
ARTICLES

The Volume of Levantine Trade in the Later Middle Ages (1370-1498)

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The impact of Levantine trade on the European economies in the later Middle Ages is still a controversial question. R.S. Lopez has tried to show, in a recently published paper, that from the end of the fourteenth century trade with the Moslem Near East was in deficit for the South European "trading nations".¹ R.-H. Bautier, on the other hand, believes that the Europeans enjoyed a favourable balance in this trade.² It goes without saying that for a proper evaluation of medieval trade with the Levant, one needs an estimate of its volume. Information on capital investment and the volume of exports to the Levant would also give us a better understanding of monetary developments on both sides of the Mediterranean, and, finally, would allow an accurate analysis of the policy of the Oriental rulers of the day to be made.

Can reasonably accurate results be obtained from the data scattered over various sources, or will calculations of the volume of late medieval trade with the Levant remain mere guesswork,

¹ *Il problema della bilancia dei pagamenti nel commercio di Levante*, in « Venezia e il Levante fino al secolo XV » (Florence 1973), I, p. 450.

² *Les relations économiques des Occidentaux avec les pays d'Orient, au Moyen Age, points de vue et documents*, in « Sociétés et compagnies de commerce en Orient et dans l'Océan Indien », Actes du huitième colloque international d'histoire maritime » (Paris 1970), p. 306.

unsubstantiated by sufficient documentation? The answer to this question seems to be clear: we cannot produce totally accurate accounts, but the data which are available do make it possible to arrive at a rough estimate of the trade which the major trading nations of Southern Europe carried on with the Levant in certain periods of the later Middle Ages.

Following our previous study,³ the present paper will deal with European trade with Syria and Egypt only, without taking into consideration trade with "Romania", a European borderland. The accounts will be given in FOB Damascus and Alexandria (etc.) prices; CIF prices would be higher by 15% for spices and dyes, and by 30-40% for cotton.⁴ But whereas the study mentioned above contained information on the major articles only, the present paper will attempt to estimate the total of the cargoes, or, where the data make it possible, the purchases of the South European trading nations on Near Eastern markets in certain years.

a) *The problem of the weights*

When trying to organize the data found in the archives of medieval companies or even in official documents of that period, a major difficulty is presented in interpreting the meaning of the various expressions used for weights and parcels. Everyone knows that the weights employed in medieval times changed over time and varied from place to place. An even greater difficulty arises from the merchants' custom of indicating quantities of merchandise in parcels whose equivalents are not mentioned in the medieval manuals of trade. One looks in vain for the meaning of the various bales and barrels whose metrological equivalences were known to those drawing up reports for their firms and to those receiving them, but often remain, alas, a riddle for us. Some bales and boxes probably corresponded to specific quantities of merchandise while

³ E. ASHTOR, *Les métaux précieux et la balance des paiements du Proche Orient à la basse époque* (Paris 1971), chapter IV; see also *Id.*, *La découverte de la voie maritime aux Indes et les prix des épices*, in « Mélanges en l'honneur de Fernand Braudel » (Toulouse 1973), I, p. 38 ff.

⁴ See my paper *Profits from trade with the Levant in the later Middle Ages*, BSOAS (*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*) 38 (1975), p. 268.

others did not. Often the same terms are used for different packages, or the same package is called by different names and, on the other hand, a single term may be used for any package. There were however certain standard parcels which had a specific equivalent in weight.

The two terms most often used in the papers of the late medieval traders in the Mediterranean area were "*pondo*" and "*collo*". I venture to propose a new interpretation of these terms which modifies the calculations made hitherto.

When discussing the Datini reports, J. Heers has drawn attention to a passage in Pegolotti's manual from which it is deduced that the *pondo* corresponded to 91 kilograms.⁵ Further, Heers supposed that *collo* meant the same as *pondo*.⁶ The passage which he quotes from Pegolotti refers to the weights of Cyprus.⁷ But countless Venetian documents of the second half of the fifteenth century which refer to the trade with Syria mention a *collo* or *pondo* which corresponded to 50 or 51 Damascene *raṭls* (of 1.8 kg). But when the parcels coming from Syria were weighed in the customs offices in Venice, it was often the case that a *collo* had only 46 or 47 *raṭls*, while others had 52, 54 or 56.⁸ Also, in judicial acts referring to transactions in Syria in the fourteenth century and at the beginning and middle of the fifteenth century there are references to a *collo* of 47, 53 or 54 Damascene *raṭls*.⁹ So one may safely suppose that this Syrian *collo* corresponded to 300 light Venetian pounds, or to 90 kg.¹⁰ The Venetian documents confirm Heers' conjecture insofar as they show that parcels weighing 90 kg (roughly) were standardized in some Near Eastern countries

⁵ *Il commercio nel Mediterraneo alla fine del sec. XIV e nei primi anni del XV*, ASI (Archivio Storico Italiano) 113 (1955), p. 183 f.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁷ *Pratica della mercatura*, ed. Evans, p. 85.

⁸ ASV (Archivio di Stato, Venice), *Giudici di petizione, Terminazioni* VII, f. 21b, 26a, 89b, 102b; VIII, f. 48b; XI, f. 98a, 109b, 165b, 166a; XII, f. 98a, 101a, 107b; XIII, f. 97b, 10a.

⁹ ASV, *Proc. di S. Marco, Com. miste*, Ba 100, Com. Fresco Querini (a. 1347); G.P., *Sent. (Giudici di petizione, Sentenze a giustizia)*, 17, f. 54b (a. 1409); 98, f. 75b (a. 1443); 121, f. 58a ff. (a. 1455); 129, f. 91a ff. (apparently the same date).

¹⁰ It seems that the documents of the Venetian customs office point to 52 *raṭls* being the official weight of a *collo*.

to the point of being considered as a fixed metrological unit. Certainly the Datini agents refer to this weight when speaking of a *collo*. Even *pondo* in reports from Syria means the standard parcel of 90 kg.

There was, however, another *pondo* (or *collo*) used in Egypt. This *pondo*, contrary to Heers' assumption, was a heavier unit. Although the Datini agents sometimes used these expressions indiscriminately for the same unit, there can be no doubt that they meant different units (or more correctly parcels corresponding to units). In their reports on the Venetian purchases in Alexandria in 1399, the Datini agents list 2100 *sportas* of pepper, whereas the inventory which they drew up of the Venetian galleys comprises 2100 *pondi* of pepper. The agents noted, however, that there remained 500 *colli* for another ship. From these documents one must conclude that *pondo* and *collo* did not mean the same (since a *sporta* of 225 kg is more than double the weight of a *collo*), and, secondly, that the agents also used the word *collo* for any parcel (that is a parcel with no fixed equivalent in weight). Even in the cargo list of the Venetian galleys to Alexandria and of the Catalan galleys to Beirut in 1396, the Datini *fattori* distinguished between *colli* and *pondi*, and in calculating the total they used the more general and vague term *collo*.¹¹ Further, some documents and literary texts expressly distinguished between the *pondo damaschino* or the *collo damaschino*¹² and *pondo alexandrino*.¹³

F. C. Lane rightly concluded from a decision of the Venetian Senate that the *pondo* used in Alexandria was four times as great as the Syrian *collo*.¹⁴ The decision dates from the year 1488, and it stipulated that for « *quolibet collo alexandrino* » 2 ducats should be paid as deposit, and for a Damascus *collo* half a ducat.¹⁵ Although the expression *collo* is used, there can be no doubt that the *pondo* is meant. Even in other texts the heavy parcel of 360 kg is called

¹¹ I refer to the cargo lists quoted below.

¹² PRIULI, *Diarii*, I, pp. 59, 110.

¹³ G.P., Sent. 38, f. 29b (a. 1424); 76, f. 47a (a. 1436). In a document of the archives of Artale Contarini one reads about *pondi alexandrini* and *pondi damaschini*, see ASV, Proc. S. Marco, Com. miste, Ba 147a.

¹⁴ *Venetian shipping during the commercial revolution*, AHR 38 (1933) p. 228.

¹⁵ ASV, Senato Mar, Reg. 12, f. 136b.

a *collo*.¹⁶ So the *collo* or *pondo* of Alexandria corresponded to four *colli* of Damascus. Many documents of the second half of the fifteenth century refer, indeed, to parcels of spices (and dyes) coming from Alexandria and weighing about 360 kg. But whereas the *collo* had a weight which was approximately fixed, namely about 90 kg, that of the *pondo* varied greatly. However, documents from the Venetian customs offices¹⁷ and other texts¹⁸ point to the fact that the *pondo* was equal to 1200 *libbre sottili*.

The *pondo* was, however, not always supposed to weigh 360 kg. The registers of the Genoese customs offices of the second half of the fourteenth century apparently show that the *pondo* of Alexandria was equivalent to 180 kg.¹⁹ The same equivalency is found in Venetian documents concerning trade with Egypt at the beginning of the fifteenth century.²⁰ Although many texts leave no doubt as to the inconsistency of the traders (and moreover of packers), one can conclude that at the end of the fourteenth, and the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Egyptian *pondo*, which at the end of the latter century was usually called *collo*, corresponded to two Syrian *colli*.²¹ It seems that these parcels represented a certain progression:

- 1 late 15th century *pondo* - 360 kg
- = 2 early 15th century Egyptian *pondi* of 180 kg
- = 4 Syrian *colli* of 90 kg
- = 8 spice *kintārs* of 45 kg

16 G.P., Sent. 98, f. 58a ff. (a. 1443); MARINO SANUTO, *Diarii*, XVII, col. 191.

17 G.P., *Terminazioni* VII, f. 8a (1479); XII, f. 135a (a. 1492).

18 G.P., Sent. 95, f. 95a ff. (a. 1442); 107, f. 129a ff. (about 1446). Even some data concerning the price of spices show that there was a *collo* equal to 8 *kintār fulṣulī* (of 45 kg), see my paper *Spice prices in the Near East in the fifteenth century*, JRAS (*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*), 1976, table V.

19 ASG (*Archivio di Stato, Genoa*), *Districtus Alexandrie*, 1367, f. 14b (=3/4 *sporta* i.e. 168 kg), 15b, 49a.

20 G.P., Sent. 16, f. 30a ff. (a. 1404, 150 kg); 27, f. 76a ff. (a. 1405, 158,5 kg); 28, f. 26a (a. 1415 approximately, 162,675 kg); 52, f. 142b f. (a. 1426, 206 kg).

21 In my treatise *Les métaux précieux* and also in my paper *Venetian supremacy in the Levantine trade*, JEEH, III, (1974), I followed HEERS (although with reservations, see *Les métaux précieux* [p. 75, note a to the table], where I pointed to the existence of an Egyptian *pondo* different from the Syrian *collo*), and accepted for this period the equivalence of Syrian *collo* and *pondo*. In the following accounts I modify, tentatively, these calculations. But the new method proposed here concerns only the *pondo* in the accounts from Egypt at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century. All other weights and parcels are calculated as before.

