

Venetians and Ottomans in the Early Modern Age

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A Culture of Trust

Ottoman Merchants and Venetian Notaries in the Early Modern Period

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Abstract The aim of this paper is to study the presence of Ottoman merchants in Venice in the Early Modern Age. The Ottoman shipping partnership as well as the Venetian *commenda* were based on the *mudarebe* (classical Islamic shipping partnership) and several examples of this kind of partnerships may be found even between Christians and Muslims. Notarial deeds were above all proxies and often give information on merchants, their number and even their private life. Some of them were agents but there were also family companies and Ottoman grandees who were involved in international trade. Communities of merchants both in Istanbul and in Venice were also sometimes created. Last but not least, these sources contain also some examples of insurance made by Muslims to protect their goods. In general in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Ottoman merchants who traded in Venice were not alone, but they could refer to a real commercial network. Ancient historiographical theories say that in the Early Modern Age Ottoman Muslims were not interested in international trade and that they left it completely in Christian and Jewish hands, however documents tell us a completely different story, a story of contacts, exchanges, and even confidence and friendship.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Peace Agreements and Ottoman Merchants in Venice. – 3 Commercial Partnerships. – 4 Ottoman Merchants. – 5 A Community of Merchants. – 6 Insurances. – 7 Life and Death in Venice. – 8 Conclusion.

Keywords Ottoman merchants. Venetian notaries. Ottoman Economic History. Commercial partnerships history. Insurances history.

1 Introduction

After Paolo Preto's book (1975) and Giorgio Vercellin's (1979, 1980) and Cemal Kafadar's (1986) papers, many scholars (cf. for instance Köse 2010) dealt with the presence of Muslim merchants in Venice, their number, the places where they lived, the goods they used to sell and buy, the interpreters and the brokers who helped them. Even the petitions they made to the government to solve the problems they had to face in a foreign land were studied. Few scholars, however, were interested in the commercial networks they belonged to, in the private deeds they made, in the devices

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they used to live and trade in a land where no *kadı* was available. This paper aims to be a first approach to a study of this kind, made obviously on scattered news, found in the most different archival sources discovered in about forty years of study. By drawing upon such a far unknown rich archival documentation, it examines the economic practices that generated, established, shaped, and maintained a culture of trust, which formed the very foundation of the Veneto-Ottoman commerce.

2 Peace Agreements and Ottoman Merchants in Venice

Since 1416 the *ahidnames* (peace agreement) established reciprocal rights for Ottoman and Venetian merchants who traded between the two countries. These documents were not unilateral grants (*berat*), derived from the idea of safe-conduct (*aman*), as those issued by the sultan for Dutch, French and English merchants in the following centuries. They were real bilateral agreements, derived from a truce (*hudna*), and the two rulers swore two documents alike (Theunissen 1998; Pedani 1996, 2017; van den Boogert 2005).

The 1453 agreement clearly stated that Ottoman merchants had to pay the same custom duties as the Venetians did, but in the 15th century the sultan's subjects who reached Venice were very few. Their number began to increase in the 16th century when they discovered the potentiality of the Rialto market. In July 1504, for instance, a certain Davud arrived with three boxes full of goods. He said that they belonged to the sultan and asked to avoid duties on them. The Ottoman ambassador Ali bey, who was in Venice in those days, did not know anything about him. Venetians, however, decided to believe Davud's words and exempted him from any taxation.¹

Other scattered news about Muslim merchants in Venice can be found. In 1507 three Venetian prostitutes were punished because they had had intercourse with Turks, despite the law that prohibited these practices. This fact shows that Muslims were present in that period and could freely wander around the city (Preto 1975, 127-8; Sanuto 1879-1903, vol. 7, 115; Molmenti 1927, 468). In 1518 a merchant, the tanner Ayas, wanted to reach Venice with 8 packs (*soma*) of leathers and 4 packs of sheepskins but he was made slave in Traù (Trogir) and set free only after the payment of 250 ducats. During that time the merchant Hasan Hüseyin left Venice by a Venetian ship but near Dulcigno (Ulcinj) it was attacked and the fabrics he had with him were brought to San Nicolò di Bari. Other Ottoman merchants from Negroponte (Eğriboz/Eubèa) too were robbed while they were travelling on Venetian ships. Besides Muslims, even the sultan's Christian

1 Venezia, Archivio di Stato (ASVe), *Senato, Deliberazioni, Segrete*, reg. 40, c. 44v.

subjects were involved in international trade. For instance Giacomo Ralli from Constantinople looked for a passage on a Venetian ship at Cattaro (Kotor) but he was robbed by the captain of 25,000 *akçes* (500 ducats), some precious stones and other goods.²

In this period the foreign merchants who wanted to trade in Venice had to use brokers. They often did not know the Italian language and could be easily swindled by tricksters. Thus, in 1534 the Venetian authorities established that all the transactions with Turks had to be made in the presence of the interpreter Girolamo Civran, who had been Muslim, had studied in a *medrese*, and was an official of the ducal chancellery. From this moment onwards Ottoman merchants had to pay the same duties of the Venetians but also a special tax of 3 % due to the interpreter (Pedani, forthcoming).³

