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Department of Economics Working Paper Series

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Working Paper 2022-02
January 2022

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This working paper is indexed in RePEc, <http://repec.org>

Judiciary and Wealth in the Ottoman Empire, 1689–1843

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Abstract: This article examines the accumulation, temporal variation, and intergroup inequality of wealth in the Ottoman judiciary between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries, based on information from the estate inventories (*terekes*) found in Istanbul's *kısmet-i askeriye* registers. After calculating the gross and net real wealth of the judges at the time of death, we compare them against contemporary economic indicators, which show moderate to modest levels of wealth accumulation. Whereas the levels of mean gross wealth varied significantly between certain groups of the judiciary, no such variations were observed in net wealth. Factors contributing to the variations of wealth levels included the bequest motive and family connections to other members of the judiciary. Wealth levels dropped drastically in the latter part of the eighteenth century, a consequence of the financial strains the Ottoman Empire experienced during this period.

JEL Codes: D31, E21, G51, H55, J30, K40, M52

Keywords: Ottoman, estate inventories, *terekes*, judiciary, wealth, inequality, *kısmet-i askeriye*

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Acknowledgments: We thank Murat Yolun of Adiyaman University for helping us to collect our sources and Christi Stanforth for helping them to edit the text. The University of Vermont made the initial data collection financially possible. Our research was also partly supported by JSPS KAKENHI (grant numbers JP26284106 and JP20H01322) and by TÜBİTAK (grant number 1059B192100443).

I. Introduction

This article examines the wealth levels and variations among Ottoman judges between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries based on estate inventories (*tereke*s) found in *kismet-i askeriye* registers in Istanbul. Numerous scholars have recently studied the levels and variations of wealth in specific regions of the Ottoman Empire.¹ But although it is immensely valuable to understand long-term wealth accumulation patterns in different corners of the polity, we know little about the patterns within segments of society with uniform qualities other than residency in a specific locale.² The present study contributes to this literature by focusing on a particular group of government officials with shared social, educational, and professional attributes.

We contribute to Ottoman legal scholarship by providing economic insights into the

¹ See, among others, Colette Establet and Jean-Paul Pascual, *Familles et fortunes à Damas: 450 foyers damascains en 1700* (Damas: L'Institut Français d'Études Arabes de Damas, 1994); Rossitsa Gradeva, "Towards a Portrait of 'the Rich' in Ottoman Provincial Society: Sofia in the 1670s," in *Provincial Elites in the Ottoman Empire: Halcyon Days in Crete V: A Symposium Held in Rethymno, 10–12 January 2003*, ed. Antonis Anastasopoulos (Crete: Crete University Press, 2006), 149–200; Boğaç Ergene and Ali Berker, "Wealth, Poverty, and Inequality in the Ottoman Empire: Observations from Eighteenth-Century Kastamonu," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40:1 (2008), 23–46; Metin Coşgel and Boğaç Ergene, "Intergenerational Wealth Accumulation and Dispersion in the Ottoman Empire: Observations from Eighteenth-Century Kastamonu," *European Review of Economic History* 15:2 (2011), 255–76; and, most recently, Hülya Canbakal and Alpay Filiztekin, "Wealth and Demography in Ottoman Probate Inventories: A Database in Very Long-Term Perspective," *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History* 54:2 (2021), 94–127.

² See, for an exception, Colette Establet and Jean-Paul Pascual, *La gent d'État dans la société ottomane damascène Les 'askar à la fin du XVIIe siècle* (Damas: Presses de l'Ifpo, 2011). Even in this case, the *askeri* designation refers to a constituency that is significantly larger and more diverse than the group we examine in this article. On the estate inventories of the *askeri*, see also Said Öztürk, *Askeri Kassama Ait Onyedinci Asır İstanbul Tereke Defterleri (Sosyo-Ekonomik Tahlili)* (Istanbul: Osmanlı Araştırmaları Vakfı, 1995) and Ömer Lütfi Barkan, "Edirne Askeri Kassama'na ait Tereke Defterleri (1545–1659)," *Belgeler* 3:5–6 (1966), 1–479.

circumstances of those who served in the judicial system. While the legal history of the Ottoman Empire has flourished in the recent decades,³ the existing scholarship has largely concentrated on a few topics, including jurisprudential matters (i.e., the sources, contents, and interpretations of the Ottoman law) and the nature, organization, and functions of the empire's legal institutions, in particular the Islamic courts of law (*mahkemes*) and the Imperial Council (*divan-ı hümayun*). Yet we still know relatively little about those who staffed the Ottoman judiciary. Given the lack of systematic and reliable information pertaining to the compensatory schemes in the Ottoman administration of justice and the revenues they generated for those who ran the system, it is important to know how the Ottoman judiciary fared economically as they fulfilled their legal and administrative functions.

In the Ottoman polity, judges were assigned to positions that were demarcated according to expected earnings. Each appointment was subject to a term limit. After serving his term at a post, a judge would enter a period of unpaid waiting, possibly of very long duration, until the next appointment. Moreover, judicial personnel were compensated not by a fixed salary from the government, but directly out of court revenues from the fees paid by court clients. These features of the system could potentially generate great inequalities among the judicial personnel, depending on the types of service they provided, where they served, their ranks in the judicial hierarchy, and major shifts in general economic conditions.

³ In particular, there is growing interest in the judiciary organization. For examples of recent studies, see Abdurrahman Atçıl, *Scholars and Sultans in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Yasemin Beyazıt, *Osmanlı İlimiyye Mesleğinde İstihdam (XVI. Yüzyıl)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014); *ibid*, "Tanzimat Devri Şeyhülislâmlarından Meşrebzâde Arif Efendi ve Kadılık Kurumundaki İstihdam Sorunu," *bilig* 54 (2010), 47-74; Levent Kuru and Ahmet Önal, *Osmanlı Kaza Teşkilatı (1078/1667–1668 Düzenlemesine Göre)* (Istanbul: Yeditepe Yayınları, 2018); Cihan Kılıç, *Osmanlı İlimiyesinde İstihdam ve Kariyer (XVII. Yüzyıl)* (Istanbul: Akademisyen Kitabevi, 2019); Levent Kuru, *Osmanlı İlmiye Tevcihâtı (1693–1725)* (Çanakkale: Paradigma Akademi, 2020).

In our broader attempts to explore the accumulation and inequality of wealth among the Ottoman judiciary, we calculate the levels of net and gross real wealth at time of death and contextualize these figures by comparing them to previous estimates of wealth and other economic indicators. In addition, we determine how wealth levels varied among the judicial personnel according to their service, the jurisdictions in which they served, and their rank. Finally, we examine how real wealth levels changed over time, especially after the Ottoman economy experienced devastating wars and the changes that followed.

To these ends, we first calculated the values of several statistics that describe the distribution of wealth for each subgroup that constituted the judiciary. Specifically, we determined the mean and the standard deviation of the distribution and the minimum and maximum values of the gross and net wealth for specific subgroups. We also calculated the Gini coefficient and the coefficient of variation (standard deviation / mean) as conventional measures of inequality for comparison across subgroups. The results show moderate to modest levels of wealth accumulation, high levels of overall inequality in the entire sample, and some interesting variations between subgroups. For the latter, the levels of inequality were lower among the judges (*kadis*) and deputy judges (*naiibs*) serving in jurisdictions of higher-order (*mevleviyets*) than among those who were inactive or serving in regular posts. For each group, measures of inequality were typically higher for net wealth than for gross wealth. Since the main difference between gross and net wealth was the amount of debt paid out of inheritance, higher inequality in net wealth was likely due to greater variation in borrowing behavior.

We examined wealth variations across the judiciary by using multiple regression analysis, which allowed us to control for other confounding factors that could have simultaneously affected wealth accumulation. Our results show that the judges serving in high-ranking

jurisdictions accumulated significantly higher amounts of gross wealth than those in regular posts, as expected. The differential in net wealth, however, was not statistically significant. This surprising finding indicates that judges in elevated posts likely accumulated substantial amounts of debt, high enough to offset the difference in gross wealth. Another important finding concerns the statistical significance of the difference in wealth accumulated by judges serving in regular posts and by those who were inactive at the time of their death. The significance of the difference held for both gross and net real wealth.

Regarding changes over time, the prevalent impression in the scholarship has been that the economic conditions of the judicial functionaries deteriorated consistently after the sixteenth century. Scholars have blamed this decline primarily on the increasing numbers of candidates for stagnant numbers of judicial appointments, a situation that led to shorter tenure times and longer waiting periods. Our results show a significant decline in wealth accumulation during the period after 1768, a period of devastating wars and economic turmoil in Ottoman history.

II. The Ottoman Judicial System – A Recapitulation

The Ottoman judiciary, part of the group called *ilmiye*, was responsible for formulating, interpreting, and implementing the Ottoman law. By accomplishing these tasks, they reinforced a basis for the legitimacy of the sultan’s authority. Protected from the death penalty and exempted from state confiscation of property, they had esteemed positions in the Ottoman Empire.⁴

⁴ As only 3 of the 145 Ottoman *şeyhülislams* were executed, some exceptional cases contradicting their privileges are found. Esra Yakut, *Şeyhülislamlık: Yenileşme Döneminde Devlet ve Din* (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2005), 39. For instance, between 1750 and 1839 the properties of 11 persons who were members of the *ilmiye* were confiscated. See Yasin Arslantaş, “Confiscation by the Ruler: A Study of the Ottoman Practice of Müsadere, 1700s–1839” (PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2017), 101.

