

Origins, Status and Ethnic Distribution of Tenancy in the 19th Century Çiftliks of Canik (1830s-1880s)

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Although labour was central for the agricultural production, most of the Ottoman research has ignored the different contractual labour relations in the big estates (çiftliks), i.e. the specifically combined units of land-labour-rent-means of production. Especially the tenancy has been the least studied labour form due to the dominant state-centered perspective, which situates the labour relations in the semi-state domain of çiftliks under the general rubric of exceptional share-cropping in opposition to the Ottoman peasantry with inherited usufructory rights. At the same time, because of the rare existence of primary sources on the tenancy, the current Ottoman research is far from discussing the meaning of tenancy both in theoretical and practical terms from the bottom up perspective. This paper will share the first results of my research on the tenants (müstecirs) of çiftliks in Canik. It will discuss the composition of the tenants, who were mostly originated from the three backgrounds: displaced migrants from the neighboring regions due to the economic and religious reasons; the semi-nomadic population, who were encouraged to settle down by opening up the land and lastly, the peasants, who became dispossessed by various means. This paper will relate the expansion of estates and of tenancy as a labour form to the growth of regional and international trade in the Black Sea in the first quarter of the 19th century. Secondly, this paper will map out the Muslim, Greek and Armenian population of tenants whose total number rose from two thousand five hundred households in 1850s to ten thousand households in the 1880s. The ethnic composition together with the nicknames showing the tenants' old occupations will be dealt with their vulnerable status of having only the use rights over the land in return for a fixed money rent. Thirdly, this paper will take into account how the rise and the transformation of the rent in money and the expansion of capitalist agrarian relations coincided with the Ottoman fiscal centralization and the consequent dispute over the amount of rent and taxes paid by tenants to their Muslim estate-holders and to the state. In sum, this paper aims to contribute to the çiftlik debate by focusing on the theoretical and practical meaning of tenancy in the Black Sea region by utilizing the Ottoman archival sources (çiftlikat survey of Canik, population registers of 1830s, petitions and higher court decisions) and British consular reports.