

SAYI 35 • 2010

OSMANLI ARAŐTIRMALARI
THE JOURNAL OF OTTOMAN STUDIES

Some Figures for the Urban and Rural Populations of Damascus Province in the Late Seventeenth Century

Malissa Taylor*

It is frequently lamented that the sources used to establish population level and settlement density for the Ottoman lands in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, commonly called the *Tapu Tahrir Defterleri*, rarely exist after the turn of the seventeenth century.¹ These sources were revenue survey registers, which exhaustively detailed the taxes and taxable assets of each Ottoman province, including the numbers of tax payers themselves. The creation of new, highly detailed registers to document population, settlement and productivity levels did not occur until the middle of the

* University of California, Berkeley.

1 A number of studies estimating population from these documents have been made for Ottoman towns and regions in the sixteenth century. This paper deals with Damascus Province, whose sixteenth-century urban population was thoroughly documented by Muhammad Adnan Bakhit in *The Ottoman Province of Damascus in the Sixteenth Century* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1982). The population of the *sancaks* that today constitute Palestine, Israel, and Jordan, which were a part of Damascus Province, have also received attention: see Amnon Cohen and Bernard Lewis, *Population and Revenue in the Towns of Palestine in the Sixteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). See also Wölf-Dieter Hütteroth and Kamal Abdulfattah, *Historical Geography of Palestine, Transjordan and Southern Syria in the Late Sixteenth Century* (Erlangen: Fränkische Geographische Gesellschaft, 1977), which compares data from the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries regarding changes in settlement density.

nineteenth century.² Hence, historians, geographers and economists know far more about the population and productivity of the sixteenth century and the nineteenth century than they know of the intervening period, roughly 1600-1830.

One source that provides a partial remedy of this ‘black hole’ are the highly detailed *avarız* registers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The *avarız* was a tax that had started as an extraordinary cash levy to support the Ottoman war effort; it was not collected yearly but when occasion demanded. As Halil İnalçık and Linda Darling have shown, the yearly collection of *avarız* was regularized in the course of the seventeenth century.³ By the first half of the seventeenth century, *avarız* registers that recorded the allocation of the tax upon the empire’s subjects had been drawn up by the finance department. Frequently, historians have lamented that these registers cannot be used to estimate the population as was possible with the *Tapu Tahrir Defterleri*. The latter counted individual households as well as bachelors resident within those households, giving a detailed account of the adult male population. The *avarız* registers have tended to record not individual households or taxpayers, but the number of *hanes*—a term meaning house, but which did not correspond to a physical household. Rather, the *hane* was an accounting unit that was composed of a number of physical households that collectively bore the responsibility of paying the *avarız* tax that was levied on each *hane*. In some cases a *hane* might contain six or seven real households, though sometimes it was a number more like ten or eleven. In any case, it fluctuated quite a bit, and it is difficult to derive even a ballpark figure from registers that record only the number of *hanes* and not the number of households belonging to each *hane*.

2 For studies based on such sources see Norman Lewis, “The Frontier Settlement in Syria” in Charles Issawi (ed.), *The Economic History of the Middle East 1800-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 259-68; Haim Gerber, “The Population of Syria and Palestine in the Nineteenth Century,” *Asian and African Studies* 13 (1979): 58-80; and Kemal Karpat, *Ottoman Population, 1800-1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

3 Halil İnalçık, “Military and Fiscal Transformation in the Ottoman Empire, 1600-1700,” *Archivum Ottomanicum* 6 (1980): 283-337; Linda Darling, *Revenue-raising and Legitimacy: Tax collection and finance administration in the Ottoman Empire, 1560-1660* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1996), 82.

It is rarely remarked that there are a number of *avarız* registers in existence that do not merely record *hanes*, but which also record the actual households contained within each *hane* in both rural and urban areas of the Ottoman Empire. In other words, they convey the same information that was recorded in the *Tapu Tahrir Defterleri*, and break down the populations of villages and urban neighborhoods into their constituent households. There is no reason to presume that they present a less accurate vision of the empire's population than the *Tapu Tahrir Defterleri*, yet scholars have been slow to exploit them for this purpose. This article seeks to make such an assessment for the city of Damascus and parts of the countryside surrounding the city in the late seventeenth century. It will document three demographic trends: the increase of population in the city of Damascus itself, the increase of the rural population in the villages of the city's surrounding oasis or 'greenbelt;' and a decrease in the rural population living in regions further from the city. It will then analyze how these demographic trends support or challenge the prevailing characterizations of Ottoman economic resources and potential in the seventeenth century.