Included in *ilmiye* were the *şeyhülislams*, *kazaskers*, *kadıs*, *müderrises*, *muftis*, *nakibüleşrafs*, physicians, astrologers, *imams*, *müezzins*, and preachers, who served many functions for the state, in addition to their basic duties in adjudication (*kaza*), education (*tedris*), and issuing *fetvas* (*ifta*).

At its peak, the Ottoman Empire boasted a sophisticated judicial hierarchy, headed by the *şeyhülislam* from about the mid-1500s. The next two highest-ranking judicial officials of the empire, the *kazaskers* of the Balkans and Anatolia, directed the judicial-administrative hierarchies in different parts of the empire. In principle, the judicial system matched seniority and knowledge of legal practice with prominence and income. Thus, more-experienced judges and the graduates of higher-ranking schools (*madrakas*) served in wealthy and prestigious posts. In practice, family connections and social networks often played a role in appointments to desirable positions.⁵

The judiciary, charged with administering justice in the sultan's name, also possessed various nonjudicial responsibilities, including notarial service, enforcement of the official prices (*narh*), and supervision of the charitable foundations (*vakıfs*). The jurisdictions in which they served were divided into two broader classes, those of the higher order (*mevleviyet*) and those of the regular judgeships of smaller towns (*kasaba*), and each group contained several graded subrankings. In the sixteenth century, the judgeships of Istanbul, Mecca, Medina, Edirne, Bursa, Cairo, Damascus, and Jerusalem belonged to the highest level, with a symbolic pay-rank of 500

⁵ Baki Tezcan, "The Ottoman *Mevali* as 'Lords of the Law,'" *Journal of Islamic Studies* 20:3 (2009), 383–407; Madeline C. Zilfi, "Elite Circulation in the Ottoman Empire: Great Mollas of the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 26:3 (1983), 318–64; Abdurrahman Atçıl, "The Route to the Top in the Ottoman *İlmiye* Hierarchy of the Sixteenth Century," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72:3 (2009), 489–512.

akçes per day. Other important provincial centers, such as Adana, Aintab, Amid, Belgrade, Sofia, and Erzurum, also boasted higher judicial status but were constituted at a lower level, with a symbolic pay-rank of 300 akçes per day.⁶ Finally, the regular judges constituted the lowest level of this hierarchy, their symbolic pay-ranks varying from 25 to 150 akçes per day. A century later, regular judgeships had 15, 12, and 7 distinct subrankings in Anatolia, Rumelia, and Egypt (under the jurisdiction of the Anatolian *kazasker*), respectively.⁷ As a convention, appointments to lower- and higher-level judgeships were made from different constituencies, and the judges in the latter could not be promoted from the former.

The courts that served larger populations typically held higher positions in the judicial hierarchy than those that served smaller populations, because their heavier workloads could generate higher revenues.⁸ The stated pay-grades of the courts may have been realistic indications of actual revenues early in Ottoman history. In later periods, however, these grades lost their economic meaning due to inflationary pressures. They became ordinal in nature as indications of each court's relative position. Although the pay-grades of many courts were adjusted in later eras, we know little about the basis for these revaluations. They could be associated with major demographic shifts and changes in agrarian production or regional trade conditions.

⁶ Fahri Unan, "Mevleviyet," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2004), 29:467.

⁷ Kuru and Önal, *Osmanlı Kaza Teşkilatı*, 25–27.

⁸ Some researchers pointed out that symbolic pay-grade of kazas per day was calculated as "ten akçes for every thousand households"; see İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin İlmiye Teşkilâtı* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1965), 91; Halil İncalcık, "The Ruznamçe Registers of the Kadıasker of Rumeli as Preserved in the İstanbul Müftülük Archives," *Essays in Ottoman History* (Istanbul: Eren Yayınları, 1998), 129.

The incomes of Ottoman judges and other court personnel were largely based on the fees they collected from court services, such as adjudications, inheritance divisions, notarial services, and correspondence with other judicial and administrative authorities. In addition, they received income from services in the allotment and collection of taxes in their jurisdictions.⁹ The sultanic lawbooks (*kanunnames*) and various other sources list the amounts the court personnel were supposed to charge for specific services. The amounts stated in these sources, however, are unrealistic: they show no rise in court fees between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries despite a multiple-fold increase in prices during the same period.¹⁰ The court personnel likely raised the fees in response to inflation and to compensate for increasingly shorter tenures and longer wait times between appointments after the sixteenth century.¹¹

By the sixteenth century, the average term of tenure for the appointments of the judges was about three years.¹² The length of tenure ranged from twelve to twenty months in the late seventeenth century, depending on the status of the judgeship.¹³ Most judges in service spent

⁹ Zeynep Dörtok Abacı and Boğaç Ergene discuss the issue of judges' revenues in their forthcoming article "The Price of Justice: Revenues Generated by Ottoman Courts of Law in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (forthcoming in 2022).

¹⁰ Özmucur and Pamuk, "Real Wages," 301.

¹¹ Halil İnalçık, "Maḥkama," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (1986), 6:3–5; Boğaç Ergene, "Cost of Court Usage in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Anatolia: Court Fees as Recorded in Estate Inventories," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 45:1 (2002), 20–39.

¹² Beyazıt, "Meşrebzâde Arif Efendi," 51.

¹³ *Ibid.* Toward the end of the seventeenth century, the tenure the *kadıs* in *mevleviyet* positions was one year. The term of office in regular judgeships was first reduced to two years and then to twenty months. Yasemin Beyazıt, "Osmanlı İlimiye Bürokrasisinde Merkez-Çevre İletişimine Dair Sorunlar (XVI. Yüzyıl)," *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil Tarih Coğrafya Fakültesi Tarih Bölümü Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 29:47 (2010), 157–76.

their careers alternating between periods of service (*ittisal*) and waiting (*infisal*) for new appointments while out of office. Over the centuries, because of the increasing number of candidates for a relatively stagnant number of judicial positions, appointment durations declined and waiting times increased significantly. On average, a regular judge in the province of Anatolia would have expected to spend fifty-one months between appointments in the first half of the eighteenth century.¹⁴ In the Balkans, most judges spent twenty-five to sixty months between appointments.¹⁵ In principle, a judge had to reside in Istanbul while out of office in order to attend the weekly council of his *kazasker* organization for further training and supervision (*mülazemet*). The judges who completed their tenures or those who abandoned posts prematurely for other reasons had to find alternative ways of earning income while waiting for a new appointment. They were typically under significant financial stress during this period and often had no choice but accumulate large amounts of debt for continuance.¹⁶

¹⁴ İsmail Gündoğdu, “The Ottoman Ulema Group and the State of Practicing ‘Kaza’ Authority during the 18th Century” (PhD diss., Middle East Technical University, Ankara, 2009), 115. Akiba states for a slightly later period that, according to an imperial order, “there were 5,000 to 6,000 members belonging to the hierarchy of *kadı*ship during the reign of Selim III [r. 1789–1807], despite the number of *kadı*ship posts in the whole Empire being around one thousand at most”; see idem, “From *Kadı* to *Naib*: Reorganization of the Ottoman Sharia Judiciary in the Tanzimat Period,” in *Frontiers of Ottoman Studies*, ed. Colin Imber and Keiko Kiyotaki (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 45.

¹⁵ Levent Kuru, “Kazasker Ruznamçelerine Göre 18. Yüzyılın İlk Yarısında Rumeli’de Kadılık Müessesesi” (PhD diss., Marmara University, 2016), 135–36. According to Kuru, only in 36 of the 3,048 appointments in the Balkans did the *kadı*s have waiting times less than twenty months; *ibid.*

¹⁶ On the nature of the *kadı*s’ expenses and the references to their financial difficulties, especially during their years out of office, see, for example, Zuhuri Danişman, ed., *Koçi Bey Risalesi* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1972), 29–30; and Sevim İlgürel, ed., *Hezârfen Hüseyin Efendi: Telhîsü’l beyân fî Kavânin-i Âl-i Osmân* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1998), 203–4. Atçıl suggested that in the sixteenth century high-ranking judges could be assigned to teaching positions while out of office; see *Scholars and Sultans*, 137.

Although most courts were staffed by active judges under normal term appointments, a significant number of them were assigned to ranking members of the judicial hierarchy for longer periods, sometimes without term limits. Such an arrangement could serve the purpose of providing financial support to those who were old, sick, or retired as well as the privileged members of the *ilmiye* who were out of office.¹⁷ In such cases, the assignees normally sent substitutes to their posts instead of personally performing their responsibilities.

