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Some Aspects of English Trade with the Levant in the Sixteenth Century

MUCH has been written about Anglo-Turkish relations and about English trade with the Levant in the last quarter of the sixteenth century; the foundation and early history of the Levant Company and the diplomatic wrangling with the French at Constantinople are familiar stories which it is not necessary to repeat. On the general question of English trade with the Levant in this period there are, however, three points which merit further elucidation and upon which some new evidence can be brought to bear. The first of these points is the alleged cessation of trade by English merchants with the Levant during the years from the middle of the 1550s to the 1570s. It is usually assumed that the trade had ceased during those years. That assumption may be correct, but it needs to be examined in the light of the available evidence. The second point concerns the financial arrangements of the Levant Company. When the Levant Company was founded in 1581 it was a joint-stock company; later it became a regulated company, but the precise date of the change has never been ascertained. It does not seem possible to determine the precise date of the change, but it is possible to approach the problem from a new angle and to suggest a tentative solution of it. Finally there is the question of the actual trade conducted by the Levant Company or by its members during the first twenty years of the company's existence. Here again it is possible to fill in the picture a little by the use of hitherto neglected sources.

It is clear that some English merchants traded with the Levant in the first half of the sixteenth century and that their trade was conducted in English ships.¹ According to the well-known story in Hakluyt, this trade continued until about 1552 when it 'was utterly discontinued, and in maner quite forgotten, as if it had never bene, for the space of 20 yeares and more'.² This view was put rather less strongly in the draft of a speech of 1563 in favour of

¹ R. Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, ed. 1903-5, v. 62-3, 167-8; High Court of Admiralty, Examinations, 3 (25 March 1539), where John Knowles declared that he had made four voyages to the Levant in the past ten years; G. Schanz, *Englische Handelspolitik gegen Ende des Mittelalters*, ii. 340.

² Hakluyt, *op. cit.* i, p. lxviii; v. 168.

Wednesday as 'a fissh daye'. The draft, which was corrected by Cecil, declared that 'the ancient navigation into the Levant' was 'diminished' and 'decayed'.¹ Six years later Gaspar Campion wrote to Michael Locke and William Winter pleading for a revival of English trade with Chios; his letter showed both that English merchants had traded with Chios in the past and that such trade had been discontinued for some years.² Finally the Levant Company's charter of 1581 claimed that the English had not commonly traded with Turkey 'in the memory of any man nowe living';³ this of course may have been a piece of special pleading to justify the company's monopoly of a 'new' trade.

These contemporary statements about the Levant trade had usually some propaganda purpose, but even so they cannot be ignored, especially as they are supported, at least negatively, by other evidence. If English merchants and English ships had continued to trade with the Levant during the third quarter of the sixteenth century, it is difficult to believe that this would have left no traces. The sources which might be expected to record such trade do not, however, reveal any trace of it. This is true both of the Port Books and of the Examinations of the High Court of Admiralty. The series of Port Books for this period is very imperfect, but the London Port Books that survive for the 'sixties and 'seventies do not record any shipments by English merchants to or from the Levant.⁴ The High Court of Admiralty Examinations are naturally concerned only with cases that came before the court, but they contain references to almost every branch of English foreign trade. The nineteen volumes of Examinations for the period 1550 to 1583 appear to contain no references at all to English merchants or ships trading with the Levant.⁵ This argument from silence may not in itself be conclusive but, combined with the statements of contemporaries, it does suggest that the traditional view of the English withdrawal from the Levant is correct.⁶

This English withdrawal from the Levant raises two further

¹ R. H. Tawney and E. Power, eds. *Tudor Economic Documents*, ii. 104, 107.

² Hakluyt, *op. cit.* v. 111-17.

³ *Ibid.* v. 192.

