; C.ZB. 69, 3408[30 M 1200(3 December)].

It was in January 1786 that the Sublime Porte decided to officially declare Bushatli Mahmud, his brother Ahmed, and Ali Pasha of Tepelena⁶⁹ as rebels and enemies of the central authority. This announcement by the center can probably be seen as an achievement of Venetian diplomacy, albeit a temporary one. As Russia and Austria decided to join forces against the Ottoman Empire, the central government changed its political approach by pardoning the three governors in March 1786.⁷⁰ The Sublime Porte was aware that its main financial and military resources were in the hands of its own governors, who by accumulating great capital, achieving offices, and tax farming, they had become power magnates.

Conclusion

The figure of Mahmud during this important period is regarded by Albanian historiography, based mainly on Western sources, as a nationalist one. It is obvious that the reports of the Venetians issued in that period are a reflection of their diplomacy against Mahmud and the Albanian historians fell into this trap, some by mistake and others on purpose.⁷¹ In fact, there is a growing reaction against the traditional understanding of the local magnates basing only on the Western accounts and influenced by the regionalist historiographies of the Balkans and the Middle East.⁷² The Ottoman Empire managed to maintain the control over the provinces through a network of alliances with different power holders even in the most remote places in the realm. Revisionist historiography on the provincial notables would emphasize the usage of the Ottoman sources instead of relying only on the Western ones. This would help us to draw the picture about the emergence of the power-holders in the

⁶⁹ This proves that the request of the Sublime Porte for putting Ali Pasha of Tepelena in charge of punishing Mahmud must have failed.

⁷⁰ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 169-173.

⁷¹ After the end of the Second World War in the Balkans, many states furthered their nationalist agenda by trying to find previous examples of political formations that could justify the first traces of their nation-states. In the Albanian case there were two main figures: Bushatli Mahmud and Ali Pasha of Tepelena, who are regarded as the first Albanian leaders to try to unite the Albanians under one state. It was especially in the communist era that such efforts, supported by the regime and official historiography, became politicized for use in propaganda.

⁷² Jane Hathaway, "Rewriting Eighteenth-Century Ottoman History" in A. Singer (ed.) *Mediterranean Historical Review* 19/1 (2004): 29-53.

Ottoman empire in quite different way.⁷³ Clientele relations between the central persons and the notables fostered alliances that would knit the center and the provinces, thus the idea of monolithic blocks would be wrong.⁷⁴

However, in the Ottoman documents, which are fairly great in number and are less used, we see in the governor of Shkodra an Ottoman official corrupted by power and challenging the authority of the central government. Furthermore, Ottoman chroniclers and Turkish historians would maintain this approach to the provincial notables, judging their activities from the center's point of view. Out of these two images, we see another face of Mahmud, who emerged as power magnate through the socio-fiscal dynamics that the Ottoman empire was experiencing at that time. He was not a nationalist figure, even though the majority of people under his authority were ethnically Albanians. Moreover, he was no more corrupt than the central officials. Thus, we can say that Mahmud was trying to protect his authority in the newly transformed Ottoman Empire.⁷⁵

⁷³ Dina Khoury, "The Ottoman centre versus provincial power-holders", pp. 135-56; F. Adanir, "Semi-autonomous forces in the Balkans and Anatolia", pp. 157- 85; Bruce Masters, "Semi-autonomous forces in Arab Provinces", pp. 186-208; all in S. Faroqhi (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, v. 3: The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603-1839, Part III: "The Centre and the Provinces."

⁷⁴ Yaycigolu, *Partners of the Empire*, p. 112.

⁷⁵ Suraiya Faroqhi, "Coping with the central state, Coping with Local Power: Ottoman Regions and Notables from the Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century," Fikret Adanir and Suraiya N. Faroqhi, eds. *The Ottomans and the Balkans: A Discussion of Historiography*. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 351-381.

CHAPTER V

THE END OF AN OTTOMAN NOTABLE

In the last chapter I focused on the two main confrontations of the Bushatlis with the central government, which after several instances of toleration decided to punish him with a military campaign. Thus, the first and the second part describe the beginnings of Mahmud's rebellion and the armed conflict between the sides in the siege of Shkodra, from which the Bushatlis emerged victorious. The third part tells about the negotiations of Mahmud with the center, Russia, and Austria in order to save himself from a second military campaign. Following his offers to the center, the Bushatli was forgiven and in the fourth chapter, we see him as an Ottoman official doing his duty. Finally, in the remaining parts, there is a depiction of the second siege of Shkodra and the later pardon granted to him through the intermediation of Spain and, in the end, his death during the war with the Montenegrins.

5.1. Challenging the Central Order

Bushatli Mahmud had his confirmation of being pardoned in 9 May 1786, by being made again governor of Shkodra. In addition to this, the central government demanded from him a thousand troops lead by Bushatli Ahmed Pasha to join the expedition of Gazi Hasan Pasha in Egypt.¹ Even though Mahmud gathered the soldiers, during the embarkation a dispute began among the troops, causing desertions. The center, informed about the event, ordered the punishment of all fugitives.² It was probably a plan of the Bushatlis, because letting a considerable number of troops leave at that delicate moment, when both Venice and the southern pashas were making preparations for war, was not something wise.

Mahmud began to mobilize his men toward the north, where he intended to pressure the Venetians as much as possible. In fact, this move was projected by the center

¹ B.O.A. AE.SABH.I. 163, 10902[10 B 1200(9 May 1786)].

² B.O.A. AE.SABH.I. 366, 25577.

itself since Venice and Malta were causing problems in the Mediterranean for the Ottomans, thus to allow Mahmud to attack the Venetian possessions in Montenegro was a logical decision. Following this, the Bushatli tried to demand tribute from the Venetians in order to come to an agreement. After long negotiations between the two parties, in the end, Mahmud received 150 thousand *akçe* as compensation. Yet, this proved to be a temporary solution since for the governor of Shkodra the possessions of Venice were very important, not only for the security of his district but at the same time to cut the links between the Austrian Empire and Montenegrins.³

The Beginning of the Rebellion

While the Ottoman center was dealing with a possible war against the Austrians and Russians, Mahmud decided to rebel against the central authority, creating great turmoil in the Ottoman Empire's western possessions. In addition to this, the governor of Shkodra tried to impose his order by replacing officials with his own men and, according to the Ottoman chroniclers, the influence of Mahmud even reached Manastir (Bitola).⁴ As we understand from a Russian Official's report, the strength of Bushatli Mahmud was so great that he even managed to challenge the governor of Rumeli, whose seat was Manastir. Furthermore, he reports that the Pasha of Shkodra even dared to lay hands on the funds that were destined for the salaries of the Janissary troops of Belgrade.⁵

Another important factor in the fast spread of his authority was the dysfunction of the Ottoman judiciary system. The main reason for this was the corruption and injustice of the *kadis* (judges), who in collaboration with the notables had made the life of the people in neighboring regions of Shkodra very difficult. Thus, in Mahmud, they saw an authoritarian official who could bring order by eliminating the lesser notables who were causing anarchy with their continuous confrontations.

³ A.S.V. Cons. di Scuttari, let. di J.M. Suma, Dt. 5/V/1786; Zinkeisen, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Tarihi*, p. 375-6.

⁴ Ahmet Cevdet Paşa. *Tarih-i Cevdet: Tertib-i cedit*. Vol. 3, p. 278.

⁵ A.Q.SH. Fondi 1506/6, Dosja nr. 1.

