

ANKARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
OSMANLI TARİHİ ARAŞTIRMA VE UYGULAMA MERKEZİ  
DERGİSİ

---

---

O T A M

---

SAYI: 6

ANKARA

1995

---

# THE OTTOMAN CENSUSES AND THE REGISTRATION SYSTEMS IN THE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

*Dr. Musa ŞAŞMAZ\**

## *The Historical Development of the Census Systems in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*

The Ottoman government prior to the nineteenth century took censuses, and conducted land and property surveys after each new territory was conquered, and renewed the process regularly at about thirty year intervals. This tradition was ostensibly abandoned in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Until the nineteenth century the Ottoman government never created a systematic population registration system to record births, deaths and migrations, as was done in some parish registers in Western Europe and England<sup>1</sup>.

The Ottoman governments in the nineteenth century, however developed a reasonably efficient system for counting the population of the Empire after census procedures were introduced in the United States in 1790, Britain and France 1801<sup>2</sup>. For the first time, Mahmut II started a census to create a new army after the Janissary Corps were destroyed in 1826. The count was however, delayed owing to the Ottoman-Russian War in 1829.

After the war, a special council called "Meclis-i Şura" was established in 1830 to determine the exact number of the male popu-

---

\* Niğde University Academic Staffs.

1. For a general bibliography of the Ottoman population censuses and surveys concerning the period between the 15th and the 19th centuries, see Daniel Panzac, "La population de l'Empire Ottoman et de ses marges du XV au XIX siècle: Bibliographie (1941-1980) et bilan provisoire", *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 1.31.1981, pp. 119-135.

2. Donald J Goque, *Principles of Demography*, New York, 1969, p. 17.

lation and financial resources. This council issued the "Instructions"<sup>3</sup> according to which the census of 1831 would be made. The count was initiated in the spring of 1830 in each locality (nahiye), county (kaza), district (sancak) and province (vilayet) of Anatolia and Rumelia by the census officials sent from the capital<sup>4</sup>.

The census was executed after 1830 with the exception of Egypt, Arabia, Albania, Bosnia and South-East Anatolia<sup>5</sup>. Roughly, it included the most important ten general provinces (eyalets) out of 29 eyalets of the state<sup>6</sup>.

In the summary of the census of 1831, the population was classified according to the religion (Muslim, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Armenian and inappropriately Gypsy) and age groups (10) (under 16, 16-40, above 40). Because of the military service, Muslims were divided into age groups. However, the non-Muslim males were not subject to military service but instead subject to cizye, they were, therefore, divided into three categories according to wealth highest, middle and lowest<sup>7</sup>.

A Census Department was founded in 1835 for the first time in the Ministry of the Interior to compile population records of the Empire. Guild and millet leaders were appointed to assist the local census takers and population officers to record any population changes. These data were occasionally collected and presented in general

3. Musa Çadırcı, "1830 Genel Sayımına göre Ankara Şehir Merkezi Nufusu üzerinde bir Araştırma", *Journal of Ottoman Studies*, 1 (1980), pp. 109-113, especially p. 110.

4. Rifat Özdemir, *XIX. Yüzyılın ilk Yarısında Ankara*, Ankara 1986, p. 115.

5. Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey 1808-1975*, Vol. II, (Cambridge, 1977), 40 (Hereafter cited as Shaw and Shaw); F. Akbal, "1831 Tarihinde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda İdari Taksimat ve Nüfus", *Bellekten*, XV/60 1951, pp. 617-628, see also the map LVI.

6. Engin Deniz Akarlı, *Ottoman Population in Europe in the Nineteenth Century; its Territorial, Racial and Religious Composition*, up. MA Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1972, p. 14.

7. The classification of age groups in 1831 has been given by K.H. Karpat and S.J. Shaw. Both classify the population by age differently, Karpat's classification of age groups is as follows: one to twelve, twelve to forty, and above forty. However Shaw gives the classification differently as it is mentioned in the text. It seems that Shaw's classification is more logical and acceptable than that of Karpat when the matter is considered in terms of military service. K.H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics*, (Wisconsin, 1985), p. 20, (Henceforth cited as Karpat, Ottoman Population); Micheal Ursinus, "Holy Mountain and Supreme Council: Mount Athos at the Beginning of a New Era", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 13 (1989), pp. 253-284 especially 271 and 283 (forthcoming article) (Hereafter mentioned as Ursinus, Holy Mountain).

census reported<sup>8</sup>. In these counts, census officers were particularly selected from the scholars and the members various millets of the Muslim and non-Muslim public and the inspire confidence in the respondent, so that they would give correct information<sup>9</sup>. In order to make the census system efficient, a travel permit was introduced to persons who wished to travel from one place to another. Travelers were required to secure a travel permit form their local police officer, issued by the Ministry of the Interior, when needed on the way; they had to show it, and drastic punishments were imposed on those who failed to carry them<sup>10</sup>.

