
PROBLEMS

The Venetian Presence in the Ottoman Empire (1600-1630)

Suraiya Faroqhi
Middle East Technical University, Ankara

Introduction

The aim of the present study is to describe the commercial and political relations between Venice and the Ottoman Empire during the first quarter of the seventeenth century. This is a period of considerable interest in the economic history of the Mediterranean, since during the years immediately before 1600 Venice possessed a major stake in the Levant trade¹ for the last time in its history. Unlike the crisis of the early sixteenth century, after the Portuguese had first managed to insert themselves into the trade of the Indian Ocean,² the crisis of the early seventeenth century, which followed a brief period of prosperity, proved irreversible from the Venetian point of view. It is therefore of interest to find out what happened to the Venetian network of diplomatic representatives, consuls and merchants during a period of considerable economic and political difficulties. The interaction between this network and the Ottoman authorities was of crucial importance for the history of Venetian trade.

Therefore the present study will concentrate upon the political and commercial aspects of Ottoman-Venetian relations. *Bailo*, consuls and merchants have already been studied in detail, and thus the relations between Venetian official representatives and the domestic authorities in Venice, as well as with the locally resident merchant community are reasonably well known.³ Equally, there are

¹ FREDERIC C. LANE, *Venice, A Maritime Republic* (Baltimore, London, 1973), pp. 400-01. However during the last quarter of the XVIth century, the Venetian merchant marine had already dwindled to a fraction of its former strength: Ruggiero Romano, "La marine marchande vénitienne au XVI^e siècle", in: *Actes du quatrième colloque international d'histoire maritime, Les sources de l'histoire maritime en Europe, du Moyen Age au XVIII^e siècle*, ed. MICHEL MOLLAT e.a. (Paris, 1962), p. 46.

² VITORINO MAGALHÃES GODINHO, "Le repli vénitien et égyptien et la route du cap 1496-1533", in: *Éventail d'histoire vivante... Hommage à Lucien Febvre* (Paris, 1953), p. 284.

³ NIELS STEENSGAARD, "Consuls and Nations in the Levant from 1570-1650", *The Scandinavian Economic History Review* XV, 1, 2 (1967), pp. 13-53.

also a considerable number of studies dealing with commercial organization, both of the "traditional" type represented in Venice, and of the "regulated companies", by means of which, to name but one example, English merchants were to establish such a prominent place for themselves in the Levant trade.⁴ While much less is known about Ottoman mercantile organization, there are a number of studies available, and at least at a general level we can describe the manner in which Ottoman merchants of the sixteenth or seventeenth century did business.⁵ On the other hand, very little is known about the interaction between Ottoman and Venetian merchants or about the attitude which the Ottoman state took toward the commercial relations which its subjects entertained with Venice.

Matters are complicated by the fact that power in the Ottoman state was organized at a number of different levels. Persons and institutions at various levels of the political hierarchy could deal with their Venetian counterparts in ways that were not necessarily approved of by the central authorities in Istanbul. At the lowest level, Ottoman merchants, frequently but not necessarily of non-Muslim background, might cooperate with Venetian traders in the illegal exportation of grain, a practice that the Ottoman central authorities tried to repress with varying degrees of success.⁶ At an intermediary level, represented by local and provincial authorities, European observers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries often commented upon the special facilities which foreign merchants enjoyed at Izmir or Aleppo.⁷ This was probably due to the fact that provincial governors and *kadis*, not to mention tax farmers and the Janissaries who acted as watchmen, depended on commercial levies for much of their income, and were in consequence inclined to do nothing that might frighten the merchants away. On the other hand, provincial governors and fortress commanders on the Morean or Albanian coast might closely cooperate with corsairs from North Africa, without necessarily heeding the orders from Istanbul that forbade these practices.⁸ Ottoman policies toward its tributary state, the tiny but commercially active Republic of Dubrovnik, might also be interpreted as

⁴ ALFRED C. WOOD, *A History of the Levant Company* (London, 1935, repr. 1964). RALPH DAVIS, *Aleppo and Devonshire Square* (London, Melbourne, Toronto, 1967).

⁵ HALIL INALCIK, "Capital Formation in the Ottoman Empire", *The Journal of Economic History* 29 (1969), pp. 97-140.

⁶ HALIL SAHILLIOĞLU, "Bursa Kadı Sicillerinde İç ve Dış Ödemeler Aracı Olarak "Kitâbu'l-kadı" ve "Süfteceler" in: *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi Semineri, Metinler, Tartışmalar* (Ankara, 1975), pp. 103-144 (Bills of exchange as a means of payment in internal and foreign trade, according to the registers of the *kadı* of Bursa).

⁷ LÜTFİ GÜCER, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Dahilinde Hububat Ticaretinin Tâbi Olduğu Kayıtlar," *Istanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası*, 13, 1-4 (1951-52), pp. 93-95 (The rules to which the grain trade in the Ottoman Empire was expected to conform).

⁸ ROBERT PARIS, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille*, vol. V (Paris, 1957), pp. 443-44.

⁹ ALBERTO TENENTI, *Piracy and the Decline of Venice 1580-1615* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1967), p. 20.

part of the tendency to organize political relations at a variety of distinct and semi-autonomous levels. Dubrovnik was permitted to do what Ottoman merchants could not do, namely trade with known enemies of the Ottoman state, while at the same time functioning in many respects as part of the Ottoman body politic.⁹

Many historians have tended to view most of these phenomena as symptoms of Ottoman decline, which is supposed to have occurred from the late sixteenth century onward. However, it is also possible, once one rid oneself of the fascination which the growth or contraction of Ottoman political power exercised upon contemporaries, to interpret this phenomenon in quite a different way.¹⁰ It is well known that members of the Ottoman bureaucracy had very definite views with respect to the position which their own state, as a Muslim polity, organized according to the principles of Near Eastern and particularly Iranian statecraft, should occupy toward the world at large.¹¹

However, practical circumstances often favoured policies which were not easy to fit into the model of the ideal Muslim and Near Eastern state, which was expected to continuously expand through the Holy War or *gaza*. The establishment of long-term peaceful relations through the *ahidname* (capitulations) was a case in point; the abrogation of the rule that a non-Muslim, residing on Islamic territory for more than a year, became a protected subject of the relevant Muslim state (*zimmi*) was another.¹²

For political reasons, the Ottoman central authorities might espouse these policies, but to induce provincial administrators to accept them might be a difficult task in "ideological" terms, irrespective of the amount of coercive power that the central administration might be able to mobilize. Ottoman local administrators who, for instance, opened their ports to North African corsairs, might easily feel that they were representing the traditions of the authentic Ottoman *gazi* state, and the North African corsairs must have agreed with them on this matter.¹³ Moreover, since the Ottoman central authorities in principle accepted the ideology of the *gazi* Muslim state, motivation to act against refractory fortress commanders who aided the North African corsairs preying

⁹ NICOLAAS BIEGMAN, *The Turco-Ragusan Relationship* (Paris, the Hague, 1967).

¹⁰ For the tendency to stress the continuing strength of the Ottoman Empire down to the second half of the XVIIIth and the beginning of the XIXth century see: A. RAYMOND, "La conquête ottomane et le développement des grandes villes arabes," *Revue de l'Occident musulman et la Méditerranée*, 1 (1979), pp. 117-34. HURI ISLAMOĞLU, ÇAĞLAR Keyder, "Agenda for Ottoman History," *Review*, 1, 1 (1977), p. 53. FERNAND BRAUDEL, *Civilization matérielle, économie et capitalisme XV^e-XVIII^e siècle*, vol. 3, *Le temps du monde* (Paris, 1979), pp. 406-16.

¹¹ On the Ottoman state ideology compare particularly İnalcık, "Capital Formation", pp. 97-103.

¹² MAJID KHADDURI, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore, London, 1955), p. 168.

¹³ On the importance of Holy War in Ottoman "public opinion", see HALİL İNALCIK, *The Ottoman Empire, The Classical Age 1300-1600* (London, 1973), pp. 187-88.

upon infidel shipping must in many cases not have been very high. The difficulty of enforcing the *ahidnames* (capitulations, privileges) can therefore be easily understood without the need to invoke a thesis of "Ottoman decline".

Another aspect of the "organization of political and commercial relations on distinct and semi-autonomous levels", was the fact that tasks considered distasteful from the point of view of the official ideology of the Ottoman state might be relegated to the initiative of lower-level authorities. The role of Dubrovnik, which provided an intermediary both in trade and in diplomacy, might be cited as one example. Another case in point was the fact that foreign merchants often had day-to-day dealings only with temporary officials (*emin*) and even more frequently with tax farmers (*mültezim*). The *emin* and *mültezim* did not, however, constitute part of the regular Ottoman bureaucracy, and in many cases they were non-Muslims. Moreover, the tax farmer, as opposed to a regularly appointed official, was generally allowed a large measure of independence, provided he regularly paid the Treasury the amounts of money stated in his contract. Within the same context, one might mention the fact that Izmir throughout the seventeenth century was not made into a provincial (*sancak*) capital, but retained a relatively low status in the administrative hierarchy as a district (*kaza*) centre.¹⁴ As a result, European merchants in this very active port town dealt only with low-level authorities, and were permitted to behave in a fashion which would have been quite unthinkable in most of the other Ottoman port towns.¹⁵

In this context, a few words must be said concerning the manner in which the Ottoman central bureaucracy viewed the problems raised by the existence of foreign trade. On the positive side, there were the benefits accruing to the Treasury from customs revenues. This matter is frequently touched upon in documents which the Ottoman administration issued upon requests from the Venetian *bailos*. In part, this emphasis on customs revenues may have been due to the fact that Venetian petitions themselves frequently dwelt upon this theme, for a rescript made out on behalf of the Sultan customarily contained a detailed summary of the document in response to which it had been issued. But references to customs revenues also occur quite independently, and must have been of some importance in the thinking of Ottoman officials. In addition to this purely utilitarian point of view, Ottoman documents also contain a more "ideological" motivation, namely that it was becoming to the state to protect merchants, and to provide its own subjects and those of friendly rulers with the means of earning their daily bread.

On the negative side, there was the difficulty of enforcing export prohibitions. The exportation of war material was prohibited by the *şariat*, although legal authorities of the Caliphal period did not necessarily agree on exactly what

¹⁴ TUNCER BAYKARA, *Izmir Şehri ve Tarihi* (Bornova-Izmir, 1974), pp. 30, 53. (The city of Izmir and its history).

¹⁵ Paris, *Marseille*, pp. 443-44.

was to be regarded as war material.¹⁶ However the Ottoman authorities rarely if ever invoked the *şeriat* as a basis for these prohibitions, which were apparently motivated by purely practical considerations. In fact many European states of the medieval and early modern period enforced similar prohibitions, quite apart from the fact that the Popes at times tried to ban all trade with Muslim countries. Among the considerations of primary importance to the Ottoman central administration were the needs of the armies, the navy, the Palace, the enormous capital city of Istanbul, and to a lesser degree, the needs of local craftsmen.

Thus while certain prohibitions, (such as those on the export of horses, arms, or gunpowder), were universally enforced throughout the Empire, others, such as the prohibition to export grain, were at times partially abrogated by export licenses. Other prohibitions might be of purely local or regional significance; for example, the export of raisins from the Aegean coast of Anatolia was forbidden, because this region was meant to supply Istanbul. On the other hand, raisins grown in Thessaly or Morea were available for export, since they had not been earmarked for the consumption of any particular sector of the Ottoman internal market.¹⁷

But the Ottoman Empire did not place any restrictions upon imports. This was due to the fact that the administration concerned itself only to a very limited extent with the protection of local producers, although protective measures occasionally resulted as a by-product of other considerations.¹⁸ In fact, where imports were concerned, the Ottoman administration tended to subordinate the protection of producers to the protection of consumers. The rationale behind an open-door policy on imports was the notion that such a policy would provide an abundant supply of goods on the market, leading to a low level of prices. Therefore even though Ottoman authors such as Naima¹⁹ might complain about the abundance of luxury imports, in practice nothing was done to stem the flow of imported goods.

In the present study, we shall attempt to describe Ottoman-Venetian relations as they appeared from the Ottoman point of view. Even though the description is largely concerned with empirical matters, the central theme is the

¹⁶ KHADDURI, *War and Peace*, pp. 225-26.

¹⁷ On Ottoman attitudes toward foreign trade see HALIL INALCIK, "The Ottoman Economic Mind and Aspects of the Ottoman Economy." in: *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East* ed. M.A. COOK (London, New York, Toronto, 1970), pp. 207-18. For an overview over export prohibitions as enforced in different parts of the Ottoman Empire compare Suraiya Faroqhi, "Die osmanische Handelspolitik des frühen 17. Jahrhunderts zwischen Dubrovnik und Venedig," *Wiener Beiträge zur Geschichte der Neuzeit* 10 (1983) pp. 207-222.

¹⁸ Thus the export of raw materials necessary to local artisans was often prohibited, especially if the industry in question produced important tax revenues. However, I have not as yet encountered a XVIIth-XVIIIth century rescript forbidding the importation of wares competing with local manufactures.

