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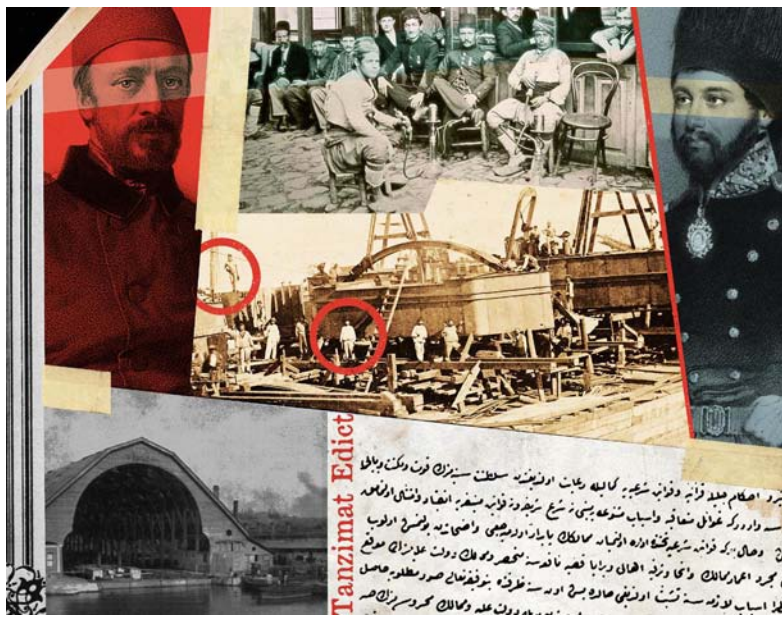
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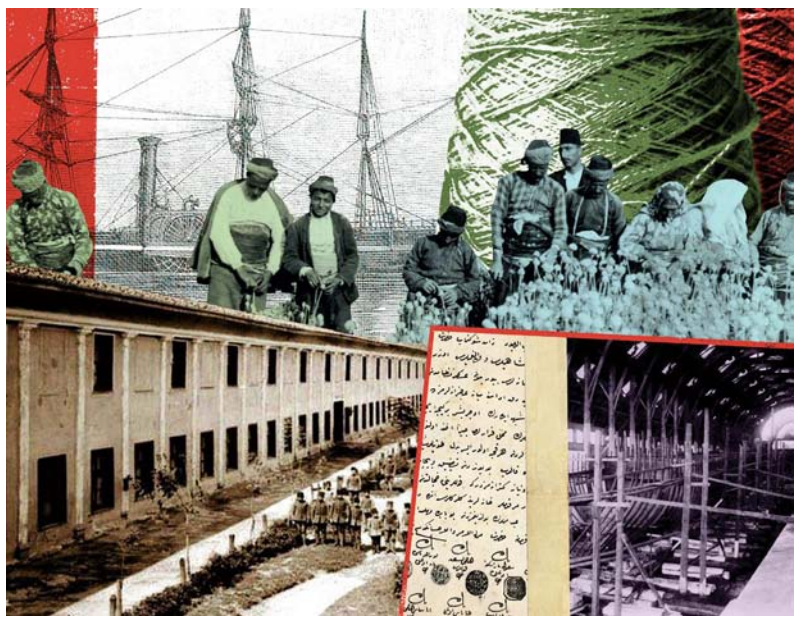
Part I
Binding the workforce

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In the name of order: (im)mobilising wage labour for the Ottoman naval industry in the nineteenth century

Akın Sefer

In the long nineteenth century, the Ottoman state launched reforms to (re)install order (*nizam*) under the banners of the Nizam-ı Cedid (New Order) and the Tanzimat (Reordering/Reorganisation).[1] One of the main goals of these reforms was to form a competitive army and navy in the face of the increasing military gap between European powers and the Ottoman Empire. As industrialisation accelerated the transformation of European navies, particularly with the growing use of steam and iron in shipbuilding, the continuous reorganisation of the Ottoman navy to catch up with these transformations became critical. In addition to successive wars and naval threats faced by the Ottomans in this period, the traumatic naval disasters wielded by the Russians, first in 1770 and then in 1827, placed naval modernisation at the centre of the Ottoman reform efforts.[2] These naval reforms had to be implemented in a context marked by internal rebellions and revolutions, ongoing military/naval competition and confrontations, deepening integration with global capitalism, and an increasingly radical bureaucratic and military reform programme, as well as dramatic technological transformations in global shipbuilding catalysed by industrialisation.

It was in this period that irregular forms of labour relations, which concerned occasionally and flexibly employed workers, became increasingly inconsistent with the idea of *nizam* in the eyes of bureaucratic-military authorities, who followed European armies and navies in reorganising labour in military production and the field of war.[3] Beginning with the late eighteenth century, in parallel with the efforts to create a modern and disciplined corps in the army utilising conscripts, irregular workers became targets of reform in military worksites due to the association of being irregular with being unskilled (that is,

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without sufficient artisanal knowledge and experience in the respective crafts), unproductive and unruly. The political debates and proposals on military reform revolved around the conception of orderliness, highlighting discipline and drilling as the basis of efficiency in warfare.[4]

In what follows, I will discuss how Ottoman policies towards production and labour in the state-run military-industrial establishments essentially reflected the ideological association between order and efficiency throughout the reform era. A core target that emanated from this mentality, I will argue, was creating regimes of labour immobility at the worksite. Ottoman administrators used remuneration as an instrument to establish and secure these regimes for maintaining a stable workforce in the long nineteenth century. The mobilisation of labour for naval production was characterised by Ottoman efforts to bind individuals, and at times communities, to specific worksites and by struggles between the state and its subjects over the mobility of labour. I will demonstrate such characteristics by examining how the Ottoman officials employed wage payment as a discursive and practical tool to justify coercion in the recruitment process and how they tried to maintain the coercive relations of production through special efforts to restrict workers' mobility.

