

**Transformations in Early Ottoman Land Tenure:
The 1416 Sheikh Bedreddin Revolt in the Longue Durée**

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~Dedicated to the Seekers of True Knowledge~

Don't say
It's the necessary result
Of historical, social and economic conditions-
I know!
My head bows before the thing you mention.
But my heart
Doesn't speak that language.¹

The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin, written in the years between 1933-35 by Turkish communist Nazim Hikmet while imprisoned for his political activity, narrates the events of the 1416 revolts against the Ottoman state from the perspective of their purported leader, the Hanafite legal scholar and Sufi mystic Sheikh Bedreddin. The poem popularized Bedreddin as an icon of revolutionary romanticism and a kind of proto-communist for the Turkish left in the 20th century: according to the literary critic Nedim Gürsel, Hikmet revived Bedreddin as a historical figure in order to analogize the context of the 1416 revolt and the situation of the modern Turkish peasantry vis-à-vis the modernizing Ottoman state against which Hikmet struggled.² Like Hikmet, Bedreddin bore the naked might of the state, executed in the public market at Serres in Macedonia for allegedly being the instigator and leader of the ecumenical coalition of dependent peasantry and freeholding warriors or *gazi* (lit. “holy warrior” – until then at the forefront of Ottoman expansion) that organized itself around Izmir in Anatolia and in current-day-Bulgarian Rumelia.³ However, the academic historiography on Bedreddin’s status as a revolutionary is split: some historians consider him to have been elevated to martyrdom by the caprice of state repression, some consider him an opportunist who latched onto or created a political movement for his own ends, others consider any such historical analogies to be

1 Nazim Hikmet, *The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin and Other Poems* (New York, NY: Persea Books, 1977).

2 Béatrice Hendrich, “A Sufi Martyr and Harbinger of Anti-Capitalism” in *Muslims and Capitalism*, ed. Béatrice Hendrich (Ergon Verlag, 2018), 237.

3 Saygin Salgirli, “The Rebellion of 1416: Recontextualizing an Ottoman Social Movement.” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55 (2012), 33.

anachronistic, and still others portray him in terms similar to Hikmet's, including pioneering Austrian Ottomanist Paul Wittek who called Prince Musa Çelebi's administration during the earlier 1402-1413 dynastic war "*la Roumélie révolutionnaire*" on the basis of Bedreddin's role as its *kadiasker*, or military judge.⁴ These interpretations tend to hinge on biographical details of Bedreddin's life, and given the relative paucity of information on the subject usually reflect the writer's underlying interpretation of the political situation in the early 15th century Ottoman world (and by extension their politics in general), true as much for those who see Bedreddin's status as strictly mythical and those who agree with the spirit of Hikmet's narrative. Hence the narrow technical truth of a given myth is of less interest than what the existence of the icon itself, worn smooth by its passage through millions of hands, reflects about the social and material reality it metonymizes. Considered not against biographical marginalia alone but against this wider background – the Ottoman peasants, freeholding warriors, and various other classes of people who felt compelled to risk their lives in the rebellion – the myth supports Hikmet's analogical reading (if not taken over-literally as a transhistoricization of Marxism), and helps explain the origin of the demand for the total abolition of property associated with the revolts.⁵ These were broadly composed of the Ottoman popular classes threatened by the tendency towards what can be called by analogy the feudal centralization of land tenure by the Ottoman state, not unlike the peasantry of Hikmet's era threatened by the capitalist subsumption of rural

4 Dmitris Kastiris, "The Şeyh Bedreddin Uprising in the Context of the Ottoman Civil War of 1402-13" in *Political Initiatives 'From the Bottom Up' in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Antonis Anastasopoulos (Rethymno, Greece: Crete University Press, 2012), 223.

