

## INTRODUCTION

Suraiya Faroqhi\*

It is customary to say that the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century prosperity of the Ottoman Empire was derived from its control of international trade routes leading toward Europe. From this perspective, the closing years of the sixteenth century are regarded as a turning point. When English merchants entered the Mediterranean and the Dutch established a monopoly over the Moluccan spice trade, the Ottoman state lost its dominant role in world commerce, particularly since Ottoman merchants rarely left the Sultan's domain, and therefore did not control the sources of their trade goods. Loss of customs revenue contributed to fiscal crisis, which in turn led to political turmoil as overtaxed peasants fled their villages (Lewis, 1968, p. 27 ff.). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (or so it is claimed), world trade would have bypassed the Ottoman Empire entirely if it hadn't been for the transit trade in Iranian silk which continued into the 1730s, and a limited exportation of local grains and cottons, which did not become really significant until the high prices of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. From 1815 onward, the Ottoman Empire increasingly entered the orbit of industrializing Europe as a market for manufactured goods and a source of raw materials, and this state of affairs was made "official" by the signing of the Anglo-Ottoman convention of 1838. Most economic historians concerned with the Ottoman Empire today would regard this image as a serious oversimplification, and their objections fall into three separate categories:

(1) The Ottoman Empire traded not only with western but also with eastern countries, namely with Yemen (independent after the 1630s), Iran, India, and to a lesser extent with China. Profits from these trades were sometimes high enough that merchants of Cairo or Aleppo were not significantly affected by the loss of European markets (Raymond, 1973–1974, vol. 1, pp. 131 ff.).

(2) Foreign trade, important though it may have been, was dwarfed by internal trade. Researchers working before about 1960 had recognized only the Istanbul supply trades as a major item, even though the detailed political controls to which this trade was subject at times made it appear to be a branch of public administration rather than

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\* Ludwig Maximilians Universität, Munich.

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commerce.<sup>1</sup> In the last three decades, however, the size and industrial importance of Aleppo, Damascus, Cairo and a number of other provincial centers has become apparent. Regional networks furnished supplies needed by these centers (Abdel Nour, 1982). Internal trade over long distances was favored by the (relative) safety provided by the Ottoman state apparatus, and thus regional economies were linked together in Empire-wide networks (Raymond, 1979–1980).

(3) While European merchants active in the Ottoman Empire handled a major share of the trade with France, Italy or England, the contribution of Ottoman merchants should not be overlooked. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Serenissima hosted significant numbers of Muslim Ottoman merchants, while eighteenth-century Greeks, Albanians, Bulgarians and Serbs ousted their former European principals and started to trade on their own (Kafadar, 1986; Stoianovich, 1960).

These claims form part of a broader historiographical trend, which is more obvious in the historiography of medieval and early modern Europe. Historians dealing with this region debated hotly for a period the relative importance of “rich” and bulk trades.<sup>2</sup> Rich trades such as the importation of silks and spices linked remote towns of Burgundy or Southern Germany with Byzantium and indirectly even with India, and the merchants engaged in these trades were almost the only people in pre-Crusades Europe whose horizons surpassed the narrow confines of Western Christendom. Henri Pirenne even credited these traders with the ability to dissolve feudal relations (Pirenne, pp. 39 ff.). However, when scholars began to view early traders as servitors of feudal households, as an integral part of the feudal economy even in the later Middle Ages, the prestige of “rich” trades declined along with that of the men engaged in them. Twentieth-century historians prefer to emphasize the minuscule amount of goods moved by medieval traders and the equally limited number of people wealthy enough to purchase them. Clearly a trade of such minute proportions could only be marginal to the life of early medieval society as a whole.

At the same time, the commercial revolution, the first signs of which could be discerned in the eleventh century, aroused a good deal of scholarly interest (Lopez, 1976). The society that sponsored Late Romanesque and High Gothic churches was clearly very different

<sup>1</sup> For an example, see Mantran (1962, pp. 179 ff.).

<sup>2</sup> This debate is based on Henri Pirenne's model of the medieval town as a creation of long-distance traders. To belittle the role of these traders in urban expansion was also a way of polemicizing against the Pirenne model. Compare Hibbert (1978).

from the fragmented fortress-based principalities that covered Western Europe in the tenth century, and the existence of towns and an urban civilization formed one of the major characteristics of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Europe. These towns lived on trade and were not purely administrative centers where taxes from the rural areas were collected and consumed, although this aspect of their role was not insignificant. Artisans obtained food and raw materials by purchasing them, and the existence of shops and a market was a *conditio sine qua non* of these new-style towns. Thus towns and trade went together; but it was a trade in salt, grain, hides, and wood, not the importation of silks and spices.<sup>3</sup> Given the high cost of overland transportation, such trade in basic staples was tied to the existence of waterways. In medieval and early modern Europe, such waterways were progressively improved, and major monographs have been written on Rhône, Loire and Seine shipping, to say nothing of the routes which connected Italy with Southampton and the Dutch ports with the Baltic.<sup>4</sup> The rich trades have also regained the esteem of historians, however, since the large profits of the silk, spice and slave trades made possible the accumulation of capital and the concomitant growth of banking and shipping.<sup>5</sup>

### The Position of Merchants within the Ottoman Polity

Ottoman historians have moved along comparable trajectories, namely from an all-but exclusive concern with "rich trades" and international trade routes to concern with local and regional trades supplying towns and cities. Thus a monograph on Aleppo published in 1942 emphasized the city's involvement in trade with Europe, while more recent researchers contend that the employment generated by foreign trade was minimal, and the prosperity or decline of the city depended on the grain, cotton cloth, olive oil and soap manufactured in its immediate hinterland (Abdel Nour, 1982). Very recently, a similar claim has been made for Izmir; a city which more than any other owed its prosperity to foreign trade, merchants from England, France, the Netherlands and Venice were attracted to the city by the products of its hinterland, and international trade in silk followed rather than preceded the establishment of a foreign trading community (Goffman, 1990, pp. 52 ff.).

<sup>3</sup> Compare the account of medieval trade currents in Bernard (1972, pp. 298-299). His account of the spice trade (pp. 276 ff.) hardly relates to urban history.

<sup>4</sup> For a brief bibliography, compare Bernard (1972, p. 330).

