

Political and Administrative Organisation of the Ottoman Central Government¹

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عزیز ناکی اوا خانمہ
با حرمت و احترام
بندہ بی وجود

In the development of the Republic of Turkey's historiography, Turkish historians wanted to clarify that the Ottoman Empire's bureaucratic system was based on Mongol-Turkish, Central and Eastern Asian administrative traditions influenced by the Caliphate as well as by the Byzantine state administration occupied by them. To prove this, two dominant historians of the era, Fuat Köprülü and İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, each wrote a book that contrasted with Western historiography, stating that the administrative structure did not primarily follow Byzantine traditions but instead Central Asian traditions.² However, a combination of the elements mentioned above did in part affect the Ottoman state administration. The predecessors of the Ottomans, the Seljuks became acquainted with the Muslim governing structure through Islamised Iran, which, however, did still strongly retain the structural elements of the defeated Sassanid state. Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, an early 19th-century Austrian historian, Ottoman-Turkish court interpreter and diplomat of the Habsburg Monarchy described the functioning of the Ottoman state administration in the stage before the Tanzimat reforms and attested in his two volumes that the Ottoman Administration was a blend of the aforementioned elements.³

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2 M. F. Köprülü, *Bizans Müesseselerinin Osmanlı Müesseselerine Tesiri*. Külliyyat 3. Alfa, İstanbul, 2014; İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devleti Teşkilâtına Medhal. Büyük Selçukiler, Anadolu Selçukileri, Anadolu Beylikleri, İlhanlılar, Karakoyunlu ve Akkoyunlularla Memluklerdeki Devlet Teşkilâtına bir Giriş*. Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 1988⁴.

3 Joseph von Hammer, *Des osmanischen Reichs Staatsverfassung und Staatsverwaltung*. II. Wien 1815, 431.

The *dīvān-i hümāyūn* (the Imperial Divan = State Council) was the focus of the Ottoman central administration, and was the most important decision-making and deliberative body of the empire. The etymology of the word *divan* is still unclear. More recently, it has been believed to be of Aramaic descent, which was adapted into Persian, and from there it entered Arabic and then all languages spoken by Muslims.⁴ Traditionally, there are several folk etymological explanations that go back to the Persian word *dev* ‘mad, devil’. According to tradition, an old Persian ruler said to his state council: *īnān dīwānand* ‘These are demons’.⁵ According to another etymology, *divan* traces back to the Arabic word *dawanna* (to collect, to register).⁶ This meaning in Arabic is also related to another interpretation of the word, the collection of poems. According to Hans Wert’s dictionary, *dīwān* (pl. *dawāwīn*) has a very broad meaning, including statements of the state treasury to the council of state as well as a comfortable couch as in in European languages.⁷ The first mention of a *divan* is a surviving military census from the period of Caliph ‘Umār. Later it means a collection of written texts (*dīwān al-rasā’il* = collection of letters). The caliph read the incoming letters, commented on them, and the clerk prepared responses based on the comments.⁸ Caliph Mu‘āwīya established the *dīwān al-ḥātām* ‘the office of seal’, which meant that letters issued from this office were all sealed when sent, while a copy of each was made and preserved. This central state administration was placed under the control of the vizier by the Abbasid dynasty. In Egyptian practice, the Divan had already functioned as an advisory body on economic affairs (*dīwān al-maqlis*). This is when we find an office called a Divan that took over the entire administration of the state.⁹ In Iran, the divan was also under the control of the vizier, who directed all outgoing and incoming correspondence (*dīwān al-inṣā wa-l-ṭuḡra*, at times, *dīwān al-rasā’il*).¹⁰

In the case of the early Ottoman state, there is little information about how the institution of the Divan operated. The first appearance of the word is from the chronicle of Aşıkpaşazāde, who referred to a twisted turban (*burma bülend*) that had to be worn in the Divan during the time of Orhan Gazi (1299-1326).¹¹ After the deaths of Mehmed I (1403-1421) and Murad II (1421-1451), the pashas of the Divan ruled the country until the heir to the throne arrived.¹² Therefore, the statement from the

4 A. Mumcu, *Dīvān-i hümāyūn دیوان همایون* Osmanlı devlet yönetiminde XV. yüzyıl ortasından XVII. yüzyılın ilk yarısına kadar en önemli karar organı. In: *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*. İstanbul 1994. 9, 430–432.

5 Hammer, *Des osmanischen Reichs Staatsverfassung*, II., 412; Duri, A. A. *Dīwān*. I. Caliphate. In: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*.² Leiden–London 1991, 323.

