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**DISTORTION OF POPULATION DATA FOR NATIONAL
CAUSES BY THE GREEKS, BULGARIANS AND
ARMENIANS IN THE LATE 19th
AND EARLY 20th CENTURIES**

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From the beginning of the 19th century onwards the Ottoman Empire witnessed the entry of more western values. Probably the most visible and effective one of them was nationalism that became an inspiration firstly to the Christian millets¹ of the Balkans and then to the rest of the Ottoman Empire. The reason why this was more effective in the Balkans than anywhere in the Empire was the fact that this area was too close to Europe and therefore was naturally affected earlier than the other parts of the country.

The first effect of this theoretical western value was the Greek uprising in the 1820s. The Greeks at the end of their uprising against Ottoman rule succeeded in having more or less for what they intended. The same acts of rioting were followed by the other Christian millets: Serbs, Bulgarians, and Romanians in the Balkans as well as the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia.

In establishing the borders between the different millets in certain areas, the population data played a more significant role in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly in places such as Macedonia where various nations fought among themselves to prove that one nation formed the majority against the other. However both in the Balkans and

¹ For more information concerning the millets and the millet system, see M. Ursinus, "Millet", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, and also B. Braude, "Foundation Myths of the Millet System", in *Christian and Jews in the Ottoman Empire, the Functioning of a Plural Society*, edited by B. Braude & B. Lewis, Vol. I, (New York, 1982), pp. 69-88.

in Eastern Anatolia the population was mixed and intermingled. There were no clear borders one could easily draw between the different nations where each group wished to found their own national state. This was especially true when talked about Ottoman Macedonia and the so-called Ottoman Armenia. These two regions became areas for struggle among the inhabited population of various millets. In Macedonia the Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, and the Vlachs tried to prove that one outnumbered the other millets. It was the case for the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia who tried to show Europe that the Armenians formed the majority in the eastern provinces of Anatolia where they dreamed of establishing an Armenian State. In Eastern Anatolia the Armenians' main rival was the Muslims.

It is quite interesting to note here that all these Christian millets both in the Balkans and in Eastern Anatolia felt themselves obligated to compile the population data just to show that the distribution of the population by millet in a specific area was in line with their national aspiration. They, therefore, began to make an estimation of the population for areas competed by various nations for annexation. Particularly, the Bulgarians and the Greeks estimated the number of the people by millet in Macedonia to strengthen their national desires for it. They also used the Ottoman official sources in the way of reinforcing their national claims. If the Ottoman statistic figures were not in line with their claims, what they did, they simply modified the Ottoman figures for the benefit of the millet to whom they belonged. The data compiled by various Christian millets for both Macedonia and Eastern Anatolia were made ready to be published in western languages especially in French and English in the European capitals. The reason for their publication in Europe was to show the French and English public that a particular nation constituted a clear majority over the inhabitants pertaining to the other millets. It was rather important for them first to convince the diplomats in Paris and London that their nation was dominant in terms of number about the districts in question. This was the most important aim of the Greeks and Bulgarians for Macedonia in the last quarter of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and of the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia in the late 19th century. This was very crucial for the achievement of their political purposes. If this were achieved by one of them the rest would naturally follow. So, in the periods mentioned above, these Christian millets devoted all their efforts to the publication of the population data which would help them to realise their national goals. It is not an exaggeration but the truth that most of these data, if not all, had nothing to do with the actual number of the population both in Macedonia and Eastern Anatolia. In fact

neither the Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs, nor the Armenians could have access to the correct information with respect to the population of a very wide area. Their population data was either the distorted version of the Ottoman governmental data or the estimates made by the Bulgarians and Greeks for the population of Macedonia. So, those researchers working on the Macedonian and Armenian questions should not be surprised if they come across with such a great amount of distorted population data.

It is also important to emphasize that in the early 20th century, the Bulgarian and Greek scholars rather preferred using the Ottoman statistics than those made by the members of their nations. It was believed by both Greeks and Bulgarians that their population data prepared independently would be questioned and given less credit by the Europeans, since each would try to show the population of the others less in order to justify its own claim. The fact is also that the Muslims would favour none of these nations. The Ottoman figures would therefore be accepted as unbiased and more convincing for the Europeans. Being aware of this fact they prepared the population table of the areas in question on the basis of the official Ottoman data. However, those figures pretended to belong to the Ottomans were distorted before their use in the studies of the Greek and the Bulgarian scholars.

