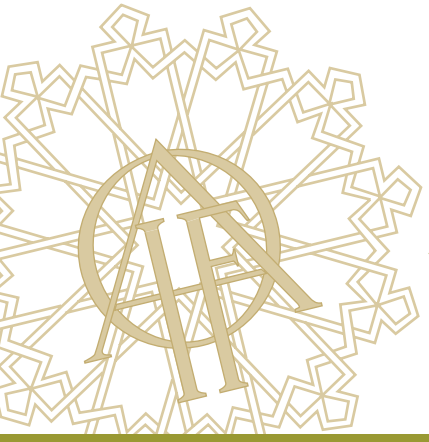
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Jane Hathaway

Marriage Alliances among the Military Households of Ottoman Egypt.

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Jane HATHAWAY*

MARRIAGE ALLIANCES AMONG THE MILITARY HOUSEHOLDS OF OTTOMAN EGYPT[1]

Our perception of women in Middle Eastern societies is affected more than we perhaps realize by our notion of their conditions in the Ottoman imperial harem. The harem of the Topkapı Palace served as the chief model for European travellers' impressions of Middle Eastern womanhood for centuries. Recent work has pointed out the fallacy of many European stereotypes of the Ottoman harem, above all the belief that the space of the harem was uniquely private, in contrast to the public space that the sultan and his male retinue occupied. On the contrary, imperial women wielded great influence within the imperial household, which in all its features was a realm far more secluded than any the average subject or the average itinerant European could hope to inhabit.[2]

Elite Women in the Ottoman provinces, we would expect, operated in much the same context as their counterparts in the capital–that is to say, within households. Certainly, the households of provincial governors were inspired by the sultan's household, although they did not include the intricate hierarchy of mothers, siblings, and offspring that typically prevailed in Istanbul. An even closer analog to the imperial household is found in the households of the localized elites whose power bases lay in the provincial capitals. The elite of the empire's largest province, Egypt, consisted primarily of officers of the seven Ottoman regiments stationed in the province[3] and the cadre of grandees

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1. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the autumn colloquium of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Ohio State University, October 1993, and at the annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, Research Triangle Park, NC, November 1993. I am grateful to members of my audiences and to my fellow panelists at the MESA meeting for their comments.

2. See Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York and Oxford, 1993).

3. These were the Müteferriḳa, Çāvūşān, Janissaries (Mustaḥfiẓān), ʿAzebān, Gönüllüyān, Tüfenkçiyān, and Çerākise. On the functions of these corps, see Ömer Lutfi Barkan, *Osmanlı imparatorluğunda ziraî ekonominin hukukî ve malî esasları* (Istanbul, 1943), Vol. I, Chapter CV, "Mısır Kanunnâmesi," p. 355-359; Stanford Shaw, *The Financial and Administrative Organization and Development of Ottoman Egypt, 1517-1798* (Princeton, 1962), p. 189-197.

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known as beys, who held subprovincial governorships and such posts as pilgrimage commander (*amīr al-ḥājj*) and treasurer (*defterdār*). Various localized Ottoman officials, such as longtime administrators or exiled palace eunuchs, might also establish households on the spot. The power of a grandee was centered in his household, which was not necessarily a kinship-based entity but rather amounted to a collection of patron-client ties, often in combination with kinship ties. Conglomerates of these households made up the Faqārī and Qāsimī factions, whose rivalry pervaded Egyptian society during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. While the household of a lower regimental officer might coalesce in his barracks, that of a higher officer, a bey, or an Ottoman official typically centered on his residence. Here the household head's favorite clients might themselves reside, acting as a sort of bodyguard. But this sort of residence-based household also encompassed the women associated with the household head: wife or wives, concubines, daughters, female servants, nurses, and so on.

Wives and concubines draw our attention here, for it was primarily through marriage and concubinage that women achieved their leverage in Egypt's military society. Marriage to an influential grandee gave a women access to his wealth, of which she might stand to inherit a part, particularly if the grandee had no male heirs. By the same token, marriage to the female relative or widow of an important grandee gave an aspiring bey or officer access to her dowry and her independent wealth. But in conjunction with the material wealth it conferred, such a marriage afforded the wife of an influential grandee or the husband of a well-connected woman an enhanced political and social status. Thus, an elite marriage of this type was as much an alliance or partnership as strategic alignments and power-sharing arrangements common among male grandees. Marriage and concubinage were the elite female's entry into the political culture of Egypt's military elite.

We have little evidence, however, that a complex, highly articulated gendered politics on the order of the "sultanate of women" evolved in Egypt. Rather, within particular households, individual wives and concubines appear to have served as sources of authority and legitimacy. They accomplished this feat by fulfilling three principal roles. (1) The wife or concubine cemented an alliance between two households. (2) She anchored the household, contributing to its identity and acting as a sort of family matriarch. (3) She guarded the household's wealth, either by protecting it from usurpers or by herself forming part of the household's heritable property.

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CEMENTING AN ALLIANCE.

If a prominent household head had a daughter, it was not uncommon for him to marry her to his most prominent client: often the eldest of his clients, or the one of longest standing. In this fashion the client became the son-in-law of the household head and acquired a kinship tie to the household. The practice is comparable to the dynastic marriages common among the European royal households of this period, but it bears even greater resemblance to the Ottoman sultan's practice of marrying a princess to a prominent vizier. Throughout the Ottoman era, we encounter numerous grand viziers, admirals, and other lofty officials who bear the epithet *damād*, signifying that they are sons-in-law of the sultan. Indeed, several imperial sons-in-law served as governors of Egypt. No doubt the most prominent was Damād Ḥasan Pasha, son-in-law of Meḥmed IV (1648-1687) and brother-in-law of Aḥmed III (1703- 1730), who held the governorship from 1688-1690 and again from 1707-1709, serving in-between (1703-1704) as grand vizier.[4] Particularly during the seventeenth century, we encounter the occasional Egyptian grandee married to the daughter of an imperial official on the spot: for example, Yūsuf Bey Ṣihr al-Naqīb–or Nakīb Damādı Yūsuf Bey, in the Turkish chronicles–the son-in-law of the head of the descendants of the Prophet (*naqīb al-ashrāf*), who until the eighteenth century was appointed from Istanbul[5].