Venetian notarial deeds show also other peculiar practices used by Ottoman merchants. In Venice they had no possibility to make a deed in front of a *kadı*, but they could ask to a Venetian notary to make a deed *alla usanza turchesca* (according to the Turkish custom). On 2 January 1561 two Ottoman subjects, the Christian Greek Jacob Alexopoulos from Trebisonda (Trabzon) and the Turk from Istanbul Veli *reis*, went to the notary Rocco de' Benedetti. They wanted to make a commercial partnership. Alexopoulos risked his money and goods in the affaire while Veli *reis* risked his *karamusal* (Ottoman boat). The deed was made *segondo il costume che si tiene in Turchia fra turchi et sudditi del Turco* (according to the custom of Turkey and of the sultan's subjects).⁴

3 Commercial Partnerships

The most widespread Islamic and Ottoman partnership was the *mudarebe*, on which the European *commenda* was based. A rich merchant entrusted his money or merchandise to an agent (*mudarib*) who traded for him and gave him back a previously agreed-upon share of the profits. As a reward the agent received the remaining share. Any loss that could result from a dangerous journey or an unsuccessful business was shouldered by the investor while the other could lose only his time or efforts. This was the most important kind of business partnership practiced in the Ottoman Empire (Çizakça 1996, 4-6).

It is probable that between the 16th and the 18th century in Venice too, several merchants were agents who traded in the name and with the money of investors who remained in Istanbul or other places of the empire.

2 ASVe, *Senato, Deliberazioni, Secrete*, reg. 47, cc. 153v-159.

3 ASVe, *Collegio Notatorio*, reg. 22, vv. 153v-154.

4 ASVe, *Notarile Atti*, b. 429, cc. 4v-5. Thanks to Mauro Bondioli for this reference.

Some notarial deeds hint to this fact. For instance, in 1542 the *divan-i hümayun tercumanı* Yunus bey had a share in the goods stored in a shop (*volta*) in Rialto after the death of Hoca Süleyman Cevheri, a dealer in jewels as his name explains,⁵ while in 1588 Hüseyin (*Issaim*) from Bosnasaray (Sarajevo) was Hacı Sinan's agent and the whole merchandise he had with him belonged to the investor.⁶ In 1589 the sultan asked the doge to give to Hacı Yusuf, who spoke in the name of Mehmed and Heva, sons and heirs of the merchant Kara Hacı from Uskup (Skopje), the goods and money left by his two agents Ahmed and Hürrem bin Abdullah, both having died in Venice (Pedani Fabris 1994, no. 988).⁷ These kinds of affairs often came to light if either the agent or the investor died and several deeds were required to deliver money and goods to the heirs. For instance, in 1625 Hacı Resul died in Istanbul and the *defterdar* Mehmed wrote a letter to the doge for this reason (Mumcu 2013, no. 438).⁸ According to Eric Dursteler a large scale merchant, called Resul *ağa* or *sipahi*, was active in the first twenty years of the 17th century. His own account book testifies that he used to send annually between Venice and Istanbul 550 bolts of camlets, 40 bales of silk, 200 bales of wax, other goods, and 20,000 ducats in cash (Dursteler 2002, 114). We do not know if Resul *ağa* of the house of the *müfti* of Cyprus Saat *efendi*, quoted in two Venetian documents (Pedani 2010b, nos. 608, 612), the *ağa/sipahi* and Hacı Resul were the same person even if it was very probable.

The Ottoman shipping partnership too was based on the classical *mu-darebe*. The captain's services could be rewarded by paying a fee but sometimes he too was one of the members of the society. The crew was also either paid or had a share in profits and losses. This kind of partnership usually consisted of three or four partners and their shares were divided into 40 parts (Çizakça 1996, 88-91, 128). Some Venetian notarial deeds make reference to societies of this kind, in particular three affairs that deal with the sale of ships. In 1636 Bayram *reis* (captain) from Istanbul, Osman *beşe* from Terranova in Albania, a small village on the Drin river (probably a janissary according to his title) and Karim (*Chierin*) Çelebi from the Tophane in Istanbul, sold the vessel called *Le tre lune* to Lorenzo Tetta but some days later they cancelled the sale and sold it again to Pietro Bevilacqua and Hasan Çelebi from Modone (Moton). They acted *in solidum* and each of them had a share of one third. They also promised to give to the buyers the *hüccet* (*kadı's* deed) that testified it had been sold to them

