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**AT THE MARGINS OF AUTHORITY:
MANIFOLD APPEARANCES OF THE *EHL-İ FESÂD* GROUPS
WITHIN THE 16TH-CENTURY ANATOLIAN SOCIAL FABRIC**

Thesis submitted to the Department of Historical Studies,
Central European University Private University, Vienna, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the Master of Arts degree in Historical Studies.

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June 2025

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Abstract

The concept of *fesâd* (disorder) was a vital component of the Ottoman central administration's imperial toolkit for managing internal politics. The concept was initially employed to regulate palace factionalism during the reign of Bayezid II, however its usage later expanded to marginalise and criminalise various groups emerging across Anatolia, as well as their associated networks, thereby excluding them from the imperial order. This study explores the evolution of the *ehl-i fesâd* concept in Ottoman administrative language by drawing mostly on the *mühimme defterleri* (state registers of important affairs), classified correspondence, and contemporary chronicles, focusing on palace factions, the territorial expansion under Selim I, and the rise of new sociopolitical and economic entities, the political “adversaries.” Throughout the sixteenth century, groups such as the *levend*, *sekban*, *sûhte*, *celâlî*, *kızılbaş*, and *yevmlü* are examined as key actors in the changing political landscape of Anatolia, with particular attention to their mobilisation during the uprising by Prince Bayezid (1559-1562). By reassessing these groups within the *fesâd* concept, this thesis challenges conventional interpretations of early Ottoman rebellions as mere uprisings or banditry, highlighting instead an evolutionary process that affected all layers of the empire. It further investigates the socio-political transformations driving this change and their impact on imperial governance.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who supported me throughout the research and writing of this thesis. First and foremost, I am deeply thankful to my supervisor, Professor Tijana Krstić. She has been a constant source of encouragement, guidance, always leading me forward and lighting my path with her torch. Her constructive feedback helped shape this thesis, making it more focused and aligned with rigorous scientific inquiry.

I would like to extend special thanks to Professor Eloïse Adde, whose constant encouragement, thoughtful structural feedback, and caring attitude towards both my academic work and personal well-being have meant more than words can convey. Her presence has left an indelible mark on this journey. I am also profoundly grateful to Professor Robyn Dora Radway for her efforts in nurturing my ability to write analytical essays with clarity and purpose. I will not forget the hours we spent both in her room and in class discussing my ideas, the care she devoted to my essays, and the belief she showed in my potential.

My deepest appreciation extends as well to Dr. Mariya Kiprovskva, my external reader, whose careful reading of my thesis and highly constructive feedback on its final version helped refine my narrative and strengthen the overall structure of this study. Her comments and thoughtful suggestions guided me to integrate several crucial points into rightful places, significantly shaping the final form of this work. Moreover, her invaluable advice regarding my future plans opened new horizons for me, offering perspectives I had not considered before. Her support for my applications, advice, and enduring kindness have made a lasting difference in my academic work and in my confidence as a young scholar.

Special thanks are also to Ágnes Németh for her efforts in improving my Persian skills, and for standing beside me throughout this process. Her assistance in navigating difficult sources has been truly invaluable. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Jessica Knowles for her presence and unflagging support during the academic year. She facilitated smooth

communication between myself and the faculty and was always helpful in resolving technical and administrative challenges.

Thanks to also to my friends, who offered helpful discussions and much-needed moral support over the years. Particular thanks to the dedicated archive workers and digitisation team at the Ottoman Archives. Their patience, hard work, and tireless efforts in digitising countless documents have made a remarkable contribution not only to this thesis but to Ottoman studies more broadly.

Finally, I owe my deepest and most heartfelt gratitude to my family. Their consistent belief in me, encouragement, and endless patience have carried me through the many challenges of this journey. I am especially indebted to my mother, whose love, sacrifices, and unshakeable faith in my abilities have been a source of strength in every difficult moment. This work, in many ways, belongs to her as much as it does to me.

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Introduction

The strategy of marginalising certain individuals or groups by assigning them various adjectives has long been a component of the statecraft. In the Ottoman context, the central authority and each of the prominent power centres within the palace controlled the boundaries of legitimacy by employing this method. Through such designations, the imperial administration excluded those it regarded as politically problematic from the legitimate order by designating their actions as *fesâd* (disorder) and identifying them as *ehl-i fesâd* or *müfsid* (people committing *fesâd*), notions deeply rooted in Islamic legal thought and based on Qur'anic injunctions.¹

Prior to the Ottoman territorial expansion of the sixteenth century, particularly with the conquest of eastern and south-eastern Anatolia, formerly under Mamluk and Safavid influence, where the Ottomans sought to establish their own administrative order, this apparatus was predominantly applied within the palace itself. It served as a means to regulate courtly factions and marginalise political adversaries by labelling those deemed politically problematic as *müfsid*. However, the enduring Safavid presence and the decentralised sociopolitical and economic structure of Anatolia led to the emergence of competing power centres beyond the orbit of imperial authority. In turn, this situation resulted in the semantic and functional expansion of *fesâd* as *ehl-i fesâd*-related entries in the archival records grew from the 16th century onwards. The term came to encompass new ‘disruptive’ elements, notably including the *kızılbaş*, reflecting the changing imperial strategies of control and categorisation in this increasingly volatile frontier zone.

¹ See Duran Ali Yıldırım, “Ayatler Işığında Bireysel ve Toplumsal Fesad Sebepleri,” *Şırnak Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 7, no. 13 (April 2016): 123–147; Yakup Yüksel, “Kur’an’da Fesât Kavramı ve Müfsitlerin Nitelikleri,” *Mevzu – Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 3 (March 2020): 45–80.

Nevertheless, attributing the increase in the *fesâd*-related entries solely to external influences would be insufficient, and a broader perspective which considers the wider dynamics of the sixteenth century is required. This period is widely recognised as an age of profound transformation for the Ottoman Empire, and even this characterisation of the era offers valuable insight for the researcher. The processes of change and transformation in this century were not only limited to institutional shifts within the classical structures of the empire such as *timâr* and *kul* systems, but also involved a series of interrelated developments, including population growth, demographic pressure, internal migration, devaluation (or price revolution), and the shifts in the recruitment policies of the imperial administration. The cumulative effects of these factors destabilised the socio-economic and political fabric of the Anatolian provinces by fundamentally shaping the ways *fesâd* was understood, invoked, and addressed. At the same time, the scope of *fesâd* expanded to encompass new terms for groups directly involved in these internal developments, including *levend*, *sekban*, *sûhte*, *celâlî*, *kızılbaş*, and *yevmlü* groups.

However, the expansion of the notion of *fesâd* cannot be understood solely in linguistic terms; rather, it compels us to consider the broader dynamics of the sixteenth century, the period in which aforementioned transformations took place. Thus far, scholars have generally assumed that the sixteenth century witnessed a population growth, which placed an increasing pressure on arable land and rural resources. This demographic strain caused a population fluctuation, with large numbers of landless individuals, particularly young men, who were moving between their rural settlements and urban centres along with monetary devaluation and recurrent financial crises, which weakened the purchasing power. Simultaneously, the dissolution of the classical *timâr* system, once the backbone of provincial military and fiscal administration, contributed to the transformation of the provisional economic mechanisms. The situation of the *timâr* affected the military structure

of the empire and forced the imperial administration from the 1570s to change its recruitment policy, which also affected the *kul* system, the main instrument through which Istanbul maintained its control over the *askerî* (ruling elite) in rural regions. Given these overlapping pressures, it is reasonable to argue that the empire had undergone a fundamental transformation by the end of the sixteenth century.

The study of this process has been shaped by growth and decline paradigms until the 1980s. On the one hand, scholars such as Braudel,² Barkan,³ Akdağ,⁴ and Cook⁵ concentrated on the issue of demographic growth and the resulting pressure on the subjects. On the other hand, Tunçdilek,⁶ Planhol,⁷ and Hutteroth⁸ framed their analyses within the decline paradigm. Later works by Erder,⁹ Faroqi,¹⁰ and Jennings¹¹ addressed both frameworks, and focused on the migration issue and the methodological limitations of fiscal registers, particularly *tahrir defterleri* (state registers of taxes) as sources on demography, since these registers recorded only tax-paying males, which forced historians to apply household multipliers to the number of *hâne* (household) to estimate total population of a certain region. However, this method caused technical debates, as household size varied considerably over time and across regions, and no reliable evidence supports the use of a fixed multiplier across the empire.

² Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1949).

³ Ömer Lütfi Barkan, "Tarihi Demografi Araştırmaları ve Osmanlı Tarihi," *Türkiyat Mecmuası* 10 (1953): 1–26.

⁴ Mustafa Akdağ, *Türk Halkının Dirlik ve Düzenlik Kavgası* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1975).

⁵ Michael Cook, *Population Pressure in Rural Anatolia 1450–1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

⁶ Necdet Tunçdilek, "Eskişehir Bölgesinde Yerleşme Tarihine Toplu Bir Bakış," *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası* 15, no. 1–4 (1953–54).

⁷ Xavier de Planhol, *De la plaine pamphylienne aux lacs pisidiens: nomadisme et vie paysanne*, *Bibliothèque archéologique et historique de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie d'Istanbul*, vol. III (Paris, 1958).

⁸ Wolf-Dieter Hutteroth, *Ländliche Siedlungen im südlichen Inneranatolien in den letzten vierhundert Jahren*, *Göttinger Geographische Abhandlungen* (Göttingen, 1968), 174–85.

⁹ Leila Erder, "The Measurement of Preindustrial Population Changes: The Ottoman Empire from the 15th to the 17th Century," *Middle Eastern Studies*, v. 11/3, 1975, p. 284–301.

¹⁰ Suraiya Faroqi & Leila Erder, "Population Rise and Fall in Anatolia 1550–1620," *Middle Eastern Studies*, v. 15/3, 1979, p. 328–345.

¹¹ R. C. Jennings, "Urban Population in Anatolia in the Sixteenth Century: A Study of Kayseri, Karaman, Amasya, Trabzon and Erzurum," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7, no. 1 (1976): 21–57.

The limitations of these quantitative data, in turn, have generated a series of theoretical discussions within the field. In 1984, Halil İnalçık formulated the *çift-hâne* theory to explain the smallest productive unit in Ottoman society without relying on numerical estimates.¹² From the late 1980s onwards, the focus of the debates shifted towards the relationship between surplus population and various conditions that shaped population movement and fluctuation within Anatolia. By the 1990s onwards, scholarly interest increasingly turned to the critique of the decline paradigm and to reassessing transformations in classical state structures.¹³

For instance, to test this new approaches, scholars have utilised alternative source to check the datasets based on the classic tax registers utilised so far. In particular, McGowan¹⁴ and Özel¹⁵ utilised *avârız* registers, Kütükoğlu utilised *narh* price list in order to observe the sixteenth century price fluctuations through the staple food prices,¹⁶ Pamuk utilised the daily

¹² Halil İnalçık, “The Emergence of Big Farms, Çiftlik: State, Landlords and Tenants”, *Studies in Ottoman Social and Economic History*, Variorum Reprints, 1985; Kayhan Orbay, *Osmanlı Çift-Hane Sistemi* (unpublished master’s thesis, Ankara University Graduate School of Social Sciences, 2010), 6. For the discussions on *çift-hane* system, see again Kayhan Orbay, *Osmanlı Çift-Hane Sistemi* (unpublished master’s thesis, Ankara, 2011); Gilles Veinstein, “Çiftlik Tartışması Üzerine,” in *Osmanlı’da Toprak Mülkiyeti ve Ticari Tarım*, ed. Çağlar Keyder and Faruk Tabak (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998), 36–59. He argued that Ottoman land organisation was based on a patrimonial system, fundamentally distinct from European feudal structures. This theory ended the long-standing Ottoman feudalism debate but also enriched our understanding of the empire by linking fiscal policies to the everyday experiences of the rural population, particularly through his complementary studies on rural taxation and land ownership patterns. See Halil İnalçık, “Köy, Köylü ve İmparatorluk,” in *V. Milletlerarası Türkiye Sosyal ve İktisat Tarihi Kongresi Tebliğler* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1990); Halil İnalçık, “Çift-Hane System and Peasant Taxation,” in *From Empire to Republic: Essays on Ottoman and Turkish Social History*, (İstanbul: ISIS Press, 1995), 61–73.

¹³ For some notable examples, see Suraiya Faroqhi, “Crisis and Change,” *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, Halil İnalçık & Donald Quataert (ed.), Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 411–636; Cemal Kafadar, “The Question of Ottoman Decline,” *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, v. 4/1–2, 1997–1998, p. 30–75; Leslie Pierce, “Changing Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire: The Early Centuries,” *Mediterranean Historical Review*, v. 19/1, 2004, p. 6–28; Günhan Börekçi, “İnkırazın Eşiğinde Bir Hanedan: III. Mehmed, I. Ahmed I. Mustafa ve 17. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Siyasî Krizi,” *Dîvân Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi*, v. 14/26, 2009; Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

¹⁴ Oktay Özel, *The Collapse of Rural Order in Ottoman Anatolia* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Oktay Özel, “The Reign of Violence: The Celalis c. 1550–1700,” in *The Ottoman World*, ed. Christine Woodhead (London: Taylor & Francis, 2012); Oktay Özel, “Population Changes in Ottoman Anatolia During the 16th and 17th Centuries: The Demographic Crisis Reconsidered,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36, no. 2 (2004); Oktay Özel, “Osmanlı Anadolu’sunda Terkedilmiş/Kayıp Köyler Sorunu (17.–19. Yüzyıllar),” in *Ahmet Yaşar Ocak’a Armağan*, ed. Mehmet Öz ve Fatih Yeşil (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2015).

¹⁵ Bruce McGowan, *Economic Life in Ottoman Empire: Taxation, Trade and Struggle for Land* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁶ Mübahat Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlılarda Narh Müessesesi ve 1640 Tarihli Narh Defteri* (İstanbul: Enderun Kitabevi, 1983).

wage records of the labourers for mapping population fluctuations and internal migration the sixteenth century countryside economic conditions created,¹⁷ and most recently, Orbay utilised waqf account books to observe the fiscal changes and the burden it created on the waqfs and people who benefited from them.¹⁸ The incorporation of these additional sources revealed further factors relevant to population growth and the related socio-economic challenges previously discussed. However, most of these studies remained largely concerned with contributing to existing debates shaped by tax register data. Özel and Orbay, by contrast, opened a new direction by integrating broader Anatolian socio-political dynamics into these reinterpretations based on newly utilised sources.

However, all these arguments were again formulated based on fiscal sources. Tax registers or other fiscal sources, regardless of how much detail they contain are not enough to explain sociopolitical and economic parameters of the sixteenth century conditions. It is obvious that such numerical data can be easily interpreted in ways that support predetermined assumptions, as they primarily reflect the demographic structure of a given region without offering direct insight into broader historical dynamics. Only a limited number of studies have incorporated other categories of sources so far. For instance, Linda Darling, in her study on the fiscal structure of the Ottoman Empire, examines the social repercussions of financial deterioration, particularly on the non-Muslim subjects by analysing various taxes. Moreover, she extensively uses the *mühimme* registers to contextualise and interpret these developments.¹⁹

¹⁷ Şevket Pamuk, “Urban Real Wages Around the Eastern Mediterranean in Comparative Perspective, 1100–2000,” *Research in Economic History* 23 (2006); Şevket Pamuk, “Osmanlı Kentlerinde Tüketici Fiyatları ve Ücretlerine İlişkin Veriler,” in *Osmanlı Devleti’nde Bilgi ve İstatistik*, (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü Matbaası, 2000); Süleyman Özmucur and Şevket Pamuk, “Real Wages and Standards of Living in the Ottoman Empire 1489–1914,” *The Journal of Economic History* 62, no. 2 (2002): 293–321.

¹⁸ Kayhan Orbay, “Filling the Gap in Demographic Research on the Ottoman Transformation Period: Waqf Account Books as Sources for Ottoman Demographic History (16th and 17th Centuries),” *Turcica. Revue d’Études Turques* (2018); Kayhan Orbay, “The Celâli Effect on Rural Production and Demography in Central Anatolia: The Waqf of Hatuniyye (1590s to 1683),” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 71, no. 1 (2018); Kayhan Orbay, “Celâlis Recorded in the Account Books,” *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 78, no. 1–2 (2004).

¹⁹ Linda T. Darling, *Revenue-Raising and Legitimacy: Tax Collection and Finance Administration in the Ottoman Empire, 1560–1660*, (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

But it is important to indicate that, at some point, it is necessary to examine the fiscal surveys since the population growth is a demographic field of study.

The repercussions of these discussions may well be traced in other types of documentation relevant to socioeconomic history and politics, such as *şer'iyye sicilleri* (state registers of courts), *mühimme defterleri* (state registers of important affairs), and, notably, correspondence between the sultan and provincial officials. These documents offer valuable opportunities to approach the ambiguities found in fiscal registers from alternative perspectives. At this stage, it seems necessary to revise the language we use when posing our questions. In this thesis, rather than relying on the limited, numerically driven vocabulary of tax registers, restricted largely to terms such as *mücerred* and *caba*, I aim to adopt the terminology preserved in the *mühimme* registers, in the classified correspondences, and in the contemporary chronicles. This language, in fact, offers much clearer answers to the questions scholars have long posed to different sorts of tax registers. This vocabulary allows us to centre our arguments on a broader conceptual framework, the notion of *fesâd* (disorder), encompassing various groups such as *levend*, *sekban*, *sûhte*, *celâlî*, *kızılbaş*, and *yevmlü*, all of which resemble nuanced sociopolitical and economic components of the sixteenth century Anatolian social fabric.

Moreover, this variety of labels helps us to integrate these *fesâd* groups into contextual narratives, as each signifies something different for officials of the imperial administration, who were assigned to deal with them. I aim to demonstrate that these alternative materials have long contained the answers scholars previously sought through the restrictive lens of tax registers. By analysing the data written in them and focusing on the transformation of the *timâr*, shifting recruitment policy, the changing types of provincial households, and the composition of Prince Bayezid's army, I aim to offer a more nuanced understanding of the sociopolitical and economic conditions of sixteenth century Anatolia. With this goal in mind, I will emphasise the role of *fesâd* groups as both products of and contributors to the structural transformation of the period.

This study relies on three distinct source groups. My first source group, the *mühimme defterleri* (state registers of important affairs), contain essential information that provides insight into the perspective of the *Divan-ı Hümayûn* (The Imperial Council) regarding *ehl-i fesâd* groups. One might question why *şer'îyye sicilleri* (state registers of courts), which offer detailed information about the socio-political structure of the *reâyâ* (subjects), were not used. While court registers are indispensable for local studies due to their specific record-keeping method and content, the *mühimme* registers are more appropriate for studies that aim to understand how the central administration interacted and dealt with these groups. Additionally, since the Imperial Council also served as the highest judicial authority, the *mühimme* registers are particularly valuable for such research. That is, complaints sent from both Istanbul and rural areas continued to be recorded in these registers until the second half of the seventeenth century.²⁰ This makes them especially well-suited to the temporal scope of this thesis, further reinforcing their significance as the primary source material for this study.

The second source group I utilised in this research consists of *arz* (petitions) and letters/classified correspondence preserved in the archival fund of Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi Evrakı (TS.MA.E.). These documents have been examined to investigate the relationships between the imperial princes, rural administrators, and *ehl-i fesâd* groups. They are particularly significant due to the detailed information they provide on people who either aspired to lead these groups or maintained affiliations with them. Furthermore, such documents offer valuable insights into broader themes explored in this study, including the change and transformation process of the Ottoman political sphere. In particular, they shed light on the phenomenon of the provincial households, and the factionalism within the imperial administration. In this regard, these sources not only enhance our understanding of the

²⁰ Mübahat S. Kütükoğlu, “Mühimme Defteri,” *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 31 (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2020), 519–522.

dynamics between provincial power foci and the *ehl-i fesâd* but also contribute to the intra-state rivalries both in the late fifteenth and mid-sixteenth century.

The final source group consists of chronicles that document the events of the period under study in detail. These chronicles are often consulted by researchers because they provide alternative data that allows for the comparative/mutual verification of information written in official documents. Several chronicles have been consulted in this study. That is, Peçuylu İbrâhim (d. 1645), in his *Târih-i Peçevi* narrates events from the reign of Süleyman I (1520–1566) to the mid-seventeenth century, while Selâniki (d. 1600), in his *Târih-i Selâniki* focuses on the latter half of the sixteenth century. In *Târih-i Na ‘îmâ*, Nâimâ (d. 1716) provides a detailed account of developments extending into the latter half of the seventeenth century. Additionally, *Siyer-i Enbiyâ-i İzâm ve Ahvâl-i Hulefâ-i Kirâm ve Menâkıb-ı Âl-i Osmân*, *Selim Şah-nâme*, *Süleymân-nâme*, *Tarih-i Âl-i Osman* and *Nâdirü’l-Mehârib*, the latter being both a section of and an independent adaptation from *Künhü’l-Ahbâr*, offer valuable and nuanced descriptions regarding the composition and character of Prince Bayezid’s forces. Works such as the anonymous *Kitâb-ı Müstetâb* and Grandvizier Lütî Pasha’s (d. 1564) *Âsafnâme* offer differing perspectives on the transformation process of the empire. Furthermore, Silahdâr Mehmed Ağa (d. 1726-1727), in his *Târih-i Silahdâr* provides additional insight into this period, while *Necmü’l-Hüdâ fî Menâkıbı’ş-Şeyh Şemseddîn Ebi’s-Senâ* offers detailed information on the socio-economic history of Eastern Anatolia and Ottoman-Safavid relations. Lastly, in the *Ahsenü’t-Tevârih*, Hasan-ı Rûmlû (d. 1577) presents various anecdotes related to Safavid history. Together, these chronicles play a vital role in the research, providing valuable context alongside the archival materials and helping to deepen the overall analysis of the period.