Furthermore, the rebellious Pasha had even interfered in the province of Bosnia by replacing the officially appointed *kapudan* with his supporters, thus creating a general crisis for the central government. In addition to this, due to the reconciliation with Kurd Ahmed Pasha of Berat, the center had to bring back on the scene Çavușoğlu Mehmed, an old enemy of the Bushatlis, and also Ali Pasha of Tepelena was requested to be ready against Mahmud.⁶

The alliance with the Pasha of Berat meant that the Bushatlis, after their consolidation in northern Albania, were trying to put the even the southern lands under their authority, thus creating a large sphere of influence.⁷ Even though the situation was escalating for the central government, the old friends of Mahmud, Gazi Hasan Pasha and the Grand Vizier Yusuf Pasha tried to negotiate with the rebellious governor by offering him the title Vizier, but to no use. Even though the center wanted to punish Mahmud, the lack of resources made the task very difficult and what is the most important, this power magnate was governing in an autonomous way. Hence, the passive stance of the Ottoman government continued until the end of 1786, but the Bushatlis were aware of the preparations against them so they took countermeasures and mobilized their troops for the coming confrontation.⁸

Response to the Invitation

The passiveness of the Sublime Porte toward Mahmud did not last long and the preparations against him began with the mobilization of the Albanian Pashas on one side and the Bosnians on the other. Aydoslu Mehmed Pasha, the governor of Rumeli, reported to the center about the activities of Mahmud in the region in February 1787, mentioning the atrocities committed by his men.⁹ It was in 6 March 1787 when, in Istanbul during a council meeting (*meclis-i şura*), the governor of Shkodra was officially declared a rebel against the state and the religion by the Shaykh al-Islām.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ A.S.V. Cons. di Scutari, let. di Jak Mark Suma, Dt. 2/XI/1786.

⁸ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 184-185.

⁹ B.O.A. HAT 19, 913[3 Ca 1201(21 February 1787)].

Furthermore, he was suspended from the governance of Shkodra, and in his place the council suggested someone from the Çavușoğlu household, since they were natives of Shkodra and old enemies with the Bushatlis. As for the district of Ohrid, the name of Ismail Pasha of Manastir was put forward by the participants.¹⁰

Additionally, in this meeting the chosen ones for the military campaign against Kara Mahmud of Shkodra were also determined. The selected individuals were Ottoman officials that had previously fought against him or old allies that knew him very well. Thus, in Bosnia Province Sırrı Selim Pasha would take the command of the Bosnian troops and move against Shkodra from the north, moreover, Aydoslu Mehmed Pasha would take the lead of the operation by being appointed as the new governor of Rumeli. Furthermore, Kurd Ahmed Pasha would take care of things in central Albania with his own troops, and as for Ali Pasha of Tepelena, he was to receive ten thousand piastre and ordered to move to Manastir, where Mahmud was creating problems for the governor of Rumeli.¹¹

Until June the situation was balanced between the two fronts, Mahmud managing to stand up to the forces acting on behalf of the central government. Since he had lost the support of Kurd Pasha¹² and that of Ali Pasha of Tepelena he began to lose control of central and southern Albania. In fact, the Ottoman governors, by mobilizing troops and through the division of duties, created the Durres-Elbasan-Ohri-Manastir axis, which blocked every movement of the Bushatlis in the south.¹³ Moreover, since Mahmud had considerable influence on the sea, the Sublime Porte decided to launch an offensive with the navy, thus closing the supply corridor that the Bushatlis had created with the Dulcignote merchant marine.¹⁴ Hence the rebellion of Mahmud

¹⁰ B.O.A. C.DH. 7, 334[16 Ca 1201(6 March 1787)].

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kurd Ahmet Pasha died on the 18 March 1787 and was replaced by his son who, in order to stay in power, became a supporter of the central government forces in the campaign against Mahmud, see: Naci, "Kostandin Berati", p.164.

¹³ For more detailed information, see: B.O.A. C.DH. 95, 4725.

¹⁴ B.O.A. C.DH. 65, 3247.

Pasha was in many ways late in getting its response from Istanbul, but in the second half of 1787 the central forces moved on to the second phase.

5.2. The Siege of Shkodra

Following the reinforcement of the central forces, Mahmud Pasha decided to confront them before they could reach Shkodra. Thus, at the head of twenty thousand troops, the Bushatlis marched towards the region of Kosovo as the governor of Rumeli wanted to attack the capital of Mahmud from the northeast. In addition to this, Mahmud wanted to reassert his authority since there was a clash between the faction of the Bushatlis and supporters of the central government. While waiting for the army of the governor of Rumeli, Mahmud discovered near Manastir an army which was commanded by his old rival Çavușoğlu Mehmed Pasha. Despite being fewer in number, the Bushatli attacked it and achieved a decisive victory against them and seized much war materiel. Informed about the advance of the imperial troops by sea and land, Mahmud Pasha returned to Shkodra and started the preparations for the resistance.¹⁵

The Lion of the Tosks

A former ally of the Bushatlis against Kurd Ahmed Pasha, Ali Pasha of Tepelena¹⁶ had become one of the most popular magnates in southern Albania and the strongest leader among the Tosks.¹⁷ Even though Ali had caused a lot of atrocities and burned down many villages, he was appointed as the governor of Trikala by the Sublime Porte, an obvious move to make use of his military capabilities. In fact, the notable from the Tosks proved to be a remarkable commander as he changed the balance of the campaign in favor of the central government. Firstly, he broke the defensive

¹⁵ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 187-188.

¹⁶ Born in Tepelena, Ali Pasha is one of the most famous of the Ottoman power magnates thanks to his role in the Greek revolution. Furthermore, he was the subject of many works even while alive and with him the European travelers gave their example of the typical oriental leader. Ali Pasha has been “blamed” for eclipsing the figure of Bushatli Mahmud and other power magnates in modern scholarship.

¹⁷ Tosk is a cultural and geographical name applied generally for the southern Albanians.

forces of the Bushatlis in Ohrid and gave the central forces a crucial victory. He even cut off the head of Mahmud's cousin and sent it to Istanbul.¹⁸

Secondly, this audacious pasha moved to Elbasan where the factions of the Bushatlis were giving a hard time to the army of the center; however, the intervention of Ali broke their resistance and brought central Albania under the authority of the central forces. Furthermore, since Kurd Pasha died, the Pasha of Tepelena took the posts both of the Trikala governance and as the new guardian of passes, becoming the most influential person in southern Albania. The Sublime Porte, due to his contributions in this campaign, did not withhold any kind of support, thus putting many other commanders under him and, at the same time, sending him a considerable amount of money.¹⁹ His contribution in the campaign against Bushatli Mahmud may have also affected his later rise and consolidation as the strongest among the power magnates.

The Costs of Rebellion

As the things in the south were getting worse for the Bushatlis, Mahmud gave importance to the armament of Shkodra castle and prepared the strategic places where his men would wage their resistance against the central forces. Furthermore, despite the measures taken for the confrontation, he had sent a large amount of money to Istanbul in order to be pardoned for his crimes. In fact, the Bushatli had even tried to bribe the governor of Rumeli, and may have tried to do the same with governor of Bosnia. However, Mahmud failed to gain forgiveness from the center and, what is worse, he lost the support of Ibrahim Beg of Tirana, who moved to the other side, betraying the Bushatlis.²⁰

In order to restrain the movements of the Bushatlis, the Sublime Porte brought in the Toptani household of Kruja with its leader Mustafa.²¹ By taking advantage of their

¹⁸ A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo, let. di Alberghetti, Dt. 16/VI/1787.

¹⁹ B.O.A. C.DH. 94, 4663; C.AS. 224, 9527.

²⁰ A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo, let di Alberghetti Dt. 13/VII/1787.