This sort of marriage, then, could link a local household to an elite household in Istanbul, such as that of the *naqīb al-ashrāf,* or even to the sultan's household. More commonly, however, it served to connect two local households or to bind an otherwise rootless client–a military slave (*mamlūk*), a mercenary, a soldier without family–firmly to the household of his patron. Examples of the client/son-in-law abound in Egypt during both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The powerful Ḥasan Agha Bilifyā, longtime commander of the Gönüllüyan corps, was closely allied with his son-in-law, the longtime *defterdār* Ismā'īl Bey. These two, in fact, virtually ran Egypt for most of the 1690s, in conjunction with another of Ḥasan Agha's clients, the Janissary

4. See Eduard de Zambaur, *Manuel de généalogie et de chronologie pour l'histoire de l'Islam* (Hanover, 1927), p. 164, 167. Ḥasan Pasha's wife used her influence with her brother to have Ḥasan Pasha recalled to Istanbul after his second term; see Aḥmad Kâhya 'Azebān al-Damūrdāshī, *Al-Durra al-muṣāna fi akhbār al-Kināna* (British Museum, MS Or. 1073-1074), p. 133-134. The single most famous example of this sort of marriage is perhaps the marriage of Mihrimāh Sulṭān, daughter of Süleymān I (1520-1566), to Rüstem Pasha, who five years after his marriage became grand vizier. See Peirce, *Imperial Harem,* p. 72, 76-77.

5. Meḥmed b. Yūsuf al-Ḥallāq, *Tārīḫ-i Mışır-ı Ḳāhire* (Istanbul University Library, T.Y 628), fols. 204v-205r; Anonymous, *Akhbār al-nuwwāb min dawlat Āl 'Uthmān min ḥīn istawla 'alayhā al-sulṭān Salim Khān* (Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Library, MS Hazine 1623), fol 34r; Aḥmad Çelebi b. 'Abd al-Ghani, *Awḍaḥ al-ishārāt fī man tawalla Miṣr al-Qāhira min al-Wuzarā' wa'l-bāshāt*, ed. A.A. 'Abd al-Rahim (Cairo, 1978), p. 171. In the late eighteenth century, the Bakrī family, a prominent Cairene clan of *ashrāf*, came to monopolize the post.

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kâhya Muṣṭafa al-Qāzdāğlı.[6] Ḥasan Agha appears to have promoted Ismāʿīl from agha to bey once Ismāʿīl had married Ḥasan's daughter. The marriage would not only have established a strong bond of loyalty between Ismāʿīl and Ḥasan Agha but would also have initiated a tie between the Bilifyā household and the household of Ismāʿīl's original patron, Ḥasan Bey al-Faqārī. These two households were the pillars of the Faqārī bloc, one of the two rival factions of the era. Hence the marriage contributed to factional cohesion, as well.[7]

Factional cohesion was an outmoded concern by the mid-eighteenth century, when the Faqārī and Qāsimī factions had been displaced by a motley crew of successor households to whom the old bipolar balance of power meant little. One of these, the Qāzdāğlı household, founded by Ḥasan Agha Bilifyā's client Muṣṭafa Kâhya al-Qāzdāğlı, achieved a preponderance within Egypt's military society during the latter half of the century, dominating both the regimental officer cadre and the beylicate. In the early decades of the eighteenth century, the Qāzdāğlıs had aligned with the smaller and decidedly subordinate Jalfī household; this alliance culminated in the duumvirate of the Janissary kâhya Ibrāhīm al-Qāzdāğlı and the ʿAzebān kâhya Riḍvān al-Jalfī, who held sway over Egypt from 1748 through 1754. On Ibrāhīm Kâhya's death however, his own successors brutally routed Riḍvān; thenceforward the greater Qāzdāğlı household reigned unchallenged until Bonaparte invaded Egypt in 1798.

But the Qāzdāğlıs were left to absorb the Jalfī remnant, and here, the strategic marriage could serve their purposes. Riḍvān Kâhya al-Jalfī's daughter married a brother of one of Ibrāhīm Kâhya al-Qāzdāğlı's clients, who had migrated from Istanbul specifically to join Ibrāhīm's household. This marriage is particularly intriguing because the bride had been married previously to one of Riḍvān al-Jalfī's own *mamlūks* (see Figure 1). The groom, however, had failed to consummate the marriage. On Riḍvān's death, he had fled to Baghdad and sent for his wife, but she had refused to join him. At her insistence, the marriage was annulled by a *fatwa*, or legal opinion, of the Mālikī rite of Sunni Islam.[8] Evidently, the daughter of the defeated Riḍvān wielded enough influence not only to repudiate the match her late father had arranged for her but to seem an asset to the Qāzdāğlıs as they consolidated their power.

6. Kâhya, also rendered *Katkhudā* and *Keṭḫüdā*, was a rank second to that of agha. By the eighteenth century, however, most regiments were in actual fact dominated by their kâhyas.

7. Ironically, Ibrāhīm Bey b. Zülfiḳār, the son of another of Ḥasan Bey al-Faqārī's clients, would cause a rift between these two branches of the faction during the 1690s by pursuing a design of beylical supremacy at the expense of regimental officers such as Ḥasan Agha Bilifyā and Muṣṭafa al-Qāzdāğlı.

8. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī, *ʿAjā'ib al-athār fi'l-tarājim wa'l-akhbār* (Cairo, 1958-1967), Vol. III, p. 158. Al-Jabartī reports that the new bridegroom and his brothers were manumitted *mamlūks* of "Bashīr Āghā Qizlār"–*i.e.*, the Chief Black Eunuch of the imperial harem (Ḳızlar Ağası or Dārüssaʿāde Ağası). The eunuch in question may be Moralı Beşīr Agha, who held office from 1746-1752, succeeding the long-lived el-Hac Beşīr (1717-1746). It is conceivable that the brothers fled Istanbul in the aftermath of Moralı Beşīr's execution.

