

AN ASPECT OF HISTORY OF MUSLIMS AND NON-MUSLIMS IN THE LATE 18th CENTURY- OTTOMAN PROVINCE OF CYPRUS*

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Introduction

The relevant documents of the Turkish archives show that a socio-political turmoil was experienced in Cyprus at the expense of Muslim and non-Muslim reayah¹ after the first half of the 18th century. Besides disastrous calamities of earthquakes, droughts, dearths, plagues and locust invasions (*kaht u galâ ve istilâ-i cerâd*) which have never been uncommon throughout the history of Cyprus (A. DVN. KBM.: 1/23; Cobham 1908, p. 355) three main additional factors seem to have played the most substantial role in the case; the destruction of central Ottoman government's direct control over the imperial provinces in favour of certain local povers called *a'yân*² (the notables) due to a process of an increasingly widening

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¹ As a matter of fact, particularly in the second half of the eighteenth century, a distinction between the Muslims and the non-Muslim groups, made its appearance more strongly felt in the Ottoman documents; that is to say, the Turkish ruling elite would prefer to name the non-Muslim subjects as "*re'âyâ*" and the Muslims as "*ehl-i İslâm*", "*ahâlî-/ İslâm*", "*ahâlî-i Müslim'in*" and the like. For many examples of this in the documents of the history of the Ottoman Cyprus, see Ottoman Archive of Prime Ministry (İstanbul), A. DVN. KBM., 1/14, 18, 40, 44, 50-51, 55; A. DVN. KBŞ.: 1/5-6, 20, 41). The non-Muslims also seemed to have accepted these terms used for themselves. For, in their petitions to the Sublime Porte they chose for themselves the titles of "*re'âyâ fukaralar*" or "*re'râyâ kullar*" before / instead of their names. Consult A. DVN. KBŞ.: 1/6, 27, 29, 36, 40-41, 43, 45, 47-48, 50, 52-54, 58.

² On the emergence and social, economic and political roles of this class of "*a'yâns*" in the Ottoman history see Akdağ 1963, 1995; Barkan 1980; Faroqhi 1994; Genç 1975; İnalçık 1965; 1977; McCarthy 1997; Özkaya 1994; Pamuk 1990; Tabakoğlu 1985 and Yücel 1974, 1988.

"decentralization ". This process actually was an outcome of internal and external political, economic and social circumstances, the rise of the representatives of the non-Muslim reayah (*re'âyâ vekilleri*), namely the Archbishops and their suffragans, the Dragomans (*tercümân-ı sarây-ı muhassıl*) and the Kojabashis³ in power and deterioration in the Turkish provincial administration. All of these occurrences interactingly were to come into being and make worse the position of the Cypriot subjects in spite of the Ottoman statesmen's sincere efforts to protect their subjects from the oppressions of the local Turkish and Christian authorities and to provide justice for them without committing any discrimination between the Muslims and the *zimmi*s. Let us throw a glance at the notable transformations of the period that affected the whole of the empire, in order to be able to understand the essence of the Cypriot history under the Turks⁴. For, there is a well-known fact that Cyprus has always remained under the influence of the the happenings prevailed over Asia Minor and the territories circling the Eastern Mediterranean Sea (Alagöz 1971, p. 16; Gürsoy 1971, p. 41).

1. The Ottoman Empire in a Transition Period

In the 18th century, especially in the second half of it, the social, economic and political *crisis* which started in the last quarter of the 16th century and came to be more spread and effective in the next one, would continue to prevail all over the empire (Barkan 1970, p. 574-590; İnalçık 1973, p. 139; Yücel 1988, p. IX; Faroqhi 1994, p. 2). The unending wars

³ The ruling elite of the non-Muslims had been cited in the documents usually in such a formula: "*Cezîre-i Kıbrıs'ın dörd nefer Piskoposları ve Divân Tercümân ve re'âyâ vekilleri ve Kocabaşları...*" (A. DVN. KBM.: 1/18, 1186 A.H./ 1772 A.D.; A. DVN. KBS.: 1/20, 1195 A.H./ 1780-81 A.D.).

⁴ For, as an example, even the most well-known and considerably objective authority on Cyprus history, Hill (1952, Vol. IV, p. 25) on many points failed to escape falling into errors because of the fact that his knowledge of the Ottoman history is insufficient. For, as he himself confesses (1552, Vol. IV, p. XI), he lacked the Turkish language, which is, indeed, a great obstacle to make use of the Turkish sources. A quotation from him may be explanatory for the case:

There was nothing reprehensible in the principle that the island should be self-supporting; and salaries of officials might reasonably be paid out of its revenues. But it was a fatal mistake, which paying officials little or nothing, to leave them a free hand to squeeze the population as dry as they possibly could. Had this error been corrected and the official instructions quoted above been carried out. Cyprus under the Turks would have been a model worthy of imitation by any conqueror for centuries to come.