¹⁹ INALCIK, "Ottoman Economic Mind", p. 215.

manner in which Ottoman officials perceived the state which they administered. An attempt has been made to interpret Ottoman-Venetian relations during the early seventeenth-century, without invoking the meaningless model of an Ottoman state which kept on declining for several centuries in succession. Our starting point is that the commercial and political relations of the Ottoman Empire were organized at different levels, and that it lay within the logic of the Ottoman political system to maintain a certain degree of autonomy as far as the different levels were concerned. In extreme cases, the logic of the Ottoman political system might even permit local administrators to do what a rescript emanating from the central bureaucracy expressly prohibited. In the case of a strongly centralized state, such as the Ottoman Empire undoubtedly was in certain respects, such an assumption may at first appear surprising. However, it has long been known that the supposedly absolutist régimes of the preindustrial period in Europe could also coexist with numerous sectors in which state involvement was minimal.²⁰ In this respect, conditions in the Ottoman Empire invite interesting comparisons that merit further exploration.

Historical Background

It has often been remarked that Venice broke off its alliance with Spain and the Pope, and concluded a separate peace with the Ottoman Empire in 1573, in order to safeguard its commercial position in the eastern Mediterranean.²¹ Obviously the loss of Cyprus was considered a minor evil, even though the island's cotton and sugar had contributed markedly toward making the voyages of the medieval Venetian merchant galleys a commercial success. In the short run at least, this policy bore fruit. In the last years of the sixteenth century, trade with the Levant seemed for a brief span to have regained its former prosperity. Even on the island of Cyprus, Venetian merchants were fairly active. They also constituted one of the more important groups of foreign traders engaged in the sale of woollen cloth and in the purchase of silk and spices in Aleppo.

However, by the beginning of the seventeenth century and particularly after the 1630s, Venetian trade in the Mediterranean was visibly on the decline. The reasons for this crisis have been investigated by many different scholars and now seem to be well established. Venetian shipping had for long been one of the weak points in the city's economy: now it was threatened both by piracy and by commercial competition on the part of the English and Dutch.²² In the sixteenth century, the woollen industry had compensated for losses in other branches of trade,²³ but the contraction of the Ottoman market, and competition from

²⁰ PAUL BOIS, *Paysans de l'Ouest*, abridged version, (Paris, 1978) p. 177 ff, 196.

²¹ FERNAND BRAUDEL, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris, 1966), vol. II, p. 416.

²² TENENTI, *Piracy*, passim.

²³ DOMENICO SELLA, "The Rise and Fall of the Venetian Woollen Industry," in: *Crisis and Change in the Venetian Economy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. BRIAN PULLAN (London, 1968), pp. 106-26.

English broadcloth, now brought about the decline of the Venetian woollen industry. Moreover the Dutch, who established their first entrepôts in Indonesian waters during those years, managed to cut off the flow of spices through the Red Sea in a much more radical fashion than the Portuguese had ever succeeded in doing. Therefore both as sellers and as buyers, Venetian merchants in the Mediterranean found themselves on the losing side.

The policies adopted by Venetian merchants and patricians, although they might at first glance be considered successful adjustments to a changing situation, contributed toward weakening the city's position in international trade. Wealthy inhabitants invested in landholding on the *Terraferma*, and high grain prices encouraged this "ruralization" in commercial terms.²⁴ Venice was increasingly becoming a regional port serving northern Italy, and its control over the northern part of the Adriatic was by now more an illusion than a reality. Even the concentration of Venetian manufacturing on luxury and semi-luxury products was bound to weaken the city's position in the markets of the eastern Mediterranean. As serious fiscal difficulties and price increases beset the Ottoman economy in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the capacity to absorb highly priced Venetian imports was bound to diminish. Thus even though Venice in the first half of the seventeenth century managed to avoid a complete collapse of its economy, its role in Mediterranean trade was permanently affected.

In addition to these economic difficulties, Venice in the early seventeenth century was confronted with serious political problems. In the face of papal power at the height of the Catholic reformation, Paolo Sarpi asserted the claims of the Venetian state to regulate the secular aspects of ecclesiastic life.²⁵ At the same time, Venice lived in a state of undeclared war with the Spanish viceroy of Naples. Closer to home, in 1618 a plot was uncovered to seize power in Venice itself, which had been hatched by mercenaries employed in the Venetian army. It was widely assumed that the preparations for this attempted coup d'état had at least been connived at by the Spanish ambassador accredited to the Serenissima.

On Venice's eastern frontier, the Uskok pirates — freebooters employed by the Austrian Habsburgs in their border warfare with the Ottoman Empire — by the beginning of the seventeenth century constituted a serious liability to Venice in both political and economic terms. Apart from the fact that Venetian shipping was being attacked, the constant threat to the lives and property of Ottoman merchants invited direct intervention by the Sultan in the northern Adriatic, since from the Ottoman point of view Venice could at the very least be held responsible for not adequately policing the seas in its immediate vicinity.²⁶

²⁴ S. J. WOOLF, "Venice and the Terraferma: Problems of the Change from Commercial to Landed Activities," *idem*, pp. 175-203.

²⁵ LANE, *Venice*, p. 397.

²⁶ GUNTHER ROTHENBERG, "Venice and the Uskoks of Senj: 1537-1618," *The Journal of Modern History*, XXXIII, 2 (1961), pp. 148-156. For the Ottoman point of

During the sixteenth century Venetian politicians had often been willing to close their eyes to the problem. However, in the early seventeenth century the situation was no longer the same, and Spanish predominance in Italy made it vitally important for the Venetians to maintain peaceful relations with the Ottoman Empire. For a considerable time the problem of the Uskok pirates was a bone of contention between the Venetian and Habsburg authorities. Finally, even while waging war against the Austrian archduke who was the protector of the Uskoks, the Venetians secured the services of a high Austrian official who proved open to judicious bribery. With the help of this administrator, who for a while represented the Austrian authorities in the pirate centre of Senj (Segna), a start was made to resettle the Uskoks in the interior. However, it was not until 1618 that the process was completed, and the piratical activities of the Uskoks finally came to an end.

Ottoman Sources on Ottoman-Venetian Relations

Hitherto these political and economic problems have been studied mainly on the bias of Venetian and to a lesser extent of other European archival sources. In this context, Ottoman sources have generally been neglected. During the last twenty years Turkish scholars such as Tayyip Gökbilgin and Şerafettin Turan have however begun to explore the Ottoman sources in Venetian archives, and the activities of Ottoman merchants who inhabited the Fondaco dei Turchi.²⁷ But very little work has been done on the sources available in Istanbul or on the documents preserved in the *kadı* registers of Bursa.²⁸ The present study can only illustrate the potential of the Ottoman archives even for the seventeenth century, which is on the whole less well covered by official documents than the "classical" period that preceded it.

Among the Ottoman archival series, the *mühimme defterleri* (registers of

view compare Istanbul Başbakanlık Arşivi, Mühimme defterleri (MD) 5, p. 445 (973/1565-66).

²⁷ TAYYIP GÖKBİLGİN, "Venedik Devlet Arşivindeki Vesika Külliyaundan Kanunî Süleyman Devri Belgeleri", *Belgeler* I, 2 (1964) pp. 119-220. (Documents from the age of Kanunî Süleyman among the collections of the Venetian State Archives) id., "Venedik Devlet Arşivindeki Türkçe Belgeler Koleksiyonu ve Bizimle İlgili Diğer Belgeleri," *Belgeler* V-VIII, 9-12 (1968-71), pp. 1-51 (The collection of Turkish documents and other documents concerning us, located in the Venetian State Archives), id., "Kanunî Sultan Süleyman devrine ait Bosna ve Hersek ile ilgili Venedik Arşivindeki Türkçe Belgeler," *Tarih Dergisi* 32 (1979), pp. 319-30 (Documents in the Venetian archives relating to Bosnia and Herzegovina during the reign of Sultan Süleyman the Lawgiver). ŞERAFETTİN TURAN, "Venedik'te Türk Ticaret Merkezi," *Belleten*, 32, 126 (1968), pp. 247-283. (The Turkish trade centre in Venice).

²⁸ For examples from these registers, compare HALİL İNALCIK, "Osmanlı İdari, Sosyal ve Ekonomik Tarihiyle İlgili Belgeler: Bursa Kadı Sicillerinden Seçmeler," *Belgeler*, X, 14 (1980-81), pp. 1-91. (Documents relating to the administrative, social, and economic history of the Ottoman Empire: Selections from the *Kadis* registers of Bursa).

important affairs) are already relatively well known and have frequently been used.²⁹ Beginning in the last years of Kanuni Süleyman's reign (1520-1566) they cover the Cyprus war and the subsequent peace negotiations with Venice. This series permits us to catch a glimpse of Venetian trade, which was resumed almost immediately after the cessation of hostilities in 1573. For the following years, we possess occasional references to Venetian shippers trading in Ottoman territory, particularly if they were caught while trying to export goods whose exportation was forbidden. But on the whole, it cannot be claimed that Ottoman-Venetian relations in times of peace are adequately covered by the documents contained in the volumes of *mühimme* records.

However, much richer documentation is available in the so-called *ecnebi* registers, (registers of matters connected with foreigners) which cover both the affairs of individual foreigners residing in the Ottoman Empire and what might properly be considered inter-state relations.³⁰ These registers survive from the early seventeenth century onward. Documents dealing with Venice and with Dubrovnik are often collected in the same registers, possibly because Ottoman scribes liked to spell Dubrovnik (Ragusa) as Dobra-Venedik. Due to the intensity and long history of Ottoman-Venetian relations, a relatively large number of registers concerning Venetian affairs can be found in the Prime Minister's Archives in Istanbul.

In these registers, we usually find copies of the capitulations (*ahidname*) in the form in which they had been approved by the reigning Sultan.³¹ However since the Venetian *ahidnames* of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries varied very little from one Sultan to the next, the main interest of the *ecnebi* registers lies in the fact that they reflect day-to-day application of the *ahidname*. Steensgaard has correctly remarked that only a minority of all local disputes was ever referred to Istanbul.³² Even so, the *ecnebi defterleri* show that the number of disputes and complaints involving foreign merchants and decided in the Ottoman capital was not inconsiderable. Moreover, cases once decided apparently possessed some value as precedents. Therefore the responsible diplo-

²⁹ For a guide to the Ottoman archives in Istanbul, see ATILLA ÇETİN, *Başbakanlık Arşivi Kılavuzu* (Istanbul, 1979) (A key to the Archives of the Prime Minister's Office).

³⁰ ÇETİN, *Kılavuz*, p. 68-72. However the two registers upon which this article is largely based are to be found in the section Maliyeden müdevver (MM): 6004 and 17901. They cover the period H. 1028-1037/1618-1628.

³¹ On the capitulations in general, compare the article "İmtiyâzât" in the 2nd edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (1960-), by HALİL İNALCIK. Mahmut H Şakiroğlu has published the text of a capitulation from the reign of Kanuni Süleyman: "1521 tarihli Osmanlı-Venedik andlaşmasının aslı metni," *Fatih Enstitüsü Dergisi* 12 (1981-82), p. 387-404 (The original text of the 1521 treaty between the Ottomans and the Venetians). For the text of the capitulations granted by Mehmed III, which was retained virtually unchanged by his successors see M. BELIN, "Relations diplomatiques de la République de Venise avec la Turquie," *Journal Asiatique* VIII, VII^e série (1876), pp. 381-424.

³² STEENSGAARD, *Consuls*, p. 21.

mats had these documents confirmed every time a new Sultan ascended the throne, even if the cases these texts referred to had long ceased to be of much practical importance. In the specific case to be dealt with here, Sultan Osman II (1618-1622) reigned only for a short period, and was after a brief interlude succeeded by his brother Murad IV (1623-1640). Thus a large number of documents had to be submitted for confirmation within a relatively short time span, and this probably accounts for the richness of the two registers which have been studied in the present article.

In addition, registers of miscellaneous documents, of which a few examples survive for the mid-sixteenth century, and which became increasingly frequent as time passes, also contain individual documents relating to the Venetians in the Ottoman Empire. In particular the *kadis* and district governors (*sancağbeyi*) of ports much frequented by foreign merchants often received special instructions from the Ottoman central administration with respect to these visitors. In most cases, it is hard to judge why certain documents should have been entered into the *mühimme defterleri* and not into the *ecnebi* registers or collections of miscellaneous rescripts.³³ Very probably, certain texts were in fact copied into more than one register; in addition, two or more documents of very similar character might appear one and in the same collection.

However, it appears that the *ecnebi* registers contained only documents which had been solicited by the diplomatic representative of the state to which the register referred, that is, in this particular instance by the Venetian *bailo*. Documents responding to queries from provincial or local administrators, even if they had a direct bearing upon Venetian affairs, were rarely included in the *ecnebi* registers. Therefore one can expect to find in these collections mainly documents favourable to the interests of the Venetians, for it was Ottoman chancery custom to avoid issuing a document, if the petition presented by the *bailo* or other foreign representative had been rejected. On the other hand, decrees limiting the scope of Venetian activity are more likely to be found in the *mühimme defterleri* or in the collections of miscellaneous rescripts mentioned above.