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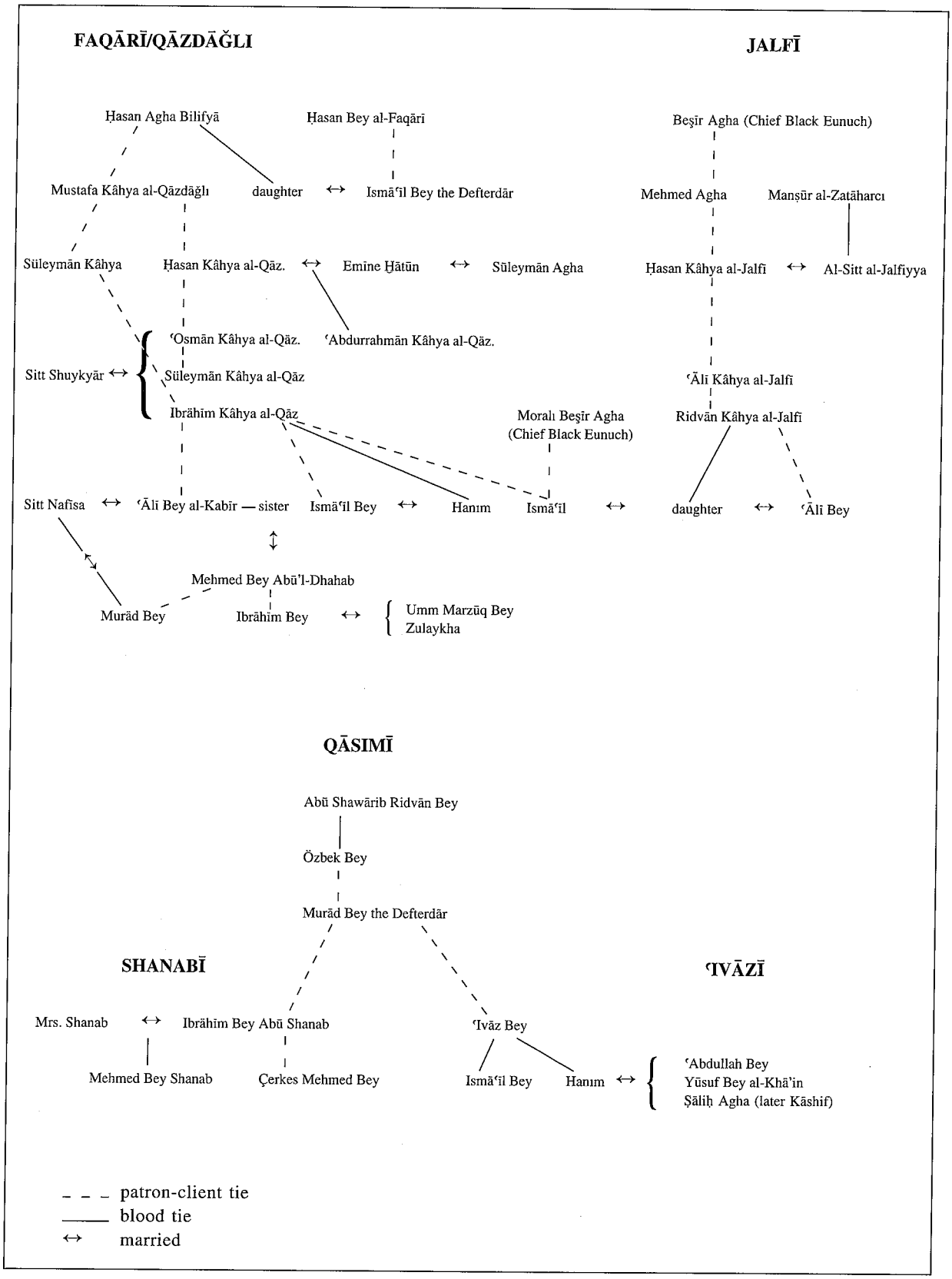


Fig. 1. Partial genealogy of the Faqārī and Qāsimī factions.

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The Jalfī-Qāzdāğlı marriage was not an alliance between equals but served rather to reconcile the remnant of the defeated household with its partner-turned-vanquisher. It seemed designed, indeed, to settle the disaffected Jalfī orphan, to say nothing of her newly-arrived bridegroom. Particulary in the era of Qāzdāğlı preponderance, the marriage alliance most commonly served to integrate an unconnected client, whether male or female, into a household and to ensure his or her loyalty and obligation. Perhaps the best-known eighteenth-century example of this practice is the latter-day Qāzdāğlı grandee ʿĀlī Bey al-Kabīr's habit of arranging marriages between prominent male and female members of his household. In 1760, he married his *khūshdāsh* (*mamlūk* of the same master) Ismāʿīl Bey to the daughter of their late patron Ibrāhīm Kâhya; in 1766, ʿĀlī's own sister wed his newly-manumitted *mamlūk* Meḥmed Bey Abū'l-Dhahab[9].

THE FAMILY MATRIARCH.

A strategic marriage of the type just examined could contribute to a household's political stature. Ismāʿīl Bey's marriage to the daughter of Ḥasan Agha Bilifyā, for example, cemented a formidable Faqārī front by binding the Bilifyā household to that of Ḥasan Bey al-Faqārī. Yet that marriage does not appear to have been essential to the development or survival of either household. Nowhere, furthermore, is there evidence that the Bilifyā daughter lent legitimacy in any fashion to one household or the other. Examples do exist, however, of wives who fulfilled precisely this function: taking the role of veritable family matriarchs, they gave their households an aura of continuity.

The Jalfī household, in the years before its subordination to the Qāzdāğlıs, seems to have regarded the wife of the household's founder as such a matriarch. If the chronicler al-Jabartī is to be believed, the Jalfī household owed its very name to the founder's wife. The founder was the ʿAzebān kâhya Ḥasan al-Jalfī, and, as al-Jabartī explains:

> He was given this sobriquet [*laqab*] because Meḥmed Agha, the *mamlūk* of Beşīr Agha al-Ḳızlar[10] [and] the master [*ustādh*] of Ḥasan Kâhya, had among his adherents a man called Manṣūr al-Zatāharcı[11] al-Sinjalfī, from an Egyptian village called Sinjalf. He was wealthy and had a daughter named Khadīja, to whom Meḥmed Agha married his *mamlūk* Ḥasan Kâhya, and she was known as al-Sitt al-Jalfiyya. [Vol. II, p. 52].

9. On Ismāʿīl Bey, see al-Jabartī, *ʿAjā'ib*, Vol. II, p. 196; and Daniel Crecelius, *The Roots of Modern Egypt: A Study of the Regimes of ʿĀlī Bey al-Kabīr and Muḥammad Bey Abū al-Dhahab, 1760-1775,* (Minneapolis and Chicago, 1981), p. 45. On Abū'l-Dhahab, see Crecelius, *Roots*, p. 49-50, and the sources cited in his n. 22.