I will discuss this crucial dimension of the transforming relationship between the Ottoman state and the working classes by focusing on two worksites that served the Ottoman navy and the illustrations that represented them.[5] The Imperial Arsenal (Tersane-i Amire) in Istanbul, the central shipyard of the Ottoman state from the sixteenth century, was perhaps the most important among state-run industrial establishments, becoming a bedrock (and a showcase) of Ottoman industrial transformation in the nineteenth century. Located right across from it on the Golden Horn was another worksite, which manufactured yarn and ropes primarily for naval vessels. The Imperial Yarn Factory (İplikhane/Rişţehane-i Amire), established in 1827, was a worksite characterised by diverse labour relations, similar to the Imperial Arsenal. Unlike the latter, however, the specific conditions of production increasingly pushed it to rely almost exclusively on conscripts and convicts as workers before its closure in the early 1870s.

The discussion below will primarily draw on documents produced through bureaucratic correspondence and official regulations of the Ottoman state, which makes a study on labour coercion particularly challenging. Especially in the context of the Tanzimat, when forced labour became increasingly illegitimate, bureaucratic authorities made a special effort to normalise it as a 'service' to the state or underline

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that these workers were hired 'by their own will'. A critical perspective to such discourses, however, will keep us cautious against the hasty conclusion that these workers were recruited from a wage labour market characterised by 'free labour'. In an era riven by naval confrontations, these worksites continuously needed highly skilled and experienced workers for efficient and competitive production. Remuneration became a central issue in this context, especially to tackle widespread reluctance to work in military worksites for long periods. Highlighting remuneration, official sources might have ignored, repressed or dismissed any references to labour coercion or denied it when the issue came to the fore. However, analysing how the state drafted workers and restricted their mobility reveals the coercive dimension of workers' recruitment and employment at these worksites.

'Gedik' as a binding tool

The key concept that bureaucratic discourses most frequently employed and evoked highlighted the idea behind Ottoman military reforms and the banners associated with them: order (*nizam*). In a line of thinking that increasingly became popular among bureaucratic classes throughout the nineteenth century, the making and maintenance of discipline in the corps were to be the core of any meaningful transformation. The Ottoman troops, including the elite Janissary corps, which was the core standing unit of the army, proved far from competitive in wars, lacking skill, discipline and even the willingness to join the war efforts. In this context, Ottoman reformists saw the creation of a new military corps, consisting of regularly trained soldiers whose everyday life would largely be restricted to the barracks, as critical to making a modern (and thus competitive) army and navy.[6]

This mindset seems to have been actively employed when the Ottoman state made efforts to reorganise the military worksites, first and foremost the Imperial Arsenal. Throughout the eighteenth century, workers at this worksite consisted mainly of men employed without a contract or status by which they would be bound on a long-term basis. Many of them, including those employed in the construction of ships, worked in return for daily wages, and they were often released when their respective tasks ended. In addition, the manufacture of materials and tools necessary for ships (ranging from sailcloth to items in wood, iron or copper) was often outsourced and paid in piecework. As naval modernisation in the 1790s aimed at boosting efficiency and

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productivity in shipbuilding, naval bureaucrats increasingly considered the employment of such irregular workers as a significant problem in the Imperial Arsenal. They saw the prevalence of such casual relations at the workplace as incompatible with the reformist goal of giving 'order' to the production process. In their eyes, this goal required a labour force consisting of regularly employed, skilled and disciplined workers who would ideally accept working for lower wages than they would receive elsewhere.

Skilled shipbuilding workers were already present in the arsenal. The challenge now was to increase their number and secure their regular attendance and long-term employment at the worksite. This changing perspective is attested by a regulation issued through an edict of Sultan Selim III in 1794, which reorganised the main body of shipbuilding workers, carpenters (*marangoz*) and hole-borers (*burgucu*) into regular corps. It justified this policy by referring to the inefficiency of the workforce: those employed in shipbuilding were leaving their jobs to work elsewhere whenever they were offered higher wages by other employers (including facilities or constructions financed by other state institutions), and they had to be brought back by force.[7] As a result, the text argued, their numbers always remained insufficient, and they did not work willingly. In response to these concerns, the edict stated that, besides a slight increase in wages, these workers would be given regular slots in the arsenal in the form of '*gedik*', an institution that served to protect guildsmen from the competition by restricting the right to enter the trade from outside.[8] These *gedik*s would provide them with a salary, paid every three months, in return for full-time employment and job security. Although their income would still remain lower than the market average for these craftsmen, naval bureaucrats hoped that their possession of *gedik*s would discourage them from attempting to run away from their jobs.[9]

Nevertheless, it is striking that the edict justified these measures not in reference to any possible demands by workers for such recognition. Rather, it did so by highlighting how these measures would curb workers' mobility and bind them to their workplace, as those with regular slots would not be allowed to work elsewhere. In effect, the regulation acknowledged that wages for these workers were too low, and even after specific improvements in payments, the state could not compete with the market due to budget constraints. Recognising the workers as regular employees with permanent slots and salaries served as much to provide a legitimate framework to forcefully bond these workers to their worksites as to attract skilled labour to work in the arsenal. In this way,

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Ottoman authorities attempted to transform *gedik*, an institution that functioned to protect craftsmen, into a tool of labour management that would reduce the latter's ability to re-commodify their labour power in the market, restricting their exit from work.

