

# YÖRÜKLER II

**Editörler**

**İlhan Şahin**

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## Agrarian Profile of Yoruk Settlements in Eastern Upper Thrace, 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> Centuries

Milena Petkova\*

### Summary

It is well-known that the Yörüks played a significant role in the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans – fast, auxiliary troops that established and maintain control in huge areas of the peninsula. Parts of these semi-nomadic groups remained in some of the conquered areas and were used in the re-population of vast, depopulated areas such as the territory of modern Eastern Upper Thrace. One of the sources that provide excellent opportunity to make observation on the sedentarization process of the semi-nomadic Yörük groups are the tapu tahrir defters of the late 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Despite all the pitfalls and limitations of these type of sources it is clear the establishment of a new settlement network and they reveal the agrarian profile of the newly founded villages. I assume that the Yörüks brought the experience in agrarian activities, though not dominant, from Anatolia and these agrarian abilities played a huge role in the process of the sedentarization of these semi-nomadic groups. Furthermore, the economic profile of their settlements in Eastern Upper Thrace played a key role in the differentiation of economic zones in the area for the next centuries.

**Keywords:** Yörüks, Ottoman, Balkans, Thrace, settlements, semi-nomadic groups.

A large number of research papers and books in world historiography are related to the semi-nomadic groups of the yörüks and their military abilities – as one of the important military forces at the rise of the Ottoman beylic, and later, as auxiliary troops in the Ottoman army, and the success they brought to the ottomans being their alleys in the conquest and the establishment of their rule over the territories of Rumeli and Anatolia<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Mehmet T. Gökbilgin, *Rumeli’de Yürükler, Tatarlar ve Evlâd-iFâtihân* (İstanbul: Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1957), 13-29; Idem, “Rumelinin İskanında ve Türkleşmesinde Yürükler,” III. *Türk Tarih Kongresi, Türk Tarih Kurumu* (1943): 648-660; Ömer L. Barkan, “Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Bir İskan ve Kolonizasyon Metodu Olarak Sürgünler”, *İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası* C. 15, 1-4 (1953-1954): 209-237; Ömer L. Barkan, “Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Bir İskan ve Kolonizasyon Metodu Olarak Vakıflar ve Temlikler”, I. *İstila Devirlerinin Kolonizatör Türk Dervişleri ve Zaviyeler*, *Vakıflar Dergisi*, S. 2 (1942): 293; Aleksey Kalyonski, *Yörüks in the Ottoman Balkans*, Sofia: Gutenberg Publishing House, 2020, 56-402; İlhan Şahin, “Göçebe Gruplar ve Organizasyonları”, *Osmanlı Dö-*

Numerous scientific publications refer to their nomadic/ semi-nomadic way of life and the specific of the social and political model and culture too<sup>2</sup>. All these scientific research and the results from them, in general, are related to clarifying the huge influence of the yörükson the establishment and later on, on the existence and functioning of the ottoman political, military and social system. Nevertheless, we should also mention the influence of the semi-nomadic groups on the political regimes in Asia Minor on the state formations long before the birth of the Ottoman beylik<sup>3</sup>.

Only few research interests are related to the abilities of the yörük groups to practice agriculture and exactly these specific capacities seem to be underestimated especially in the process of their colonization and sedentarizaion in Balkan Rumeli<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, the main observations and analyses very often refer to their abilities to grow different cereals (most often wheat), rice and cotton. This is presented in the context of their nomadic way of life including the process of selecting what type of cereal

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*neminde Konar – Göçerler*. İstanbul: Eren, 2006, 53-115; Harun Yeni, “The Utilization of Mobile Groups in the Ottoman Balkans: A Revision of General Perception”, *Archive*, 83 (2013): 183 – 205.

