



Forest, Bandits, and State: Some Measures Taken against the Use of Forests as Illegal Activity Areas in the Ottoman Empire (16th-18th centuries)*

Orman, Eşkiya ve Devlet: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Ormanların Yasadışı Faaliyet Alanı Olarak Kullanılmasına Karşı Alınan Bazı Önlemler (16.-18. Yüzyıllar)

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ABSTRACT

The territories of the Ottoman Empire included extensive forested areas. These forests provided a rich source of timber and other materials essential for the maintenance of the empire's military establishments, including the Imperial Arsenal, the Imperial Armory, and the Imperial Arsenal of Ordinance and Artillery. Furthermore, the Ottoman people utilized these forests to meet their own needs, primarily for firewood. In addition to these, which consumed a certain level of the empire's forest resources, there were also bandits who used the vast wooded areas both as a hideout and as a base for their illegal activities. Bandits would conceal themselves behind trees situated along the routes traversing forested areas, which were also used for travel and trade. Despite the efforts of the central administration to guarantee the security of these areas through the deployment of personnel to the derbend organization, their success in this endeavor was not complete. In such cases, in order to ensure road safety, the central administration took certain measures to prevent bandits from using forest as an ambush site.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, Forest, Bandits, Route Safety, Deforestation

ÖZ

Osmanlı Devleti'nin idaresi altındaki topraklarda ağaçlarla kaplı geniş ormanlık bölgeler bulunmaktaydı. Tersane-i Amire, Cebehane-i Amire, Tophane-i Amire gibi devlete ait askeri kurumların ahşap malzeme ve benzeri diğer ihtiyaçları bu ormanlardan rahatlıkla karşılanmaktaydı. Bunun yanı sıra Osmanlı halkı da bu ormanlardan başta yakacak odun olmak üzere kendi ihtiyaçlarını görmekteydiler. İmparatorluk coğrafyasındaki orman varlığını belli düzeyde tüketmeye yönelik bu kullanımların yanı sıra geniş ağaçlık alanları hem bir saklanma hem de yasa dışı faaliyetlerinin bir üssü olarak kullanan eşkiyalar vardı. Eşkiyalar, seyahat ve ticaret güzergâhlarının ormanlık bölgelerden geçtiği yerlerde yol kenarlarındaki ağaçlara saklanarak yolculara saldırmaktaydılar. Merkezi idare her ne kadar derbend teşkilatında görevli kimseler sayesinde bu tür yerlerin emniyetini tesis etmeye çalışsa da bu konuda tam bir başarı gösterilememekteydi. Böyle durumlarda yol emniyetini tesis etmek için merkezi idare eşkiyanın ormanı bir pusu yeri olarak kullanmasının önüne geçmeye yönelik bazı önlemler almaktaydı.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı Devleti, Orman, Eşkiya, Yol Güvenliği, Ağaçsızlaştırma



Introduction

The Ottoman Empire encompassed extensive forested regions, which were known as the ‘Sea of Trees’¹ in Anatolia and ‘Deliorman’² in Rumelia. For centuries, the Ottoman fleet depended on forests of the Anatolian coastline of the Black Sea for the supply of wood for shipbuilding³. This natural richness also influenced civil architecture, and wood was mostly preferred for the construction of dwellings in the capital and other cities⁴. The widespread use of wood in Turkish tradition suggests that the preservation of Turkish housing customs relies on the ongoing use of wood as a primary building material⁵.

Aside from being used for construction, forests also served as a significant source of fuel. The populace was free to procure their wood fuel from the places included in the concept of *cibâl-i mubâha*, which literally means an area that anyone could cut wood since it was not the property of any individual or entity⁶. In addition to the aforementioned usage of forests by state institutions and the public, there were additional forested regions referred to as *koruy-hümâyûn*. These were allotted for the sole use of the Ottoman palace and under the direct protection of state officials⁷.

