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## **Negotiating nature : ecology, politics, and nomadism in the forests of Mediterranean Anatolia, 1870-1920**

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## Being a Forest Laborer in Late Ottoman Mediterranean Anatolia

This chapter examines the subsistence practices of the Tahtacı in the rapidly changing ecological, economic, and political environment of late Ottoman Mediterranean Anatolia, which became warmer, less forested, and more integrated with regional and global markets over a short period of time. As the previous chapters have illustrated, the intensification of commercial agriculture and forestry in the nineteenth century made the region an arena of power struggles over natural resources. The wide range of diverse, flexible strategies of the Tahtacı allowed them to cope with increasing commercialization in forestry and the penetration of the modern state.

As a background to the changing subsistence practices of Tahtacı, the first part of the chapter sketches the nature of their work: Lumbering. This reveals the challenges and opportunities the Tahtacı had from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Timber harvesting was a labor-intensive job that could not be replaced by any contemporaneous technology, and it required specialized, local knowledge of the trees and forests that scientific foresters were lacking. The expertise and labor of the Tahtacı was therefore of vital importance for both timber merchants and forest officials.

As the second part of the chapter demonstrates, in the mid-century, as a result of the increasing demand for mass production in forestry and the gradual expansion of market relations, the Tahtacı became more impover-

ished and dependent on timber merchants. Due to their debt burden, they were trapped in a monopolistic relation with local notables who had the political and economic influence to win tenders, hire large ships, and bypass bureaucratic procedures. In this process, the Tahtacı communities not only had to cope with chronic debt but also new liabilities imposed by an administration that was implementing more aggressive policies in order to increase its control over natural and human resources. The bonded labor and specialized expertise of the Tahtacı communities made the nineteenth century the golden age for timber trade in the Mediterranean region.

The third part of the chapter deals with the question of how Tahtacı communities responded to the demands of the central authority and the pressures of the expanding market. For the Tahtacı one of the most concrete reflections of the modern state in their daily life was compulsory military service. Especially from the second half of the nineteenth century, military conscription practices were volatile and context-dependent, which provided room for the Tahtacı communities to maneuver.<sup>1</sup> As an experienced hill society, they developed complicated strategies to avoid military duty. In peace times, when the demand for forest products as well as forest labor increased, the strategy was not to move deeper into the mountains, since their clients were at low altitudes. Instead some claimed exemption from military service by manipulating the vague boundaries of conscription practices. Only in times of war, when work opportunities in lowlands diminished and military obligations increased, did they resort to outlawed strategies such as taking to the hills and banditry.

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- 1 For detailed information on the conscription policies of the Ottoman Empire and popular reactions, see Erik J. Zürcher, "The Ottoman Conscription System In Theory And Practice, 1844-1918," in *Arming the State: Military Conscription in the Middle East and Central Asia, 1775-1925*, ed. Erik J. Zürcher (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999); Mehmet Beşikçi, *The Ottoman Mobilization of Manpower in the First World War: Between Voluntarism and Resistance* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Mehmet Beşikçi, "Mobilizing Military Labor in the Age of Total War: Ottoman Conscription before and during the Great War," in *Fighting For a Living: A Comparative History of Military Labour, 1500-2000*, ed. Erik J. Zürcher (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014); Gültekin Yıldız, *Neferin Adı Yok: Zorunlu Askerliğe Geçiş Sürecinde Osmanlı Devleti'nde Siyaset, Ordu ve Toplum (1826-1839)* (Istanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 2009).

Contrary to the generally accepted perception that the Tahtacı were isolated communities detached from the rest of the society, the Tahtacı intentionally adopted a less mobile life at lower altitudes - closer to sedentary peasants and the administration - despite increasing administrative and economic pressures. Due to their vital importance for forestry, the administration made no serious efforts to settle them.<sup>2</sup> The Tahtacı gradually left peripatetic strategies over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some became involved in pastoral strategies while others became wage laborers. Unlike pastoral nomadic groups who used the opportunity to obtain land by intermarriage with agricultural groups, the Tahtacı as an endogamic community, had no such an opportunity.<sup>3</sup> However, unlike many other peripatetic groups, they obtained land by purchasing it from local settled communities. Lands made available when rural populations descended to much lower altitudes also made it possible for the Tahtacı to realize permanent settlement.

## § 6.1 Lumbering as a Labor-Intensive Work

In late Ottoman Anatolia, processing and transportation of wood was more challenging than it is today. The first sawmills were established as late as 1892.<sup>4</sup> According to a report of the English consul dated 1902,<sup>5</sup> there were several steam sawmills working nonstop in Izmir. However, the use of sawmills was not widespread in Anatolia, and those that existed were insufficient in terms of their technological capabilities. Forest laborers and peasants used axes and handsaws to cut and split the trees.<sup>6</sup>

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- 2 Forced sedentism was not a widespread phenomenon in the story of the sedentarization of Tahtacı groups. As a rare example, in 1887 a group of nomadic Tahtacı was sedentarized in Savcılar, Simav. Since then, the tribe was occupied with agriculture. See BOA, DH.EUM.2.Şb, 58/8, 14 Zilkade 1336 [21 August 1918].
  - 3 See Neyzi; Naci Kum-Atabeyli, "Türkmen Yürük ve Tahtacılar Arasında Tetkikler Görüşler: Tahtacı Türklerinde Manevi Kültür," *Türk Folklor Araştırmaları* 1, no. 11 (1950): 175.
  - 4 Küçük, 39.
  - 5 TNA, FO, 195/2134, 1902.
  - 6 Dursun, 306. The British report mentioned above states that even though hydraulic saw mills were introduced, trees continued to be felled by axes and sawed by hand on the spot.

The report of Niyazi Bey, dated 1918,<sup>7</sup> provides a vivid depiction of this labor-intensive work. The first task of the laborers, he wrote, was to find proper trees, of which the Tahtacı mostly processed pine, cedar, and sometimes fir. The second task was to cut off the useless top part of the tree and chop the wood into logs. The length of the logs ranged from 2 to 5 meters. Since trees were taller on the hilltops, logs from higher altitudes could reach up to 6 meters in length. The bodies of trees were cleaned of branches and knolls and processed. Since it was difficult to transport the trees, processing took place in the forest. Approximately 20 planks with lengths of 2-3 meters, widths of 20-30 centimeters, and thicknesses of 1.5-2.5 centimeters were made from each log. A large tree could render 300 *salma*, thin planks used in roof construction, of 4-4.5 meters each. Processing wood necessitated specialized knowledge and years of experience. Niyazi Bey admiringly describes the Tahtacı communities' way of swinging their axes that weighted a couple of kilos and their ability to direct thirty meter tall trees to fall wherever they wanted them to, taking into account the wind and nearby saplings.

The hardest part of the job was transportation. The value per cubic meter of timber was about seventy-three *kuruş* in 1895, including the cost of cutting and processing, which was thirty *kuruş*. Transferring timber from mountains to ports was such challenging work that the value of the timber reached about one hundred *kuruş* once the cost of transportation was included.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the wage for cutting, processing, and transferring timber was approximately sixty *kuruş* per cubic meter in challenging cases. Men and sometimes boys were responsible for transporting the planks to the rivers, usually with donkeys and mules, which were appropriate draft animals in rough terrain.

Carrying timber over rough, bumpy paths with the help of mules was challenging, as Niyazi Bey states, and was much more expensive in the Taurus Mountains than in much of Europe. One important reason was that

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Saw mills were of native construction and worked with manpower. The best saw mill could turn out 200 planks in 24 hours. See TNA, FO, 195/2134, 1902.

7 BOA, DH.EUM.2.Şb, 67/54, 20 Haziran 1334 [20 June 1918].

8 BOA, İ.OM, 3/3, 4 Safer 1313 [27 July 1895].

sledges used for the transportation of timber in mountains across Europe were inapplicable in the geographical conditions of Taurus Mountains, so trees had to be cut into pieces before being transported. Timber had to be carried on the lumberjacks' shoulders from where they were cut and processed to places where donkeys and mules could reach.<sup>9</sup>

Transportation over water was the most widespread way of getting forest products from high altitudes to the ports. The Tahtacıs relied on experience, transferred from generation to generation pertaining to the use of waterways to transport timber to the coast. The Tahtacıs in Mersin can still explain in detail how their grandfathers and grandmothers used the Göksu River to carry tons of timber from the plateaus of Bucakkışla, Aladağ, and Kahtama<sup>10</sup> to Silifke. In the Antalya region, the Akçay Stream was used to carry logs to Finike.<sup>11</sup> In Aydın the Akçay river enabled timber to be taken to railways at the center of the province.<sup>12</sup>

Lumbering necessitated the mobilization of a large number of skilled laborers with local knowledge of trees, forests, paths, and waterways. Since it required specialized expertise that could not be supplied by scientific foresters or replaced by any technological alternatives of the time, timber merchants and administrators were dependent on the Tahtacıs. Tahtacı communities gained this expertise by accumulating experience over generations. For at least six hundred years, they had wandered and earned their living in the Mediterranean mountains. In challenging conditions, they harvested timber and firewood for local communities. With the intensification of commercial forestry due to the increasing need for forest products, their labor and artisanship became more crucial than ever before. Their labor and expertise were indispensable for the continued provision and transportation of large amounts of forest products.

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9 BOA, DH.EUM.2.Şb, 67/54, 20 Haziran 1334 [20 June 1918].

10 D. A. (1950), Dalakderesi/Mersin, 11.08.2015; S. K. (1958), Köprübaşı/Mersin, 12.08.2015; F. B. (1942), Köprübaşı/Mersin, 13.08.2015.

11 V. A. (1951), Akçainiş/Antalya, 20.04.2016.

12 TNA, FO, 195/2134, 1902.

The nature of the work created two outcomes in terms of the subsistence of the Tahtacı communities. First, unlike other peripatetic groups, Tahtacı adapted their craft to new conditions and carried on their traditional occupation for a longer time. On the other hand, the commodification of forests transformed them into bonded laborers due to their increasing dependence on traders.

