

Causes Behind the Dismissal of Ottoman Timar Holders in the Mid-15th Century Balkans: A Comparative Approach

Causas por Detrás da Dispensa dos Detentores de Timar Otomanos nos Balcãs em Meados do Século XV: uma Abordagem Comparativa

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the reasons behind the dismissal of Ottoman landholders in the mid-15th-century Balkans. Although studies mostly focus on the 16th and 17th centuries, the 15th century received incidental attention. Relying mainly on seven population and land records, as well as other archival documents, this article argues that the discharge of contemporary Ottoman landholders resulted from eleven main reasons, specified below. As underlined throughout the paper, these cases provide a lot of new insights regarding the functioning of the system at the time. Among others, the increasing state control over the landed estates in this period manifested itself in the dismissal of the timar holders at regular intervals. This indirectly prompted a good portion of timariots to stay in their estates, instead of using their revenues on military campaigns.

KEYWORDS: Timar system; 15th century; Balkans; Ottoman Empire; Land tenure system.

RESUMO

Este estudo centra-se nas razões por detrás da dispensa de timariotas otomanos em meados do século XV nos Balcãs. Embora os estudos se concentrem principalmente nos séculos XVI e XVII, o século XV recebeu uma atenção incidental. Baseando-se principalmente em sete registos populacionais e de terras, para além de outros documentos de arquivo, este artigo sustenta que a dispensa dos proprietários de terras otomanos coevos resultou de onze razões principais, especificadas abaixo. Como sublinhado ao longo do artigo, estes casos fornecem muitos novos *insights* sobre o funcionamento do sistema na época. Entre outros, o crescente controlo estatal sobre as propriedades rurais neste período manifestou-se na dispensa dos detentores de timar a intervalos regulares. Isto levou, indiretamente, uma boa parte dos timariotas a permanecer nas suas propriedades, em vez de utilizarem as suas receitas em campanhas militares.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Sistema Timar; século XV; Balcãs; Império Otomano; Sistema de posse de terras.

Introduction

Bu Murad için Ohri'den döndü gitti Akçahisâr'a kulluga varmadı deyü i'lam itdükleri sebebden Martin'e ve Doğan'a ve Dede oğlu Martin'e dahi müşterek virildi, müşterek yiyub nöbetçe eşerler; Fi evâhir-i Zilhicce, Sene 854, der Edirne.

Since they have reported that the abovementioned Murad did not join the army service for the Campaign of Krujë (Akçahisâr), his landed estate was given to Martin, Doğan, and Martin, the son of Dede, in partnership. They hold this estate in partnership and till their land in turns. (This record has been compiled) In the last ten days of the month of Zilhicce (February 1451) in the year 854 in Edirne. (CDAB, 250, p. 21)

Timar-ı Ömer, veled-i Karaca Ali. Bu mezkur kendü pir olduğu sebebden oğlu Hamza'ya ve Yusuf'a müşterek verildi. Müşterek yiyüb nöbetçe eşerler; fi evvel-i sefer, sene 854, der Edirne.

The landed estate of Ömer, the son of Karaca. Since this individual grew old, his landed estate was transferred to his sons, Hamza and Yusuf, in partnership. They hold this estate in partnership and plow

it in turns. (This record was made) on the first of the month of Sefer, in the year 854 (16th of March, 1450) in Edirne. (OAK, 45-30, 7a)

Timar-i Rayko Lagotori, ez tahvil-i Radin. Bu Rayko'nun hırsuzluğu çıkmış olduğu sebebdan asıldı, oğlu Kraso'ya müntakil oldu, fi evvel-i Receb, sene 855, der Sofya.

The landed estate of Rayko Lagotori, who obtained it from Radin. Because Rayko engaged in theft, he was hanged. This landed estate was transferred to his son Kraso on the first of the month of Receb, in the year 855 (30th of July, 1451) in Sofia. (OAK, 52/59, 10b)

The passages above were taken from one of the earliest existing Ottoman land and population surveys, *tahrir defters*, from the mid-15th century, and provide extensive information about the contemporary landholders in the Ottoman Balkans. The first land survey, CDAB, 250, gives valuable insights about the timar holders in the region of Kastoria-Greece. Together with one other survey, CDAB, 525, which covers several locations including Timur Hisar (Sidirokastro), İstefanya (Langadas), Kaloyan, Bogdanos, and Avret Hisar (Neo Gynaikokastro) in Northern Greece, as well as Köprülü (Veles), and Üsküb (Skopje) in Northern Macedonia, they also point to the presence of *voyruk* soldiers, the members of the pre-existing lower-class non-Muslim military aristocracy, and the names of several monks who were the leaders of their monastic communities in the abovementioned areas. The last survey, OAK, 45-30, is cataloged under the "Oriental Collections" at the University of St. Cyril and Methodius in Sofia, Bulgaria (OAK, 45-30, 1b-21b). OAK, 45-30 presents information about 29 landed estates, and their current and previous holders in the Thessaloniki and Avret Hisar (Neo Gynaikokastro) regions. Although it does not provide cadastral and population information regarding the center of Thessaloniki, it still counts as an invaluable source, giving the earliest details on the structures of the Ottoman timar system in the periphery of the city. OAK, 52-59, from which the last passage was cited, in a similar vein, is compiled in the region of Visako (Visoka Polyana-Bulgaria) and İznepol (Tran-Bulgaria). This study will concentrate on the reasons behind the dismissal of Ottoman timar holders in the mid-15th century in the Ottoman Balkans¹. Aside from relying on the mentioned sources, this study will include

¹ The Timar system was the Ottoman Empire's core land tenure and military system from the 14th to 17th centuries, granting cavalrymen (Sipahis) revenue rights over land in exchange for military service, allowing them to collect taxes (timars) to fund themselves and provide troops for the

other land surveys, namely CDAB, 707, CDAB, 303, CDAB, 117.5, and OAK, 52.59, which provides similar information about the Ottoman land tenure system in Sofia and Pirot (Şehirköy), Prilep and Kičevo, Kruševac (Alacahisar), and Toplički (Toblice), respectively². Although these records are fragmented, and several pages are missing, comparative research still allows us to reach a general conclusion on the issue of the causes of the dismissal of landholders in the Ottoman Balkans. That being said, unfortunately, this field of study gravely suffers from a lack of original research. Albeit declining in recent years, indeed, the researchers have previously focused on several Ottoman *defters* in various Balkan provinces; however, the reasons behind the dismissal of Ottoman landholders could not be properly understood (Uzunçarşılı, 1982, p. 311). There is not a single study that directly focuses on this historical problem. Indeed, other studies that dealt with various issues about the timar system occasionally referred to the reasons behind the dismissal of Ottoman timariots in different periods³. However, instead of adopting a comprehensive approach, they maintained that a few conventionally accepted cases, such as failing to appear at muster during the campaign seasons, were the main reasons behind the discharge of the timar holders. Aside from this, such studies tend to concentrate on only one or two *tahrir defter* and geographical region, trying to generalize about the entire timar system that lasted for centuries. This indicates a serious problem in the field, which requires significant research. Heath Lowry's recent book review of *1445 Tarihli Paşa Livâsı İcmâl Defteri*, showed the importance of correct reading of Ottoman *tahrir defters*, which also necessitates traveling to target locations to get acquainted with their topographical characteristics in the Ottoman Balkans. Lowry is concerned that the lack of scholars who are knowledgeable not only about Ottoman history but also the general late medieval history of the Balkans resulted in significant factual mistakes in the political history of the region. In this regard, he encourages serious research on other Ottoman cadastral records in various parts of the Ottoman Balkans, including Greece (Lowry, 2023, p. 267; İnalçık et al., 2013).

Sultan, functioning like a decentralized feudal system but with revocable grants tied to service, not inheritance (Uzunçarşılı, 1982, p. 311).

² CDAB, 707, 1b-21b; OAK, 52/59, 1b-18b. While CDAB, 707, and OAK, 52.59 is located in the St. Cyril and Methodius National Library in Sofia, Bulgaria, CDAB, 303 and CDAB, 117.5 are at the Presidential Ottoman Archives and Atatürk Library in İstanbul-Turkey.

³ There are a number of studies that include this subject as a component in their articles. However, most of these studies do not directly ponder the discharge of the timar holders as a main theme. However, they are still important as they use several primary source materials from various periods, introducing them to the wider academic community and making them aware of them (Karaboğa & Bozdoğan, 2021, p. 347; İnalçık, 2012, p. 168; Kılıç, 2017, p. 118).