6 Duri, *Dīwān*. I. Caliphate. *EP*, 323.

7 H. Wehr, *Arabisches Wörterbuch für die Schriftsprache der Gegenwart*. Wiesbaden 1958³, 273.

8 Duri, *Dīwān*. I. Caliphate. *EP*, 323.

9 Duri, *Dīwān*. I. Caliphate. *EP*, 323.

10 A. K. S. Lambton, *Dīwān*. IV. *İrān*. *EP*, 333.

11 Ahmed Âşık Aşıkpaşaoğlu. *Tevârîh-i Âl-i Osmân*. (ed.: Atsız, N. Ç.) In: *Osmanlı Tarihleri*. Türkiye Yayınevi, İstanbul 1949., 118.; B. Lewis, *Dīwān-i hümāyūn*. *EP*, 337.

12 Aşıkpaşaoğlu: *Tevârîh*, 155–156; 190–191.

English Consul of Izmir, Paul Ricaut, that a Divan didn't exist before the reign of Sultan Murad II cannot be true. It is possible, however, that Murad II was the first to appoint his teacher, Lala Şahin, as grand vizier.¹³ In the 15th, 16th and the first half of the 17th centuries, the most important decision-making body in the Ottoman Empire was the Imperial Divan (*dīvān-i hümayūn*).¹⁴ A tradition that deeply influenced Ottoman statehood stemmed from the Sasanian theory of the state. This concept is that the ruler and the state regard the preservation of social justice (the support of tax-paying subjects) as their most important duty. As a result, the Divan was not only the authority of central administration, but acted as the ultimate legislative forum.¹⁵ Until the reign of Mehmed II, sultans personally participated in the Divan together with the pashas.¹⁶ The legal code of Mehmed II reveals that he abandoned this practice and instead listened to the meeting from a different room, separated by a curtain or lattice.¹⁷ Starting from the reign of Sultan Süleymān the Magnificent, this custom was altered even further. The sultan began to distance himself from everyday contact and rarely met with the grand vizier, instead communicating with him in writing (*telhīs*).¹⁸

The importance of this central authority is proven not only by the Turkish sources, but also by the contemporary European sources, which sometimes mention certain reports about its activities. In addition to the most frequently cited authors, such as Gerlach¹⁹ and Busbecq,²⁰ here is an account by Ferenc Forgách of Ghymes, who was a learned Hungarian clergyman and bishop of Großwardein in the 16th century, "The Divan is held by the Turks before the public, here one answers the questions of the envoys and the people. A window, into which a lattice has been woven, opens onto the place of deliberation from the ruler's apartments and from which everything can be seen and heard. However, no one can see the ruler. The place in question is covered like a stage, sufficiently comfortable and spacious enough to hold many people. ... In every single Divan, food is also served to the chief dignitaries and the others

13 P. Ricaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*. London 1686, 80.

14 J. Matuz, *Das Kanzleiwesen Sultan Süleymān des Prächtigen*. Wiesbaden 1974, 5; A. Mumcu, *Hukuksal ve Siyasal Karar Organı Olarak Divan-i Hümayun*. Ankara 1986².

15 H. İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire. The Classical Age, 1300-1600*. Fheonix 1997³, 89–92.

16 Mumcu, *Hukuksal ve siyasal karar organı*, 131.

17 Matuz, *Das Kanzleiwesen*, 11–12; A. Özcan, *Fatih Sultan Mehmed Kānunnāme-i Âli-i Osman* (Tahlil ve Karşılaştırmalı Metin). Kitabevi, İstanbul 2003, 15.

18 Fodor P., Szultán, birodalmi tanács, nagyvezír. Változások az oszmán hatalmi elitben és a nagyvezíri előterjesztés kialakulása. In: *A szultán és az aranyalma*. Balassi Kiadó, Budapest 2001, 45–66.

19 Stephan Gerlachs *deß Aeltern Tage-Buch der von zween glorwürdigsten römischen Kaysern, Maximiliano und Rudolpho, beyderseits den Andern dieses Nahmens an die ottomanische Pforte zu Constantinopel abgefertigten und durch den Wohlgebornen Herrn Hn. David Ungnad, Freiherrn zu Sonnegk und Preyburg [...] mit würcklicher Erhalt- und Verlängerung des Friedens zwischen dem Ottomannischen und Römischen Kayserthum und demselben angehörigen Landen und Königreichen glücklichst-vollbrachter Gesandtschafft*. (ed.) von Samuel Gerlach, Zunner, Frankfurt am Mayn 1674.