The thesis is divided into three main chapters. In the first chapter, I examine the Ottoman imperial administration’s conceptualisation and categorisation of social and political unrest in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Anatolia through the lens of the term *fesâd*. Drawing

primarily on various correspondence and *mühimme* registers, I explore how *ehl-i fesâd* served as a label imposed on diverse groups perceived as threats to social order and state authority. I analyse the nuanced distinctions made between various factions such as *levend*, *sekban*, *sûhte*, *celâlî*, *kızılbaş*, and *yevmlü*, demonstrating the differentiated approach of the administration to managing unrest, which ranged from ordinary banditry to politically and religiously charged insurrections. Through examples from the reign of Bayezid II (1481-1512), Selim I (1512-1520), I conceptualise how the notion of *fesâd* was employed not only to marginalise military and social groups but also to delegitimise political adversaries and factional rivals. I situate the *ehl-i fesâd* within broader imperial strategies of control and categorisation, which sets the stage for a focused investigation of the period between 1550 and 1600.

In the second chapter, I examine the Prince Bayezid Affair (1559-1562) within the broader sociopolitical and military transformation of mid-sixteenth century Anatolia under the reign of Süleyman I (1520-1566). In the third chapter, which I divided into three parts, I analyse the presence and activities of the *ehl-i fesâd* groups within contextual frameworks by focusing primarily on environmental, and military factors in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Anatolia. In the first part, my focus centres on the environmental context. In this part, I examine how the environment was perceived by the Ottomans through the imperial decrees and contemporary chronicles. In the second part, I address a largely overlooked aspect of *ehl-i fesâd* studies by investigating how the imperial administration perceived the issue of the growing proliferation of firearms. I analyse how the widespread and often unauthorised possession of firearms by various *fesâd* groups contributed to the social disorder and posed a direct challenge to imperial authority, by mainly utilising the decrees. Accordingly, I analyse the state's efforts to control the circulation of firearms through the regulation of production, the confiscation of weapons, and the restriction of access to key raw materials as a critical phase in its attempts to manage *fesâd*.

Furthermore, this section explores the tensions between official monopolies over firearm manufacture and the rise of private, frequently illicit, production activities, which reflected broader economic and administrative transformations within the empire during this period. In the last part, I explore the conditions that brought together the surplus population in Anatolia from the mid-sixteenth century, as well as the concurrent rise in *kapıkulu* troop numbers. While military needs undoubtedly played a role, I argue that this development reflected the gradual incorporation of various *fesâd* groups into the *kapıkulu* corps as a means of absorbing surplus population and potentially “disruptive” elements from the 1570s onwards.

While the research, analysis, and writing of this thesis are entirely my own, I did use AI-based tools such as Quillbot and ChatGPT to correct grammatical errors in the final drafts of the text. All substantive content, arguments, interpretations, and translations remain my sole responsibility.

Chapter 1

Historicising the *Fesâd* Before the Sixteenth Century

1. The Language of the Records

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the *mühimme* registers consistently feature a term used by the imperial administration to marginalise individuals or groups it sought to exclude from the system: the *ehl-i fesâd*. The term consists of two Arabic words: *ehl* (people/group) and *fesâd* (disorder). The notions of *fesâd* and *müfsid* in the Ottoman Empire were deeply rooted in Islamic legal tradition. From the earliest revelations of the Qur'an, these terms were repeatedly defined and their scope delineated through relevant verses.²¹ Notably, in verses 204, 205, and 206 of Surah al-Baqarah (The Cow), the Qur'an explicitly outlines the characteristics of *fesâd* and *müfsid*:

“And some men there are whose saying upon the present world pleases thee, and such a one calls on God to witness what is in his heart, yet he is most stubborn in altercation, and when he turns his back, he hastens about the earth, to do corruption there and to destroy the tillage and the stock; and God loves not corruption; and when it is said to him, ‘Fear God’, vainglory seizes him in his sin.”²²

In this way, these two notions assumed a legal framework and became significant instruments within both the legal and political traditions of Islamic polities. As Yavuz Aykan has argued in his study on the connection between Ottoman and Qarakhanid legal traditions, the categorisation of individuals as *müfsid* according to Islamic legal norms did not necessarily reflect the actual composition of society. Rather, these were abstract classifications that made juridical judgement possible.²³

²¹ See Duran Ali Yıldırım, “Ayetler Işığında Bireysel ve Toplumsal Fesad Sebepleri,” *Şırnak Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 7, no. 13 (April 2016): 123–147; Yakup Yüksel, “Kur'an'da Fesât Kavramı ve Müfsitlerin Nitelikleri,” *Mevzu – Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 3 (March 2020): 45–80.

²² Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, vol. 1 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1955), 55–56.

²³ Yavuz Aykan, “A Legal Concept in Motion,” *Islamic Law and Society* 26, no. 3 (2019): 252–271.

However, it is important to recognise that these terms were not solely created to maintain social order within the framework of Islamic jurisprudence. Instead, Ottoman archival documents show that the concepts of *fesâd* and *müfsid* were also appropriated by ruling elites as an apparatus to regulate power foci and to intervene in political rivalries. In this regard, the Ottoman Empire stands out as one of the most valuable case studies for examining the evolution and instrumentalisation of these notions due to the abundance and accessibility of its archival records.

Yet, the significance of *fesâd* and *müfsid* cannot be confined to interpretations within Islamic jurisprudence or to the expressions in fatwas and *şer'iyye sicilleri* (state registers of courts). Particularly from the early sixteenth century onwards, it is possible to observe a notable increase in the appearance of the term *ehl-i fesâd* in the *mühimme* registers. From these registers, it is understood that while the former, the *ehl* refers to a group of individuals defined by a particular attribute or relationship, the latter, *fesâd* implies moral or social disorder, something that goes beyond legal wrongdoing to include disruption of lawful societal harmony or religious order. Thus, the *ehl-i fesâd* literally means “people of malice,” or “the corrupt folks,” and carries a strong normative and a moral judgement, designating a group as responsible for spreading social, moral, or political disorder.

Even though Mustafa Akdağ,²⁴ Orhan Türkdoğan,²⁵ and more recently Birol Gündoğdu²⁶ analysed the term itself, their narratives are problematic in certain aspects. For instance, Türkdoğan questioned that whether sixteenth century population fluctuation might represent a form of social mobility and regarded the categorisation of *ehl-i fesâd* groups as a sociological problem by suggesting they might be classified as “societal collective events.” He

²⁴ Mustafa Akdağ, *Türk Halkının Dirlik ve Düzenlik Kavgası* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1975).

²⁵ Orhan Türkdoğan, “Sosyal Hareketler Olarak Celali Ayaklanmaları,” *Belleten* 60, no. 228 (1996): 421-442.

²⁶ Birol Gündoğdu, *Erken Modern Dönemde Osmanlıda İsyân Algısı* (İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2023).

examines such incidents within two categories: social movements and crowds, allowing him to analyse the nature of *celâli* groups and their actions within broader patterns of social dynamics.

He chooses the *celâli* groups for his case study precisely because academic interest in them had developed much earlier than for other *ehl-i fesâd* groups, producing a relatively richer body of scholarship. While this type of sociological reading may seem conventional to non-Ottomanists, Ottoman historiography has long been bound by rigid frameworks in interpreting social unrest. The most commonly known of these frameworks insists that uprisings, rebellions, or acts of banditry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries should not be equated with European-style peasant revolts, given the fundamental characteristic differences between Ottoman and European rural societies.

However, the chronicles consistently convey similar narratives, particularly concerning the *Celâlî* rebels, their connections with the ordinary population, and how the phenomenon of *fesâd* came to involve not only armed groups, former soldiers, vagabonds, or brigands but also segments of the rural populace. For instance, Keşfi Mehmed Çelebi (d. 1525),²⁷ in his *Selîm-nâme* recounts that "...a group known as 'Celâlî,' consisting of destitute and wretched elements from among the common folk, deceived a number of *etrâk-ı bî-idrâk* (ignorant Turks) with empty words and led them into disarray..."²⁸ Similarly, Matrakçı Nasuh (d. 1564),²⁹ in his *Süleymân-nâme*, describes: "...Thereafter, that unwilling and unruly crowd [Celâlî] surged forward in waves, with the clashing of swords, advancing like a bloody flood, gathering in groups; either through willingness or out of fear, villages and tribes declared their submission

²⁷ Ahmet Uğur, "*Selîm-nâme*," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 36 (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2009), 440–441.

²⁸ Abdurrahman Sağırlı, *Keşfi Mehmed Çelebi Selim-nâme veya Bağ-ı Firdevs-i Guzât ve Ravza-i Ehl-i Cihâd*, (unpublished MA thesis, Istanbul University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Early Modern History, 1993), 129.

²⁹ Hüseyin Gazi Yurdaydın, "Matrakçı Nasuh," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 28 (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2003), 143–145.

and loyalty to them. The remaining towns and villages were devastated and razed...”³⁰ “...Yet before the imperial army could fully assemble, Hürrem Pasha, without delay and accompanied by his retinue, swept through like a storm, crossing mountains and valleys with the overflowing host of soldiers, moving via Bozok, and engaging that *etrak-ı nâ-bekâr* (useless/vagabond Turks) in battle, as fate decreed. Many among the rebellious insurgents were slain in sudden assaults...”³¹ Moreover, the author recounts that Turkmen groups were among principal contributors to the *Celâli* uprisings: “...from the Turkmen tribes, another Celâli uprising appeared, and those marauders, with venomous teeth full of wrath, inflicted harm upon the lands and oppressed the Muslims...”³²

However, Birol Gündoğdu categorises early modern Ottoman uprisings into three groups: religious/ideological, personal or family-related, and military/political, and engages with the leadership aspect. Even though the *ehl-i fesâd* groups provided the primary manpower of the disorder, he does not include them into his narrative. We must approach such classifications with caution, as they directly reflect the perceptions of the imperial administration. While the state viewed these people and groups as threats to its authority, we cannot fully determine the actual motivations behind these movements.

Gündoğdu himself acknowledges this matter through the Sheikh Celal Uprising of 1519 and Kalender Shah Incident (1527), by stating that these categories were used as analytical frameworks rather than absolute definitions. He observes that although these two religiously/ideologically motivated revolts initially appear distinct, the course of the subsequent incidents shifted towards a socio-political and economic axis. He further notes that state’s relatively effective handling of religiously framed rebellions led to a transformation in the

³⁰ Davut Erkan, “*Matrâkçı Nasûh’un Süleymân-nâmesi (1520–1537)*” (unpublished MA thesis, Marmara University, Institute of Turkic Studies, Department of Turkish History, Division of Early Modern History, 2005), 121.

³¹ Davut Erkan, *ibid.*, 122.

³² Davut Erkan, *ibid.*, 126.

character of such uprisings, even as religious and ideological elements continued to exert influence behind the scenes.³³

As for the issue of classification, it was not only modern scholars but also contemporary chronicles that offered varied and sometimes conflicting explanations for such incidents. For instance, regarding the outbreak of the Celâl of Bozok incident, Şükrî-i Bitlisî (d. 1531),³⁴ in his *Selim-nâme*, explicitly employs religious terminology to inform his readers of the causes behind the revolt, stating: "...he rose to fame when he revolted, unquestionably claiming to be the Mahdi. Thereafter, he left the region and established a new settlement for himself..."³⁵ Similarly, Keşfi Mehmed Çelebi recounts Celâl's own narrative of messianic pretension at the time of his uprising, describing: "...Proclaiming nonsense such as, 'No arrow can pierce me, no sword can cut me, no harsh wind can blow over me. I am the Caliph of the time and the Mahdi of the age,' he declared himself commander-in-chief and leader of the army. Swayed by his base desires and the promptings of the devil, he incited a rebellion..."³⁶

In his *Târih-i Âl-i Osmân* (commonly known as the history of Rüstem Pasha), Matrakçı Nasuh employs strong epithets such as *müfsid* (corruptor) and *mülhid* (heretic), similar to those written in imperial correspondence documents. By using these terms, he explicitly blame these individuals: they are *müfsid* because they cause *fesâd* (corruption and disorder), and *mülhid* because they reject belief in God, being portrayed as even more severe than the *kâfir* (infidels).³⁷ In his *Süleymân-nâme*, Nasuh primarily narrates the events involving Celâl and the imperial viziers following the outbreak of the rebellion. He describes Celâl and the turmoil he caused as follows: "... a Celâlî rebellion erupted in the Bozok region of Anatolia. This rebellion was seen

³³ Birol Gündoğdu, *ibid.*, 64.

³⁴ Abdülkadir Özcan, "Şükrî-yi Bitlisî," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 39 (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2010), 254–256.

³⁵ Şükrî-i Bitlisî, *Selim-Nâme*, ed. Ahmet Uğur, Mustafa Çuhadar, and Ahmet Gül (İstanbul: İsis Yayınları, 1995), 368.

³⁶ Abdurrahman Sağrılı, *Keşfi Mehmed Çelebi Selim-nâme...* 129.

³⁷ Matrakçı Nasuh, *Târih-i Âl-i Osmân (Osmanlı Tarihi 699–968/1299–1561)*, prepared by Dr. Göker İnan, edited by Prof. Dr. Erhan Afyoncu (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2019), 354.

as signs of the Day of Judgment, spreading great turmoil and fear throughout the land, like an earthquake shaking both heaven and earth...”³⁸

Interestingly, Matrakçı Nasuh provides differing dates for this incident in his two chronicles: in the *Târih-i Âl-i Osmân*, he places it in H. 933 (1526), while in the *Süleymân-nâme*, he assigns it to H. 934 (1527). This discrepancy is notable, as most chronicles date the original event to 1519. Furthermore, Şükrî-i Bitlisî does not specify a date for this incident. Ercan Gümüş, in his study on Kemal Paşazade, Celâlzade Mustafa, and Hoca Sadeddin, notes that except for Celâlzade, these authors do not provide any precise dating in their chronicles for this incident. Gümüş also highlights that, regarding the causes of the rebellion, Celâlzade interprets it largely as an administrative failure rather than a religious one, whereas Kemal Paşazade emphasises “ethnic” tensions rather than religious motivations.³⁹

However, in the contemporary studies focused on sixteenth century Anatolian *fesâd* incidents, the most frequently highlighted subjects are the groups of *levend*, *sekban*, *sûhte*, *celâlî*, *kızılbaş*, and *yevmlü*. Although, some of these terms may appear interchangeable, each of them held distinct meanings rooted in the sociopolitical context of the *mühimme* registers. In these registers, for instance, the *celâlî* groups referred to participants in large, politically driven uprisings, especially between the mid-sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The term *levend* was initially used for irregular soldiers or maritime mercenaries, but over time came to mean armed vagrants, often made up of former soldiers. Closely related, the *sekban* groups, who were often dismissed in large numbers after a war and many of whom turned to banditry were identified as irregular armed troops recruited for military needs. Likewise, *yevmlü* bands, meaning day-paid soldiers, mercenaries, also belonged to this unstable military stratum. If I use religiously framed notions as a litmus paper, these *fesâd* groups would be categorised as non-

³⁸ Davut Erkan, “*Matrakçı Nasûh’un Süleymân-nâmesi (1520–1537)*”, 121.

³⁹ Ercan Gümüş, *Tarihçi ve Asi: 16. Yüzyıl Celâlî İsyanları’nın Osmanlı Tarih Yazımına Yansıması* (İstanbul: Libra Kitap, 2018), 139-142.

religious in character, in contrast to the *sûhte* and *kızılbaş* groups, whose activities were coloured by religious motives.

On the one hand, the term *sûhte* typically referred to itinerant, unemployed madrasa students known for rioting, looting, and banditry. Their involvement in violence posed a serious problem for the state, both religiously and administratively, since they were connected to religious education and scholarly institutions, as in the case of Medrese Uprisings.⁴⁰ On the other hand, the *kızılbaş* groups, who embraced Shi'î beliefs and frequently associated with the Safavids, posed both a religious and a political challenge to Sunni Ottoman existence, especially in the permeable regions such as eastern and southeastern Anatolia. They were regularly accused of insurrection and were consistently depicted in official narratives as a source of unrest, who were capable to align with broader anti-state movements. Therefore, they were perceived as both a domestic and a foreign issue due to these connections, while other groups were primarily regarded as a domestic issue within Anatolia. Unsurprisingly, *kızılbaş* groups were not often classified alongside other bandit groups in official registers but instead were viewed as a distinct and more serious threat for the imperial order.

In theory, the way a person or a group was characterised and categorised by the imperial administration in a document was supposed to have a specific meaning for the official to whom the document was addressed. Had these labels been interchangeable and fluid, the bureaucracy would not have drawn such distinctions but would have described all *ehl-i fesâd* groups in the same way. For instance, for a rural governor, dealing with an ordinary *kuttâ-ı tarîk* (highway bandit) was not the same as confronting other *fesâd* groups. While ordinary bandits posed law and order problems for the imperial administration, other groups were perceived as direct threats to state authority and social stability, which required proper political management or military intervention. The imperial administration consistently distinguished these groups from

⁴⁰ Mustafa Akdağ, *Türkiye Tarihinde İctimai Buhranlar Serisinden: Medreseli İsyanları* (İstanbul: İsmail Akgün Matbaası, 1952).

ordinary bandits, and this distinction is clearly visible in the language of the registers in various forms.

For instance, the *Divân-ı Hümayûn* (Imperial Council) explicitly separates *levend* and *eşkiyâ* (bandit) groups by reporting that fifteen to twenty mounted men gathered to rebel under the name of *sûhte*.⁴¹ Moreover, the governor of Amasya was scolded for his failure to capture disruptive groups identified distinctively as *sûhte* and *levend*.⁴² Another record narrates that the governor is ordered to ensure that, whether the criminals were *sûhte*, *levend*, or *harâmî*, none should be permitted to harm the subjects.⁴³ Similarly, in a further case, *celâlî*, *levend*, and *sûhte* groups, alongside *harâmî* groups operating under the guise of *sipâhî* (cavalry) troops, are collectively listed as oppressors of the subjects. The use of the phrase *celâlî eşkiyası* (*celâlî* bandits), interestingly, signals that not every bandit was regarded in the same category.⁴⁴ This unusually detailed label shows the complex, multi-layered nature of the unrest during the early seventeenth century.

Even though examples I listed here are limited, they could be regarded as prototypes of a deeper information pool. The term *fesâd* did not simply denote disorder but also referred to factional rivalries within the state, particularly between competing power foci. This distinction is essential for comprehending the character of sixteenth century *fesâd* and its broader implications, notably the transformation of the provincial elite, which directly affected the households of imperial princes. It can be argued that *fesâd* first emerged within the palace between various power centres, as will be shown in the following pages. That is, before *fesâd* extended to provincial administrators, their households, and military forces when these groups came to threaten central authority, it was something between the power groups who resided in

⁴¹ Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (hereafter BOA), Mühimme Defteri (hereafter MD), no. 72, order no. 757.

⁴² BOA, 3 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (966-968 / 1558-1560), T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Yayınları, Ankara, 1993, 48. Order no. 485.

⁴³ BOA, MD, no. 3, order no. 286.

⁴⁴ BOA, MD, no. 78, order no. 27.

the imperial court. By the mid-sixteenth century, various *fesâd* groups had also appeared in Anatolia, operating independently of provincial elites. In the later decades, as the princes were confined to the palace, the term increasingly came to signify unrest linked to provincial elites appointed from the centre and their courts and followers.

2. Mapping the Evolution of the *Fesâd* as A Political Apparatus

To comprehend both the broader *fesâd* concept of the Ottoman imperial administration and the nature of the sixteen-century incidents, I believe few of the earliest examples, which illustrate early indications of the wider *fesâd* formation process, should be analysed first. For instance, the relatively stagnant reign of Bayezid II (1481-1512) has been characterised by some historians as a period of consolidation⁴⁵ or domestic consolidation,⁴⁶ since his reign was dominated by a political crisis for the throne with his brother Cem Sultan which lasted from 1481 to the death of Cem in 1495, and factionalism that originated in his princely years. For instance, amid the crisis following the death of Mehmed II in 1481, İshak Pasha, who would soon become the first grand vizier of Bayezid II, sent a letter to Sinan Pasha, the governor of Anatolia and Prince Bayezid's son-in-law. In the letter, İshak Pasha reported that the then Grand Vizier Karamanlı Mehmed Pasha and his followers, labelled as Cem supporters and *müfsid* (those committing *fesâd*), were beheaded: "...at present, the heads of Mehmed Pasha and numerous other *müfsid* have been severed, and the entire household is expecting the noble presence of Sultan Bayezid..." He further instructed that all provincial governors in Anatolia be mobilised to monitor Prince Bayezid in order to secure his accession to the throne.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ V. J. Parry, "The Ottoman Empire (1481–1520)," in *The New Cambridge Modern History*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 395–419.

⁴⁶ Max Kortepeter, "The Turkish Question in the Era of the Fifth Lateran Council (1512–1517)," in *The Ottoman Turks* (İstanbul: Isis Press), 105–123.

