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## THE MARKET FOR DOMESTIC AND IMPORTED TEXTILES IN SIXTEENTH CENTURY ISTANBUL

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### INTRODUCTION

When one thinks of Ottoman textile trade, the city of Bursa immediately comes to mind. As the Ottoman capital at the end of the fourteenth century, it was known for its flourishing silk industry which exported fine brocades and velvets to Europe and the East. As it expanded, it fostered a secondary market in which Persian merchants exchanged a large part of the raw silk they carried to supply local weavers for European woollens as well as the Bursa silk fabrics. By the end of the fifteenth century, its fabrics were being exported to northern Europe: both the Russian and Polish courts, for example, commissioned purchases on their behalf.<sup>1</sup> But much of the production of Bursa was consumed at home; by the court which formed its own discrete demand in clothing the extensive personnel of the palace, now in Istanbul, and for distribution on ceremonial occasions; and by the wealthy residents who used large quantities of luxury fabrics for both domestic and personal furnishings. This internal dynamic was also true for the international cotton trade which originated in the Anatolian countryside.<sup>2</sup>

The character of this internal market remains largely unexplored, particularly for Istanbul itself, the destination of textiles both imported and local, luxury and utilitarian, not commissioned for the court but to be used by the residents of the city. To gain an inside view of the market of Istanbul, the following paper presents a survey of the estate inventories of a group of individuals who lived in the imperial city during the sixteenth century. These individuals either died while travelling through the city or were residents whose property was brought to court for evaluation because no heirs were known to exist or as a result of disputes originating from creditors or fractious relatives.

Possessions to which they could lay claim were listed by the Islamic court and accompanied by a fair market value. From these we not only learn the intimate details of their households, their debts and business undertakings, but we can also ascertain their class and ethnic background, the area in which they lived, their occupation, or an occupational

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<sup>1</sup>Halil Inalcik "Harir," The Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nd edition (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978) 4:216.

<sup>2</sup>Suraiya Faroqhi "Notes on the Production of Cotton and Cotton Cloth in XVth and XVIIth Century Anatolia," Journal of European Economic History 8(2):411.

reference. And from the sum value of their estates we can deduce the socio-economic level to which they belonged. The estate inventories show us the importance of textiles in the everyday lives of a vast range of individuals. Furthermore, they give us insight into the diversity of taste of the popular market.

Thus, for the years 1521-1524, the first years of the reign of Süleyman, there exist ninety estate records for the legal area (kaza) of Uskudar on the Asian shore of the Bosphoros. These are housed in the archives of the Office of the Muftu of Istanbul, adjacent to the mosque of Süleymaniye and are the earliest usable core of legal records for the area. Examples are also drawn in this study from two earlier volumes beginning in 1513, but, in general, these are in hazardous condition and unavailable for extensive study. We have a cross-section of Ottomans in these documents: members both of the subject class (re'aya) and of the ruling administrative and military class (askeri). Our sample includes lepers and itinerant workers, farmers and boatmen, manumitted female slaves and housewives, holders of large scale agricultural estates and ship-captains, shopkeepers and artisans. The estates list the most intimate details of their lives, from their underwear to their business dealings, from a kilo of onions to gold bracelets worth a year's wages.

THE RECORDS:

As a preface, we must point out that, although our focus is the Ottoman community-at-large, the influence of the court cannot be dismissed. The textiles of the court of Süleyman have been researched and acknowledged in several volumes of which the sultan himself would have been proud. Similarly, the situation of the Ottoman court as a market for the Eastern silk trade is well-known. Tahsin Öz, past director of Topkapi Palace Museum, for example, pointed out in one of the earliest works the diverse origins of textiles used by the palace in the second half of the sixteenth century - in addition to the famed centers of Persia, Syria and Baghdad, the local centers of Istanbul, Bursa, Amasya, Chios, Dervis Paşa and Hasan Paşa, for example, supplied the palace with silks<sup>3</sup>. As revealed in a recent work by J. Michael Rogers, fine cotton and woolen goods were also gathered from centers within the empire and beyond to meet the demands of the court.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the Ottoman rulers with their talent for order and bureaucracy codified clothing consumption, a practice we still tacitly observe in our more egalitarian societies. Society was arranged in a visual schema in which the gender,

<sup>3</sup>Tahsin Öz Türk Kumaş ve Kadifeleri (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim, 1946), 62.

