

Water Allocation, Gardens and Çiftlik in the Afyon Area: 1600-1860

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Although Ottoman scholarship has recently opened new vistas to our understanding of çiftlik formation in various parts of the Ottoman Empire, our knowledge about çiftlik types remains quite limited. Research so far suggests that the çiftlik formation in the Ottoman Balkans, Western-Eastern Anatolia and Black Sea Region is largely related to the appropriation of peasant properties or vacant lands by local/imperial investors and power-holders through coercion and legal mechanisms. However, conflicts over the status of orchards and gardens around Afyon (Karahisar-ı Sahib) investigated by the Commission of Large Estates (Çiftlikat Komisyonu) in the mid-nineteenth century offer new and interesting insights into the linkage between water management and çiftlikization at the western edge of the central Anatolian plateau. This paper explores how the conflicts over water-abundant zones, freehold gardens and orchards in the early modern period set the stage for the subsequent çiftlik disputes of the nineteenth century in the Afyon area. It shows that as early as the seventeenth century, locals were deeply engaged in complex water allocation schemes, which became a source of intensified conflicts in the following century with their spread into communal meadows, waqf grasslands and seasonal pastures of transhumant communities. Although these early disputes were settled at the courtroom with the recognition of collective rights and through communal mediation, the competition over rural resources in Karahisar-ı Sahib urged the Tanzimat bureaucrats to define and formulate these conflicts with exclusive reference to usufructs rights over land and çiftliks. The study also suggests that the imperial policies around the mid-nineteenth century regarding the interlinkage between çiftliks, gardens and water management in Afyon were affected not only by the ongoing land disputes in the Balkans and Anatolia, but also by the Central Anatolian Drought and Famine of 1845, which encouraged imperial authorities to settle more refugees and nomads in the Eskişehir-Kütahya-Afyon zone.