⁴⁷ TSMA.E. Document 0881, dated H. 886 (1481).

Moreover, the factions within the palace were very alarmed that Mehmed II's funeral was delayed for several days, and his body began to decay.⁴⁸ Interestingly, İshak Pasha wrote to Prince Bayezid that since the death of his father communication had collapsed, and none of the already dispatched messengers returned with news. Moreover, he expressed his profound astonishment concerning the situation within the power foci in Istanbul, which he identified as follows: "...since the passing of your father, may God sanctify his grave, from this mortal world to the eternal abode, we have sent twenty or thirty couriers to my sovereign [i.e. Bayezid II]. Yet to this day, not even one has returned, leaving us in great bewilderment regarding this matter. The entire realm has fallen into a state of *fetret* (interregnum) and *fesâd* (disorder)..." Given the unreliability of the current messengers, İshak Pasha further advised Bayezid not to trust them, and to issue a clear directive to his most trusted men to investigate and resolve the matter if any doubt or suspicion arises.⁴⁹

These series of incidents were few of the early written examples of labelling/marginalisation practices of the imperial administration. Also, it is understood from these two letters that the notion of *fesâd* and the designation of individuals as *müfsid* were associated not only with groups gathered around figures from the upper ranks of the ruling elite, as in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but also with factionalism and political adversaries. That is, even in the early years of the empire, such a terminology was applied during the periods of power vacuum and instability in order to eliminate people who were found politically problematic.

⁴⁸See İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, "Fatih Sultan Mehmed'in Ölümü: Cesedinin Kokması-Oğulları Arasında İlk Mücadele-Amasya Valisi Bayezid'in Saltanata Daveti-Babasının Ölümünü Haber Alan Karaman Valisi Cem'in Hareketi-Akşehir'e Gelen Cem Sultanın İlk Fermanı," *Belleten* 39, no. 155 (1975): 473, 481; İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, "Fatih Sultan Mehmed'in Ölümü," *Belleten* 34, no. 134 (1970): 231–234; Hilmi Kaçar, "Joos Van Ghistele Seyahatnamesinde (1491) Sultan II. Mehmed'in Ölümü ve Şehzadelerin Taht Kavgası," *Cihannüma: Tarih ve Coğrafya Araştırmaları Dergisi* 8, no. 2 (2022): 151–192.

⁴⁹ TSMA.E. Document 0443.

However, in the early years of the sixteenth century, the state's understanding of *fesâd* expanded. The rising influence of the Safavids who filled the political vacuum created by the waning Aq Qoyunlu deeply affected southeastern and eastern Anatolia, where a new wave of unrest emerged. Given the highly permeable nature of the region in every respect, the extension of the frontiers to more advanced lines come with particular issues. For instance, the collapse of local powers in the region constituted one of the principal factors triggering recurrent political crises in this sociologically complex geography. Since the pre-Ottoman period, the area had been notorious for the activities of various groups, Turks, Turkmens, Kurds, and Arabs, engaging in acts of *kutta-i târik* (highway robbery) and brigandage.⁵⁰ Therefore, the advance of the Safavids, as a religiously charged entity, became a matter of particular concern for the Imperial Council, since the involvement of the *kızılbaş* groups in the Safavid expansion constituted another key development in the process of the state's expanding view of the *fesâd*.

Although Çağatay Uluçay,⁵¹ Rıza Yıldırım,⁵² Ayşe Baltacıoğlu-Brammer,⁵³ Ayfer Karakaya,⁵⁴ Yasin Arslantaş,⁵⁵ and many others have already examined them in remarkable

⁵⁰ Oktay Özel, "The Reign of Violence: The Celâlis c. 1550–1700," in *The Ottoman World*, ed. Christine Woodhead (London: Taylor & Francis, 2012), 198.

⁵¹ Çağatay Uluçay, "Yavuz Sultan Selim Nasıl Padişah Oldu? (II)," *Tarih Dergisi / Turkish Journal of History* 7, no. 10 (1955).

⁵² Rıza Yıldırım, "*Turkomans between Two Empires: The Origins of the Qizilbash Identity in Anatolia (1447–1514)*" (PhD diss., İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of History, 2008).

⁵³ Ayşe Baltacıoğlu-Brammer, "Neither Victim nor Accomplice: The Kızılbaş as Borderland Actors in the Early Modern Ottoman Realm," in *Historicizing Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire, 1450–1750*, ed. Tijana Krstić and Derin Terzioğlu (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 423–451; Ayşe Baltacıoğlu-Brammer, "One Word, Many Implications: The Term 'Kızılbaş' in the Early Modern Ottoman Context," in *Ottoman Sunnism: New Perspectives*, ed. Vefa Erginbaş (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 47–70; Ayşe Baltacıoğlu-Brammer, "Formation of Kızılbaş Communities in Anatolia and Ottoman Responses, 1450s–1630s," *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 20, nos. 1–2 (2014): 21–48.

⁵⁴ Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, "Who Really Were the Kızılbaş? A Rethinking of the Kızılbaş Movement in Light of New Sources and Research," in *The World of the Safavids*, ed. Rudolph Matthee (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), 37–55; Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, "From Persecution to Confessionalisation: Consolidation of the Kızılbaş/Alevi Identity in Ottoman Anatolia," in *The Kızılbaş/Alevi in Ottoman Anatolia: Sufism, Politics and Community* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 256–320; Ayfer Karakaya-Stump and Cengiz Şişman, "Confessionalization and Religious Nonconformity in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire: The Cases of Kızılbaş/Alevi and the Sabbatean Communities," in *Crafting History: Essays on the Ottoman World and Beyond in Honor of Cemal Kafadar*, ed. Hakan T. Karateke and Dana Sajdi (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2023), 588–608.

⁵⁵ Yasin Arslantaş, "*Depicting the Other: Qizilbash Image in the 16th Century Ottoman Historiography*" (unpublished MA thesis, İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, Department of History, 2013).

details, I found it necessary to situate the *kızılbaş* within my broader *fesâd* context, by focusing on their appearance in the documents and how the state perceived the *fesâd* components in this context, as a preliminary step before moving on to the exact terminal scope of my study, between 1550 and 1600. To do so, I aim to utilise the classified correspondence, which was less utilised in the mentioned studies except that of Uluçay, and various chronicles.

For instance, in a document dated H. 916 (1510–1511), Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha, as the governor of Diyarbakır, reports that the *kızılbaş* were procuring weapons and preparing for a disturbance. He labelled them as “*kızılbaş deyu melfuf*,” a term that suggests a religious denunciation but also marks them as subversive figures associated with banditry and disorder.⁵⁶ Around the same time, in a document dated H. 918 (1512–1513), Prince Süleyman explicitly records that the *kızılbaş* forces received support from both local soldiers and peasants: “...The Khalifa [Nur-Ali] also came to the districts, seized and executed their *subaşı*, and the soldiers and subjects of the aforementioned province submitted to him. Thereupon, those regions were constantly surrounded by the *kızılbaş*, who, with complete unity, laid siege to the fortresses of Torul and Canik...” This is a rare and valuable reference, which provides direct evidence of how imperial authority was challenged not only by organised rebel factions but also through the complicity of local populations.⁵⁷

Moreover, this note aligns with an account in the *Ahsanu't-Tawârîkh*, narrating the Shah’s dispatch of Nur Ali Khalifa to Anatolia in response to regional uprisings. The account also says that several thousand mounted followers along with their families joined him upon his arrival in Karahisar: “...This year, upon receiving news of the rebellions in Turkey, the Shah dispatched Nur Ali Khalifa to the region in order to rally the devout Sufis there. When the Khalifa arrived in Karahisar, some three to four thousand mounted disciples, together with their

⁵⁶ TSMA.E, Document 0699.

⁵⁷ TSMA.E, Document 0759.

families, joined him...” This account shows that how *kızılbaş halifes* entered strategic districts such as Tercan and Kelkit and secured the support of both provincial soldiers and peasants.⁵⁸

Moreover, in the *Ahsanu't-Tawârîkh*, author Hasan Beg Rumlu states that these incidents were also associated with factionalism within the state. For instance, Prince Murad, a grandson of Bayezid II, not only fled from his brother Selim but also allied himself with Nur Ali Khalifa, then attempted to seize the city of Tokat. However, after local resistance and failing, he ultimately defected to the Safavid court.⁵⁹ Besides, in the *Selim-şahname*, İdris-i Bitlisi also narrates that Murad sought refuge at the Iranian court.⁶⁰ Interestingly, in a document from the previous year, it is recorded that Şehzade Murad gathered *kızılbaş* groups around him in the region and oppressed the local population, a detail that corroborates the account provided by the aforementioned source concerning Murad’s activities.

Moreover, the *kızılbaş* communities were perceived not only as a destabilising force by the Ottoman administration but also, more broadly, as a source of unrest for various political entities across the region. For instance, in a letter sent by Elvend Mirza of the Aq Qoyunlu to Şehzade Ahmed, the eldest son of Bayezid II, it is reported that a significant number of *kızılbaş* were killed in a conflict in May 1507 between Hüseyin, the ruler of Firuzkuh, and various *kızılbaş* factions: “...a man arrived from Hüseyin, who is the ruler of Firuzkuh, and reported that a considerable battle and conflict had taken place between Hüseyin and the *kızılbaş*, during which a great multitude of the *kızılbaş* faction were killed...” This illustrates how the *kızılbaş*, “the disruptive and subversive elements,” transcended Ottoman concerns, and became a shared anxiety among regional powers who sought to assert control over this socially and religiously

⁵⁸ See Hasan-ı Rumlu, *Ahsanu't-Tawarikh*, vol. II, trans. C. N. Seddon, M.A., I.C.S. (Oriental Institute, 1936), 62–63.

⁵⁹ Hasan-ı Rumlu, *ibid.*, 63. The author notes in footnote 14 that during the transcription of the work, the phrase “*bin Ahmed*”, indicating that Prince Murad was in fact the son of Prince Ahmed, was forgotten. See Hasan-ı Rumlu, *ibid.*, 244.

⁶⁰ Hicabi Kırılancı, *İdris-i Bidlisi Selim Şah-name* (PhD diss., Ankara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 1995), 125.

marginalised population. Also, the phrase *cem 'i kesîr* (a great multitude) within the document is important, as it signals the existence of a large insubordinate group in frontier regions.⁶¹

At this point, I argue that the eastern military campaigns discussed here not only exemplify the eastern foreign policy focused on centralisation and territorial integration but also experiences that shaped the way that Selim I perceived the threat. Thus, Selim I incorporated Eastern Anatolia into the Ottoman realm by sending important figures such as İdris-i Bitlisi⁶² and Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha, along with the promulgation of codes, and various other administrative practices, which marks a significant expansion and consolidation. Even though the *kızılbaş* groups were primarily associated with the eastern provinces, the “threat” was not only present in Eastern Anatolia. For instance, in a document dated H. 918 (1512–1513) concerning a *mukâtaa* (tax farm), it is revealed that *kızılbaş* groups caused the failure to collect outstanding debts after the death of the tax farm holders. Notably, in cities such as Bursa and Balıkesir, areas relatively less affected by the *kızılbaş* groups, these disturbances were significant enough to threaten the emergence of a *fetret* (interregnum) in the region, as highlighted in the document.⁶³

Moreover, the fact that the rebellious Şahkulu and various nomadic Turkmen groups he was connected to settled along the Mediterranean coastal line, particularly in the Teke region is also significant to comprehend how the imperial administration understood the *fesâd* understanding of the imperial administration. For instance, in a document dated H. 12/915 (1510), the reference to Şahkulu’s father, *Hasan Halife*, as one of the Ardabil khalifahs places Şahkulu and his family firmly within the influential Safavid religious network, which by this

⁶¹ TSMA.E., Document 6392/1, dated H. 12/912 (May 1507).

⁶² The seven letters İdris-i Bitlisi sent to Bayezid II and Selim I not only shed light on the development of his character and his position within the state, but also, particularly through the five letters addressed to Selim I, offer crucial insights into the administrative structuring of Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia and the establishment of Ottoman authority, both directly and indirectly, in these regions. See Vural Genç, “İdris-i Bidlisi’nin II. Bayezid ve I. Selim’e Mektupları,” *Osmanlı Araştırmaları/Journal of Ottoman Studies* 40 (2016): 147–209.

⁶³ TSMA.E., Document 0968, dated H. 918 (1512–1513).

period had extended its reach from eastern Anatolia into central Anatolia, particularly among the groups inclined towards Safavid religious authority and political dissent.⁶⁴ Within the Safavid order, *khalifahs* were not merely religious envoys; they also acted as social brokers and political agents, maintaining local networks of allegiance, providing spiritual instruction, and serving as intermediaries between the Safavid centre and provincial adherents.⁶⁵ However, the document is also noteworthy for understanding the perception of the Şahkulu among the population, as it highlights that he declared himself a kind of a Mahdi. As Hasan Khalifa's son, Şahkulu would have inherited not only the religious legitimacy attached to his father but also a web of local supporters and sympathisers.⁶⁶

Şahkulu's rebellion and its effect among population must be analysed with the sociological realities of the region. That is, the Teke region, where Safavid sympathies and anti-Ottoman sentiment frequently converged, was, after all, one of the principal *kızılbaş* strongholds in Anatolia. When considered alongside other centres of *kızılbaş* influence, it becomes evident that these areas collectively spanned an extensive territory, stretching as far east as Damascus and as far north as Tokat.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the gradual Ottoman incorporation of Eastern Anatolia followed the dispersal of Şahkulu and his forces. Interestingly, although several early documents indicate a significant *kızılbaş* presence in certain Mediterranean coastal towns, no major incidents were recorded in these areas after the Şahkulu uprising.

All these definitions concerning the common *ehl-i fesâd* behaviour functioned as a significant and flexible label employed by the central administration. Despite its frequent usage,

⁶⁴ "...among the Khalifahs of Ardabil, a certain Hasan Khalifa had a son named Şahkulu, came to prominence..." TSMA.E., Document 6321/1.

⁶⁵ Kathryn Babayan, "The Safavid Synthesis: From Qizilbash Islam to Imamite Shi'ism," *Iranian Studies* 27, no. 1-4 (1994): 135-61.

⁶⁶ "...among the mentioned prisoners, a certain named Salih Fakih publicly preached on behalf of the Şahkulu, proclaiming, God forbid, "this is God, and this is the Prophet, and those who are not stand before him, whoever does not obey him is as one without faith" this accusation was made before the sharia court..." TSMA.E., Document 6321/1.

⁶⁷ Awesta Fuad Hassan Harky, *Fars Kaynaklarına Göre Şah Tahmasb Döneminde (1524-1576) Safevi Ülkesinde Yaşanan İç Sorunların Osmanlı-Safevi İlişkilerine Etkileri* (unpublished master's thesis, Ankara Üniversitesi, 2021), 32.

the precise characteristics or behaviours that caused someone to be categorised as *ehl-i fesâd* remain unclear, as no document provides a definitive list or explicit criteria. Although the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century *mühimme* registers contain abundant references to *ehl-i fesâd*, they do not clarify the boundaries of the term. This deliberate vagueness appears to have been a strategic choice by the Ottoman state, allowing it to maintain flexibility and discretion in applying the label depending on the political or social context.

Moreover, identifying the individuals and groups that the chroniclers refer to as such is equally difficult. Although it is possible to sketch a general portrait of *ehl-i fesâd* by evaluating the descriptions provided by chroniclers, their accounts often derive from earlier authors, which makes it essential to trace the origins of the term through the earliest available state records. Understanding why particular individuals and groups were included in official documentation as *ehl-i fesâd* provides a key to studying the evolution of this concept. It is important to remember that both archival documents and chronicles are official in nature, and uncritical use of them risks reproducing official historiography. Therefore, historians should carefully formulate questions posed to these sources, aiming to minimise anachronism. Archival materials remain vital for studying this sociological category and understanding how the central authority identified and responded to perceived disorder.

At this point, before concluding, I would like to share two important documents regarding the formation of the *celâli* groups, the *celâli* identity, and their comprehension by the imperial centre. The first document is significant for its early use of the term *celâlî* to describe rebellious bands and social disorder, notably predating the well-known Celâlî Rebellions led by Celâl of Bozok. From İdris-i Bitlisi's (d. 1520)⁶⁸ *Selim Şah-nâme*, which served as the principal

⁶⁸ Abdülkadir Özcan, "İdris-i Bitlisi," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 21 (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2000), 485–488.

source for both contemporary and later accounts, it is known that this rebellion took place around January 1519.⁶⁹

However, though the first document opens with the phrase “in this year,” it bears no explicit date; however, its classification date is H. 905 (1499–1500). So, if the date is correct, the mention of *celâli-i bedkâr* (the wicked *celâli*) along with the *zümre-i eşkıyâ ve eşirrâ* (the bandits and miscreants) indicates that, by the late fifteenth century, the term was already applied to groups engaged in violent rebellion, pillaging, and defiance of state authority. This usage reflects a wider pattern of rural unrest and social instability in Anatolia during this period. Moreover, it is particularly noteworthy that the refusal of the local subjects in *Vilâyet-i Rûm* to travel to Zile to pay their dues, and their demand that tax collectors come to them instead, reveals not only the practical difficulties caused by ongoing unrest but also an indicator for significant upheavals already affecting the region. Moreover, the designation of the disorder and its preparators as *celâli* by the imperial centre at such an early stage indicates that the term was already used to describe insurgent groups well before the 1519.⁷⁰

The second document is a petition signed by Şadi Pasha as the governor of Sivas, with a classification date of H. 918 (1512–1513), again before the 1519 rebellion, which emphasizes the *celâli* issue concerning the regional unrest in a single sentence: “...a decree was issued from Istanbul regarding the *celâli* faction, and in accordance with the imperial order, that faction...”⁷¹ It is important to note that according to the *Amasya Tarihi*, Şadi Pasha was appointed as the governor of Amasya in the month of Dhu al-Hijjah 918 (February 1513).⁷² Later studies based on this study indicate that he was later appointed as the governor of Sivas in 1518.⁷³ However,

⁶⁹ Hicabi Kırılancı, “*İdris-i Bitlisî, Selim Şah-nâme*” (PhD diss., Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Eastern Languages and Literatures, Division of Persian Language and Literature, 1995), 368.

⁷⁰ TSMA.E. Document 0696.

⁷¹ TSMA.E. Document 0756.

⁷² Hüseyin Hüsameddin, *Amasya Tarihi*, vol. 3 (Amasya: Amasya Belediyesi, 1927), 158.

⁷³ Adnan Gürbüz, “XV-XVI. Yüzyıllarda Sivas Şehrinde İdari ve Ekonomik Yapı,” *Vakıflar Dergisi* 26 (1997): 87–96.

İdris-i Bitlisî notes that Şadi Pasha, one of the two principal commanders of Selim I's army, was already serving as the governor of both Sivas and Amasya for a period following the month of Şaban in the year H. 920, corresponding to during or after September 1514.⁷⁴

Yet, another study on his father, İshak Pasha, states that archival documents consistently refer to Şadi Pasha as the governor of Sivas from the very beginning. In the study, it is suggested that this situation stemmed from the frequent reassignment of local officials due to the extraordinary complex situation in the region.⁷⁵ Despite the conflicting accounts about whether Şadi Pasha was the governor of Amasya or Sivas when this document was written, what truly matters is that the Şadi Pasha himself refers to bandit groups as *celâli* before the famous Celâli rebellion of 1519. This makes the document especially significant, as it shows that the term *celâli* was already being used to describe rebellious groups prior to the event traditionally believed to have given its name to the wider *celâli* movement.

However, it must be acknowledged that, in the case of the second document, the likelihood of a classification error is considerably lower, as several other documents with almost identical content from the same period exist in the archive. By contrast, an archival survey of the second document reveals no other records with comparable content for the same period. Given both the language and tone of the text, and the fact that it remains the sole document dated to that year concerning such a significant incident, its dating remains open to question and requires further corroboration.

It has thus become evident that the notion of *fesâd* expanded considerably over the course of the sixteenth century to encompass various groups across Anatolia whose actions were regarded by the imperial administration as threats to its very existence, as well as to public

⁷⁴ Hicabi Kırlangıç, *ibid.*, 266.

⁷⁵ Cengiz Güler, *Bencillik ve Zulüm Törelerini Sona Erdiren: Vezîrül Kebir İshak Pasha* (İstanbul: Erdem Yayınevi, 2023).

order and law. The use of this label was not merely an apparatus for eliminating competing power centres within the palace, but a designation widely applied across the provinces.

However, beyond the specific incidents that took place across the region, as noted above, *fesâd* formation process reached such a dangerous point for the imperial administration by the mid-sixteenth century that a prince, Bayezid, one of the last surviving sons of Süleyman I, succeeded in gathering a considerable number of people from Anatolia in pursuit of his own future. This particular episode marked a critical turning point, fundamentally transforming the broader process through which *fesâd* and its associated elements expanded. It also reshaped the typology of the rural elite, whose involvement both sustained this process and was itself shaped by the socioeconomic and political conditions of the sixteenth century.

