

**REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
KIRŞEHİR AHI EVRAN UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY**

**RIVER, RICE and CITY: THE TRANSFORMATION of
PLOVDIV in the EARLY MODERN OTTOMAN PERIOD**

Dilara AVCI

Ph.D. Thesis

KIRŞEHİR-2025



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PhD THESIS

Advisor

Prof. Dr. Murat

TUĞLUCA

KIRŞEHİR-2025

KABUL VE ONAY

Kırşehir Ahi Evran Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tarih Ana Bilim Dalı doktora öğrencisi Dilara AVCI tarafından hazırlanan “RIVER, RICE and CITY: THE TRANSFORMATION of PLOVDIV in the EARLY MODERN OTTOMAN PERIOD” adlı tez çalışması 26.12.2025 tarihinde yapılan savunma sınavı sonucunda başarılı bulunarak jürimiz tarafından oybirliği ile **DOKTORA TEZİ** olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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ABSTRACT

RIVER, RICE and CITY: THE TRANSFORMATION of PLOVDIV in the EARLY MODERN OTTOMAN PERIOD

Ph. D. Thesis

Preparer: Dilara AVCI

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2025- (xv+128)

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This study examines the relationship between the Maritsa River and the city of Plovdiv during the early modern period (from the 14th century to the end of the 16th century). No prior environmental history study has been conducted on the relationship between the Maritsa River and Plovdiv. Therefore, this work discusses how the Maritsa River in the early modern Ottoman era can be addressed within the context of environmental historiography. This thesis consists of three main sections. The first chapter of the thesis discusses the geographical location and characteristics of the Maritsa River and the city of Plovdiv. The second section focuses on how the river and the city were managed through waqfs. The final chapter concentrates on the human element as the fundamental component of the relationship between the river and the city.

In this context, Chapter I, first focuses on the geography of the Maritsa River and its status before the Ottoman conquest. With the beginning of the Ottoman conquests in the Balkans, it is observed that not only the river but also the river basin was used as a natural corridor of conquest. One of the most significant of these conquests is the conquest of Plovdiv. Following the city's conquest, rice cultivation, introduced by the Ottomans to the region, also began, utilizing the environmental resources provided by the river and the city. This chapter also addresses the natural elements of Plovdiv; the uses of forests, groves, summer pastures, and meadows under Ottoman administration are examined.

In Chapter II, the management of the river and the city through waqfs, independent of the Ottoman administration following the conquest, is discussed. First, the question of how waqfs should be addressed within the discipline of environmental history is emphasized, and then some waqfs that were or were not directly established in Plovdiv are examined. Those that provided the city's drinking water, contributed to its economic development, and supported the region's environment were often

waqfs, among the most important institutions. Through waqfs, dings and mills are discussed; it is revealed under what conditions and how institutions and people benefited from the river. The final point addressed within environmental history concerning waqfs is the hamams (public baths) and the use of environmental features as points of utilization.

Chapter III focuses on the human element as the fundamental component of the relationship between the river and the city. Particular attention is given to the *çeltükçis*, working in rice fields. The areas where the *çeltükçis* lived around the river and the city, and how they used the river for production, are examined. Not only the *çeltükçis* are discussed; the study also investigates how the askerîs in the region utilized the river and the city to strengthen their own positions.

Keywords: Early modern, environmental history, Maritsa, Plovdiv, rice cultivation.



ÖZET
NEHİR, PİRİNÇ ve ŞEHİR: ERKEN MODERN OSMANLI FİLİBE'SİNİN
DÖNÜŞÜMÜ

DOKTORA TEZİ

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Bu çalışmada, erken modern dönemde (14. yüzyıldan 16. yüzyılın sonuna kadar) Meriç Nehri ile Filibe şehri arasındaki ilişki incelenmiştir. Daha önce Meriç Nehri ve Filibe ilişkisi hakkında bir çevre tarihi çalışması yapılmamıştır. Bu nedenle, erken modern Osmanlısında Meriç Nehri'nin çevre tarihi yazımı bağlamında nasıl ele alınabileceği tartışılmıştır. Bu tez üç ana bölümden oluşmaktadır. Tezin ilk bölümünde Meriç Nehri ve Filibe şehrinin coğrafi konumu ve özellikleri ele alınmış, ikinci bölümünde nehrin ve şehrin vakıflar aracılığıyla nasıl yönetildiği üzerinde durulmuştur. Son bölümde ise nehir ile şehir arasındaki ilişkinin temel bileşeni olan insan unsuruna odaklanılmaktadır.

Bu bağlamda I. bölümde öncelikle Meriç Nehri'nin coğrafyasına ve nehrin Osmanlı fethinden önceki konumuna ve sonrasına odaklanılmıştır. Osmanlıların Balkan fetihlerine başlamalarıyla birlikte, yalnızca nehir değil, aynı zamanda nehir havzasının da doğal bir fetih koridoru olarak kullanıldığı görülmektedir. Bu fetihlerin en önemlilerinden birisi de Filibe'nin fethidir. Şehrin fethiyle beraber, Osmanlıların bölgeye tanıtmış oldukları pirinç tarımı da başlamış, nehrin ve şehrin sağlamış olduğu çevresel unsurlardan faydalanılmıştır. Bu bölümde ayrıca Filibe'nin doğal unsurları ele alınmış; ormanlar, korular, yaylaklar ve meraların Osmanlı yönetimi altındaki kullanımları incelenmiştir.

II. bölümde ise, Osmanlı fethinin ardından, nehrin ve şehrin Osmanlı yönetimi dışında vakıflar aracılığıyla nasıl idare edildiği ele alınmıştır. Öncelikle vakıfların çevre tarihi disiplini dâhilinde nasıl ele alınması gerektiği üzerinde durulmuş ve sonrasında doğrudan Filibe'de kurulmuş ya da kurulmamış bazı vakıflardan faydalanılmıştır. Filibe'ye içme suyunun sağlanmasında, şehrin ekonomik olarak kalkındırılmasında ve bölgenin doğal unsurlarına katkı sunulması genellikle vakıflar aracılığıyla olmuştur. Vakıflar aracılığıyla dingler ve değirmenler incelenmiş; kurumların ve

insanın nehirde hangi kořullarda ve nasıl yararlandıkları ortaya konulmuřtur. Vakıflarla ilgili çevre tarihi ierisinde ele alınan son nokta ise hamamlar ve çevresel özellikleri olmuřtur.

III. bölümde, nehir ile şehir arasındaki ilişkinin temel bileřen olan insan unsuruna odaklanmaktadır. Özellikle pirin tarlalarında alıřan eltükü reâyâ üzerinde durulmuřtur. eltükü reâyânın nehrin ve şehrin hangi bölgelerinde yařadıkları, nehri üretim noktasında nasıl kullandıkları üzerinde durulmuřtur. Ayrıca bölgedeki askerîlerinde nehirde ve şehirden nasıl yararlanarak kendi konumlarını güçlendirdikleri incelenmiřtir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: eltik, Çevre tarihi, Erken modern dönem, Filibe, Meri Nehri.



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ABBREVIATIONS

BOA: Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of State Archives (Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi)

TDV: Türkiye Diyanet Foundation (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı)

TT: Tahrir Registers (Defterleri)

MD: Mühimme Registers (Defterleri)

AE: Ali Emirî

VGMA: Directorate General of Foundations Archive (Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Arşivi)

IBID: in the same place

СВ. СВ. КИРИЛ И МЕТОДИЙ: St. St. Kiril and Methodius Library

Gallica: French Archive

INTRODUCTION

Subject, Scope And Aim

Towards the end of the 16th century, summers in Plovdiv (Filibe)¹, nourished by Maritsa River (Meriç Nehri)² were so hot and humid that the leading Ottoman administrators, whose authority was uncontested, were compelled to retreat to the summer highlands (yaylak) in the elevated parts of the city to escape the oppressive heat. The temperature in the highlands was comparatively lower than in the lowlands. Consequently, they did not ascend merely for respite from the weather, but also left a contingent of officials in the city center to ensure the continuity of imperial administrative affairs.

However, this practice, which was not entirely unusual within the framework of Ottoman governance, appears to have caused discontent among the reâyâ of Plovdiv, who subsequently lodged complaints with the central authorities.³ The actual source of the grievance was likely not merely that the city's administrators had left deputies in their place, but rather that the reâyâ themselves lacked the means to escape the infernal heat of Plovdiv. Indeed, as was also stated in the judicial decree, the air of Plovdiv was *mute'affin* that is, putrid and malodorous and consequently, the populace faced the constant danger of contracting malaria (humma). Plovdiv, with the rice fields and irrigation channels surrounding it, provided a conducive environment for the proliferation of malaria carrying mosquitoes. This process was further facilitated by the marshes in the region, which collectively made the spread of diseases considerably easier.

At this precise juncture, it is necessary to perceive the historical context not merely as an urban problem, but as a broader issue central to the focus of environmental historians. As Hughes has stated, environmental historians must possess a thorough knowledge and familiarity with the geography that underpins their subject of study. However, merely describing the geographical conditions is insufficient; it is imperative to understand and rigorously analyze the impacts of this geography on both the rulers and the local populace.⁴

¹ Plovdiv is the currently the second largest city in Bulgaria. Although it was referred as Filibe during the period of Ottoman rule, the name Plovdiv will be used throughout this dissertation.

² Within the text, the name of the river will appear as Maritsa. In Turkish sources, the river is referred to as the Meriç River.

³ BOA, A.DVNSMHM.d no. 49.

⁴ J. Donald Hughes, *Çevresel Tarih Nedir?*, çev. M. Fatih Çalışır, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, İstanbul 2019, p.181. Ellen Churchill Semple who was an American geographer said that: "Man can no more be scientifically studied apart from the ground which he tills, or the lands over which he travels, or the seas over which he trades, than polar bear or desert cactus can be understood apart from its habitat."

This approach facilitates the establishment of a solid analytical framework for studying Maritsa River and the city of Plovdiv.

Consequently, this analytical framework directs us to the following central question: “*How did the management of the Maritsa River in the early modern period transform the environment and social fabric of Ottoman Plovdiv?*” The Ottomans conceptualized the Maritsa River not merely as a border line or a natural landscape, but as a managed infrastructural entity. They rescaled regional logistics by promoting the river corridor and transport via Enez (Ainos); they articulated the city and the countryside through waqf-based hydraulic investments (waterways, aqueducts, mills, weirs, and bathhouses); and they transformed the regimes of labor, taxation, and food by tightly regulating rice or wet agriculture, through detailed legal codes (kanunnâmes) and integrating the *çeltükcis* (*çeltükçü reâyâ*) into the fabric of neighborhoods and villages. Ultimately, despite the seasonality of the Maritsa River, Plovdiv was transformed into a hydro-social system organized around rice ecologies, which was sustained both by transport-based economies and self-perpetuating through waqf revenues.

The transformations mentioned above are not merely of local concern; on the contrary, they are intimately linked to the fundamental questions posed by the discipline of environmental history. Although environmental history does not possess as long a past as other historical sub-disciplines, the answers we receive from the questions we pose to documents must be considered in this light. The parallel rise in environmental problems and environmental history scholarship and the fact that these studies, while beginning primarily in America, did not remain there but spread worldwide cannot be regarded as coincidental. Pressing contemporary issues, we frequently hear about today, such as the climate crisis, melting glaciers, water scarcity, critically problematic water levels, and the beginning extinction of certain animal species, could very well have prompted historians to ask: What about before? What was it like in the past? Was there always a climate crisis? Were species always doomed to extinction? To what extent did seasons and air temperatures increase and decrease?⁵ This curiosity thereby fueled a rise in environmental history scholarship and a distinct shift in focus toward the early modern Ottoman world.

It is at this precise juncture that Radkau's perspective shifts the debate to different dimensions by introducing a distinct viewpoint to environmental history. According to

⁵ J. R. McNeill, “The State of the Field of Environmental History”, *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, C:35, S:1, 2010, p. 349.

Radkau, environmental history, which requires an eclectic, "branch-to-branch" perspective, suggests that for early modern Ottoman Plovdiv and the Maritsa River as well, there will be a variety of different answers we can uncover by posing different questions to the various actors of nature. In this context, a historian attempting to write environmental history demonstrates their conviction that non-human living entities can also influence and alter the course of history itself.⁶

Radkau's perspective on diverse actors of nature is highly significant for understanding agricultural production methods in the Ottoman world, in particular. In the Ottoman core, polyculture was dominant, while monoculture was rare. Although the state of rice farming, one of the key points in his thesis, might be seen as a continuation of the typical Asian model, the rice cultivation witnessed in Anatolia and the Balkans in fact retained its distinctly Mediterranean character. This polyculture inherently involved an environmental equilibrium.⁷ It is not at all logical, therefore, to consider cultivated crops in isolation from their geographical conditions. For the Ottomans, polyculture was not merely an economic choice, but also a crucial element of environmental equilibrium.

The agricultural dimensions of environmental history become more meaningful when considered in conjunction with the field's theoretical frameworks. It is at this precise point that the classification of environmental history proposed by John McNeill, a leading historian in the field, becomes particularly important. According to McNeill, environmental history is the history of the relationship between nature and human societies dependent on it, which he divides into three categories. The first is *biogeochemical* environmental history; he cites the history of forests or the history of water pollution as examples of this category. The second is the history of human attempts to manage the environment, focusing on the history of the political and legal actions undertaken by states or political mechanisms concerning the environment. Finally, the third category encompasses the history of what people have thought and written about the relationship between nature and society. This last category, it should be noted, constitutes a part of not only environmental history but also of cultural and intellectual history. The subject of this thesis corresponds to the second category described by McNeill.

⁶ Joachim Radkau, *Doğa ve İktidar, Global Bir Çevre Tarihi*, trs. Nafiz Güder, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2020, p.IX; Chris Gratien, *Dağlar Bizimdir, Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Çukurova'nın Çevre Tarihi*, trs. Dâra Elhüseyni, Ayrıntı Basım, Ankara 2025, p.32-33.

⁷ Radkau, *Doğa ve İktidar, Global Bir Çevre Tarihi*, p.XXV.

According to McNeill, the representatives of the Annales School, including Braudel himself, overlooked the fact that the environment is subject to change and can be transformed through, and because of, human actions.⁸ Environmental historians tend to view and assess the relationship between humans and the environment as one of reciprocal interaction. This general perspective of environmental historiography is also observable in the Ottoman case. The Ottoman administration, which utilized the waters of the Maritsa River and established regulations for the cultivation of *çeltük* (a significant irrigated crop), along with the *çeltükçis* who practiced this agriculture, collectively transformed the environment of the Maritsa River and Plovdiv.⁹ Within this framework, it is also crucial to determine which periods the examination will encompass.

The temporal scope of this study encompasses the period from the conquest of Plovdiv to the end of the 16th century. There are several reasons for selecting this timeframe. The first is to elucidate the status of the Maritsa River, which became a natural corridor of conquest and Plovdiv during the period known as the Ottoman early modern era, concurrent with the beginning of the Ottoman conquests in the Balkans. The second reason is to demonstrate the process of the region's revitalization through the cultivation of rice, an agricultural product introduced by the Ottomans in the early modern period. The third reason is to attempt to write the environmental history of the Maritsa River, one of the significant rivers of the Balkans, a crucial part of early modern Ottoman environmental history and of Plovdiv, an important location sustained by this river. With the aim of revealing the transformation of the Maritsa River and Plovdiv within the context of environmental history during the aforementioned period, the thesis is structured in three main chapters.

Chapter 1 begins by describing the geographical conditions of the Maritsa River and Plovdiv, followed by a focus on the region's geographical features before the Ottomans and after the Ottoman conquest. The Maritsa, perhaps the most important river in the Balkans after the Danube, held great significance for the region. The management of key elements of environmental history was hardly possible without human knowledge and intervention. Although environmental history studies tend to focus more on non-human species, the

⁸ Faisal Husain, "Türkiye'de Çevre Tarihi Yazımının Serüveni", *Toplum ve Bilim*, S. 169/170, 2024, p. 115. These historians concentrated on the humans and their environmental activities, such as how they engaged in agriculture, construction a dam or animal husbandry. However, they did not discuss the environmental relations with its own dynamics or the effects of humans. In his article, Husain observes Halil İnalcık, Mustafa Akdağ and Nejat Göyünç's researches. İnalcık, Akdağ and Göyünç concentrated on the Turkish or Ottoman societies through the environment but they did not provide much information about how environment changed.

⁹ Önder Eren Akgül, "John R. McNeill ile Çevre Tarihi Üzerine Mülakat", *Toplumsal Tarih*, S.312, 2019, p.26-29.

environmental elements in the Ottoman Maritsa River and Plovdiv gained a different position through human involvement. Specifically, the process initiated by Lala Şâhin Pasha's conquest of Plovdiv not only marked the city's gradual transformation into an Ottoman urban center but also involved the introduction of a new agricultural product by utilizing the region's potent biotic elements, geographical structure, climatic conditions, and soil composition, alongside the mobilization of the local population for this agricultural production. This chapter also includes information on how the Maritsa River was used for transportation. Although not to the extent of the Danube, the Maritsa River became suitable for transport when conditions permitted, a fact recognized and subsequently developed by important beys and pashas. The construction of significant bridges commissioned by Lala Şâhin Pasha for the specific use of the city, and the position these bridges held within early modern Ottoman environmental history are examined. Subsequently, the chapter addresses the initiation of rice cultivation in the region and how the prominent Ottoman figures and the local population collaborated in this endeavor. In addition to the agricultural potential, the chapter also focuses on the region's forests, groves, pastures, summer-winter pastures (*yaylak-kışlak*), and marshes, analyzing how early modern Ottoman Plovdiv was influenced within the framework of these environmental actors.

The physical and ecological framework outlined in the first chapter establishes a foundation for a better understanding of the environmental functions of *waqfs* in the second chapter. Chapter 2 focuses on specific *waqfs* that were either established in early modern Ottoman Plovdiv or, founded elsewhere, also operated services in Plovdiv. In early modern environmental history studies, *waqfs*, through their foundation charters (*vakfiyes*), held a position that influenced the local geography and the lives of the people, effectively acting as the "extended arm" of the Ottoman state in the region. The chapter first provides an introduction on how and in what ways *waqfs* should be utilized in environmental history studies, then continues with information on how the mentioned *waqfs* utilized the Maritsa River and transformed Plovdiv. One of the most significant challenges for early modern Ottoman cities was providing drinking water to the local population. The state was not the sole entity responsible for supplying drinking water; conversely, the chapter continues with information on how water was supplied for the people of Plovdiv with the knowledge and approval of the state. In addition to drinking water, the chapter examines the *dings* (rice-hulling facilities) created by the *waqfs'* use of the river and their contributions to the region.

Finally, by providing information on the animals owned by the *waqfs*, it highlights the animals crucial for Plovdiv, such as water buffalo, horses, camels, and sheep.

It has been observed that *waqfs* have not previously been sufficiently incorporated into the analytical framework of environmental history studies. Within the scope of this dissertation, an attempt is made to demonstrate how *waqfs* utilized both the river and the city in a more effective manner. *Waqfs* can also be regarded as a reflection of Ottoman administration in the region. This study seeks to reveal both how *waqfs* became one of the transformative forces of the region and how they contributed to the use of river water not only in agriculture, transportation, and cleanliness, but also as a source of energy.

The third and final chapter of the study focuses on humans as the complementary element of the Maritsa River and Plovdiv. Humans, as significant actors, not only witnessed the transformation and investments in the region but are also considered crucial agents of change, contributing their local knowledge with the information and support of the Ottoman authorities. In this context, the focus is on the class of *çeltükçis*, who worked in the rice fields, the region's most important agricultural product, and their status in Plovdiv. In addition to the *çeltükçis*, the chapter examines the contributions of those working for the *waqfs* to the region, focusing on the groups that essentially enabled the area's ecological transformation. These groups can also be positioned as the "environmental managers" of their time. They can be seen as key individuals who translated the unwritten rules of their affiliated *waqfs* into concrete actions along the river and in Plovdiv.

In fact, what was intended to be done in the three sections mentioned above has been carried out through *rice*. All three sections are interconnected through rice as the central element. In Chris Gratien's "Dağlar Bizimdir: Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Çukurova'nın Çevre Tarihi"¹⁰, the narrative and chapters are constructed around *mosquitoes*, a living species that makes it possible to bring together both environmental history and animal history studies. Gratien demonstrates that agriculture in Çukurova did not produce solely economic benefits, but also generated negative consequences that became more visible over time. He seeks to explain in detail how malaria spread through mosquitoes and how the region underwent transformation, particularly during the late Ottoman period and the early Republican era.

¹⁰ Chris Gratien, *Dağlar Bizimdir: Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Çukurova'nın Çevre Tarihi*, trs. Dâra Elhüseyni, Fol Yayınları, İstanbul 2025.

Samuel Dolbee, on the other hand, constructs his narrative around locusts in his book “Çekirgelerin Saltanatı: Osmanlı’da Sınır, Çevre ve İktidar”.¹¹ Dolbee attempts to trace the history of the modern Middle East through *locusts*, which are, in fact, small animals. Examining the process from the period of Ottoman dominance to the establishment of nation-states through a relentless pest allows for the emergence of a distinctive perspective. Dolbee focuses not only on the physiological existence of locusts, but also on the various dimensions of their relationships with nomads, refugees, and migrants. The studies conducted by Gratien on mosquitoes and by Dolbee on locusts resonate with this dissertation through the lens of rice cultivation.

The first chapter focuses on the Maritsa River, the second chapter on the city of Plovdiv, and the third chapter on the human actor that serves as the connecting element between the river and the city. Rice was cultivated and harvested in the vicinity of the Maritsa River, and after the harvest, it is known that transportation and shipment to İstanbul were carried out using the Maritsa River. It has been demonstrated that waqfs whose administrative centers were not located in Plovdiv processed rice by separating it from its husks and converting it into rice grains through ding mills as an energy source. The third chapter, meanwhile, concentrates on the *çeltükçis*, whose primary occupation was rice cultivation, which can be described as the most important product of the region. As discussed in detail above, these three chapters are interconnected through rice cultivation.

Primary Sources

First, the *tahrir* registers provide vital information on the demography, village’s *çeltükçis*, and economic structure of the Maritsa River region and Plovdiv. Given the period covered by the thesis, the *tahrir* registers examined span from the 14th to the 16th centuries.¹²

Tahrir registers do not provide direct information for environmental history studies; consequently, they have been evaluated within the framework of the information they

¹¹ Samuel Dolbee, *Çekirgelerin Saltanatı: Osmanlı’da Sınır, Çevre ve İktidar*, trs. Can Gümüş İspir, Fol Yayınları, İstanbul 2025.

¹² The first *tahrir* register examined in this thesis is Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivi Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), Tapu Tahrir Registers (TT.d.) no.26. This register was a mufassal, dated Hijri 895. Another mufassal register consulted was TT.d. 77 which was dated in Hijri 925. The third register used in this thesis is TT.d. 370, recorded in Hijri 937. The fourth register examined was TT.d. 494, dated Hijri 978. It was also a mufassal *tahrir* register. Last register was recorded as TT.d. 1001. The archival catalog entry indicates the year Hijri 29 Zilhicce 1300, while a note on the register the date Hijri 993. Nurullah Karta, *XVI. Yüzyılda Filibe Kazası*, Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yayınlanmamış Doktora Tezi, Erzurum 2005, p.4.

contain. Given that the contents of the *tahrir* registers do not encompass direct data on the environment and environmental management, the *mühimme* registers were utilized to observe the decisions taken by the central authority.

The chronological range of the consulted *mühimme* registers spans the years 972-992. Through the *mühimme* registers, it is possible to gain insight into how environmental issues concerning the Maritsa River and Plovdiv such as rice cultivation, marsh fever (humma), the use of pastures and meadows, and the status of forested and wooded areas were perceived by the central administration and how these issues were resolved. Furthermore, in addition to environmental matters, information can be obtained on the distribution of animals in the region (such as sheep, lambs, and camels) and animal products.

Alongside the *mühimme* registers, *kanunnâmes* (provincial law codes) were used to understand the principles governing the region's administration. In particular, the *kanunnâmes* provide information on rice cultivation carried out in the Maritsa River and its vicinity, the rules under which this agriculture was to be conducted, and the penalties prescribed for those who violated these regulations. Within the scope of this thesis, use has been made of law codes from the period of Mehmed II ("the Rice Prohibition Code" *Çeltük Yasaknâmesi*)¹³ and a code directly concerning Plovdiv from the era of Bayezid II ("the Prohibition Code for Rice Rivers" *Yasaknâme-i Enhar-ı Çeltük*). Furthermore, to observe the continuity of these regulations, a law code issued during the reign of Ahmed I has also been consulted.

However, in order to reveal how written rules were implemented in daily life, the documents of waqfs, specifically, *vakfiyes* are of paramount importance, as they belonged to the institutions that possessed the power to transform the environment in the locality around the Maritsa River and Plovdiv. These *vakfiyes* were utilized extensively, particularly within the second chapter. Not all the *vakfiyes* used within the scope of this thesis originate from waqfs established directly in Plovdiv; those founded in İstanbul but which also operated services in Plovdiv have also been consulted. These include the *vakfiye* of important figures for Plovdiv such as Şehâbeddin Pasha, as well as individuals like İsfendiyarbeyzade from the Candaroğlu dynasty, who was exiled to Plovdiv by Mehmed II and established his waqf there,

¹³ There were two significant kanunnâme issued during the reign of Mehmed II. One of them related to rice cultivation in Province of Rumeli, while the other was regulated rice cultivation in Anatolia. Ahmet Akgündüz stated that these kanunnâmes were drafted as "ülû'l-emrin âmme maslahatına dayalı tanzimî tasarrufları". Ahmet Akgündüz, *Osmanlı Kanunnâmeleri ve Hukukî Tahlilleri*, 2. Kitap II. Bâyezid Devri Kanunnâmeleri, FEY Vakfı, İstanbul 1990, p.403.

in addition to the waqfs founded by significant figures such as Gazi Sinan Pasha. *Vakfiyes* are also a crucial source for understanding the ways in which social actors transformed the environment. To date, historians working on Ottoman environmental history have seldom examined waqfs from the perspective of their impact on the environment. This study, however, reframes waqfs not merely as urban or religious charitable institutions, but also as *environmental institutions*. In doing so, it makes a novel conceptual contribution to Ottoman environmental history and evaluates archival material from a different perspective.

Another source that allows us to observe the transformation of the environment is travelogues (*seyahatname*). Travelogues provide a panoramic view of the Maritsa River and Plovdiv from both an Ottoman and a foreign perspective. The primary travelogue to be mentioned regarding the region is the *Seyahatname* of Evliya Çelebi.¹⁴ It is evident that Evliya Çelebi provides information not only about Plovdiv but also about other significant locations in the Balkans, encompassing environmental, socio-economic, religious, and cultural details. He offers descriptions not solely of Plovdiv itself but also of the Maritsa River, which I characterize as the city's heart. However, while Evliya Çelebi provides rather detailed information about the Maritsa River and its relationship with Edirne, his account is relatively less informative regarding the river's connection to Plovdiv.

When the primary source groups for the thesis began to be examined, and the Ottoman travelogue was first analyzed, it was observed that he placed greater emphasis on Edirne's relationship with the Maritsa River. Apart from this, he describes Plovdiv's geographical features, ruling class, its conquest, economic characteristics, cultivated agricultural products (on which he elaborates, comparing Plovdiv rice to Egyptian rice), Plovdiv's climatic features (which he depicts as summers of infernal heat), its bathhouses, and mosques. With the exception of Evliya Çelebi, no other Ottoman travelogue from the early modern period concerning Plovdiv has been encountered.

Apart from Evliya Çelebi, the travelogues utilized for early modern Ottoman Plovdiv are those written by European travelers. Travelers such as Lubenau, Busbecq, Fresne-Canaye, and Schweigger have provided some information, more or less, about Plovdiv.¹⁵ However, the primary objective of all these aforementioned European travelers was not

¹⁴ Evliya Çelebi, *Günümüz Türkçesiyle Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi*, III. Cilt II. Kitap, eds. Seyit Ali Kahraman-Yücel Dağlı, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul 2006.

¹⁵ Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq, *Kanuni Döneminde Avrupalı Bir Elçinin Gözlemleri (1555-1560)*, trs. Derin Türkömer, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2011, p. x-xı; Reinhold Lubenau, *Reinhold Lubenau Seyahatnamesi, Osmanlı Ülkesinde 1587-1589*, I. Cilt, trs. Türkis Noyan, Kitap Yayınevi, İstanbul 2016.

solely to explore Plovdiv, any more than it was for Evliya Çelebi. They followed a simple, straightforward logic: the Middle Way, the *Via Militaris*.¹⁶ Their common objectives were generally either to reach İstanbul or to pass through Plovdiv as part of the pilgrimage route. When the European travelers, proceeding from their respective starting itineraries, arrived in Plovdiv, they saw the iconic bridge constructed by Lala Şâhin Pasha and began describing this bridge in detail. Beyond the bridge, they were also struck by the rice paddy cultivation; Lubenau, for instance, even compared the rice to the wheat farming practiced in his homeland. Upon encountering trees not found in their native regions, Lubenau was astonished and felt compelled to write about the cypress trees.¹⁷ When the observations of these European travelers are analyzed in conjunction with Ottoman archival documents and *vakfiye* the environmental history of the Maritsa River and Plovdiv becomes more comprehensively understandable.

When the thesis topic was first decided, accessing the Plovdiv *şer'iyye* registers was a primary objective. It was believed that these registers would provide crucial information about significant issues concerning the Maritsa River and their resolutions. Unfortunately, access to the Plovdiv *şer'iyye* registers could not be obtained. Initially, no information on this matter could be acquired from the Ottoman archives; subsequently, efforts were made to access the registers by contacting archives in Bulgaria. Following this, the bibliographies and source bases of historians who have produced significant works on Plovdiv were examined, yet no cluster of information on this subject could be found there either.

Later, Grigor Boykov, in his latest book on Plovdiv, provided detailed information on this situation. The information he gives indicates that he also did not encounter this set of sources. According to Boykov's estimation, the registers may perhaps be in Russia.¹⁸ It is evident that if this source group emerges in the future for studies on both the Maritsa River and the city of Plovdiv, it will undoubtedly yield research on very important topics; these registers are also highly significant for environmental historians.

In conclusion, by weaving together the structural and administrative framework provided by the Ottoman archival documents, the diverse practices and services enacted

¹⁶ Reinhold Lubenau, *Ibid*, p. 13; Philippe du Fresne Canaye, *Fresne-Canaye Seyahatnamesi 1573*, trs. Teoman Tunçdoğan, Kitap Yayınevi, İstanbul 2017, p. 7-11; Solomon Schweigger, *Sultanlar Kentine Yolculuk 1578-1581*, trs. Türkis Noyan, Kitap Yayınevi, İstanbul 2020, p. 14-19.

¹⁷ Benedict Curipeschitz, *Yolculuk Günlüğü 1530*, çev. Özdemir Nutku, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara 1989, p. VII-3.

¹⁸ Grigor Boykov, *Ottoman Plovdiv, Space, Architecture and Population (14th-17th Centuries)*, Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, Vienna, 2024, p.45

upon the river and city as detailed in waqf records, and the firsthand observations of travelers, an intricate picture of the early modern environmental history of the Maritsa River and Plovdiv can be constructed.

Secondary Sources

Firstly, Grigor Boykov's important book *Ottoman Plovdiv: Space, Architecture, and Population (14th-17th Centuries)* was used to explore the city within the context of the Ottoman administration. Boykov examines a wide range of sources on Ottoman Plovdiv, including regional geography and conquest, urban topography, Ottoman adaptations and its buildings. In addition to this, he analyzes the population geography of the city that are dynamics, spatial distribution and so on. Even though, Boykov's book is not an environmental history study, it nevertheless highlights the significance of Maritsa River for Plovdiv. While his study provides crucial insights into the spatial and demographic development of early modern Plovdiv, broader Ottoman environmental history scholarship has emphasized the central role of water in imperial governance.

Although Boykov's research constitutes a pioneering contribution to studies on Plovdiv, the aim of this dissertation is not to produce a conventional urban history of the city. Rather, it seeks to contribute to urban historical studies through an environmental history perspective. Boykov does not place the Maritsa River at the center of his analysis of Plovdiv. In contrast, what this dissertation aims to demonstrate is that the Maritsa River has never been a static river.

Historians have demonstrated the crucial role that water played in state building across various regions of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁹ Foremost among the scholars who come to mind in the field of Ottoman environmental history studies is Alan Mikhail.²⁰ In his

¹⁹ For the detailed information about the Ottoman environmental history studies in Turkey: Onur İnal, *Environmental History as an Emerging Field in Ottoman Studies: An Historiographical Overview*, *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, C:38, S:38, 2011, p. 5-25; Selçuk Dursun, *Çevresel (Ekolojik) Tarih Lensinden Osmanlı Tarihine Yeniden Bakmak*, in *New Trends in Ottoman Studies*, ed. Marinos Sariyannis, 2014, p.59-69. John R. McNeill, *Giriş: Anglofon Osmanlı Çevre Tarihi*, tr. Önder Eren Akgül, in. *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze İnsanın Ayak İzleri: Müdahale, Etkileşim, Mücadele*, eds. Deniz Dölek-Sever& Özlem Sert, Alfa Yayınları, İstanbul 2025, p.24-32.

²⁰ Alan Mikhail is one of the pioneering scholars in Ottoman environmental history. Mikhail who works at Yale University as a Professor, concentrates on especially Ottoman Egypt. He contributed to the Ottoman environmental history studies. In his works, he frequently highlights the relationship between humans, animals, energy sources, and the environment, examining these dynamics through both economic and administrative perspectives. His important studies: Alan Mikhail, *Osman'ın Ağacı Altında, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Mısır ve Çevre Tarihi*, çev. Seda Özdil, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2019; Alan Mikhail, *Osmanlı Mısır'ında Doğa ve İmparatorluk, Bir Çevre Tarihi*, çev. Seda Özdil, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2024; Alan Mikhail, *The Animal in Ottoman Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York 2014; Alan Mikhail, "Unleashing the Beast: Animals, Energy, and the Economy of Labor in Ottoman Egypt", *American*

work *Under Osman's Tree: The Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and Environmental History*, Mikhail focuses on early modern Ottoman Egypt and the Nile River. This seminal study provides a framework for understanding how a major river under Ottoman sovereignty was utilized within the imperial administration. The book concentrates on Ottoman Egypt and its relationship with the Nile, specifically through the lenses of irrigation works, labor (both human and animal), and disease.

In his book *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History*, Mikhail presents a study spanning from the 17th to the 19th centuries, examining water usage in rural Egypt and the social and environmental history of Egyptian irrigation. In this context, the Nile River is but one of the key actors that must be understood to comprehend the environmental history of Egypt.²¹ This integration of irrigation enabled the development of more effective policies by incorporating the local knowledge of Egyptian peasants regarding the land.²²

Along with the works of Alan Mikhail, the studies of Faisal Husain have also served as foundational sources that constitute a starting point for this thesis. It would be accurate to state that Husain's book, *Rivers of the Sultan: The Tigris and Euphrates in the Ottoman Empire*, likewise focuses on the environmental history of the early modern Ottoman period, much like the work of Alan Mikhail.²³ Husain focuses on the Ottoman administration of Iraq, a geography where the empire always had to exercise caution and of the Tigris and

Historical Review, 118, 2013, p.317-48. Alan Mikhail, "Engineering the Ottoman Empire: Irrigation and the Persistence of Early Modern Expertise", In *Ottoman Rural Societies and Economies*, ed. Elias Kolovos. Crete University Press, Rethymno 2015. Alan Mikhail, "Foreword: Ottoman and Nature", In *Seeds of Power: Explorations in Ottoman Environmental History*, ed. Onur İnal and Yavuz Köse, White Horse Press, Cambridgeshire 2019. Alan Mikhail, "Animals as Property in Early Modern Ottoman Egypt", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 53, 2010, p.621-652. For the detailed information about Mikhail's thoughts related to Ottoman environmental studies: Dilara Avcı, "Interview: On Environmental History with Alan Mikhail", *Uluslararası Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Volume: 8, Issue:2, 2024, p.196-208.

²¹ Alan Mikhail, *Osmanlı Mısır'ında Doğa ve İmparatorluk, Bir Çevre Tarihi*, çev. Seda Özdil, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2024, p.1.

²² Mikhail, *Ibid*, p.21.

²³ Faisal Husain's work was detailed above, was originally his Ph.D.. His advisor is John McNeill a professor at Georgetown University. Husain defended his Ph.D., "The Tigris-Euphrates Basin under Early Modern Ottoman Rule (c. 1534–1830)" in 2018. This dissertation formed the basis of his later monograph, *Rivers of the Sultan: The Tigris and Euphrates in the Ottoman Empire* and it was published by Oxford University Press in 2011. This book was translated into Turkish as *Sultan'ın Nehirleri: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Dicle ve Fırat* by Timaş Publishing in 2023. For the detailed information about Husain's books: Mohammad Hossain, "Faisal Husain. Rivers of the Sultan: The Tigris and Euphrates in the Ottoman Empire. Oxford University Press, 2021, 264 pp.", *İnsan Ve Toplum*, 12(3), 242-245. Hakan Kaya, "Faisal H. Husain'in "Sultan'ın Nehirleri: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Dicle ve Fırat" Adlı Eserinin Değerlendirmesi", *Darulfunun İlahiyat*, 34 (1), 2023, pp.323-329. For the detailed information about Husain's thoughts related to Ottoman environmental studies: Dilara Avcı, "Interview: On Environmental History with Faisal Husain", *Uluslararası Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Volume:7, Issue:1, 2023, p.97-105.

Euphrates, which he characterizes as twin rivers. Although the capacity of these two rivers on which Husain focuses is not as great as that of the Nile, the geographical area they influence is vast. The Ottomans consolidated their control in the region through shipyards established by the imperial navy. As Husain emphasizes, after conquering the region, the Ottomans did not begin their rule with complete confidence; on the contrary, they had to exert greater effort to tighten their dominion because they faced the Safavids, one of their greatest historical rivals.

Consequently, while the significant studies of Mikhail and Husain elucidate the methods of river management in different parts of the Ottoman Empire, a similar approach can be applied to the Maritsa River, a crucial waterway in the Ottoman Balkans. It is precisely now that the environmental challenges the Ottomans encountered in Egypt or Iraq took on a different dimension in the Balkans, specifically around the Maritsa River. Therefore, although the case of the Maritsa River and Plovdiv shows certain similarities with the problems and solutions the Ottomans faced in Egypt or Iraq, these issues assumed a distinct character in the Balkan context.