5 ASVe, *Senato, Deliberazioni, Secrete*, reg. 62, cc. 14r-v.

6 ASVe, *Notarile Atti*, reg. 3359, cc. 281v-282.

7 ASVe, *Documenti Turchi*, b. 8, No. 988.

8 ASVe, *Bailo a Costantinopoli*, b. 251, reg. 335, cc. 25 a-b.

by Sarı Yusuf in Algiers. Part of the money had been already given to them to pay the mariners who had clearly no share in the partnership. The partners were called *patroni et parcenevoli* in the text, that is to say captains (*reis* in Ottoman) and owners of the ship (Pedani 2008, 3-21).⁹ Another deed dates back to 30 October 1641. This time Murad *reis* Umorovich and Süleyman Hacı Mehmedovich from Castelnuovo (Hersek Nova) *in solidum* sold the vessel called *La Madonna di Sabioncello* that they had bought in Ragusa (Dubrovnik) to Pietro Bevilacqua and Gabriele Martinelli.¹⁰ Both sales were made by means of a Venetian notary and it is interesting to note that no broker was present in both even though, in the first affair, it is clearly written that the sellers must pay the tax for the brokers. The third deed was made in 1567. Three Muslim and Christian sailors, Teodorino Presoleni from Corfu, Ahmed from Crete and Draco from Chania (Canea) contested a contract made with the captain Cafer *reis* from Genoa: they said that they deserved more than the 15 gold *scudi* given to each other member of the crew. The crew was made of 57 mariners and each of them was paid with a share of the profits.¹¹

Other partnerships existed in the Ottoman world. There was the *mu-fawada* where the two partners were equal, and they could deal with the whole capital even if the invested amounts and the subsequent profits could be different. Then, there was the *inan* (*muşaraka*) where each partner could invest different amounts and the profits could also be distributed in different shares according not only to the investments but also to the reputation of each partner. On the contrary, the losses were assigned according to each party's investment. Lastly the *vüch* was established when the partners had no money and had to find capital even if they had a good reputation as traders (Çizakça 1996, 6-9).

It is difficult to understand which kind of partnership Ottoman merchants who traded in Venice preferred since their societies were established before they left. We can, however, discover family partnerships where two members of the same family shared the work and the capital. This was the case of Pir Kaya bin Binyad from Harput in Anatolia and his brother, Hacı Kara, who died in Venice; in 1615 he went to Istanbul where he received a *hüccet* by the vice-*kadı* Mehmed bin Hacı İlias that stated that he and his nephews Mustafa and Fatime were Hacı Kara's heirs (Mumcu 2013, no. 190).¹² In 1628 Mehmed Çelebi Basdaro from Terranova sold 19 sacks of wool that his father Hüseyin bey Basdaro embarked in Durazzo.

9 ASVe, *Notarile Atti*, reg. 11,000, cc. 255-256, 264v-265, 271v, 275v-278, 306-309, 327v-328.

10 ASVe, *Notarile Atti*, b. 2940, cc. 182-183.

11 ASVe, *Notarile Atti*, b. 3280, cc. 580r-580v, 586v-587v, 588v-591v. Thanks to Mauro Bondioli for this reference.

12 ASVe, *Bailo a Costantinopoli*, b. 250, reg. 331, cc. 11 a-b.

Sometimes, the money used by merchants involved in Venetian trade had been borrowed from pious foundations and fund administrated by guardians on behalf of their orphan wards. These foundations clearly were cash *vakf* whose endowed capital was only “transferred” to borrowers; after a certain period, usually a year, it was returned to the *vakf* plus a certain extra-amount, which was then spent for all sorts of pious or social purposes. In this way it was possible to remain within the law and avoid the charge of usury. It has been also proved that the bulk of their credits went to small-scale consumers rather than to capital pooling entrepreneurs, at least for the Bursa zone (Çizakça 1996, 131-4). On the contrary, a research based on Venetian documents shows that the Bosnian cash *vakf* could finance with major trade capital and lend almost all their capital to a few merchants who could borrow from many institutions at the same time. In the ordinary *mudaraba* partnership losses of capital, due to acts of God or third parties, was the responsibility of the investor alone while the agent could lose only his labour and time but when the money of a cash *vakf* was involved it had to be refunded by the borrower, no matter what had happened on the journey (Faroqhi 2014, 84-5; 2004, 225-39; 2016, 41-2). This explains why the merchants involved in such a situation did everything in their power to recover the losses. They made petitions (*arz*) to the sultan as the merchants from Bosnia who left Venice and were attacked by Uskoks pirates in 1588 (Stefini 2015, 153-76; Ortega 2014, 74-5).

Other examples of money borrowed from cash *vakf* can be found in Venetian documents, besides the Bosnian merchants attacked by Uskoks in 1588. For instance in 1591 the Senate gave back to Hacı Yusuf 2,600 ducats belonging to orphans left by two Ottoman merchants who had died in Venice.¹³ In 1617 other merchants from Bosnia were attacked by the Spanish fleet in the Adriatic and they asked the sultan to send a *çavuş*, Mustafa, to Venice to try to recover their properties most of which had been borrowed from pious institutions and fund administrated by guardians (Pedani Fabris 1994, no. 1214).¹⁴

4 Ottoman Merchants

Notarial deeds usually specify if the Ottoman merchants knew Italian or not because in this case an interpreter was required. Thus, there were persons who spoke Italian, such as Murad *reis* Umorovich and Süleyman Hacı Mehmedovich from Castelnuovo (Hersek Nova) (1641)¹⁵ and the 39

