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Yazar: Mustafa ÖKSÜZ\*

**On Altıncı Yüzyılda Gazze Sancağı'nda Gayrimüslim Nüfus**

**Özet:** Yavuz Sultan Selim'in 1516'daki Mercidabık zaferiyle Osmanlı hakimiyetine giren Gazze, dört asır boyunca mezkûr devlet tarafından idare edildi. Bu uzun döneminin ilk yüzyılında tutulan tahrir defterleri, Gazze Sancağı ve etrafında yaşam sürdüren halklar hakkında zengin bilgiler içermektedir. İlgili defterlere dayanarak başta azınlıklar olmak üzere bölge ahalisi hakkında bazı gözlem ve değerlendirmelerde bulunmak mümkündür. Osmanlı egemenliğinin ilk yüzyılı olan on altıncı asırda Müslümanlarla birlikte Hristiyanlar ve Yahudiler Gazze Sancağı'nın muhtelif yerlerinde hayatlarını sürdürmüşlerdir. Sancak bu haliyle üç dinin birlikte yaşadığı bir yer olma özelliğini taşımaktadır. Nitekim bu hususiyetini sadece adı geçen yüzyıl için değil sonraki dönemler için de korumuştur. Nüfus dağılım sıralamasında Müslümanların baskın unsur olduğu demografik yapının ikinci grubunu Hristiyanlar teşkil etmektedir. Yahudiler ise her zaman bu sıralamanın sonunda yer almıştır. Müslümanlar Hristiyanlar gibi hem şehirde hem de kırsal kesimde yerleşik hayat sürmeyi benimsemişlerdir. Yahudiler ise genelde kent merkezinde varlıklarını sürdürmüşlerdir. Gayrimüslim unsurun baskın kısmını oluşturan Hristiyan nüfusun hem sancaktaki yerel ahalinin göçüyle beslendiği hem de Kudüs ile Mısır'dan göç aldığı ve kendi içinde çoğu kez mezhep bazlı muhtelif alt cemaatlere bölündüğü görülmektedir. Gazze kent merkezinde Samiriler ve Rabbaniler olmak üzere iki alt cemaat halinde varlığını devam ettiren Yahudilerin ise mezhepsel bölünmüşlükleri kayıtlara yansımıştır. Bu makalede Osmanlı egemenliğinin ilk asrında Gazze'de yaşayan Hristiyan ve Yahudiler hakkında başta mufassal tahrir defterleri olmak üzere diğer arşiv kaynaklarına da müracaat edilerek genel bir değerlendirme yapılacaktır. Böylece günümüz dünyasının netameli konularından biri olan Filistin/Gazze meselesine tarihsel bir bakış açısı sağlanmaya çalışılacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Osmanlı Devleti, Gazze, Gayrimüslim, Hristiyan, Yahudi

**Non-Muslim Population in the Gaza Sanjak in the Sixteenth Century**

**Abstract:** The Gaza region, which came under Ottoman rule following the victory of Yavuz Sultan Selim at the Battle of Marj Dabiq in 1516, was administered by the Ottoman Empire for four centuries. The census books from the first century of this long period contain a wealth of information about the Gaza Sanjak and the people living around it. Based on these books, it is possible to make some observations and evaluations about the people of the region, especially the minorities. In the sixteenth century, the first century of Ottoman rule, Christians, Jews, and Muslims lived in various parts of the Gaza Sanjak. This state is notable for being a place where three religions coexist. This feature was not only preserved in the sixteenth century but also in the following periods. Christians constituted the second-largest demographic group, with Muslims forming the majority of the population. Jews were the third and last group in demographic terms. Muslims, like Christians, adopted a settled life both in urban and rural areas. Jews generally continued to reside in the city center. It is evident that the Christian population, which constituted the majority of the non-Muslim population, was sustained by the immigration of the local population in the sanjak and also received immigration from Jerusalem and Egypt. It was also divided into various and often sect-based sub-communities. The sectarian divisions of

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the Jews, who continued their existence in Gaza city center as two sub-communities, Samaritans and Rabbanites, were reflected in the records. This article will present a general evaluation of the Christians and Jews living in Gaza in the first century of Ottoman rule by consulting other archive sources, especially the detailed cadastral registers. In this article, we will endeavor to provide a historical perspective on the Palestine/Gaza issue, which is one of the most contentious issues in the contemporary world.

**Keywords:** Ottoman State, Gaza, Non-Muslim, Christian, Jew

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## Introduction

Prior to the Islamic conquest of Palestine, which included the Gaza region, the majority of the population there was Christian, with a Jewish minority. It is evident that both Christians and Jews experienced a multitude of demographic shifts following the establishment of Muslim rule. Concurrently, the advent of Islam as a new religion prompted adherents of the other two monotheistic faiths to convert to Islam. Consequently, this natural transformation, which occurred over centuries, had an impact on the demographic structure, changing the shape of the population and making Muslims the dominant element. Nevertheless, despite the significant number of conversions that occurred, there were also some Jewish and Christian communities that remained steadfast in their adherence to their ancestral religions and continued to observe their ancient traditions.<sup>1</sup>

Non-Muslim communities had the opportunity to dwell within Islamic society for centuries, despite changing rulers, through the *dhimma* covenant.<sup>2</sup> As long as there was no clear intervention from outside which could change the existing structure, they maintained their position in the society. This situation would last until the late nineteenth century, when an unforeseen change would begin to occur in the demographic structure of the region with the mass migration of Jews from abroad to Palestine. With this demographic change and the resulting establishment of Israel, the centuries-old fabric of the society since the Islamic conquest would be altered radically.

The objective of this article is to examine the historical process of the non-Muslim population residing in the district of Gaza following the

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the spread of Islam see Youssef Courbage and Philippe Fargues, *Christians and Jews under Islam*, trans. Judy Mabro (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), 1-28.

<sup>2</sup> A form of agreement between foreign residents and their host country, which is designed to facilitate long-term residence in an Islamic nation, is referred to as a *dhimma* covenant and the individual who enters into such an agreement is known as an *ahl al-dhimma*. For further details, see Eyyüp Said Kaya and Hasan Hacak, "Zimmet," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, accessed June 2, 2024, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/zimmet>.

establishment of Ottoman sovereignty, with particular reference to the Tahrir registers. In light of these findings, the objective of this study is to gain an understanding of the development and transformations of the minority groups formed by the Jews and Christians, as evidenced by the records of the sixteenth century.

### Sources and Method

The cadastral registers, also known as tahrirs, were conducted in areas where the feudal system, or timar, was in effect for the taxation of the population. Today, these household census-based registers are used to estimate the population. At least eight household censuses are known to have been conducted during the early years of Turkish rule. However, only five mufassal tahrir records, or district-level registers, from the Gaza district have survived until the present day. It should be noted that the tahrirs from the 40-year period between 964h/1557 and 1005h/1596-97 have not survived. The lack of tahrir records makes it difficult to conduct an overall and detailed analysis. However, in light of the existing registers, a general assessment of the situation may be undertaken.<sup>3</sup>

It is evident that, by their very nature, cadastral records do not resemble today's population records in a number of respects. Their primary objective was to ascertain the taxable population and the name of the head of the household responsible for taxation. Additionally, the records documented bachelors (mujarrad) who had reached the age of marriage but had not yet entered into matrimony or established a family unit. In the course of this research, the number five is selected for the study group, although there exists a divergence of opinions regarding the number of individuals that constitute a household unit. In order to create the requisite chart, the number of houses is multiplied by five, with the number of bachelors being added to this figure. This methodology aims to generate an understanding of the demographic profile of the population residing in the district. Despite their historical value, it is important to recognize that the data obtained from the tahrir registers is not without error. Their utility lies in helping realize the true demographic situation in the sixteenth century.

