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TAYK IN THE 16TH — 17TH CENTURIES: DEMOGRAPHIC AND RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATION OF THE ARMENIAN POPULATION*

This study examines the demographic and religious transformations that occurred among the Armenian population in the historical province of Tayk in the 16th and 17th centuries. Utilizing primary sources and Ottoman tax registers, it provides a detailed analysis of population dynamics, the complex structure of both rural and urban households, and shifts in the ethno-confessional landscape under conditions of sustained political and military pressure. The evidence indicates that Tayk underwent a profound demographic crisis in this period, marked by a sharp decline in total population, the depopulation of numerous villages, and the growing influence of Muslim settlers. These events were accompanied by deep religious change, culminating in the gradual Islamization of part of the Armenian population and the transformation of the Christian majority into a minority. The factors that led to these processes, including wars, resettlements and the tax policy of the Ottoman Empire, have been studied.

Key words: Tayk, Armenian population, demographic changes, ethno-confessional transformation, resettlement, Islamization, Ottoman Empire, migration, population crisis, Christianity.

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ТАЙК В XVI—XVII ВВ.: ДЕМОГРАФИЧЕСКАЯ И РЕЛИГИОЗНАЯ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ АРМЯНСКОГО НАСЕЛЕНИЯ

В данном исследовании рассматриваются демографические и религиозные трансформации, произошедшие среди армянского населения исторической провинции Тайк в XVI—XVII вв. Опираясь на первоисточники и османские налоговые регистры, данное исследование представляет собой тщательный анализ динамики населения, сложной структуры сельских и городских семей, а также эволюции этноконфессиональной демографии в условиях широкомасштабного политического и военного давления. Имеющиеся данные свидетельствуют о том, что в этот период Тайк пережил глубокий демографический кризис, характеризующийся значительным сокращением общей численности населения, при этом многие деревни обезлюдели или попали в сферу влияния мусульманских иммигрантов. Эти события сопровождались значительными религиозными трансформациями, кульминацией которых стала постепенная исламизация части армянского населения и превращение христианского большинства в меньшинство. Изучены факторы, приведшие к этим процессам, включая войны, переселения и налоговую политику Османской империи.

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Ключевые слова: Тайк, армянское население, демографические изменения, этноконфессиональная трансформация, переселения, исламизация, Османская империя, миграция, кризис населения, христианство.

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Introduction

Tayk, as the north-western province of historical Armenia, underwent significant political, demographic and religious changes in the 16th — 17th centuries. This was due to the territorial expansion of the Ottoman Empire and internal administrative, political and social transformations within the empire. Political reforms, socio-economic changes and religious-political dynamics in the region during this period had a strong impact on the demographic and ethno-religious profile of Tayk, especially in terms of the transformation of the religious affiliation and identity of the Armenian population.

The purpose of this article is to rethink and reconstruct the demographic and religious profile of the Armenian population of Tayk in the 16th — 17th centuries based on an analysis of various sources. The article examines the region's position in the administrative and political system of the Ottoman Empire, the methodological features of population accounting, the formation of the ethno-religious profile, and the process of Islamization that began in the 17th century.

The main objectives of the study are as follows: to analyse the administrative and political status of Tayk within the Ottoman Empire and its impact on the socio-political situation of the local population; to identify the logic behind the methods used to record population numbers, their advantages and limitations; to reconstruct the ethno-religious profile of Tayk based on an analysis of Ottoman tax records; to assess demographic processes in the first half of the 17th century, considering the phenomenon of Islamization not only as a religious and political tool imposed from above, but also as a reflection of the local socio-economic and legal environment.

The relevance of the study is determined by contemporary trends in historiography, which seek to deepen the study of regional histories, especially in the context of border and peripheral provinces, rethinking the processes of transformation of ethno-religious identity.

The scientific novelty of the article is evident on several levels. First, unlike previous studies, it raises the issue of the Islamization of Tayk, taking into account both administrative and political factors and local socio-economic factors. In addition, the article draws on source data that has not yet been comprehensively analysed in the specialist literature. Particular attention is paid to statistical information reflected in Ottoman tax registers, the joint analysis of which allows us to reconstruct the multi-layered social structure of this period.

