

Making Business between the Atlantic and Levant during the mercantilist ages

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I

The entry of the French, English, and Dutch into the Levant trade led to great changes in the European trading patterns. These western trading nations were able to corner the Ottoman market and sell goods in the Levant. Furthermore, they aimed to buy and sell more and more goods and involved in the commercial network and participated in economic changes in the Mediterranean.

The development of international transport in overseas trade played a vital role in developing Ottoman-Atlantic economic relations. The Ottoman policy towards the newly rising western nations was also crucial in their expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean trade. Thus, the seventeenth century witnessed a new stage for the institutionalisation and integration of international commodity markets in the Levant and Northwestern Europe. These markets stabilised their influence and penetrated the European continent as well as the seas beyond, so that the prices of various commodities in various distant localities converged under the influence of internationally set prices. In the concerned period, the Levant trade in primary commodities and its counterpart in the north were among the most important segments of the new European economy. Special interest in the genesis of the Atlantic world economy of trade and production can certainly be justified.

From the late sixteenth century onwards, three significant factors began to appear in the European economy, which helped to unseat the Southern Europeans from their former pre-eminence as Levantine traders. The first factor was the establishment of strong trading companies in England and Holland who began to monopolise the trade with the East. The second was the recognition of the technical superiority of the Atlantic ships, with the result that Venetian merchants allowed more and more trade to be carried out in foreign hulls and they even purchased or commissioned ships from the Northern European merchants. A third factor was the failure of Venetian woollens industry to compete successfully with the new, lighter, brighter woollen cloths being produced for the Levant by the North Atlantic nations.

Along with the opening of the new trading route to the East around the Cape, and due to the Ottomans' policy towards the newly rising trading nations, goods coming from both Persia and South and East Asia continued to be brought by way of the Ottoman Empire to Europe. The Northern Europeans' trading activities in the Ottoman and Persian lands were crucial in this development.

In the sixteenth century, the Italians had control of Europe's trade with the Levant, not only in textiles, wines, oils and fruits coming from the Mediterranean region and purchased in the Ottoman ports in the East Mediterranean, but also in the spices and silks shipped overland from the countries bordering the Indian Ocean. But towards the end of the century, the picture of Europe's trade began to change in the Levant by the Northern Europeans' entering the boundaries of the Empire. Firstly, they concentrated on Aleppo to control trade from the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe.

II

Traditionally, French maritime trade had been concentrated more in the Mediterranean than in the Atlantic. In 1569, the French had already concluded a commercial treaty with the Ottoman Sultan, who had given them permission to allow nations, with no treaty of their own, to trade under the same conditions, when flying the French flag¹. Due to these privileges, the Ottoman sultan granted the right to the French to protect the *harbi*² merchants in the Levant. In 1598 France extended these privileges to the Dutch, hence Dutch merchants obtained formal permission from King Henry IV to trade in Ottoman ports under the French flag³.

In the sixteenth century, until the grant of their national charter of privileges by the Ottomans in 1580, the English traded in Ottoman ports also under the protection of France. Dutch ships sailed under foreign (English or French) flags in the Ottoman ports until 1612. The Dutch first traded in the Levant under the protection of the French. However, before this time Dutch merchants already traded under the French and English flags in the Ottoman ports⁴.

The English and Marranos also helped the Dutch in entering Levant trade. Before being granted the first Dutch capitulation of 1612, Dutch merchants also traded under English flags in Ottoman territories. However, sometimes they traded under their own flags in places where the Ottoman administration could not muster enough power to control the activities of Dutch merchants. Officially, these latter trade activities comprised smuggling. According to the *ahidnames*, however, Dutch ships could only

¹ Braudel 1972, 625-28; Kurat 1953, 305-315.

