

Georgian Valide of the Ottoman Empire – Bezmialem Sultan

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Abstract

We can meet too many political actors having Georgian routes in the tremendous Ottoman Empire. Among them the most distinctive are several women who had left their trail not only in the political processes carried within the Sultan's Palace, but also cherished memories of many ordinary people. One of such figures was represented by Valide Bezmialem, - wife of the Mahmud II and mother of the Abdulmejid I, being a representative of the affluent Jakeli's family. Despite of the uniform, groundless and ungrounded opinion existing in the Turkish scientific literature, stating that the wife of Mahmud II was recognized as a resident of Crimean and Kipchak Khanates, I can firmly declare that Valide Sultane had been Georgian without any doubt. This fact is confirmed by the diplomatic letters reached our ages which additionally strengthen this version.

Since the date of ascending of Abdulmejid to the throne, the Padishah's mother was taking an active part in the process of resolving of all key issues of the domestic (internal) and foreign politics of the Empire. Summarizing of different historical sources and scientific works demonstrated that activity of the Bezmialem Sultane in the role of the Padishah's mother cannot be assessed distinctively and linearly. Contemporary works reflected participation of Bezmialem Sultan in corruptive deals and bribery. Despite of the above-mentioned, there is no doubt in her significant contribution into the social life of the Ottoman Empires, underlaid with rich charity funds and organizations founded by Bezmialem. Bezmialem Sultan was funding building of libraries, schools and hospitals, mosques, minarets and fountains. All this deserved a great love to and popularity in broad layers of the society towards this political figure, who carried her activity with a distinctive intelligence, foresight and state-oriented thinking. The whole financial potential of the Mother Sultan was accumulated on building, progressing, and developing of the Empire.

Keywords: history of the Ottoman Empire, Valide Sultan, Women Sultanate, Valide Bezmialem, Sultan Mahmud II, Sultan Abdulmejid I.

Preamble

The target of this article is to represent key aspects and significance of activity of the Valide Sultan of the Ottoman Empire having Georgian origins, being a wife of Mahmud II and mother of the Sultan Abdulmejid I, - Valide Bezmialem Sultan in the domestic and foreign politics of the Ottoman Empire. It is also aimed at acquainting of the reader and the whole scientific community with the most significant issues, current reforms of the state and aspiration to implement the

European style and taste in the Ottoman Empire of that period. The represented material has informational and introductory character. It, in some sense, consolidates the knowledge on the current issues existing till the contemporary period.

Method

The present article is based on the research methods recognized in the historical science and Science about Turkey (Turcology). Broadly well-known and adopted research methods are applied in the work; they include historical analysis, comparative analysis, summarizing of scientific literature data, determination of a cause-effect relation and discourse analysis. In the period of working over this article the author had studied and translated special literature shared in the competent, scientific society from Turkish language; besides, library-searching work was carried to analyze different aspects of the subject being under research which combine and objectively represent positive and negative sides of the activity of Valide Bezmialem Sultan in the history of the Ottoman Empire.

Trails of many Georgians are found in the whole history of the Ottoman Empire. Either their destiny or logical development of events had charged them with a focal role in ruling of this tremendous state. It is noteworthy that "Slave Trading" which, for centuries, had been a serious problem in the Georgian kingdoms and their national tragedy, on another hand, was granting a chance to people having Georgian roots, not to be lost in the foreign environment and to realize themselves successfully. It will be interesting to note that a category of fortunate Georgians, who had not been lost in time and currency of events included several women. One of them who occupied a particular place was wife of the Sultan Mahmud II (1785-1839) of the Ottoman Empire and mother of Abdulmejid I (1823-1861), named Valide Bezmialem Sultan (1807-1853). (Serin S, 2019:25) To analyze

