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CONDITIONS OF TRADE IN THE
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN:
AN APPRAISAL OF EIGHTEENTH-
CENTURY OTTOMAN DOCUMENTS
FROM ALEPPO

BY

R. MURPHEY

(New York)

What is new and what is traditional in a particular epoch of Ottoman history? This question preoccupies the thoughts of all practitioners of the craft. This paper examines what is reported by eighteenth-century European diplomats and merchants on the subject of their nations' trade with the Ottomans and later interpreted by modern historians, and compares the image presented in these works with what can be gleaned from local records emanating from Ottoman provinces. The purposes of such an exercise is not to expose the subjectivity or selectivity of any of the sources on which our present understanding of the Near Eastern trading phenomenon has come to be based, but to try to provide a clearer framework for our assessment of the commercial characteristics of the age by revealing some of its lesser known aspects. As a starting point must be emphasized that at no time prior to the Napoleonic age must we seek the compliancy in trading matters that naturally emerged among the Ottomans after military alliances such as that forged with the British commander Sir Sidney Smith in 1799 aimed at removing Napoleon's forces from Egypt, or the triple alliance against Russia in the Crimea in 1855. World conditions in the nineteenth century necessitated greater reliance on international diplomacy and transformed the Ottomans' relationship with the major European powers.

If we acknowledge the exceptional character of the nineteenth century and disregard it as an appropriate framework for comparisons, what then can be said to have been significantly different about the conditions of trade with the Ottoman empire in the eighteenth century as compared with earlier periods? The existing literature on the subject in western languages¹⁾ repeatedly emphasizes that the century was characterized by a general trend of decentralizing of authority and loss of bureaucratic efficiency, which left the government incapable of protecting merchants from harassment by local magnates and officials. If government efficiency in the realm of control over commercial affairs is taken as a valid measure of central authority, then a look at earlier periods should reveal a comparatively greater success in enforcement of customs regulations and official trade and taxation policies.

A single document from the beginning of the previous century serves as proof that an active contraband trade, rampant evasion of customs, and other signs of "weak" central government were strikingly in evidence in earlier periods, even those associated with firm central authority. From the above-mentioned document, a report submitted by the sultan's customs commissioner at the port of Volos

1) The long list of "adventurer traders" (as distinguished from soldiers of fortune, diplomats, missionaries, and pilgrims) whose accounts are primarily concerned with developing or exploring the commercial potential of the Middle East commences in the late sixteenth century with two Englishmen, William Harborne and John Sanderson. See S.A. Skilliter, *William Harborne and the trade with Turkey 1578-1582; a documentary study of the first Anglo-Ottoman relations* (Oxford, 1977), and W. Foster (ed.), *The Travels of John Sanderson in the Levant 1584-1602* (London, 1931) [Hakluyt Society, Second Series No. 67]. Sanderson's account has a particularly lugubrious air about it, but his insistence on the insalubrious conditions prevalent in the Syrian ports in those years probably accurately reflects true conditions. The most frequently cited synthetic studies about trading conditions in the Ottoman empire during the eighteenth century are: P. Masson, *Histoire de commerce français dans le Levant au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1911), F. Charles Roux, *Les échelles de Syrie et de Palestine au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1928), and A.C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company* (Oxford, 1953). See also the list of works singled out by Owen in his review of the issue of 'decline' in the historiography on the Middle East, R. Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy 1800-1914* (London, 1981), pp. 1-23 and esp. n.2 on p. 294.

(*Ott. Golos*) in southern Thessaly, it appears that in a single month in August of 1600 (*safer* 1009) thirty ships anchored in that harbor had escaped payment of any customs dues and that during the preceding seven-month period beginning from January 1600 (*receb* 1008) a cumulative list of one hundred and twenty customs-evading captains had been amassed.²) Accounts of sixteenth-century commerce in the Marmara and Aegean are likewise rife with government complaints about interloping and black marketeering (*matrabazlık*)³.

