

Neither Muslims nor Zimmis: The Gypsies (Roma) in the Ottoman State

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This study explores the place of the Gypsies (*kıptî*) in Ottoman society as depicted in the *sicil*, the records of the *şeriat* court, of eighteenth-century Salonica. I argue that the Gypsies are the salient example of a Salonican group that was fully segregated from the other segments of local population, at least for administrative purposes. The Ottoman administration's suspicious attitude toward the Gypsies was expressed in the general disapproval of the nomadic way of life. Drawing on the Balkan Gypsies as an example of a group that was pushed to the margins of Ottoman society, I demonstrate what it meant to be part of such a group and describe the various features and techniques by which the marginal people were relegated to the fringes: stigmatization, segregation, exclusion and punishment. The various strategies and techniques that were adopted by the Gypsies in order to alleviate their position are also examined.

Keywords: Gypsies (*kıptî*), Salonica, Ottoman State, kuranic poll tax (*cizye*), marginality, records of the *şeriat* court (*sicil*), stigmatization, segregation, exclusion, punishment.

Introduction

In 1715 two Muslim brothers, Hüseyin and Ahmet, brought a claim before the *şeriat* court of Salonica against Zeynü'lâbidîn Ağa, the local official responsible for collecting the *cizye*, the poll tax, from the Gypsies (*kıptî cizyesini cem'â memur*). The brothers asserted that they were new arrivals to Salonica, and that their place of origin was Toyran (now Stari Dojran,

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in Bulgaria). They then outlined their genealogy: their grandfather's name was Velko and he was a Christian (*millet-i nasaradan olan*); his son and their father, Mehmet, converted to Islam and subsequently received a Muslim name; they were the offspring of Mehmet and his Christian wife Maroda.¹ The tax collector in question had demanded a *cizye*, the Kuranic poll tax, from them as if they were Gypsies, 'even though our grandfather was Christian and our father converted to Islam, and despite the fact that we do not have any remnant of "gypsiness" in our genealogy' (*nesebemize kat'an kıptiyet tari olmamışiken*). Nevertheless, they protested, the tax collector argued that they were liable to pay the *cizye*, as they were Gypsies (*bizden kıpti olmak üzere cizye teleb eder*). After reviewing the evidence, the kadi accepted the claim of the two brothers and he rejected the tax collector's insistence to the contrary.²

This litigation, though brief and rather focused, raises a number of issues for discussion. First, it indicates there was a sub-category of Ottoman Muslims who had to pay the *cizye*, a Kuranic tax that was exclusively imposed on non-Muslims in order to demonstrate their inferiority vis-à-vis the Muslims. Second, their obligation to pay this tax was based on their ethnic origin and not on their religion. The text's ethnic terminology evokes terms like 'gypsiness' that in theory should be completely alien to the Ottoman way of shaping collective identities. In other words, there was a group of Muslims that was segregated from their fellow Muslims and treated as a distinct category outside the Muslim community. Furthermore, as I will show in this article, this category included both Muslims and Christians—ostensibly an insupportable mixture in pre-nineteenth-century Ottoman society.

Drawing on the Balkan Gypsies as an example of a group that was pushed to the margins of Ottoman Muslim society, I will demonstrate what it meant to be part of such a group, and describe the various features and techniques by which the marginal people were relegated to the fringes—stigmatization, segregation, exclusion and punishment. I will also examine the various strategies and techniques that were adopted by the Gypsies in order to alleviate their position vis-à-vis the local authorities.

1. According to Islamic law, a Muslim man may marry a Christian or a Jewish woman. The children of such a matrimonial bond are reckoned to be Muslims.

2. The National Archives of Macedonia, Thessaloniki, *Sicil* vol. 25, p. 42, 20 Şaban 1127 [20.8.1715]. All references are from the Salonican *sicil* unless otherwise stated. On the dismissal of Zeynü'lâbidin Ağa on the grounds of corruption and embezzlement, see later in this article.

Ottoman society has long been depicted as being regulated from above through rigid demarcations between opposing socio-cultural categories. On one side of the line were all those imbued with various rights; on the other, those who were devoid of such rights. Some well-defined binary dichotomies existed in the Ottoman city: the *askeri*, those who belonged to the military, administrative or religious elites, who were exempted from paying taxes, versus the *reaya*, Muslims and non-Muslims who were subject to taxation; other major dichotomies confronted Muslims versus non-Muslims, the free-born versus slaves and men versus women (İnalçık 1973: 65–9; Shaw 1976: 112–13).

Nevertheless, some Ottomans lived outside these social organizations or on their margins, whether they simply gravitated there or were actively pushed. Other marginal elements were those who lived on the border of two ostensibly opposing groups; for them the rigid borders were rather porous. Gino Germani (1980: 49) defines marginality as ‘the lack of participation of individuals and groups in those spheres in which, according to determined criteria, they might be expected to participate. By participation we mean the exercise of roles conceived of in the broadest sense. These imply to act as well as not to act (produce or consume), to give as well as to receive; they also imply obligations or duties as well as rights...’ His definition represents the experiences of Ottoman Gypsies as well.

The Gypsies of the Ottoman Balkans are the most outstanding example of Ottoman people who lived on a flexible border—the one that distinguished Muslims from non-Muslims. They were pushed into a twilight zone between the two, and subsequently formed a group of their own. In their case, the state itself played a role in their marginalization. The Gypsies’ position in the Ottoman society is unexpected. The Ottoman state regarded and defined itself as a Muslim state committed to the holy Islamic law—the all-embracing *şeriat*. Local customs (*adet*) and the sultanic legislation (*kanun*) were additional, and in some cases pivotal, legal sources to the shaping of Ottoman regulations. However, the basic ideology that moulded the Ottoman way of thinking was based to a large extent on Islamic values. The definition of an individual’s position in Ottoman society was, in principle, regulated through this prism. Bernard Lewis demonstrates that one of the basic and crucial divisions of Ottoman subjects was their religious affiliation. Whether one was *zimmi* (local non-Muslim), *harbi* or *müste’min* (both terms signify foreigner non-Muslims) or Muslim determined one’s place within Ottoman society, one’s access to the administration or the military apparatus, and

one's obligation to pay special taxes—the *cizye* poll tax being the most illustrative and symbolic expression of this demarcation. This division of Muslims versus non-Muslim was based on the Islamic principle that all Muslims are equal members of the Islamic *umma*. Other modern criteria, such as language or ethnic origin, were ostensibly irrelevant to the Ottoman administration (Lewis 1961: 321–7).

The Gypsies, however, prove to be the clearest example of a group that included both Muslims and Christians, who were categorized by the administration as one tax unit segregated from the general population on both this issue and regarding accessibility to privileged positions in society. Religious affiliation, usually the principal consideration, if not the only one, in determining the status of all Ottomans, was of secondary importance when it came to the Gypsies' administrative status.