Let us now move on to the main purpose of this paper which is to disclose how the Greeks and Bulgarians for Macedonia, and the Armenians for Eastern Anatolia misused and distorted the population data in their political causes.

In the early 20th century, the Ottoman population data for Macedonia published in *Asr Gazetesi* on 2 January, 1905, was the population statistic of 1905 compiled by the General Inspectorship of the Three Provinces. These statistics of 1905 was known in the western sources as the Turkish official statistic of 1905² which differed from the statistics of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa.³ The Turkish official statistics of 1905 has been

² *Asr Gazetesi* on (26 Şevval 1322) 2 January, 1905, no 944 published the so-called Turkish official statistic of 1905 which is as follows:

Muslims	:	1.500.507
Bulgarians	:	575.734
Greeks	:	627.962
Vlachs & Serbs	:	199.717
Total	:	2.903.920

³ Y. Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, (Ankara, 1991), Volume I, Part I, p. 164, and also E. Z. Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, (Ankara 1983), Volume VIII, p. 148, see the statistical information supplied by Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa is:

Muslims	:	1.508.507
Bulgarians	:	896.497
Greeks	:	307.000
Serbs	:	100.717
Vlachs	:	99.000

used in various studies dealing with "the Question of Macedonia" in the early 20th century. In these studies the statistics of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa and the Turkish official statistics of 1905 have often been mistakenly thought as the same one. We now have at our disposal both the Turkish official statistics of 1905 published in *Asr Gazetesi* on 2 January 1905 and the statistical table of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa. As far as we know, at least five different studies have used the figures of the Turkish official statistic of 1905.

Let us now examine their figures. The first study using the Turkish official statistics of 1905 was written by J. Ivanoff, *Les Bulgares devant le Congrès de la Paix*,⁴ in which the total population of the three provinces (Kosova, Manastır and Selanik) has been given by millet. The figures of the Turkish official statistics of 1905 according to Ivanoff are as follows:

Muslims	1.508.507
Bulgarians	896.596
Greeks	307.000
Serbians	100.717
Vlachs	99.000
Total	2.911.720

V. Colocotronis in *La Macedoine et l'Hellenisme*⁵ also used the figures of the Turkish official statistics of 1905. These are:

	<u>Greeks</u>	<u>Bulgarians</u>
Selanik	373.227	207.317
Manastır	261.283	178.412
Kosova	13.452	172.005
Total	648.962	557.734

As is seen above in the table the calculation of the Greeks in the three provinces does not make 648.962, but 647.962. In his book, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913*⁶ D. Dakin has also used the Turkish official statistic of 1905 in order to show that the Greeks were

4 J. Ivanoff, *Les Bulgares devant le Congrès de la Paix*, (Berne, 1919), p.298.

5 V. Colocotronis, *La Macedoine et l'Hellenisme*, (Paris, 1919), p.606.

6 D. Dakin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913*, (Salonica, 1966), p. 20.

more in number than the Bulgarians in the three provinces. In Dakin's study the population of the Greeks and the Bulgarians is exactly the same as those used in Colocotronis' study except that the Bulgarian number is given as 172.735, not 172.005 for Kosova. It naturally affected the total number of the Bulgarians in all the Macedonian provinces, which is 558.464 in Dakin's table, not 557.734 as in Colocotronis'. Another Greek scholar, L.S. Stavrianos, apparently quoting from Colocotronis' study as distorted and wrongly calculated, also made the most of the Turkish official statistics of 1905 in his study entitled by *The Balkans Since 1453*.⁷

The figures of the Turkish official statistic of 1905 have been recorded in the *Asr Gazetesi* on (26th Şevval 1322, no 994) 2 January, 1905. It was pointed out in the newspaper that *Tan Gazetesi* in France had published an article by George Willier on the 27 Kanun-ı Evvel, Efrenç 1904, providing information for the population of Selanik, Manastır and Kosova provinces.⁸ It was stated in *Asr Gazetesi* that the province of Manastır did not consist of 3 sancaks (Manastır, Gorice and Serfice) as written in *Tan Newspaper*, but 5 sancaks (Manastır, Gorice, Serfice, Debre and İlbasan). Being unaware of the number of the sancaks in the province, the population had been divided amongst the three sancaks rather than five. *Tan Newspaper's* figures for the Manastır and Selanik provinces⁹ are:

	<u>Manastır</u>	<u>Selanik</u>
Muslims	217.115	426.902
Greeks	279.964	372.831
Bulgarians	142.715	189.447
Vlachs	18.323	6.788
Jews & Others	4.200	63.432
Total	662.317	1.048.400

Asr Gazetesi did not believe that the *Tan Newspaper's* figures reflected the fact that they were the same figures as those in the Ottoman sources. Then, it published the updated figures of the three provinces of Macedonia available at the population offices in the three provinces by

⁷ L. S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, (New York, 1963), p. 517.

⁸ *Asr Gazetesi* on (26 Şevval 1322) 2 January, 1905.

⁹ *Ibid.*

the help of the General Inspectorship of the Three Provinces. The data supplied by the Inspector are:

	<u>Manastir</u>	<u>Selanik</u>	<u>Kosova</u>
Muslims	260.418	485.555	752.534
Greeks	291.283	323.227	13.452
Bulgarians	188.412	217.117	170.005
Vlachs & Serbs	30.116		169.601
Total	770.229	1.025.99	1.105.592 ¹⁰

The total population of the three provinces by millet:

Muslims	1.500.507	52.00 %
Patriarchists	627.962	21.40 %
Bulgarians	575.734	19.75 %
Vlachs & Serbs	199.717	6.85 %
Total	2.903.920 ¹¹	

There is also a note in *Asr Gazetesi* stating that the Jews and Catholics were not included in the statistical figures. Their total was approximately 100.000.

The figures provided by Ivanoff did not belong to the Turkish official statistics of 1905, but to the statistics of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa. As far as the Bulgarian national claims for Macedonia were concerned, it appeared to the Bulgarians that Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa's figures were more suitable than those of the Turkish official statistics of 1905. The year of the publication of Ivanoff's work was important in terms of the history of the Balkans, because, in 1919, a Peace Conference was held in Paris to determine the borders of the Balkan States after the First World War. By his work it was intended to influence the public opinion of Europe for the benefit of the Bulgarians by publishing more suitable figures so that they could achieve in annexing a large part of Macedonia by means of these population data. However, it is observed that in 1920 when the discus-

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

sions at the Conference about the future of Macedonia were over, he did not hesitate to publish the real data of the Turkish official statistics of 1905 in another study of his, *La Question Macedonienne*.¹² In this year nothing at all including the population data could change the destination of Macedonia, because the necessary decision had already been taken a year earlier. Therefore, he did not refrain from publishing the less suitable figures of the Ottoman statistics, that is the Turkish official statistics of 1905, for the Bulgarians.

The struggle for the annexation of the Macedonian provinces seems to have been made between the Greeks and the Bulgarians. One side tried to minimize the statistical numbers of the other side to arrive at an intended result. While the Bulgarians used those Ottoman statistical tables favourable to the Bulgarian claims, the Greeks rather preferred reducing the Bulgarian number and increasing the Greek number in the Ottoman official statistics in order to claim that the Greeks outnumbered the Bulgarians in Macedonia.

Let us now find out how this was carried out by the Greeks. When analyzing Colocotronis' population data, it is observed that he has simply taken 18.000 out of the number of the Bulgarians and added 21.000 to the Greek number in the Turkish official statistics of 1905. This is very clear when we compare the Greek and Bulgarian numbers between the Colocotronis table and that of the *Asr Gazetesi*. The reality is that the Bulgarian population was 575.734 as opposed to 557.734 in Colocotronis' table, a reduction of 18.000 in the Bulgarian population, and the Greek population was 648.962 as opposed to 627.962 in his table. It is pretty clear from the above that Colocotronis distorted the numbers deliberately. While he kept using the last three numbers (...962) of the total Greeks as in the *Asr Gazetesi* he changed the first three numbers of the Greeks from 627.962 as in *Asr Gazetesi* to 648.962, an increase of 21.000. Colocotronis also claims that the population figures he uses in his study do belong to the statistics of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa. This information is also wrong, and his figures are indeed the distorted version of the figures published in *Asr Gazetesi*.

