
ARTICLES

The Venetian Supremacy in Levantine Trade: Monopoly or Pre-Colonialism?

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Both in books and papers written in the past and in recently published studies¹ one reads time and again that Levantine trade was a Venetian monopoly in the later Middle Ages. The purpose of the present paper is to re-examine this conclusion, but from a different viewpoint.

The history of the Levantine trade of Venice (and of other European « trading nations ») in the Middle Ages has been written, mostly, without relating it to the social and economic development of the Near Eastern countries themselves. Few medievalists have studied Oriental sources as well. But the establishment of Venetian supremacy in Levantine trade and the foundation of flourishing Venetian colonies in Egypt, Syria and other Near Eastern countries is a phenomenon of Oriental history, as much as of European expansion.

The main questions which we will try to answer are the following:

a) How can the great prosperity of Venice's Levantine trade in the later Middle Ages, in contrast to the decline of its competitors, be explained?

¹ J. HEERS, *Gênes au XV^e* (Paris 1961), p. 579.

b) Was Venice's Levantine trade of a scale to constitute a true monopoly?

c) Did the Venetians pursue a policy intended to discourage or even exclude other nations from the Levantine trade?

We shall try to find answers to these problems by consulting not only documents and texts in Venetian and other Italian archives, but Arabic sources as well.²

a) LEVANTINE TRADE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 15TH CENTURY.

At the end of the fourteenth and at the beginning of the fifteenth century several European nations had major shares in the Levantine trade, with flourishing colonies in the big coastal towns of Egypt and Syria, consulates and *fondachi*. The figures found in the documents of a Venetian notary in Alexandria to whom merchants of all European trading nations applied revealed that competition was lively. According to the documents of Antonielo de Vataciis referring to the second half of 1404 and the whole of 1405, the number of cogs (round ships) which anchored in the harbour of Alexandria was as listed on p. 7.

Certainly these data cannot be considered as true statistics, as we cannot be sure that the captains of all ships consulted our notary.

² The sources most often used are the following:

ASV (Archivio di Stato, Venice), Giudici di petizioni, Sentenze. - G. P., Sent.

ASV Cancellaria Inferiore, Notai, Busta 83, Cristoforo del Fiore - Cristoforo del Fiore.

ASV same series, Busta 222, Antonielo de Vataciis. - Ant. de Vataciis.

ASV same series, Busta 230, Nicolo Venier. - Nicolo Venier.

ASV Notarile 14832, Giacomo della Torre, Pt. I - Giacomo della Torre.

ASV Senato, Deliberazioni Mar. - Mar.

ASV Senato, Deliberazioni Mar. -Mar.

ASV Procuratori di San Marco, Commissarie miste, Busta 128a. - Arch. A. Zane.

ASV same series, Busta 180. - Arch. B. Dolfin.

ASG (Archivio di Stato, Genoa), Antico Comune 26: Cartularium introitus et exitus massariorum generalium communis Janue. - Ant. Com. 26.

ASG Caratorum Veterum no. 1552, 1553, 1556. - Car. Vet. 1552, 1553, 1556.

ASF (Archivio di Stato, Florence), Consoli del Mar. - Mar.

But they are sufficient to show the great role of Catalan and Genoese trade in Alexandria. It is true that most of these ships were of

	July-December 1404	1405
Catalans	1	7
Basques ³	2	
Provençals	1	
Genoese	3 ⁴	6
Pisans	1	
Venetians	1	1
Sicilians	1	4 ⁵
Maltese		1
Ragusans	1	1
Cypriots	1	
Rhodians		2
Pera	1	
unknown	1	2

small tonnage, but some had 400 butts.⁶ On the other hand, the data which we have culled from the acts of the Alexandria notary correspond very well to those which F. Melis collected from the archives of F. Datini referring to the port of Beirut. He found that, according to these records, the number of Venetian ships which anchored in Beirut in the years 1399-1408 amounted to 278, against 264 Genoese and 224 Catalan vessels.⁷ Even they show convincingly that at the end of the fourteenth century and at the beginning of

³ One from Bayonne.

⁴ One from Porto Maurizio.

⁵ One of these cogs, the Santa Maria de la Scala, a ship with three rudders, was also in Alexandria in July 1404. But it certainly did not remain there till April 1405, so two journeys were made.

⁶ G. Luzzatto concludes that the butt corresponded to 0,7-0,75 t, cf. *Per la storia delle costruzioni navali a Venezia nei secoli XV e XVI*, in « Studi di storia veneziana » (Padova 1954), p. 42 f; U. Tucci concluded that it was equal to 610 kg, cf. his paper *Un problema di metrologia navale: la botte veneziana*, in « Studi Veneziani IX » (1967), p. 222; F. Melis, dealing with documents which refer to shipping in the Western Mediterranean, is inclined to accept Heers' opinion that at least in Genoa the butt corresponded to less than half a ton, perhaps 476,5 kg, cfr. J. HEERS, *Gènes au XV^e siècle*, p. 269; F. MELIS, *Werner Sombart e i problemi della navigazione nel medio evo*, in « L'opera di Werner Sombart nel centenario della nascita » (Milano 1964), p. 95 ff.

⁷ *Note sur le mouvement du port de Beyrouth d'après la documentation florentine aux environs de 1450*, in « Sociétés et compagnies de commerce en Orient et dans l'océan indien », Actes du huitième colloque international d'histoire maritime (Paris 1970), pp. 371-373.

the fifteenth century the Venetians by no means outdid the other trading nations. In this period there was no Venetian supremacy in Levantine trade.

The data concerning the ships visiting the ports of Egypt and Syria in this period are supplemented by many notarial records dealing with the intense commercial activities of the Southern European trading nations.

At the beginning of the fifteenth century the Genoese apparently had two *fondachi* in Alexandria⁸ and many documents in the archives of Genoa or deeds drawn up by Venetian notaries in Alexandria and Damascus leave no doubt as to the considerable number of Genoese merchants who pursued their activities there at the beginning of the fifteenth century. To the true Genoese one must add many merchants from the neighbouring towns of Liguria, who probably enjoyed the same privileges and were active in the same branches. In these deeds one finds merchants from Ventimiglia, Albenga and Savona⁹ and sometimes reference is made to ships from Genoa and Savona sailing from Alexandria to Aigues-Mortes.¹⁰ In the official records of the Genoese authorities from this period an « *officium Cipri and Alexandrie* » is often mentioned. From these records one also learns that the Genoese authorities organised convoys of galleys to Cyprus and Alexandria.¹¹ As Genoese trade in Alexandria was very intensive the government of Genoa realized that it could use it as a source of income and in 1403 imposed a new tax of 1% on the commercial activities in the great Egyptian port. Apparently at the same time a similar tax was established for Genoese trade in Syria (drietus Syrie).¹² The Genoese and other

⁸ HEYD, *Histoire du commerce du Levant II*, p. 432.

⁹ Ant. de Vataciis, 25 Sept. 1405, 6 Oct. 1405; Nicolo Venier B, 2, f. 12a/13a, 31a/b, 32a/b.

¹⁰ Ant. de Vataciis, 1 Oct. 1405; G. P., Sent. 21, f. 19a ff.

¹¹ ASG Ant. Com. 26, pp. 36, 40, 44, 48 etc. These data contradict Heers' statement that Genoa never established galley lines connecting it with the ports of Egypt and Syria, cf. *Types de navires et spécialisation du trafic en Méditerranée à la fin du Moyen Age*, in « Le navire et l'économie maritime du Moyen Age au XVIII^e siècle, principalement en Méditerranée » (2^e colloque international d'histoire maritime, 1957) (Paris 1958), p. 114. But, surely, these galley convoys were less regular than those of the Venetians and later suspended.

¹² ASG Ant. Com. 26, pp. 43, 147.

Ligurian merchants sold great quantities of coral, Catalan textiles and other articles in the Near East.¹³ They traded not only in Alexandria, Damascus and Beirut, but also in Cairo, Acre and other towns.¹⁴ In that period Chios had become a main emporium of Genoese trade in the Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean: spices bought in Alexandria were shipped to Chios and from there they were sent to Genoa and elsewhere.¹⁵ Rhodes played a similar role. The Genoese merchants exported various products of the Western Mediterranean, such as coral, textiles etc. via Rhodes to the Near East.¹⁶

The documents in the archives of Bouche-de-Rhône point to the great volume of Marseille's Levantine trade at the beginning of the fifteenth century. The records of the Italian notaries in the Near Eastern emporia too show that then the Provençals and French had still a great share in Levantine trade. In the files of Antonielo de Vataciis one finds the names of many merchants of Avignon, Montpellier and Narbonne.¹⁷ The French merchants did not pay short visits to Alexandria, Damascus and other Near Eastern towns, but had real colonies there. In Alexandria they had three *fondachi*. One was called the *fondaco* « of Avignon and France », or « of the French, the merchants of Avignon and Montpellier » or simply « of the French ».¹⁸ The second was the *fondaco* of Marseilles¹⁹ and the third was that of the merchants of Narbonne (being in the same building as that of the Catalans).²⁰ There were also, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, several French consulates in Alexandria: a

¹³ Nicolo Venier B, 2, f. 1a, 2a ff.

¹⁴ Cristoforo del Fiore I, f. 3a (a. 1425); G. P., Sent. 78, f. 2a ff. (a. 1435).

¹⁵ Nicolo Venier B, 2, f. 27b, 33b, 40a ff.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 2a-4a (a. 1417), 10a/11a (a. 1418-19), 42a (a. 1421), 43b ff. (a. 1422), 50b (a. 1422). For a later period cf. MARINO SANUTO, *Diarii III*, col. 1199 X, col. 95.

¹⁷ E. BARATIER-F. RAYNAUD, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille*, II, pp. 229 ff., 238 ff.; Ant. de Vataciis, 1 July 1404, 3 July 1404, 6 July 1404, 11 August 1404, 8 November 1404 etc.

¹⁸ Ant. de Vataciis, 6 July 1404, 4 Oct. 1404, 6 Oct. 1404, 30 Oct. 1404.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8 Nov. 1404.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 29 July 1404. That Western pilgrims sojourned in this *fondaco*, cf. *Le Saint voyage de Jherusalem du seigneur d'Anglure* (Paris 1878), p. 78, does not prove, as the notarial acts show, that the traders of Narbonne were no longer active in Alexandria, a view expressed by Heyd II, p. 433.

consulate of Avignon, Montpellier and others, often called simply the « consulate of the French », ²¹ further, a consulate of Marseilles ²² and a consulate of Narbonne. ²³ The records of Venetian notaries also contain the names of French merchants who lived in Damascus in the second decade of the fifteenth century ²⁴ and point to the frequency of voyages from the Near Eastern ports to Aigues-Mortes. ²⁵

The excellent research carried on by Mlle Cl. Carrère in the archives of Barcelona reveals the intensity of Catalan trade in the Near East in this period. At the end of the fourteenth century the number of Catalan galleys which visited the ports of Egypt and Syria every year varied from three to five and at the beginning of the fifteenth century on an average 7 galleys and cogs visited Egypt and Syria. ²⁶ The notarial deeds drawn up by Antonielo de Vataciis contain many details concerning the activities of Catalan traders in Egypt in the first years of the fifteenth century, ²⁷ while those of Giacomo della Torre mention Catalan merchants in Damascus in the years 1411-1413. ²⁸

The commercial relations between Naples, Amalfi and especially such Sicilian towns as Palermo, Messina and Syracuse, and the Moslem Near East were never interrupted throughout the Middle Ages. In the first half of the fifteenth century Naples had a *fondaco* and a consulate in Alexandria and there were also merchants from Amalfi and Gaeta in Alexandria. ²⁹ Puglia supplied Egypt and even Syria with olive oil in the fifteenth century. ³⁰ The merchants of Ancona too were very active in the Levantine trade in the first half of the fifteenth century. They had a *fondaco* and a consulate in

21 Ant. de Vataciis, 3 July 1404, 8 July 1404, 4 Oct. 1404, 6 Oct. 1404, 30 Oct. 1404.

22 *Ibid.*, 27 Sept. 1404.

23 *Ibid.*, 8 Nov. 1404.

24 Giacomo della Torre no. 7, 9, 10.

25 Ant. de Vataciis, 11 Aug. 1404; 27 Aug. 1404; Nicolo Venier B, 2, f. 42b ff.; Cristoforo del Fiore I, f. 4b ff.; see also G. P., Sent. 10, f. 87 f.

26 *Barcelone centre économique 1380-1462* (Paris 1967), pp. 644, 851.

27 14 Aug. 1404, 1 Oct. 1404 etc.

28 Giacomo della Torre no. 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 14, 16-20, 24.

29 Ant. de Vataciis, 2 July 1404, 12 Sept. 1404, 21 April 1405, 22 Nov. 1405; Nicolo Venier A, f. 22b f., 23b, B, 2, f. 52a ff.; cf. Heyd II, p. 432.

30 Cristoforo del Fiore I, f. 1b f. (a. 1425); G. P., Sent. 34, f. 39a ff. 52, f. 85b 150, f. 71b ff. 176, f. 1a ff.

Alexandria from 1396.³¹ Apparently it was the consul of Ancona who represented the merchants of Ragusa in Alexandria in this period.³²

b) THE DECLINE OF VENICE'S COMPETITORS.

Whereas at the beginning of the fifteenth century Levantine trade offered wide scope for the commercial enterprises of all Southern European trading nations and the Venetians had not yet obtained any real supremacy, this situation changed considerably and progressively in the subsequent period. The commercial activities of all European nations, besides Venice, were irregular, often interrupted and the activities of some were more or less continuously declining. This is a fact which scholars dealing with the trade of certain regions or towns have already stressed and any new research in the numerous documents to be found in the Italian archives will confirm this conclusion.

Throughout the fifteenth century Genoese ships exported great quantities of textiles from Flanders, England and other countries to the ports of North Africa and Egypt. They also imported into Egypt olive oil from the Western basin of the Mediterranean.³³ But there can be no doubt as to the continuous decline of Genoese trade in Egypt and Syria in the later Middle Ages. The Genoese had indeed less interest in spices. The cargo inventories of Genoese ships coming from the Near East at the end of the fourteenth century contain smaller quantities of spices than those brought by the galleys of Venice.³⁴ The decline of Genoese Levantine trade in the first half of the fifteenth century is obvious.³⁵ However the Genoese trading colonies in Egypt and in Syria did not disappear.

