

## **‘Çiftlik Debate’ Revisited II: New Findings and New Questions**

*Mehmet Ali Çelik, Evgenia Kermeli, Anıl Aşkın, Bedirhan Laçın, Fatma Öncel, Canay Şahin*

There has been a recent revival of interest in çiftlik studies. This panel is the second in the series focusing on the çiftlik phenomenon in Ottoman history. In our first panel, we discussed various cases from the early sixteenth to the late nineteenth centuries in the first Early Modern Ottoman Studies Conference in 2023. Privately owned estates and farms (çiftliks) presumably engaged in commercial production have long been an issue for the social and economic history of the Ottoman Empire. The nature of land ownership and the extent of commercial agriculture are the two main questions of this topic. Even the term çiftlik can be elusive depending on the context. Although scholars have already addressed the questions, it is very difficult to talk about a general explanatory framework for this phenomenon. During the “classical age” of the empire (1300-1600), the Ottoman state owned most of the arable land (miri) apart from the waqf and other private holdings in the Balkans and Anatolia, where the timar system effectively settled. Peasants lived on these state-owned lands with their usufruct rights (tasarruf). In this structure, the peasant household is the basis of agricultural production, and the state, i.e., the ruling elite, had the claim over surplus in the form of revenue. The legal framework of the miri land regime persisted until the Tanzimat Era. However, that does not mean that the state remained the sole owner and beneficiary of the arable land, and there was no agrarian transformation in the countryside. After all, the significant presence of the privately owned çiftliks before the Tanzimat Era complicates this picture, especially considering the fact that many çiftliks established on the miri lands. Canonical studies approached this question in relation to broader themes like the degeneration and decentralization of the classical imperial institutions, widespread implementation of tax-farming (iltizam/malikane), the emergence of provincial notables (ayan), the transition from feudalism to capitalism, peripheralization, and integration of the Ottoman countries to the new European dominated capitalist world economy. Some scholars even argued that independent peasantry remained the core of the agricultural economy until the mid-nineteenth century, and çiftliks were rather marginal. However, there are many unaddressed questions in this literature and this debate remains inconclusive. This panel aims to raise critical questions about the çiftlik formation processes, revise, and contribute to the çiftlik debate by focusing on concrete cases in different times and localities. It also aims to further complicate the nature of de facto and de jure land ownership and bring the agrarian transformation and change into the debate. In this panel, Mehmet Ali Çelik evaluates the role of peasant indebtedness in çiftlik formation processes in the seventeenth century Karaferye (Veria). Evgenia Kermeli discusses the theories on çiftliks by examining the development of the transferability and the pawning of usufruct rights through the prism of 17th to 19th century financial and administrative tools. Anıl Aşkın focuses on the episodes of violence and peasant flights related to the emergence of unregistered landed estates around Niğde in the eighteenth century. Bedirhan Laçın discusses the different forms of labor, the legal status of the villagers, and the state's approach to the conflict between landlords and villagers over their claims to land

usufruct by focusing on the çiftliks of the Çelikpaşazâde family. Fatma Öncel traces the Ottoman central bureaucracy's comprehensive attempts to define çiftliks after the confiscation and liquidation of the landed property of Ali Paşa of Tepelena. Canay Şahin explains the theoretical and practical meanings of tenancy in the çiftliks of the nineteenth century Canik region.