

THE END OF AKINCI CORPS IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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Abstract

It has been known that the Akıncıs were in the Ottoman Empire an extension of the corps which provided the border security of the Turkish states. They were named in the Seljuki period as "margraves". Even the Ottomans were one of these margraves. Adopting a more centralist policy, the Ottoman Empire didn't leave the border security to margraves as it was the case in Seljuks, but they assigned this job to some akıncı families. Evrenesoğulları in Albania and Dalmatia, Mihal-oğulları in Bosnia, Semendire and Serbia, Malkoç-oğulları in Silistre and Turhan-oğulları in Mora were the most famous ones among these families. The missions of the Akıncıs was to ensure the frontier security, to undertake reconnaissance mission in the regions which would be conquered, to gather intelligence, to raid the enemy territories and to act advanced guards, which was called as the fifth column activities at that time. It is assumed that Evranos Bey established the Akıncı corps. They were the light cavalry forces and had a certain organizational structure. Those with manor were registered in the account book with their descriptions. Their number exceeded fifty thousand during the period of Suleyman the Magnificent. The number of Akıncıs continued to increase until the 16th Century. In 1595, during the attacks carried out against Walachia Voivodina Mihail, who rebelled, the Akıncıs which stayed behind the Ottoman army, which was retreating over the wooden bridge, were nearly destroyed due to the inconsiderate act of Grand Vizier Sinan Pasha. After that incident the Akıncıs could not recover and their mission was undertaken by the Akkerman, Dobruca and Bucak Tatars and Crimea Khanate's forces. With the exception of the short research of İ. Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, which is based on secondary sources, no serious study has been produced on the guild of Akıncıs by benefiting from the manorial books, muhimme books and local registry books. In this study the "Yergöğü bridge incident" which brought the end of the Akıncıs will be examined by referring to the secondary works of that time such as Mustafa Ali's Kühnül Ahbar and İbrahim Peçevi's Tarih-i Peçevî. Registers of the

Akıncıs in mühimme books of 1595 will also be taken into consideration. The findings will also be reflected in the conclusion.

Keywords: Akıncıs, the Akıncı corps, Koca Sinan Pasha, Yergöğü Bridge Incident, 1595.

Introduction

The akıncı (raider) corps has always been an interesting field of study for researchers of the Ottoman history and civilization (Refik, 1933; Tacan, 1936; Zeki 1333; Malkoç, 1936). However, no analytical study has been carried out about the history of the akıncıs (raiders) based on the primary sources such as *tax registers*, *akıncı books*, *mühimme books* and *local registry books*. Academic sources of the period have not been evaluated in this context excepting few postgraduate theses (Kıprovska, 2004; Arslan, 1995; Koday, 2001). The studies conducted on this topic have either constituted one entry of the encyclopedia (Uzunçarşılı, 1993; Özcan, 1989; Babinger, 1993; 2000) or comprised one part of the whole studies (Özcan, 1999). Some studies (Başar, 1992; Sabev, 2002) have been carried out centering upon Evrenosoğlu, Mihalli, Malkoçoğlu and Turhanlı families, which were the most important governing akıncı families. Excepting the study titled *Evrenos Hanedanı* [Evrenos Dynasty] (Lowry- Erünsal, 2010; Demetriades, 1981) of Heath W. Lowry and İsmail E. Erünsal, these studies are not the analytical studies based on the above-mentioned primary sources. They seem to be incapable of providing a complete introduction of the akıncı corps. On the other hand, in the 16th century, registration on the basis of akıncı families was performed in the provinces and districts located in the Rumelian borders where the akıncıs lived. Data in these registers are considered very valuable for the history of the akıncı corps. İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı states that akıncı books were kept for the akıncıs; these books recorded names, appearances, and villages or quarters of the akıncıs as well as names of their fathers; there were regular books demonstrating timars of those who held a timar; and one of these books was kept in the registry located in the capital city, and the other one was kept in the institutions of qadi in the provinces or districts where the akıncıs lived (Uzunçarşılı, 1993). Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives catalogues do not contain any collection recorded under the name of “akıncı books” as stated by Uzunçarşılı (Rehber 2010; Kıprovska, 2004). However, *detailed tax registers*, which contain the records of provinces and districts where the akıncıs lived, include records of many akıncıs who acquired the status of a rayah and paid taxes within the framework of village and quarter records (TD. 232 (1544); TD. 722 (1613)). In addition, dirlik was appropriated by the state for the akıncıs who succeeded in battles. Names, appearances, and timars of those akıncıs who held a timar were written in the *timar daybooks* belonging to provincial locations and district locations where the akıncı corps operated. Besides these sources, registries of the quarters where the akıncıs operated should be examined. Moreover, the

