

# THE PHENOMENON OF FRATRICIDE IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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## ABSTRACT

*The history of the Ottoman Empire during the reign for more than five centuries (1299-1922) faced many problems that had a clear impact on its political history. At the beginning of its history, it had to stabilize its internal influence from the dangers of the neighboring emirate or external dangers. but the empire was in the culmination of serious internal problems represented by a greedy competition among brothers or children to take over the throne, which had a clear impact through the history of the empire for the long term, which weakened the power of the Sultans during their reign inside the country, that affect or cause on their main goal which is to expand beyond the borders of the state.*

*Many sons and brothers of the sultans were killed, exiled or excluded in the palaces of odalisques palaces to ensure the Sultan power, but this was worsened at the beginning of the reign of Sultan Muhammad Al-Fatih when he initiated the law of Fratricide, therefore the sultans made settlement with the neighboring emirates and the foreign countries in order to reach their goal by overthrow each other, the research tries to meet the subjects as far as possible.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the terminology, Fratricide is derived from the Latin origin Fratricidium or Fratricida, originally consisting of the words Fratri = Frater, meaning fraternity or brother, and Cida meaning slaughtering or killing, "Killing the Brothers".<sup>2</sup>

Through the successive historical eras, the phenomenon of the fratricide was practiced, and given the historical evidence, the first murder of brothers was recorded among the human beings who had been by Cain, the son of the prophet of God Adam, when he killed his brother, Abel, despite the difference in comparison, purpose, and motive, as mentioned in the well-known novel.<sup>4</sup>

Also, the practice of this phenomenon has been recorded in ancient Western societies as practiced by the Romans

<sup>3</sup>, as well as other kingdoms such as the Mongols in India, so it was not exclusive to Ottoman society itself.

Generally, this phenomenon expanded to kingdoms that do not have a specific system to the investiture of the throne, as it was relying on the choice of the king himself to one of his sons (and in rare cases one of his daughters) to take the throne after him, and this usually leads to competition and fighting among the king's family members. In the Ottoman Empire, all the Sultan's children from several wives have the right to ruling the throne, causing brothers' murder<sup>5</sup>.

### **FIRST: THE MOTIVES FOR PRACTICING THE PHENOMENON OF FRATRICIDE IN THE FIRST OTTOMAN ERA**

There were many and varied methods to take the power of the Ottoman sultans, but it changed over time. The concept that all the sons of the deceased sultan have the right of ruling the throne was considered, they usually appointed their rulers of the states and the leaders of their armies until 1537, the one who reaches the capital of the government firstly, and maneuvers to impose his authority was the one who gets the throne of the Sultanate.<sup>6</sup>

but, the hostility and the competition of power soon emerged distinctly, after the death of Orhan in 1360, among the sons of Sultan Murad I 1360-1389 who described by the Ottoman and Turkish references with the intelligence and boldness with a strong religious inclination, as well as his military ability and strong will, so that he was nicknamed "Khaddendkar" which means the king.<sup>7</sup>

Sultan Murad I, selected his eldest son Bayazid, to be the closest to him with love and warmth without his children, which aroused one of his sons, SaroBatuSauuji, to revolt against him in 1383, in agreement with Andruynkos the son of the Roman emperor Hanna Baal, who was then in the Ottoman court.

This agreement included the removal of their parents from their thrones and then living in peace and security, they didn't care about the consequences of this schism, the rebellion on their country, of course, be useful for enemies.<sup>8</sup>

The rebellion began when Sauujitook advantage of his father's crossing into the Roman country of Ely,he declared his rebellion in Bursa and ordered to begin with his name each Friday sermon. For the unity of the country, Sultan Murad wasn't sympathy with his son rebellious, so he engaged an armed force with his son, Sauujiwas forced to fleeing towards Dimotika, and as the army increased and besieged him, he and his allies had to surrender to the troops of his father who ordered to kill them.

