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***ASÂKİR-İ SERHAD* – GUARDIANS OF THE EMPIRE
IN AN AGE OF UNCERTAINTY:
THE OTTOMAN FRONTIER ON THE SAVA
AND THE MIDDLE DANUBE IN THE 18th CENTURY**

Abstract: After the establishment of the border with the Habsburg Empire, the defense of the Ottoman Empire along the Danube and Sava rivers necessitated the establishment of new mechanisms. This study presents a structuralist attempt to systematize the incoherent military organization at the border in various border provinces; define the structure, means, and forms of administration; and, most importantly, to trace the changes in military organization throughout the 18th century. The frontier was divided into separate sectors in accordance with information collected from archival sources along with minor historiographical additions in accordance with consideration of the *longue durée*. The institutions of the *kapudan* and the *muhafiz*, how they were related to one another, and their position within the military organization will be more closely investigated and new interpretations will be given. The question of how the military capacity was organized will be meticulously examined, and lists of fortress garrisons will be presented with a focus on differences between times of war and peace. These will establish frameworks for further research.

Keywords: Danube, Sava, 18th century, *serhad*, *serhad kulu*, *kapudan*, *muhafiz*.

Researchers still have not established a fully clear understanding of how the 18th century Ottoman–European frontier along the Sava and the middle of the Danube was organized. Due to changes in various frontier defense systems and command jurisdictions, it is incredibly difficult to trace all the actors involved in local changes or to make credible interpretations. The goal of the study was to carry out a comparative examination of the frontier and the border regions along the rivers within the *eyalet* of Bosnia and the *sancak* of Smederevo (*Semendire*). The basic aim is to outline the structure of the Ottoman defenses, determine various models of military organization, and ascertain a coherent system within which these various systems functioned. This is not a study of the

army, military units, or the number of fortress garrisons, but rather of the organization of the Ottoman military defense against Europe in this region. Contemporary literature has established how the *kapudanlık* operated in the *eyalet* of Bosnia as a unified institution. It has also established that the Belgrade *muhafız*, who had the rank of vizier and the title of pasha, had certain jurisdictions over a significantly larger area than the *sancak* of Smederevo. What remains largely unknown, however, is how the government and administrative systems in the area around Šabac (*Böğürdelen*) and the *nahiye* of Šabac were organized, and which has the subject of recent studies.¹ The interconnectedness of these frontier defense systems and how they functioned during times of war and peace is the basis of the study presented here. During the 18th century, there were significant changes along the frontier between Europe and the Ottoman Empire. The decentralization of Ottoman rule caused important and sometimes abrupt changes in military organization and in jurisdictions, command, and the very existence of military units and commands. The nature and extent of these changes will be meticulously examined as part of this study of how the Ottoman defense operated.

1. Frontier Defense System

Research into the Ottoman frontier is invariably connected to the meaning and use of the Ottoman term *serhad/serhat*. During the period of conquest, the border zone was considerably wider, and before the introduction of Ottoman administrative organization in the conquered territories, the *vilayets*² functioned as specific territorial units organized around the *gazis*, or fighters for the Faith, led by *uc beyleri*, or march leaders. By the 18th century, the term *serhad* had disappeared from the sources and were replaced by the terms *nizam-ı serhad*, or troops of the frontier, and *serhad-ı/hudud-ı islamiyye*, or the borderlands of Islam. By this time, it was no longer possible to draw parallels with the organization of the *serhad* and the institutions dating from the early period of the Ottoman conquests.³ Therefore, in the sources, this term refers exclusively to the frontier. It is also important to bear in mind that the notion of a state border presented in Ottoman documents dealing with the delineation of a frontier area (*hududname* or *sinirname*), did not refer to a strictly defined line. The first time a precise land border was established through a treaty concluded in 1699 and was based on reports from members of a border committee and from cartographers and military engineers on both sides. If the border fell along a river, the waterway was not divided, and both sides were able to make use of navigable waters.⁴

When the Ottoman border was returned to the Sava and Danube rivers after the Great Turkish War (1683–1699), a need arose for new ways to manage the frontier. After 1699,

¹ Tričković 1970; Pavlović 2017.

² The term *vilayet* has multiple meanings. In the early period of the Ottoman conquest, it was used more broadly to designate a country or territory—for example, the *Sırp Vilayeti*, or Serbian Land. *Vilayet* was often used to refer to conquered territory in which Ottoman rule had not yet been consolidated. Beginning in the 19th century, this term was used to indicate an Ottoman province. (Šabanović 1959: 32–35).

³ Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı, Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı, Osmanlı Arşivi, İstanbul, Bab-ı Asafî, Divan-ı Hümayun, Mühimme Defterleri, No. 186, hüküm 478; 187/97; 157/593 (BOA. A. DVNS. MHM. d.).

⁴ Ágoston 2020: 416–420; Pelidija 1989: 43–44.