<sup>5</sup> Compare Williams (1966) for an account of gains from the slave trade financing capitalist development in Europe.

Similarly, however, disdain for the "rich trades" is by no means universal among Ottoman economic historians. In fact, the coffee trade from Yemen to Egypt and the core provinces of the Ottoman Empire has turned out to be a long-neglected "rich trade," which allowed the merchants of seventeenth-century Cairo to survive the decline of the transit trade in spices from the Moluccas.

We can also discern parallels between the discussions in Ottomanist and Europeanist historiographies concerning the role of merchants, even though, following a tradition in our profession, debate among Ottomanists tends to be rather muted. Halil Inalcık has been the first historian extensively to study Ottoman merchants from Ottoman archival sources. His work has shown the existence of a lively trade in Anatolian textiles and other manufactured goods across the Black Sea, which by the end of the fifteenth century was largely in the hands of Turkish-Muslim merchants (Inalcık, 1979). Thus the Ottoman conquest of the territories surrounding the Black Sea, a considerable setback for Genoese traders, did not mean that trade atrophied; Ottoman merchants took the place of the expelled foreign traders. Moreover, Ottoman administrations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries took a generally positive attitude toward long-distance trade, regarded as a source of customs duties, and abundance of goods in the market (Inalcık, 1969, pp. 102 ff.).

These statements rebut a thesis current in late nineteenth and twentieth-century secondary literature, namely that Muslim Turks were not interested in trade but preferred administration, military life and landholding, while a sultanate dependent mainly on revenues from agriculture regarded trade and traders suspiciously (Issawi, 1980, p. 4). Even though Inalcık does not explicitly state this, both his work and a later study of moneylending by Ronald Jennings show that the reticence of nineteenth-century Turks to enter the world of commerce was a product of relatively recent historical circumstances, and by no means characteristic of their culture as it had evolved over time (Jennings, 1973). Ottoman Muslims of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries showed no particular repugnance toward prolonged contact with unbelievers. Even the move toward introversion which supposedly characterized seventeenth-century Ottoman culture did not affect the propensity of Ottoman Muslim merchants to visit the Serenissima, at least not in the short run.

Once the vitality of the Muslim-Ottoman mercantile community had been demonstrated, the next step was to ascertain the place of these merchants within the Ottoman polity. In the context sketched

by Inalcık, merchants were subjects to whom the state accorded special privileges because they provided consumer goods and produced customs revenues. But at the same time, their ceaseless search for profit made them suspicious to at least one group of the doctors of law (*ulema*), particularly when those among the latter who took a position condemning all novelties. This was typical of *ulema* close to the seventeenth-century faction of the Kadizadelis (Inalcık, 1969, p. 105 ff.). Quite surprisingly, we do not know much about the strategies by which Muslim Turkish traders attempted to shore up their position, an increasingly difficult task from the late seventeenth century onward. When trade with Europe increased, both in absolute terms and also relative to "eastern" countries, Muslim merchants came to be at a disadvantage compared to their Christian or Jewish counterparts. In the closing years of the eighteenth century, when Sultan Selim III discouraged Ottoman non-Muslim traders from seeking European protection by according them tax privileges, Muslim merchants successfully sought the same favors and were granted the status of *Hayriye tüccarı* (Bağış, 1983). But by this time, the eclipse of Muslim traders was an established fact. More local research is needed before we can determine whether these merchants put up a fight prior to withdrawing. Apart from the *Hayriye tüccarı*, there is no indication that the Ottoman central administration provided Muslim merchants with special protection.

Here an observation of Islamoğlu's and Keyder's may be useful. They have pointed out that the Ottoman central administration's attitude toward merchants was profoundly ambiguous (Islamoğlu and Keyder, 1977, p. 46 ff.). Merchants were indispensable to the functioning of the state apparatus, but at the same time they were regarded as inveterate smugglers or subverters of the guild system, and their profiteering often led to shortages of basic goods. Thus the state administration saw its main task in the control of merchants, not in their protection. Muslim and non-Muslim merchants shared the rather disturbing quality of being merchants, and protection was granted only to those who might cause trouble to the Ottoman central administration.

Starting from Inalcık's observations, Islamoğlu and Keyder have further conceptualized the function of merchants in the Ottoman polity (Islamoğlu and Keyder, 1977, p. 39 ff.). In their view, the Ottoman social formation contained subsectors of society making a living by petty commodity production, while at the time of writing, the authors viewed the Asian Mode of Production as the dominant mode in the Ottoman Empire. Merchants served as the link binding craftsmen and peasants producing for the market to society at large. While peasants

and artisans had access only to local markets, merchants carried the goods produced by villagers and craftsmen to provincial centers, to the capital, or took charge of exportation. Without this activity, peasants of the Bergama region and semi-nomads of the Çukurova would not have found it worthwhile to plant cotton, as local demand could not have been sufficient (Faroqhi, 1984, pp. 128–129). Moreover, many artisans must have depended on merchants for their supply of raw materials. Thus seventeenth-century weavers in Kayseri who were not producing for international markets received their cotton from Adana; this required traders to organize transportation through the Taurus mountains with their often dangerous passes.<sup>6</sup> Communities engaged in petty commodity production, such as the spinning and weaving of mohair in the Ankara region, also received their supply of money through the agency of traders. If the latter paid in debased coin, artisans and market-oriented peasants had trouble producing the standard *akçe* or *guruş* demanded by tax collectors. In addition, the tax registers of the time demanded money payments from peasants as tithes of perishable produce. The products of the vineyard in particular (raisins, syrup, grape juice) were often bought up by merchants, and peasants probably used the proceeds of these sales to buy the goods they could not produce themselves, such as salt, iron ploughshares and a small quantity of coffee. Thus the activity of merchants tied petty commodity producers to larger markets. This statement is valid even if one does not accept the Asian Mode of Production as a category of analysis.