²¹ Ahmet Cevdet Paşa. *Tarih-i Cevdet: Tertib-i cedit*. Vol. 4, p. 280.

influence in central Albania, Istanbul blocked all commercial activity by Shkodra merchants since most of them were agents of Mahmud. The Çavușoğlus began to attack from inside Shkodra through their partisans and some other Shkodra households, fearful of punishment, joined the Çavușoğlus. However, Mahmud did not lose control immediately as he eliminated and neutralized the suspicious group and organized the resistance while Bushatli Ahmed successfully confronted the Bosnian troops that were coming from the north.²²

Despite all his efforts, Mahmud found himself surrounded by Imperial armies advancing from both south and north towards Shkodra castle. In August, there were rumors that the center had pardoned the rebellious Bushatli, but these were officially denied by the central authorities.²³ Furthermore, by concentrating its forces, the Sublime Porte succeeded in breaking the resistance of the rebellious in Shkodra. As they came close to the castle of Mahmud, the arrival of Hasan Pasha the Algerian caused the uprising of Ulcinj against the Bushatlis, and in the end, the nephew of Mahmud, Mehmed Beg²⁴ at the age of fourteen would be handed over to the Ottoman authorities. However, the greatest loss for Mahmud was the decapitation of his brother Ahmed, who after defeating the Bosnian armies in the north was later betrayed by his own men.²⁵

Aware of the coming danger, on 26 August 1787, after losing almost everything in the rebellion, Mahmud decided to lock himself in his castle with just three hundred soldiers and make his last stand. After a long advance the Imperial army, at the head of which was Aydoslu Mehmed Pasha, had entered Shkodra and besieged the castle.²⁶ The assault on the castle of Shkodra proved to be a difficult issue, and the

²² Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 190-191.

²³ B.O.A. AE.SABH.I. 192, 12849[22 L 1201(7 August 1787)].

²⁴ Son of Bushatli Mustafa "the blind", previous leader of Shkodra Paşalık, and later Mehmed Beg will have a son with the name of Mustafa, who would rebel in 1830th against the central authority.

²⁵ A.Q.SH. Fondi 1506/6, Dosja nr. 1. His head was then sent by the Bosnian governor Selim Pasha to Istanbul, see: B.O.A. HAT 18, 814.

²⁶ A.Q.SH. Fondi 134, D.24, p.1; Pllumi, *Frati i Pashallareve Bushatli*, p. 121-122.

center during this time declared war to Russia. For this reason, the Sublime Porte ordered its commanders in Shkodra to finish off Mahmud before the confrontation with the enemy.²⁷ Yet, due to the need of soldiers, the center ordered many of the notables who took part in the siege of Shkodra to retreat and to be prepare for the war against Russia. Moreover, since the rebellious pasha was locked in the castle, there was no need to have that large a number of troops waiting outside and so in September many of them left, giving Mahmud a good opportunity to counterattack.

The Triumph of the Rebellious Pasha

Çavuşoğlu Mehmed Pasha and the governor of Rumeli, Aydoslu Pasha, faced problems in maintaining under order the army, which was composed mainly of mercenaries, since the siege was taking a long time. These troops committed many atrocities while stationed in the cities, and also the notables started to take advantage of the chaotic situation in Shkodra by taking revenge on their rivals. Furthermore, due to the fanatical element among some of these central forces, the Catholics of the city were massively attacked, not only due to their religious affiliation but also for being the main supporters of the Bushatlis. On top of all this, all the people of the city began to feel hatred towards the imperial troops since this whole while they were just pillaging and robbing the people.²⁸

It was on the 25 November 1787, when Mahmud decided to make the final move against the Imperial army. By using the tunnels of the castle,²⁹ the Bushatli was always informed about the situation outside, thus he also knew that the people would support him because the other side was robbing them. Thus, using a sortie tactic, he caught the Imperial forces unprepared and assaulted them with men from the castle. This surprise attack was supported by the tanner's guild alongside with the other people of Shkodra, and also by the Catholic highlanders. Caught between a rock

²⁷ B.O.A. C.DH. 67, 3315.

²⁸ A.S.V. Cons. di Scutari, let. Dt. 30/XI/1787.; Pllumi, *Frati i Pashallareve Bushatli*, p. 124.

²⁹ For these tunnels we have information from the manuscript of Pater Balneo, who emphasizes the importance of these during the siege for the negotiations and the couriers who would distribute his letters to the officials.

and a hard place, the army was destroyed and Bushatli Mahmud won a decisive victory against his rival Çavuşoğlu Mehmed Pasha, who was killed during the battle. As for Aydoslu Pasha, he escaped by changing his clothes and moving to Dalmatia.³⁰

However, the aftermath of the battle was affected not only by the military skill of Mahmud but also due to other officials behind the scenes. In fact, Selim Pasha, governor of Bosnia and Gazi Hasan Pasha were near Shkodra the whole time, even during the assault by the Bushatlis, but despite this, they did not come to the rescue of Çavuşoğlu and Aydoslu.³¹ This shows how prevalent factionalism was amongst the Ottoman central officials, considering that Gazi Hasan Pasha had significant influence in Istanbul as one of the closest men to Sultan I. Abdulhamid. With victory over the imperial forces, Mahmud could start the negotiation process from a stronger position than before, since as the winning side and due to the war against the foreign menace he could give considerable help to the Sublime Porte.

5.3. A Useless Victory and a Regretful Rebel

Even after the victory over the siege of Shkodra, things for Mahmud did not go very well, as the center saw him as a threat that was challenging its authority in the province, and for this reason had to be eliminated at any cost. In fact, in December the central government demanded that the people of Shkodra hand over the Bushatli or suffer the consequences.³² Although the Sublime Porte did not use a military punishment in Shkodra, they implemented an economic blockade for all commercial activity and decreed arrest should the merchants of Shkodra try to trade in other regions. Mustafa Pasha of Toptanis, who after receiving the title of Pasha began to

³⁰ A.S.V. *ibid.*; Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, p. 616.

³¹ A.S.V. *ibid.* According to this Venetian report from Shkodra, not only did they stay passive during the assault of Mahmud towards the Governors of Rumeli and Çavuşoğlus, but at the same time as the battle was finished they began to negotiate the terms for demanding forgiveness to the center in the name of Bushatli Mahmud.

³² B.O.A. C.AS. 213, 9119[29 S 1202(10 December 1787)].

put under his authority all central Albania, including the allies of the Bushatlis, was charged as executor of these measures.³³

Surrounded by the rival Albanian pashas, Mahmud tried at least to neutralize the opposition in Shkodra, thus avoiding a surprise attack from enemies within. The confrontation of Mahmud with the central government for some of the Muslims, be they normal subjects or notables, was seen as a challenge to the authority of the Sultan and thus to the Caliph of all Muslims. Moreover, some of his closest men were caught planning the assassination of the Bushatli at the encouragement of the new Pasha of Bosnia. For this reason, after eliminating all the participants in this plan, Mahmud decided to move to the north again where he killed the Pasha of İşbuzi for complicity.³⁴ Afraid of another assault by the central government and of a revolt by his own subjects, Mahmud gathered a considerable amount of war materiel and artillery into his castle. Following this, he sent his brother Bushatli Ibrahim to break the blockade of Mustafa Toptani.³⁵

However, despite all the efforts of Ibrahim with Kahraman Beg of Tirana and Mahmud Beg of Kavaje, Mustafa Pasha of Toptanis managed to emerge victorious in all the confrontations. Sheltered in the castle of Durres, the allies of the Bushatlis expected help from Mahmud Pasha who at that moment, due to the difficult situation in Shkodra, tried to avoid any movement outside of Shkodra. In addition to this, Mahmud was expecting forgiveness since the Sublime Porte was at war with both Austria and Russia and the forces of the Bushatlis could help stop the advance of the enemy troops on the northern front. Yet, no forgiveness from Istanbul was forthcoming and the situation for the Bushatlis was worsening since his influence over central Albania and in other neighboring districts had almost disappeared.³⁶

³³ A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo, let. di Marko Kabashi, Dt. 8/2/1788.