the extent of significance of Bezmialem Sultan in the Ottoman Sultanate completely it is sufficient to explain an essence of the title and institution of the “Valide Sultan”. It was an official status charged on mothers of Sultans of the Ottoman Empire since the XVI century. The first Valide was mother of the Sultan Suleiman I (1494-1566), Valide Ayşe-Hafsa Sultan (1478-1534). It is considered, that implementation of this title conditioned strengthening of influence of the Sultan’s mother, as of a political figure and gave a ground to one of the most distinctive periods of the Ottoman Empire which was named as the “Women Sultanate” (1550-1656). (Terzi A, 2018: 15-17) During the period lasting for more than one century several Valide Sultans left their indelible trace in the history of the Empire. Among them the most prominent are the following figures: mother of the Sultan Murad III (1546-1595), Valide Afife Nurbanu Sultan (deceased in 1583), mother of the Sultan Mehmed III (1566-1603) Valide Safiye Sultan (1550-1605), mother of the Sultan Murad IV (1612-1640) and Sultan Ibrahim I (1615-1648), also being a grandmother of Sultan Mehmed IV (1642-1693) Valide Mahpeyker Kosem Sultan (deceased in 1651) and mother of Sultan Mehmed IV Valide Turhan Hatice Sultan (1627-1683). Some researchers include into this list the official wife of the Sultan Suleyman I (1494-1566), Hasece Hürrem Sultan (1502-1558), but a definite part of researchers of the Ottoman History does not share this view as Hürrem Sultan had died before ascending of her son Sultan Selim II (1524-1574) to the throne and due to this fact the official title of the Valide Sultan was not assigned to her. (Terzi A, 2018:25-28) Despite of the fact that by the first half of the XIX century Sultans’ mothers were not participating in political processes, Bezmialem Sultan, thanks to her intelligence and political instinct, managed to have a significant impact at the doors of the Sultanate. The existing data about this woman is gene-

rally connected with her son, the Sultan Abdulmejid I and the period of his governance that is caused by increasable social interest regarding her, Valide Sultan. (Kırpık, C, 2018 :53-55) The official status conditioned activity of Bezmialem on the political arena. Historians note the change which had an impact on the style and quality of life of Valide Sultan. Within the shortest period of time the Padishah's mother revealed aspiration to luxury. She got interested in the innovations being popular in Europe, and made all efforts to spread them in the Sultan's Palace. The period of activity of Bezmialem Sultan was characterized with bribery and corruption that was a norm. (Yıldız, A. 2018:24-25) However, this woman's personal portrait would not be complete if we do not take into consideration love and respect expressed to her by people. This attitude was supported by the charitable activity of Bezmialem Sultan. All were aware that for supporting of the poor population Valide Sultan had founded several funds. Thanks to her efforts many schools, hospitals, mosques, bridges were built, a higher educational institute carrying her name had been incorporated. When we are looking through this impressive list we are assured that during those 13 years of carrying of this honorable title and, accordingly, having too many opportunities, Valide Bezmialem managed to make multiple beneficial projects for her state and became an example of a state-oriented social actor. Another significant detail of her firm and single-minded character is that she was suffering from tuberculosis for the last 10 years of her life, which in that period had been in the list of fatal diseases. This circumstance did not hinder her in active involving into the social life and being of a decision-making political figure till the end of her life. (Korkmaz, Ş. 2015: 25-28)

Based on the historical sources we may say that Valide Bezmialem Sultand (1807-1853) really had Georgian roots. Moreover, she was a representative of the Jakeli's aristocratic family. There is a reliable