Substitutes, as deputy judges, had legal training and served largely as proxies who assisted the appointed judges in situations that involved a wide jurisdiction and a heavy workload. For example, there were twenty-six deputies associated with the *kaza* of Eyüp, forty with Galata, and five with Üsküdar.¹⁸ There were deputy judges in many big townships. Their functions, jurisdictions, and terms of tenure were determined by the judge. From the end of the seventeenth century onward, many judges preferred not to travel to their posts and instead sent deputies to fulfill their responsibilities, based on a variety of financial arrangements that allowed them to share the revenues generated by the court.¹⁹

Revenue-sharing arrangements between the judges and their deputies were observed starting in the sixteenth century, though the central government occasionally tried to limit this practice when it led to excessive demands for revenue extraction. In many such arrangements,

¹⁷ Kuru, “Rumeli’de Kadılık,” 82–94.

¹⁸ Uzurçarşılı, *İlmiye Teşkilatı*, 133, 134.

¹⁹ Hamiyet Sezer Feyzioğlu and Selda Kılıç, “Tanzimat Arifesinde Kadılık-Naiplik Kurumu,” *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 24/38 (2005), 35. Jun Akiba has been working on this very topic; see Jun Akiba, “Ottoman Venality, or Tax Farming of Judicial Offices in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1700–1839” (paper presented at the Shari‘a Workshop at the Middle East Institute, Columbia University, January 26, 2018).

the judges did not travel to their jurisdictions but received payment from the deputies.²⁰ During the eighteenth century, the government repeatedly issued orders to require the judges to assume their responsibilities in person, but to little avail.²¹ During the early years of the Tanzimat reforms (1839–76), an attempt was made to introduce the salary system to deputies, but it was later abandoned in 1841. The government nevertheless succeeded in depriving the deputies from the fee revenues accruing from tax collection, while relieving them from the obligation of remitting other fee incomes to the original appointees who deputized them. Instead, the original appointees received salaries from the state treasury.²²

III. The Judiciary in Inheritance Registers

For a quantitative analysis of wealth accumulation in the Ottoman judiciary, we collected data from the estate inventories recorded in the registers of the *kismet-i askeriye* court of Istanbul.²³ This court was presided over by an official with the title *kassam-ı askeri* (*askeri kassam*), who specialized in registering the inheritance of government officials, referred to as the

²⁰ İnalçık, “Mahkama”; Uzunçarşılı, *İlmiye Teşkilatı*, 117–18; “Naip,” in *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Millî Eğitim Basımevi, 1964), 9:50–51.

²¹ Uzunçarşılı, *İlmiye Teşkilâtı*, 256, 259; Yurdakul, *Reform*, 140, 301–2; Kuru, *Kazasker Ruznamçelerinde*, 202, 211–12, 219.

²² Jun Akiba, “Kadılık Teşkilâtında Tanzimat’ın Uygulanması: 1840 Tarihli Ta’lîmnâme-i Hükkâm,” *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 29 (2007), 9–40.

²³ Registers of Istanbul *kismet-i askeriye* court are now kept in the Istanbul Müftülük Archives. We used digitized copies available at the Center for Islamic Studies (İSAM), Türkiye Diyanet Foundation, Istanbul.

“*askeri* class.”²⁴ This class included the military, administrative, and religious officials of the ruling elite who had the privilege of tax exemption. The standard for inclusion in the *askeri* class, however, was not clearly defined and may have changed over time.²⁵ The registers of Istanbul, for example, included the estates of various artisans, merchants, and non-Muslims, whose membership in the ruling elite is questionable in many cases.²⁶ But we do not expect the ambiguity in the definition of the *askeri* class to affect our analysis, since we focus on the judicial personnel, a well-defined category of people who clearly belonged in the ruling elite.²⁷

²⁴ For the *kassam-ı askeri* and the *kısmet-i askeriye* court, see Uzunçarşılı, *İlmiye Teşkilâtı*, 121–25; Said Öztürk, “Osmanlı İlmiye Teşkilâtında Kassamlık Müessesesi,” *Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi* 15 (1995–97), 393–429; İlhami Yurdakul, *Osmanlı İlmiye Merkez Teşkilâtı’nda Reform (1826–1876)* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2008), 127–35.

²⁵ For definitions of the *askeri* class mentioned in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources, see Uzunçarşılı, *İlmiye Teşkilâtı*, 125–26n2; Barkan, “Edirne Askeri Kassamı,” 5–7.

²⁶ *Kısmet-i askeriye* registers from the earlier period (late sixteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries) include fewer artisans/merchants and non-Muslims (about 3 and 1 percent, respectively), according to Said Öztürk’s study; see Öztürk, *Askeri Kassam*, 125, 127–28. Later, in a register covering 1790 and 1791, for example, 13 percent of the estate inventories belonged to artisans and merchants and 6 percent to non-Muslims (including female non-Muslims). See Sezgin Demircioğlu, “615 Numaralı İstanbul Askeri Kassam Defterinin Değerlendirmesi (H. 1205–1206/M. 1790–1791)” (master’s thesis, Istanbul University, 1998) (calculation is ours). For *kassam-ı askeri* courts in other locations, see Barkan, “Edirne Askeri Kassamı,” 1–479; André Raymond, “Les documents du mahkama comme source pour l’histoire économique et sociale de l’Égypte au XVIIIe siècle,” in *Les Arabes par leurs archives (XVIe–XXe siècles)*, ed. Jacques Berque et Dominique Chevallier (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1976), 125–39; Colette Establet et Jean-Paul Pascual, *La gent d’État*.

²⁷ *Naibs* during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had an ambiguous status between official and semi-official according to Gilles Veinstein’s article, but the *naibs* he dealt with are those who served as assistants to *kadıs* or who were dispatched to a subdivision of *kadıs*’ district. See Gilles Veinstein, “Sur les nâ’ib Ottomans (XVème–XVIème siècles),” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 25 (2001), 247–67. Unlike the *naibs* in Veinstein’s article, *naibs* in our sample are those who deputized the original officeholders, except for a few who served in a subdivision in a large city (Istanbul, Bursa, and Edirne). For subdivision *naibs*, see *kısmet-i askeriye* Register, 722, 28a; 734, 42b; 980, 66b.

Our dataset covers the years between 1689 and 1843. Although the oldest extant register of the Istanbul *kısmet-i askeriye* court covered the years between 1000 A.H. (1591/92 C.E.) and 1017 A.H. (1608/09 C.E.), there are only thirteen volumes available from the Hijri eleventh century (1591–1689).²⁸ Hence, we decided to collect data starting from the year 1101 A.H. (1689/90 C.E.), from which date the registers survived more or less consecutively, though still with several gaps until the 1710s. Our sample ends in 1843, just after the inauguration of the Tanzimat reforms, which changed judges' status significantly.

Our study is based on a sample of 575 estate inventories of those whom we identified as judicial personnel based on their functional service and ranks in the judicial hierarchy. The first classification (“functional service”) required us to distinguish the *kadis* from the *naibs*, among those whom we know to have served in a specific judgeship either at the time of their death or earlier in their lifetimes. Later, we also distinguished these groups based on whether they served in high-level or ordinary judgeships (*mevleviyet* and *kasaba*, respectively). When the deceased were identified in the records merely as “*hakimü 'ş-şer*” (literally, “sharia judge”) of a particular jurisdiction, a generic term that could mean either “judge” or “deputy judge,” we classified them as a separate group. Finally, in a few cases we also distinguished those who are identified in the records merely as the *muvakkat* (*muvakkıt*) or *mutasarrıf* of a certain judgeship. The term *muvakkat* indicates that the deceased was an appointee to a particular judgeship but he had not taken office at the time of death.²⁹ And although the term *mutasarrıf* could denote the holder of

²⁸ For the catalogue of the Istanbul *kısmet-i askeriye* Court registers, see Ahmet Akgündüz, *Şer'îye Sicilleri*, vol. 1: *Mahiyeti, Toplu Kataloğu ve Seçme Hükümler* (Istanbul: Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı, 1988), 100–116.

²⁹ For *muvakkat*, see Yurdakul, *Reform*, 145–49; Kuru, “Rumeli’de Kadılık,” 111–15. Although the term has been known as *muvakkıt*, we suspect that the use of passive participle (*muvakkat*) is more appropriate. We thank Himmet Taşkömür for reminding us of this point.

a judgeship, in our sources it referred to those who did not personally serve as a judge in his post of appointment but allowed a deputy to serve in his place and received income from the latter.

Unfortunately, information on the type and location of service is lacking for many individuals in our dataset. We distinguished among these according to their ranks in the judicial hierarchy. Unlike functional service, which indicates active employment in a specific judgeship (*kaza*), the ranks of the personnel indicate their relative status in the judicial hierarchy. In determining the ranks of the judiciary in our sample, we distinguished among those with the following labels: “*mevaliden*” (or “*mevali-i izamdan*”), “*kuzattan*,” and “*eşraf-ı kuzattan*.”³⁰ The term *mevali* (plural of *molla*) indicates status that is commensurate to serve in a *mevleviyet* and entitlement to income appropriate for this task, though we cannot be sure, unless the records make it clear, that those who carried this label were active in judicial administration. “*Kuzattan*,” which literally means “among *kadıs*,” is the rank label designated for those whose seniority would allow them to serve in and earn income at the level of regular town (*kasaba*) judgeships. Among the latter category, those who attained the highest level but remained under the level of *molla* were identified as “*eşraf-ı kuzattan*.” In practice, those with the three ranks could, but did not always, serve as a judge, deputy judge, or *hakimü’ş-şer’*. Those with the designations “*kuzattan*” and “*eşraf-ı kuzattan*” could also be *muvakkats* or *mutasarrıfs*.³¹ Finally, the records indicate that some of the out-of-office members of the judiciary (especially those with the rank

³⁰ In the tables, these appear in short forms as “*mevali*,” “*kuzat*,” “*eşraf-ı kuzat*.”

