

HISTORICIZING THE OTTOMAN *TIMAR* SYSTEM:  
IDENTITIES OF *TIMAR*-HOLDERS, 14<sup>TH</sup> TO 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

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Abstract:

This article aims to develop a new narrative of changes in the Ottoman *timar* system independent of the complaints of decline brought by advice writers like Mustafa ‘Ali. Based on the *icmal defterleri*, it examines the identities of *timar*-holders and their changes over time, a topic generally ignored in descriptions of the Ottoman military. It connects changes in *timar*-holding with changing conditions in the sultans’ reigns. It then takes a longer-term look at these changes over the half-centuries and finds the well-known complaints in the *nasihatnameler* to be based on a very short-term view of the system.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire; timar system; sipahi; icmal; muhimme; nasihat; ecnebi;

Mustafa Ali

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The Ottoman Empire's "classical age" is known as an era when the empire's main administrative system, the *timar* system, simultaneously organized military life, political hierarchies, the social system, and the largest sector of economic production and distribution.<sup>1</sup> By the reign of Süleyman Kanuni in the mid-sixteenth century, the *timar* system, the legal structure of *kanun* that regulated it, and the scribal officials who saw to the *kanun*'s organization and implementation were regarded as the constituting institution of the empire.<sup>2</sup> Alterations to the system, such as the granting of *timars* to outsiders, the decrease in the number of men-at-arms (*cebeliüs*), the tax farming of *timar* revenues, and the chaotic administration and inadequate defense of the empire thought to result from these changes, were condemned by Ottoman critics writing advice works known as *nasihatnameler*. Narratives of the *timar* system, reflecting these works, have posited a "classical age" in which a mature *timar* system flourished, followed by a period of detrimental changes contributing to the empire's fall.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> İnalçık, Halil, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600*, Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber (trs.) (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973). This paper was given in a different form at the CIEPO conference of 2015 in Budapest, at a panel organized by Douglas A. Howard and has benefited from those interactions as well as the comments of the anonymous readers for this journal. It is not intended to be the definitive word on the *timar* system but to suggest an alternate narrative or narratives within which to frame future research.

<sup>2</sup> Fleischer, Cornell H., *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli (1541-1600)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Howard, Douglas A., "Ottoman Historiography and the Literature of 'Decline' of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", *Journal of Asian History*, 22 (1988), 52-77.

<sup>3</sup> The most active perpetrator and influential exponent of this view has been Lewis, Bernard, "Some Reflections on the Decline of the Ottoman Empire", *Studia Islamica*, 9 (1958), 111-27, but it has been very widespread among scholars as well as the general public. See, for example, Barkan, Ömer Lütfi, "Timar," *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol.12, pp. 286-333, or any of the standard

Some of the changes formerly ascribed to imperial decline have more recently been attributed to the price inflation of the sixteenth century and the “military revolution,” the replacement of cavalry forces armed with swords and bows by gun-bearing infantry. Still, the hidden assumption in both these formulations is that prior to those changes the *timar* system was conducted in adherence to sultanic edicts—firm, stable, even static—and that this changelessness was a bulwark of the empire’s strength. Descriptions of the system tend to conclude with Maria Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru that with the changes of the late sixteenth century “the Porte precipitated the decline of the *timar* system, on which the military strength of the Ottoman Empire was based in the classical era.”<sup>4</sup>

My longitudinal study of *timar* awards in the Ottoman summary registers (*icmal defterleri*), however, contradicts the assessment of the *nasihatnameler*.<sup>5</sup> It finds no unchanging classical system, no turning point after the death of Süleyman in 1566 or, according to Mustafa ‘Ali, around 1580, and no subsequently dwindling or disappearance of *timars*, at least up to the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>6</sup> The critiques in the literature of advice (*nasihatnameler*)

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textbooks.

<sup>4</sup> Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, Maria M., “Sur la transmission du timar dans l’Empire ottoman (XVe-XVIe) siècles”, in *Türkische Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte (1071-1920)*, Hans George Majer and Raoul Motika (eds.) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995), p. 9; see Cvetkova, Bistra, “Early Ottoman *Tahrir Defters* as a Source for Studies on the History of Bulgaria and the Balkans”, *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 8 (1983), 180.

<sup>5</sup> Darling, Linda T., “*Nasihatnameler*, *İcmal Defterleri*, and the Ottoman *Timar*-Holding Elite in the Late Sixteenth Century”, *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, 43 (2013), 193-226 (hereafter *Nasihatnameler I*) and eadem, “*Nasihatnameler*, *İcmal Defterleri*, and the Ottoman *Timar*-Holding Elite in the Late Sixteenth Century: Part II, Including the Seventeenth Century”, *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, 45 (2015), 1-23 (hereafter *Nasihatnameler II*).

<sup>6</sup> Ali, Mustafa, *Mustafâ ‘Âlî’s Counsel for Sultans of 1581: Edition, Translation, Notes*, Andreas Tietze (ed. and tr.), 2 vols., Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, 137, 158 (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1979, 1982). This result was also noted by Dávid, Géza, and Pál Fodor, “Changes in the Structure and Strength of the Timariot Army from the Early Sixteenth to the end of the Seventeenth Century”, *Eurasian Studies*, 4.2 (2005), 158; they corrected the

claim that the corruption of the system began when *timars* were granted not to the sons of previous *timar*-holders but to people who were “outsiders” (*ecnebiler*).<sup>7</sup> The question of the identities of these “outsiders” and the legitimacy of their receiving *timars* then becomes significant. The evidence of the Ottoman documents shows that the identities of *timar*-holders were changing constantly, not only in the late sixteenth century, and that their numbers did not diminish but increased. A new narrative is needed that incorporates these conclusions and correlates them with conditions in the empire. Most studies of the *timar* system focus on the numbers of *timars*, the status of the land, the taxpayers, and the revenue, while the identity of the *timar*-holders is a neglected question.<sup>8</sup> The present paper sketches the observable changes in *timar* holding between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries and contextualizes them within two different possible narratives of the development of the *timar* system. This article does not aim to be the definitive work on *timar*-holders’ identities (that will require much more extensive and detailed research), but rather intends to disturb the standard narrative, raise questions that have not yet been asked, and suggest a couple of alternate formulations.

The sources for such a narrative necessarily vary over time. For the

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description of the *timar* army on the Hungarian frontier in that period but did not generate a broader narrative.

<sup>7</sup> Ali, *Counsel for Sultans*, pp. 17-19, 84-86; Koçi Bey, *Koçi Bey Risalesi*, Yılmaz Kurt (ed.) (Ankara: Ecdad, 1994), pp. 47-52. See also Darling, Linda T., “The Sultan’s Advisors and Their Opinions on the Identity of the Ottoman Elite, 1580-1653”, in *Living in the Ottoman Realm: Everyday Life and Identity from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Christine Isom-Verhaaren and Kent Schull (eds.) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), pp. 171-81.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, İnalçık, Halil, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, Volume One, 1300-1600*, Halil İnalçık with Donald Quataert (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Murphey, Rhoads, *Ottoman Warfare, 1500-1700* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

fourteenth century there are only a few mentions in the chronicles, although some of the sources that should be plumbed on the question of *gaza* might also prove helpful on the issue of early *timars*.<sup>9</sup> From the fifteenth century on there are the *icmal defterleri* (summary registers listing all *timar*-holders in a province).<sup>10</sup> Although these registers may be problematic because of their summary nature and should be compared with the *ruzmançe defterleri* (daily records of *timar* bestowals), they conveniently indicate broader trends in *timar*-holding. From the sixteenth century on, *mühimme* registers (registers of outgoing orders), some of which are available in published form, can be added, as well as the aforementioned *ruzmançe defterleri*, which would well repay greater study, as they contain detailed information about the lives and careers of *sipahis* who received *timars*.<sup>11</sup> Although the *ruzmançe defterleri* provide more complete data on specific individuals, the *icmal defterleri* include all the *timar*-holders of an area (usually by *liva*), not just those receiving *timars* or increases at a particular point, and so provide a clearer overall picture of who the *timar*-holders were over time. The *ruzmançes* occasionally attempt to be more complete, and there are also *yoklama* or inspection registers that cover the personnel of a particular campaign.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Darling, Linda T., “Reformulating the *Gazi* Question: When Was the Ottoman State a *Gazi* State?” *Turcica*, 43 (2011), 13-53, and the sources listed there.

<sup>10</sup> Those in the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi can now be supplemented with the ones in the Oriental Section of the Bulgarian National Library and the Tapu ve Kadastro collection in Ankara; see Binark, İsmet (ed.), *Bulgaristan'daki Osmanlı Evrakı* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 1994). See also Afyoncu, Erhan, “XVII. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Bürokrasisinde İki Yeni Defter: Cebe ve Derdest Defterleri”, *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi*, 15 (2015), 221-30.

<sup>11</sup> See Howard, Douglas A., *The Ottoman Timar System and Its Transformation, 1563-1656* (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> The *ruzmançes* at the beginning of a sultan's reign contain a larger number of *timars*, because

From the *icmal defterleri*, on the assumption that they reflect the more detailed information in the *ruznamçes*, it is possible to calculate the percentages of *timar*-holders at any one time who were either sons of previous *timar*-holders, slaves of the sultan, followers of great men of state, members of the provincial military or the administrative cadres, or who had no identifying title or patronymic. My study included holders of *timars* and *zeamets* but not of *has*. Their names often reveal their ethno-religious identities, while their titles refer to the offices they held, and Janissaries and members of the central and provincial military cadres are generally labeled as such. The presence of a patronymic reveals their status: if they were sons of *timar*-holders, at the time they petitioned for a *timar* they had to prove through documents and testimony that they were true sons of prior *timar*-holders or military officials. When they were originally entered into the defter, therefore, their fathers' names were known and were recorded as significant. According to Douglas Howard's research, the patronymics of sons of low-ranking soldiers such as *sekbans*, or of civilian officials, were usually not recorded, apparently because their fathers were not already in the *timar* system, so the patronymic distinguishes sons of *timar*-holders from sons of others.<sup>13</sup> In previous studies I tracked changes in *timar* bestowal patterns over time using data from 49 *icmal defterleri* and other documents from the Başbakanlık archive as well as published registers, a sampling of those dated

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they include all those whose *berats* granting possession had to be renewed by the new sultan; however, according to a personal communication from Douglas Howard, these are listed in the order in which they were received, so they are mingled in with other requests. On *yoklamas* see Mutafçieva, Vera P., and Dimitrov, Str. A., *Sur l'état du système de timar des XVIIe-XVIIIe ss.*, (Sofia: Éditions de l'Académie Bulgare des Sciences, 1968); Howard, *The Ottoman Timar System*, pp. 154-8, 211-25.