Other parcels were used as units of weight for certain articles, and Heers has established their weights from the data given by Pegolotti in his chapter on Cyprus. His conclusions can be supplemented and to some extent endorsed by data from other sources.

The *fardo*, a name used mainly for parcels of cinammon and Brasil-wood, was equal, according to the registers of the Genoese custom offices, to the Egyptian *pondo*.²² Even the *fasso*, used for Brasil-wood and other articles, consisted apparently of four Alexandrine spice *kintārs*, i.e. 180 kg.²³ Heers' conclusion about the *cassa* of sugar is corroborated by the Genoese registers: it corresponded to a gross weight of 86 kg and a net weight of 64 kg.²⁴ But his conclusion about the normal weight of cotton sacks is contradicted by various documents. From a letter written in Perugia in 1379 one learns that a shipment of Egyptian cotton to Ancona consisted of sacks of 600 pounds.²⁵ Undoubtedly Anconitan pounds are meant and consequently a sack contained 206 kg.²⁶ The Genoese customs registers, dating from the same period, refer to cotton sacks coming from Egypt and weighing 164 kg, 180 kg, 225 kg and even 270 kg.²⁷ The cotton shipped from Syria to Venice was usually packed in sacks containing 160 kg.²⁸

b) *Venetian trade with the Orient in the light of the Datini papers (1370-1410)*

The reports which Francesco Datini received from his agents in Beirut, Damascus, Alexandria, Venice, Barcelona and several

²² ASG, *Drietus Alexandria*, 1367, f. 15a (1 *fardo* pepper = 4 *cant.* 20 *rot.*), 15b (1 *fardo* cinnamon = 3¼ *cant.*, 2 *fardi* Mecca ginger = 7 *cant.* 10 *rot.* of Alexandria).

²³ *Ibidem*, f. 48b, 52b, 60b; ASV, G.P., Sent. 18, f. 27a ff. (a. 1409). Characteristically enough the same expression is used in a judicial act referring to a transaction at the middle of the fifteenth century (a. 1442) for the heavy Egyptian *collo* of 360 kg, see. G.P., Sent. 95, f. 95a ff.

²⁴ ASG, *Drietus Alexandria*, 1367, f. 79b, 80b, 81a.

²⁵ See F. MELIS, *Documenti per la storia economica dei secoli XII-XVI* (Florence 1972), p. 144.

²⁶ Pegolotti, p. 160.

²⁷ ASG, *Drietus Alexandria*, 1367, f. 54b, 63b, 74b, 75a.

²⁸ G.P., Sent. 176, f. 94; 185, f. 153a; G.P., Ter. XI, f. 80b f.; XII, f. 97a, 103a, 106a; XIII, f. 99a.

ports in Southern France contained detailed cargo inventories, price lists and similar documents from the year 1379-1408, and undated documents which perhaps date from the early years of the 1370's. But the cargo lists which have been preserved in the Datini archives are not evenly distributed over these years, and the great majority are from the years 1391-1408.²⁹ Some lists are preserved in two or even three copies and are dated; others are undated but their dates can be found in other sources.

Although precise bulletins, the Datini reports,³⁰ as other similar sources of that period, contain much information that remains enigmatic to us. Often the Datini agents did not specify the kind of spice shipped to the South European ports, or grouped different kinds together. They either registered "ginger" without indicating the kind, or else "ginger of all kinds". Since at certain periods *beledi* ginger was worth twice as much as Mecca ginger, such vague entries could cause errors. One also finds in the cargo lists which the Datini agents drew up items such as "minor spices", which sometimes amounted to a considerable number of parcels. Naturally it is almost impossible to estimate the value of these articles. One should also bear in mind that the ships returning from the Near Eastern emporia often loaded certain quantities of Oriental merchandise in Cyprus, Rhodes and Modon. The Datini reports, as others, seldom state the source of these cargoes. Despite all these shortcomings, however, the Datini papers enable us to arrive at some fairly accurate estimates of the Levantine trade at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century.³¹

²⁹ F. MELIS, *Aspetti della vita economica medievale* (studi nell'archivio Datini di Prato), (Siena 1962), p. 27.

³⁰ They were kept in the *Archives of Prato* in two folders *Quaderni (libretti) di carichi di navi e di valute di mercanzie*, 1171 e 1175. As far as I learnt when visiting the archives in October 1974 they were brought together in folder 1171. But it seems that several documents have gone astray, or been put elsewhere.

³¹ For similar calculations see J. HEERS, *Il commercio mediterraneo, etc.*, p. 285 ff., but, as he bases them on the prices in Venice, the profits realized by the Venetian traders are included. The following accounts refer to the capital investments of the South European traders. Besides Heers, who quoted various documents of the Datini archives which refer to the cargoes of the Venetian galleys, some were summarized by F. MELIS, *Aspetti . . .*, p. 383, and in my *Les métaux précieux*, p. 74, 118 ff. For prices, see my *Histoire des prix et des salaires dans l'Orient médiéval* (Paris 1969), pp. 324 ff., 341 ff., 410 ff., 429 ff.; my paper *La découverte de la voie maritime aux Indes, etc.*,

VALUE OF THE CARGOES OF VENETIAN GALLEYS
(OR TOTALS OF PURCHASES)

Beirut			Alexandria		
1382	2 galleys	85,000 <i>dinars</i>			
1386	total of purchases	67,885 » ^b			
1393	4 galleys	160,000 »			
1394	4 galleys	110,000 »	3 galleys and supplementary cog	230,000 <i>dinars</i>	
1395	5 galleys	230,000 »	total of purchases	212,000 »	
1396	5 galleys	146,000 »	3 galleys	133,000 » ^c	
1399	5 galleys and suppl. cog	36,000 »	total of purchases	278,635 »	
1400	1 galley and suppl. galley	36,000 »			
1401			total of purchases	303,097 » ^d	
1404	3 galleys	115,000 »	2 galleys and supplementary cog	135,000 »	
1405	3 galleys	84,000 »			
1406	4 galleys	58,000 »			
1408			4 galleys	90,000 » ^e	

^a There were in that year 3 Beirut galleys, see ASV, Senato, Misti, Reg. 37, f. 78b.

^b See Table II.

^c According to other sources a supplementary cog was sent to Alexandria in 1396, to collect the spices which had remained there, see JEEH III, p. 18.

^d See Table III.

^e The paper containing the cargo list of this convoy is torn, so that from the title only "... *capetano messer Nicholo Capello*" remains. That the document refers to the Alexandria galleys in 1408 is evident from the proportion of pepper and ginger listed there and from the story told by EMMANUEL PILOTTI, *Traité sur le passage en Terre Sainte*, ed. Dopp (Louvain 1958), p. 203, where he says that Nicolo Capello was then the captain of the Venetian galleys bound for Alexandria. Although our figures are no more than a rough estimate, there can be no doubt that purchases by Venetians in Alexandria in 1408 were rather small, for the document quoted here contains information on the bullion and cash brought back by merchants.

The following two accounts of the purchases which Venetians made in Damascus in 1386 and in Alexandria in 1401 have the great advantage of including the prices at which the merchandise was bought. Errors of calculation which result from supposing that prices were equal to those in preceding or subsequent years are then reduced. Both lists refer to the purchases made prior to

p. 33 ff and *Spice prices in the Near East in the fifteenth century*, JRAS, 1976. In the reports referring to the Beirut galleys both the *collo* and the *pondo* have been considered equal to 90 kg. When more than one copy of a cargo list has been preserved and different quantities of a certain article are indicated, that declaring the greatest (or greater) quantity has been used for calculation of the total. If, besides a cargo list of a convoy of galleys, the Datini archives contain accounts of the purchases of the Venetians in Alexandria or Damascus in a certain year, the latter document has been quoted here.

the arrival of the galleys, in other words before the annual spice fair. One may, however, infer from the papers of the Venetian consulate in Alexandria for the years 1418-1419 that usually purchases made during the spice fair amounted to only a part of those made through the year. One document records the purchases of pepper made by the Venetians in Alexandria in 1418 as 201 *sportas*, whereas one learns from another paper that in that year the Venetian consulate sold the traders (or that together they bought) 1048 *sportas*. A document, which probably dates from 1419, refers to approximately 440 *sportas*, worth 44,000 *dinars*, whereas the total of the Venetian pepper purchases in that year

TABLE II
VENETIANS' PURCHASES IN DAMASCUS UP TO SEPTEMBER 1, 1386

	Quantity bought	Average prices of a Damascus <i>kintars</i>	Price
pepper	700 <i>kintars</i>	48,4 <i>dinars</i>	35,880 <i>dinars</i>
<i>colombino</i> and <i>beledi</i> ginger	120 »	65 »	7,800 »
Mecca ginger	12 »	40 »	480 »
sugar	150 »	52 »	7,800 »
indigo	32 <i>zurli</i> ^a	40 »	1,408 »
Brazil-wood	10 <i>kintars</i>	104 »	1,040 »
myrrh	3 »	22 »	66 »
hepatic aloes	1 »	42 »	42 »
ginger in syrup	12 <i>barrels</i>	24,5 »	294 »
Persian frankincense	18 <i>kintars</i>	49 »	882 »
cinnamon	4,5 »	44 »	198 »
cloves	1 »	248 »	248 »
clove stalks	»	50 »	200 »
nutmeg	7,5 »	112 »	840 »
mace	4 »	320 »	1,280 »
galingale	3 »	290 »	870 »
long pepper	4 »	78 »	302 »
bedoary	6 »	104 »	624 »
turbith	4,5 »	170 »	765 »
camphor	1 »	960 »	960 »
orpiment	1,5 »	44 »	66 »
cubeb	0,3 »	140 »	42 »
borax	19 <i>ratls</i>	200 »	38 »
scammony	50 »	580 »	290 »
wov ^a . silk	1,400 pieces	4,1 each	5,470 »
			67,885 <i>dinars</i>

^a If one judges by the price, it is the same weight as in Egypt, namely 1.1 spice *kintars* (of 45 kg), v. *El libro di mercatantie* (Turin 1936), p. 78.

