

Middle Eastern Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/fmes20

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To cite this article: Mustafa Mesut Özekmekçi (24 Feb 2025): Passwords in the Ottoman military in the nineteenth century: a political and social analysis, Middle Eastern Studies, DOI: 10.1080/00263206.2025.2468340

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2025.2468340

Published online: 24 Feb 2025.

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MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES
https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2025.2468340

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Passwords in the Ottoman military in the nineteenth century: a political and social analysis

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This article analyses the use of the 'Parola'/Password in the Ottoman Empire from 1732 to the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. I will first explain the observations and findings of Ottoman reformers regarding passwords, particularly in the eighteenth century, which were adopted as systematic security measures by various European armies (such as Austria and Russia) and involved various procedures. These observations indicate that the Ottoman Army did not employ passwords from the early eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, and even if it did, their use was not linked to military necessities such as patrols, guard posts, or sentry duties, as practised in European armies. However, this situation would change after 1826; various regulations prepared for the new *Asâkir-i Mansûre-i Muhammediye* Army, established in place of the Janissary Corps, contain provisions and explanations regarding the password and its usage. It can be argued that around the end of the 1830s, passwords started to be used in the Ottoman military, similar to European armies. Furthermore, it is understood from the password-related articles of the Military Penal Codes, published and continuously updated from the 1860s, that the process of using passwords has continued uninterrupted. Another topic addressed in the article is the password used by the Ottoman military during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. Passwords that remained in effect for more than a year provided us with a facility to evaluate the military and political climate of the period and the perspective of Ottoman officers. Finally, I will briefly explain the presence of passwords in the nightlife of Istanbul towards the end of the reign of Mahmud II.

Passwords date back to the various cultures and civilizations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, Iran, China and many other times and among different peoples; the practice goes back to ancient times. However, the earliest examples of institutionalized password usage can likely be traced back to the Roman Empire. The Romans had routine secret words established every night to protect their military camps from spies and to ensure that their units could recognize each other.[1] During the spread of Islam, Muslims frequently utilized passwords and secret signals to distinguish friend from foe.[2] Additionally, it is known that early modern European military manuals also included the use of passwords for entering camps.[3]

In the tenth-century translation of *Dîvânu Lugâti't- Türk*, one of the most important dictionaries of the Turkish language, the password is defined as '*im*'. According to the dictionary, the commander of the army chooses the name of a weapon or a bird as a password. When soldiers encounter each other at night, they ask for the password. If the password is correctly provided, they recognize each other as being on the same side. However, those who fail to give the correct response are shot. There is also the saying, '*im bilse er ölmes*', meaning that the person who knows the document (password) will not die.[4]

Şemsettin Sami's Ottoman Turkish dictionary said that term whose origin is Italian, is a word agreed upon by a guarding soldier and others to recognize each other, and its original Turkish

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equivalent is stated to be *uran yasa*. In contemporary dictionaries, however, while the word 'parola' has various meanings, its best-known meaning is the predetermined word used by soldiers or members of a secret society to recognize each other.[5]

Password usage in Ottoman classical period (1300–1600)

During the Classical Ottoman period, there are indications that officials used passwords to ensure the security of castles. Although no archival document on the subject has been found, the most important source pointing to the existence of the password method in the army is the 'Memoirs of a Janissary'. The book, describing the Ottoman army during the reign of Mehmed II (1441–1445 and 1451–1481), states that castle guards used passwords and those who did not know the password were not allowed inside.[6]

In the periods when the Ottoman state was not able to gain superiority over its rivals in military terms, password usage decreased, or they were not used at all. This becomes clear from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts, when the search for military solutions increased. In this context, it is possible to mention four works written from different perspectives that strongly suggest the abandonment or non-existence of password usage in the army. The first of these, in chronological order, is *Usûlü'l-Hikem fî Nizâmi'l-Ümem* (Principles of Wisdom Regarding the Order of Nations). Written by İbrahim Müteferrika, a significant figure in Ottoman-Turkish printing and translation history, the work was published in 1732.[7] In Müteferrika's work, which is considered one of the precursors of Turkish modernization with his views on the restructuring of the Ottoman military through European models' particular emphasis is placed on the password, which is described as a security measure. Müteferrika says:

> The password is one of the important matters that need to be carefully considered, especially during campaigns and battles. When Christian soldiers go on campaigns, they pay great attention to outpost and password rules. From the day they set out, military officials arrive at the headquarters of the supreme commander every day and at every stop. After the council is convened, the outpost status for that night and day is discussed and decided upon. Then the responsible officers, assigned in pairs, carry out the task of delivering the password. The password phrase received from the supreme commander is secretly delivered to the regimental commanders (Colonels), and from there, it is similarly transmitted to the outposts. If anyone arriving at the outposts is unable to provide the password, they are captured and eliminated. Additionally, the higher outpost and ultimately the supreme commander are informed of this situation. Outpost clusters are frequently organized throughout the army, even at distances of several hours away, and these clusters are periodically inspected by officers. The password is changed frequently to prevent the enemy from learning it through any means. Those found negligent or in violation of these laws and regulations are executed without mercy.[8]

Later examples emphasizing the importance of password application appear are approximately 60–70 years after *Usûlü'l-Hikem fî Nizâmi'l-Ümem*. Ebubekir Ratıb Efendi, sent to Austria as an envoy in 1792, and Mustafa Rasih Efendi, sent to Russia as an ambassador in 1793, provided explanations about password practices of the armies of the countries they visited. Ebubekir Ratıp Efendi's impressions on the subject were as follows:

> To ensure the security of places like garrisons and outposts, a password was determined daily by the assembly that convened. These passwords were communicated within the hierarchy, from higher ranks to lower ranks, and passed from unit to unit by word of mouth. For military units in rural areas, a five-day password was sent when necessary. The password was used for shifts, and soldiers who forgot the password were punished with torture. If those who knew the password attempted to escape, the password for that day would be changed.[9]

According to Mustafa Rasih Efendi, the General, who was the commander-in-chief, determined the secret word they called the password every night for each day. The passwords were chosen from historical figures, churches, cities and towns of the Russians. The determined password would be delivered in writing by the general to the officer of the next lower rank. The officers

would pass it on to the trained soldiers in the outposts. When asked for the password, those who knew it were free to enter places such as posts. Those who could not give the answer were not allowed to enter these places. Those who opposed the practice were shot.[10]