13 ASVe, *Senato, Deliberazioni, Costantinopoli*, reg. 8, c. 31v.

14 ASVe, *Documenti Turchi*, b. 11, no. 1214.

15 ASVe, *Notarile Atti*, b. 2940, cc. 182-183.

Turks and 6 Greeks who signed together a deed in 1628¹⁶ (*ad annum*, with the merchants' seals). On the contrary, others did not speak Italian and the interpreters could be brokers, inhabitants of Venice, captains of ships or even other Ottoman subjects.¹⁷ Most deeds were proxies and the attorney too could be a broker, the captain of a ship, another Christian or Muslim Ottoman subject or even a Venetian. Religion was of no importance in this case and the proxies were based above all on how much the chosen person was reliable and trustful.

The partnerships were usually made among Ottoman Muslims but some of them could involve also Christian Greeks, Jews or even Persians. For instance, in 1583 Hacı Ahmed arrived in Venice with a Persian partner, Ali, who, at a certain point, decided to convert to Christianity. Thus, the whole capital, that reached the sum of 5,500 piastre plus some goods, was seized by the Venetian officials. Only after many petitions and appeals did Hacı Ahmed succeed in getting all the money back (Pedani Fabris 1994, nos. 927, 929).¹⁸

To find Ottoman-Venetian commercial society is more difficult. In 1492 and 1601 two laws forbade partnerships with Muslims. On 29 November 1248, to prevent partnerships with foreigners, the Great Council of Venice decided that the goods both of Venetians and of people from abroad were exempted from a 2.5 % tax which had to be paid on the goods of international companies. Another law concerning the same subject was issued in 1272, when it was decided that Venetians could not bring home the goods of foreigners (Cessi 1931, 120; Ashtor 1983, 398).¹⁹ Yet these prohibitions also signal that in real life these practices did occur. For instance, the partners who sold the famous golden crown-like helmet to Süleyman the Magnificent in 1532 was formed by Vincenzo Livrieri, jeweller and the brothers Caorlini, goldsmiths (12 parts/*carati* of the capital), Pietro Morosini (4 *carati*), Giacomo Corner, Pietro Zen and Marcantonio Sanudo (4 *carati*), and the *defterdar* Iskender Çelebi (4 *carati*). That is to say it was a Venetian *commenda* divided into 24 *carati* and not an Ottoman ship partnership which was usually divided into 40 parts (Sanuto 1879-1903, vol. 56, 358-9). In 1567 a Christian and a Muslim, Elia son of Marco from Cania and Hasan reis (*Cussam Reys*) sold their ship to two Venetians. The payment had to be made half in Venice and half in Istanbul, but, in advance, they had to give to the new owners the *hüccet*, certifying that the

16 ASVe, *Notarile Atti*, b. reg. 10890, cc. 665-667; b. 10928.

17 ASVe, *Notarile Atti*, reg. 27, cc. 27v, 114-114v, 154v, 177v-178; b. 3357, cc. 60v-61, b. 3358, cc. 153v-154, reg. 10890, cc. 640v-641v.

18 ASVe, *Documenti Turchi*, b. 7, nos. 927,929.

19 ASVe, *Maggior Consiglio*, Comune II, cc. 115-115v. ASVe, *Senato, Deliberazioni, Costantinopoli*, reg. 9, cc. 160-160v. ASVe, *Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar*, reg. 13, cc. 91v-93.

ship belongs to them, and to pay the arrears they had with some Jews.²⁰ As we have already seen in 1636 Pietro Bevilacqua and Hasan Çelebi bought together the vessel *Le Tre Lune*. It may be noted that the 1601 law was issued after a dispute arose because of a partnership of this kind agreed in Istanbul between the Venetian Agazzi family and an influential Ottoman official, Ali *ağa*, the chief of the janissaries, brother-in-law of the powerful *kapıağası* Gazanfer and husband of his sister, Beatrice Michiel (Dursteler 2006, 51-2; Pedani 2000, 9-32; Pedani 2010a, 225).

Sometimes Ottoman grandees were also involved in trade in Venice that they exercised by agents. A galliot belonging to a vizier was taken by the Spanish fleet in the Adriatic about 1617 and Venetians refunded him with 48,000 ducats while 70,000 piastre were given to the merchants involved (Pedani Fabris 1994, no. 1344).²¹ A letter with no date, written by the *sancakbeyi* of Bosnia, deals probably with the same episode. It says that the *çavuş* and *müteferrika* Mumin *ağa* lost 30,000 thalers in goods bought in Venice for himself and for the imperial palace (Pedani Fabris 1994, no. 1990).²² Other grandees were Cafer *paşa*, involved in trade in the last years of the 16th century and the grand vizier Gümülcili Nasuh (1611-1614), were both quoted by Dursteler (Dursteler 2002, 118-21). These important persons often asked for special exemptions and protection for their goods and agents (Ortega 2014, 71).