well-grounded version that the future Valide was a close relative of the Akhaltsikhe's Pasha Suleiman Jakeli (1667-1769 and 1770-1791). This opinion looks like an absolutely real if we take into consideration that Akhaltsikhe, the same Childiri Pasha Region (this term is used for this unit in the Turkish scientific literature), was an Ottoman Province officially founded on the territory of Georgia. (Uzunçarşılı, İ, 1988: 46-48) All are aware that a well-organized criminal scheme was working in the state in which Georgian noble men also participated on top of Ottomen and Dagestani. Young people kidnapped from Georgian kingdoms and lands, primarily were taken to Childiri Region. During the centuries this place was turned into the node of accumulating of Georgian slaves and their taking to the Ottoman Empire. The tremendous empire needed human resources. A part of boys kidnapped from Georgia were transformed into jannizaries, and beautiful Georgian girls were taken to harems as slaves. (Uzunçarşılı, İ. 1988:58-60) Accordingly, we may suppose that the future Padishah's mother, primarily, was placed in the harem, where from an ordinary haseki became a favorite of Mahmud II (1785-1839), e.g. Haseka, and later became mother of the new Sultan Abdulmejid I (1823-1861), Valide Sultan and one of the most affluent figure of the Empire. However, in the Turkish historiography this version is not shared completely and deem as ungrounded. Some scientists go more far as they think that the Jakeli were Kipchaks and conclude that the Bezmialem Sultan also was a Kipchagian princess. (Kırpık, C. 2018:32-35) Such interpretation of facts spoils historical authenticity and implement incorrect attitudes. They consider, that after placing into harem, Bezmiaem had studied not only the Ottoman speech and writing and reading, but obtained a definite secondary education. However, this education was not deep and complete that is confirmed by the personal letters written by Bezmialem. Uneven calligraphy and

many orthographic, syntactical and stylistic mistakes force us to make another conclusion, - it excludes Kipchakian and Crimean versions of origination of Valide Bezmialem Sultan as majority of people categorized to this ethnical origination was good in Ottoman speech, writing and reading. (Göçer, K., 2014: 103-9) Nobody knows exactly how Bezmialem Sultan managed to obtain a particular belief and respect of the Sultan Mahmud, that the fact confirms that in 1823, after giving birth to the future Sultan Abdulmejid, Hasece Bezmialem Sultan's life had been significantly changed. She was officially granted with the title of the second Kadi-Effendi, that in Ottoman language means "lady" and conditions changing of character and quality of Bezmialem's life. This circumstance is especially important in the context if we consider, that Mahmud II officially had a lot of wives and much more haseci. (İnce Y, 2016:46-48) The Bezmialem title and place in the Padishah's Kingdom was more strengthened by the circumstance, that the state of Mahmud II suffering from tuberculosis was complicating gradually and it accelerated the process of ascending of his only one heir, Shehzade (Prince) Abdulmejid to the throne. It is well-known that Bezmialem kept an order in the period when the Padishah was alive and collected fellows around herself to create a powerful political nuclei and reliable support. In this situation her political ally became Kocha Husrev Mehmed Pasha (1769-1855). (Küçük C , 2002: 27-30) He was a famous state actor of the Ottoman Empire, Admiral and Reformer. In the period of his long-termed activity Husrev Pasha was occupying key military-administration positions of the Empire and was managing reforms of the Ottoman army since the time of governance of Mahmud II. Husrev Pasha duly analyzed the created situation and made all efforts to use the situation created after death of the Padishah in his own favor. His main political enemy was a great Vizier (Ott. Vizier-I Azami) Mehmed Emin Rauf Pasha (1780-1860).

He had been appointed on this position during governance of the Sultan Mahmud twice and was recognized as a serious competitor. On the 1st of July, 1839, Mahmud II died and this fact accelerated events. (Soyşekerci, S, 2018:78-80) Husrev Pasha was the first who get this news and personally accompanied Abdulmejid in the Dolmabahce Palace for participating in all necessary ceremonies. Bezmialem and her supporters were in a hurry as they were afraid that another heir of Mahmud II, Shehzade Abdul-Azizi (1830-1876) would ascend to the throne, who was his son from the fifth wife Pertevniyal Sultan (1810-1883). As Shehzade Abdul-Aziz, that time, was minor, naturally, Pertevniyal Sultan would be declared as the regent, or “Naibe-I Sultana” and would turn into an actual governor of the Ottoman Empires. (Göçer K, 2014:51-54) Despite of the fact, that as a result of development of events Abdul-Aziz in 1861-1876, after death of Abdulmejid, ascended to the throne, in 1839 Bezmialem Sultan, together with her supporters, defeated her enemies and declare Abdulmejidi as the Padishah. (Yıldız A, 2018:91-92) In this way, mother of the new Padishah officially obtained a title of Valide Sultan. It was her solid guarantee that in the life of Bezmialem Sultan a new political era was started which assigned her an unlimited power.