Major Issues in Ottoman-Venetian Relations

On the basis of about three hundred rescripts analysed for the purposes of the present study, a variety of topics can be examined in a more or less detailed fashion.³⁴ On the political side, there was the eternal problem of the frontier. As Halil İnalcık has stressed, Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror (1451-1481) had conceived a policy of systematically reducing the Venetian colonies on the borders of the Ottoman Empire, and during his reign, Venice lost control over

³³ For an example of a register of miscellaneous rescripts see MM 9829.

³⁴ Apart from MM 6004 and 17901, individual rescripts from the *mühimme* registers have been taken into consideration.

the Morea.³⁵ Under later Sultans this policy was pursued at a slower pace, though never given up: as late as the mid-seventeenth century, Ottoman forces were to conquer the Venetian colony of Crete. Even in the early eighteenth century, when both Venice and the Ottoman Empire had lost their former position in world politics, the Ottomans were still strong enough to prevent the Venetians from regaining a foothold in the Peloponnese.³⁶ Thus, the daily skirmishes between Venetian governors on the Dalmatian coast on one side, and Ottoman provincial administrators or corsair captains on the other, must be seen in the context of long-term policies. In fact, the period covered by the present study might be described as the relatively peaceful interlude which separated the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus from the long war for the domination of Crete.

On the other hand, Ottoman-Venetian relations in Dalmatia cannot be adequately described without taking into account the role of the Spanish viceroys of Naples. In one of the *ecnebi* registers studied here, we find an interesting document relevant to abortive peace feelers on the part of Spain, which ostensibly originated from the court of Naples. Corsairs and pirates professing allegiance to the Spanish Crown, and subjects of Naples attempting to purchase grain on the Dalmatian coast, constitute the more routine matters treated in the rescripts at our disposal.

Many of the rescripts dealing with the conditions under which the Catholic religion might be exercised in towns and cities like Bandırma, Izmir, or Aleppo must also be interpreted in the context of European religious controversies. Inside Italy, Venice was opposed to the Pope and to Spain, and recognized Henri IV as king of France when the latter was still a Huguenot.³⁷ On the other hand, the Catholic reformation of the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was an important force in Venetian public life.³⁸ To pose as the defender of the Catholic priests resident in Jerusalem was a matter of prestige in European politics, and the frequency of references to the "*Kemame kilisesi*" (Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem) in the rescripts solicited by the Venetian *bailo* must be seen in this context.

Of more immediate interest to the historian dealing with Ottoman-Venetian relations is the geographical distribution of individual Venetians and their consuls throughout the Ottoman Empire. Consuls are relatively easy to trace, since the appointment of these functionaries had to be confirmed by the Ottoman authorities before the former could take up their official duties. Usually, the Ottoman document of appointment also contained a summary of the *ahidname* which constituted the guidelines for the consul's activity.³⁹ As far as

³⁵ HALIL INALCIK, "An Outline of Ottoman-Venetian Relations" in: *Venezia centro di mediazione tra Oriente e Occidente* (Secoli XV-XVI), Aspetti e Problemi (Florence, 1977), pp. 83-90.

³⁶ LANE, *Venice*, p. 408 ff.

³⁷ LANE, *Venice*, p. 393.

³⁸ BRIAN PULLAN, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice* (Oxford, 1971), *passim*.

³⁹ For an example see MM 6004, p. 2 (1028/1618-19).

individual merchants were concerned, those whose business affairs progressed smoothly entered the Empire and departed again without leaving a trace in the Ottoman rescripts. But those who were somehow involved with local authorities, particularly where inheritances were at issue, have frequently found their way into the registers, and their activities can be reconstructed to a certain extent.

In addition, there is the vast number of Ottoman rescripts which directly concern the organization of trade. Some of them deal with the conflicts between Venetian merchants and local Ottoman authorities; disagreements were often engendered by legally or illegally levied taxes. Enforcement of export prohibitions constituted another frequently disputed matter. Occasionally competition from English shippers, which contributed materially to the decline of Venice as a commercial power in the fifty years following the end of the Cyprus war, is also reflected in the Ottoman rescripts. Unfortunately, the rescripts analysed here contain practically no quantitative information. However, the wide range of topics covered, and the occasional vividness of detail, more than make up for this shortcoming.

International Politics in the Adriatic

Since less than a hundred kilometres of sea separated the Ottoman possessions in Albania from the Spanish-controlled Kingdom of Naples, it is not surprising to find a number of references to "*barbî İspanya keferesi*" ("Spanish infidels from the abode of war") among the rescripts granted to the Venetians. Ottoman governors of Lissa, Kırka, Hersek (Herzegowina), Delvina, and Avlonya (Vlorës) were instructed to cooperate with Venetian naval commanders against possible attack on the part of the Spaniards, presumably the viceoys of Naples.⁴⁰ This cooperation took the form of exchanges of information concerning the movements of the common enemy. However, in view of the fact that relations between local Ottoman and Venetian authorities in Dalmatia tended to be much less friendly than those between the two governments themselves, it is difficult to say how much of this cooperation in fact materialized.

The persistence of distrust in spite of what were, for the time being, cordial political relations, is reflected in a rescript dealing with a minor political event. Some Spanish corsairs, based upon a port in the Kingdom of Naples, had landed on the Venetian island of Istandin (Tinos).⁴¹ There they were driven off by the local Venetian authorities, and among the booty the corsairs left behind, were goods which very obviously belonged to Muslim owners. Acting in accordance with the relevant provisions of the capitulations, the Venetian authorities in Istandin decided to send the goods to the neighbouring Ottoman island of Andra. For this purpose, they requested a rescript that would allow the messengers entry into Ottoman territory. In the Ottoman reply, addressed to the *kadı*

⁴⁰ MM 6004, p. 14 (1030/1620-21).

⁴¹ MM 6004, p. 135 (1037/1627-28).

of Andra, the latter was instructed to receive the messengers and to make out a properly sealed receipt for the goods they were to deliver. But above all, the *kadi* was enjoined to make sure that the men from Tinos stayed on Andra only for the minimum amount of time needed to discharge their commission and were sent back to Venetian territory as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the document does not say whether there was anything specific that the messengers from Tinos were to be kept from finding out, or whether the order was simply intended as a general measure of precaution.

Since Spain and the Ottoman Empire were officially at war, direct trade relations were obviously not permitted by the Ottoman authorities. However in the daily course of frontier relations, this prohibition was occasionally ignored.⁴² Thus the Sultan reminded the *kadi* of Draç (Durrës, Durazzo) and other Ottoman administrators active on the Albanian coast that merchants from the Spanish domains, probably Neapolitans, were in the habit of trading in the area. Some of the visitors seem to have openly declared their nationality, others claimed to be from the port of Dubrovnik, (Ragusa) which recognized Ottoman suzerainty. Yet others may have declared themselves Venetians, and the relevant rescript seems to have been issued at the instigation of the latter, although the text does not contain any references to an initiative on the part of the *bailo* in Istanbul. Among the instructions issued to local Ottoman administrators, it was emphasized that *bona fide* Venetians, whose government maintained friendly relations with the Ottoman Empire, were not to be molested under the pretext that they were Spanish subjects.

However, Ottoman-Venetian cooperation during these crucial years went beyond the ordinary courtesies of border relations. In 1618, the Catholic inhabitants of the Valtelline had revolted against the authority of the Protestant Graubünden (*Ligues grises*). The Spanish governor of Milan had seized the opportunity to establish garrisons in a strategic area, which linked the Spanish possessions in northern Italy with the Low Countries by way of Franche-Comté.⁴³ This move in turn directly affected Venetian interests, since the Valtelline controlled by Spain threatened communications with France at the time when a Franco-Venetian alliance opposed the aspirations of the Spanish viceroys in Italy. Under these circumstances, Venice applied for aid to the Ottoman Sultan, requesting permission to recruit mercenaries on Ottoman territory.⁴⁴ It is probable that at the court of Istanbul the significance of the conflict was well understood.

In a rescript dated Dec. 1624/Jan 1625 and addressed to the provincial governor (*beylerbeyi*) of Bosnia as well as to the lower-level governors of Iskenderiye (Shkodra), Delvina and Morea, the Ottoman chancery explained

⁴² MM 6004, p. 5 (no date).

⁴³ PIERRE CHAUNU, *La civilisation de l'Europe classique* (Paris, 1966), p. 100. GEOFFREY PARKER, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road 1567-1659* (Cambridge, Engl., 1981), pp. 80-101.

⁴⁴ MM 6004, p. 113 (1034/1624-25).

that the Spaniards had conquered the locality of "Valtuniye in Frengistan". Being located in immediate proximity to the Venetian domains, it was considered likely that the Spaniards would use "Valtuniye" as a springboard for an attack upon Venetian territory. Under these circumstances it was stated that the Venetians, as allies of the Ottoman Empire, should be permitted to recruit mercenaries who would, of their own free will, serve Venice in its struggle against Spain. It is possible that the Ottoman authorities were thinking of the Morlacchi, mountaineers living in the districts bordering on Venetian territories in Dalmatia, who in later years sometimes revolted in support of Venetian war aims. Or else the Porte may have been thinking of Albanians, who in the sixteenth century had occasionally fought on the battlefields of distant Scotland.⁴⁵ At the same time, it is noteworthy that a Sultan granted his subjects official permission to participate in what was, after all, a conflict not directly affecting Ottoman interests. Obviously it was not feared that the departure of a few hundred or even of a few thousand men would significantly affect the tax revenues or the security of the districts they had inhabited. This state of affairs might be interpreted as a warning not to exaggerate the short-term political consequences of demographic difficulties in the early seventeenth-century Ottoman Empire.⁴⁶

Even more explicit evidence of the informal Venetian-Ottoman alliance of those years is a document dated May 1626 and addressed to the authorities of Dubrovnik.⁴⁷ This rescript concerns a Spanish peace offer, a matter which had been in the air since the Count-Duke Olivarez had become Prime Minister to Philip IV in 1622. Olivarez was known to favour peaceful relations with the Sultan, in order to free Spanish armies for the war against the Protestant princes of Europe.⁴⁸ Seen from a "Realpolitik" point of view, this choice made sense. Ottoman-Spanish borders, both in North Africa and in the Adriatic Sea, were stabilized to a point that it would have taken a major military effort to upset them.⁴⁹ Moreover, the outcome of such an effort, in the light of the experiences gathered during the 1570's, was unforeseeable to say the least. On the other hand, the Netherlands, the German territories and the French borderlands constituted a much more accessible prize, while Philip II's policy of pursuing a war on both fronts against the Ottomans and against the Protestant powers of Europe had resulted in a dangerous over-extension of the financial resources of the Spanish Crown. Previously, Anthony Sherley had hoped that the initiative for peace

⁴⁵ LANE, *Venice*, p. 409.

⁴⁶ COMPARE CHAUNU, *L'Europe classique*, p. 70.

⁴⁷ MM 6004, p. 125 (1035/1625-26).

⁴⁸ CHAUNU, *L'Europe classique*, p. 71. For a different evaluation of the choices open to the Spanish governments of the 17th century, compare however A. DOMINGUEZ ORTIZ, "The Revolt, of Catalonia against Philip IV," *Past and Present* 29 (1964), pp. 105-110.

⁴⁹ On his account compare ANDREW C. HESS, "The Battle of Lepanto and its Place in Mediterranean History," *Past and Present* 57 (1972), pp. 53-73.

would come from the Sultan.⁵⁰ But in 1625-26, the time was obviously ripe for a proposal from the Spanish side.

Ostensibly, the initiative came from the Spanish viceroy of Naples, and not directly from Madrid. The preliminary negotiations seem to have been encouraging to the Spaniards, for a second embassy was sent out in 1626. However, while the embassy was on its way, the Ottoman court's evaluation of the situation radically changed. In its letter to the Dubrovnik councils, the Ottoman chancery explained that the Spanish crown was the ancient enemy of the Sultan, and that any peace overtures on the part of Spain were simply meant to permit a concentration of forces against Ottoman allies in Europe. The text does not state who these allies were. But presumably it was Venice, because France, the traditional ally of the Ottomans, only became involved in a war with the Spanish Habsburgs in 1628.⁵¹ It must be assumed that the Venetian *bailo* had worked behind the scenes to effect this change in policy and avert a peace which directly threatened the interests of Venice. As Anthony Sherley had already remarked, Venice could maintain its position as the "hinge of Europe" no longer, once the Ottoman Empire and Spain were at peace.⁵²

The fact that the letter rejecting the Spanish peace offers was addressed to the governing council of Dubrovnik highlights the position of this small trading republic as a privileged gateway, into or out of the Ottoman Empire according to the circumstances. On the authorities in Dubrovnik devolved the responsibility of sending back the Spanish emissaries, and even of transmitting the order to return, in case the envoys had already set out for the Ottoman border. It is well known that Dubrovnik merchants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries not infrequently gathered political information, on behalf both of the Sultan and of his adversaries. Thus the role of the Dubrovnik councils as intermediaries between the Ottoman Empire and the Christian powers of the western Mediterranean formed part of an established diplomatic pattern.⁵³

Piracy and Border Conflicts

In spite of the Ottoman-Venetian alliance, border conflicts on the Dalmatian coast were not infrequent. Within this context, the rescripts which the Ottoman central authorities addressed to the provincial governor of Bosnia, and to local authorities in places like Novi or Klissa were usually reminders of the fact that the Ottoman Empire maintained treaty relations with Venice, and

⁵⁰ According to Chaunu, *L'Europe classique*, p. 71. See also Parker, *Spanish Road*, pp. 231-268.