At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the most important project related to the restructuring of the Ottoman army is the *Nizam-ı Cedid* (New Order).[11] In the *Hülasatü'l-Kelâm fi Reddi'l-Avâm* (Rejection of the Ideas of the Common People) better known as '*Koca Sekbanbaşı Risalesi*' a treatise which emphasizes the importance of trained soldiers and the modern army, and where the *Nizam-ı Cedid* initiative is highly regarded, the necessity of using passwords to protect the military camp, especially from spies, is explained in detail:

> There are significant differences between the old and new military systems. In order to prevent a fortress guarded by new and disciplined soldiers from being besieged by the enemy, (sentries and patrols) roam. So as to distinguish them from spies, a secret word is determined every night, and only those who know it are allowed into military positions. If an outsider spy encounters these patrols, they are immediately asked for the password. Each night has a different password. One night it might be the name of a city, another night the name of a different city, or the name of a pasha. Some nights, the password could be the name of a fortress or an object. When asked, if a spy cannot provide the password accurately for the night, he is captured and taken to the army commander. During patrols, it becomes apparent that those who know the password are known individuals. Spies can only be identified in this way. In our old ways, there were no such security measures, making it easy for spies to enter fortresses and they could not be recognized.[12]

Password usage in the first half of the nineteenth century

The usage of a predetermined word to recognize each other, mentioned as being utilized by soldiers and secret societies, was a significant and well-known example in the Ottoman Empire during the assassination of Alemdar Mustafa Pasha, an Ottoman statesman who served as Grand Vizier between 29 July 1808 and 15 October 1808. The password used by the Janissaries who would carry out the assassination of Alemdar was conveyed by Şanizade Ataullah Efendi, who authored one of the most important chronicles of the period: 'They came out of their barracks around seven o'clock and marched to the Aga Gate, setting the word "It is Morning" as a password to distinguish between those who were with them and those who were not, like the password used by regular soldiers.'[13]

The works of the four Ottoman statesmen mentioned above primarily concern the reform of the Ottoman Empire and its army, inspired by European states. Accordingly, these texts lead to the conclusion that the password system was not employed in the Ottoman Army. Furthermore, no archival evidence has been identified to suggest that the Janissaries used passwords. However, Sanizade's statement that the Janissaries determined a password for their assassination attempt against Alemdar Mustafa Pasha adds a layer of complexity to the issue.

The summer of 1826 is a turning point in Ottoman history. With the abolition of the Janissary Corps, which had been the greatest problem of central authority for many years, Mahmud had removed the greatest barrier to his desired modern state and organized army and had created the obedient *Asâkir-i Mansûre-i Muhammediye* army. The efforts to make the Mansûre army resemble European armies in terms of training weaponry, uniforms, and other aspects are widely known. However, the importation of elements from Europe with the establishment of the new army is not limited to these alone. Evidence shows that Ottoman soldiers performing guard and patrol duties also adopted the password system. As a start, statements suggesting that passwords were used in the Rami barracks in 1828 can be given as an example.[14] The reflection of this independent practice related to the security of the sultan to the army in general; in other words, the systematic beginning of the password mechanism is in 1830/1831. Because there are few manuscripts on the subject, their probable dates are between 1830 and 1844. The process accelerated with the translation of the manuals of modern armies into Turkish.

The first of these is the text titled *Kanuni Seferiyyeden Müstahreç Hidemat* (The Duties in the Law for Expeditionary Forces, hereafter KSMH) which discusses various military issues in detail. This military manual is undated. However, since the ranks mentioned in it date from the early 1830s, this military instruction must also date from these years. It explains what a password is, what it is used for, who determines it, what can be used as a password, and what measures will be taken if it falls into enemy hands.[15] According to a second manuscript on the subject, a directive from 1838/1839 (H.1255) contains various provisions regarding the determination and usage of passwords, specifically tailored for sergeants who also had guard and patrol duties in the name of *Hidemat-ı Zabitanı Sağire* (NCO Instruction on Service).[16] As for the directive, it is understood that the password referred to the secret of the night,[17] was determined by a higher status officer. Meetings were held in the training field to provide the password to junior officers and soldiers, and during this time, a circle was formed to prevent the password from being heard beyond it. This circle was guarded at a certain distance by a corporal and six armed soldiers, whose faces were turned outward. The senior sergeant within the circle was informed of the password by the senior officer. Through replacing the information by whispering it from ear to ear, everyone within the circle was informed. In terms of the usage procedure of passwords, during patrols, soldiers were required to complete various procedures to identify one another (such as fixing bayonets when entering a military place like a fortress or outpost, lining up in formation), and then they were asked to whisper that particular the night's password into each other's ears.[18] The third is the book titled *Hidmet-i Asker der Zaman-ı Sefer* (Service of the Soldier at the Time of Expedition, hereafter HAZS) written by Mehmet Hüsrev Pasha, who served as *Serasker* (Commander-in-Chief) in the Ottoman army. The password and its functions are also mentioned in this book.[19]

Towards the end of the reign of Sultan Mahmud II, the password was used not only by military units but also at night in Istanbul. Prosperity, sustenance, and most importantly, the security of the capital had always been the number one priority of the state in almost every era. Concerns regarding public order increased even further towards the end of the 1830s but the exact cause remains unknown. Indeed, there are examples in various incident records from this year indicating the enforcement of curfews at night. Furthermore, these curfews brought along the use of passwords. During the nighttime hours when being outside was prohibited, individuals caught by police officers were asked for the password of that night. Those who didn't know the password were taken to the *Seraskerlik* (office of the Minister of War) for questioning. In necessary cases, the residents of their neighbourhood were consulted about these individuals. Examples demonstrate the reflection of theory into practice. The barber, Karabet, who was found on the streets near Bahçekapısı without permission during the night, was caught by the mounted patrol soldiers and taken to the *Seraskerlik* because he could not provide the password when asked. After being interrogated and questioned, Karabet, who was deemed trustworthy, was released.[20] İsmail, like Karabet, encountered the same situation when he came across officers on the street at four in the morning.[21] As Avner Wishnitzer mentioned, the night is concealing. This is because offences that cannot be committed during the day are committed at night.[22] Therefore, towards the end of Sultan Mahmud II's reign, the existence of a curfew in Istanbul indicates that the night was no longer dark and protective enough to conceal everyone, and a certain procedure was applied to those who violated it, regardless of their religion.

