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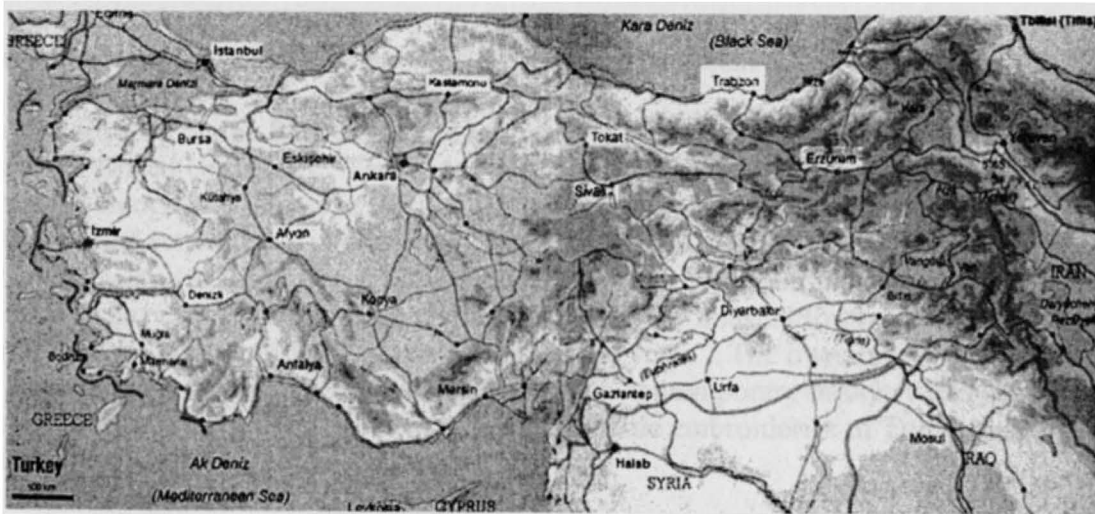
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## THE GAZIANTEP CLOTH TRADE: A STUDY OF A PUTTING-OUT SYSTEM OF CLOTH PRODUCTION IN SOUTHEASTERN TURKEY

Charlotte Jirousek

An Ottoman era system of cloth production and marketing identified in Gaziantep is a rare survival of traditional production patterns once central to the Ottoman Turkish economy.

This system is descended from the much older Ottoman production system that once organized textile manufacturing throughout the Ottoman Empire. Textile manufacturing had been an important part of the economy of Asia Minor since the dawn of history. It was noteworthy throughout this region in both the Roman and Byzantine eras, and during the early Muslim rule of the Selcuk Turks beginning in the eleventh century. The legendary silk road linking east and west was really a network of trade routes connecting various northern and southern routes between the cities of Asia and the entrepots of the Eastern Mediterranean. Therefore it should not be surprising that during and after the Ottoman conquest in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, textiles were being produced commercially in every part of Anatolia. The silk textiles of Bursa and the court manufactories of Constantinople are well known, as is Aleppo as a center of the silk trade. However, these centers were in fact the mercantile hubs of a much larger network of production. Gaziantep cloth production had strong connections to Aleppo, about 60 miles to the south, Prior to the breakup of the Ottoman Empire these towns were part of one economic and political region, and international textile trade network that also included Urfa, Maras and Kilis to the north (See Map).



Map of Turkey, highlighting selected textile producing towns

In the sixteenth century Gaziantep (known as Aintab until the 1920s) was already a substantial city in the Ottoman tax roles. It was not so well known for silk, but was rather a center for the production of red dyed leather and cloth. The raising and use of madder red as a trade good and as the basis for a dyeing industry was important. Trade in wool, leather and mutton were also important, as Aintab along with other cities in the region was a center for the products of the Turkmen nomads of Southeastern Anatolia, who brought their herds to the markets of Aintab seasonally to sell animals, wool, and their own weaving. Later as cotton expanded as a crop in the region, they also became important producers of red cotton cloth, and

