

DILARA AVCI

THE POMAKS: CONVERSION TO ISLAM IN THE WESTERN  
RHODOPE MOUNTAINS IN THE 15TH CENTURY

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THE POMAKS: CONVERSION  
TO ISLAM IN THE WESTERN  
RHODOPE MOUNTAINS IN THE  
15th CENTURY

A Master's Thesis

by  
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Ankara  
June 2019



To all of my *Pomak* ancestors



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RHODOPE MOUNTAINS IN THE 15th CENTURY

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences  
of  
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by


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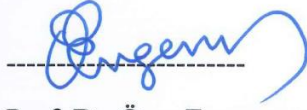
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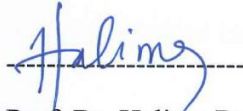
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# ABSTRACT

## THE POMAKS: CONVERSION TO ISLAM IN THE WESTERN RHODOPE MOUNTAINS IN THE 15th CENTURY

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In this thesis, the religious conversion process among the local population in the Western Rhodope, an area under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, is examined. The importance and location of the Rhodope during the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans is evaluated and compared with the conquests of Bosnia and Albania and the initiation of the Islamization process, where the conversion to Islam took place differently in each of these 3 regions. Although the Ottoman Empire did not directly conquer or exert effort for Islamization in the Western Rhodopian region, the Pomaks residing in the region in the 15th century began to become Muslims, where such transition is clearly evidenced in the tahrir defters used in this thesis dated 1445, 1464/65 and 1478/9. Through these three defters, it is possible to have an insight into the process of Islamization in the Pomak settlement units, thus invalidating the theories on forced Islamization.

**Keywords:** Balkans, Bulgaria, Conversion, Ottoman Empire, Pomaks, 15<sup>th</sup> century.

## ÖZET

POMAKLAR: 15. YÜZYILDA BATI RODOPLAR'DA İSLAM'A GEÇİŞ

Avcı, Dilara

Yüksek Lisans, Tarih Bölümü

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Evgeniy Radoslavov Radushev

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Bu tezde, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun hakimiyeti altında olan bir coğrafyanın, Batı Rodop'ların nasıl Müslüman olmaya başladığı incelenmektedir. Osmanlı'nın Balkanlar'da ki yayılmasına bağlı olarak, Bosna ve Arnavutluk'un fetihlerinin ve de İslamlaşma sürecinin başlamasıyla, Rodoplar'ın bu süreçteki önemi ve de yeri değerlendirilmektedir. Bahsedilen üç örnekteki, İslamlaşma süreçleri birbirinden farklıdır. Her ne kadar Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Batı Rodop coğrafyası için direkt bir fetih çalışması ya da İslamlaştırma için özel bir çabası olmamasına rağmen, bölgede yaşayan Pomaklar, 15.yüzyılda Müslüman olmaya başlamışlardır. Bu geçiş ise, tahrir defterlerinin ışığında açıkça görülebilmektedir. Bu tezde 1445, 1464/5, 1478/9 tahrir defterlerinden faydalanılmaktadır. Bu üç defter sayesinde, bölgedeki Pomak yerleşim birimlerinin İslamlaşma sürecine tanık olunmakta ve de zorla İslamlaştırma teorileri geçersiz kılınmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Balkanlar, Bulgaristan, İslamlaşma, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Pomaklar, 15.yüzyıl

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Objective of the Thesis

The subject of this thesis is the conversion of the local population to Islam in the Western Rhodope Mountains in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The western Rhodope Mountains, specifically Nevrekop region, were significant due to the settlement of the Pomaks<sup>1</sup>. The reason why I chose to study the Pomaks was because it was highly interesting that the people in this area voluntarily began to convert from Christianity to Islam from the third quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, which was specific to this particular region and did not take place in other areas in the Balkan Peninsula, except Bosnia and Albania. According to the tahrir registers, the Pomaks had gone through the conversion process and all of them had become Muslims by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, they preserved their language called Pomakça, but abandoned everything else related to the former religion and religious practices.

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<sup>1</sup> In the literature, there is not one single acceptable idea regarding the origin of the Pomaks. It has been a controversial issue not only in the Balkan historiographies such as Bulgarian, Greek and Macedonian but also in the Turkish historiography. Each region mentioned above has argued that the Pomaks were descended from them. However, what is certain about Pomaks is that they are Muslims of Slavic origin.

Throughout the history since the ancient times, Nevrekop region has been an important center in the Balkan Peninsula. In the ancient times, there were territories called Nicopolis and Nestum which then were turned into the city of Nevrekop<sup>2</sup>. Before the Ottoman rule came into power, there had already been an on-going settlement; the region became more developed with the arrival of the Ottomans. The development of Nevrekop region was associated with Via Egnatia which was also called the Sol-Kol region as Nevrekop was under the administration of Paşa Sancağı at the time. <sup>3</sup> During the Ottoman period, it became a center for Islamic life, which was highly interesting considering the religious background of the region.

The conversion of the Pomaks has been under debate not only in the Balkan historiography but also the Turkish historiography. According to the official Turkish historical sources, the Pomaks were descended from Kuman-Kipchak Turks. In fact, Hüseyin Memişoğlu argues that the only truth about the Pomaks is that their descendants came from the pure Turkish lineage.<sup>4</sup> The continual academic research during the Communist period in Bulgaria displayed that the Pomaks' mass conversion occurred really quickly due to the Ottoman administration and army. In Bulgaria, the Pomak issue has spread all over the country and has become a matter of great importance among the national Bulgarian institutions and in the structure of national identity.<sup>5</sup> Particularly, the Bulgarian historiography called the period of the Ottoman rule a *Dark Age* which lasted for almost 500 years. It was stated that the

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<sup>2</sup> The name of Nevrekop was changed into the Gotse Delchev after the end of the Ottoman presence.

<sup>3</sup> Harun Yeni, "Demography and Settlement in Paşa Sancağı Sol-Kol Region According to Muhasebe-i Vilayet-i Rumeli Defteri Dated 1530" (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Ankara: İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Hüseyin Memişoğlu, *Pages of The History of Pomak Turks*, (Ankara: Şafak Matbaası, 1991),41.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Neuburger, "Pomak Borderlands: On the Edge of Nations," *The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* Vol.28 No.1 (2000): 182.

conversion of Pomaks took place forcefully and purposely<sup>6</sup>, all of which has been supported and documented by novels, films and music in Bulgaria for many years.<sup>7</sup> In addition, some Bulgarian historians used the chronicles which mostly belonged to the priests. For instance, a chronicle which was lost after it was written was used as a proof for their views about mass conversion. Although there has been no particular chronicle representing the 15<sup>th</sup> century of the Pomaks, the following centuries were supported by some chronicles. For example, Draginov mentioned about the topic of forceful Islamization of the Pomaks who lived in the Rhodope Mountains,<sup>8</sup> which cannot be based on accurate archival sources apart from only some apocryphal chronicles. On the other hand, after the Communist period, some Bulgarian historians published works about the process of conversion to Islam, mass conversion and forceful Islamization of the Pomaks based on the Ottoman archival documents.

I believe it is necessary to use two-sided archives to analyze the issue of forced Islamization. For example, it would be advisable to carefully review the Ottoman Archives for the specified period in Turkey. In particular, the examination of the

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<sup>6</sup> Dia Anagnostou, "National Interpretations in Bulgarian Writings on the Pomaks from the Communist Period through the Present", *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, Vol 7, No 1 (2005):59. According to Anagnostou, there were different themes defining the Pomaks. Firstly, in the Communist period, most of the nationalist Bulgarian historians defined them as true Bulgarians. The Marxist views were another theme which shaped the perspective of the academicians regarding how the Pomaks were perceived.

<sup>7</sup>For further information, please read this article; Maria Todorova, "Conversion to Islam as a trope in Bulgarian historiography, fiction and film", in *Eurozine*. Also look at this web site; <https://www.eurozine.com/conversion-to-islam-as-a-trope-in-bulgarian-historiography-fiction-and-film/?pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Anna Alexieva, "Ottoman Dominion Epoch in the Cultural Memory of Bulgarian People," in *Balkan Tarihi Araştırmalarına Metodolojik Yaklaşımlar*, eds. Dr. Abidin Temizer (İstanbul: Libra Kitapçılık ve Yayıncılık, 2014), 157-179.

archives in Turkey demonstrates that the archives related to the Balkan countries constitute for 41% of the total, which translates into 208 volumes of archives.<sup>9</sup>

Over the past decades, the historians have been well-versed and knowledgeable in the Ottoman archives<sup>10</sup>, such as Kiel, Todorova, Radushev and so on, who were the ones exposing the inaccuracy of the theories like forced Islamization.<sup>11</sup>

All of these reasons mentioned above emerge a great necessity to reveal the truth of the Pomaks, which is the reason why I have chosen this controversial topic both in the Balkan historiography and the Turkish historiography.

## **1.2. Sources and Methodology**

Even though there were a lot of significant studies on the conversion to Islam in the Balkan Peninsula, there were not many studies and researches about the conversion to Islam around the Western Rhodope Mountains where many Pomak villages were located, which was mostly because the tahrir defters were not analyzed by the historians. Thus, the successive studies on this topic did not display the accurate facts from the history, which is why I have chosen this topic for my thesis with the aim to unfold the process of conversion to Islam from the beginning of the Ottoman rule in the region. In addition, I benefited from the tahrir registers called defters in this thesis as primary sources.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Mustafa Parkak, Balkan Tarihi Araştırmalarında Tapu ve Kadastro Kuyud-ı Kadime Arşivinin Önemi,”in *Balkan Tarihi Araştırmalarına Metodolojik Yaklaşımlar*, eds. Dr. Abidin Temizer (İstanbul: Libra Kitapçılık ve Yayıncılık, 2014), 205-214.

<sup>10</sup> Evgeni Radushev, “Meaning of the Historiographic Myths about Conversion to Islam” in *Halil Inalcık Armağanı* ed. Taşkı Takış and Sunay Aksoy (Doğu Batı, 2009):208.

<sup>11</sup> Aşkın Koyuncu, “Balkan Savaşları Sırasında Pomakların Zorla Tanassur Edilmesi (1912-1913),” *OTAM* 33 (2013), 153.

<sup>12</sup> In this thesis, the Icmal type MAD 525 and the mufassil type TD3 and TD7 defters are used.

The defters have had great importance in the analysis of the conversion process in the Western Rhodope Mountains after the Ottoman Empire in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Ottoman authorities registered each man in order to collect taxes from them, which is why the registers were very important. Thanks to these registers, it was easy to acquire information about the population, the types of taxes, and the social-economic status in the society.<sup>13</sup> The tahrir registers which we have examined contain a great amount of valuable information about the expansion of the Ottomans in the Balkan Peninsula and the structure of administrative units.<sup>14</sup>

Even though the tahrir registers have been highly useful in comparing and contrasting the status of the region within the empire, they fail to reveal what the latest situation was like.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the tahrir registers were divided into two

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<sup>13</sup> For further information about the defters, please read the following books and articles. Halil İnalçık, *Hicrî 835 Tarihli Süret-i Defter-i Arvanid* (Ankara: TTK,1987); Mehmet Öz, “Tahrir Defterlerinin Osmanlı Araştırmalarında Kullanılması Hakkında Bazı Düşünceler”, *Vakıflar Dergisi*, 12 (1991): 229-239; Kemal Çiçek, “Osmanlı tahrir Defterlerinin Kullanımında Görülen Bazı Problemler ve Method Arayışları”, *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları* 97 (1995).; Heath W. Lowry, *Studies in Defterology: Ottoman Society in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Istanbul: Isis Press 1992); Feridun Emecen, “Mufassaldan İcmale”, *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, XVI (1996) : 37-44; Metin M. Coşgel, “Ottoman Tax Registers (Tahrir Defterleri)”, *Economics Working Papers*, (2002); Ö. Lütfi Barkan, “Türk İktisat ve Mâliye Tarihi İçin Kaynaklar: Türkiyede İmparatorluk Devirlerinin Büyük Nüfus ve Arazi Tahrirleri ve Hakana Mahsus İstatistik Defterler I”, *İFM*, II/1-2 (İstanbul 1940-1941), s. 20-59, 214-247; Erhan Afyoncu, “Türkiye’de Tahrir Defterlerine Dayalı Olarak Hazırlanmış Çalışmalar Hakkında Bazı Görüşler”, *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi*, Cilt 1, Sayı 1, (2003): 267-286; Ömer Lütfi Barkan, “Türkiye’de İmparatorluk Devirlerinin Nüfus ve Arazi Tahrirleri, *İÜİFM*, II/I, İstanbul 1940, s. 30-32; N. Todorov, *The Balkan City*; and N. Todorov and A. Velkov, *Situation démographique de la Péninsule balkanique ( fin du XVe s.– debut du XVIe s.)* (Sofia, 1988),

<sup>14</sup> Uğur Altuğ “Erken on Beşinci Asır Osmanlı Balkanları’nda Tımar Sistemi’nin Tatbikinde Coğrafi Koşulların Tesiri,” *Adam Akademi*, 1, (2011):33.

<sup>15</sup> The tahrir registers were very useful for the Ottoman Empire in many ways such as the control and management of the timar system, reconstruction and settlement of vacant places, establishment of the Ottoman Empire in the newly conquered territories, regular functioning and control of the state system, identification of the people who aligned behind, for example, *derbentçi*, *piyade* and *köprücü*, who assisted the newly ascended Sultan when needed. The most significant reason was probably to keep track of the state’s financial situation. In addition, the tahrir registers were regularly carried every 30 or 40 years under the state supervision. However, the tahrir registers which were used as primary sources are dated 1445- 1464/1465 and 1478/1479 with short intervals between the dates. The registers were carried out in newly conquered countries, thus, would indicate the inclusion of the newly conquered area in the state by law and an inventory of the region would be issued. The preparation of the tahrir for the region would mean that the conquest of the new region was completed. For further information, please read Erhan Afyoncu, *Osmanlı’da Tahrir ve Arşivcilik*, in *Osmanlı Teşkilatı*, ed. Güler Eren, Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, p. 312-313.



categories such as *icmal* (synoptic tax registers) and *mufassal* type (detailed tax registers) registers.<sup>16</sup>

The *mufassal* type registers contained very detailed information about not only the local population but also the residents in the region. This type of registers included the unit names and numbers of both populations, which were male and widows, the legal status of the men in the region such as bachelor<sup>17</sup> or married<sup>18</sup> and the approximate amount of land in use as well as different types of production.<sup>19</sup> The *mufassal* type tahrir registers made it possible to gain insight into the population, the taxpayers and the economic activities carried out by men in the towns and villages.<sup>20</sup> In addition, there was another type called *icmal* registers which provided little insight into the area and relevant population. In this thesis, MAD 525, which is Paşa Livası İcmal Defteri<sup>21</sup>, was used as a primary source.

In addition to the Paşa Livası İcmal register, there are *mufassal* type registers dated 1464/1465<sup>22</sup> and 1478/1479<sup>23</sup>, which were examined as primary sources for the thesis.

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<sup>16</sup> In this thesis, these two type of tahrir registers will be used in next chapters.

<sup>17</sup> Bachelor means unmarried men and it is called *mücerred* in the Ottoman Empire. The taxation quantity differed from between married men and not married.

<sup>18</sup> Married men were registered by the katib as *hane*. Moreover, hane was divided into two categories such as *hane-i gebran*, which was for Christians, and *hane-i Müslim*.

<sup>19</sup> Metin M. Coşgel, "Ottoman Tax Registers (Tahrir Defterleri)," *Economics Working Papers*, (2002): 5. [https://opencommons.uconn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1295&context=econ\\_wpapers](https://opencommons.uconn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1295&context=econ_wpapers)

Also, Coşgel added that the *mufassal* type of registers and English Domesday book were in similar, however, in the larger context, the *mufassal* type of registers contained more detailed information from Domesday Book.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>21</sup> This *icmal* register is very important to contrast before the conversion to Islam in Nevrekep region because at this register, for Nevrekep and its villages, there was not any Muslim population in the area. However, with 1464/1465 *mufassal* type of register, the innovators, the first Muslims were encountered in the TD3 defter. In 1445 Paşa Livası İcmal register was published by Halil İncalcık, Evgeni Radushev and Uğur Altuğ.

<sup>22</sup> This type of *mufassal* defter were registered as TD3; it is in Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), in İstanbul.