5 Kastiris, "The Şeyh Bedreddin Uprising in the Context of the Ottoman Civil War of 1402-13", 232-233. "He [Mustafa Borkluce, Bedreddin's disciple] taught the Turks that they must own no property and decreed that, with the exception of women, everything should be held in common: food, clothing, yokes of beasts, and fields. [He said] 'I shall have access to your house as though it were mine and you shall have access to my house as though it were yours, with the exception of the female members'."

life under the Kemalist state.⁶ As for the secondary question of Bedreddin's personal convictions, the lack of historiographic accord rests on the apparent contradiction between the image of the messianic revolutionary and the seemingly orthodox record of his legal-religious writings: by placing these in the context of the historical orientation of Hanafite *fiqh* towards protecting the rights of the independent peasantry and its substantive drift away from this commitment as a result of its subordination to the requirements of Ottoman state building, the apparent contradiction evaporates.

On the eve of their defeat by the Timurids at the Battle of Ankara in 1402, at the height of their power until that point and on the verge of capturing Constantinople, the Ottomans had come into possession of a broken tessellation of land tenure systems across their Anatolian and Thracian territories, a consequence of their rapid conquests. The most significant categories were the holdings of the conquered *begs* and Byzantine aristocrats who maintained their property rights once they had submitted to Ottoman authority,⁷ the *timar* estates granted conditionally on state-held lands to *sipahis*, by analogy to European conditions a kind of feudal lord responsible for the upkeep of the Ottoman cavalry, the *waqfs* or pious foundations established by state decree, and the conquered lands granted on formerly Christian lands as freeholdings or estates to the frontier warriors or *gazis*. In the formerly Byzantine lands of Anatolia and Thrace, large aristocratic holdings by the Eastern potentates had become widespread in the preceding

6 Dani Rodrik, "Rural Transformation and Peasant Political Orientations in Egypt and Turkey". *Comparative Politics* 14 (1982), 428.

7 Vera Moutafchieva, *Agrarian Relations in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th and 16th Centuries* (Boulder, USA: East European Monographs, 1989), 9.

centuries,⁸ despite the efforts of the Byzantine bureaucracy at curbing the power of this new class and protecting small freeholdings (historically the economic backbone of the Byzantine state, and as Perry Anderson has argued, one of the reasons the Eastern Roman Empire survived where the slave plantation based Western Empire collapsed) by imposing direct restrictions the sale of peasant land.⁹ In these regions the Ottomans would at times replace the local Byzantine aristocracy with their own *sipahis*, and at others vassalize the local power structure as they did with the *begs*, conquered pre-Ottoman Turkic landowners, but with the result in either case that the existing relations of production and land arrangements were preserved.¹⁰ A significant difference, however, between the conquered lands converted into the *timar* estates of the *sipahis* and those left to the *uç begleris* and Byzantine aristocrats, is that under the system of Hanafite *fiqh* adopted by the Ottomans the former fell under the category of *miri* or public land, and the latter of *mulk* or private property. *Miri* lands belonged directly to the treasury, which granted revokable titles to their use or the collection of their surplus, as in the case of the *timar* estates held by *sipahis*.¹¹ The lands granted to the extant *begs* and potentates were therefore maintained as *mulk* under the hybrid *malikane-divani* system that ensured property rights for the aristocracy and a portion of revenues for the Ottoman state.¹² The *malikane-divani* was not an orthodox Hanafite legal category but an ersatz papering-over, reflecting the pragmatic constraints of power rather than a sincere commitment to either the letter or spirit of Islamic law. It provided a solely nominal continuity for what were essentially new land arrangements – however traditional, since

8 Danuta Gorecki, "Land Tenure in Byzantine Property Law: *jura in re aliena*". *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 22 (1981), 203.