history of akıncıs should be written by examining *mühimme books*, in which decisions of the Supreme Court of the Ottoman Empire were written, that contain considerable number of judgments about the akıncıs besides review of particular academic sources. It is clear that such a big topic cannot be handled within the body of a single article. The present study has two main purposes. The first is to emphasize the necessity to investigate the history of the akıncı corps, which was a very effective military unit for the Ottoman Empire, within an integrated approach. The second is to generally describe the akıncı organization, and to deal with *Yerköğü Köprüsü* (Giurgiu Bridge) tragedy, which took place as a result of sudden attack by the Wallachian voivode Mihai during the revolt launched by him in 1595.

Akıncı Corps

Akın (raid) refers to a violent and abundant movement or act of going into and out of the enemy property for performing exploration, plunder, and destruction in the enemy property as part of the attack. The term *akıncı* was used for referring to the Ottoman light cavalry troops in the meaning of “raider”. *Akıncılık* is the institutional name of this organization (Sâmi, 1317).

The akıncılık was established in place of “uc (border) organization” seen in the Seljuk Empire. The Ottomans was actually an “uc beylik” in the beginning. The Ottoman Empire had two “ucs” during the periods of Osman I and Orhan I. The first one was *İznik- İzmit* direction against İstanbul, and the second one was *Gelibolu* direction against Rumelia. These areas were called “uc”. The “uc organization” was governed by tribe beys, as in the Seljuk period. The position of beys descended from father to son. Tribe beys in the “ucs” were called “akıncı beys” or “uc beys”. Seljuk “uc beys” had an autonomous structure. They paid a fixed tax to the sultan once a year. Apart from this responsibility, they were free in their activities. The sultan did not interfere in new places conquered by them, which caused them to have a great influence. On the other hand, the akıncıs in the Ottoman Empire carried out all activities on behalf of the sultan. The sultan could appropriate dirliks for the akıncıs in the conquered places. Also, the sultan allowed the akıncı beys to convert these dirliks into private estates (“mâlikâne in Ottoman Turkish”). The Ottoman Empire imposed restriction on the “sword right”, which was prevalent in the Seljuk Empire. The restriction was that everything would be done on behalf of the sultan (Akdağ, 1979/I).

It is accepted that foundations of the akıncı organization were laid by Köse Mihal in the period of Osman I. Military services were performed by the akıncıs until permanent foot and cavalry troops were established in the period of Orhan I. It is thought that the akıncılık was institutionalized as an organization by Gazi Evrenos Bey (d. in 1417). The akıncıs were moved to borderlines after the Guild of Janissaries was founded in the period of Sultan Murad I (Özcan, 1989). After the akıncıs advancing in the *İznik-İzmit* direction towards the end of the period of Sultan Orhan conquered the Anatolian side of the Istanbul Strait, they were moved

to Rumelia as it was understood that Istanbul would not be able to be captured. After Gelibolu was conquered, the conquests were divided into two sections as in the old tradition. The *left section* advanced in the direction of Komotini and Thessaloniki by passing through Maritsa, and the *right section* progressed in the direction of Sofia and Plovdiv after Edirne. In the course of time, *Evrenosoğlu family* was directed to Albania and Dalmatia region; *Mihalli family* was directed to Bosnia, Smederevo, and Serbia region; *Malkoçoğlu family* was directed to Silistra region; and *Turhanlı family* was directed to Thessaly and the Morea region. It is known that these akıncı families left institutional marks by founding many foundational works in the regions where they operated¹. In this period, there were harmonious relations between “ucs” and the capital city. Sultans always moved the center of the Ottoman State to the cities close to the borders. Edirne was the center of Rumelian conquests. Thousands of akıncıs gathering around akıncı beys were Turkish young men coming from the Anatolia. These young men took possession of

