CHAPTER 4

The Inspection Registers of 1791–93

Starting in the winter of 1791, scribes of the Imperial Council with janissary guards in their service prepared a number of registers with an unprecedented degree of regularity. In his study of Sultan Selim’s imperial decrees, Enver Ziya Karal mentions that a special team was put together for regular inspections during Selim’s reign; though he did not say when, I propose that he was referring to the inspections of the early 1790s. According to the imperial orders that authorized the inspections, the main objective was to identify potential mischief makers, including vagrants, unemployed and unemployable bachelors (serseri ve başıboş ve bekâr), beggars, mendicant dervishes, idle students at religious seminaries, and other people who, according to government officials, did not have legitimate business in Istanbul. To attain this objective the inspectors were given orders to target certain artisanal groups with which such people were likely to mix: porters, gardeners and itinerant vendors, boatmen, and Albanian bath attendants. The inspectors also focused on places where such groups commonly spent time or where they were likely hide from view: bachelors’ quarters and inns, mosques, religious seminaries, dervish lodges, and soup kitchens.

I have located twelve registers dating from the end of 1791 and August 1793. At least two and possibly four of these were drawn up immediately after the Ayasofya incident. Another group of five registers were prepared in the summer and fall of 1792. Finally, a third group of registers were completed through the summer and fall of 1793. Together, they cover the greater Istanbul area, including Eyüp, Üsküdar, and Galata, as well as the neighborhoods within the

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2 MD 198: 5 and Vasiç, Tarih-i Vasiç, fols. 135a–b.
3 Some of these registers appear to be very similar, but contain slight differences (for example, A. DVN. 831 and 834) and copies of some registers appear in different collections in the archives. In addition, the recently opened population census collection at the Ottoman archives in Istanbul also has six registers that overlap with the areas covered by the inspection registers I discuss. I thank Nalan Turk for bringing them to my attention and Cengiz Kırlı for helping me access them. See BOA, Nüfus Defterleri [NFS. d], nos. 2–7.
4 A. DVN. 827, 829, and possibly 830 and 965.
5 A. DVN. 831, 832, 833, 834, 835.
6 A. DVN. 836, 837, 899–L.
city walls. In many cases, they also include lists of men who faced expulsion because their names did not occur in earlier registers and they had failed to find acceptable guarantors, or because only a limited number of people might engage in their trade and they had not found a vacancy, or perhaps because of vagrancy and unemployment. These men were generally recorded as vagrants, bachelors, and unidentifiable persons; they occasionally also turn up in a register of expellees. For example, one such register lists the names and place of origin of 431 Muslim and non-Muslim men who were arrested and were to be expelled from the city. Separate registers were prepared for the inspection of religious institutions such as seminaries, dervish lodges, mosques, and soup kitchens.

The regional arrangement of the registers corresponds, for the most part, to the jurisdictions of the senior officials responsible for public security. The original imperial decree authorizing the inspections was addressed to the following: sekibanaşı, cebecibaşı, topcubaşı, bostancibaşı, judges of the greater Istanbul area, çavuşbaşı, patriarchs of the Greek and Armenian communities, and the inspectors. The registers show, however, that in most cases officials from the scribal service in the Imperial Council were in charge of the inspections, and that a number of janissary aides (yamakān ve çukadārān) assisted them. In some cases, the higher officials who acted as chiefs of police in their own area of jurisdiction appointed these scribes to prepare the registers and provided them with assistants from the Janissary Corps. For example, for the inspection of bachelor’s chambers, inns, and shops outside the city walls, as well as porters and boatmen at the wharfs, the bostancibaşı appointed three lieutenants (hasekiyān) in his service to assist Seyyid Abdullah Efendi, who was in charge of preparing the register. However, the four major police officers—the aga of the janissaries or the sekibanaşı as his deputy, topçubaşı, cebecibaşı, and bostancibaşı—were not necessarily present in the inspection process. In some registers there is no mention of any senior official at all, and

For example A. DVN. 829. For the inspection of religious seminaries, see numerous references in Mübahan Kütkükoğlu, XX. Asra Erişen İstanbul Medreseleri.

A. DVN. 965. Similarly, an inspection register from 1763 lists 5156 employers and employees in 41 guilds in the Galata and Kasımpaşa regions, and an additional 497 men without guarantors who were expelled. This was nearly 10 percent of all of the work force on record in those areas. See, İBK, M.C.-Yz_B.000010 (AH. 1176).

A. DVN. 830, and 836. The wording in the imperial order that was sent out required that a separate register of expellees be prepared, but this was not always the case in practice (...kefillileri deftere kayd, tard olunanları da içi başka deftere kayd ve defterleri hüzürumuza ‘arz ve takıme dikkat...) MD 198: 5.

For example A. DVN. 829. For the inspection of religious seminaries, see numerous references in Mübahan Kütkükoğlu, XX. Asra Erişen İstanbul Medreseleri.

A. DVN. 831.