<sup>23</sup> This type of *mufassal* defter were registered as TD7; it is in Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), in İstanbul.

### 1.3. Literature Review

Like I stated above, the Balkan historiography and the Turkish historiography include the subject of the conversion process which has been studied by several historians and academicians who have different ideas and views such as Marxist ideas, nationalistic ideas, and so on.<sup>24</sup> For instance, Gandev<sup>25</sup> and Str. Dimitrov<sup>26</sup> shaped their academic studies using the perspective of romantic nationalism. In particular, Gandev mentioned that the Ottomans started to kill innocent Christian Bulgarians in order to gain more power in the region, which was completely wrong and inaccurate. Furthermore, he calculated the number of people who were murdered by the Ottomans and used a title named *catastrophic theory*. However, the examination of the tahrir registers in the archives revealed no clue or supporting proof for this theory. The Ottomans never used murder as an administrative or sovereignty policy towards to local population who resided in the newly conquered areas. On the contrary, they used istimalet policy for the local population so that they could get accustomed to the new state administration. In addition, Christo Christov

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<sup>24</sup> The review of the Bulgarian and Balkan historiography mostly points out that the conversion to Islam was imposed upon the local population forcefully and the Ottomans were armed against the innocent Christian people. During the communist period in Bulgaria, especially most of the historians wrote that the Ottoman administration in the Balkans inhibited the development of Bulgaria and Peninsula, accordingly the conversion of Islam took place involuntarily, specifically in the western Rhodope Mountains. Most of the historians used the chronicles which were written by the priests and the other religious men.

<sup>25</sup> Hristo, Gandev, the Bulgarian people during the 15th century: a demographic and ethnographic study, Sofia: Sofia Press, 1987.

<sup>26</sup> S. Dimitrov including his, "Demografski otnoshenia i pronikvane Na islama v zapadnite Rodopi i dolinata Na Mesta prez XV–XVII vek [Demographic Relations and Spread of Islam in Western Rhodopes and the Valley of Mesta in the 15th–17th Centuries]," Rodopski Sbornik, 1 (1965). S. Dimitrov, a representative of the scholars who still maintain the traditional approach, "Shte imame li nauchni pozitsii po problemite Na islamizatsiyata i sadbinite Na bulgarskite mohamedani? [Shall We Ever Have a Scientific Position on the Problems of Islamization and the Fate of Bulgarian Muslims?]," Rhodopica, 1 (1999), 131–147.

and de Kyril Vassilev were the most prominent historians in the communist period who supported the romantic international concept.<sup>27</sup>

Such nationalist romantic views began to change in the late 1980s.<sup>28</sup> Especially Evgeni Radushev<sup>29</sup> and Zelyazkova<sup>30</sup> were among the frontline historians who wrote that the idea of a forceful Islamization by the Ottomans was totally wrong and inaccurate, besides, that these views could not be supported. Unlike other historians who manipulated the political ideologies during the Communist period, Radushev tried to study and examine this topic in the light of the archival documents, mostly the tahrir registers.

In this thesis, I will use the tahrir registers which dated back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. However, we can find the analysis of the tahrir registers in the book of Radushev which was published before this thesis; *“The Pomaks: Christianity and Islam in the Western Rhodope Mountains and the Valley of the Mesta River from the 15<sup>th</sup> c. to the 1730s”*. The book was divided into two volumes and he transcribed the tahrir registers related to the regions where the Pomaks resided in the second volume.

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<sup>27</sup> Dia Anagnostou, “National Interpretations in Bulgarian Writings on the Pomaks from the Communist Period Through the Present,” *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* Volume 7 Number 1 (2005), 59

<sup>28</sup> For instance, with Evgeni Radushev, Zelyazkova

<sup>29</sup> Radushev started to study the conversion to Islam in the western Rhodope Mountains where various Pomak villages were located. Especially, after the Communist period ended in Bulgaria, unlike most colleagues, he supported the idea that there were no forceful Islamization or mass Islamization by the Ottomans in Bulgaria against the Pomak population. With the aim to support these ideas, he wrote several articles and books. Please see, E. Radushev, *Pomatsite [The Pomaks]*, Vol. 1 (Sofia: St. Cyril and Methodius National Library Oriental Department, 2008), E. Radushev, “Meaning of the Historiographic Myths About Conversion to Islam” in Halil Inalcık Armağanı ed. Taşkı Takış and Sunay Aksoy (Doğu Batı, 2009), E. Radushev, “Das “belagerte” Gebirge,” [The “besieged” Mountain] in *Bulgarian Historical Review*. Translated by Maciej Urbaniak. Vol. 3, No.4 (2005), E. Radushev, “The Spread of Islam in the Ottoman Balkans,” in *Oriental Archive* Vol. 78 (2010), E. Radushev. “The Spread of Islam in the Ottoman Balkans: Revisiting Bulliet’s Method On Religious Conversion,” in *Oriental Archive* Vol. 78 (2010), E. Radushev, “Demografski i etnoreligiozni procesi v zapadnite Rodopi prez 15–18v [Demographic and Ethno-religious Processes in the Western Rhodopes, 15th–18th Centuries],” *Istorichesko badeshte*, 1 (1998), 46–89

<sup>30</sup> A. Zelyazkova, *Razprostranenie Na islama v zapadno-balkanskite zemi pod osmanska vlast. 15–18v. [The Spread of Islam in the Western Balkan Lands under Ottoman Rule. 15th–18th Centuries]* (Sofia, 1990). A. Zelyazkova, “Islamization in the Balkans as a Historiographical Problem: the Southeast-European Perspective,” in Fikret Adanır and Suraiya Faroqhi, ed., *the Ottomans and the Balkans: A Discussion of Historiography* (Leiden, 2002), 223–266.

However, the book was written in the Bulgarian language, and it has not been translated into English or Turkish. Additionally, he wrote several articles about the controversial topic of Islamization and the Pomaks.

In addition to all these historians, the book of Bulliet, "*Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History*" will be used in this thesis. Actually, his book was not related to the Balkan Peninsula, on the contrary, the book included other countries mostly in the Middle East such as Iran and Iraq. However, his methods and techniques can be applied for the Balkan Peninsula in the investigation of the conversion to Islam. His quantitative methods held great importance in evaluating the development of Islamic society using sociological approaches, unlike other researchers. In this thesis, the people converting to Islam will be analyzed and examined with the help of Bulliet's denomination.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, Anton Minkov<sup>32</sup> has recently studied the topic of conversion to Islam in the Balkans using the theories and methodology of Bulliet. He mentioned about special cases of conversion in the Balkans, such as the Rhodope Mountains, Bosnia and Albania.<sup>33</sup> These three regions went through rapid conversion unlike the other regions in the Peninsula. Like Rhodopes, Albania is a mountainous region where the conversion process began with the conversion of the local elites. On the contrary, unlike the Rhodope Mountains, not the whole population in Albania converted to Islam. Most importantly, the conversion process in the Western Rhodope Mountains took place from the 15<sup>th</sup> century until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> According to Bulliet, the conversion to Islam took place in 5 stages such as innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards.

<sup>32</sup> Anton Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans, Kisve Bahası Petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 1670-1730* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> In addition to all these which were mentioned above section, when Minkov wrote his book, he also benefitted from Kiel, Zelyazkova, Todorova, Radushev, etc. All these historians actually disagree with the historians and academicians from the Communist period's regarding forceful Islamization, conversion of the Pomaks, the dark centuries of Bulgaria caused by of the pressure and assimilation of the Ottoman Empire against the nations in the Balkans.

century, all the Pomaks had voluntarily converted to Islam depending on various reasons in the background such as socio-economic, psychological, and motivational reasons. In Albania and Bosnia, the conversion process did not take place the way it did in the western Rhodope Mountains. Furthermore, Minkov used the *kisve bahası* petitions<sup>34</sup> as an example to explain the conversion of the local Christians who lived in the Balkans. The reconsideration and reanalysis of the Bulliet's theories and methodologies by Minkov have been helpful in examining the process.

Moreover, Kiel is a significant historian who studied both the Ottoman and the Balkan history that fell within the range of the Ottoman administration. He is one of the major historians who denied the presence of a forceful mass Islamization by the Ottomans in the Balkans. Also, he critiqued that the only reason why the Pomaks changed their religion was to avoid the poll-tax which was the backbone of the Ottoman Empire, and that was the reason why the Empire experienced financial difficulties since the revenue of this tax was very high. Also, his article about "*Nevrekop*"<sup>35</sup> in the *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* gives valuable information not only about the kaza of Nevrekop but also the conversion process among the local population. In addition, he benefited from the tahrir registers, by which he even managed to calculate the number of people who converted to Islam for the first time in the kaza.

Last but not least, I would like to mention the master's thesis published by Harun Yeni, in which he explained the details about Paşa Sancağı in 15<sup>th</sup> century with the help of some tahrir defters. I will use some of the icmal and mufassal tahrir registers

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<sup>34</sup> The petitions of *Kisve Bahası* represented people who voluntarily converted from Christianity to Islam. *Kisve Bahası* means price of dress. During the conversion process, someone who wanted to be Muslim would write a letter to the Ottoman Sultan and ask for money to buy a dress representing his new religion.

<sup>35</sup> Machiel Kiel, "*Nevrekop*," *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi* 33 (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2007), 54-55

similar to his thesis, such as TD 3 and TD 7 mufassal type tahrir registers. In addition to Yeni's master thesis, I will also benefit from the master thesis published by Agata Chmiel,<sup>36</sup> in which she examined the Drama region in the neighborhood of Nevrekop rather than the kaza of Nevrekop. Although she explained that her case study was based on the tahrir register dated 1478, she examined TD 3, like I will do in the next chapters. Chmiel also tried to explain the conversion process in other Pomak villages in 15<sup>th</sup> century with the help of the Ottoman sources such as tahrir registers. Not only she searched the Bulgarian historiography but also investigated the Turkish historiographic materials which were related to the conversion to Islam among the Pomaks who lived in the western Rhodope Mountains. However, my thesis is not designed as a case study, but I will rather try to analyze and compare these three tahrir registers.

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<sup>36</sup> Agata Chmiel, "Religious and Demographic Development in the South-Western Rhodope Mountains in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century: A Case Study of the Tahrir Registers of 1478" (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Ankara: İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, 2012).

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE WESTERN RHODOPE MOUNTAINS: ENVIRONMENT AND ITS RELATIONS WITHIN THE FRAME OF CONQUEST

#### 2.1. Geography-Climate and Transportation

The Balkan Peninsula is a rather mountainous region, which is the reason why it was named after a mountain. The region, which is the area of concern on the following pages, is characterized by an extremely mountainous structure.<sup>37</sup> The Rhodope Mountains are approximately 3,700 meters high.<sup>38</sup> There are several mountains on the Balkan Peninsula, which could be called as “young mountains”, such as the Balkan Mountains, the Carpathian Mountains and the Dinaric Mountains.<sup>39</sup> The research area is not a young mountain, but rather an old one with a more flat and curved structure compared to the other mountains. Furthermore, the Rhodope Mountains are not structured similarly to the Alps, which has made it more habitable for the

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<sup>37</sup> Nevrekop, the study region, is called Gotse Delchev in Bulgarian and is located in the Blagoevgrad region. After the withdrawal of the Ottomans from the Balkan geography, the name Nevrekop was changed. Georgi Nikolov Delchev, who was seen as a national hero in Bulgaria at the time, played an important role in changing the name of the region. In addition, today the region is located within the borders of Bulgaria and Greece. It should be noted that Nevrekop has held great importance since the ancient times. During the Roman period, the city was called as Nicopolis and Nestum.

<sup>38</sup>George Hoffman, *The Balkans in Transition (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1963)*, 16.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid, p.13.

local people since the ancient times and the examination of the relief of the mountains also demonstrate that the Rhodope Mountains are older. In addition, the region is surrounded by the Pirin and Rila Mountains, which are higher than the Rhodope.

The region border of concern is parallel to the Aegean Sea, therefore, the influence of the Mediterranean climate is strongly felt in the mountains. Due to its geographical and climatic features, people have chosen to settle in these mountains since the ancient times, whereas the Rila and Pirin Mountains were rather inhabitable compared to the Rhodope. The relevant studies on the Rila Mountains demonstrate that there have been not as many settlements or villages as in the Western Rhodope since the ancient times up until today.

The major water resource feeding the Western Rhodope Mountains is the Mesta (Nestos) River<sup>40</sup> which flows through the south-east direction of Rhodes and discharges in the region of Yenice-Karasu into the Aegean Sea. The flow of the river is continuous throughout the year which makes the mountain region not such an arid area as it is rather believed.<sup>41</sup> In addition, thanks to Mesta River, there are many villages on both sides of the Rhodope Mountains, where it is possible to encounter village settlements even in the highest areas of the region. Additionally, the research area is 508 meter above from the sea level.<sup>42</sup> On the contrary, there are very few village settlements on the foothills of the Pirin and Rila Mountains, and the local population is quite smaller compared to the Rhodope Mountains, which is

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<sup>40</sup> The ancient name of the Mesta River is Nestos. Today, it is called Karasu. The river's basin width is 5479 km, 3437 km<sup>2</sup> of which remains in Bulgaria and the other half flows in Greece. The relevant details can be found in the following article. Andreas Kallias, Fotis Pliakas and Ioannis Diamantis, *The Legislative Framework and Policy for the Water Resources Management of Transboundary Rivers in Europe: The Case of Nestos/Mesta River, between Greece and Bulgaria* (Environmental Science & Policy, 9, 2006).

<sup>41</sup> Mark Mazower, *The Balkans A Short History*. (New York: A Modern Library Chronicles Book, 2000), 4.

<sup>42</sup> Harun Bekir, "Gotse Delçev (Nevrekop) ve Yöresi Türk Gelenek ve Görenekləri," *Motif Akademi ve Halkbilimi Dergisi, Balkan Özel Sayısı*, (2012), 56.



mainly because, as mentioned above, the mountains possess different kind of structures. In addition, the Rila and Pirin Mountains are very perpendicular, which makes it less suitable for settlement.

Climate is one of the major factors that determines how suitable a region is for settlement. Before examining the region, it would be a good idea to assess the climate of the Balkan Peninsula. Considering the Balkan geography, it should be mentioned that the Balkan Peninsula is under the influence of two different climates such as the Continental Climate and the Mediterranean Climate. The Continental Climate prevails in the inland parts of the peninsula, whereas the Mediterranean Climate is dominant particularly along the coastal strip.<sup>43</sup>

In Bulgaria, there are three different climate zones<sup>44</sup>, which are called “*Moderate Continental, Transitory Continental and Continental Mediterranean*”.<sup>45</sup> The region falls within the *Continental Mediterranean* zone, same as in the Pirin Mountains, which are adjacent to the Rhodope Mountains. The research area has a Mediterranean climate<sup>46</sup> due to its proximity to the Aegean Sea. As a result, the winter is not too cold and the summer is quite warm, which makes the Western Rhodope suitable for settlement. The large number of inhabitants keeps the region vibrant and alive. Nevrekop is located exactly around the plain. The region has always been somewhat advanced since the ancient times, and the importance of the region can be traced

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<sup>43</sup> Hoffman, 22-23.

<sup>44</sup> Bulgaria Geographic Atlas, p. 89

<sup>45</sup> The moderate continental climate zone is known for its cold winters and hot summers. Secondly, the transitional continental climate zone is also known for its partly cold winters and hot summers. Finally, in the continental Mediterranean zone, winters are warm and summers are extremely hot.

<sup>46</sup> As a result of the influence of the Mediterranean climate, high rain precipitation is observed during the fall-winter period. Only on the peaks of the mountain, the winter snowfall is more lasting. Especially in Western Rhodope Mountains, snow thickness is between 50 cm and 110 cm. At the peak points of the mountain, snow thickness is 130 cm and up to 150 cm. If you want to learn detailed information about the climatic zone that dominates the summit of the mountain, Petar Beron gives you a lot of information about this subject. Moreover, Bulgaria Geographic Atlas provides us with detailed information, both proportionate and visually.

back to the ancient Greece, where, at the time, it was believed to be the habitat of the barbarians and also perceived as a route to the sophisticated Greek world.<sup>47</sup> The other regions which were well-populated were Bosnia and Albania.