¹ Evrenosoğlu Family: Gazi Evrenos Bey (1417) was originally one of the beys of Karesi. His father was İsa Bey. Evrenosoğlu Family had marks in Komotini, Serres, and Giannitsa. There is a dervish lodge and shrine in Ivraniye village of Nis constructed in the name of İsa Bey, the ancestor of Evrenosoğlu family. Evrenos Bey has one alms house and mosque in each one of Komotini and Sere, and a mosque and madrasah in Giannitsa; Ahmed Bey, the son of Ali Bey who is the son of Evrenos Bey, has a general Islamic-Ottoman social complex in Giannitsa, a mosque and alms house in Tatar Pazarçık, an alms house, a small mosque, a public bath, and stores in Vodena, Macedonia, a public bath in each one of Prilep, Kosovo, and Herzegovina; Evrenosoğlu İsa Bey has a mosque and an alms house in Giannitsa; and Evrenosoğlu İskender Bey has Ulucamii in Giannitsa (Evrenos bin İsa Vakfıyesi [Evrenos bin İsa Foundation Charter], Edirne H. 29 Z 818 (29 February 1416), VGMA, *Arapça Vakfiyelerin Tescil Defteri* [Registry Book of Arabic Foundation Charters] nr. 2113, p. 1, order: 1; Arslan, 1995). Mihalli Family: There is a mosque, an alms house, and a public bath belonging to Mihal Bey as well as a bridge repaired by him in Edirne, a public house as well as a public bath and a mosque repaired by in Bilecik Gölpazarı; Gazi Ali Bey (d. 1500), the son of Hızır Bey who is the son of Mihal Bey, has a mosque, an alms house, a madrasah, a school, and a dervish lodge in Plene; Ahmed Bey, the son of Gazi Ali Bey, commissioned the repair of Seyyid Battal Gazi Lodge, (Arslan, 1995). Turhanlı Family: It is accepted that Turhan Bey is the ancestor of the akıncıs in Thessaly and the Morea. It was Paşa Yiğit who conquered Skopje. There is a mosque, a small mosque, two dervish lodges, and a school belonging to Turhan Bey (d. in 1456) in Trikala, a mosque, a madrasah, and a public bath in Larissa in the Morea, a small mosque in each one of Tatar village, Soğukpınar and Livadya, a foundation for meeting expenses of these buildings, 48 stores, 54 commercial houses, 3 vineyards and 3 mills, and lands in Tatar village, Soğukpınar and Livadya, and a shrine in Larissa, Thessaly. In Skopje, there is a mosque belonging to İshak Bey, the son of Paşa Yiğit [Turhan Bey bin Paşa Yiğit Vakfıyesi (Turhan Bey bin Paşa Yiğit Foundation Charter), H. 850 (M. 1446), VGMA, *Haremeyn Vakfiye Defteri* (Haremeyn Book of Foundation Charter) -10, nr. 743, p. 146, order: 34; *Turhan Bey Vakfıyesi* (Turhan Bey Foundation Charter), H. 1138 (M. 1725), VGMA, *Haremeyn Vakfiye Defteri* (Haremeyn Book of Foundation Charter) - 12, nr. 745, p. 11, order: 6]. Also see (Arslan, 1995: 89-90). Malkoçoğlu Family: There is a mosque belonging to Malkoç Bey in Edirne; there is Bali Bey Mosque and Malkoç Efendi Madrasah in Sarajevo; there is Malkoç Bey Mosque in Akhisar; and there is a shrine belonging to Makoçoğu Mehmed Bey in Gebze (Arslan, 1995).

