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BEYOND BARBARY PIRACY: OTTOMAN POLICY IN THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY MAGHREB THROUGH OTTOMAN ARCHIVAL SOURCE

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Abstract: The Ottoman presence in the Maghreb has long been interpreted through historiographical frameworks that depict the *Garp Ocakları* (North African provinces) primarily as corsair polities engaged in piracy and maritime predation. Although recent scholarship has increasingly challenged Eurocentric and colonial interpretations of Ottoman North Africa, comparatively little attention has been paid to how the Ottoman central administration itself conceptualised and governed these provinces through its own documentary record. Drawing primarily upon imperial decrees preserved in the *Mühimme* Registers, together with other Ottoman archival materials, this article re-examines Ottoman policy toward the sixteenth-century Maghreb from the perspective of the imperial centre. It argues that the Garp Ocakları were regarded by the Ottoman government not as semi-independent corsair entities but as strategically organised frontier provinces entrusted with safeguarding the western frontiers of the empire, protecting Muslim communities, maintaining regional stability, and implementing imperial policy in the Mediterranean Sea. By placing Ottoman archival evidence at the centre of the analysis, the present study contributes to the ongoing historiographical reassessment of Ottoman North Africa and demonstrates the limitations of interpreting Ottoman rule in the Maghreb primarily through the enduring paradigm of "Barbary piracy."

Keywords: *Ottoman Empire, Ottoman North Africa, Garp Ocakları, governance of Ottoman frontier provinces, Ottoman archival sources*

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Introduction

Few issues in the historiography of the early modern Mediterranean region have proved as enduring and as contested as the characterisation of the Ottoman Maghreb as "Barbary" corsair polities and the maritime activities of the *Garp Ocakları* (the Ottoman provinces of North Africa) as "Barbary piracy." Since the nineteenth century, much of the British and French historiography has interpreted these Ottoman provinces primarily through the concepts of "Barbary piracy," corsairing, and Christian captivity – presenting the region chiefly as a theatre of maritime violence and predation.[1] Reinforced by diplomatic reports, travel literature, captivity narratives, and later colonial historiography, this interpretative framework has profoundly shaped both scholarly and popular understandings of Ottoman North Africa. As a result, the political, administrative, legal, and strategic dimensions of Ottoman rule have frequently remained subordinate to narratives that privilege piracy as the defining feature of the Ottoman presence in the Maghreb.

This article does not question the historical reality of corsairing, captivity, or maritime violence in the early modern Mediterranean. Rather, it asks whether the mere concept of "Barbary piracy" provides an adequate framework for explaining the political and administrative relations between the Ottoman central government and its North African provinces. It is equally important not to treat European historical writing as a homogeneous body of scholarship. While British and French historiographical traditions often reflect intellectual assumptions closely associated with nineteenth-century imperial and colonial experiences, diplomatic correspondence, commercial records, and treaty documentation produced by states such as the Dutch Republic, Sweden, and Denmark frequently reveal a more pragmatic perception of the Garp Ocakları as recognised political authorities and legitimate diplomatic interlocutors within the Mediterranean order. These contrasting perspectives suggest that European understandings of the Ottoman Maghreb were considerably more diverse than later colonial

1 The period between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed the gradual formation of one of the most enduring anti-Ottoman stereotypes in European political and literary culture. As Ottoman expansion advanced into the Balkans and Central Europe, the image of the "Terrible Turk" (*Türkengefahr* in German) became deeply embedded in European public discourse. On the construction of these anti-Turkish representations, see Turbet-Delof (1973); Jezernik (ed.) (2010); and Sabatos (2020), which traces the image of the Turk in Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian literary traditions from the early modern period to the present. Similar representational patterns are encountered in nineteenth-century British and French diplomatic and consular correspondence concerning North Africa, where Ottoman officials and Maghrebi corsairs were frequently described through a vocabulary of barbarism, piracy, and fanaticism.

narratives have often implied and point to the need for a broader reassessment of Ottoman North Africa grounded in a wider range of historical sources.

Over the last two decades, this historiographical landscape has undergone a significant transformation.[2] Moving beyond inherited colonial paradigms and long-established narratives of "Barbary piracy," a growing body of scholarship has called for a fundamental reassessment of Ottoman North Africa through the political, institutional, and social structures of the Ottoman Empire itself. In particular, Nora Lafi has argued that the history of Ottoman Africa should no longer be interpreted merely as a prelude to European colonialism or through analytical categories derived from nineteenth-century imperial experience, but rather examined within its own historical context and through a critical engagement with Ottoman and local sources. Similarly, Isabelle Grangaud and M'hamed Oualdi have questioned the tendency to explain North African history primarily through colonial frameworks, emphasising instead the plurality of historical actors, political institutions, and archival traditions that shaped the region (Lafi 2015; Grangaud and Oualdi 2014; Lafi 2024). Recent studies have likewise challenged one of the most persistent assumptions inherited from this historiography by questioning the conventional portrayal of the Garp Ocakları as politically uncontrolled "Barbary" corsair states and by demonstrating the importance of examining Ottoman maritime institutions, diplomacy, and legal practices in their own terms (Duymuş 2024). Taken together, this scholarship demonstrates that Ottoman North Africa constitutes a distinct field of historical inquiry requiring analytical frameworks grounded in Ottoman, North African, and European source traditions rather than inherited Eurocentric assumptions alone.

Despite these advances, Ottoman archival materials, although increasingly consulted, have generally served to corroborate narratives built primarily on European sources rather than to reveal how the Ottoman central administration itself defined the Garp Ocakları. Addressing this gap, the present study adopts an Ottoman-centred perspective, drawing primarily on imperial decrees preserved in the *Mühimme* Registers,[3] together with

2 Recent scholarship has likewise begun to question some of the long-established assumptions surrounding captivity in Ottoman North Africa. Rather than treating all captives exclusively as passive victims, several studies have highlighted the diversity of individual experiences and the social mobility that could emerge under particular circumstances (Hershenzon 2018; Matar 2021; Velero-Cuadra 2025; Ødegaard 2025).

3 The *Mühimme Defterleri* (Registers of Important Affairs) were official Ottoman registers recording imperial orders and decrees issued by the Imperial Council (*Dîvân-ı Hümâyun*) on matters of state administration, military affairs, provincial governance, and foreign relations.

complementary Ottoman archival materials, in order to examine how Istanbul defined and administered the Garp Ocakları, Ottoman North Africa, during the sixteenth century.

The present article argues that the Garp Ocakları were conceived by the Ottoman government not as semi-autonomous corsair entities whose existence revolved primarily around maritime predation, but as strategically organised frontier provinces integrated into the empire's legal, administrative, and military order. Their functions extended well beyond corsairing to encompass the defence of the western frontiers of the Ottoman Empire, the protection of Muslim communities, the maintenance of regional stability, and the implementation of imperial policy across the Mediterranean. By reassessing Ottoman policy towards the Maghreb through contemporary Ottoman archival evidence, this study contributes not only to the political history of the Ottoman Empire but also to the broader historiographical reassessment of Ottoman North Africa. In doing so, it demonstrates that the concept of "Barbary piracy," while useful for explaining one dimension of early modern Mediterranean history, cannot by itself account for the political, legal, and administrative realities of Ottoman rule in North Africa or the Maghreb, the "western part" of the Arab world.

Ottoman Expansion into North Africa and the Formation of a Mediterranean Frontier

The Ottoman expansion into North Africa should not be understood merely as a sequence of military campaigns or as the establishment of bases for corsair warfare. Rather, it formed part of a broader imperial strategy that emerged in response to the rapid expansion of the Spanish and Portuguese kingdoms across the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, and the Indian Ocean during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. From the perspective of the Ottoman central government, the Maghreb constituted not simply a maritime frontier but a strategically vital region whose security was closely connected to the defence of the empire, the protection of Muslim populations, and the preservation of the Mediterranean balance of power. It is within this wider geopolitical and ideological context that Ottoman expansion into North Africa should be understood.