³¹ As stated, although the *kadıs* in specific judgeships must have been of the ranks of “*mevaliden*,” “*eşraf-ı kuzattan*,” or “*kuzattan*,” the estate inventories do not always explicitly identify the ranks of the deceased. On the other hand, while many *naibs* also boasted judicial ranks, including “*mevaliden*,” not all of them did. In fact, a few were originally teachers in religious colleges (“*müderresinden*”).

of *kuzattan*) were employed as court scribes or stewards of higher religious authorities. A very few others earned livings outside the judiciary system by, for example, selling rice or books, or operating public baths.³² In this study we consider all of them members of the judiciary irrespective of their actual functions.

Table 1 shows the numbers of judicial personnel in our sample by their service, ranks, and jurisdictions in different time periods. Because of their small numbers overall, we did not differentiate *hakimü'ş-şer'*, *mutasarrıf*, and *muvakkat* based on whether they were associated with higher- or lower-level judgeships, though most, if not all, were affiliated with regular *kazas*. In the case of individuals for whom we had no information regarding their appointments, we identified them in table 1 as “inactive” members of the judicial personnel. In fact, by far the highest proportion of the judicial personnel in the sample—more than a third of all entries in the dataset—consists of inactive *kuzat*. The proportion of the judges in the highest-order courts (“*kadı, mevleviyet*”) is also high, about 17 percent of the total. The numbers are very small in some categories, such as the inactive *mevali* and the deputy judges of higher-order courts (“*naib, mevleviyet*”).

Table 1
The Numbers of Judicial Personnel in the *Tereke* Records

Positional Categories	1689–1708	1709–28	1729–48	1749–68	1769–88	1789–1808	1809–43	Total
Kadı, kasaba	4	4	12	9	17	6	3	55
Kadı, mevleviyet	2	9	8	8	22	25	24	98
Naib, kasaba	0	2	1	5	24	14	21	67
Naib, mevleviyet	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	3
Inactive, kuzat	0	3	9	22	72	56	50	212
Inactive, eşraf-1 kuzat	0	0	1	3	12	16	34	66
Inactive, mevali	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	5
Hakimü'ş-şer'	0	0	0	0	2	13	3	18
Mutasarrıf	0	0	0	1	4	6	2	13

³² *Kısmet-i askeriye* register, 458, 77a; 635, 34b; 1025, 36a.

Muvakkat	0	0	3	4	8	3	0	18
Scribal	0	0	0	1	8	5	6	20
Total	6	18	34	53	172	146	146	575

Not every period is equally represented in the sample, as can be seen in the table. The numbers are low for the early decades of our period because earlier registers are not differentiated according to specific types of documents and contain large number of entries other than estate inventories. Registers that specialized in estate inventories became common from about 1760, allowing us to collect higher numbers of observations for robust coverage.³³ Istanbul's *kismet-i askeriye* archive contains about 1,520 registers that cover the period 1101–1258 A.H. But only 678 of these include estate inventories according to Ahmet Akgündüz's classification.³⁴ Of these, we surveyed 226 registers, about 33.3 percent of the total.³⁵ As much as possible, we entered all available inventories from the first register of each decade, up to fifty entries. We then moved to the registers of the next decade and repeated the same procedure. There are two reasons for the large cluster of observations from the 1760s and the 1800s: (1) more records are available from the 1760s onward; and (2) we wanted to intensively mine this era for future research. We have no reason to expect that the gaps in our source base might bias our results.

The judicial personnel included in our sample were mostly residents of intramural Istanbul (and its three suburbs: Galata, Eyüp, and Üsküdar), regardless of where they died. In addition,

³³ Specialization of registers likely stemmed from the increase in the number of estate inventories processed, although the increase seems to have started a decade earlier. Akgündüz, *Şer'iyeye Sicilleri*, 1:101–2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:100–116.

³⁵ Of these, thirty-nine did not contain any estate inventories that belonged to the judiciary.

our dataset includes thirty-one judges who were only temporary residents of Istanbul, recorded as staying as guests (*misafiren, müsafereten*), sometimes in an inn (*han*). In such cases, our records show their assets as being located in Istanbul, not in their hometowns.

Estate inventories were not prepared in all cases of death, which calls for caution in using them for research, as many scholars have discussed.³⁶ In principle, the court could not get involved in the assessment and division of estates unless there was a minor, mentally disabled, or absentee individual among the legal heirs, or unless there was a request from the heirs or the creditors of the deceased.³⁷ Estate inventories could also be registered if the state treasury (*beytülmal*) received a share from the estates, corresponding to cases in which the deceased had no heirs, the only heir was a spouse, or the heirs could not be identified. Registration of an estate was also necessary when the amount of the debt exceeded the total value of the estate. Although estate inventories were not kept for all members of the Ottoman judiciary on death, we believe the ones included in our dataset nevertheless constitute a representative sample for quantitative analysis. While our sample likely includes a higher proportion of older judges because of rising rates of mortality with age, we expect this tendency to be partially offset by the registration requirement for the estates of those who left a minor child.³⁸

³⁶ See, for example, Establet and Pascual, *Familles et fortunes*, 30–31; Gradeva, “Towards a Portrait of ‘the Rich,’” 155–56.

³⁷ Musa Çadırcı, “Tanzimat’ın İlanı Sıralarında Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Kadılık Kurumu ve 1838 Tarihli “Tarîk-i İlmiyye’ye Dâ’ir Ceza Kânunname’si,” *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 14:25 (1981–82), 153; *kısmet-i askeriye* register, 741, fol. 1a, ferman dated evahir-i Safer 1216 (July 1801).

³⁸ Establet and Pascual estimate that the deceased in their sample were younger than the average age at death. Establet et Pascual, *Familles et fortunes*, 31.

For consistency, we excluded from the dataset sporadically recorded information regarding revisions to previous inventories and the inventories that were obviously incomplete. If additional assets were discovered after an estate was inventoried, the court procedure was to enter a supplementary note (*zeyl*) that showed the evaluation and division of the newly found assets, but not the revised version of the whole inventory, at the time of the new discovery, for the record. The information regarding supplementary assets was randomly scattered throughout the registries rather than entered systematically for easy identification with the intention to merge with the original inventory. Therefore, it is nearly impossible to track all revisions concerning every record included in our dataset, which would have required a comprehensive search through all of the court registers in the archives. Likewise, we decided to exclude estates that were self-evidently incomplete at the time of original registry—such as lacking the value of certain assets, debts or credits, or references to property in other locales. Our dataset thus uniformly consists of complete information regarding the original state of estate inventories, based on the premise that the registration of estate was a continuous process—assets or heirs could appear later, or conflicts over ownership or debts could arise.

We should also note that estate inventories recorded only privately owned assets. Although rights to state-owned (*miri*) land or lifetime tax farming (*malikane*) could be passed from the deceased to their heirs, one cannot “inherit” public property (nor usufruct right to them) according to Islamic laws of inheritance, so this information is not included in estate inventories. Likewise, information regarding lifelong tenancies of endowed properties was not recorded, because the ownership of endowed property did not legally belong to the tenant.³⁹ Although

³⁹ A lifelong tenancy of endowed properties (such as a shop or a house) could be obtained by an *icareteyn* (double-rent) contract, according to which the tenant would pay an advance lump-sum

estate inventories started to include references (in the form of an additional note at the end of an inventory) to endowed properties inherited by heirs after the 1790s, we decided to omit these references for consistency. In addition to the unavailability of this information in earlier eras, even after the 1790s they were recorded only when the heirs transferred their shares to other heirs or third parties. Thus, if the heirs chose to keep their shares, the inventory would not have included the information regarding tenancies of endowed properties.

