

PROVINCIAL FINANCE REPORTING AND OTTOMAN FISCAL ADMINISTRATION

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The purpose of this paper is to introduce the possibility of improving our understanding of the Ottoman fiscal system and political economy by analyzing the provincial finance reports sent from the outlying provinces to Istanbul. Our assessment of Ottoman state finances has until now been built on the 18 central government “budgets” known to exist for the 16th and 17th centuries. Scholars such as Sahillioglu, Tabakoglu, Cezar, Genc and Ozcan, have uncovered and analyzed these documents. But the central treasury’s budgets do not include all the wealth of the empire. Part of the revenues collected in the provinces stayed in the provinces and never entered the treasury’s totals, and that part increased over time to become the basis for the growing power of the provinces in the 17th-19th centuries. That growth has been studied politically (Yaycioglu, etc.), but it needs to be studied economically as well. Among the sources for such an examination, an important one is the hundreds, possibly thousands, of provincial finance reports. Until now, such reports have been studied and published individually, without comparison even to other published reports. In order to exploit these sources fully, what we need is a comparison across provinces and across time. Such a project would best be done digitally, although I have made a beginning study as an individual scholar. Digital analysis would allow input from scholars of the provinces in all parts of the empire over centuries of time. Such a project would demand a standardized way of dealing with the data, and a permanent repository where such data could be stored, making this an ideal project for digital methods and a host institution in Türkiye. This paper will report the results of my initial investigation of these provincial finance registers for the provinces of Syria in the sixteenth century and will open the possibility of a larger and more cooperative exploration of this missing source for Ottoman fiscal and economic history.