⁴ Exch. K. R. Port Books, 2/1; 3/2; 4/2; 6/3, 4. The Port Books for Bristol, Plymouth, Exeter, Poole, and Southampton do not seem to record any trade by English merchants with the Levant in the sixties and seventies, except for one small shipment by a Bristol merchant to Crete in 1579 (*ibid.* 1130/3).

⁵ High Court of Admiralty, Examinations, 6-24. Other records of the court, which have not been fully examined, may contain references to the Levant trade, but an examination of some of the Libels did not reveal any such references.

⁶ Some evidence against the withdrawal is examined and refuted in E. Lipson, *Economic History of England*, 3rd edn. ii. 336. This does not, however, include Michael Locke's statement of 1576 that he had 'been captain of a ship of 1000 tons in divers voyages in the Levant'. As Locke was born about 1532 he can hardly have captained a ship before 1552, but it is clear that the ship was not English and that its alleged voyages were not between England and the Levant (*Cal. State Papers Colonial, East Indies, 1513-1616*, p. 12; R. Collinson, *The Three Voyages of Martin Frobisher*, pp. 87-8).

points of some interest. The first is the geographical extent of the withdrawal and the second is the question whether, after the English withdrawal, trade between England and the Levant was continued by foreign merchants. Some writers seem to interpret the withdrawal from the Levant as a withdrawal from the Mediterranean as a whole. That would appear to be Professor Braudel's view of what he calls 'l'interrègne anglais'.¹ It must be admitted that the scanty evidence rather supports that view, at least for the 1560s. Thus the London Port Books for the second half of that decade do not record any English ships as trading to or from Italian ports. They do, however, show two English merchants importing goods from Venice in a Venetian ship in 1567. Giles Floode, draper, imported cinnamon, pepper, marmalade, green ginger, and nutmeg, all officially valued at £93 16s. 8d., and William Cooper, haberdasher, imported 'vj Venis lutes', officially valued at 1s. each.² Whether or not the English largely withdrew from the Mediterranean in the 1560s, it is clear that they were trading there in the following decade. Professor Braudel has shown the presence of English ships at Leghorn in 1573;³ the following year a group of English merchants was exporting goods to Leghorn, Marseilles, and Civita Vecchia.⁴ In March 1576 the *John* of London left Southampton for Leghorn with a cargo of cottons, kerseys, and tin.⁵ If the English had temporarily withdrawn from the Mediterranean, they had certainly returned there some years before resuming the Levant trade.

The cessation of English trade with the Levant, in the sense of trade conducted by English merchants, does not necessarily imply that English goods did not find their way to the markets of the eastern Mediterranean or that the products of the Levant were not imported into England. Such goods might be handled by foreign merchants and might reach their destinations either directly or indirectly. Though the great days of the Flanders galleys were over,⁶ Venetian ships still maintained some contact between England and Venice and the Venetian dependencies. In 1563 two Venetian ships arrived at Margate, one of them with cur-rants apparently from Zante.⁷ Two years later the *Virgo* left

¹ F. Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, pp. 476-9.

² Exch. K. R. Port Books, 4/2.

³ Braudel, *op. cit.* p. 479; Braudel and R. Romano, *Navires et marchandises à l'entrée du port de Livourne (1547-1611)*, pp. 49-50. English merchants were given permission to export herrings to Leghorn in 1573 (*Acts of the Privy Council, 1571-1575*, p. 165).

⁴ *Cal. State Papers Domestic, 1591-1594*, p. 66.

⁵ Exch. K. R. Port Books, 814/10.

⁶ A. A. Ruddock, *Italian Merchants and Shipping in Southampton, 1270-1600*, pp. 206-32.

⁷ High Court of Admiralty, Examinations, 15 (25 June 1563). See *ibid.* (12 July 1564 and 12 March 1565) and H. C. A. Libels, 38, no. 44 for further evidence of Venetian ships in English waters. Ships for Margate were probably really bound for Gore End, where goods from London were taken on board.