It is often challenging to discern the voices of children, women, and slaves, beside those of the free male population, from these sources. It is occasionally possible to obtain information regarding the medical practitioners, the visually impaired, the physically disabled, and the mentally ill individuals

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<sup>3</sup> For further information regarding the Tahrir registers, see Mustafa Öksüz, "Filistin'in On Altıncı Yüzyıldaki Nüfusuna Dair Kaynaklar: Mufassal Tahrir Defterleri," *SBARD* 14, 27 (2016): 253-264.

recorded in the source. Moreover, it can be observed that some prominent figures within the community, such as chamberlains, chieftains, or clergymen, had annotations or explanatory notes accompanying their names. Consequently, each entry in the land registers provides invaluable insight regarding the population size, demographic composition, and geographic distribution at a particular point in time.

### **Distribution of the Non-Muslim Population in the Gaza Sanjak**

The administrative unit of the sanjak comprised two urban settlements, one of which was designated as a city (Gaza) and the other a town (Ramla). The city of Gaza, situated within the nahiya of Gaza, constituted the most densely populated area in the sanjak, and it also had the highest proportion of non-Muslim residents. The nahiya of Ramla, which represented the second largest concentration of the sanjak's population, included the town of Ramla. The nahiya of Ramla as well was characterized by the coexistence of Christian and Muslim populations. The sanjak, as a whole, seems to have retained this distinctive feature of confessional diversity throughout the century.

DISTRICT	DATE	MUSLIMS		CHRISTIANS		JEWS	
		H <sup>4</sup>	M <sup>5</sup>	H	M	H	M
GAZA CITY	932h?/1525-26?	580	38	232	1	120	
	945h?/1538?	1355	203	242	29	113	
	955h/1548-49	1823	179	324	9	134	7
	964h/1557	1872	77	345		99	
	1005h/1596-97	746	140	302		81	
GAZA VILLAGES	932h?/1525-26?	2852	189	56			
	945h?/1538?	4126	306	84	12		
	955h/1548-49	6302	397	180	11		
	964h/1557	6860	113	150	16		
	1005h/1596-97	6439	135	164	2		
RAMLA TOWN	932h?/1525-26?	319	15	26			
	945h?/1538?	409	24	32	1		
	955h/1548-49	532	64	58	7		
	964h/1557	550	77	75			
	1005h/1596-97	213	23	81	1		

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<sup>4</sup> *hane*: Household

<sup>5</sup> *mujarrad*: Bachelor

RAMLA VILLAGES	932h?/1525-26?	971	101	129	11		
	945h?/1538?	1610	106	130	20		
	955h/1548-49	2330	100	248	12		
	964h/1557	2682	9	268			
	1005h/1596-97	2.427	39	245	11		
Number of Households/Single Persons in the Sanjak of Gaza (Sixteenth Century)							

Although most of the non-Muslim population of the Gaza sanjak was dispersed throughout its territory, they remained a minority in comparison to the total population. Historically, Christianity constituted the second-largest religious group of the Gaza sanjak under the Ottoman rule. The status held by the Christian community in the area traditionally differed from that held by the Jewish community. In contrast to the latter, Christians occupied a superior position within the non-Muslim hierarchy. Moreover, there was a discrepancy in settlement preferences between the two communities. The Christian population of the sanjak was dispersed throughout the region, while the Jewish population was concentrated in the city of Gaza.

DISTRICT	DATE	MUSLIMS	CHRISTIANS	JEWS
GAZA CITY	932h?/1525-26?	2938	1161	600
	945h?/1538?	6978	1239	565
	955h/1548-49	9294	1629	677
	964h/1557	9437	1725	495
	1005h/1596-97	3870	1510	405
GAZA VILLAGES	932h?/1525-26?	14449	280	
	945h?/1538?	20936	432	
	955h/1548-49	31907	911	
	964h/1557	34413	766	
	1005h/1596-97	32330	822	
RAMLA TOWN	932h?/1525-26?	1610	130	
	945h?/1538?	2069	161	
	955h/1548-49	2724	297	
	964h/1557	2872	375	
	1005h/1596-97	1088	406	
RAMLA VILLAGES	932h?/1525-26?	4956	656	
	945h?/1538?	8156	670	
	955h/1548-49	11750	1252	
	964h/1557	13419	1340	
	1005h/1596-97	12.174	1236	

Estimated Number of Population for the District of Gaza (Sixteenth Century)
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The population movements in the sanjaks demonstrate the efficacy of the Ottoman regime, while simultaneously illuminating the paradoxical predicament of the established system. In point of fact, the system naturally generated both wealth and demographic growth in villages and towns. It can be observed that periods of systemic crisis were accompanied by perceptions of Bedouin threat, which were reflected in population shifts. The data indicate that in the case of a chaotic situation that emerged as a result of Bedouin attacks, imperial rulers were unable to develop an effective mechanism for resolving the problems and to eliminate the threat of the nomads. The two-front wars that followed Suleiman the Magnificent and the Jelali threat that rocked Anatolia played a pivotal role in the emergence of this vulnerability.

### **The Population of Gaza City**

The city of Gaza, the administrative and commercial center of the district, retained this characteristic throughout the sixteenth century. The sanjak, which was comprised of two subdistricts, Gaza and Ramla, was overseen by a viceroy who was accountable to the head of the province of Damascus. At times, it appeared as though the governors of Jerusalem and Gaza were effectively one and the same. This situation was closely related to the administrative reorganization and the Ottoman conquest of the region. Nevertheless, it is evident that various administrative alterations were implemented in the region over the following centuries, as required. In this manner, the Ottoman authorities demonstrated a pragmatic approach to the matter and were willing to take the necessary steps to address the prevailing circumstances.

CITY	DATE	MUSLIM		CHRISTIAN		JEW	
		H	M	H	M	H	M
GAZA	932h?/1525-26?	580	38	232	1	120	
	945h?/1538?	1355	203	242	29	113	
	955h/1548-49	1823	179	324	9	134	7
	964h/1557	1872	77	345		99	
	1005h/1596-97	746	140	302		81	
The Quantity of Households and Bachelors at Gaza City in the 16th Century							

The protracted period of recovery for the region is indicative of the instability that preceded the establishment of Ottoman rule. The actions of the Bedouin tribes, which were beyond the control of the authorities, and the difficulties experienced in Jerusalem, the third holiest city in Islam, provide a

clear illustration of the prevailing circumstances. The brief tenure of Yavuz Sultan Selim (1512-1520) did not permit the immediate establishment of the Ottoman system following the collapse of the Mamluk state. Following the demise of his father, Sultan Suleiman I (the Magnificent) ascended the throne. As a consequence of the change in rulers, the new Sultan was confronted with a significant challenge in the form of a rebellion led by Jan Bardi Ghazali (d. 927h/1521) in the region. The crisis was swiftly resolved, and order was restored.<sup>6</sup>

Efforts for establishing security and stability in other areas, particularly in Jerusalem, contributed to the development of the region through their effects on the reconstruction process during the era of Suleiman I. This meant that any event occurring on one side was bound to have repercussions on the other as well. Likewise, any malfunction in the system on one side was also reflected on the other side. The data indicates that the population of Gaza continued to grow until 1557 (964h) following the establishment of stability.

While the demographic trends of Muslims and Christians were highly correlated, the trends of the Jewish population displayed greater volatility. Both Muslims and Christians demonstrated a parallel increase in population alongside the city's demographic expansion, reaching a peak in 1557 (964h), when the census was conducted. The internal conflicts and external challenges faced by the Jewish community may be considered as contributing factors behind the community's fragile structure. It appears that the adverse conditions that they experienced did not have a similarly deleterious impact on the Muslim and Christian populations. However, beginning in the last quarter of the 16th century, the inability to retain control of the Bedouins within the district and the surrounding region had a profound impact on the region's population, leading to a general decline in demographic terms.