³¹ E. SPADOLINI, *Il commercio, le arti e la loggia de' mercanti in Ancona* (Portocivitanova 1904), p. 10 ff.

³² Ant. de Vataciis, 22 Sept. 1404.

³³ R. BRUNDSCHVIG, *Deux récits de voyage inédits en Afrique du Nord au XV^e siècle* (Paris 1936), pp. 135, 164; MARINO SANUTO, *Diarii III*, col. 1123.

³⁴ See my *Les métaux précieux et la balance des paiements du Proche-Orient à la basse époque* (Paris 1971), p. 75 f.

³⁵ HEERS, *Gènes au XV^e siècle*, pp. 374, 377 ff.

The Burgundian traveller Bertrandon de la Broquière found Genoese merchants in Beirut and Damascus in 1432. Some of them acquired for the sultan of Cairo the military slaves who made up his army in their colonies in the Crimea.³⁶ Data to be found in Genoese documents concerning the payment of taxes and commercial activities in Egypt and Syria in the second half of the fifteenth century leave no doubt as to their continuation. They are supplemented by notarial deeds testifying to the purchase of spices and other articles in Damascus in the middle of the century.³⁷ But just as the Genoese traders were not very interested in the spices offered in Egypt and in Syria, so were they less eager to buy Syrian cotton. Although they bought certain quantities of it³⁸ and also of Egyptian cotton,³⁹ they preferred to acquire this raw material, so necessary for the developing European textile industry, in Turkey.⁴⁰ The volume of the trade of Chios, Genoa's great emporium in the Aegean, steadily increased in the first half of the fifteenth century. The taxes paid to its government by the merchants amounted to 120,000 gold coins a year.⁴¹ According to the registers of the custom services, in 1445 four ships arrived in Genoa which had visited the ports of Egypt or Syria. They had, however, continued their journeys to Chios, Rhodes or Tunis and loaded other merchandise there. In

³⁶ *Le Voyage d'outremer de Bertrandon de la Broquière*, publ. par Ch. Schefer (Paris 1892), pp. 30, 32, 68.

³⁷ ASG S. Giorgio, Sala 38/54, a loose paper between f. 71 and 72 bearing the date 13 Oct. 1458 (The MS. has been published by J. HEERS, *Le livre des comptes de Giovanni Piccamiglio*, Paris 1959 where I did not find this text, but cf. there p. 232, 248, 249 other notes about the trade with Alexandria); ASG S. Giorgio, Div. Off. no. 26 (2252), f. 197a (a. 1473); Notarial acts: Borromeo Rizzo I, no. 74 (import of cloth in Damascus in 1447); Ant. Fazio 13 (2), no. 64 (trade in Acre and Damascus in 1449-50), no. 74 (export of coral from Rhodes to Beirut on a Genoese ship in 1454 and its sale in Damascus by Genoese); Branca Bagnara 10, no. 20 (purchase of cinnamon and diamonds in Damascus before 1460); Oberto Foglietta IX, no. 30 (ship hired for journey to Alexandria in 1464) (Heers, p. 374 erroneously: 1449).

³⁸ *Le métaux précieux*, p. 120 ff.

³⁹ Archives B. Dolfin Ba 181, fasc. 23, notes of 22 Jan. 1418: colli 12 gotoni.

⁴⁰ Considerable quantities of cotton were loaded on Genoese ships in Chios, cf. ASG Car. Vet. 1552, ff. 125a, 126b, 127a, 143a, 148a; G. Musso, *Nuovi documenti dell'archivio di Stato di Genova sui Genovesi e il Levante nel secondo Quattrocento*, « Rassegna degli archivi di Stato 27 » (1967), pp. 484, 488.

⁴¹ G. PISTARINO, *Chio dei Genovesi*, « Studi Medievali », 1969, pt. I, p. 15.

1458 and in 1507 too only one ship from Beirut arrived in Genoa.⁴² Genoa could not compete with Venice in Egypt and Syria not only because it had fewer markets for spices. Its traders had never succeeded in supplanting the merchants of Provence and Languedoc in Northern France, in order to make this country its exclusive market as the Venetians had succeeded in doing in Germany. The small quantities of spices which the Genoese sold in Southern Italy, Spain and England were mostly acquired in Chios and Rhodes. In fact, Genoa could not offer the Near Eastern countries the great quantities of metals, especially silver and copper, which they urgently needed. Venice obtained them from Bosnia, Serbia and Germany.⁴³ So Genoa's Oriental trade became, of necessity, more and more directed to the countries around the Black Sea, where it had built up a true thalassocracy and enjoyed commercial hegemony.

What has been said about the gradual decline of Genoa's Levantine trade is true for almost all other « trading nations » of Southern Europe, besides Venice.

E. Baratier has shown that Marseilles' Levantine trade was discontinued after a flourishing period in about 1380-1385. Its revival at the beginning of the fifteenth century lasted only a short time.⁴⁴ The records of the Venetian notaries in Alexandria and Damascus, who were often the only Western notaries to whom European merchants could apply, shed light on the decline of the Levantine trade of other towns of Southern France. Bertrand de la Broquière mentions a galley from Narbonne which visited

⁴² ASG Car. Vet. 1552, ff. 45A, 124a, 127a, 131a, 134a. HEERS, *Gènes au XV^e siècle*, pp. 374, 376 (whose statements should be corrected); ASG S. Giorgio, Sala 38/54, ff. 4b, 17b; Car. Vet. no. 1556, f. 36a ff. Genoa's government was aware of the decline of its Levantine trade. In 1496 it conferred on the *Officiales Alexandrie* the right to appoint the consul « propter que negociatio loci illius et totius egypti ac syrie solitā frequentationem et cursum habere possit que a longo tempore nec dum plurimum diminuta sed in toto extincta videtur », ASG S. Giorgio, Primi Cancellieri Ba 88, p. 322.

⁴³ The disadvantage was surely, not absolute. Spain still produced silver and even Venetian merchants bought it for export to the Moslem Near East, see the accounts of the *fraterna Giacomo & Polo Sanudo*, years 1449, in ASV, Miscellanea di carte non appartenenti a nessun archivio, Ba 29, f. 4b-5a. But the quantities of Balkan and German silver which the Venetian obtained were incomparably greater.

⁴⁴ *Histoire du commerce de Marseille*, II, pp 229 ff., 240 f.

Alexandria and Beirut during his stay in Syria.⁴⁵ It is also known that the consulates of Marseilles in the Near Eastern emporia were not closed throughout the fifteenth century.⁴⁶ But in the numerous notarial deeds drawn up in Damascus in 1417-19, and in Alexandria in 1420-22 and in 1425-26 the references to French and Provençal merchants are much more rare than in those dating from the beginning of the fifteenth century,⁴⁷ although one or two Provençal ships anchored from time to time in the harbour of Alexandria. The character and volume of French Levantine trade did not change until the end of the fifteenth century.⁴⁸ The enterprise of Jacques Coeur who in the middle of the century attempted to establish intensive and regular trade between France and the Moslem Near East failed. Although in 1456 the travels of the « French galleys » to the Near East were re-established and also French cogs sometimes visited Egyptian and Syrian ports, the volume of the French Levantine trade remained rather limited. In the second half of the fifteenth century the number of the French traders in Egypt and in Syria was, according to Venetian documents, insignificant.⁴⁹

Catalonia's Levantine trade declined progressively from about 1420. In the third decade of the fifteenth century the number of the Catalan ships which visited the ports of Egypt and Syria every year was no more than three and in the fourth decade — only one. In the middle of the fifteenth century Catalan ships very seldom anchored in these ports. The commercial relations between Catalonia and the Moslem Near East were again intensified in the second half of the century, but they did not reach the scale of the beginning of the century.⁵⁰ Once more records of the Venetian notaries in the Near East confirm the conclusions drawn from the documents

⁴⁵ *Le Voyage d'outremer*, p. 32.

⁴⁶ Nicolo Venier B, 2, f. 45a ff.; ASG Arch. segr. 2774 (mat. pol.) sub 8 Aug. 1476; G. Musso, *Nuovi documenti*, p. 492.

⁴⁷ Nicolo Venier B, 2, f. 42b ff.; Isarne Pellagalli de Montpellier and *ibid.* on a merchant of Narbonne who imported honey into Egypt and further *ibid.* f. 45a ff.; Cristoforo del Fiore, I, f. 6b ff.

⁴⁸ MARINO SANUTO, *Diarii III*, col. 1123 VII, col. 72.

⁴⁹ Joh. Pradal of Montpellier went to Damascus in 1462, see G. P., Sent. 138, f. 164b f. A merchant from Montferrat who sojourned in 1471 in Aleppo is mentioned in G. P., Sent. 186, f. 25b ff.

⁵⁰ CL. CARRÈRE, *Barcelone*, pp. 646, 855 ff.

in the archives of Barcelona. Notarial deeds dating from the third decade of the fifteenth century seldom refer to the activities of a merchant from Barcelona or any other town of Catalonia.⁵¹ The number of Catalan merchants who lived in the 1460's and 1470's in Syria must also have been rather small, judging by the deeds of a Venetian notary.⁵² The decline of Catalan trade in the Moslem Near East probably resulted at least to some extent from the raids made by Catalan pirates. The fleets of the king of Aragon and Catalonia also attacked the ports of Egypt and of Syria.⁵³ In the fifteenth century the Catalans became the pirates par excellence in the Central and Eastern basins of the Mediterranean and often the peaceful traders were held responsible for their activities. The Mamluk authorities confiscated the merchandise which, they were told, belonged to Catalans.⁵⁴

The scale of the commercial relations between Southern Italy and the Mamluk kingdom in the middle and the second half of the fifteenth century cannot have been great, although they were never completely interrupted.⁵⁵ Sicily fulfilled the role of intermediary between the different economic regions around the Mediterranean, also exporting to Egypt certain quantities of its own products, such as molasses. But the Sicilian towns were the main emporia where foreign traders, Venetians, Genoese and Catalans exchanged their goods. The Levantine trade of Ancona almost came to a standstill after the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453.⁵⁶ The voyages of merchants from Ancona to the Near East were not discontinued altogether, but references to them in the documents of the second half of the fifteenth century are much more rare than in preceding periods.

The decline of Ancona's Levantine trade was also, to some degree, the consequence of the prosperity of the commercial activi-

⁵¹ Nicolo Venier B, 2, ff. 30a, 46b ff.

⁵² Cristoforo del Fiore VI, records of 2 May 1461, 14 June 1461, 5 Nov. 1462.

⁵³ 'Abdalbāsīt b. Khalīl, ar-Rauḍ al-bāsīm, MS. Vaticana 729, f. 17a.

⁵⁴ See G. P., Sent. 48, f. 102a ff. 52, f. 8b f. 79, f. 121b 155a ff., 157a f. 80, f. 147b ff. 82, f. 52a 84, f. 118b ff. 93, f. 157b; Nicolo Venier B, 2, f. 14a ff., 16a ff., 19a f., 40a ff., 42b ff., 46b ff.

⁵⁵ ASV Giudici di Petiziōn, Terminazioni 11, f. 29b (a. 1476).

⁵⁶ M. NATALUCCI, *Ancora attraverso i secoli*, I (Città di Castello 1960), p. 514f.

ties of Florence and Ragusa. For a long time Ancona had served Florence as a supplementary port. The Florentine merchants had colonies in Alexandria and in Damascus from the beginning of the fifteenth century and even earlier. They exported their own textiles there and also the products of the textile industries of England, Flanders, Catalonia and France. On the other hand they bought spices and exported other Oriental articles to Aigues-Mortes and elsewhere.⁵⁷ In 1422 they obtained a privilege from Sultan Barsbay.⁵⁸ From that time they had a consulate in Alexandria⁵⁹ and in the middle of the century the *Signoria* organised a regular galley line to Alexandria and the ports of Palestine and Syria, Jaffa and Beirut. In 1444 the decision was made to send two galleys to Syria and Egypt every year which were to anchor in the ports indicated before departure.⁶⁰ At the same time the tariff on the freight to be paid for all articles was established.⁶¹ In 1447 the ports to be visited by the galleys were finally fixed.⁶² Besides the galleys of the Alexandria-Beirut line, the Florentine also had a kind of « *galea di trafego* », as the galleys visiting the ports of Northern Africa often continued their voyages as far as Alexandria.⁶³ Then in 1460 the tariff on the freights of the galleys was reduced.⁶⁴ However, all the efforts were in vain and the Florentines did not succeed in maintaining a regular galley line to Egypt and Syria.⁶⁵ But it would be a

⁵⁷ See the tariff of ship freights in G. MÜLLER, *Documenti sulle relazioni delle città toscane coll'Oriente cristiano e coi Turchi* (Firenze 1879), p. 357 f.; G. P., Sent. 21, f. 19a ff.

⁵⁸ The Venetian report in PREDELLI, *Libri commemoriali IV*, p. 45. Predelli has omitted some passages (in the MS vol. 11, f. 91a/b) according to which the sultan promised the Florentines « che siano honorati più che Venitiani e Genovesi etc. ». But these are mere phrases.

⁵⁹ Cristoforo del Fiore I, f. 13a ff.; G. P., Sent. 54, f. 36a ff. 107, f. 133b ff.

⁶⁰ ASF Mar III, f. 71a f. (quotation incomplete and inexact by M. E. MALLETT, *The Florentine galleys in the fifteenth century*, Oxford 1967, p. 64).

⁶¹ MÜLLER, *Documenti*, p. 358 f. The text has no date. Müller supposed that it dates from 1444, but it may be that the tariff was fixed in 1442 when that referring to voyages to the Western Mediterranean was established.

⁶² Müller, p. 291 from Mar III, f. 78a. This text is shorter than Mar IV, 4, f. 2b, although there are no significant differences.

⁶³ Mar III, f. 122b (quotation inexact by Mallett p. 65 f. who does not say that this was customary before the decree of 1458).