A decision taken by the Council of State of the Porte stated the amount each individual in Anatolia and Rumelia was to pay to the state<sup>11</sup>. According to the decision, it was attempted to count property and income, and every male person paying taxes to the state. For this purpose, in 1838 the province of Hüdavendigâr and sancak of Gallipoli were chosen as pilot areas for these practices<sup>12</sup>.

After proclamation of the Tanzimat Edict 1839, it seems that the governors of the Tanzimat era were not satisfied with the previous census results. They conduct new census in 1843-44 and the new information became available in 1844. The government did not however publish the results of this census. There is no sufficient information available on it. Yet, it appears that some western scholars<sup>13</sup> may have had an access to the figures of the census of 1844.

Although there is little information as regards census of 1859-60. It was executed after 1857 and ended in 1860. The purpose of this census was to obtain financial data. The census was performed under the control of valis and the supervision of the defterdar according to the instructions concerning the register of population

---

8. S.J. Shaw, "The Ottoman Census System and Population 1831-1914", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 9 (1978), pp. 325-338 and especially 327 (Hereafter cited as Shaw, Census System).

9. Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, pp. 19-20; Çadırcı, p. 110.

10. Shaw and Shaw, p. 40.

11. Abdurrahman Vefik, *Teekalif Kavaidi*, Vol. II, İstanbul 1330, p. 125.

12. Stanford Shaw, "The Nineteenth Century Ottoman Tax Reforms and Revenue System", *International mJournal of Middle East Studies*, 6 (1975), pp. 421-459, especially p. 422 (Hereafter Shaw, Nineteenth Century).

13. For instance, A. Ubucini has used the figures of the census of 1844 with his own adjustment in his study namely, *Lettres sur la Turquie*, (Paris, 1853), and Eugene Bore has also had an access to the figures of this census in his work entitled by *Almanach de l'Empire Ottoman pour l'annee 1849 et 1850*, (Constantinople, 1849-50).

and land property of 1859<sup>14</sup>. Its results were not published nor were the documents kept under protection.

Some of the Tanzimat leaders aimed to use the figures in the process of modernizing the administrative system. They founded a new department called Tahrir-i Emlak Nezareti in the Ministry of Finance under the obligation not only to register property for tax concerns, but also to count the male subjects of the empire and to issue tax certificate to each male.

The Ottoman Government conducted a new census in 1866 for which Danube, Janina and Bursa provinces were chosen as model provinces. The conduct of a new census in Danube province in 1866 was considered vital because of the fundamental changes which had taken place in the ethnic, religious, economic and social composition of this province. This census was regarded as the most complete and comprehensive of all the Ottoman census, although it did not include females. It registered the occupations and properties of the people beside the usual data given in the previous censuses, information in this census is unique and quite adequate as to make it a primary source in regard to the social and demographic history of Danube Province<sup>15</sup>.

In 1874 the Şura-yı Devlet (Council of State) issued an order and three regulations to conduct a new census and to implement a new registration system. The first regulation concerned the census methods; the second provided for the establishment of a system based on three types of registers and the third dealt with the appointment of population officials<sup>16</sup>.

14. Vedat Eldem, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun İktisadi Şartları Hakkında bir Tedkik*, Ankara 1970, pp. 49-50.

15. Karpat Ottoman Population, pp. 24-25; Idem, "Ottoman Population Records and the Census of 1881-82/93", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 9 (1978), pp. 237-274, especially 248 (Hereafter Karpat, Records and Census).

