

Family Composition among the Ottoman Soldiery and Commoners (1626–1826)

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1. Introduction

This article aims to examine the family composition of the janissaries and other members of the Ottoman military in a long-term and comparative perspective. We study the soldiery in six cities in three regions in Anatolia and the Central Balkans from 1626 to 1826 and compare their families with those of the local commoners. The main question we explore is ‘diversity versus uniformity’ across classes/occupations and regions. It is informed by the debates on historical family formations and their relationship with transitions to modernity, for example, in terms of fertility behavior, human capital formation and growth, which have lately found new life as an outgrowth of the ‘Divergence’ discussions.¹

We set out from Todorova’s work on Balkan families where she challenges taxonomies with geographical referents, which can be traced back to Hajnal. Hajnal classified historical family formations and marriage patterns as ‘European/West European/Northwest European’ and ‘East European/Eastern/non-European/traditional’.² This model was later refined by Laslett as ‘Western’, ‘West central/middle’, ‘Mediterranean’ and ‘Eastern’.³ As historical case studies have accumulated since the 1960s, however, the dualism and blanket geographical referents of early works have come under criticism.⁴ The main thrust of this critical literature

¹ J. L. van Zanden, with T. de Moor and S. Carmichael, *Capital Women: The European Marriage Pattern, Female Empowerment, and Economic Development in Western Europe, 1300–1800* (Oxford 2019); A. M. de Pleijt with J. L. van Zanden, and S. Carmichael, ‘Gender Relations and Economic Development: Hypotheses About the Reversal of Fortune in Eurasia’, in C. Diebolt with A. Rijpmma, S. Carmichael, S. Dilli and C. Störmer, C. (eds), *Cliometrics of the Family. Studies in Economic History*, (Cham 2019), 149–172.

² J. Hajnal, ‘European Marriage Patterns in Perspective’, in D.V. Glass with D. E.C. Eversley (eds), *Population in History, Essays in Historical Demography, vol. I: General and Great Britain* (New Brunswick 1965), 101–143; J. Hajnal, ‘Two Kinds of Preindustrial Household Formation System’, *Population and Development Review*, 8/3 (1982), 449–494.

³ The two transitional types that Laslett introduced, the ‘West central’ and ‘Mediterranean’ families stood between the ‘West’ and the ‘East’ in terms of the ‘method of domestic group formation’ (upon marriage or fission of large households), ‘marriage demography’ (nuptiality, age at marriage), household composition (simple versus joint families), and ‘organization of work and welfare’. P. Laslett, ‘Family and Household as Work Group and Kin Group: Areas of Traditional Europe Compared’, in R. Wall with J. Robin and P. Laslett (eds), *Family Forms in Historic Europe* (Cambridge 1983), 513–563; P. Laslett, ‘Characteristics of the Western Family Considered over Time’, in P. Laslett (ed), *Family Life and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations* (London 1977), 12–49. For further elaborations of the model, see M. Mitterauer, ‘Family Contexts: The Balkans in European Comparison’, *The History of the Family*, 1/4 (1996), 387–406; J. M. Halpern with K. Kaser and R. A. Wagner, ‘Patriarchy in the Balkans: Temporal and Cross-Cultural Approaches’, *The History of the Family*, 1/4 (1996), 425–442.

⁴ J. Goody, ‘Comparing Family Systems in Europe and Asia: Are There Different Sets of Rules?’ *Population and Development Review* 22/1 (1996), 1–20; M. Szołtysek, ‘Spatial Construction of European Family and Household Systems: A Promising Path or a Blind Alley? An Eastern European Perspective’, *Continuity and Change*, 27/1 (2012), 11–52; M. Szołtysek with B. Ogórek and S. Gruber, ‘Global and Local Correlations of Hajnal’s Household

has been the diversity of family formations on both sides of the ‘Hajnal line’, which extended from Leningrad to Trieste and divided Europe (and the world) into two zones of very different domestic regimes.

This model covered Ottoman Europe as ‘the Balkans’, i.e., the ‘East’, starting from Hajnal’s own work but most of the relevant studies utilized source material from the post-Ottoman Balkans. Prominent characteristics of the ‘Eastern’ families were nearly universal early marriage, high fertility, and large and complex households. Yet, other parts of the Ottoman Empire have not been examined in these terms, possibly because the enjeu of the debate was defining and locating ‘Europeanness’, rather than exploring the applicability of the model to other geographies — although other vague categories like the ‘Oriental/Islamic/Arab family’ by default applied to the Ottoman lands in the past scholarship. On their part, scholars working on the Ottoman Empire have not worked with these taxonomies either. Notable exceptions other than Todorova are Duben and Behar, who characterize Istanbul families in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as ‘Mediterranean’, and rural families of Anatolia as ‘Eastern’ per Laslett’s taxonomy.⁵ Regarding the Ottoman Balkans, Todorova paints an even more complicated picture arguing that the family formation and marriage patterns in some parts of the region shared certain characteristics with the ‘Western family’ while the ‘Mediterranean family’ prevailed in northeastern Bulgaria in terms of marriage age and incidence, and ‘multiple family’ households prevailed in tribal and mountainous regions where animal husbandry was the dominant mode of subsistence.⁶ By these criteria alone, i.e., kinship systems, ecology and the mode of subsistence, all of which had a bearing on family types, one would expect the rest of the Ottoman Empire to have been even more diverse.

Formation Markers in Historical Europe: A cautionary Tale’, *Population Studies*, 75/1 (2021), 67–89; M. N. Todorova, ‘On the Epistemological Value of Family Models: The Balkans within the European Pattern’, in M. N. Todorova, *Scaling the Balkans: Essays on Eastern European Entanglements* (Leiden, Boston 2018), 284–299; J. Sperling with S. Kelly Wray (eds), *Across the Religious Divide: Women, Property, and Law in the Wider Mediterranean (ca. 1300–1800)* (New York London 2010); T. Dennison, with S. Ogilvie, ‘Does the European Marriage Pattern Explain Economic Growth?’, *The Journal of Economic History*, 74/3 (2014), 651–693.

⁵ A. Duben with C. Behar, *Istanbul Households: Marriage, Family and Fertility, 1880–1940* (Cambridge 1991); A. Duben, ‘Turkish Families and Households in Historical Perspective,’ *Journal of Family History*, 10/1 (1985), 75–97.

⁶ M. N. Todorova, ‘Situating the Family of Ottoman Bulgaria within the European Pattern’, in M. N. Todorova, *Scaling the Balkans: Essays on Eastern European Entanglements*, (Leiden, Boston 2018), 262–283; idem, *Balkan Family Structure and the European Pattern: Demographic Developments in Ottoman Bulgaria* (Washington 1993), 41–42.

Present scholarship on Ottoman family formations and demographics in the early modern period relies heavily on probate inventories (*tereke*) as they provide information on the heirs, namely, the conjugal family and other kin who were entitled to a share from the inheritance. As valuable as the existing works are in this rather underdeveloped field, most tend to deal with sporadic cases, and remain reticent about their sources and methodology. Differences in family formations across social strata, regions and change over time rarely enter the picture.⁷ By the same token, when they examine social strata separately, for example, the tax-paying subjects (*reaya*) and the ruling elite (*askeri*), they do not offer clear definitions. Another group of studies that uses diverse sources deals with military families more often. These are monographs on individual households or the elite stratum in a particular region. They provide meticulous accounts of the political and economic ‘enterprise’ of the family, but their demographic characteristics stay outside the picture.⁸

This study addresses some of these gaps by examining the demographic characteristics of families in distinct social groups: janissaries, other soldiery and the commoners, using probate inventories. The purpose of the comparison is to find out whether janissary families and those of other military men in different regions of the empire resembled one another rather than the commoners in the localities where they lived and died. One might expect the soldiers serving across the realm to have common dispositions by virtue of their occupation and their organizational connection. Contrariwise, similarity between the family and marriage patterns of the active soldiers and the commoners in a certain region would be a sign of the power of the regional domestic cultures, themselves determined by a host of local factors. By ‘commoners’, in this study we refer to people who held no socio-occupational titles and were likely to represent the economically modest sections of the society (Appendix I). We deliberately exclude the non-military elite for simplicity’s sake because their inclusion (a) dictates a multi-layered occupational approach and, (b) calls for an additional set of

⁷ Some notable exceptions are J. Tucker, ‘The Arab Family in History: ‘Otherness’ and the Study of the Family,’ in J. Tucker (ed), *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 195–207; Doumani, *Family Life*; C. Estabiet with J.P. Pascual, *Familles et Fortunes a Damas, 450 Foyers Damascains en 1700* (Damascus 1994); K.H M. Cuno, *Modernizing Marriage: Family, Ideology and Law in Nineteenth-and Early Twentieth-Century Egypt* (New York 2015).

⁸ M. L. Meriwether, *The Kin Who Count: Family and Society in Ottoman Aleppo, 1770–1840* (Austin 1999); L. Schatkowski Schilcher, *Families in Politics: Damascene Factions and Estates of the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Stuttgart 1985); J. A. Reilly, *A Small Town in Syria: Ottoman Hama in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Oxford 2002).

identification criteria to tackle ambiguities related to ‘civilian’ titles. Their exclusion leaves the social panorama incomplete without distorting it.⁹

Since probate inventories from before the seventeenth century are rare, we start our survey from 1626, going two centuries backwards from the abolition of the corps. Therefore, we cannot compare the military and the commoners in the early periods when the lived political culture of the Ottoman administration was closer to its ideal version, which dictated a categorical division between two estates, the ruled (*reaya*) as the producers on one side and the agents of the ruler (*askeri*) on the other. It also dictated that upward mobility from *the former* into the *latter*, especially the so-called intrusion of the commoners into the central military establishment (*kapıkulları*) was kept under control. Our investigation starts from a period when signs of ‘corruption’ and ‘degeneration’ in the socio-political system, a favorite and overused theme in the decline literature,¹⁰ had already started, and as far as the janissaries were concerned, the processes of localization through marriage and *esnaf*-ization were underway.

Even before the seventeenth century, there were multiple mechanisms of interaction and mobility between the commoners and the military. Let us consider the central army alone during the *devşirme* period. Turkish Muslim families of Anatolia served for several years as hosts for teaching Turkish, Turco-Islamic culture and religion to the recruited youths while the sons of active, retired or deceased janissaries provided new manpower to the troops.¹¹ Already

⁹ Our preliminary examination of the probates of non-military ‘public servants’ such as prayer leaders, teachers, deputy governors/tax collectors (*mütesellim*) on the one hand, and ‘potential public servants’ such as *efendis*, *mollas*, *hafizes*, who constituted part of the civilian social/economic elite, suggests that their marriage behavior was closer to that of the active and potential soldiers than that of the ‘commoners’.

	Janissaries	Other military	Potential military	Public employees	Potential public employees	Commoners
Rate of polygyny	11.3	11.5	11.0	13.5	9.2	5.6

¹⁰ For an overview of decline literature, see D. A. Howard, ‘Ottoman Historiography and the Literature of ‘Decline’ of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries’, *Journal of Asian History*, 22/1 (1988), 52–77; M. F. Çalışır, ‘Decline of a “Myth”: Perspectives on the Ottoman Decline’, *Tarih Okulu/The History School*, 9 (2011), 37–60; O. Bouquet, ‘From Decline to Transformation: Reflections on a New Paradigm in Ottoman History’, *Osmanlı Araştırmaları/The Journal of Ottoman Studies*, 60 (2022), 27–60; C. Kafadar, ‘On the Purity and Corruption of the Janissaries’, *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin*, 15/2 (1991), 273–280; L. T. Darling, ‘Ottoman Political Thought and the Critique of Janissaries’, in M. Sariyannis (ed), *Political Thought and Practice in the Ottoman Empire, Halycon Days in Crete IX: A Symposium held in Rethymno 9–11 January 2015*, (Rethymno 2019), 117–136; L. T. Darling, *The Janissaries of Damascus in the Sixteenth Century, Or, How Conquering a Province Changed the Ottoman Empire* (Berlin 2019); L. T. Darling, ‘Crime Among the Janissaries of Ottoman Golden Age’, in F. Castiglione with E. L. Menchinger and V. Şimşek (eds), *Ottoman War and Peace: Studies in Honor of Virginia H. Aksan*, (Leiden: Boston 2020), 13–34.

¹¹ For the levy and training of the *devşirme* boys, see G. Yılmaz, ‘Becoming a *Devşirme*: The Training of Conscripted Children in the Ottoman Empire’, in G. Campbell with S. Miers and J. C. Miller (eds), *Children in Slavery Through the Ages*, (Ohio 2009), 119–134; G. Veinstein, ‘On the Ottoman Janissaries (Fourteenth–Nineteenth Centuries)’, in Erik-Jan Zürcher (ed), *Fighting for a Living: A Comparative Study of Military Labour*,

in the seventeenth century, the main source of recruitment to the Janissary corps was evidently the sons of janissaries, who were by default candidates for membership in the corps. In the years 1646–49, the sons of the janissaries provided roughly 80% of the janissary manpower, which rose to 90% in the 1670s whereas the contribution of the novices (*acemi oğlan*) was 3.3 and 0.4 respectively in those two periods.¹² With the virtual end of the *devşirme* practice, Muslim families became the main recruitment pool for the corps, and Muslims of every background were admitted through legal, extra-legal or illegal means. The legal recruits were the sons of janissaries known as *kuloğlu*, *acemi oğlanı*, and the extra-legal recruits were the voluntary converts called *nevmüslims*. Finally, bribing and marketing of pay tickets were the common illegal ways of entering the corps.¹³ Thus, even though the fusion of the commoners and the military accelerated in the eighteenth century, especially after decentralization of the janissary military structure and the end of the rotation system at the beginning of the same century,¹⁴ means of interaction and cultural influence had already been in effect before 1626.

