

RESEARCH ON THE OTTOMAN FISCAL SURVEYS

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I. *Periodic and general surveys of the entire empire*

As I have indicated elsewhere in some detail,¹ the most precious possession of the Turkish archives is the great series of registers in which were entered the results of the surveys of population and taxable resources which, until the beginning of the seventeenth century, were carried out every 30 or 40 years in accordance with a long-established administrative tradition.

These registers (*defter-i hâkani*) contain in the first instance a listing of the empire's adult male population; the entry for each person states his father's name, his legal status, the duties and privileges of his economic or social position, and the extent of his land. The registers also give much information regarding land use (arable, orchard, vineyard, rice-paddy), the numbers of mills, beehives, etc., and the estimated fiscal value of these sources of revenue. Moreover, the information contained in the registers is not confined to an agrarian inventory. There is information on the revenue from customs duties, markets, official weighing scales (with their locations, regulations and the volume of transactions effected) fisheries and mines. The registers make it possible to establish the precise distribution of revenue as between imperial domain, military fiefs (*timar*), pious foundations and private property. In effect the registers were a cadastre of fiefs and other land in which was entered the status of each fief with a summary statement of its tenurial history.

The reason why these surveys were carried out relates to the administrative organization of the empire. The great majority of Ottoman civil and military functionaries were not paid from the central treasury of the empire but accorded the right to enjoy the revenue from certain taxes in a given area. At the beginning of the sixteenth century the fief holders alone numbered some 38,000 and were in receipt of more than half the empire's

¹ 'Les grands recensements de la population et du territoire de l'empire Ottoman et les registres impériaux de statistiques', *Revue de la Faculté des Sciences Economiques de l'Université d'Istanbul*, ii, 1940; 'Essai sur les données statistiques des registres de recensements dans l'Empire Ottoman aux XV^{ème} et XVI^{ème} siècles', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, i, 1957; E12 s.v. Daftar-i Khakani.

revenue; moreover, the sum allocated to military fiefs increased over the sixteenth century with the rising number of timariots. The successful operation of this system required detailed information on the empire's various sources of revenue and the changes which they underwent. Only in this way was it possible to keep a check on the relationship between the value officially assigned to a fief (in the registers and the *berat* issued to the beneficiary) and the amount of revenue actually accruing to the beneficiary. Furthermore, in the period of economic expansion when the population was growing, surveys carried out at frequent intervals made it possible for the state to keep its registers up to date and thus profit from new sources of revenue. In the seventeenth century, however, the central government no longer possessed either the authority or the will to carry out these surveys effectively in consequence of the prevailing anarchy in the empire's administration. The disordered state of the fief system in any case rendered the activity pointless.

2. *The state of preservation of the registers*

On the completion of a new survey, the obsolete registers containing the results of the previous survey were deposited in the archives of the *Defterhane*. For the most part they were later mislaid or destroyed, principally in the course of being moved from one depository to another in the last century. Nevertheless there remain almost a thousand volumes in various libraries and archives in Turkey and elsewhere, above all in the Başbakanlık Arşivi, İstanbul.

Some of the extant registers date from the reigns of Murad II (1422-51) and Mehmed the Conqueror (1451-81); these contain references to even earlier registers which have been lost. There is also a complete collection of registers containing the results of the last surveys carried out in the empire. These date primarily from the reigns of Selim II (1566-74) and Murad III (1574-95), with the addition of a few surveys carried out at a later date in such provinces as Crete on its conquest from the Venetians or the Morea on its reconquest. This collection is now kept in the archives of the Tapu ve Kadastro Umum Müdürlüğü in Ankara. The number of detailed (*mufassal*) registers in this collection is 254; most of these volumes measure 15x42 cm. and contain about 300 leaves. Some are as large as 21x58 cm., are 7.5 cm. thick, and weigh 6.5 kg. Each province (*sancak*) is covered on average in two to three of these volumes.

3. *Current research*

Following the publication of my earlier studies drawing attention to the historical importance of these registers, the Turkish Historical Society asked me to prepare a full-scale study of them. This study will contain a detailed catalogue of the surviving registers. It will present the results of my research on the methods by which the surveys were executed, the way in which the registers were compiled, and the palaeographic problems which they raise. I shall give an account of the peculiarities of the administrative and fiscal system of the Ottoman Empire, and in the light of this explain the functions of the various kinds of register which were in use. In short, my study will contain all that is needed to facilitate the use of these registers. In addition, the study will include a first presentation of the demographic data contained in these registers for a period comprising the early years of the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent (1520-30). On the basis of the almost complete series of registers extant for this period, I shall attempt to give a quantitative account of a number of aspects of the economic and social structure of the empire in the early sixteenth century. This account will be illustrated by graphs and maps.