Chapter 2

The Mobilised Disorder:

The Prince Bayezid Affair (1559-1562)

In the age of Süleyman I (1520-1566), Anatolia witnessed a couple of tragic incidents, which could be regarded as the evolved form of the earlier factionalism: the consecutive executions of princes Mustafa (d. 1553) and Bayezid (d. 1562). Also, the sixteenth century dynamics such as population growth, large-scaled rebellions, and the firearm diffusion among the ordinary subjects makes these incidents more crucial than those of Bayezid II's or Selim I's eras. These executions of two Ottoman princes, particularly the latter, were quite important not only for their effects upon politics, but also for the society within the broader framework of *ehl-i fesâd*.

The most comprehensive study of the Bayezid Affair was conducted by Şerafettin Turan, who argued that both princes Mustafa and Bayezid incidents were interconnected

reflections of a deeper unrest period in sixteenth century Anatolia, which was shaped by the tense socioeconomic and political climate. He situated these rebellions within a broader context of provincial displeasure, especially in eastern and northeastern Anatolia.⁷⁶ Moreover, Refik Altınay, who studied prince Bayezid's exile years, highlights how a domestic rebellion evolved into a foreign policy crisis. He notes that Bayezid's alignment with the *kızılbaş* groups caused a security concern.⁷⁷ From today's perspective, it is obvious that the decision of people gathered around Bayezid, a "fugitive" prince, who demanded Safavid protection, was not merely a pragmatic calculation. However, it should be reconsidered within the sixteenth century dynamics to comprehend the main impulse to take such a dangerous decision.

The subsequent scholarship, however, has largely framed the Bayezid issue through personal correspondence,⁷⁸ poems,⁷⁹ and other documents⁸⁰ exchanged between Bayezid and Süleyman, by interpreting the conflict primarily as a dynastic, father-son confrontation. While this remains a valuable dimension, it has obscured a crucial issue: the socio-military composition of his army, which holds important insights about wider transformations within Ottoman military and social structures during the mid sixteenth century. I situate the rebellion not merely as a dynastic conflict between two princes, but as a complex manifestation of evolving *fesâd*, by analysing the composition of the Bayezid's army. Even though it is hard to detect the exact motives behind the abandonment of *timâr*-holdings in Anatolia, I analyse Bayezid's ability to mobilise a sizeable and diverse army and composition of this force in order to fill the gap in the existing literature. However, my aim is not to recount the whole story of

⁷⁶ Şerafettin Turan, *Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Dönemi Taht Kavgaları* (İstanbul: Kapı Yayınları, 2011); Şerafettin Turan, "Şehzade Bayezid'in Babası Kanuni Sultan Süleyman'a Gönderdiği Mektuplar," *Tarih Vesikaları Dergisi* 1, no. 16 (1955): 118–27.

⁷⁷ Ahmet Refik Altınay, "Konya Muharebesinden Sonra Şehzade Sultan Bayezid'in İran'a Firarı," *Tarih-i Osmani Encümeni Mecmuası* 6, no. 36 (1916): 705–27.

⁷⁸ İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, "Babasından Sonra Saltanatı Elde Etmek İçin Kardeşi Selim'le Çatışan Şehzade Bayezid'in Amasya'dan Babası Kanuni Sultan Süleyman'a Göndermiş Olduğu Arıza," *Belleten* 25, no. 96 (1960): 597–600.

⁷⁹ Mustafa Çiçekler, "Şehzade Bayezid ve Farsça Divançesi," *Şarkiyat Mecmuası* 7 (1998): 211–28.

⁸⁰ Şefaattin Deniz, "İsyân, İltica ve Ölüm: Safevî Kaynaklarında Şehzade Bayezid Meselesi," *Osmanlı Medeniyeti Araştırmaları Dergisi* 20 (2024): 123–38.

this civil war, but rather to focus on the composition of his army and its connection with the broader *fesâd* elements of Anatolia in order to address the existing gap in the literature.⁸¹

Early documents clearly show that the palace pursued the very same strategy it had employed in earlier incidents to neutralise perceived threats: marginalising and stigmatising the threat by removing it from the sphere of law and order, and branding those involved as perpetrators of *fesâd*. For instance, in a document dated H. 12/965 (1558), the Grand Vizier Rüstem Pasha associated Bayezid's actions with his *musâhibs* (intimate companions), who were apparently part of the *kapıhalkı* (household), as in the case of Karamanlı Mehmed Pasha, the grand vizier of Bayezid II.⁸² Lütüfi Pasha further indicates that unless these individuals were replaced, the *fesâd* would not end: There is no doubt that there remains no alternative but to act. It is now certain that, unless action is taken, they will inevitably cause *fesâd* (disorder)...⁸³ The choice of the term *fesâd* in reference to incidents concerning Prince Bayezid is noteworthy, since it reflects particular approach of one of the most important power foci, Rüstem Pasha and his influence capacity in Istanbul to the matter.

Correspondingly, *Nâdirü'l-Mehârib*, the earliest known account of the Prince Bayezid affair and a key source for subsequent chronicles composed between 1567 and 1569,⁸⁴ contains numerous details regarding the process of his delegitimisation. In order to explain the initial phase of the rebellion, Bayezid's conduct, and the path that ultimately led him into open revolt, its author, Gelibolulu Mustafa Âli (d. 1600), observes: "The gatherings held with depraved and ill-natured men, and the councils of those of base character, whose judgement was poor and whose capabilities were meagre, provoked the wrath of the luminous-faced sovereign. The very

⁸¹ Although various numbers have been suggested in the literature, no definitive record establishing an exact number has yet been published.

⁸² "...All of this has been brought about by his *musahibs* (intimate companions). Now, that the *sekanbaşı* (head of the corps) servant of yours, it is through his governance that all affairs have been conducted, and all matters proceeded upon his direction..." BOA, TSMA.E. Document 721/18

⁸³ BOA, TSMA.E. Document 721/18.

⁸⁴ Bekir Kütükoğlu, "Âli Mustafa Efendi," Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi, vol. 2 (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1989), 414–416.

presence of such inept and despicable figures in the company of the prince transformed the scene into one of pure wickedness and turmoil. In consequence, the blaze of the Sultan's fury was kindled, consuming the joy and serenity of the state in the fire of righteous anger.”⁸⁵

In the later sections, Mustafa Âli attributes Bayezid's behaviours to the influence of those he welcomed into his court: “In this fashion, Bayezid, marked by folly and poor judgement, extended honour and favour to *Kuduz* (rabid) *Ferhad*, a servant in the divan (court), and to a nomad known by the name of *Aksak* (lame) *Seyfeddin*. By exalting and favouring these irreligious and unworthy men, he imagined that the bud of his desires within the garden of his ambitions could be forced open by the stroke of his hand.”⁸⁶ Similarly, the Austrian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq (d. 1592), in his *Turcicae Epistolae*, notes that Bayezid had begun to form a faction within his court, in Amasya, against his own brother Prince Selim.⁸⁷

However, it is also necessary to examine Prince Bayezid's actions in order to uncover the various strata within his army and to better understand their possible connection to *fesâd*-related issues. Contemporary records frequently state that Bayezid recruited followers by making various promises, which appealed not only to bandits and idle vagabonds in Anatolia, but also to *timâr*-holders. This suggests that, although the precise content of these promises remains uncertain, they must have held considerable appeal for certain segments of society. Several documents indicate that these promises largely concerned the allocation of *timâr* lands, offering a powerful incentive for both disaffected soldiers and provincial notables to align themselves with Bayezid's cause.

⁸⁵ Gülhizar Kara, “*Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî'nin Nâdirü'l-Mehârib Adlı Eserinin Edisyon Kritiği ve Muhtevasının Değerlendirilmesi*” (unpublished MA thesis, Dokuz Eylül University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Islamic History and Arts, Programme of Islamic History, 2009), 96.

⁸⁶ Gülhizar Kara, *ibid.*, 97.

⁸⁷ Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq, *Travels into Turkey: Containing the Most Accurate Account of the Turks, and Neighbouring Nations, Their Manners, Customs, Religion, Superstition, Policy, Riches, Coins, &c. The Whole Being a Series of Remarkable Observations and Events, Interspers'd with Great Variety of Entertaining Incidents, Never Before Printed* (London: Printed for J. Robinson, 1744), 98.

Before proceeding with the *timâr*-holdings, it is necessary to consider the events that had unfolded in Amasya prior to Bayezid's rebellion, and how the history of that governorship was closely connected to Bayezid's case, both in terms of his followers and his mobilisation strategy, a connection which Busbecq recounts in considerable detail. At the time, Bayezid was serving as governor of Amasya, a post previously held by his half-brother Prince Mustafa. Mustafa, however, had been executed on the orders of Süleyman I in 1553, five years before Bayezid's revolt, having been accused of conspiring with the Safavids.⁸⁸

Busbecq deliberately draws attention to this connection, stating that Bayezid sought to exploit the widespread discontent and lingering factional loyalties that had persisted following Mustafa's death. He notes that his former supporters were still seeking revenge. Indifferent to the consequences of their actions, these men eagerly awaited a new figure around whom they could rally.⁸⁹ Moreover, Hans Dernschwam, a member of Busbecq's diplomatic delegation, also records in his travelogue that Mustafa was the favourite of the Ottoman army, and that his execution provoked widespread anxieties across the empire over the prospect of a potential uprising.⁹⁰ However, according to Busbecq, Bayezid, through his agents, located an ordinary man in Thrace, a region Bayezid considered the most opportune place to incite rebellion, as it was both well supplied with horses and home to segments of the Turkish militia who had strongly favoured Mustafa.⁹¹ Bayezid's intention was to have this man impersonate the murdered prince, thereby stirring unrest and reviving the memory of his executed brother to consolidate support for his own cause.

⁸⁸ Zahit Atçıl, "Why Did Süleyman the Magnificent Execute His Son Şehzade Mustafa in 1553?" *Turkish Historical Review* 48 (2016): 67–103. Also see, Şerafettin Turan, "Mustafa Çelebi," in *Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 31 (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2020), 290–292.

⁸⁹ Busbecq, *ibid.*, 98.

⁹⁰ Hans Dernschwam, *İstanbul ve Anadolu'ya Seyahat Günlüğü*, çev. Yaşar Önen (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1992), 86.

⁹¹ Busbecq, *ibid.*, 99.

As for the *timâr*-holdings, a document dated H. 966 (1558) explicitly shows that some *timâr*-holders were sentenced to punishment for supporting Bayezid, though they were pardoned. It is reported that the Sultan ordered local judges of key provincial centres to pardon people who previously joined Bayezid. The phrase “on several occasions the sacred decrees be dispatched” implies that the rebellion was not a minor or isolated incident but required multiple, repeated official responses.⁹² This strongly suggests that Prince Bayezid was successful in rallying a significant number of supporters and that the unrest was persistent enough to demand ongoing imperial attention.

One of the reasons behind these pardons was probably a desire to avoid provoking new sources of unrest, where economic conditions had already begun to deteriorate. Beyond that, there were also people who lost their *timâr*-holding rights, simply because they had sided with Bayezid, even though they had those rights by virtue of family. For instance, Hüseyin, a *timâr*-holder in Aksaray, failed to join the battle between imperial princes Bayezid and Selim in Konya. Due to this absence, his *timâr* was reassigned to Mehmed, a *sipâhi* loyal to the Sultan. Hüseyin’s son claimed he was on a mission to bring Prince Bayezid. Meanwhile, Mehmed, the loyal *sipâhi* was actively fighting against Bayezid at Konya. Despite Hüseyin’s denial of opposing Bayezid, evidence from Mehmed’s record was accepted. However, Hüseyin’s failure to respond to the summons twice weakened his case. Eventually, a reconciliation was reached, and Hüseyin voluntarily relinquished his *timâr*. As a result, Hüseyin and his descendants were prohibited from receiving any future land grants.⁹³

In addition to these *timâr*-holders, it is recorded that members of the former households of dismissed, executed, or deceased high-ranking imperial palace officials were also joining with Bayezid. For instance, an order reports that Mahmud, formerly the chief gatekeeper of the deceased Süleyman Pasha, was closely associated with Prince Bayezid. Mahmud is portrayed

⁹² BOA, MD, no. 3, order no. 87.

⁹³ BOA, MD, no. 3, order no. 1207.

as both disruptive and wounded, which suggests his direct involvement in *fesâd* incidents. After staying in Amasya, he gathered a group of men and took part in disturbances around Niksar. This points to the wider spread of rebellious activity linked to Bayezid's faction. In response, the imperial authorities ordered Ayas Beg, the governor of Çorum, to track down, investigate, and capture Mahmud with the utmost care and by any means necessary. Also, it is illustrative of the active measures taken by the Ottoman administration to suppress local insurrections linked to Prince Bayezid by targeting key rebel figures and their networks.⁹⁴

Moreover, there are also documents indicating that the former provincial notables were also allied with Bayezid. For instance, a document reports that the former administrator of the Ürgan region, who is now reported to be with Prince Bayezid, engaged in rebellion. He actively incited his tribe to abandon their loyalty to the central authority, and some members continued to resist. The order instructs İsa Beg, the current governor, to take immediate and decisive action upon his arrival. He is to enforce strict order and discipline within the tribe, reflecting the gravity and urgency of the situation. İsa Beg is commanded to suppress rebels and wrongdoers by legal means. If possible, he is to act as their authority (*bey*) and to deal harshly with those who have joined Bayezid, without leniency.⁹⁵

Despite these, the existing literature offers no definitive figure regarding the number of those who joined Prince Bayezid's cause based on sources other than chronicles. Most studies, however, cite Peçevi, who reports that "at present, it is declared that their total number has exceeded fifteen thousand, and may even have reached twenty thousand."⁹⁶ Yet, his account in this matter relies heavily on the *Nâdirü'l-Mehârib*, which records that "more than fifteen thousand cavalry and infantry, consisting of lowly Turkmen and rabble, departed from Amasya in the last days of the month of Rajab in the aforementioned year, proceeding stage by stage

⁹⁴ BOA, MD, no. 3, order no. 230.

⁹⁵ BOA, MD, no. 3, order no. 75.

⁹⁶ İbrahim Peçevi, *Tarih-i Peçevi*, vol. 1 (İstanbul: Matba-i Amire, 1866), 390.

towards the city of Konya, the capital of the province of Rum.”⁹⁷ Moreover, Busbecq also records that Süleyman I was well aware of Bayezid’s intentions, noting that the prince planned to march on Istanbul or elsewhere with “a considerable force” as soon as the insurgents had gathered in sufficient numbers.⁹⁸

In addition to these chronicles, a correspondence document dated H. 966 (1558–1559) explicitly reflects the anxieties circulating in Istanbul regarding the size of Bayezid’s army and following. An informant within Bayezid’s camp reported that although many men had already been enlisted, some were yet to arrive. In the estimation of this informant, their number stood at approximately fifteen thousand, a force comparable in size to that of the governor of Anadolu. Significantly, the mention of men “having been enrolled, though some have yet to arrive” indicates an ongoing process of recruitment. This is also reflected in the account of Mustafa Âli, who describes the situation in vivid terms: “For this situation rendered idle the rabble who had provoked this banditry without considering its consequences. Subsequently, as though their names had been inscribed in a register of malice (*tumâr-ı şemâtet*), they began to hurl arrows of mockery and, like madmen, to recklessly loose the bowstrings of righteousness in every direction...”⁹⁹

However, the number cited in the correspondence surpasses what could be expected from a typical princely entourage or private retinue, suggesting a broader mobilisation involving individuals who had been rendered idle or displaced by socioeconomic instability and other factors. Given the composition of a proper Ottoman army, it is also likely that this number encompassed not only soldiers, but also a range of auxiliary personnel responsible for meeting the logistical and practical needs of the army in the field.¹⁰⁰ For instance, another document

⁹⁷ Gülhizar Kara, “*Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî’nin Nâdirü’l-Mehârib Adlı Eserinin Edisyon Kritiği ve Muhtevasının Değerlendirilmesi*”, 101.

⁹⁸ Busbecq, *Travels into Turkey*, 103.

⁹⁹ Gülhizar Kara, *ibid.*, 97.

¹⁰⁰ “...However, there was someone familiar within his army who sent word to your servant saying that loyalty runs deeply among them. It was reported that having been enrolled, though some have yet to arrive. According to

shows that according to an informant coming from Amasya, Prince Bayezid constructed a house adjacent to the court kitchen for the purpose of cannon manufacturing. This seemingly minor detail is, in fact, significant. To produce such a war machine, Bayezid would have required not only manpower coming from Anatolian groups mobilised for rebellious causes, but also specialised artisans capable of producing artillery.

The skilled craftsmen such as founders, metalworkers, and carpenters would have been indispensable for such a move.¹⁰¹ His recruitment strength thus reflects his capacity to mobilise not only disaffected peasants and various *fesâd* groups, but also artisans who had significant importance. When we consider the general socio-political conditions of Anatolia, it is quite interesting for a prince to mobilise such a crowd. This situation undoubtedly should be considered within the broader conditions of sixteenth century, as I will demonstrate in the last chapter.

However, back to the composition of his army, another document reports that the *sefer-i hümayûn* (imperial campaign) rumours had already spread widely and an urgent call had been made to gather loyal troops and maintain the vigilance. This explicitly indicates that the imperial administration was hesitant about the same idle, disaffected elements who had already been drawn into Bayezid's army and who might incite further unrest if not swiftly confronted. Interestingly, the emphasis on the governors of Erzurum, Diyarbakir, Aleppo, and Damascus might be interpreted as Istanbul's awareness of the permeability of these zones, both militarily and ideologically, since that was the containment line along the volatile and contested frontiers, particularly with the Safavids.¹⁰²

your servant's assessment, their force numbered about fifteen thousand, roughly equal to the army of the governor of Anatolia..." TSMA.E. Document 0511.

¹⁰¹ BOA, TSMA.E. Document 0885.

¹⁰² "...to the mentioned servants, instructing them, according to ancient custom, to be prepared by Nowruz. It should be admonished that no one be negligent, and the rumours of the *sefer-i hümayûn* (imperial campaign) has been widely disseminated throughout the surrounding regions. Everyone is to remain alert regarding the campaign. Whatever the matter concerning the campaign, an imperial order shall be issued to ensure preparations are made accordingly..." TSMA.E. Document 0878.

Correspondingly, three documents dated H. 966-968 (1558/1560) explicitly show that Bayezid's army was composed of Anatolian *fesâd* groups. The first document narrates that the people, who were labelled as *haramzâde* in the Ankara and Çubuk regions, are reported to have caused disorder while moving to join Bayezid's army.¹⁰³ The second document mentions that someone named Tankır, previously known to have joined Bayezid's forces, is described as a *müfsid* who was wandering around Canik Mountains with a group of *ehl-i fesâd*.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, in the third document, it is reported that after Bayezid gathered people around him and defeated his brother Selim, he was again gathering troops near Amasya, accompanied by other orders to monitor all ports with ships and galleys and to capture the prince immediately before he fled to Crimea.¹⁰⁵

The chronicles also give some details about the composition Bayezid's army. For instance, Peçevi reports that: "...After gathering all the causes and means of this rebellion and sedition, Sultan Bayezid assembled a considerable number of obstinate outlaws in the name of *yevmlü* (mercenaries). He enlisted them as *kapıkulu* (imperial troops), *sekbân*, and *tüfenkçıyan* (musketeers), comprising highway robbers from Anatolia, Karaman, and among the Kurds and Arabs..."¹⁰⁶

Although it is known that his army was largely composed of non-*kapıkulu* members, Istanbul did not entirely overlook this issue and did not exclude the possibility of *kapıkulu* involvement. For instance, in a document dated H. 966 (1558–1559), upon Süleyman I's question regarding Janissary participation in Bayezid's army, the grand vizier Lütü Pasha acknowledges that even though they were mostly loyal to the sultan, there are few individuals who engaged in secretive communications among them, something regarded as a conspiratorial behaviour: "... And it was declared, 'how could the Janissaries commit treason?' God forbid.

¹⁰³ BOA, MD.3, Hüküm 36.

¹⁰⁴ BOA, MD.3, Hüküm 283.

¹⁰⁵ BOA, MD.3, Hüküm 43.

¹⁰⁶ İbrahim Peçevi, *Târih-i Peçevi*, vol. 1 (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Âmire, 1866), 390.

Those who speak against the most glorious sultan are numerous, yet among them are some vile and shameless individuals who conspire among themselves. It was reported to the superiors that they are not in agreement. However, their conversations and conspiracies were presented to the superiors to be examined and suppressed beforehand, to prevent their alliance from strengthening...”¹⁰⁷ When connected to the earlier referenced document, which recounts an army around fifteen thousand strong composed largely of non-*kapıkulu* elements yet with potential *kapıkulu* involvement, this narrative explicitly corroborates both the scale and the composition of Bayezid’s army.

Moreover, *Selânikî* narrates that: “...my brother Bayezid [Selim II speaks] has rebelled and marched against me. We informed the late, merciful, and pardoning sovereign of this situation, presenting our report. By His Imperial Majesty’s command, it was said: ‘the army he has raised against you consists of rebellious, disloyal subjects who disrupt the countryside.’ You yourself, mounted on a horse and leading a capable and loyal force of yeomanry, should march out of the country to confront him. Those like him will not stand against the sword; they will flee. It is better to break them...”¹⁰⁸

Moreover, in the *Siyer-i Enbiyâ-i İzâm ve Ahvâl-i Hulefâ-i Kirâm ve Menâkıb-ı Âl-i Osmân*, composed around 1557–1558,¹⁰⁹ Ramazanzâde Mehmed Çelebi (d. 1571)¹¹⁰ explicitly reports that: “Prince Sultan Bayezid, driven by pride and incited by his youthful companions, strayed from the path of guidance and entered the road of perdition. Violating the bonds of brotherhood, he gathered an army composed of *leşker-i şekâvet-eser* (brigand soldiers), and marched against his mild-tempered brother, Sultan Selim. When they engaged in battle upon

¹⁰⁷ BOA, TSMA.E.0877.