timars in new lands seized through conquests performed by the akıncı bey or the sultan (Âşıkpaşa-zâde, 1970), and were replaced by new volunteers. There were permanent akıncı soldiers at disposal of the akıncı beys at the borders, and there were also lieutenants and volunteers awaiting their turns (Akdağ, 1979). Akıncıs had a very dynamic organizational structure. Their organizational structure was established by the akıncı law (Kânûnâme, 1979: 58b, 63a, 64a; Kavânîn-i Osmâniyân, 2753: 49b-50a). They did not belong to permanent army corps (MD. 3/ 55, 147, 520, 839, 897, 1054, 1333, 1651), they did not have any particular salary and barracks, they were tax-exempt, and some of them had timars. Those who held timars were called “tavıca” or “toyca” (MD 5/1109 (4 Ş 973/ M. 16 Mart 1566); MD. 12/ 222 (H. 5 L 978/ 1 Mart 1571). They supplied all their needs and equipment including sword, shield, arrow, bow, spear, mace, blade, and armor from the akıns (raids) and the regions where they lived through their commanders (MD. 3/ 897 (28 C 967/ 26 Mart 1566; MD. 3/1333). The akıncıs were called with the names of the akıncı commanders they were subordinated to (e.g. Mihalli akıncıs, Turhanlı akıncıs, Evrenosoğlu akıncıs, and Malkoçoğlu akıncıs) [MD. 5/ 239 (10 M 973/ M. 7 Ağustos 1565). Mihalli için bk. MD. 5/ 903 (27 Ocak 1566)]. To be an akıncı, a person had to be young, strong, and “ehl-i hâl ve'l-akt”, that is physically flawless and trustworthy. For that, village’s imam or kethüda (chief steward) or a reliable person had to stand security for the akıncı candidate (Uzunçarşılı, 1993). In the Ottoman Empire, the border security was under the responsibility of the akıncıs (MD. 12/ 276 (22 Za 978/ 17 Nisan 1571); MD. 12/ 1070 (5 Z 979/ 19 Nisan 1572). In addition, among the important missions of the akıncıs were to collapse the enemy states close to the borders materially and spiritually by conducting raids against these countries, to assimilate and force the people in these countries to migrate; to pioneer (to perform exploration) while the army was going for a campaign; to secure the back of the army on the way back from the campaign; to keep busy the countries that could provide assistance to the country which the army fought with; to participate in the battles when required; and to intercept passages, towers, and garrisons of the country the army fought with (MD. 5/ 53, 56, 239, 577, 716, 903, 1088, 1277, 1305, 1549, 1550, 1583, 1688, 1765, 1866). It was not possible for the akıncıs to raid within the borders of the country or against a country which the empire was in peace. In such cases, the raiders would be punished (MD. 5/ 1550 (17 L 973/ 7 Mayıs 1566).

The number of akıncıs was recorded as around 2000 in the period of Sultan Orhan, and 20,000 during the Battle of Kosovo. The number of only Mihalli akıncıs was 50,000 during Buda and Austria campaigns of Suleiman the Magnificent. The number of Turhanlı akıncıs in the Morea was 7000 according to the population census conducted in 1559. The number of akıncıs was recorded as 50,000 during the *Yerköğü Köprüsü* (Giurgiu Bridge) incident in 1595, which caused the akıncıs to come to an end. Thirty years later following this incident, that is in 1625, the number of akıncıs was just 2 to 3 thousands (Uzunçarşılı, 1993; 1994).

