

## THE OTTOMAN STATE AND SEMI-NOMADIC GROUPS ALONG THE OTTOMAN DANUBIAN SERHAD (FRONTIER ZONE) IN THE LATE 15<sup>TH</sup> AND THE FIRST HALF OF THE 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES: CHALLENGES AND POLICIES

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The main subject of this article is the relationship between the Ottoman state and semi-nomadic groups in the Ottoman Danubian frontier zone (*serhad*) in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Taking the two extremities of the Danubian frontier zone – the provinces of Smederevo in Serbia and Silistre in the northeastern Balkans – as case studies, the article compares the ways in which the Ottoman state dealt with semi-nomadic Vlachs at one end of the frontier zone and Turcoman *yürüks* (and related groups) at the other. Placing the subject in the broader context of the historical development of the Danubian frontier zone, the author analyzes the Ottoman state's changing policies toward these two groups. Taking into account the largely different historical legacies and demographic make-ups, the article analyzes the many commonalities (as well as some important differences) in the way the Ottoman government integrated such groups in its administrative structure. It highlights the process in which such semi-nomadic groups, traditionally utilized by the Ottoman state as auxiliary soldiers, were gradually “tamed” by the state in the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, becoming gradually sedentarized and losing their privileged status.

**Keywords:** Ottoman, frontier, 16<sup>th</sup> century, semi-nomads, Vlachs, Yürüks

The frontier and (pastoral) nomadism are two concepts that have fascinated (Middle Eastern and) Ottomanist historians from the very conception of these fields of historical inquiry. While in world historiography the frontier has been conceptualized in a great number of ways – as a zone of separation or contact, zone of settlement, as a “barrier”, or a linear demarcation delimiting the extent of political authority (Power, 1999, 1–12), in Ottoman historiography the frontier in the early modern period has traditionally been perceived as an active expansion frontier zone. The Ottoman frontier zone conceptualized as *uc* (lit. “end”, “extremity”, often translated into English as “marches” or “marchlands”) in the late 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and more often as *serhad* in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, has been viewed

as a part and parcel of the Ottoman *ghaza* (Holy War against the infidel) ideology. In this context “the Ottoman frontier against Christendom therefore must serve principally as the stage on which the *ghazi* drama is continually played out” (Heywood, 1999, 232). Central to this conceptualization of the expansionist Ottoman frontier based on Paul Wittek’s ‘*ghaza* thesis’ (Wittek, 1938) is the understanding that the continuous expansion of the frontier very much determined the empire’s social and economic structures and the predominance of its military class (Agoston, 2003, 15). The Ottoman frontier in the process of its expansion at the expense of Christendom was also a zone of mutual adaptation of conquerors and conquered – a process of intense cultural and material exchange and negotiation of identities (Kafadar, 1995, 62–90). It was in this process of exchange and negotiation that the Ottomans – famed for their political pragmatism – articulated their essential mechanisms of political and administrative control. As the frontier was continuously moving farther, lands that once had been part of the frontier zone would gradually become part of the ‘core’ (or hinterland) Ottoman territories. In fact, as the Ottoman state itself originated as a frontier principality in northwestern Anatolia ca. 1300 (it did not acquire a true ‘metropolis’ till the conquest of Constantinople in 1453), all Ottoman territories in the Balkans (and, with certain limitations, in Anatolia as well) had once been part of the frontier zone.

While certainly of no smaller importance, the role of pastoral nomads in the history of the Ottoman state has received much less attention. Wittek made a distinction between early Ottoman *ghazis* and *pastoral* Turcoman nomads whereby he saw the latter as playing a subordinate role – following victorious Ottoman warriors for the faith into newly conquered territories (Wittek, 1938, 25) – given the current state of the field in the social sciences Wittek would not point out that the early Ottoman *ghazis* were, for the most part, pastoral nomads. While the connection between pastoral nomads and pre-modern state formation has been well recognized in the broader Middle Eastern historical discourse (Lapidus, 1990), there are only a few well-known monographs dealing with this issue in Ottomanist historiography (Gökbilgin, 1957; Orhonlu, 1963; Lindner, 1983; Kasaba, 2009). In his work Lindner discusses the early Ottoman principality’s transformation from a semi-nomadic chieftaincy to a sedentary agriculturalist state and following that, analyses the bureaucratic Ottoman state’s policies that aimed at the suppression of pastoral nomads in Anatolia, as the latter, having been once “valued military specialists” (Lindner, 1983, 105) who played a crucial role in bringing the Ottoman state into existence, had become a liability in the context of the development of the Ottoman centralist imperial enterprise by the mid-sixteenth century. If this process received attention in other studies, it has usually been reduced to the analysis of state-nomad relations in Ottoman Anatolia and the Arab provinces (Murphey, 1984; Orhonlu, 1963). The one well-known monograph that deals with Ottoman Turcoman (semi-)nomads in the Balkans provides valuable empirical