Bezmialem Sultan had an impact on the Dolmabahce very soon. As it was noted above, the new Valide could not hide inspiration to the European culture and life style. The deceased Padishah had a great influence on formation of her taste who, with his reformative governance, tried to implement the best achievements of the European culture and thinking in the Army and all fields of the society of the Ottoman Empire. These reforms are called as “Gul-I Hane Hatt-I Sherif”.(Efe A, 2016:78-80) This fact assures us that while ascending of Abdulmejid to the throne the cruelest act stipulated by the “law of fratricide” (e.g. “Patiha law”) had not been fulfilled – it meant murd-

ering of all sons of the Padishah to avoid a desire of state turnover and obtaining of the power. The Mother Sultan assured Abdulmejid that it would be better to settle this problem without any noise as murdering of princes would cause irritation of the Janissaries Corps and development of irrevocable processes in the Empire. (Serin, S. 2019: 56-58) The Padishah granted to the Prince Abdul-Aziz a status of Beglar-Bey and sent to the Yedikule Palace, and his mother, Pertevniyal Sultan sent to the Old Palace. Upon obtaining of the official status Valide Bezmialem Sultan actively involved in the process of selecting of high official bodies candidates and their appointing. First of all, she took care over approval of Hoca Husrev Pasha as a Great Vizier. On the first hand, she expressed her gratitude for the political support, and on the another hand, she needed Husrev Pasha as a reliable ally in the future political battles. Bezmialem, being a professional person in the palace intrigues, did not exclude that her defeated enemies would repeatedly try to create problems and cause political crisis artificially. Thus, Husrev Pasha obtained a full belief of the new Padishah and his mother and the Great Vizier occupied his position, however, we would note that his success had not be long-termed as in one year, in 1840, he was accused in corruption and resettled to Tekirdag which had been left by him only in 1846. (Terzi A, 2018: 102-9)

In the history of the Ottoman Empire Bezmialem became the fourteenth Sultan who was officially granted with a title of Valide-Sultan. On top of all, she was named as "Meht-i Ulyâ-yı Saltanat", that in their language means the "Great Sultan's regent". A definite change was entered into the traditional ceremony, as during the last 189 years it was the first case, when the deceased father was replaced by a son on the throne. In that period Bezmialem Sultan was a rather young woman of 30 years. She fulfilled her obligations with responsibility and endeavor. (Göçer K, 2014: 87-89) First of all, it related to the

radical changes started in the whole Empire by the new Padishah which was named by scientists as “Tanzimat”. It was aimed at modernizations of all layers of the Empire. The process started by the Abdulmejid I was continued until 1876 as it included not only military, but social economic transformation as well. The new Padishah acquainted the society with general principles of the expectable reforms upon ascending to the throne. (Davison, R. H., 2010: 45-48) As Abdulmejid was very young and unexperienced, Bezmialem played a significant role in the issues of ruling of the Empire. On top of advices, Valide Sultan, in private talks, directly criticized her son and always sincerely expressed her own opinion in connection with all key issues. Bezmialem Sultan was taking care over organization of feasts and official events carried in the Dolmabahce Palace. In the period of her activity, the palace’s life was more diversified, interesting and approximated to the European standards. The Padishah’s mother was responsible for security of her son as well. She provided the Sultan with secret information in a verbal and written form regarding the people who were in covered conflict with the Abdulmejid’s government. There were too many legends about luxury and wealth of the Sultan’s Palace. Women of high society competed with each other in valuable jewelry and fashionable garments. It is known that Valide Bezmialem Sultan loved valuable presents. There were too many rumors about bribery as well. (Akyıldız, A. 1993: 46-51) Thus, for example, a well-known Arabian trader Perec Iusup, at a low cost was buying gold from the Empire’s treasury and was selling expensively on the Arabian Peninsula that was illegal activity. To avoid problems, he was paying a high cost not only to influenced bodies of Istanbul, but personally to Valide Sultan as well. There were rumors about illegal transactions connected with state taxes having a trace of the Bezmialem Sultan. Such irresponsible and unre-