The End of the Akıncıs

Mihai (Mihai Viteazul), the voivode of the Wallachia province (called *Eflak* by the Ottomans), which currently makes up the south of Romania, rebelled in the 1590s. For suppressing this revolt, Mehmed III appointed Grand Vizier Ferhad Pasha, which he had designated in place of the Grand Vizier Sinan Pasha discharged by him after he became the sultan. Mehmed III exiled the former Grand Vizier Sinan Pasha to Malkara. Serdar Ferhad Pasha made the military preparations very meticulously. In the meanwhile, a decision was made to lay Yergöğü Köprüsü (Giurgiu Bridge), where the akıncıs would be raided later on, over the Danube River for transition of the soldiers from Ruse city to the Giurgiu castle. While the preparations were being continued at full speed, approximately ten thousand janissary children who wanted to return to Istanbul and attend the Guild of Janissaries after fulfilling their service of protecting the Ganja Castle said to the Pasha, *“We have performed our service of protecting. In conformity with our conditions, we request for our names to be written in the Asitâne book, and our wages to be provided by der-i devlet (state office). We are in great trouble because of waiting”*. Pasha scattered the janissary children by reprimanding them with the words, *“Your duty was announced to be served in Ganja and Tabriz. Why are you trying to create trouble instead of waiting the order? Do not you know that those disobeying their superiors are considered misbeliever and their wives are considered widow?”* As a result of provocations of Sinan Pasha, who could not tolerate appointment of Ferhad Pasha as the grand vizier, and the Vizier Ciğala-zâde Sinan Pasha, troops of the janissary children prompted a revolt by commoving the public (Naima, 1967). This revolt was suppressed through intervention of the sultan. Sinan Pasha was again exiled to Malkara, and Ciğala-zâde was banished to Karahisar. Eventually, Grand Vizier Ferhad Pasha launched the Wallachia campaign on 17 Şaban 1000 (Islamic Calendar), that is on 29 May 1592 (Gregorian Calendar). The Deputy Grand Vizier Damad Ibrahim Pasha, who hoped to be a Grand Vizier after Sinan Pasha, slowed down logistics of the army in order to eliminate Ferhad Pasha. Upon the letters of request sent by Ferhad Pasha to the sultan, İbrahim Paşa responded to the sultan, *“My sultan, soldiers absolutely hate Ferhad Pasha. They do not resist against the enemy in front of him. They do not perform the works demanded from them on time. Even if all of the soldiers are put to the sword (killed), they do not respect him and do not want to be under his flag”*. This response had an influence on the sultan. Ferhad Pasha was discharged, and Sinan Pasha took the position again. In the meanwhile, to eliminate Ferhad Pasha, who was supervising the construction of Yergöğü Köprüsü (Giurgiu Bridge), Sinan Pasha had a fatwa issued and had a Hatt-ı Hümayun written for “infidelity” and “killing” of him with allegations like, *“He secretly became an ally of Mihai, the voivode of Wallachia, to put Islamic soldiers to death”* and *“he performed infidelity”* –in return for 35,000 akçes according to an assertion. He assigned the task to Ahmet Aga, the chief gatekeeper. Learning the developments against him in the capital city, Ferhad Pasha went to his farm in Istanbul by following a different road, and hid himself there. The Deputy Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha revealed

Ferhad Pasha by trickery. He firstly had him imprisoned in Yedikule (Seven Tower), and then killed (Naima, 1967/I; Solak-zâde, 1989/ II).