The cities we examine are Sofia and Manastır in the Central Balkans, Manisa and Bursa in Western Anatolia, and Ayntab and Diyarbakir in Southeastern Anatolia. The family unit we are interested in is the conjugal family alone, and not the household because our source does not provide information on the living arrangements and the cohabitants. We take the conjugal family as proxy for households but any comparison with historical household types has to be considered as tentative. The study focuses on four characteristics of the family formation: a) the incidence of celibacy versus nuptiality, b) the incidence of polygyny as reflected in the number of surviving wives, c) the number of surviving children as proxy for fertility and mortality, and d) sex structure of the surviving children.

The family size, i.e., the number of wives and children, and the sex structure of the children together also open a window onto norms that governed the gender relations, a fundamental constituent of the domestic scene, and offer a glimpse of the strength of patriarchy prevalent in

1500–2000, (Amsterdam 2013), 115–134. For the recruitment and training of non-*devşirme* boys, see Y. Spyropoulos, ‘Children of Janissaries and Janissary Youths Beyond the Devşirme (17th–early 19th c.)’, forthcoming in Yahya Araz and İrfan Kokdaş (eds), *Çocukluk Halleri* (İstanbul Kitap Yayınevi).

¹² Based on data in A. Gül, ‘18. Yüzyılda Yeniçeri Teşkilatı’, Ph.d. dissertation (Atatürk University 2020), 80–82.

¹³ Gül, *Yeniçeri Teşkilatı*, 54–91; Spyropoulos, ‘Children of Janissaries’; E. Radushev, ‘“Peasant” Janissaries?’, *Journal of Social History*, 42/2 (2008), 447–467; A. Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahası Petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 1670–1730* (Leiden and Boston 2004), 72–77, 128–129, 183–184.

¹⁴ Regarding this process, see Y. Spyropoulos, ‘Janissary Politics on the Ottoman Periphery (18th–early 19th c.)’, in M. Sariyannis (ed) *Political Thought and Practice in the Ottoman Empire, Halycon Days in Crete IX: A Symposium held in Rethymno 9–10 January 2015*, (Rethymno 2019), 449–481; A. Yıldız with Y. Spyropoulos and M. M. Sunar, ‘İstanbul, Taşra ve Yeniçeriler’, in A. Yıldız, Y. Spyropoulos and M. M. Sunar (eds), *Payitaht Yeniçerileri: Padişahın “Asi” Kulları 1700–1826*, (İstanbul 2022), 13–36.

different regions and different social groups. Patriarchy is also a characteristic measured in the comparative study of family types associated with specific geographies, typically, the ‘Eastern/traditional family’. Polygyny speaks for itself as a medium and expression of male power while high fertility and sex ratios (number of males per 100 females) correlate with male-dominant regimes in both modern and historical societies.¹⁵ Too many births affect female health and life expectancy negatively.¹⁶ Similarly, sex ratios reflect relative mortality of the males and females, and can give away son preference—which can manifest itself in ways as benign as stopping behavior and as violent as girl infanticide. Either way, a female-deficient family formation is associated with patriarchy.

Our expectations about the marriage patterns and families of the soldiers, particularly the janissaries, are the following: most of them must have been single and younger than the other population categories per requirements and risks of military life. This should partly apply to their commanders as well. We also assume that those who married, married late. Therefore, they must have had fewer children than the rest, and most of the children must have been minors. Due to their age, again, monogamy may have been more common, but some may have also practiced polygyny as they were comparatively mobile people attending campaigns or serving at places mostly away from their places of origin. As for the gender composition of their children, we have no hypotheses to set out with although one may speculate that due to their profession, characterized by hierarchy and a masculine ethos, members of the military may have had a stronger preference for sons than the ordinary people.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces the data, the demographic categories we examine, and the method we use to identify them. An extensive appendix provides further details of our method. Section 3 presents the findings under two subheadings. First, we provide descriptive statistics comparing the military and the commoners in two periods: 1626–1725 and 1726–1826. This allows us to see the patterns of change over time.

¹⁵ M. Szołtysek with F. J. B. Tapia, B. Ogórek, and S. Gruber, ‘Family Patriarchy and Child Sex Ratios in Historical Europe’, *The History of the Family*, 27/4 (2022), 702–735.

¹⁶ S. D. Dilli with S. G. Carmichael and A. Rijpm, ‘Introducing the Historical Gender Equality Index’, *Feminist Economics*, 25/1 (2019), 31–57; N. Golmakani, E. Fazeli, A. Taghipour and M.T. Shakeri, ‘Relationship Between Gender Role Attitude and Fertility Rate in Women Referring to Health Centers in Mashhad in 2013’, *Iranian Journal Nursing Midwifery Research.*, 20/2 (2015), 269–274; Z. Spéder with B. Kapitány, ‘How are Time-Dependent Childbearing Intentions Realized? Realization, Postponement, Abandonment, Bringing Forward’, *European Journal of Population*, 25 (2009), 503–523; G. Kaufman, ‘Do Gender Role Attitudes Matter? Family Formation and Dissolution among Traditional and Egalitarian Men and Women’, *Journal of Family Issues*, 21/1 (2000), 128–144. S. R. Johansson, ‘Welfare, Mortality and Gender: Continuity and Change in Explanations for Male/Female Mortality Differences over Three Centuries’, *Continuity and Change*, 6/2 (1991), 145–153.

Second, we replot the findings in a regional perspective. Section 4 summarizes the findings and concludes.

2. Sources and method

Research on family demography in the late Ottoman Empire relies on census data and vital records whereas scholarship on the early modern period has to rely on narrative sources if we exclude the limited research scope that tax surveys and scattered church records provide. A unique source that allows quantitative inquiry into early modern demography is the inheritance inventory which provides valuable information on the size and structure of the family at the last stage in the decedents' life cycle. Inheritance inventories also lend themselves to regional, temporal and social comparison due to their highly standard format, hence their popularity in a wide array of quantitative and narrative studies. Research potential of the probate inventories as well as their limitations have been discussed in a large number of publications.¹⁷ To save space and to avoid repetition, we point out here only those problems that can affect the study of family formations and demography.

1. *Nuptiality*. (a) We cannot show age-specific nuptiality in this study as the records do not mention the age of the deceased. We guesstimate for now that our average decedent was in his forties. To give an idea about male nuptiality in this age group, in 1900, it was 97% in some 'eastern' examples, and between 80% and 91% in Western Europe. In 1885, in Istanbul, the respective rate was 94.6%.¹⁸ (b) The method by which we find the ever married is not flawless either. What we look for is whether the decedent had a surviving spouse or children. One could also detect a widower if he owed money to a late wife, and the court deducted the debt from the man's estate and paid to one of the wife's heirs. If none of these conditions applied, one could mistake a widower for a single man.
2. *The number of surviving children*. Present scholarship based on probate inventories systematically confuses the number of surviving children with true fertility whereas

¹⁷ For a recent survey of the relevant literature, see H. Canbakal with A. Filiztekin, 'Wealth and Demography in Ottoman Probate Inventories: A Database in very Long-Term Perspective', *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History*, 54/2 (2021), 94–127.

¹⁸ The 'traditional' family data represent Bulgaria and Serbia. In Western Europe, Spain stood remarkably close to the 'eastern' model with a never-married rate of 4% in the age group 45–49. Hajnal, 'European Marriage Patterns in Perspective'. United States in the nineteenth century stood between the 'east' and the 'west'. See M. Haines, 'Long-term Marriage Patterns in the United States from Colonial Times to the Present,' *The History of the Family*, 1/1 (1996), 15–39. For Istanbul, Duben with C. Behar, *Istanbul Households*, 123. For Bulgaria around the middle of the nineteenth century, see Todorova, *Balkan Family*, 41–46.

probates tell us nothing about total births. If a child dies before s/he is sexually reproductive and leaves no conjugal heirs, s/he does not exist as far as property management is concerned. In a high mortality demographic regime, as in the Ottoman Empire, most decedents should be expected to have fathered more children than what we see in the inheritance records. Thus, the ‘number of surviving children’ stands for the interaction of the fertility and mortality rates which are unknown even for the nineteenth century.¹⁹ There are no records that can be used for the early modern period, except perhaps, the church records for the Christians. Yet, relative fertility can be estimated across regions or periods using the probates when no major variation in mortality is expected.

3. *Polygyny*. The condition of past polygyny in a decedent’s life cannot be shown even if he is survived by a wife, and we know that he also had had former wives. This is because the simultaneity of these marriages cannot be shown. Thus, our polygyny estimates are life cycle specific.
4. *Sex ratios*. Since the age of the children is rarely specified in the probate records, one can only generate two broad age categories: ‘adult children’ and ‘minors.’ The ‘adults’ could be any age in the range of 15–30, and the minors could be 0–15 in the absence of a physical sign of puberty before 15, or 0–9 for girls 0–12 for boys.²⁰ Thus, comparison of the sex ratios based on probate inventories with expected sex ratios based on modern or historical studies yields only approximate results. However, when the discrepancy between expected sex ratios and our observations is big, approximate results too add considerably to our understanding of the Ottoman family demographics.

As for the data, the study uses 2,401 probate inventories that belonged to the urban male Muslim population. We have taken from them two databases: Manastır, Manisa, Bursa, Ayntab and Diyarbakir material is from Canbakal (2008–2012) and Sofia material has been kindly

¹⁹ E. Erünl, ‘Examining Age Structure and Estimating Mortality Rates in Ottoman Bursa Using Mid-Nineteenth-Century Population Registers’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 57 (2020), 179–196 offers the earliest estimates.

²⁰ According to Hanafi Law, both boys and girls were considered having reached puberty after the age 15. The youngest possible age of pubescence was 12 for boys and nine for girls in the absence of a physical proof of puberty, Ali Bardakoğlu, ‘Bulûğ’, *TDVİA*, 413–414. We expect most adult children to be below 35 because life expectancy in Turkey was 35 for both sexes as late as 1950. F. C. Shorter with M. Macura, *Trends in Fertility and Mortality in Turkey, 1935–1975* (Washington 1982), 6. We also guesstimate that the deceased fathers would be at least 30 years old in order to have adult children. They should have been at least 15 when they begot a child, and another 15 years would have passed before the child reached puberty.

provided by İrfan Kokdaş.²¹ We have omitted rural and non-Muslim inventories because their representation is irregular and limited. We have also omitted decedents who are explicitly identified as ‘visitors’ in the record, but included those who died in inns and may be permanent residents (Table 1).

Table 1. Dataset

Population categories	1626–1725		1726–1826		TOTAL	
	Number of observations	Share in period dataset (%)	Number of observations	Share in period dataset (%)	Number of observations	Share in dataset (%)
Janissaries	40	4.8	99	6.3	142	5.9
Other military	53	6.3	84	5.4	137	5.7
All active military	93	11.1	183	11.7	279	11.6
Potential military	255	30.3	445	28.5	697	29
All military	348	41.4	628	40.3	976	40.6
Commoners	493	58.6	932	59.7	1,425	59.4
ALL	841	100.0	1,560	100.0	2,401	100.0
Manastır	23	2.7	207	13.3	230	9.6
Sofia	94	11.2	349	22.4	443	18.5
Manisa	245	29.1	310	19.9	555	23.1
Bursa	302	35.9	281	18.0	583	24.3
Ayntab	177	21.0	272	17.4	449	18.7
Diyarbakir	0	0.0	141	9.0	141	5.9

We divided the remaining probate population into two major categories as commoners and military groups. At the first stage of differentiation, we categorized people with no honorific or socio-occupational titles as commoners and those with the titles *ağa*, *beşe* and *bey* as military. It is possible of course that the absence of a title in the records is due to an incidental omission. Indeed, that is what we found out after examining each *tereke* in detail. With the help of some of the criteria to be explained below, we transferred 156 such names to the military category, either as active or as potential military. These names make up about 10% of the untitled decedents, which is not insignificant. The rest of the people with no titles belonged to a socially and economically modest stratum. As for those with military titles, we grouped them into three subgroups as the Janissaries, the Other Military, actively involved in military service,

²¹ TÜBİTAK Project no 108K034 and titled ‘Distribution of Wealth in the Ottoman Empire, 1500–1840/Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Servet Dağılımı, 1500–1840’ (2008–2012). For sampling details, see Canbakal with Filiztekin, ‘Wealth and Demography’, 94–127. Sofia dataset involves all records.

and finally, an indeterminate group which we call the Potential Military. We then employed six more criteria to classify those with military titles into these three groups (Table 2).

Table 2. Criteria used to classify decedents with military titles.

	Janissary	Other Military	Potential Military
Profession	24	95	13
Regiment	14		
Rank	38		34
Court Procedure	45	23	
Court Fees	18		
Military Service		19	
Title			652
TOTAL	139	137	699

The principles by which honorific titles were used in the Ottoman Empire are not fully understood yet, and it is difficult to differentiate the use of the titles as a manifestation of prestige from their use as a professional marker (especially in the case of *ağa*, *bey* and *beşe*). Ranks and professional titles that were denotative of multiple positions and often used by the members of several military corps, palace retinues, state agents or local dignitaries further complicate the picture. Yet with close reading of the inventories, we have set up a number of criteria by which some of the active military staff can be identified with certainty. Some of these can be identified as Janissaries but some janissaries may remain hidden among the Active Military due to lack of positive markers. Similarly, some active soldiers stay hidden among the Potential Military for lack of positive evidence. The rest of the Potential Military can be title-usurpers or hold the title by custom, seniority or some other criterion of high status. The principles of classification we have used are:

- a) Profession: If the military corps of the deceased is specified in the document, we count him as a professional soldier regardless of his honorific title or non-military occupation.
- b) Regiment: Regimental information is important for identifying the active military in the absence of an honorific title. It can also be used to ascertain military identity when the decedent holds a rank, title or nickname denoting multiple possibilities.