16. These three types of registers were the basic register (esas defter), the summary register (icmal), and daily event register (yevmiye-vukuat): The basic register was to list all males living in the villages and town quarters numbering individuals consecutively, and listing the families and their numbers. This register to be kept by the officials in kaza center included columns for registering the individual's age and changes in his military and personal status. The summary register listed the total number of people found in villages and in the center of kaza. It was to be compiled on the basis of the information derived from village and mahalle registers. It listed Christians according to their religious and ethnic affiliation and the columns for the separate recording of Muslims, Greeks Bulgarians, armenians, Jews and others. The event register was to be kept in kaza center for the recording of births, deaths, migrations into and out of district and changes in personal status. Every six month the total number of these daily events was to be entered in the summary registers. Karpat, Ottoman population, pp. 29-30; Idem, Records and Census, p. 247.

The regulations of 1874 regarding the population register, the system of registration, the identity card requirement, and the administrative organization, were implemented in 1881-82 with some modifications, and remained in effect throughout the existence of the Empire. The process of population census especially in the last quarter of the nineteenth century has been considered as reasonably efficient. Its attachment to the identity card and the obligation of the individual to use it in dealing with the government departments made the results of the censuses far more reliable<sup>17</sup>.

The department of censuses was a separate unit from the army and cadastral departments. It consisted of three chief bureaus; correspondence, statistic and archive with an additional forwarding department which looked after the receipt and dispatch of the correspondence. At the Capital in each department there were a chief clerk and census scribes. At the provincial level, census officers headed by ministers were nominated to each provincial capital to control the officials' works. At the local level, a census officer was appointed to each quarter and village to conduct the census with the assistance of mayor, imam, members of the council of elders, and the millet representatives<sup>18</sup>.

On the basis of the new regulation enacted in 1878, the 1881-82 population census started in 1881. In this census the female population of the Empire was conducted for the first time. The first results began to come in from some areas between 1884 and 1885, but other provinces did not finish their census until 1887, and in 1893 the census record in a bound manuscript were submitted to Abdülhamid II<sup>19</sup>. They gave precise and detailed information on the population of all areas, and showing the areas where the census was not finished, and supplying the estimates for the areas not subject to the individual census and registration. In 1885 specially experienced officials and inspectors were sent to Edirne, Sivas, Balıkesir, Adana, Trabzon and the Aegean Islands to control the census results, to compile population statistics, and to take necessary measures in order to insure constant and correct registration of all population changes<sup>20</sup>.

---

17. Meir Zehir, "Population Statistics of the Ottoman Empire in 1914 and 1919", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 17 (1981), pp. 85-106, especially 85 (Hereafter Meir Zehir, Population Statistics).

18. Shaw, *Census System*, p. 330.

19. Karpat, *Records and Census*, p. 256.

20. Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, p. 33, for the census figures pp. 127-147; *Idem*, *Records and Census*, p. 254-255, for the census figures, pp. 258-273.

Following the census of 1881-1893, the final modification of the census regulations was made in 1900 and 1902 with small changes in order to correct the problems occurring during the conduct of the initial censuses. Under these new regulations, a new empire-wide census was started in 1903 and finished in 1906<sup>21</sup>. The figures published in "Asr Gazetesi" were not extracted from a new census, but they were updated figures taken from the population registers of the Three Provinces-Selanik, Manastır and Üsküb<sup>22</sup>.

The Final statistic of the Ottoman Empire, issued on 14 march 1914 was not based on a new survey or a count, but on the modification simply made by adding births to and omitting deaths registered between 1906 and 1914 from the figures of the 1905-6 census. Estimates were made for tribes and areas not subjected to the census. Its figures were published in both French and Ottoman language<sup>23</sup>.

### *The Purpose of Population Censuses in the Nineteenth Century*

The population censuses conducted in the nineteenth century differed from the land and property surveys of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in the sense that they directly counted the people rather than the lands and the people who worked on lands<sup>24</sup>. The main aim of these surveys was to provide a sound basis for the recruitment of men for military service. The data of the surveys of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were kept in registers. They were however not regularly renewed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They then became out of date.

The military and financial system were at the edge of collapse when the Sultan Mahmut II ascended to the throne, the government was not able to collect the regular taxes and recruit men for military service, since there was no accurate knowledge of the financial and human resources of the Empire. Indeed the recruitment of a modern

21. Shaw, *Census System*, pp. 333-335 and for the census figures of 1906-7, see *Karpat Ottoman Population*, pp. 162-169.

22. *Asr Gazetesi* published in Selanik on January 2, 1905, gives the updated population figures of Selanik, Manastır and Üsküb. They were collected by the General Inspectorship of Three Vilayets for the administrative and political purposes.

