HALIL INALCIK

AN OUTLINE OF OTTOMAN-VENETIAN RELATIONS

IN this paper I shall try to make a rapid survey of Venice's position in the Levant from the Ottoman standpoint.

It must be remembered that the Ottoman archival documents before the conquest of Constantinople are scanty and became substantially important only in the 16th century. For the Conqueror's time, the *Cadi* Registers of Bursa are important, but only after the beginning of the 17th century there exist special registers for Venice containing the correspondences which are particularly important for the capitulations and the Venetian consulates in the Ottoman empire.

Since Venice both dominated the trade of the Levant and possessed a colonial empire there, her relations with the Ottomans were extremely complex. The Ottoman expansion in the Byzantine territories meant that Venice lost a trading area which hitherto she had exploited at will, free of duties and control. Before the Ottomans Venice had received commercial privileges from the local governments in most important regions in the Levant. The Seljukid Turks had granted commercial privileges to the Venetians as early as 1207. The oldest commercial concession to Venice made by a Turcoman prince in Western Anatolia was in the peace treaty of 1348, which was concluded between the Holy League and the Aydin oghlu Khidr Beg.

Venetian consulates were established in the following years at Altoluogo and Palatia. But the Ottomans with an imperialist policy threatened the Venetian's privileged position in all these areas, already at the end of 14th century. The Ottomans considered as their own zone of control all the Balkans south to the Danube and in order to carry out this policy, they determined to wipe out Venetian control and occupy Venetian outposts on the coasts all around the Balkans. The Ottoman-Venetian confron-

tation became, therefore, a primarily political one from the outset. On the other hand, it should be noted that the Ottoman imperialist challenge forced Venice itself to become more and more a military power and to follow an aggressive and expansionist policy. So Venice tried to take possession of any strategically important coastal region which the Ottomans threatened to take over. The small states benefited from this rivalry to prolong their existence by playing off Venice and the Ottomans against each other. The Byzantine empire in Constantinople definitely owed its prolonged existence as an Ottoman vassal state to this situation.

Between 1423 and 1430, when Venice held Salonica, the Ottomans thought it as a vital threat to their rule in the Balkans and feared that Constantinople too might be delivered in the same way to the Venetians by the Greeks. So they lessened the pressure on Constantinople. There was indeed a talk about a Venetian takeover of the city since the first Ottoman threat to the city in 1359. I would like also to raise the question why the Ottomans were often more successful than Venetians in expanding their control on the Christian countries in the Balkans. Besides the Ottoman military advantages, I believe there were also some social reasons for it. In the struggle for domination in the Balkans, the Ottoman policy to attract the masses by abolishing systematically feudal services and dues and by protecting the Orthodox church and the lesser clergy in the countryside was much more successful than the Venetian regime which, as a rule, maintained in its possessions in the Levant the previous feudal taxation and services for the benefit of the Venetian aristocracy and state, and pursued a policy of cooperation with the upper classes with a religious policy promoting catholicism or the tendencies favouring union with the Catholic church. Of course this religious attitude was determined by the Venetian policy, in close co-operation with the papacy, of driving the Christian west in a crusade against the Ottomans. The Ottomans exploited shrewdly the social and religious sentiments of the Orthodox masses against the Venetians by a conscious propaganda, which they called *istimālet* policy, compared with the aloof Christian brothers economically exploiting, religiously persecuting, feudal both in spirit and practice. The Ottomans managed to show themselves religiously tolerant, socially and economically closer and protective. If we turn to the military field, the Ottomans, in their

fight against the Venetian sea power, employed in the first phase the corsary warfare very effectively. The Ottomans, when in control of Western Anatolia in 1390, gave a better organization to the activities of the corsairs, which incidentally included the native Greek seamen in the Aegean ports.

In my article (EI^2) based on the archival evidences on Gallipoli, I showed how in this principal Ottoman naval basis the Ottomans employed the native Greeks.

The Ottomans recognized the Venetian superiority on the sea and took precautions against their sea power. Besides employing the corsairs, the Ottomans built up military installations against the Venetian sea power. When during the reign of Bayezid I the struggle reached its crucial height, the Ottomans built up at Gallipoli a fortified harbour enclosed by a wall. The small Ottoman raiding fleet was moored there, to hit and run. In 1416 when Loredan attacked it the Venetians' main objective was the destruction of this basis. The Ottomans attempted to defy the Venetian sea power at open sea until the end of the 15th century. The Ottomans also tried, in this first period, to co-operate with Genoa, Venice's rival, on the sea, granting the Genoese extensive commercial privileges as early as 1352 and later on giving them a long term monopoly over alum production in the area of Magnesia. The privileged position of the Genoese in the Ottoman dominions, was principally due to the Ottoman anti-Venetian policy. The prosperity of Pera and of Chios was also largely due to this Ottoman policy favouring the Genoese against the Venetians. In this connection we can assert that the Ottoman policy of breaking the Venetian economic and political domination in the Levant first started in 1352. I must emphasize that the Ottomans did not mean to destroy the Levant trade in general but tried to shift it from the powerful Venetians to its weaker rivals, first to the Genoese, and then later on to the Florentines and Ragusans. But, despite these efforts, the Venetians maintained their position both by their superior naval power and through their conciliatory policy towards the new masters of the Levant.

