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THE SETTLEMENT OF TUNISIAN IMMIGRANTS IN SYRIA IN THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY ACCORDING TO OTTOMAN ARCHIVE DOCUMENTS

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ABSTRACT: *The Ottoman State captured North African lands such as Algeria, Libya and Tunisia in the 16th century. Tunisia, which was conquered in 1574 lost Ottoman rule in 1881 when it was occupied by France. Due to the great territorial losses suffered by the Ottoman State in the 19th century, millions of Muslims living in Europe, Africa, Crimea and the Caucasus had to leave their lands and take refuge within the shrinking borders of Ottoman territory. After Tunisia came under the rule of France, some of the Muslims migrated from Tunisia in order to settle in the lands that remained under Ottoman rule. The Ottoman government, which sent some of the Tunisian immigrants to settle in Syria at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, made great efforts to supply their nutrition and to provide for their shelter and settlement. Tunisian immigrants have taken their place in the ethnic formation history of Syria, which already has a high demographic diversity.*

KEYWORDS: *Migration, settlement, Ottoman Empire, Tunisian, Syria*

L'INSEDIAMENTO DEGLI IMMIGRATI TUNISIANI IN SIRIA ALL'INIZIO DEL XX SECOLO
SECONDO DOCUMENTI D'ARCHIVIO OTTOMANO

SOMMARIO: *Lo Stato ottomano conquistò terre nordafricane come Algeria, Libia e Tunisia nel XVI secolo. La Tunisia, conquistata nel 1574, perse il dominio ottomano nel 1881 quando fu occupata dalla Francia. A causa delle grandi perdite territoriali subite dallo Stato ottomano nel XIX secolo, milioni di musulmani che vivevano in Europa, Africa, Crimea e Caucaso dovettero lasciare le loro terre e rifugiarsi all'interno dei sempre più stretti confini del territorio ottomano. Dopo che la Tunisia passò sotto il dominio della Francia, alcuni musulmani emigrarono dalla Tunisia per stabilirsi nelle terre rimaste sotto il dominio ottomano. Il governo ottomano, che ha inviato alcuni degli immigrati tunisini a stabilirsi in Siria all'estremità orientale del Mediterraneo, ha compiuto grandi sforzi per fornire loro nutrimento e provvedere al loro riparo e insediamento. Gli immigrati tunisini hanno preso il loro posto nella storia della formazione etnica della Siria, che presenta già un'elevata diversità demografica.*

PAROLE CHIAVE: *Migrazione, insediamento, Impero Ottomano, Tunisia, Siria*

Introduction

This study contributes to the existing literature on the social, economic and demographic history of Syria from the perspective of immigration policies during the late Ottoman era. The settlement of Tunisian immigrants coming to Syria in early 20th century is investigated in this study. The study employed documentary material from the Ottoman Archives concerning the settlement policy including the housing, nourishment and safety of the Tunisian immigrants coming to Syria and has resulted in important findings. Migrations from Tunisia, located on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, to Syria on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean made Syria an even more socially and economically

cosmopolitan region. Syria, where the social and ethnic conflicts still continue to happen; is being affected by the demographic structure that took shape during the Ottoman period. In the 19th century, immigrants with different ethnic and national identities from various countries were settled in Syria, which was already a diverse region comprising many cultures and ethnicities. By the early 20th century, this diverse structure also included immigrants from Tunisia. Before the Ottoman retreat from the region, the social structure of Syria was already shaped. With these aspects, this study, which will reveal a cross-section of the social and economic history of Syria, aims to contribute to the existing literature on the history of migration and settlement.

There are a number of studies about the migrations that have shaped the social structure of Tunisia and Syria under the Ottoman rule. The most important of these are: Chatty (2017), Karpas (2010), Amara (2019), Maksudoğlu (1986), Saylan (2017), Taş (2000) and Toprak (2012). Although these studies are on migration activities in Syria and other Mediterranean regions under Ottoman rule, it is necessary to examine the settlement of the Berber community in Syria as a separate study. The sources of this study are 21 archived documents issued by the Ottoman state and the secondary sources which are also evaluated. These documents contain a wide variety of information concerning refugee immigrants from Tunisia in Syria including historical records of sending refugee immigrants to other regions for various reasons, expenses for the completion of housing, precautions taken against the precarious conditions refugee immigrants found due to delayed settlement. It is hoped this study will contribute to further understanding of the social, economic and demographic history of Syria, a Middle Eastern country that is today a hot spot for social and political conflicts. The historical basis of the problems in this context of the refugee immigration issue and the place of this resettlement in Syrian history provides answers and is extremely important for the history of Syria, as the issue of immigration is itself extremely important for understanding the historical basis of the current problems and their solution.

This study is divided into 3 sections: first Tunisia under the Ottoman rule; second Syria as an important settlement area for refugees is examined; and third information and analysis concerning the settlement and accommodation process of refugee Tunisians in Syria.