At the same time, merchants helped the Ottoman financial administration procure cash. The central government needed to convert large amounts of revenue collected in kind into ready money. Thus grain dues from crown lands were sold in nearby towns and cities, and while some of these sales could be effected by tax farmers directly, the services of professional merchants must often have been indispensable. It is also likely that some merchants became tax farmers once they had accumulated enough capital; in particular, the Jewish tax farmers active at the end of the sixteenth century must have come from this kind of background (Faroqhi, 1984, p. 143). Tax farmers were only accepted by the central administration if they provided guarantors, and while we do not know how applicants for a tax-farming contract found their sureties, merchants probably had both the requisite capital and the propensity for risk-taking. Without these services, the Ottoman state apparatus could not have functioned.

<sup>6</sup> Special weighing scales for cotton existed in Kayseri (Faroqhi, 1984, p. 135).

This brings us to the question of whether Ottoman merchants contributed to the dissolution of a socio-political system in the integration of which they had originally played such a crucial role. This is a complex problem best treated by analyzing it into its components. Conventional wisdom assumes that from the eighteenth century onward, the ruling elite was oriented toward political and military pursuits and toward revenues derived from agriculture. It was therefore disinclined to adopt measures protecting traders. Such an attitude can be linked to the reservations whose existence Islamoğlu and Keyder have suspected, probably with some justification, for the classical period. But recent studies suggest that the political elite of the eighteenth century were more closely involved in trade than had been true of their sixteenth-century predecessors or their early twentieth-century successors. Life-time tax farms (*malikâne*) could at least in principle be held only by members of the political elite, not by "mere" possessors of wealth such as merchants (Genç, 1975, p. 235).<sup>7</sup> Members of the political class were thereby given a stake in the survival of the central state, which alone could ensure their continued enjoyment of these revenues. It is not known whether this effect was intentional. But the material stake of members of the ruling elite in their polity explains why, even at the moment when the central state was weakest, very few members of the provincial elites attempted to set up independent states.

One of the avowed aims in setting up life-time tax farms was the protection of the taxpayers, including merchants as payers of customs and weighing dues. This aspect was much less successful, as frequent sub-contracting precluded any supervision of the collection process on the part of *malikâne* holders. But even though most *malikâne* holders did not market copper, alum and other products of their tax farms, many members of the provincial elite were involved in commerce due to their role as tax collectors. Important eighteenth-century magnates such as the Karaosmanoğulları marketed produce they received as taxes and also negotiated the sale of the cotton grown by peasants, an activity which brought them into close contact with French exporters. (Veinstein, 197). Moreover, under the impetus of the high prices which prevailed during the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, commercial agriculture expanded, and many provincial tax farmers and landholders in the more accessible regions began to produce for the market. (Stoianovich, 1953, p. 406). By describing these developments as a novelty of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, I do not mean

<sup>7</sup> Salzman's forthcoming thesis will clarify the political elite's involvement in tax-farming.

to say that the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Ottoman political elite had not been involved in trade. Compared to earlier and later periods, however, commercial involvement by this group was probably at its height between about 1750 and 1840. At least traders belonging to the political elite were not in any way "strangers" to the system, and their material interests were bound up with its stabilization and not with its dissolution.<sup>8</sup>

When speaking of traders, however, we generally think not of the political elite, but of the non-Muslim professional merchants who by the late eighteenth century dominated Ottoman trade with Europe. The latter began to waver in their loyalties by the eighteenth century, when an increasing number of traders sought appointments as translators for foreign embassies, in order to benefit from the tax relief connected with such positions. Some European embassies increased the number of their protégés because this was perceived as an avenue to political influence (Bağış, 1983, p. 17 ff.). Thus Jesuit missionaries encouraged members of the Eastern churches to convert to Catholicism, a conversion practiced particularly by wealthy Syrian Christians. At the same time, seventeenth-century French kings claimed the status of protectors to all Roman Catholics in the Ottoman Empire, so that conversion to Catholicism for successful Christian merchants meant at least a vague claim to French protection. Conversion to Roman Catholicism (and in the nineteenth century, to Protestantism as well) was perceived by the Orthodox churches "established" in the Ottoman Empire as a threat to their own interests. In many instances, the latter mobilized members of the Ottoman central administration who regarded conversion to recently established Christian denominations as a threat to their revenues. The advantages of the French connection, however, and the ease with which a merchant diaspora could be formed when a minority faith bound together its members, combined to make conversion an attractive proposition for many successful traders (Raymond, 1973-74, Vol. 2, pp. 483-496).

Conversion to a foreign faith and the status of being foreign protégés made many Christian merchants of the late eighteenth century into outsiders increasingly estranged from Ottoman society. Minority merchants acted as a solvent of the Ottoman socio-political system in a sense that once mistakenly had been ascribed to European medieval merchants operating within feudal states. Minority merchants'

<sup>8</sup> The statement is related to the view that medieval European merchants were not merely a potential solvent of the feudal system, but also indispensable to its functioning (Hibbert, 1970, p. 93).



primary loyalties were to family firms and ethno-religious communities, even though certain businessmen formed close ties with provincial magnates whose financial affairs they managed. Once national states were established on territories formerly belonging to the Empire, such merchants might also have felt an allegiance toward one or another of these states; the case of Greek Ottoman traders after the Greek rebellion of 1821 is a case in point (Stoianovich, 1960).

But these non-Ottoman political allegiances did not necessarily imply economic subservience to the interests of European merchants. On the contrary, Ottoman Christian traders of the eighteenth century successfully competed in many cases with Europeans, and often managed to take business away from the latter. As early as the 1620s, Armenians established themselves in Marseille importing Iranian silk (Bergasse and Rambert, 1954, pp. 74–70). This group was perceived by local merchants as a major threat, since lower business expenses enabled the Armenians to sell at lower prices than their French competitors. Long-drawn out intrigues with the French government led to the expulsion of the Armenians in 1658. Their descendants were able to enjoy a late revenge, however, when in 1751, French merchants who tried to open a firm in Ankara for the direct purchase of mohair were driven out due to the efforts of local Armenian traders (Masson, 1911 p. 555). Seventeenth-century Holland was more liberal in its policies toward foreign merchants, and an Armenian colony established itself there (de Groot, 1978, p. 293). Some members of the Dutch-Armenian community were able to send their own merchantmen to the Eastern Mediterranean, which counted as *bona fide* Dutch ships; Armenian merchants established in Izmir probably acted as local contacts. But even here, the Armenians were at times regarded as a threat.