9 Ibid 192.

10 Salgirli, "The Rebellion of 1416", 38.

11 Moutafchieva, *Agrarian Relations in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th and 16th Centuries*, 5.

12 Halil Inalcik and Donald Quataert, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire: Volume 1: 1300-1600* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 128.

underneath the religious vestiment they boil down to the ol' imperial vassalization – and represented a serious rupture with the original legal intent of *mulk*, as will be discussed.¹³ The *waqf*, a third possible configuration of Ottoman land tenure at the time, is another example of this substantive transformation of land tenure categories: according to orthodoxy, the *waqf* or pious foundation could only be formed from *mulk* lands and was intended to serve a charitable or religious purpose – in the Ottoman empire, however, the practice was transformed into one that served personal interests (although some *waqfs* undoubtedly continued serve their ostensible function). Converting one's property into the so-called *evatlik waqf* was a means of avoiding inheritance taxes and ensuring that the property would belong to one's descendants in perpetuity.¹⁴ Also widespread was the practice of forming *waqfs* out of so-called false *mulk* (*miri* land either dispensed for this purpose by the state or intentionally misreported).¹⁵ The *ahli waqf* fell into this former category, and was used by the state to provide aristocratic estates for functionaries and officials.¹⁶ Even Sheikh Bedreddin, before committing himself to Musa Çelebi's administration, converted his property in Edirne into a *waqf* in order to ensure that his son would inherit it, though in fairness this would not have been a true false *waqf* but rather a false false *waqf* by virtue of his property being an urban house and therefore properly *mulk* in the first place. The pliability of all these categories is shown to have been almost absolute by the coexistence in certain lands of *waqfs* and *timars*, meaning that in a strict legal sense they would have been simultaneously *miri* and *mulk*, and so in the case of an overlapping *waqf* and *timar* a peasant would be paying three different rents or taxes to the *waqf* holder, the *sipahi*, and the

13 Moutachieva, *Agrarian Relations in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th and 16th Centuries*, 5.

14 Ibid, 95.

15 Moutafchieva, *Agrarian Relations in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th and 16th Centuries*, 92-93.

16 Ibid, 94.

state.¹⁷ In essence, these became claims on the agricultural surplus of a region divorced from their functional purpose, legal fictions that mediated the extraction of rent by a class of aristocratic landowners.

In the concrete, the Ottoman system of agricultural production and administration was the *çift-hane*, which consisted of *çiftliks* or plots of land tilled by an individual peasant family who exercised full control over production and enjoyed certain property rights such as inheritance and exchange against other lands, though not outright sale.¹⁸ Unlike the Byzantine peasantry, which typically lacked the means of production either in land or materials and was de facto enserfed,¹⁹ the Ottoman peasants or *reayya* were, as Halil Inalcik states, nominally freeholders. That the *çift-hane* system could be and was subsumed by *malikane-divani*, *mulks*, *timars*, and *waqfs* makes this superficially free status as well as Inalcik's associated claim that the independent *çiftlik* was the Ottoman "mode of production" doubtful.²⁰ The concept of the mode of production is strictly defined as the totality of social relations related to production and not just its immediate concrete form; this would include all such legal and political relationships, including those such as the *timar* and *waqf*.²¹ Further, the purpose of fostering dependence is not dependence in itself but exploitation, and the existence of the varied extractive systems imposed atop this form of production simply means that immediate relations of dependence such as slavery weren't necessary for the Ottoman state to maintain its extractive position – though there is a not

17 Moutafchieva, *Agrarian Relations in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th and 16th Centuries*, 26.

18 Inalcik, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, 146.

19 Salgirli, "The Rebellion of 1416", 36.

20 Inalcik, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, 143.

21 Samir Amin, *Class and Nation, Historically and in the Current Crisis* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998), 100.