TABLE III

VENETIANS' PURCHASES IN ALEXANDRIA^a UP TO SEPTEMBER 22, 1401

	Quantity bought		Average price	Price
pepper	2,200 <i>sporas</i>	1 <i>sporta</i>	67.5 <i>dinars</i>	148,500 <i>dinars</i>
ginger of all kinds	850 <i>pondi</i>	1 <i>kinṭār</i>	20 »	68,000 »
cinnamon of all kinds	400 <i>ḡardi</i>	1 <i>kinṭār</i> of mann	32 »	28,800 »
mace	14 <i>colli</i>	1 » »	140 »	2,156 »
cloves	40 <i>pondi</i>	1 » »	102.5 »	9,225 »
Brazil-wood	70 <i>fassi</i>	1 <i>kinṭār</i>	15.5 »	4,340 »
gum-lac	650 <i>colli</i>	1 »	16 »	20,000 »
grain of paradise ^b	5 »	1 <i>kinṭār</i> of mann	59 »	325 »
ginger in syrup	164 <i>barrels</i>	13.5 <i>din.</i> each ^c		2,214 »
frankincense	60 <i>colli</i>	1 <i>kinṭār</i>	14.5 »	1,700 »
sandalwood ^d	80 »	1 »	7.5 »	1,200 »
aloes	4,500 <i>manns</i>	1 <i>kinṭār</i> of mann	35 »	1,577 »
indigo	220 <i>zurli</i>	1 <i>zurlo</i>	32 »	7,040 »
long pepper	15 <i>pondi</i>	1 <i>kinṭār</i> of mann	75 »	2,550 »
galingale	8 »	1 » »	70 »	1,260 »
cubeb	12 »	1 » »	90 »	2,340 »
ivory	9 »	1 <i>kinṭār</i>	22.5 »	810 »
cassia ^e	40 <i>colli</i>	1 <i>kinṭār</i> of mann	5 »	220 »

303,097 *dinars*

^a Does not appear in the document, but is certain (e.g. use of *sporas* as weight of pepper). As to the date see ASV, Senato, Misti 45, f. 100a, where one reads that the galleys did not depart from Venice till August 31 at least. They should anchor in Alexandria 20 days, see *ibid.* f. 90a. So the account does not comprise all the purchases made during the fair.

^b *meleghette*.

^c Supposing that the price given is in fact that of a *barrel*.

^d Apparently "white" sandalwood, cf. my *Histoire des prix et des salaires*, p. 356.

^e *Cassia fistula*, i.e. the pulp of the pods of the pudding-pipe tree, used as purgative.

amounted to 115,000 *dinars* approximately. The latter paper bears the title « Pepper bought after the arrival of the galleys ». From these documents³² one may conclude that during the spice fair the Venetians bought a third or a quarter of what they had bought during the year as a whole.³³

The totals contained in our tables, conjectural though they are, show that the volume of Venetian trade in the last decades of the fourteenth century and the first decade of the fifteenth century varied greatly. In some years the value of the spices, dyes, drugs and the Near Eastern sugar which they purchased in Egypt and in Syria amounted to 320,000 - 440,000 *dinars*. They then invested

³² See below tables X and XI, and cf. my paper *Venetian supremacy, etc.*, p. 39.

³³ F.C. LANE expressed another view, see *Fleets and fairs*, in his « Venice and history » (John Hopkins Press 1966), p. 135 f., but he referred to Marino Sanuto's report from 1498 when the situation in Egypt was very strained owing to the general unrest.

in both Egypt and Syria from 160,000 to 220,000 *dinars* in these articles. This happened in 1394, 1395, and 1399. Although we have, in 1393 and 1401, information for only one country, there can be no doubt that Venetian purchases in these years amounted to similar sums. If in 1393 they bought in Syria spices and dyes for 160,000 *dinars*, and in 1401 in Egypt for 303,000 *dinars*, the total of their purchases in both countries must have exceeded the sum of 400,000 *dinars*.

In 1394 the Venetians also bought considerable quantities of silk and silk fabrics in Syria. In the same year and in 1395 they also purchased large quantities of pearls, 113 boxes in 1394, and in 1395 they spent not less than 60,000 *dinars* on the same article. So in the latter year they invested more than half a million *dinars* in the purchase of spices, dyes, sugar, bocassins, silk and pearls.

The years in which Venetian purchases of spices and other Oriental articles reached these peaks were exceptional however. It is not hard to guess the reasons for this. At that time the supply of Persian and Indian articles to the ports of the Black Sea had been discontinued owing to the campaigns of Timur, and the Italian merchants made a great effort to make good the loss by large purchases in the Levant.³⁴ Even the Venetians' great investment in Alexandria in 1401, when it apparently reached an unprecedented sum, can easily be explained. It seems that in the preceding year their purchases in Syria and in Egypt had been very small, for in 1400 Timur had invaded Syria and laid siege to Damascus. The Datini papers contain only one report from 1400; it refers to two galleys which brought merchandise from Syria worth 36,000 *dinars*. These galleys were sent there in the spring, but when news of the imminent danger spread everywhere the Venetian traders feared that they were in danger and left the towns of Syria.³⁵ They

³⁴ This has been rightly stressed by R.-H. BAUTIER, *Les relations économiques des Occidentaux avec les pays d'Orient, au Moyen Age, etc.*, p. 295.

³⁵ Timur invaded Syria in October 1400, besieged and conquered Aleppo and later Damascus. But before the siege panic-stricken people had already fled from Aleppo, Damascus and other towns of Syria, and among them many Italian merchants, see IBN HADJAR, *Inbā al-ghumr* (Cairo 1971), II, pp. 134; Sulūk III, p. 1034, 1036, 1038; G.P., Sent. 11, f. 45a ff. Cargoes destined for Syria were sent elsewhere, see G.P., Sent. 18, f. 70a f.

probably bought much more in 1401 than in "normal years" in order to compensate for their small profits in 1400.

In other years the volume of their purchases in Syria and in Egypt was much more limited. In certain years at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century, they bought spices and dyes for an average of 80,000 - 150,000 *dinars* in both Syria and Egypt — in 1382, 1386, 1404, 1405, 1406, and 1408 for example. Although we have no data from Alexandria for the years 1405 and 1406, one can assume that in those years Venetian purchases were rather small, for in that period their transactions in Egypt seldom exceeded those made in Syria.

It seems that in that period the Venetian usually bought in Syria 300 - 700 *sportas* of pepper (years 1386, 1394, 1395, 1396, 1404, 1405, 1406) and in Egypt 700 - 1400 (years 1382, 1396, 1404, 1408). The ginger purchases in Syria amounted in "normal" years to 1700-1800 spice *ķintārs* (years 1395, 1404, 1405), and in Egypt to 400 - 800 (years 1382, 1394, 1395, 1396, 1399, 1404).³⁶ Calculating the value of 1500 *sportas* pepper and 2400 *ķintārs* ginger in (about) 1400 one arrives at a sum of no more than 140,000 *dinars*.

To the investment in spices and in Oriental dyes must be added the purchases of cotton, for it seems that at the end of the fourteenth century cotton had already become a major branch of Venetian trade in Syria. An undated report sent to the Datini company reads as follows:

TABLE IV

raw cotton of Acre, Damascus and Siamo	3,120 sacks
spun cotton	80 bales
powdered sugar	320 boxes
potash ^a	50 mier ^b

^a *alume catina*, see *Zibaldone da Canal*, ed. Stussi (Venice 1967), p. 66 and cf. p. 134. The great quantities of alum exported by the Venetians from Syria probably also comprise fullers earth. *alume catina* was used as now for making soap in Gaëta and elsewhere. see G.P., Sent. 20, f. 122a; 71, f. 55a ff.; 79, f. 118b ff.

^b I. c. *migliaio*, thousand pounds.

³⁶ See table XVII. Even the relatively great investment in 1404 may be explained by the suspension of the galley service in 1403.

Another report of Datini's agents refers to a convoy of cogs sent to Syria in 1408.³⁷

TABLE V
CARGO OF 4 VENETIAN COGS COMING FROM THE SYRIAN MARCH FAIR
IN 1408

raw cotton	1,809 sacks
spun cotton	263 »
potash	294 »
powdered sugar	34 »
pearls	3 boxes

Calculating the price of a *ķintār* of cotton at 20 *dinars*, and supposing that a sack contained 160 kg, one can conclude that a convoy of 5 cogs carried 2500 sacks of raw cotton, worth about 44,000 *dinars*.

Finally one must also remember that every year many Venetian ships anchored in Syrian ports and loaded various articles. F. Melis has established that in the years 1399-1408 the number of Venetian ships visiting Beirut amounted to 278.³⁸ Since in these years only 22 Venetian galleys and supplementary cogs (*navi di rata*) visited Beirut, the number of Venetian vessels of other types coming there every year must have been considerable. Many were probably small vessels, their cargoes consisting for the most part of cotton, potash and other relatively cheap and bulky articles.

Adding the value of the spices, dyes, sugar and cotton to that of the silk and pearls (and precious stones), one reaches a total of 300,000 *dinars* for normal years and 400,000 - 450,000 *dinars* for other years when the spice fairs were particularly successful. That annual purchases of 400,000 *dinars*, or, as in 1395, more than half a million *dinars*, were exceptional may be inferred from the number of the galleys which the Venetians sent in that period to Beirut and to Alexandria. Their number in the last decade of the fourteenth century totalled 75, and, in addition, at least 5

³⁷ Published by BAUTIER, *art. cit.*, p. 320.

³⁸ *Note sur le mouvement du port de Beyrouth*, in « Sociétés et compagnies », p. 371 ff.

supplementary cogs were sent to these ports by the Venetian authorities. Such numbers were not to be reached again until the 1480s. The average number of Venetian galleys visiting the two great Levantine ports in the first half of the fifteenth century was no more than 61.

c) *The Oriental trade of other nations in the light of the Datini papers*

The metrological difficulties become even greater when one attempts to draw conclusions from Datini's cargo lists and other inventories of the ships sailing from the Near Eastern ports to Genoa, Southern France and Catalonia. The terms used by Datini's agents in these ports for the parcels of the various articles are more diverse and some of them are quite unknown, at least to the present writer. More important, however, is the question whether the *pondo* (or *collo*) in these cargo lists is equal to that used when referring to the cargoes of Venetian ships. As the spices, dyes and other Oriental articles were bought in the same Near Eastern emporia, one may indeed suppose that the same units are meant, even if the report was forwarded to Datini from Collioure or from Barcelona. Another difficulty confronting the analysis of these cargo lists is the frequent lack of dates. Comparing the cargo lists of the ships coming from the ports of Syria and Egypt to Venice with those referring to the ships sailing to the Western Mediterranean, it is evident that the reports sent to Datini by his agents in the latter region were seldom dated. Since it is impossible to estimate the value of merchandise contained in cargo lists which are undated, in the following table I have calculated only shipments listed in dated documents and for years for which there are such documents referring to Venetian galleys (in order to make comparison possible).³⁹

³⁹ Some lists have been partially summarized by HEERS, *Il commercio*, p. 174; ASHTOR, *Les métaux précieux*, p. 120 f.; CL. CARRÈRE, *Barcelone, centre économique 1380-1462* (Paris 1967), p. 644.