23. For the figures of 1914, see Meir Zehir, *Population Statistics*, 89-101 and *Karpat Ottoman Population*, 170-190.

24. Engin Deniz Akarlı, *Ottoman Population*, p. 14.

army and its organization into active and reserve units had to rely on accurate information about the number and age of the male population. The government finally decided to determine the number of the male population in Anatolia and Rumelia as the Muslim males were obliged to serve in the army whereas the non-Muslim males were to pay cizye in lieu of the military service. The Muslim population was therefore divided into age groups and the non-Muslim population into the traditional categories of wealth<sup>25</sup>.

The main aim of the census of 1831 was to set right the injustices and inequalities that had been the consequence of the changes in the values of property and in the status of the land system. For instance, the constant tax exemptions bestowed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries on a special group for a particular job were no longer in existence. In addition, the need for more income revenues forced the government to increase the revenues from the cizye to finance the new army which became the back-bone of the Empire following the destruction of the Janissary army in 1826<sup>26</sup>. The land registering was also made in 1831, the reason for this was that the state had not been able to put into effect the laws concerning the collection of taxes because of the constant wars. This was due to the fact that the Muslims and the non-Muslims were not paying their regular taxes and the government therefore decided to register the lands in order to collect just and regular taxes from its subjects<sup>27</sup>.

Accordingly the Council of State in 1838 intended to ascertain the amount of taxes which each individual in Anatolia and Rumelia was to pay to the state's tax collector<sup>28</sup>. It is also observed that the amount of cizye was further increased at about the same time<sup>29</sup>. The Council of State does not appear to have been satisfied that after 1839 many meetings were held to discuss how best to apply the new taxation policies and to determine the necessary measures to insure that the tax-payers would pay taxes in proportion to their means. It was finally decided to conduct a new census and a property survey as a first step, and this plan was however postponed in

---

25. J. Cvijic, *Remarks on the Ethnography of the Macedonian Slavs*, (London, 1906), p. 35; Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Vol. 5, Ankara 1947, p. 159.

26. Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, p. 20; Çadırcı, 1830 Genel Sayımına Göre, p. 109.

27. Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, p. 160.

28. Abdurrahman Vefik, *Tekalif Kavaidi*, Vol. II, p. 125.

29. Ursinus, *Holy Mountain*, p. 272.

order to be discussed in detail in a meeting to be held by the provincial notables in İstanbul<sup>30</sup>.

The entries in the population registers were conspicuously used as a way of keeping close watch on Muslim males owing to the need for conscription<sup>31</sup> and on non-Muslim males owing to the collection of *cizye*.

Following the Crimean War, the Department of Cadastres tried in 1858-58 to conduct a new census for the financial purposes. It would count land, landed property and their value, at the same time, collecting information regarding people's income revenue<sup>32</sup>. This census was made according to a new cadastral regulation issued in 1858 to arrange an entirely new land and property survey around the Empire. The cadastral commissions went into the *kazas* and villages with the census experts to record every piece of land, measure by measure, showing each building's value and urban cultivated plot and the identity, occupation and income of each individual<sup>33</sup>. Beside the financial purposes, population data were required for refugee settlement, construction of railways, military conscription planning and telegraph lines, and many other activities of the new social and economic life of the Empire<sup>34</sup>. Furthermore, the religious-ethnic composition of the population of the Balkans became a very significant matter after the *Islahat Fermanı* was announced in 1856. The main aim of this edict was to introduce reforms for the benefit of the non-Muslim subjects<sup>35</sup>. In order to implement the articles of the *Islahat Fermanı* and to diminish the rising nationalism and European pressures, a new census was needed to know the precise population figures of the Balkans. Tuna province was taken as an example and the census was conducted from 1866 to 1873<sup>36</sup>. There is also an indication that under the surveil-

30. Halil İnalcık, "Application of the Tanzimat and its Social Effects", in the *Ottoman Empire, Conquest, Organization and Economy*, (London, 1978), pp. 3-33, especially 8-9.

31. Justin McCarthy, "Age, Family, and Migration in the Nineteenth Century Black Sea Provinces of the Ottoman Empire", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 10 (1979), pp. 309-323, especially 309 (Hereafter McCarthy, Age Family).

