

The Ottoman Archives As A Source For The Economic History Of The Muslim Countries

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ARCHIVE:

Term originally used to designate a building or part of a building in which collections of records and documents were housed. Its second and more frequent current use is as a term describing the collections of records and documents stored in such a place. Both definitions are now commonly encountered¹.

With the establishment of the Archives Nationales in 1789 and of the Archives Départementales in 1796, there was for the first time a unified administration of archives which embraced all extant repositories and record-producing public agencies. The second result was the implicit acknowledgement that the state was responsible for the care of its documentary heritage. The third result was the principle of accessibility of archives to the public².

The English Public Record act of 1838 brought all separate collections together and placed them under the master of the rolls. England, therefore, is the outstanding example of centralization, whereas the more usual practice is decentralization of archives to the domestic area in which they originated³.

ARCHIVE AS A SOURCE FOR THE STUDIES OF ECONOMIC HISTORY:

The economic historian, even more than his colleagues in other fields of historical inquiry, has a liking for documentary evidence - a marked

1 — See, Encyclopedia International, 1967 edition, Vol. 1, p. 555.

2 — See, Encyclopedia Britannica, 1973 edition, vol. 2, p. 326 B.

3 — See, Encyclopedia of Britannica, p. 327.

tendency to prefer archives to annals and other literature. The historians will of course be aware of the insights, and even information that books can give them, and they will appreciate the relevance to their researches of the image of a society as reflected in the works of its authors and compilers. But whenever possible they will direct their main attention to the contemporary and immediate evidence or trace of historical events, in their original form, not as transmitted-and therefore transmuted - by a literary intermediary¹.

The modern economic historians rely very largely on published and unpublished documentary and statistical materials. In the west, even the medievalists have at their disposal a mass of records, public and private, lay and ecclesiastical, central and local, on which to base their study of economic structures and economic change².

Archival material on the other hand is very much important for those who study on the history of social institutions, administration or fiscal matters, for they contain a lot of information on land-tenure, taxation and other related matters³.

IMPORTANCE OF THE OTTOMAN ARCHIVES:

No similar wealth of documents has come down to us from any other State of the Muslim Near East and Middle East, says Prof. Uriel Heyd for the Ottoman Archives⁴.

Ottoman Archives begin in the fifteenth century, and become really full in the sixteenth. For earlier periods of Middle Eastern History, and for areas outside the Ottoman Empire, there are, with certain limited exception, no archives at all. This does not mean at all that there are no documents. Considerable numbers of documents have in fact survived, and may be found in public and private collections. This point should anyhow be remembered that the states of the medieval Middle East, with the exception of Ottoman Empire, were destroyed, and their archives, ceasing to serve any practical purpose, were neglected, scattered and

1 — See, Bernard Lewis, 'Sources for the Economic History of the Middle East', Studies in the economic history of the Middle East, edited by M.A. Cook, London 1970, p. 78.

2 — See, Bernard Lewis, Sources for the Economic History of the Middle East, p. 78.

3 — See, Omer Lutfu Barkan, 'Tahrir defterlerinin istatistik verimleri hakkında bir arastirma', IV. Turk Tarih Kongresi, 10-14 Kasim 1948, p. 291.

4 — See, Uriel Heyd, Ottoman Documents on Palestine, 1552-1615 p. XV.

lost¹. The ottoman Empire was by no means the first Middle Eastern State to maintain detailed administrative records².

Prof. M.A. Cook of London University says: «No comparable archive survives for any other pre-modern Middle Eastern State³.» There is no doubt that the Ottoman Archives are very rich sources of information on economic matters.

Another important documents is the pre-Ottoman material preserved in the Ottoman Archives, most of it, unfortunately, in Ottoman copies of adaptations. Ottoman policy in a newly conquered province was usually very conservative and normally maintained, at least for a while, the existing fiscal and administrative practice⁴.

Large numbers of individual documents survive in isolation - some in the form of inscriptions, others quoted in the texts of the chronicles; but only for one period after the rise of Islam is any important body of original documents available - and the light they have shes on the period from which they derive has deepened the surrouding darkness⁵.