Southampton for Venice with a cargo that included cloth.¹ In 1567 a Venetian ship arrived at London from Venice with some 320 butts of malmsey and muscatel which were imported under a licence held by Benedict Spinola.² Fuller details of the exports to Venice are available for the year Michaelmas 1570 to Michaelmas 1571 when two ships left London for that port with cargoes of cloth, lead, tin, tallow, lambskins, rabbit skins, and wool. Both ships were Venetian and all the goods were exported by Italian merchants.³ Two years later, in 1573, a ship from Genoa brought spices and 60,000 lb. alum to Southampton.⁴ It is often difficult to tell whether the Venetian ships touched at ports in the Levant during their voyages. Sometimes they certainly did. In 1568 a Venetian ship brought wine from Crete to London.⁵ Of two Venetian ships bound for Margate in 1569, one at least had touched at Crete.⁶ Indeed a charter party of 1575 details what may have been a typical voyage; the *St. Dorothy* was to sail from Venice to Corfu, Zante, Crete, Cadiz, and then on to Southampton and Margate.⁷

Such direct contacts with the Levant were supplemented by indirect trade in English and Levantine products. English cloth was sold in the Levant by Venetian and French merchants. When in the 'sixties and 'seventies the Russia Company was trading with Persia through Russia, its factors complained of competition in the Persian market from Armenian merchants who sold English cloth imported through Aleppo and Tripoli in Syria. The cloth, chiefly kerseys, had been shipped to Aleppo and Tripoli by Venetian merchants. It is impossible to estimate the extent of this Venetian trade in English products, which the Russia Company's factors undoubtedly exaggerated.⁸ In the year ending at Michaelmas 1576 fifteen Italian merchants were said to have exported goods worth £1,768 from London and to have imported goods worth £13,019.⁹

¹ Exch. K. R. Port Books, 814/2.

² *Ibid.* 4/2.

³ *Ibid.* 4/5; 5/6. The cargoes included 171 fother lead, 10,500 lb. tin, 48,000 lb. tallow, 16,000 rabbit skins, 3600 lambskins, 1057 Hampshire kerseys, 12,060 goats Cheshire cottons, 40 northern and 20 Devonshire dozens, 35 pieces bays, and two dozen sacks of wool.

⁴ *Ibid.* 814/9.

⁵ *Ibid.* 4/2.

⁶ High Court of Admiralty, Examinations, 17 (30 November 1569, 29 January 1570).

⁷ *Ibid.* 21 (13 May 1575). The 'Speciall direction for divers trades', which has been dated c. 1575-85, gives the exports to and the imports from Tripoli in Syria, but the wording of this section suggests that the anonymous author considered this trade to be in the hands of foreign merchants. Instead of the usual 'we lade', he wrote, 'they transporte for' and 'they bringe from' Tripoli (Tawney and Power, *op. cit.* iii. 208). This rather suggests that the document was written before the foundation of the Levant Company in 1581.

⁸ Hakluyt, *op. cit.* iii. 57-8, 136-46.

⁹ Lansdowne MSS. 22, no. 16. These figures were presumably based on official values. This document gives the names of the merchants; it also gives the names of merchants of the Low Countries and the value of their imports and exports, though there is no indication of this fact in the description of the document in the *Catalogue of Lansdowne Manuscripts*.

but what proportion of such goods entered into the Levant trade cannot be determined. English kerseys were also shipped to the Levant from Marseilles, where they were handled by such firms as Melchior Manlich et C^{ie}. Some English tin followed the same route. These firms imported spices, dyes, silk, and cotton wool from the Levant, some of which may have found its way to the English market.¹ No doubt such products of the Levant were often distributed through Antwerp to the countries of western Europe, including England. This trade is not easy to trace, for the records of English imports from Antwerp do not specify the country of origin. Only occasionally does the description of the goods reveal the place of origin, as when Thomas Eaton and Thomas Randall imported 'taffatas de Levant' from Antwerp in 1567. Perhaps John Eliote's 'ij dozen knit cotton peticotes' had a similar origin.²