data, but does little in the way of conceptually integrating the incorporation of Balkan Turcoman pastoralists into the broader framework of Ottoman state-formation (Gökbilgin, 1957). As for non-Turcoman Balkan pastoralists, such as the Vlachs, their history has been treated more narrowly as a part of the respective 'national histories', in the case of Vlachs in the western Balkans – Yugoslav, Serbian, and Bosnian history (Bojanić-Lukač, 1971; Đurđev, 1984; Filipović, 1974, 1983). The most recent work on the Ottoman Empire and its nomads presents an evolutionary perspective and argues that it was only in the modern period that the Ottoman state pursued systematic policies aimed at controlling and sedentarizing nomadic and semi-nomadic groups (Kasaba, 2009).

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This paper will deal with a specific geographic and thematic aspect of the Ottoman Danubian *serhad* (frontier zone) in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (partly venturing into the 1560s as well). Looking at two geographic extremes of this frontier zone – the Ottoman *sancak* (province) of Smederevo (Tr. Semendire) in north-central Serbia in the west and the *sancak* of Silistre (mod. Silistra) in the east, which largely encompassed the historic region of Dobrudja in modern Bulgaria and Romania, I will make some remarks, in broad strokes at this stage, about the patterns of settlement, demographic transformation, colonization and conversion to Islam and, broadly speaking, Ottoman population management along the Ottoman Danubian frontier zone, with an emphasis on the countryside, i.e. the rural population and the balance between sedentary and (semi-)nomadic populations. I will focus specifically on the way two semi-nomadic groups – the Turcoman *yürüks* (and related or similar groups) in the province of Silistre and the Vlachs in northern Serbia, were integrated in the Ottoman administrative system. Both groups traditionally practiced pastoral nomadism (as well as, to a limited extent, agriculture) and had developed military skills whereby they played prominent roles in the defense system of the Danubian frontier zone and enjoyed a privileged status in exchange. They were also important agents of colonization and would be often encouraged or tacitly allowed by the Ottoman authorities to settle in sparsely populated parts of the frontier zone. Special attention will be paid to the changing status of the two groups in relation to the consolidation of Ottoman control in the Danubian frontier zone.

The rationale for doing this is that while these two geographic extremities of the Ottoman Danubian frontier zone had largely different demographic make-ups and patterns of development, the management of the Danubian frontier zone was conditioned by a number of common imperatives and strategic priorities for the Ottoman state. Looking at how the Ottoman state responded to different chal-

lenges at the two opposite ends of the frontier zone could provide us with some insight into the patterns of Ottoman political and territorial expansion into South-eastern and Central Europe and also possibly shed more light upon the nature of early modern political centralization.

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The Ottoman Danubian frontier zone emerged in the late 14<sup>th</sup> and further developed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Ottoman expansion in the Balkans reached the Danube in the late 1380s when Çandarlı Ali Pasha invaded the Bulgarian Kingdom of Turnovo and conquered Silistre in the process (with Firuz Bey being its first *sancakbeyi*) (Dimitrov, Zhechev & Tonev, 1988, 8–10). In 1395 Bayezid I (1389–1402) was the first Ottoman sultan to lead his troops beyond the Danube to fight the Wallachian *voevode* Mircea the Elder (1386–1418). The Ottoman victory over the Hungarian King Sigismund at Nicopolis in 1396 marked the definitive conquest of the medieval Bulgarian kingdoms of Turnovo and Vidin as well as the Despotate of Dobrudja (Fine, 1997, 422–5). Thus, at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the Ottomans had established the Danube as their northern frontier to the east of Serbia.

As for Serbia, after the Battle of Kosovo (1389) it became a vassal of the Ottomans and, just as Wallachia, would be caught in the power struggle between Hungary and the Ottomans in the following decades. As the Ottomans stepped up their pressure after despot Stefan Lazarević's death in 1427, the Ottomans temporarily occupied the Despotate of Serbia with its capital Smederevo (1439–44) and then ultimately conquered it in 1459. Thus Smederevo, which had served as the capital of the Serbian Despotate since 1430, became the capital of a new Ottoman *sancak* and would feature as the most important Ottoman fortress along the border with Hungary until the fall of Belgrade in 1521, when the latter became capital of the province (Miljković-Bojanić, 2004, 39–45).