⁶⁴ MÜLLER, p. 351 f.

⁶⁵ MALLETT, *op. cit.*, pp. 63 ff., 153 ff.

great mistake to explain Florence's small share in the Levantine trade mainly in terms of the failure to establish a regular galley line to the ports of Egypt and Syria. The products which Florence could offer on the Oriental markets, those of its own renowned textile industry above all, were not sufficient for the acquisition of quantities of spices comparable to those purchased by the Venetians. The European merchants, as is well known, paid for only a part of the spices and the other Indian goods in cash. Secondly, the Florentines had no markets where they could sell great quantities of spices. So they could not compete with the Venetians in the Near East. Furthermore, this region probably had only minor importance for the Florentine traders who marketed their fine cloth there. They could employ Genoese agents or Provençal ships.⁶⁶ Ragusa's Levantine trade did not decline, it even increased. But it was not regular and its volume was incomparably smaller than that of the other trading nations at the beginning of the fifteenth century.

c) THE VENETIAN GALLEY SERVICE.

Whereas the Levantine trade of most European trading nations declined from the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Venetians considered the spice trade as one of the major branches of their international trade and made great efforts to become the main supplier of Central Europe and great parts of Eastern Europe with these and other Indian goods. The great tenacity which characterised their commercial policy in the Near East expressed itself first of all in the maintenance of a regular galley service to the main ports of Egypt and Syria. The Venice-Alexandria line functioned regularly from 1346, that of Beirut from 1374. The service was sometimes suspended owing to political circumstances or other reasons, for a year or even more. But these were rare exceptions. The striking feature of the galley service was its regularity and this was undoubtedly one of the reasons for Venice's great success.

⁶⁶ See F. MELLIS, *Werner Sombart* etc., pp. 91, 107, 112 f.

The following table comprises data concerning the two convoys of galleys which visited Alexandria and Beirut in the period under discussion.⁶⁷

	To Alexandria	Galleys	To Beirut	Source
1389	2		4	Misti 41, f. 9b ff.
1390	—		2+suppl. galley	<i>ib.</i> f. 110a
1391	2		3	Misti 42, f. 3a
1392	3		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 63a ff.
1393	3		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 113b ff.
1394	3		4	Misti 43, f. 8b ff.
1395	3+suppl. cog ⁶⁸		5	<i>ib.</i> f. 63b f.
1396	3 » » »		5	<i>ib.</i> f. 133b ff.
1397	3 » » »		5	Misti 44, f. 5a ff.
1398	3 » » »		5	<i>ib.</i> f. 47a ff.
1399	3 » » »		5	<i>ib.</i> f. 108b ff.
1400	3 » » »		6	Misti 45, f. 17a ff.
1401	3 » » »		—	<i>ib.</i> f. 90a f.
1402	4		2	Misti 46, f. 31a ff.
1403 ⁶⁹	—		—	
1404	2 » » »		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 143b ff.
1405	3		3	Misti 47, f. 9a ff.
1406	3		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 56a f.
1407	3		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 118b
1408	4		4	Misti 48, f. 12b ff.
1409	4		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 82a ff.
1410	4		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 144b ff., 151a f.
1411	4		4	Misti 49, f. 31b ff.
1412	4		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 125b ff.
1413	3		4	Misti 50, f. 3b ff.

⁶⁷ The data in the chronique of Morosini referring to the years 1404-33 have been published by F. C. LANE, *The Merchant Marine of the Venetian Republic*, in his « Venice and history, collected papers » (Baltimore 1966), p. 148. A graphic synopsis has been given by A. TENENTI-C. VIVANTI, *Le film d'un grand système de navigation: les galères marchandes vénitienes XIV^e-XVI^e siècles*, in « Annales E. S. C. 16 » (1961), pp. 83-86. Tables for the years 1400-12 and 1443-56 are to be found in the paper by F. THIRIET, *Quelques observations sur le trafic des galées vénitienes d'après les chiffres des incanti (XIV^e-XV^e siècles)*, « Studi in onore di Amintore Fanfani » (Milano 1962), III, pp. 511, 516. The average number of the galleys on the Alexandria and Beirut lines in every decade has been calculated for the period stretching from 1400 to 1529 by R. ROMANO-A. TENENTI-U. TUCCI, *Venise et la route du cap 1499-1517*, in « Mediterraneo e Oceano Indiano », Atti del Sesto Colloquio Internazionale di Storia Marittima, tenuto a Venezia dal 20 al 29 settembre 1962 (Firenze 1970), p. 111. Comparing our survey with the tables in these papers one will become aware of some (minor) differences.

⁶⁸ When the quantity of spices acquired was too great (for the galleys), a supplementary galley or cog was sent to load it.

⁶⁹ In this year even the galley lines to the West functioned only partially: the galleys, usually going to Flanders, visited only the ports of the Western Mediterranean.

(Continued)

	To Alexandria	Galleys	To Beirut	Source
1414	3		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 133b ff.
1415	3		4	Misti 51, f. 29a ff.
1416	4		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 135b ff.
1417	4		4	Misti 52, f. 22a f.
1418	3		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 101b ff.
1419	3		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 180b ff.
1420	3		4	Misti 53, f. 53a ff.
1421	3		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 158b ff.
1422	3		4	Misti 54, f. 35a ff.
1423	3		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 116b ff.
1424	3		4	Misti 55, f. 31a ff.
1425	1+1 ⁷⁰		2+2	<i>ib.</i> f. 120b ff., 147a ff.
1426	3		3	Misti 56, f. 32a ff.
1427	—		—	
1428	3		3	Misti 57, f. 11b ff.
1429		6 ⁷¹		<i>ib.</i> f. 117a ff.
1430	3		3 ⁷²	<i>ib.</i> f. 225a ff.
1431		6 ⁷³		Misti 58, f. 70a ff.
1432		6		<i>ib.</i> f. 138a f.
1433	4+suppl. galley		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 204b, 213b ff.
1434	4		4	Misti 59, f. 56b ff.
1435	2		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 119a ff.
1436	—		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 169b ff.
1437		6		Misti 60, f. 29a ff.
1438	—		—	
1439	3		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 157a ff.
1440	3		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 223a ff.
1441 ⁷⁴	—		—	
1442	3		3	Mar I, f. 103a f.
1443	3		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 176b, 177a
1444	3		3+suppl. galley	Mar II, f. 8b ff., 32b
1445	4		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 84a ff.
1446	4		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 152b ff.
1447	4		—	Mar III, f. 26b ff.
1448	5+2 suppl. galley		—	<i>ib.</i> f. 71a ff., 91b ff
1449	3		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 139b ff.
1450	3		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 197b ff.
1451	4		4	Mar IV, f. 62a ff.
1452	4		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 132b ff.
1453	3		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 188b ff.

⁷⁰ There were two convoys in this year, one in June and one in the autumn.

⁷¹ All the galleys were to visit both Alexandria and Beirut.

⁷² One of the galleys was to transport pilgrims.

⁷³ All the galleys were to visit Alexandria and then Beirut, and from there the captain was to dispatch one galley to Jaffa and two to Tripoli and Lattakia.

⁷⁴ In this year the government of Venice decided to suspend the galley service to Egypt and Syria, see Mar I, f. 45b.

(Continued)

	To Alexandria	Galleys	To Beirut	Source
1454	3		3	Mar V, f. 38a ff.
1455	3		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 92b ff.
1456	4		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 138a ff.
1457	3		3	Mar VI, f. 21a ff.
1458	3		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 68b ff.
1459	3		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 124a ff.
1460	3		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 187a ff.
1461	3		4	Mar VII, f. 15b ff.
1462	3		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 61b ff.
1463	3		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 117b ff.
1464	3		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 171b ff.
1465 ⁷⁵	—		—	
1466	3		3	Mar VIII, f. 77a
1467	4		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 127b ff.
1468	3		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 173a f.
1469 ⁷⁶				
1470	4		4	ASV Incanti I, f. 9a ff.
1471	4		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 16a ff.
1472	4		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 20a f.
1473	4		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 23b
1474	4		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 29a ff.
1475	4		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 36a ff.
1476	4		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 42a ff.
1477	4		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 49a ff.
1478	4		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 55b ff.
1479	4		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 64a ff.
1480	3		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 69b ff.
1481	4		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 80b ff.
1482	4		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 87a ff.
1483	4		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 94a ff.
1484	4		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 100a ff.
1485	6		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 107a f.
1486	4		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 117a f.
1487	6		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 122b
1488	6		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 129b
1489	4		3	ASV Incanti II, f. 5b f.
1490	4		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 17a ff.
1491	6		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 27b ff.
1492	5		4	<i>ib.</i> f. 281 f.
1493	4		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 36a ff.
1494	4		3	<i>ib.</i> f. 43b ff.
1495	2		2	<i>ib.</i> f. 1'a ff.
1496	3+suppl. cog		2	<i>ib.</i> f. 2'a ff.

⁷⁵ Until the sultan answered the demands put forward by a Venetian ambassador, the government would delay the departure of the galleys, although the galea de trafego would visit Alexandria and Beirut, see Mar VIII, f. 25b.

⁷⁶ For this year we have found no references.

By adding the numbers of the galleys of both lines for five year periods one obtains the following totals:

	Alexandria	Beirut	Joint convoys	Total
1391-1395	14	20		34
1396-1400	15+5 suppl. cogs	26		41+5 cogs
1401-1405	12+1 » »	8		20+1 »
1411-1415	17	19		36
1416-1420	17	18		35
1421-1425	14	20		34
1426-1430	9	9	6	24
1431-1435	11	12	12	35
1436-1440	6	10	6	22
1441-1445	13	15		28
1446-1450	23	12		35
1451-1455	17	18		35
1456-1460	16	18		34
1461-1465	12	16		28
1466-1470	14	15		29
1471-1475	20	17		37
1476-1480	19	15		34
1481-1485	22	16		38
1486-1490	24	17		41
1491-1495	21	16		37

The number of galleys visiting the ports of Egypt and Syria in a five-year cycle varied, according to our tables, from 28 to 34 on the average. In some periods it rose to 38-40, as in 1396-1400, 1406-1410, 1471-1475 and 1481-1490. The variations were due to political circumstances, such as relations with the Sultan of Cairo. The invasion of Syria by Tamerlane resulted in a considerable decrease in the number of galleys going to that country — whereas in the last decade of the fourteenth century 4-6 galleys visited Beirut every year, there were in 1401-1405 altogether 8.⁷⁷ In the mid 1430's a long-term crisis in Venice's Levantine trade was caused by the measures taken by Sultan Barsbay in an attempt to monopolise the spice trade. Studying the data concerning the Venetian galley line to Egypt and Syria in the second half of the fifteenth century and comparing them with those referring to the

⁷⁷ The effects of the Tatar invasion on Venetian trade in Syria are confirmed in several sources, cf. G. P., Sent. 11, f. 45a ff. 17, f. 60a 18, f. 70a f.

end of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth, one becomes aware of a considerable change: when the commercial activities were resumed on the previous scale, the number of the galleys visiting Beirut diminished and became fewer than those visiting Alexandria. Although the galleys visiting Beirut (and other ports of Syria) at the end of the fourteenth century and in the first half of the fifteenth century had always been smaller than those going to Alexandria,⁷⁸ one must conclude from this change that the importance of the cargoes brought from Alexandria had grown considerably. The most important of the spices exported from Alexandria was always pepper. Another fact which emerges is the increase in the number of galley convoys in the year preceding the discovery of the sea route to India. Their number was indeed greater in those years than for many decades before. In 1471-1475, in 1481-1485 and in 1491-1495 their number rose to 37 and 38, as it had been at the end of the fourteenth century and between 1406-1410 when the Venetian Levantine trade had first reached its apogee.

One cannot maintain that the galley traffic increased much in the fifteenth century, but it was regular and at least did not decrease. Against 307 galleys which visited Syria and Egypt in the first half of the century, there were 309 in its second half, till the fatal year 1496.

But although there was no change in the number of the galleys, the quantities of Indian spices they transported had very much

⁷⁸ According to the decisions of the Venetian Senate the galleys sent to Beirut were always « *de mensuris Romanie* », whereas those going to Alexandria were « *de mensura grossa de melioribus et sufficientioribus que sint in nro arsenatu* », cf. the decisions for the convoys of 1389-1401, 1409, 1410, 1443 etc. The galleys going to the Greek ports (Romania) had then a tonnage (as far as the cargo is taken into consideration) of no more than 140-165 tons, the big ones of more than 200, cf. F. C. LANE, *Venetian shipping through the commercial revolution*, in « *Venice and history* », p. 5, note 5. The great difference between the galleys of the Alexandria and Beirut lines is also shown by the sums paid for their lease. In the years 1400-12 41 galleys to Alexandria fetched 46,710 ducats and the same number of galleys going to Beirut only 25,000, cf. THIRIET, *Quelques observations sur le trafic des galées vénitienes*, p. 511. Sometimes two or three « *de mensura grossa* » and one or two « *de mensura illarum Romanie* », were sent to Beirut, cf. the decisions for 1417, 1418 and 1442. But also at the end of the fifteenth century big galleys were destined for the Alexandria convoy and small ones for that of Beirut, cf. the decisions for 1489 and 1490.

increased, because the galleys used in the second half of the fifteenth century were much bigger than those of the fourteenth century. The big galleys had a tonnage of 1000-1500 butts (600-900 tons), whereas the galleys of the fourteenth century had no more than 600-700.⁷⁹

d) VENETIAN SUPREMACY AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE DECAY OF ORIENTAL INDUSTRY AND TRADE.

Although the galley service had been vital to the success of Venice's Levantine trade, it was only one of its causes. If the Venetians succeeded in the first half of the fifteenth century in outdoing their competitors and in establishing their supremacy in the Levantine trade, this was to a certain extent the consequence of changes in the economic and social structures of the Near Eastern countries. The geographical situation of Venice, the regularity of the galley service, its commercial relations with regions which supplied great quantities of metals and which were also markets for the Oriental articles — all these advantages would not have been sufficient to obtain supremacy in the Levantine trade and the enjoyment of economic prosperity which survived the great shock of the discovery of the Cape route. The interrelation between social and economic phenomena in the two different civilisations has apparently not been taken into consideration by the historians of Venice and of European economics in the Middle Ages.