Searching for the Ottoman Gypsies

The Gypsies in the Balkans have won the attention of researchers since the late nineteenth century, when anthropologists and philologists began reporting on these 'exotic and strange savages'³ living within the gates of 'civilized Europe'.⁴ These early studies were mainly occupied with contemporary Gypsies. Only marginal attention was given to the Ottoman heritage and to the Ottomans' long history of relations with the Balkan Gypsies. Margaret Hasluck was among the first researchers who turned to Ottoman documents in order to grasp the Gypsies' status in the Ottoman State. By publishing an imperial edict that dealt with the Gypsies, Hasluck (1948) offered an important insight into the Gypsies' history in the Ottoman state. Her study also highlighted the importance of Ottoman documents for the understanding of the official regulations about the taxation of Gypsies. While her work was modest in its scope and goals (her main academic interest was the Albanians and their customs), it remains, nonetheless, the main focal point for later studies. Basing his summary on Hasluck's paper and others that explored

3. Mattijs van de Port demonstrates that in nineteenth-century Europe the Gypsies became the despised, yet captivating symbol of people who were free of any rules or social constraints. 'The Gypsy camp was Europe's erogenous zone, the closest wildness, invested with the unfulfilled desires, impossible yearnings and unsatisfied passions of bourgeois civilization.' (van de Port 1998: 7).

4. From a geographical point of view, the Balkan Peninsula is of course part of Europe. However, it was often perceived in Western Europe as an alien region, as the 'other'. See Todo-rova (1997).

imperial prescripts on the Gypsies, Angus Fraser (1992: 171–6) argues that the Gypsies' lot was better than that of their counterparts in Europe since they were not demonised and subsequently systemically persecuted. Apart from sporadic attempts to tighten the state control on them and their 'dubious' manners, they were left free to conduct their lives.⁵ In a similar manner, Zoltan Barany (2002: 84–5) states that though Gypsies occupied the lower echelon of Ottoman society, they still had a defined place there. Recent years have seen additional studies dedicated to the Ottoman Gypsies in the form of monographs that deal with this group in a specific Balkan state or regions.⁶ A recent contribution, by Elena Marushiakova and Vasselin Popov (2001) relies on both Ottoman and European sources to delineate the history of the Gypsies in the Ottoman state.

The importance of the taxation documents to the study of Ottoman Gypsies is clear: they provide us with the global view as it was perceived and shaped in the political centre. I will attempt here to present a more detailed and down-to-earth picture by using another Ottoman source that was compiled in the provinces by local agents of the political centre: the *sicil*. As state-generated sources, these documents reflect mainly the local administration's apprehensions. These records mirror the diversity of the kadi's responsibilities in the Ottoman city. While they do not always yield a detailed and clear picture, they clearly reflect the perceptions of the local elite and echo some of the Gypsies' responses and strategies vis-à-vis their Ottoman rulers, though the official language of the document blurs their original voices. Among other things, these documents reveal the interaction between the Ottoman authorities and the Gypsies, between the central group and its marginalized periphery. Barany (2002: 58) tells us that marginality is always relational. He argues that the 'dominant group defines the marginal group through the lenses of the dominant social norms, religion, ethnic identity, economic and occupational status.' The *sicil* reveals the perceptions and considerations of the dominant group when dealing with the Gypsies.

My case study in this article is the Gypsies in Ottoman Salonica (Selânik) during the eighteenth century. I rely to a large extent on the records, known as the *sicil*, of the *şeriat* court of Salonica.⁷ I was also able to collect some

5. For a general survey on the Balkan Gypsies, see also Crowe (2000); Asséo (2003).

6. For some examples, see on the Gypsy community in Bulgaria Marushiakova and Popov (1997); on the Gypsies in Greek Thrace, see Zegkini (1994).

7. I examined eighty-eight volumes of Salonica *sicil*, spanning a period of seventy years—from 1694 to 1765. The volumes were divided by the clerks into the following subjects: litigations, each one followed by the kadi's decision or approval; the kadi's correspondence with

supplementary evidence from the seventeenth-century *sicil* of neighbouring Karaferiye (now Verroia, in Greece).⁸ According to an Ottoman tax assessment, Salonica and its rural hinterland had a considerable population of Gypsies. An edict from 1706 refers to 4,000 Gypsy taxpayers in all the Salonican area, including its surrounding villages; among them, some 1,000 Gypsy taxpayers—500 Muslims and 424 Christians—lived within the city walls at that time.⁹ The French ambassador Count Louis-August Félix Beaujour estimated the city's Gypsy population at 2,000 at the beginning of the nineteenth century (quoted in Moutsopoulos 1980: 54). Therefore, we can deduce that while the Gypsies were clearly a minority in Salonica, their numbers were quite substantial. Like some other inhabitants of Salonica, though on a smaller scale, local Gypsies were clients of the *şeriat* court. They came to court to submit claims against others, or were obliged to appear in court to defend themselves against allegations; they registered all kinds of agreements and they also appeared as taxpayers. It is interesting to note that all the Gypsies who appeared in the *şeriat* court of Salonica during the eighteenth century were Muslims, while some who frequented the court from the surrounding villages were Christians. In addition, we can meet the Gypsies in descriptions of petitions they submitted to the Sultan and which were later incorporated into the Sultan's edicts that were, in their turn, dispatched back to the provinces. This type of official document was also regularly registered in the *sicil*. It can shed light on the strategies of Gypsies who attempted to negotiate and, where possible, improve their social position.¹⁰ All these diverse documents provide us with a look into the Gypsies' lives in Ottoman Salonica.

What can we learn from these insights? To begin with, the *sicil* yields random insights that might be considered only as anecdotes.¹¹ For example, the apprehension of Mustafa, a Gypsy from Yenice-i Vardar (today Gianitsa, in Greece), who allegedly stole 350 *akçe* from the pocket of a Christian villager in broad daylight in the central market of Karaferiye, his immediate trial,

the provincial authorities in Edirne or with the central authorities in Istanbul; various endowment accounts; and the registration of some of the estates of the city's deceased persons.

8. I examined three volumes of the Karaferiye *sicil* (vols. 30, 49, 50). In addition I am indebted to Dr. Antonis Anastasopoulos from the University of Crete in Rethymno, who generously provided me with some documents that he found in the volumes of the Karaferiye *sicil*.

9. *Sicil*, vol. 15, p. 50, 3 Şevval 1117 [18.1.1706].

10. On petitions as a source that sheds light on the *reaya*'s attitudes vis-à-vis the state's agents, see Faroqhi (1986).

11. For a discussion on the methodological use of the *sicil* as an historical source, see Zeevi (1998); Peirce (2003: 8–9); Ergene (2003: 125–41).

and the ensuing verdict to cut off his hand,¹² can lead us to no broad conclusions about Gypsies' participation in crime. Elsewhere I showed that the *sicil* files contain only a fraction of the criminal activities that went on and can hardly enable us to quantify this phenomenon (Ginio 1998: 185–91).

But the *sicil*, as a text, can furnish a broader understanding of the Gypsies' conditions in Ottoman society. In this article I will present a discriminatory terminology that aimed to differentiate between Gypsies and other groups that comprised the local population and to uncover labels that were attributed to Gypsies and might have echoed prejudices and stigmatization. I will also try to retrieve generalizations that can equally reflect the prejudices and discriminatory treatment of the Gypsies. Finally, I will outline collective responses that were adopted by some Gypsies as a group.