The Volume of Levantine Trade in the Later Middle Ages (1370-1498)

TABLE VI

VALUE OF CARGOES OF GENOESE, FRENCH AND CATALAN SHIPS

	Genoese	French	Catalan
1391	ship of Buto Squarzafo Alexandria-Genoa spices, dyes 22,000 <i>din.</i> sugar 2,250 * cotton, flax 3,750 * <hr/> 28,000 <i>din.</i>		ship of Fr. Casasaggio Beirut-Barcelona spices, dyes 38,000 <i>din.</i> sugar 4,700 * cotton, flax, bocassins 2,300 * <hr/> 45,000 <i>din.</i> ship of Giov. Maiella Beirut-Barcelona spices, dyes 21,500 <i>din.</i> sugar 1,300 * cotton, flax, wool, bocassins 3,200 * <hr/> 25,000 <i>din.</i> ship of Piero Dertazo da Livoli Beirut-Catalonia spices, dyes 13,000 <i>din.</i> sugar 7,000 * cotton, flax, silk fabrics 1,000 * <hr/> 21,000 <i>din.</i>
1394	ships of Giorgio Riccio and Crist. Lomellino Alexandria-Genoa spices, dyes 10,000 <i>din.</i> sugar 78,000 * ^a cotton, flax 800 * <hr/> 88,800 <i>din.</i> ship of Piero Dentuo ^b Alexandria-Flanders spices, dyes 11,500 <i>din.</i> cotton 500 * <hr/> 12,000 <i>din.</i>	ship of Paolo di Montesimoli Alexandria-Aigues- Mortes spices, dyes 3,100 <i>din.</i> cotton, flax 900 * <hr/> 4,000 <i>din.</i>	ship of . . . Pascale Beirut-Collifoure spices, dyes 16,000 <i>din.</i> sugar 600 * cotton 1,400 * <hr/> 18,000 <i>din.</i>
1395	ship of Ott. Lercaro Alexandria-Genoa spices, dyes 33,000 <i>din.</i> sugar 280 * alum 1,320 * <hr/> 34,600 <i>din.</i> ship of . . . Negro Alexandria-Genoa spices, dyes 25,000 <i>din.</i> alum 3,000 * <hr/> 28,000 <i>din.</i> 2 galleys Syria-Genoa spices, dyes 70,000 <i>din.</i> sugar 4,700 * cotton, bocassins, silk fabrics 13,000 * <hr/> 87,700 <i>din.</i> ship of N. Grillo and suppl. cog Beirut-Genoa spices 35,300 <i>din.</i>		3 galleys Beirut-Barcelona spices, dyes 40,000 <i>din.</i> sugar 5,140 * cotton 360 * <hr/> 45,500 <i>din.</i>

Table VI. (continued)

	Genoese	French	Catalan
1396	2 galleys Alexandria-Genoa spices, dyes sugar <hr/> 62,000 <i>din.</i>	ship of Jac. Ibalvi ^c Beirut-Aigues- Mortes spices, dyes sugar bocassins, camlets <hr/> 25,000 <i>din.</i>	5 galleys Beirut-Barcelona spices, dyes sugar bocassins <hr/> 238,000 <i>din.</i>
	ship of Polo Lercaro Alexandria-Genoa spices, dyes cotton, alum <hr/> 47,000 <i>din.</i>		
	ship Lomellina Alexandria-Genoa spices <hr/> 35,000 <i>din.</i>		
	ship of Raf. Squarzaico Alexandria-Genoa spices, dyes cotton, flax <hr/> 21,000 <i>din.</i>		
1397			4 galleys Beirut-Barcelona spices, dyes sugar <hr/> 78,800 <i>din.</i>

* The value of the 171 *pani* sugar has been calculated on the supposition that a loaf was equal to 9 *kinjar djarwi*, as stated by al-Maktizi, *al-Khitat* I, p. 102 f. But in another cargo list, that of the Genoese cog of Raffaele Castello (a. 1379), cf. HEERS, *l. c.*, one finds 1457 *pani* which would therefore be a quantity equal to 900 tons, worth some hundred thousands *dinars*. So the meaning of the *pani* is not clear.

^b Dentuo is a typical Genoese name, see M. BALARD, *Gènes et l'Ousremier* I, Les actes de Caffa du notaire Lamberto di Sambuceto (Paris 1973), index p. 400.

^c On the name Jac. Ibalvi see E. BARATIER - F. REYNAUD, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille* II (Paris 1951), appendix.

The estimates in our table are certainly even more open to question than those referring to the cargoes of the Venetian galleys. Nevertheless they allow us to draw some conclusions.

They show that the Genoese, French and Catalan galleys and cogs, returning from Syria and Egypt, had cargoes worth on average 18,000 - 25,000 *dinars*. Often a ship loaded Oriental merchandise worth 45,000 *dinars*, whereas many ships transported cargoes worth no more than 12,000 - 15,000 *dinars*. The merchants of these nations also loaded cotton onto their galleys and the Genoese often brought great quantities of alum from Egypt, both of which were cheaper articles than spices. On the other hand, some of their cogs had a much greater tonnage than the Venetian ships. In 1395 six Genoese ships brought merchandise worth about 185,000 *dinars*

and three Catalan galleys a cargo worth 45,000 *dinars*. If nine ships alone loaded merchandise in the Levant worth 230,000 *dinars*, it is not impossible that the total capital invested in that year by the South European trading nations (beside the Venetians) amounted to 400,000 *dinars*. In 1396 the cargoes of five Genoese ships were valued at 165,000 *dinars*, those of five Catalan galleys were worth 238,000 *dinars*, and a ship sailing to Aigues-Mortes loaded merchandise worth 25,000 *dinars*. In this year at least the purchases of the other trading nations considerably exceeded those of the Venetians.

Our estimates refer, with one exception, to cargoes whose inventories have been found in the Datini archives. These lists (at least those which have been preserved) are, however, incomplete. The number of ships which the Genoese, some towns in Southern France and the Catalans sent in that period to the Levantine ports was much greater, and together exceeded the number of Venetian ships.⁴⁰ Both the Catalan and French merchants intensified their commercial activities in the Near East, when the Venetians and Genoese were exhausted after the war of Chioggia. The number of Catalan galleys which visited Beirut at the end of the fourteenth century was 3-5 a year,⁴¹ and in some years of the first decade of the fifteenth century it was even greater. The following table summarized the data found by Cl. Carrère in the archives of Barcelona.⁴²

TABLE VII
NUMBER OF CATALAN SHIPS VISITING THE LEVANT

	Egypt	Syria	both
1403	4	4	1
1404	7	2	1
1405	7	3	1

The seaborne trade of the Provençals and the merchants of Languedoc was very irregular, but from the documents which

⁴⁰ See F. MELIS, *Note sur le mouvement, etc.*

⁴¹ CL. CARRÈRE, *ibidem*.

⁴² *Op. cit.*, p. 851 f.

E. Baratier has examined one learns, however, that from 1379 to 1391 2-5 ships sailed annually from the Provençal ports to Alexandria and Beirut.⁴³

The estimate of the volume of Genoese trade with the Levant in that period would, however, be incomplete were the shipments of Oriental spices which were transported on Genoese ships directly from the Near Eastern emporia to the ports of Northwestern Europe not included. At the end of the fourteenth century pepper, ginger and other spices were usually shipped direct to Flanders and England, and this was a typical Genoese activity. Our table contains only one of these shipments for 1394. But Genoese notarial documents leave no doubt that such shipments were frequent.⁴⁴

In order to gauge the capital which the trading nations of Southern Europe invested in that period in the trade with Levant, one must also take account of the considerable quantities of Oriental merchandise shipped to the West via Cyprus and Rhodes. Famagusta served as a great Genoese entrepôt, and Rhodes was used by Catalans.

Finally the Levantine trade of the "minor" trading nations should not be minimised. Although the commercial activities which were carried on in the Near East by the merchants of Ancona, Naples and Sicily cannot be compared with the trade of Venice, Genoa and the Catalans, or even of the Provençals, the cargoes of their ships represented, in all, a considerable investment of European capital. The reports of the arrival of two Anconitan cogs in 1379 from Syria and Egypt may serve as a sample. The cog coming from Tripoli brought

spices for	3,910	<i>dinars</i>
sugar	2,400	»
cotton, potash	5,540	»
	<hr/>	
	11,850	<i>dinars</i>

⁴³ *Histoire du commerce de Marseille*, appendix, and see p. 231 ff.

⁴⁴ L. LIAGRE-DE STURLER, *Les relations commerciales entre Gênes, la Belgique et l'Outremer d'après les archives notariales génoises (1320-1400)* (Bruxelles 1969), no. 558, 559, 562-64, 591 et cf. p. CXLII.

The cog coming from Egypt had the following cargo:

spices	3,640	<i>dinars</i>
sugar	690	»
cotton	4,320	»
	<hr/>	
	8,650	<i>dinars</i> ⁴⁵

On the other hand, we must not be misled by the large amounts which the Genoese and Catalan traders spent in 1395 and 1396 for the purchase of Near Eastern articles. Like the Venetians, the Genoese made an effort to compensate for the losses they had suffered in their colonies on the Black Sea by greater investments in the Near East. Even the Catalans did not find in Rhodes those Indian and Persian articles which had reached there in previous years from the ports of the Black Sea. Further, spice prices were then very high in the Near East, so that the value of the cargoes increased considerably.

Consequently one can conclude that the capital invested by the Southern European trading nations (other than the Venetians) in Levantine trade amounted in "normal" years at the end of the fourteenth century to approximately 400 - 450,000 *dinars*.

d) *Data from the middle of the fifteenth century*

Whereas at the end of the fourteenth century the Venetians had not yet achieved supremacy in Levantine trade, and the capital invested (including the merchandise exported) by other Southern European trading nations was certainly greater, the commercial activities which these nations carried on in the Levant began to decline after the first decade of the fifteenth century. They had always been less regular than those of the Venetians, but for various reasons in the fifteenth century there were many periods in which some South European trading nations discontinued their trade in Syria and in Egypt, or limited it to a very modest size. The trade of the Genoese in the Near East declined almost progressively.

⁴⁵ MELIS, *Documenti*, p. 144.

In March 1424 an agent of the Venetian trader Lorenzo Dolfin reported that since the departure of the galleys the Venetians had bought spices and dyes in Alexandria for 28,791 *dinars*, and that they had 5,000 *dinars* in cash and (European) merchandise worth 40,000 *dinars*, the Genoese 30,000 *dinars* in cash and merchandise and the Florentines 14,000. The other trading nations, wrote the agent, did not count.⁴⁶ At the end of the same month another agent of the same Venetian trader reported from Damascus that since the departure of the galley, in the autumn, the Genoese had bought spices for 10,875 *ducats* and that they had 55,000 *ducats* in cash and merchandise.⁴⁷ Since the exchange rate of the ducat in 1424 was apparently 0.89 *dinar*,⁴⁸ it follows from these letters that the Genoese had by the end of March 1424, about 100,000 *ducats* in cash, export articles and spices in Damascus and Alexandria. Reports of *fattori* in other years of the first quarter of the fifteenth century point, however, to the decline of Genoese trade in Syria and Egypt. In March 1414 an agent of the Venetian firm Antonio Zane wrote from Damascus that the Venetians had 25,000 *ducats* in cash and 12,000 in merchandise, and the Catalans a total of 10,000. As for the Genoese, he reported that they had bought only small quantities of spices.⁴⁹ At the end of September 1416 another agent of this firm reported from Damascus that the Venetians had 79,000 *ducats* and merchandise worth 40,000. He also remarked that there were neither Genoese nor Catalans in the Syrian capital.⁵⁰ Of course, the Genoese never discontinued their activities in the Levant altogether, and in 1438 the government of Genoa farmed out the duty of 4% imposed a short time before on the trade with Syria and Egypt.⁵¹ But the data in the Genoese notarial documents

⁴⁶ Letter of Nicolo Bernardo, dated March 16, 1424; printed by MELIS, *Documenti*, p. 190.