Within this broader context, Ottoman expansion into North Africa reflected the convergence of two interconnected political traditions inherited by the empire: the Turco-Mongol ideal of universal sovereignty (Turan 2003) and the

Islamic conception of the caliphate and jihad. The conquest of Constantinople marked a decisive stage in the integration of these traditions, enabling the Ottoman dynasty to present itself not only as a universal imperial power but also as the principal protector of Sunni Islam. Following the incorporation of the Arab lands, the legitimacy of Ottoman caliphal authority increasingly rested upon safeguarding the Holy Cities, protecting the pilgrimage routes, and responding to appeals from Muslim communities facing external threats. Consequently, requests for assistance from Muslims in India (Mughul 1974: 109–113), Aceh (Safvet 1327: 604–614, 678–683; Safvet 1329: 1521–40), Central Asia (Kemaloğlu 2017: 398), al-Andalus, and North Africa (Emecen 2017: 125–41) formed part of a wider imperial discourse in which military intervention was represented as both a political responsibility and a religious obligation. Rather than constituting isolated episodes, these interventions reflected an imperial vision that increasingly linked the legitimacy of Ottoman rule with the defence of Muslim societies across a wide geographical area.

During the sixteenth century, the incorporation of Egypt (1517), Algeria (1545), Tripolitania (1551), Abyssinia (1555), and Tunisia (1573/1574) gradually created an interconnected defensive system extending from the Red Sea to the western Mediterranean. From an Ottoman perspective, these provinces did not represent a collection of isolated conquests but formed an integrated frontier designed to contain Iberian expansion, secure the empire's maritime communications, and protect Muslim populations from external aggression. In this sense, they may collectively be understood as constituting what may be described as an Ottoman "Turkish Shield" in Africa—a defensive frontier whose primary function was to safeguard both imperial interests and the wider Islamic world.

The origins of this frontier strategy lay in the expansionist policies pursued by the Spanish and Portuguese kingdoms following the completion of the Reconquista. King Ferdinand II of Aragon (d. 1516), inspired by both dynastic ambition and crusading ideology, envisaged extending Iberian power beyond the conquest of Granada and ultimately advancing towards Jerusalem (Abulafia 2012: 462). Seeking to establish a Catalan commercial and political sphere encompassing Sicily, Sardinia, Naples, Majorca, and North Africa, Ferdinand—encouraged by Cardinal Jiménez—initiated the conquest of the Maghreb in cooperation with Portugal. Following the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), Spain occupied Melilla (1497), Mersa el-Kébir (1505), Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera (1508), Oran (1509), Peñón of Algiers (1510), Béjaïa (1510), and Tripoli (1510) (Karasapan 1960: 96; Kavas 2003a: 179). Portugal, meanwhile, concentrated on Morocco and

the Atlantic coast, having already captured Ceuta (1415), Alcácer Ceguer (1458), Tangier, and Asilah (1471), before extending its authority to Agadir (1505), Doukkala (1513), and numerous other settlements along the West African littoral (Hess 2010: 17–37; Chakib 1987: 20). Portuguese expansion subsequently continued around the Cape of Good Hope towards the Indian Ocean, where a chain of fortified bases at Sofala, Mozambique, Kilwa, and Mombasa enabled Lisbon to dominate regional maritime commerce while simultaneously undermining Muslim-controlled trading networks.

The expansion of Portugal into the Indian Ocean and of Spain across the western Mediterranean confronted the Ottoman Empire with a strategic challenge that extended well beyond North Africa itself. Portuguese control over key maritime routes threatened not only the commercial networks of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean but also the security of the Holy Cities and the annual pilgrimage routes, while Spanish expansion endangered the Muslim populations of the Maghreb and the remnants of al-Andalus. Within the Ottoman imperial vision outlined above, these developments were perceived not as isolated regional conflicts but as interconnected challenges requiring an integrated political and military response.

The first Ottoman response emerged in the Red Sea. Beginning in 1505, the Mamluk Sultanate attempted to resist Portuguese advances along the coasts of Yemen and Abyssinia, where Portuguese expansion increasingly threatened Mecca and Medina—the spiritual centre of the Islamic world. Yet the military and financial resources of the Mamluks proved insufficient to contain Portuguese naval power (Bostan 2024). Recognising both the strategic and religious implications of this situation, Sultan Selim I (1512–1520) incorporated Egypt into the Ottoman Empire following the battles of Chaldiran (1514) and Ridaniyya (1517). The annexation of Egypt was therefore not merely a territorial conquest but also the assumption of responsibility for the protection of the Holy Cities and the principal routes of the pilgrimage. Reflecting this new role, Selim adopted the title *Hâdimü'l-Haremeyn* (Servant of the Two Holy Mosques) (Yavuz 1997: 26–27). Under his successor, Suleiman I (1520–1566), Ottoman authority was further consolidated through the establishment of the Yemen and Abyssinia provinces, creating a defensive line along both shores of the Red Sea and strengthening imperial control over one of the most strategically sensitive maritime corridors of the early modern world (Orhonlu 1996).

The incorporation of the Maghreb into the Ottoman imperial system followed a similar strategic logic. Long before the establishment of the

Ottoman provinces in North Africa, appeals for assistance had already reached Istanbul from the Muslim communities of al-Andalus. The first known embassy arrived in 1486, several years before the Fall of Granada, when the rulers of the Banū al-Aḥmar requested Ottoman military assistance against the advancing Castilian forces (Uzunçarşılı 1975: 200; Danişmend 1971: 388).[4] Although Sultan Bayezid II (1481–1512) lacked the naval capacity to intervene directly in the western Mediterranean at that stage, he nevertheless responded by dispatching Kemal Reis with an imperial fleet in 1505.[5] Subsequently, experienced Turkish seafarers—including Kemal Reis, Oruç Reis, and Kara Hasan Reis—continued to operate in the western Mediterranean, combining naval warfare against Iberian forces with the evacuation and protection of Muslim populations fleeing the collapse of Muslim rule in Iberia (1492).

Ottoman expansion into North Africa was therefore neither an abrupt nor an opportunistic development. Rather, it evolved through a gradual interaction between local appeals for protection and the wider geopolitical objectives of the Ottoman Empire. The emergence of Ottoman authority in the Maghreb should consequently be understood as part of a broader imperial frontier policy, in which regional security, maritime defence, and the protection of Muslim communities became mutually reinforcing objectives.

Following the Ottoman incorporation of Egypt, a comparable dynamic became increasingly visible in the central Maghreb. Before the Spanish occupation of Tripoli in 1510, Pîrî Reis, who had accompanied his uncle Kemal Reis in the region, recorded in the *Kitâb-ı Bahriye* (Book of the Sea) that "The people of Tripoli sent a letter to the sovereign with Kemal Reis, requesting a sanjak bey" (Pîrî Reis 2002: 507). This brief but significant statement suggests that demands for Ottoman intervention did not arise solely from imperial ambitions in Istanbul but were also articulated by local political actors seeking military protection and administrative incorporation into the Ottoman state (Koloğlu 2003: 179). Consequently, Ottoman expansion in North Africa cannot be understood exclusively as a process imposed from the imperial centre; it also developed through negotiations with local elites and communities confronting the advance of Spanish power.

4 The appeals from Andalusia continued after 1486. For example, a letter sent from Andalusia during the reign of Süleyman I is preserved in BOA, TS.MA.e. 576/35 (10 August 948/ November 1541).

5 Pîrî Reis, who accompanied his uncle Kemal Reis on these expeditions, later described many of these voyages in the *Kitâb-ı Bahriye*. See Pîrî Reis (2002: 24, 28).

Pîrî Reis provides a similarly revealing explanation for the invitation extended to Oruç Reis by the people of Algiers. He attributes this decision not merely to the military reputation of Turkish seafarers but to the inability of the fragmented Maghrebi principalities to organise an effective maritime defence against the Spanish:

> "*Mağrib pâdişâhlarınun tâkati yokdur ki gemiler donatub denizi bekleyeler… şimdi Rum'dan varmış Oruç Reis'i beklediler; zira ki bir kal'ada Türk olıcak kâfir gelmeğe heves etmez…* [The Maghreb sultans lack the means to equip ships and lie in wait at sea… They waited for Oruç Reis, who had just arrived from Rum; for no infidel would dare to approach a fortress where Turks were present…]" (Pîrî Reis 960/1553: 136b).[6]

This passage illustrates contemporary Ottoman perceptions of the political and military conditions prevailing in the Maghreb. According to Pîrî Reis, the weakness of regional rulers, combined with their limited naval capabilities, rendered sustained resistance to Iberian expansion extremely difficult. Ottoman military support therefore emerged not simply as an instrument of imperial expansion but as a practical response to the security concerns of local Muslim communities. Whether or not every aspect of this portrayal reflected historical reality, the passage remains valuable because it demonstrates how Ottoman contemporaries themselves conceptualised the relationship between Istanbul and North Africa.

