

Urban wealth inequality in the Ottoman Empire, 1650-1870

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This study explores almost 10.000 notarial deeds of house sales in ten major cities of the Ottoman Empire from 1650-1870. Using house prices as a measure of pre-industrial urban wealth, we show two peaks of reverse U-shaped inequality in housing, occurring in the 1730s and 1790s. The study also reveals high levels of housing inequality between cities, with a similar pattern to within-city inequalities and a peak around the 1830s. Our sources allow us to code the religion of house buyers and sellers, and to estimate the housing inequality between the Muslim majority and non-Muslim minority urban residents. Results suggest that the period 1830-50 was a turning point, marked by rising non-Muslim participation in the housing market and declining inequality between religious groups. However, after 1850, inequality between Muslims and non-Muslims reached its highest point. We attribute these trends to monetary debasements, political and economic reforms of 1830-50, and the integration of the Ottoman Empire with the global economy, which primarily favored non-Muslim urban groups.