It was through continued reflection upon this very distinction that the scope and content of my thesis topic gradually took shape. Neither the region and river studied by Mikhail nor those studied by Husain were trouble-free domains for the Ottomans. On the contrary, they had to constantly reconstruct their dominance over those regions and rivers. However, this was not the case for Plovdiv or the Maritsa River. From the beginning of the Ottoman conquests in the Balkans, the Maritsa River and Plovdiv, the core of this thesis, remained under Ottoman sovereignty until nearly the end of the 19th century. There was a change neither in the administration of the river or Plovdiv, nor a threat of the region being seized by different communities. Following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, Plovdiv first became part of the autonomous province of Eastern Rumelia and was subsequently annexed by the Bulgarian Principality in 1885. This means it remained under singular Ottoman administration from approximately the 1360s until 1885.

Within the scope of this dissertation, there are several reasons for the specific selection of Plovdiv as the study. The Maritsa River does not flow through only a single city; rather, it passes through multiple urban centers, and it holds particular importance for the city of Edirne. The primary reason for not selecting Edirne within the framework of this study is the possibility that the administrative practices and regulations there may have differed from those of other cities due to Edirne's former status as an Ottoman capital.

Plovdiv, on the other hand, represents the second most prominent city associated with the Maritsa River. Another significant reason for choosing Plovdiv is the availability of tahrir registers and the possibility of tracing developments through these records. Accordingly, this dissertation does not examine the entire period during which the Maritsa River remained under Ottoman sovereignty; instead, it focuses on the early modern period. Beginning with the Ottoman conquest of Plovdiv, the period up to the end of the sixteenth century is examined within the scope of this study.

Throughout the period of Ottoman rule, the water resources and opportunities provided by Maritsa River for the region, its critical role in sustaining irrigated agriculture, and the transportation activities it enabled were all maintained, thereby ensuring the continuity of trade in the area. Within the framework of this aforementioned significance, highlighting the river's impact and importance for Plovdiv further underscores the thesis's role within the field of environmental history.

CHAPTER 1

No water, no life. No blue, no green.

Sylvia Earle

1. RIVER

Rivers are not just blue lines on the map. They have been the foundations of settlement, agriculture, transportation, and state making. This chapter examines the Maritsa (Maritsa) River and its basin, with particular attention to the city of Plovdiv, from antiquity through the Ottoman conquest and into the early modern period. The Maritsa basin, stretching across Bulgaria, Turkey, and Greece, has long been a crossroads of peoples and states. By focusing on this geography, the chapter seeks to show how the environment, be it floodplains, marshes, fertile soils, and mountain ranges, shaped the history of one of the Balkans' most important river valleys.

Three main points will be emphasized throughout the chapter. First, the Maritsa River created opportunities for agriculture, especially rice cultivation, which became one of the most important Ottoman contributions to the region. Second, the river basin provided natural transportation routes, known since antiquity as the Via Militaris, which guided armies and trade alike. These routes did not change with political regimes but structured how empires, including the Ottomans, expanded and ruled. Third, the river also presented challenges: floods, marshlands, and the threat of disease forced both local populations and imperial administrators to constantly negotiate with its waters. Taken together, these features make clear that the Maritsa was not simply a background to human history, but an active force that shaped settlement, economy, and governance in the Balkans.

This chapter will unfold in four parts. It begins with a description of the geographical features of the Maritsa and Ergene basins in the larger Thrace region. The focus then shifts to the history of Plovdiv and the Maritsa valley before and after the Ottoman conquest, showing how successive states sought to control this strategic area. The third section considers the role of the river in transportation and trade, including its use by local communities, traveling armies, and imperial administrators. The final part focuses on land use, particularly agriculture, rice cultivation, pastures, and forests, revealing both the productivity and the environmental constraints of the basin. By tracing these themes together, this chapter

highlights how the Maritsa River basin was both a resource to be exploited and a constraint to be managed, ultimately shaping the development of the Balkans under Ottoman rule.

1.1. Rivers As Life, Borders, And Exchange

Throughout history, rivers have been of fundamental importance to humans both in material and mental terms.²⁴ Rivers are basic natural resources supporting ecosystems and human societies, and the health of rivers is crucial to the Earth's sustainable development.²⁵ Is it possible to imagine the world without water? The answer is no. In fact, it is precisely water that makes the Earth distinct and habitable among all the planets, turning it into a place where life can flourish. Given the fundamental importance of water to life, it is no surprise that societies have historically chosen to settle near rivers and seas, deliberately founding their communities and states in these locations. When we look at the most influential empires, states and communities in world history, we see that they were usually founded in close relationship with rivers and seas. When we look at the birth of the first civilizations, it is impossible not to see rivers. China cannot be thought of without the Yangtze River, Egypt without the Nile, India without the Indus, Great Britain without the Thames, Germany without the Rhine, and the Balkans without the Danube and the Maritsa. These important states and communities were all established and sustained through their relationship with rivers.²⁶

Communities have also benefited from rivers in developing the economic activities of the states they have established around rivers. Rivers do not merely flow through fertile land, they are ones that create it and people have gradually developed their agricultural activities. Advanced agriculture not only improved crop production but also created favorable conditions for animal husbandry. Fishing, too, added to the economic importance of rivers. Beyond the basic economic activities that allowed people to support and feed themselves, rivers also facilitated trade and commerce. Goods were transported by rivers with rafts, boats and ships, and in this way material and goods exchanges between cultures flourished. Products could be transported much more affordable by river than by land.

In addition to their role in economic life, rivers have also had a great effect on forming the political borders of states. Throughout history, different empires and states have

²⁴ Paula Schönach, "River Histories: a Thematic Review", *Water History*, V.9, 2017, p.234.

²⁵ Hao Wang, Guohua He, "Rivers: Linking Nature, Life and Civilization", *River*, Volume:1, Issue:1, 2022, p.25.

²⁶ Christof Mauch and Thomas Zeller (Ed.), *Rivers in History: Perspectives in Waterways in Europe and North America*, University of Pittsburg Press, 2008, p.1.

used rivers as political borders. For example, the Roman Empire marked its northern frontier with the Danube River. To secure this line, Roman Empire built bridges across the river.²⁷ Yet protecting rivers as political borders was not easy. As control over rivers passed from one society to another, the material and spiritual concerns of the people living nearby also shifted. With the conquest of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers and their surrounding geography by Suleiman the Magnificent in the 16th century, the political borders of the Ottoman Empire changed, and its frontier with the neighboring Safavid Empire became more closely monitored. The fertile lands along the Euphrates and Tigris rivers both increased the empire's economic diversity and forced the Ottoman administration to take new measures to cope with the great responsibility these rivers brought. When control of a river changed, so too did the management of all the natural elements connected to it.²⁸

1.2. The Geography of the Maritsa Basin

Rivers are not only geographical features but have also been the source of life and the driving force of civilization throughout history. From ancient times, rivers have held geographical importance, though they differ greatly in size and breadth. The Maritsa River, which is the main subject of this thesis, is one of the most important rivers of the Balkans. It has not only influenced the course of Balkan history but has also sustained the people living along its banks. As a transboundary river flowing through Bulgaria, Türkiye, and Greece, the Maritsa links mountain headwaters to lowland floodplains and its Aegean delta. In what follows, I outline the basin's physical setting, its environmental richness, and the ways these conditions shaped settlement and land use.

Although the Maritsa and Ergene Basins are two intertwined basins, the Ergene River is in fact a major tributary of the Maritsa, joining it near Edirne. For this reason, scientists consider the Ergene Basin as one of the largest sub-basins of the Maritsa Basin, and they refer to the region where both rivers flow as the 'Maritsa -Ergene Basin'. The Maritsa -Ergene Basin is part of the Thrace Basin, a geological depression located on the Alpine-Himalayan belt at the northwestern tip of modern Türkiye. It is bordered by the Istranca (Strandzha) Mountains to the north, the Rhodope Mountains to the west, and the Menderes Mountains to the south. Geologists describe the Thrace Basin as a “tertiary basin,” meaning it was formed during the Tertiary period (66-2.6 million years ago) and has continued to

²⁷ Kenneth R. Olson and Edward Krug, “The Danube, an Empire Boundary River: Settlements, Invasions, Navigation, and Trade Pathway”, *Journal of Water Resource and Protection*, 2020, V.12, p.884.

²⁸ Faisal Husain, *Rivers of the Sultan, The Tigris and Euphrates in the Ottoman Empire*, Oxford University Press, 2021, p.1.

accumulate sediments since that time. Sedimentation processes, marine (sea), lacustrine (lake), and terrestrial (land), have been ongoing there since the Eocene epoch (about 56-34 million years ago). The Maritsa River itself took shape during the Upper Holocene (the last 12,000 years). Along its course, the thickness of the alluvial soils, fertile sediments deposited by the river, varies depending on the position of the river channel.

When discussing the Maritsa River basin, it is important to note that a significant portion of the river's basin lies within present-day Bulgaria. This section located in Bulgaria is generally mountainous. In contrast, the section in modern-day Türkiye consists of low and flat areas called floodplain.²⁹ The delta of the Maritsa River drains into the Aegean Sea, its coastline forming a straight line running northwest-southeast.³⁰ The river originates from the Musallâ peak in the Rila Mountains, in the northwestern part of the Rhodope Mountains, and carves its way through the mountains before descending to the plains.³¹ The full Maritsa basin includes not only the Maritsa River itself but also its main tributaries, the Arda, Tunca and Ergene rivers, making it a shared transboundary water system.³² Today, the Maritsa basin covers an area of about 52.600 km². 65% of this basin is in Bulgaria, 28% in Turkey, and 7% in Greece.³³

²⁹ İlayda Topgöl, *Hidrografik Açısından Aşağı Meriç Nehri ve Taşkınlar*, T.C. Çankırı Karatekin Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Çankırı 2019, s. 15–19.

³⁰ Kemal Göçmen, “Enez Limanının Değişen Öneminde Meriç Deltasının Etkileri”, *Güneydoğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi*, S. 2-3, 1974, p. 253.

³¹ Metin Tuncel, “Meriç” *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Meriç, C.XXIX, Ankara 2004, s.188.

³² Maritsa river is one of the most important river which is transboundary. Transboundary river means that shared by two or more countries. Maritsa river shares by modern Bulgaria, Türkiye and Greece. For detailed information: <https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/transboundary-waters>.

³³ Fatma Tombul, “Uluslararası Antlaşmalar Çerçevesinde Meriç Havzasında Su Yönetimi”, *Anadolu Üniversitesi Bilim ve Teknoloji Dergisi*, C: 15 S: 2, 2014, p.149; Doğan Yıldız, Dursun Yıldız, Mehmet Şamil Güneş, “The Emerging Flood Risk on the Lower Part of Transboundary Meric/Maritsa River Basin”, *International Journal of Scientific and Technological Research*, V.5, No.9, 2019, p.2.

Meriç-Ergene River Basin. Area - 52600 km² Length - 550 km



Map 1.1: The map illustrating the study area³⁴

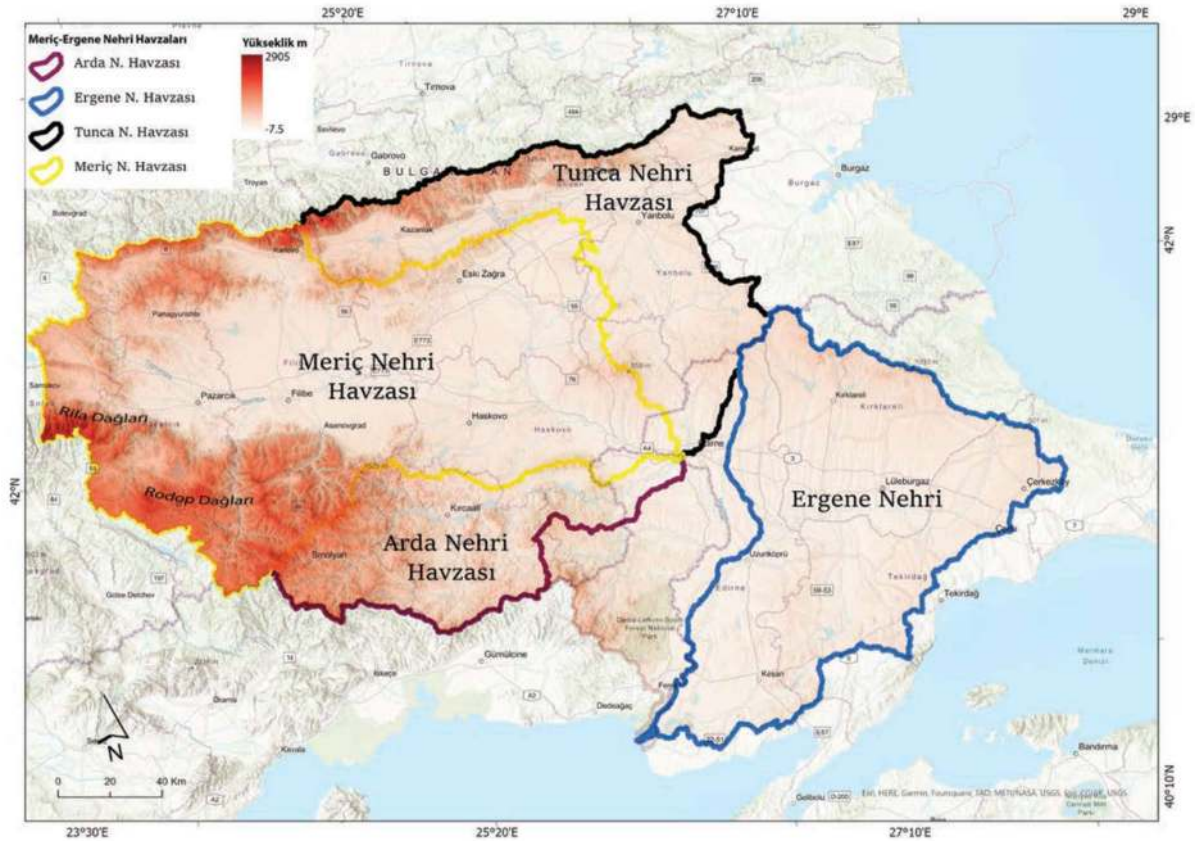
21% of Bulgaria's water resources are located in the region of Plovdiv,³⁵ which is rich in both underground and surface (like river) water resources. The most significant of these surface resources is the Maritsa River itself. Before draining into the Aegean Sea, the river passes through numerous Bulgarian towns, including Belovo, Dimitrovgrad, Dolna Banya, Kostenets, Plovdiv, Pazarcık, Simionovgrad, Lyübimets, and Harmanlı, before reaching Svilengrad on the Bulgarian-Greek border.³⁶ From İstanbul, the Ottoman capital, the distance to Plovdiv was measured as about 452 km, while Edirne lies 143 km from the river's mouth at Enez on the Aegean Sea. The Maritsa River nourishes the plains around both Edirne and Plovdiv, the two most important cities of the region, each located directly on the banks of the Maritsa River.

³⁴ This map is one of the primary maps used in studies on the Maritsa River and the Maritsa River Basin. <https://floodmerg.tarimorman.gov.tr/en/meric-ergene-river-basin>, last access date: 04.11.2025.

³⁵ Filibe or Plovdiv is a city located in modern Bulgaria today. It is the second largest city after Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. Although Sofia is the central city, Plovdiv is the cultural capital. Since the thesis will focus on the relationship between the Maritsa River and Plovdiv, it will be mentioned frequently.

³⁶ Reyhan Rafet Mustafa, *Bulgaristan Filibe (Plovdiv) ve Yakın Çevresinin Coğrafi Etüdü*, Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İstanbul 2010, p.22-23.

The most important rivers of the Maritsa -Ergene Basin are the Maritsa River itself and its major tributary, the Ergene River, from which the basin takes its name, along with smaller tributaries.³⁷ The Maritsa River Basin is encircled by the Rila Mountains and the Rhodope (Rodop) Mountains. These two mountain ranges shape the flow of the river in its upper and lower courses. By contrast, the Ergene sub-basin is framed by the Strandzha (Istranca) Mountains to the north.



Map 1.2: The Maritsa and Ergene Basin³⁸

The surrounding mountains (Rila, Rhodope, and Strandzha ranges) have created significant biological diversity. Because the basin lies at the transition zone between Sub-Mediterranean and Mediterranean climates, its fauna includes species from different climatic and biogeographic realms,³⁹ particularly in its amphibians and reptiles (together scientifically called herpetofauna). Humidity levels remain consistently high, due in part to the moisture-regulating effect of the Maritsa River. The river's dominance in the region has

³⁷ <https://webdosya.csb.gov.tr/db/scd/icerikler/mer-c-ergene-kyp-n-ha--scd-20240216125742.pdf>. p.14.

³⁸ <https://www.tck.org.tr/publics/1673564920.pdf>. p.56.

³⁹ Nikolaos Th. Skoulidakis, Alcibiades N. Economou, Konstantinos C. Gritzalis, Stamatis Zogaris, “Rivers of the Balkans”, *Rivers of Europe*, ed. Klement Tockner, Christopher T. Robinson, Urs Uehlinger, Academic Press (Elsevier), London 2009, p. 470.

long enabled both irrigated and rain-fed agriculture, with especially high productivity in rice and wheat. The mountainous terrain also supports robust livestock farming practices.⁴⁰ Seasonal movement of animals between highland summer pastures (yaylak) and lowland wintering grazing grounds (kışlak) has significantly enhanced small ruminant productivity. During the intense summer heat, animals are traditionally moved to higher pastures, where diverse forage available in these elevated areas improves the quality of meat and dairy products, as the varied upland vegetation enhances both the quality and nutritional value of the livestock output. With all these aforementioned favorable conditions, the region has evolved into a vibrant hub for human economic activity. The region's favorable geographic and climatic characteristics have made it particularly suitable for human settlement. At the same time, they made the region a destination for migrations and a contested territory that various communities sought to control throughout history.

1.3. The Maritsa River and the Making of Plovdiv

The history of the Maritsa River and the city of Plovdiv shows how geography and politics constantly intersected in the Balkans. Situated on fertile plains along the river and lying on the main route between the Ottoman Empire and Europe, Plovdiv became both a prize and a battleground for successive empires. Before the Ottoman conquest, the city and its surroundings frequently changed hands, reflecting the strategic and economic value of the river. With the arrival of the Ottomans in the fourteenth century, however, the region was gradually transformed from a contested frontier into a stable center of their empire in Europe.

1.3.1. History of the Region before the Ottoman Conquest

The Maritsa River is the second largest river in the Balkan Peninsula after the Danube River. The river and its valley became a settlement center as early as the Neolithic period, when agriculture also began to develop in the surrounding plains.⁴¹ Like London on the Thames River and Paris on the Seine River, the city of Plovdiv, established on both banks of the Maritsa, grew and developed thanks to the river. The Thracians, the earliest known inhabitants of the region, called the city *Pulpudeva*. With the Persians conquering the region in the 6th century B.C., the Maritsa River served as a bridge for their passage into Europe. After the Thracians, the region successively came under the control of the Roman Empire, the Bulgarians, the Byzantine Empire and finally the Ottomans in the 14th century. Unlike

⁴⁰ Wolf- Dieter Hütteroth, "Ecology of the Ottoman Lands", in. *The Cambridge History of Turkey, Volume 3, The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603-1839*, ed. Suraiya Faruqi, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.27.

⁴¹ Skoulikidis, Economou, Gritzalis, Zogaris, *Rivers of the Balkans* p.444.

many other river valleys, Plovdiv and Maritsa valley remained under Ottoman rule for nearly five centuries, until 1885.⁴²

The city of *Pulpudeva* was re-founded by the famous Macedonian king Philip II in 342 B.C., after whom it was renamed *Philippopolis*.⁴³ Established on a hill that has been open to settlement since the Chalcolithic period, the city became an important urban center. During the late Roman and early Byzantine periods, however, the city suffered repeated attacks from invading barbarian tribes. In the 5th century C.E., the Huns devastated the region. The city was later rebuilt during the reign of Justinian I, only to be conquered by the Bulgarians in the 9th century C.E. Later, the city remained under Byzantine rule from the 10th century until the end of the 12th century. During the Third Crusade, Crusader armies ravaged it. Although the Bulgarians recaptured it in 1203, the Crusaders seized control again just a year later. Their occupation caused further destruction.⁴⁴ All these repeated raids on the city and its repeated changes in government finally came to an end in the 14th century when *Philippopolis* was conquered by the Ottomans.⁴⁵

1.3.2. Maritsa River and Plovdiv with the Ottoman Conquest

The Ottomans' expansion into the Balkans began during the reign of Orhan Bey (1324-1362). After the death of Osman Bey, the founder of the Ottoman dynasty, Orhan Bey ascended to the throne and set his sights on westward. At this point, his greatest rival was the Byzantine Empire, though he also faced the Serbian and Bulgarian states eager to expand against Byzantium. Taking advantage of Byzantium's internal affairs (the struggle for the throne between Kantekouzenus and John V Palaiologos), the Ottomans positioned themselves as allies of Kantekouzenus and his son against the Bulgarian and Serbian states.

⁴² Michael Kiel, "Filibe", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C. XIII, İstanbul 1996, p.79-81. For detailed information on this subject, the article written by Kiel can be thoroughly examined. The administration of the Plovdiv and Maritsa River region remained under Ottoman imperial rule from the 14th century until the late 19th century. Following the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War (known as the 93 Harbi), the area first came under the administration of Eastern Rumelia, then in 1885 was incorporated into the newly established Principality of Bulgaria. As control over Plovdiv and its surroundings changed hands, the ethnic composition of the region began to transform significantly.

⁴³ Nurullah Karta, *XVI. Yüzyılda Filibe Kazası*, p.7.

⁴⁴ Aydan Yumerov, "Bir Osmanlı Şehri Olarak Filibe ve Filibe Mevlevihanesi", *Mütefekkir: Aksaray Üniversitesi İslami İlimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Yıl 1, S: 1, 2014, p.194-195.

⁴⁵ Kiel, "Filibe", p.79. The local population offered little resistance to the region's transition to Ottoman rule. This lack of opposition may be attributed to the area's exhaustion from centuries of warfare, raids, and invasions. With the establishment of Ottoman control, the frequent changes of governance that had long plagued the region finally ceased.

Süleyman Pasha and his soldiers confronted Bulgarians and Serbians stationed along the Maritsa River. In 1352, he defeated the Bulgarians at the Maritsa River,⁴⁶ after which Ottoman forces launched raids into Bulgarian lands to increase their resources and wealth. To secure their presence, Süleyman Pasha stationed his soldiers in the fortress of Tsympe (Çimpe/Cinbi/Çimpi) on the Gallipoli peninsula, providing shelter from the harsh conditions of winter and establishing a crucial foothold that strengthened Ottoman communications with the Balkans. The capture of this military outpost from Byzantium marked the beginning of their later conquests into Europe.⁴⁷

After the death of Orhan Bey, his son Murad I (1362-1389) ascended to the throne and continued the Balkan conquests. Frontier lords (uç beyleri) played a central role in the Balkans. At this point, the Ottoman advances increasingly took on a systematic character. After consolidating control over the Gallipoli peninsula, the Ottomans targeted the castles protecting Edirne from the south along the Maritsa valley, as well as Dimetoka, another important center to keep Edirne under pressure. Murad I was focusing particularly on Edirne and he entrusted important commanders such as Lala Şâhin⁴⁸, Hacı İlbeği⁴⁹ and Evrenos Bey with responsibility for these campaigns.⁵⁰

The Ottoman forces, fighting in the Sazlıdere area, inflicted a significant defeat on Byzantine forces. After this success, Murad I who was *şehzade* at this moment summoned his commanders Hacı İlbeği and Evrenos Bey, who were operating in the Maritsa valley and the Keşan mountainous, to deal the final blow. All forces united to conquer Edirne, which

⁴⁶ Halil İncalcık, “Orhan”, *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C. XXXIII, İstanbul 2007, p.378.

⁴⁷ Münir Aktepe, “Osmanlıların Rumeli’de İlk Fethettikleri Çimbi Kal’ası”, *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi*, C. 1, S. 2, 1950, p.285. Although the idea that everything started with the capture of Çimpe Castle during the Ottomans’ passage to Rumelia is supported by İncalcık, according to him, everything did not start with Çimpe Castle. İncalcık, who narrates the information in the *Düsturname*, states that the Ottomans reached a strategic position in Gallipoli with the conquest of Bolayır. To read İncalcık’s opinion on this subject in detail, see: Halil İncalcık, “Orhan”, *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C. XXXIII, İstanbul 2007.

⁴⁸ Lala Şâhin is one of the important commanders who left their mark on the early Ottoman period. He played a major role in the construction and settlement of the Maritsa River, especially after it was captured. He was given the first rank of beylerbeyi due to his successes in Rumelia. For detailed information about his life, see: Abdülkadir Özcan, “Lala Şâhin”, *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C. XXVII, Ankara 2003.

⁴⁹ Hacı İlbeği, like Lala Şâhin and Evrenos Bey, is a figure who played an important role in the conquests of Rumelia. He is known for his conquests around the Maritsa River. He played a great role in the conquests of Burgaz and Dimetoka, which are located much further along the Maritsa River. For information about Hacı İlbeği, see Abdülkadir Özcan, “Hacı İlbey”, *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C. XIV, İstanbul 1996.

⁵⁰ Evrenos Bey, Hacı İlbeği's comrade-in-arms, was a member of the Evrenosoğulları family. He, like Hacı İlbeği and Lala Şâhin, played an important role in the conquests of Rumelia. He contributed to other conquests after the Ottomans reached the Maritsa River border. While Murad I was dealing with problems in Anatolia, Evrenos Bey fought with his other comrades-in-arms to hold the Balkans. For more detailed information about him, see: Fahamettin Başar, “Evrenosoğulları”, *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C. XI, İstanbul 1995.

according to the sources was conquered without the need for a prolonged siege.⁵¹ The conquest of Edirne facilitated the Ottoman expansion in Rumelia and ultimately for the capture of Constantinople.⁵² With the conquest of Edirne, Ottoman expansion in the Balkans gathered momentum. Dimetoka (modern Didymóteikhon), located 40 km south of Edirne where the Kızıl Deliçay River joins the Maritsa River, was captured in 1361 by the akıncı warriors under the leadership of Hacı İlbeği. With this victory, the Ottomans secured the significant part of Maritsa region, also capturing smaller fortresses such as Kuleli Burgaz, Efremköy and Simavna.⁵³

After the conquest of Edirne, Ottoman forces moved into the upper Maritsa valley towards Plovdiv. After a prolonged siege, and through the intense efforts of Lala Şâhin, the first *Rumeli Beylerbeyi*, Plovdiv came under Ottoman rule in 1364.⁵⁴ After the conquest of Plovdiv, the Ottomans continued to conquer of the Maritsa River's upper side. The Ottoman conquests of Serbia and Bulgaria facilitated the establishment of control over the upper watersheds of the Maritsa River. Within the context of the Maritsa -Ergene basin, the conquest of Tekfurdağı⁵⁵ (modern Tekirdağ) and Kırkkilise (modern Kırklareli) by the Ottomans also held significance for future campaigns. It is known that initially, Şehzade Murad conquered Tekfurdağı and subsequently Kırkkilise. After being lost for a period following their initial conquest, these two cities were later reconquered by Murad during his sultanate. Tekfurdağı was conquered in 1357-58, and the conquest of Kırkkilise was

⁵¹ Halil İnalçık, "Edirnenin Fethi (1361)", In. *Edirne: Edirne'nin 600. Fethi Yıldönümü Armağan Kitabı*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara 1993, p. 149.

⁵² M.Tayyib Gökbilgin, "Edirne", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C.X, İstanbul 1994, p. 426; İnalçık, "Edirne'nin Fethi (1361)", p.137.

⁵³ Michael Kiel, "Dimetoka", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C. IX, İstanbul, 1994, p.305-306; Hacer Ateş, "Osmanlı İlerleyişi Esnasında Trakya Şehirlerinin Durumu Hakkında Bir Değerlendirme", *Güney-Doğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi*, C.37, 2021, p.145.

⁵⁴ The information that Plovdiv was conquered by the Ottomans in 1364 is debatable. While names such as Hoca Sadeddin and Evliya Çelebi indicate the date of the conquest of Plovdiv as 1364, Michael Kiel, while writing the Plovdiv article, emphasizes that the conquest took place in 1361, but that this issue is debatable. In the Rum-İli Tahrir Register, No. 370 (937/1530), the conquest of Plovdiv is stated as 1363. Grigor Boykov also states the conquest of Plovdiv as 1363 in his master's thesis. Grigor Boykov, *Demographic Features of Ottoman Upper Thrace: A Case Study on Filibe, Tatar Pazarcık and İstanımaka (1472-1614)*, İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences, Unpublished Master Thesis, Ankara 2004.

⁵⁵ Tekfurdağı was a small port city situated between Gelibolu and İstanbul. Tekfurdağı gained significant strategic importance due to its proximity to Edirne and İstanbul, both of which served as the Ottoman capital at different periods. Hacer Ateş, "Osmanlı İlerleyişi Esnasında Trakya Şehirlerinin Durumu Hakkında Bir Değerlendirme", p.133.

As Hacer Ateş notes that, live animals transported from various locations in the Balkans, as well as rice brought from Plovdiv, wool, dried fruit, and flax products, were shipped to İzmit and the other regions from Plovdiv and its surroundings and were subsequently sent to İstanbul via the port of Tekfurdağı. Hacer Ateş, "Tekirdağ" *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C. XL, İstanbul, 2011, p.360.

subsequently re-established in 1368-69.⁵⁶ However, the conquest of centers such as Dimetoka, Edirne, Plovdiv, Tekfurdağı, and Kırkkilise did not in itself secure the conquest of the entire Maritsa basin. The conquest of the Maritsa basin was fully completed only with the Ottoman capture of Enez in 1456.

At the river's mouth on the Aegean Sea, the Genoese stronghold Enez fell into Ottoman hands in 1456 when Fatih Sultan Mehmed marched from Edirne and reached its outskirts.⁵⁷ The town was of strategic importance as a port and as the point where the Maritsa, rising in the Rhodope Mountains, empties into the Aegean Sea.⁵⁸ Approximately twenty years later, in 1485 during the reign of Bayezid II, the Ottomans founded Pazarcık (today's Pazardzhik) on the flat plain where the Topolnitsa (Topolniça) River, originating from the Balkan Mountains, meets the Maritsa River. Although archeological excavations show earlier habitation in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the town grew substantially only after the Ottoman conquest in 1360s. Located on the route from İstanbul to Belgrade and from Plovdiv to Sofia, Pazarcık became an important node in the regional network.⁵⁹ Within approximately 120 years, from the capture of Dimetoka in 1361 to the founding of Tatarpazarcığı in 1485, the Ottomans gradually gained control over the Maritsa River basin.

1.4. A Natural Corridor on the Maritsa River

Although smaller in scale than great rivers such as the Danube or the Euphrates, the Maritsa River played a role to some extent as a transportation artery in the Balkans. Flowing through Thrace toward the Aegean, it provided both a natural corridor and a logistical backbone that shaped patterns of settlement, trade, and conquest. From antiquity through the Ottoman period, armies, merchants, and travelers used the Maritsa valley as a route across the region, while the river itself, navigable only in parts and seasons, still served as a vital link for local transport and commerce.

⁵⁶ Hacer Ateş, *Ibid*, p.360; V. Türkan Doğruöz, Volkan Dökmeci, Alifer Çiftçi, "1880 Tarihli Kırkkilise Sancağı'nın Tarihi ve Coğrafi Açısından Tasviri (Perigrafi İstoriogeografiki Tis Eparhias Ton Saranta Ekklesion) Adlı Eser Tercümesinin Kırklareli Tarihi Açısından Yorumlanması", *Anadolu ve Balkan Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 3 (6), 2020, p.73; Metin Tuncel, "Kırklareli", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C.XXV, Ankara, 2022, p.478; Hacer Ateş, Osmanlı İlerleyişi Esnasında Trakya Şehirlerinin Durumu Hakkında Bir Değerlendirme, p.133.

⁵⁷ Hürü Sağlam Tekir, "20. Yüzyıl Başlarında Enez (İnöz) ve Çevresinde Çetecilere Yardım Faaliyetleri", *Erzincan Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, C.6, S. 2, p.428.

⁵⁸ Maritsa River facilitated trade between the southern parts of Edirne and Enez. Fulya Feyiz, "1785-1797 Yılları Arasında Enez Gümrüğü", in. *Enez Kitabı*, ed. Halûk Kayıcı-Emin Ünsal, Egem Basın, İstanbul 2023, p. 211.

⁵⁹ Grigor Boykov & Michael Kiel, "Tatarpazarcığı", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C. XL, İstanbul, 2011, p.170.

1.4.1. Maritsa River in Antiquity and Byzantium

The basin formed by the Maritsa River has long created a natural network of routes. Since antiquity, the Maritsa River has provided multiple conveniences to people and armies, serving as both a migration corridor and an invasion route. In ancient times, the Maritsa River was known as a major transportation route between Europe and Asia. The fertile fluvial soils of the Maritsa and Tunca valleys have attracted human settlement since the Neolithic era. Plovdiv witnessed multiple struggles during the Roman administration and was later sacked by the Goths after they crossed the Danube River. Under Byzantine rule, Plovdiv became an important transit hub of Edrene (modern Edirne), who escaped by boat at night to Enez during a flood of the Maritsa River. The event shows that the river was not always navigable. It was only during periods of high water, such as seasonal floods in spring or autumn, did the Maritsa become navigable by boat.⁶⁰ It is plausible that the event took place during seasonal floods in spring or autumn, when heightened precipitation and snowmelt typically result in increased river discharge and navigable conditions.

Despite the Maritsa River's seasonal limitations for navigation, Umur Bey⁶¹, the ruler of the *Beylik of Aydınoğlu*, arrived at the mouth of the Maritsa River in late 1342 with nearly 20,000 troops and 380 ships.⁶² Umur Bey transported his warships up the river to Dimetoka.

⁶⁰ Oruç Bey, *Oruç Beğ Tarihi (Giriş, Metin, Kronoloji, Dizin, Tıpkıbasım)*, ed. Necdet Öztürk, Çamlıca Basım Yayın Kitapları, İstanbul 2008, p.24; Haydar Çoruh, “Osmanlı Devleti’nde Nehir Islahı ve Taşkın Organizasyonu (Meriç/ Enez Limanı, Savreyn, Seyhan/Ceyhan, Sakarya/Mudurnu)”, *Osmanlı Mirası Araştırmaları Dergisi*, V.5, No: 12, 2018, p.170; Halil İnalçık, “İ. Murad”, *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C. XXXI., Ankara 2020, p.156.

⁶¹ Umur Bey was the distinguished naval commander of the Aydınoğlu principality and one of the most remarkable Turkish seafarers who left his mark on the 14th century. Through his significant campaigns in İzmir, the Aegean islands, and the Balkans, he became one of the key figures influencing the political course of his era. Umur Bey assumed governance of the İzmir region at the remarkably young age of 15-16. A master of naval affairs, he placed great emphasis on the construction of war galleys. He later established an important relationship with Emperor Kantakouzenos, who requested his assistance against enemies. Umur Bey supported Kantakouzenos until his death, after which Orhan Bey began providing aid to the emperor. These crucial supports extended by Orhan Bey to Kantakouzenos ultimately facilitated the Ottomans' crossing into the Balkans, marking a significant turning point in their expansion. Enveri wrote *Düstûnâme* for telling the wars of Umur Bey. For detailed information: Erdoğan Merçil, “Aydınoğulları”, *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C. IX, İstanbul 1991, p.239-241. Feridun Emecen, “Umur Bey”, *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C. XLII, İstanbul 2012, p.156-159. Tuncel, “Meriç”, p.188-190. Mücteba İlgürel, “Osmanlı Denizciliğinin İlk Devirleri”, *Belleten*, C. 65 – S. 243, 2001, p.639.

⁶² Hacer Ateş, “Osmanlı İlerleyişi Esnasında Trakya Şehirlerinin Durumu Hakkında Bir Değerlendirme”, p.137. Maritsa River is long river and because of this reason, combined with climatic and geographical formations, seasonal variations occur in its flow regime depending on climatic and geographical conditions. During the winter months, heavy precipitation in the region leads to an increase in the volume of water, causing the river's discharge to rise and seasonal floods to occur at certain times. As a result of this situation, some settlements along the riverbank become inundated, the river's water level rises, and it becomes possible to navigate parts of the river during certain periods.

Neriman Ersoy Hacısalihioğlu, “Meriç Nehri'nin Türk Tarihindeki Önemi”, ed. Okan Yeşilot, in. *Türk Tarihinin Dağları, Gölleri ve Nehirleri*, Vakıfbank Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2024, p. 530. Neriman Ersoy

Upon his arrival, the Byzantine Empress (wife of Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos) and prominent Byzantine nobles welcomed him.⁶³ Maritsa River permitted navigation along the stretch between Dimetoka and Enez.

1.4.2 The Maritsa under Ottoman Rule

Following the incorporation of the Maritsa River region into Ottoman administration, riverine and maritime activities were actively encouraged. The waqf of Yıldırım Bayezid included two villages in Dimetoka, Sülemiş and Sofular Mehmedi, whose inhabitants were tasked with ferry services at the Prankı crossing (sometimes referred to as the village of Prankı) on the Maritsa River. By special imperial decrees (ahkam-ı şerife), Yıldırım Bayezid specifically exempted these boatmen from avârız (extraordinary taxes) for conducting ferry services on the Maritsa River. This privilege recognized their important role in maintaining river transport.⁶⁴

The Maritsa River was used as a significant commercial water route, as recorded in the important travel writings of Evliya Çelebi from that period. He states that frigates from Enez would sail toward Gelibolu.⁶⁵ In addition to this, the port of Enez held great importance. Goods produced for the world markets entered through Enez, reached Edirne and from there continued their route either toward Rumelia and the Balkans or to İstanbul.⁶⁶

In continuing an ancient precedent, the Ottomans made use of the Maritsa basin as a natural corridor, sustaining its long-standing role as a route for trade, armies, and imperial expansion across the Balkans. In ancient times, Plovdiv witnessed numerous attacks and changes in governance, primarily due to its location along the Via Militaris (also called Orta Yol).⁶⁷ The Maritsa basin formed a natural route, allowing armies and trade to move between

Hacısalihoglu, "19. Yüzyıl Ticaretinde Meriç Nehri'nin Önemi", in. *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Nehirler ve Göller I*, ed. Şakir Batmaz, Özen Tok, Not Yayınları, Kayseri 2015, p. 282-283.

⁶³ Emecen, "Umur Bey", p.158. Tuncel, "Meriç", p.189. Johann Wilhelm Zinkeisen, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Tarihi I*, çev. Nilüfer Efçeli, ed. Erhan Afyoncu, Yeditepe Yayınları, İstanbul 2019, p.148.

⁶⁴ BOA, TT.d, nr. 20, p. 265-267; M. Tayyib Gökbilgin, *XV. ve XVI. Asırlarda Edirne ve Paşa Livası, Vakıflar-Mülkler-Mukataalar*, İşaret Yayınları, İstanbul 2007, p.181-182; Hacer Ateş, "Bizans Kalesinden Osmanlı Şehrine: Fethinden XV. Yüzyıl Sonlarına Kadar Dimetoka", *Tarih Dergisi*, S.75, 2021, p.112.

