

Commercializing Agricultural Production through the Illicit (yasak) Trade of Wheat: Local Notables and Landed Estates (çiftlik) of the Balkans and Western Anatolia (1700s-1830s)

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The current literature on early modern Ottoman agriculture has partially emphasized the place of commercialization of agriculture via production in the landed estates in general but has failed to analyze the process in detail with concrete data. Çiftlik became the hallmark of the eighteenth century, yet any argument based on the available archival material failed to provide data on the production volume to understand the productive capacity. This study argues that the evidence for the increase in the level of agricultural production is the growing illicit wheat trade from the 1700s onwards, and it went hand in hand with the activities of speculators aimed at increasing the price of wheat in the domestic market by stacking a considerable amount of wheat in their granaries. While the çiftlik were the centers of wheat production, their owners became the main actors of this trade. The destination of the wheat was mainly the Western states, namely England and France, whose demand for agricultural products far exceeded their supply, especially between the 1750s and 1800s, which was also the period of the peak of the illicit wheat trade from the Balkans and Western Anatolia. By distinguishing the illicit (yasak) from the smuggled (kaçak), the study attempts to place the activity in its historical context carefully. After discussing the methods and tactics of the actors, it will scrutinize the cases of certain çiftlik-holder local notables and imperial officials who actively partook in the illicit trade of wheat in detail.