

BOOK REVIEWS

Земята и хората през XVII – първите десетилетия на XVIII век. Овладеяване и организация на аграрното и социалното пространство на Централните и Южните Балкани под османска власт, Академично издателство [Land and People – in the Seventeenth Century and the First Decades of the Eighteenth Century. Reclamation and Organization of the Agrarian and Social Space in the Central and Southern Balkans under Ottoman Rule]. By Stefka Parveva. Sofia: Prof. Marin Drinov Academic Publishing House, 2011. 484 pp.

The subject of land in the Balkans and its agricultural reclamation and use during the period of Ottoman rule has been extensively studied by scholars. This book, however, is based on the discovery of sources that are essentially different from what has been previously known and used, sources which shed light on new aspects of the agrarian issue. These sources are two types of population and land survey (*defters*) that were unusual in the Ottoman administration. The first type of *defter* was compiled in the late 1660s and early 1670s. They include a description of the land of the individual rural households and the common land in the village territory of 21 villages and two separate *mezraas* in the Edirne *nahiyes* of Üsküdar and Ada. These *defters* are held in the Oriental Department of the National Library in Sofia.

The second type of *defter* offers a description of the population and its property in the towns, villages and *çiftlik*s in the *kazas* of Arcadia and Anavarin in the southwestern Peloponnese. The survey was compiled after the re-conquest of the Peloponnese by the Ottomans from the Venetian Republic and dated January 15, 1716. The *defter* of the two *kazas* is part of the collection of the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi in Istanbul.

The information included in these documents is different from the standard content of *tapu tabrir defters* as they were compiled until the end of the sixteenth century. The analysis of these atypical sources clarifies certain aspects of agrarian and social life in the Balkans during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that have generally remained understudied. This study attempts to reconstruct the rural and the urban agrarian landscape and the prevailing patterns of land use. It also traces the economic behaviour of peasants and townsmen in the process of reclamation and organisation of the land belonging to the village and the town

territory. Furthermore, the new information regarding family landholdings and the yield ratios of cultivated products enables the author to assess the productive capacity of the *raiye* *çiftlik* and the quantitative components of the system, i.e. harvest, consumption, taxation, and remaining surplus per household. It also enables her to seek answers to a number of questions, including for instance the extent to which agricultural production was adequate to support a family and create a marketable surplus, whether or not the agrarian system offered incentives to the producer, and where one might draw the limits of poverty and wealth during the period (the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries). In addition to these sources, Parveva also makes valuable use of archival sources and studies that she herself published or discovered in the Archives in Sofia, Istanbul and Athens.

Part one of the monograph focuses on the economic and social aspects of village life in the area around the city of Edirne and the southwestern Peloponnese. In the beginning of this section, Parveva provides an overview of the villages under examination in the area around Edirne, which she groups into three categories: villages belonging to *vakefs*, *timars* and *hases* and included in the tax-farming (*iltizam*) system. Parveva offers a detailed analysis of the structure, contents and dating of land surveys of the villages in the area around Edirne. She devotes particular attention to the Arab unit of measurement, the *cerib*, which was used to measure and register the land in the villages, and how it compares to the Ottoman unit, the *dönüm*.

In the first chapter Parveva examines the everyday lives and festivals of the population in the Edirne villages. The villages had 681 men on register, who were probably heads of households (*hane*) and possessed and cultivated land. The majority of the registered peasants had the status of *reaya*. There were also representatives of the ruling class (*askeris*) among the villagers. Their presence was relatively insignificant: 59 men, or 9 percent of the registered village inhabitants. Four of the villages in question were inhabited exclusively by Christians, while two others were inhabited exclusively by Muslims. The remainder were very small and were mixed in their religious makeup. Overall more than two-thirds of the registered men in the villages were Christians (Bulgarians and Greeks). In addition to the local residents, the *defters* registered peasants from other villages or townsmen who had landholdings in these villages.