⁵¹ Over the succession in Mantua. See J.H. ELLIOT, *Imperial Spain 1469-1716* (Harmondsworth, 1970), pp. 334-35.

⁵² CHAUNU, *L'Europe classique*, p. 70. The expression comes from WILLIAM MC NEILL, *Venice the Hinge of Europe (1081-1797)* (Chicago, London, 1974).

⁵³ NICOLAAS BIEGMAN, "Ragusan Spying for the Ottoman Empire," *Belleten*, XVII, 106 (1963), pp. 237-55.

admonitions to keep the peace. Thus the local governor (*sancakbeyi*) of Isken-deriye (Šhkodra), along with all *kadis* and fortress commanders in the province, was ordered to maintain good relations with Venetian subjects, and to consult with Venetian authorities whenever the need presented itself.⁵⁴ More specifically, the *bey* of Herzegovina was informed of the fact that a fortress commander stationed near the Venetian castle town of Kotor (Cattaro) was demanding taxes (*haraç*) from the inhabitants of certain Venetian villages. The Sultan indicated his displeasure at this state of affairs, as contrary to the privileges he had granted, and enjoined the governor to remedy the situation.⁵⁵ Moreover the Ottoman central authorities ordered the governor of Bosnia to see to it that double taxation of villages close to the Ottoman-Venetian border was brought to an end. In this case, oppression of the villagers had apparently been connived at by local authorities both Venetian and Ottoman.⁵⁶

Other border conflicts arose out of the fact that Venice's few remaining possessions in Dalmatia were completely surrounded by Ottoman territory. Access to these fortified ports by land had therefore to be regulated in some detail. An example of such conflict resolution is provided by the case of a Janissary named Bekir, who, apparently upon his own initiative, had set up a customs house taxing European merchants approaching the Venetian port of Split (Spalato).⁵⁷ According to the Venetian complaint, these taxes constituted illegal innovations (*bidat*), and local Ottoman officials were ordered to investigate, and to suppress the customs station if the complaint was based on fact. In another instance, the Venetian *bailo* complained of the activities of an unnamed military commander, who had set himself up in an unauthorized fortress commanding access to Spalato.⁵⁸ The robberies committed by this personage, so the Venetian petition explained, hurt not only the interests of passing merchants, but those of the Ottoman fisc as well, since traders could be expected to avoid this route in the future, thus depriving the Sultan's treasury of much needed customs revenues.

Despite such difficulties, the port of Spalato attracted a considerable amount of traffic and constituted a serious competitor to Dubrovnik. Therefore the governing circles of the latter came to an agreement with the Ottoman tax official responsible for the collection of tolls from merchants crossing the border between the Ottoman Empire and Dubrovnik.⁵⁹ Since both the tax collector (*emin*) and the Ragusans had an obvious interest in diverting traffic from Spalato

⁵⁴ MM 6004, p. 53 (1033/1623-24).

⁵⁵ MM 6004, p. 53 (1033/1623-24).

⁵⁶ MM 6004, p. 143 (1030/1620-21).

⁵⁷ MM 6004, p. 41 (1032/1622-23).

⁵⁸ MM 6004, p. 108 (1034/1624-25).

⁵⁹ JORJO TADIĆ, "Le commerce en Dalmatie et à Raguse et la décadence économique de Venise au XVII^e siècle," in: *Aspetti e cause della decadenza economica veneziana nel secolo XVII* (Venice, Rome, 1961), pp. 237-74. See also FAROQHI, "Venedig und Dubrovnik."

to Dubrovnik, the Ottoman tax-collector took measures to force traders bound for Spalato to visit Dubrovnik instead. In spite of the latter's subordination to the Ottoman Empire — which normally resulted in the Sultan's support for Dubrovnik in its conflicts with commercial competitors — in this case the Ottomans gave priority to the alliance with Venice. Accordingly, when the Venetians complained of the tax collectors' behaviour, the Ottoman authorities ordered the punishment of the *emin*, although nothing is known either about the nature of the punishment or about its effectiveness.

Much more serious, however, than occasional conflicts between Venetian merchants and local Ottoman administrators were the problems arising out of the activities of pirates and corsairs in the Adriatic. Scholars such as Tenenti and Lane have remarked how at the turn of the sixteenth century, Venetian shipping was attacked both by Northerners, who were at least partly motivated by commercial competition, and by the corsairs of North Africa.⁶⁰ In addition, the state of undeclared war between Venice and the Spanish viceroys of Italy made the Venetians vulnerable to attacks by corsairs based upon ports in the Kingdom of Naples. The Uskok problem had been eliminated only in 1618, after considerable damage had been done to Venetian shipping. For a while, it appeared as if the overall economic position of Venice would remain permanently affected by this onslaught upon its carrying trade.

However, as the seventeenth century wore on, the importance of shipping within the Venetian economy declined, and in consequence, the city became less vulnerable to pirate attack. Certain scholars have therefore tended to regard the impact of piracy more as a passing accident⁶¹ than as a long-term reason for Venetian economic decline. But, if it is argued that the fortunes of Venice were closely connected with long-distance maritime trade, then the piratical activities particularly of English shippers should be considered as a factor which strongly contributed toward the weakening of the Venetian position.

Not all the aspects of Adriatic piracy were reflected in the rescripts which the Ottoman Sultans accorded the Venetians. Surprisingly enough, the Uskoks are mentioned only in passing, and not in connection with the Venetians, but with the Ragusans.⁶² Nor did the presence of corsairs and pirates from the Northern Seas and from the island of Malta make any impact on Ottoman-Venetian relations during the early years of the seventeenth century. On the other hand, the activities of corsairs and pirates from the Ottoman domains are amply documented. This is true both of the North Africans, who were subject to the Ottoman Sultan but negotiated direct treaties with foreign powers, and of the Albanian or Morean captains who were regularly active in the waters of the Adriatic.

⁶⁰ LANE, *Venice*, pp. 387-88 and TENENTI, *Piracy*, pp. 16-31, 56-88.

⁶¹ RICHARD TILDEN RAPP, *Industry and Economic Decline in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (London, Cambridge Mass., 1976), p. 154.

⁶² MM 6004, p. 80 (1032/1622-23).

Ottoman rescripts dwell particularly upon the fact that the activities of North African and "Adriatic" corsairs were connected. Since the North Africans operated far away from their bases, they obviously needed a place in which to revictual. Often they disposed of the booty on Rumelian territory, for this saved the risk and expense of carrying goods and slaves all the way to North Africa. Acting upon Venetian complaints, the Sultans sent out rescripts admonishing those fortress commanders who most frequently cooperated with the corsairs of the Magrib; the commander (*ağa*) of Novi (Herzegovina), the distinct governor (*sancakbeyi*) of Avlonya (*Vlorës*) and the commanders (*dizdar*) of the ports of Preveze, Modon, Anavarin (Navarino), and Limasol.⁶³ The rescript issued by the Ottoman chancery threatened not only the accused commanders, but also their superiors, the provincial governors, with deposition and unspecified dire punishment if the peace was not respected.

On the other hand, there is little reference in these official documents to the reasons why local commanders acted in the fashion described. An important factor was doubtlessly the notion, based upon the *şeriat*, that Holy War could be interrupted only by brief truces and not by lasting peace.⁶⁴ Furthermore, Venice was seen as one of the major enemies of the Empire, and if this was somewhat outmoded by the early years of the seventeenth century, it must still have constituted a vivid image in the minds of Ottoman frontier warriors (*gazi*).

However some rescripts emanating from the Ottoman central government propounded the exact opposite, and asserted something that the recipients must have found very hard to accept: namely, that the Venetians were ancient and faithful friends of the Ottoman Empire, and could therefore expect preferential treatment with respect to other Christian allies.⁶⁵ One of the very few explanations by which the Ottoman administration tried to make its policy palatable to its subordinates, was the observation that existing treaty relations with Venice made it impossible to regard booty taken from Venetian citizens as legitimate.⁶⁶ Therefore glory as a *gazi* could no longer be gained from the struggle against the Venetians, but efforts in this direction must henceforth be aimed at other states.

Of the concrete measures by which the Ottoman government attempted to control politically inexpedient piracy, one might name the attempt to limit shipbuilding in the Ottoman Adriatic ports. As a routine measure, local administrators were ordered to burn the boats of coast dwellers who had gained a reputation as pirates. As well as these punitive measures, the inhabitants of the locality of Iskradin, not far from the Venetian fortress of Sibenik, (Sebenico) were in the year 1621-22 forbidden to build boats large enough to hold 25 or 30

⁶³ MM 6004, p. 34 (1032/1622-23), 35 (1032/1622-23), 52 (1033/1623-24), 104 (1033/1623-24), 105 (1033/1623-24), 109 (1034/1624-25), 126 (1036/1626-27), MM 17901, p. 5 (1028/1618-19).

⁶⁴ KHADDURI, *War and Peace*, p. 220.

⁶⁵ MM 17901, p. 12 (1028/1618-19).

⁶⁶ MM 6004, p. 109-10 (1034/1624-25).

men, even for trading purposes.⁶⁷ In justification, the rescript proclaimed that in the past the men of Iskradin had never used boats of this size. However, it is very possible that the Venetians in requesting this order from the Sultan were not simply concerned with the problem of piracy, but also with undesirable competition in local carrying trade.

Among the more narrowly military measures against pirates, the Ottoman administration envisaged certain joint actions with the Venetians. Rescripts addressed to the authorities in Tunis, Rhodes and Morea, from the year 1624-25, refer to an attack upon the Venetian possessions of Korfu and Kefalonia by North African and Morean corsairs,⁶⁸ and proclaim that the plunderers had been put to flight by the appearance of the *derya beyleri*. This term normally refers to district governors officiating in the coastal provinces of the Ottoman Empire, so presumably the *derya beyleri* who drove away the attackers were commanders in the Ottoman fleet. In another rescript the *kadis*, the district governors, and fortress commanders of the Inebahti (Lepanto, Naupaktos) and Aya Mavra (Leukas) areas were advised that Venetian galleys, patrolling the Adriatic against pirates, might visit Ottoman ports under the addressee's jurisdiction.⁶⁹ It was stressed that as long as the Venetian naval units committed no unfriendly act, they were to be treated as allies. However it is well known that on the issue of piracy, Ottoman-Venetian communications not infrequently broke down, even resulting in the Ottoman fortress of Valona (Vlorës) opening fire on a Venetian naval unit in 1638.⁷⁰

Ecclesiastical Affairs

A comparatively large number of rescripts solicited from the Sultan by the Venetian *bailo* deals with the affairs of Catholic churches and priests. Certain rescripts were requested to secure the position of churches used by Venetian residents. Thus by the reign of Ahmed I, Izmir was being frequented by a large enough number of Venetians for a Frankish church to have come into existence in which the Venetians worshipped along with other European residents.⁷¹ The European Catholic church of Aleppo was older, for it was claimed that it had been assigned to the French and Venetians when they first returned to trade in the city — that is about fifteen years after the Ottoman conquest in 1516.⁷²

More significant are the instances in which the *bailo* interceded on behalf of small groups of Roman Catholics that were scattered over the territories of the Ottoman Empire. For example, some monks in the province of Bosnia were having difficulties with unnamed local residents, who had reproached the

⁶⁷ MM 6004, p. 26 (1031/1621-22).

⁶⁸ MM 6004, p. 109-10 (1034/1624-25), p. 111 (1034/1624-25).

⁶⁹ MM 6004, p. 134 (1037/1627-28).

⁷⁰ LANE, *Venice*, p. 408.

⁷¹ MM 6004, p. 33 (1032/1622-23).

⁷² MM 17901, p. 15 (1028/1618-19).

monks for not furnishing their contingent of boys to the levies of future Janissaries undertaken on behalf of the Ottoman central administration, and for not sending a gift to the Sultan on his accession. The Bosnian monks were granted a rescript of protection,⁷³ and in a comparable fashion, the Venetian consul at Aleppo took an interest in the affairs of the Maronite community residing in this city. Disputes between the Maronite patriarch and his flock, complaints concerning the intervention of Greek Orthodox and Syrian patriarchs in the affairs of the Maronites, and even a conflict involving an exchange of real estate between the local Maronite and Armenian churches, are consequently all documented in the registers dealing with Venetian affairs.⁷⁴

Much more sustained, however, was the interest of the Venetian *bailo* in the sanctuaries of Jerusalem and surroundings, that is, particularly the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (Kemame) and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. A rescript dated 1031/1621-22 even claims that the friars guarding the Holy Sepulchre were Venetian subjects (*Venedik reayası*).⁷⁵ As a result, the Ottoman administration did not consider it unusual that the Venetian *bailo* intervened on behalf of the friars, and particularly on behalf of the Latin Guardian of the Holy Places, who controlled access to the sanctuaries of the Holy Sepulchre and the Dormition.⁷⁶

In addition to the *bailo*, the "Frankish" monks of Jerusalem also possessed an effective protector in the administrators of a pious foundation established on behalf of the soul of Sultan Kanuni Süleyman (1520-1566).⁷⁷ Since the dues paid by European pilgrims formed part of the foundation's endowment, the administrator had every interest in keeping the sanctuaries in good condition, so that they might be visited by a large number of pilgrims. In fact, judging from the strongly worded rescript that the foundation administrator procured for the Latin monks of Jerusalem, one might even speculate that his protection was more effective than that afforded by the *bailo*.