Bosnian territory became vulnerable to attack from the Austrian army on multiple sides; however, this was not the case in the *sancak* of Smederevo. Until the late 18th century, enemy raids originating from the Austrian Banat were not expected, which also determined how this part of the border was defended. A clear yet informal division of the frontier into three defensive lines emerged based on the main points for possible incursions by the enemy army: Belgrade and the lines along the Danube and the Sava rivers. The line along the Sava and east of the Drina, which was legally part of the *sancak* of Zvornik (*İzvornik*), was adjoined to the border line within the *eyalet* of Bosnia, where territories were named according to the most important border fortifications or a river: the Sava Frontier (*Sava-i serhad*), Bihać Frontier (*Bihke-i serhad*) and the Kilis Frontier (*Kilise-i serhad*).⁵ There was an exception to this only between 1718 and 1739 when both banks of the Sava and most of the *sancak* of Smederevo belonged to the Habsburg monarchy.⁶

According to composition and variety, and primarily by the number of military units, the Belgrade fortress was almost equal to all other total military capacities in the interior of the *sancak* of Smederevo put together. To finance the military defense of the frontier, the Belgrade vizier was given other provinces in the *arpalık* along with the task of financing the provincial units, known as *yerli kulu*, or *serhad kulu* in areas outside of the *sancak* that he governed.⁷ Other than financial responsibilities, it cannot be concluded that this led to the creation of new administrative or defensive structures. Although Belgrade was the most significant defensive position on the middle Danube, the organization of the defensive line in the interior had its own local specificities. Strategically, the protection of Belgrade's broader hinterland fell to the fortresses on the Danube and the Sava. If war broke out, the main enemy attack was expected to be on the Sava. Because of this, the most significant resources were deployed in Belgrade and Šabac, which required a specific form of military organization for the Sava line.⁸

The Danube line had no elements of a separate command. The system of fortifications along the Danube and in the hinterland served as a line of defense against the enemy, with each fortification functioning independently. *Palankas*⁹ were built in the interior to protect the main trade and travel routes and to ensure the safety of the immediate surroundings. Defense along the rivers was similarly organized. There was a single command of the river fleets, such as those on the Danube and the Sava, but in practice the viziers named the *kapudans* or “captains” of small river flotillas called *şaykas*¹⁰ within their own *sancaks*. For example, the Smederevo captains protected the Danube between Belgrade to the west and to the Ram fortress (*Hram, İpek*) to the east. There were fifty-four kilometers of waterway between Belgrade and Smederevo, which was similar distance along the roads between two *palankas* in the *sancak*. The commanders of the *yerli kulu* garrisons—the

⁵ BOA.A.DVNS.MHM. d. 125/8; 125/19.

⁶ Pelidija 2003: 56–60.

⁷ This was a principle of allocating to the vizier administrative authority over another *sancak*, in addition to his primary one, that was governed by his representative—a *kethüda* or *mütesellim*.

⁸ Pavlović 2017: 229–320.

⁹ There were two types of Ottoman fortifications: fortresses and *palankas*, forts built with wooden palisades.

¹⁰ N.B. The *kapudan* of a fortress and the *kapudans* of *şaykas* were completely separate positions and had no relationship to one another.

muhafizes, the unit officers under their command, and the captains of the *şaykas*—certainly had the authority to patrol their own areas. One of their most important responsibilities was the protection of river crossings, for which the *yerli kulu* from the nearest *palanka* were responsible. Some of the river units were deployed in the hinterland along the Great Morava, the final section of the Morava River.¹¹

Significant fortresses along the Danube line dating from the classical period (Smederevo, Ram, Ada Kale, Gradište, Golubac, and Poreč) did not have a strategic role in the 18th century. Until the 1780s, the *muhafiz* of Smederevo had no need to be constantly on guard, but the establishment of the Banat military frontier and the Austrian army's appearance on the Danube led to changes in the Ottoman defense. This was best reflected in the appointment of a certain Halil Pasha as the *muhafiz* of Smederevo in 1789.¹² At the same time, a dignitary in Niš with the title of pasha carried out the civilian role of *mütesellim*. Judging by the decision to send a pasha to Smederevo to serve as *muhafiz*, this strategic move was highly significant for the Sublime Porte. Smederevo protected Belgrade from enemy raids, along with access to Belgrade from the east and south. In the late 18th century it was threatened by Osman Pasvantoğlu's troops. It had fewer *yerli kulu* garrisons than Šabac (138 versus 272 after 1739). The first recorded reinforcements made to the Smederevo Fortress began in 1769, when the gates and bridges were repaired. There are records concerning a delivery of stockades from Bosnia to Šabac and Smederevo in 1783, along with cannon for Smederevo that same year. The number of standing *yerli kulu* was also increased to 150 just before the war in 1788. Other forts were also reinforced around the same time. A garrison of 200 soldiers at Ada Kale was mentioned in 1785, along with *gönüliyan*, shock troops known as the *serdengeçti*, and *Arnavud eşkiyası*.¹³

In 1699 the frontier in the *eyalet* of Bosnia was surrounded by enemy territory. However, not every border area was treated equally. Special orders from the sultan indicated which border areas of the *eyalet* might be accessible to the enemy's regular army, and which might be to a smaller number of regular units and a larger part of the irregulars, which the Ottoman sources referred to as the *serhad kulu* (frontiersman) and *akıncı* (Uskoks). During times of war, most soldiers came from the enemy side of the Sava at two crossings: one near the Gradiška¹⁴ fortress and the other near the Brčko *palanka*. A smaller number of soldiers crossed near the Brod fortress. The enemy army would also attempt to reach Banja Luka from Gradiška, Gračanica from Brčko, Šabac and Belgrade from the Rača *palanka* (on the Srem side), and Derventa from Brod. In addition to direct attacks across the Sava, enemy raids across the banks of the river were not uncommon.¹⁵

¹¹ Pavlović 2017: 165.

¹² Ibid., 2019: 87; Ilić Mandić 2020.

¹³ Ibid., 2019: 86–87. The term *eşkiya* referred to bandits who were often a source of recruitment for volunteers in the service of the vizier during the 18th century and served either alongside the *yerli kulu* or in direct personal service to the vizier as *kapu halkı*, which rendered the difference in meaning between bandits and troops almost moot.