In his “The Trouble with Timars: An Excursion into a Seventeenth-Century Documentary Landscape”, Victor Ostapchuk concentrated on the evolution of the timar system in the 1600s, delving into various archival materials including contemporary *tahrir defters* (population and land registers), and related *ıcmal defters* (summary, concise, synoptic registers) (Ostapchuk, 2020, p. 35). In this work, he incidentally touched upon the causes for the dismissals of the timar holders; however, he only mentioned a few of them, such as “dereliction of duty and other irregularity” and “missing campaigns (Ostapchuk, 2020, p. 35). Furthermore, in her “Nasihatnameler, İcmal Defterleri, and the Timar – Holding Ottoman Elite in the Late Sixteenth Century, Including the Seventeenth Century”, Linda T. Darling dealt with the complaints about the evolution of the timar system in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, which is important to this study’s objectives (Darling, 2014, p. 193). More importantly, in her “Public Finances: The Role of the Ottoman Centre”, she also delved into the grounds for dismissal of the timar holders (Darling, 2006, p. 118). Here, she pondered how the Ottoman central finance department changed according to the necessities that arose from fulfilling the increasing financial expenditures of the military. In doing so, she gave special attention to the effects of this evolution on the timar system (Darling, 2006, p. 118). Her observations about the relationship between the dismissal of timar holders who fell short of their military responsibilities and the increase in banditry in the late 1500s are noteworthy in this respect. Additionally, in his “The Fall of Icarus: the Paradox of the Ottoman Centralization and the Abstraction of Timars”, Muhsin Soyudoğan investigated the process of centralization of the Ottoman land tenure system in the late 15th century, concentrating on the Balkans. Here, he also gave some attention to the reasons behind the dismissal of timar holders, saying: “previous defters indicate that timar holders used to be dismissed for being involved in criminal activities, for absenting themselves from military operations, or for attempting to defraud the authorities in relation to timar revenues”. He also adds a fourth cause, “possession of timars for more than three years”, with a comment that this practice whom he calls purge was not a common one (Soyudoğan, 2017, p. 174).

Soyudoğan’s study is noticeable, which conveys the idea that there is a certain amount of awareness about the broader reasons behind the discharge of the Ottoman timar holders at the time. My study aims to further expand the issue, bringing forth that the reasons for the discharge of the timar holders are much more complex than they were presented before, as they stemmed from previously overlooked, multifaceted, and diverse social, economic, military, and political causes. My study will not only contribute to our understanding

of the mechanism of the functioning of the Ottoman timar system in the mid-fifteenth century but also allow researchers to compare it with other contemporary or near-contemporary land tenure systems, such as Pronoia in the Balkans. This study limits its scope to Northern and Northwestern Greece, Northern Macedonia, Western Bulgaria, and Eastern Serbia. Although there are other contemporary *defters* from various parts of the Balkans, such as Albania and Thessaly, they will not be the primary focus of this research. These *defters* are quite hefty in size and content; thus, a whole new comparative research is needed to examine them, which I plan to do next (Arkan & Delilbaşı, 2001). However, I will occasionally refer to various records in these *defters* in my study, to enhance the overall quality of my research outputs⁴. In addition, the scope of this study does not include finding a rationale for the formation of the Ottoman land tenure system, on which we have a sufficient number of studies. It also does not seek to give a trajectory of the evolution of this system over centuries. Rather, it seeks to find an answer to the question: What were the reasons that led to the dismissal of Ottoman timar holders from their landed estates in the mid-fifteenth-century Balkans? In this respect, this study will analyze 406 different landed estates in the mentioned population and land surveys, which provide specific information regarding the causes for the dismissal of 102 separate landholders. This article maintains that these Ottoman landholders were discharged due to 11 main reasons: (1) Criminal activities, (2) Physical or mental impairment, (3) Failing to fulfill a military duty, (4) Taking flight from the landed estate, (5) Voluntary resignation and/or promotion, (6) Violation of authority/responsibility, (7) Specific cases of disappearance or death, (8) Illegal or fraudulent acquisition of the landed estate, (9) Betrayal, (10) Holding the estate for too long, (11) Wrong Reports.

1. Criminal activities

In the subject *tahrir defters*, approximately 9 percent of the timar holders (9 in total) lost their estates due to engaging in criminal activities, which makes it one of the most encountered reasons⁵. The most common criminal

⁴ Some of the *defters* do not provide many insights about the discharge of the contemporary timar holders in the regions where they were compiled. So, they are not useful to this study (Balta, 1989; Lowry, 2012; Bojanić, 1973; Pulaha, 1974).

⁵ There is another record in which a timariot was signalled as “jailed”. I did not add him to this group since we do not know if he committed a crime or was put into prison for some other offence: “Bu mezkur Ahmed için mahpus oldu deyü...” (OAK, 45-30, 19a).

activity among the landholders appears to be stealing. Three individuals were removed from their holdings as a result of this. Two of them, Stephan and Yovan, stole supplies from the army and sheep from the estates of a *paşa* (a high-ranking official in the Ottoman political and military system), respectively; that is why they were removed from their positions⁶. In the last case, although the nature of the theft was not further specified, a timariot called Rayko was executed by hanging⁷. In other cases, we see that the landholders committed murder⁸. Two landholders named Curce and Uzgur, the sons of Nikola Iskoric, who shared a timar estate in the Prilep region, for example, murdered an unspecified person⁹. In the same region, Doyo and Yorko, the sons of Dimitri, killed a tolerated Christian (*haraçgüzar*) who was probably living in the territories of a vassal state, as a result of which they lost their estates¹⁰. A similar case occurred when one of the timar holders got drunk and kidnapped one of the associates of a judge (*kadı ademin çalmış*) in the region of Toplički (Toblice)¹¹. Lastly, in the same region, another timar holder lost his possession because a local notable called Yakub Beg notified the authorities that he had engaged in fornication¹². First, these instances indicate that committing a crime was widespread among the Ottoman timar holders. Crimes were committed for a variety of reasons, but in most cases, financial motivation played a big role. Such motivations even urged the timar holders to treat the tolerated Christians as a legal target for enslavement, which was strictly forbidden by the Sharia law. Second, the responsibilities of the *Subaşı* (police superintendents) were not adequately detailed before. It was previ-

⁶ CDAB, 525, p. 59: “Bu köy mezkur İstapan için Tirnavi Hisarı’ndan azık uğurlayıp Bogi kafiye satdı diyü subaşı i’lam itdüğü sebebden Yıl oğlu Turalibey’e ber vech-i muzaf viridiler. Fi evahir-i Zilkade sene 854, der Edirne”; CDAB, 303, 8: “Bu mezkurun (Yovan) kardaşları gelüp paşa hassına virüp koyun aldıkları sebebden bu timar alınub Radoslav oğlu Yovan’a virildi. Mutasarrıf olub yılda üç zirhlu ile eşer, fi evahir-i Zilhicce, sene 856, der Edirne”.

⁷ OAK, 52/59. 10b: “Bu Rayko’nun hırsuzluğu çıkduğı sebebden asıldı, oğlu Kraso’ya müntakil oldı, fi evvel-i Receb, sene 855, der Sofya”.

⁸ Murder is also a common occurrence in external *defters*. A janissary called Yusuf, for example, committed a murder in the region of Zvečan, thus, his estate was taken from him in 1466 (Şabanoviç, 1964, p. 29).

⁹ CDAB, 303, p. 27: “Bu mezkurlar adem öldürmüşler ol sebebden alınub bu iki paare köyler Akpınarlı Saruca’ya virildi, mutasarrıf olub eşer, fi evahir-i Rebiyülevvel, sene 859, der Edirne”.

¹⁰ CDAB, 303, p. 38: “Bu mezkurlar için haraç güzar kafir öldürdüler deyü i’lam itdükleri sebebden alınub Mirko’ya virildi, fi evvel-i Cemaziyelula, sene 855, der Sofya”.

¹¹ CDAB, 117/5. 38a: “Bu mezkur serhuş olub kadı ademin çalmış ve hem raiyyetleri dahi miskindür deyü sancak begi Mehmed Beg’e mektub yazub i’lam itmış ol sebebden Cerrah Hamzaıya virildi. Fi evasıt-ı Cemaziyellevvel, sene 859, der Filibe”.