20 E. S. Forster, *The turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq. Imperial Ambassador at Constantinople 1554-1562*. Translated from Latin of the Elzevir edition of 1633. Oxford 1927.

assembled. At a certain hour the dishes are placed before the chief dignitaries, as well as before the orators, and for the others it is placed sometimes here, sometimes there, even on the green grass, and in this there is no shame in men, however great their dignity, eating there or taking their portions with them.”²¹

The most important source for the functioning of the *dīvān-i hümāyūn* is the legal code (*kānunnāme*) of Sultan Mehmed II. It contains a detailed description primarily of the members of the Divan, and beyond this, of the relationships and hierarchy of the court dignitaries. In this, there is a separate description of who can be seated at the Divan and who cannot.²²

The composition of the Divan changed over the years after the first Ottoman rulers. In the time of Sultan Süleymān I (1520–1566), members and participants in the Divan, which had already been documented from the early period of the Ottoman state, probably consisted of only a small number at the beginning of his reign. The members included: the grand vizier, who was the sultan’s general deputy especially in civil and military matters; three other (later this number increased) so-called dome viziers; the military judges of Rumelia and Anatolia (*qāḍī’asker/qaḍīleşker*); the *defterdār* of *mālīye*, who dealt with the income and disbursements of the treasury (*hazīne*); the *defterdār* of *mīrī*, who dealt with distributed fiefs (timar lands); and the *nişāncı* (*tevqī’i*), who made the *tugra* or signature of the sultan on the deeds issued under the name of Padishah. The *beylerbeyi* of Rumīli and the *qapudan paşa* (admiral of the Ottoman fleet) were also called upon to participate in the deliberations of the Imperial Council during the reign of Süleymān the Magnificent, both of whom later attained the office of vizier and became regular members of the Divan.²³ From the second half of the 16th century, several other dignitaries, especially the *beylerbeyi* of Buda in Hungary, attained the office of vizier. Later, viziers in the provinces began to multiply. These viziers, if they were in Istanbul in person, were likely to attend the meetings. The lower officials who attended were not allowed to sit down. Among them, the most important was the head of the Divan secretaries (*re’īsü l-küttāb*). These secretaries were also present, but could not be seated or to participate in the deliberations.

Other important participants in the Divans as non-members were the interpreters (dragomans). It seems that at the beginning, the interpreters at the Porte were Muslims, but the majority of them had converted to Islam. Some of them played very important roles, such as Yunus bey, who worked as a dragoman at the Porte for more than 20 years at the beginning of the 16th century. He was originally a Greek, and was also

21 Majer F., (ed.) *Ghymesí Forgách Ferencz nagyváradí püspök magyar históriája 1540–1572, Forgách Simon és Istvánfi Miklós jegyzéseikkel együtt*. Pest 1866, 103–104.; Forgách F. *Emlékirat Magyarország állapotáról*. (transl.: Borzsák, István), In: *Humanista történetírók*. Budapest 1977, 661.

22 Özcan, Fatih Sultan Mehmed Kānunnāme-i Âli-i Osman, 5–14.

23 S. Papp, *Die Verleihungs-, Bekräftigungs- und Vertragsurkunden der Osmanen für Ungarn und Siebenbürgen. Eine quellenkritische Untersuchung*. Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Wien 2003, 18.

utilized as a diplomat several times, especially for international affairs with Venice.²⁴ Two expatriate interpreters at the Porte, Tercümān Mahmūd and Tercümān Murād, are also worth mentioning. They were captured after the defeat of Hungary (1526) and raised at the Porte. Mahmūd was originally Austrian (Serbold, son of Jakob von Pibrach),²⁵ but Murād was Hungarian (his original name was Balázs Somlyai). Mahmūd wrote a history of Hungary (*Tārīḥ-i Ūngürūs*) with the help of Murād,²⁶ and Murād himself translated some important sources from Ottoman-Turkish into Latin, such as the *Tārīḥ-i Oruç* (or, according to some historians, the historical work of Neşrī's Cihānnümā), which were then published by Johannes Launklavius/Löwenklau in Latin and German in 1590/1591.²⁷ Another Hungarian expatriate, Zülfikar efendi became head interpreter at the Porte, although he was actually only able to translate between Hungarian and Ottoman-Turkish. Since he was not able to translate from Latin himself, he enlisted the help of other experts, mostly foreign diplomats or translators. His lack of knowledge was once revealed during a meeting of the Divan when he could not understand a letter from the Spanish king written in Latin. His job had been performed by the translator of the Habsburg monarchy's envoys, the Greek Nikusius Panajotis, who had been born in Istanbul.²⁸ This resulted in Panajotis becoming the interpreter of the Porte.²⁹ Following this, the position was filled exclusively by Phanariot Greeks (Rums) until 1821.