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<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed examination of this rebellion, see Feridun Emecen, "Canbirdi Gazâli," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, accessed June 2, 2024, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/canbirdi-gazali>.



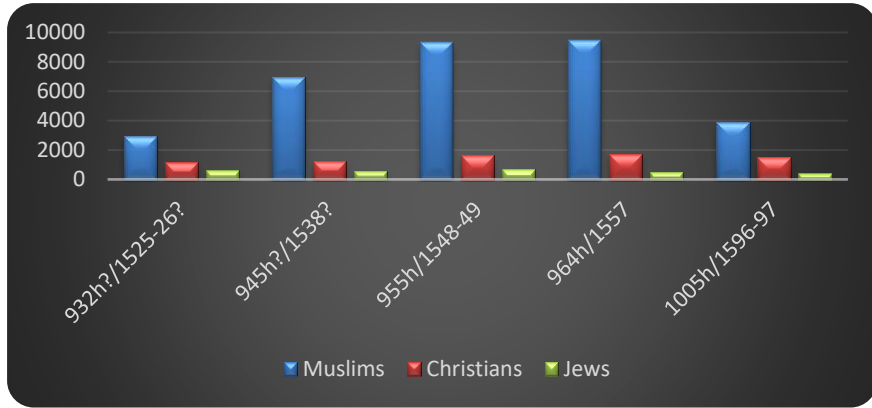


Chart 1: The distribution of Gaza City's Population in the 16th century

Gaza was home to Muslims, Christians, and Jews throughout its history. This city long served as a microcosm of the coexistence of monotheistic religions. Indeed, it retained this characteristic until the dissolution of the Empire. The Muslim population, which came to predominate in the city and in other areas of the district, was followed by Christians and Jews in population numbers. Although the number of non-Muslims was relatively small, their presence in the city was nonetheless discernible.

At this point one is prompted to ask where the inhabitants of the sanjak sought shelter as they fled from the state of disorder and chaos caused by Bedouin attacks. There are different answers to this question, varying according to the elements that made up the population. The Muslims abandoned their settled lives and sought refuge in the areas where tribes were located. Once the situation had stabilized and security had been re-established, they returned to their homes. Consequently, there was a robust interconnection between them and the Bedouins. Similarly, Christians sought refuge in safer areas and cities, although they occasionally chose to return to their villages. Likewise, they were indigenous to the area and enjoyed cordial relations with the surrounding tribes. This enabled them to secure their lives and survive in dangerous situations. The Jews, however, who had a different choice of permanent settlement, did not adopt a rural life. Faced with these circumstances, they were compelled to abandon their residences in search of alternative secure locations.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of the demographic trends in Palestine during the 16th century, see Mustafa Öksüz, "XVI. Yüzyıl Filistin Nüfusuna Bir Bakış," *İnsanlığın Kırmızı Çizgisi: Kudüs*, ed. Mefail Hızlı, Ahmet Güç, Süleyman Sayar (Bursa: Bursa Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kitaplığı, 2019), 214-229.

### The Christian Population of Gaza City

The Christian population, which constituted the second largest demographic group in the city, was dispersed across various communities and neighborhoods. As a consequence of the growing number of households and bachelors, the population exhibited a gradual increase from the beginning of the sixteenth century. Then, over a few decades, the chaotic environment in the region led to a deterioration in the situation. Consequently, the population declined toward the end of the century. The data from the detailed census provide comprehensive information about the various segments of the city's population. Despite the disappearance of some communities from the urban landscape over time, the general population structure of Christians appears to have been preserved since the first census. The complex problems created by the failure to bring the Arab tribes under control forced some people to leave Gaza, including the city itself, and to migrate to other areas.<sup>8</sup>

QUARTER/ COMMUNITY	THE QUANTITY OF CHRISTIAN HOUSEHOLDS AND BACHELORS AT GAZA CITY									
	932h?/1525 -26? <sup>9</sup>		945h?/1538? <sup>10</sup>		955h/1548- 49 <sup>11</sup>		964h/1557 <sup>12</sup>		1005h/1596- 97 <sup>13</sup>	
	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M
The Christian Quarter of Gaza <sup>14</sup>	81	1	115		116	3	99		95	
The Community of Shobak <sup>15</sup>	28		19	7	46	1	45		31	
The Community of Rizkallah <sup>16</sup>	35		30	5	34		38		36	

<sup>8</sup> For a comprehensive evaluation of the population of Gaza City in the 16th century, see Mustafa Öksüz, "Gazze: XVI. Yüzyılda Bir Osmanlı Şehrının Demografik Yapısı," *İNŞA* 2, 1 (Mayıs 2024): 6-47.

<sup>9</sup> The Ottoman Archives of the Directorate of State Archives of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye (BOA), Tapu Tahrir Registers (TT.d), no. 427, p. 166-168.

<sup>10</sup> BOA, TT.d, no. 1015, p. 14-16.

<sup>11</sup> BOA, TT.d, no. 265, p. 37-43.

<sup>12</sup> BOA, TT.d, no. 304, p. 46-51.

<sup>13</sup> General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre Archive, Kuyûd-ı Kadîme Archive, Land Registry Books (TKG, KK.TT.d), no. 192, f. 13a-15b.

<sup>14</sup> Mahalle-i Nasârâ der- Nefs-i Gazze

<sup>15</sup> Cemâ'at-i Şûbek (شوبك)

<sup>16</sup> Cemâ'at-i Rizkullâh (رزق الله)

The Community of Wadi Moses <sup>17</sup>	16		19		24		26		15	
The Community of Jabbariya <sup>18</sup>	25		20	7	40	1	51		44	
The Community of Peasants for Sakhra Al-Sharif <sup>19</sup>	19		18	8	41	4	75		70	
The Community of Khalil <sup>20</sup>	23									
The Community of Copt <sup>21</sup>	5		5	2	5					
The Community of Taqā'ina from the the Jebel of Jerusalem <sup>22</sup>			6		8 <sup>23</sup>		11		11	
The Community of Sakhra Al Sharif resident at Egypt <sup>24</sup>			10		10					
<b>Total</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>345</b>		<b>302</b>	

<sup>17</sup> Cemâ'at-i Vâdî-i Mûsa (وادي موسى); The name of Jamaah was registered in the first registers (BOA, TT.d., no. 427 p. 167; BOA, TT.d., no. 1015, p. 15; BOA, TT.d., no. 265, p. 40) as "Vade" and in the rest (BOA, TT.d., no. 304, p. 48; TKG, KK.TT.d., no. 192, f.14a) as "Vâdî-i Musa (وادي موسى)"

<sup>18</sup> Cemâ'at-i Cebbâriye (جبارية). The name of Jamaah was registered at three places (BOA, TT.d., no. 1015, p. 16; BOA, TT.d., no. 265, p. 41; TKG, KK.TT.d., no. 192, f. 14b) as "Cebbâriye (جبارية)", at one point (BOA, TT.d., no. 427, p. 167) "el-Cebbâre (الجبارة)" and at other one (BOA, TT.d., no. 304, p. 48) "Cebbârine (جبارنة)".

<sup>19</sup> Cemâ'at-i Fellâhîn-i Sahrâ-yı Şerîfe (فلاحين)

<sup>20</sup> Cemâ'at-i Halîl (خليل)

<sup>21</sup> Cemâ'at-i Kibt (قبط)

<sup>22</sup> Cemâ'at-i Nasârâ min-cebel-i Kuds-i Şerîf Tekâ'ine (تقاعة). Except for the place where it was recorded as Bekâ'ine (TKG, KK.TT.d., no. 192, f. 15a) it may be read as Tekâ'ine (تقاعة).

<sup>23</sup> A note, "an-Hazret-i Halîlurrahmân," indicates that the individuals in question were from Hebron under the names of two individuals, Melal veled-i Nasır and Sevad veled-i Nasır.