³⁴ Ibid., Dt. 16/IV/1788.

³⁵ Ibid., Dt. 11/V/1788.

³⁶ Ibid, let. di Stefano Marconi, Dt. 24/VI/1788.

Offers, Counteroffers and Consequences

The above-mentioned circumstances were threatening the position of the Bushatlis in Shkodra so much that the head of the household decided to have recourse to negotiations with the foreign enemies of Istanbul. Both Russia and Austria were interested in these negotiations and sent their emissaries to present their offers to Mahmud, so that he could help them to achieve victory against the Sublime Porte. Hence, the Russians offered him military assistance if the Bushatlis would continue their struggle against the central government, moreover they would support him with their navy coming from the Mediterranean. In this correspondence between the two parties we see the involvement of Pater Balneo,³⁷ who during one of his trips came across to a Russian agent heading to Mahmud. The Pater, as he mentions in his memoires, recommended an alliance with the Austrians because, according to him, they were geographically closer to Shkodra than Russia and at the same there was the Catholic presence.³⁸

Compared to the Russians the Austrians were quite more advantageous ally, considering the continuous relations that they had cultivated for centuries in the Balkans; furthermore, they had always been politically present in the region due to the Catholic population inhabiting there. Thus, in exchange for a diversion against the Ottomans, the Austrians would recognize him even as “King of Albania” and this proposal was approved by the emperor, who on many occasion sent gifts to Mahmud. However, both of these alliances represented a risky move for Mahmud, even though he did not officially accept any of them. The majority of the Shkodra populace belonged to the Islamic religion, so this could cause revolts against the Pasha as the reputation of the Sultan as the Caliph of the Muslims was very strong.³⁹

³⁷ It looks very suspicious the way in which Pater Balneo finds himself always meeting the emissaries just by coincidence, thus we have to consider the possibility of him being an agent or even a double agent.

³⁸ Pllumi, *Frati i Pashallareve Bushatli*, p. 128; Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 202-203.

³⁹ Naci, *Ibid.*, p. 204.

As the consequences for accepting the offers from Russia and Austria would tend to create many problems, Mahmud stayed passive and preferred to wait for a pardon from the Sublime Porte. However, his enemies began to surround him from every angle, especially his old rival Mustafa Pasha of Toptanis, who at that moment controlled all central Albania and whose aim was the elimination of the Bushatlis.⁴⁰ However, Mahmud did not lose hope in making peace with the central government, and for this he offered them a persuasive gift.

On 15 June an Austrian noble came to Shkodra as an emissary of the emperor and, bearing a considerable amount of money, began to negotiate the terms of collaboration with the Bushatlis. Nevertheless, after five days of dwelling in Shkodra, just as they were about to leave, Mahmud planned an ambush for them and had their heads sent to Istanbul as an offer and proof of his loyalty to the Sultan. The reasoning behind this act was not only to serve as a proof of Mahmud's loyalty to the Sultan but at the same time would help him to regain the trust of his Muslim subjects. Furthermore, the Austrian emperor wanted to hand over Ottoman-Albania to the kingdom of Naples as part of an agreement of alliance between these states, thus Mahmud would just become a vassal of a Christian king.⁴¹ In addition to this, he probably would have lost the support of his Muslim subjects and could later be easily eliminated by the new ruler.⁴²

This action by Mahmud was crucial in calming down the Muslim element in Shkodra, because during the siege it had been the support of the population and guilds that granted him a victory over the central army. Moreover, considering that the Toptanis created a lot of problems for the Bushatlis and their allies, the support of the masses in Shkodra could at least provide Mahmud with support against any assault from his neighboring rivals. In fact, not only did the population of Shkodra support him once more, but at the same time Mahmud, with the help of his allies, even managed to

⁴⁰ A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo, let. di Stefano Marconi, Dt. 24/VI/1788.

⁴¹ Pllumi, *Frati i Pashallareve Bushatli*, p. 130.

⁴² Naci, *Ibid.*, p. 208.

defeat Mustafa Pasha of Toptanis. Thus things were changing for the better for the Bushatlis.⁴³ Hence, after neutralizing the movement of his enemies in central Albania, Mahmud punished all his former allies in the north who had betrayed him during the siege and, after burning down their palaces in Tivar (Bar), he left his supporters in charge of the city.⁴⁴

Guarantors of Mahmud and Selim III

The Sublime Porte was informed about the events in its western provinces thanks to the reports of an English ambassador, who in his writing mentioned the negotiations between Mahmud and the Austrians. He also underlined the fact that the Austrian emissaries were killed after the negotiations, and that four hundred soldiers of Vienna were about to join the Montenegrins for a revolt.⁴⁵ However, the immediate military intervention of Bushatli Mahmud prevented the spread of this Austrian action to other regions, thus protecting not only his district but at the same time even the territorial integrity of the Ottoman empire itself.⁴⁶ Despite the changing of his politics, the center did not grant him forgiveness for his mistakes and this stance of the Sublime Porte continued until the accession to the throne of Selim III.

During the war against the two empires, the Ottomans were suffering multiple defeats and one of the reasons causing this was the struggle that the central government had with provincial magnates like Bushatli Mahmud. In fact, the Sublime Porte had wasted considerable economic and military resources in eliminating those notables who were defying its authority, but it paid the consequences while fighting

⁴³ Ibid, p.211.

⁴⁴ Injac Zamputi, *Il settecento Veneziano e l'Albania*, p. 79.

⁴⁵ B.O.A. AE.SABH.I. 356, 24916[10 L 1202(14 July 1788)].

⁴⁶ A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo, let. di Stefano Marconi, Dt. 12/VIII/1788.

the European powers.⁴⁷ It was firstly Abdi Pasha,⁴⁸ the governor of Rumeli, who asked for the pardon of Bushatli Mahmud in exchange for his services on the front. Furthermore, he continuously addressed upper officials and the central authorities on behalf of the rebellious Pasha of Shkodra, who had become regretful, and recommended his appointment on the Belgrade or Bosnian front.⁴⁹ In addition to this, Abdi Pasha also demanded the mobilization of twenty thousand soldiers by the Bushatli, and in exchange for his services the central authorities should give him back the district of Shkodra and his titles.⁵⁰ Gazi Hasan Pasha began to negotiate with Mahmud too, and as we understand from a document both these Ottoman officials were acting as guarantors for the Bushatli, who immediately began the preparations for the front.⁵¹

5.4. Serving the Sublime Porte

For the Ottomans, the circumstances during the first half of 1789 were so desperate that they decided to try anything possible to help them in military campaigns. Even though Mahmud was not officially forgiven by the central authorities, the Ottoman commanders on the fronts appealed to Istanbul to appoint him as governor of Bosnia, showing the gravity of the situation.⁵² Despite this request, the Bushatli was not appointed as governor of the province since Sultan Selim III had not forgiven him yet. However, in a report submitted to Selim, he would forgive him in exchange for his loyalty and his participation on the Bosnian front with twelve thousand soldiers.

⁴⁷ Ahmed Cevdet Paşa. *Tarih-i Cevdet*, V. 4, (İstanbul: Üçdal Neşriyat, 1966), p. 409. According to Cevdet Ahmet these battles against the provincial notables, more than challenging of the sultan's authority, were struggles between central figures for personal interests.

⁴⁸ It was Mahmud Pasha who made the first attempt by sending his man, Podgoričeli Murad Ağa to the governor of Rumeli and asking for his help since he was regretful for his mistakes, see: Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Ibid*, p. 136.

⁴⁹ B.O.A. HAT 23, 1106C [7 C 1203(5 March 1789)].

⁵⁰ B.O.A. HAT 23, 1106B [17 C 1203(15 March 1789)].

⁵¹ B.O.A. HAT 1380, 54435[26 C 1203(24 March 1789)].