We encounter the Gypsy population in the *sicil* in two principal capacities: as taxpayers and as musicians who entertained local society in public venues, such as coffeehouses; in the latter context, they also feature in more official ways, namely, in military bands (*mehter*). This division determines the shaping of this article as well. I will now delineate the perception of Gypsies in the terminology of the *sicil*; then I will use the correspondence of the 'Gypsy poll tax' to describe the state's efforts to regulate and enforce its control over the Gypsy population, and also to describe cases of Gypsy resistance to these efforts. The final part of this article will address the particular relations between Gypsies and music performance as presented in the *sicil*.

Stigmatization of the Gypsies

The differentiation of the Gypsies in the sicil terminology

When Rabi'a bint Kasim came to court to express her wish to have a *hul* divorce (divorce by a husband of his wife at her request) from her husband, Mustafa ibn Abdüllah, the scribe added the tag '*kıpti/kıptiyya*' ('Gypsy') for both litigants.¹³ As this addition did not apply any legal consequences, we can only deduce that the term 'Gypsy' had a significant social application that the scribe found worthwhile to add. Indeed, the *sicil* parlance does indicate the Gypsies' otherness. The scribes used distinct linguistic patterns to emphasize their difference from other Muslims and to render those differences visible. The marking of what was defined as inferior groups by em-

12. The National Archives of Macedonia, Thessaloniki, *sicil-i Karaferiye*, '*hüccet-i kat-i yed*', vol. 30, p. 55, 17 Şevval 1080 [9.3.1670].

13. *Sicil* vol. 1, p. 35, 29 Muharrem 1106 [19.9.1694].

ploying specific terminology is known from all Ottoman *şeriat* courts: The free sedentary Muslim male adult was portrayed in the *sicil* as the norm; the scribe would register his name, address and occupation, sometimes adding his nickname thus disclosing his place of origin. All others—women, non-Muslims, minors and nomads to mention the most prevalent examples—were registered by noting their ‘otherness,’ which could imply different legal or administrative status (Peirce 1997: 171; al-Qattan 1996: 194–8). Nomads were marked by their ethnic origin. Leslie Peirce (2003: 146) mentions that the *sicil* terminology can teach us about the Ottomans’ connotations with regards to ethnic origin: it was a label that was attributed only to nomadic tribal groups unassimilated to urban culture.

The *şeriat* court of Salonica was not different: in the cases of several Muslim groups the scribes deviated from the prevailing norm of litigants’ registration by adding the litigant’s origin group after his or her name, thus emphasizing that he/she differed from other Muslims. In Salonica these groups of discriminated Muslims included the Gypsies, the Blacks (*zenci*, *kara arap*, most of whom were manumitted or fugitive slaves), the migrant Albanians (*arnavut*), and converts to Islam (*mühtedi*).¹⁴ All these groups shared the common stigma of being foreigners and outsiders. Yet, only the Gypsies were subject to a discriminatory and systematic taxation. In the Gypsies’ case, their ‘otherness’ stemmed from what the surrounding society perceived as a vagabond routine of nomads and their alleged loose way of life.

The Gypsies as elusive nomads

Generally speaking, when the scribes registered names of litigants or culprits, the verdicts or the culprits’ alleged behaviour were relevant to the same individuals alone. However, when the scribes refrained from mentioning names, but merely referred to the individuals’ religious, social or ethnic group, they intended to set legal or administrative precedents that would serve future cases in the future. These generalizations are pertinent to our discussion as they often shed light on the administration’s assumptions and perceptions.

Such is the case that deals with the Gypsies’ evasions from regularly paying their taxes. Indeed, the administration’s perception, i.e. stereotypes, of the Gypsies is most obvious in the tax edicts. The origin and the ramifications of this poll tax that was levied on the Gypsies will be discussed later in

14. On the ambiguous place of converts in the *sicil*, see Ginio (2005) [forthcoming].

this article, but I would like to present here the various stigmatising generalizations that appear in these official texts. The edicts pertaining to the Gypsies' taxes emphasized the various ways in which the group would presumably try to avoid paying taxes. The edicts offered detailed instructions to the tax collector of how to cope with this tax evasion. They mentioned, as examples, sudden relocation, giving false allusions to ostensible exemptions or pretending that the taxes had been duly paid to another tax collector—the agent of a *wakf* or *timar*. Collectors were instructed to take exceptional counter-measures going as far as the taking of hostages to ensure the Gypsies' compliance, inflicting hefty fines on tax dodgers, and ignoring any false allegations of exemption.¹⁵

For the administration, the main threat of evasion lay in the Gypsies' habit to constantly move from one place to another: 'From ancient times till now the Gypsies are not connected to any territory or system. They are separated from any registration and they are not attached in any manner. On the basis of this disconnection (*sebresiyet*), their *cizye* should be collected by one hand' (*mefruz al-kalem ve-maktu al-kadem min kül al-vücuħ serbestiyet olup. Serbestiyet üzere yed-i vahidden cizyedarları tarafından zabt ve tasarruf olunagelmeyin*'). The terms *serbest*, 'free', 'disconnected', and *serbestiyet*, 'freedom', 'disconnection', are crucial to the understanding of the Gypsies' position in Ottoman society. George Soulis claims that *serbest* acknowledges the Gypsies' right to proceed unhindered with their own way of life, 'since the Gypsy race lives separately and is numerically limited, but is free in every respect' (quoted in Fraser 1992: 175). Actually, this term related to a very precise issue: the collection of taxes. It does not imply official recognition of the Gypsies' right to roam the countryside freely, but rather to emphasize their 'freedom' from the interference of other local officials in favour of a central collection of their taxes by the *cizye* collector.¹⁶ In other words, it means that because of the Gypsies' specific customs they were not connected to any of the regular systems of tax collection; instead, they were subject to a different system of tax collection that catered only for them. The centralization of the Gypsy tax collection in the hands of one person, the *cizyedar*, was meant to

15. The instructions to the *cizye* collectors appear regularly in the *sicil* as the assignment of this duty had to be renewed every year. See, for example *sicil* vol. 8, pp. 79–80, 2 Rebiülevvel 1113 [5.9.1701]; vol. 16, pp. 184–5, 20 Ramazan 1120 [3.12.1708]; vol. 41, pp. 75–7, 19 Muharrem 1141 [25.8.1728].

16. For a similar understanding of the term *serbest* to apply that someone is exempted from outsiders' taxation. See Gerber (1994: 137).

ease the administration's fear that the Gypsies would exploit their nomadic way of life to evade payments; it did not imply any acknowledgment of their freedom.

A *sicil* document from August 1715 reveals the extent of centralization by which the tax collector endeavoured to assure the proper payment of the Gypsies' taxes. This single document records what could be described as a ceremonial gathering that took place in the *şeriat* court of Salonica: all the heads of the Gypsy groups who lived in the district of Salonica were present, both Muslim and Christian. They collectively declared, in the presence of the *cizyedar* Zeynü'lâbidîn Ağa, that they did not have any complaint against the *cizyedar* as their taxes and other burdens were fairly assessed and collected. They further proclaimed that the said tax collector had not extracted any false taxes from them and that he, together with his entourage, did not harass them in any way. They added that this declaration put an end to any previous disputes that they held with the *cizyedar* and, similarly, any future claims that they might raise would be utterly refuted by the court on the basis of their current declaration.¹⁷

It seems that this unanimous declaration might conceal previous conflicts that stemmed from allegations against the *cizyedar* of prior extortion of illegal taxes and his violent attitude towards the Gypsies. This document also demonstrates the attempt of the *cizyedar*, by summoning to court the entire Gypsy leadership from all over the area of Salonica, to regulate his relations with them by tackling their conflicts at the district level. It was probably an attempt to enforce an *ad-hoc* centralized mechanism on the Gypsies to ensure the regular payment of taxes.