What are the results of these first researches into the demographic data of the registers? I am arranging them in a series of tables of greater or less uniformity covering the entire empire. The most important types of table are the following:

(i) A first group covers a category of the population referred to as the '*avarız haneleri*', that is those households liable to pay the tax known as '*avarız*' which was levied in the empire at irregular intervals. This category covers those who, lacking any inherited or acquired privilege in virtue of which they could claim exemption from the tax, constituted the mass of the Ottoman population. The tables relating to this category of the population present the primary information on the demography of the empire. They show the composition of the empire's population by religion (Muslim, Christian, Jew) or way of life (townsman, peasant, nomad). Furthermore, within these main lines of division the population can be subdivided by marital status (head of a household or bachelor for Muslims, head of a household, bachelor or widow acting as head of a household in the case of Christians and Jews). This information is of great value when one comes to estimate the size of the total population.

(ii). The second category consists of those who for one reason or another enjoyed the privilege of exemption from the payment of 'avarız. They fall into two groups: (a) The first comprises the grand dignitaries of the empire who represented its military and ruling classes. The study of their numbers and distribution is of great help in understanding the social and administrative structure of the empire; it shows us exactly how many military and other fiefs and fief-holders (*za'im, sipahi*) there were, and where in their fiefs the fief-holders usually lived. This category includes the *sancak beyleri* (the military and administrative governors of the *sancaks*), the kadis, the *medrese* teachers, the leaders of caravans, the commanders of garrisons and their subordinates, but also many more humble subjects of the empire who served the state as falconers, grooms in the imperial stables, and members of the minor military organizations (*voynuks, yöruks, müsellems, Tatars, etc.*). (b) The second group comprises a long list of persons exempted from 'avarız: the servants of religious institutions, members of illustrious families whose services to the empire in war or religion had been confirmed by imperial firman, persons engaged in the performance of duties imposed by the state such as miners, the guardians of defiles and mountain passes, those who watched and repaired the bridges and the roads, those responsible for tending the horses, water-buffaloes and camels of the sultan, and those who supplied salt-petre, arrows, timber for the navy, and other materials of war. To this list may be added those who, by reason of old age or infirmity, were not in a position to make a living and so were unable to pay taxes. These were the old, the blind, the dumb, the paralysed and the insolvent.

These registers are not simple enumerations of households or taxpayers. In the first place, they constitute a systematic census of the entire population of the empire (excluding only Egypt, North Africa and the Hijaz) executed in a statistical spirit with a wealth of details, and for this reason their value from the point of view of historical demography is very great. Secondly, the registers contain the results of a detailed agricultural census covering arable land, fruit trees, vines, mills, pasture land, beehives, and all kinds of agricultural products with numerous data on the approximate volume of production and its yield in revenue.

4. A comparison

In comparison to the material available to demographic historians elsewhere, the Ottoman registers constitute a very impressive source.

Historians of medieval Europe give the impression that properly demographic sources come into existence only from the thirteenth century in southern Europe and from the fourteenth in the north.² This material, however, arises not so much from true censuses as from enumerations carried out in exceptional circumstances for fiscal or military purposes. This makes it difficult to use. It often turns out that, for example, only those possessing more than a certain minimum amount of property or those capable of bearing arms were registered in a given city. In other cases the only index of the size of the population is the number of households, and we have to make an arbitrary guess at the value of the multiplier, which varied with time and place. Moreover, as a result of the territorial fragmentation of the feudal period, these enumerations consist only of partial and heterogeneous data among which it is hard to establish any basis for comparison. Thus there is in a sense no lack of demographic material for medieval Europe; what is missing is results derived from censuses carried out over large territories at regular intervals using uniform procedures and covering the whole population. The surveys which took place in England in 1086 and in France in 1328 are rare and exceptional.

It might be supposed that the Ottoman Empire would be an unlikely place to find such materials. The empire had no well-established landed or racial aristocracy, gave no encouragement to municipal autonomy, and lacked any organization comparable to the Catholic Church with regard to the registration of births, deaths and marriages. Consequently it has no familial, municipal or religious archives. Equally one might expect the execution of regular censuses of the population for the purpose of obtaining demographic statistics to be a practice developed in Western Europe in modern times, and thus belonging to an evolutionary stage which the Ottoman Empire had not reached. However, it has to be remembered that, even if the statistical spirit is a modern Western development, the eminently centralized Oriental monarchies of the past were compelled for administrative and financial reasons to carry out frequent censuses according to methods which were already well-advanced.

