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THE NAHIYAH OF MASURICA ACCORDING TO THE 1831 OTTOMAN POPULATION REGISTER

Abstract: *Masurica represents a settlement with ancient historical roots, as evidenced by archaeological findings discovered in its surrounding area, which indicate a continuity of habitation since early period times. These findings place Masurica among the locations of particular historical significance in the southern Balkans. During the Ottoman period, Masurica was first mentioned as a village, while by the course of the 19th century it had attained the administrative status of a nahiyah, becoming a constituent unit of the kaza of Vranje. This administrative status reflected its importance not only from a demographic perspective but also in economic and strategic terms within the framework of the local Ottoman administration. Until the events of 1877–1878, the nahiyah of Masurica was predominantly inhabited by Muslim Albanians, who constituted the overwhelming majority of the population. Ottoman population registers attest to the extensive spread of settlements and the presence of a stable social organization. However, during the Russo-Ottoman wars and with the territorial expansion of the Serbian state, the Albanian population of this area faced systematic violence, which led to the forced displacement of the local inhabitants from their centuries-old lands. This violent process brought about profound changes in the ethnic and demographic structure of Masurica, leaving deep social, cultural, and economic consequences that persisted in the following decades. The geographic position of the Masurica nahiyah was particularly favorable for the development of economic life. Situated in a contact zone between the Vardenik mountain slopes and the surrounding lowlands, Masurica enjoyed suitable conditions for agriculture, livestock breeding, and the rational exploitation of forest resources. These natural resources formed the main basis of the local economy and ensured the population's livelihood, making the nahiyah relatively economically stable. The proximity to the well-known Roman military road Via Militaris, specifically its middle branch, was also of particular importance for*

the economic and strategic development of this nahiyah. This road constituted a major communication artery connecting the Ottoman capital, Istanbul, with the Balkan provinces and retained its significance during the Ottoman period. Along this route, which passed through the territory of Masurica, a considerable number of inns and rest stations had been established, so much so that it was difficult to find a two-hour segment of road without an inn, indicating the intensity of commercial, administrative, and military movement. Another important economic feature was the presence of iron mines in Upper Masurica, which were used to supply six furnaces for iron smelting in the surrounding area. This activity gave the Masurica nahiyah a special role in the regional economy and in the Ottoman artisanal production network. This study aims to analyze in detail the demographic structure of the Masurica nahiyah and the process of its population's displacement, relying primarily on the 1831 Ottoman population register, as well as other relevant historical sources, with the goal of shedding light on the historical developments of this area.

Key words: Masurica, 19th century, Ottoman period, demography, Albanians, migration.

NAHIJA MASURICA PREMA OSMANSKOM POPISNOM DEFTERU STANOVNIŠTVA IZ 1831. GODINE

Apstrakt: Masurica predstavlja naselje sa drevnim historijskim korijenima, što potvrđuju arheološka otkrića u njenoj okolini, koja ukazuju na kontinuitet naseljenosti još od ranih perioda. Ova otkrića svrstavaju Masuricu među prostore od posebnog historijskog značaja na jugu Balkana. Tokom osmanskog perioda, Masurica se prvi put spominje kao selo, dok je tokom 19. stoljeća stekla administrativni status nahije, postajući sastavni dio kaze Vranje. Ovaj administrativni status odražavao je njen značaj ne samo sa demografskog aspekta, već i sa ekonomskog i strateškog u okviru lokalne osmanske administracije. Do događaja iz 1877–1878. godine, nahija Masurica je bila pretežno naseljena muslimanskim Albancima, koji su činili ogromnu većinu stanovništva. Osmanski popisni registri svjedoče o širokoj rasprostranjenosti naselja i prisutnosti stabilne društvene organizacije. Međutim, tokom rusko-osmanskih ratova i sa teritorijalnim širenjem srpske države, albansko stanovništvo ovog područja suočilo se sa sistematskim nasiljem, što je dovelo do prisilnog iseljavanja lokalnih stanovnika sa njihovih stoljetnih ognjišta. Ovaj nasilni proces prouzrokovao je duboke promjene u etničkoj i demografskoj strukturi Masurice, ostavljajući duboke društvene, kulturne i ekonomske posljedice koje su se reflektovale i u narednim decenijama. Geografski položaj nahije Masurica bio je posebno povoljan za razvoj ekonomske djelatnosti. Smještena u zoni kontakta između planinskih padina Vardenika i okolnih nizina, Masurica je imala pogodne uslove za razvoj

poljoprivrede, stočarstva i racionalno korištenje šumskih resursa. Ovi prirodni resursi predstavljali su glavnu osnovu lokalne ekonomije i osiguravali egzistenciju stanovništva, čineći nahiju relativno ekonomično stabilnom. Poseban značaj za ekonomski i strateški razvoj ove nahije imala je i blizina poznatog rimskog vojnog puta Via Militaris, tačnije njen srednji tok. Ovaj put predstavljao je glavnu komunikacijsku arteriju koja je povezivala osmansku prijestolnicu Istanbul sa balkanskim provincijama i zadržao je značaj i tokom osmanskog perioda. Duž ovog puta, koji je prolazio kroz teritoriju Masurice, izgrađen je značajan broj hanova i stanica za odmor, toliko da je bilo teško pronaći dvosatni segment puta bez hana, što pokazuje intenzitet trgovačkog, administrativnog i vojnog kretanja. Još jedna važna ekonomska karakteristika bila je prisutnost rudnika željeza u Gornjoj Masurici, koji su opskrbljivali šest peći za topljenje željeza u okolini. Ova djelatnost davala je nahiji Masurica poseban značaj u regionalnoj ekonomiji i osmanskoj mreži zanatske proizvodnje. Ova studija ima za cilj detaljno analizirati demografsku strukturu nahije Masurica i proces iseljavanja njenog stanovništva, oslanjajući se prvenstveno na osmanski popis stanovništva iz 1831. godine, kao i na druge relevantne istorijske izvore, s ciljem osvjetljavanja istorijskog razvoja ovog prostora.