32. Vedat Eldem, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun*, p. 50.

33. Shaw, *Nineteenth Century*, pp. 426-27.

34. Justin McCarthy, *Muslims and minorities, the Population of Ottoman Anatolia and the End of the Empire*, (New York, 1983), p. 168 (Hereafter McCarthy, Muslims and Minorities).

35. Karpas, *Ottoman Population*, p. 24.

36. The census returns of the three villages of Tuna of 1866 were studied by the Bulgarian authors, for more information, see M. Todorova, "Population Structure, Marriage Patterns, Family and Households (According to Ottoman Documentary Material from

lance of Subhi Paşa in 1864-65 the people residing in Istanbul and its vicinity were counted<sup>37</sup>.

Concerning the census of 1866 Shaw points out that "Midhat Paşa, governor of Tuna province, used the figures of the census of 1866 as bases for educational, economic, and social reforms, and also as arguments to the central government for the allocation of further funds to meet local needs, in particular that of settling the thousands of Muslim refugees. Later, he, as a Grand Vizier in 1872, formed a commission to investigate the census system and its uses in resolving the empire's problems"<sup>38</sup>. Another purpose of the census of 1866 was to issue to each individual an Ottoman identity card that could later be used to register changes in the status of an individual<sup>39</sup>.

The female population for the first time was counted in the census of 1881-82. The Ottoman government believed that the successful improvement in the economic conditions of the Empire depended upon the extent of the knowledge of its human and natural resources so that the priority and concentration on development could be given to the most densely populated areas where the construction of schools, railways, waterways, roads and bridges were required<sup>40</sup>.

In late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Ottoman government also counted its male and female population for technical and political reasons. The technical reason was to make the census system far more reliable than the previous ones. The political reason for the execution of a new census originated from the nationalist struggle amongst the nations in the Balkans, because each nation in the Balkans claimed that one outnumbered another, and therefore the conduct of a new census to assign a clerical head from the majority amongst the Vlachs, Greeks, Bulgarians and Serbians, became important. The government in the new census to be executed prepared a list showing the number of all non-Muslim religious groups in accordance with their sectarian ties with the participation

---

North-Eastern Bulgaria in the 60's of the Nineteenth Century)", *Etudes Balkaniques*, 19 (1983), pp. 59-72.

37. M. münir Aktepe (Editor), *Vakanuvis Ahmed Lutfi Efendi Tarihi*, Vol. 10, (Ankara, 1988), p. 125.

38. Shaw, *Census System*, p. 330.

39. Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, p. 35.

40. Karpat, *Records and Census*, p. 242.

of all the representatives of the groups mentioned to put an end to the struggle amongst the millets in Macedonia<sup>41</sup>. This census was conducted in 1905-6. The figures of the Turkish official statistic of 1905 were specially compiled in order to help to implement the reform program of Murzteg in Macedonia.

### *The Preparation of Data for the Population Censuses*

The Ottoman population statistics were compiled in detail by the Ottoman government through the conduct of censuses. The Ottoman government was not alone in collecting information about the population of the Empire. There were others, such as, the representatives of the non-Muslim subjects, travelers and European consuls who collected information on the population of the Empire by making estimation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. according to the principles of demography, the only way to have a knowledge of the size of the population is to enumerate the people. Accordingly, only the Ottoman government was in a position to enumerate the people and to compile accurate population statistics of its Empire, because a single person or a small group of people could not have achieved this massive task. The others can only be used in a situation that the Ottoman's statistics were absent<sup>42</sup>. Now the question arises how did the Ottomans count their people? In order to answer the question, we should examine the censuses taken by the Ottoman government in the nineteenth century, one by one, because the process followed to receive the figures of a census did not always resemble that of the others.

When the Council of State was founded, it issued the regulations as to how to conduct the census of 1831 and to count the population. It decided to register the people in three different defters, one for Muslims, another for non-Muslims, and the third one for the immigrants. It was also decided to indicate age, physical appearance and occupation for Muslims, and three categories of wealth for non-Muslims<sup>43</sup>. The government tried to select the census-takers from the respected officials in order that the people would not be suspicious about the census data that might be used against them. The census officials took their secret instructions from the Porte about their official duties before they went to the places in Anatolia

41. Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, p. 35.

42. McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities*, p. 3.

43. Rifat Özdemir, *XIX. Yüzyılın İlk Yarısında Ankara*, p. 116.

and Rumelia in Istanbul, the Register Office was established to collect and evaluate the data to be sent from the places of the census<sup>44</sup>. There were in provinces a *Jurnal Başkatibi*, his assistant and *İkinci Jurnal Başkatibi*, who were appointed to each province and given monthly salary in order to collect the population reports and to send them to the Register Office in Istanbul. If they abused their duties, such as not registering the changes on the population in their responsible areas, they would be dismissed from the office and punished. They were also warned to refrain from making mistakes and secret agreements with the local people<sup>45</sup>. Furthermore, in the 1830's there were at the provincial level *nufus nazırı*, at sancak and kaza levels population officials and scribes to register deaths, births and immigrants and to compile regular tables showing the total number of people in each district. There were also at village level functionaries like *muhtar*, *imam*, representatives of the millets and population officials who were appointed to register people and to enforce the regulations of the population registration and finally to issue travel permits and census receipts<sup>46</sup>. These people dealing with the population matters were also charged with the updating of the registers such as births and deaths, marriages and occupations. Copies of registers from the provinces were regularly sent to Istanbul and used to compile population tables<sup>47</sup>.

In the census of 1844 there was resistance from the population because of the census, so the people were reluctant to be registered in the census. The census of 1858-60 was conducted not only by the population officials and others mentioned earlier, but also by engineers and respected local people under the heading of valis and defterdars<sup>48</sup>. The census of non-Muslims in 1862 in Cyprus was executed by four groups, each comprising one Muslim and one Christian officer plus a scribe.

Officials in the census of 1866 in Tuna Province visited each house to register data on every individual such as the name of fa-

44. Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Vol. 5, p. 159.

45. A document from the Mahkeme Sicilleri of Selanik gives information about the salary and the duties of the Jurnal Başkatibi and Second Jurnal Başkatibi in 1251/1835. Jurnal Başkatibi received 400 guruş and Second Jurnal Başkatibi, 350 guruş monthly salary. Mahkeme Şeriye Sicili, no 231, p. 59 (I would like to thank Micheal Ursinus for this document).

46. Shaw, *Census System*, p. 327.

47. McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities*, p. 163; Cvijic, *Remarks on the Ethnography*, p. 35.

48. Vedat Eldem, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun*, p. 50.

ther, year of birth, death and marriage and the status of the person, occupation, residence, type of property and the size of different taxes<sup>49</sup>. In the register the special lists showed the number of heads of households, their estate-holdings, occupations and their total incomes. These population data were summed up in different lists indicating the total number of the taxable population, their total incomes, the value of estates and the total amount of tax collected, listed according to the religious affiliation<sup>50</sup>. All these information supplied in the census by the population officials were despatched to Istanbul through the population officials in the provinces.

The population officials entered necessary changes in the lists in their district based on the information provided by the *muhtar*, *imam* and the council of village elders who filled in an *ilmuhaber* supplied by the government. The population officials were obliged to go to the country-side to examine the situation on the spot and to report all the changes to their superior population office and finally to the Register Office. A copy of the registers of Muslim population was sent to the military authorities<sup>51</sup>.

After 1874 a census team existed in each kaza and district. It included the population officials, one Muslim and one non-Muslim chosen from the community leaders, a scribe, and his assistant. When necessary, old population registers were used. Nonetheless the census was generally carried out by going to every locality in the area. All the male inhabitants even children had to be seen before the census team and the council of village could enter their ages, names and physical appearances in detail. The census team was ordered to see also new-born babies to examine every demand for exemption from taxation and military service, and ensure that nobody was left concealed and unregistered. The catalogue of the census of a certain locality was attested by imam, muhtar and the council of village elders, and one copy of the census was dispatched to the population office in the kaza. The kaza officials would send, within three months after receiving the census records, a cumulative lists of males in their district to the sancak and then to the provincial population office that would finally forward the lists to the register office in the Imperial Register. Non-Muslims were entered in a different register as a means to facilitating tax collec-

49. todorova, Population Structure, p. 60.

50. Karpat, Ottoman Population, p. 24.

51. Karpat, Ottoman Population, p. 30; Idem, Recods and Census, p. 249.

tion. Each counted person was given an official identity card, which contained all the information entered in the register about the person<sup>52</sup>.

