

## Urban Farming and Leasing in Early Modern Istanbul

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My work as a fellow at the Rachel Carson Center focuses on the completion of my book, entitled *Urban Farming and Leasing in Early Modern Istanbul*. This book illuminates to a completely new degree the history of the market gardens, or *bostanlar*, of Istanbul, which covered large areas of land in the city until well into the twentieth century, and shaped Istanbul's economy, food culture, and environment. Using archival, archeological, and literary evidence, I explore the emergence and early histories of these gardens in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Special focus is placed on two large market complexes that emerged in this period within Istanbul's city walls, in Langa and Yedikule.

Widespread commercial produce farming in Istanbul and on its outskirts relied on wage labor and significant investment in irrigation structures, such as wide and deep wells. I argue that these developments were connected to shifts in leasing practices, especially for land endowed to Islamic charitable foundations, which indeed controlled much of the land in and around the city. Leases for endowed land had been limited to three-year terms. Beginning in the mid-sixteenth century, however, such legal strictures were circumvented or relaxed. Long-term or life-term leases, which in some cases were even inheritable, gave rise to forms of *de facto* property rights, which encouraged investment in urban agriculture. Urban elites increasingly established market gardens in the city, as well as vineyards and farm estates in the nearby countryside. I trace this development through court records, endowment deeds of Islamic charitable foundations, and surveys of agricultural labors in Istanbul.

To shed light on the histories of the laborers who worked in Istanbul's market gardens, this book also broadens the scope to explore land struggles in the western Balkans, which I argue was a significant factor in the mass migration of landless peasants to Istanbul—and the formation of the migrant gardener. The transformation of the land in and around Istanbul into market gardens affected water usage, technology, topography, diets, and medical practices. It changed the relationship between urbanites and plants. I identify the creation of several local cultivars in Istanbul's market-garden complexes, such as the “Langa” cucumber or “Yedikule” lettuce. Indeed, by the early seventeenth century, Istanbul had become a breeding ground for new varieties not just of vegetables but also of flowers and animals.

A few Ottoman-era *bostanlar* still remain in Istanbul and they are severely threatened by development. This book, the first monograph on their history, might also therefore be used to aid in the struggle to preserve them and the livelihoods of their gardeners.