In the eighteenth century, competition increased, if anything, between European merchants and non-Muslim Ottomans. Serbian traders in cattle and pigs expanded their activities, and a sizeable colony of Serbian merchants was active in Vienna (Stoianovich, 1960). In the Bulgarian towns of Sofia, Ruse (Rusçuk) and Vidin, we encounter increasing economic differentiation among townsmen, and certain probate inventories of the time show evidence of prosperity through trade (Todorov, 1970). The efficiency of the marketing network which distributed rough woollen fabrics (*aba*) throughout the villages of Anatolia and the Balkans prevented the widespread adoption of imported wools in the Ottoman countryside (Todorov, 1967–68). Greek merchant shipping also expanded, and after a period of somnolence which had lasted from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, Chios again

grew into a major center of trade. The Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars in particular constituted a period of prosperity when the small French ships which had carried sizeable amounts of freight on behalf of Ottoman merchants (the so-called *caravane*) were unable to operate due to the superiority of the British navy (Stoianovich, 1960). Increasing demand for grain, cotton and other Mediterranean goods also fuelled the need for freight services, and infertile islands such as Hydra, Psara and Meis developed into sizeable emporia. The shippers responsible for the temporary prosperity of these ports certainly profited from trade currents which resulted from the aggressive penetration of European traders into Ottoman space. But at the same time, Armenian wholesalers, Serbian cattle-traders and Greek shippers competed with their European rivals, and cannot be regarded as merely the latter's compradors.

A similar situation existed in the middle of the nineteenth century (Kasaba, 1988, p. 73). In the Izmir region, British merchants attempted to supplant the purchasing network of non-Muslim merchants. The locals bought agricultural products cheaply as they lent money to peasants and tax farmers alike, while to the latter, they also furnished the necessary guarantees. In the 1840s, British merchants attempted to set up a bank, which was to offer credit at lower rates than those offered by local moneylenders, thereby reducing the latter's advantage; but these efforts did not succeed, and by the 1870s the same moneylenders or their successors continued to dominate the market. This was probably due to the intermediaries' influence upon local administrative personnel who depended upon them for cash and therefore issued orders which placed British traders at a disadvantage. British consular reports were vocal in deploring this connection. In his study of the nineteenth-century Aegean, Reşat Kasaba has stressed the main contradiction of the local economy, that had existed even in the eighteenth century: non-Muslim intermediaries benefitted in the long run from the commercial opportunities created by Ottoman dependency upon Europe, but this did not imply consonant interests in the short run (Kasaba, 1988, p. 114).

### Commercial Conjectures

Up to this point, we have discussed structural and qualitative change, of necessity slow, so that our account is biased in favor of continuities. But qualitative changes are demonstrated ultimately by the analysis of quantitative data. In this respect, the study of Ottoman commercial history has recently made some progress. Yet major gaps remain. To

the quantifying historian, Ottoman archives mainly yield data on tax farms. But bids for tax farms were often tendered not singly, but for an agglomeration of unrelated dues; even worse, the group of taxes bid for by one and the same tax farmer and therefore aggregated in a single total might vary from one three-year period to the next. Therefore the construction of tables and graphs is much more difficult than in the case of early modern Europe tax farms, and the results are much less impressive. Similar problems exist in the case of price history. Even though this was one of the most dynamic fields of European economic history during the 1930s, only Ömer Lütfi Barkan and a few of his students have worked on Ottoman prices and wages (Barkan, 1975; Çizakça, 1987). This relative neglect is partially due to the problematic character of the sources. For food prices we use the kitchen accounts of pious foundations (*imaret*), which in their contents and presentation strongly resemble the Spanish hospital accounts which Earl Hamilton analyzed in the 1930s (Hamilton, 1965). Unlike their Spanish counterparts, however, they do not survive in long and continuous series. This makes it difficult or impossible to apply the generally accepted guidelines on the collection of prices, which require that all data be derived from the records of one and the same institution: Barkan was obliged to amalgamate data from different institutions and even different cities. While the margin of error thus introduced is limited due to the Ottoman custom of imposing city-wide prices by administrative fiat, researchers have probably been deterred by the state of the evidence.

Systematic work on tax farm data as a source of economic and commercial history was inaugurated by Mehmed Genç, whose work has made it possible to draw a rough sketch of eighteenth-century conjuncture (Genç, 1975, 1984, 1987a).<sup>9</sup> Genç has shown that following the disruptions of the Ottoman-Habsburg war of 1683–1699, Ottoman trade and manufactures recovered and entered into a long period of continuous prosperity, that only ended with the resumption of large-scale warfare in the 1760s. In Rumeli and western Anatolia, cotton manufactures expanded, while in Tokat and Aleppo, large-scale workshops replaced independent artisans and domestic workers. The printing of cottons was also streamlined, and large workshops, veritable manufactures, prospered in the textile centers of Tokat and Aleppo (Genç, 1984, pp. 53–54). The output of Tokat's manufactures doubled between 1730 and 1750, while the silk weavers of Chios, who operated

<sup>9</sup> In addition, Genç's discussion of archival records also reflects the eighteenth-century upswing (Genç, 1987b).

about 1,800 looms in 1740, successfully competed with imported silks. Silk manufactures prospered in Istanbul and Edirne, while the soap workshops of Crete supplied Istanbul. Iron manufactures in what is today southern Bulgaria expanded to the point that fuels became scarce. In certain regions agricultural production also grew. All this activity led to an expansion of internal trade, as raw materials were carried to producing centers, semi-finished goods changed hands, and the markets of Istanbul and other major cities were supplied with the products of remote regions. Moreover, commercialization affected certain rural areas as well; in regions such as the Aegean seaboard, French purchasers of grain and cotton were commonplace, while the extension of tobacco cultivation in the Balkan peninsula increased peasant exposure to the market.

The numerical documentation assembled by Genç is concerned not only with the eighteenth-century boom, but also with the reasons why this boom was ultimately replaced by a long-term slump. As the title of one of his articles indicates, he regards war and war financing as the reason for Ottoman economic decay, as the central administration demanded deliveries at prices way below those current in the market and penalized more efficient producers by demanding higher prestations (Genç, 1984). Genç's tables show the differences between prices paid by the state and those registered in the Istanbul market (Genç, 1984, p. 87 ff.). There are no tables showing the depressing effect on trade of extensive requisition of the means of transportation, but such an effect doubtlessly resulted. Thus the contraction of peace-time economic activities was not balanced by a war-related boom of the kind so often encountered in more recent history, and long-term warfare resulted in even more long-term economic decay.