The exact date when the password system was implemented during the night could not be determined from the journal records, I examined, which are mostly from the year 1837.[23] However, it is clear that there was a curfew at night for the security of the capital, and only those who knew the password were exempt from this restriction. It becomes clear that, due to the inconvenience caused by the use of the password and the intense complaints from the public, the application was eventually relaxed. For instance, the issue of *Takvîm-i Vekâyi* (official newspaper of the state) dated 18 March 1838 mentioned that the curfew was softened under certain rules, especially because of the need for doctors, surgeons, and midwives during the night.[24] After a

while, an undated document produced by the central bureaucracy stated that the permanent security of the population of Istanbul had been ensured.[25] Therefore, the password system was deemed unnecessary. By the year 1840, the password system implemented in Dersaâdet[26] and neighbouring Beyoğlu, Eyüp, Galata and Üsküdar was completely abolished, with conditions such as not going out on the streets unnecessarily and not wandering about without a lantern being lifted.[27] However, some important points warrant mention here. The extensive digitized database of the *şer'iyye* registers which covers the years 1557–1911 and includes Ottoman court records from Istanbul, provides insights into the political, legal, economic and social history of Istanbul.[28] But it lacks information on how password bans influenced social life and the courts. Records indicate that individuals brought to the *seraskerlik* for interrogation because they could not provide the password at night were not necessarily required to appear in court. Documentation reveals that these individuals were typically released following the necessary interrogations. Furthermore, there is a lack of information regarding password protocols in the official documents, such as regulations and instructions pertaining to the *Zaptiye Müsiriyeti*, the police unit responsible for maintaining internal security in Istanbul from the 1840s onwards.[29]

Curfews were imposed from time to time in the Ottoman Empire, especially in Istanbul. During the reign of Sultan Mahmud II, curfews, including this new password system, lasted for approximately three years. This initiative, which aimed to control not only space but also time by the state and could be considered peculiar, undoubtedly warrants further investigation into who conceived it and how passwords were determined for each night. However, the possibility that 'the uniformed Sultan',[30] who himself resided in a barracks for a long time like an ordinary soldier,[31] attempted to govern the capital for a period as a well-disciplined and well-ordered outpost should not be overlooked.

Password usage in the second half of the nineteenth century

The importance of passwords as a component of military communication was clearly specified within the Ottoman military legislation by the second half of the nineteenth century. There are examples in the conscription laws of 1865 and 1869 which illustrate the beginning of the established legal procedures concerning passwords. Article 73 of the 1865 law[32] and Article 77 of the 1869 law code (with identical content in both texts) stipulate that disclosing the password to the enemy, along with military secrets, would be punished by execution.[33] The instructions regarding the *Asâkir-i Nizamiye Hududiyenin Vezaifi* (Tasks of the Regular Army on the Border) issued in 1873 indicate that the use of passwords began for soldiers stationed at the border. In this context, senior officers at the border were required to determine a nightly and daily password and convey it in writing to lower-ranking officers for a minimum of twenty-four hours and a maximum of one month. Designed to prevent espionage incidents at the border, the instructions also stated that it would not be appropriate for a soldier to move from one place to another without a password, and that those who were found not to know the password would be held accountable according to the provisions of the Military Penal Code regarding passwords.[34]

Before delving into the military passwords for the years 1877–1878, there is another point that needs to be emphasized. During the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 known as the '93 Harbi' in Turkish historiography and starting on 24 April 1877, the security of the capital, particularly of Beyoğlu and Galata, was a concern for the central authority. These districts, described as centers of entertainment and mischief, prompted considerations on how to establish order. One of the proposed solutions was to reintroduce the password system in Galata and Beyoğlu. A document dated 16 August 1877, related to the topic, provides significant information about the history of the password application. As for the document, the password system was already being implemented primarily in military units during campaigns and in areas considered dangerous at night. It also emphasized that the password measure was actually tried towards the end of Sultan Mahmud II's reign. However, concerns arose that the application of this system would not be

beneficial at that time, considering the various abuses of the system in the past and the numerical difference in population between Istanbul in the 1830s and the capital in 1877.[35] The password system, previously mentioned and attempted to be implemented in Istanbul during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II, was reconsidered in 1877 but could not be revived due to differences in time and context.

Considering the reintroduction of the password system for the security of Istanbul is simply one of the examples indicating the empire's considerable concern over public order due to the war. Moreover, the sensitivity shown by the state regarding passwords during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 was not limited to Istanbul alone. On 1 January 1878, a decision was made to use a password in the harbour at night to distinguish European merchant ships entering Samsun Port from Russian warships.[36] Another port in the Black Sea where passwords were used was Varna. Like Samsun, besides various designated signals for ships arriving at the port of Varna, it also required that those who did not provide the correct password be denied entry to the port.[37] Additionally, during the reign of Abdulhamid II, there were various examples of password usage in more private matters beyond social life and the military.[38]

The most important element of this study is the passwords used during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. However, the documents do not provide specific information about which passwords were selected for the war and their intended purposes. These passwords belong to the period between 1 June 1293 Rumi (13 June 1877) and 18 August 1294 Rumi (30 August 1878).[39] More than 800 passwords have been identified for a period of one and a half years. Before delving into details, it is necessary to briefly discuss why and how a word becomes a password.

Two works written on this subject have clarified the issue. The first of these is KSMH and the other is HAZS. According to the KSMH, the words that could be used as passwords should be the name of a great deceased person, an army commander, a famous martyr in a battle, a well-known battle, a great city or the name of a brave soldier.[40] The only difference in HAZS is that the name of a famous *Serasker* should be the password.[41] Also it can be given as an example regarding the selection of passwords by Hüseyin Avni Pasha.[42] The Military Penal Code Commentary written by him states, regarding passwords: 'Considering the possibility of the enemy sneaking into the barracks or a dangerous place, and as a precautionary measure against this danger, a name or word is determined at the guard posts to indicate that those entering and exiting are not spies or enemies, and this name or word is changed once every twenty-four hours…'.[43]

As stated in the instructions (KSMH, HAZS) the passwords given to officers from 1877 to 1878 were largely selected from city names (Baghdad, Kosovo, Trabzon) countries (Arabia, Serbia), region names (Caucasus, Lazistan), and titles of the sultan (which were Fatih Sultan (Mehmet the Conqueror), Sultan Hamid) and some pashas (Hüsrev Pasha, Gazi Osman Pasha). These passwords preferred for officers offered clues to particularly motivate the officers. However, there are also passwords that do not attribute any special importance to Ottoman history or the officer, which are clearly ordinary and likely designed to be easy to remember.