The Ottoman registers do in fact contain the results of systematic censuses of the population uniformly executed, repeated at regular intervals, and covering large areas of the empire. The data are genuine statistics intended to provide information which was basic to the whole administrative and financial organization of the empire.

² IX e Congrès International des Sciences Historiques, Paris 1950, *Rapports*, p. 56.

5. The growth of the Ottoman population in the sixteenth century

Using the two fairly complete collections of registers referred to above that for the early years of the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent (1520-30) and that for the reigns of Selim II and Murad III (1566-95), it is possible to obtain a statistical account of the empire's population at two different periods and to establish what changes had taken place in the interval, in particular the amount by which the population had grown. This project has not however been completed as yet. In the interim, I give some sample figures relating (i) to the size of the urban population, and (ii) to certain provinces of the empire.

(i) Naturally the growth of the population in a number of the larger towns is not a precise index of the growth of the population as a whole. There may have been increasing urbanization and some evacuation of the countryside in favour of the towns, above all in times of social and economic crises; and a redistribution of the population in favour of certain parts of the empire could render any inference of this kind misleading. We are however in the sixteenth century and in the Ottoman Empire. The urbanization of the period of industrialization is still in the future, and the movement of population is strictly controlled under a regime of attachment to the soil. Thus with certain qualifications one can accept the hypothesis that in this period the growth of the urban population was closely related to the growth of the total population, and assume the proportion to be the same in each case. Table I shows the amount of this increase for some typically Ottoman cities and towns.

To obtain the total populations from the numbers of households given in the registers, I have used a multiplier of 5. Since, moreover, certain military groups, the Janissaries, the servants of the imperial court and the empire's slave population were excluded, I have raised the figures by 20 per cent in the case of Istanbul and 10 per cent elsewhere. It must be admitted that these are only assumptions and may in some cases be misleading. With this qualification, we can for the moment infer from the table the following results:

(a) In comparison to the size they have attained at the present day, the cities and towns of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century represented concentrations of population on a very small scale, with the one

exception of Istanbul. However, the order of size indicated in the table is in line with what we find elsewhere in the Mediterranean in the same period.³

TABLE I *Population of the principal cities and towns at various dates*

City or town	Before 1520	1520-1530	1571-1580	After 1580
Istanbul	97,956 (1478)	400,000(?) (?)	700,000(?) (?)	-
Aleppo	67,344 (1519)	56,881	45,331	46,365
Damascus	-	57,326	-	42,779 (1595)
Bursa	-	34,930	70,686	-
Edirne	-	22,335	30,140	-
Amid	-	18,942 (1541)	31,443	-
Ankara	-	14,872	29,007	-
Athens	-	12,633	17,616	-
Tokat	17,328 (1455)	8,354	13,282	21,219 (1646)
Konya	-	6,127	15,356	-
Sivas	3,396	5,560	16,846	-
Sarajevo	-	5,632	23,485	-
Monastir	2,645	4,647	5,918	-
Skoplje	4,974	4,631	9,867	-
Sofia	-	3,899	7,848	-
Total for 12 towns	-	142,562	271,494	-

(b) Leaving aside the Syrian cities of Aleppo and Damascus, the population of which decreased in the sixteenth century, the Ottoman urban population grew continuously. Thus the population of the former capital of Bursa, a typically Ottoman city, doubled between 1520-30 and 1570-80. Similarly, if we leave aside Istanbul and the two Syrian cities, the population of the remaining twelve towns and cities given in the table increased on average by 90 per cent. This may be compared with the figure of 84 per cent for the increase in the urban population elsewhere in the Mediterranean.⁴

³ The population of Venice stood at 100,000 inhabitants in 1509, and had only reached 175,000 in 1575. Similarly the population of Naples and Milan from the end of the fifteenth century stood at 100,000 inhabitants each, while that of such major Italian cities as Rome, Florence, Bologna and Verona must have remained at about 50,000. The other towns did not even exceed 10,000. See F. Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, Paris 1949, p. 268; IX e Congrès International des Sciences Historiques, Paris 1950, *Rapports*, p. 65.

⁴ See note 3.

(ii) I have also attempted to calculate the growth of the population in selected provinces; the results are given in Table 2.