² *Harbis*, or 'foreigners', were, according to Ottoman Muslim theory, those enemy aliens or non-Muslims not protected by treaty who inhabit the *Darül-harb*, that is, any part of the world which had not yet become *Darül-islam*, which was the part of the world that was ruled according to Islamic law (Qur'an). The life and property of a *harbi* venturing into Muslim lands were completely unprotected by law unless he was given a temporary safe-conduct, *eman*. He was called *müstemin* and, in general, his position resembled that of a *zimmi* (*dhimmi*), a tax-paying non-Muslim protected by treaty, except that he was not obligated to pay taxes for one year. Should he have remained longer than one year, however, he was made a *zimmi*. For more information on these terms see *EL*, new edition (1979), s.vv. Dar al-harb, Dar al-islam (art. by Abel) and dhimmi (art. by Cahen).

³ This situation was also explained by Sir Robert Cecil in Heeringa (1910, 169) as follows: "[1599]...The Flemmings merchants doe beginne to trade into these countryes, which will cleane subvert ours, although it be now butt little worth; yett seing ther is noe meanes to prohibitt them, I thought it better to take their protection then suffer them to go under the French, whoe ceaseth not to give them all the trouble he can, saying they ought to come under his kinge, and although the Grand Signor hath absolutly commanded they shall come under H.M.'s her bannor and noe other, yet with his continuall bribing he still troubleth me... and now [1600] last of all the vizrey being changed, with hope to brybe him he beginneth a new sute with me for the sayd Flemmings, alleaging they are the king of Spaine his subiects and most come under him as other foresteers, whoe are of right belonging to us by a former graunt. Thus what with his mony and hope these have, that he will turne Turke, he findeth suth freindshipp..."

⁴ Bulut 2001.

trade within the limits set by the articles of the capitulations granted to England and France⁵.

The Jewish merchants, who were the Ottoman subjects in the Empire and described as *Levantini*, also played role in the expansion of the activities of western merchants into the Empire. Israel stresses the importance of the Jewish merchants in consolidating the commercial connection between the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean⁶.

Before 1612, because of the non-official position of the Dutch merchants in the Ottoman ports, the corsairs⁷ were the main obstacles for their trading activities in the East Mediterranean. Therefore, it was very important for the States General to establish direct diplomatic contacts with the Ottoman authorities. The States General sent a letter addressed to the Ottoman Sultan Ahmed I in 1604. In the letter the Sultan's intervention was asked in case of future difficulties concerning Dutch captives on the slave markets within the Ottoman Empire; moreover, permission was sought to trade in the Sultan's Syrian dominions. Another letter was sent to the Ottoman government of Algiers in 1606, repeating the argument and asking freedom of trade and shelter for Dutch ships in ports⁸.

The answer from Sultan Ahmed I reached the States General in an informal way. Dutch shipping continued to suffer from the depredations of corsairs in the Mediterranean and the Dutch authorities continued to send letters to the Ottoman governors in Tunis and Algiers asking redress. The dispute would never be solved by simple requests for restitution as long as Dutch corsairs were active in the same seas as their Turkish counterparts⁹. As a matter of fact, piracy was a serious obstacle in the Levant for the merchant vessels. Moreover, there was a close connection between trade and piracy. According to Braudel, when there were no merchant vessels, there were no pirates¹⁰.

III

Significant details are recorded regarding the capitulations granted to French, English and Dutch merchants, especially concerning the economic activity they carried out in the Ottoman territories. However, the Sublime Porte granted not only economic but also certain political rights to them.

⁵ BBA MD 90, 364.

⁶ After the Spanish expulsion of the Jews in the last decade of the fifteenth century, most of them came to the Ottoman Empire and the Netherlands because of the tolerance practised in both areas. However, until the last decades of the sixteenth century the Netherlands was not a good place of religious tolerance. Benjamin Arbel stressed the role of the Jewish merchants in the early modern period of the Levant. Jonathan Israel pointed out that western and central European Jewry underwent structural changes in the commercial sphere which radically transformed Jewish life. According to him, the turning point for the Jewish community was about 1570. After this period this community became important in the economic connections between the Ottoman Empire and Europe, especially the Dutch Republic. For more information see Arbel 1995; and Israel 1985.