⁵² B.O.A. HAT 1380, 54449[8 B 1203(4 April 1789)].

Furthermore, in his response, the Ottoman Sultan emphasized the importance of his obedience and discipline during the military actions.⁵³

It was on 14 August when the Bushatli received his forgiveness and it was brought by his nephew Bushatli Mehmed, accompanied by Mahmud Beg of Kavaja,⁵⁴ who was now released from his charges and was expected to help his uncle in mobilizing troops. In a short time and forcibly, Mahmud Pasha managed to gather a large army from his district and began marching in the direction of Kosovo, where he was to muster more soldiers that were needed on the front against the Austrians. After reaching Bosnia, Bushatli Mahmud was ordered by the governor of Bosnia, Mehmed Pasha, to move to Izvornik with the notables of Kosovo.⁵⁵ During this time the Pasha of Shkodra, appointed commander (*serasker*) of Yeni Pazar, began the confrontations with the Austrian army. Thus, by defeating them, the Bushatli commander managed to enter the territories of the enemy. However, due to the lack of proper provisions and cold weather the Austrians began to cause him great losses and, for this reason, he was obliged to retreat from the front and return to Shkodra.⁵⁶

Moreover, the Montenegrins in the vicinity of Shkodra were causing many problems and, taking advantage of the participation of Mahmud on the front, they succeeded in pillaging the region of Podgorica and invading some castles. As a matter of fact, the Austrians had a collaboration agreement with the Montenegrins in order to create an obstacle to the Bosnians and Albanian forces taking part on the northern front. In addition to this, the Toptanis and their allies were causing disorder in central Albania, thus risking the interests of the Bushatlis. Hence, after Mahmud returned to Shkodra, he immediately mobilized his army against the Toptanis and, during the confrontations, defeated them. On the other hand, the Montenegrins were carrying

⁵³ B.O.A. C.DH. 327, 16329[3 § 1203(29 April 1789)].

⁵⁴ Mahmud Beg of Kavaja, the son of Mahmud's sister, was imprisoned in Edirne for his support of the Bushatlis during the siege of Shkodra, see: B.O.A. HAT 1385, 54920.

⁵⁵ B.O.A. HAT 187, 8888.

⁵⁶ B.O.A. C.AS. 1125, 17654[27 R 1204(14 January 1790)].

out their diversions to no use since the Austrians at that moment changed their policy. Due to the Prussian pressure from the north, and the French revolutionary threat, Austria was ready to give up the war, leaving the Ottomans tete-a-tete with the Russians.⁵⁷

Since the battles on the Bosnian front were ending, the center decided to focus all its military power against the Russians. This was seen as a good occasion by the commander governor of Shkodra, who aimed to win the vizierate of Rumeli, thus officially taking under his authority all his rival pashas. In his first attempts, he used the mufti of Shkodra, Murteza Efendi, who as a witness of Mahmud's loyalty and perseverance toward the central government, and believed that the Bushatli would achieve great things as a vizier.⁵⁸ However, the previous activities of Mahmud would make this demand improper, so for this reason, the central government decided to give him the vizierate as the governor of Anatolia, which would provide for the Bushatli six hundred sacks of money. With this money, the governor of Shkodra could dispatch and provide the needed equipment for the army that had to be sent into the front.⁵⁹ Even though the center had its doubts about the loyalty of Mahmud and his true intentions, he had a crucial role in the mobilization of troops for the northern front, thus the Pasha of Shkodra attained the title of vizier in 1790.⁶⁰

Towards the end of 1790, the Ottomans were defeated many times by the Russians, who under the leadership of remarkable commanders like Ushakov and Potemkin conquered many territories to the north of the Black Sea. Afraid of the Russian expansion, England and Prussia convinced Sweden to attack Russia in collaboration with the Ottomans. In exchange, the Sultan would supply Sweden with the necessary

⁵⁷ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 219-220.

⁵⁸ B.O.A. HAT 1385, 54945[3 Ca 1204(19 January 1790)].

⁵⁹ B.O.A. HAT 187, 8814.; Ahmed Cevdet Paşa. *Tarih-i Cevdet*, Vol. 5, p. 29.

⁶⁰ Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, p. 616-617. Even though the Turkish historian underlines the fact that Mahmud became vizier during the grand vizierate of Gazi Hasan Pasha, the truth is that he took the title after the decapitation of his old friend. In fact, Gazi Hasan Pasha opposed giving the vizierate to the Bushatli, thus it was Ruscuklu Hasan Pasha who made possible the granting of vizier title to Mahmud, see: Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Ibid*, p.28.

money on the condition that they would immediately begin the military campaign against Russians.⁶¹ Meanwhile, Bushatli Mahmud was ordered to move with his army of forty thousand soldiers in the direction of Wallachia, where the Austrians were about to withdraw their troops from the region. The reasoning behind this was to prevent the Russians from conquering it since this could have turned to tragedy for the Ottomans, considering their territorial losses during this war.⁶² In addition to this, the central government was trying to enlist even the Prussians alongside Sweden against the Russians, however, the most important thing for the Ottomans was to assume control of the positions left by the Austrians in Wallachia, and this task was to be assigned to Mahmud.⁶³

Aware of his crucial role in this war, the Bushatli did not rush immediately to action, instead he tried to obtain more profit by taking advantage of the situation. So he made an official request in to take over governance of Rumeli, for which he offered the Sublime Porte the mobilization of an army composed of fifteen thousand soldiers.⁶⁴ Regarding this matter, Mahmud used coercive enrollment methods while dispatching his army against his rivals or for the campaigns of the center. The most important thing is that there was no religious difference about the enrollment in the army and those who were unwilling to take part had to pay according to their economic capacities in exchange. Hence, divided into three groups, those from the rich class had to pay one hundred and fifty piasters, the middle class between fifty and seventy and the last group thirty piasters. On this issue, Mahmud forced even the priests to pay tribute for the army, as he took one hundred piasters from each one, and punished severely those who tried to hide from enrollment or payment.⁶⁵ Even if the Pasha of Shkodra could raise large numbers of soldiers for the Sublime Porte, there was still skepticism towards him from the central bureaucrats since he

⁶¹ Shaw, *Between Old and New*, p. 59-61.

⁶² B.O.A. C.HR. 79, 1435[20 Ca 1205(21 January 1791)].

⁶³ B.O.A. HAT 30, 1406[1 C 1205(5 February 1791)].

⁶⁴ B.O.A. HAT 185, 8607.

⁶⁵ Zamputi, *Il Settecento Veneziano*, p. 78.

had rebelled many times. For this reason, they gave to Mahmud the title of commander of Wallachia and ordered him to move to that front since in Bosnia the Austrians had stopped the fight. Moreover, even though strengthening a difficult man like the Bushatli may bring disastrous consequences later, the center gave his nephew Mahmud Beg of Kavaja the title of Pasha and made him commander, in exchange for five hundred cavalry troops, just to please Mahmud.⁶⁶

Following this, the Vizier of Shkodra moved to Wallachia and helped the Ottomans to restrain the Austrians, who on the 4th of August, 1791 signed the Treaty of Sistova in which they gave up all their conquests. It was one of the Prussian delegates who admitted that the presence of the Bushatli Mahmud with his large army in the front affected the decision of the Austrians to sign the treaty without any important profit. Furthermore, the threat of the French revolution and the consequences that it could cause throughout the European continent forced all the monarchies to collaborate with each other in order to prevent a similar revolution elsewhere. Again it was Prussia, England and Austria itself who asked the Russians for an immediate truce with the Ottomans. Thus, the delegates of the two empires started the peace negotiations by putting an end to the war for which both countries had been sacrificing a lot of resources. It was on the 2nd of January when the representatives signed the treaty of Jassy⁶⁷ in which the Ottomans recognized Russian legitimacy over the Crimea and also surrendered the region of Yedisán⁶⁸ to them. Despite the efforts to save its territorial integrity with the idea of *status quo ante bellum* the Ottomans were forced, due to military inferiority and lack of discipline in its army, to accept the terms.⁶⁹

5.5. Second Siege of Shkodra

⁶⁶ B.O.A. C.A.S. 121, 5420[13 L 1205(15 June 1781)].

