

Animals on the Move

Tracing Livestock in the Ottoman Empire from Farm to Table to Waste

EDITED BY

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CHAPTER TWO

Breed, Meat Provisioning, and Money: An Early History of Merino Sheep in the Ottoman Lands (1827-44)

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Merino sheep have a rich global history, spanning from regulated grazing in medieval Spain to nineteenth-century industrialization in Britain and breeding in the colonies for meat and wool.¹ While the merino breed was kept as a state secret by the Spanish Empire, “merino mania” began to emerge in the late eighteenth century due to growing interest from investors in ac-

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1 Carla Rahn Philips and William D. Philips, Jr. *Spain’s Golden Fleece: Wool Production and the Wool Trade from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); John A. Marino, *Pastoral Economics in the Kingdom of Naples* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988). For breeding in colonial spaces, see: Rebecca J. H. Woods, *The Herds Shot Round the World: Native Breeds and the British Empire, 1800-1900* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Rebecca J. H. Woods, “From Colonial Animal to Imperial Edible: Building an Empire of Sheep in New Zealand, ca. 1880-1900,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 35, no. 1 (2015): 117-36; Benjamin Hurwitz, “Grazing the Modern World: Merino Sheep in South Africa and the United States, 1775-1840” (PhD diss., George Mason University, 2017).

quiring flocks, by all means, to establish farms and break Spain's monopoly.² In Ottoman history, merino sheep came to the fore in the 1830s with the aim of import substitution industrialization, to domestically supply high quality wool for the textile industry.³ The Ottoman industrialization literature has long argued that the state, inspired by France and Britain, imported its first merino sheep in 1839 to lessen the textile industry's dependence on international wool markets.⁴ However, I find that the first merino purchase by the Ottomans was in October 1833, six years earlier than previously shown. This redating of the purchase unearths understudied actors and networks of the wool and merino trade extending from Liverpool, Alicante, and Trieste to Odessa and Istanbul, particularly during a period of rising wool prices.⁵

An early history of merino sheep in the Ottoman lands reveals previously undiscovered connections. First, it shows that the Spanish consul-entrepreneurs remained the primary contacts and mediated the merino trade in the Ottoman and Russian empires. This fact contrasts with other breeding experiments in North America, Europe, South Africa, and Australasia where investors sought ways to bypass Spain's monopoly. Second, it demonstrates the state-backed enrichment of merchants in the meat provisioning industry and the early attempts to "Muslimize" this business. This paper finds figures like Sayıcı İsmail Agha and his brothers, to whom the first flock of merino sheep was entrusted. İsmail and his brothers amassed enormous profits in line with the Ottoman policies of Muslimization of meat provisioning business

2 Carroll W. Pursell, Jr. "E. I. du Pont and the Merino Mania in Delaware, 1805-1815," *Agricultural History* 36, no. 2 (1962): 91-100.

3 Tevfik Güran, *19. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Tarımı* (Eren Yayıncılık, 1998): 45-59; Necmi Odabaşı, "Mihaliç Çiftlikât-ı Hümayûnu ve İdaresi" (PhD diss., Uludağ University, 2014), 160, 209-10. Odabaşı underlines that there was an interest in merino sheep in 1835, but this interest did not materialize until the 1840s. M. Erdem Kabadayı, "Introduction of Merino Sheep Breeding in the Ottoman Empire: Successes and Failures" in *Animals and People in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi (Eren Yayıncılık, 2010), 157.

4 Kabadayı, "Introduction of Merino Sheep," 154; Mehmet Genç, "Ottoman Industry in the Eighteenth Century: General Framework, Characteristics, and Main Trends" in *Manufacturing in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, 1500-1950*, ed. Donald Quataert (SUNY Press, 1994), 73-74.

5 For 60 percent rise in wool prices between 1827 and 1835, see Rebecca J. H. Woods, "Green Mountain Merinos: From New England to New South Wales in the Nineteenth Century," *Vermont History* 85, no. 1 (2017): 10.

right after the Greek Revolution and the abolition of the Janissaries in 1826. Third, it reveals the intricate connections between meat provisioning, merino breeding for industry, and Ottoman military finance, collectively forming what I refer to as the Ottoman *military-industrial complex*.⁶ This *complex* was an outcome of and response to the multiscale conflicts, violence, and alliances unfolding since the eighteenth century and leading to the “New Order”⁷ (*Nizam-ı Cedid*) and the Tanzimat political economies.⁸ An early history of merino sheep, therefore, is essential for understanding the complex relations between the Ottoman state, economy, and military.

In what follows, I first focus on the 1833 purchase from Odessa, where two Spanish consul-entrepreneurs owned a farm and sold merino sheep to Ottoman entrepreneurs. I find that merino breed circulated as a commodity marketed through commercial and consular networks. Next, by examining the Ottoman bureaucrats’ correspondences, I argue that the merino sheep became live assets and fixed capital enabling industrial profits to be allocated toward military expenses. In the third part, I demonstrate that the elimination of state monopolies in meat provisioning occurred in the wake of the mass corruption of state-backed Sayıcı İsmail Agha and his brothers. Differing from the previous research on import substitution industrialization, I find that an early his-

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- 6 My use of military-industrial complex echoes Erol Ülker’s military-financial complex as “an informal alliance of military and financial sectors” during World War I. Ülker notes that the military and civilian provisioning enabled amassment of money in the hands of Muslim-Turkish entrepreneurial class, who also came to dominate the lucrative and strategic businesses such as wagon and import trade, infrastructure investments, and mining. See, Erol Ülker, “Military, Finance, and Economy in the Late Ottoman Empire: Directorate-General of Hedjaz and Military Railways and Ports, 1914-1919,” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 22, no. 1 (2020): 17-28; Erol Ülker, *Meşrutîyet’ten Cumhuriyet’e Mesleki Temsil ve Sol* (Yordam, 2023).
- 7 Building on the critiques of modernization theory, Ali Yaycıoğlu frames the New Order as an intellectual coalition of “Euro-Ottoman military enlightenment” and “Islamic puritan activism.” See, Ali Yaycıoğlu “Guarding Traditions and Laws—Disciplining Bodies and Souls: Tradition, Science, and Religion in the Age of Ottoman Reform,” *Modern Asian Studies* 52, no. 5 (2018): 1542-1603. See also, Butrus Abu-Manneh, “Between Heterodox and Sunni Orthodox Islam: The Bektâşi Order in the Nineteenth Century and Its Opponents,” *Turkish Historical Review* 8, no. 2 (2017): 203-18; Frederick F. Anscombe “Islam and the Age of Ottoman Reform,” *Past & Present* 208, no. 1 (2010): 159-89.
- 8 Yonca Köksal, *The Ottoman Empire in the Tanzimat Era: Provincial Perspectives from Ankara to Edirne* (Routledge, 2019).

tory of merino sheep reveals the rise and fall of bourgeois family businesses. By combining and expanding upon the animal histories of the Middle East⁹ and Science, Technology, and Society (STS) studies,¹⁰ I examine merino sheep as both an emerging commodity and an early technoscientific organism to resurface understudied political economies.

Consuls, Bureaucrats, and Entrepreneurs of the 1833 Odessa Purchase

The earliest evidence of merino sheep purchase is a receipt with an attached expense book, pointing to two high-ranking Ottoman bureaucrats who bought the sheep from Spanish consul-entrepreneurs in Odessa to breed them in Ottoman lands for the textile industry.¹¹ The first bureaucrat was Ömer