For the soldier passwords, none of these approaches were applicable. Only one sultan (Sultan Murad) and one pasha name (Bald Hasan Pasha) were selected as the soldier passwords for a single day. The soldiers' passwords do not include sultans, cities, or pashas, and they are generally simpler than those given to officers, consisting mostly of military equipment.[44] In this context many types of weapons (cannon, rifle, revolver, mortar, sword, shotgun), any component of the weapon (stock, butt, cartridge, barrel, trigger, hammer), explosive materials (grenade, bomb), ammunition (gunpowder, bullet, primer) deemed important or vital for soldiers were identified as passwords for soldiers. Considering usage frequency, the most chosen objects for the soldier's password were rifle needle, cannon and war.

The rifle types in the inventory of the Ottoman army of that period – although not used very often – were also used. The Peabody Martin rifle was used as a soldier's password with the pronunciation of Martini Henry. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Schneider (Şınayder)

and Winchester (Vinçester) firearms, which were plentiful in the Ottoman army, were also among the types utilized as passwords. The passwords chosen for conscripts were items that became closely identified with their bodies and, above all, their lives during their long military service.

Passwords and institutional memory for officers

I will start by exploring passwords relating to the Ottoman state's institutional memory and those likely to motivate officers. The first that come to mind are the sultans who were considered both materially and spiritually as leaders of the state and the people. Sultan Abdulhamid II, who ascended to the throne in 1876 (1876–1909), is the thirty-fourth of the Ottoman sultans. Among the thirty-four sultans, only eight of them were adopted as officer passwords. Among the most commonly used passwords is Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror, also known as Fatih Sultan Mehmet. Following Fatih, the passwords 'Sultan Selim' and 'Yıldırım Bayezid' come next. 'Sultan Selim' refers to Selim I (1512–1520), who was one of the great general sultans. Besides the rulers of the classical period, 'Sultan Mahmud II' (r.1808–1839), which refers to Mahmut II from the modern period, was used only once as a password. Additionally, during the reign of Abdulhamid II (r.1876–1909), the password 'Sultan Hamid' was preferred. Although Sultan Murad (r.1876) initially brings to mind the conquests of the Balkans by Murad I and Murad II, it is likely that the password refers to Murad V.

There are two reasons for my inference. Firstly, among the passwords, there are two sultans for whom the title of sultan is not mentioned. One is Yıldırım (Bolt) Bayezid I (r.1389–1402), as mentioned earlier. The title 'Bolt' (Yıldırım) was given to the sultan in praise of his military prowess, and it can be assumed that those who prepared the password took this into account. The other one is Abdulaziz, deposed in 1876. Although the name of the sultan was adopted as a password, the dethroned ruler was not deemed worthy of the title of sultan. The use of the password in this way must be related to the political life of the period. A more detailed discussion on this issue can be found in the section on passwords related to pashas. Apart from sultans, there is one member of the dynasty deemed noteworthy to be used as a password. Prince (şehzade) Cem (b.1459-d.1495), who lost the throne to his brother during his lifetime, seems to have been honored by being included in the password list as 'Sultan Cem'. The use of the sultan designation, which was withheld from Abdulaziz, for the prince (şehzade) is striking.

Another significant group of passwords among the officer ranks were the 'Pashas'.[45] Some of the important statesmen of the classical era who, by attaining the highest rank of Marshal (müşirlik) in the Ottoman army, held positions such as *Serasker* ministers of military academies and army commanders.[46] According to my observations, although the majority were from the nineteenth century, the names of thirty-four Pashas from Ottoman history were used as passwords. One of the most frequently used names was Derviş Pasha (d.1896), who served as *Serasker* twice. Among the nineteenth century Ottoman Pashas, statesmen such as Muhtar Pasha (d.1919), Gazi Osman Pasha (d.1900), and Namık Pasha (d.1892), as well as prominent figures from the classical era like Lala Şahin Pasha (d.1389) who played an important role in the conquest of Rumelia, and Davud Pasha (d.1498), whose name was given to the starting point of the Balkan campaigns (Davud Pasha Sahrası/Davut Pasha Ordugahı), and Çorlulu Ali Pasha (d.1711) also served as passwords on various occasions.

In addition to these, two officer passwords are particularly significant in terms of reflecting the institutional memory of the army, its perspective on contemporary politics, and possibly its psychological state during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. Both figures played a key role in the deposition of Sultan Abdulaziz. The first was Hüseyin Avni Pasha (d.1876), the first graduate *Serasker* of the Military College (*Mekteb-i Harbiye*), founded in 1834. The second was Süleyman Pasha (d. 1892), who served as the commander of the Military Academies. The selection of pashas, later labelled as coup plotters, as passwords on various occasions during this period suggests that the Ottoman military – or at least the officers responsible for determining passwords

– had not forgotten their former commanders. It may even be argued that they viewed them with a certain degree of sympathy for their actions. This is particularly noteworthy given that, in addition to selecting the names of coup-leading pashas as passwords, the title 'sultan' was not used for Abdulaziz, whom they had deposed, and the only sovereign-related password assigned to enlisted soldiers was 'Sultan Murad'. Furthermore, these passwords indicate that in 1877–1878, Sultan Abdulhamid II had not yet fully consolidated his power.[47]

For officers, the most frequently identified passwords were city names. Many cities from regions such as Anatolia, Rumelia, Iraq, Georgia, Bulgaria, Serbia were used as passwords, regardless of their size. Among them, Baghdad, which was the password for sixteen nights, ranks first. Baghdad is an ancient city that changed hands multiple times between the Ottoman Empire and Iran and was reacquired with great difficulty during the reign of Sultan Murad IV.