24 Aydın: *Divan-i hümayun Tercümanları*, 48–53.

25 E. D. Petritsch, Der habsburgisch-osmanische Friedensvertrag des Jahres 1547. *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs* 38(1985), 71–72, and about the interpreter at the Porte Mahmūd (60–66); P. Ács, Tarjumans Mahmud and Murad. Austrian and Hungarian Renegades as Sultan's Interpreters, In: *Die Türken in Europa in der Renaissance*. (ed. von Wilhelm Kühlmann – Bodo Guthmüller) Tübingen 2000, 307–316. (Frühe Neuzeit, 54); T. Krstić, Illuminated by the Light of Islam and the Glory of the Ottoman Sultanate: Self-Narratives of Conversion to Islam in the Age of Confessionalization. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, 1(2009), 35–63; Papp S., A Képes Krónika, Thuróczy János krónikája és a Tārīḥ-i Ūngürūs kapcsolata. Volt-e „török fogságban” a Képes Krónika? In: *Szent Márton és Benedek nyomában. Tanulmányok Koszta László emlékére*. Fontes et libri 3. (eds.:) Fedeles Tamás – Hunyadi Zsolt. Sorozatszerkesztő: Papp S. Szeged–Debrecen, 2019, 342–357.

26 In the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Török F. 57; Gy. Hazai, (ed.) *Die Geschichte der Ungarn in einer osmanischen Chronik des 16. Jahrhunderts: Tercümān Mahmūd's Tārīḥ-i Ungurus*. Edition der Handschrift der Bibliothek der Ungarischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. (Studien zur Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur der Türkvolker 8.) Berlin 2008.

27 J. Leunklavius, *Neuwe Chronica Türkischer Nation*. Frankfurt am Main.; Löwenklau, J. 1591. *Historiae Musulmanae Turcorum*. Francforti; R. F. Kreutel, *Der Fromme Sultan Bayezid. Die Geschichte seiner Herrschaft (1481–1512) nach den altosmanischen Chroniken des Oruç und des Anonymus Hanivaldanus*. Styria Verlag, Graz-Wien-Köln 1978, (Osmanische Geschichtsschreiber 9); Aydın: *Divan-i hümayun Tercümanları*, 55; (Bilgin Aydın mentioned, that the text von Neşri had been translated by Tercüman Murad.)

28 Simon Reniger to Ferdinand III. Constantinople, 3rd of April 1650, ÖStA, HHStA Wien, Staatenabteilungen, Türkei I, Kt. 122, Konv. 1, fol. 119r–121r. (Fragment)

29 G. Kármán, Grand Dragoman Zülfikar Aga. *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 35,1(2018), 5–29.

It is very likely that the Divan sessions took place four times a week on consecutive days, from Saturday to Tuesday.³⁰ Twice a week, on Saturday and Tuesday, the grand vizier visited the sultan to inform him about the state of affairs in the audience chamber (*'arż odası*).³¹ Sometimes the sultans also received foreign diplomats or politicians at a private audience following a Divan meeting. An example of this was when the Hungarian Prince Rákóczi, who had led a rebellion against the Habsburg Monarchy (1703–1711), was received at the end of 1717 and again at the beginning of 1718. The topics of conversation discussed were so important that the interpreter Andreas Schmid recorded the sultan's words first in Arabic script and then in transcription (Turkish in Latin script) and in Latin translation, *Taraḫi devleti aliemde muzaheret ü muavenet bulağıagina ishtibah ioktur, ve devleti aliemize gelen giümle musafirlere riayet oluna gelmiş tür, sanga dachi ziadessile olağıagi mukarrerdür. (Taraḫ-i devlet-i aliyemde muzaheret ü muavenet bulacağına iştibah yoktur. Devlet-i aliyemüze gelen cümle misafıra riayet olunagelmışdür. Sana dahi ziyadesiyle olacağı mukarrerdür.* “There can be no doubt that the help and protection of the empire will be provided. Attention is generally given to guests who come to our high realm. It is certain that this will be the case for you to an even greater extent).”³²

After the morning prayer, the participants sat down and affairs were negotiated by the members of the Divan. Decisions were recorded during the meeting by the *re'īsü l-küttāb* or the other Divan secretaries, and this draft was called the *müsvedde*. After the meetings, meals were held together.³³ The members of the Divan were experts in the problems and matters discussed. During the Divan session, only those issues that were the most important in terms of state affairs were included in the discussion, other matters were handed over to specific experts. It is likely that only the grand vizier himself heard all or almost all of the matters. It was customary during the meeting to check the documents taken down there and issue them after they received the imperial signature (*tuğra*) from the *nisāncı*. If matters were not settled in the Divan session, they were postponed to the Afternoon Divan (*ikindi dīvān* = Afternoon Divan or *paşa dīvān* = Grand Vizier Divan), a practice that is known starting from 1532. This session started after the *ikindi* prayer (from 3 to 4 p.m. in summer and from 2 to 3 p.m. in winter) and continued until evening. As the other name of this Divan, the *paşa dīvān*, shows, usually only the grand vizier participated in this. The *tezkereci*, who was his private secretary, read the important matters and the decisions were made by the grand vizier. However, sometimes he called in other

30 Ricaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*. London 1686. 81.

31 İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire*, 93; B. Lewis, *Dīvān-i humāyūn. EP*, 337.