⁶⁵ Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi, Cilt 3, 2.Kitap*, haz. Seyit Ali Kahraman, Yücel Dağlı, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul 2006, p.546. Evliya Çelebi provided more detailed information about the water when describing the Maritsa River and the Maritsa Basin. In addition to the river, he also shared his observations on Plovdiv, Edirne and Tatarpazarcığı.

⁶⁶ Çoruh, "Osmanlı Devleti'nde Nehir Islahı ve Taşkın Organizasyonu (Meriç/ Enez Limanı, Savreyn, Seyhan/Ceyhan, Sakarya/Mudurnu)", p.170.

⁶⁷ The Via Militaris is an important road that connected the old capital Rome with the new capital Constantinople. Active for about 2000 years, this route was repaired and used at different times by its successor, the Ottoman Empire, during its campaigns in the Balkan Peninsula. The Romans built large and impressive bridges at all river crossings along the Via Militaris route. For detailed information please look at this study by

the Black Sea and Aegean Sea. Enez, the most important port city of Eastern Thrace, owed its significance to this geography. Goods moved south from Odessos on the Black Sea through the upper Maritsa valley, reaching the Aegean either by road following the river or by sailing sections of the river itself. This same geography later enabled Ottoman expansion. The Via Militaris and the Maritsa River basin formed a natural network of pathways that allowed Ottoman armies to advance from Eastern Thrace deep into the Balkans. By the 14th and 15th centuries, Plovdiv and the Maritsa River came under Ottoman control, and the Ottomans actively encouraged navigation on the river. In this way, the Maritsa functioned as a strategic axis across eras, shaping both ancient trade and Ottoman conquest.⁶⁸

The Ottomans carried this ancient precedent forward, using the Maritsa basin as the backbone of their conquest route. Geography, no less than politics, determined the sequence of Ottoman expansion across the Balkans. In 1360s, the Ottomans started with the conquest of Edirne, and then continued with Dimetoka, and soon after Plovdiv. The Ottoman army advanced along Maritsa River and the old Via Militaris, pressing deeper in to the Balkans. They captured Sofia in 1385 and then Niš in 1386, and with each step the Ottomans secured their hold over this natural riverine corridor.

After these conquests, the Ottoman army turned its attention to capturing Belgrade, which since the reign of Fatih Sultan Mehmed had been regarded as key to securing their presence in Central Europe.⁶⁹ Belgrade fell in 1521 under Suleiman the Magnificent, and the conquest of Budin in 1541 confirmed Belgrade's role as the hinge of Ottoman expansion into Hungary and beyond.⁷⁰

Burcu Funda Ayberkin, From Via Militaris to Ottoman Times: A Brief History and A Restoration Proposal for the Büyükkarıştıran Bridge, *Journal of Innovations in Civil Engineering and Technology*, V:7, I:1, 2025. Also, the route of the Maritsa River and Plovdiv, which is the focus of this thesis, is called Orta kol. This route starts in İstanbul and passes through Silivri, Çorlu, Edirne, Plovdiv, Sofya and Belgrad.

⁶⁸ Tuncel, Ibid, p. 189. Askerî yol, Via Militaris, proceeding along the left bank of Maritsa River in the vicinity of Pazarcık, it follows a line parallel to the river and begins to diverge partially from this point onward. After crossing the Luda Jana at Daganovo, the road advances via Malo Konare and Calapica, skirts the north of Plovdiv, and then, following the river, reaches Svilengrad and Edirne, respectively. In contrast, the route taken by travelers lies much closer to Maritsa River. This path, after a brief stop at Govedare, proceeds along the southern bank of the river to reach Plovdiv, passing over more than thirty arched wooden bridges along the way. One of these bridges is understood to have been constructed most likely by Lala Şâhin Pasha after the region's conquest. This information, conveyed by Yerasimos, is recorded in Paolo Contarini's 1580 travelogue. Stephane Yerasimos, *Les Voyageurs Dans L'Empire Ottoman (XIVe- XVIe siecles)*, *Bibliographie, Itinéraires Et Inventaire Des Lieux Habites*, Imprimerie De La Societe Turque D'Histoire, Ankara 1991, p.50.

⁶⁹ Feridun Emecen, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Kuruluş ve Yükseliş Tarihi (1300-1600)*, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2015, p.64-67, 237.

⁷⁰ Divna Djuric-Zamolo, "Belgrad", TDV, Cilt V, İstanbul, 1992, p.408; Marko Popovic, "Siege of Belgrade in 1521 and Restoration of Fortifications After Conquest", in *Belgrade 1521-1867*, ed. Dragana Amedoski, Ministry of the Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, Yunus Emre Enstitüsü, 2018, p.1-2.

The 1532 campaign against Ferdinand of Austria illustrates this geography in action. Ferdinand's ambition to take back the Hungarian lands, coupled with the Ottomans' determination to aid his rival King John Zápolya, prompted Suleiman the Magnificent to march from İstanbul with his army in 1532. The armies reached Edirne from İstanbul within eight days. From Edirne, they arrived in Plovdiv six days later.⁷¹ Plovdiv was just one of the key supply centers for the Ottoman army along this route. The army stopped in Plovdiv and stayed there until it reached the central hub of Sofia. The armies then continued from Plovdiv to Sofia. Afterwards, İbrahim Pasha arrived in the city of Niš. Later, Suleiman the Magnificent and İbrahim Pasha reached Belgrade. All this route once again shows us that in this campaign, the Ottoman army followed the Maritsa River basin route and eventually arrived in Belgrade. The most significant issue was the problem of crossing the numerous rivers in the region, particularly the maintenance of bridges. The Ottoman administration held both Muslims and Christians responsible for the upkeep of the bridges in these areas.⁷²

For the Ottomans, it obviously had strategic importance and, like other rivers, it was used during wartime for the transport of soldiers, artillery, weapons, ammunition and logistical supplies. In times of peace, it served for the transportation of people, commercial goods and food. Yet compared with large rivers such as the Euphrates, Tigris and Danube, transportation on the Maritsa River was far more limited. The fertile plains of Plovdiv and Eski Zağra, through which the Maritsa River passes, made the basin important for the Ottomans, but the river itself could not match the navigability of Danube River in Europe. Its use was largely confined to short stretches and upstream movement.⁷³

By contrast, the Danube served as one of the Ottoman Empire's lifelines in Europe. Like the Romans, who had long relied on the Rhine and Danube for defense and expansion, the Ottomans used the Danube for as both a frontier and a highway.⁷⁴ During the reign of Fatih Sultan Mehmed (1451-181), the Danube began to carry troops and supplies for

⁷¹ The army encountered marshes near Plovdiv and struggled to pass through them. Due to the hardships faced along the way, particularly in navigating the swampy terrain, thirty thousand akçe was granted as a reward to the Solaks (elite Ottoman infantry guards). Another piece of information we can derive from this is that marshes were encountered around Plovdiv. The fact that the administrators rewarded them due to the army's difficulties in the marshes is quite significant.

⁷² M. Akif Erdoğan, "Kanuni Sultan Süleyman'ın 1532 Tarihli Alman Seferi Ruznamesi", *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi*, XXIX, 2014, p. 168- 176. In order to read more detailed information about this military campaign, see, Feridun Bey's Münşeat.

⁷³ Gabor Agoston, *Osmanlı'da Strateji ve Askerî Güç*, çev. M. Fatih Çalışır, Timaş Yayınları, İstanbul 2012, p.109-112-130.

⁷⁴ Murat Çınar, "Dünya'da Ülke Sınırlarını Oluşturan Nehirler", *International Journal of Eurasia Social Sciences* V:13, I: 47, 2022, p. 399.

Ottoman campaigns in Central Europe. Under Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566), an independent fleet was created following the conquest of Hungary. The Danube's strategic importance lay not only in its role as a boundary but also in its ability to move large armies, reinforce garrisons, and supply fortresses deep inside Europe. Compared with the rugged terrain of the Balkans, where roads were slow and costly, river transport was cheaper and faster, giving the Ottomans a vital logistical advantage.⁷⁵

The Ottoman Empire strategically utilized rivers not only as natural barriers for defense and as routes for military campaigns but also as vital arteries for communication and trade. By constructing bridges over key rivers, the Ottomans enhanced both civilian mobility and military logistics, reinforcing their control over conquered territories. They symbolized imperial authority and engineering skill while at the same time enabling the movement of armies, merchants, and ordinary travelers. This dual-purpose approach, combining security with infrastructural development, helped integrate frontier provinces, sustain economic activity, and bind distant regions more firmly to the center.

Accounts from travelogues and chronicles confirm that the Maritsa, though modest in scale, supported commercial and local transport.⁷⁶ In *Menâzirü'l Avâlim*, for example, boats from Enez are described docking at Yeniköprü in Edirne to sell jars, jugs, cups, bowls, pottery, vinegar and salt. Piri Reis likewise noted in *Kitab-ı Bahriyye* of Pîrî Reis that Enez remained an active commercial hub in the 15th and 16th centuries, its traffic sustained by the river. Such references show that even if the Maritsa lacked the navigability of great imperial rivers, it nonetheless facilitated regional trade and circulation.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Mehmet Taş, "18. Yüzyılda Tuna Donanması ve Donatımı", *Turkish Studies* 15(2), 2020, p.1400-1402.

⁷⁶ For the detailed information about the travelogues and chronicles, please look at these travelogues: To give an example, Benedict Curipeschitz's observations of Plovdiv and Maritsa River during his journey in 1530 are quite valuable. Benedict Curipeschitz, *Yolculuk Günlüğü 1530*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınevi, 1989, s.40-41. In according to Evliya Çelebi, later, on... On Wednesday, October 5th, we departed from Godevar and, after crossing Plovdiv plain and once again, entered the city of Plovdiv via a long wooden bridge. This is likely the bridge constructed by Lala Şâhin Pasha in 1387. Lala Şâhin Bridge (although Lala Şâhin bridge is one of the bridges built in the early modern period, it is one of the rare bridges that have survived to the present day) serves as a connection between the two parts of the city. The most detailed information about the Lala Şâhin Pasha Bridge could be seen in Katip Çelebi's work *Cihannüma*. Lala Şâhin Pasha conquered Plovdiv in 765 (1363) and built a large bridge on the Maritsa River, which passes in the middle of the city, a width where two cars can be easily crossed with a lot of money and two arrow shots away. Many civil servants and workers have been appointed foundations and ministers for the necessary maintenance and repairs. In addition, for this topic, it should be read, Hatice Arslan Çağlıkeçecigil, "18-19. Yüzyıllarda Meriç Nehri Üzerindeki Köprüler", in *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Nehirler ve Göller, 1*, haz. Şakir Batmaz-Özen Tok, Kayseri 2015, p.531.

⁷⁷ Çağlıkeçecigil, *Ibid*, p.529. Neriman Ersoy Hacısalıhoğlu, "Meriç Nehri'nin Türk Tarihindeki Önemi", p.537-538.

The Ottoman conquest also brought deliberate efforts to adapt the Maritsa to imperial needs. After taking Plovdiv for the Ottomans, Lala Şâhin Pasha ordered the construction of a substantial 300-step wooden bridge over the river, reported to be long enough to span “two arrow shots” and wide enough for two loaded carts to pass together.⁷⁸ Lala Şâhin Pasha also improved the region’s roads for the army’s passage, built a masonry bridge over the Maritsa River, and opened its fertile lands to rice cultivation,⁷⁹ relying on captive for these projects.⁸⁰

With the consolidation of Ottoman rule, bridge building multiplied across Maritsa, Tunca and Arda rivers. These structures served two purposes: to link cities with surrounding settlements and to Saray-ı Hümayun with the city in Edirne. In Plovdiv and especially Edirne, bridges became central to the region’s landscape. Şehâbeddin Pasha⁸¹ bridge, built in 1452 during the reign of Murad II, marked the beginning of a wave of construction. Subsequent works included the Fatih bridge linking the palace to Edirne, the Kanuni Bridge designed by

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.503. Bekir Aydın, *XVI. Asırda Filibe Tarihi*, İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Bölümü Mezuniyet Tezi, 1967, p.10.

⁷⁹ After the conquest of Plovdiv, Lala Şâhin Pasha was assigned by Murad I to work on the development and settlement of the region. The generally accepted information is that rice cultivation was introduced to the region by Lala Şâhin Pasha and people started to work in the paddy fields. Hoca Sadeddin and Evliya Çelebi wrote about this situation in detail. Fahamettin Başar, “Çirmen Savaşının Balkan Tarihindeki Yeri”, *Güneydoğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi*, S: 12, 1998, p.51. However, Fahamettin Başar makes a different conclusion regarding rice in his article titled “Çirmen Savaşının Balkan Tarihindeki Yeri” by saying that with the capture of Plovdiv by the Ottomans, the wheat and rice beds of the region also passed from Byzantine to Ottoman rule. With the war of Çirmen, the Ottomans continued to reach Macedonia and Vardar and that was also important the other conquest routes. Başar, Çirmen Savaşının Balkan Tarihindeki Yeri, p.54. Similarly, in her book titled “Filibe Hurufat Defterlerine Göre Filibe Kazasındaki Vakıf Müesseseleri 1719-1834”, Habibe Kazancıoğlu draws attention to the fact that with the change of administration of Plovdiv, the rice and wheat centers also left the hands of Byzantium. Important chroniclers of the period state that rice production in the region started with Lala Şâhin Pasha. When the subject of rice was examined for the thesis, no information was found about rice cultivation in the region before the Ottoman rule. Habibe Kazancıoğlu, *Filibe Hurufat Defterlerine Göre Filibe Kazasındaki Vakıf Müesseseleri 1719-1834*, Kayıhan Yayınları, İstanbul 2019.

⁸⁰ Masonry bridge is called kagir köprü, due to their arched shape, masonry bridges, which differ from flat wooden bridges, must be constructed according to the pressure lines of the arch to ensure uniform pressure distribution throughout. In addition to this information, the earliest bridges were all either wooden or masonry. Kazım Çeçen, “Köprü”, *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C. XXVI, Ankara 2002, s.252.

⁸¹ Şehâbeddin Pasha was very active figure of the administrative and governance, economic-socially. During the reign of Murad II, Şehâbeddin Pasha undertook several significant military campaigns. Apart from these campaigns, as far as we can learn from the Ottoman chronicles, Şehâbeddin Pasha entered Imperial Council (Divan) as a vizier while serving as the Beylerbeyi of Rumelia. After being removed from his position as the Beylerbeyi of Rumelia, he was reappointed to this role following the dismissal of Kasım Pasha, who was accused of failure, criticized by the frontier lords (uc beyleri), and opposed by Çandarlı Halil Pasha. For detailed information; Feridun Emecen, “Şehâbeddin Paşa”, *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C. Ek II, Ankara 2019, p.548. Tayyib Gökbilgin presented Şehâbeddin Pasha, differently. Gökbilgin argued that Şehâbeddin Pasha and Kula Şâhin Pasha were the same person. Nevertheless, Aşıkpaşazade never mentioned about Şehâbeddin Pasha although he wrote that Kula Şâhin Pasha was a beylerbeyi of Rumeli. Apart from Aşıkpaşazade, Oruç Beg mentioned about Şehâbeddin Pasha. Hoca Saadeddin who mentioned about Plovdiv in detail, occasionally referred to Şehâbeddin Pasha or Kula Şâhin Pasha. Aşıkpaşazade wrote that Kula Şâhin Pasha made imaret and medrese in Plovdiv. According to Gökbilgin, Şehâbeddin Pasha and Kula Şâhin Pasha referred to the same person because, as of the 15th century, the name Şehâbeddin was also used as Şâhin. Gökbilgin, *XV. ve XVI. Asırlarda Edirne ve Paşa Livası, Vakıflar- Mülkler- Mukataalar*, p.255-257.

Mimar Sinan in 1554, as well as the Bayezid II and Gazi Mihal bridges over the Tunca. Although the Gazi Mihal bridge was built by the Ottomans, it was not the first bridge built in the region. In the place where the Gazi Mihal bridge was built, the Romans, who had previously ruled the region, also built a bridge, evidence of the continuity of strategic priorities in the region. For this reason, the Ottomans paid great attention to their maintenance, ensuring that the crossings remained functional and secure both in times of war and peace. Together, these bridges embodied Ottoman engineering skill, facilitated military and commercial traffic, and integrated the palace-city complex of Edirne into the empire's transportation network.

Compared with Danube, Maritsa and its tributaries did not become major arteries for imperial conquest or long-distance transport. Still, the bridges and roads constructed across them show how the Ottomans adjusted the region's geography to their own needs. These structures secured communication between the palace and the city, and they connected fertile plains with surrounding settlements. In this way, the Maritsa basin, though more modest in scale, was incorporated into the political and economic order of the empire.

1.5. Agricultural Lands

Maritsa River and its tributaries originate from Bulgaria and enter Türkiye in Edirne, where the river meets Arda River from the right bank and Tunca River from the left bank. Maritsa River basin, long associated with irrigated agriculture, contains some of the region's most fertile lands and sustains the rural population living around it. Here intensive farming has shaped the landscape: alongside cereals and paddy production, villagers grow a wide variety of vegetables and fruits, while livestock breeding, frog hunting, and fishing provide additional sources of livelihood.⁸²

For local farmers, everything revolved around water and land. These were the main elements of agricultural production, and they defined the relationship between human communities and the river itself. As Faisal mentions in his book "Sultan'ın Nehirleri, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Dicle ve Fırat", Egypt was a gift from the Nile, and Iraq was an adaptation to the Tigris and Euphrates. It can be added that Plovdiv and its immediate surroundings were all an adaptation to Maritsa River. To use its waters, especially for rice

⁸² İlker Eroğlu, "Meriç Nehri Havzasında Sıcaklık ve Yağış Değerlerinin Dönemsel Trend Analizi", *European Journal of Science and Technology*, S:23, 2021, p. 751.

cultivation, people had to live in close negotiation with the river, both relying on it and struggling against it.

1.5.1. A Brief History of Agriculture

This section examines the short history of agriculture, beginning with the role of great river valleys in the earliest farming societies and moving to the spread of rice as a staple crop across Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. By placing Maritsa basin within this wider context, it shows how rivers continued to shape cultivation and settlement, and how the introduction of rice under the Ottomans transformed local agriculture in fundamental ways.

Agriculture can be defined as all activities related to the soil, plant products, animals and the production of animal products.⁸³ Agriculture, which began in the Neolithic Age around 12,000–15,000 years ago, was one of the great revolutions of human history. It turned fertile river valleys such as those of Egypt, Mesopotamia and India into centers of surplus production.⁸⁴ The annual floods of the rivers deposited nutrient-rich soils that allowed repeated cultivation, making possible the domestication of staple crops such as wheat, barley, rye, millet, sesame, chickpeas, peas, lentils and flax and the first herd animals such as sheep, goats, pigs and cows. From the start, agricultural production shaped dietary habits. While western civilizations generally focused on wheat, the Far East civilizations preferred rice.⁸⁵

The main factor of production in agriculture was the land, and making land productive often required irrigation systems that could be built and maintained with state support. States not only organized irrigation but also protected fields and farmers from external threats, ensuring the continuity of production. The crops planted varied according to local climatic conditions. In the temperate steppes and plains of Central and Eastern Anatolia, Syria and the Balkans, wheat dominated, while in harsher areas barley and rye prevailed. Other types of cereals and legumes supplemented these staples. Fields were usually planted with a single crop each year, though successive crops could sometimes be grown depending on local needs.⁸⁶

Maritsa River and its basin present significant opportunities for agriculture, especially through irrigated agriculture. Among irrigated crops, rice stands out as the most

⁸³ Mithat Direk, *Tarım Tarihi ve Deontoloji*, Eğitim Akademi Yayınevi, Konya 2012, p. 16.

⁸⁴ Gini Orlinski (Ed.), *Food and Society: The History of Agriculture*, Britannica Educational Publishing, London 2012, p.26.

⁸⁵ Fernand Braudel, *Maddi Uygarlık, Gündelik Hayatın Yapıları*, çev. Mehmet Ali Kılıçbay, İmge Kitabevi, İstanbul 1990, p. 71-72.

⁸⁶ Emecen, “Çeltik”, *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C.VIII, İstanbul 1993, p.265-266.

significant, predominantly cultivated along the riverbanks, while areas located farther from the river are generally reserved for dry farming. However, in order to understand the importance of rice cultivation, one must trace its road back to its ancient origins. This central role of rice ties the basin to a much broader history of rice cultivation. While it has long been assumed that the earliest domestication of rice occurred in the Yangtze River basin of China, recent archaeobotanical and genetic studies have challenged this view. New evidence suggests that the initial domestication process may have taken place between 8,200 and 13,500 years ago in the Pearl River valley, located further south in China.⁸⁷ This revision in scholarly consensus underscores the complexity of early agricultural development in East Asia and invites reevaluation of long-standing narratives regarding the origins of rice cultivation. After the domestication of rice in China, Korea and Japan, it later reached Iraq, Syria and Khorasan regions in the third century BCE. It later grew along the Caspian coast of Iran and in humid zones of Egypt and became established in Europe during the Middle Ages when the Arabs introduced it to Spain.⁸⁸ Balkans had meet the rice cultivation thanks to the Ottomans.⁸⁹

1.5.2. Rice or Çeltük/Çeltik

Grain crops have formed the backbone of civilizations across the world. Three stand out in particular: rice in Asia, maize in the Americas, and wheat and related cereals in Eurasia.⁹⁰ Although rice originated in Asia, its cultivation spread widely over time, taking root in diverse regions far beyond its original homeland.

Rice (*Oryza sativa*) is one of the most important agricultural crops. It is the only cereal that grows fully in water, completing its life cycle submerged. The plant, an annual grass that can reach about 1.2 meters, produces clusters of grains covered by two superimposed husks, known as paddy. These grains may be elongated or rounded, white or yellowish in color. After harvesting, the bunches are dried, and the grains are easily separated from the ears. Processing takes place in paddy mills, where the husks are removed by passing the grains through a griddle, yielding the familiar white rice. Traditionally, husking was done

⁸⁷ Dragana Amedoski, "Introduction of Rice Culture in the Central Balkans (15th and 16th Century)", *In: State and Society in the Balkans before and after Establishment of Ottoman Rule*, Zbornici radova (35). Istorijski institut, Beograd, p.235-236.

⁸⁸ Feridun Emecen, "Çeltik", p.265.

⁸⁹ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, Volume II*, trs. Sian Reynolds, New York: Harper & Row, 1972, p.79.

⁹⁰ Salih Başkutlu, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Değirmencilik Endüstrisi ve Buhar Değirmenleri*, Doktora Tezi, Sakarya Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, p.42.

with mortar and pestle, powered by hand, foot, or water. Archaeological evidence suggests the first rice cultivation dates back to 8,200 and 13,500 years ago.⁹¹



Figure 1.1. *Ripening heads of rice (Oryza sativa).*



Figure 1.2. *Stalks of mature rice after harvest.*

Rice is an agricultural crop that requires a lot of water and a lot of labor. Because the plant must remain submerged throughout its growth, paddy fields were necessarily located near abundant water sources, or made suitable through the construction of canals. This reliance on constant water, combined with the demanding labor of cultivation, made rice both a valuable and difficult grain to produce. In areas devoted to paddy, no other crops could be grown. The Maritsa River, with its abundant flow and fertile basin, offered especially favorable conditions for rice cultivation around Plovdiv.

It is not known when rice cultivation began in the Maritsa River. Similarly, although it is not known when rice cultivation started in Anatolia, it is generally accepted that the crop became widespread with the entry of the Turks into Anatolia in the fourteenth century. Having practiced rice cultivation in Türkistan, particularly in regions close to China suitable for this water-demanding plant, the Turks carried the crop with them as they migrated and conquered new territories. In this context, Maritsa River emerged as a crucial for agricultural settlement. Communities who sought to farm and establish themselves in Bulgarian and Greek lands depended on its waters for both economic survival and daily life.

The most important agricultural innovation that the Ottomans carried out here after their conquest of the Balkans was probably the introduction of rice, which they were the first to bring to Southeastern Europe.⁹² Rice was a highly valued crop. In fact, the Ottomans,

⁹¹ Amedoski, *Introduction of Rice Culture in the Central Balkans (15th and 16th Century)*, p. 235-236.

⁹² Wolf- Dieter Hütteroth, "Ecology of the Ottoman Lands", p.38.

finding rice production in Anatolia insufficient, expanded rice production into the Balkans in the 14th century. After the conquest of Plovdiv by Lala Şâhin around 1365, rice farming likely began in the region.⁹³ Maritsa River was ideally suited to this new crop, providing all the conditions necessary for its production. Recognizing the river's potential, Lala Şâhin Pasha directed conquests along its course, ensuring that the surrounding geography could be integrated into this agricultural system.

With the introduction of rice cultivation by Lala Şâhin Pasha, Plovdiv (due to its proximity to the Maritsa River) became one of the centers of rice farming. Under Ottoman rule, the cultivation of this valuable crop was closely regulated, with detailed provisions set out in the *kanunnames*. These codes provide highly valuable information about rice, specifying the conditions under which it could be planted and which lands were suitable. Above all, water availability determined the extent of cultivation, and the *kanunnames* carefully outlined how much rice could be sown in particular fields depending on their access to water.

The first known *yasakname* concerning rice was issued during the reign of Mehmed II. As can be understood from its introduction, this code regulated rice cultivation processes in centers such as Ferecik, Gümülcine, Karasu Yenicesi, Drama, Serez, Selanik, Yenice-i Vardar, Manastır, Üsküb, Tırhala, and similar regions around Gelibolu. The first states that “olub-gelmiş kanun üzre ol vilayetlerde yürüyüb yasak edüb çeltüğü vaktiyle ekdüre ve suvarda ve suyunu görüb gözede. Her kim çeltük alacak olursa veyahut içine davar koyacak olursa, adet üzre yasak edüb hakkından gele, kimesne mani olmaya ve ne kadar çeltük var ise, vaktiyle suvardub biçdüre ve yığdura ve vaktiyle ağırdurub bazarlara dökdüre”.⁹⁴ As can be understood from this, it was required to follow the long-standing laws in these provinces. Rice was to be sown on time, and its irrigation was to be supervised. Those who entered rice fields without permission or allowed animals to graze in them were to be stopped and punished. Rice harvested on time was to be sent to markets for sale. As an important agricultural product, rice was subject to state supervision.

⁹³ Halil İnalçık, Rice Cultivation and the Çeltükci-Reâyâ System in the Ottoman Empire, 1600-1700, *Turcica Revue d'études Turques XIV* içinde (69-141. ss), Louvain-Paris-Strasbourg, 1982, p. 70. The first information about the rice cultivation of the Ottoman Empire in Rumili is found in Hoca Sadeddin's work called Tacüt-Tevarih. Also, Hoca Sadeddin was cited by Babinger and Hammer. For detailed information please read Halil İnalçık's, article which is called Rice Cultivation and the Çeltükci-Reâyâ System in the Ottoman Empire.

⁹⁴ Ahmet Akgündüz, *Osmanlı Kanunnâmeleri ve Hukukî Tahlilleri, 1. Kitap Osmanlı Hukukuna Giriş ve Fatih Devri Kanunâmeleri*, Osmanlı Araştırmaları Vakfı, 1994, p.408.

This Yasakname implemented during Mehmed II's reign later served as a basis for subsequent regulations on rice. Although Plovdiv is not mentioned in this code, nearby regions are referenced. During the reign of Bayezid II, who succeeded Mehmed II, a specific Plovdiv Rice Prohibition Code (Yasakname-i Enhar-ı Çeltük) was issued. Similar to the previous code from Mehmed II's era, this one also prescribed nose piercing as a punishment for those who violated the rules.⁹⁵

The Ottoman state's strict regulation of rice production through legal codes clearly demonstrates the crop's strategic and economic value. However, the most concrete evidence for understanding the practical implementation of this legal framework and quantifying regional-scale production emerges from tahrir registers. Indeed, the tahrir registers from critical production centers like Plovdiv and the Maritsa River Basin explicitly reveal the geographical distribution of paddy fields, tax revenues, producer demographics and the state's direct control mechanisms over rice production. The Ottomans conducted multiple tahrir in Plovdiv. These registers also reveal how rice cultivation was shaped by geographical factors, especially climate, topography, soil, and human labor. Among these, climate was decisive. The climate of Plovdiv is generally suitable for rice cultivation. Evliya Çelebi refers to Plovdiv's summer climate as "hellishly hot," and such heat was crucial for rice, which required both soil and water temperatures above 12°C, ideally 25–30°C for germination and transplanting.

⁹⁵ According to the aforementioned kanunnâme, as was known from earlier laws and practices, if the prescribed prohibitions were not observed, those who violated them were subjected to corporal punishment or fined. In addition, some offenders had their beards cut, or their noses pierced and were paraded through bazaars. "Ol vilayete varan yasak kulları, kadılar marifetiyle ma-tekaddemden olıgelmiş kanun ve kaide üzre zikrolan enharda yürüyüb hilaf-ı emr iş edenlerün haklarından gelüb tehdid edeler. Amma tehdid her kişinin cürmine göre gereklidir ki, bazısını döğüb ve tazmin ettirmek ve bazının sakalın kesmek ve bazının burnun delüb bazarda gezdürmekdir". Ahmet Akgündüz, *Osmanlı Kanunnâmeleri ve Hukukî Tahlilleri*, 2.Kitap II. Bâyezid Kanunnâmeleri, Osmanlı Araştırmaları Vakfı, 1994, p.403.

The regulations contained in the çeltük kanunname and related decrees were not limited to this period alone. According to a kanunname issued during the reign of Ahmed I, it was ruled that rice cultivation and the establishment of alfalfa fields in any sanjak or timar without authorization were not permitted, and that such cultivation carried out without permission was deemed unlawful, "bir sancağa veyâhud bir timâra çeltik hâsıl yazılub kadimden çeltik ekile gelen yerleri yoncalık eyleyeseler caiz değildir. Yoncalığı giderilüb yine çeltiğe hüküm olunur. Ayrıca, çeltik nehirlerinden çeltikte çalışanların sorumlu olduğuna dair bilgilere de rastlanılmaktadır. Tohumu ne ise beylik tarafından aliverilüb çeltik hâsıl yazılan yerlerde çeltik nehirleri harâb olsa çeltik eke gelmiş kimseleri cem edüb elbette ol nehirleri tamir ve ihya edüb ziraat ediverilür ki mukarrer olan timâra noksan gelmeli olmaya". Yılmaz Kurt, "I. Ahmed (1603-17) Dönemine Ait Bir Osmanlı Kanunnâmesi, *Türk Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi*," C. XXXI, S: 35, 2010, p.13.

Table 1.1. *The Ideal Temperature Ranges for the Transformation of Rice*

Vegetation Cycle ⁹⁶	Critical Temperature	Ideal Temperature
Ecesis	15 °C	18-23 °C
Seedling Development	8-45 °C	20-25 °C
Rhizogenesis	19-33 °C	22-28 °C
Tillering	16-33 °C	18-30 °C
Generative Cycle	-	22-29 °C
Flowering	15-45 °C	25-40 °C
Maturation	-	22-29 °C

Following planting, the fields had to be kept in shallow, controlled floods using surface water with little flow to avoid erosion. Plovdiv's close proximity to the Maritsa River made this possible: the gentle slope of the terrain allowed irrigation with minimal elevation gain, while oxen-drawn plows leveled fields for even water distribution. One of the main branches of the Maritsa River, the Göpsü Stream, was especially important for irrigating surrounding villages. Another key factor in rice cultivation is soil quality. Along the Maritsa, fertile alluvial deposits retained water efficiently and provided ideal conditions for paddy farming, in contrast to less productive soils such as brown forest types found nearby. Together, these factors explain why Plovdiv emerged as a major rice center under Ottoman rule.⁹⁷

The final factor influencing rice cultivation is the human element. At every stage of rice farming, labor play a critical role, and for this system to function, cultivators had to be protected from waterborne disease.⁹⁸ Malaria, in particular, posed a serious threat in environments of stagnant water and mosquitoes, potentially limiting the workforce available for rice cultivation. For the period covered by this thesis, namely the late 16th century,

⁹⁶ Bülent Kırıl& Halil Sürek& A. Kadir Ezer& Mustafa Neğiş& İ. Hakkı Yüce, *Çeltik*, T.C. Tarım Orman ve Köyişleri Bakanlığı Proje ve Uygulama Genel Müdürlüğü Edirne Zirai Araştırma Enstitüsü Müdürlüğü, Yayın no:4, 1985, p.7; Filiz Ünal (Ed.), *Çeltik Tarımı*, Gıda Tarım ve Hayvancılık Bakanlığı, Çiftçi Eğitim Serisi no.58, Ankara 2012, s.10- 26.

⁹⁷ Reyhan Rafet Mustafa, *Bulgaristan Filibe (Plovdiv) ve yakın çevresinin coğrafi etüdü*, Marmara Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2010, p.29; Murat Tanrıkulu, "Tosya'da Pirinç Üretiminin Dünü, Bugünü ve Geleceği", *Akademik Bakış Dergisi*, S:71, 2019, p.234.

⁹⁸ Nuran Taşlıgil, Güven Şahin, "Türkiye'de Çeltik (Oryza Sativa L.) Yetiştiriciliği ve Coğrafi Dağılımı", *Adıyaman Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, Yıl:4, S:6, 2011, p.183-185.

archival evidence suggests that considerable attention was given to protecting people from stagnant water and mosquitoes. An order issued by the Ottoman authorities to the kadı of Plovdiv reveals that the “bad air” in the city was causing fever among the inhabitants, which was attributed to the nearby rice irrigation channels. According to the “old custom”, the Ottoman urban elite would leave Plovdiv during the summer and retreat to the mountainous regions.⁹⁹ Although there is no clear indication that malaria was widespread in the Plovdiv region, the very existence of these precautions underscores the perceived risk to human health. More broadly, in the early modern period, disease and treatment were understood through a different medical logic than today. It is noteworthy that the issue of rice related health risks was discussed centuries later in the Ottoman parliament: records of the Meclis-i Mebusan reveal detailed discussions of malaria’s transmission routes and effects, showing the long-standing recognition of rice’s health implications.¹⁰⁰

In addition to these human concerns, rice farming itself required a carefully sequenced, four-stage process: preparing the fields, levelling, irrigating, and harvesting.¹⁰¹ The preparation of rice fields generally took place between autumn and spring. Seasonal rains sometimes made fields inaccessible, but they also created the moist conditions necessary for cultivation. Levelling followed, typically through cross ploughing the fields twice in succession. Draft animals such as oxen and buffalo were used to plough and flatten

⁹⁹ BOA, A.DVNSMHM.d.no.49, p.38. According to this hüküm, because the climate of Plovdiv, particularly during the summer months, was extremely hot, many people, especially kadıs, went to the highlands. They left their deputies in the city center. Although this practice caused some administrative disruption, it had long been customary. There was unhealthy air conditions and it lead to sickness. “Filibe kâdısına hüküm ki südde-i sa’âdetime mektûb gönderüb nefsi-i Filibenin etrâfı çeltik enhârı olmakla havası mute’affin olup kadimü’l-eyyâmdan sayf da ‘ulemâ ve sulemâ ve e’imme-i hutebâ vesâ’ir ehl-i cihât yerlerine kâ’immakâm nasb idüb yaylaka çıka gelmişlerdir ve zikr olunan yaylaktan câmi’ ve mesâcid ve medrese ve zâviye olup eyyâm-ı devlet-i hüsvânê iştigâlde iken kuzât-ı sâlifeden bazı tâ’ife-i mezbureye kâ’immakâmını kabul etmezim cihetlerinizi ahire tevcih eylesiz diyü ta’ciz ve tahvîf etmekle kadîmden olıgeldiği üzere yaylaka çıkmaktan ictinâb idüb ekseri hummaya mübtelâ olup yine üslûb-ı sâbık üzere yerlerine kâ’im-makâm nasb idüb zamanında yaylaka çıkmak için hükm-i hümayunum ricâ etmeğin buyurdum ki vusûl buldukda tâ’ife-i mezbure kadîmden yerlerine kâ’immakâm nasb idüb yaylaka çıka gelmişler ise üslûb-ı sâbık üzere yerlerine hizmetlerine kâdir kâ’immakâm nasb idüb kadîmden çıka geldiği zamanda yaylağa çıkmalarına kimesne mâni’ olmayub kadîmden olı gelene muhâlif kimesneye iş ettirmeyesiz”. Aleksandar Shopov, “Cities of Rice: Risculture and Environmental Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Balkans”, p. 172.

¹⁰⁰ For the detailed information please look at these works: Chris Gratien, “Pirinç Tartışmaları: Meclis-i Mebusan’da Politik Ekoloji”, In: *İktidar Tohumları: Osmanlı Çevre Tarihi Üzerine İncelemeler*, ed. Onur İnal& Yavuz Köse, İletişim Yayınevi, İstanbul 2022, p.262-264,268. Chris Gratien, “Pilavdan Dönen İmparatorluk: Meclis-i Mebusan’da Sıtma ve Çeltik Tartışmaları”, in. *Osmanlı’dan Cumhuriyet’e Salgın Hastalıklar*, çev. Burcu Kurt, ed. Burcu Kurt& İsmail Yaşayanlar, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, İstanbul 2023, p.97-99. Chris Gratien, “The Ottoman Quagmire: Malaria, Swamps, and Settlement in the Late Ottoman Mediterranean”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 49/4,2017, p.596.

¹⁰¹ Sadık Müfit Bilge, “XV.-XVIII. Yüzyıllarda Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Çeltik Tarımı (Mülkiyet İlişkileri, Üretim, Teknikler, Çevresel Etkiler)”, In: *İnalılık ve Oğuzoğlu Anısına Osmanlı Devleti’nin Kuruluşundan Cumhuriyet Türkiye’sine Yalakova’dan Yalova’ya- Cilt 2*, 2024, p.184.

the soil. Oxen and buffalo also helped carry tools and sugar beets during cultivation activities.¹⁰² In some fields, laborers cleared wild weeds such as yellow thistle (sarı diken) during the fall months. Only after this intensive preparation could sowing commence, leading into the subsequent phases of irrigation and eventual harvest.

While preparing the rice fields for cultivation, laborers would remove wild weeds in the month of May or June. Once the fields were properly prepared, the next stage was irrigation. Since rice is a water-dependent crop, it must be cultivated in flooded conditions. Adequate water was essential for seed germination and growth, so areas with stable water supplies, or lands enriched by floods and seasonal rains, were preferred for sustainable production. After irrigation came sowing. In some regions of Rumelia, the sowing period ranged from the beginning of May to early June, depending on local climate and geography. Seeds were sown into flat, flooded plots known as tava. These plots were levelled and prepared so they could retain water. Seeds were either broadcasted manually by rice farmers (çeltikçü reâyâ) or planted by hand into the flooded plots. To sustain high yields, water levels required careful management: excess irrigation could rot the roots, while insufficient water caused stress and reduced output. As a solution, annual rotation systems were implemented in many regions to prevent such problems. Crop rotation was especially important in Plovdiv, where rice was cultivated only once every two years. In the intervening years, other grains such as wheat, barley, oats, or rye were planted. The rice plant reaches harvest maturity in approximately 150–180 days. Harvest typically occurred in late summer or early November. Before harvesting, the fields were drained, and a drying period of about ten days was required. The rice was then harvested either by hand or with sickles, in a manner similar to other grains. Finally, the rice sheaves were processed and prepared for consumption.¹⁰³

The entire cycle was labor intensive, from flooding paddy basins and planting to transplanting and harvesting. This process relied heavily on water from the Maritsa River and its tributaries, required sustained effort. According to the 1490 tahrir, several karyes (villages) affiliated with Plovdiv were engaged in rice cultivation through access to nearby rivers, particularly branches of the Maritsa River.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Ibid, p.185.