¹² CDAB, 117/5. 24b: “Bu mezkur için kendü kızıyla zina eder ve kulluk etmez deyü Yakub Beg i’lam etdüğü sebebden alınub Çakır oğlu Hamza’ya virildi. Fi evail-i Zilkade, sene 853, der Edirne”.

ously proposed that the timar holders could not intervene in crimes committed in their landed estates (Akdağ, 1955, p. 45). This was within the boundaries of *Subaşı*'s responsibility. However, the question was gravely overlooked: if the timar holder committed a crime, who would interfere? The records indicate that *Subaşı*s did not have the authority to arrest the timar holders. What they could do was to gather evidence and witnesses among the *reaya* (The tax-paying lower class of Ottoman society). After finishing their local investigation, they used to present their reports to higher authorities. As will be detailed below, the state was deciding whether the allegations were false or true; according to which, they kept or removed the current timar holder.

2. Physical or mental impairment

Physical or mental impairment also appears to be one of the common causes for the removal of Ottoman landholders. The records indicate that ten percent of the timar holders (ten in total) lost their estates, reasons related to this: seven of them became old and weak, one became ill, the other got maimed, and the last one went mad. Among those who grew old, two were also recorded as *fertut*, which signifies that they also became senile and may have been mentally unstable¹³. It is interesting that, except for one case, almost all aged timar holders managed to install their sons as the new holders in their estates. The same situation is also observable in another timar holder called Yorgi's estate; although he became mad, his sons, Vulkaşın and Nikola, were able to inherit his landed estate¹⁴. In the last two cases, the cadastral officials recorded the reasons for dismissals as *hasta oldu* and *malul oldu*, both of which could mean getting sick, but the latter also carries the meaning of being maimed (CDAB, 117/5. 31b; 303, p. 51). These cases demonstrate that usefulness was the key factor for the state. It shows the pragmatic side of the Ottoman land tenure system. The landholders were allowed to keep their estates as long as they were capable of fulfilling their military duties. If they were physically unfit to serve as cavalry, the state would take

¹³ CDAB, 303, pp. 28, 38, 56 and 29: "Bu mezkur fertut pir ulduğu sebebden oğulları Muhammed'i ve Hüseyin'i müşterek yazdırdı. Kendü haric oturur, mezkurlar nöbetçe eşerler. Fı evahir-i Ramazan, sene 857, der Filibe"; OAK, 45-30, 7a; CDAB, 525, p. 50; CDAB, 525, p. 39: "şimdiki halde fertut pır olduğu sebebden şahin'e virildi. Fı evahir-i Reblyülevvel, sene 855, der Sofya".

¹⁴ CDAB, 303, p. 59: "şimdiki halde bu mezkur Yorgi delü olduğu sebebden oğlu Vulkaşın'e ve Nikola adlu kafıre müşterek virildi. Müşterek yiyüb nöbetçe eşerler. Fı evail-i Receb, sene 857, der Edirne".

their timars from them. However, it does not mean that they were treated as something like throwaways. The authorities were able to assess that physical and mental impairment occurred as a natural phenomenon; thus, the timar holders could not be held responsible for these. In the majority of cases, they appointed the sons of such individuals to the estates. This could be understood as a duty of loyalty, through which the state allowed the timar holders to keep the estate within the family.

3. Failing to fulfill a military duty

The most encountered reason behind the discharge of Ottoman landholders is failure to fulfill military duty and responsibility. We can observe that approximately 33 percent of the landholders (32 in total) lost their estates due to causes related to this. The overwhelming majority of this group's landholders (26) did not respond to various military calls at all, ignoring the calls for duty. 3 others appear to have fled the enemy during a military campaign. The remaining ones either went back to their estates after a brief participation in the campaigns (1), joined the campaigns late (1), or, in contrast to participating in the campaigns, sent somebody else (1). *Yumuşa gelmedi/varmadı*, *uğraşa gelmedi/varmadı*, *kulluğa gelmedi/varmadı*, *kulluktan kaldı*, *hizmete gelmedi/varmadı*, or *çeriye gelmedi/varmadı*, are the expressions that were mostly used to signify the action of not joining the campaign, or the army¹⁵. Specifically, *Yumuş* could mean specific duties that the landholders were put into by high-ranking officials. The phrases *kulluğa varmadı* and *kulluktan kaldı* were, in many cases, associated with those who failed their sentry duties in various fortifications in the Balkans. In one single instance, *harbe gelmedi*, expression is also used, which signifies an unspecified battle that the associated land holder failed to join¹⁶. *Eşkün* or *eşkin*, a term that is used to signal military campaigns, is also used in the documents (İnalçık, 2012, p. 170). According to this, an individual called Sirandin, who held a landed estate in Prilep, did not join the calls of duty for an *eşkün* for two

¹⁵ Examples are as follows: OAK, 45-30, 7b: "Şahabeddin Paşa bu mezkurı yumuşa göndermiş varmamış, ol sebebden Umur oğlu Mustafayı müşterek kıldılar. İkişi müşterek yiyüb nöbetçe eşerler. Fi evasıt-ı Zilkade, sene 856, der Dimetoka"; CDAB, 707. 4b: "Bu Muhammedi için uğraşa gelmedi diye bildirdükleri..."; CDAB, 303, p. 24: "Bu Milnoş için Kocacık Hısarı dızdanı kulluk etmez deyü bildirdiği..."; CDAB, 250, p. 16: "Novaberde hizmetine dahı gelmemiş..."; CDAB, 250, p. 5: "Bu mezkur için çeriye gelmedi diye...".

¹⁶ OAK, 45-30, 3a: "Mevkuf yazıldı idî harbe gelmediğinden".

consecutive years; thus, his landed estate was transferred to a certain Rale in August 1455 (Hijri: Evahir-i Şaban 859)¹⁷. Furthermore, as stated, one timar holder appears to have responded late to the call of duty¹⁸. That is, a timariot by the name of Küçük Karaca was summoned to the campaign of Novo Brdo. However, the record signals that he joined the army after the conclusion of the campaign with the capture of the castle of Novo Brdo, which happened on 1 June 1455. Therefore, the authorities decreed the transfer of his estate to another individual in August of the same year. (Hijri: Evahir-i Şaban 859)¹⁹. A similar case could also be observed regarding another timariot called İshak, who, instead of participating in military duty, sent a page (oğlan) from the region of Debar. İshak was originally holding the estate in partnership with another timariot named Kasım. As a result of this action, the authorities removed both timariots from their possessions²⁰. In addition, a landholder's *eşkünci* (the one who is required to join the military campaigns) did not respond to a call of duty in the Prilep region sometime in 1451. Although the cadastral officer does not mention who this *eşkünci* was, it appears that this landholder named Yako was required to bring along a page (gulam) with him when joining the campaigns. Thus, one can argue that he failed to do so; thus, the authorities deprived him of his estate²¹. Further, according to another note, a landholder called İsa returned home after joining an unspecified military duty in January 1452 (Evail-i Muharrem 856). As he did not notify the authorities about this, he lost his landed estate, which he held in the Sofia region²². The term *eşkün* is also used regarding a similar case, in which a certain landholder, Muhammedi, went home, abandoning a military campaign (*eşkünden gitmiş*); thus, his landed estate was taken away. Lastly, a landholder called Murad, the son of Saruca, was reported to escape from the army during a military duty in Bosnia (kulluktan kaçtı); thus, his estate was taken away from him in January 1451 (Hijri Evahir-i Zilkade, 854)²³.

¹⁷ CDAB, 303, p. 62: "Bu mezkur iki yıldan berü eşküne gelmediği sebebdendir..."

¹⁸ There is no shortage of similar cases in other *tahrir defters*. In the *defter* of Thessaly (1454-1455), for example, we encounter the following record: "Timar-ı Hamza ve Mustafa veled-i Eflak Şahin, gulam-ı mir, amma mezkur Hamza eşküne geç verdiği için..." (Arıkan & Delilbaşı, 2001, p. 115).

¹⁹ CDAB, 250, p. 16: "Bu mezkuru İstanbul'a cühudlar alub gitmeğe göndermişler Gümölcine'ye varıcak kalmış Novaberde hizmetine dahi gelmemiş".

²⁰ CDAB, 525, p. 53: "Şimdiki halde bu mezkur İshak kulluğa varmayub Debre'den oğlan dutup yerine gönderdiği sebebdendir".

²¹ CDAB, 303, p. 40: "Şimdiki halde eşküncisi gelmediği sebebdendir alınub".