asonable attitude, naturally, had a negative impact on the Empire's treasury, spoiled a reputation of state officials, damaged international image of the Empire. (Yıldız, A. 2018:39-42) Despite of the above-mentioned, the Mother Sultan was loved and respected by the largest part of the society. Bezmialem Sultan spent a tremendous financial resource accumulated for years on charity. As it was mentioned above, she created several funds and organizations in different parts of the Empire which had a source of definite income determined enabling them to work even after death of Valide Sultan and to provide people with the assisting resource. Another topic for discussion is constructing of buildings, repairing and restoration of damages buildings. (Serin, S. 2019: 43-45) She was building free hospitals equipped with the best medical devices existing that time. Valide Bezmialem Sultan paid a great attention to developing of education. For this purpose, she initiated and funded opening of many schools, libraries, mosques and fountains. She was taking care over development of typography and lithography in schools, was buying books for libraries, was buying unique transcripts enriching the book's fund. Foreigners name the schools funded by Bezmialem Sultan as the first Turkish colleges and by this fact underlined not only the well-organized material-technical base, but a studying quality as well. Activity of Bezmialem Sultan is not limited with above-the stated. She was the first who financed the so called "Galata Bridge" which has been named as the Valide's Bridge. Thanks to its unique construction it is perceived as a swimming bridge. This circumstance conditioned the greatest authority of the Padishah's mother in the whole Empire. Ordinary people saw noble, kind, considerate, lavish woman in her. (Göçer, K. 2014: 78-82) This authority is proved by the fact that recently one of the Turkish Medical University carries her name.

Bezmialem Sultan's activity, as the Padishah's mother, lasted for more than 13 years. It is known, that she, in her youth, was deceased with tuberculosis, but thanks to the physician's efforts could live for 46 years. Her state was worsened in 40s and on the 2nd of May of 1853 she died in the Beshiktash Palace. Her remains were placed in Dolmabahce Palace to prepare it for ceremony necessary for burial. Representative of ecclesiastic ranks were following her who loudly were reading extracts from Koran Funeral procession was met outside by many people who accompanied her with tears on the last way to her lovely mother. (Serin S, 2019, 80-85 pg.) Valide Bezmialem Sultan was buried in the mausoleum of Mahmud II, next to her husband. On the date of the mother's burial Sultan Abdulmejid issued 79 thousand kurushi that was a very expensive amount of that time. (Yıldız, A. 2018: 78-81) It is noteworthy that in the period of existing of the Ottoman Empire Valide-I Muhterem, Der-I Devlet Bezmialem Sultan turned into a significant figure who was buried with a special respect. Such luxurious burial was conducted only to the Padishah's mother. The ceremony was attended by foreign politicians and ambassadors of different states on top of representatives all layers of the Empire's society.

Results

Essential result of the present article is to demonstrate a particular significance of activity of Valide Sultan, Bezmialem having Georgian origins in the history of the Ottoman Empire. Her positive and negative impact on domestic and foreign politics of the state is explained, analyzed and grounded.

The research conducted in frames of the article makes it clear that Valide Bezmialem Sultan put a great contribution into development of the Ottoman Empire. She was a founder of many charity funds and organizations, initiator of different projects important for

libraries, schools and the state, as a whole, and financially supported them that was resulted in respect and recognition in the society.

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