## § 6.2 The Impact of the New Forestry on Forest-Dependent Communities

### 6.2.1 *Debt Bondage and Migration*

Until the last quarter of the century, when the first concrete, modern forestry methods were introduced, merchants were the main beneficiaries of forest resources. The utilization of forest products was based on agreements made between merchants and forest laborers. The conditions of these agreements were the main reason forest laborers were driven into debt. Merchants bargained with sedentary peasants and peripatetic communities for the production and transportation of certain amounts of timber to be delivered by given dates. The merchants usually provided the animals used for the transportation of the timber as an advance payment on the condition that, after finishing their job, the laborers pay for the animals with interest. The merchants usually overcharged for these animals, which constituted an additional source of income for the merchants. For their basic needs, laborers could also be paid in advance, which was a further opportunity for merchants to charge interest. After the products were transported to the ports, the cost of the animals and other provisions, advance payments, interest, and taxes were deducted from the market price of the timber. This calculation always ended with the laborer becoming indebted to the merchant.<sup>13</sup> Some merchants intentionally manipulated the weight of the timber to their advantage.<sup>14</sup>

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13 Bricogne, 10.

14 Öztel, 297.



A decree of the Supreme Council dated 1857<sup>15</sup> referred to contracts signed among peripatetic Tahtacı tribes and local notables in Menteşe. The terms of these contracts reveal the working conditions of Tahtacı groups as well as their relations with timber merchants. Each contract was signed between a group of Tahtacıs consisting of fifteen to twenty people and an agha, who was a local notable or merchant. These contracts were valid for three years. There was an exclusive relationship between the Tahtacıs and the aghas, which meant that their timber could be sold to no one else except the agha for whom they were currently working. The food and animals provided by aghas were valued at higher market prices, whereas the timber processed by the Tahtacıs was valued at much lower than the market rate for timber. For instance, four *kuruş* of timber could be valued at two *kuruş*. In this way, an agha could earn an income of 80,000-100,000 *kuruş* plus a twenty percent *güzeşte zammı* (interest collected on debt). Since expenditures increased annually, it was impossible for Tahtacı families to repay their debts. In some cases, debt-ridden people were obliged to give away their products for free unless they could find another agha willing to pay their debts. Thus, the Tahtacıs became “prisoners of a few people, with an increasing debt day by day.” “In order to provide prosperity and order,” according to the Supreme Council, an ordinance was enacted. Accordingly, exorbitant prices were to be amended and the accounting was to be just. Moreover, the income of the Tahtacıs was to be paid in appropriate installments calculated according to the estimated amount they would produce. Finally, in order for the Tahtacıs to be able to pay their installments, they would be allowed to sell their timber to whomever they wished. So, in the early period of the commodification of forests from the beginning of the 1850s to the early 1870s, in certain circumstances, the administration intervened in local conflicts in favor of laborers.

A petition submitted by a group of Tahtacıs some fifteen years after this case describes a similar situation. According to their complaint, they had migrated from Alâiye to Mersin to work in timber production. The petition-

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15 BOA, İ.MVL, 375/16468, 17 Zilhicce 1273 [8 August 1857].

ers complained that the timber merchant Nikola overcharged them for provisions he supplied during their work and bought their products for less than its value on the market. Nikola claimed 33,435 *kuruş* from the laborers, whereas they stated that he forced them to pay for timber that was lost or destroyed after they had delivered it to the merchant. An investigation committee was established following this complaint. The committee, presided by Abdulkadir, prepared a chart of accounts including the debts between the timber merchant and the community - four households consisting of some fifty people in total. The committee decided that the merchant had to pay two thirds of the price of the damaged timber. Accordingly, the debt of the community decreased to 4,182 *kuruş* through the intervention of the administration after the petition of the Tahtacı.<sup>16</sup>

Another story of the arbitrary practices of local notables towards the Tahtacı came from Biga. According to a record dated 1865, the timber merchant Ahmed mistreated a group of Tahtacı who worked for him. This community had been living in the Kala-i Sultâniye and Ayvacık districts since 1845. Demanding 4,000 *kuruş* from the community, he not only seized the money of Kara Ali, Koca Mustafaoglu Mahmud, Mehmed Ali, and Kadiroğlu Mustafa by force but also turned them into his debtors by preparing a debt certificate for 26,000 *kuruş*. Thereafter, he brought them to Karesi in chains and sold their mules, obtaining 7,500 *kuruş* from the sale. Moreover, he beat one with his rifle and released them only after they accepted an additional debt certificate for another 2,000 *kuruş*. The man tortured by Ahmed died three days later.<sup>17</sup>

In this period, it was common among Tahtacı families to move to neighboring regions to escape deepening debt and pressure from local notables. The migration routes Tahtacı groups followed were shaped by the accessibility of forest resources and local power relations. There were two trends in the Teke region during the 1850s and 60s. The first was to move from the western to the eastern Taurus, where, due to increasing demand from Egypt for Anatolian timber to be used in the construction of the Suez Canal, there was a

16 BOA, ŞD, 2117/1, 7 Nisan 1288 [19 April 1872].

17 BOA, MVL, 704/3, 6 Muharrem 1282 [1 June 1865]

huge need for labor in the forests. The second tendency was to migrate to the Aegean region, where commercial agriculture was widespread. Several petitions in the Ottoman Archives were submitted by local notables during the 1850s and 1860s demanding the return of Tahtacı communities that had migrated due to their unpaid debts.

A petition dated 1854, for example, indicates that a group of Tahtacıs in Teke had moved to İçil and Adana without paying their debts. The claimants from the Zenâiroğlu family thereupon demanded that the administration collect the debt from the community members who had stayed in Teke.<sup>18</sup> According to another document, dated 1858, a group of Tahtacıs moved from Antalya to Adana, where there was a larger demand for timber workers. A group of merchants in Antalya sued them claiming that they had left the province without paying their debts. Thereupon, the community submitted a petition to defend themselves in which they stated that they had no occupation other than timber harvesting and had to migrate to Adana to work in the forests.<sup>19</sup> A similar migration from Teke was mentioned in a document issued in 1866. Some members of the Tahtacı community in Teke moved to Menteşe without paying their taxes.<sup>20</sup>

According to a document dated 1862, merchants from the Zenâiroğlu family submitted an additional petition claiming that a group of Tahtacıs, consisting of 21 households that had pursued a mobile way of life within the boundaries of the Teke district, migrated to the Menteşe subprovince without paying a debt of 90,515 *kuruş*. The merchants demanded their return to Teke and claimed that the new customers of the Tahtacıs were not allowing their return to the Teke district. They were worried that Tahtacıs who had stayed in Teke would escape, too, so long as the local government refused to

18 BOA, A.MKT.DV, 80/9, 24 Safer 1271 [16 November 1854].

19 BOA, A.MKT.UM, 345.87, 4 Safer 1275, [13 September 1858]

20 BOA, MVL, 722/20, 8 Rebiülevvel 1283 [21 July 1866]. Yılğür refers to an official decree dated 1866 that indicates that despite all the efforts of the Ottoman administration, it faced difficulties collecting taxes from the communities called *Kıbtî* due to their highly mobile way of life. As a result, a considerable debt of unpaid taxes accumulated in this period. Egemen Yılğür, "Son Dönem Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Devlet ve "Çingeneler": Vergi, Askerlik ve Adlandırma Meseleleri," *MSGSÜ Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 2, no. 18 (2018): 279.

interfere in the matter.<sup>21</sup> In 1868, contrary to the claim that it declined to intervene, the government of Teke demanded the repatriation of Tahtacı who had moved to Menteşe subprovince to escape their debts to locals. The Aydın district governor corresponded, however, that it was not possible to return the Tahtacı. It had been about twenty years since they arrived in Aydın, and they were generally pursuing a sedentary way of life.<sup>22</sup>

The monopoly of the notables over the labor and products of the Tahtacı as well as the perpetuation of community-based taxation practices caused many conflicts at the local level. For example, in the aforementioned case, other members of the Tahtacı community in Teke began paying the share of the taxes of Tahtacı families that had moved to Menteşe, which amounted to 15,420 *kuruş*.<sup>23</sup> Another document dated 1857 mentions seventy-six Tahtacı and Abdal families that “slipped away” from the Teke district to the regions of İçil, Adana, and Konya without paying debts to merchants and their taxes for the years 1854, 1855, and 1856. The tax burden for just 1855 was 28,000 *kuruş*. Moreover, twenty-three nomadic Tahtacı families in the Tarsus district had debts amounting to 200,000 *kuruş* to Tarsus merchants.<sup>24</sup>

The demands of petitioners were usually not accepted. Allowing the migration of Tahtacı to regions where timber production was widespread was actually compatible with the interests of some timber merchants as well as the administration. Since the Tahtacı were skilled workers whose labor was cheap, it was contrary to the interests of timber merchants to allow Tahtacı communities to leave productions area and resettle in their previous places. Furthermore, authorities noticed that overburdening the Tahtacı and limiting their mobility from one district to another caused deeper problems. The conflicting positions among officials and notables created room for the Tahtacı to maneuver. Notwithstanding the growing pressure of local merchants and indebtedness, many Tahtacı groups escaped taxes and obligations related to their deepening debt by moving elsewhere.

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21 BOA, A.MKT.DV, 219/49, 7 Ramazan 1278 [8 March 1862].

22 BOA, ŞD, 1375/1, 17 Nisan 1284 [29 April 1868].

23 BOA, A.MKT.DV, 219/49, 7 Ramazan 1278 [8 March 1862].

24 BOA, A.MKT.MHM, 128 89, 7 Safer 1274 [27 September 1857].

### 6.2.2 *Tax Liabilities and Compulsory Work*

Communities that depended on felling and transporting wood and timber were most affected by the new forest regulations.<sup>25</sup> The revocation of usufruct rights to forests that villagers had held since “time immemorial” led to a considerable increase in their tax burden related to the production and selling of timber, firewood, and charcoal.