Although the documents in the Ottoman Archives contain very interesting and important information for the practice of the economic principles of Islam, the systematic use of the documents by Muslim economic historians is unfortunately at a very rudimentary stage.

Valuable documents in the Ottoman Archives have attracted the attentions of the European and American scholars⁶ so much so that they write several articles and books⁷ depending entirely on the materials in the archives and they have been continuously sending their Ph. D. students to do research there. They say in every occasion that the Ottoman Archives offer material of wealth and diversity which is not easily found elsewhere.

1 — Ibid., p. 81.

2 — See, Bernard Lewis, 'Studies in the Ottoman Archives-1, BSCAS, vol. xvi., part 3, p. 469.

3 — See, M.A. Cook, 'Introductory Remarks', studies in the Economic History of the Middle East, p. 160.

4 — See, Bernard Lewis, "Sources for the Economic History of the Middle East", p. 81.

5 — See, Idem, 'The Ottoman Archives as a source for the history of the Arab lands', p. 139.

6 — L. Fekete, Bernard Lewis, Uriel Heyd, Stanford J. Shaw, V.J. Parry may be mentioned among them.

7 — Uriel Heyd, The Ottoman Documents en Palestine.

THE OTTOMAN ARCHIVES:

There are two main Archives in Istanbul. The first one is the Basvekalet Arsivi (the Archives of the Prime Minister's Office) which is the central state archives of Turkey today, and Topkapi Sarayi Arsivi (the archives preserved in the Topkapi Sarayi Museum).

Apart from these two main collections in Istanbul there are some regional archives in Ankara and other cities. The most important are the Vakiflar Genel Mudurluğu Arsivi (the records of the General Directorate) in Ankara and the archives of the religious courts called Sijillat-i Sher'iy-ye¹.

Archives are compiled not for historical but administrative purposes. Ottomans therefore kept their archives very good. Every single document and bound register (daftar) was given importance and care. Documents were classified, kept and cleaned regularly and even the keepers were selected, very carefully, among the most trustworthy persons. It is narrated that on a gravestone of a keeper was written "you may give your head but may not betray a secret"².

We give here a document from the Basvekalet Arsivi showing the care and attention given to preserve the materials in the Archives in Ottoman times.

"To the honourable Minister of foreign affairs",

Among the duties should be given priority is to preserve letters, agreements, files and bound registers which have very important records on the state matters. To keep all these documents very well it is necessary to store them in a stone building. There is a good house, as you know which belong to the Prime Minister's wife. This building is now vacant and might be used for that purpose. Old letters of the late Sultans to the Sherreefs of Mecca and other leaders of foreign states, valuable registers should easily be fetched and consulted if needed. Therefore you kindly have them stored in the said building and entrust head of the Mahtar (leader of a band of music) with this duty. He should do his work with more care. It should be his duty to place the documents in the building every evening and take them out every morning. He should keep them under a very

1 — See, Sidjil in Encyclopedia of Islam.

2 — See, Omer Lutfu Barkan, Turkiyede Imparatorluk devirlerinin büyük nüfus ve arasi tahrirleri...

strict control and should not let anyone enter the building except the officers in charge. You should observe that this system will work properly¹.

The ottomans used to keep their documents in treasures (hazine) together with their most valuable things².

The war and post-war periods and the change of regime and the alphabet brought a change for the worse, and a period of neglect culminated in the sale of 200 bales of finance records to a Bulgarian paper mill as waste paper. As a result of ensuing scandal some of the material was recovered and, perhaps more important, the Turkish Government began to take the problem of the archives seriously in hand³.