- <sup>2</sup> Brian Spooner, “The Cultural Ecology of Pastoral Nomads”, *An Addison-Wesley Module in Anthropology*, 45 (1973): 4-52; Robert Simon, “Symbiosis of Nomads and Sedentaries on the Character of the Middle Eastern Civilization”, *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 35 (1981): 229-242; Xavier de Planhol, “Vie pastorale caucasienne et vie pastorale anatolienne”, *Revue de géographie alpine*, XLIV (1956): 371-380; Idem, “Geography, Politics and in Anatolia”, *International Social Science Journal*, IX (1959): 525-531; Rudi Paul Lindner, *Nomads and Ottomans in Medieval Anatolia*, Bloomington: Indiana University, 1983.
- <sup>3</sup> Suavi Aydın, Oktay Özel, “Power Relations between Tribe and State in the Ottoman Eastern Anatolia”, *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 3-4 (2006): 51:67; Asa Eger, “Patronage and Commerce at the Twilight of Mamluk Rule: the New Fifteenth Century Inscriptions from the Amuq Plain, Turkey”, *Journal of Islamic Archaeology*, 1 (2014): 55-73; Carter Findley, *The Turks in World History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005; Yusuf Halaçoğlu, *Anadolu’da Aşiretler, Cemaatler, Oymaklar (1453-1650)*, Cilt 1, 2. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2009; Faruk Sümer, *Selçuklular Devrinde Doğu Anadolu’da Türk Beylikleri*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, Basimevi, 1990.
- <sup>4</sup> Halil İnalçık, “The Yürüks: Their Origins, Expansion and Economic Role”, *The Middle East and the Balkans under the Ottoman Empire. Essays on Economy and Society*, Bloomington: Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1993, 103-107; Nina Swidler, “Sedentarization and Modes of Economic Integration in the Middle East”, *When Nomads Settle. Processes of Sedentarization as Adaptation and Response*, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1980, 21-34; Meltem Toksöz, *Nomads, Migrants and Cotton in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Making of Adana – Mersin Region*, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2010; Necdet Tunçdilek, “Yayla- settlements and Related Activities in Turkey”, *Review*, 9-10 (1964): 58-71.

to be cultivated so it could not prevent their movements with the herds between winter and summer pasture lands<sup>5</sup>.

The present article aims to shed light on the agrarian profile of the yörük settlements in the region of modern Eastern Upper Thrace during the late 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century. Certain observations based on what's already known to the public and my own research experience show that exactly the agrarian activities of the colonized semi-nomadic groups played a crucial role in the adaptation process to the newly conquered and administrated lands. The research is mainly based on the information of detailed and synoptic land survey registrations (taputahrirdefterleri) and additional information from travellers' accounts, ottoman chronicles and late observations and results of ethnographic research. These competences to cultivate lands, harvest, accumulated in Anatolia and performed in Rumelitogether with the political and demographic circumstances played a significant role in the process of sedentarization of some of the representatives of these semi-nomadic groups.

At the very beginning of this article, I should outline the pitfalls and the limitations of the tax registrations considering it very important for my observations and conclusions to be presented in this text. The taputahrir registers are considered to be a significant indicator of the spread of the tax system and the functioning of the Ottoman fiscal regime as well as for the efforts of the state to have a sufficient economic policy aiming to reach each and every taxpayer. All these types of registrations (tapu tahrir defterleri) do not provide information on the exact number of the yörük groups in a certain territory. Usually, tax registrations were undertaken in the summer – a season when it was much easier for the ottoman officials to travel and reach more settlements and their population. For the specifics of their nomadic way of life a registration undertaken in the summer suggests that the yörük groups of the winter pasture lands were not included in the register<sup>6</sup>. The tapu tahrir defters provide information on tax units which form a certain source of revenue, i.e. the terms "hane", "cemaat", "kariye" for example at first refer to tax units and represent their economic potential.

What in generally defers the nomadic groups from the sedentarized population is the agrarian activity which changes the economic profile of the settlement and of course in terms of taxes more efficiently collected taxes from the registered taxpayers are more successful in making huge sources of revenue. The purpose of each fiscal system, including the ottoman one, was to establish and have a reliable network of registered

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Paul Roux, "La Sédentarization des nomads Yürük du vilayet d'Alanya (Turquie Méridionale). Note préliminaire a une monographie des districts d'Alanya et de Gazipaşa", *L'Ethnographie*, 55 (1961): 64-78.

<sup>6</sup> Lindner, *Nomads and Ottomans*, p. 97.

taxpayers and their settlements in order to form revenues that would serve the imperial budgetary, including collecting money for successful and well financed military campaigns. Therefore, we could assume that in certain regions of the imperial territories, the policy was to have more sedentarized population than nomadic groups. Last, speaking about 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, depended of course on the environment as well as on the political situation in a certain province<sup>7</sup>. Now I would like to draw your attention exactly on the process of sedentarization of the semi-nomadic groups of the yörüks that continued more than a century, the period 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, in Eastern Upper Thrace (modern South-east Bulgarian territories). To reveal this, I will present in comparison the agrarian profile of yörük settlements from Ottoman Rumeli and Anatolia. This will make it possible to observe certain changes in the economic activities that happened to the semi-nomadic groups on the territory of Eastern Upper Thrace.