32 Andreas Schmid's report to Vienna, Edirne, 4th of January 1718, ÖStA, HHStA Wien, Staatenabteilungen, Türkei I, Kt. 182, fol. 1.

33 Matuz, *Das Kanzleiwesen*, 13.

officials (*qāzī'asker*, *defterdār*) to deal with the business of the *ikindi dīvāns*.³⁴ During the reign of Sultan Süleymān I, two Afternoon Divans still existed, on Wednesday and Friday, where the grand vizier usually ruled on legal issues with the help of the army judges (*qāzī'asker*) of Rumelia and Anatolia and sometimes with the judges (*qāzī*) of Galata, Eyüb and Üsküdar.

There are other alternative forms of the Divan, which were differentiated from one another on the basis of ceremony. The first was the *'ulufe* or *galeb dīvānı*, a ceremony with a very special characteristic. During this Divan, one-fourth of the yearly salary was paid to the janissaries and other military units of the Porte. There is abundant information from incidental diplomatic correspondence about the *'ulufe* or *galeb dīvānı*, such as in the reports of the Habsburg resident envoy, Simon Reniger.³⁵ Sometimes, when the affairs of state required, the Divan held the meeting while standing (*ayak dīvānı*). In these cases, the sultan sometimes took part in the meeting in person. At the time of a great janissary revolt (1656), there was an *ayak dīvānı*, but only two members of the Divan, who had almost lost their lives in the uprising, were personally present with the sultan.³⁶

The Grand Divan was officially a decision-making organisation under the sultan's control, and the most important decisions were made here until the end of the 16th century. This was true even when essential matters of state were referred to an audience with the sultan, where the ruler himself wrote his orders on the petition (*'arz*, *'arzuḥāl* and later *telḥīs*). From the reports of Simon Reniger, it seems that the *dīvān-i hümayūn* was divided into three different levels from the perspective of foreigners. The first was the Divan and Council, the second was the Public Divan and the third was the Great Divan. The first one most likely was when the Divan only dealt with

34 Gy. Káldy-Nagy, J. Matuz, *Das Kanzleiwesen Süleymāns des Prächtigen*, Freiburger Islamstudien. Bd. V. F. Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden 1974. VIII + 172S. + XVI Tafeln. (Besprechungen). *Wiener Zeitschrift für Kunde des Morgenlandes* 65(1975), 335–337; İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*. II. Ankara 1988⁵, 355–356.

35 „Allerdurchleuchtigster, allergnädigster khayser und herr, vorgestern, den 17. diß, hat man in seraglio und grossen divano die militia bezahlt. Der indianische pottschafter hat eben dazu mahl bey dem sultan audienz gehabt. Daß praesent, so er bracht, war ein säbl und kostlicher raiger buschen, baide mit herlichen edlstein, grosen diamandten und rubin versetzt. Die Türckhen aestimiren dises praesent sehr hoch, sonst hat man disem pottschafter alle gewöhnliche ehr und ceremonien erwissen, bey 20 cafftan auß getheilt, selbst dritten darinen in divano bey der mahlzeith gehalten und selbst vierdten vor den sultan gelassen. Hat ungefehr bey 100 persohn mit sich, aber ein schlechtes gesindl, übel khlaidt und (salva reverentiae) halb par fueses. Waß er biß hero vorbracht, war maisten theilß ein compliment, wirdt auch schwerlich waß anders antreffen, dan die kauffleuth biß weillen dergleichen pottschafter procuriren, darmit sie under ihrem glaitt sicher hin und her raisen mögen, wo fehrn gedachter pottschafter nit etwo wegen Condahar, so die Persianer denen Indianern vor ein jahr abgenomben, die Ottomanische Porten [181v] wider Persia in eine allianz zu ziechen vermaint. Die zeith würdt besser nachricht geben, versichere aber, daß die Türckhen bey iezigen coniuncturen mit Persia nichts anfangen werden.“ Simon Reniger to Ferdinand III. Constantinople, 19th of June 1653, ÖStA, HHStA Wien, Staatenabteilungen, Türkei I, Kt. 126, Konv. 1, fol. 181r–182v.