Two passwords, Kosovo and Varna, are the locations of significant battles during the classical period of Rumelian conquests; Kosovo (1385) also marks the assassination of Murad I and Varna (1444) is where Ottoman power was solidified for almost five centuries in the Balkans. Besides these places with well-known stories and historical backgrounds, there are other cities with symbolic significance. Chronologically most of them are associated with the Crimean War (1853–1856), during which the first examples of epic and patriotic poetry and anthems arose.[48] The Crimean War resulted in a significant success for the Ottomans together with their allies against the Russians, and despite the passage of time, this victory was still fresh in the memory of the Ottoman army. This is evident in the choice of passwords such as Gözleve (Evpatorya), Kalafat (Calafat), Sivastapol (Sevastopol) and Silistra (Silistre) which were important locations where major battles and sieges occurred during the Crimean War. Therefore, the pride of the achieved success was conveyed to the officers of that time through these passwords. Another reason for choosing these passwords may be the fact that, just as in the Crimean War, the enemy in the 1877–1878 war was the Russians. Apart from these, another password that I believe holds symbolic value is Zayçar (Zayeçar) which was famous for its defence of Plevne (Pleven). It is reasonable to assume that this town was chosen as a password for officers due to its recapture from the Serbians by Osman Pasha in 1876 even before he won the title of gazi/hero. However, considering that Konya, after Bağdat, a city with no special historical reference for Ottoman history, is the second most frequently used password, and Tokat, another city without any significant historical event, ranks third in this classification, the validity of this assumption becomes undoubtedly debatable.[49]

In addition to the assessment of why and how passwords were chosen, it can be argued that the selected passwords exhibit use of consistency within themselves. Moreover, there was a system or a simple control mechanism in the Ottoman military's use of passwords. This is because passwords chosen for both officers and soldiers, although often different from one another, overwhelmingly began with the same Arabic letter.[50] Furthermore, the selected passwords are a form of anagram. Examples where passwords consist of almost the same letters with minor differences, such as Bilecik/Bilezik, Zayçar/Zincir, Niş/Nişangah, Arabistan/Araba, Filibe/Flama, were used. It is highly likely that this was deliberately chosen as a form of control mechanism. In this context, the passwords shared as examples can be examined in Table 1.

This system, which can be termed systematic, was barely altered, as will be further understood when the documents in Appendix I are examined. In addition, another observation related to the password system was made between 30 June 1293 (12 July 1877) and 23 July 1293 (4 August

Table 1. Example of passwords starting with the same letter.

Officer	Soldier	First letter of passwords
Osman Pasha	Araba	ع (Ayın)
Bağdat	Barut	ب (Be)
Canik	Cephane	ج (Cim)
Zayçar	Zincir	ز (Ze)
Hüseyin Avni Pasha	Harbi	ح (Ha)

Table 2. Example of using the same password on different dates.

Officer password	Soldier password	How many times paired
Halep	Harbi	12
Amasya	İğne	9
Konya	Kundak	9
Tokat	Tüfenk	8
Trabzon	Top	8

1877). The password starting with the first letter of the Ottoman alphabet, 'elif', on 30 June, progressed through the alphabet until 23 July, ending with a password starting with the last letter of the alphabet, 'ye'. Whether this situation was chosen by coincidence or deliberately is also a matter of curiosity.

It also appears that officer and soldier passwords were sometimes reused separately despite belonging to different dates. In such usage, while the officer password was largely preserved as is, a different word was chosen for the soldier password (such as *Muhtar Pasha/Mengene*, *Muhtar Pasha/Meme*, *Süleyman Pasha/Sancak*, *Süleyman Pasha/Silah* to create a new combination (Table 2).

Conclusion

The passwords, although short in terms of words, are important means of communication that can have great and even fatal consequences in military terms. This seemingly small but very important issue was well observed by the Ottoman masters who analysed European armies. The security instructions of the Mansûre army show that warnings on this subject were put into practice shortly after the abolition of the Janissary Corps.

First, a surprising and perhaps unprecedented attempt was made to make passwords, an important part of military communication, part of the Ottoman military order as well as social life by the state at the end of the reign of Mahmud II. It is quite interesting that this was attempted to be implemented in a city where approximately half a million people lived, in addition to the efforts and energy expended on the subject based on the crime record journals. The practice that emerged in 1837 is an important example to show the limits of Sultan Mahmut II's rule. The fact that this initiative came to the agenda even at the dawn of the twentieth century makes the situation even more interesting. Therefore, the use of passwords in social life, which can be considered one of the interventions of the state in the time as well as the space of public life from the perspective of modernization, should be considered further.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the word was freed from the greater meanings attached to it and returned to its original meaning in every sense. It is obvious that passwords, which are a means of ensuring security firstly for oneself and then for the public, belong to armies first and foremost. In this context, the importance of passwords in matters such as military locations, border security and the fact that they were considered a secret belonging to the army are clearly understood from the military codes of the period. The passwords used during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 are important from various perspectives. The first of these relates to Ottoman military communication techniques. It reveals how the security of military locations such as headquarters, barracks was constructed, albeit partially. The fact that the words chosen as passwords for both officers and soldiers almost always began with the same letter, and even resembled anagrams to some extent, can be considered in this respect. On the other hand, the frequent use of the same passwords and the fact that they were repeatedly matched with the same words can be considered a weakness in terms of security. The repeated use of the same passwords reveals that most selected passwords were easy-to-pronounce words. Many soldiers in the Ottoman army lacked formal education, and even into the twentieth century, literacy rates among ordinary soldiers were notably low. As a result, passwords for soldiers were often chosen from simple, familiar words.

The passwords show the state's institutional memory or at least the perspectives of the creator of the passwords on the past or the time they were in and the events of this time by identifying the parts of this memory that are considered important. Therefore, various inferences can be made about the Ottoman officers' view of daily politics and the past based on the passwords. In this context, the first prominent aspect in the relationship of the Ottoman officers with history is the sultans. The Sultan most admired or best known by officers is the conqueror of Istanbul. Mehmed II was the creator of the Ottoman sultan typology. Even today, he is the most popular and well-known Ottoman Sultan. It is therefore understandable that his name was a favourite password among the officers of the time.

The passwords offer an approach to the past and the present of Ottoman history, but in any case not only to its important figures but also to the history of the imperial army. Along with the references to the classical Balkan conquests such as Varna and Kosovo, the Crimean War, which can be called the first victory of the modern Ottoman army, was the most valuable nucleus of the recent past or an important source of motivation for the soldier. As stated above, the most significant battles of this war and the places where it occurred were often chosen as passwords; this is not surprising. After all, success is the most important thing to be remembered, especially by those who long for a glorious past.