IV. Wealth Accumulation in the Judiciary

Typically, an inventory begins with the deceased's place of residence, sometimes followed by the information on the circumstance of his death (the location, etc.) and the deceased's identity, including his name, father's name, title, and official status in the administration. Then the heirs are identified and, if necessary, the trustee's name is given. Afterward, lists of property and belongings with appraised values follow, including all of the privately-owned assets—immovables, slaves, animals, books, clothes, furniture, utensils, cash, and other items. If the deceased had financial claims that were collected before the division of

payment (*icare-i muaccele*) and a regular monthly or annual rent (*icare-i müeccele*), which was set at a lower value. *Icareteyn* contracts became widespread in Ottoman society beginning in the early seventeenth century. For the *icareteyn*, see Ahmet Akgündüz, *İslâm Hukukunda ve Osmanlı Tatbikatında Vakıf Müessesesi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1988), 354–90; Kayoko Hayashi, “Isuramu Ho no Sasshin: Osumancho ni Okeru Shin Chintai Keiyaku Seido no Tanjo wo Megutte (An Innovation in Islamic Law: On the Emergence of a New Rental Contract),” in *Iwanami Koza Sekai Rekishi*, vol. 14: *Isuramu, Kan Indoyo Sekai* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2000), 169–91. For more recent studies, see Süleyman Kaya, *Osmanlı Hukukunda İcâreteyn* (Istanbul: Klasik, 2014); Kayhan Orbay, “İcâreteyn Hakkında,” in *Osmanlı Sosyal ve Ekonomik Tarihi: Prof. Dr. Yılmaz Kurt Armağanı*, ed. Hatice Oruç and Muhammet Ceyhan (Ankara: Akçak Yayınları, 2016), 83–92. For an impression of how various groups invested in *icareteyn* contracts in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Fatih Bozkurt, “Tereke Defterleri ve Osmanlı Maddi Kültüründe Değişim (1785–1875 İstanbul Örneği)” (PhD diss., Sakarya University, 2011), 92.

the estate, they are also given. Uncollected claims are entered separately. After indicating the sums of the estates' gross values, the records enumerate deductions, such as the expense of washing and swathing the corpse; fees associated with the assessment and division of the estate; the portion of the dowry owed to the surviving wife; debts; and various other expenses, including the cost of transportation if the deceased died away from Istanbul. Then the net values are calculated and the shares of the heirs are recorded. When the sums of the debts exceed the total values of the estates, the estates are divided among the creditors after all of the fees and expenses are deducted.⁴⁰ In such cases, we estimated the net wealth of the deceased by deducting the total original debts from the estate's total value.

To facilitate intertemporal comparison of wealth, we transformed original nominal values to real equivalents (in akçe). The values of gross and net wealth provided in the registers were naturally specified in current prices (in akçe and/or guruş), for contemporaneous purposes. This would not have been a problem for our analysis had the price level stayed about the same between 1689 and 1843. The consumer price index for Istanbul, however, increased from about 7.29 to 193.12 (1469 = 1.0),⁴¹ much of this rise happened in the nineteenth century. To remove price effects from the wealth data, we deflated the original nominal figures to real values by using the consumer price index prepared by Süleyman Özmucur and Şevket Pamuk.⁴²

⁴⁰ This method of inheritance division was called *gurema usulü*. See Veysel Gürhan and Ercan Gümüş, "Osmanlı Kadı Sicilleri'nde bir Borç Ödeme Yöntemi Olarak 'Guremâ Usulü' ve Uygulanışı," *Turkish Studies* 11:6 (2016), 61–74.

⁴¹ See Şevket Pamuk, *İstanbul ve Diğer Kentlerde 500 Yıllık Fiyatlar ve Ücretler; 1469–1998* (Ankara: Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü Matbaası, 2000), 14–17.

⁴² Süleyman Özmucur and Şevket Pamuk, "Real Wages and Standards of Living in the Ottoman Empire 1489–1941," *Journal of Economic History* 62 (2002), 293–321.

We use the information regarding gross and net real wealth in our sample to generate estimates of the levels and inequality of wealth among the judicial personnel. We first calculated some descriptive statistics that show the distribution of wealth in each positional category. Specifically, as seen in table 2, we calculated the mean, standard deviation, and minimum and maximum values of the gross and net real wealth.

To keep the analysis simple, in table 2 we combined the previously (table 1) itemized positional categories of *hakimü'ş-şer`*, *mutasarrıf*, *muvakkat*, and scribal into a single group, “other.” When we compare the mean wealth across positional categories, interesting results emerge. The gross wealth averages were generally higher for the personnel employed in higher-level judgeships (*mevleviyet*) than in regular ones (*kasaba*), as expected. Among the inactive personnel, the values are highest among the *mevali*, followed by the *eşraf-ı kuzat*. The mean gross wealth was lowest among the inactive *kuzat*.

Table 2
Wealth Differences between Judicial Subgroups
(Real Wealth in akçe, 1469 = 1.0)

Positional Categories	Gross Wealth				Net Wealth			
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Kadı, kasaba	36,819.9	53,139.9	1,095.2	361,852.5	20,069.8	51,800.1	-42,537.4	360,981.3
Kadı, mevleviyet	88,436.5	103,730.5	1,217.1	522,959.2	16,640.1	105,921.7	-324,824.2	367,495.7
Naib, kasaba	31,905.0	68,291.8	1,012.5	422,181.1	19,616.1	64,390.8	-45,603.9	399,723.5
Naib, mevleviyet	41,542.2	41,584.5	17,191.5	89,558.2	10,494.6	9,088.7	0.0	15,792.9
Inactive, kuzat	11,828.7	20,684.3	133.7	164,219.0	5,803.8	29,862.5	-331,802.8	161,290.0
Inactive, eşraf-ı kuzat	34,831.9	99,028.7	458.9	758,963.8	26,224.5	95,786.1	-164,565.4	705,416.7
Inactive, mevali	124,450.6	221,592.9	1,057.3	516,296.7	74,235.1	123,450.8	992.1	288,794.3
Other	32,610.4	74,528.0	913.6	528,370.3	13,351.5	61,831.4	-251,953.6	328,355.7
Total	35,978.8	74,761.3	133.7	758,963.8	14,645.8	67,882.5	-331,802.8	705,416.7

One way to contextualize these figures is to compare them to contemporary real estate and slave prices. Based on eighty-six observations from one court register, Yasemin Çiftçi recently calculated the mean house price in Galata, a suburb of Istanbul, to be about 674 guruş for 1725, which corresponds to about 11,587 akçes in real prices (1469 = 1.0). The distribution of housing values might be skewed toward the higher end, though: Çiftçi observed the mode and the median to be “200–300” and “200–210” guruş, corresponding to “3,483–5,158” and “3,483–3,610” akçes, respectively.⁴³ And based on twelve observations from the court records of Galata between 1718 and 1730, Mustafa Akbel estimated the mean price for male and female slaves in Galata to be 240 guruş, corresponding to 4,126 akçes in 1469 prices.⁴⁴

These findings indicate that the mean net wealth among the judiciary at the time of death was not extreme. Another way to consider the figures in table 2 is to compare them to the judiciary’s potential intakes based on their work. According to Dörtok Abacı and Ergene’s calculations, *kadıs* who occupied the judgeships of Kastamonu, a regular *kaza*, and Bursa, a *mevleviyet*, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries could earn annually up to

⁴³ Yasemin Çiftçi, “An Analysis of the Ottoman Real Estate Market in 1725 through Galata and Bursa Judicial Records,” *İçtimaiyat Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 5:2 (2021), 197. 1 guruş = 120 akçe. The range was between 10.8 and 8,000 guruş. For comparison, the author calculates the mean house price in Bursa as 120 guruş at around the same time in nominal prices. According to Hüseyin Necdet Ertuğ, the house prices in two other districts of Istanbul, Hasköy and Eyüb, at around the same time ranged from 50 to 6,000 guruş in nominal prices, or 860 to 103,152 akçes in real ones (1469 = 1.0). Ertuğ notes that many lower-end price observations in his dataset are associated with intrafamily transactions. See Hüseyin Necdet Ertuğ, “Şeriyeye Sicillerine Göre Hicri 1137 (1724–25) Yılı İstanbul’unda Osmanlı Konutu / Menzili,” *Akademik İncelemeler Dergisi* 10:2 (2015), 139.

⁴⁴ The range is 6–600 guruş. The median prices were 150 and 225 guruş, Mustafa Akbel, “Osmanlı Başkentinde Kölelerin Durumu ve Azatları: Galata Örneği (1718–1730),” *Tarih ve Gelecek Dergisi* 3:1 (2017), 212–38.

56,000 and 171,000 akçes, respectively, in 1469 prices.⁴⁵ In other words, only the highest-level judiciary personnel (*mevali*) could have expected to leave behind estates worth roughly equivalent to what a *kadı* could earn in Kastamonu in a single year.

Finally, our figures can be considered in the light of other wealth estimates based on Ottoman estate inventories. Ergene and Berker calculated the mean net wealth in Kastamonu to be 9,173 akçes (1469 = 1.0) during the period between 1712 and 1760.⁴⁶ Hülya Canbakal and Alpay Filiztekin similarly proposed estimates of “real mean wealth” for the period between 1740 and 1760 to be 15,571 akçes in Bursa, 9,186 akçes in Kayseri, 8,445 akçes in Manisa, 9,221 akçes in Ayntab, 11,082 akçes in Trabzon, 7,157 akçes in Manastır, and 19,527 akçes in Diyarbakir, all in 1469 prices.⁴⁷

We should exercise caution in comparing these figures to our estimates, because the records examined in these studies include inventories that belonged to women and individuals with highly diverse socioeconomic characteristics, including urban laborers and rural populations. But given the relatively privileged position of the judiciary in the Ottoman society, it is significant that the mean net wealth of certain subgroups of the judicial personnel was at or below the mean wealth accumulated in many corners of the polity and that the mean net wealth estimated for two provincial centers (Bursa and Diyarbakir) was above the overall means we estimated for the entire judiciary. These comparisons indicate moderate to modest levels of

⁴⁵ Dörtok Abacı and Ergene, “Price of Justice.”