36 İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin Saray Teşkilatı*. Ankara 1988⁵, 225–229.

everyday decisions. A Public Divan would have been when a reception of dignitaries, diplomats, or rebels that were pardoned would also be allowed to attend. A Great Divan was probably a meeting when the grand vizier had an audience with the sultan after a Divan meeting.³⁷ The importance of the Divan began to wane during the 17th century.

In the 16th century, the Afternoon Divan did not have an independent chancellery of its own, and as a result, all issues were dealt with in the three secretariats or offices (*qalem*) that belonged to the Imperial Divan. The most important secretariat of these three was the *beglikçi qalemi*, or *dīvān qalemi*, which was also called the *mühimme qalemi* (secretariat of important matters because the *mühimme defteri* were drafted in this secretariat).

The name of the department is related to the title *beglikci*, who was the head of this office and thereby a deputy of the *re'īsü l-küttāb*.³⁸ The word *beylik* probably comes by folk etymology from *bitik* or *biti* (Turkish: document, letter) and the *bitikçi* was the chief official responsible for the paperwork in the chancellery (mostly of the Eastern Turkish states). The term *bitikçi* was not used by the Ottomans, but they did use the term *biti* in the meaning of a document in the early practice of the sultan's chancellery.³⁹ The decisions of the Divan were set down in writing here. Imperial letters (*nāme-i hümayūn*) to other sovereigns and the most important vassal rulers, as well as the commands (*fermān*, *hüküm*) to Ottoman officials and vassal rulers of lesser importance were also issued here.

Another secretariat was the 'transfer office' *taḥvīl qalemi*, also called the *nişān* or *kise qalemi* 'land grant office or 'purse office', which was responsible for the appointment of high officials and fief-holders.⁴⁰ It was here that the documents of appointment (*berāt-i hümayūn* or *nişān-i şerīf*) for the highest dignitaries were issued, the viziers, *beylerbeyis*, *sanjakebeyis*, *mollas* (the judges of the highest rank), foundation administrators (*mütevellī*), guild masters (*eşnāf kethüdāsi*), as well as other dignitaries and officials who held fiefs (*haşş*, *zi'āmet* and *tīmār*).⁴¹

The final department was the *rü'ūs qalemi*. It can be called the diploma department or the main secretariat. The most important difference between the *taḥvīl* and the *rü'ūs qalemi* was that the diplomas for the appointment of officials who received salaries

37 „Volgenten tags, den 1. April seind sie in grossen divano mit den vezirn an der taffel gesessen, mit sieben cafftan ein khlaydt und zum sultan zuer audienz introducirt.” Simon Reniger to Ferdinand III. Constantinople, 9th of April 1653, ÖStA, HHStA Wien, Staatenabteilungen, Türkei I, Kt. 126, Konv. 1, fol. 77r–78r.

38 Matuz, *Das Kanzleiwesen*, 19.; H. İnalçık, *Reis-ül-küttāb*. İslām Ansiklopedisi. IX. Eskişehir 1997², 674.

39 Mumcu, *Hukuksal ve siyasal karar organı*, 68.; „Bitikçi = yazıcı, kâtib yerinde kullanılmış bir tâbirdir. Uygur lehçesinde bitik yazı, mektub, nüsha demektir.” M. Z. Pakalın, *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü*. I. İstanbul 1946, 237; F. Kraelitz, *Osmanische Urkunde in türkischer Sprache aus der zweiten hälfte des 15. Jahrhunderts. Ein Beitrag zur osmanischen Diplomatie*. Wien 1921, 45.

40 Mumcu, *Hukuksal ve siyasal karar organı*, 68.

41 Matuz, *Das Kanzleiwesen*, 20.

instead of fiefs (e.g. from the *şeyhü l-islām* and the black eunuch to the simplest fortress soldiers) were not issued in the *taḥvīl* but in the *rū'ūs qalemi*.⁴² In the reign of Süleymān I, administration was not as strictly divided into departments.⁴³

The *mühimme defteri* are the most important type of source that has survived. In the professional historical literature, there is often the opinion that every document from the sultan was recorded in it. With some exceptions, this view can indeed be accepted. The literal meaning of *mühimme defteri* is the defter of important matters. The first copy of this preserved at the *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi* (İstanbul) dates from 1544/45.⁴⁴ During the reorganisation of the *Başbakanlık Arşivi*, a new register book from 1501 came to light. According to the editors who published this, İlhan Şahin and Feridun M. Emecen, the method of registration at the offices belonging to the Divan was changed at the beginning of Sultan Süleymān's reign, so the aforementioned *mühimme defteri* (from 1544/45) is the earliest surviving copy composed according to the method of the new defter series after this reorganization.⁴⁵ Another type of defter, the *şikâyet defteri* (register book of complaints) also branched off from the *mühimme defteri* in the middle of the 17th century and one copy of this from 1675 is preserved in Austrian National Library in Vienna.⁴⁶

