

Serving the Sultan and (Dis)obeying the Law: State Capacity and Timar-Holders in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Bosnia

Fahd Kasumovic

This paper aims to evaluate the state capacity in the Ottoman borderland province of Bosnia by researching the functionality of its timar system and the state's response to the illegal practices and arbitrary behavior that periodically occurred throughout the 18th century. Although several important features of the timar system in Bosnia have been researched in historiography, the obtained data has still not been used to discuss and evaluate the issue of state capacity in terms of the state's ability to establish the law, order, property rights, to overcome the challenges, accomplish its policy goals, as well as to fulfill the main functions of the state. The author argues that the analysis of the central government's response to the arbitrary decisions of the local state servants, or the lack of any adequate response, may provide us with a deeper insight into the issue of the Ottoman Empire's state capacity in the period often designated as an age of crisis and transformation. To fill in the gaps in historiographical knowledge, this paper analyses the ahkam registers of the province of Bosnia, the various other documents produced by the regional and local authorities, but also the personal financial books of the timar and zeamet-holders, which have hitherto very rarely been used for this purpose. With an aim of better explaining the links between the timar system in Bosnia and the Ottoman Empire's state capacity, its themes also include the necessary comparisons with the government's accomplishments in dealing with challenges in other sectors of the provincial revenue collection system, apart from the timar system.