Due to the mountainous nature of the region, it is important to underline the importance of transport. The region is geographically located in the middle of Western Thrace and Upper Thrace where the Rhodope Mountains separate these two regions like a sharp line. Two important lines for transport have been in use since ancient times, the first of which is the line from Drama-Seres region to the North. With using this line, it is possible to have access to the region by following the mining villages, especially from the region of Seres. The examination of the map also shows the suitable route to the Nevrekop plain by crossing the villages along this line such as Zirnov, Elis, Tirlis and Vezme, which will be explained further in the next section. The second line is the more traditional route of transport to the region, from the southeast to the north. With a starting point from the Yenice-Karasu region, it is possible to reach the Nevrekop plain by following the bed of the Mesta River.<sup>48</sup> It is tricky to reach the region though not impossible. Even in the nineteenth century, there are records of some French traveller traversing the western part of the Rhodope Mountains who faced great difficulties on the route and complained that the only available pathways on the route were the ones traced by wild animals.<sup>49</sup> Even in the nineteenth century, the access to the region was challenging, whereas it was much harder particularly in the classical period of the Ottomans. Additionally, it was highly unsafe to use these two paths considering the conditions in the given period

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<sup>47</sup>Cengiz Haksöz, "The Making of the Rhodopean Borders and Construction of the Pomak Identities in the Balkans," *International Crimes and History*, Issue 17, (2016):51.

<sup>48</sup>Evgeni Radushev, *The Pomaks Christianity and Islam in the Western Rhodope Mountains and the Valley of the Mesta River from the 15th c. to the 1730s Part I*. (Sofia: St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library Oriental Department, 2008),343-345.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid,p.33-35.

when the region was extremely disorganized. In order to increase the safety of the routes, the *derbend*<sup>50</sup> organization was established by the Ottoman Empire.<sup>51</sup> The people who ensured the security of derbends were called *derbentçi*<sup>52</sup>. Despite the difficulty of transport, it was possible to observe a developed network structure in the region, where the plain of Nevrekop was located in-between. However, it is necessary to underline that the access and communication between the region and the outside world were very difficult.

As explained above, the climatic features of the region have attracted numerous inhabitants since ancient times. The local population naturally made a living off animal husbandry as a result of the mountainous structure of the region. In addition to animal husbandry, agriculture has been practiced since ancient times. As stated below, the review of Tahrir registers of the region reveals various production materials and tools. In addition, there are various data on the growth of vegetables and fruits, wine production, vineyards and gardening, and fishing in the villages along Mesta River as a result of the Mediterranean Climate in the region. Depending on the Mediterranean breeze, cereals such as wheat, barley and oats are also found to hold great importance for the local population.

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<sup>50</sup> The means of derbent is engaged. It is used for *karakolhanes* which were located on the hills and the Straits. Also, derbent was used between the two mountains. The history of Derbent construction dates back to the Eastern Roman Empire. The system has developed itself within the Empire.

<sup>51</sup> Mehmet Zeki Pakalın, *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Sözlüğü 1. Fasikül* (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1971), 425.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 425. With the proclamation of the decree of the Tanzimat, their duties were abolished. Before the decree, it is a phrase used for those who maintain gateways. They used to work for the protection of military routes, the salvation of trade routes. These services are exempt from customary monopoly.

## 2.2. The Ottoman conquest of the Balkans, Particularly the region of the Rhodope Mountains

The Ottoman conquests of the Balkans<sup>53</sup> began during the time of Orhan Bey.<sup>54</sup> It should be underlined that the relations between Orhan Bey and the Balkans began in the period when Aydınoğlu Umur Bey intervened in the internal affairs of the Byzantine Empire. Umur Bey took advantage of the civil war in the Byzantine in which he came out against the Emperor Cantacuzenus. However, on the contrary, Orhan Bey helped Cantacuzenus coming into conflict with Umur Bey, as a result of which he benefited from the internal turmoil in the Byzantine Empire, where the Ottoman armies, thanks to Tzymbe castle<sup>55</sup> (1352), began to get accustomed to the territory of both Thrace and Macedonia.<sup>56</sup> The first Ottoman maneuver bases in the Balkans were Bolayır and Gallipoli.<sup>57</sup> To preserve and consolidate the Ottoman domination in the newly conquered territories, the Ottomans, under the leadership of Süleyman Pasha, moved the Muslims from Anatolia and settled them in various areas on the Balkan Peninsula.<sup>58</sup>

The conquest of Edirne was completed after the castle was taken over, which would facilitate the expansion of the Ottoman Empire into the Balkans. Under the leadership of Süleyman Pasha, the Ottoman armies fought against the Bulgarian and Serbian armies in 754/1353 to help the Byzantine emperor Cantacuzenus. This series of events started in the period of Orhan Bey, and came to an end during the reign of

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<sup>53</sup>E. A. Zachariadou, "Orkhan," *Encyclopaedia of Islam VIII*, (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1995), 175-177.

<sup>54</sup> Orhan Bey who was the second bey of the Ottoman Empire was the son of Osman Bey. He ascended the throne in the year of 1326. He administered the empire between 1326 and 1362.

<sup>55</sup> Tzymbe castle was seized by the Ottomans in 1352 under the leadership of Suleyman Pasha. He was the son of Orhan Bey and also one of the significant figures in the conquests of the Balkans.

<sup>56</sup> E. A. Zachariadou, "Orkhan," *Encyclopaedia of Islam VIII*, (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1995), 175-177.

<sup>57</sup> Halil İnalçık, "Türkler ve Balkanlar", *Balkan Türkoloji Araştırmaları Merkezi BAL-TAM* (2005):19-44

<sup>58</sup> Halil İnalçık, *The Ottoman Empire the Classical Age 1300-1600* (London: A Phoenix Paperback, 2000), 10.

Murad I when Lala Şahin Pasha<sup>59</sup>, one of Murad's Pashas, defeated the tekfur of Edirne, feudal landlord, in the Sazil-Dere war, which was the event that finalized the conquest of Edirne. It should be highlighted that the conquest of Edirne made it possible to utilize a natural corridor in the region of the Rhodopes Mountains, which is the area of concern in this thesis.<sup>60</sup> As a result of the conquest of Adrianople (Edirne), both Philippopolis and Gümüldjine were included in the Ottoman lands.<sup>61</sup>

Following the conquests mentioned above, the region starting from the Western part of Bulgaria up to the Balkan Mountains came under the domination of the Ottoman Empire, which eventually resulted in the Byzantine Emperor John Palaeologus to become a vassal of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>62</sup>

Considering the issue of vassalage, it should be noted that the Ottomans systematically implemented two phases in the event of new conquests. First, they began to impose certain governmental conditions against the neighboring countries, after which were followed by the attempts to have direct control over the country by using strategies such as the elimination of other dynasties in the neighboring countries.<sup>63</sup> Later, they would replace the dynasties in the region, and then they would assign the Pashas with administrative power for the management of such territories under the Ottoman rule. Lala Şahin Pasha and Evrenos Bey can be given as examples of these.

After the conquest of Edirne, the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans continued rapidly. It must be underlined that one of the most important reasons for the rapid and easy realization of successive conquests is that there was no unity on

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<sup>59</sup> Lala Şahin Paşa was assigned to rule Edirne after his victory by sultan Murad I.

<sup>60</sup> M.T.Gökbilgin, "Edirne," *Encyclopedia of Islam* II, (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1991), 683-686.

<sup>61</sup> J.H.Kramers, "Murad I," *Encyclopedia of Islam* VII, (Leiden:E.J.Brill, 1993), 592-594.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid,593.

<sup>63</sup> Halil İnalçık, "The Ottoman Methods of Conquest", *Studia Islamica*,No.2 (1954):103-129.

the Balkan Peninsula. In addition to the conflicts between countries, the ongoing civil wars within the countries facilitated the conquests for the Ottomans so that they succeeded to expand their territories in the Balkan Peninsula. The Christian kingdoms in the Balkans did not pose much threat to the progress of the Ottomans in the conquest of the Balkans.<sup>64</sup> Thanks to the hostility between the Byzantine Empire and the Bulgarians, Murad I conquered Ishtebol (Sozopolis), which was located near Burgas.<sup>65</sup> Although they were not highly unified, the armies of the Crusades occasionally gathered to prevent the Ottoman expansion. The Crusaders, who gathered during the period of concern, did not succeed and failed to stop the Ottoman expansion.

The conquests in Rumelia proceeded with the Battle of Çirmen, which is believed to be different than the battle of Sırsındığı.<sup>66</sup> The war took place in 1371, and the army, which was united against the Ottoman Empire, suffered great losses.<sup>67</sup> The Serbian expansion in the Maritza region was thus halted. As a result, regarding the region of concern, the Ottoman expansion to the cities of Macedonia such as Serres, Drama and Kawalla became even easier, which later on facilitated the expansion of the Ottomans in the west of Vardar.<sup>68</sup>

During this period, Evrenos Bey was one of the most critical names.<sup>69</sup> There are different views regarding who Evrenos Bey actually was. One widely accepted

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<sup>64</sup>Justin McCharty, *The Ottoman Turks An Introductory History to 1923* (London and New York: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1997), 44.

<sup>65</sup> J.H.Kramers, "Murad I," *Encyclopedia of Islam* VII, (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1993), 592-594.

<sup>66</sup> For detailed information please read Halil İnalçık's book which is *Kuruluş Dönemi Osmanlı Sultanları (1302-1481)* İnalçık mentioned about that Çirmen (Sırsındığı) as a same war against the combined Christian army. That army was consisted of the different Christian states which were Serbs, Bosnians, and Hungarians.

<sup>67</sup> Halil İnalçık, *Kuruluş Dönemi Osmanlı Sultanları (1302-1481)* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi (İSAM), 2010), 87-88.

<sup>68</sup> J.H.Kramers, "Murad I," *Encyclopedia of Islam* VII, (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1993), 592-594.

<sup>69</sup>I.Melikoff, "Ewrenos," *Encyclopedia of Islam* II, (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1991), 720. The importance of Evrenos Bey is indisputable in the conquests of the Balkans. Since the conquest of Karasi by the

opinion is that he was the Bey of the Karasi Beylik, before he actually came under the Ottoman domination. Karasi Beylik was located in the region of between Balıkesir and Çanakkale. Following the conquest of the Karasi Beylik, the Ottomans took over the Karasi fleet giving Evrenos Bey significant popularity who then held great importance and became a significant figure during the conquests of Rumeli. Another important opinion is that Evrenos Bey was the tekfur of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>70</sup> There are also various views in the literature in addition to these two major opinions.<sup>71</sup>

The successive conquests proceeded by the conquest of Feredjik (Pherrai) by Evrenos Bey in 1372, in which the Ottoman armies took over the regions such as Kavala, Drama, Serres and Karaferi (Yenice-i Vardar). On the other hand, Evrenos attempted to conquer the regions such as Pori, Iskedje, Maronea (Awret Fortress). Followingly, the region of Yenice-i Vardar was called by the name of Evrenos Bey as the Evrenos Bey region.<sup>72</sup>

There is no consensus among historians about his past, but it is commonly accepted that Evrenos Bey was a very important “*uc beyi*”. Although he played an important

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Ottomans, that is, since 735/1334-1335, Evrenos had taken the lead of important campaigns. The name of Gazi Evrenos was frequently mentioned by the Ottoman historians, especially after Süleyman Pasha passed to Çanakkale.

<sup>70</sup> Çalı, Ayşegül. “*Akıncı Beyi Evrenos Bey’e Ait Mülkname*” *OTAM, Sayı.20 (2006)*, p.60. For further information about Evrenos Bey and his background, please look at these books and articles: Ayşegül Kılıç, *Evrenos Bey’in Kökeni Hakkında Tartışmalar ve Yeni Bir Değerlendirme*, (Ankara: TTK Belleten, c.LXXV, 2011); Ayşegül Kılıç, *Bizans ve Osmanlı Kaynaklarında Gazi Evrenos Bey’in İmajı Hakkında Bir İnceleme*, (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi DTCF Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi, XXX/49, 2011); Yücel Öztürk, *Evrenos Oğullarının Menşei Hakkında Oluşmuş Bilmecenin Yeni Bir Analizi*, (Kocaeli Büyükşehir Belediyesi); Ayşegül Kılıç, *Şemseddin Ahmed Bey ve (H.904) 1498 Tarihli Vakfiyesine Göre Yenice-i Vardar Vakfı*, (Akademik Bakış Dergisi, Sayı:56, 2016); Mehmet Öz, *Kimlik Tartışmalarına Osmanlı Kimliği Vasıtasıyla Bir Katkı: Osmanlı Devleti Kimler Tarafından Nasıl Kuruldu?* (Ankara: Türkiye Günlüğü, Sayı 83, 2005); Heath Lowry, *The Evrenos Family and the City of Selanik (Thessaloniki): Who Built the Hamza Bey Camii Why?* (İstanbul: Bahçeşehir Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2010); Heath Lowry, *Osmanlıların Ayak İzlerinde: Mukaddes Mekanlar ve Mimari Eserleri Arayış Yolculukları*, (İstanbul: Bahçeşehir Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2009); Fahmettin Başar, *Evrenosoğulları*, (İstanbul: DİA, c.XI, 1995).

<sup>71</sup> Kılıç, Ayşegül. “*Evrenos Bey’in Kökeni Hakkında Tartışmalar ve Yeni Bir Değerlendirme*”, Belleten, c.LXXV.TTK Ankara (2011) p.748.

<sup>72</sup>I.Melikoff, “Ewrenos,” *Encyclopedia of Islam II*, (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1991), 720.

role in the conquests of Rumeli since the time of Orhan Bey, he also made great achievements and conquests under the reign of Murad I. During the conquests of Rumelia, the Mikhal-oghullari, the Malkodj-oghullari, the Turakhan-oghullari and the Ewrenos-oghullari were the descendants' families of the Ottoman frontier warrior nobility in the newly conquered territories of the Balkan Peninsula.<sup>73</sup>

In 1383, Seres was taken over by the Ottoman armies, a region near the Western Rhodopes, our research area. When Seres was taken, it had already been surrendered to Kavala. Between the years of 1371 and 1381, the Ottoman conquests on the Seres-Vidin line<sup>74</sup> halted, but with the conquests mentioned above, the Ottoman expansion in the Balkans continued rapidly. The progress of conquests in the Via Egnatia (Sol-Kol)<sup>75</sup> lane might be associated with Evrenos Bey since Seres was established as the center during the next conquests in the Balkans. After Seres, the center was moved to Yenice-i Vardar, which was established as a Muslim town. As mentioned above, the Ottomans moved the nomadic tribes from Anatolia and settled them in different regions, especially those in which were recently conquered. The nomads brought from the Western Anatolia, particularly Manisa and Saruhan, were settled in the

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid, 720.

<sup>74</sup> Halil İnalçık, *Kuruluş Dönemi Osmanlı Sultanları (1302-1481)* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi (İSAM), 2010), 97.

<sup>75</sup> Via Egnatia (Sol-Kol) was not only associated with the Ottoman Empire, except the Ottomans, during the Roman Empire, Byzantine Empire, this route had been used since the earliest times. The Via Egnatia had strategic importance because it connected Constantinople with the Adriatic Sea. Thanks to this connection, the Ottomans conquered some of the strategic important locations such as, Drama, Seres, and Gümölcine. For further information please read this source. Harun Yeni, "Demography and Settlement in Paşa Sancağı Sol-Kol Region According to Muhasebe-I Vilayet-I Rumeli Defteri Dated 1530" (Unpublished Master Thesis, Ankara: İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, 2006):20. In addition, the Ottomans used this route as an administrative unit in Paşa Sancağı. Further information about the Sol-Kol region which is Paşa Sancağı, please read this book. M.Tayyib Gökbilgin, *XV. Ve XVI. Asırlarda Edirne ve Paşa Livası, Vakıflar-Mülkler-Mukataalar* (İstanbul: İşaret Yayınları, 2007). Furthermore, it should be highlighted that in the tahrir registers till 1530, there was no statement regarding Sol-Kol (Canib-i Yesar) region. Gökbilgin gave detailed information with several examples according to the statement of Canib-i Yesar.



region<sup>76</sup> founded by Evrenos Bey with the aim to revive the newly established region.

