**Military Levies of the Ottoman Empire (*Devshirme*s) Used as Unfree Laborers in the Palace Gardens during the 16th and 17th Centuries**

For centuries, the Ottoman state levied children from specific parts of the empire where the Christian subjects resided through the system known as *devshirme*, in order to train and use them in military and administrative positions. These levied children were transplanted into the Turkish-Islamic environment various stages of education and upon completion of their education they served in the Palace, the janissary army, and the state, forming a part of the ruling class of the Ottoman state. A less emphasized role of these levied children was to perform skilled or unskilled labor, in state workshops, ships carrying goods for the palace, construction, or in fruit and vegetable gardens, vineyards, or orchards. This paper intends to outline the state manufactures that levied boys had to work after the completion of their training near Turkish farmer’s in the rural areas and to stress the role of the janissaries also as workmen; and especially to investigate more carefully the boys who were forced to labor in the imperial garden (*hass bahçe*) and the provincial gardens (*taşra bahçe*s), such as those in Büyükdere, Üsküdar, and Edirne.

The levied boys who were spared to work in the gardens of Istanbul were registered under Bostancı Ocağı (gardener regiments) of the Ottoman army. This section of the army had a half-military mission. Those who were part of the gardener regiments were responsible for protecting the palace gardens, orchards, vineyards, forests and seashore of Istanbul. An important part of the regiment, however, labored in these gardens.

This paper intends to investigate these laborers. Who they were, from where they were levied, how many boys were utilized in which gardens, what was their salary and working conditions, are some of the questions that will be researched. It is known that the boys who were levied from among the Bosnian Muslim families were used in these gardens. The archival sources, however, provide us with the information of different ethnic backgrounds of these boys. The boys worked under specialized masters and got promoted in the echelons of the palace appointment system, or in these gardens for a lifetime until retired as laborers; and some simply refused to adjust to the conditions of forced labor and ran away. Luckily, it is possible through archival research to trace the stories of some of the children who were forced to labor in the Ottoman capital.