A relatively early document dispatched by the Teke subprovince in 1858 mentions a dispute about a newly emerged tax liability. The people of the Finike, İğdir, and Kardıç subdistricts had bought grains from people in Antalya who had bought timber from them for decades. Because the roads were difficult, they had transported the timber and grains on boats. Since the promulgation of the Tanzimat regime in 1838, which abolished the arbitrary fees collected by local officials and establish a standardized, centralized system of taxation - at least in theory -, they had been exempt from paying any customs for this trade. Recognizing the customary trade of vital products between local communities, the administration outlawed tax collection on the trade between these people. However, in 1858, Cezzar Mustafa, the customs collector (*gümrük mütezimi*) in Antalya, imposed a customs duty on his own initiative. He did not allow the people to transfer their products unless they paid the tax. The people of Finike, İğdir, and Kardıç refused to pay.<sup>26</sup> According to Cezzar Mustafa, in order to be exempt from taxes, profiteers made their commodities look like vital needs. He also argued that this custom was valid only for products transported overland not by water. Despite local resistance, the practice of collecting a 12 percent customs tax was approved by the central government given that the regulations and tender agreement that authorized Cezzar Mustafa did not contain any reference to this custom.<sup>27</sup>

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25 Dursun, “Forest and the State: History of Forestry and Forest Administration in the Ottoman Empire,” 242.

26 BOA, MVL, 568/35, 7 Şaban 1274 [23 March 1858]; BOA, A.MKT.NZD, 231/12, 8 Zilhicce 1273 [30 July 1857].

27 BOA, A.MKT.UM, 379/80, 23 Rebiülâhir 1276 [19 November 1859].

The change of the status of forests from “communal” ones utilized by local populations to “state” forests under the Forest Regulation of 1870 meant additional tax liabilities and fines in cases when the regulation was violated, which caused prevalent social unrest and sometimes a reaction to the administration at the local level. One example was a group of woodsmen from the Alâiye district who, in 1887, sent a petition to the Ministry of Internal Affairs asking to allow the free production of timber and firewood as in the past. The petitioners complained that they had suffered famine “since the forests were policed by being assessed as cubic meters.”<sup>28</sup> This statement clearly manifests the connection between the needs to quantify the forest and to discipline its residents. Similar to the pattern in other countries, the Ottoman Empire’s attempts at the scientification of forestry and maintenance of “public order” in forests dramatically altered the means of subsistence of populations that earned their livelihood by producing timber and charcoal. As the woodsmen incisively described in their petition, counting and measuring (*ta’dâd ve müсахâ*) was the first step towards the confiscation and appropriation (*zabt ve kabz*) of products.

In 1912, villagers who made their living producing timber in the forests of Bolu also submitted a number of petitions protesting the abolishment of their rights to free use of coppices and their rising tax burden. They expressed their complaints about the new forestry regime that had been brought into effect in their district three years earlier. Since the mountains around their villages began to be considered state property, their tax burden rose substantially.<sup>29</sup> When production costs were added to this, “nothing was left in their hands except troubles” due to the bad working conditions.<sup>30</sup> In their petitions villagers accused the administration of violating the law and asked officials to end their suffering by reverting to the old common law until the people approved the new one.<sup>31</sup> As the demand of the villagers indicat-

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28 “... ormanların metre ve mik’ab olmasına vaz’ olunarak taht-ı inzibâta alınması hasebiyle...” See BOA, DH.MKT, 1460/32, 16 Safer 1305 [3 November 1887].

29 BOA, T.OMİ, 1701/36, 5 Nisan 1328 [18 April 1912].

30 BOA, T.OMİ, 1701/36, 22 Nisan 1328 [5 May 1912].

31 BOA, T.OMİ, 1701/32, 24 Nisan 1328 [7 May 1912].

ed, “what the state defines as criminal often differs substantially from the peasant definition of crime.”<sup>32</sup>

According to the new law, those caught cutting trees without permission or beyond the boundaries of their certificates had to pay twice as much for the right to use the forest for their livelihood, in addition to a punitive stamp tax and tithe. Seventy percent of the tithe was paid to the informant who denounced the “illegal” cutting and thirty percent to the forest officer. Furthermore, illegally cut trees were confiscated. In accordance with this rule, Tahtacıs living in the Tarsus district had to pay twice as much tax in 1906 due to illegal tree removal from the Kırgedîği *mirî* forests of Adana province. The additional costs ran up to over 4,000 *kuruş*.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, upon an investigation carried out by Ahmed Muhtar, the chief forest inspector in Belgrad, and by Galib, a clerk from the Forestry Ministry in the Tarsus forests, the Tahtacıs in this area paid 8,747 *kuruş* logging outside the boundaries defined in their authorization certificate.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to formal taxes, the rural population was also forced to pay extra fees and fines and perform compulsory work. For example, it was widespread practice for forest officers to collect arbitrary fees called *dağ hakkı* (mountain duty) and *kum hakkı* (sand duty).<sup>35</sup> Similarly, according to a petition written by Musa and Mustafa, two Tahtacıs from Aydın province, the governor of Bayındır District, Tevfik, unjustly collected 4,750 *kuruş* from the community as a penalty; moreover, he put them in prison.<sup>36</sup> Another Tahtacı community that inhabited the Torbalı district complained about the commander of the Aydın province who forced them to cut timber from the forest of their villages and transport it to İzmir with their own animals for free to

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32 Peluso, *Rich Forests, Poor People: Resource Control and Resistance in Java*, 14.

33 BOA, ŞD, 537/14, 29 Şevval 1324 [16 December 1906]; BOA, BEO, 3101/232557, 5 Cemaziyelâhir 1325 [16 June 1907].

34 BOA, BEO, 3021/226564, 14 Safer 1325 [28 March 1907].

35 Çağlar, 55.

36 BOA, DH.MKT, 1438/23, 19 Zilkade 1304 [9 August 1887]; BOA, DH.MKT, 1449/108, 04 Muharrem 1305 [22 September 1887].

build his house.<sup>37</sup> There is no record indicating that the administration opened formal investigations into these complaints.

Another example of forced forest labor was a group of villagers in Kandıra district who earned a living by chopping wood, who were forced to work by the administration for the construction of the Kandıra Road. Because they could not do their own jobs in the course of this compulsory work, firewood that would have been sent to Istanbul could not be produced. Its provision, which was necessary to meet the needs of the population of Istanbul, was so critical that an inspector was sent to Kandıra to solve the problem. The inhabitants of two villages of Kandıra were obliged to cut 3,000 *çeki* of firewood, and the price determined by the administration for this job was much lower than its value on the market. Some villagers, who could not provide the firewood that the inspector demanded of them, had to buy firewood from merchants for 8 *kuruş* to sell to forest officers for 5 *kuruş*. Moreover, each household was forced to pay a 42-*kuruş* transportation fee. The inspector and two additional officers delivered the money to the firewood merchant Ahmed. This money transfer and infractions related to the mismeasurement of firewood produced by the villagers then became the subject of a separate investigation.<sup>38</sup> The final conclusion is not stated in the archival records.

Officials were concerned about the reaction of the rural population who had benefitted from the right to freely use the forests for hundreds of years and were then forced to pay extra taxes.<sup>39</sup> Due to the dissatisfaction of large segments of society with the new taxes, the Ottoman administration faced difficulties in enforcing the new forest regime. Based on his observation from Istanbul, Davis described the reactions to the new forest law as follows:<sup>40</sup>

A great disturbance even had been caused in various places on the north coast of Anatolia by an attempt to prevent the villagers from

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37 BOA, DH.MKT, 1655/48, 13 Muharrem 1317 [24 May 1899].

38 BOA, DH.MKT, 1214/29, 25 Şevval 1325 [1 December 1907]; BOA, DH.MKT, 2732/62, 16 Muharrem 1327 [7 February 1909].

39 Batmaz, Koç, and Çetinkaya, 1, vi-vii.

40 Davis, 132.



exercising their right of "forestry," a privilege they had enjoyed from time immemorial.

In order to prevent social disorder, the forest administration continued to recognize certain rights to the free grants of wood. One was the right of villagers who subsisted by lumbering to provide and sell timber and charcoal at the local market without paying taxes on the condition that they transfer these products using their own vehicles and animals. The regulation also allowed peasants to obtain cutting licenses without paying any taxes to supply timber and firewood for their vital needs from nearby forests.

The basic aim of these allowances was to support agricultural production. Therefore, the Tahtacı did not fully benefit from the continuance of the customary rights recognized by the administration. These rights were granted to peasants involved in agriculture under certain conditions and also to mostly sedentary lumbermen who were able to transport their products by using their own carts to be sold at the local market. Most Tahtacı groups were deprived of these opportunities.

With the expansion of market relations in forestry, the dependency of the Tahtacı on timber merchants dramatically increased. Since forests were transformed into commodities and forestry came to be considered a vital source of revenue, the Forest Administration was inclined to grant tenders for the massive removal of trees. Even though Tahtacı families could obtain cutting licenses that allowed them to fell trees for their own use, these licenses were issued for retail not wholesale basis (see, for example, Table 6.1).<sup>41</sup> The scale of the work in which merchants were involved was substantially larger, whereas the licenses the Tahtacı received allowed them to extract only small amounts of timber. Forest officers, who were insufficient in number, were unwilling to grant permission or to implement other procedures for such small-scale business that were a waste of time and profited neither the administration nor themselves personally.

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41 BOA, T.OMİ, 1698/10, 23 Mart 1326 [5 April 1910]; BOA, T.OMİ, 1698/21, 16 Mayıs 1326 [29 May 1910].