10. This was el-Hac Beşīr Agha, Chief Black Eunuch from 1717-1746.

11. I have been unable to determine the meaning of this word. The Turkish *cı* suffix connotes a profession; otherwise, the word would appear to be a mistranscription. One possibility is *zāhireci*, a lower rank in the imperial Janissary corps.

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Following his marriage, Ḥasan Kâhya himself adopted the *laqab* al-Jalfī and, in fact, is sometimes mentioned in chronicles and official documents alike by this *laqab* alone, as if his first name were superfluous[12] When the *nisba*, or adjectival form, of a village name is used as a *laqab* in this fashion, it usually indicates that the person so-named holds the tax farm of the village in question. The effect of this marriage, then, was presumably to give Ḥasan Kâhya access to the tax farm of Sinjalf village in the Lower Egyptian subprovince of Minūfiyya through the current tax farmer's daughter.

Since the village name became the sobriquet for the entire household, one suspects that the tax farm must have formed the nucleus of the household's wealth, much as the tax farm of the village of Bilifyā in the Upper Egyptian subprovince of al-Bahnasā did for the household of that name. Thus, al-Sitt al-Jalfiyya became a cornerstone of the Jalfī household by providing a basic source of its wealth.

Al-Sitt al-Jalfiyya does not, however, fade completely from history once she is safely married to Ḥasan Kâhya. On the contrary, she seems to have remained a household matriarch of sorts for some years after her husband's death. In an intriguing episode from the Damūrdāshī chronicle, the arm of the mercenary Lāz Ibrāhīm, killed in retaliation for assassinating ʿĀlī Kâhya al-Jalfī, is presented to al-Sitt al-Jalfiyya in return for *bakhshīsh*. In like fashion, Lāz Ibrāhīm's head had been presented to ʿĀlī Kâhya's client, Riḍvān Kâhya al-Jalfī.[13] ʿĀlī Kâhya had himself been the client of al-Sitt al-Jalfiyya's husband, Ḥasan Kâhya, and it is likely that she married him on Ḥasan Kâhya's death. It appears, then, that both Riḍvān and al-Sitt al-Jalfiyya had put a price on the assassin's head (or arm, as the case may be). One might well ask whether it were normal for the wife of a slain man to join his client in exacting vengeance. In this instance, indeed, Riḍvān Kâhya and al-Sitt al-Jalfiyya seem to preside over the revenge killing as joint heads of the Jalfī household.

It is difficult, however, to gauge al-Sitt al-Jalfiyya's precise function in the Jalfī household because she is only sparsely mentioned in the chronicles. This is a feature common to women in general, whether they are family matriarchs or not. Somewhat better-represented, in any case, is the wife of another prominent grandee, the Qāsimī chieftain Ibrāhīm Bey Abū Shanab. (For the sake of convenience, I shall refer to her as Mrs. Shanab.) The chroniclers do not reveal Mrs. Shanab's origins or how and why Ibrāhīm Bey came to marry her. Like al-Sitt al-Jalfiyya, however, Mrs. Shanab appears as a formidable presence within her household after her husband's death, almost as if she had in some respects taken his place as symbolic head of the household. On

12. Al-Damūrdāshī, p. 213; Istanbul, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, *Mühimme-i Mışır*, Vol. I, Nos. 409, 410, 412 (1127/1715).

13. Al-Damūrdāshī, p. 470. « Lāz » refers to someone from the northeastern region of Anatolia, near the Black Sea coast.

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a few occasions, the chronicler Aḥmad Çelebi refers to her as *al-mar'āh* ("the woman" in Arabic), which is no doubt intended to be taken in the sense of "the lady," a sobriquet implying respect for her stature.[14] When the body of her son, Meḥmed Bey Shanab, who has died in hiding in 1726, was dicovered by his Faqārī opponents, it was given to her for burial. On this occasion, the Ottoman governor tells Mrs. Shanab, "Better you had given birth to a stone than to him," and reproaches the corpse: "You are the cause of the destruction of your father's house."[15] His remarks could imply that he holds Mrs. Shanab responsible for producing a son who undid all the work of her illustrious husband. On the other hand, there is a sense of commiseration with Mrs. Shanab, whose son has betrayed both his parents. The governor soon had the Shanab house razed, thereby demonstrating that despite Mrs. Shanab's prestige and although she was not liable for her son's misdeeds, the household could not be sustained by a widow who was not married to one of her late husband's clients and who had no living son.

In general, the Arabic chronicles give the impression that the older generation of household leaders–the generation of Ibrāhīm Bey Abū Shanab, Ḥasan Kâhya al-Jalfī, and Ḥasan Ağa Bilifyā–were less bellicose and more politically astute than their successors. The wives of these elder statesmen seem to share the respect accorded to their husbands. But they also derived prestige from being the mothers of the younger generation of grandees who were heirs to the leadership of their fathers' households; in this sense, they were literally household matriarchs. Although Mrs. Shanab's immense prestige owed much to her husband, the "grand old man" Ibrāhīm Bey Abū Shanab, she also drew stature from being the mother of Abū Shanab's son and heir to his household, Meḥmed Bey Shanab. It must therefore have been an immense disappointment to her to see her son destroy the alliances and squander the wealth that his father had carefully nurtured.

This is not to say, however, that the status of Mrs. Shanab and other elite women rested entirely on that of the men with whom they were connected. The wife of a grandee lived in the thick of political intrigue and was likely to be a skilled political operator herself. As first ladies and matriarchs, furthermore, women attained political influence that did not disappear with the deaths of their husbands, patrons, or sons. In decorous widowhood, they assumed a sort of elder stateswoman or dowager status from which the households and factions to which they belonged derived prestige. The chroniclers leave no doubt that Mrs. Shanab, al-Sitt al-Jalfiyya, and other prominent widows of their generation were just such political adepts.

14. Aḥmad Çelebi, p. 480.
15. Al-Damūrdāshī, p. 326-327.

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WIVES AND HOUSEHOLD WEALTH.

1. WIVES AS GUARDIANS OF A HOUSEHOLD'S PROPERTY.

The breakdown of traditional factional allegiances during the succeeding generation gave elite women greater opportunity to display their political acumen. In the early 1700s, the Faqārī and Qāsimī factions splintered into fractious successor groups. While the Faqārī faction weathered a muted internal rivalry between the Qāzdāğlı household and that of Zülfiḳār Bey, the Qāsimīs split completely asunder as a result of the competing ambitions of the successors of Ibrāhīm Bey Abū Shanab and those of his *khūshdāsh*–that is, fellow *mamlūk* of his master–ʿIvāẓ Bey. Abū Shanab's *mamlūk* Çerkes Meḥmed Bey became the mortal enemy of ʿIvāẓ Bey's son, the young firebrand Ismāʿīl Bey, going so far as to join the Faqārī remnant's schemes against Ismāʿīl Bey's party.