Başvekalet Arsivi¹

The archives of the Prime Minister's office, the name now given to the central state archives of Turkey and of the Ottoman Empire. The formation of the Ottoman Archives begin with the rise of the Ottoman state, but the present collection, though containing a number of individual documents and registers from earlier times, dates substantially from after the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul in 1453. The record office, in Ottoman times known as the khazine-i Evrak (treasure of registers), originally consisted of two main groups of documents; the records of the Imperial Council (Divan-ı Humayun) and of the Grand Vizier's Office (Bab-ı Ali). To this core other collections were added from time to time, notably the records of the finance departments and the registers of the cadastral survey office.

A new phase in the organisation and study of the Başvealet Arsivi had begun in 1911, after the formation of the Ottoman Historical Soc-

1 — See, Plate I, (p. 11), This document is taken from the Başvekalet Arsivi, Muhimme Defteri Nr. 183, f. 4.

2 — See, Cevdet Turkey, Osmanlı Devlet Teskilatında Arşivler, Belgelerle Türk Tarihi Dergisi, Nr. 45, p. 20.

3 — See, Bernard Lewis, The Ottoman Archives as a Source for the History of the History of the Arab Lands, JRAS, 1951, p. 141.

For more information on Başvekalet Arsivi see, Mithat Sertoğlu, Muhteva Bakımından Başvekalet Arsivi, Ankara, 1955; Bernard Lewis, Başvekalet Arsivi, Encyclopedia of Islam (New Edition).

See, L. Fekete, Über Archivalien und Archivwesen in der Türkei, AO, Budapest, iii, 1953, pp. 179-206.

iety (Tarih-i Osmani Enjumeni). In 1936 Professor L. Fekete¹ was invited to advise on the methods² to be followed in these tasks.

The contents of the Basvekalet Arsivi may be divided broadly, according to the form in which they are preserved, into two groups:

- a. Ewrak: Papers,
- b. Defters: Bound registers.

The defters may be considered in three main groups:

- a. The imperial council and grand vizirate,
- b. The cadaster (Tapu), comprising the great land and population survey of the state.
- c. Finance (Maliye).

When the Ottoman Historical Society was formed the main object was to study and classify the documents. Among the millions of documents classification by subject has begun and even some interesting documents have been published in the periodical of the society³.

Several people worked for the classification of the documents. Fekete, Ali Emiri, Kamil Kepeci are among the people who worked for the classification and the classifications by their name are used by the readers in the reading room today. Classification is going on today and about 200.000 documents are classified in a year and are put in separate envelopes⁴.

(2) TOPKAPI SARAYI MUZESI ARSIVI⁵

Topkapi Saray Museum Archives has some sections as Basvekalet Arsivi. For instance one of them called Yemen Fatihî Sinan Pasa Arsivi⁶ (Archive of Sinan Pasha), which has very valuable wacf deeds and

1 — See, L. Fekete, *Über Archivalien und Archivwesen in der Türkei*, AO, Budapest, iii, 1953, pp. 179-206.

2 — Today there are several classifications in Basvekalet arsivi and the one made by Fekete called Fekete Tasnifi is still in use in the Archive.

3 — The name of the periodical is "Tarih-i Osmani Enjumeni Mecmuası" and later was changed as "Turk Tarihi Enjumeni Mecmuası". Mr. Abdurrahman, Seref was the official historiographer and the president of the society. See his valuable article in the bibliography.

4 — See, Cavdet Turkey, *Osmanlı Devlet Teşkilatında Arşivler*, p. 21.

5 — For more information and an alphabetical index of the materials see, *Topkapi Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi Kılavuzu* edited by Tahsin Öz, I-II, İstanbul, 1938-40.

6 — For more information and a list of the section, see, Tahsin Öz, "Topkapi Sarayı Müzesinde Yemen Fatihî Sinan Pasa Arşivi", *Bellekten*, 1946, pp. 171-193.

other documents. Besides court documents (such as Edirne Sicillat-i Ser'iye defterleri, a collection of the defters of the religious court in the city of Edirne which was once the capital of the Ottomans), the collection includes correspondence with the provinces on matters concerning imperial household and the foundations. There are numerous account reports submitted by the mutevellis (administrators) of a foundation.

