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Aleksandar Fotić*

University of Belgrade
Faculty of Philosophy
Department of History

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Tracing the Origin of a New Meaning of the Term *Re'āyā* in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Balkans

Abstract: Besides its usage with the primary meanings: 1) social status; 2) subjectship, the term *re'āyā* was used to denote, as many historians tend to claim, "only non-Muslim subjects" from "sometime" in the second half of the eighteenth and in the nineteenth century. The paper demonstrates that this meaning of the term *re'āyā* had already been in use since the first decades of the eighteenth century, and not to the exclusion of but along with other meanings. More frequent replacement of the neutral *shari'ā* term *zimmī(ler)* and the usual official term *kefere* with the word *re'āyā* should be considered a consequence of structural social change taking place in the same century.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, Balkans, *re'āyā*, non-Muslims, eighteenth century

To understand correctly the term *re'āyā* is very important in our efforts to shed more light on the social, economic and political history of the Ottoman Empire. It had more than one meaning, a fact that historians largely failed to recognize until as late as the mid-twentieth century. Even though many are aware of it today, the phenomenon has not yet received a thorough study. The exception is the article of the Czech scholar J. Kabrda, which was based on the analysis of a small number of the then known documents. He raised the most important questions, and suggested how to address them. However, his work remained largely unknown to contemporary historians, not to mention a wider public.¹ After a few introductory notes on Ottoman eighteenth-century social and economic realities, the meanings of the term *re'āyā* will therefore be analysed here in detail.

The history of the eighteenth-century Ottoman Empire is an immensely challenging area of study. Ottoman society was going through long and irresolvable economic crises that affected both Muslims and non-Muslims. Discontent was further fuelled by increasingly frequent military defeats and territorial losses. The technological gap between Western Europe and the Empire was more

* sasafotic@gmail.com

¹ I. Kabrda, "Raya", *Izvestiya na Istorichesko to družestvo v Sofiya* 14–16 (1937), 172–185. Curiously, even in the most comprehensive and widely-known analytical encyclopaedic entry some meanings are omitted altogether, and some are not looked at in detail, see C. E. Bosworth and S. Faroqi, "Ra'īyya", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-ROM Edition, v. 1.0 (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

and more difficult to narrow. Even if significant changes in the areas of administration, army, financial and fiscal policies happened to be well conceived, they received little support even from the majority of the capital's elites, let alone the Empire's drowsy periphery. Traditional ways of coping with a crisis, as a rule entailing regression to "glorious" times and strict obedience to *shari'a*, proved ineffective. Ironically, however, those who offered fresh ideas and believed the way out lay in breaking with tradition and introducing major changes were denounced as the main hindrance to overcoming the crisis.

Yet another target for laying the blame for the situation were those who, during the many wars waged in the eighteenth century, responded, and responded in massive numbers, to the calls of hostile states and rose against their own. The more so as the state, once the wars were over, was too lenient, at least that was what the majority believed, in granting them amnesty, even several-year tax exemption, hoping to retain them as its subjects and entice them back from the countries they had fled to. Thus, the distrust of non-Muslim subjects continued into times of peace. Economic crises, inevitably accompanied by tax rises, and a growing feeling of being powerless to change anything, swayed the impoverished Muslim subjects against those perceived as being covert internal enemies. The safety of Muslims in a Muslim country became an important issue on local levels. As a result, demands arose that non-Muslim subjects be considered untrustworthy, expelled from the *derbendci* and *märtölös* services and disarmed, and that all police work be entrusted to Muslims. Such demands had been voiced before, whenever a crisis broke out, but they had never been so loud.

It is understandable why in 1692, amidst the war with the Holy League, the *kādi* of Manastır/Bitola had been ordered to appoint a certain Mustafa as head of the police force (*märtölös-başı*) in his jurisdictional area (*kazā*). The argument was that *märtölöses* "of Christian *re'āyā* origin" were murdering and oppressing people and should therefore be expelled from the police force and replaced with Muslims.² The policy of distrust as regards the Christian population continued, however, even after the war was over. As a result of complaints lodged by some *kādīs*, in 1704 all *kādīs* of the Central and Left wings of Rumelia received the *fermān* forbidding recruitment into the police force of non-Muslims and Albanians (*zimmī ve Arnāvud tā'ifesinden pāndūr olmayub*) because of their involvement with outlaws. All newly-recruited policemen were to be "Muslims (*Müslimān*) of good conduct and character references".³ A similar *fermān* ordering appointment of "Muslims" was sent in 1749 to the governor of Rumelia

² *Turski izvori za ajdustvoto i aramistvoto vo Makedonija (1650–1700)*, ed. A. Matkovski (Skopje: Institut za nacionalna istorija, 1961), 94–95.