<sup>13</sup> Howard, *The Ottoman Timar System*, pp. 170-2; see n. 18.

before 1560 and most of those from 1560 to the late seventeenth century (when the registers become few in number), with a concentration around 1580, when the major change was supposed to have occurred.<sup>14</sup> They showed what all students of the *timar* system are aware of, that the system did not end in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century but continued to exist and to function in some fashion through the seventeenth century and beyond.

The general conclusion to be reached from these registers is that up to the end of the seventeenth century (the scope of this study), *timars* did not disappear or even decrease in number overall, but decayed in some provinces and flourished in others and were held by different groups at different times for different reasons.<sup>15</sup> Nor did *timar*-holders lack military functions after the “military revolution”; they continued to have roles in the siege warfare of the gunpowder era and in the protection and governance of the countryside and the borders. The previous narratives of the *timar* system, both the older one of a general decline after 1580 and the newer one in which the *timar* system was eclipsed by the military revolution and the switch to infantry with guns, must be reconsidered.

The current step toward a revised narrative centers on the question of who held *timars* at different points in the empire’s history, with emphasis on the first

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<sup>14</sup> The sample spans the fifteenth-to-seventeenth-century time period at approximately ten to fifteen-year intervals (depending on the vagaries of document preservation) and spatially covers the empire as a whole (Rumeli, Anadolu, and the Arab lands), but as much as possible stays clear of special situations (such as war zones, islands, or frontiers). Added to the archival sources were a number of published registers and data from registers; my thanks to the tireless librarians who helped in this endeavor. Data were drawn from the following registers in the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi: A.{DFE.d.67, 81, 82, 170, 209; MAD10, 66, 129, 544; Ruz.17; TKMA333, 584;TT1m, 18, 66, 72, 86, 102, 139, 188, 193, 197, 212, 217, 258, 271, 313, 356, 358, 371, 390, 421, 469, 471, 544, 548, 553, 562, 590, 601, 613, 661, 677, 728, 765, 730, 732, 735, 837. See below for further detail on these registers.

<sup>15</sup> Many more local studies must be made to track these differences and determine their causes, but these studies must be situated in the larger context of the empire as a whole; the history of a single province or area cannot represent the history of the entire empire.

half, and asks how the observable changes in *timar* bestowals can be linked to the larger historical issues of the period. In order to track change over time, I break the period into smaller segments and examine it in two different ways, first by sultan's reign, which might indicate changes in *timar* bestowals resulting from the policies or desires of different sultans or specific conditions during their reigns. This is followed by an analysis broken into fifty-year periods in order to reveal longer-term trends in *timar* bestowals governed by conjunctural shifts.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Timar* bestowals in the early empire**

A history of the Ottoman *timar* system must begin in the early fourteenth century with the stories of awards by Osman (1299-1326) and Orhan (1326-1362) to leaders of the *gaza* of large tracts of land, called *timars* by the fifteenth-century historians, which these leaders divided among their followers.<sup>17</sup> We have no documentary records of this event or others like it, but they are narrated in the chronicles. The practice described there strongly resembles the Mongol *iqṭā'* system said by the historian Rashid al-Din to have been instituted by Ghazan Khan (1295-1303) to provide for fighters and their horses.<sup>18</sup> In the beylical

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<sup>16</sup> The length of these periods is somewhat arbitrary; the logic is that a century seems too long to reveal changes, but a fifty-year period is longer than any individual sultan's reign.

<sup>17</sup> Akgündüz, Ahmed, *Osmanlı Kanunnameleri ve Hukuki Tahlilleri* (Istanbul: Fey Vakfi, 1990), v. 1, p. 256; Aşıkpaşazade, *Āshūkpāshazādeh Ta'rīkhī: A History of the Ottoman Empire to A.H. 833 (AD 1478)*, 'Ālī Bey (ed.) (Istanbul: Matbaa-ı 'Āmire, 1914; rpt. Westmead, Eng.: Gregg International Publishers, 1970), pp. 20, 38. See Darling, Linda T., "The Development of Ottoman Governmental Institutions in the Fourteenth Century: A Reconstruction", in *Living in the Ottoman Ecumenical Community: Essays in Honour of Suraiya Faroqhi*, ed. Vera Costantini and Markus Koller (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2008), pp. 23-4; and the careful exposition by Vera P. Mutaščieva, *Agrarian Relations in the Ottoman Empire in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, East European Monographs (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 7-16. Compare Fodor, Pál, "Ottoman Warfare, 1300-1453", in *The Cambridge History of Turkey, Volume 1: Byzantium to Turkey, 1071-1453*, Kate Fleet (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 195-9.

<sup>18</sup> Rashid al-Din Fazlullah Habib, *Jami'u't-Tawarikh: Compendium of Chronicles*, W. M.

period, the frontier *beys* continued to hold and distribute their lands in a similar fashion, as did the frontier *beys* well into the fifteenth century.<sup>19</sup> The individualized *timar* system known from later years appeared at the latest after the acquisition of the province of Hamid by Murad I (1362-1389), when he gave individual *berats* (authorization documents) to the existing *timar*-holders of Hamid.<sup>20</sup> *Timar* surveys (*tahrirs*) began under Bayezid I (1389-1402), if not before; his surveys of conquered lands in Ankara and Albania indicate that he granted his followers *timars* in Anatolia as well as Rumeli.<sup>21</sup>

The Ottoman defeat by Timur at Ankara in 1402, the retaking of Ottoman lands by their former rulers, and their subsequent reconquest by different sons of

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Thackston (tr.) (Cambridge: Harvard University Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 1998-1999), vol. 3, pp. 730-5.

<sup>19</sup> Beldiceanu, Nicoară, *Le timar dans l'État ottoman (début XIVe-début XVIe siècle)* (Wiesbaden: Ottoman Harrassowitz, 1980), p. 24; Grignaschi, Mario, "Les guerriers domestiques dans la féodalité turque", *VI. Türk Tarih Kongresi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1967), pp. 206-29.

<sup>20</sup> Aşıkpaşazade, p. 60; Darling, "Development", p. 6. For Seljuk antecedents to this system see Köprülü, Mehmet Fuat, "Bizans Müesseselerinin Osmanlı Müesseselerine Te'siri Hakkında Bazı Mülâhazalar", *Türk Hukuk ve İktisadi Tarihi Mecmuası*, 1 (1931), 165-313; Beldiceanu, *Le timar*, pp. 26-8; Cahen, Claude, *The Formation of Turkey: The Seljukid Sultanate of Rûm: Eleventh to Fourteenth Century*, P. M. Holt (tr.) (Harlow, England: Longman, 2001), pp. 103, 104-6; and for Byzantine antecedents see Lemerle, Paul, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium: From the Origins to the Twelfth Century: The Sources and Problems* (Galway, Ireland: Paul Lemerle, 1979), pp. 222-41; Ahrweiler, Hélène, "La 'Pronoia' à Byzance", in *Structures féodales et féodalisme dans l'occident méditerranéen (Xe-XIIIe siècles): Bilan et perspectives de recherche* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1980), pp. 681-9; Oikonomides, Nicolas, "The Role of the Byzantine State in the Economy", in *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2002), pp. 1042-50; Bartusis, Mark C., *Land and Privilege in Byzantium: The Institution of Pronoia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). On an individual *timar* granted by Orhan see Beldiceanu, *Le timar*, p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> İnalçık, Halil. *Hicrî 835 Tarihli Sûret-i Defter-i Sancak-ı Arvanid* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1954), pp. xv, 103; idem, "Arnavutluk'ta Osmanlı Hâkimiyetinin Yerleşmesi ve İskender Bey İsyanının Menşei", *Fatih ve İstanbul*, 1, no. 2 (1953), 155-6; and idem, "Ottoman Methods of Conquest", *Studia Islamica*, 2 (1954), 109; see also Darling, "Development," p. 30 & n. 62; Beldiceanu, *Le timar*, p. 23 & nn. 42-6, pp. 24-5. The evidence consists of references in fifteenth-century registers to fourteenth-century surveys in Albania and Ankara; the first speaks of exemption documents (*temessük*) given to surveyed taxpayers by named officials who were *beylerbeys* of Rumeli under Bayezid, the second of *timars* granted in Bayezid's time, and the third of a survey of Ankara by Timurtaş Paşa, its governor in 1396.

Bayezid disrupted the *timar* system throughout Anatolia and Rumeli; as rule changed hands back and forth, so most likely did *timars*. During the period of civil war from 1402 to 1413, Emir Süleyman is said to have continued the surveys in the areas he controlled; other princes and *beys* are also known to have granted *timars*.<sup>22</sup> The recopying of a manual for the finance scribes in 1412 in Bursa reflects Çelebi Mehmed's support for administrative continuity.<sup>23</sup> His efforts to reconquer and reassemble the empire during his reign as Mehmed I (1413-1420) surely won support from those who had held *timars* under Bayezid and who stood to regain them from Mehmed.

