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Demographic Structure of the 18th Century Ottoman Rule in the Balkans: A Study of Judicial Records (*Qāḍī Sijil*) in Manastir

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ABSTRACT

Based on the Ottomans' archival materials, it has become incumbent upon the Ottoman or Balkan historian to investigate and analyze as objectively as possible the history of Ottoman rule in this region. Among all the Ottoman archives' documents, those of the judicial records (Shari'ah or Qadi Sijils) are considered to be the most important. In them, we have both a reliable objective source and a chronology of history concerning the Balkans and other regions. These records were not merely compilations of bureaucratic, administrative, and verbose data relating only to judicial, social, architectural, economic, and agricultural undertones. These facts are already explicitly stated in the Sijils themselves. It is, however, implicit facts which are of great importance and which are of enormous historical significance. The demographic structure is among the most complicated and disputed issues among the historians of religion and social sciences. Considering the objective data found in the Shari'ah Sijils, particularly to those about the most important district of the Ottomans in the Balkans, namely Manastir (today Bitola), the subject of demography will be analyzed as objectively as possible. Besides, in this article, both explicit and implicit facts will be studied.

Keywords

Demography; Muslim and Non-Muslim Society; The Balkans; Shari'ah/Qadi Sijils; Judicial Records; The Ottoman history; Archival materials.

INTRODUCTION

As a consequence of its geopolitical position, the Balkan Peninsula, through the ages, displayed a distinct historical and cultural homogeneity. A history of the Balkans in general is an inseparable part of Ottoman history as well as Islamic civilization at large. The common history of the Muslim dominion of the Balkans is documented and preserved in millions of written records presently kept in the Ottoman archives in Turkey, and in various Balkan countries.

During the first half of the 20th century, historians of the Balkan peoples have, on the one hand, evaluated centuries of Ottoman domination in a uniformly negative and often hostile manner. They have pointed out that the Balkan people were cut off from the rest of Europe and from its important development adding that they were also prevented from developing their own civilizations and institutions. The historiography of this period during these centuries was interpreted in a nationalistic and often myopic view. On the other hand, some Western studies have been useful. However, these studies had one major drawback in the sense that they had no access to Ottoman sources or were linguistically unqualified to use them. In their reliance on previous studies, on each other, on the work of Balkan historians, and on available materials in languages they had familiarity with in Western European archives, these authors, nevertheless, managed to produce some good but very limited works (Sugar, 1977).

In the beginning of the second half of the 20th century opinions began to shift. Historians of the Balkan peoples began to utilize their archives much more extensively than previously practiced. The result has been a much more scholarly and objective study, which has shed new light on the Ottoman period. In the West some qualified scholars also began to write based on these archive materials and their numbers have steadily increased (Sugar, 1977).

Based on archival materials left by the Ottomans, it has become incumbent upon the Ottoman or Balkan historian to investigate and analyze as objectively as possible the history of Ottoman rule in this region. Among all the documents contained in the Ottoman archives those of the *Qādī Sijils* or *Shari'ah Sijils* (Judicial Records) are considered to be the most important. In them we have both a reliable objective source and a chronology of history with regard to the Balkans and other regions.

However, the question may be raised as what are these records and the most significantly why these records are considered the most important source for the Ottoman history, especially with reference to the Balkan region. Literally, the term *sijil* derives from Arabic, and means writing, recording, document, scroll, book, etc (Baalbaki, 1994; Redhouse, 1890). However, the technical meaning of the term refers to books that contain all kinds of judicial matters concerning the people, the decisions of *qādīs* (judges) and all sorts of other writings either directly or indirectly related to the court. These books have several titles, where they are either referred to as *sijillāti shar'iyyah* (pl. *sijillāt* and sin. *sijil*), or *qādī sijils*, or *qādī daftars*, or mahkamah daftars, etc. In the Balkan languages, for instance, it has been used as *Kadiski Sidžili*, *Šerijatski Sidžili*, etc. Amongst all these, the most common usage is that of *qādī sijils*. Therefore, in this study, this title will always be referred to as such with reference to these books.