Concerning price history, Murat Çizakça has tapped a hitherto little exploited source, namely the probate inventories drawn up to safeguard the rights of heirs, and particularly of the Ottoman state in cases where the latter could claim a share of the inheritance (Çizakça, 1984).<sup>10</sup> These inventories are most abundant for the larger cities of the Empire, such as Cairo, Istanbul, Edirne and Bursa. For the price historian, data from probate inventories are less than ideal. In most cases we cannot be sure that the prices named in the registers were obtained at "real" sales, and did not represent "understandings" between the heirs, who must have had a common interest in limiting the fees accruing to public officials and to the state. Moreover, the documents

<sup>10</sup> Compare also Özdeğer (1988).

usually tell us very little about differences in quality between individual lots of goods, so that we may deduce price trends where in fact goods of varying quality were at issue. Yet Çizakça in his work on Bursa silk prices has developed a challenging hypothesis: in the later sixteenth century, Bursa manufacturers of silk cloth were confronted with a "profit squeeze," as the raw silk they purchased from Iranian traders increased in price, while they were unable to pass on this increase to the customer. Imported woollen and silk fabrics as well as the lower earnings of Ottoman officials due to the Empire's financial troubles rendered customers unwilling to pay higher prices. Thus the Bursa silk manufacture was destroyed by European competition. Çizakça's work continues the line of reasoning inaugurated by Barkan, namely that it was the early penetration of the Ottoman economy by Italian, French, Dutch and English traders which caused a long-term crisis. In his later work Çizakça has acknowledged, however, the eighteenth-century recovery brought to the knowledge of researchers as a result of the work of Mehmet Genç. He explains this development as a result of decreasing European demand for raw materials from the eastern Mediterranean due to the eighteenth-century annexation of Indian and Chinese markets (Çizakça, 1985).

Ottoman data on Ottoman trade can be supplemented by European materials; studies which integrate these two types of sources are still comparatively rare.<sup>11</sup> The archives of the Marseille Chamber of Commerce constitute the most fruitful source of quantitative data. But since French trade with the Ottoman Empire only became a major-scale affair in the second half of the seventeenth century, the Marseille archives are of value mainly for the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During the French Revolution, Marseille lost its monopoly on the Levant trade, so the local archives are much less instructive for the subsequent period. But for a period of about one hundred and fifty years, the development of ports (*échelles*) in the eastern Mediterranean and the lives of galley slaves, plague, epidemics and maritime transportation can be studied on the basis of Chamber of Commerce records.<sup>12</sup>

Most scholars who have exploited the Marseille documentation, however, are primarily concerned with French and not with Ottoman commercial history. As a result, they are quite ready to abandon them-

<sup>11</sup> Goffman (1990, p. 110 ff.) is notable for his use of Ottoman sources to elucidate Venetian problems.

<sup>12</sup> For example Panzac (1985c). Zysberg (1987) is an all-but exhaustive study of French galley slavery; but Muslim galley slaves figure marginally at best.

selves to the "drift" of their sources, and do not attempt to make the documents yield up information marginal to the interests of the compilers but of vital interest to the Ottoman economic historian. As an exception to this rule, the largely unpublished dissertation of Necmi Ülker on the rise of Izmir (from the earthquake of 1688 to 1740) discusses the rebuilding of the city and the rapid recuperation of its trade on the basis of Marseille archives (Ülker, 1974). Izmir's history may serve as an illustration of the rule that physical destruction of a city will lead to permanent decline only if structural reasons, such as the erosion of the hinterland, endanger the continuity of urban life. But Izmir's hinterland was not rendered permanently unproductive by the earthquake of 1688, so both the trade in cotton and mohair and the export of Iranian silk soon recovered (Ülker, 1974, p. 144).

At the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, Izmir was the leading port as far as Franco-Ottoman commerce was concerned. The traders of Marseille successfully competed with the English, even though the latter were well established in Izmir. The same phenomenon has been analyzed by the British commercial historian Ralph Davis with respect to the trade of Aleppo (Davis, 1967, pp. 26-27). Both in Izmir and Aleppo, British merchants were hampered by the fact that they found little or no return freight, once the cheapness of Chinese and Bengal silks made the Iranian product seem unattractive to many European purchasers. On the other hand, French merchants bought a variety of goods, including cotton, cotton thread and mohair, and thus were able to offer Izmir customers an exchange for the woollen cloth manufactured by the expanding industry of the Languedoc.

But the Ottoman province for which the Marseille data have been most intensively exploited is doubtlessly Tunisia. This is due to the fact that many Tunisian scholars have studied in France, worked in French archives, and have been able to publish their theses with the support of the University of Tunis or independent scholarly associations. Sadok Boubaker's work on the commercial relations of seventeenth-century Tunis with Livorno and Marseille is based on a Toulouse doctoral dissertation accepted in 1980. In a preface written shortly before the publication of this study in 1987, one discerns a semi-apologetic stance. The author feels that his topic may appear irrelevant to a new generation of scholars, whose interests are concentrated upon locally generated documentation and the purely domestic history reflected therein (Boubaker, 1987, p. 15). But for the commercial historians of the Ottoman Empire, Boubaker's concern with weights, measures and coins as well as his

detailed discussion of individual trades opens up fascinating perspectives: even in the 1630s, Marseille and Genova were major consumers of Tunisian wheat, and the quantities purchased grew by leaps and bounds in years of bad harvests (Boubaker, 1987, p. 109 ff.). The same thing applied to the Balearics, which belonged to the realm of the King of Spain, and even to the island of Malta, controlled by the Knights of St. John and the center of Christian piracy. At least in this sector, Braudel's vision is vindicated: beyond political and religious controversies, the trade of the Mediterranean conformed to a common rhythm.