insignificant resemblance to the *coloni* of early medieval Europe in their lack of mobility. Since these forms of tenure existed largely to sustain the Ottoman military, political exigencies meant that such exploitation could be and was ramped up to the point of bare subsistence for the peasantry.²² The form of land tenure that was truly freehold in the Ottoman system was that granted as *mulk* from conquered lands, mostly in Thrace, to the frontier warriors referred to variously as *gazi*, *akinçi*, *tovica*,²³ *musellem*, *yaya*,²⁴ or simply low-ranking cavalry²⁵ in the historiography. These names have different connotations (*gazi* means holy warrior, *akinçi* means raider), or refer to different groupings (the *yaya* were infantry and the *musellem* cavalry, the *akinçi* regular soldiers and *tovica* their officers) but in general refer to the same category of warriors raiding and conquering lands on the Ottoman frontier, with holdings ranging from personal farms for the average *akinçi* to large estates for the *tovica*.²⁶ These served the same function as the *timars* did in providing the means of reproduction for the military class but were in theory not subject to central control, and freeholding *akinçi* were even exempt from the land tax that was ordinarily levied on private holdings, a highly privileged position that perhaps reflects their importance to Ottoman imperial ambitions until that point.²⁷

22 Salgirli, “The Rebellion of 1416”, 59.

23 Kastritsis, *Sons of Bayezid*, 141.

24 Moutafchieva, *Agrarian Relations in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th and 16th Centuries*, 10.

25 Salgirli, “The Rebellion of 1416”, 65.

26 Moutachieva, *Agrarian Relations in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th and 16th Centuries*, 9-10.

27 *Ibid.*, 10. In fact, I believe the land question is central to the question of the Ottoman expansion. Properly juxtaposed by the usually elided background of established class relations (e.g. Kafadar’s liberal account in *Between Two Worlds*), and a land system already saturated by aristocratic estates, the promise of freeholding would have been a powerful impetus for propertyless young men to fight at the frontier – in this sense the Turkish expansion was the Eastern mirror of the Western Crusades, likewise the superstructural expression of the simple material fact of dispossessed younger sons of the nobility issuing from a world whose lands had already been saturated, and had as little to with the history of Islam as the Crusades did with, say, Christ.

The original thrust of the inherited legal categories of Hanafite *fiqh* points to the change they had undergone in the Ottoman context. In the 8th and 9th century Abbasid caliphate, where the Hanafi school originated, most of the land belonged to the independent peasant proprietor, alongside *waqfs* that actually served their charitable or religious purpose.²⁸ Large private estates worked by tenant, wage or slave labour did not exist in any significant number at the time.²⁹ Abbasid peasants could also sell and inherit their lands freely, unlike the *reayya*, and in the absence of any immediate feudal forms of domination (which feudalism Samir Amin categorizes as the incomplete, embryonic form of the absolutist tributary mode of production that developed late in Europe) were subject only to a central authority to which they paid the ‘*ushr* or *haraj* land tax depending on whether they were Muslim or not, respectively. Payment of the land tax to the state served to legitimate one’s *mulk* property rights in the state register, and was extremely reasonable compared to other extractive regimes of the time, in the realm of 10-20% of agricultural output, whereas for the Ottoman *çift-hane* subsumed under the ownership of a *timar*, a *waqf*, or *mulk* estates, this land tax would effectively have been one rent among others and the rate of exploitation was significantly higher. In general Hanafite *fiqh* was oriented around preserving the status of the independent peasant and preventing the rise of economic and political forms of domination;³⁰ Abu Hanifah, the founder of the school, rejected the validity of tenancy

28 Johansen, *Islamic Law on Land Tax and Rent*, 17.

29 Moutafchieva, *Agrarian Relations in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th and 16th Centuries*, 4.

30 Johansen, *Islamic Law on Land Tax and Rent*, 18. “The Hanafite legal doctrine, by establishing the basic idea that a land tax is payable only for landed property, enables the jurists to develop a clear criterion of distinction between tax and rent and allows them to unite (at least as far as *kharaj muwazzaf* is concerned) taxation of all kinds of landed property into one set of basic rules. It does not, in this respect, differentiate between the smallholdings of the peasant proprietors and the big estates of the wealthy and powerful landlords. Cahen has pointed out that *kharaj* was mainly levied on peasants’ smallholdings. If this is true, then the legal doctrine of the Hanafite school of law must have worked in favour of the property rights of the peasants.” Extending Johansen’s point, if the tax was mainly levied on smallholdings and these therefore represented a numerical majority, this is proof that at one point the political engine of the Islamic conquest must have been widespread land reform in favour of the peasantry, since large aristocratic estates worked by slaves, serfs/coloni or contract