The fact that products from the Levant, as well as from Spain and Portugal, could be obtained at Antwerp was, according to Burghley, one of the reasons for the decline of English shipping; a single hoy could bring from Antwerp 'as much in one yere as x merchantes shippes war wont to bryng from the other placees in ij yers'.³ This might suggest that the ease of obtaining goods at Antwerp was the reason for the English withdrawal from the Levant. It is doubtful, however, whether there was any single reason for the withdrawal. Contemporaries ascribed the decline of the Levant trade to a variety of causes. In 1563 it was claimed that 'the ancient navigation into the Levant' had diminished partly because 'the spicery that was in the Venetians handes is come to the Portingales and Spaniardes by ther meanes of there Indias',⁴ but in fact it would seem that the Venetians maintained their Mediterranean spice trade in spite of Portuguese competition.⁵ The decline was also ascribed to increasing Turkish aggressiveness and to increasing lawlessness on the sea routes to the Levant. In 1563 the blame was laid partly on 'the haunte of the Turkes and Mores that now haunt those seas, and dayly increass there navy there'.⁶ Later it was believed that after 'the Turk took Scio and other lands within the Archipelago, he drove our nation clean from the said trade',⁷ but the capture of Chios in 1566 does not seem

¹ R. Collier and J. Billioud, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille*, iii. 243-5, 458-9, 519-20; A-E. Sayous, 'Le commerce de Melchior Manlich et C^{ie} d'Augsbourg à Marseille et dans toute la Méditerranée entre 1571 et 1574', *Revue historique*, vol. 176 (1935), pp. 389-411; M. Baulant, *Lettres de négociants marseillais: Les Frères Hermite (1570-1612)*, pp. 1-28.

² Exch. K. R. Port Books, 4/2.

³ Tawney and Power, *op. cit.* ii. 125.

⁴ *Ibid.* ii. 104.

⁵ F. C. Lane, 'The Mediterranean spice trade', *American Historical Review*, xlv (1939-40), 581-90.

⁶ Tawney and Power, *op. cit.* ii. 104.

⁷ *Ibid.* ii. 79.

very relevant to a decline in trade that had taken place more than a decade earlier.

There may be some truth in these reasons, but they do not appear wholly convincing. Conditions of trade may have deteriorated in the eastern Mediterranean, but that did not prevent the Venetians and the French from trading there. It is possible, of course, that the geographical position of Marseilles and of Venice and its dependencies made it easier for the French and the Venetians to overcome the difficulties of trade; their ships had not such a long haul or quite such an exposure to Barbary corsairs as the English had. Again, English merchants may have found it easier to trade with Antwerp than with Aleppo, but that did not prevent a group of them from trying to tap the riches of the east by the north-east passage. When that passage led to Russia and not to Cathay, the Russia Company developed a trade in silks and spices from Persia, which suggests an attempt to find a substitute for the abandoned Levant trade. Indeed the high hopes that for many years were centred in this Persian trade may be one reason why English merchants were reluctant to reopen direct trade with the Levant. Moreover, the establishment of trade with Russia coincided with the development of trade with west Africa and of the slave trade with the West Indies. The timing of these enterprises rather suggests that they were in part a substitute for a Levant trade whose conditions had become temporarily unfavourable. It is certainly not clear why those conditions had become unfavourable,¹ but even some temporary adverse factors may have diverted resources of capital, ships, and men away from the Levant and into these new trades. Assuming that such resources were not unlimited, their diversion into new trades may partly account for the reluctance of English merchants to re-enter the Levant.