It is also noteworthy that the Greek scholars never tended to mention in their tables the population of the Muslims in Macedonia. The reason for this was that the Muslim population in the three provinces was more than the total of the Greeks and the Bulgarians. For the Greeks the Bulgarians were enough. They did not wish to see the Muslims as another

12 J. Ivanoff, *La Question Macedonienne*, (Paris, 1920), p. 176.

competitor for Macedonia. The Greeks, therefore, excluded the Muslims from their population tables. In fact the selection of the State to which Macedonia would be annexed was depended on the choice of the European Powers. From this respect, the Muslim chance to receive the backing of the Europeans was hardly anything at all regardless of what their percentage in the total population of Macedonia was. The Muslims indeed possessed 52 % of the total population of Macedonia. Furthermore, it is also the case that the Greeks omitted the name of the Vlachs and their number in the statistical tables despite the fact that there were the Vlachs mentioned in *Asr Gazetesi*. Their numbers were intentionally not given, because the Greeks would then state that there were no Vlachs, but Greeks and Bulgarians amongst the Christians in Macedonia.

Before uncovering the distortion of the population data it will be beneficial to provide some background information about the Armenians and Eastern Anatolia. The struggle for the establishment of an Armenian State begun soon after the Turco-Russian War of 1877-78. The Treaties of St. Stephano and Berlin mentioned the names of the Armenians in one of their articles spelling out that the Porte was to protect the Armenians against the Kurdish and Circassian attacks and to introduce the reforms for the amelioration of the state of the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia.¹³ The mention of their names in the Treaties was deemed by the Armenians as a first step to begin to establish their national State. The long British support for the application of the Armenian reforms lasting from 1878 to 1897 gave the Armenians an encouragement and hope which obviously played an important role in the occurrences of the Armenian riots in different parts of the country.

While the Armenians were doing all they could to strengthen their power in the provinces, the Patriarchs and their bishops competed with one another to prepare statistical tables concerning the population of the various groups in Eastern Anatolia. The population figures were crucial for the application of the reforms. The importance of the distribution of the population was often mentioned both in the Turkish and in the British documents, because the proportion of the Armenians to that of Muslims would be an indicator in proportion to which the Armenians would receive administrative posts in the provincial administration.

What is really interesting in their statistics is that the Patriarchs and bishops tried to show the population of the Armenians to be much higher than was the actual case. For this purpose, they omitted the Muslim

¹³ For the British and Ottoman policy toward the reforms for the Armenians, see Musa Şaşmaz, *British Policy and the application of Reforms for the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia 1877-1897*, u.p. Ph.D. Dissertation, Birmingham University, 1993.

population of nomads and of Circassians to get a greater share for their millet. They also divided the Muslim population into sub-groups so that the Armenians could be shown to be a majority. These carefully estimated population figures prepared by the Armenian clergymen were despatched to the representatives of the European Powers in Istanbul to persuade them to take into account the Armenian figures which would result in the application of the reforms in their advantages. This situation would comparatively make the realisation of the establishment of the Armenian State easier. From this point of view, great efforts were devoted to the preparation of the population tables.

It is interesting to note here that one of the Patriarch's letters addressed to Goschen, the British Ambassador to Istanbul, on 10 September 1880 about the population of the Sivas province provided valuable information as to the discrepancy which existed between the returns furnished by the Patriarch Nerses of the population of the Sivas province and the one supplied by the Armenian bishop of Sivas.¹⁴ It also revealed a great lack of local knowledge on the part of the Patriarch with regard to the Sivas province and the distribution of the population of the Christians.

Let us now analyse these Armenian population tables. To begin with, Nerses in his population table gave the total population of the Sivas province as 605,063; 199,245 Armenians, 388,218 Muslims and 17,600 Greeks. The bishop's figure was 201,245 Christians and 694,431 Muslims totalling 895,676. The difference between the figures of Nerses and those of the bishop concerning the Muslim population was roughly 200,000 which appears to have been simply taken by the Patriarch out of the bishop's figures for political purposes, because both figures were prepared in the year 1880, and no administrative border changes took place as far as the province in question was concerned in this particular period. As will be noticed, the number of Christians mentioned in the two statements was almost consistent.

Secondly, Divrigi with a population of 15,060 Christians as opposed to 45,278 Muslims was included in 'Armenia', whilst Gürün with 8,830 Christians and 9,930 Muslims, and Tonus with 10,000 Christians and 22,272 Muslims were classed among the districts "qui ne font pas partie de l'Armenie".