Viewed from the standpoint of the relative scale and importance of the unofficial trade in these three centuries—the sixteenth, the seventeenth, and the eighteenth—it is difficult to say which of them demonstrated most convincingly the central government's failure to regulate the internal and external trade of the empire. Clearly, the eighteenth-century accounts of French travellers and merchants which complain of the venality and excesses of local officials in the port cities of the Ottoman empire present only a limited vision of commercial conditions as they impinged most immediately on themselves. The following remarks are based primarily on relevant documentation from the second half of the eighteenth century preserved in the records of the *kadis* of Aleppo. The viewpoint represented in foreign consular reports is well publicized and the Ottoman government response to some of the complaints raised in these reports is also known in part⁴). This paper, on the other hand, will try to reveal through study of the declarations and official statements (*ilams*) submitted to the central government by a variety of local figures such as the *kadis*, tax-farmers, government officials, and even the foreign consular representatives themselves, the full

2) Istanbul, Başbakanlık. Archives, *Maliyyeden Müdever* [Hereafter = *MM*] *Register* 15792

3) A. Refik, *Onuncu asr-ı hicri'de İstanbul hayatı* (Istanbul, 1333/1945), pp. 109-145, and R. Murphey, "Provisioning Istanbul: The State and Subsistence in the Early Modern Middle East", *Food and Foodways*, 2 (1987), pp. 217-263

4) See in particular the series in the Başbakanlık Archives of Istanbul known as the *ecnebi defterleri*. This series is described in A. Çetin, *Başbakanlık arşivi kilavuzu* (Istanbul, 1979), pp. 68-72.

range of information and opinion presented to the Ottoman government during the decision-making process.

Diplomatic Privilege

One of the new characteristics of the eighteenth century Ottoman trading complexion was the broader participation of a diverse array of European trading partners instead of the domination of one or another of the "favored" nations as had been the general pattern in earlier periods. The range and scope of the various European nations' activities in the Levant around the middle of the eighteenth century can be judged by the number of locally-resident and officially-licensed agents (*beratlu tercüman*s) accorded to each of them by the terms of their respective treaties. A list for the Aleppo consulates dated 1758 (1177 A.H.) reads as follows⁵:

country	no. of agents
1st England	11
2nd France	8
3rd Austria	8
4th Netherlands	7
5th Sweden	4
6th Sicily	3
7th Venice	2

The resident consuls were themselves often heavily involved, either as hidden or overt partners, in many commercial transactions. For instance, in 1763 (1177 A.H.) the Dutch consul in Aleppo, by using his own *tercüman* named Germanus as broker, entered into a purchase agreement for 833.83 *batmans* of silk which, by the then current price of 22 *gurush* per *batman*, was worth more than 19,000 *gurush*⁶). After

5) Haleb, *Evamır-ı sultanıyye* [Hereafter = *ES*], Vol. 55, pp. 168-169

6) During the early part of the eighteenth century the exchange value of the *gurush* fluctuated between 110-120 *akçes*, the latter still then being considered the

Germanus had submitted a downpayment of roughly one-quarter of the amount due to an Aleppo merchant named Hacı Süleyman, the silk was delivered to the warehouse of the consul himself. Subsequently Germanus and his three partners filed for bankruptcy and claimed inability to pay their debts which, in part to Hacı Süleyman and in part to other Aleppo merchants, totalled 190,988 *gurush*. When asked to answer for his part in these transactions before the court the consul, claiming immunity from judicial punishment, declined and stated:

“According to the terms of the imperial agreement (*ahudname*), cases involving litigation or dispute (*intıcaac ve ihtızar*) with foreigners are not to be tried in the [local] courts⁷⁾.”