The interrogation of Topal Hüseyin, a member of the Tahtacı community from Keçeçınar village in Balıkesir, exemplifies the reluctance of forest officials to carry out the cutting procedures. Hüseyin was accused of lumbering beyond his authorization certificate. According to records of his interrogation, dated 1909, two families applied for cutting certificates from the Forest Administration and received authorization from the officer, Mahmud, to cut 8 cubic meters of timber from the dry forest around Kurtulmuş. Topal Hüseyin claimed in his statement that Mahmud neither provided the authorization document nor marked the trees, even though they paid the necessary fees and asked him to come to the forest and implement the procedures. Hüseyin thereupon claimed that this was regular practice.<sup>42</sup>

One of the main differences from previous centuries in terms of the working environment of the Tahtacı was that they rarely confronted their clients. The most common practice of earning a livelihood for Tahtacı communities in the late Ottoman era, especially given the increasing commercialization of forest products in the middle of the century, was to provide forest products to merchants who were involved in regional trade networks and capable of leasing *miri* forests for long-term use owing their relations with officials.<sup>43</sup> These merchants could obtain permission for mass cutting and find customers whose demand never ended.

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42 Chris Gratien, "Interview with a Woodsman," <http://www.docblog.ottomanhistorypodcast.com/2013/07/forest-tahtaci-ottoman-empire.html> [14.02.2018 / 13:58].

43 The contracts about tree cutting from *miri* forests signed between the Forest Administration and the merchants regulated rules about the laborers, among other things. Accordingly, laborers employed by a contractor had to be Ottoman subjects living in the forest area who derived their means of livelihood from the forests. Even though most of the profit belonged to the merchant and laborers were underpaid, responsibility and punishment were collective. According to the contracts signed between the administration and merchants, both the merchants and the laborers would be regarded as guilty in cases of cutting unmarked trees. See BOA, T.OMİ, 1695/43, 11 Mart 1324 [24 March 1908].

Table 6.1 List of felling licenses obtained by a group of Tahtacıs in Mut on 30 May 1909<sup>44</sup>

Name of the holder	Name of forest	Species	Unit	m <sup>3</sup>	d <sup>3</sup>
Aydınlı Tahtacılarından Âşık İsmail Hakkı	Kurudere	Black pine	80	52	254
Tahtacı Ali Kahya	Süzek	Black pine	120	26	140
Tahtacı Çıkık Hasan	Sazlıpınar	Black pine	112	26	294
Tahtacı Halit'in Hasan	Körkuyu	Black pine	100	25	896
Tahtacı Hasan Kahya	Yadmalı	Black pine	105	25	579
Tahtacı Abidin Kahya	Karataş	Black pine	115	24	818
Tahtacı İbrahim	Körpınar	Black pine	124	30	138
Totals			757	184	119

Deprived of the financial and political power to purchase trees in tenders or hire ships, the Tahtacıs were contracted by merchants who could win such tenders and how could skip procedures such as counting, measuring, and marking trees due to their organic relation with bureaucrats.<sup>45</sup> Despite local resistance and setbacks, the new forestry regime was implemented more systematically in the course of time. Forest utilization by rural populations, both

44 BOA, T.OMİ, 1698/10, 23 Mart 1326 [5 April 1910].

45 BOA, ŞD, 517/10, 7 Zilkade 1311 [12 May 1894]. For “ordinary” people, it was not so easy to skip the cutting procedures. On behalf of Çukurbağ village in Tarsus, the imam and mukhtar of the village submitted a petition to the local administration. The petitioners requested permission to produce 1,060 pieces of timber over one year from *mirî* forests located 15 km from their village and to sell them after paying the necessary forest taxes. The district governor and town administrator accepted this request, and the local people began to cut trees from the mentioned forests. However, Ramiz, the documentation inspector charged with the investigation of forests in this region, prepared a report that indicated that this practice was contrary to procedures since, according to the rules, regardless of the purpose of the applicants – whether to meet the urgent needs of local people or to trade on the market – they could only cut trees that had been marked by forest inspectors and forest officers. Ramiz stated that since local governments were not allowed to provide certificates to people without the inspection by the forest inspectors and officers, the district governor and town administrator needed to be interrogated for illegally granting cutting permits to the habitants of Çukurbağ and other villages. BOA, ŞD, 517/10, 7 Zilkade 1311 [12 May 1894].

sedentary peasants and nomadic craftsmen, was gradually restricted. By transforming the inhabitants and users of the forests into “trespassers,” forest officials and contractors in their network monopolized the utilization of the forests.

### § 6.3 Beyond Resistance and Compliance: New Adaptation Strategies of the Tahtacı

#### 6.3.1 *Tahtacı at the Intersection of Iranian, Gypsy, and Turkmen Identities*

The level and focal points of struggles between ordinary people and officials on military practices in the Ottoman Empire were volatile depending on the economic function of the community, local power struggles, and whether it was a time of war or peace. At times when economic activities diminished at lower altitudes, banditry became a strategy pursued more widely by communities in the Taurus region. Especially in the early seventeenth and the late eighteenth centuries, this was a common phenomenon in the Taurus Mountains.<sup>46</sup> Even though brigandage was weakened as a result of the decline of nomadism throughout the nineteenth century, many mountain forests remained secure shelters for communities resisting taxation and conscription policies, as they were for the Zomian people of Southeast Asia.<sup>47</sup>

During World War I banditry became a major issue for the government. Difficulties caused by the war created an environment for brigandage. Due to the conscription of young men and mules, the rise in the price of grains,<sup>48</sup> the recession in construction, and the end to timber exports to Lebanon and

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46 McNeill, *The Mountains of the Mediterranean World: An Environmental History*, 228-229.

47 Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*.

48 For the war economics in the Ottoman Empire during the World War I, see Zafer Toprak, *İttihad-Terakki ve Cihan Harbi: Savaş Ekonomisi ve Türkiye’de Devletçilik, 1914-1918* (Istanbul: Homer, 2003).

Egypt in this period, Tahtacı communities faced severe poverty.<sup>49</sup> Despite the fact that desertion from the military was not uncommon among the Tahtacıs, banditry among Tahtacı deserters was not widespread. As a rare example, some small-scale, armed fights occurred between Ottoman soldiers and Tahtacı groups in Aydın in March 1918.<sup>50</sup> The main tendency among the Tahtacıs, however, was to continue to work in timber harvesting.

This was a period when cheap wage-labor in lumbering expanded. Tahtacı children constituted an important segment involved in low wage

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- 49 In this period many timber merchants could not fulfill the obligations stated in their contracts. Before the war, the Anglo-Oriental Trading Company Limited in İzmir won a contract to benefit from 2,000 *kantar* of dry, barked pine trees from the forests of Bayındır district, Aydın. However, due to war conditions, it became difficult to find workers and vehicles, so the company could not import 300 *kantar* of bark. The director of the company demanded the extension of the contract. Both the administrative councils in the district and in the province rejected this request (BOA, BEO, 4325/324303, 10 Muharrem 1333 [28 November 1914]). Similarly, according to a contract dated 26 May 1907, timber merchant Vasil Vasiladi was allowed to obtain 25,000 *kantar* of firewood, 15,000 *kantar* of charcoal, and 15,000 wooden poles from a forest located in Teke, Konya province. In his petition, Vasiliadi says that due to a scarcity of forest labor and transportation facilities under the extraordinary conditions of war, it was not possible to extract these products in time. His first application demanding the extension of the contract was accepted. Due to continuing bad conditions, at the end of two additional years, on 14 May 1918, he demanded six extra months. This demand was not accepted. BOA, ŞD, 3136/68, 5 Receb 1334 [8 May 1916]. İbrahim Halil also demanded the extension of his cutting certificate that had allowed him the extraction of 7,000 *kantar* of bark from pine trees in the Bozburun *miri* forests situated in Köyceğiz for four years. He could not extract the products as he could not procure the necessary forest workers and vehicles due to continuous war. The Subdistrict Administrative Council accepted his request, whereas the District Administrative Council rejected his application upon the report of the Forest Office in Köyceğiz. BOA, BEO, 4449/333603, 13 Rebiülevvel 1335 [7 January 1917].
- 50 An armed fight took place in a forest in Bozdoğan in March 1918 between a Tahtacı militia and Ottoman soldiers charged with pursuing the group. After a one hour clash, four were killed and their leader was seriously wounded but eventually escaped. Moreover, two women and one child of their family were killed. About two weeks later, the governor of the Aydın province informed the Ministry of Internal Affairs that the “well-known” Tahtacı Mestan militia had finally been captured. See BOA, DH.EUM.6.Şb 34/2, 16 Cemaziyelâhir 1336 [29 March 1918]; BOA, DH.EUM.6.Şb, 35/32,5 Receb 1336 [16 April 1918].

employment. Some Tahtacı groups had to take up side-jobs such as roofer, construction worker, or porter.<sup>51</sup> Crafts related to their centuries-old occupation, such as carpentry and burning lime were also prominent among the Tahtacı.<sup>52</sup> Coal mining was another job that Tahtacı undertook in this period.<sup>53</sup> Some were recruited into the army for their experience in woodwork. During World War I, many Tahtacı groups were employed for lath production as a military service. According to the report of Niyazi Bey, a group of Tahtacı living in Gülek and Karaisalı worked in construction as a military service. Some Tahtacı groups living around Mersin began to work in timber transportation for the army.<sup>54</sup>

Since male laborers of draft age were vital due to their contribution to timber production, the conscription of these laborers interrupted production. For this reason, timber merchants helped deserters by using their influence in local politics. According to a report prepared by the *Harbiye Nezâreti* (Ministry of War), for instance, a group of timber merchants and their allies in the local government protected Tahtacı deserters in Anamur. In order to enlist the Tahtacı, according to the Ministry, these merchants had to be brought under control.<sup>55</sup> Niyazi Bey asserts a similar claim in his report on the Tahtacı. He alleges that non-Muslim timber merchants in the Mersin region helped Tahtacı escape military service.<sup>56</sup>

Especially from the mid-nineteenth century to the early years of the twentieth century, when military practices were volatile and far from stand-

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51 BOA, DH.EUM.2.Şb, 67/54, 20 Haziran 1334 [20 June 1918].