³ *Turski izvori za ajdustvoto i aramistvoto vo Makedonija (1700–1725)*, vol. 3, ed. A. Matkovski (Skopje: Institut za nacionalna istorija, 1973), 11–12. It is worthy of note that the Albanians are therein presented as an ethnically rather than religiously defined group, in the same way as the Roma. That means that they were commonly believed to attach greater importance to

and the *kādīs* of Yenişehir-i Fener/Larissa, Serfice/Servia, Dimotika, Trikala, Veroia, Kastoria, Manastır/Bitola and other places.⁴

None of these measures proved effective. Clusters of similar documents throughout the eighteenth century show that many bands of outlaws were homogeneously Muslim, but also that many were religiously mixed.⁵ Keeping this in mind, as well as the fact that decrees on the disarmament of non-Muslims kept being issued throughout the eighteenth century, it is quite understandable why the Christians felt more and more insecure and mistrustful of a state which was unable to protect them from local dignitaries and their extortions.

The term *re'āyā* was introduced in Ottoman society from Arab Islamic civilization. The adopted denotation of the term was the lowest social class, the “flock”, the mass of common taxpaying subjects. Peasants did constitute the vast majority of *re'āyā* but, broadly speaking, it comprised all taxpayers, including nomads, urban population (craftsmen, merchants) and those members of the *ulemā* (religious and legal scholars) who were not state employees; briefly, all who were not members of the military (*askerī*) class regardless of their religious affiliation and financial standing. Yet, there was a multitude of minor political and social groups which eluded classification into the military class or the ordinary *re'āyā* (so-called *mu'āf ve müselleme re'āyā* – tax-exempt *re'āyā* and, on the other hand, holders of free *baştines* who had *askerī* status even though they worked the land themselves). The line of demarcation between the military class and the *re'āyā* fully depended on the sultan's will or, more precisely, on the needs of the state. Owing mostly to the work of Suraiya Faroqhi, the meaning of the term that refers to political and social category is the meaning that has been most thoroughly examined.⁶ That meaning, in addition to others, remained in use until the beginning of the *Tanzimat* reforms, when the division into *askerī* and *re'āyā* was abolished by the 1839 Edict of *Gülhane*.

It is from that meaning that derived a narrower one referring exclusively to the members of the “peasantry” (*re'āyā* versus *şehirli*). That meaning is evi-

their ethnic affiliation than to the religious affiliation of an individual, a group or a tribe or, in other words, that they did not take their religious affiliation seriously enough.

⁴ *Turski izvori za ajdutstvoto i aramistvoto vo Makedonija (1725–1750)*, vol. 4, ed. A. Matkovski (Skopje: Institut za nacionalna istorija, 1979), 110–111.

⁵ See the multi-volume collection of documents *Turski izvori za ajdutstvoto i aramistvoto vo Makedonija*, published in Skopje 1961–1980, covering the period from 1650 to 1810.

⁶ Bosworth and Faroqhi, “Ra'iyya”; S. Faroqhi “Political Activity among Ottoman Taxpayers and the Problem of Sultanic Legitimation (1570–1650)”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 35/1 (1992), 1–39; idem, “Politics and socio-economic change in the Ottoman Empire of the later sixteenth century”, in *Süleyman the Magnificent and his Age. The Ottoman Empire in the Early Modern World*, eds. M. Kunt and Ch. Woodhead, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Longman, 1997), 105–113.

dent in the Balkans as early as the sixteenth-century – in the *kānūnnāme* for the Bosnian *sancak* (1565) and the one for the *sancak* of Klis (1574): “[As a] *sipāhī’s* [income], for bridal tax, 60 *aķçe* shall be taken from the virgin daughters and 30 *aķçe* from widows; 30 *aķçe* from the virgin daughters of city dwellers and *re’āyā*, and from their widows 15 *aķçe*; the same from the virgins and widows of infidels – 30 *aķçe* for the tax from the richer and 15 *aķçe* from the poor” (*ve resm-i ’arūsāne sipāhiniñ bakire kızından altmış aķçe ve dül ’avretinden otuz aķçe ve şehirlü ve re’āyānūñ bakire kızlarından otuz aķçe ve ve dül ’avretinden on beş aķçe alınur kefereniñ bakire ve bivelereinden dahī kezalik ā’lāsından otuz ve ednāsından on beş aķçe resim alınur*).⁷