<sup>4</sup>J.M. Rogers "An Ottoman Palace Inventory under Beyazid II," Varia Turcica (Leiden: Divit Press, 1987), 39-54.

class, ethnic, and religious affiliation of an individual were readily observable, as were rank and socio-economic level within these divisions. Not only was the color of the clothing regulated, but so too was the fabric itself. Thus, a neatly ordered world of identification based on class cum state affiliation was set down in a way which reminds us of the images observed in miniatures. Through a system of regulations and interdictions established by the sultans in their kanun we learn that certain privileges were reserved for the askeri class, the administrative and military class in the employ of the state. Along with the right to bear arms and ride horses, it was distinguished from the subject class by its clothing, not only the type of garment, but the color and type of fabric from which it was made.<sup>5</sup> Styles peculiar to groups within Ottoman society also developed independently. In 1550, for example, the astute observer Derschwan noted that the Karamanlu women in Istanbul, that is, women of the Karamanlu group, a Turkish-speaking but non-Muslim minority from Central Anatolia, wore a distinctive cone-shaped headdress with multiple layers of veiling.<sup>6</sup> Proscriptions themselves set up market demands. More importantly, the desire of the individual to emulate the official elite, to appear as close as possible to the genuine article, to advance oneself visually in a society akin to a meritocracy, without crossing the line of the law, must have provided a strong impetus for the subject class and lower ranks within the official class to present themselves as reasonable facsimiles. It was partially in response to this impulse that these laws were enacted to curtail such behavior.

From the estate records we can make the following observations: textiles comprised the bulk wealth of personal possessions. It was not unusual for the textile holdings of an individual to amount to more than seventy-five percent of his or her wealth either in volume or in value. Textile items, both individually and collectively, could amount to a value more than that of even the residence in which a person lived. The most common fabrics used by the lower-socio-economic levels were bezz, dimi, and cuha. These remained the basic textiles used throughout all levels of society - a

<sup>5</sup>Suraiya Faroqhi Towns and Townsmen of Ottoman Anatolia: Trade, Crafts and Food Production in an Urban Setting. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 126-7. See also Inalcik, Halil, "Osmanlı Pamaklı Pazan, Hindistan ve İngiltere Pazar Rekabetinde Emek Maliyetinin Rolu," ÖDTU Gelisme Dergisi, Özel Sayısı (1981) 1-66, and Fahri Dalsar Türk Sanayi ve Ticaret Tarihinde Bursa'da İpekçilik (Istanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi, 1960); T. Majda, "Libas," Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nd edition (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), 5:751.

<sup>6</sup>Yasar Önen, trans. Istanbul ve Anadolu'ya Seyahat Günlüğü (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 1987), 78.

cotton or linen homespun, and a stronger fustian with a linen warp and cotton weft, and a coarse wool broadcloth. Bezz was used for clothing, particularly underclothing and shirts (don ve gömlek) and may have been woven locally from linen cultivated in the area. The government created its own special demand for a similar utilitarian cloth which also appears widely in the documents, bogasi, from which the underwear of the military was made.<sup>7</sup> Dimi was used for furnishing coverings - mattresses, cushions, etc. - as well as for clothing. Men and women of all levels owned garments of the coarsely woven woolen cloth, cuha. Finer qualities were produced in Salonika from which the garments of soldiers of all ranks were constructed usually in colors of red, turquoise or sky blue, and lesser amounts of yellow.