Despite the existence of individual reviews and works of a general nature, the issue remains poorly studied, as in the context of regional history, Tayk has generally been overlooked by historians, especially in terms of demographic and religious changes. The present article aims to address this lacuna, thereby stimulating further interest in the topic within the fields of Armenian and Ottoman studies.

Tayk in the Administrative and Political System of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th — 17th Centuries

The Ottoman Empire, which emerged at the end of the 13th century, turned its attention to the East in the last quarter of the 14th century. In 1473, after defeating the forces of Ak Koyunlu Uzun Hasan in the battles of Erzinjan and then Derjan, the Ottomans invaded the western regions of Armenia (Anasyan 1961: 51). From the beginning of the 16th century, a fierce rivalry unfolded between the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Persia for control of Armenia. Almost a century and a half of war ended with the Treaty of Kasr-i Shirin in 1639, which cemented the victory of the Ottoman army.

Immediately after the conquest of the western provinces of Armenia, the Ottoman authorities took measures to fully integrate them into the administrative and political structure of the empire. The main instrument for implementing this programme was periodic administrative and territorial reforms aimed at transforming both the political system and the demographic picture of the region (Safrastyan 1960: 285). The main task of the state was to convert the local Christian, predominantly Armenian population to Islam. The administrative division of the newly conquered lands into large and small units served as a mechanism for strengthening the empire's control and systematically transforming the ethno-demographic structure of the region.

In the early period of Ottoman rule (before the first half of the 16th century), the Armenian regions of the empire were divided into six eyalets (provinces): Erzurum, Van, Kars, Akhaltsikhe, Sebastia, and Diyarbekir.

According to the Turkish historian Feridun Bey, in the 16th century, the territory of the province of Tayk in historic Armenia was included in the three aforementioned eyalets. In particular, the districts of Tortum and Mamrvan were annexed to the Erzurum Eyalet, the districts of Olti and Berdagrak to the Akhaltsikhe Eyalet, and Gole to the Kars Eyalet (Safrastyan 1964: 219—220). It should be noted, however, that Feridun Bey's account is incomplete, as the author does not consider the fate of a number of other areas of Tayk. It can be assumed that the remaining part of the historical province was also included in the above-mentioned administrative units.

Interesting information about the administrative and demographic picture of Tayk in the 16th century has also been preserved in the “Extensive register of the Gurjistan Vilayet”. Unlike Feridun Bey's testimony, the “Extensive register of the Gurjistan Vilayet” does not include the districts of Berdagrak, Livane and Shavset in the Akhaltsikhe Eyalet. They were most likely governed as hereditary estates under the “yurdluk” and “ojaklik” systems (Svanidze 1984: 194). Instead of the above-mentioned districts, the document mentions: the district of Banak with the nahiyes of Banak, Kiyamkhis and Panazkert (Jikia 1958: 558—559), the district of Olti with the nahiyes of Ketkhut, Mzvari, Chrdili, Bardus, Andzav, Arsad, Chanuchur (Jikia 1958: 595—603), and the district of Small Ardahan (Jikia 1958: 499).

Administrative and territorial reforms in the newly conquered regions continued into the 17th century. According to a report by Kätib Çelebi, as a result of reforms carried out in the first half of the 17th century, the territory of historic Tayk was divided between the Akhaltsikhe and Erzurum eyalets. The Akhaltsikhe Eyalet included Soke, Banak, Mamrvan, Berdagrak, and Gyole, which was part of Little Ardahan, while the Erzurum Eyalet included Tortum and Mamrvan (Safrastyan 1964: 41).

According to the Turkish historian Evliya Çelebi, in the second half of the 17th century, the region underwent another administrative reform. The main changes took place in the Akhaltsikhe Eyalet: the new eyalet had 13 districts instead of the previous 18. The territories belonging to Tayk were incorporated into the districts of Olti, Banak, Berdagrak, Artanuj and Livane (Safrastyan 1966: 26). Tortum and Mamrvan remained part of the Erzurum Eyalet, while Gyole, part of the Small Ardahan district, was once again incorporated into the Kars Eyalet (Safrastyan 1964: 26—27).

The fourth administrative-territorial reform carried out by the Ottoman authorities in Western Armenia took place at the end of the 17th century. This is reported in the tax register entitled “Jaba-defter of the Childir Eyalet”. This time, the main changes took place in the Akhaltsikhe Eyalet: as a

result of the new reform, the province expanded to include 21 districts and became a border region. As for Tayk, all of its districts were included in the Akhaltsikhe Eyalet, with the exception of the Tortum district, which, as before, remained part of the Erzurum Eyalet (Abuladze 1979: 100—204).