Even so, the *bailo*'s intercession resulted in a sizeable number of Ottoman rescripts protecting the interests of Catholic monks and laymen temporarily or permanently residing in the Ottoman Empire. This suggests that the French capitulation of 1604, which includes an article protecting the interests of Catholic priests and churches in Palestine, was not intended to grant the French king an exclusive right of intervention in this matter. Quite to the contrary, it is very likely that the Ottoman administration took a pragmatic view of the whole situation.⁷⁸ In the early seventeenth century, the French commercial presence in the Ottoman Empire did not amount to much, while the Venetians both did a

⁷³ MM 6004, p. 103 (1033/1623-24).

⁷⁴ MM 17901, pp. 6, 15, 17 (all 1028/1618-19).

⁷⁵ MM 6004, p. 20 (1031/1621-22).

⁷⁶ MM 6004, p. 101 (1033/1623-24).

⁷⁷ MM 6004, p. 97 (no date, about 1033/1623-24).

⁷⁸ GABRIEL EFENDI NORADOUNGHIAN, *Recueil des actes internationaux de l'Empire Ottoman* (Paris, 1897-1902), vol. 1, p. 95.

good deal of business and maintained a close political relationship to the Sultan. Under these circumstances the effectiveness of an ambassador's intervention was based upon that official's status at the Ottoman court, and much less on the letter of the capitulations.

Between Politics and Commerce: the *ahidname* and its Application

In principle, relations between Venice and the Ottoman Empire were regulated by the *ahidname*, which European diplomatic terminology generally called capitulations. However, in view of the difference between "capitulations" of the sixteenth or seventeenth century, and their nineteenth or twentieth-century homonyms, it appears preferable to call the earlier documents "grants of privileges". This more neutral term also stresses the proximity of the *ahidnames*, granted to foreign rulers by sixteenth or seventeenth century Sultans, to the guarantees accorded cities or states that became part of the Ottoman realm by "voluntary" surrender. Charters of this latter type had for instance been issued to the former Genoese colonies of Galata and Chios, and Ottoman chanceries equally referred to these documents as *ahidnames*.⁷⁹

It is worth remarking that the *ahidname* was primarily a political document, dealing with the relationship between two states. Commercial matters were touched upon, but appear as somewhat marginal issues. One may suppose that the Ottoman administration regarded commercial relations as problems of a more local nature, to be decided *ad hoc* as need arose.⁸⁰ Moreover, in spite of a long sequence of territorial and economic losses, the Venetian state of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries must have still appeared formidable enough to ensure the "primacy of politics".

Among the provisions of the *ahidname*, the clause that gave rise to most dispute was one that at first glance would appear to be a mere side-issue, namely what was to happen to the estates of Venetians who died on Ottoman territory. Where subjects of the Sultan were concerned, the fisc claimed the estate of people dying without legal heirs. Thus in every major settlement, there was an

⁷⁹ For a copy of the *ahidname* of Galata as confirmed in the early 17th century, see MM 6004, p. 96.

⁸⁰ *Ad hoc* rescripts were apparently preferred even when a given problem related to commerce was encountered in many parts of the Ottoman Empire. Thus both MM 6004 and MM 17901 contain a sizeable number of rescripts in which the tax farmers of ports like Izmir or Iskenderun were forbidden to borrow money from Venetian merchants. Apparently many tax farmers had adopted the habit of demanding loans from merchants, promising to deduct the money from future customs payments. However, the tax farmers frequently evaded payment under various pretexts, so that the Venetians seem to have demanded, and obtained, the prohibition of this practice. However, at least in the early XVIIth century, this matter was never included in the *ahidname*. Compare MM 6004, p. 29 (1032/1022-23) 17901, p. 13 (1028/1618-19).

official who confiscated such inheritances on behalf of the Sultan. Exemptions from this ruling were however granted to various categories of people apart from foreign merchants, for example participants in the pilgrimage caravan to Mecca.⁸¹

Due to difficulties of travel and communication, legal heirs might often find it impossible to present themselves at the time the inheritance was being divided. Later on, they were likely to run into difficulties when they attempted to claim their share from an official determined to hold onto what he had got. Therefore disputes between Ottoman subjects and the officials in charge of confiscating heirless property were extremely common, and the Venetian complaints on this issue simply form part of a larger pattern. It is in this context that one must interpret the numerous rescripts enjoining local *kadis* and district governors to see to it that the estates of deceased Venetians were handed over to the *bailo*. Some of these cases were indeed rather picturesque: after the death of the Venetian consul in Gelibolu (Gallipoli), the *bailo* in Istanbul had great trouble extricating the consul's residence from the hands of the official in charge of heirless property.⁸²

Another issue frequently taken up by Ottoman rescripts was the status of long-term Venetian residents. Here a fairly serious legal problem awaited resolution. For while Ottoman law granted that the ruler could promulgate laws, it was always assumed that these laws should not conflict with the Muslim religious law or *şeriat*.⁸³ In actual fact, even though the Ottoman bureaucracy took the rules of the *şeriat* very seriously, solutions not easily incorporated into the Islamic legal system were adopted on a number of issues. One of these was the abrogation of the rule that a non-Muslim from a country which had entered into official relations with a certain Muslim ruler, became a subject of the Islamic polity after a year's residence.⁸⁴ This "naturalization" would have involved the payment of all locally levied taxes, such as the poll tax (*cizye*), dues in money and in kind demanded particularly in times of war (*nüzul*, *avarız*) and many others of a similar nature. In spite of continuous complaints about irregular contributions demanded from foreign merchants, long-term Venetian residents were usually very anxious to assert that they were not subjects of the Ottoman Empire - behaviour which indicates that their position was more advantageous than they would have readily admitted.⁸⁵

Under these circumstances, a rescript defined the procedure by which a resident Venetian might become a Christian subject of the Ottoman Empire.

⁸¹ Compare MD 27, p. 56, no 142 (983/1575-F76).

⁸² MM 6004, p. 101 (1033/1623-24).

⁸³ HALİL İNALCIK, "Kanuni Süleyman the Lawgiver and Ottoman Law," *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 1 (1969), p. 105-38, particularly p. 108-10.

⁸⁴ KHADDOURI, *War and Peace*, p. 225.

⁸⁵ On the dues to be paid by foreign merchants, see STEENSGAARD, "Consuls and Nations," p. 39-41. MM 6004, p. 100 (1033/1623-24).

One of them was marriage to a local Christian woman, the other was a declaration of intent.⁸⁶ In the absence of these two features, even very long residence did not make a Venetian into an Ottoman subject. Nor was the ownership of real property crucial, although in the eyes of many people, the acquisition of such property seems to have created a presumption of intent to become an Ottoman subject. Thus the Sultan's administration permitted Venetians as well as other foreign merchants to live in the Ottoman territories for many years, while at the same time retaining all the advantages commonly accorded to visiting traders.

Another important aspect of the privileges granted to the Venetians needed occasional clarification, namely the authority of *bailos* and consuls within the Venetian community. At first glance, the legal situation seems unambiguous: according to the *ahidname*, disputes among Venetians were to be settled by the *bailo*.⁸⁷ Moreover, local authorities were not to hear these cases once they had been decided by the *bailo*, even if one of the parties requested such a hearing,⁸⁸ and disputes involving the *bailo* himself could only be resolved in Istanbul.⁸⁹ That local authorities could not retry a case decided by the *bailo* was in conformity with Ottoman judicial practice, for a case decided by a *kadı* could also be reviewed nowhere but in Istanbul. On the other hand, this partial assimilation of the *bailo* to the status of an Ottoman judicial official must have been difficult for many local authorities to accept. References to the honourable social position of the *bailo*, and to the eminent status of the Venetians as long-time friends of the Ottoman Empire, which abound in rescripts sent out by the Ottoman central administration, seem to have failed to make a great impression upon provincial and local administrators.

Another aspect of the *bailo*'s position that required official clarification was brought up in the course of a complicated dispute, which seems to have taken place sometime in the early seventeenth century (probably during the brief reign of Sultan Osman II (1618-22)). Certain traders, about whom nothing is said in the documents but who must have been Ottoman subjects, had purchased woollen cloth and other fabrics in Venice, insured their goods, and then loaded them onto a state galley bound for the Venetian port of Split (Spalato).⁹⁰ The convoy was attacked by a Spanish flotilla, and the goods were lost. Thereupon the merchants lodged a complaint in Istanbul. In their opinion, because of the insurance contract concluded in Venice, the Venetian government had stood surety for the safe delivery of the goods. As a result, the merchants demanded compensation from the Venetian *bailo* in Istanbul, whom they regarded as the legal representative (*vekil*) of the government in Venice.

The *bailo* denied both points: Neither had the Venetian government

⁸⁶ MD 6004, p. 21 (1031/1621-22).

⁸⁷ BELIN, "Relations diplomatiques," p. 417.

⁸⁸ MM 17901, p. 12 (1028/1618-19).

⁸⁹ BELIN, "Relations diplomatiques," p. 417.

⁹⁰ MM 6004, p. 117 (1034/1624-25).

accepted responsibility for the safe delivery of the goods, nor had he himself been sent to Istanbul to represent the Venetian government in what he must have regarded as a civil matter. Apparently the case went through a number of phases, but finally the Ottoman government accepted the *bailo's* position. After the administration had decided against the *bailo's* responsibility in cases involving Venetian insurance policies, merchants with complaints involving such matters were probably forced to take their cases to Venice, although the Grand Vizier's intervention might also be solicited. In a sense, the Sultan's decision was in conformity with the *ahidname*, which stated that the *bailo* could not be held responsible for other people's debts.⁹¹

From the *bailo's* point of view, the decision of the Ottoman administration meant that his status as a diplomatic representative was reinforced. The position taken by the Ottoman government was in harmony with the hypothesis that the latter viewed Ottoman-Venetian relations as primarily a matter between states, and regarded the commercial aspect as something of a side issue. On the other hand, the Ottoman merchants involved in the affair seem to have taken the opposite position, and at one point, they apparently came quite close to having their interpretation officially accepted. Whether the Ottoman government's decision in favour of the *bailo* affected the use of Venetian ships and insurance facilities by Ottoman merchants, is unfortunately not documented in the source material at hand.

Consuls

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Venice still possessed an appreciable network of consuls throughout the Ottoman Empire. Among the latter, the consul of Aleppo was the most prominent. In Ottoman documents of the time, he was often called a *baylos*, that is, put on the same footing as the official Venetian representative in Istanbul. In addition, the consuls of Tripoli (Syria), of Alexandria (Egypt), and of Iskenderun, the port of Aleppo, were placed in charge of fairly large groups of Venetian merchants.⁹² However, the rescripts studied here do not refer to the affairs of these last-named officials, and concentrate instead upon the consuls of Rumeli and Anatolia.

On the Albanian coast, the consulate of Avlonya (Vlorës) must have been anything but a sinecure. Venetian boats frequently approached the coast to trade in salt, and for many of these shippers, Avlonya must have constituted the most accessible consulate.⁹³ More important was the fact that corsairs from North Africa not infrequently sought shelter under the guns of Avlonya. Complaints about Venetians who had been sold as slaves in contravention of the privileges

⁹¹ BELIN, "Relations diplomatiques," p. 417.

⁹² STEENGAARD, "Consuls and Nations," p. 14.

⁹³ On the Venetian salt trade compare JEAN CLAUDE HOCQUET, *Le sel et la fortune de Venise*, 2 vols (Lille, 1978-79).

granted by the Ottoman Sultan quite often reached the consul, who was then expected to intervene. Thus the Ottoman central administration was informed of the activities of a Jewish merchant of Avlonya, who acted as a middleman for the North African corsairs.⁹⁴ Probably the information which the Venetian consul in Avlonya passed on to Istanbul often placed him in a rather delicate position as far as local power politics were concerned. Most likely it was as a result of this particular situation that a rescript was issued in the year 1624-25, which was designed to protect the Venetian consul from all molestation.⁹⁵

As a last remnant of its seaborne empire, Venice in the early seventeenth century still maintained consuls on several Mediterranean islands. Thus there was a Venetian representative on Naxos, an island which had only been fully incorporated into the Ottoman Empire during the second half of the sixteenth century.⁹⁶ In addition, there were consuls on the island of Mürtadabad (probably Kea), on Chios and on another island which has not as yet been identified.⁹⁷

However, the most important island consulate was certainly Cyprus, from where Venetian shippers continued to export cotton well into the seventeenth century. Originally, the Ottoman administration had forbidden the export of Cyprus cotton, but apparently the prohibition was not enforced for very long.⁹⁸ One of the rescripts in the *ecnebi* registers even contains a few figures that permit us to gauge the importance of Venetian trade in Cyprus.⁹⁹ A certain Ludovico, son of Pietro, a Venetian who had lived on the island for eighteen years, had represented the Dutch as consul on Cyprus while entering into a partnership with the resident Venetian consul. After Ludovico's death, the provincial governor of Cyprus and other local authorities tried to lay their hands upon the inheritance. During the ensuing dispute, it was asserted that Venetian and Dutch merchants had entrusted Ludovico with more than 100,000 *gurus*'s worth of goods and ready money. Moreover, Ludovico had become a rich man in his own right, who was owed money by an impressive number of Cypriots, both Muslim and Christian. In addition, he had even acquired real estate from debtors who had been unable to repay him. Thus it appears that during the first quarter of the seventeenth century, the Cyprus trade was far from dead, and that a few Venetian merchants even managed to grow rich on it.