The dethronement of Abdulaziz marked one of the first modern coups in Turkish history. Removing the sultan from power undoubtedly symbolized opening Pandora's box. With this initial modern coup and subsequent ones (in 1908–1909, 1913, 1960 and 1980), the armed forces directly intervened in politics, at times even superseding civilian authority. This attitude, which became institutionalized over time, continued into the Republican era. The passwords chosen to suggest that the change made regarding the throne, or in other words, the military's intervention in contemporary politics, were approved by a part of the army or its staff of the period. There is no other reason to explain why Hüseyin Avni and Süleyman Pasha (if the intensity of password usage is taken as a criterion, Süleyman Pasha is more popular than Hüseyin Avni), who deposed Abdulaziz and paved the way to the throne for the prince Murad Efendi, were chosen as passwords. It can also be argued that Murad V, who did not remain on the throne for long, was somehow still more valuable to the Ottoman officer than Abdulaziz and perhaps the current sultan Abdulhamid II. Therefore, based on the passwords, it becomes clear that Abdulhamid II was not yet in full control of both the army and the government. It is obvious that the sultan, who banned the use of the name Murad even in newspapers during the censorship period and ruled the state with complete absolutism, would definitely not accept the selection of the names of the former sultan and the coup plotters as passwords.

Acknowledgments

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Merve Doğan, Veysel Şimşek, Ferhat Berber, Ali Sönmez, Fırat Yaşa, Cengiz Kırlı and Fatih Yeşil as well as the reviewers of this article. Their insightful readings, critical assessments and significant contributions greatly enhanced it.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID

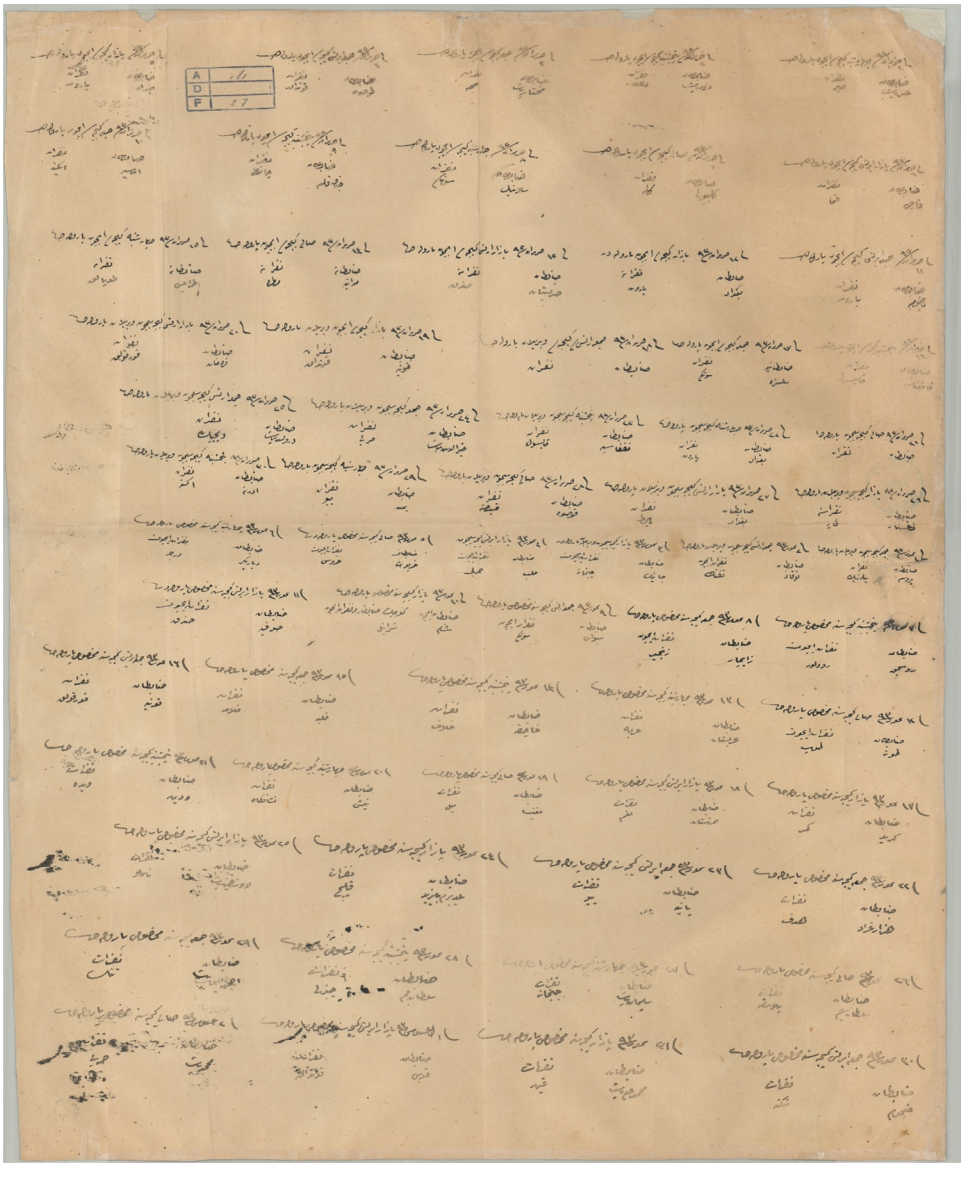
Mustafa Mesut Özekmekçi http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7613-9939