Ključne riječi: *Masurica, 19. stoljeće, osmanski period, demografija, Albanci, migracije.*

Population Registration in the Ottoman Empire

Although the Ottoman Empire had compiled cadastral registers as early as the fifteenth century, the practice of modern population enumeration began only in 1828–1829 in parts of Anatolia and the Balkans. This census, however, was left incomplete due to the Russo-Ottoman War.¹ In 1830, following the end of the war, a special council was established and a decision was made to conduct a census that would encompass the empire's population in its entirety. The council was tasked with determining where the enumeration would begin, who would carry it out, in what form it would be conducted, and with preparing the necessary regulations.² Preparations were completed in June 1830, and the census was implemented during the second half of that year and the first half of 1831. Thus, the census covered Anatolia and the Balkans, while other regions remained outside its scope.³ The Ottoman census focused exclusively on the male population, with the aim of identifying religious affiliation, approximate

¹ Kemal H. Karpat, *Popullsia Osmane 1830-1914*, Alsar, Tiranë 2017, 19.

² Musa Çadırcı, 1830 Genel Sayımına Göre Ankara Şehir Merkezi Nüfusu Üzerinde Bir Araştırma, *Osmanlı Araştırmaları I*, İstanbul 1980, 110.

³ Raif Kaplanoğlu, *1830-1843 Yılları Nüfus Defterlerine Göre Bursa'nın Ekonomik ve Sosyal Yapısı*, Nilüfer Belediyesi, Bursa 2013, 14.

ethnic characteristics, and occupational or social status.⁴ The principal objective was not to establish the total population count, but rather to determine taxable groups and to identify individuals eligible for conscription into the newly founded military division Asakir-i Mansure-i Muhammediye, which replaced the abolished Janissary corps.⁵ Another purpose was to register those liable for the jizya tax, as well as the bedel-i askeriye a payment imposed on non-Muslims as compensation for exemption from military service primarily affecting the reaya (tax-paying subjects). Officials summoned to the capital for this task were first gathered in a designated place, assigned duties, and then dispatched to census districts. To ensure public trust and security, members of the local elite—such as imams, teachers, and mudarris were recruited to oversee the process.⁶ During 1830–1831, as census officials began submitting results to the Sublime Porte, a special commission was established in the capital to safeguard and process the registers. Based on the data, taxes were calculated and demographic changes identified. For this purpose, in 1831 the Statistical Agency (Ceride Nezareti) was founded.⁷ After the registers were collected, they were compiled and the results recorded in a special ledger.⁸ It is noteworthy that significant variations in methods and classifications were observed across different territories. The empire lacked sufficient teams to register and classify all males. In most areas, Muslim males were recorded in two categories: those fit for military service and those unfit. In some regions, the latter were further subdivided into elderly, children, disabled persons, and those incapable of work. Elsewhere, males were classified by age groups 1 to 16, 16 to 40, and over 40 or by physical features such as beard or mustache.⁹

Building upon the 1831 census and other historical sources, the demographic structure of the nahiyah of Masurica is analyzed through its constituent settlements, including villages, population numbers, anthroponyms, and professions. The census data are compared with additional historical materials, with the aim of providing an objective overview of Masurica's demography during this period, as well as of migration processes.

⁴ Yunus Koç, Nüfus, *Diyanet İslam Ansiklopedisi* (mê tej: *D.İ.A.*), C. XXXIII, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı (mê tej: T.D.V.), İstanbul 2007, 297.

⁵ Mübahat S. Kütükoğlu, 1830 Nüfus Sayımına Göre Menteşe Sancağında Hane Nüfusu, *Osmanlı Araştırmaları XXIII*, İstanbul 2003, 75–76.

⁶ Cem Behar, Osmanlı Nüfus İstatistikleri ve 1831 sonrası Modernleşme, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Bilgi ve İstatistik*, ed. Halil İnalçık, Şevket Pamuk, T. C. Başbakanlık Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, Ankara 2000, 68.

⁷ Mehmet Güneş, Osmanlı Dönemi Nüfus Sayımları ve bu Sayımları İçeren Kayıtların Tahlili, *Gazi Akademik Bakış*, C. 8, S. 15, 2014, 227; In 1831, in the Ottoman state, the institution for finance, census, and statistics, known as Ceride Nezareti, was established, Cevdet Küçük, *Ceride Nezareti, D.İ.A.*, C. VII, T.D.V., İstanbul 1993, 409.

⁸ Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda İlk Nüfus Sayımı 1831*, T. C. Başbakanlık Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü Matbaası, Ankara 1995, 12.

⁹ C. Behar, *Osmanlı Nüfus İstatistikleri ve 1831 sonrası Modernleşme*, 68–69.

General Characteristics of the Register

The defter under examination is preserved in the Directorate of State Archives under the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, within the Ottoman Archives Department, catalogued as NFS.d, serial number 6829.¹⁰ It comprises a total of 15 pages, with the final page (no. 15) left blank. The register itself contains no original pagination; numbering was added later using modern numerals. Written in the rika script, the defter is well preserved and generally easy to read. On its first page, the following information is provided: “The nahiyah of Masurica, part of the kaza of Vranje. This is the register of the enumeration of the Muslim population of the aforementioned nahiyah, compiled between February/March 1831 and May 1832 (from the beginning of Ramadan 1831 to the end of Dhul-Hijjah 1832)”.¹¹ From page 2 onward, the register begins with the village of Surdulica, recording households and individuals sequentially from no. 1. At the end of each village entry, the total number of households and Muslim males is noted. The defter covers 11 villages: Surdulica, Alakinca, Zhitörögja, Old Masurica, Lloginca, Prekodolci, Binovca, Kukavica, Lepenica, Jellashnica, and Verbova. The final page (no. 14) concludes with the statement: “This register was compiled according to sharia law and in conformity with the fatwa issued by Sejid Hafiz Ali, appointed by the central authority (caliphate) in the kaza of Vranje. This register was prepared in accordance with sharia law, and I, the humble servant, Sulejmani, census registrar of the aforementioned kaza, hereby attest as supervisor”.¹²