In August 1840, a political decision regarding the empire’s forests in general was enacted. On this date, a Directorate of Forestry was established within the Ministry of Trade. The initial regulation implemented by this department regarding forests addressed the conservation of trees and controlled harvesting. Moreover, regulatory actions of the directorate

- 1 Resül Narin, “Osmanlı Devleti Zamanında Kocaeli Ormanları”, *Belleten*, LXXV/274 (December 2011), pp. 769-783; Resül Narin, “Osmanlı’dan Cumhuriyet’e Ağaç Denizi Kocaeli”, *Uluslararası Çoban Mustafa Paşa ve Kocaeli Tarihi-Kültürü Sempozyumu IV*, Kocaeli 2018, pp. 971-997.
- 2 S. S. Bobçev, “Deliorman Türklerinin Kökeni”, trans. M. Türker Acaroğlu, *Belleten*, LII/203 (August 1988), p. 699; Machiel Kiel, “Deliorman”, *DİA*, IX (1994), pp. 141-144.
- 3 İdris Bostan, *Osmanlı Bahriye Teşkilatı: 17. Yüzyılda Tersâne-i Âmire*, Ankara 1992, pp. 102-120; Yusuf Alperen Aydın, *Sultanın Kalyonları, Osmanlı Donanmasının Yelkenli Savaş Gemileri (1701-1770)*, İstanbul 2011, pp. 224-263; Tuncay Zorlu, *Osmanlı ve Modernleşme, III. Selim Dönemi Osmanlı Denizciliği*, İstanbul 2014, pp. 43-50.
- 4 For the use of wood in the 17th and 18th centuries see, Doğan Kuban, *Türk Ahşap Konut Mimarisi, 17.-19. Yüzyıllar*, İstanbul 2017. However, the use of wood in the civil construction caused conflagrations. It has been examined in the available literature. For an in-depth review, see Ahmet Tekin, *Ottoman Istanbul in Flames: City Conflagrations, Governance and Society in the Early Modern Period*, İstanbul 2020.
- 5 Doğan Kuban, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
- 6 Bekir Koç, “Osmanlı Devleti’ndeki Orman ve Koruların Tasarruf Yöntemleri ve İdarelerine Dair Bir Araştırma”, *Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi*, 10 (1999), pp. 142-143; Üstüner Birben, “Cibal-i Mübaha”, II. Ormanlıkta Sosyo-Ekonomik Sorunlar Kongresi, February 19-21, 2009, SDÜ, Isparta, pp. 395-404 (<https://ormanweb.isparta.edu.tr/ormis/bildiriler/39.pdf>); Sevim Erdem, Ahmet Başkan, “Osmanlı Devleti’nde Orman ve Orman Alanlarının Kullanımı ve Buna Yönelik Hukuki Düzenlemeler”, *The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies*, 42 (2016), p. 287.
- 7 İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devleti’nin Saray Teşkilatı*, Ankara 1988, pp. 498-500; Ahmet Uzun, *İktisâdi ve Malî Yönerleriyle İstabl-ı Âmire (1500-1900)*, Ankara 2020, pp. 147-198.

alongside policies facilitated the commercial use of forests, generated substantial revenue⁸. Consequently, forests were regarded as state-owned natural assets that generated revenue for the treasury, thereby necessitating the formulation of regulations and the implementation of forest conservation measures.

The conservation of forests and the establishment of security in forested areas were consistently regarded as priorities by the Ottomans. Before the 19th century, since the earlier periods of the Ottoman Empire, the *derbend* organization was tasked with ensuring the security of areas beyond the confines of urban settlements. This organization was composed of *derbendcis*, who worked in return for certain taxes, as well as other officials referred to as *beldar*, *martolos*, and *pandor*⁹. The primary responsibility of these officials was to guarantee the maintenance of public order and security along the roads and passages, particularly in regard to the prevention of illicit activities perpetrated by bandits¹⁰.

In the first half of the 19th century, as forests emerged as a significant source of revenue, the security of the routes traversing these areas also became a priority. In the aftermath of the Tanzimat Edict (1839), a *zabtiye* organization was established in each province and sanjak with the objective of guaranteeing security and maintaining public order. The *derbend* organization, which had previously fulfilled this role, was placed under the authority of the newly established *zabtiye* administration¹¹. The Ministry of *Zabtiye*¹² established later in the 19th century would subsequently evolve into a structure that also fulfilled law enforcement duties in rural areas and became a prominent institution in the efforts to combat banditry¹³.

This paper will first address the ways in which the Ottomans utilized their forests. It will then move on to discuss briefly the methods employed to guarantee the security of the roads passing through these forested areas, the use of forests as a defense area by the people, and the means of struggle against bandits who mostly used forests as a base. Lastly, the strategies implemented by the Ottoman political center to address this matter, which pertains to internal security, will be examined.