¹⁴ The Austrian fortress at Stara Gradiška, where the Habsburg army gathered for an attack on the Bosnian side, was located across from the Ottoman fortress on the left bank of the Sava (Gezer 2020: 73–74).

¹⁵ Rašid, Čelebizade 2013: 337; Novili 2016: 62–63; Subhi 2007: 376; Pelidija 2003: 239–241; Feldzüge: 201–202; Čaušević 2004: 24.

In the 18th century, not all stretches of the Sava in Ottoman territory were handled uniformly. The capacity of the stretch of the river marking the border with the Habsburg monarchy was overlooked, while downstream from the Rača and Noćaj *palankas* to the confluence of the Danube was considered a navigable waterway. Throughout the 18th century, the parts of the Sava that passed through Ottoman territory was not given the same consideration. Part of the frontier up to the Brod fortress was secured by the army from the *palankas* and fortresses along the river and in the hinterland. The border forts built right on the river (Dubica, Gradiška, Brod, and others) were part of defense system that also included those located nearby hinterland (Doboj, Tešanj, Jajce, and others) and those farther afield (Maglaj, Kozarac, Tuzla, and others). The eastern part of the Sava line was more heavily fortified after 1739, when the Kobaš fortress was again repaired and Derventa and Brčko were fortified. In addition to building new fortifications and filling the ranks of the *yerli kulu*, new detachments were added to the old ones. This mainly pertained to fortifications in the nearby hinterland and was meant to strengthen their defensive capabilities. The *yerli kulu* at these fortresses were responsible for securing peace and security of the population under threat of *Uskok* incursions from the left bank of the Sava. Continually reinforcing fortifications, building new ones, and increasing the number of *yerli* garrisons was meant to increase the overall defense of the frontier during highly uncertain times and in anticipation of continual raids and new wars.¹⁶

An enemy army attacking from the east of the confluence of the Drina and the Sava, would be directed toward Šabac and Belgrade, so these two fortresses worked in tandem beginning from the construction of the Šabac fortress. The Šabac fortress served to shield the flank of the Belgrade fortress, and during the Ottoman defensive wars of the 18th century, it became clear that severing the link between the Šabac and Belgrade fortresses would result in either a punishing siege or the Šabac fortress falling into Habsburg hands.¹⁷ During peacetime, the population on the right bank of the Sava was constantly harried by raiding parties. The villages in the *nahiyes* of Upper and Lower Mačva were thus given *derbend* status.¹⁸ This became more of an issue after the 1737–1739 war when the *reaya* complained of enemy attacks and the mistreatment of the Zvornik *kapudan*. Consequently, in 1747 the Sublime Porte ordered the vali of Bosnia and the Belgrade vizier to launch an inquiry and oversee the situation. The vali and vizier were firmly reminded they had an obligation to hold and protect (*hıfz ve zabt*) the Šabac fortress during times of war. The same document states that at some earlier period, the Belgrade *muhafız* had been responsible for paying the

¹⁶ Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı, Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı, Osmanlı Arşivi, İstanbul, Bab-ı Defterleri. Büyük Kale Kalemi, Defterleri, 32295; 32318; 32410 (BOA. D.BKL. d.), Muallim Cevdet Tasnifi Belgeleri. Cevdet Bahriye, 95/4554 (BOA. C. BH.)

Kreševljaković 1991: 151, 154, 158; BOA.A.DVNS.MHM. d. 144/094; Handžić 1976: 109–110.

¹⁷ Pelidija 2003: 239–241; Feldzüge: 201–202.

¹⁸ Dangerous areas with access to enemy territory were classified as *derbends*. Villages with *derbend* status were those whose population had *reaya* status and were armed and on standby to provide defense in exchange for a lesser tax burden (Bojanić 1974: 140; Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı, Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı, Osmanlı Arşivi, İstanbul, Bab-ı Asafî. Divan-i Hümayun Sicileri. Bosna Ahkâm Defterleri, 1/15 (BOA.A.DVNS.AHKR. d.).

wages of the Šabac *yerli kulu*.¹⁹ The reasoning given for this was that the Sava line was so long that the Bosnian army was unable to carry out its regular duties in a timely manner across such a large distance. The Šabac *nahiye* was located far from its administrative center in Zvornik. Natural barriers and intense, ongoing pressure from across the border also contributed to this decision.

During war, in addition to the army from the Šabac fortress, which in peacetime was responsible for maintaining law and order, the Sava line was also manned by garrisons from Belgrade under the command of the Belgrade vizier and the *serasker* of the Rumelian front. This confirmed that, in times of peace and war, the part of the Sava defense line that extended from Rača to Šabac (and quite possibly to Paleš/Palej, now Obrenovac) was under the shared protection of the Belgrade and Bosnian *yerli kulu* from Šabac and Zvornik.²⁰ The Šabac *yerli* garrisons were thus under the command of the Šabac *muhafiz* but financed by the Belgrade vizier. It can be surmised that the Šabac *muhafiz* maintained an independent command during peacetime, but he served under the Belgrade vizier as *serasker* when hostilities broke out. How much informal involvement the Belgrade vizier had in the command of the *yerli kulu* in Šabac beyond his formal authority remains an open question, as it does for the other fortifications with *yerli* garrisons he financed. There is no information about this in the sources. It should be noted that the funds for the Šabac *yerli kulu* came from *cizye mukataa*²¹ from the Šabac *nahiye*, which were transferred to the *hazine*, or treasury, of the Belgrade vizier. This only increased the chances that the vizier and his representatives would abuse their authority.²² By the mid-18th century, however, the Belgrade vizier had fewer possibilities to control the *yerli kulu* within their immediate surroundings.