²² CDAB, 303, p. 83: "Bu Muhammedi eşkünden gitmiş".

²³ CDAB, 707. 16b: "Şimdiki halde bu mezkur Bosna'da kulluktan kaçtığı sebebdendir".

Regarding the others, we can derive more specific information. For example, a certain Kasım escaped from the campaign site during the siege of Constantinople (April 6 – May 29, 1453). Therefore, he lost his estate in December 1453²⁴. According to another record, a landholder called Silahdar Yusuf appears to have fled when the Hungarians occupied Sofia during the initial stage of the Crusade of Varna in 1443. It is interesting, however, that he was appointed to his estate approximately five years after this incident took place, in January 1448. It seems that someone reported to the authorities about his flight from the army earlier; thus, he lost his estate in April 1449²⁵. This is a fascinating case that conveys the idea that the Ottoman timar holders were occasionally held responsible for their misconduct before their appointments to the landed estates.

So, the question arises: why did these landholders try to avoid fulfilling their military responsibilities? I think this could be divided into two reasons: the first one was more specific and related to the conditions of the time, and the second one was more general. The first group includes the military conditions on the ground, which negatively affected timar holders' willingness to join the campaigns. We can trace these timariots in the records because the cadastral officials indicate the specific phenomena related to these timariots. The military failures that the Ottomans experienced in suppressing the Scanderbeg revolt, for example, demoralized a timar holder called Murad; thus, he escaped the army in Ohrid during the Ottoman campaign against Krujë-Alacahisar (1450)²⁶. The abovementioned timar holders who deserted the army could also be added to this group. The timariots in the second group, on the other hand, regarded joining the military campaigns as fruitless labor for their financial interests. Previous researchers demonstrated that the economic challenges the Ottomans faced, especially in the late 16th century, prevented the timariots from responding to the calls of duty (Akdağ, 1975, p. 83). For a good portion of them, the revenues they accrued from their timars were not sufficient for their campaign expenses (Mutafchieva & Dimitrov, 1968, p. 13). The same rule cannot be applied to the mid-15th century. After all, we cannot see a direct correlation between the absent timariots and their low revenues, because those who had relatively higher revenues even failed to answer the calls of duty. Thus, there

²⁴ OAK, 45-30, 10a: "Bu Kasım için İstanbul üzerinden koyub kaçtı deyü ilam ettikleri sebebdan alınıb".

²⁵ OAK, 45-30, 11a: "Bu Yusuf için Engürüs geldiğinde Sofya'dan kaçtı deyü".

²⁶ CDAB, 250, p. 21: "Bu Murad için Ohriden döndi gitti Akçahisara kulluğa varmadı".

must be a different case here. Darling previously put forward that the state was trying to aggressively increase its authority over the landed estates in the frontier territories by appointing its household agents, *Kapıkulları*, in the mid-15th century (Darling, 2017, p. 145). Our records indicate that, in most cases, the timar holders used to lose their landed estates in a few years after obtaining them²⁷. The majority of the timar holders were able to hold the estates between one to three years, while those who kept the estates for more than 5 years appear increasingly rare²⁸. Thinking that 35 percent of the timariots in total lost their estate due to this reason, failing to fulfill a military duty appears to be quite common among them. I argue that this insecurity made the timar holders highly unresponsive to the military calls. In other words, the timar holders were aware that the landed estates would not be in their possession for long; thus, instead of spending their revenues by joining the expensive campaigns, they preferred to stay in place. Furthermore, the authorities were reacting to these cases generally in a year; in some individual cases, it would take more than one year. During this time, the timar holders were still able to continue to collect taxes from their *reaya*; thus, one could easily think that they were able to accumulate sufficient wealth to think about their next moves²⁹.

4. Taking Flight from the Landed Estates

Taking flights from the landed estates, which is particularly related to the previous section, appears as one of the lesser encountered reasons for the transfer of timar holdings to other individuals. We can detect only four records (approx. 4 percent) in which the cadastral officials noted these cases. It should be known that, in contrast to the voluntary resignation, detailed below, this group includes those who left their landed estates without notifying the authorities and then disappeared (*kaçtığı sebebden*, or *bırakıp gitmiş*). Although we are not fully sure about the reason for their departures,

²⁷ For example, a timar estate changed hands five times in four years in the region of Prilep between 1446 and 1450 (CDAB, 303, p. 79).

²⁸ It is generally argued in Ottoman historiography that timariots who lost their estates because of these reasons could gain them back if they “went on within seven years” (İnalcık, 1973, p. 147). Dağlı claims that some landed estates could be vacant up to twenty years in the 1600s (Dağlı, 2012, p. 150).

²⁹ Şevket Pamuk says that the sipahis collected taxes from their dependent peasants ‘mostly in kind’ which is a debated statement (Pamuk, 2004, p. 239).

some details in the records give hints. Interestingly, one of the landholders who left his estate and disappeared appears to be Dan III, also known as Dan the Younger, who was the son of Dan II of Wallachia (CBAD, 707. 5a). There is almost no reliable record regarding his life before the period when he entered the throne struggle for the Wallachian crown between 1456-1460. However, the cadastral record provides invaluable insights into his activities prior to this time. The Ottoman authorities offered protection to him, appointing him as a timar holder in the Sofia area in January 1448 (Hijri, evahir-i şevval, 851)³⁰. However, subsequent entries show that Dan had left his estate without informing the Ottoman authorities (*bırakıp gittiği sebebden*) in December 1450 (Hijri, evail-i Zilkade 1450)³¹. Two similar records are also noticeable in Veles (Köprülü) and Toplički (Toblice), where the two timariots named Paşa, the son of Mehmet Bey, and Ali, the brother of Etmekçi Zağanos, respectively, abandoned their estates without notification³². Although the cadastral officers also used the phrase *bırakıp gittiği sebebden* (due to abandoning and leaving the estate), regarding these landholders, they employed *kaçtığı sebebden* (due to fleeing), in relation to another timariot called Bogdan, who held his estate in the region of İznepol (Tran-Bulgaria)³³. I argue that these expressions could be used interchangeably since they convey the idea of leaving the timar without notifying the authorities. One may argue that these landholders might have betrayed the Ottoman state, taking the side of the enemy by abandoning their landed estates. However, that does not sound likely to me, considering that such timariots were singled out in other records, being clearly noted as traitors. Rather, similar to the timar holders in the previous section, economic reasons played a huge role here. These three timariots collected their taxes from the *reaya*, but, instead of spending them on military expenses, they preferred to embezzle them. However, in contrast to those whose land estates were taken away due to failure to join the campaigns, they preferred to flee with their tax money instead of waiting for the state to react. That is why the authorities used phrases related to fleeing or abandoning the estates rather than voluntarily resigning, as we shall see in the coming section.

³⁰ CBAD, 707. 5a: "Müntakil kerde şod be Dan veled-i Mir-i Eflak el vaki fi evahir-i şevval, sene 851, der Edirne".

³¹ CBAD, 707. 5a: "Bıragub gittiği sebebden Çakırcı Halil oğlu İskender'e virildi. Fi evail-i Zilkade, sene 854, der Edirne".

³² CBAD, 525, p. 49: "Bu mezkur (Paşa) bıragup gittiği sebebden..."; CBAD, 117/5. 12b: "Bu mezkur (Ali) bıragup bu tımarını gitmiş".

³³ OAK, 52/59. 11b: "Bu Bogdan kaçduğı sebebden şimdiki halde Vetko'ya virildi".

5. Voluntary Resignation and Promotion

In contrast to those who left their estates without the approval of the governing bodies, 16 individuals (appr. 17 percent) appeared to reject their nomination to a landed estate or give up their estates as a result of resignation or promotion. These individuals could be divided into three groups. While the first group is composed of those who did not accept the offer of their appointment to a landed estate, the second group signals timariots who voluntarily resigned from their estates after a certain period. In a similar vein, the third group of individuals lost their estates because they were appointed to a post in state administration. Regarding the first group, we do not have sufficient information in the records as to why these individuals numbered 3 rejected their nomination to a timar estate. However, the records provide hints. It appears that 2 of these individuals were recorded as Sarraç Yusuf and Davud Beg Rikabdarı Yusuf³⁴. *Sarraç* means saddlemaker in Turkish, and the registers show that Sarraç Yusuf was employed at the “stables of the sultan”. *Rikabdar* is a title that signified the attendants who used to look after the sultan’s or a high-ranking bureaucrats’ boots and help them put on their shoes. Here, Yusuf appears to have had this role under the authority of a certain Davud Beg. Instead of holding an office, the third individual, called Pirlepelü Svandin, used to possess a landed estate in Prilep (Pirlepede timar yiyügelen) when he was appointed to his new estate in the same region³⁵. Thus, one can conclude that these individuals did not accept their new appointments because they were content with their current occupations, positions, or possessions. These appointments would mean that they would lose these positions, which they did not want to happen. Thus, they preferred to keep them; instead of being relocated to their new landed estate.