By the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century the Danube had established itself as the frontier line between the “Abode of Islam” and the “Abode of War” in both Ottoman practical policy-making and political imagination. It could serve as the ultimate defensive line against Hungarian or Wallachian attacks. On the other hand, crossing the Danube promised the riches of conquest or martyrdom to Ottoman *ghazis*, no matter whether the campaigns were led by sultans, famous frontier lords such as Mihaloğlu Ali Bey, or were carried out by smaller bands of Turcoman raiders. As the Ottoman poet Şeyhi (d. 1429) put it: “The Danube River (which lies in our neighborhood) is to be preferred to the spring of Paradise” (quoted in Panaite, 2000, 102). Being often described by Ottoman chroniclers in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries as a “gazi river” (Panaite, 2000, 102–3), the Danube very much pre-

served its status as a frontier line between Christendom and Islamdom till the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century.

While the principality of Wallachia had been intermittently paying tribute to the Ottomans since the times of Mircea the Elder, it was often a disloyal neighbor, and sometimes a dangerously aggressive one, as Vlad Dracula's invasion across the Danube in 1461–62 demonstrated. Bayezid II's campaign against Moldavia in 1484 and the resulting Ottoman conquest of the fortresses of Kili (Chilia) and Akkirman that controlled the northwestern Black Sea coast paved the way to the consolidation of Ottoman control over the two Danubian principalities. Wallachia was steadily incorporated as an Ottoman vassal by 1525 and would remain so till the 19<sup>th</sup> century despite occasional revolts of Wallachian *voevodes* (such as that of Michael the Brave's in 1595) (Panaite, 2000, 156–64). Similarly, Moldavia, which had been tentatively drawn into the Ottoman sphere of influence in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century (1455), became a firm Ottoman vassal only after Süleyman I's campaign against the *voevode* Petru Raresh in 1538 (Panaite, 2000, 164–8). Silistre and its *sancakbeyi* would play a strategic role as an outpost of Ottoman control over the Danubian principalities and as a springboard for the Ottomans' northern campaigns (Dimitrov, Zhechev & Tonev, 1988, 8–14, 76–82).

Simultaneously, the other end of the Ottoman Danubian *serhad* also saw momentous developments in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Ottoman capture of Belgrade in 1521, the victory at Mohács in 1526, and the emergence of Ottoman Hungary in 1541 led to a situation in which the *sancak* of Smederevo (with capital Belgrade) lost its frontier status and was transformed into an interior province of smaller importance that became part of the governorate-general (*beylerbeyliği*) of Budin (Buda). Yet, Belgrade would continue to play a major role as a base for Ottoman campaigns in central Europe (Šabanović, 1955, 62–3).

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Utilizing Ottoman administrative sources, above all Ottoman *timar* tax registers as well as the attendant provincial law-codes, a comparison between the demographic development and Ottoman population management of the two provinces may shed more light on a number of commonalities despite the fact that the two provinces had very different demographic make-ups and development from the late 15<sup>th</sup> through the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. For the *sancak* of Smederevo one may rely on several *timar* tax registers starting from 1476 and ending in 1560 – detailed (*mufassal*) registers from 1476, 1516, 1527, 1536, and 1560, and a synoptic (*icmal*) one from (1530). These have also been a subject of a number of modern scholarly works, mostly by Serbian authors (most notably Miljković-Bojanić, 2004; Zirojević, 1973; Bojanić-Lukač, 1971). Conversely, for the province of

Silistre we possess just two registers with attendant law-codes – a synoptic one from 1518 (whose demographic data is also available in a 1530 synoptic register) and a detailed one from 1569; research on them has been limited (Dimitrov, 1983; Dimitrov, 1997–9).

### General Nature of Demographic Development

The most obvious differences between the demographic nature of the two regions relate to overall population dynamics, the ethno-religious structure of the population, and the balance between settled agricultural populations, with the status of *re'aya*, that paid regular land tax (*çift resmi, ispençe*), the canonical tithe on agricultural produce (*öşr*) and extraordinary levies (*avarız-ı divaniye ve tekalif-i örfiyye*) on the one hand, and semi-nomadic groups, such as Vlachs and *yürüks* who enjoyed special status, on the other.

In terms of overall population dynamics, the province of Smederevo was characterized by a relative stability of the overall size of the rural population which was also more or less uniformly Orthodox Christian with the exception of urban centers. The Ottoman conquests in the western Balkans in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the ensuing Ottoman campaigns against Hungary up to the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century did cause substantial, but not sweeping demographic changes. These included population migrations into enemy (Hungarian) territory and a high percentage of abandoned villages – around 17 per cent according to the tax registrations of 1476 and 1516 (Miljković-Bojanić, 2004, 177), which the Ottoman government managed by encouraging the resettlement of abandoned lands by populations from neighboring districts. In most cases these were semi-nomadic Vlach groups that would settle in sparsely populated lands (especially in the western part of the province), enjoying a number of fiscal privileges. Indeed, it has been forcefully argued that it was only in the decades immediately following the Ottoman conquest of the Serbian Despotate in 1459 that Vlachs migrated in large numbers from their traditional lands of habitation in the western Balkans – Bosnia, Hercegovina, Montenegro, and Stari Vlah in Serbia to the flatlands of northern Serbia (i.e. what became the *sancak* of Smederevo) (Đurđev, 1984, 24–5).

