



Famine and Childhood: Ottoman Children's Experiences during the Famine of 1873-1875

Kıtlık ve Çocukluk: 1873-1875 Kıtlığı Sırasında Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Çocukların Deneyimleri

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Abstract

This article explores the unique experiences of children who lived in a famine-affected region of Central Anatolia between 1873 and 1875. The deplorable conditions forced some children to consume inappropriate foods, be traded for bread, be abandoned during migration, or be subjected to exploitation and domestic servitude. The article emphasizes the contrast between child-rearing practices and the concept of childhood in the Central Anatolian region and urban areas of the period. This challenges the prevailing emphasis in previous studies that have primarily examined urban children during the period of peace. Emphasizing the famine of 1873–1875, the research underscores that the concept of childhood and the material culture developed and adopted by urban families of the period under the effect of modernization were not observed in Central Anatolia. Thus, it is suggested that examining childhood in the Ottoman Empire necessitates a periodical and regional methodology that considers the socioeconomic and cultural variations that influenced the experiences of children in various regions and eras. In addition, the article delves into the Ottoman government's response to the famine. The article addresses these issues by comprehensively examining Ottoman archival sources, periodicals and gazettes, together with contemporary accounts and reports from the famine period.

Keywords: Childhood in the Ottoman Empire, Famine in Anatolia, History of Children

Öz

Bu makale, 1873-1875 yılları arasında Orta Anadolu'da kıtlıktan etkilenen bir bölgede yaşayan çocukların deneyimlerini incelemektedir. Kıtlığın getirdiği ağır şartlar altında bazı çocuklar, uygunsuz gıdalar tüketmeye, ekmeğe veya para karşılığında takas edilmeye, göç sırasında terk edilmeye, istismar edilmeye ve ev hizmetçiliğine maruz kalmaya zorlanmıştır. Çocukların yaşadığı bu olumsuz olaylar dönemin Orta Anadolu bölgesinde ve şehirlerdeki çocuk yetiştirme pratikleri ile çocukluk kavramı ve algısı arasındaki zıtlığı gözler önüne sermektedir. Bu çalışmada ortaya konan bilgiler, barış döneminde kentli çocukları inceleyen ve bunun üzerinden çocukların tarihini ve çocukluk algısını değerlendiren çalışmalardan farklı sonuçlar ortaya koymaktadır. Genel olarak, dönemin ana kaynaklarında kentli erkek çocuklara ağırlık verilirken, kırsal kesimdeki alt sınıf hanelere ve çocukların olağanüstü dönemlerdeki deneyimlerine dair verilen bilgiler son derece sınırlıdır. Araştırma, 1873-1875 kıtlığına vurgu yaparak, dönemin kentli ailelerinin modernleşmenin etkisiyle geliştirdiği ve benimsediği çocukluk kavramının ve maddi kültürün Orta Anadolu'da görülmediğinin altını çizmektedir. Dolayısıyla, bu makale, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda çocukluğun incelenmesinin, çeşitli bölge ve dönemlerdeki çocukların deneyimlerini etkileyen sosyoekonomik ve kültürel farklılıkları dikkate alan dönemsel ve bölgesel bir metodoloji gerektirdiğini öne sürmektedir. Buna ek olarak, çalışma, Osmanlı hükümetinin kıtlığa verdiği tepkiyi inceleyerek, etkili önlemlerin uygulanmasını engelleyen gelişmeleri ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışmada Osmanlı arşiv kaynakları, süreli yayınlar ve gazetelerin yanı sıra kıtlık dönemine ait raporlardan yararlanılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Çocukluk, Anadolu'da Kıtlık, Çocuk Tarihi



Introduction

Understanding childhood in the Ottoman Empire proves challenging due to its vast historical timeline, spanning from the 14th to the 20th century and encompassing three continents. Notions of religion, ethnicity, culture, class, geography, and political developments must be closely examined when exploring the concept of childhood in this context. There were several understandings of childhood at different points in time among different societies in the Ottoman Empire. While some scholars addressing cultural and social aspects of Ottoman society discuss children and childhood, their reliance on limited evidence restricts the depth of their insights. As research materials in relation to the concept of childhood are far richer for middle and upper-middle or upper classes of Ottoman families than those below, scholars focusing on childhood studies have tended to go with what is closest to their hands.¹ The same tendency has been observed in scholars of Ottoman children or the concept of childhood as the earlier works concluded based on a wide range of materials on children of the dynasty or upper-class families. Attempts to generalize about entire classes based on these limited sources further complicate the understanding of childhood. Therefore, the lives of Muslim middle or upper-middle children in that kind of scholarly works claimed to represent children of all classes and children from different cultures, religions, ethnicities, and geographies in the Ottoman Empire.²

In societies or countries, where middle class families constituted majority of the population, examination of childhood by focusing on middle and upper-middle class children provide us clearer picture of essential elements of their history and concept of childhood.³ Harry Hendrick supports this claim by indicating that the ambiguity on the meaning of childhood cleared and its identity primarily determined in the first decade of the 20th century, but “to the satisfaction of the middle class and the respectable working class.”⁴ Between 1780 and 1840, a major change of attitude towards children’s capabilities and responsibilities happened. After the 1840s, as childhood was considered as a distinct period, requiring protection and discipline through school education, people’s attitude towards wage-earning child, which had been considered to be the norm, altered.⁵ However, in an empire like the Ottoman, where the majority resided in rural areas and belongs to lower classes, scholarly works focusing on privileged families fail to offer a comprehensive understanding of childhood. Therefore, studying childhood in the Ottoman Empire requires a localized and periodical approach, acknowledging the socio-economic and cultural diversity that shaped the experiences of children across different regions and periods.

The mid-19th century saw a confluence between the modernization efforts undertaken in the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the domains of law, education, and social life, and the concurrent development of the notion of childhood. During this period, there was a noticeable increase in the recognition and acceptance of childhood within the societal framework, prompting the establishment of novel institutions, organizations, materials, legal regulations, and particularly

¹ Peter N. Stearns, “Challenges in the History of Childhood,” *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1 no: 1 (Winter 2008): 37.

² See: Cüneyt Okay, *Osmanlı Çocuk Hayatında Yenileşmeler: 1850-1900* (İstanbul: Kırkambar, 1998); Cüneyt Okay, *Eski Harfli Çocuk Dergiler*. (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 1999); *Toplumsal Tarihte Çocuk*, haz. Bekir Onur (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1994).

³ Stearns, “Challenges in the History of Childhood” 37.

⁴ Harry Hendrick, “Constructions and Reconstructions of British Childhood: An Interpretative Survey, 1800 to the Present” *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* içinde. Editör Allison James and Alan Prout (London: Falmer Press, 2005), 34.

⁵ Hendrick, age, 38.

educational curricula. Consequently, studying childhood in the Ottoman Empire became an integral component of the modernization endeavor. Simultaneously, the interpretation of the idea of *child* underwent reevaluation within the framework of modernity. In the context of Ottoman modernization, various educational, intellectual, and social reforms can be observed. These include the promotion of school attendance for both boys and girls, the establishment of institutions catering to the care and basic needs of children, the development of curricula aimed at fostering loyalty to the state, the placement of juvenile delinquents in prisons, and the emergence and widespread dissemination of children's literature through books, magazines, and newspapers.

