

Syrian Finances in the Sixteenth Century: A Study in Provincial Budgets

Linda T. Darling

The central treasury “budgets” (income and expense summaries) of the Ottoman Empire should be supplemented by the budgets of the provincial treasuries, which held moneys not reported in the central budgets. These central budgets have been extensively studied and used to determine the financial health of the empire at various dates. In contrast, the studies of provincial budgets made so far, by Sahillioğlu, Özbaran and others, mostly focus on explicating a single budget. In contrast, this paper will examine a series of budgets from the Syrian provinces in the sixteenth century. The revenue figures have been published (in a festschrift for Claudia Römer), and last year in Ankara I discussed the significance of these budgets and how they might be studied. This paper will include the expenditures of the three Syrian provinces, compare the expenditures and the income, and examine changes over time in the way the province spent its revenues. I found previously that of the cash revenue in the Damascus treasury in 1589, 58% was spent locally and remained in the province while less than half, 42%, was sent to Istanbul or paid for expenses outside the province. This is a significant amount of money that was not accounted for in the central government budgets and has not been considered in estimations of the empire’s financial status. This paper will compare the three provinces of Damascus, Aleppo, and Tripoli, in terms of both revenue and expenses, for the last third of the sixteenth century (which is all we have figures for). It will discuss their implications for the provinces themselves, for the central government’s budget, and for our understanding of the fiscal health of the empire in this period of inflation and budgetary deficits.