Thus Vlach colonization contributed substantially to the stabilization of the settlement network in the province of Smederevo in the last decades of the 15<sup>th</sup> and the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. While villages of settled agriculturalists were small to mid-sized, with an average size of around 20 households, Vlach villages were predominantly small – in 1476 85 per cent of them had under 20 households (47 per cent under ten), with an average of 13 households; this nature of Vlach settlements had not changed substantially as reflected in the Ottoman tax register of 1516



(Miljković-Bojanić, 2004, 159–72). The small size of Vlach villages may be explained with the recent arrival of Vlachs in northern Serbia as well as with the pastoralist nature of their lifestyle. After 1536, when the Vlachs lost their privileged status, some of the Smederevo Vlachs left the province, while the rest gradually became part of the settled agriculturalist population of the province.

The province of Silistre, on the other hand, represents a very different case. While not much is known about the medieval demographic history of the region, we know that in the period from the eleventh to the thirteenth century Dobrudja (then known as Karvuna or Little Scythia) was subject to frequent invasions of nomadic Turkic peoples from the Ponto-Caspian steppe (Petchenegs, Ouzes, and Cumans) which must have contributed to the continuous depopulation of the area (Diaconu, 1970, 39–49, 62–5, 79–81; Diaconu, 1978, 41–58, 130–3). At the same time we know of the migration of Turcomans from Anatolia under the leadership of the legendary Sarı Saltık in the 1260s, although the demographic dimensions of this migration remain vague. Fifteenth-century developments such as the Ottoman civil war (1402–13), the revolt of Sheyh Bedreddin in 1416 that started in Dobrudja and neighboring Deliorman, as well as the Crusade of Varna (1444), further contributed to the region's depopulation so much so that a participant in the Crusade of Varna – Andreas di Palazzio described the region between Varna and the Danube as “desertum” (Dimitrov, Zhechev & Tonev, 1988, 16). The invasion of Dobrudja by the Wallachian *voevode* Vlad Dracula in 1461–62 had a similar destructive effect.

The Ottoman tax registration data of 1518 (replicated in a 1530 register) suggests a sparsely populated Dobrudja with a large number of small or very small Muslim villages inside Dobrudja (overwhelmingly below ten households in size) and a small number of large Christian villages along the Danube and the Black Sea coast. Taking the district (*nahiye*) of Silistre in particular it had 223 villages of which 208 were Muslim and only 15 were Christian. Eighty per cent of the rural population was Muslim (BBOA TD No. 370, 383–398). The size and toponymics of the Muslim villages suggests that those villages were founded by recent nomadic or semi-nomadic arrivals from Anatolia – the overwhelming majority of these recently founded Muslim settlements bore the name of their founders and/or a water source (e.g. Küçük Ahmed Kuyusu, Murad Pınarı). The population in 20 per cent of these new Turkish/Muslim settlements was registered as *cemaats* – lit. ‘community’, ‘group’ – usually characterizing nomadic or semi-nomadic groups in this context – in many cases their names suggested their origins or lifestyle – e.g. Saruhan Cemaati (coming from Saruhan in western Anatolia), or Cemaat-i Ekmek Yemez (lit. “those who do not eat bread”) (BBOA TD No. 370, 388). As we do not possess an earlier register for the province one may speculate about the possible reasons for this mass migration, but it most probably took place in relation to the Ottoman-Safavid conflict as it developed during the reign of Sultan

Selim I (1512–20). This conflict pitted against one another the newly founded Safavid (and officially Shi'ite) Empire of Iran against the Ottoman Empire which styled itself as an upholder of Sunni orthodoxy. The main factor behind the repopulation of Dobrudja likely was Selim I's massive repressions against numerous Turcoman nomads in Anatolia perceived to be sympathetic politically and religiously with the new Shi'ite regime in Iran. The 1518 registration shows 1784 "households" (of which 650 are dubiously registered as "bachelors") as a separate group of deportees – deported from Anatolia into the southeast part of the province in the district of Pravadi; a note attached to this registration makes this clear (*zıkr olan ta'ife bundan evvel Anadolu'dan Dobruca'ya gelüb*) and further specifies that the deportees had the freedom to settle wherever they liked, that is, they could migrate to other parts of the province, and possibly beyond (BBOA TD No. 370, 436); the attendant law-code suggests that those were accompanied by relatives whose migration the Ottoman government could not control firmly (Akgündüz, 1990–, vol. 3, 467). Thus, the province of Silistre, being a potential zone of conflict along the Danubian frontier was serving as a safety valve that assimilated deportees and migrants from another zone of conflict (Anatolia).