Population registers were typically compiled at intervals of 6 to 12 months, and the register under review belongs to this type. They encompassed the entire population, arranged hierarchically from the largest administrative unit to the smallest: vilayet, sanjak, kaza, nahiyah, and villages. In this case, the focus is on the nahiyah as an administrative unit composed of several villages. The census served as a population database, while subsequent changes births, deaths, migrations were annotated directly on the individual’s entry, usually in red ink. For instance, a red line was drawn across a name to indicate death; in cases of relocation, the date and new place were recorded. Newborns were not assigned numbers but were added next to the parent’s entry, in red ink and a distinct style. At the end of each neighborhood or village, newcomers (if any) were listed without numbers. The register concluded with the authorized registrar’s signature and official seal.¹³

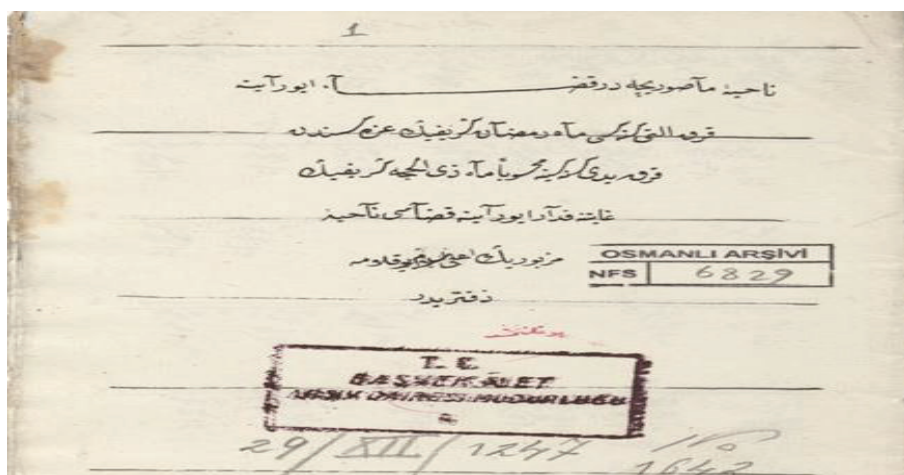
¹⁰ T. C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), NFS.d. 6829/1-15.

¹¹ BOA, NFS.d. 6829/2.

¹² BOA, NFS.d. 6829/14.

¹³ Muzafer Bislimi, Adnan Sherif, Irfete Ibraimi, *Dokumente osmane për historinë e Maqedonisë: regjistrime të shekullit XIX : sanxhaku i shkupit, kaza tetovë 1832/33*. V. 1, li. 1, Shkup 2020, 7-10; Sadik Mehmeti-Hatixhe Ahmed, *Popullsia e kazasë së Prizrenit sipas defterëve të vitit 1833 (Prizreni, Suhareka, Rahoveci, Malisheva, Drenasi)*, Instituti Albanologjik, Prishtinë 2024, 17-42.

Enumeration began with the head of household, followed by his descendants, thereby enabling calculation of the number of households and inhabitants in the villages of the Masurica nahiyah. Nineteenth-century Ottoman population registers are invaluable sources for genealogical research, as they provide detailed information on family composition, intergenerational relations, and social structure of the period. Through these registers, populations displaced from the Masurica nahiyah after 1878 can trace their ancestors and reconstruct or supplement their family genealogies. In addition to data on births and deaths recorded with the individual's name, father's name, age, and the terms *fevt* (deceased) or *tevellüd* (born) the registers also contain titles such as imam, mullah, hajji, sipahi (cavalry soldier), as well as two cases of fugitives (*firar*). The inclusion of titles such as imam clearly indicates the existence of mosques in these villages, where they served. In the register under review, imams are mentioned in the villages of Old Masurica, Surdulica,¹⁴ Prekodolci, and Jellashnica. From these data, corroborated by other sources, it is evident that mosques existed in these villages, staffed by the respective clerics.¹⁵



Prilog 1. The first page of the Population Register of the Masurica Nahiyah.¹⁶

¹⁴ The mosque of Surdulica was called the mosque of Sulejman Pasha; Osmani, *Sanxhaku i Nishit gjatë periudhës osmane*, 163; "In Surdulica there was a large mosque, which was later converted into a school, as well as the finest houses, which after the emigration were sold at symbolic prices."; Felix Kanitz, *Das Königreich Serbien und das Serbenvoli: von der Römerzeit bis zur Gegenwart*, V. II, Velag von Bernhar Meyer, Leipzig 1909, 264-165.

¹⁵ BOA, *NFS.d.* 6829.

¹⁶ BOA, *NFS.d.* 6829/1.