Two great changes had occurred in the Oriental world: the old industries had fallen into decay and the merchant class had suffered a crushing blow from the government of the Mamluk sultans. Without analysing these two developments, which took place in the second half of the fourteenth century and the first half of the fifteenth century, one cannot understand the great expansion of Venice's Levantine trade.

⁷⁹ THIRIET, *art. cit.*, p. 513.

Most branches of the textile industries of Irak, Syria and especially Egypt — whose products had once been renowned for their excellent quality and exported to all countries around the Mediterranean — had been in decline for a long time. The consequences of the Tartar invasion of Irak in the middle of the thirteenth century had been disastrous for its industries. The industries of Syria lost a great part of their specialised workers when Tamerlane exiled skilled craftsmen to Central Asia. In fact only the bocassin industry survived. But it would be wrong to explain the decline of Near Eastern industries simply or mainly in terms of the effect of invasions by foreign armies, although this is indeed the explanation given by medieval chroniclers and even by some modern orientalists. We are told, for example, that the textile industries in Lower Egypt ceased to exist when the Delta was invaded by the Crusaders at the beginning of the thirteenth century. But if this industry had been profitable, the factories would have been opened once more, when the enemy had retreated, perhaps in some other place.

The decay of the textile industries in the Near East was mainly the outcome of technological stagnation. The factories were not closed everywhere at the same time, but there was a progressive decline, for the Oriental industries could not withstand the competition of the industries of Western Europe which had made remarkable technological progress. The automatic fulling mill driven by water, the great innovation of the thirteenth century, did not remain unknown in the Near East, but it was not used in the textile industry. It seems that even the spinning wheel was not introduced there, whereas it was employed in Germany and in Northern France from the second half of the thirteenth century. Apparently a third innovation, the treadle-loom, was also unknown in the Near East. Such technological stagnation was probably brought about by the establishment of monopolies. When the private industries were suppressed, the managers of the state factories had no interest in making innovations, for there was no more competition. Then the factories had to be closed and the import of European textiles became a real example of dumping. Italian

and Catalan merchants offered great quantities of textiles, of all kinds and prices, on the Near Eastern markets. In this context the report of Marino Sanuto on the import of textiles in the Near East in 1500 should be quoted. According to the Venetian historian a Genoese ship brought 4600 pieces of textiles to Alexandria while three French boats brought 13,000.⁸⁰

A study of the development of another Oriental industry which once played a great role in the economic life of the Near East, leads to the same conclusion. Up to the end of the fourteenth century Egypt and Syria could export great quantities of sugar to both Eastern and European countries.⁸¹ Then the sugar factories declined in both countries⁸² and they began to import molasses and even good sugar from Sicily and other countries.⁸³ On the reasons for the decay of the sugar industry in the Near East, Arabic historians supply us with detailed information which leaves no doubt: it was mainly due to the encroachment of the Sultan and his sons who first suppressed free competition within the country and later proved incapable, with a corrupt administration, of competing with the sugar imported from Cyprus and Sicily where this industry flourished in that period.⁸⁴

There were also other industries which in the later Middle Ages had produced for export and then, after the Crusades, fell into decay. One such industry was paper manufacture — in the fifteenth century paper was imported by Italian merchants in the

⁸⁰ *Diarii* III, coll. 942, 1199.

⁸¹ al-Makrizi, *as-Sulūk* I, p. 383 f.; *Ibn al-'Abdārī, al-Madkhal* (Cairo 1929), IV, p. 65; al-Kalkashandī, *Subh al-a'shā* V, p. 296; HEERS, *Il commercio nel Mediterraneo alla fine del sec. XIV e nei primi anni del XV*, « ASI 113 » (1955), pp. 172, 174, 175, 185.

⁸² See *Ibn Dukmāk, al-Intisār* (Cairo 1893), IV, pp. 41-46 (a text which shows clearly that the explanation given by some scholars is erroneous: the sugar industry declined before Sultan Barsbay established his monopoly).

⁸³ G. P., *Sent.* 48, f. 5a f. 54, f. 31b ff., 34a f., 36a ff. 96, f. 66a ff. 98, f. 117b ff.; MARINO SANUTO, *Diarii* X, col. 95 [On the other hand, the exportation of white sugar and candy from Syria and also Egypt went on till the end of the fifteenth century, see Archives Dolfin Ba 181, fasc. 23, notes of 22 Jan. 1418 (export to Genoa); ASG Car. Vet. 1553, ff. 23a, 74a (the same ship of Oberto Squarzafico)]. At the beginning of the sixteenth century the Genoese obtained great quantities of sugar from Madeira, see ASG Car. Vet. 1556, f. 49a and other notices referring to sugar loaded in Spain which probably came from Madeira.

⁸⁴ On the sugar industry in Sicily, see C. TRASSILLI, *Produzione e commercio dello zucchero in Sicilia dal XIII al XIX secolo*, « Economia e storia », III (1955), pp. 325-342.

Near Eastern countries, from which it had once spread to Southern Europe.⁸⁵

The decline of Oriental industries resulted in a considerable increase in the volume of trade between the Southern European countries and the Near East. For the European merchants who could not pay for the spices and other Oriental articles in cash acquired them by barter — cloth, paper and other European products exchanged for spices.⁸⁶

In other words, a vacuum had been created in the Near Eastern economies, and among the European merchants who penetrated it the Venetians were, of course, foremost.

Another factor which enabled the Venetian merchants to carry on very profitable activities in various branches of trade was the decline of the Karimites. Until the beginning of the fifteenth century this group of Oriental wholesale traders controlled the spice trade of the Yemen, Hidjaz, Egypt and Syria and at the same time had a large share in many other branches of trade, such as the slave trade. As great capitalists to whom the sultan of Cairo and other Oriental rulers applied for loans, they were very influential and could easily outdo competitors. The sultans of Egypt themselves invested their money with some of them and they were therefore called « merchants of the sultan ». According to a well informed Arabic historian there were 200 Karimis in Egypt in the reign of al-Malik an-Nāsir Muḥammad (1309-1341).⁸⁷ The fourteenth century was undoubtedly the apogee of the Karimi trade. Zaki 'd-dīn Abū Bakr b. 'Alī Ibn al-Kharrūbī (d. 1385) was called « the last of the Karimis », but according to some sources another merchant, Burhān an-dīn Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Maḥallī (d. 1403) was the last great Karimite.⁸⁸ Sultan al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad Shaikh (1412-1419) still

⁸⁵ Imports into Egypt: G. P., Sent. 45, f. 33a ff. (a. 1419) 70, f. 11 f. (a. 1412) 96, f. 81a ff. (a. 1441) 108, f. 68a ff. (a. 1448); Nicolo Venier B, 2, f. 32b f. (a. 1421); into Syria: G. P., Sent. 127, f. 27b ff. (in Tripoli, ca. 1455), 132, f. 166b ff. (in Aleppo, a. 1460), Cristoforo del Fiore VI, f. [4a] (into Damascus, 100 balle, a. 1459?); Marino Sanuto, Diarii X, col. 95 (a. 1509); in Turkey: G. P., Sent. 37, sub 24 Aug. 1402 (into Bursa, ca. 1400).

⁸⁶ G. P., Sent. 29, f. 153a ff. (paper exchanged for cinnamon).

⁸⁷ See my paper *The Karimī merchants*, JRAS, 1956, p. 51.

⁸⁸ W. J. FISCHER, *Über die Gruppe der Karimī-Kaufleute*, « Studia Arabica » (Analecta Orientalia 14) (Rome 1937), p. 71.

had among his courtiers a Karimi merchant.⁸⁹ But in the period after Shaikh's rule the Karimites declined or even disappeared as a well defined group of great merchants. Their downfall was brought about by the measures taken by Sultan Barsbay, to establish a state monopoly over the spice trade. Although Barsbay's efforts had no success and the spice trade did not become a monopoly of the sultan of Cairo, he reduced their share in the profits of the Indian trade, abolished their privileged status and replaced them to some extent by his own commercial agents.⁹⁰ Some Karimites are still mentioned in the Arabic sources of the second half of the fifteenth century, but they no longer represented a strong group whose influence was felt in any major branch of Near Eastern trade. Some of them became the sultan's agents, while others left the countries under his control and settled in India or elsewhere.⁹¹

The Venetian documents shed bright light on this development. Texts referring to Venetian trade at the beginning of the fifteenth century mention Moslem merchants who sold them enormous quantities of Indian goods. A certain « Shaikh 'Alī », a merchant in Cairo, sold the Venetian Clario Arcangeli spices for 56,000 dinars in 1412.⁹² But texts and documents dating from the middle and the second half of the fifteenth century refer to the « merchant of the sultan ». Some of these commercial agents of the sultan were, characteristically enough, foreigners, such as Khawādġā Ghālib Rufā'il from Valencia, mentioned in a notarial act drawn in Alexandria in 1456⁹³ or Khawādġā Ibrāhīm al-Abrantīshī who was also a Spaniard and agent of the sultan in Alexandria in the 1470's and 80's.⁹⁴ Other texts show how formerly independent wholesale dealers became agents of the sultan.

⁸⁹ ASHTOR, *art. cit.*, p. 46 f.

⁹⁰ I. M. LAPIDUS, *Muslim cities in the later Middle Ages* (Harvard Press 1967), p. 126 ff. (somewhat exaggerated, but essentially correct).

⁹¹ S. Y. LABIB, *Handelsgeschichte Ägyptens im Spätmittelalter* (Wiesbaden 1965), p. 402 f.; A. DARRAG, *L'Égypte sous le régime de Barsbay* (Damas 1961), pp. 233, 235 f.

⁹² G. P., Sent. 36, f. 56a ff.

⁹³ Cristoforo del Fiore V, f. [17b f].

⁹⁴ 'Abdalbāsīt b. Khalīl, at-Rauḍ al-bāsīm, MS. Vaticana 729, f. 109b; as-Sakhāwī, Dhail, MS. Bodl. 853, f. 115a.

Documents drawn up by a Venetian notary in Damascus and other deeds dating from 1413 refer to a great Moslem merchant whose name was Aḥmad Ibn al-Muzallik. He had many dealings with the Italian traders and, among other articles, sold them cloves in exchange for textiles.⁹⁵ Eight years later, in December 1421, the Senate of Venice decided to send ambassadors to the sultan of Cairo to protest against the encroachment of «Ben-Emuslach» on the activities of the Venetian merchants in Damascus, as well as to make other requests. According to the instructions given to the ambassadors, he had forbidden other Damascene merchants to buy Venetian merchandise. The ambassadors were to bring home to the sultan that this was not the right of a private merchant.⁹⁶ So, until the beginning of the 1430's Ibn al Muzallik was a private merchant. In the Arabic biographical dictionary of as-Sakhāwī there is information on the family of great Damascene merchants called Ibn al-Muzallik. The first was Shams ad-dīn Muḥammad b. 'Alī Ibn al-Muzallik, who died in 1444, called «the greatest merchant of Damascus» (or «the head of the Damascene merchants»). He travelled to India and other countries of the Far East and made enormous profits. Aḥmad, mentioned in the Venetian sources, was one of his sons. He died in 1468. Two other sons of Shams ad-dīn were Sirādj ad-dīn 'Umar (d. 1437/8) and Badr ad-dīn Ḥasan (d. 1474).⁹⁷ But when Sultan Barsbay embarked on his policy of monopolization the Ibn al-Muzallik had to become his agents. In Venetian judicial records referring to the years 1436 and 1440 «Ibn al-Muzallik» is the name of the «merchant of the sultan» in Damascus, who alone had (under Barsbay's monopoly) the right to sell pepper to the Italians.⁹⁸ In these latter records the first

⁹⁵ Giacomo della Torre, no. 16, 17, 18; G. P., Sent. 46, f. 63a ff.

⁹⁶ N. JORGA, *Notes et extraits pour servir à l'histoire des Croisades au XV^e siècle*, ROL V (1897), p. 115.

⁹⁷ ad-Ḍau' al-lāmi' II, p. 147 II, p. 126 VI, p. 120 VIII, p. 173 f. and cf. ASHTOR, in JRAS, 1956, p. 51; Lapidus p. 128 and note 25, p. 214 f.; DARRAG, p. 235; LABIB, p. 402.

⁹⁸ G. P., Sent. 76, f. 51b ff. 90, f. 133a. Of course the sultan's agent could pursue commercial activities of his own. Whereas he sold the sultan's spices, he could deal in other articles. So one finds in the deeds of a Genoese notary referring to the activities of two Genoese in Damascus, some time before 1450, that Aḥmad Ibn al-Muzallik sold them diamonds, see ASG Branca Bagnara 10, no. 20.

name of the Moslem merchant is not mentioned. Was it the same Aḥmad, his father, or perhaps one of his brothers? It does not matter, for what is relevant is that the Ibn al-Muzallik had become agents of the sultan. Characteristically enough, the third generation of the family, dealt with by as-Sakhāwī, were government officials who held offices in various departments. They were the sons of Badr ad-dīn Ḥasan.⁹⁹

In order to evaluate the importance of the great change in the social structure of Near Eastern society caused by the downfall of the great merchant class, it should be stressed that these wholesale traders were active in several branches of trade. Aḥmad Ibn al-Muzallik also imported coral to Damascus¹⁰⁰ and later the merchant of the sultan Ghālīb Rufā'īl exported great quantities of salt from Alexandria to Syria.¹⁰¹ So, when the great independent Moslem (or more correctly Oriental, because some were Christian or Jewish) merchants had disappeared as a class, the Venetians came into control of several branches of the wholesale trade. They acquired cotton directly from the peasants, and as early as the beginning of the fifteenth century traded with the villagers in the province of Aleppo.¹⁰² They were involved in the slave trade too. The supply of white slaves destined for the military service in the sultan's army had, of course, always been the job of Italian merchants, but after the downfall of the Karimites the Venetians imported also Negroes into Egypt and Syria. In 1434 Nicolò Contarini imported 11 Negroes into Tripoli.¹⁰³ Another Venetian merchant brought 188 Negroes in (about) 1480 and also some black slave girls from Tripoli (in Lybia) to Alexandria, whereas a captain of a *galea di trafego* transported 13 slaves from Tunis to Beirut.¹⁰⁴

So it was these two great changes, the decline of Near Eastern industries and the downfall of the great merchant class that made the Venetian success possible.