### **The Ottoman State and the Semi-nomadic Vlachs and *Yürüks***

With around 15 per cent Vlachs in the province of Smederevo (in 1516 the province of Smederevo had 12,000 extended Vlach households of around 100,000 households total) and around 80 per cent Turcoman population in the district of Silistre the balance was obviously diametrically skewed, yet the Ottoman state's approach to these populations in the two provinces was not dissimilar. On the one hand, it was aimed at the use of these semi-nomadic groups (that naturally possessed developed military skills) to its own purposes in the Danubian *serhad*, usually giving them special privileged taxation status, on the other hand the Ottoman state made persistent efforts to tie them to the land, thus sedentarizing them and territorializing their communities.

### **The Vlachs of Smederevo**

The Vlachs of the late Middle Ages were the most prominent semi-nomadic group in the Balkans prior to the Ottoman conquest. They were Romanized stock-breeders scattered throughout the Balkan peninsula – initially in Thrace, Macedonia, Thessaly, the Pindos Mountains, and Moesia, and from the eleventh century onwards in the western Balkans as well (Vasary, 2005, 19). Their continuous contact with Slavs led to a significant degree of Slavicization and it was for this reason



that, especially in the western Balkans, the term 'Vlach' came to be used to denote a socio-economic status and not necessarily ethno-linguistic identity. While medieval Serbian rulers imposed restrictions on the intermarriage between sedentary Serbs and semi-nomadic Vlachs, these efforts do not seem to have been effective, in 1336 Stefan Dushan abolished these policies (Solovjev, 1926, 93; Filipović, 1963, 75). By the early 16<sup>th</sup> century Vlachs had Slavicized to the extent that the overwhelming majority of Vlachs registered in the Serbian lands would have Slavic names (Miljković-Bojanić, 2004, 215).

The Vlachs in the pre-Ottoman western Balkans were organized in groups known as *katun*, each having a different number of households, from 10 to 105 as late medieval Serbian legal sources show (Filipović, 1963, 47–50). Each *katun* was led by an elder known as *primikjur*, and larger Vlach communities, consisting of several *katuns* were headed by *knezes* (Filipović, 1963, 83–7).

What distinguished Vlachs in the late medieval western Balkans from the rest of the population was not just their semi-nomadic lifestyle based on animal husbandry, primarily sheep-breeding, for there were other semi-nomadic groups as well, including Slavs. Vlachs owed special services to their lord, be it the ruler, local notables, or monasteries (Filipović, 1963, 51). They, unlike most other semi-nomadic groups in the area, were also horse breeders, and thus performed service as horse-drivers (*celatori*) and mounted soldiers (*vojnici*) (Filipović, 1963, 76–81).

With the conquest of Serbia (1459) as well as Bosnia (1463) and Hercegovina (1481) the Ottomans inherited the Vlach organization as it had developed in the medieval western Balkans and integrated it into the Ottoman political, military, and administrative structures. The Ottoman adaptation of the Vlach organization as reflected in contemporary tax registers and the attendant law-codes suggests a degree of regularization of the structure of Vlach communities in relation to their military service duties as well as taxation. To this one should add the increasing territorialization of Vlach communities in the several decades following the conquest of medieval Serbia, whereby Vlachs in the province of Smederevo were registered as tied to the land, each Vlach household registered on a family farm (*baština*) as early as in 1476 (Miljković-Bojanić, 2004, 158–9, 230; Đurđev, 1963). Thus, the Ottoman state seems to have taken advantage of the Vlachs' migration to the northern Serbian lands in the second half of the fifteenth century to implement measures aiming at their gradual sedentarization.

Thus, from the second half of the fifteenth century (i.e. upon the Ottoman conquest of the western Balkans) the Ottoman state treated the Vlachs in Serbia, Bosnia and Hercegovina and parts of northwestern Bulgaria as a special social group that performed specific military duties and enjoyed a number of fiscal privileges as compared to the regular agricultural subject population (*re'aya*). Taxes

were levied on them per household and per *katun*, whereby the latter can be viewed as both a unit of social organization and an auxiliary unit of taxation. The earliest Ottoman provincial law-codes concerning Vlachs in the *sancak* of Smederevo set the size of a Vlach *katun* at 50 households (the case of Braničevo Vlachs was an exception, whereby they were initially organized in *katuns* of 20 households as of 1467, but this regulation did not last) (Bojanić-Lukač, 1971, 261; Inalcik, 1954, 156).