¹⁰⁸ Selânikî Mustafa Efendi, *Tarih-i Selânikî (971-1003/1563-1595)*, trans. Mehmet İpşirli (Ankara: TTK Yayınları, 1999), 56–57.

¹⁰⁹ Rukiye Özdemir, “*Ramazân-Zâde’nin Târîh-i Nişâncı Paşa İsimli Eserinin Tahlil ve Metin Tenkidi*” (PhD diss., Atatürk University, Institute of Turkic Studies, Department of History, Erzurum, 2018), 17.

¹¹⁰ Abdülkadir Özcan, “Ramazanzâde Mehmed Çelebi,” *Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 28 (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2003), 449–450.

the plain of Konya, those within his ranks scattered, many repenting, and he himself, defeated and accursed, chose flight...”¹¹¹

It is understood that there was a narrative commonly used both in imperial documents and chronicles to delegitimise the rebels by casting them as unruly and unworthy challengers, while emphasising the legitimacy and strength of the imperial administration’s loyalists. However, Bayezid’s ability to rapidly assemble a large force indicates that he successfully leveraged local networks and social structures.

Correspondingly, another question emerges at this point: how was a prince able to support and provision these men, while even the imperial treasury, which was formally responsible for sustaining all imperial subjects, struggled to do so? For instance, in a document dated H. 966 (1558-1559) the imperial administration describes his followers as financial burdens with precarious loyalty, but even though they label his income resources as insufficient for a prolonged campaign, he sustains the rebellion since his “ill-fated” companions supported him.¹¹² This interpretation of the centre was further expressed in another document with great details, recording that a qadi in Sivas, was compelled to surrender a portion of imperial estate revenues to the rebels. Moreover, even though the governor of Sivas was lacked sufficient money, he was willing to sell his belongings to provide the requested amount of money. Meanwhile, a witness reports that he saw some cash boxes being constructed in Tokat marketplace, suggesting that these were the necessary preparations for a large-scale financial mobilisation. Also, it is reported that Bayezid dispatched an emissary to get one hundred thousand silver coins from the revenue official of Çorum.¹¹³

However, in a document dated H. 966 (1558/1559), a man named *Teğeltici* is reported to have joined the army of Bayezid. In the document, the direct association of Bayezid with this

¹¹¹ Ramazânzâde, *Târîh-i Nişâncı Paşa (Tenkitli Metin-Tahlil)*, edited by Rukiye Özdemir (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2022).

¹¹² BOA, TSMA.E. Document 0877.

¹¹³ BOA, TSMA.E. Document 0885.

Teğeltici, the son of Celal the *müfsid* (people committing *fesâd*), the infamous leader of the 1519 *Celâli* Uprising, is significant for understanding the evolving rebellion structure of Anatolia.¹¹⁴ This document confirms both İlgürel's assertion and the scholarly consensus concerning the origins of the *celâli* groups, or, more broadly, the *celâli* identity. This consensus holds that virtually all Anatolian uprisings between 1550 and 1700 came to be labelled as *celâli* uprisings, following the infamous rebellion of *Celâl of Bozok* in 1519,¹¹⁵ and started to intensify from the 1590s onwards.¹¹⁶

Furthermore, when this association is viewed in conjunction with Bayezid's documented contacts with Safavid Iran, it reveals a more intricate geopolitical dimension. The *Celâli* movement appears not only as an internal disorder but also as part of a wider network of political confrontation involving cross-border alliances and external influences. This complexity could be interpreted as the interplay between the dynastic struggles within the Ottoman realm and broader regional tensions, particularly between the Ottomans and Safavids, which shaped the emergence and trajectory of the *ehl-i fesâd* insurgencies. Considering all this evidence, it becomes clear that this conflict was not merely a dynastic rivalry between two princes, but rather a confrontation of existential realities of the sixteen-century imperial subjects of Anatolia.

The case of Prince Bayezid demonstrates with particular clarity that, during the early years of Ottoman state consolidation in Anatolia, a figure like Bayezid was able to mobilise people from both the upper and lower ranks of society in open defiance of imperial authority.

¹¹⁴ BOA, TSMA.E., 0754.

¹¹⁵ For instance, according to the related entry in the *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, this initial uprising is recorded to have taken place in 1519, during the reign of Selim I (r. 1512-1520). See Mücteba İlgürel, "Celali İsyanları," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 7 (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1993), 252–257. However, it is well known that Selim I passed away in September 1520, and within about a week or ten days his son ascended the throne as Süleyman I. In the aforementioned petition addressed to Süleyman I, there is a phrase *ibtidâ-i cülûs*, which means "at the beginning of the reign" or "shortly after the enthronement", and from this phrase, it may be inferred that the uprising of *Celâl*, later remembered as the namesake of all rebellions between 1550 and 1700, in fact took place during the reign of Süleyman I, rather than that of his father.

¹¹⁶ Mustafa Akdağ, *Celâli İsyanları (1550-1603)* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1963).

While episodes of unrest had long occurred throughout Anatolia, the cumulative evidence surrounding the Bayezid affair poses a significant challenge to the prevailing scholarly view that systemic decline began only after the reign of Süleyman I. On the contrary, the available sources indicate that even during the period when Süleyman I was consolidating his authority, an “unfavoured” prince such as Bayezid, particularly in comparison to his brother Selim at the time, was capable of assembling a force of around fifteen thousand men, a number comparable to the armies commanded by the governor of Anatolia, and of attempting to determine his own political fate. This suggests that by the 1560s, the classical imperial structures no longer held sufficient authority or legitimacy in the eyes of those who chose to align themselves with Bayezid, rather than remain within the established order.

In this regard, the argument advanced by Islamoğlu, that surplus and marginalised populations increasingly sought refuge and opportunity within the households of rural elites, a claim Özel strongly contests, appears to be substantiated by the evidence at hand. Indeed, the primary sources consistently point to the validity of this pattern, highlighting the limitations of imperial control and the growing appeal of alternative power structures for Anatolia’s displaced and disaffected populations.

It is clear that both the Bayezid Affair and the *fesâd* related incidents were not randomly occurred phenomena; rather, they were reinforced by both the external influence of the Safavids and the broader realities of the sixteenth century, including monetary devaluation, the transformation of the *timâr* system, internal migration, environmental pressures, the diffusion of firearms, shifts in imperial recruitment policy, and the changing typology of the rural elite, all of which will be analysed in detail in the following chapter. Moreover, *fesâd* incidents in the sixteenth century involving individuals labelled as *ehl-i fesâd* were not confined solely to episodes of unrest or brigandage. Their activities and associations can, in fact, be traced within

the broader socioeconomic and political realities of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, as outlined above.

Chapter 3

Re-evaluating the Impact of Climate, Diffusion of Firearms and Changes to *Timâr*-Holding on the Social Unrest in Anatolia

As I discussed above, the sixteenth and seventeenth-century registers, together with various chronicles, not only provide valuable insight into the *ehl-i fesâd* structure but also offer examples that enable us to analyse the impact of the environmental conditions and, effects of the firearms, and changes to *timâr*-holding, factors that have long been identified in the scholarship as important for social unrest in 16th-century Anatolia. Even though Pál Fodor acknowledged each of these conditions, his analysis remains largely confined to secondary literature. Rather than examining these issues in depth, he presents them as contextual factors influencing the subjects of his own inquiry, particularly the changing monetary structure of the empire, its implications for the tax system, and its broader effects on land tenure. However, Fodor treats these dynamics primarily as background conditions, not as integral components of the *fesâd* phenomenon, which constitutes the central focus of this study. Moreover, his engagement with these issues occupies only a marginal portion of his narrative and thus leaves considerable room for further, more detailed investigation.¹¹⁷ In this chapter, I aim to examine the conceptual phenomena of the sixteenth century from the *ehl-i fesâd* perspective, by

¹¹⁷ Pál Fodor, *The Business of State: Ottoman Finance Administration and Ruling Elites in Transition (1580s–1615)*, *Studien zur Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur der Turkvölker*, vol. 28 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2018), 9–55.

engaging with the existing scholarship while incorporating my own findings and posing new questions.

1. The Environmental Approach

The environmental movements that began in the United States after World War II influenced not only politics and society but also the academic world, leading to a marked rise in studies on climate and environmental change.¹¹⁸ As Onur İnal has demonstrated, considerable body of work has since emerged in this growing field.¹¹⁹ Although he identifies Ottoman and Middle Eastern historians as “latecomers” to environmental history¹²⁰ and regards Roderick Nash as the founder of the field, it would be unjust to overlook the analytical contributions of earlier figures such as Febvre and Braudel in European historiography, and Ömer L. Barkan in Ottoman studies. Even though the Ottoman environmental history has grown steadily, there are few studies that directly examines this topic in relation to the *ehl-i fesâd* groups, all of which mostly focus on the direct effect of the environment on the *fesâd* incidents. However, my primary focus emerges from a critique of the environmental approach by traditional historiography, which have accused earlier scholarship of forcibly constructing indirect connections between nature and humankind.

However, the environmental approach is not an invention of contemporary historiography. On the contrary, chronicles and registers explicitly establish connections between mankind and nature, thereby suggesting a direct correlation between these two notions. Also, this allows us to check the sources with other datasets to make our arguments more solid, in case they can convey incorrect information. For instance, one of the recent works containing relevant information on the relationship between social unrests and environment is Neil

¹¹⁸ Robin Haunschild and Lutz Bornmann, “Climate Change Research in View of Bibliometrics,” *PLOS ONE* 11, no. 7 (2016): 1–19.

¹¹⁹ Onur İnal, “Environmental History as an Emerging Field in Ottoman Studies: An Historiographical Overview,” *Osmanlı Araştırmaları / The Journal of Ottoman Studies* 38 (2011): 1-25.

¹²⁰ Onur İnal, *ibid.*, 4.

Robert's study. Although it is also not a direct study on the *ehl-i fesâd* groups, his stable isotope analysis based on Acıgöl (Narlıgöl) sediments reveals something interesting.¹²¹ It shows that there were three different extreme drought periods between 1400 and 1900: the first from 1410 to 1450, the second from 1580 to 1620, and the third from 1840 to 1880. In contrast, the periods between 1450-1580 and 1620-1840 are marked as relatively more humid and rainy intervals.¹²² Even though this study stands as one of the finest examples of collaboration between history and natural sciences, he does not analyse the potential effects of this period on the uprisings involving various *ehl-i fesâd* groups.¹²³

However, I would like to offer an example to argue that while environmental history is crucial for understanding social dynamics, it cannot be treated as the sole explanatory factor. In her work, Teslime Ata uses the 22 *Numaralı Mühimme Defteri* (*Register of Important Affairs No. 22*), which covers the period between May and September 1573, in order to examine banditry incidents in Anatolia during the reign of Selim II (1566-1574). But she does not interpret these as mere isolated incidents; rather, she identifies several notable characteristics, including their geographic concentration in the western and coastal regions, their seasonal peaks during the warmer months, and the diverse social composition of various *fesâd* groups, such as *sûhte* and *levend* bands, tribal factions, state officials, and singular brigands. When we consider her findings alongside climatic reconstructions of Roberts, a correlation (not in a positive sense) emerges between environmental conditions and social unrest. For instance, Roberts

¹²¹ Neil Roberts, "Boon or Curse? The Role of Climate Change in the Rise and Demise of Anatolian Civilizations," in *Winds of Change: Environment and Society in Anatolia*, ed. Christopher H. Roosevelt and John Haldon (Istanbul: Koç University Press, 2021), 5–39.

¹²² Neil Roberts, *ibid.*, 22.

¹²³ However, his findings can be cross-checked against other datasets in natural sciences. For instance, the period between 1570 and 1580 corresponds to one of the four wettest intervals in terms of May–June precipitation within the 1350-1650 period, which, thereby, confirm the data generated by Roberts. Consequently, in the first half of the sixteenth century Ottoman central Anatolia, which covers reigns of Selim I (1512-1520) and Süleyman I (1520-1566), had a comparatively milder climate than both the preceding and succeeding periods. See Ramzi Touchan, Ünal Akkemik, Malcolm K. Hughes, and Neşet Erkan, "May-June Precipitation Reconstruction of Southwestern Anatolia-Turkey During the Last 900 Hundred Years From Tree Rings," *Quaternary Research* 68, no. 2 (2007): 196–202; Hakan Yiğitbaşoğlu, Jonathan R. Dean, Warren J. Eastwood, Neil Roberts, Matthew D. Jones, and Melanie J. Leng, "A 600 Year-Long Drought Index for Central Anatolia," *Journal of the Black Sea/Mediterranean Environment* 21 (2015): 84–88.

characterises the period between 1450 and 1580 as one of relative humidity and agricultural abundance and indicates that the 1570s were one of the wettest decades in centuries. One might have expected such environmental abundance to mitigate social unrest; yet Ata's findings demonstrate that brigandage persisted despite, or maybe because of the opportunities created by this climatic productivity.

So, it might be argued that the concentration of violence in regions such as Edirne, Bursa, and Çanakkale, known for their agricultural abundance and position along major trade routes, became attractive spots for *ehl-i fesâd* groups particularly during agriculturally productive spring and summer months (formerly known as the time of *sefer*, the war).¹²⁴ In this sense, Ata's findings may serve as evidence for the limited capacity of environmental abundance to secure social order, which is in direct opposition to the Griswold,¹²⁵ White,¹²⁶ and Özel,¹²⁷ who tend to emphasise environmental/ecological burden as one of the principal impulses of unrest. But, if we presume that their assumptions are true, the registers compiled since the mid-sixteenth century could be interpreted as such.

That is, the period between 1580 and 1620, marked by Roberts as the second of the three most severe drought periods between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, corresponds to a period when the *ehl-i fesâd* incidents in Anatolia intensified, major *celâli* uprisings erupted, and the imperial administration initiated widespread persecutions. Although these studies suggest a positive correlation between droughts and these high-impacted social events, registers do not explicitly attribute the *ehl-i fesâd* actions only to environmental causes. But this does not mean

¹²⁴ Teslime Ata, "Anadolu'daki Eşkîyalık Faaliyetlerine Dair Bir İstatistik (22 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri Işığında)," *Genel Türk Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi* 3, no. 5 (January 2021): 85-92.

¹²⁵ William J. Griswold, *The Great Anatolian Rebellion 1000-1020/1591-1611*, Islamkundliche Untersuchungen Bd83, Berlin, 1983; William J. Griswold, "Climatic Change: A Possible Factor in the Social Unrest of Seventeenth Century", *Humanist and Scholar: Essays in Honor of Andreas Tietze*, ed. Heath W. Lowry, Donald Quataert, The Isis Press, 2010.

¹²⁶ Sam White, *The Climate of Rebellion in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*, Cambridge University Press, 2011; Sam White, "Rethinking Disease in Ottoman Empire", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, c. 42/4, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

¹²⁷ Oktay Özel, *The Collapse of Rural Order in Ottoman Anatolia* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

that Ottomans were unaware of environmental conditions, nor that such conditions did not affect the Ottoman population at all. On the contrary, the state registers do include highly significant entries concerning environmental events, which may be regarded as clear evidence of Ottoman awareness of climatic/environmental circumstances and their effects on people, livestock, and even politics.

Also, it is observable that from the 1560s onwards, there was a noticeable increase in the number of documents issued by the *Divân-ı Hümayun* (The Imperial Council) concerning *şiddet-i şitâ* (severe winter)¹²⁸ and *şiddet-i baran/kesret-i baran* (excessive rainfall),¹²⁹ particularly those addressing their effects on the population, livestock, and state affairs. The following documents directly refer to the incidents which disrupted social life, administrative systems, and even diplomatic relations, by explicitly establishing direct connections between environmental conditions and social dynamics. However, these examples must be approached with caution, as the language of the records does not explicitly indicate that environmental factors were the direct cause of *fesâd*. Rather, by analysing the causes of the incidents recorded in these sources, one can trace a connection to *fesâd*-related issues. As Ata has demonstrated in her study, it is possible to identify certain correlations, both positive and negative, between environmental conditions and instances of *fesâd*.

For instance, a decree addressed to the qadi of Bursa, dated H. 1003 (1594–1595) is particularly noteworthy in this regard. In this instance, a severe winter, explicitly attributed to the ‘Almighty Creator’, resulted in the death of many thousands of sheep, which caused significant economic and administrative repercussions. The widespread loss of livestock would

¹²⁸ “...You have reported that, due to the severity of the winter, a supply has been kept and preserved in a secure place in the village named Çiftlik, which is subject to the district of Eskişehir...” BOA, MD, no 27, order no. 330.

¹²⁹ “...However, as floods have now arrived, the obstruction of its ancient course has caused the water to flow elsewhere, thereby damaging the lands of the Muslims and preventing their cultivation. This has, in turn, affected the revenues of the waqf, as well as those of the *timâr*-holders and other property owners. It is also reported that, in former times, when its course was likewise obstructed, the inhabitants of the surrounding villages would contribute to clearing the waterway and blocking it from reaching the said river...” BOA, MD, no 21, order no 521.

have severely disrupted the supply of meat, wool, leather, and other essential animal products critical for both socioeconomic life and military needs, particularly in a capital such as Istanbul where efficient provisioning was vital.¹³⁰

Another decree dated H. 980 (1572-1573) is important, as it gives quite detailed information not only about the expected ordinary results of the environmental effects, but also the political ones. In the document, it is narrated that how environmental conditions could decisively shape military and political decision-making of the Ottoman-Habsburg-Polish diplomacy. The reference to the severe winter preventing Ottoman progress could be interpreted as far from an incidental detail. In this case, a planned expedition against the rebellious Moldavian Voivode was abandoned due to frozen rivers, obstructed passes, and drained provisions that made a large-scale mobilisation unsustainable. It is understood that the Ottoman logistical systems, which were heavily reliant on seasonal patterns and agrarian surpluses, were highly vulnerable to such a disruption. It could be said that the decision to defer action until spring means that the imperial administration was already aware of these natural limitations, though only to a certain degree.¹³¹

Also, these environmental constraints did not merely delay campaigns but also shaped the frontier/borderline dynamics. That is, the local rulers, elites and frontier commanders were consciously aware of these seasonal fluctuations. This might have led their defiance or allegiances in line with the calendar of imperial vulnerability. In this respect, natural conditions in these peripheral regions were not incidental but played a direct, structuring role in the politics

¹³⁰ "...due to the severe winter caused by the Almighty Creator this year, many thousands of sheep perished. Moreover, it was noted that the regions of *Eflak* (Wallachia) and *Boğdan* (Moldavia) were also in a state of upheaval, resulting in significant damage to the aforementioned estate..." BOA, MD, no. 73, order no. 789.

¹³¹ "...A decree to the Voivode of *Boğdan* (Moldavia): A letter was sent to inform that the previously rebellious Voivode of *Boğdan* (Moldavia), who had captured and imprisoned Istvan Baturi, the Voivode of Erdel (Transylvania), and had sent him to the King of Bech (Archduchy of Austria). While planning to gather forces and march to the *Boğdan* (Moldavia), the severe winter prevented their progress. Despite the intention to proceed after winter had passed, and with your army ready, you have already informed the situation concerning the Voivode of Erdel (Moldavia), the King of Bech (Archduchy of Austria), and the situation in the regions of Poland..." BOA, MD, no. 21, order no. 37.

and security of the Ottoman borderlands, as will be further demonstrated in the examples from Ottoman-Safavid borderlands below.

Correspondingly, a decree dated H. 998 (1589–1590) records a famine in the vicinity of Erzurum and continues with how severe winter conditions stopped both the administrative and fiscal operations in the province. The reference to these postponing activities shows how vital the seasonal agricultural cycles were for both provincial revenue systems and provisioning of garrisons. In the document, it is stated that the imperial administration ordered an emergency transfer of ten thousand *akçe* (silver coins) from the Erzurum treasury to cover the temporary expenses of the *kapıkulu* troops in the region. This is particularly noteworthy, as it shows the direct result of the environmental adversity on the imperial fiscal management structures.¹³²

Nevertheless, as I mentioned above, the Ottomans, at least in the classical registers, did not explicitly regard certain environmental circumstances as one of the principal causes of *fesâd*. However, one might reasonably assume that the explicitly recorded environment-related incidents such as famine, migration, and plagues, which contributed to *fesâd* and disruptions to imperial order, were in practice associated with *fesâd*-related concerns.

In order to support this argument, let us proceed to the other mentioned groups of sources, aside from registers: the early modern chronicles. Firstly, it must be noted that chronicles should always be approached carefully, as their contents often resemble epic narratives and must be considered cautiously. For instance, Selânikî (d. 1600), while recounting the early years of Sultan Selim II's reign, states that "the city of Istanbul, which was overwhelmed by crowding and excess population, was left without sufficient provisions."¹³³ This observation is particularly significant as it establishes a direct connection between a natural

¹³² "...The Governor of *Gence*, Davud, sent a petition to the court, and after reaching his region, he encountered severe winter, which caused a delay until the harvest of the region became profitable. In the meantime, it was ordered that ten thousand *akçe* (silver coin) be requested from the Erzurum treasury to cover the expenses of the *Kapıkulu* soldiers in the region..." BOA, MD, no. 73, order no. 728.