A similar regulation in the same period concerning caulkers testifies to how *gedik* was seen as a legitimate instrument to tie workers to the worksite. In an effort to increase the quality of the caulking process, which was critical for ships to operate longer without requiring frequent maintenance, the administration decided to form a regular corps by bringing caulkers from Alexandria, who were known for their distinctive skills in caulking, to replace caulkers in the capital to whom the job was outsourced. Although these caulkers were not to receive salaries, and thus would not officially have *gedik*s, the regulation underlined that they were to be considered equivalent to *gedik* holders: they were required to be present and working in the arsenal 'day and night', also referring to the special barracks built to accommodate these corps.[10]

Negotiating coercion

This, however, was far from sufficient to satisfy the need for a regular labour force in the arsenal, which did not consist only of workers employed in ship construction and repair. The demand for other craftsmen and day labourers grew consistently, parallel to the dramatic increase in naval production. Such growth owed much to technological modernisation and the construction of several new workshops and shipbuilding facilities, which gradually marginalised the role of outsourcing in the production of tools and materials.[11] Thus, along with the *gedik* arrangement in the 1790s, the state also sought to decrease its dependence on migrant workers, who had been occasionally recruited from provincial towns outside Istanbul, mostly as day labourers. It obliged the guilds in Istanbul to send an assigned number of their men as workers on a daily basis. These workers were remunerated through a combination of fixed daily wages paid by the arsenal and mandatory donations (*iane*) collected within their respective guilds.[12]

Throughout the four decades this regulation remained in action, the capital's guilds did not stop showing their discontent about the arrangement: they failed to send the required numbers assigned to them, often sent youngsters who had little skills or experience, and continuously petitioned for exemptions due to a range of excuses, from financial distress to frequent catastrophic incidents such as fires. In 1837,

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this type of labour obligation was finally replaced with a tax to be paid in cash, for which the state essentially blamed the guilds. A bureaucratic report highlighted how such resistance by the guilds failed the state's initial expectation for increased productivity, as the young men sent by guilds proved to have neither the skill and experience nor the motivation to work, a major reason for which was that they could not receive their donations, as obliged by the state, due to embezzlement by the guilds' elders. As a result, the administration decided to hire wage labourers in their place, financed by the tax.[13]

The abolition of the obligation to send workers, in effect, demonstrated the administration's acknowledgement that the labour arrangements of the New Order were not sufficient to address the needs of (re) building a competitive navy. Thus, the reformist naval administrations devised a new scheme in the 1830s: they started to systematically introduce military labour into the production process by organising naval conscripts (or civilian workers given military status) under the 'labour/industrial battalions' (*esnaf/sanayi taburları*). These conscripts would be trained in specific skills and kept under constant supervision and discipline at work, and were obliged to serve for long periods (initially 10 years) at a cost much lower than their civilian counterparts. Thus it was thought to be the ideal solution to create an efficient labour force. Although the subsequent administrations continued to push for this path for the rest of the century, the dream of forming an entirely militarised labour force never came true, thanks to the effective resistance of Muslim and non-Muslim subjects against military conscription.[14] As a result, naval authorities remained dependent on employing civilian workers and coercing them to work, which required the authorities to devise new techniques and discourses.

In the early nineteenth century, aside from the regular craftsmen and labourers sent by the guilds in the capital, many workers continued to be drafted from the provincial districts around Istanbul or along the Black Sea and the Mediterranean coast. From the sixteenth century, in case of labour shortage, an imperial decree was sent to the judge or the administrator of a district to round up the required number of men with certain occupational qualifications and send them to Istanbul. The Imperial Arsenal utilised this source especially in wartime, marked by persistent demand for labour, primarily for shipbuilding workers.[15] While the orders usually emphasised that workers should be selected from among skilled, young and healthy volunteers, the district officials often had to resort to coercion. As they were obliged to meet the assigned number of men, these officials sometimes did not shy away from sending

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whomever they could draft, regardless of skill or age, or imprisoning those who resisted the draft. As a result, desertion was neither rare nor unexpected, especially when men had to give up their agricultural tasks to sustain their families or when they were able to earn more than the meagre wages offered by the arsenal.[16]

The coercive nature of the recruitment process became more apparent and controversial, particularly after the edict of 1839, which officially launched the Tanzimat reforms that would substantially transform state–society relations for the rest of the century. In particular, the proclamation opened a discursive space for Ottoman subjects to raise their voices against the forced labour draft. In addition to the sultan's commitment to the guarantees for the protection of life, honour and property as well as for the equality of both Muslim and non-Muslim subjects, the edict also promised that taxes would be reassessed and collected in cash, and no further exaction would be requested from the subjects.[17] These promises corroborated an earlier edict that intended to abolish the practice of *angarya* (corvée) in the Balkan provinces, which had recently led to social unrest due to the serfdom-like conditions of non-Muslim peasants, who were forced by their Muslim landlords into bondage to the soil.[18]