- c) Rank: In the absence of any reference to a specific military corps, a person has been identified as active military if ranks peculiar to a military corps are mentioned. This has been particularly helpful in the case of janissaries. If both the rank and regimental information are given, we have considered the latter as the most relevant information.
- d) Service: In the case that a person died during military service (death in a campaign or during guard duty), we have considered him as an active soldier.
- e) Court Procedure: If an ordinary decedent left no heirs, or if he was survived only by a widow, his entire property in the first case, and three fourths of it in the second case were seized by the imperial treasury or *vakıf* authorities where relevant. In the case of an active member of a specific military corps, the property was taken over by his military corps. This principle proved particularly useful for identifying the janissaries within the Potential Military.
- f) Court Fees: If a fee was assigned to the supreme judge (*kazasker*) as part of the expenses of the inventory, we considered the decedent as an active soldier regardless of his honorific titles. If a specific fee was charged for a janissary officer (*serdar*, *odabaşı*, *yeniçeri ağa*), we classified him as an active janissary.
- g) Socio-occupational titles: If a decedent with the title *beşe*, *ağa* or *bey* did not meet any of the above criteria, we classified him as part of the Potential Military.

After the probate population is thus divided, the Commoners make up about 60% of the probate population, and the Potential Military constitute about 30%. Thus, the two together decide the overall patterns and trends. Throughout the two hundred years we cover, the distribution of the inventories among the four groups in the dataset stays stable. One should note, however, that the number of janissaries and other active soldiers we have been able to identify for the first one hundred years is rather limited, which calls for extra caution when assessing the results for this period. Similarly, the datasets for some of the cities examined do not cover the whole 200-year period. This creates some biases, but we take them into consideration when assessing the results.

2. Findings

In this section, we first examine the differences between families in the four groups, and the changes that occurred in the family demography from 1626–1725 to 1726–1826. After that, we compare the three regions.

a) Family demographics in two periods

i. Nuptiality

The incidence of nuptiality is particularly relevant for the social history of the janissaries because it is known that they were expected to be single combatants, always ready at the barracks or fortresses to take up arms instead of busying themselves with family issues. While the rule of celibacy was not applied to the rest of the Ottoman soldiers, the Janissary corps had been originally founded as the guardsmen of the Sultan. Therefore, imperial authorities tried to restrict their number by limiting the recruitment pool to *devşirmes* and *kuloğlus*, and to keep them socially and spatially isolated from the rest of the society by constraining them to living in the barracks of Istanbul.

Despite examples of janissary marriages from early periods in the history of the corps, and the absence of reliable evidence showing that they were indeed prohibited from getting married, both contemporary narratives and modern sources consider celibacy as a rule and janissary marriages as a development beyond the control of the imperial authorities. The right of marriage, according to these authors, was granted to some military officers (such as *çorbacıs*) and older members of the corps by sultanic approval especially during the reign of Selim I (r. 1512–1520). Yet the rule was relaxed by the sultans over time and ignored by the janissaries.²²

In our data, the Janissaries indeed stood out with the lowest incidence of marriage in 1626–1725 (48.8%) and continued to display a pattern distinct from all others in the following century. But many more of them (62.4%) were married in 1726–1826 (Fig. 1). Most of the earlier quantitative studies on this topic concern Istanbul,²³ and suggest that a similar pattern may have prevailed there as well, namely, 45%–50% in 1604–1668²⁴ and 66% in 1718–1730.

²² The basic source of information for the rule of celibacy is a sixteenth-century memoir-like account titled *Kavanin-i Yeniçeriyân* (*The Rules of the Janissaries*), T. Toroser (ed), *Kavanin-i Yeniçeriyân: Yeniçeri Kanunları*, (İstanbul 2011), 36, 40, 59–60, 204. Most of the later historians followed the arguments of this source providing similar details. Küçükyağcı adds a new dimension by pointing out the Bektashi affiliation of the corps members and the rule of celibacy (*mücerredlik*) in this religious order. He also mentions an early sixteenth-century observer, a certain ‘Spanish Petro’, who wrote that the rule of celibacy was valid at that time. For further details, see E. Küçükyağcı, *Turna’nın Kalbi: Yeniçeri Yoldaşlığı ve Bektaşilik* (İstanbul 2009), 136–138, M. S. Y. Sanz, *Türkiye’nin Dört Yılı, 1552–1556*, A. Kurutluoğlu (trans.), (İstanbul 1974). Ricaut, a British diplomat of the mid-seventeenth century, notes that although the greatest part of the army consisted of bachelors, it was rather a matter of personal choice for purposes of military advancement than an official ban. P. Ricaut, *The History of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, (London 1686), 366.

²³ For the early eighteenth-century Istanbul, see N. Y. Kayaçağlayan, ‘XVIII. Yüzyılın İlk Yarısında Yeniçerilerin Politik ve Sosyo-Ekonomik Roller: İstanbul Örneği’, unpublished Ph.d. dissertation (Ankara Yıldırım Bayezit University 2018); M. Akbel, ‘Tereke Kayıtlarından Hareketle Yeniçerilerin Sosyo-Ekonomik Durumları’, *Tarihin Peşinde/The Pursuit of History*, 15 (2016), 257–278; Taner Öztürk, ‘İstanbul’da İkamet Eden Yeniçerilerin Miras Kayıtları Üzerinden Sosyal Yaşantılarına Mikro Bakış (1748–1750)’, unpublished M.A. Thesis (Akdeniz University 2021).

²⁴ G. Yılmaz, ‘*The Economic and Social Roles of Janissaries in a 17th century Ottoman City: The Case of Istanbul*’, Unpublished Ph.d. Dissertation, (McGill University 2011), 110.

However, a caveat is in order. These studies either do not explain who counts as a ‘janissary’ (Kayaçağlayan 2018) or they use loose criteria (Akbel 2016, 261–262; Öztürk 2021; Yılmaz 2011). For example, more than half of the janissaries in the latter study do not qualify as janissaries by our criteria of classification. Thus, the incidence of marriage among Istanbul janissaries may have been different from our three regions. A small sample from Adana also points to regional diversity. Though remarkably close to the region of ‘Southeastern Anatolia’ in our study, it shows a marriage rate much lower (30%) than our findings about janissaries in the eighteenth century.²⁵

The remaining three population groups, the Other Military, the Potential Military and the Commoners, were closer to one another with a marriage incidence of 82% to 95%, and the overall average was 87% (Table 3). Change from one period to the next was negligibly upwards. Thus, overall, nuptiality at death was within a historical range for the age group 45–49 in Western *and* Eastern Europe in 1900 while janissary nuptiality was closer to that of men in their 20s.

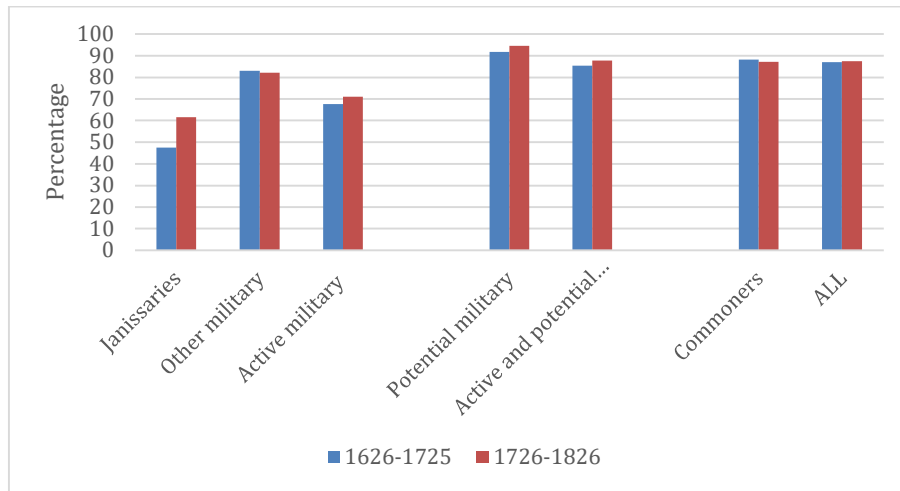
Table 3. Family demographics

	Population	Married (%)	Polygamous (%)	Number of children per married decedent	Probable number of children per married decedent*	Share of minors	Sex Ratio (minors)
1626–1725	841	87.0	10.6	2.0	2.0	44.5	122.2
1726–1826	1560	87.4	7.1	1.9	2.0	48.1	110.2

* Includes unborn children x 0.5, assuming 50% survival rate before puberty

²⁵ From a dataset compiled by Aysel Yıldız on the janissaries of eighteenth-century Adana. The dataset has 258 probate inventories drawn from 37 court registers dated 1719–1761. Adana Şerhiye Sicilleri, no. 1, 4–6, 12–14, 16–18, 23, 26–28, 30–36, 38, 44–45, 50, 52, 65, 104, 125, 129–136. See also Y. Spyropolous with A. Yıldız, ‘Pseudo-Janissarism (*Yeniçerilik İddiası*) in the Ottoman Provinces (with Special Reference to Adana): Its Emergence, Geographic and Socio-Economic Aspects’, *Cihannüma Tarih ve Coğrafya Araştırma Dergisi*, VIII/1 (2022), 32–48.

Figure 1. Nuptiality



ii. Polygyny

Scholarship of the recent decades has shown that contrary to deep-rooted assumptions, polygyny was practiced by a small minority of Muslim men in the Ottoman Empire. Most studies based on probate inventories point to polygyny rates below 10%, and to the wealthy top of the social pyramid as the main practitioners of polygyny.²⁶ However, trends of change over time have received little attention so far. Duben and Behar, for example, showed that polygyny declined in late Ottoman Istanbul (2.51% in 1885 and 2.16% in 1907),²⁷ and conjectured that the trend must have started earlier. Our study confirms.

According to our dataset for 1626–1725, the Other Military stood out with a remarkably high rate of polygyny (21.1%), followed by the Potential Military (15.9%) and the Janissaries (15.8%). These figures are much higher than what Öztürk's data show for janissaries in contemporary Istanbul, namely, 4.7%.²⁸ We cannot tell now whether the discrepancy is related to methodological differences or whether it is real and reflect regional peculiarities. As

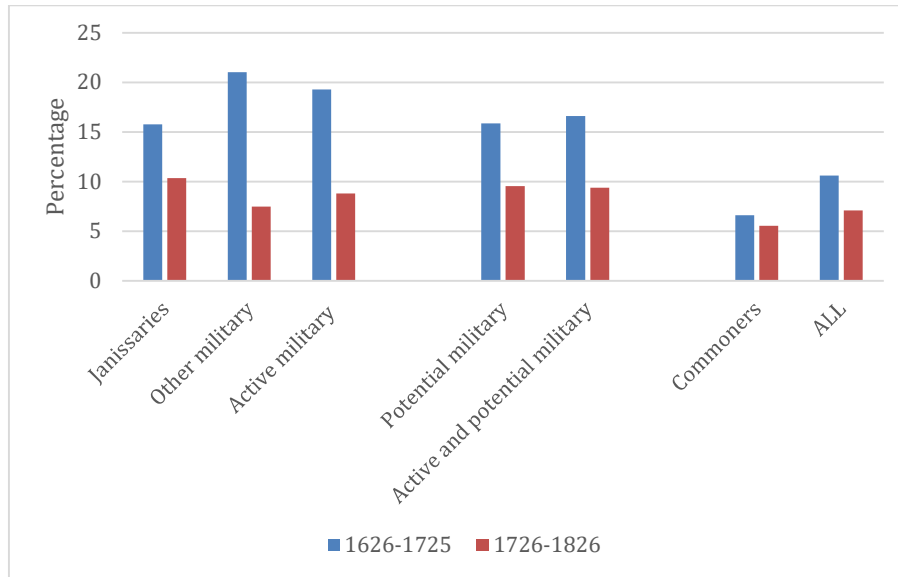
²⁶ Meriwether, *The Kin Who Count*, 124–125; A. Kurt, 'Osmanlı Toplumunda Poligami', in G. Eren (ed) *Osmanlı*, vol. 5 (Ankara 1999), 397–405; K. M. Cuno, 'Ambiguous Modernization: The Transition to Monogamy in the Khedival House of Egypt', in B. Doumani (ed), *Family History In the Middle East: Household, Property, and Gender*, (New York 2003), 250; Cuno, *Modernizing Marriage*, 71; Ö. Demirel, '1700–1730 Tarihlerinde Ankara'da Ailenin Niceliksel Yapısı', *Belleten*, 54/211 (1990), 951; H. Gerber, 'Anthropology and Family History: The Ottoman and Turkish Families', *Journal of Family History* 14/4 (1989), 412; M. C. Zilfi, "'We Don't Get Along': Women and Hul Divorce in the Eighteenth Century', in M. C. Zilfi (ed), *Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Era* (Leiden and New York: Köln, 1997), 294–295.

²⁷ Duben and Behar, *Istanbul Households*, 148–149.