¹⁰³ Sadık Müfit Bilge, "XV.-XVIII. Yüzyıllarda Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Çeltik Tarımı (Mülkiyet İlişkileri, Üretim, Teknikler, Çevresel Etkiler), p.189-190.

¹⁰⁴ Havva Merve Seyhan, *Üretimden Tüketime Balkanlarda Çeltik (XV- XVII. Yüzyıllar)*, Fırat Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yayınlanmamış Doktora Tezi, 2022, p. 45- 109-126.

The preparatory stages of rice farming (flooding field basins (tava), planting, and harvesting) involved labor-intensive processes and depended heavily on the waters of the Maritsa River. The fields where rice was cultivated were generally places granted to waqf institutions, and the rivers mentioned in the tax registers of Plovdiv often correspond to these locations. In several cases, the same rivers supported both rice production and water-powered mills, linking agricultural and institutional revenues. The registers list a striking variety of rivers over time, reflecting the hydrological and fiscal integration of rice into Plovdiv's landscape and economy:

Table 1.2. *Water Sources Linked to Rice Cultivation in Plovdiv Tahrirs (insert years)*

1490 ¹⁰⁵	1519 ¹⁰⁶	1530 ¹⁰⁷
Büryan	Sekin	
Söğütlü (river)	Kozan ve Doru-atlu	Kurdeş (Konuş) Nehri (river)
Manendlü(river)	Kurd Ahmet Paşa ve Gayri nehirler (rivers)	Seğid Nehri (river)
Bazrak, Çelebi Kadı ve Tabanı Yassı(rivers)	Yahya Paşa ve Kara Bikâr ve Köse Paşa Nehirleri (rivers)	Yahya Paşa Nehri, Satsinik Nehri, Hacı İbrahim Nehri ve Kara Pınar Nehri(rivers)
Kiber(river)	Karabikâr, Gül Paşa, Çavuş Nehirleri (rivers)	Büzürk Nehri(river)
Gelincik(river)	Sekin Arkı, Kozan ve Çuruçek Nehirleri (rivers)	Tabanı Yassı Nehri(river)
Hızırkadı(river)	Konuş Arkı Nehri (river)	

¹⁰⁵ Seyhan, Ibid, p.109.

¹⁰⁶ Seyhan, Ibid, p.114.

¹⁰⁷ BOA, *TT. d. 370*, p. 89- 101.

Kuzzat(river)	Hızır Fakı ve Eyerciler Nehirleri (rivers)	
	Büzürk Nehri (river)	
	Kırçima (river)	
	İne-Begi ve İne-Hızır? Nehirleri (rivers)	
	Kara Re'is Nehri (river)	
	Tekür Pınarı Nehri (river)	
	Ahmed Paşa Nehri (river)	
	İne-hızır Nehri (river)	



Figure 1.3. Map (1741) showing canals marked with green in the plain around Plovdiv (Phillipopoli) and Tatar Pazardjik, both marked with red.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Vienna, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, (K1a 4A) 'Mappe der Landlage längs der Hauptstraße von Belgrad nach Konstantinopel, as cited in Shopov, 2021, p. 174

Rice, as the most important irrigated crop in Plovdiv, was paradoxically often cultivated under dry farming conditions in certain parts of the region. Despite being the region's most important irrigated crop, rice was often grown alongside or even within systems of dry farming. Tahrir registers reveal a wide array of dryland production, including wheat, barley, rye, fruits, vegetables, and similar crops, underscoring the ecological diversity of Plovdiv's agriculture. This diversity reflects the region's continental climate, marked by cold winters and, as Evliya Çelebi put it, "hellishly hot" summers, and conditions particularly suited to cereals.

Table 1.3. “Akçe” Figures for Major Cereal Crops in Plovdiv Based on Tahrir Registers

Mahsuller (Crops)	Tahrirs ¹⁰⁹				
	1489	1520	1568	1570	1585
Gendüm (Buğday) (Wheat)	45660	126668	172881	168575	171501
Cev ve Gayrihu (Arpa) (Barley)	23642	72343	-	-	-
Mahlut (Karışık) (Mix)	-	-	145895	116190	143880

The data indicate a significant increase in wheat production between 1520 and 1568, suggesting both a demographic expansion and an intensification of arable land use. Compared to wheat, barley appears to have been produced in lesser quantities and disappears from the records after 1520. In contrast, mahlut (a mixture of grains) begins to appear in records starting from 1568, replacing barley and signaling a possible shift in cultivation strategies or classification systems. In any case, wheat dominated Plovdiv's agricultural economy, not only feeding the town's residents but also supplying grain to its wider hinterland.

1.6. Forest or Grove, Grassland and Marshland in the Region

In Ottoman land law, the types of land subject to tenure are categorized into three: private land (*mülk arazi*), waqf land (*vakıf arazi*), and state land (*mîrî arazi*). Within state land, it is also necessary to address cibâl-i mübâha. In such lands, protective measures were

¹⁰⁹ Karta, “XVI. Yüzyılda Filibe Kazası”, p.170.

resorted to less frequently. Within this framework, forested areas were classified according to the type of land on which they are situated.¹¹⁰ The term of forest¹¹¹ *koru* (grove)¹¹², woodshed or *baltalık* (coppice forest)¹¹³ -though not widely employed in the early modern period- were used to describe tree-enclosed areas. Their newer meaning, which came to represent the economic possibilities of firewood and timber utilization, emerged toward the late 19th century¹¹⁴. This transformation of forests sheds light on how the Ottoman administration monopolized forest resources, centralizing control over their economic and ecological value.¹¹⁵ In this chapter, the forest and grove are used interchangeably. Cases

¹¹⁰ Bekir Koç, “Osmanlı Devleti’ndeki Orman ve Koruların Tasarruf Yöntemleri ve İdarelerine İlişkin Bir Araştırma”, *OTAM*, S: 10, 1999, p.140-141. Bekir Koç divided this categorization into three. First, forests, groves and woodlands as mülk. Secondly, forests, groves and woodlands as waqf. Thirdly, forests, groves and coppice lands at mîrî status.

¹¹¹ The word of forest’s meanig is “tree covered vast area, extensive *koru*”.

¹¹² The word of *koru*’s meanig is “well-groomed little forest”.

¹¹³ The word of *baltalık*’s meaning “a grove or forest designated to supply a village or town with firewood”.

¹¹⁴ Although early modern Ottoman Plovdiv is examined in the thesis, the term forest (*orman*) is not frequently encountered in the documents. A provision referencing the forest situation in Plovdiv would serve to illustrate this circumstance. “Hasköy kadısına hüküm ki: “Südde-i Saadetime mektup gönderüp Uzuncaova’da Şemoçe nam derbend karyede kemendci namile ele götürülen on dört neferin Uzuncaova’da vaki olan taşköprünün Filibe canibinde orman içinde boğdukları sagir oğlan ve mecruhen katl eyledikleri oğlanın babası aynı ile bulunup ve mezburların bunu cümlemiz katleyledik deyu ikrar eylemeğin hapsolunup bilfiil mahbus oldukların bildirmişsin imdi mezburları suret-i sicillerle Südde-i Saadetime gönderilmesin emredüb buyurdum ki vusul buldukda üzerlerinde sabit fesad ve şenaatlerinin suret-i sicilleri ile kayd u bend ile yarar adamlara koşup Südde-i Saadetime gönderesin ve koşup gönderdiğin adamlara tenbih eylesesin ki yolda onat hıfz eyleyüp gıybet ettirmekden hazer eyleyeler”. BOA, A. {DVNSMHM.d.,14-358, Hijri 14-03-978). Uzuncaova is a village affiliated with Hasköy, but due to its proximity to Filibe, this detail is specified in the provision. In a forested area located near Filibe, a deaf boy and his father, were killed. Also, Dursun mentioned in his dissertation that in the region of Filibe, forested areas were undity and messy. In addition to this, huge forests were present on the right bank of Maritsa River and at the foothills of Samakov, as well as between Filibe and Tatar Pazarı. The left side of Maritsa River consisted of bad grooves. Dursun’s dissertation mostly relates to the 19th century and because of this, his information is not directly applicable to the 16th century. However, when we think about the early modern Ottoman environmental history of Filibe and Maritsa River, it becomes clear that forests did exist in these regions. For the detailed information please look at this dissertation: Selçuk Dursun, *Forest and the State: History of Forestry and Forest Administration in the Ottoman Empire*, Sabancı University, Institute of Social Sciences, 2007, p.410. In addition to this, Curipeschitz mentioned that although he wrote Uzunova (it must be Uzuncaova), there were oakwood in this region. We cannot directly see the forests of Plovdiv from the archival sources but travelogues also refer to forests in the broader region. Curipeschitz, *Ibid*, p.41. Furthermore, some certain travelogues wrote that forests of Plovdiv and name of some trees. Travelogue of Lubenau, when he explored the region, he saw cypress and he added this tree considered as noteworthy, possibly because his hometown did not have such trees. Reinhold Lubenau, *Reinhold Lubenau Seyahatnamesi, Osmanlı Ülkesinde 1587-1589*, I. Cilt, Kitap Yayınevi, çev. Türkis Noyan, İstanbul, 2016, p.141-147.

Cypress trees are commonly seen in Islamic tradition, as they are often planted in or around cemeteries. One of the most important reasons for planting cypress trees in burial grounds is the smell produced by decomposing bodies. These trees help reduce the odor by absorbing the ammonia released during decomposition, which is why cypress trees are preferred in cemeteries. For the detailed information please look at this study: Mutlu Melis Özgeriş, Faris Karahan, Mustafa Özgeriş, “Servî Ağacının Türk Kültürü ve Peyzajında Kazandığı Anlamların Hayâlî’nin “Serv” Redifli Kasidesindeki Yansımaları”, *Anemon Muş Alparslan Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 10(1),2022, p.274.

¹¹⁵ Selçuk Dursun, “İmtiyazla Mülksüzleştirme: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Erken Dönem Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nde Orman Müsterekleri”, In: *İktidar Tohumları Osmanlı Çevre Tarihi Üzerine İncelemeler*, ed. Onur İnal & Yavuz Köse, İletişim Yayınevi, İstanbul 2022, p.320. Compared to the later periods, the historical sources from the 16th or 17th centuries are rather limited. Information concerning forests is scarce, and

related to groves (koru) were often recorded for various reasons. Archival cases concerning groves were frequent and diverse. They included disputes over state-administered groves (mîrî korular), the conversion of groves into farmland, and the grazing of livestock within them. Particularly, the unauthorized conversion of groves into agricultural land caused complications, prompting the administration to seek clarity on whether these groves had historically been under state monopoly or outside any established tenure.¹¹⁶ In addition to this, the conversion of groves into agricultural land, the cutting down of trees in groves, and the grazing of livestock in groves also provoked state intervention. To address such problems, the Ottoman administration regularly sent provisions to Plovdiv instructing local officials to investigate and take necessary measures.¹¹⁷

When considering the early modern Ottoman Empire, it is important not to project later, modern era perceptions backward. Administrative practice in the sixteenth century prioritized pragmatic governance over ideals such as “environmental protection,” which had little relevance in contemporary thought. In the late 16th century, terms like “forest” (orman) or “grove” (koru) did not evoke notions of environmental preservation or protection of greenery, but instead reflected concerns tied to land use and resource control.

Alongside its forests and groves, Plovdiv also stood out within the Ottoman Balkans as a region rich in pastures.¹¹⁸ Grazing is, in fact, a means of harvesting.¹¹⁹ Unlike a field, pastures do not produce a directly storable crop but instead regenerate the means of

therefore archival materials must be examined carefully in order to obtain detailed data. Anđelko Vlašić, Stanje Šuma U Slavonji Za Osmanske Vladavine (1526.-1691.), In. Prema Povijesti Slavonskih Šuma, 2019, p.72.

¹¹⁶ Filibe kâdısına hüküm ki “Filibe kazâsında vâki’ olan mîrî koruların ve mîrî sınırı dahilinde bazı yerleri evvel haize olan mültezimler bazı kimesnelere mer’a ve ziraat için vermekle korulara ve çayırılara külli zarar ve noksan müretteb olup ve mîrî korulardan bazı mahallere hâli yerlerdir deyü bazı evler gelip konup hala karyeler olduğu i’lâm olundu imdi mîrî korulara dahl ve taarruz olunmak câ’iz değildir buyurdum ki vusûl buldukta te’hîr etmeyüb miri koruların etrâfında vâki’ olan karye ahâlisinin ehl ve taarrüfûyle bi’z-zât üzerine varub yerlü yerinde dikkat ve ihtimâm ile hakk üzere teftîş idüb göresin fi’l-vâki’ mültezim-i mezbûr ziraat ve mer’a için verdiği yerler kadimden miri için korunu gelen yerlerden midiri yoksa kimesnenin tasarrufunda olmayub ve arazi-i ahliye olmakla mîrî tarafından taleb olanlara emriyle mirili olmuştur ve ol kimesneler gelip ... ne mikdar zaman olmuştur ve emriyle mi kondurulmuştur nicedir vukuz üzere yazıp arz eyleyesiz sonra ol babda emr ne vechle sâdir olursa mucebiyle amel edesiz”. A_{DVNSMHM_00035_00153, (Hijri 986).

¹¹⁷ Korucu Hacı Derviş reported that animals were entering certain groves without permission and that trees were being cut in some areas in order to cultivate land. Filibe ve Eskizağra ve Hasköy kadılarına hüküm ki “darende Korucu Hacı Derviş gelip taht-ı kazânız da korucusu olduğu korulara davar girip gezib ve bazı yerler ziraat olunup ve ağaçlar kesilip zarar ve ziyan olunduğu i’lâm etmeğin buyurdum ki vardıkda bu husûsa kendiniz bi’z-zât mukayyed olup vech-i meşrûh üzere korunun eğer ziraat olunmuş yeri var ise ve ağaçları kesilmiş ise şer’le korulara zarar ve ziyan olan vaki’ olan Dervîşi men’ ve def’ idüb ber-vechle tenbih ve te’kîd eyleyesiz ki min-ba’d bir ferd korulara girip ve koyun davar getirip ve ağaçları kesip zarar ve ziyân etmeyeler isimleri ile yazıp bildirip”... A_{DVNSMHM. d. 21-767, Hijri 11-01-981)

¹¹⁸ Kazancıoğlu, *Filibe Hurufat Defterlerine Göre Filibe Kazasındaki Vakıf Müesseseleri 1719-1834*, p.

¹¹⁹ Ferhat Gökbülak, “Otlatmanın Otlak Ekosistemi İçin Önemi”, *İstanbul Üniversitesi Orman Fakültesi Dergisi*, Seri B, C:47, S: 1-2-3-4, 1997, p.58.

production itself, livestock. By their very nature, pastures resist accumulation, storage, or tightly controlled reproduction.¹²⁰

A *mera* is a tract of land designated or traditionally used, either by one or several villages or by towns, for grazing livestock and utilizing its grass. Their importance is evident in the conflict that erupted when state authorities attempted to build a bathhouse on land the community claimed as pasture: the *kadı* of Plovdiv was ordered to investigate whether the site was communal grazing land or property of the Saray-ı Amire.¹²¹

During the early modern period, Plovdiv also served as a significant supply hub for the capital. Livestock farming, especially the raising and transport of sheep and lambs, was critical to provisioning İstanbul.¹²² The productivity of small ruminants grazing on Plovdiv's pastures was high, and the shipment of animals to the capital was a long-established and

¹²⁰ Ozan Giray Şâhin& Ali Murat Özdemir, Orta Asya Göçerlerinde Otlak ve Su Kaynakları Üzerindeki Hâkimiyet ve Soy Bağı Örgütlenmesi, *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Bahar (36), 2022, p.80-81.

¹²¹ The disputed neighbourhood and town in question were pastures that the local inhabitants had customarily used and benefited from since ancient times, and they were not subsequently seized and annexed to the lands and meadows belonging to Saray-ı Amire. Therefore, it is not proper for individuals who said to this is our pastures. Filibe kâdisına hüküm ki: "Hâliyâ kasaba-i mezbur kurbinde vâkı' olan sarây yirine ve çayırında binâ olunan hammâm yirleri için nefis-i Filibe ahâlîsi; "Mer'âmuzdur." diyü dahlidüp nizâ' itdükleri istimâ' olundu. İmdi; feth-ı hâkânide sarây binâ olunmalu oldukda sarâya müte'allik yirler ve çayırların hudûd u sınırı ta'yîn olunmuşdur. Kadîmü'l-eyyâmdan Sarây-ı Âmire'nün hudûdî dâhilinde olan yirler ve çayırlara; "Mer'âmuzdur." diyü dahlolunup nizâ' olunmağa sebep ü bâ'ıs nedür? Bâ-husus ki, hîn-i fetihden berü anda kimesne kalmayup sarây binâ olundukdan sonra cem' olmuş tâyife idüğü ma'lûm u zâhirdür. Buyurdum ki: Hüküm-i şerîfüm varıcak, nizâ' olunan mahal kasaba-i mezbur halkınun kadîmü'l-eyyâmdan ilâ-yevminâ hâzâ tavarları yörüügeldüğü mer'âları olup sonradan alınıp Sarây-ı Âmirem yirlerine ve çayırlarına ilhâk olunmuş olmayup feth-ı hâkânide sarây binâ olundukda hudûd-ı mu'ayyene ile mahdûd olan hâssa sarâya müte'allik yirler ve çayırlara sonradan cem' olan kimesneler ol vechile dahlidüp mer'â da'vâsın iderler ise câyiz değildir. Tamâm dikkat ü ihtimâm üzre görüp hakikat-i hâle muttali' olup sıhhati üzre yazup arzidesin". 6 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri, (972 / 1564–1565), < Özet-Transkripsiyon ve İndeks >, T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı Yayın nu: 28, Ankara, 1995, p.202-203. With this hüküm, we could possible think that there was a saray in Plovdiv because this hüküm explicity refers to a Saray-ı Âmire. In addition to this information, Gökbilgin also mentioned the existence of a palace in his book. According to Gökbilgin, a palace was indeed present in Plovdiv, and funds were allocated from Filibe çeltük mukataası for its repair. His information was dated in Hicri 895. M. Tayyib Gökbilgin, *XV. ve XVI. Asırlarda Edirne ve Paşa Livası, Vakıflar- Mülkler-Mukataalar*, p.125,131. Gökbilgin further noted that during this period, the kadı of Plovdiv, İshâk Çelebi, allocated 64.570 akçe for the maintenance of Plovdiv bridge and imperial stables associated with the palace. Gökbilgin, *XV. ve XVI. Asırlarda Edirne ve Paşa Livası, Vakıflar- Mülkler-Mukataalar*, p.132.

¹²² Dragana Amedoski & Tatyana Kotic, "Köstendil Kazasının 1581 Tarihli Celebkeşan Defteri (5 Belge ile Birlikte)", *Türk Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi*, C: XXXIII, S:37, 2012, p.1-2.

stable practice.¹²³ The Kanunname of Sultan Süleyman even stipulated that flocks of sheep were to follow the traditional paths to İstanbul that had been in use since ancient times.¹²⁴

Seasonal rhythms also shaped how pastures were used. Yaylaks (summer highland pastures) offered elevated grazing grounds and cooler air, while kışlaks (winter lowland pastures) provided shelter and fodder during the winter season.¹²⁵ Plovdiv's climate and geography made both indispensable for animal husbandry.¹²⁶ In the scorching summers that Evliya Çelebi vividly described, livestock were driven to the yaylak, and municipal authorities themselves often sought refuge there.¹²⁷ With winter's arrival, herds returned to the kışlak, ensuring a seasonal cycle of grazing that underpinned the region's pastoral economy.

Demands for sheep, lambs, or goats (with goats rarely attested in records) from Plovdiv were organized according to specific categories and procured locally. Sheep held particular importance as multipurpose animals, raised for their meat, milk, wool and skin.¹²⁸

¹²³ Natural grazing areas such as meadows and pastures do not only provide cheap roughage for ruminants (animals that chew their cud). Pastures also contribute to the protection of soils, the creation of new living spaces for animal groups called wild animals, and the enrichment of groundwater and streams since they also serve as water collection basins. When we consider Ottoman Plovdiv at this point, it becomes clear that pasture farming also contributed to the Maritsa River and its tributaries. Animals, specifically sheep and lambs, have the ability to renew vegetation, feed, and renew other important actors of the environment (e.g. streams, rivers, and lakes).

<https://www.tarimorman.gov.tr/HAYGEM/Belgeler/Hayvancılık/Küçükbaş>

Hayvancılık/Koyun

Yetiştiriciliği/2020 YILI/Koyun_Yetiştiriciligi.pdf.

¹²⁴ Milos Lukovic, "Balkanlarda Besicilerin Transhumance Hareketleri ve Balkan Savaşları'nın Besicilerin Mevsimsel Hareketlerine Etkisi" *History Studies*, V: 5, I: 6, p.48.

¹²⁵ Halil Cin, *Türk Hukukunda Mer'a, Yaylak ve Kışlaklar*, Turhan Kitabevi, Ankara 1980, p.4.

¹²⁶ The highland pastures of Plovdiv were very significant in terms of supplying meat to major centers such as İstanbul and Edirne. The hüküms sent to Plovdiv concerned only sheep, lambs or the conditions for sending them. For instance, it could be seen that only sheep and lambs, or matters related to the transfer of animals to the central district of Plovdiv, were included in these orders. From this perspective, hüküms also show regulations regarding which products were produced in highland pastures and how they were to be distributed. An imperial order notes that Sofya, Plovdiv and Tatarpazarı shall receive honey, ghee, and other materials from the highlands pastures. Furthermore, it could be seen in hüküms that were also regulations concerning the foods produced in the highland pastures and to whom these products were to be delivered. "Sofya ve Filibe ve Tatarpazarı kadılarına hükm ki mahrûse-i Edirne bakkalları südde-i sa'âdetime gelip taht-ı kazânızada vâki' olan yaylakların bal ve yağın ve peynirini kadimden bunlar varub mahrûse-i mezbûre defteriçün ele gelmişler iken halâ Selanik ve gayrı yerlerden bazı Yahudi tâ'ifesi gelip almakla külli müzâyaka verdiklerin bildirüb ol bâbda emr-i hümayunum taleb ettikleri ecilden buyurdum ki göresiz vâki' ise her biriniz taht-ı kazânıza da ol yaylaklar da olanlara muhkem tenbih ve te'kid edesiz bal ve yağ ve peynirlerin ola geldiği üzere mahrûse-i mezbûre defteriçün bunlara verip Selanik'e ve gayrı yerlere vermeyeler bade't-tenbih ... yazıp bildiriniz". A. {DVNSMHH. d. 7 – 1234, Hijri 10-10-975.

¹²⁷ Evliya Çelebi, *Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnamesi*, Cilt III, 2.Kitap p.499.

¹²⁸ Emre Hastaoğlu & İbrahim Tuğkan Şeker, "Kuzu Etinin Türk Mutfak Kültüründeki Yeri", *Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy Studies*, 8 (1), 2020, p.661.

Documents related to the sheep and lambs of Ottoman Plovdiv mostly describe the animals' appearance, physical characteristics, and gender (heder and ewe).¹²⁹

One recurrent category is the mevsim koyunu, or “seasonal sheep.”¹³⁰ These were especially requisitioned from Plovdiv during periods of meat shortage in İstanbul.¹³¹ Another frequently mentioned type is the sağmal koyun (milking sheep), which was valued not only for meat but also for its milk.¹³² Imperial orders emphasized that sağmal sheep were not to be slaughtered en route, but delivered alive to the capital.¹³³ A third designation found in the

¹²⁹ Lambs, which are the offspring of sheep, are separated into male and female. Although there is no significant difference in taste between the meat of male and female lambs, there is a difference in their fat content. The meat of heder is leaner than that of ewe. For the detailed information: Emre Hastaoğlu & İbrahim Tuğkan Şeker, “Kuzu Etinin Türk Mutfak Kültüründeki Yeri”. For this reason, ewe are preferred more. When we look at the Ottoman archive documents (Mühimme registers), the preference for heder or ewe sheep-lamb is stated through the provisions. Kaya Göktepe, “İstanbul’un İfaşesinin Temini Meselesi ve İstanbul’un İfaşesine Katkı Sağlayan Bir Merkez: Tekirdağ Kazası (XVIII-XIX. Yüzyıllar)”, *Belleten*, V:81, I:292, 2017, p.864. Ahmet Tabakoğlu & Büşra Karataşer, “İstanbul’un İfaşesinde Trakya Bölgesinin Rolü”, *Sosyal Bilimler Metinleri*, Sayı:1-1, 2017, p. 10-15.

¹³⁰ It usually refers to animals born in the spring and slaughtered in the autumn. This term was used to indicate the seasonal cycle of sheep and the time of slaughter. These sheep also indicate the period when the sheep and lambs needed each year are brought to the city or nearby areas. Arif Bilgin, *Osmanlı Sarayının İfaşesi (1489-1650)*, Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi 2000, p.213-214.

¹³¹ In the aferomentioned hüküm, detailed information is provided regarding the types and sexes of sheep, as well as whether they were to be considered seasonal or non-seasonal, and whether goats were permitted to be driven or not. “Filibe ve Tatar Pazarı ve Sofya ve İhtiman ve Prezic ve Şehrköy ve İzenbol ve Berkofça ve Samakov ve izlâdi ve Razluk kadılarına hüküm ki dergâh-ı mu‘allâm çavuşlarından olup koyun emini olan Mustafa zide kadruhu dergâh-ı mualla da mühürlü tezkire gönderüb mahrûse-i İstanbul’da et bâbında ziyâde müzâyaka olup taht-ı kazânızdan gönderilü gelen mevsim koyunlarından ve sene-i güzışeden ‘atik ve cedid celebler ve sürücüler ‘uhdesinde hayli baki koyun kalup ve bazı celebler doğancı ve yağcı ve ellici ve küreci ve ... ve ... ile sipâhi olmakla koyun noksan üzere gelirken i‘lâm idüb dergâh-ı mu‘allâm çavuşlarından Nasuh Çavuş mübâşeretile zikr olunan celeblerin ve sürücülerin üzerlerinde bâki kalan ve hala olan mevsim koyunları sürülmek için emr-i şerifim verilmek ricâsına arz etmekte buyurdum ki vardıkda her biriniz taht-ı kazanız da vâki‘ olan kassablara muhkem tenbîh ve te‘kîd eylesiz ki kasabat ve kura da min-ba‘d koyun boğazlayub keçiden gayrı nesne boğazlamayalar ve cedid ve ‘atik celeblerin ve sürücülerin eğer mevsim koyunlarıdır ve eğer sabıka da defteri mucebince uhdelinde olan koyunların yoklayub ellerinde kadılarda ve koyun emini mührün ile temessükleri olmağın üzerlerinde ne mikdar koyun var ise defter mucebince ‘atik ve cedid celeblerin ve doğancı ve yağcı ve küreci ve ellici ve ... bir ... ile emr olunanların ta‘yîn olunan koyundan müşârun-ileyh çavuşum mübâşeretile ihrâc ettirip dahi celebler muvâcehesinde yarar sürücülere der-uhde ettirüb der-uhde olan koyunları iki defter idüb bir suretini müşârun-ileyh çavuşuma virüb ve bir suretini yarar naiblerinize ve sürücüler ile irsâl eyleyüb koyun eminine teslim ettiresiz şöyle ki bu husûs da ihmal ve müsâhelenüz sebebi ile zikr olunan koyun ve ... külli özüünüz makbûl olmayub muateb olursuz ana göre mukayyed olası.” A_{DVNSMHM.d. 47 – 225, Hijri 06-04-990)

¹³² It refers to sheep that are specifically bred to increase milk yield and are focused on milk production. These sheep are usually obtained from high-yielding dairy breeds and are bred with a focus on milk production. Their legs are long, thin and delicate. Their bones are thin, and their bodies are long, deep and widening towards the back. When we look at the dishes made in the Ottoman early modern period cuisine, it is known that sheep milk was generally consumed either plain with bread added or the milk was diluted a little and consumed with bread. The consumption of milk with bread was not exclusive to the subjects, there is information that it was also consumed by those of the askeri sınıf.

¹³³ There was a shortage of meat in İstanbul. In order to alleviate this shortage, it was requested that livestock be transported from the locations specified in the decree. In particular, it was emphasized that dairy sheep should be sent to the capital without being slaughtered. Edirne kadısına ve Filibe, Gümölcine, İpsala, Gelibolu, Ahyolu, Aydos, Karınabad, Yanbolu, Zağra-i Atik ve cedid, Kırkkilise, Vize, Bergos, Silivri, Hayrabolu, Pınarhisarı, Çatalca, Çorlu, Hatunili, Rusikasrı, Kızılağaç, Mustafa Paşa Köprüsü, Akçakızanlık, Çırpan, Tatarpazarı, Uzuncaova-i Hasköy, Dimetoka, Yenice-i Karasu, Malkara, Ferecik, İnoz, Bodra?, Kavak, Keşan,

records is kıvrıcık koyun (curly-fleeced sheep), also carefully detailed in official decrees.¹³⁴ During müzayaka (crisis) periods in İstanbul, imperial directives to the kadı of Plovdiv repeatedly stressed the urgent dispatch of kıvrıcık and sağmal sheep to the capital, with explicit warnings against premature slaughter. These provisions highlight both Plovdiv's role as a key supplier and its strategic advantage: its pastures were highly productive, and its proximity to İstanbul made it indispensable for alleviating shortages in the capital's meat supply.

While Plovdiv 's pastures were vital for supplying the capital, this agricultural productivity coexisted with significant environmental constraints, most notably the persistent issue of marshlands that plagued the region and influenced land use. During his 1433–1434 journey across the Balkans, Bertrandon de la Broquière, en route to meet Sultan Murad II, traversed numerous settlements along the Maritsa River valley. While passing through İpsala, he explicitly noted that the banks of the Maritsa River were characterized by extensive marshlands.¹³⁵ As evidenced in the Eğri Seferi Ruznamesi, the marshlands of Plovdiv posed significant logistical constraints on the Ottoman army during its mobilization.

Mürefte, İncelik, Rodoscuk, Uzunköprü, Havass-ı Mahmudpaşa, Babaeskisi ve Ereğlikası kadılarına hüküm ki halâ mahrûse-i İstanbul'da et bâbında ziyâde müzâyaka olup bir mertebe müzâyakaya bâ'is bazı kasaplar ve madrabazlar sağmal ve erkek kıvrıcık koyun cem' idüb İstanbul'a alıp gönderir diyü bahane idüb adak.... ile mahrûse-i mezbûreye et husûsunda külli müzâyaka verdikleri ma'lûmumuz olmağın sene 993'de Korhor nâm mevzide koyun muhâfazasıçün dergâh-ı 'âli çavuşlarından Eyüb çavuş vardukda her biriniz gereği gibi bi'z-zât mukayyed olup ol makûle matrabazlara ve kassablara sağmal ve erkek kıvrıcık koyun cem' ettirmeyüb ve müzâyaka ve ... erkek kıvrıcık koyun boğazladıp ... sağmal ve erkek kıvrıcık koyun boğazlarsa imdiile yazıp 'arz eyleyesiz ve ellerinde ne mikdar ... yarar koyun bulunursa 'aded verdirib yarar müsellimler koşup mahruse-i mezbure da koyun emini getirip teslim eyleye ve bi'l-cümle alsa bir ... sağmak ve erkek kıvrıcık koyun ve keçi boğazlatmağa rızâ-yı şerifim yoktur kemal-i emr-i şerifime muhalif iş idüb ... uğraya evvelki kanun-ı kadimdir gereği gibi haklarından gelesin ve bazı celebler ki vilâyet ve divana rmanda mahrûse-i İstanbul zahiresiçün hammam olunan... kazaya ve meraya alıp gidip ... imiş ol makûle celeblerin dahi haklarından gelip menâzil ve merâhilde yararlarıda koyun ve sığır telef ettirmeyüb koyunları ... olunup ve bir sürü... yarar müsellimler koşup ... emin ile gelen koyun .. teslim eyledi şöyle ki bu hususda ... als ... makbul olmaz bu husus ehem kanundan..... emin ile gelen koyun .. teslim eyledi şöyle ki bu hususda ... als ... makbul olmaz bu husus ehem kanundan..." A_{DVNSMHM.d. 52-818, Hijri 13-03-992) The prohibition on slaughtering sağmal and heder kıvrıcık sheep constituted a demographic policy implemented during periods of population growth and famine.

¹³⁴ It is a sheep breed known for its curly wool. Since the wool of these sheep is curly and soft, they are used especially for obtaining wool. Male and female sheep differ in curly sheep. Males have a tuft of bangs on their foreheads and the horns open outwards. The underside of the chest and legs are hairless. When the curly sheep is slaughtered, its short tail and long neck will be revealed. This sheep benefits from the pastures provided by the Balkan geography for approximately 8 months. Unlike other sheep breeds, curly sheep are a sheep group that does not have a high milk yield. However, when it feeds its own young, its own milk is completely sufficient. The lamb can benefit from its mother's milk until it is ready for slaughter, and the young will be separated from the mother after approximately 120 days. The rib meat of this animal breed (also called brisket meat) is used in kebab varieties. In addition, since the fat structure of curly sheep is quite balanced, it is also preferred in more than one type of meatball. While the meat of the Kıvrıcık sheep is preferred as a food source, its fleece is usually sheared and used in May.

¹³⁵ Bertrandon De la Broquiere, *Bertrandon De la Broquierenin Denizaşırı Seyahati*, trs. İlhan Arda, Eren Yayıncılık, İstanbul 2000, p. 232.

These wetlands, perceived as a geographical stressor, were intrinsically linked to the Maritsa River's floodplains, which dominated Plovdiv's topography.¹³⁶

This examination of Plovdiv within the Ottoman resource management paradigm reveals a critical tension between imperial economic imperatives and persistent environmental constraints. The province's significance as a livestock hub, supplying specialized sheep breeds (kıvırcık, sağmal, mevsim) to İstanbul under centralized directives was fundamentally shaped by its geomorphology. While productive pastures enabled intensive transhumance, the Maritsa River's hydrology created extensive marshlands that simultaneously constrained agricultural expansion and military mobility, as documented from Broquière to the Eğri Seferi Ruznamesi. Ottoman administration navigated this dialectic through juridical-administrative mechanisms: investigating land tenure conflicts (e.g., mîrî koru conversions, pasture-bathhouse disputes), enforcing seasonal livestock routes, and monopolizing forest resources as economic assets (koru) rather than ecological reserves.

1.7. Conclusion

The Maritsa River has always been more than a line of water across the Balkans. It was the reason why towns like Plovdiv flourished, why armies marched the way they did, and why the Ottoman state invested so much effort in regulating land and resources. Its fertile floodplains supported cereals and rice, its pastures sustained livestock that fed İstanbul, and its forests provided timber and grazing grounds. At the same time, the river could not be fully controlled: floods, marshlands, and disease reminded communities and rulers alike that nature set limits on human plans. For the Ottomans, the Maritsa basin was both an opportunity and a challenge. It tied the region into imperial networks of conquest, supply, and administration, yet it also demanded constant negotiation with its waters and landscapes. In this way, the story of the Maritsa shows how environment and empire were inseparable, each shaping the other across the centuries.

¹³⁶ Bilal Hamza Erbaş, *Çevre Tarihi Perspektifinden III. Mehmed'in 1596 Eğri (Eger) Seferi*, TOBB Ekonomi ve Teknoloji Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2022, p.152.

CHAPTER 2

*Filibe, situated atop one of the three hills that seem to have been torn away from a mountain range, stands apart units distinct setting.*¹³⁷

Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq

2. CITY

This chapter examines the environmental history of Plovdiv, nourished by Maritsa River. In the early modern Ottoman Balkans, geography and institutions that organized access to water, land, animals, and energy mediated the interaction between people and their surroundings. Plovdiv, situated on the Maritsa River and surrounded by fertile plains and forests, offers a striking case of how urban life depended on and transformed its environment. During this transformation process, the waqfs assumed vitally important roles. There were waqfs that regulated, developed, and sustained the relationship between the river and the city. By tracing how waqfs structured the provision of drinking water, the operation of mills, the building of baths, and the management of livestock, the chapter shows that the Ottoman city was inseparable from its ecological foundations.

2.1. The Use of Waqfs in Environmental History

In the early modern Ottoman Balkans, the relationship between humans and the environment was shaped by not only patterns of production but also through administrative, social, and religious institutions, forming a complex, multilayered system. One of the key components of this system was the waqf institution, which provided a structured framework for both the use and protection of the environment. This section, building on the first chapter, explores how waqfs shaped the ecological framework of early modern Plovdiv. The analysis focuses on how endowed properties, such as water sources, pasturelands, seasonal grazing areas, and meadows, were incorporated into a broader system that connected the city with its surrounding environment. Although waqfs are commonly studied within the context of urban history, their environmental dimensions remain underexplored. This chapter shows how waqf registers, which detail endowed properties and revenues, are valuable in

¹³⁷ Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq, *Kanuni Döneminde Avrupalı Bir Elçinin Gözlemleri (1555-1560)*, p.25.

understanding not just the socio-economic structure of a city but alsos for understanding how communities interacted with their environments.