52 In the early republican period, with increasing control over the administration of forests, lime burning and carrying emerged as an alternative work for the Tahtacı groups of İzmir who lost their jobs. See Rıza Yetişen, "Naldöken Tahtacıları: Coğrafi Durum-Köyün Adı-Köyün Eskiği-Köydeki Eserler-Geçim Vaziyeti-Köy Halkının Menşei," *Türk Folklor Araştırmaları* I, no. 17 (1950): 264; Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, *Kızılbaşlar/Aleviler* (İstanbul: Ayrıntı, 2012), 68.

53 In Çivril, 12 households subsisted on coal mining and lumbering. BOA, DH.EUM.2.Şb, 58/8, 14 Zilkade 1336 [21 August 1918].

54 BOA, DH.EUM.2.Şb, 67/54, 20 Haziran 1334 [20 June 1918].

55 BOA, DH.MUİ, 77 -1 20, 11 Rebiülevvel 1328 [23 March 1910].

56 BOA, DH.EUM.6.Şb, 54/34, n.d.

ardized, more complicated avoidance strategies were prominent among the Tahtacıs. They adopted sophisticated techniques to not join the army, which made compulsory military service the main contested issue between the Tahtacıs and the Ottoman administration from the late nineteenth century onwards. For example, Tahtacı communities registered as *Kıbtî* (Gypsy) by the administration objected to their own recruitment by referring to a centuries-old policy that excluded these communities from military service. Until the mid-nineteenth century, population groups labeled as *Kıbtî*, even if they identified as Muslim, paid *cizye*,<sup>57</sup> a poll tax that was annually collected from non-Muslim subjects.<sup>58</sup> Some were recruited as auxiliary troops and served the army as craftsmen;<sup>59</sup> however, they were never included in the military class. Ginio's study provides convincing evidence of practices to exclude the *Kıbtîs* from military practices.<sup>60</sup>

Tanzimat reformers, who promised equal citizenship to all subjects, abolished the *cizye* in 1856, at least on paper. However, in the following decades - due to Muslim and non-Muslim opposition to the recruitment of non-Muslims as well as due to the preference of the government that non-

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57 Elena Marushiakova and Veselin Popov, *Gypsies in the Ottoman Empire: A Contribution to the History of the Balkans* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), 36, 70-72; Eyal Ginio, "Neither Muslims nor Zimmis: The Gypsies (Roma) in the Ottoman State," *Romani Studies* 14 (2004): 117-144.

58 For detailed information on *cizye*, see Claude Cahen, Halil İnalcık, and Peter Hardy, "Djizya," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 559-567. For military practices among the Gypsy-called communities in the late nineteenth century Ottoman Empire, see Ceyda Yüksel, "Buçuk Millet: The Ottoman Gypsies in the Reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909)" (PhD diss, Boğaziçi University, 2009), 102-116. For a recent rich discussion on the changing military and taxation policies toward the peripatetics in the empire, see Yılgür, "Son Dönem Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Devlet ve "Çingeneler": Vergi, Askerlik ve Adlandırma Meseleleri."

59 Emine Dingiş, "XVI. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Ordusunda Çingeneler," *SDÜ Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, no. 20 (2009): 33-46; Marushiakova and Popov, 35.

60 Ginio, 135-137.

Muslims pay an exemption tax instead of joining the army<sup>61</sup> - this tax was replaced first with the *iane-i askerî* (military assistance) and then with the *bedel-i askerî* (military payment-in-lieu), taxes that substituted of military service for non-Muslim subjects.<sup>62</sup> In other words, the practice of *cizye* continued in the name *bedel-i askerî* for a couple more decades. In this period, both Muslim and non-Muslim *Kıbtîs* continued to pay this tax<sup>63</sup> until the government prepared a decree at the end of 1873, which was delivered to the provinces in early 1874, that imposed the obligation of military service on Muslim *Kıbtîs*.<sup>64</sup> The exemption of non-Muslims from military service was abolished in practice only after 1909.<sup>65</sup>

Just before this decree was prepared, at the beginning of 1873, a group of Abdals and Tahtacı in Antalya complained in a petition that the commander of a reserve division (*redif binbaşısı*) persistently pressured them to enroll them in the army even though “they had been *Kıbtî* since time immemorial (*mine’l-kadim*).” The petitioners claimed that men were being imprisoned while their children and wives suffered in the forests.<sup>66</sup>

The next year, right after the aforementioned announcement on the inclusion of Muslim *Kıbtîs* in compulsory military service, a Tahtacı community from Antalya nevertheless claimed exemption from military duty on the grounds of being registered as *Kıbtî*.<sup>67</sup> The petitioners based their demand on

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61 As Zürcher accentuates, this preference stemmed from the fact that the *cizye* was the second most important source of tax revenue after the *aşar* (tithe). Zürcher, "The Ottoman Conscription System In Theory And Practice, 1844-1918," 88-89.

62 See Ufuk Gülsoy, *Cizyeden Vatandaşlığa: Osmanlı'nın Gayrimüslim Askerleri* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2010), 81-110.

63 See Ömer Ulusoy, "Tanzimat Sonrası Osmanlı Arşiv Belgeleri Temelinde Balkanlarda Çingene/Roman Algısı" (paper presented at the Bulgaria and Turkey at the Intercultural Crossroads: Language, History and Literature, Plovdiv, 2011).

64 For the transliteration of this document, see Yüksel, 340-341.

65 Zürcher, "The Ottoman Conscription System In Theory And Practice, 1844-1918," 86.

66 BOA, ŞD, 609/40, 28 Kânûn-ı Sâni 1288 [9 February 1873].

67 Some members of the Tahtacı community today confirm that the Ottoman state registered their ancestors as *Kıbtî* in the sense of “irreligious” and “barbarian”. A Tahtacı from Kaşdışlen village claims that his grandfather was registered as *Kıbtî*. See Selçuk, 33. Similarly,



prior practices that provided *Kıbtî*-registered communities exemption from military service. The final decision concerning the request of these Tahtacı was that Muslim *Kıbtîs* were to be conscripted without distinguishing them from other citizens. The justification for this decision was that it was contrary to the general principles of the Ottoman state to exempt Muslim *Kıbtîs* from military service since they were Ottoman citizens. It was also decided that the Muslim Gypsies' share of the military exemption tax be written off.<sup>68</sup>

In 1906, nearly three decades after the aforementioned claim by these Tahtacı, compulsory military service for Muslim Gypsies was determined not only in the regulations but also put into practice. Some Tahtacı groups then claimed the furtherance of their exemption from military duty asserting Iranian citizenship based on passports they obtained from Iranian consuls in the empire. According to an official record dated 1906, a group of Tahtacı in the Burdur subprovince were not enrolled in military service on account of their Iranian citizenship.<sup>69</sup> Yörükan also says that about 350 Tahtacı households in Anamur and Silifke, which are two districts in current-day Mersin province, "pretended to be Iranians" by obtaining Iranian passports.<sup>70</sup> Contradicting this claim, Ali Rıza, the Iranian official at the time, asserted that they did not publish new passports but just renewed the documents of Tahtacı who already held Iranian passports.<sup>71</sup>

Even today, some Tahtacı groups still call themselves *Acem*, Iranian, and mention avoiding military service as the prominent reason given by the members of the community since the Ottoman era. Some think that holding an Iranian passport signifies Iranian origins. Others are of the opinion that these documents were given to their ancestors by the Iranian Consulate in order to provide them with these exemptions.<sup>72</sup>

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a Tahtacı from Antalya relates that the Ottomans registered his Köyceğiz-born father as *Kıbtî*. İ. Ç. (1946), Akçainiş/Antalya, 20.04.2016.

68 BOA, A.MKT.MHM, 472/52, 23 Zilkade 1290 [12 January 1874].

69 BOA, DH.MKT, 2066/76, 19 Teşrin-i Sâni 1322 [2 December 1906]

70 Yörükan, 145.

71 ibid., 180.

72 M. Ç. (1952), Dalakderesi/Mersin, 11.08.2015; T. Ö. (1958), Köprübaşı/Mersin, 12.08.2015; K. K. (1960), Çine/Aydın, 11.05.2016.

An eighty-three-year-old woman from Mersin defines her ancestors as “*Acem Tahtacı*” and explains the meaning of this identity without reference to any ethnic group: “Being *Acem* means hiding in the mountains and deserting the army.” Because the children were starving in the mountains, she says, fathers and mothers decided to settle, register, and abandoned the *Acem tayfası*, the Iranian community.<sup>73</sup>

A case in the Ottoman records affirms the description of the Tahtacı woman. Battal Kahya, a member of a nomadic Tahtacı community in Dinar, obtained passports from the Iranian Consulate in Konya first for himself and his family of eight people and then for about seventy people from his community. According to the report of the Konya Governorate, Battal Kahya (“*İrânî Battal*” or “*Acem oğlu Hüseyin*” as he called himself in his petitions) helped thousands of Tahtacı in Isparta obtain Iranian passports for exemption from military duty and taxes. The Iranian Consul Kavas Habib granted Iranian citizenship to these Tahtacı. The governorate also stated that more than fifty years had passed since Battal Kahya became an Ottoman subject and began paying taxes on the basis of this identity. The administration decided not to recognize the Iranian passports and to treat these people as Ottoman citizens.<sup>74</sup>

Another group of Tahtacı in the Isparta subprovince, who were referred as *Kıbtî* Tahtacı in official records, demanded the continuation of their exemption from military duty asserting their Iranian citizenship.<sup>75</sup> Nüzhet Bey, the Erkân-ı Harbiye Kaymakamı (Chief of the General Staff) at the time who was appointed to inspect the Karahisar Redif Fırkası (Reserve Infantry Division), stated in his report that thirteen households of the *Kıbtî* Tahtacı in Sandıklı holding Iranian passports were not registered in the last census. Upon investigation, it was understood that this nomadic community, which earned a living through lumbering, had long been living in the villages of Aşağı Gökdere and Yukarı Gökdere in Eğridir but “escaped the attention of