In the Dardanelles, the consulate of Gelibolu (Gallipoli) did not serve any immediate commercial purpose, but served to help merchants passing through the Dardanelles when they got into difficulties with the Ottoman authorities. Ships leaving the Ottoman Empire were inspected when passing the fortresses of Kilidbahır and Seddbahır, to make sure that they did not export goods of which

⁹⁴ MM 6004, p. 52 (no date).

⁹⁵ MM 6004, p. 115 (1034/1624-25).

⁹⁶ MM 6004, p. 2 (1028/1618-19).

⁹⁷ MM 6004, p. 4 (1028/1618-19); p. 116 (1034/1624-25); p. 38 (1032/1622-23).

⁹⁸ MD 21, p. 123, no. 300 (980/1572-73).

⁹⁹ MM 6004, p. 21 (1031/1621-22).

there was a scarcity in Istanbul.¹⁰⁰ In addition, shippers passing through the Dardanelles paid a number of levies, which also often resulted in situations in which the aid of a consul was needed. Thus it is probable that the consul of Gelibolu transmitted the complaints of certain Cretan shippers who reported that the dues they were expected to pay upon passing the Dardanelles had been increased from about 1000 *akçe* to 5000-6000 *akçe*. In another instance, a Palace official tried to collect dues over and above the customary amounts from Venetian and French boats entering or leaving the Sea of Marmara. In this case as well, the consul of Gelibolu probably informed the *bailo* and thereby set the complaint mechanism going.¹⁰¹

On the Marmara coast, the Venetians maintained consulates in Bandırma and in Silivri. In spite of its modest size, a certain amount of business was done in the port of Bandırma, since we learn of two Venetians renting a storehouse in this place and purchasing leather and raw wool.¹⁰² No information survives concerning commercial activity in Silivri. But since we know of Venetian merchants visiting the area and trading on the shores of the Sea of Marmara, one must assume that the consulate had been instituted to take care of their needs.

Inland, the only consulate of importance was Ankara. In the early seventeenth century, Venetians and Poles were particularly prominent among the merchants visiting this city, which was famous for its mohair and mohair yarn. Certain Venetians resided at Ankara for long periods of time; some of them are on record as renting private houses over several years, thus avoiding the crowding and discomfort of public hostleries.¹⁰⁴ However, the best quality mohair yarn could not legally be taken out of the Ankara area, for the tax collected from locally woven mohair cloth constituted a source of revenue of importance to the Ottoman treasury.¹⁰⁵

Venetian Merchants in the Ottoman Provinces

In the meantime, other Venetian traders visited the fairs of the Balkans and the Morea, and a rescript dated 1031/1621-22 recommends a merchant trading on the island of Ağrıboz (Euboa) and in the Morea to local governors.¹⁰⁶ In this document, the Ottoman administration particularly stressed the need to make

¹⁰⁰ MD 7, p. 403, no 1696 (976/1568-69).

¹⁰¹ MM 6004, p. 103 (1033/1623-24); p. 26 (1031/1621-22). As a pretext for his exactions, the official in question had instituted a separate checkpoint of his own.

¹⁰² MM 17903, p. 5 (1028/1618-19).

¹⁰³ MM 6004, p. 32 (1032/1622-23).

¹⁰⁴ ÖZER ERGENÇ "1600-1615 Yılları Arasında Ankara İktisadî Tarihine Ait Araştırmalar." in: *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi Semineri, Metinler-Tartışmalar* ed. O. OKYAR, U. NALBANTOĞLU (Ankara, 1975), p. 145-168 (Research concerning the economic history of Ankara, 1600-1615).

¹⁰⁵ MM 7527, p. 69 (1055/1645-46).

¹⁰⁶ MM 6004, p. 17 (1031/1621-22).

sure that Janissaries in charge of policing the fairs did not overcharge the merchants whom they were supposed to protect. In fact, visits of Venetian merchants to the celebrated Thessalian fair of Maşkolur had been documented in Ottoman sources for the second half of the sixteenth century.¹⁰⁷ In the early seventeenth century, however, Maşkolur was no longer mentioned as a place frequented by Venetian traders, although the Thessalian fairs were at the time a major centre of Ottoman internal trade.¹⁰⁸

Venetian traders in Thessaly and the Morea during the second half of the sixteenth century seem to have been mainly concerned with the export of raisins and currants, although the Venetian island of Zante was itself a major producer of dried fruits. The role of Venetian traders in this context is stressed by a rescript issued in 1573-74, when after the end of the Cyprus war, merchants from Venice again began to visit the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰⁹ The return of the Venetians particularly affected the profits of the tax farmer who had contracted for the dues payable from Morean raisins and currants, and in a previous petition to the Ottoman central administration, the latter had complained that due to the non-arrival of Venetian exporters, the market price of currants had dropped to almost nothing.¹¹⁰ In the documents of the early seventeenth century studied here, no direct reference is made to the export of Morean currants by Venetian merchants. Probably the latter were by this time feeling the effects of competition on the part of English traders, whom we find established in Balyabadra (Paleopatras) at the end of the sixteenth century. However, conflicts between Venetian shippers and the tax official (*emin*) of Holomiç (Higoumonitza) indicate that the age-old Venetian relations with the Morea had not totally disappeared.¹¹¹

Interestingly enough, two rescripts refer to Venetian merchants who had obtained permission to purchase white sturgeon (*morina balığı*) and caviar in the Black Sea port of Kilia.¹¹² In one instance, the text appears to refer to an individual case, while from the other, one can assume that Venetian merchants had established a somewhat more long-lasting relationship, since the rescript in question refers to the fact that two merchants, named Constantine and Giulio, were in the habit of travelling this route every year. These documents imply that occasionally the Ottoman authorities relaxed their policy of closing the Black Sea to European merchants, particularly when political relations with the traders' home country were good.¹¹³ However, only in the document referring to a

¹⁰⁷ MD 5, p. 23, no 60 (972/1564-65).

¹⁰⁸ SURAIYA FAROQHI, "The Early History of the Balkan Fairs," *Südoest-Forschungen*, XXXVII (1978), p. 50-68.

¹⁰⁹ MD 23, p. 47 no 96 (981/1573-74).

¹¹⁰ BAŞBAKANLIK ARŞIVI, section Ali Emiri 148.

¹¹¹ MD 73, p. 113, no 256 (1003/1594-95). MM 6004, p. 17 (1031/1621-22).

¹¹² MM 6004, p. 8 (1029/1619-20); p. 42 (1032/1622-23).

¹¹³ For a general discussion of this matter, see HALİL İNALCIK, "The Question of the Closing of the Black Sea under the Ottomans," *Archeion Pontou*, 35 (1979), pp. 74-110.

particular individual case was the merchant accorded official protection unambiguously described as a Venetian. In the second instance, all we know is that the Venetian *bailo* intervened on behalf of the traders, which might have been due to the fact that Constantine and Giulio had close business relations with Venetian merchants, or else had taken up employment of some sort in the household of the *bailo*. Under these circumstances, Venetian trade in sturgeon and caviar did not in all probability reach a very impressive level.

In addition, Ottoman rescripts of the early seventeenth century mention Venetian salt traders on the Dalmatian coast. Documents referring to this trade frequently repeat the routine formula that since many Ottoman localities in this area suffered from a shortage of salt, traders supplying this vital commodity should be protected by the *kadis* and provincial governors.¹¹⁴ However, in this sector the Venetians had to compete with the shippers of Dubrovnik (Ragusa) who were generally in a better position to obtain commercial privileges on Ottoman territory. Thus in certain localities, such as the salt-trading centre of Gabela, no shipper, Venetians included, was permitted to sell salt before the Ragusans had emptied their warehouses.¹¹⁵ But even so, there were a number of Venetians who possessed salt depots on the Dalmatian coast, and Ottoman local administrators who tried to lay hands on their goods. However it is impossible to determine the amount of business which remained in the hands of Venetian merchants, whose government but a century or two earlier had monopolized the Adriatic salt trade.

In addition to the trade of Venetian citizens proper, the commercial activities of the inhabitants of certain Venetian colonies must be taken into consideration. The inhabitants of Zante (Ottoman: Zaklise) continued to enjoy the privilege of buying a certain quantity of grain whenever they delivered their tribute, and were in this respect assimilated to the Ragusans.¹¹⁶ Thus it appears that even though the Ottoman Empire no longer exported large quantities of grain to Venice, as had been the case in the mid-sixteenth century, certain vestiges of this trade had survived the difficult years around 1600. On the other hand, Cretan shippers helped to supply Istanbul with lemon juice, honey, olive oil, and cheese, and could also be found trading in western Anatolia.¹¹⁷

This modest every-day trade of the Cretans, who at the same time undertook voyages to Egypt, seems to have possessed some importance in the eyes of Ottoman administrators in the capital. As a reason for protecting these traders from exactions on the part of local authorities in the Dardanelles area, a rescript explicitly refers to the fact that the shippers might cease to visit Istanbul. Local authorities were admonished to keep this consideration in mind and to refrain from demanding taxes which were not commensurate with the amount of profit that the Cretans might be able to make.

¹¹⁴ For example MM 6004, p. 24 (1031/1621-22).

¹¹⁵ MM 6004, p. 86 (1032/1622-23).

¹¹⁶ MM 6004, p. 1 (1028/1618-19).

¹¹⁷ MM 6004, p. 37 (1032/1622-23); p. 103 (1033/1623-24).

The New Port of Izmir

Apart from Aleppo, the Venetian trading community mentioned most frequently in Ottoman records was that of Izmir. This is worth noting, because according to Venetian sources at the beginning of the seventeenth century most Venetians apparently did business in Syria or Egypt, and not in Anatolia.¹¹⁸ However, the frequency with which the Ottoman central authorities issued rescripts addressed to the *kadı* of Izmir indicates that the Venetian presence in this latter town was of greater significance than has been assumed to date. Unfortunately, little is known about the early urban development of Izmir or about its trade before the 1680's. However, the town increased from about 2500 inhabitants in the second half of the sixteenth century to an approximate 90,000 toward the end of the seventeenth, attracting immigrants from as far away as Macedonia.¹¹⁹ Thus it is possible that the "construction site" atmosphere of the city generated a certain amount of conflict and tension, which in turn focussed the attention of the Ottoman central administration upon both local and foreign merchants doing business in Izmir.

Seventeenth-century Izmir differed from all other contemporary Anatolian towns because it constituted the only major port city of the peninsula, whose *raison d'être* lay in international trade. Venetians brought mainly woollen cloth and occasionally glassware, which was becoming a fashionable item in wealthy Ottoman circles. In return they purchased raw cotton and cotton thread and in addition small amounts of wax and leather. Sometimes woollen cloth and cotton were bartered, with money only used as a standard of exchange.¹²⁰ Sale on credit and more or less disguised interest payments were also not unknown.¹²¹

From the rather small number of commercial disputes recorded in the *Ecnebi* registers, it appears that Venetians usually did business with Christian or Jewish merchants established in Izmir. However, some Venetian traders also ventured out into the countryside, buying cotton directly from the producers. These more adventurous merchants managed to secure an additional advantage, as a command from the Sultan permitted them to pay their customs duties on the basis of the price actually paid in the countryside, and not on the basis of the substantially higher price which prevailed in Izmir proper.¹²²

In the early seventeenth century the legal export of cotton from the Ottoman Empire in general, and from Izmir in particular, was a recent innovation. This

¹¹⁸ STEENSGAARD, "Consuls and Nations," p. 14.

¹¹⁹ Tapu ve Kadastro Genel Müdürlüğü, *Kuyudu kadime*, no 167, fol 3b ff.; JEAN BAPTISTE TAVERNIER, *Les six voyages... en Turquie en Perse et aux Indes* (Paris, after 1679), vol. 1, p. 85.

¹²⁰ Iranian silk, which in the second half of the 17th century constituted one of the major items traded in Izmir, is not yet mentioned in MM 6004: compare p. 34 1032/1622-23.

¹²¹ MM 6004, p. 54 (1033/1623-24).

¹²² MM 6004, p. 47 (1033/1623-24).

trade had existed throughout the second half of the sixteenth century, but as a contraband venture, since the Ottoman administration then regarded cotton and cotton thread as a war material. It is not clear why this policy was reversed in the 1620's: an increase in local production, a reduced need for sailcloth in the absence of naval wars, and a growing need for cash revenues must all have played a part. Under the circumstances, certain Venetians wished to have their right to export cotton confirmed by special decree. Local administrations in Izmir either insisted that the export of cotton was still prohibited, or else they were unwilling to concede this right to the Venetians even though they admitted that it had been granted to the French and English.¹²³ Thus, the favourable relations between Venice and the Ottoman Empire were of only limited use to Venetian merchants, since they were being eclipsed by the dynamism of their European competitors.