The data in the census of 1881-82 was provided directly by the person involved. Nevertheless special cases were also accepted in legal circumstances when a third person attended by two people over the age of twenty-one supplied it for the missing people. This provision was ostensibly intended to free females from being seen by the census-takers by which females would be allowed to be registered in the census for the first time<sup>53</sup>. The data in the register was repeatedly renewed by adding and subtracting immigrants, births and deaths, and updating other changes. However the renewing and updating records were not always accurate<sup>54</sup>, so after 1882 the government decided to send the census officials to France and England to study modern census techniques<sup>55</sup> so that the census and registration system would be made more efficient.

From 1897 onwards the methods of registering the subject were therefore made far more specific than the initial censuses. The certificates of birth and other data entered in the register specified not only the sex of child, but also its name, date and place of birth, names of its father and mother, and the detailed address of the child concerned. If a new baby was born dead, one of the relatives of the dead baby had to inform the population officials within a certain period varying from five days to two months according to the distance from the capital.

Regular inspection was also made to take necessary action against the arbitrary behavior of the population officials. Any action taken against the regulation concerning the registration of the population was subject to the decision of the court<sup>56</sup>. The final result of the censuses were sometimes published<sup>57</sup> either in the shape of booklets or in the provincial and state salnames.

---

52. For more information about the way of producing figures in this census, see Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, pp. 28-32; Idem, *Records and Census*, pp. 247-253; Shaw, *Census System*, pp. 328-332.

53. Karpat, *Records and Census*, p. 252.

54. J. McCarthy, "The Population of Ottoman Syria and Iraq 1878-1914", *Asian African Studies*, 15 (1981), 3-44 especially p. 5 (Hereafter McCarthy Syria and Iraq).

55. Shaw, *Census System*, p. 333.

56. *Ibid.*

57. McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities*, p. 164-166.

### *Evaluation of the Ottoman Census and Registration System*

The records of the population statistics were compiled and maintained by the Census Department from the reign of Mahmud II to the end of the Empire. These records of statistics like all population records contained errors which usually consisted of undercounting females and children, and imperfect knowledge of the age of individuals<sup>58</sup>. It was especially true that in the early censuses of the nineteenth century females were not counted at all, so the male population was simply doubled in order to arrive at a total population, because the Ottoman government in the earlier censuses was not concerned with the total population of the Empire owing to the military and taxation concerns.

Undercounting of children was a common practice in developing countries. The families could not have reckoned the child to be a member of the household. Another possibility is that they deliberately concealed the name of the child in order to avoid taxation and recruitment to the military. Undercounting of females was a consequence of the position of females in traditional Muslim society. They did not wish to be seen by the members of the opposite sex, especially by strangers. It resulted in undercounting females in Ottoman society<sup>59</sup>.

The census was not applied to some people, in particular, nomadic tribes in some inaccessible areas where estimation had to be made according to the information provided by the representatives of the tribes and local officials<sup>60</sup>.

The Ottoman census systems and their figures have been strongly criticized by some Western scholars such as Cvijic, stating that *"the female inhabitants are considered to be of little importance, and their number is not given exactly, being doubtless much greater in reality. The number given of the male inhabitants is also much less than is actually the case. Municipalities pay a military tax according to the number of the male inhabitants, therefore every Christian prefect does his best to withhold the real number from Turkish statistics. As to the Nufuz Memuri who controlled the matter, they were lazy and unconscientious and often let themselves be bribed to consent to mark a minimum number of male inhabi-*

58. McCarthy, Syria and Iraq, p. 4.

59. McCarthy, Syria and Iraq, p. 10.

60. Karpat, Ottoman Population, p. 33.

tants. Hence the *nufus defteri* and *salnames* always state a smaller number (especially of Christians) in the towns than is actually existent"<sup>61</sup>, and D. Dakin, in his book entitled "The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913", also has stated that "*The Turks had no census comparable to that in Western countries, but for military and taxation purposes they drew up figures based on the Nufuz defteri, or books in which officials recorded births and deaths. They recognized the four millets-Greeks, Bulgarians, Roman Catholic and Jews. Like the Eparchial lists made by the priest, the Turkish figures were inaccurate. No distinction was drawn between Serbs and Bulgarians. Figures otherwise compiled were the work of propagandist and describe ideals rather than actual facts*"<sup>62</sup>. Moreover, they argued that "*The Ottomans deliberately grouped all Muslim together in population reports, regardless of language, ethnic or sectarian ties (Turk, Arab, Kurd and Laz) while separating Christians by sect. The Ottoman also overcounted the Muslims in official statistics and undercounted the Christians*"<sup>63</sup>.