Tunisia under the Ottoman Rule

Tunisia borders the Mediterranean to the north, Libya to the east and Algeria to the west. According to the records, the first inhabitants of these lands, which have an important position in Mediterranean

domination and trade between Africa and Europe, were communities from West Asia and Europe. Later, Berbers began to settle in the region. The region became a commercial center when the Phoenicians settled here. The Romans, who dominated the region with the defeat of the Carthaginians in the Punic War, made Tunisia the center of their North African lands. The arrival of Muslims in Tunisia in 647 followed the period of Vandals and Byzantine domination¹. Muslim Arabs succeeded in capturing this region, which they called "İfrikıya", in 649². Thus, Tunisia was introduced to Islam in the 7th century due to the Muslim occupation. From the 7th century onwards, Islam spread rapidly in the region, and with the immigration of Andalusian Muslims to Tunisia, the number of Muslims increased.

In the 16th century, the Ottoman State was interested in the Southern Mediterranean coasts, when the Hafsis ruled in Libya and Tunisia, and the Beni Mezganne tribe, Zeyyaniler and Sa'di people were dominant in Algeria³. Meanwhile the Spanish branch of the Habsburgs was the greatest rival to the Ottomans in the Mediterranean. The main reason behind the Ottoman Empire's policies on the Mediterranean was to protect its coasts and its dominance in the Eastern Mediterranean. The reason that brought Spain into conflict with the Ottoman Empire was the damage caused by Turkish pirates in North Africa to the Spanish coasts and to maritime trade⁴. The Spanish occupation of Tunisia as a base, meant a serious threat to the Ottoman Empire.

The determined policies of the Ottoman State to seize Tunisia were realized only in 1569 as a result of the activities of the Algerian Governor and Admiral Kılıç Ali Pasha⁵. However, on October 7, 1573 Tunisia was recaptured by Spain⁶. After all these waves of conflicts, the Ottoman navy, which completed its preparations to completely capture Tunisia⁷,

¹ Z. Erginsoy, *Kuzey Afrika'da Osmanlı-Habsburg Mücadelesinin Sonu; 1574 Tunus Seferi*, «Bilge International Journal of Social Research», 3:1 (2019), p. 27.

² F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, University of California Press, London, 1995, p. 82; A. Adıgüzel, *Hız. Osman Döneminde (24-35/644-656) Fetihler*, «Journal of Oriental Scientific Research», 11:3 (2019), p. 1186.

³ S. Hizmetli, *Osmanlı Yönetimi Döneminde Tunus ve Cezayir'in Eğitim ve Kültür Tarihine Genel Bir Bakış*, «Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi», 32 (1991), p. 1; A. Kavas, *Osmanlı Devleti'ni Kuzey Afrika'da Kalıcılaştıran Sefer: Tunus Savaşı (1574)*, «İstanbul Medeniyet Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi», 1:1 (2016), p. 7.

⁴ Z. Erginsoy, *Osmanlı-Habsburg Mücadelesinin Sonu* cit., p. 27.

⁵ S.H. Özkan, *XVIII. Yüzyılın Başlarında Kuzey Afrika*, «Avrasya Etüdüleri», 40:2 (2011), p. 289; S. V. Toprak, *Osmanlı Yönetiminde Kuzey Afrika: Garp Ocakları*, «Türkiyat Mecmuası», 22 (2012), p. 231.

⁶ Z. Erginsoy, *Osmanlı-Habsburg Mücadelesinin Sonu* cit., p. 30.

⁷ E. Naki, *1574 Tunus Seferi Sonrası İspanya-Osmanlı İlişkileri ve Osmanlı Sarayındaki Gayri Resmî Müzakereci Jaime de Losada*, «Journal of Eurasian Inquires», VII:1 (2018), p. 57; Z. Erginsoy, *Osmanlı-Habsburg Mücadelesinin Sonu* cit., p. 31.

set out from Istanbul on May 15, 1574⁸. The Ottoman navy, which entered the Tunisian Gulf on July 11⁹, conquered Tunisia on August 24, 1574 at the end of a 33-day war¹⁰.

While the local powers of the region, which had a say in the Tunisian lands, maintained their status, the Ottoman State appointed the *beylerbeyi* here and received taxes every year¹¹. In Tunisia, which has a striking unique place among the Ottoman provinces, two dynasties that imposed semi-independence on the Ottoman administration and enabled power to pass from father to son¹².

Tunisia and its neighbouring countries, which had very weak ties with the Ottoman Empire, came under the influence of Italy and France in the 19th century. When France captured Algeria in 1830, the Muslims living there took refuge in the Ottoman regency¹³. This conquest of France was an important development in terms of Mediterranean geopolitics¹⁴ and its continuation was inevitable. France, which captured Algeria, turned its attention to Tunisia and occupied it in 1881¹⁵. Sadık Bey, who ruled the region as Tunisian Governor since 1859, signed an agreement with the French on 12 May 1881 and accepted French sovereignty¹⁶.

After the invasion, France turned its attention to the Tunisia-Libya line due to the rebellion that started in Southern Tunisia at the beginning of July 1881 and spread to the whole of Southern and Central Tunisia in a short period of time. The French was in acquaintance with the uprisings in Tunisia. In 1864 there was an uprising that affected French citizens against the doubling of taxes and the compulsory recruitment of soldiers¹⁷. Although France intervened in the uprising in 1881 by sending considerable forces, it could not ensure security in Tunisia. In the face of the harsh intervention and occupation of France, more than 200,000 Tunisians consisting of various tribes had

⁸ A. Kavas, *Osmanlı Devleti'ni Kuzey Afrika'da* cit., p. 28.