¹³³ Selânik-i Mustafa Efendi, *Tarih-i Selânikî (971-1003/1563-1595)*, trans. Mehmet İpşirli (Ankara: TTK Yayınları, 1999), 56.

phenomenon, famine, and the issue of internal migration, a notion closely related to social disorder, on the basis of causality.

Furthermore, a passage from the anonymous *Kitâb-ı Müstetâb*, written around 1620, reports that “for example, in the Sivas province, some time ago a famine and scarcity occurred so severe that the subjects were reputed to have eaten cats and dogs, and even, it is said, human flesh.”¹³⁴ This account is also quite astonishing when considered within the framework of Ottoman social realities, revealing the extreme consequences of environmental hardship on societal stability. Also, the ambiguous temporal reference of “some time ago” in the *Kitâb-ı Müstetâb* closely parallels an incident recorded in another contemporary chronicle, the *Necmü'l-Hüdâ*, which reports a similar calamity in the year H. 1012 (1603–1604).

This particularly striking and astonishing account appears in an account which was written by Receb Efendi (d. 1600), the son-in-law and disciple of Şemseddin Sivasi (d. 1597), the founder of the Şemsiyye branch of the Halvetiyye order.¹³⁵ In this work, while describing the *Vilâyet-i Rûm* following the Karayazıcı incident,¹³⁶ he recounts that “...After this event [referring to Karayazıcı], order and discipline in the Rum provinces were completely disrupted. The land was corrupted, and society seemed overrun by forces as destructive as the biblical Gog and Magog. Tyranny and lawlessness flourished, invading every corner. Particularly, the population of Sivas and its surrounding districts dispersed like locusts. Wild animals, such as wolves, took residence in the abandoned and ruined villages. As the land became ownerless, empty, and neglected, hunger emerged as a major issue. The impoverished population consumed leaves, tree roots, and bark, and later resorted to eating scraps and refuse they found

¹³⁴ Yaşar Yücel, *Osmanlı Devlet Düzenine Ait Metinler I: Kitâb-ı Müstetâb* (Ankara: DTCF Yayınları, 1974), 20.

¹³⁵ Hasan Aksoy, “Şemseddin Sivasi,” *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi* 38 (2010): 523–526.

¹³⁶ He is recognised as the first *celâlî* to proclaim his sovereignty in Anatolia under the title of *Halim Shah*. See Mücteba İlgürel, “Karayazıcı Abdülhalim,” *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, c. 24 (İstanbul: 2001), 482–483.

in the streets. They hunted dogs and cats, resembling wolves in their desperation. This dreadful condition persisted...”¹³⁷

Moreover, he records another episode reminiscent of the famine account in the *Kitâb-ı Müstetâb* stating that: “...in the year H. 1012 (1603-1604), famine and scarcity had reached their peak. After cats and dogs were no longer to be found, people began to consume animal blood and carcasses and subsequently resorted to slaughtering and eating children. On one occasion, a pot containing cooked child’s flesh was discovered. The perpetrator was sentenced to be thrown into the fire. As he burned, starving onlookers gathered around and, when the flames abated, scrambled to seize and eat the roasted flesh like *büryân* (roasted lamb). After this incident, these horrific acts could no longer be prevented. Poverty and hunger had driven people to such catastrophic consequences. It was a calamity of the gravest kind...”¹³⁸

It is clear that that by the 1603-1604, famine had reached such severity that the people were driven to cannibalism, not as isolated atrocities but as part of a wider breakdown of social order. Even though the author interpreted the narrative of the people fighting to consume the flesh of an executed cannibal as both the erosion of societal norms and the desperation provoked by subsistence crises, it needs to be approached cautiously. However, what is important from this narrative is the author’s comprehension of environmental factors as a contributor alongside war, rebellion, and administrative problems to this near-apocalyptic devastation.

Such incidents were by no means unusual for the period, as other chronicles from earlier centuries record similar narratives. For instance, Naimâ (d. 1716), in his history, referring to a severe famine in the lands from Eastern Anatolia and Western Iran around H. 920 He narrates that: “...since he [Shah of the Rafizis] had previously expelled the subjects of the towns and villages, those lands were left fallow, and famine and scarcity had reached their utmost

¹³⁷ Receb-i Sivasi, *Necmü'l-Hüdâ fî menâkıbı 'ş-Şeyh Şemseddîn Ebi's-Senâ*, trans. Hüseyin Şemsi Güneren, ed. Fatih Güneren, 85.

¹³⁸ Receb-i Sivasi, *ibid.*, 85.

degree...”¹³⁹ As the Ottoman forces pursued “Shah of the Rafizis”, they advanced through a region already ravaged by his earlier policies. It is stated that the Shah forced local subjects to desert their lands, expelled them from towns and villages, causing in deserted agricultural lands, famine, and shortages, which left the territory profoundly destabilised even before the arrival of Ottoman troops. Similarly, İdris-i Bitlisî, in his *Selim Şah-nâme*, records that while Süleyman’s army was pursuing the *kızılbaş* groups aligned with the Shah, who was at the time residing in Tabriz and referred to as a *sapkın* (heretic),¹⁴⁰ they passed through regions of extreme heat and aridity. As a result, the army was forced to halt and encamp for three days at a location called Cevsak.¹⁴¹

Even though in the Silahdar’s (d. 1726-27) chronicle, there are similar accounts for the seventeenth century, there are no episodes concerning the sixteenth century as in the aforementioned chronicles. However, the second volume of Silahdar’s *Tarih*, under the chapter titled *belâ-yı kâht* (the calamity of famine), contains highly noteworthy remarks in this regard as it highlights a prolonged famine. He narrates that: “...there were many slanders about Kara İbrahim Pasha’s (1683-1685) involvement with the infamous Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa Pasha (1676-1683), and accusations of being the Armenian agent himself. Even now, the Grand Vizier Süleyman Pasha was still in office, therefore set a maximum price for market, and the price of wheat was controlled at one hundred and fifty *akçes* (silver coin) per *kile* (bushel), while the price of meat was set at sixty *akçes* (silver coin) per dirhem (dram). However, despite these measures, no solution was found, and the famine continued to worsen. By 1698, the price of wheat had risen to two hundred *akçes* (silver coin) per *kile* (bushel), and meat had reached forty dirhems (dram) per *akçe* (silver coin). In fact, in some parts of Anatolia, people resorted to

¹³⁹ Mustafa Naima Efendi, *Tarih-i Naima*, ed. Mehmet İpşirli, vol. 1 (Ankara: TTK Yayınları, 2014), 278.

¹⁴⁰ Hicabi Kırlangıç, “*İdris-i Bitlisî, Selim Şah-nâme*” 267.

¹⁴¹ Hicabi Kırlangıç, *ibid.*, 264.

eating acorns, wild roots, and even walnut shells, leading to widespread devastation, which became a widely spread and tragic event...”¹⁴²

It is understood from the episode that the crisis severely troubled the region, with harvest failures driving the prices of essential goods such as wheat and meat to unprecedented levels. during military campaigns and periods of interrupted agricultural cycles, no crops grew, and those that were planted failed to mature. From the year 1696 onwards, a severe famine spread across the entire Islamic world.

The aforementioned examples from both existing scholarship, archival sources, and chronicles highlight the significant potential for further research in this field. As noted, the number of studies in this area tends to increase in parallel with the growing availability of archival documents capable of addressing historians’ specific questions, particularly for the later periods. However, this does not suggest that solid research for the early modern period is unattainable; on the contrary, the examples cited here attest to its feasibility, as they clearly demonstrate the Ottomans regarded the environment as one of the conditions that affected various aspects of sociopolitical and economic life. Therefore, both registers and chroniclers should be utilised in further studies to develop a more comprehensive understanding.

2. Effects of the Diffusion of Firearms

The implementation of both firearms and cannons is one of the pivotal moments in military history as they emerged as catastrophic forces within the traditional medieval armies. Beyond the ongoing debate regarding the origins and initial deployment of firearms in the Ottoman context, their production, logistics, and supply networks are more important for determining their effects on the ordinary subjects. The spread of firearms emerges as a crucial subject for understanding the increasing number of *ehl-i fesâd* incidents, a development that

¹⁴² Silahdar Fındıklı Mehmed, *Tarih-i Silahdar*, vol. 2 (Istanbul: Orhaniye Matbaası, 1928), 243.

can be traced through the *mühimme* registers, particularly those from the second half of the sixteenth century, as studied by İnalçık,¹⁴³ Ágoston,¹⁴⁴ and Tezcan¹⁴⁵ in their respective works.

Yet, although İnalçık was the first to draw attention to this issue, subsequent scholarship has largely framed the discussion within the context of the *sekbân* (irregular troops) as the primary agents of firearm proliferation. With the notable exception of Tezcan, who argued that the increasing armament among *sekbân* troops could be attributed to the realities of the sixteenth century and the demands of prolonged warfare, these arguments have focused almost exclusively on explaining the growth of the *kapıkulu* corps and the military transformations of the period. However, they have paid insufficient attention to the broader social consequences of the diffusion of firearms, particularly its impact on ordinary subjects and its contribution to the expanding phenomenon of *fesâd*. In particular, the connection between the spread of firearms, ordinary subjects, and the expanding phenomenon of *fesâd* has remained limited. In this section, I aim to examine precisely this relationship: how the increasing availability of firearms among imperial subjects contributed to the already escalating problem of *fesâd*, and how it altered the nature and scale of unrest in sixteenth century Anatolia.

At the first glance, it might seem that the growing number of recorded incidents was simply a result of the territorial expansion, an assumption that a larger territory would inevitably encompass more incidents. However, the second half of the sixteenth century was not a period of major territorial expansion; rather it was characterised by efforts to maintain territorial stability. In order to determine whether such an increase was unusual or usual, one must

¹⁴³ Halil İnalçık, “The Socio-Political Effects of the Diffusion of Fire-Arms in the Middle East,” in *War, Technology and Society in the Middle East*, ed. W. J. Parry and M. E. Yapp (London, 1975), 195-211; Halil İnalçık, “Military and Fiscal Transformation,” in *War and State in the Middle East: Essays in Honour of Albert Hourani*, ed. William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (London, 1991), 283–311.

¹⁴⁴ Gábor Ágoston, *Guns for the Sultan: Military Power and the Weapons Industry in the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 15-60; Gábor Ágoston, “Firearms and Military Adaptation: The Ottomans and the European Military Revolution, 1450–1800,” *Journal of World History* 25, no. 1 (2014): 85-124.

¹⁴⁵ Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

compare successive registers from the second half of the sixteenth century, starting with the earliest, which dates to H. 951/952 (1544).¹⁴⁶

When considering the relationship between the *ehl-i fesâd* groups and firearms, another crucial thing that should be considered is *sekban* groups (irregular soldiers), an important part of this network of relationships. What distinguished *sekban* from other *ehl-i fesâd* groups is their expertise as *tüfenk-endâz* (armed soldiers). Moreover, considering the impact of the increasing use of firearms in European armies on Ottoman military units,¹⁴⁷ it is not difficult to imagine the extent to which armed individuals engaging in banditry could threaten defenceless subjects.

For instance, from a document dated H. 978 (1571) it is understood that the imperial administration regarded the widespread use of firearms as a principal cause of *fesâd* originating from among the subjects: "...You have sent a letter to İstanbul, reporting that in the aforementioned region, as well as in certain subdivisions and villages, some among the subjects have been carrying firearms and wandering the mountains under the pretext of hunting, in the style of the janissaries, thereby raising concerns of *fesâd*..."¹⁴⁸ Also, the repeated orders for the confiscation of firearms, coupled with the explicit reprimand for the failure to enforce them in a timely manner, underscores this point.

While it is known that these irregular soldiers were actually part of the Ottoman army and transformed into *celâli* rebels from the seventeenth century onwards,¹⁴⁹ documents show that they were already engaged in banditry and rebellious activities from the mid-sixteenth century. For instance, a document dated H. 975/976 (1567-1569) clearly notes that the

¹⁴⁶ Halil Sahillioğlu, *Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi H. 951-952 Tarihli ve E-12321 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri* (İstanbul: İslam Tarih, Sanat ve Kültür Araştırma Merkezi (IRCICA), 2002).

¹⁴⁷ Rhoads Murphey, "The Ottoman Attitude towards the Adaption of Western Technology: The Role of the Efrençî Technicians in Civil and Military Applications," *Contributions à l'Histoire Économique et Sociale de l'Empire Ottoman*, 1983, 286-198; Halil İnalçık, "Osmanlılarda Ateşli Silahlar," *Belleten* 21, no. 83 (1957): 501-12.

¹⁴⁸ BOA, MD, no.10, order no. 540.

¹⁴⁹ Abdülkadir Özcan, "Sekban," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 36 (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2009), 326-328.

appropriation of official military identity for purposes of intimidation and violence had become a familiar tactic by this period: "...Prior to this, the *sekbân* groups and certain individuals, upon receiving my imperial order to the *timâr*, donned the janissary headgear and disguised themselves as *acemi oğlanlar* (candidate janissaries), roaming about and committing oppression and transgressions against the subjects..."¹⁵⁰

Moreover, beyond incidents involving ordinary *sekbân* groups, there were also independent cases in which individuals holding the rank of *sekbanbaşı* (head of the corps) were directly involved. In one instance, it is reported that the disturbances linked to the *sekbân* corps were not merely excesses of certain groups within the military but had a broader and more complex issue: "...Mustafa, the head of a *sekbân* group in the village of Doğancı, has confessed to killing concubines along with Ali bin İlyas and others. This has been registered, and the necessary accounts have been settled..."¹⁵¹

However, as understood from the documents, not every *tüfenk-endâz* (armed) bandit was necessarily a *sekbân*, but they presented themselves as such on purpose. The imperial administration was keenly aware of this, as one decree addressed to a provincial governor makes clear. It highlights the widespread appropriation of military identities for lawless activity, by complicating the efforts of the imperial administration in order to maintain public order and distinguish between legitimate soldiers and impostors. Even more troubling for the central government was the involvement of officials in leading *sekbân* group, as the following document dated H. 1017 (1608) records: "...In the aforementioned region, Mehmed Çavuş, an officer of the imperial palace, assumed leadership of a band of brigands, gathering around seventy to eighty of them under the name of *sekbân*, then he went from village to village..." This situation shows how the lines between official authority and organised brigandage had

¹⁵⁰ BOA, 7 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (975-976 / 1567-1569), c. II, T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, Ankara, 1999, 44. Order no. 79.

¹⁵¹ BOA, MD, no. 28, order no. 937.

blurred, presenting a serious challenge to the imperial administration's capacity to assert control over its provinces.¹⁵²

The last two orders are particularly important because, within the Ottoman administrative system, members of the ruling elite enjoyed significant privileges in comparison to the tax-paying subjects. They were exempt from taxation, allocated lands by the central authority, and held various other advantages. Therefore, engaging in banditry was a highly consequential decision for a member of the elite, as he risked everything, position, networks, privileges, and status. Such actions must be understood within the broader dynamics of the sixteenth century, and not merely as a pursuit of material gain or personal enrichment. Moreover, as incidents involving *sekbân* groups became increasingly common in Anatolia, one of the primary concerns of the Ottoman administration was the proliferation of firearms among the subjects. It is generally acknowledged that the possession and use of weapons were restricted to janissaries and *sipâhi* (cavalry). For instance, a document dated H. 973 (1565/1566) explicitly records that: "...It was reported that certain individuals from among the bandits have been using firearms in defiance of my imperial order and have not refrained from acts of uprising and depravity. Therefore, an imperial decree has been issued stating that no one other than members of the janissary and *sipâhi* (cavalry) corps shall bear or be permitted to bear firearms..."¹⁵³

But archival records from as early as H. 967 (1559-1560), a notably early period for the widespread availability of firearms among the subjects, contain decrees ordering the confiscation of the weapons already circulating among the population. Significantly, this register belongs to a period marked by internal unrest, namely a civil war between Prince Selim and Prince Bayezid, sons of Süleyman I. In order to demonstrate how the central administration responded to the unauthorised possession of firearms during this volatile moment, I would like

¹⁵² BOA, MD, no 71, order no. 60.

¹⁵³ BOA, MD, no 5, order no. 134; BOA, MD, no 10, order no. 544.

to present three decrees from the same register dated H. 966/968 (1558-1560), each addressed to different provincial governors of the empire, Amasya, Bursa, and Bolu. The selection of these regions is particularly significant. Amasya held strategic importance during the aforementioned civil war, as Prince Bayezid had served as its governor shortly before his rebellion. Bolu and Bursa, on the other hand, were mountainous regions of inner Anatolia, where banditry and irregular armed activity were commonly associated with the rugged terrain, much like the conditions prevailing in the highlands of eastern Anatolia.

The first decree to the governor of Amasya reminds that an earlier imperial order had already prohibited the possession of firearms by the subjects, and is accompanied by a formal dispatch to enforce this prohibition. Despite this, the document reveals that some factions within the region were nonetheless found to be in violation, bearing firearms unlawfully. The governor is instructed to remain vigilant and confiscate any firearms held by subjects or bandits who disobey the order. These weapons were to be handed over to the castle's castellan, and those who resisted the command were to be sent to Istanbul. Strict warnings were also to be issued to prevent further violations. This document not only attests to the persistence of firearm possession among subjects despite earlier bans, but also highlights the determined efforts of the imperial administration to stem the dissemination of weapons through strict administrative oversight and punitive measures. It is indicative of the growing concern within the Ottoman state over the destabilising potential posed by the subjects' armed presence and the resulting need to reinforce control mechanisms at provincial levels.¹⁵⁴

The second decree, addressed to the governor of Bursa, reflects the ongoing struggle to enforce firearm restrictions among the subjects. Although previous orders had explicitly prohibited both the subjects and others from using firearms, it is clear from this decree that such prohibitions had been widely ignored. The document highlights how individuals, particularly

¹⁵⁴ BOA, MD, no. 3, order no. 900.

in mountainous areas, continued to use firearms for hunting, an activity that not only defied the sultan's orders but also posed a broader security concern within the empire. The order demands not only vigilance but also proactive investigation and inquiry, indicating that the authorities suspected covert, organised breaches of the prohibition. It prescribes the confiscation of firearms and the penal servitude of violators, emphasising both the punitive approach of the administration and the seriousness with which these orders were expected to be enforced. The mention of penal servitude as a punishment reflects how the state associated unauthorised firearm possession with significant criminality and disorder.¹⁵⁵

The last decree, addressed to the governor of Bolu, closely mirrors the content and concerns of the earlier decrees sent to Amasya and Bursa. But its wording indicates that a previous decree on the matter had already been issued, and importantly, that this earlier command was still considered valid and binding. The explicit instruction to maintain constant vigilance, to confiscate any firearms discovered, and to send violators to the capital underscores the seriousness with which the administration regarded this issue. What is notable here is the absence of any mention of hunting or specific bandit activities, the prohibition is framed as a general, uncompromising ban on possession alone. This signals the wider concern of the empire over the potential for unrest and its awareness that the mere availability of firearms among the subjects, irrespective of their immediate use, posed a threat to provincial security and imperial authority. The persistence of such orders also points to the difficulties of enforcement and the limits of state control over its rural population during a period when firearms were becoming increasingly accessible.¹⁵⁶

The anxieties of the imperial administration concerning social disorder were not limited to the possession and use of firearms by the subjects. In parallel, it sought to impose restrictions on their participation in various hunting activities, which were increasingly perceived as a

¹⁵⁵ BOA, MD, no. 3, order no. 986.

¹⁵⁶ BOA, MD, no. 3, order no. 1462.

source of potential unrest and as an encroachment upon privileges traditionally reserved for the ruling elite. For instance, a decree concerning the imperial hunting preserves explicitly prohibits unauthorised individuals from engaging in a range of activities within these protected domains. Moreover, it could be argued that the imperial government did not merely aim to curtail the use of firearms among the provincial population but also actively sought to limit their access to communal natural resources and to regulate their subsistence and leisure practices.¹⁵⁷ However, the concerns of the imperial administration extended beyond mere regulations; they also encompassed the control of materials critical to their manufacture.

For instance, another order dated H. 973 (1565/1566) reveals that the efforts of imperial administration to curb the spread of firearms not only by restricting their direct use among subjects but also by controlling the circulation of critical raw materials such as iron, lead, and copper. Such measures reveal a comprehensive approach aimed at preventing the escalation of armed unrest by limiting access to the tools of war at their source.¹⁵⁸

The increasing production of firearms from the early H. 970 (1562-1563) onwards is particularly noteworthy, alongside their expanding use. As it is understood from the registers, weapons were to be produced in designated centres and marked with a state seal before distribution according to official regulations. However, as firearms became more widespread, their production, an activity requiring considerable skill and craftsmanship, began to emerge as a new occupational field among peasants. This new development is recounted in a decree dated H. 975/976 (1567/1569), which states that some peasants had begun producing firearms in workshops outside the official gun manufactory and were even removing the official seals from state-issued firearms to sell them unlawfully. The decree orders that peasants must be warned to only work in the official manufactory for wages and that anyone found removing the state seal from firearms must be arrested and presented to the authorities, and the supervision and

¹⁵⁷ BOA, MD, no.5, order no. 691.