73 D. Ö. (1933), Akçainiş/Antalya, 20.04.2016.

74 BOA, ŞD, 1759/26, 7 Muharrem 1324 [3 March 1906]; BOA, ŞD, 2761/16, 23 Şaban 1326 [20 September 1908].

75 BOA, DH.MKT, 1222 /1, 27 Zilkade 1325 [1 January 1908].

officials.” Their existence was proved only with the testimony of the imams and the mukhtars. According to Nüzhet Bey, extant records about the local population were not trustworthy. He also added that the claim of being Iranian by *Kıbtî* Tahtacı communities in the Isparta subprovince and by the Gypsies in the western part of the country in general was unreasonable since Iranian tribes lived along the Iranian boundaries.<sup>76</sup>

Not surprisingly, Iranian consuls who provided citizenship and passports to itinerant groups known as Tahtacı and Gypsy were considered a threat to public order. The southern part of Hüdâvendigâr province and the western part of Konya province, which today are Kütahya, Afyon, Isparta, and Burdur provinces, was the region where Iranian consuls worked to deliver passports to the local populations. Kavas Habib and Ali Rıza Efendi were two Iranian consuls dismissed by the Ottoman administration for doing this.<sup>77</sup> The Iranian Embassy stated that the Ottoman gendarmerie and police approached the tents of nomadic Tahtacıs who were Iranian citizens on Akdağ plateau located in the Sandıklı district and attempted to seize their animals for the army. The governor of Hüdâvendigâr province claimed that the people were not Iranian but nomadic *Kıbtî* thieves.<sup>78</sup>

Despite these dismissals, there were many Tahtacıs that held Iranian identity papers, and not only from the aforementioned region. In 1918, Niya-zî Bey mentions thirty settled and 200 nomadic Tahtacı communities in Sandıklı and Eğridir as well as some families in Kaburgediği in the province of Adana who obtained Iranian citizenship to be exempt from military duty.<sup>79</sup> A report on the Tahtacı and Çepni communities in Kütahya, prepared by local officials in 1918, also mentions some “mobile *Kıbtîs* whose physical appearance resembled the Tahtacıs.” These *Kıbtîs*, a total of twenty-five households, were making their living by lumbering. The members of this community held Iranian passports and demanded exemptions from military service. The report stated that this community had been living in this region for

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76 BOA, DH.MKT, 1222 /1, 27 Zilkade 1325 [1 January 1908].

77 BOA, ŞD, 2761/16, 23 Şaban 1326 [20 September 1908].

78 BOA, DH.MTV, 8/7, 15 Temmuz 1329 [28 July 1913].

79 BOA, DH.EUM.2.Şb, 67/54, 20 Haziran 1334 [20 June 1918].

about two centuries, so it was not possible for them to be from Hamedan in Iran.<sup>80</sup>

It is controversial exactly when and how the Tahtacı came to be identified and registered as *Kıbtî*. The general tendency in academic and popular writing on the Tahtacı is to assume that after compulsory military service emerged in the Ottoman Empire the Tahtacı began to introduce themselves as *Kıbtîs* or Iranians to the officials for the purpose of not being enrolled in the army. For example, Yörükan and Çağatay argue that, hoping not being recruited, 150 Tahtacı households in the Tefennî district were registered as *Kıbtî*.<sup>81</sup>

Population registers, however, indicate that in 1831, long before the introduction of compulsory military service, the administration registered Tahtacı groups in Teke and İçil regions under the general category of “*Kıbtîs*, Abdals, and Tahtacı.”<sup>82</sup> Like the Abdals, another peripatetic community in the region, the Tahtacı were excluded from military service.<sup>83</sup> Some 90 years later, as mentioned above, an official appointed to prepare a report on the Tahtacı communities in Kütahya described them as groups of wood-producing, nomadic Gypsies.<sup>84</sup> Such categorizations indicate, contrary to the assumptions of nationalist authors of the Republic, that these group names were not discrete categories in the eyes of Ottoman officials. Considering these descriptions, the assumption that the Gypsy identity was concocted by the Tahtacı in the 1870s is weak. It is more likely that the Tahtacı opposed the new military obligations of the modern state and that, in this struggle, they – like other *Kıbtî*-called communities – attempted to use the *Kıbtî* label, which was attributed to them from outsiders, to their advantage. The main question at this point is why the Tahtacı preferred to identify themselves in

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80 BOA, DH.EUM.2.Şb, 58/8, 8 Ağustos 1334 [8 Ağustos 1918].

81 Yörükan, 146; Neşet Çağatay, “Tahtacılar,” in *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1979), 670.

82 Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda İlk Nüfus Sayımı 1831*, 3 ed. (Ankara: Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü Matbaası, 2010), 116, 122.

83 Ak, 18.

84 BOA, DH.EUM.2.Şb, 58/8, 8 Ağustos 1334 [8 Ağustos 1918].

this category in the 1850s but neither in the previous nor following decades. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, they not only gradually descended to lower elevations, coming nearer and nearer to the valley societies, but also faced a more demanding administration whose agents were classifying subjects into monolithic identities. This process of making the society more “legible”, to use James Scott’s term, forced them to “define” themselves. In the 1870s, it was the Gypsy label that had already been attributed to them by others helped them avoid the obligations being imposed by the modern state. Three decades after, when this identity was no longer unhelpful, they claimed to be Iranian, which was also not an unfamiliar identification for them. They intentionally moved down to the lowlands but found new ways to avoid administrative practices. In addition to showing the inability and incompetence of the administration to surveil certain segments of the population, the aforementioned cases reveal that the Tahtacı were so experienced and skillful at hiding from officials that they became involved in daily life in local communities but still escaped the attention of officials. What enabled them to develop such a strategy was their fluid identities and the specialized local knowledge that they had accumulated over the centuries.

A statement by Hasan Mümtaz, a Tahtacı with whom Yörükan conducted an interview in the mid-1920s, on Iranian passport-holding Tahtacı communities is helpful for visualizing this strategy. He declares that these people were living in the Isparta forests, situated at the crossroads of the Konya, Izmir, and Bursa provinces. If a local governor did not recognize their passports, they could easily run to another province, a tactic that was common among the Gypsies in Europe in the previous centuries.<sup>85</sup> Until local governors communicated with each other, realized the issue, and compromise on a solution, they could do whatever they wanted.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Ali Rıza, an Iranian official consul who was dismissed by the Ottomans for illegally providing passports to the Tahtacı, stated that these Tahtacı groups were so mobile that it was impossible to follow them. His statement also indicates that Irani-

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85 Leo Lucassen, *Zigeuner: Die Geschichte Eines Polizeilichen Ordnungsbegriffes in Deutschland, 1700-1945* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1996).

86 Yörükan, 181.

an Consulate was also not comfortable providing Iranian passports to these Gypsies:<sup>87</sup>

They are exceptionally crafty and tricky people. They commit an offense and then run away. Because they are raised in the mountains, they can't stand towns... You see a couple of families; the next day you can't find any of them at the same place. They lie about their addresses and each of them has several names... They are inferior. I suppose they are from the Kibtî community. Most of them hold Kibtî population certificates. According to necessity, they become either Kibtî or Iranian subjects or anything else. If necessary, they completely disappear without leaving any trace.

Despite the fact that the government faced serious difficulties in recruiting the Tahtacıs, the attempts of Tahtacıs to maintain their exemptions failed. They eventually became soldiers of the modern state just like other citizens, but interestingly, the word *Kibtî*, which was used by the administration to denote groups externally known as Gypsy, and functioned as a tool for exclusion, was transformed into a tool for a counter strategy developed by the community in a specific context.<sup>88</sup> Offering bribes to officials<sup>89</sup> was a common way for ordinary people to avoid military service, but the Tahtacıs developed a more sophisticated strategy based on an effort to stay within the legal boundaries defined by the central authority by manipulating the law.

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87 *ibid.*, 180-181.

88 Okely states that communities labeled Egyptian or Gypsy by outsiders accepted these labels for certain practical purposes: "... there was no advantage in dropping the assumed title merely in order to escape the authorities. Moreover, money could be earned from the 'simple people', as well as from royalty, by presenting an exotic identity as fortune teller and dancer. The term 'Egyptian' or later 'Gypsy' could have been useful as a means of self-identification and it was not likely to be just a stigmatic label imposed by persecuting outsiders." Judith Okely, *The Traveller-Gypsies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 4.

89 For example, to exempt them from military duty, the governor of Köyceğiz district, a register officer and a correspondence officer accepted bribes from Tahtacıs who had recently settled in Köyceğiz/Menteşe. See BOA, DH.MKT, 2520/31, 22 Rebiülâhîr 1319 [8 August 1901].

### 6.3.2 *Two Waves of Sedentarization among the Tahtacı Communities*

Despite their objection to the new demands of the modern state, the Tahtacı gradually became members of lowland society. As a general trend, their level of mobility lessened over the last two centuries. The variety of adaptation patterns that emerged among the community notwithstanding, I divide the complex, nonlinear sedentarization experience of the Tahtacı into two for the sake of efficiency. Each overlaps with major processes and ruptures in socioeconomic life in the Anatolian countryside.

#### 6.3.2.1 Emergence of Export-Oriented Agriculture

The Aegean coasts of Anatolia were among the first areas in the Ottoman Empire that shifted to commercial agriculture.<sup>90</sup> In the first half of the nineteenth century, a vast area along the Aegean coasts was opened up to export-oriented cultivation, whereas the Mediterranean coasts in Southern Anatolia experienced this process a few decades later. In response to this difference, two forms of mobility emerged along the coasts of Mediterranean Anatolia. During the nineteenth century, the overall mobility level of the rural population along the Aegean coasts was much lower than that in the south.