⁹ F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World* cit., p. 325.

¹⁰ N. Jorga, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Tarihi III*, Yeditepe Publishing, Istanbul, 2005, p. 142; A. Kavas, *Osmanlı Devleti'ni Kuzey Afrika'da* cit., p. 34;

¹¹ N. Jorga, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu* cit., p. 143.

¹² R. Mantran, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Tarihi I*, Adam Publishing, Istanbul, 1992, p. 500; A. Kavas, *Osmanlı Devleti'ni Kuzey Afrika'da* cit., p. 37.

¹³ A.M. Planel, *Les ressortissants de la protection consulaire française en pays musulman Le cas des Algériens de Tunisie sous le Second Empire*, «Madrid mélanges de la Casa de Velazquez», 51:1 (2021), p. 139.

¹⁴ N. Amara, *Faire la France en Algérie: émigration algérienne, mésusages du nom et conflits de nationalités dans le monde: de la chute d'Alger aux années 1930*, unpublished PhD thesis, Université Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2019, p. 6.

¹⁵ S.V. Toprak, *Osmanlı Yönetiminde Kuzey Afrika* cit., pp. 232-233.

¹⁶ M. Maksudoğlu, *Tunus'un Osmanlı Devletinden Ayrılması*, «Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi», 4 (1986), pp. 168-169.

¹⁷ A.M. Planel, *Les ressortissants de la protection consulaire* cit., p. 141.

to migrate to Libya. The aim of those immigrants who took refuge in Tripoli was not to settle there permanently, but to return when the conditions were suitable¹⁸.

An Important Settlement Region: Syria

Syria, which is at the eastern end of the Mediterranean and in a key position for the dominance of the Middle East, has been an important settlement area since prehistoric times. Syria, the last stop between the desert and the sea, has been an important place where many elements of civilization, religions, alphabet and various arts were transmitted to the Mediterranean world¹⁹. The arrival of the Ottomans in Syria occurred in the Seljuk period. Syria came under Ottoman rule with the Mercidabık War in 1516²⁰. With the conquest of Egypt as well as Syria, the Ottoman State expanded the scope of its Eastern Mediterranean strategy²¹.

Examining the 19th century demographic structure of Syria, where many immigrants were settled during the Ottoman period, shows that the majority of the population were Muslim. For example, in 1867, 99,436 of the 115,377 households in Aleppo Province, one of the most important cities in the Syrian region, were Muslim, 1,544 were Christians and 724 were Jews. In other words, 85.8% of the populations of Aleppo Province were Muslim²².

The Muslims living in the lands that the Ottoman State had lost in the 19th century had abandoned their homes. Because the Muslims living in the territory of the nation states established in Europe were either expelled or fled due to their ethnic and religious identities²³. Since this situation continued until the collapse of the Ottoman State, the shortage of land to accommodate the immigrants was an important problem for the Ottoman state. As the migrations of refugees increased, it became difficult to find land to accommodate the incoming masses. Therefore, after Anatolia and the Balkans, the resettle-

¹⁸ M. Sıtıti, *Tunus'un Fransızlar Tarafından İşgali Karşısında Osmanlı Siyaseti (1878-1888)*, unpublished PhD thesis, Istanbul University, 2008, p. 166.

¹⁹ F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World* cit., p. 161.

²⁰ K.Z. Taş, *Suriye'nin (Şam) Osmanlı Hâkimiyetindeki İdari Yapısı*, «Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi», 15:1 (2000), p. 77.

²¹ E.S. Gürkan, *Osmanlı-Habsburg Rekabeti Çerçevesinde Osmanlılar'ın XVI. Yüzyıldaki Akdeniz Siyaseti*, in *Osmanlı Dönemi Akdeniz Dünyası*, H. Çoruh, M. Y. Ertaş, M. Z. Köse, (eds.), Yeditepe Publishing, Istanbul, 2011, p. 19.

²² *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Halep*, ed. T. Koltuk, Union of Turkish World Municipalities, Istanbul, 2018, p. 42.

²³ D. Chatty, *Syria the Making and Unmaking of a Refugee State*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2017, p. 19.

ment areas spread over a wide area, including Iraq, Syria, Cyprus, the Aegean Islands, Libya, Bosnia and Ioannina²⁴. The Ottoman State's lack of land on which to settle immigrants in Anatolia in the 19th century made Syria an important settlement center as Syria had a low population density²⁵. For this reason, the Ottoman government had to settle millions of refugee immigrants in Syria and Anatolia²⁶.

The Ottoman State, which began the resettlement process in the Syrian region, focused primarily on those places where water resources were located in order to settle the immigrants. For this purpose, the vacant lands in the cities of Syrian Province such as Beirut, Damascus, Aleppo, Raqqa, Havran, Haifa and Palestine were determined as the settlement areas²⁷. The Muslim Immigrant Commission (*Muhacirin-i İslamiye Komisyonu*) carried out the settlement and the subsistence for the refugee immigrants who would settle in these lands. The Commission, while dealing with the accommodation and settlement of immigrants who came to Syria, tried to provide them with opportunities such as land and housing allocation, education, tax exemption and the provision of agricultural equipment²⁸.