In the Western societies and middle- and upper-class Ottoman families in the second half of the 19th century, children were recognized as innocent subjects in need of discipline, protection, and discipline. Children also needed unique clothes, food, and activities for entertainment. Hospitals, toy shops, clothes store for children and houses were created for the need of children in the 19th and 20th centuries. As Romero states, these new materials lead to cities becoming more attractive places for families and children as many of the people in rural areas had the disabilities of benefitting from the advantages of improved materials for children.⁶ One can observe that type of construction of childhood in children's periodicals published in the Ottoman Empire in the onward of 1876.⁷ The point that needed to be considered is that these periodicals targeted children of middle- and upper-class urban families mostly during times of peace. In many rural areas and among lower class Ottoman families, the reality was considerably different. In these societies, children, after the age of 7-8, must help their families, especially in the basic household works. They mainly were not treated as innocent human beings needing special treatment. Especially during wars and other significant political developments, children were expected to work in the absence of male members of their families who had to participate in the campaigns.⁸

Extraordinary events such as war and famine threatened the traditional concept of childhood, formulated in peacetime as the documents yielded during wars allows researchers to access knowledge on experiences of children and their contribution to their household, community, and army.⁹ This article will examine the impact of the famine on children in Central Anatolia between 1873 and 1875. Current research on the Central Anatolian famine has not prioritized examining children's experiences, as they are typically regarded as passive actors in historical events.¹⁰

⁶ Margarita Sánchez Romero, "Landscapes of Childhood: Bodies, Places and Material Culture," *Childhood in the Past* 10 no:1, (2017): 18-19, DOI: 10.1080/17585716.2017.1305080.

⁷ While the newspaper, *Basiret*, covers news related to the emergence of modern concept of childhood, including compulsory education in England, the establishment of a reformatory, the announcement of a children's ball in Istanbul, and the opening of an industrial school for girls in Istanbul in 1875, it is evident that children in Central Anatolia and rural areas did not exposed to this material culture and the distinct treatment of children by their families. For the abovementioned news see: *Basiret*, s.1132 (25 Zi-l-Ka'de 1290), 3; *Basiret*, s. 1139 (3 Zi-l-hicce 1290), 2; *Basiret*, s. 1175 (22 Muharrem 1291), 2; *Basiret*, s.1190 (10 Safer 1291), 1.

⁸ Regarding the shift of society and state expectations regarding children during the Balkan Wars see: Eyal Ginio, *The Ottoman Culture of Defeat: The Balkan Wars and their Aftermath*. (London: Hurst&Company, 2016), 21-22, 151-182; Eyal Ginio, "War, Civic Mobilization and the Ottoman Home-front during Balkan Wars: The Case of Children" *The Wars before the Great War*" Editörler D. Geppert, W. Mulligan ve A. Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2015), 97.

⁹ Mischa Honeck and James Marten, "More than Victims: Framing the History of Modern Childhood and War" in *War and Childhood in the Era of Two World Wars* içinde. Editör Mischa Honeck ve James Marten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 1-14., 7.

¹⁰ The seminal research concerning famine in Central Anatolia: Yener Bayar, "1873-1875 Orta Anadolu Kıtlığı" (Yüksek lisans tezi, Marmara Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 2013); Özge Ertem, "Eating The Last Seed: Famine, Empire, Survival And Order In Ottoman Anatolia In The Late Nineteenth Century" (Doktora Tezi, European University Institute Department Of History

According to Ottoman archival sources, newspapers of the period, traveler accounts and records of public meeting made on the famine, some of the difficulties endured by some children residing in Central Anatolia during the famine period were as follows: being sold for bread or money, being forced to live in unsuitable conditions and be fed in inappropriate foods that ultimately resulted in their deaths, being coerced into assuming adult responsibilities and morals, becoming susceptible to abuse and, in some cases, being subjected to abuse themselves, being abandoned during the migration process, and being forced to work as domestic servants or beggar in the locations where they migrated. Furthermore, they were deprived of access to schools, education, and training opportunities specifically designed for children during this time. Lastly, they were unable to benefit from the material culture that emerged for children during the same period. During the famine in Central Anatolia from 1873 to 1875, which coincided with the modernization efforts surrounding the concept of childhood, there were substantial shifts in the understanding of childhood, the societal expectations placed on children, and the expectations that children had of society among the communities in the famine-affected areas.

1. Brief Notes on the Causes of Famine

During the late 1873 and early period of 1874, the residents of Anatolia faced formidable challenges that cast a dark shadow over the region. Central Anatolia grappled with a significant loss of sustenance, plunging its inhabitants into the harsh realities of starvation and sickness. By the end of 1874, the exact total of fatalities remained indeterminate, but it is estimated that it reached to a staggering count of 150,000.¹¹ According to estimates, over 100,000 cattle used for livestock purposes and commerce, died during the aforementioned winter season. The suffering extended beyond as the people experienced significant hardships due to a substantial decrease in the number of sheep and goats, which declined from 2,000,000 to around 500,000. The agricultural produce suffered extensive harm and perished due to the prevalence of illnesses among the farm animals. According to the report, the onset of the famine was initially felt in isolated villages with minimal food stockpiles.¹²

Nevertheless, those mentioned villages were effectively isolated from adjacent settlements due to an exceedingly formidable snow barrier, rendering them unable to surmount this obstacle due to their lack of resources and capabilities. Given the topographical circumstances prevalent in Central Anatolia, particularly the severe winters experienced during the period of 1873–74, it is not surprising that isolated villages were geographically disconnected from one another and were effectively separated from external connections. During November and December, there was a substantial rainfall, characterized by torrential downpours. Similarly, there was a persistent and uninterrupted snowfall, in the subsequent months of January and February. Ankara, which experienced significant hardships during the winter and faced an influx of refugees, was initially believed to be the disaster’s epicenter. However, as transportation routes were gradually restored and communication with adjacent regions started over, it became evident that Ankara had fared

And Civilization, 2012); Mehmet Yavuz Erler, *Osmanlı Devleti’nde Kuraklık Ve Kıtık Olayları (1800-1880)* (İstanbul, Libra Yayınları, 2010); Ayşegül Kuş, “Tozer’in Turkish Armenia and Eastern Asia Minor Adlı Yapıtında Yozgat ve Çevresinde Yaşanan Kıtığın (1873-1875) Doğal ve Sosyo-Ekonomik Nedenleri,” *OTAM*, 44 (Güz 2018): 107-132.

¹¹ *Report of the Public Meeting in Aid of the Asia Minor Famine Relief Fund. Willis’s Rooms*, June 24th 1875, 9.