Here we do not forget the active role played by Prince Bayezid to help his father eliminate the Sauujirebellion.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, Sultan Murad I asked Roman Emperor Hanna Paleologus to do the same punishment

to his son Andronicus, but the emperor blinded his son 's eyes and kept him away from the country and eliminated this incitement.<sup>10</sup>

The first Ottoman era was marked by fierce competition between the heirs of the throne because there was ambiguity about the procedure of getting the power. The first cases of fratricide were diagnosed during the reign of Sultan Bayezid the first (1389-1402) when he ordered the execution of his brother (Jacob) immediately after his assumption of power.<sup>11</sup>The instigation of some of his henchmen against his brother who was brave, strong personality, he accepted the defamation because he feared that Jacob maybe takes the power. This phenomenon continued with the birth of the Ottoman sultans of the "army" of the children.<sup>12</sup>

After the death of the sultan, civil battles soon took place in the conflict for the throne. The religious scientists of the Ottoman Empire accepted this practice as a necessity in order to prevent disturbance and instability in the state. This phenomenon was also accepted as the reason for the rise of the most effective and competitive Sultan.<sup>13</sup>

Because of the defeat of Ankara and the death of Sultan Bayezid in his capture (1403), there was a conflict among the sons of the Sultan (Muhammad, Suleiman, Issa, and Mustafa), each claiming his right to the inheritance of their father.

However, Muhammad prevailed, who led an army towards his brother Issa and killed him, then killed his brother Suleiman, and then marched an army towards the forces of his brother Musa in the European part of the Ottoman empire, also killed him.<sup>14</sup>Immediately, his brother Mustafa announced his rebellion against him, after his disappearance since the battle of Ankara, but he was defeated and returned to flee and hide in Rome and remained a prisoner of exile. Thus Mohammed took over the throne and named (Muhammad Chalabi the first)and remained the king until his death (1421).<sup>15</sup>

The news of the death of Sultan Mohammed remained in secret to continue the preparation to the ruling of his 18-year-old son Murad from Amasya, and was crowned forty-one days later, and named Murad the second (1421-1451) so he became the sixth Ottoman ruler.<sup>16</sup>

Murad the second engaged with his uncle Mustafa, who returned to claim for the throne and besieged Constantinople in August 1422, and Murad 's forces killed the Grand Vizier. Mustafa continued marching to engage with his uncle, who was concealed behind a

small river, but the situation is changed because most of his leaders of Mustafa had betrayed him and turned to the side of Murad II and most of the soldiers left him.<sup>17</sup> Murad sent a campaign towards his uncle and after a battle near the river (Olubad) Mustafa was defeated and Mustafa's soldiers handed him to his nephew Murad then Murad ordered to kill him.<sup>18</sup>

It is an odd coincidence that one of Sultan's brothers named Mustafa was non-obedience to the Sultan too, who took the support of the princes of Asia Minor, but Murad II sent to Mustafa forces so he captured his brother and killed him with a number of soldiers.<sup>19</sup>

## SECOND: THE PRACTICE OF FRATRICIDE CHANGED FROM TRADITION TO BE A LAW

Sultan Muhammad the second (Al-Fatih) (1451-1481) was differed from the other sultans by being the first who make the fratricide as official law.<sup>20</sup>

After hiding the news of Sultan Murad's death on February 3, 1451, Muhammad arrived Aderna coming from Manisa. He was accepted by ministers, nobles, scientists and others to rule the throne on 18 February 1451 under the name of Muhammad the second. He was not yet 19 years old.<sup>21</sup>

When he took the ruling of the throne, and while the wife of his father (Mara), who is from the family of Isfendiyar Oghuz, in the throne room for consolation and sorrow for the death of the Sultan's father her husband.<sup>22</sup>

Mohammed the second sent a man named Ali BeyEvrenos to the women suite of the royal palace to kill the eight-month- years old Sultan's younger brother, Ahmed Chalabi, by drowning him in the bathroom. Sultan Mohammed justified the fratricide by making it a law to be followed by him and the upcoming sultans.<sup>23</sup>

He confirmed it by saying "Each of my sons who inherit the crown of the Sultanate after me will be allowed to kill his brothers for the public order. Most of the judges agreed to this procedure, so it should be implemented according to the situation." <sup>24</sup>

And this requires some clarification because the Ottoman society is a Muslim community, and killing in Islamic law is prohibited, as the case in many of heavenly and earthly laws, as well as being an act of doesn't unison with moral values of human beings.

Nevertheless, the phenomenon of fratricide practiced in Christian societies as in Islamic societies.<sup>25</sup> It seems that the Ottomans tended to follow the Makaveli view that

the supreme interest of the country requires that, the purpose is the justification of the reason (Raison d'état = Reason of State).<sup>26</sup> Therefore, Sultan Muhammad issued a justification for killing all his surviving brothers because he has a supreme interest in the Sultanate. At that time, scientists have no choice just to support and allowed it.<sup>27</sup>

Sultan Selim the first (Yavuz) who named the Terrible (1512-1520) the son of Sultan Bayezid the second, and his heir. Born in Amasia, took the throne after military engagements with his father and his brother Ahmad in 1512 and he probably poisoned his father.<sup>28</sup>

But for his brother Ahmad when Selim took over the throne, Ahmed declared the rebellion by controlling Bursa and imposing taxes on its people. Sultan Selim rushed to prepare a huge campaign of about 70,000 fighters under his leadership to eliminate his brother's rebellion after leaving his son Suleiman to run the country in Istanbul. But Selim did not capture his brother, but he arrested the five sons of his brothers, who were between the ages of (7-20) years, and ordered to kill them all.