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- 9 Suraiya Faroqhi, ed., *Animals and People in the Ottoman Empire* (Eren Yayıncılık, 2010). Alan Mikhail, *The Animal in the Ottoman Egypt* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Alan Mikhail, “Unleashing the Beast: Animals, Energy, and the Economy of Labor in Ottoman Egypt,” *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 2 (2013): 317-48; Alan Mikhail, “Animals as Property in Early Modern Ottoman Egypt,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53, no.4 (2010): 621-52; Semih Çelik, “‘It’s a Bad Fate to be Born Near a Forest’: Forest, People and Buffaloes in mid-19th Century North Western Anatolia” in *Seeds of Power: Explorations in Ottoman Environmental History*, ed. Onur İnal and Yavuz Köse (White Horse Press, 2019), 111-33. Semih Çelik, “‘Sheep go to Heaven, (Angora) Goats go to Hell’: A Spatiotemporal Analysis of the Angora Goat Economy in Ankara Province (1895-1905)” in *Weaving the History: Mystery of a City, Sof*, ed. Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu and Gözde Çerçioğlu Yücel (VEKAM, 2018), 95-107; Onur İnal, “One-Humped History: The Camel as Historical Actor in the Late Ottoman Empire,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 53, no. 1 (2021): 57-72.
- 10 Tiago Saraiva, *Fascist Pigs: Technoscientific Organisms and the History of Fascism* (MIT Press, 2018); Alex Blanchette, *Porkopolis: American Animality, Standardized Life, and the Factory Farm* (Duke University Press, 2020).
- 11 After the violent abolition of the Janissaries in 1826, and during the tumultuous period of the Greek Revolution, the Ottoman state initiated a series of reforms to create a regular army similar to its contemporary European counterparts. The state-owned textile industry came to the forefront during this time to meet the new army’s clothing requirements. As discussed below, the industrial-scale production of fezzes enabled state bureaucrats to sell the new commodity to civilians and generate profits. For the origins of the fez reform, see İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, “‘Asâkir-i Mansûre’ye Fes Giydirilmesi Hakkında Sadr-ı Âzâmın Takriri ve II. Mahmud’un Hatt-ı Hümayunu,” *Bellekten* 18, no. 70 (1954): 224-25; Donald Quataert, “Clothing Laws, State, and Society in the Ottoman Empire, 1720-1829,” *International*

Lütfi Efendi, whom I also consider an entrepreneur for his proactive role in importing and breeding merino sheep in the Ottoman Empire in the early 1830s. He served as the Overseer of Imperial Textiles¹² and was the founding manager of Feshâne, one of the earliest investments in the textile industry to produce military and civilian headgear. The second bureaucrat was Ahmed Fevzi Pasha, the Ottoman diplomatic agent in St. Petersburg at the time, who would soon become the Admiral in Chief. The receipt, penned by Mazlum (Mustafa Fehmi) Pasha, a high-ranking functionary in the Imperial Dockyards and Ömer Lütfi Efendi's son-in-law, does not specify how many merino rams or ewes had been purchased. Some evidence from 1835, however, suggests that there must be at least 183 rams and 612 ewes at the time of purchase. The merino sheep sailed from Odessa to Istanbul on a ship owned by a Russian merchant, perhaps of Greek origin, called Zuhuraki¹³, who was paid 12,729 *куруş* (piaster) and 10 *paras* for his service.¹⁴

These connections to Odessa, far from being accidental, confirm that the city and its environs had become important hubs for merino breeding and trade in the Black Sea. As Patricia Herlihy notes, some French immigrants introduced merino sheep and their breeding to Odessa in the first decades of the nineteenth

Journal of Middle East Studies 29, no. 3 (1997): 403-25. For the merino sheep in Egypt, see Alan Mikhail, "Veterinary Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Egypt" in *Plague and Contagion in the Islamic Mediterranean*, ed. Nükhet Varlık (Arc Humanities Press, 2017), 127.

- 12 The original phrase used here is "*harir nazırı*." *Harir* literally means silk, but it refers to textiles in this context.
- 13 Zuhuraki remained as the key merchant for Ottomans to purchase merino sheep from the breeders in the western Black Sea in the 1840s. Between 1840 and 1850, the network of informants working for state intelligence reported that there were rumors about Zuhuraki the Russian merchant who brought a pair of merino sheep for 5,500 *куруş* to Istanbul. Cengiz Kırılı, *Sultan ve Kamuoyu: Osmanlı Modernleşme Sürecinde Havadis Jurnalleri (1840-1850)* (Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2008), 383.
- 14 BOA, HH.d.21529. "*Kapudan-ı derya devletli Ahmed Fevzi Paşa hazretlerinin marifet-i âliyeleriyle kırk dokuz senesi şehri cemazi'ül-evvelinde Hocabeyden celb ve hâkîpây-yı ihsan-fezâ-yı hazret-i şehinşâhîye takdim ile şeref-sünub eden emr u ferman-ı hümayun-ı mülukane mucibince Feshâne-yi Amire nazırı sabık kayınpederim Ömer Lütfi Efendi marifetiyle perveriş ve idare olunan İspanya ağnamının mikdarı ve hasılat ve mesarifatı mübeyyin defteridir.*" As the document's author identifies Ömer Lütfi Efendi as his father-in-law, I conclude that it was written by Mazlum Pasha.

century.¹⁵ A report from 1819 mentioned some commercial merino breeders and the liveliness of the wool trade in the city. According to the report, “there was one or two establishments ... engaged to furnish, in the course of two years 3000 [merino] rams” at a location 21 kilometers south of the city center.¹⁶

The intrusion of the Ottoman army into a commercial farm near Odessa in 1855 reveals that the merino breed had by then become a commodity traded by the Spanish consul-entrepreneurs in the Black Sea. During the Crimean War, Gerardo de Souza,¹⁷ the Spanish consul to the Ottoman empire in Istanbul, complained about the Ottoman ground forces who trespassed on and damaged the Korulu Farm near Odessa owned by Francisco Baguer y Rivas, the Spanish consul to Russia residing in Odessa. According to the bailiff of the farm, damage caused by the soldiers amounted to 68,920 rubles. He also added that the farm was specifically designed to “raise a flock of purebred merinos,” like no other.¹⁸

The breakdown of the damage given by the Ottoman army to the Korulu Farm proved that merinos were the most expensive asset. Almost 70 percent of the damage—about 46,700 rubles—corresponded to the value of 457 “elite merino rams” (*béliers de haute élite*). The remaining 30 percent covered good breeds of cow, merino ewes, merino lambs, sheep with coarse wool, and some Ankara goats famous for their mohair. Altogether, this amounted to 5,351 animals.¹⁹ Another document concerning the attack on the farm noted that soldiers had stolen four flocks of merino sheep, without mentioning the other animals.²⁰ The presence of Ankara goats in a commercial farm in Odessa might indicate that the Spanish investors experimented with the Anatolian

15 Patricia Herlihy, *Odessa Recollected: The Port and the People* (Academic Studies Press, 2018), 128.

16 William Simons, *An Account of Odessa Translated from French Showing the Benefits of the Trade of the Black Sea to the United States of America and the Advantages of a Commercial Treaty with Turkey* (Newport, 1819), 9.

17 According to Edhem Eldem, the consul’s full name was Gerardo de Souza y Castro. He came to Istanbul in 1831 and learned many languages over years. Edhem Eldem, “Ottomans at the Alhambra, 1844-1914: An Investigation into the Perception of Al-Andalus by Ottoman Subjects in Times of Modernity,” *Turcica*, 49 (2018): 279.

18 BOA, HR.TO.268/34.2 (28 July 1855).

19 BOA, HR.TO.268/34.2. It means that one merino ram on average costed 102.18 rubles.

20 BOA, HR.TO.268/34.4.

breed and traded it in international markets. The Korulu Farm's inventory, hence, was a sign of regional trade and commodification of livestock breeds, primarily merino sheep, in the era of industrialization.

Gerardo de Souza, while complaining that merino sheep were for breeding and not for meat, also noted that the Ottomans had regularly purchased sheep through him to initiate industrial-scale crossbreeding. Concerned that the stolen merino sheep might already have been butchered, Souza emphasized that “as everyone knows it is worthless to butcher and eat them...since they are raised for breeding...and quite expensive for this reason.”²¹ The Ottomans, he continued, should have known that the Korulu Farm was owned by the Spanish consul in Odessa, since they had bought a number of merino rams in 1842 from Korulu to start breeding in Bursa.²² Here Souza was referring to the Ottoman state investments in merino breeding, which involved repurposing an imperial landed estate (*çiftlik*) in the plain of Mihaliç to the west of Bursa. By (cross)breeding sheep on an industrial scale, the aim was to produce high-quality wool for the textile industry.²³ While the Mihaliç project falls outside the scope of this article, it is important to underline that the farms in and around Odessa and these Spanish and Russian connections remained crucial for the industrial logistics.²⁴

21 BOA, HR.TO.268/34.4. “Korulu çiftliği koyunlarının pabası ziyade olduğundan ve yalnız sair koyunların cinsi ıslah için tahsis olunduğundan kesilüb yenilmeğe yaramayacakları herkesin malumu misüllü ...” For the French original, see BOA, HR.TO.268/34.7.

