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978-0-521-13536-8 - Economic Life in Ottoman Europe: Taxation, Trade and the Struggle
for Land, 1600-1800

Bruce McGowan

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Studies in modern capitalism · Etudes sur le capitalisme moderne

Economic life in Ottoman Europe

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1600–1800

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Preface

This effort to present new information about rural life in south-eastern Europe is partly a response to the challenge implicit in Fernand Braudel's famous study of the Mediterranean basin wherein he understandably neglects the eastern in favor of the western shores, but at the same time provocatively suggests connections between developments in the Ottoman territories and developments upon the continent as a whole. Especially intriguing is the implied relationship between export oriented agriculture in Ottoman territories (i.e. *chiftlik* agriculture) and export oriented or market oriented agriculture elsewhere.

I did not know at the outset of this research that the subject of export oriented agriculture and its social effects was to receive new prominence with the publication of Immanuel Wallerstein's first volume on the emergence of a world scale economy in the early modern period. The 'seigneurial reaction' discussed along the way by Braudel moved to the center in Wallerstein's work, where modes of coerced labor are seen as characteristic in the emerging peripheral world with which Western Europe traded. However, like Braudel, Wallerstein also gave the Ottoman territories brief and diffident treatment within his ambitious conception.

Obviously scholars like Braudel and Wallerstein are in need of more facts on the Ottoman territories. The few at work in this relatively undeveloped field are duty-bound to provide more basic statistical information, both for themselves and for other scholars. It is partly for this reason that statistical tables have been appended to these case studies; but partly, of course, these tables are included to support conclusions which would seem unwarranted if offered without statistical evidence.

In response to Braudel's implied challenges, an effort has been made
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to relate both the Ottoman export trade and the social effects of that trade in south-eastern Europe to developments elsewhere on the European continent. (Such comparison could conceivably be further extended to place the Ottoman territories within the entire center-periphery scheme conceived by Wallerstein, though this was not attempted here.) At first glance, there is a temptation to relate the quasi-serfdom (the *reaya* institution) established by the Ottomans directly to the 'second' or 'later' serfdom which developed more or less contemporaneously throughout Eastern Europe. Yet it is difficult to show persuasively any causal connection between the Ottoman quasi-serfdom and the serfdom variants to the north despite their coincidence in time and their proximity. Indeed, the Ottoman institution cannot with certainty be linked to earlier Byzantine or Slavic models, despite the survival in the Ottoman system of certain vestigial forms inherited from earlier states. In the moderate spirit of the Ottoman *reaya* institution we tend rather to see a reaction against earlier, more oppressive modes of serfdom, a reform program which contributed greatly to the Ottoman state-building potential. And, as in Eastern Europe, there is a striking disjuncture in time between the rise of this serfdom variant and the rise of a domestic export trade: the *reaya* institution was fully established long before the sixteenth-century 'wheat boom' which marked the rise of a significant trade in indigenous Ottoman products, in contrast to an earlier entrepôt trade in silk and other luxury items originating further east.

A related hypothesis entertained by the author at the outset of these investigations was that south-eastern Europe of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would probably be shown to divide into two more or less distinct economic zones – an outer seaward zone greatly affected by waterborne trade and an inner zone which remained within the command economy preserve of the capital city with its staple policies. This expectation has been only partly substantiated by the evidence developed so far.

The subjects of the five essays in this collection are logically related. Their publication together is intended to intensify their complementary character. Like the exploratory trenches of the archaeologist, they are aimed at revealing the outlines of the reality remaining to be uncovered. Briefly, these subjects are: the development of an international trade in indigenous Ottoman products on a scale sufficient to affect land use in south-eastern Europe (chapter 1); an analytic model

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with which to rationalize the deployment of land and labor during the disintegration of the classic Ottoman land regime, and an application of that model to south-eastern Europe (chapter 2); an attempt to establish demographic trends and their spatial distribution by using the head tax data pertaining to south-eastern Europe (chapter 3); a parallel attempt to measure demographic trends and/or economic strength by studying changes in the distribution of a second body of tax data, the so-called 'tax houses' of the inner provinces (chapter 4); and an attempt to follow fiscal and interrelated agricultural developments at one Balkan location through the use of local judicial records (chapter 5).

The spatial and temporal framework for these essays was significantly affected by the limits of the documents consulted. Originally the plan was to take the entire period of the Black Sea closure (i.e. 1475–1783) as a time frame and to measure the effects of this occlusion – this arrested circulation – upon the whole of south-eastern Europe, at first conceived as including the Romanian and Hungarian territories. Unfortunately, the tax house and head tax series (chapters 3 and 4) exclude territories north of the Danube and are relatively weaker for Bosnia and Serbia than for the remaining south-eastern European territories. The judicial records used for the Manastir study (chapter 5) are similarly limited in time although they begin somewhat earlier and end somewhat later than the other series used. Limitations in time were also a feature of trade estimates by non-Ottoman sources (chapter 1). Since Ottoman customs records are little concerned with content of trade and because they ignore contraband, it was imperative that non-Ottoman estimates of trade be brought into play. But the best of these pertain to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries rather than the earlier period. For these reasons, the original scope of study was reduced in order to concentrate on the last two centuries of the Black Sea closure.

I feel a keen gratitude towards certain individuals who encouraged this lonely project at critical moments. Above all I wish to thank Charles Issawi for his role in clearing the way for its publication. Halil Inalcik has been constant in his encouragement and has allowed an early look at his most recent writings which were of special interest as they deal with this same period. Immanuel Wallerstein has also been generous and helpful. Bernard Lewis, Alan Fisher, John Smith and William Schorger each for different reasons deserve my thanks. The writer is

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My wife and son cheerfully tolerated an absence of a year and a half while I worked in archives at Skopje, Sarajevo, Istanbul and Vienna. Their understanding eased that separation and gave me peace of mind while I was far from home.

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