Ahmed who was distressed because of his sons' murder returned to collect his supporters and fought a final war that ended with his capture and killing in (Eskişehir) on April 24, 1513.<sup>29</sup>

The reign of Suleiman the Magnificent was not the most Magnificent (1520-1566), despite the Ottoman Empire in its reign has greatness and expansion westward to the walls of Vienna (1529) and east to Tabriz (1533), as well as ruling of Baghdad (1534) (1535), and Yemen (1555), but his reign was not without heinous conflicts.

His wife, Hurrem Sultan and called (Roxelana), had a distinct influence on him.<sup>30</sup> In order to ensure that her son Selim take the power after his father.

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She conspired with the Grand Vizier Rustem Pasha, also she is the one who made him grand vizier because he is the husband of her daughter. Rustam Pasha takes advantage of the war between the Ottoman Empire and Persia, the presence of Mustafa with the leaders of Janissaries.<sup>31</sup> So he wrote to the Sultan that Mustafa is inciting the Janissaries to make him ruler instead of his father, as Sultan Selim the first did with his father Sultan Bayezid the second. the sultan immediately

traveled to Persia when he received the statement of the Grand Vizier.

His Russian wife incited him with hatred upon his son. When he arrived at the camp, he summoned his son Mustafa to his tent, when he entered, the sultan's guard suffocated Mustafa in 1553. She also incited him to kill his sons (Jahnaker and Bayazid) and convinced him. Jahnaker committed suicide because of his strong attachment towards his brother.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, Bayazid, expected the same fate. He declared his rebellion. The Sultan sent a campaign which defeated him on May 31, 1561, which ended by Bayazid fleeing with his children to Persia.<sup>33</sup> However, the Shah Tahmasp (1524-1576) handed them over to the Sultan, killing Bayazid and his sons (Urkhan, Mahmud, Abdullah, and Osman) in Qazvin. They were buried in Sivas. He had a small son in Bursa. He was strangled and buried near his father and brothers.<sup>34</sup>

In the reign of Sultan Selim the second (1566-1574), the situation changed somehow, as the Sultan tried to choose who is the best heir from his sons to avoid fighting after him, he sent his eldest son to be the territorial ruler in Manisa to prepare him later on to become Sultan Murad the third (1574-1595).<sup>35</sup>

But this did not eliminate the Sultan's new fears towards his brothers, he left nothing to chance or circumstances, and rushed to get rid of any future competition for his throne, in 1574 he executed his five brothers.<sup>36</sup>

Murad the third also sent his eldest son as a ruler of Manisa, who later became Sultan Mohammed the third (1595-1603). The selection for the best heir to the throne of the Ottoman Empire continued. Meanwhile, fratricide among the Ottoman sultans continued for decades.<sup>37</sup>

Although the fratricide is no longer the fundamental principle of securing the throne.<sup>38</sup> But it's reached the peak during the reign of Sultan Mohammed the third when he ordered the execution of nineteen of his brothers strangled immediately when he took the throne in 1595.<sup>39</sup> Before his death in 1603, he executed his eldest son because of his popularity, which threatens his throne.<sup>40</sup> He left for him his two sons (Ahmed and Mustafa).

After the death of Mohammed the third, Ahmed, the eldest of the two brothers, took the throne after his father, who was then thirteen years old. Later, he refused to kill his brother Mustafa (demented), who remained locked in the women suite in the palace.

After the death of Sultan Ahmad in October 1617, Mustafa ruled the throne instead of Osman the son of the deceased Sultan by the support of his mother Kösem Sultan (Mahpeyker Sultan), but Mustafa the first was deposed in February 1618 and replaced by Sultan Osman the second (1618-1622).

Who kept his uncle Mustafa and his two half-brothers (Murad and Ibrahim) and their mother Kösem Sultan alive, but he deliberately killed his brother Mohammed<sup>41</sup> in 1620 despite the opposition of the murder of Mohammed by his wife father, Mufti As'ad.