⁴⁶ Ergene and Berker, “Wealth and Inequality.”

⁴⁷ All conversions to 1469 prices are based on our calculations. See Canbakal and Filiztekin, “Wealth and Demography,” 5. While Canbakal and Filiztekin do not explicitly state this in the article, we assume that the figures they present as “real mean wealth” represent “net” valuations.

wealth accumulation in the Ottoman judiciary, especially for those in the lower levels of the hierarchy, despite significant variations in our sample (on these variations, see below).

Aside from implications for the relative affluence of the judiciary in the society, the figures in table 2 provide important insights about differences between subgroups with regard to economic behavior. For example, the ordering of mean wealth between subgroups seems to change drastically for active *kadis* and active *naibs* when we shift the focus from gross wealth to net wealth figures. Whereas the mean gross wealth was higher for active judges and deputies posted in higher-order towns than for those in regular ones, the ordering for mean net wealth was reversed. Since the main difference between gross and net wealth was primarily the amount of debt paid out of inheritance, the lower values of mean net wealth among those in higher-order judgeships probably came about because the members of the latter group were more likely to take out loans between appointments than those posted in regular towns were.⁴⁸ Equally interesting, the ordering remained the same among the inactive personnel.

V. Inequality of Wealth

For a closer look at wealth inequality among subgroups, we calculated the values of the coefficient of variation and the Gini coefficient as standardized measures commonly used to perform quantitative assessments of inequality. The coefficient of variation, defined as the ratio of the standard deviation to the mean, shows the extent of variability in relation to the mean of the population. Since more-equal wealth distributions would have smaller standard deviations, the coefficient of variation would be smaller for positional categories with more-equal wealth.

⁴⁸ About 28 percent (29 of 102) of those who served in *mevleviyet* jurisdictions had debts and court fees that exceed the overall values of their assets. This rate is 21 percent (119 of 575) in the entire dataset.

The Gini coefficient is a similar statistic of variation, measured from the proportions of wealth held by individual components of a distribution, which in principle can vary between 0 and 1. A Gini coefficient of 0 would correspond to perfect equality, where everyone has the same wealth, and a coefficient of 1 would indicate maximal inequality (e.g., all wealth is held by one individual).

Table 3
Inequality of Wealth within Judicial Subgroups

Positional Categories	Gross Wealth		Net Wealth	
	Coefficient of Variation	Gini Coefficient	Coefficient of Variation	Gini Coefficient
Kadı, kasaba	1.4	0.59	2.6	0.63
Kadı, mevleviyet	1.2	0.55	6.4	0.62
Naib, kasaba	2.1	0.68	3.3	0.73
Naib, mevleviyet	1.0	0.39	0.9	0.01
Inactive, kuzat	1.7	0.63	5.1	0.69
Inactive, eşraf-ı kuzat	2.8	0.72	3.7	0.77
Inactive, mevali	1.8	0.71	1.7	0.69
Other	2.3	0.69	4.6	0.70
Total	2.1	0.71	4.6	0.74

Our estimates, reported in table 3, show high levels of overall (total) inequality within the judicial personnel. Although no directly comparable estimates exist for wealth inequality among the judicial personnel per se, we can attempt to put these figures in context by evaluating them in relation to measures of wealth inequality available for other societies and time periods and in light of the fact that our measures concern a relatively uniform segment of the society. Using information from the estate inventories of Damascus and Cairo in the early eighteenth century, Establet, Pascual, and Raymond found the Gini coefficients to be 0.74 and 0.81 in these large

Ottoman urban centers.⁴⁹ For Kastamonu in the eighteenth century, the Gini coefficient was lower, in the 0.60s, likely due to the elimination of extreme outliers from their sample.⁵⁰ Canbakal and Filiztekin estimated the coefficients to be in the 0.70s for Bursa and Diyarbakir, and in the 0.50s and 0.60s for Kayseri and Manisa, for most subperiods before the nineteenth century.⁵¹ Comparable levels of wealth inequality could be found in non-Ottoman parts of the world in the eighteenth century. Economic historians of early modern America and Britain, for example, have likewise used estate inventories, along with other sources, to estimate the Gini coefficient to be 0.72 for the net worth of free men and unmarried women in the late eighteenth-century United States, with major regional variations, and 0.73 for British insurable wealth circa 1780.⁵²

The Gini coefficients of 0.71 and 0.74 that we report in table 3, as the overall measures of gross and net wealth inequality in the Ottoman judiciary, thus seem high in comparison. To see this, note that the town- or country-level estimates of the Gini coefficient are based on all applicable adults, including both the poor and wealthy segments of the economic hierarchy and the ordinary citizens as well as elite government officials. The individuals included in our

⁴⁹ Colette Establet, Jean-Paul Pascual, and André Raymond, “La mesure de l’inégalité dans la société ottomane: Utilisation de l’indice de Gini pour le Caire et Damas vers 1700,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 37:2 (1994), 171–82.

⁵⁰ Ergene and Berker, “Wealth and Inequality,” 28; Boğaç Ergene, Atabey Kaygun, and Metin Coşgel, “A Temporal Analysis of Wealth in Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Kastamonu,” *Continuity and Change* 28:1 (2013), 1–26; at 13.

⁵¹ Hülya Canbakal and Alpay Filiztekin, “Wealth and Inequality in Ottoman Lands in the Early Modern Period” (paper presented at the AALIMS–Rice University Conference on the Political Economy of the Muslim World, April 4–5, 2013).

⁵² Carole Shammas, “A New Look at Long-Term Trends in Wealth Inequality in the United States,” *American Historical Review* 98 (1993), 412–31; John A. James, “Personal Wealth Distribution in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain,” *Economic History Review* 41 (1988), 543–65.

dataset, by contrast, constitute a somewhat uniform segment of the society: personnel with similar training and employment opportunities. Although they are based on different types of populations, comparing our estimates with other estimates of wealth inequality nevertheless gives us clues regarding the high magnitude of inequality among the members of the Ottoman judiciary.

Table 3 also shows thought-provoking results regarding the inequality of wealth within individual subgroups. For each group, measures of inequality were generally higher for net wealth than gross wealth, indicating that differences in borrowing behavior among individuals magnified the variation of wealth within each category. The ordering of inequality measures among the categories was also somewhat different between gross and net wealth. Regarding differences between categories, the inequality of gross wealth was lower among the judges and deputies serving in higher-order judgeships than among those who were inactive or serving in regular posts.

VI. Wealth over Time

We now turn to the question of how wealth changed over time. This question is important because the economic status of the judicial personnel may have deteriorated after the sixteenth century. As we mentioned earlier, increasing numbers of the candidates for limited numbers of judicial appointments led to shorter tenure times and longer waiting periods in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, there is significant anecdotal evidence for enhanced economic troubles among the judicial appointees.⁵³ Our dataset allows us to examine these arguments

⁵³ See note 16.

systematically from the late seventeenth century onward.

Aside from institutional changes in the judiciary itself, drastic changes in the broader Ottoman economy likely impacted wealth accumulation among the judicial personnel. Chief among the critical turning points in the economic history of the Ottoman Empire during our period, especially regarding its impact on the wealth of individuals, is the year 1768. Researchers have recently identified this year as the beginning point of several decisive events and a severe financial crisis in the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁴ The fiscal circumstances of the empire took a downturn during this period, primarily because of the Ottoman-Russian wars of 1768–74. The economy further deteriorated when the Ottomans entered another war in 1787, this time against both Russia and Austria. To close the budget gap that emerged, the government imposed a variety of new taxes aimed at increasing revenue.⁵⁵ There are reasons to expect that the fiscal strain on the polity and society continued in the early nineteenth century, given the subsequent phases of the military conflict with Russia (1806–12 and 1828–29) and the Greek War of Independence (1821–29).⁵⁶ Özmucur and Pamuk’s calculations indicate significant inflationary pressures in

⁵⁴ Coşgel, Metin, and Boğaç A. Ergene, “Inequality of Wealth in the Ottoman Empire: War, Weather, and Long-Term Trends in Eighteenth-Century Kastamonu,” *Journal of Economic History* 72:2 (2012): 308–31; Ergene et al., “A Temporal Analysis.”

⁵⁵ For further details, see Yavuz Cezar, *Osmanlı Maliyesinde Bunalım ve Değişim Dönemi (XVIII. yy. dan Tanzimat’a Mali Tarih)* (Istanbul: Alan Yayıncılık, 1986), 74, 110, 135; and Ahmet Tabakoğlu, *Gerileme Dönemine Girerken Osmanlı Maliyesi* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1985), 295–300.