This brief overview of the early period prompts three conclusions regarding *timars*: one, that the body of *timar*-holders in the fourteenth and very early fifteenth centuries consisted mainly of the warriors of the *beys* (not true in later times); two, that the *beys* must have been quite busy awarding *timars* to their followers, and that this activity contributed immensely to the development of Ottoman bureaucratic administration (and probably had a linguistic effect as well); and three, that in these decades the *timars* must have been the site of intense political contention between the followers of different *beys*. Such a contention has disappeared from our narratives of the period, which retain only the memory of a rivalry between the *timar*-holding families in general and the followers of the frontier raiders, the *akıncıs*, as these fighters and their leaders

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<sup>22</sup> Beldiceanu, *Le timar*, p. 23, n. 40, on *timars* granted by Musa Çelebi and *timars* granted to the fathers and grandfathers of *timar*-holders active in 1464.

<sup>23</sup> Nabipour, Mirkamal, *Die beiden persischen Leitfäden des Falak 'Ala-ye Tabrizi über das staatliche Rechnungswesen im 14. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Georg-August-Universität, 1973), p. 7; Darling, Linda T., "Ottoman Accounting Prehistory". in *Proceedings of the 12th World Congress of Accounting Historians*, Oktay Güvemli (ed.) (Istanbul: Association of Accounting and Finance Academicians, 2008), vol. 3, pp. 2421-33.

were politically marginalized.

The earliest extant *timar* register, dated 835/1431-32 and covering the Albanian province of Arvanid during the reign of Murad II (1420-1444, 1446-1451), suggests that after 1420 the *timar*-holding group was dramatically different from the picture painted above.<sup>24</sup> In that register, only 20 percent of *timar*-holders were sons of prior *timar*-holders, and few were sons of other great men.<sup>25</sup> Nearly half (46%) were the sons of nobodies, their fathers' names not being listed in the register; these men were probably sons of lesser military men, scribes, or *reaya*.<sup>26</sup> A full 22 percent were men recruited in the *devşirme*, Janissaries and men holding palace positions, and another six percent came from the provincial governments' military forces. Thirty percent of the total were *sipahis* from the province of Saruhan, transferred there after a revolt in 1416, and 13 percent were non-Muslims.<sup>27</sup> There is some overlap in these percentages. If this register represents Murad's *timar* bestowals, at this point in his reign he seems to have been displacing the sons of *timar*-holders in favor of people of lesser origins, whether because there were not enough sons of former *timar*-holders or because he wished to replace them with new men.

A sampling of the *icmal defterleri* for the next few decades reveals a

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<sup>24</sup> This register, TT1m, appears to be the only *icmal* from Murad II's reign. The next three registers, attributed in the catalog to Murad's reign, actually cover the early years of Mehmed II's reign: MAD525 bears the date 858/1454, and MAD250 and MAD303 are dated 859/1454-5.

<sup>25</sup> Mutafçieva, *Agrarian Relations*, p. 38, lists even lower percentages of sons of *timar*-holders for later entries in the 1431 register and for other undated fifteenth-century registers.

<sup>26</sup> See Howard, *The Ottoman Timar System*, pp. 170-2.

<sup>27</sup> İnalçık, *Hicrî 835 Tarihli Sûret-i Defter-i Sancak-ı Arvanid*. Until 1520 there were provinces where Christian *timar*-holders numbered up to 16 percent of the total, and there were a few even into the seventeenth century; Darling, "Nasihâtname I," p. 203; thus, the idea that Christian *timar*-holders vanished at the end of the fifteenth century must be revised. For a list of the earliest surviving registers of different locations in Anatolia see Çiçek, Kemal, "The Earliest Population and Fiscal Surveys (Tahrir Defterleri) for the Anatolian Provinces of the Ottoman Empire", *OTAM*, 7 (1996), 45-97.

pattern that changed with each succeeding sultan, although the extent to which each sultan personally guided these policies is unknown. If there was a classical “system”, it was not very systematic. Mehmed II (1451-1481) is considered unusual for favoring graduates of the palace school over men who rose through the *timar* system, appointing men from the *devşirme* into the grand vizierate and other high offices. It would be natural to assume that he continued or even increased the awarding of *timars* to Janissaries, but the evidence contradicts this assumption. A sample of the extant *timar* registers from his period showed an average of only 3 percent of the *timar*-holders as Janissaries, compared to 22 percent in the 1431 register.<sup>28</sup> Thus, it appears that the ordinary men of the *devşirme* were considerably less favored than the graduates of the palace school, whom Mehmed promoted to high office. Forty-six percent of *timars* were held by sons of *timar*-holders, which in addition to policy could reflect a higher rate of survival and reproduction by *sipahis* during Murad II’s reign than during the Interregnum.<sup>29</sup> Registers from Tırhala and “Serbia” dated 1454 show an average of 36 percent of *timar*-holders coming from the provincial government’s military forces, from the retinues of *beylerbeys* and *sancakbeys*, while 25 percent or more were Christians.<sup>30</sup> In the following year nearly 40 percent of the *timars* of Vidin

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<sup>28</sup> The registers used from Mehmed II’s reign are MAD10 Tırhala 859/1454, MAD 554 Serbia 859/1454, and MAD 66 Tırhala 873/1468. All figures other than Soyudoğan’s are rounded off from Darling, “*Nasihatnameler I*”, pp. 219-21. They are only a sample; a more detailed study of this period using other registers might alter these figures somewhat.

<sup>29</sup> Thanks to Douglas Howard for the suggestion that the birth rate among timariot families was a relevant factor; *The Ottoman Timar System*, pp. 178-82.

<sup>30</sup> The designation “Serbia” was given to this register by Šabanović, Hazim, *Krajište Isa-Bega Ishakovića: Zbirni Katastarski Popis iz 1455. Godina/Hicri 859 Tarihli Suret-i Defter-i Mücmel-i Vilayet-i Yeleç ve İzveçan ve Hodidide ve Seniça ve Ras ve Üsküb ve Kalkandelen me’a Tevabi’iha* (Sarajevo: Orijentalni Institut u Sarajevu, 1964). See also Soyudoğan, Muhsin, “Reassessing the Timar System: The Case Study of Vidin (1455-1693)” (PhD diss., Bilkent University, 2012), p.

were granted to provincial military forces: fortress guards (including *martolos*, Christians), gunners, and falconers.<sup>31</sup> Mehmet II also enacted measures increasing central control over the bestowal of *timars*.<sup>32</sup>

Another register from Tırhala in 1468 shows a distinct change in awards; it contained no *timar*-holders from the provincial military and a only handful of followers of other great men, together with a much reduced number of Christians, but the highest number of sons of *timar*-holders in the period, 75 percent. Throughout Mehmed's reign, *timar*-holding sons of nobodies declined from the 46 percent of Murad II's reign, initially to about 20 percent and later to only 4 percent. In none of these registers were *timar*-holders of *devşirme* origins significant. This pattern suggests that Mehmed may have been trying either to attract his chief military men by patronizing their followers, or to weaken them by bringing their men into his own service (or both, perhaps), and that later on he showed favor to the sons of *timar*-holders, but not to Janissaries or the sons of other *reaya*. As we know, to placate these sons of *timar*-holders and recruit them for his army he had to take land away from *zaviyes* and *akıncıs*; we shall see what happened to the *timar*-holders' sons when Bayezid II returned these lands.

The Janissary element among the *timar*-holders now appears smaller than

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141; İnalçık, Halil, "Timariotes chrétiens en Albanie au XV. siècle d'après un register de timars ottomans", *Mitteilungen des österreichischen Staatsarchiv*, 4 (1951), 118-38; Cvetkova, "Early Ottoman *Tahrir Defter*", pp. 160-7 & nn. 63-5. In a 1469 register over one-fourth of the *timars* were assigned to Christians: Oruç, Hatice, "Christian Sipahis in the Bosnian Sandjak (15<sup>th</sup> Century)", *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 26 (2009), 5-16; a late fifteenth-century register for Vidin showed 18 percent Christians: Gradeva, Rossitsa, "Between Hinterland and Frontier: Ottoman Vidin, Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries," in *The Frontiers of the Ottoman World*, A. C. S. Peacock (ed.) (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 337-45.

<sup>31</sup> Soyudoğan, "Reassessing the Timar System", pp. 185,193, 296, 299, 301.

<sup>32</sup> Káldy-Nagy, Gyula, "The First Centuries of the Ottoman Military Organization", *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scieniarum Hungaricae*, 31.2 (1977), 153-4.

was formerly estimated by extrapolation from the earliest register. The number of Janissary *timar*-holders in Murad II's reign proved not to be typical of later periods. More *timars* went to sons of *timar*-holders even prior to Mehmed's "reform" than we used to think.<sup>33</sup> The frontier forces were definitively out of power by the later fifteenth century, and the revenues of lands held as *mülk* and *vakıf* by frontier commanders were diverted to supporting *timar*-holders and men-at-arms drawn not only from the sons of *timar*-holders but from the official provincial forces as well.<sup>34</sup> The political struggle now lay between the *timar*-holders (most of whom were *not* former Janissaries) and the Janissaries (most of whom were not *timar*-holders), but there was a third significant force, the provincial military (whether Muslim or Christian, tied to the political hierarchy or autonomous non-*akıncı* forces), a number of whom did hold *timars*. While they apparently had no role as such in the political rivalries of the capital, it seems that their role in the empire as a whole was not as negligible at this time as it previously appeared. They should be investigated, as they are probably among the men who later became the forces of the *ayan* and *derebeys*; the *timar* records offer an opportunity to study their early development.

The *timar* awards made under Bayezid II (1481-1512) and Selim I (1512-1520) differed from both Mehmed's and Murad's, but they showed some trends

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<sup>33</sup> A fragmentary register for Vidin dated 1477 showed 85 percent of *timar*-holders as sons of previous *timar*-holders; Bulgarian National Library "Kiril and Methodius," OAK 265/27.