⁶⁷ For more detailed information regarding the treaty of Jassy and its terms, see: Shaw, *Between the Old and New*, p. 64-68.

⁶⁸ This region is situated between the rivers Dniester and Bug.

⁶⁹ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 222.

After the war with Russia came to an end, Sultan Selim III became aware of the problems that were present in the country, and among them was the issue of power magnates like Mahmud of Shkodra, who was at the same time a vizier. Despite his participation in the war against the enemies, the Bushatli was in the eyes of the central government still a dangerous official who might again pose a threat to the central authority as soon as he found the proper moment. However, in order for Mahmud to show his true face, there was no need for the war to end since he gave the first sparks just after moving to Vidin, where ahead of a large army and with the title of vizier no one could stop him.

The Greedy and Ambitious Vizier of Shkodra

Mahmud, staying at the front, affected positively by his mere presence the signing of the Treaty of Sistova by the Austrians, who did not claim any territorial change in their favor. However, in the last months of 1781, while returning from Vidin he committed many atrocities in different places and seized the funds that were entrusted to him for the military campaigns. Furthermore, he began to reconstitute the Paşalık of Shkodra as it was before the first siege, eliminating his rivals and replacing them with their allies or relatives.⁷⁰ The Sublime Porte was informed about the actions of Mahmud by Abdullah Efendi, who as a provincial treasurer (defterdar) accompanied the rebellious vizier on every journey he made, thus becoming an eyewitness of the places pillaged by the vizier and his men.⁷¹

On the other hand, Mahmud turned his attention to commerce and began to obstruct the activities of the Venetians by supporting the Dulcignote fleet, which worked for him. In addition to this, he even taxed tobacco more than the official decrees, thus invalidating the capitulations granted by the center for foreign subjects in the ports which were under his authority.⁷² Aware that the Bushatli was challenging the central

⁷⁰ A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo, let. di Antonio Morana, Dt. 28/VII/1791; A.S.V. Cons. di Scutari, let. Jak M. Suma, Dt. 30/X/1791; Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Tarih-i Cevdet*, Vol. 6, p. 142.

⁷¹ B.O.A. HAT 200, 10175; HAT 202, 10420[3 S 1206(2 October 1791)].

⁷² A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo, let. di Antonio Morana, Dt. 14/I/1792.

authority again, the Sublime Porte decided to execute him right after the war ended, thus removing this threat once and for all. However, despite everything the Vizier of Shkodra had in Istanbul Teberdar Ali, who was an agent of Mahmud and informed him of everything, thus warning him about the punishment that coming to him.⁷³

His activities were provoking a reaction from the Muslim element of Shkodra since their leader had crossed the line many times and they feared a general punishment coming from the Sublime Porte. In fact, it was Bushatli Ibrahim Pasha who decided to leave his brother and to move to the side which was with Istanbul.⁷⁴ Furthermore, the Sublime Porte began to unify southern Albanian notables against the rebellious Bushatli. After ensuring the loyalty of Bushatli Ibrahim, the center managed to take on her side even the nephew of the rebel, Bushatli Mehmed, who decided to confront his uncle. As from the southern notables, the first one to be called in arms was Ali Pasha of Tepelena, who had shown a remarkable performance against the Russians in the front, but the center knew that he was ambitious and greedy like Mahmud. Despite the mistrust toward Ali Pasha, the center went beyond this and tried to forge an alliance between him and Ibrahim Pasha of Vlora by encouraging an alliance of the two households. This was to be created through the marriage of Veli Pasha, son of Ali with the second daughter of Ibrahim Pasha. The alliance of these two southern magnates alongside the collaboration of Bushatli Ibrahim and Mehmed would ensure enough support in order to finally eliminate Mahmud of Shkodra.⁷⁵

It was Ebu Bekir Pasha, the governor of Rumeli, who took the responsibility of going after Mahmud and bringing his head to Istanbul. In order to make everything sure this time, the central government implemented an economic blockade for every subject of Shkodra that might try to make commercial activity.⁷⁶ Furthermore, with the help of all the Albanian pashas, the governor of Rumeli managed to reach the city

⁷³ B.O.A. HAT 1401, 56504-5.

⁷⁴ Ahmed Cevdet Paşa. Ibid.

⁷⁵ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 228-229.

⁷⁶ B.O.A. C.DH. 26, 1280.

of Shkodra. As for Mahmud, despite his strong opposition, he decided to make the same move he did before, taking shelter in the castle of Shkodra and waiting for the right moment to counterattack. In addition to this, the weather helped Mahmud since during rainy periods the rivers around the castle create great floods impeding the central forces from holding it under siege.⁷⁷

Ebu Bekir Pasha, the supreme commander in this campaign, decided to requisition seven hundred houses in Shkodra as military barracks due to the bad weather. Furthermore, in order to bring pressure on the population of the city to surrender Mahmud and his men, the governor of Rumeli took forty hostages and imprisoned them in Vlora castle, although it did not make any difference.⁷⁸ Like in the first siege, the central forces began to provoke the Catholics and not only were they persecuted but at the same time, some of them were hanged. These behaviors toward the Catholic subjects made them run to their rescuer, Bushatli Mahmud, who showed tolerance and protected their rights.⁷⁹

It was on the 30th of November, 1793 when Mahmud with a sortie move defeated the surrounding forces for the second time. Thanks to the Catholic Highlanders, who attacked from Lezha (Leş), the imperial army conducted by Ebu Bekir Pasha retreated to Elbasan and, due to the hostility of the local people, later moved to Ohrid, joining Ali Pasha of Tepelena.⁸⁰ This second defeat by its own official showed the Sublime Porte just how serious were the problems relating to its military power. In addition, the central government did not have the needed resources to raise another campaign against Mahmud, as we see in a report issued after the downfall of Shkodra showing that the state treasure was short of money.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Naci, *Ibid.*, p.230.

⁷⁸ Ahmed Cevdet Paşa. *Tarih-i Cevdet*, V. 6, p. 143.

⁷⁹ Zamputi, *Il Settecento Veneziano*, p. 79.

⁸⁰ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 231; Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Ibid.*, p. 144-145.

⁸¹ B.O.A. HAT 225, 12537[16 C 1208(19 January 1794)].

5.6. The Spanish Intermediation and the Last Forgiveness

Even for Mahmud, things were not going very well as his Paşalık had almost perished due to the blockade issued by the center. However, in order to please his Muslim subjects, he issued declarations emphasizing his obedience to the Sultan and telling the people that it was not the Caliph of Islam who sent the army against him but enemies in the center. Moreover, he tried to achieve another act of pardon from the central government by showing compassion to prisoners and granting them safe conduct to their homes. It was very obvious that the Bushatli wanted to prevent another campaign from the center, even though the chances were very small, not only due to the shortage in the state treasury but also because the castle of Shkodra was a difficult one to capture.⁸²

However, Mahmud, in order to defend himself from any threat, began to send bribes to the center and tried to obtain the support of the Spanish crown. First of all, Spain was informed about the tolerance and equality of the Bushatlis towards the Catholics of Albania and due to this, the clerics of this community had sent many letters to the representatives of this empire in Rome. In these letters, the clerics emphasized that it was the policy of the Bushatli household which granted them equality and protected their rights against the fanatic Muslim officials. Secondly, the forests of northern Albania provided Spain with quality lumber essential for the construction of the ships of the imperial navy. Hence, the sovereignty of the Bushatlis was important for them, and Mahmud tried to take advantage of this by asking for the intermediation of the Spanish representatives in Istanbul and Rome.⁸³

In order to get forgiveness from the center, Bushatli Mahmud stayed in a defensive and passive mode for a long time, so that the Spanish intermediation and his “generous gifts” could work effectively. Moreover, he promised peace to those who fought him and took the side of the Sublime Porte and especially welcomed with a

⁸² On this matter we have an interesting report by the voyvoda of Wallachia where he suggested, regarding the capture of Shkodra, to take as example the conquest of Toulon (18 December 1793) by the French republicans, in which the famous Buonaparte participated, see: B.O.A. HAT 183, 8427.