The table shows the steeply upward trend of population growth in the provinces selected. In addition I have calculated the increase to

TABLE 2. Population of selected provinces at two periods
(A=1520-30; B=1570-80)

Province		Muslims				Total	% Increase
		Settled	Nomad	Christians	Jews		
Anadolu	A	388,397	77,268	8,511	271	474,447	41.7
	B	535,495	116,219	20,264	534	672,512	
Karaman (Konya, Akşehir, Kayseri, etc.)	A	117,863	25,654	3,127	-	146,644	82.8
	B	214,952	39,617	13,448	11	268,028	
Zülkadriye (Kırşehir, Mar'aş, etc.)	A	18,185	48,665	2,631	-	69,481	62.6
	B	70,368	38,497	4,163	-	113,028	
Rum-iKadim (Amasya, Tokad,Canik, etc.)	A	90,839	8,672	6,551	-	106,062	79
	B	145,715	25,724	18,177	27	189,643	
Rum-iHadis (Trabzon, Kemah, Malatya etc.)	A	24,914	305	50,757	-	75,976	54
	B	58,975	160	58,146	-	117,263	
Toplam	A	640,198	160,564	71,577	271	872,610	55.9
	B	1,025,487	220,217	114,198	572	1,360,474	

be 71 per cent for a large part of the eastern Balkans (the *sancaks* of Gelibolu, Vize, Edirne, Çirmen, Silistre, Niğbolu, Vidin, Sofya, Köstendil and Selanik) and 55 per cent for Syria. Thus the Ottoman Empire participated fully in the well-known growth of population which characterized the Mediterranean countries in the sixteenth century.

6. *The religious composition of the population*

To give the reader an idea of the range of demographic information to be found in the surveys, I give in Table 3 a break-down of a number of urban populations by religion. The figures relate simply to the number of households entered in the registers (cf. Table I).

TABLE 3. *Religious composition of the principal urban populations, circa 1520-35*

City or town	Muslims	Christians	Jews	Total
Istanbul	9,517	5,162	1,647	16,326 (1478)
Bursa	6,165	69	117	6,351
Edirne	3,338	522	201	4,061
Ankara	2,399	277	28	2,704
Athens	11	2,286	-	2,297
Tokat	818	701	-	1,519
Konya	1,092	22	-	1,114
Sivas	261	750	-	1,011
Sarajevo	1,024	-	-	1,024
Monastir	640	171	34	845
Skoplje	630	200	12	842
Sofia	471	238	-	709
Selonica	1,229	989	2,645	4,863
Serres	671	357	65	1,093
Trikkala	301	343	181	825
Larissa	693	75	-	768
Nicopolis	468	775	-	1,343

It is surprising to note that, even in the most unlikely places, there is a marked Turko-Muslim majority. This state of affairs must be due in part to

the coercive resettlements of population effected by the government.⁵ At the same time it is notable that the Muslims who lived in these towns were not, as has been thought, exclusively officials or soldiers in an army of occupation. This is shown by the few registers in which the livelihood of the persons listed is stated. The following examples illustrate the participation of Muslims in the urban economy:

(i) According to a census carried out in 1546, of the 1,427 households in Sofia, 1,171 were Muslim, 168 were Christian, 52 were Jewish and 36 were foreign, of Ragusan origin. Of the 1,171 Muslim households, 626 were headed by craftsmen (saddlers, tanners, cobblers, dyers, weavers, blacksmiths, armourers, etc.). Only 247 heads of households were soldiers, officials, men of religion or in receipt of pensions. The rest were probably agriculturalists. The 168 Christian heads of households included 110 artisans and traders; in 58 cases no information is given.

(ii) In 1546 again the town of Skoplje consisted of 1,004 Muslim, 216 Christian and 32 Jewish households. Of the 1,004 heads of Muslim households, 434 were officials, soldiers and men of religion, and 14 were entered as old or infirm. The rest consisted entirely of craftsmen and traders.

(iii) In 1454, of the 355 Muslim heads of households entered for the town of Larissa, 217 were craftsmen. In the same period, the town of Trikkala contained 255 Muslim households of which the heads of 121 were entered as craftsmen.

(iv) In 1478, not a single Jew yet lived in Salonica. Of the 837 Muslim households mentioned at this time, 584 were entered as craftsmen. By contrast, the occupation of 282 Christians is not indicated; this suggests to me that they were simply cultivators of the soil.

⁵ See my article 'Les déportations comme méthode de peuplement et de colonisation dans l'Empire Ottoman', in *Revue de la Faculté des Sciences Economiques de l'Université d'Istanbul*, xi, xiii, xv, 1953.

7. The fertile crescent, circa 1570-90

Finally Table 4 shows the population of a number of Arab provinces as given in surveys carried out between 1570 and 1590. The figures refer to households.

*TABLE 4. Population of certain Arab provinces circa
1570-90*

Province	Muslims		Christians	Jews	Total
	Settled	Nomad			
Halep	81,203	47,454	3,386	233	132,276
Trablus	34,316	4,698	11,768	307	51,089
Şam	86,369	4,062	7,867	2,068	100,186
Bagdat	39,379	24,619	4,035	603	68,636
Basra	13,464	6,197	-	-	19,661