About Forests and Bandits

In the long 19th century, forests came to be regarded as a valuable natural resource, generating revenue for the state. However, in preceding centuries, forests were more frequently

8 Özkan Keskin, *Orman ve Ma'âdin Nezâreti'nin Kuruluşu ve Faaliyetleri*, (Unpublished PhD Diss., İstanbul University, 2005), pp. 9-11.

9 Cengiz Orhonlu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Derbend Teşkilâtı*, İstanbul 1990, pp. 83-100.

10 Orhonlu, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

11 Orhonlu, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-160.

12 Zekeriya Türkmen, "Jandarma", *DİA, EK-1. Cilt*, 2020, pp. 689-691.

13 Okan Cömert, "XIX. Yüzyılda Ege Bölgesinde Jandarmanın Eşkiya ile Mücadele Sorunsalı", *İzmir Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 11 (2019), pp. 33-49.

the sites of illegal activities, which the Ottoman authorities were obliged to address in order to reestablish control and order. On the other hand, in order to elucidate the rationale behind the preference of some individuals for using forests as their area of illegal activities, it seems significant to adopt an alternative perspective.

In this regard, Elias Canetti's characterization of forest as a crowd symbol provides a valuable perspective from which to consider forest as a phenomenon. Canetti argues that upon entering forest, an individual experiences a sense of shelter and protection from the surrounding trees, which create a "dome" overhead. Furthermore, Canetti highlights the plural immobility of a multitude of trees as a distinctive quality of forest. Given that tree roots are anchored in the soil, their resilience is unwavering, and they remain firmly rooted in the face of any threat. Consequently, he proposes that forest symbolizes an unyielding army that never retreats, maintains a fixed position, and must be vanquished by the last soldier in order to gain even a single inch of land¹⁴.

It is plausible that bandits who used forest as a base of their activities may have had such thoughts or feelings. In other words, upon entering forest, bandits felt that they were sheltering in a structure that protected them. After all, forests afforded bandits the opportunity to carry out their illegal activities. Perhaps a bandit would sincerely admit that forest provided a safe shelter because it was a place where ambushes could be set up and where the political authority could not easily enforce its rule¹⁵.

Bandits who, for personal or social reasons, desert a settlement and take shelter in forest, do not extend a welcoming gesture to travelers who pass through the area for different purposes. Indeed, it is their actions that led them to engage in illegal activities. In this sense, forest can be regarded as a passive and natural host to the actions of bandits¹⁶. One of the primary purposes of the *derbend* organization was to guarantee the security of travel and commercial routes against such actions. Besides, travelers also had armed companions for the protection of themselves and their belongings, and some of them were in possession of their own weapons. A case in point is that of Evliya Çelebi, the most travelled Ottoman of the 17th century¹⁷. Evliya Çelebi occasionally managed to defend himself and his companions from the threat of bandits, either through the actions of the officials he travelled with, his own men, or his own efforts. However, many other Ottoman travelers were not so fortunate.

14 Elias Canetti, *Kitle ve İktidar*, trans. Gülşat Aygen, İstanbul 2023, pp. 91-92.

15 Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Eşkîyalar*, trans. Osman Akınhay, İstanbul 2011, p. 8; Mehmet Başaran, Ali Özçelik, "XIX. Yüzyılda Aydın ve Çevresinde Eşkîyalık ve Güvenlik Sorunu", *XVIII. Türk Tarih Kongresi, Kongreye Sunulan Bildiriler; Vol. III*, ed. S. Nurdan, M. Özler, Ankara 2022, p. 893.

16 For the relationality between banditry and geography, see also Sabri Yetkin, *Ege'de Eşkîyalar*, İstanbul 1996, p. 20.

17 Feridun M. Emecen, "Bir Seyyahın Güvenliđi: Silahlar", *Evliya Çelebi'nin Dünyası*, ed. Coşkun Yılmaz, İstanbul 2013, pp. 227-228.

It was the responsibility of the central authority to maintain order and ensure the safety of its subjects. This was achieved by apprehending and punishing the perpetrators of illegal acts which threatened the authority and stability. However, the pursuit and capture of bandits not only consumed time but also generated significant expenditures. The extent of this expenditure could also become unpredictable due to the actions of a particularly challenging bandit¹⁸. In such cases, authorities could decide based on the desired outcome in a relatively short period of time and choose to eliminate specific areas of forest that served as a refuge for bandits and a location for their illegal activities. The Ottoman central administration made similar decisions on numerous occasions.