22 BOA, HR.TO.268/34.7.

23 For the establishment of and labor organization in the Mihaliç Imperial Farms, see Anıl Aşkın, “The Environment, Institutions, and Economy in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire: The Imperial Landed Estates of Mihaliç (1840-1850)” (MA thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2017). For a long nineteenth century perspective on the landed estates of Mihaliç, see Odabaşı “Mihaliç Çiftlikât-ı Hümâyûnu.” For a broader perspective on sheep breeding in Mihaliç and the *çiftlik* debate, see Fatma Melek Arıkan's chapter in this present volume and Zeynep Akçakaya, “‘Çiftlik’ Tartışmasına Yeniden Bakmak: Mihaliç’te 19. Yüzyılda Koyunlar, Tüccarlar, Seller, Devlet ve Çiftlikler” in *Osmanlı Tarihçiliğinde Yeni Çalışmalar: Kaynak, Bağlam, Yöntem*, ed. Fatma Öncel and Sinem Erdoğan İşkorkutan (Vakıf Bank Kültür Yayınları, 2023), 161-84.

24 For another document referring to a purchase mediated by the Spanish consul in 1848, see BOA, HH.d.66/30, 4 Cemazeyilevvel 1264 (8 April 1848).

Further details about Francisco Baguer y Rivas resurface a connection between merchant banking and industrial capitalism in the early nineteenth century. A company known as Huth & Co. paid Baguer y Rivas for his consular services in Odessa. As Manuel Llorca-Jaña demonstrates, the founder of this company was a German merchant, Frederick Huth, who had conducted business in Spain for many years and married Manuela, a woman with ties to the Spanish crown. Huth mediated the merino wool trade between Spain and England through his vast business network. As a result, Huth & Co. had many corporate agents based in South and North America, Europe, and Russia. With the help of his wife's royal ties and due to his commercial success, he was noticed by the Spanish government. In the 1830s, the company began paying the salaries of Spanish consuls in regions where its presence aligned with consular needs, both within and beyond Eastern Europe—a move made possible through its corporate agents and business network.²⁵

The occupation of Francisco Baguer y Rivas's commercial merino farm in 1855 shows how the consular and commercial worlds had by then been intertwined. In addition to his involvement in colonial trade and credit, Llorca-Jaña adds that Frederick Huth had built his early fortune extensively on exporting Spanish raw merino wool to Britain as well as importing iron and coal to Spain.²⁶ In this global venture, Huth & Co.'s operations in Odessa became more important after the company opened its Liverpool branch in the 1830s. Corporate tasks handled by the branch included monitoring and coordinating indigo imports and Spanish wool shipments destined for sale in Odessa, as well as participating in Russian and Australian wool trade.²⁷ Odessa, therefore, became the company's easternmost branch, which may have provided access to Russian and Ottoman markets.²⁸ Interestingly, Francisco Baguer y Rivas

25 Manuel Llorca-Jaña, *The Globalization of Merchant Banking before 1850* (Routledge, 2016), 62.

26 Manuel Llorca-Jaña, "Connections and Networks in Spain of a London Merchant-Banker, 1800-1850," *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Economic History* 31, no. 3 (2013): 435, 448.

27 Llorca-Jaña, *Merchant Banking*, 85-86.

28 Llorca-Jaña, "Connections and Networks," 441-42. Manuel Llorca-Jaña mentions that Huth & Co. had two correspondents based in Turkey (i.e., Ottoman Empire), out of a total of 265 correspondents stationed across North America, the Caribbean, South America, Asia, and Africa.

invested in breeding merino sheep in there while Huth & Co. had planned to sell merino wool. I have not come across any reference clarifying whether the commercial merino farm in Odessa served as Huth & Co.'s outpost to produce and sell merino wool alongside selling sheep.

Be that as it may, once shipped from Odessa to Istanbul, merino sheep as live assets and expensive breeding technology were treated with care by the Ottomans. Following the purchase in October 1833, the first flock of merino sheep was set to be brought to the imperial *çiftlik* of Ayazağa. Two Ottoman personnel, likely appointed by the high-ranking bureaucrats who facilitated the purchase, accompanied the flock on its voyage from Odessa to Istanbul. After anchoring at the pier of İstinye, the merino sheep were brought ashore and later transferred to Ayazağa. Many construction materials such as timber, iron nails, brick, tile, and straw mats were purchased from local merchants in the capital to repurpose a stable into a sheepfold on the estate. Expenses listed in the *çiftlik* records as “medication” (*mualece*) for sheep imply that Ottoman bureaucrats were also involved in various efforts to facilitate the animals' acclimation to their new environment.²⁹

Further preparations suggest that Istanbul was intended only as a temporary residence for the animals, and that the Balkans were to serve as the base of early merino breeding. Several inspectors, assisted by Ömer Lütfi Efendi's armed guards, were dispatched from Istanbul to examine pastures in Edirne and Hayrabolu. Winter quarters for the sheep were built, likely after the inspectors recommended renting a dairy farm (*mandıra*) around Hayrabolu. Ömer Lütfi Efendi stationed his men to oversee the construction and rent rooms for the construction workers (*amele*).³⁰ Once the preparations were complete, the sheep were shorn in the spring of 1834. During this period, some officials made more frequent roundtrips between Hayrabolu and Istanbul,³¹ delivering the early wool samples to the authorities and keeping them updated on the progress of breeding. From Spain to Odessa and then Istanbul and the Balkans, merino sheep—exchanged as a commodity between the Spanish consul-entrepreneurs and the Ottoman entrepreneur-bureaucrats—started to

29 BOA, HH.d.21529.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

deliver their use-values, both as breeding technology and wool, to the early Ottoman industry.

Early Industrial Breeding Plans and the Channeling of Fez Surplus Toward Military Expenditures

Early references to merino wool before the Odessa purchase suggest that the Ottoman bureaucrats considered domestic breeds for fez production rather than dismissing them outright. Around the time the Ottoman state launched fez manufacturing experiments in Edirne and opened a manufacturing plant in Istanbul, sample fezzes were produced using wool from domestic breeds in Plovdiv and Bursa. These samples were sent to Istanbul and underwent a thorough examination by the Chamber of Consultancy (*Meclis-i Şûrâ*). While the wool from Bursa was considered suitable for fez production, the Chamber sought ways to incorporate merino wool into domestic production. Ömer Lütfi Efendi, a member of the Chamber, was already aware of merino sheep and their wool, and he conveyed news of their global popularity to the others. He stated that “Spanish wool does not only belong to Spain, and it is abundant in France, Austria, and Russia so it is possible to acquire it by the help of the merchants [of those countries].”³² The increase in the number of merino sheep and wool suppliers in the neighboring areas clearly encouraged Ottoman entrepreneur-bureaucrats to invest.

Previous scholarship has argued that the early imports of merino sheep were driven by the inferiority of local breeds,³³ but the calculations behind import decisions were more nuanced. As mentioned above, local varieties of wool were not entirely disregarded; they were still sampled and examined. Between the establishment of Feshâne in Istanbul in 1833 and the death of Ömer Lütfi Efendi in October 1836, Nuri Pasha, the governor of Çirmen (Ormenio), was appointed to examine wool varieties in the Balkans. He sent several samples of fine wool from domestic breeds in Plovdiv and Edirne, within a certain price range, along with some locally manufactured fezzes. A similar duty of sampling fine local wool was assigned to Ahmed Agha, the governor of Bursa, who also sent his samples to Ömer Lütfi Efendi. After comparing the fezzes produced from dif-

32 BOA, HAT.317/18671.

33 Kabadayı, “Introduction of Merino Sheep,” 153; Genç, “Ottoman Industry,” 73.

ferent samples, the Chamber of Consultancy concluded that the Bursa wool was better than the Balkan wool in terms of quality, texture, and malleability.³⁴

The better suitability of Bursa wool for fez production raised two potential avenues for future investment. One was that Bursa itself would become a new fez production center capable of sourcing wool locally. This would require new investments in machinery and buildings, potentially leading to the abandonment of the fez manufacturing experiments in Edirne—likely initiated in the early 1830s, before the establishment of the Istanbul Feshâne in 1833. These experiments followed a model that incorporated state actors and artisanal production and were often referred to as the Edirne Feshâne. The other, and preferred, option was to produce the wool in Bursa and ship it to Edirne. As Nikolai Todorov shows in his pioneering study, artisans in woolen *aba* cloth guilds in the Balkans had been expanding their putting-out networks since the early nineteenth century. Some in the local guilds like the Gümüşgerdâns were even becoming the first industrial capitalists, according to Todorov, thanks to the state contracts they had secured to supply woolen cloths to the Ottoman army.³⁵ Given the state's vested interests in the woolen industry in the Balkans, the Chamber members must have been disinterested in major investment elsewhere.