European, or more particularly English, competition was also reflected in the disputes concerning the non-payment of the dues known as *cotimo* and *bailaggio*, which constituted one of the chief sources of income for Venetian consuls in the Ottoman Empire.¹²⁴ By the beginning of the seventeenth century, it had become common enough for Venetian merchants to transport their goods on English ships. However in such cases, merchants were none too eager to pay the *cotimo* and *bailaggio* to the Venetian consuls. As a result, the latter were not infrequently deprived of the money they needed in order to operate effectively.

On this, the Ottoman authorities seem to have upheld the position of the consuls, enjoining the English shippers, and even non-Muslim Ottoman subjects upon occasion, to pay their dues to the Venetian consul. While it is probable that rescripts of this type were not obtained without some lobbying behind the scenes, the position expressed in them conformed to the known attitude of the Ottoman administration. It was usually deemed expedient to strengthen the authority of the acknowledged head of each particular community residing on Ottoman territory, so that the latter could be made responsible for the behaviour of the group as a whole. Thus the case of the Venetian consuls conforms to a well-established pattern.

Aleppo: Customs and the Regulation of Trade

Even though the trade of early seventeenth-century Izmir was expanding fast, Ottoman as well as Venetian authorities were mainly concerned with the Venetian presence in Aleppo and its port Iskenderun. This explains why the Venetians demanded, and the Ottoman chanceries made out, an impressively large number of documents addressed to the governors and *kadis* of Aleppò, which referred to one aspect or another of Venetian trade.

¹²³ MM 6004, p. 34 (1032/1622-23), 47 (1033/1623-24). In fact, the French capitulations of 1604 contained a clause to that effect: NORADOUNGHIAN, *Recueil*, I, p. 95. According to this text, Selim II and Nehmed III had granted similar permissions.

¹²⁴ STEENGAARD, "Consuls and Nations," p. 26. See also MM 6004, p. 6 (no date).

From the Ottoman rescripts dealing with the Venetian colony in Aleppo, one gains the impression that the latter's rights and duties had been defined mainly by Kanunî Sultan Süleyman (1520-1566). His name is usually mentioned at the head of a long line of Sultans who had confirmed rescripts regulating the status of the Venetian community in Aleppo. This is worth noting because Süleyman's predecessor Selim I (1512-1520), soon after conquering Syria from the Mamluks, had issued two *ahidnames* to the Venetians, while under his grandson Selim II, (1566-1574) the peace concluded after the Cyprus war redefined the Venetian position in the Ottoman Empire. Although Süleyman I appears to have issued a sizeable number of rescripts dealing with the Venetian presence in Aleppo, it is probable that the prestige which his reign enjoyed, half a century after his death, also contributed to the frequency with which his name was invoked.¹²⁵

Rescripts relating to Venetian affairs in Aleppo can be treated under three headings. First of all, a number of documents defined the position of the Venetian trader *vis-à-vis* the Ottoman authorities, both central and provincial. A second set of documents dealt with the rights and obligations of Venetian merchants with respect to ordinary Ottoman subjects, be they merchants, guildsmen, or even simple neighbours. In addition, a number of documents clarified the position of the Venetian consul, or *baylos* of Aleppo according to Ottoman official parlance. While the *ahidname* is frequently invoked in these rescripts, the documents were mainly concerned with problems arising from day-to-day business dealings, about which the *ahidname* has comparatively little to say.

According to a rescript confirmed by Sultan Ahmed I (1603-1617), Venetian merchants trading in Aleppo could not be forced to make purchases, neither of silk nor of any other goods.¹²⁶ This injunction was probably intended to protect traders against provincial governors, who might be tempted to resuscitate the trade monopolies of earlier Mamluk Sultans.¹²⁷ With even more emphasis, the rescripts declared that Venetian traders could not be obliged to sell to provincial governors under the pretext that the goods they offered for sale were needed by the Ottoman state.¹²⁸ It appears that this justification was sometimes used by provincial governors when they confiscated certain goods, for the merchants in question usually had a great deal of trouble before they received even partial payment.

Conventional wisdom current among Ottoman officials in the central administration was very much opposed to expedients of this type. Thus in the last

¹²⁵ Compare İNALCIK, "Kanunî Sultan Süleyman," p. 105-06.

¹²⁶ MM 17901, p. 6 (no date).

¹²⁷ ELIYAHU ASHTOR, "The Karimi Merchants," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1956), p. 54.

¹²⁸ MM 17901, p. 7 (1028/1618-19) Most of the rescripts in MM 17901 were renewed at the same time, and therefore bear the same date.

quarter of the sixteenth century, an official letter sent by the authorities in Istanbul to the Şerif of Mecca had explained to the latter that if Indian merchants no longer visited Jiddah in large numbers, this was due to the fact that the Şerif's men had very often mistreated them. According to the officials who had drafted the rescript, the Şerif only needed to make sure that the Indian merchants were treated with justice, and they would not fail to return.¹²⁹ Ottoman official ideology concerning the protection of merchants did not, therefore, remain a dead letter, but at least to a degree, informed official policies.

Of equal significance was the permission given to Venetian importers of woollen or silk cloth to set their own prices.¹³⁰ This meant that the Aleppo *muhtesip*, an official concerned with the regulation of the market place, was not to concern himself with the prices of imported Venetian cloth. However, this ruling did not apply in Istanbul, where Venetian fabrics, along with Genoese velvets and a rather enigmatic "Spanish" cloth, were sold at officially determined prices just as if they had been locally produced.¹³¹ However, the exemption granted to the Venetian merchants fits in very well with Halil Inalcık's observation that long-distance and wholesale traders, even if they were subjects of the Ottoman Empire, were generally exempt from the rules enforced by the market inspector.¹³² As a result, both Ottoman long distance traders and their Venetian *confrères* established in Aleppo, were left free to make as large a profit as the market would bear.

A number of rescripts regulated the importation of money from Venice into the Ottoman Empire. Venetian merchants paid for part of their purchases in Aleppo with the money earned through the sale of woollen cloth and a few other items of less importance. Whatever they needed over and above this amount, was imported either in the shape of unminted silver, or else as Venetian coins (*guruş*). This silver, once it had been brought to Aleppo, was inspected in the place where the consul resided, and a special rescript assured the importers that the inspection should not take place in the office of the local customs inspectors.¹³³ The excuse frequently proffered by the customs inspectors for their intervention, namely that they were simply trying to prevent the outflow of silver to Iran, was not considered acceptable in this context. At the same time, the Ottoman authorities confirmed an older rescript that fixed the rate of exchange at 34 *pare* to the Venetian *guruş* and forbade the local authorities to pay only 33 *pare* as they had been wont to do.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ MD 27, p. 20, no 60 (983/1575-76).

¹³⁰ MM 17901, p. 7 (1028/1618-19).

¹³¹ MÜBAHAT KÜTÜKOĞLU, "1009 (1600) tarihli Narh Defterine göre İstanbul'da çeşitli eşya ve hizmet fiyatları," *Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 9 (1978), p. 20 (Various prices of goods and services in Istanbul, according to an official price register dated 1600).

¹³² İNALCIK, "Capital Formation," p. 98.

¹³³ MM 17901, p. 12 (1028/1618-19).

¹³⁴ MM 17901, p. 13 (1028/1618-19).

A rescript dated 1620-21 — in this case we are dealing with a text recently promulgated and not with the simple confirmation of an older document — regulated the dues to be paid by the Venetian community for the money which it imported into the Ottoman Empire.¹³⁵ When recounting the precedents for the rulings to be enforced, the Ottoman authorities admitted that the Venetians imported relatively small amounts of silver, which were mainly intended for day-to-day consumption. In the past, Venetian merchants had been permitted to import up to 30,000 *guruş* without any charges; from what they imported over and above this limit, an unspecified amount of dues was to be paid to the Sultan's privy purse. Recently however, local tax officials had apparently demanded 2 percent of all the money imported by the Venetians, and had even produced a rescript from the Sultan to back up their claim. Apparently the case of the French, from whom a similar payment had regularly been demanded, had served as a precedent. However, the administration in Istanbul ultimately ceded to representations on the part of the Venetians, who seem to have claimed that the French, who imported only money and practically no goods, should not be treated in the same manner as themselves.¹³⁶ Thus the Ottoman administration went back to the previous regulation, that is outright exemption for the first 30,000 *guruş*, and unspecified payments to the Sultan's privy purse on the remainder. This regulation is remarkable in that it reflects a relative abundance of silver in circulation. Had the opposite situation had prevailed, it is very likely that the Ottoman administration would have permitted the importation of silver without charge.

Certain Venetian merchants seem to have profited from the relatively high value of silver relative to gold in the coastlands of the eastern Mediterranean, by purchasing gold from the local population.¹³⁷ Remarkably, these transactions were not forbidden even though the Ottoman administration of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries frequently demanded that Syrian taxes be paid in gold.¹³⁸ Therefore, one would have expected the Ottoman central administration to try to monopolize local gold resources. Quite to the contrary, however, the Sultan only demanded that the consul testify to the Venetian citizenship of the merchant in question, so as to prevent fraud. It is not clear what Venetian merchants did with the gold they had acquired in this fashion. However, since the Ottoman rescripts of the time also depict Venetian traders as exporting precious stones,¹³⁹ one is tempted to associate the acquisition of gold with the

¹³⁵ MM 6004, p. 16 (1030/1620-21).

¹³⁶ See also STEENSGAARD, "Consuls and Nations," p. 39.

¹³⁷ MM 17901, p. 11 (1028/1618-19).

¹³⁸ HALIL SAHİLLİOĞLU, "Osmanlı Para Tarihinde Dünya Para ve Maden Hareketlerinin Yeri (1300-1750)," *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi Üzerine Araştırmalar*, special issue of *Gelişme Dergisi* (1978), p. 11. (The role of international trends in the movement of specie and precious metals in Ottoman monetary history).

¹³⁹ MM 17901, p. 9 (1028/1618-19).

purchase of jewels, probably from Indian merchants who generally demanded payment in gold.

As might be expected, many rescripts deal with the protection of Venetian merchants against demands for money over and above the regularly established customs duties. A clause prohibiting such levies had been explicitly inserted into the *ahidname*. But since it was very difficult to enforce, various rescripts were requested by the Venetian *bailo* to clarify particular cases. Thus a document originally issued by Sultan Süleyman I, and subsequently confirmed by his successors, stressed the fact that Venetian merchants paid a duty of 21 percent on the spices they purchased in Aleppo. (*ösr-i babar*).¹⁴⁰ On the other hand, customs officials were forbidden to demand payments beyond this amount, as they had been accustomed to do under a variety of pretexts. The officials had for example demanded fees for their servants, for the handling of the bales, and for the issuance of receipts. In addition, the Janissary guards employed by the Venetian consul often also collected a share from the value of the goods they were supposed to protect.¹⁴¹ These abuses were prohibited by special rescript, while other texts dealt with an even more difficult matter, the fraudulent overestimation of the value of duty-paying goods by the Aleppo customs authorities. A further rescript determined that if a Venetian merchant sold goods under the condition that customs duties were to be borne by the purchaser, the contract was to be deemed valid at law.¹⁴²

At the same time, another document established the procedure to be followed by customs officials when Venetian boats were shipwrecked. This rescript can be interpreted as an elaboration of two separate sections of the *ahidname*. The latter formulated the principle that the victims of a shipwreck were to be protected and whatever was salvaged of their belongings restored to them. In addition, the *ahidname* also contained the provision that irregular taxation should be repressed as far as possible,¹⁴³ a desideratum which, on a more general level, characterized the ideal state as envisaged by the Ottoman central bureaucracy. Accordingly, the Sultan decreed that goods belonging to Venetians which had been salvaged from a shipwreck on the return voyage, were not liable to customs dues if the owners could document that they had already acquitted themselves in Aleppo, Iskenderun, or elsewhere.¹⁴⁴

Certain rescripts also discuss the goods traded by Venetians, and more particularly the question which wares could or could not be exported. Imports did not give rise to any problems, and are therefore but rarely referred to. Apart from the obligatory woollen cloth, glassware also found a certain outlet on the market of Aleppo.¹⁴⁵ Much more varied was the list of goods exported: silk,

¹⁴⁰ MM 17901, p. 10 (1028/1618-19).

¹⁴¹ MM 17901, p. 10 (1028/1618-19).

¹⁴² MM 17901, p. 10 (1028/1618-19); p. 8 (1028/1628-29).

¹⁴³ BELIN, "Relations diplomatiques," p. 416, 421.

¹⁴⁴ MM 17901, p. 14 (1028/1618-19).