It is interesting to note that on the very same day as the Gypsies were making their affirmation in court, a sultanic decree was composed in Istanbul with regard to the same Zeynü'lâbidîn. The decree addresses the ongoing conflict between the Gypsies and this *cizyedar*. Apparently, the Gypsies took advantage of the Sultan's passage at the head of his army in Salonica to submit a petition against the *cizyedar*. While the essence of their petition was not specified in this decree, we learn that Zeynü'lâbidîn was also found guilty of embezzling the Gypsies' taxes that were earmarked to cover the cost of manufacturing the janissaries' coats, one of the major burdens of the state towards its elite units, and one which was performed with much pomp during the holy month of Ramazan. This last reproach probably, and not the

17. *Sicil* vol. 25, p. 45, 15 Şaban 1127 [15.8.1715].

Gypsies' petition, is what stood behind the *cizyedar*'s subsequent disappearance and the decree to seal up Zeynü'lâbidîn's house and to collect, under the threat of imprisonment, the taxes dues from his subordinate collectors, one of whom was the *cizyedar*'s own brother.¹⁸

Against the background of the second document we can deduce that the *Cizyedar*, who must have been aware of the allegations against him, attempted to achieve some sort of reconciliation with the Gypsies and this is the reason for their statement in court. While this is merely a hypothesis, the case reveals the Gypsies' possibility to negotiate their position vis-à-vis the *cizyedar*, an option that will be dealt with later in this article. At this stage we can sum up the general attitude of the State's agents towards the Gypsies: being bereft of any fixed domicile, combined with their continuous wandering, transformed all Gypsies into potential tax evaders who could elude them, the state's agents. This stigmatization fell upon all Gypsies—Nomads and sedentary, Muslim and Christian alike. From the administration's point of view all Gypsies were suspected tax dodgers who must be forced to pay their dues. The Ottoman administration's suspicious attitude toward the Gypsies and their alleged customs was expressed in a general disapproval of the nomadic way of life.¹⁹

'Those who hold Muslim Names' (bi-nam muslim): The stigmatization of the Gypsies for not being True Muslims

European visitors to the Ottoman Balkans repeatedly referred to what they described as the bad manners and shallow religious beliefs of the local Gypsies. These sources, mostly memoirs and travelogues written by travellers and consuls, appeared primarily in the nineteenth century and, later, anthropologists added their contributions to the literature on the Gypsies. The European bystanders also noted the derogative image of Gypsies in the eyes of their Muslim and Christian neighbours. The main stigmatization attributed to the Gypsies is their seeming negligence in keeping the religious commands, to the extent that they were characterized by the surrounding society as pagans who only pretended to profess a religion. Sexual looseness, opting for criminality and even cannibalism were additional character traits that were attributed to the Gypsies. Two examples of these recurring defamations will suffice: here follows, first a description by François Pouqueville,

18. *Sicil* vol. 26, p.16, 14 Şaban 1127 [14.8.1715].

19. On the evolvement of the tense relations between the Ottoman administration and the nomads in general, see Lindner (1983).

the nineteenth-century French Consul to the court of Ali Pasha in Ioannina and later in Patras, of the Muslims' attitude toward the Gypsies: 'Les Bohémiens, que les Turcs traitent d'athées et d'anthropophages—l'opinion que les Bohémiens sont anthropophages est générale dans la Turquie' (1826, vol. 1: 148). The second example comes from the nineteenth-century philologist Alexandre Paspatis (1870: 1–3). He describes the Gypsies as 'sauvages,' who were intentionally and explicitly segregated from the surrounding society. They would ignore all commonly accepted rules and social practices; their Muslim and Christian neighbours despised them as pagans who made their livings by of cheating and stealing. They prevented the Gypsies from participating in religious events and forbade them from entering their mosques and churches. Their adherence to the established religion resulted, according to Paspatis's informers, from their desire to receive benefits that they did not deserve.

Do these testimonies reflect local convictions, or do they merely mirror European prejudices that the writers attributed to the Balkan population? The *sicil* records echo only rarely accusations against the Gypsies' mock devotion to Islam. The most general reference to their alleged superficial adherence to Islam is manifested in the poll tax documents found in the Salonican *sicil*. When a decree related to the Muslim Gypsy taxpayers, it did not refer to them as 'Muslims,' but merely as 'those with Muslim names' (*muslimân namında olanlar* or *bi-nam muslim*). Such a category is totally foreign to the Ottoman legal and administrative records. In general, having a Muslim name does not bestow its owner with any specific rights or burdens. The only criterion that affected legal status was religious affiliation. But for the Gypsies the division was different: it juxtaposed those who were non-Muslims with those who had Muslim names. The decrees do not provide us with further explanation for the creation of this otherwise unknown category of 'holders of Muslim names.' We can only assume that for the Ottoman administration the Gypsies' adoption of Muslim names did not symbolize their true religious belief, which implied full membership in the Muslim community, but served as only a cover that endowed its holder with some marginal reduction in his obligation to pay the poll tax.

An accusation of criminal behaviour against individual Gypsies was found in the *sicil* of eighteenth-century Eyüp, a suburb of Istanbul that was home to the city's holiest Islamic site. In their seminal work of the cemeteries of Istanbul, Nicolas Vatin and Stéphane Yerasimos published a document from the *şeriat* archives of eighteenth-century Eyüp that shed light on an-

other general admonishment against the Gypsies: the 'corrupt' way of Gypsy women and their 'aberrant' trespassing into the forbidden arena of public space (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001: 45–6). The document, dated from 1786, refers to a quarrel between what the document describes as a delegation of the respectful inhabitants of Eyüp, the well-to-do leaders who were charged with maintaining order in the neighbourhood, and a group of three Gypsies: two women and one man. The local residents reproved the Gypsies for being vulgar, dishonest and violent. They added that when being rebuked by their neighbours, the Gypsies told barefaced lies and threatened to burn down the neighbourhood. Furthermore, the Gypsy women, according to the plaintiffs, harassed and solicited pilgrims who had come to the holy place and had sexual intercourse with strangers amid the cemetery's tombs. The Gypsy man, for his part, was known for officiating secret marriage ceremonies, it was claimed (Vatin and Yerasimos 2001: 195–6).

Another contemporary Ottoman source that makes similar accusations is the Ottoman Shadow theatre (*Karagöz*). This popular entertainment form, performed mainly in coffeehouses, highlights—even if in a rather extreme and exaggerated mode, since its aim was to make people laugh—some of the prejudices that prevailed in the Ottoman city. Some puppets represented the derogative image of religious or ethnic groups in Ottoman society—the Albanian, the Laz, the Arab, the Jewish and so on. A Gypsy character was embodied in the so-called *Bok Ana* ('the mother of filthiness') who performs sorcery, magic and illusions (And 1987: 64, 75).