Some Examples of Partial Deforestation against Banditry

In October 1731, Mahmud Pasha, the governor of the sanjaks of Alexandria and Dukakin, was honored by Sultan Mahmud I (r. 1730-1754) with the words ‘may you be prosperous’ for the heads of bandits he sent to Istanbul. This was in recognition of his efforts to suppress banditry in the region. The Sultan expressed his satisfaction with the care and attention that the governor had demonstrated in protecting the lands and people under his administration. Additionally, he indicated that other bandits had attacked individuals on a road in his region, resulting in fatalities and the seizure of their belongings. Grand Vizier Osman Pasha (1731-1732)¹⁹ also noted that the area in question was characterized by dense forests on both sides and that bandits who obstructed the road had taken refuge there and perpetrated attacks against individuals traversing the route. Osman Pasha²⁰, who had previously been responsible for the security of such routes and crossings and had previously held a position of authority over the *pandors* and *martoloses*, recommended that the safety of travelers could be optimally ensured by issuing instructions to fell and burn the trees on both sides of the road, to level the swamps along the road, and to construct bridges where necessary. It was resolved that this work should consequently be initiated without delay. Furthermore, the governor of the Ohrid Sanjak was to provide assistance. The local population in the vicinity of the road was to be engaged in collective work in order to facilitate the completion of the aforementioned work²¹.

The residents of the Sanjak of Canik, consisting of eighteen *kazas*, demonstrated a lack of compliance with the orders of their pashas. Murtaza ties this to the geographical structure of Canik, a mountainous area which features numerous gorges and forests in the region. The beech trees in the forest of Canik grow so densely that it is very difficult for people to pass through. If a state official or administrator were to come upon them, the people

18 For further information on the possible financial implications of suppressing banditry, see Yetkin, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

19 About Grand Vizier Osman Pasha, see İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi, IV. Cilt, II. Bölüm, XVIII. Yüzyıl*, Ankara 1988, pp. 321-325.

20 Orhonlu, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

21 BOA, C DH 84/4165.

would pile up the trees in one or two parts of the gorge, which would make them capable of resisting a thousand people if only five of them were to be stationed behind. In such a case, it would not be feasible to reach them on horseback to bring them to their senses; they could only be captured by infantry, which never occurred. Murtaza was of the opinion that the people of the region had numerous pashas expelled in this manner over time. As there were no consequences for their actions, the perpetrators escaped punishment and subsequently became rebels²². In light of Murtaza's statements, it can be argued that the mountainous terrain and dense forest cover provided the people of Canik with a strategic advantage. One may speculate that this advantage enabled people of the region to defend themselves when necessary and to even challenge certain unjust practices of their pashas.

Historical records indicate that Canik's geography had provided refuge for those opposed to the existing order over the course of centuries. This "continuity" is documented over time, though a comprehensive analysis is not feasible within the constraints of this study. However, to cite one example, a decree written from Istanbul to Çerkes Beg, the Beg of Bozok Sanjak, in early 1583, indicates that the qadi of Samsun sent a letter to Istanbul stating that the *levend* group had made Canik Sanjak a base and settled there because it was mountainous and stony, and that they were causing harm to people. Additionally, he asserts that the inhabitants of the region were able to live their lives without fear during the previous year due to the presence of the *sipahis*, who had established security within the sanjak. However, when the *sipahis* were deployed on campaign, the sanjak was left unprotected, which will certainly result in an inevitable increase in attacks on the local population. Consequently, Çerkes Beg was tasked with the responsibility of protecting Canik with the *sipahis* under his command²³.

A review of historical records suggests a link between geographical features and instances of illegal activity. In that, it seems, as expected, that Canik was not the only case of people using the shelter and concealment opportunities provided by the geography to oppose the established order. The historical records also show that the Ottoman central government took measures against such people who were exploiting forests as a base for attacks on public order. For example, in late 1574, Kasım, the Beg of the Sanjak of Dukakin in Albania, was ordered to have the large forest opposite *Leş* (Lezhë), the harbor of the sanjak, where thieves and waylayers were hiding, cut down and burnt down by joint effort. The area was then to be cultivated so that the possibility of thieves and waylayers being able to lurk out there would be impossible²⁴.

22 Mehmet Yaşar Ertaş (ed.), *Arnavutluk'tan Basra'ya 18. Yüzyılda Kayserili Bir Kâtibin Seyahat Anıları*, İstanbul 2000, pp. 65-66.