In disputes involving the consuls personally or their self-appointed *tercümans*, the diplomats enjoyed the automatic right of appealing their cases for decision by the imperial council in the capital Istanbul, and all foreign merchants had the right to appeal cases which involved sums in excess of 4,000 *akçes*⁸⁾. By exercising the right of

standard money of account. With the reign of Ahmed III (1718-1730) a final break with the *akçe* standard was made and from the mid 1720s standard exchange rates were established for all currencies based on the “New Gurush” whose value was set at 120 *akçes*. The precise date of this important reform which established the *gurush* as the new standard money of account in place of the *akçe* is not clear, but there is general agreement that it took place during the reign of Ahmed III. See S. Südi, *Usul-ı Meskukat-ı Osmanıye ve Ecnebiye* (Istanbul, 1311/1893), p. 46 ff. and the introduction to the 1982 reprint edited by I. Artuk, p. 19. The texts of two imperial rescripts issued by Ahmed III have been published and they bear the dates 1721 and 1725, an indication that the full implementation of the reform may date from this period. See B.S. Baykal, “Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda XVII. ve XVIII. yüzyıllar boyunca para düzeni ile ilgili belgeler”, *Belgeler*, 4 (1967), pp. 61-62 and E. Kolerkişç, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Para* (Ankara, 1958), pp. 99-100. The *batman* measure used here is the equivalent of 700 *dirhems* or 2.24 kg.

7) *ES* 6, p. 175 For Germanus (Germanos Sader), see O. Schutte, *Repertorium der Nederlandse vertegenwoordigers, residerende in het Buitenland, 1584-1810* (1976), p. 355

8) *MM* 2747, p. 85 The relevant passage from an order addressed to the *kadi* of Izmir in 1682 (1093 A.H.) reads as follows:

“*ahudname-ı hümayuna muracaat olundukta Francalunun 4,000 akçeden ziyade olan davaların divan-ı hümayun'da istıma olunup, gayrı yer'de istıma olunmaya deyü [...]* mukkayed.”

appeal even in cases where the evidence clearly indicated against them, consular officials and merchants were able both to delay justice and to use the judicial protections provided in the treaties as a source in effect of free credit with local merchants. In order for the latter group to collect their debts they would have to become embroiled in lengthy and costly litigation whose pursuit might well harm their other business interests. The consular officials in Ottoman provincial towns thus trusted in the ability of their ambassadors in Istanbul to intercede on their behalf with the central authorities. In the case just cited involving the Dutch consul in Aleppo and his bankrupt *tercüman* Germanus, while the assets of the firm had been seized by the court for distribution to creditors, it was alleged (allegations that were confirmed by both English and French merchants resident in Aleppo at the time) that the Dutch consul had entered the sealed warehouse under cover of night and removed some goods valued at 11,000 *gurush*. The government, while obliged to honor its treaty agreements with respect to the right of appeal, made every effort to ensure that such disputes were settled locally through the testimony of reliable witnesses. Ottoman merchants had neither the financial resources nor the organizational sophistication to compete effectively with foreigners in protracted law suits, especially when they needed to be pursued in the distant capital.

Customs Evasion

In principle, both foreign goods brought for sale in the Ottoman empire and Ottoman goods purchased by foreign traders with the intention of selling them in their home countries were subject to a one time flat assessment on total value. Though the rate of this assessment was negotiated between the individual capitulatory nation and the Porte, the most usual was 3%. Foreign traders were thus exempt, with the exception of certain strategic and scarce goods, from a range of taxes assessed on internal trade such as receiving fees (*amediyeye*),

shipping and export fees (*reftiye* and *masdariye*)⁹⁾, and dues for goods in transit (*zarar-ı kasabiye*)¹⁰⁾ The reality was of course not quite so simple. According to information provided in Ahmed Vasıf's history entitled *Mehasin'ül-asar*¹¹⁾ it was not until 1784 that England joined France, Russia, and Austria in being exempted from payment of the *resm-i masdariye*. Furthermore, sale of certain products such as coffee, cotton, and some dyes was subject to supplementary treasury taxes (*rüsum-ı murî*) whose collection was farmed out to imperial commissioners in major ports such as Izmir and points of customs entry such as Aleppo To guarantee collection of the treasury taxes on such goods, foreign merchants were required to pay a supplement to the market price at the time of purchase. In the case of cotton goods, this supplement amounted to 1 *akçe* per *vukiye*¹²⁾ for raw cotton, and 2 *akçes* per *vukiye* for cotton thread. Foreign purchasers had to show a receipt confirming payment of these charges (*eda tezkiresi*) to customs officials before they could legally load their cargos for export, and the seller was responsible for delivering the supplementary charges col-