The Ottoman envoys too did not usually pay duties. In 1523 Hasan bey arrived with three ships charged with silk clothes to sell, with a value of 1,500 ducats belonging to the merchant from Castelnuovo (Hersek Nova) that travelled with him. In 1525 another envoy, a Moor, left Venice with a galley and two ships full of goods; in 1529 Yunus asked to be refunded for the 25 ducats he had paid in his previous voyage in 1526 as duties on pairs of spectacles, a clock and several pieces of Murano glass; in 1533 he arrived with golden and silk clothes worth 12,000 ducats but, this time, Venetian authorities pretended that at least the merchants who travelled with him paid the duties (Pedani 1994, 49, 85).

The story of another important merchant Seyyid Abdi *çavuş* has been described by Suraiya Faroqhi (Faroqhi 2014, 79-82). Venetians called him the *emir dagli zambelotti*, because of his involvement in the trade of camlets from Ankara. About 1586 a shipment he had made was taken by the Uskoks in the Adriatic; two of his servants were killed and another, Piyale, spent time in Senj as a prisoner. To have his man and his goods returned, Seyyid Abdi wrote petitions to the doge and to the sultan; in 1588 an offi-

20 ASVe, *Notarile Atti*, b. 3280, cc. 511v-512v, 555v-556r, 562v, 564v-565v, 588v-591v, 612r-612r, 615r-616v, 631r-631v. Thanks to Mauro Bondioli for this reference.

21 ASVe, *Documenti Turchi*, b. 12, No. 1344.

22 ASVe, *Documenti Turchi*, b. 19, no. 1990.

cial envoy was sent from the court to settle the affair; in 1591 the merchant himself sent the Venetian interpreter Mateca Salvago as his agent and in 1594 his man Hüsrev to settle his affaires which were finally solved by a broker, Filippo Emmanuel (Pedani 1994, 177).

5 A Community of Merchants

The *mudarabas* were usually made by three or four partners but this does not mean that Ottomans could not create larger societies. For instance the *kapän tuccaları* were merchants organized in special guild-like structures who were granted a special status and privileges. These merchants usually were the only ones who could purchase special merchandise (usually food) in a certain region but had the duty to bring and sell it only in Istanbul. Furthermore their ships were granted priority in loading and unloading (Çizakça 1996, 117-22). We do not know if those who used to trade in Venice had a special imperial title of privilege (*berat*) to supply Istanbul with special goods but we know that they were sometimes considered a group and could also act as a group, at least at the beginning of the 17th century. Looking in the archives it is possible to find, for instance, a petition that the 17 most important Istanbul merchants interested in Venetian trade was made to the Senate of the Republic in November 1616. Each of them had different agents and were members of different partnerships but they all had realized that their agents in Venice deceived them by selling and buying their goods at higher and lower prices than those they asserted. In this way they could take the difference. For the Istanbul merchants it was difficult to end their partnerships abruptly, thus they asked the Venetian authorities to re-establish the ancient custom and that Venetian brokers carefully signed all the bargains they made in an official register.²³

There are other examples of Ottoman merchants acting as a group or a guild-like structure. This happened, for instance, when the persons temporarily in the Venetian *fondaco* created an agent to take care of their interests either in loading and unloading their goods or in front of the Venetian authorities. In Venice Ottoman subjects had no consul but in some Venetian places, for instance the islands of Corfu and Zante, they used to choose their own consuls. This practice began at the end of the 16th century; it developed in the following one, when these representatives were officially recognised by the Republic, and then went on in the 18th century, when the sultan began to issue *berats* to confirm them (Pedani 2005, 213-19).

In Venice there was not a real consul but the functions were the same. He was called *fattore* in the documents, such as those that Venetians

23 ASVe, *Senato, Dispacci Ambasciatori, Costantinopoli*, filza 82, cc. 72r-72v, 1616, 2 nov./1°.

had in some foreign places where no consul was available. For instance, in 1626, just seven years after the institution of the *fondaco*, the Turkish and Greek Ottoman merchants from Terranova, Scutari (İskenderiye), Elbasan, Antivari and Croia (Kroya/Akçahisar) and all those who came from the ports of Durazzo (Dıraç/Durrës), Scutari and Antivari, called a notary and created an attorney to deal with their merchandise. They were both private and merchants of the imperial *casnà* (*hassa*) and with this deed they cancelled all the proxies that some of them had already made for other persons. With another deed they all chose Cristoforo Damiani son of Ludovico as their agent for this job.²⁴ About one hundred and fifty years later, in 1795, the forty merchants present in the *fondaco* behaved in the same way and created a new agent to take care of their goods: the Venetian Agostino Marchiori.²⁵

There were also other moments in which the merchants acted as a community. In 1670, for instance, after the end of the Cretan war (1645-1669), a group of them asked new rules for their trade to the *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*, the Venetian officials, who dealt with trade. In 1672 they all went to the same office with a lawyer to protest against unjust taxes but after two years the Ottoman subjects present in Venice refused to pay him and to fulfil what had been decided by their predecessors (Pedani 2007, 39-54).²⁶ In 1654, during the Cretan war, the whole Ottoman community of the merchants of leather, made of Christian, Jewish and Muslim subjects, made petitions against the Venetian guild of the tanners that had created a trust to keep the price low. This time, the Ottomans began to boycott the Rialto market and threaten the authorities to choose another place to trade. In the end they succeeded in getting a ruling against the Venetian guild (ST, filza 609; Pedani 2008, 13; Pedani 2010a, 230; Ortega 2014, 68-69).