Nevrekop and the surrounding regions were not taken over by the conquests<sup>77</sup> although there were some planned military expeditions and raids along the line of the conquests mentioned above. There is no clear information regarding the conquest of the Rhodope Mountains.<sup>78</sup> Today, there is still no clear explanation.<sup>79</sup> What is for certain is that the region was under the control of the Ottomans during the '70s or '80s in the 14<sup>th</sup> century considering the dates when the regions of Drama and Seres were conquered. As mentioned above, Evrenos Bey, a significant uc beyi during the foundation of the Ottoman Beylik which was close to Rhodopes, failed to take over the Rhodopes after the conquest of Seres, due to the challenging geographical features of the region. But, some of the old Ottoman Chronicles mentioned a military expedition toward the inner parts of the mountain which was then cancelled as a result of the geographical position of the region.

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<sup>76</sup> Halil İnalçık, *Kuruluş Dönemi Osmanlı Sultanları (1302-1481)* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi (İSAM), 2010), 97.

<sup>77</sup> For further information please read Radushev's article in which he explained that some of the historians, St.Zachariev and W.Detschev working on the topic of the Balkan history claimed that the Ottomans prepared devastating expeditions for the subjugation of the Rhodope Mountains. Moreover these devastating expeditions were made by the significant pashas of the Ottomans, such as Daud Pasha, Ibrahim Pasha and Cadit Ali Pasha. On the other hand, these claims asserted by the historians mentioned earlier do not seem to be persuasive due to the lack of supportive evidence; hence, early Balkan and Ottoman historian, S.Dimitrov pointed out, with the support of the archive materials, that there were no commanders with those names at the time.

<sup>78</sup>E. Radushev, "Das"belagerte" Gebirge," (The "besieged" Mountain) in *Bulgarian Historical Review*. Translated by Maciej Urbaniak. Vol.3, No.4 (2005), 1.

<sup>79</sup> Machiel Kiel, "Nevrekop," *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi* 33 (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2007), 54-55. He explained that there was no satisfactory explanation about the history of the Ottomans in Nevrekop, especially in the Bulgarian historiography which aimed to reveal the Ottoman history in the area. S.Dimitrov also stated that no Bulgarian historians carried out any independent and reliable academic research with the aim to clarify the issues of the Western Rhodopes. Comp. Radushev; Demographic and Ethnographic Processes in the Western Rhodopes from the 15th to the 18th century;

<sup>79</sup> Radushev, Evgeni. *The Pomaks Christianity and Islam in the Western Rhodope Mountains and the Valley of the Mesta River from the 15th c. to the 1730s Part I*. Sofia: St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library Oriental Department, 2008. Especially during the socialist regime in Bulgaria, there were no satisfactory studies or research about the western Rhodopes under the administration of the Ottoman Empire, or the conversion of the Pomaks. With the work of Radushev, The Pomaks, the Bulgarian historiography retrieved an objective insight into the Balkan history under the Ottoman Empire.

The Bulgarian historian, Str. Dimitrov, puts forward that the Ottomans besieged the territory from the west, the north as well as the south and conquered the region of the Rhodope Mountains. According to Str. Dimitrov, the region, from the western Thrace to Filibe, was completely taken over by the Ottomans following some small-scaled but bloody wars against the local Christian population. However, there are no sources to verify this argument. As much importance of the opinion of Dimitrov holds in the Bulgarian historiography, there is no clear consensus on how the Rhodopes fell under the hegemony of the Ottomans. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the following sections, although the Ottomans were not particularly interested in the territory of the Rhodopes, the early conversion process in this area has been a very remarkable issue. However, there are different opinions regarding the conversion of the Pomaks from Christianity to Islam such as whether by “*forced conversion*” or “*voluntarily conversion*”, in which no consensus has been achieved among the historians. Especially the Bulgarian historiography and the Turkish historiography, which were based on the Ottoman archives and the documents, put forward different theories regarding such issue.<sup>80</sup>

A critical question to raise here would be the question why the Ottomans tried to settle “*iskan policy*” in the region even though they did not conquer the region due to its mountainous features. A possible answer to the question would be the short

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<sup>80</sup>What needs to be emphasized here is the perspective of the Bulgarian historiography as the Bulgarian historiography began to differ especially after the Ottoman- Russian war between 1877 and 1878. The Bulgarians abandoning the rule of the Ottomans established their own national-state and they believed that the domination of the Ottoman Empire over the Balkan Peninsula was violent including the assimilation, forced conversion, etc. They wrote history in this manner, influenced by romantic nationalism, because they thought that the Ottoman rulers forced them to abandon their own culture and ethnics. This continued during the time of the communism in Bulgaria, especially in this period, the Pomaks were seen as the real Bulgarians by most Bulgarian historians. They said that even their native language called “*Pomakça*” was very similar to the Bulgarian language. These historians representing the romantic nationalism established the literature defending the forced conversion of the Pomaks from Christianity to the Islam by the Ottoman rulers and the army. However, such kind of approach changed after the disintegration of communism in Bulgaria. In particular, the contributions of some Bulgarian historians cannot be ignored, such as Maria Todorova and Evgeni Radushev.

distance between the region and Drama and de Seres. The Ottomans' iskan policy in the Balkans has been argued by different historiographies, such as the Bulgarian historiography. According to Dimitrov, one of the important names of the Bulgarian historiography, the Ottoman Empire began to take over the Çeç region, which is close to Nevrekop, our research area. In fact, Çeç, Dospat Mountains and Mesta River were virtually blocked which prevented the communication and access to the region from the outside world. However, it can be said that the effect of Islamic religion on the region acted as blockade rather than the blockade carried out by the army.<sup>81</sup> In addition, Dimitrov wrote that the Yörüks groups, the nomads, were placed in these regions strategically, in a planned manner, so that the groups in the region would successfully consolidate the Ottoman rule. Furthermore, these texts, which gained popularity in the 1970s, still constitute an important part in the Bulgarian historiography. They base their views particularly on the Bulgarian chronicles, which in fact are very problematic and must be carefully examined in order to be objective and find accurate answers to some of the questions about the Pomaks and the western Rhodopes region under the Ottoman rule.

At this point, we should mention the settlement policy, which is called *iskan policy*<sup>82</sup> of the Ottoman Empire<sup>83</sup>, in which a large scale of people abandoned their homeland and migrated from Anatolia to the Balkans, some of which were voluntary

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<sup>81</sup>E. Radushev, "Das"belagerte" Gebirge," (The "besieged" Mountain) in *Bulgarian Historical Review*. Translated by Maciej Urbaniak. Vol.3, No.4 (2005), 18.

<sup>82</sup>Yunus Koç, "Osmanlı'da Kent İskanı ve Demografisi (XV-XVIII.Yüzyıllar)," *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi*, Cilt 3, Sayı 6, (2005), 161-210. Koç mentioned that in detail, the history of the Ottoman cities and the historians who are experts on the subject and the fields of these historians are described in detail in the article.

<sup>83</sup> It should be stated that the settlement and demography of the cities in the early Ottoman period is more problematic than in other periods and has a weaker picture in terms of literature.

and some were forced migration by the engagement of military.<sup>84</sup> In order to facilitate the migration process, the Ottoman Empire did not collect tax from the immigrants for a certain period of time and also helped them to settle in the new region. Exile was used as a settlement and colonization method in the Ottoman Empire<sup>85</sup>, which then was rapidly preferred for further consolidation of the Ottoman conquests in the Balkans.<sup>86</sup> According to Barkan, it was not only the tribes from Anatolia who were settled in the newly conquered regions, but also the local population was distributed to the other villages and towns.<sup>87</sup>

During the settlement process in Nevrekop, we should highlight the importance of Yörüks from the nomad tribes, who played a major role in the consolidation of the Ottomans' conquests in the Balkans. The nomads came from Anatolia and settled in the region of Seres and Drama, where they stayed for a certain period of time during the year.<sup>88</sup> As a result of the short distance to our region of concern, the region of the Rhodope Mountains was affected by the influence of Ottomanization and the spread of Islam.<sup>89</sup> The consolidation of the Ottoman rule was solidified as a result of these two policies, the two important consequences of which were colonization and conversion. Colonization was the more physical dimension, especially thanks to the nomad groups who expanded throughout the Balkans, especially the newly

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<sup>84</sup> Ömer Lütfi Barkan, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Bir İskan ve Kolonizasyon Metodu Olarak Sürgünler," in Osmanlı Devleti'nin Sosyal ve Ekonomik Tarihi Tetkikler- Makaleler Cilt 1, eds. Hüseyin Özdeğer (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Rektörlük Yayınları, 2000) p.561.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid, 509.

<sup>86</sup> H.A.Gibbons was also surprised that the Ottomans proceeded to carry out their settlement and colonization methods during and after the conquests throughout the Balkan Peninsula.

<sup>87</sup> Ömer Lütfi Barkan, 562.

<sup>88</sup>E. Radushev, "Das"belagerte" Gebirge," (The "besieged" Mountain) in *Bulgarian Historical Review*. Translated by Maciej Urbaniak. Vol.3, No.4 (2005), 18.

<sup>89</sup> Machiel Kiel, *Osmanlı Dönemi Kentsel Gelişimi ve Mimari Anıtlar, Güney Bulgaristan: Rodop Dağları Bölgesi* (Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2000), p.27. Kiel mentioned about that Jirecek who lived between the years 1854 and 1918 mentioned that the search of Pomak traditions revealed that the strong Yörük groups living in the Rhodopes Mountains were effective in the conversion process of the local Christian population in changing their religious status from Christianity to Islam.

conquered areas by the Ottomans. The Ottoman rule expanding to the region of Nevrekop became more consolidated in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, however, following the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the administrative system was established including all units, when Nevrekop became a *kaza* and a *kadi* was appointed in 16<sup>th</sup> century. Additionally, the timar system grew firmer at that time. The review of the tahrir registers covering the Nevrekop region demonstrates that the number of timarli sipahis had increased. At this point, it is important to highlight how the Yörüks were grouped in the Balkans, in which they were classified as 5 main groups in the tahrir registers. The 5 main groups were Naldöken, Tanrıdağı (Karagöz), Selanik, Ofcabolu and Vize Yörüks.<sup>90</sup> These Yörüks surrounded the Balkans using the *crescent (hilal)* theory. They were effective in the Ottomanization process and the spread of Islam to the Rhodopes with the use of the tactic of hilal metaphor. If it were not for these two factors, there would have been no way for the Ottoman rule to be permanent in the region.

Even though the region was influenced by the spread of Islam, the population did not adopt heterodox form of Islam and its culture. On the contrary, Sunni Islam, considered as the official Islam, was considered to be the base of their religion. Sunni Islam was introduced in the region by imams and religious officials sent to the region by the state. At the beginning of 15<sup>th</sup> century, the people of Nevrekop, who went through the conversion process, had turned it into a significant city dominated by the Islamic religion over the years.<sup>91</sup> This is very interesting because the impact of the

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<sup>90</sup> Tayyib Gökbilgin, *Rumeli'de Yürükler, Tatarlar ve Evlad-ı Fatihan* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1957), p. Gökbilgin categorized Yörüks of Naldöken, which were Tatarpazarı, Filibe, Edirne, Kızılağaç. Yörüks of Tanrıdağı (Karagöz) played the most significant role in the colonization of the Balkans. These Yörüks were really effective at these routes; Drama-Yenice-Karasu. In addition to these groups, Vize Yörüks were effective at Dimetoka, Edirne and Çorlu regions. Finally, Yörüks of Selanik were really effective at Avrethisarı, Ustorumca, Demirhisar, and Filibe.

<sup>91</sup> Machiel Kiel, "Nevrekop," *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi* 33 (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2007), 54.

people on the region is highly influential, whereas why the local population did not apply the same religious practices as these people is one of the important questions historians have to ask regarding such issue.<sup>92</sup>

These nomadic people mentioned above were categorized into 3 groups by Fernand Braudel, famous French historian and the co-founder of the Annales School<sup>93</sup>, which were called normal transhumance<sup>94</sup>, inverse transhumance<sup>95</sup> and mixed transhumance.<sup>96</sup> Mixed transhumance is not the case in the Nevrekop region. However, it is possible that other two options can be applied for the situation in our region. I believe that the normal transhumance is better suited to the circumstances in Nevrekop, because, in normal transhumance, shepherds just move into the highlands due to the space specialties they provided. They made contacts with the local villages and the population, especially where there were markets, in which they could sell their products and wares. Sale of the products did not take place rapidly but it was rather slow because of the challenging geographical features, all of which lead to the

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<sup>92</sup>At this point, Ahmet Yaşar Ocak's books can help the readers comprehend the topic of Sunni Islam and heterodox type of Islam which was defined as more marginal than the Sunni Islam. Ocak categorized the Islam according to their specialties, such as Sunni Islam, Mystical Islam, etc. Even though, the Yörüks can be defined as more marginal, more heterodox than the state Islam, which is Sunni Islam, the Pomaks did not adopt their religious status or practices. For further information about the types of the Islam, please look at these books: Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Osmanlı Sufiliğine Bakışlar, Makaleler-İncelemeler* (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2011); Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Türkler, Türkiye ve İslam* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1999); Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Tasavvuf ve Sufiler: Kaynaklar, Doktrin, Ayin ve Erkan, Tarikatlar, Edebiyat, Mimari, Güzel Sanatlar, Modernizm* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2005).

<sup>93</sup>Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (California: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>94</sup>Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. He explained this type of nomads in details. In this type of transhumance, sheep farmers generally came from the plains, these people lived plain but when the summer began which is unfavorable season for them, they left the region. Additionally, the summer season did not suitable for the stock-raising. So, the mountainous areas could give more suitable places for them. (86. sayfa)

<sup>95</sup>Inverse transhumance is more different from the normal transhumance. The flocks and the shepherds came from the mountainous areas for some of the reasons. Plains were the center of the market for them. When the market was established in the lowlands, they left the region which they live in. Also, these people were very rush when they started to their roads to the lowlands. Braudel gave an example from Spain for the lightening up the situation. In the winter season, people and their cattle started to their migration from cold mountainous areas to the lowlands, such as to Navarre. (86)

<sup>96</sup>In mixed transhumance, not only the summer but also the winter combined and this type of transhumance still seen as the Corsican Chataigneraie. (87)

better recognition of Islam by the local population of Nevrekop, who gradually grew fonder of the religion.

Besides the Western sources, old Ottoman sources mentioned those who migrated from Anatolia to the Balkans along with their way of movement and routes. According to Neşri, Aşıkpaşazade, and Oruc Bey, under the reign of Sultan Murad I, the nomad population started to move to Saruhan which is close to Manisa to the Balkan Peninsula.<sup>97</sup> Yörüks living in Saruhan were moved to the Seres region. Exile was used frequently when individuals refused to abide by the basic Ottoman state system.<sup>98</sup>

In addition, Braudel underlined that in addition to tax problems, it can also be said that the Ottomans had various reasons to place Yörüks in the Balkans. In the east part of the Balkan Peninsula, the Ottomans started to place the nomad colonies, however, considering the west part of the peninsula, the same situation was not applicable. With establishment of these nomadic types of the colonies, the Ottoman Empire wanted to persuade Yörüks to adopt sedentary life and to settle in the Balkan Peninsula with Muslim people. The Ottomans thought that the borders could be protected with the help of these people. In addition, Yörüks who did animal husbandry, sometimes damaged and harmed the local villagers in Anatolia, which was the main reason why they were sent to the borders in the Balkan Peninsula in the first place.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, it would be more accurate to say that Yörüks were not the

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<sup>97</sup>Omer Lütfi Barkan, 566.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid, 568.

<sup>99</sup> Halil Inalcik, "Türkler ve Balkanlar," *Balkan Türkoloji Araştırmaları Merkezi*, Prizren, (2005), 20-44.

most powerful groups in the Balkans, but they were the most efficient in the protection of the borders and the introduction of Islam to the local Christians.<sup>100</sup>

We should also keep in mind the importance of the *istimalet* (tolerance and protection policy) policy as well as the iskan policy during the Ottoman conquests in the Balkans.<sup>101</sup> This policy was expressed in the Qur'an as "Te'lif Al-kulub".