The chapter offers snapshots of everyday life in the villages and the festivals held by the village people. It also reconstructs some of the stereotypes regarding their attitudes and behavior. It highlights certain aspects of the real and imaginary

worlds in which people lived, and this may help further our understanding the land-use patterns and agricultural activity of the villagers. Parveva devotes particular attention to the village environment, the toponyms in the village boundaries as a bearer of historical memory, and people's perceptions of and reactions to natural disasters and the deadly diseases of the time. On the basis of contemporary accounts, she tells of the guardians and villains in the imaginary world of peasants and offers descriptions of the holy places for Christians and Muslims from the area.

In the second chapter, Parveva addresses the issues of reclamation and organization of agrarian space within the territory of the village. She studies the distribution of land in the village territory and the methods and degree of its reclamation within the framework of Ottoman law concerning agrarian land. She also analyzes various sectors of the village territory, including fields, vineyards, gardens, forests, common pastures, meadows and vacant fertile land. She examines various models of behavior among village people in the processes of land acquisition and the organization of its cultivation, and she reveals the influence of the urban center on the patterns of reclamation of agrarian land in the villages, both near and far, of its hinterland. 71 percent of the land that was suitable for sowing was cultivated. Aggregate data regarding the individual village territories show that in 67 percent of the villages in question the process of land reclamation was considerably advanced (between 65 and 97 percent) or had been completed. In the rest of the villages (one-third of the total number), the share of reclaimed land was below 50 percent and was far lower in comparison with the villages from the first group. In fact, most of these villages were situated in relatively mountainous areas and had large territories and common pastures, which made them more suitable for cattle-breeding.

The scarcity of land in the villages was not an insurmountable obstacle to the economic activity of farmers. In close proximity to their villages they had an additional stock of land which offset the land shortage in their own territory. This was the arable land of the *mezraas*, the *müsellem çiftlik*s and the territory of neighboring villages that included lands that were still vacant and un-reclaimed. Strangers cultivated their scattered (*perakende*) fields in these lands.

In the third chapter, Parveva focuses on the yield of grain crops and the productive capacity of the *raiyet çiftlik* (*çift*). She offers a historical reconstruction of the “model of production” of cereals in one *raiyet çiftlik* in the *kazas* of Arcadia and Anavarin on the basis of villagers' reports regarding the yield ratio of grain, the tax legislation and the consumption rates of cereals. According

to her findings, villagers in the southwestern Peloponnese applied a three-field system of crop rotation as they cultivated their fields. They sowed wheat, barley, oats, millet and rye, but not all of the villages had the full scope of crops. Villagers sowed between 12 and 20 *kile* in one *raiye* *çiftlik*. In a regular year, they harvested 3.7 to 7 times more grain than they had sown. Wheat was not the dominant crop in the villagers' fields and normally made up only about one-third or half of the harvest. The cereal harvest in the *raiye* *çiftlik*s in the two *kazas* was enough to feed the family, pay the tithe and the *saliye*, and put aside what was needed for sowing. Some quantity of grain was left over, and this surplus ranged between 10 percent and 45 percent of the whole harvest. The surplus was biggest in the villages and *çiftlik*s in the plain (32 percent to 45 percent). The harvest in the hilly, semi-mountainous and mountainous areas left much smaller surpluses, between 10 percent and 16 percent. Both the quantity and the monetary equivalent of the grain surplus varied from highs of 1,823 *akçes* in the flat areas to lows of 164–272 *akçes* in the hilly and highland areas. Regarding the productive capacity of the *raiye* *çiftlik*, there were deficits at times. For instance, the village of Licudisi produced a harvest with an 18 percent deficit.

This analysis is followed by a reconstruction of the productive capacity of an average *raiye* *çiftlik* in the *kazas* of Arcadia and Anavarin. This time, the analysis of the figures focuses on the grain surplus that was left in the farmers' hands after they had paid their tithe and *saliye* and put aside what they needed for subsistence and for the next sowing. Villagers sowed an average of 16.9 *kile* of grain in the fields of a *çift*. This yielded a harvest of 92.5 *kile* (2.4 tons), or roughly 5.5 times as much. Nearly one-third (31 percent) of this grain remained as surplus for the producer. The average monetary equivalent of this surplus was 739 *akçes*. In the period in question, this amount was enough to cover the old regular monetary taxes (the poll tax, or *cizye*), even after it was reformed and increased in 1691, and the *ispence*. But it was not enough to cover the other levies of the *avarız* category or the new set of provincial taxes.

