

that there “was no survey”. The tapu land-registration commissions did not perform surveys of the land. They worked with individuals’ claims to land, investigating these claims only in case of need. A land survey would have been superfluous to their objective, which was to register and issue title for properties that were owned and, doing so, to institutionalize a mechanism that would help ensure that property taxes were paid. This mechanism was the requirement that property could not be bought and sold without proof that taxes had been paid. Tosun Arıcanlı has succinctly argued, “This [land-tenure reform] was nothing more than a policy for the purpose of expanding a revenue base for the state without any conflict or collusion between the central and local powers.”¹⁵ This point is much debated. While I would not be so quick to ascribe to a reform of these dimensions only an objective such as this, there is no doubt that revenue from taxes and registration fees, as well as the ‘*ushr*’ tax charged on the harvest, were needed by the Ottoman coffers and an important factor motivating reform.¹⁶

It should also be noted that the Ottomans *did* undertake land surveys, but these appear to have been quite distinct from the tapu commissions. Too little is known about these *şemsiyye* commissions. They appear to be an important part of the story of large land sales in the northern part of Palestine that resulted in many farmers being reduced to

¹⁵ Arıcanlı, “Property, Land and Labor in Nineteenth-Century Anatolia”.

¹⁶ For a summary of this debate see in Donald Quataert, “Agriculture”, in Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert, eds. *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, reprinted 1996), 857- 859.