The *qādī sijils* of the Ottoman Empire were books compiled at law courts throughout the empire. Although this sort of book antedates the Ottoman period in Muslim history, however, the only books known to have survived to the present day were compiled in Ottoman courts (El-Nahal, 1979). The *qādī sijils* were local court record books generally written in single handwritten copies. After compilation, they were preserved at many sites in courts, used and consulted for reference occasionally over one or two generations. They were then left accumulating the dust of centuries. They were preserved locally, where some were stolen or destroyed in wars, while others were burned or became rotten from exposure. Some cities have preserved many while others only a few (Ongan, 1958).

Demographic structure is among the most complicated and disputed issue among the historians of religion and social sciences. Taking into consideration the objective data found in the *Shari'ah Sijils*, particularly to those pertaining to the most important district of the Ottomans in the Balkans namely Manastir (today Bitola), the subject of demography will be analyzed as objectively as possible. The district of Manastir is known to be the first and major area of the Ottoman rule in Europe and the Balkan region in particular. It was the seat of the Ottoman empire for almost six centuries in Southeast Europe with multi-religious and multi-ethnic society comprising of Muslims, Jews, Christians and local indigenous beliefs. In addition, in this article, both explicit and implicit facts will be studied. The subject will be studied from two major perspectives: a) quarters and settlements and b) households and inhabitants, accordingly.

DISCUSSION

Quarters and Settlements

Practically every city in the world has a business district, good and bad residential neighborhoods, industrial districts or suburbs, parks and recreational centers, “ghettos”, and others. The combination of these areas determines the unique nature of each city. In older European cities, whose histories date back to antiquity or to medieval times, it is still possible to point to the old part of the city which was built around some fortification or royal residence, separated from the new parts of the city by a belt of major avenues or boulevards that follow the lines of the protective walls of the old city (Sugar, 1977). During that time, cities in the Balkans followed such as pattern almost without exception, built up around the acropolis of ancient Greek cities or around significant geographic topography.

In the earlier periods of Islam, the same was also with regard to Muslim cities, of course Muslim cities built according to a code of aesthetics inherent in Islam. The early Muslim tradition aimed at city planning was the foundation used in building the structures of cities under Ottoman rule. Hence conquered cities began to take on a new appearance, aptly called “the tradition of the Muslim-Ottoman City” (Özdemir, 1986; YILMAZÇELİK, 1996). This is clear from the architectural characteristics of cities that were established during Ottoman rule. Generally speaking, mosques, madrasahs (school), *bedestens* (covered bazaars), market places (*çarşı*), public baths (*hamam*), citadels (*kale*), and quarters (*mahalle*) were among the main characteristics and components of the Ottoman city.

Like many cities in different communities, each city within the Ottoman Empire comprised basic local units called quarters or *mahalle*. These *mahalle* were usually built around individual religious edifices (i.e. mosques, masjids, etc.) or central markets (*bedesten*). Each *mahalle* represented a separate and distinct community, often with its own rituals and way of life. Its inhabitants were linked by a common religion, economic pursuit, or by other factors that distinguished them from their neighbors. The places of worship or the market formed the core of the *mahalle*, which was maintained and expanded when necessary through the cooperation of all its residents. It usually had its own fountain, school, mosque or church; and if it was also a trade center, there were *khâns*, factories, and the

like, which were constructed and maintained by foundations contributing to or established by the local Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants alike as well as by the guilds to which they belonged.

Usually, it was the *mahalle*'s religious leaders be they imams, rabbis, or priests, etc. – who was the *mahalle*'s officially designated representative in the government, in charge of receiving decrees from the sultan and sending out criers to proclaim them to the populace. They were also obliged to receive complaints whenever any residents of the *mahalle* violated the law. As time passed, neighboring *mahalles* with common or similar religious and/or economic pursuits tended to group themselves into districts, particularly when non-Muslims were involved, and this was encouraged by the state to ease the task of supervising diverse groups (Shaw & Shaw, 1977).