Following the edict's proclamation, the labour draft for the arsenal became increasingly contested by Ottoman subjects, and in a seemingly unprecedented way. The draft decrees preceding the 1839 edict refrained from naming the practice as *angarya*, a term often used in reference to compulsory and unpaid work either in the fields owned by other landowners or for local public enterprises, including road construction and repair.[19] Ottoman bureaucrats were aware of the widespread resentment against this practice: in the sixteenth century, for example, the state had actively used this knowledge as it often decreed against *angarya* in the newly conquered areas to consolidate its legitimacy among local populations.[20] Such institutional memory might have had a role in the official reluctance to call the draft *angarya*, which otherwise could have injured the already challenging efforts to mobilise labourers.[21] Another reason might have been the officials' hope, expectation or implicit assumption that there would be no need to forcefully recruit workers due to the payment of wages (even if lower than the market level): similar to the decrees for the mobilisation of soldiers, some orders for labour draft were explicit enough regarding the centre's preference for workers' consent, which would save the central authorities from dealing with potential runaways.[22]

Moreover, state elites were tempted to assume that, even when workers were not paid wages, other forms of remuneration (for instance,

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tax exemptions or monthly allowances paid to a worker's family during his employment) justified the extraction of their labour on a consensual basis. This assumption led the authorities to expect such consent to continue when tax exemptions were abolished and replaced with wage payments during the Tanzimat era. In 1840, the tax collector (*muhassıl*) of a village on the Aegean island of Chios, which used to send 18 sawyers and replace them every six months, asked the centre to abolish this obligation since the villagers would 'obviously' not want to pay their taxes as long as the obligation to send workers continued. The government, however, rejected this request as the arsenal still needed their labour, underlining that the workers would be paid their due wages from now on.[23]

The emphasis on paid labour in the state's response heralded the future approach of the Tanzimat administrations regarding the disagreements between the state and its subjects over how *angarya* should be defined and understood. These disagreements suggest that, by *angarya*, the Ottoman ruling elites primarily understood unpaid labour. They acknowledged that it was a form of forced labour only because work was not compensated monetarily as wages. Thus, when the imperial edicts referred to the abolition of *angarya* at the beginning of the Tanzimat era, the imperial bureaucracy interpreted this as the abolition of the practice of unpaid employment. However, the confrontations over the draft of provincial workers for the arsenal during this period demonstrate that *angarya* was not defined merely as unpaid employment but also by coercion in the popular mind. In other words, at least for some Ottoman subjects, it seems that *angarya* referred to any involuntary service even when the service was financially compensated, regardless of whether those serving worked for the central state, landlords or other local powerholders.

The mobilisation process of workers with wages after the Tanzimat highlights the state's struggle to impose its own definition on the popular mind by claiming a contradiction between remuneration and coercion. In 1848, the government again sent orders to mobilise workers for shipbuilding to coastal areas, including the province of Trabzon, an important source of shipbuilding labour on the Black Sea coast.[24] Writing back to the capital to get its approval for the local administration's coercive measures in drafting these workers, the province's governor admitted that using physical force was unjust and that many people were running away to escape the draft. Yet, the Grand Admiral, referring the case to the High Council (*Meclis-i Vâlâ*), argued that the subjects were 'not justified' in refusing to work in the arsenal since the latter would pay them

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for their labour. In its ruling, the High Council accepted this rationale and argued that it was likely that their desertion was 'due to the fear of *angarya*, which was practised in some affairs before the Tanzimat'.[25] Thus, it urged the local administrators to encourage and persuade the subjects by explaining to them clearly that they would not be used as *angarya* but be paid and employed only for a limited period of time. However, continued the council's ruling, in case some still resisted the draft, this should be seen as a refusal 'to serve the Sublime State', and thus, after leaving out the ones with serious health problems, the required number of workers should be drafted and sent to the arsenal immediately, 'disregarding their lame excuses (*a'zar-ı vahiyesine bakılmayarak*)'.[26]

Petitions written by provincial subjects on labour recruitment throughout the Tanzimat era contained complaints about physical violence and corruption used in the draft process, about deserted towns and villages as many young men ran away, and about the increasing poverty of the families left behind as a result. For these people, the recruitment for the arsenal did not really differ from the *angarya* practice of earlier times. Official responses to such petitions, however – albeit warning administrators not to use violence but rather 'encouraging' methods in drafting these workers – likewise dismissed the petitions' complaints on the basis of wage payment.[27] According to the official line of argument, payment of service made resistance to employment unjustified and disproved the accusations that this was a form of corvée. Unlike the state elites, however, these petitions put forward an alternative definition, implying that *angarya* happened when workers were forcefully drafted, paid lower than the market rate and, in many cases, bound to a worksite and a task unfamiliar to them for long periods. Such hidden traces of alternative angles in the archives inspire us to explore new perspectives and research questions, which we will do with the help of illustrations.

Shifting the perspective from state to workers

In the first collage by Tim Robinson (p. 22), images of workers at the arsenal and outside in a coffeehouse are placed between the figures of two reformist statesmen, Mehmed Emin Âli Pasha (on the left) and Sadık Rıfat Pasha (on the right), whose gazes are highlighted. The presence of these two figures in this scene is not due to a particular role they played individually in the cases discussed above, but rather to the political class they represented: both belonged to the

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Western-oriented reformist state elites of the mid-nineteenth century and served, on various appointments, in several institutions established throughout the reform era.[28] Among these institutions was the High Council they served throughout the 1840s, which played a crucial role in the reorganisation of state–subject relations in this period through its decisions, including those on the above-discussed cases over *angarya*. In the lower part of the illustration are two images referring to the two aspects of Ottoman modernisation in the context of our discussion: a scene from the modernised arsenal and an excerpt of the Tanzimat Edict of 1839.