When trade with the Levant was resumed under the auspices of the Levant Company, it was represented as the establishment of a virtually new trade in an area that had not been 'commonly used and frequented' by the English for a generation.² The fact that the Levant Company was initially a joint-stock company may be some reflexion of the newness of its trade. When a new branch of trade was subject to company control from the very start, as in the case of the Russia and East India Companies, such companies were joint-stocks; when company control was imposed on an existing trade, as in the case of the trade with the Baltic, Spain, and Barbary, such companies were regulated ones. Though the Levant Company was originally a joint-stock company, it later became a regulated

¹ It is possible that difficulties with Spain were a factor, if English ships called at Spanish ports on their way to the Levant. One of the last recorded English voyages for the Levant in the 'fifties came to an end at Cadiz where the ship was requisitioned by the Spanish authorities (*Calendar of State Papers Spanish*, xi. 48).

² Hakluyt, *op. cit.* v. 192.

company in which the members traded individually or in partnerships. The historian of the Levant Company has argued convincingly that the change occurred 'between 1588 and 1595',¹ and it now seems possible to throw a little more light on the transition.

The Levant Company's first charter was granted on 11 September 1581 for seven years; it was not renewed and therefore expired in September 1588. In March and April 1588 goods from the Levant were entered in the London Port Books² largely, but not wholly, in the name of 'Sir Edward Osborne, Richard Staper and company'. Osborne and Staper had pioneered the revived Levant trade, and the former was the company's governor. The company itself seems to have had no official name granted to it by its charter, though it was known conventionally as the Turkey Company at this time. It would seem therefore that 'Sir Edward Osborne, Richard Staper and company' was in fact the Levant Company trading as a joint-stock company. This view is confirmed by John Sanderson's description of the arrival of the *Hercules* in 1588 'with that shipp ladinge for accompte of the Turkie Company',³ for most of the cargo of the *Hercules* was entered in the name of Osborne, Staper and company.

There were, however, some other importers besides Osborne, Staper and company. A pilot, a purser, a mariner, and three of the masters of the ships imported small quantities of currants, oil, indigo, nutmegs, galls, raisins, and cotton yarn. Such imports probably represented the exercise of the ancient right of portage. More puzzling are the imports entered in the names of individual merchants. There were eight such entries, ranging from Edward Holmden,⁴ who imported from Zante 273,600 lb. currants officially valued at £4,104 10s., to Jeffrey Tobbart, who imported 600 lb. currants valued at £9. They included 'John Saunderson, Anthony Bate and company', who imported silk, cotton yarn, pepper, nutmegs, pistachio, and indigo officially valued at £100. The importers of small quantities, like Richard Thompson with his 70 lb. bale of raw silk, may well have been interlopers, but it is difficult to regard Holmden, Sanderson, and Bate in that light. Holmden was a leading figure in the Venice Company;⁵ Sanderson and Bate were both employed by the Levant Company and were returning to England in the *Hercules* which carried their goods.⁶ It is tempting to see in these cases a development of authorized individual trading which foreshadowed the transition to the regulated company, but they are susceptible of a different and perhaps

¹ A. C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company*, pp. 22-3.

² Exch. K. R. Port Books, 7/8; 8/1.

³ J. Sanderson, *The Travels of John Sanderson in the Levant, 1584-1602*, ed. Sir William Foster, p. 6.

⁴ His name is also spelt Hambdon, Hombden, &c.

⁵ M. Epstein, *The Early History of the Levant Company*, pp. 22-3.

⁶ Sanderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-6, 36-54, 132.

more reasonable explanation. Holmden's import of currants from Zante was presumably part of his trade as a member of the Venice Company. Sanderson, Bate and company may merely have been transmitting their earnings to England in the form of goods, or they may, of course, have been engaging in a little unauthorized private trade, which no joint-stock trading company could ever quite prevent its servants from doing. The evidence of the Port Books seems, therefore, to support the accepted view that the Levant Company remained a joint-stock company until at least 1588.