After the Ottomans conquered major parts of the Balkans, they did not alter the old patterns in the cities they conquered. They did however alter the character of the focal points by making them Muslim-Ottoman cities, and gave rise to new focal points namely, schools and markets. In cities that were established or that appeared spontaneously around Ottoman focal points the same patterns were copied. What differentiated any given city under Ottoman rule from what it had been prior to conquest was that the divisions existing between districts were institutionalized and made more strict and explicit. The repeatedly mentioned Ottoman custom of arranging everything in strict hierarchical order, producing regulations for everything, was also reflected in their cities. In a sense European cities within the Empire took on a so-called "Oriental-Muslim-Ottoman" character (Sugar, 1977).

The city was really nothing more than a conglomeration of more or less self-contained *mahalles* assembled around a common core. Each *mahalle* was separated from the other either by natural obstacles like ravines or by man-made walls. In Balkan cities each *mahalle* contained an average of between twenty-five to fifty houses. This figure does not however include the large cities whose numbers are considerably larger (Todorovski & Tozi, 2000). In addition, each *mahalle* had its own night watchmen and was administered by its own headman, usually a religious figure. If the *mahalle* was large enough, it contained its own places of worship for both Muslims and non-Muslims, coffee houses, public baths (*hamam*), a local market, etc.

The city's center was clearly distinguishable by the major mosques, large covered bazaars, a citadel perhaps, and even a large open square. Furthermore, numerous building regulations and zoning laws were strictly enforced in each *mahalle*, giving the Ottoman city its particular milieu and characteristic. Moreover, the *mahalles* were along narrow and winding streets, and the cities were clean, as noted by most of the travelers who traveled across the European provinces of Ottoman (Sugar, 1977).

Based on the *qādī sijils*, the *sâl-nâmes*, the travelers' accounts and other sources, Manastir may be considered a typical Ottoman city, which contained the characteristics and components most associated with the notion Oriental-Muslim-Ottoman (Sugar, 1977). Since those structures were found primarily in various quarters (*mahalle*) of the city, one is able to describe the demographic conditions of Manastir, which were well established throughout Ottoman rule. As a large city in Rumelia, during Ottoman rule, particularly in the 18th century, Manastir had many different religious and ethnic groups. On the one hand those people belonging to one of the groups lived collectively together in a *mahalle*, and on the other hand there were people not belonging to any specific group living together in a single *mahalle*.

The number of *mahalles* in Manastir during the late 15th century was small. Some of them were: Demirci Yusuf, Ismail, Kara Hamza, Burekci Ali, Alâeddin, Tabak Devlethân, Saraç Davud, Dabijiv, etc (Sugar, 1977). Later on, during the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century, due to the increase of the number of inhabitants and new settlers, their numbers doubled. According to the *sijils* the *mahalles* of Manastir during that period were as follows: 1) Azab Beg, 2) Ali Çavuş/Çavuş Ali, 3) Bâlî Beg/Bâlî Voyvoda, 4) Dimeşki Beg, 5) Egri Kaş, 6) Emir, 7) Emir Beg, 8) Emir Çelebi, 9) Firûz Beg, 10) Hamza Beg, 11) Hacci Beg, 12) Ogul Paşa, 13) Sinan Beg, 14) Sohta Beg, 15) Suhte Hoca, 16) Suhteler, 17) Tabak, 18) Hasan Beg, 19) Girnçar, 20) Iskender Beg, 21) Iyne Beg, 22) Kara Tabak, 23) Kara Oglan, 24) Karaca Beg/Kara Beg, 25) Kasim Çelebi, 26) Kepek Beg, 27) Koca Kâdi, 28) Kurd-Çavuş, 29) Turbe, 30) Yahya Kâdi, 31) Yahudi Hâne, 32) Yakub Beg, 33) Yeni Mahalle, 34) Yeni Avli (Stojanovski, Gorgiev, & na Makedonija, 1995).