In a highly charged atmosphere in which today's ally could easily become tomorrow's deadly foe, women found themselves intruding in the political arena more visibly than they ever had before. Perhaps the most striking example of such a politically active woman is the sister of the wealthy and immensely popular Ismāʿīl bey b. ʿIvāẓ, who was, naturally, a highly desirable match for any of her brother's adherents. She was known as Hanım bint ʿIvāẓ; *hanım*, the Turkish equivalent of "miss," is unquestionably a title of respect. Owing to the deadly infighting among Egypt's grandees, Hanım was married, then widowed by a succession of prominent ʿIvāẓīs. Significantly, the Arabic chronicles give her second and third husbands the sobriquet *zawj Hanım* ("husband of Hanım"), indicating the prestige accruing from marrying this woman, who as the years passed must have been acquiring the hallowed status of ʿIvāzī first lady, if not matriarch.

Hanım bint ʿIvāẓ was no mere figurehead, however, but played a critical part in keeping the ʿIvāzīs' wealth out of the clutches of their opponents. When a governor antagonistic to her brother arrived in Egypt in 1720 and began plotting to kill him, Hanım wasted no time in dividing up and redistributing all Ibn ʿIvāẓ Bey's property, as well as that of his murdered followers, so that the governor could not lay hands on it.[16] She took the same course of action when each of her three husbands was assassinated. Recounting the third occasion, the chronicler al-Damūrdāshī, unable to contain his enthusiasm, calls her "the heroine [*al-qahramāna*] bint ʿIvāẓ Bey Hanīm," making an Arabicized feminine singular out of the Turkish word for "hero".[17]

The issue of the wealth of one of Hanım's murdered husbands allows us to observe an intriguing instance of gender solidarity that transcended the Shanabī-ʿIvāzī antagonism. Al-Damūrdāshī recounts how in 1724, the assassins of Hanım's first husband, her brother's ally ʿAbdullah Bey, tried to trick the unwitting Hanım into giving them

16. Al-Damūrdāshī, p. 251.
17. Al-Damūrdāshī, p. 423; see also p. 282-283, 434.

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the gold and furs that ʿAbdullah had deposited with her as a security (*amāna*) by sending her a forged writ (*tadhkira*). This message purported to be from ʿAbdullah Bey, informing his wife that he was alive but in hiding and needed these items. Mrs. Shanab joined the concubine of the late governor ʿĀlī Pasha (1706-1707, 1717-1720) in informing Hanım of her husband's fate and advising her to foil the assassins by demanding to see her husband.[18] The three women should by all rights have been enemies, for while ʿĀlī Pasha had been sympathetic to Ismāʿīl Bey b. ʿIvāẓ, Mrs. Shanab was the widow of Çerkes Meḥmed Bey's patron. Their cooperation suggests that the Shanabī-ʿIvāẓī alliance that had anchored the Qāsimī faction in years past had not disintegrated among the leading Qāsimī women as it had among the faction's male grandees. This circumstance no doubt had much to do with ties of long standing among the women concerned; Mrs. Shanab, for instance, may have nurtured a strong maternal affection for the daughter of her husband's slain *khūshdāsh*.[19] And yet there is something unmistakably female about this alliance, for the younger generation of male Shanabīs and ʿIvāẓīs showed no such reverence for the ties that had bound their fathers and patrons. Mrs. Shanab's son was nearly as venemous a foe of Ismāʿīl Bey b. ʿIvāẓ as was Çerkes Meḥmed Bey. The entire incident suggests that wives, concubines, and daughters could play a more enduring role than men in preserving the identity of a political faction. Qāsimī loyalties survived among these three women long after they had fallen victim to the ambitions of male members of the faction. Even more striking, the women were willing to indulge these atavistic loyalties even when they threatened the political designs of the subfactions to which their male relatives belonged.

Nor was this extraordinary feminine alliance a mere fluke. It resurfaces some years later, in 1731, when the same three women appear to support a plot by three male ʿIvāẓīs, including Hanım's husband of the moment,[20] to kill the Faqārī chieftain Zülfiḳār Bey, who had assassinated Ismāʿīl Bey b. ʿIvāẓ in 1724. Yet the plot was not a simple case of ʿIvāẓī revenge; it had originated with a disgruntled Faqārī, Ḫalīl Agha Qaṭāmish, who was personally jealous of Zülfiḳār's large household.[21] Enmities and alliances had grown increasingly unpredictable with the disintegration of the two traditional factions. Once again, then, the women's alliance is a last bastion of Qāsimī solidarity in the face of unravelling factional bonds. In supporting Zülfiḳār's

18. Al-Damūrdāshī, p. 282-284.

19. The assassination of ʿIvāẓ Bey in 1711 is a famous episode in the history of Ottoman Egypt's grandees. See al-Damūrdāshī, p. 154-156; Aḥmad Çelebi, p. 230; al-Jabartī, *ʿAjā'ib*, Vol. I, p.119-122; ʿAbdülkerīm b. ʿAbdurraḥmān, *Tārīḫ-i Mıṣır* (Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, MS Hekimoğlu ʿĀlī Pasha 705), fols. 128r-146v.

20. Her husband was Yūsuf Bey *zawj Hanım*, who, after he had taken in one of Çerkes Meḥmed Bey's allies, was called Yūsuf Bey al-Khā'in, "the traitor"; see al-Damūrdāshī, p. 321. The other two conspirators were Yūsuf Bey al-Sharaybī and the former Janissary agha Süleymān Abū Difiyya.

21. Al-Damūrdāshī, p. 377. Ironically, Zülfiḳār Bey had been jealous of Ismāʿīl Bey b. ʿIvāẓ for the same reason (al-Damūrdāshī, p. 262).