Early sixteenth-century Ottoman seafarers consistently portrayed the Maghreb as a region whose maritime resources and political organisation were insufficient to confront the rapidly expanding Spanish presence. Their narratives emphasise both the strategic importance of naval warfare and the military expertise possessed by experienced Turkish commanders such as Kemal Reis, Pîrî Reis, Oruç Reis, and Kara Hasan Reis. The remarkable successes achieved by these figures strengthened Ottoman prestige throughout North Africa and encouraged closer political cooperation between local rulers and the Ottoman state. Once these initially autonomous maritime commanders entered imperial service, their activities became increasingly integrated into Ottoman strategic planning. The major campaigns of Preveza, Tripoli, Djerba, Malta, and

6 The strategic value attributed to experienced Ottoman commanders is corroborated by later events. For example, the Crusaders were able to recapture Mahdia from Turgut Reis only after assembling a large coalition fleet consisting of Spanish, Papal, Maltese, Neapolitan, and Sicilian forces. See İlter (1937: 192–194).

Tunis should therefore be understood not merely as episodes in the history of corsair warfare but as components of a broader imperial struggle over control of the Mediterranean. Through these campaigns, numerous coastal strongholds were gradually incorporated into the Ottoman administrative system, thereby consolidating what has been described here as an Ottoman defensive frontier, or "Turkish Shield," extending across North Africa.

Therefore, the evidence presented in this section suggests that Ottoman expansion into North Africa cannot be reduced to a narrative of corsair activity alone. Rather, it represented the gradual construction of an imperial frontier in which strategic defence, administrative integration, and the protection of Muslim communities became mutually reinforcing objectives. This broader geopolitical context provides the essential framework for understanding the administrative practices and imperial policies examined in the following sections.

Administrative Integration and Provincial Governance in the Garp Ocakları

The establishment of an Ottoman defensive frontier in North Africa was accompanied by the gradual integration of the conquered territories into the empire's provincial administration. Rather than remaining loosely connected military outposts or autonomous corsair enclaves, the principal North African cities were incorporated into the Ottoman administrative hierarchy through the creation of sanjaks and eyalets (administrative divisions) governed according to imperial institutions. This process demonstrates that Ottoman policy in the Maghreb extended well beyond military conquest and naval warfare, encompassing the construction of a durable administrative order capable of sustaining imperial authority across the western Mediterranean. For example, many cities in Algeria, such as Medea, Constantine, Tenes, and Annaba, were initially sanjaks under the *Kaptanpaşa* (Chief Admiral).[7] When Barbaroszade Hasan Pasha was appointed as the first *beylerbey* in 1545, these cities became sanjaks of the Beylerbeylik (province/provincial governorship) of Cezayir-i Garb (Algeria) (Taş 2020: 250-84). In 1550, Mehdiye was an Ottoman sanjak

7 Until 1534, the Kapudan Pasha (Kaptan-ı Derya) formally held the rank of a sanjak governor. Following the appointment of Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha as Kapudan Pasha in 1534, he simultaneously became Beylerbeyi of the Eyalet of Cezâyir-i Bahr-i Sefîd, and newly conquered Mediterranean territories were gradually incorporated into this provincial structure before later being organised as separate eyalets. See Şahin (1999: 125).

in the Mediterranean, under the administration of Turgut Reis and again affiliated with the Kaptanpaşa. That same year, it was invaded and a few years later, it was first attached to the newly established the Beylerbeylik of Trablusgarp (Tripolitania), and after 1577, to the Eyalet of Tunus (Tunisia) (Kavas 2003b: 387-89).

Within this provincial framework, the western Ottoman provinces gradually acquired a distinctive institutional character. Although Algeria, Tripolitania, and Tunisia shared the administrative principles governing other Ottoman provinces, their strategic location on the empire's western maritime frontier required the development of a specialised military and naval organisation. It was this combination of provincial administration and permanent military mobilisation that eventually gave rise to what contemporaries came to describe as the Garp Ocakları. Unlike Egypt, whose economy rested largely upon agricultural production and taxation, the Garp Ocakları developed as permanently mobilised frontier provinces whose fiscal and military organisation relied upon maritime commerce, naval expeditions, and the revenues generated through legally sanctioned corsairing. Therefore, they were organised as military garrisons that could sustain themselves with the income generated from corsairship, trade, and naval expeditions. Initially, the administration of the provinces was entrusted to famous sailors who had contributed to their conquest. Those in the entourage of the *Reis* (Captain) formed the province's naval forces, while the Janissaries, Azeps, and other soldiers sent from the centre formed the province's land forces. In the mid-16th century, Beylerbeys were generally appointed for one year, although this period could vary in the Garp Ocakları. Barbaroszade Hasan Pasha, the first Cezayir-i Garp Beylerbey, served for six years before being dismissed; Salih Reis, who succeeded him, served for five years and died. Hasan Pasha, appointed for the second time in 1557, served for four years before being expelled from the province as the result of an uprising; when he was appointed for the third time in 1562, he served for five years (Taş 2020: 270). Murad Pasha, the first Beylerbey of Tripolitania, served for five years before passing away; Turgut Reis, who succeeded him, served for nine years until his martyrdom. Subsequent beylerbeys served an average of one to three years in both Algeria and Tripolitania (Taş 2022: 61-63; Taş 2020: 270).

The Ottoman provincial system further limited the concentration of authority in the hands of a single official. The Beylerbeys were the highest-ranking officials in the province, representing the authority of the Ottoman Sultan. As in other Ottoman provinces, the beylerbeyi represented the sultan's executive authority, while judicial and fiscal officials constituted parallel channels of

communication with the imperial centre, thereby limiting the concentration of provincial power (Hathaway 2016; İpşirli 1992). However, they were not the sole authority in this regard. The *qadi*s (judges) appointed to the province also had the authority to correspond directly with Istanbul. Similarly, the treasurers who audited the financial accounts of the Janissary leaders and the Garp Ocakları had similar authority. They were permanent members of the provincial councils in the Garp Ocakları. This established a balance between different powers and prevented the people from being oppressed by the administrators. The Arab element of the local population, constituting the predominant demographic stratum, was appointed to offices such as *kâtib al-dîwân* (council secretary), *mufti* (chief religious authority), and *nâib* (deputy), thereby functioning as an auxiliary yet integral component of the Ottoman provincial administrative apparatus. Particularly significant was the right of local communities to submit collective petitions (*mahzars*) directly to Istanbul whenever provincial officials acted unlawfully or in concert to oppress the population (Taş 2022: 42–43; İpşirli 1992: 70). This mechanism illustrates that imperial authority functioned not solely through military command but also through institutional channels of accountability linking the provinces with the Ottoman centre.

After the conquest, capable beylerbeys such as Barbaroszade Hasan Pasha, Murad Pasha, Salih Reis, Turgut Reis, Uluç Ali Reis (Kılıç Ali Pasha), and Venedikli Hasan Pasha were appointed to the Garp Ocakları, establishing the classical Ocak system. However, towards the end of the century, administrative problems began to arise in this system. The charismatic, authoritarian beylerbeys were gone, replaced by pashas appointed from Istanbul for a year or two, who had weak ties to the garrison. The janissaries and sailors refused to obey these new beylerbeys appointed from the centre and instead pledged allegiance to influential figures who used titles such as "agha," "dey" and "bay" whom they elected from among themselves. These individuals quickly took control of the janissary corps. From the 17th century onwards, the authority of the beylerbeys in the region gradually declined and the administrative structure changed. This new administrative system emerged successively in Tunisia in 1591, Tripolitania in 1603, and Algeria in 1671, and was known as the "*Dayılar İdaresi*" (Administration of the Deys). During this period, the African provinces resembled the Ottoman Empire's privileged provinces in the Balkans, which were governed by princes elected by local notables. The emergence of the *Deylik* administrations at the end of the sixteenth and during the seventeenth century should therefore be understood not as evidence that the Garp Ocakları had always functioned as autonomous corsair

republics, but rather as the consequence of a gradual transformation within an administrative system that had originally been established as an integral component of the Ottoman provincial order. Distinguishing between these two historical phases is essential for avoiding the retrospective projection of later political structures onto the sixteenth century.