usually resulted in defeats, changings in the nature and volume of the international trade carried out chiefly with the European countries, a rapid increase in population and unemployment were also among the most prominent reasons for that *crisis*. Additionally, the converting predicaments in the world economy; that is, the "price revolution", the widening of monetary relations, new war technologies which necessitated professional armies and transformation from the fiscal capitalism to the industrial one and the like, too, (Barkan 1970, pp. 574-590; Tabakoğlu 1985, pp. 235-246) led the Ottoman statesmen to look for new ways to escape it. They had to find new sources of revenue especially in cash for their central treasury, which would be used for the rapidly widening imperial expenditure and would increase the capacity of the existing ones.

In order to achieve those aims, besides *confiscations* of the properties of the well-to-do officials (*müsâdere*) and devaluation (*tagşış*) (Yucel 1992, pp. 8-11), the state initially began to collect almost regularly the taxes of "*avârız*", "*imdâdiye*" and other "*tekâlif*", which had been so far harvested occasionally during extraordinary periods like wars (Pamuk 1990, p. 127). Secondly, the range of "*iltizâm method*" was to be expanded at the expense of the "timar system", in other words, the state changed the sources of revenue which largely belonged to the "timar system" into "*mukata'as*"⁵. This would mean to sell certain imperial sources of revenue to the men of capital for one or three years. The third method, applied by the Ottoman statesmen to provide enough amount of ready money, was the "*mâlikâne system*" (Genç 1973: 231-283) which is quite similiar to the "iltizam method"⁶ as a system in that in this method the "*mukata'as*" were to be sold not for one or three years, but for life in return for an advance payment (*mu'accele*) and a yearly sum (*mâl*). The state's expectation from the application of this method was that the "*mâlikâne*" owners would have been more willing to protect the Muslim or non-Muslim reayah and improve their "*mukata'as*", for they

⁵ "*Mukata'a*" means a tax source. Its geographic boundaries and the kind and the possible maximum quantity of the taxes which would be collected, had been used to be fixed by the state. The Ottoman guilds in the cities, customs of external trade or various taxes of a certain region could constitute a "*mukata'a*" (Sertoğlu 1986, p. 229).

⁶ The "*mültezim*", who bought a source of revenue, generally had not been careful about the living conditions or endurance of the peasants and improvement of the "*mukata'a*" he bought by auction. They tried as possible as to squeeze the real producers in their predetermined periods by imposing extraordinary or illegal taxes (*tekâlif-şakka*) in order to get more than they offered to the state in their limited periods.

would not have to surrender them to the state after a few years. The fourth arrangement (*eshâm system*) made by the Turkish rulers of the period was to divide the "*mukata'as*" into very small fragments or shares and sell the annual tax revenues of an each share to the rich persons for life in return for a total advance payment. When a share-holder died, his share had to be returned to the state (Pamuk 1990, p. 131).

In fact, all of those ways failed to remedy the deterioration of the Ottoman economy. Under the existing developments and the changings in the war technology, the Ottoman "*timâr system*" rapidly lost its importance and thereby, the number of the timar-holding *sipahis* (cavalry) reduced and came to be useless (Yücel 1988, p. XIII). On the contrary to their quality and effectiveness, the *Yeni Çeris* enlarged in number due to the entrance of many unqualified persons from the Turco-Muslim elements into their class, which only had made the burden of the central Treasury heavier. Along with that corruption in the military and economic systems, the solidarity of the Ottoman society, too, came to be threatened by a social turmoil named as the "*Celâli movements*"⁷ in the nature of brigandages, which started and quickly widened, especially in the central Anatolia. The "*Celâli*" bands were populated by the unemployed youths (*levends* or *gurbet tâifesi* and *suhte*) and the landless subjects who had to abandon their lands (*çifts*)⁸ under the pressure of heavy tax burden imposed by the state and the *brigands*, and began to husbandary around the hillsides and crowded the medreses as students in the cities, or mercenary troops (*sekbân bölüks*)⁹. The "*sekbân bölüks*" had been organized and armed by the provincial governors under the permission of the state to protect the social order against brigandage. It's interesting enough, many of those governors would revolt against the central administration during the 17th century (McCarthy 1997, pp. 171-174).

In the destruction of the social solidarity of the Ottoman Empire; that is, in the dispersal of the Muslim and non-Muslim reayah (*perakende vü ihtilâl / perişân*), in spite of being representatives of the state authority, the

⁷ Consult Akdağ 1963.

⁸ This incidence was to be called in the Ottoman social history the "Great Flight" (*büyük kaçgun*) and continued until 1610 (Yücel 1988, pp. XIII-XV).