9) *MM* 2747, pp. 104-105 provides a list of the variable rates of the *masdariye*, for certain controlled goods as collected from foreign merchants, and both Muslim and non-Muslim Ottoman merchants as well. At the date of the documents's issuance in 1685 (1096 A.H.) the list of these controlled items included the following: woolsens and brocades, lamb fleeces, cowhides and finished leather goods, glassware and mirrors, tin, boxwood, paper, salt, and salted fish. The amount of the *masdariye* charges was determined on the basis of weight or volume rather than value of the goods shipped. For example, salted fish was assessed according to the number of barrels—in three standard sizes *su varili*, *omuz varili* and *arka varili*—which were shipped.

10) *ES* 17, p. 55. "[...] her gûne sair tekalifden ve ale'l-husus masdariyye ve kasabiyye ve resm-i amediyye ve reftiyye ve bac ve yasak kulu ve sair tekalifden salim olalar deyü [] mukayyed." For examples of the rates paid by locally-resident merchants for *reftiye* dues on such goods as coffee, cotton, soap, leather goods and olives see, *ES* 7, pp. 150-151. For example cotton, assessed at a rate of 1.75% of the value of the goods received, yielded an annual revenue for the Aleppo region of 6,100 *guruh*.

11) The event is chronicled in Vasıf's history in his account of developments during the year 1198 A.H. The official proclamation bore the date *evahir-ı cemazi'ül-ahır* or mid May 1784. See the continuation of Vasıf's history edited by Mucteba İlğürel, *Istanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları No. 2242* (Istanbul, 1978), p. 161

12) The *vukiye* or *okka* of Istanbul consisted of 400 *dirhems* or 1.2828 kg.

lected from the purchaser directly to the imperial commissioner in charge of the relevant tax-farm. We know from the eighteenth-century judicial records of Aleppo however that these tax apportionment schemes devised by the government could, due to a variety of causes, prove difficult to enforce.

Two cases from the mid-eighteenth-century Aleppo records (one from 1741 and the other from 1763) reflect directly on the question of customs evasion and indicate that the source of the problem was internal and bureaucratic. The ability of the foreigners to load their cargos without displaying proof that the supplementary charges had been paid implied the cooptation of the customs commissioners at nearby ports such as Iskenderun and Latakia¹³). Such problems were only compounded by internal administrative conflicts and rivalry between local tax-farmers competing for control over the most lucrative sources of revenue. In one example, the temporary confusion caused by the simultaneous claim of collection rights over the *pembe rüsumu* by both the coffee commissioner and the cotton commissioner led to a situation where foreign traders and local merchants alike could easily circumvent the regulations¹⁴). The decline of both tax-farm and treasury receipts from these and other products is repeatedly recorded in entries from the Aleppo registers of this period.

The depletion of revenues and tax receipts should not however be interpreted as an indication of the decline of trade. Particular caution should be used in interpreting the available data on the volume of trade in certain luxury items such as coffee. Based on information provided in a register dated 1757 (1171 A.H.) which indicated that the rate of the coffee tax was 5 *paras* per *vukiye* and that the total annual collection was 15,371 *gurush* and 12 *paras*¹⁵) we might be tempted to assume that the total volume of coffee imported to the

13) *ES* 4, p. 84.