At first sight, one may argue that the illustrative collage follows the still-dominant perspective in historiography that highlights the central role the state authorities played, through their institutions, policies and discourses, in Ottoman modernisation and the accompanying transformation of the state's relations with the working classes in this process. From this perspective, the direct impact of the top-down reforms on labour relations at these sites may even be self-evident for the present cases, which are mainly concerned with naval worksites. Such a state-centric view is also corroborated by visual evidence in the archives regarding the Imperial Arsenal. Most of the images of the arsenal were shot on behalf of more extensive efforts for Ottoman state propaganda addressing Western public opinion in the late nineteenth century, which aimed at representing the Ottoman state and society as 'modernised' in European ways. Consisting overwhelmingly of human-free images of public institutions, worksites and urban landscapes, the state-sponsored photographic albums of this period often depicted the Ottoman subjects, including workers or conscripts in the military worksites, in an orderly fashion – the way reformist statesmen wanted them to become and to be seen.[29] In short, the illustration conveys the impression that this discussion confirms the centrality of state policies and elites in nineteenth-century modernisation processes.

But this is only one side of our narrative. Perhaps we might interpret Robinson's choice to place workers' images at the centre of his collage, and in particular, his emphasis on the individual figures of workers at the arsenal in red circles, as the artist's own way of expressing the questions that this research aims to raise concerning the bigger narratives of Ottoman reform: questions about how working-class individuals experienced these transformations, in what ways they might have shaped them or what 'Ottoman modernity' meant from the perspective of the relations of production. Such questions could indeed point to possibilities of alternative narratives in which the working

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classes played roles at least as central as the state authorities. Seen in this way, the discussion above could offer some clues about what archival evidence offers us to pursue such interrogations for a more comprehensive understanding of Ottoman transformations in the nineteenth century.

One significant dynamic that such questions concerning archival sources may highlight is what seems to be an internal relation between Ottoman reform and labour coercion. As creating and maintaining coercive regimes at work was central to the Ottoman agendas for naval modernisation, bureaucratic discourses of the reform era tried to conceal the coercive characteristics of the labour relations by underlining wage payment, with an implicit reference to modern capitalist discourses that associate wages with freedom of labour. The struggles of working-class subjects, such as running away from work or employing discourses of reform to resist the labour draft, produced the written sources revealing how coercion characterised the modernisation attempts at these worksites.

The image of the coffeehouse at the top of the collage, where workers sit side by side with officers, deserves a particular note in this regard. Thanks to these struggles, the forced labour schemes of reformist statesmen failed to eliminate dependence on hiring workers for wages. As a result, the latter, consisting mostly of migrants from the Black Sea and Eastern Anatolia, dominated the workforce of the arsenal in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the face of this, new mechanisms had to be developed not only to discipline the labour process at the worksite (for example, by time discipline and division of labour) but also to control the everyday spaces of the working classes, due to the perceived threat of their presence, lifestyle and mobility to urban elites, especially in the capital. Coffeehouses and other public spaces where such migrant working-class subjects gathered and sometimes were accommodated became particularly important in such efforts.[30] Indeed, such spaces could be central to the formation of workers' strikes and protests in this period, which largely emanated from their inability to receive wages regularly: a problem that linked wage payment to processes of immobility.

Following commodities and materials

Let us turn to the second collage by Tim Robinson (p. 23), which largely uses themes connected to the process by which cotton was spun into

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yarn, used in manufacturing sailcloth for naval vessels. Unlike the first one, where Robinson chose exclusively from among the Ottoman-era images sent by the author, here he makes two exceptions by introducing two generic images of his own choice, a paddle steamer and, connected to its rigging, some cotton yarn. In the foreground, we see peasant men, women and children picking cotton. Below is an 'orderly' scene of child conscripts and their officers posing in front of the barracks of the Rişтehane, the Imperial Yarn Factory. In a distinct frame, Robinson puts two images side by side: a petition written in 1847 by the Greek community in the Black Sea province of Trabzon against the draft for the Imperial Arsenal, and a scene of a ship in the making, highlighting the internal connections between modernised shipbuilding, coercion and the historical agency of Ottoman subjects.[31]

The paddle steamer in the background, a transitional type between sailing vessels and full steamers in the early nineteenth century, is likely a reference to the era in which the Rişтehane was established, its operations starting in 1827. With its sails lowered down, the image is perhaps a saluting gesture at the age of steamships, implying the ironic characteristic of this investment: launched as a spinning mill with the primary aim of increasing the production of yarn for sail-making, as well as for military uniforms, the Rişтehane was founded in an age when the demand for sailcloth would gradually diminish in the navy. Although the initial plan was to employ civilian wage workers, management problems and the low profitability of the initiative pushed the Ottoman authorities to increasingly resort to forced labour.[32]

In the early 1830s, the factory largely utilised non-Muslim children who were forcefully drafted from Anatolia and worked under 'perishing' conditions, according to an Ottoman edict.[33] However, as discussed earlier, it was in this period that such forced labour draft, being considered *angarya* by Ottoman subjects, became increasingly antithetical to the promises of the Tanzimat. Thus, almost simultaneously with the Imperial Arsenal, the Rişтehane turned towards military labour in the early years of the Tanzimat, as the Ottoman navy began to conscript (mostly non-Muslim) workers to the 'Rişтehane battalions'. In parallel with the decreasing profitability of yarn production as well as the failures in forming these battalions due to popular resistance to conscription, the factory was likely seen as more functional to serve as a prison, as by the end of the 1860s, it was exclusively used for ropemaking by convicts.[34]