⁴⁷ Letter of Zorzi Loredan, dated March 27, 1424; ASV, *Proc. S. Marco, Com. di citra*, Ba 282, fasc. II, tomo III.

⁴⁸ See W. POPPER, *Egypt and Syria under the Circassian sultans* [Pt. III], (Univ. of California Press 1957), p. 74.

⁴⁹ Letter of Lorenzo Foscarini, dated March 24, 1414; ASV, *Proc. S. Marco, Com. miste*, Ba 128a, fasc. V.

⁵⁰ Letter of Nicolo Contarini, dated Sept. 30, 1416, *ibidem*.

⁵¹ N. JORGA, *Notes et extraits pour servir à l'histoire des Croisades au XV^e siècle*, ROL VI (1898), p. 404.

and other evidence leave us in no doubt of the steady decline of Genoese activities in the Near Eastern markets.⁵²

The commercial activities of the Catalans in the Levant, though often interrupted, were never completely discontinued. In Syria their activity declined steeply, but every year some of their ships anchored in Alexandria. In some periods, like 1425-1429 and later in the sixth decade of the fifteenth century, from 1454, the Catalans increased their trade with Egypt.⁵³ But, taken as a whole, it had decreased greatly compared with the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century.

The Venetians' Levantine trade, on the other hand, steadily increased. In 1414 a convoy of three galleys from Alexandria brought a cargo worth about 125,000 *dinars*.⁵⁴ This cargo was still approximately the value of the average cargoes of the Venetian galleys coming from Alexandria at the end of the fourteenth century and in the first decade of the fifteenth century. But soon after this the volume of Venetian trade in the Levant increased steeply.⁵⁵

In 1423 the Doge Tommaso Mocenigo claimed that the investments made by the Venetians every year in the Levant, amounted to 300,000 *ducats*, and this is fully borne out by other evidence. In April 1423 an agent of Lorenzo Dolfin mentioned in a letter that two Venetian galleys departed for Beirut with 200,000 *ducats*.⁵⁶ Information from the fourth decade of the fifteenth century is even more impressive. When the Mamluk sultan expelled the Venetians from his dominions at the beginning of the year 1435, they left merchandise worth 235,000 *ducats*⁵⁷ in Egypt and Syria, according to reports in the chronicles. The expulsion of the Venetians was the sequel of the conflict with the sultan who tried to establish a monopoly of the pepper trade. In August 1436 the

⁵² LIAGRE-DE STURLER, *op. cit.*, p. CXLVIII.

⁵³ CARRÈRE, *op. cit.*, p. 853 ff.

⁵⁴ See the cargo list published by R.-H. BAUTIER, *art. cit.*, p. 320.

⁵⁵ The following data should be added to those compiled in my paper in JEEH III, p. 39.

⁵⁶ Letter of Nicolo Bernardo from Alexandria, dated April 12, 1423; ASV, *Proc. S. Marco, Com. di citra*, Ba 282, fasc. II, tomo III. However, according to the registers of the Misti 4 galleys were sent to Beirut, see JEEH II, p. 19.

⁵⁷ JORGA, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

Senate of Venice discussed the matter, and the Doge proposed to send an ambassador to Cairo who should agree to an annual purchase of 1500 *sportas* from the sultan.⁵⁸ Since the annual purchase of pepper at the end of the fourteenth and at the beginning of the fifteenth century had probably been no more than this (see above) and the Doge believed in 1436 that the Venetians could afford to buy it from the sultan at the price fixed by him (in order to have the permission to purchase on the free market as much as they wanted and at commercial prices), one can safely conclude that the volume of their pepper trade had already increased considerably.

Other information contained in a famous speech of the same Doge Tommaso Mocenigo indicates a great increase in Venice's trade with the Levant. He mentioned (or is supposed to have mentioned) that the Venetians sold the following quantities of Oriental merchandise annually:⁵⁹

TABLE VIII

VENETIAN SALES OF NEAR EASTERN MERCHANDISE IN ABOUT 1421

in Lombardy	pepper	300,000 <i>ducats</i>	raw cotton	250,000 <i>ducats</i>
	cinnamon	64,000 »	spun cotton	30,000 » *
	ginger	80,000 »		
	Brazil-wood	120,000 »		280,000 <i>ducats</i>
	indigo	50,000 »		
		614,000 <i>ducats</i>		
in the Veneto	pepper	40,000 <i>ducats</i>		
	cinnamon	19,200 »		
	ginger	40,000 »		
		99,200 <i>ducats</i>		
			total	614,000 <i>ducats</i>
				280,000 »
				99,200 »
				993,200 <i>ducats</i>

* The text is faulty. It reads « *colone filati migliaia 20,000 da 15 fino a 20 duc' il centinaio sommano duc' 30,000*. But 20,000 *migliaia* of pounds at the said price would have yielded at least 3 mill. *ducats*. Probably the total is right and one should correct 20,000 *migliaia* to 200. The accounts of the Venetian cotton traders show indeed that they bought very small quantities of spun cotton.

⁵⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 376.

⁵⁹ MARINO SANUTO, *Vite de' duchi*, in « *Muratori* » 22, col. 154.

Supposing that the FOB prices of the spices and dyes were lower by 50% and those of the cotton by 85%,⁶⁰ one can still conclude that the Venetians purchased every year

spices and dyes for	356,500 <i>ducats</i>
cotton for	42,000 »
	<hr/>
	398,500 <i>ducats</i>

To these totals there should be added the value of the "minor" spices and that of the spices and dyes sold to the Germans (and other traders from Central Europe). In 1511, when the Venetian pepper trade had greatly declined, the Germans bought Oriental articles worth 140,000 *ducats*⁶¹ at the spice fair in Venice in January. Consequently one can conclude that the capital invested by the Venetians in Oriental spices, dyes and cotton had reached half a million *ducats* in about 1420. The cotton sold by the Venetians came mainly from Syria, whereas they imported small quantities from other countries.⁶² The comparison of the total Venetian investment in the Near East at the time of Tommaso Mocenigo, (i.e. 500-550,000 *ducats*) with the value of their purchases of about 1400 (300,000 *dinars*) would point to an increase of more than 33%. Such a conclusion would, however, be exaggerated.

One can also approach the problem of the volume of trade with the Levant in another way. To assess the volume of Venetian trade with the Levant one can try to discover the number of Venetian traders in the Near Eastern emporia and the volume of their transactions.

The number of Venetian merchants who resided for a long time in the great centres of the Levant trade was not insignificant. At the time of the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, the number of the Venetian "nobles" present was 68.⁶³ But as

⁶⁰ See in my paper *Profits from the trade with the Levant in the fifteenth century*, BSOAS 38, p. 268.

⁶¹ G. THOMAS, *Capitolare dei Visdomini dei Todeschi in Venezia* (Berlin 1874), p. VI.

⁶² See accounts of the firma ANDREA ZORZI-FRATERNA SANUBO, ASV, *Miscellanea di documenti non appartenenti ad alcun archivio*, Ba 29, f. 13b (a. 1451): purchase of cotton in Spain.

⁶³ NICOLÒ BARBARO, *Giornale dell'assedio di Costantinopoli*, 1453, ed. E. Cornet (Vienna 1856), p. 16 ff.

Venetians living in Constantinople were particularly numerous, this cannot be considered a characteristic sample. The traders who travelled on board the galleys every year to Alexandria and to Beirut were even more numerous. In 1408 there were 80 Venetians in Alexandria.⁶⁴ For our purpose, however, it is much more important to collect information about the number of the *fattori*, as the papers of the Venetian consulate in Alexandria dating from the time of Biegio Dolfin (second decade of the fifteenth century) show clearly that not only before the arrival of the galleys, but also during the spice fair itself, the *fattori* purchased Indian articles.⁶⁵ And the traders coming from Venice certainly relied on them, as they knew how best to conduct trade with the Moslems.

Such an attempt can only be made for those years for which various series of documents have come down to us from some of the Near Eastern markets, but as several volumes of notarial records drawn up in Alexandria and in Damascus in the fifteenth century have been preserved, it is certainly possible. The following table, which is no more than a sample, refers to years for which there is sufficient documentation to enable such checking. It has been compiled from data found in the records of the *Giudici di petizion*, of the notaries Nicolò Venier and Cristoforo del Fiore, in the papers of the Venetian consulate in Alexandria, and the ledgers of the firm Lorenzo Dolfin.⁶⁶ However, our sample cannot be altogether conjectural, as there is good reason to believe that the documents of the Venetian consulate, our main source for the Venetians in Alexandria in 1418-1419, contain the names of almost all the *fattori*.

⁶⁴ *Traité d'Emmanuel Piloti*, p. 203.

⁶⁵ An account referring to the purchase of pepper by the Venetians in 1419 contains only 39 names, many of them known from other documents as resident of Alexandria.

⁶⁶ The various sources date from the following years:

1418	Damascus	notary Nic. Venier; G.P., Sent.
	Alexandria	archives of the Venetian consulate; G.P. Sent.
1419	Damascus	notary Nic. Venier; G.P., Sent.
	Alexandria	archives of the Venetian consulate; G.P., Sent.
1420-22	Alexandria	notary Nic. Venier; G.P., Sent.; archives of Lorenzo Dolfin
1455-57	Damascus	notary Cristoforo del Fiore; G.P., Sent.

The acts of Nicolò Venier are in ASV, *Cancellaria inferiore*, Notai, Ba 230 and those of Cristoforo del Fiore there, Ba 83.

TABLE IX

VENETIAN FATTORI IN THE LEVANT

	Alexandria	Damascus
1418	36	28
1419	43	41
1420	41	
1421	27	
1422	42	
1455		24
1456		14
1457		34

The table shows that the Venetian colony in Alexandria in 1418-22 numbered about 40 merchants, whereas the colony in Damascus consisted of approximately 30 *fattori*.

Besides the colonies in Alexandria and in Damascus, Venetians lived permanently in Damietta, Acre, Ramla, Beirut, Tripoli, Hamath, Lattakia and Aleppo. It seems that before the middle of the fifteenth century only Tripoli had a sizeable colony, however. Using information from the *Sentenze* of the *Giudici di petizion* for five years in the mid fifteenth century (for which we have no other sources) I have traced the following numbers:

TABLE X

VENETIANS IN TRIPOLI

1441	5
1442	8
1443	8
1444	10
1445	6

Probably only a few Venetians lived in other towns of Egypt and Syria in the first half of the fifteenth century. Bertrandon de la Broquière apparently met only one in Hamath.⁶⁷ Even in Beirut there lived only a very few *fattori*; our sources for 1419 contain the names of four. The Venetian colony in Aleppo apparently became sizeable in the second half of the fifteenth century. It is true that our information (except for the papers of the Venetian consulate in Alexandria) does not cover all Venetians living in the

⁶⁷ *Le voyage d'outremer de Bertrandon de la Broquière* (Paris 1892), p. 77.

