



حبر أبيض
WHITE INK



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The Aghas: Centers of Power in the Ottoman Court

Aghas is a term that is frequently used when talking about the secret life in royal palaces, across different cultures, and through ages, but this role maximizes greatly when talking about the royal palaces in the era of the Ottoman Empire. What is the story of the aghas? What is their secret role in the royal court? How did they become one of the most important centers of power in the Ottoman Empire?

The word "agha" is a Turkish word with multiple meanings, as it means: master, chief, uncle, head of the family, older brother, chief of the servants in the palace of one of the greats, or one of the titles which purpose is to glorify. That word was applied to the chief of the Janissaries, and to a common man, to mean that he was a polite, educated person.

But in fact, when we think of the word Agha, the mental image goes to the eunuchs' aghas, who are the most famous in history i.e. The Ottoman history in particular. Agha here is a young child sold to the sultan, and some of his genitals are removed or mutilated, so that he will not have sexual ability when he reaches puberty. Thus, it is easy for them to enter and work in the royal palaces without fear for the sultan's Harem.

At this point, we note the limited role of the aghas, as it is limited to internal protection and service in the royal palaces. But this role will develop a lot, especially after Sultan Muhammad Al-Fatih established his famous Topkapi Sarayi palace. This is the famous royal palace in which the most famous stories will take place, which show the aghas' power centers in the Ottoman court.

First of all, it is necessary to point out a kind of ethnic diversity of the aghas. There were the white aghas, meaning White-skinned, and the black aghas, meaning black-skinned. The white aghas were dedicated to guarding the sultan, so their chief was called "The Agha of the Gate of Felicity". As for the black aghas, their role was to protect the women of the sultans, and that is why their chief was called "The Agha of The House of Felicity".

At first, the white aghas exploited their closeness to the sultan to increase their influence and the ability of their chief to influence the selection of state leaders and senior officials. But since the end of the sixteenth century, and especially with the arrival of Muhammad Agha Al-Habashi to the Topkapi Sarayi and his assumption of the position of The Agha of The House of Felicity, he had a moral impact on the sultan's Harem. Since that time, the black aghas had the most powerful control in the palace. They had a powerful influence on decision-making. What increased their power even more was that the Agha of The House of Felicity assumed the task of supervising the Two Holy Mosques, which is one of the great tasks in the Ottoman Empire.

There is abundant information in historical sources about the life of black eunuchs in the Ottoman court, from the beginning, including the gradation and advancement in this court. It began with the registration of African Negroes coming to the "Sarayi" in what is known as the "Kolah ocak defteri" meaning the record of incoming slaves. Then the matter of the Negro child was entrusted to one of the educators specializing in this matter and is known as "Lala". The negro child had to kiss the hand of the educator and begin to learn and serve according to his orders. The eunuchs began to be graded in many services and jobs within the royal Harem. They learned the assets and manners of the royal Harem.

On the other hand, the white aghas tried to increase their influence by supervising the training of the devşirme's men, who would become the sultan's slaves and guards.

As a result of the importance of the role played by the aghas in the Ottoman court, especially the black aghas, we find their presence is demonstrated greatly in historical drama, whether European drama about the Ottoman era, or even Turkish drama about this era.