The administrative organisation outlined above demonstrates that the Garp Ocakları cannot be understood simply as maritime communities organised around corsairing. Their incorporation into the Ottoman provincial hierarchy, the establishment of institutional mechanisms linking provincial authorities with Istanbul, and the presence of judicial, fiscal, and military officials appointed by the central government reveal a far more complex structure of imperial governance. While their strategic location on the western Mediterranean frontier gave these provinces certain distinctive characteristics, these features developed within the broader framework of Ottoman provincial administration rather than outside it. Therefore, the following section examines how this institutional framework operated in practice through mechanisms of communication, supervision, and decision-making that connected the Garp Ocakları with the Ottoman imperial centre.

Imperial Governance and Political Legitimacy in the Garp Ocakları

The administrative integration of the Garp Ocakları into the Ottoman provincial system was accompanied by a distinctive normative language through which the imperial government defined its responsibilities toward North Africa. Rather than treating these provinces as exceptional possessions governed outside the ordinary framework of imperial administration, the Ottoman central government consistently described them through concepts that emphasised protection, justice, frontier defence, and the welfare of the Muslim population. The following documents illustrate how these principles were articulated in official correspondence between Istanbul and the western provinces.

From the 16th century onwards, the Ottoman Sultan, who assumed the caliphate, saw himself as the protector of all Muslims and considered the lands where Muslims lived as his own territory. For this reason, Ottoman documents consistently represented the Garp Ocakları as *suğûr-i İslâmiye* (the Islamic frontier fortresses), thereby locating these provinces within the broader defensive geography of the empire rather than depicting them merely as naval bases or corsair strongholds (BOA A. DVNS. MHM. d,

111/169, 1701). Particularly revealing is a decree issued in 1567 defining the three principal responsibilities expected of the beylerbeys governing these frontier provinces: (1) *hıfz u hırâset-i memleket* (the defence and protection of the territory), (2) *zabt u rabt-ı vilâyet* (the maintenance of political order and lawful administration), and (3) *refâhiyyet ü itminân-ı reâyâ* (the welfare and tranquillity of the subjects) (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 7/250, 20 September 1567). Rather than emphasising territorial exploitation or the extraction of resources, the decree defined successful provincial government through the interrelated principles of security, justice, and public welfare. This is sometimes briefly expressed in documents as "*reâyâ ve berâyânın âsûde-hâl olması* (the peace and tranquility of the subjects and the people)."

The documentary evidence examined here does not suggest that the Ottoman central administration conceptualised the Garp Ocakları as territories to be governed through a logic of extraction or differential status. Instead, official correspondence consistently represented them as integral frontier provinces whose administration was expected to combine military defence with justice and the welfare of the population.

Ottoman Concept	**Functional Meaning**
Hıfz u hırâset	Defence and protection
Zabt u rabt	Political order and lawful administration
Refâhiyyet	Welfare of the subjects

Significantly, the decree does not define successful government through tribute, taxation, or military conquest, but through the protection of territory, the maintenance of public order, and the welfare of the population.

Trablusgarp [Tripolitania]

The Ottoman correspondence concerning Tripolitania illustrates how the general principles outlined above were translated into provincial practice. Rather than focusing exclusively on military affairs, the imperial orders addressed a wide range of administrative concerns, including security, justice, fiscal order, relations with local communities, and the responsibilities of provincial governors. The following documents demonstrate the practical operation of Ottoman governance on the empire's western frontier.

In 1559, in a letter written in Arabic by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent to the notables of Tripolitania prior to the Battle of Djerba, it was emphasised that Tripolitania had been conquered primarily to protect Muslims from infidel attacks,[8] and that the people of Tripolitania were now subjects of the Ottoman Empire and enjoyed the same rights as other subjects. Subsequently, it was mentioned that it was necessary to act together against the infidels and that, for this purpose, they had to obey the administrators at their head. Finally, it was stated that if the administrators sent by the Sultan oppressed the people or imposed unjust taxes, this situation would be reported to Istanbul, the necessary action would be taken, and justice would be ensured for them (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 3/578, 6 December 1559). The letter sent to Turgut Reis, the Beylerbey of Tripolitania, on the same date also emphasised the three points mentioned above (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 3/579, 5 December 1559).

Preserving the lands means always being prepared for naval and land warfare. For this reason, the provinces had to maintain a constant naval force and make various preparations on land, such as repairing castles and installing cannons. Sometimes, requests were made to the capital for military supplies and ship equipment, and the province's defense capabilities were enhanced with the resources received from there. At other times, the provinces attempted to meet their own needs using the spoils obtained from naval battles.

The subjugation of the province was aimed at establishing just governance on the one hand and suppressing the uprisings and ensuring public order on the other. Once order was established in the province, the people also gained security and prosperity. Although the period following the conquest of Tripolitania passed peacefully under Murad and Turgut Pasha, unrest gradually began to emerge in subsequent years, followed by the outbreak of rebellions. There were essentially two reasons for the unrest and the uprisings that followed: one was the oppressive practices of the rulers, and

8 Throughout the imperial correspondence, expressions such as *küffâr-i hâksâr* (damned infidels), *küffâr-i bed-girdâr* (infidels of evil nature), *kefere-i la'în ve fecere-i dûzah-mekîn* (cursed infidels and sinners whose place is hell), *küffâr-i mezellet-âsâr-i hezimet-encâm* (despicable infidels whose end is defeat), *zümre-i müşrikîn* (polytheists), *adû-yı hâksâr ve küffâr-ı âteş-karâr* (despicable enemies and infidels destined for hellfire), *a'dâ-yı dîn ü devlet* (enemies of religion and state), and similar formulations function primarily as documentary designations for hostile military powers—principally the Spanish, Portuguese, the Knights of Malta, and their allies—rather than as theological classifications of all non-Muslims. Accordingly, the translation "infidel" employed in this article reflects the terminology of the Ottoman documents and should be understood contextually as referring to enemy forces.

the other was the resistance of the local population to being ruled by what they still perceived as a foreign element.

In 1567, during Mehmed Pasha's governorship, the first rebellion in Tripolitania broke out in Tajura. This uprising, which spread to Tavurga, was suppressed by Kılıç Ali Pasha; the Sultan rewarded him with a sword and two robes of honor (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 7/250, 20 September 1567; Rossi 1974: 197).

A document dated May 1571 reported to the capital that Egypt, Algeria, and Tunisia were currently safe, and that their people were comfortable and peaceful. Nevertheless, the capital also stated that there was a possibility of the Spanish attacking Algeria and Tunisia, and requested that precautions be taken, that the fleet be dispatched if necessary to damage enemy ships, that actions detrimental to the state's honor be avoided, and that any dangerous situation be immediately reported to Istanbul (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 10/14, 27 May 1571).

The omission of Tripolitania from this document is noteworthy, as the political landscape of the region remained considerably complex. In 1571, the people of Gabes, near Tripoli, rebelled, refusing to pay the taxes imposed on them and declaring that they would pay the amount they themselves had determined; however, order was restored through the military intervention of Beylerbey Cafer Pasha, and it became possible to collect the taxes (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 14/1584, 10 June 1571; BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 10/91, 25 June 1571). At that time, Tunisia was not yet an independent province but was attached to Algeria. Although some castles in the region were still in enemy hands, the other conquered areas were first attached to Tripolitania and later annexed to Algeria. The Governor of Tripolitania, Cafer Pasha, objected to the central government, stating that this situation had led to a serious decline in provincial revenues; however, the decree sent from Istanbul stated that the region's ulema and people had complained about the oppression of the Tripolitania rulers and wanted to be attached to Algeria, and that no objection should be made in this regard (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 14/1597, 1571).