At the same time Venetian authorities began to consider the sultan's subject of the *fondaco* as a community with their chief representatives. For instance, in 1586 five Muslims, Hacı Ali ibn Ahmed from Ankara, Ahmed ibn Hüseyin, Nasrullâh çelebi ibn Mehmed, Mehmed ibn Mehmed and a certain Ahmed, certified that a girl Gülşen/Dorotea from Budua, daughter of Ahmed *çavuş*, had sworn in their presence that she wanted to follow her mother's faith and be a Christian (Pedani 2007, 10; Ortega 2014, 83-4). In the 18th century many Venetian documents made reference to some merchants who had lived in Venice for a long period, the so-called *vecchiardi del fontego*, as the persons with whom to deal if the entire Muslim community in Venice was involved. In this case some Muslims had prob-

24 ASVe, *Notarile Atti*, reg. 10890, cc. 665-667.

25 ASVe, *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*, 2a serie, b. 996, fasc. Fedi di sanseri, 24 Aug. 1795.

26 ASVe, *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*, 2a serie, b. 186, fasc. no. 113/1, 18 Nov. 1670; fasc. no. 113/2, 5 Sep. 1701.

ably decided to remain in Venice for ever, while the bulk of the community came to and fro according to seasons.

6 Insurances

In his book about business partnership Murat Çizakça states:

In the Ottoman case, it can be presumed that an effective maritime insurance did not exist. Certainly, not a single document has been found to indicate the contrary. (Çizakça 1996, 128-9)

Venetian documents can help us in this research too. The oldest witness of an insurance made by an Ottoman Muslim dates back to 17 October 1559. It is in a letter written by the *bailo* Marino Cavalli to the Senate. He stated that his son Sigismondo acted as the *kapudan-i derya*'s agent to get the premium of an insurance made by another agent, Pompeo Boro, by means of a third person, Girolamo Fella. It made reference to a ship the great admiral had rented (that probably underwent an accident). The money for making the insurance had been paid in Ancona but it was made with Venetian insurers. Now Girolamo Fella did not want to give back the 2,450 ducats of the premium, even if he had already cashed 500 ducats from the insurers.²⁷ In that year the chief of the Ottoman navy was Piyale pasha (1554-1567), a Croatian renegade, who took part in the siege of Malta and the conquest of Cyprus and was the first great admiral to become also vizier. Clearly if insurances did not yet exist in the Ottoman Empire, the sultan's subjects could appeal to other states, even of the Christian Europe, to insure their goods.

Other documents dating back to the following century show that to insure a ship or a load it was possible to go to a *kadı*. For instance, in 1602 a Venetian, Tranquillo Coletti, stated that he had paid 1,000 *akçes* for the *hüccets* necessary to insure the merchandise he had sent to Venice by an Ottoman *caramussale* (*karamusal*). This time he asked the *bailo* to ensure the other owners of the goods take part in paying the insurance.²⁸

It was easier, however, to apply to Venetian insurers. Three years later a certain Mehmed wrote a petition (*arz*) to the sultan asking that the Venetians were obliged to pay the premium of an insurance he had made in Cairo with the Venetian consul Giovanni da Mosto (1599-1602). He presented to the *divan* not only the Christian deeds but also some *hüccets* testifying that the consul had agreed to refund the damages that he and

27 ASVe, *Senato, Dispacci Ambasciatori, Costantinopoli*, b. 2B, 17 Oct. 1559.

28 ASVe, *Bailo a Costantinopoli*, b. 272, reg. 387, 27 Jul. 1602.

his partners could suffer during their sea journey from Cairo to Venice (Mumcu 2013, No. 107).²⁹ In 1592 another Muslim, Mustafa, agent of Ali bey made a proxy: he charged the draper Giovanni from Corsica to take care of his master's wool that is or will be sent to Venice from Albania by a Venetian ship and also to spend 300 ducats to insure it.³⁰ Again on 12 July 1611 Mehmed Çelebi from Croia, agent of a group of investors (*reises*, *hocas* and janissaries) from Scutari in Albania, made an insurance with the Venetian insurer Giovanni Trombino on the wool and skins arriving in Venice on the *marciliana* of the captain Giorgio son of Nicolò.³¹