<sup>34</sup> Cvetkova, Bistra, "Sur certaines reformes du régime foncier au temps de Mehmet II", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 6 (1963), 104-20; Beldiceanu, Nicoară, "Recherches sur la réforme foncière de Mehmed II", *Acta Historica*, 4 (1965), 25-39; Mutafçieva, Vera P., "De la politique interieure de Mahomet II le Conquérant", *Studia et Acta Orientalia*, 5-6 (1967), 253-65; Mutafçieva, *Agrarian Relations*, pp. 131-4; Arıkan, Zeki, *XV-XVI. Yüzyillarda Hamit Sancağı* (Izmir: Ege Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi, Tarih Bölümü, 1988); Özel, Oktay, "Limits of the Almighty: Mehmed II's 'Land Reform' Revisited", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 42.2 (1999), 226-46.

that would be repeated under their sixteenth-century successors, with the notable exception of Süleyman. The revenues that Mehmed II had diverted to the *timar* system were subtracted again under Bayezid II for restitution to their previous owners (in most cases), but their return did not restore to the owners their former political importance. Only around 20 percent of *timar*-holders under these two sultans were sons of prior *timar*-holders, a considerably lower figure than under Mehmed or Süleyman.<sup>35</sup> Even in the reduced *timar* system of Bayezid and Selim, then, sons of *timar*-holders held a diminished place. This reduction in the role of *timar*-holders' sons surely explains the agitation in the early sixteenth century over the granting of *timars* to “outsiders.”<sup>36</sup> About 10 percent of *timar*-holders on average were from the *devşirme* or palace slaves, a number that was higher than the level under either Mehmed II or Süleyman and more like the figures for Süleyman's successors.<sup>37</sup> Less than 5 percent were from the provincial military forces. The sons of nobodies crept upward to 30 percent (one wonders how many of them were sons or grandsons of dispossessed *timar*-holders), and that figure would continue to increase for the next two centuries. This pattern is still

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<sup>35</sup> The registers employed for these reigns were TT18 Bosna 890/1485 and TT66 Aydın, Mentеше 924/1518. A fragmentary register for Kırkkilise dated 1483 also shows 25 percent of *timar*-holders as sons of previous *timar*-holders; Bulgarian National Library “Kiril and Methodius,” OAK 18/17.

<sup>36</sup> See Káldy-Nagy, Gyula, “The ‘Strangers’ (*Ecnebler*) in the 16th Century Ottoman Military Organization”, in *Between the Danube and the Caucasus*, György Kara (ed.) (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1987), pp. 165-9; Mutafchieva, *Agrarian Relations*, pp. 134-5; Darling, “*Nasihatnameler I*”, p. 199.

<sup>37</sup> But see a register for Trabzon in 1486 described by Barkan, where out of 207 *timars*, 101 or almost half were granted to slaves of the sultan; Barkan, Ömer Lütfi, “Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Bir İskan ve Kolonizasyon Metodu Olarak Sürgünler (III)”, *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası*, 15.1-4 ((Ekim 1953-Temmuz 1954), p. 217, rpt. in idem, *Osmanlı Devleti’nin Sosyal ve Ekonomik Tarihi: Tetkikler – Makaleler*, Hüseyin Özdeğer (ed.) (Istanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Yayınları, 2000), p. 586. This register brings the average of awards to palace slaves under Bayezid and Selim up to nearly one-fourth, which was thought to have generated rebelliousness among the sons of *timar*-holders; Barkan, Ömer Lütfi, “Timar”, *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 12, p. 301.

observable at the very beginning of Süleyman’s reign, although it was soon to change. Apparently the “classical” system was less classic, as well as less systematic, than either we or the Ottoman advice writers believed.

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Table 1: TIMAR-HOLDERS’ ORIGINS (AVERAGE PERCENTAGES)

For reasons of space, this table omits the sons of administrative personnel, other identifiable military groups, and high officials, so the percentages do not equal 100.

Sultan	Sons of <i>Timar</i> -holders	Janissaries, <i>gilman</i>	Provincial Military	Followers of Greats	Sons of Nobodies
Murad II	20	22	6	—	46
Mehmed II	46	3	24	—	14
Bayezid II-Selim I	19	10	2	2	30
Suleyman	49	6	3	6	16/25
Selim II	20	4	3	3	61
Murad III	40	7	3	3	38

Sources: Darling, Linda T., “*Nasihatnameler, İcmal Defterleri*, and the Ottoman *Timar*-Holding Elite in the Late Sixteenth Century”, *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, 43 (2013), 193-226; idem, “*Nasihatnameler, İcmal Defterleri*, and the Ottoman *Timar*-Holding Elite in the Late Sixteenth Century: Part II, Including the Seventeenth Century”, *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, 45 (2015), 1-23.

### The “classical” *timar* system of Süleyman’s reign

The reign of Süleyman (1520-1566) was when *timar*-granting and *timar*-recording procedures were regularized and the *timar* system gained its full

“classical” character.<sup>38</sup> His centralization efforts are better-known than those of Mehmed II, but even during his time many *timar*-holders seem to have been on lands that they held by tradition or inheritance rather than assignment. In other respects his *timar* awards differed from those of some of the other sultans. In Süleyman’s reign, almost half the *timars* went to sons of *timar*-holders, although this proportion varied widely from place to place and from year to year, going as high as 93 percent and as low as 10 percent.<sup>39</sup> Only 6 percent of *timars* were granted to the men of the *devşirme*, although later in his reign higher figures appeared; and the officer corps came increasingly from the palace school.<sup>40</sup> So far this resembled Mehmed II’s pattern, but the provincial military were only granted 3 percent of the total, with slightly higher figures appearing in the years after Prince Bayezid’s rebellion. With few exceptions, administrative personnel held 5 percent or fewer of the *timars*, as did followers of men of state in most registers.<sup>41</sup> Sons of palace slaves amounted to 2 percent, and sons of nobodies

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<sup>38</sup> For Süleyman’s legislation governing inheritance within the *timar* system see Beldiceanu-Steinherr, Irène, “Loi sur la transmission du timar”, *Turcica*, 11 (1978), 78-102, and Howard, Douglas A., “Ottoman Administration and the *Timâr* System: *Sûret-i Kânûnnâme-i ‘Osmânî Beray-i Timâr Dâden*”, *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 20 (1006), 46-125; for his regulation on surveys see Beldiceanu-Steinherr, Irène, and Beldiceanu, Nicoară, “Règlement ottoman concernant le recensement (première moitié du XVIe siècle)”, *Südost-Forschungen*, 37 (1978), 1-40. For an analysis see Grignaschi, Mario, “Das osmanische *timar*-Recht und der *kanun* Süleymans des Gesetzgebers”, in *Armağan: Festschrift für Andreas Tietze*, Ingeborg Baldauf and Suraiya Faroqhi (eds.) (Prague: enigma corporation, 1994), pp. 123-36.

<sup>39</sup> The registers employed for Süleyman’s reign were TT371 Karaman 926/1520, TT390 Mora 926/1520, TT421 Trabluşşam 926/1520, TT102 Manisa 927/1521, TT139 Aydın 934/1527, TT72 Manisa 938/1531, TT188 Beyşehir 943/1536, TT193 Bosna 946/1539, TT197 Erzurum 946/1539, TT217 Paşa 949/1542, TT271 Haleb 957/1550, TT313 Haleb 966/1538, TT469 Avlonya 967/1559, TT548 Trabluşşam 968/1565, Ruz.17 Aydın 971/1563, Malta Campaign Register 972/1564, TT356 Lipova 973/1565, TT86 Bolu 973/1565, TT358 Diyarbekir 973/1565, TT553 Bosna 973/1565, TT544 Haleb 973/1565, TT562 Karahisar-ı Şarki 973/1565, and TT212 Paşa 974/1566. For the extreme percentages see registers TT139 Aydın and TT197 Erzurum.

<sup>40</sup> Kunt, İ. Metin, *The Sultan’s Servants: The Transformation of Ottoman Provincial Government, 1550-1650* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 64, 66. Cvetkova noticed this as well without quantifying it: Cvetkova, “Early Ottoman *Tahrir Defters*”, p. 178.

<sup>41</sup> There were three exceptions in the 23 registers studied: TT217 (6 percent), Ruz.17 studied by

dropped to 16 percent for most of Süleyman's reign, although a few higher figures at the beginning and end brought the average to 25 percent. Süleyman's cadre, despite the heavy emphasis on sons of *timar*-holders, was thus the most diverse of any sultan's.

The *kanunname* regulating *timar* bestowals, a collection of edicts dating from the 1530s to the 1570s, controlled only the award of *timars* to the sons of *sipahis* and the larger grants given to officials, civil servants, and military officers.<sup>42</sup> It took no account of other *timar* recipients and did not attempt to regulate the bestowal of *timars* on men from other military and state services or on sons of nobodies. Its aims seem to have been to limit the inheritance of *timars* or *timar*-holding status by *sipahis*' sons, to ensure that those gaining *timars* provided service, and to increase the difficulty of gaining a *timar* by impersonation. Thus, despite the favoring of *timar*-holders' sons under Süleyman, this *kanunname* testifies to his administration's firm control over them. A chronological analysis of its provisions suggests a gradual transformation of the *sipahis* from a warrior class to a landholding gentry and gives the impression that Süleyman (or his scribal corps) was in fact attempting to create a hereditary *timar*-holding class dependent on the sultan. This impression, however, depends on ignoring all the other men of different backgrounds who gained *timars* in this

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Howard (26 percent), and TT356 (10 percent). Also exceptional was the Malta Campaign Register of 972/1564 studied by Cassola, but it was exceptional on many counts. Thus, *timar* awards to administrative personnel did not disappear, as has been asserted; see Dávid, Géza, "Ottoman Armies and Warfare, 1453-1603", in *The Cambridge History of Turkey, Volume 2, The Ottoman Empire as a World Power, 1453-1603*, Suraiya N. Faroqhi and Kate Fleet (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 287.