Boubaker also discusses the exportation of oil; by 1700, Tunisian exports to France consisted of both wheat and olive oil, while in the nineteenth century, the trade in olive oil surged far ahead of its rival. For 1692–1699, the French consulate in Tunis documented the share of various Tunisian ports, namely Tunis, Sousse, Sfax, Djerba and Bizerta in the oil trade (Boubaker, 1987, p. 117). The expansion of the trade in olive oil also affected the land market, as olive plantations became progressively more expensive. In a sense, Tunisia seems at present the Eldorado of the quantifying Ottoman historian: my own efforts to read off economic processes from Anatolian land prices have not led to such beautifully clear-cut results.

Much less is known about the (probably crucial) eighteenth-century history of Tunisia, as the major monograph dealing with this period concentrates on politics and not on economic structures. For the nineteenth century, however, Tunisian incorporation into the French economic orbit has been studied in detail. Khelifa Chater suggests that the long period of low prices traversed by the European economy between 1818 and 1848 could also be discerned in Tunisia. If this observation is correct, it constitutes *prima facie* evidence for incorporation into the European economic orbit (Chater, 1984, p. 303).<sup>13</sup> Chater himself expresses his reservations, however, since the prices with which he has to deal were not determined by demand and supply, but had been unilaterally imposed by the *bey*. The latter had established himself as the monopolistic exporter of olive oil, and oriented the price according to Marseille quotations. In this sector "incorporation" was thus effected not directly by the activity of French merchants, but by that of a ruler who creamed off the profits made from exportation. But of course this method would not have worked if the Tunisian economy had not been geared toward the French market.

Boubaker and Chater are concerned both with the economy of

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<sup>13</sup> Chérif (1984), in spite of its title, contains little material of use to the historian of trade.

Tunisia and with the activities of French merchants who drew the region from the Ottoman into the French orbit. On the other hand, Sabatier's work on eighteenth-century Crete is a traditional study of French trade, dealing with the *conditions de commerce* in a manner which would not have seemed strange to Paul Masson, whose work is now eighty years old (Masson, 1911). This exclusive concentration upon the small French community is a great pity, as eighteenth-century Crete, with its flourishing soap manufactures, shared in the eighteenth-century Ottoman boom. The growth of the soap industry was based on the abundance of olive oil, and oil used in manufacturing was not available for export. But one gains the impression that French merchants were not greatly affected by this trend, as their profits remained high; presumably olive groves expanded rapidly enough to supply both local and French demand.

Sabatier has also produced a study of the *caravane*, that is the freight business (Sabatier, 1976). From the seventeenth century onward, a large share of the trade between Ottoman provinces was conducted on European ships. Given frequent attacks by the Knights of Malta even at this late date, European shippers could offer greater security and lower freight rates; this applied particularly to the North African provinces, where corsair activity was an important source of revenue to the upper class, and locally owned merchantmen would have constituted a ready target for reprisals. As a result, the *caravane* can be regarded as a barometer for Ottoman internal trade. For a number of years in the middle of the eighteenth century Sabatier has tabulated French ships leaving Crete for Ottoman ports: trade connections were closest with Alexandria, followed by Istanbul, Izmir and Morea; the capital being a major customer for Cretan soap (Sabatier, 1976, p. 211). The figures compiled by Sabatier also demonstrate that in the mid-eighteenth century, Ragusan shippers successfully competed with the French for Ottoman carrying trade. As a vassal of the Porte, Ragusa was at least in principle exempt from the unwelcome attentions of Algerian and Tunisian corsairs, while the Christian religion of the shippers normally protected them from Maltese attacks (Sabatier, 1976, p. 216). During the Seven Years War (1756–1763), the French *caravane* declined to a fraction of its former importance, and the resulting slack was taken up in part by the Ragusans. But these war-related problems of the French *caravane* also provided a golden opportunity for Ottoman Greek shipping. Apart from picking up customers in the carrying trade, Greek ship captains, with the consent of the Ottoman authorities in Crete, transformed their craft into corsairs flying the En-



glish flag, and successfully preyed on French merchantmen (Panzac, 1985a, p. 561). To date we apparently possess no monograph on Greek shipping comparable to Sabatier's work. As a result we can only say that during the major wars of the eighteenth century, French *caravane* figures were no longer useful indicators of Ottoman internal trade, but we cannot as yet fill the gap with alternative figures.<sup>14</sup>

Only for the 1780s do we possess some global information on Ottoman internal trade, due to French statistics on port traffic in Alexandria (Panzac, 1985b). Again, the difference between a war year (1782) and a year of peace (1785) is remarkable. European ships were strongly affected by war-related insecurity, and in 1782 they amounted to less than 30 percent of all ships entering or leaving the port. But their relative rarity did not affect Mediterranean trade as much as might have been assumed, as the gap was filled by local shipping. With the advent of peace, European merchantmen were back in force, and now almost 50 percent of all ships entering or leaving Alexandria were European-owned. Moreover, European ships carried the more valuable cargoes, while Ottoman shipping was left with the less lucrative trades. Yet the freight contracts concluded in Alexandria in the middle of the eighteenth century reveal that Magrebi and Ottoman Muslim merchants had by no means withdrawn from trade: 894 contracts record the names of 1731 merchants residing all over the Empire. Of this total, 92.7 percent were Muslims, 4.1 percent Christians, and the remainder Jews. It thus appears that the rise of non-Muslim traders in the Ottoman Empire was an even more complex and contradictory phenomenon than hitherto had been assumed (Panzac, 1985b, p. 186).

### Integrating Internal and External Dynamics

When pulling together these disparate studies of Ottoman commercial conjunctures, we are confronted with a surprise: for a long time, Ottoman historians had concentrated on the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, leaving the middle period a virtual *terra incognita*. But recently, quantitatively oriented historians of commerce have shown a marked preference for the eighteenth century. Greater familiarity has bred not contempt but esteem. This trend was already notable in the work of André Raymond on Ottoman Cairo, who along with Mehmet Genç may be regarded as the pioneer of eighteenth-century commercial history in this region. The relative scarcity of global statistics has forced researchers to concentrate on local and regional conjunctures.

<sup>14</sup> Related problems were taken up by Panzac (1982, 1985a, 1985b, 1986).