During the Chamber meetings, military authorities expressed their concerns about the sustainability of the fez production in Edirne if it were to rely solely on Bursa wool. The Commander in Chief of Ground Forces (*Serasker*) notably warned that there had to be a backup plan in case wool production in Bursa was suspended.³⁶ While agreeing on the better compatibility of Bursa wool for fez production, he maintained that relying on only one region to source wool could pose a risk to the continuity of the industry. Although I cannot trace how the commander's concern was received by others, the approach of

34 BOA, HAT.0324/18926-A. "... Edirne ve Filibe ve ol havalide hasil olan yapağının kıyyesinden yirmi sekizer otuzar dirhem incisi tefrik ettirilerek i'mal olunmuşken Brusa feslerine nisbetle uygunsuz olduğu tahakkuk eylemiş olduğundan oraların yapağısının yumuşak nev'inden mubâyaa ve tedarîğinde bir güna mahzur mütâlâa olunmadığı surette hazır vücuda gelmiş olan Edirne feshânesinin ta'tili münasib olmayub ..."

35 Nikolai Todorov, *The Balkan City, 1400-1900* (University of Washington Press, 1983), 232-33, 270-71.

36 BOA, HAT.0324/18926.

diversifying domestic wool sources to ensure continuity of production may offer insight into later Ottoman investments in large merino farms in Bursa.

I argue that importing merino sheep for the military textile industry marked a new era in which the entrepreneur-bureaucrats sought to gain the ability to subsidize military expenses through industrial surplus value. The imperial business plan was a profit-oriented project from the beginning. According to the entrepreneur-bureaucrats, Feshâne was going to produce more than the needs of the military and sell the fezzes to the civilians in the empire. This exclusive emphasis on Feshâne as the spearhead of industrial reform within imperial ambitions suggests that other production facilities, such as the one in Edirne, were either implicitly assumed to fall under the same business plan or regarded as peripheral to it. Ömer Lütfi Efendi estimated that 30,000 fezzes could be produced every year. Profits from the fez sales would ensure the reproduction of industrial capital, and part of the surplus value was to be spent subsidizing the fezzes to be given to the military.³⁷ After a series of discussions, the Chamber of Consultancy decided to invest in merino sheep within this framework of industrial profitability and subsidizing military expenses.³⁸ Thus, the ability to stream part of industrial surplus value toward military expenses depended on the reproduction of the industrial circuit of capital—a circuit which acquired a fiscal task and outlook.

The purchase of merino wool from Trieste shortly after the Odessa purchase also maps the wool suppliers and their commercial networks in the Mediterranean. In 1836, Ömer Lütfi Efendi reported that the Spanish wool in Feshâne's stocks would suffice for producing fezzes only for another four or five months. He requested the import of an additional 20,000 *kıyye*, or 25,640 kilograms, of Spanish wool from Trieste—where he had previously made purchases—through a certain Apal Hürmüz, a non-Muslim Ottoman merchant with

37 BOA, HAT.317/18671. "... *asakire verilecek feslerin mesarif-i vakıa'sı satılacak feslerin menafi'-i hasılasından çıkarılacağı ...*" Compared to Ömer Lütfi Efendi's annual estimate of 30,000 fezzes in 1833, the annual fez production was going to reach 100,000 in 1839. See Tevfik Güran, "Feshâne," in *Türk Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/feshane> (last accessed on 8 June 2023).

38 BOA, HAT.317/18671. "... *İspanya diyarından sair düvel-i ecnebiye memalikine ağnam celb olunduğu misillü inşallah-ı teali bi't-tedriç buraya dabi getirülürük refte refte hariçten yapığı mubâyasından dabi istiğna hasıl olacağı ...*"



MAP 2.1 Merino Sheep and Wool Supply Chains Relevant to the Ottomans.

a state-issued commercial charter (*beratlu tüccar*) (See **MAP 2.1**).³⁹ “The Austrian wool,” he wrote, “is better than all and would be suitable for fez production.”⁴⁰

The delivery and payment plan were outlined in the contract between Ömer Lütfi Efendi and Apal Hürmüz. Apal Hürmüz was expected to complete the delivery in multiple shipments over six months rather than all at once. The merino wool was going to be purchased in batches, and for the first and only

39 BOA, D.DRB.İ.2/5, 2 Cemazeyilahir 1252 (14 September 1836). Apal Hürmüz, originally spelled “آپل هرموز”, was residing in Galata, the famous commercial and financial district of Istanbul.

40 These references to the merino wool market in Trieste do support some contemporaneous observations on regulated and commercial merino breeding in Austria. Around the early 1780s, Austrian state officials imported several hundred animals from the port of Alicante to Trieste. In a report dated 1810 on merino breeding, Charles P. de Lasteyrie, pointed to Austria as one of the places with scientific merino breeding. See, Charles Philibert de Lasteyrie, *An Account of the Introduction of Merino sheep into the different states of Europe, and at the Cape of Good Hope*, translated by Benjamin Thompson (John Harding, 1810), 38-39, 196, 198-200.

time, Ömer Lütü Efendi specified the brand of merino wool to be purchased in Trieste: it had to be Arra.⁴¹ Each shipment was to be unloaded directly into the warehouses of Feshâne in the Golden Horn. According to the payment plan, the total cost was 870,000 *kuruş*, meaning that the unit cost of merino wool was about 34 *kuruş* per kilogram. It remains unknown how much profit Apal Hürmüz made from this trade. For the first round of wool purchases, Ömer Lütü Efendi was to pay him 100,000 *kuruş* within the first eleven days following the signing of the contract. For the remaining batches, payments would be made proportionately based on the volume of wool shipped and delivered to Feshâne each time.⁴²

Breeding Merino Sheep in the Balkans for Wool Supply to the Feshâne in Istanbul

After their early stay in Ayazağa, the imported merinos were entrusted to İsmail Agha and one of his brothers Hüseyin Agha, who both “grazed and managed” the sheep in Hayrabolu.⁴³ The earliest statistics on merino sheep managed by them date back to September 1836. In almost three years, from late 1833 to mid-1836, the number of merino sheep increased from 795 to 1,311 (TABLE 2.1).⁴⁴ This was largely due to Ömer Lütü Efendi, whose examination of the physical conditions in the eastern Thrace indicated that the pastures of İsmail Agha’s *çiftlik* in Hayrabolu were the most suitable for merino raising.⁴⁵ Although Ömer Lütü initially decided to purchase these lands for Feshâne,

41 Ibid. “...İspanya yapacağı cinsinden fes i’maline yarar Arra (ş) markalı nev’inden olarak...”

42 BOA, D.DRB.İ.2/5, 2 Cemazeyilahir 1252 (14 September 1836).

43 BOA, HH.d.21529 and BOA, KK.d.4050.8, 2 Muharrem 1257 (24 February 1841).

44 BOA, HH.d.21529. The birth and death statistics, which were annually kept in detail only for merino sheep, suggest that the early efforts focused on increasing the number of purebred flocks.

45 BOA, D.DRB.İ.4/2, 9 Muharrem 1255 (25 March 1839). This document refers to the events in the early 1830s. In the 1833 receipt, İsmail Agha’s farms were described as dairy farms (*mandıra*). Ömer Lütü Efendi’s preference for his pastures might confirm that they were well-maintained and nutrient-rich for commercial farming.

TABLE 2.1 The 1836 Statistics on Merino Sheep in Hayrabolu.

Type of Sheep	Initial Number	Death (Between December 1835 and September 1836)	Survived
Ewe (<i>marya</i>)	612	60	552
Ram	183	7	176
Yearling Male Lamb	43	8	35
Yearling Female Lamb	222	45	177
Birth	575	164	411
Total			1351
Number of Sheep given to the Minister of Foreign Affairs		20 milk ewes 20 yearling lambs	40
Net			1311

Source: BOA, HH.d.21529.