In a similar vein, two other timar holders appeared to have relinquished their timars because they received a promotion, being assigned to a bureaucratic or military position. The first one, Mustafa, was appointed as the *kullukçu* of a high-ranking official named Mustafa Hacı Beg³⁶. Although there is no substantial research on the roles and responsibilities of *Kullukçu*, it was previously proposed that these individuals acted as a police force

³⁴ OAK, 52/59. 18a: “Bu mezkur (Sarrac Yusuf) kabul itmediği sebebeden...”; CDAB, 117/5. 3a: “Davud Bey Rikabdarı Yusuf’ virildi... Kabul itmedi”.

³⁵ CDAB, 303, p. 38: “Pirlepe’de timar yiyügelen girü Pirlepeli Svandin adlu kafire virildi... Bu mezkur kabul eylemedi”.

³⁶ CDAB, 303, 17a: “şimdiki halde bu Mustafa Hacı Beg’in kullukçusu olduğu sebebeden alınıp...”.

under various officials; thus, Mustafa must have become one of them under the supervision of Mustafa Hacı Beg (Binark, 1968, p. 751). The other landholder, Aydın, was assigned as *kethüda* in Veles (Köprülü); thus, he gave up his landed estate³⁷. Although the general responsibilities of the city *kethüdas* have not yet been fully documented, it was proposed that these officials acted as the artisan groups' representatives in a specific location, providing communication between them and the state (Akdağ, 1955, p. 45). It appears that Aydın was happy with his new position; thus, he left his timar. These instances indicate that having a reliable administrative, bureaucratic, or military position in the Ottoman state mechanism was more preferable, at least to a portion of the timar holders. This potentially stemmed from the relative stability that these positions provided to the individuals, considering that most of the time, the timar holders lost their estates within one or two years after their appointments.

We do not have sufficient information regarding the remaining eleven timariots who voluntarily resigned their estates after holding them for a certain period (CDAB, 707. 6b. 16b; OAK, 52/59. 16a; CDAB, 303, pp. 11, 28 and 48; CDAB, 250, p. 21; OAK, 45-30, 3b; CDAB, 117/5. 3a). It appears that two of these individuals have been assigned to another timar; thus, one can say that their motivation was to alter their estates for some other timars³⁸. However, this rule cannot be applied to other timar holders because the cadastral officers do not note any swaps regarding their estates. Thus, there must be other unspecified reasons, such as appointments to a state office or reasons related to their individual conditions.

6 Violation of Duty

The other cause, "violation of duty", includes those who acted contrary to the rules and regulations that the timar holders needed to follow in their respective places of duty. In total, ten individuals (ten percent) lost their timars in relation to these reasons. These timar holders could also be subcategorized according to the specific causes that led to their dismissals. Two land holders appear to have lost their estates due to joining a raiding operation without the permission of the state authorities. These are quite

³⁷ CDAB, 303, 17c: "şimdiki halde bu Aydın Köprülü'de kethüda olduğu sebepten hissesi alınub...".

³⁸ OAK, 52/59. 17a: "Bu mezkur birağub gayrı yerde bedel timar olduğu sebepten".

interesting cases that need closer scrutiny. As stated before, the state began significantly increasing its authority over the landed estates at the expense of the frontier lords in this period, appointing its own agents to the frontier timars³⁹. Those who held their timars from aforesaid (kadimi) did not need permission from the state to participate in raiding operations before. However, with the increase of the state control over the estates, especially under the rule of Murad II, they were required to obtain the approval of the state authorities. That is why, for example, a timar holder named Muhammedi, and another one, Osman the son of Arucak Hacı, lost their estates because they joined a raiding campaign without obtaining the necessary permission (destursuz akında gittiği sebebeden)⁴⁰.

Furthermore, in the region of Kastoria, another timar holder, Silahdar Mustafa, used to engage in unspecified misconduct. The governor of Albania, Hamza Bey, reported this to the authorities, adding that his province is under pressure due to Mustafa's misconduct, as the inhabitants were afraid of him⁴¹. The governors' report resulted in this timar holder being discharged. Aside from this, two other individuals seem to have enslaved and sold tolerated non-Muslims under the Ottoman authorities; as a result of which they were discharged from their estates. In the first case, the governor (sancak beyi) and judge (kadı) of Toplički (Toblice), separately sent letters to the authorities, stating that a timar holder named Vidinlü Mahmud (Mahmud of Vidin) enslaved and sold an unspecified number of non-Muslims (illik esir sattı); thus, his estate was transferred to another individual⁴². According to the other case, a timar holder named Tırnavolu Hamza also engaged in enslaving tolerated non-Muslims under Ottoman rule in the same area. However, in contrast to the previous landholder, he was reported to have conned a daughter and a son of a non-muslim into slavery (details are not provided), an undertaking which caused his removal⁴³. There is one other

³⁹ Barkan says that the provincial governors could also assign timars in their respective places of duty (Barkan, 1974, p. 290; Darling, 2017, p. 145).

⁴⁰ CDAB, 525, p. 50: "Şimdiki halde bu mezkur destursuz akına gittiği sebebeden bu timar Kapanderi ve kardaşı Koşar'a ve Komnen'e müştereken virildi, hissenin yarısını Kapandırır yiyüp, her sene eşer ve yarısına mezkurlar müşterek mutasarrıf olub nevbetçe eşerler. Fi evail-i Şevval sene 858 der Sofya".

⁴¹ CDAB, 250, p. 7: "Bu mezkur için Arnavud ili Begi Hamza Beg mektup yazub çeri kağırtmaya komaz ili ürküdür ol tarafda timar yidüğünden inciniriz deyü ilam eyledüğü sebebeden...".

⁴² CDAB, 117/5. 19a: "Bu Mahmud illik esir sattı deyü sancak begi ve kadı mektubuyla alınıb...".

⁴³ CDAB, 117/5. 36b: "Bu mezkur bir kafirün oğlu ve bir kızı ayardub satduğı sebebeden tımarı alınıb...".

case in which a timar holder attempted to subdivide his landed estate in the region of Thessaloniki. According to this, after subdividing his estate, a landholder named Eynebegi, the son of Saruca Hızır, distributed the divided appanages to various unspecified individuals in March 1452 (Hijri: Evahil-i Safer 856). Therefore, the landed estate was taken away from him⁴⁴.

Four other cases are related to taxation practices and infractions connected to this. In one specific case, a timariot named Ali illegally granted tax-exempt status to a Christian individual in the region of Toplički (Toblice). As the *subaşı* (police superintendent) reported this to the authorities, his landed estate was taken away from him⁴⁵. In the same region, another timar holder named Musa, the son of Kapucı İsmail, kept the inhabitants of the village of İstonvinçe, exempt from the *haraç* (a land tax levied on non-Muslim subjects), arbitrarily⁴⁶. In addition, instead of collecting the taxes himself on his estate, he hired a tax farmer (tamam bu tımarun haracın mültezim oldı) to do the job⁴⁷. The authorities did not overlook these transgressions; thus, he lost his landed estate. A similar case is also noted in the neighboring area of Avrethisar (Neo Gynaikokastro), where another landholder, Mustafa, also appointed a tax farmer (her yıl eşmeğe mültezim olduğu sebebeden). This, however, resulted in him being ousted from his landed estate in February/March 1452 (Hijri: Evasıt-ı Şaban 859)⁴⁸. Lastly, a landholder named Arnavud Ahmed was deprived of his landed estate in the region of Kastoria because the villagers living in his timar complained to the authorities about him. Although the reasons are not given clearly (they were probably about infractions related to taxation), the authorities found their complaint right, removing him from the estate in April 1454 (Evahir-i Rebiyülahir, sene 858)⁴⁹. These examples are very significant as they convey the intricacies of the land tenure system in the Ottoman Balkans. Previous researchers are often at a loss regarding the formation and development of the timar system. Here, we first

⁴⁴ OAK, 45-30, 19b: "şimdiki halde bu mezkur için bu tımarını bozdu dağıttı deyü..."