competed successfully with the Aleppo production. Aintab was also an important producer of the silk and cotton cloth known as *alaca* by the end of the nineteenth century (Quataert, 1993). Sericulture and silk weaving was practiced not only in Aleppo, but also as early as the fifteenth century in outlying districts such as Tarsus to the West, according to a very graphic European traveller's description (Purchas, 1625). Urfa and Diyarbakir to the East were also centers of silk production. Thus sericulture and at least some silk crafts were probably done in the area from a fairly early date, with the output sold by villagers to supply the Aleppo manufactories and markets.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, however, silk weaving was not an important part of Aintab manufacturing. Some silk weavers may have moved there from centers further east such as Urfa and Diyarbakir after 1890, since the number of looms in Aintab increased markedly in the mid nineties. Even greater numbers arrived from Aleppo, to the south, following the revolution that ended the Ottoman Empire and established the Turkish Republic in the early 1920s. At that time the neighboring and closely related cities of Aintab and Aleppo were separated by the border that created the new nation of Syria out of the old Ottoman province. Many Turks living in Aleppo moved 60 miles north, together with the tools of their professions, and Armenians and Arabs moved south to Aleppo. The father of my primary contact in the Gaziantep cloth trade was born in Aleppo and brought his family north to settle during the revolution. The family still retains ties with kin in Aleppo.

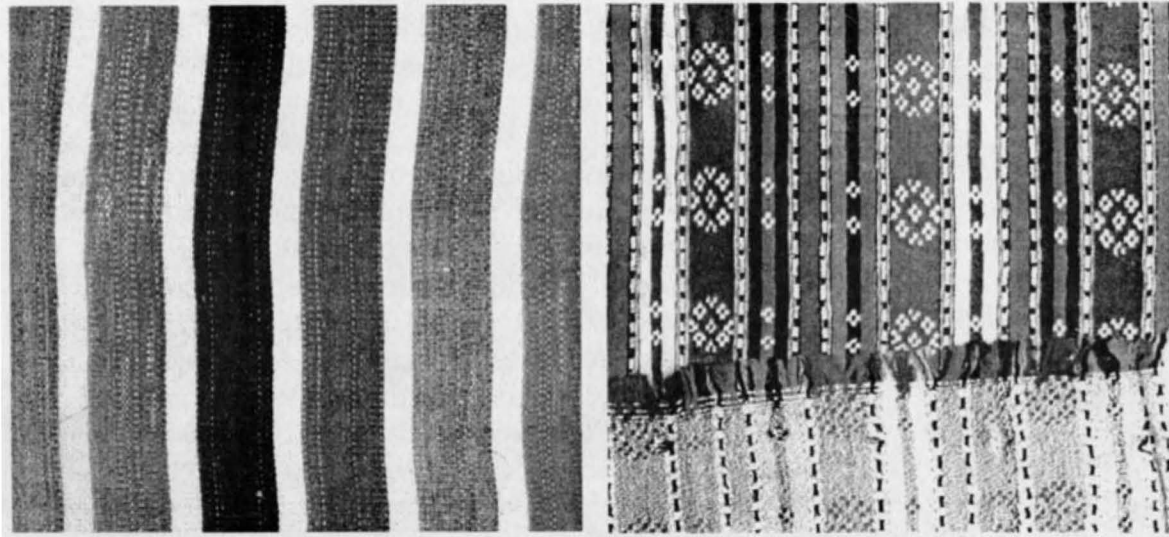
The manufacturing systems and fragments of the old trade networks survived well into the twentieth century throughout the former Ottoman world. Even today there are quite a number of communities in Anatolia where textile production still continues in the traditional mode.