According to the law-code for the province of Smederevo for 1476 Vlachs in the province paid only the equivalent of one *filori* (Venetian ducat, equivalent to 45 Ottoman silver *akçe* in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries) as well as the monetary equivalents of a ram (15 *akçe*), a sheep with a lamb (20 *akçe*) per household, 5 *akçe* for small misdemeanors (*cürm ü cinayet*), and 2 *akçes* for administrative expenses. A *katun* paid collectively 150 *akçe* as the monetary value of various items (a tent, two rams, two ropes, two pieces of cheese, and three horse halters), bringing the total tax liability per household to 90 *akçe* – much less than what an agricultural *re'aya* household paid – usually more than 150 *akçe* (Akgündüz, 1990–, vol. 1, 527–8; BBOA TD No. 16, 378, 623). Being exempt from all other taxes, Vlachs were to provide one soldier (*voynuk*) per five households who could serve in the defense of strategic locales or participate in raids led by the governor (as specified in a later provincial law-code from 1527) (Barkan, 1943, 325), a *katun* had to supply one servant (*hizmetkar*, *komornic*) to the governor (Akgündüz, 1990–, vol. 1, 528). Half a century later, as a 1527 law-code informs us, these regulations had not changed significantly, one important addition was the obligation to provide one soldier per household if necessary – obviously reflecting the intensification of warfare at the western end of the Ottoman Danubian frontier zone in the 1520s (Barkan, 1943, 325). The Vlachs of Smederevo enjoyed a considerable degree of self-rule under the leadership of their *knezes* and *primikjurs*, the latter offices were generally hereditary within the community and new holders were only confirmed by the Ottoman authorities, they could not be removed from office unless they had openly violated the law (Akgündüz, 1990–, vol. 1, 528; Miljković-Bojanić, 2004, 232–3). The law-code of 1476 mentions of a supreme chief (*re'is*) of the Vlachs in the province, a certain Maloga, son of Nikola who presided over 20 other *knezes* and 331 *primikjurs* (Akgündüz, 1990–, vol. 1, 528; Miljković-Bojanić, 2004, 238).

As already mentioned, as early as in 1476 the Ottoman state strove to give each Vlach household a (*filorcijska*) *baština* – a small farm of 7–15 hectares (depending on the quality of land) usually along the frontier in abandoned villages, *knezes* and *primikjurs* had *baštinas* several times larger, and the highest ranking among them could also be *timar*-holding *sipahis*. Thus the mentioned Maloga held a large *timar* worth 10,246 *akçe* in 1476 (Miljković-Bojanić, 2004, 237).

The Vlachs of Smederevo enjoyed their privileged status associated with auxiliary military service until 1536. According to the provincial law-code for that year that accompanied a new comprehensive tax survey of the province the Vlachs were abruptly deprived of their privileges – most probably a result of the province’s loss of its frontier status following the Ottoman conquest of Belgrade in 1521, the Ottoman victory at Mohács in 1526 and the subsequent Ottoman expansion in Hungary. Similar changes regarding the status of Vlachs took place in neighboring provinces – the *sancaks* of Vidin, Kruševac, Zvornik, and Bosnia. The 1536 law-code describes in detail the privileged status Vlachs had until that time, the tax exemptions they had enjoyed and the services they had provided to the state (including service in ship-building, not mentioned in earlier law-codes). Without specifying the reason for that, the law-code states that from that moment onwards the Vlachs would be registered as regular *re’aya* (taxpaying population), paying *cizye* (the poll-tax for non-Muslims) as well as land taxes, taxes on agricultural produce and extraordinary taxes (Akgündüz, 1990–, vol. 5, 358). The Vlachs retained some of the major features of their communal organization, whereby *knezes* and *primikjurs* would continue to act as representatives of the Vlachs vis-à-vis the state and would assist in the collection of taxes (Akgündüz, 1990–, vol. 5, 358; Đurđev, 1949).

Most of the Vlachs in the province of Smederevo accepted this decision of the government and adapted. For example, the Vlach village of Rudo Polje (Karanovac) grew from 17 to 21 households from 1540 to 1570, paying *ispence* and all other appropriate taxes (Miljković-Bojanić, 2004, 240). Others did not and sought to relocate, especially to the provinces of Bosnia and Vidin in which Vlachs were temporarily restored to their privileged status in 1540; in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century some Vlachs would migrate into Habsburg territory where they would enjoy (at least for a time) the privileges they had had in the Ottoman lands prior to 1536 (Miljković-Bojanić, 2004, 239–40).