Ottoman archival sources on the immigrants from North Africa show that Syria was one of the places where Muslims from Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco took refuge in the last quarter of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Cities that hosted refugees were: Beirut, Tripoli, Damascus, Hama, Aleppo, and Raqqa²⁹. It should also be noted here that there was immigration not only to Syria but also to the New World from Algeria and Tunisia. More importantly, since the 1860s, there was a significant flow of immigrants from Syria and certain Ottoman lands to the New World. Of course, it can be said that among the main factors in these migration movements were the political and economic turmoil that affected the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century³⁰.

The immigrants who were resettled in Syria experienced problems with local populations. The people of the region regarded these new arrivals as an economic burden for them and cultural differences

²⁴ A. Saydam, *Kırım ve Kafkasya'dan Yapılan Göçler ve Osmanlı İskan Siyaseti (1856-1876)*, «Osmanlı», 4 (1999), p. 683.

²⁵ O. Kızılkaya, T. Akay, *Kafkasya Muhacirlerinin Suriye Vilayeti'ne İskanı ve Karşılaşılan Zorluklar*, «Turkish Studies-International Periodical for the Languages», 8:2 (2013), p. 140.

²⁶ D. Chatty, *Syria* cit., p. 19.

²⁷ O. Kızılkaya, T. Akay, *Kafkasya Muhacirlerinin Suriye* cit., p. 142.

²⁸ K. Saylan, *Suriye Vilayeti'ne Göç Eden Kafkas Muhacirlerinin İskan ve İaşe Me-selesi*, in *Geçmişten Günümüze Göç I*, ed. O. Köse, Canik Municipality Cultural Publications, Samsun, 2017, p. 438.

²⁹ E. Taşbaş, *Halifenin Gölgesine Sığınanlar: Göçler ve Muhacirin-i İslamiye Komisyonu*, Berikan Publishing, Ankara, 2017, p. 305.

³⁰ N. Amara, *Faire la France en Algérie* cit., p. 257

caused problems. Some of the lands given to the resettled immigrants were lands used by the local people, which resulted into unrest and conflict. The Bedouins, who generally lived a tribal life and were a closed society, did not easily accept the immigrants³¹. For example, the Hawran region, which is an important settlement region of Damascus Province, was one of the places where the Bedouins and other indigenous communities frequently attacked these immigrants³². This was not the only problem created by the resettlement of immigrants in Syria. It is also known that other states, due to conflicting interests, frequently intervened in Ottoman settlement policies. Russia was opposed to the Ottoman settlement policies because of their being controversial to Russian interests on East Anatolia. Because of this, Russia wanted Circassians to be resettled in Central Anatolia and Syria. On the contrary, Italy, France and England opposed the settlements of refugee immigrants in Syria, Beirut and Palestine³³.

Resettlement and Provisioning of Tunisian Immigrants in Syria

The first and most important problems for the immigrants, the main actors in the process, were the resettlement procedures. If an immigrant settles on a land, this would be the new homeland of the immigrant and they would be able to start his economic activities as soon as possible to continue their life. However, in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, it was quite difficult for the Ottoman State, which faced the problem of immigration not only in Syria, but across the whole of Ottoman territory, to quickly finalize settlement processes. The reasons for this were economic problems, disruptions in the coordination of local administrators and the central government, the large number of immigrants and finding suitable land. The following examples, which are reflected in the Ottoman documents, show that the government experienced great difficulties as in other regions in the settlement of immigrants in Syria.

Syria was one of the significant resettlement places. However, at the end of the 19th century, the scantiness of land due to the intensity of the immigrants were commenced. At the end of 1894, the Syrian governorship was asked how many of the immigrants were not settled,

³¹ O. Kızılkaya, T. Akay, *Kafkasya Muhacirlerinin Suriye* cit., pp. 141-142.

³² T. Başıbek, *19. Yüzyıl Sonunda Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Muhacir Hareketliliğine Suriye Vilayetinden Bakmak*, «Toplumsal Tarih», 282 (2017), p. 56.

³³ S. Erkan, *XIX. Yüzyıl Sonlarında Osmanlı Devleti'nin Göçmenleri İskan Politikasına Yabancı Ülkelerin Müdahaleleri*, «Osmanlı», 4 (1999), p. 624; K. H. Karpat, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Etnik Yapılanma ve Göçler*, Timaş Publishing, Istanbul, 2010, p. 171.

and the answer received indicates that there were immigrants who were still not settled yet, and that 70 of the 10859 immigrants sent to Syria up to this time are still waiting to be settled³⁴.