⁹ In fact some of these "*sekbans*" were the ones whom the state itself armed and used in the battles against Austria, Venice and the Iranian Safavids (McCarthy 1997, pp. 167-172).

oppressive state officials (beylerbeyis, sancakbeyis, kadis and their naibs, mutesellims or muhassils, voyvodas, multezims and the other members of the "ehl-i 'örf") were the most responsible ones (Tabakoğlu 1985, pp. 223-227). For they had abused their power to commit various malpractices¹⁰ neglecting the firmans of "adâletnâme"¹¹ issued by the Sultans. For instance, they sold their own timars to others by way of "iltizâm ", illegally demanded foods, sheep or something else (*yem veyiyecek / koyun ve kuzu taleb etme*) from the subjects during their unlawful visits (*il üzerine devre çıkma*) through "salma" and increased the rates of dues and fines (*ziyâde taleb*), imposing extraordinary taxes (*tekâlif-i şakka*) (Yücel 1988, p. XIII).

Eventually, all of these economic, military, demographic, social and political provisions of the time were to cause the classical Ottoman regime to degenerate and decline steadily (İnalçık 1973, p. 47) throughout the 17th century by losing a lot from its central authority both in the capital and in provinces. In the next century there emerged a new social power, namely the local notables (*a'yâns*) to fill that gap of authority or to take a share of it (Pamuk 1990, pp. 121-122) by getting the control in the Ottoman provincial organization. They were mostly the retired members of the "askeri" class including the "ulemâ", rich merchants or heads of great and rooted families (Genç 1973, p. 251). By capturing the control of the territorial forces organized by the people under the support of the state against brigandage, seizing the positions of "mutesellim" and "voyvoda", which gave the right to collect taxes, the "a'yâns" gradually would become the agents of the state and the real representatives of the rural population (Tabakoğlu 1985, p. 224). Nonetheless, these newly emerged local powers, too, would generally pursue their own interests and thereby would come to be a different source of trouble for the state and society.

2. The Ascendancy of the Christian Clergy

By the second half of the 18th century, it was understood that the Ottomans' military power had come to be insufficient to cope with the European states due to the general conditions of the empire summarized above, which in fact, constitute somewhat a definition of the increasingly

¹⁰ For many kinds of the commitments of the "ehl-i 'örf" consult Tabakoğlu 1985, pp. 226-230.

¹¹ See İnalçık 1965.

widened "decentralization" process, too. Consequently, on the one hand, this fact was to lead the Ottoman statesmen to appeal to one of their most effective political weapons, the capitulations (*imtiyâzât*)¹² (İnalçık 1973, p. 137) in foreign affairs. In domestic matters, on the other hand, against some contemporary European powers' policy of retaking the island through establishing secret relations with the Christian population of Cyprus, the then Turkish government would pursue a more tolerant and flexible policy towards the *zimmi* (non-Muslim) groups of the country in order to keep them on their own side. This approach which includes granting the non-Muslim elements quite generous privileges and socio-economic rights would result in the ascendancy of the Orthodox Church in Cyprus where the non-Muslims had enjoyed the majority throughout the Turkish period with certain exceptions¹³ (İnalçık 1997, p. 3-11).

As it is known after the conquest of 1570-71¹⁴, the Venetian feudal system was replaced by the classical Ottoman regime including the "millet system" for the non-Muslims, and Cyprus became one of the Ottoman provinces under the name of the Province of Cyprus, "*Eyâlet-i Kıbrıs*" (Çevikel 1997, pp. 39-68).

The newly established Ottoman Province of Cyprus under the rule of a Beylerbeyi (governor) lasted until 1670 (Luke 1969, p. 31). Thereafter the island was attached to Kapudan Pasha, the Beylerbeyi of the Province of "*Cezâ'ir-i Bahr-i Sefid*", who would rule it through an official, "*müsellim*" or "*mütesellim*" appointed by himself. According to Hill (1952, Vol. IV, pp. 73-75) it was converted into the tenure (*hass*) of the Grand Vezir in 1703 and its this status was to last until 1785 with an interlude between 1745-1748 during which it was again governed as an independent province. The Grand Vezirs ruled Cyprus through a "*muhasıl*" who had been the *de facto* ruler. In 1785 Cyprus was put under the authority of Kapudan Pasha who could then only offer a candidate to be "*müsellim*" or "*muhasıl*" with a fixed salary and the right of officially nominating would be in the hands of the

¹² İnalçık (1973, p. 138) states that the capitulations would have disastrous effects for the Ottoman economy until not before the 19th century.

¹³ For instance, according to Cyprianos (Cobham 1908, pp. 366-67), a native Greek chronicle and a member of the clergy, the number of the Turks was 47.000 and that of the Christians 37.000; that is, the former possessed the majority.

¹⁴ For the documents of the Ottoman preparations, the conquest of the island and the establishment of the Province of Cyprus (*Eyâlet-i Kıbrıs*) see *Mühimme Defteri 12* (1996).