After Murad the fourth (1623-1640) took power. He also did not hesitate to issue an order to execute his brothers (Bayezid) and Suleiman (1635). The brother of Murad, Bayezid (Ibrahim), spent most of his life imprisoned in the palace. The Sultan feared from murdering until his actions became unstable, and this unstable behavior caused the family chaos<sup>42</sup>.

### THIRD: THE DISAPPEARANCE AND VANISHING OF FRATRICIDE PHENOMENON

By the end of the 16th century, the Ottomans were turning from the practice of fratricide to other practices. It is noticeable that this phenomenon disappeared in 1648, but this did not prevent once in 1808 when Sultan Mahmud the second (1808-1839) ordered killing his brother (Mustafa the fourth), the only survivor, in order to keep his throne safe.

As the Ottomans rejected the phenomenon of fratricide, they took the

principle of the older age of males, whether the brother or son of the deceased Sultan to rule the throne. This practice was called "Ekberiyet" from 1617 until the end of the Ottoman Empire. Meanwhile, other practice implemented which is the imprisonment of brothers, and called this practice (The Cage), this system began its practice in (1622).

So, when older age ruling, the rest of the brothers and sons are left to live in order to ensure the survival of the royal offspring, but under a system similar to a mandatory residence in the women suite, they are prevented from communicating with the public and rarely have any education or administrative experience.

<sup>26</sup>

This practice contributed by make sultans without competence and experience in governance, or even insane.<sup>27</sup>

#### **FOURTH: THE EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF FRATRICIDE PHENOMENON IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE**

In law view of killing brothers and children, by the new or former Sultan, it was identified by Western scholars as one of the manifestations of the tyranny of the Ottoman sultans, the Austrian writer, the ambassador of the Ottoman Empire (OgierGhiselin de Busbecq) mentioned during the reign of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent that the sons of the Ottoman sultans "The most miserable creatures of the earth." They could not escape being killed which is their inevitable fate according to the right of the killing of brothers and children. As the excessive killing of Sultan Suleiman the magnificent of his sons, the writer described them in detail in his writings.<sup>28</sup>

The issue of the fratricide appears to have been in many situations with personal willing of the sultans, in fact not for the interest of the Ottoman Empire as claimed. For example, the insistence of Sultan Murad the third to kill his brothers despite the Mufti rejects the order by confirming that the brothers of Sultan Murad not big enough to be a threat to the empire. This has awakened uncertainty in government departments in Istanbul about the wisdom of such phenomenon and continuation of it, so it is no longer

#### **CONCLUSION**

The research concludes the following results:

The tradition of (fratricide) killing brothers and the relatives of the ruling family wasn't new or Innovative by the Ottoman Empire because many of the countries that preceded it in this phenomenon as the Sasanian Empire, and Byzantine Empire, however, the Ottoman Empire legislated their law of fratricide, depending On the Quranic text.

Ottoman Empire faced at the beginning weakness and decline in the power, after the death of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent In the year 1566, since the sultans after

him drew back from the actual direction of the empire affairs by the grand viziers .

There have been numerous attempts to replace the sultans by the grand viziers, sultans' functions have been determined in the empire by approving or disapproving of the actions of their deputies and to appear in the official ceremonies.

However, the experience of some Ottoman sultans in the late sixteenth century had no knowledge of the outside world, because their concept was limited, as a result of the succession system.

Leading to the taking over the throne weak sultans, semi-prisoners, immersed in a state of extravagance, luxury and hunting, as well as women, and odalisques who had a significant influence in Sultans, especially the close of them, and Sultan mother who was keen to keep the kingdom of her sonsthey were conspiring with the support of the ministers close to them, inside the royal palace, which affects negatively on the system of governance and administration, whether that before the Sultan took over the Ottoman throne, or even after he took power.

#### **NOTES**

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- <sup>9</sup>Mohammed Farid Beck, the previous reference, p.152, *Europe at the beginning of modern times - Part I* , Dar Al Maarif, Cairo , 1969, p.605.
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- <sup>11</sup> Nadia Mahmoud Mostafa, the previous reference, p.35.
- <sup>12</sup> -Lewis Bernard,the *Emergence of Modern Turkey*,London ,1961, p ,188.
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- <sup>19</sup> Nizar Kazan, the previous referencep. 29-30.
- <sup>20</sup> -Donald Quataert, Op., Cit., p. 91-92.
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- <sup>22</sup> -Donald Quataert, Op., Cit., p. 95.
- <sup>23</sup> -Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and his Time*, Translated by, Ralph Manheim, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Printed Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1992, P. 65-66.
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