The Sources

This study will draw upon the information recorded in three detailed *avarız* registers residing at the Başbakanlık Arşivleri in Istanbul. The first of these, and the most valuable because it is complete, is the survey of the city of Damascus produced in 1086/1675.⁴ Prepared by Halil Sahillioğlu and published by IRCICA in 2005, this document will hopefully be utilized a great deal in future scholarly labors.⁵ The other two sources record the population of villages in the province of Damascus. Unfortunately only fragments have survived of both of these manuscripts, which severely limits the scope of what we are able to ascertain from them about rural demography. The first of these rural *avarız* surveys was undertaken in 1086/1675, and was perhaps produced by the same personnel who prepared the urban register dating from the same year.⁶ The second survey

4 Başbakanlık Arşivleri (hereafter BA), Maliye'den Müdevver 1977.

5 Halil Sahillioğlu (ed.), *Şam Şehrinin XVII. Asırda Sosyal ve Ekonomik Yapısı - 1977 Numaralı 'Avârız Defteri'ne Göre / Al-binya al-iqtisâdiyya wa'l-ijtimâ'iyya li-madīnat dimashq fi'l-qarn al-sâbi'- 'ashar* (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2005).

6 BA, Bab-ı Asafi, Defterhane-i Amire Defter (hereafter A.DFE) 143.

was made in 1106/1695, by coincidence the same year that the finance bureau introduced the lifelong tax farm known as *malikane*, which was to revolutionize Ottoman fiscal practice in the eighteenth century.⁷ In some sense it was not coincidental, as both were measures designed to maximize tax revenues at a time when the treasury was exhausted from twelve years of warfare with the allied powers of Russia, Venice, the Papal States, and the Habsburgs known collectively as the Holy League.

How reliable are these documents? A historian of Ottoman Bulgaria recently expressed skepticism over the reliability of the information in the detailed *avarız* registers.⁸ In addition to the *avarız* registers that he had studied to derive a population estimate for several Bulgarian towns and villages, he had consulted records of the *cizye*—the poll tax levied on Christians and Jews—that dated from approximately the same years. He found that these two sources frequently contradicted each other, and not by any small margin of error, leading him to despair of arriving at an accurate population estimate.

These frustrations are a stark reminder that to some degree, all population estimates based on Ottoman bureaucratic documents must be taken with a grain of salt. Nevertheless, they are the best source available for such a task, even with their acknowledged drawbacks. Furthermore, there is no reason to suppose that the figures provided in the *avarız* registers are any less accurate than those that appear in the *Tapu Tahrir Defterleri* of the sixteenth century. Comparing *Tapu Tahrir Defteri* (hereafter TT) 401 with TT 263, we find that the population of the village of Mezze, lying just outside Damascus proper, grew from 186 to 265 recorded taxpayers in just five years (1543-1548).⁹ In the same five year period the village of

7 BA, A. DFE 186; for the many studies on the importance of the *malikane* see Ariel Salzmann, *Tocqueville in the Ottoman Empire: Rival paths to the modern state* (Boston: Brill, 2004); Dina Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul, 1540-1834* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Erol Özvar, *Osmanlı Maliyesinde Malikâne Uygulaması* (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2007).

8 Grigor Boyknov, “Notes on the Reliability of Detailed *Avarız* and *Cizye* Records for Ottoman Demographic History,” paper presented at the *XI International Congress of Social and Economic History of Turkey* on June 18, 2008, at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey.

9 Bakhit, 233.

Kafr Souseh—Mezze’s neighbor on its southeastern border—is purported to have declined from 167 taxpayers to just 82.¹⁰ Short term fluctuations of such magnitude (doubling or halving) at a time of general peace and prosperity beg the question of the registers’ accuracy. All arguments built upon such data must therefore acknowledge the tentative and uncertain nature of the conclusions.

Another important issue to confront is that of the individuals counted in the two types of registers. Who is counted and are the two groups counted comparable? The *Tapu Tahrir Defterleri* were produced in order to give a very wide ranging sense of a province’s economic potential, including the numbers of individuals subject to a variety of taxes. In both the urban and rural settings, they counted adult males, including those who had their own households and those who did not. While they singled out those among this population who served as prayer leaders (imams) or preachers (*hatibs*), they did include them as part of the taxpaying population. In the urban population, the most important group that is missing from these sources are those who were tax exempt—namely the military population, whose numbers were likely substantial.

The *avarız* registers, on the other hand, were made to facilitate the collection of the *avarız* tax only. Its methods of accounting were all related to this one specific task. Although it has sometimes been described as a poll tax, it is clear from these detailed registers that the *avarız* was a property tax. Technically, the *avarız* registers are not counting people, but property. The urban register documents each dwelling in the city of Damascus and even takes account of the condition of the property in question. It identifies the owner, and it is the owner who pays the *avarız*.¹¹ Many people who rented houses owned by a waqf escaped *avarız* liability because the waqf was tax exempt, although in some cases the renter was liable; it was not clear why this was the case. Those who owned multiple houses were charged for all of their properties, if their renters contributed then they paid the house’s

10 Ibid., 234.

11 See for instance Sahillioğlu (ed.), 120, where all five of the houses numbered 26-30 belong to one Kurd Bölükbaşı, who is responsible for the *avarız* for each of them. This despite the fact that houses 27 and 29 are listed as currently occupied by renters, whose names are not recorded and therefore show no sign of being liable.