⁹⁹ ad-Daw' al-lāmi' 1, p. 41.

¹⁰⁰ Nicolo Venier B, 2, f. 6a/b.

¹⁰¹ Cristoforo del Fiore V, f. [17b f.].

¹⁰² G. P., Sent. 15, f. 48a ff.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 70, f. 132a ff.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 180, f. 103b f.

e) VENETIAN EXPANSION IN THE 15TH CENTURY.

In the first half of the fifteenth century the number of the Venetian merchants in Egypt and Syria increased considerably, the old colonies grew and new ones sprang up. This development was clearly reflected in the changes in Venice's colonial administration. Where formerly a vice-consul had resided, a full-fledged consulate was now established and where no consulate had existed such an office was created. For example at the head of the Venetian colony in Damietta in 1420 there was a vice-consul, but in 1440 it had a consul.¹⁰⁵

In Palestine Venetian trade flourished in Acre from the beginning of the fifteenth century. This town had been destroyed by the Mamluks after its conquest in 1291 and it had been in ruins for a long time. But in the fifteenth century it became an emporium of the cotton trade which was carried on mainly by Venetian merchants and in the middle of the century a Venetian vice-consul resided in the town.¹⁰⁶ Acre served also the Venetians as a port from which they shipped other goods, such as the spices acquired in Ramle and Damascus.¹⁰⁷ Subsequently, the Venetian Senate decided in 1447 that two of the nine cogs sailing to Syria should visit Acre.¹⁰⁸ The galleys also anchored in the harbour of Acre — they first visited Jaffa, went from there to Acre and then returned to Jaffa.¹⁰⁹ The small town of Ramle (called by the Europeans Rama, because it reminded them of the birthplace of Samuel) also had a very active Venetian colony in this period, and the Venetians bought both cotton and spices there.¹¹⁰ But Venetian traders also visited other towns and villages of Palestine, such as Ghaza, where they purchased spices.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ Nicolo Venier A, f. 8b; G. P., Sent. 119, f. 64a ff., cf. Heyd II, p. 427 f.

¹⁰⁶ G. P., Sent. 78, f. 2a ff. 99, f. 2a ff. (referring to 1436 and 1441).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 95, f. 108b f.; accounts of Alvise Baseggio, ASV, Proc. S. Marco, Com. miste, Ba 117, fasc. 16.

¹⁰⁸ Mar III, f. 23b f., 30b ff.

¹⁰⁹ Misti 60, f. 158b (a. 1439).

¹¹⁰ Libri Commemorativi, ed. Predelli IV, p. 40 (where the text is not correctly reproduced); G. P., Sent. 19, f. 2a f., 28b f. 21, f. 37a f. 28; f. 92a f. 32, 79b ff.

¹¹¹ G. P., Sent. 16, f. 81b ff. 17, f. 38a ff.

Throughout the fifteenth century Beirut was the main port from which the Venetians exported the spices they bought in Syria. In some texts a vice-consul of Beirut is mentioned, in others a consul.¹¹² Hamath (called Amman), a great emporium of the cotton trade, had a Venetian vice-consul¹¹³ at the beginning of the fifteenth century, but by the middle of the century it had a consul.¹¹⁴ The Venetian colony in Hamath was well organised, it had its chapel and a Venetian priest.¹¹⁵ In the first half of the fifteenth century Lattakia was a town where the Venetians carried on a lively trade, mainly buying cotton.¹¹⁶ In 1477 a Venetian consul resided in the town.¹¹⁷ Even in the middle of the fifteenth century Venetian trade flourished in Lattakia and its harbour was visited by Venetian ships, galleys and cogs.¹¹⁸ The texts which refer to Venetian trade in Lattakia in the second half of the fifteenth century are less numerous and it seems that it had in fact decreased. But in that period Tripoli was the great Venetian emporium on the coast of Northern Syria, and from Tripoli great quantities of cotton and potash were shipped to Venice, while the textiles and other products destined for Northern Syria were carried there.¹¹⁹ In 1442 Venice appointed a consul for Tripoli for the first time. He was to be the head of the Venetian colonies in Hamath, Lattakia, Sarmin and Aleppo. As the establishment of the consulate was considered an important matter and a new stage in Venetian expansion (« nova et inusitata »), the Senate instructed an ambassador sent to the sultan to inform him, and to ask for orders concerning the consulate to be given to Mamluk authorities in Syria.¹²⁰ The small town of Sarmin, which is mentioned in the text we have quoted, served the Venetians as

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 52, f. 44a ff. 71, f. 55a ff.

¹¹³ Many letters addressed to Donà Soranzo, vice-consul in Hamath, are to be found in ASV Miscellanea di carte non appartenenti a nessun archivio, Ba 8.

¹¹⁴ Mar III, f. 31b (a. 1447) V, f. 113a (a. 1455); G. P., Sent. 178, f. 46a (a. 1481).

¹¹⁵ Cristoforo del Fiore VI, f. [3b] (a. 1460).

¹¹⁶ G. P., Sent. 27, f. 24b, 57a f. 38, f. 66a ff., 128a f. 50, f. 23a ff., 63b 51, f. 17b f. 52, f. 135b f.

¹¹⁷ Mar III, f. 31b.

¹¹⁸ G. P., Sent. 107, f. 79a, 81a, 185a ff., 192a ff. 109, f. 225a ff.; Mar III, f. 23b f.; 162b f.; Misti 60, f. 158b.

¹¹⁹ Mar III, f. 157a; G. P., Sent. 97, f. 116b ff. 18, f. 85b ff. 95, f. 75b f.

¹²⁰ Mar I, f. 125a ff.

a cotton market, but they also sold European textiles there.¹²¹ Aleppo, on the other hand, was the North Syrian emporium where the caravans from Persia and other silk producing countries arrived. So the town had a Venetian colony from the end of the fourteenth century. At the beginning of the fifteenth century the Venetians were very active in Aleppo¹²² and even more so in the second half of the century.¹²³ They bought Persian silk¹²⁴ and imported metals, such as tin¹²⁵ and textiles, such as German cloth there.¹²⁶

The number of the Venetians who belonged to these traders' colonies cannot have been insignificant, for they had « councils of twelve ».¹²⁷ Not only the big colonies of Alexandria and Damascus, but others also had learned chaplains who also served as notaries.¹²⁸

f) THE VOLUME OF THE VENETIAN SPICE TRADE IN THE 15TH CENTURY.

The Venetian documents contain much information on the volume of Levantine trade. They show that it was increasing throughout the fifteenth century, and that there was in Venice a class of merchants who regularly invested great sums in it and especially in those branches in which the Venetians had obtained supremacy.

¹²¹ G. P., Sent. 38, f. 66a ff. 132, f. 38a ff.

¹²² See R.-H. BEAUTIER, *Les relations économiques des occidentaux avec les pays d'Orient au moyen âge*, in « Sociétés et compagnies » etc., p. 298.

¹²³ G. P., Sent. 175, f. 36b f., 46a 178, f. 35b f. 186, f. 25b, 27b.

¹²⁴ MARINO SANUTO, *Diarii* VI, col. 57/8, 487, cf. *Heyd* II, p. 458.

¹²⁵ G. P., Sent. 11, f. 41a ff. (before 1401) and cf. 15, f. 48a ff. 136, f. 106b f.; accounts of the family Priuli, Museo Correr (in Venice), MS. Donà Tron, PD. C911/ II sub 19 Oct. 1512.

¹²⁶ G. P., Sent. 28, f. 66a ff.

¹²⁷ Aleppo in 1471, see G. P., Sent. 186, f. 27b; Tripoli in the middle of the fifteenth century *ibid.* 70, f. 132a ff. 136, f. 106a; Beirut *ibid.* 186, f. 127b ff.

¹²⁸ See for Tripoli G. P., Sent. 102, f. 61a ff. 104, f. 15a ff. 106, f. 21a 178, f. 144b ff.; for Aleppo *ibid.* 186, f. 27b. The development of the colonies must however not be rectilinear, there may have been ups and downs. A decree of the Venetian Senate of the year 1488 mentions the consul of Damascus and the vice-consuls of Aleppo, Tripoli and Beirut, s. Mar 12, f. 136b. Pietro Casola mentions, in 1494, the Venetian vice-consul in Tripoli, see *Viaggio a Gerusalemme* (Milano 1855), p. 49.

Purchases of spices for 3000-6000 ducats a year were by no means unusual transactions. There was a considerable number of merchants who, often through their *fattori*, bought pepper, ginger and other spices for such a sum every year. The archives of Biagio Dolfin, Venetian consul in Alexandria in the second decade of the fifteenth century, contain numerous examples of purchases of 30, 50, or even 100 *sportas* of pepper by a single merchant¹²⁹ (the price of a *sporta* being then about 100 ducats). Most of the documents to which we can refer mention transactions made by certain merchants at various dates,¹³⁰ but in the Venetian archives there are also documents which point to the regularity of these transactions. The papers of Tomaso Malipiero contain inventories of cargoes exported from Syria in the 1480's and 1490's.¹³¹ For a just evaluation of this merchant's transactions one must stress that he dealt both in spices and in silk, so the purchase of spices was only part of his commercial activities. The following table sums up his purchases of spices, indicated in *colli* of (approximately) 90 kg.¹³²

¹²⁹ Archives Dolfin Ba 181, fasc. 23.

¹³⁰ In 1439 Bartolomeo Gabriel bought for Giacomo Zane, in Acre, 142 *kinjars* of pepper for 6390 duc. (netto, i. e. without customs and transport expenses), see G. P., Sent. 83, f. 186b ff.; in 1440 Marco Urso bought, in Damascus, 78 *kinjars* amounting to 3250 ducats, see *ibid.*, 84, f. 124a; Nicolo Bernardo and brothers bought in Alexandria, in 1447, 75 *sportas* of pepper for 3375 duc., *ibid.* 107, f. 129a ff.; Marco Bocasso bought in Damascus, in 1455, 50 *colli* of spices for 3000 duc., *ibid.* 122, f. 65b ff.; in 1461 Ambrosio de Casmin acquired pepper, beledi ginger, cinnamon and brazilwood in Alexandria for 3873 duc., see *ibid.* 150, f. 71b ff.; Andrea Vendramin purchased in the same year in Alexandria 41 *colli* of spices whose average value was 100 duc., that is for about 4100 duc., *ibid.* 150, f. 49a ff.; in 1474 Domenico di Piero bought in Damascus, 50 *colli* of spices and other Indian articles whose value was apparently more than 3000 ducats, see ASV G. P., Terminazioni 11, f. 27b ff.; in (about) 1483 Michael Contarini purchased in Damascus, 49 *colli* of pepper whose value was, according to his accounts, 2756,25 duc., see G. P., Sent. 181, f. 89b ff.; in 1491 Joh. Venier bought in Alexandria pepper for 11,100 duc., *ibid.* 191, f. 40b ff.

¹³¹ ASV, Proc. S. Marco, Com. miste, Ba 161, fasc. VI. As the inventories are stained and obliterated deciphering is very difficult and, further, they have no dates. So one must establish them according to the names of the captains and the «patrons» of the galleys who are mentioned there.

¹³² The first inventories refer to the convoy whose captain was Lorenzo de Leze and to which belonged a galley called «Mora». In 1476 Lorenzo de Leze was indeed captain of the galleys of Beirut and Cristoforo Moro one of the patrons, see ASV Segretario alle voci VI, f. 83b and Incanti I, f. 43a. The second cargo list dates from 1478 when Alvise Mudazio was captain of the convoy and Alvise Rimondo one of the patrons, see Segretario l. c. and Incanti I, f. 56b. The third one dates from 1479, when Nicolo Pisano and Marco Aurio were patrons, see Incanti I, f. 65a. The cargo list of the *galee di trafego*, whose

	1476	1478	1479	1480	1481
Pepper	71	114	130	51	28
Beledi ginger			19	1	15
Cloves			9	2	1
Brazilwood		58	5	2	21
<i>Value</i>	duc. 2400	4865	7332	1871	2450

Although the calculation of the cargoes' values is merely conjectural, it shows that every year Tomaso Malipiero bought spices (and other Indian goods) to a value of 2000-3000 ducats and sometimes for much greater sums.

The accounts of the family Priuli refer to larger transactions. We quote some of the accounts of their agent in Alexandria:¹³³

PURCHASES IN 1509

<i>Francesco Priuli</i>			
Beledi ginger	duc. 1629	kar. ¹³⁴ 16	
Michino ginger	416	2	
Cloves	164	—	
Nutmeg	427	14	
Mace	64	—	
Incense	132	13	
Zedoary	29	8	
<i>Total</i>	duc. 2932	kar. 7	

<i>Lorenzo Priuli</i>			
Beledi ginger	duc. 3459	kar. 2	
Michino ginger	166	7	
Cloves	339	1	
<i>Total</i>	duc. 3964	kar. 22	

<i>Vincenzo Priuli</i>			
Beledi ginger	duc. 1703	kar. 3	
Michino ginger	151	4	
Cloves	447	7	
Nutmeg	61	7	
Aloe	12	2	
<i>Total</i>	duc. 2274	kar. 23	

captain was Marco Bragadin, also dates from this year. The fourth inventory is that of the convoy whose captain was Franco de Zorzi and which comprised a galley called « la Michaela ». Francesco Zorzi was captain of the galleys of Beirut in 1480, see *Segretario alle voci* l. c. and the patron of one of the galleys belonging to it was Domenico-Michael, see *Incanti* I, f. 70b. The last cargo list refers to the convoy of 1481 when Anzolo Trevisan was captain and Piero Zustignan and Joh. Donato patrons of galleys. The purchases in 1480 were made in association with two other merchants.

¹³³ Museo Correr, MS. Donà Tron PD C 911/II. The identification of Girolamo Priuli is conjectural.