The Ottomans adopted a conciliatory *istimalet* policy, not only for the peasant population in the Balkans<sup>102</sup>, but also for churches, indigenous military classes and the great land-owner feudalists.<sup>103</sup> At this point, the case of Kaloyan can be given as a remarkable example. Kaloyan (Beautiful Ivan) is a name which is commonly known to be given to the members of the Nobel Byzantine families or to high-ranking individuals in the Empire. In order to benefit from this situation, the Ottoman Empire gave this name to the region, which I think, the Ottomans used Kaloyan as a *haraçgüzar* in the region. Even after his death, the name was still effective and remained the same in the region, which is a case of example constituting an important part of the state's practice of expropriation (*istimalet*).

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<sup>100</sup>Braudel, p.100. Please look at the article: Vieran Kursar, Being an Ottoman Vlach: Identity (les) Role and Status in Western Parts of the Ottoman Balkans (15th-18th Centuries), *OTAM*, 34/Güz (2013), p.118. He mentioned that Yörüks were used by the Ottoman administration as auxiliary troops and also used as colonizing agents in the newly conquered areas in the Balkans.

<sup>101</sup> Mücteba İlgürel "İstimalet," *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi 23* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2001), 362. İstimalet policy possess main elements such as being good to the people in the conquered places, protecting them, ensuring the safety of life and property against foreign enemies, freedom in religious matters, and the convenience of tax. The most remarkable effects of the *istimalet* policy appeared in Thrace and Balkan conquests. The Ottomans continued their policy of *istimalet* not only during conquests but also after the establishment of a new administrative structure.

<sup>102</sup> As explained in detail by Mücteba İlgürel at the İstimalet policy section, the Ottomans adopted *istimalet* policy from Selcuks and started to practice it during the establishment process in order to win over the local people, which lead to positive results as seen in the example of winning an Akıncı family who played an important role in the history of Ottoman military, such as the Mihaloğulları.

<sup>103</sup> Halil Inalcik, "Türkler ve Balkanlar," *Balkan Türkoloji Araştırmaları Merkezi*, Prizren, (2005),



As I have mentioned before, the Icmal defter, which was made in 1445 and used as a primary source, had a section for Nahiyet-i Kaloyan and Nevrekop.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, it is possible to find a section called “Voynugan-i Vilayet-i Kaloyan” in the same Icmal defter,<sup>105</sup> where Voynuks<sup>106</sup> had important roles in the Ottomanization process.<sup>107</sup>

The Ottoman state did not discriminate the non-Muslim population in the newly conquered areas, except for the cizye tax they paid. The Ottoman Empire preferred to let the local population preserve their traditions and ways of life in the region, which was one of the major factors contributing to the extension of the Ottoman sovereignty, particularly in the Balkan Peninsula. The fact that the practice of istimalet was carried out not only during the conquests but also after the conquest increased the faith of the non-Muslim population in the Ottoman rule during the establishment of a new administrative structure. For this reason, the local people in

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<sup>104</sup> Halil İnalçık, Evgeni Radushev, Uğur Altuğ, *1445 Tarihli Paşa Livası İcmal Defteri* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2013), 77. In that area Yahşi Beg was zaim. (veled-i Hamza Beg) In addition to this, Yahşi Beg was one of the most important figures in the conquest of the Balkan Peninsula and he was one of the Akinci begs. He continued to follow the orders of the Ottomans and helped the state to consolidate the Ottomanization process in the region. When we look at the region, katib noted that cebelu 9, çadır 1 and keçim 1.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid, 79.

<sup>106</sup>Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri, article of Voynuk, p.595. It is a phrase used to refer to at the time of the expedition, they were the servants of the horses of the statesmen. In generally, they were composed of Christians. According to Yavuz Ercan, the word of Voynuk means soldier and is a Slavic Word and is pronounced as Voynik in Bulgarian. Voynukluk was generally found in Bulgaria, so the Word Voynuk referred to Bulgaria when we searched the archives. For further information about the Voynuk system please read this book. Yavuz Ercan, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Bulgarlar ve Voynuklar* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1989), 1. In addition, Voynuks were divided into two parts which were *amme* and *hassa*. Those who served in military expeditions were named as *amme*, the others who served at İstabl-ı Amire were named as Voynuks of *hassa*. Moreover, according to Tevkii Abdurrahman Paşa Kanunnamesi (Milli Tetebbu’lar Mecmuası, Cilt: 1, p.325) Voynuk organization was established in Bosnia during the reign of Rumeli beylerbeyi Timurtaş Paşa. The organization of Voynuk was very significant for the Ottomans. Although, in 1691, Voynuk organization was demolished with a ferman, it was restructured in 1693. Later on, it maintained its existence with ups and downs until 1878. Additionally, according to Niğbolu Kanunnamesi in 1516, Voynuks were held exempted from haraç, ispençe, resm-i kovan, resm-i hınzır, etc. For further information, Ayşe Kayapınar “Voynuk” TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi 43 (İstanbul:Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı,2013),

<sup>107</sup> There were several Voynuks around the area of our research. For instance, Voynuk Petko, veled-i Milo (at Karye-I Koçane) as well as Voynuk Miloş, yamak birederan-I mezkur Bogoslav,Rayko. In addition, there were several more in Nevrekop such as Voynuk Konstandin, Voynuk Miho Honatos, Voynuk İstoyko and Voynuk Yorgi.

the newly conquered territories were loyal and stood by the Ottomans' side in the event of external invasions and conflicts, in which the influence of the istimalet policy cannot be overlooked.

In the region of concern, the Ottoman Empire proceeded with the same strategy in the same way. Accordingly, the most significant consequence of the policy was the fact that, with no doubt, it led to the ihtidas, which was stated in the primary source tahrir registers as well as the icmal and mufassal types.

The first data about the initiation of the ihtidas could be traced back to the Paşa Livasi İcmal book dated 1445.<sup>108</sup> This tahrir register is the first of the three primary sources utilized for this thesis, which was explained in detail in the introduction part of the thesis. Although there was no Muslim population in Nevrekop included in this tahrir register, the relevant data can be found in other mufassal type of tahrir registers made in 1464 or 1465. There were 19 or 20 years between these two tahrir registers. However, within approximately 19 or 20 years, the conversion process had begun. It can be observed that the name of fathers of those who newly converted was from the Slavic language, whereas they were personally called with Islamic names like Abdullah. During the review of the tahrir registers, I tried to find data regarding the conversion process in Nevrekop. The second tahrir register related to Nevrekop showed a third register which was made in 1478, which demonstrated that the number of Muslims in the region had increased in about approximately 10 years as stated in the part of Hane-i Müslim. The number of Muslims in the region had increased in about approximately 10 years with look at the part of Hane-i Müslim.

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<sup>108</sup> Halil İnalçık, Evgeni Radushev, Uğur Altuğ, *1445 Tarihli Paşa Livası İcmal Defteri* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2013).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

# **CONVERSION TO ISLAM IN THE WESTERN RHODOPE MOUNTAINS**

### **3.1. Colonization and Conversion**

The elucidation of the Ottoman conquests in the Balkans will provide readers with better insight into our research region, Nevrekop. In this chapter, I would like to introduce the term ``*the spread of Islam*`` along with its grounds such as colonization and conversion. The spread of Islam takes place two-dimensionally, which can be separated as demographic and religious progression. We are going to evaluate the spread of the religion in Nevrekop and its vicinity. These two dimensions complemented one other in the process of the expansion of the new religion throughout the Christian population who lived under the Ottoman rule. The term colonization refers to the physical presence of the Ottoman administrative units in

the region. In general, the presence of the Yörüks in the mountain region paved the way for the recognition of Islam by the Christian population. I have already highlighted that who the Yörüks were and how they ended up in the Balkans.

Following the colonization process, the conversion to Islam in due course began and gradually expanded. The current documents from the Ottoman archives<sup>109</sup> demonstrate that there was a conversion from Christianity to Islam in the region of Nevrekop and its vicinity. However, what happened was not an active conversion, but rather a gradual one, especially in the kaza of Nevrekop and its karyes.<sup>110</sup>

At this point, what comes to the mind is the question how the Islam came into play in the region and who spreaded it. Such expansion did not only take place in the region of concern, but it was also apparent in the region of Deliorman, Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The regions gained recognition as Islamic territories as a result of the influence of the nomadic outsiders. However, the researches have not taken much interest in the Rhodope Mountains as they did in Bosnia, Albania, etc.<sup>111</sup>

It is possible that there were also other factors which were effective in the conversion of the local population from Christianity to Islam besides the colonization. In the beginning of the 15th century, the region began to be recognized as an Islamic area as a result of the outsiders who came to settle therein. The nomadic muslim tribes acted as a tool in the spread of Islam by giving the local Christians insight into various aspects such as what kind of a religion it is, what it permits or prohibits, who the followers worship and so on, which was how the conversion to Islam initially began. The documents demonstrate that there were not a great amount of

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<sup>109</sup> For my thesis research, I used three primary sources such as MAD 525, TD3 and TD7, which have been already mentioned in the introduction part of the thesis.

<sup>110</sup> Karye means village. All three primary sources I used for the research consisted of multiple karyes. For example, MAD 525, "1445 tarihli Paşa Livası İcmal Defteri" consisted of 24 karyes.

<sup>111</sup> H.T. Norris, *Islam in the Balkans: Religion and Society between Europe and the Arab World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 43.

Muslimsettlers in the region at this point. As will be mentioned below, the first tahrir register (MAD 525) covering the research area did not contain any data regarding the conversion process among the local Christian population. However, there is another tahrir register which was recorded under the Ottoman rule.

### 3.2. Early Tahrir Defters in Western Rhodope Region

For the very reason, I will be using MAD 525<sup>112</sup>(1445-Paşa Livası İcmal Defteri), which is the *tahrir register (defter)*<sup>113</sup> that included these important Ottoman *kazas in the Balkans such as “Timurhisarı, Kaloyan, Nevrekob, Köprülü, İstefenya and Boğdanos “*. As far as we know, the MAD 525 was the second tahrir register for the region. We estimate that the first tahrir register for Nevrekop was compiled after the conquest of Selanik by the Ottoman army in 1430.

Tahrir registers held great importance and they were carried out by the *emin*<sup>114</sup>, who carefully examined the regions and compiled all the relevant data on taxable sources for the Ottoman administration system. Our research area was referred to as Nahiyet-

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<sup>112</sup> It is located in “Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşiv Dairesi Başkanlığı” (Ottoman Archives of the Prime Ministry) at Maliyeden Müdevver Defter.

<sup>113</sup> Halil İnalçık, a famous Ottoman historian in Turkey, published the first defter which was the oldest one and was related to Albania, dated 835 A.H. in 1431-1432. It is “Arnavid register” and holds great importance for the socio-economic history of the Ottoman Empire. Halil İnalçık, *The Ottoman Methods of Conquest*,

<sup>114</sup> Firstly, an *emin* would be appointed by the Ottoman administration for the task. Then, the *emin* and his *katib* (clerk), someone who worked for *emin* and drew up the all the records in the tahrir register, would head to the relevant territory for the defter, which then they would gather up all the taxational data such as vineyards, orchards, cultivation sites, etc. The local *kadi*, who was responsible for the law, would give his support and consent during all these processes. Before the evaluation of a particular region, he would collect all the documents from the *timar*-holders such as *berats* and *suret-I defters*, *temessüks* and *mahsulat defteri*. After that, the *emin* would inspect each of *karyes* to compare and contrast the current data with the former records. All the *timar*-holders had to bring all adult men to the presence of the *emin* for recording their names in the defter, which was then handed over to the Ottoman Sultan by the *emin*. Then, Sultan would start his inquiry, after which the registers would be finally confirmed. For further information about the tahrir registers and its specialities by *emins*, please read the article of “Ottoman Methods of Conques” by Halil İnalçık.

i Kaloyan ve Nevrekob in MAD 525. When we look at the nahiye<sup>115</sup>, we encounter a person called Zaimiş Yahşi Beg<sup>116</sup>, who was the son of Hamza Beg. To ensure consolidation of the Ottoman rule in the region, he was entrusted with the task by the Sultan. Furthermore, this nahiye had 9 cebelu, 1 cadır and kecim 1.

Der Nahiyet-i Nevrekob had one nefs, which was Nevrekop, our research area, with additional 23 subdistricts.<sup>117</sup> The review of the synoptic part in the defter revealed that there were no Muslim hanes in our region and only the number of Christian hanes were displayed such as mücerred and bive.<sup>118</sup> Even though there were no Muslims in the region, the Ottoman authorities and the nomadic tribes, which were mostly Yörüks, were already settled and introduced the Ottoman presence and the religion of Islam. The efforts and influence of the new settlers, mostly Yörüks, had a significant effect on the local Christian population in the introduction of Islam.

In the conversion process, *ihtida*, the importance of direct contact and communication with Christians was undeniable. The local people anticipated that the former administration system was no longer valid and the local political power was handed over onto the Ottomans from then onwards, which was not an Orthodox but a

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<sup>115</sup> Nahiye means an administrative unit of the Ottomans, which refers to small or large geographical districts. Nahiye is a sub-unit of a kaza or a sancak, which are other significant administrative units. As a military unit, we saw that each nahiye was controlled by a timarli sipahi called serasker. Please see TDV, Nahiye article.

<sup>116</sup>Yahşi Beg was a zaim in the Ottoman administration system. Zeamet was the appellative given to a land in the timar system during the Ottoman Empire that had a tax revenue with an annual value between 20 000 and 100,000 akçes. The person who managed the zeamet was called zaim, who was veled-i Hamza, Zaimiş Yahşi Beg in our case. Please see TDV Zeamet maddesi.

<sup>117</sup> According to the MAD 525 Paşa Livası İcmal Defter, these karyes were Karye-i Singirto, Karye-i Petralit, Karye-i Musomişte, Karye-i Sadova, Karye-i Murtence, Karye-i Kopriyane, Karye-i Ustane, Karye-i Lozne, Karye-i Balance, Karye-i Dirane and Karye-i Kuruşeva. Moreover, there were other karyes not mentioned in the real defter such as Karye-i Dabnice, Karye-i Vezmi, Karye-i Koçane, Karye-i Jirova, Karye-i Ponikova, Karye-i Sırbce, Karye-i Platene, Karye-i İslavimir, Karye-i Golatec, Karye-i Dolane, Karye-i Parutino and Karye-i Franko which was named as Karye-i Firgovo in the TD3 AND TD7 tahrir registers.

<sup>118</sup> Hane represents married men, mücerred represents single men, and bive represents widowers. However, in the sixteenth century, there were no more widowers in the given defter.

Muslim dynasty. The Ottoman authorities did not have direct communication with these people, however, the Yörüks did.

Additionally, the Paşa Livası İcmal register mentioned “Der-Yed-i Godoy Oros Keşişleri”.<sup>119</sup> In fact, these keşişs (monks) were located in three different parts of the region such as Der Vilayet-i Nevrekob<sup>120</sup>, Der Vilayet-i Boğdanos<sup>121</sup> and also Der Vilayet-i Gümülcine<sup>122</sup>. They were free to provide service and serve the local Christian population. Nevertheless, the records reveal that there were no effective religious Christian community or services in the region due to the challenging geographical features of the mountainous area, which indicates that the services of Monks were neither efficient nor significant.

As mentioned above, although MAD 525 included hints regarding the presence of the conversion process in the region, there was no solid data on conversion. However, the mufassal register dated 1464 or 1465 reveals a great amount of information and data about the ihtida. First of all, this thesis is based on the data in the tahrir register called Mufassal register, which was compiled in the reign of Mehmed II, between 1464 and 1465, 19 or 20 years after MAD 525. In the Ottoman Empire, tahrir registers were generally carried out every 30 or 40 years unless there

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<sup>119</sup> “Kim, Mehumeyn Bayezid Hündgar’dan ve Sultanumuz’dan hükümleri vardır kim ba haracın virmeyeler ve her kande kim dilerler is yürüyeler”, this sentence means that, as far as I see, these keşişs (monks) had been known since the reign of Bayezid I and the Ottoman administration exempted them from taxation. MAD 525, P.78.

<sup>120</sup> In the region of Der Vilayet-i Nevrekob, there were 4 keşişs; Keşiş Konstandin, Keşiş Yorgi, Keşiş Konstandin and Keşiş Yorgi. They also had several manservants called nefer-i hizmetkaran mentioned in the tahrir register.

<sup>121</sup> Keşiş Kaloyan, Keşiş Dimitri and their manservants were mentioned in the defter.