²⁸ S. Öztürk, *Askeri Kassama Ait Onyedinci Asır İstanbul Tereke Defterleri (Sosyo-Ekonomik Tahlil)*, (Istanbul 1995). Cf. Yılmaz, 'The Economic and Social Roles of Janissaries', 110.

expected, the Commoners had the lowest incidence of polygyny (6.6%) and the Potential Military stood in between (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Polygyny



Polygyny was one feature of family demographics that changed most remarkably over time. It declined from 10.6% to 7.1% in the whole dataset from 1616–1675 to 1726–1826 (Table 3).²⁹ The direction of change was the same in all social groups but much stronger among the military. The population share of the polygamous soldiers was more than halved, and the practice receded even among the Commoners. In other words, the conjugal preferences of all the groups we examine tended to converge and approached those of the Commoners in the eighteenth century. These findings corroborate the hypothesis that the decline in polygyny seen in nineteenth-century Istanbul may have had a longer history. Yet available studies on eighteenth-century Istanbul itself show contradictory results concerning the direction of change there.³⁰

iii. *The number of surviving children*

To the best of our knowledge, the only long-term study of fertility in Ottoman lands belongs to Kokdaş.³¹ Studying the number of surviving children of the decedents in probate inventories

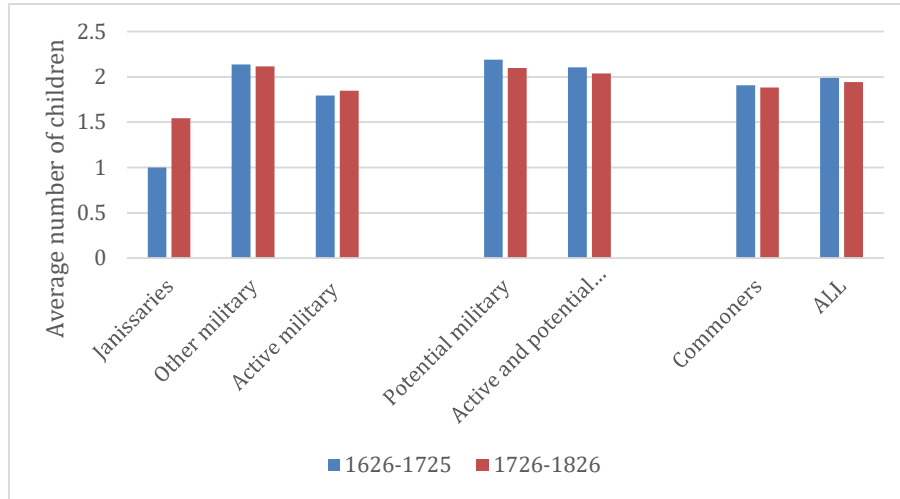
²⁹ We do not consider former wives who had passed away before the decedent because even if we know that the decedent had another spouse at the time of his death, we cannot establish that the two marriages overlapped. Therefore, our estimate of polygyny reflects only the incidence of multiple wives at the time of death.

³⁰ Akbel, 'Tereke Kayıtları', 261–262; T. Kara, 'III. Ahmed Devrinde İstanbul'da Sosyal ve Kültürel Hayat', Unpublished Ph.d. dissertation (Ondokuz Mayıs University 2014), 176–177.

³¹ İ. Kokdaş, 'Preliminary Observations on the Demographic Roots of Modern Childhood in the Ottoman Empire: Wealth, Children and Status in Ruse, Vidin and Sofia, 1670–1855', in G. Yılmaz with F. Zachs (eds), *Children and Childhood in the Ottoman Empire, from the 15th to the 20th Century* (Edinburg 2021), 103–128.

as a proxy for fertility in Vidin, Ruse and Sofia in 1670–1855, Kokdas has identified a shift towards smaller families among the wealthy stratum, especially among the title-holders, and highlighted this shift as a change in fertility behavior and a precursor of the low fertility patterns observed in the late nineteenth-century in the same region. Our findings lend partial support to this observation.

Figure 3. Number of surviving children



Earlier studies have argued that janissary fertility rates were below the average of the commoners.³² Our findings confirm this for our first period. The average number of children in janissary families was one, which implied very small families (Fig. 3). The Commoners were survived by 1.9 children per married decedent, while the Other Military and the Potential Military left behind slightly more descendants. The all-inclusive average was 2.0, and including the unborn babies in the child count does not change these results significantly. These figures show a very fragile demographic regime even though, obviously, they do not represent the fertility rate. If they had, this would have implied that these regions would have faced depopulation without immigration. Even today, the global population replacement rate is 2.3, i.e., for the population to remain stable, each woman (reproductive couple) must have at least 2.3 children.³³ In the very high child mortality environment of the early modern period, the replacement rate had to be much higher. In fact, even though true fertility rates in the regions we examine must have been higher than 2.0, depopulation was still a possibility if the children

³² Kayaçağlayan, 'Yeniçerilerin Politik ve Sosyo-Ekonomik Roller', 84; Öztürk, 'Yeniçerilerin Miras Kayıtları', 66–70; Akbel, 'Tereke Kayıtları', 262.

³³ <https://database.earth/population/fertility-rate/2023>. The fertility rate in late nineteenth-century Istanbul was 3.5, which was already lower than pre-industrial rates (Duben and Behar 1991, 161, 165). Also see Shorter and Macura, *Trends in Fertility* for remarkably high fertility rates in early twentieth-century Anatolia.

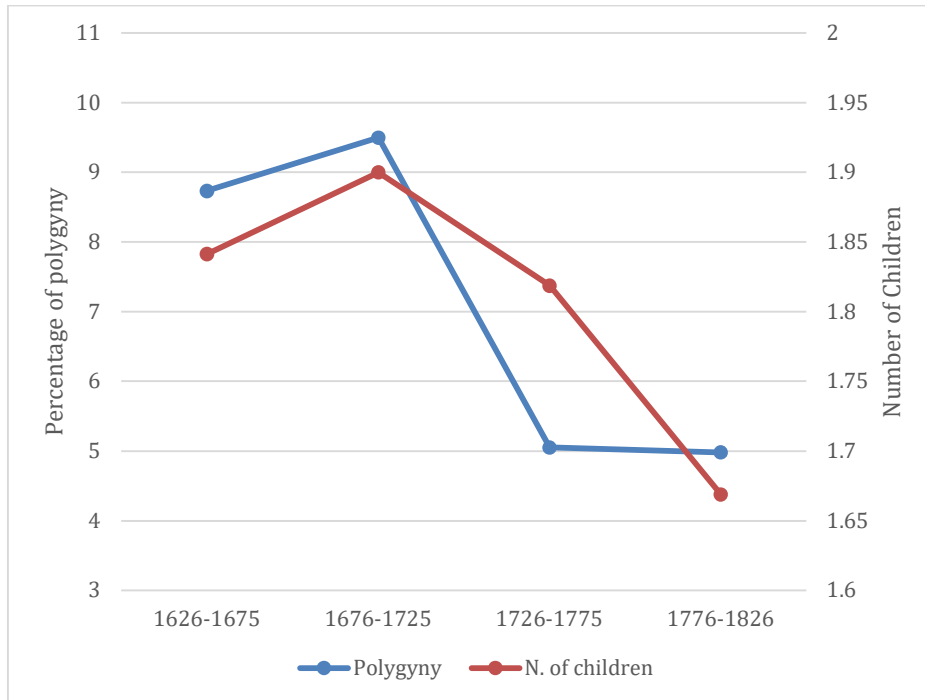
who had died before their fathers had been minors and died without progeny. This too was a strong possibility in a pre-modern mortality regime.

In the next one hundred years, the number of surviving children declined slightly in all groups, except the Janissaries. They were survived by more children (1.5) in 1725–1826, which, thus, tended to converge with the rest. We think that the enlargement of the janissary families was probably related to a rise in the average age of the Janissaries. As more of them struck roots where they served, their life expectancy increased, and they fathered more children.

As for the small shrinkage in the family size among the other groups and the overall average, it does seem to corroborate a shift toward smaller families. However, we do not know at this stage whether fewer children survived because fewer had been born, or because more had died. Undoubtedly, more had died, for example, in the decades around the turn of the nineteenth century when a devastating pandemic and environmental, economic and political difficulties took a heavy toll on the population. However, evidence from Western Anatolia shows that the decline in the number of children actually started in the first half of the eighteenth century when the economic situation was good, and there was a lengthy period without wars and particularly devastating epidemics (Fig. 4). In other words, the decline in 1726–1826, at least, in Western Anatolia, may not have been due to the mortality crisis after the 1780s alone. Similarly, the fact that the decline was more pronounced in families of the Potential Military, the wealthiest among the four groups, i.e., those who were the least likely to suffer from the taxing standards of living, suggests that fertility patterns might indeed be changing. This clearly corroborates Kokdas (2021). That said, we still defer definitive conclusion on this topic until further evidence accumulates because population studies date the demographic transition in the region, the Balkans and Turkey, to the twentieth century.³⁴

³⁴ Todorova, *Scaling the Balkans*, 245–248; Shorter with Macura, *Trends in Fertility*; C. Bakar with S. Oymak and I. Maral, ‘Turkey’s Epidemiological and Demographic Transitions: 1931–2013’, *Balkan Medical Journal*, 34/4 (2017), 323–324; M. M. Yüceşahin with E. M. Özgür, ‘Regional Fertility Differences in Turkey: Persistent High Fertility in the Southeast’, *Population, Space and Place*, 14/2 (2008), 135–158.

Figure 4. Polygyny and surviving children in Western Anatolia



iv. Gender of the surviving children

Gender distribution of the children as well as that of the adult population result from a combination of the biological chances of birth and survival, and the historical circumstances that define access to resources and life risks posed by the gender division of labor.³⁵ Thus, at a basic level, sex ratios in any historical period reflect, the difference between the birth rate and the age-specific mortality rate for each gender. So, sex ratios of the minor children in our study show the ratio between the number of surviving minor boys (births minus deaths) and the surviving girls in the same age group. At the same time, these ratios cast light on the social organization and norms that assign different values to males and females and distribute the survival-determining rights and risks accordingly. Thus, gender distribution of the surviving children in our study says as much about the norms behind the family demographics in each social group and the society as a whole. The same principles apply to sex ratios among adults.

³⁵ Johansson, 'Continuity and Change', 135–177.

What tells us through sex ratios whether there was discrimination in intrafamilial distribution of resources is excess mortality of one gender, i.e., the deviance between what is considered ‘normal’ for a given age group in each historical setting. The debate concerning ‘missing girls/women’ since the paradigm-changing work of Sen (1992) and the use of sex ratios today as a measure of gender inequality and patriarchy rest on this idea.³⁶

In the three regions combined, the sex ratios of the minor heirs were remarkably high throughout the period examined: 120 in 1626–1725, i.e., 120 boys per 100 girls, and 110 in 1725–1826 (Fig. 5). Even though it is normal to expect figures above parity in historical societies with a strong record of patriarchy, such as southern and southeastern Europe, these figures signal a very high level of excess female mortality, especially in 1626–1725.³⁷ One could argue that these figures may not necessarily result from mortality disparities but underregistration of the estates that had minor female heirs only. Even so, they still signal discrimination because securing the share of the minors and assigning custodians to them was one of the most common purposes of the formal registration of the inheritance. Since the custodian was legally responsible for the just management of the property and personal wellbeing of the child, keeping minor girls out of this system meant lack of concern about both.³⁸

Whether from the perspective of physical survival or care for the children’s wellbeing, reflected in the formal registration of the inheritance, daughters of the Janissaries were the most fortunate

³⁶ M. das Gupta, ‘Explaining Asia’s “Missing Women”: A New Look at the Data’, *Population and Development Review*, 31/3 (2005), 529–535; K. A. Lynch, ‘Why Weren’t (Many) European Women “Missing”’, *The History of the Family*, 16/3 (2011), 250–266; Szołtysek, with Tapia, Ogórek, and Gruber, ‘Family Patriarchy’, 702–735.

³⁷ The expected ratio at birth in modern societies is slightly above parity (102–105). However, as high mortality environments increased males’ survival disadvantage, expected sex ratio at birth and infancy in past societies was lower. F. J. B. Tapia with M. Szołtysek, ‘“Missing Girls” in Historical Europe: Reopening the Debate’, *The History of the Family*, 27/4 (2022), 619–657; F. J. B. Tapia with G. Cappelli, ‘Missing Girls in Liberal Italy, 1861–1921’, *The Economic History Review*, (2023), 6–7. We expect infant mortality to be much higher than 200 throughout the period examined, hence the expected infant sex ratio to be no higher than 100. C. Behar with Y. Courbage, and A. Gürsoy, ‘Economic Growth or Survival? The Problematic Case of Child Mortality in Turkey’, *European Journal of Population* 15 (1999), 241–278 (1999); M.N. Todorova, *Balkan Family Structure and the European Pattern: Demographic Developments in Ottoman Bulgaria* (Budapest 2006), 79–85. Due to girls’ biological advantage in every age cohort, the sex ratio was expected to decline as children grew older. Our findings suggest that, on the contrary, sex ratios may have increased during childhood as was the case, for example, in Italy and Greece in the nineteenth century. F. J. B. Tapia with M. Raftakis, ‘Sex Ratios and Gender Discrimination in Modern Greece’, *Population Studies*, 76/1 (2021), 1–18; R. Echavarri, ‘Neonatal Discrimination and Excess Female Mortality in Childhood in Spain in the first half of the Twentieth Century’, *Clometrica*, 16 (2022), 79–104.

³⁸ Underreporting of girls and women in censuses and various bureaucratic records is a common phenomenon in patriarchal cultures, and often, it cannot be differentiated from the phenomenon of ‘missing girls’. S. Gruber with M. Szołtysek, ‘The Patriarchy Index: A Comparative Study of Power Relations Across Historical Europe’, *The History of the Family*, 21/2 (2016), 143.