2. Frontier Defense Administration

Ottoman military organization during peacetime was not the same as during war. During times of peace, there was no unified military command. Military structure and command over the garrisons was not based on territory but rather on a clear hierarchical organization of garrisons and their commanding officers. When military operations began, a *serkasker* named to command the front and was placed in command of all regular and irregular formations and the local mustered population (*nefr-i 'amm*). In the 18th century the Bosnian *vali*, the Rumelian *vali*, or the Belgrade vizier were not only given the title of *serasker* (commander-in-chief) of the Sava and Danube Frontiers but were also required to personally carry out the duties of the one. The *seraskers* sent orders to muster troops, to the commanders of the *sipahi*, Janissary, and *yerli kulu* units. In the next phase of preparations,

¹⁹ The duties of the Belgrade vizier to protect the Šabac Fortress and pay the *yerli kulu*'s wages had no influence on the Šabac fortress's change in status, and especially not on the administration of the *nahiye*. The Šabac *nahiye* was not attached to the *sancak* of Smederevo, and throughout the 18th century the transfer of *timars* was noted in the registers as being within the *sancak* of Zvornik and the *eyalet* of Bosnia (Orijentalni institut – Arhiv, Sarajevo, Timari Bosna, Zvornik, Klis, Hercegovina, 245/1, 104–165 (OIS, Arhiv, AO).

²⁰ Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı, Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı, Osmanlı Arşivi, İstanbul, BOA. C. AS. – Muallim Cevdet Tasnifi Belgeleri. Cevdet Askeriye, 704/29556-1-2 (BOA.C.AS.); Pavlović 2017: 165, 247, 296.

²¹ *Mukataa* was a form of tax farming.

²² BOA.C.AS. 965/41989-1-1.

when the enemy had already entered Ottoman territory and important fortifications were under threat, the vali or the vizier would name a commander or *serdar* for a section of the front or a particular battle.²³ In these cases, the *serdar* was in command of all available units at the front. Most often the *kapudans* in command of the *yerli kulu* were installed as *serdars* to defend the Sava line but the defense of the Danube line was more specific.

Until the late 18th century, enemy incursions into the *sancak* of Smederevo were expected to come from across the Sava and head directly for Belgrade, so the *seraskers* of the front—either the Belgrade vizier or the *vali* of the Rumelian *eyalet*—was charged with the entire defense of this part of the frontier. It appears that the Sava and Belgrade frontiers along with some other less strategically important fortifications along the Danube, were under this *serasker's* jurisdiction. It is important to mention that the viziers of the *sancaks* in the *eyalet* of Bosnia could fulfill the function of a *serdar*, but it seems this was most often the case when the army from Bosnia was sent to one of the eastern battlefields.²⁴

Defense of the Ottoman frontier along the Danube and the Sava rivers had some other specificities, such as different roles for the Bosnian vali and the Bosnian viziers in comparison to the vizier in Smederevo and his superior, the vali of the Rumelian *eyalet*. The specific roles of two institutions, the *kale-i kapudan* (*kapudan* of a fortress) and the *muhafiz* should be emphasized. As part of the decentralization of the 18th century, the vizier in Belgrade was tasked with organizing the defense of the province and the Ottoman frontier. Apart from periods that were only nominally peaceful, the vali of the *eyalet* of Rumeli had no real authority in these matters during peacetime. During the transitional period, the military and administrative organization of the Bosnian *eyalet* was less decentralized than it was in the *eyalet* of Rumeli or the *sancak* of Smederevo. The reasons for these differences between the two neighboring provinces lie in the cohesiveness of Bosnian territory and in how all affairs were concentrated in the hands of the vali as the main administrator of the *eyalet*. The Belgrade vizier had responsibilities that matched the those of the Bosnian *vali*, but the Bosnian viziers remained in the vali's shadow. The administrators of the *sancaks* of Zvornik, Herzegovina, and Klis were also exempt from securing finances for the *yerli kulu*. Funds came from the Bosnian *vali* and went directly to the commanders of the armies at the fortresses: the *kapudans* and the *ağas* of the Janissaries.²⁵ As the *yerli kulu* garrisons took over the defense of the frontier, the office of the *kapudan* in the *eyalet* of Bosnia became more important than the role of vizier. The *kapudans* in the *eyalet* of Bosnia and the *muhafizes* in the *sancak* of Smederevo had very similar responsibilities.²⁶

Previous studies have not shed enough light on the office of the *muhafiz* within the Ottoman frontier.²⁷ In the historiography, the *muhafizlık* is primarily defined as a specific office within the Ottoman military organization. In this sense, it refers to a specific administrative unit—a *serhad*—governed according to a particular regime and under the administrative authority of a *muhafiz* who was directly subordinate to the central government.

²³ BOA.A.DVNS.MHM. d. 1442/139.

²⁴ Bosnavi 1979: 29; Novili 2010: 67; Subhi 2007: 388/389.

²⁵ BOA.A.DVNS.MHM. d. 125/8, 138/121, 1442/139; Kreševljaković 1991: 52.

²⁶ Hickok 1997:111; Muvekkit 1999: 415.

²⁷ This is supported by the fact that no such term appears in the *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Encyclopedia of Islam).