owner, not the *avarız* collector. If a person was ‘squatting’—that is, living in a house whose owner was unknown—the squatter did not pay *avarız*.¹²

Although the *avarız* register counts dwellings rather than households per se, these two seem reasonably comparable. Hence, the primary comparison that will be undertaken for the urban population in this article is the number of Damascene dwellings in 1675 with the last recorded *Tapu Tahrir* statistics of households in the sixteenth century. Many factors have been taken into account to make these numbers as comparable as possible. Because the 1675 register deals only with those who had their own dwelling, whether as an owner or renter, it makes sense to deal in households rather than individuals. Therefore, this paper compares the number of dwellings in the 1675 register with men listed as having their own household in the *Tapu Tahrir Defterleri* of the sixteenth century. The figures under comparison do not include the *Tapu Tahrir*’s category of adult men who do not live on their own (*mücerred*) because there is no accounting for this group in the 1675 register. On the other hand, the 1675 register counts a population that is not present in the *Tapu Tahrir Defterleri*: the military class. These include not only janissaries (infantry), sipahis (cavalry) and other actual military personnel, but also the scholars learned in the Islamic sciences called the ulema, and the *sadat*, or those who claim that they descend from the family of the prophet Muhammad. All of these people, generally tax exempt from the *avarız*, are nevertheless carefully counted and listed as tax exempt in the 1675 register. Since they are a population absent from the sixteenth-century *Tapu Tahrir Defterleri*, they too will be subtracted out to make a more comparable sample of what we might call regular taxpayers, or what the Ottomans called *reaya*.

Comparison of the rural populations presents a different set of difficulties. The *Tapu Tahrir Defterleri* account for village populations in the same way that they account for urban populations, listing the numbers of married men, adult men without their own households, and those who performed religious functions such as imams and *hatibs*. The *avarız* rural surveys do not count the village populations this way, nor do they follow the same format as the urban *avarız* register. Rather, they present a list of male names, tally these up and record them as, for example “82 individual

12 See for instance Sahillioğlu (ed.), 73-4, showing that a ruined and ownerless house was not assessed any *avarız* liability, despite the fact that someone named Husayn bin Gharīb resided there.

subjects” (82 *neferen reaya*). It seems fair to presume that these are the individuals liable for *avarız* in the village, but to what extent is that group comparable with the figures from the *Tapu Tahrir Defteri*? For village men to be liable for *avarız*, they needed to own property in the village. Court cases and *fetvas* from Damascus in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries make it clear that ‘property in the village’ could mean not only a house but animals, trees or a garden.¹³ Hence each man in the list did not necessarily own his own dwelling, and for that matter it is conceivable that some property holders were living in a parent’s household as bachelors. There were also those who lived in villages and had no property at all; *fetvas* attest to such and to the right of the property-less person to refuse to participate in the village property-based taxes.¹⁴ The comparison of the rural figures is therefore more problematic than those of the city. For the sake of simplicity, this study counts all the men whose names were recorded in the *Tapu Tahrir Defterleri*—married men, bachelors and clerics. This total is then compared with that of the total names in the 1675 and 1695 *avarız* registers—despite the fact that it means the sixteenth-century totals will likely account for a larger group of men than those of the seventeenth century.

Demographic Findings

As mentioned above, the population numbers from the sixteenth-century *Tapu Tahrir Defterleri* vary to some degree. In his exhaustive tabulations of demographic data from the sixteenth-century Damascene *Tapu Tahrir Defterleri*, Adnan Bakhit records that in 950/1543, 7,213 Muslim households, 546 Christian households, and 519 Jewish households were

13 E.g. Damascus Sharia Court (hereafter DSC), vol. 20, n. 828, p. 261, which notes that village property based taxes were levied on both the immovable (real) property (*akar*) and freehold properties (*emlak*) of the plaintiff. The fact that either or both of these necessitated participation in property-based taxes is born out in *fetvas* such as the one given by Ali Efendi el-Muradi (d. 1770) in *Al-nūr al-mubīn*, Maktabat al-Asad al-Wataniyya (Alassad National Library, ANL hereafter), Zahiriyya 7508, f. 70a. Even though the questioner in this case did not own a house but a garden, he was ruled to be liable for property based taxes.

14 Shaykh Isma‘il al-Hayiq, *Fatawā al-Shaykh Isma‘il al-Hayiq*, ANL, Zahiriyya 5677, f. 10b.

recorded in the city of Damascus.¹⁵ To that, another 70 households can be added that were recorded as belonging to religious functionaries such as imams or *hatibs*, resulting in a total of 8,348 households. However, the *Tapu Tahrir Defteri* of 955/1548 showed a large increase, and according to the available information, represented the high-water mark of Damascene population in the sixteenth century. In that year, 9,475 households were recorded, of which 8,119 were Muslim, 136 imam, 704 Christian, and 516 Jewish. The size of this increase—up 13.5% in only five years—raises the question of whether this amount of growth actually occurred or if some of the gain was attributable to a more exacting bureaucratic effort in 1548 than in 1543. Whatever the case, this paper takes the figure of 9,475 households to accurately represent the height of Damascene population in the sixteenth century, for the last *Tapu Tahrir* figure recorded for the city, that of 1568-9, lists only 8,701.¹⁶