⁷ Corsair activities by both Westerners and North Africans were common in Mediterranean life. However, these activities could be seen in a different context by Ottomans and westerners. "The Ottoman Empire was large, and the North African provinces were not central supports either of its economic power, or of the power of the centre. They were military outposts, useful in providing men and ships and bases against the Empire's main enemies, perhaps even strategically essential at times. But detailed control of their day-to-day affairs was neither easy, nor necessary" (Pennel 1990, 54).

⁸ Erdbrink 1974, 160 and De Groot 1978, 92.

⁹ De Groot 1978, 93.

¹⁰ Braudel 1972, 883.

According to İnalçık¹¹, the following provisions concerning the status of non-Muslim merchants in the Ottoman areas were included either explicitly or implicitly in all of the commercial privileges:

1. General security of person and property, including:
 - testamentary rights, freedom of worship, burial, and dress;
 - ship repairs, emergency rations, and aid against attack by corsairs;
 - permission to address complaints to the head of the Muslim community.
2. Extraterritoriality, including:
 - consular jurisdiction;
 - consular's salary and other exemptions.
3. Abolition of collective responsibility.

A capitulation guarantee had pre-eminence over the laws of the empire and, upon drawing up a capitulation, the sultan sent orders to local authorities to abide strictly by its provisions. It was not a “treaty” but a “freedom” or “privilege” granted to the Europeans to trade freely throughout the Ottoman territories¹². But in practice the members of foreign nations were permitted residence only in certain ports, and within these ports usually only in specified quarters or caravanserais. However, in İzmir, Aleppo, Galata and in other Ottoman trading cities, they enjoyed considerable freedom of movement.

All capitulatory privileges and guarantees were granted to the Dutch by these instruments; and all rights included in the French and English capitulations applied to the Dutch. For the Republic, the political-military cooperation with the Empire is quite explicitly mentioned in the capitulations. According to a special provision (article 51), Dutch ships fighting against the ships of non-capitulatory nations were allowed to use Ottoman ports and to replenish their supplies. Article 21 made it clear that corsair ships from Algiers remained entitled, as formerly, to provide themselves with munitions and materials in Dutch ports. If enemy merchants loaded merchandise on Dutch ships, it could not be confiscated on the grounds that it was enemy merchandise (article 38).

The Ottoman government's regulations regarding precious metals, as formulated in the capitulations granted the English and Dutch, stipulated that no duty was to be levied on the import of gold and silver coins. These coins could not be converted into Ottoman coins in the local mints (article 1) and orders were sent to the provincial authorities to this effect. Such measures served Ottoman finances and the Ottoman economy in general, since exactly at this time the empire was suffering from a dearth of precious metals¹³. But this policy would finally result in financial and economic upheaval with the invasion of the Ottoman market by counterfeit coins imported chiefly by the Dutch. The Dutch were permitted to bring in and take out goods by sea to the Black sea ports, including Trabzon and Caffa, and by land to Azov and Moscow, and Dutch ships coming from Dumyat and Alexandria could carry goods to Istanbul or other places belonging to the Muslims. These clauses were evidently favoured by the Ottomans in order to profit from Dutch shipping and contribute to the

¹¹ İnalçık 1979, 1179.

¹² Ibid, 1179-80.

¹³ İnalçık 1951, 651-61.

feeding of Istanbul from the two most important areas, Egypt and the northern Black Sea (article 6).

In the capitulations, guarantees against corsair acts show how concerned Western nations had become about increased privateering in this period. The sultan promised that any Dutch subject, enslaved by the corsairs of Algiers, would be freed and his property returned in its entirety (article 17). The consuls could not arrest the Dutch merchants nor seal their houses. Merchants' lawsuits involving consuls and *dragomans* (translators) had to be heard at the Sultan's Court (article 6).

In comparison with Venetians and French, the English and Dutch capitulations provided more extensive privileges and guarantees. The English and Dutch were granted a 2-3% rate of customs duty¹⁴ (article 46) instead of the 5% paid by the Venetians and French¹⁵. No authority could levy more customs duty than 3% (article 56).