A Brief Historical-Geographical Overview of Masurica

Masurica lies 3 km south of Surdulica and occupies a highly favorable geographical position: situated along the Masurica River, precisely at the boundary between the eastern mountain slope and the western valley plain. Two ancient settlements exist in Masurica, where remnants of former walls are still visible.¹⁷ One is located in the mountains, to the right of the river (approximately 2 km away), where stones from old house walls and aged fruit trees (plum, cherry) remain. The other site is near Masurica, at the lower part of the settlement. Additionally, two places known as Crkvište (“church site”) are found in Masurica: one near the village itself, and the other in Vardenik. At the first site, the walls of a shrine and stone steps are visible; the church was oriented east–west.¹⁸

The kaza of Vranje, which included the village of Masurica, was definitively incorporated into Ottoman rule in 1455. This region lay at the crossroads of economically and strategically important routes connecting Istanbul with Belgrade and beyond. As such, both before and during Ottoman rule, it exerted a notable influence on the development of Vranje and its surroundings, including Masurica.¹⁹

Masurica referred to in Ottoman documents as Masuriça, Masurica, or مصوريجه first appears in the cadastral register (tapu tahrir) of the early sixteenth century. In this register, it is listed as a village within the nahiyah of Inegoshta²⁰, part of the kaza of Vranje and administratively belonging to the liva of Kyustendil.²¹ Within the nahiyah of Masurica there existed a Samokov, a specialized site for iron ore processing. Similar workshops were located in Romanovc, Topli Dol, and Zaguzhan.²² The German diplomat Johann Georg von Hahn²³, during his journey from Belgrade to Thessaloniki, also mentioned the mines of Masurica, noting: “The wealth of iron ore in Upper Masurica is so great that it supplies six iron-smelting furnaces in the surrounding area. All the iron produced is processed immediately on site, less into horseshoes and other items, but primarily into horseshoe nails. This industry is run by the Roma, who

¹⁷ J. Trifunovski, O ranijim šiptarskim naseljima u Masuričkoj kotlinici, *Hrvatski geografski glasnik* 19, br. 1. (1957), 176; Jusuf Osmani, *Pronat e muhaxhirëve në Sanxhakun e Nishit*, V. II, Prishtinë 2025, 319-320.

¹⁸ Jovan F. Trifunoski, *Vranjska Kotlina: antropogeografska ispitivanja; kniga druga*, posebni deo, Skopje 1963, 220-223.

¹⁹ Machiel Kiel, İvranye, *D.İ.A.*, C. EK-1, T.D.V. Yayınları, İstanbul 2016, 682.

²⁰ Inegošt in Turkish and Inogošt in Serbian mean the region around Surdulica. *Aysun Acar Durkan, 1572 Tarihli Köstendil İcmal Defterinin Transkripsiyonu ve Değerlendirilmesi*, (Yüksek Lisans Tezi), Erzurum Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Erzurum 2021, 221-223.

²¹ Ahmet Özkılınç vd. haz, *Rumeli Eyaleti (1514-1550)*, T. C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı Yayınları, Ankara 2013, 563.

²² J. F. Trifunovski, *Vranjska Kotlina*, 220-223.

²³ Johann Georg von Hahn (1811–1869) was a German diplomat and scholar, widely regarded as the father of Albanological studies. 21/01/2026.

https://www.biographien.ac.at/oebl/oebl_H/Hahn_Johann-Georg_1811_1869.xml.

are numerous in this region; it is estimated that there are at least 300 families, 100 of whom live in the neighboring village of Jellashnica.²⁴ According to Trifunovski, Masurica during the Ottoman period was also known as “a small Istanbul.” At the center of the village stood a mosque, along with two Muslim cemeteries, the remains of which were visible until a few decades ago. In 1877–1878, the majority of the indigenous Albanian Muslim population of the Masurica nahiyah was forcibly displaced, while the small number who remained were compelled to leave in subsequent years. Today, Masurica is inhabited primarily by a Serbian population, with a few Muslim Roma families also present. Most of the current inhabitants are relatively recent arrivals.²⁵



Prilog 2. A 1530 map of the liva of Kyustendil, with the kaza of Vranje and the villages of Masurica, Surdulica, Alakinca, etc.²⁶

²⁴ Johann Georg von Hahn, *Reise von Belgrad nach Salonik*, Kaiserlich- königliche Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, Wien 1861, 40-43.

²⁵ J. Trifunovski, O ranijim šiptarskim naseljima u Masuričkoj kotlinici, 174-177.

²⁶ A. Özkılınç, *Rumeli Eyaleti (1514-1550)*, 981.

Comparative Analysis of the Population of the Masurica Nahiyah According to the Ottoman Register of 1831 and Johann Georg von Hahn in 1861

Based on the Ottoman population register of 1831, Masurica was a nahiyah composed of several villages, administratively linked to the kaza of Vranje. Vranje itself belonged to the sanjak of Kyustendil, which was an administrative unit of the vilayet of Skopje. According to the 1831 Ottoman register of the Muslim population, the nahiyah of Masurica comprised 11 villages:

No.	Villages ²⁷	Households	Muslim Males
1.	Surdulica (Surduliça)	13	47
2.	Alakinca (Alakinça)	13	37
3.	Zhitoragja (Jitoraca)	15	29
4.	Masurica e vjetër (Eski Masuriça)	31	78
5.	Lloginca (Loginça)	10	43
6.	Prekodolci (Prekodolça)	13	44
7.	Binovca (Binofça)	9	24
8.	Kukavica (Kukaviça)	5	11
9.	Lepenica (Lepenica)	5	17
10.	Jellashnica (Jelaşniça)	32	109
11.	Vërbova (Virbova)	22	56
TOTAL		168	495

Table 1. Muslim population in the nahiyah of Masurica in 1831.²⁸

As shown in the table, the nahiyah of Masurica in 1831 had 11 villages with a Muslim population, totaling 168 households and 495 males. If the female population approximately equal in number to the males is added, the nahiyah of Masurica in 1831 would have had around 1,000 inhabitants.

Masurica and its surroundings are also mentioned in Hahn's travel account *From Belgrade to Thessaloniki* (1861), which provides important demographic details. Hahn recorded the following data for the Albanian villages of Masurica:

1. *Prekodolci (Brekodoltza)* – 20 households, located at the entrance of the western gorge.
2. *Zhitoragja (Schitoradscha)* – 25 households, one hour upstream along the river.
3. *Alakinca (Lakinza)* – 20 households, one hour upstream along the brook, at the confluence with Surdulica.