The foundational missions of waqfs encompass a plurality of intertwined and complex objectives. These include religious motivations, such as the pursuit of divine pleasure, as well as the founder's endeavor to secure a lasting legacy, a form of symbolic immortality wherein the founder's name endures as long as the waqf persists, despite their physical demise. Further motives involve the desire for social recognition and distinction among one's peers, and the aspiration for one's deeds to be acknowledged by both contemporaries and superiors. Additionally, there are material considerations, including the augmentation of wealth and, crucially, the protection and perpetuation of that acquired wealth through the institutional mechanism of the waqf, safeguarding it from various contingencies.¹³⁸

Furthermore, according to the concept of "continuing reward after death" (sevab ba'del mevt), derived from a saying of the Prophet Muhammad, a Muslim who succeeds in accomplishing three things will continue to earn divine reward even after their demise. These are: first, having provided a beneficial piece of knowledge to people; second, having righteous children who continue to pray for them after their death; and third, having established an ongoing charity (sadaqah jariyah). It is widely held that waqfs functionally serve to fulfill these very three conditions.¹³⁹

While consolidating their own standing, they also endeavored to strengthen their geographical region and environment, taking deliberate action to this end. They worked to develop the Ottoman city and its surroundings across diverse fields such as religion, education, health, transportation, public works, and urban development.¹⁴⁰ From a contemporary perspective, public services that would typically fall under the purview of the state were carried out through waqfs. For instance, a service such as the provision of clean water to a city could be undertaken not by the state directly, but by a waqf established in the

¹³⁸ Methiye Gül Çöteli, "Vakfiyelere Göre Ticaret Yapılarına Dair Kentsel Bilginin Mekâna İndirgenmesi", *Belleten*, C: LXXXII, S.293, 2018, p.186; Bahaeddin Yediyıldız, "Müessese"- Toplum Münasebetleri Çerçevesinde XVIII. Asır Türk Toplumunu ve Vakıf Müessesesi, *Vakıflar Dergisi*, S:15, 1982, p.27-28; Mehmet Şeker, "Osmanlı Vakfiyelerinde Çevre Bilinci ve Örnekleri", *Ekoloji Çevre Dergisi*, Yıl:1, S:4, 1992, p.26-30; Hasan Yüksel, *Osmanlı Sosyal ve Ekonomik Hayatında Vakıfların Rolü Üzerine Bir Araştırma (1585-1683)*, Doktora Tezi, Ankara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 1990, p.143.

¹³⁹ Murat Çizakça, "Osmanlı Dönemi Vakıflarının Tarihsel ve Ekonomik Boyutları", in. *Türkiye'de Hayırseverlik, Vatandaşlar, Vakıflar ve Sosyal Adalet Araştırması*, TÜSEV, İstanbul 2006, p.23.

¹⁴⁰ Çöteli, "Vakfiyelere Göre Ticaret Yapılarına Dair Kentsel Bilginin Mekâna İndirgenmesi", p.186.

region.¹⁴¹ It can also be interpreted that a cooperative relationship existed between the Ottoman Empire and the established waqfs.¹⁴²

The investments made by waqfs, members of the Ottoman dynasty, or the Sultans of the era, while being acts performed for the pleasure of God, also served to strengthen İstanbul's legitimacy over the Maritsa River and its basin. In other words, these investments were aimed not only at earning divine favor but also at securing the approval of the local population and, ultimately, reinforcing the political authority of the investors themselves.¹⁴³

This thesis therefore proposes a different approach by integrating waqfs into environmental history studies. When evaluated from this perspective, waqfs can reveal patterns of ecological transformation in cities and their environs, making an analysis of waqf properties and revenues through an environmental lens essential for this study.

2.2. Waqf and Water Management

2.2.1. The Use of Drinking Water

Was water in early modern Plovdiv merely a technical necessity, or was it also associated with social hierarchy and institutional control? How did people meet their daily need for drinking water? Did they secure their own water individually, or was this process mediated by waqs and other institutional arrangements? More specifically, who was responsible for providing access to drinking water in Plovdiv, and what mechanisms were employed? Who were the key actors and mechanism involved in meeting Plovdiv's drinking water needs? This section will focus on the role of waqfs in securing and distributing water in Plovdiv, both through waqfs within the city and through foundations established elsewhere that drew on Maritsa River and its tributaries. By tracing these networks, we can see how drinking water was embedded in a wider system of environmental management, where access to an essential resource depended on both geography and institutional frameworks.

One of the earliest known waqfs that provided drinking water to Plovdiv was established by İsmail Bey, a member of the Candaroğulları dynasty (also known as the

¹⁴¹ Muhiddin Tuş, "Osmanlılarda Özel Toprak Mülkiyeti ve Vakıf Münasebeti", *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, S:5, 1998, p.188. Yüksel, *Osmanlı Sosyal ve Ekonomik Hayatında Vakıfların Rolü Üzerine Bir Araştırma (1585-1683)*, p.243.

¹⁴² Çizakça, *Osmanlı Dönemi Vakıflarının Tarihsel ve Ekonomik Boyutları*, p.23. Furthermore, the waqf system, established across the territories under Ottoman rule from the Balkans to the Middle East and Africa represents one of the most significant philanthropic institutions; Çizakça, *Ibid*, p.22.

¹⁴³ Husain, *The Tigris-Euphrates Basin Under Early Modern Ottoman Rule, c.1534- 1830*, PhD. Thesis Georgetown University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2018, p.136-137. Çöteli, "Vakfiyelere Göre Ticaret Yapılarına Dair Kentsel Bilginin Mekâna İndirgenmesi", p.186.

İsfendiyoğulları dynasty), and a powerful principality in Anatolia prior to its incorporation into the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴⁴ The Candaroğulları had maintained peaceful relations with the Ottoman Empire from the fifteenth century, cemented by dynastic marriages between the two houses. Murad II married İsfendiyar Bey's daughter, and his sisters married İsfendiyar Bey's sons, İbrahim and Kasım Bey.¹⁴⁵ These ties between the Candaroğulları and Ottomans, however, deteriorated under Mehmed II when İsmail Bey's brother, Kızıl Ahmed, sought refuge with Uzun Hasan. Because of this situation, Mehmed II relocated İsmail, the ruler of the Candaroğulları Beylik, to Plovdiv around 1461-1462 as part of the *sürgün* (forced resettlement) policy.¹⁴⁶ Just like the imarets and zawiya he had commissioned in Kastamonu, he soon started investing in the Plovdiv region.

Granted Markova (modern day Markovo, near Plovdiv in Bulgaria) as a mülk,¹⁴⁷ İsmail Bey soon became central to the city's water supply. Markova located on the edge of

¹⁴⁴ Poet Hamidi-İsfahani, from the Candaroğulları lineage, praises İsmail Bey. İsmail Bey is portrayed as a prominent figure who transcends both worldly and spiritual realms. He is praised for transforming the region of Plovdiv to the level of Egypt, likening the Maritsa River to the Nile River. This metaphor is important to emphasize what İsmail Bey did for Plovdiv. Grigor Boykov, *Ottoman Plovdiv, Space, Architecture and Population (14th-17th Centuries)*, Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, Vienna, 2024, p.145-148.

¹⁴⁵ Gökbilgin, *XV. ve XVI. Asırlarda Edirne ve Paşa Livası, Vakıflar- Mülkler- Mukataalar*, p.328.

¹⁴⁶ Yaşar Yücel, "Candaroğulları", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C. VII, İstanbul 1993, s.149. According to Grigor Boykov, there was three architectural patronage of the Plovdiv since 14th century. Lala Şâhin Paşa, Şehabeddin Paşa and then İsfendiyoğlu İsmail Bey. Although these first two was appointed to rule Rumeli by the Ottoman Sultans, İsfendiyoğlu İsmail Bey was driven from Anatolia to Plovdiv by Mehmed II. For the detailed information: Grigor Boykov, "Anatolian Emir in Rumelia: İsfendiyoğlu İsmail Bey's Architectural Patronage and Governance of Filibe (1460s-1470s)", *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 1-2, 2013; Grigor Boykov & Maria Kiprovska, "The Ottoman Philippopolis (Filibe) during the Second Half of the 15th c.", *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 3-4, 2000; Grigor Boykov, "Architecture as a Symbol of Power: Some Thoughts on the Ottoman Architectural Heritage of Plovdiv (Filibe)", Grigor Boykov, *Ottoman Plovdiv, Space, Architecture, And Population (14th-17th Centuries)*, Austrian Academy Of Sciences Press, Vienna, 2024; Grigor Boykov, *Mastering the Conquered Space: Resurrection of Urban Life in Ottoman Upper Thrace (14th-17th C.)*, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences, Ankara, 2013; Grigor Boykov, *Demographic Features of Ottoman Upper Thrace: A Case Study On Filibe, Tatar Pazarcık and İstanımaka (1472-1614)*, Unpublished Master Thesis, İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences, Ankara, 2004; Ümit Katırcı, *Candaroğlu Ailesinin Osmanlı Sistemine Entegrasyonu: Bir Beylik Ailesi Şecere Araştırması*, Yayımlanmamış Doktora Tezi, Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü, Ankara, 2022.

¹⁴⁷ Mehmed II converted Markova's status into a timar, but Sultan Bayezid II reaffirmed it as a mülk. Vakf-ı evlâd-ı İsmail Bey bin İsfendiyar Bey karye-i Markova nam karye-i merhûm Sultan Mehmed Han tâbe serâhu mezbûr İsmail Bey'e harâcıyla ve ispençesiyle vesâir mahsûlâtıyla hudûdu ve sınıruyla temlik idüb virmiş imiş mezkûr İsmail Bey dahi vakf-ı evlad idüb tasarruf olunur iken sonra bozulub timara virilmiş ba'dehû merhûm sultan Bayezid Han aleyhi'r-rahmeti ve'l-gufrân vakfiyetin mukarrer dutub hükm-i şerif erzânı kılmış ol hükm mücebince ilâ yevmenâ hazâ vakf-ı evladlık üzere tasarruf olunur merhum Sultan Mehmed Han virdüğü mülknamesi ve merhum ve mağfirün leh Sultan Bayezid han sadaka itdüğü mukarrernâme görüldü haliyen Padişahımız e'azze Allâhu ensârehu hazretleri dergâhından hükm-i şerif sadaka olunmuş. TT.d. nr.370, p.104. Katırcı, *Candaroğlu Ailesinin Osmanlı Sistemine Entegrasyonu: Bir Beylik Ailesi Şecere Araştırması*, p.198. In Gökbilgin's work, it was stated that Kadı, Hacı and Marvas villages was granted as a tax exempt property to Hasan Bey who was waqf's founder son, along with the vakfiye dated 872, 876 and 882, and that the revenues from the village (particularly those derived from animal husbandry) were to be inherited by his son after his death. Gökbilgin, *XV. ve XVI. Asırlarda Edirne ve Paşa Livası, Vakıflar- Mülkler- Mukataalar*, p.328.

the Rhodope Mountains, provided abundant springs that could be channeled toward Plovdiv. By converting Markova into a waqf and using its resources and location, İsmail Bey institutionalized the supply of water to the city, ensuring that access to drinking water was not left to private initiative but embedded in a charitable and administrative framework. This transformation marked on the earliest examples of how waqfs shaped the environmental structure of the city.

Through this waqf, İsmail Bey constructed an aqueduct from Markova to Plovdiv, securing the city's drinking water. According to Boykov who is one of the most important researcher for Plovdiv studies, this aqueduct may have followed or restored one of the three Roman aqueducts that had historically supplied water to Philippopolis, two of which originated in the vicinity of Markova. Although no precise information exists on the exact route of İsmail Bey's aqueducts, the new structure likely built upon the remnants of Roman infrastructure. Once the water reached the city, it was distributed to the public via fountains. The aqueduct constructed by İsmail Bey is believed to have entered Plovdiv from the south, reaching the Saray Hill (modern day Dzhenem in Bulgaria). From there, the waterway continued northeast, ultimately arriving at Bunarkcık Hill (modern day Bunardzhik in Bulgaria).¹⁴⁸

İsmail Bey's work in Plovdiv was part of a wider Ottoman practice of channeling mountain water into urban centers. Yahya Pasha who was Rumeli Beylerbeyi, for example, redirected the Saraçınarı stream to Sofia, constructing aqueducts and fountains that transformed the city's water supply.¹⁴⁹ Likewise, İsa Beg¹⁵⁰ endowed similar systems in Üsküp. These parallels show that İsmail Bey's efforts were not an isolated act but part of a common Ottoman approach toward urban hydraulic development across the Balkans.

¹⁴⁸ Boykov, *Ottoman Plovdiv, Space, Architecture, And Population (14th-17th Centuries)*, p.148.

¹⁴⁹ Stefan Beychev, "Water and the City: Ottoman Sofia in the Early Modern Period", in *Living with Nature and Things, Contributions to a New Social History of the Middle Islamic Periods*, eds. Bethany J. Walker & Abdelkader Al Ghouz, Gottingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020, p.145-147; Stefan Beychev, *The Nature of the Ottoman City: Water and Urban Space in Sofia, 1380s-1910s*, Cambridge University Press, 2025; Boykov, *Ottoman Plovdiv, Space, Architecture, And Population (14th-17th Centuries)*, p.149; Mehmet İnbaşı, "Yahya Paşa'nın Üsküp'teki Vakıfları", *Vakıflar Dergisi*, S:53, 2020, p.12; Hacer Ateş, "Şehirlerin Su İhtiyacının Karşılmasında Vakıfların Rolü: XV-XVI. Yüzyıllarda Rodos'ta Vakıf Suları ve Yapıları", *Trakya Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, C:21, S:2, 2019, p. 827-832. Gürer Karagedikli, "Osmanlı Şehrinde İrva ve İska: Edirne Şehrinde Su ve Suyolları Üzerine Bazı Bilgiler (17. Yüzyıl Sonu ve 18. Yüzyıl Başları)", XVII. Türk Tarih Kongresi, 2014 Kongreye Sunulan Bildiriler IV. Cilt, IV. Kısım, p.1377-1380.

¹⁵⁰ İshakbeyoğlu İsa Bey served as the sanjakbeg of Üsküp and Bosna in the mid-15th century. He managed the use of water resources and also he commissioned the construction of an aqueduct in Üsküp. Enes Pelidija & Feridun Emecen, "İsa Bey", TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi, C. XXII, İstanbul 2000, p.476. Grigor Boykov, *Ottoman Plovdiv, Space, Architecture, And Population (14th-17th Centuries)*, p.149. Lidiya Kumbaracı-Bogoyevič, *Üsküp'te Osmanlı Mimari Eserleri*, çev. Suat Engüllü, Mas Matbaacılık, İstanbul 2008, p.372-375.

İsmail Bey's provisioning of water to Plovdiv, therefore, conformed with a broader process of hydraulic management in the region. His relocation through the *sürgün* policy illustrates how the state transferred both elite individuals and ecological resources to newly settled territories.

By embedding his aqueduct within a waqf, İsmail Bey tied water management to enduring institutional structures. The water system established in Plovdiv, therefore, cannot be wholly separated from similar imperial projects in places like Sofia, where human capital and environmental resources were relocated together to consolidate Ottoman control.

2.2.2. Water Powered Mills

Mills defined as devices used for grinding coarse materials with the help of water, muscle, or wind, were central to Ottoman production prior to industrialization. By processing grain, mills shaped local economies and landscapes. Depending on regional conditions, the state employed three types of mills.¹⁵¹ First were windmills, which were operated in regions with strong and consistent winds. The second and more commonly used type in this study were water-powered mills. These mills functioned using water flow, making them particularly suitable for areas with abundant streams and rivers. The final type of mill was animal-powered mills, established in places with limited water.¹⁵² These mills, commonly used in the early modern period, gradually lost their significance with the onset of industrialization, which brought stream-powered mills to the fore.¹⁵³

Watermills were the most common type of mills in Plovdiv because of its rich water resources. Watermills in Plovdiv were typically constructed along the Maritsa River or its tributaries in favorable areas. Their operation depended on consistent water flow. In times of drought or low water levels, animals were occasionally used to manually turn the millstones manually.¹⁵⁴ Ottoman archival sources refer to these mills as *asiyâb*, and they were generally situated in villages close to streams or rivers. The tahrir registers of Plovdiv¹⁵⁵ indicate that not every village contained a mill; however, mills were typically found in settlements that were close to the Maritsa River or its branches. Plovdiv's topography made the construction

¹⁵¹ Salih Başkutlu, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Değirmencilik Endüstrisi ve Buhar Değirmenleri*, p.X; Ruhi Özcan, "Arşiv Belgeleri Diliyle Su Değirmenleri (Âsiyâb)", *OTAM*, 40, 2016, p.196.

¹⁵² Salih Aynural, "İstanbul Değirmenleri", In: *Antik Çağ'dan XXI. Yüzyıla Büyük İstanbul Tarihi, Cilt 6*, 2015, p.77.

¹⁵³ ¹⁵³ For the detailed information please look at this work: Salih Başkutlu, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Değirmencilik Endüstrisi ve Buhar Değirmenleri*".

¹⁵⁴ Özcan, "Arşiv Belgeleri Diliyle Su Değirmenleri (Âsiyâb)", p.196.

¹⁵⁵ Every tahrir registers related to Plovdiv at 15th and 16th centuries

and operation of mills both practical and profitable, and many of them were operated through waqf institutions, which either built new mills or purchased existing ones. Their revenues were funneled into the waqf system, ensuring both financial sustainability and continuity of infrastructure.

Following his earlier water projects, İsmail Bey established the Plovdiv waqf in 1472 to include mills, rice-hulling facilities (ding), and other properties.¹⁵⁶ One such property was the village of Kadıköy (modern day Kadievo in Bulgaria), located near the Vacha (formerly Krichim) River,¹⁵⁷ where he endowed a watermill with three wheels and adjoining structures, including rice-hulling facilities, a warehouse (ambar), and grain storehouse (buğdayhane). He also established an auxiliary building (müştemilat) on the Göpsü River (modern day Stryama River, another left tributary of the Maritsa) next to one of the mills. This auxiliary building contained two millstones and, in a separate room nearby, one ding. İsmail Bey allocated income from his waqf to cover both employee salaries and the operational costs of the water system he had constructed in Markova.¹⁵⁸

In the same year (1477), a supplementary document (zeyl) to the waqf recorded further waqfs.¹⁵⁹ These included two watermills located on the Değirmen Deresi, which flowed near Markova village, and two more mills with an auxiliary building near the village of Kara Reis (modern day Bolyartsı, Bulgaria), close to the village of Kırk Pınar (modern day Cherkezitsa, Bulgaria).¹⁶⁰ Notably, İsmail Bey's waqfs consistently combined mills with rice-hulling facilities and their supporting infrastructures.¹⁶¹ This integration illustrates how the waqf system not only secured grain milling but also developed the infrastructural and technological base needed for rice agriculture. It is especially striking that the waqf network institutionalized and supported this rural economic system through the integration of both hydraulic and mechanical components.

¹⁵⁶ A copy of the waqf is recorded in VGMA, in register no.628, page 449 and line 233. Ding (mills) means are rice hullers, used specifically in regions where rice cultivation was practiced, to separate the husk from the paddy. For the detailed information; İlker Yiğit & Ziya Çağrı Yazgan, "Osmanlı Dönemi Bir Sanayi İşletmesi Olarak Değirmenler: Tosya Nahiyesi Örneği (1578/1579)", *ERDEM İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Dergisi*, S: 82, 2021, p.188.

¹⁵⁷ Boykov, *Ottoman Plovdiv, Space, Architecture, And Population (14th-17th Centuries)*, p.57-147.

¹⁵⁸ VGMA. VGM.d nr. 628, p. 451; BOA.AE.SMMD.II nr. 1/57; Katırcı *Candaroğlu Ailesinin Osmanlı Sistemine Entegrasyonu: Bir Beylik Ailesi Şecere Araştırması*, p.117-118.

¹⁵⁹ VGMA.VGM.d. nr. 630, s.974, sr. n.586

¹⁶⁰ VGMA. VGM.d nr. 628, p.452; BOA.AE.SMMD.II nr. 1/57.

¹⁶¹ Katırcı, *Candaroğlu Ailesinin Osmanlı Sistemine Entegrasyonu: Bir Beylik Ailesi Şecere Araştırması*, p.119. Boykov, *Ottoman Plovdiv, Space, Architecture, And Population (14th-17th Centuries)*, p.147.

Rice-hulling facilities (*ding*) were technologically different from the mills used to grind wheat, rye, and mixed grains (*mahlut*) and could not be taxed in the same way. Dings were technically mills powered by water, but they were composed of four distinct sections. These sections include water wheels, rotating wooden shafts, pounding hammers, and paddy hollows. The first section consists of water wheels that operate using hydraulic power. Each of the four sections contains 12 paddles (or blades). In the second section, rotating wooden shafts transfer the force of the water wheel to the pounding hammers. The third section supplies unhulled rice to the indentations where the grains are pounded. Once pounded, the rice is sifted and then taken to the final section, where a second round of sieving occurs to separate remaining husks and unwanted material.¹⁶²

Because of this unique design, *dings* were taxed separately under the *resm-i ding*, assessed based on the number of pestles (pounding hammers) they operated. These taxes, recorded in Plovdiv's fiscal records, provide a quantitative measure of the scale of milling and rice processing in the region.

Other leading figures continued this pattern by combining mills, rice-hulling facilities, and waqf structures. In 1506, Gazi Yahya Pasha, son of Malkoç Mustafa Bey, endowed four watermills (*asiyâb*) and two *ding* (rice hulling devices) on the Kozludere Stream in Plovdiv, demonstrating how local elites tied water infrastructure to charitable institutions.¹⁶³ Pir-i Mehmed Pasha¹⁶⁴ followed a similar strategy. His waqf charter lists mills and rice-hulling facilities strategically located in key villages such as Küpsi (modern day Stryama), İneyenice, and Kara Reis (modern Bolyartsı), as well as additional mills near the Regoz Stream (modern Rakovski) and Baylıkzade.¹⁶⁵ These properties show how environmental features, such as streams and tributaries, were deliberately integrated into the economic base of waqfs.

Sixteenth century waqfs further expanded this system in Plovdiv. Semiz Ali Pasha, who served as *Rumeli Beylerbeyi* in 1550, transformed villages near Plovdiv into centers of

¹⁶² Seyhan, *Üretimden Tüketime Balkanlarda Çeltik (XV- XVII. Yüzyıllar)*, p.247.

¹⁶³ The source of the Kozludere stream is located in the village of Avratalan, which is close to the kaza of Plovdiv. Kozludere River passed through the kaza of İzladı and joined Maritsa River in Tatarpazarı. For the detailed information please look at this work: Haluk Kayıcı, (*Edirne Vilâyeti Sâlnâmelerine Göre) Filibe Sancağı (1870-1877)*, Şenyıldız Yayıncılık, İstanbul 2016, p.251.

¹⁶⁴ Pîrî Mehmed Pasha was a vizier serving under both Yavuz Sultan Selim and Kanunî Sultan Süleyman. He was dismissed in the reign of Kanunî Sultan Süleyman and replaced by İbrahim Pasha. For the detailed information please look at this work: Yusuf Küçükdağ, "Pîrî Mehmed Paşa", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C.XXXIV, İstanbul 2007, p.280-281.

¹⁶⁵ VGMA.VGM.d.747, s.466, sr.n.309.

hydraulic investment.¹⁶⁶ His waqf encompassed eight mills in Küpsi and nearby villages, additional mills in Konoş and Kırk Pınar, as well as walnut trees, cattle, hay barns, and two rice-hulling buildings. Twelve additional mills were recorded under his name on the Vardar River under his waqf. In total, his foundation controlled at least twenty five mills in the Plovdiv region, reinforcing how waqfs tied together grain processing, rice cultivation, and animal husbandry within a single ecological-economic framework.

Semiz Ali Pasha's investments in Plovdiv were not merely a list of waqfs but rather offered a perspective on how to ecological elements of the city were integrated with its economic and religious structures. By endowing 25 mills in the region, Semiz Ali Pasha did not view these mills merely as centers of production but also as instruments that encouraged animal husbandry alongside agriculture, thereby creating a multiyared system of production and circulation. Like the aforementioned pashas and beys, Semiz Ali Pasha established his mills near significant rivers in Plovdiv, such as Göpsu, Kırk Pınar and Kozludere, and these mills became part of a hydraulic system that underpinned the functioning of Plovdiv's economy.¹⁶⁷

Later in the sixteenth century, Koca Sinan Pasha-known as the Conqueror of Yemen and described by the historian Selânikî as devoted to public works continued this trajectory.¹⁶⁸ His Plovdiv waqf included six mills on the Maritsa River, two irrigation canals, additional mills in surrounding villages.¹⁶⁹ His waqfs illustrate how hydraulic investment and water management remained central to elite strategies of beneficence and imperial consolidation.

Taken together, the investments of İsmail Bey, Yahya Pasha, Pir-i Mehmed Pasha, Semiz Ali Pasha, and Sinan Pasha show how waqfs on the Maritsa River anchored Ottoman environmental management in Plovdiv. Mills and rice-hulling facilities along the Maritsa generated revenue and sustained a coordinated system that tied water use, agricultural

¹⁶⁶ Gökbiçgin, *XV. ve XVI. Asırlarda Edirne ve Paşa Livası, Vakıflar- Mülkler- Mukataalar*, p.503.

¹⁶⁷ Erhan Afyoncu, "Semiz Ali Paşa", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C. XXXVI, İstanbul 2009, s.495-496. VGMA.VGM.d.585, s.16-20. Reyhan Şâhin Allahverdi, "Semiz Ali Paşa'ya Ait Bir Vakfiye ve Sınırname", In: *Sosyal ve Liberal Bilimlerde Yeni Yönelimler*, ed. Hasan Babacan, Sevilay Özer, Gece Kitaplığı, Ankara 2016, p.571.

¹⁶⁸ Nurcan Yazıcı, "Osmanlı Mimarlığında XVI. Yüzyılın Önemli Bir Banisi: Yemen Fatih Gazi Sinan Paşa ve Camileri", *Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, C:4, S:17, 2011, p.439; Mehmet İpşirli, "Koca Sinan Paşa", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C. XXVI, Ankara 2002, p.137-139.

¹⁶⁹ Yazıcı, "Osmanlı Mimarlığında XVI. Yüzyılın Önemli Bir Banisi: Yemen Fatih Gazi Sinan Paşa ve Camileri", p.449; VGMA. VGM.d.570, s.47, sr.n.22.

production, and rural labor to the urban economy. This system embodied both use and preservation, ensuring continuity of resources across generations.

As Alan Mikhail has emphasized, Ottoman natural resource management relied on local knowledge and labor, which waqfs institutionalized and linked to the imperial system. The result was a web of interdependent cooperation among imperial officials, waqf administrators, and rural communities. Because of this intricate interdependence, even a minor disruption to any point in the waqf system, such as the breakdown of a mill or a failed harvest, had the potential to influence the entire structure.¹⁷⁰ Plovdiv illustrates how sensitive Ottoman environmental management was to ecological change, and how waqfs functioned as its central nodes.

The fiscal record reinforces this picture. The tax known as *resm-i 'asiyâb* was levied on water-powered and wind-powered grain mills, assessed in Plovdiv at 60 akçe per year for mills operating year-round, 30 akçe for half-year mills, and 15 akçe for those operating only a quarter of the year.

Table 2.1. Below is a table presenting the *resm-i asiya*b and *resm-i ding* revenues for Plovdiv (akçe)¹⁷¹

Nahiyeler (Subdistricts)	Resm-i Asiyab					Resm-i Ding				
	1489	1520	1568	1570	1585	1489	1520	1568	1570	1585
Merkez	260	960	1095	1060	1080	-	200	80	-	120
Karacadağ	-	45	360	330	360	-	40	120	120	120
Konuş	540	585	570	600	570	-	200	200	200	200
Koyuntepesi	45	330	600	180	480	-	140	160	80	160
Küpsi	30	498	810	675	810	-	40	-	-	-
Rubçoz	-	195	150	120	150	-	-	-	-	-
Mezraa	-	15	30	15	30	-	-	-	-	-
Cemaat ve Bazdaran Köy	60	90	765	670	765	-	40	40	20	40

¹⁷⁰ Alan Mikhail, *Osman'ın Ağacı Altında, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Mısır ve Çevre Tarihi*, çev. Seda Özdil, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2019, p.19. Beychev, "Water and the City: Ottoman Sofia in the Early Modern Period", p.145-147.

¹⁷¹ Karta, *XVI. Yüzyılda Filibe Kazası*, p.176.

The *resm-i asiyâb* in the table shows a consistent increase over the sixteenth century, while *resm-i ding* appears intermittently, concentrated in subdistricts such as Konaş and Koyuntepesi where rice cultivation was most active. This pattern underscores the ecological embeddedness of rice production, which relied on the wetlands around the Maritsa River. By integrating mills and dings into their foundations, waqfs institutionalized technological and ecological systems that sustained Plovdiv's role as a regional center of grain and rice production.

2.2.3. Cleanliness: Baths and Infrastructure

Beyond drinking water and mills, another crucial dimension of Plovdiv's environmental history was the provisioning of public baths. Due to their reliance on natural resources, urban ecology infrastructure, and water management, public baths are indeed a part of environmental history. Bathhouses were not only places of cleanliness and social life but also institutions that depended on careful management of water and fuel. Through waqfs, they became part of the same system that tied rivers, forests, and urban infrastructure together. This section examines the construction and operation of baths in Plovdiv, showing how they linked daily practices of hygiene to broader patterns of environmental use and urban development.

Although people have experimented with various methods to maintain personal cleanliness, bathing has remained the most preferred method throughout history. Climatic conditions and considerations of privacy led to a need for enclosed spaces, which in turn gave rise to the emergence of bathhouses. The term *hamam*, derived from the Arabic root *ḥamm* meaning "to heat" or "to be warm," originally denoted a place for hot bathing. Historically, baths have been used by various civilizations and gained significant prevalence particularly during the Roman period. Given the emphasis placed on personal cleanliness in İslam, bathhouses were widely adopted and preferred in Muslim societies.¹⁷² The religious emphasis on purity led to a strong cultural association between physical cleanliness and İslam, prompting Muslims to utilize and construct baths.¹⁷³ The baths used in Roman, Byzantine, and Seljuk cultures continued to be used in the Ottoman period and evolved further. The baths built by the Ottomans in Anatolia and the Balkans show regional

¹⁷² Semavi Eyice, "Hamam", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, C. XV, İstanbul 1997, p.402-414.

¹⁷³ Özer Ergenç, *XVI. Yüzyılda Ankara ve Konya*, Ankara Enstitüsü Vakfı Yayınları, Ankara 1995, p.49.

differences. However, baths built in the Balkans are largely similar to those constructed in İstanbul.

In the Ottoman context, two types of baths can be identified: public baths and private baths. Apart from these, baths were generally categorized as single or double baths. Single baths were used exclusively by men, though certain hours of the day were designated for female use. Double baths consisted of two adjoining sections, one for men and the other for women. The women's section in double baths was often larger than the men's. While the men's entrance typically opened onto a main street or square, the women's entrance was placed in a more private and less visible location to preserve modesty.

During the Ottoman period, the construction of a large number of bathhouses was driven by two main reasons. The first was economic. Baths generated steady income and were thus often endowed as charitable institutions by trustees. The second reason was their social function; public baths provided services to the broader community. In addition to those open to all, some baths were constructed for charitable purposes and provided free access to the poor, while others served as a source of income for the foundation to which they were attached.¹⁷⁴

The sequence of rooms in Ottoman bathhouses varied, typically including a changing room (soyunmalık), warm room (ılıkık), hot room (sıcaklık), halvet (private hot room), furnace room (külhan), and the water tank.¹⁷⁵ In the külhan section, a heating system was organized to warm the bathhouse. In addition to natural sources, water for bathing was supplied from wells and cisterns. The essential requirement for heating the water in bathhouses was access to clean water, preferably from a nearby spring, stream, or river.

This necessity was often noted in the foundation deeds. In the case of Philippopolis, water for bathhouses was primarily supplied from the Maritsa River and its branches.

¹⁷⁴ Cleanliness is half of faith (Müslim, Taharet, 1). The key to prayer is cleanliness (Ebu Davut, Salat, 73). Alidost Ertuğrul, "Hamam Yapıları ve Literatürü", *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi*, C:7, S:13, 2009, p.241-243. Bahaeddin Yediyıldız, "Vakıf Müessesesinin XVIII. Asır Türk Toplumundaki Rolü", *Vakıflar Dergisi* XIV, 1982, p.6. In addition to this, according to the scholars who work history of İslam, there are 3 key institutions that symbolizes an İslamic city: bathhouse, mosque and bazaar. For the detailed information please look at this work: Özer Ergenç, *XVI. Yüzyılda Ankara ve Konya*, p. 48.

¹⁷⁵ The section called "soyunmalık" is the first area one enters in the bathhouse, where visitors remove their clothes and after completing the bathing process, return to rest. The section referred to as "ılıkık" or "soğukluk" is the intermediate space situated between the "soyunmalık" and the hot room. The actual bathing takes place in the hot room, which is accessed through a narrow doorway roughly the height of a person. This part is also the warmest and most steamy section of the bathhouse. The "külhan" is the area where the fuel residues accumulate. In the early modern period, bathhouses were heated with wood; the "külhan" is located directly behind the entrance section of the bathhouse. Ertuğrul, "Hamam Yapıları ve Literatürü", p.250-252.

Following the Ottoman conquest, a significant effort was made to provide water to the city. The heating of water used in the baths was largely achieved through firewood. The abundant forests around Plovdiv made it a suitable region for obtaining timber. The proximity of wooded areas played a major role in the provisioning of firewood to bathhouses in the city. However, the demand for firewood led to various issues such as deforestation, regulations, or gradual restrictions by the early modern period.¹⁷⁶

After the conquest of Plovdiv, Ottoman elites quickly invested in public infrastructure that tied the city to its riverine landscape. Lala Şâhin Pasha, the first beylerbeyi of Rumelia, commissioned a large wooden bridge over the Maritsa River and soon built a public bath just below the city walls. This choice of location reflects a broader Ottoman practice, reusing and transforming existing urban sites to anchor new authority.¹⁷⁷

Lala Şâhin's successor Şehâbeddin Pasha continued this investment. As Rumeli Beylerbeyi in the 1430-1440s, he endowed a medium-sized foundation that included several bathhouses, most notably the *Tahtakale Bathhouse*.¹⁷⁸ Evliya Çelebi later described it as a popular hub that could host up to a thousand people daily, owing to its five separate hot rooms (which were common in Ottoman bathhouse architecture), a sacle that reveals both architectural ambition and the large volumes of water and fuel required.¹⁷⁹ Şehâbeddin Pasha's architectural patronage in areas around the Maritsa River, especially his bathhouse constructions, sheds light on how he benefited from this geography.¹⁸⁰ As Grigor Boykov notes, Şehâbeddin Pasha's architectural contributions defined both the core and defining the

¹⁷⁶ Ertuğrul, Ibid, p.243-249; Eyice, "Hamam", p.414.

¹⁷⁷ Boykov, *Architecture as a Symbol of Power: Some Thoughts on the Ottoman Architectural Heritage of Plovdiv (Filibe)*, p.71.

¹⁷⁸ The vakfiye of this waqf has not survived to the nowadays. There is a Maliyeden Müdevver Defter (Hijri 1041-1042 and Hijri 1021-1050) in the Ottoman Archive. As noted in the studies of Kayhan Orbay and Hatice Oruç, they were unable to locate the vakfiye in the registers prior to these dates. Kayhan Orbay&Hatice Oruç, "Filibe'de Şehâbeddin Paşa Vakfı 1632-1641 (H.1041-1051)", *Güneydoğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi*, S:18-19, 2010, p. 21; Hatice Oruç&Kayhan Orbay, "Şehâbeddin Paşa'nın Filibe'deki Vakfına Ait Kaynaklar: Muhasebe Defterleri", *Belleten*, Cilt XXXV – S:39, 2014, p.1.

¹⁷⁹ Boykov, *Ottoman Plovdiv, Space, Architecture, And Population (14th-17th Centuries)*, p.109; Boykov, *Architecture as a Symbol of Power: Some Thoughts on the Ottoman Architectural Heritage of Plovdiv (Filibe)*, p.80. Eyüp Coşkun&Ferhat Ensar, "Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesinde Bulgaristandaki Bazı Kültür Merkezleri", *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Araştırma Dergisi*, S:43,2007, p.155; Evliya Çelebi, *Günümüz Türkçesiyle Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi*, 3.Cilt, 2.Kitap, p.502.

¹⁸⁰ Boykov, *Ottoman Plovdiv, Space, Architecture, And Population (14th-17th Centuries)*, p.109; Boykov, *Architecture as a Symbol of Power: Some Thoughts on the Ottoman Architectural Heritage of Plovdiv (Filibe)*, p.80. Eyüp Coşkun&Ferhat Ensar, "Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesinde Bulgaristandaki Bazı Kültür Merkezleri", *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Araştırma Dergisi*, S:43,2007, p.155.

periphery of Ottoman Plovdiv, integrating transportation, water management, and urban growth.¹⁸¹



Figure 2.1. The complex of Şehâbeddin Paşa by the river Maritsa: 1. T-shaped¹⁸² imaret/zaviye; 2. Medrese; 3. Hünkâr bath; 4. Panayır han; 5. Mausoleum (türbe); 6. Kitchens (aşevi). (Photo D. Cavra, 1879)¹⁸³.

¹⁸¹ Grigor Boykov, *Architecture as a Symbol of Power: Some Thoughts on the Ottoman Architectural Heritage of Plovdiv (Filibe)*, p.78.

¹⁸² T-shaped imaret/zaviye had started with the late 14th century. Şehabeddin Pasha in Plovdiv (1430), İshak Bey (1438-39), İsa Bey (1475) in Üsküp are chronologically followed by Evrenos Ahmed Bey in Gianitsa (Yenice-Vardar). For detailed information; Zeynep Oğuz, *Multi-Functional Buildings of the T-Type in Ottoman Context: A Network of Identity and Territorialization*, Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi, Master Thesis, 2006, p.82; Boykov, *Architecture as a Symbol of Power: Some Thoughts on the Ottoman Architectural Heritage of Plovdiv (Filibe)*, p.78.

¹⁸³ For detailed information; Boykov, PhD Thesis, p. 381; Fatih Sarımeşe, “Mimari ve Süsleme Özellikleriyle Filibe Şehabeddin Paşa Cami”, *Anadolu ve Balkan Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 7(14),2024, p.331.