¹² *Report of the Public Meeting in Aid of the Asia Minor Famine Relief Fund*, 9.

relatively well compared to the surrounding villages and towns, which were greatly impacted.¹³ These conditions, along with the lack of financial resources, hindered their ability to purchase food inside urban areas, and even if food was available for purchase, logistical challenges prevented its distribution to distant villages. The peasants were subjected to a state of deprivation leading to severe starvation.¹⁴ Efforts to deliver assistance to the affected region from domestic and international sources faced immense challenges due to the prevailing circumstances.¹⁵

Given that the famine in central Anatolia impacted a population that was initially solely capable of meeting its own needs, all levels of society experienced it profoundly. The famine had an almost equal impact on both the affluent and impoverished individuals in the area due to the lack of food. Undoubtedly, wealthier individuals had the resources to combat starvation for a longer duration. However, in 1874 and 1875, even wealthy households could not to manage the famine. Once rich in agricultural value, Anatolia faced a year-long period of famine, pushing farmers to the brink of desperation. These dire circumstances resulted in the fragmentation of social structures, increased mortality rates, population migration to metropolitan areas, and a notable rise in incidents of theft. The echoes of this tragic period in Anatolian history reverberate as a somber reminder of the profound human cost of famine and the challenges faced by communities in the face of natural disasters. The children were severely affected by the famine, experiencing death, abandonment, exploitation, forced labour, or migration to other areas.

2. Effects of famine on children

Food scarcity as a consequence of crop failures and financial difficulties led to a pervasive state of undernourishment and, in extreme instances, famine. Although the government made admirable efforts in urban areas, they did not reach many villages and small towns in Central Anatolia. Consequently, residents in these areas continued to face the dire consequences of inadequate access to sustenance, resulting in the loss of life due to the unavailability of bread. Additionally, the report highlights that inadequate nutrition and incorrect dietary practices were contributing to the occurrence of illnesses among children.¹⁶ In the southern regions of Central Anatolia, entire villages were witnessing a significant decline in population due to an influx of individuals suffering from severe malnutrition and deprivation. Malnutrition had a significantly detrimental impact on children, making them more susceptible to developmental problems and diseases. Amidst a period of extreme hunger, multiple individuals highlighted the consumption of meat from deceased animals and the ingestion of unsuitable food, which had detrimental effects on children's health. According to a report published on April 23 in the *Levant Herald*, a severe scarcity of food forced people into desperate measures, including the consumption of cottonseed. The distressing details outlined in the

¹³ *Report of the Public Meeting in Aid of the Asia Minor Famine Relief Fund*, 18.

¹⁴ *The Famine in Asia Minor: Its History, Compiled from the Pages of the "Levant Herald"* published in 1875, presents significant insights into the famine that occurred between the years 1873–75. The first pages of the source provide details on the manner and individuals responsible for accessing the information. Consequently, those residing in the regions where these events occurred, with extensive knowledge of the local languages and traditions, diligently documented the occurrences on a daily basis. Moreover, their ability to comprehend and analyze the unfolding circumstances enabled them to provide insightful observations. Subsequently, the veracity of each story provided by these sources was corroborated. According to the report, information on the famine and its profound consequences, which impacted the Central Anatolia area throughout the winter season, purportedly reached Istanbul in early April. *The Famine in Asia-Minor: Its History, Compiled from the Pages of the "Levant Herald"* (Constantinople, 1875), p. VI-VII.

¹⁵ *Report of the Public Meeting in Aid of the Asia Minor Famine Relief Fund*, 17.

¹⁶ *The Famine in Asia-Minor: Its History, Compiled from the Pages of the "Levant Herald"*, 65.

article recounted the plight of a destitute family grappling with extreme hunger. In their desperation, the family resorted to pulverizing peeled Indian corn cobs into a fine powder and using it to produce bread for their children. As the report documented, the use of this bread resulted in the unfortunate demise of children due to the development of digestive ailments, presumably due to its unsuitability as a food source for growing individuals.¹⁷ An identical incident is documented in another report, which indicates that a poor mother resorted to grinding waste maize cobs or stalks into a cake-like substance in order to feed her children due to her desperate circumstances. The children who consumed it promptly developed serious intestinal illnesses and succumbed.¹⁸

Comparable records can be found inside the Ottoman archives. According to the report from April 1874, due to the scarcity of food resources, the local population resorted to combining grape seeds, the roots of the grass species known as ayırık, and several other available plants. These ingredients were then subjected to grinding using a manual milling apparatus in an attempt to transform them into consumable food.¹⁹ The report of the Public Meeting in Aid of the Asia Minor Relief Fund underlines a similar incident. In the face of the crisis, women and children ascended the mountainous areas that were previously used as grazing lands for sheep and goats. They went on to gather their daily yield, subsequently engaging in the process of mixing the harvested produce into dough. Additionally, they included a measure of coarse flour to facilitate the bread creation. This exemplifies the repercussions of the calamity on the female and child populations.²⁰

Through the famine in Central Anatolia, contemporary sources indicate that certain individuals, including children, turned to consuming unconventional and desperate sources of nourishment, such as animal carcasses. In exceptionally dire situations, there was a possibility that they even resorted to cannibalism. The consumption of carcass animal meat as a means of survival during periods of severe food shortages was an extreme and morally reprehensible survival tactic, as evidenced by primary sources. According to the report of Miralay Ahmed Hilmi Bey on April 1874, in a state of desperation, a girl of eleven years of age was witnessed consuming the remains of a deceased donkey inside a hamlet situated in the Keskin District, located between Ankara and Yozgad.²¹

Cases of cannibalism frequently arose from extreme desperation, as individuals and societies confronted the impending peril of death caused by severe hunger. According to the letter sent to the mother of the Sultan the dire conditions of the regions and cases of cannibalism are described as follows:

The prevailing atmosphere of despair and gloom in our region is progressively intensifying, with our society relying on the remains of deceased animals for sustenance. The absence of livestock has resulted in a significant loss of human life. Certain individuals exhibit the boldness to slaughter their children, while on a daily basis, over two hundred families engage in the relocation of their children to other regions. In the vicinity of the bakeries, a considerable number of brides, exceeding three hundred, patiently await the arrival of nightfall while cradling their infants in their arms. Regrettably, a portion of these distressed individuals resort to an act of desperation, relinquishing their breast-fed children by discarding them into the doorway of the nearby mosque. In the event that a favorable

¹⁷ *The Famine in Asia-Minor: Its History, Compiled from the Pages of the "Levant Herald"*, 5.

¹⁸ Report of the Public Meeting in Aid of the Asia Minor Famine Relief Fund, 18.

¹⁹ Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA.), *A.MKT.UM.*, 1330/29, 1.

²⁰ *Report of the Public Meeting in Aid of the Asia Minor Famine Relief Fund*, 25.