⁴⁵ CDAB, 117/5. 37b: "Diri kafiri haracdan çıkardı deyü..."

⁴⁶ CDAB, 117/5. 14b: "Sancak beyi mektup yazub İstonvinçe adlu köyünün raiyyetlerini haraçdan kaçırdı, haracı alınmadı deyü i'lam ittüğü sebebeden..." ("The governor of this sanjak sent a letter and announced that he kept the villagers of İstonvinçe tax exempt, without collecting their payments...").

⁴⁷ CDAB, 117/5. 14b: "Ve tamam bu tımarın haracına mültezim oldı deyü..." ("became a tax collector for the haraj of this entire landed estate").

⁴⁸ OAK, 45-30, 7b: "Bu mezkur Mustafa'nın hissesine her yıl eşmeğe mültezim olduğu sebebeden..." ("Since a tax collector (mültezim) began to plow Mustafa's share in the estate every year").

⁴⁹ CDAB, 250, p. 14: "Bu mezkurun raiyyetleri şikayet itdüğü sebebeden..."

understand that the system is already well established in the mid-15th century with its peculiar rules, characteristics, and formations. The state was able to react fast against any kind of irregularity that could potentially happen in timar units, as its own agents, such as the regional judges and even members of the *reaya* class, proved effective in reporting them. Aside from pointing out the magnitude of the timar system's significance for the Ottoman military structure, this also shows the degree of experience that the Ottoman state developed over time in land tenure organization. Secondly, these cases bring forth that the influence of the frontier lords had significantly decreased over the landed estates in the frontier territories at the time (Kiprovska, 2021, p. 85). There are countless reports regarding the frontier lords, who were the first distributors of landed estates in various regions. In Thessaly, for example, the frontier lord Turahan Gazi and his family members were holding extensive landed estates⁵⁰. The same situation is also valid for Evrenos Gazi, whose associates are visible in various *defters*⁵¹. Those who held timar before under their supervision did not need permission from the state to join raiding campaigns. However, the mentioned records above indicate a transformation regarding the power balance in the region, as a result of which the state began to implement its bureaucratic rules in a more visible way.

7. Specific Cases of Death or Disappearance

One may expect to see that many timars changed hands because of the death or disappearance of their owner. However, this is not the reality on the ground in the target population and land surveys. Four different landed estates (approx. four percent) were transferred to other individuals for this reason. We encounter two individuals who died or were murdered; thus, their estates changed hands. A timar holder, named İsmail, the son of Kınık of Germiyan, for instance, was initially appointed to a landed estate in the region of Toplički (Toblice) in October 1453 (Hijri: Evahir-i Ramazan, 857). Later, however, it was understood that while trying to claim his landed estate, he was killed by an unspecified person or people in the pass of Şehirköy (Piro). Therefore, his timar was transferred to another person called

⁵⁰ For instance, a cadastral record shows that a village called Halapos was possessed by the relatives of Turahan Gazi, Musa Bey, and his son Sagir Ali: "Timar-ı Musa Bey ve oğlu Sagir Ali hiş-i Turahan Bey, Serasker" (Arkan & Delilbaşı, 2001, p. 35).

⁵¹ Arkan & Delilbaşı, 2001, XX.

Yakub in January 1454 (Hijri: Evail-i Muharrem 858)⁵². Another timar holder named Ramazan, who held a landed estate in the same region, lost it because he died after falling from the fortifications of Kruševac (Alacahisar) when “the infidel” besieged it⁵³. We know that Kruševac was captured by the Ottomans under Murad II in 1428 (Shaw, 1976, p. 76). Previous research signaled that the Serbians took the city back immediately after Murad II’s death in 1451 (Güzel et al., 2002, p. 149). However, the records indicate that the aforesaid Ramazan was alive in October 1453 (Hijri: Evahir-i Ramazan, 857). The transfer of his landed estate only took place in October 1454 (Hijri: Evail-i Zilkade 858); thus, it appears that Ramazan must have died during the Serbian Siege of Kruševac, which took place between these dates. This also explains why Mehmed II sent raiding parties to Serbia in 1454, which were eventually defeated by the united Serbian/Hungarian forces. These operations must have had initially punitive characters, which ultimately culminated in the Ottoman siege of Belgrade in 1456. The remaining two cases are related to the disappearance of the timar holders. Although the details are not provided, it appears that a timar holder named Dimitri and another one called Umur, who held landed estates in Kičevo and Kastoria, had disappeared (belürsüz oldı), probably during separate military campaigns⁵⁴. Thus, their landed estates were transferred to some other individuals⁵⁵. It is interesting to note that the Ottoman authorities mostly identified those who inherited timars from their fathers or relatives, such as brothers, (or some other individuals, in specific cases) using the phrase *ez tahvil-i*, which is composed of Persian *ez* (از, from), Arabic *tahvil* (تحويل, change, alteration), and Persian Possessive adjective suffix (-i), putting it before the name of the previous owner of the landed estate. This signals the transfer of the landed estates between various individuals. However, it appears that the cadastral officials felt the necessity to indicate specific cases such as death or disappearance during a military encounter; instead of just employing the term *ez tahvil-i*. This shows that they perceived such specific cases as different than natural death; thus, they detailed these in the entries⁵⁶.

⁵² CDAB, 117/5. 22b: “Bu Kınuk varmayub yolda Şehirköy derbendinde öldürdükleri sebebden...”.

⁵³ CDAB, 117/5. 24a: “Alacahisar’da kafır geldiğinde düşmüş...”.

⁵⁴ CDAB, 525, p. 65: “Bu Umur için Kethüda Murad Beg belürsüz oldı deyü i’lam ettiği sebebden...”; CDAB, 303, 11: “Bu Dimitri belürsüz oldı...”.

⁵⁵ In a similar vein, according to the *defter* of Vidin, a timar holder named Üveys in Vidin, for example, had died during the Ottoman campaign in Moldavia in 1475 (Novaković, 1973, p. 21).

⁵⁶ We can also see similar cases in *tahrir defters*, compiled in other regions. Albanian *defter* of 1432 reads: “Bu Kasım için kayboldu deyü bildirdikleri sebebden bu Kosrice adlu hisse

8. Illegal or Fraudulent Acquisition of the Landed Estate

One of the most interesting causes that resulted in the dismissal of the timar holders is fraud, which includes any sort of illegal information that the timar holders provided to the authorities to obtain landed estates⁵⁷. We have seven timar holders in total (approximately seven percent), who acquired and then lost their estates for reasons related to this. Five of these holders presented themselves as the relatives of the deceased timar holders, and two lied about their previous military duties. In the first case, for example, two landholders falsely claimed to be the son or brother of the deceased timariots⁵⁸. Further, a timariot was recorded as *Düzme*, an adjective that signified the impostors who pretended to be someone else to deceive the authorities⁵⁹. These cases demonstrate that in the formative years of the Ottoman land tenure system, although it was not the dominant way, inheritance still played a significant role in the transfer of the timars. The individuals' close male relatives, including sons and brothers, could take over their timar estates. Authorities took no issue with the implementation of this practice. Aside from this, we also come across another timar holder who was dismissed because he appeared to be the "stepson" of the previous timar holder. Thus, we understand that the authorities did not allow the stepchildren to take over their non-biological fathers' landed estates. That is why this landholder called Tursun, the stepson of a certain Karagöz, lost his estate in Prilep in October 1446 (Hijri: Evahir-i Receb, 850)⁶⁰. Lastly, another holder falsely asserted that he was from a *sipahi* family. However, the local judge (kadı) revealed that he was actually from the class of *reaya*; thus, his landed estate was taken away⁶¹. This instance points out that the Ottoman authorities did not always allow vertical social mobility in the timar system. Although the timar estates were provided to soldiers of non-timar origins, such as janissaries, the tax-paying local classes were generally excluded from this in this period. This case is also

Çaşnigir Hızır'a verildi, tasarruf edüp kal'a-i mezkuru bekler; fi evasit-i Rebi'-ilahir sene 854, der Edirne" (İnalçık, 1987, p. 36).

⁵⁷ Previous research showed what kind of measures the state authorities took to examine the authenticity of the timar patents; thus, it is not necessary to reword them here (Afyoncu, 1997, p. 47).

⁵⁸ CDAB, 303, p. 33: "şimdiki halde bu mezkur Dimitri için mezkur Hamir'in kardaşı değüldür deyü..."; CDAB, 117/5. 37b: "Bu Ali için mezkur Saruca'nın oğlu değildir".