In addition, there were several other *mahalles* in Manastir in addition to the ones mentioned, which emerged during the second half the 18th century. Interestingly however some of the *mahalles* mentioned are not stated in the *sijils* of this period. These ones, which are stated during this period, are as follows: 1) Ali Çavuş, 2) Azab Beg, 3) Bâlî Voyvoda, 4) Dimeşki Beg, 5) Emir, 6) Hamza Beg, 7) Firûz Beg, 8) Iyne Beg, 9) Kasim Çelebi, 10) Kara Debbâg, 11) Kara Oglan, 12) Ogul Paşa, 13) Sinan Beg, 14) Temişvar Beg, 15) Yakub Beg, 16) Zindanci (Shari'ah Sijils, 1873, pts. 54–77).

It is quite possible that the *mahalles* in Manastir numbered more than the previously given figure, but only these are stated in the *qādī sijils* for that period in time. In addition, one should bear it in mind that not all these *mahalles* remained static, from time to time there were either changes made with regard to the names, some of them did not exist earlier but emerged in later periods, or some existed earlier but changes were later made to their names, etc. In order to determine the time period in which a *mahalle* emerged later is relatively easy. Unfortunately dating those *mahalles* that had undergone changes to their names are hard to determine with a relative degree of accuracy. As an example with reference to the former, the *mahalles* Temişvar Beg, Sohte Hoca, Suhteler, Turbe, Zindanci and few others emerged in later periods, during the late 17th or 18th centuries.

It is clear that the *mahalles* in Manastir mostly bore the names of people. It is apparent that those people were either high ranking officials, *'ulamās*, wealthy philanthropists, or some other prominent figures. Many of the names of districts remain in the present day Balkans, particularly in Macedonian, where the cities even now remind us of the old *mahalles*. In addition, the Jews of Manastir had their own *mahalles* and settlement areas during the earlier periods, namely Yahudi Hâne mahallesi and Büyük Avli mahallesi. Their settlements were located on the left banks of the river Dragor, covering a large area around the famous bedesten of Manastir. In later centuries, their settlements extended to other *mahalles*, namely Iyne Beg mahallesi and Emir Çelebi mahallesi, where they lived side by side with other groups belonging to different religions, Muslims and Christians alike (Dimovski-Colev, 1993).

The numerous cases recorded in the *qādi sijils*, not only during the second half of the 18th century but also before this period, show that both Muslims and non-Muslims (*dhimmī*) lived together for centuries in the same *mahalles*, side by side in Manastir as well as in villages around it. For instance, the houses of Mitre and Sokol both *dhimmīs* were located next to the houses of Abdi and Fatime both Muslims. The house of Ilko a *dhimmī* was right next to the houses of Osman Çelebi and Pervâne-Zâde (Stojanovski et al., 1995).

Households and Inhabitants

In order for city life in Manastir to be understood well, one must first analyze the demographic conditions of the population living there in detail. This will facilitate solving many social and economic problems of the society. Ö. Lutfi Barkan claims that:

“History, until recently, while explaining the characteristics of various eras and civilizations in the past, not only did not take into account the demography of these eras and civilizations but also neglected it. This has, for us, led to a lack in terms of analytical knowledge for many events of the past” (Ömer Lutfi Barkan, n.d.).

The demography, he further illustrates, can provide more information to us and facilitate the way to know about the society's socio-economic and military problems of a region in terms of: “the mass of population, density and dynamism; its appearance in a geographical expansion and location; opportunity of developing the place and at what pace; its rates of population increase, ages, sexes, activities and so forth” (Ömer Lutfi Barkan, n.d.).

Although a demographic study of a region is very important, it is extremely difficult to give detailed information as far as Manastir is concerned with regard to its demographic conditions during Ottoman rule. There are two reasons for this: first, based on available data, there is not a single official document referring in the population census of the area until the Tanzimât period; second, due to economic, political, military and other issues, the population movements, migration and diaspora occurred frequently during this period (Sugar, 1977; Vakalopoulos, 1973). In spite of this some limited assumptions may be made.