²¹ BOA, *A.MKT.UM.*, 1330/29, 1.

outcome does not materialize on this occasion, we will reach a juncture when individuals may resort to cannibalistic behavior.²²

Due to the famine, there was a deep sense of hopelessness, and families faced an extreme food shortage, making it difficult to provide for all members, even children. According to a May 6 report, it can be seen that the Turkish population had the highest degree of impact as a result of the famine occurring in Central Anatolia, as it was reported that a daily average of four to five individuals of Turkish descent succumbed to malnutrition.²³ The Ottoman administrators also made record of the appalling conditions witnessed among children, characterized by starvation and misery, prevalent on the streets. Governor Raşid Naşid Pasha of Kastamonu visited the Çankırı area to get an explicit knowledge of the severity of the situation. During his visit, he witnessed a substantial number of orphaned individuals who were homeless, without basic necessities such as food, clothing, and protection. The governor demonstrated an awareness of the imperative need to implement appropriate steps for the safety of these children, recognizing the need for financial assistance to facilitate the provision of clothing and transportation to their respective families. To address these issues, the sum of 7,500 kurus, as requested by the governor, was sent to the governor.²⁴

A significant number of children were also reported to be on the verge of entering the winter season without clothing, having previously sold their clothing and left their homes. The phrase *naked* is not hyperbolic; multiple sources depict individuals, particularly children, aimlessly roaming without clothing, beseeching for assistance, crying, and begging, lying on the streets, moaning and perishing, filling the urban areas.²⁵ The state donated the uniforms of the newly organized Redif soldiers, as well as the uncollected clothing of the old soldiers, to the public in various locations, including Ankara, Yozgat, and Kayseri.²⁶ Similar incidents were observed in Ankara when tens of women left their children in the front yards of the mosques in Beypazarı, Ankara, and hungry and sick children and women wondered around with crying faces in the streets and bazaars in Ankara.²⁷

3. Migration and Its Consequences on Children

Mass migration and its associated challenges emerged as another consequence of the famine. The outbreak of famine prompted large-scale migrations as individuals sought sustenance and essential supplies. During this process, certain individuals participated in activities that caused disturbances to public order, primarily due to the limitations and constraints present in the region.

²² Valide Sultan Aliyyetü'ş-Şan Efendimiz Hazretleri'ne,

Duçar olduğumuz ihtiyacattan bahisle takdim kılınan telgraf-namemiz üzerine Yozgat Mutasarrıflığıyla kaymakamlığıımıza vukubulan fermanınıza binaen vakt-i hasada kadar ma'a nahiye-yi Boğazlıyan Kazası mekulât ve mezruatları miktarı mercimiz mutasarrıflığına kaymakamlıktan ba-telgraf beyan mucibi arz olunmuş ise de irade-i cevabiyesine henüz muvaffak olunamayıp hal-i hüzn-ü iştilimiz gün be gün artmakta ve hayvanat-ı saire lâşeleriyle geçinmekte isek de bi-hikmetullah hayvanat kalmayarak haylice nüfus telef olmakta ve bazı kesan evlatlarını kesmek gibi hâlâta cüretle beher gün iki yüz haneyi müteceviz evlatlarını arkasıyla diyar-ı ahire nakl etmek ve fırınlar önünde üç yüzü müteceviz gelin kız memede bulunan çocukları kucağında gecelere kadar bekleyub yine ekme alamayarak meyusen avdet ve bazıları memede olan çocuklarını cami kapısına atmakta olduklarından eğerçi bu defa da bir semeresi zuhur etmez ise artık birbirlerimizi yemek derecesine geleceğimizden bu kere de müselle-i alem olan merhamet ve şefkat-i fehimanelerine ilticaen tasdi ederiz ferman fi 10 Nisan sene 90 [22 Nisan 1874]

Vekil-i Ahali-yi Kaza-yı Boğazlıyan Veli Hafız Ahmed Ohan. BOA, *A.MKT.UM.*, 1322/17, 4.

²³ *The Famine in Asia-Minor: Its History, Compiled from the Pages of the "Levant Herald"*, 14.

²⁴ BOA, *A.d.*, nr. 856, md. 280.

²⁵ Bayar, "1873-1875 Orta Anadolu Kıtlığı", 90.

²⁶ BOA, *A.d.*, nr. 967, s. 31, md. 177.

²⁷ Bayar, "1873-1875 Orta Anadolu Kıtlığı", 80.

The occurrence of road obstruction, theft, injury, homicide, and plundering escalated during this course of events.²⁸ During a time when individuals were grappling with famine and insurmountable challenges, the decline in public order served as an additional catalyst for mass migration. Under these circumstances, numerous children were abandoned or deserted to perish on the streets. Hülâsatü'l-Efkâr Gazette reports that families abandoned their children as they migrated to other places, resulting in the deaths of numerous children due to malnutrition during the famine.²⁹ According to the report touching upon a similar instance submitted in June by Rev. Mr. Farnsworth, several villages in the vicinity of Aksaray, Yozgat, and Kayseri were subject to evacuation, with the discovery of deceased individuals in some village streets. The discovery of three deceased children, with the eldest being 10 years of age, inside a room located at Nefesköy, a location around five hours far from Yozgat, was highlighted. The children were likely abandoned by their families due to the need for migration. Based on the report, there were no witnesses to the last moments of the children's suffering, and efforts to locate their respective families for the purpose of arranging a proper burial were unsuccessful.³⁰

The children who did not stay behind had to adapt themselves to the challenging circumstances of their journey. Otherwise, they would be left behind during their expeditions. The news article titled *Letter from Kırşehir in the province of Ankara* published in the Basiret newspaper on May 29, 1290, narrates the tale of a family compelled to migrate with their children as a result of a severe famine. According to the news source, the family initiates their migration down the Kızılırmak River. Feeling famished and fatigued, the family takes a break at the Kızılırmak to recuperate for a brief period. Upon witnessing the infant's incessant and unending wailing, the father makes the decision to throw the child into the river. In this manner, the child would not impede their progress. The mother concurs with her husband to cast the child into the river, and proceeded with their journey. During their journey, they encountered another family with a child, and they informed them about the circumstances. However, the family firmly informed them that the situation was not feasible and that they had no intention of separating from their child.³¹

If children did not remain behind and instead migrated alongside their families, they were obliged to support their parents throughout the entirety of the journey and its aftermath. The migration to urban areas posed numerous challenges, as families and individuals faced difficulties in adapting to urban environments, including housing, employment, and social integration problems. The phenomenon of migration resulted in a disruption of conventional support structures, such as extended family and community networks. In light of these conditions, children were compelled to engage in begging as a means of subsistence, particularly when their families faced challenges in acquiring the necessary resources. In his epistolary collection entitled *İstanbul Mektupları*, written between the years 1871 and 1878, Basiretçi Ali Efendi sheds light on the circumstances behind the migration of Anatolian individuals to Istanbul as a consequence of starvation. Due to the Anatolian famine, many women whose men were in Istanbul took their sons and daughters and came to Dersaadet. Despite the government's allocation and provision of housing, sustenance, and other

²⁸ Erler, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Kuraklık Ve Kıtık Olayları (1800-1880)*, 171-173.

²⁹ *Hülâsatü'l-Efkâr Gazetesi*, s.84, (20 Rebî'ü'l-evvel 1291/25 Nisan 1290.) s.1.

³⁰ *The Famine in Asia-Minor: Its History, Compiled from the Pages of the "Levant Herald"*, 56.