⁵⁹ OAK, 45-30, 15a: "Sofî Hızır bu timarda düzme olmağın gene kadimisi Saruca'ya virildi...".

⁶⁰ CDAB, 303, p. 78: "Mezkur Tursun, Karagöz'ün üvey oğlu olduğu cihetden alınıp...".

⁶¹ CDAB, 303, p. 29: "Bu mezkur Vılkaşın için kadı mektup yazıp sipahi oğlu değildir deyü...".

related to the two other abovementioned individuals who lied about their backgrounds (Kütükoğlu, 1998, p. 309). One of them, called Ibrahim, was discharged from his landed possession because he had never held a timar before (evvelden timar yemiş değildir)⁶². The other one, Naib İvaz, was previously employed as the *yaya* of a *yayabaşı* (in this context, commander of the *yaya* troops in the Ottoman army), called Ustunsur Çelebi Bey. However, it seems that although such individuals were not allowed to hold landed estates, Naib İvaz did not inform authorities of his military background as a *yaya* soldier. Therefore, he was deprived of his landed estate⁶³.

9. Betrayal

One of the lesser encountered causes for the discharge of the timar holders is related to betrayal, which signifies those who joined the enemies of the Ottomans or abandoned their estates and took refuge in the Christian realms. Although previous research gravely overlooked this cause because of nationalistic concerns, it is still visible in land and population surveys. We have three records (approx. three percent) in total, related to this reason. Two of them are in the region of Kruševac (Alacahisar) and Toplički (Toblice). Timar holders, named Vilk and Markaša, seem to have been commuting between the Ottoman lands and Serbia freely before⁶⁴. The records indicate that they preferred to “remain” in Serbia (Despot ilinde kalmış), therefore, their timars were transferred to a certain Vidinlü Mahmud in October 1453 (Hijri: Evahir-i Ramazan, 857)⁶⁵. A similar case could also apply to two timar holders in Kičevo. The records indicate that after the capture of the castle of Svetigrad (Kocacik), the Ottoman authorities appointed an Albanian landholder called Andreyoz as the governor in August 1448 (the castle was captured on the 31st of July)⁶⁶. There is a strong possibility that this individual was the “old and respected Albanian” mentioned by Marin Barleti, the contemporary

⁶² CDAB, 303, p. 46: “şimdiki halde bu mezkur için evvelden timar yiyügelmiş değildir...”. This situation is also highlighted by Darling in her research on the timar system in the late 1500s (Darling, 2014, p. 198).

⁶³ CDAB, 117/5, 26b: “Ustansır Çelebi Beg yayası idi deyü bildirdikleri sebebdendir...”.

⁶⁴ Miljkovic states that the percentage of the Christian timar holders in Toblice was about eight percent (Miljkovic, 2014, p. 41).

⁶⁵ CDAB, 117/5, 1a: “Bu mezkurlar (Vilk ve biraderiş Markaša) Despot ili’nde kalmışlar ol sebepten...”.

⁶⁶ CDAB, 303, 17a: “Kocacik hisarı dizdarı Andreyoz...”.

historian and the biographer of Scanderbeg, relating to the events during the Ottoman operations against the Castle of Svetigrad. Barleti reports that before the siege started, the sultan sent this individual as a herald to the city to negotiate a possible surrender of the castle; however, the defenders rejected the surrender⁶⁷. Barleti's specification of the individual as "old" conforms to the Ottoman sources, which specify that four years later, in 1452, Andreyoz had died, and this landed estate was given to Andreyoz's sons Nikolay and Gön, who began tilling it in turns⁶⁸. Although there is no further information provided on the identity of Andreyoz, it was reported to the authorities that Andreyoz's sons were occasionally visiting the rebellious Scanderbeg (İskender'e varırlar gelirler), who initiated a large-scale uprising against Ottoman rule, forming a political union called the League of Lezhë in Albania. As a result, the authorities deprived these individuals of their landed estates⁶⁹.

Additionally, there is another instance of betrayal, which provides a lot of information for understanding the contemporary Ottoman land tenure system. According to this, "the orphans" called Hüseyin and Yusuf, the sons of a certain Bosna Hasan, were provided landed estate in Toplički (Toblice), in late March or Early April of 1448 (Hijri: Evasıt-ı Muharrem, 852)⁷⁰. It appears that their mother was the same person, as the note specifies that when they were summoned to the campaigns, their uncle (brother of their mother), was required to till the land in their estates. However, seven years later in 1455, their mother had taken Yusuf (who was probably the younger brother) with her and took refuge in the Christian lands⁷¹. This gives us an idea that, as it was common practice in Ottoman society at the time, the mother kept her Christian religion, although the boys were brought up as Muslims⁷². Although no further information was added about the fate of

⁶⁷ Barleti, 1596, p. 126.

⁶⁸ CDAB, 303, 17a: "Şimdiki halde Andreyoze'nin hissesi oğulları Nikolay ve Gön'e virildi...".

⁶⁹ CDAB, 303, 17a: "Bu mezkurlar için Zaim İskender'e varırlar gelürler deyü bildirdiği sebebden...".

⁷⁰ CDAB, 117/5. 25a: "Şimdiki halde Delü İlyas, Bosna Hasan öksüzleri Hüseyin ve Yusuf'a müşterek virildi...".

⁷¹ CDAB, 117/5. 25a: "Şimdiki halde mezkur Yusuf'ı anası alub kafire gitmiş ol sebebden hissesi kardeş Hüseyin'e zam olındı...".

⁷² The Catalan chronicler Ramon Muntaner who traveled with the Catalan company in western Anatolia and the Balkans in the early 1300s, reports this phenomenon in his work: "If a Turk wished to marry the daughter of the most prominent man in any of those cities, towns, or castles that had been conquered by them, her father, mother, or other of her kinsfolk were obliged to give her to him in marriage. If a son were born, they would make him a Turk and they would circumcise him so that he became a Saracen; but if the child were female, she could follow whatever religion she wished" (Muntaner, 2006, p. 46).

Yusuf in the following records, we can speculate that he was converted to Christianity later. His share in the landed estate, on the other hand, was given to his brother Hüseyin. In general, the betrayal of timar holders is a quite interesting issue which deserves a broader future undertaking, as there is no previous research on it. Although we have only three records in this respect, one should remember that these are just the ones the authorities managed to uncover. There must be more such timariots whose secret connections were not reflected in the records. What is noticeable from the abovementioned cases is that at least a visible portion of the Ottoman timar holders in the Balkans still protected their regional pre-Ottoman identities in this transformative period. In other words, their religious or ethnic backgrounds played a certain role in their allegiance to Ottoman rule. They agreed to serve as regional landholders in the Ottoman system to protect their pre-existing economic and social privileges. However, when the opportunity arose, they did not hesitate to change their allegiance. We do not encounter such reports frequently in the *defter*s of the same regions in the following decades; thus, we can say that this cause was especially peculiar to the formative years of the mid-15th century.

10. Holding the Estate Too Long

Another reason the landholders were dismissed was that they were holding the estate for too long. This demands more detailed examination. The records do not indicate many landholders who lost their estates for this reason. We have four separate cases (approx. four percent), two of which are from the region of Sofia and the others from Kičevo and Prilep. Regarding the landed estates in Sofia, we do not know how long their holders possessed them, as there are no previous records. The first timar holder, Hamza, for instance, obtained his timar from a certain Davud sometime in the past. However, the authorities deemed that he was holding the estate for a long time (*çokdan yiyü geldiği sebebeden*); thus, the estate was given to Lazlu Şahin in November/December 1452 (Hijri: Evasıt-ı Zilkade, 856)⁷³. A similar case also applies to a certain İlyas, who obtained his timar from his father in the past. However, this estate was transferred to another individual in late December of early January 1452/1453 (Hijri: Evasıt-ı Zilhicce, 856)⁷⁴. Regarding

⁷³ CDAB, 707. 15a: "Bu mezkur (Hamza) çokdan yiyü geldiği sebebeden...".