Administrative and territorial reforms in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire continued until the beginning of the 20th century. Their frequency was determined by the military and political interests of the empire and was aimed at strengthening and stabilising the central government's control over the border areas.

Features of the methodology for calculating the population of Tayk

As a historical region of the Armenian Highlands, Tayk played a particularly important role in shaping the socio-political and cultural life of the region in the 16th — 17th centuries. Therefore, studying the demographic processes that took place here during this period allows us not only to reconstruct a comprehensive demographic picture of the region, but also to identify the course of socio-economic development and assess the impact of ethno-confessional transformations. At the same time, the research is complicated by the fact that the sources that have come down to us are fragmentary, and the information they contain is often contradictory. In these conditions, methodological issues become fundamental to the entire research process.

Statistical data on the population of Tayk and, in general, Western Armenia have been preserved in various types of sources. These include Ottoman administrative and tax registers, the testimonies of Armenian chroniclers, and church registers. However, each of these sources was created for a specific purpose and is of limited value from a statistical point of view.

The main purpose of the Ottoman tax lists was to collect taxes, so they usually only included male taxpayers. As for the patriarchal registers, they were never published in full, and the number of Armenians in them was deliberately underestimated in order to ease the tax burden (Akopov 2013: 117—118).

In terms of gender differentiation, family composition and accurate population accounting, Turkish official almanacs (salname) and censuses were also extremely imperfect. Officials often limited themselves to information provided by village elders, which was deliberately overstated and significantly differed from reality.

The study of Tayk demographics faces a number of methodological problems. The first is the selectivity of the data: the surviving records mainly include only men who were subject to taxation or military service. As a result, women, children and the elderly are not included in the records. The second problem is temporal shifts: records from different sources refer to different years and therefore do not reflect the reality of the same period. The third problem concerns religious and ethnic affiliation, as Armenians and other peoples were classified according to religion — Muslims and non-Muslims. The difficulty here is that it is often difficult to determine the ethnicity of Christians and Muslims based on tax list data.

All these factors significantly complicate the reconstruction of the real demographic picture of Tayk. The combination of these circumstances makes it particularly difficult to reconstruct the accurate demographic structure of the region.

Under these conditions, the most reliable method is considered to be the family-based registration of villages by districts and eyalets, followed by the determination of the number of families and the average number of members in each family. According to primary sources, Armenian peasant families were usually large. While in cities, extended families rarely exceeded 15—20 people, in villages there were households of 30, 40 and even 50 people (Yeritsyan 1880: 216—217). This phenomenon can be explained not only by the need to avoid fragmentation of land, but also by the desire to ensure property and personal security. According to the observations of Academician A. Melkonyan, the average number of members in an Armenian family was 8, in a Turkish family 6—7, and in a Kurdish family even fewer (Melkonyan 1994: 111—112). In our

opinion, the calculation formula characteristic of other regions of Western Armenia is also applicable to Tayk.

In summary, it can be noted that the methodological features of calculating the population of Tayk are determined both by the nature and fragmentary nature of the sources and by the historical and political situation in the region. In the 16th — 17th centuries, the territory was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, which influenced both the mechanisms of administrative accounting and the formation of the real demographic picture. Consequently, the study of population size is only possible through a comprehensive and multi-level approach that includes source analysis, demographic modelling, and a comprehensive analysis of the historical and political context.

The ethno-religious picture of Tayk in the second half of the 16th century

A comparison of Armenian, Georgian and Ottoman sources from the period in question clearly shows that, despite unfavourable ethnic shifts for Armenians in previous eras, the majority in Tayk was made up of the indigenous Armenian population (both Apostolic and Orthodox) until at least the second half of the 16th century. A comprehensive study of Ottoman tax registers from this period shows that the vast majority of the population had Armenian or Georgian names, or names widespread among these ethnic groups (Jikia 1941: 332—392, Shengelia 2013: 98—160, 237—308).

These tax registers, compiled by order of the Ottoman government, are of great importance for reconstructing the region's demographic picture. For example, the “Extensive register of the Gurjistan Vilayet” provides information on over 1,250 settlements, including depopulated villages, the number of male inhabitants and households, and the elders of those households (Svanidze 1984: 140). It also provides details of the types and amounts of monetary and in-kind taxes. The document also contains information about income-generating facilities, such as fishing grounds on lakes and rivers, orchards, pastures, estates and water mills.