¹⁵⁸ BOA, MD, no. 5, order no. 1396.

enforcement of this order were entrusted to the head of firearms production.¹⁵⁹ It is clear that this unauthorised production and trade alarmed the central administration, prompting measures to maintain monopoly and enforce discipline in this strategically important industry. Although several factors contributed to this shift, examining the broader conditions and overall context of the sixteenth century reveals that this development should be considered alongside other contemporary ideas of the period.

However, another document dated H. 975/976 (1567/1569) addresses an interesting issue, that is the complex relationship between state-controlled firearm production and private economic activities. As I mentioned earlier there were assigned official people responsible for producing and repairing firearms in sixteenth century Anatolia. However, with this document, it is clear that while imperial administration recognised the practical need for skilled gunsmiths to remain on hand for the constant repair of Janissary firearms, they had concerns over these craftsmen producing additional muskets for private sale. Interestingly, one of these craftsmen is identified as a *rençber* (labourer, navvy), which indicates how the technical expertise required for firearm production had by this time extended beyond the traditional military-industrial circles into the lower social strata. The appointment of a trusted overseer to supervise these activities could be interpreted as another anxiety of the imperial administration about losing control over firearm circulation and its awareness of the broader economic appeal of musket production as a lucrative sideline. This regulation effort fits within a wider pattern seen in the sixteen-century Ottoman Empire, where economic pressures and the spread of specialist skills challenged the boundaries of state authority.¹⁶⁰

At this stage, with some hesitation, I find myself asking whether this document allows us to pose a broader question: how did state workshops, despite being officially monopolised, function as spaces of negotiation between formal obligations and private enterprise, a dynamic

¹⁵⁹ BOA, MD, no. 7, order no. 1889.

¹⁶⁰ BOA, MD, no.7, order no. 1997.

arguably indicative of the shifting economic conditions of the period? It would be difficult, of course, to advance such a claim based on a single document. Nevertheless, the contents of other registers from same period frequently record comparable incidents. A more secure approach to this question might be achieved by tracing the processes of decentralisation, beginning with the local courts of the imperial princes in the sixteenth century and continuing with the increasing influence of the ruling elite in the seventeenth.

However, it is evident that the Ottoman imperial administration regarded the spread of firearms among the population as one of the principal sources of *fesâd*. This observation is significant, for it suggests that the central authority sought to maintain its monopoly on power by framing the production, possession, and use of firearms as a critical marker of authority, one that could easily disrupt the established order if it fell into the hands of the wider population. The restrictions imposed on the circulation and use of firearms reveal the extent to which the state recognised the destabilising potential of this technology. The distribution of firearms among former soldiers, idle vagabonds, and other marginalised groups posed a tangible threat, as it could readily lead to uprisings. The capacity to wield arms represented a form of power that could embolden individuals or groups to challenge imperial authority.

Thus, from at least the mid-sixteenth century onwards, the imperial administration explicitly associated the circulation of firearms with *fesâd*. Yet this alone did not explain the phenomenon; it must also be understood in relation to the broader socioeconomic and political realities of the period. The factors that drove individuals to acquire firearms and rally behind local leaders or rebellious figures were deeply rooted in the conditions of the sixteenth century, conditions that will be examined in detail in the following sections.

3. Changes in the *Timâr*-holding Patterns

Scholars have offered different explanations for this development. İnalcık framed it as part of the empire's military strategy to match the Habsburg army during the Long War,

interpreting the rise within the context of a broader military revolution.¹⁶¹ Then, Uzunçarşılı, calculated the exact numbers and showed that recruitment into the *kapıkulu* corps increased sharply after the 1570s.¹⁶² Agoston, however, traced this trend back to the reign of Süleyman I, suggesting it reflected a growing demand for and supply of military manpower.¹⁶³ He further argue that this development was also rooted in deeper socio-economic transformations that shaped the empire from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. Although recent historiography has examined the behaviours of Anatolia's surplus population, it has paid insufficient attention to how the state itself responded to these demographic and social shifts.

For instance, Akdağ attributes importance to the psychological disposition of the *levendât* bands, particularly refusal of the *çiftbozan reaya* (land abandonment of the subjects) to submit to large landowners. He sees this resistance as a psychological factor behind the uprisings, by arguing that this mindset prevented the agrarian crisis from evolving into a feudal order, instead giving rise to large, violent *celâli* mobilisations.¹⁶⁴ He further interprets the *celâli* phenomenon as an evolution of *levendlik* (being a *levend*). He argues that the rise of such *levend* and *sûhte* groups in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries must be understood in relation to the socioeconomic conditions of the subjects. According to him, the peasant population, through sending their children to madrassas, enrolling young men into the *kapu* (household) system, and abandoning their villages due to landlessness and economic hardship, inadvertently contributed to the emergence of *levendât* and *sûhtevât* groups.¹⁶⁵

Correspondingly, Metin Kunt argued that the *kapıhalkı* notion was an attractive phenomenon for this surplus population, by arguing that argues the *timâr* system, which had

¹⁶¹ Halil İnalcık, "Military and Fiscal Transformation in the Ottoman Empire, 1600–1700," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 6 (1980): 283–337.

¹⁶² İsmail H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devleti Teşkilatından Kapıkulu Ocakları*, vol. 1 (Ankara: TTK Basımevi, 1988).

¹⁶³ Gabor, Agoston. "Firearms and Military Adaptation: The Ottomans and the European Military Revolution, 1450-1800." *Journal of World History* 25, no. 1 (2014): 85–124.

¹⁶⁴ Mustafa Akdağ, *ibid.*, 77. In doing so, Akdağ also offers one of the earliest examples in Turkish historiography of reading social unrest through a psychosocial lens, a perspective that deserves to be more systematically connected to the broader historiographical debates shaped by figures like Le Bon.

¹⁶⁵ Mustafa Akdağ, *ibid.*, 72.

traditionally ensured that *timâr*-holders resided within their designated lands and fulfilled military obligations, was increasingly undermined by the growing influence of these households. The neglected local responsibilities weakened the cohesion of the provincial order.¹⁶⁶ However, İslamoğlu argued that the presumed surplus population was the result of the internal migration and the settlement of nomadic groups, and the Ottoman population never reached the levels Cook proposed and contended that the fragmentation of *çiftlik* holdings did not necessarily result in widespread landlessness. That is, she attributes the growth of urban populations, particularly in madrasas and wage labour sectors, to rural youth migrating in response to heavy workloads in the countryside.¹⁶⁷

However, scholars critique her tendency to generalise findings drawn from specific regions to the empire, by assuming a uniform meaning for demographic and fiscal terms across all provinces. For instance, her interpretation of the term *caba* in the tax registers, which she reads as synonymous with *mücerred* (bachelor). This reading significantly inflates the proportion of unmarried men in the region, a remarkably high rate of 35%.¹⁶⁸ As a result, the broader argument built upon this interpretation has become erroneous. Researchers argue that in such cases, it is crucial to examine not only the tahrir registers of a given region but also the regional law codes, to determine the specific meanings attributed to particular terms within their local context.¹⁶⁹

However, her claim that surplus population “preferred” either internal migration or joining the *kapıhalkı* of provincial elites has been criticised by Özel. He argued that the strict

¹⁶⁶ İ. Metin Kunt, *The Sultan's Servants: The Transformation of Ottoman Provincial Government 1550–1600* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 85.

¹⁶⁷ Huricihan İslamoğlu, *State and Peasant: The Transformation of Ottoman Governance in the Early Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), chap. 4.

¹⁶⁸ Erhan Afyoncu, “Türkiye’de Tahrir Defterlerine Dayalı Olarak Hazırlanmış Çalışmalar Hakkında Bazı Görüşler,” *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi* 1 (2003): 271–72; Oktay Özel, “Population Changes in Ottoman Anatolia During the 16th and 17th Centuries: The 'Demographic Crisis' Reconsidered,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36, no. 2 (2004): 186

¹⁶⁹ Mehmet Öz, “Osmanlı’da Devlet ve Köylü İlişkileri Hakkında Bir Kitap,” *Türkiye Günlüğü*, no. 16 (1991): 153; Mehmet Öz, “Tahrir Defterlerindeki Sayısal Veriler,” in *Osmanlı Devleti’nde Bilgi ve İstatistik* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü Matbaası, 2000), 17–32.

regulations limited such movements, and it is chronologically premature to speak of the retinues composed of irregular soldiers within the Ottoman provincial-military organization under the *timâr* system during the first three quarters of the sixteenth century. Although *çiftbozan* (land abandonment) groups existed in the Ottoman countryside well before that period, the current state of research indicates that such retinues were primarily a phenomenon of the years preceding or coinciding with the Celâli uprisings at the turn of the seventeenth century.¹⁷⁰ As a result, the issue highlighted by İslamoğlu and later criticised by Özel remains unresolved: the motives drove this surplus population, and their existence in various contexts, as labourers, students, bandits, rebels, or mercenaries.

Although Özel directly opposes İslamoğlu's notion of "preference," he also critiques the concept of *kapıhalkı* as I mentioned in the second chapter. Nevertheless, archival documents explicitly show that the state acknowledged this reality. In this chapter, I analyse the possible motivations behind the collective movements of the *ehl-i fesâd* groups, or the underlying factors that compelled this surplus population to act in a coordinated manner. This analysis is conducted through an examination of the changing nature of military recruitment policies, the transformation of the *timâr* system, and the evolving structure of provincial elite households, as reflected in contemporary records and chronicles. Moreover, given their ability to use firearms, Cezar argued that the related numbers in the chronicles on princely armies for is referring to the economic burdens, as someone who needed to secure a livelihood quickly, probably the fastest option among them was enlisting as a *yevmlü*, a form of military service akin to *kapıkulu* army, since both were being paid for their services.¹⁷¹

This shift in recruitment policy can be divided into two phases, before and after 1573. In the first phase, the state largely avoided this approach, as it was still able to manage the activities of *fesâd* groups through conventional measures. However, following the War of

¹⁷⁰ Oktay Özel, *ibid.*, 185, footnote 24.

¹⁷¹ Mustafa Cezar, *Osmanlı Tarihinde Levendler* (Ankara: TTK Yayınları, 2013), 25.

Cyprus (1570-1573), a growing number of *timâr*-holders started to swiftly desert their lands and turned to banditry or joined *kapihalkı* of provincial elites as mercenaries. Combined with deteriorating socio-economic conditions, the expansion of provincial households, increasingly blurred lines within the military structure, and rising of influential *fesâd* leaders who were capable of rallying followers, the imperial administration began to employ the *kapıkulu* system as a quasi-employment mechanism. In doing so, it sought to stabilise both the countryside and the military establishment by integrating elements it could no longer control through the classical administrative frameworks. Thus, I aim to address that oversight by situating these developments within the wider framework of imperial policy and local governance in the later sixteenth century.

It could be argued that by the mid-sixteenth century, in theory, a *timâr*-holder unable to secure sufficient income from his land, or a subject dissatisfied with prevailing socio-economic conditions and excluded from his former social milieu, had five main options to sustain his livelihood: migration to major cities, joining the *kapıkulu* (central army) corps, pursuing madrasa education, turning to banditry, or enlisting as a *yevmlü* (mercenary). To understand how the socio-economic conditions of the second half of the sixteenth century affected the presumed surplus population, it is essential first to examine the economic environment of the period. For instance, during a royal hunt in Edirne, Süleyman I summoned the dismissed grand vizier Lütfi Pasha and asked: “Lütfi Lala, in your time the provincial treasury vaults were not full; yet now, under Rüstem’s tenure, there is no space left in the provincial vaults for coin, and countless loads of akçe (silver coin) have even been sent to the Yedikule Treasury. Why was such effort and revenue collection not achieved in your time? What was the reason for this?” To this, Lütfi Pasha responded: “My sovereign, you speak the truth. Yet, in the village where this humble servant resides and in the surrounding countryside, the subjects who in my time

worked four pairs of oxen now manage but two, and those with two can barely sustain a single pair.”¹⁷²

This episode is highly significant for examining both the character of the *çift-hâne* system and the socio-economic structure of Anatolia during the reign of Süleyman I. Given the disproportion between the population growth and agricultural production, it could be argued that holding a *timâr* in much of inner and northeastern Anatolia appears to have lost its former economic advantage for many young men because of the inflation and prolonged war. For instance, as seen from the data taken from Konya and Akşehir, although the number of rural taxpayers nearly doubled throughout the sixteenth century, agricultural production increased by only about 15%.¹⁷³ It is evident that the Ottoman Empire experienced a series of economic problems, which in turn affected the *timâr* system and, by extension, the *çiftlik* system. Grand Viziers explicitly associated these issues with the *çiftlik* holdings, while the state increasingly struggled to pay the salaries of the *kapıkulu* corps.

Regarding this matter, *Kitâb-ı Müstetâb* states that: “...Due to the continuous campaigns and unnecessary expenditures every year, and the failure to uphold the law of Osman, both the provincial and Yedikule treasuries have been entirely depleted. Moreover, for over twenty years, fifty to sixty pouches of gold florins have been issued annually from the inner treasury for the expenses of campaigns and the stipends of the *kapıkulu* corps. Despite this yearly disbursement from the treasury, it barely suffices for the janissaries and the *sipâhis*, while the stipends of other corps members and frontier troops have ceased to be paid.”¹⁷⁴ In the eighth chapter of the book, the chronicler describes how, from the time referred to in the

¹⁷² Yaşar Yücel, *Osmanlı Devlet Düzenine Ait Metinler I: Kitâb-ı Müstetâb* (Ankara: DTCF Yayınları, 1974), 20. This was also something Cook addressed in his book. He argued that by the second half of the century the average household is rarely held more than half of, or a third or even a quarter of a *çift* in some cases. See Michael Cook, *Population Pressure in Rural Anatolia 1450–1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 11. Even though scholars working on tax registers oppose this idea, the explicit expressions of the chronicles, I think, crucially important to reconsider this issue.

¹⁷³ Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World: Population Change and State Breakdown in England, France, Turkey and China, 1600–1850* (Routledge, 2016), 359.

¹⁷⁴ Yaşar Yücel, *ibid.*, 18.

aforementioned history, the cumulative effects of near-constant military campaigns in both the Persia and Rumelia border territories led to widespread impoverishment and social disarray across Anatolia: “...Had there been no such events, from the time recorded in the aforementioned history to this day, there would have been frequent campaigns in both the Persian and Rumeli territories. Due to this, most of the peasants in Anatolia were impoverished and in disarray...”¹⁷⁵

Regardless of the the exact reasons, it is obvious that the transformation of the *timâr* brought significant changes in many aspects of classical Ottoman structures. The transformation of the *timâr* system likely produced three distinct outcomes. The first outcome was undoubtedly concerning the ordinary subjects. The second one was concerning *timâr*-holders, whose lands could no longer sustain them, and who abandoned their *timâr* and turned to banditry or enlisted as *yevmlü*, or joined *kapıkulu* troops after 1570. The third outcome was related to *kapıkulu* troops, who faced worsening conditions and may have turned to banditry or enlisted as *yevmlü* in provincial households. These three responses reflect the divergent reactions of groups exposed to the same pressures but dependent on different sources of income.

As for the first outcome, for instance, the author of the *Kitab-ı Müstetâb* states that: Due to this [prolonged wars], most of the peasants in Anatolia were impoverished and in disarray, and many became brigands and *celâli*, with most of the villages in ruin and desolation...”¹⁷⁶ He further reinforces his argument by stating that: “some of the peasants of the sultan became *celâli* or brigands, and they engaged in banditry”¹⁷⁷ These two episodes frame the emergence of *celâli* and brigand groups as the product of systemic malfunction and degradation rather than isolated disturbances by directly linking the participation of rural subjects in such movements to broader structural failures.

¹⁷⁵ Yaşar Yücel, *ibid.*, 20.

¹⁷⁶ Yaşar Yücel, *ibid.*, 17.

¹⁷⁷ Yaşar Yücel, *ibid.*, 20.

Moreover, in the introduction to the same chapter, the author explicitly attributes the origins of these developments to the reign of Murad III (1574-1595): "...since the time of Sultan Murad, it has been more than twenty-five years that the Code of *Âl-i Osman* has been disrupted, and after this, the practice of military campaigns was initiated by the *sipâhi* and *silahdar*, followed by the Janissary Aga and the viziers..."¹⁷⁸, thereby unambiguously positioning the late sixteenth century as the decisive turning point when systemic disorder began to escalate.

As for the second option, that is, the effects of *timâr*-holders who joined the *kapıkulu* corps, Naima in his history describes the situation as follows: "...When the *timâr* holders entered the Janissary corps, thereafter they would waste time in their duty hours. When the officials of the state requested permission for raids, they would say 'What benefit is there in taking a land after it has been pillaged?' If not, after the disbandment of the regiment, they would reach as far as Beç, and there was no one to prevent the army of Islam. And even when the province of Buda was not protected by the state and complaints were made, they would say, 'One cannot build anything unless a land is destroyed.' With this, the peasants were enslaved, and their villages were ruined and destroyed. For this reason, the strength of the peasantry was greatly diminished, and one could not venture to a *palanka* (wooden fortification) without gathering five or six hundred men from one..."¹⁷⁹

According to him, the *timâr* holders, originally responsible for military service and local governance, increasingly entered the Janissary corps by abandoning their provincial duties. This shift led to the neglect of official responsibilities and military discipline, as evidenced by their refusal to engage in raids. The disbandment of military regiments and the lack of effective state protection, particularly in border regions like Buda, created a security vacuum, as neither the state nor local forces could effectively control the countryside. Also, attitudes of the officials reflect a normalisation of violence and destruction by legitimising disorder. However, this

¹⁷⁸ Yaşar Yücel, *ibid.*, 17.

¹⁷⁹ Naima Mustafa Efendi, *ibid.*, 75-76.

situation is also observable through the numerical data concerning the changing recruitment policy of the empire.

Another document dated H. 975 (1567) reports that certain people who had previously been granted *timâr* began to wear janissary headgear and present themselves in the appearance of *acem oğlanları* (candidate janissaries). Under this guise, they oppressed the subjects. This incident shows that disaffected *timâr*-holders, who had either lost or grown dissatisfied with their traditional positions, began to disguise themselves as Janissaries. This case explicitly reflects the increasing instability within the Ottoman military system, the breakdown of the *timâr* structure, and the social unrest that came with these changes.¹⁸⁰ However, the large number of records from the 1570s concerning *timâr*-holders who failed to participate in campaigns also supports my argument.

Correspondingly, a later document dated H. 1010 (1601) explicitly shows that the assembled bandits in Anatolia, were largely organised in the style of *kapıkulu* troops as follows: “...It was ordered to campaign against the bandits assembled in Anatolia, yet in reality, the bandits here are, for the most part, in the style of *kapıkulu* troops, some presenting themselves as *sipâhi oğlanı*, *silahdâr*, others as *ulûfeci* of the right and left, and others still as *gurebâ* of the right and left. It is impossible to apprehend them as the registers of the *altı bölük* corps are not presently with us. For this reason, there is an excess of them...”¹⁸¹ What makes this document precious is it explicitly states that the mobilised bandits in Anatolia were a heterogeneous mixture of semi-official military elements and irregular actors whose identification and control were complicated by incomplete or missing documentation. This blurred status likely made their containment and regulation particularly challenging for the imperial centre. Furthermore, the subsequent incorporation of these irregular units under state control, by transforming them

¹⁸⁰ “...prior to this, members of the *sekbân* corps who had been granted *timâr*s, along with certain other individuals, wore Janissary headgear and roamed about in the guise of *acem oğlanları* (candidate janissaries), committing acts of oppression and aggression against the subjects...” BOA, MD, no. 3, order no. 79.

¹⁸¹ BOA, İE.DH.00007.00623.001

into a quasi-*kapıkulu* force, can be seen as part of a continuing process from the second half of the sixteenth century.

However, the third outcome concerning *kapıkulu* troops directly concerned the changing structure of the imperial recruitment policy. Until 1520, the Janissaries, the most populous branch of the *kapıkulu* army were around 8 thousand, but then rose to around 12 thousand between 1526 and 1529, and reached about 13 thousand by 1574. That is, in first three-quarters, often regarded as the population growth period, the Janissary corps was relatively stable in number. However, the numbers reached approximately 26 thousand in 1595, doubled compared to 1574 numbers, then surpassed 35 thousand three years later, and by 1609 had risen to around 37 thousand.¹⁸² These numbers tell us something interesting. This increase should be indicative of the shifting recruitment policy, and subsequent incorporation of this surplus population, whether former *timâr*-holders or the idle individuals who joined into various *fesâd* groups, into the army by recruiting them.

Also, it is obvious from the registers that the War of Cyprus (1570-1573) was a turning point for the fate of the *timâr*, since many *timâr*-holders who could use firearms well abandoned or left their lands. It can be further argued that the *kapıkulu* army became, at least partially, a form of employment place for people who tended to be *sekban* (irregular troops) in Anatolia due to their ability. Also, the deficiency originating from the *sipâhi* units in the imperial army could have been compensated with increasing the number of Janissaries. Therefore, the increasing numbers of Janissaries in the second half of the sixteenth century could be interpreted as a shift in the recruitment policy of the imperial centre.