Another important type of registration book or defter related to the international documents of the Porte was the *nāme-i hümayūn defters*. Documents of the *nāme*-type were issued exclusively to the sovereign Muslim or European rulers and the most important vassal rulers of the Ottoman Empire. However, these documents, which were for international relations, were recorded in the *mühimme defterleri* until the 1580s, but then disappeared for a time. It is not yet clear where these types of documents were recorded for several decades. However, there are two defters from the University Library in Göttingen, which are most likely prototypes of the *nāme*-defters.⁴⁷ These two volumes contain about 500 documents sent from 1054 A.H. (1644 C.E.) to 1098 A.H. (1686 C.E.) by the Porte to several different rulers in Asia

42 İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin Merkez ve Bahriye Teşkilâtı*. Ankara 1988³, 45: 2. „Rüüs, küçük berat demektir.”

43 Matuz, *Das Kanzleiwesen*, 20.

44 M. Berindei, & G. Veinstein, *L'Empire Ottoman et les Pays Roumains 1544–45*. Paris – Cambridge 1987; H. Sahillioğlu, *Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi H. 951–952 Tarihli ve E-12321 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri*. IRCICA, İstanbul 2002; Dávid G. & Fodor P., „Az orszög ügye mindenek előtt való”. *A szultáni tanács Magyarországra vonatkozó rendeletei (1544–1545, 1552)*. „Affairs of State Are Supreme.” *The Orders of the Ottoman Imperial Council Pertaining to Hungary (1544–1545, 1552)*. Budapest 2005, História – MTA Történettudományi Intézete. História Könyvtár. Okmánytárak 1.

45 İ. Şahin, & F. Emecen, *Osmanlılarda divân-bürokrasi-ahkâm. II. Bâyezid dönemine ait 906/ 1501 tarihli ahkâm defteri*. İstanbul 1994, XV–XVI.

46 H. G. Majer, (ed.) *Das osmanische „Registerbuch der Beschwerden” (Şikâyet defteri) vom Jahre 1675. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Cod. mixt. 683. I.* Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien 1983.

47 *Protocollum correspondentiae Turcarum Vezirii cum praecipuis Europae aulis*. Göttingen, Niedersächsische Nationalbibliothek, 4 o Cod. MS. Turcica 29, 30.

and Europe. Each document belongs to the *nāme* or *mektūb*-type. *Mektup* means a kind of letter from the grand vizier to domestic and foreign dignitaries. Both manuscripts probably fell into the hands of Habsburg soldiers during the Ottoman campaign after the former Hungarian capital, Buda (1686), was taken. They were both in private hands in Vienna in the 18th century, and then were sold to Göttingen. The oldest *nāme-i hümayūn defterleri* in the archives of *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* date to the end of the 17th century.

The final type of defter is the *Düvel-i Ecnebiye defterleri* ‘register of foreign countries’, which was part of the Divan administration. They were compiled in various periods and contain the most important diplomatic correspondence, mostly from the beginning of the 18th century. These manuscripts also contain later copies of the older and more important treaty documents and commercial agreements, as well as the Sublime Porte’s correspondence with ambassadors and consuls (the older defters show relations between the Ottomans and the Habsburg Monarchy, Venice, Dubrovnik, France, and Poland). For example, the *Nemçelü Ahid defteri* contains the text of the 1568 treaty amongst other diplomatic files mostly from the second half of the 18th century. In addition to this defter, there are another 13 examples of defters related to the Habsburg Monarchy and then the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy that contained political correspondence until approximately the beginning of the First World War.⁴⁸

In conclusion, it is important to mention that the *dīvān-i hümayūn* was the most important ceremonial location for the grand vizier, and even sometimes the sultan himself, to receive foreign ambassadors. Diplomatic ceremonies are often mentioned the final reports of the ambassadors. The permanent resident envoy of the Habsburg monarchy, the aforementioned Simon Reniger, also made regular reports from Istanbul between 1648 and 1664 that provided accounts of the affairs of the Divan to the Vienna Court.⁴⁹ It should also be noted that not only diplomats from independent

⁴⁸ Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Düvel-i Ecnebiye defterleri, Nemçe ahd defteri, Nr. 57/1; Nemçe Ahidname Defteri, Nr. 59/3; Nemçe Ahkam Defteri, Nr. 58/2; Nemçe Ahkam Defteri, Nr. 60/4, Nemçe Ahkam Defteri, Nr. 61/5.