### **The *Yürüks* (and Related Groups) in the Province of Silistre**

Looking at (the district (*nahiye*) of) Silistre as of 1516, in which, as mentioned in the preceding section, 80 per cent of the rural population were Turkish Muslims mostly of semi-nomadic stock, one can see that only 45 per cent of the Muslim population in the countryside (921 of 2028 households) were regular Muslim *re’aya* tilling the land and paying all regular taxes (*çift resmi*, *öşr*, *avarız-i divaniyye*) – the rest, i.e. around 55 per cent, had special military (or logistic) duties and enjoyed special tax privileges. The overwhelming majority of the rural Muslim population were registered as “*çiftlü*”, including those with special duties

and privileges (i.e. they had been given a plot of land (*çift* or *çiftlik*), similar in size to the *baştina* – from 7 to 15 hectares, depending on the quality of the land). Most of those 55 per cent that had special duties were integrated into the *yürük* auxiliary military organization in which Turcoman (semi-) nomads, in many ways similar to the Vlachs, were organized in units (*ocaks*) of 25. According to a law concerning Balkan *yürüks*, dated 1530, five members of each unit, known as *eşküncüs*, would participate in military campaigns and the rest would serve as reservists (*yamaks*) and would have the duty to equip and finance the *eşküncüs*, each reservist paying 50 *akçe* in lieu of extraordinary taxes (for which reason these reservists were also known as *ellicis*) (Barkan, 1943, 260; BBOA TD No. 370, 365). Apart from the *yürüks*, those 55 per cent consisted also of falconers (*doğancıs*), horse breeders (*güreci*), butter-makers (*yağcı*) etc. While the term *güreci* has often been transliterated as *küreci*, from *küre* (in the meaning of smelting furnace) and thus has been associated with mining in the scholarly literature, a more appropriate reading (especially given that these were found in various parts of the empire that did not have established mining centers) would be *güre*, meaning a (wild) colt, hence *güreci* – a colt/horse breeder, whereby *gürecis* were those who raised colts (up to three years old) where after these were directed to the sultan's stables to be used in the army (Dimitrov, 1997–99, 289). Similarly, *yağcıs* had the duty to supply the army or charitable institutions (within the framework of the *waqf* institution) with specified amounts of butter.

According to the provincial law-codes of Silistre for 1518 and 1530, all these groups enjoyed a number of fiscal privileges, not dissimilarly to the Vlachs in the province of Smederevo. They had greater freedom to settle where they wished, paid only 12 *akçe çift resmi* (instead of the regular 22 *akçe*) if they farmed a plot, and were exempt from extraordinary taxes (*avarız-ı divaniye*) in exchange for their duties (Akgündüz, 1990–, vol. 3, 466–8; BBOA TD No. 370, 379–81; Dimitrov, 1997–99, 290–1). The deportees from Anatolia mentioned above enjoyed similar privileges (BBOA TD No. 370, 436).

How had the situation changed by 1569 according to the detailed tax registration and the attendant provincial law-code (BBOA TD No. 483) that were issued in that year? The overall population in the countryside of the sub-province had risen to 8139 of which 83 per cent (6798 households) were Muslims. In other words, the overall countryside population had risen more than three times, with the weight of Muslims slightly increased. The number of Muslim villages had risen almost by 50 per cent, but that increase has to be attributed mainly to village neighborhoods that had become separate, independent villages. The average size of a Muslim village had doubled to 20 households, and would have been greater if not for the former village neighborhoods (*mahalles*) that had split off to form separate villages. Most of the 63 *mezra'as* (not settled or not stably settled farming plots) from the 1518 tax register had become fully-fledged villages. (As for the

Christian villages, their number had remained very much unchanged although their average size had more than doubled).

Regular tax-paying rural Muslim *re'aya* constituted 82 per cent, and those Muslim groups with special duties discussed here – only 13 per cent, down from 55 per cent in 1518 (the remaining 5 per cent belonged to other exempt groups – religious personnel, *waqf re'aya*, descendants of the Prophet, elderly and disabled, etc.). Moreover, the *yürüks* and the related or similar groups now paid regular land tax, and most of them – extraordinary taxes. That is, in addition to the fact that the percentage of such privileged semi-nomadic groups among the rural Muslim population had dropped around four times, their privileges had been very much curtailed, and did not give them many advantages compared to the regular peasant *re'aya*, while they were expected to provide the assigned services to the state.