Sometimes the distinction between a real insurance and only a promise is not clear. For instance another petition was made in 1620: some merchants attacked by the Spanish fleet in the Adriatic said that they had made an insurance before leaving Venice against the damage that could occur during the sea journey with the Venetian authorities and that the *bailo* had to refund them (Mumcu 2013, No. 305).³² After many petitions, letters and other documents, in the end, the Venetian government decided to pay in order to avoid problems caused also by the presence of a vizier among the 72 owners. The *kadı* of Gelibolu Abdullah made a *hüccet* to certify that 70,000 tolar were paid as a premium for goods worth 186,000 tolar. The payment was made by three Venetians, Francesco Negroni, Antonio Ferri and Giovanni Pietro Rigoni, who procured the goods that could be recovered. This is what it is written in the Italian translation, even if in the *hüccet* it is written that if the Venetians could recover the merchandise they had to give it back to the merchants. In another document in Italian these three persons state that they acted in the name of the Venetian government as dummies (Mumcu 2013, No. 308; Pedani-Fabris 1994, nos. 1271, 1272, 1275).³³

The *bailo* in Constantinople was involved in affairs of this kind when consuls or other official representatives of the Republic, acting as private persons, agreed to make insurances or even only verbally reassure Ottoman merchants. The distinction between a private and a public role was clear for the Venetian authorities but very ambiguous for the Ottoman ones. This is clearly stated in a *name-i hümayun* issued by Osman II in 1618. The sultan says that the Republic must recognize the promises made by the count and other officials of Spalato (Split) to his merchants.

29 ASVe, *Bailo a Costantinopoli*, b. 250, reg. 331. c. 32.

30 ASVe, *Notarile Atti*, reg. 11913, cc. 269-269v.

31 ASVe, *Notarile Atti*, reg. 11933, cc. 547-548.

32 ASVe, *Bailo a Costantinopoli*, b. 251, reg. 334, cc. 1-3.

33 ASVe, *Bailo a Costantinopoli*, b. 251, reg. 334, cc. 8-10; b. 251, reg. 334, cc. 1-3. ASVe, *Documenti Turchi*, b. 12, nos. 1271, 1272, 1275.

They were officials of the Republic and could not act as private persons. Trusting their promises the Ottoman subjects began their voyage, now that they had been placed under the protection of some Venetian armed galleys, even if they were then overcome by the Spanish fleet (Pedani Fabris 1994, nos. 1127, 1231).³⁴

Promises or real insurances were made not only by Venetian officials but also by consuls of other nations. About 1723 the French consul in Crete, Lamer, assured some Ottoman merchants that had decided to rent a ship with the Venetian flag. During the voyage they were attacked by a corsair from Malta and, this time, both the Venetian *bailo* and the French ambassador in Istanbul were involved in the matter.³⁵ The same thing happened ten years later, in 1735, when 43 Muslim merchants from Morea (Mora) rented a Venetian vessel and asked the French consul to check the captain's *patente* (licence). He answered that the document assured them against the risks of corsairs and during the journey their ship was sacked by a Spanish privateer.³⁶ After two years of quarrels, in 1739, the sultan issued an order: no Muslim or *haracguzar* (Christian or Jewish) merchant could embark on a Venetian ship without an insurance signed by a Venetian consul's or ambassador's own hand.³⁷

7 Life and Death in Venice

Most of the deeds made by Ottoman merchants in Venice were proxies. This is a clear hint that the Ottoman community in Venice was made by persons who did not remain for a long period. They usually stood for the time necessary to sell and buy their goods. If we must take into account the journeys of the Venetian *mude* (convoy of ships), Ottoman merchants probably either arrived in spring and left in autumn or arrived in autumn and left in spring. Other foreigners settled in the city for longer periods: many Germans arrived with their families; as happened for men from Lucca, Florence, and even for Armenians, Greeks or Jews. Some Muslims, however, stopped for longer periods and they probably became the reference for the others. Otherwise no explanation is possible for the fact that the Venetian registers of the dead certify the presence in the city of very old merchants who died at the age of eighty or ninety (Lucchetta 1997, 133-46).

The numbers of the Ottoman merchants increased in the 16th and in the

34 ASVe, *Documenti Turchi*, b. 9, nos. 1127, 1231.

35 ASVe, *Bailo a Costantinopoli*, b. 255, reg. 351, cc. 237-241.

36 ASVe, *Bailo a Costantinopoli*, b. 257, reg. 356, cc. 132-135.

37 ASVe, *Bailo a Costantinopoli*, b. 257, reg. 357, cc. 46-59; b. 258, reg. 359, cc. 289-298.

first half of the 17th century but three wars (1645-69, 1684-99, 1714-18) ruined their trade. Since the number of brokers in Venice was always 200 from 1504 to 1799, the number of those who worked with Turks may hint to the trend of Muslim mercantile activity: the brokers for Turks were 15-20 in 1587, 33 in 1631, 25 in 1674-5, 11 in 1751 and 5 in 1768 (Vercellin 1980, 60-4). Most commercial agreements were made in the presence of brokers who had to sign them in their official register but sometimes even the Ottomans went to a notary to sign a deed, for instance when they had to sell a ship. In this case they promised, however, to pay the taxes due to the brokers.