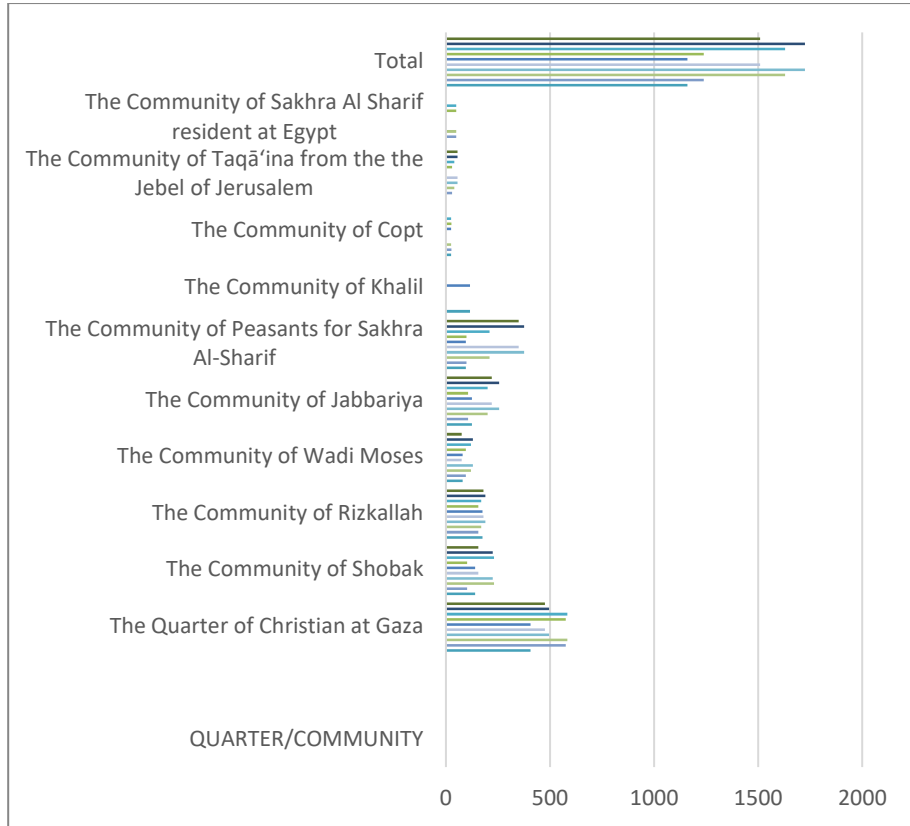
<sup>24</sup> Cemâ'at-i Sahrâtî'ş-Şerîfe mütemekkinîn fi'l-Mısır

QUARTER/COMMUNITY	ESTIMATED CHRISTIAN POPULATION IN THE CITY OF GAZA				
	932h?/1525-26?	945h?/1538?	955h/1548-49	964h/1557	1005h/1596-97
The Quarter of Christian at Gaza	406	575	583	495	475
The Community of Shobak	140	102	231	225	155
The Community of Rizkallah	175	155	170	190	180
The Community of Wadi Moses	80	95	120	130	75
The Community of Jabbariya	125	107	201	255	220
The Community of Peasants for Sakhra Al-Sharif	95	98	209	375	350
The Community of Khalil	115				
The Community of Copt	25	27	25		
The Community of Taqā'ina from the the Jebel of Jerusalem		30	40	55	55
The Community of Sakhra Al Sharif Resident at Egypt		50	50		
Total	1161	1239	1629	1725	1510

As evidenced by population surveys from the region in the 16th century, the inhabitants of the sanjak were adversely affected by the prevailing circumstances but were able to recover in due course. Although the term "parish" was typically employed for the distribution of the Christian population within the town, the term "quarter" was also utilized. It is important to note that in the cadastral records, the term "community" is used exclusively to refer to the Jewish population, which constituted the other non-Muslim demographic in Gaza. The 40-year interval between the last and the fourth cadaster makes it challenging to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the evolution of events during this period. Since the last quarter of the century, the failure to bring the Bedouins under control<sup>25</sup> and the deterioration of general safety seems to have led some people to abandon their towns and

<sup>25</sup> A notebook belonging to the Governor of Gaza (22 Muharram 987/21 March 1579) contains a detailed account of the military effectiveness of the soldiers deployed in the region during the rebellion of the Bani Lam tribe, The Ottoman Archives of the Directorate of State Archives of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye (BOA), Kamil Kepeci Collection (KK.d), no. 000234, p. 34. The order to the Governor of Damascus, dated 22 Rajab 987/14 Eylül 1579, on the promotion of a soldier named Sinan oğlu Ali, commended for his contributions during the Bani Lam tribe uprising, BOA, KK.d., no. 0075\_M, p. 43. In the order sent to the Damascen governor dated 17 Reb'ulevvel 985 (4 June 1577), the usefulness of the governor of Gaza and his troops was acknowledged in their attack against the Beni Atiyeh Tribe during their rebellion, BOA, KK.d., no. 00088, p. 6. Furthermore, it is pertinent to mention that an additional order was issued on 18 Cemâzeyilâhir 985/2 September 1577. In this order, the Governor of the Gaza, Iskender, dispatched a representative to report that the location of his province within the rebellious Arab region necessitated the augmentation of the military presence there. For further details see *ibid.*, p. 283.

villages. In spite of all these factors, the losses in the number of households and bachelors did not fall below the level of 1525-26? (932h?) by the end of the century.



**Chart 1: The Distribution of Christian Population in Gaza City**

In addition to those who had been residents of the area for some time, the communities of Rizkullah, Shobak, Jabbariya, Wadi Moses, and Sakhrat al-Sharif also established a presence in all of the Tahrirs. This demonstrates that these communities remained active and engaged in the city throughout the period of crisis. Those who had arrived in the city with the expectation of a new beginning were forced to abandon their aspirations as the situation deteriorated. The turmoil that had initially emerged in the region spread directly to Gaza, affecting those who had relocated from outside the region as well as those who had remained.

The predominant demographic group within the city's Christian community was identified as individuals who had been registered under the

heading of "a neighborhood." According to the latest censuses, the community of Sakhrat al-Sharif was the second most populous in the city. The next most populous communities were Jabbariya, Rizkullah, and Shobak, which had a predominantly Jordanian origin. The high level of agricultural activity in and around the Gaza was evidenced by the recording of farmers' names. The city's strategic location at the convergence of the Hajj and trade routes from Egypt, Syria, and Anatolia, coupled with the demand for agricultural products, fostered a vibrant agricultural sector.<sup>26</sup>

A consideration of the distribution of Christian communities reveals the existence of communities that originated from outside the city to be a notable phenomenon. Over time, a number of communities from Jerusalem and Egypt settled in the city. Conversely, some of these communities exhibited a relatively less stable structure, ultimately departing from the city for a variety of reasons. For instance, there is no reference to the Khalil community except for the year 1525-26? (932h?). In the initial three cadastral registers, the Coptic Christians of Egyptian descent residing in Gaza departed the city after the year 1548-49 (955h). The ten-household Sakhratollah farmer, previously recorded in the Tahrir registers as a resident of Egypt, was a resident of Gaza between the years 1538? (945h?) and 1558-59 (955h). However, no further information about them can be found in any of the subsequent register books. The Taqa'ine, a community of Jerusalem origin, was the most stable of those who came and settled. The community continued to reside in the city since 1538? (945h?) and did not abandon it during the sixteenth century.