The importance of the international market for Salonika wool production and export has been well studied by Braude; what the records show us in addition, however, is that this cloth which was long associated with the military also ended up in the hands of the population-at-large.<sup>8</sup> Although not mentioned in the records, a degree of this woolen cloth may have been imported from Florence: Florentine merchants were known to have been active in the city at the end of the fifteenth century bearing quantities of imported wool cloth predominantly of the colors favored by the population.<sup>9</sup> Another cloth, alaca, was also outstanding in its presence both in reference to clothing and furnishings. This term may refer to the stiff striped satin (usually in reds, greens, and yellows) still widely used in the Middle East. Originally imported from India, it was subsequently copied and produced in Syria in the sixteenth century.<sup>10</sup> But since the term "alaca" was also used to denote something that was speckled, variegated or striped, and used equally to describe a cow as a rug, its reference to a particular fabric is often tenuous.

As would be expected, as the value of the estate increased, so too did the amount and variety of textile goods, both personal and domestic. To basic felt rugs (kebe) and the flat-weave kilims or worked rugs (zili), often of high value, were added carpets (hali), small rugs (kalice), and prayer

<sup>7</sup>Ismail Hakki Uzunçarşılı Osmanlı Tarihi, vol. 2 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1983), 282-4.

<sup>8</sup>Benjamin Braude "International Competition and Domestic Cloth in the Ottoman Empire, 1500-1650: A Study in Underdevelopment," Review II (3):437-51.

<sup>9</sup>Hidetoshi Hoshino and Maureen Fennel Mazzaoui, "Ottoman Markets for Florentine Woolen Cloth in the Late Fifteenth Century," International Journal of Turkish Studies, 3(1985-6):18-20.

<sup>10</sup>Donald Cioeta "Silk on Cotton: A Luxury Cloth and its Place in Ottoman Syrian Society," Paper presented at the 22nd annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, 1988.

rugs (seccade) of unknown origin and scant description. Cushions acquired embellishment and description for as wealth increased so also did the ornateness of the possession. Furnishings now were described as "printed" (basma) or were "hand-worked" (musanna) by the owners or women of the household. Some Bursa velvet (kadife) and brocade (kemha) cushions and pillows were embroidered with gold or "black work." Mattresses were now covered with striped alaca, perhaps imported from Syria, or with "local" cloth (beledi cloth), which contrary to what may be expected was often as expensive as its imported cousin.

The variety of domestic and imported textile goods is illustrated by the estate of an unknown woman of middle socio-economic level from Üsküdar in 1518 (during the reign of Selim, father of Sultan Süleyman).<sup>11</sup> Of immediate note is one of the most expensive items, a kaftan described as "firengi", possibly either a reference to its Italian origin (possibly woolen) or to a type of satin (atlas) also known by that name.<sup>12</sup> In either case, this garment, either European in origin or inspiration, was the only one found mentioned in this period and was disproportionately expensive. There was also a garment of cloth known as pay-pürek, a type of silk to be discussed later. She owned cushions of benek, a flowered brocade, another of silk brocade (kemha) of unknown description, others of beledi and Tokatli beledi cloth, cloth woven in Tokat.<sup>13</sup> Yet others were embroidered or printed, or elusively described as sekerpare, the name also borne by a lozenge-shaped morsel of cake soaked in sugar syrup. Her bedcovers were not of coarse homespun but of brocade. In addition, she owned a variety of small rugs and kilims, and a quantity of common bezz cloth.

The estates of women are particularly interesting not only for the variety of textiles which they contain but also for the contrast of contents. Juxtaposed beside a water buffalo or a scythe, for example, we will often find a robe of rich brocade and a variety of finery. Although women owned real estate - houses, gardens, orchards and shops - an abundance of textiles was more typical of their gender than of their male counterparts who invested their capital in support of the family, often in a business or a farm. When women with their own discretionary income (protected by law) chose not to

<sup>11</sup>The estate inventories were included in the legal records (şeriye sicilleri) for the court districts of Istanbul. These are housed in the Müftülük Archives (hereafter M.A.) attached to the mosque of Süleymaniye. See M.A.6:1:98.