⁸³ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 233.

ceremony his brother with the nephew, who betrayed him during the war, by taking the side of the center.⁸⁴ Following these events, the Sublime Porte finally decided to forgive him in February 1795, and as the ambassador of Venice underlined in his report, this was made possible thanks to both Spanish intermediation and the bribes sent by Mahmud in Istanbul. In fact, since the failure of the second siege of Shkodra, Venice through its representatives in Istanbul had made many efforts to incite another punishment against the Bushatli who had inflicted considerable damage to Venetian commerce on the Albanian coast. The official decree arrived in Shkodra in April 1795. After taking another forgiving, in addition, Mahmud succeeded in holding onto his vizierate title and also he took the duty as commander (*serasker*) of Albania, thus taking under his authority all the pashas and recreating the Paşalık of Shkodra.⁸⁵

The Last Adventures of Mahmud Pasha of Shkodra and His Death

In spite of his bribes, the main reason that the pardon of Mahmud was made possible was the influence of the Spanish crown, an ally that the Ottoman Sultan held in high esteem. However, all the parties knew that the peace was only temporary and that confrontations would break out at short notice- if not from the center, the Bushatlis would start them. Since the declaration of the *nizam-ı cedid* (new order) reforms, Selim III had been having a hard time fully implementing them due to strong pushback from the supporters of the old order. In addition to this, Bushatli Mahmud, Ali Pasha of Tepelena and Osman Pasvanoglu Pasha⁸⁶ were openly challenging central authority with their semi-autonomous rule in the Balkans. This *saint-trinity*, not only opposed the central authority but also represented the order of the notables, which would fight any reform from the center that might threaten their rule.

⁸⁴ A.S.V. Cons. di Scutari, let. di Jak M. Suma, Dt. 26/VIII/1794.

⁸⁵ Franca Cosmai and Stefano Sorteni. *Dispacci da Costantinopoli di Ferigo Foscari 1792-1796*, Vol.2, (Venezia: La Malcontenta, 1996), p. 452-453; A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo let. di Emidio Tedeschini, Dt. 4/V/1795.

⁸⁶ For more information about Pasvanoglu, see: Robert Zens, "Pasvanoğlu Osman Paşa and the Paşalık of Belgrade, 1791-1807", *Mutiny and Rebellion in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Jane Hathaway, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004), p. 89-104.

Bushatli Mahmud of Shkodra, taking advantage of the delicate situation of the Sultan and the confrontation between the factions of the old and the new order, began his plan by putting under his authority those opposing his command. Firstly, he mobilized the army against the notables of Kosovo who refused to accept his sovereignty, and with the support of his allies, Mahmud achieved a decisive victory.⁸⁷ Later Yusuf Beg, probably encouraged by Ali Pasha of Tepelena, dismissed the previous ruler of Dibra,⁸⁸ who was an ally of the Bushatlis, provoking Mahmud to immediately move against him. The aftermath resulted in the defeat of the Vizier of Shkodra and the reasons for this may have included the mountainous geography of the region and the assistance of troops coming from Ali Pasha.⁸⁹ However, the Bushatlis managed to bring this problematic region under their authority by forging an agreement with Yusuf Beg, later converting him to an ally. Moreover, after taking care of the Dibra issue they turned their attentions to the Montenegrins who, as always supported by Russia and Austria, were inflicting severe damage on the subjects of Shkodra and pillaging Muslim localities.⁹⁰

On the other hand, during this period the situation in Europe had changed dramatically as now the French Republic was preparing a military campaign against the other states. At the beginning of 1796, France decided to attack the Austrian Empire and in order for the campaign to be effective, the Republic sent its emissaries to Mahmud offering him military assistance in exchange for a diversion against the Austrians. This offer pleased the Bushatlis as they were to create the diversion for France by assaulting the Montenegrins, who had consistently challenged their authority and caused disorder in the region. Hence, the opportunity to finally eliminate the ever-present threat from the north was now possible thanks to the

⁸⁷ A.S.V. Cons. di Durazzo, let. di Gregorio Ballulia, Dt. 14/IX/1795.

⁸⁸ This region was under the authority of Muhtar Pasha, son of Ali Pasha of Tepelena.

⁸⁹ B.O.A. HAT 127, 5270A-B.

⁹⁰ Gasper Gurakuqi, "Kronike mbi Mahmud Pashen, Brahim Pashen e Mustaf Pashen [A chronic on Mahmud Pasha, Ibrahim Pasha and Mustafa Pasha]", *Hylli i Drites*, (Shkoder: Shtypshkronja Franceskane, 1931), p. 23.

French, who immediately sent their military specialists to help Mahmud in his preparations.⁹¹

The Montenegrins, as mentioned before, were divided into two factions, the Vladika (Prince-Bishop) supported by the Russians, and Radonjic the leader of the Montenegrin notables, who was the man of the Austrians. However, the campaign that was about to be launched against them fostered a historic collaboration that would change the future of Montenegro, as almost all the Montenegrin tribes became united against a common enemy. Thus, heading an army of approximately fifteen thousand, Mahmud decided to use his old tactic of dividing his numerous troops into three and to surprise his enemies by attacking from different positions. However, he was defeated severely, losing almost one-third of his army, and retreated from the battlefield wounded.⁹² The Bushatli returned to Montenegro with fresh forces and in September made his entrance into enemy territory ahead of an army composed of twenty-three thousand soldiers. On the 22nd of September, the battle began and after four hours of fighting the Montenegrins, using a pincer movement, ambushed Mahmud and surrounded his army, inflicting serious damages. It was in a church where the Pasha of Shkodra gave his final fight and was later decapitated by the enemy.⁹³ Furthermore, in order to commemorate their great victory against the Ottoman governor, the Montenegrins placed the head of Mahmud in Cetinje as a trophy.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 238-239.

⁹² Cosmai and Sorteni, *Dispacci da Costantinopoli di Ferigo Foscari*, p. 757; B.O.A. HAT 198, 9964.

⁹³ Even though this is the general depiction of Mahmud's death, the Venetian ambassador in his report issued on the 28 October 1796 asserts that he was shot from behind by one of his officers, who was bribed by Istanbul, see: Cosmai and Sorteni, *Ibid.*, p. 770.

⁹⁴ Naci, *Pashalleku i Shkodres*, p. 238; Gurakuqi, "Kronike mbi Mahmud Pashen...", p. 24.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

As we have seen in this biography, from his childhood to his death, Mahmud was always part of Ottoman society despite his Albanian ethnic background. He was born in a typical eighteenth-century Ottoman household, and under the leadership of his father succeeded in obtaining the governorship of Shkodra, thus entering the state administrative system. The way in which he managed to obtain this important post reflects the transformations taking place inside the empire. One of the main changes was the appointment of an official not from the household of the sultan, which at that period had shrunk, but from the provincial power-holders, without whom the center could not control the provinces and their resources. Gradually, the malfunctioning of the old Ottoman administrative system created gaps in the provinces and many posts or fiscal and military duties were seized through brute force by local power-holders.