<sup>122</sup> Keşiş Dimitri and his manservant were also included in the defter’s records.

were any specific reasons or conquests.<sup>123</sup> This Mufassal register consisted of 490 pages, but we did not have all of the pages as some of them were missing.<sup>124</sup>

The register was compiled in 1464 or 1465 and included the Sol-Kol kazas of the Ottoman Empire, which were Timurhisarı, Nevrekop, Siroz (Serres), Zihne and also Drama. The mufassal register not only covered the mountainous parts of the Rhodopes but also covered the area on the skirts. For the thesis, I went through 65 villages located in the kaza of Nevrekop. A great number of details could be obtained from the review of the mufassal defter dated 1464 or 1465 and it was apparent that the number of villages had increased after 1445 due to various reasons due to the consolidation of the Ottoman rule in the region. In this regard, it is important to analyze and compare the two tahrir registers. The mufassal tahrir register dated 1464 or 1465 demonstrates the influence of the Ottoman administration on the Christian people in the region. However, in the Bulgarian historiography, there is a great amount of falsification and misinformation about the Ottoman administration in the Pomak regions, as can be seen in the articles of Gandev on this topic.<sup>125</sup> In the table below, these villages were compared before and after the Ottomans came into power in the region.

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<sup>123</sup> Erhan Afyoncu, “Osmanlı’da Tahrir ve Arşivcilik”, *Osmanlı Teşkilatı*, Ed. Güler Eren, (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 1999), 312.

<sup>124</sup> Harun Yeni, “Demography and Settlement in Paşa Sancağı Sol-Kol Region According to Muhasebe-i Vilayet-i Rumeli Defteri Dated 1530” (Unpublished Master’s Thesis, Ankara: İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, 2006).

<sup>125</sup> Gandev, the famous Bulgarian historian, argues that numerous Bulgarian villages were diminished by the Ottomans following the Ottoman conquests in the Balkans. However, it is apparent that Gandev is wrong as we see an increased number of villages in the region, which was examined in this thesis. The other tahrir registers reveal that there were a lot of new villages administrated and recorded by the katib. For instance, the first register for Nevrekop only mentions 23 villages in the kaza of Nevrekop, whereas, the one dated 1464 or 1465 reveal new villages after the Ottomans came into power, such as, Lıka, Aşağı Taşova and Rakişteni, etc. Also, in his book, Anton Minkov mentions that most Bulgarian historians perceived the Ottoman sovereignty in the Balkans as a mostly tragic period, which led to religious discrimination among the local Bulgarian population, such as the gradual conversion of the Pomaks between 15th century to the 18th century, and assimilation imposed upon the Pomaks. Until recent Balkan historiography, the Pomaks had been considered to be assimilated forcefully by the Ottoman army and authorities and people thought that the Pomaks lost their own Bulgarian identity as a result of the Ottoman conquests and expansion. All this information is considered to be incorrect because these statements are not based on any accurate or real data.



**Table 1. The Ottomanization in the Nevrekop Region**

<b>MAD 525</b>	<b>TD 3</b>	<b>TD 7</b>
Nevrekop (Kaza)	Nevrekop (Kaza)	Nevrekop (Kaza)
Singirto	Singirto	Singirto
Petralit	Petralit	Petralit
Musomište	Musomište	Musomište
Sadova	Sadova	Sadova
Murtençe	Murtençe	Murtençe
Kopriyane	-	-
Ostane	Ostane	-
Lozne	-	-
Balance	-	-
Dirane	-	-
Kuruşeva	-	-
Dabnice	-	Dubnice
Vezmi	Vezmi	Vezmi
Koçane	Koçane	Koçane-Virjova
Jirova	-	-
Ponikova	-	-
Sırbce	-	-
Platene	Platene	Platane
İslavimir	-	-
Golatec	-	-
Dolyane	Dolyane	Dolyane

Table 1, ( Cont'd)

Barutine	Barutine	-
Franko	Franko	-
-	Brezniçe	Brezniçe
-	Ribne ma Gostun	-
-	Dobrunište	Dobrunište
-	İskrepedna	İskrepedna
-	Gırlani	-
-	Besniçe	-
-	Korniçe	Korniçe
-	Vilkosele	Vilkosele
-	Lozniçe	Lozniçe
-	Koprileni	Koprileni
-	Debrane	Debrane
-	Sadoviçe	Sadoviçe ve Firgovo
-	Teblani	Teblani
-	Kruşeva	Kruşeva
-	Ablaniçe	Ablaniçe
-	İslaştani	İslaştani
-	Tihovište	Tihovište
-	Libahova	Libahova
-	Taşova	-
-	Gudeşova	Gudeşova
-	Gaytaniye	Gaytaniye

Table 1, ( Cont'd )

-	Aşağı Taşova	Aşağı Taşova
-	Lıka	-
-	Rakişteni	Rakişteni
-	Kalenos-Kremen ve Obidin	Kremen ma Obidin
-	Hotoğosta	Hotoğosta
-	Oraşıçe	Oraşıçe
-	Palaçka	-
-	Baniçe	-
-	Dubnitsa	-
-	Elise	Elise(Lise)
-	Lesniçe	-
-	-	Gorne Filib
-	-	Dorne Filib
-	-	Gostun
-	-	Ribne
-	-	İstane
-	-	Çeç
-	-	Direnova
-	-	Osikova
-	-	Girblane

As demonstrated above, it is easy to see the development of the region. It should also be underlined that the mufassal tahrir registers, which were dated 1464 or 1465 and

1478, contain accurate data to compare and contrast the region before and after the Ottoman administration came into power.

The synoptic parts are especially very significant in the analysis of the socio-economic characteristics of the region compared to the other regions under the Ottoman rule. On the contrary, the İcmal register dated 1445, Paşa Livası register, only contained a summary of the population and the percentage of the religions. The second tahrir register (1464 or 1465), the primary source for this thesis, reveals significant insight into how the region went through ottomanization during the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in the region of the Western Rhodopes, specifically in Nevrekop, where ottomanization took place not only with the efforts of the Ottoman authorities but also the new settlers in the region. Thanks to them, the local Christian population learned about this new empire that would govern the area and what kind of religion Islam was.

Accordingly, it should be appropriate to demonstrate the percentage of new Muslims and the distribution in the villages. In the below part, you can see the table I made which represented the new Muslims in different districts.

**Table 2. The Mufassal Register (1464/1645) of Nevrekop Region and Muslim Percentage in Villages**

<b>VİLLAGE NAMES</b>	<b># of Christian <i>hanes</i></b>	<b># of Müslim <i>hanes</i><sup>126</sup></b>	<b># of Christian <i>mücerreds</i></b>	<b># of Christian <i>bives</i></b>
<b>NEVREKOB</b>	215	12	50	23
<b>RAKİŞTENİ</b>	60	1	17	6
<b>LİBAHOVA</b>	80	4	12	7
<b>İSLAŞTENİ</b>	51	1	10	1
<b>SİNGİRTO</b>	125	8	15	17
<b>SADOVA</b>	93	6	12	6
<b>MURTENİÇE</b>	22	2	4	1
<b>MUSOMİŞTE</b>	81	2	20	10
<b>VİLKOSELE</b>	65	1	10	5
<b>OSTANE</b>	38	1	4	6
<b>DUBNİTSA</b>	31	2	6	2
<b>GIRMLENİ</b>	50	1	8	2
<b>HOTOĞOŞTA</b>	32	1	5	5
<b>BANİÇE</b>	18	1	3	2
<b>SADOVİÇE</b>	41	1	8	2

As seen in the table, there was Muslim population in the kaza of Nevrekop and 14 karyes, whereas the other karyes displayed above did not have any Muslims. I will

<sup>126</sup> According to Bulliet, these people were categorized as innovators, which will be explained further in chapter four. Bulliet argues that the conversion to Islam included 5 phases such as innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards.

firstly evaluate Nevrekob, which belonged in the Sol-Kol. In MAD 525, there were no Muslims according to the defter, however, this situation changed 19 or 20 years after with TD3. All the villages herein were frequently visited by the nomad groups, which was how people started to adopt Islam. At this point, the transhumance routes need to be identified. According to the book of Tayyib Gökbişin, Paşa Livası, the regions of Yenice-Karasu, Drama and Timurhisarı<sup>127</sup> were some of the popular centers for nomads.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, during the use of the transhumance routes, the new religion began to gain recognition from the local Christian population. In particular, these transhumance routes were frequently mentioned and underlined in the mufassal register of 1464/1465.

The conversion process in the Western Rhodopes highly differed from the significant Ottoman centers like Sofia or Filibe in the Balkans. For example, the city of Sofia was on the route of Via Militaris, which was frequently used by the Ottoman army, however, the relations with the local people and influence of Islam did not exhibit a significant effect in the region of Rhodopes or Bosnia. On the contrary, researchers and historians do not have any piece of significant information about why Islam was adopted in these locations in different ways and different rates. The rate of conversion from Christianity to Islam was not very high in Filibe or Sofia, which was because, in my opinion, there were different conditions in these different cities.

The impact of the Yörük groups on the conversion process among the local Christian population could be evaluated by the names adopted by new Muslims. For instance,

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<sup>127</sup> Tayyib Gökbişin, *XV. Ve XVI. Asırlarda Edirne ve Paşa Livası, Vakıflar- Mülkler- Mukataalar* (İstanbul: İşaret Yayınları, 2007)

<sup>128</sup> The calculation of the Yürüks using these transhumance routes in Yenice-Karasu, Drama and Timurhisarı shows that there were 74 ocaks and approximately 25 people, which equalled to 1850 and a total of 11100 people.

the records in TD3 show that there were 12 Muslims in the kaza of Nevrekob<sup>129</sup>, who were given names such as Turhan, Karaca, Balaban, Saruhan, İlyas and İsmail, etc. It can be predicted that most of them were the Yörüks names, such as Saruhan, Balaban, Karaca, etc. There were also several examples in the other villages such as the village of Libahova<sup>130</sup>, where new Muslims were named Karaca, Atmaca and Bayezid. In the village of Sadova<sup>131</sup>, the frequently preferred names were Doğan, Hızır, Ahmed and İsmail, which were mostly inherited from the Yörüks as in the other villages and Nevrekob. I believe this is evidence that the local people were influenced by the Yörüks, so they converted from Christianity to Islam adopting Yörük names as well as names with Islamic origin.<sup>132</sup>

**Table 3. The Mufassal Register (1478/79) of Nevrekop Region and Muslim Percentage in Villages**

<b>VILLAGE NAMES</b>	<b># of Christian hanes</b>	<b># of Müslim Hanes</b>	<b># of Christian mücerreds</b>	<b># of Christian bives</b>
Nevrekop (Kaza)	405	21	-	34
Hotoğuşta	44	1	2	7
Rakişteni	158	3	4	6

<sup>129</sup>TD3, p.124.

<sup>130</sup>TD3, p.83.

<sup>131</sup>TD3, p.138.

<sup>132</sup> The other names were also influenced by the Yörüks. For example, in the village of Rakişteni (TD3, p.78.) a new Muslim name Karagöz was adopted, which was a direct Yörüks effect. Additionally, the name Balaban was seen in the village of İslaşteni (TD3, p.79). In the village of Baniçe (TD3, p.129), the name Bazarlu was recorded by the katib. In the village of Singirto (TD3, p.133), the names Yusuf, Süleyman, Karagöz and Hızır were recorded. In the village of Murteniçe (TD3, p.140) the names Süleyman and Balaban were encountered. Also, another example in the village of Ostane (TD3, p.143) was the name İbrahim, an Islamic name.

Table 3, (Cont'd)

Libahova	108	11	6	8
İslaştıni	100	2	2	1
Ablaniçe	100	3	25	12
Kruşeva	29	1	-	3
İskrepedna	60	1	3	1
Petralid	63	4	-	2
Sadoviçe ve Firgovo	104	1	24	7
Koçane- Virjovo	182	1	-	3
Vilkosele	96	5	2	9
Lozniçe	101	3	-	8
Musomişte	158	5	-	12
Şigrito	201	23	34	18
Koprileni	210	14	-	14
Sadova	139	21	30	11
Çeç	2	53	18	3
Murteniçe	48	12	19	6
Oraşiçe	18	1	-	3
Koprileni	210	14	-	14

When I examined these tables, there were increasements of Muslim and non-Muslim population in the kaza of Nevrekop, almost folded doubled. For instance, in 1464/5, there were 12 Muslims, however, 1478/9, there were 21 Muslims.



## CHAPTER 4

### AGRICULTURE AND PRODUCTION IN WESTERN RHODOPE MOUNTAINS

Today, the area where the *kaza* of Nevrokop was located exceeds far beyond the boundaries of Gotse Delchev<sup>133</sup> municipality in Bulgaria – where nearly half of the settlements in the former Ottoman *kaza* are now located in the Greek territory. Beyond the borders of today's Bulgaria lies the southern part of the Chech<sup>134</sup> area, nearly covering the entire Mesta river gorge. The villages in the region are located on the left bank of the river. To the west, Chech is confined by the Dospat River, to the east-northeast the *kazas* of Ahi Çelebi and Sultan Yeri are divided by the Krushova Mountain in the Central Rhodopes, and in the south it extends up to the slopes around the town of Xanthi. By the end of the nineteenth century, Chech had been divided into two parts according to the administrative centers it was dependent on - Nevrokop Chech and Drama Chech. Today, the area is still divided into two parts – the northern part belonging to Bulgaria (Bulgarian Chech) and the southern part – to Greece (Greek Chech).

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<sup>133</sup> Today Gotse Delchev municipality is located in Blagoevgrad.

<sup>134</sup> Chech area was different from the other regions in the Rhodope Mountains region. The mufassal defter of 1478/1479 reveals that there were only 2 non-Muslim people and 53 Muslim people at Chech in these years. The region was significant due to the high percentage of Muslims. For more detailed information about Chech please look at TD 7, p. 60.

This area has a great significance for the Ottoman presence in the Western Rhodopes. The researchers particularly emphasize that Chech is a symbolic region for the mass conversion of the local Christian population to Islam. As for the name “Chech”, there are many speculations, with even some people linking it to the Caucasian Chechens. The Ottoman sources shed enough light on the issue as a village bearing the same name was enlisted in the Ottoman register of 1478-1479, which belonged to the so called Drama Chech and appeared to be somewhere around the village of Radibosh<sup>135</sup> today (the name is no longer mentioned in the later accounts locality under the same name).

The Western Rhodope Mountains under Ottoman rule demonstrate an astonishing conservatism in its economic development. The mountainous features and the distance of the region to the major trade centers were discouraging for the development of agriculture and stock-breeding; which lead to limited development in the traditional activities of the population of this region. The only novelty in the agriculture production nomenclature was the “American cultures” – corn, beans, potatoes etc., but it is difficult to know their shares and distribution in the economy since the Ottomans did not include them in the tax registers for a long time.

The two detailed registers<sup>136</sup> used here are among the earliest Ottoman documents of this type. They are the only sources from which we can obtain information about the economic conditions of our region a hundred years after the Ottoman conquest. The taxable agricultural products demonstrate that cereals top the list of the production nomenclature in this mountainous area, and their assessment makes up the foundation of the tithe (öşür) collection and yields greatest fiscal revenue.

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<sup>135</sup> Radibosh is located in South-Western Rhodope Mountains.

<sup>136</sup> These are 1464/1465 and 1478/1479 mufassal type tahrir registers which have been mentioned in the third chapter of this thesis.

In today's Gotse Delchev region, cereals are cultivated in the low lands along the Mesta River<sup>137</sup> bed –where the climate is most favorable with a suitable terrain. However, wheat was cultivated in all settlements of the Ottoman *kaza* of Nevrekop located in the middle and high mountain belts. Today, these areas are not developed in terms of agriculture, where forests occupy nearly all of the territory. The village of Ribnovo is a good example to this situation, which is a typical mountain village on the western slopes of the Rhodopes, located in the pine belt high above the Nevrekop valley. We know that up to the communist collectivization in the 1950s, local people had cultivated plots on the surrounding slopes and mountain ridges, which were shaped in the past by felling the forest. The forestation from the second half of the twentieth century wiped off the suitability for agricultural activities here, which has resulted in the locals to rent arable lands during the agricultural season in other remote places in the country.

In order to obtain an approximate idea of cereal production in the Western Rhodopes during the Ottoman period, I have prepared a tabular form including the kind of crops and the tithing required for production in some villages of the high mountain belt (600 – 800 m altitude) and compared them with the yields of settlements from the Nevrekop valley (500 m altitude). Here, it must be borne in mind that the low yield in the mountain is resulted not only from the harsher climate, but also from the limited plots of land and the smaller amount of the population engaged in agriculture.