To these numbers, let us compare those from the 1675 urban *avariz* survey. According to the 1675 register, the total number of Damascene households in that year was 12,899. However, this number also includes those households that were deemed military—combatants, ulema and *sadat*. According to the register, military households made up 1,498 of the total. Lending some credence to the general accuracy of this figure are the numbers of Damascene soldiers provided by Karl Barbir for a slightly later period, 1693-1702.¹⁷ When the military households are subtracted out, the adjusted total is 11,401 households with *reaya* occupants, an increase of about 20% over the height of the population level of the sixteenth century in 1548, and an increase of 31% over the last available number from 1568-9. Of these, 980 are identified as Christian, although that is merely the number of households from the majority Christian area around Bab Tuma in the Old City.¹⁸ The number of Qaraite, or Samaritan households, was recorded as 38, while other Jewish households, designated together as *efrenci* (Ashkenazi or Sephardic) and *musta'rab* (Mizrahi), were record-

15 Bakhit, 49.

16 Ibid.

17 Karl K. Barbir, *Ottoman Rule in Damascus, 1708-1758* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 95, documents the presence of 1,004 'local' janissaries in 1693-4 and 268 'imperial' janissaries in 1701-2.

18 See Sahillioğlu (ed.), 303-30 for predominantly Christian neighborhoods and 331-7 for Jewish areas.

ed as 343. Neither of these were meant to represent the totality of these groups within the entire city. Christians and Jews both lived in majority Muslim neighborhoods, where the word *zimmi*—a term for a non-Muslim usually referring to Christians and Jews—usually followed their individual household entries. This distinction did not, however, enter the summary of information that the register's scribes compiled after all houses on a street or alley had been counted. Nor did they state whether the *zimmi* in question was a Christian or a Jew, although that is sometimes inferable from the name. Hence the number of households for both groups was definitely higher.

While comparing the number of taxpaying males of the sixteenth century with those of the seventeenth has its difficulties, the analysis of the available data supports the conclusion that the urban population of Damascus was higher at the end of the seventeenth century than it had been at any point in the sixteenth. This conclusion is, however, subject to all the uncertainties that were discussed above and the caveat that the two types of registers are not making accounts that were intended to be comparable. Nevertheless, it would be much harder to make a case from this data that the urban population had shrunk. In light of these figures, the question that first comes to mind is whether this increase was part of an overall upward trend, meaning that rural population too had increased, or whether the increase of the city's population suggested that rural populations had abandoned the countryside for the city. It is with these questions in mind that we turn to the fragments of the rural *avariz* registers from 1675 and 1695.

The 1675 register records the population for 28 settlements, most of them villages but one or two were too small to qualify as villages and hence labeled *mezra'a*. All of the villages were located southwest of the city. None of the villages in the 1675 survey are duplicated in the 1695 survey, the extant part of which records 16 villages and 4 farms to the south and southwest, and then an additional 25 villages in the Biqa' Valley along with 7 *mezra'as*. Of this total, only 24 could be matched with villages of the same name in the last *Tapu Tahrir Defteri* made for Damascus in 977/1568-9 (see Table A). The overlap would have been much greater if the 1568-9 register had survived in its entirety, but unfortunately, a large part of the very section that dealt with villages in the southwest region is missing. Where it was possible to make a comparison between the village

populations in 1569 and those in the late seventeenth century, the results varied quite a bit by region.

Two opposing trends become very clear. In the villages that were relatively close to the city and located either within the ‘greenbelt’ of the oasis or close thereby, the population level had nearly uniformly increased. In some cases, it had increased spectacularly. As Table A shows, the villages of Mezze and Kafr Souseh had expanded by 75% and 230%, respectively, from their levels in 1569. While Mezze had had 200 taxpayers in 1569 and Kafr Souseh had had 79, Mezze had 350 in 1675 while Kafr Souseh had 261. Considering that the *Tapu Tahrir Defterleri* were likely to record a larger slice of the population than the *avariz* register, increases of this scale are particularly remarkable.

If the high growth of the population of the greenbelt area is one clear regional trend, the second such trend is the tale of population contraction in the Biqa‘ Valley. Of the nine villages that were present in both the 1568-9 and the 1695 registers, only two—Bira and Majdal Balhis—had positive growth (see Table A). Neither of these grew more than modestly. Majdal Balhis grew from 53 taxpayers to 60; Bira grew from 49 to 51. Some of the villages that contracted did so by an equally modest amount: Istabl declined from 15 to 14 and ‘Amiq from 32 to 30. Nevertheless, those Biqa‘ villages that experienced relatively large changes in their populations uniformly experienced it as loss: Shamsiya dropped from 37 to 8 taxpayers; Jubb Janin was reduced from 108 to 63; and Raqid from 49 to 23. In total, these villages contained 473 taxpayers in 1569. In 1695, they contained only 361. This discrepancy may be attributable in part to the differences in accounting for taxpaying villagers that were discussed above, but it is a wide enough difference to reasonably conclude a trend of contraction, even if these figures overstate the extent of it.