The confrontations between these notables brought about disorder and chaos in the provinces, thus risking the lives of the tax-payers, from whose production taxes were levied, and bringing a halt to commercial activities. As banditry and robbery spread far and wide, it was the intervention of certain individuals or families which would put an end to the chaos by implementing their own order at the expense of the central institutions. In the Shkodra district, the Bushatlis managed to take the governorship thanks to the support of the Tanners' faction alongside the Catholic element, which up to that moment had been discriminated against and pushed aside. Thus providing stability, they soon brought prosperity and security to all their subjects, something that the center could not provide.

However, inasmuch as the provincial notables could benefit from the public resources granted by the center together with an official title, they would find themselves incorporated in the Ottoman imperial system. As part of this system, they were obliged to fulfill their public duties and at the same time to provide the center

with financial and military aid. Yet, as we have seen in the case of Bushatlis, these households proved essential to the central government's ability to make use of provincial resources; however, there had to be a sharing of authority, which inevitably led to disputes between the two sides.

Mahmud Pasha of Shkodra, during his efforts to expand his authority, faced the opposition of not only the other notables but also the central government. The direct confrontations and the wars of the Bushatlis to protect their provincial order against the centralizing efforts of the center have been labeled by Albanian historiography as a struggle for independence and the first steps towards the unification of the Albanian nation. For all that the Bushatlis did rebel against the center, we need to underline the fact that even during these critical moments there was a continuous negotiation process with offers and counter-offers, which shows us another aspect of this center-periphery relationship. After both of his main rebellions, Mahmud Pasha was pardoned, not merely due to bribes and the intermediation of the Spanish crown, but also due to the presence and the clash of two factions in the center.

The new order started by Sultan Selim III faced the opposition of the defenders of the old regime, which tried to prevent the implementation of these reforms by any means, even giving support to power magnates in the provinces like Mahmud or Pasvanoglu of Vidin. In addition to this, the Bushatlis faced a local opposition too, since the Muslim population of Shkodra itself was about to rise against him as he was challenging the Caliph of Islam. This shows that despite Mahmud's local origins, the Muslims of Shkodra still respected the sultan as the supreme spiritual leader of Islam. Therefore, considering that the population of Shkodra and the districts under the authority of Mahmud Pasha was mainly Muslim, the idea of an independent state separate from the Ottoman Empire would have been impossible to realize.

One of the main successes of the Bushatlis as depicted by Albanian historiography is that they were able to get all Albanians to cooperate, in spite of their different religious affiliations, against being conquered from without, and especially their successful incorporation of the Catholics into military forces during the conflicts. What is more, this proved to bring about another positive development for the

Ottoman central government, because before the Bushatlis the Catholics had been exposed to Austrian and Venetian influence, causing many problems for the Ottoman authorities. Thus, not only did the Catholics come under the authority of an Ottoman pasha, they also took part in the wars against Austria and Russia. In addition to this, by leaving their mountainous regions and moving to the cities, they now directly became a part of Ottoman society. Therefore, we can assume that provincial notables fostered a kind of *Ottomanization* for the closed communities that dwelled in harsh terrain, as the Catholics used to do.

The success of Mahmud in incorporating the Catholics into his order was not repeated when he tried to exert control over the Montenegrin tribes, who under the leadership of their Vladika emerged victorious against him. Furthermore, the consequences of Mahmud's military interventions in Montenegro would later serve to unify all the tribes of Montenegrins in opposition to him. In fact, these dynamics apply even for the Serbs under Pasvanoglu or the Greeks during the time of Ali Pasha of Tepelena. Thus, for the origins of the emergence of the nineteenth-century Balkan states, I call for a new approach to the intervention of these provincial magnates and the way that they affected the creation of nation-states in the Balkans. However, to better understand this process it is crucial to use not only Western sources, but also the Ottoman archives which, truth be told, are used with reserve by Balkan historians.¹

Cases like that of Mahmud are not something present only in the Ottoman empire, where we witness the struggle of the government to implement centralization, to connect everything to the center through its institutions. In the eighteenth century, which is depicted by many scholars as the Age of Revolutions, other European countries were facing the same problem as the Ottomans, and therefore although with some differences, *mutatis mutandis*, we witness other Mahmuds in those states

¹ Frederick Anscombe, "The Balkan Revolutionary Age" *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 84, No. 3 (September 2012), Chicago University Press, p. 572-606.

too.² This thesis, in focusing on the biography of an Ottoman official, has tried to shed light on the dynamics of the period in which that individual lived. Furthermore, it shows a new way forward for Albanian historians on how to view the Paşaliks Period, and also as an invitation to join in a revision of the historiography which, compared to the other Balkan countries, has fallen behind.



² Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe, 1789–1848*. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975).

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HAT: Hatt-ı Humayun tasnifi.

TS.MA.e: Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi Evrak.

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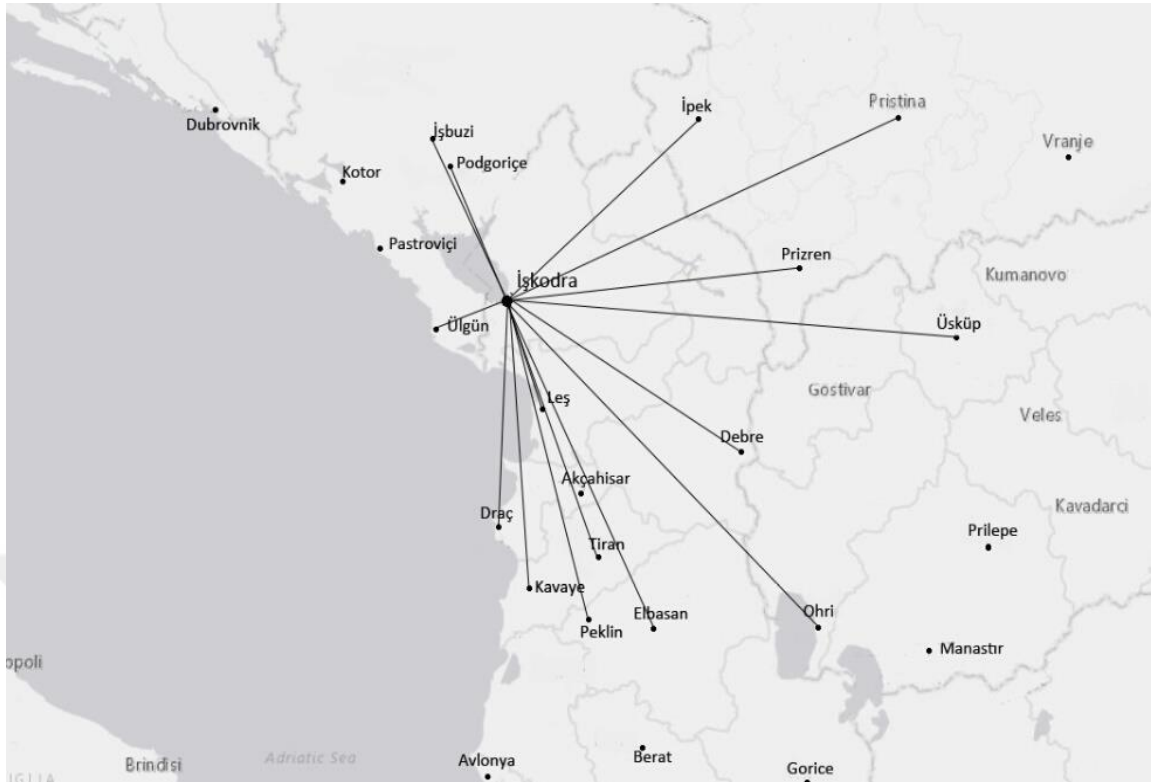


APPENDICES

A. Map of the Western Balkan



B. The Network of the Bushatlis



C. The Influence Zone of the Bushatlis