The term was widely used with its primary and most general meaning: “population”, “populace”, “inhabitants”, as well as “subjects” and, in this sense, the “people” of a state, Muslim as well as non-Muslim: “subjects of the Sultan”, “Venetian subjects”, “Polish subjects” (*re’āyā-yi Padişāhī*, *Venedik re’āyāsī*, *Leh re’āyāsī*); of a vassal state or region: “the population of Dubrovnik” (*Dübrovnik re’āyāsī*); of a larger or smaller region or settlement: “people of Montenegro”, “inhabitants of Bitola”, “townspeople”, “villagers” (*Karaca Dağ re’āyāsī*; *Manāstir re’āyāsī*; *şehir re’āyāsī*; *karye re’āyāsī*); or meaning any “community”, any “group” of people within the Empire tied together in some way – by the same religion: “Muslim and infidels”; “non-Muslim subjects”; “Orthodox subjects”; “Catholic subjects” (*Müslimān ve keferere re’āyāsī*; *zimmī re’āyāsī*; *Rüm re’āyāsī*; *Lātīn re’āyāsī*); by membership in the same nation, ethnic group, tribe, clan: “Bulgarians and Serbs/Bulgarian and Serbian people”, “Greeks”, “Armenians”, “Albanians”, “Kurds” (*Bulgār ve Sırb re’āyāsī*; *Rüm re’āyāsī*; *Ermenī re’āyāsī*; *Arnāvud re’āyāsī*; *re’āyā-yi Ekrād*); by the same trade or privileges: guardians of the passes; *voynüks* – tax-exempt peasant soldiers; miners; dwellers on pious foundation land (*derbendci re’āyāsī*; *voynük re’āyāsī*; *ma’den re’āyāsī*; *vakf re’āyāsī*).⁸ In order to emphasize the equality of Muslims and non-Muslims, the Reform Edict of 1856 abolished the use of the term *re’āyā* to denote a “subject”, and introduced the neutral term *teba’ā* (follower, member and, hence, subject).

The term *re’āyā* with its general meaning “group”, and hence “people”, was used in the same contexts and cases as the terms *ahālī*, *tā’ife* and *millet*, or as the somewhat less frequent terms *halk*, *cema’at* or *zümre*. There is no doubt that the use of the term with *this meaning was completely class neutral*. Until recently, how-

⁷ *Kanuni i kanun-name za Bosanski, Hercegovacki, Zvornički, Kliški, Crnogorski i Skadarski sandžak*, eds. B. Djurdjev et al. (Sarajevo: Orijentalni institut u Sarajevu, 1957), 77, 88, 128, 136.

⁸ A. Fotić, “Institucija amana i primanje podaništva u Osmanskom carstvu: primer sremskih manastira 1693–1696”, *Istorijski časopis* 52 (2005), 248–251. It should be pointed out that in some documents, especially those concerning the church, *Rüm re’āyāsī* meant not only “Greeks” but also “Orthodox people” in general.

ever, it was almost unknown in Balkan, and not only Balkan, historiographies. That is why we can find misinterpretations of the original documentary material in many cases, misinterpretations which result from assuming or implying social stratum membership.⁹ Curiously, this meaning, albeit by now largely known to the international scholarly community, is not even mentioned by Brill's *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.¹⁰

This lengthy introduction has seemed to me necessary for a clear understanding of the new meaning of the term *re'āyā* which gained wide usage in the eighteenth century – the one referring to non-Muslim populations.

This new meaning, inadequately and imprecisely explained in the early nineteenth century, is included in the first Serbian dictionaries, encyclopaedias and histories, which subsequent historians then used as sources. Vuk Karadžić, the author of the first Serbian dictionary, published in 1818 and then in 1852, had no second thoughts: "In the Turkish Empire *re'āyā* is the name for all people who are not of the Turkish faith" (*U Turskome carstvu raja se zovu svi ljudi koji ne vjeruju Turske vjere*). This, however could have been just one general view. His contemporary, the Orthodox priest Matija Nenadović, an educated man himself, used the term "rajaluk" (*ra'yyet*) to denote "being a subject" (a meaning that most modern Balkan historians would miss).¹¹ Yet, it cannot be established whether the meaning he used included Muslim subjects as well.