Cafer Pasha's term of office is notable as a period when the deterioration of provincial administration became apparent. The Pasha imposed heavy taxes on the people, and the qadis (judges) he appointed were known for various irregularities and acts of oppression. When the people of Tripoli and Cerbe rebelled against these practices, many Cerbe residents were forced to flee oppression and migrate. Complaints reached Istanbul that Cafer Pasha

had unjustly collected money from the people and seized their property. Consequently, a decree sent to the province in 1572 stated the following:

> "*İmdi reâyâ ve berâyâya bi-vechin mine'l-vücûh zulm ü teaddî olduğuna rızâ-yı şerîfim olmadığı ecilden eğer beylerbeyi ve eğer kâidler aldıkları bi-hasebi'ş-şer' ashâbına reddolunup ol cânibde vâki' olan asker halkı kullarımın nizâm-ı ahvâlleri mühimmâttan olmağın buyurdum ki … vech-i meşruh üzre bi-gayr-ı hakkın malları alındığı şer'le sâbit ve zâhir olursa hilâf-ı şer'-i kavîm alınan hukûku ashâbına bî-kusûr hükmedip alıverip...* [Now, since it is not acceptable to me that my subjects be subjected to oppression and injustice in any way, if the beylerbey and the qadis have taken anything from them,... if it is established and evident according to the law that their property has been taken unjustly, I have ordered that then the rights taken contrary to the law shall be returned to them without fault according to the law, and the order of my soldiers on that side shall be restored...]" (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 18/306, 9 March 1572).

Accordingly, Istanbul has not yet accused Pasha and has indicated that an investigation into the incidents complained of will be conducted and a decision will be made accordingly. However, as the complaints continued, the situation changed, and a new beylerbey, Mustafa Pasha, was appointed from Istanbul; he was tasked with investigating Cafer Pasha's irregularities and rectifying the situation. The inspection revealed that Cafer Pasha had embezzled 60,000 gold coins collected from the public; half of this amount was recovered through amicable means and handed over to the new governor to be distributed to the rightful owners. Furthermore, the new beylerbey was strictly ordered not to allow any external interference in the internal workings of the Janissary organisation (Rossi 1974: 198; BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 18/306, 1572; 22/214, 1573).

During this period, it was determined that the coins minted in Tripolitania were of poor quality; the new beylerbey was tasked with resolving this issue by collecting the defective coins and minting new coins of high-quality silver to replace them (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d., 22/100, 1573). According to records from 1573, Tripolitania had been experiencing famine for about 7-8 years, and as a result, the province's revenues were insufficient to cover the salaries of soldiers and officials. The Beylerbeyi requested that approximately 500 community leaders from the Ibadi groups (Wahbiyya and Mistawa) in Djerba be exempted from taxes, that the wealthy were not

helping the poor, and that only Musa b. Cellud, the leader of the Wahbiyya, was a useful individual. Therefore, he requested that five of his followers be exempted from taxes, while the rest be reclassified as *reaya* (subjects), thus revoking their exemptions. However, Istanbul investigated the matter of the exemptions, asking for a detailed explanation of what they had done in return for being exempt from taxes, and what kind of services they had rendered (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d., 22/163, 1573).[9]

During these years, the people of the Awjila region formed an independent structure governed by a sheikh chosen from among themselves, who was not affiliated with Tripolitania; they exerted pressure on the Arab groups in the region. Following complaints, Istanbul authorised an expedition to the region. The Beylerbey stated that Awjila needed to be brought back under control due to the loss of revenue suffered by Tripoli in regions such as Qairouan, Sousse, and Monastir; the central government instructed that action be taken carefully so as not to damage the state's reputation (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d., 22/164, 1573).

The Fizan region, south of Tripoli, was located on important trade routes coming from sub-Saharan Africa. The security of the region was vital for the continuity of trade. Fizan was initially governed by a judge appointed from among its own people and paid an annual fixed tax to Tripoli. During the reigns of Murad, Turgut, and Kılıç Ali Pasha, this tax amounted to 1,140 *miskals* of gold. When the taxes could not be collected, an expedition was launched, resulting in the administration of the region being handed over to a *sanjakbey* sent from Tripoli. In 1573, Ali Bey, the Bey of Fizan, sought to increase the tax to 3,000 miskals, citing the need to ensure the safety of the roads; however, the center rejected this request and ordered that only 200,000 *akçe* be collected, stipulating that taxes the people could not bear should not be imposed (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 23/698, 16 January 1574; 23/706, 1574).[10]

9 Some studies claim that the Ottoman administration unfairly treated the Ibadi people on the island of Djerba, imposing double taxes on them (a type of tribute tax called "katîat" along with taxes like zakat and ushur collected from Muslims). The "katîat" tribute tax, which did not apply to the Sunni population, was an additional financial burden for the Ibadi people on the island. The Ibadi people of Djerba frequently revolted against this injustice, and this unfair situation was only rectified in 1842 by Ahmed Pasha, the Governor of Tunis. See al-Meryemi 2015.

10 In the sixteenth century Ottoman monetary system, 450 akçe were minted from 320 grams of silver. Accordingly, 200,000 akçe required approximately 142,222 grams (about 142 kg) of silver. Assuming one miskal equals 4,8 grams, 3,000 miskals of gold correspond to approximately 14,400 grams. If the gold–silver ratio is taken as 1:11,8, then 3,000 miskals of gold would amount to approximately 169,920 grams of silver in value. In this case, the silver equivalent of Ali Bey's salyâne was intended to be increased from approximately 142,000 grams to around 170,000 grams; however, the request was ultimately rejected. For gold–silver ratios in the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire, see Pamuk 2000: 63, as well as the relevant studies of Halil İnalcık.

Between 1573 and 1577, Tripolitania was administered by Beylerbey Haydar Pasha along with Tunisia; in 1577, the province was separated again and the governorship of Tripolitania was given to Hasan Pasha. However, by the late 1570s, the order of the province had seriously deteriorated, particularly due to Haydar Pasha's practices. In the decrees of 1579, it was demanded that the villages and districts that the beylerbeys and other administrators had acquired based on the letters of appointment in their possession be transferred to state ownership by paying their prices from the Imperial Treasury. Due to the famine that occurred in the same year, it was decided to send provisions from the Tırhala district to Tripoli (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 31/462, 1577; 36/226, 1579; 36/941, 5 June 1579).

During this period, serious tensions arose between Tunisia and the Tripolitania garrison regarding sovereignty and revenue sharing. The status of regions such as Qairouan, Monastir, Sousse, and Kaffsa was frequently a source of dispute; despite orders from the centre, the Tunisian military opposed these decisions (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 36/230, 36/457, 36/621, 36/742, 36/786, 1579). In 1580, a campaign was launched against rebellious groups, and although the expenses were covered by the state treasury, it was determined that the beylerbey had seized all of the spoils. As a result, it was decreed that one-third of the spoils should go to the beylerbey and the remainder to the treasury (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 39/434, 1580).

In the same year, as provincial revenues became severely insufficient due to the distribution of fiefs and estates, this practice was abolished and replaced with the annual tax system. Thus, provincial revenues were considered entirely the property of the sultan; the lands acquired by soldiers were confiscated, and it was decided that salaries would be paid annually from the central treasury (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 39/436, 39/438, 39/439, 39/598, 1580).

From the 1580s onwards, signs of deterioration in the Ottoman central administration began to be strongly felt in Tripolitania as well. Most of the beylerbeys prioritised their personal interests over the development of the country during their short terms of office, while the Janissary corps gradually slipped out of central authority's control and began to interfere in administration. The people were greatly distressed by heavy taxes, forced labour, and newly imposed obligations; complaints were frequently brought to the capital. A decree, dated 30 June 1582, ordered the elimination of practices contrary to Islamic law, innovative taxes, and oppression of the people in the province, demanding the establishment of justice (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 47/416, 30 June 1582).

The decrees issued between 1580 and 1587 are filled with concrete examples of the breakdown of the provincial system. These decrees included provisions such as collecting provincial revenues solely on behalf of the treasury, preventing soldiers from interfering in tax collection processes, preventing the Janissaries from oppressing the subjects by sending them as "*nöbetçi*" (guards), keeping the castle keys out of Janissaries, and ensuring that no one other than the beylerbeys interfered in the administration (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 62/45, 62/276, 62/282, 62/284, 62/285, 62/308, 62/309, 1587). However, despite all these measures, the weakness of authority could not be overcome, and a major uprising broke out in 1587–1588.