The Dutch capitulations, like others, contained an article stating that rights mentioned in the first French and English capitulations apply to the Dutch. Any major differences of opinion that might arise between subjects of the Sultan and the Republic were to be referred to the Sublime Porte and to the Dutch ambassador residing there.

IV

The consular representatives of the foreign merchants of each nation were paying '*avaniyas*'¹⁶ or arbitrary payments to the local authorities. The French, English and Dutch merchants were also comforted with the *avaniyas*, frequently required by the local officials. Occasionally, the foreign merchants managed to avoid paying *avaniyas* by offering gifts to the local authorities. The *avaniyas* constituted 1 to 2 % of the value of a merchant's imported and exported commodities. These accounts were kept by the ambassador and consuls, respectively. Since the Dutch merchants in the Levant tried to avoid paying the *avaniyas*, Dutch representatives applied to the Ottoman government for a solution to these problems¹⁷.

The regular levies, called *tanza*, were paid by the captains of ships to their consuls in Aleppo, Cyprus, İzmir, and so on. The complaints of the Dutch consuls to the Porte and their reports to the States General indicate that the Dutch ships avoided paying

¹⁴ In the capitulation of 1612, the phrase "*adet ve kanun üzere*" (in accordance with tradition and the current regulations), appears to determine the customs rate. In the sixteenth century, the general rate was 5%, but the Ottoman customs tariff rate varied according to the status of the merchant, and the nature of the commodity. The Dutch merchants were also exempt from *kassabiye*, *masdariye*, *reftiye*, *yasakçı* and *bac* duties (BBA ED 22, 39). They were Ottoman taxes levied on all merchants trading in the market, except merchants with privileges such as granted in the Dutch capitulations.

¹⁵ There was a common view that the first single 3% customs was first granted to France with renewed their capitulations of 1673 (İnalçık 1959, 96). However, the registers of the Dutch capitulations clearly show that the Dutch were the first who were legally granted the maximum 3% rate (see article 46 in the Dutch capitulations).

¹⁶ "Conflicts between the nations and the local authorities generally involved *avaniyas*, i.e. arbitrary payments extorted from the nation as a whole by the Turkish authorities to meet their own or their clients' claims. The vast majority of these *avaniyas* fall into two groups, firstly unilateral increases of duty, often as a once-for-all sum to commute an increase of duty, secondly collective responsibility for claims that according to European ideas of justice ought properly to be raised against individuals" (Steensgaard 1967, 20).

¹⁷ Heeringa 1917, 214.

these levies and that a number of ships sailed under foreign flags to escape the payments¹⁸.

After 1612, the expenditures of the Dutch consul were compensated by a tax that was paid by Dutch merchants to the consul¹⁹. Most of these expenditures were incurred in Istanbul and Aleppo. However, a majority of the revenues were paid by İzmir merchants²⁰, which sometimes caused a conflict between local consuls and merchants²¹.

Since consulate fees levied on foreigners for the right to trade under the protection of the flag of a European nation was an important source of income, the consuls competed with each other in order to induce other nations to ask for protection. The consuls of the Netherlands in the Levant followed this policy and sometimes tried to collect more consulate fees from both Dutch merchants and foreigners protected by them. The complaints of the merchants in the Levant indicate that paying consulate fees (cottimo) caused some problems between the merchants and the consuls²².

Evidence indicates that after getting their own capitulations, occasionally Dutch ships sailed under French or English or Venetian flags in order to avoid paying these fees²³.

¹⁸ Both the Ottoman and the Dutch archival documents show these kinds of situations (BBA ED/22; BBA MM 2765 and ARA LH 97-101, 123-126).

¹⁹ BBA BA 902, 116, 2.

²⁰ The report of the Dutch consul in İzmir indicates that their consular revenues were the following in the 1680s: 7/10 from İzmir, 2/10 from Aleppo, and 1/10 from Istanbul (ARA LH 125).

²¹ Slot 1990, 18.