While the Ottoman armies were struggling on different fronts in the west, political conflicts between the Ottoman viziers delayed solution of the problems in the Austrian front and suppression of revolt of Mihai, the voivode of Wallachia. Finally, on 11 Zilkaade 1003 (18 July 1595), the Grand Vizier Koca Sinan Pasha advanced towards Mihai, the voivode of Wallachia, with an army of 100,000 people. Realizing that he would not be able to cope with the Ottoman army, Mihai was not able to dare to fight. Thus, he continuously retreated trying to draw the Ottoman army into marshes. This being the case, the Grand Vizier Sinan Pasha thought that he had given Mihai a lesson and decided not to advance more. Thus, he started to withdraw by leaving Satırcı Mehmed Pasha with 2,000 soldiers for security of Bucharest. Watching the operation of the Ottoman Army day to day, the Voivode Mihai entered in Wallachia as soon as Sinan Pasha left Târgoviște city. Then, he started to follow the Ottoman Empire at a distance of one day. On 19 October 1595, he captured Târgoviște, and had 3500 Ottoman soldiers, who were defending the city, massacred through various tortures. By that time, the Ottoman Empire had reached the north shore of the Danube River and arrived in the *Yergöğü* (*Giurgiu*) castle. They would pass to Ruse located against Giurgiu along the other shore of the Danube River. Firstly, the Grand Vizier Sinan Pasha and his subordinates arrived in Ruse by passing through the Danube River. It would take three days for the Ottoman army and impedimenta to go across. Back of the army was secured by the akıncıs. The *Yergöğü* (*Giurgiu*) Bridge would be demolished after the akıncıs passed. During this campaign, the Ottoman army, especially the akıncıs, had obtained many booties. Sinan Pasha put collectors at bridgeheads to take one-fifth share of the state (*pençik*) and the commander's share from these booties. Since collectors were collecting treasury share and commander's shares, it took longer time to cross the bridge (Âlî, 2162, vr. 598a, 598b- 599a). Sinan Pasha turned a deaf ear to the information that the rebellious Voivode Mihai was approaching with an army consisting of 70,000 people and the warning that the collectors were slowing down the transition through the bridge, they should collect treasury share and commander's share after all soldiers crossed the bridge, and it was very dangerous for division of the army into two on two sides of the Danube River. The Voivode Mihai did not take any action until the Ottoman army crossed the bridge. After the entire army except for the akıncıs crossed the bridge, The Voivode Mihai had fire opened on the bridge. Hearing the sound of enemy's cannons, Sinan Pasha announced that he stopped collecting booties. However, this order was too late. Being shot a couple of times, the wooden bridge collapsed. As a result, thousands of akıncıs were drowned in the Danube River (24 October 1595). A few thousand akıncıs who had not been able to cross the bridge yet were put to the sword of the enemy (Öztuna, 1972). Discussing the *Yergöğü* (*Giurgiu*) Bridge incident under the title of "Destruction of the Akıncı Corps", Hammer states that the most distinguished part of the akıncıs was slaughtered there, and the akıncıs could not recover themselves again after this incident (Hammer, 1990/ IV). Historians of the period note that the sole person responsible for the *Yergöğü* (*Giurgiu*) Bridge

tragedy was Sinan Pasha. Even though the army staged demonstrations against the pasha, nothing changed. Sinan Pasha left Rusa on 8 November 1595. On his way from Rusa to Istanbul, he was discharged from his position as the Grand Vizier (Naima, 1967/ I). Mehmed Pasha, the Lala of Manisa District, was appointed as the new Grand Vizier. However, Lala Mehmed Pasha died after performing duty as a Grand Vizier for nine days. Mehmed III re-designated Sinan Pasha, whom he had exiled to Malkara, as the Grand Vizier considering that the Deputy Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha, who hoped to take up the position of Grand Vizier at that time, had had “Ferhad Pasha killed for no reason” (Solak-zâde, 1989/ II). The Historian İbrahim Peçevi (Peçevi, 1982/ II), who was in the service of the Grand Vizier Ferhad Pasha and Lala Mehmed Pasha for many years, and closely witnessed the developments on the Austrian front of the Ottoman Empire by joining the army in 1593, states that Sinan Pasha was appointed as the grand vizier for the fifth time because he was rich and thus had many guardians (Peçevi, 1982/ II), and refers to the Yergöğü (Giurgiu) Bridge as “*an unprecedented disaster*” (Peçevi, 1982/ II).

As a conclusion, after the Yergöğü (Giurgiu) Bridge incident, the akıncıs could not recover again, thus they evanesced in the course of time. The number of the akıncıs fell to 2-3 thousand in the mid-17th century. After this stage, the responsibilities which had been assumed by the Ottoman Empire akıncıs in the past started to be shouldered by the Crimean Tatars and soldiers called *serhad kulu* deployed at border castles (Akgündüz, 1990). Although Yergöğü (Giurgiu) Bridge incident came to be a sorrowful end for the akıncı corps, it was also time for this traditional organization to transform in parallel with the developments taking place across the world. Political, social and economic developments occurring in the world had affected the Ottoman Empire, too. The Ottoman Empire had reached its natural borders in the European continent. It was not possible to maintain old-style raids and plundering against big states that had secured their borders through big garrisons. In that period, big armies would not be able to be formed through conventional timar system, household troops formed through old devshirmeh method, and akıncı troops based on plunder economy. As a matter of fact, as of the mid 17th century, the Ottoman system started to be discussed both in the ruling mechanism and among the ulama circles.

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