Once, Venice was a violent city and many Muslims were killed, although some died of disease. On feeling the impending fatal moment some of them asked for a notary. They did not make a will but only a declaration to settle their affairs. If they could not do this, their heirs had to make petitions in Istanbul or also Venice to get back the money that usually was taken by the state in order to deliver it to the right persons. The story of Hüseyin Çelebi bin Hacı Hidr bin İlyas, a *suf* (wool) merchant from Ayaş (1575), described by Cemal Kafadar was not extraordinary. We may recall here that it ended not with his funeral but in spring 1577, when the Republic sent to his father in Istanbul the 2,950 ducats, 19 *grossi* and 6 *piccoli* (that is to say 833 sequins) that had been kept in the Venetian Mint (*Zecca*) under his name. It took so much time because there was the plague and also the secretary of that office had died and had left all his papers in the greatest confusion.³⁸ Other Muslims died in Venice: Hasan bin İnyetullah (1579) (Pedani Fabris 1994, no. 888),³⁹ the ninety-year-old Hoca Derviş from Beypazarı (1588), slipping on the wet pavement of the street (Pedani 2010b, no. 420; Lucchetta 1997, 140),⁴⁰ Ahmed and Hürrem bin Abdullah who died at Rialto (1589) (Pedani Fabris 1994, no. 988),⁴¹ Hacı Hüseyin bin Abdullah (1591),⁴² Hacı Kara (1615) (Mumcu 2013, no. 190),⁴³ Hüseyin bin Hasan who was killed by Mustafa bin Abdullah (Pedani Fabris 1994, no. 2001),⁴⁴ and Ibrahim from Valona (Avlonya/Vlorë) who was killed by some Venetians (1720) after having taken part to a brawl during which another Turk from Gianina (Yanya/Ioannina) died.⁴⁵

Records of Ottoman subjects' commercial activity abound in the Vene-

38 ASVe, *Senato, Deliberazioni, Costantinopoli*, reg. 5 cc. 37, 39, 40-41, 51-52v.

39 ASVe, *Documenti Turchi*, b. 7, no. 888.

40 ASVe, *Lettere e Scritture Turchesche*, filza 4, cc. 112-113.

41 ASVe, *Documenti Turchi*, b. 8, no. 988.

42 ASVe, *Bailo a Costantinopoli*, b. 252, reg. 343, c. 89; Mumcu 2013, no. 940.

43 ASVe, *Bailo a Costantinopoli*, b. 250, reg. 331, c. 11.

44 ASVe, *Documenti Turchi*, b. 20, No. 2001.

45 ASVe, *Bailo a Costantinopoli*, b. 254, reg. 350, cc. 112-116, 325-329.

tian Archives, but it is much more difficult to find information about their private life. For instance, there is the draft of a merchant's letter and another letter written by a Persian (or by an Ottoman spy) to the doge and in both, Venice is described as a very expensive city. There is also a letter in Arabic by Hacı Ahmed Lütüfi to a friend in Trieste in 1802 and a report in the same language by a Christian Ottoman subject, Rad from Aleppo, who arrived in Venice to trade in 1644-1656: he wandered in the city to see the churches and holy relics that surely were of no interest to a Muslim (Pedani Fabris 1994, nos. 1995, 2000, 2012; Pedani 1995, 227-36; Faroqhi 2014, 82-3; Pedani, Issa 2016, 375-400).⁴⁶

8 Conclusion

In general Venetian documents show that in the 16th and 17th centuries the Ottoman merchants who traded in Venice were not alone but could make reference to a real commercial network that, starting from Istanbul, had its bases not only in Ragusa, Spalato, Durazzo but also in the Western coast of the Adriatic (Pedani Fabris 1994, nos. 130, 245).⁴⁷ Thus, exchange letters issued in Venice could be paid in Ancona and vice-versa. If in some moments the Venetian market appeared reluctant to welcome Muslims, they could threaten Venetian authorities to leave the Rialto and move to Ragusa or Ancona (Pedani Fabris 1994, nos. 249, 1368).⁴⁸ The severe Venetian laws tried to force all the ships crossing the Adriatic to reach first Venice and then other ports in order to get the duties on their loads, but many Ottoman merchants preferred to follow other routes and to arrive in Venice only at the end of a long journey. Moreover, the sources show the existence of strict links between Ottoman subjects and Christian merchants. Venetian merchants could loan money and then be reimbursed by means of the credits a Muslim merchant had in Venice. Notarial deeds show that Christians could act in the name of a Muslim or help him in his trade or even share the same business.

Ancient historiographical theories say that in the Early Modern Age Ottoman Muslims were not interested in international trade and that they left it completely in Christian and Jewish hands, but documents tell us a completely different story, a story of contacts, exchanges, and even confidence and friendship.

46 ASVe, *Documenti Turchi*, b. 19, no. 1995; b. 20, nos. 2000, 2012.

47 ASVe, *Documenti Turchi*, b. 1 no. 130; b. 2, no. 245.

48 ASVe, *Documenti Turchi*, b. 2, no. 249; b. 13, no. 1368.

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