İsmail managed to retain them on the condition that he would raise and multiply the merino flocks and supply merino wool to the factory.⁴⁶

These tasks established a financial relationship between İsmail Agha and the Treasury for Regular Army (*Mansure Hazinesî*, hereafter TfRA). He was expected to keep registers indicating the number of sheep along with a list of his expenses for raising merino flocks, shearing, washing wool, and shipping it to Feshâne. The TfRA covered his expenses for these activities, though he was not expected to profit from them.⁴⁷ Given that raising sheep and producing wool was a yearlong labor process, İsmail Agha could benefit by either underpaying his workers or subcontracting merino breeding to a third party in his network. The wording of the TfRA made clear that he was not permitted to deliver merino wool to anyone other than state authorities. The TfRA, however, left open the possibility for the sale of authorized sheep—likely those no longer of use—with the stipulation that the resulting revenues be transferred to Istanbul.⁴⁸

After covering İsmail Agha's expenses, the TfRA delivered the merino wool—which along with the merino sheep, actually belonged to the Sultan's Privy Purse (SPP)—to Feshâne free of charge. The financial relationship be-

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

tween the TfRA and the SPP could follow one of three possibilities. First, since the TfRA appropriated and distributed the wool free of charge to Feshâne, it could pay the SPP the value of wool produced in İsmail Agha's *çiftlik*. For this purpose, the two treasuries had to set a price for wool. The second option was to assign a value to the merino sheep entrusted to İsmail Agha. The TfRA would then pay this sum to the SPP and thereby become the new owner of the animals. In that case, there would be no need for the SPP to oversee the finances arising from merino breeding. The third option was to treat the two treasuries as a single entity of the Ottoman state (*ayrılık ve gayrılık olmaksızın birliktir*) and continue supplying merino wool to Feshâne free of charge.⁴⁹

While it is difficult to trace which option was chosen, especially given the rapid and ever-changing fiscal and institutional reforms in the late 1820s and 1830s, the account books for Feshâne's merino sheep in the 1840s suggest that a combination of the first and second scenarios was implemented. As breeding and crossbreeding activities continued, İsmail Agha and his successors as the managers of the merino flocks in Hayrabolu and Plovdiv reported the values of purebred merino and crossbreed sheep, as well as the values of wool, milk, and cheese produced on these *çiftlik*s.⁵⁰ In this way, the value of constant capital and technology (purebred merino and crossbred sheep) and the value of output (wool and other products) could be constantly monitored. This granular accounting also enabled the treasuries or imperial funds with different ownership claims over the sheep and their produce to send or receive funds as needed.

Counting Sheep, Faking Losses: Profiteering and Fragile Trust in Ottoman Provisioning

In addition to his involvement in merino breeding for Feshâne, İsmail Agha also served as a sheep counter (*sayıcı*), meaning that he played an important role in the collection of a sheep tax in the Balkans. In a conjuncture when the Ottoman elite aimed to place the running of meat provisioning under the control of Muslim actors in the early nineteenth century, he and his three brothers

49 Ibid.

50 BOA, HH.d.59, Late Ramazan 1261 (Early October 1845).

(Hüseyin Agha, Salih Agha, and Mustafa Agha)⁵¹ grew wealthier with state support. Originally from Kalkandelen (Tetovo) in North Macedonia,⁵² they had been residing in Bergos (Burgas) by the late 1830s, where they ran a joint family business composed of animal trade, sheep counting, money lending, and the management of *çiftliks*.⁵³ However, not long after, they were interrogated and imprisoned for several years, and their properties were confiscated for secretly pocketing millions of *kuruş*. What follows is a detailed account of their rise and fall as sheep counters.

The sheep counter refers to a late eighteenth-century institution in Istanbul's meat provisioning industry, which followed upon early modern provisioning policies known collectively as the *celepkeşan* system. Anthony Greenwood describes the *celepkeşan* as a vast network of sheep merchants, i.e., *celeps*, registered and tasked by the central government, to purchase sheep primarily in the Balkans and bring them to Istanbul for sale to the butchers all year round.⁵⁴ In this system, local judges prepared a record of shipment, verifying the number of sheep collected by the merchants to be sent to the capital.⁵⁵ The merchants were allowed to subcontract this task or hire sheep drovers (*sürücü*) and give them a share of the profit.⁵⁶ One distinctive characteristics of this provisioning system was compulsory sales to the slaughterhouses in Istanbul, with no strict rules or procedures governing their purchase from the flock owners.

Starting with the late eighteenth century, sheep counters like İsmail Agha, started to fulfill a task with a stricter fiscal outlook. In the 1780s, a new provisioning policy called one-tenth sheep tax (*ondalık ağnam*) was introduced in

51 BOA, KK.d.4050.14-15, 7 Cemazeyilevvel 1256 (7 July 1840). Mustafa Agha partook in the provincial management in the province of Tekfurdağı. See, BOA, C.ML.342/14066, 15 Cemazeyilevvel 1256 (15 July 1840).

52 BOA, HAT.1270/49231, 25 Muharrem 1253 (1 May 1837).

53 BOA, HAT.1270/49230, Ramazan-Zilkade 1250 (Early 1835). Part of their family business was inherited from their father, Elhâc Yusuf Agha. Yusuf died while he was heading to Mecca for pilgrimage or on his way back from pilgrimage to his hometown Kalkandelen. See, BOA, KK.d.4050.25, 7 Cemazeyilevvel 1256 (7 July 1840).

54 Antony Warren Greenwood, "Istanbul's Meat Provisioning: A Study of the Celepkeşan System" (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 1988), 67.

55 Ibid., 120-21.

56 Ibid., 129.

the Balkan provinces, requiring flock owners to sell one-tenth of their animals to the counters at the prices set by the state every year. Private individuals authorized by the central government, or the state-appointed functionaries entrusted with state capital, could serve as counters.⁵⁷ Likely introduced due to the growing population and increasing need for military provisions, compulsory purchases by the counters marked a stricter approach to meat provisioning, which may not have represented a total rupture from the *celepkeşan* system. Yet according to Ahmet Uzun, after the decades of inflation in the early nineteenth century, the state-set sheep prices became significantly lower than the market prices, effectively turning *ondalık ağnam* into a burdensome tax.⁵⁸

The early 1830s, when İsmail Agha and his brothers became sheep counters in the Bahar, Yenişehir (Larissa), and Samakov wings, also marked a period in which the government sought to “Muslimize” the meat provisioning business.⁵⁹ Shortly after the violent abolition of the Janissary corps in 1826, Elhâc Mustafa Agha, the Chief Meat Provisioning Officer of the Palace (*Hassa Kasabbaşısı*), prepared a report on the finances of sheep counters, amounting to several million *куруş* annually. Reflecting the Ottoman elites’ reverberating vocabulary of distrust toward Greeks during the Greek Revolution in the early 1820s,⁶⁰ Mustafa Agha stated that there were “more than one thousand infidel” sheep counters who had allegedly inflicted damage on the Muslims in the countryside for many years. Some “poor” flock owners even petitioned to bring one-tenth of their sheep directly to the authorities to bypass these counters. Mustafa Agha also implied that the Janissaries had long prevented provisioning officers

57 Ahmet Uzun, “İstanbul’un Et İhtiyacının Sağlanması: Ondalık Ağnam Uygulaması (1783-1858)” (PhD diss., Istanbul University, 1997), 61.

58 Ibid., 61.

59 The wings (*kol*) referred to the four major sheep-breeding ecologies of the Ottoman Balkans, which supplied hundreds, if not thousands, of flocks for both military and civilian provisioning in Istanbul via key overland routes. This system reflected a highly sophisticated network of animal husbandry, market exchange, transport logistics, and imperial finance. The volume of deliveries from different wings generally increased in the spring, while regions with milder winters served as provisioning centers during the colder months.