Memoirs written by Ottomans became fashionable in the second half of the nineteenth century. These sources, too, impugn the Gypsies for their ostensible depravity. Abdülaziz Bey (1850–1918), writing on contemporary Istanbul, distinguished Gypsy women from other Muslim women by their provocative behaviour and unrestrained manners (new edition, 1995: 329–31). Sciaky (1946: 108–9), describing Salonica in the same period, refers to a neighbourhood known as 'the Gypsy neighbourhood.' It was remarkable by its sheer poverty. Its dwellers pretended to be Muslims, but when inside their houses they did not keep their religion. The authors refer to customs and manners—and the disregard for them—that are well known from European sources: the Gypsies, they wrote, broke the gender boundaries and blatantly violated religious norms. Here again, we must be cautious when drawing conclusions, as some of later nineteenth-century Ottoman men of letters did read and acquire European influence, possibly also prejudices against the Gypsies, in their writings.

The *sicil* provides us with but a few (though they are illustrative) references that indicate the derogatory image of the Gypsies in the eyes of contemporary Ottoman society. At the same time it routinely records the main administrative mechanism that separated Gypsies from the general population: the special poll tax.

Segregation, punishment and resistance: The ‘Gypsy poll tax (*cizye*)’

The most evident proof in the *sicil* of the Gypsies’ marginalization by the authorities is their segregation from the total community of Muslims or Christians, and their categorization as a distinct group that had to pay a special tax. The sole criterion for categorizing as part of this group was by birth. Furthermore, unlike other inferior groups that lived in the Ottoman state, one could not leave this category by way of conversion, education, settlement or manumission.

Nevertheless, some distinction was made in the levy of this tax between Muslim, or more precisely, ‘those who hold Muslim names,’ and Christian Gypsies. Taking evidence from the *sicil* of early seventeenth-century Sofia, Peter Sugar (1977: 103) explains that ‘while the Gypsies were considered such low people that even Muslims could be taxed illegally, their religion was still worth 70 *akçe* tax discount’. I encountered a similar distinction in Ottoman Salonica: Christians had to pay an annual tax of 730 *akçe*; the Muslims were required to pay 660 *akçe*. It must be further emphasized that the scribes named the tax imposed upon the Muslim Gypsies as *bedel-i mektu*—that is to say, ‘the equivalent of the fixed tax.’ This semantic device was surely assumed to legitimise the levy of such a tax from a Muslim group. Salonica was not an exceptional case; there are parallel data from all over the Balkans—from Plovdiv, Silistre, Cyprus and elsewhere. However, I did not come across a similar phenomenon with regard to the Arabic provinces—a rather significant distinction, as I demonstrate below. Muhammad Bakhit (1982: xx), writing on Ottoman Syria, mentions an occasional tax—*adet*—imposed upon Gypsies, Bedouins, Turkmen and Kurdish tribes, as nomadic groups. In his case, however, the Gypsies were part of broader Muslim group that was portrayed as nomadic and had to pay this tax only randomly. What was the origin of this poll tax that was imposed on Muslims?

European sources indicated the Gypsies’ religious laxity as the major reason for such a discriminatory tax. According to them, the authorities took advantage of this prevalent prejudice to enhance state revenues. Some mod-

ern Western researchers subsequently accepted this allegation to a degree that it became the predominant explanation. However, there is no indication in the dozens of taxation edicts that I saw that corroborate this. And yet there are two phrases that recur in the relevant edicts which do offer something of a justification: *kadim al-eyyamdan ilâ hâzâ el'an* or *mu'tad-i kadim üzere* that is to say 'since old times' or 'according to the old custom.' These affirmations suggest that this tax derived from local custom, a salient source of acquiring legitimacy in Ottoman administrative codes that enabled the continuation of local, and sometimes even pre-Islamic, regulations into the Ottoman period (Beldiceanu 1960–4: 42–3).

Indeed, George Soulis (1961: 156–9; see also Messing 1981: 156–7), who writes about the Balkan Gypsies during Byzantine and Venetian times, refers to a special poll tax that the Gypsies had to pay as a group under Venetian rule. Furthermore, Machiel Kiel (1990: 71) remarks that the Ottomans continued to levy pre-Ottoman and local poll taxes by renaming them *cizye*. Following Kiel, I offer a similar explanation. The Gypsy poll tax supplied the state with significant revenues—and we have evidence from the *sicil* that these tax revenues were used, for example, to reconstruct castles, or finance the janissaries' coats,²⁰ it is quite clear, then, why the state was inclined to maintain this tax and continue its collection. The authorities circumvented the legal problem of levying a poll tax from Muslims by designating a different term that was devoid of the original religious meaning. Its essence, however, remained the same.

This argument about Byzantine inheritance is further sustained by the Ottoman terminology. The Gypsies were named by the Ottoman administration as *kıptî*, 'an Egyptian,' a reflection of the common myth that existed in Europe that the Gypsies originated in Egypt. In some cases the scribes used the term '*çingene*.' Both of these terms originated in Greek terminology: *yiftos* and *atsingani* (Messing 1981: 156–61). This linguistic use bears much significance to our discussion, as the Ottoman administration adopted the contemporary Greek terms and not the terms used in Islamic languages such as Nuri, Lori, Zet, Gadgar (Walker 1995 [1913–36]: 138–9). The use of *çingene* in some Arabic dialects is relatively late and presumably reflects Ottoman Turkish influence.

20. See, for example, the transfer of some of the revenues from the Gypsy *cizye* to pay the salaries of the workers who refurbished the citadel of Vidin: *sicil*, vol. 30, p. 149, 23 Cemazilevvel 1132 [1.4.1720].

Moreover, although Gypsy communities lived in the Arab provinces, I did not find in the literature any similar tax that was regularly imposed upon them. My explanation of this difference lies in the time of the Muslim conquest and the arrival of the Gypsies to the Balkans. As Byzantine rule ended in the Arab provinces well before the arrival of the Gypsies, sometime during the tenth century, we do not find such a tax in these provinces; however, the Gypsies settled in the Balkans before the Ottoman conquest. When the Balkans fell under Ottoman sway, there was already a Gypsy population and it was subject to a discriminatory tax. Consequently, the existence of such a tax should be regarded as a part of the Byzantine and Venetian fiscal heritage in the Balkans.

The *sicil* documents that deal with the Gypsy *cizye* shed light on another two features of this tax and its ramifications on the relations between the Gypsies and the political centre: punishment and resistance. Ottoman legislation had some punitive measures that applied explicitly to Gypsies, but it always concerned individual acts. Heyd (1973: 120), in his book on the Ottoman penal system during the sixteenth century, mentions regulations that applied specifically to Gypsy villains. These regulations underline the Ottoman administration's suspicion of the Gypsies as nomads who can harass the settled population and therefore should be severely punished for any individual crimes or misdemeanours committed. However, these instructions do not exemplify a state-sponsored general and constant persecution.

The levy of the *cizye* was the main point of confrontation between the state and the Gypsy population. The imperial decrees present these encounters as a constant struggle between the Gypsies who did their best to evade the payment, local officials and men of power who sometimes hindered the collection of the tax by temporarily siding with the Gypsies, or by forcibly extorting unjust payments from them, and the *cizye* collector, who was the only state official with the formal authority to deal with the Gypsies.