Apparently the meaning to the Venetians of Constantinople completely changed during the Ottoman expansion in the Balkans after the middle of the 14th century. First of all Constantinople itself was not anymore of great economic importance as a market for the imports from the West, though we know that the Vene-

tians replaced all the other trading nations in the port of Constantinople during this period. Constantinople then underwent an economic and demographic decline not anly because of the competition of the thriving Genoese colony across the Golden Horn but also because all its hinterland had gone under the Ottoman rule, and Bursa, the Ottoman capital, had become an emporium for the East-West trade expecially attracting silk trade from Persia.

Also Adrianople and Gallipoli rose as competitors of Constantinople in the 15th century. Constantinople then owed its importance more to its geographic and strategic position than to its economic conditions. For Venice, Constantinople was primarily the key to the Black Sea, a trade area so important for the Venetian trade in the Northern countries. In the last analysis in this period the question of Constantinople was inseparable from that of the Straits. The loss of Constantinople to the Ottomans, giving them the complete control of the straits between the two seas as well as Asia and Europe, was going to make them inevitably so powerful that Venice decided to figh for it at all costs. On the other hand, the Ottomans were so much distressed with an eventual Venetian takeover of the City that they usually refrained themselves from pressing the Greeks too hard. It was no wonder that the fiercest and longest war between Ottomans and Venetians in this period was fought during the Conqueror's reign who, after the conquest of Constantinople, embarked upon a series of expeditions which aimed at the elimination of all Venetian outposts in the Balkan peninsula. But the fact that this war started only in 1463 and not before is noteworthy. After the conquest the Sultan was desperately concerned about the re-population and growth of Istanbul as a great metropolis worthy of his empire. What was left after a long period of decline was a poor and ruined city with a population numbering, at the highest estimate, 50 thousand and most probably much less than that. During the conquest the city had lost almost all its population and the re-settlement progressed very slowly in the first years after the conquest. A recent discovery of a survey of population and buildings of Istanbul in 1455 shows that the first settlers from Anatolia had returned home and the uninhabited and abandoned buildings were in decay. The Ottoman government knew traditionally that unless trade and crafts were revived they could not expect a rapid settlement of the city. As the

Conqueror tried to appease and convince the Genoese in Pera to stay, he also gave the Venetians capitulations to settle and engage in commerce there under the peace treaty concluded on April 18, 1454. The Venetians tried to get back their commercial quarters at the port area in Istanbul itself without success. But they enjoyed freedom of trade and obtained a reasonable rate for customs duties as 2 per cent ad valorem. However it must be remembered that they were exempted from it altogether under the Byzantines. (But it should also be added that they were subject to pay 10 per cent in the mamluk dominions). Incidentally, we now know the exact place of the Venetian storehouse in Istanbul by the name of Arslanlu Makhezen wich was made a part of the endowments to the Church of Hagia Sofia. Also mention is made of a district called Venedik Loncasi Mahallesi at the same area with the church formerly belonging to the Venetians. All this came under state proprietorship after Ottoman conquest in the busiest section of the port area and the district was repopulated with Jews, mostly from Adrianople.

The Venetian trade was considered as something necessary since they supplied the upper classes, palace and government people with fine woollen cloths form the West as principal item of commerce, paper and luxury goods. Import of silver and gold also was always trought vital for the empire, and as it is to become especially important in the 16th and 17th centuries when Europe began to receive cheap Mexican silver from the new world. All precious metals were imported without customs duties into the Ottoman dominions. The Venetian gold ducat was alwaysa much sought after currency in the Ottoman empire, even after Mehmed the Conqueror minted his own gold coin called *sikke-i hasene*. It is interesting to note that when the Ottoman-Venetian war broke out the customs duties were raised to 5 per cent.

The Conqueror tried to free his empire from the economic dependence on the Venetians by encouraging Florence and Dubrovnik, rivals of Venice, in their commerce with the Ottoman dominations. In 1469 he granted new trade privileges to Florence. At the time there were some fifty Florentine houses in the empire, and Florentine traders became increasingly active in the Bursa market, as testified in the *Cadi* registers of that city. By annexing Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1463, Mehmed opened a new and direct route with Florence, through Dubrovnik. As trade with Florence expanded the route between Florence, Ancona,

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Dubrovnik and Bursa and Istanbul gained importance. In the following century the increasing number of Ottoman merchants, Greeks, Jews and Turks who brought silks, spices, sugar and grain along this route to the Italian fairs began to cause Venice serious anxiety, even giving rise to rumours that Ancona was going to accept Ottoman protection. In brief the opening of the land route through the Balkans was an Ottoman answer to Venetian economic monopoly in the Levant based on its naval superiority.