<sup>42</sup> Howard, "Ottoman Administration and the *Timâr* System: *Sûret-i Kânûnnâme-i 'Osmânî Beray-i Timâr Dâden*", pp. 46-125. Copies (or versions) of the compilation date from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries. These edicts were quoted, when appropriate, in a number of the entries in the *mühimme* registers.

period. Such an attempt was not continued under his successors, who appear to have shifted their ambitions in the Mediterranean from conquest to legal domination at about the same time.<sup>43</sup>

This period, from the 1530s to 1565, was when the stereotypes and legends of the *timar* system developed in which *timars* were seen as the prerogative of sons of prior *timar*-holders and not to be given to outsiders, who were considered less capable and less devoted to the empire's success.<sup>44</sup> Süleyman's prestige helped to classicize the system as it was configured during his reign, and his penchant for legislation wrote these decisions "in stone" for later generations. In that way, a system designed for flexibility and expansion rigidified and became part of the Ottomans' early modern identity. The general population growth of the period affected the elites as well as villagers and townspeople.<sup>45</sup> As more sons of *sipahis* competed for *timars* and more failed to acquire them, prejudice against including additional competitors naturally increased. Although as late as 1531 Süleyman had issued an edict forbidding anyone to harass or exclude those who were not the sons of *timar*-holders, in 1544 he had to change his tune, not eliminating outsiders completely but certainly not encouraging their appointment: "Now, it is not at all my order to grant *timars* to

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<sup>43</sup> On Ottoman ambitions in the Mediterranean see Gürkan, Emrah Safa, "Fooling the Sultan: Information, Decision-Making and the "Mediterranean Faction: (1585-1587)", *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, 45 (2015), 57-96; White, Joshua M., *Piracy and Law in the Ottoman Mediterranean* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), pp. 3-4.

<sup>44</sup> Káldy-Nagy, "The 'Strangers' (*Ecebiler*)," pp. 165-9.

<sup>45</sup> Goldstone, Jack A., *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Barkan, Ömer Lütfi, "Essai sur les données statistiques des registres de recensement dans l'empire ottoman aux XVe et XVIe siècles", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 1 (1958), 9-36; Cook, M. A., *Population Pressure in Rural Anatolia, 1450-1600* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972); Jennings, Ronald C., "Urban Population in Anatolia in the Sixteenth Century: A Study of Kayseri, Karaman, Amasya, Trabzon and Erzurum", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 7 (1976), 21-57.

people from the *reaya*, garrison soldiers, or *müsellems*.”<sup>46</sup> The retired grand vizier Lütü Paşa in his *nasihatname* warned against giving *timars* to members of the *reaya* because the decrease in the number of peasants as everybody rushed to *timar*-holding status would lower the sultan’s revenue. He clearly had no concept of population growth; even with the flood of rural people to the cities and the army, the agrarian population was still increasing. The new order did not prevent outsiders from gaining *timars*, but it did mean that their qualifications were carefully checked from then on.

Orders in the earliest surviving *mühimme* register (register of outgoing orders) of 1544-45 already begin to reflect the increased competition for *timars*. A content analysis of all orders regarding *timars* in the published *mühimme* registers found five orders regarding the sons of *timar*-holders command the provincial governors to write in their bestowal documents the date and circumstances of the death of the applicants’ fathers, first to make sure that they were not still alive (when no *timar* would be awarded) and then to determine the number and size of *timars* allocated to their sons (deaths at home, on campaign, and in battle rated increasingly large awards).<sup>47</sup> When the governor of Budin awarded *timars* to *gönüllüs*, he was told to send a separate petition specifying how many awards he was making, presumably to prevent false documents from being added to the stack.<sup>48</sup> Several orders in the earliest register suggest a shortage of

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<sup>46</sup> Káldy-Nagy, “The ‘Strangers’ (*Ecnebilir*),” p. 168 (translation mine).

<sup>47</sup> *Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi H.951-952 Tarihli ve E-12321 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri*, Halil Sahillioğlu (ed.) (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2002), #37, #321, #322, #406, #526.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, #351. On *gönüllüs* see Fodor, Pál, “Making a Living on the Frontiers: Volunteers in the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Army”, in *Ottomans, Hungarians, and Habsburgs in Central Europe*, Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor (eds.) (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 229-64.

*timar* lands, including an order making *timars* from unsurveyed land, an attempt to use an initial *timar* to fulfill a petition for a raise, and the assignment of a *timar* worth less than a third of the amount granted.<sup>49</sup> These examples testify to a noticeable crowding in the ranks of aspiring *timar*-holders by the 1540s. In 1558 the *mühimme* register showed 60 percent of entries on *timar*-holders reporting issues related to crowding in the ranks, primarily the making of *timars* out of ruined villages and disputes over existing *timars*.<sup>50</sup> This number can be raised to over 90 percent by including entries complaining that *sipahis* had their *timars* taken away or were not given the *timars* that contained their homes, plus four that described people obtaining *timars* with false documents. Moreover, villages producing more than their surveyed amounts were usually taken for the sultan's *has*, while ruined or unproductive areas were given as *timars* in the hope that that the *timar*-holders would do what was necessary to bring them back into production.<sup>51</sup> Some probably did, but others merely complained or robbed their neighbors and had their *timars* taken away.

At the end of Süleyman's reign the *mühimme* registers signal the appearance of new problems. In the register of 1564-65, several entries complained of delays in the awarding of *timars* after a survey. More complaints

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<sup>49</sup> *Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi H.951-952 Tarihli ve E-12321 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri*, #205, #367, #478. These orders add up to about a third of the entries in the register that mention *timars* for any reason.

<sup>50</sup> *3 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (966-968/1558-1560)* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Bakanlığı, 1993), too many entries to list.

<sup>51</sup> An example is an unnamed village in Erzurum *sancak*: *6 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (972/1564-1565)* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Bakanlığı, 1995), #260. The logic may have been that villages in the sultan's *has* needed to be productive and peaceful because they lacked continuous supervision, while those with more problems at least had *timar*-holders in residence. This practice is said to have started during Mehmed II's reign; Cvetkova, "Early Ottoman *Tahrir Defters*", pp. 171-3, 180.

of extortion by *timar*-holders and officials began to appear, which suggests that prices had started to rise noticeably and that some *timar*-holders' incomes no longer met their expenses.<sup>52</sup> The incidence of reports of oppression, crime, and rebellion was approximately double that of the next three published registers, although *sipahis* convicted of crimes or oppression had their *timars* taken away. The *sancakbeys* and their *subaşıs*, it seems, were often guilty of oppressing villagers or entering free (*serbest*) areas and extorting money under various pretexts.<sup>53</sup> In the *mühimme* register of 1564-65 there were five cases of *timars* awarded through bribery or false documents; such cases are documented since at least the early sixteenth century.<sup>54</sup> Two entries mentioned “outsiders” (*ecnebi*), the first use of the term in the published registers. One of these outsiders was a *zeamet*-holder with a *berat* for an area that turned out to be already occupied, which he claimed was a mistake, and the other entry listed sixteen men in Rumeli who claimed to be sons of *timar*-holders but who had no witnesses to that fact.<sup>55</sup>

Several entries in the *mühimme* register from the following year (1565-66) record the granting of *timars* to men returning from the battle of Malta.<sup>56</sup> The Malta campaign register shows that no *timars* were awarded there to the sons of *timar*-holders; all went to the sultan's slaves, men from the provincial governor's

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<sup>52</sup> *6 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri*, for example #187, #650, #660. Mustafa 'Ali noted this as well: 'Ali, *Counsel for Sultans*, p. 54.

<sup>53</sup> See also Nenad Moaçanin, *Town and Country on the Middle Danube, 1526-1690* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 31, 121-2.

<sup>54</sup> Cvetkova, “Early Ottoman *Tahrir Defters*”, p. 181, n. 115.

<sup>55</sup> *6 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri*, bribery: #1463, #1473; false documents: #633, #743, #883; outsiders: #1458, #1185.

<sup>56</sup> *5 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (973/1565-1566)* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Bakanlığı, 1994), #546, #547, #549, #594, #644.

forces, or the followers of viziers and other great men.<sup>57</sup> Four entries complained about outsiders in the *timar* system. Since in the same year a register was issued for Karahisar-1 Şarki showing 69 percent of *timars* being given to men with no title or patronymic, this number of complaints seems remarkably small. One incident (two entries) concerned men with *timars* or garrison positions obtained under false pretenses despite the fact that twice their positions were taken away and awarded to others; another complained about a castle warden who took people's *timars* away and gave them to others with no right to them; and the third, lodged by the son of a deceased *timar*-holder, reported a man who was not the son of a *sipahi* obtaining a *timar* with another's *berat*.<sup>58</sup> One last entry described a Janissary awarded a *timar* worth 12,000 *akçes* whose *berat*, upon inspection, mysteriously stated his award as 22,000 *akçes*.<sup>59</sup> The impression these registers leave, unlike the earlier ones, is less of overcrowding and more of a growing financial need or greed on the part of the *timar*-holders.<sup>60</sup> The debasement of the coinage in the following year suggests that prices were rising and that *timar*-holders may have been having greater difficulty meeting their expenses. We do not know the extent to which the government tried to ameliorate that deficit, or to whom.

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<sup>57</sup>Cassola, Arnold, with İdris Bostan and Thomas Scheben, *The 1565 Ottoman Malta Campaign Register* (Malta: Publishers Enterprises Group, 1998); Darling, *Nasihatnâmeler I*, pp. 220-1.

<sup>58</sup> *5 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri*, #204, #223, #256, #1229. All these complaints came from central and eastern Anatolia, but none from Karahisar-1 Şarki.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, #1779.