⁴⁹ S. Papp, & Zs. Cziráki, & H. Tóth, & J. Szabados, *Everyday Life and Imperial Politics in the Köprülü Era. Reports of the Resident Envoy, Simon Reniger from Constantinople to the Vienna Court (1649-1660)*, Szeged 2018, 1443. (Manuscript)

states were received at the Divan, but also the envoys of vassal states such as the Crimean Khanate, Transylvania, Moldova and Wallachia.⁵⁰

Simon Reniger reported some unusual events from the Divan. One day, for example, the English ambassador's translator had not interpreted the diplomat's words humbly enough, which angered the grand vizier. Therefore, he ordered the translator to be expelled from the Divan meeting, forcing another interpreter to take over.⁵¹ The Divan was used as a court of justice several times. During the great Celāli uprising, a rebel leader, Katercioğlu, obtained a pardon from the Great Vizier and appeared with his men in Istanbul at a Public Divan, where he and his men were not only forgiven, but he was appointed the pasha of Beyşehir (Karamania).⁵²

50 „Den 9. diß hat der sibenbürgische ambassator, nebens vorhero gehabt tractament in divano und acht cafftan, beym sultan audienz gehabt. In divano hat der vesir zu ihm geßagt: ...” Simon Reniger to Ferdinand III. Constantinople, s. d. [between the 10th of October and the 10th of November], including Opinio, ÖStA, HHStA Wien, Staatenabteilungen, Türkei I, Kt. 121, Konv. 2, fol. 341r–348r; S. Papp, Transylvania, Wallachia, Moldavia. In: *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*. (eds.: G. Ágoston, & B. Masters,) Facts on File An Imprint of Infobase Publishing, New York 2009, 570–571; 588–590; 389–391; S. Papp, Die Inaugurationen der Krimkhane durch die Hohe Pforte (16–18. Jahrhundert). In: *The Crimean Khanate between East and West (15th–18th Century)*. (ed.: Denise Klein), Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2012, 75–90. (Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte Bd. 78); Natalia Królikowska, Sovereignty and Subordination on the Crimean-Ottoman Relations (Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries). In: *The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. (ed.: Gábor Kármán,–Lovro Kunčević,) Brill, Leiden – Boston, 2013, 43–65; S. Papp, Krimtatarische und ungarische Interessengemeinschaft während des Rákóczi-Freiheitskampfes. In: S. Papp, & F. Tóth, (eds.) *Európa és Magyarország II. Rákóczi Ferenc korában / Europe and Hungary in the Age of Ferenc II Rákóczi*. Studia Caroliensia 3–4 (2004), 63–78.

51 „Dieße tag, alß der Engelländer ambassator auff instandiges anlangen bey dem gros vesir audienz erhalten und wegen der gelt pretension purgieren und den accordt recht außlegen wollen, und der dolmatsch angefangen zue reden mit dießen formalibus, sie hetten nur pactiert das volckh überzueführen, welches sie auch albereit gethan, in übrigen wehren sie der Türckhen diener nicht, ist der vesir also baldt auffgstanden, hatt den ambassator sizen lassen und bevolhen, der dolmatsch hinfüro ihme nicht mehr under daß gsicht kommen solle, in massen dann die Engelländer ein andern auffnehmen, dessen im divan und angehörigen orten sich bedienen muessen.” Simon Reniger to Johann Rudolf Schmid. Constantinople, 29th of August, 4th, 5th, 12th of September 1649, ÖStA, HHStA Wien, Staatenabteilungen, Türkei I, Kt. 121, Konv. 1, fol. 236r–241r (Extracts).

52 „Die revolution in Asia ist ganz gestillt. Dem Katterschy Ogli, welcher allein mit 500 man ein zeit herumb crassiert, ist so vill guts versprochen worden, das er endtlih deß vesirs parola getrauet und mit 15 der seinigen den 12. diß sich hie her gewagt, dießem sampt den seinigen sein in offnem divan pardoni erthailt und cafftani angelegt worden. Meniglich hatt ihn wollen sehen als das die Türckhen fast einer dem andern auff den kopff gestigen. Der vesir hatt in seim serraglio ihn loggiert, tractiert ihn woll und hatt ihn alberait zum bassa zue Beischeher in Asia⁵² gemacht. Vor den sultan, wie ich iüngst geschriben, ist er noch nit kommen.” Simon Reniger to Johann Rudolf Schmid. Constantinople, 25th of November 1649, ÖStA, HHStA Wien, Staatenabteilungen, Türkei I, Kt. 121, Konv. 2, fol. 278r–281v.