Further to the south of Damascus proper, the trend was less clear cut. The villages that lined the valley of the river ‘Awaj saw both increases and decreases. Of the villages closer to the river, Artuz and Judaydat Artuz both increased. Their southern neighbors Bayt Sabir and Kafr Hur, also part of the ‘Awaj valley, also gained. The small farm of Dayr, which had no residents in 1568-9, registered 7 taxpayers in 1675. Just south of the valley, the village of Tayba saw modest growth (from 31 taxpayers to 40) while the town of Kunakir saw a steep decline, from 152 to 91 taxpayers. In

the higher elevations above the valley, two fairly robust villages, Qala‘at Jandal and Biqa‘sem, both shrank markedly: the former by 58% and the latter by 48%. On the other hand, another village at high elevation just to the north of Qala‘at Jandal, ‘Aysem al-Fawqa (Upper ‘Aysem), had more than doubled its population, from a village of 25 to one of 55 tax payers. Its sister village ‘Aysem Tahta (Lower ‘Aysem), which was located 200 meters below in the valley, had had a very different experience. While the ‘Aysem Tahta of 1569 had had 37 taxpayers, that of 1675 had only 9. However, a note in the margin indicates that even this small group of 9 villagers represented a recovery for ‘Aysem Tahta, which had ceased to exist at some point earlier and had only recently come back into existence as a unit independent from the neighboring village of Qatana.¹⁹ While the populations of some villages was up and others down, the aggregate of the village populations tells a more straightforward tale of an overall contraction: in 1568-9 this sum was 654, while in 1675-1695 it was 408.

Significance

What do such findings tell us about the overall economic landscape of the late seventeenth century? In general, the broad economic trends of the Ottoman domains in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries are thought to be applicable to the circumstances of Greater Syria. Two recent works that broadly summarize the economic potential of the Ottoman lands in this period, a short treatment by Wölf-Dieter Hütteroth and a monograph by Faruk Tabak, both agree on this point.²⁰ These trends can be summarized as a decline in overall population from the heights of the sixteenth century matched with a corresponding contraction in agriculture. A further problem for agricultural growth was that the most productive lands were frequently abandoned by the peasantry for various reasons: low lying lands benefiting from river irrigation turned swampy and malarial, rain fed plains suffered from over-cultivation or exploitative taxation and became

19 BA, A.DFE 143, 28.

20 Wölf-Dieter Hütteroth, "Ecology of the Ottoman Lands," in Suraiya Faroqhi (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey: The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603-1839* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 18-43; Faruk Tabak, *The Waning of the Mediterranean 1550-1870* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 189-241.

grazing land. In general, agriculture retreated from plains to the higher elevations on mountainsides to escape the mosquitoes and rapacious tax collectors. Grain prices increased sharply as less land was under cultivation than had been the case in the sixteenth century, and a relatively larger portion of the population now lived in the cities.

All this being said, both Hütteroth and Tabak agree that none of these trends negatively impacted Greater Syria as much as Anatolia and other parts of the Ottoman Empire. While Tabak maintains that the trend of increasing urbanization certainly proceeded apace in the Syrian lands, he interprets this trend as a testament to the increasing productivity of agriculture. He estimates that the ratio between rural producers and urban consumers was roughly 3.5 to 1 in the middle of the sixteenth century, whereas by the turn of the nineteenth century, it was 2 to 1.²¹ Less land may have been under cultivation at the end of the eighteenth century, but it was more efficiently cultivated, with yields comparable to those in Europe. Given this set of facts, Tabak concludes that prime agricultural land in Greater Syria did continue to remain under cultivation.²² Additionally, he posits that the late seventeenth century showed some aspects of an economic and population recovery from the drop off of a century earlier.

Most of the data in this article tends to support Tabak's brighter, Syrian-exception thesis than his broader, gloomier portrait of the later Ottoman centuries. The rise in the Damascene urban population during a period of contraction in the rural communities lying further from the city is a case in point. Not only does Tabak expect a rise in urban population relative to the rural population to characterize the entire post sixteenth-century Ottoman era, but he expects a rise in absolute terms. At the end of the eighteenth century, he opines, the population of Greater Syria had risen to 1.6 million from a sixteenth-century high of 800,000-900,000.²³ Hence, the rise in the population of Damascus proper fits easily into such a projection, especially in light of the fact that he designates the late seventeenth century as the likely moment of a recovery.

21 Faruk Tabak, "Agrarian Fluctuations and Modes of Labor Control in the Western Arc of the Fertile Crescent, c. 1700-1850," in Çağlar Keyder and Faruk Tabak (eds.), *Landholding and Commercial Agriculture in the Middle East* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 140-1.

22 *Ibid.*, 140.

23 *Ibid.*, 140.