This claim, however, can be challenged by suggesting that the institution of the *muhafiz*²⁸ did not have the actual authority that it was believed to have had in previous historiography.²⁹ The basic issues were territory and the nature of this institution's authority. The sources indicate that the Belgrade vizier, who had also been appointed *muhafiz* of the Belgrade *yerli kulu* formations, paid from his own *hazine* the wages of the *yerli kulu* units outside the *sancak* given to him to administrate.³⁰ Financing of garrison can rightly be understood as a form of jurisdiction over the command of the units, at least during times of war.

During the 18th century, the Belgrade vizier became increasingly less capable of controlling the *yerli kulu* within his immediate surroundings, and those outside of his *sancak* certainly had more autonomy to act. Due to financial responsibilities, he often involved himself in certain issues regarding the authority of the vizier in the neighboring *sancak* of Kruševac (*Alacahisar*), but this should not be associated with any sort of formal jurisdiction.³¹ Finally, even if he did have complete authority over the *yerli kulu*, which is doubtful, this did not mean he had any further jurisdiction over other military affairs, and certainly none over civil matters. For these reasons, it is important to emphasize that the *muhafizlik* should be understood as the service or office of the *muhafiz*, who was the commander of the *yerli kulu* at a particular fortress. In other words, the *muhafiz* was the commander of the new units rather than a commander of a new military precinct in the frontier.

In the historiography, the term *kapudanlık* refers to territory under the civil and military authority of a *kapudan*. Yet it was, in fact, the *office* of the *kapudan* of the fortress—the *kapudanlık*—that had strictly military jurisdiction over a fortress's entire *yerli kulu* or the *yerli kulu* of several *palankas* and fortresses.³² Starting in the mid-16th century, the first *kapudans*, commanders of local auxiliary fortress garrisons, had jurisdiction over the *yerli kulu* of a particular fortification (Gradiška, Jasenovac, Dubica, Kostajnica, Krupa). These were fortifications on the Sava, located at the busiest stretches of the river. At the time the *kapudans* were first mentioned as infantry commanders, the border with enemy territory was not at the Sava, but this area had a more difficult bridge crossing into the *sancaks* of Požega and Pakrac.³³

Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, *kapudans* were given jurisdiction over the *yerli kulu* garrisons at nearby fortresses, which included paying daily wages, installing lower commands, recruiting ordinary soldiers, ensuring the garrisons were properly equipped, etc. There is no mention in the sources regarding the *kapudan*'s territorial jurisdiction nor of any broader authority over other garrisons or civil affairs.

Within the *eyalet* of Rumeli, and primarily within the *sancaks* of Smederevo and Kruševac and parts of neighboring *sancaks*, the commanders of fortifications with *yerli kulu* garrisons, which during peacetime included fortresses and *palankas*, were *muhafizes* without a clear hierarchy of command. No one *muhafiz* was superior to another. Just like

²⁸ The Ottoman suffix *lık* is often misinterpreted. *Muhafizlik*, *kapudanlık*, and *defterdarlık* should be understood as the service, office, or institution of the *muhafiz*, *kapudan*, and *defterdar* respectively.

²⁹ Tričković 1971: 297–303; *Id.*, 1970: 347–349; Pavlović 2017: 305–319.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2017: 293–304.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2017: 118, 233, 301.

³² BOA.A.DVNS.MHM. d. 138/121; Kreševljaković 1991: 52.

³³ *Ibid.*, 1991: 81–87.

the *muhafizes*, the *kapudans* did not answer to each other. The *kapudan* was the direct commander of the *yerli kulu* garrisons at a fortress and also the commander of the first units (*cemaat*) of *farises* or *azabs*, depending on the service from which he had been named, meaning whether he had previously been the *ağa* of the first *cemaat* of *farises* or the first *cemaat* of *azabs*.³⁴ Documents attest to the *kapudan* being frequently referred to as the *muhafiz*.³⁵ The term was used within the context of the *muhafiz-i kale*, the warden or protector of a fortification. It is not clear that the *muhafiz* was in fact the warden of the fortress, as some dictionaries indicate, but nevertheless the term is mentioned in the context of defense and the office assigned to him in this regard. The term *muhafiz-i kale* referred to the service of defender or protector, which fell within the duties of a *kapudan* and was mentioned as synonym for the *kapudan*'s duties.³⁶ In Rumeli, there were no fortress *kapudans*, but the *muhafiz* was seen as an office with similar authority. At some of the smaller fortifications, it was not unusual for the *yerli kulu* garrisons to be made up of only the *mustahfiz*'s units headed by a *dizdar*, who would then be the only commander.³⁷

The *kapudans* used the honor and importance they had gained during the wars of the early 18th century to enrich themselves and extend their political influence through tax farming. From the mid-18th century onward, they can be considered as part of the financial elite rather than belonging strictly to the military elite. As the 18th century drew to a close, the *kapudans* and *muhafizes*, the commanders of the *yerli kulu*, and other representatives of the late 18th century financial elite, began to develop rivalries with the already powerful civil elite. There were two basic consequences of this: greater financial pressure on the *reaya* and the diminishing effectiveness of the *yerli kulu* as a means to defend the frontier and maintain security. This was how things stood when the Austro–Turkish War broke out in 1788, during which the Bosnian *vali* and the Belgrade vizier relied almost exclusively on hired troops in their personal service (*kapu halkı*). It was not uncommon for these mustered soldiers to have been previously known as *eşkiyas* or *levends*.³⁸

3. The Army on the Frontier of Islam

The army that fought to defend the frontier along the Sava and the middle of the Danube was basically divided into units of regulars and irregulars. The regular army consisted of imperial units or *kapı/kapu kulu*. The irregular formations included the *serhad kulu* or *yerli kulu* and the *nefr-i 'amm* (the local mustered population). The elite infantry and cavalry units of the imperial army were made up of Janissaries and *sipahis*. By the end of the 16th century, the need for the style of fighting these units were trained in began to gradually diminish. State revenues and territory decreased during the transition to defensive wars, which directly influenced the effectiveness of the Janissaries and the *sipahis*.