Imperial Court, "*Divân-i Hümayun*" (A. DVN. KBM.: 1/43, dated 6 Zi'l-ka'de 1200 A.H. / 1785-86 A.D. and that of 1201 A.H. / 1786-87 A.D.). This administrative reorganization was to continue until the reforms of Mahmud II and Abdu'l-Mecid.

As a result of the newly adopted policy towards the domestic affairs of the island, the gradually weakening central Ottoman government wanted to escape the continuous and secret opposition and agitations of the Cypriot clergy who by using the advantages of the "millet system" might have had a possible connection with the foreign enemies. For, some of the European great powers of the time had been planning to capture the island. Therefore, making the Christian men of religion a partner in the provincial administration would seem quite wise to the then Ottoman government (Hill 1952, Vol. IV, p. 59; Çiçek 1992, p. 59; Çevikel 1998, pp. 10-11). Thereafter, although previously having punished the Archbishop Silvestros and his three suffragans who went to Constantinople to provide a reduction in their tax burden in 1730¹⁵ (Cobham 1908, p. 354), the Ottoman statesmen were to accept the Bishop of Baf Joakim, the Bishop of Kiti Macarios, the Bishop of Gerine Nicephoros and some other well-to-do Greeks in a good manner in 1754¹⁶ and give them what they requested. Additionally the Grand Vezir of the time Bahir Köse Mustafa Pasha granted them a firman by which he appointed the Bishops as "*Kojabash*" who then would become guardians and representatives of the non-Muslims and have the right of direct access to the Sublime Porte (Hill 1952, Vol. IV, p. 78; Spyridakis 1964, p. 57). Through the privileges of 1660¹⁷ and the newly

¹⁵ Cyprianos (Cobham 1908, p. 353) seems unable to explain why the Sublime Porte had not been in such a great need of recognizing the clergy as the real leaders and the representatives of the reayah until 1660 when the Sublime Porte started a process that would result in full recognition in 1754.

¹⁶ Thereafter such fruitful visits of the Archbishops and their three suffragans, who were usually cited in the documents as "*Kıbrıs'dan dövd nefer Piskopos kulları*" (A. DVN. KBM.: 1/11, 14, 18; A. DVN. KBŞ.: 1/22), would occasionally continue.

¹⁷ The official recognition of the Archbishops and their three suffragans as the representatives of the Greeks, the responsibility for the collection of the taxes of the non-Muslims and the right to present directly their petitions sealed by themselves to the Sublime Porte (Maier 1968, p. 120). Previously, the clergy and the Dragomans possessed simple public duties as the chiefs of the Christians and they could not use any right of jurisdiction over their flocks and churches without an imperial "*berat*". In short, they do not seem to have been active in the civil affairs of the *zimmi* population. It is, however, the clergy tried to have their interference in public matters of the Christian reayah accepted by always meeting the imperial

granted ones, in fact, the Cypriot clergy did not seem to have sought the fact that they had come to the position of the Ottomans' agents.

The clergy had gradually risen in power by making use of every kind of their privileges and opportunities. Thereby, they came to a so effective position that they could succeed in the dismissal of an oppressor muhassil (governor) E'l-hac 'Abdü'l-baki Aga from his office with the support of the Turks (A. DVN. KBM.: 1/40; Cobham 1908, pp. 364-65). One should note that the Christian ruling elite had been struggling for power with the governor for a long time. At the same time, they could also obtain an administrative reform in 1785 (A. DVN. KBM.: 1/43, 1200-1201 A.H.) after which Cyprus was put under the authority of Kapudan Pasha, the Beylerbeyi of the Province of "*Cezâir-i Bahr-i Sefid*". On the position of the representatives of the Orthodox Christians in the last quarter of the 18th century, Maier (1968, p. 120) urges that the Turkish administration came to be subordinate of the Archbishop Chrysanthos (reigned 1768-1810) and the Dragoman Hacı Georgakis Kornesios who were the *de facto* government.

After having been recognized and granted various administrative and economic privileges up to the period, the very representatives of the *zimmis* would begin to follow a path which was quite different than expected; that is, by abusing their given authorities as a tool, they were to exploit their own co-religionists through various malpractices¹⁸. One of the most distinctive method applied by the clergy in their exploitation was to purchase the whole yearly produce of the Greek peasants with a specified date for payment and at their own valuation, and then either export or sell it at an advanced price (Maier 1968, p. 119).

There are many documents which testify the malpractices of the clergy. According to two documents (A. DVN. KBŞ.: 1/15-16, dated 1191 A.H. / 1777 A.D.), for instance, the Bishop Efunderyo, Nikola, Felibu, Hilaraci Andoni and Maskoyakumi (?) with E's-seyyid 'Abdü'l-'aziz bin Mehmed, Çorbacı 'Isma'il and E's-seyyid 'Ali bin Mehmed from the Village of Labta in

officers (Pashas, Governors or Mollas) on their arrival from Constantinople and offering them, whether customary or prescribed, gifts (*bakhshish*) (Cobham 1908, p. 353).