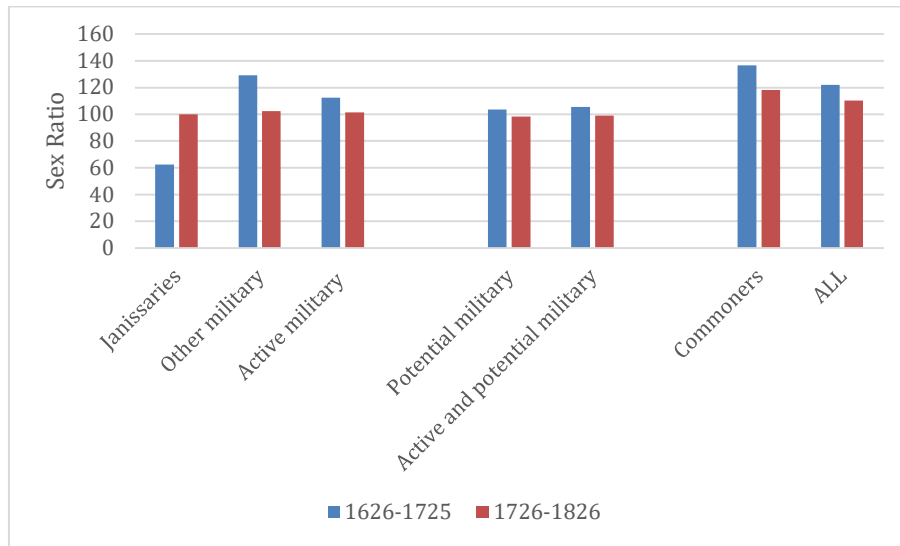
among all the daughters in 1626–1725. Sex ratios of the children of the janissaries were extremely low, with 62.5 boys for every 100 girls. Put differently, the sons of janissaries had high excess mortality. Since boys were naturally more vulnerable when exposed to hardships, this might mean that not only the janissaries themselves but also their families were subject to especially harsh circumstances in this period. Thus, these findings falsify our expectation of higher sex ratios among the military in this period. However, it should be recalled that the Janissary group is quite small in this period, and it might be safer to consider the Janissaries together with the Other Military at this time, in which case the sex ratio rises to 112.5. Among the Commoners, the sex ratio of minors was even higher: 137 boys for every 100 girls. This is among the highest sex ratios so far found in historical studies, placing the three regions combined among the least girl-friendly zones.³⁹

In 1726–1826, gender composition of the children of the janissaries rose and reached parity (100), which is closer to what one would expect in a historical setting with moderate discrimination against girls. To the contrary, the situation for girls improved in all other groups in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, i.e., child sex ratios (as well as sex ratios of the adult children of the deceased, not treated here) declined either because male mortality increased, or female mortality declined. Yet, boys still outnumbered girls except among the Potential Military. Notably, the gender distribution among the children of this group was close to parity in the earlier period too. While the commoners remained as the least girl-friendly group, the opposite was true of the Potential Military. This is remarkably similar to the situation in early modern Europe, where excess girl mortality due to gender discrimination had a class dimension. It was particularly visible in modest and poor families since better off families could afford the risk of investing in daughters as well, the poor did not have the extra resources to keep both a boy and a girl alive.⁴⁰ Similarly, in our case, the Potential Military were the wealthiest and the Commoners were the poorest. Thus, even if a particularly strong masculine and patriarchal ethos prevailed in military families of all kinds, the wealth factor may well have overridden its effect on sex ratios. We intend to study the relevance of wealth in this matter in a separate study.

³⁹ For other observations of high sex ratios, see F. B. Tapia with M. Szoltysek, B. Ogórek and S. Gruber, ‘Inferring “Missing Girls” from Child Sex Ratios in European Historical Census Data: A conservative Approach’, Discussion paper CEPR DP15818 (2021), 10.

⁴⁰ Tapia and Cappelli, ‘Missing Girls in Liberal Italy’, 1–27.

Figure 5. Child (*sagır*) sex ratios



3.b. Regions compared

Some of the findings presented so far would be highly misleading unless the regional variation they hide were revealed. For example, we have seen that the average number of surviving children slightly declined over time. But this was clearly the case only in Western Anatolia, where the number of children dropped from 1.87 in 1626–1725 to 1.69 in 1726–1826. In Southeastern Anatolia, too, we have found smaller families in the second period but this appears to be due to a composition effect in the dataset.⁴¹ In the Central Balkans, the opposite happened: the number of children increased from 1.54 to 1.83 regardless of a composition effect.⁴² Thus, as far as fertility and mortality rates are concerned, we do not see a uniform development.

Synchronic comparison of the regions too shows how misleading combined averages can be. We have seen above that the Janissaries had the highest incidence of polygyny in both periods,

⁴¹ In Diyarbekir, the number of surviving children per married decedent was lower than Ayntab in 1726–1826 (1.91 and 2.58 among the Commoners respectively). As this is when Diyarbekir records start, we cannot compare the earlier period. Since there is no change in Ayntab from the seventeenth century to the eighteenth century, the decline we see in the number of children must be due to the presence of Diyarbekir in the second period—assuming relative fertility/mortality rates remained the same.

⁴² Manastır, which had a higher rate of surviving children than Sofia, had a rather small share in the dataset of 1626–1725. As its population share increased in the following period, the increase in the number of surviving children in the combined set could be related to the change in the composition. However, the number of children in Sofia too increased (from 1.33 to 1.52) from one period to the next. The latter observation contradicts Kokdaş (2021) and needs to be cross checked in further detail.

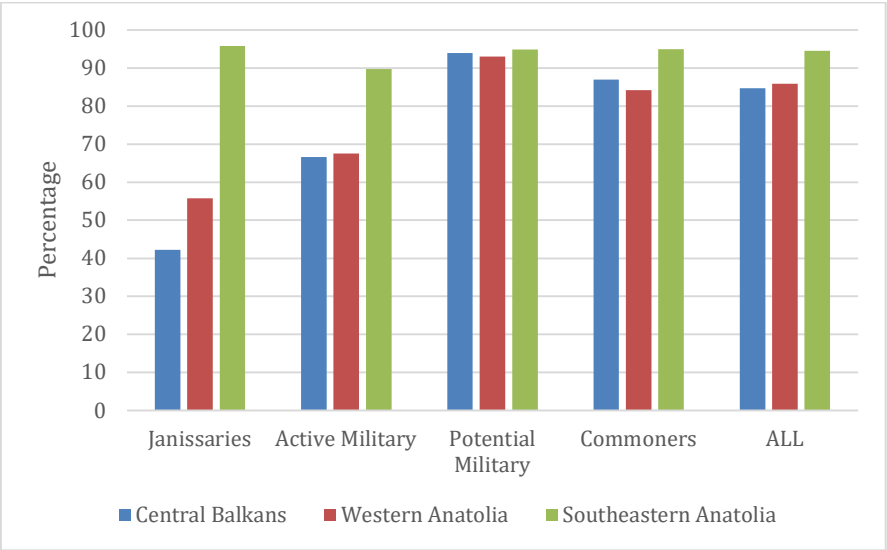
followed by the Other Military in 1626–1725 and the Potential Military in 1726–1826. That the military or, perhaps, the *askeri* in general stood out in this regard may not seem surprising as they were the ones who were expected to emulate the sultan's household most closely and had the means to do so. Yet when we examine each region separately, it appears clear that it was the active military in Southeastern Anatolia who pulled the average so high up. Almost one in every four soldiers had multiple wives in this region while only 5.3% in the Central Balkans did (Fig. 6b), and among the latter, not a single janissary was polygamous.⁴³ Western Anatolia stood roughly in the middle. Similarly, the rate of married Janissaries in Southeastern Anatolia was close to universal marriage (96%) showing either that Janissaries in this region were older, or they just followed the local example, or both. Janissary nuptiality in the Central Balkans was only half as high (Fig. 6a) pointing to a young population.

If one were to take the share of minors among children as indicative of the age of the deceased, the Janissaries in Southeastern Anatolia would indeed appear to be older, and those in the Central Balkans would appear to be the youngest group in the three regions (and among all groups). Put differently, the Janissaries in the Central Balkans died younger than their comrades elsewhere. This situation cannot have been related to the occupational hazards the janissaries faced in this particular region because the share of minors in all the social groups here was higher than in the other two regions (80.8% and 51.5%–42.6%). The respective rates for the Other Military were 66.2% and 41%–59.5%. It should be noted, however, that young male deaths in probate data might not necessarily be related to high male mortality but also legal culture. If, for example, it was less common in this region to go to the court for estate registration, the share of the minors among the heirs, hence, the share of the young deaths among the decedents would be higher because the legal system was more attentive to the minors' rights. Regardless, the Central Balkans also had the lowest average sex ratios among the three regions, which also corroborates the possibility that male mortality here was indeed higher.

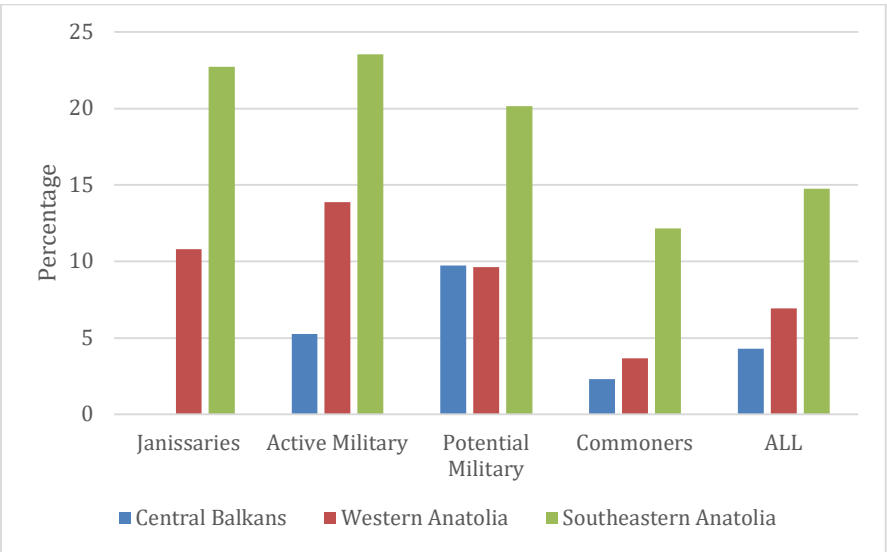
⁴³ Also see Kayaçağlayan 'Yeniçerilerin Politik ve Sosyo-Ekonomik Roller', 84, where the author argues that janissary polygyny in eighteenth-century Istanbul was rare.

Figure 6. Marriage patterns across regions

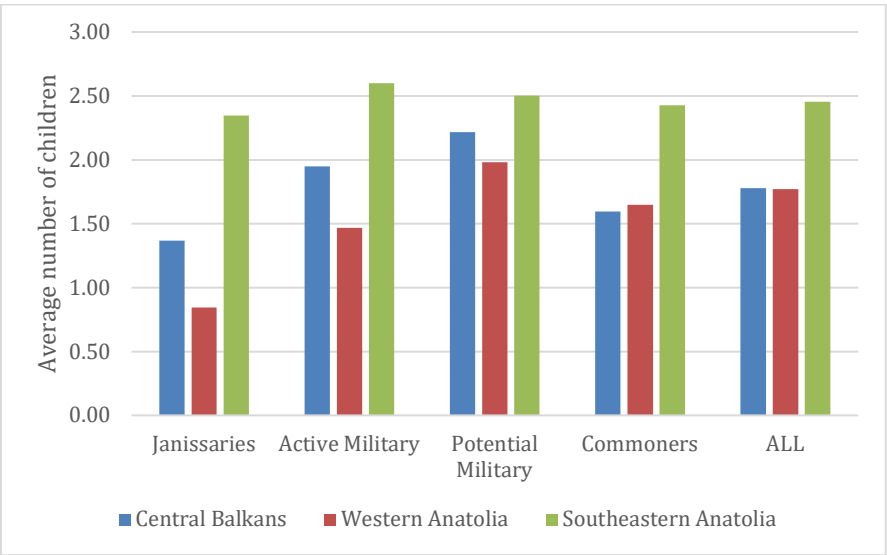
6a. Nuptiality



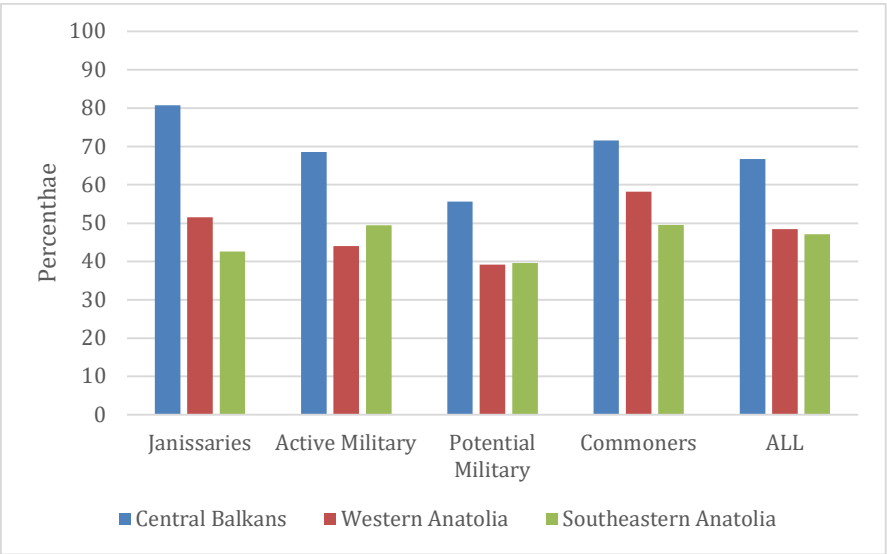
6b. Polygyny



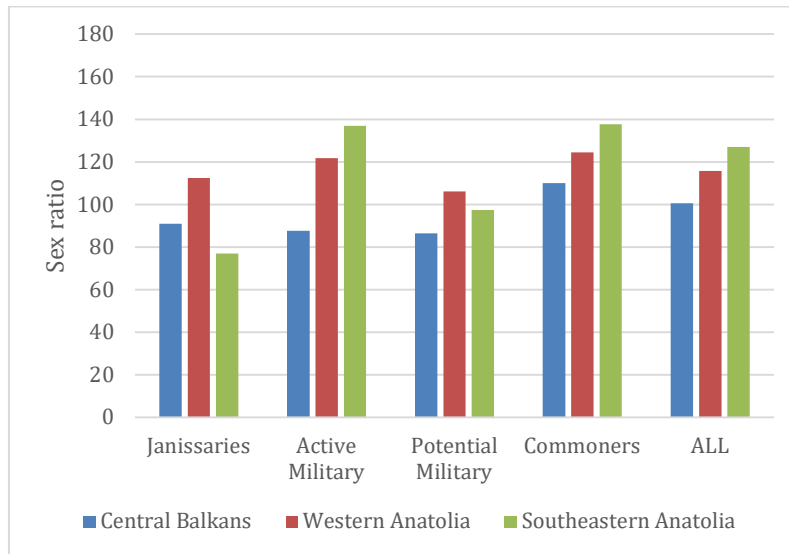
6c. Surviving children



6d. Share of minors



6e. Sex ratios, minors



When we compare the family patterns among the Commoners in the three regions, we observe similar differences. Marriage in Southeastern Anatolia was more common than the other two regions (94.9%), matching the ‘eastern family’ pattern for the age group 45–49.⁴⁴ Also, the polygyny rate in Southeastern Anatolia was four times as high as in the Central Balkans: 12.2% and 2.3%, respectively. Western Anatolia, again, stood between the two and closer to the Balkans. The largest conjugal families were in Southeastern Anatolia, with 2.43 children per married decedent while the other two regions had nearly one child less. All the foregoing suggests a more male-dominated family environment in this region, and child sex ratios complement the picture. The Commoners in Southeastern Anatolia had the highest child sex ratio (138) while the average for the four groups was 127. These figures appear even more extreme when we consider regional differences in mortality. Southeastern Anatolia had the highest rate of child mortality in the early decades of the Republic, and it still has the highest mortality rate today.⁴⁵ If it was the case in Ottoman times, too, then we would expect the sex ratios here to be lower than Western Anatolia, i.e., the opposite of what we have found.⁴⁶ That

⁴⁴ Hajnal, ‘Marriage Patterns’, 103.