Levant, but only those who were involved in law-suits or found it necessary to draw up notarial acts. But they do not point to very large colonies. Perhaps we should not be completely mistaken in supposing that the number of Venetians residing permanently (in other words, for some years) in Syria and in Egypt amounted to no more than 120 in the middle of the fifteenth century.

But what did the purchases of a single *fattore* amount to? The following two documents give us an idea.

TABLE XI

ACCOUNT OF PEPPER BY THE VENETIAN CONSULATE IN 1418⁶⁸

pip sporte 236 vendudo p linchanto segundo uxanza a di 27 hotobre del 1418 p le galie capit' Andrea Mozenigo

Stefano Quirino <i>gd</i> Philipi	s	5	b	98		
Carlo Contarini		10		98	k	15 q 2
Domenigo Morexini		5		97		1
Lorenzo Bembo		10		97		12
Antonio Barbaro		10		100		1
Anzelo Michiel		10		99		1
Zan Morexini		5		100		
Angelo Michiel		10		100		1
Lorenzo Longo		3		100		2
Domenigo Morexini		5		101		1
Jacomo de Zorzi		3		100		6
Antonio Marin		10		100		
Baldissera Rizo		5		100		1
Artale Contarini		2		99		15
Angelo Michiel		10		100		1
Domenigo Morexini		10		100		1 ^a
Jacobo de Zorzi		5		100		5
Angelo Michiel		10		100		1
Antonio Marin		5		100		
Angelo Michiel		10		99		13
Carlo Contarini		3		99		13
Angelo Michiel		10		99		13
Anthonyo Marin		5		100		
Carlus Contarini		5		98		13
Angelo Michiel		10		99		1
Piero Bernardo		10		99		1
Piero Bernardo		5		98		12

s^o 236^b

^a It seems that the clerk of the consulate did not err in noting the same purchase twice, but that the agent bought the same quantity for different firms.

^b The total is only 201 *sportas*.

⁶⁸ ASV, *Proc. S. Marco, Com. miste*, Ba 180, com. Biegio Dolfin, fasc. 13. The quantities of pepper are given in *sportas*, the price in besants (*dinars*), karats (1/24 *dinar*) and *quarters* (of karat).

TABLE XII
ANOTHER ACCOUNT OF PURCHASES OF PEPPER BY VENETIANS
IN ALEXANDRIA ⁶⁹

page 1 <i>Sporte de pip' comprato dapoi zonte le galie</i>					
Angelo Michiel et L' Bembo della voxe p'	sp ^o	37	k	2	r ^o 50
el dito Angelo et L' dela segunda voxe		45		3	3
It' li diti		5		4	40
Carlo Contarini de la p ^a voxe		17			
Marco Zorzi p ^a voxe		18			
It' dela segunda		20			
Piero Bernardo del la p ^a voxe		15			10
dela segunda		22			
It' da Jacob Gurti *		18			
It' dal compagno di Jacob Gurti		4		1	
It' da Macuiet ^b Magnebil		3		1	37
It' da Scehuich ^c		6		1	64
Francesco Zorzi de la p ^a voxe		7		1	50
It' da Sirithi		4		4	40
It' da Jacob Gurti		7			77
Chiario Archangeli de la p ^a voxe		22		2	72
de la segunda		30			
Jacomo Emo de la p ^a voxe		15		1	18
It' de la segunda		5			44
It' da al gusoli ^d		8		3	63
Stephano Quirino de la p ^a voxe		7		1	85
It' da Jacob Gurti segunda voxe		15		2	50
It' da Jacob dito		11		3	75
Philipo Malerbi segunda voxe		2		1	43
Andrea Cazilli da Jacob Gurti		5		3	13
It' da Jacob dito		1		2	
page 2 <i>pi' bit' p nros mercatores da Jacob Gurti post ... secde vocis</i>					
Stephano Quirino		10			
It'	sp ^o	12			
P' Bernardo	sp ^o	18			
Philipp de Malerbi		1			
Francescho Zorzi	sp ^o	10			
Andrea Cazilli	sp ^o	5			
pip' abudo da zilaledi ^e					
Piero Bernardo	schibe	16			
pip' abudo da Gerbeli					
Piero Bernardo	schibe	11			
pip' abudo dalornos ...					
Filippo Malerbi	sp ^o	4			
dela segunda voxe Piero Bernardo		2			

* name of an Egyptian merchant.

^b Mahmud?

^c Shaikh Shuwaikh.

^d al-Ghuzali.

^e Djalal ad-din.

⁶⁹ Archives of the Venetian consulate in Alexandria, *ibidem*. The accounts refer to the various stages ("voxe") of the auction. The quantities of pepper are indicated in *sporas*, spice *kintār* (of 45 kg) and *ratls* (1/100 *kintār*).

These documents show that a Venetian *fattore* in Alexandria often bought, at the beginning of the Spice Fair, pepper worth 1623 *dinars* (average of 13 *fattori* comprised in table X), or even 4,000 *dinars* (average of 11 *fattori* comprised in table XI). A list of pepper purchases which apparently refers to the total of the purchases of the Venetians in Alexandria in 1419⁷⁰ gives an average of 3,700 *dinars*. But according to the latter document, only 31 merchants were obliged to pay the consul the duty for their purchases, and the names of others are listed without a payment being added. So one can suppose that some agents bought, or at least paid, for others. Certainly the same is true for the document reproduced here as table XI. As more than 40 Venetians lived in Alexandria in 1419, one can calculate from these papers that a *fattore* bought in that period pepper worth about 3,000 *dinars* a year. Since pepper then represented 70% of Venetian purchases in Egypt one can assume that such a *fattore* would buy other Oriental articles for about 1,300 *dinars*. So the volume of his transactions through the year would have amounted to some 4,300 *dinars*. In drawing conclusions from these documents one must, however, remember that the price of pepper was very high at that time. It was 33-66% more than the normal price at the end of the fourteenth century. Reducing the conjectural total of the pepper purchases of a *fattore* by 50% (that means 33% of the prices in 1418-19) one can calculate his purchases at a total of 3,300 *dinars*, i.e. 3,666 *ducats*. If the volume of the transactions of the Venetian traders in other towns of Egypt and Syria was the same, one can conclude that the total amounted to 440,000 *ducats*. The difference between this sum and the total resulting from the figures given by Tommaso Mocenigo can easily be explained: the Doge calculated on the basis of extremely high prices prevailing in the second decade of the fifteenth century, when the *carica* pepper was 120 *ducats* whereas its "normal price" in that period was half that sum,⁷¹ and 100 pounds of ginger was 40 *ducats*, although the normal price was 20.⁷²

⁷⁰ See JEEH, III, p. 39.

⁷¹ See F.C. LANE, *Pepper prices before da Gama*, « Journal of Economic History », 28 (1968), p. 594f.; E. ASHTOR, *Spice prices in the Near East in the fifteenth century*, JRAS, 1976.

⁷² ASHTOR, *Spice prices*, l. c.

e) *The volume of trade of individual Levant traders in the fifteenth century*

In estimating the transactions of the Venetian *fattori* in the Near East one is not reduced to guess-work, for the judicial documents provide us with information.

Some of this is given below:

TABLE XIII
SHIPMENTS (PURCHASES) OF SPICES AND DYES BY VENETIAN FATTORI

- a) Polo Barbarigo loaded in 1415 in Beirut on the galley of Marco Erizo 334 *colli*
- b) the same *fattore* loaded in 1416 in Beirut on the galley of Jac. Barbarigo 172 *colli* Barbarigo 172 *colli*
- c) Ant. Condolmier, patron of a Beirut ship in 1425 (approximately), witnessed in a litigation that he had loaded 414 *colli* of one *fattore*
- d) Michelotto Michiel & Lunardo Spiera loaded in 1426 in Alexandria 29 *colli*
- e) Lorenzo Tiepolo, *fattore* in Beirut, shipped in 1429 254 *colli*^a
- f) Alvise Ziola bought in 1454 in Damascus pepper for 2,000 ducats (which would have made 80 *colli*)
- g) Marco Morosini loaded in about 1460 in Alexandria 60 *colli* to the value, according to him, of 130 ducats each
- h) the quantity of spices loaded in Alexandria in 1462 on an Alexandria galley by Hieronimo Contarini & Brothers was 91 *colli*.⁷³

^a The galley of Andrea Tiepolo is spoken of. He was patron of a Beirut galley in 1429, see ASV, Senato, Mistri, 57, f. 118r.

At first glance these scattered data look inconclusive, but one can deduce from them that a *fattore* in Beirut working for two or three traders in Damascus shipped 200-300 spice *colli* annually. The average value of a spice *collo* being 40-80 ducats and as many *fattori* were buying not less than 80-120 *colli* a year, one can calculate a total investment of 720,000 ducats a year. But as much of the merchandise acquired through the year and shipped by the Venetian agents in Syria consisted of cheaper articles (cotton, potash) one must deduct a considerable sum from this total.

Finally one can try to calculate the volume of Venetian trade with the Levant by estimating the transactions of the firms in

⁷³ G.P., Sent. 28, f. 25a f.; 35, f. 39b ff.; 45, f. 61a ff.; 52, f. 142b f. 77a f.; 119, f. 97a f.; 135, f. 133a; 137, f. 110a ff.

Venice which were engaged in this branch of trade and then multiply their volume by a conjectural total number of firms.

Many of the Venetian Levant traders were middle rank merchants, or more correctly merchants who invested only a modest sum annually in transactions in the Near East. Most of these firms carried on trade in several different countries, and their investments in the Levantine trade (involving the export of European merchandise and the import of spices, dyes and cotton) amounted at the middle of the fifteenth century to no more than 800-1,500 *ducats* a year.

TABLE XIV

TRANSACTION OF VENETIAN MIDDLE RANK TRADERS

- a) Guido da Canal sends, in 1434, 1,000 *ducats* to Damascus for the purchase of spices
- b) Matteo & Joh. de Garzonibus buy, in 1435, in Alexandria pepper for (about) 1,620 *asbrafis*
- c) Lorenzo Barbaro buys, in 1436, by his *fattore* in Tripoli potash for 1,237 *ducats*
- d) Zuan Loredan exports, in 1440, to Tripoli furs worth 1,400 *ducats*
- e) Antonio Polani sends, in 1445, to Tripoli silver ingots and canevas worth 1,700 *ducats* and in 1459 to Damascus Brescia cloth for 1,000 *ducats*
- f) Andrea Vendramin exports, in 1458, to Damascus cloth (sold) for 1,090 *ducats* and copper wire for 300 *ducats*
- g) Marco Trevisan exports, in 1458 (approximately), to Syria velvets for 130 *ducats* and Brescia cloth for 1,266 *ducats*
- h) Polo Mudazio sends, in 1458, to his brother (and agent) in Alexandria merchandise sold for 1,730 *ducats* (netto)
- i) Leonardo Duodo sends, in 1459, to Beirut cloth for 643 *ducats* (cost price) and in cash 518 *ducats*
- j) Zaccaria Soranzo goes, in 1468, into a partnership with Benedetto Sanuto for trading in Damascus, oranzo invests 1,200 *ducats* and Sanuto 600.⁷⁴

The judicial documents from which these data have been collected also contain many references to much smaller investments. Even these really small investments were often made by firms which were at the same time engaged in transactions elsewhere.