³⁴ In the year 1748/1749, the *ağa* of the first *cemaat* of *azabs* in Banja Luka was el-hac Mehmed Ağa, who was also the *kapudan* of the Banja Luka fortress (BOA.D.BKL. d. 32410 p. 10).

³⁵ The *ağa* of the first *cemaat* of *farises* and the *kapudan* el-hac Süleyman Ağa was also addressed as the *muhafiz* of the Janissary cavalry and infantry at the Prijedor fortress (BOA.D.BKL. d. 32410 p. 99).

³⁶ Pakalın 1993: 564; Redhouse 2000: 789.

³⁷ BOA.D.BKL. d. 32541, p. 1, 5, 10; Kreševljaković 1991: 51–71; Moaćanin 1998: 241–246.

³⁸ BOA.C.AS.927/40082-1-1; Muvekkit 1996: 610; Korić 2016.

Documents also testify to the presence of Janissaries and *sipahis* in the provinces, but they were not significant military elements of defense. Along the Sava and the Danube lines, the numbers of active Janissary and *sipahi* soldiers were not the same in the *eyalet* of Bosnia and the *sancak* of Smederevo. Some studies indicate that by the end of the 17th century, there were no Janissaries at all stationed at the forts in the *eyalet* of Bosnia.³⁹ In the Janissary payroll records, however, there are documents indicating a smaller number of Janissaries stationed at fortifications in the *eyalet* of Bosnia.⁴⁰ In contrast to Bosnia, the Janissaries in the *sancak* of Smederevo were a significant factor at fortifications, particularly in Belgrade where they numbered around 6,000, or 40–50 percent of the *sancak*'s total capacity.⁴¹ As is the case with determining the effectiveness of the Janissaries, it is difficult to determine how many battle-ready *sipahi* there were. According to statistics, it appears that the Bosnian *vali* was more able to rely on the *sipahis* than the Belgrade vizier.⁴² It is important to mention that the true number of *sipahis* assembled cannot always be established. Until the 1770s, the response from the *sipahis* was deemed satisfactory by the central government. *Fermans* containing warnings that the *sipahis* would appear when called up were very common in the late 18th century.⁴³

The most important and effective border army was made up of the *yerli kulu*, which had once been a local auxiliary army recruited from among the *reaya* who were without land or work, or impoverished members of some of the older *kapı kulu* units. Apart from the *reaya*, the ranks of the *yerli kulu* also included relatives of the *ulema* and administrative officials. The *yerli kulu* army was made up of different infantry and cavalry detachments divided into units: *müstahfizes*, *azabes*, *farises*, *gönüllüs* (volunteers), and *beşlüs*. Within the *yerli kulu* units there were also units of *timarlı* and *zaim*, who were under the command of former *timar* and *zeamet* holders and who were then listed as paid mercenaries at the fortresses.⁴⁴ It was not uncommon for organized units to have names like *nizam-ı cedit* (the New Order) or a captain's *cemaat*, etc. All *yerli kulu* units were under the special command of an *ağa*. In addition to the *ağas*, the command also included officers or *zabits*: *kethüda*

³⁹ Gezer 2020: 248.

⁴⁰ There are 80 soldiers listed in the Janissary payroll records for the year 1749, but in the 1769 census, only 20 were listed (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı, Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı, Osmanlı Arşivi, İstanbul, Yeniçeri Kalemi Defterleri, 34311; 34349 (BOA.D.YNÇ.d.). This was also mentioned in the chronicles among the units called up for service, although there is no record of how many reported for duty. At the end of the century, they were primarily *yamaks*, but as a part of the paid forces in personal service to the *vali*, (Muvekkit 1999: 554, 560; Bašeskija 1991: 74).

⁴¹ In Belgrade, there were just over 6,000 Janissaries. The numbers varied between 5,308 (in 1695) and 6,196 (in 1779). One of the major Janissary strongholds on the Danube was the fortress of Ada Kale, or *Ada-ı Kebir* (Pavlović 2017: 281–290).

⁴² According to a list of the *sipahis* from 1711 of those sent to the Russian front, there were 1,569 *timars*, which according to the author was also the number of *sipahis* (Skarić 1930: 8). Based on the *rûznameçe defter* of 1769/1770, it is clear there were around 800 *sipahis* (OIS, Arhiv, AO, 245/1, 104–165). These numbers do not represent the total number of *sipahis* in the *eyalet* of Bosnia. In the year 1768, it is mentioned that 4,000 *timarlıs* and *zaims* were called up to put down a rebellion in Montenegro. Within all of the *sancak* of Smederevo, there were at the most 877 *sipahis* and 26 *zaims* (Ibid., 2017: 268–270; Muvekkit 1999: 58; Bašeskija 1991: 79).

⁴³ Stein 2007: 63–75; Aksan 2007: 54–56.

⁴⁴ Pavlović 2017: 239.

(second-in-command or lieutenant), *alemdar* (standard-bearer), and *çavuş* (sergeant).⁴⁵

River captains and their units were stationed at the Belgrade and Šabac fortresses to protect the waterways. The captains' units provided auxiliary defense for river fortifications, which was even more important for preventing the enemy from crossing the river and creating pontoons.⁴⁶ The most important river fleets were stationed at Šabac and Belgrade, and foremost along the Danube line. The *derbendci* played a particular role during times of war, when their officers were tasked with working alongside civilians to protect territories under threat, and particularly those from which the most income came from the *cizye*.⁴⁷ It was around this time when parts of local volunteer regiments made up of Christians and led by *knezes* (local *reaya* representatives) began appearing alongside the Ottoman army on the battlefields along the Danube and the Sava.