Although the Ottoman tax registers are incomplete and do not fully reflect the ethnic, demographic, and religious composition of the empire's population, they are nevertheless the first statistical documents and are of exceptional importance to researchers of demographic processes.

According to statistics from the “Extensive register of the Gurjistan Vilayet”, the Banak district of Tayk had 61 settlements with 1,790 households (1,432 Christian and 358 Muslim) and a population of about 13,962, excluding estates and depopulated villages (Jikia 1941: 332—392). Christians accounted for over 80% of the total population.

The document also reports the existence of a significant number of mixed Armenian-Georgian villages in the Banak district and, conversely, the rarity of Turkish or Kurdish settlements. This suggests that Ottoman rule in the region was still weak during this period.

Among of the districts of Tayk that were part of the Eyalet of Akhaltsikhe, the Berdagrak district was notable for its sizeable Armenian population. By the end of the 16th century, it had 2,299 households (Paghava 2020: 100) and a population of over 18,000. According to G. Inchichyan, the district retained its Armenian character until the mid-17th century (Inchichian 1806: 132). The large number of Armenian names found in the Ottoman tax lists suggests that Armenians made up more than 80% of the district's population (Shengelia 2013: 294—307).

The Tortum district was also known for its Armenian population. According to the Ottoman tax register of 1574, there were 73 settlements comprising 1,680 households (Shengelia 2013: 237—293) and around 13,440 people. Armenians were unevenly distributed: they constituted more than two-thirds of the population in the following regions of Tortum district — Tortum, Lskav and Agjrik, but a smaller proportion in the north, in the Khakhu region. A significant proportion of the population here was Georgian, which can be explained by the presence of important spiritual centres of Tayk in the region: the monastery complexes of Oshkvank and Khakhu. These belonged to the Chalcedonian tradition and naturally attracted Orthodox settlers. Nevertheless, the head of the village of Khakhu was an Armenian named Girkor son of Kirakos (Shengelia 2013: 270).

Incidentally, there is an interesting point of view in Armenian historiography regarding the Orthodox population living in the Tortum district and throughout Tayk in general. Armenian historian Hakob of Karin wrote: “And the inhabitants of this country were half Armenian by origin and half Georgian by faith, but they spoke Armenian” (Hakob of Karin 1903: 18). H. Tashyan also addressed this issue, stating that: “The phrase “Armenian by origin and Georgian by faith” expresses a difference in religious rather than ethnic terms, as the expression “spoke the Armenian language” already shows. These “Georgians” were Georgians in the same sense as the “Firengi” are now Armenians. Just as during the Byzantine rule we had numerous “Romans” - Armenians, among whom there are still Armenians of the Byzantine rite who preserve the Armenian language, so throughout history we also had “Armenians-Georgians by faith”, not to mention those who became completely Georgianised Hellenised and lost their Armenian identity” (Tashian 1921: 68—69).

The Mamrvan district also had a large Armenian population. Only 32 of its 96 settlements (one third) are listed in detail in the Ottoman tax register. They were home to 531 families, or about 4,200 people, mainly Armenians. The total amount of taxes collected from these 32 villages was 191,000 akçe (Akopov 2021: 106). No demographic data on the remaining 64 (two-thirds) settlements has been preserved in the tax books. However, there is an indication of the amount of taxes — 345,000 akche (Akopov 2021: 107), which is almost twice as much. This suggests that in order to obtain data on the population of the Mamrvan district that is as close to reality as possible, the above figure should be tripled. As a result, we get the following picture: more than 12,000 people lived in 96 settlements of Mamrvan, of whom about 10,000 were Armenians (Apostolic and Orthodox).