⁵⁶ Particularly relevant for the purposes of our discussion here might be the loss of the Peloponnese region after Greek independence, which must have decreased the available posts for appointment and further strained the judiciary’s financial conditions. See Akiba, “Kadıılık Teşkilâtında Tanzimat’ın Uygulanması,” 33.

the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which must have negatively impacted the economic well-being of most groups in the empire.⁵⁷

Table 4
Mean Gross Wealth over Time
(Real Wealth in akçe, 1469 = 1.0)

Positional Categories	1689–1708	1709–28	1729–48	1749–68	1769–88	1789–1808	1809–43	Total
Kadı, kasaba	19,644.3	27,017.3	42,296.8	58,121.6	29,851.7	36,139.6	33,553.8	36,819.9
Kadı, mevleviyet	20,459.5	102,370.3	86,110.5	148,917.1	123,979.5	81,585.0	44,047.1	88,436.5
Naib, kasaba		56,428.6	47,442.4	94,263.3	35,482.1	11,986.6	23,172.9	31,905.0
Naib, mevleviyet					17,876.8		53,374.9	41,542.2
Inactive, kuzat		20,173.5	13,256.0	27,022.5	11,571.5	9,502.8	7,361.1	11,828.7
Inactive, eşraf-ı kuzat			96,104.4	40,538.6	17,359.4	16,403.8	47,365.1	34,831.9
Inactive, mevali					42,513.0	261,793.1	13,640.7	124,450.6
Other			49,500.3	13,066.7	68,185.6	10,298.7	18,748.0	32,610.4
Total	19,916.0	66,821.1	47,288.2	57,081.4	38,242.5	28,600.0	27,254.3	35,978.8

Tables 4 and 5 show the change in the mean gross and net real wealth over time, in vicennial intervals. The most striking change in both gross and net real wealth happened around the year 1768, as hypothesized. Although there seemed to be a similar decline around the late 1720s, the number of observations (see table 1) available for the preceding period is too low for us to reach a definitive conclusion. The sharp fall around the year 1768 was likely due to the devastating effects of the war and ensuing fiscal crisis, as discussed above. The mean gross real wealth fell sharply in all positional categories during the two decades after 1768, by about one-third in total. The mean net real wealth fell even more sharply during the same period, by about three-quarters in total. This decrease probably resulted from heavy amounts of borrowing by the

⁵⁷ Özmucur and Pamuk, “Real Wages,” 300–331. According to their consumer price index for Istanbul, prices increased more than 700 percent between the 1790s and the 1840s.

judiciary personnel as an immediate consequence of the financial crises.

Table 5
Mean Net Wealth over Time
(Real Wealth in akçe, 1469 = 1.0)

Positional Categories	1689–1708	1709–28	1729–48	1749–68	1769–88	1789–1808	1809–1843	Total
Kadı, kasaba	7,251.6	17,313.2	27,690.6	43,232.2	6,779.5	20,790.4	22,004.3	20,069.8
Kadı, mevleviyet	-21,173.2	26,468.3	16,151.3	87,086.0	21,383.9	696.0	5,046.7	16,640.1
Naib, kasaba		50,506.9	23,684.3	85,276.0	18,786.8	1,360.6	13,965.3	19,616.1
Naib, mevleviyet					15,690.8		7,896.4	10,494.6
Inactive, kuzat		11,022.9	8,262.8	18,768.6	1,603.6	6,034.0	5,134.1	5,803.8
Inactive, eşraf-ı kuzat			81,500.1	31,488.0	-3,102.2	11,545.8	41,392.6	26,224.5
Inactive, mevali					36,048.9	146,394.3	6,289.3	74,235.1
Other			28,671.9	9,512.4	26,369.7	869.3	13,466.0	13,351.5
Total	-2,223.4	24,530.5	21,384.2	39,817.5	9,909.2	7,668.6	15,970.9	14,645.8

The responses to the financial crisis of the late eighteenth century differed across positional categories. Although the mean gross wealth for the whole sample (total) kept falling in the ensuing decades, there were signs of relative recovery among certain groups after the first decade of the nineteenth century. Specifically, the mean gross wealth of inactive *kuzat* and judges in higher-order posts kept declining until the end of our period. The wealth of the judges assigned to regular judgeships, on the other hand, started to rise around the turn of the century. Likewise, the wealth of deputy judges in regular posts, inactive *eşraf-ı kuzat*, and those in the “other” category rose during the last period of table 4, after about the first decade of the nineteenth century.

Table 5 indicates a partial recovery for net wealth in the initial decades of the nineteenth century, though it remained under the 1709–68 levels. In total, the mean net wealth started to rise in the 1810s. The rise started even earlier for judges in regular posts and all three types of inactive personnel. Although the mean net wealth subsequently fell somewhat in some

categories, the number of observations in those categories is too low to generalize.

VII. A Regression Analysis of Wealth Inequality

In this section, we discuss the results of a regression analysis of the impact of differences in positional categories and time periods on the accumulation of wealth in the Ottoman judiciary. The preceding discussion has already given us various clues regarding the relationship between these variables. Since the considered variables likely influenced wealth simultaneously, however, such isolated comparisons must be viewed as tentative until we control for their effects systematically. Moreover, there were likely several other confounding variables that should be included in the analysis of factors influencing the wealth of judicial personnel during this period. By controlling for these influences systematically, multiple regression analysis allows us to estimate with greater precision the magnitudes and statistical significance of the individual effects of our key variables of interest.

The dependent variables of our analysis are gross and net real wealth, discussed above. The key variables of interest are the positional categories and time periods. To examine the effects of these variables on gross and net wealth, we constructed two sets of binary variables. The binary variables regarding positional categories correspond directly to those examined in tables 2–5. Each binary variable in the set is defined as equaling 1 for the judicial personnel who belonged to the relevant category, and 0 otherwise. The variable “*kadı, mevleviyet*,” for example, equals 1 for an individual who served as a judge at a higher-rank post, and 0 otherwise. To avoid multicollinearity, we omitted from the analysis the category of judges serving in regular townships (“*kadı, kasaba*”). This category will thus serve as the reference group for other positional categories, so that the coefficients of all other binary variables in this set will simply

show the differential effect from the reference group.

We used a similar procedure to define a binary variable to consider the effect of time periods. Specifically, we constructed two binary variables that mark the key time periods that stood out in our analysis in tables 4 and 5, namely the periods before and after the year 1768. The first binary variable thus equals 1 if the estate inventory was recorded during the period before 1768, and 0 otherwise. Likewise, the second binary variable corresponds to the period after 1768, so that it equals 1 if the year on record was greater than 1768. We omitted the first period as the reference group (to avoid multicollinearity), so that the coefficient of “Post-1768 Period” will show the differential effects of how wealth changed during this time period relative to the initial period of 1689–1768. In addition, we included the variable “Year” (Gregorian) to determine how wealth changed during our period, aside from the possible downward shift after the year 1768.

Our analysis includes four sets of control variables. The first set consists of the religious titles of individuals. Although all of these men were members of the Ottoman religious establishment (*ilmiye*), judiciary personnel varied in terms of whether they carried the titles of *el hac* for performing the religious pilgrimage to Mecca and *esseyid* for having family/blood connection to Prophet Muhammad. One might expect the costly voyage to Mecca to reduce an individual’s wealth or, alternatively, to indicate disposable income to spare for such an endeavor, and having connection to the Prophet may have enhanced one’s chances of accumulating wealth, for example by generating greater trust and business connections. To test for these expectations and control for their influence, we include two binary variables regarding the titles of *el hac* and *esseyid*: each variable takes the value of 1 if the individual carried the relevant title, 0 otherwise.

In the second set of control variables, we include two binary variables that similarly

control for having affiliation with powerful families. Specifically, we observe whether an individual's name included the prefix *zade-*, which denotes a member of a prominent family, and whether the individual had *ilmiye* connection in the form of a close relative, such as a brother or father, with *ilmiye* affiliation.⁵⁸

The third set of control variables takes advantage of the information recorded in estate inventories regarding an individual's heirs. We used this information to construct two types of variables, specifically as proxies to an individual's age and his bequest motive. Regarding the former, although the inventories did not record an individual's age, we can infer this indirectly from the information about whether the heirs included a parent. The presence of a parent as heir might be indicative of a relatively young age, since we would expect an older individual to be less likely than a younger one to have a surviving parent as heir. We include this variable in the analysis to control for the effect of age on wealth, based on the expectation that an individual's wealth would grow over time.

The other type of variables we construct from the information regarding heirs concerns the bequest motive. We would expect this motive to be higher for individuals who had children, because they would be more likely than those with no children to accumulate wealth, with the objective of transferring it to the next generation. Moreover, we might expect this motive to be stronger for individuals who had young children, compared to those who had only older children, and to be stronger still for those who had both young and older children. To account for the differential effects of the bequest motive among the judiciary personnel, we include binary variables that control for whether an individual's heirs included "young children only," "older

⁵⁸ *Ilmiye* connections could be indicative of affiliations with networks that might have facilitated easier access to prestigious posts, longer tenures in such positions, and/or shorter wait times. See the references cited in note 5.

children only,” and “young and older children.” The omitted reference category in this set of variables is the case of individuals who had no children, so that the coefficients of the included variables show the differential effects of having young, older, or young and older children on wealth, relative to having no children. In addition, as another proxy for the bequest motive, we include a binary variable to mark whether an individual’s heirs included the state treasury (“*beytülmal*”). This applied to cases in which the deceased had no heirs, the only heir was a spouse, or the heirs could not be identified. In such cases, we would expect the individual to have less motivation to accumulate wealth for bequeathing.