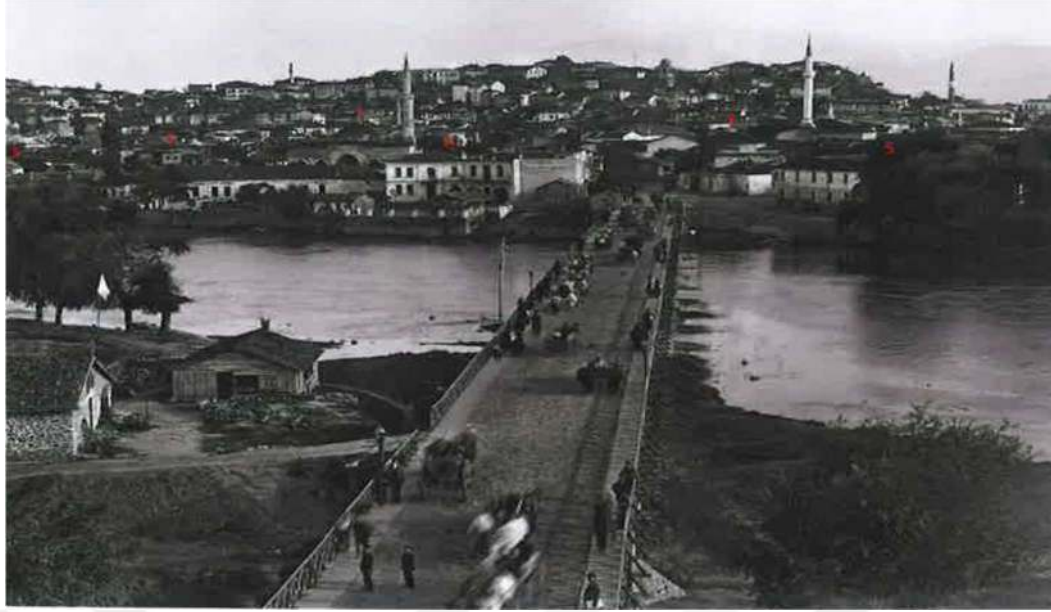


Figure 2.2. *Şehâbeddin Pasha's Külliye, Viewed from Lala Şâhin Pasha Bridge to the north, 1890s*¹⁸⁴

What makes these sites particularly noteworthy is their location. Clustered by the Maritsa River and the Lala Şâhin Pasha Bridge, they highlight the intertwined relationship between waterways, infrastructure, and urban development in the Ottoman Balkans.¹⁸⁵ From an environmental history perspective, the bathhouses built in Plovdiv were not only shaped by social customs but also by the practical demands of water supply, energy use, and urban planning. As in the examples of Lala Şâhin Pasha and Şehâbeddin Pasha, the placement of the bathhouses in strategic areas of Plovdiv reveals a deliberate adaptation of the city to its riverine landscape. Later patrons extended this pattern. Semiz Ali Pasha endowed a bath in Kadı village (now known as Kadievo in modern Bulgaria), drawing on the Küpsü River, while Koca Sinan Pasha built two in the forested district of Uzuncova, where local wood supplied the fuel for heating.¹⁸⁶ These waqfs show how baths were consistently sited at the intersection of water and fuel resources, making them central nodes in the city's environmental as well as social fabric.

In sum, the bathhouses of Plovdiv demonstrate how cleanliness was inseparable from environmental management. Situated at the crossroads of rivers and forests, and sustained through waqfs, they illustrate how everyday practices of hygiene were embedded in larger

¹⁸⁴ Boykov, *Ottoman Plovdiv, Space, Architecture, And Population (14th-17th Centuries)*, p.115.

¹⁸⁵ Grigor Boykov, *The Waqf and The Complex of Şihabeddin Paşa in Filibe, Balkanlarda Osmanlı Vakıfları ve Eserleri Uluslararası Sempozyumu*, 2012, p.183.

¹⁸⁶ Reyhan Şâhin Allahverdi, *Semiz Ali Paşa'ya Ait Bir Vakfiye ve Sınırname*, p.571; VGMA. VGM.d.570, s.47, sr.n.22.

systems of water use, fuel consumption, and urban planning. Like aqueducts and mills, baths show that the Ottoman city was shaped as much by its ecological foundations as by its architectural form.

2.3. Waqs and Animals

The waqfs established in Plovdiv engaged with the environment not only through water and land but also through animals. Waqfs often included animals, which constituted another important component of the region's environmental history. For instance, Gazi Yahya Pasha endowed a farm in the village of Yakupça near Plovdiv. This farm included 455 animals, consisting of sheep, horses, and water buffalo.¹⁸⁷

Especially, the issues surrounding water buffaloes were a very interesting topic. Water buffaloes struggled to regulate their body temperature during the summer heat. Their dark coloration absorbed solar radiation, while their thick skin made it exceedingly difficult to dissipate the accumulated heat. Furthermore, as they were significant milk-producing animals, they were obligated to produce the expected yield of milk for both their own offspring and their owners. To meet this demand for milk production, water buffaloes were frequently fed, and this high feeding rate additionally increased their metabolic heat production, compounding the heat absorbed from the sun.

The primary mechanism water buffaloes use to cool down is sweating; however, they possess a limited number of functional sweat glands. Those who tended to the water buffaloes would therefore release them into natural water pools in marshy areas to allow them to cool down. These ponds were indispensable for the buffaloes' survival, offering protection from the detrimental effects of sunlight to which they are highly susceptible. The comfortable existence in these ponds not only ensured their survival but also cemented their role as an integral part of this "aquatic ecosystem".¹⁸⁸

According to Faisal, water buffaloes, sorrowful mammals struggling against nature, have not been among the animals capable of transforming themselves to the same extent as small ruminants.¹⁸⁹

Semiz Ali Pasha, through his waqf in the Kadı village of Plovdiv, donated cows to a menzil, along with fields and grazing land, while the Mirza Çavuş farm in the district of

¹⁸⁷ VGMA.VGM.d.629, s.419, sr.n.332. İnbaşı, *Ibid*, p.12.

¹⁸⁸ Husain, *The Tigris-Euphrates Basin Under Early Modern Ottoman Rule, c.1534- 1830*,p.232-233.

¹⁸⁹ Husain, *Sultan'ın Nehirleri, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Dicle ve Fırat*, p.173.

Konuş noated cattle. Kadı village even housed a camel and a barn, underscoring the variety of animals incorporated into waqf foundations.¹⁹⁰

The variety of animals endowed by these foundations, such as sheep, horses, water buffalo, cattle, and camels, shows Plovdiv's economy drew on multiple forms of animal power. Small livestock, particularly sheep and lambs, played a vital role in supplying İstanbul's livestock needs. Thanks to its favorable climate and the efficiency of the yaylak-kışlak (transhumance) system, Plovdiv became one of the empire's major centers for sheep and lamb breeding.

Camels held a special place in this system. As Onur İnal notes, camels were "living machines" of the early modern Ottoman Empire, able to carry loads of approximately 250 kg, while horses could carry about 190 kg. Beyond their carrying capacity, what distinguished camels from horses was their ability to eat while walking and to continue on their journeys for weeks without rest. In addition to this, the transportation of heavy and bulky goods such as not only rice but also grain, salt and cotton, from production centers to urban markets was economically feasible almost exclusively by camels. Other pack animals used in transport, such as horses, were up to twice as costly compared to camels, making their preference in commercial activities nearly impossible relative to camel transport. In contrast, horses, donkeys, and mules needed breaks during long travels.¹⁹¹ The mild winters in Plovdiv made the city one of the main hubs for camel breeding in the Ottoman Balkans. Camel caravans played a vital role in Plovdiv's economy and as previously mentioned, were frequently used to transport rice.¹⁹² This situation was not unique to rice or to Plovdiv. What is even more striking is that heavily loaded goods were transported by camels, and this mode of transport was preferred even in coastal regions of Rumelia, where maritime shipment would have been possible. In her article, Faroqhi notes that the woolen fabrics produced by Jewish weavers in Selanik wished to send part of these textiles by sea, even though the kadı of Selanik wished to send part of these textiles by sea, but were instead carried by camel caravans. Faroqhi further adds that it remains unclear why maritime transport, despite being

¹⁹⁰ Allahverdi, *Ibid*, p.571.

¹⁹¹ Onur İnal, "One-Humped History: The Camel as Historical Actor in the Late Ottoman Empire", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 53, 2021, 65; Halil İnalçık, "Arab Camel Drivers in Western Anatolia in the Fifteenth Century", *Revue d'Histoire Maghrébine* 31-32 (1983), p.266. Onur İnal, Tek Hörgüçlü Tarih: Geç Dönem Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Tarihsel Bir Aktör Olarak Deve, tr. Deniz Dölek-Sever, in. *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze İnsanın Ayak İzleri: Müdahale, Etkileşim, Mücadele*, eds. Deniz Dölek-Sever & Özlem Sert, Alfa Yayınları, İstanbul 2025, 158-159.

¹⁹² Shopov, "Cities of Rice: Risculture and Environmental Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Balkans", p.5.

cheaper according to the Ottoman administration, was not preferred over camel transportation. Some of the possible reasons may have stemmed from the belief that camel caravans reached İstanbul more quickly, or from the perception that sea travel was not sufficiently safe.¹⁹³

In a vast empire where river transportation was limited to outside regions like Egypt and Iraq, pack animals like camels held immense importance for transportation. Trade and the transport of goods were mostly done via land routes using pack animals. Among these, camels were the most suitable for long-distance travel and the transport of a wide range of goods, agricultural products (particularly rice in the case of Plovdiv), textiles, animal hides, and wool. They also transported timber¹⁹⁴ for shipbuilding from the forests, stones and minerals from quarries, and salt from saltpans. In this way, animals, like aqueducts, mills, and baths, were woven into the city's environmental fabric, linking local ecologies to imperial networks of supply and transport.

2.4. Conclusion

The case of Plovdiv reveals how waqfs functioned as more than charitable waqfs; they were mechanisms that linked people to their environment. Through water supply, mills, and baths, they organized access to rivers and forests, while through the management of livestock they connected urban life to wider landscapes of pasture and transport. Taken together, these waqfs show that the Ottoman city was not only a social and economic hub but also an ecological one, embedded in and sustained by the flows of water, energy, and animals.

By their very nature, waqfs introduce a long term perspective. Since a waqf is established to exist in perpetuity, it is necessary for the source of its income; whether a river, a mill, or a tract of land, to remain productive on a continuous basis. It is, after all, quite natural that in the Ottoman Empire both philanthropic institutions and the legitimacy of Ottoman rule would suffer if these resources were not maintained productively and managed properly over the long term.

¹⁹³ Suraiya Faroqhi, "Camels, Wagons, and the Ottoman State in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 1982, p.532-533.

¹⁹⁴ İnal, *One-Humped History: The Camel as Historical Actor in the Late Ottoman Empire*, p.57-72; 5 numaralı mühimme defteri, (973 / 1565–1566), *Özet ve İndeks, Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı Yayın No: 21, Ankara, 1994*, p.84.

CHAPTER 3

*A region emerges as people try to make a living from a particular part of the earth, as they adopt themselves to themselves to its limits and possibilities.*¹⁹⁵

Donald Waister

3. PEOPLE

The first chapter of this dissertation explored the river itself as an ecological force, while the second examined how institutions, particularly waqfs, organized and mediated access to water, land, and animals. This final chapter turns to people (the sultans, pashas, beys, cultivators, and waqf officials), who stood at the center of Plovdiv's environmental history. If rivers shaped the geography and waqfs structured its institutions, ultimately human actors mobilized knowledge, labor, and power to transform the Maritsa basin into a working landscape.

The argument of this chapter is that people were not passive users of nature but active agents who reshaped Plovdiv's ecology. Ottoman elites directed conquest and cultivation, promoting rice farming and commissioning infrastructure. Reâyâ, especially the specialized class of rice cultivators, labored in difficult conditions that tied their lives and livelihoods directly to the wetlands. Waqf officials and employees, meanwhile, acted as day-to-day environmental managers, responsible for distributing water, maintaining mills and baths, and overseeing forests and pastures. Together, these groups reveal how the transformation of Plovdiv was not only geographical and institutional but also profoundly human.

The chapter unfolds in three parts. The first section examines the askerî class, from Murad I and his commanders to local pashas, who employed political and military power to harness the Maritsa and introduce rice cultivation. The second focuses on the reâyâ, particularly the *çeltükçis*, whose labor made large scale rice production possible and whose status illustrates the ecological and social burdens of this crop. The third considers waqf officials and employees as environmental managers, showing how their daily interventions in water supply, mills, baths, and forests embedded human decisions into the city's ecology.

¹⁹⁵ Donald Worster, *New West, True West: Interpreting The Region's History*, *Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol.18, No.2, 1987, p. 149.

By bringing together these different groups, this chapter argues that Plovdiv's environment was neither a static backdrop nor solely a product of natural forces. It was a landscape constantly reshaped by people, powerful elites, ordinary cultivators, and institutional managers alike, whose actions defined the ecological history of the Maritsa basin.

3.1. "Administrators (Askerîler)"

This final chapter turns to the human factor. Throughout the thesis, Ottoman sultans, pashas, and beys have appeared as figures who acted upon and reshaped the Maritsa River and Plovdiv. Here, their role is reconsidered explicitly within an environmental history framework. Drawing on political authority, military force, and economic resources, these elites not only conquered and administered Plovdiv but also transformed its landscape; building bridges, redirecting water, and promoting rice cultivation. By examining their interventions, we see how imperial power and local ecology were bound together through human agency.

The ecological transformation of Plovdiv and the Maritsa River begun during the reign of Murad I, one of the early Ottoman founders. Even prior to the conquest of Plovdiv, by exploiting a natural corridor in conjunction with the conquest of Edirne, the Ottomans effectively initiated the conquest of the Maritsa River itself. Indeed, Murad I's policies were neither incidental nor haphazard; he had meticulously conducted a detailed analysis of environmental factors and geography. After conquering key Balkan cities such as Edirne, Dimetoka, and Plovdiv, he leveraged the geographical characteristics of the Maritsa River to ease the advance of his armies. These Balkan conquests were not the result of Murad I's personal efforts alone; on the contrary, the prominent pashas and beys of the era left their mark on these conquests and contributed to the integration of the Balkans into the Ottoman ecological sphere.

Lala Şâhin Pasha played a key role in the environmental transformation of Plovdiv. Following the conquest of Plovdiv, he commissioned a stone bridge to secure transportation within the city. As emphasized throughout the thesis, his most significant investment in Plovdiv was the introduction and promotion of rice cultivation. Due particularly to Plovdiv's soil structure (alluvial soils are generally more suitable for rice cultivation), its proximity to water, and its favorable temperatures, rice cultivation was established in the region. No evidence suggests that rice had been cultivated in the region under Bulgarian or Byzantine

rule. With the arrival of Ottoman administration in the region, mastery over rice, a highly profitable yet equally challenging agricultural crop, began to take shape. Lala Şâhin Pasha's introduction of rice to the region also permits us to infer that Ottoman administrators possessed knowledge of environmental conditions and the geography they conquered. Aware that rice had to be grown near water sources; Lala Şâhin must have seen Plovdiv, nourished by the Maritsa River, as highly suitable for cultivating this crop. It is evident that he possessed expertise regarding rice cultivation, and genuine success followed.

Much like Lala Şâhin Pasha, the foresight of Şehâbeddin Pasha in Plovdiv also holds great significance. Şehâbeddin Pasha was one of the important pashas of the Mehmed II era.¹⁹⁶ The approximately sixty-year interval between them allowed Şehâbeddin Pasha to move a step beyond the accomplishments of Lala Şâhin Pasha. Şehâbeddin Pasha continued bridge construction, erecting the indispensable elements of an Ottoman city on the banks of the Maritsa River. He too recognized the importance of the Maritsa River and made decisions that facilitated access to water.

When discussing the period of Mehmed II, it would be incomplete to mention only Şehâbeddin Pasha and his contributions. Although İsfendiyarzade's presence in Plovdiv differed from that of the other two pashas, he would become one of the most significant figures to benefit from Plovdiv and Maritsa River. Initially, his relations with Mehmed II were positive; however, the Sultan, wishing to neutralize a potential threat from a Turkish principality, later exiled İsfendiyar to Plovdiv and granted him the village of Markova as a property. As discussed in detail in the second chapter, Markova is located near the Musalla Hill, the source point of the Maritsa River. Through the foundation he established, he supplied drinking water from Markova to Plovdiv. Possessing knowledge of both the local geography and the transfer of resources across regions, he successfully carried out this project. The provision of drinking water was a matter of considerable importance in the early modern period, typically supplied organized through waqfs. While utilizing the river's water, the fact that he supplied drinking water to Plovdiv from the region of his exile reveals his understanding of how nearby environmental resources could be utilized.

In addition to the names mentioned above, other pashas and beys also invested in the region and incorporated environmental elements into their policies. It must be underlined that an environmental history that excludes the human agent, or downplays its contribution,

¹⁹⁶ For detailed information about Şehâbeddin Pasha and his works in Plovdiv please read Boykov's researchs.

would inevitably be deficient. Humans seek to understand, transform, and adapt other living elements of their environment to meet their needs and living standards. İsfendiyar did not acquire the knowledge to bring water from Markova on his own; he drew on the expertise of the local populace and invested with the aim of also winning their support. The environmental knowledge of local people was utilized by beys or pashas with economic and political power, who, backed by the Ottoman central administration, employed and transformed non-human elements in the geographies they controlled. Human agency was thus paramount in early modern Ottoman Plovdiv. Political and economic power from above was reinforced by the geographical and environmental knowledge rooted in the Plovdiv locality, and investments in the region followed this dynamic.

To summarize, the environmental transformation of Plovdiv and the Maritsa River unfolded through the reciprocal interaction between natural elements and human agency. Ottoman sultans, pashas, and beys assumed an active role in the region's transformation not only through their political and military decisions but also via environmental interventions. Lala Şâhin Pasha's construction of bridges and his introduction and promotion of rice cultivation in the region, as well as Şehâbeddin Pasha's investments along the Maritsa River, demonstrate how the ecological potential of the region was shaped by Ottoman administration. At this point, humans emerge not as passive users of nature but as actors who transformed it, reshaped it, and built a long-term political order. The case of the Maritsa River and Plovdiv thus provides a strong case study for early modern Ottoman environmental history, revealing that environmental transformation depended not only on natural conditions but also on human agency, knowledge, historical experience, and administrative policies.

3.2. Reâyâ

Among the most important sources for understanding Plovdiv's socio-economic conditions are the tahrir registers. Read through an environmental lens, they reveal that the *çeltükçis* were not ordinary peasants but a specialized, state defined labor regime whose expertise, fiscal status, and proximity to water bound them to the Maritsa River and made them pivotal to Plovdiv's ecological and economic transformation. This section argues that Ottoman administrators engineered and stabilized rice production by replacing earlier *ortakçı kulluk* arrangements with a hereditary, immobile class of rice cultivators; granting them distinct tax treatment and subjecting them to unusually close supervision; and organizing their work through a division of labor (*reîs* and *kürekçiler*) that embedded local ecological knowledge into routine practice. The discussion unfolds in four steps. First, a

brief genealogy from ortakçı kulluk to the codified status of *çeltükcis*, second, their legal and fiscal profile (heredity, immobility, exemptions, and dues), third, the labor ecology of rice (roles, tools, and tasks) and the spatial footprint of *çeltükcis* in Plovdiv and its hinterland as traced in the tahrirs. Finally, the culinary and provisioning circuits through which unmilled çeltük became *pirinç* (rice), linking Plovdiv's wetlands to imperial kitchens and urban poor relief.¹⁹⁷

3.2.1. Reâyâ Involved in Water-Centric Livelihoods

Agricultural activities around the Maritsa River were not restricted to the *çeltükcis* engaged solely in rice production. Due to the river's influence, fishing activities were also conducted within the city of Plovdiv. Much like the *çeltükcis*, those involved in fishing resided in settlements in close proximity to the river. Fishermen were recorded in the *tahrir* registers. As observed in the initial *tahrir* register of Plovdiv, a Muslim individual named Hüsnü was registered as a fisherman; notably, no other fishermen were encountered in the register besides him.¹⁹⁸ An examination of subsequent registers reveals that the *tahrir* registers conducted in 1520 and 1568 demonstrate that both Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants were engaged in fishing activities.¹⁹⁹

Another professional group operating on the river consisted of those engaged in raft transportation. These raftmen were recorded in the registers as *salcılar* or *sal haydacıları* and resided in settlements in close proximity to the riverbanks. Trade on the Maritsa River was predominantly conducted via rafts or boats. This commercial journey, extending from Plovdiv to Enez where the river discharges into the sea, involved the transportation of goods

¹⁹⁷ Plovdiv was a city composed of quite diverse ethnic elements, much like a typical Ottoman city. When the first *tahrir* conducted in the region is examined, both Muslim and non-Muslim elements are encountered. The first *tahrir* register related to Plovdiv was dated Hijri 895 with no. BOA TT.d. 26. Furthermore, this mufassal *tahrir* records a community classified as "hâne-i çingâneyân". hâne-i müslim: 796, mücerred: 99, hâne-i gebr: 78, mücerred:6, bive: 11, hâne-i çingâneyân:33, hâsıl 79901. BOA, TT. d.26, p.43. When the occupational groups are examined, we again see fishermen, millers, water-carriers, and rice cultivators who made use of the Maritsa River. Furthermore, information about the region in later periods can be obtained from *tahrir* register conducted in the year 925. BOA, TT. d.77. Hane-i Müslim: 658, bive:13, hane-i kıptiyan: 35, mücerred müselle: 186, hane-i gebr: 12, yamak:17, imam:18, müezzin: 23, çeltükçü: 28, bağcı:4, hasıl: 1.000.904 BOA, TT. d.77, p.282. When examining the occupational groups, water-carriers, rice cultivators, and vintners are again observed. Through the additional *tahrir* register prepared for the region in the year 937, we are able to obtain extensive information regarding its socio-economic structure. Hane-i müsliman: 609, mücerredan:26, hane-i Yahudiyan: 33, mücerredan:1, hâne-i çingâneyân: 33, mücerredan:2, hâsıl: 1.321.891. 370 Numaralı Muhasebe-i Vilayet-i Rum-İli Defteri, pp.51-52. This *tahrir*, once conducted, makes it increasingly evident that the city had evolved into an Ottoman urban center. Elements that can be regarded as characteristic of an Ottoman city, such as a madrasa, a public soup kitchen (imaret), a bathhouse (hamam), and others- appear more prominently in this record.

¹⁹⁸ TT.d.26, p.69.

¹⁹⁹ Nurullah Karta, XV. Ve XVI. Yüzyıllarda Filibe Şehrinde İktisadi Hayat Ve Meslek Grupları, *Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 8, no. 2 (2006), p.160.

that merchants had either purchased or were destined for sale. To facilitate the logistical operations of the raftmen, cargo transfers were executed at various scales of piers (*iskele*) situated along the banks of the Maritsa River.

Transportation via rafts on the Maritsa River was not a simple. Particularly at the Maritsa Bridge in Edirne, rafts frequently capsized, resulting in fatalities. Consequently, raftmen began to operate collectively to mitigate such risks. After delivering their cargo, raftmen returned by towing their rafts upstream along the same waterway with the help of ropes. To facilitate movement during the return journey, willow trees on the right bank of the Maritsa River had to be cleared. Raftmen employed laborers to assist their navigation along the river, particularly during periods of higher water discharge. The practice of rafting on the river can be defined as an inherently challenging and laborious vocation.²⁰⁰

Furthermore, as no water source other than the Meriç River existed within the city of Plovdiv, the inhabitants fulfilled their water requirements through the mediation of water carriers. These carriers, who specialized in water transportation, supplied water to the populace from the Maritsa River using large barrels mounted on horses.²⁰¹

During the early modern period, camels were utilized for transportation as extensively as the river. The utilization of the river intensified during specific seasons when hydrological conditions and river discharge permitted navigation. In the later period, the utilization rate of the Maritsa River specifically increased. Commercial vitality was sustained through the shipment of goods from Plovdiv to Enez. In the late period, transportation from Plovdiv to Enez via rafts took approximately 10-12 days.²⁰²

3.2.2. System of *Çeltükcis*

3.2.2.1. From *Ortakçı Kulluk* to *Çeltükcis*

Before discussing the *çeltükcis*, it is useful to first examine the system of *ortakçı kulluk*. The *ortakçı kulluk* was utilized prior to the Ottomans, during the Karamanid period in Karaman, as well as by the Mamluks and the Dulkadir Turkmens.²⁰³ In the *ortakçı*

²⁰⁰ Ersoy Hacısalihioğlu, 19. Yüzyıl Ticaretinde Meriç Nehri'nin Önemi, in. *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Nehirler ve Göller I*, Not Yayınları, Kayseri 2015, p. 282-285.

²⁰¹ Ersoy Hacısalihioğlu, Meriç Nehri'nin Türk Tarihindeki Önemi, p.539-541

²⁰² Emine Gümüşsoy, 19. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Belgelerinde Meriç, in. *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Nehirler ve Göller*, ed. Şakir Batmaz& Özen Tok, Not Yayınları, Kayseri 2015, p. 623-626.

²⁰³ İnalçık, "Rice Cultivation and the Çeltükçü-Reaya System in the Ottoman Empire", p.85-86; Irene Beldiceanu-Steinherr, "XV. ve XVI. Asırlarda Anadolu'da Ortakçılar", *VIII. Türk Tarih Kongresi, 11-15 Ekim 1976*, Ankara (II. Cilt), p.1321-1322, 1324. According to Beliceanu, it is not possible to think that the Seljuqs was take from the system. There is a possibility that Byzantium was used the system.

kulluk system of the Karamanids, half the cost of the seed was covered by the landowner or the state, while the other half was covered by the farmer, designated as an *ortakçı kul*. After the cost of the seed was deducted, the revenue from the resulting harvest was then divided equally between the parties.²⁰⁴

The legal status of the *ortakçı kuls* in the Ottoman Empire differed from that of the *reâyâ* class, which formed the base of society. Their working conditions and status varied depending on their labor circumstances and the difficulty of cultivating the crops they grew. Until they were emancipated by their owners, the *ortakçı kuls* remained the property and slaves of their masters. According to Ömer Lütfi Barkan, the *ortakçı kuls* shared common characteristics with the class known as serfs in Europe, especially restrictions on rights such as marriage, inheritance, and freedom of movement.²⁰⁵

The lands cultivated by the *ortakçı kuls* were typically state lands (*hassa topraklar*), private properties (*mülk araziler*), or waqf lands (*vakıf arazileri*). They engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry, but as an economically underdeveloped group, they could not afford to purchase agricultural tools or livestock. They relied on the landowner's resources and survived through their labor.²⁰⁶

The Ottomans adopted the *ortakçı kulluk* system practiced by the Karamanids, keeping the rule that half of the seed cost was covered by the landowner or the state, and the other half by the *ortakçı kuls*. However, if the *ortakçı kuls* covered the entire cost of the seed themselves, they became entitled to two-thirds of the harvest they produced.²⁰⁷ The *ortakçı kuls* were not responsible for the maintenance of essential agricultural tools used in rice cultivation, nor for the upkeep of fields, water channels, and ditches. This responsibility fell to the landowners.²⁰⁸

During the reign of Mehmed II, the administrative policies of the Ottoman Empire also began to change. These changes shaped decisions about rice cultivation. Direct control over rice fields on mülk and waqf lands passed to the Ottoman administration. This marked a break with the *ortakçı kulluk* system. In the Balkans, which could be considered the heart of the empire in the fifteenth century, *çeltükçis* were classified separately for making it easier

²⁰⁴ Havva Merve Seyhan, *Üretimden Tüketime Balkanlarda Çeltik (XV- XVII. Yüzyıllar)*, p.23.

²⁰⁵ Ömer Lütfi Barkan, "XV ve XVI. Asırlarda Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Toprak İşçiliğinin Organizasyonu Şekilleri I, Kulluklar ve Ortakçı Kullar", *İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası*, 1, 1939, p. 30-34.

²⁰⁶ Irene Beldiceanu-Steinherr, "XV. ve XVI. Asırlarda Anadolu'da Ortakçılar", p.

²⁰⁷ İnalçık, Rice Cultivation and the Çeltükçü-Reaya System in the Ottoman Empire, p.85.

²⁰⁸ İnalçık, Ibid, p.81.

for the Ottoman administration to supervise them directly. The *ortakçı kul* system, which had its origins in the pre-Ottoman era, ended in the Ottoman Empire in 1518.²⁰⁹

3.2.2.2. Who are Çeltükcis?

According to Halil İnalçık, when studying rice cultivation in the Ottoman Empire, one should first look at the tahrir registers of the Hüdavendigâr Liva, the region where the Ottomans first took root. These registers contain valuable information about rice cultivators.²¹⁰

The Ottoman law codes (*kanunnames*) classified *ortakçı kuls* and *çeltükcis* separately from the ordinary *reâyâ*. The *çeltükcis* were registered in the tax registers as “çeltükçü” and their names were recorded afterward. They were exempted from the certain taxes like miners (*madenci*), salt workers (*tuzcu*) and mountain-pass guards (*derbendci*).

Çeltükcis lived under more restricted conditions compared to the general *reâyâ*. For a member of the reaya to become a *çeltükci*, an imperial decree (*ferman*) issued by the sultan was required. Once an individual was registered in the tax records as *çeltükci*, this status was permanent. They would remain *çeltükcis* until death. Rice cultivation was hereditary, passed down from father to son. If a *çeltükci* died, his status transferred to his son; if he had no son, it passed to his brother. If the deceased had no brother, the status was transferred to the sons or brothers of other *çeltükcis*.²¹¹

Women are not seen in the records as *çeltükcis* because they were generally not recorded in official documents. However, comparative evidence and present day practice suggests that women likely worked alongside men in cultivating this crop, even if they were absent from the registers. The prevailing assumption that Ottoman women did not work outside the home stems largely from the fact that their names were not recorded in documents compared to men. Contrary to this general belief, women likely worked in the fields and contributed to production at least as much as men contribute.

A *çeltükci* could not change their profession or transfer their work to another person. This restriction was linked to the specialized expertise rice cultivation required. Since acquiring this expertise was not an easy process, the state monitored *çeltükci* carefully. The

²⁰⁹ İnalçık, Ibid, p.93.

²¹⁰ Halil İnalçık, “Rice Cultivation and the Çeltükçü-Reaya System in the Ottoman Empire”, p.75. Ömer Lütfi Barkan& Enver Meriçli, *Hüdavendigâr Livası Tahrir Defterleri I*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara 1988, p.28.

²¹¹ Halil İnalçık, “Rice Cultivation and the Çeltükçü-Reaya System in the Ottoman Empire” p.101.

state supervised them mainly by inspecting the rice harvest itself, since their livelihood depended entirely on this crop. In this sense, their labor can be viewed as a form of *corvée*.²¹²

Beyond the *çeltükçis*, one may compare other historical systems of forced labor, such as enslaved Africans on sugar plantations in the Americas or the people forcibly brought from various parts of Russia to work in the swamps during the construction of St. Petersburg, a city founded by Peter the Great on the Baltic coast. Even under harsh overseers, it was unrealistic to expect these groups to work without pause. On the contrary, their labor was inevitably interrupted by climatic cycles, extreme temperatures, storms, and heavy rainfall. The type of work these groups performed, as well as their locations, remained deeply influenced by environmental conditions.²¹³

Due to the arduous nature of rice cultivation, the *çeltükçis* were exempt from the *avârız* tax. Additionally, while other *reâyâ* paid the *çift resmi* at a rate of 22 akçe, the *çeltükçis* paid it at a reduced rate of 6 or 9 akçe. The time for collecting the *çeltük öşrü* was during the harvest season, when the rice had “reached maturity” (*kemâlin bulub*) and was ready to be reaped.²¹⁴

The state was well aware of the difficult working conditions of the *çeltükçis* and, as a result, either exempted them from certain taxes or collected them at a reduced rate. This policy stemmed from an understanding of the hardships they endured and a desire to stabilize their financial obligations to some extent.

There were three main reasons why people generally sought to avoid rice cultivation. First, cultivators were responsible for everything from sowing to post-harvest processes, which required constant labor in wetlands. Second, they suffered from diseases and health difficulties caused by these working conditions in such environment. Finally, the overseers and authorities often exploited their labor.²¹⁵

On *mirî arazi*, the seeds for rice cultivation were provided by the state. However, the state did not distribute these seeds free of charge. After recovering the cost of the seeds from the harvest, half of the remaining revenue went to the state. From the remaining share,

²¹² James Scott, *Against the Grain, A Deep History of the Earliest States*, Yale University Press, London 2018, p.21.

²¹³ Remziye Melike Çetin, “I. Petro’nun Şaheseri: Petersburg”, *AVRASYA Uluslararası Araştırmaları Dergisi*, C:3, S:6, 2015, p.31.

²¹⁴ Sadık Müfit Bilge, *Osmanlı Klasik Çağı’nda (1300-1600) Tarımın Vergilendirilmesi ve Vergileme İlkeleri Bakımından İncelenmesi*, İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi 2015, p.143.

²¹⁵ Seyhan, *Üretimden Tüketime Balkanlarda Çeltik (XV- XVII. Yüzyıllar)*, p.23.

the *sipahi* then collected his *öşür*. The *çeltükçis* faced a number of hardships, and over time, this led to their distinct status.²¹⁶

The Ottoman administration was involved in every stage of rice production. From the delivery of seeds and timely irrigation of the fields to the harvesting and storage of the rice, the state maintained a presence throughout the entire process. Few other products saw such a high degree of state involvement as rice.

The *çeltükçis* typically lived in villages near the fields they cultivated. Proximity to the farmland was essential for the smooth continuation of agricultural activities. When discussing the *çeltükçis*, it is also necessary to mention two related groups within this system: the *reis* (headman), *kürekçi* (oarsman/rower). At the head of the *çeltükçis* was a *re'is* (headman) who had to be thoroughly knowledgeable in the information of rice cultivation (*çeltük 'ilmi*). This individual was required to have a firm understanding of rice agriculture and had to work diligently to ensure uninterrupted production in his assigned region. Only someone with experience and expertise in rice cultivation could hold this position. In fact, in the early modern Ottoman era, both local expertise and the transmission of knowledge were highly important for agriculture. The primary responsibilities of the *re'is* included procuring seeds from the state, understanding the timing of sowing, knowing when to release water into the irrigation channels, managing the harvest, and coordinating all other details, including how much of the yield would be delivered to the state treasury.²¹⁷ A *çeltük re'isi* (rice cultivation headman) in Plovdiv was required to know precisely when to sow the seeds. Typically, rice cultivated in the Balkans was sown from late May or June, as temperatures began to rise.²¹⁸ Thus, the *çeltük re'isi* would begin preparations for the sowing process in May or June and proceed with the planting of the crop. He was expected to have secured the seeds well before these months. Additionally, one of the key responsibilities of the *reis* was to prevent the cultivation of any crop other than rice on the designated land.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Gül Akyılmaz, “Osmanlı Devleti’nde Yönetici Sınıf-Reaya Ayrımı”, *Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi*, C:8, S:2, 2004, p.8-9.

²¹⁷ Amedoski, “Introduction of Rice Culture in the Central Balkans (15th and 16th Centuries)”, p.240; İnalçık, *Rice Cultivation and the Çeltükçü-Reaya System in the Ottoman Empire*, p.107-108.

²¹⁸ Özlem Sert, “Environmental History of Rice Plantations in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire Between the 15th and 19th Centuries and Its Potential For Climate Research”, *Journal of Environmental Geography* 14 (1–2), 2021, p.1-5.

²¹⁹ Kenan Ziya Taş, “Osmanlı Çeltik Üretimsahası Olarak Konrapa ya da “Osmanlı Sarayının Nadidesi Konuralp Pirinci”, *Balıkesir Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, C:23 – S: 44,2020, p.1259.

Moreover, the *çeltük reîsi* was required to have thorough knowledge of the local geography and its surroundings. He was also responsible for determining which plots of land were suitable and productive for rice cultivation. In addition to these duties, he needed strong accounting skills, both at the initial stage of acquiring seeds and later, when calculating the state's share and other allocations after the harvest. The *reîs* thus had multiple overlapping responsibilities in this role.

The *kürekçis* (canal-diggers, levee builders, field hands), together with the *çeltükçis*, would select a plot of land large enough to draw water from the river and then begin preparing the field. The chosen land was typically located in areas with easy access to water, but rice was not cultivated solely around Plovdiv; nearby villagers also converted their fields into new rice production areas. A clear example is the village of Azizbeğlü. As recorded in the 1517 cadastral *tahrir*, 17 *çeltükçis* were registered in this village. Once the land was chosen, the fields were flooded with enough water for the rice to grow, the seeds were sown, and the period of monitoring the field began. Once the rice was fully matured, the harvest was again carried out by the *kürekçis*.²²⁰ To ensure the smooth continuation of rice cultivation, the irrigation channels required frequent maintenance. *Kürekçis* cleaned these channels. Much like the role of the *reîs*, the work of the *kürekçis* was a specialized field demanding expertise and relied on intensive labor.²²¹ Their main tasks included digging canals (*ark açmak*), constructing dikes (*bend yapmak*), managing the soil and mud left by floods, clearing channels blocked by tree branches and leaves, purifying water, and weeding the rice fields. To carry out these tasks effectively, they had to understand the river's cycles, that is, the local ecology. Without the work of the *kürekçis*, rice production would not have been possible. They were key actors whose work engaged both natural and human-shaped environments, even if rice cultivation mostly relied on modified landscapes.²²² In the early modern period, the primary tools used by the *kürekçis* were spades, and hoes. These tools were employed throughout the entire process, from preparing the rice fields to harvesting

²²⁰ Shopov, "Cities of Rice: Risculture And Environmental Change İn The Early Modern Ottoman Balkans", p.8-9.

²²¹ Kenan Ziya Taş, "Osmanlı Çeltik Üretimsahası Olarak Konrpa ya da "Osmanlı Sarayının Nadidesi Konuralp Pirinci", p.1259.

²²² James Scott, *Against the Grain, A Deep History of the Earliest States*, Yale University Press, London, 2018, p.47.

the crop. The spade and hoe, in particular, were used to remove unwanted weeds in the rice fields. Both the hoe and the spade were operated manually, relying on human labor.²²³

3.2.2.3. *Çeltükcis* in Plovdiv

As previously mentioned, the *çeltükcis* typically lived in close proximity to rice production centers, most likely because they needed to reside near the fields they cultivated. Additionally, a portion of those working in rice cultivation consisted of *Yörüks* (nomadic Turkomans), who traditionally moved between their summer and winter pastures.²²⁴ Indeed, the *Yörüks* were not unfamiliar with rice production. They would graze their herds along river valleys, the most suitable lands for rice cultivation, while following their traditional migratory routes.²²⁵

The first tahrir register in which the number of rice cultivators can be observed is the register numbered TT.d.26. In this tahrir, cultivators are documented in the neighborhoods such as Mahalle-i Hacı Mesud²²⁶, Mahalle-i Cüneyd²²⁷, and Mahalle-i Muhsin Hevace.²²⁸ This evidence shows that *çeltükcis* also lived within the center of Plovdiv, a fact that challenges the perception that rice cultivation was limited only to the outskirts of Plovdiv.

Beyond the city center, the presence of *çeltükcis* is also documented in Kadı köyü, known for its proximity to the Kırçime River. In Kadı köyü, 34 rice cultivators were recorded, while 25 were registered along the Kırçime River, and an additional 30 were identified as *çeltükçiyan-ı müselleman* (tax-exempt Muslim rice cultivators).²²⁹

We can again trace the rice cultivators in the cadastral register numbered TT.d.77. Compared to the initial survey, the number of rice cultivators in the neighborhoods of Plovdiv had increased. They appear in Cami²³⁰, Çalık Hacı²³¹, Muhsin hevace²³², Çukacı Sinan²³³,

²²³ Havva Merve Seyhan, *Üretimden Tüketime Balkanlarda Çeltik (XV- XVII. Yüzyıllar)*, p.230. Sadık Müfit Bilge, XV.-XVIII. Yüzyıllarda Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Çeltik Tarımı (Mülkiyet İlişkileri, Üretim, Teknikler, Çevresel Etkiler), p.182.

²²⁴ Sadık Müfit Bilge, "XV.-XVIII. Yüzyıllarda Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Çeltik Tarımı (Mülkiyet İlişkileri, Üretim, Teknikler, Çevresel Etkiler)", p.181.