<sup>12</sup>Mine Esiner Özen, "Türkçe'de Kumaş Adları," Fatih Sultan Mehmed'e Hatıra Sayısı (Istanbul: Tarih Dergesi, İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi 33, (1980-82) 302.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., passim.

engage in business transactions, they often engaged in the concentrated "conspicuous consumption" of fine textiles. Now, this term must be borne with a note of irony since the records and contemporaneous reports suggest that wealthier Muslim women, at least, remained physically secluded from the public eye and were swathed in layers of black silk satin and gauze veils when they ventured into the public domain, usually en route to the public baths. In their case, the term "inconspicuous consumption" may be more appropriate. Although women were consumers of fine textiles, their efforts were concentrated on the private sphere in which they primarily operated whereas those of men were turned towards the public sphere which they dominated.

The estates show that beneath their dour exteriors, women of middle socio-economic level owned at least one robe or gown of silk - either pay-pürek, an elusive term referring to a pattern identified as "cricket's feet," or of pay-güzin, both probably brocades of Bursa origin.<sup>14</sup> These were in addition to basic garments made of bezz or cuha already mentioned. Even if she could not afford entire garments made of luxury fabrics - often amounting to the value of a small orchard or to several months' wages for a worker - she, like her less wealthy sisters, owned individual accessories made from finer fabrics or which were embellished. Belts or sashes, both for male and female residents, were often the most expensive items in a wardrobe and the most elaborate were made of silk velvets and brocades; others were described as consisting of Circassian cloth (cerkezi), a local imitation of Iranian or Kashmiri shal.<sup>15</sup> Accessory items were multiple among the estates of women. Headdresses often consisted of up to ten pieces - face veils, caps, skullcaps and neckerchiefs. As with the use of luxury fabrics, these multiplied as socio-economic status rose.

In contrast to the conservative clothing of present-day urban Turkey, as with much of industrialized Europe, contemporaneous observers noted that, indeed, the Ottoman gentleman revelled in his sartorial splendor. In the mid-sixteenth century, Ogier Ghislen de Busbecq, the emissary of the Holy Roman Emperor to the court of Süleyman, noted that even among the general population only those who had suffered financial loss or other calamity wore dark colors. Also, bright colors were considered to be propitious and were subsequently affected by military personnel when on campaign.<sup>16</sup> The fashion demand for new and interesting

<sup>14</sup>Mubahat S. Kütükoğlu, Osmanlı Narh Müessesesi ve 1640 Tarihi Narh Defteri (Istanbul: Enderun Kitabevi, 1983), 75.

<sup>15</sup>See Özen, "Salaki"; 334.

<sup>16</sup>Charles T. Forster and F.H.B. Daniell, trans. The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghislen de Busbecq, vol. 1 (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1968), 40-1. Orig published, London, C.Kegan

designs appeared insatiable for Ottoman dandies. Young men often became known by a particular name and fabric which they favored and it was not unusual to earn a sobriquet based on the pattern and silk which they sported.<sup>17</sup> But how representative is the dandy of everyday life in sixteenth century Istanbul?

The records show that love of color which marked court dress was also present among the community-at-large. Under their black silk mantles, women sported veils and scarves of the not-too-discrete colors of yellow, orange, and purple, in addition to their other colorful garments. Only older women it seems, as is still the custom in many areas of the Middle East today, wore either dark colors or white. But in a society in which emphasis was placed on public presentation, it was in the estates of the men that some of the most colorful and the most expensive items were found; more exactly, among the middle level members of the official class, the askeri, duly employed in the administration or the military. Thus, in the estates of cavalry officers - sipahis and silahdars - and of mevlanas (learned men of theology and law), we find robes of green muhayyer (fine watered mohair camlet produced in Ankara, or Angora, as it was then known), sometimes lined with fur. These robes were also made from wool broadcloth imported from Salonika or of fine iskarlet from Italy. The value alone of their clothing worn while travelling was often more than many of the residences in the towns through which they passed. It was also not unusual for craftsmen employed in some semi-official capacity to own comparatively luxurious garments. Among the horseshoes in the estate of Hizir b. Abdullah, a blacksmith, for example, we find a robe of brocade (çatma), and in the estate of Alaca Dimitri, a livestock dealer of Greek origin, we find an expensive robe of Salonika wool.<sup>18</sup>