(3) OTHER ARCHIVES:

a. **Vakiflar Genel Mudurlugu Arsivi** in Ankara. Archive of the waqf (foundation) directorate. There are copies of the foundation deeds in bound registers and also some original waqfiyes (foundation deeds) most of them written in Arabic and some of them Turkish and Persian.

b. SER'IYE SICILLERI

Archives of the Religious Courts in the Provinces. These are regional archives and stored in different places today. For example Bursa Sijils¹ are in Bursa city Museum, Edirne Sijils are in Topkapi Saray archives, Istanbul sijils are in Istanbul Religious building.

IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS FOR THE ECONOMIC HISTORY:

(1) DEFTER-İ KHAKANI OR TAPU DEFTERLERİ¹

The collection of registers in which were entered, during the Ottoman period, the results of the surveys made every 30 or 40 years until the beginning of the 11th/17th century, in accordance with old administrative and fiscal practice.

Defter-i Khakani's are fairly well classified and a greater part of them is to be found in the archives (Basvekalet Arsivi) in Istanbul where there are 1072 volumes, covering most of the provinces of the Ottoman State. Most of the surviving defters seem to have been transferred to Ankara where they are kept in the Tapu ve Kadastro Mudurlugu. Defters begin with a Qanunname² a codification of the fiscal law and custom of the province.

¹ For Bursa Sijils see, Halil İnalcık, Bursa, Bellekten, 1947, pp. 693-708. See Bibliography. For Adana Sijils see, Naci Kum, Adana Ser'i mahkeme sicilleri üzerinde araştırmalar, T.T.K., Ankara 10-14 Kasım, 1948, pp. 362-36.

1 — See, Omer Lütfü Barkan, EI (New Edition).

2 — More information on Qanunname will come further.

These registers contain in the main first instance a listing of the state's adult male population; the entry for each person states his father's name, his legal status¹, the duties and privileges of his economic or social position, and the extent of his land². The registers also give much information regarding land use (arable, orchard, vineyard, rice paddy), the members 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 affected), fisheries and mines.

The registers make it possible to establish a 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 history³.

Another classification maintained throughout the defters in that of religion. There were Muslims, Christians and Jews, of which the last two paid certain additional taxes. Their separate registration was therefore necessary for fiscal purposes, and the registers enable us to determine the numbers and location of Muslim, Jews and Christians throughout the country⁴.

(2) MUHIMME DEFTERİ (DEFTER OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS)⁵

Among the most important materials in the archives, from the Economic History point of view, is a large number of decrees which have survived in a kind of official «letter-book» called Muhimme Defteri or, in full, umur-i Muhimme Defteri. It contains copies of

1 — Each householder is shown as married or single, and his religion is also indicated. Disabled men, who are exempt from taxation, are also designated as such. In accordance with the Hanafi Law, disabled dhimmis were also exempt.

2 — More information on this might be found in: Omer Lutfu Barkan, "Les grands recensements de la population et de territoire de l'empire Ottoman et les registres impériaux d statistique", *Revue de la Faculté de Sciences Economique de l'Université Istanbul*, II, 1940. Also see other articles of this author in the bibliography.

3 — See, Omer Lutfu Barkan, "Research on the Ottoman fiscal surveys", p. 163.

4 — See, Bernard Lewis; *Studies in the Ottoman Archives-I*, p. 476.

5 — See, Bernard Lewis, *The Ottoman Archives as a source for history of the Arab Lands*, p. 142.

(Firmans and berats, etc.) of the Ottoman Sultans addressed to officials in all parts of the state, and until the seventeenth century, also of the Sultan's letters (name) to foreign rulers. The existing volumes of the register cover a period of over 300 years, from the middle of the sixteenth to the second half of the nineteenth century, and contain copies of more than 150.000 or perhaps 200.000 decrees¹.