and share-cropping contracts based on a *hadith* relating that the Prophet Muhammad said “Till it [the land] or grant it free of charge to your brother”, from which derived a general principle that profiting from another’s labour on the land was against Islamic law.³¹ If one assumes as a speculative exercise that the Hanafite doctrine indeed reflects the original emancipatory kernel of Islam, Islam as a movement in which the rejection of exploitation and domination was fundamental and the “unbelievers” of the Qu’ran represent the forces of slavery and reaction (as did the Qurayshi elite of the Prophet’s time), then the nature of the Islamic conquests comes into focus as an ebullient wave of real emancipation – however transient, and this must be understood as a philosophical event in the Badiouan sense and not a totalizing system of governance since evidently various forms of exploitation endured – sweeping through the Byzantine and Sassanid empires and the post-Roman archipelago of rump aristocracies like an axe through putrid wood, the dregs of a spent antiquity impotent before the combined power of external liberators and internal revolt. Even without concrete historical inquiry this line of speculative thought is a kind of reverse proof of the Islamic revolution representing a liberatory moment for the people of late antiquity, since the speed and scale of its explosion is otherwise simply inexplicable in strictly military terms or by the standards of bourgeois realist political thought, and it engendered little in the way of actual population movements outside of the Arab conquerors installing themselves as local rulers (consider the relative populations of the until recently nomadic Arabic desert tribes and the vast agglomerations of antiquity they are claimed to have “colonized”, as per the modern Iranian monarchist mythology for example).³² The other speculative proof of the emancipatory

labour were the dominant form of land tenure in the pre-Islamic Sasanian, Byzantine, and post-Roman regions of the Levant and North Africa.

31 Ibid, 27.

32 Ibid, 57.

character of the Abbasid revolution is that this period is correctly understood to be the Islamic golden age of scientific and cultural production. Such efflorescences are only possible in social formations in which the greater mass of the people are living lives free of oppression and exploitation, since even the most brilliant individual subject is totally dependent on (and the product of, in any case) the totality of the social condition of knowledge and understanding, which totality by necessity suffers in oppressive social formations both quantitatively, since the majority are disenfranchised from the *gemenweisen*, and qualitatively, owing not only to the suffering of the poor but also to the deleterious effects of domination on the subjectivity of the ruling classes (consider Marx's explanation of why Aristotle failed to unravel the nature of economic value, or Perry Anderson's hypothesis on why the Roman Empire was so technologically and scientifically backwards despite its economic and military power, or if one prefers a more rigorous analytical proof, the condition of the alienated master in Hegel's lord-bondsman dialectic). The brutal silence of class society settles over the world, the wizard and the imbunche alike are stunted; the institutions of the core become sclerotic and hidebound, unable to pursue creative lines of inquiry; these persist at the periphery, but there they are buffeted by the inconstant winds of the material world and remain a nomadic fringe of truth around the city of iniquity.

The Hanafite category of *mulk* or private land must therefore be understood in contradistinction to earlier forms of tributary domination and exploitation, as a bulwark against them, and not through the lens of contemporary capitalist land relations, of private property writ not so private. Nonetheless it unwittingly prefigured them: it wasn't the Ottomans who first wrought the change that made *mulk* into a legitimation of large estates rather than the rights of