At the time when 740 North Africans and Hejaz immigrants who had previously come to Damascus and were waiting for resettlement which had not yet been made, a further 253 Moorish immigrants subsequently came to Damascus from Tunisia in June 1899. It was thought that these newly arrived Maghrib immigrants were dispatched to the Euphrates Valley and that their settlement there would cause difficulties, so it was decided that all these immigrants would be sent to the Hamidiye District in the Hama Sanjak of Syria³⁵. Of course, those sent to Syria for resettlement were not only Tunisian immigrants. Until the end of 1899, thousands of Cretan immigrants were also sent to Aleppo, Damascus and to the other cities of Syria. In the telegram sent from the Syrian Province on October the 16th of the same year 1899, it was reported to the Muslim Immigrant Commission that immigrants were temporarily kept as guests in the inns and houses in the center of the province in a miserable condition, there were difficulties in allocating them to their resettlement destinations and, therefore, immigrants should be gradually sent to the region³⁶. The difficulties experienced were the same for all the immigrants.

Tunisian immigrants, who were sent to Syria 4 months earlier, were still waiting to be settled in miserable and desolate condition. One of these immigrants, Mecit Bey, wrote a petition informing the government about their situation. In the letter sent from the Government to the Ministry of Internal Affairs dated the 16th of December 1908, it was mentioned that the Algerians who had previously immigrated to Damascus were settled, and it was requested that the necessary procedures for the settlement of the Tunisian immigrants be completed³⁷. Again, as it is understood from the letter dated the 2nd of December 1908, written by the Immigration Commission, 1 million 63,071 *куруş* was needed for the resettlement of all the immigrants in Syria. There were about 1200 immigrants from Rumelia, the Caucasus, Tunisia and Algeria waiting as guests in the various cities of Syria. It was impossible to cover the housing costs of such a large number of immigrants from the provincial revenues. For this reason, the immigrants who were in a precarious condition had to be provided with shelters. In addition to provisions, 5000 *lira* in order to provide fuel and

³⁴ E. Taşbaş, *Halifenin Gölgesine Sığınanlar* cit., p. 130

³⁵ «Instruction for immigrants coming from Tunisia to Damascus via Beirut to settle in Hama on the empty land». BOA (Presidency State Archives of the Republic of Turkey), DH.MKT. 2220/45, 9 July 1899.

³⁶ E. Taşbaş, *Halifenin Gölgesine Sığınanlar* cit., p. 148-149.

³⁷ «Correspondence about the work to be done about immigrants who migrated to Syria to settle». BOA, DH.MKT. 2698/29, 31 December 1908.

to purchase the necessary tools for agriculture should be found urgently. It was ordered to transfer this money derived from a lottery organized for contributing the resettlement costs to the branch of Ziraat Bank in Damascus³⁸. It was important and urgent for the province to provide the necessary money as soon as possible due to the precarious and miserable situation of immigrants who were temporarily placed at the inns (*han*).

The presence of immigrants waiting under difficult conditions for their resettlement continued in the following year. The resettlement of 120 Tunisian immigrants consisting of 34 families who came to Damascus via Aleppo, could not be done. In addition, there were 70 Caucasian immigrants waiting to be settled in the region. The governor's office, who had problems with finding the required money for the settlement of these immigrants, requested it from the Ministry of Interior. The government found this impossible and wanted the 5,000 lira required for the expenses to be covered by the local budget or covered by the Agricultural Bank of Damascus from lottery revenues. In the reply sent to the Syrian Province on the 24th of February 1909, it was stated that permission was requested from the vizierate for the procedures to be carried out regarding the Tunisian immigrants, reply was expected. It was mentioned that the Ministry of Finance in order to obtain the money urgently, and to prevent the immigrants from staying in temporary residences and misery for a long time³⁹.

Again, another Tunisian immigrant group in Syria applied to the government to be resettled as soon as possible, but they were not resettled yet. Tunisian immigrants applied again on the 8th of March 1909, and drew attention to their plight. The Governor of Syria reported the situation to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in a letter for the urgent settlement process on the 25th of March 1909. Upon correspondence with the Grand Vizier, the Ministry of Internal Affairs requested that Immigration Commission carry out the transactions immediately, to give the necessary orders for resettlement⁴⁰. Looking at the records two years after this event, it is seen that the settlement problem continued. There were Tunisian immigrants who came to Syria in 1910 and still could not be settled. According to the records of the Council of Ministers dated the 12th of February 1911, the

³⁸ «Instructions on the settlement of immigrants from Caucasus, Tunisia, Rumelia and Algeria who were sent to the Province of Syria and to solve this problem». BOA, DH.MKT. 2760/42, 8 March 1909.

³⁹ «Procedures to be made about Tunisian immigrants coming to Damascus». BOA, DH.MKT. 2760/53, 08 March 1909.

⁴⁰ «Resettlement demands of Tunisian immigrants in Syria». BOA, DH.MKT. 2776/1, 25 March 1909; «Correspondence between Ottoman government and Syrian Province regarding the dispatch and settlement of Tunisian immigrants». BOA, DH. MKT. 2794/3, 12 April 1909.

Tunisian and Algerian immigrants who were in the Syrian Province had not yet been settled. In the document in question, it was decided to increase the allocation given to the immigrants, and if possible, to allow them to be resettled, otherwise it was decided to allocate land as soon as possible without giving them a daily wage⁴¹.