The initial two tahrir registers fail to provide any information about local officials and employees, as well as the disabled within the Christian community in Gaza City. The third register (1548-49/955h) marks a turning point in the attention paid to other segments of the Christian community, especially the blind. Consequently, a note was made under the names of a blind man named Salim bin Ibrahim and a monk named Musa bin Mihail in the neighborhood, indicating their respective situations.<sup>27</sup> There are also two blind men (Ibrahim bin Juma'a in the community of Jabbariya<sup>28</sup>; Salim bin Kusayb in the Wadi Moses<sup>29</sup>) in two different Christian communities. Among the Copts, there is a priest known as Harif bin Ishaq.<sup>30</sup> In Shobak there are two monks (Yusuf bin řahen, Hurras bin Salim) and a blind man (Nasır bin

<sup>26</sup> For a comprehensive overview of Gaza throughout history, see Mustafa L. Bilge, "Gazze," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, accessed June 2, 2024, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/gazze>.

<sup>27</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 265, p. 38-39.

<sup>28</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 265, p. 41.

<sup>29</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 265, p. 40.

<sup>30</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 265, p. 39.

Urban).<sup>31</sup> In the paragraph that gives information about Tekāine, it is mentioned that two of the people in the community (Hilal veled-i Nasr, Sevad veled-i Nasr) came from Halilurrahman.<sup>32</sup> This indicates that people from outside used to come and join the communities in Gaza City.

By the year 1557 (964h), the corpus of available information had been augmented. The fourth book of the cadastre provides detailed information about the disabled within the Christian community. According to the source, there were five blind individuals residing in Gaza. Two of them resided in the quarter<sup>33</sup>, two in the community of Shobak<sup>34</sup>, and one in the community of farmers for Sakhrat al-Sharif.<sup>35</sup> In addition to these individuals, another was reported to be insane and resided in Shobak.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the register contains a reference to two religious men who resided in Shobak<sup>37</sup> and Jabbariya.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, the final tahrir register, dated 1596-97 (1005h), provides comprehensive data comparable to that of the previous register. It is recognized that four individuals identified as having visual impairment (one residing in the quarter<sup>39</sup> and three in the Jabbariya<sup>40</sup>) and two classified as having mobility limitations<sup>41</sup> were currently residing in the city. In addition, there was one individual who was bedridden.<sup>42</sup> Among the numerous individuals with disabilities in the area, there was also a physician named Moses who resided in Jabbariya<sup>43</sup>.

### **The Jewish Population in Gaza City**

The Jewish population of Gaza, which had chosen to reside exclusively in the city of Gaza, maintained the same structure throughout the century and was composed of two groups, namely the Samaritans and the Orthodox Jews.

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<sup>31</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 265, p. 41.

<sup>32</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 265, p. 42.

<sup>33</sup> Faraj bin İbrahim, Farajullah bin Kubeys, BOA, TT.d., no. 304, p. 48.

<sup>34</sup> The sole name identified was that of Martis bin Jabbara, although it was noted that there were two individuals with visual impairments listed in the record. BOA, TT.d., no. 304, p. 49.

<sup>35</sup> Yakop bin Müslim, BOA, TT.d., no. 304, p. 51.

<sup>36</sup> Mansur bin Nasur BOA, TT.d., no. 304, p. 49.

<sup>37</sup> Salim bin Umran BOA, TT.d., no. 304, p. 49.

<sup>38</sup> Halil bin İbrahim, BOA, TT.d., no. 304, p. 49.

<sup>39</sup> Musa veled-i Huleyf, TKG, KK.TT.d., no. 192, f. 13b.

<sup>40</sup> The final entry in the register is an enumeration of those who were blind, physicians, or lame: 6. Selman Veled-i Yahya, Subey Veled-i Salim, and Avvad Veled-i Selam were documented as visually impaired. TKG, KK.TT.d., no. 192, f. 14b.

<sup>41</sup> Avvâd veled-i Nemir, Halil veled-i İsa (Jabbariya), *ibid*.

<sup>42</sup> Yusuf veled-i Nemr (Jabbariya), *ibid*.

<sup>43</sup> Musa veled-i İsa (Jabbariya), *ibid*

The tahrir registers do not provide any information regarding the specific district in which they resided. The text makes no mention of them as a distinct community. It can be reasonably assumed that this attitude was shaped by the fact that they did not have a distinct neighborhood and shared the same street with other segments of the population.

COMMUNITY	THE QUANTITY OF JEWISH HOUSEHOLDS AND BACHELORS AT GAZA CITY									
	932h?/1525- 26? <sup>44</sup>		945h?/153 8? <sup>45</sup>		955h/1548-49 <sup>46</sup>		964h/1557 <sup>47</sup>		1005h/1596-97 <sup>48</sup>	
	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M
Jews	95		98		116	5	81		73	
Samaritans	25		15		18	2	18		8	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>120</b>		<b>113</b>		<b>134</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>99</b>		<b>81</b>	

The same was valid for the Samaritans, who historically constituted a minority within the Jewish community. The Samaritans had a relatively smaller population than the Orthodox Jews. The fact that they were consistently recorded separately from the latter in the cadastral register books was closely related to their attempts to distinguish themselves from the others. Consequently, the conflict and discrimination among the two groups was naturally reflected in the cadastral registers. Furthermore, the clerks duly complied with their request and registered them under separate titles.

From the population distribution, it is not possible to ascertain the proportion of Jewish immigrants from the West. However, the same situation holds true for Jerusalem, where the court records contain a wealth of information about the immigrants. The ambiguity of the sources concerning the origin of the Jews of Jerusalem is somewhat alleviated by the records of the courts.<sup>49</sup> Among the various districts, Safad appears to be the sole exception due to the preponderant influence of European immigrants. The comprehensive data regarding the origins of the Jewish immigrants can be

<sup>44</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 427, p. 168-169.

<sup>45</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 1015, p. 17.

<sup>46</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 265, p. 24-26.

<sup>47</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 304, p. 51-52.

<sup>48</sup> TKG, KK.TT.d., no. 192, f. 15b-16a.

<sup>49</sup> Amnon Cohen, *A World Within: Jewish Life as Reflected in Muslim Court Documents From the Sijill of Jerusalem (XVIth century)* Vol. 1. Texts. Vol. 2. Facsimiles (Philadelphia, PA: Centre for Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania, 1994).



readily accessed in the Safad records.<sup>50</sup> In light of the various accounts, it is plausible to suggest that there were instances of Jewish migration from Europe to Gaza during this century. However, it is not possible to provide an exact figure due to the lack of available sources.

It is evident that the number of households and bachelors exhibited considerable instability. Although the second cadastral book, dated 1538? (945h?), indicates a slight loss in the population rate, it can be seen that this situation changed in the year 1548-49 (955h), with the highest point in population growth being reached within the century. In fact, from this point forward to the year 1596-97 (1005h), there was a decline in the population. Nevertheless, the four-decade gap is too substantial to permit a comprehensive evaluation.

A contrasting picture emerges when the data are analyzed on the basis of the two communities that made up the Jewish population of Gaza City. This was in contrast to the general trend. From the initial census onwards, the Samaritans left the city in increasing numbers. Although the censuses from 1548-49 (955h) and 1557 (964h) are seen as indications of a modest recovery, the overwhelming evidence of the city's decline is evident in the 1596-97 (1005h) census, which provides a comprehensive overview of the situation at the time.

COMMUNITY	ESTIMATED JEWISH POPULATION IN THE CITY OF GAZA				
	932h?/1525-26?	945h?/1538?	955h/1548-49	964h/1557	1005h/1596-97
JEWS	475	490	585	405	365
SAMARITANS	125	75	92	90	40
TOTAL	600	565	677	495	405

The remainder of the Jewish population, which constituted the majority of the congregation, was more firmly structured than the Samaritans. The population of the Jews increased significantly between the years 1538? (945h?) and 1548-49 (955h), reaching its highest level in the century. However, after the latter year, there was a precipitous decline in their population. Consequently, the most recent data from the previous century were not included in the initial census. One might posit that this trend was largely

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<sup>50</sup> For further information about the Jews of Safad, see Mustafa Öksüz, *Şam Eyaleti'nin Güney Sancaklarında (Filistin) Nüfus, XVI. Yüzyıl* (Ankara: Sonçağ Akademi, 2023), 151, 306, 448.

consistent with that observed in other neighborhoods, including Jerusalem.<sup>51</sup> A comparison of the census data for households and bachelors of the Jewish population in Gaza with that of their counterparts in Jerusalem and Safed reveals that both areas had a considerable Jewish population according to the first district.