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<sup>137</sup> It should be highlighted that the villages which were located in the near of Mesta River were written *Pomesti* at the tahrir defters.

**Table 4. The Villages in the Mountainous in the Kaza of Nevrekop<sup>138</sup>**

Ribново-75 hane	Wheat- 7 mud <sup>139</sup> , barley- 10 kile <sup>140</sup> , rye - 5 mud, millet- 1 mud
Osikovo-45 hane	Wheat- 6 mud, barley -1 mud, oat- 2 mud, rye- 3 mud
Kovaçoviçe-18 hane	Wheat- 55 kile, barley -15 kile, rye- 40 kile
Dolyan-5 hane	Wheat- 3 mud, barley- 2 mud, oat- 10 kile, rye- 2 mud, millet- 10 kile
Pletena-39 hane	Wheat- 42 kile, barley- 3 kile, oat- 4 mud, rye- 92 kile
Satovça and Firgovo-105 hane	Wheat- 15 mud, barley- 2 mud, oat- 2 mud, rye- 7 mud

<sup>138</sup> This table was made according to mufassal defter of 1478/1479 called TD7. Also, Rduşev mentioned about these villages in his Pomatsite book, please look at page 62.

<sup>139</sup> The scale used to measure dry goods, such as cereals and pulses, is called müd. In the Ottomans, the müd was also used as a measure of arable areas. Cengiz Kallek, "Müd," *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi 31* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2006), 457-458.

<sup>140</sup> An old scale used especially for measuring dry fruits and cereals. Kile varied from region to region, such as in the Balkan Peninsula, there was higher percentage of kile. According to Manco Vekov, in the Balkans, these areas exhibited different percentages, Varna, Vidin, Dobriç, Dobruca, Danube, Western Bulgaria, Karlovo, Lofça, Filibe, Rhodope which was in 13,7 in 1787 and 34, 38 and 48 in 1868. Cengiz Kallek, "Kile," *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi 25* (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Ansiklopedisi, 2002), 568-9, 560.

**Table 5. Villages of Nevrekop Valley**

Kaza of Nevrekop- 413 hane	Wheat- 140 mud, barley- 6 mud, oat- 10 mud, rye- 20 mud, millet- 20 mud
Sadova- 130 hane	Wheat- 42 mud, barley- 4 mud, oat- 7 mud, rye- 6 mud, millet- 6 mud
Musomište- 163 hane	Wheat- 50 mud, barley- 4 mud, oat- 5 mud, rye- 10 mud, millet- 25 mud
Koprivlen- 244 hane	Wheat- 60 mud, barley- 2 mud, oat- 7 mud, rye- 12 mud, millet- 13 mud

As can be seen from the data above, in the whole *kaza* of Nevrekop including the highest part, the main types of cereals are cultivated and wheat occupies the largest share, which largely explains the density of the settlement network in this mountainous area and its sustainability over time. Our table, however, reveals a significant feature: in the mountainous region of Western Rhodope, the rye production comes immediately after wheat followed by oats, millet, and lastly barley. Obviously, the climate factor comes into the picture here revealing that low wheat yields in the compelling agricultural areas forced farmers to increase the production of a less challenging cereal crop (rye) that would help feeding people. Oats, millet and barley were used to feed domestic animals.

The data provided by the two tables represent the approximate quantity of tithing and grain yields in the inherent ecological areas of Nevrekop- the mountain, valleys and riparian planes. As it is expected, planar parts are considerably more densely

populated. There are 6 large villages and 1 city in the Mesta River valley (the table shows the city with the three largest villages), where the settlement network in the valley reaches its spatial boundary - the settlements with their economic space closely cover the whole territory along the two banks of the river. In this fairly limited landscape with a length of up to 25 km and a width of 7 - 10 km, there is a large cluster of population that exceeds the number of mountaineers from the slopes of the Rhodopes, although they are distributed in three times more villages. Therefore, in our sample, the mountain villages, according to their inhabitants, offer the following picture: 1) average small villages (6 to 20 households / hane) - 2; 2) average villages (21 to 40 households / hane) - 1; 3) medium-sized villages (from 41 to 80 households / hane) - 8. Compared to this, the valley seems to be overcrowded with people in the city of Nevrekop with its 413 *hanes* and its few but populous villages.

The favorable climatic conditions determine the population in the narrow Nevrekop valley, and suggests better economic indicators compared to the conditions in the mountainous slopes. The Ottoman cadaster does not make it possible to link the yield to the quantity of arable land, so we have to satisfy our interest with the quantity of grain production per capita. The figures suggest the effects of climatic and geographical features and the agricultural technology at the time on feeding of the population in the mountainous region. For the slopes of the Western Rhodopes an average of 193 kg grain (wheat, oats, barley, rye and millet) is revealed, where it is 360 kg for the Nevrekop valley.

These two indicators help us to determine the approximate living standard of the Ottoman subjects in the Western Rhodopes. According to the various economic schools, during the pre-modern epoch annually 200 kg of cereals were required per

capita for food and sowing-seed for the next year. Here, however, it is necessary to specify which kind of grain to take into account in the calculations.

**Table 6. The Villages in the Mountainous Area and The Villages in the Foothills of Rhodope Mountains<sup>141</sup>**

	Wheat	Barley	Oat	Rye	Millet
Ribново- 75 hane	3500	250	-	2500	500
Osikovo- 45 hane	3000	500	1000	1500	-
Kovaçavitsa- 48 hane	375	375	-	1000	-
Dolyan- 5 hane	1500	1000	250	1000	250
Pletena- 39 hane	1050	75	1900	-	-
Satovça and Firgovo- 105 hane	7500	1000	1000	3500	-
Kaza of Nevrekop	70000	3000	5000	10000	10000
Sadova	21000	2000	3500	3000	3000
Musomişte	25000	2000	2500	5000	12500
Koprivlen	30000	1000	3500	6000	6500

<sup>141</sup> Radushev, Pomatsite, p.65.

Firstly, it is important to keep in mind that in Nevrekop region, as well as in all Ottoman agricultural areas in the Balkans, the harvested crops included five basic cereals: wheat, oats, barley, rye and millet, which suggests that the Balkans under the Ottoman rule can be defined as the easternmost of the grain-producing enclaves in the pre-industrial Europe. Although roughly 60% of the grain production falls on wheat in the Balkans, the regional climatic conditions, and not less importantly – the production traditions of the people, provided the cultivation of a whole variety of cereals. And this suggests the following important things:

1. The variety of cereal production ensures that the producer is not strictly confined to any adverse climatic conditions resulting in poor harvest, as is often the case in the areas exclusively dedicated to wheat production. It means that in the event of poor harvest and lower wheat yields, feeding norm can be achieved using other edible crops for humans such as rye and millet. In such an ecological environment, the threat to the European West - chronic famine - is out of question. In a suitable climate, accompanied by traditions of growing a variety of cereals, people do not consider making chestnut and buckwheat flours, which at the time served the needs of the Europeans from the Northwest as a supplement into their food, before the potatoes came to occupy vast arable lands.

2. The variety in grain production supports the livestock farming (oats and barley serve mainly its needs). The livestock in turn provides the farmer with stock-breeding products and dung for the arable lands. In this sense, diversity provide a favorably production cycle in agriculture in which the systematic alternation of wheat with fodder crops allows for the feeding of more animals and they in turn provide the necessary products for the farmer and the fields.



Up until here, I tried to explain the effect of the climatic and geographical features in the Western Rhodopes on agriculture and the daily living of the local people. I have specified that the natural and climatic conditions in our mountainous region made it possible to reach a nutritional norm of approximately 200 kg. grains per capita. The combination of Mediterranean climatic impact and a geographic location with not such a high latitude (500 – 800 m) provides people with challenging, but not so adverseliving conditions. However, there are significant economic differences in the foothills of the south of Nevrokop, which demonstrates that the living standard in the mountain is considerably lower than in the plains. This fact, among other features, comes to explain why in the mountainous regions one ascertains an increased rate of conversion to Islam, caused mainly by socioeconomic motives.

**Table 7. Comparison of Villages located in Nevrekop and Drama in terms of their geographical structure<sup>142</sup>**

Villages	Taxation	Villages	Taxation
Breznitsa 78 household- 8 bachelor	4843 akçe	Doksanbas 81 household- 9 bachelor	13392 akçe
Dubnitsa 33 household- 6 bachelor	2731 akçe	Girzovo 30 household- 4 bachelor	4185 akçe

<sup>142</sup> Radushev, The pomaks, p.76.

Table 7, (Cont'd )

Satovça 42 household- 8 bachelor	2941 akçe	Homondas 42 household- 10 bachelor	6548 akçe
Petrelık 22 household- 4 bachelor	2240 akçe	Çernoglav 22 household- 4 bachelor	4585 akçe
Pletena 12 household- 2 bachelor	953 akçe	Verjani 10 household- 3 bachelor	2795 akçe
Ablanitsa 50 household- 12 bachelor	4450 akçe	Apadiya 52 household- 8 bachelor	7783 akçe

The above data in the table reveals that the agriculture in the foothills brings about a two to three times higher revenue than in the mountains, which indicates a significantly higher standard of living for the local people of the plain. This circumstance, which has been already mentioned, is directly linked to the process of conversion to Islam.

In order to further analyze the conversion process, we need to pay attention to some features of the Ottoman taxation, especially to those which contain religious inequality and discrimination over the non-Muslim subjects of the Sultan such as the taxes called the *ispenç / ispençe* and the *cizye*.

The *ispençe* tax does not originate from the Muslim religious law (Sharia), but was inherited from the Balkan medieval fiscal practices. The origin of the word is

unclear; it is supposed to be from the Latin word *ofespesio* which meant payments, expenditures. Most probably the *ispençe* originates from the Byzantine taxation system designating one of the taxes, collected by the Byzantine *proniars*. H. Inalcik suggests that the Ottoman *ispençe* appeared as the cash equivalent of free labor provided by the peasants in the estates of the landlords from the pre-Ottoman times.<sup>143</sup>

The *ispençe* is a personal tax levied only on the non-Muslim subjects of the Ottomans. It is collected by the head of the domain (the *sipahis*, the owners of *zemets*, *hasses*, *waqfs* etc.) and levied on all male non-Muslims - married, unmarried, as well as widows regardless of whether they lived in a city, village or estate, or whether they were landowners or not. Payment begins when boys enter sexual maturity, in which sense, the tax is very much like the poll tax (*cizye / baş haracı*).

The *ispençe* does not depend on the proprietary status of the tax payers, although sometimes it is wrongly defined as a "personal land tax". Rather, the tax implicates the ability of a person to earn money and make a living. Every young man who does not own a piece of land, but works in his father's farm making a living is subjected to pay 25 *akçes ispençe* tax annually. The same amount is paid by all other producers (farmers, artisans etc.) no matter how much land they own, whereas only widows is entitled to pay 6 *akçes*.

The Muslim population was also subject of a similar tax called *resm-i çift*, which is believed to be the equivalent of the tax levied on non-Muslims called *ispençe*, whereas there is an obvious connection between Muslim landholding and taxation in this case. A Muslim farmer would pay 22 *akçes* for the *çifts* of land he owned, which

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<sup>143</sup> Halil İnalcık, *Hicri 835 Tarihli Suret-i Defter-i Sancak-i Arnavid* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1954), 12.

meant that *resm-i çift* was in fact a kind of personal land tax. In this regard, the taxation differed among the religions. The indigent Muslim farmers, called *bennak*<sup>144</sup>, would pay half of the *resm-i çift* – 11 *akçes*, whereas unmarried non land-holders paid 6.

The 3 *akçe* difference between *ispençe* and *resm-i çift* does not seem significant. However, when we make a comparison between two indigent farmers, a Muslim and a Christian, each with two unmarried sons, the Muslim farmer would be subject to the half of the tax amount for himself, which would be (*bennak*) = 11 *akçes* and 6 for each of his sons equaling to a total of 23 *akçes*, whereas the Christian farmer would be required to pay *ispençe* tax three times equaling to a total of 75 *akçes*. The 52 *akçe* difference is far from negligible, which nearly corresponded to one piece of gold in that period. Here one may conclude that the *ispençe* tax appears to be a considerable burden for non-Muslim taxpayers, which often paid two times more than his Muslim colleague.

Now let us see the relationship between the *cizye* tax and living standards of the people in our region. What was the levy like and who had to pay it? It is known that the entire male non-Muslim population in the Ottoman Empire was subject to this tax. In order to understand the size of the tax burden and mechanism of the assessment, it is necessary to know the meaning of the taxation unit *cizye hane*. The historical-demographic studies show that *cizye hane* was mostly associated with the nuclear family model in the Balkans, which was comprised of five members on the

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<sup>144</sup>*Bennak* means a tax-payer engaged in agriculture. Indeed, this idea is supported the fact that there was a tax levied on married men who were capable of working the land in the Ottoman Empire. For more detailed information please read Feridun Emecen, “Bennak” TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi, 5., 458-459.

average,<sup>145</sup> in which approximately two-three of them (the father and his grown up son/s) were subjected to pay *cizye*. The Ottoman tax accounts reveal enough evidence that the non-Muslim subjects of the Sultan were mostly obliged to pay twelve *dirhems* of silver (37.8 gram) each, which approximately equaled to the value of one golden coin (*altın*) or 60 *akçes* in the fifteenth century. In fact, this is the lowest and multifold category of *cizye* taxpayers in the Ottoman Empire, which included the ordinary producers and taxpayers in the state.

The amount of *ispence* and *cizye* taxes, as well as the amount of grain produced, will help us to have an insight into the socioeconomic conditions in the Western Rhodope Mountains, where an intensive process of conversion took place in the second half of the fifteenth century. Recently, the researchers examining apostasy from Christianity in the Balkans have similarly put forth the association between conversion to Islam and the regional living standards and economic conditions. It would be accurate to say that such a complicated and complex process arose out of many underlying factors such as political, religious and ethno-cultural conditions, however, the region where the conversion process occurred primarily depended on the economic parameters that were required from the Christians in the Muslim empire. Recently, the Dutch Ottomanist M. Kiel<sup>146</sup> attempted to summarize the financial conditions for the villages of the Chepino district in the Central Rhodopes - an emblematic region for a powerful conversion to Islam. M. Kiel's main economic indicators were sourced from the Ottoman cadaster of that area and tally with what I have already ascertained concerning the Nevrekop region in the Western Rhodopes. Both areas

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<sup>145</sup> Ömer Lütfi Barkan, "894 (1488/1489) Yılı Cizyesinin Tahsilatına Ait Muhasebe Bilançoları", *Türk Tarih Kurumu Türk Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi*, Cilt 1- Sayı 1, (1964) : 1-119. Compare with H. Hadzibegic, "Dzizja ili Harac" *Prilozi za Orijentalnu Filologiju* III-V (1952-1955): 55-135.

<sup>146</sup> Kiel is one of the most important historians who examined the region of Nevrekop and conversion to Islam in the Balkan Peninsula and he wrote several significant tahrir registers related to the Pomak villages.

share similar geographical and climatic features, which explain the similarity in production structure and yield.

After all, taking into account the average annual grain production per capita (200 kg), as well as the burden of *ispençe* and *cizye* tax, the Dutch historian concluded that the Ottoman subjects in the Rhodope Mountains needed to work for about half a month just to afford being an Orthodox Christian.

As for the *kaza* of Nevrekop in the western part of the Rhodope Mountain, we found that approximately 200 kg of grain was produced per capita (nearly the same amount ascertains M. Kiel for the adjacent region of the Central Rhodopes). We already know that all non-Muslim men who were subjects of the Ottomans owed the state 25 *akçes* as *ispençe* and approximately 1 golden coin for the *cizye* tax. Recalculating these two taxes in their silver equivalent equals approximately to 50 gr. of silver. This means that the common non-Muslim taxpayer was required to allocate a sum of money equalling to 50 grof silver from his income annually in order to pay off his obligations under these two taxes.