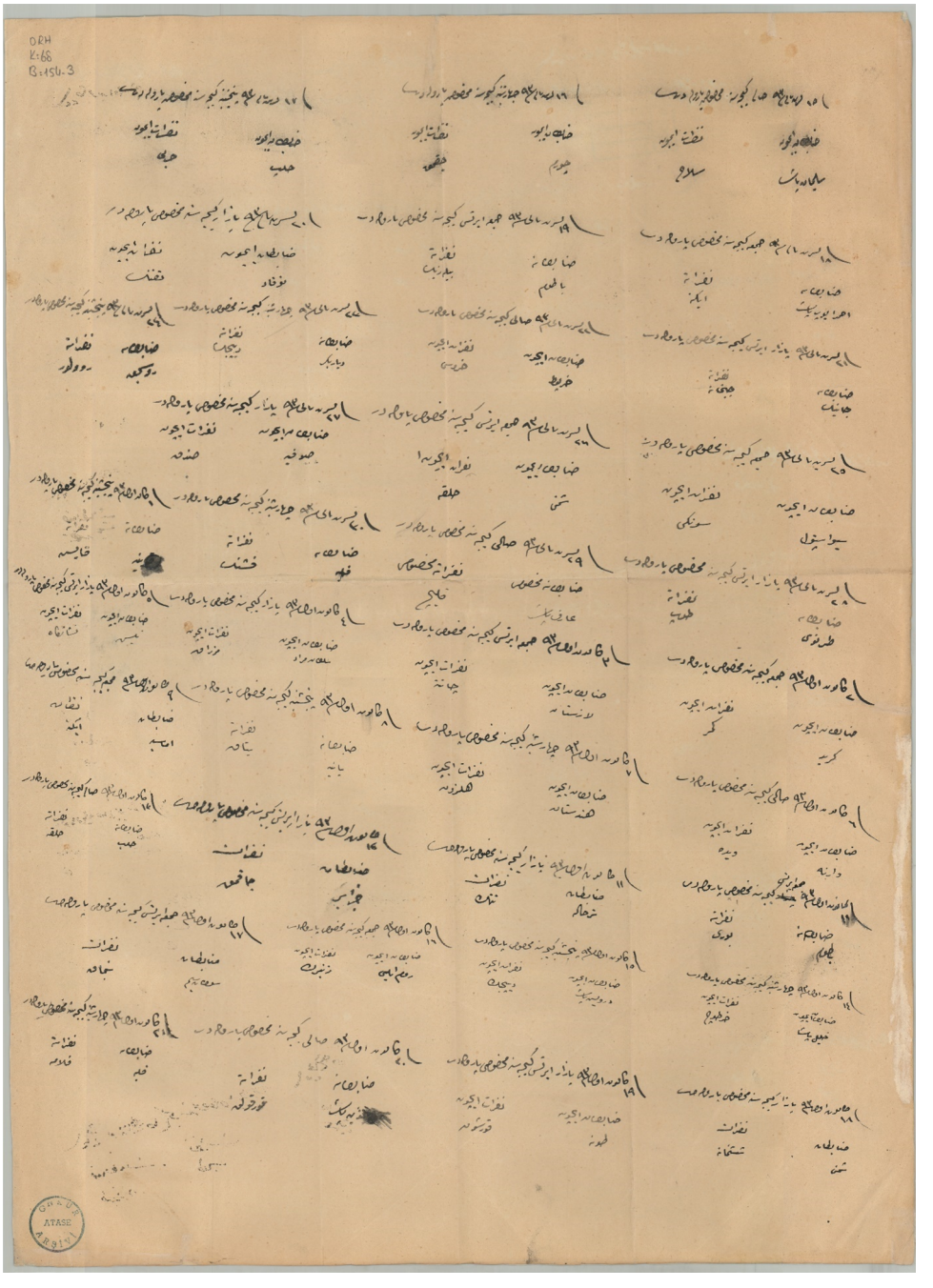
Notes

1. Jonathan Eaton, 'The Political Significance of the Imperial Watchword in the Early Empire', *Greece & Rome*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (2011), pp.48–63.
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3. Klára Andresevá, 'Military Camps in Military Manuals', in Alexander S. Wilkinson and Graeme J. Kemp (eds), *Negotiating Conflict and Controversy in the Early Modern Book World* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), p.175.
4. Besim Atalay, *Divanü Lûgat-İt-Türk Tercümesi* [Translation of Divanü Lûgat-İt-Türk] Vol.1 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1985), p.38.
5. Şemseddin Sami, *Kamus-i Türki* [Ottoman Turkish Dictionary] (Istanbul: İkdam Matbaası, 1901), p.343.
6. Kemal Beydilli, *Bir Yeniçerinin Hatıratı* [Memoirs of a Janissary] (Istanbul: Tarih ve Tabiat Vakfı Tatav Yayınları, 2003), p.93.
7. Adil Şen, *İbrahim Müteferrika* ve *Usûlü'l-Hikem fî Nizâmi'l-Ümem* [Principles of Wisdom Regarding the Order of Nations] (Ankara, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 1995).
8. Simplified by Şen, pp.101–02, 114,181–83.
9. Sema Arıkan, 'Nizâm-ı Cedit'in Kaynaklarından Ebubekir Ratib Efendi'nin "Büyük Layiha"sı' [Ebubekir Ratib Efendi's 'Great Layiha', One of the Sources of Nizâm-ı Cedit] (MA Thesis, T.C. İstanbul Üniversitesi, 1996), pp.78, 93, 121, 142, 206, 222–28, 300. See also the Fatih Yeşil, *Aydınlanma Çağında Bir Osmanlı Kâtibi Ebubekir Râtib Efendi (1750-1799)* [An Ottoman Scribe in the Age of Enlightenment: Ebubekir Râtib Efendi (1750-1799)] (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2010).
10. Yılmaz Karakaya, 'Mustafa Rasih Efendi'nin 1793 Tarihli Rusya Sefaretnamesi' [Mustafa Rasih Efendi's 1793 Embassy to Russia] (MA Thesis, T.C. İstanbul Üniversitesi, 1996), p.141.
11. The modern army was established by Sultan Selim III.
12. Abdullah Uçman, *Koca Sekbanbaşı Risalesi* [The Treatise of Koca Sekbanbaşı] (Istanbul, 1974), pp.72–73.
13. Şâni-zâde Mehmed Atâ'ullah Efendi, *Şâni-zâde Târîhi* [Şanizade's History] *(H.1223-1237/1808-1821*), Ed. Ziya Yılmazer, vol.1, (Istanbul: Çamlıca, 2008), p.118.
14. Charles MacFarlane, *Constantinople in 1828, a Residence of Sixteen Months in the Turkish Capital and Provinces* (London: Saunders and Otley,1829), p.427.
15. It is not clear who wrote the work titled *Kanuni Seferiyeden Müstahreç Hidemat*. There is a master's thesis on the subject: Veis Karahan, 'Kanuni Seferiyeden Müstahreç Hidemat Metin-Ses Bilgisi/Şekil-Dizin' [The Duties in Law for Expeditionary Forces Text-Phonetics/Form-Index] [(MA Thesis, Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi, 2018).
16. *Hidemat-ı Zabitan-ı Sağireye ait talimatname* [Instructions for NCOs], the year of 1838-1839.
17. Ottoman Turkish translation: *sırr-ı leyli.*
18. *Hidemat-ı Zabitan-ı Sağireye ait talimatname* Hijri 1255/Gregorian 1838-1839, pp.111–12, 186–87.
19. Mehmet Hüsrev Pasha, *Hidmet-i Asker der Zaman-ı Sefer* [Service of the Soldier at the Time of Expedition], pp.63–66, 98, 102–03. Although it is known that the work was written during the reign of Sultan Abdülmecid, the date of its publication is uncertain.
20. The date of the record should be 18 August 1837. See also, Başkanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi Defterleri (TS.MA.d) 5049.
21. BOA, TS.MA.d 5049.Lef.6 (8 October 1837).
22. For Ottoman nightlife in the eighteenth century, see also Avner Wishnitzer, *Gece Çökerken Osmanlı'da Gece Hayatı* (translated by Can Gümüş İspir) [As Night Falls: Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Cities after Dark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p.1] (Istanbul: Fol Yayınları, 2023), p.14 Also see the relevant study about the end of the nineteenth century, Nurçin İleri, 'Nightlife and Temporal Order in fin de siècle Istanbul', *Etudes Balkaniques,* 53/2 (2017), pp.263–325.
23. The documents where the public order incidents in Istanbul were recorded on a daily basis.
24. *Takvîm-i Vekâyi* (18 March 1837), No. 162, p.2.
25. BOA, İrade Dahiliye (İ. DH). 12/564; 26/251 (date unknown).
26. Ottoman Istanbul was called Dersaadet. Today it is the Fatih district of Istanbul.
27. *Takvîm-i Vekâyi* (15 December 1840), No. 213, p.4.
28. For online access to these sources, please visit https://www.kadisicilleri.org/?blm=yayin (accessed 27 September 2024).
29. A comprehensive doctoral dissertation on the Zaptiye Nezareti is Ali Sönmez's work, 'Zaptiye Teşkilatının Kuruluşu ve Gelişimi' [Foundation and Development of Zaptiye Organization] (PhD thesis, Ankara University, 2005). Additional insights can be found in Sönmez's article, 'Zaptiye Teşkilatının Düzenlenmesi (1840-1869)' [Arrangement of the Zaptiye Institution (1840-1869)], *Ankara Üniversitesi Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Vol. 25, No. 39 (2006), pp.199–219.