These converge to show us an economy tied together by vigorous interregional links, and the old saw that Ottoman internal trade only supplied Istanbul is simply no longer tenable. Moreover, the manufacturing boom which characterized the period between about 1700 and 1760 provided opportunities for the expansion of trade, even though the fragmentary nature of our documentation does not permit us to compare commercial and manufacturing conjunctures.

Ottoman price history has interested only a limited number of commercial historians. On one level this is due to the problematic nature of the data. But it is also true that Ottoman historians never committed themselves to the assumption, widespread among their Europeanist counterparts, that price curves constitute *the* crucial indicators for the performance of an economy. In a polity in which many purchasers paid prices decreed by administrative fiat, and many of these administratively imposed prices bore little relationship to manufacturing costs, prices indicated the political power of the central state and the emptiness of the Treasury rather than overall economic performance.

Some of the most important findings of recent Ottoman commercial history relate to the long resistance of the Muslim merchant class, not only in Egypt but elsewhere as well. Certainly non-Muslims had an advantage due to their much closer relationships to European traders, but competition between Europeans and non-Muslim Ottomans was often strong. Muslim Ottomans in particular suffered under a grave disadvantage, however, in that they depended upon European *caravanners* for much of their sea trade. Local, Greek- or Ragusa-owned shipping asserted itself mainly at times when European captains were hamstrung by war. This reminds us of André Gunder Frank's observation that countries dependent upon the European world economy prosper at times when war or depression weaken relations of dependence (Frank, 1969, p. 33). If this dictum applies to our case, obviously the late eighteenth-century Ottoman economy must have been strongly dependent on the European world economy. But the process by which dependency was instituted, which adherents to the world economy paradigm would call "peripheralization," was by no means complete even by 1800, and it is a mistake to regard areas such as eighteenth-century Tunisia or the Aegean seaboard as typical of the Ottoman realm as a whole. The last thirty years of the eighteenth century were definitely the crucial period for the "peripheralization" process.

However important, the incorporation of the Ottoman realm into the European world-economy is not the only theme of the pre-

nineteenth-century economic history of this region. The paradigm change of the last ten or fifteen years has resulted in a renewed interest in internal economic dynamics: the protoindustrialization debate in early modern Europe is an example of this search for local sources of economic growth (Mendels, 1972). Indian economic historians have also ransacked both local and European documentation to uncover internal commercial dynamics, incidentally rehabilitating the eighteenth century in the process (Bayly, 1983, pp. 35–73). Christopher Bayly's stimulating attempt at uncovering parallel dynamics in eighteenth-century India, Iran and the Ottoman Empire also involves a model incorporating both outside pressures and internal dynamics. From this perspective, the growth of indigenous commercialization in an almost Ibn Khaldunian fashion weakened the cohesion of these large empires, as imperial peripheries accumulated wealth which in turn enabled local potentates to resist demands from their respective central governments (Bayly, 1988, pp. 23–51). In this situation, the efforts of European traders to secure profits by obtaining a more or less exterritorial status acquired a dynamic unimaginable without preceding commercial growth and political decentralization. Bayly assumes an increase in commercial activity between the Mediterranean and India from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries (Bayly, 1988, p. 26). Thus the Ottoman economic expansions of the mid-sixteenth and the early eighteenth centuries were not localized events, but formed part of those very broad waves of conjuncture which historians have discerned from time to time, but still have a lot of difficulty explaining.

### Traders, Governors and Middlemen

A model which combines internal and external dynamics is complicated and often difficult to handle, but more appropriate to Ottoman realities than the older model, which assumes straightforward penetration by European merchants and incorporation-as-periphery. The articles which make up the present collection all deal with the interaction of internal and external factors. Palmira Brummet's study of the Venetian *muda*, that unique convoy of trade galleys which symbolized the city's medieval prosperity, takes up the familiar motif of the Ottoman Empire sitting astride the axes of international trade. But Brummet gives the old theme a new twist. While the traditional image had also implied that the Ottoman government was purely military in orientation and little interested in commercial affairs, Brummet assumes that the Ottoman administration of the early sixteenth century actively set out to control the Indian Ocean and Red Sea routes. From

the perspective she proposes, international trade is crucially important, and Ottoman commanders with Indian Ocean experience such as Selman Reis, were well aware of its significance. Given the Portuguese threat to established routes, late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Venice could be at once a political opponent and a commercial ally. While Ottoman armies and navies snapped up Venetian strongholds one after another, there was no attempt to eliminate Venetian commerce. In the Indian Ocean region, Ottoman merchants and migrants formed a starting point not only for political conquest, but also a source of long-term economic strength.

Ottoman links with the Indian region passed through either the Euphrates-Tigris or the Red Sea, neither of which routes has been very well studied. Dina Khoury's work on the trade of Basra and Mosul therefore fills a major gap. Her concern is with the linkage between international and local-regional trade networks. In seventeenth-century Basra, English and Dutch merchants occasionally appeared, even though they were no match for the local traders with their connection to tribal leaders, provincial governors and other regional power-holders. Khoury's work balances international trade in luxuries such as spices and high-quality textiles against trade in foodstuffs such as grain and dates. The supply of foodstuffs to Basra was only in part a commercial venture, however, as the rural areas surrounding the city received little in return for their deliveries, apart from a few dyestuffs. Apparently Basra was supplied largely through taxation in kind, partly from the produce of date groves belonging to urban notables and in times when the Ottoman government more or less effectively controlled the city by deliveries from eastern Anatolia and northern Mesopotamia. Thus Khoury's monograph shows the imbrication of different kinds of trade with the activities of "protection producers" who could act all the more independently as control by the Ottoman center was only moderately effective.

The second link from Istanbul to the Indian Ocean was the Red Sea, and commerce along this route was closely associated with the pilgrimage to Mecca. This trade is insufficiently reflected in Ottoman official sources, however, since much of it was either tax-free or taxed by the Şerif of Mekka, whose records, if ever they were kept, have not survived. Most pilgrimage accounts also pay scant attention to trade, apart from that of the seventeenth-century Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi. His account allows us to piece together the complicated web of commercial exchanges and gifts which allowed the pilgrims to survive during a stay of several months in an environment providing

very few natural resources. By the time of Evliya's visit in 1670–71, the coffee trade had taken the place of the older luxury trade in pepper, cloves and nutmeg. The growing popularity of coffee-drinking in Cairo and Istanbul, but also in remote towns of Anatolia, tied the Arabian peninsula into interregional commercial exchanges, while large gifts of Indian rice and Egyptian wheat determined the limits and possibilities of private grain trading.