In September 1588 the Levant Company's charter expired and in April 1589 the charter of its rival, the Venice Company, also expired. Very little is known of the Venice Company, which had received a charter in 1583,¹ but Holmden's import of currants in 1588 suggests that the trade with Venice and its dependencies was not conducted on a joint-stock basis. That is certainly true of the period after the Venice Company's charter had expired. Between 1 July and 29 September 1589 some fifteen merchants imported goods from Venice and Zante to the official value of £15,681. It would be unwise to lay too much stress on figures that cover only three months, but for what they are worth the figures show a great concentration of the trade in a few hands. Four importers accounted for 94 per cent. of the trade; they were Edward Holmden (£8,069), Thomas Cordall and company (£3,310), William Garraway (£1,740), and Paul Banning (£1,557).² Similarly after the expiration of the Levant Company's charter the trade with Turkey was conducted by individual merchants and not by a joint-stock company.³

In January 1592 these groups of merchants trading with Venice and Turkey respectively were united in the Levant Company and were granted a new charter. There has been much dispute whether this new Levant Company was a joint-stock or not. Scott believed that it was a joint-stock company with shares of £130 each, but the £130 mentioned in the charter seems to have been a high entrance fee for late comers rather than a share in a joint-stock company.⁴ Charters are rarely a reliable guide to whether a company was regulated or joint-stock, but there is one small point of difference between the Levant Company's charters of 1581 and 1592 which may be significant. Both charters provide for the nomination of two members of the company by the queen. In the 1581 charter such members were 'to be adventurers in the said trade, for such stocke and summe of money, as they shall put in' and were to be 'contributorie to all the charges of the said trade and adventure

¹ Wood, *op. cit.* pp. 18-19.

² Exch. K. R. Port Books, 8/4. The chief import was currants from Zante.

³ Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁴ W. R. Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish, and Irish Joint-stock Companies to 1720*, ii. 85-6; Hakluyt, *op. cit.* vi. 88-9.

indifferently, according to their stockes'; in the 1592 charter the royal nominees were only to pay 'such payments and charges touching and concerning the same trade . . . ratablie as other of the sayd Companie of marchants of Levant shall, and doe, or ought to beare and pay'.¹ It may be possible to read too much into this, but the clause of 1581 suggests a joint-stock and the clause of 1592 does not.

It is doubtful whether, after the grant of a new charter in 1592, the Levant Company reverted to joint-stock trading. It was clearly a regulated company in 1595,² and there is no evidence to suggest that it was a joint-stock company between 1592 and 1595. After 1595 the evidence of Sanderson's letters can be supplemented by the records of actual shipments. In May 1596 the *Royal Exchange* arrived at London from Alexandretta with a cargo belonging to twenty-two individual merchants.³ Two years later the shipments of goods, excluding cloth, to Venice and the Levant were made by at least thirty-six merchants.⁴ These examples show clearly that the Levant Company was then a regulated company. They are more convincing than arguments to the contrary based on statements made by the Venetian ambassador in Constantinople.⁵ It is very likely that the Levant Company's joint-stock trading ended with the expiration of the first charter and was not resumed.

The Port Books for 1587-8, which throw some light on the Levant Company's structure, also give a detailed picture of the imports from the Levant for the year ending at Michaelmas 1588. One of the ships bringing these goods, the *Hercules*, has a certain title to fame, for according to John Eldred, who travelled in her, she 'was the richest ship of English marchants goods that ever was knowen to come into this realme'.⁶ This might seem just the contemporary language of hyperbole, but fortunately an assessment of the cargo of the *Hercules* does not rest on literary sources alone. The *Hercules* left Tripoli in Syria in November 1587 and after 'an extreame storme, fowle wether, and contrary winds', reached London at the end of March 1588. According to John Sanderson, who travelled in the ship, the *Hercules* carried a cargo 'for accompte of the Turkie Company' for which 'Alderman Hart and Alderman Spencer offered . . . £70,000 at an adventure; but suer the goods came to much more when they made the de- vision'.⁷ The goods from the *Hercules* which were entered by the customs in the name of Sir Edward Osborne, Richard Staper

¹ Hakluyt, *op. cit.* v. 200-1; vi. 89.

