

Towards a typology of the çiftlik holding: 17th to 19th centuries

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The formation of çiftliks and their mode of production has been the subject of scholarly attention for quite some time. Many interesting hypotheses developed on çiftliks and their role in the economic and social life in various parts of the empire and especially in the Balkans. In particular, with regard to landholding, the main focus was twofold, primarily to examine whether the function of çiftliks was an indirect way to the transition towards private property and secondly to determine their role in the commercialization of agriculture produce. In this endeavour, scholars presupposed that the trajectory of the equation between freehold property and commercialization characterising the European paradigm would be an adequate point of departure. However, currently this thesis has been revised by European historians like Geoffrey Hodgson who connects the rise of capitalism on agricultural lands not on univocal propriety rights but on the development of financial and administrative tools that ensured the growth of collateralizable property and saleable debt. The aim of this paper is to rediscuss the core of the theories on çiftliks, examining the development of the transferability of tasarruf (ferağ intikali) and the pawing of this right (ferağ bi-l vefa), through the prism of 17th to 19th century financial and administrative tools. The paper will utilize kanuns, fetvas of prominent jurisconsults and risales on landholding and taxation. It will argue that these tools and the land taxes were in fact quite instrumental in the wide spread of commercialization of çiftliks, albeit the lack of universal freehold property. Financial contracts like muzara'a and musakkat developed and adapted to the directives and limitations of a miri regime that was far from mundane as explicitly stated by one of the protagonists of the Tanzimat reforms, Mehmed Emin Ali Pasha who in 1867 wrote a fascinating exposé des faits of what the Tanzimat state considered the agricultural production to be for and how it should be taxed.