The Thracian valley is the territory that provided “natural” geographical barriers – the Rhodopes and Sakar mountain from the South, Srednagora and Balkan mountains on the North, and these circumstances combined with the appropriate state tax policy in this region far away from military and political conflicts could provoke sedentarization of some of the colonized semi-nomadic groups<sup>8</sup>. The comparison with Karaman is not only related to migrated groups from this territory but for similarities of the environment between the Thracian valley and the territory of the Karamanbeylik. So, to say, similar environment that could provoke easier adaptation to the local (Thracian) environment and this make the “newcomers” continue, at least for the first decades, maintaining their typical way of life, have the same economic activities, establish the same settlement patterns, i.e. everything that once existed in Anatolia as a pattern was brought to the lands beyond the Bosphorus.

Before we “transfer” to the Thracian valley, we should first see what was at their disposal in Ottoman Anatolia, so they could adopt to the newly conquered lands. The examples I would use from Asia Minor refer to the territory of the eaylet of Karaman. All the registrations for Eastern Upper

<sup>7</sup> Halil İnalçık, *The Ottoman Empire the Classical Age 1300 – 1600*, Weidenfeld & Nickolson, 1973, 5-104; Idem, “Empire and Population”, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire* (Ed. H. İnalçık & D. Quataert), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 3-37; Metin Kunt, *The Sultans's Servants. The Transformation of the Ottoman Political Government 1550-1650*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1093, 1-76.

<sup>8</sup> Halil İnalçık, “The Yörüks: Their Origins, Expansion and Economic Role”, 97-136; İlhan Şahin, *Osmanlı Döneminde Konar-Göçerler*, 35-40; Milena Petkova, “The Process of Sedentarization of the Semi-nomadic Groups of the Yörüks in Parts of 16<sup>th</sup> Century Ottoman Rumeli: Migration Control or Tax Control?”, *Journal of Balkan and Black Sea Studies*, 3 (2019): 25-43.

Thrace provide information on the origins of some of the colonized taxpayers indicated after the entry of their names, for example: Menteşe, Karaman, Aydın, etc.<sup>9</sup>. For the majority of these cases for the region under study it is mentioned Karaman, therefore I have chosen the territory of the eyalet and the tax registrations to examine and to compare the provided information with the data for the region of Eastern Upper Thrace<sup>10</sup>.

To adapt to the new environment, it is important for these groups to have the abilities to manipulate the conquered space, so to say knowledge how to rule over a certain geographical region. What is well known is their capacity to transfer marshy areas into arable lands in Anatolia and the opposite – to turn the cultivated lands into marshy areas whenever needed for their nomadic way of life<sup>11</sup>. This was part of their everyday life in certain areas in Asia Minor for centuries, long before their colonization to the Balkans. Their specific abilities to cultivate and control marshy areas in the lowland zones along with the capability of establishing and maintaining for centuries settlement network above 1000 m altitude made them one of the most successful groups to adapt to the newly conquered lands in Rumeli<sup>12</sup>. Their experience meant that the yörük groups could establish and control the “economic” space in difficult conditions and at the same time reliable political and military companions of the ottomans during 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. These skills played a significant role first in the establishment of the new settlement network in Eastern Upper Thrace following exactly the same settlement pattern as it was in Anatolia. There, the process of establishing control by semi-nomadic groups on vast areas started as late as the 11<sup>th</sup> century, so to say a hundred of decades of experience was brought to the Balkans and served to the ottoman political model in establishing control on depopulated territories as well as to transfer these lands into rich economic areas.

<sup>9</sup> Ayşe Kayapınar, Levent Kayapınar, “Anadolu Beylikleri ve Balkanlar”, *Anadolu Beylikleri*, İstanbul, Siyen Yayınları, 2018, 451-483.

<sup>10</sup> İlhan Şahin, “XV ve XVI Yüzyılda Sofya-Filibe-Eski Zağra ve Tatar Pazarının Nüfus ve İskân Durumu”, *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları*, 48 (1987): 249-256; Milena Petkova, *The Central Balkans and the Ottomans. Demographic and Agrarian Economy in Eastern Upper Thrace during the 16<sup>th</sup> Century*, Sofia, Gutenberg Publishing House, 2020, 83-125.

<sup>11</sup> Halil İnalçık, “Empire and Population”, 37-38; Asa Eger, “The Swamps of Home: Marsh Formation and Settlement in the Early Medieval Near East”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 70 (2011): 55 – 56.

<sup>12</sup> Wolfram Eberhard, “Nomads and Farmers in Southeastern Turkey. Problems of Settlement”, *Oriens*, 1 (1953): 36-37; Wolf-Dieter Hütteroth, *Bergnomaden und Yaylabauen im mittleren kurdischen Taurus*, Marburg: Marburger Geographische Schriften, 1959, 16-48.