After Italy occupied Libya on the 29th of September 1911, a group of Algerian and Tunisian immigrants wanted to come to Damascus and settle because of the Italian-Ottoman War (Tripoli War), which would last for about a year. However, these immigrants sent a petition to the sultan stating that they were unfairly treated in Damascus and that they were devastated by hunger and misery. Upon this petition, the government asked the Syrian Province the reasons for this misery and requested the actual number of these immigrants. On the 8th of January 1913, a reply was received from the Syrian Province. According to this, the number of immigrants who came to Damascus on the 25th of December 1911 was 196 in total, 164 adults and 32 children. The governorship states that the nutritional needs of all these immigrants were met⁴².

As can be seen in the documents above, from the end of the 19th century until 1913, the Ottoman State had great difficulties in settling the immigrants from both Tunisia and other countries in Syria. In a period when the state suffered from economic and political troubles, of course, immigrants were in the worst difficulties. Because immigrants who could not be settled had great difficulties in finding shelter and nutrition for years as they could not get back to their homes and lands.

One of the problems that both the Ottoman State and the immigrants experienced in terms of resettlement was the issue of citizenship. This problem had to be solved from the outset due to the state's previous experience. Immigrants, who had some economic privileges for a certain period of time, could claim that they belonged to a foreign state in order to benefit from the capitulations of foreign states after these privileges ended. Especially the French citizenship of Algerian immigrants should be seen as not their loyalty to France but as an expression of conscious pragmatism. Because they were aware of the various economic, political and military exemptions of living as French citizens in Ottoman lands.⁴³ This was a significant problem for the Ottomans to handle with caution. Because of these bitter experiences,

⁴¹ «Requesting the settlement costs of Tunisian and Algerian immigrants who are guests in the Syrian Province from the Ministry of Finance». BOA, BEO. 3888/291529, 30 April 1911.

⁴² «Notifying the government of the complaints of Algerian and Tunisian immigrants who settled in Damascus due to the Tripoli War to the government». BOA, BEO. 4130/309704, 02 January 1913.

⁴³ N. Amara, *Faire la France en Algérie* cit., p. XXIX.

the Ottoman Government sought to obtain a commitment document from the immigrants stating that they would not claim to be foreign nationals and that they would obey Ottoman laws.

Likewise, for Tunisian immigrants who are considered to be resettled in Syria, early measures were taken for citizenship. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the government that a document containing mutual agreement should be obtained from Tunisian immigrants who wanted to come and settle in Damascus in order to accept their resettlement requests, since France claimed the right over the Tunisians. Since such problems were previously experienced in respect to the Algerian immigrants, it was also required that the documents to be submitted by the immigrants be approved by the French embassy. However, the Tunisian immigrants who were waiting for settlement were also in misery. Drawing attention to the situation of the immigrants, the Ministry of Internal Affairs demanded that they would be resettled in Syria as soon as possible in a petition dated the 5th of May 1909⁴⁴. 117 Tunisian immigrants repeatedly submitted their complaints about their situation to the government and they awaited resettlement. These immigrants demanded that they should be settled on a *miri* land (state owned land/treasury land). Although immigrants needed to be resettled as soon as possible, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs drew attention to the letter sent to the Immigration Commission on the 19th of November 1893 and requested the procedures to be carried out accordingly. According to the aforementioned article, a document should be obtained from each immigrant with a separate seal and signatures stating that all immigrants who want to immigrate to the Ottoman Empire accepted Ottoman citizenship and would be subject to the laws of the Ottoman State, and that they would not in the future claim to be a citizen of a foreign country⁴⁵. Subsequently, each immigrant would have this letter approved by the embassy of the state they belong to and will afterwards be accepted as immigrants. These were requirements for the admission as immigrants and after the completions of these transactions were made by the immigrants, they were settled in Syria.

At the end of the same year, a new group of Tunisian immigrants who arrived in Syria were accepted for resettlement on the condition that they pledged to become Ottoman citizens. According to the letter sent to the government from the Syrian governorship on the 7th of December 1909, a new group of immigrants from Tunisia and Algeria, consisting of 24 families, came to Syria with passports or not. These

⁴⁴ «Informing the Ministry of Interior about the number of people who want to come and settle in Syria from Tunisia and whether they will accept resettlement in Adana Province». BOA, BEO. 3598/269828, 15 July 1909.

⁴⁵ «Informing the Ministry of Interior about the number of people who want to come and settle in Syria from Tunisia and whether they will accept resettlement in Adana Province». BOA, BEO. 3598/269828, 15 July 1909.

immigrants wanted to be settled in Syria. Since it was expected that other immigrants would also come, the governorship asked the government's opinion on the settlement decision. In the reply given by the government to the Province of Syria, it was stated that it would be appropriate to send Tunisian immigrants to Mersin and Yumurtalık instead of Syria, as they were thought better able to adapt to the climate conditions. However, in the document to the decision of the immigrants, the government ordered the settlement procedures to be made according⁴⁶. It is thought that the settlements were made here because the migrants' preference was Syria.

In 1910, on the other hand, the Ottoman Government took early precautions for citizenship. The Ottoman government had taken the necessary precautions for the settlement and various problems of the immigrants who would set off from Algeria and Tunisia to the Ottoman lands in the summer. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, sent instructions on the 3rd of July 1910 to the governor of Libya, from where the immigrants whose resettlement was decided to be made in Beirut and Syria, and ordered the arrivals to be transferred to the settlement areas in case they accepted to become Ottoman citizens. Among these immigrants, those who accepted Ottoman citizenship were sent to Beirut and Syria for settlement⁴⁷.