Then, there is the 'yarn'. Let us look at the artist's introduction of this generic image in the collage as a token raising possible questions: did the cotton thread connect different worksites, with diverse characteristics of

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relations of production and coercion, to each other? Can we think of the cotton fields of Anatolia, the manufacturing worksites of Constantinople and the naval vessels sailing through Ottoman waters as different scenes of the same narrative? Or, more generally, can we see the transformation of a commodity from an agricultural to an industrial product as a process that mobilised different forms of labour, activating diverse types of coercive relations? If so, how could the characteristics of a commodity shape the formation of these relations?

Considering that scholars of global history have successfully revealed the ways in which commodities and materials connected distinct socioeconomic and political formations, such questions indeed inspire and encourage us to form new and exciting agendas for research in Ottoman history.[35] Besides cotton, we may take the artist's use of an image of wooden ship construction in the arsenal next to the petition as a plea for a focus on how coercive labour relations connected different phases of the procurement of timber. Indeed, certain districts in Ottoman Anatolia and the Balkans, particularly along coastal areas, were obliged to fell trees, process them into timber and transport them to the closest docks to be sent to the arsenal by sea. The same districts were also required to send the assigned numbers of shipwrights when requested, not only for the Imperial Arsenal but also for the provincial shipyards that produced ships for the navy. The entire process, from felling trees to constructing wooden ships, entailed a wide range of actors: a non-exhaustive list would include village communities, nomadic populations, animals, regional notables and their militias, rural and urban craftsmen, naval conscripts and officers, seafarers and judicial and administrative officials.[36] The transformation of the tree into pieces of timber ending up in wooden shipbuilding, in other words, was a process characterised by connected (and, in most cases, established) sets of labour relations and practices spanning distinct villages, towns and cities.

Restrictions on workers' mobility

One thread that might connect different worksites across diverse sectors (for example, agricultural, industrial and service sectors), weaving a significant pattern of Ottoman transformations in the long nineteenth century, concerns the immobilisation of labour. Research on Ottoman agricultural estates, the *çiftliks*, has already highlighted how notables controlling these estates tried to maintain or reimpose restrictions to labour mobility and increase their control over the labour force in the

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production process, within the context of commodification and market competition.[37] Reminiscent of the *çiftlik*-holders' quest for bonded labour, the Ottoman state had to use diverse methods for binding workers to its worksites in order to curtail workers' ability to leave for better jobs during a period when maintaining a regular and productive labour force was essential to meet the increasingly competitive demands of naval production.

For this purpose, the Ottoman state utilised certain means to prevent workers from running away from its worksites, some of which it had already been familiar with from earlier periods. For workers drafted from the provinces or Istanbul, one reliable restriction method was communal obligation. When the central administration required a district or community to send a certain number of workers to the arsenal, responsibility to address this demand was levied not on individual subjects but rather on the official representatives of districts or religious communities. Such an obligation on communities secured the replacement of workers whenever one or more of them deserted from the draft, ran away during work or needed to be replaced due to problems ranging from workers' skills or health to job accidents. In most cases, these workers were drafted to work in the construction of specific vessels, and they were released when these tasks were completed. Thus, in most orders, we see a reference to the construction of a specific warship, as well as a rather general reference to 'the increasing number of tasks' in the arsenal.[38]

However, when the construction process took too long to keep an individual worker at the worksite or when labourers were needed continuously, the districts were obliged to replace workers on a regular basis. These replacement periods were most likely decided according to the district's proximity to the capital, often ranging from one to six months, with some exceptions including Armenian boys in the Yarn Factory, who were replaced after 12 years of service in the 1840s.[39] Since the obligation was levied on the entire district or sometimes on a Christian religious community (*millet*) rather than on individuals, the district or community had to complete the missing number of workers when labourers deserted or did not arrive.[40] As a result, a worker who deserted would most likely face the threat of alienation from his own community or at least from those who had to replace him and their families. Furthermore, since it was the community leaders or district officials who were held responsible for sending workers, the unwanted prospect of antagonising local or communal powerholders might also have played a role in discouraging workers from running away, thus cementing immobilisation at the worksite.

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In addition to communal obligation and tracking down workers and retrieving them by force when they escaped,[41] the state also took physical measures to prevent desertion when workers arrived. Provincial workers were often accommodated in the same inn close to their worksites; the doors of these inns were locked at night, and at times tax receipts of non-Muslims (obliged to pay poll tax) were not given back until their release.[42] Such measures had to be complemented by additional ones to prevent their flight across different worksites in the city. Tax officials were required to note down on the tax receipts the worksite that the labourers were assigned to, with the intention of at least curbing the competition for skilled labourers among different worksites owned by the state, including the Imperial Arsenal and the Yarn Factory.[43]

Such measures were supplemented by more institutional methods of spatial control in the nineteenth century. A core aspect of military reform was the construction of barracks where soldiers were kept under continuous surveillance, discipline and training. Soon, Ottoman authorities used such spatial control for similar efforts to create a regular and skilled labour force in the naval worksites, with the construction of barracks for workers and conscripts inside these worksites. In the 1790s, when skilled caulkers from Alexandria, Egypt, were brought to create a regular corps, they were accommodated in barracks constructed specifically for them in the Imperial Arsenal.[44] Similarly, barracks were built throughout the century for the conscripts employed in the arsenal or the Rişţehane (as seen in the second illustration). A barracks, in other words, was considered a physical tool of labour control and a prerequisite for a regular workforce, a symbol of order in production, in the age of Ottoman reform.