14) *ES* 6, pp. 178-179. “*medine-i Haleb’de vakı tahmıs-ı kahve mukataasıl emını ‘pembe benın mukataam dahilindedir, resmini ben alırım’ deyü nızadan hali olmamaktan naşı [...].*”

15) *ES* 55, pp. 162-163

Syrian ports from Egypt was 614,852 divided by 5 or 122,970.4 *vukiyes*, equivalent to approximately 158 tons. We know however from the case involving the *pebbe rüsumu* just cited that there was a strong rivalry for control over revenue sources between competing tax-farmers in single localities. Furthermore, the scope of this rivalry could, and often did, transcend individual jurisdictions. Incentives were offered in competing quays and by the local officials stationed there to attract both the most intrinsically valuable cargos and those taxed at the highest rates. In an interesting document consisting of the petition submitted in 1777 (1191 A.H.) by the commissioner of the farm of coffee dues who resided in Aleppo¹⁶⁾ we learn of the diversion of trade in coffee traditionally dispatched from Damietta to Payas and Iskenderun (Alexandretta) to smaller quays attached to the jurisdiction of the *voivoda* of Tarsus named Tur-oğlu. Through this diversion, the revenues of the said tax-farmer in Aleppo suffered a depletion of between 40 and 50 pursus or 2 to 2.5 million *akçes* over a seven-year period between 1771-1777 (1185-1191 A.H.). If we annualize the lower of these two figures and convert to *paras* it may be seen that the resultant sum of 857,142 *paras* exceeds by a significant margin the figure of 614,852 *paras* recorded twenty years earlier in 1757 (1171 A.H.) for total coffee imports into the Syrian ports¹⁷⁾. Clearly thus neither rise nor decline in reported revenues based on official sources can provide a very dependable gauge of the true scope and intensity of trading activity.

Taking advantage of weaknesses in the Ottoman bureaucratic system wrought by interpersonal rivalries among local officials, unclear jurisdictional boundaries, and interagency competition at the top levels of the state administration, and capitalizing on their own general exemption from all imposts except for the one-time one-place customs charges of 3%, foreign traders were able to compete quite effectively in both the internal and external commerce of the empire.

16) *ES 14*, pp. 78-79

17) See note 13 above.

Availing themselves of the guarantee of free access to goods at current market prices (*narh-ı ruzî*) provided by the *ahudname* agreements, foreign traders were under no obligation to limit their purchases or consider what effect they might have on local supply. Attempts on the part of local officials to apply a different price scale for foreigners met with firm opposition by government authorities¹⁸). Because the Ottoman empire was considered a customs union, the customs dues on European goods imported into Ottoman territory could be paid at any port at the importer's discretion. When the goods reached their final destination and documentation was submitted proving that the 3% dues had already been collected at an earlier port of call, they had to be treated as duty-free goods. However, since the customs collection was farmed out to *mültezıms* and port commissioners who depended on the predictability of their revenues from one year to the next, such liberality gave rise to awkward imbalances¹⁹). In cases involving commercial disputes which were brought to its attention through official reports and declarations (*ilams*) representing the differing perspectives of all the parties from local officials to *mültezıms* to ambassadors representing the interests of the various foreign nations, the government had the unenviable task of trying to reconcile the differences, honor its own treaty commitments, and at the same time to maintain its own interests.

18) An example of the government's intervention to bar the collection of the illegal export permission fee (*ızın akçesi*) which officials at the Cretan port of Hania (Candia) were demanding of foreign purchasers of olive oil is recorded in *MM* 2747, p. 146. This entry contains the text of an order dated *evasıt-ı şaban* 1098/ late June 1687

19) For instance, the Aleppo customs commissioner complained in a report dated 1746 (1159 A.H.) of a 15% decline in his revenues resulting from collections made at Cyprus and the port cities of Syria (*ES* 5, pp. 335-336). Whereas the average value of the customs on French imports to Aleppo was normally 30,000 *gurush* per annum, because of collections of 1,857 *gurush* at Trablus, 253.5 *gurush* at Lazkiye, and 198.5 *gurush* at Cyprus during the first six months of 1746, his projected annual receipts would be reduced by approximately 4,600 *gurush* or slightly more than 15%. If it is assumed that the 30,000 *gurush* figure was realized from the customs dues of 3%, then the average annual value of French imports to Aleppo must have been in the neighborhood of 1,000,000 *gurush*.