The tahrir records also reveal that the Jews of Gaza had a good relationship with their co-religionists in Jerusalem. In this regard, it can be posited that there was a high degree of communication and relationship between the two cities. Consequently, it can be observed that over time, individuals from Gaza migrated to Jerusalem<sup>52</sup> for various reasons. As well, some from Hebron<sup>53</sup> relocated to the city of Gaza. Moreover, an examination of the files of the Jerusalem Sharia courts reveals a vibrant relationship between the cities of Gaza and Jerusalem.<sup>54</sup>

### Christians in the Gaza Villages

As previously stated, Christians and Muslims, in contrast to Jews, continued to reside in villages within the Gaza sanjak. In the initial census, it was observed that Muslims and Christians were residing in the village of Dayr al-Dârûm. However, a change in circumstances occurred at a later date, resulting in the addition of a second village to the list. With the exception of the aforementioned village, it is not possible to identify any other settlements within this township. The absence of Sawâfir in the first census suggests that it was either completely abandoned or registered elsewhere. It is possible that some locations were registered in different administrative units during the organization of the region.

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<sup>51</sup> For further information regarding the population of Jewish residents of Jerusalem during the sixteenth century, see Mustafa Öksüz, "Osmanlı İdaresi'nin İlk Yüzyılında Kudüs-i Şerif Sancağı'nda Yahudi Nüfusu" *Journal of Islamicjerusalem Studies* 16 (2016): 1-24.

<sup>52</sup> The record (955h/1548-49) indicates that the names of two individuals from the city of Gaza, (Yehuda bin Barda'? and Medchal? bin Barda'?) who originated from Hebron, and the other two Gazans (Jacop bin Aaron, Seleva? bin Aaron) who were residing in Jerusalem, were among the Jews of the Rabbinate. Furthermore, Sa'd bin Ma'der, also reported to be blind, was from the same community. See BOA, TT.d., No. 265, p. 24-25.

<sup>53</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 304, p. 52; TKG, KK.TT.d., no. 192, f. 16a.

<sup>54</sup> For further information on this subject, see the following source: Cohen, *A World Within Jewish Life as Reflected in Muslim Court Documents from the Sijill of Jerusalem (XVIth Century)*, Vol 1 (Texts), p. 207.

DATE	VILLAGES	MUSLIMS		CHRISTIANS	
		H	M	H	M
932h?/1525-26? <sup>55</sup>	Dayr al-Dârûm <sup>56</sup>	87		56	
945h?/1538? <sup>57</sup>	Dayr al-Dârûm	80	16	54	8
	Sawâfir	61	15	30	4
955h/1548-49 <sup>58</sup>	Dayr al-Dârûm	185	23	114	11
	Sawâfir	140		66	
964h/1557 <sup>59</sup>	Dayr al-Dârûm	180		114	11
	Sawâfir	78	13	36	5
1005h/1596-97 <sup>60</sup>	Dayr al-Dârûm	175		125	
	Sawâfir	83	8	39	2

VILLAGES	ESTIMATED CHRISTIAN POPULATION IN GAZA VILLAGES									
	932h?/1525-26?		945h?/1538?		955h/1548-49		964h/1557		1005h/1596-97	
	M	C	M	C	M	C	M	C	M	C
Dayr al-Dârûm	435	280	416	278	948	581	900	581	875	625
Sawâfir			320	154	700	330	403	185	423	197

The Christian population appears to have fluctuated, as evidenced by the various data sets available. However, this is not certain, because there was a gap of around forty years between the two final censuses of the sixteenth century. But it is noteworthy that Dayr al-Dârûm demonstrated a consistent and notable increase. Although Sawâfir displayed indications of an increase in the most recent census, its general population trends aligned with the prevailing trend in the region. In comparison to other data from the region, this situation appears to be within the expected range.

Throughout the century, the Muslim population continued to constitute the majority in both villages. In contrast, the Christian population was consistently at the lowest echelon of the demographic ranking. The non-

<sup>55</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 427, p. 176-177.

<sup>56</sup> Today, this place is known as the Dayr al-Balah. See "Dayr al-Balah," Palestine Remembered, accessed June 2, 2024,

[https://www.palestineremembered.com/GeoPoints/Dayr\\_al\\_Balah\\_958/ar/index.html](https://www.palestineremembered.com/GeoPoints/Dayr_al_Balah_958/ar/index.html)

<sup>57</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 1015, p. 59-60, 119-120.

<sup>58</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 265, p. 83-88, 200-203.

<sup>59</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 304, p. 114-117, 220-222.

<sup>60</sup> TKG, KK.TT.d., no. 192, f.49a-51b, 109b-110b.

Islamic population of Dayr al-Dârûm constituted the largest minority group in the villages of Gaza. Furthermore, aside from the two aforementioned villages, there were no other rural communities in the Gaza sub-district where the members of minority groups were settled.

### Ramla Christians

Although the town of Ramla was home to a Muslim and Christian population, it lacked a Jewish presence. In this regard, the town can be considered to have had a bi-religious structure. The number of Christians residing in the city of Ramla fluctuated considerably over time, with the figures varying considerably between different censuses. While the data from the initial census was somewhat limited, the information from subsequent censuses was more comprehensive. Although the Christians were mentioned as a community in the initial census, subsequent censuses provided more detailed information regarding their residential locations. In the subsequent two censuses, it was indicated that the quarter of Shakr was the location where the Christians reside. In the fourth census, the Turkman were added to the list of neighborhoods.

DATE	QUARTERS/C COMMUNITY	MUSLIMS		CHRISTIANS	
		H	M	H	M
932h <sup>61</sup> /1525-26 <sup>61</sup>	The Christian Community in Ramla			26	
945h <sup>62</sup> /1538 <sup>62</sup>	Shakr	74	8	32	1
955h/1548-49 <sup>63</sup>	Shakr	87	3	58 <sup>64</sup>	7
964h/1557 <sup>65</sup>	Shakr	89	8	41	
	Rima's Christian Community			29	
	Turkman	117	19	5	

<sup>61</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 427, p. 236.

<sup>62</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 1015, p. 124-125.

<sup>63</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 265, p. 224-225.

<sup>64</sup> "The Rîmâviyyîn community, originating in the village of Bayt Rîma, which had previously been allotted to the Sahratullah Foundation within the Sanjak of Jerusalem, relocated to Gaza. The jizya tax was allocated by the Sultan as a foundation for the Sahratullah organization. In accordance with the aforementioned supreme command, a total of 25 individuals from the village were required to pay the jizya tax for this purpose..." BOA, TT.d., no. 265, p. 225.

<sup>65</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 304, p. 243-244, 246.

1005h/1596-97 <sup>66</sup>	Shakr	29		41	1
	Rima's Christian Community			35	
	Turkman	55	5	5	

VILLAGES	ESTIMATED CHRISTIAN POPULATION IN RAMLA									
	932h?/1525-26?		945h?/1538?		955h/1548-49		964h/1557		1005h/1596-97	
	M	C	M	C	M	C	M	C	M	C
The Christian Community in Ramla		130								
Shakr			378	161	438	297	453	205	145	206
Rima's Christian Community								145		75
Turkman							604	25	280	25

Over the course of the century in question, the largest Christian population in the town was situated in the vicinity of Shakr. The second concentration of non-Muslims was in the Turkman neighborhood, which had a smaller minority population. Furthermore, it was documented that a community originated from a village called Bayt Rîmâ, situated near Jerusalem, and subsequently settled in Ramla. The movement of people between Jerusalem and Ramla provides evidence of the existence of close ties between the two places.