the free peasant as originally intended, since their growth and the consequent modification of the law to include the formerly-proscribed tenancy (*ijara*) and other relations of economic exploitation began to be noticeable by the early 10th century throughout the Abbasid caliphate as small proprietors were bought out and their lands consolidated into the hands of a smaller class of landowners.³³ This transformation, an inevitable historical consequence of the freedom to exchange land enshrined by the peasant emancipation, although centuries-long and slowed by the successive revolutions that for a time toppled all nascent pretenders to aristocracy in the early Islamic age (of which the Abbasid revolution against the hereditary and ethnic-particularist Umayyad dynasty was one, hence perhaps its initial concern with the rights of the free peasantry), has the effect from our foreshortened perspective of obscuring the original ethical and political imperatives of Islamic jurisprudence. This is perhaps why Saygin Salgirli, who gives a thorough account of the material motivations of the 1416 revolt, concludes solely from Bedreddin's record as a legal scholar that he likely didn't share in the sentiment articulated by Borkluçe Mustafa, his disciple and leader of the Anatolian flank of the revolt, that called for the abolition of private property as such, and was perhaps involved with the revolt for more self-interested reasons.³⁴ The land tenure categories established above allow for an explanation of the faultlines of the revolt and Bedreddin's place in it: around Izmir in Anatolia, the body of the rebellion was made up mainly of the Muslim and Christian peasantry who still lived under the Byzantine feudal system inherited by the Ottomans roughly 30 years earlier, and in Rumelia consisted of the *akinçi* who'd been dispossessed by the land concessions of Prince Suleyman's 1403 peace treaty with the Byzantines as well as this same class of exploited peasantry, along

33 Ibid, 4.

34 Salgirli, "The Rebellion of 1416", 55.

with groups of internal Turkic pastoral nomads resettled there by the Ottomans, following the sweeping-under-the-rug tendency common to interactions between centralized tributary states and freewheeling peoples.³⁵ Intended to buy peace on the Western frontier to give Suleyman time to deal with the internal dynastic conflict with his brothers, the 1403 peace deal returned conquered lands to the Byzantines and other Christian powers and ended raiding, depriving the military class of its only two sources of sustenance.³⁶ Salgirli locates the impetus for the revolt less in the messianic powers of Bedreddin and Borkluce, and ideological motivations in general, than in this 1403 dispossession, and the subsequent effects of a decade of the dynastic conflict on the security and material reproduction of the peasantry, since the whole land tenure system under the Ottomans was designed to funnel agricultural surplus more or less directly to the military and had reduced most of the peasantry to ruin.³⁷ Although no doubt these were the immediate motivations, the tendency of Islamic land tenure toward aristocratic landholding on a longer timescale helps explain why, as Dmitri Kastritsis says, “it is not possible to study the Bedreddin revolt as a purely social, political, or religious phenomenon, because it was all three at once”.³⁸ If the significance of Islam as a philosophical event lies in the recognition of the unity of the secular world and the divine (in distinction to Christianity’s renunciation of the secular, give unto Caesar what is Caesar’s etc.) and hence the inadmissibility of relations of domination between human beings, then the creep of exploitative land arrangements that coalesced at this historical moment into an integrated system of governance in the name of Islam itself represented by necessity a religious matter as well as an economic one.³⁹ The *timar* system was