Parallel with this general trend, almost all Tahtacı groups along the Mediterranean coasts on the eastern side of the Antalya district were highly mobile, notwithstanding the fact that there were many Tahtacı villages in the Aegean region. Due to the increasing demand for agricultural products in this region, many Tahtacı groups in the west abandoned itinerant lumbering earlier than those in the east. Timber production for cross-continental trade shifted to forests located along the southern coast of Anatolia, which was the main reason that almost all Tahtacı groups in the east were highly mobile. The Ottoman *temettuat* (income) registers reflect this geographical differentiation. The data show that most Tahtacı villages established before the middle of the nineteenth century were located in Aydın and Hüdâvendigâr provinces, where the mobility level of the community was relatively low. Many

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90 Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922*, 2 ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 133.

Tahtacı groups in this region were settled or pursued a semi-nomadic way of life in a narrower area. Türkali,<sup>91</sup> Narlıdere, Göğdelen (also known as Alurca or Doğançay), Tolaz (also known as Uladı or Yakapınar), Cumaovası Karakuyu, Bademler, and Uzundere<sup>92</sup> were some Tahtacı villages established before the middle of the nineteenth century. These villages and those mentioned in this section were all located in the west of the Antalya Plain.

The *temettuat* registers of Eğirdir show that in Tahtacı, Karağı, Kâtip, Karacahisar, Yaka, Yakaafşar, Terziler, Mirahur, Bucak (Kafirviran), Yenice (Aksu), Baklan, Kiçibağlı (Bağılı), Köşireli (Kösreli), Yazır (Koçulu?), and Çukur villages, 158 households earned their living by lumbering. The largest lumbering population lived in Kâtip and Yakaafşar villages, located in the forests at higher altitudes.<sup>93</sup> A village named “Tahtacı,” located in the Simav district of Kütahya subprovince of Hüdâvendigar eyâlet, accommodated eighteen households. None was occupied with lumbering. Most were engaged in agriculture and cultivated wheat, barley, and chickpeas on their own land, each parcel of which was ten to twenty *dönüm* on average, or on the land of Aşık Paşa Waqf. The villagers earned an average of 500-600 *kuruş* annually. Each household had some twenty to thirty goats and ten sheep.<sup>94</sup> In Yarangüme village, located in Menteşe, Aydın Eyâlet, there were six settled Tahtacı households that had lived and paid taxes in Manisa the year before moving to this region. They earned their living by stockbreeding and lumbering. The average income was about 1,000 *kuruş* (see Table 6.2).<sup>95</sup>

There were fifty-five households in another village named “Tahtacı” in Sobuca, Aydın. None of them were lumberman, cultivators, or stockbreeders. There was an *imam*, a miller, a shoemaker, and one household that earned a livelihood by renting out land. The rest of the men in the village were weavers. Almost all households had one to two *dönüm* of vineyards and kept bees.

91 Ayten Kaplan, “Balıkesir Tahtacı Köyleri Kongurca ve Türkali’de Halk Bilimi Açısından Müzik Yapısının Araştırılması” (MA diss., Ankara University, 1998), 28.

92 Yetişen, *Tahtacı Aşiretleri: Adet, Gelenek ve Görenekleri*, 10-14.

93 Yeşil, 48-49.

94 BOA, ML.VRD.TMT.d, 9251, 29 Zilhicce 1261 [29 December 1845].

95 BOA, ML.VRD.TMT.d, 2606, 29 Zilhicce 1261 [29 December 1845].



The income of each household varied from 500 to 2,590 *kuruş*. The income of three inhabitants was much lower. They survived with the support of other members of the village.<sup>96</sup> Another village named “Tahtacı” located in the Köyceğiz district in Menteşe, Aydın province, consisted of fifty-six households. All were peasants who cultivated wheat, barley, and millet on ten to fifty *dönüm* of land. They were also engaged in subsistence husbandry. The income of the villagers varied from 125 to 1,500 *kuruş*. The richest household, which earned 3,525 *kuruş* per annum, was engaged in trade and possessed sixty goats, five mares, five cows, a mill, and seventy-five *dönüm* of land that they rented out to others.<sup>97</sup>

There was a clear differentiation and social stratification in these two Tahtacı villages that distinguished them from traditional Tahtacı communities that could only survive by adopting certain communal practices. The establishment of these villages constituted the first wave of the sedentarization of Tahtacı communities. Another remarkable difference was that lumbering was no longer an occupation in which all members of a certain community or village were engaged, let alone that they mass produced timber to meet the demands of distant populations via timber merchants involved in cross-continental trade. Timber produced by the Tahtacı in Eğirdir, for example, was mostly for the local population and used as a construction material. These families constituted only fourteen percent of the total population of the villages in which they lived.<sup>98</sup>

Table 6.2 *Temettuat* registers of the Tahtacı community settled in Yarangüme village in Tavas, Menteşe in the province of Aydın<sup>99</sup>

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96 BOA, ML.VRD.TMT.d, 2552, 29 Zilhicce 1261 [29 December 1845].

97 BOA, ML.VRD.TMT.d, 2240, 29 Zilhicce 1261 [29 December 1845].

98 Yeşil, 46-49.

99 BOA, ML.VRD.TMT.d, 2606, 29 Zilhicce 1261 [29 December 1845].

	Afyoncu Ali	Deli Kahya oğlu İsa	Deli Kahya oğlu Musa	Kafdanlı Hüseyin	Ali oğlu Hasan Kahya	Ali oğlu Hasan Kahya	Total
The amount of the annual tax paid in previous year ( <i>kuruş</i> )	110	180	180	180	120	180	950
The amount of the tax on winter pasture paid in previous year ( <i>ku- ruş</i> )	20	40	40	50	15		
Milch goat							
Number				100		30	
Annual Income				1000		300	
Yean				42		10	
Horse	1	1	1		1	10	
Mule		3	3	3	1	3	
Timberwork	550	750	750	750	750	1500	
Estimated annual income	550	750	750	1750	750	1800	6320

### 6.3.2.2 The End of the Little Ice Age

As described in Chapter 2, as a result of general warming after the Little Ice Age, agricultural productivity along the southern coasts of Mediterranean

Anatolia, which were inhabited by a large Tahtacı population, increased. This region reemerged as a prominent commercial center. The plains of this region were reopened to cultivation. In this process, both nomadic and settled groups gradually moved to the plains close to the coasts. Paralleling this general trend, many Tahtacı families descended to lower altitudes of the Taurus Mountains.<sup>100</sup> The level of the mobility of the Tahtacıs lessened and new villages were established, signifying a second wave of sedentarization among the Tahtacıs.

The main advantage for the Tahtacıs following from the flow of the rural population to villages and towns at lower altitudes was new opportunities to acquire land due to a higher land-to-labor ratio at higher altitudes. Güzeltepe, formerly Asıtepe, was a Tahtacı village located in Aydın province that exemplified this development. According to the inhabitants of Güzeltepe, in 1870s, due to Sunni villagers who moved to the lowlands leaving their fields vacant, "it was easier there to earn their bread,"<sup>101</sup> and Tahtacıs in the higher hills found opportunities to settle. From that time forward, they had a fixed winter quarter lower than their previous habitats and higher than the new villages of the agriculturalists. The labor needed for commercial agriculture was obtained from the highlands, which affected the subsistence practices of the Tahtacıs as well. During the following decades, as demand for labor increased, the Tahtacıs began to work for large landowners, too.<sup>102</sup>

The establishment of most Tahtacı villages in the last decades of the nineteenth century was the result of the availability of empty land and forests to clear. The inhabitants of Çamalan and Kaburgediği, which are two current-day Tahtacı villages in Mersin province, say that their villages were established in the 1860s on empty fields at altitudes above 700 meters in the Tar-

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100 Tabak, "The Ottoman Countryside in the Age of the Autumn of the Mediterranean, c. 1560-1870," 322.

101 K. K. (1960), Çine/Aydın, 11.05.2016.

102 A. K. (1958), A. L. (1954), Çine/Aydın, 11.05.2016.

sus.<sup>103</sup> Some Tahtacıs of Tarsus migrated west in the 1870s and established the village of Dalakderesi by clearing a forest. A further factor that contributed to the process of settlement in this area was sharecropping. The pioneers of Dalakderesi village developed a livelihood model based on a mix of peripatetic and pastoral strategies, mainly sharecropping. They continued lumbering but also worked the land of large landowners.<sup>104</sup>

Köprübaşı village, located in the current province of Mersin, was established around 1910 according to its Tahtacı inhabitants. Five to six Tahtacı families initially used this region as their winter quarters. The temporary settlement gradually transformed into a village. Before that, for about ten years, they had lived in a forest located at a higher altitude. In this period, due to the intensification of commercial agriculture and the high land-to-labor ratio in the region, large landowners needed more employees to work their lands. Kravgas, a notable, influential family in this region, encouraged the Tahtacı communities to settle here, which is how the Tahtacıs began to cultivate the land of this family. The Tahtacıs received no monetary payment but received a share of the crops. Meanwhile, during the summers, they continued to work in the forests. In ensuing years, with money earned from lumbering, they purchased land from the Kravga Beys.<sup>105</sup> Community elders in Köprübaşı in particular describe the settlement process and the involvement of the Tahtacıs in agriculture as a crucial rupture in their history. Earlier Tahtacı generations called settled Sunni farmers “Turk,” a label associated more with state power than with a certain ethnic group. According to the Tahtacıs, their ancestors began to change and became “Turk” in this period. Engagement in farming not only meant a transition from one livelihood strategy to another, but also a radical change in their position in the social stratification. Thus, this experience is deeply embedded in the collective

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103 C. T. (1926), H. Ç. (1950), Ş. Ç. (1951), Çamalan/Mersin, 15.08.2015; E. G. (1952), A. E. (1953), K. Y. (1960), Kaburgediği, 16.08.2015.