²²⁵ İnalçık, p.104.

²²⁶ BOA.TT.d.26,p.69.

²²⁷ BOA.TT.d.26,p.70.

²²⁸ BOA.TT.d.26,p.65.

²²⁹ Seyhan, *Üretimden Tüketime Balkanlarda Çeltik (XV- XVII. Yüzyıllar)*, p.108. Not only in the village of Kadı but also Bekirlü, Manendlü, Kapucu, Drifil, Menteşeli, Vele-i Danişmend, Durud Bazdar Köyü, Hasan Başmakçı, Yuva Karaca villages also had çeltükçü.

²³⁰ TT.d.77, p.544

²³¹ TT.d.77,p.548

²³² TT.d.77,p.549

²³³ TT.d.77,p.550

Turbeyi Hevace²³⁴, Karaca Bey²³⁵, Hacı Sinan²³⁶, Bahşayış Ağa²³⁷, Tatarlar²³⁸, Keçeci Eyne-Beyi²³⁹ ve Veled-i Şakiran.²⁴⁰

According to the 1530 tahrir register, *çeltükcis* were documented in the mahalles of Yakub Fakı, Muhsin Hevace, and Çukacı Sinan.²⁴¹ The continuity of *çeltükcis* in the mahalles listed in the earlier two tahrir registers appears to have been maintained. Additionally, *çeltükcis* were identified in villages near the river, such as Kadı köyü, Aziz Beğlü, and Novasil.²⁴²

3.2.2.4. Rice within the Human-Environment and Nutrition Cycle

As detailed above, the *çeltükcis* and the Ottoman system of rice cultivation in Plovdiv played a crucial role not only in ecological transformation but also in shaping food culture. Rice was ecologically well suited to Plovdiv, but it also became a social and cultural commodity. The unmilled rice produced by the *çeltükcis* was transformed into milled rice (*pirinç*), which entered the imperial culinary system. The labor of the *çeltükcis* transformed both the environment of the Maritsa River and the dietary habits of the empire.

According to Arif Bilgin, the reason for rice's widespread popularity in Ottoman cuisine was its remarkably high satiety level. When consuming rice, a person's feeling of fullness reaches between 80-90%, whereas the satiety derived from wheat remains around 50-60%. This helps explain why rice was so widely preferred.²⁴³

During the early modern period, the focal era of this thesis, rice from Plovdiv supplied the imperial tables until the end of the 16th century. It was notably reddish in color compared to Egyptian rice.²⁴⁴ After the 16th century, rice supplied to the imperial kitchen began to be sourced predominantly from Egypt. The reasons behind the preference for rice from the Balkans, particularly Plovdiv and the Tatarpazarı regions, or Egypt, rather than Anatolia, are

²³⁴ TT.d.77,p.553

²³⁵ TT.d.77,p.553

²³⁶ TT.d.77,p.554

²³⁷ TT.d.77,p.554

²³⁸ TT.d.77,p.555

²³⁹ TT.d.77,p.557

²⁴⁰ TT.d.77,p.557

²⁴¹ TT.d. 370, pp.85-105.

²⁴² Havva Merve Seyhan, *Üretimden Tüketime Balkanlarda Çeltik (XV- XVII. Yüzyıllar)*,p. 115-116.

²⁴³ Arif Bilgin, *Osmanlı Sarayının İaşesi (1489-1650)*, p.223-224.

²⁴⁴ Polonyalı Simeon, *Polonyalı Simeon'un Seyahatnamesi 1608-1619*, trs. Hrand Andreasyan, Kitap Yayınevi, İstanbul p.223.

not entirely clear, despite the known production of rice in Anatolia. What is certain is that İstanbul's main rice supply came from the Balkans and Egypt, not Anatolia.²⁴⁵

Outside the palace, rice was consumed not only by the affluent segments of Ottoman society but also, though less frequently, by the poorer classes. Within the structure of Ottoman cuisine, rice was primarily used in main dishes such as pilav, in desserts, and as an ingredient in soups. Beyond the tables of the palace and ordinary people, rice was also utilized in Ottoman public soup kitchens (*imarets*), where pilav and rice soup were standard fare. On Fridays, during Ramadan, and on festive nights, rice pilav was invariably cooked and distributed.²⁴⁶

Rice, an agricultural product of Far Eastern origin, was utilized differently in Ottoman cuisine. While pilav in the Far East was typically prepared by boiling and draining, in Ottoman cuisine, it was simmered with fat (often butter). Usually served with various meats, pilav became a highly favored dish.

Taken together, the system of *çeltükci*s reveals how rice cultivation in Plovdiv was not simply an agricultural activity but a deeply institutionalized labor regime. Evolving out of the older *ortakçı kulluk* model, it created a class of cultivators whose status was hereditary, whose work was supervised by reis and supported by *kürekçi*s, and whose fiscal obligations reflected both their hardships and their strategic value. The tahrir registers show their spread across neighborhoods and villages, demonstrating how rice shaped settlement as much as economy. At the same time, their labor transformed wetlands into paddy fields and unmilled *çeltük* into *pirinç* that reached the palace, *imarets*, and urban households. In this way, the *çeltükci*s specialized intermediaries between the Maritsa River's ecology and the Ottoman state's dietary and fiscal systems, embodying the intersection of environment, society, and empire.

3.3. Environmental Administrators Who Works at Waqfs

The administrators, employees, supervisors (*nazır*), trustees (*kayyum*), and other officials of Plovdiv's waqfs can be viewed as environmental managers. Although their titles suggest primarily administrative or religious roles, in practice they were responsible for organizing how water, land, mills, baths, and forests were used on a daily basis. Acting with the sanction of the Ottoman state, they served as de facto state actors who translated the

²⁴⁵ Bilgin, *Osmanlı Sarayının İaşesi (1489-1650)*, p.224.

²⁴⁶ İbrahim Yılmaz, "Osmanlı Son Döneminde Üretim ve Toplum Sağlığı İkileminde Pirinç Ziraatı", *Pamukkale Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, S. 63, 2024, p.142.

abstract rules stipulated in foundation deeds into concrete actions: when to clean an irrigation channel, how to operate a mill, or how to allocate fuel. To succeed in their roles, these officials had to read and respond to the cycles of the Maritsa river and its tributaries, making them key intermediaries between institutional framework and local environments.

Although the waqf deed (*vakfiye*) itself has not survived to the present day, the waqf of Şehabeddin Paşa and its revenues brought certain professional groups in Plovdiv into prominence. For example, those working in the Tahtakale Bathhouse or the Hünkâr Bathhouse needed to be knowledgeable about water, its management, and its usage. Tasks such as channeling water to the bathhouse and heating it were distinct and challenging responsibilities that required specialized knowledge from the bathhouse staff.

To give an example, according to the earliest surviving tahrir on Plovdiv, there were four bath attendants (*dellak*), one bath manager (*hamamcı*), and one bath worker (*hamamî*).²⁴⁷ According to the 1570 tahrir, there were 7 bath attendants (*dellak*) and 3 bath workers (*hamamî*).²⁴⁸ To maintain their status as important centers of hygiene, the bathhouses required direct intervention in water management, with water supplied through specially constructed waterways. This necessitated direct human intervention in both the environment and water resources.

Fuel was provided by firewood sourced from the forests around Plovdiv, which had its own environmental impact. The bathhouse staff thus acted as water and energy managers, coordinating with the natural systems of Plovdiv and the Maritsa River to ensure a smooth supply of both water and fuel. Their daily activities were closely tied to environmental conditions: the quantity and temperature of the water, as well as fluctuations in the flow of the Maritsa River, could either facilitate or complicate their tasks. This highlights a relationship of mutual dependence between humans and key environmental elements.

One of the key figures for Plovdiv and its surroundings was İsfendiyarbeyzade İsmail Bey, along with the administrators of the waqfs he established in Markova and Plovdiv. They played significant roles as environmental managers, utilizing and transforming the environment to their benefit.

²⁴⁷ TT.d. 26, pp.34-37. Boykov, Kiproskova, “The Ottoman Philippopolis (Filibe) during the Second Half of the 15th c.”, p. 127.

²⁴⁸ Nurullah Karta, “XV. ve XVI. Yüzyıllarda Filibe Şehrinde İktisadi Hayat ve Meslek Grupları”, p.159.

Table 3.1. *The officials of İsmail Bey’s waqf in Plovdiv and their salaries are listed below.*²⁴⁹

Official	Wage
Mütevelli	10 dirhems daily
Nâzır	One-third of the revenue from all mills and <i>ding</i>
İmam	Five dirhems daily, and annually, one <i>müdd</i> of rice from the waqf’s <i>ding</i> production, along with three <i>müdd</i> of wheat measured by the Plovdiv <i>müdd</i> standard from the revenue
Müezzin ve Kayyım	Three dirhems daily, and annually, two <i>müdd</i> of wheat and half a <i>müdd</i> of rice

The *mütevelli* of İsmail Bey’s waqf in Plovdiv received a daily wage of 10 dirhems. The *mütevelli* was the person responsible for managing the affairs of the waqf in accordance with the conditions of the waqf deed, sharia rulings, and prevailing law. The appointment of the *mütevelli* was based on the will of the waqf’s founder.²⁵⁰ The *mütevelli*, who was responsible for the functioning of the waqf, was also in charge of repairs, renovations, and similar tasks, in addition to general management.

The *nâzır* was the person who audited the waqf’s finances, supervising the *mütevelli*’s decisions and actions.²⁵¹ From the Plovdiv waqf, he received one-third of the revenue generated from all mills and *dings* (production units). As detailed in the second section, he received one-third of the total income from three mills and two *dings* in Kadı village (located near the Kırçime River), and from two mills and one *ding* in Hacı Halil village (situated on the Göpsu stream).

The waqf’s *imam* received a daily wage of five dirhems, plus an annual payment of one *müdd* of rice from the waqf’s *ding* production and three *müdd* of wheat measured by the Plovdiv *müdd* standard. The imam’s compensation was directly linked to agricultural products cultivated in Plovdiv, highlighting two key crops: rice, the region’s most important agricultural product, and wheat, which was also significantly grown. While rice cultivation was closely tied to the Maritsa River and its ecosystem, wheat required less water. The

²⁴⁹ Katırcı, *Ibid*, p.118.

²⁵⁰ Nazif Öztürk, “Mütevelli”, TDV Yayınları, C. XXXII, İstanbul, 2006, p.217-218.

²⁵¹ Mehmet Genç, “Nâzır”, TDV Yayınları, C: XXXII, İstanbul, 2006, p.449-450.

imam's remuneration thus reflected both wetland (rice) and dryland (wheat) farming, illustrating how environmental diversity in Plovdiv influenced local economic structures.

The phrase "*ding* production" suggests that mills and *dings* operating along the river not only processed rice and wheat but also served as economic resources supporting the livelihood of the imam, who was simultaneously a religious functionary and a beneficiary of the waqf. This demonstrates how environmental elements, such as the Maritsa River and its tributaries, mills, rice fields, and wheat fields, played an active role in sustaining social order.

Furthermore, the salary of a religious official like the imam underscores how ecological resources in Plovdiv and the Maritsa River were utilized within the socioeconomic system. Annual fluctuations in rice and wheat yields, whether abundance or scarcity, directly affected the imam's income, reinforcing the interdependence between environmental conditions and human economic structures.

The *müezzın* and *kayyım*²⁵² received lower wages compared to the imam. They were paid three dirhems daily, along with an annual allocation of two *müdd* of wheat and half a *müdd* of rice. Their compensation, like that of the imam, was tied to agricultural resources from the local environment.

The significant revenue sources of Yahya Paşa's waqf, established in Üsküp, were located in Plovdiv. The *mütevelli* of Yahya Paşa's waqf received a daily wage of 20 dirhems from the waqf. In addition to this amount, he also received the entire revenue from the waqf's villages in Üsküp and Plovdiv.

The waqf also employed five *câbi*, who operated in İzmit, Sofia, İstanbul, Üsküp, and Plovdiv. The *câbis* were responsible for collecting the waqf's revenues in full and delivering them to the trustee.²⁵³

²⁵² Kayyım means the trustee of the waqf and also the cleaner of the mosque. İsmail Özmel, "Kayyım", TDV Yayınları, C: XXV, Ankara, 2002, p.107.

²⁵³ Mehmet İnbaşı, Yahya Paşa'nın Üsküp'teki Vakıfları, p.22-23.

Table 3.2. The officials and their wages working in the Plovdiv section of Semiz Ali Paşa's waqf are as follows.²⁵⁴

Waqf	Particular	Official	Wage/Dirhem
Menzil, değirmen, çiftlik, fırın, ambar,	Plovdiv	Câbi	5
		Kâtip	2
Yaylak-otlak	Plovdiv	Câbi	2
		Kâtip	2

The duty of câbi was to collect the rents and revenues belonging to the waqf. Depending on the size, workload, and income level of the waqf in which they served, the câbis received daily wages ranging from 1 to 10 akçe.²⁵⁵

The câbi responsible for the *menzil*, mills, farms, bakeries, and storerooms received a daily wage of 5 dirhems. The câbi overseeing summer pastures and grazing lands was assigned a daily wage of 2 dirhems. The wages of the *kâtib* were also set at 2 dirhems per day.

Officials such as the *mütevelli*, *nâzır*, *câbi*, and *kâtib* should therefore be seen not only as administrators or religious figures but also as environmental managers. Their daily responsibilities, overseeing irrigation, maintaining mills, distributing water, or collecting revenues tied to agricultural production, placed them at the center of Plovdiv's ecological system. The fact that their salaries were often paid in rice, wheat, or revenues from mills and dings underscores how closely their livelihoods were bound to the rhythms of the Maritsa River and its surrounding landscape. In this way, the waqf system sustained social and religious order and embedded human labor, institutional authority, and environmental resources into a single, interdependent framework.

3.4. Conclusion

Taken together, the evidence from the askeri elite, the *çeltükçis*, and the officials of Plovdiv's waqfs shows that human actors were inseparable from the city's environmental history. Through conquest, investment, cultivation, and administration, they reshaped the Maritsa River and its surroundings, while at the same time adapting their practices to its

²⁵⁴ Reyhan Şâhin Allahverdi, *Semiz Ali Paşa'ya Ait Bir Vakfiye ve Sınırname*, p.573.

²⁵⁵ Mehmet İpşirli, "Cabi", TDV Yayınları, C:6, İstanbul, 1992, p.529.

ecological limits. The transformation of Plovdiv was therefore the product of a constant negotiation between natural conditions and human agency, where power, labor, and knowledge converged to build an enduring socio-ecological order.



CONCLUSION

In the early modern Ottoman Empire, natural elements held significant importance. These natural features, spread across various regions of the empire, were utilized and modified by humans according to the needs of the period. Because environmental components were essential for human life, states frequently incorporated them into humanmade infrastructures and undertook regulations in this direction.

When natural environmental elements are mentioned, rivers are among the first features that come to mind. Likewise, when early modern Ottoman Balkans are considered, the idea of a river immediately emerges. One of these rivers was the Tuna, where two Ottoman fleets were stationed, and the other was the Maritsa River along the Via Militaris route. The central focus of this thesis is how Maritsa River, as a natural watershed, was gradually integrated into the Ottoman imperial order and how the city of Plovdiv acquired its distinctive appearance through its relationship with the river.

The inclusion of Edirne and later Plovdiv into the imperial administrative system led to the incorporation of the Maritsa River into Ottoman governance. To benefit from the river, the Ottomans first constructed bridges across it, thereby beginning to shape Plovdiv within a framework.

Within the ecosystem of the Maritsa River, environmental elements hold particular significance in the case of Plovdiv. Rice cultivation, introduced to the region by the Ottomans, was one of the most important agricultural activities and transformed the river from a mere natural water source into an economic gateway. Thanks to rice cultivation, Plovdiv became one of the principal suppliers. The successful development of rice agriculture was directly linked to the climatic characteristics of Plovdiv, which allowed for stable yields, turning the region into one of the main agricultural centers of the empire.

When discussing agriculture, it must be emphasized that production depended not only on soil but also on the availability of water and labor. The reaya working in rice fields often suffered from diseases related to long-term exposure to marshy environments, although not all illnesses stemmed solely from rice cultivation. The timing of rice cultivation, the preparation of fields, the cleaning of irrigation channels and the maintenance of channel each required labor intensive processes. Without the constant flow of the Maritsa River and the expertise of the *çeltükçis*, the primary product of Plovdiv rice, could not have been produced.

The rice cultivated in Plovdiv nourished not only the city itself but also the imperial capital throughout the early modern period. For this reason, water, rice, and disease constitute a triad that must be considered together when examining the *çeltükcis*. While benefiting from the river, these cultivators were simultaneously exposed to illnesses caused by the same water. Although archival sources occasionally mention measures aimed at preventing disease, the majority of information relates to production rather than health precautions.

The triad of water, animals, and humans also played an essential role. Animals were integral components of the environmental system and were indispensable for agricultural and transportation processes. In early modern Plovdiv, oxen and buffalo grazed in marshy meadows, sheep and goats fed on uplands, and camels transported rice to markets. The region was also one of the prominent locations for large scale animal husbandry because Plovdiv's climate and geography were highly suitable for it. Animals could not survive arbitrarily; the sites where they lived, grazed, and were fed had to match their physiologies. Animals such as oxen, sheep, goats, and camels, suited to wet or semi-wet environments, found the vicinity of the Maritsa River ideal. The presence of human-operated mechanisms supporting these processes is likewise notable.

Neither the management of animals nor the management of water was handled solely by the state. On the contrary, one of the most significant institutions of the early modern Ottoman system, "waqfs" played a central role in organizing water, rice production, and environmental resources. Although waqfs are often associated almost exclusively with religious or social services, they also provided vital information for urban environmental studies. Waqfs managed the natural resources of a region, supporting both the economic and ecological life of the area. In Plovdiv, they were responsible not only for establishing mills along the river but also for regulating and for operating them in accordance with seasonal changes. Waqfs adapted to the environmental characteristics of the geographies in which they were founded, understood the essential natural elements, and used them efficiently.

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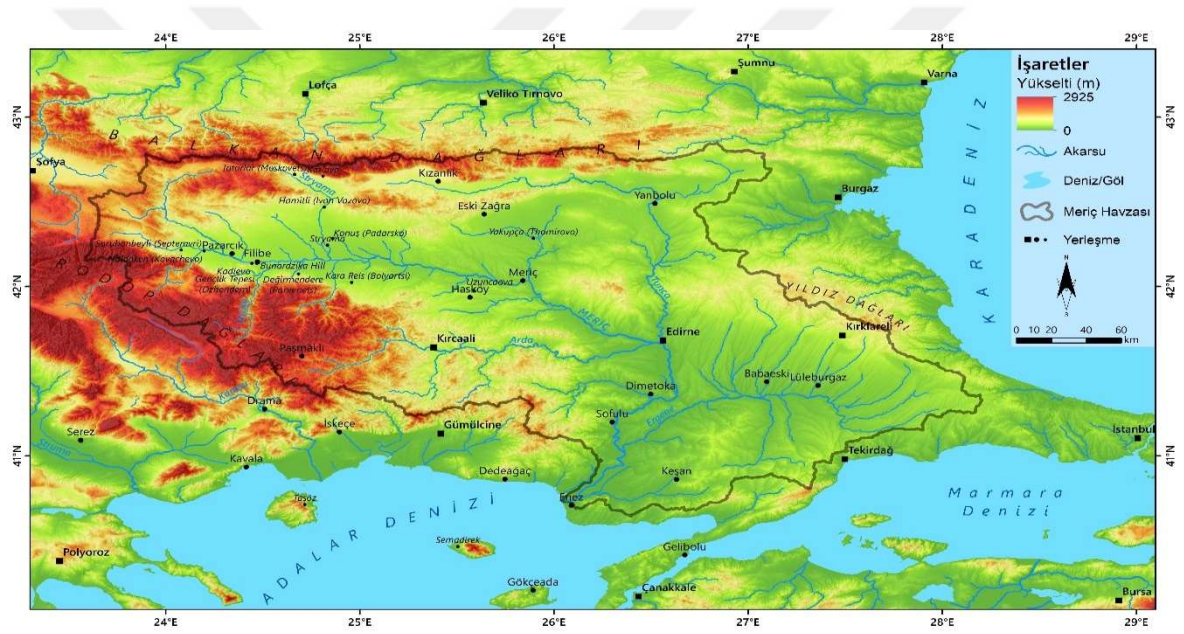
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APPENDICES



1. Basin of Maritsa

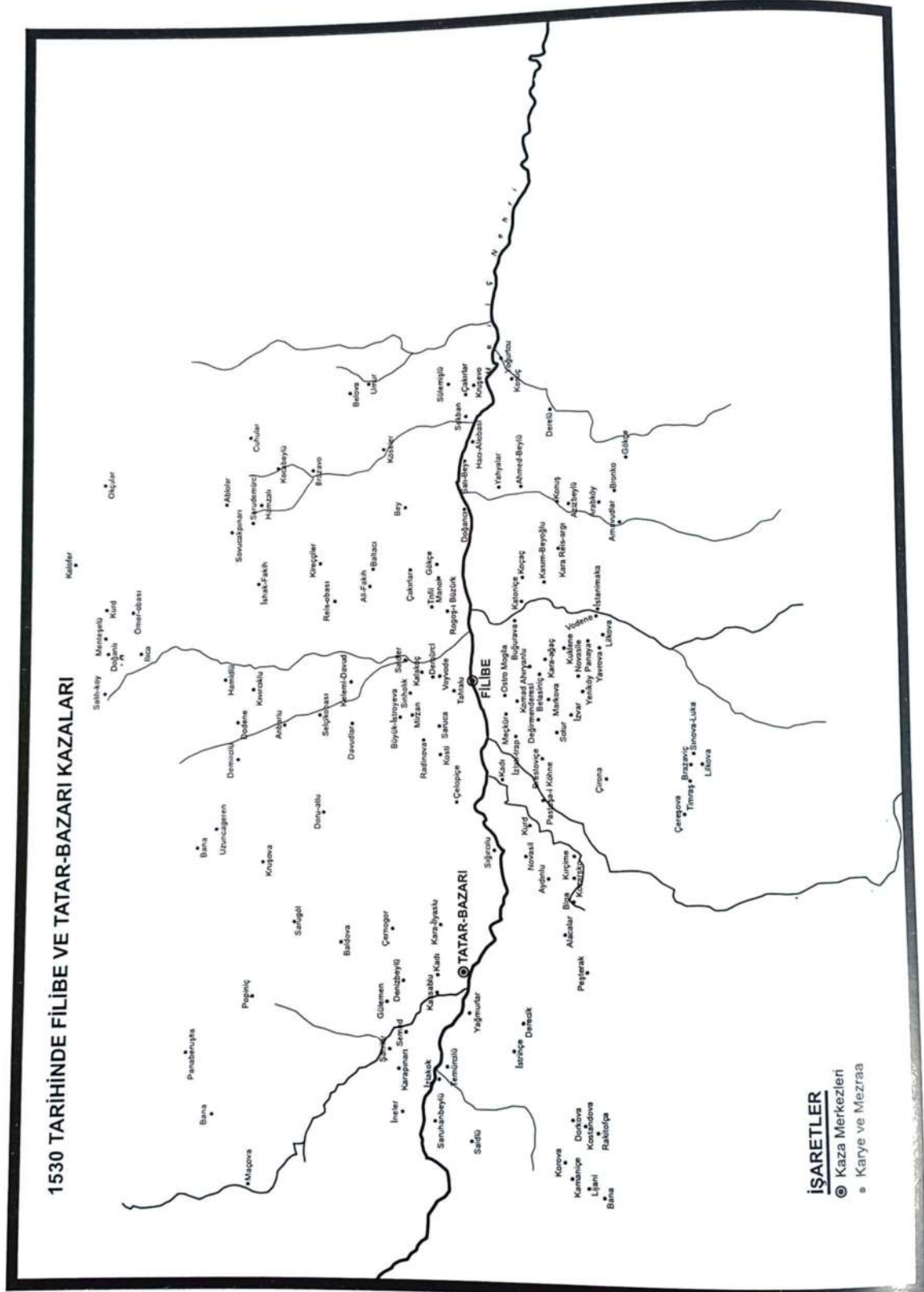
(Okan Yeşilot, Türk Tarihinde Dağlar, Göller Nehirler, by Atilla Karataş, p.548)



2. Basin of Maritsa

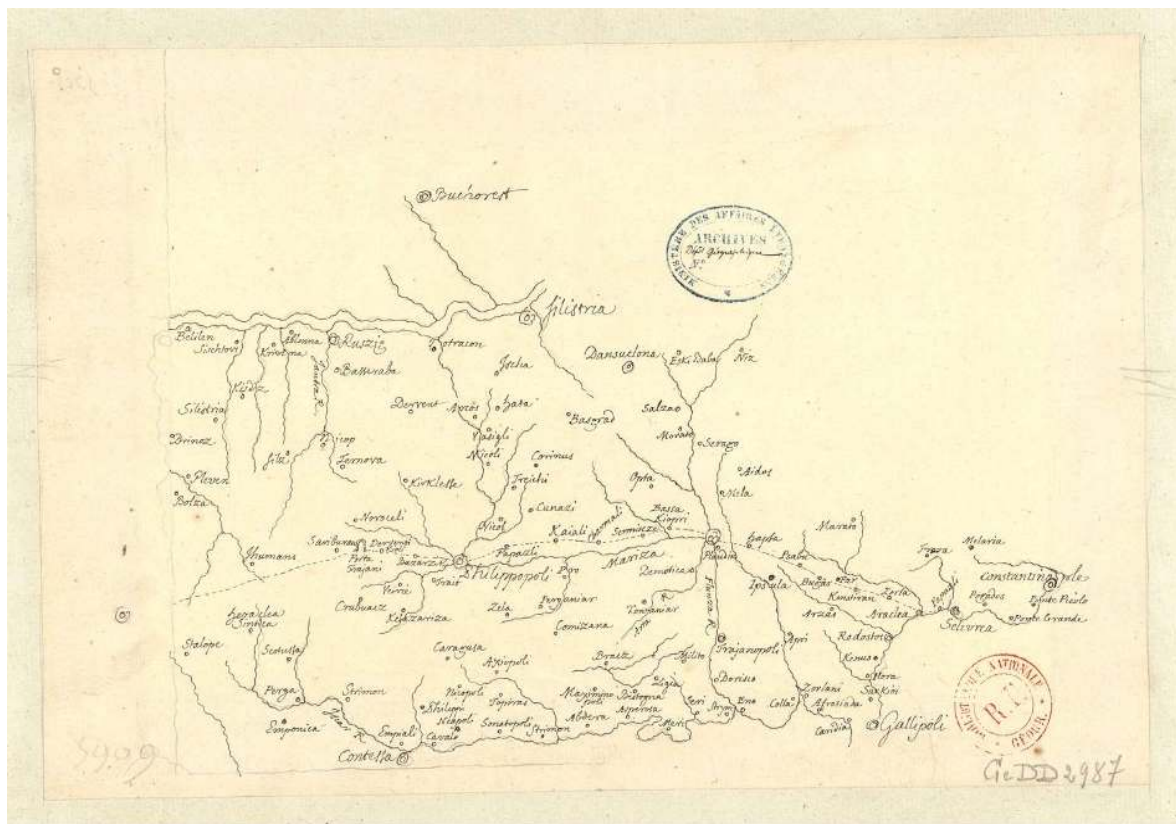
By Atilla Karataş for this thesis

FİLİBE VE TATAR-BAZARI KAZALARI



4. TT. 370

Devlet Arşivleri Yay. , p.164.

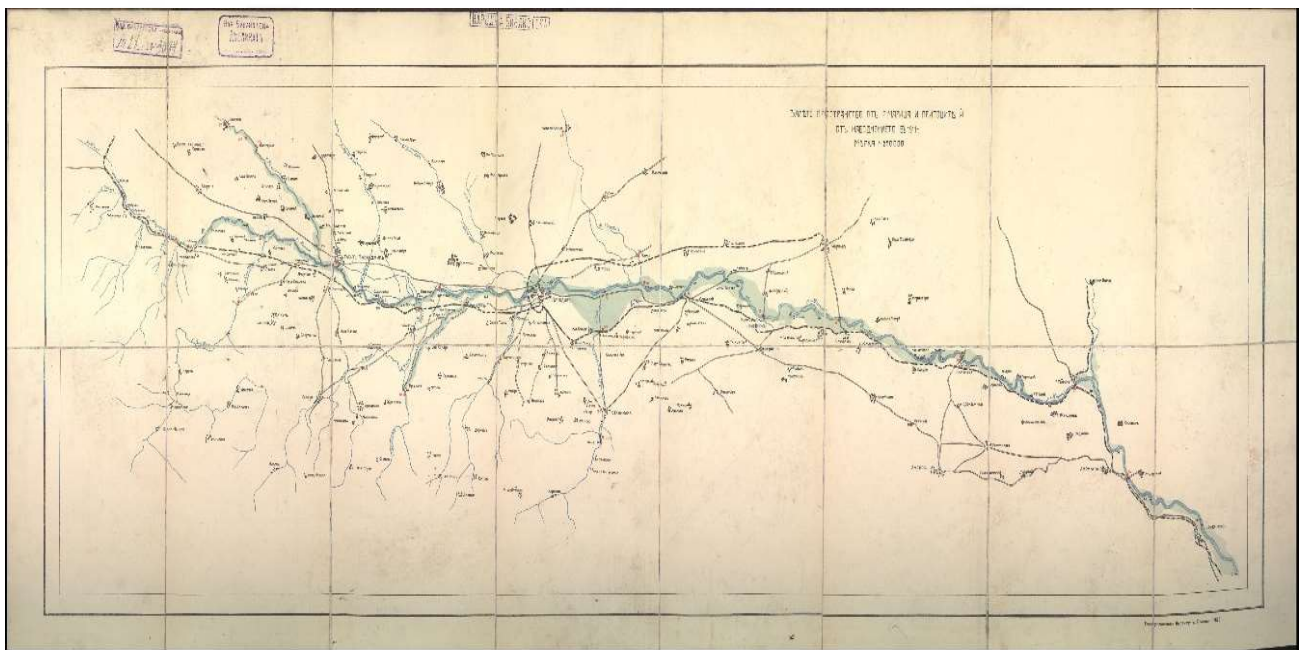


Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

5. River of Maritsa

[Carte manuscrite du cours de la Maritza] [de la main de Mr. d'Anville] Author Anville, Jean-Baptiste d' (1697-1782).

[https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b5964171z.r=maritsa?rk=42918;4,](https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b5964171z.r=maritsa?rk=42918;4)



6. Flood of Maritsa River

СВ. СВ. КИРИЛ И МЕТОДИЙ- “Кр I 11” 1911, (Sts. Cyril and Methodius)



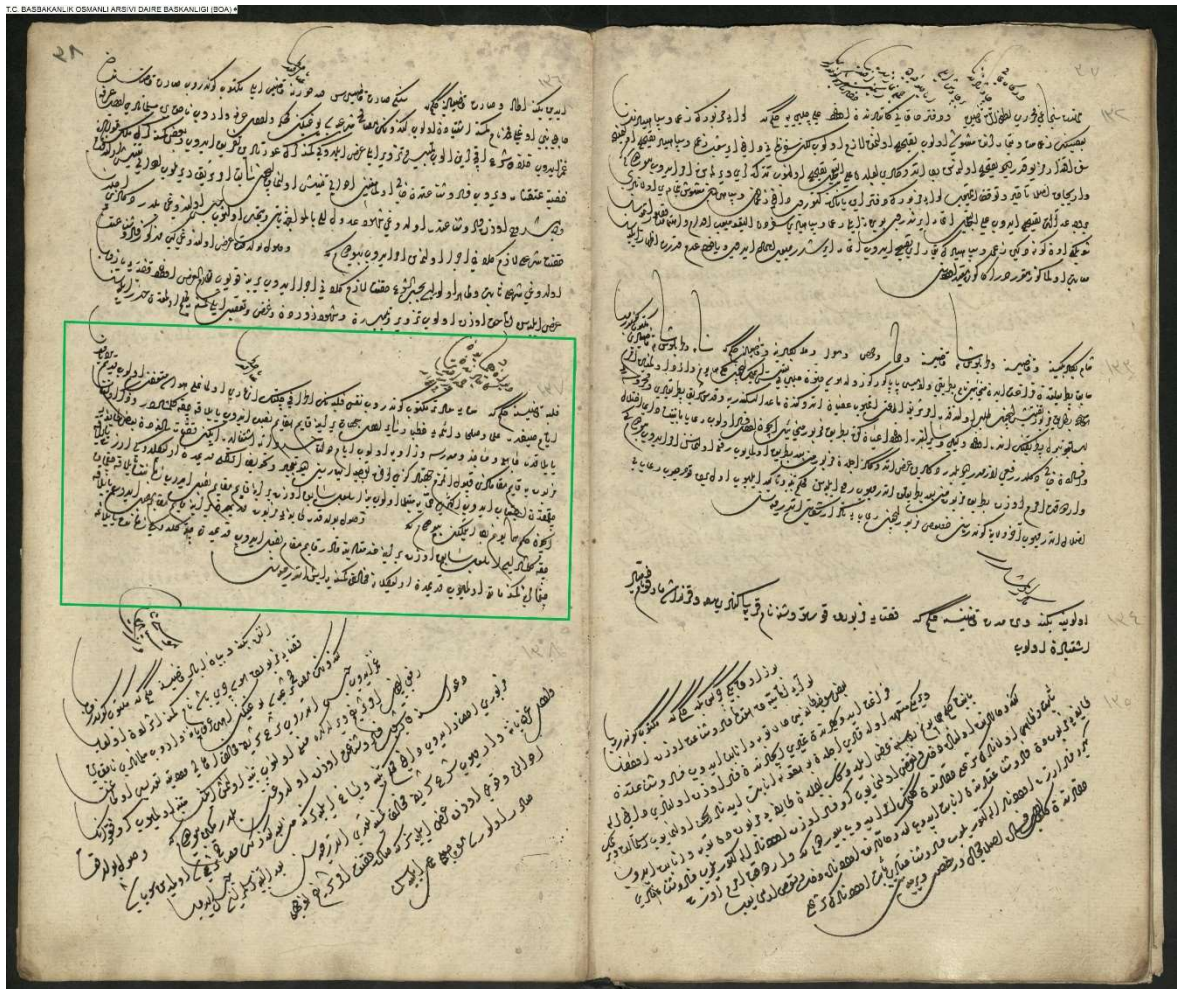
7. Maritsa River

BOA. HRT.h.2207- (H.9 -03-1329)



8. Topographic Map of Plovdiv

СВ. СВ. КИРИЛ И МЕТОДИЙ-Кр IV 2127, (Sts. Cyril and Methodius)



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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

XVI. yüzyılın sonlarına doğru Meriç Nehri'nden beslenen Filibe'de yazlar o kadar sıcak ve nemli geçiyordu ki, yönetim güçleri tartışılmaz olan devrin önde gelen idarecileri, şehrin sıcaklığından kaçabilmek için Filibe'nin yüksek kesimlerine yani yaylalara çıkmak zorunda kalıyordu. Yaylalarda hava sıcaklığı o vadakine göre daha düşüktü. Bu yüzden yalnızca serinlemek amacıyla yaylalara gitmiyor, aynı zamanda merkezdeki işlerinin de devam edebilmesi için bazı yöneticileri şehir merkezinde bırakıyorlardı.

Osmanlı yönetimi için aslında alışıldık olan bu durum Filibe'deki reâyâyı rahatsız etmiş olmalı ki merkeze şikâyetlerini iletiler.²⁵⁶ Rahatsızlığın asıl sebebi belki de şehrin yöneticilerinin görev yerlerine vekil bırakmaları değil, reâyânın Filibe'nin cehennem sıcaklığından kaçacak imkânlarının olmamasından kaynaklanıyordu. Nitekim Filibe'nin havası hükümde belirtildiği gibi *havası mute'affin olub, (kokmaya müsait olan, kokan)* idi bu nedenle halk hummaya yakalanma tehlikesiyle karşı karşıya kalmaktaydı. Filibe, etrafını saran çeltik tarlaları ve sulama kanallarıyla *sıtma* taşıyan sivrisinekler için uygun bir ortamın oluşmasını sağlamakta ve bölgedeki bataklıkların da bu süreci kolaylaştırmasıyla beraber hastalıkların yayılması kolaylaşmaktaydı.

Tam da bu noktada tarihsel bağlamı yalnızca bir şehir problemi olarak değil, çevre tarihçilerinin odaklandığı daha geniş bir mesele olarak görmek gerekmektedir. Hughes'un da ifade ettiği gibi, çevre tarihçileri ele aldıkları konuya zemin teşkil eden coğrafyayı çok iyi bilmek ve tanımak zorundadırlar. Ancak, yalnızca coğrafi koşulları tanımlamak yeterli değildir; coğrafyanın hem yöneticiler hem de yerel halk üzerindeki etkilerini bilmek ve bu etkileri iyi analiz etmek gerekmektedir.²⁵⁷ Bu yaklaşım, Meriç Nehri ve Filibe şehrini incelemek için sağlam bir analitik çerçeve çizilmesine olanak sağlamaktadır.

Dolayısıyla bu analitik çerçeve, bizi şu temel soruya yönlendirmektedir: “Erken modern dönemde Meriç Nehri'nin yönetimi, Osmanlıların Filibe'nin çevresini ve toplumsal yapısını nasıl dönüştürdü?” Osmanlılar Meriç Nehri'ni sadece bir sınır çizgisi ya da doğal manzara olarak değil, yönetilen bir altyapı bütünü olarak kurguladılar. Nehir koridorunu ve

²⁵⁶ BOA, A.DVNSMHHM.d no. 49.

²⁵⁷ J. Donald Hughes, *Çevresel Tarih Nedir?*, çev. M. Fatih Çalışır, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, İstanbul, 2019, p.181. Amerikalı coğrafyacı Ellen Churchill Semple (yaklaşık 1900'lerde yaşamış) şöyle diyor: “Man can no more be scientifically studied apart from the ground which he tills, or the lands over which he travels, or the seas over which he trades, than polar bear or desert cactus can be understood apart from its habitat.” Yani nasıl ki bir biyolog kutup ayılarını yaşadıkları ortamı bilmeden inceleyemezse, tarihçiler de insanların çevrelerini bilmeden onları anlayamaz.

Enez üzerinden taşımayı teşvik ederek bölgesel lojistiği yeniden ölçeklediler, vakıf temelli hidrolik yatırımlarla (suyolları, kemerler, değirmenler, dingler ve hamamlarla) şehri ve kırsalı birbirine eklemlendiler, pirinç yani “ıslak” tarımı sıkı kanunnamelerle düzenleyip çeltükü reâyâyı mahalle ve köy dokusuna yerleştirerek emek, vergi ve gıda rejimini dönüştürdüler. Sonuçta Filibe, Meriç Nehri’nin mevsimselliğine rağmen hem taşımaya dayalı hem de vakıf gelirleriyle kendini besleyen, pirinç ekolojileri etrafında örgütlenen bir hidro-sosyal sisteme dönüştü. Yukarıda bahsedilen bu dönüşümler, yalnızca yerel bir sorun olarak değil, aksine çevre tarihi disiplininin sorduğu temel sorularla da yakından ilişkilidir.