<sup>60</sup> İnalçık, Halil, "Military and Fiscal Transformation in the Ottoman Empire, 1600-1700", *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 6 (1980), 283-337. Complaints of oppression decreased in this register after the rise of the previous year, which goes against the trope of ever-increasing oppression.

## The post- Süleymanic *timar* system, two different stories

The period after the death of Süleyman has long been considered the era of the *timar* system's decline, an idea drawn from the *nasihatnameler*, works of political advice written during an era when most of the sultans were young, mad, or uninterested in ruling and appeared particularly in need of advice. The analysis and advice in these works, however, were geared to immediate problems and presented a rather myopic perception of the system as a whole. The data in the *icmal defterleri* both help explain why the authors complained of decline and provide evidence for revising their verdict over the longer term. The question then becomes how to revise it. This section provides two analytical alternatives, a short-term version which continues the narrative by sultanic reign, and then a longer-term view, a narrative by fifty-year periods, as employed in my previous articles. As we will see, these two periodizations lead to quite different conclusions regarding what was happening to the *timar* system in the late sixteenth century.

Under Selim II (1566-1574) the predominance of the sons of *timar*-holders was lost, but that of the sons of nobodies was reinforced.<sup>61</sup> In the *icmal defterleri* of his period, sons of *timar*-holders dropped to 20 percent, while sons of nobodies increased to 61 percent. Men of the *devşirme* received fewer *timars*, 4 percent rather than 6. The provincial military stayed about the same, while administrative personnel and followers of great men lost ground, contrary to the usual

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<sup>61</sup> Registers employed for Selim II's reign are TT471 Teke 976/1568, TT258 Manisa 980/1572, and TT677 Mezistre 981/1573.

assumption of growth in *timars* granted to court and governmental personnel.<sup>62</sup> The *mühimme* register for the years 1567-69 confirms that the competition for *timars* continued to intensify and that *timar* revenue was increasingly insufficient; several orders indicate that despite the new regulations, people were gaining *timars* under false pretenses, either by impersonation (including dressing as Janissaries),<sup>63</sup> or by falsifying documents.<sup>64</sup> In several cases, people enlarged their *timars* through various stratagems.<sup>65</sup> A few people illegally acquired orders to receive two *timars*, or a *timar* and a salary.<sup>66</sup> One report states that some *timar*-holders on the road were killed and their *berats* stolen, another that for fear of such an occurrence some awardees refused to go to the Porte to obtain their *berats*.<sup>67</sup> In order to prevent such behaviors, the *timar* award process was more closely regulated.<sup>68</sup> Reports of crime and oppression involving *timar*-holders were relatively fewer in this register, but the persistent presence of those labeled *ecnebi* is suggested by references to what were called “*ecnebi timars*.” Three orders describe *ecnebis* receiving *timars*, in one case under the protection of *emirs* and *alay beys*.<sup>69</sup> Three other orders command that *ecnebis* who received *timars*

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<sup>62</sup> Darling, “*Nasihatnameler I*”, pp. 220-1. *Mühimme* register 13 dated 978/1570, which contains orders for *timars* resulting from the Cyprus campaign, shows 21 percent of *timar* recipients as sons of *timar*-holders, 34 percent as Janissaries or *çavuşes*, and 31 percent as sons of nobodies; the number of Janissaries grew enormously, while the sons of nobodies, though still substantial, were cut in half.

<sup>63</sup> *7 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (975-976/1567-1569)* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Bakanlığı, 1998), #79, #89.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, #363, #495, #974, #1353, #1522, #1957, #2589. Clearly, this was a bigger problem than *ecnebis*, although even seven cases per year is not a large number for the entire empire.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, #957, #2153, #2154, #2646, #2649, #2650.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, #91, #1968, #2198, #2565.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, #2258, #2173.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, #277, #481, #924, #1327, #1435, #1685, #1755, #1824. Apparently the size of *timars* was reduced as well, in order to provide more of them; this might explain the reduction in *cebelüs* that the advice writers complain about. See Cvetkova, “Early Ottoman *Tahrir Defters*”, p. 180.

<sup>69</sup> *7 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri*, #341, #974, #1937. One *ecnebi oğlu ecnebi* became a notorious

after the Nahçıvan campaign should be dispossessed and replaced by the sultan's slaves and *sekbans* or by sons of *sipahis* who were on rotation out of their *timars*.<sup>70</sup>

Similar trends are visible in the *mühimme* register for 1570-72, and some new problems emerge.<sup>71</sup> The number of orders threatening to take *timars* away from their holders for oppression, crime, or dereliction of duty seems larger. Also larger is the number of men holding *timar* documents but unable to acquire vacant *timars*.<sup>72</sup> The *timars* of two *sancaks* were all reportedly awarded to the *sancakbey*'s men and those of another *sancak* to the sons of the surveyor, his scribe, and his chosen men, rather than to sons of *timar*-holders or men with orders for *timars*.<sup>73</sup> Several orders reflect conflict between *timar*-holders and their sons waiting to become *timar*-holders, in one case leading to murder.<sup>74</sup> Finally, there are several orders condemning deviations from the administrative procedures established under Süleyman.<sup>75</sup>

The major trends of Selim's reign were reversed under Murad III; the *icmal defterleri* show sons of *timar*-holders gaining greatly (40 percent), sons of nobodies down but still a substantial group (38 percent), and the other groups about the same low numbers.<sup>76</sup> The high level of violence by this time among

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thief and was arrested (#974).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., #40, #91, #541.

<sup>71</sup> *12 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (978-979/1570-1572)* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, 1998).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., #347, #662, #837, #871, #915. Cvetkova noticed this also; Cvetkova, "Early Ottoman *Tahrir Defterleri*", p. 181.

<sup>73</sup> *12 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri*, #347, #548.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., #350, #595, #604.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., #604, #662, #701, #1175.

<sup>76</sup> Registers employed for Murad III's crucial reign are TT661 Novigrad 987/1579, TT590 Budin 988/1580, TT601 Kastamonu 990/1582, TKMA333 Akşehir 991/1583, TKMA584 Beyşehir

those unable to acquire a *timar*, or those whose income proved insufficient, suggests a situation with few alternatives. The sense of urgency is well reflected in the diatribes of Mustafa ‘Ali. It was at this juncture that he wrote his scathing critique of the *timar* awards of 1580.<sup>77</sup> It reflected the high proportion of *timars* granted to the sons of *timar*-holders during Süleyman’s reign and the drop under Selim, but it showed no awareness of how recently that trend had taken hold or who the *timar*-holders were in other periods.

If we disaggregate the figures for Murad III’s reign, 1580 does appear as a turning point, but not in the direction of Mustafa ‘Ali’s recommendations. In the later part of Murad’s reign, the proportion of sons of *timar*-holders in the *timar* system dropped to only 26 percent, but the sons of nobodies went up to over 50 percent. *Devşirme* men decreased to 6 percent, provincial military men increased to 6 percent, and followers of men of state fell to just over 1 percent. This configuration matched neither Mustafa ‘Ali’s description of the problem nor his recommendation of solutions, which may help explain his failure to gain promotion; what he wrote was perhaps neither accurate nor helpful. The percentage of sons of *sipahis* holding *timars* was low, but that was probably because of the losses the Ottomans experienced in their war with the Safavids (1578-1590).<sup>78</sup> However, seeing the large number of *timars* granted to men other than *sipahis*, ‘Ali concluded that the reason must be corruption of some sort, the granting of their rightful places to unworthy outsiders, when it was probably due

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991/1583, MAD 129 Mora 997/1588, TT765 İç İl 984/1576, TT613 Trabzon 992/1584, and A.{DFE.d.67 Kocaeli 1004/1595.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Ali, *Counsel for Sultans*.

<sup>78</sup> See Carl Max Kortepeter, *Ottoman Imperialism During the Reformation: Europe and the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 1972).

more to the deaths of *timar*-holders, the inability to go on doubling the empire's size indefinitely, and a general unwillingness to displace Muslim landholders in the Arab lands, a conquest large in area but where the *timar* rewards were relatively small.

The *mühimme* register for 991/1583 held fewer complaints regarding *timars* in general, only three related to their bestowal, and no mention of *ecnebis* in the *timar* system at all.<sup>79</sup> This was despite the fact that the *icmal defterleri* for that year showed large numbers of *timars* being granted to men who were not the sons of *timar*-holders.<sup>80</sup> The war losses may have eased the pressure on *timar* awards, or perhaps the problem was not as dire as 'Ali claimed. In addition, it appears that already in the 1580s the *timar* system was losing its centrality as the main route to high office at the political center: beginning in the 1580s, as Metin Kunt showed, a growing number of high offices were awarded to men who had never been regular *timar*-holders.<sup>81</sup> Career paths, in other words, were in the process of changing, and already before the military revolution the *timar* system was losing its former prestige.

### **Another view of the problem**

Using a different chronology creates the possibility of a different narrative of the changes in the *timar* system. From the analysis above, organized by sultans' reigns, it would appear that each sultan had a different policy when it

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<sup>79</sup> *Sultan'in Emir Defteri (51 Nolu Mühimme)*, ed. Hikmet Ülker (Istanbul: Tarih ve Tabiat Vakfı Yayınları, 2003).

<sup>80</sup> Darling, "Nasihatsameler I", p. 208, an average of 33 percent.