²⁷ For more on these eleven villages, see: Osmani, *Pronat e muhaxhirëve në Sanxhakun e Nishit*, V. II, 284, 289, 304, 312, 316, 318, 319, 333, 346, 361, 382.

²⁸ BOA, *NFS.d.* 6829/2-15.

4. *Old Masurica (Stara Masuritza)* – 60 households, situated on both sides of the brook, where it emerges from the western gorge. From here to its source in the uninhabited Vlasina mountains, the Masurica flows for about five hours through uninhabited gorges. Other sources, however, note Bulgarian villages on the surrounding ridges.
5. *Surdulica (Surdulitza)* – 40 households, located where the stream of the same name (also called Suropica) emerges from the southwestern gorge, with settlement on both sides.
6. *Binovca (Winofcza)* – 25 households, one hour northwest of Masurica, in the plain.
7. *Dllugojnica (Dlugonitza)*²⁹ – 30 households, a mountain village southeast of Prekodolci.

In addition to these, Hahn noted that Jellashnica (Jeleschnitza), Lepenica (Lepenitza), and Verbova (Wrbova) the latter located one hour from the inn on the road to Vranje, with 20 households were also inhabited by Albanians.³⁰ The total number of households recorded separately for these seven villages was 210, which Hahn estimated to correspond to approximately 1,000 Albanian inhabitants in this easternmost region.³¹

No.	Villages	Households	Total Population
1.	Prekodolci (Prekodolça)	20	1.000
2.	Zhitoraxha (Jitoraca)	25	
3.	Alakinca (Alakinça)	20	
4.	Masurica e Vjetër (Eski Masuriça)	60	
5.	Surdulica (Surduliça)	40	
6.	Binovca (Binofça)	25	
7.	Dllugojnica	30	
TOTAL		220³²	

Table 2. *The Albanian population of the Masurica Nahiyah in 1861 according to Hahn.*³³

From Hahn's data, it is evident that the nahiyah of Masurica, composed of seven villages in 1861, had approximately 1,000 inhabitants. Compared with

²⁹ Dllugojnica of Masurica is the village of Hasan Masurica's father. Hasan Masurica's father was Hoxha Islam Bajrami, who was displaced from the village of Dllugojnica in the Masurica Nahiyah during the years 1877–1878, Kadrush Sylejmani, Hasan Masurica hoxhë e Inovatorë, Prishtinë 1993, 13-15; J. Osmani, *Pronat e muhaxhirëve në Sanxhakun e Nishit*, 300-301.

³⁰ J. Georg von Hahn, *Reise von Belgrad nach Salonik*, 149.

³¹ *Ibidem*, 41-42.

³² Note: Hahn made an error of ten households during the enumeration. Instead of recording 220, he wrote 210.

³³ J. Georg von Hahn, *Reise von Belgrad nach Salonik*, 149.

the Ottoman register of 1831, a population increase is observed: in that year, the nahiyah contained eleven villages with about 1,000 inhabitants, while three decades later, with only seven villages, the population remained around 1,000. If we focus on the villages appearing in both the 1831 Ottoman register and Hahn's 1861 account, a clear increase in the number of households and consequently in population is visible.

Villages	Households (1831)	Households (1861)	Increase
Prekodolci (Prekodolça)	13	20	+7
Zhitoraxha (Jitoraca)	15	25	+10
Alakinca (Alakinça)	13	20	+7
Masurica e Vjetër (Eski Masuriça)	31	60	+29
Surdulica (Surduliça)	13	40	+27
Binovca (Binofça)	9	25	+16

Table 3. *Comparative Data on the Number of Households in Masurica Villages (1831–1861).*

The comparative analysis of the Ottoman data from 1831 and Hahn's account from 1861 demonstrates that the nahiyah of Masurica experienced continuous population growth, despite the reduction in the number of villages from eleven to seven. The increase in households in the seven villages recorded in both sources is a direct indicator of demographic expansion and the consolidation of several key settlements. The Ottoman data, based on religious affiliation, compared with Hahn's data, which emphasize ethnic identity (in this case Albanian), reveal that during the period 1831–1861 the seven villages of Masurica underwent demographic growth and consolidation. This process reflects the internal demographic and economic dynamics of the region, as well as the influence of Ottoman administration on its socio-economic organization.

*Patronymy, Natality, and Mortality in the Masurica Nahiyah
According to the Ottoman Population Register of 1831*

No.	Villages	Births	Deaths	Age Range	Most Frequent Patronyms
1.	Surdulica (Surduliça)	1	2	4-71	Husein, Sulejman, Mustafë
2.	Alakinca (Alakinça)	1	1	3-76	Osman, Sulejman, Mustafë
3.	Zhitoragja (Jitoraca)	-	-	3-71	Tahir, Husein, Hasan, Osman, Ali
4.	Masurica e vjetër (Eski)	-	4	2-86	Mustafë, Sulejman, Ali, Husein, Jahja

	Masuriça)				
5.	Lloginca (Loginça)	2	6	2-71	Salih, Mustafë, Tahir, Husein, Bajram, Arsllan
6.	Prekodolci (Prekodolça)	3	2	3-81	Salih, Mustafë, Husein, Talib, Ahmed, Jahja
7.	Binovca (Binofça)	-	1	3-86	Osman, Selim, Jahja, Sulejman, Davud
8.	Kukavica (Kukaviça)	-	2 people wanted	2-51	Salih, Ali, Islam, Sulejman, Tahir
9.	Lepenica (Lepeniça)	2	2	4-56	Malik, Selim, Abas
10.	Jellashnica (Jelaşniça)	2	2	2-86	Sulejman, Jahja, Et'hem, Muhtar, Halil, Ahmed, Ibrahim, Hasan, Mehmed
11.	Vërbova (Virbova)	1	4	1-81	Sulejman, Kurta, Halil, Demir, Ali, Bekash
TOTAL		12	24	1-86	Sulejman, Mustafë, Jahja dhe Halil