⁷⁴ Same series 70, f. 102a ff.; 75, f. 41b ff.; 84, f. 136b ff.; 100, f. 52b ff.; 107, f. 78b f.; 129, f. 153b; 130, f. 65a f.; 132, f. 106b ff.; 133, f. 56a ff. 190, f. 140b ff.; Cristoforo del Fiore VI, f. [3b].

TABLE XV

SMALL INVESTMENTS

a) Purchases of spices by the firm Antonio Zane

1411	Damascus	cloves	141 <i>ducats</i>	
		lac and nutmeg	614 »	
				755 <i>ducats</i>
1413	Damascus	pepper	336 <i>ducats</i>	
		cloves	199 »	
		lac	67 »	
				602 <i>ducats</i>
1414	Alexandria	pepper	208 <i>dinars</i>	
	Cairo	»	421 »	
				629 <i>dinars</i>
1416	Damascus	pepper	89 <i>ducats</i>	
		cinammon	105 »	
				194 <i>ducats</i>
1417	Alexandria	pepper	108 <i>dinars</i>	
		Miecca ginger	66 »	
				174 <i>dinars</i>
1423	Damascus	pepper	147 <i>ducats</i>	
		beledi ginger	146 »	
				293 <i>ducats</i>

b) Purchases of Lorenzo Dolfin

1420	Alexandria	pepper	405 <i>dinars</i>	
1421	Damascus	lac	99 <i>ducats</i>	
1423	Alexandria	pepper	227 <i>dinars</i>	
	Acre	raw cotton	292 <i>ducats</i>	
	Lattakia	raw cotton	37 »	
		spun cotton	69 »	
				398 <i>ducats</i>
1424	Damascus	pepper	305 <i>ducats</i>	
1425	Alexandria	pepper	122 <i>dinars</i>	
1426	Acre	raw cotton	278 <i>ducats</i>	
		spun cotton	64 »	
				342 <i>ducats</i>

c) Federigo Contarini exports, in 1426, to Syria olive oil which is sold for 550 *ducats*

d) Lorenzo Tiepolo sends, in 1435, to his agents in Ramla 500 *ducats* for the purchase of spices

e) Piero Zimalarcha exports, in 1443, to Tripoli cloth for 609 *ducats*

f) Antonio Morosini sends, in 1443 (approximately), 609 *ducats* to Alexandria for buying pepper

g) Matteo Malipiero sends, in 1445, to Lattakia silver ingots worth 466 *ducats* for the purchase of cotton

h) Piero Morosini sends, in 1445 (approximately), silver ingots worth 570 *ducats* to Syria

i) Franco Loredan sends, in 1447 (approximately), 520 *ducats* to Syria

- j) Antonio Colonna exports, in 1452, to Damascus cloth for 520 *ducats* (selling price)
- k) Andrea da Molin & Polo Donado send, in 1456, to Damascus Brescia cloth sold for 762.5 *ducats* and 700 *ducats* in cash for having pepper and beledi ginger
- l) Polo & Jac. Sanudo buy, in 1449, in Damascus Brazil-wool and cotton for (about) 870 *ducats*
the company Sanudo & Andrea Zorzi buys, in 1466, in Damascus 13 *colli* spices worth probably 700 *ducats*
the company sells in 1467 pepper, ginger, cloves and turbith for about 1,300 *ducats*, the cost price probably being about 780 *ducats*.⁷⁵

Investments like those listed in this table may have been typical of the majority of Venetian traders in the fifteenth century. Both Antonio Zane and Lorenzo Dolfin were enterprising merchants, for example, and the first carried on commercial operations in Bruges, Nicosia, Limassol and Tana, the latter in London, Rhodes and Constantinople.

Against the large number of middle-class and small traders who were engaged in trade with the Levant, there was in Venice a group of rich merchants and companies which invested considerable sums in this leading branch of Venetian trade. There are many further examples⁷⁶ which might be added to the data given in previous papers.⁷⁷

TABLE XVI

INVESTMENTS OF RICH MERCHANTS AND COMPANIES

- a) Antonio Duodo imports, in 1428 (approximately) into Alexandria 1,100 *kinjars* olive oil sold for 6,325 *asbrafts*
- b) the agents of Piero Pisamano & Brothers have, in 1435 (approximately), in Alexandria about 5,000 *ducats*, and buy only pepper
- c) Luca Soranzo & Brothers invest, in 1443, in the trade in Tripoli 5,173 *ducats* and in 1444, 3,215 *ducats*
- d) Nicolo Bernardo & Brothers buy, in 1447 (approximately), in Alexandria pepper for 3,376 *ducats*

⁷⁵ *Same series* 52, f. 85b f.; 75, f. 3b ff.; 100, f. 40a; 102, f. 64b ff.; 107, f. 81a; 108, f. 113a; 114, f. 4a f.; 119, f. 31b ff.; 123, f. 49a ff.; *Proc. S. Marco, Com. miste*, Ba 128a, fasc. V; *Com. di citra*, Ba 282, fasc. II, tomo III; Documenti non appartenenti ad alcun archivio, Ba 29, accounts of firm Andrea Zorzi-Sanudo.

⁷⁶ G.P., Sent. 46, f. 25b ff.; 75, f. 76b ff.; 104, f. 84b ff., 129a ff.

⁷⁷ See in my paper in JEEH III, p. 33 and note 130, further p. 41 f. and notes 158, 159, 160, 161; my paper *Profits from the trade with the Levant*, BSOAS 38, p. 265, 268, 269.

Our classification is, of course, very superficial, not only because the transactions of a single company in different geographical regions may often have overlapped, but also because their activities were irregular. One year a company might invest a great sum in trade with the Near East, in another much less. However, if one supposes that 250 Venetian traders annually invested in trade with the Levant an average of 1,000 *ducats*, and 50 companies 5,000 *ducats* each, one arrives at a total of half a million ducats. This conjecture would imply that 400 merchants in the town itself and 120 agents in Egypt and Syria were engaged in the trade with the Levant. Checking these purely conjectural numbers with the available demographic data of late medieval Venice, this does not seem to be too small a figure, for the *Maggior Consiglio*, which in 1267/68 probably comprised all the rich merchant families, had 502 members then.⁷⁸ An estimate of Venice's population in 1379/80 gives 1211 nobles and 817 *popolani*, most of the latter being artisans and petty (local) traders.⁷⁹

The volume of the Venetians' commercial activities in the Near East was more or less the same as that of the traders belonging to other nations. In 1417 three Genoese imported coral to Damascus: Oberto Doria a quantity worth 682 *ducats*, Raffaele di Poggia a quantity worth 600 *ducats* and Pino di Megalotis coral worth 987 ducats.⁸⁰ A year later, the Genoese Carolus de Gualteriis sold 128 pieces of Catalan cloth in Damascus,⁸¹ and they were probably worth (selling price) about 1,500 *ducats*. In 1421 a merchant of Montpellier, Isarnus Pellagulli, came to Alexandria with merchandise and cash amounting to 1,050 *ducats*.⁸²

f) *The reports of the Diarii (last years of the fifteenth century)*

The comprehensive chronicles of Girolamo Priuli and Marino Sanuto contain most valuable accounts both of the capital invested

⁷⁸ G. CRACCO, *Società e stato nel medioevo veneziano (sec. XII-XV)* (Florence 1967), p. 237.

⁷⁹ G. LUZZATTO, *Storia economica di Venezia dall'XI al XVI secolo* (Venezia 1961), p. 130.

⁸⁰ Nic. Venier B, 2, f. 2a ff.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, f. 1a.

⁸² *Ibidem*, f. 42b f.

by the Venetians in the trade with the Levant and of the cargoes of the galleys returning from Egypt and Syria. They also provide interesting information concerning the commercial activities of other trading nations in the Levant. Though these chronicles, to which that of Malipiero adds further information, begin in the last years of the fifteenth century, they contain reports which seem to be characteristic of conditions prevailing in the Levantine trade, at least, in the last quarter of the fifteenth century.

Various information suggests that the volume of Venetian commercial activities in the Levant increased in the second half of the fifteenth century. The number of Venetians residing for a long time, often many years, in the towns of Syria and Egypt had risen substantially. What had been a factory became a true colony. In Tripoli the Venetians had as early as about 1434 a « Council of twelve ».⁸³ The colony in Aleppo had such a council in 1471⁸⁴ and that in Beirut in 1485 (approximately).⁸⁵ The increase in the number of the galleys sent to Alexandria is also symptomatic, for these galleys were bigger than those going to Beirut.⁸⁶ There is no contradictory evidence which would support the opinion that the growing power of the Turks put an end to the great trade of Alexandria about the year 1470.⁸⁷

The chroniclers provide the following data on the capital (cash) taken by the Venetian merchants travelling on the galleys to the fairs.⁸⁸

This seems to indicate that the capital (cash) invested by Venetians in trade with the Levant at the end of the fifteenth century amounted, together with the sum spent for the purchase of cotton, to 350-400,000 *ducats* a year. The merchants travelling on board the spice-galleys usually carried more than 300,000 *ducats*

⁸³ G.P., Sent. 70, f. 132a ff.

⁸⁴ Same series 186, f. 27b.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, f. 127b ff.

⁸⁶ Cf. JEEH III, p. 22.

⁸⁷ As Bautier maintains, see *art. cit.*, p. 299.

⁸⁸ Priuli I, p. 30, 48, 94, 259; II, p. 74; Marino Sanuto I, col. 234, 270; II, col. 736; III, col. 1188; MALIPIERO, *Annali Veneti*, in ASI VII, (1843), pt. 1, pp. 640, 646. Cf. the table of V. MAGALHÃES-GODINHO, *L'économie de l'empire portugais aux XVe et XVIe siècles* (Paris 1969), p. 306 who quotes the figures of Sanuto and Priuli.