35 Salgirli, “The Rebellion of 1416”, 67.

36 Ibid, 49.

37 Ibid, 68.

38 Kastritsis “The Şeyh Bedreddin Uprising in the Context of the Ottoman Civil War of 1402-13”, 238.

39 For more on this see my *Notes on al-Ash’ari and Spinoza*.

inaugurated in the mid-14th century, and didn't become the dominant form of land tenure and military organization until the expropriation of the landed aristocracy under Mehmed II that cemented the control of the central Ottoman state in the mid-15th,⁴⁰ but it steadily progressed in size and significance throughout that century, and the Interregnum of 1402-1413 and 1416 revolt seem to have been critical moments in the transition away from the freeholding *gazi* model of military organization. Whereas Musa Çelebi was supported militarily by the *akinçi*, Mehmed I, who in 1413 ended his brother's brief reign in Rumelia at the Battle of Çamurlu,⁴¹ relied primarily on the *sipahis*, and in 1421 passed reforms that reduced the status of the *musellem* and *yaya* to auxiliaries in the Ottoman military. As Moutafchieva notes, the conflict of the Interregnum (and by extension the 1416 revolt since the latter was composed in Rumelia of the same classes who supported Musa Çelebi), was in this sense "the victory of the feudal cavalry over the free peasants".⁴² Likewise, in the context of the tendency over the centuries towards the de facto enserfment of the non-military peasantry that seems to have proceeded apace not only in Ottoman regions but in the Byzantine Empire, the call for the abolition of property should perhaps be seen not only as a pragmatic solution to the immediate problems of production for the peasantry as Salgirli claims, but a categorical solution to the immanent tendency of any system of private property towards consolidation in fewer and fewer hands, and subsequent exploitative relations of production.⁴³ The abolition of property as such is much more than a simple economicist demand for e.g. reduced taxation or land reform: it is an expression of the political-economic raised to the level of the philosophical, since it compares the inevitable historical

40 Moutafchieva, *Agrarian Relations in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th and 16th Centuries*, 15-16.

41 Kastritsis, *Sons of Bayezid*, 188.

42 Moutafchieva, *Agrarian Relations in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th and 16th Centuries*, 10.

43 Salgirli, "The Rebellion of 1416", 61.

terminus of the real abstraction of private property against the possibility of a social formation based on a higher understanding of human freedom and the divine. Hence, the motivations for the revolt extended beyond immediate political-economic concerns to the religious-philosophical trajectory of the Ottoman state, and the Islamic world in general, in the *longue durée*.

That Sheikh Bedreddin would have supported a political movement that sought to not only preserve the independent peasantry but leap far beyond the historical moment, an emancipatory leap not truly achieved until the revolutionary sequences some 500 years later, is therefore only surprising if the historical break with exploitative rural relations represented by Islamic orthodoxy, and the retrenchment of exploitative relations in Hanafite garb under the Ottomans, is obscured. Furthermore, aside from being a legal scholar (whose mastery of the Hanafite tradition was apparently such that Timur had once asked him to enter his service after hearing him at a single debate), that Bedreddin was associated with a gnostic Sufi movement called Hurufism, whose doctrine in Kastritsis' words was "eschatological and universalistic", supports the idea that Bedreddin would have joined the revolt for religious and political reasons and not merely for personal gain.⁴⁴ Against this evidence, Salgirli's conclusion that Bedreddin is unlikely to have held the views attributed to him even if the movement itself was revolutionary rests exclusively on the basis that neither his writings outside of the possibly apocryphal *Waridat* nor his tenure as Musa Celebi's *khazasker* hint at him being anything other than an ordinary Hanafite legal scholar; but as demonstrated, seen in the light of an emancipatory Islam and the

44 Kastritsis, "The Şeyh Bedreddin Uprising in the Context of the Ottoman Civil War of 1402-13", 238.

composition of Musa Celebi's political base, this is insufficient to rule out the possibility of his religious commitment to the free peasantry.⁴⁵

Both the establishment of landed estates in the preceding centuries and the later Ottoman centralization of power in a system of military fiefdoms were developments that for the free peasant represented increasing exploitation and subjugation relative to the freeholding societies of the Ummah in the early Islamic period. That this historical change took place merely reflected the superior military power of the Turkic system of military-agricultural integration that had overrun both the Arabic world and the Byzantine Empire rather than any kind of cultural or ethical "progress".⁴⁶ In this sense, the analogy between the situation of the 20th century Turkish peasantry and that of the early 14th century is even more convincing than the purely ideological analogy of Bedreddin and Borkluce as proto-communists, as each was a class facing existential disruption by forces of historical change instantiated in the state. Rather than conforming to an uncritically reproduced stereotype of the revolutionary as utopian iconoclast, perhaps Bedreddin was revolutionary in the sense that Walter Benjamin defined it: not driving the train of history, but desperately trying to pull the emergency brake.

45 Salgirli, "The Rebellion of 1416", 55.

46 Moutafchieva, *Agrarian Relations in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th and 16th Centuries*, 7-8.

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