¹³⁴ Carat — an imaginary monetary unit, being 1/24 of a gold piece.

PURCHASES IN 1510		
<i>Girolamo Priuli</i> ¹³⁵		
Beledi ginger	duc. 2307	kar. 3
Cloves	238	6,5
Nutmeg	1041	15
<i>Total</i>	duc. 3587	kar. 0,5

PURCHASES IN 1511		
<i>Girolamo Priuli</i>		
Beledi ginger	duc. 2109	kar. 5
Michino ginger	210	
Cloves	561	23
Nutmeg	162	8
Incense	114	11
<i>Total</i>	duc. 3157	kar. 23

The study of these and other accounts and records shows clearly that most Venetian firms were family enterprises and, furthermore, that these enterprises were fragmented, each partner pursuing commercial activities of his own. The Venetians were less inclined to found great companies, as the Florentines did. However, the Venetian merchants did also found companies although not such rich ones as the Florentines. It goes without saying that such companies were founded, first of all, for the spice trade. In the proceedings of a litigation we discover that such a company (founded by Clario Arcangeli, Nicolo Memo, Luca Foscarini, Lorenzo Bembo and Dario Morosini) bought in Cairo spices for 56,000 ducats in 1412.¹³⁶ The company of Benedetto Zio, Giacomo and Alexandro Contarini exported to Aleppo merchandise worth 16,810 ducats in 1479 and 1480. Their agent stated, however, that coming to Aleppo he found other merchandise belonging to the company.¹³⁷

But what was the total of the Venetian purchases in the Moslem Near East and are we indeed entitled to conclude that they increased throughout the fifteenth century — or did they remain more or less on the same level? Even taking into consideration all the errors which may result from the incompleteness of our sources, one can maintain that they are sufficient to enable us to draw probable conclusions. We must, first of all, try to calculate

¹³⁵ His accounts comprise the expenses in Egypt (« fino posto in galie »), but not the freight and expenses (customs) in Venice.

¹³⁶ See above note 92.

¹³⁷ G. P., Sent. 178, f. 35b ff.

the value of the spices which the Venetians exported from Egypt and Syria.

For the end of the fourteenth century and the first years of the fifteenth century the archives of Francesco Datini provide us with exact data.¹³⁸

			Quantity	Value	Total	
1394	Pepper	Alexandria	2190 pondi	dinars 65,700		
		Beirut	1586 »	44,408		
	Ginger	Alexandria	138 »	12,420		
		Beirut	246 »	44,280		
						166,808
1395	Pepper	Alexandria	2100 pondi	63,000		
		Beirut	1000 kintār	60,000		
	Ginger	Alexandria	190 pondi	19,000		
		Beirut	323 kintār	64,600		
					206,600	
1396	Pepper	Alexandria	1573 pondi ¹³⁹	47,728		
	Ginger	Alexandria	221 »	19,890		
					67,618	

¹³⁸ They have been published by J. HEERS, *Il commercio nel Mediterraneo alla fine del secolo XIV e nei primi anni del XV*, « ASI 113 » (1955), p. 205 ff. As to the prices of the spices, according to which we have made our calculations, see *Les métaux précieux*, p. 73. Here we have, however, made some corrections and changes. The price of pepper in Damascus has been calculated for 1394 at 56 dinars, for 1396, 1399 at 60 dinars and for 1404 and 1405 at 90 ducats (these latter prices according to Archives Dolfin Ba 180, fasc. 23). As to the ginger (beledi), we suppose that its price was in Alexandria in 1394 45 dinars, in 1395 50 dinars, in 1396 45 dinars and in 1399 26,5 dinars. For its prices in Damascus in 1394-96 and 1399 see my *Histoire des prix et des salaires dans l'Orient médiéval*, pp. 414/5. For the years 1404 and 1405 my calculations are based on the supposition that a kintār costed 100 ducats.

All these calculations have been made assuming that the *pondo* (or *collo*), which is, in the reports sent to Fr. Datini, the measure of the spices exported from both Egypt and Syria, is the same unit. It is indeed *a priori* unlikely that Datini is agents used different measures for the cargoes of the galleys of Alexandria and Beirut. So we believe that we can accept the method employed by Heers, cf. *Les métaux précieux*, p. 74. Further, the *collo* of Beirut is an exact measure, corresponding to 50 *raïls* (of Damascus) or 90 kg, whereas the *pondo* is a rather vague unit (Heers believes that the *collo* was equal to 91 kg and as we have adopted his calculation in *Les métaux précieux*, they have been corrected here accordingly).

¹³⁹ According to another document - 1526, see *Les métaux précieux*, p. 119.

(Continued)

			Quantity	Value	Total
1399	Pepper	Alexandria	2100 pondi	52,920	
		Beirut	220 »	6,600	
	Ginger	Alexandria	130 »	6,890	
		Beirut	2420 colli	65,340	
					131,750
1404	Pepper	Beirut	1724 pondi	ducats 77,580	
	Ginger	»	920 »	46,000	
					123,580
1405	Pepper	Beirut	820 pondi	36,900	
	Ginger	»	828 »	41,150	
					77,050

From these calculations one can conclude that the quantities of pepper and ginger brought to Venice every year by the galleys coming from Alexandria and Beirut had, at the end of the fourteenth century and in the first years of the fifteenth century, an average value of 140,000-150,000 dinars (i.e. 180,000 ducats).¹⁴⁰ That of the cargoes of the Beirut galleys was always about half.

As to the volume of Venice's Levantine trade in the 1420's, we may cite the reports sent to the Venetian firm Antonio Zane by its agents in Damascus. These reports refer to the purchases of spices (and some other articles) made by the Venetians every year between the departure of the galleys and the next *mudda*.¹⁴¹

The purchases in the year 1413 amounted to 200,000-220,000 ducats. But, on the other hand, one can assume that the Venetian merchants bought great quantities of spices during the *mudda*, the

¹⁴⁰ Without taking into consideration the spices (bought and) left in Alexandria and Beirut. Sometimes they were loaded on «navi di rata» (supplementary ships), sometimes they remained there till the next *mudda*.

¹⁴¹ Archives A. Zane. Several of these lists (reproduced here as in the original, as far as spices and Indian articles are concerned) refer to successive dates in the same year. We have chosen three lists dating from autumn, i.e. a date shortly before of the arrival of the galleys. Consequently one can suppose that the quantities of spices bought between this date and the arrival of the galleys was insignificant. The texts bear the title: «Acati fati p Viniz' da poi el ptir de le galic di... fin a di...».

PURCHASES OF THE VENETIANS IN DAMASCUS
(in *ķinġars*)

	Till October 8, 1411	Till September 14, 1413	Till September 24, 1416
Pepper	140	400	270
Beledi ginger	280		190
Colombino ginger	14	520	
Michino ginger	75		17
Ginger in lemon		40	
Green ginger ¹⁴²	50	18	
Nutmeg	140	20	200
Mace	24	85	85
Cloves	40	20	55
Clove stalks		180	1
Cinnamon ¹⁴³	35	10	100
Thick cinnamon		55	3
Selani ¹⁴⁴	5	14	
Lac	70		1
Brazilwood	65	80	85
Galanga	4	100	10
Turpeth	6	15	2
Long pepper	35		
Incense	15	20	25
Indigo		25	26
Cardamon		50	1
Camphor		6	1
Zedoary		4 ¹⁴⁵	3
Cubebs		10	2
Lavender		1	
Borax		3	
Galbanum		1	6
Orpiment			11
Ammoniac			1
Myrobalan			4
Pearls for ducats	12,000		6,000
Bocassin pieces of cloth	8000	7500	5,000

yearly spice fair, and the data in the Datini archives show that the Venetians bought on average 660 *ķinġars* pepper every year in Damascus. So there is good reason to believe that the purchases were much more sizable than those listed in the Zane documents.

¹⁴² Verdi conf.

¹⁴³ Canela lunga.

¹⁴⁴ Apparently another kind of cinnamon, called after the island of Ceylon, see *Heyd II*, p. 597 ff.

¹⁴⁵ This quantity is quoted from a list of purchases up to June 8, but in another list of purchases up to August 16: 3 *ķinġars*.

Besides the reports sent to this firm there are some other records concerning the volume of Venetian purchases in the Near East in the first half of the fifteenth century.

a. 1413	Purchases in Damascus up to the <i>mudda</i> , according to the reports sent to A. Zane	duc.	200,000 - 220,000
a. 1414	Marco Erizo, owner of a galley, loads more than 1000 <i>colli</i> of spices in Beirut. ¹⁴⁶ As four galleys visited Beirut in that year, it can be assumed that their total cargoes had the value of	»	200,000
a. 1418	Total of the pepper sold by the Venetian consulate in Alexandria: <i>sporte</i> 1048, <i>rotuli</i> 366, ¹⁴⁷ probably of the value of	»	105,000
a. 1419	An account of the quantities of pepper acquired by Venetians in Alexandria amounts to a total of	din.	114,770 ¹⁴⁸
a. 1421	In this year the Venetians could not buy as many spices as they wished and the galleys came back with	duc.	130,000 ¹⁴⁹
a. 1423	Sum of money spent by the Venetians every year in the Near East according to the doge Tomaso Mocenigo	»	300,000 ¹⁵⁰
a. 1433	The merchants travelling on the galleys to Egypt and to Syria have altogether	»	460,000 ¹⁵¹
a. 1434	In spite of the measures taken by Sultan Barsbay the Venetians buy 730 <i>ķinġar</i> pepper in Damascus, ¹⁵² whose value was probably	»	43,800

All these data, different though they are, point clearly to the considerable increase in the quantities of spices which the Venetians bought in Egypt and Syria after the beginning of the fifteenth century.

¹⁴⁶ G. P., Sent. 28, f. 12b.

¹⁴⁷ *Les métaux précieux*, p. 123. Although this document has no title, there can be no doubt that it does not comprise all the purchases made by the Venetian merchants. In fact the consulate papers to be found in the archives of B. Dolfin, contain data concerning other purchases.

¹⁴⁸ Archives B. Dolfin, Ba 181, fasc. 23. It seems that this list comprises all the Venetian purchases, as it has the title: « obbligado a pip » referring to the imposts to be paid by the merchants.

¹⁴⁹ JORGA, *Notes et extraits*, ROL V (1897), p. 115 f.

¹⁵⁰ Tommaso Mocenigo apud Muratori 22, col. 954, cf. H. KRETSCHMAYR, *Geschichte von Venedig II* (Gotha 1920), pp. 619, 621 (to be corrected in *Les métaux précieux*, p. 73); Cronica Morosini, quoted by PH. GRIERSON, *La moneta veneziana nell'economia mediterranea del Trecento e Quattrocento*, in « La civiltà veneziana del Quattrocento » (Florence 1957), pp. 86, 97.

¹⁵¹ GRIERSON, l. c.

¹⁵² G. P., Sent. 75, f. 41b ff.

Finally we must summarize the data concerning the Venetian spice trade at the end of the fifteenth century. The following calculations refer — as those made in the reports sent to Fr. Datini — only to the two most important articles, pepper and ginger. They should make it possible for us to compare the size of the spice trade at the end of the fourteenth century with that a hundred years later.¹⁵³ These figures show that the value of the quantities

1496	Alexandria	Pepper	950 colli	duc.	101,240	
		Ginger	600 »		60,000	
	Beirut	Pepper	2600 »		71,500	
		Ginger	550 »		15,125	
					<hr/>	247,865
1497	Alexandria	Pepper	1250 colli	duc.	150,000	
		Ginger	776 »		93,315	
	Beirut	Pepper	993 »		39,610	
		Ginger	709 »		28,360 ¹⁵⁴	
					<hr/>	311,285

of the two most important spices which the Venetians bought every year had increased from the end of the fourteenth century almost by 100%!

g) THE VENETIAN COTTON TRADE IN SYRIA.

It seems however that the development of another branch of Venice's Levantine trade — the export of Syrian cotton — was no less striking. Its importance must be especially stressed because in this branch of the Levantine trade Venetian supremacy was much more obvious than in others. Their supremacy in the cotton trade was apparently overwhelming and they had begun to export cotton from Syria as early as the period of the Crusades,¹⁵⁵ but the trade

¹⁵³ The figures are quoted from PRIULI, *Diarii I*, pp. 59 (3 galleys of Alexandria and two « de trafego »), 73. The Egyptian *collo* was, according to Lane in AHR 38, p. 228 equivalent to 1120 Venetian pounds. But according to ASV Mar 12 f. 136 (of a. 1488) the *pondo* (or *collo*) was considered as four times as much as the *collo* of Beirut. Many data in the *Terminazioni* of the *Giudici di petizioni* confirm our calculation. They point to 1200 Venetian pounds (*sottili*) as the equivalent of such a *pondo*.

¹⁵⁴ As a *kinār* acquired by barter was worth 85 duc., we assume that it cost 80 in cash.

¹⁵⁵ *Heyd I*, pp. 375, 376.

expanded mainly in the later Middle Ages. It may be that as a consequence of the demographic decline of Syria and the decreasing demand for grain, cotton plantations expanded. But the change corresponded, on the other hand, to the ever growing demand for cotton by the European merchants. Without such conjectures one could not explain the huge purchases of cotton made by the Venetians in Syria throughout the fifteenth century. The importance of cotton exports from Syria for the trade of the Venetians was so great that they were able to continue their commercial activities in the Near East even in the period subsequent to the discovery of the sea route to India, when the spices in the Near Eastern emporia had become so expensive that their export to Europe could not yield sizeable profits.

Data concerning the cotton trade are abundant in all Venetian sources and they leave no doubt that the export of Syrian cotton was, besides the spice trade, the most important branch of Venice's Levantine trade.