In general, for the historical region of Tayk, we have the following picture:

Table 1. **Population of Tayk by region: Christians and Muslims (estimated, late 16th century)**

№	District	Settlement count	Household count	Christians	Muslims	Estimated population
1	Berdagrak	60	2,299	2,299	-	18,392
2	Parkhar	27	810	648	162	6,318
3	Tortum	73	1,680	1,344	336	13,104
4	Tavuskar	40	1,258	941	317	9,747
5	Olti	101	3,082	2,940	142	24,514
6	Mamrvan	96	1,555	1,244	311	12,129
7	Banak	61	1,790	1,432	358	13,962
8	Gyole	40	1,200	960	240	9,360
Total		**498**	**13,674**	**11,808**	**1,866**	**107,526**

In a number of settlements in Tayk, a peculiar phenomenon has been observed that is practically unheard of in other regions of Western Armenia. This is indicative of a parallel onomastic tradition within a family unit. To illustrate this, one may consider the possibility that a father might possess a Georgian name, whilst his son is endowed with an Armenian name, or that brothers within the same family might bear names belonging to different ethnic groups. For instance, Ibrahim, son of Ivan, a resident of the village of Ktsha in the Tortum district, named his son Hakob; Giorgi, a resident of the village of Oshkvank, had two sons, one named Ovlet and the other Hakob; the father of a resident of the village of Betghar, Giorgi, was Khachatur (Shengelia 2013: 249, 258, 285—286); a resident of the village of Thaskurk, Beka, had a son named Azat; one of the sons of a priest from the village of Norberd was named Hovsep, the other was named Saba (Jikia 1941: 344, 386); Saba, a resident of the village of Kiskim in the Berdagrak district, had son named Avak; Grigor, a resident of the village of Vorjnhagh, had the patronymic Makhorobel (Shengelia 2013: 297, 302); Martiros, a resident of the village of Khanirverk in the Mamrvan district, had the patronymic Khvaje; Ghazar, a resident of the village of Upper Khorkhor, had the

patronymic Giorgi; Karapet, a resident of the village of Gompor, had a brother named Makhorobel (Shengelia 2013: 220, 229, 230). Such facts testify to the existence of villages with a mixed population, as well as to the presence of not only tolerance but also friendly relations between the two ethnic groups. This phenomenon can also be explained as a consequence of the spread of Orthodoxy among the Armenians.

Nevertheless, Georgian translators of tax registers S. Jikia and N. Shengelia obstinately decline to recognise this fact. In an effort to demonstrate the pre-eminence of the Georgian element in the region, if not its absolute dominance, then at least its extensive representation, they frequently "Georgianised" Armenians, presenting the names "Grigor" and "Girkor" in the Georgian forms "Grigol" and "Girkol".

As for the Turkic and Turkic-like personal names found in Tayk, a predominantly Armenian environment, their appearance can be explained by the fact that such names were once widespread among the Armenians themselves. As a result, both Armenian and Turkic names could be found within the same family (Tashian 1980: 224—225). For example, in the village of Olurnus in the Mamrvan district a man named Nurkhad, one of the sons was named Martiros and the other Sultan; a resident of Mamrvan named Manvel had the patronymic Karagöz (Shengelia 2013: 213, 216).

To sum up the above, it can be said that in the second half of the 16th century, Tayk continued to preserve its Armenian character and remained an important centre for the preservation of Armenian identity. A comprehensive analysis of Ottoman tax registers shows that the majority of the population was Armenian, both Apostolic and Chalcedonian. As for the Armenian-Georgian mixed settlements and the dual system of name usage recorded in the sources, they reflect the diverse manifestations of religious and cultural interaction in the region.

Demographic Processes in Tayk in the First Half of the 17th Century: The Islamization of the Region

The Turkish-Persian wars of the 16th and 17th centuries had a devastating impact on the Armenian population of Western Armenia, particularly in Tayk. The military actions that were undertaken were accompanied by significant levels of destruction and the involuntary resettlement of the population. A contemporary report is presented as follows: In 1590, the city experienced widespread mourning in response to the capture of the Tortum Gorges (Aghaneyants 1912: 102). This is indicative of the dire situation in which the Armenian-populated districts found themselves as a result of the border clashes of the 16th — 17th centuries.