If the rise in Damascene urban population was more or less to be expected, then perhaps the aspect of the seventeenth-century *avarız* registers that is most valuable is the glimpse it offers of where rural populations expanded and where they contracted. These registers indicate that the area that saw the largest population growth was not the city itself, but rather the villages that lay in the great oasis called the Ghuta, which surrounded the city to the west, south and east as far as 20 kilometers out in some places.²⁴ Since the final *Tapu Tahrir Defteri* for Damascus, that of 1568-9, did not contain three of the six Ghuta villages surveyed in 1675, Table B presents the figures from 1675 with those from the year 1543 in order to compare a complete set. In 1543, the population was nearing its zenith that occurred at mid-century. The comparison of the two shows clearly that with the exception of Muadamiyah, the villages lying near to Damascus all expanded considerably. While in 1675 the *reaya* population of the city of Damascus had expanded only about 20% from the population of the mid-sixteenth century, the aggregate population of these villages situated in the oasis or on its periphery nearly doubled, from 827 taxpayers to 1,572. Again, it is worth mentioning that the accounts are skewed towards an undercounting in the seventeenth century, meaning that the actual percentage of growth is probably closer to 100% than the 90% recorded here.

While the city and the countryside in the greenbelt showed strong growth, the figures from the villages of the Biqa' and 'Awaj regions indicate that the rural population living further away from the city declined in absolute terms. As mentioned above, in the Biqa', the overall contraction was reflected in nearly every village with data from 1568-9. In the 'Awaj valley on the other hand, a number of villages appeared to have gained population since 1568-9. In fact, nine villages had grown while only five had declined, although the numbers gained did not match the net loss. It is worth examining what the growing villages had in common and how this pattern compares with Tabak and Hütteroth's characterizations of demography. Most notably, all of the expanding villages were about 800 meters above sea level and lay in the fertile river valley of the 'Awaj or its tributaries. That is, the growth area ran precisely against what Tabak and Hütteroth identify as the main trend of the era: the abandonment of fertile, low-lying land for mountain slopes of higher altitude. Only Kiswa, lying

24 Muḥammad Kurd 'Alī, *Ghūṭat Dimashq* (Damascus: Maṭbū'at al-majma' al-'ilmī al-'arabī, 1952), 15.

in the river valley and surrounded on all sides by villages that expanded, defied the trend by shrinking. Tabak's modification of this hypothesis in relation to Greater Syria was entirely warranted; it does indeed appear that the most fertile land was where the population was congregating in the late seventeenth century.

This sample of villages also appears to prove that the correlate of expansion in the river valley was the abandonment of the villages at higher elevations. Rising above the 'Awaj river valley is the slope of Mount Hermon, which forms a part of the Golan Heights. Of the villages located at elevations of over 1000 meters up the slope, Qala'at Jandal and Biqa'sem together accounted for a large part of the population drop. In the arid regions of the Mount Hermon slope, only Upper 'Aysem showed gains. On the other hand, a village like Kafr Hur was something of a hybrid. It sat directly in the green expanse surrounding a tributary of the 'Awaj, but the river ran through a gap in the heights at an elevation of about 1300 meters. In general, population tightly hugged the 'Awaj and became relatively more sparse in the areas further from the river, whether that meant mountain slopes or plains. The one rain fed plain area for which the *Tapu Tahrir Defteri* of 1568-9 provided a comparison was the village of Kunakir, south of the river valley. Like its peers on Mount Hermon, Kunakir had never recovered its sixteenth-century size and was considerably reduced.

The rural *avarız* registers contribute yet another piece of information that is supremely helpful in clarifying to what extent Greater Syria's rural economy was experiencing developments like those occurring elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire. Because the *avarız* was a property tax, if there were any large, privately owned farms called *çiftlik*s present in the village, their number was recorded (See Table C).²⁵ Although their primary urban residences were not liable for *avarız*, the combatants, *sadat*, or ulema who

25 The increasing number of such holdings and the question of their impact upon the Ottoman economy was hotly debated among historians for a period of nearly 20 years; an excellent synopsis of the issues as well as a final overview of its conclusions is presented in Keyder and Tabak (eds.), *Landholding and Commercial Agriculture in the Middle East*. In brief, the editors and contributors acknowledge that while the spread of such holdings meant that access to profits from agriculture were more firmly grasped by a class of rural elites, such elites did not attempt to become involve in the management of production, which stayed in the hands of the peasants.

owned a *çiftlik* in the countryside were compelled to pay *avarız* according to the size of the property. The rate of *avarız* was recorded in the register, giving some sense of the relative size of the *çiftlik*. Some *çiftlik*s were devoted to agriculture, while others were turned over to pasturage; unfortunately the registers do not identify which kind of activity took place on a *çiftlik*, although in some cases it is possible to make an educated guess. The largest *çiftlik* holder in Daraya, Ahmad Efendi al-Bakri, did not pasture animals upon the land but had it cultivated by eleven residents of the village, whom his son Asad Efendi brought before the military judge of Damascus in December of 1689. Asad Efendi complained that the taxes (including the *avarız*, presumably) assessed on his land were too high and he demanded that the villagers prove that his *çiftlik* was in fact seven *faddans* of the village lands and not less.²⁶ Given the great fertility and abundance of labor in Daraya, it is unlikely that much of the other *çiftlik* land in the village was given to grazing.