As demonstrated by the official decrees sent to Tripoli, the disintegration observed in the provincial administration essentially stemmed from the inability of three fundamental elements to function in harmony: (1) the Beylerbey and other administrative officials, (2) the Janissary corps responsible for public order, and (3) the subjects (*reaya*), the settled population of the province. The power struggle between the Beylerbey and the Janissaries often directly affected the subjects; the people complained about the injustices they suffered first to the qadis and Beylerbeys, and when they did not get results, they complained to Istanbul. Although the Ottoman central administration responded to these complaints by sending decrees containing harsh language to the beylerbeys and qadis, it failed to establish an effective oversight mechanism to ensure that the measures taken were properly implemented. This vicious cycle ultimately created fertile ground for widespread social unrest and rebellions in the province.

In this context, in 1587, the uprising that began in Tajura as a result of the oppressive attitudes of Beylerbeyi Mehmed Pasha and the provincial soldiers quickly spread to the surrounding regions. The leader of the rebels was a Maghrebi named Yahya b. Yahya es-Suweydi. With his eloquence and influential personality, Yahya managed to gather around him many urban and Bedouin inhabitants of Tripolitania. Declaring himself the "mahdi" in connection with widespread popular beliefs linking the year 1000/1591–1592 to the apocalypse, Yahya claimed authority over Tajura, Giryana, and Misrata. He inflicted a heavy defeat on the Ottoman troops sent against him. Following this victory, Yahya's claims became even more assertive; he spoke of enslaving Turks and Jews, banned the use of Turkish-made goods, and minted coins in his own name (İlter 1937: 215-6; Rossi 1974: 201).

As the rebellion grew, Grand Admiral Hasan Pasha was tasked with investigating the situation. After spending the winter of 1588 breaking the

resistance of local forces in the province, Hasan Pasha arrived in the spring of 1589 with a fleet of fifty galleys. Alongside the naval forces, ground troops were also dispatched from Tunisia, and the rebels were dispersed through this joint operation. As a result of the investigation, Beylerbeyi Mehmed Pasha, who was found to have been negligent and abusive in his duties, leading to the growth of the rebellion, was removed from office and arrested; many high-ranking officials were punished, and the return of property unjustly taken from the people was ensured. Furthermore, the Janissary garrison in Tripolitania was disbanded and the troops were distributed to different regions; in their place, 300 Janissaries, 100 artillerymen, 200 quartermasters, and 450 soldiers from various classes from the navy were stationed. Mehmed Pasha was replaced by the Governor of Algeria, Istanköylü Ahmed Pasha (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 66/19, 1589; 66/16, 1589; İlter 1937: 217).

However, with the departure of the fleet from the region, the rebels regrouped. Despite the forces sent from Tunisia and Egypt, the new governor Ahmed Pasha was killed by the rebels (1590). During this period, Yahya, lacking military experience and logistical capabilities, requested assistance from the Knights of Malta. The Knights, who had lost Tripoli in 1551, wanted to take advantage of this opportunity; however, despite the supplies and provisions they provided, they failed to achieve the desired outcome from the rebellion and withdrew (İlter 1937: 218; Rossi 1974: 202-3; Hess 2010: 174).

Following the assassination of Ahmed Pasha, the governorship of Tripolitania was given to Mehmed Pasha, son of the Governor of Egypt, Üveys Pasha, on condition that the necessary military supplies and provisions be provided from Egypt. Mehmed Pasha marched against the rebels with the forces arriving from Egypt. Yahya was finally captured with the cooperation of Sheikh Nüveyr of the Mehamid family and sent to Istanbul to be flayed. In correspondence dated 22 *Jumada al-Thani* 1000 (1592), Mehmed Pasha reported to the centre that the rebellion had been completely suppressed and that the people had returned to peace (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 67/150; 69/271).

Taken together, the Tripolitanian documents reveal that imperial authority was exercised through continuous correspondence, supervision, and administrative intervention rather than through military coercion alone. They demonstrate that the Ottoman central government closely monitored developments in the province and expected its governors not only to suppress threats to public order but also to preserve justice, administrative stability, and the welfare of the population. In this respect, the evidence from

Tripolitania reinforces the broader argument advanced in this article that the Garp Ocakları functioned as integrated Ottoman frontier provinces governed according to established principles of Ottoman provincial administration. The suppression of prolonged rebellions likewise illustrates the determination of the Ottoman government to preserve provincial order and prevent the emergence of competing centres of authority within the imperial framework.

Cezâyir-i Garp [Algeria]

The incorporation of Algeria into the Ottoman Empire followed a different trajectory from that of Tripolitania. Ottoman authority first emerged through the activities of autonomous Turkish commanders responding to local requests for military assistance before becoming formally integrated into the imperial system in 1519 under the protection of Sultan Selim I. From the establishment of the beylerbeylik in 1545 onwards, Algeria evolved into the principal western frontier province of the empire, governed through institutions broadly comparable to those operating elsewhere in the Ottoman provincial system (Taş 2020: 258–271).

In the early 16th century, Algeria was a sanjak,[11] but from the middle of the century it became a province and was administered by beylerbeys for about a century. Following the first beylerbey, Barbaroszade Hasan Pasha (1545-1552), Salih Reis, one of Barbaros' men, became the second beylerbey (1552-1556); after his death, Tekeoğlu Mehmed Pasha was sent from Damascus to Algeria. However, the provincial soldiers could not accept the Pasha, who had no connection to Algeria, and Mehmed Pasha (d. 1557) was killed by the soldiers shortly thereafter. Barbaroszade Hasan Pasha was sent back to Algeria to calm the situation and restore order. Hasan Pasha was tired of the disobedience of the Algerian garrison and, as a precaution, created a military class from the local population. However, this move further angered the Algerian janissaries, who stormed his palace in 1561, captured the Pasha, put him on a ship, and sent him to Istanbul. Ahmed Pasha was sent to Algeria to suppress the capital's rebellion. After Pasha restored peace with harsh measures, he suddenly passed away, and Barbaroszade Hasan Pasha was sent back to the province in 1562. Mehmed Pasha, son of Salih Reis, was appointed to replace Hasan Pasha, who served until 1567, but he

11 In a document dated 1555, Hasan Ağa, who ruled Algeria from 1534 to 1544, is referred to as "*mir-i sâbık-ı livâ-i Cezayir,*" meaning the former bey (*sanjak bey*) of the Sanjak of Algeria. See: BOA, A. RSK. d, Registry No. 1452, p.374.

was dismissed due to reports of corruption, and the province was given to Kılıç Ali Pasha in 1568. Following Kılıç Ali Pasha's appointment as Grand Admiral in October 1571, appointments in Algiers were largely made at his behest. The death of Grand Admiral Kılıç Ali Pasha, the region's patron, in 1587 changed the course of subsequent beylerbey appointments. Although the appointment of beylerbeys with no maritime background, unfamiliar with the region, and appointed for short terms caused many problems, there was not much change in the administrative structure (Taş 2020: 258-265).

The first decrees sent to the province concern the granting of fiefs, estates, or appointments such as captaincy, leadership, or commandership to those who have served successfully in the military, at the request of the beylerbeys. Again, what the state wanted from its administrators here was the protection and security of the country, the control and restraint of the province, and the prosperity and tranquility of the subjects. The following statements in a 1565 decree are noteworthy (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 6/971, 8 April 1565):

> "*Ol diyârlarda vâki olan cumhûr-ı müslimînin refâhiyyeti ve küffâr-ı hâksârın mezelleti ve nekbeti için hâliyâ deryâya azîm donanma-i hümâyûnumuz irsâl olunup feth ü zabtı vâcib olan ba'zı kılâ'ın muhâsarası emrim olmuştur ümmîddir ki Hakk sübhânehû ve te'âlâ hazretlerinin ulüvv-i inâyet-i fütûh-bahşları ile donanma-i nusret-karînimize feth u zafer müyesser olup Cezayir ve Mısır yolundan küffâr-ı nâ-bekârın mazarrat ve fesâdı def' u ref' oluna…* [The Ottoman Navy has set sail for the prosperity of all Muslims living on the Mediterranean coast and the defeat of their enemies. The Sultan has ordered the navy to conquer the necessary locations and capture certain castles. It is the Sultan's wish that, with Allah's grace, the Ottoman fleet be victorious and that the harm inflicted upon Muslims by the infidels/enemies along the sea route from Algeria to Egypt be completely eliminated]."