Table 4. *Patronymy, natality, and mortality in Masurica, 1831.*

Based on the Ottoman population register of 1831, the eleven villages of the Masurica nahiyah reveal a clear structure of paternal lineage, with households often encompassing multiple generations under one roof. Village sizes varied considerably, from small settlements such as Kukavica with only 5 households and 11 males, to larger ones like Jellashnica with 32 households and 109 males, reflecting diverse economic and social conditions. The most common patronyms—Sulejman, Mustafa, Yahya, and Halil indicate the dominance of certain family lines and their intergenerational continuity. The population consisted of a mix of children, adults, and elderly individuals, with a notable number of early-recorded births and deaths, pointing to high mortality rates at younger ages. At the same time, longevity exceeding 80 years was observed in five villages, suggesting relatively favorable economic and living conditions. On average, each household contained 2–4 males, and the distribution of population across households reflects strong social organization and the prevalence of extended families as a form of economic security and social stability.

Some Professions in the Masurica Nahiyah According to the Ottoman Population Register of 1831

Professions in Masurica Nahiyah	Imam	Mullah	Hajji	Spahi	Fugitives
Masurica e Vjetër (Eski Masuriça)	1	-	-	-	-
Surdulica (Surduliça)	1	2	1	-	-
Prekodollca (Prekodolça)	1	-	-	1	-
Jellashnica (Jelaşniça)	1	-	-	1	-
Kukavica (Kukaviça)	-	-	-	-	2
TOTAL	4	2	1	2	2

Table 5. *Selected professions in the Masurica nahiyah, 1831.*

The data from the Ottoman Population Register (1831) reveal that the professional structure of the Masurica nahiyah was limited and primarily tied to religious and administrative functions, reflecting the peripheral character of the region. Imams represented the most widespread category, with four cases recorded in Old Masurica, Surdulica, Prekodolci, and Jellashnica. This highlights the central role of religious institutions in the social and administrative organization of the nahiyah. Mullahs (two cases) and one hajji were registered only in Surdulica, a settlement with a more consolidated religious and educational profile. The hajji title indicated religious prestige and economic stability. Sipahis (two cases) were found only in Prekodolci and Jellashnica, suggesting limited feudal-military influence in the area. An interesting element is the registration of two fugitives in Kukavica, reflecting the fiscal and disciplinary function of the Ottoman register and the mechanisms of surveillance in peripheral regions prior to the Tanzimat reforms.

The Displacement and Resettlement of the Albanian Population from the Masurica Nahiyah

In the early centuries of the Ottoman Empire, population movements were primarily aimed at increasing the Muslim population from Anatolia toward the Balkans. However, in the eighteenth century, following the Treaty of Karlowitz, the Ottoman Empire began to lose territories under its administration. Consequently, both the direction and mechanisms of settlement and displacement changed. To protect the Muslim population living in the Balkans, a large wave of migration from the Balkans to Anatolia began.³⁴ This

³⁴ Mead Osmani, *Sanxhaku i Nishit gjatë periudhës osmane (Shek. XIX)*, Instituti i Historisë “Ali Hadri” – Prishtinë 2022, 213.

situation intensified alongside the efforts of the Christian world to expel the Ottoman population from Europe and the Balkans and relocate it to Anatolia.³⁵ After the Russo-Ottoman War of 1853–1856, known as the Crimean War, approximately two million Muslims were displaced between 1856 and 1865, forced to leave their homelands and resettle in Rumelia and Anatolia.³⁶ Following the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878, Russia and the Balkan states, driven by expansionist Pan-Slavist policies, compelled large numbers of Muslims to migrate toward Rumelia and Istanbul due to insecurity and constant threats to life.³⁷

The uprisings in the Serbian Principality in the early nineteenth century, the privileges later granted to the Serbian population, and the final withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from the region in 1878 left the Sanjak of Niš under Serbian administration. As a result, the Muslim population of this area, which had previously constituted a significant portion of its inhabitants, was severely affected and within a short period became a minority.³⁸ One of the areas impacted by these displacements was the nahiyah of Masurica, administratively part of the kaza of Vranje. According to Serbian sources, Albanians from 14 villages in the Vranje district, including Masurica, allegedly assisted the Serbian army. For this reason, the Serbian authorities did not expel them in 1877–1878. However, within three years (1879–1881), attacks against Albanians in the Vranje district began, with some being killed to force their displacement and seize their lands. One documented case is that of Jusuf H. Rexhepi from Surdulica, who repeatedly appealed to Serbian authorities for protection but was ultimately murdered on March 25, 1881. His brother, Mulla Selimi, sought justice but without success.³⁹ The violence against Albanians in the 14 villages intensified further. Testimonies reveal that Serbian villagers openly plundered livestock and belongings, and even committed killings. Reports describe corpses piled together “as if they were animals,” and people “cut into pieces.” These accounts illustrate the extreme suffering endured by Albanians in the Vranje district. Many displaced families fled overnight, taking only part of their possessions, crossing the Ottoman-Serbian border with their animals, and resettling in Presheva, Kumanovo, and other areas.⁴⁰ This reflected the Serbian policy of permanently cleansing these fertile lands of their remaining Albanian inhabitants.

³⁵ Nedim İpek, *Rumeli'den Anadolu'ya Türk Göçleri*, T.T.K. Yayınları, Ankara 1999, 1.

³⁶ H. Yıldırım Ağanoğlu, *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Balkanların Makûs Talihi: Göç*, Kum Saati Yayınları, İstanbul 2001, 33.

³⁷ N. İpek, *Rumeli'den Anadolu'ya Türk Göçleri*, 10; H. Yıldırım Ağanoğlu, *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e*, 61.