On the other hand, someone like Beddah Ağa Qawaszade, a former janissary and cavalryman resident in Damascus, probably pastured his fifty head of sheep on one of the several *çiftlik*s he owned in the arid plain south of the 'Awaj.²⁷ In all probability, the sheep resided in one of his *çiftlik*s in Kunakir, Nafur or Shaqhab. By 1695, Beddah Ağa appeared to have a particularly strong hold over Nafur and Shaqhab. Nafur in its entirety was his *çiftlik*, and Shaqhab had no village common land; its land was held in eight separate *çiftlik*s, the largest of which belonged to Beddah Ağa. Additionally, the revenues of Shaqhab were part of the Ağa's *zeamet*, or benefice awarded for military service.²⁸ The fact that neither of these villages had any listed residents makes it seem all the more likely that the land had been converted to raising livestock. Such may be the case also for the farm of Qawlit and the small village of Husaynia that were registered as having *çiftlik*s in places where there were no cultivators living. While the trend of converting fertile land to pasturage was at work in some areas, as was the case in the Ottoman Empire generally, it appeared to be taking place primarily in villages like Nafur and Shaqhab, two towns situated at the juncture of the plain and the desert. This again emphasizes the converging of

26 DSC, vol. 18, n. 168, p. 103

27 DSC, vol. 5 (part II), n. 247, bears witness to Beddah Qawaszade's business in sheep; A.DFE 186, 4, records his *çiftlik*s in Kunakir, Shaqhab and Nafur.

28 A. DFE 186, 4.

the population around well-irrigated land, although there may have been a non-economic incentive as well. Shaqhab, Nafur, and for that matter Kunakir are all exposed to the desert and the possibility of Bedouin raids.

If the shrinking of the rural population was the trend not only in the two areas of the Biqa' and the 'Awaj surveyed here, but represented a trend throughout the more remote areas of the Greater Syrian countryside, the question arises as to how Damascus and other cities in the area fed themselves during these years. The two areas that lost population in this survey belonged to or were just bordering the areas that grew the majority of the wheat that Damascus consumed: the Biqa' valley to the west and the Hawran plain, south of the 'Awaj valley. Oddly, Damascene chroniclers of the late seventeenth century were more likely to speak of good prices and plentitude than expensive grain and its dearth. According to James Grehan, good luck had something to do with this state of affairs: an unusually long span of good weather meant that harvest was plentiful most years, with "on average, no more than one famine every two to three decades. It was a remarkable stretch of good fortune."²⁹ While the weather was certainly a factor that worked in the city's favor, Tabak's hypothesis that the smaller amount of land under cultivation must simply have yielded more produce seems to be the unavoidable conclusion.

One question is whether the villages of the greenbelt were producing more of what the city ate than they had in the sixteenth century? With such a leap in population, the question arises as to whether these villages had become more productive with their enlarged labor forces, or whether their high populations meant that consumption in the village curtailed the amount of produce they sent to the urban markets. Although the rise or fall in the amount of agricultural taxes levied on the villages does not necessarily correlate with their productivity, some facts relating to the tax remittances of the village of Sahnaya may be indicative of how much extraction a village could bear.³⁰ From a lengthy battle in court between the villagers

29 James Grehan, *Everyday Life & Consumer Culture in 18th-Century Damascus* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 80.

30 Unfortunately, there is no way to estimate the productivity of the village or productivity per capita as some studies for the sixteenth century have, see Bruce McGowan, "Food Supply and taxation on the middle Danube (1568-1579)," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 1 (1969): 139-196 and Metin Coşgel, "Agricultural Productivity in the Early Ottoman Empire," *Research in Economic History* 24 (2006):

and its collection agents, we know that Sahnaya's taxes on produce were assessed as 88 *ghirara* of wheat and 30 *ghirara* of barley according to the "sultanic *defter*" (perhaps TT 474).³¹ Further on in the course of the legal action, we learn that wheat was valued at 10 *kuruş* per *ghirara* in the years around 1690, and barley at 6.³² The value of the grains prescribed in the *defter* as Sahnaya's tax liability would therefore have been worth 1,060 *kuruş* in the late seventeenth century. What becomes clear from the legal battle is that between 1685 and 1690, the villagers had been paying a yearly total of between 1,771.5 and 1,816 *kuruş* in agricultural taxes—1,206 to the waqf for the Madrasa Farisiyya and another 565.5 to 610 *kuruş* to the treasury.³³ In real terms, Sahnaya's taxes had risen by about 67-71% while its population had only increased about 30% since 1543, suggesting either that it was producing more or that the villagers were getting by on less. It may well have meant both given that this amount did not include imposts such as the *avarız*, which were collected separately.