³¹ *Basiret Gazetesi*, s. 1253, (29 Mayıs 1290), 2.

resources, they let their children roam the streets and engage in begging acts.³² In addition, they had to endure the hunger and suffering associated with the migration process. According to a report dated June 5, children assisted their families who had to migrate due to food scarcity. Based on the report, a female person and a child embarked on a migration towards Elbistan while carrying their beds on their backs. According to a correspondence originating from the Talas neighborhood on June 3rd, it was reported that a woman arrived at the buildings in a state of extreme debilitation, to the extent that her death seemed imminent inside the confines of the courtyard. However, subsequent consumption of tea and soup served to restore her strength, as seen by her emergence from the premises around thirty minutes later. Furthermore, it was observed that, subsequent to receiving a monetary contribution, she was observed in the vicinity of the entrance. The woman was accompanied by her two offspring, while an additional three children under her care were experiencing hunger inside the urban area. The individual said that they had abstained from consuming bread for a duration of two consecutive days.³³

Individuals frequently resort to selling their possessions to cope with financial difficulties and acquire the necessary resources for survival in the places they migrate. This could be viewed as a survival strategy, fueled by immediate necessities. In order to sell off their assets, they were compelled to migrate to more populous urban centres. Miralay Ahmed Hilmi Bey's report indicates that to facilitate the sale of their wooden products, the individuals carried their children on their backs while traversing cities in a state of need, without footwear and sustenance. The individuals purchased a small quantity of wheat or barley using the proceeds from their sales, endeavoring to fulfill their immediate need for a limited duration. Nevertheless, it was noted that these individuals were unable to return to their respective towns because they were experiencing hunger. Consequently, they remained inside the towns and, in such a condition, resorted to approaching unfamiliar households, where they would request sustenance.³⁴ Nevertheless, these measures yielded enduring repercussions, potentially intensifying destitution and complicating the process of recuperation once the famine was abated.

Several young girls affected by the famine were either brought or sent to Istanbul with the purpose of being placed in domestic service. In 1840, a comparable phenomenon of migration and work practices took place in response to the famine that afflicted Central Anatolia. During the 1870s, there was a notable surge in the influx of young females who migrated or were relocated to Istanbul with the purpose of engaging in domestic labor.³⁵ From the period of November 10 to November 17, 1874, among the persisting hunger and its profound repercussions, it was seen that four girls hailing from Çankırı were temporarily lent to Istanbul residents by their fathers and brothers, who were employed in Istanbul but stationed at different work establishments. On November 10, Osman Aga, a resident of Eski İplikhane in Eyüp, lent his seven-year-old daughter Hatice to someone. Similarly, on November 16, Hamal Mehmed Aga, who resided on the upper floor of a shop near the Fish Market, lent out his daughters Naime, aged eight, and Zeliha, aged seven, to someone. Additionally, Mahmud Aga, who resided at a candy store in Mahmudpaşa, lent his sister Ayşe to

³² Basiretçi Ali Efendi, *İstanbul Mektupları*, haz. Nuri Sağlam (İstanbul, Erdem Kita Yayınları, 2017), 318.

³³ *The Famine in Asia-Minor: Its History, Compiled from the Pages of the "Levant Herald"*, 51.

³⁴ BOA, *A.MKT.UM.*, 1330/29, 1."

³⁵ İrfan Kökdaş ve Yahya Araz, "İstanbul'da Ev Hizmetlerinde İstihdam Edilen Kuzeybatı Anadolu Kız Çocuklarının Göç Ağları Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme (1845-1911)," *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi* XXXIII no:1 (2018): 46.

the residents of Istanbul on November 17.³⁶ The process of lent children to affluent families was mainly recorded at the kadi's office, and the service duration of children was restricted to reaching adulthood.

4. Commodification of Children

In times of extreme desperation, parents were compelled to make difficult choices to safeguarding the lives of their remaining family members. A scarcity of resources and food afflicted Central Anatolia between 1873 and 1875, thereby impeding parents' ability to provide for and care for their children. Consequently, there were instances of children being sold or exchanged for basic necessities in Central Anatolia during this time.

Based on a report pertaining to Sivrihisar, the inhabitants of this region, who had endured significant adversities and distress during the occurrence of famine in 1874, were confronted with considerable challenges during the winter season in 1875. The individuals who endeavoured to sustain themselves by selling all their assets in the previous year found themselves devoid of any remaining items to sell in the current year. Based on the report, during the midst of the previous winter, it was purported those individuals belonging to lower socioeconomic strata purportedly engaged in the practice of exchanging their children, aged between ten and fourteen, with more affluent individuals for a modest amount, as a means to avert the dire consequences of starvation.³⁷ Basiret Newspaper provides another example of such an incident. According to a news report from Basiret in 1874, two girls, one perhaps five or six years old and the other two to three years old, were reportedly sold. It was known that these children were the children of a woman named Meryem from Yahşihan, located in Central Anatolia, and due to her dire circumstances, she had to sell two of them for forty kuruş. Upon acknowledging that the children were promptly handed over and transferred to the stated mother, it was decided that they would permanently remain with her for the duration of their lives.³⁸

In the Keskin region, distressingly, it was reported that some of these poor people resorted to the desperate measure of selling their children for sustenance in the form of bread.³⁹ According to Mr. Whitaker, who purports to possess information about these instances, the children involved in these cases exhibited an age range spanning from nine to fourteen years old and were reportedly sold at varying costs. As the famine persisted, it gradually engulfed people initially enjoying a relatively comfortable socioeconomic status. Consequently, those who had acquired children found themselves unable to sustain their support for these individuals and subsequently engaged in negotiations with their families to facilitate their return. However, the parents, whose emotional

³⁶ Kökdaş ve Araz., "İstanbul'da Ev Hizmetlerinde İstihdam Edilen Kuzeybatı Anadolu Kız Çocuklarının Göç Ağları Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme (1845-1911)": 51.

³⁷ *The Famine in Asia-Minor: Its History, Compiled from the Pages of the "Levant Herald,"* 114.

³⁸ *Basiret Gazetesi*, s. 1284 (16 Cemâziye'l-âhir 1291), 3.

³⁹ The phenomenon under examination reveals that children were regarded as commodities. Similar instances of such treatment can be observed in the Ottoman Balkans during the 17th and 18th centuries. Eugenia Kermeli's extensive research into the Ottoman court records of Crete throughout the 17th and 18th centuries reveals a prevailing practice of treating children as commodities. In numerous instances, parents relinquished their underage children as a means of repayment for their outstanding obligations. After settling their outstanding debts, families were able to reclaim their children. Kermeli has been credited with the establishment of no fewer than 15 legal instances pertaining to the aforementioned matter, as documented in the court archives of Crete throughout the period spanning from 1654 to 1659. Eugenia Kermeli, "Children Treated As Commodity in Ottoman Crete," *the Ottoman Empire: Myths, Realities and 'Black Holes'*, editörler Eugenia Kermeli and Oktay Özel (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2006), 271.

resilience had been diminished by the famine or who were unable to provide adequate care, were compelled to decline the responsibility of reclaiming their children.