² Professor Wood's evidence on this point seems conclusive (Wood, *op. cit.* p. 22).

³ Lansdowne MSS. 81, no. 50.

⁴ Exch. K. R. Port Books, 10/11. Some of the goods were exported by partnerships whose size cannot be determined.

⁵ Lipson, *op. cit.* ii. 339.

⁶ Hakluyt, *op. cit.* vi. 9.

⁷ Sanderson, *op. cit.* pp. 5-6.

and company were officially valued at £37,683 2s. 8d.¹ There is a considerable gap between this sum and Sanderson's £70,000, but the gap may perhaps be bridged by the difference between official and real values. The relationship between official values, which were based on the *Book of Rates*, and real values is difficult to determine in a period when prices were rising and when official values were not adjusted to the rise. A very tentative estimate for seven items in the *Hercules's* cargo shows that their official value was £13,390 and their real value about £40,038.² It looks indeed as if the aldermen might have made a good 'adventure' if their offer of £70,000 had been accepted.

The *Hercules* was one of five ships that brought goods from the Levant to London in the year ending at Michaelmas 1588.³ The total cargoes of the five ships were officially valued at £55,261 18s. 8d. They consisted of the following goods: 613,300 lb. currants, 10,850 lb. 'Damaske reizens', 6 barrels sweet oil, 49,705 lb. nutmegs, 54,120 lb. indigo, 104,500 lb. galls, 8,380 lb. pepper, 10,000 lb. aniseed, 2,196 lb. cinnamon and 10,100 lb. 'barcke of synamon caled scavesons', 100 lb. vermilion, 580 lb. cloves, 856 lb. sal-ammoniac, 256 lb. myrobalans, 428 lb. mace, 260 lb. sanguis draconis, 360 lb. aloes, 420 lb. calamus, 1,500 lb. wormseed, 110 lb. scammony, 550 lb. ginger, 300 lb. 'moma',⁴ 1,120 lb. cassia fistula, 600 lb. mastic, 1,000 lb. turmeric, 200 lb. pistachio, 9,133 lb. raw silk, 66,500 lb. cotton wool and 15,840 lb. cotton yarn, 700 lb. flax, 23 bales containing 'botanes'⁵ of cotton cloth in 1,590 pieces, 660 pieces 'wattred and unwattred chamblettes',⁶ 1,770 double pieces program, 3 bales of 'shasshes'⁷ containing 518 pieces, 25 pieces 'Iser' cloth, 2 bales containing 55 pieces 'comashes', 9 'quitts of cotton cloth', 13 Turkey carpets, 1 bag sponges, 1 box of china, and 1 box of mirrors. These goods were an interesting and varied lot, with no doubt an appeal to the Elizabethan apothecary, grocer, and mercer. The considerable quantities of cotton wool and yarn must surely have gone to the fustian makers as well as to the stuffers

¹ Exch. K. R. Port Books, 8/1.

² The items were raw silk, cotton yarn, cotton wool, nutmegs, galls, wormseed, and indigo. The official values were taken from the 1583 *Book of Rates*, except for indigo for which the value was calculated from Exch. K. R. Port Books, 7/8. The real values are the prices quoted by the Levant Company in 1586 (Lansdowne MSS. 241, fo. 392^v).

³ Exch. K. R. Port Books, 7/8; 8/1. The ports of shipment were Patras, Zante, and Tripoli in Syria.

⁴ Probably mummy, obtained in Egypt and used as a medicine. Sanderson recorded the purchase of 600 lb. of mummy 'together with a whole bodie', which he says were shipped in the *Hercules* and later sold to the London apothecaries (Sanderson, *op. cit.* p. 45).

⁵ 'Botanos or peeces of linnin litted blew' (*O.E.D.* quoting the 1611 *Book of Rates*). They seem in fact to have been pieces of cotton cloth made in Cyprus (Baulant, *op. cit.* p. 4).