¹⁸ This process, in fact, might not have started first at this time. Its many examples can be found before. For example, around 1670's, the Dragoman Markoulles did not hesitate to "increase his illegal gains by falsifying the census" which would be used for the collection of the taxes of the non-Muslim rayah (Hill 1952 / IV, p. 72).

the sub-district of Gerine, which is a "mukata'a" belongs to the "evkaf-ı Haremeynü'ş-şerifeyn"¹⁹ established by Haydar Paşazâde Mehmed Bey, claim that the "re'âyâ vekilleri" and "kojabashis" (the Archbishop Hrisantos and his three suffragans: Penaridos, Meldiyos, and Safraniyos) had illegally exacted 80 piastres (gmy) from each of them under the name of "şartlama" in corporation with some Turkish officials²⁰ and they want to be judged according to the Sharia (*şer'-i şerif*).

From another document (A. DVN. KBŞ.: 1/25), it is understood that an order (*hüküm*) was sent to the Kadı of Cyprus that as soon as possible the Dragoman (*Kıbrıs Muhassılı Tercümânı*) Yorga Yorgaki veled-i (son of) Yanni should have been arrested and sent to the capital to be judged. For he was accused of falsifying the census and thereby collecting money of the reayah more than the officially fixed sums and lawlessly taking the possession of another "zimmi" Aci Kostanti veledi Dimitri's right of inheritance, (*hakk-ı irsiyye*) left from his deceased brother.

A different malpractice of the clergy was also come across in the collection of the yearly or occasional taxes (*emvâl-i mîrî; cizye, haraç, nüzül, maişet*, etc.) levied from the zimmis, which was under their authority. They were to make censuses and determine the rate of the tax burden of each Christian reayah. The state was used to prescribe only a total amount to be collected. The "re'âyâ vekilleri" including the Dragomans, sometimes falsified censuses and made exactions (Hill 1952, Vol. IV, p. 72). An official writing (*ilâm*) of the Kadı of Lefkoşa Nu'man Paşazade E's-seyyid Mehmed Sa'du'l-lah (A. DVN. KBŞ., 1/27, dated 19.9.1198 A.H. / 1783-84 A.D.) to the Sublime Porte shows that by that method in four years (1194-97 A.H.), "*dörd nefer Piskoposlar*" collected 112,450 grus (piastre) more than prescribed (*zulmen ziyâde as miri*) from the non-Muslim population of 16 sub-districts of the province²¹.

As a matter of fact, against all these oppressions of the clergy, the Christian reayah were not to remain silent. They would complain many times about the exploitations of their own representatives to the Sublime

¹⁹ Means the pious foundations of the two Holy places: Mecca and Medina.

²⁰ For the rejection of this accusation and counter-accusation of the clergy see A. DVN. KBŞ.: 1/20, dated 1195 A.H. / 1780-81 A.D.

²¹ Lefkoşa, Mesariye, Mağusa, Karpas, Baf, Hrisofi, Kukla, Avdim, Tuzla, Lcymosun, Piskobi, Gilan, Gerine, Lefke, Omorta, Pendaye.

Porte. It's probably because of this, the visits of the Archbishops Philotheos (1730), and the Bishop of Kiti Macarios and the teacher Ephraim sent by the Archbishop Paisios (around 1760) to the Sublime Porte would end in failure (Cobham 1908: 354-56). Again some of the *zimmis* with a few Turks presented a petition, "*mahzar*" to the Sublime Porte that the clergy had exacted 70-80 piastres from each of them under the name of "*şartlama*" by using force and acting in corporation with some of the Turkish officials (A. DVN. KBS.: 1/15-16, dated 1191 A.H. / 1777 A.D.).

Besides that, against the abuses of the clergy, the non-Muslim reayah reacted in another way that they took their various legal, but even very simple problems emerged among themselves for solution not to the ecclesiastical court, a principle of the Ottoman "*millet system*", but to the Sublime Porte which referred them to the court of the Kadis (A. DVN. KBS.: 1/21, 25, 28, 33-34). The subject of a document (A. DVN. KBS.: 28) may be an explanatory example for the case. According to the document, a *zimmi* Aci Nikola wants justice from the Sublime Porte, for another *zimmi* Tiryaki Kozmi had illegally seized (*kabz u ahz eyleyen*) his 500 piastres.

Thus, Cyprianos (Cobham 1908, p. 365), who was both a contemporary man of religion and a native chronicle, on behalf of the clergy accuses his own co-religionists of being "ingrateful" against themselves, for they had ascribed their misfortunes and debts to their "spiritual fathers and chiefs" instead of the "greedy" Turkish governors and he adds: "Ingratitude, alas, a very old heritage among Cypriots".