Consequently, the children were left unsupervised and subsequently met their demise on the streets. A minority of children were entrusted to American missionaries and subsequently received their education in American educational institutions. However, it is important to note that this represents an insignificant percentage of the population.⁴⁰ The low rate could be attributed to the Ottoman administration's attitude towards the missionaries. The state's inability to provide adequate care for children who had lost their parents or were abandoned on the streets presented an opportunity for missionaries to fulfill their desired role. The missionaries or Christians who conducted thorough observations of the regional circumstances and endeavoured to address the issue expressed a desire to either adopt some of these children or provide them with education at their educational institutions. Nevertheless, the Ottoman bureaucracy demonstrated a reluctance to facilitate the education or adoption of these children by missionaries.

In the given circumstances, individuals experiencing hunger and a lack of clothing expressed a desire to relinquish their boys and girls for adoption or abandon them to other families within the community. The report indicates that even affluent households declined to receive children as the famine had an impact on middle- and upper-class households during 1875, which forced the families who had previously purchased children for their own labour to abandon them due to their inability to provide sustenance.⁴¹ Consequently, there was a notable rise in the population of unaccompanied minors residing on the streets, either due to parental demise or abandonment, with a dearth of readily available caretakers for their welfare. The individuals were compelled to undertake migration to alternative geographical areas; nevertheless, a significant proportion of them perished during their journey.⁴²

The point that needs to be underlined is the act of selling children during times of famine or similar extraordinary events witnessed in other areas during the same period. During the occurrence of famine in Mainpuri in 1837, Uttar Pradesh, India, it was seen that parents resorted to selling their daughters for a nominal sum of rupees. In response, the local police took a passive approach by only advising parents to exercise care while dealing with women of disrepute, who were known to exploit the situation by further selling these girls into prostitution.⁴³ Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley makes reference to three commonly used expressions pertaining to the commodification of children and cannibalism that are frequently found in the descriptions provided by gazetteers during the period of the North China Famine from 1876 to 1878. These phrases include the notion of individuals consuming one another, the act of exchanging children and subsequently consuming them, as well

⁴⁰ *Report of the Public Meeting in Aid of the Asia Minor Famine Relief Fund*, 21-22.

⁴¹ *The Famine in Asia-Minor: Its History, Compiled from the Pages of the "Levant Herald"*, 114.

⁴² Ahali-yi merkumûnun derun u birunları girdab-ı hayrete düşerek ne edip ve ne yapacaklarını şaşırıp def-i ihtiyacat galesinin başlarından aşırıp esvablarına varıncaya kadar satıp savmış ve açık çıplak kalmış olduklarından telef olmakdan ise çaresiz kalanlar sagir ve sagire nüfus-u zükür ve inaslarını omuzlarına bil-tahmil evlatlığa kabulünü ve meccanen terkinî şuna buna arz eylemekte iseler de herkesin müzayakaları meydanda olduğundan çocuklarının evlatlığa kimse tarafından kabul eden bulunmadığı cihetle cer-i nafaka için dağılmakta bulunanların dahi açıklıktan zaafiyetle emare-yi murîş nasiyelerinde zahir olduğundan yola düşüp açlıktan yollarda vefat edenleri vuku bulduğu reyü'l-ayn müşahede olunmuştur. 13 Nisan, 90 (Nisan 1874). BOA, *A.MKT.UM.*, 1330/29, 1.

⁴³ Cormac Ó Gráda, *Eating People Is Wrong, and Other Essays on Famine, Its Past, and Its Future* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 2-3.

as variations of the idea that people resorted to cannibalism to such an extent that even close relatives were driven to destroy one another.⁴⁴

Children not only faced the challenges of famine but also became vulnerable to dangers from external sources and individuals. As per Seyyah Derviş's report, certain threats originated from local authorities. Reports indicated that some local administrators perpetrated acts of child abuse during the famine. According to the lahiya written on the attitudes of local authorities in the region by Seyyah Derviş, it is stated that initially, the district governors and directors were required to seek approval from Director Cemil Bey before being assigned to their respective provinces. Secondly, it is widely recognized in the bazaar and market that the director, Cemil Bey, has outstanding debts and obligations exceeding thirty thousand kurus from the Reformatory. The officials of the Reformatory have not received their wages for a period of four months. Another transgression has occurred involving the aforementioned director, who belongs to a nefarious group of individuals. In an attempt to perpetrate a criminal act against one of the children at the Reformatory, the director was intercepted by the sergeants, who promptly intervened. They provided a comprehensive account of the incident and reported it to His Excellency, Governor Pasha. Nevertheless, they were disregarded. They also sought the assistance of an individual from the organization and various other locations. It was noted that they derived no advantage from their actions and were subsequently expelled and dismissed from the reformatory through deception. As a result, they found themselves roaming the streets without any financial resources. No one has the ability to avert this situation, which is notorious for the involvement of Abdurrahman Vali Pasha, who continues to serve as a subordinate to his Holiness with the intention of enticing intelligent children from the Rushdiye Mektebi through financial incentives and guiding them towards a negative trajectory. Numerous local authorities refrained from speaking during this procedure.⁴⁵

The incident was sent to the Şura-yı Devlet to commence an inquiry.⁴⁶ A document found regarding one of the accusations made to Mehmet Salim Bey in the Şura-yı Devlet revealed that Abdullah Derviş Bey had engaged in an act of injustice concerning the income generated from waqf land. This offense was among the allegations made against him in the aforementioned document. Nevertheless, there is a lack of substantiating evidence about a trial pertaining to the allegation of

⁴⁴ Gráda, *Eating People Is Wrong, and Other Essays on Famine, Its Past, and Its Future*, 15; Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley, "Tough Choices: Grappling with Famine in Qing China, the British Empire, and Beyond", *Journal of World History*, 24, no: 1 (March 2013): 135-176.

⁴⁵ Mumaileyhimin vasıtalarıyla vukubulan fenalığın birincisi kazalara tayin olunacak kaymakam ve müdürler mumaileyh Cemil Bey'e müracaat etmeksizin bir yere tayin olunmak ihtimali yok ikincisi mumaileyh Cemil Bey'in Islahhane'den otuz bin kuruşu müteceviz deyni ve zimmeti olduğu çarşı ve pazarda mütevattır Islahhane memurlarına dört mahdır para verilmemiş bundan başka bir fenalık daha var müdür-i mumaileyh gayet esfeh ve fasık güruhundan olup Islahhane şakirdanından bir çocuğa cebren fiil-i şenii etmeğe uğraşır iken çavuşlar işi haber alıp der-akab kurtarıp vukuu-i hali ber-tafsil hikâye ederek Devletli Vali Paşa hazretlerine beyan etmişler ise de asla sem' ve itibar olunmadığından bir de vücuhdan bir kimseye ve başka yerlere başka müracaat etmişler anlardan dahi bir faide göremediklerinden başka kendilerini birer desise ile Islahhane'den tard ve teb'id olunup sokaklarda bir parasız sürünmekte oldukları müşahede olundu Rüşdiye Mektebi'nden dahi para kuvvetiyle yüzü parlak çocukları ayardub fena yola sevk etmekte hâlâ birinin ismi Abdurrahman Vali Paşa hazretlerine sakilik ettiği meşhur bu hale mani olacak kimse yok Faziletli Hâkim Efendi hazretleri diğer hal ile meşgul ve sükûtu olub asla müdafaaya iktidarı yok Saadetli Defterdar Efendi hazretlerinin mahdumunu Sinob'a tahrirat müdürü etmişler anın dahi olvechle sükut etmesi lazım geliyor Divan Reisi Faziletli Efendi fazıl bir zat ise de yeni geldiği münasebetle şakk-i şefe etmiyor imiş BOA. ŞD., 2883/23, 2.(04.08.1292).