<sup>81</sup> Kunt, *The Sultan's Servants*, pp. 64, 66.

came to awarding *timars*, and that the prominence of sons of *timar*-holders, men of the *devşirme*, provincial military forces, and sons of nobodies changed with each reign. In that analysis, the problems of those seeking *timars* and not finding them determine the course of the narrative. Taking a longer view frees the analysis from sultanic policies and whims to follow the general trends independently of short-term fluctuations. If we group the calculations of *timar*-holders' origins by half-centuries, a period that exceeds any sultan's length of reign, a very different picture emerges, one that provides even less support for the standard narrative based on the *nasihatnameler*. On this larger scale, the percentage of sons of *timar*-holders receiving *timars* did not change at 1580, nor indeed throughout the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Over the long term, contrary to the opinions of authors such as Mustafa 'Ali and Koçi Bey, sons of *timar*-holders, sons and retainers of officials, and sons of nobodies gained *timars* in about the same proportions after the 1580s as before. The figures for sons of *timar*-holders remained remarkably stable. The registers studied yield an average of 42 percent of *timar*-holders as sons of prior *timar*-holders in the first half of the sixteenth century, 39 percent in the second half, 38 percent in the first half of the seventeenth century, and 37 percent in the second half. Given the warfare from 1565 on, both on the Eastern and the Western front, it is surprising that the awards to sons of *timar*-holders did not decrease far more. The change was unexpectedly minor, contradicting the legendary transfer of masses of *timar* revenue to the sultan's *has* or to officials and palace favorites that

is repeated in almost every account of the *timar* system's "decline".<sup>82</sup> The proportion of Janissaries and palace staff also continued to decrease over time, as did the followers of great men; whoever the outsiders were who were supposed to be gaining *timars* in place of the sons of *sipahis*, in the long term they were emphatically not the protégés of the rich and powerful. The one group whose share of *timars* continued to rise in each half-century after 1400 was the sons of nobodies. Although their fathers had no names in the registers and could have been anonymous *reaya*, they and/or their fathers have been identified as coming largely from the lower military and administrative echelons, thus already servants of the sultan. They obtained their *timars* for the most part in the aftermath of military campaigns, where they had demonstrated their prowess on the battlefield and had been recommended for promotion when the sons of *timar*-holders were probably still at home.<sup>83</sup>

Ever since the fifteenth century the sons of nobodies had received between a fourth and a third of the *timars*, and in the late sixteenth century they obtained between a third and a half. That was an increase, but it was not the overturning of the *timar* system that the writers of *nasihat* proclaimed. And this increase was not across the board; in some provinces it was greater, in some provinces less, in some greater at one time and less at another; and in a few places the sons of nobodies held no *timars* at all. The highest figures come from Aydın, Manisa, Karahisar-i Şarki, Akşehir, and Beyşehir. The lowest figures come also from

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<sup>82</sup> See, for example, Aksan, Virginia, "War and Peace", in *The Cambridge History of Turkey, Volume 3, The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603-1839*, Suraiya N. Faroqhi (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 88. I here revise what I rashly wrote in the same volume in "Public Finances: The Role of the Ottoman Centre", p. 120.

<sup>83</sup> Darling, "*Nasihatnameler II*", pp. 12-15; Howard, *The Ottoman Timar System*, pp. 170-7.

Aydın and Manisa, and from Haleb (ironically, since that was where Mustafa ‘Ali claimed the problem was at its height), as well as Tırhala, Erzurum, İç İl, Bolu, and Diyarbakır.<sup>84</sup> There is no particular geographical pattern to these figures, except that throughout the sixteenth century the extremes of high and low both occurred more often in Anadolu than in Rumeli. We cannot yet take such a close look at the later period.

Our ability to determine what happened in the seventeenth century is limited primarily by the preservation pattern of the *icmal defterleri*. In the Başbakanlık Arşivi there is a group of *defter*s that runs up to 1628.<sup>85</sup> There is also a group at the end of the century beginning in 1692.<sup>86</sup> Between those dates there is one for Mosul in 1648, which does not appear to be a complete register; in Sofia there is one for Malatya and Maraş in 1661.<sup>87</sup> As a result, for the seventeenth century we can as yet speak only in general terms. However, when the extant registers for that century are averaged together, they show that the sons of *timar*-holders received *timars* at about the same rate as in the late sixteenth century, thirty-seven percent and thirty-eight percent respectively.<sup>88</sup> That rate did

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>85</sup> Registers employed for the first half of the seventeenth century are TT728 Bosna 1011/1602, TT730 Vidin 1011/1602, TT732 Kocaeli 1011/1602, TT735 Küdavendigâr 1027/1617, A. {DFE.d.81 Paşa 1038/1628. Most mid-century registers either cover fortress garrisons (omitted from this study) or contain no names.

<sup>86</sup> Registers employed for the late seventeenth century are A. {DFE.d.170 Kars 1104/1692, TT837 Kars 1104/1692, A. {DFE.d.189 Bosna 1106/1694, and A. {DFE.d.209 İnebahtı 1115/1703. Other registers for the late period contain no names. The figures in the seventeenth-century registers for specific locations differ from those in registers with earlier dates, suggesting that they are independent counts and not mere copies. Even the ones that say “copy” (*suret*) appear to be copies of registers different from the earlier ones examined, perhaps lost registers. This was also noticed by Dávid and Fodor, “Changes in the Structure”, p. 165.

<sup>87</sup> These are registers A. {DFE.d.109 in the Başbakanlık archive and OAK 235/1 in the Bulgarian National Library. The *icmal defterleri* in the Tapu ve Kadastro collection have not yet been available to me.

<sup>88</sup> Darling, “*Nasihatnameler II*”, pp. 12, 19. In some areas of the empire, *timars* seem to have

not change, so all the arguments about how the sons of *timar*-holders were being disadvantaged, how they were being shut out of *timars* by the corruption of officials who were awarding the *timars* to their own followers, were baseless rhetoric. It was simply not true. If there were *timar*-holders' sons without *timars*, it resulted most likely from population growth in the *timar*-holding class (which the Ottoman critics could not observe, lacking statistical tools), rather than from their deliberate exclusion.

Other groups, the sons and retainers of central and provincial military and civilian officials, did not hold large numbers of *timars*. All together, in the sixteenth century they averaged 16 percent of *timars*, in the early seventeenth century 12 percent, and in the late seventeenth century 2 percent, a steady decrease.<sup>89</sup> The late seventeenth-century figure includes a few people labeled as retirees, but there were no sons or retainers of central officials; in that period only sons and retainers of provincial officers received *timars*. The highest percentages of sons and retainers of officials in *timars* came in times of war. The diatribes about central officials getting their retainers *timars* in return for bribes, if not completely false, certainly described a problem of limited extent.

The sons of nobodies, however, are a different story. In the fifteenth century (in the registers examined) their proportion of *timars* was 23 percent, in the early sixteenth century 28 percent, in the later sixteenth century 38 percent, in

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become increasingly hereditary; Dávid and Fodor, "Changes in the Structure", pp. 166-8. The opposite trend is observable in Aydın; see Howard, Douglas A., "Central and Provincial Administrative Interaction in *Timar* Bestowals in the Early Seventeenth Century", in *Decision Making and Change in the Ottoman Empire*, Caesar E. Farah (ed.) (Kirksville MO: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1993), pp. 85-6.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

the first quarter of the seventeenth century 45 percent, and in the late seventeenth century it rose to 52 percent. It is possible, I suppose, that in later years the scribes of the *timar* registry grew more careless in recording the *timar*-holders' ancestry, but this comfortable idea is countered by the care taken in the new *tahrirs* that were made in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Like that of the retainers, the percentage of sons of nobodies receiving *timars* peaked in time of war, reaching 60 percent during the War of the Holy League. The identities of these "sons of nobodies" must be checked through other sources to see if they still came from the same origins as the earlier ones. However, their acquisition of increasing numbers of *timars* was a trend that, despite occasional dips, was observable from the fifteenth century on and was not a new phenomenon in the late sixteenth or the seventeenth century. The people who were dispossessed because of it were not the sons of *timar*-holders but the palace and administrative personnel, whose percentage of the total gradually dropped to zero.<sup>90</sup> If there was a class struggle within the *timar* system, it was between different groups than we have thought, not between the *timar*-holders and the *devşirme* but between the palace and provincial elites and the sons of nobodies.

Beyond military prowess, an important reason for the growing willingness to accept sons of nobodies as *timar*-holders must have been the greater irrelevance of *timar*-holding to political ascendancy. *Mühimme* registers from the seventeenth century confirm the decreased significance of *timars* among the important affairs of the empire.<sup>91</sup> The proportion of entries dealing with problems

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>91</sup> See 82 Numaralı *Mühimme Defteri* (1025-1027/1617-1618) (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet

of *timar*-holding noticeably decreased, and orders regarding the routine functioning of the system virtually disappeared. The system, in other words, continued to function outside the view of the sultans and viziers. In addition, the advice writers became progressively more silent about *timar* awards. There was also no mention of *ecnebis* in these registers. The “reform” of the *timar* system in 1632 consisted of regularizing the award of *timars* to outsiders, and an advice work written around the time of the last published *mühimme* register did not even mention the *timar* system as a problem.<sup>92</sup> Although *timars* were as numerous as in the sixteenth century, their role in imperial governance had radically changed.

There is another relevant complaint in the *nasihatnameler*, and it is one that the *icmal defterleri* cannot tell us about. That element is the *timars* that were notoriously awarded as *paşmaklık* to harem women or as *arpalık* to officials. Since these people did not have provincial duties, they were not usually included in the provincial registers, and the *icmal* registers generally omit their *timars*. What the *icmals* can do is to determine the size of the problem. Subtracting the number of *timars* in registers after the 1580s from the number listed before that date should yield a rough idea of how many *timars* were removed from the provincial *timar* system for award to noncombatants.<sup>93</sup> Provincial studies differ

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Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2000); 83 *Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (1036-1037/1626-1628)* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2001); 85 *Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (1040-1041/1630-1631)* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2002); *Mühimme Defteri 90*, Mertol Tulum (ed.) (Istanbul: Tütük Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı, 1993) dated 1056/1646-47.