A very important way of restricting workers' mobility was the cancellation or withdrawal of wages for months, with payments made in instalments. The Tanzimat era reforms aimed to shift the obligation for taxes and conscription from communities to individuals.[45] In harmony with these efforts, the Naval Council decided in the 1840s to sanction individual runaways by denying them their right to claim outstanding wages for the time they had worked in the arsenal.[46] The decision demonstrates that the naval authorities saw unpaid wages as an instrument to prevent provincial draftees from running away. The official documents always justified the delays in payment through financial problems, which was not entirely wrong: budget constraints led to failures in many state industries in the mid-nineteenth century.[47] However, these delays also served to keep the labour force working more regularly. In effect, it is not

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a coincidence that such payment problems marked the relations between workers and the state throughout the mid-to-late nineteenth century when the arsenal desperately needed a more regular and experienced labour force. Such delays, prompting several strikes and demonstrations, particularly in the 1870s, became an important dimension of working-class formation in this period.[48]

Besides Ottoman workers, this was particularly the case with foreign (mostly British) mechanics and shipbuilders employed during the mid-century industrialisation campaign. As they initially came under short-term contracts, at the end of which they were entitled to leave, the administration delayed their payments for long periods. These delays gave the Ottoman administration the chance to keep skilled and experienced workers as long as possible in a time of massive investments in naval production throughout the 1860s and 1870s. Such long delays in payments were made when huge amounts of money were spent on mechanisation, building new factories and workshops in the arsenal, and buying new steamships and ironclads for the navy.[49] In short, capital expansion in the naval worksites owed very much to such delays, both by bonding the skilled labour necessary to run these factories and enabling the administrators to fund this expansion through the money temporarily withdrawn from local and foreign workers in the arsenal.

Conclusion

Ottoman bureaucratic documents on the Imperial Arsenal and the Imperial Yarn Factory refer, for each site, to a workforce marked by a diversity of labour relations, consisting of different groups with distinct relations to the state, ranging from salaried craftsmen and mechanics with contracts to enforced guildsmen, provincial draftees, conscripts and convicts. However, such documents often remain either silent or in denial about the coercive nature of these relations. The discussion here highlights the fact that the diversity in the profiles of the labour force at each site was in itself a product of decades-old struggles between the Ottoman state and its working-class subjects over the former's attempts to reorganise labour relations for the sake of *nizam* in the production process. Not only that, it also shows how the official emphasis on remuneration could disguise a range of coercive relations with the help of the ideological association of wage labour with freedom in the modern mind. What these struggles in the nineteenth century show, among other things, is the necessity of considering remuneration in an analytical

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framework where we examine different relations of labour alongside various forms of payment and coercion. In this sense, these struggles remind us that wage labour is an abstraction that consists of, and could easily be used as a cover for, complicated histories of coercive relations and processes.

This chapter explored research questions and analytical possibilities related to the history of labour in the Ottoman naval industry through a dialogue with artistic illustrations, which in turn were based on the initial draft of this chapter. Focusing in this way on the relations of production in a worksite highlights what might be a significant dynamic of Ottoman reform policies: to create an efficient labour force, these policies used wage relations as a means of bondage, both in discourse and in practice, in the context of the state's struggle to expand industrial capital and survive against military threats in the nineteenth century. Wage payment was used not only as a cover to forcefully mobilise workers to the worksite but also as a tool to immobilise workers at the worksite. Research on different worksites and from the perspective of relations of production could, thus, lead us to a wider pattern in understanding a possibly central component of 'modernity' in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire.

Notes

1 The Nizam-ı Cedid refers to the reform programme under the rule of Sultan Selim III (r.1789–1807), whereas the Tanzimat refers to the bureaucratic reform process officially launched with a reform edict in 1839. See Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 71–208; Quataert, 'The Age of Reforms, 1812–1914'.

2 Panzac, 'Un Prologue Aux Tanzimat', 2002.

3 In state worksites, casual or irregular workers, who were also called *muvakkat* ('temporary') in official categorisation, referred to those who were hired or drafted for specific tasks (or shipbuilding projects) in return for daily wages and/or tax exemptions. The regular workers, often called *daimi* (permanent) or *yerlu* (local), consisted mostly of skilled craftsmen who were kept employed without a definitive length of employment, often receiving salaries and/or other benefits (for example accommodation and clothing) in addition to daily wages.

4 Yaycıoğlu, *Partners of the Empire*, 41–2.

5 Two illustrations, collated by Tim Robinson from Ottoman photographs and documents dated back to the nineteenth century and based on the scenarios by Anamarija Batista and Corinna Peres, accompany this paper, an initial draft of which was presented at the Worlds of Related Coercions in Work (WORCK) annual conference in 2019, under the title of 'The Mobilization of Wage Labour for Ottoman State Factories in the 19th Century'. As I hope to demonstrate by engaging in an active dialogue with them, the illustrations will contribute to this discussion by going beyond a mere description of specific scenes regarding the cases that involve workers, worksites and state authorities. Rather, I will attempt to use the artistic creations of Robinson, perhaps at the risk of overinterpretation, as a space to discuss some of the historically important questions and connections these creations highlight, pointing also to the scope of possibilities in understanding and explaining the historical relations between the Ottoman state and the working classes in the nineteenth century. Besides Tim Robinson, I owe

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special thanks to the editors, Anamarija Batista, Viola Müller and Corinna Peres, each of whom provided extensive comments and suggestions to develop the paper, and to the other authors and illustrators of this volume, for making this space possible.