### Christians in Ramla Villages

The villages of Ramla, like the town itself, were bi-religious. In other words, both Christian and Muslim communities continued to exist in the area, but there were no Jewish settlements. The majority of the population adhered to the Muslim faith, as was the case in other locations. In certain locales, Christians continued to coexist with their Muslim neighbors as a minority. The village of al-Lydd had the highest concentration of Christians. In other instances, the concentrations were more modest. The 955h/1548-49 census lists only one village, Dayr Ayyub, and there was no mention of this village in the following years. It is probable that the registration was transferred by the officials to a different region.

<sup>66</sup> TKG, KK.TT.d., no. 192, f. 119b-120b.

DATE	VILLAGES	MUSLIMS		CHRISTIANS	
		H	M	H	M
932h?/1525-26? <sup>67</sup>	al-Lydd	197	33	129	11
945h?/1538? <sup>68</sup>	al-Lydd	268	3	130	20
955h/1548-49 <sup>69</sup>	al-Lydd	302	3	198	8
	Dayr Ayyub <sup>70</sup>	13	3	6	1
	‘Abûd?	33	1	44	3
964h/1557 <sup>71</sup>	al-Lydd	335		160 <sup>72+</sup> 85 <sup>73</sup> T 245	
	Harbatâ	36		4	
	‘Abûd?	16		19	
1005h/1596-97 <sup>74</sup>	al-Lydd <sup>75</sup>	316	14	162 <sup>76+</sup> 60 <sup>77</sup> T 222	11
	Harbatâ	29		4	
	‘Abûd?	16		19	

al-Lydd served as a host to the Christian population originating from Bayt Rîmâ, a village situated in proximity to Jerusalem, since 955h/1548-49. As previously stated, a number of the inhabitants of the aforementioned village opted to settle in the surrounding neighborhoods of the town. The reasons for this mass migration remain unknown. The fact that the officials considered this to be a normal event and recorded the arrivals at their new locations suggests the possibility that they had been living in the area prior to this event. It seems plausible to suggest that this community was previously resident in this area but was compelled to relocate for reasons of security. It is reasonable to posit that they returned to Ramla following the re-establishment of the system by the Ottoman Turks.

<sup>67</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 427, p. 245-247.

<sup>68</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 1015, p. 136-140.

<sup>69</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 265, p. 232-240, 293-294, 308-309.

<sup>70</sup> The village was destroyed and its inhabitants deported when it was occupied by Israel on March 6, 1948. See “Dayr Ayyub,” Palestine Remembered, accessed June 2, 2024, <http://www.palestineremembered.com/al-Ramla/Dayr-Ayyub/ar/index.html>

<sup>71</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 304, p. 298-304, 316-317, 320.

<sup>72</sup> The Community of Christians in the village, BOA, TT.d., no. 304, p. 302

<sup>73</sup> The Community of Rimâviyyîn, BOA, TT.d., no. 304, p. 303

<sup>74</sup> TKG, KK.TT.d., no. 192, f. 144a-148a, 154b-155a, 156b-157a.

<sup>75</sup> It was occupied by Israel on July 10, 1948. See, “al-Lydd,” Palestine Remembered, accessed June 2, 2024, <http://www.palestineremembered.com/al-Ramla/al-Lydd/ar/index.html>

<sup>76</sup> The Community of Christians in the village, TKG, KK.TT.d., no. 192, f. 147a

<sup>77</sup> The Community of Rimâviyyîn, TKG, KK.TT.d., no. 192, f. 147b

VILLAGES	ESTIMATED CHRISTIAN POPULATION IN RAMLA VILLAGES									
	932h?/1525-26?		945h?/1538?		955h/1548-49		964h/1557		1005h/1596-97	
	M	C	M	C	M	C	M	C	M	C
al-Lydd	1018	656	1343	670	1513	998	1675	1225	1594	1121
Dayr Ayyub					68	31				
'Abûd?					166	223	80	95	80	95
Harbatâ							180	20	145	20

The villages of 'Abûd? and Harbatâ were not referenced in any of the early historical records. The village of 'Abûd? was notable for its relatively high proportion of Christian residents, in comparison to the Muslim population. Nevertheless, there were few discernible differences between the two communities in terms of their demographic profiles. The subsequent appearance of these communities in censuses was closely related to the social welfare and development of the region. In certain instances, officials employed a practice of registering villages in different sanjaks. It is evident that this presented a significant challenge in terms of monitoring the evolution of these communities.

### **Poll Tax (Jizya)**

The transition period was necessitated by the fact that the stability of the region was not fully established in the immediate aftermath of the Ottoman conquest, and it took some time before the inhabitants could return to their places of residence. Consequently, the normalization of economic life was reflected in the rates of the poll tax over a certain length of time. The earliest known record, dating to the years 1525-26? (932h?)<sup>78</sup>, indicates that 60 aspers per capita was levied on non-Muslims in the Gaza. In fact, the same rate was applied in the initial tahrir census of Jerusalem, with the objective of revitalizing the area and attracting people.<sup>79</sup>

As the situation in the sanjak improved and the welfare level of the people increased, the rates of jizya also increased. In the year 1538? (945h?), the ratio taken by per person was increased to 80 aspers.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, it is evident

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<sup>78</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 427, p. 169.

<sup>79</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 427, p. 269.

<sup>80</sup> "Mahsûl-i cizye-i gebrân ve Yahûdiyyân ve Sevâmire 388 neferan beher nefer fi 80 31040", BOA, TT.d., no. 1015, p. 18.

that this sum was maintained in 1548-49 (955h)<sup>81</sup> and 1557 (964h)<sup>82</sup>, with the same amount of jizya being collected from non-Muslims in Gaza.

A review of the dates of the initial four tahrirs of Gaza during the reign of Sultan Suleiman I reveals that the collection of the jizya was determined on an equal basis for non-Muslims. Consequently, the same proportion of the jizya was collected from the Jews and the Christians. This was the policy that was followed until the death of the Sultan. However, under his descendants there were modifications to the jizya policy. The suspicion that the Jews were attempting to avoid paying the jizya by engaging in deceitful practices appears to have been a primary reason for this change.

The initial step towards modifying the poll tax policy was initiated upon the ascension of Sultan Selim II to the throne. The revised rates of the poll tax were established by the edict (Evâ'il-i Shaban 975/January-February 1568) addressed to the chief justice of Jerusalem. This document indicated that while the jizya for Christians was increased by five aspers, this rate was elevated by ten aspers for Jews. Thus a new approach was implemented, superseding the previous practice.<sup>83</sup>

The absence of cadastral records has led to uncertainty regarding the extent to which the changes implemented included the districts of Gaza, Nablus, Ajlun, and Lajjun. These concerns are alleviated by the order dated in August/September of the same year (Evâ'il-i Reb'ülevvel 976/Ağustos/Eylül 1568), which was sent from Damascus to Jerusalem, Gaza, Ramla, Majdal, and Nablus. Consequently, the implementation was not limited to Jerusalem alone, but extended to other locations.<sup>84</sup>

Furthermore, the data from Safed, which has the greatest number of cadastral records of any district, provides corroborating evidence on this matter. It indicates that the Jews paid more poll tax (90<sup>85</sup> and 100<sup>86</sup> aspers) than

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<sup>81</sup> Although there is no separate note on the jizya of Jews in the Tahrir book, it is stated that Christians were obliged to pay 80 aspers. Consequently, it can be posited that the same ratio was maintained for Jews as well. BOA, TT.d., no. 265, p. 24, 26, 37.