³⁸ J. Osmani, *Sanxhaku i Nishit gjatë periudhës osmane*, 171–202.

³⁹ Sabit Uka, *Jeta dhe veprimtaria e shqiptarëve të sanxhakut të Nishit deri më 1912*, V. 4, Prishtinë 1995, 41–42.

⁴⁰ S. Uka, *Jeta dhe veprimtaria e shqiptarëve të sanxhakut të Nishit*, 42–43.

There is, however, a discrepancy between Serbian sources and those of Kanitz.⁴¹ According to Kanitz, the Albanian Muslim population concentrated along the right bank of the Morava River in eleven villages resisted the Serbian army under General Beli-Marković during the January 1878 military operations. After being forced into submission near Vranje, this population chose mass migration toward Albanian-inhabited Ottoman territories rather than remaining under permanent Serbian administration. The abandoned settlements were repopulated by Orthodox Slavs from the mountainous regions of “Old Serbia,” long interested in the fertile lands of the Morava plain.⁴²

The displaced Albanian Muslim population from Masurica settled primarily in Albanian-inhabited areas of Bujanoc and Presheva, facilitated by territorial proximity and ethnic similarity. According to scholar Sabit Uka, five families from Masurica resettled in Bujanoc: two in Tërnoc, two in Nasalce, and one in Bilaç. In Presheva, families settled in Bushtran, Rahovica, Lower Shoshaja (Shoshaja e Poshtme)⁴³, and ten families in the town of Presheva. Other villages of the Masurica nahiyah Surdulica, Dllugojnica, Alakinca, Verbova, Jellashnica, and Prekodollci also experienced displacement, with their inhabitants resettling mainly in Bujanoc and Presheva. Some families later migrated further, to Karaçeva, Dobërçan, Gjilan, and others to Kumanovo and Skopje, with part continuing toward deeper Ottoman territories, including present-day Turkey. As was common, displaced families often adopted the name of their place of origin as a surname. One notable example is Hoxha Hasan Masurica, a prominent figure among Albanians and beyond.⁴⁴

The displacement of the Albanian Muslim population from Masurica during and after 1877–1878 demonstrates a continuous process of migration, initially directed toward Bujanoc and Presheva and later extending to more distant regions. This process also reflects an organized resettlement pattern, where ethnic and geographical factors played a decisive role in determining new destinations.

⁴¹ Felix Philipp Kanitz (1829–1904), Hungarian archaeologist and ethnographer, was born in Budapest on August 2, 1829, and passed away in Vienna on January 8, 1904; consulted at 15:20 on February 6, 2026. <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/9190-kanitz-felix-philipp>.

⁴² F. Kanitz, *Das Königreich Serbien und das Serbenvoli: von der Römerzeit bis zur Gegenwart*, 263–264.

⁴³ For further information on those displaced from Masurica to Lower Shoshaja, refer to: Nexhat Agushi, *Shoshaja (Monografi)*, Pika 5A, Gjilan 2024.

⁴⁴ K. Sylejmani, *Hasan Masurica hoxhë e Inovatorë*, 13–17; S. Uka, *Jeta dhe veprimtaria e shqiptarëve të sanxhakut të Nishit*, 261.

Summary

Masurica is a settlement that preserves traces of early habitation, as evidenced by the remains of houses and ancient cultural monuments found in the village and its surroundings. These traces indicate that the area has been continuously inhabited and has played a significant role in the lives of the local population. In 1455, Masurica was fully incorporated under Ottoman rule, becoming an administrative part of the kaza of Vranje. This marked the beginning of a long period under Ottoman administration, which influenced the organization of daily life, social structure, and the economic development of the area. During the Ottoman period, up to the early 19th century, Masurica did not hold a particularly prominent administrative role. However, its location near the main Istanbul–Niš–Belgrade route ensured its continued significance as a communication hub. This road axis was a major artery connecting the Ottoman capital with the northern Balkans and further to Central Europe. Therefore, even though Masurica was not an administrative center, it held particular value as a transit and communication point. This demonstrates that small settlements often have greater importance than may appear at first glance, as they become part of broader networks of human and commercial movement. By the early 19th century, specifically in 1831, Masurica is recorded as a nahiyah comprising eleven villages. This represented significant development compared to the 16th century, when Masurica was only a small village. Comparing Ottoman data from 1831 with Hahn's 1861 records indicates a steady population increase in the Masurica nahiyah. The growth in the number of houses in the seven main villages and the consolidation of certain central settlements reflect economic development, social stability, and the effects of Ottoman administration on local community organization. The analysis of family structures, the distribution of main patronymics, and occupational profiles show a strong social organization, with religious institutions playing a central role in maintaining local stability. Additionally, a combination of favorable economic conditions and high mortality rates at a young age reflects the complex demographic dynamics of the period. The period 1831–1861 marks the consolidation and development of the Masurica nahiyah, making it a case study of how social, economic, and administrative factors influenced the evolution of rural communities in the Ottoman context. This expansion was closely linked to economic factors, particularly the exploitation of arable land and iron deposits. Fertile land and natural resources created favorable living conditions, promoting population growth and strengthening social structures.