The final control variable is the *icareteyn* contracts. We noticed during our research that many inventories contained direct references to investments made in double-rent contracts involving property owned by charitable foundations (*evkaf*).⁵⁹ Because the values of these investments are technically excluded from the values assessed in the inventories, we flagged these records with a binary variable to see whether such investments might explain any wealth variations.

Table 6
Judicial Subgroups, Time Periods, and Wealth

	(1) Gross Real Wealth	(2) Net Real Wealth
Kadı, mevleviyet	39,990.2*** (11,762.4)	-12,362.5 (12,825.0)
Naib, mevleviyet	4,254.9 (21,120.6)	-10,636.6 (12,320.2)
Naib, kasaba	-104.5 (10,024.9)	1,140.8 (9,558.4)
Inactive, mevali	90,121.4 (82,320.9)	53,652.3 (45,893.0)
Inactive, eşraf-ı kuzat	2,975.9 (11,465.2)	6,771.2 (11,322.5)

⁵⁹ See note 39. References to other types of investments in charitable foundations are virtually nonexistent in the *tereke*s.

Inactive, kuzat	-18,364.7** (7,137.9)	-10,832.2 (7,077.0)
Other judicial position	-2,196.0 (12,654.1)	-6,525.7 (10,893.4)
Post-1768 period	-23,203.2* (12,549.2)	-37,658.2*** (12,042.6)
Year	91.61 (173.8)	321.9** (163.0)
Elhac	8,252.0 (6,821.8)	10,228.1 (7,212.4)
Esseyid	-2,316.1 (6,545.4)	-1,324.0 (6,132.8)
Zade	2,911.9 (10,838.9)	-7,556.5 (10,360.0)
Had ilmiyye connection	53,748.9*** (19,322.5)	46,214.9*** (16,570.1)
Heirs included parent	-1,709.0 (7,908.4)	2,505.7 (7,405.7)
Heirs included beytülmal	-833.4 (5,700.2)	-1,602.0 (5,689.1)
Heirs included young children only	15,228.5** (7,612.0)	12,214.8* (7,268.3)
Heirs included older children only	17,695.7* (9,283.4)	5,991.1 (9,748.5)
Heirs included young and older children	13,756.5* (7,015.1)	13,099.0** (6,519.9)
Had icareteyn contract	-14,211.2* (7,775.7)	-4,987.6 (6,741.9)
Constant	-124,727.3 (300,359.1)	-535,746.3* (281,284.5)
Observations	575	575
R-squared	0.192	0.078
Standard errors in parentheses: *p < 0.10 **p < 0.05 ***p < 0.01		

Table 6 shows the results of Ordinary Least Squares Analysis of how the positional categories, time periods, and control variables affected the accumulation of wealth in the Ottoman judiciary during the period between 1689 and 1843. Columns 1 and 2 show influences on gross and net real wealth, respectively. Since all explanatory variables are included in the analysis, the results show the magnitude and the significance level of the effect of each variable

of interest in isolation, all else being the same.

Regarding our key variables of interest, the results are consistent with our preliminary observations based on tables 2–5. Two positional categories stand out as having significantly different wealth accumulation than the judges assigned to regular posts, the reference category. The first is the category of judges in higher-rank posts (“*kadı, mevleviyet*”), the coefficient of which is positive and highly significant in terms of its effect on gross wealth. The effect on net wealth, however, is negative and insignificant at conventional levels. This finding reinforces the earlier observation regarding the importance of the higher levels of debt accumulated by such judges. Although they were able to accumulate considerable levels of gross wealth, the difference dissipated once the debts and fees were accounted for in net wealth. The other result that stands out among positional categories concerns the negative and significant coefficient of inactive personnel eligible for regular posts (“inactive, *kuzat*”). Interestingly, the coefficient of this category remained negative and significant between the gross and net wealth, though with a smaller magnitude and significance in the latter case. This finding indicates that the borrowing behavior of this group did not differ significantly from that of the judges in the reference category.

The results of the variables “Year” and “Post-1768 Period,” the second set of key variables of interest, show how wealth changed over time and the magnitude and statistical significance of the drop in wealth previously observed in tables 4 and 5. Specifically, the coefficient of “Year” is 91.6 and 321.9 for gross and net wealth, indicating that wealth levels rose by these amounts in real terms (1469 = 1.0) per year during this period. Interestingly, the coefficient is significant at the 5 percent level for net wealth, but not for gross wealth, perhaps indicating the judicial personnel’s ability to compensate for the structural pressures in the

judicial system that threatened their incomes. Regarding the changes after 1768, the coefficients of this variable was $-18,808.0$ and $-22,217.4$ for gross and net wealth, indicating that wealth levels overall dropped systematically by these amounts in real terms during the period after 1768, aside from the annual changes captured by the “Year” variable, all else being the same. This is clearly an important finding when compared to the averages displayed in tables 4 and 5. Another notable result is the highly significant coefficients of the “Post-1768 period” variable.

Table 6 shows interesting results regarding how the control variables affected wealth. Religious titles seem to have had no significant effect on wealth, as seen from the insignificant coefficients of “*elhac*” and “*esseyid*” at conventional levels. Although having an affiliation with prominent families (“*zade*”) similarly had no significant effect on wealth, the effect of having an *ilmiye* connection was positive and highly significant, as expected, for both gross and net real wealth. In the same vein, although the results show that our proxy variables for age had no significant influence on wealth, the effects are significant and positive for the bequest motive. In general, the uniformly positive and significant (for gross wealth) coefficients of “young children only,” “older children only,” and “young and older children” indicate that judicial personnel who had children accumulated greater wealth than those who had no children. Moreover, the bequest motive was more significant for individuals who had only young children or had both young and older children than those who had only older children, consistent with the expectation discussed above.

Finally, we estimated the coefficient of *icareteyn* contracts to be negative and significant for gross wealth, but not for net wealth. Since the amounts invested in *icareteyn* contracts were not included in assessed estates, the negative impact of this variable on gross wealth makes sense. The impact on net wealth, however, is insignificant, suggesting that those invested in

icareteyn contracts might have possessed the financial acumen to better protect their wealth from debt burden that impacted many others in the judiciary, at least enough make up for their initial impact on gross wealth.

VIII. Conclusion

In our analysis of the estate inventories of the Ottoman judiciary between 1689 and 1843, we found moderate to modest levels of wealth accumulation, especially for the lower segments of the judicial hierarchy. While the judiciary could cope with the economic pressures associated with shorter tenures and longer waiting periods between the late seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries, the economic and financial difficulties that the Ottoman polity and society experienced after the year 1768 negatively impacted their wealth levels. More research is required to understand how the judiciary responded to this challenge, but the government's effort to intensively regulate the judiciary's financial entitlements based on their legal work in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries suggests that the judges tried hard to make up for their losses by extracting revenue from the population in their jurisdictions.⁶⁰

Our analysis showed significant variations across the subgroups of the judiciary in the accumulation of gross wealth but not of net wealth. This discrepancy suggests that the judiciary's exposure to debt may have also increased with seniority and appointments to higher-level

⁶⁰ Given that the compensation schemes in Ottoman courts of law largely depended on fees for specific judicial, administrative, and notarial services, it is reasonable to assume that the economic conditions of the Ottoman judiciary must have impacted how they functioned in their official capacities. For the regulations issued during the reign of Selim III (r. 1789–1807), see Uzunçarşılı, *İlmiye Teşkilâtı*, 256–60; İlhami Yurdakul, "III. Selim'in İlmiye Islahatı Programı ve Tatbikatı," in *III. Selim ve Dönemi: Nizâm-ı Kadîm'den Nizâm-ı Cedîd'e*, ed. Seyfi Kenan (Istanbul: İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2010), 105–27. See also Akiba, "Ottoman Venality," 26–36.

judgeships. Future studies might shed better light on the factors that contributed to debt accumulation patterns in the higher levels of the judiciary, but one observation that frequently comes up in the literature is the financial burden associated with maintaining crowded households among high-level religious dignitaries, which must have constituted a considerable burden, especially during times out of office.

Interestingly, inequality among the judiciary personnel was considerable compared to contemporary Ottoman and non-Ottoman standards. In addition to examining differences among subgroups and changes over time, our analysis uncovered various other factors that influenced the accumulation of wealth in the judiciary. Both gross and net wealth depended on the number of children the deceased left behind, an indication of the bequest motive that likely shaped not only the accumulation of wealth but also its preservation for the next generation. Finally, we observed that having relatives with an *ilmiye* affiliation had a positive impact on both gross and net wealth levels, a finding that points to the advantages such connections generated in gaining easier access to favorable appointments, longer tenures in these positions, and shorter wait times, factors we could not fully study in our analysis due to a lack of information.

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