Imperial edicts suggest sundry means of control and punishment that aimed to provide the state with maximum control on the 'vagrant' Gypsies and to prevent any act of disobedience. Each and every order that concerned the Gypsy *cizye* reiterated the various modes of collection and prevention of tax evasion: to achieve some sort of control the authorities divided the Gypsies into groups (*cemaat*) of fifty taxpayers and nominated a leader (*çeri başı*) who had to stand bail for the full payment of the tax by all the group members (together with their relatives). Those Gypsies who claimed the previous payment of their taxes elsewhere had to present a document stamped

with the sultanic seal and issued by the state alone; if they could not show this document a hefty fine of 300 *akçe* was imposed on top of the owed tax. The edicts also reiterated the monopoly of the tax collector as the only official who tackled the tax levy and his prerogative to punish Gypsies if necessary. In no circumstances, the orders clearly stated, should any other official intervene in the collection of the Gypsy *cizye*. Furthermore the decrees pronounced that even in cases in which the Gypsies lived in villages that belonged to pious endowments, and therefore had to transfer their taxes in favour of that endowment, their taxes would still be levied exclusively by the designated *cizye* collectors. The collectors were to subsequently transfer the payments to the relevant endowment administrators.

Apparently, such procedures were not always enough. The *sicil* mentions initiatives of local tax collectors who took recourse to more violent methods. Some of them improvised and embraced aggressive measures against individual Gypsies such as taking Gypsies as hostages to ensure the due payment of taxes. Take, for example, the following case: Fatma bint Mehmet, a Gypsy woman from Salonica who belonged to the group (*cemaat*) of the *kazgancı* (makers or sellers of copper caldrons), submitted a claim against Mehmet Ağa ibn Hüseyin, the collector of the Gypsy *cizye*. According to the plaintiff, two months prior to the litigation the tax collector took her son, Şahbaz, with him to ensure that no member of their group would run away (*cemaati mezburenin firar etmemeleri havfi için*). He kept her son with him until three days prior to the litigation in court. Fatma added that she had also heard that the tax collector occasionally put pressure (*tazyik*) on her son in matters that were related to the group's interests and even threatened him several times with floggings (*ba`z-ı defa döverim diye tehvif eylediği masmuum olup*). She then told the court that no one had told her that her son had died three days previously and that he was buried; she was not given the opportunity to see his corpse. Following the submission of her claim, the court asked for information from a group of respectful (*bi-ırz*) men who were present at the burial. They declared in court that the plaintiff's son had indeed served the tax collector. However, they contended, Şahbaz died while he was far away from his mother, the plaintiff, and it had not been possible to alert her about his death. As they were charged with the preparation of the body for burial, they added, they could assure the court that his death was natural and not the result of violence.²¹

21. *Sicil* vol. 57, p.2, 19 Ramazan 1152 [20.12.1739].

Even if we accept the declaration of natural death of the young Gypsy, it is remarkable to note the method that was adopted by the tax collector in this particular case: he made a member of the group accompany him to ensure that every member would pay his taxes. This phenomenon can provide us with insight about the power relations between the tax collectors and the Gypsies. Yet, the Gypsies were not always powerless in their struggle against corrupt tax collectors. Indeed, while their nomadic lifestyle was the source of their social marginalization, it also gave them a way to resist the local state agents. As mentioned above, imperial edicts referred to myriad aspects of resistance, such as abandoning dwellings and running away or pretending to having paid the tax elsewhere. According to these edicts, some Gypsies attempted to find shelter among local dignitaries and people of power in order to avoid paying taxes. Others availed themselves of the right to appeal to the Sultan for justice. One such example is a petition that was submitted by Gypsies against the tax collector: Gypsies from the *cemaat* (group) of Bazarğâh petitioned the Sultan while he was camping near Salonica on his way to the front (*ordu-yi hümayun*). They accused the *cizye* collector of demanding, in contradiction to regulations, higher taxes than were actually owed and of taxing youths and children who were not supposed to pay taxes at all. After examining the case, the kadi of Salonica ordered that there should be no illicit collection of taxes from the Gypsies.²² This case shows that from time to time Gypsies did approach the highest authority, the sultan, and that occasionally they obtained a favourable verdict against the tax collector.

Physical isolation can be another socially severe feature of segregation. Noel Malcolm (1996: 115–16), writing on sixteenth-century Bosnia, shows that Gypsies were banished from various cities by the local administration; only those who could prove to have a required skill or craft could dwell inside the cities. Crowe (1994: 5–6; 214–15) mentions that Gypsies living in what is today Bulgaria, Albania and the former republics of Yugoslavia were packed into their own neighbourhoods, living in almost total segregation from the general population. Abdülaziz Bey (new edition, vol.2, 1995: 329–31), writing on nineteenth-century Istanbul, recalls that Gypsies lived in their own neighbourhood. According to him, Christian Gypsies were prevented from dwelling inside the city.

I did not come across any reference in the *sicil* to Gypsies dwelling in their own neighbourhood in eighteenth-century Salonica. Separate neighbour-

22. *Sicil* vol. 26, p. 10, 13 Cemazilevvel 1127 [175,1715].

hoods for Gypsies evolved, for example, in neighbouring Karaferiye²³ and also, apparently, in Salonica in the century that followed.²⁴ Actually, culling Gypsies' addresses from the various references in the *sicil*, I found quite an array of neighbourhoods that were mainly but not exclusively inhabited by Muslims. One significant feature common to all of these neighbourhoods was their situation in the lower, consequently poorer, areas of the city. However, I also found references to a group of houses that belonged or were identified as belonging to Gypsies (*çingene menzilleri/ menazil-i kıptiyan*) inside a given neighbourhood that can attest to a voluntary separation. Having said that, I must add that a few documents from the Salonican *sicil* that recorded the sale of assets by Gypsies referred to the existence of other Muslim or Christian neighbours as well.²⁵ We cannot deduce today whether these Muslim or Christian owners lived in these houses adjacent to the Gypsies' dwellings, or whether they bought the houses for investment and subsequently rented them out to Gypsies. Notwithstanding, we can say that while physical segregation was not enforced, for contemporary Salonicans the grouping of Gypsies in some residential areas was evident enough to refer to these areas 'the houses of Gypsies.'

Exclusion: The Gypsies and the military service

The most blatant case of recorded exclusion of Muslim Gypsies from state institutions was the military service. Studies on the Gypsies in the Ottoman lands bring ample evidence that Gypsies were habitually recruited to serve in Ottoman units (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001: 34–5; Barany, 2002: 90), and this custom continued through the eighteenth century. However, the scarce information we have from the *sicil* suggests that they were only recruited to fill modest auxiliary tasks. We find, for example, Gypsies who served in military bands. But in this case, as will be discussed below, the state did not grant the Gypsies the status of *askeri*.

It seems that local authorities frowned upon the Gypsies' recruitment and perceived them as a useless group that caused more harm than good to the

23. See, for example, the purchase of a building that was situated in the 'Gypsy neighbourhood' (*çingene mahalesi*) of Karaferiye: *sicil-i Karaferiye*, vol. 30, p. 150, 8 Muharrem 1082 [17.5.1761].