Another record of Ottoman citizenship concerning Tunisian immigrants in Syria is from 1911. According to the decision taken in May 1911, the Algerians who settled in the Ottoman lands would not be regarded as Ottoman citizens, regardless of their period of residence. In order for these immigrants to become Ottoman citizens, they must submit a petition to the Ottoman government and the French consulate on their renunciation of French citizenship. The government has informed the Tunisian and Algerian immigrants in Syria that they can acquire Ottoman citizenship only after these procedures are completed⁴⁸.

It is almost impossible to identify all Tunisian immigrants who settled in Syria during the Ottoman period from the documents. However, it is also possible to follow migrations from correspondence on various subjects. The 1914 record on the issue of "Ottoman citizenship" mentioned above is a good example of this. According to the letter sent by

⁴⁶ «The number of Tunisians who want to settle in Syria and the correspondence between the Syrian Province and the Ministry of Internal Affairs about it would be more appropriate to send them to Mersin and Yumurtalık». BOA, BEO. 3674/2755442, 11 December 1909.

⁴⁷ «Correspondence between the Libyan Province and the Ottoman government regarding the transfer of immigrants from Algeria and Tunisia to Syria». BOA, DH. ŞFR. 663/111, 13 July 1910.

⁴⁸ «Decisions on Tunisian and Algerian immigrants settled in Syria». BOA, ŞD. 653/58, 13 May 1911.

the Governor of Syria Hulusi Bey to the Ministry of Internal Affairs on the 28th of November 1914, 17 immigrants of British and French nationality from Algeria and Tunisia were settled. The governor reports that these immigrants had applied for Ottoman citizenship⁴⁹.

One of the most important issues regarding the immigrants resettled in the Ottoman lands was the exemptions granted to them. The Ottoman State initially exempted immigrants who took refuge, from taxation for 10 years and from military service for 25 years. The aim here was to enable the immigrants to become producers as soon as possible. However, this meant economic loss for the state over a long period of time, and for this reason, the exemption period was reduced for the immigrants during the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War to 3 years exemption from taxes and 10 years exemption from military service. As both the number of immigrants and their burden on the state increased, changes were made again in 1889 regarding exemptions. After this date, tax exemption of immigrants was determined as 2 years and military service exemption as 6 years.

Immigrants from Tunisia and Algeria who were settled in Syria in 1888 were exempt from military service for 20 years. A letter was sent to the provinces of Syria, Adana, Aleppo and Beirut and the governors of Jerusalem and Zor in 1908, when this period expired, and the procedures were initiated⁵⁰. Likewise, Tunisian immigrants who came and settled in Syria in the following years were exempt from military service for 6 years. The military exemption of these immigrants expired in 1909. As a result of the correspondence between the 5th Army Command, the Ministry of War, Foreign Affairs and Internal Affairs and the Grand Vizier in September 1911, it was decided to grant the same exemption to newly arrived Tunisian and Algerian immigrants⁵¹.

Not only deciding on the geography to be resettled, but also transporting the immigrants to the settlement was an important issue in immigrant resettlement. The government has also acted very selflessly regarding the dispatch of Tunisian immigrants who came to Syria but were not found suitable for settlement there. The food, accommodation

⁴⁹ «About the Russian, French, British and Tunisian and Algerian immigrants who want to come to Syria and become Ottoman citizens». BOA, DH.EUM. 5. Şb. 4/53, 28 November 1914; «Correspondence regarding the requests of Tunisian immigrants to become Ottoman citizenship». BOA, DH.ŞFR. 450/142, 28 November 1914.

⁵⁰ «Conscription of immigrants who have settled in Syria because their military service exemption period has expired». BOA, MV. 119/73, 29 June 1908.

⁵¹ «Decisions on Tunisian and Algerian immigrants settled in Syria». BOA, ŞD. 653/58, 13 May 1911; «On the exemption of immigrants from Tunisia to Syria from military service for six years». MV. 153/53, 19 June 1911; «Exemption of Tunisian immigrants settled in Syria from military service». BOA, DH.MB.HPS.M. 1/41, 11 July 1911; «Military service exemption of Tunisian immigrants who settled in Syria». BOA, BEO. 3941/295504, 29 September 1911.

costs and subsequently the travel expenses up to the time they were dispatched to their settlements were also covered. In a letter sent by the Immigration Administration to the Ministry of Internal Affairs on the 25th of September 1912, it was reported that 17,770 *kurus* was allocated to Tunisian and Algerian immigrants who were guests in the Syrian province center in Ramadan in 1910. In addition, nutrition costs and house rents have been met until the immigrants leave from here to go to the settlement areas. In this process, an increased amount of money was returned to the treasury because some immigrants left early⁵².