It should be remembered that nineteenth-century or even later scholarship was nowhere near to elucidating the key meaning that the term had had in earlier centuries, the one referring to social status. Hence the prolonged presence, and not only in popular but also in scholarly history writing, of the completely erroneous view that Muslims could by no means have had the status of *re'āyā*, not even in the sixteenth century.

⁹ Ibid. 251.

¹⁰ Bosworth and Faroqhi, "Ra'yya". This meaning is included in the following dictionaries: F. A. M. Meninski, *Lexicon Arabico-Persico-Turcicum ...*, vol. 1, 2nd rev. ed. (Vienna 1780; first published 1680); J. Th. Zenker, *Türkisch-Arabisch-Persisches Handwörterbuch*, facs. ed. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1967; first published 1866); Sir J. W. Redhouse, *A Turkish and English Lexicon*, facs. ed. (Istanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1978; first published 1890); *Redhouse Yeni Türkçe-İngilizce Sözlük (New Redhouse Turkish-English Dictionary)*, eds. U. B. Akım et al. 7th ed. (Istanbul: Redhouse Press, 1984); M. Z. Pakalin, *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1983).

¹¹ V. Karadžić, *Srpski rječnik istumačen njemačkijem i latinskijem riječima* (Vienna 1852; facs. ed. Belgrade: Nolit, 1972); *Memoari prote Matije Nenadovića*, ed. Lj. Kovačević (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1893), 176–177, 197–198 (see discussion in Fotić, "Institucija amana", 251–252).

The primary definition of the term “raja” (*re’āyā*) in Serbian and older Yugoslav dictionaries amounts to “non-Muslim subjects in former Turkey” (*nemuslimanski podanici u negdašnjoj Turskoj*) or “subjugated Turkish subjects who are not Muslim and who pay taxes” (*pokoreni turski podanici koji nisu muslimani i koji plaćaju danak*).¹² Definitions of the term intended for a broader public have obviously not made any progress since the publication of Vuk Karadžić’s *Dictionary* two hundred years ago. More recent editions of the dictionaries pay no heed to the entry contributed to the *Encyclopaedia of Yugoslavia* by H. Šabanović in 1968, where the meaning referring to social status is included as well.¹³

Even now, when other meanings of the term *re’āyā* have been largely elucidated, historians do not seem to be interested in the meaning referring to non-Muslim population. Some on purpose, because the negative connotations that stem from defining “non-Muslim” and “subject” as the lowest social category fit the intended interpretation.

It is high time to go further than the single explanatory sentence granted to this meaning of the term *re’āyā* in Brill’s analytical and very widely used and very reliable *Encyclopaedia of Islam*: “From the 12th/18th century onwards, the term is increasingly used for the Christian taxpayers only; 13th/19th-century population counts distinguish between *re’āyā* and Islam.” A very good handbook, included as mandatory reading for students, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, first published in 1994, whose title and table of contents mislead the reader into expecting that the topic is not merely outlined, but scrutinized in its social context, does not even mention the topic. It is only at the end of the book, in the Glossary, that we can find a single meaning: “All those groups, Muslim, or non-Muslim, outside the *askerī* elite, engaged in economic activities and thus subject to taxes.” The latest relevant book, the third volume of *The Cambridge History of Turkey* entitled *The Later Ottoman Empire 1603–1839*, does mention this meaning, also in the Glossary, but without the necessary precision: “... in the nineteenth century used only for non-Muslims”.¹⁴

Since the 1960s, historians in the former Yugoslavia have been increasingly aware of the central meaning of the term: lowest social status regardless of

¹² M. Vujaklija, *Leksikon stranih reči i izraza*, 4th ed. (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1991); *Rečnik srpskohrvatskoga književnog jezika*, vol. 5, eds. M. Stevanović et al., 2nd ed. (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1990); A. Škaljić, *Turcizmi u srpskohrvatskom-hrvatskosrpskom jeziku*, 5th ed. (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1985).

¹³ H. Šabanović, “Raja”, *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*, vol. 7 (Zagreb: Jugoslavenski leksikografski zavod, 1968), 32.