23 BOA, MD 44, hk. 356.

24 BOA, MD 26, hk. 636.

Another example of deforestation is recorded in 1577. The qadi of Yenice-i Karasu stated that a forested area was located on the opposite bank of the river in the *kaza*. He further asserted that the outlaws and mischievous people, who were based there, were perpetrating attacks against individuals passing through the area. As a potential solution, the qadi proposed the establishment of a village in the area by cutting down forest and resettling the nomads. He further suggested that agriculture could be carried out in the newly created village. His proposal was accepted, and it was ordered that bandits be prevented from their misdeeds by making this place pleasant. Additionally, it was instructed that a report be provided on the progress of this work and the number of households that had settled in the newly established village²⁵.

In another example, deforestation was presented as a solution to the issue at hand as a result of the petitions sent to the center by the people of Cisir-i Ergene (Uzunköprü) rather than by the authority figures in the region. The complainants explained that bandits who were habitually gathered in forest near Çöpköy were responsible for harming travelers and people requested permission to cut down forest in order to ensure the safety of travelers. Consequently, in the decree sent to the *Nâib* of Cisir-i Ergene in June 1690, it was ordered that the people, in collaboration with their *subaşı*s (an official who ensured the security), cut down the trees where necessary and make these places clear of bandits²⁶.

A similar order, in April 1692, was sent to the qadis in the Nis and Belgrade regions to widen the road by clearing forests on both sides of the route leading to these regions. Furthermore, the order stated that the road should be widened to a sufficient width to prevent ambushes by bandits. In the previous year, bandits had harassed and damaged the wagons, merchants and travelers making use of this road. In order to address this issue, the inhabitants in the vicinity of the road were to work in shifts on the nearest road, and they were to be provided with a daily wage of ten asper per man, in addition to half *kıyye* of flour²⁷.

Another example of the measures taken to ensure road safety is related to the city of Amasya. A decree was written at the end of March 1698 to the qadi of Amasya in response to a letter he had previously sent to Istanbul²⁸. From the letter it seems that on some days, people who block the road were hiding in this forest area known as Ilıcak Boğazı near Amasya and harming the passersby. It was therefore imperative that the trees in this forest area be felled and removed (*kal' u kam'*)²⁹. Furthermore, this area constituted the route used by

25 BOA, MD 30, hk. 519.

26 BOA, MD 100, hk. 81. See also Meryem Kaçan Erdoğan, "Bozgun Yıllarında (1683-1699) Rumeli'de Eşkıyalık Faaliyetleri", *Türk Kültürü İncelemeleri Dergisi*, 26 (2012), pp. 48-49.

27 BOA, AE. SAMD.II. 2/117.

28 BOA, MD 110, hk. 1493.

29 This notion referring to the removal (*kal' u kam'*) [of forest] was at the same time used against the enemy troops, thereby implying their annihilation: BOA, MD 5, hk. 98.

the inhabitants of Hakala and Akdag. Consequently, both Amasya and the residents of the aforementioned settlements were amenable to the occupation of the removal of forest (*kal' u kam*). The judgement was conveyed to the qadi of Amasya, indicating that their request had been granted.

A later example of bandits using forest areas near a bridge in a region for their illegal activities is related to the Pavlo (Pavli) Bridge. One may gain insight into this matter by examining the judicial decrees of Mustafa, the Nâib of Cisir-i Ergene, dated 19 Cemaziyelevvel 1166 (March 24, 1753)³⁰ and Hâfiz İbrahim, the Nâib of Hayrabolu, dated 20 Cemaziyelevvel 1166 (March 25, 1753)³¹. The two decrees exhibit a notable similarity in their content. In accordance with the preceding orders, the elimination of bandits operating in the Tekfurdağı (Tekirdağ) region and at the Pavlo (Pavli) Bridge was assigned to Sirozî Elhâc Mustafa Agha³². Apparently, the issue in question remained unsolved. In Cisir-i Ergene and Hayrabolu, members of the religious community, the people, and the *a'yân* (local notables) proceeded to the courts in their respective *kazas* to voice their concerns and to seek resolutions. For several years, bandits and villains (*haramzâde*) had been occupying forest adjacent to the Pavlo Bridge as a place of refuge during the summer season. From their concealed position in the woods, they would fire bullets at horsemen, infantry, or wagons passing over the bridge, thereby seizing their belongings and property and hiding back in the woods.