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assassination, moreover, the women carried on the interests of the men to whom they owed their places in the Qāsimī bloc long after these men were dead: ʿIvāẓ Bey had been killed in 1711, his son in 1724, the governor ʿĀlī Pasha in 1720; Ibrāhīm Bey Abū Shanab, meanwhile, had died in the plague of 1718.[22]

Zülfiḳār Bey, for his part, regarded the women as a genuine threat and requested an order from the governor to exile them to Anatolia. To his plan, the Janissary kâhya ʿOsmān al-Qāzdāğlı allegedly responded, "You idiot [*Yā qillat ʿaqlak*]! They will say at the Porte that the Ghuzz of Egypt were afraid of three women and exiled them to Anatolia!" ʿOsmān Kâhya instead courageously placed the women under house arrest[23]. In the end, Ḫalīl Agha succeeded in killing Zülfiḳār Bey in spite of the three women's detention; the bey's murder set off a nostalgic wave of Faqārī-Qāsimī antagonism that ended in the virtual annihilation of the Qāsimī remnant.

The Faqārī reaction to the women's alliance reveals that the women's enemies, at least, regarded them as serious political actors and as anchors of the Qāsimī bloc. The women did not act at the pleasure of whatever chieftains happened to head the sundered remnants of the Qāsimī faction but, on the contrary, defied the rift within the faction by retaining the old Shanabī-ʿIvāẓī partnership; the male Qāsimīs weakened themselves and ultimately met disaster by not following the women's example.

Hanım bint ʿIvāẓ is only the most spectacular of a series of grandees' wives who stashed away their husband's property. In the two invasions that occurred toward the end of the eighteenth century, the invading powers dealt forcefully with women who clung to their husbands' wealth, thereby admitting that they regarded these women as potential threats. In 1786, an Ottoman naval force under the command of the admiral, or Ḳāpūdān Paşa, Ḥasan landed at Alexandria with the aim of ousting the duumvirs Ibrāhīm Bey and Murād Bey, whom the Porte suspected of collaborating with the Russian empire.[24] Ḥasan went so far as to imprison the two wives of the momentarily defeated *shaykh al-balad*, or head of Cairo, Ibrāhīm Bey, until they relinquished Ibrāhīm's fortune.[25] Following the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798, the French occupying force treated Sitt Nafīsa, wife of Ibrāhīm Bey's former fellow strongman Murād Bey, as a veritable proxy for her husband, who had fled to Upper Egypt. She attained this stature because Murād Bey, following the familiar pattern, had left part of his property with her as a security (*amāna*) when he fled.[26]

22. See n. 19, above; al-Damūrdāshī, p. 225, 256, 264; al-Jabartī, *ʿAjā'ib*, Vol. I, p. 276, 146-147, 301-302.

23. Al-Damūrdāshī, p. 378. The word Ghuzz, commonly used for Egypt's military population, derives from Oghuz, the Turkic confederation within which the Ottomans originated.

24. Daniel Crecelius, "Russia's Relations with the Mamlūk Beys of Egypt in the Eighteenth Century," paper delivered at the Middle East Studies Association conference, Boston, November 1986.

25. Al-Jabartī, *ʿAjā'ib*, vol. III, p. 344.

26. Al-Jabartī, *Journal d'un notable du Caire durant l'expédition française, 1798-1801*, trans. Joseph Cuoq (Paris, 1979), p. 41-42, 56; see also below.

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The extraordinary alliance of the three Qāsimī women and the treatment of the wives of the duumvirs point up a general feature of the role that the wives of grandees played: when grandees' operations were disrupted–when they were killed or forced to flee Cairo–their wives became islands of stability who maintained their husbands' status in their absence. What this meant first and foremost, was that wives protected their households' wealth against all usurpers, including the Ottoman state. A fleeing grandee commonly left his wealth in the hands of his wife (or sister, in Ismāʿīl Bey b. ʿIvāẓ's case) as a security (*amāna*); thus the wife became, in effect, her husband's agent. This responsibility could carry with it considerable political power but could also leave the wife subject to the antagonisms that had been directed against her husband. In such circumstances, however, her gender stood her in good stead; women's attachment to the home, as well as the habit of treating wives and daughters with a modicum of respect, made a wife harder to attack. Men's reluctance to take women completely seriously as political actors–and therefore as serious threats–also worked to a wife's advantage; witness the ridicule heaped on Zülfiḳār Bey when he attempted to exile the three formidable Qāsimī women.

2. WIVES AS HERITABLE PROPERTY.

It may seem paradoxical that a wife could play a crucial political role while at the same time depending on some attachment to a man for her social and political identity. If Mrs. Shanab were really a serious actor on the Cairene political scene, for example, why could the household to which she belonged not survive after the death of her son? Attention must be paid to the fashion in which this dependence itself contributed to a woman's ability to assume a political function. This seeming paradox lies at the heart of the marriage alliance; it informs above all the practice whereby a wife was passed from a deceased husband to his client. Indeed, the successive marriages of Hanım bint ʿIvāẓ are extraordinary only because of the immense prestige she enjoyed and the frequency with which her husbands died. In general terms, her predicament was not uncommon. When a grandee died, one of his clients typically married his widow or chief concubine. This practice was part of the process of inheriting and taking over the house of the patron; the client who married the widow was typically his patron's heir, and the widow was, in effect, part of his inheritance. Thus, following Zülfiḳār's Bey's murder, his mamlūk ʿĀlī Bey transferred all Zülfiḳār's followers to a new house and married Zülfiḳār's widow.[27] While we can regard such a custom as demeaning to women and, indeed, a sign of their objectification, we can also view it as a verification of the importance of the marriage alliance to the continuity of the household.

27. Al-Damūrdāshī, p. 384. The house was that of the exiled Chief Black Eunuch Yūsuf Agha (1671-1687).

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The experiences of two women from the Qāzdāğlı household suggest, however, that the "heritable wife" was a complex phenomenon circumscribed by strict rules of succession. One concubine, Sitt Shuykyār, seems to have been handed down from generation to generation of Qāzdāğlı leaders; this perhaps explains the Persian sobriquet *shuykyār*, which denotes a woman who has had a husband. Originally purchased by ʿOsmān Kâhya al-Qāzdāğlı, she passed to the latter's client and heir, Süleymān Kâhya, after ʿOsmān's assassination in 1736. Following the death of Süleymān Kâhya three years later, however, Sitt Shuykyār did not fall immediately to the lot of the heir presumptive, ʿAbdurraḥmān Kâhya, along with Süleymān's material wealth. Instead, she married Ibrāhīm Kâhya.[28] Why this discrepancy? Although he inherited Süleymān's wealth, ʿAbdurraḥmān did not assume leadership of the Qāzdāğlı household; that honor fell to Ibrāhīm, who belonged to another line of patrons and clients within the Qāzdāğlı bloc and had inherited the wealth of that line.[29] It appears, then, that the widow of the household head was not treated entirely as heritable property but was available only to the succeeding head of the household. Indeed, on becoming Qāzdāğlı headman after Ibrāhīm Kâhya's death, ʿAbdurraḥmān at last married Sitt Shuykār. Thus, the "heritable wife" phenomenon, at first blush a degrading custom, actually seems to have dovetailed with the "family matriarch" phenomenon; the man who assumed household leadership became the consort of the household's first lady.