While it is not possible here to elaborate the evolutionary stages influencing the government's thinking on specific issues, it may be instructive to follow the development over time of some particular disputes. The Aleppo court records covering the two-year period from January 1748 (*muharrem* 1161) to February 1750 (*rebi'ül-evvel* 1163) refer on four separate occasions to a dispute over the farm on the customs dues for textile imports reaching Aleppo by caravan from Baghdad, Basra, and Erzurum. As the case is presented by the farmer of the Aleppo customs, el-hac Ahmed, the clause in the treaty agreements exempting European traders from payment of any import dues in excess of the flat rate of 3% was intended to apply only to those goods of genuine European origin and manufacture (*halis Franca kârî meta'isi*)²⁰). Despite the clear intent of these regulations traders of European nationality were, according to the custom farmer's allegations, declaring goods of eastern and Anatolian origin (*emtia-i Hindiye ve eşya-ı Rumıye*) to be French products solely to avoid payment of the customs charges assessed on the overland cloth caravans. Apparently merchants such as the French Jew Belilos named in the dispute in question also managed sometimes to shelter from taxation the goods of Ottoman merchants—both Muslim and *zimmî*—by declaring these merchants' goods, travelling in the same caravan, to be part of their own shipments²¹). In a quick succession of imperial orders dated *şaban*, *receb*, and *şevval* of 1161 the position in the dispute defended by the tax-farmers seems to have gained the support to the government. At this stage in its deliberations, the government decided to withdraw the collection of these revenues from the jurisdiction of the provincial governors and transfer these rights on the basis of long-term renewable contracts (*ber vech-i malikâne*) to investors,

20) *ES I*, p. 124.

21) *ES I*, p. 149 The practice was presumably quite prevalent since direct reference is made to it in several other entries. See in particular *ES 18*, p. 46: “*rusum-ı kahve İstanbul ve tevabii mukataası mülhakatından olan iskelelere li ecl'il-ticare kahve getiren bazı Rum taifesi Moskovaluya ve Ermeni zümresi dahi Nemçeluya istinad ve bazı ehl-i ıslam tucarı dahi suret-i mudarebede bazı müstemin ismine kayd birle 'resm-i gümrükten meada ahar rüsum-ı mirî vermeziz' deyü mumanaat eyledikleri [] inha.*”

calculating presumably that it would thereby at least regularize treasury revenues. After this decision, a period of one and a half years of silence ensued in the documentation. Then, in February 1750 (*rebi, ül-evvel* 1163) a resumé addressed to Ismail Pasha, the general overseer of revenue collection in Aleppo province (*Haleb muhassılî*)²², made reference to the fact that during the period of control by the tax farmers, far from regularizing revenues, bureaucratic failures and loss of administrative control over the taxation process had so discouraged trade that the government had been compelled to revert to the former bureaucratic *status quo*. The incident, in itself not of particularly outstanding significance, serves as an indication of the sensitivity and responsiveness of the apparatus for appeal to the central authority. While the reaction was not always as immediate as might be desired, the foreign ambassadorial representatives could at least be assured that every complaint was duly recorded and carefully weighed during the government's decision-making process.

A General Assessment of Conditions of Trade in the Ottoman Empire During the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century

The period under investigation witnessed a significant disruption of the eastern trade because of an ongoing conflict between the Ottoman empire and Iran. The first episode which led to an outbreak of war came in the period 1723-1725, and was followed in 1733-1736 by Nadir Shah's attempts to recapture Baghdad. War resumed in 1741-1746 and, after an interlude of peace, broke out anew in 1774-1776²³. The Aleppo documentation makes repeated reference to decline in the volume of trade reaching Ottoman territory via Baghdad and Basra and to the attempts by various European trading nations to fill the gap. Under conditions of partial and sometimes complete closure of the eastern gateways to the Ottoman markets

22) *ES* 1, p. 148.