Data from 1861 confirm population growth in the villages of the nahiyah, showing that Masurica had become a dynamic area. However, the period following the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878 brought radical changes. After the war, the Masurica nahiyah experienced a major demographic transformation. The Muslim Albanian population was forcibly expelled from its settlements, suffering significant human and material losses. This violent

process marked a dramatic turning point in Masurica's history. From a predominantly Muslim Albanian area, it was transformed within a short period into a space inhabited mostly by Serbian Orthodox settlers from various regions. This shift was not merely a population displacement but a profound social and cultural transformation that left an indelible mark on the identity of the Masurica nahiyah. Most of the expelled population relocated near the new Serbian-Ottoman border, mainly to Albanian-majority settlements in the municipalities of Bujanovac and Preševo, as well as the surrounding areas of Gjilan, Kumanovo, Skopje, and further within Ottoman territories. Even those residents who remained until 1881 were eventually forced to leave due to ongoing violence and pressure. This process of expulsion and migration highlights the intensity of these changes and the impossibility of maintaining a stable coexistence under the new political conditions. The history of Masurica is thus a painful story of displacement and loss of identity. Although many years have passed since these events, traces of the former Muslim Albanian presence continue to be identified through the ruins of cultural monuments and settlement structures. These material evidences are important reminders that history cannot be completely erased; it remains present in stones, ruins, and the collective memory of people. Today, Masurica appears as a predominantly Serbian settlement, with a few remaining Muslim Roma families.

Zaključak

Masurica je naselje koje čuva tragove ranog naseljavanja, što potvrđuju ostaci kuća i drevnih kulturnih spomenika pronađenih u selu i okolini. Ovi tragovi ukazuju da je područje bilo kontinuirano naseljeno i da je imalo značajnu ulogu u životu lokalnog stanovništva. Godine 1455. Masurica je u potpunosti uključena pod Osmansko vlasništvo, postajući administrativni dio kaze Vranje. Ovaj trenutak označava početak dugog perioda pod osmanskom administracijom, koja je utjecala na organizaciju svakodnevnog života, društvenu strukturu i ekonomski razvoj ovog područja. Tokom osmanskog perioda, do početka 19. stoljeća, Masurica nije imala naročito značajnu administrativnu ulogu. Međutim, njen položaj u blizini glavne ceste Istanbul–Niš–Beograd osiguravao je njen stalni značaj kao komunikacijskog čvorišta. Ova prometna osovina bila je glavna arterija koja je povezivala osmansku prijestolnicu sa sjevernim Balkanom i dalje prema Srednjoj Europi. Stoga, iako Masurica nije bila administrativno središte, imala je poseban značaj kao tranzitna i komunikacijska tačka. Ovaj podatak pokazuje da mala naselja često imaju veću važnost nego što se na prvi pogled čini, jer postaju dio šire mreže kretanja ljudi i robe. Početkom 19. stoljeća, tačnije 1831. godine, Masurica se bilježi kao nahija koja se sastoji od jedanaest sela. Ovo je predstavljalo značajan razvoj u odnosu na 16. stoljeće, kada je Masurica bila samo malo selo. Poređenjem osmanskih podataka iz 1831. sa Hahnovim podacima iz 1861.

godine, primjećuje se stabilan porast stanovništva u nahiji Masurica. Povećanje broja kuća u sedam glavnih sela i konsolidacija određenih središnjih naselja odražava ekonomski razvoj, društvenu stabilnost i utjecaj osmanske administracije na organizaciju lokalnih zajednica. Analiza strukture porodica, raspodjele glavnih patronimika i profesija pokazuje snažnu društvenu organizaciju, u kojoj su vjerske institucije igrale centralnu ulogu u održavanju stabilnosti oblasti. Također, uočava se kombinacija povoljnih ekonomskih uvjeta i visoke smrtnosti u ranoj dobi, što odražava složenu demografsku dinamiku tog perioda. Period 1831–1861. obilježava konsolidaciju i razvoj nahije Masurica, čineći je primjerom za proučavanje utjecaja društvenih, ekonomskih i administrativnih faktora na evoluciju ruralnih zajednica u osmanskome kontekstu. Ovo širenje bilo je usko povezano s ekonomskim faktorima, posebno iskorištavanjem obradivog zemljišta i rudnika željeza. Plodno zemljište i prirodni resursi stvarali su povoljne uvjete za život, podstičući rast stanovništva i jačanje društvenih struktura.

Podaci iz 1861. godine potvrđuju rast stanovništva sela u nahiji, pokazujući da se Masurica pretvorila u dinamično područje. Međutim, period nakon rusko-osmanskog rata 1877–1878. donio je radikalne promjene. Nakon rata, nahija Masurica doživjela je veliku demografsku transformaciju. Muslimansko albansko stanovništvo nasilno je protjerano iz svojih naselja, doživjevši velike ljudske i materijalne gubitke. Ovaj nasilni proces označio je dramatičnu prekretnicu u historiji Masurice. Iz područja pretežno naseljenog muslimanskim Albancima, u kratkom periodu postalo je naseljeno uglavnom srpskim pravoslavnim stanovništvom iz različitih krajeva. Ova promjena nije bila samo preseljenje stanovništva, već duboka društvena i kulturna transformacija koja je ostavila neizbrisiv trag u identitetu nahije Masurica. Većina protjeranog stanovništva preselila se blizu nove srpsko-osmanske granice, uglavnom u albansko većinskim naseljima općina Bujanovac i Preševo, kao i u okolinu Gnjilana, Kumanova, Skoplja i šire u osmanskim teritorijama. Čak i oni stanovnici koji su ostali do 1881. godine, zbog nasilja i stalnog pritiska, na kraju su bili prisiljeni na preseljenje. Ovaj proces protjerivanja i migracije pokazuje intenzitet tih promjena i nemogućnost održavanja stabilnog suživota pod novim političkim okolnostima. Historija Masurice je, dakle, bolna priča o preseljenju i gubitku identiteta. Iako je prošlo mnogo godina od tih događaja, tragovi bivšeg muslimansko-albanskog prisustva i dalje se prepoznaju kroz ruševine kulturnih spomenika i stambenih struktura. Ovi materijalni dokazi važni su podsjetnici da se historija ne može potpuno izbrisati; ona ostaje prisutna u kamenju, ruševinama i kolektivnom sjećanju ljudi. Danas se Masurica predstavlja kao naselje sa većinskim srpskim stanovništvom, dok su prisutne i neke muslimanske romske porodice.

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