After the establishment of Ottoman rule in Southeastern Europe, the numbers of both Muslim and non-Muslim (that include Jews, Christians and others) inhabitants increased sharply in most cities in the Balkans, including Manastir. In the early 15th century, the number of all households was 150 (Todorovski & Tozi, 2000). After a few decades, during the early 1460s, there were 463 households in Manastir altogether, out of which 278 were Muslim, 160 were non-Muslim (*dhimmī*), 10 bachelors and 15 widowed households (Stojanovski et al., 1995). As a result the population was 2,265, out of which 1,390 were Muslims while 875 were non-Muslims (Todorovski & Tozi, 2000). Immediately following this, there was a slight change. The number of households during the 1470s began to decline. The number of Muslim households fell to 259 while the number of non-Muslim households increased to 185. Therefore, altogether there were 444, leaving a population of 2,100, out of which 1,300 were Muslims while 800 were non-Muslims. Half a century later, during the late first half of the 16th century, the number of both Muslim and non-Muslim households almost doubled, reaching between 756 and 845 (Inalcık, 1993; Todorovski & Tozi, 2000). The population numbered approximately between 3,780 and 4,225 (Ömer Lutfi Barkan, 1957). In addition, there were approximately 200 Jewish households in Manastir during the 1520s. This number was later confirmed by Rabbi Samuel Namais who then, in 1591, transmitted this figure to Lorenzo Bernardo, a traveler (Matkovski, 1983; Vakalopoulos, 1973).

After a century, during the late 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries, the number of households rose to almost 1,500. Having a population of around 6,000 (Ömer Lutfi Barkan, 1957). Out of this number, approximately 58 percent were Muslims, 15 percent Christians, 22 percent Jews and 5 percent others (Todorovski & Tozi, 2000). Soon afterward, during the early 1660s, the number of all households in the city of Manastir was 3,000. This is double the previous number (Stojanovski et al., 1995).

As for the period that is currently of interest, perhaps the only helpful and important data on approximate population rate of Manastir may be based on the documents contained in the *qādi sijils* bearing the heading “avâriz ve nuzûl”, which was a tax collection imposed on the *hânes* (house-holds). Therefore, the *hânes* that were subjected to “avâriz ve nuzûl”, may be taken as supportive data for the population rate. However, before proceeding a few questions regarding “*hâne*” may be asked, for instance: What can be understood from “*hâne*”, in this context? What

is the accepted pattern in determining which “*hânes*” were to be subjected to “*avâriz ve nuzûl*”? Which and how many “*hânes*” were considered actual where the “*avâriz ve nuzûl*” was imposed?

The *hâne* in this regard was not only a household where single family lived, it also signified the person owning real estate and/or lands, bachelors and married people, and so forth. Hence it did not signify an actual household in the ordinary sense, but rather a group of people in general was considered a household. The “number of actual households” in one *hâne*, which was subject to “*avâriz ve nuzûl*”, differed from place to place. Sometimes it was three, sometimes five, sometimes ten, sometimes fifteen and sometimes more than fifteen (Ömer Lütfi Barkan, n.d.; Brands, 1967). As far as Manastir is concerned, the “number of actual households” in one *hâne* cannot be known with any degree of certitude. Therefore, the minimum number of ten and the maximum number of fifteen will be assumed to calculate the approximate population of the city. This means that one *hâne* was equal either to ten or fifteen “actual households” (Ömer Lütfi Barkan, n.d.).

In addition, an approximation of the population rate in the Ottoman Empire during the 16th century was made by O. Lutfi Barkan and other researchers. They assumed each “actual household” to be equivalent to five people, meaning one “actual household” was multiplied five times. Many historians during the early 19th century have used the same assumptions (Özdemir, 1986). Hence the same numbers will be used as a basis to approximate the population rate of Manastir for the period currently under study.