60 Hüseyin Şükrü Ilıcak, “A Radical Rethinking of Empire: Ottoman State and Society during the Greek War of Independence 1821-1826” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2011), 10-16.

from taking measures against the counters because of their connections with them. After “saving the state from the evil Janissaries,” he wrote, the next step was to “eliminate the menace of sheep counters” by replacing the non-Muslim ones with Muslims. For this purpose, following the abolition of the Janissary corps, he had expelled—or, in the original phrasing, “routed out and cleansed the inappropriate”—sheep counters, emphasizing that the appointment of Muslim counters would be more broadly accepted among elite circles.⁶¹

Mustafa Agha’s proposal for the gradual Muslimization of sheep counters, approved by Sultan Mahmud II, dates the elite vision of Muslimizing lucrative sectors back to the pre-Tanzimat era, rather than only to the early twen-

61 BOA, HAT.605/29618, Cemazeyilahir 1242-Cemazeyilahir 1244 (1827-28). “...sayıcılar maddesi cay-bahs olarak bunların topu binden ziyade gavur olub öteden beri taşralara ettikleri uygunsuzlukları meşhur-ı âfak iken şimdi gösterilen nizama göre bunları bir kat dahi serbest etmek lazımlı gelüb bu ise kefereyi ehl-i İslam üzerine taslit ve ettikleri ta’diyatı tecvız dimek olacağından buna rıza-yı hazret-i bâri ve rıza-yı cenab-ı cibandari olamayub gerçi bu sene ve vafir senelerden berü cari olarak ocağ-ı mahkur habislerinin müdahalelerinden dolayı şimdiye dek berkes dağ-ber-dil zaruri bir şey denilememiş ise de ... devlet-i aliye bunların beliyesinden kurtulmuş olacağından memalik-i mabruse ahalisini dahi işbu sayıcılar beliyesinden(?) kurtarmak lazımeden ve bi’l-garaz bunların kalması sebebiyle mesela kassab başılığa biraz sekte gelüb de şimdi canib-i miriye gösterdiği menfaatin birazına hâle gelecek olsa bile bu kadar ehl-i İslam bu beliyeden kurtulub da ...şu sayıcılar beliyesinin def’içün fi-mâ-bâ’d bunların kefereden istihdam olunmamak üzere ehl-i İslamdan tedarik ve istihdam olunsu ve zat-ı maslahata dahi hâle gelmemesiçün devletçe her ne güna tedbir ve ikdam lazımlı ise icra kılınmasının a’lâ şey olacağından bir kere bu keyfiyetleri ... sayıcıların öteden beri aşırı hareket ve fukaraya mazarratları cibetiyle fukara ondalık olarak vereceği ağnamı kendi eliyle götürüb teslimi razı olmak derecelerinde sayıcılarından yüzlerinden rahnedar olduklarına ve kendüsü [Elhâc Mustafa Ağa] dahi mütedeyyin ve hamitkâr adam olarak böyle şeyleri tecvız etmeyeceğine nazaran ehl-i İslamdan sayıcılar istihdamı bir hüsn-ü surete rabtı irad ve teklif olundukda vaki’ olan ifadesinde eğerce sayıcılar fi’l- asıl o misüllü envâ’-ı şenâ’at ve ta’arruzata mütecasir olmuşlar ise de kendüsü kasab başı olalıdan berü dikkat ve ihtimam ile içlerinde uygunsuz olanları def’ ve tathir etmiş olduğundan saye-yi şevketvaye-yi şehinşahilerinden hâric-i daire-yi ...bir güna vaz’-ı hareket edecemeyeceklerini ve ma’mâfih eğerce bunların ehl-i İslamdan olması müstahsen olacağında...” Without delving into further detail, Ahmet Uzun also notes the Ottoman state’s growing concern with favoring and appointing Muslim sheep counters. See, Ahmet Uzun, *İstanbul’un İaşesinde Devletin Rolü: Ondalık Ağnam Uygulaması, 1783-1857* (Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2006), 80.

tieth century as is often assumed.⁶² According to Mustafa, Muslimization had to be gradual because there were only “eight or nine non-Muslim shepherds” in the Balkans, who had long been involved in sheep counting and trade and had acquired comprehensive knowledge of sheep breeding from the countryside.⁶³ While it is unclear whether his use of “shepherd” was intended as derogatory toward non-Muslim sheep merchants, I see the specific number of counters as an indication of the concentration of wealth among a small group of merchants in the provisioning networks, whom the ruling elite wanted to eliminate. It would take time for state-backed Muslim counters to gain command over the countryside, as a sudden rupture in favor of Muslimization could seriously disrupt meat provisioning. Therefore, the task of Muslimizing sheep counters was to be “completed step by step.”⁶⁴

Under normal circumstances, the net profit of sheep counters was determined by their contractual agreements with state authorities, along with complex calculation methods that linked their private operational gains to the fiscal demands of the state. According to Ahmet Uzun, sheep counters pledged to deliver both the animals collected in-kind for provisioning and, in regions where the *ondalık ağnam* was paid in cash, the corresponding payments to Istanbul. The unit cost per sheep—including transportation and personnel expenses—was predetermined by state authorities and varied according to the provisioning wing. Upon arrival in Istanbul, state officials verified whether the counters had delivered the agreed number of animals and tax shares; those who failed to meet their obligations were fined. For those counters who ful-

62 For the early twentieth century state policies to empower the national Muslim bourgeoisie, see Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye’de Milli İktisat 1908-1918* (Yurt Yayınları, 1982) and Y. Doğan Çetinkaya, *Osmanlı’yı Müslümanlaştırmak: Kitle Siyaseti, Toplumsal Sınıflar, Boykotlar ve Milli İktisat* (İletişim Yayınları, 2015). For a critique of ambivalent treatment of the Muslim bourgeoisie and mercantile classes in Ottoman studies, see Yaşar Tolga Cora, “A Muslim Great Merchant [Tüccar] Family in the Late Ottoman Empire: A Case Study of the Nemlizades, 1860-1930,” *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 19, no. 1/2 (2013): 1-29.

63 BOA, HAT.605/29618, Cemazeyilahir 1242-Cemazeyilahir 1244 (1827-28). “...gavurlar öteden berü bu maslahatın içinde bulunarak sayıcılık usulünü ve taşralar ağnamının keyfiyatını ve müteferri’at-ı sairesini öğrenmiş ve sekiz dokuz kadar şoban olduğundan şimdiki halde topunun def’iyle yerlerine İslamdan olarak refte refte abirlerinin tedarik ve istihdamı lazım gelse...”

64 Ibid.

filled their obligations, the cost per sheep was deducted from the total revenues, comprising tax payments and sales to butchers, and the remaining net revenue was then divided between them and the state authorities, typically in equal shares or according to a pre-established ratio. Uzun also notes that the system became even more profitable for the counters when they delivered more animals than initially contracted, as the state was often willing to pay above the artificially low set prices. Moreover, since the system prioritized quantity over quality, the counters could deceive the authorities by retaining the healthier, better-fed animals for themselves.⁶⁵

Despite their close collaboration with central state authorities in provisioning and imperial finance, sheep counters increasingly became a source of concern due to their relative autonomy in the Balkan countryside. In each provisioning cycle, sheep counters were able to valorize their money-capital invested in livestock purchases, while further entrenching themselves within local political economies across provisioning ecologies. This offered them broader avenues for capital accumulation. The Ottoman elite's evident objective of gradually eliminating non-Muslim sheep counters may be linked to this cyclical pattern of accumulation, regulated through state-imposed prices. Over time, this would allow state-backed Muslim counters not only to gain greater control over provisioning networks but also to amass increasing economic power. Initiated amid the turmoil of the Greek Revolution and the abolition of the Janissary corps, it remains unclear whether this gradualist approach would have ultimately required more direct or violent intervention to fully displace undesired actors. In any case, the attempt to Muslimize meat provisioning reflects a broader elite vision: the strategic use of state power to restructure commercial hierarchies and facilitate the transfer of capital and wealth from one group to another in service of ruling class interests.

İsmail Agha's mass fraud case demonstrates that the Muslimization of sheep counters did not bring a structural change in the political economy of provisioning. Between 1835 and 1839, he handled the purchase of 3,338,905 sheep and their delivery to Istanbul under the *ondalık ağnam* tax. In 1839, the state authorities accused him of hiding 470,747 sheep and pocketing 9,731,936 *kuruş* over a period of three to four years. In response, İsmail admitted to concealing

65 Uzun, *İstanbul'un İaşesinde Devletin Rolü*, 80-86.

423,129 sheep and retaining 8,039,451 *kurus* for himself, apparently by selling the animals in Istanbul at prices well above the state-imposed purchase rates.⁶⁶ This profitable enterprise depended on inflating the reported death toll of sheep. Flocks collected in the Balkans were typically driven on foot for approximately 500 kilometers to Istanbul, during which some loss was expected. Exploiting this assumption, İsmail Agha engaged in forgery by declaring some living sheep as deceased in official records. These unaccounted-for animals, retained in his possession, were likely among the healthier and better-fed specimens of the flock. Besides these activities, İsmail also subcontracted his sheep-counting rights in various districts to local tax farmers, thereby gaining a foothold in provincial fiscal networks.⁶⁷ The array of manipulations and tactics employed by him—and likely by many others—demonstrates how state-backed authority in meat provisioning could become a lucrative source of wealth. This dynamic ultimately confirms the insight of Sultan Mahmud II, who reportedly remarked: “Sheep counting is a trick of numbers, so great mischiefs get into it.”⁶⁸