The purpose of conducting censuses were to produce data to organize administrative, social, political, financial and military matters as well as public works. The Ottomans did not deliberately undercount the non-Muslim subjects. Undercounting them would mean sacrificing revenue which was against the benefits of the Empire. It seems also unlikely that the Christian prefect did his best to undercount the non-Muslims, since, in the course of counting the population, he was not the only one determining whether the person concerned should be included in or excluded from the count, in addition to the prefect, there were also the representatives of the non-Muslim millets, imam, muhtar and some population officials. So the counting of the non-Muslims did not simply depend on the will of the Christian prefect or the Muslim representative. The enforcement of the identity card and its use in all affairs seems to have forced people to be registered in population offices. In almost every aspect of life of the Empire the identity card was strictly required for any contact with government or any type of business one had to run. That is why there was a very small room left for a person to avoid being registered especially in towns. As far as the sources available are concerned, there is no evidence at all to ac-

---

61. Cvijic, *Remarks on the Ethnography*, p. 36.

62. D. Dakin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913*, (Salonica, 1966), p. 199.

63. McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities*, p. 58.

cept the accusations that the population records were misrepresented for political purposes. If anything shows the reverse, the Ottomans would publish the returns of the censuses in order to prove that the Muslims were more than was actually the case. There is no doubt that its census and registration systems were not as perfect as those in modern times, the Ottomans did however their best to count the population of the Empire as accurately as possible throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries<sup>64</sup>.

A document taken from the *Mahkeme Sicili* Selanik also shows how the Ottomans tried to make their censuses and registration systems more efficient. The *Yoklama Defter*s from the provinces had to be sent to the Census Department in the capital after the complete of the count according to the regulations. Even in early censuses the government was quite strict to follow the procedures for obtaining census figures in accordance with the regulations. An example occurred in Salonica that the *Yoklama Defter*s of this province were dispatched in disorder to the register office in the capital. The Department of Census thereupon in 1835 strongly warned the register officer in the province to send the *Yoklama Defter*s in accordance with the rules of registration<sup>65</sup>. This warning came soon after the first census of 1831 which is considered to be the least accurate of all the censuses and this document clearly indicates that the Ottoman government undoubtedly tried its best to conduct sound censuses as possible as it could.

As for the accusations that "the nufuz(s) memuri were lazy and unconscientious and often let themselves be bribed...", the Ottoman government was careful about choosing its population officials. The government selected them either from the graduates of middle school, high school, and high technical school or from those having experience of civil service between five and ten years or from those serving as assistant in a census office between three and five years<sup>66</sup>. They were instructed to act with tolerance and respect towards the villagers and refuse any gift offered by the individuals<sup>67</sup>.

If the Ottomans intended to use the population results for political purposes they would never allow the non-Muslims to keep holding the post of the general directorate of the statistic depart-

64. Shaw, *Census System*, p. 336.

65. *Mahkeme Şeriye Sicili*, no 231, p. 40.

66. Shaw, *Census System*, p. 335.

67. Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, p. 29; *Idem*, *Records and Census*, p. 248.

ment for a long time<sup>68</sup>. It is difficult to understand the logic of some of the western scholars who have criticized the Ottoman government about the recognition of the non-Muslim groups as millets, and who simultaneously complained that the Ottoman government did not make any distinction between Greeks, Slavs, Bulgars, Albanians and Serbs<sup>69</sup>.

The conclusion is that the census and registration systems of the Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries produced the population figures which were without any question incomparable with the figures received from the censuses conducted in recent times in terms of accuracy and reliability<sup>70</sup>. It is, however, a fact that the figures of the government received from the censuses were far more reliable and accurate than those estimates and statistics made up by the church officials and western travelers.

---

68. Between 1893 and 1908 the Ottoman Empire's Directorate of Statistics was headed by the non-muslim officers- Armenians, Jews and Americans, see about the details, Karpat, Records and Census, pp. 250-51.

69. L.S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, (New York, 1963), pp. 517-518.

70. For a general criticism of the estimates made by the European and others, see McCarthy, Muslims and Minorities, pp. 63, 89, and 182.