But even this rule did not apply in all cases. Otherwise, ʿOsmān Kâhya need never have purchased Sitt Shuykyār in the first place; on the death of his patron, Ḥasan Kâhya, around 1714, he would simply have married Ḥasan's widow, Emīne Ḫātūn, the mother of ʿAbdurraḥmān Kâhya. Yet so far from becoming heritable property, Emīne Ḫātūn seems to have spent roughly a quarter of a century single. What saved Emīne from the fate of other widows may have been the presence of her son, ʿAbdurraḥmān. Being the mother of a future household head may have rendered Emīne off limits to her late husband's clients. Likewise, Mrs. Shanab's son, Meḥmed Bey Shanab, may account for Mrs Shanab's spinsterhood after the death of Ibrāhīm Bey Abū Shanab–though advanced age may have been a contributing factor.[30] Al-Damūrdāshī offers evidence, however, that a son could protect his mother only if he were an adult. Commenting on the death of the ʿIvāẓī Yūsuf Bey al-Jazzār, the chronicler notes that because Yūsuf Bey's son "lacked his first beard [*khālī al-ʿidhār*]", the bey's *mamlūk* received his tax farm, took his wife, and appropriated his house.[31]

28. Al-Damūrdāshī, p. 437, 566.

29. Ibrāhīm was the client of a different Süleymān Kâhya, the *khūshdāsh* of ʿAbdurraḥmān's father Ḥasan Kâhya (see Figure 1).

30. According to al-Jabartī (*ʿAjā'ib*, Vol. I, p. 276), Ibrāhīm Bey Abū Shanab was ninety-two at the time of his death in 1718. About his wife's age we have no information.

31. Al-Damūrdāshī, p. 263.

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Eldest sons and elder brothers may have had the prerogative of marrying their mothers and sisters off, as well as guarding their spinsterhood. Shortly before his assassination, Ismāʿīl Bey b. ʿIvāẓ promoted the kâhya of the Çāvūşān corps to bey, apparently in the expectation that he would marry the highly desirable Hanım[32]. Some fifteen years later, just as the Qāzdāğlı concubine Sitt Shuykyār was passing from Süleymān Kâhya's hands into those of Ibrāhīm Kâhya, al-Damūrdāshī and al-Jabartī report the marriage of ʿAbdurraḥmān Kâhya's mother Emīne Ḫātūn to then-Çāvūşān kâhya Süleymān Agha[33]. One would suspect that ʿAbdurraḥmān had much to do with his mother's marrying Süleymān Agha, who was a firm ally of ʿAbdurraḥmān and was instrumental in securing the Qāzdāğlı inheritance for him. Emīne Ḫātūn herself, however, may well have taken some part in arranging the marriage out of concern for her son's welfare.

His mother's remarriage no doubt came at a decisive moment for ʿAbdurraḥmān: he had finally come into his inheritance after seeing it waylaid for years by two family clients–although to be sure, the inheritance had been substantially increased by the enterprising ʿOsmān Kâhya. Yet he still did not head the household and, in fact, needed to keep his wealth and his political identity from being overwhelmed by the man who did, Ibrāhīm Kâhya. For these reasons, no doubt, he cultivated a tie with Süleymān Agha, who took it upon himself to go into the dying Süleymān Kâhya's tent and make certain that no one else attempted to lay claim to his wealth. In this instance, then, Emīne Ḫātūn was the instrument of a marriage alliance that proved of economic and political benefit to her fatherless son. Her remarriage contains elements of all three types of marriage bond: in the role of heritable wife and family matriarch, she cemented a critical alliance for ʿAbdurraḥmān.

The heritable wife was not always an instrument, however, but could take an overt role in shaping the political fortunes of her household. Successive marriages to prominent grandees schooled a women in the fine art of political intrigue. The redoubtable Hanım bint ʿIvāẓ, for example, had by the time of her third marriage become an accomplished political operator. She is definitely not to be regarded as the helpless victim of inscrutable fate; finding herself with a new husband, she brought her own ambitions to bear on his political career. When Hanım's third husband, Ṣāliḥ Agha, found an opportunity to govern the Nile Delta subprovince of al-Manṣūra, al-Damūrdāshī has her telling him, "Become a *ṣanjāq* [*beyi*], and I will take it upon myself to protect you from all the boasting [*iftikhār*]"[34]–meaning the boasting of the Faqārīs, and particulary Meḥmed Bey Qaṭāmish, who was bent on destroying the last of the Qāsimīs. Ṣāliḥ, in collusion with the Ottoman governor, ultimately joined in the assassination of

32. Al-Damūrdāshī, p. 239
33. Al-Damūrdāshī, p. 437; al-Jabartī, *ʿAjā'ib*, Vol. III, p. 130.
34. Al-Damūrdāshī, p. 414.

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the Faqārī leaders who stood in the way of his advancement;[35] one is certainly justified in suspecting that Hanım took a Lady MacBeth-like part in the scheme.

One of the more remarkable examples of a widow's independent action is that of the concubine of ʿĀlī Pasha, who governed Egypt from 1706-1707 and again from 1717-1720. His concubine, we recall, has joined Hanım bint ʿIvāẓ and Mrs. Shanab in their earlier attempt to foil the designs of the Faqārīs and their allies. When ʿĀlī Pasha was executed by sultanic order in 1720, his concubine chose to remain in Cairo, defying his son's wishes to take her back to Istanbul.[36] She refused, in effect, to become heritable. We do not know whether she married or from where she drew support following the departure of her late master's family. Al-Damūrdāshī always refers to her simply as "ʿĀlī Pasha's concubine [*maḥḍiyya*]," leading one to suspect that she did not, in fact, marry. We know that ʿĀlī Pasha had supported Ismāʿīl Bey b. ʿIvāẓ–this, in fact, was probably the reason for his execution–and that his concubine sympathized with the Qāsimī remnant; otherwise, we know little of what niche she managed to occupy. She does not appear to have attached herself to another household, unless perphaps she were sheltered by Mrs. Shanab. In any event, her seeming isolation and lack of male protection did little to prevent her from undertaking political activity.