¹⁴ Bosworth and Faroqhi, “Ra’iyya”; *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 2: 1600–1914, eds. S. Faroqhi et al., 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 991; *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, vol. 3: *The Later Ottoman Empire 1603–1839*, ed. S. Faroqhi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 526.

religion (H. Šabanović, N. Filipović, D. Bojanić and others). As for the ways of referring to Christians, things have mostly remained on what Šabanović reiterated several times from 1964 onwards while editing various source materials: "From the 18th century the term begins to denote *only* those subjects of Christian faith (who pay taxes)." In another place, he expanded this statement by adding that "from the middle of the 17th century in the European part of the Ottoman Empire the term comes to be predominantly used to denote the dependent peasantry of the Christian faith". A. Matkovski was much more concerned with the term itself, and looked at it from various angles. As for this meaning, he restricted the period of its usage to the second half of the eighteenth and first four decades of the nineteenth century, stressing, just as erroneously, that it had referred *only* to non-Muslim population, and adding that it had been then that the term had become derogatory.¹⁵

Later work of Bosnian historians has clearly shown that there indeed was in the eighteenth century a numerous "Muslim *re'āyā*". And not only in the eighteenth but also in the early nineteenth century. A. Sućeska drew attention to a document of 1814 which shows that the Sultana, who enjoyed income from an imperial *hāss* estate in the environs of Sarajevo, complained to the Porte of the Muslim *re'āyā* refusing to pay *re'āyā* taxes claiming that Muslims were not liable to taxation. The order she received in reply was explicit that all registered Muslim *re'āyā*, both urban and rural, were liable to pay *re'āyā* taxes, the same as their ancestors had been.¹⁶ Besides, it is well known that almost the entire eighteenth century was marked by the attempts of Muslim *re'āyā* in Bosnia to acquire *'askerī* status one way or another in order to rid themselves of taxation, usually by signing up fake janissary lists.

That was likely the case all across the Empire rather than only in Bosnia. A 1803 *fermān* of Selim III regarding tax collection abuses in the *kazā* of Manastir/Bitola specifies that it has been issued at the request of Muslim and non-Muslim *re'āyā* (*Manāstir kazāsın/d/a sâkin ve mütemekkin Müslim ve ehl-i zimmet re'āyânın takdîr eyledikleri arzuhâlları*).¹⁷

The authorities certainly used this kind of terminology. However, common people in Bosnia during the nineteenth century, and probably even earlier,

¹⁵ *Turski izvori za istoriju Beograda*, vol. 1, 1. *Katastarski popisi Beograda i okoline 1476–1566*, ed. H. Šabanović (Belgrade: Istoriski arhiv grada Beograda, 1964), 631; Šabanović, "Raja"; A. Matkovski, *Krepostištvo vo Makedonija vo vreme na tursko vladeenje* (Skopje: Institut za nacionalna istorija, 1978), 68.

¹⁶ A. Sućeska, "Pokušaji muslimanske raje u Bosni da se oslobode rajinskog statusa u XVIII vijeku", in *Stopanskite, socijalnite i etničkite promeni na teritorijata na Jugoslavija i Čehoslovačka od XVI do sredinata na XVIII vek* (Skopje: Institut za nacionalna istorija, 1986), 195–206.

¹⁷ *Turski dokumenti za makedonskata istorija 1803–1808*, vol. 2, ed. P. Džambazovski (Skopje: Institut za nacionalna istorija, 1953), 34, 143.

mostly used other terms for the Muslims with the status of *re'āyā*. In the middle of that century, the Franciscan Ivan Frano Jukić wrote, "beys and other Turkish notables call [Muslim peasants] *poturica* and *čosa*, while Catholics call them *balija*".¹⁸ All these words have very insulting connotations. The word *potur* for Muslim *re'āyā* was well known as early as the sixteenth century, and remained in use through centuries. "The village is called *selō*, and the peasant *pōtūr* (*Köye selō, köylüye dendi pōtūr*); as Üsküfi Bosnevī wrote in 1631/32 in his Ottoman-Slavic dictionary.¹⁹ Also, local Muslim and non-Muslim Balkan population called Muslim *re'āyā* "Turks", which was the word most commonly used for all Muslims in the Balkans (except Roma and sometimes Albanians). A century earlier, around 1757, Zulfikar Rizvanbegović, captain of Stolac fortress, wrote in a Cyrillic letter addressed to the *knez* of Dubrovnik that "according to imperial writ all those who hold imperial land have to take title-deeds on the land, the same as the other Turks and *re'āyā* do" (*pak im pada po zapoviedi carevoje uzimati tapije na zemlje kakono uzimaju i ostali Turci i rajeja*).²⁰

In order to avoid imprecision in translation, it is very important to keep in mind at all times that the term *re'āyā* could refer to Muslims with that status as well. It is only if the content of any one eighteenth-century document permits it that we can argue with certainty that the term *re'āyā* refers to non-Muslims.