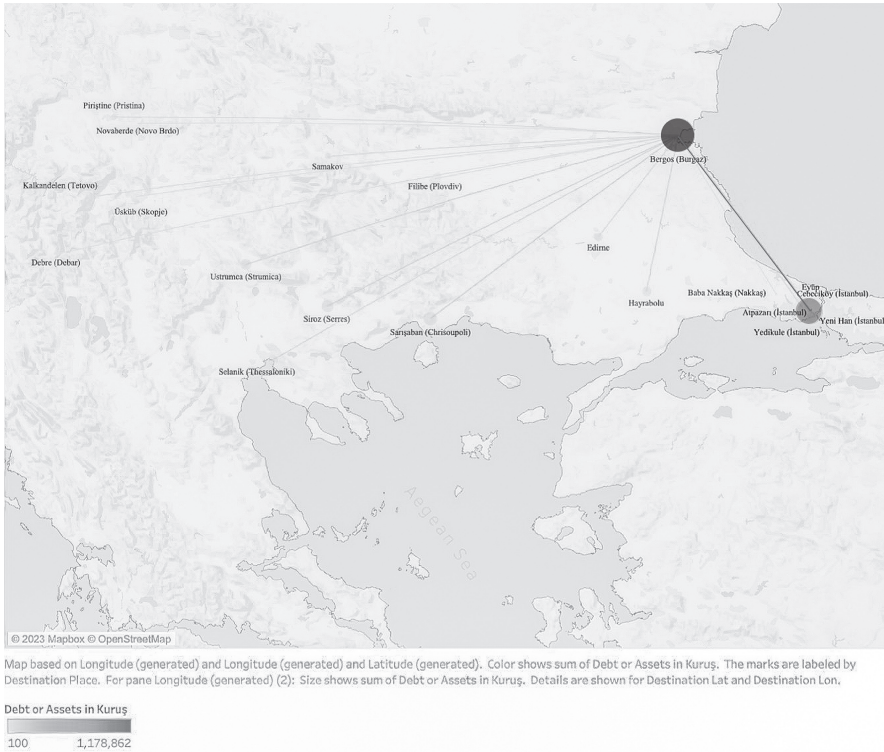
The investigation into the assets of İsmail Agha and his brothers quantifies their state-backed enrichment. In late 1840, the official investigators’ calculations to clear their debts showed that they doubled their assets in less than a decade after becoming sheep counters. The value of their *çiftlik*s, lands, and animals in Hayrabolu and Bergos was 310,109 *kurus* in 1840. They had acquired about 52 percent of this wealth after their appointment as sheep counters in the early 1830s.⁶⁹ They had been producing and selling tons of wheat, barley, rye, millet, fodder, and hundreds of kilograms of tobacco and sesame. They also rented portions of their land to generate additional income. This

66 İlker Aykut, “Osmanlı’da İktisadi Suçlara Bir Örnek: Ondalık Ağnam Uygulamasında Sayıcı İsmail Ağa’nın Yolsuzluğu” (MA thesis, Istanbul University, 2011), 56-58. See also, BOA, KK.d.2433 and KK.d.2433.M (1255-56).

67 Aykut, “Osmanlı’da İktisadi Suçlara Bir Örnek,” 56-58.

68 BOA, HAT.605/29628.1. “... bu sayıcılık maddesi akçe oyunu olduğundan içine pek çok fesad giriyor ...”

69 BOA, İ.MVL.31/523.2, 25 Şevval 1256 (20 December 1840). These investigations were carried out after İsmail Agha requested to be released and settled in Istanbul in late August 1840. He wanted the government to rent him a five or six room apartment to live with his family and servants, endow him with a monthly salary, and leave some of his money and jewelry to him. See, BOA, İ.DH.20/944, 2 Recep 1256 (30 August 1840).



MAP 2.2 Monetary Assets and Credit Network of İsmail Agha and His Brothers.

scale and speed of İsmail Agha and his brothers' enrichment suggests that their mobilization of state power and its resources could be seen as an episode of *original* accumulation in the Marxian sense,⁷⁰ which allowed them to amass money by *force* and *fraud*, convert the money into capital, and eventually expand their already existing capital in use.

Alongside their immovable assets, they created a network of debt and credit extending from northern Macedonia to Istanbul (See MAP 2.2). On the Istanbul

70 For force and state violence being a constituent of capital and capitalism, see Karl Marx, "Part Eight: So-Called Primitive Accumulation" in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (Penguin Books, 1990[1976]), 871-940; Robert Nichols "Disaggregating Primitive Accumulation," *Radical Philosophy* 194 (2015): 18-28; William Clare Roberts, "What was Primitive Accumulation? Reconstructing the Origin of a Critical Concept," *European Journal of Political Theory* 19, no. 4 (2020): 532-52. For the use of original accumulation instead of primitive accumulation, see Siyaveş Azeri, "Ursprüngliche Akkumulation'nun Sürekliliği, Dolaylı Tahakküm ve Devlet," *Praksis*, no. 47 (2017): 93-118.

end of the network, they had been doing business with famous moneylenders who had offered official brokerage and currency conversion services to the Ottoman treasury. Among them were Sarraf Arzuman, Sarraf Hazar, Sarraf Hatem, Sarraf Bedros (son of Mardiros), Güzeloğlu Artin, Sarraf Mıgırđıç, Sarraf Abraham Feraş, and Sarraf Bedros from Egypt.⁷¹ There were also a large number of local butchers, greengrocers, villagers, village administrators, and scribal clerks who had received credit from İsmail Agha and his brothers.⁷² Following his imprisonment, İsmail complained that he would face considerable difficulty managing this credit network,⁷³ the sinews of which were debts extending into villages as well as into the cities.

The purchase and droving of hundreds of thousands of sheep from the Balkans required what Andreas Lyberatos describes as a “semi-state economic network.”⁷⁴ The expense books related to İsmail Agha’s activities in sheep provisioning in 1835 and 1836 offer insight into the rural organization and division of labor within his semi-state network. He had between 1,000 and 2,000 men under his command, if not more. While some of these men were responsible for delivering the orders declaring the season of one-tenth purchases had started, around 500 others were employed as village counters.⁷⁵ Additionally, there were about 700 salaried men who went to the local bazaars to purchase provisions to feed this network’s animals, hundreds of shepherds who sheared the sheep to be driven to Istanbul, and officials who sought winter pastures to make sure that the provisioning went on year-round (See **MAP 2.3**).⁷⁶

71 BOA, KK.d.2433. Some of these moneylenders and their residences can be found in the following article: Ömerül Faruk Bölükbaşı, “İstanbul Sarrafları (1691-1835),” *Türk Kültürü İncelemeleri Dergisi*, no. 30 (2014): 19-96.

72 BOA, KK.d.2433.

73 BOA, İ.DH.20/944.

74 Andreas Lyberatos “Men of the Sultan: The *Beğlik* Sheep Tax Collection System and the Rise of a Bulgarian National Bourgeoisie in Nineteenth-Century Plovdiv,” *Turkish Historical Review* 1, no. 1 (2010): 70.

75 The number of these village counters does seem realistic. As shown in the **MAP 2.3**, there were almost 90 destinations in the Çöke District which was only one of the broader sheep provisioning wings. Buying sheep from various wings and multiple districts through the sheep counters’ network would require stationing hundreds, if not thousands, of men.

76 BOA, C.AS.464/19342, (1835-36).



MAP 2.3: Seventy-Eight Villages and Seven Pastures in the Çöke District under the Bahar Wing based on BOA, C.ML.421/17107.1.

İsmail Agha's state-backed enrichment, which coincided with the ruling elites' attempts to Muslimize the meat provisioning sector in the late 1820s, and its subsequent interruption due to his fraud, also shed light on the rise of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie, notably the Chalikov family, who emerged around the same time as İsmail Agha and his brothers. As Andreas Lyberatos shows, the Chalikovs (Çalikoğulları in Ottoman Turkish) were originally from the small town of Koprivshitsa⁷⁷ and they later moved to Plovdiv about 90 kilometers south.⁷⁸ The family had been involved in the sheep trade and they later became official sheep counters, commanding a vast “semi-state economic network” like

⁷⁷ According to Nikolai Todorov, Koprivshitsa supplied wool to putting-out merchants and urban manufactures in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Todorov, *The Balkan City*, 213.

⁷⁸ Lyberatos, “Men of the Sultan,” 57.