This decree is particularly significant because it defines the objectives of the imperial naval campaign not merely in military terms but also through the protection of Muslim communities and the restoration of security across the Mediterranean. The language employed by the chancery therefore reflects the broader conception of frontier governance discussed above.

In a decree dated 1567, the beylerbey, who was asked to take precautions against the Spanish who might attack Algeria, was told, "*sen dahi basîret üzere olup gaflet etmeyip gaflet ile a'dâdan memleket ü vilâyete zarar*

eriştirmekten hazer edesin. [You too should be prudent and not be negligent, and beware of allowing harm to come to the country and the province through negligence]" (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 7/51, 11 August 1567). The warning against negligence demonstrates that provincial governors were held personally accountable for the security of the frontier. Rather than granting unrestricted authority, the imperial centre expected active vigilance and administrative responsibility from its provincial representatives.

In a decree sent to Kılıç Ali Pasha, the Beylerbey of Algeria, dated 1568, the following statements were made regarding the welfare and peace of the people:

> "*Cezâyir-i garb Beğlerbeğisine hüküm ki, hâliyâ ol câniblerde olan reâyâ ve berâyâyı isyân üzere olan aʿrâbdan ve sâir zalemeden sıyânet ve himâyet edip muntazamü'l-hâl olup kemâl-i adâletin ve kılâʿ taʿmîrine mübâşeret eyledüğin istimâ olundu İmdi senden umulan dahi bunun gibi efʿâl-i pesendîde idi ki vücûd ve zuhûr bulmuş… Buyurdum ki vusûl buldukta hilʿat-ı hümâyûnu giyip dahi fukarâ ve reʿâyâ ki vedâyiʿ-i Hallâk-ı berâyâdır kemâkân sıyânet ve himâyet edip daima vazîʿ u refîʿ ve sağîr u kebîrin ahvâllerine (…) adalet üzere olasın ki eyyam-ı saadet-encamımda her biri asude-hal olup ferâh-ı bâl ile devâm-ı devlet ü ikbâlim içün hayr duaya iştigâl göstere.* [I have heard that you have protected the people there from rebellious Bedouins and tyrants, established order, ruled with justice, and repaired the castles to defend the province. This is precisely what was expected of you, and you have fulfilled it well. In recognition of your services, I have sent you a robe of honor. When the robe arrives, wear it. Protect and care for the poor, who are entrusted to you by Allah, and my subjects there, as you have done until now. Monitor the situation of all the people, from the greatest to the least, and treat them justly, so that each of them may live a secure and peaceful life in my reign and pray for the continuation of my state]" (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 7/2456, 13 November 1568).

Particularly revealing is the combination of military and civil responsibilities assigned to Kılıç Ali Pasha. The decree praises him not only for protecting the province against external threats and repairing its fortifications but also for safeguarding the poor, ensuring justice, and maintaining the welfare of the population. These expectations closely correspond to the principles of

hıfz u hırâset, *zabt u rabt*, and *refâhiyyet* identified earlier, illustrating the remarkable consistency of Ottoman provincial governance.

When Kılıç Ali Pasha became Grand Admiral in 1572, Ahmed Pasha, the Sanjakbey of Kocaili, was appointed to the Beylerbeylik (provincial governorship) of Cezayir-i Garb. In a decree sent to the Algerian soldiers and their leaders informing them of this matter, the Sultan's satisfaction was expressed, stating, "*Yüzünüz ağ olsun sizden mercû olan bu idi elhamdülillâh hayır vücûda geldi.* [May your faces be bright, for what was expected of you has come to pass, praise be to Allah]," referring to the two enemy ships they had captured in Ali Pasha's absence. Then, "*imdi vilâyet-i mezbûreye nazar-ı fırsat-âsârım sâir hîta-i hilâfet-i vâsi'atü'l-aktârımda dâhil memâlik-i celîletü'l-i'tibârdan dûn değil belki dâru'l-cihâd olduğu haysiyet ile daha efzûndur ve anda olan beyler ve ağalar kullarım ve sâir asâkir-i nusret-meâsir ve a'yân-ı vilâyet südde-i saâdetimde olan kullarım gibidir.* [Now, my gaze of opportunity falls upon the aforementioned province, which is no less than the other lands within my vast and extensive caliphate, but rather more exalted due to its status as the abode of jihad. It is not inferior in respect, but rather, by virtue of its status as the abode of jihad, it is even more exalted. The lords and nobles there are my servants, and the other soldiers of victory and the notables of the province are like my servants in the seat of my happiness]." Thus, it was stated that Algeria was a land of jihad and therefore more valuable in the eyes of the Sultan than other Ottoman provinces, and that the soldiers of Algeria were as valuable as the statesmen in the Sultan's own palace. After warnings to the new Beylerbey Ahmed Pasha to pay attention to the defense of Algeria, it was recalled that France had long been a friend of the Ottomans, and it was emphasised that French subjects and merchants should not be attacked, but that, conversely, Spanish coasts could be attacked and plundered (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 18/288, 9 March 1572).

Perhaps the most revealing document examined in this section is the imperial decree of 1572. Far from portraying Algeria as a peripheral dependency, the Sultan explicitly described it as *dârü'l-cihâd* (the abode of holy war) and declared that it occupied a position of even greater importance than many other provinces of the empire because of its frontier role. Equally significant is the statement that the soldiers and notables of Algeria were regarded as equivalent to those serving at the imperial court. Such expressions provide valuable insight into the political vocabulary through which the Ottoman centre conceptualised its western frontier.

Taken together, the Algerian documents demonstrate that imperial authority was maintained through continuous communication between Istanbul and the provincial administration. The decrees consistently emphasise frontier defence, justice, public welfare, and the accountability of provincial governors, while simultaneously recognising Algeria's exceptional strategic significance within the Ottoman Empire. Rather than depicting the province as an autonomous corsair polity, the documentary evidence reveals a frontier province closely integrated into the Ottoman administrative and political order.

Tunus [Tunisia]

Tunisia occupied a distinctive position within the Ottoman frontier system because it lay between the provinces of Algeria and Tripolitania and remained contested between the Ottomans and the Habsburg Monarchy until its definitive conquest in 1574. During this prolonged struggle, the imperial government not only pursued military objectives but also sought to establish a durable provincial administration in the territories brought under Ottoman control (Hess 2010: 107-8, Uzunçarşılı 2009: 29; İlter 1937: 117; Ahmed İbn Ebi'd-Dıyâf 1964: 16)

Following the conquest of 1569, Tunisia came under Ottoman rule. While urban development initiatives were launched, efforts were also made to establish an administrative structure. During this process, the demands of the people were given particular consideration. A decree sent to Ramazan Bey, Kılıç Ali Pasha's deputy in Tunisia, contained the following statements:

> "*vusûl buldukta tamâm basîret ve intibâh üzere olup hıfz u hırâset-i memleket ve vilâyet ve zabt u rabt-ı asâkir ve riâyet-i raʿiyyet cadde-i iʿtidâlden udûl eylemeyip emr-i şerʿ-i kavîm ve müstedʿâ-yı kânûn-i kadîme mütâbaʿat ve aʿyânı vilâyet ile hüsn-i muʿâşeret üzere olup...* [Upon arrival, they shall be fully discerning and vigilant, preserving and protecting the country and province, maintaining order and discipline among the soldiers, and observing the people, without deviating from the path of moderation, adhering to the strong and established command of the law and maintaining good relations with the notables of the province...]."

Here again, we encounter the following fundamental principles: protecting and safeguarding the country's lands, keeping the soldiers under control,

looking after the needs of the people, not deviating from justice and complying with Sharia and ancient law, and getting along well with the province's dignitaries and people (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 18/287, 5 March 1572).