The most significant large-scale manifestation of the forced resettlement of the Armenian population is associated with the name of Shah Abbas I. In 1604, in the face of the looming threat of Ottoman invasion, he ordered a forced deportation, which is recorded in history as the "Great Surgun". According to contemporary accounts, approximately 300,000—350,000 Armenians were forcibly expelled from their homes and resettled in the central regions of Safavid Iran. In his description of the tragic event, Zakariah of Van noted the following: "For the king gave the order to go and take away the Armenian houses. And they set out and took captive Kars, Shirakunis, Basen, Kaghzvan, Agjakale, Alashkert, Gavg(su), Aiklis, Tumanis, Childir, Artahan, **Kola**, Sheki, Shirvan, Shemakhi, **Banak, Pasker (Panazkert), Ukhtik, Mamrvan** (emphasis added), Tarhun, Seper, Erivan, Nakhichevan, Jugha, Agbak, Salmast and many other villages and towns, which cannot be listed in writing. For from Davrezh to Theodoropol, called Erzerum, they made a desert, and from Erivan to Tarvez — 60,000 captives were taken away" (Hakobyan, Hovhannisyan 1974: 411—412). This forced resettlement caused a sharp demographic shift in the fate of the Armenian people: many Armenian districts were depopulated, and traditional agricultural and urban life was seriously disrupted.

Twenty-five years later, history repeated itself. Having failed to achieve military success in the Apazi region, the Ottoman army, under the command of Khalil Pasha, pillaged Erzincan, Erzurum, Pasinler, Tortum and the surrounding districts, forcibly evicting the Christian population (Hakobyan, Hovhannisyan 1978: 327).

To establish complete control over the subjugated peoples, the Sultan's government began populating the conquered areas with Turkic- and Iranian-speaking tribes. In response to the Kurds' desire to resettle, Sultan Murad IV organised their mass migration to the northern regions of the Erzurum Vilayet in 1635. Previously, the Kurds had only moved north in the summer to graze their numerous herds on the yaylaks, but now they settled in the depopulated Armenian villages and took up permanent residence. Furthermore, the local Armenian population was obliged to support the Kurds and their livestock throughout the winter (Akopov 2013: 134).

The Ottoman authorities' policy had one goal: to change the ethnic makeup of Western Armenia. As a result of wars and forced resettlements, the Armenian population of Tayk declined sharply. This is particularly evident when comparing the statistical data from the tax registers of 1574 and 1642 (Inbaşı et al. 2014). Let us take the district of Tortum as an example.

Table 2. **Comparative Data on Households and Religious Composition in Tayk (1574 and 1642)**

№	Settlement name	1574			1642		
		Household count	**Christians**	**Muslims**	**Household count**	**Christians**	**Muslims**
1	Tortum (Rabat and town)	**54**	50	4	**22**	18	4
2	Pochents	**38**	30	8	**9**	1	8
3	Skhtorut	**39**	31	8	**3**	-	3
4	Vank	**16**	13	3	**-**	-	-
5	Tankar	**7**	6	1	**3**	1	2
6	Cherbil	**29**	23	6	**1**	1	-
7	Masrakul	**6**	5	1	**-**	-	-
8	Sukurek	**12**	10	2	**-**	-	-
9	Karnaghots	**9**	7	2	**3**	2	1
10	Girkurnik	**6**	5	1			
11	Upper Lskav	**87**	80	7	**12**	10	2
12	Lower Lskav	**52**	48	10	**6**	2	4
13	Nikhagh	**60**	35	25	**11**	-	11
14	Betghar	**15**	12	3	**4**	-	4
15	Bshnkots	**13**	10	3	**-**	-	-
16	Oskikav	**30**	24	6	**-**	-	-
17	Aghaser	**-**	-	-	**9**	4	5
18	Sinak	**12**	10	2	**-**	-	-
19	Kazarents	**15**	12	3	**4**	-	4
20	Meghujur	**-**	-		**8**	4	4
21	Barilis	**12**	10	2	**-**	-	-
22	Katnajur	**-**	-	-	**2**	2	-
23	Khozbrik	**30**	24	6	**14**	1	13
24	Bar	**16**	13	3	**14**	8	6
25	Kejnet	**77**	62	10	**-**	-	-
26	Great Aghjrik	**32**	26	6	**2**	-	2
27	Pochents	**29**	23	6	**-**	-	-
28	Ktskha	**102**	82	20	**22**	1	21
29	Aghjrik	**25**	20	5	**-**	-	-
30	Kismas	**14**	11	3	**-**	-	-

Table 2. **Comparative Data on Households and Religious Composition in Tayk (1574 and 1642)** (continued)