⁴⁶ BOA. ŞD., 3212/27, 4.

child abuse, its detection, investigation, and subsequent acquittal.⁴⁷ This hinders us from forming a conclusive assessment of the occurrence of this incident.

5. State Responses to the Famine

The state implemented several measures in 1873, including: a) refraining from calling up the redif soldiers who were required to be recruited, b) transporting approximately 200 tons of flour weekly from Istanbul to Ankara through the Izmit Port, and shipping cereals to Ankara from Sivas, Kütahya, and Afyon, c) allocating funds to Ankara, Amasya, and Çankırı for the purchase of cereals, which would be repaid, d) prohibiting the export of cereals, e) assigning civil servants to collect taxes instead of mültezims, as the latter would exert pressure on the people, f) imposing exceptional punishment on local dignitaries who engaged in speculation following the incident in Yozgat, as a precedent, g) finding numerous local administrators guilty and dismissing them, h) exempting grains sent to the famine-stricken region from domestic customs.⁴⁸

During the post-April era, the central government implemented a range of actions to address the issue of starvation. The primary measures of significance were the allocation of food and grain assistance to Central Anatolia arriving from Diyarbakır, Erzincan, Malatya, and adjacent areas; the dispatch of flour from Istanbul to the aforementioned region; and the granting of tax exemptions for imported commodities arriving via the ports of Gemlik and Bursa.⁴⁹ According to Miralay Ahmed Hilmi Bey's report on April 18, 1874, the transportation of agricultural commodities from the regions of Sivas, Harput, Elbistan, and Malatya was deemed essential. Consequently, fulfilling the populace's demands inside the given area would be somewhat achieved, thereby mitigating the likelihood of migration to alternative places.⁵⁰

In 1874, the Ottoman government provided funding to assist the famine-stricken population in accordance with government directives, utilizing established entities such as the Municipality Fund (Belediye Sandığı), Safety Fund (Emniyet Sandığı), Benefit Fund (Menafi Sandığı), and Property Fund (Mal Sandığı) within the administrative framework. During periods of inadequate local administration in the drought-stricken area, the government assessed the requirements of the region and regulated the distribution of essential assistance through institutions such as commissions, inspection teams, and inquiry committees created in Istanbul, namely Investigation Commissions (Tahkikat Komisyonu), Famine-affected Relief Commission (Iane-i Musabin Komisyonu), Grain Distribution Commission (Zahire Dağıtım Komisyonu), and Inspection Committees (Teftiş Heyetleri).⁵¹ These commissions enhanced the organization and efficacy of state-provided help.

Another endeavour of the government in 1874 was the implementation of an effort known as sadaka-i padişahi, whereby provisions of food and bread were allocated to support children whom their family had abandoned.⁵² However, some Ottoman bureaucrats indicate that this issue could not be resolved solely by providing children and young individuals with food and monetary resources. Specifically, there was a belief that providing irregular and excessive assistance would

⁴⁷ BOA. ŞD., 1643/6.

⁴⁸ Bayar, "1873-1875 Orta Anadolu Kıtılgı", 69; BOA, A.MKT.UM., 1320/24.

⁴⁹ *The Famine in Asia-Minor: Its History, Compiled from the Pages of the "Levant Herald"*, 8-9.

⁵⁰ BOA, A.MKT.UM., 1330/29, 1; BOA, A.d., nr. 856, md. 255, 259.

⁵¹ Erler, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Kuraklık ve Kıtık Olayları (1800-1880)*, 338-348.

⁵² BOA, A.MKT.UM., 1326/5.

divert families from engaging in productive work. In the 19th century, the state implemented the policy of adding children from poor families and orphans to the labour force. It was not exclusively a policy formed by bureaucrats since Ottoman intellectuals agreed upon the idea of directing poor children and orphans to be labourers in institutions and receive apprenticeship education to add them to the labour force.⁵³ China, which also experienced famine during the same years, had similar discussions. According to the North China Herald, the Chinese government dispersed aid mostly in the cities rather than in the famine-stricken countryside. The individuals, who were educated to engage in work for their livelihood, were transformed into vagrants. They congregated in significant numbers among the prominent epicenters of criminal activity and public health concerns. The editors claim that the responsibility to provide lies with employment rather than with food.⁵⁴

The local authorities also demonstrated an awareness of the need to establish an institution dedicated to safeguarding and educating children as a means of addressing the prevailing issues. The Governor of Ankara expressed the need to establish a reformatory facility to cater to the welfare of the aforementioned neglected children. However, the acquisition of funds for the building of this facility proved to be unattainable. Based on the governor's observations, it was found that a portion of the children who experienced the loss of their families during the famine were placed under the care of the state, while others were entrusted to their relatives. Additionally, many of these children were apprenticed to diverse professionals, facilitating their acquisition of vocational skills, and enabling them to secure a livelihood. Notwithstanding the measures implemented by the government, a considerable number of children continued to live on the streets. The governor emphasized the urgency of establishing a reformatory, noting the potential inconvenience for children temporarily residing in cavalry and infantry barracks if they were to remain there for an extended duration. The requirements made by the governor were deemed reasonable by the committee; nonetheless, the commission faced financial constraints that hindered their ability to construct a reformatory facility. Due to this rationale, a total of 70,000 kurus was gathered throughout the province, with an additional nominal sum to be contributed by the commission. These funds were then allocated to the governor's office with the purpose of converting suitable urban structures into reformatories.⁵⁵

The residents of the region considered the state's endeavours inadequate and corresponded with different newspapers in order to raise awareness among urban dwellers in other areas and the government about their current situation and to secure further funding for the region.⁵⁶ An exemplary instance of this was the periodical *Basiret*. The journal extensively reported the hunger in Central Anatolia, emphasizing the importance of public, particularly wealthy people, contributing donations. Newspapers during that period provided lists of the needs required by the population in Central Anatolia.⁵⁷ Furthermore, some Ottoman officials who visited the region felt obliged to compose a report concerning the prevailing conditions in that area. Ahmed Hilmi Bey, who wrote a comprehensive report on the effects of the famine in Central Anatolia, states that: "On the eighth day of my departure from Dersaadet, I traveled to Ankara, and after three or four days, I continued

⁵³ Yahya Araz, *Osmanlı İstanbul'unda Çocuk Emeği: Ev İçi Hizmetlerinde İstihdam Edilen Çocuklar (1750-1920)* (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2020), 15.