The *yerli kulu* were stationed at fortresses and *palankas* primarily to safeguard the fortifications in the event of an enemy attack. These small garrisons were tasked with policing duties to maintain law and order. They lived with their families in the *mahalles* alongside the civilian population and were engaged in farming and other everyday activities. One part of the *yerli kulu* garrisons were housed exclusively in the fortifications and performed duties related to the fortress itself such as guarding the gates and ramparts. These were units of the *müstahfiz*es under the command of a *dizdar*. Other *yerli kulu* units performed duties outside the fortifications. During war, if there were fortress garrisons that were not under attack, one out of every eight or ten soldiers would be chosen from them and sent out to assist other fortifications under threat or to another front. The remaining army stayed remained at the fortification with the *müstahfiz*es. Units were also organized in the same way in the *eyalet* of Bosnia and the *sancak* of Smederevo, with some fluctuations in capacity throughout the 18th century.

Along the Danube line, the Belgrade fortress had the largest capacity for the *yerli kulu* and provided the main support for the Belgrade vizier. The number of *yerli kulu* at the Belgrade fortress varied between 2,576 (before 1688) and 5,611 (in 1702), or about by two thousand by the end of the 18th century.⁴⁸ The same changes in the total number of *yerli kulu* stationed at all fortifications were also noted in the *eyalet* of Bosnia. Before the war of 1716, records indicate there was a total of 9,316 *yerli kulu*, but according to the 1748/49 census, that number had more than doubled to 22,547.⁴⁹ However, this was not just a matter of an

⁴⁵ Uyar, Ericson 2009: 104–109; Hegyi 2018: 117–137; Özcan 2013.

⁴⁶ Members of the *yerli kulu* garrisons could not be Christians, but at the river fortresses and the surrounding *palankas*, there are records of them being coxswains or rowers. This was the case in Golubac (*Güvercinlik*) and the town of Dobra, where there were 92 rowers, and on the island of Krajina (Old Poreč) 94 Christians were registered, some of whom belonged to *şayka* units. There is no reason to assume that it was any different at other river forts. In Šabac 21 rowers under only one *kapudan* were mentioned (Pavlović 2017: 165).

⁴⁷ BOA.A.DVNS.MHM. d. 126/71; Özcan 2013.

⁴⁸ At the more important fortresses, along with the *yerli kulu*, there were also Janissary garrisons. At the smaller *palinkas*, the *yerli kulu* were the only effective military power. There were 300 of them in Šabac, 100 in Užice and Leskovac, 94 in Hasan Pasha Palankası (now Smederevska Palanka), Karanovac (Kraljevo) 20, Kolari 45–70, Jagodina 60–70, Kragujevac 30–45, Batočina 40–80, Valjevo 40, and so on. (Pavlović 2017: 281–290, 286–292; Tričković 2013: 87–88, 206–207, 307).

⁴⁹ Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı, Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı, Osmanlı Arşivi, İstanbul, Ali Emiri Tasnifi Belgeleri. Ali Emiri Sultan Ahmed III, 052/05193-1-1; 052/05193-1-2 (BOA.AE.SAMD.III);

increase in the number of garrisons stationed at already-existing fortifications. It was also a reflection of newly built ones with larger yerli kulu garrisons.⁵⁰

The conscripted army primarily consisted of civilians who were called up only when needed. They were divided according to those who were paid and those who were not. The recruitment base for the mustered army was partially the same as for the *yerli kulu*. The paid mustered units were, for the most part, made up of those first referred to as *sarucas/sekbans/seymens*, later on as *levends*, and finally by the end of the century as *eşkiyas*, who were part of the *kapu halkı*, (men in personal service to the *vali* or vizier), former commanders, and administrators of the *sancak*. Various groups of volunteer units were formed from the *levends*, among whom were the *serdengeçti*, who served as the vanguard. These units were synonymous with the bravest volunteers who stood in the front ranks and were the first to enter carrying banners during the defense or conquest of a fortress. The term itself, in the context of volunteers, appears along with both Janissary and *yerli kulu* soldiers, and referred to an unpaid mobilized population, although it was most often associated with units of volunteers recruited from the ranks of the *levends*.⁵¹

The precise number of mustered local troops and paid soldiers cannot be established because the lists were compiled by the commanders. Because they were privately financed, usually through funds from the *ayans*, there are no payroll records available in the state archives. From the very start of the 18th century, the brunt of the fighting in the Sava Frontier and the area within the *eyalet* of Bosnia was borne by paid and conscripted *reaya*. Along the Danube Frontier, the need for their increased presence and engagement among the troops was connected to the latter part of the century. This was due to the difference in the level of threat from the enemy in these two areas. The entirety of the *eyalet* of Bosnia, including all three areas under the most serious threat, was under the same threat of attack throughout the 18th century. Until the latter part of the century, the *sancak* of Smederevo was not threatened by the Austrian part of the Banat and in the interior, so the *yerli kulu*, the Janissaries, and small units of mustered troops were able to manage the burden of defense.⁵²

During times of peace when the mustered units were disbanded and only salaried

BOA.D.BKL.d. 32410, p. 219; Pelidija 2003: 138–156.