104 K. K. (1946), M. Ç. (1952), Dalakderesi/Mersin, 11.08.2015.

105 T.Ö. (1958), D. A. (1950), S. K. (1958), M. S. (1950), F. B. (1942), Köprübaşı/Mersin, 11-12.08.2015.

memory. A member of the Tahtacı community in Köprübaşı depicts this process as follows:

Our ancestors stayed here in these mountains and then settled. They knew nothing about farming. After settling in, they worked for land-owners and learned how to cultivate cotton. “You learned how to cultivate: Now you’ve become a Turk” they told each other.<sup>106</sup>

Referring to stories he heard from his grandfather about the establishment of their village, another Tahtacı describes this experience from a similar point of view:

They had never cultivated land before coming here. Once they arrived here, someone spread some seeds on the ground. “Sow something, be a Turk, be a Sunni” one of them said.<sup>107</sup>

In this period, Tahtacıs who adopted a less mobile life based on nomadism between fixed winter quarters at lower altitudes and changeable forested lands close to their winter quarters developed complex subsistence practices - a mix of peripatetic and pastoral strategies. The Tahtacıs of Dalakderesi, Kuzucubelen, Kaburgediği, and Çamalan were some of first examples of this trend in Adana province. The 1918 report of Niyazi Bey states that the Tahtacı villages at the highest altitude in the province of Adana were at 800-900 meters.<sup>108</sup> They spent their summers in forests that were located much closer to their winter quarters compared to the forests they had inhabited in previous decades. For instance, the Tahtacı communities in Dalakderesi began to spend summers in Ayvagediği, which was four hours from their village. As of 1908, the Tahtacıs in Kaburgediği were climbing to Kalecik, which was three hours from their village. Before that, they used to spend their summers at higher elevations in the Tanzit region. Just like the Tahtacıs of Belenkişlek,

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106 F.B. (1942), Köprübaşı/Mersin, 13.08.2015.

107 T.Ö. (1958), Köprübaşı/Mersin, 12.08.2015.

108 BOA, DH.EUM.2.Şb, 67/54, 20 Haziran 1334 [20 June 1918].

with the exception of five to ten families, they were involved in agriculture and living at lower altitudes.<sup>109</sup>

The increasing commercialization of forestry brought also about social differentiation among the Tahtacı. For example, some members of the community found the opportunity to mediate between timber merchants and forest workers. This practice was especially common in the early republican period. Haydar Ahmad, nicknamed “Kemik,” who was one of the founders of Yeniköy, a Tahtacı village located in the foothills of Madran Mountain in Aydın, was one of these middlemen.<sup>110</sup> “Göğ” Hüseyin was another Tahtacı who bought forest products from the Tahtacı communities and sold them to richer merchants.<sup>111</sup> İbrahim, known as “İbi,” from Karatepe, a Tahtacı village in Antalya province, worked for the timber merchants Osman and “Damat.” His duty was to find forest workers from his village, oversee their work, and deliver the products to the merchants.<sup>112</sup> Finally, İbrahim, “Çatal,” “Çalık,” and Bektaş were well-known Tahtacı “aghas,” who mediated between merchants and the Tahtacı of Çamalan, a village in Mersin.<sup>113</sup> On account of this mediation mechanism, Tahtacı became involved in a sub-sector of forest products. Some Tahtacı describe the Ottoman era as a period when their ancestors worked for timber merchants without following any rules regarding cutting. Some members of Tahtacı communities in Aydın call this period the “time of smuggling,”<sup>114</sup> which implies that there were restrictions but that people somehow avoided them. Some also say that even though in the course of time smuggling unpermitted trees became more and more difficult, smuggling was always a part of the job: “Sometimes you have to collaborate and share with officers and other times with the merchants.”<sup>115</sup>

109 BOA, DH.EUM.2.Şb, 67/54, 20 Haziran 1334 [20 June 1918].

110 İ. T. (1958), K. K. (1960), Çine/Aydın, 11.05.2016.

111 İ. Ş. (1940), Çine/Aydın, 11.05.2016.

112 D. K. (1935), M. K. (1941), Ş. Ç. (1940), Karatepe/Antalya, 19.04.2016.

113 H. A. (1932), A. B. (1939), Çamalan/Mersin, 15.08.2015.

114 İ. T. (1958), K. K. (1960), Çine/Aydın, 11.05.2016; H. Ş. (1933), Yeniköy/Aydın, 15.05.2016; A. S. (1945), Ş. L. (1934), Alamut/Aydın, 12.05.2016.

115 S. Ö. (1938), Yenimahalle/Antalya, 17.04.2016.

The Tahtacı sold trees they cut without permission to local villagers,<sup>116</sup> “Turks who were good at cultivating but bad at cutting.”<sup>117</sup>

The general trend of living at lower altitudes brought about not only new opportunities but also new challenges. It caused disputes at the local level. For example, according to one archival record, the locals of Ortakçı village of Aydın sued the Tahtacı communities that were settled by the government on their plateau in 1886.<sup>118</sup> The current inhabitants of Kızılcapınar village also say that before their ancestors arrived in Kızılcapınar, they had settled elsewhere, but the local population sued them and claimed that the newcomers heavily damaged them.<sup>119</sup> It is possible that these two cases are the same. The inhabitants of Dalakderesi, a Tahtacı neighborhood in Mersin, also tell that their ancestors lived first in Evci and then in the region known as Değirmengediği, where they were harassed and accused of stealing animals from local villagers.<sup>120</sup>

Logging in forests that were closer to towns and villages increased competition between the Tahtacı and villagers to use the land. An example is the complaint of a number of villagers from Antalya dated 1909. Their petition indicates that a timber merchant named Lülüzade Ömer Efendi hired a group of Tahtacı to harvest timber. The villagers asserted that, by allowing the animals of the Tahtacı onto their land, Lülüzade Ömer Efendi and the Tahtacı prevented them from cultivating and caused the destruction of olive groves. Due to the destruction to the land and trees, the villagers produced less, which resulted in a decline of tithe revenues. The amount of the loss to the government was 40,000-50,000 *kuruş*.<sup>121</sup> Since taxes collected from sedentary agriculturalists constituted a vital source of revenue for the Ottoman Empire, any factor that diminished agricultural productivity was seen as a threat to the treasury by the administration. The Ministry of Internal Affairs

116 A. S. (1945), Alamut/Aydın, 12.05.2016.

117 D. G. (1944), Akçainiş/Antalya, 20.04.2016.

118 BOA, DH.MKT, 1359/75, 10 Zilkade 1303 [10 August 1886].

119 H. E. (1950), Kızılcapınar/Aydın, 10.05.2016.

120 M. Ç. (1952), Dalakderesi/Mersin, 11.08.2015.

121 BOA, DH.MKT, 2767/58, 1327 Safer 22 [15 Mart 1909].

was therefore interested in the case, at least initially. The final result of this dispute is not recorded in the archives.

The settlement process of the Tahtacı communities constituted an important topic in the report of Niyazi Bey. According to him, there were two alternatives for the Tahtacı. They either engaged in farming or carried on with their traditional craft and died out. Niyazi Bey divided the Tahtacı into two according to their position on this juncture. The first consisted of those who were “prudent and kept up with the time”; and the second group was composed of Tahtacı who were “imprudent and traditional.” He states that Tahtacı communities involved in agriculture were from the “upper classes.” On the other hand, according to him, all members of the community had been deprived of resources in recent years. Farmers could survive, whereas the others lived a miserable life.<sup>122</sup> Niyazi Bey describes the increasing tendency toward sedentarization among the Tahtacı not as the outcome of a series of socioeconomic developments but as a voluntary choice. However, his association of sedentariness and engagement in agriculture with a rise in the socioeconomic status was correct. Tahtacı communities that abandoned peripatetic strategies and adopted a pastoral life in a permanent settlement gained the opportunity to become involved in agriculture. This was also a period in which socioeconomic differentiations emerged both between and within Tahtacı groups.

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122 Niyazi Bey mentions two Tahtacı groups: the Çaylaks and Aydınlıs/Üsküdarlıs. Their villages, religious leaders, and practices differed. Niyazi Bey says that the Aydınlılar were richer, cleaner, healthier, more proper, and more hardworking. The Üsküdarlıs criticizes the Çaylaks and defined them as “Abdal.” According to a myth, the Çaylaks were called Yanyatır because they were sitting, when Hz. Ali delivered *kısmet* (luck, chance). It is a yet unanswered question whether landowner Tahtacı communities overlapped with those “richer, cleaner, healthier, more proper, and more hardworking” Üsküdarlı communities or whether the Çaylak communities were those Tahtacı groups who were perceived as Gypsy or *Kıbtî* and described as “imprudent” and miserable by Niyazi Bey. BOA, DH.EUM.2.Şb, 67/54, 20 Haziran 1334 [20 June 1918].



## § 6.4 Concluding Remarks

The two main questions I discussed in this chapter are how Tahtacı communities were affected by the bureaucratized, commercial forestry and what strategies they developed to adapt to their changing ecological, economic, and political environment.

This chapter first displayed the political rationality behind the new forestry. Despite widespread smuggling, low tax revenues, and exemptions provided to local interest groups, bureaucrats managed to create significant changes in forest utilization. Due to their alliances with local interest groups, they abolished the immemorial rights of local communities. These rights were considered to interfere with the development of market relations. Forest-dependent communities, including the Tahtacıs, became more impoverished and dependent on local notables who were involved in large-scale trade in forest products as a result of their political influence. This was a period when the Tahtacıs faced chronic debt due to pressure from timber and charcoal merchants as well as new tax liabilities, military conscription, and compulsory work imposed by the administration. It was this bonded labor that enabled mass production in forestry.

This chapter also demonstrated that in the mid-nineteenth century, when the Little Ice Age ended and the commercialization of agriculture and forestry took off, Tahtacıs intentionally descended to lower altitudes to take the advantages of the newly emerging market opportunities. This was also a period when the temporary settlements they used as winter quarters gradually evolved into permanent villages and Tahtacı communities came more closely in touch with other segments of society. At the same time, they adopted highly flexible strategies that allowed them to avoid certain administrative practices, especially forced military conscription. The diversity and complexity of these strategies reveals not only the vague boundaries between resistance and compliance but also between “state” and “non-state” spaces.