The agrarian model of the nomadic settlement in Anatolia combines agriculture and heard breeding for these two sectors of the agrarian economy proved to be the best for the environment conditions in these ottoman lands<sup>13</sup>. Areas of salty soils that maintained enough of fresh grass in the pasture lands despite the high temperatures and less humidity in the region<sup>14</sup>. The soils and the environment in general made the herd breeding more important than agriculture, i.e. without modern techniques it was meant that agriculture was not dominant even without the efforts of a certain government regulations or tax policy regarding the semi-nomadic groups.

If we should look for any special marks or signs showing the sedentarization of semi-nomadic groups, it is not the wheat, barley, oats that will show us this process. Usually, they would grow certain type of wheat, barley in spring and harvested in the early autumn not to prevent the movement with the sheep, for example. These cereals can coexist with the nomadic way of life, and this is one of the things that could not provoke sedentarization. Combining herd breeding and agriculture only reveals their potential to establish control on huge areas of economic space and this last together with the military abilities made them the most wanted and at the same time most problematic companion of the ottoman state through the centuries.

The most arable and suitable for agriculture lands were usually in the vicinity of the cities and what registrations for Karaman eyalet show is that different cereals along with small amounts of vegetables grown in the region for it was known as being "under water"<sup>15</sup>. The ottoman legislation framework of course suggests different taxes but if we pay attention to what was collected from different yörükce maats of this territories is taxes exclusively on cereals and the regular rüsumlar on agricultural activities. Explanatory notes near the name of the cemaats in the registrations of 1500-1501<sup>16</sup> mention that the semi-nomadic groups practice agriculture within the boundaries of other villages. Along with this are the usual taxations on sheeps, so to say heard breeding and agriculture going along together. Because this type with agriculture – growing wheat, barley or

<sup>13</sup> Wolfram, "Nomads and", p. 37.

<sup>14</sup> *Soils of the Great Konya Basin, Türkiye* (Ed. T. de Meesta), Wageningen: Centre for Agricultural Publishing and Documentation, 1970, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Huri İslamoğlu-İnan, Suraiya Faroqhi, "Crop Patterns and Agricultural Production Trends in Sixteenth Century Anatolia", *Review (Fernand Brodel Center)* 2 (1979): 400 – 436; Suraiya Faroqhi, "Crisis and Change, 1590 – 1699", *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300 – 1914* (Ed. Halil İnalcik & D. Quataert), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 411 – 636; Suraiya Faroqhi, "Taxation and Urban Activities in Sixteenth Century Anatolia", *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 1 (1979 – 1980): 19 – 53.

<sup>16</sup> BOA, TT 46, ff. 1 – 72.

something else didn't require the group to settle permanently and spent the whole year within the boundaries of a village. One could plough the fields in the late autumn, spent winter there and leave for winter pasture lands in the early spring. The harvesting could start late summer as well (for certain types of wheat for example). 25.5 % of the villages in this registration from the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century are registered taxes on vegetables and in some of these villages are registered yörük groups. I assume that this way of life within the boundaries of another village with settled agrarian population serves as a contact zone for making observations and accumulation of agrarian experience if not a start of a sedentarization.

The next registration of 1506-1507<sup>17</sup> shows 57 % of the yörük groups paying taxes on sheep and different cereals as well, so to say more than half of the included in the registration groups combine agriculture and heard breeding and not provoked sedentarization. What stopped this process also was the vast pasture lands, low density of settlement network and no tax policy initiated by the ottoman state to provoke the sedentarization in the region. These frequent tax surveys for the eyalet of Karaman could not be found for any region in Thrace and it only shows the efforts of the establishment of the ottoman rule in these regions trying to get more sufficient economic policy in collecting taxes.

The earliest so far registration is of 1489<sup>18</sup> and data covers the territory of one of the earliest sancaks in Rumeli – Paşasancak. The information presented here refers to the territory of one of the kazas in this ottoman sancak – the kaza of EskihisarZağra. Taxes on reeds (sazlık) as well as the described marshy areas in some of the villages<sup>19</sup> provide information on marshy areas and as the density of the settlement network suggests that there is a slowly going on process of converting marshy areas into arable lands. The collected taxes from the small, numerous Yörük village sare on sheep and wheat and barley, i.e. maintaining the same economic profile as it was in Karaman, and only 4% of the collected taxes are on vegetables. This small percentage only shows the beginning of a process which development would be clear in the forthcoming decades.