The Muhimme Defteri first attracted the attention of scholars a few years before the outbreak of the first World War. It is not known when the Muhimme Defteri was first established. The Turkish archives (Basvekalet Arsivi) in Istanbul possesses a series of over 250 volumes of the register and its supplements which cover the period from 961/1554 to 1300/1882-3; a day-by-day record of correspondence, containing the text of outgoing communications of all kinds. These are in simple chronological order, without any classification whatever. This lack of any classification of the entries in the Muhimme Defteri, makes the search for material on a certain region or a certain matter or rather time-consuming undertaking¹.

As far as fiscal matters are concerned, these defters are very important sources. Almost all decrees in the Muhimme Defteri volumes are written in Turkish. There are also relatively few Arabic documents².

3 RUUS DEFTERLERİ:

The collection of registers which contain berats for office holders and awarded by the Ruus Office. They are altogether 337 volumes and registered in different classifications³.

The oldest of these Defters is dated 953/1547 and the newest is dated 1326/1908. It means that they cover a period of over 350 years⁴. For the Economic History and history of Ottoman Law they are very valuable sources.

1 — See, Uriel Heyd, Ottoman Documents on Palestine, p. xv.

1 — See, Uriel Heyd, Ottoman Documents on Palestine, p. 6.

2 — Ibid, p. 30

3 — 71 volumes of them are in Basvekalet Arsivi Kamil Kepeci classification between the numbers 208 and 279. Volume numbers 703-705 are in the same classification. 261 volumes of Ruus Defteri are shown in the catalogue II. of Mahzen Defteri. For more information see, Mithat Sertoglu, Basvekalet Arsivi, p. 30-31.

4 — For more information on Ruus registers and their importance as a source for fiscal matters. See, Nejat Goyunç, 'XVI. Yuzyilda Ruus ve Onemi', IUEI, Tarih Dergisi, 1967, xxii, pp. 17-34. For this point see, p. 18.

(4) Other important documents:

a. **Qanunname.** A codification of the fiscal law and custom of a province. Defter-i Khakani's often begin with a Qanunname. They were practical documents issued as guides to administrative usage¹. There were different Qanunname's for every province and they divided into chapters and articles which clearly shows that they are prepared according to Islamic Law².

b. **Wakfiye.** (A deed or trust in mortmain)

There are numerous wakfiye's in the archives, libraries and museums. Many of them are written in Arabic. Some of the waqfs recorded in the registers date back to the Mamluk period, while some of the oldest were founded by Saladin and other Ayyubids. Waqfs could consist of villages, with their land and revenues, shops and houses in towns, or of certain taxes, the proceeds of which had been consecrated by a ruler to a particular purpose.

There are about 21 of them in Basvekalet Arsivi³, 16 of them in Sinan Pasa Arsivi⁴. A lot of them are in the main Archive in Topkapi Sarayi Museum and Turk ve Islam Eserleri Muzesi (Turkish and Islamic Art Museum) in Istanbul, Vakiflar Genel Mudurlugu Arsivi (The Archive of the General Directorate of Waqfs) in Ankara, in Ankara, and in several libraries all over Turkey. They are very valuable sources for the studies in many fields including Economic History of the Muslim Countries.

1 — Some of the Qanunname texts are printed; See, 'Omer Lutfu Barkan, 'XV. ve XVI. Asirlarda Turkiye'de Zira'i Ekonominin Hukuki ve Mali Esasları', 50 Qanunname texts are given in the end of this book. There are also some of them in the libraries, for example see, MSS. Veliyuddin Nr. 1970; Topkapi Saray Museum Revan Kosku Library, Nr. 1935.

2 — See, Halil Inalcik, 'Osmanlılarda Ralyyet Rsumu,' Belleten, 1959, p. 576 (foot-note).

3 — For the list of Waqfiye's in Basvekalet Arsivi See, Mithat Sertoğlu, Muhteva Bakimindan Basvekalet Arsivi, p. 77.

4 — For the list of Wakfiye's in Sinan Pasha Archive (A section in Topkapi Sarayi Archive) See, Tahsin Oz, 'Topkapi Sarayi Muzesinde Yemen Fatih Sinan Pasá Arsivi', Belleten, 1946, pp. 171-193.

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