⁵⁰ In the latter half of the 18th century, the number of garrisons at fortifications right on the river was reduced. According to the 1706/7 census, Gradiška had 558 *yerli kulu*, Dubica 329, and Brod 325 (BOA.D.BKL. d. 32295, p. 2, 3, 5). In the following war, the number of soldiers in Gradiška decreased to 411, in Dubica to 268, and in Brod to 143 (BOA.D. BKL. d. 32318, 2–3). After the 1739 Treaty of Belgrade, the same number of soldiers remained in Gradiška. In Dubica, they were reduced to 152, and in Brod the number dropped dramatically to only 48. (BOA.D.BKL. d. 32410, p. 8, 91, 99). During this time, new fortifications with increased military capacities—the Derventa and Kobaš fortresses and a *palanka* Brčko—were added to the eastern part of the Sava Frontier. Existing fortifications in the nearby hinterland and in the interior were given new *yerli kulu* detachments. The largest army was in Banja Luka. In 1706/1707 it numbered 1,225 soldiers, and according to the census of 1748/1749 that number had increased to 2,413 soldiers (BOA.D.BKL. d. 32410, p. 19).

⁵¹ They were often also called *ölüm eri* (pupils of death). A unit of around 120 soldiers was led by an *ağa*, who often appeared in the *mühimme defters* as one of the most important officials in Belgrade. The ranks were also being filled in the provinces by enlisting the *levends*. Like the *dahis*, ethnic background was very important to them, especially among the Anatolian troops. Another term for these units was *dalkılıç*. (BOA.A.DVNS.MHM. d. 173/933; Subhi 2007: 484; BOA.A.DVNS.MHM. d. 110/247; 126/78; Novili 2016: 76; Pelidija 2003: 351; Özcan 2009; İpşirli 2001).

⁵² Muvekkit 1999: 560; Bašeskija 1991: 266; Sućeska 1965: 95; Pavlović 2017: 121.

troops remained at the fortifications (*yerli kulu* and Janissary), along with those in service to the provincial elite. In peacetime, the *yerli kulu* were responsible for maintaining security in the interior and along the banks of the river. They secured roads, bridges, and other crossings; ensured the safety of the *palankas*; and served as the security force responsible for assisting the *kadis* (judges) by arresting and interrogating those who had committed criminal acts. By century's end, they had managed to bring under control those areas that had been previously unsafe due to banditry. When a stronger response was needed, assistance would come from groups of paid irregulars and those in direct service to military officers and provincial administrators. Toward the end of the century, despite increased numbers at the fortifications, the *yerli kulu* were not able to defend some areas, including the southeastern part of the *sancak* of Hercegovina and northeastern part of the *sancak* of Smederevo. Because of this, the troops hired from the Bosnian *vali*'s and the Belgrade vizier's personal services were the only ones who offered up resistance to the increasingly powerful army of former *ayans*, or warlords, such as Osman Pasvantoğlu.⁵³

Research into the Ottoman army's capabilities in the European frontier during the 18th century has pointed to the limited importance of the *yerli kulu* units and an increasing reliance on mustered troops during times of war. As a result, defensive capabilities became increasingly dependent on powerful private financiers—most often the *ayans*. The types of defensive structures within the frontier depended on anticipated enemy incursions, the way in which the units and the command structure of the defensive forces were organized in the *eyalet* of Bosnia did not differ from the neighboring *eyalet* of Rumeli, as has previously been claimed. In terms of their jurisdiction, the *kapudans* of the fortresses did not differ significantly from the *muhafizes* as an element of the Ottoman defense system, and the term *muhafiz* in fact became synonymous with the office of the *kapudan*. An important segment of research has pointed to the absence of territories with organized administrations and defenses such as the *serhad* and has to a significant extent also challenged conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the *yerli kulu* units, especially concerning their importance in military engagement. It is important to emphasize that the relationship of the viziers toward the *muhafizes* and the nature of their command jurisdiction over the *yerli kulu* are not simple matters and thus require further research. Military jurisdictions and command structures should in no way be linked with administrative or governmental apparatuses, but within the volatile circumstances of the 18th century, particular attention should be given to the position and prerogatives of the vizier's rule and to his officials in the provincial interior.

Translated by *Elizabeth Salmore*

⁵³ Šabanović 1956: 191–195; BOA.C.AS. 1188/53054; Hickok 1997: 153–155; Korić 2016: 224.

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***ASÂKIR-I SERHAD* – ЧУВАРИ ЦАРСТВА У ДОБА НЕИЗВЕСНОСТИ:
ОСМАНСКА ГРАНИЦА НА САВИ И СРЕДЊЕМ ДУНАВУ У XVIII ВЕКУ**

Резиме

Одбрана Османског царства на Сави у Дунаву у XVIII веку, након успостављања границе са Хабзбуршким царством, подразумевала је успостављање нових механизма. Истраживање представља структуралистички покушај систематизације некохерентне војне организације на граници у различитим пограничним провинцијама, дефинисања структура, начина и облика њиховог администраирања и посебно праћења промена војне организације кроз XVIII век. Установљена је подела граничног простора на посебне секторе у складу са подацима из архивских извора уз мање историографске допуне у складу са факторима дугог трајања. Посебно су истражене институције капетана и мухафиза, њихов међусобни однос и положај унутар војне организације, са датим новим тумачењима. Минуциозно је испитан проблем функционалности војних капацитета и представљени су пописи посада утврђења са нагласком на разлике током мирнодопског и ратног периода, те су тиме створени оквири за даља истраживања.

Кључне речи: Дунав, Сава, XVIII век, серхад, серхад кулу, капудан, мухафиз.

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