From the sixteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century, documents often mention Muslim and non-Muslim populations in the same sentence, especially when they deal with issues concerning both groups. Insistence on the distinction between them is quite understandable, because it stemmed from the *shari'a* tenets and was reflected in almost all spheres of everyday life. The distinction was expressed in a variety of ways: "Muslims and infidels" (*Müslimān ve kefere*); "community/group of Muslims and of infidels" (*Müslimān ve kefere tā'ifesi*); "Muslim and non-Muslim/infidel *re'āyā*" (*Müslimān ve zimmi re'āyā, Müslimānān ve kefere re'āyāsi*); "people of Islam and the Armenian community" (*ehl-i İslām ve Ermenī tā'ifesi*); "Muslim and Christian" (*Müslim ve Nasrānī*); the Muslim and infidel poor (*Müslimān ve kefere fukarāsi*); and many others.²¹

Also, and more frequently from the eighteenth century, documents contain phrases without *kefere* or *zimmi* or any other clarifying term being added, such as: "people of Islam and *re'āyā*"; "Muslims and poor *re'āyā*"; "population of the province and *re'āyā*"; "poor *re'āyā* and population of the state" (*ehl-i İslām ve*

¹⁸ I. F. Jukić, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 1, ed. B. Ćorić (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1973), 310.

¹⁹ D. M. Korkut, "Makbûl-i 'āryf (Potur-Şāhidija) Üsküfi Bosnevije", *Glasnik hrvatskih zemaljskih muzeja u Sarajevu* 54 (1942), 401.

²⁰ Ć. Truhelka, "Nekoliko mlađjih pisama hercegovačke gospode pisanih bosanicom iz dubrovačke arhive", *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Bosni i Hercegovini* 26 (1914), 491.

²¹ See various volumes of published Ottoman chronicles, *mühimme defters*, *sicills*, and other published Ottoman documents.

re'âyâ; *Müslimân u re'âyâ vu fukarâ*; *ahâlî-i vilâyet ve re'âyâlar*; *fukarâ-yi ra'iyet ve ahâlî-i memleket*), etc.²² Unless the content of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century documents is explicit, we shall not be able to draw a reliable conclusion as to whether they refer to social status or to religious division. Especially because the terms *ahâlî* (basic meaning: “population,” “inhabitants”) and *Müslimân* often refer to members of the *âskerî* class, those exempted from taxation, model Muslims, rich people and, also, members of the religious class (*‘ulemâ*). For documents dating from the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, we might tend to rely on our previous experience and assume that the division implied is class division. But was it always the case, in all types of seventeenth-century documents and texts?

It is for the same reason that we cannot be completely sure as to whom the terms such as those found in a document registered in the court records (*sicill*) of the *kādî* of Manastır/Bitola in 1706 refer to. Pleading for the promised amnesty, an outlaw admitted to the authorities: “We used to kill people and plunder the property of Muslims and *re'âyâ* and other subjects” (*emvâl-i Müslimîn ve re'âyâ u berâyâyı gâret ve katl-i nufûs*).²³ The same goes for Selim III's *fermân* of 1800 ordering that the burden of taxes be distributed evenly between “Muslims and *re'âyâ* alike” (*ehl-i İslâm ve re'âyâ*).²⁴ Unless we are able to learn more about the context, we shall by no means be able to know with certainty whether the division is social or religious.

When was it, then, that the term *re'âyâ* really came to be used for Christians only (alongside all other meanings)? There is not enough time or space to analyze all documents from the first half of the eighteenth century which do no more than suggest that the distinction is religious rather than social. Writing on Ottoman Vidin, Rossitsa Gradeva makes a remark: “It is not surprising that Vi-