30. Gültekin Yıldız, 'Üniformalı Padişah' [A Sultan in Uniform under Mahmud II], in Çoşkun Yılmaz (ed.), *II. Mahmud Yeniden Yapılanma Sürecinde İstanbul* [The Istanbul of Mahmud II in the Process of Being Rebuilt] (Istanbul: Kültür Başkenti Yayınları, 2010), pp.102–29.
31. Yüksel Çelik, *Râmi Kışlası II. Mahmud Devrinde Aydın-Despotik Modernleşmenin Karargâhı* [Rami Barracks: Headquarters of Intellectual-Despotic Modernization in the period of Mahmud II] (Istanbul, Vakıfbank Kültür Yayınları, 2022).
32. Although the *kanunname* (legal document) lacks a specific date, librarians indicated that it belongs to Hijri 1282/Gregorian 1865. See İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Atatürk Kitaplığı, *Asakir-i Berriye-i Şahane Ceza Kanunname-i Hümayunudur Suret-i Hatt-ı Hümâyûn* [Penal Code of the Ottoman Ground Forces], 343.014/MC_Osm_K.00159/01.
33. Uğur Ünal, *Sultan Abdulaziz Döneminde Osmanlı Kara Ordusu (1861-1876)* [The Ottoman Land Forces During the Reign of Sultan Abdulaziz (1861-1876)] (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2016), p.153. In the Military Code of 1883, the content and penalty of the same article are maintained without alteration.
34. *Asâkir-i Nizamiye-i Hududiyenin Vezâifi Hakkında Talimattır* [Tasks of the Regular Army on the Border] (8 February 1874), pp.15–16.
35. Millî Savunma Bakanlığı Askeri Tarih Arşivi (MSB-ATA), 110-9-1-3/72-0-164.
36. MSB-ATA, 110-9-1-3/128-0-370.
37. MSB-ATA, 110-9-1-3/107-0-79.
38. In 1902, to prevent the possibility of Fuat Pasha, who was to be exiled on the İzzettin steamship, from being rescued by his men, an order containing a password was prepared. Those who did not know this password were prohibited from approaching the ship, and the ship's captain was also informed of the situation. Upon the direct order of the sultan, Şevket Pasha and his men, who went to the ship to control the situation, were not allowed on board by the captain because they did not know the password. As a result, Şevket Pasha returned to the palace, learned the password, and only then was able to go back to the ship. Tahsin, *Abdülhamit ve Yıldız Hatıraları* [Tahsin Pasha, Abdulhamid, and the Yıldız Memoirs], edited by Yüksel Kanar (Istanbul: Kapı Yayınları, 2021), pp.131–33.
39. MSB-ATA, 110-9-1-3/68-0-154. There are no passwords used between 12 and 17 April 1293 (Julian Calendar).
40. *KSMH*, pp.17–18.
41. *HAZS*, pp.63–64.
42. He served as the *Serasker* (Minister of War) three times (1869–1871,1873–1875, 1875–1876).
43. Hüseyin Avni, *Askeri Ceza Kanunu Şerhi* [Commentary on the Military Penal Code] (Istanbul: Matbaa ve Kütüphane-i Cihan). Possibly second part of the nineteenth century.
44. However, it is observed that the passwords sent to the Artillery Command between 3 and 12 August 1878, such as Marmara and Beirut, consist entirely of city and region names. See MSB-ATA 110-9-1-3/129-0-134.
45. Pasha was a title given to high civil servants and soldiers of higher rank than colonel during the Ottoman Empire. In addition, the title of pasha was also given to the chief rulers of Egypt under Ottoman patronage.
46. For these officers, see Ünal, *Abdulaziz Döneminde,* p.66.
47. After 1880, such a situation was not encountered in the passwords.
48. Candan Badem*, Kırım Savaşı ve Osmanlılar* [The Ottomans and the Crimean War (1853-1856)] (translated by Eşref Bengi Özbilen) (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2017), pp.10–13.
49. I think the reason for Tokat being used so frequently is related to Gazi Osman Pasha. Osman Pasha was born in Tokat in 1833.
50. The Ottoman alphabet is a script used for writing Ottoman Turkish, consisting of 31 letters in total, including three Persian letters added to the Arabic script.

Appendix 1: Images of archive documents (MSB-ATA, 110-9-1-3/68-0-154)




DEH
K-68
B-150-3