24. Sciaky (1946: 108–9).

25. See, for example, a claim that was submitted by a Christian, an inhabitant of the Ak Mescit neighbourhood, against his Gypsy neighbour who had trespassed on his property: *sicil* vol. 18, p. 239, 14 Zilhicce 1121 [13.2.1710].

army. Palpable evidence can be found in an edict that was issued by the Sublime Port. The edict lamented the poor quality of those who were recruited to serve as drivers of ox-carts (*arabacı*) in recent military campaigns. It complained that all the recruits were either youths or children (*oğlan ve uşak*) who did not know how to steer the wagons or soldiers and Gypsies who deserted from the army ranks. Their recruitment hindered the military operations. The edict demanded the enlistment of more reliable and skilful soldiers in the future. Their enlistment was to be guaranteed by surety (*kefiller*).²⁶

A clear example of exclusion from military service can be found in a sultanic edict that was registered in the kadi court of Karaferiye. It deals with the removal of Receb, a Gypsy *timar*-holder, on the grounds that Ottoman law forbade the assignment of *timar* at the hands of Gypsies. The edict orders Receb's discharge because he was a Gypsy and 'the holding of a *timar* by the Gypsy community is against the *kanun*' (*kıptî taifesinin timar tasarrufu hilâf-ı kanun olup*). The *timar* system was the backbone of both the Ottoman army and the provincial administration. Its essence was an exchange of land revenue assignment, *timar*, in return for military service as provincial light cavalry, which joined the standing army during battle and was charged with the administration of the villages under the *timar* holder's jurisdiction during peacetime (Barkey 1994: 36–8; Murphey 1999: 36–43). Becoming a *timar*-holder was one of the few channels of social mobility that was open to Muslim *reaya*. The Gypsies were denied this option. Receb's discharge stemmed from a sweeping ban on the employment of Gypsies, including Muslims, as timariots. It was Hasan, the *alay beyi* of Salonica's *sancak*, who notified the Sublime Port about Receb's identity and asked for his immediate removal and the handing over of his *timar* to a trustworthy timariot. Equally interesting is the mode according to which the court identified Receb as a Gypsy. Four witnesses, all of them timariots from the *liva* of Salonica, gave statements about Receb's 'true identity' that led to his expulsion (*Receb kıptî olduğuna liva-i mezburdan dört nefer erbab-i timar şehadet etmelerile*). It should be noted that Islamic law requires only the testimonies of two witnesses for issuing verdicts in all legal cases, except those pertaining to fornication. In this case, four male witnesses were needed because of the severity of this particular offence (Schacht 1964: 193–8).²⁷ While Receb's discharge was based on the *kanun*, and not on the *şeriat*, the scribe used

26. *Sicil* vol. 2, p. 87, 15 Cemazilahir 1107 [20.1.1696].

27. *Sicil-i Karaferiye*, vol. 49, p. 627, 21 Şaban 1117 [8.12.1715]

the term *şehadet*, ‘testimony’, which clearly evokes a Muslim legal (*şer’i*) procedure.

It is equally interesting to note the qualities that were required of a timariot, and how Receb, being a Gypsy, could not attain them. The edict noted any new candidate who was to replace Receb must permanently reside in the *sancak* (a prerequisite that Gypsies, who were perceived as nomads, ostensibly could not meet?) and serve in war under the flag of the *alay beyi*. The Sublime Port approved a new nominee, who was found worthy (*lâyık*) and most suitable (*evlâ*) for this job, characteristics that Receb, as a Gypsy, apparently lacked according to the Ottoman administration.

Receb’s dismissal, as noted, was the result of a general ban on the employment of Gypsies in the capacity of timariots, a military position that was accessible only to Muslims from the sixteenth century. This general prohibition enables us to draw a broader conclusion about the suspicious attitude towards Gypsies that eventually caused their ineligibility: the perception of their ‘otherness’ was so vigorously enforced to reach even into Ottoman ‘secular’ law.

Marginal yet essential: The Gypsies and music performance

Though marginal, the Gypsies were still significant to society in certain niches and social contexts. Like the Jews who served as moneylenders in Mediaeval Europe, by performing despised, yet necessary tasks, they made their own particular contributions to local society. One task that was entrusted in the Ottoman Gypsies’ hands—or rather enforced on them—was carrying out the death penalties. Placing the act of execution in the hands of society’s marginal elements is known from other parts of the world. This was the role given, for example, to Jews in pre-twentieth-century Morocco. We can assume that this was perceived as additional punishment and insult for the culprit. It seems that the Balkan Gypsies had a similar duty. The *sicil* is almost totally mute with regard to executions. While the punishment is stated, the text does not provide further information about the executors and the precise mode of execution. More substantial information comes from the Karagöz plays in which the Gypsies performed this defamatory task. Cevdet Kudret (1968: 355–7) compiled the most complete anthology of these theatre plays. In one of the skits, ‘*Canbazlar*’ (‘The Rope Walkers’), the Gypsies (*çingeneler*) remove, while singing cheerfully, what was thought to be the body of the pretending Karagöz who, ultimately, did not fail to come to life again.²⁸

A later reflection of this derogatory duty can be found in the novels of Ivo Andrić, the Yugoslavian Nobel-prize-winning author. In his *The Bridge on the Drina* (1977), Gypsies were summoned to impale a Serbian rebel.

Gauging from a few references in the *sicil*, I found that Gypsies were engaged in similar occupations and crafts assigned to them in the West: they were smiths, ironworkers, and entertainers. Entertainment, and especially music, were among the main occupations taken up by Gypsies in the Balkans (Marushiakova and Popov 2001: 41–2). A discussion about the Ottoman Gypsies and music encapsulates the main issues raised in this article.

Playing music was certainly one of the reasons for marginalizing the Gypsies, but it was also music that provided them with a channel through which they could try and ameliorate their position. The scope of this article does not allow for a detailed survey on the place of music in Ottoman times. However, looking through the prism of the *sicil*, it is clear that the public performance of loud music had a bad reputation. The main evidence comes from petitions at court to enforce the expulsion of infamous women from the neighbourhood. One of the recurring allegations against these women was that they used to play loud music to entertain their guests (Ginio 2002: 135). Music was also linked to the criminal deeds of the so-called bandits (*eşkiya*) who lived outside of respectful society in Salonica and, especially, in their hideaways up in the hinterland mountains. Violent and lethal behaviour was their main trademark, though they were also infamous for their offensive activities, such as getting drunk in the streets and playing drums (*tabl*) and trumpets (*surne*) in public.²⁹

Music and dance were combined in the performances of young male dancers (*köçek*). We learn that such dancers, who entertained janissaries in the military units' coffeehouses in Salonica, caused havoc and repeated clashes between two groups of janissaries. The local authorities responded to what they perceived as a genuine danger to public order by enforcing the permanent closure of the four coffeehouses in question. The removal of benches and stoves from these coffeehouses was undertaken to ensure that no customers would ever return to these establishments.³⁰ While we do not know what the identity of the dancers in this particular case was, Reşad Ekrem Koçu (2002 [1947]: 61), the historian of popular life in Ottoman soci-

28. For a brief English summary of this skit, see And (1987: 82).

29. *Sicil*, vol. 25, p. 74, 8 Zilkade 1129 [13.10.1717].