6 On the modernisation of the naval corps in the late eighteenth century, see Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 150–66.

7 Vak'anüvis Halil Nuri Bey, *Nûrî Tarihi*, 375–8. The text explained desertion to other worksites by underlining that in the latter they were paid an amount five times higher than that paid by the arsenal, and sometimes more.

8 Although it had often been used for administrative and military officials earlier, the concept started to refer mostly to the rights of artisans and traders in the eighteenth century; see Akarlı, 'Gedik: A Bundle of Rights', 170. Still, serving as both occupational licenses and financial instruments, the meaning of *gedik* and what it referred to remained ambiguous at the time of its practice and in historiography. For a comprehensive analysis, see Yıldırım and Ağır, 'Gedik: What's in a Name?'.

9 Vak'anüvis Halil Nuri Bey, *Nûrî Tarihi*, 375–8.

10 Presidency State Archives of the Republic of Turkey (hereafter, BOA). BOA.C.BH.59-2754.

11 On technological transformation in the late eighteenth-century Imperial Arsenal, see Zorlu, *Innovation and Empire in Turkey*.

12 On Ottoman artisans and their guilds, see Faroqhi, *Artisans of Empire*.

13 BOA.C.BH.53/2491.

14 Sefer, 'From Class Solidarity to Revolution', 2013, 403–4.

15 For the mobilisation of such irregular workers for the Imperial Arsenal in the seventeenth century, see Bostan, *Osmanlı Bahriye Teşkilâtı*, 71–81.

16 For examples from the eighteenth century, see Aydın, *Sultanın Kalyonları*, 106–7.

17 For an English translation of the edict by Halil İnalcık, see Khater, *Sources in the History of the Modern Middle East*, 11–14.

18 Inalcık, 'Application of the Tanzimat', 1973, 105. See also Kaya, 'Were Peasants Bound to the Soil'.

19 *Angarya*, originally a Greek word, means 'compulsory service'. For seafarers on board, any extra work assigned in addition to the regular work was described by this term. Kahane and Tietze, *The Lingua Franca in the Levant*, 476.

20 Inalcık, 'Balkanlar'da Osmanlı Fetihleri'nin Sosyal Koşulları', 2011, 7; Shaw, *The Financial and Administrative Organization*, 20.

21 Indeed, it was this bureaucratic memory that prompted the Egyptian authorities in the early nineteenth century to put special efforts into encouraging the population towards conscription by highlighting in their orders that conscription had nothing in common with corvée, which was particularly ill-famed in the popular mind. See Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men*, 98.

22 See, for example, BOA.HAT. 1243/48301B.

23 BOA.C.BH.105/5080.

24 BOA.A.MKT.MVL.9-17.

25 BOA.İ.MVL.119-2972.

26 BOA.İ.MVL.119-2972.

27 For examples, see BOA.HR.MKT.197/46; BOA.A.MKT.MHM.126/95; BOA.A.MKT.48-5.

28 For Ottoman bureaucracy and bureaucrats in the reform era, see Findley, *Ottoman Civil Officialdom*.

29 Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*, 151. A version of the photographic albums sponsored by the state during the reign of Abdulhamid II is preserved at the Library of Congress, accessible online. See 'Abdulhamid II Collection', Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, accessed 5 October 2022. http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/ahii/

30 Kırlı, 'Coffeehouses'.

31 For the petition, see BOA.İ.MVL.103/2269.

32 Öztürk, 'XIX. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Imparatorluğu'nda Sanayileşme',1990.

33 Kabadayı, 'Working for the State', 35.

34 Naval Museum Archives, Istanbul (hereafter, DMA). ŞUB.51/139a.

35 Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*; Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*.

36 On the provision process of timber and other raw materials for the Ottoman navy in different periods, see Düzcü, *Yelkenliden Buharlıya Geçişte Osmanlı Denizciliği*; Aydın, *Sultanın Kalyonları*.

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37 See Kaya, 'Were Peasants Bound to the Soil'.
38 For examples, see BOA.A.MKT.MHM.70/3 and A.MKT.MHM.126/95.
39 BOA.C.BH.209/9756; C.BH.3/131; A.DVN.21/90.
40 This was the case when six men, sent by a village on the island of Chios, which was normally supposed to send 18 sawyers to the arsenal every six months, deserted in 1829. BOA.C.BH.3/136.
41 Vak'anüvis Halil Nuri Bey, *Nûrî Tarihi*, 375.
42 Faroqhi, 'Labor Recruitment and Control', 24–5.
43 BOA.C.ML.15/652.
44 Beydilli and Şahin, *Mahmud Raif Efendi*, 224.
45 Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*, 13; Aytekin, 'Tax Revolts during the Tanzimat Period', 2013, 314.
46 DMA.Env.341/28.
47 Clark, 'The Ottoman Industrial Revolution', 1974, 73.
48 Sefer, 'From Class Solidarity to Revolution', 2013.
49 Sefer, 'British Workers and Ottoman Modernity', 2021.

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