⁷⁴ CDAB, 707. 16a: "(İlyas) Çoktan yiyü geldiği sebebeden...".

the other two estates, we encounter similar cases. A landholder named Hamza in Kičevo was recorded as *gulam-ı mir*⁷⁵. The meaning of this title was a matter of debate among various historians. Although researchers are not fully sure about such individuals' backgrounds, most agree that they were of palace origin. As Emecen pointed out, these individuals could be military officers, soldiers from the Kapıkulu army, or bureaucrats who graduated from the *Enderun* (inner-palace) school (OAK, 52/59, 1b-18b; OAK, 45-30, 1b-21b; CDAB, 117/5, 1a-38a; CDAB, 525, pp. 2-92; CDAB, 250, pp. 1-43; CDAB, 707. 1b-21b; CDAB, 303, pp. 2-85; Emecen, 2014, p. 353). In this case, Hamza seems to have acquired the landed estate from his father (ez tahvil-i pedereş). Therefore, if we think that the Muslims, especially Muslim *sipahis*, could not be assigned as *kapıkulu* soldiers, he must have been the son of an individual of palace origin, who was also *gulam-ı mir*. This landholder also lost his landed estate as the authorities decreed that he had been holding the estate for too long (*çokdan yir*); however, we are not sure about the exact date of this adjustment, since the date is not readable in the document (CDAB, 303, 17b). Lastly, in the region of Prilep, a certain Milanko's landed estate was transferred to another timariot named Novak, the son of Cura, for the same reason in October 1453 (Hijri: Evail-i Zilkade, 857)⁷⁶. In all the abovementioned cases, although the date of dismissal is provided in the records, we are not able to find any evidence as to when these landholders obtained their timar holdings. The earliest cadastral entry comes from 1445; thus, we understand that the timariots mentioned were holding their estates at least for seven or eight years, depending on their individual cases. A number of other indicators give more hints. Except for one, three of the mentioned timariots obtained their estates from their fathers (ez tahvil-i pedereş). Thus, it seems that the timars were in the possession of their families at least for two generations. So, what could this case signify to us? Previously, focusing on the timariots who recorded with their fathers' names, Darling traced the ubiquity of the timariots who inherited them from their fathers in this period. She argued that the increasing presence of those who were not recorded with their fathers' names indicates that the authorities were striving to distribute the estates to new ones. Through this, the state aimed to augment its central authority vis-à-vis the locally established *sipahi* families (Darling, 2017, p. 145). These records further demonstrate that

⁷⁵ CDAB, 303, 17b: "Tımar-ı Hamza, veled-i Menteşe, gulam-ı mir, ez tahvil-i pedereş. Şimdiki halde bu Hamza için çokdan yir deyü...".

⁷⁶ CDAB, 303, p. 32: "Bu mezkur (Milanko) çokdan yidüğü sebebden...".

the authorities were anxious about the presence of these established *sipahi* families. That is why they did not allow them to take root as regional aristocratic families in their respective territories.

11. Wrong Reports

Finally, those who lost their landed estates as a result of wrong reports constitute a small percentage of the timariots (three in total, approx. three percent). These reports include misinformation or accusations, which were provided to the authorities about the timar holders by the local state officials or people. We know that these were wrong reports because the accused timar holders gained their estates back. However, it is possible that there might have been some more timariots who were the victims of such reports; however, the authorities did not realize this at the time of the compilation of the records. The first record is from Timurhisar (Sidirokastro), where a timar holder by the name of Hirano was reported to have contracted leprosy (the reporters were not specified) in November 1451 (Hijri: Evahir-i Şevval 855)⁷⁷. However, as the reports appeared to be false, the authorities gave the estate back to Hirano a year later. Similarly, in Köprülü (Veles), some unspecified individuals informed the authorities that a timar holder called Tanrıvermiş did not respond to a call of duty (*kulluğa varmadı*) in April 1448 (Evail-i Safer, 852)⁷⁸. However, a year later, the authorities concluded that the report was false; thus the estate was given back to him⁷⁹. The remaining case, in which a timar holder named Yovan was falsely reported to be dead, is quite interesting, as it provides a lot of insights regarding the conflicts of interest between various timar holders at the local level. According to this, Yovan acquired his landed estate in the region of Kičevo in January 1453 (Evahir-i Zilhicce, 856)⁸⁰. Later, however, the authorities were misinformed about his alleged death; as a result, he lost his landed estate⁸¹. Although the document does not specify the individuals who spread false

⁷⁷ CDAB, 525, p. 5: "Mezkur Hrano dahi cüzam oldı deyü şehadet ettikleri cihetden... Şimdiki halde girü alınıb bu timar girü Hrano'ya ve oğlu Dimitri'ye müşterek virildi".

⁷⁸ CDAB, 525, p. 50: "Bu Tanrıvermiş için kulluğa varmadı deyü bildirdikleri sebebeden alınıb...".

⁷⁹ CDAB, 525, p. 50: "Kulluğa varmadı deyü bildirdikleri vaki olmaduğun sebebeden girü mezkur Tanrıvermiş'e mukarrer oldu...".

⁸⁰ CDAB, 303, p. 10: "Bu timar alınıb Radoslav oğlu Yovan'a virildi...".

⁸¹ CDAB, 303, p. 10: "Bu mezkur için öldü diye i'lam itdükleri sebebeden...".

reports, it appears that two previous *sipahis*, named Ali and Şirmerd, who were dismissed from their timars (location not specified), obtained the allegedly dead Yovan's estate in June 1453 (Hijri: Evahir-i Cemaziyelevvel 857)⁸². Although it is not possible to reach a definite conclusion on the issue, it can be speculated that these dismissed *sipahis*, Ali and Şirmerd, might have been responsible for the false report, spreading which they hoped to be appointed in Yovan's stead. In spite of this, however, the following records show that the authorities found out that Yovan was still alive; thus, they have taken the estate away from Ali and Şirmerd. What is more interesting here is that, regardless of this, they did not appoint Yovan back to his estate. In February 1455 (Hijri: Evahir-i Safer 859), the landed estate was provided to Yovan's brother, called Tazıcı Dragan⁸³. This behooves us to think that Yovan was in an unfit physical or mental condition to possess a timar at the time, which might have been the cause of the false reports. This also prompted the authorities to appoint his brother to this timar instead of him. Still, it took almost 19 months for the Ottoman authorities to react, which is an interesting case. One might speculate that it lasted that long because of a thorough investigation or the corruption of the cadastral officers.

Conclusion

This study concentrated on the reasons behind the discharge of the Ottoman landholders in the mid-15th-century Balkans, relying mainly on seven population and land records alongside other primary sources. In this respect, it argued that the dismissal of landholders occurred primarily for 11 main reasons listed above. These reasons, I assert, give deeper insights into the structure and functioning of the Ottoman timar system at the time. I believe that a number of conclusions could be drawn from those. These cases provide a lot of information about the responsibilities and roles of many state officials and bureaucrats, such as *subaşı*s on the ground, and how they interacted with the local timar holders. Further, they demonstrate that the state asserted its strong control over the landed estates, which were located in the frontier regions. It used to change the timar holders very quickly, assigning new timar holders and discharging the old ones within a rela-

⁸² CDAB, 303, p. 10: "Ali'ye ve Şirmerd'e müşterek virildi...".

⁸³ CDAB, 303, p. 10: "Bu mezkur Yovan ölmemiş sağ imiş ol sebebeden bu köy alınub kardaşı Tazıcı Dragan'a virildi...".

tively short period. It also did not allow the timar holders to keep the estates for too long. This prompted a good portion of the timar holders not to join and spend their revenues on the campaigns, as they knew that they would lose their estates in a few years anyway. This also caused several timar holders to collect revenues from the dependent peasants in their estates and go into hiding, in the hopes of keeping these funds for themselves. In contrast, however, the state could be more lenient towards those who were unable to fulfill their military obligations due to illness-related situations. In such situations, the state could appoint such timar holders' designated heirs to the estates. In some cases, we observe that several timar holders were unwilling to accept timar grants, fearing they would risk their current administrative or military positions. In other cases, they had to give up their estates due to reasons related to promotion or a duty change. A portion of the timar holders obtained their estates, presenting wrong information to the state authorities. Yet, some others suffered from the wrong reports that were presented to the authorities by their local rivals. We also see that it was a relatively common practice among timar holders to act outside of their military and administrative responsibilities, such as changing the patterns of taxation, which resulted in their removal from their possessions. In relation, others were in secret connection with the hostile powers, which caused their dismissals. Lastly, several timar holders disappeared or died on specific occasions, such as war or siege; thus, their timars were reassigned.

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CDAB (Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı-Ottoman Archives of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye) [Istanbul]. MCO. (Muallim Cevdet Ortatoy) 117.5.

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