№	Settlement name	1574			1642		
		Household count	Christians	Muslims	Household count	Christians	Muslims
31	Chankres	**44**	35	9	**-**	-	-
32	Arjots	**7**	6	1	**-**	-	-
33	Aygek	**33**	28	5	**5**	-	5
34	Zinaker	**24**	19	5	**8**	2	6
35	Vakhtikants	**16**	13	3	**9**	3	6
36	Khashut	**15**	12	3	**7**	5	2
37	Geghik	**18**	14	4	**4**	1	3
38	Norshen	**27**	22	5	**15**	7	8
39	Vardishen	**16**	13	3	**-**	-	-
40	Arjunits	**8**	6	2			
41	Khakhu	**43**	34	9	**44**	23	21
42	Vkhik	**55**	44	10	**17**	-	17
43	Enguzek	**26**	21	5	**18**	11	7
44	Abrnes	**31**	25	6	**12**	-	12
45	Geghut	**19**	15	4	**3**	-	3
46	Ani	**8**	6	2	**-**	-	-
47	Bardosants	**21**	17	4	**-**	-	-
48	Kaghnut	**26**	21	5	**7**	-	7
49	Odik	**50**	40	10	**6**	1	5
50	Surbohan	**14**	11	3	**2**	1	1
51	Veringegh	**16**	13	3	**8**	6	2
52	Vaghaver	**15**	12	3	**-**	-	-
53	Kodashen	**10**	8	2	**-**	-	-
54	Azord	**27**	22	5	**5**	-	5
55	Osit	**13**	10	3	**17**	-	17
56	Otgha	**23**	18	5	**17**	-	17
57	Is	**20**	16	4	**-**	-	-
58	Oshkvank	**30**	24	6	**26**	3	23
59	Oshk	**43**	34	9	**31**	-	31
60	Tskhik	**30**	20	10	**16**	-	16
61	Oshkidzor	**20**	12	8	**16**	-	16
62	Hars	**30**	24	6	**30**	-	30
63	Lek	**20**	16	4	**18**	-	18
64	Tev	**25**	16	9	**11**	-	11
65	Khartkha	**20**	16	4	**10**	-	10
66	Sagher	**-**	-	-	**6**		6
67	Egrek	**-**	-	-	**2**	-	2
68	Meghragom	**-**	-	-	**3**	-	3
69	Aghbyurik	**-**	-	-	**5**	-	5
70	Makidzor	**-**	-	-	**7**	2	5
71	Aytents	**-**	-	-	**11**	-	11
72	Paridzor	**-**	-	-	**14**	-	14
73	Aghbidzor	**-**	-	-	**5**	3	2
Total		**1,680**	1,344	336	**560**	140	444

According to data from 1574, the Tortum district had a population of 1,680 households, of which 1,344 (approximately 80%) were Christian and 336 (approximately 20%) Muslim. By 1642, this figure had decreased to 560 households, with 140 (approximately 25%) Christian and 444 (approximately 75%) Muslim. The total number of households decreased almost threefold, and the previously predominant Christian majority became a minority.

A comparative analysis of tax registers reveals a precipitous decline in the Christian population, with a recorded decrease of approximately 89.6% — from 1,344 to 140 households. Conversely, the Muslim population exhibited an increase of approximately 32.1% — rising from 336 to 444 households. This decline is indicative not only of a sharp decrease in the total population, but also of a concomitant qualitative change in the ethnic and religious composition of the region.

In contrast to the situation in 1574, a significant number of settlements are no longer documented in the statistical records of 1642. This phenomenon can be attributed to the destruction or complete depopulation of these settlements. A number of villages experienced a sharp increase in the number of Muslims. For instance, in 1574, the village of Ktskha had 102 households, one of which belonged to a Muslim. By 1642, this figure had decreased to 22 households, with 21 of these being Muslim (Inbaşı et al. 2014: 30).

The Christian population, though significantly diminished, persisted in mountainous and relatively isolated villages, where the encroachment of the Muslim population remained largely confined.

