

Riculture, Economy and the Environment in the Niš Region in the 16th Century

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One of the initial grand projects the Ottoman Empire undertook following the conquest of the Balkans was the introduction of rice cultivation. It was of great importance for sustaining all layers of Ottoman society. However, the cultivation of rice required specific conditions, which were found in the Niš Valley. This study aims to present the riculture in the Niš region in the 16th century, based on five tapu tahrir defters, three of which are preserved in the State Archive in Istanbul, one in the State Archive in Ankara (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri), and one in the Austrian National Library in Vienna (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek)

This topic necessitates a multidisciplinary approach encompassing economic and environmental history. Due to the specific conditions required for its cultivation, rice significantly transformed the ecosystem of the Niš region, particularly impacting rivers and the surrounding settlements, such as the valley of the Nišava River. The paper also examines the role of Ottoman elites who, through Islamic charitable foundations, utilized rivers, villages, and people to create rice fields and irrigation channels. The control assumed by Ottoman elites in rice cultivation was intricately linked to their role in regional and international trade. It is necessary to examine the role of the Niš Valley in regional and international rice trade, which contributed to the state's and local elite's income. It is important to emphasize that Niš was situated in a very favorable strategic location on the Tsarigrad Road, connecting Belgrade and Istanbul, influencing trade intensity.

In conclusion, by analyzing rice cultivation in the Niš region, this study challenges unfounded claims within historiography regarding the region's negligible role in the global economy. The introduction of riculture not only opened new possibilities in regional and global trade but also fundamentally transformed the ecosystem of the cultivated areas.