The quantity of cotton bought by a middle rank merchant in the fifteenth century was no more than 30-40 sacks. A sack usually contained 80-90 *rattls* of Tripoli, that is about 160 kg.¹⁵⁶ A *kinṭār* (of Tripoli) of North Syrian cotton cost, in the first half of the fifteenth century, from 22 to 25 ducats,¹⁵⁷ while Palestinian cotton (« di Acri ») was much more expensive. Consequently the purchases in Syria amounted to 600-800 ducats per annum, and many texts cite such purchases.¹⁵⁸ Cotton purchases in Acre amounted to higher sums.¹⁵⁹ There were also, however, great cotton traders who bought 70 sacks, 100 sacks or even more every year, investing 2000 ducats

¹⁵⁶ ASV G. P., Terminazioni 11, f. 80b f. 12, f. 97a, 103a, 106a 13, f. 99a f. See on the other hand, Misti 56, f. 109a (July 1, 1427) where one reads that a sack of cotton contained 700 Venetian pounds in Lattakia and in Hamath only 400.

¹⁵⁷ G. P., Sent. 50, f. 23a ff. 52, f. 135b f. 97, f. 116b ff. 123, f. 53b ff.

¹⁵⁸ Nicolo Pisani, a. 1406, 39 sacks, see G. P., Sent. 27, f. 3a f.; Mafeo Corner, a. 1446, 32 sacks, s. *ibid.* 107, f. 149b ff.; Antonio de Mezo, about 1447, 41 sacks for 744 ducats, s. *ibid.* f. 154b f.; Anzolo de Pesaro, about 1447, 32 sacks of the value of 560 duc., *ibid.* f. 185b ff.; Jeronimo Malipiero, a. 1477, in Damascus 37 sacks and a. 1482 in Tripoli 40 sacks, *ibid.* 180, f. 31b ff., 88b ff.

¹⁵⁹ Nicolo da Canal, a. 1414, 18 sacks for 600 duc., s. G. P., Sent. 25, f. 69b ff.; Giovanni Priuli, a. 1417, 35 sacks, *ibid.* 45, f. 78a ff.

and more.¹⁶⁰ The number of these great merchants cannot have been small and often they formed associations, founding companies whose purchases amounted to some thousands of ducats.¹⁶¹

The following table contains data for cotton purchases made by the «fraterna Soranzo», represented in Hamath by Donato Soranzo.

Mudda	Sacks of cotton bought	Price in ducats ¹⁶²	Source
September 1407	12	546	SASSI, p. 107 ¹⁶³
March 1408	47	1670	<i>Op. cit.</i> , p. 76, 109
September 1408	25	906	<i>Op. cit.</i> , p. 109
March 1409	44	1386	<i>Op. cit.</i> , p. 111 ff.
September 1409	11+?	703	<i>Op. cit.</i> , p. 113
			ASV Miscellanea di carte non appartenenti a nessun arch. Ba 8
March 1410	32	1390 ¹⁶⁴	arch. Ba 8
September 1411	10	569	<i>Ibid.</i>
March 1413	5	153	<i>Ibid.</i>
September 1413	17	513	<i>Ibid.</i>
1415	41		<i>Ibid.</i>
September 1416	31		SASSI, p. 98

Although these figures are not complete, they show that the cotton purchases of Donato Soranzo and brothers amounted to more than 2000 ducats a year. Further one can conclude from these accounts that the investments of such a firm in the Near East were much greater, as the purchase of cotton was only one of the Soranzos'

¹⁶⁰ Costantino Priuli, a. 1415, 58 sacks and a certain Sofoli 55 sacks, ASV Miscellanea di carte non appartenenti a nessun archivio Ba 8; Bartolomeo Gabriel, about 1440 in Acre, 70 sacks and 5 sacks of spun cotton altogether amounting to 3500 duc., s. G. P., Sent. 84, f. 127a ff.; Giovanni Morosini, about 1443 in Tripoli, 79 sacks and 5 sacks of spun cotton, the latter of the value of 75 duc. each, *ibid.* 95, f. 75b f.; Giovanni Priuli, a. 1454, 502 sacks, *ibid.* 121, f. 60a ff.; Vettore Dolfin, about 1460, 100 sacks, *ibid.* 132, f. 38a ff.; Jerónimo Campanato, a. 1486, about 105 sacks, *ibid.* 188, f. 45a ff.

¹⁶¹ A company represented by Michael Gabriel bought 130 sacks in 1414, see G. P., Sent. 29, f. 34a; Mafeo Caveza & Cie, a. 1416, 222 sacks, s. *ibid.* 34, f. 4a ff. (then in 1425-1426 he bought alone through a fattore 104 sacks probably of the value of 2500 duc. in Hamath; *ibid.* 73, f. 114b, 125a ff.; Luca Soranzo and brothers, a. 1444, bought cotton for 1122 duc., *ibid.* 104, f. 84b ff.; Bernardo Zicia & Cie, about 1447, 109 sacks, each amounting to 25 duc., the total being 2725 duc., *ibid.* 107, f. 169a ff.; Alvise Mudazzo and brothers bought in 1455, 502 sacks through their fattore in Tripoli, *ibid.* 121, f. 60a ff.

¹⁶² Without the fractions.

¹⁶³ S. SASSI, *Sulle scritture di due aziende mercantili veneziane del Quattrocento* (Napoli [1950]).

¹⁶⁴ This price includes expenses which were very high.

activities. They also bought bocassin and other articles. On the other hand, in the period in which the export of Syrian cotton became a major branch of Venetian trade there were also many merchants who every year exported some sacks of cotton from Syria without becoming cotton traders.¹⁶⁵

All these purchases, great and small, must have amounted to much more than 50,000 ducats a year. Perhaps one might even suppose that they reached 100,000 ducats. A report by the chronicler Girolamo Priuli gives us valuable clue. In an account of two Venetian ships coming from Syria and which were sunk in the Adriatic in 1495, he says that their cargoes consisted of 1000 sacks of cotton, besides other articles.¹⁶⁶ Supposing that the convoy (see below) numbered only 5 ships, one can conclude that their cargoes comprised 2,500 sacks of cotton — representing a value of 50,000 ducats.

In view of the great importance of the cotton trade, the Venetian Senate organised in March and in September every year, convoys of cogs which were escorted by warships. Some visited Alexandria and others Syrian ports. The data which one finds in the Venetian sources concerning these convoys are incomplete. We have found the following:¹⁶⁷

CONVOYS OF ROUND SHIPS

Mudda	To Alexandria	Average tonn.	Joint ¹⁶⁸	To Syria	Average tonn.	Source
1389	1					Misti 41, f. 90a
March 1390	2					<i>Ibid.</i>
March 1408				4		BAUTIER, <i>op. cit.</i> , p. 320
Sept. 1417				5	600 butts	ASV Coll. not. V, f. 751
March 1418				9 ¹⁶⁹	600 butts	<i>Ib.</i> f. 88b

¹⁶⁵ ASV G. P., Terminazioni VII, f. 87a 11, f. 80f. 12, f. 106a.

¹⁶⁶ *Diarii* I, p. 42.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. the table compiled by Lane from the chronicle of Morosini in his paper *The Merchant Marine of the Venetian Republic*, p. 148.

¹⁶⁸ Convoy « to Alexandria and Syria », without details.

¹⁶⁹ This is the number of ships whose patrons had applied for permission to join the convoy. In the MS. there are no signs (such as crosses) next to their names indicating those who obtained permission.

Continued: CONVOYS OF ROUND SHIPS

Mudda	To Alexandria	Average tonn.	Joint ¹⁶⁸	To Syria	Average tonn.	Source
March 1426				7	700 butts	Coll. not. VI, f. 16b
Sept. 1426				3	2:700-750, 1:1025	<i>ib.</i> f. 24a
March 1427				6	750 butts, one 1025	<i>ib.</i> f. 27b
Sept. 1427	2			7		Misti 56, f. 104a
Sept. 1430	2	one 914, one 1025		3	727 butts	Coll. not. VI, f. 84a (cf. Misti 57, f. 227a)
March 1431			6		760 butts	Coll. not. VI, f. 92a
Sept. 1431			7		677 butts	<i>ib.</i> f. 99b
Sept. 1433				7 ¹⁷⁰	770 butts	<i>ib.</i> f. 121b
March 1441				6	551	<i>ib.</i> VII, f. 23a
March 1443				11 ¹⁷¹	500	<i>ib.</i> f. 59a
Sept. 1445				3	one 800, others not mentioned	<i>ib.</i> VIII, f. 26b
Sept. 1447				10 ¹⁷²	600	<i>ib.</i> f. 61b
Sept. 1449				9	700, one 1100	<i>ib.</i> f. 95a ff.
March 1450				14 ¹⁷³	600	<i>ib.</i> f. 104b
Sept. 1455				2		ASV Mar V, f. 105a ¹⁷⁴
Sept. 1456				5	735, one 1200	Coll. not. IX, f. 81a
March 1471				4		<i>ib.</i> 11, f. 111b

Our table shows that the convoys sent to Syria in March, for the « mudda » of cotton,¹⁷⁵ usually comprised 6-7 cogs, and if one adds the round ships sailing to Alexandria and the cogs sailing to the

¹⁷⁰ According to Misti 58, f. 211b, 213a only 6.

¹⁷¹ This is the number of the ships for which permission to sail had been requested. Usually their number was 9-10, whereas only 6-7 obtained permission.

¹⁷² According to Mar III, f. 23b f., 30b f. only 9.

¹⁷³ See notes 169, 171.

¹⁷⁴ There the reasons are given why the number of the cogs sent to Syria in that year was low.

¹⁷⁵ What Heyd II, p. 460 f. says about a *mudda* in June should be corrected. But sometimes Venetian ships sailed in the summer (July) to Syria to load cotton, see G. P., Sent. 34, f. 4a ff.

ports of Egypt and Syria in September, one will arrive at a total of 13-15 per annum. But these convoys were less regular than the service of galleys and their cargoes had less value.¹⁷⁶ Studying carefully the data concerning these convoys one sees also that they sometimes replaced the Alexandria galleys when the latter had been suspended. As to the voyages to Syria, the data found in the « Collegio Notatorio » make it possible to reach some fairly accurate conclusions, for despite the instructions given to the captains of the convoys to avoid encountering a hostile fleet, one may presume that all of these ships did indeed visit the Syrian ports.¹⁷⁷

Besides cotton the cogs transported another Syrian product which the European industries needed very much — potash (« cenere » or « lume » in the Venetian sources). Trade in this product of Syria increased considerably in the later Middle Ages and it was almost monopolised by the Venetians, who supplied it to the soap factories of Gaeta and other enterprises.¹⁷⁸ Although it was a heavy and voluminous and not expensive product, they invested great sums in its trade. Piero Michiel and Lorenzo Barbaro gave orders in 1412 for about 334 tons of potash, whose value probably amounted to 1000 ducats,¹⁷⁹ while purchases of 600-900 *ķintārs*, of the value of 1300-1900 ducats, were common.¹⁸⁰ But some merchants bought much greater quantities of potash. Luca and Andrea Vendramin, for example, bought in 1441 2184 *ķintārs* for 4095 ducats and in 1442 451 *ķintārs*.¹⁸¹ The two Venetian ships which sank in the Adriatic in 1495, of which Priuli gives an account, had loaded 2400 sacks of potash (probably more than 2000 *ķintārs*).¹⁸²

¹⁷⁶ On the role of the round ships cf. LANE, *Venetian shipping during the commercial revolution*, in « Venice and history », p. 5 ff.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. LANE, *The Merchant Marine* etc., *ibid.* p. 148, who quotes the chronicle of Morosini. This chronicle, however, does not distinguish between the cogs sailing to Cyprus and those sailing to Syria. Consequently the numbers are greater.

¹⁷⁸ G. P., Sent. 71, f. 55a ff.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 20, f. 122a.

¹⁸⁰ Cristoforo del Fiore VI, f. [17b f.]; G. P., Sent. 53, f. 23a 71, f. 55a ff. 84, f. 136b ff. 99, f. 26a ff. 124, f. 63b ff.

¹⁸¹ G. P., Sent. 97, f. 1160 f.

¹⁸² *Diarii* I, p. 42.

b) THE VENETIANS REPLACE THEIR COMPETITORS IN THE NEAR EAST.

How great Venetian supremacy in the Levantine trade had become by the mid-fifteenth century is clearly shown by the fact that Venetian traders imported into the Near East several products from regions formerly controlled by their competitors or else which they manufactured themselves.

One of these products was olive oil. It is true that Venetians were already importing olive oil into Egypt at the beginning of the fifteenth century.¹⁸³ But in that period it was sold mainly by Catalan and Genoese traders who had acquired it in the Western Mediterranean. It was also imported into Egypt by Moslem merchants from Tunisia, Libya and other North African countries. The Venetians first imported olive oil from Puglia both into Egypt and Syria,¹⁸⁴ but in time they began to sell olive oil from Majorca¹⁸⁵ and North African countries, especially Tunisia,¹⁸⁶ in Egypt and Syria. The Venetian sources leave no doubt as to the sums invested (and earned) in this branch of Levantine trade. In about 1428 a Venetian merchant sold in Egypt 1100 *qintār* of olive oil at 5.75 ducats each.¹⁸⁷ In 1488 two merchants imported into Alexandria 959 butts (equivalents to 582 kg. each).¹⁸⁸ In the negotiations between the Mamluk sultan *Ḳaṣūh al-Ghūrī* and the Venetians in 1512 he maintained that at the end of the fifteenth century they had imported 3,000-4,000 butts every year, and even more.¹⁸⁹

The Venetians' textile trade in the Near East is an even more striking example. The Venetians had always imported Florentine cloths such as *panni di fontego* (which were cheap), *loesti*, *silforte* and *bastardi* into Egypt, Syria and all other Near Eastern countries.

¹⁸³ Misti 45, f. 90a; Archives Dolfin Ba 181, fasc. 23 (oio di Barbaria).

¹⁸⁴ G. P., Sent. 34, f. 39a ff. 52, f. 85b ff. 176, f. 1a ff.; Cristoforo del Fiore I, f. 1b ff.

¹⁸⁵ Cristoforo del Fiore I, f. 16a ff.

¹⁸⁶ G. P., Sent. 34, f. 11a ff. 48, f. 85a ff. 52, f. 8b f.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 46, f. 25b ff.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 188, f. 180b ff.