Among the estates of residents of the community we also find evidence of the diverse origins of some of the textiles: Kutni, a silk and cotton cloth, reputedly from India (Hindi Kutni), wool from Kefe on the Black Sea, leather from Russia (bulgari and postin); fine expensive gauze cloth from the looms of Denizli, and as mentioned in the estate of the unknown woman, possibly cloth from Italy. In their households there was also further evidence of the market dynamic: cups from Syria (Sam tasi), knives from Hungary or Austria (Engürüs bicaği); and leather trays from Russia (bulgari). Here it should be underlined that these items were not rare among the askeri class who were often well-travelled cosmopolites, for indeed, the possession of imported and luxury goods appeared

Paul, 1881.

<sup>17</sup>See Özen; p. 39 in reference to "Bindalli," for example, a silk cloth with designs of branches favored by young men.

<sup>18</sup>M.A.6.3.376:233 and M.A.6.3105a:229.

characteristic of this group; however, these, and similar items, were also present among the strong middle class of which the Ottoman Empire commonly consisted - the families of bakers, farriers, boatmen, millers and tradesmen. For although there was a tendency towards starkness of possessions, among these were textiles of value and finesse from diverse origins.

Our survey takes us through the reign of Süleyman in which time the presence of the administrative-military class all but disappeared from the general record books as a result of the consolidation of bookkeeping under the sultan. We find, however, that among the subject class of the middle socio-economic level a demand for, and the possession of, garments from Bursa brocade (Bursa kemha), İbrişim, taffeta, and vale.<sup>19</sup> Satin (atlas) and Salonika wool continue to appear. Also the lust for color continues, ranging from turquoise, to purple, crimson and musk. In 1575, a few years after the end of the reign of Suleyman in another probe of the estates from the same area, we notice that both the range of textiles and their prices had not expanded dramatically during his reign.<sup>20</sup> It is not until the end of the sixteenth century, with the expansion of the askeri class and the accelerated accumulation of wealth among its members that we begin to see a surge in the use of luxury and imported fabrics. As an important footnote it should also be noted that at the end of the sixteenth century many of the state employees supplemented their official salaries which had steadily diminished with rising inflation. Some, to the neglect of their formal duties, eventually turned to that one area of opportunity: domestic and international trade.

CONCLUDING REMARKS:

In closing, we must emphasize that the importance of the demands of the general market cannot be overlooked. As stated by Inalcik in his discussion of the Bursa silk trade, the pressures to meet both external and internal demands of the market eventually led not only to an expansion of output, but also to a decline in quality. Among the pressures noted was the demand of the "common people" for cheaper versions of luxury goods. This, in turn, led to the production of more loosely woven fabrics, the lowering of guild standards, and the subsequent establishment of unauthorized weavers.<sup>21</sup> This popular demand is also credited with opening the door to the cheap, low quality, showy European textiles which would prevail in the following centuries.

<sup>19</sup>Inalcik, "Harir,"; see, for example, M.A.6:20:156a; M.A.6:47:72a-b; M.A.6:53:44b.

<sup>20</sup>For example, M.A.6:34:11a,12b,66a,67a,126a-b.

<sup>21</sup>Inacliik, "Harir," 218.

It is perhaps a harbinger of the changes to come that listed among the estate of a merchant who died at the beginning of the seventeenth century, that among the quantities of red and green beads, scissors, knife sharpeners, and silk thread we find lengths of inexpensive Londra çuha or London broadcloth, a fabric which was to change the face of trade in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup>M.A.6:125:59b. The merchant, Mizra Mehmed, died in 1614 in his quarters of the han of Mehmed Aga Cesme.