²² 85 *Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (1040–1041 (1042)/1630–1631 (1632))* <Özet – Tanskripsiyon – İndeks>, eds. H. O. Yıldırım et al. (Istanbul: Başbakanlık Osmanlı Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2002), 454; *Topçular Kâtibi Abdülkâdir (Kadri) Efendi Tarihi, (Metin ve Tahlil)*, vol. 1, ed. Z. Yılmaz (Ankara: TTK, 2003), 16, vol. 2, 790; H. Doğru, *Rumeli' de Yaşam. Bir Kadî Defterinin Işığında* (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2007). Ek: *Rumeli'de Bir Kaza: Hacı-oğlu Pazarı Kadî Defterleri (Şer'îye Sicili) 29 Cemaziye'l Ahir 1213 – 2 Şaban 1224* (http://www.kitapyayinevi.com/download/Kadi_Sicili_Ek.pdf <28 Jan. 2007>), nos. 27, 110, 111, 390; *Das sicill aus Skopje. Kritische Edition und Kommentierung des einzigen vollständig erhaltenen Kadiamtsregisterbandes (sicill) aus Üsküb (Skopje)*, ed. M. Kurz (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 192, 251, 264, 512, etc.

²³ *Turski izvori za ajdutstvoto i aramistvoto vo Makedonija (1700–1725)*, vol. 3, 31, 202. I have tersely translated the term *berâyâ* as “other subjects”. The meaning of this term has not been clarified yet. As it almost always occurs after the term *re'âyâ* in phrases, it is quite possible that it referred to those who were members of the *re'âyâ*, but were exempted from paying certain taxes (see Matkovski, *Kreposništvo*, 70–98).

²⁴ *Turski dokumenti za makedonskata istorija 1800–1803*, vol. 1, eds. P. Džambazovski and A. Starova (Skopje: Institut za nacionalna istorija, 1951), 31, 152.

din is one of the places where the division between ‘Muslims’ and ‘*reaya*’, in which *reaya* stands for Christians, appears in local documentation rather early, from at least the first decade of the 18th century.”²⁵ Bearing in mind the arguments mentioned above, it would be good to see quotations from those documents.

The earliest reliable reference I have been able to find comes from the year 1731. The order to collect money for paying the soldiers engaged in pursuing outlaws (*haydūts*) in the *kazā* of Manastir/Bitola prescribes that a portion of the financial burden is to be distributed among “town Muslims, *re’āyā* and Jews in Bitola, and some Yürük and Albanian villages”. At the end of the document, where the total sum collected is added up, the same pattern of division, though expressed in a different way, fully confirms that the term *re’āyā* refers to Christians only. The sum collected in Bitola comprised “355 grosses from town Muslims, 405 from town Christians and 210 from Jews”.²⁶ A similar pattern probably applies to a document of 1710, but that cannot be argued with certainty: the burden of the upkeep of *martōlōs* in Manastir/Bitola was distributed among “the *re’āyā* registered in *cizye*-records, *çiftlik re’āyā*, town Jews, and Muslim and Albanian villages”.²⁷

From the second half of the eighteenth century, an increasing number of examples clearly show that the term *re’āyā*, even though it was not preceded by the explanatory label “infidel” (*kefere*), was used for the Christian population.

Although there may be a few random earlier examples, it could be said that the increasingly frequent use of a new meaning of the term *re’āyā* was associated with the structural political and social changes brought about by the wars of the late seventeenth and first two decades of the eighteenth century in which a large part of Ottoman territory in Europe had been lost. It was certainly a consequence of the growing Muslim distrust of the Christians. Finally, a circumspect approach requires reemphasizing that the term *re’āyā* came to refer to the Christian population only *gradually*, and that throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it was used with that meaning *alongside* all other meanings. Great caution should therefore be exercised when interpreting the sources where the term *re’āyā* lacks a modifier. There is no doubt at all that in the period in question it does not necessarily refer to tax-paying non-Muslim subjects, and documents usually do not offer sufficient information for ruling out the meaning referring to the lowest social stratum. To make things even more

²⁵ R. Gradeva, “Between Hinterland and Frontier: Ottoman Vidin, Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries”, *Frontiers of Ottoman Space, Frontiers in Ottoman Society* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2014), 36. She adds in a footnote that this division appears even earlier, in 1664, but “it had become a standard formula only from the mid-18th century onwards”.

²⁶ *Turski dokumenti za makedonskata istorija 1818–1827*, vol. 4, ed. P. Džambazovski (Skopje: Institut za nacionalna istorija, 1957), 33–37.

²⁷ *Turski izvori za ajdutstvoto i aramistvoto vo Makedonija (1700–1725)*, vol. 3, 63–68.

difficult, there is no way whatsoever to know which meaning was intended in a document that concerns areas where there were no Muslim *re'āyā*.

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