TABLE I. POPULATION OF MANASTIR

No.	Year	“ <i>Hânes</i> ” subjected to “ <i>avâriz ve nuzûl</i> ”	“ <i>Actual households</i> ” 10-15	Total approximate population (after being multiplied by five)
1	1170 (1756/1757) ¹	258.5	2,585-3,877.5	between 12,925-19,387.5
2	1171 (1757/1758) ²	249	2,490-3,735	between 12,450-18,675
3	1172 (1758) ³	249	2,490-3,375	between 12,450-18,675
	1172-1173 (1758-1759) ⁴	247.5	2,475-3,712.5	between 12,375-18,562.5
5	1189 (1775/1776) ⁵	150	1,500-2,250	between 7,500-11,250
6	1191 (1777) ⁶	179.5	1,795-2,692.5	between 8,975-13,462.5
7	1207 (1792/1793) ⁷	95	950-1,425	between 4,750-7,125
8	1212-1213 (1797-1798) ⁸	112.5	1,125-1,687.5	between 5,625-8,437.5
9	1213 (1798) ⁹	76	760-1,140	between 3,800-5,700
10	1214 (1799/1800) ¹⁰	69	690-1,035	between 3,450-5,175

Source: Shari’ah Sijil

Before proceeding to the full data of this period, an example of the approximate population can be given for the sake of better clarification and the methodology used. In the document of “*avâriz ve nuzûl*” dated 1171 (1757-1758), the number of *hânes* in Manastir subjected to taxes were 249 (Shari’ah Sijils, 1873, pts. 54-13a-14b-1). If one *hâne* contained ten “actual households”, then there were 2,490 altogether ($249 \times 10 = 2,490$). If each “actual household” were multiplied by five (i.e. the number of inhabitants in an “actual household”), then there were 12,450 people ($2,490 \times 5 = 12,450$). So this may be considered to be an approximate population of Manastir. If the same formula is applied to fifteen “actual households” (i.e. one *hâne* contains fifteen “actual households”), such as $249 \times 15 = 3,735$ then $3,735 \times 5 = 18,675$, then this number may be considered to be an approximate population. Consequently, Manastir’s population between 1757 and 1758 was approximately between 12,450 and 18,675 inhabitants. However, it should be noted that while trying to find out an approximate population of Manastir the numbers ten and fifteen per “actual household” are only an approximation. Below, based on the above-mentioned methodology, is a table showing the approximate “population” of Manastir during the second half of the 18th century will be given and it is as follow in table 1.

¹ Sijil: #54-9b-11a-3, (see the document 53, section of the documents).

² Sijil: #54-13a-b-1 and #54-34a-35a-1, (see the document 54, section of the documents).

³ Sijil: #54-22a-b-1 and #54-23a-25a-1, (see the documents 55 and 56, section of the documents).

⁴ Sijil: #54-26a-27a-2, (see the document 57, section of the documents).

⁵ Sijil: #60-59b-1.

⁶ Sijil: #62-10b-1, (see the document 58, section of the documents).

⁷ Sijil: #69-14b-1, (see the document 59, section of the documents).

⁸ Sijil: #76-58b-1.

⁹ Sijil: #76-43a-44a-1.

¹⁰ Sijil: #76-34b-1.

CONCLUSION

The population in Manastir during the second half of the 18th century, as seen from the table above, fluctuated. In the first decade the population was at its highest, then in the following decades it began to decline. Around the end of the third decade it increased slightly, but then continued to slide. Unfortunately, it is not evidently known as to why the population continued to decline. This was not only the case with *Manastir*, but with major cities of the Balkans, where their population declined drastically. It is very possible that this decline, as it was indicated, was due to economic, political, military, or other causes, like population movements, migration and diaspora that frequently occurred during this period, as well as the Ottoman-Russian war during the last quarter of the 18th century (1768-1774). In addition, it is very difficult to determine either the exact or the approximate percentage of Muslims and non-Muslims in Manastir during this period.

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