30. *Sicil*, vol. 101, pp. 58–59, 2 Şaban 1176 [15.2.1763].

ety, notes that many *köçek*s were Gypsies. Only in later times did others take their place; most of them came from the non-Muslim minorities. Thus, for example, Loncali Köçek İsmail, a late eighteenth-century Gypsy *köçek*, was well known for his long hair ('like a girl's') and deep black skin. Apparently, he had many admirers in his native Istanbul, and his legendary beauty and adventures were immortalized by the Ottoman poet Enderunlu Fazıl Bey (died 1791) (Koçu 2002 [1947]: 67–74).

While not only Gypsies kept Ottoman audiences amused with music and public dances, later European sources suggest that they were among the principal groups that took part in this type of activity, which was regarded with much suspicion and disapproval yet was also highly popular. The authorities' distrustful attitude towards Gypsy minstrels is shown in an edict from the late eighteenth century. Abdüllaḥ, the contemporary governor (*mütesellim*) of Salonica, issued this edict to all officials who resided in the neighbouring town Karaferiye. It referred to the Gypsy minstrels (*mutribân*) who roved the district and harassed the local communities. We learn more about their 'dangerous' behaviour in the sentence which explicitly mentions that they initiated illicit activities (*harekât nâ-şer'iyeye salik olan*).³¹

Music, nevertheless, also had an important part in Ottoman court ceremonies (Fraser 1992: 176), especially with regard to the janissary units that served as garrison guards in the urban citadels. Military music was one of the main symbols of these units. It was morale-boosting and manifested the military glamour and fearsome might of these units; music was meant to stir up the soldiers' readiness and sense of *esprit de corps*. (Murphey 1999: 156–7). The *sicil* shows that Gypsies played at these citadels. One sultanic edict reiterated the obligation of Gypsies to pay their taxes through the band leaders who served the governors, and mentioned that the potential taxpayers were those who belonged to the groups of Gypsy musicians found in the various districts of the Balkans (*eyalet-i rumeli kazalarında vaki sazendegan kıbtîyan taifelerinin*).³² Indeed, the 'musical band's tax' (*mehter hakkı*) is mentioned in the *sicil* as a regular tax that was levied on Gypsies.³³ Apparently, the attachment to a military unit and the stationing at a military bastion could blur the boundaries between the military and civilians. A few

31. *Sicil-i Karaferiye*, vol. 101, p. 5, 11 R[ebiül]e[levvel] 1209 [4.11.1794]. I am indebted to Dr. Antonis Anastasopoulos from the University of Crete, who kindly provided me with a copy of the original document.

32. *Sicil* vol. 44, p. 45, 30 Zilkade 1143 [6.6.1731].

33. *Sicil* 41/75, 4 Safer 1141 [8.9.1728].

Gypsies attempted to take advantage of this situation to get an exemption from the poll tax.

One such attempt appears in a claim submitted by Ali Ağa, who was in charge of collecting the poll tax from the Gypsies. Fifteen Muslim Gypsies had refused to pay their taxes, estimated at 660 *akçe* for each individual. The tax collector described the apparently long disagreement with the Gypsy defendants. He noted that in the past the Gypsies had refused to pay their taxes by arguing that those who played in the orchestras of the local citadels had been exempt from the poll taxes since the Ottoman occupation of the city.³⁴ On the basis of this old custom (the Ottomans finally conquered Salonica in 1430), they demanded the same exemption. By attributing a long history to their claim they hoped to enhance its looked-for legitimacy. The official was powerless to enforce them to pay their taxes. Therefore, he submitted a petition to the Sublime Port asking for its intervention. The response required the Gypsies to present an official document that would acknowledge their exemption (*muafiyetlerini müşir cedid beratları*). In case they failed to do so, they were to pay their taxes. Indeed, the sultanic edict was proclaimed in court and the Gypsy defendants were asked to present a similar document. As they possessed no such document, the court obliged them to pay their taxes.

While the Gypsies failed to obtain the sought-after exemption, it is pertinent to our discussion to see how they endeavoured to require such a financial and administrative privilege. They contended that their position as musicians in a military band exempted them from paying the poll tax. They were adamant in this contention to the extent that the tax collector had to ask for the central authorities' intervention. Only then, and after the Gypsy players were summoned to court, did they relinquish their claim. This litigation clearly shows that the Gypsies attempted to negotiate their position against the local agent of the state and exemplifies their ability to sustain their claim as long as the disagreement remained in the local administrative and legal arenas.

Conclusions

Unlike in Christian Europe, Ottoman Gypsies were not constantly persecuted and harassed by the central authorities or the surrounding society in the

34. *feth-i hakaniden beri mahmiye-yi merkume kılâında nöbet-i çalış hizmetleri mukabelesinde bedel-i maktudan muafı olup. Sicil*, vol. 1, p. 76, 20 Cemazilahir 1106 [5.2.1695].

eighteenth century. Their presence was part and parcel of the matrix of Ottoman society. Their existence was buttressed by a long list of regulations and taxation acts that, while clearly discriminating against them, nevertheless made them a legitimate part of Ottoman society and a steady source of state revenues. The place given to Gypsies, however, was unmistakably inferior. In fact, Gypsies are the clearest example of a group in the Ottoman Balkans that was marginalized. Whether Muslim or Christian, they were categorized as one distinct group that shared some common features—and that had to pay a special poll tax that was earmarked only for them.

The *sicil* records show that the Gypsies were stigmatised as a group that was notorious for avoiding the fulfilment of their obligations towards the State, elusive people who could easily move from one place to another and therefore should be treated with suspicion and a firm hand. The European sources, and the scant existing Ottoman information, also note that Gypsies were stigmatised for being unbelievers, people who live outside the accepted norms and rules. Indeed, they were despised because of what was seen as their loose and boisterous behaviour and bad manners.

It seems that these allegations were well known to contemporary Ottomans and, consequently, they are evident in the Ottoman Shadow plays and in the official terminology that was adopted by the administration to deal with Gypsies. Stigmatization, segregation and exclusion were clear elements of the Gypsies' experiences under the Ottomans.

Notwithstanding this last statement, it seems that the main discriminatory step against the Gypsies stemmed not from their otherness, but rather from local fiscal regulations that had prevailed in the area before the Ottoman conquest. Indeed, the collection of the poll tax from the Gypsies reveals another important feature of Ottoman administrative policy: the state adopted and maintained local customs when it was in its interest to do so. This was so even in some cases in which it meant possible contravening of the *shariat*. Linguistic devices enabled the state to blur the contradiction between levying the *cizye* on Muslims and the requirement of Muslim law to treat all Muslims as equals.

Finally, the *sicil* documents enable us to learn about some of the Gypsies' responses to the imposition of the poll tax. We saw that while socially the Gypsies lived on the edge of society, they attempted, sometimes at least, to use legal devices to confront corrupt officials. The Gypsies, then, were not utterly powerless; on occasion, they were even able to win cases in court or to receive a favourable sultanic edict that supported their claims. Furthermore,

they endeavoured to improve their status when the possibility arose. The clearest example is their employment as musicians in military bands. Living in the citadel and serving the military elite units was seen by some Gypsies as a potential breach through which they could move from the inferior status of tax payers to the ranks of military men, who benefited from exemptions. This attempt ultimately failed. However, it yielded an opportunity for us to understand the ambiguous relations between the Gypsies and the authorities: while being frowned upon and confined to the margins, the Gypsies' services were nevertheless needed. This was the Gypsies' main channel and chance to negotiate their position vis-à-vis the society around them.

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