<sup>92</sup> Howard, “The Ottoman Timar System,” pp. 193-235; Kâtip Çelebi, Hacı Halife, *Düstûru'l-amel li-ıslahi'l-halel*, in Ayn-i Ali Efendi, *Kavânîn-i Âl-i Osman der hülâsa-i mezâmin-i defter-i divân*, M.T. Gökbilgin (ed.) pp. 119-40 (Istanbul, Enderun Kitabevi, 1979); *Bozuklukların düzeltilmesinde tutulacak yollar (düstûru'l-amel li-ıslahi'l-halel)*, Ali Can (tr.) (Ankara, Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 1982).

<sup>93</sup> If noncombatant *timar*-holders were required to provide men-at-arms, these *timars* may be

on this issue; in both Aydın and Vidin between 1580 and 1632 the number of *timars* decreased, but in Aydın this decrease was a drastic 52 percent and in Vidin it was a moderate 10 percent.<sup>94</sup> The archives contain *icmal defterleri* spanning the period around 1580 for fifteen *livas*.<sup>95</sup> In these registers, the number of *timars* awarded to the provincial army decreased in six *livas*, remained the same in three, and increased in six. The total number of *timars* in these fifteen *livas* did not fall, it grew. There is no single pattern to this growth; sometimes the numbers fell after a rise, sometimes there was a steady decline, sometimes a large increase, sometimes an incremental one. We clearly cannot generalize from the experience of a single province; the only general statement that can be made is that conditions were experienced differently in each province, and there was no one empire-wide trend. Again, further research in other sources is needed to flesh out this picture, but our notions about the decline of the *timar* system must be revised. In terms of numbers, the *timar* system was not diminished by the changes of the seventeenth century; the *timar*-holders did not disappear and were not replaced. The question of whether the size and value of the lands in the *timar* system remained the same demands a different study; indications are that it did not, but investigations so far have been confined to individual localities. This study shows that there were some areas where the number of *timars* decreased rapidly, and those lands may have gone to compensate their new recipients for the fluctuations in the value of their salaries. Once the currency stabilized, however, such lands

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listed; I thank the anonymous reviewer for this suggestion. I did not, however, see palace personnel holding *timars* or *zeamets* in the *defters* I examined. But I did not examine the *has*.

<sup>94</sup> Howard, *The Ottoman Timar System*, pp. 152, 158; Soyudođan, *Reassessing the Timar System*, p. 221.

<sup>95</sup> Darling, “*Nasihatnameler, II*”, pp. 6-8.

may have been returned to the *timar* system, as the numbers from 1632 do not indicate a general long-term reduction in *timars*. Unfortunately, we cannot yet say in detail what happened in the later seventeenth century; there are counts of *timars* in the works of Evliya Çelebi and Hüseyin Hezarfen, but they include additional elements such as garrison *timars*.<sup>96</sup>

Fortress garrison *timars* were not counted in my study. In fact, they were subtracted from the totals wherever possible and must be studied separately.<sup>97</sup>

The rise of urban garrisons in the seventeenth century and the strengthening of frontier fortresses on both east and west diverted a yet unknown portion of the *timar* stock to their support, vastly increasing the number of *timars*. For example, the *liva* of Erzurum had almost 2000 garrison *timars* and only a few hundred provincial (*eşkinçi*) *timars*.<sup>98</sup> If increasing numbers of Janissaries did receive *timars*, it may have been among the garrison forces. At the same time the average size of a *timar*, even those belonging to provincial *timar*-holders, seems to have decreased, and among the garrison forces even these smaller *timars* were shared by two to nine men. Simultaneously, the role of provincial *timar*-holders in the empire's protection and defense was reduced, though not eliminated. This change undoubtedly contributed to the anxiety over *timars*, as well as reducing the number of *cebelüs* or men-at-arms that a *timar*-holder brought to a campaign,

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<sup>96</sup> Evliya Çelebi, *Narrative of Travels in Europe, Asia, and Africa, in the Seventeenth Century*, Joseph von Hammer (tr.) (London: Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1834); Hezarfen, Hüseyin Efendi, *Telhîsü'l-Beyân fî Kavânin-i Âl-i Osmân*, Sevim İlgürel (ed.) (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1998).

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, Oruç, Hatice, "1528/30 Tarihli Mücmel Tahrir Defterine göre Bosna Sancağında Mustahfiz Timarları", in *Perspectives on Ottoman Studies: Papers from the 18<sup>th</sup> Symposium of the International Committee of Pre-Ottoman and Ottoman Studies (CIEPO) at the University of Zagreb, 2008*, Čaušević, Ekrem, Moaçanin, Nenad, and Kursar, Vjerran (eds.) (Münster, Germany: LIT Verlag, 2010), pp. 743-61.

<sup>98</sup> See TT760 dated 1049/1634.

another complaint of the early seventeenth century.<sup>99</sup> A garrison soldier drawing income from a *timar* also had different responsibilities and outlook from a *timar*-holder stationed in the countryside. Rather than a decline, what can be seen here is the repurposing of the *timar* system to serve the needs of an empire with a stable frontier, an infantry army, and an unacceptable level of urban unrest. This revised *timar* system needs to be studied in its own right, as an adaptation of an old socioeconomic institutions to new conditions, not as a symptom of imperial decay.

## Conclusion

Rather than a universal decline of the *timar* system, we should see the changes of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a repurposing of the system to meet the altered needs of the later period. The people supported by *timars* in the seventeenth century were ordinary soldiers, garrison troops, and local notables. *Timars* no longer represented the route to high offices in the central government after the sixteenth century and were avoided by those with political ambitions; that is, the “decline of the *timar* system” was a decline in political significance more than in functioning. It certainly did not disappear.

At least in the seventeenth century, *timar*-holders were important to the empire’s identity and self-image, which as many scholars have shown was intimately tied up with *kanun*, the scribal corps, and the regulation of taxation and

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<sup>99</sup> See note 68. This result was also noticed by Dávid and Fodor, “Changes in the Structure”, pp. 170-8. They attribute the reduction in *cebelüs* to “the administrative reshaping of the empire” (p. 174), the strengthening of the *beylerbeys* (and to a lesser extent the *sancakbeys*) and their retinues vis-à-vis the ordinary *timar*-holders, and the simultaneous reduction in status and military effectiveness of the *timar* element compared to other components of the Ottoman army.

*timar*-holding. There was still a *timar* army drawn from the provinces. Although it is not yet clear what the seventeenth-century *timar*-holders did on their *timars*, they were mustered for campaigns, since they still had a military role in the siege warfare of the period as well as in the form of cavalry. If excused, they paid a fine, the *bedel-i timar*, which may have been used to hire specialized troops.<sup>100</sup> The *timars* associated with the garrisons of frontier fortresses and urban citadels proliferated. In the first half of the seventeenth century, the number of *timars* did not decline; if anything, it grew. We do not yet have enough figures for the late seventeenth century to tell what happened then.

The sons of *timar*-holders did not lose their position in the *timar* system; it remained the same as before. The great loss of opportunity by *timar*-holders' sons was a false alarm, as their share of *timars* did not decrease significantly. The sixteenth-century scramble for *timars* occurred when the population desiring *timars* increased faster than the available *timars*, and it was neither the precursor nor the result of the corruption of the system, as the authors of advice so vehemently try to persuade us. Population reduction or the *timar* system's loss of political prestige brought it to an end. The sons and retainers of central government officials actually acquired fewer *timars* over time. The repurposing of the *timar* system in the seventeenth century did not make *timars* disappear, but it made their status and centrality decline, at least from a central government point of view. The cavalry army and the *timar* system lost not so much their military role or their presence in the countryside but their role in governance and their

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<sup>100</sup> Only one register of the *bedel-i timar* was found in the archives, so no comparisons could be made. This tax was probably farmed and might be found in the *iltizam* registers.

prestige as a pathway to promotion to vizierial rank. Officials and their sons and retainers then chose a different route to high office, avoiding the *timar* system. Finally, once the primary weapon was no longer the cavalry bow, it no longer took a lifetime of training to become an expert warrior, and the sons of *timar*-holders lost their military advantage. The sons of nobodies became the mainstay of the *timar* system; by the end of the seventeenth century the sons of nobodies held over half the *timars* in the *icmal defterleri*, not counting those of the garrison troops. The *timar* system continued to exist into the eighteenth, nineteenth, and even the twentieth century, but it possessed a different character and has barely been studied in those periods with respect to the *timar*-holders.<sup>101</sup>

The “decline” of the *timar* system may now be understood to mean the loss of its central position in Ottoman organization and of its iconic status as the characteristic form of Ottoman society. The “post-classical” era, then, must be thought of as the era in which the Ottoman political, military, economic, and social systems were no longer unified or congruent and their regulation no longer formed the ideological center of Ottoman imperialism. The *nasihatnameler* reflected that process of reconceptualization even in their adherence to old values in the face of new demands and institutional transformations. Constructions of Ottoman history based on them, however, must be regarded as doubtful and

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<sup>101</sup> Besides the article by Gradeva, which reaches into the eighteenth century, see Mutafčieva and Dimitrov, *Sur l'état du système des timars des XVIIe-XVIIIe ss.*; Radushev, Evgeniy, “XVII.-XVIII. Yüzyillarda Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Toprak Rejimi ve Osmanlı Askerî Nizamı”, in *CIÉPO: Comité international d'études pré-ottomanes et ottomans, VIIe symposium actes*, Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont, İlber Ortaylı, and Emeri van Donzel (eds.) (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1994), pp. 299-304; Čar-Drnda, Hatidža, “Remnants of the *Timâr* System in the Bosnian *Vilâyet* in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century”, *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 10.1/2 (Fall 2004), 171-74; Clayer, Nathalie, “Note sure la survivance du système des timâr dans la region de Shkodër au début du XXe siècle”, *Turcica*, 29 (1997), 423-31.

subject to revision. Historicizing the *timar* system and the other imperial institutions is a step toward determining how their participants' experiences reflected or were connected to the historical changes of their periods.