The quantified productive capacity of the average *raiye* *çiftlik* leads one to the conclusion that when the *çift-hane* system was developed and applied in an economic environment that was more favorable for villagers, it was easier to strike the desired balance of production, consumption and taxation. Obviously, this balance was in jeopardy or already disturbed from the late sixteenth century on, when the Ottoman authorities, in response to the pressures of frequent socio-economic, military, and political crises, transformed extraordinary taxes into regular annual levies and introduced a new set of provincial taxes. The

inclusion of these new levies and taxes in the annual tax list of villagers created an opportunity to transform the average *çiftlik* from a surplus-making production unit into a deficit-making one.

In the third chapter, Parveva analyzes the agrarian strategies in the micro-economies of the various types of settlements, depending on the environmental conditions, the production capacity of the *raiyet çiftlik*, and the road and market infrastructure in the area of the two *kazas* under examination in the southwestern Peloponnese. Chapter four examines the property characteristics and social profiles of villagers in southeastern Thrace, i.e. the area around Edirne. The analysis of the economic and social status of peasants is based on the “model of production” of cereals in one *raiyet çiftlik* and the agrarian strategies that were adopted in the villages of southwestern Peloponnese.

Data about the peasant landholdings in the hinterland of Edirne bears evidence of the existence of a growing polarization in the distribution of land among the members of the rural community. This is seen in the comparison of the size of lands cultivated by the poor in each village and the lands of their affluent fellow villagers. The difference is usually significant. This polarization is also evident in comparisons of different villages when they are viewed as communities of landholders.

The first part of this chapter examines the issue of poverty among villagers and raises several major questions:

What were the specific causes of poverty in a given village?

When did the Ottoman authorities designate a village as poor?

What terminology was used for this designation in the official records?

What consequences were there for taxpayers and the Treasury when a village was designated as poor?

How did villagers conduct themselves in times of impoverishment?

The authorities kept track of the economic status of the taxpayers at the level of the settlement and not the individual household. In the official tax documents, the designations “poor,” “very poor,” and “extremely poor” were applied to a village the residents of which, as a community of taxpayers, were unable to pay part or all of the taxes owed by the village. The quantitative parameters of poverty in the villages and their residents in the *nahiyes* Üsküdar, Manastır and Çoke in the *kaza* of Edirne are studied on the basis of data from the *avarız defter*s from the 1670s and 1680s. Overall, in 1676 only 7 percent of households in the three *nahiye* lived in villages that had been officially designated by the clerks as “poor,” “very poor,” or “extremely poor,” i.e. unable to pay part

or all of the taxes due. An analysis of the impoverishment of the villages in a period of some 20 years (1669–1686) reveals several patterns in this process. It becomes clear that poverty was brought about by long-term and short-term factors related to the changing economic and military-political situation and the hardships, crises or recoveries that accompanied them. An equally important role was played by natural disasters, which were often followed by poor harvests and deadly epidemics.

The second part of chapter four concerns the well-to-do peasants. The land *defters* of the Edirne villages show that 29 percent of the villagers with the status of *reaya* cultivated two or more *çiftlik*s: 20 percent cultivated 2 to 3.9 *çifts* and 9 percent cultivated 4 to 12 *çifts*.

The prerequisites for the emergence of this layer of well-to-do peasants can be sought in the available opportunities for cultivation of more land that could yield good crops, resulting in the production of surpluses, which could in turn be sold on the market. This chain of prerequisites could be supplemented by the surplus in animal husbandry and its commercialization. Parveva devotes particular attention to trade in grain and the participation of villagers in legal and illegal commercial exchange. She explores the importance of marketable agricultural products for the budget of the peasant family and the role that was played by the village markets and fairs in the process of selling the farm surpluses.