²² Niel Steensgaard (1967, 32) states that “the conflict is very well illustrated by a petition by the Levant merchants in Amsterdam to the States-General in 1615:

1-The consul should be a scrupulous man, and must not carry on business on his own account.

2-A cottimo on the Venetian model ought to be established in the nation.

3-The consul should receive a fixed salary.

4-Gifts must only be made with the nation’s approval, and they should be paid from the cottimo, as is done by the Venetians.

5-Other extraordinary expenses on the nation’s behalf should be paid from the cottimo as well, including the frequent gifts now being neglected on account of the consul’s economic situation.

6-Should the cottimo not suffice in case of a large extraordinary expense, a *tansa* (special duty) as large and as protracted as necessary should be imposed on the members of the nation, only of course with the nation’s consent.

7-The consul will be shown due respect”.

²³ In January 1636, after two Dutch capitulations were granted, ambassador Cornelis Haga reports that “...nederlands schippers in Smirna met een Engelshe vlagge op de Roode gear nieveent deselve met neemen ende in plaatse vatsien de gessonelijk he vlagge van haer ho mog van delfsefs...” (On the Roode ship, instead of their own flags the Dutch shipmen came with the English flag in İzmir) (ARA LH 97). The letters of the Dutch ambassador, Warner, to the Ottoman Sultan also indicate that the Dutch merchants avoided from paying consular fees by using foreign flags, French or English, in the Ottoman territories. Warner requested an order from the Sultan to the *kadı* of Aleppo for solving the problem. “*Saadetlü devletlü Sultanım hazretlerinin huzur-u şeriflerine arz-u hal budur ki Halep iskelesi İskenderuna ticaret ile gelen Felemenk kalyonları ve kapudanları geldikte ahidname-i hümayun mucibince Felemenk konsoloslarına elçilik ve konsolosluk avaidin virmemek için hileye salit olup Felemenk bayrağın kaldırıp Fransız bayrağın dikmekle Üstadı Generalleri vaz’ ettiği üzere ol makule hile eden kapudanları Felemenk konsolosu götürüp ayinimiz üzere muhkem tenbih ve te’kid edüp men ü def eyleye...ahidname-i hümayun mucibince... babında Halep beylerbeyisine ve kadı efendiye hükm arz olunub. Baki ferman sultanımdır. Elçi Varner.*” (It is our petition to the high court and the Sultan that when Dutch ships arrive at the port of Alexandretta to transport goods to Aleppo, the captains should raise the French or English flags to escape from paying consular duties to the Dutch consul in Aleppo which is stated in the Dutch capitulations. Such captains should be severely punished by the consul in Aleppo in accordance with the orders of the States General. The governor and *kadı* of Aleppo were informed about the issue. The ultimate order is expected from my honourable sultan. Ambassador Varner) (Leiden Univ.Oriental Manuscripts, code 1122, 45).

The complaints of the Dutch merchants show that the Dutch consul in İzmir, Jacob van Dam, tried to obtain as much consulate fees as possible²⁴. In 1673, Leiden merchants²⁵ asked for the dismissal of the Dutch representative in İzmir, Van Dam. His reaction to the conduct of some merchants and his treatment of them in general were unacceptable in their eyes. In their opinion Van Dam had harmed the relations between the Netherlands and the Ottoman Empire²⁶. Indeed, although these consulate fees might be seen as a revenue for the Dutch mission in the Levant, it was harmful for the Dutch merchants as well as for the Ottoman-Dutch commercial relations because these fees would discourage the merchants from trading in the Ottoman lands.

The other complaints of the traders were related to the monetary conditions of the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth century. According to some Dutch merchants, the most important problem was created by the Ottoman money market. It is a fact that the Ottoman Empire was a great empire and had large public expenditures. That is why it absorbed most of the money from the market. Thus, occasionally merchants could not find enough money to trade in the market, and this caused a rise of interest rates in the market. This was true for all merchants, both Ottoman and western merchants.

Consequently, various problems occurred in the Levant in the relations between two communities, the Dutch and the Ottomans as well as with the other westerners. Official authorities from both sides extended great efforts to solve these problems. But there was a big difference between theory and practice.