Ottoman merchants traded with both East and West, and commercial links with France, England or Holland have been discussed on the basis of records generated by the Marseille Chamber of Commerce, the Levant Company or the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie. Ottoman material is also available, however, in the shape of taxfarming accounts and customs registers. As yet only a few examples are known, but more are available in the Ottoman archives. Those few texts that have become accessible depict late fifteenth-century Akkerman and Kilia, sixteenth-century Antalya and Amasra and Karadeniz Ereğlisi (Inalcık, 1979; Faroqi, 1984, p. 104 ff.). For the seventeenth century, we happen to possess a short customs register of Iskenderun, at that time the main port of Aleppo in spite of its unhealthy climate. Iskenderun was used largely by European merchants, and since the register covers a time when warfare impeded traffic, it does not reflect the "real" activity of the port. But it is still of interest because it contains information on local traders. The latter supplied French, English and Dutch shippers with cottons and other local products, a useful complement to the chief commodity exported, namely Iranian silk.

Customs registers of the eighteenth century are more abundant, and Neşe Erim's work on the customs of Erzurum is a pioneering study in several respects. Firstly the older customs registers, all of modest size, each stand alone. Possibilities of analysis are accordingly limited. But in the case of Erzurum, documents concerning the assignment of tax farms and records of individual merchants and their goods are available. Thus the history of the tax farm over a lengthy period of time can be coordinated with the "micro" analysis of trade, and the picture thereby gains a depth impossible to achieve in studies of older periods. In addition, Erim focuses on the many small traders, some of them veritable hucksters, whose activities fit rather well into the model drawn by van Leur and Niels Steensgaard. But these peddlers also developed forms of commercial association. We obtain a fascinating picture of trade in a region of great commercial importance, which until Erim's work had remained virtually unknown.

The remaining three articles are concerned with the late nineteenth

and early twentieth centuries. Unfortunately the crucial period between 1770 and 1840, when the Ottoman economy finally became a dependent part of the European world economy, remains unstudied. By the end of the century, the economies of Syria, Iraq and the Izmir region were determined by the fate of certain export crops, such as grain, silk, raisins or cotton. Yet this did not mean that Ottoman entrepreneurs remained completely passive, particularly since they often controlled local trade. Hala Fattah's work on nineteenth-century Iraq documents that Ottoman provincial governors controlled not only the grain trade, but also the livelihoods of the poorer town dwellers. Government stores were often kept closed even in times of scarcity, so that prices might rise yet further and merchants favored by the governor reap even larger profits. With the appearance, from about 1860 onward, of numerous British shipping houses threatening to take over local trade, however, the pattern became much more complicated. Ottoman governors and tax farmers on the one hand, and British intruders on the other, sought allies among local merchants. Members of the minorities prospered as partners of the British, while Ottoman authorities used the pretext of scarcity to withhold grain from English shippers. Trade wars turned into "regular" warfare in 1917, when the British army controlled central and southern Iraq, and the food supply of Baghdad was in dispute between the Ottoman and British armies.

Linda S. Schilcher's work concerning the effects of the late nineteenth-century Great Depression on Syrian cultivators again stresses the role of local middlemen. The latter were organized, informally but in a highly effective fashion, and Schilcher describes the group as a "commercial-fiscal cartel" encompassing merchants and tax farmers with sizeable economic and political resources. The collapse of prices for Syrian grain after 1885 led to the decline of these intermediaries, as the Ottoman state, seeing its revenues threatened, turned against the "commercial-fiscal cartel" and attempted direct collection of taxes. Cultivators rebelled and refused to pay, and even when after 1897 the Ottoman central government reinstated many of the old intermediaries, the latter felt permanently threatened. Sultan Abdülhamid's government pursued its policy of centralization through the construction of railways, while local unrest continued. As in the Iraqi case, the struggle between the central state and local intermediaries over the control of grain exportation generated so much tension that Ottoman authority was seriously undermined, and its rapid collapse during World War I becomes comprehensible.

The last paper in this sequence is also the only one to deal with

the Ottoman "core area," that is, the eastern Balkans and western Anatolia, from which the Ottoman central administration derived most of the resources needed for day-to-day functioning. Elena Frangakis-Syrett deals with British attempts to penetrate economically the hinterland of Izmir. The 1838 Treaty of Balta Limanı had outlawed all monopolies except for those which had been converted into tax farms. But some monopolies were advantageous to both the central government and local merchants. British traders who, with the aid of their consuls, attempted to break them down, had a formidable coalition arrayed against them. In this coalition, the local merchants were often harder to cope with than the Ottoman state, for the former was amenable to political pressure, while local merchants' knowledge of the market made them indispensable to whoever wished to trade in the hinterland. British merchant houses therefore employed non-Muslim agents, who were often independent traders as well, so that competition continued in a different guise. This economic struggle took place mainly among the more modest investors, however, for there were British firms with far superior capital resources, which could override all local resistance.

Izmir differed from Syria or Iraq in its proximity to Istanbul and the Ottoman central government which was exposed to the pressures of the Great Powers and their instrument the *Dette Ottomane*. In the age of steamships and railways this meant that local governors had less leeway, and the Ottoman state apparatus plays a more passive role in Frangakis-Syrett's paper than in those of Schilcher and Fattah. Even so, we deal with the same triad consisting of the central state, local intermediaries and foreign merchants. Members of these three groups formed alliances and competed with one another to gain control over the product of peasant labor. In earlier periods, down into the eighteenth century, foreign merchants did not enter this competition directly, but acted through allies among local governors or established merchants. This provides us with a convenient way of characterizing the Ottoman economy before and after European penetration or incorporation. The Ottoman economy had become a dependent part of the capitalist realm of Europe, when European merchants in large numbers could compete directly for the control of rural production and no longer needed the mediation of the state and locally established middlemen. But even when this victory had been achieved, contestation by local merchants and tax farmers did not cease, and if the articles collected in this issue have a common emphasis, it is on the vitality and resilience of Ottoman merchant networks.

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