Çevre tarihi diğer tarih alt disiplinleri kadar köklü bir geçmişe sahip olmamasına rağmen belgelere yöneltilecek olan soruların çeşitliliğini etkilemez. Çevre sorunlarının artmasıyla paralellik gösteren çevre tarihi çalışmaları ve çalışmaların öncelikli olarak Amerika’da başlamasına rağmen sadece Amerika’da kalmayıp dünya çapında yayılması ise tesadüfi olarak nitelendirilemez. Günümüzde sıklıkla duyduğumuz iklim krizi, buzulların erimesi, suların azalması, su seviyelerinin oldukça sorunlu bir noktaya gelmesi, bazı hayvan türlerinin kaybolmaya başlaması gibi birbirinden önemli sorunlar tarihçileri şu soruya sevk etmiş olabilirdi. Peki ya öncesinde, peki ya geçmişte nasıldı? Hep iklim krizi var mıydı? Canlı türleri her zaman yok olmaya mahkûm muydu? Mevsimler ve hava sıcaklıkları ne derece artıp azalıyordu?²⁵⁸ Bu merak çevre tarihi çalışmalarının daha çok artmasına ve bu merakın erken modern Osmanlı’ya da kaymasına sebep olmuştur.

Radkau’nun görüşü, çevre tarihine farklı bir bakış açısı kazandırarak tartışmayı farklı boyutlara taşımaktadır. Radkau’ya göre daldan dala bir bakış açısı gerektiren çevre tarihi aslında erken modern dönem Osmanlı Filibesi ve Meriç Nehri’ndeki doğal aktörlere farklı sorular sorarak farklı cevaplar alabileceğimiz bir alan çıkacaktır. Çevre tarihi yazmaya çalışan bir tarihçi insan dışındaki canlı ve tarihin akışını ve kendisini değiştirebileceğine duyduğu güveni de bu noktada ortaya koyabiliyor aslında.²⁵⁹

Radkau’nun tartıştığı farklı doğa aktörleri bakış açısı, Osmanlı dünyasında da özellikle tarımsal üretim biçimlerini anlamak için oldukça önemlidir. Osmanlı’nın ana merkezinde polikültür dominanttı ve monokültür çok azdı. Bu tezde önemli noktalardan

²⁵⁸ J. R. McNeill, The State of the Field of Environmental History, *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 35, no.1, 2010, s. 349.

²⁵⁹ Joachim Radkau, *Doğa ve İktidar, Global Bir Çevre Tarihi*, çev. Nafiz Güder, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul, 2020, p.IX. Chris Gratien, *Dağlar Bizimdir, Osmanlı’dan Cumhuriyet’e Çukurova’nın Çevre Tarihi*, çev. Dâra Elhüseyni, Ayrıntı Basım, Ankara, 2025, s.32-33.

birisi olan pirinç tarımının durumu tipik Asya tarzının devamı olarak görülmesine rağmen aslında Anadolu ve Balkanlarda görülen pirinç tarımı Akdeniz karakterini devam ettirmekteydi. Polikültür aslında bir çevre dengesi içermekteydi.²⁶⁰ Tarımı yapılan ürünleri coğrafi koşullardan ayrı düşünmek bu noktada çok mantıklı değildir. Polikültür Osmanlılar için sadece ekonomik bir tercih değil aynı zamanda önemli bir çevresel denge unsuruydu.

Çevre tarihinin tarımsal boyutları, aslında alandaki teorik çerçevelerle birlikte ele alındığında daha anlamlı bir hâle gelmektedir. Alanın önde gelen çevre tarihçilerinden olan John McNeill'in çevre tarihini sınıflandırma biçimi önem kazanmaktadır. McNeill, çevre tarihini doğa ve doğaya bağlı toplumların ilişkisinin tarihi olarak ele almaktadır ve bunu üçe ayırmaktadır. İlk olarak, bio-jeo-kimyasal çevre tarihi. Bu kategoriye ormanların tarihi ya da suların kirliliğinin tarihini örnek verir. İkinci olarak, insan topluluklarının çevreyi tanzim etmeye çalışmalarının tarihi. Bu noktada devletlerin ya da siyasi mekanizmaların çevre üzerindeki politik ya da hukuki eylemlerinin tarihine odaklanmaktadır. Son olarak, insanların, doğa ve toplum ilişkisine dair düşündükleri ve yazdıklarının tarihini kapsar. Tabii bu son kategori olarak değerlendirilen kısım sadece çevre tarihinin değil aynı zamanda kültürel ve entelektüel tarihin de bir kısmıdır. Bu tez konusu ise McNeill'in anlattığı ikinci kategoriye denk gelmektedir.

McNeill'e göre, Annales okulunun temsilcileri, Braudel de dâhil olmak üzere, çevrenin değişebileceğini ve çevrenin insan eylemleri ile ve sonrasında değişebileceği hakkındaki durumunu göz ardı etmişlerdir.²⁶¹ Çevre tarihçileri insan ve çevre ilişkilerini karşılıklı iletişimde görüp değerlendirme eğilimindedirler. Çevre tarihçiliğinin bu genel perspektifi, Osmanlı örneğinde de gözlemlenebilir. Meriç Nehri'nin suyundan faydalanan ve önemli bir sulu tarım ürünü çeltüğün yetişmesinde kurallar koyan Osmanlı yönetimi ve çeltük tarımını icra eden çeltükçü reâyâ Meriç Nehri ve Filibe'nin çevresini değiştirmişlerdir.²⁶² Bu çerçevede yapılacak bir incelemenin hangi dönemleri kapsayacağı da önem arz etmektedir.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, s.XXV.

²⁶¹ Husain, *Türkiye'de Çevre Tarihi Yazımının Serüveni*, s. 115. Bu tarihçiler çoğunlukla insanların çevreye ne yaptığını odaklandılar (mesela nasıl tarım yaptıkları, barajlar kurdukları ya da hayvan yetiştirdikleri gibi) ama çevrenin hem kendi dinamikleriyle hem de insan etkisiyle nasıl değiştiğini pek tartışmadılar. Husain, *Türkiye'de Çevre Tarihi Yazımının Serüveni* adlı makalesinde, Halil İnalcık, Mustafa Akdağ ve Nejat Göyünç üzerine benzer bir gözlemlerde bulunmuştur. Onlar da Osmanlı ve Türk toplumunun çevreye ne yaptığını yoğunlaşmışlardı ama çevrenin kendisinin nasıl değiştiği konusunda çok az şey söylemişlerdi.

²⁶² Önder Eren Akgül, John R. McNeill ile Çevre Tarihi Üzerine Mülakat, *Toplumsal Tarih*, Sayı:312, 2019, s.26-29.

Çalışmanın zaman aralığı Filibe'nin fethi ile beraber 16. yüzyılın sonuna kadar olan süreyi kapsamaktadır. Bu zaman aralığının seçilmiş olunmasının birkaç sebebi bulunmaktadır. İlk olarak, Osmanlıların Balkan fetihlerinin başlamasına paralel olarak, doğal bir fetih koridoru hâline gelen Meriç Nehri ve Filibe'nin Osmanlı erken modern dönem olarak adlandırılan dönemdeki durumlarını ortaya koymaktır. İkinci sebebi ise, erken modern dönemde Filibe ve etrafının Osmanlılar tarafından tanıtılan zirai bir ürün olan çeltik tarımının ve bölgenin ihya olma sürecini ortaya koymaktır. Üçüncü sebep olarak, erken modern dönem Osmanlı çevre tarihinin önemli bir parçası olan Balkan coğrafyasının önemli nehirlerinden birisi olan Meriç Nehri ve bu nehrin beslediği önemli bir konum olan Filibe'nin çevre tarihini yazmaya çalışmaktır. Yukarıda bahsedilen zaman aralığında Meriç Nehri ve Filibe'nin çevre tarihi bağlamında geçirdiği dönüşümü ortaya koyabilmek maksadıyla tez üç ana bölümde ele alınmıştır.

Çalışmanın birinci bölümünde, Meriç Nehri ve Filibe'nin coğrafi koşulları betimlenerek anlatılmaya başlanmış ve daha sonrasında, Osmanlılar öncesindeki ve Osmanlı fethiyle beraber bölgenin coğrafi koşulları üzerinde durulmuştur. Balkanların belki de Tuna Nehri sonrasında en önemli nehri olan Meriç, bölge açısından oldukça büyük öneme sahipti. Çevre tarihinin önemli unsurlarının yönetimi insanın bilgisi ve dâhili olmadan çok da mümkün değildi. Her ne kadar çevre tarihi çalışmaları insan dışı diğer canlı türlerine daha fazla odaklansa da Osmanlı'nın Meriç Nehri ve Filibe'deki çevresel unsurlar insanın dâhiliyle daha farklı bir konum kazanmıştır. Özellikle, Lala Şâhin Paşa'nın Filibe'yi fethetmesiyle beraber oluşan süreç Filibe'yi sadece bir Osmanlı şehrine dönüştürmekle kalmamış aynı zamanda bölgenin güçlü canlı unsurlarının, coğrafi yapısının, iklim koşullarının, toprak yapısının kullanılarak yeni bir tarım ürününün tanıtımı ve bölgede yaşayanların bu tarım üretimi için nasıl kullanılmaya başladıklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bölüm aynı zamanda Meriç Nehri'nin ulaşım açısından nasıl kullanıldığına dair bilgiler içermektedir. Tuna Nehri kadar olmasa da Meriç Nehri uygun koşullar sağlandığı zaman ulaşımına uygun hâle gelmektedir ve bu durum önemli beyler ve paşalar tarafından da bilinip kullanılmıştır. Osmanlı yönetimi öncesinde Umur Bey ve nehri kullanması ardından Lala Şâhin Paşa'nın bölgeye giriş yapmasıyla beraber paşa tarafından nehrin şehir özelinde kullanılması için yaptırdığı önemli köprüler ve bu köprülerin erken modern dönem Osmanlı çevre tarihi özelinde nasıl bir pozisyon belirttiği üzerinde durulmuştur. Daha sonrasında, bölgedeki çeltik tarımının başlama süreci ve Osmanlı'nın önde gelen isimlerinin ve bölgedeki yerelin bu noktada nasıl beraber çalıştıklarına odaklanılmıştır. Ayrıca bölgedeki tarım potansiyeline

ek olarak, bölgedeki orman, koru, mera, yaylak-kışlak ve bataklıklardan bahsedilmiş ve erken modern Osmanlı Filibe'sinin bu çevresel aktörler çerçevesinde nasıl etkilendiği üzerinde durulmuştur.

Birinci bölümde çizilen bu fiziki ve ekolojik çerçeve, ikinci bölümde vakıfların çevresel işlevlerinin daha iyi anlaşılması için bir zemin oluşturmaktadır. Çalışmanın ikinci bölümünde, erken modern Osmanlı Filibe'sinde ya kurulmuş olup ya da başka yerlerde kurulmuş ama Filibe'de de hizmet veren belli başlı vakıflar üzerinde durulmuştur. Erken modern çevre tarihi çalışmalarında vakfiyeler, yerel coğrafya ve yerel insanların yaşamlarını etkileyen pozisyonda olup, Osmanlının bir nevi oradaki eli pozisyonunda bulunmuşlardır. Bölümde öncelikle, vakıfların çevre tarihi çalışmalarında nasıl ve ne şekilde kullanılmaları gerektiğine dair bir giriş yapılmış ardından bahsi geçen vakıfların Meriç Nehri'nden nasıl faydalanıp Filibe'yi nasıl dönüştürdüklerine dair bilgilerle devam etmektedir. Erken modern dönem Osmanlı şehirlerinin en önemli sorunlarından bir tanesi bölgede yaşayan insanlara içme suyu temin edebilmektir. İçme suyunun temin edilmesinde tek sorumlu devlet olmayıp, tam aksine devletin bilgisi ve onayı dâhilinde içme suyunun nasıl Filibe'deki insanlar için temin edildiğine dair bilgilerle devam etmektedir. İçme suyuna ek olarak, vakıfların nehirten faydalanmalarıyla oluşan ding ve bölgeye katkıları üzerinde durulmuştur. Son olarak, vakıfların sahip olduğu su sığırı, at, deve, koyun gibi hayvanlar hakkında bilgi verilerek hayvanların Filibe için önemi durulmuştur.

Çalışmanın üçüncü ve son bölümünde Meriç Nehri ve Filibe'yi tamamlayıcı noktası olan insan üzerinde durulmuştur. Önemli bir aktör olan insan sadece bölgedeki dönüşüme ve yatırımlara şahit olmamış aynı zamanda kendisinde bulunan yerel bilgileri Osmanlı otoritelerinin bilgileri ve destekleri itibarıyla değişimin önemli bir aktörü olarak ele alınmıştır. Bu noktada bölgenin en önemli tarım ürünü olan çeltik tarlalarında çalışan çeltükçü reâyâ sınıfı ve Filibe'deki konumlarına odaklanılmıştır. Çeltükçü reâyâ sınıfına ek olarak, vakıflarda çalışanların bölgeye katkıları ortaya konulmuş, aslında bölgenin ekolojik ve sürdürülebilirlik noktasında faydalı olabilmesini sağlayan gruplar listelenmiştir. Çünkü bu gruplar aynı zamanda kendi dönemlerinin “çevre yöneticileri” olarak konumlandırılabilir. Bu gruplar, bağlı bulundukları vakıfların yazılı olmayan kurallarını nehrin kenarında ve Filibe'de somut eylemlere dönüştüren kilit kişiler olarak görülebilir.

Tez konusuna ilk karar verildiği zaman Filibe şer'iyeye sicillerine ulaşmak önemli bir hedefti. Çünkü bu siciller sayesinde Meriç Nehri ile ilgili önemli sorunlara ve bu sorunların

çözümlerine dair bilgiler edinileceği düşünölmekteydi. Ne yazık ki, Filibe şer'ıye sicillerine ulaşılammıştır. Öncelikle, arşivden bu konu hakkında bir bilgiye ulaşılammış, daha sonra Bulgaristan arşivine gidilip sicillere ulaşma çabasinda bulunulmuştur. Bunlar ertesinde, Filibe hakkında önemli çalışmalar yapmış tarihçilerin kaynakçaları ve kaynak grupları incelenmiş fakat onlardan da bu konu hakkında bilgi kümesine ulaşılammıştır. Yök Tez'deki Filibe hakkında yazılmış tezler incelenmiş, fakat onların da bu kaynak grubuna ulaşamadıkları görölmüştür. Sonrasında, Grigor Boykov (2024), Filibe hakkında çıkardığı son kitabında bu durum hakkında detaylıca bilgi vermiştir. Kendisinin de bu kaynak grubuna rastlamadığı verdiği bilgilerden anlaşılmaktadır. Boykov'un tahminine göre siciller belki Rusya'da olabilir.²⁶³ İleride hem Meriç Nehri hem de Filibe şehri hakkında yapılacak çalışmalar için eğer bu kaynak grubu ortaya çıkarsa muhakkak çalışmalar genişletilebilecektir çünkü siciller çevre tarihçileri için de oldukça önemlidir. Ancak, sicillerden oluşan eksikliği giderebilmek için Osmanlı arşiv belgelerinin diğerr türlerine başvurulmuştur.

Bu noktada, tahrir defterleri Meriç Nehri ve Filibe'nin demografisi, köyleri, çeltükçü reâyası ve ekonomik yapısı hakkında önemli bilgiler vermektedir. Tezin kapsadığı dönem itibarıyla incelenen tahrirler 14-16. yüzyıllar arasını kapsamaktadır.²⁶⁴ Tahrir defterleri çevre tarihi çalışmaları için direkt olarak bilgi vermez, bu sebeple tahrir defterleri içerdikleri bilgi çerçevesi kapsamında değerrlendirilmişlerdir. Tahrir defterleri dışında merkezi otoritenin aldığı kararları görmek için mühimme defterlerinden yararlanılmıştır.

Yararlanılan mühimme defterleri, 972-992 yılları arasını kapsamaktadır. Mühimmeler sayesinde, Meriç Nehri ve Filibe hakkındaki çevresel meselelerin (çeltük tarımı, humma, meraların ve çayırların kullanımı, ormanlık ve koruluk alanların konumu gibi) merkezden nasıl algılandığı bu çevresel meselelerin nasıl çözümlendiğine dair bilgi sahibi olunabilmektedir. Ayrıca, çevresel meselelere ek olarak, bölgedeki hayvanlar (koyun, kuzu, deve gibi) ve hayvansal ürünler hakkındaki dağılım bilgisine de ulaşılabilir.

Mühimme defterleri ile beraber, bölgedeki işleyişin esaslarını görmek amacıyla kanunnamelerden faydalanılmıştır. Kanunnameler özellikle, Meriç Nehri ve civarında

²⁶³ Boykov, Kitap, p. 45

²⁶⁴ İlk incelenen tahrir defteri, BOA. TT.d.26 olmuştur. 895 tarihli olan bu defter mufassal tahrir defteridir. İncelenen bir diğerr tahrir defteri ise BOA. TT.d. 77 kodlu ve 925 tarihli mufassal tahrir defteridir. Bir diğerr defter ise TT.d. 370 kodlu 937 tarihli defterdir. 978 tarihli mufassal tahrir defteri olan BOA. TT.d. 494 defter numarasında bulunmaktadır. BOA. TT.d. 1001 kodlu defter ise arşivde H-29-12-1300 olarak kayıt edilmesine rağmen, 1585 tarihli olduğu defter derkenarından anlaşılmaktadır. Karta, Tez, s.4.

yapılan çeltük tarımı, bu tarımın hangi kurallar kapsamında yapılacağı ve bu kurallara uymayanlara hangi cezaların verileceğine dair bilgiler sunmaktadır. Bu noktada, tez kapsamında, II. Mehmed dönemindeki kanunnamelerden (Çeltik Yasaknâmesi)²⁶⁵, II. Bayezid döneminde direkt olarak Filibe hakkında olan kanunnameden (Yasaknâme-i Enhar-ı Çeltük) yararlanılmıştır. Devamlılığı gözlemlemek amacıyla gözlemek amacıyla I. Ahmed döneminde yayımlanan bir kanunnameden de yararlanılmıştır.

Yazılı kuralların günlük hayattaki uygulanma biçimini ortaya koyabilmek için Meriç Nehri ve Filibe civarındaki yerelde çevreyi dönüştürme gücüne sahip olan müesseselerin belgeleri yani vakfiyeler oldukça önem taşımaktadır. Özellikle ikinci bölüm içerisinde vakfiyelerden yararlanılmıştır. Tez kapsamında kullanılan vakfiyelerin hepsi doğrudan Filibe’de kurulan vakfiyelerden oluşmamaktadır. İstanbul’da kurulmuş ve Filibe’de de hizmet veren vakfiyelerden de yararlanılmıştır. Şehabeddin Paşa gibi Filibe’nin önemli isimlerden olan birisinin vakfiesinden, Filibe’ye II. Mehmed tarafından sürgün edilerek orada vakfiesini kuran Candaroğullarından İsfendiyarbeyzade gibi isimlere ek olarak, Gazi Sinan Paşa gibi önemli isimlerin kurmuş olduğu vakfiyelerden yararlanılmıştır. Vakfiyeler aynı zamanda toplumsal aktörlerin çevreyi dönüştürme biçimlerini anlamak amacıyla da önemli bir kaynaktır. Osmanlı çevre tarihi çalışan tarihçiler bugüne kadar vakıfları çevre üzerindeki etkileri açısından pek incelemediler. Bu çalışma ise vakıfları sadece şehir ya da dinsel hayır kurumları olarak değil, aynı zamanda çevresel kurumlar olarak yeniden düşünmektedir. Böylece hem Osmanlı çevre tarihine yeni bir kavramsal katkı yapılmış hem de arşiv malzemesi farklı bir bakış açısıyla değerlendirilmiştir.

Çevrenin dönüşümünü gözlemleyebildiğimiz bir diğer kaynak ise seyahatnameler olacaktır. Seyahatnameler, Meriç Nehri ve Filibe hakkında hem Osmanlı gözüyle hem de yabancıların bakış açısından bir panoroma çizer. Bölge hakkında ilk olarak bahsedilmesi gereken seyahatname Evliya Çelebi’nin Seyahatnamesi olacaktır.²⁶⁶ Evliya Çelebi’nin sadece Filibe hakkında değil, Balkanların önemli noktaları için de hem çevresel hem de sosyo-ekonomik, dinî ve kültürel bilgiler verdiği görülmektedir. Sadece Filibe değil aynı zamanda Filibe’nin de kalbi olarak nitelendirdiğim Meriç Nehri hakkında da bilgi vermiştir.

²⁶⁵ II. Mehmed döneminde, Rumeli Eyâletindeki çeltük ve diğeri Anadolu’daki çeltük olmak üzere ayrı iki tane yasaknâme bulunmaktadır. Ahmet Akgündüz’e göre bu dönemdeki yasaknâmeler, *ülül-emrin âmme maslahatına dayalı tanzimi tasarrufları olduğunu* belirtmektedir. Ahmet Akgündüz, *Osmanlı Kanunnâmeleri ve Hukukî Tahlilleri*, 2. Kitap II. Bâyezid Devri Kanunnâmeleri, s.403.

²⁶⁶ Evliya Çelebi, *Günümüz Türkçesiyle Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi*, III. Cilt II. Kitap, haz. Seyit Ali Kahraman-Yücel Dağlı, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2006.

Fakat Evliya Çelebi, Meriç Nehri ve nehrin Edirne ile ilgili olan ilişkisi hakkında oldukça detaylı bilgiler verirken nehrin Filibe ile olan ilişkisi hakkında görece daha az bilgi vermiştir.

Tez ile ilgili birincil kaynak grupları incelenmeye başlandığı zaman Edirne'nin Meriç Nehri'yle olan ilişkisinin üzerinde daha fazla durduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Bu durum haricinde, Filibe'nin coğrafi özellikleri, yönetici sınıfı, nasıl fethedildiği, ekonomik özellikleri, yetiştirilen tarım ürünleri (Evliya Çelebi de Filibe pirinci üzerinde çok durmuş, Mısır pirinciyle karşılaştırmasını yapmıştır), Filibe'nin iklim özellikleri (cehennem sıcaklarının yaşandığı yazlar olarak tasvir eder), hamamları, camileri anlatır. Evliya Çelebi haricinde erken modern dönem Filibe'si hakkında yazılan Osmanlı seyahatnamesine rastlanmamıştır.

Evliya Çelebi haricinde erken modern dönem Osmanlı Filibe'si için yararlanılan seyahatnameler Avrupalı seyyahların yazdıkları seyahatnameler olmuştur. Lubenau, Busbecq, Fresne-Canaye, Schweigger gibi seyyahlar Filibe hakkında az çok bilgi vermişlerdir.²⁶⁷ Bütün bu bahsedilen Avrupalı seyyahların asıl hedefi tıpkı Evliya Çelebi gibi sadece Filibe'yi keşfetmek değildi, basit bir mantığı takip ettiler, Orta Yol istikameti.²⁶⁸ Ortak amaçları genellikle ya İstanbul'a ulaşmak ya da hac rotası dâhilinde Filibe'den geçmekti. Avrupalı seyyahlar kendi başlangıç rotalarından hareket ettikleri, sonrasında Filibe'ye ulaştıkları zaman, Lala Şâhin Paşa'nın yaptırmış olduğu o dönemin ikonik köprüsünü gördüler ve bu köprüyü detaylarıyla anlatmaya başladılar. Köprü dışında onlar da çeltük tarımından etkilendiler ve hatta Lubenau pirinci kendi memleketlerinde yapılan buğday tarımıyla kıyasladı. Geldikleri coğrafyada bulunmayan ağaçları görünce şaşırdı ve selvi ağaçları hakkında yazmak istedi.²⁶⁹ Avrupalı seyyahların bu gözlemleri, Osmanlı arşiv belgeleri ve vakfiye kayıtlarıyla beraber ele alındığı zaman, Meriç Nehri ve Filibe'nin çevre tarihi daha iyi anlaşılabilir.

Sonuç olarak, Osmanlı arşiv belgelerinin sunduğu yapısal ve idari çerçeve, vakfiyelerin nehir ve şehir üzerindeki farklı uygulamaları ve verdikleri hizmetleri, seyyahların gözlemleriyle birleştiği zaman Meriç Nehri ve Filibe'nin erken modern dönem çevre tarihi hakkında girift bir resim ortaya konulabilmektedir.

²⁶⁷ Busbecq, Ogier Ghislain de, *Kanuni Döneminde Avrupalı Bir Elçinin Gözlemleri (1555-1560)*, çev. Derin Türkömer, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul, 2011, s. x-x1. Reinhold Lubenau, *Reinhold Lubenau Seyahatnamesi, Osmanlı Ülkesinde 1587-1589*, I. Cilt, çev. Türkis Noyan, Kitap Yayınevi, İstanbul, 2016.

²⁶⁸ Reinhold Lubenau, *Ibid*, s. 13. Philippe du Fresne Canaye, *Fresne-Canaye Seyahatnamesi 1573*, çev. Teoman Tunçdoğan, Kitap Yayınevi, İstanbul, 2017, s. 7-9-11. Solomon Schweigger, *Sultanlar Kentine Yolculuk 1578-1581*, çev. Türkis Noyan, Kitap Yayınevi, İstanbul, 2020, s. 14-19.

²⁶⁹ Curipeschitz, Benedict, *Yolculuk Günlüğü 1530*, çev. Özdemir Nutku, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara, 1989, s. VII-3.

Başlangıç olarak, Osmanlı idaresi bağlamında şehri incelemek için Grigor Boykov'un önemli eseri "Ottoman Plovdiv: Space, Architecture, and Population (14th-17th Centuries)" den yararlanılmıştır. Boykov, Osmanlı Filibesi üzerine bölgesel coğrafya ve fetih, kentsel topografya, Osmanlı dönüşümleri ve yapılarını kapsayan geniş bir kaynak yelpazesini incelemektedir. Buna ek olarak, şehrin nüfus coğrafyasını, dinamiklerini, mekânsal dağılımını ve benzer unsurları analiz etmektedir. Boykov'un çalışması bir çevre tarihi araştırması olmamakla birlikte, yine de Meriç Nehri'nin Filibe için taşıdığı önemi ortaya koymaktadır. Onun çalışması, erken modern dönem Filibe'nin mekânsal ve demografik gelişimine dair kritik bilgiler sunarken, Osmanlı çevre tarihi yazını genel olarak suyun imparatorluk yönetimindeki merkezi rolünü vurgulamıştır.

Boykov'un araştırması Filibe çalışmalarına öncü bir katkı teşkil etse de bu tezin amacı şehrin geleneksel bir şehir tarihini yazmak değildir. Aksine, tez, bir çevre tarihi perspektifi aracılığıyla kent tarihi çalışmalarına katkıda bulunmayı hedeflemektedir. Boykov, Filibe analizinde Meriç Nehri'ni merkeze yerleştirmez. Buna karşılık, bu tezin ortaya koymayı amaçladığı şey, Meriç Nehri'nin hiçbir zaman durağan bir nehir olmadığıdır.

Tarihçiler, suyun Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun çeşitli bölgelerinde devlet inşasında oynadığı hayati rolü ortaya koymuşlardır.²⁷⁰ Osmanlı çevre tarihi çalışmaları denilince akla ilk gelen isimlerin başında Alan Mikhail gelmektedir.²⁷¹ Mikhail, *Under Osman's Tree: The Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and Environmental History*, adlı çalışmasıyla erken modern dönem

²⁷⁰ Detaylı bilgi için bakınız: Onur İnal, *Environmental History as an Emerging Field in Ottoman Studies: An Historiographical Overview*, Osmanlı Araştırmaları, C:38, S:38, 2011, s. 5-25; Selçuk Dursun, Çevresel (Ekolojik) Tarih Lensinden Osmanlı Tarihine Yeniden Bakmak, içinde *New Trends in Ottoman Studies*, ed. Marinos Sariyannis, 2014, s.59-69. John R. McNeill, Giriş: Anglofon Osmanlı Çevre Tarihi, tr. Önder Eren Akgül, in. *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze İnsanın Ayak İzleri: Müdahale, Etkileşim, Mücadele*, ed. Deniz Dölek-Sever& Özlem Sert, Alfa Yayınları, İstanbul 2025, s.24-32.

²⁷¹ Alan Mikhail Osmanlı çevre tarihi çalışmalarının öncü isimlerindendir. Mikhail, Yale Üniversitesi'nde çalışmalarına devam etmektedir. Çalışmalarında özellikle Osmanlı çevre tarihi kapsamında Mısır'a odaklanmaktadır. Mikhail'in çalışmaları alana çok fazla katkı sağlamıştır. Mikhail çalışmalarında genellikle insan, hayvan, enerji kaynakları, çevre gibi dinamiklere odaklanmaktadır. Önemli çalışmalarından bazıları ise şunlardır: Alan Mikhail, *Osman'ın Ağacı Altında, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Mısır ve Çevre Tarihi*, çev. Seda Özdil, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2019; Alan Mikhail, *Osmanlı Mısır'ında Doğa ve İmparatorluk, Bir Çevre Tarihi*, çev. Seda Özdil, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2024; Alan Mikhail, *The Animal in Ottoman Egypt*, Oxford University Press, New York 2014; Alan Mikhail, "Unleashing the Beast: Animals, Energy, and the Economy of Labor in Ottoman Egypt", *American Historical Review*, 118, 2013, p.317-48. Alan Mikhail, "Engineering the Ottoman Empire: Irrigation and the Persistence of Early Modern Expertise", In *Ottoman Rural Societies and Economies*, ed. Elias Kolovos. Crete University Press, Rethymno 2015. Alan Mikhail, "Foreword: Ottoman and Nature", içinde *Seeds of Power: Explorations in Ottoman Environmental History*, ed. Onur İnal and Yavuz Köse, White Horse Press, Cambridgeshire 2019. Alan Mikhail, "Animals as Property in Early Modern Ottoman Egypt", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 53, 2010, s.621-652. Alan Mikhail'in Osmanlı çevre tarihi çalışmaları hakkındaki düşünceleri için lütfen bakınız: Dilara Avcı, "Interview: On Environmental History with Alan Mikhail", *Uluslararası Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Volume: 8, Issue:2, 2024, s.196-208.

Osmanlı Mısır'ı ve Nil Nehri'ne odaklanmaktadır. Bu temel çalışma, Osmanlı egemenliği altındaki büyük bir nehrin imparatorluk idaresi içinde nasıl kullanıldığını anlamaya yönelik bir çerçeve sunmaktadır. Kitap, Osmanlı Mısır'ı ile Nil arasındaki ilişkiyi özellikle sulama faaliyetleri, emek (hem insan hem hayvan emeği) ve hastalık eksenlerinde ele almaktadır.

“Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History” adlı eserinde Mikhail, 17. yüzyıldan 19. yüzyıla uzanan bir dönemi kapsayan bir inceleme sunarak kırsal Mısır'da su kullanımını ve Mısır'daki sulamanın toplumsal ve çevre tarihini ele almaktadır. Bu bağlamda Nil Nehri, Mısır'ın çevre tarihinin kavranabilmesi için anlaşılması gereken temel aktörlerden yalnızca biridir. Sulama sistemlerinin bu şekilde bütünleştirilmesi, Mısırlı köylülerin toprakla ilgili yerel bilgilerinin sürece dâhil edilmesi yoluyla daha etkili politikaların geliştirilmesini mümkün kılmıştır.²⁷²

Alan Mikhail'in çalışmalarının yanı sıra, Faisal Husain'in çalışmaları da bu tezin çıkış noktasını oluşturan temel eserler arasında yer almaktadır. Husain'in “Rivers of the Sultan: The Tigris and Euphrates in the Ottoman Empire” adlı eserinin, tıpkı Alan Mikhail'in çalışması gibi, erken modern Osmanlı döneminin çevre tarihine odaklandığını belirtmek yerinde olacaktır.²⁷³ Husain, imparatorluğun her zaman temkinli bir yönetim uygulamak zorunda kaldığı bir coğrafya olan Irak'taki Osmanlı idaresine ve kendisinin “ikiz nehirler” olarak nitelendirdiği Dicle ve Fırat'a odaklanmaktadır. Her ne kadar Husain'in üzerinde durduğu bu iki nehrin kapasitesi Nil Nehri kadar büyük olmasa da kapsadıkları coğrafi alan oldukça geniştir. Bu hâkimiyet, imparatorluk donanması tarafından tesis edilmiştir. Husain'in vurguladığı üzere, Osmanlılar bölgeyi fethettikten sonra yönetimlerine tam bir özgüvenle başlamamışlardır; aksine, tarihsel rakiplerinden en güçlülerinden biri olan

²⁷² Mikhail, *age*, s.21.

²⁷³ Faisal Husain'in çalışmaları genellikle Osmanlı çevre tarihi ile ilgilidir. Husain, doktorasını Georgetown Üniversitesi'nde John McNeill danışmanlığında tamamlamıştır. Husain'in doktora tez konusu “The Tigris-Euphrates Basin under Early Modern Ottoman Rule (c. 1534–1830)” hakkındadır. Husain'in doktora tezi daha sonra kitaplaşmıştır. Oxford Yayınlarından çıkan *Rivers of the Sultan: The Tigris and Euphrates in the Ottoman Empire* adlı kitabı alan için oldukça önemlidir. Kitap daha sonra Timaş Yayınları tarafından Türkçe'ye çevrilmiştir ve kitap *Sultan'ın Nehirleri: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Dicle ve Fırat* adıyla yayınlanmıştır. Husain'in kitapları hakkında detaylı bilgiye sahip olmak için lütfen bakınız: Mohammad Hossain, “Faisal Husain. Rivers of the Sultan: The Tigris and Euphrates in the Ottoman Empire. Oxford University Press, 2021, 264 ss.”, *İnsan Ve Toplum*, 12(3), 242-245. Hakan Kaya, “Faisal H. Husain'in “Sultan'ın Nehirleri: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Dicle ve Fırat” Adlı Eserinin Değerlendirmesi”, *Darulfunun İlahiyat*, 34 (1), 2023, ss.323-329. Faisal Husain'in Osmanlı çevre tarihi çalışmaları hakkındaki düşünceleri için lütfen bakınız: Dilara Avcı, “Interview: On Environmental History with Faisal Husain”, *Uluslararası Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Volume:7, Issue:1, 2023, s.97-105.

Safevîlerle karşı karşıya olmaları nedeniyle hâkimiyetlerini pekiştirmek için daha yoğun çaba sarf etmek zorunda kalmışlardır.

Bu doğrultuda, Mikhail ve Husain'in Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun farklı bölgelerinde nehir yönetimine dair yöntemleri ortaya koyan önemli çalışmaları, Osmanlı Balkanları'ndaki hayati bir su yolu olan Meriç Nehri'ne de benzer bir yaklaşımın uygulanabileceğini göstermektedir. Tam da bu noktada, Osmanlıların Mısır ya da Irak'ta karşılaştıkları çevresel sorunların Balkanlar'da, özellikle Meriç Nehri çevresinde, farklı bir boyut kazandığı görülmektedir. Dolayısıyla Meriç Nehri ve Filibe örneği, Osmanlıların Mısır ya da Irak'ta karşılaştıkları sorunlar ve geliştirdikleri çözümlerle belirli benzerlikler taşımakla birlikte, bu meselelerin Balkanlar bağlamında kendine özgü bir nitelik kazandığı söylenebilir.

Tez konusunun kapsamı ve içeriği, tam da bu farklılık üzerine sürdürülen düşünsel bir değerlendirme süreci sonucunda şekillenmiştir. Ne Mikhail'in incelediği bölge ve nehirler ne de Husain'in ele aldığı alanlar Osmanlılar açısından sorunsuz coğrafyalar olmuştur. Aksine, Osmanlılar bu bölgeler ve nehirler üzerindeki hâkimiyetlerini sürekli olarak yeniden inşa etmek zorunda kalmışlardır. Oysa bu durum Filibe ve Meriç Nehri için geçerli değildir. Osmanlıların Balkanlar'daki fetihlerinin başlangıcından itibaren, bu tezin merkezini oluşturan Meriç Nehri ve Filibe, 19. yüzyılın sonlarına kadar Osmanlı egemenliği altında kalmıştır. Ne nehrin yönetiminde ne de Filibe'nin idaresinde belirgin bir değişim yaşanmış, ayrıca bölgenin farklı topluluklar tarafından ele geçirilmesine yönelik ciddi bir tehdit de ortaya çıkmamıştır. 1877–1878 Osmanlı-Rus Savaşı'nın ardından Filibe, önce Doğu Rumeli Özerk Vilayeti'nin bir parçası hâline gelmiş, ardından da Bulgar hakimiyetine geçmiştir.

Bu tez kapsamında, Filibe'nin inceleme alanı olarak seçilmesinin birden fazla gerekçesi bulunmaktadır. Meriç Nehri yalnızca tek bir şehirden geçmemekte; aksine, birden fazla şehirden akmakta ve özellikle Edirne şehri açısından özel bir önem taşımaktadır. Bu çalışma çerçevesinde Edirne'nin tercih edilmemesinin temel nedeni, Osmanlı'nın eski başkentlerinden biri olması dolayısıyla buradaki idarî uygulama ve düzenlemelerin diğer şehirlerden farklılık göstermiş olduğudur. Buna karşılık Filibe, Meriç Nehri ile ilişkili ikinci en önemli şehir konumundadır. Filibe'nin tercih edilmesinin bir diğer önemli nedeni ise tahrir defterlerinin mevcudiyeti ve bu defterler aracılığıyla tarihsel gelişmelerin izlenebilmesine imkân tanınmasıdır. Bu doğrultuda, bu tez çalışmasında, Meriç Nehri'nin Osmanlı egemenliği altında kaldığı tüm dönemi incelememekte; bunun yerine erken modern döneme odaklanmaktadır. Filibe'nin Osmanlılar tarafından fethedilmesiyle başlayan

süreçten 16. yüzyılın sonlarına kadar olan dönem, bu çalışmanın inceleme kapsamını oluşturmaktadır.

Osmanlı hâkimiyeti süresince, Meriç Nehri'nin bölgeye sağladığı su kaynakları ve sunduğu imkânlar, özellikle sulu tarımın sürdürülebilirliğindeki hayati rolü ve mümkün kıldığı ulaşım faaliyetleri korunmuş; bu durum bölgede ticari sürekliliğin sağlanmasına katkıda bulunmuştur. Yukarıda belirtilen bu önem çerçevesinde, nehrin Filibe üzerindeki etkisi ve taşıdığı anlamın vurgulanması, tezin çevre tarihi alanındaki yerini ve katkısını daha da belirgin hâle getirmektedir.