3. Problems in the Decentralized Turkish Provincial Administration

The Christian clergy was not the main factor, of course, which had made worse the economic and social position of the whole inhabitants of the island. They committed many oppressions in collaboration with some of the Turkish authorities, which indicates, surely, a crucial fact that there were something problematic in the Turkish administration, too, that had played a substantial role in the case.

To begin with, it should be stated that besides many other factors, the continuous *inflation* in the Ottoman economy, mainly due to the policy of devaluation (*tağsîs*) (Yücel 1992, pp. 8-11), seems to have constituted an important point in the proportional corruption of the Turkish provincial government in Cyprus, too, as it had been witnessed in many other

imperial provinces. It is however, the greeds of some of the Turkish officers, the Archbishops, their subordinate clergy and the Dragomans (*tama'-hâm ve celb-i mâla teb'iyyet*) (A. DVN. KBS.: 1/12, 27; A. DVN. KBM.: 1/40, 44), had been very effective in that corruption.

The application of the certain economic and administrative systems of "iltizâm", "mâlikâne " and "eshâm " mentioned above to provide abundant ready money for the state Treasury possessed an important place in the socio-economic and political upheavels of the time. Through these methods, many subordinate authorities or more correctly "parasites" came to enter between Sultan and his subjects.

The Grand Vezirs who hold the island as their tenure (*Kıbrıs hassı mukata'ası*) (A. DVN. KBM.: 1/43), the Vezirs, other great "mâlikâne", "mukata'a" or "vakıf" owners and even some of the members of the "ehl-i 'örf" of the period (1703-1800) ruled Cyprus through certain officials called "muhassıl" or "müsellim"²², "câbi", "voyvoda" and the like, and usually preferred to stay in the capital. Those law-ranked officials bought their positions from their big patrons by offering them the highest price in accordance with the method of auction (*iltizâm*) (Cobham 1908, p. 365). Thus, the morality of the buyers, "mültezims" seems not to be given much importance everytime, which sometimes was expressed in the documents. For example, in one of them (A. DVN. KBS.: 1/8, dated 1179 A.M. / 1765 A.D.) the non-Muslim "re'âyâ fukarâları" of the four villages of the sub-district of Dipkarpas, which were under the control of Mehmed Sa'id Bey, the younger son of the previous deceased Grand Vezir Abdu'l-lah Pasha, complain to the Sublime Porte about various malpractices of the "mültezim" E'l-hac Ali who had bought his "mukata'a" six years ago from the Kethüda of Harem Abdu'l-lah Aga, the agent of Mehmed Sa'id Bey, and want instead of him a new one who is just, cherishes his subjects and religious; "karyelerimiz emr u fermânları ile bir ehl-i insâf ve ra'iyyet-perver ve mütedeyyin bir kimseye iltizâm...".

Then most of those appointed local authorities were not to hesitate to oppress the Muslim and non-Muslim reayah in various ways (A. DVN. KBŞ.: 1/5-6, 35; A. DVN. KBM.: 1/40, 44) to exact more than they gave to the Grand Vezirs, Vezirs, "mâlikâne" and "vakıf" owners or the military

²² The titles of "Muhassıl" or "müsellim, mütesellim", that mean "a chief tax farmer", could be used together by an official (A. DVN. KBM.: 1/14; Hill 1952, Vol. IV, p. 73).

commanders. This is stated in the documents usually in the formula of "*ziyâde tekâlif taleb etme*", "*zulmen ziyâde*" or "*zulm ü te'addiyât*"; that is, they tried to increase the rates of their taxes and fines for their crimes. Silahdar Osman Aga (1764), E'l-hac Abdu'l-baki Aga (1785) and Ali Aga (1786) were of the most distinctive examples of oppressor governors (*muhassıls*) of the period.

Although some of those governors (*muhassıls*), appointed from the capital or sometimes from within Cyprus (A. DVN. KBM.: 1/55), would carry out their tax farming missions by way of "*sub-multezims*"; that is, they were to sell the right of collecting taxes to the others most of whom were the local notables (*ağas*) (Cobham 1908, p. 351). These local notables were originally the retired members of the military and religious classes (*ehl-i 'örf* and *'ulemâ*) who had not returned back to their birthplaces after their retirements and stayed in the island. The titles they adopted for themselves clearly indicate this: "Miralay-i *sâbık* (former) Hacı Mehmed", "Kethüdâ-i *sâbık* Hüseyin", "Ağa-i Yeniçeriyân-i *sâbık*" or "*Sâbıkan* Kıbrıs Defterdârı E'sseyid İsmâ'il Efendi" (A. DVN. KBŞ.: 1/5, 12, 14, 16, 54, 58; A. DVN. KBM.: 1/4, 14).