İsmail Agha's. Based on the Chalikov family papers, Lyberatos states that the sheep counters on the ground were highly organized cavalries and the locals called them the "Bulgarian army."⁷⁹ The family reportedly staffed their network on an ethnic basis, and this contributed to "the emerging Bulgarian nationality."⁸⁰ They also donated to the urban religious establishments with the profits they earned with their later investments in woolen manufacture in Plovdiv.⁸¹

İsmail Agha was intriguingly connected to the Chalikovs. As contemporaries, their networks including merino breeding had overlapped in the Balkans. When the corruption case was opened against İsmail Agha in 1839, he handed over the merino sheep under his management to a certain Salcho Chomakov, the nephew of Stoyan Chalikov (d. 1850), one of the leading figures of the family.⁸² Within the Chalikov sheep counting network, Salcho was responsible for droving animals from the Balkans to the slaughterhouses in Istanbul.⁸³ He also apparently assisted or partnered with İsmail Agha to breed and crossbreed merino sheep.⁸⁴ In the Ottoman state documents, there are references indicating that he managed some *karabaş* sheep alongside merino and remained as the prime contact for crossbreeding merino sheep in the Balkans for the textile industry.⁸⁵

Sayıcı İsmail Agha's imprisonment and confiscation of his properties granted the Chalikov family greater room to maneuver. Because of his overlap with İsmail Agha's networks, the central government attempted to investigate Stoyan

79 Ibid., 67. Also see, BOA, C.AS.510/21305.2, (1835-36).

80 Lyberatos, "Men of the Sultan," 70. One expense book suggests that the ethnic staffing might be in relative, not absolute, terms. For example, in the Chalikov network, Stoyan Chalikov employed 120 Muslims and 323 non-Muslims to serve as officials in the local bazaars in 1835-36. Whereas İsmail Agha in the same year employed 667 men, 336 Muslims and 331 non-Muslims. See, BOA, C.AS.510/21305.2; BOA, C.AS.464/19342, (1835-36).

81 Lyberatos, "Men of the Sultan," 71 and 74-75.

82 BOA, KK.d.4050.8, 2 Muharrem 1257 (28 February 1841).

83 Lyberatos, "Men of the Sultan," 19, 66.

84 From the finances related to merino and *karabaş* sheep, Salcho owed 2,560 *kuruş* to İsmail Agha at the time of the latter's imprisonment.

85 BOA, KK.d.4050.8, 2 Muharrem 1257 (28 February 1841); Kabadayı, "Introduction of Merino Sheep," 159. According to İrfan Kokdaş, *karabaş* sheep breed was raised in the regions of Deliorman and Dobruca. See, İrfan Kokdaş "Celebs, Butchers, and the Sheep: The Worlds of Meat in Istanbul in the Sixteenth-Seventeenth Centuries," (MA thesis, Sabancı University, 2007), 30.

Chalikov's account books in early 1840, but never followed through. Stoyan Chalikov and İsmail Agha often worked in the same provisioning zones, namely the Bahar, Yenişehir, and Samakov wings. Stoyan admitted that if the government also checked his account books, two things would become clear: that he owed too much to İsmail Agha, and that he had concealed some of the sheep collected under the *ondalık ağnam* tax in order to increase his profits. Yet, he defended himself, claiming that, unlike İsmail Agha, he had not resorted to force and violence in the countryside in his role as sheep counter. He only used the extra money he made for the expenses of his family. Although Stoyan was required to pay only one-fourth of his debt to İsmail Agha, the latter had to sell most of his movable and immovable properties.⁸⁶ Clearly, the central government found Stoyan's *profit* more tolerable compared to İsmail's *corruption*.

İsmail Agha's corruption not only paused the Muslimization of sheep counting but also coincided with, if not caused, the Ottoman transition to a new meat provisioning policy in the mid-1840s, marking a new epoch for the Chalikovs in gaining the recognition and trust of the regime.⁸⁷ In 1844, Nedelio Vulkovich Chalikov, who was Stoyan Chalikov's nephew, was appointed as the chief sheep merchant, *celepbaşı*, responsible for the Balkan end of Istanbul's meat provisioning.⁸⁸ The Ottoman Minister of Finance supported the appointment, noting that Nedelio was "reasonable and held in esteem among his likes."⁸⁹ Nedelio was expected to coordinate and assign quotas to sheep merchants so that there would be enough animals in Istanbul every season, preventing any drastic or unexpected changes in supply and prices. The minister announced that there was not going to be any state monopoly (*inhisar*) in sheep provisioning. The merchants registered by Nedelio Chalikov would bring their animals to Istanbul themselves. If they failed to do so or sold their animals to third parties, they

86 BOA, KK.d.4050.1, 2 Muharrem 1256 (6 March 1840).

87 On the relation between corruption, the Tanzimat reforms, and the Penal Code see Cengiz Kırılı, *Yolsuzluğun İcadı: 1840 Ceza Kanunu, İktidar ve Bürokrasi* (Verita, 2015).

88 Lyberatos, "Men of the Sultan," 66. Also see BOA, İ.MVL.56/1072.1 and 2, 7 Cemazeyilevvel 1260 (25 May 1844). *Celepbaşı* means the chief sheep merchant, and the term evokes the early modern lexicon of provisioning in a new era.

89 BOA, İ.MVL.56/1072.1, 7 Cemazeyilevvel 1260 (25 May 1844). "...söz anlar ve emsali beyninde mer'iyü'l-hâtır ..."

would be fined twice the rate of their unauthorized transactions.⁹⁰ While it is dubious to describe the minister's guarantee that there would be no state monopoly as a transition to liberal meat provisioning in the 1840s,⁹¹ it is suffice to say that the state outsourced a significant provisioning task to a merchant and his network while imposing some rules and restrictions.

Conclusion

An early history of merino sheep in the Ottoman lands asserts three conclusions. First, in the global history of merino sheep, Odessa became a new frontier for merino breeding. Merino sheep as a commodity and technology circulated more widely in the Black Sea through consular and commercial networks. These networks proved to be crucial to import substitution industrialization in the Ottoman Empire. Second, the early investments in the textile industry highlight that the demand for merino wool and sheep initiated closer examinations of domestic alternatives alongside supplementary purchases. More strikingly, the calculations made after importing merino sheep were not limited to profitability. Instead, they were marked by the will to channel part of industrial surplus value into military expenses.

Third, the merino sheep, as novel technoscientific organisms in the Ottoman lands, were initially incorporated into the centuries-old meat provisioning structure by entrusting them to a wealthy sheep counter, İsmail Agha, and his brothers. While the initial plan advocated by the entrepreneur-bureaucrat Ömer Lütfi Efendi was to purchase İsmail Agha's commercial farms to raise merino flocks for Feshâne, it did not materialize. Instead, İsmail's pastures and his extensive sheep provisioning network proved to be critical infrastructures that could be adapted for wool production for Feshâne. By

90 BOA, İ.MVL.56/1072.1 and 2, 7 Cemazeyilevvel 1260 (25 May 1844).

91 Several recent studies have shown that the Sublime Port implemented interventionist measures in meat provisioning until the early 1860s, in contrast to the common association of the early Tanzimat era with the adoption of liberal economic policies. See Yonca Köksal and Mehmet Polatel "A Tribe as an Economic Actor: The Cihanbeyli Tribe and the Meat Provisioning of İstanbul in the early Tanzimat Era," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 61 (2019): 97-123; Yonca Köksal Özyaşar and Can Nacar, *Anatolian Livestock Trade in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Leiden University Press, 2024).

relying on his infrastructural power and compensating him for his expenses in breeding and wool production, the Feshâne directors simply outsourced their wool supplies to a wealthy Muslim merchant and sheep counter. İsmail Agha and his brothers were favored and supported by the Ottoman state after 1826 when the ruling elite expressed their intention to eliminate non-Muslim sheep counters by replacing them with Muslims.

İsmail Agha and his brothers' corruption caused a pause in the attempt to Muslimize sheep provisioning. This pause contributed to the rise of a Bulgarian bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century by allowing the Chalikovs to become more deeply involved in meat provisioning. While the rise of the Chalikovs may appear contradictory to the process of Muslimization, the Ottoman statesmen's attempts to radically alter capital ownership in the meat provisioning industry in the late 1820s reveal the extent to which state power could be mobilized to facilitate wealth transfer from one group to another. Considering the close relations and business ties between İsmail Agha and the Chalikovs within the provisioning networks, the Ottoman elite's support for the Chalikovs could be seen as consistent from their perspective, as they were already backing an actor involved in a state-backed Muslim merchant's network. Examining merino sheep both as a commodity and technology in Ottoman lands, in short, reveals the configurations of power and capital in multiscale political economies and conflicts.

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