V

After Aleppo, Northwestern European merchants found new trading centres for the trade between the East and the West, such as Cyprus and İzmir. Thus, the European transportation and trade continued as regards both the commodities coming from the East and the Ottoman products. The decline in the Southern European industry became obvious in the second decade of the seventeenth century. England and the Netherlands and later France appeared as the new rivals in the South. The result of the Western Mediterranean decline was a competitive struggle for the shares in Levant market between the English and Dutch industries, later joined by the French for particular kinds of cloth.

The basic exports from the Ottoman territories to the European world were the raw materials used in textile production. Because of the Ottoman economic concept, the Ottoman authorities did not or could not control the expansion of the new western trading nations within the boundaries of the Empire²⁷. The policies of Ottomans facilitated their expansion. Furthermore, together with the activities of the merchants those policies caused the early stage of the integration between the trading centres of the Middle East and the Western European economic centres.

²⁴ ARA LH 98.

²⁵ These merchants are: Adrien en Jean le Pla, Charles Wasteau, B. Hoogmade, David en Elize de Bane, Pieter le Pla, A de Visscher, Dr. van Peene, Marinus Adr. Veer, and Hosson Compte.

²⁶ Leiden Gemeentearchief, Stadsarchief II, 1280.

²⁷ Their primary concern in the economic relations with the western communities was supplying the main cities from its staple zone, by a system of price controls and service villages and service groups, controls over craft guilds and merchants, and prohibitions on foreign purchases of foodstuffs inside and on the export of anything which could be regarded as a strategic commodity or war material, as well as a specie.

Textile industries in Western Europe such as silk, cotton and camlets profited from the commercial contacts with the Ottoman Empire. Thanks to the large supplies of cheap and fine raw materials obtained from the Levant (and other regions such as Persia and Spain), textile manufacturing in the Western Europe flourished in the seventeenth century. Together with Spain and Persia, the Ottoman Empire became a very significant exporter of the raw materials for the Dutch, English and French textile industries. As Clough and Rapp state, “when one speaks of textiles in the pre-modern period, it is as if to speak of steel or automobiles today”²⁸. Thus, the European capitalist economy flourished and industrial exports to the Mediterranean market increased.

The main reason for the replacement of Italian textile products by western European textiles was the cost of production. In the seventeenth century the Dutch, English and later on French textile products were offered at lower prices²⁹ than the Italian products. The Empire, with its huge population in Anatolia, the Balkans and the Middle East, was to become a significant importer of the textile products from the north instead of the South of Europe³⁰.

The flourishing of the Ottoman-Dutch economic relations resulted in strong competition between the western commercial powers: the Venetians, English, French and Dutch. After 1652, competition even resulted in wars among the new Northern European traders: the Anglo-Dutch wars. In general warfare, piracy and trade were closely related to each other in the Mediterranean and all countries had to rely on the force of arms to safeguard their economic interests.

VI

One can presume that the rise of the Ottoman-Atlantic economic relations influenced the European world economy and consequently increased the volume of international trade and brought new trading partners to the Levant. Hence, traditional commercial relations began to change between the Ottoman Empire and the Westerners. The middle of the seventeenth century marked a new stage in the pattern of Ottoman-European economic relations: the time in which Ottoman raw materials began to be exchanged for manufactured European goods, and the Ottoman territories began to be opened to the European markets.

The Ottoman ‘open door’ policy towards the new western trading nations in the Levant created new commercial centres in the Middle East. While before the seventeenth century, the Europeans were mostly in favour of Aleppo, during that time

²⁸ Clough & Rapp 1975.

²⁹ Cipolla believes that production costs played a decisive role in changing the balance of economic power in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For more information on this topic see Cipolla 1980.