Conclusion

The pattern of population growth and economic development in Damascus Province during the last quarter of the seventeenth century bears some resemblance to the general state of such developments in the Ottoman Empire, but also differs sharply in a few key ways. The abandonment of some settlements in the plains and the spread of pasturage upon those lands is one trend wherein the trend in Greater Syria matched that of the Ottoman Empire generally, although it does not appear to have taken place on prime farmland. Unlike some other areas of the Ottoman Empire and the Mediterranean lands of Europe, the well-irrigated fertile lands of the river valleys continued to support agriculture. These areas, and even more so the oasis of the Ghuta, were where the bulk of the rural population lived

161-188. The taxes of the seventeenth-century were no longer tied to amounts of wheat, barley or fruit produced, as they were in the sixteenth. All that can be done is to compare the value of the taxes assessed in the seventeenth century with that of those assessed in the sixteenth.

31 DSC, vol. 18, n. 41, p. 33.

32 DSC, vol. 18, n. 192, p. 125.

33 For the waqf amount see DSC, vol. 18, n. 192, p. 124-7; for the amount paid to the treasury via *iltizam*, see BA, Maliye'den Müdevver 9866, p. 31.

DAMASCUS PROVINCE

and cultivated. It was the Ghuta villages which, far more than the city, had seen the greatest growth since the sixteenth century. In contrast, the villages on the less fertile slope of Mount Hermon dwindled in size, another break with the general Mediterranean trend of increasing population and production at higher altitudes. Finally, the steady movement towards an increasingly higher percentage of urban residents was readily apparent; with the important exception of the oasis, the rise in urban population was matched by a fall in rural population.

To return to a point made earlier, these conclusions should be considered with some caution. The villages represent only a small sampling of the rural hinterland of Damascus, and there are many legitimate concerns about the accuracy of the sources. Nevertheless, they allow a first step towards constructing a more nuanced portrait of Greater Syria and its economic resources in the seventeenth century, an era about which we still know astonishingly little.

TABLE A

	TT 474	A.DFE 143	A.DFE 186	
settlement	1568/9	1675	1695	Percentage Growth
al-Qadam	75	115		53%
Kafr Souseh	79	261		230%
Mezzeh	200	350		75%
Daraya		569		
Sahnaya		80		
Muadamiyah		79		
Ashrafiya		118		
Adaliya		40		
Hirjilla	28	41		46%
Kiswa		38		
Judayda	33	39		18%
Artuz	16	23		44%
Qatana		94		

MALISSA TAYLOR

Kharbat Suda		6		
Aysem Tahta	37	9		-76%
Aysem Fawqa	25	55		120%
Qala't Jandal	135	57		-58%
Biqa'sem	65	34		-48%
Kafr Hur	60	65		8%
Dayr (farm)	0	7		unquantifiable gain
Hina		28		
Abbasiya		15		
Ashrafiyat Abbasiya		0		
Husayniya			0	
Beytima			not recorded	
Bayt Sabir	72	78		8%
Hazretfiya?		7		
Dayr Khabbaya		35		
Tayba	31		40	29%
Muqaylaba		18		
Khiyarat al-Zaytun		19		
Dayr Ali			12	
Zakiya		42		
Nafur			0	
Rajm al-Khayat			32	
Qara Khan			8	
Majidiya (farm)			5	
Qawlit (farm)			0	
Shaqhab			0	
Dayr al-Adas			3	
Kunakir	152		91	-40%
Bouayda (farm)			6	
Dayr Makir			13	

DAMASCUS PROVINCE

Kafr Shams			29	
Ayn Afa?			12	
Dayr al-Asafir Badir			0	
Shamsiya	37		8	-78%
Majdal Balhis	53		60	13%
Ya'lub	70		62	-11%
Lala	60		50	-17%
Jubb Janin	108		63	-42%
Bira	49		51	4%
Raqid	49		23	-53%
Istabl	15		14	-7%
Amiq	32		30	-6%

TABLE B

settlement	TT 401	A.DFE 403	Growth from 1543 to 1675
al-Qadam	54	115	113%
Kafr Souseh	167	261	56%
Mezzeh	186	350	88%
Daraya	207	569	175%
Sahnaya	62	80	29%
Muadamiyah	92	79	-14%
Ashrafiya	59	118	100%
Total	827	1572	90%

TABLE C

settlement	Çiftlik	reaya
al-Qadam	4	115
Adaliya	5	350
Hirjilla	4	41
Judayda	7	39
Artuz	7	23
Ashrafiya	5	118
Daraya	11	569
Abbasiya	3	15
Muqaylaba	3	18
Qarakhan	1	8
Hussayniya	2	0
Qawlit	1	0
Rajm	2	32
Ashrafiya of Abbasiya	1	0
Kunakir	3	91
Shaqhab	8	0
Nafur	1	0
Ayn Afa	3	16
Dayr al-Asafir Badir	2	0
Aytnit	1	21
Khiyara	2	7
Jadira	3	50
Istabl	3	14
Harizat	7	0