⁶ I.e. watered and unwatered camlets.

⁷ Turban-cloths (Sanderson, *op. cit.* p. 239, n. 1).

of quilts and the makers of candle wicks. In 1586 the Levant Company had asked its Aleppo factors to send cotton yarn, of which the coarsest kind 'serveth for candells' and the finest 'for fustians'.¹ Some years earlier 'cotton woll for spinners' had been included among the foreign wares 'metest for servinge the realme'.²

It is not possible to compare the imports from the Levant for 1588 with the exports for that year, for no record of the latter has survived. Indeed no full picture of exports to the Levant can be obtained until nearly the end of the century. In the year ending at Michaelmas 1598 the shipments of cloth of assize from London to the Levant comprised 750 shortcloths, 18,031 kerseys, and 95 Devonshire dozens. These were not very impressive figures, amounting as they did to some 6.4 per cent. of the total London cloth exports, but they exceeded the corresponding figures for Russia and France. In the same year, 161 shortcloths and 5,663 kerseys were transported overland by foreign merchants to Venice to be sold there and in the countries adjoining the Levant seas.³ Some of these cloths probably found their way into Turkey. In 1601 Malynes complained that English merchants sold their cloth 'too good cheape' in Turkey because of competition from other English cloth carried into Turkey by way of Venice.⁴

Apart from cloth, the only considerable exports to the Levant seem to have been tin and rabbit skins. In the year ending at Michaelmas 1599 exports by native merchants from London to Zante, Crete, Constantinople, and Alexandretta consisted of 2,125½ cwt. tin, 42 cwt. iron wire, 26,600 black rabbit skins, 34 cwt. sarsaparilla, 4 cwt. brazil-wood, 15 cwt. logwood 'which is here forbidden by statute', and 5 cwt. white single plates.⁵ The official value of these goods was £4,278 6s. 4d. In the same year the exports to Venice consisted of 253 cwt. tin, 265 fother lead, 11,340 black rabbit skins, 5,400 tawed sheepskins and 4,000 tawed lambskins, 635 lb. sarsaparilla, 60 cases Normandy glass, 1 cwt. madder, 2 barrels white plates, 15 cwt. 'eboyne woode', 7 cwt. logwood, 24 cwt. 'Fernambuck',⁶ and 3½ cwt. 'emforbin (?)'. These goods were officially valued at £3,240 4s. 8d.⁷ No doubt cloth was also shipped to the Levant in 1598-9, but no figures of such shipments are available.

Figures, even detailed figures, of exports and imports for isolated years do not form any reliable basis for generalization, but these records of shipments to and from the Levant suggest certain features of the trade that are not incompatible with evidence drawn

¹ Sanderson, *op. cit.* p. 131.

² State Papers Domestic, Eliz., cxlvi, no. 13.

³ *Ibid.* cclxviii, no. 101.

⁴ G. de Malynes, *A Treatise of the Canker of Englands Common Wealth* (1601), pp. 73-4.

⁵ Pewter or tin?

⁶ I.e. brazil-wood.

⁷ Exch. K. R. Port Books, 10/11.

from other sources. They suggest, for example, that the balance of trade with the Levant was unfavourable, though they do not make possible a statistical assessment of that balance. They suggest, too, that the Levant was not a very good market for English goods. The exports were limited both in quantity and type. They consisted largely of the twin staples, tin and cloth, and even the cloth was the traditional shortcloth and kerseys, and not the products of the new drapery. Indeed the goods manufactured by the so-called new industries do not figure in the exports at all, unless the iron wire shipped to Constantinople was a product of the Mineral and Battery Works; even the glass shipped to Venice was probably a re-export, and a rather surprising one considering the Venetian skill in glass making. This limited range of exports contrasted markedly with the variety of the imports from the Levant. In that respect the Levant trade conformed to the general pattern of English foreign trade in this period.

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