⁵⁴ Tarpley, "Tough Choices: Grappling with Famine in Qing China, the British Empire, and Beyond": 140.

⁵⁵ BOA, *A.d.*, nr. 612, md. 889.

⁵⁶ *Hülâsatü'l-Efkâr Gazetesi*, s. 84, (20 Rebi'ü'l-ıstevvel 1291/25 Nisan 1290), 1-2.

⁵⁷ *Basiret Gazetesi*, s. 1528 (13 Rebiü'l-Ahir 1292), 1; *Basiret Gazetesi*, s. 1484 (21 Safer 1292), 3.

on to Yozgad, reaching my destination yesterday. After thoroughly examining and witnessing the grievances expressed by the residents of Yozgad and its surroundings, I feel compelled to submit a comprehensive report to the authorities upon my return to Dersaadet. This report will outline the specific issues that have been thoroughly investigated and scrutinized, and I will also express these findings verbally. Both Ankara and its environs are now experiencing this pattern, and assistance is urgently needed to find a solution.”⁵⁸

Despite the state’s efforts, the region continued to experience issues such as complaints, bribes, and black-market activities. Consequently, an investigation committee was dispatched to the area to investigate the grievances, ascertain the issues and requirements of the region, oversee the allocation of assistance, address the migration crisis, and identify potential agricultural production potential.⁵⁹ The archival sources do not imply or accuse any high-ranking administrators of neglecting the importance of combating starvation. However, these objections and charges were more relevant to district governors, districts’ rulers, and members of administrative councils. The inspector’s report, the articles in the *Levant Herald* and the observations of travellers were focused on the inability of the local authorities to take precautions and their lack of merit. According to the 1874 report criticizing the local administrators, the lack of essential necessities that the inhabitants were in dire need of resulted from the government’s lack of precaution. The severity of the famine can be ascertained through an evaluation of the sanjak’s population and the accessibility of commodities within its borders. Even in the fall season, since there was enough grain to sustain the population for more than a year, it should not have been lost to the hands of some mischief-makers, even though the prices were affordable at that time. The government should have acquired them and allocated them to the provinces. Meeting the need for bread would have prevented both damage to the treasury and disruption of public order. Consequently, a significant reduction in casualties would occur, and individuals would not be compelled to flee their own place.⁶⁰ Based on some of the findings of the inspectors sent by the Ottoman authorities to the area, an essential contributing factor to the terrible impact of the famine on the local population was attributed to the deficiency in competence shown by the regional administrators and civil workers. It has been asserted that the local administrators lacked the essential competence to implement the required steps in this situation.⁶¹

The remarks made by the traveler Derviş Abdullah on Çankırı are significant as they shed light on the profound impact of the famine experienced inside the city and the local authorities’ reaction to it. Upon his arrival at Çankırı, it was said that the mutasarrıf was consistently occupied with indulging in nightly eats and drinks, displaying a lack of concern for the impoverished populace and involvement in various transgressions. He stated that it is imperative to underscore the need for further inquiry into the mutasarrıf since the inhabitants of Çankırı were enduring a state of profound distress.⁶² Tozer, who traveled to the famine-affected areas, also suggested that the central government’s delay in implementing measures and providing assistance could be attributed to the local administrators’ failure to transmit the issue to the central government promptly.⁶³

⁵⁸ BOA, *A.MKT.UM.*, 1322/17, 3.

⁵⁹ BOA, *A.d.*, nr. 856, md. 255; For their report see: BOA, *A.d.*, nr. 856, md. 259.

⁶⁰ BOA, *A.MKT.UM.*, 1330/29, 1.)

⁶¹ BOA, *A.MKT.UM.*, 1330/29, 1.

⁶² BOA, *ŞD.*, 2883/23, 2.

⁶³ Kuş, “Tozer’in Turkish Armenia and Eastern Asia Minor Adlı Yapıtında Yozgat ve Çevresinde Yaşanan Kıtlığın (1873-1875) Doğal ve Sosyo-Ekonomik Nedenleri”: 126.

Conclusion

The children residing in the area under investigation in this research underwent a distinct form of upbringing due to the deplorable conditions precipitated by the famine. The primary sources emphasize that during the famine in Central Anatolia, insufficient nutrition and incorrect food habits were key factors leading to the high occurrence of diseases in children. The lack of food caused to their deaths, especially when fundamental goods such as bread were scarce. Contemporary documents indicate that certain people, especially children, turned to eating unusual and hazardous sources of food, like animal corpses. Furthermore, the famine caused countless families to migrate, abandoning many children. Children who traveled with their families were obligated to assist their parents during the entire arduous journey and its aftermath. They were coerced into begging in the regions they migrated to, subjected to abuse, or compelled to serve as domestic servants for other families. Lastly, there were recorded instances of children being sold or exchanged for vital commodities in Central Anatolia at that time. As a result, children faced both the effects of famine and were exposed to dangers from external sources and individuals.

Conflicts among influential factions of officials impeded the Ottoman state's capacity to address the famine promptly and efficiently. Significantly, these acrimonious disputes exemplify a breakdown of agreement over the appropriate framework for contextualizing a severe famine. Ottoman bureaucrats compiled reports outlining strategies to address the issues of famine-induced hunger and health problems. The reports primarily focused on determining the specific type of aid to be provided to the region, the source regions from which it should be obtained, the precise quantities required, the means of transportation to be used, and the optimal distribution locations. Nevertheless, the administrators failed to adequately address the means of rectifying the conditions and system that led to the famine, as well as the necessary measures to prevent future occurrences of a similar nature. In addition, the absence of a railroad in the area was a significant factor that greatly amplified the severity of the famine. Transporting sufficient goods during the famine proved to be very arduous and expensive, particularly in regions with rugged terrain. Investing in railroads might have simultaneously decreased transportation costs and minimized fatalities during immigration from the area.

The duties and encounters of children in the Central Anatolian region during the famine, and the concept of childhood held by the local inhabitants, diverge significantly from those residing in urban areas. Nevertheless, research on children and childhood has predominantly focused on analyzing and romanticizing the lives of children residing in urban areas and the prevailing social perspective of childhood in those regions. The children of the bureaucratic-theocratic ruling elite, who might be considered a homogeneous group, may have had comparable experiences, but these experiences were markedly distinct from those of children from poorer rural lower-class families. Regrettably, the primary sources, such as fatwas, ethics books, books of discipline, children's newspapers and magazines, textbooks, and laws and decrees containing legal regulations, predominantly focus on providing information about male children from the middle- and upper-class urban Muslim population. Given that the prevailing body of research on childhood during the Ottoman era relies heavily on these sources, it fails to offer insights into the experiences and perspectives of children residing in rural communities, lower-class urban households, and, notably, during times of crisis. This study is particularly significant in terms of documenting the lives of rural children during the famine, considered as extraordinary period. This is significant in illustrating the

extent to which the understanding of childhood transformed due to modernization, and how the notions of child and childhood influenced by modernization spread rural areas, particularly during the famine of 1873-1875.

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