After the conclusion of the 1639 Kasr-i Shirin Peace Treaty, the Turkish government began the process of Islamizing the conquered population. Hakob of Karin wrote: “At that time, in 1643, a grand decree of the Sultan of Istanbul was issued through one of the most renowned and authoritative mullahs in the city of Erzurum, and through a pasha named Jafer, information about Christians was collected to create a geographical map of all the lands around Erzurum. And, setting out, they thoroughly inspected every household and settlement within the royal domains. And all the Georgians of the region began to follow the law of Muhammad, while the Armenians remained in their faith thanks to the mercy of Christ and the prayers of the Holy Gregory the Illuminator” (Hakob of Karin 1903: 18). Another case of mass Islamization is reported by G. Inchichyan: “…the former Armenian settlements of Tortum, exhausted by violence and deprivation, everywhere embraced Islam, although the villages continued to be partially inhabited by Armenians and partially by Muslims”(Inchichian 1806: 93—94)

The forced Islamization carried out by the Turkish authorities with such vigor led to the fact that, in a short time, the Orthodox Church in Tayk effectively ceased to exist. Speaking about the significant spiritual centers of Tayk (Ishkhan, Banak, Oshk, Khahu, and others), Prince Vakhushti Bagration emphasized their depopulated state (Melikset-Bek 1955: 84—85). Naturally, this had a devastating effect both on the Georgianized Armenians and on the portion of the Armenian population that had been practicing Chalcedonian Christianity for several centuries. H. Tashyan noted that, left isolated and without a central leadership, the Armenian community required only one triggering event to convert en masse to Islam. That very occasion was the events of 1643 (Tashian 1973: 178).

Under pressure from the authorities, a significant portion of Islamised Armenians formally converted to Islam. However, in practice, they maintained a dual identity: Muslims by day and Christians by night, secretly attending churches and performing Christian rites. This population was called “keskes” — that is, half Armenian Christians, half Turkish Muslims. A significant portion of the “keskes” in Tayk almost did not differ from the rest of the Armenian population. Many of them could not even speak Turkish fluently; their speech retained a large number of Armenian words, and their names often had the Turkish ending “oğlu” added: Kostan-oğlu, Kirakos-oğlu, Gaspar-oğlu, etc (Tashian 1921: 81; Lynch 1910: 537). Armenian and Christianity were particularly well preserved among the “keskes” women. This can be attributed to the fact that, in traditional Armenian society, women were the primary custodians of language, faith and cultural traditions within the family unit. In the context of forced Islamization and cultural pressures, Armenian women have demonstrated resilience in their commitment to preserving their traditions within the

domestic sphere. They have played a pivotal role in nurturing their children with the Armenian language and have been instrumental in safeguarding the collective memory of their community.

It is also important to note that part of the Armenian population of Tayk, seeking to avoid oppression by the Laz people, often identified themselves not only as Muslims, but also as Laz. Therefore, they were often called not "keskes," but "Armenian-Laz" (Melkonyan 1994: 80).

Parallel to the process of Islamization, part of the Armenian population of Tayk chose to convert to Catholicism, thereby completely preserving their Armenian identity. H. Tashyan wrote: "This circumstance partly contributed to their survival during the period of forced Islamization, as Armenian Catholics enjoyed a certain degree of European protection; on the other hand, it should not be forgotten that by the end of the 17th century and especially by the beginning of the 18th century, violent persecution of Catholics began, the consequences of which reached even these remote gorges" (Tashian 1980: 66). Consequently, the process of adoption of Catholicism by the Tayk settlements of Norshen, Kudrashen, Vorzhnhag, Kiskim, Nikhagh, Karmirk, Tsetkunts, Tandzut, Upper and Lower Mokhurkut, as well as a group of villages of Khotorjur, was observed.

Thus, in the first half of the 17th century, the Armenian population of Tayk underwent radical demographic and ethnic changes. Wars, mass evictions and forced resettlements led to depopulation, while the Ottomans encouraged Muslim tribes to settle in the deserted Armenian areas. Tax registers show a decline in the number of Christians by about 90% and a relative increase in the number of Muslims. This change altered the religious and ethnic composition of the region: part of the Christian population was forcibly Islamised, forming a group known as the "keskes".

Conclusion

Consequently, during the first half of the 17th century, Tayk experienced a profound demographic crisis, resulting in a decline of approximately two-thirds in its total population. Concurrent with this transformation was a profound ethno-confessional shift, marked by a transition in which the Christian majority became a minority, while the Muslim population gained absolute dominance.

These processes were in accordance with the policy of the Ottoman Empire in the 17th century, which aimed to ensure numerical superiority among Muslims in border regions and to weaken the position of the Christian population. It is unfortunate that these processes did not cease at this point; rather, they persisted throughout the following centuries. This ultimately resulted in a radical alteration to the demographic landscape of historic Tayk.

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