According to the document dated the 19th of February 1916, a large number of Libyan and Tunisian immigrants were sent to Syria to be resettled in Aleppo Province. However, Aleppo Governor Mustafa Bey stated that it was difficult for these immigrants to settle in masses. The Governor also requested permission from the government, stating that it would be more appropriate for these immigrants to be sent to the regions of Diyarbakır Province with a hot climate and settle there⁵³. Welcoming this request positively, the Ministry of Internal Affairs approved the distribution of Libyan and Tunisian immigrants waiting in Syria for resettlement to cities and towns with suitable climate such as Adana, Konya, Diyarbakır, Ankara and Kayseri. In addition, the government, which thinks that precautions should be taken in order to prevent problems during the dispatch of immigrants, asked the governorship to where they can be sent under their own means⁵⁴. Thus, the government without desolation would be able to take the necessary measures to transport the immigrants to the places where they will be settled.

The various findings could be reached from the documents about the immigrants resettled in Syria. There was no record of any urban citizen, craftsman, tradesman or trader among the Tunisian immigrants included in this study. However, this doesn't mean that there are no records about the subject. Because the correspondence between the Ottoman province and the center generally covered the basic needs for the resettlement of the immigrants. Meeting these needs was very difficult for that period and it would took time. The process of resettling of these immigrants was a very long and costly consisted of feeding, sheltering, covering the expenses of fuel and

⁵² «Findings regarding the abandonment of the Algerian and Tunisian Immigrants as guests in Syria, their expenses and the payment of their household rents». BOA, DH.İD. 10-1/63, 02 October 1912.

⁵³ «On the separation and resettlement of Tunisian and Libyan immigrants sent to Aleppo to be resettled in different places». BOA, DH.ŞFR. 510/28, 19 February 1916.

⁵⁴ «An attempt to distribute the Tripoli and Tunisian immigrants who were sent to Halep for settlement to provinces such as Adana, Konya, Diyarbakır, Ankara and Kayseri». BOA, DH.EUM.5.şb. 81/6, 26 February 1916.

transportation, building their houses, giving agricultural land for them to farm, and finally supplying agricultural tools and equipment. Until this process took place they were hosted in various private and public buildings.

The period when the immigrants came to the Ottoman lands was coincided with a period of great economic and political depression for the Ottomans. This situation can be also followed from the Ottoman policies of the 19th and 20th centuries. In the beginning of the 19th century, when immigration began to intensify, the immigrants were exempted from military service and taxes for up to 25 years. But these exemptions followed a course in parallel with the deterioration of the state in economic and military terms. In other words, these exemptions gradually decreased to 2 years. Of course, in this case, it the immigrants suffered the most. Specific to Syria, the exemptions have decreased from 25 to 6 years similar to the other parts of the empire.

In addition, there are other immigrants who came here during the settlement of Tunisian immigrants to Syria. As mentioned before, Syria was one of the Ottoman lands where settlement activities were intense, and many immigrants from the Balkans, Caucasus, Libya, Hejaz, and Algeria, along with Tunisian immigrants, were included in the Syrian immigration history and demographic structure in the 20th century.

Conclusions

Tunisia, which had an important position in terms of both Mediterranean influence and trade between the two continents of Europe and Africa, had been under the sovereignty of many states throughout its history. The Ottoman State, becoming stronger in the 16th century and wanted to dominate the Mediterranean, entered into a great struggle with Spain to control Tunisia. The Ottoman State succeeded in conquering the region in 1574, ruled the region for more than three hundred years, until France occupied Tunisia in 1881. Muslims living there would preferred to migrate to the Ottoman Empire instead of living under the French regime. Therefore, the Ottoman State then had to deal with the immigration of the Muslims from Tunisia as well as losses caused through the loss of Tunisia. The arrival of long-term immigrants from Algeria as well as Tunisia has been showing the effects of French policies in the region since 1830⁵⁵. The Ottoman government sent some of the refugees from Tunisia to Syria, thinking that the geographical and climate conditions would be suitable for these refugee

⁵⁵ N. Amara, *Faire la France en Algérie* cit., p. VII.

immigrants. Located at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, Syria was one of the places where refugee immigrants were constantly sent in the 19th century. For this reason, as one of the regions where immigrants are densely populated, Syria's demographic mobility continued until World War I.

Of course, it is also necessary to evaluate the settlement activities and developments mentioned in Syria within the conditions of the period. It should be noted that the colonial activities experienced in the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th century triggered migration in African coasts such as Tunisia and Algeria, along with the European lands. Accordingly, this situation constitutes one of the important arguments explaining the intense arrival of immigrants from many regions to the Ottoman country during the mentioned periods. However, in the Ottoman period, the Syrian lands stand out as one of the places that faced various problems due to the intense migration flow.

Tunisian immigrants who went to settle in Syria for reasons such as the intensity of immigrant settlement activities, the political and economic problems of the Ottoman State and the reactions of the local people, faced great problems. The disruption of the settlements of the refugee immigrants, on the one hand, caused tragedies that drove them to misery, on the other hand, it caused conflicts with the local people. Despite all these difficulties, some of the Tunisian immigrants were settled in various regions of the Syrian Province, while some were sent to the Eastern Mediterranean coasts of Anatolia and settled.

It should be also noted that it is a historical fact that in the strategically important lands such as Anatolia and the Middle East, where the Ottoman Empire previously ruled, the existing ethnic and national diversity that causes conflicts today has connections with the Ottoman immigrant settlement policies.