According to my estimates, the production of wheat and rye per capita in the Nevrekop region is approximately 205 kg, which corresponds to 1010 kg for a five-member family. If two of the members are tax payers, it means that nearly the half of their income from grain would be separated for paying off the *ispençe* and *cizye* duties.<sup>147</sup> In the small *reaya* farms the cattle-breeding is usually parallel with the agricultural production, so the two duties can be paid by the income of 3-4 sheep (50 gr. silver) for each payer. This concomitant production alleviates the non-Muslim peasants' budget. On the other hand, however, that same budget is seriously burdened

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<sup>147</sup> The amount of silver needed to pay the *cizye* is 38 grams and 12 gr. for the *ispençe* tax. The purchasing power of this amount of silver equals approximately to 200 kg wheat and rye. Comp. Radushev, E. The Pomaks, 84-85.

by the church taxes and duties, which the Ottoman Christian owes to the local priest, to the Metropolitan, and to the Patriarchate in Istanbul. Some historians claim that there were more than twenty different taxes which the Orthodox Church collected from its people<sup>148</sup> in addition to some other taxes called “extraordinary taxes” (*avariz-i divaniye ve tekalif-i örfiye*). Moreover, a further examination of the data presented so far reveals a very important point: the living standard of Christians and Muslims in the Western Rhodopes is in a proportion of 1:2 two in favor of the Muslim population.

This situation can be illustrated by the following example: the average non-Muslim in the Western Rhodope Mountains before paying the *cizye* and *ispençe* taxes had 466 gr. of cereals (wheat and rye) as a means of livelihood, which is equal to 559 gr. of bread or 1397 calories per day.<sup>149</sup> After paying the two taxes, our non-Muslim can now count on 225 gr. of cereals = 270 gr. bread = 647 calories per day. At the same time, his Muslim colleague, after paying the *resm-i çift* tax, would have 507 gr. of bread equaling to 1,200 calories per day. Here, I must note that 2000-2500 calories per day were required in the pre-industrial Europe, 50-60% of which coming from cereals. The Muslim population in the Western Rhodopes is close to this nutritional norm. Their non-Muslim fellows, however, after paying *cizye* and *ispençe* taxes, with 647 calories per day, remain way below this rate.<sup>150</sup>

The following conclusions can be drawn from the figures above:

1. The climatic and geographical features in the environment result in low income for the population engaged in agricultural activities, where the yield from

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<sup>148</sup>Hristo Gandev, *Problemi Na Balgarskoto Vazrajdzne (Problems in the Research of the Bulgarian National Revival)* (Sofia: 1976), 86.

<sup>149</sup>Radusev, *The Pomaks*, p.79-91.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, p. 91-93.

agricultural activity in the mountains is two to three times lower compared to the foothills and plains.

2. The living standard of the non-Muslim population in the Western Rhodopes is lower than that of a Muslim citizen in proportion of 1: 2.

This objective situation lays the groundwork for conversion to Islam, which R. W. Bulliet calls “social conversion”,<sup>151</sup> which can be considered suitable for the region of Nevrekop. According to Bulliet, there are two axioms of religious conversion. Firstly, the anticipation of new converts’ regarding the new religion Islam should be inline with their anticipations regarding the former religion.<sup>152</sup> It should be highlighted that the new religion has to represent something in order to attract more attention. Even though my research covers the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Kiel said that the new religion Islam became more fashionable for local Christian people. Kiel added that these people started to think that the Ottomans won a lot of wars which took place in the Balkan Peninsula because of the fact that God was with the Ottomans and he punished Christians, which was also believed to trigger the process of conversion to Islam in the given century.

In addition to attraction of the new religion, the socio-economic conditions in Western Rhodope Mountains were problematical, where higher taxes were levied on the Christian population compared to the Ottomans and the conversion to Islam meant that would no longer be entitled to pay the cizye tax to the Empire. Such tax exemption could be one of the possible reasons why people chose to convert to Islam, however, it would be inaccurate to define such case as forceful conversion because of the high cizye taxation. It should also be stated that the issue of forceful conversion does not reflect the truth in this region since the Ottomans did not collect

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<sup>151</sup>P. W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Europe: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 33-34.

<sup>152</sup> Anton Minkov, *Kisve Bahası*, p.14.



any taxes from the newly converted people for a long time. As Kiel said, the cizye tax was one of the most significant backbone of the Ottomans, then why would they give up such revenue?

When I mention about social conversion term, I must emphasize how the local Christians managed to have access to information. These people were informed and influenced by the Yürüks. As I mentioned earlier, Yürüks were significant in the colonization of the Balkan Peninsula under the Ottoman domination. As Gökbilgin said, thousands of Yürük people divided into five major groups paved the way for the religion of Islam to gain recognition among the local people. Christian people met Islam and they realized that these two religions were not fundamentally very different as both Islam and Christianity command that there is only one God to believe in and worship. Additionally, both religions forbid lying and stealing. Gradually, local people started to learn these similarities between both religions which eventually lead them to grow fonder of Islam.

The routes taken by the Yürüks generally crossed the Rhodope Mountains and Pirin Mountains, where the Yürüks engaged in trade in the bazaars and started to communicate with the local population. They were not only located within the borders of the Balkans, but they also contributed to the ottomanization in the region and became pioneers for the introduction of Islam.

When I examined the tahrir defters, I noticed that these people were not colonized by the Ottomans, rather they were new converts, which is revealed by the names such as Karaca, son of Todor. It should be highlighted that the name of the father was Bulgarian, but the name of the son was inherited from the Turkish language meaning that he chose to convert from Christianity to Islam whereas his father still remained Christian. In the light of the tahrir registers, I have gathered up the data proving my

argument that there was no forceful conversion to Islam imposed upon the local people by the Ottomans.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION**

The main objective of this thesis is to examine the conversion process of the Pomaks who lived in the Western Rhodope Mountains in the 15th century and look for an answer to the controversial issue regarding the transition from Christianity to Islam as it has been under debate for many years due to lack of consensus on whether the conversion was by force or voluntary. In this thesis, the conditions and circumstances under which the conversion of the Pomaks took place will be evaluated.

Firstly, the introduction part of the thesis includes information about the Islamization process of the Pomaks and the perceptions of various historical thesis regarding the process which are fundamentally based on different point of views. There are two major views to be underlined according to the Bulgarian historical sources. Firstly, it is stated that the Pomaks were forcefully converted to Islam by the Ottoman army and authorities beginning from the 15<sup>th</sup> century and that they were virtually of the Bulgarian origin. Conversely, in Turkish historiography, it is argued that the Pomaks came from Kuman-Kipchak Turks and that they were true Turks and Muslims. In addition to these two contrasting views, there are other different arguments put forward by the Greek and Macedonian historians.

The Tahrir defters used for the thesis reveal that there was no forced Islamization imposed by the Ottomans. In particular, such views were influenced by romantic

historiography in Bulgaria and significantly increased in the period of communism. In the first part, I mentioned the inadequacy of the documents used and the lack of objectivity. In fact, I believe that a comprehensive examination of both the Turkish Republic and Bulgarian archives will provide more accurate information regarding the conversion process. However, some researchers did not utilize these archives especially during the period of communism, and rather they used the Chronicles and mere ideas, which are suspected to be inaccurate. Towards the end of the communist period, some researchers raised bolder questions and began to objectively address the issue, such as M. Kiel, Todorova, E. Radushev and A. Zelyazkova.<sup>153</sup> Thanks to these researchers, more objective information were revealed about the controversial subject.

Besides the use of secondary sources, thanks to the tahrir defters, it is possible to reach a conclusion by means of the Ottoman Archives which demonstrated how the Pomaks began to convert to Islam and the number of Muslims emerged.

In the second part of the thesis, the geographical boundaries of the region were examined and the borders of the challenging region within the conversion process took place were determined before the evaluation of the subject. In this respect, the Balkan conquests of the Ottomans were mentioned regarding the area of concern in the Balkan Peninsula, the Nevrekop region in the Rhodope Mountains. It is important to underline that although the Ottoman Empire carried out successful conquests throughout the Balkans, the region of Rhodope was not directly conquered by war as a result of the geographical location of the region. The influential names in the Balkan conquests at the time came as far as the borders of Rhodope, but there are no records regarding the inclusion of the region in the Ottoman lands. According to

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<sup>153</sup>See, Bibliography part.

some Ottoman chronicles, Evrenos Bey reached the Rhodope borders after the conquest of Seres but the conquest failed as a result of the challenging geographical features. Interestingly, although the Ottoman Empire did not take over the region directly, the region itself entered into the domination of Ottoman rule. After the region was taken over, the conversion process began and the local people of the region became Muslims in a short period of time as it is revealed by the tahrir books used as a main source of the thesis. In conclusion, it was apparent that the people in the region were not forced to convert to Islam, contrary to the prevailing view of Bulgarian historians. The tahrir book dated 1445 reveals no Muslim population in the region, whereas the data provided by the tahrir book of 1478/9 show that the number of Muslims in the Nevrekop increased by one hundred percent. In addition to the increase in Muslim numbers, the names chosen by the new Muslim inhabitants can also be accessed through Tahrir defters. As said by Bulliet, new Muslims were influenced by pre-Islamic names and Islamic influences and chose their own names accordingly. In addition, it is possible to encounter the influence of the Yürüks on the names chosen for the region studied in the thesis. In addition, I frequently encountered the name Abdullah in the books, which means that new Muslims were present in the region.

In the third part, I focused on my primary sources and examined how many Muslim populations there were in the region and villages. Following the 1445 Paşa livasi icmal register, Muslim population was observed in many villages, including the center of Nevrekop. The process of conversion to Islam was certainly influenced by the community of Yörüks who affected to the local people in the Western Rhodope. The effects of the march on the Ottoman Empire cannot be ignored as they were very effective in the recognition of both Islam and the new state which would rule the

region. The Yürüks reached the Nevrekop area, using the way of Via Egnatia within the routes they used, which resulted in the local people to gain knowledge about the Islamic religion and the idea that Christianity and Islam were not fundamentally different from each other.

In the last section, I used the Tahrir registers to examine the products grown in the Nevrekop region and its villages as well as the taxes on these products. As I mentioned before, although the geographical characteristics of the region are very difficult, the region remains under the influence of the Mediterranean climate, which allowed the production of a variety of products, however the region is mostly known for the production of cereals, wheat, barley, rye and millet. In this regard, I tried to explain the two regions of the Nevrekop region through comparative tables. I compared the differences in production between the villages on the mountain and the villages on the plain and the taxes collected, which were acquired thanks to the examination of the primary resources.

The Rhodope region is a very significant region for the process of conversion to Islam. The first signs of islamization were observed in this region, there are not enough and objective research and resources in the region. Although it is a region that has recently attracted the attention of researchers, there is still no clear consensus on the issue.

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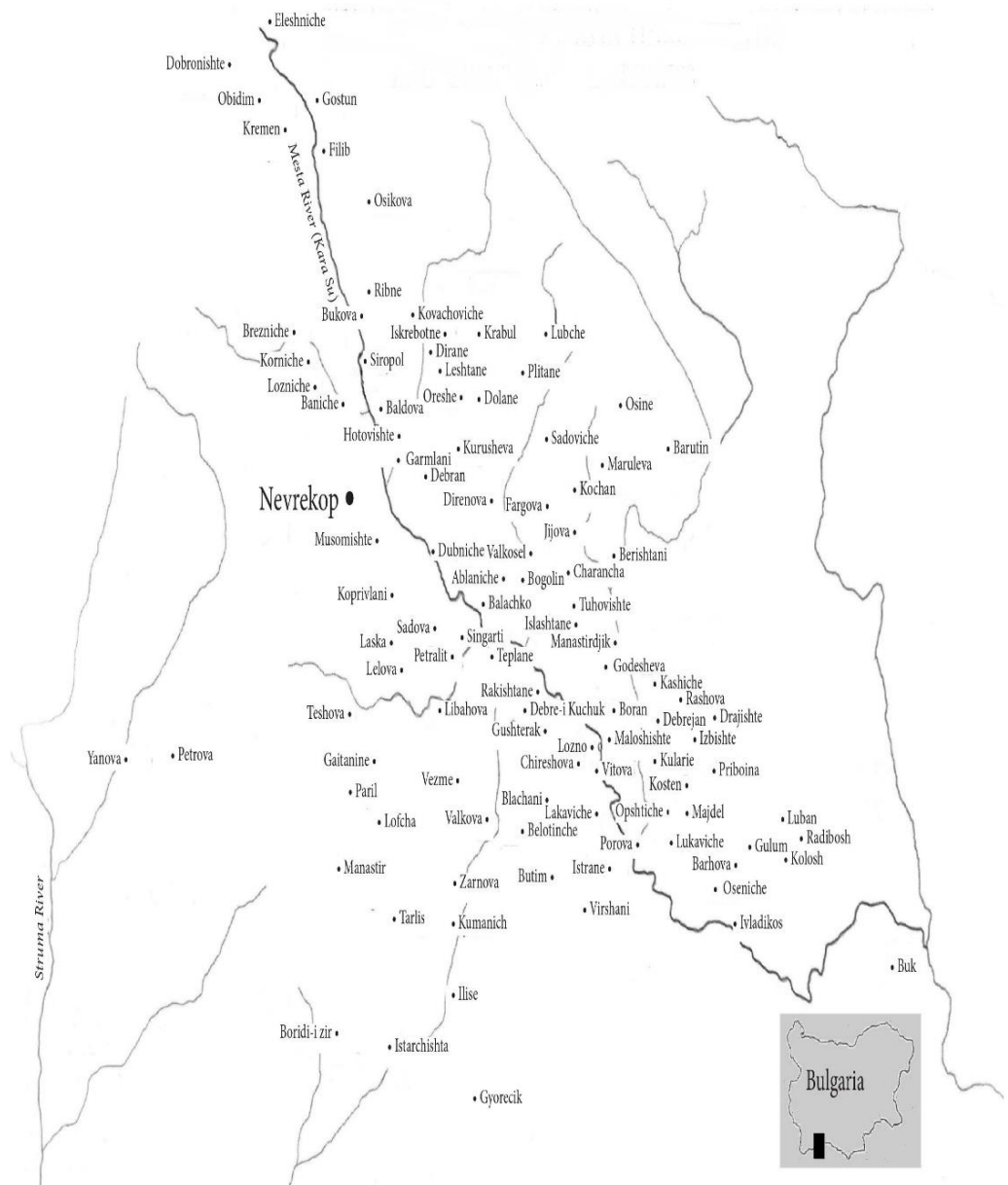
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## **APPENDICES**



## Appendix 1: Kaza of Nevrekop and its villages



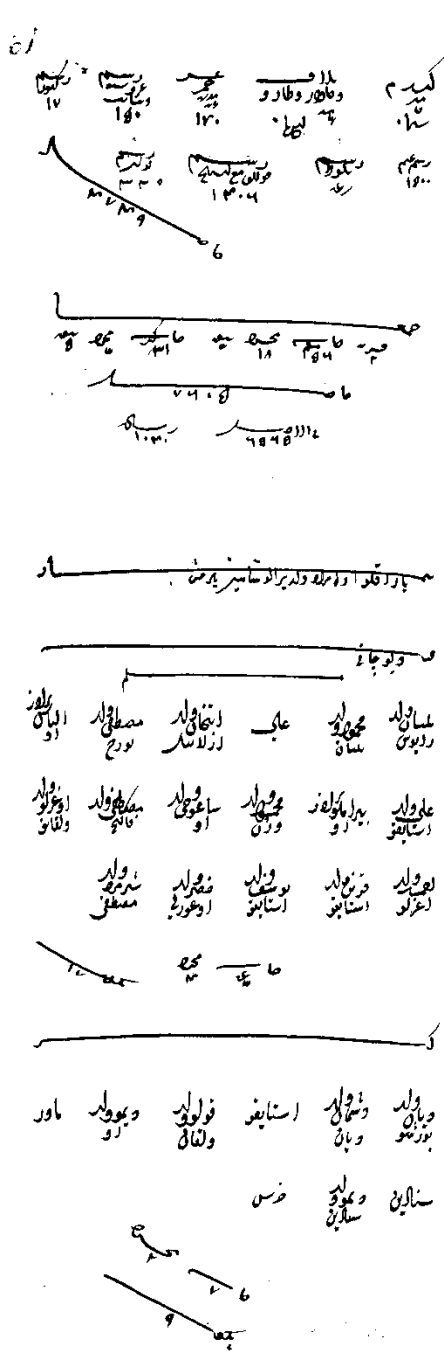
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