ʿĀlī Pasha's concubine should probably be regarded as an exception to the rule of heritability. The fact that her heritability would have required a physical relocation perhaps contributed to her ability to remain independent. It seems to be the norm, however, that heritability accompanied political activity rather than precluding it. Even the last great widow of pre-nineteenth century Egypt, Sitt Nafīsa, owed her political influence to her heritability. Like Hanım bint ʿIvāẓ, she was repeatedly widowed and remarried. Her first husband was the famous ʿĀlī Bey al-Kabīr, who rebelled against the Ottoman Sultan in 1768; on his assassination in 1773, she married Murād Bey, the *mamlūk* of ʿĀlī Bey's *mamlūk* Meḥmed Bey Abū'l-Dhahab.[37] It is as Murād Bey's wife that she is best known, for in that capacity, she acted as broker for the interests of the grandees who had fled to Upper Egypt in the wake of the French invasion. A number of incidents reported by al-Jabartī reveal that the French recognized her as

35. This was the infamous 1736 massacre at the *defterdār*'s house, in which ten leading Faqārī grandees were killed. Ṣāliḥ himself killed Meḥmed Bey Qaṭāmish, who had vetoed his appointment as *kāshif* (the title of a minor subprovincial governor) of Manṣūra. His predecessor as *kāshif*, ʿOsmān Kâhya al-Qāzdāğlı, was also killed. For a description of the massacre, see al-Damūrdāshī, p. 418-420. The massacre and its aftermath also form the subject of several imperial orders, or *mühimmes*; see, for example, *Mühimme-i Mışır* Vol. V, No. 342 (1148/1736). The mühimmes refer to the massacre as *vaḳʿat-i shūr-angīz* ("the tumultuous incident").

36. Al-Damūrdāshī, p. 256.

37. Murād's first wife was the widow of Ṣāliḥ Bey, a remnant of the Qāsimī faction and enemy of ʿĀlī Bey al-Kabīr. See Murād's obituary in al-Jabartī, *Journal*, p. 327.

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Murād's representative in Cairo. When the French confiscated the house of a prominent blind shaykh of al-Azhar university who had forcefully protested the French occupation, he complained from hiding to Sitt Nafīsa, who relayed his complaint to Murād Bey in Upper Egypt.[38] After making peace with Murād and giving him the emirate of Upper Egypt, the French paid Sitt Nafīsa a monthly pension of 100,000 *paras*, or Egyptian silver coins; this amount was raised to 140,000 after Murād's death in 1801. Yet following Murād's death, Sitt Nafīsa was handed off to one of his *mamlūks*; the French acquiesced in this time-honored-ritual.[39] Still, we may see in this eventuality an affirmation of Sitt Nafīsa's influence. To assume leadership of Murād's household without marrying his remarkable widow would have been unthinkable; Sitt Nafīsa was a necessary component of the leading grandee's power.

Generally speaking, the heritable wife's value, like that of a cherished family heirloom, appreciated with age: marriages to politically prominent personages increased her political acumen; this acumen, in turn, made her an asset to her deceased husband's clients. This equation assumed that the wife of a grandee was, in some sense or other, a political actor. Though in some respects a commodity, she was not passive or voiceless. The role of heritable wife and that of matriarch or first lady were by no means mutually contradictory; many women found themselves playing both roles.

CONCLUSION.

In the capacity of wife or concubine, or in some cases sister or daughter, an elite woman of Ottoman Egypt was able to contribute significantly to the stability, aggrandizement, and preservation of the household to which she belonged. Marriage, in this context, was a household activity, much like purchasing slaves or recruiting mercenaries. Indeed, the household was the indispensable arena of the elite woman's activity, as it was of the elite man's activity. It was arguably even more critical to a woman's operations, for a woman was less likely than a man to leave the house for an extended period. To be sure, women were not *confined* to their houses but enjoyed some degree of mobility within Cairo's elite neighborhoods. It seems to have been fairly common for women to visit each other in their homes, as Mrs. Shanab and ʿĀlī Pasha's concubine visited Hanım bint ʿIvāẓ, and to use these visits as occasions for political maneuvering. At times of political crisis, nevertheless, the man of the house was apt to flee his residence while his wife and concubines stayed behind. In this sense, they were truly anchors of the household. The women of the house and the section of the

38. Al-Jabartī, *Journal,* p. 238. Murād sent a *kāshif* from his household to intercede with the French, and the house was returned.

39. Al-Jabartī, *Journal,* p. 308, 315, 350.

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residence over which they presided–commonly known as the *ḥarīm*–were a locus of relative stability within the household.

In more general terms, the *ḥarīm* represented relative stability in the midst of a turbulent, changing society. Here the usurping strongman might at least hesitate to tread; here his vanquished foe would stash his wealth in the hope of better days to come. And here he might actually hide to escape the wrath of his victorious enemy. The women of the household were thus not mere accessories to a household's power, prestige, and longevity but were vital elements of them.

This function of women grew more pronounced as central control of Egypt weakened in the course of the eighteenth century. As the Faqārī and Qāsimī factions became obsolete, the women of the households that had comprised these factions preserved some semblance of traditional loyalties while at the same time safeguarding household wealth in the face of ever-shifting alliances. The preponderance of the Qāzdāğlı household in the later half of the eighteenth century offered some hope of stability although, to be sure, the Qāzdāğlıs vied among themselves for dominance while asserting relative autonomy from the central government. As individual grandees amassed more and more wealth and power, their wives took on the status of headwomen to their husbands' headmen. And when their husbands were challenged, whether by rival grandees or by outside forces, these women took responsibility for preserving the wealth and integrity of enormous households.

In a society in which political power was centered in households, marriage was a natural form of political merger or alliance. The elite wife was not only the mother of her husband's heirs and successors but also his ally, partner, and agent, especially in time of crisis. Thus, while the wife partook of her husband's political and economic stature, she could also contribute to it, often substantially. Indeed, a veteran of one or more marriages brought considerable political experience, and typically considerable wealth, to a new match. A marriage was arranged in the expectation that the wife could bestow or derive some political benefit from it; a woman's marriage bond was the foundation upon which she built her political activity. In short, female political empowerment was not an unexpected dividend of the elite marriage but a key feature of it.

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