The decree issued to Ramazan Bey is particularly revealing because it encapsulates, within a single administrative instruction, the principal elements of Ottoman provincial governance discussed throughout this article. Military defence, administrative order, justice, protection of the population, adherence to both the sharīʿa and established imperial law (*kānûn-ı kadîm*), and cooperation with local notables all appear together as complementary responsibilities of provincial government rather than as separate objectives.

In a decree dated 1570, it was ordered that individuals wishing to build mosques in cities such as Tunis and Bizerte be granted concessions (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 14/609, 22 October 1570). The people of Tunis wanted to be an independent province and did not wish to be attached to Algeria or Tripolitania. Although the capital responded positively to this request, it initially attached the conquered cities to either Tripolitania or Algeria based in their proximity, but left the final resolution of the matter until after the Crusader fleet had been eliminated (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 14/76, 14/78, 14/1597, 17/6, 17/8; 1571). At one point, the Beylerbey of Tripolitania even wanted to attach the cities of Sousse and Monastir, which were affiliated with Tunisia, to Tripolitania due to their proximity. However, the capital sent representatives to investigate where the people of the aforementioned cities wanted to be affiliated and stated that a decision would be made accordingly (BOA, A. DVNS. MHM. d, 16/637, 13 October 1571).

Equally noteworthy is the imperial government's decision to investigate the wishes of the inhabitants before determining the provincial affiliation of Sousse and Monastir. Rather than imposing an immediate administrative solution, the central government instructed its representatives to ascertain local preferences before reaching a final decision. Although such consultation should not be interpreted in modern democratic terms, it nevertheless illustrates a pragmatic concern for local conditions in the process of provincial integration.

As Crusader naval activity intensified in the Mediterranean, the imperial government repeatedly instructed the governors of the western provinces to strengthen the defence of Tunisia by taking precautions against enemy fleets and repairing and reinforcing the coastal fortifications (BOA, A. DVNS.

MHM. d, 14/1532, 4 June 1571). The Ottoman defeat at Lepanto, following the conquest of Cyprus in 1571, temporarily weakened Ottoman naval supremacy, enabling the Spanish under Don Juan of Austria to recapture Tunis on 11 October 1573 (Naki 2016: 133–36; Kavas 2016: 19–24).

The loss of Tunis immediately triggered a large-scale imperial response. Under the direction of Grand Vizier Sokullu Mehmed Pasha, the Ottoman government rapidly mobilised ships, troops, provisions, and ammunition for a major expedition. In the summer of 1574, the combined forces led by Sinan Pasha and Grand Admiral Kılıç Ali Pasha, reinforced by the provincial contingents of Algeria, Tripolitania, and Tunisia, as well as troops drawn from across the empire, besieged the Spanish positions at La Goulette (Halkulvâd), Tunis, and San Jak Island. Following a month-long campaign, the Ottoman forces reconquered Tunisia in September 1574, thereby bringing an end to Habsburg ambitions in the central Maghreb (Kavas 2016: 24–36; Naki 2016: 136–41).

The scale and speed of these preparations demonstrate the strategic importance that the Ottoman government attached to Tunisia as a key component of its western frontier. Rather than accepting the temporary Spanish occupation, the imperial centre committed substantial military and logistical resources to restoring Ottoman authority in the province.

Following the reconquest, the Ottoman administration immediately established a permanent provincial organisation. Approximately 4,000 Janissaries were stationed in Tunisia under their own military hierarchy, while Haydar Pasha served as beylerbeyi. Alongside the military establishment, an *Emîrü'l-Evtân* was appointed to supervise provincial revenues, a *qadi* was assigned to administer justice, and a provincial council (*divan*) coordinated civil and military affairs (Maksudoğlu 1966: 193).

In Tunisia, under the rule of the Beylerbeys, things began to deteriorate in the following years. The Janissaries, disturbed by the atrocities committed by the division leaders, stormed the provincial council in 1591 and killed them. The Beylerbey did not have the power to maintain stability and was forced to bow to the soldiers' demands. The soldiers obeyed influential individuals among themselves whom they called "*Dayı*." About 300 *dayı*, who were the leaders of small groups, would gather to discuss administrative matters and express their opinions. However, due to the large number of *dayı*, it was impossible to reach a common decision. Beylerbey Cafer Pasha found a new solution by appointing Rodoslu İbrahim, who had the most followers among these *dayı*s, to the provincial council as the representative

of all the *dayı*s (as the leader of the soldiers). From then on, the people who had the real say in the province were those who were selected as *dayı*s in this way (Maksudoğlu 1966: 194-95). Therefore, the emergence of the deys represented a transformation in the internal distribution of provincial authority rather than the disappearance of Ottoman sovereignty.

The Tunisian evidence demonstrates that the establishment of Ottoman authority involved considerably more than military conquest. Alongside the defence of the frontier, imperial correspondence consistently emphasised the organisation of provincial administration, the maintenance of justice, cooperation with local elites, and the welfare of the population. Even after the administrative transformations of the late sixteenth century, these principles continued to shape the functioning of the Garp Ocakları, supporting the broader argument advanced in this article that North Africa formed an integral component of the Ottoman provincial order rather than a peripheral or exceptionally governed possession.

Viewed collectively, the evidence from Tripolitania, Algeria, and Tunisia reveals a remarkably consistent conception of Ottoman provincial government. Despite differences in local circumstances, imperial correspondence repeatedly emphasises frontier defence, justice, the protection of the population, administrative order, and cooperation with local elites. The recurrence of this administrative vocabulary across different provinces and decades suggests the existence of a coherent normative framework through which the Ottoman court defined the governance of the Garp Ocakları. This documentary consistency forms the principal basis for the broader argument advanced in this article that the sixteenth-century Garp Ocakları functioned as strategically integrated Ottoman frontier provinces rather than as loosely connected corsair polities.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this article suggests that the sixteenth-century Garp Ocakları should be understood primarily as strategically integrated Ottoman frontier provinces rather than being interpreted through the later historiographical paradigm of autonomous Barbary corsair states/republics. Although corsair activity undoubtedly constituted an important component of their military and economic life, the Ottoman documentary record consistently presents these provinces as integral elements of the imperial provincial system.

Equally significant, the imperial correspondence examined here does not indicate that the Ottoman central administration conceptualised North Africa as a territory to be governed through a logic of extraction or permanent differential status. Instead, official decrees repeatedly define provincial government through the interrelated principles of frontier defence, justice, public order, and the welfare of the population. Although such normative language should not be interpreted uncritically as a direct reflection of administrative practice, its remarkable consistency across different provinces and decades demonstrates the normative framework through which the Ottoman court sought to define, legitimise, and organise its authority in the Garp Ocakları.

Accordingly, the findings of this study invite a reconsideration of historiographical approaches that have predominantly interpreted the Garp Ocakları through European diplomatic correspondence, travel narratives, and nineteenth-century colonial literature. Incorporating Ottoman administrative documentation does not eliminate the need for critical source analysis; rather, it broadens the evidential base and enables a more balanced reconstruction of Ottoman rule in North Africa. Rather than arguing for the superiority of one documentary tradition over another, this study seeks to demonstrate the analytical value of Ottoman administrative documentation for understanding how the imperial government conceptualised and sought to govern its North African provinces. Read alongside North African and European sources, these documents contribute to a more balanced reconstruction of Ottoman rule in the early modern Mediterranean.

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Archival Material

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Appendix 1. BOA, TS.MA. e, 757/63, 10.11.925 (3 November 1519): Letter sent by the leaders of the city of Algiers to Yavuz Sultan Selim.



The leaders of Algiers reported that Algiers was weak against its enemies in the Mediterranean, that Oruç Bey, who protected them from attacks, had passed away and been succeeded by his brother Hayreddin Bey, and that the people of Algiers were loyal to the Ottoman Empire.

Appendix 2. BOA, TS.MA.e. 576/35, 10.08.948 (November 1541): Petition sent by the Muslims of Andalusia to Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent.


T.C. BAŞBAKANLIK OSMANLI ARŞİVİ DAİRE BAŞKANLIĞI İSTANBUL

TSMA.E.0576

Request for the Muslims residing in Granada and other cities of Andalusia to be relocated to Algeria to save them from the oppression of the Spaniards.