⁴⁵ P. Demeny with F. Shorter, *Türkiye’de Ölüm Seviyesi Doğurganlık ve Yaş Yapısı Tahminleri - Estimating Turkish Mortality, and Age Structure Application of Some New Techniques* (Istanbul 1968), 8–21; F. Bilge, ‘Infant Mortality in Turkey: Causes and Effects in a Regional Context’, *Papers in Regional Science*, 100 (2021), 429–453; O. Işık with M. M. Pınarcıoğlu, ‘Geographies of a Silent Transition: A Geographically Weighted Regression Approach to Regional Fertility Differences in Turkey’, *European Journal of Population*, 22/4 (2006), 399–421.

⁴⁶ Tapia and Sołtysek, ‘Missing Girls’ in Historical Europe’, 626.

is because in a higher mortality environment, males would be more prone to catching diseases unless discrimination against girls tipped the ‘natural’ balance. The Central Balkans had the lowest sex ratio (110 among the Commoners and 101 among all) although still showing excess female formality.⁴⁷

In brief, even though there was also within-region diversity, features associated with ‘traditional’ or ‘eastern’ families in different taxonomies intensified in regional averages from west to east. Available studies on other regions of the empire suggest that intensification may have started in Central Anatolia and continued in Arabic-speaking parts of the empire in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, this observation stays tentative until dataset compatibility in these studies is confirmed.⁴⁸

4. Conclusion

The main findings of this study are the following:

1. *Changes that can be interpreted as signs of a move towards the ‘modern’ family.* The two main changes seen in every region and social group were a decline in polygyny rates and sex ratios of the minor children. Because fewer men had multiple wives, conjugal units in the eighteenth century were smaller than those in the seventeenth century. In other words, families appeared less ‘eastern’ or ‘traditional’ in the eighteenth century. In Western Anatolia, this trend was strengthened by a decline also in the number of children while in the Central Balkans, the opposite happened. The change in sex ratios of minors may signify a decline in female mortality, an increase in

⁴⁷ These figures are compatible with the sex ratios for the age group 5–9 in Greece in 1870 (106.6) and in Bulgaria around 1880 (106.2). Tapia and Raftakis, ‘Gender Discrimination in Modern Greece’, 6. Note, however, that child sex ratios in Bulgaria tended to increase further with age and exceeded 108 at 9–10. F. J. B. Tapia, ‘Sex Ratios and Missing Girls in late-19th-Century Europe’, *EHES Working Paper*, 160 (June 2019).

⁴⁸

Region	Period	Polygyny (%)	Average number of surviving children
Ankara	18th c.	12	2.4
Konya	18th c.	12.4	2.9
Aleppo	18th c.	?	4.8
Damascus	17th c.	10.6	2.6
Nablus	early 19th c.	17.7	?

Nablus observation is based on a small sample of 62 inventories. J. E. Tucker, ‘Marriage and Family in Nablus, 1720–1856: Toward a History of Arab Marriage’, *Journal of Family History Sources*, 13 (1988), 165–179; Demirel, ‘Ankara’da Ailenin Niceliksel Yapısı’, 950, 952; H. Erten, *Osmanlı Aile Yapısı: 18. Yüzyılda Konya Örneği* (İstanbul: 2017); Establet and Pascual, *Familles et Fortunes*, 52–57; A. Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century*, (New York 1989), 201.

male mortality or both. Despite this improvement in their life chances, still, more girls died than boys in the same age group.

2. *Janissary distinctiveness and the loss of it.* Janissary families stood apart from all the other social groups with low nuptiality and small families in the seventeenth century, but they came to resemble the others more in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In view of the socio-economic transformations that the corps and its members underwent in the eighteenth century, convergence of their domestic life with that of the rest does not seem surprising.
3. *Regional family formations.* We have examined three regions along the east-west axis in the northern part of the empire and found major differences in the family composition. Families exhibited more 'eastern' features as we moved eastwards on the map, and this pattern applied to all social groups. This does not take us back to the presumed Hajnal line, or show that across Southeastern Europe, Anatolia and the Eastern Mediterranean families became ever more 'traditional' in one direction. In the Balkans further to the west of the area we have studied, families probably had characteristics resembling those observed in Southeastern Anatolia, as Todorova argues, due to similarities in ecology, modes of subsistence and kinship systems. Differences between Sofia and Manastir signal this transition westwards (see Fn. 41). There is also sporadic evidence from other regions that runs against the idea of an east-west continuum of 'traditionality' in family formations.⁴⁹ Therefore, new case studies are needed to fill the information gaps in the map.

We have also seen that the observed patterns were not frozen in time in any region. Nevertheless, a significant degree of continuity between the geographical spread of the family formations in seventeenth-century Anatolia on the one hand and modern Turkey on the other cannot be overlooked. It is not as easy to say the same for the Ottoman Balkans without untangling the multiple regime changes and socio-political interventions that affected this multinational region since the nineteenth century.⁵⁰

4. *The military and regional family formations.* Minor exceptions aside, the Janissaries and the Other Military, i.e., the active soldiery of the Ottoman Empire mirrored the

⁴⁹ See also B. B. Doumani, *Family Life in the Ottoman Mediterranean: A Social History* (Cambridge 2017), for diversity in domestic cultures in settlements remarkably close to one another in the Eastern Mediterranean.

⁵⁰ For a detailed description of the regional distribution of the simple and complex families in the Balkans, see Todorova, 'Situating the Family of Ottoman Bulgaria', 443–456, and K. Kaser, 'Introduction: Household and Family Contexts in the Balkans', *History of the Family* 1/4 (1996), 375–386.

demographic characteristics of the places where they lived and died. This may not seem much surprising for the eighteenth century, when the fusion of the janissaries, other soldiers and the locals reached a new high, but it is notable that the seventeenth century was similar. This means that at least from 1626 onwards, there was no singular ‘janissary family’ or a ‘military family’ just as there never was an ‘Ottoman family’.

All our initial hypotheses about marriage and family patterns of the janissaries failed in Southeastern Anatolia but worked particularly well for the Central Balkans. This may be because our view of the janissaries or more broadly, the Ottoman military, are shaped by a regional bias in the available literature on the topic. Regarding the only variable about which we had no a priori assumptions, gender composition of the minor children, the Janissaries of Southeastern Anatolia stood out with the lowest sex ratio. This was the only variable by which the Janissaries did not conform to the regional pattern. In view of all the other observations about the region, we surmise that this was as a sign of high male mortality among the janissaries rather than a more girl-friendly environment.

Exploration of the reasons behind these interregional and intergroup differences in family formations, and the changes that occurred between 1626 and 1826 should constitute the topic of another study.

Appendix: Identifying the active military

We have used seven criteria to identify the Janissaries, other active soldiers and the potential military: a) socio-occupational and honorific titles, b) profession, c) regimental information, d) rank information, e) court procedure, f) court fees, and g) active military service.

(a) Socio-occupational and honorific titles

Titles are the very first criterion by which we separate the Commoners from the rest. However, as Tülüveli also notes, the ways honorific titles were used have not yet been fully understood,⁵¹ and reliance on honorific titles alone to figure out status or occupational identity even at this basic level can be misleading. It is very instructive, for example, that after close examination of each inventory, we have found that 156 decedents without titles were not actually commoners. Forty-six of them were active/registered janissaries while 64 served in other military units, and some high-ranking military officers in one or the other group. The remaining 46 decedents seemed to be potential military (Tables A1, A2, A3).

Although the value of titles as indicators of socio-economic status and profession stays open to question, in the absence of better alternatives, some scholars consider them as usable clues about the occupation and status of a given individual (Yi 2004;⁵² Yılmaz 2011; Canbakal: 2007). Other historians, however, have reservations about their use as a reliable source of information due to the unsystematic nature of Ottoman record keeping practices, the possible role of personal preference in self-identification as well as the ambiguous nature of some titles that could refer to multiple ranks, occupations, or services (Tülüveli: 2005; Açık: 2015). Pointing to the random use of different titles with reference to the same person in different records or times, these scholars underline the need for further research on their usage as signs of personal status and profession. While we agree with this call for caution, one should note that the case studies on which these criticisms are based are also often unsystematic and draw on few examples from a limited number of places (Trabzon, Üsküdar, Amasya).⁵³ Therefore, their conclusions too should be considered as tentative.

Clearly, it may not always be possible or practical to examine each titled individual in detail in a given study, particularly in a quantitative study using large datasets. In this study, we have

⁵¹ Tülüveli, 'Honorific Titles', 17–27.

⁵² E. Yi, *Guild Dynamics in the Seventeenth-Century Istanbul*, (Leiden and Boston 2004).

⁵³ G. Tülüveli, 'Honorific Titles in Ottoman Parlance: A Reevaluation', *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 11/1–2 (2005), 17–27; T. Açık, "'Bey"likten "Ağa"lığa: 17. Yüzyılın İlk Yarısında Trabzon'da 'Unvan Enflasyonu', *Karadeniz İncelemeleri Dergisi*, 16 (2014), 9–38.

tried to do just that. We have studied each case thoroughly without taking the titles as absolute markers of social status or office holding. The results of the cross-check system we have applied suggest that if studied carefully, honorific titles can provide valuable clues about socio-economic and occupational identity.

Three common and particularly challenging titles relevant for the study of the soldiery are *ağa*, *beşe* and *bey*. Since these titles were widely used by various servants of the state, more sophisticated criteria are needed to differentiate the use of these titles as manifestations of prestige, power, and wealth from their use as professional titles. The title ‘*ağa*’, for instance, could refer to a senior member of the classical corps as a sign of seniority, but it could also refer to a local notable, palace servant, tax farmer, senior servants in households of the Ottoman dignitaries, or any prestigious figure as an expression of the social recognition of wealth and power. Therefore, if no further clues are provided, we have classified the *ağas* as Potential Military (Table A3). Out of 699 people in the latter category, 43% (299 individuals) are *ağas*.

The title of *beşe* has occupied a special place in academic debates due to its strong association with the janissaries. Although all Ottomanists are aware of the methodological problems of considering all *beşes* as active/real janissaries, some, which we may call as ‘risk-takers’, do so nonetheless, while ‘sceptics’ remain hesitant. The first group of historians take this title as an important criterion for the identification of the corps members and build on this assumption. Thus, they study the infiltration of commoners into the corps and integration of the janissaries into the social and economic life of the cities via the wider and vague category of *beşes* rather than the active/real janissaries. Yi, for instance, considers people bearing the titles *beşe*, *ağa* or *bey* as janissaries, and analyses their incorporation into Istanbul guilds through the cases that involve *beşes* in the seventeenth-century court registers.⁵⁴ Contrary to Yi, Yılmaz excludes the titles *bey* and *ağa*, and regards *beşe* as one of the basic criteria of membership in the corps arguing that it was ‘the title used for janissaries.’⁵⁵ Finally, Nagata and Nagata point to the

⁵⁴ Yi, *Guild Dynamics*, 69, 139.

⁵⁵ Yılmaz, *The Economic and Social Roles of Janissaries*, 18, and especially 121–122, 192–93 for a discussion of people with the title of *beşe* and more specific cases of janissary status. See also, G. Yılmaz Diko, ‘Blurred Boundaries Between Soldiers and Civilians: Artisan Janissaries in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul’, in S. N. Faroqi (ed), *Bread from the Lion’s Mouth*, (New York 2015), 176. Öztürk and Toprak, too, are aware of the problems of

virtual disappearance of the title *beşe* (together with *serdengeçdi*) among the probate population of Sarajevo following the abolition of the army in 1826, and similarly argue that the *beşe* title was a marker of membership in the corps.⁵⁶ They are absolutely right. However, the post-1826 purges and the anti-janissary atmosphere may also have discouraged people about using the title.