TABLE XVII

CAPITAL INVESTED BY VENETIANS IN THE LEVANT

	Alexandria	Beirut
1495	190,000 <i>ducats</i>	
1496	220,000 »	130,000 <i>ducats</i>
		cotton ships 50,000 »
1497	300,000 »	60,000 »
1498	240,000 »	70,000 »
	(or 200,000)	(or 60,000)
1500	225,000 »	50,000 »
	(or 140,000)	

with them, and at least 50,000 ducats were sent to Syria for the cotton fair in the spring. That trade with the Levant reached a peak just before the discovery of the sea route to India is also borne out by another report of Marino Sanuto who recounted that in the month of May 1498 five galleys and 10 other ships came to Rosetta with 400,000 *ducats*.⁸⁹

The reports of Priuli and Sanuto provide various information concerning the spice cargoes loaded on the galleys. Those referring to the two most important articles are characteristic of the general tendency of the Levantine trade in that period, and it is worth while comparing them with the cargoes listed by the agents of Fr. Datini a hundred years earlier.⁹⁰

From these data it is evident that in the years preceding the travel of Vasco da Gama the annual quantity of pepper which the Venetians purchased in Egypt and in Syria had risen to 2,500-3,000 *sportas*. A hundred years earlier it had usually been about 1,500-1,600 *sportas* (see above p. 584).⁹¹ The increase in purchases of ginger is even more striking. At the end of the fourteenth and at the beginning of the fifteenth century they amounted, in "normal

⁸⁹ I, col. 1032. See also other statements quoted in my *Les métaux précieux*, p. 67.

⁹⁰ The following data are either the total of the purchases or the value of the purchases or the value of the cargoes of the galleys. For the sources see note 93.

⁹¹ F.C. Lane concluded that the Venetians then bought annually 1,400,000 - 1,750,000 English pounds of pepper, i.e. 2800 - 3500 *sportas*, see *Venetian shipping during the commercial revolution*, AHR 38, p. 228 and cf. my paper *La découverte de la voie maritime aux Indes, etc.*, p. 40.

PURCHASES OF PEPPER AND GINGER BY VENETIANS

1382	Alexandria	679	<i>sportas</i>	Alexandria	472	<i>kinjar fulfuli</i>	
1386	Damascus	560	»	Damascus	480	»	»
1393	Beirut	1,118	»	Beirut	566	»	»
1394	Alexandria	2,247	»	Alexandria	840	»	»
	Beirut	634	»	Beirut	492	»	»
			2,881 <i>sportas</i>				1,432 <i>kinjar fulfuli</i>
1395	Alexandria	2,100	»	Alexandria	380	»	»
	Beirut	727	»	Beirut	1,742	»	»
			2,827 »				2,122 » »
1396	Alexandria	1,258	»	Alexandria	800	»	»
	Beirut	561	»	Beirut	618	»	»
			1,819 »				1,418 » »
1399	Alexandria	2,100	»	Alexandria	744	»	»
	Beirut	110	»	Beirut	4,838	»	»
			2,210 »				5,582 » »
1401	Alexandria	2,200	»	Alexandria	1,700	»	»
1404	Alexandria	1,440	»	Alexandria	704	»	»
	Beirut	689	»	Beirut	1,840	»	»
			2,129 »				2,544 » »
1405	Beirut	328	»	Beirut	1,646	»	»
1406	Beirut	287	»	Beirut	296	»	»
1408	Alexandria	707	»	Alexandria	20	»	»
1496	Alexandria	1,520	»	Alexandria	4,800	»	»
	Beirut	1,035	»	Beirut	1,100	»	»
			2,555 »				5,900 » »
1497	Alexandria	2,000	»	Alexandria	6,208	»	»
	Beirut	468	»	Beirut	1,280	»	»
			2,468 »				7,488 » »
1498	Alexandria	1,588	»	Alexandria	5,672	»	»

years", to 400-800 spice *kinjars* in Alexandria, and 600-1,700 in Damascus (Beirut), altogether an average of 1750. At the end of the fifteenth century the Venetian bought at least 5,000 *kinjars* of ginger in Alexandria alone.

The estimates of the sums which the Venetians spent at the end of the fifteenth century for the spices bought in Damascus and in Alexandria provide similar conclusions.

⁹² Priuli I, pp. 59, 60, 73, 109; Sanuto II, col. 87, 165, 172.

TABLE XIX

VALUE OF THE CARGOES OF VENETIAN GALLEYS 1496-1498

1496	Alexandria	185,000 <i>ducats</i>	
	Beirut	140,000 »	
			325,000 <i>ducats</i>
1497	Alexandria	300,000 <i>ducats</i>	
	Beirut	103,000 »	
			403,000 <i>ducats</i>
1498	Alexandria	270,000 <i>ducats</i>	

Even these totals are no more than rough estimates, since the data found in the *Diarii* are not exact. In some accounts the articles contained in a certain number of parcels are not specified,⁹³ so that we are reduced to conjecturing their value. However, these estimates do point to a considerable increase in Venice's trade with the Levant in the fifteenth century. They show that at the end of the fifteenth century the Venetians bought spices and dyes worth 400,000 ducats a year. If one adds to this the purchases of cotton, silk, jewels and potash, one arrives at half a million ducats. This is a sum which a hundred years before they had invested in the trade with the Levant only in years of extraordinary prosperity. As 500,000 ducats had the value of 400,000 *dinars* at the end of the reign of the Bahṭī Mamluks, one can conclude that the Venetians' Levantine trade had increased by 33% in 100 years. The increase in Venetian trade in the Near East was to some extent certainly due to the decline in the trade of the Genoese and of other Southern European trading nations in this region, but it was also a consequence of the greater demand for spices in a prosperous Europe.⁹⁴

Our conclusion is borne out by a report of a contemporary writer. A French traveller who in 1512 came to Egypt says in

⁹³ See Priuli I, p. 59: the total is 4300 *colli*, but the author specifies only 4152; p. 60: the total is 2401 *colli*, whereas only 2304 are specified; p. 73: the total is 4400 *colli* and only 2424 are specified; *ibidem*: a total of 2639 *colli* and only 2157 specified.

⁹⁴ The rise in European investment in the Levant trade and the resulting unfavourable balance of payments were not the consequent of the policy of Sultan Barsbay and his successors, as Lopez maintains, see *Il problema della bilancia dei pagamenti nel commercio di Levante*, p. 450. What Lopez says about the establishment of a monopoly of the export of cotton is simply a *lapsus calami*. The balance of payments must have been unfavourable as early as the end of the fourteenth century, if not much earlier.

his travelogue that the customs offices in Alexandria were farmed out for 250,000 *ashrafi* a year.⁹⁵ Supposing that the revenue accrued from a 10% duty, one can calculate the value of imports and exports at 1.25 million *ducats* each. Since one must add to the revenue from duties paid by the Venetians those accruing from customs paid by the traders of other Southern European nations, and from the trade with Turkey and the countries of North Africa, there is no great discrepancy between our conclusion and this report. The French traveller's report refers only to the customs offices in Alexandria, but the data which we have collected show convincingly the decline of the trade with Syria in the second half of the fifteenth century.

It would be futile even to attempt to calculate the average volume of the trade which other Southern European trading nations carried on in this period in the Moslem Near East. It was too irregular. But it was by no means insignificant.

According to reports quoted by Marino Sanuto, a Genoese ship arrived in Alexandria in 1500 with 4,600 pieces cloth and a considerable quantity of paper, copper, tin and other merchandise. In the port of Alexandria there were three French ships which had brought 13,000 pieces of cloth, as well as other articles. Finally the chronicler mentions three Catalan ships. In addition, at the end of the year two ships from Ragusa and one from Greece came to Alexandria. If we accept the estimates of the Venetian traders, which Sanuto quotes, the merchandise of the big Genoese ship was worth 100,000 *ducats*, and the Genoese merchants travelling on it had 50,000 *ducats* in cash.⁹⁶ The French ships would have brought cloth worth 200,000 *ducats* to Egypt.

The commercial activities of the Genoese, French and Catalans in the years 1499 and 1500 must have been considerable. In a report dated August 15, 1500 and quoted by Marino Sanuto one reads that, by the forecast of the Venetians in Alexandria, the Genoese and other non-Venetians would purchase in that year a total of

⁹⁵ JEAN THENAUD, *Le voyage d'outremer*, ed. Ch. Schefer (Paris 1884), p. 27.

⁹⁶ Marino Sanuto III, col. 942, 1122 f., 1199, 1527.

2,800 *colli* of spices « *si che quel viazo si reduce in mani di forestieri* ». ⁹⁷ A letter written in Genoa in April 1500 deals with the export of great quantities of German copper from Genoa to the Levant, and the writer of the letter says that since Venice is at war with the Turks, the Genoese have earned 300,000 *ducats* in two years, « as everybody comes there to buy spices ». ⁹⁹ The forecast is borne out by a report included in Priuli's chronicle that the Germans found few spices in Venice in August 1499. ¹⁰⁰ In the autumn of that year the voyage of the Venetian galleys to the Levant was suspended altogether. The amount of 150,000 *ducats* supposedly earned by the Genoese in both 1499 and 1500 points to purchases of spices worth 300,000 *ducats* a year. Perhaps we shall not be altogether mistaken in concluding from these data referring to a greatly reduced volume of the Venetian trade, that in "normal years" of that period the Genoese and the other trading nations bought in Egypt and in Syria no more than a third of the quantity purchased by Venetians.

A considerable part of the capital of about 700,000 *ducats* invested every year by the European traders, however, consisted of cloth, copper and other merchandise which they exported to the Near East. ¹⁰¹ These European articles amounted perhaps to a third of the European investment in the trade with the Levant. Taking into account the great volume of the export of European merchandise into the Near East, one can conclude that despite a favourable balance of payments, the balance of trade of the Near Eastern countries was in deficit. Calculating the prices paid for the spices which were consumed in the Near Eastern countries, for the import of metals, cloth and slaves, mostly brought from various regions

⁹⁷ III, col. 942.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, col. 1199.

⁹⁹ Marino Sanuto IV, col. 28.

¹⁰⁰ I, p. 159.

¹⁰¹ May I refer to my paper *Les lainages dans l'Orient médiéval, emploi, production, commerce*, in « *Atti delle Settimane di studi, Istituto F. Datini* », Prato, II (1970); *L'exportation de textiles occidentaux dans le Proche Orient musulman au bas Moyen Age (1370-1517)*, to be published in « *Studi alla memoria di Federigo Melis* ».

in Europe, one cannot believe that the balance of trade for the Levant itself was favourable.¹⁰²

The data in the sources we have quoted also show that the direct revenue which the Sultan had from the transit trade of the Indian articles should not be exaggerated. His stubborn attitude towards the European traders, the age-long prohibition on travels in the Red Sea and the strict control over their activities, were motivated by military and monetary reasons: the fear of being attacked from two sides, and the need for silver and copper from Europe.

¹⁰² *Les métaux précieux*, p. 95 f. This distinction has not been made in the excellent paper of LOPEZ-MISKIMIN-UDOVITCH, *England to Egypt, 1350-1500, long-term trends and long-distance trade*, in « Studies in the economic history of the Middle East », ed. M.A. Cook (Oxford University Press 1970), p. 127. About the consumption of spices in Egypt see AL-MAKRIZI, *Le traité des famines*, translation of G. Wiet (Paris 1962), p. 831.