This forest served as a wintering ground for camels belonging to the state³³. Therefore, authorization from the state was required to exploit this forest. The trees in this area were observed to be in close proximity to one another and exhibited a dense growth pattern up to the bridge. Forested area terminated at the boundaries of Hayrabolu, Baba-yı Atik (Babaeski), and Cisir-i Ergene. In order to ensure the safety of the bridge and the road through the consensus of the *a'yân* and the people of these *kazas*, as well as the involvement of Sirozî Mustafa Agha, permission was requested to clear a designated area by breaking down trees a little more than a bullet's range away. Ultimately, with the collaboration of the inhabitants of the nearby *kazas*, it was ordered that the trees in the woods within a two-bullet range from the bridge be dismantled and rendered accessible. Therefore, bandits would be deprived of an effective firing range from the ambush point in forest for those crossing the bridge. In other words, the safety of the travelers would be ensured not by capturing bandits but by removing the trees near the bridge.

30 BOA, C. DH 14/691-2.

31 BOA, C. DH 14/691-1.

32 For this person from the *a'yân* of Tekirdağ, see Fadimana Fidan, "18. Yüzyıl Tekirdağ'ında Sirozî Mustafa Ağa'nın Damadı Veli ve Kızı Hatice Örneğinde Statü-Servet Ediniminde Aile Bağlarının Rolü", *Cihannüma, Tarih ve Coğrafya Araştırmaları Dergisi*, VII/2 (December 2021), pp. 195-227.

33 For information on this issue, see Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Saray Teşkilatı*, pp. 495-496.

In these examples, forested areas were described as potential hideouts for bandits due to their proximity to settlements or roads. It was therefore feasible to deforest these forested areas by organizing the local population. In Canik, however, forested areas offered the inhabitants the opportunity to protect themselves from the state forces. It can be argued that cutting down these forested areas as a form of struggle similar to those elsewhere did not occur to the administrators in Canik. However, there is another example of how such burdensome forests were not always cut down.

In 1803, the Austrian state requested the Ottoman state to cut down forests in three settlements on the Bosnian border (Ostrovica, Prijedor, and another settlement) as a precautionary measure against bandits encroaching on its territory. Yet, the Ottoman central administration took another measure. In the decree written to Ebubekir Pasha, the Governor of Bosnia, it was strictly ordered that the state officials in the vicinity of the relevant places should send *pandors* and soldiers to these troubled areas and ensure their protection. Accordingly, Austrian troops were prohibited from crossing the border and entering Ottoman territory on the pretext of retaliating against bandits based in the border forests. Those who disregarded these instructions were to be held accountable for failing to fulfill their obligation to safeguard the border³⁴.

In fact, in a possible war, the Austrian army could easily pass through these places if the trees on the border were cut down. However, forested areas on the border not only prevented the enemy army from crossing easily, but some measures could even be taken to make it even more difficult. For example, according to a decree written on June 4, 1571 to Sinan Beg, the Beg of Bosnia, some people from the villages within the Bosnia Sanjak were summoned to serve as *cerehor*, a term denoting the provision of rear services for the protection of the frontier. The specific task assigned to them was *kirındı kestirmek* (chopping down). It can be assumed that the purpose of chopping down was to impede the advancement of the enemy army by cutting tree branches and leaving them on the forest road.

Conclusion

One of the most persistent concerns of the Ottoman central administration was undoubtedly the issue of internal security. This was an understandable consequence of the vast expanse of the imperial geography. The most significant internal security concern pertained to the protection of transportation routes. In order to address this issue, the central authority had established local organizations. Furthermore, the deforestation of select forested areas, which provided bandits with advantageous locations for ambushes and attacks or allowed them to seek shelter and hide, was employed as a measure in the fight against bandits.

34 BOA, C. DH 62/3074.

If possible, some of these areas were designated for settlement, thus enlivening the region. However, if a forested area where banditry was based was on the enemy border, the Ottoman central administration took a pragmatic approach to the issue. For instance, in lieu of felling the trees in forested areas, which would serve as an impediment to a potential border incursion by an adversary, Ottoman decision-making opted to deploy a greater number of officials with the objective of enhancing security in the region. This reveals that deforestation was not the sole method employed to combat banditry.

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Cevdet, Dahiliye (C. DH) 84/4165, 62/3074, 14/691-1 ve 2.

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