<sup>82</sup> Although there is no separate note on the jizya of Jews in the Tahrir book, it is stated that Christians were obliged to pay 80 aspers. Consequently, it can be posited that the same ratio was maintained for Jews as well. BOA, TT.d., no. 304, p. 50-52.

<sup>83</sup> "For the imperial ascension, ten coins were added to the Jewish jizya and five coins to the Christian jizya," as evidenced by a registration dated Evâ'il-i Şa'bân 975/January-February 1568, Centre For Islamic Studies (İSAM), Jerusalem Islamic Court Records (JICR), no. XLVII, p. 112.

<sup>84</sup> İSAM, JICR, no. XLVII, p. 166.

<sup>85</sup> The Ottoman Archives of the Directorate of State Archives of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye (BOA), Maliyeden Müdevver Registers (MAD), no. 17738, p. 49.

<sup>86</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 686, p. 48.



the Christians (85<sup>87</sup> and 90<sup>88</sup> aspers), thereby establishing a distinction between them. Consequently, the transformation initiated by Selim II was sustained throughout the reigns of Murad III (1574-1595) and Mehmed III (1595-1603), during which the new policy of the *jizya* was implemented.

On August 4, 1586, during the rule of Murad III, a decree was sent to the judge of Damascus and the head of the province's treasury. This decree reveals the suspicions surrounding the Jews in the imperial capital. The Jews were accused of having been involved in corrupting the *jizya*. Reportedly, the Jews were concealing their names and financial status from the authorities in order to avoid paying the full amount of the poll tax.<sup>89</sup>

One year after this order (Evâhir-i Rajab 995/June-July 1587), another order was sent by Sinan Pasha, the governor of Damascus, to the governor of Jerusalem. The first order, which originated from the capital of the empire, is briefly summarized here: It was ordered that a new list be drawn up immediately. In accordance with this order, the names of the Jews were to be entered in the *jizya* book in relation to their financial status. This was to facilitate the identification of missing taxpayers and thereby to reduce the number of unidentified individuals.<sup>90</sup>

Subsequently, a new list was prepared and the names of 51 individuals were added. However, in the record dated July 27, 1587 (21 Shaban 995), it was stated that there was no need to attach too much importance to the issue and that those who came to visit the city were added to the list of those required to pay the census tax. Consequently, the community was obliged to pay an additional *jizya*.<sup>91</sup> The document indicates that the census was not limited to Jerusalem but also included Jews residing in the provinces of Nablus and Gaza. It is also known that Bekir Çavuş, the individual responsible for this task, had appointed a person by the name of Mustafa and had requested that officials provide him with support and assistance in carrying out his duties.<sup>92</sup>

It is not possible to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion from the sources about the cause of this suspicion regarding Jewish attempts to evade the *jizya*. Nevertheless, it is possible to suggest that the growing influence of the various groups that constituted the local Jewish community, as well as the improvements in the financial situation of the Jews, may have contributed to

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<sup>87</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 559, p. 13.

<sup>88</sup> BOA, TT.d., no. 686, p. 85.

<sup>89</sup> Centre For Islamic Studies (İSAM), Jerusalem Islamic Court Records (JICR), no. XLVIII, p. 9-10.

<sup>90</sup> İSAM, JICR, no. XLVIII, p. 11-12.

<sup>91</sup> For a registration dated 21 Shaban 995/27 July 1587 see, İSAM, JICR, no. XLVIII, p. 14.

<sup>92</sup> For a registration dated Evâhir-i Rajab 995/June-July 1587 see, İSAM, JICR, no. XLVIII, p. 11-12.

the change in attitude. This change was also evident at the municipal level, particularly in Damascus.

The absence of the tahrir registers precludes the possibility of ascertaining and monitoring the total amount of jizya collected from non-Muslims in Gaza during the reigns of Selim II and Murad III. Nevertheless, the last tahrir of the century, dated 1596-97 (1005 H) and belonging to the period of Mehmed III, indicates that the principle of the equal jizya had been abandoned.<sup>93</sup>

The new increases resulted in the Jews being required to pay more jizya (50 coins) than the Christians (45 coins), a situation that was also observed in the sanjaks of Jerusalem and Safed. Apparently, the suspicion that Jews were evading the jizya was not limited to Jerusalem. This consideration was spread to the whole region, including Gaza. The lengthy wars waged by the Empire in the West and East, the deteriorating financial situation, the depreciation of currency, and the outbreak of the Jelali revolts can be cited as the reasons for increasing the jizya in the reign of Mehmed III.

Although a portion of the jizya collected from non-Muslims was allocated to Islamic endowments, it is known that the remainder was remitted to the state treasury. Khalilurrahman, Ishaq al-Nebi, and Sakhratullah Musharrafa were the religious institutions where the non-Islamic population in Gaza paid their jizya.<sup>94</sup>

The allocation of the tribute of non-Muslim populations to religious foundations as a source of income also facilitated their protection by the local ulama. It is evident that no institution would be willing to relinquish the income that had been granted to it. On a monthly and annual basis, each institution was required to cover its various expenses. It is evident that a portion of the jizya revenue was allocated to the ulama, as the sums they were paid constituted a form of expenditure. This transfer of income from the jizya was intended to provide the clerics with the resources necessary to meet their needs. In this manner, a natural field of interaction was established between the patron and those who were protected. It can be argued that this interdependence also served to prevent potential social crises between Muslims and non-Muslims due to the influence of the prevailing circumstances.

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<sup>93</sup> TKG, KK.TT.d., no. 192, f. 3a

<sup>94</sup> BOA, TT.d, no. 131, p. 1.

## **Conclusion**

While Christians constituted the second largest religious group in demographic terms after Muslims, Jews came the third as in other locations, except for the district of Safed. It can be posited that the multi-religious world of the Sanjak of Gaza was preserved throughout the century and affected by the developments in the district and the region. It is evident that the city's growth and population increase were significantly influenced by the progresses in economy and security. Nevertheless, it cannot be asserted that this was consistently the case for all parties involved. The challenges encountered by each community inevitably resulted in disparate outcomes. Indeed, the data demonstrate that each group tended to follow a different line of development as events unfolded.

It is a well-documented fact that the region and the city remained peaceful throughout the first century of Ottoman rule. The wars in the east and west during the reigns of Murad III and Mehmed III, along with the revolts that occurred, had a detrimental effect on the central areas of the empire. It is evident that these developments also had a negative impact on neighboring provinces. Consequently, the raids of the Bedouin tribes which could not be prevented constituted a threat to the security of the inhabitants of Gaza sanjak, compelling some of them to relocate over time.

During the reign of Suleiman I, the adopted policy was levying an equal amount of jizya from all non-Muslim communities. However, this changed with the accession to the throne of Selim II, and the Jews were obliged to pay higher sums for jizya. The suspicions against the Jews in the matter of jizya ultimately led to an increase in their payments, which could not be reversed.

The classification of the Jewish community only as Samaritans and Jews makes it impossible to ascertain the provenance of those who arrived in Gaza from Europe and other locations. The inclusion of Samaritans and Jews in the register without any accompanying explanation may plausibly be interpreted as a consequence of their relatively limited demographic presence when compared to the more substantial Christian population. The Samaritans constituted a minority among the Jews. The departure of these individuals from Gaza may have been a consequence of the dispute between the two sides and other factors.

It appears that some Christians from other locations, particularly from Jerusalem and Egypt, relocated to Gaza when conditions in the district were favorable. It is known that some of them, especially the Coptic Christians, left the city and the district because of the deterioration of the situation in the region over time. With regard to the population, Christians exhibited a more

stable demographic structure than Jews. By the end of the century, the decline in the number of households and the number of bachelors was less pronounced among Christians than among Muslims.

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