¹⁸⁹ REINAUD, *Traité de commerce entre la république de Venise et les derniers sultans memeloucs d'Égypte*, A 1829 II, p. 32 cf. p. 28. See also MARINO SANUTO, *Diarii* I, col. 380: in 1496 1000 butts remained in Alexandria without being sold.

The Florentine colonies in Egypt and Syria did not encroach upon this flourishing trade and from the mid fifteenth century the Venetian merchants imported ever increasing quantities of Florentine cloth to the value of 1,000-1,500 ducats.¹⁹⁰ On the other hand there are a few texts indicating that these Venetians were agents of Florentine firms.¹⁹¹ The Venetians merchants succeeded also in replacing the Catalan traders who had begun to import great quantities of their textiles into the Near East at the end of the fourteenth century. In the first half of the fifteenth century, when Catalan trade in the Near East was declining, the products of Catalonia's flourishing textile industry were offered for sale by Genoese merchants¹⁹² and above all by Venetians. As early as the 1420's they were selling Catalan cloth in Alexandria and Damascus.¹⁹³ In 1426 they sold in Egypt « panni di Valencia ». Some of these Catalan textiles had been acquired in Sicily.¹⁹⁴ At the end of the century they imported cloth from Majorca into Northern Syria.¹⁹⁵ Characteristically enough, Venetian merchants also sold Genoese textiles in the emporia of the Near East. In 1479 a Venetian company imported into Syria, according to the proceedings of a litigation, Genoese cloth to the value of 1,700 ducats.¹⁹⁶

Coral was a product of several regions of the Western Mediterranean and throughout the fifteenth century it was therefore imported into the Near East by Provençal, Genoese and Catalan traders. The Genoese exported coral from La Calle (which were formerly in the possession of the Catalans), and the coast of Sardinia supplied them with considerable quantities of coral too. Even Majorca was also rich in coral. Rhodes, where the Genoese and Catalans had flourishing colonies, became a great centre of the coral industry.¹⁹⁷ But after the decline of Genoese and Catalan trade in Egypt and Syria, the Venetians began to import coral there,

¹⁹⁰ G. P., Sent. 117, f. 204a ff. 178, f. 35b ff.

¹⁹¹ See e. g. Cristoforo del Fiore V, f. 1a ff.

¹⁹² Nicolo Venier B, 2, f. 1a, 10a/11a.

¹⁹³ Arch. Dolfin, Ba 181, fasc. 23, records of March 1419; Giacomo della Torre no. 14.

¹⁹⁴ G. P., Sent. 48, f. 5a f. 52, f. 94a ff. 54, f. 34a ff.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 178, f. 35b f.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* f. 36a ff. 182, f. 11a ff., 87b ff.

¹⁹⁷ BARATIER-REYNAUD, p. 244; HEERS, *Gènes au XV^e siècle*, p. 378.

some of which had been acquired in Rhodes.¹⁹⁸ In the fourth decade of the fifteenth century, when Venetian supremacy in Levantine trade was already firmly established, they apparently imported great quantities of coral into Syria and into Palestine. How flourishing a branch of Venice's Levantine trade the import of coral had become is demonstrated by the report on a litigation over transaction in 1488: Nicolo Malipiero & Co. had bought coral from other Venetians for 18,300 ducats, to be delivered in Tunis and then shipped to Egypt.¹⁹⁹ The authorities of Genoa tried to repair the damage done to its trade by forbidding, in 1496, Corsican coral to be transported to Egypt in ships that were not Genoese. There can be little doubt that this order had no success.²⁰⁰

i) VENICE'S HEGEMONY IN THE LEVANTINE TRADE AND ITS LIMITS.

From about 1420 to the discovery of the sea route to India Venice enjoyed the full advantages of its supremacy in the Levantine trade. It had sufficient power to thwart the sultan's plans to monopolise the spice trade. Certainly the most important consequence of Venice's supremacy in the Levantine trade was that the efforts made by Barsbay and some of his successors failed and the spice trade remained free. In fact the sultan of Cairo had to content himself with imposing on the Venetians (and on the other trading nations of Southern Europe) the purchase of a certain quantity of his pepper, but once they had bought it they could acquire spices from private merchants.²⁰¹ Apparently Venice obtained more privileges from the Mamluk sultans than we know

¹⁹⁸ Nicolo Venier B, 2, f. 14a ff.; Cristoforo del Fiore I, f. 16a ff.; G. P., Sent. 83, f. 45a ff.

¹⁹⁹ G. P., Sent. 70, f. 113b f. 78, f. 2a ff. 99, f. 2a ff. 107, f. 103b ff. 187, f. 152a. At the end of the fifteenth century one of the galleys sailing to Beirut was destined for the transport of coral collected in Marsa Kharez and elsewhere, see ASV Incanti I, f. 37a, 64b, 80b.

²⁰⁰ ASG, S. Gorgio, Primi Cancellieri Ba 88, p. 319.

²⁰¹ Wansbrough's conclusions concerning the existence of such a monopoly in the second half of the fifteenth century are not warranted by the texts, see *A Mamluk commercial treaty concluded with the Republic of Florence 894/1489*, in « Documents from Islamic chanceries », ed. S. M. Stern (Oxford 1965), p. 75.

of,²⁰² but in one of those preserved it is expressly stated that every Moslem merchant should be allowed to establish the price of spices and other commodities. The Sultan's commercial agent then could not put pressure on the merchants and everybody could buy and sell without his permission.²⁰³ The Venetians could complain to the sultan about his officials and obtained their dismissal and punishment. Any attempt to curtail the freedom of their commercial activities or the right to carry on their trade everywhere and to stay in the dominions of the sultan as long as they wished encountered strong opposition and the sultan, who could not afford to lose the great income from commercial taxes, had to give in. The supply of metals, such as silver and copper, was probably no less important to the government of Cairo.²⁰⁴

Venetian supremacy in the economic life of the Near East was so great that the ducat became the currency in which most transactions were made, even when the partners involved were not Venetians.²⁰⁵ This was certainly one of the reasons for the coinage of the *asbrafi*, the new gold coin of Egypt and Syria minted in 1425. For eight hundred years the Moslems had believed that the weight and alloy of the gold dinar was fixed by the sacred, canonical law. How did it come about that the sultan of Cairo ventured to coin a new lighter dinar? We can assume that the stocks of gold which the mints of Cairo and Damascus possessed in the fifteenth century were more limited than they had been before, and the success of the European nations in obtaining ever increasing quantities of gold from the Western Sudan must have led to a fall in the gold stocks of the Near Eastern Mints.²⁰⁶ But another reason was that the Italian gold coins, the florin and the ducat, had spread through the countries of the Moslem Near East and became the currency in which even Moslem merchants made their accounts and payments. They were preferred because they were of equal weight, whereas

²⁰² JORGA, *Notes et extraits*, ROL IV, p. 552 ff.

²⁰³ J. WANSBROUGH, *A Mamluk ambassador to Venice in 913/1507*, SOAS 26 (1963), p. 528.

²⁰⁴ JORGA, pp. 318, 553; ASV Mar I, f. 113a.

²⁰⁵ HEERS, *Gènes au XV^e siècle*, p. 377.

²⁰⁶ See *Les métaux précieux*, p. 24 ff.

that of the dinar coined by the sultan's mints was rather erratic. The Italian gold coins did not need to be weighed. However, they bore Christian emblems and aroused the anger of devout Moslems. So in 1408 Sultan al-Malik an-Nāsir Faradj decided to coin a dinar of the same weight as the ducat. But his monetary reform failed. Within a few years his new dinar was debased, the amount of gold alloy gradually diminishing. Then in 1425 Sultan Barsbay made a second attempt to replace the Christian gold coin by a Moslem one, of the same weight and value. His reform was a great success and ever since the new gold coin, called *ashrafi* after his honorific title al-Malik al-Ashraf, was the currency used in the Near East, as well as the ducat.²⁰⁷ Although the Italian gold coin which served as model for the *ashrafi* was usually called *ifrantī* (meaning florin) by the Arabs, there can be no doubt that the number of the ducats on the Near Eastern markets was much greater, and the Arabic name points only to the fact that the florin had spread in the Near East before the ducat. The monetary reform of Barsbay resulted then from the intense commercial activities of the Venetians in the Near East.

Even before outdoing their competitors the Venetians had enjoyed a privileged status in the sultan's dominions compared with other European trading nations. In the treaty concluded with the Ayyubid sultan al-Malik al-'Ādil II, in 1238, they had already obtained the privilege that in litigations between Venetians and other European merchants the Venetian consul in Alexandria should be the judge.²⁰⁸ Other European states whose merchants took part in the Levantine trade tried to obtain similar privileges and made efforts to obtain copies of the treaties between Venice and the sultans of Cairo, before they submitted their own demands and propositions for commercial treaties to the Mamluk government. Some Orientalists have shown that a treaty concluded in 1487 between Florence and the sultan of Cairo clearly indicates the use of a

²⁰⁷ A. RAUGÉ VAN GENNEP, *Le ducat vénitien en Egypte*, *Revue Numismatique*, IV^e série, I (1897), pp. 373 ff., 494 ff.; W. POPPER, *Egypt and Syria under the Circassian sultans 1382-1468 A. D.*, vol. II (University of California Press, 1957), p. 48 ff.

²⁰⁸ TAFEL-THOMAS, *Urkunden II*, p. 338.

Venetian model — the treaty between Venice and the sultan in 1442. Even the Florentine-Mamluk treaties of 1489 and of 1497 contain explicit references to the status of the Venetians.²⁰⁹

In 1415 Venice also obtained from sultan Shaikh al-Maḥmūdī the right to have a consul in Jerusalem. Seven years later Sultan Barsbay confirmed this privilege. The Venetian consul was to protect both the citizens of the republic and pilgrims coming on Venetian ships. The Genoese had had a consul in Jerusalem for a long time already and as he was to protect all the European Christians in the Holy Land they protested, in vain, when the sultan agreed to the establishment of the Venetian consulate.²¹⁰ So it came about that for some time there were two Italian consuls in Jerusalem, one Genoese and one Venetian.²¹¹

In considering this evidence of Venetian supremacy in the Levantine trade and their privileged status, the question arises whether their success was due, at least partially, to their diplomatic skill. But careful examination of the Venetian sources, such as the instructions given to the ambassadors to the sultan and the deliberations preceding them, reveal little evidence for such a supposition. It seems that Venice's position in the Levant had become so strong that it had no need of diplomatic action against competitors. The Venetians did not consider the rather limited and irregular Levantine trade of other European trading nations as a threat to their position. Until the end of the Mamluk period the Genoese bought spices in Egypt and cotton in Syria and, on the other hand, they exported European textiles, sugar, coral and other articles to the Near East.²¹² The Florentines too exported pepper,

²⁰⁹ M. AMARI, *I diplomi arabi nel R. archivio fiorentino* (Firenze 1863), p. 482; J. WANSBROUGH, *Venice and Florence in the Mamluk commercial privileges*, SOAS 28 (1965), p. 483 ff.

²¹⁰ JORGA, *Notes et extraits*, ROL IV, p. 553; ASV Libri Commemorativi 11, f. 77b (quotation by PREDELLI, *I libri commemorativi* IV, p. 40 erroneus).

²¹¹ W. HEYD, *Les consulats établis en Terre Sainte au Moyen Age pour la protection des pèlerins*, « Archives de l'Orient latin » II (Paris 1884), p. 355 ff. According to the travelogues of the pilgrims, quoted by Heyd, the Venetians already had a consul in Jerusalem before 1415! Perhaps the consulate was officially recognised in that year.

²¹² ASG Car. Vet. 1553, f. 23b, 24a, 28a; G. MUSSO, *Nuovi documenti*, pp. 461, 490 ff.; SANUTO, *Diarii* X, col. 95; F. LUCHETTA, *L'« affaire Zen »*, in *Levante nel primo Cinquecento*, « Studi Veneziani » X (1968), p. 189.

ginger, cotton and silk from Syria.²¹³ Even French participation in the Levantine trade at the end of the Mamluk period is well documented. In Alexandria and Beirut there were French consulates and French ships imported heavy cargoes of textiles and other Western products.²¹⁴ But the Venetian preponderance was the most striking feature of the Levantine trade. The other trading nations could not challenge the supremacy of Venice.

But did this supremacy amount to a veiled political hegemony? As the Venetians had the greatest share in the spice, dye and cotton trade and so exported great quantities of raw materials, while also importing the products of various European industries, could one maintain that they had established a kind of pre-colonial or perhaps neo-colonial regime? Were the Mamluks only puppets who had to comply with the wishes of the Venetians who controlled the economic resources of the Near East?

Because Venetian supremacy in the Levantine trade in the fifteenth century was not a true monopoly, the answer to this question is no. It is true that the Mamluk sultans who had handed over the income from the feudal estates to the army could not afford to lose the income from the commercial imposts collected from the spice trade. As they were not inclined to modernize the war machine they also had to apply to Venice for help when they tried to fight the Portuguese. They had no cannon or other fire arms, or very few. The sultan of Cairo had been considered the faithful ally of Venice for a long time already so that its enemies treated him as an enemy too.²¹⁵ But, on the other hand, one should not forget that compared with the sum which the customs of the spice and cotton trade yielded, which was not more than 300,000-400,000 ducats a year, the sale of products from the sultan's own estates supplied his Treasury with as large a sum. The Mamluk sultans were not docile puppet kings, but rather violent Oriental despots. The Venetians never obtained judicial exemptions and

²¹³ MALLET, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

²¹⁴ MUSSO, *art. cit.*, p. 492 and see above p. 25.

²¹⁵ W. V. STROMER, *König Siegmunds Gesandte in den Orient*, « Festschrift für Hermann Heimpel » (Göttingen 1972) II, p. 600.

extraterritorial rights, such as were granted to the Western powers by the Ottomans. A litigation between a Venetian and a Moslem had to be brought before a Moslem judge and, of course, the criminal jurisdiction over European merchants was also left to them.²¹⁶

²¹⁶ See however TAFEL-THOMAS II, p. 487: the first Mamluk sultan al-Malik al-Mu'izz granted the Venetians the privilege that a Moslem having a claim against one of them had to apply to their consul; a claim of a Venetian against a Moslem was, however, to be brought before a Moslem judge.