Thirdly, Nerses described Darende, Gürün, Aziziye (Pınarbaşı) and Tonus (Altunyayla) as sancaks, whilst Tonus was only a nahiye (commune),¹⁵ and the other three were kazas; he placed Tokat to the south-

¹⁴ For this, see Goschen to Granville, no 404, 28 Sept 1880, FO 78/3095 enclosing the Patriarch's letter of September 10th.

¹⁵ Andreas Birken, *Die Provinzen des Osmanischen Reiches*, (Wiesbaden, 1976), p. 142.

east of Sivas, whereas it lies north-west of Sivas; and he stated that Aziziye had quite recently been added to the province of Sivas, which was also far from being accurate, because Aziziye had been founded during the reign of the Sultan Abdülaziz in 1859-60 (1277 H) by Hacı Ahmed Paşa, the vali of Sivas, and the reforming officer in Sivas.¹⁶ It then continued as an administrative unit adjoined to Sivas province.

One might question whether the Porte might have applied the same method as the Patriarch had attempted to distort the population figures. There is strong evidence to show that the Porte did not use the same method as the Patriarch. The evidence is that before the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-78 neither the Armenians nor the Muslims envisioned that the post-war era would see the emergence of an 'Armenian Question', since the Armenians were reckoned by the Porte as a 'loyal millet' until the very end of the war, and Armenians and Muslims got along rather well until the war, especially at the village level.¹⁷ In other words, the Armenians were not expected to cause any problems to the Porte unlike those experienced in the Balkans. So, the comparison of the population figures for the Armenians before and after the war in the provincial and state salnames can throw light on whether the Porte falsified the population-figures for political ends. There are population figures at our disposal for the Armenians before and after the war for the Trabzon province. Though this province is outside the area of the so-called Ottoman Armenia, it can still be useful as an indication of whether or not the population-figures were intentionally falsified by the Porte. The population of the Armenians in that province for the year 1871-72 is given as 35,510 in comparison with 38,958 in 1878-79 and 40,887 in 1887-88.¹⁸ As can be seen from these figures, there is no indication of any intention at all by the Porte to falsify the figures to further its political aims.

Finally, it would be useful to examine the reliability of the Ottoman census returns.¹⁹ The Ottoman system of census was generally considered reliable as long as it was conducted in areas where the population consisted mainly of settled people and was easily accessible to the officials. However, Eastern Anatolia could not be classified in this category, because the country possessed both nomadic and *muhacirin* elements

¹⁶ See *Sivas Salname of 1306 H.*

¹⁷ See Robert F. Zeidner, "Britain and the Launching of the Armenian Question", *IJMES*, 7(1976), p. 469.

¹⁸ For the population figures used for the Armenians in Trabzon province, see *Trabzon Salnames of 1288, 1296 and of 1305.*

¹⁹ Further see forthcoming article, M. Şaşmaz, "The Ottoman Censuses and Census Systems in the 19th and early 20th Centuries", in *Forthcoming Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırmaları Merkezi Dergisi*, 5 (1995).

and covered an area mostly inaccessible to the census-takers. All these features prevailing in the country reduced the reliability of the Ottoman population figures for the eastern provinces. The population of such regions was not made by means of enumeration in the census. Even though in some places a proper census was conducted this was an exception. The officials apparently did their best to establish the precise population figures for those provinces by making as close estimates as they could. It was important for the government to arrive at correct figures as it would increase both the revenue and the military efficiency of the Empire.

As is clear from above, the Greeks, Bulgarians and Armenians deliberately distorted the population data so as to annex Macedonia or Eastern Anatolia at the expense of the population in majority. Thanks to the acts of the distortion of the population data, particularly the Greeks succeeded in deceiving the Europeans and annexed a considerable part of Macedonia. The Armenians tried long to detach the eastern provinces from the Ottomans by all means including the distortion of the population data. However, they were at the end unable to accomplish their aim of establishing an Armenian State because of the fact that Britain brought nothing but misery to the Armenians although the Armenians had long trusted Britain as their protector.²⁰

²⁰ A very challenging article about the judgement of the British policy for the Armenians in the late 19th and early 20th centuries is to be published in near future. This article will question how Britain used the instances to achieve her own goals other than those of the Armenians.