Thus, one might argue that despite the great differences in the demographic dynamics and make-ups of the provinces of Silistre and Smederevo, the Ottoman state followed similar approaches to managing frontier populations, especially as pastoral semi-nomads were concerned. In fact, as it has been acknowledged that the *yürüks* were much better organized as an auxiliary force in the Balkans as compared to Anatolia (Çabuk, 1986, 430–5), one may suggest that the way in which the *yürük* organization was shaped in the Balkans may have been influenced by the tradition of the Vlach auxiliary organization which the Ottomans inherited from the medieval Balkan states (most notably from Stefan Dushan's Serbia). Yet, one might say that while the Ottoman state's treatment of Vlachs in Smederevo and Turcomans in Silistre reflected a number of common imperatives along the Danubian frontier zone, the integration of the Turcomans in Silistre was part of another general process – the struggle of the centralizing Ottoman state to tame the Turcoman nomads – a process discussed in greater detail by scholars such as Ira Lapidus and R.P. Lindner. While the Ottoman state could afford to abruptly take away the privileges of the already historically 'tamed' Vlachs, it had to be more cautious and accommodationist vis-à-vis the Turcoman nomads who posed a much greater challenge.

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I would also like to make some additional remarks on two issues. Regarding the question of *sürgün*, or forced deportations, I would like to address briefly the classic thesis of the prominent Turkish historian Ö.L. Barkan. In a seminal article on forced deportations in early modern Ottoman history, Barkan developed the argument that in the 14<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> centuries the Ottoman state repeatedly and successfully intervened in the internal political, economic, and demographic developments in

the empire by forcibly resettling at will, and with ease, numerous populations from one area in the empire to another with the aim to address population pressure, improve regional economic productivity, suppress politically disloyal groups and individuals, etc. (1949–54). This emphatically statist view that emphasized (and glorified) Ottoman state centralism, is not definitively borne out by the evidence. That the Ottoman state could easily and often move populations “like balls on a pool table” (to borrow Barkan’s expression) in the above presented context would be an exaggeration – the most important Ottoman state-controlled forced deportation was the deportation of 1784 Turcoman households from Anatolia to the province of Silistre in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, but as one can see, those were accompanied by relatives and other followers whose migration the state could hardly control. Most of those who migrated to Dobrudja (and the neighboring region of Deliorman) in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century were not organized deportees. We also know of the deportation of some of the defenders of Belgrade to Istanbul after the conquest of the city in 1521 (Emecen, 1994). All in all, the Ottoman state was not fully in control of these processes, especially regarding nomadic and semi-nomadic migrations, but was fairly quick to follow up, adapt, register and tax such populations – i.e. it showed an ability to integrate such demographic developments in its overall policy-making framework.

The other question that I wanted to briefly address is a classical one in Balkan historiography – the issue of Islamization, in the specific meaning of conversion to Islam. Balkan nationalist historians have advanced numerous arguments supporting the thesis that the Ottoman state intentionally and systematically, directly or indirectly, pushed for the conversion to Islam of large groups of the indigenous population in the Ottoman Balkans (Zhelyazkova, 1990, 105–11; Aleksov, 2005, 158–190). This is also not definitively borne out by the evidence, and in the concrete context of this paper, conversion played a very little role in the countryside in the province of Smederevo, not only and not that much because of the role that the Orthodox church played in the preservation of the Christian identity of its parishioners, as many Balkan historians have argued, but above all because of the lack of contact between Muslim populations and potential converts. In the case of Silistre in the Eastern Balkans, the situation is different as there was a massive migration of Muslim population in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The detailed register of 1569 shows that 4 per cent of the Muslims in the countryside in the district (*nahiye*) of Silistre were converts, which is a significant proportion, indeed conversion rates in the neighboring region of Deliorman in the same period are twice as high (BBOA TD No. 382). One likely major reason for the relatively low conversion rates in the countryside of Silistre (as compared, for example, to the neighboring region of Deliorman), despite the massive presence of Muslim new-comers, is that Christians and Muslims lived far away from each other in the countryside – the Christians in a few large villages along the Danube and the



Black Sea coast, and the Muslim colonists – inland. Most of the local converts to Islam lived in the cities, where contact between Christians and Muslims was much more intense and direct and possibilities for social advancement of new converts were significant. Moreover, a convert in the city could escape the ostracism of his former co-religionists which was an important factor that acted against conversion in the countryside. Urban Muslims also enjoyed certain visible tax privileges – while urban non-Muslims were exempt from the respective land tax (*çift resmi*) provided that they did not engage in agriculture, urban Christians uniformly paid *ispençe* – usually understood to be the *çift resmi*'s equivalent land-tax for non-Muslims, but in this case functioning more like a head-tax (in case they did not practice agriculture), in addition to the canonical *cizye* (Vasić, 1986, 69–70). In the context of all these factors, it is not surprising to see that of 833 registered Muslim adult males in the town of Silistre in 1569 (not counting the military personnel in the fortress), 119 were local converts and 30 were freed slaves (BBOA TD No. 483, 239–49); similarly in 1536 in Semendire, 21 per cent of the Muslims in the *varosh* were new converts (BBOA TD No. 187, 101–4).

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