The local dignitaries constituted a new power in the period under examination, the "*a'yân ü eşrâf*"²³ of Cyprus. They gradually came to power through their wealth, dignity and the protection at the capital and obtaining sometimes the offices of "*muhassıl*" or "*müsellim*", but usually those of "*mültezim*", "*vovodâ*" or "*câbi*" of various "*mukata'as*" in Cyprus. Thereby they became a kind of ruling agent of the state along with the other Turkish military and religious authorities who had begun to abuse their powers for their own sake.

Eventually the Ottoman State would come to recognize them. In fact, this did seem to be an indication of somewhat a natural compromise. For, according to many documents, it is understood that the then Ottoman government seems to have sought the help of the "*a'yân*" in the solution of social, economic and even military issues (A. DVN. KBM.: 1/22-23, 28, 40, 53; A. DVN. KBŞ.: 1/5, 8, 35) by counting their titles among those of other Turkish officials as; "*umumen 'ulemâ ve sülehâ ve e'imme ve hutebâ ve zü'emâ ve corbacıyân ve sâ'ir a'yân u eşrâf....*" or "*Lefkoşa Nâ'ibine ve Eyâlet-i Kıbrıs'da*

²³ See Çevikel 2002.

vâki kazâların kuzât ve nüvvâbına ve Kıbrıs Muhassılı zide mecduhuya ve zikrolunan kazâların *a'yân* ve zâbitân ve *vüçûh-i memleket*²⁴ ve bi'l-cümle iş erlerine hüküm ki....".

Although having become agents of the state, many of the local notables, in other words, the "*a'yân ü eşrâf*" who seized the positions of "*mültezim*", "*voyvoda*", "*câbi*" or "*nâ'ib of kadî*", had not acted in accordance with the principles of the Sharia, "*şer'-i şerif*" and "*kânûn*" or the firmans of "*adâletnâme*"²⁵ including the orders issued by the Sultans to protect the Ottoman subjects usually from oppressions of the members of the military class, "*ehl-i 'örf*". They committed many malpractices which had caused the social disorder to increase as a result of the dissemination of the reayah, "*perâkende vü per'i şân*" (A. DVN. KBS.: 1/39, 42-43, 45-46, 49; A. DVN. KBM.: 1/8, 15). Unlawfully levying provisions on the reayah, "*yem ve yiyecek taleb*" during their illegal control visits (*il üzerine devre çıkmak*), increasing the rates of the dues (*kânûndan ziyâde akçe/penbe ve ipek almak/taleb*) to impose illegal taxes like "*şartlama*" or accepting bribes were among their most usual abuses.

For the social turmoil of the period, in fact, the notables of the *zimmi* population (*Rum Tercümânı, Tuzla'lı sâbık (former) Kocabaş*) seemed to be proportionally responsible, too. For they could also be "*mültezims*" of the same kind (A. DVN. KBM.: 1/14, 39). As "*mültezims*", the Christian dignitaries possessed somewhat big çiftliks and collected the imperial taxes (*emvâl-i mîrî*) of regions populated by the Greeks or of a certain number *zimmis* (A. DVN. KBM., 1/4; D. BSM. KBE., 20559-60).

Reflecting the general picture of the whole empire (İnalçık 1965, pp. 49-145; Yücel 1988, p. XI) to a great extent, the members of the military class (*ehl-i 'örf; sipâhis* or *sâhib-i 'arzs, subaşis, serdârs, dizdârs*, etc.) constituted the most crucial source of the problems which had given rise to the disturbance and dissemination of the Cypriot subjects. They had sometimes directly oppressed the Muslim and non-Muslim reayah by increasing the degrees of the prescribed dues (*ziyâde taleb*) or demanding provisions during their prohibited visits around their tenures (*il üzre devre çıkub müft ü meccanen yem ve yiyecek / kuzu ve koyun / me'kulât ve meşrûbâtlarını alub*) (A.

²⁴ This title also means dignitaries of a place.

²⁵ See İnalçık 1965.

DVN. KBA.: 1/10, 36, 52-53; A. DVN. KBM.: 1/8). Additionally, many documents show that the oppressive military commanders abused their authorities by giving support to those who in various ways had plundered the powerless and unarmed dwellers of the island, too (A. DVN. KBS.: 1/43, 45, 47-51; A. DVN. KBM.: 1/8). This is expressed in the documents in a formula like this: " *re'âyâ fukarâları olub, kazâ-i mezbûr sâkinlerinden kimse / kimseler kendi hâlinde / hâllerinde olmayub şerir ve gammaz olub dâ'imâ fukarâyı ehl-i 'örfe gammaz / varub gammazlayarak ve akçelerimiz alınmağa bâ'is...* ".