The next registration for the region in Eastern Upper Thrace refers to the second decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>20</sup>, time when the state initiative on

<sup>17</sup> BOA, TT 32, ff. 1 – 381.

<sup>18</sup> BOA, TT 26, ff. 58-89.

<sup>19</sup> Milena Petkova, "Land Property in Ottoman Rumeli - Case Study on Land Possession System in Parts of Paşa Sancak (Ottoman Rumeli) (Copies of Hüccets and Sınırnames Preserved in Ottoman Tapu tahrir Defters of XVIth century)", *2nd International Archive Congress on Ottoman Lands*, (Ed. Hatice Oruç, Mehmet Yıldırım, Songül Kadioğlu), İstanbul, 2019, 779-790.

<sup>20</sup> BOA, TT 77, ff. 459 – 746.

establishment of more effective fiscal policy and registrations is taken. The “magnificent” times with increase of population, territorial expansion and stable political regime, at least in the Balkan territories.<sup>21</sup> This registration refers again to small settlements and the percentage of cultivated vegetables has increased to 6%. The registration of 1579 shows that the percentages on taxes for growing vegetables has increased to 36 % in settlements where still the registration tells that some of the taxpayers are yörüks. Some of them practice agriculture within the boundaries of another village, maintaining these contact zones between seminomadic groups and sedentarized population. Slowly, in villages earlier registered with Yörük taxpayers, the only mentioning is that they are Muslim. The term yörük disappears in the last registration for the region of the kaza of Eskihisar Zağra.<sup>22</sup>

To suggest an appropriate explanation for the data from the historical sources we should assume what might have happened in this long going process for more than a century. At the beginning there were huge, depopulated areas in Eastern Upper Thrace due to long-lasting military conflicts from late medieval times between the Bulgarian kingdom and the Byzantine empire. What appeared in the depopulated lowland areas was vast marshy zones which stayed until the ottoman conquest of the territory. The next step was the colonization of different groups from Anatolia, including the semi-nomadic groups of the yörüks. They new how to settle, or at least how to control the local environment and turn the marshy areas into small arable lands, at least at the second half of the 15th century. These vast depopulated areas were attractive enough for the yörük groups for they could keep their mode of existence from Anatolia only with small changes. At this early period – end of 14<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 15<sup>th</sup> century the semi-nomadic groups along with other peasants and representatives of the ottoman military and administrative powers participated in a more general process I would call the demographic conquest of these empty lands. From then on it was the ottoman government to make its decisive steps to establish control on these groups in a different historical situation compared to the region of Karaman for example. As the years pass by more and more newcomers came from Anatolia and brought the settlement pattern. And since the territory of the Thracian valley is surrounded with several mountains it was no longer possible for the majority of the yörük groups to maintain their nomadic way of life. In the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century explanatory notes in the registers show that partly these

<sup>21</sup> Suraya Faroqhi, Leyla Erder, “Population Rise and Fall in Anatolia 1550–1620”, *Peasants, Dervishes and Traders in the Ottoman Empire*, London: Variorum Reprints, 1986, 322–345; İncalçık, *The Ottoman State*, 29–31.

<sup>22</sup> BOA, TT 494, ff. 421–514.

seasonal migrations provoked the complaints of settled population regarding their harvest. During this period a huge number of cemaats appear in the registrations with the term kariye, and those who were once living within the boundaries of villages now became separate villages.

At this same period the ottoman central power initiates a new tax policy toward the yörük groups regarding the size of their taxes for agriculture. It was two times smaller compared to the regular resm-içift or ispençe for the non-Muslim population in Thrace.<sup>23</sup> These factors influenced the sedentarization of some of these groups and that's one of the explanations why the percentage of growing vegetables increased in their settlements. At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century a huge number of once settled groups became mostly engaged in agriculture. In the region growing cereals and vegetables remained dominant for centuries and thus made the economic profile of Eastern Upper Thrace. What is curious for me is that obviously, though settled, they still managed to control the marshy areas and after the Turco-Russian war of 1877-1878 and later political events that provoked the mass migration of this population towards the territories of Turkey, the Bulgarian state had to face this difficulty – how to maintain the arable lands. The governments had a special policy on building channels for the water and keep the agriculture in the regions. These channels for the last let me say more than 3 decades are no longer maintained and nowadays with the depopulation of the region for economic reasons we could start observing an environmental process that was in Thrace in late 14<sup>th</sup> century – the appearance of marshy zones, abandoned territories that can no longer be used for agriculture.

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<sup>23</sup> Petkova, "The Process of Sedentarization...", 30-43.