¹⁴⁵ MM 6004, p. 138-39 (1038/1628-29).

some of it grown in the Tripolis region, cotton, wool, indigo, gall nut for tanning, spices, rhubarb, and precious stones.¹⁴⁶

Of this list, only cotton presents a problem. A rescript dated 1618-19 permitted the export of this commodity and claimed to be a confirmation of earlier decrees, issued on behalf of Sultans Selim II (1566-1574) and Murad III (1574-1595). However, we know from numerous other sources that during the period in question the export of cotton was still prohibited. Possibly an exceptional concession of limited duration had been granted, such as the English had also requested for Tripolis in the year 1586-88.¹⁴⁷ Under Sultan Mehmed III (1595-1603) the list of specifically permitted goods was extended by the addition of raisins, pistachios and morocco leather, a commodity otherwise frequently reserved for the Ottoman internal market.

In the relevant rescript,¹⁴⁸ the granting of a general concession to Venetian exporters was motivated by fiscal considerations. According to the text, certain unnamed persons had been causing trouble to the Venetian merchants of Aleppo, and these activities had resulted in a loss of customs revenue. Thus political considerations, which in the eyes of the Ottoman authorities were of primary importance in Ottoman-Venetian relations, were to a certain degree reinforced by the interests of the Sultan's treasury.

Aleppine and Venetian Traders

Another set of rulings incorporated in the registers under discussion attempted to clarify the position of Venetian merchants in Aleppo *vis-à-vis* ordinary inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire — mainly merchants or craftsmen, but also local administrators of pious foundations. They specified that Venetians resident in Aleppo who rented storerooms or other accommodations, could not be evicted provided that they regularly paid their rent.¹⁴⁹ This ruling was of particular importance since most European merchants rented accommodations in a *han*, a building not dissimilar to the *fondacos* of Venice. Throughout the larger cities of the Ottoman Empire, these structures generally belonged to religious foundations which leased them to the highest bidder, often for a period of three years. Whoever was awarded the contract then paid a fixed amount of money to the foundation chest, and could keep whatever profit he made beyond the stipulated sum. Under these circumstances, the contractor might feel tempted to evict tenants whenever he could find someone else willing to pay a higher rent, a procedure which was facilitated by the fact that the current tenant had often made certain improvements to the fabric of the building. It was with this situation in mind that a rescript issued by Sultan Mehmed III (1595-1603) and

¹⁴⁶ MM 17901, p. 9 (1028/1618-19), p. 17 (same date).

¹⁴⁷ MM 17901, p. 9; MD 62, p. 133, no 298 (995-96/1586-88).

¹⁴⁸ MM 17901, p. 9.

¹⁴⁹ MM 17901, p. 9 (1028/1618-19).

confirmed in 1618-19, determined that evictions of this sort were illegal, and that the old procedures should be respected.¹⁵⁰ No particular conclusions can be drawn from the fact that confirmation of this rescript was requested and granted in the early seventeenth century rather than at any other time, for confirmation of this type were often purely a matter of routine. On the other hand, the original date of issue during the very last years of the sixteenth century indicates the commercial prosperity of Aleppo during this particular period, which is already known from other sources.

Equally important was the ruling that court cases arising from commercial dealings between local merchants and Venetians were to be heard only if the original transaction had been recorded in the *kadi's* register (*sicil*), and the latter official had issued a special document stating the facts of the case (*hüccet*).¹⁵¹ This privilege was not unique, for apart from the Venetians in Aleppo, the merchants of Dubrovnik from at least the fifteenth century onward were the beneficiaries of a similar ruling.¹⁵² In this fashion, the dependence upon witnesses which characterizes Islamic law was lessened, and problems arising from the principle held by Muslim jurists that on most issues a non-Muslim might not testify against a Muslim, could be minimized.¹⁵³ For if the *kadı* had issued a written document, the only witnesses needed would be those that could testify to the authenticity of the *hüccet*; and with respect to a document made out in the *kadı's* court, Muslim witnesses would generally not be lacking.

Another rescript codifying the application of Muslim religious law with respect to the Venetians deals with the problem of stolen goods. In the introduction, the rescript refers to the fact that Venetian ships carrying their wares to the Ottoman Empire were sometimes attacked by Christian pirates and the merchandise robbed. Later, the stolen goods were turned over to non-Muslim traders in Aleppo. The Ottoman government decreed that Venetians in such situations should be permitted to claim the return of goods bearing the Venetian mark, even if subsequent owners asserted that they had purchased these wares in good faith.¹⁵⁴ As an additional guarantee, the decree provided that disputes concerning the recovery of Venetian goods stolen by pirates could only be

¹⁵⁰ Long-term tenants could protect themselves by concluding a contract of so-called "double rent": a lump sum was paid at the time the contract was first concluded, while the monthly or yearly rent might be so small as to be almost symbolic. In this case, the lease could even be passed on to the heirs. Compare Ömer Lütfi Barkan, "Edirne Askeri Kassam'na Ait Tereke Defterleri (1545-1659)," *Belgeler*, III (1966), pp. 36-37. (The probate inventories prepared by the *askeri kassam* of Edirne, 1545-1659).

¹⁵¹ MM 17901, p. 9 (1028/1618-19).

¹⁵² BIEGMAN, *The Turco-Ragusan Relationship*, p. 71.

¹⁵³ JOSEPH SCHACHT, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 124-25, 192-94.

¹⁵⁴ MM 17901, p. 11 (1028/1618-19).

settled in Istanbul.¹⁵⁵ Though the document had originally been issued on behalf of Kanunî Sultan Süleyman (1520-1566), it must have been very timely throughout the piracy-ridden years of the later sixteenth and early seventeenth Centuries.

The Venetian Consul in Aleppo

A separate set of regulations dealt with the status of the Venetian consul, or in Ottoman terminology the *baylos* of Aleppo. Certain rescripts reminded local authorities of the honourable (*vacibürreayet*) status of the consul as a Venetian noble, and stressed his right, laid down in the *ahidname*, to decide disputes among Venetians. Other documents deal with the privilege of the consul to appoint Janissaries of his own choice as guardsmen (*yasakçı*), and with the remuneration these men were to receive.¹⁵⁶ This latter issue was often rather a thorny matter, on which Venetian representatives in other cities of the Ottoman Empire also requested help from the central administration. In addition, the right of the consul to travel to Iskenderun and Tripolis (Syria), or else to visit Jerusalem, was expressly placed on record.¹⁵⁷

Curiously enough, a considerable number of rescripts was concerned with the food supply of the Venetian consulate in Aleppo. Apart from the fact that the consul could receive a certain amount of wine without paying taxes, this official, with the blessing of the Ottoman authorities, seems to have secured supplies for the Venetian community in general. Thus we hear that the consul ordered beef and sold it to resident Venetians at a price determined by himself, the Ottoman market supervisor having no say in the matter.¹⁵⁸ Equally the consul might provide bakers and tailors to serve the Venetian community; the men he hired for these jobs were to be excused certain services to the Ottoman state.¹⁵⁹ Thus it almost appears that the Ottoman authorities saw the Venetians residing in Aleppo as forming part of the consul's household; and the fact that the entire colony was concentrated in two commercial buildings (*han*) probably did much to strengthen this view.

Privileges Interpreted: the "little ahidnames of Aleppo"

Most of the matters treated in the present study, and many others as well, were first decided in individual rescripts issued by various Sultans, and confirmed by their successors when they acceded to the throne. However for the sake of convenience the most important rulings, which generally had first been

¹⁵⁵ Recourse to Istanbul was frequently granted in capitulations. Compare Nora-doughian, *Recueil*, vol. 1, pp. 98, 101.

¹⁵⁶ See for example MM 17901, p. 8 (1028/1618-19).

¹⁵⁷ MM 17901, p. 13 (1028/1618-19).

¹⁵⁸ MM 17901, p. 15 (1028/1618-19).

¹⁵⁹ MM 17901, p. 15 (1028/1618-19).

codified in the reign of Sultan Süleyman I (1520-1566), were summarized in four documents,¹⁶⁰ addressed not to the governors and *kadis* of Aleppo, but "to whomever it may concern".

These documents generally contain very little that might be regarded as an introduction or conclusion; under these circumstances, nothing can be said about their genesis. But minus the diplomatic formalities of oaths and invocations, one might almost regard these texts as the "privileges granted to the Venetian community in Aleppo". At the same time, this set of documents provides clues to the actual application of the *ahidname*, to the manner in which the Ottoman authorities viewed the Venetian merchants trading in Aleppo, and of course, to the matters which the *bailo* considered as particularly important for the continuation of Venetian trade in this city.

Clearly N. Steensgaard was on the right path when he suggested that there must have been other legal texts, apart from the *ahidname*, which determined the status of foreign merchants in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁶¹ The principal legal base was Muslim religious law (*seriat*), but almost equally important were the rescripts issued by various Sultans, either in response to queries from provincial administrators, or else to complaints from the Venetians themselves. The "little *ahidnames* of Aleppo" must be taken as a digest which conveniently summarized current Ottoman administrative practice.

Conclusion

In the present study, we have attempted to answer a specific question: why was it that certain articles forming part of the privileges granted to the Venetians or to other foreign traders were notoriously difficult to enforce? In examining this problem we have also been able to make a number of observations concerning the functioning of the Ottoman state in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In developing our argument, we have set aside the traditional explanation that the Ottoman central government was often not in a position to impose its will upon the provincial administrators it employed. Not that this assumption is completely invalid; in fact, for the eighteenth century it remains largely correct. But the weakness of the Ottoman central government under the Sultans of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries should not be exaggerated. The present study has attempted to show that one can understand the behaviour of Ottoman provincial authorities without recourse to the time-honoured thesis of "Ottoman decline".

The Ottoman central authorities frequently cited the *ahidname* even where it had no direct bearing on the case which they had been called upon to judge.

¹⁶⁰ MM 6004, p. 138-43 (about 1028/1618-19). Since the most important provisions of these rescripts have already been discussed in other contexts, no analysis of their contents is necessary here.

¹⁶¹ STEENSGAARD, "Consuls and Nations," pp. 16-19.

This shows that in spite of the problems arising from its application, the *ahidname* was by no means an empty piece of paper, but was in fact regarded by the Ottoman government as the document which regulated the Venetian presence in the territories governed by the Sultan. At the same time, both the *ahidname* and the Sultan's government were primarily concerned with interstate relations. As a result commercial problems were left to local authorities to regulate within the general framework of Ottoman procedure; the latter, of course, did not exclude the *ahidname*. It is in this sense that the "little *ahidnames* of Aleppo", which are very different in tone from the general Venetian *ahidname*, should be interpreted.

Even though they rarely referred to the fact, Venetian merchants benefited from the positive attitude which the Ottoman administration generally took toward trade and traders. At least in Aleppo, the Venetians enjoyed privileges commonly accorded Ottoman wholesalers, that is an exemption from the obligation to sell at officially fixed prices. At the same time, foreign merchants were not required to pay most of the taxes demanded from Ottoman subjects, so that the Venetians' position relative to that of local traders was not bad, even if on the negative side one takes *avantias* and forced loans into account. Moreover, as the export of Syrian and Anatolian cotton was no longer prohibited from the early seventeenth century onward, a new and potentially lucrative branch of commerce was opened up, although the English and Dutch profited more from these opportunities than did the Venetians. But as far as the Ottoman central administration was concerned, during the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries merchants from Venice were given considerable encouragement.

On the other hand, the provisions of the *ahidname* proved difficult to apply when they contradicted well-established Ottoman usages, particularly usages based upon Muslim religious law (*seriat*). In the same fashion, the notion of a long-lasting peace and quasi-alliance with the once formidable enemy Venice must have appeared unacceptable to people who viewed the Ottoman Empire as a state constantly expanding into new territories by means of Holy War. What is more, the proponents of the "peace policies" in the Imperial government had assimilated the same traditions as their recalcitrant subordinates, and it is very probable that the behaviour of the fortress commanders of Avlonya or Limassol aroused a certain amount of sympathy in the authors of the very rescripts sent out to admonish them. The notoriously lenient behaviour of many Venetian naval commanders toward Catholic pirates posing as crusaders might constitute a parallel in this respect.¹⁶²

Two separate but compatible explanations can be offered for the behaviour of Ottoman provincial authorities *vis-à-vis* Venetian and other foreign merchants. One of them relates to what might be called the ideological legitimation of the Ottoman state. The other is based upon the hypothesis that in spite of its well-known centralization, the Ottoman state organized itself on various levels.

¹⁶² TENENTI, *Piracy and the Decline of Venice*, p. 51.

which were allowed a degree of autonomy in their day-to-day functioning. In particular dealings with foreign merchants formed a necessary but not very prestigious administrative task, and were often left to the initiative of tax farmers and temporary officials. In this way the Ottoman administration could minimize its own contact with foreign merchants, and to some extent, afford to ignore the arrangements into which the latter might enter with local administrators.

Whatever privileges the Ottoman central authorities might have been willing to grant in their negotiations with European diplomatic representatives, the application of the *ahidnames* occurred only to the extent in which these privileges could be fitted into what the Ottoman bureaucracy regarded as proper procedure. Ottoman officialdom may not have obeyed all the orders it received from above, but it followed intelligible principles in what it accepted and what it rejected. In this sense, one might even claim that the very limitations upon the applicability of the *ahidnames* illustrate the cohesion rather than the decline of a flexible and durable state structure.