To sum up, in spite of all these abuses and malpractices of the Turkish and non-Muslim authorities which resulted in a social, economic and political chaos in Cyprus during the period, it can be claimed, contrary to the tales elaborated in narratives of certain European travellers (Çiçek 1992, pp. 211-216), that the Ottoman subjects of the island (especially the Greeks) were proportionally in a good position compared to those living in many other provinces of the empire and the living standards they enjoyed had not been under those of their contemporary counterparts in other Mediterranean countries, either.

It's most probably because of the fact that the central government of the Ottomans with an independent legal system, had always tried to protect the reayah against all of the oppressive Turkish and non-Muslim authorities, which had been seen in the cases of Muhassıl (governor) Silahdar 'Osman Aga murdered in the revolt of the Turks and the Greeks in 1764 (A. DVN. KBS.: 1-5-6), Muhassıl E'l-hac 'Abdu'l-baki Aga dismissed from his position and exiled on the complaints of the Muslims and non-Muslims in 1785 (A. DVN. KBM.: 1/40; A. DVN. KBA.: 1/29, 31), Muhassıl 'Ali Aga who was complained again by the Turkish and the Greek reayah, removed from his office and confined in the fortress of Magusa in 1786 (A. DVN. KBM.: 1/44, 50-51) and the Dragoman (*Kıbrıs Muhassılı Tercümânı*) Acı Yorgaki veled-i (son of) Yanni who was complained by the Christian reayah about his various abuses (*hilâf-ı şer' vergileri hususunda zulm ü te'addisi* or *hakk-ı irsiyyesini fuzuli zabt*) arrested and sent to the capital to be judged (A. DVN. KBS.: 1/25, 29, 31).

The liquidation of these tyrants prompted specially the Greek reayah to take to Constantinople personally even their the simplest problems witnessed among themselves or with the Muslims about buying and selling, business, trade, inheritance, pasturing animals, etc., or the malpractices

exposed upon them (A. DVN. KBS.: 1/21, 28, 32-34, 37-38, 57) by the local authorities. As it is confessed by Cyprianos (Cobham 1908, p. 354) and the relevant documents also indicate, the Sublime Porte never neglected them and treated "graciously" and with great care even when it was under the pressure of great internal and external occurrences like revolts, wars and the like at that time.

Besides protecting the reayah by severely punishing the oppressors, the Sublime Porte had accepted many times the representatives of the Greek reayah (*re'âyâ vekilleri*) and their petitions, sometimes in their own language, namely the Greek (A. DVN. KBM.: 1/14) and answered their requests (A. DVN. KBM.: 1/11, 14, 18, 21, 23; A. DVN. KBS.: 1/6; Cobham 1908, pp. 350, 353). Moreover, the Ottoman government also spent efforts to ease their economic condition by making *reductions* (*rahmen li'l-fukarâ*) in the amount of their annual tax burden during extraordinary periods (D. BŞM. KBE.: 20558; Cobham 1908, p. 355).

It seems that the Ottoman State always remained stuck to one of the "fundamental and unchanging" principles it followed in the affairs of state and society: The protection of subjects whom God had given them in trust (*vedâyi'* / *vedi'a-i Hâlık/ Cenâb-i Rabbi'l-âlemin*) against the oppressors, that means justice, and to make them prosperous are the bases for the permanence of the state (İnalçık 1973, pp. 66-67). This essential understanding is being come across, both at the beginning and at the end, in the imperial papers. In one of them issued in 1572²⁶, Selim II commands to the Turkish authorities in Cyprus that; "*tâ'ife-i re'âyâ ki vedâyi'-i Hâlık berâyâdır, mehmâ emken himâyet ü siyânet eyleyüb, kimesneye zulm ü te'addî itdirmeyüb....*". It's almost at the end of the 18th century, the same meaning is being repeated in the document (A. DVN. KBM.: 1/44, dated 13. 12. 1200 A.H. / 1786 A.D.), which orders the confinement of an oppressor Muhassil (governor) 'Alî Aga in the fortress of Mağusa; "*vedi'a-i Cenâb-ı Rabbi'l-âlemîn olan fukarâ-i ra'yyet ve ahâli-i memlekete itmedigi mezâlim ü te'addiyât-i mütenevvi'a kalmayub....*".

This understanding and its application of the Ottomans without any doubt seem to have had a great share in the fact that the non-Muslim reayah of the Province of Cyprus saw it quite wise to remain loyal to the

²⁶ See *Muhimme Defteri 12* (1996, Vol. III, p. 641 / 1215).

Turkish rule during the periods of interregnum²⁷ and nationalism after the French Revolution²⁸.

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²⁷ For example, during the war against Russia the Ottomans lost their fleet completely (1770) around Chesme on the western shores of Anatolia and the Mediterranean Sea at a moment passed under the Russian control (Hill 1952, Vol, IV, p. 93).

²⁸ Consult Çevikel 1998.

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