So, if there was a population surplus in the first half of the century, it could be argued that it was not initially channelled into the Janissary corps. Also, despite the dissolution of the *timâr* system and the declining role of the *sipâhi* corps in military campaigns compared to

¹⁸² İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devleti Teşkilatından Kapıkulu Ocakları I* (Ankara: TTK Basımevi, 1988), 613–614.

earlier periods, the imperial administration undertook various efforts to revive the *timâr*.¹⁸³ However, if the increasing intensity of the *fesâd* incidents in the registers would be interpreted as a reflection of an idle surplus population activity, it could be argued that the imperial administration was, at first, reluctant to resolve this issue by recruiting these groups as *kapıkulu* soldiers, a potential triggering factor for their integration into the provincial households, either as workers, or as the sources indicate, the *yevmlü* (mercenaries).

As for the *kapıhalkı* (household), Kunt argues that the *timâr* system, which had traditionally ensured that *timâr*-holders resided within their designated lands and fulfilled military obligations, was increasingly undermined by the growing influence of these households. The neglected local responsibilities weakened the cohesion of the provincial order, as he notes, “*the fact that many timâr-holders were attached to a pasha household was contrary to the logic of the timâr system, since such timâr-holders spent most of their time not in their timârs but in the service of a pasha.*” More critically, he identifies a deeper structural rupture through the practice of granting permanent control over certain state revenues to officials, irrespective of their assigned locations. Even though these “quasi-private properties” imply a sort of ownership rights, it is definitely not an actual proprietorship; rather, it could be regarded as purchasing the usufruct. This development, by undermining the fiscal and administrative flexibility of the classical system, created severe breaches in the provincial order, contributing to the broader processes of decentralisation and the proliferation of semi-autonomous power networks within the empire’s hinterlands.¹⁸⁴

As for the migration, even though it is hard to detect whether this was something preferable for this surplus population as İslamoğlu argued, they might have preferred education or migration to major cities like Istanbul, Edirne, and Bursa for salaried vocations, over

¹⁸³ See, Linda Darling, *Revenue-Raising and Legitimacy: Tax Collection and Finance Administration in the Ottoman Empire, 1560–1660* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 82–110.

¹⁸⁴ İ. Metin Kunt, *The Sultan’s Servants: The Transformation of Ottoman Provincial Government 1550–1600* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 85.

inheriting *timâr* lands. For instance, *Müstetâb* states that: “...and some of them [referring to the subjects] became porters, craftsmen, and prominent peasants in major cities such as Istanbul, Edirne, Bursa, and other important towns...”¹⁸⁵ As for the salaried jobs, one of the most significant indicators of this situation is the steady decline in the daily wages of both skilled and unskilled construction workers since the early sixteenth century. One of the principal reasons behind this trend was the increase in internal migration, which began with the growing interaction between urban and rural areas following the rise in population.¹⁸⁶

However, the migration issue was something that imperial administration aimed to prevent. That is, for an empire whose administrative and economic structure was fundamentally based on agriculture, a land could only prosper and become fertile if it was inhabited by a settled population. In this regard, the following passage in the *Kitâb-ı Müstetâb* is particularly worth noting: “...The current situation is that many of the subjects have now settled in various provinces of the Safavid realm, in the territories of the Tatar khans, and in certain frontier provinces of the Rumeli... What is now referred to as ‘prosperity’ is in fact the prosperity of the subjects, and what is called ‘flourishing lands’ signifies nothing other than the presence of the subjects...”¹⁸⁷

On this matter, the following line reported by Lütî Paşa in the *Âsafnâme* is significant: “...and if the subjects of a certain place flee elsewhere to escape oppression, the governor of that place must send them back to their original location, lest the land fall into ruin...”¹⁸⁸ Naima

¹⁸⁵ Yaşar Yücel, *ibid.*, 20.

¹⁸⁶ Süleyman Özmucur and Şevket Pamuk, “Real Wages and Standards of Living in the Ottoman Empire 1489-1914,” *The Journal of Economic History* 62, no. 2 (2002): 293-321; Şevket Pamuk, “Osmanlı Kentlerinde Tüketici Fiyatları ve Ücretlerine İlişkin Veriler,” in *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Bilgi ve İstatistik* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü Matbaası, 2000); Şevket Pamuk, “Urban Real Wages Around the Eastern Mediterranean in Comparative Perspective, 1100–2000,” *Research in Economic History* 23 (2006); Donald Quartet, *Tüketim Araştırmaları ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Tarihi 1550-1922* (İstanbul: Alfa Yayınları, 2020). Regarding internal migration, see Osman Gümüşçü, “Internal Migrations in Sixteenth Century Anatolia,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 30 (2004): 231-248.

¹⁸⁷ Yaşar Yücel, *Osmanlı Devlet Düzenine Ait Metinler I: Kitâb-ı Müstetâb* (Ankara: DTCF Yayınları, 1974), 20.

¹⁸⁸ Ahmet Uğur, “Âsaf-Nâme-i Vezir Lütî Paşa,” *İslam İlimleri Enstitüsü Dergisi* 4 (1980): 252. For another copy, see Rudolf Tschudi, *Asafnâme des Lutfi Pascha* (Berlin: Mayer & Müller, 1910), 33. “...Und wenn die Untertanen eines Ortes infolge von Bedrückung sich flüchteten und an einen andern Ort kämen, dann soll der Gouverneur jener Gegend sie an ihren alten Ort zurückschicken, auf daß das Reich nicht entvölkert werde...”

recounts this matter as follows: "...At that time, the reaya too, having gained confidence, violently killed the judge of Požega. However, the commander-in-chief, considering this damage as the lesser of two evils, gave them a written pardon, stating 'I ordered it; it is blood spilt in vain. When some objected, claiming that issuing such a pardon amounted to granting permission, he replied, 'Should we inspect the frontier reaya and drive them into enemy lands?' In the end, this leniency yielded highly favourable results..."¹⁸⁹

These chronicles identify the reign of Murad III (1574–1595) as the pivotal juncture marking the onset of systemic decline. However, the economic landscape of the first half of the sixteenth century was significantly different than that of the second half of the century, and the impact of this economic situation on various groups and individuals within Ottoman society naturally changed over time. The gradual deterioration of the financial situation¹⁹⁰ and the loss of the former role of the *kapıkulu* army could be seen as key factors in the changing character typologies of the individuals and groups involved, directly or indirectly, in the Anatolian incidents. That is, given the effects of aforementioned developments, it could be assumed that the structure of such armies evolved from the armies composed predominantly of former *timâr*-holders and *fesâd* groups to the *kapıkulu* soldiers.

From the 1570s onwards, however, a different situation began to take place, closely paralleling the sharp rise in the number of *kapıkulu* troops. That is, the effects of the War of Cyprus on the *timâr* system appeared on an unprecedented scale. Firstly, the campaign, which largely relied on Anatolian *sipâhi*, spanned four years.¹⁹¹ This was a critical rupture in the early modern Ottoman military structure, which had traditionally conducted campaigns on a single front and within the established season between *rûz-ı hızır* (spring) and *rûz-ı kâsım* (autumn).¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Naima Mustafa Efendi, *Tarih-i Naima*, c. 1 (Ankara: TTK Yayınları, 2014), 161.

¹⁹⁰ Ahmet Tabakoğlu, *Gerileme Dönemine Girerken Osmanlı Maliyesi* (İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 1985).

¹⁹¹ Mustafa Akdağ, "Timâr Rejiminin Bozuluşu," *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi* 3, no. 4 (1945): 419–431.

¹⁹² A document explicitly notes that the military should be ready by the Nowruz according to the ancient custom, so that the army would be able to march on time. TSMA.E. Document 0878.

This triggered a wave of leaving without permission, land abandonments, land reassignments, and desertion among soldiers. The *mühimme* registers contain quite detailed information on this issue, particularly regarding desertions without permission. For instance, Seyyid Gazi, who held a *timâr* worth 4,200 *akçe* (silver coin), fled from Cyprus without permission.¹⁹³ Another record presents a group of *sipâhi* who deserted their posts or fled without permission during or after the Cyprus campaign. It names specific individuals such as Ahmed, Arslan, Durmuş, and others, with details about the value of their *timâr* lands in different regions. Also, the official decision to confiscate their *timâr* lands due to absence highlights the Ottoman state's increasing difficulty in maintaining the traditional *timâr* system.¹⁹⁴ Another document similarly records the desertion of Ömer, a *timâr*-holder who left Cyprus without official permission, and was absent from military inspection at the fortress. Consequently, the state confiscated his *timâr* and reassigned it to another individual, Mehmed.¹⁹⁵

As to the desertions, for instance, a *sipâhi* named Yunus, holding an 8,000 *akçe* (silver coin) *timâr* fled Cyprus without permission.¹⁹⁶ Another record involves Hamza, a *timâr*-holder fled the Cyprus campaign without authorisation. Therefore, a new imperial order was issued to redistribute his *timâr*.¹⁹⁷ Another document notes that Süleyman and Hamza, holding 4,000 *akçe* (silver coin) *timârs* fled the Cyprus campaign without authorisation, and with a decree followed, Mehmed appointed to one of these confiscated *timârs*.¹⁹⁸

Also, there are some documents indicates voluntary resignation of the *timâr*-holders. For instance, a document reports that Hoca Bayram Çavuş, who holding a *timâr* valued at 9,347 *akçe* (silver coin) in the Sultancık village and other locations, had failed to join the Cyprus campaign. Consequently, it was proposed that both his *timârs* were reassigned to another holder

¹⁹³ BOA, MD, no. 13, order no. 06.

¹⁹⁴ BOA, MD, no 13, order no. 349.

¹⁹⁵ BOA, MD, no. 13, order no. 1042.

¹⁹⁶ BOA, MD, no. 13, order no. 07.

¹⁹⁷ BOA, MD, no. 42, order no. 1459.

¹⁹⁸ BOA, MD, no 42, order no. 1461.

and his position as *çavuş* be revoked. In response, Hoca Bayram requested to continue in military service by receiving a *timâr* of 3,800 *akçe* (silver coin) in Konya, Topludeğnek village and other places. Ultimately, he voluntarily resigned from his former *timârs*. Rather than risking further sanction or complete exclusion, Hoca Bayram opted to resign from his higher-valued *timâr* voluntarily, accepting a smaller one elsewhere.¹⁹⁹ It could be argued that this reflects both the pressures placed upon provincial military elites during the Cyprus War and the adaptive strategies they employed to maintain a place within the socio-military hierarchy, albeit under altered terms.

Another document notes that Lütfi, who had originally been granted a 3,000 *akçe* (silver coin) *timâr* at the outset of the Cyprus campaign, was declared dismissed upon his voluntary resignation. The case of Lütfi highlights a different but complementary aspect of the same phenomenon. Rather than negotiating for a reduced position or alternate posting, Lütfi appears to have completely relinquished his *timâr*, removing himself from the *timâr*-holder ranks. Also, the wording of the records implies this was done by his own will, “*mezkûr ihtiyârıyla*”.²⁰⁰

Moreover, there are documents concerning the reassignment of deserted *timârs* to other holders and the administrative complexities that followed. For instance, Şah Hüseyin, a *sipâhi* holding a 2,955 *akçe* (silver coin) *timâr* had deserted the Cyprus campaign without permission. In consequence, it was ordered that the *timâr* be reassigned to a new holder. The document notes that Kasım, a newly appointed *darende* (candidate for office) who previously lacked a *timâr*, was to receive this vacant post through the standard bureaucratic process.²⁰¹ Interestingly, another report states that while some *sipâhis* of a certain region had complied with orders and joined campaigns such as Cyprus, others had refused to serve. Their *timârs* had subsequently been reassigned to other individuals. However, a problem emerged: the former

¹⁹⁹ BOA, MD, no 8, order no. 526.

²⁰⁰ BOA, MD, no. 15, order no. 1303.

²⁰¹ BOA, MD, no. 42, order no. 1460.

holders, despite having lost their *timârs* due to absence, refused to accept the situation, neither returning to service nor allowing the new assignees to exercise control over the lands and revenues.

This led to ongoing disputes and instability within the region. As a result, an imperial order was issued ordering that, upon confirmation of these reassignments, the new holders should be allowed to exercise their rights according to their imperial *berat* (official deed). Any former holders or opposing claimants were to be barred from raising disputes or making excuses contrary to the law.²⁰² This document provides an invaluable glimpse into the disruptions and conflicts caused by mass desertion during the Cyprus campaign. Not only did desertion necessitate widespread reassignment of *timârs*, but it also undermined the local order, as former holders resisted both their dismissal and the authority of new assignees.

The documents reveal consistent patterns: *timâr*-holders abandoning campaigns without leave, consequent confiscations of their lands, and their rapid reassignment to others, often causing disputes between new recipients and dispossessed former holders. However, these developments not only had a direct impact on the structure of the *timâr* system but was also of considerable significance in shaping *timâr*-holders and *sipâhis* as distinct socio-political actors. Moreover, all these behavioural patterns among *timâr*-holders compel us to reconsider the socio-economic conditions of the period, as holding a *timâr* no longer appears to have been as desirable a position as it had been in earlier. In particular, the actions of dispossessed *timâr*-holders following the loss of their *lands* became a critical aspect of this broader transformation.

For instance, in these documents, the relationship between *ehl-i fesâd* groups and the subjects is conveyed through references to the “sons of Muslims”. However, these are not only records the violent acts of notorious bandits but also exposes a significant social dynamic of the period: the abduction of young Muslim men. For instance, a document dated H. 993 (1585)

²⁰² BOA, MD, no. 23, order no. 771.

refers to the War of Cyprus (1570-1573) during the reign of Selim II (r. 1566-1574), noting that a *sûhte* named Abdülbasir, who had been involved in acts of brigandage since that time, not only raided houses and ambushed roads, but also drew the male sons of the Muslim subjects to his side.²⁰³

The actions of Abdülbasir, particularly his abduction of Muslim youths from rural settlements, can be understood within the wider context of post-Cyprus War instability. The 1570–1571 campaign imposed significant economic and demographic pressures on Anatolian society, disrupting local economies and heightening the vulnerability of young men, especially those lacking secure employment or access to land. In such a climate, figures like Abdülbasir exploited this exposed demographic, abducting young men who, deprived of livelihood opportunities in the aftermath of a prolonged and costly military venture, became susceptible targets for forced recruitment into outlaw bands or coerced labour.

This account, therefore, represents more than an instance of isolated violence; it reveals how the economic deprivation and administrative dislocation resulting from large-scale military operations such as the War of Cyprus created conditions in which rural banditry could thrive. Young men, drawn from a destabilised countryside, increasingly constituted the human resource base for these illicit networks, whether through compulsion or necessity. Abdülbasir's actions can thus be seen both as a product of and a contributing factor to the wider erosion of imperial authority in Anatolia during the later sixteenth century.

Another document dated H. 984 (1576-1577), is a particularly significant as it captures an earlier phase of unrest linked to the activities of *sûhte* bands mentioned in the first document and confirms those incidents by predating them nine years. In other words, this second document belongs to the immediate aftermath of the War of Cyprus (1570–1571). It records that *sûhte* bands continued to assemble and commit assaults against the sons of Muslims, by

²⁰³ BOA, MD, no. 55, order no. 301.

targeting both their persons and property.²⁰⁴ The consequences of the war, marked by economic strain, population displacement, and the disruption of provincial order, might be created a fertile environment for such acts of violence. In this regard, the document not only anticipates but also confirms the continuity of disorder attested in later sources, by placing these events within a broader narrative of post-war upheaval and socio-economic dislocation in the Anatolian provinces of the empire.

However, approaching the *ehl-i fesâd* incidents under the uprising or rebellion title, and solely evaluating them as centre-opposition movements involving the *ehl-i örf* (ruler class), may lead to inaccurate conclusions if based on such a presumption. Therefore, it is crucial to periodically analyse the participation of the subjects in these movements and identify the reference points of individuals and groups. Such analysis is essential for any inference or interpretation to be made in this regard.

²⁰⁴ BOA, MD, no. 28, order no. 314.

Conclusion

This study has sought to explore the origins and gradual evolution of the concept of *fesâd* and its concrete manifestation through the label *ehl-i fesâd* as one of the central components of the Ottoman imperial toolkit in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Rather than treating *fesâd* merely as a synonym for rebellion or brigandage, the thesis has argued that it functioned as a highly flexible political instrument through which the state eliminated rival factions within the palace and, individuals and groups that posed a threat to imperial authority in provincial territories. While previous academic research has often addressed *fesâd* groups associated with ordinary uprisings, this thesis has shifted the focus towards the evolution of the term itself, tracing its development through selected incidents. By approaching the concept without imposing pre-existing value judgements such as rebellion, uprising, or brigandage, the study has attempted to situate *fesâd* within the political vocabulary of the empire, as a tool of internal consolidation and administrative control over imperial subjects.

The analysis of continuous *mühimme* registers provided valuable evidence for reconstructing the gradual development of this mechanism. The earliest surviving examples of *fesâd*-related records, dating to the final years of Mehmed II's second reign (1551-1581), revealed that the term was initially employed within the palace, serving as a means of eliminating rival political factions. This early phase differs significantly from the broader use of the concept in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when it became closely associated with the management of provincial unrest and socio-political instability.

The reign of Selim I (1512-1520) marked a significant turning point, as the eastward territorial expansion of the empire brought the state into closer contact with rival powers and contested frontier zones of influence. This, in turn, expanded the scope of *fesâd*, by incorporating the *kızılbaş* groups and nomadic Turkmen communities into this category. The thesis has argued that this shift reflects not only changing political priorities, but also the needs

of the empire to develop more sophisticated and rhetorically effective instruments of governance. In this sense, the study offers a contribution to the understanding of Ottoman political culture by revealing how the *fesâd* concept functioned not as a static label, but as a dynamic instrument, which was shaped by broader socio-political transformations of the time. It invites further research into the deployment of other discursive tools to regulate imperial authority, as well as how those labelled as *ehl-i fesâd* navigated, resisted, or appropriated these definitions.

From the reign of Süleyman I (1520-1566) onwards, it becomes evident that the concept of *fesâd* acquired a more defined and layered character. Rather than referring to a singular phenomenon, *fesâd* expanded to encompass a variety of groups such as *levend*, *sekban*, *sûhte*, *celâlî*, *kızılbaş*, and *yevmlü*. Although these designations existed earlier, over time their meanings diverged, and in imperial orders addressed to provincial officials, each term came to denote distinct categories. This semantic differentiation evolved in parallel with the numerous transformations the Ottoman state experienced throughout the sixteenth century, including demographic growth, monetary depreciation and devaluation, the transformation of the *timâr* system, internal migration, and fluctuations in daily wages. While previous scholarship has predominantly examined these developments through fiscal sources, this study instead prioritises narrative accounts preserved in contemporary chronicles and *mühimme* registers. This approach has revealed how these notions profoundly shaped the social fabric of sixteenth century Anatolia beyond the patterns suggested by numerical data alone.

One significant finding concerns the mobilisation of various *fesâd* groups in Anatolia during the Prince Bayezid Affair (1559-1562), which has been demonstrated through different categories of primary sources. The precise relationship between Bayezid's army and broader demographic or social phenomena such as population growth and unrest remain a contested

subject. Many arguments have relied on speculative interpretations of numerical data from tax registers.

However, by incorporating a wider range of sources, this study has sought to demonstrate that a considerable number of young men from Anatolia, classified as *ehl-i fesâd*, joined Bayezid's forces. In doing so, it addresses a notable gap in the existing literature, offering a more nuanced understanding of the social composition of rebellion in mid-sixteenth century Anatolia and its ties to broader socio-economic dynamics. Moreover, one of the significant debates at this juncture concerns the increasing size of the *kapıkulu* army and its role within the *fesâd* incorporation strategy of the imperial administration. It has been argued that the *kapıkulu* troops functioned as a quasi-employment mechanism, serving as an apparatus through which the central authority sought to integrate *fesâd* elements. Both the numerical data and the chronological analysis of *mühimme* registers regarding the composition of various *fesâd* groups strongly support this argument, by illustrating the evolving relationship between military structures and various *fesâd* groups throughout the period.

Additionally, this study has uncovered noteworthy findings regarding two important factors in the formation of *fesâd* groups: the environment and the diffusion of firearms. Firstly, in contrast to the assumptions of classical historiography, which often presents environmental history as a field preoccupied with artificial correlations between nature and mankind, it has been demonstrated that the Ottoman state itself regarded the environment as a significant structuring factor. Ottoman archival sources contain remarkably detailed information on this subject, revealing that the state perceived the environment not merely in relation to agriculture, but as a force influencing politics and social life alike. Through a close reading of these documents, it has been shown that environmental conditions were actively integrated into administrative reasoning and policymaking, particularly in contexts involving population movements and the regulation of unrest.

Similarly, by addressing the largely underexplored relationship between firearms and *fesâd* groups in the existing literature, this study has demonstrated that the Ottoman state explicitly identified the spread of firearms as a source of *fesâd*. Several examples have been presented to illustrate this connection, by highlighting how individuals skilled in the use of firearms occupied a game-changing position within the provincial unrest dynamics. The state's acute awareness of this development is evident in the stringent measures it implemented to control the dissemination and use of firearms. In doing so, this research has shown that firearms were not merely instruments that enhanced the power of conventional armies, but also exerted significant influence over various internal parameters of the state, including security, provincial governance, and social mobility.

Ultimately, by evaluating the collective structure of *ehl-i fesâd* groups and analysing the common behavioural patterns they exhibited, this study has undertaken a detailed examination of the sixteenth century conditions that triggered these formations. The findings allowed to test the current debates in the literature with archival sources, demonstrating that the socio-political and economic conditions of the sixteenth century played a decisive role both in the emergence of *fesâd* and in shaping the shared behavioural patterns of these groups.

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