³⁰ Between 1620 and 1635, French Levant trade fluctuated between 12 and 14 million livres, declining thereafter until 1661. France imported only 3 million livres of Levantine commodities at a time when the combined Dutch and English imports from the zone were approaching 25 million livres annually. At the end of the century, according to Davis, the average English imports of cotton was 300 tons annually, and double the weight of silk. “In 1699 imports of galls had reached 1,200 tons. The greatest import in bulk was of fruit from İzmir and Patras, which reached a peak about 1699” (Davis 1967, 173). Dutch purchases of Turkish mohair yarn amounted to 2,760 bales yearly (Heeringa 1917, 102-103) while the sale of Leiden lakens in the Levant had fallen, however, it was about 2,500 at the end of the century (Heeringa 1917, 99, 303). The French transported 4,000 bales mohair from İzmir and exported 3,200 Languedoc cloths to the Levant annually at the end of the century (Masson 1896, 236; Tongas 1942, 210-11).

they discovered the new trading and producing centres of the Empire: Ankara, Bursa, Salonica, Cyprus and İzmir. In the beginning of the Ottoman-Dutch relations, Antwerp and Aleppo were two important commercial centres, but later İzmir became the commercial centre of the Levant, while Amsterdam became the centre of international trade in Europe.

For the Europeans, İzmir became the international entrepot for all kinds of commodities between the East and the West while the other cities became important producing and local trading centres. All these centres produced the main raw materials for the textile industries of the Empire and Europe. Following such trading centres as Aleppo, Istanbul, Bursa, Cyprus, and İzmir, some other cities also became production centres. From the middle of the century onwards, all these centres appeared to become very important cities in providing the raw materials for the European economy.

VII

Therefore, cotton, linen, wool, silk and mohair yarn became the main raw material for Western European textile industries in the seventeenth century. Ankara became an important producing and trading centre for mohair yarn in the middle of Anatolia, while Bursa was a significant production and trading centre for silk in the western part of Turkey. The Dutch merchants in the seventeenth century, and later merchants from other western nations tried to establish their own production agents in either Ankara or Bursa, but never succeeded for any length of time. The Ottoman Muslim and non-Muslim merchants controlled this trade and transferred the raw materials to İzmir and other port cities.

It may be said that the Ottoman exports, though they contained only a small fraction of the total world trade in the early modern times, made a significant contribution to the economic evolution of Western Europe. Main items from the Levant such as wheat, cereals, cattle, hides, olive oil, wool, linen, mohair, silk and cotton reached to Europe and this stimulated the institutionalisation of international commodity markets. The Dutch merchants were the most active community both in the trade of bulky and luxury commodities between the Empire and Europe. They sent these products not only to Holland, but also to Italy, France, Germany, and England and to other places in Europe. Their ships to the Ottoman ports sailed from many different ports of Europe: Hamburg, Danzig, Amsterdam, Enkhuizen, Rotterdam, Dordrecht, Cadiz, Lisbon, Emden, Barcelona, Zante, Marseilles, Genoa, Naples, Leghorn and Malta. This transportation and commercial network between Europe and the Levant made the flow of commodities between the two regions possible.

The commercial expansion of Europe and the accumulation of capital led to the creation of new industries, particularly in the area of textiles, which had to find export markets to continue their expansion. The fundamental inputs of the French, English and Dutch textile industries were silk, cotton, linen, mohair yarn and wool. England mainly imported raw silk, wool and cotton while France and the Dutch Republic mostly imported cotton, raw silk and mohair yarn. The Levant trade was very profitable for merchants. The English and French Levant companies accumulated great wealth from this trade. Their consuls and ambassadors were active in

protecting their commercial rights. Many of them were also personally involved in commercial activities.

Consequently, the Ottoman Empire increasingly opened its economy to Western Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. With the widening of the network between the two regions, the commercial relations of the Ottoman-Dutch merchants increased significantly. This development created a new situation between the markets of the two regions, the Levant and Northwestern Europe. Especially, due to the Ottoman-Dutch economic relations, a trend began to develop towards the integration of the European economy with the Levant. However, it did not constitute full integration of the economy of the Empire and the European capitalist economy. It was only the starting time of the integration of the two economies and this trend continued afterwards.

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