The other group, the sceptic historians, object to equating all the *beşes* with janissaries of various background. Spyropoulos, for instance, criticizes conclusions based on the assumption that the titles *beşe* and *ağa* meant a division between low-ranking soldiers and senior officers, and underlines that the *beşe* title was not reserved for the janissaries.⁵⁷ He and Altıntaş point out that the *beşe* title was widely used, at least among the eighteenth-century armorers and artillerymen.⁵⁸ Indeed, we did encounter such an example in our dataset (Table A2). Using several cases from the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century court registers of Üsküdar, Trabzon and Amasya, Açık makes a similar observation, and having found a considerable number of janissaries without the title, and *beşes* without any ties to the janissary army, he argues that this title lost its significance over time as a marker of military service. Indeed, he cites an interesting case from the seventeenth century in which five *beşes*, residents of Amasya, apply to the local court to deny any affiliation with the janissary corps:

Since people call us *beşe* it has been assumed that we are all janissaries, yet by no means do we have any affiliation with or involvement in janissary-hood. Further, until this moment we have contributed what we could to the regular and irregular taxes imposed on the aforementioned neighborhood, and we will continue to pay our share in the future taxes as long as we are alive. We never refuse to pay them.⁵⁹

the *beşe* title but choose to consider them as janissaries. Taner Öztürk, ‘18. Yüzyıl Ortalarında İstanbul Yeniçerileri’, A. Yıldız with Y. Spyropoulos and M. M. Sunar (eds.), *Payitaht Yeniçerileri: Padişahın “Asi Kulları, 1700–1826* (İstanbul 2022), 103; M. B. Toprak, ‘Osmanlı İstanbul’unda Demografi, Servet ve Eşitsizlik: 18. Yüzyıl Tereke Defterlerinden Bir Analiz’, unpublished Ph.d. Dissertation (Marmara University 2022), 154–155.

⁵⁶ Y. Nagata with M. Nagata, ‘Saraybosna Şerhiye Sicilleri Üzerine Bir İnceleme’, in *XII. Türk Tarih Kongresi, Kongreye Sunulan Bildiriler*, vol. 3 (Ankara 1999), 693. See also Tülüveli, ‘Honorific Titles’, 21.

⁵⁷ Y. Spyropoulos, *Κοινωνική, διοικητική, οικονομική και πολιτική διάσταση του οθωμανικού στρατού: οι γενίτσαροι της Κρήτης, 1750–1826*, unpublished Ph.d. dissertation (University of Crete 2014), 69–70.

⁵⁸ Spyropoulos, *Κοινωνική, διοικητική*, 69–60; A. Altıntaş, ‘İstanbul Loncaları ve Yeniçeriler: Kayıkçı Esnafı Üzerine Bir Deneme, 1677–1752’, in A. Yıldız with Y. Spyropoulos and M. M. Sunar (eds.), *Payitaht Yeniçerileri: Padişahın Asi Kulları, 1700–1826*, (İstanbul 2022), 143.

⁵⁹ “Beyne’n-nâs herbirlerimize beşe ta’bîr olunmağla zümre-i yeniçeriyândan olmamız tevehhüm ve zu’m olunmuşdur ve lâkin vechen mine’l-vücûh yeniçerilikde alaka ve medhalimiz olmaduğundan mâ’ada bu ana gelinceye dek mahalle-i mezbûrede vâki olan tekâlif-i örfiyye ve şakkayı mezbûrlar ile ma’ân tahmilimiz mikdârı edâ itdik ve ba’d-e’l-yevm yine hayy oldukça tahmilimiz mikdârı vâki’ olan örfiyye ve şakkayı edâ ideriz aslâ ve

In view of the limited and unsystematic nature of the information available on the social, military, economic and political roles of the janissaries in any period and their strong ties with the people bearing the *beşe* title, the study of the janissaries through *beşes* appears as a legitimate research strategy. However, methodological pitfalls in this approach need to be recognized. We agree with the second group of historians that there is not a definite connection between bearing the title of *beşe* (or *ağa*) and being a registered or active janissary, and that by itself, the title denotes a possibility only. That said, ‘a possibility’ means that the bearers of the title can still be janissaries even when there is no sure marker of affiliation with a specific unit. In other words, skepticism needs to work both ways, hence our category of Potential Military.

In the four-fold classification in our study, it is in the group of janissaries that we have the largest number of *beşes* (73 individuals), and if we include the *beşes* among the ‘Other Military’ who are active soldiers of uncertain corps affiliation, this number reaches 100 (Table A1 and A2). There remains 266 *beşes* in the dataset (Table A3) with more or less equal chances of being active soldiers or janissaries. We have designated this group as ‘Potential Military’ because they do not meet any of the following criteria by which we have been able to identify the active janissaries and other soldiers. These criteria emerged through a close reading of the probate text.

Table A1. Criteria of Identification for Janissaries

	<i>Beşe</i>	<i>Ağa</i>	No Title
Profession	21		3
Regiment	2	5	7
Rank			
<i>Karakollukçu</i>			2
<i>Alemdar</i>	4	3	15
<i>Odabaşı</i>	1	1	4
<i>Serdengeçdi ağa</i>		5	
<i>Yeniçeri ağa</i>		2	
<i>Haseki ağa</i>		1	
Court Procedure	32	1	12
Court Fees	13	2	3
Total	73	20	46

kat’â edâdan imtinâ’mız yokdur.” Amasya Şeriiyye Sicilleri 15, 9/3 (April–May 1664), as cited in T. Açık, ‘Beşe Unvanı Hakkında’ *Tarih Dergisi*, 62 (2015/2), 54.

Table A2. Criteria of Identification for Other Military Personnel

	Titles						No Title
	<i>Beşe</i>	<i>Ağa</i>	<i>Bey</i>	<i>Molla</i>	<i>Seyyid</i>	<i>El-hac</i>	
Profession							
<i>Subaşı</i>		2		2	1		4
<i>Sipahi</i>		1				1	34
<i>Sancakbeyi</i>			1				
<i>Dizdar</i>		1					
<i>Cüdi</i>		1	4			1	1
<i>Gulam-ı Acemi</i>	2						
<i>Cebeci</i>	1						
<i>Topçu</i>							5
<i>Top Arabacı</i>							1
<i>Burç ağası</i>						1	
<i>Bölükbaşı</i>							10
<i>Kalyoncu</i>							1
<i>Alaybeyi</i>			1				
<i>Humbaracı</i>		2					
<i>Delilbaşı</i>		1				1	1
<i>Tüfengçibaşı</i>		1					
<i>Zabit (kura/puyane zabiti)</i>		2					
<i>Lağımçı</i>			1				
<i>Bostancı</i>					1		3
<i>Çeribaşı</i>		1	1				
<i>Tuğcubaşı</i>							1
<i>Alayçavuşu</i>		1					1
<i>Kavas</i>							1
Court Procedure	15	3	5				
Military Service							
Death during a campaign	8	7					1
Death during service	1	2					
Total	27	25	13	2	2	4	64

Table A3. Criteria of Identification for Potential Military Personnel

	Titles				No Title
	<i>Beşe</i>	<i>Ağa</i>	<i>Bey</i>	<i>Mir</i>	
Profession					
<i>Paspan</i>					1
<i>Yamak</i>					1
<i>Menzilci</i>					1
<i>Muhzır/başı</i>					2
<i>Tatar</i>					1
Rank					
<i>Çavuş</i>					17
<i>Halife</i>					10
<i>Yazıcı</i>					8
<i>Kethüda</i>					6
Title	266	299	86	1	
Total	266	299	86	1	47

Profession.

If the probate record identifies the decedent by profession as a member of a military corps, we have classified him as a janissary or an active soldier (Table A1–A2). It should be noted, however, that the probate inventory provides a snapshot of a person’s identity at the time of his death. Transfers from one military corps to another due to seniority, personal choice, or governmental strategy was quite common during the period under study. Some retired janissaries, for instance, became *sipahis*,⁶⁰ or others switched to a bureaucratic career or began to serve in another military corps. They could even resign to become an ordinary subject (*reaya*) as in the case of Mustafa b. Hasan from Ayntab who applied the court to verify his new status:

I had served the sultan for a couple of years claiming janissary-ship. But due to physical weakness, in addition to being poor and having a large family, I gave up that claim more than fifteen years ago, and I have been paying my taxes.⁶¹

The title, profession, and the place of residence of the deceased is normally mentioned at the beginning of a standard probate record. For instance, the entry for Janissary Hasan, who died in Manisa in 1642 reads “*El-merhum Hasan Beşe er-râcil mate sakinân an mahalle-i Kôrhane*

⁶⁰ Sanz, *Türkiye'nin Dört Yılı*, 106.

⁶¹ Ayntab Şerhiye Sicilleri 39, 148/3 (C 1101/March April 1690), as cited in H. Canbakal, *Society and Politics in an Ottoman Town: Ayntab in the 17th Century*, (Leiden: Boston 2007), 87.

min mahallât-ı el-Mahmiye-i Manisa”,⁶² which means that he was a *racil* from Manisa. The term *racil* literally means ‘infantry soldier’ and seems to have been used as a synonym for ‘Janissary’ especially in the court registers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In later periods, it was replaced by the word ‘*yeniçeri*’ (janissary) and its derivatives such as ‘*yeniçeri taifesinden*’ (of the janissaries) or ‘*dergah-ı ali yeniçerilerinden*’ (of the Janissaries of the Sultan’s court). In our dataset, 24 of the active janissaries are identified as *racil* rather than as *yeniçeri*. While we have not been able to find any discussion or explanation of the term *racil* in current scholarship, clues about the court procedure in records involving *racils* have shown that they were janissaries. As will be explained below, estates of the janissaries were seized by the *Yeniçeri beytülmal* (treasury of the corps) under certain circumstances. This applied to the *racils* as well.

The rest of the soldiery whose profession is explicitly specified in the dataset belongs to various branches of the Ottoman central army (*cebeci*, *topçu*, *humbaracı*, *top arabacı*, *lağımçı*, *acemi oğlanları*) and the local corps (*yerlû*) as well as the provincial forces (*subaşı*, *sipahi*, *dizdar*, *burç ağası*, *kalyoncu*, *kura zabiti*), the police/guard forces (*bostancı*, *kavas*) as well as an indeterminate group of *cündis* (Table A2). Literally, the term *cündi* means cavalry or expert horseman, and in this sense, it is the opposite of the term *racil*. Yet, the military corps it refers to is not always clear. In the Ottoman royal court, there was a unit under the command of *cündibaşı* composed of gifted and talented horsemen who usually performed in traditional sports (*cirit*, *tokmak*) for amusement and training.⁶³ It seems that the term *cündi* could also refer to a *sipahi* especially during the sixteenth and seventeenth century,⁶⁴ but the topic calls for further research. In our dataset, there are seven *cündis*, all from seventeenth-century Bursa. Except for one who served as *iç mehter* of a governor, there are no clues about the functions of the rest. For that reason, we have preferred to keep them separate from the *sipahis*.

(a) Regimental Information

Regimental information is important for differentiating the active military personnel from the rest, especially when a record involves ranks or nicknames with multiple meanings, or when no other information is provided about the professional identity of the deceased. Although

⁶² Manisa Şerhiye Sicilleri 146, fl. 17 (1 Ra 1052/8 June 1642).

⁶³ For their training, functions, and history, see M. Z. Pakalın, *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Sözlüğü* (Istanbul 2004), 3 vols., I, 317.

⁶⁴ Yılmaz, *The Economic and Social Roles of Janissaries*, 202, ft. 76, and R. C. Jennings, *Christians and Muslims in Ottoman Cyprus and the Mediterranean World, 1571–1640*, (New York: London 1993), 289 consider *cündi* as an honorific title used by *sipahis*.

regimental detail alone does not necessarily imply janissary identity, we consider it as such when accompanied by another qualifier such as ‘*racil*’ (as opposed to, for example, ‘*topçu*’). Availability of regimental information has enabled us to identify five decedents without any military title as janissaries.⁶⁵ We have also identified a certain Mehmed Çavuş as an active janissary from the 21st *ağa bölük*, and Ebubekir Halife as a professional *top arabacı* (a cannon-wagon carrier) from the 16th *bölük* thanks to this additional information. Similarly, we have moved three untitled people to the category of Other Military as they turned out to be artillerymen.⁶⁶

(b) Rank

In the absence of any reference to the military profession or a specific unit, references to ranks or services peculiar to a particular military corps become an important criterion of identification. In the registers we have used for the dataset, there are ranks that refer to the internal hierarchy of three armed units: the janissary army, the *sipahis* and the personal armies of the provincial authorities (governors and *mütesellims*). Although the ranks of *serdengeçdi*, *alemdar*, *karakollukçu*, *haseki* or *odabaşı* were also present in corps other than the Janissaries, whenever this was the case, the record gives the corps name. Therefore, we have classified as janissaries those decedents who held one of these ranks but whose corps was not specified in the *tereke*. We have thus included 38 individuals in the Janissary category⁶⁷ (Table A1). If, however, both rank and regimental information is provided, we have considered the latter as more important, as in the case of two *serdengeçdi ağas*, one from the 1st *ağa bölük* and the other from the 51st *bölük*. The dataset also has two senior officer ranks in the provincial forces,

⁶⁵ The *usta* of the 27th *bölük*, one soldier with the title of *şerif* from the 50th *bölük* and three soldiers from the 30th *cemaat*, the 23rd *bölük* and the 1st *bölük*.

⁶⁶ One *topçu halife* from the 8th regiment, one *halife* from the 49th regiment, and one soldier from the 9th regiment.

⁶⁷ For the internal hierarchy of the janissary army and the functions of these military officers, see İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devleti Teşkilâtından Kapukulu Ocakları I: Acemi Ocağı ve Yeniçeri Ocağı* (Ankara 1988), 173–237.

the *alaybeyi*⁶⁸ and the *çeribaşı*.⁶⁹ In the same manner, *delilbaşı*,⁷⁰ *tüfengçibaşı*,⁷¹ *tuğcubaşı*,⁷² *alay çavuşu*⁷³ are ranks of armed units attached to households of the provincial authorities.

