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SOME OBSERVATIONS
ON THE OTTOMAN-TURKISH JUDICIAL DOCUMENTS
(HÜCCETS)

In this short study I wish to present some observations I have made while studying a collection of hüccets from the monastery of Vlatadon in Thessaloniki¹.

In this collection, which covers the period from the end of the 15th century to the beginning of the 20th, we can observe the following features, common, I believe, in every similar document from any other part of the Ottoman empire.

First we see that in the middle of the 15th century the first word of the opening formula in the hüccets “Sebeb-i tahrir-i kitab-i ... budur ki” (The reason of the writing of the document ... is as follows:) is written almost normally (doc. no 1, middle of Zilhicce 889/30-12-1484/8-1-1485). From the beginning of the 16th century the line of the first letter S begins to be elongated (doc. no. 2, middle of Ramazan 908/10/19-3-1503). In the next two decades this line becomes two or three times longer and in 911-920 (1505-1515) it is already at least five times longer, so that it covers almost half of the first line of the text (doc. no.3, 23 Rebiyüilevel 911/24-8-1505). As of 929 (1523) and later the line of the S covers almost the whole of the first line of the text, and the introductory formula is written at the remaining space of it, so that the main text of the hüccet starts from the beginning of the second line (doc. no. 4, beginning of Cemaziyelevelvel 929/18/27-3-1523). At the same time this formula starts being written higher than the line of the S (doc. no. 4, 5, 6).

At the end of the same century the line of the S starts getting smaller and is written from the middle of the first line of the text, with a few exceptions only (doc. no. 7, middle of Muharrem 996/12/21-12-1587).

From 1030 (1620-1621) onwards the line of the S is very small and the introductory formula is more and more difficult to be read. At the same time a line almost perpendicular to the phrase appears at the end of it (doc. no. 8,

¹. This short paper was firstly presented during the Seminar on Ottoman Paleography and Diplomatic, held at Visegrad, Hungary from March 23 to April 1, 1982.
Later on and during the 18th century the line of the S is written obliquely to the text and the last line following the formula is perpendicular to the text (doc. no 9, 25 Şaban 1171/4-5-1758).

From 1227 (1812-1813) the line of the S is followed by two or even more lines arising from the next to the first words of the formula, and the last line is going upwards (doc. no. 10 (27 Zilhicce 1227/1-1-1813).

From about 1240 onwards the introductory formula is just a rather unreadable scribble at the end of the first line of the text (doc. no 11, 3 Safer 1252/20-5-1836).

About 1280 (1863) a new type of hücets appears, with a printed seal at the top of the document. The introductory formula has completely disappeared (doc. no. 12, 25 Safer 1289/4-5-1872).

In the 20th century another type of hücets appears, with a seal in relief, having a ring of oak leaves around, and another circular inscription (doc. no. 13, 21 Seväl 1323/18-1-1905).

We also observe in the hücets another development, parallel to that of the introductory formula: The writing of the name and the title of the kadi over the text, is followed by his seal from 965 (1557) onwards. This seal had at that time an almond-like shape, with more or less sharp endings (doc. no. 14, 18 Cemaziylevelvel 965 (8-3-1558).

From 984 (1576) there are also seals with circular shapes (doc. no. 15, end of Safer 984/28-5-1576). In the next decade seals with various shapes appear and for two centuries every shape can be used. Most of the seals are circular, octagonal and mainly oval, which remains almost the only shape used after 1211 (1796) (doc. no. 16-21).

A third feature at the development of the hücet is that which we observe at the end of the text, in the phrase "Şuhud ul-hal" (The witnesses for the case). From the end of the 16th century onwards the word "hal" takes usually a shape quite complicated, which reminds a pair of scissors (doc. no. 6). Sometimes it is written like a "pence" or a "tugra" (doc. no. 22-24).

From 1095 (1684) the word "hal" or even the whole phrase is usually just a zigzag movement of the pen without any particular shape (doc. no. 25). Sometimes it is written clearly or in a scissors-like shape, but the last one becomes rare. During the 19th century it is usually a free movement of the hand, but there are also correct and clear writings (doc. no. 26-27).

Having those observations in mind, we can check the date of any hücet, whether it is correct or not; we can also see whether a document is written at the time it is dated or it is a later copy of the original. For instance Prof. Neset Çagatay published in "Vakıflar Dergisi, vol. 12 (1978) a vakıfnâme of
Sultan Murad I dated 772 Hicrî (1371), which he believes to be the original. However, according to what we have observed, this is impossible. The long line at the beginning of the text, the five oval seals of the kadis (the sixth kadi, the only one without a seal, must be the one who wrote the original), and the scissors-shaped L of the word “hal” indicate that it is a copy, made about the 17th century (doc. no. 28).

I hope that these observations will be of some help to those who study this kind of Turkish documents. A further investigation will certainly reveal similar developments in other kinds of Turkish documents.
Doc. no 1.

Doc. no 2.

Doc. no 3.
Some observations on the Ottoman-Turkish judicial documents

Doc. no 4.

Doc. no 5.

Doc. no 6.
Some observations on the Ottoman-Turkish judicial documents

Doc. no 10.

Doc. no 11.
Doc. no 12.
Some observations on the Ottoman-Turkish judicial documents

Doc. no 13.
Some observations on the Ottoman-Turkish judicial documents

Doc. no 17.

Doc. no 18.
Some observations on the Ottoman-Turkish judicial documents

Doc. no 22.

Doc. no 23.

Doc. no 24.
Some observations on the Ottoman-Turkish judicial documents

Doc. no 28.