23) I.H. Danişmend, *Izahlı Osmanlı tarih kronolojisi* (Istanbul, 1955), vol. 4, pp. 13-17, 21-25, 29-32, and 59-60.

during the periodic renewals of hostilities between the warring Muslim states, even otherwise uncompetitive products such as European coffee could profitably be shipped and imported through Iskenderun while the sea and river route through Basra via the Tigris to the northern markets was temporarily abandoned as too dangerous²⁴) There is good evidence to suggest that overall the eighteenth century witnessed a steady if moderate growth in the total volume of trade between the Ottoman empire and European states. Over the sixty-five year period between 1724-1789 the value of French trade increased by 190%, an average yearly increase of 2.91%²⁵). The taste for oriental goods especially Indian, Central Asian, and Iranian textiles in the Ottoman capital Istanbul gave additional opportunities for foreign merchants who, unlike their Ottoman counterparts, were not bound by wartime restrictions on trade with Iran²⁶). Fine English woolens and other luxury goods of European origin continued to make their way east through Ottoman ports throughout the half-century of the Turco-Iranian wars²⁷).

The relationships between the Ottoman empire and European trading nations in the seventeenth and even in the eighteenth century was on the whole, despite the objections of moralists such as Naima²⁸) who were opposed to conspicuous consumption and the

24) See, for example, the context of a document dated 1777 (1191 A.H.) from the *kadi* records of Aleppo (*ES 14*, pp. 82-83):

“bir kaç seneden berü Bağdad ve Basra tariklerinin İsdarî hasebiyle kahvenin adem-i vurudundan naşı kahve rüsumu vradına kesr tarî olup, ancak Iskenderun iskelesine bilad-ı efrenden vurud eden efrenc kahvesi nev’an hasilat-ı mukataaya medar [...]” On the importation of West Indian coffee into Istanbul by the Marseilles fleet in the late 18th century, a trade valued at one million *livres* per annum, see G.A. Olivier, *Travels in the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and Persia*, 2 vols. (London, 1801), Vol. 1, p. 362.

25) Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy*, p. 6, table 1.

26) See the example of a consignment of textiles valued at 11,350 *gurush* transported from Basra by an Austrian merchant in 1780 (1194 A.H.) recorded in *ES 5*, pp. 380-381.

27) See the detailed description of a shipment valued at 91,331 *gurush* forwarded from Aleppo to Baghdad in 1750 (1163 A.H.) recorded in *ES 1*, p. 158.

28) *Tarih-i Naima* (Istanbul, 1280/1863), 4, pp. 293-294 and 6, pp. 7-10. The principle objection voiced by Naima was, however, against countries which main-

trade in luxuries on ethical grounds, beneficial to both partners. From the Ottoman point of view one noteworthy exception to this general rule emerged in cases where the government, either for convenience or out of necessity, relinquished its direct control over sale and taxation of certain primary goods to tax farmers who were granted long-term semiproprietary contracts²⁹). An example, by no means isolated, of this phenomenon may be seen in the case of controls governing purchase and sale of dyes used in the leather and textile industries. According to a document dated 1746 (1159 A.H.), up until the year 1741 (1154 A.H.) sale of acorns and nut gall used in the preparation of dyes and soaking solutions for the leather industry, and madder root and cotton fleece for the textile industry had been restricted to members of local guilds and, apart from the usual customs dues, no supplementary charges—known under the name of *büdaat resmi*—had been collected by the treasury³⁰). Starting in 1746 (1159 A.H.) however the government, presumably in pursuit of the aim of increasing treasury receipts, decided to loosen the restrictions on sale of these substances. To this end, a tax-farm was created, leased in the beginning for 1,500 *gurush* or 170,000 *akçes* a year and later increased to 2,500 *gurush* or 300,000 *akçes* a year. Supplementary treasury charges, whose collection was to be entrusted to the tax-farmer, were to be paid on the following schedule: 2 *akçes* per *vukıye* for nut gall and tannic acid (*beyaz mazi*), acorns (*palamud*), madder root (*gök boya*), and wool fleece (*yapak*); and 4 *akçes* per *vukıye* for

tained an uneven trading relationship with the Ottomans such as Russia, which supplied furs, and India, which supplied cloth, neither buying Ottoman goods for export in return. The European traders, by contrast, arrived at Ottoman ports loaded with *gurush* to finance their purchases. This latter kind of trade, Naima felt, served only to enrich the Ottoman lands. See the *Tarih-i Naima*, 4, p. 294. “*Ankara diyarî ve Haleb ve Sayda ve Trablus ve cumle Durzı cibalı enfrenç taifesin emvalî ile memlu [...]*.” See also R. Murphey, “The Velıyyuddin Telhıs”. *Belleten*, 43 (1979), p. 560, n. 15 for some passages expressing proscriptions against *zib* and *ziynet* or ornament and ostentation.