In the last section of chapter four, Parveva attempts to draw a profile of various professional and social groups in the rural communities. She outlines the property characteristics of the religious functionaries (priests and imams), craftsmen, strangers (*yabancı*), former Christians who had converted to Islam, and women, and analyzes their landholdings and other sources of income. She also studies the motives underlying their economic and social behavior.

Finally, a conclusion is made about the availability of land that was suitable for cultivation. Along with the incentives and restrictions of the economic, political and geographic milieu which created the preconditions necessary for property stratification of villagers, there were fundamental reasons that did not allow for the accumulation of wealth or property by affluent farmers to bring about any dramatic changes in the organization of agrarian production and land use patterns or to occasion any consequent alterations of the economic system or social order in the Empire. These reasons were enshrined in the Ottoman law regulating the principles of land ownership and inheritance. As is well-known, the ultimate owner of the land was the state, and peasants had only possession

rights. This legal regulation led to a number of restrictions on the management and inheritance of land and the inclusion of land in real commercial exchange, money-lending transactions, and so on. This legislative philosophy provided the Ottoman authorities with a tool with which to maintain control of land and ensure its cultivation in order to secure resources with which to implement their policies. At the same time, it deprived farmers of any opportunity to acquire wealth based on privately owned and unconditionally inherited land and also precluded any economic initiative of a larger scale, the introduction of new crops, or any improvements in agricultural technology or competition.

In chapter five, Parveva focuses on the *askeri çiftlik*s in the area around Edirne and the attitude of the representatives of the ruling class towards land and the agrarian sector of the Ottoman economy. She begins by analyzing the quantitative characteristics of the *askeri* landholdings according to data from the land surveys of 1669. This data reveal that the picture of *askeri çiftlik*s established in and around Edirne is not exceptional in terms of the proliferation of *çiftlik* agriculture in general and the scope of individual *çiftlik*s in the Balkans. Most *askeri* landholdings were small in size. Parveva analyzes the ratio of *askeri* to *reaya* landholdings in the villages in order to determine the involvement of the *askeris* in the process of land reclamation in the village territory and establish the place of the *askeri çiftlik*s in the agrarian space under examination. When the 21 villages and 2 *mezraas* are considered as a whole, one finds that 72 percent of the arable land belonged to the *reaya* landholdings and 28 percent to the *askeri* landholdings. This offers further evidence that the *reaya* peasants remained the main producers and landholders. Essentially, their economic activity supplied agricultural produce for the large consumers, the markets, and export. Although the intervention of representatives of the ruling class in agricultural production was obvious, the principles of the imperial agrarian system, founded on the *raiyyet çiftlik*, were not transformed. Parveva examines the inventories of inheritances (*tereke defter*s) of three representatives of the *askeri* group who held *çiftlik*s in the villages.

In the second section of the book, Parveva addresses the issue of land reclamation and organization of the agrarian space in the town. This section consists of two chapters. Chapter one focuses on the town of Arcadia and chapter two on the towns of Silistra, Sofia and Vidin. The two chapters offer a reconstruction and analysis of the agrarian space in the Balkan town and the agrarian activity of town dwellers in the period under examination. The data demonstrates the existence of well-mastered and organized agrarian space in

the town. Despite the various opportunities for economic activity offered by the town, town dwellers maintained their interest in land cultivation. Attracted by the opportunity to supply the town market and the desire to avoid it when family subsistence was concerned, the townsmen invested capital, time and labor in the cultivation of land and the breeding of livestock. As a result, both large and small plots of land were cultivated in the residential area and in the territory of the town. For some town dwellers, agrarian activities were probably the main source of income, while for others they were only an additional part of the family budget. For still others, the landholdings were a matter of wealth and social status.

The different priorities in the agrarian activity of town dwellers and villagers predetermined the differences in the agrarian landscape of the two types of territories. While the arable land in villages was reclaimed mostly for grain fields, the town's land-use area was dominated by vineyards, gardens and meadows. As for the bread and fodder, the townsmen relied on the grains that were produced in the rural hinterland and sold on the urban markets.*

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