Some terms denote more than one position, rank or service, and they are very frequently used by the military: for example, *çavuş* (17 people), *halife* (10 people), *kethüda* (six people), *tatar* (one person), *paspan* (one person), *yamak* (one person) and *yazıcı* (eight people). We have considered them as Potential Military. In a similar way, *bölükbaşı* is a rank in the Janissary corps equivalent of the captain, but it may also refer to the regiment commander of the mercenary (*sekban*) troops.⁷⁴ In the absence of additional information concerning their affiliation with a specific troop, we have included *bölükbaşıs* in the safe category of Other Military, rather than the Janissaries. One exception to this is Bölükbaşı Ali b. Mehmed, who died during the Morea campaign. (Table A2)

(c) Military service

Some probate entries are devoid of any identity details except the title and the cause of death. Some of these indicate death during a campaign or on guard duty at a fortress. We have placed such decedents in the category of Other Military as they clearly had an active military position. There are 19 such people in the dataset. Of these, 16 died during a campaign and three, while serving at a fortress. Nine of them were *beşes*, nine were *ağas* and one was untitled. Even though it is highly likely that some of them were janissaries, we have categorized them as active military to be on the safe side. (Table A2)

(d) Court Procedure

After all the identity markers above are exhausted, there remains a large pool of people who were either commoners or belonged to the Potential Military. This is when we turn to some

⁶⁸ Aziz b. Halil b. Abdullah Bey was the *alaybeyi* of Mardin at the time of his death.

⁶⁹ Es-seyyid Ahmed Ağa and Seyyid Abdullah b. Rüstem Bey. For the functions of *sipahi çeribaşı*, see A, ‘Çeribaşı’, *TDVİA*, 270–72; Abdülkadir Özcan, ‘Çeribaşılık Müessesesi’, *Mimar Sinan Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 1 (1991), 196–203.

⁷⁰ There are three decedents from this group in the dataset. Ahmed b. Mehmed Ağa died in Sofia while he was serving as the *başdelilbaşı* of Hüseyin Paşa. El-hac Ebubekir b. Abdullah was a *delilbölükbaşı*, and Abdullah was a *delilbaşı*.

⁷¹ El-hac Halil b. Veliyüddin Ağa who was the *tüfengçibaşı* of the *mütesellim* of Saruhan.

⁷² Süleyman who died in Sofia while he was serving as the *tuğcubaşı* of Ahmed Paşa.

⁷³ There are two in the dataset: Süleyman b. Abdullah Çavuş Ağa, the *alay çavuş* of Silahdar Mehmed Paşa, and Ebubekir Çavuş, the *alay çavuş* of Hasan Paşa.

⁷⁴ For the functions of the janissary *bölükbaşıs*, see Uzunçarşılı, *Kapukulu Ocakları*, 217–218; and for *sekban-sarıca bölükbaşıs*, see M. Akdağ, ‘Timar Rejiminin Bozuluşu’, *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi*, III/4 (1945), 429–430.

specifics of the probate process. A general rule that applied to all the estates brought to the court was that when a person died heirless or left a widow without progeny, all of the estate in the first case, and three fourths in the second case was seized by the public treasury (*beytülmal*).⁷⁵ We have a total of 127 estates in our dataset that belonged to commoners and were taken over by a representative of the *beytülmal* (generally *mütesellim* or *voyvoda*).

If a janissary was survived by legal heirs, the latter were entitled to their share like those of the other subjects. The only exception was that non-Muslim relatives of the janissaries of *devşirme* origin were not considered as legal heirs and their estates were seized by the *yeniçeri beytülmal*.⁷⁶ Similarly, if a janissary died heirless or was survived by a widow only, the entire property or what was left after the widow's share had been set aside was seized by the *yeniçeri beytülmal*. The same mechanism was at work in other corps, for example, the armorers, artillerymen, and cannon-wagon carriers as well *gılman-ı acemi*.⁷⁷ In our dataset, the estates of four artillerymen, one cannon-wagon carrier, one *delil*, and one *alay çavuşu* were seized by their highest local commander while that of a governor's servant was seized by one of the governor's men (*etibba*).

Thus, each military corps acted like a corporate body regarding the *tereke*s of their soldiers and officers, and generally, the highest or authorized representative of the relevant body seized the estate on behalf of his institution. This is particularly clear in the case of the Janissary corps in which *serdars* in the cities and *yeniçeri beytülmal emini* in the fortresses took over the estate after the deduction of debts and the court fees. The property was then sold and transferred to the capital by the local officers or kept by the regiment. The regiment officers were responsible for seizing the property of their soldiers when it did not exceed a certain sum. According to Mouradgea d'Ohsson, for instance, the provincial officials were entitled to seize the property of a janissary deceased in the region under their authority unless the value of the property exceeded 1500 *guruş*, in which case it was sent to the central treasury of the corps in Istanbul.⁷⁸ Unfortunately, the *tereke* registers do not provide any detail about what happened after the

⁷⁵ For an important recent study on private property, inheritance rights and the *beytülmal*, see A. Çimen, 'Public and Private Property Claims in the Ottoman Empire: The *Beytülmal* and its Institutionalization in the Early Modern Period', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Marmara University 2023). For more details concerning the seizure, sale and collection of the revenues from the properties of the heirless people, see A. Bilgin with F. Bozkurt, 'Bir Malî Gelir Kaynağı Olarak Vârissiz Ölenlerin Terekeleri ve Beytülmal Mukataaları', *Kocaeli Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi* 2/20 (2020), 1-31.

⁷⁶ Gül, *Yeniçeri Teşkilatı*, 752.

⁷⁷ BOA, C.AS. 52/2409 (3 Z 1228/27 November 1813).

⁷⁸ Mouradgea d'Ohsson, *Tableau général de l'Empire othoman*, vol. 7 (Paris 1824), 335–336.

serdar or *yeniçeri beytülmal emini* seized it. As the *yeniçeri beytülmal* was under the control of the *ağa* of the Janissaries, he would normally allocate some of the money sent to the capital to the expenses of the janissary army and would annually transfer the remaining amount to the inner treasury (*ceyb-i hümayun*). Therefore, except for a certain portion, the reigning eventually seized the bulk of the estates.⁷⁹

The janissary regiments of the 1st *bölük*, 5th *bölük*, 64th *cemaat* and the 71st *cemaat* had a privileged status in this regard, as they were allowed to collect and benefit from the probates of their comrades autonomously. By a sultanic decree of the early decades of the eighteenth century, the right to seize the estates of the deceased members of these two *bölüks* and two *cemaats* who died without known heirs was granted to their own regiments.⁸⁰ We have identified one heirless officer and an heirless ordinary soldier from the 1st *bölük* through the recipient of the seized property.⁸¹ Overall, 45 janissaries in the dataset were identified by examining the authority that handled the heirless estates.⁸²

There seems to have been fierce competition in the ‘*tereke* market’ among different claimants over the heirless estates. As such estates provided extra revenues for the relevant institutions/authorities/individuals, figuring out the social status of the deceased as well as the place of his death was of vital importance for the parties involved. Each group jealously traced the death of their members and tried to prevent intervention by third parties, sometimes leading to disputes over claims of right.⁸³ As legal status of the land where the person died (*tımar* or *vakıf* land) was another factor that determined the rights to heirless property, *vakıfs* were another player in the competition. The death of a janissary called Mehmed from the 71st *cemaat*, for instance, in his coffeehouse attached to the *vakıf* of Sultan Bayezid caused a fierce dispute between the trustee of the *vakıf* and that of the regiment. He had a total wealth of 2,000 *guruş*, after the deduction of his wife’s share and debts, and the remaining amount was claimed by the

⁷⁹ For more details on the *yeniçeri beytülmal* and seizure of the probate estates of the janissaries, see Uzunçarşılı, *Kapukulu Ocakları*, 307–310, Gül, *Yeniçeri Teşkilatı*, 752–61; Öztürk, *Askeri Kassam*, 92–94; Kayaçağlayan, ‘Yeniçerilerin Politik ve Sosyo-Ekonomik Roller’, 95–102.

⁸⁰ The reason for this right is obscure. Yet it was first granted in the year 1145/1732–1733 and then was renewed by each sultan in the years 1171/1758, 1188/1775, 1204/1789, 1222/1807, and 1223/1808. It was still valid in the 1820s. For further details, see BOA, C.AS. 407/16807 (2 C 1237/24 February 1822); C.AS. 254/10603 (27 M 1219/8 May 1804); HAT, 1354/52911 (undated); HAT 35/1765 (undated).

⁸¹ El-hac Hasan Ağa, a *serdengeçdi ağa* of the same regiment had 1,368 *guruş* while a soldier called Mehmed, had a total wealth of 42 *guruş*. Sofya Şeriyye Sicilleri 29, fls. 109–110 (11 Za 1223/29 December 1808).

⁸² Seventeen of them were seized by the *yeniçeri beytülmal emini*, 12 by the local *serdar*, 8 by the local janissary commander (*yeniçeri zabiti*), 4 by the *turnacıbaşı*, 6 by a certain Süleyman Ağa from the 56th *bölük* and finally 2 by the *orta zabıt*.

⁸³ For more details see Bilgin and Bozkurt, ‘Vârissiz Ölenlerin Terekeleri’, 13–15.

trustee of the *vakıf*. Only after the trustee of the 71st *cemaat* proved that the deceased was an active and real janissary from his own regiment, and the Sultan decided in favor of the janissaries, the *vakıf* authorities suspended their claims.⁸⁴

Symmetrically, the absence of military claims on the property of heirless *beşes*, *ağas* or *beys*, can be taken as a sign that the decedent is not an active soldier. We have two such examples, an *ağa* and a *bey*, one of whom died heirless in a *khan*. In both cases, the estates were seized by *vakıf* custodians, and not by military officers.⁸⁵ As these examples illustrate, the court procedure and the institution/authority that seizes the estate of a decedent provide reliable information about the identity of the person. Thus, by reference to the *beytülmal* details and involvement of the *vakıf* authorities, we have found out that a total of eight *ağas* and five *beşes* were not janissaries. For the same reason, we have placed two *beys* in the category of Potential Military rather than the active Other Military.

(e) Court fees

Another important but neglected criterion that we have employed to determine the decedents' identity is the court fees charged. In principle, partitioning of the commoners' inheritance was handled by local judges in return for a court fee called *resm-i adi* (ordinary tax) whereas inheritance of the *askeris* was under the authority of the *kazaskers*. An inheritance judge (*kassam-ı askeri*) presided over the court process when an *askeri* estate was inventoried, and he charged a special fee called *kısmet-i askeriye/resm-i kazaskeri* on behalf of the *kazasker*. The amount of the fee for inventorying and dividing the estate varied between 15% and 25% for each case.

As the *kazasker* fee was charged on estates of the entire *askeri* estate, it has allowed us in this study to differentiate the active military staff and the *ağas*, *beşes* or *beys* who may have assumed the title through other means. Since the *kazasker* fee was not specific to the janissaries, however, it is of no help in identifying the members of the corps. Therefore, if no further information other than the *kazasker* fee is provided for a *beşe* or an *ağa*, we have considered them as active soldiers in the category of Other Military— even though most of them may have

⁸⁴ BOA, HAT 35/1765 (undated): “*Kaimmakam paşa, ocaklı terekesini vakıf subaşı zabt edemez. Evkafın beytülmalı sahib-i dirlik yoldaş olmaz ise demektir. Hak Ocağıdır.*”

⁸⁵ Seyyid İbrahim b. Abdullah and Süleyman b. Abdullah Bey. For further details, see Bursa Şeriiye Sicilleri B-309, fl. 104 (19 L 1240/6 June 1825); B-165, fl. 62 (4 S 1154/21 April 1741).

been janissaries. We have thus transferred 15 *beşes*, 3 *ağas* and 5 *beys* from the category Potential Military to the active military with the help of the *kazasker* fee (Table A2).

As for the Janissaries, we have discovered that some special fees were charged on their estates. Unfortunately, these were not charged systematically, and its logic escapes us. Therefore, when all the above criteria failed, we resorted to these specific fees for identifying the Janissaries. One of them was collected/charged by the local military officer (*serdar*) under various names (*serdar ağa resmi* /*[resmi]* for the *serdar*/for the *ağa*/for *serdar çavuşu*/for *serdarlar çavuşu*/for *serdar adamı*). Using this criterion, we have identified three commoners as Janissaries,⁸⁶ and moved 13 *beşes* and two *ağas* from the category of Potential Military to the category of Janissaries.⁸⁷ A similar fee we have associated with the Janissaries is the *odabaşı* fee (*ücret-i odabaşı*) by reference to which we have categorized a certain Mustafa b. Abdullah Beşe as a janissary. He died in a khan without any known heirs, and 80 *akçes* were added to the court expenses for the *odabaşı*.⁸⁸ Two other specific fees called *yeniçeri ağa resmi* or *yeniçeri zabiti resmi* also appear in 14 probate records, but these belong to individuals already identified as Janissaries with the help of other criteria. Therefore, they are not included in the table.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Ahmed b. Süleyman: 0.75 *guruş* fee for the *serdar çavuşu*; Mehmed b. Ahmed: 1 *guruş* fee for the *serdar çavuşu* and Hacı Mustafa: 0.5 *guruş* fee for the *serdar çavuşu*.

⁸⁷ The fees varied between 13 *guruş* and 0.5 *guruş* and made up 0.83% to 2.19% of the gross wealth.

⁸⁸ Bursa Şeriyye Sicilleri B-56, fl. 54 (evail-i S 1046/5-14 July 1636). Among the costs, there is also a fee for the *kazasker* (100 *akçes*). His total wealth is 3,745 *akçes*.

⁸⁹ The fees for the servant of the *ağa* and the *çukadar* of the *ağa* varied between 60 *akçes* and 280 *akçes*, and 30 *akçes* and 300 *akçes* respectively. The fee of the *ağa* himself ranged from 170 *akçes* to 16 *guruş* amounting to 8% to 9.66% of the gross wealth.