Dubrovnik, after the extension of the Ottoman rule over Bosnia and Herzegovina became completely dependent on the Ottoman empire. The increase in its annual tribute to the Porte can be viewed as an indication of the growth of its commerce with the Ottoman empire. Also this trade encouraged the growth of a wool industry in Dubrovnik whereas in the past Venice systematically endeavoured to destroy it by seizing the Ragusan shipments by sea.

But even during wartime the Ottomans could not do without Venetian trade. During the Ottoman-Venetian wars of 1463-1479, 1499-1503, 1537-1540 Ragusa acted as intermediary for trade between Venice and the Ottoman empire. When there was no political or military dispute, the Ottomans unhesitatingly restored to the Venetians their commercial privileges; and, as an interesting fact, let me mention that in 1546 the Ottomans granted Venice the monopoly of alum mining in return for a payment of 25.000 gold ducats. Despite wars and conflicts, the Venetian economy in the 16th century seems to have achieved a continuous growth in parallel with the Ottoman economic and urban development. Then Istanbul with its population of over 300.000 became a great market for the Venetian trade. Venice always dominated the spice trade in the ports of Egypt and Syria. Under the Ottomans Aleppo, Cairo and Damascus continued to be important centers of commerce for the Venetians. So much so that the new mercantilist nations of the West gave first priority to having their Levant companies for their economic growth in the second half of the 16th century, and it was the deliberate Ottoman policy that determined their successful competition and replacement of the Venetians in the Levant. Only after the Ottoman-Venetian war of 1570-73 France began to replace Venice in the Levant.

For a better understanding of the Ottoman-Venetian relations

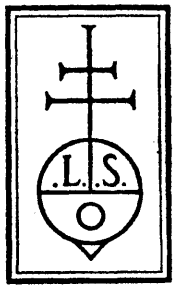
it is essential to study the *ahdnāmes* granted to the non-Muslims from the abode of war, which under the name of capitulations underwent quite a misleading interpretation in the period of decline.

The precondition for granting to a foreigner the guarantee of freedom of trade and residence was that he should make application for it with a promise of friendship and peace – it is in return for this undertaking that the Sultan binds himself to guarantee this freedom. The Sultan retains authority to decide unilaterally when the foreigner has broken the pledge of " friendship and sincere good will " and when, in consequence, the grant is rendered void. In conceding such a grant the Ottoman authorities kept in view: 1. the principles of the religious law; 2. political advantages to be expected from the applicant state; 3. the economic and financial interests of the empire; determining factors were usually the opportunity of acquiring a political ally within the Christendom, of obtaining scarce goods and raw materials such as cloths, tin and steel, and especially of increasing customs revenues, the principal source of hard cash for the treasury. It was tacitely understood that reciprocal advantages were expected in return for the privileges conceded, and when these advantages failed to materialize, the Sultan could claim that the precondition of " friendship and sincerity " had been broken. When in 1540s the Venetians were unable to guarantee secure passage by land and sea for Muslim merchants operating in Venice, the Ottoman government warned them to remember their obligations to give reciprocal protection. In the *ahdnāme* granted to Venice in 1540 there were several articles recognising reciprocity. As to the Capitulations granted, it seems that Venetians obtained it half a century later than the Genoese. When in 1390 the trade ports of Western Anatolia came under the Ottoman rule Bayezid I confirmed the privileges made already between the Venetians and the Turkmen princes and extended them to " all places under his rule ". Actually, from the time when Edirne was occupied by the Ottomans in 1361, Venice was attempting to obtain capitulations from the Sultan. In 1384 she was making diplomatic advances in order to procure permission to obtain grain from Ottoman territory and to establish a commercial settlement on Ottoman soil, preferably at Uskudar opposite the Genoese Pera. In the period of civil war, after the battle of Ankara in 1402, Ottoman pretenders recognised the necessity to conciliate Ve-

nice. Suleyman Çelebi actively sought Venetian support, and in the peace agreement of 1403 for the first time granted important concessions to Venice. The capitulations to Venice were renewed later on with extensions in 1446, 1454, 1479, 1482. In the latter treaty Venice was permitted permission to trade with Caffa and Trebizond in the Black Sea. In the *ahdnāme* of 1503 the concessions were further extended. These were renewed by Selim I in 1513, and Suleyman in 1521. In the treaty of 1540 the commercial privileges were further extended, the Arab lands, and Bosnia was included but Trebizond and Caffa were excluded. With the Ottoman conquest of Egypt and Syria the value of the capitulations had increased enormously for Venice. As we have already noted, Venitian predominance in the Levant came to an end only after the crucial war of 1570-73. From then on the predominance of Western nations, namely France, England and Netherlands, began in the Levant.

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