29) For an example see, in particular, the case described above in note 22.

30) *ES* 5, p. 370.

galic acid (*sıyah mazi*)³¹). The immediate beneficiary of this liberalization of sale and distribution was the tax-farmer who, in return for his investment of 2,500 *gurush* or 300,000 *akçes* annually, reportedly realized an income of between 30 and 40 purses or 1.5 to 2 million *akçes* from sales. However, the increased competition for goods introduced by allowing purchase for export, and the general loosening of controls, led to shortages. Thus, the leather dyers (*deb-bagh*), bootmakers (*huffaf*), and others who depended on a ready supply of acorns and nut gall for the manufacture of their products imposed a 50% increase on the sale price of their finished products such as bootliners (*mest*), shoes (*papuç*), and outer boots (*çizme*). After the tax-farm's creation, an event which had a direct impact on the supply of lamb fleeces as well, artisans who had been accustomed to purchasing their lamb fleeces at prices of between 4 and 5 *paras* or 12-15 *akçes* per *vukiye* were now obliged to pay double that price or 8 to 10 *paras* per *vukiye* for their raw material. These increased costs were of course passed directly on to local consumers. Responding to the repeated complaints of both manufacturers and consumers in Aleppo, in 1747 (1160 A.H.)—only one year after the creation of the new tax-farm—the government decided to revoke all present and future tax-farm leases for these collections, and to make up the 2,500 *gurush* in lost revenues by distributing small increases (*zam*) among the holders of tax-farm contracts throughout the province. While inevitably mistakes were made, and policy decisions reviewed in the light of new developments, the Ottoman bureaucratic system in the eighteenth century seems still to have exhibited a considerable aptitude for self-correction.

During the eighteenth century the government's attitude towards trade was by no means uniformly nurturing, and there can be no doubt that European merchants encountered some difficulties, suffered the effects of bureaucratic intransigence and capriciousness, and were forced to endure the general unpredictability of Ottoman

31) Cf., *ES 4*, p. 84 referred to in note 11 above.

markets. In a period of fiscal reorganization during which the more unified system of revenue collection of the sixteenth and seventeenth century was gradually being modified by an increasing "mukataacization" or parcelization of revenue collection in the eighteenth, some jurisdictional ambiguities were bound to arise³²). This period of bureaucratic transition also witnessed the development of intense interagency rivalry and competition within the Ottoman government. All of these developments naturally had an unsettling effect on foreign traders who had become accustomed to a different *modus operandi* in the previous two to three centuries of their trading relations with the Ottomans. In short, while these developments inevitably caused some initial consternation during the period of readjustment, neither the increased competition for Near Eastern markets, nor the process of internal bureaucratic reorganization underway in the Ottoman empire during the eighteenth century seems to have slowed the trade or led to an enduring disruption in east-west relations³³). Had the game not been worth the candle, it would be difficult to explain the steadily increasing volume of trade during the period.

32) For a general assessment of the significance of the fiscal reorganization undertaken in the Ottoman empire after 1690, see Y. Cezar, *Osmanlı Maliyesinde Bunalım ve Değişim Dönemi, XVIII. yy'dan Tanzimat'a Mali Tarih* (Istanbul, 1986), esp. p. 27 ff.

33) The regularization of exchange rates in a permanent and serious way during the early part of the century (see note 6 above) represents another facet of the government's organizational effort. To the extent that they introduced a greater measure of predictability for foreign merchants operating in the empire's territories, these measures are to be regarded, on the whole, as a positive development.