### **Textile Production**

Sericulture and silk weaving had long been important around Adana and Tarsus to the west, and along the Mediterranean coast, as well as in the Hatay, to the south. Isolated silk weavers can still be found in these cities. Gaziantep has the most intact and extensive traditional putting out system devoted to traditional textile production that I have seen in Turkey, producing silk in plain weaves, satin weaves and rep weave *moire*, done in a variety of patterned, striped, plain, and ikat designs, known as *alaca* and *kutnu*. Although weaving towns in western Turkey still follow the traditional putting out system, only in Gaziantep is the system engaged in substantial production of traditional cloth. (Plate 1)

*Alaca* and *kutnu* cloth was once produced in many different towns and cities throughout Anatolia and was widely used for traditional costume in all parts of Turkey and the Ottoman Empire. Both the rep weave *alaca* and the similar but cheaper *medeniye*, as well as the satin weave *kutnu* were woven with silk warp and cotton weft, although an all-cotton version became a common variant in the nineteenth century. The use of the cotton, particularly in the satin weave *kutnu*, meant that the outer warp-faced satin was primarily silk, while the inner, weft-faced side was primarily cotton. Not only was such silk cloth cheaper, many devout Muslims held that the wearing of silk next to the skin was an impious luxury (Tezcan & Delibaş). These two reasons combined meant that these types of cloth were widely used and popular with both the rich and the poor. They were used for regional dress in every part of Anatolia, and in most parts of the

larger Ottoman world, from royal court to village. Furthermore, these weaves were known and used throughout the near east. One trade historian has noted that there was in the sixteenth century a considerable demand in the Aleppo markets for the *kutni* of Cairo, considered to be of exceptional quality (Inalcik & Quataert, 1994).



1. Left: *alaca* cloth, a warp-faced weave with silk warp and cotton weft. *Medeniye* is the same structure but with warp more widely spaced, hence cheaper. Right: *Kutnu* cloth, a warp-faced satin weave with silk warp and cotton weft.

Weaving of this cloth is even to be found in Muslim (or formerly Muslim) regions of North India and Pakistan. There it is known as *mashru* (which translates as permitted), meaning permitted for the wear of Muslims, because of its cotton back. Indian historians assert that this weaving came to India from Ottoman Aleppo. (Dhamija & Jain, 1989) Furthermore, a loom with a warp tensioning system virtually unique to Anatolia appears to be in use in some *mashru* weaving, further suggesting an Anatolian or Ottoman origin.

### The Production System

The putting out system as practiced in Turkey consists of a division of labor in textile production in which separate craft specialists are organized and paid by a capitalist/entrepreneur. Work may be done in the artisan's home or in a workshop. Production is organized and financed by capitalist entrepreneurs who may have begun their careers as craftsmen. Some are themselves merchants, who provide capital and raw materials to craftsmen, whom they also pay for labor, and then market the cloth that they have commissioned. One putting out system I observed was managed by the senior dye master. Another was run by a businessman who began life as a maker and threader of reeds and harnesses (*tarakci*). The largest putting out system was managed by a man who sells cloth wholesale and retail; but his father was a weaver, and he worked at the loom as a child.

For a variety of cultural and economic reasons, the putting-out system continued in use in Ottoman Turkey long after it had generally disappeared in Europe, a fact that long misled historians of nineteenth century Ottoman manufacturing who tended to equate centralized

factories with meaningful industrial production (Quataert, 1993). Thus some have argued that Ottoman textile manufacturing declined in the nineteenth century, based on the lack of centralized factories, but in reality a vigorous textile industry continued. However cloth production was now mostly for domestic markets, and exports were primarily of reeled silk and raw materials (cocoons , wool, cotton, mohair).

There were two main reasons why the putting out system continued in use: individual ownership of skills and equipment; and use of female labor. The fact that craftsmen usually owned and controlled their own equipment and tools, and that the various skills of production were divided into distinct but interdependent specialities encouraged continuance of the traditional decentralized system, even when new technologies were introduced. Although the capitalist/entrepreneur owns some equipment and has the funds to operate the system, most equipment was owned by the craftsmen, and thus the capital was relatively widely distributed. So a craftsman or entrepreneur might buy a new loom, but (until recently, at least) not a factory full of looms. Also, in a Muslim society it was until recently unthinkable for most women to work outside the home, and so the desire to take advantage of female labor was a further disincentive for centralization. Thus large centralized factories were slow in coming, although this kind of production did gradually emerge beginning in the latter nineteenth century in some urban areas.

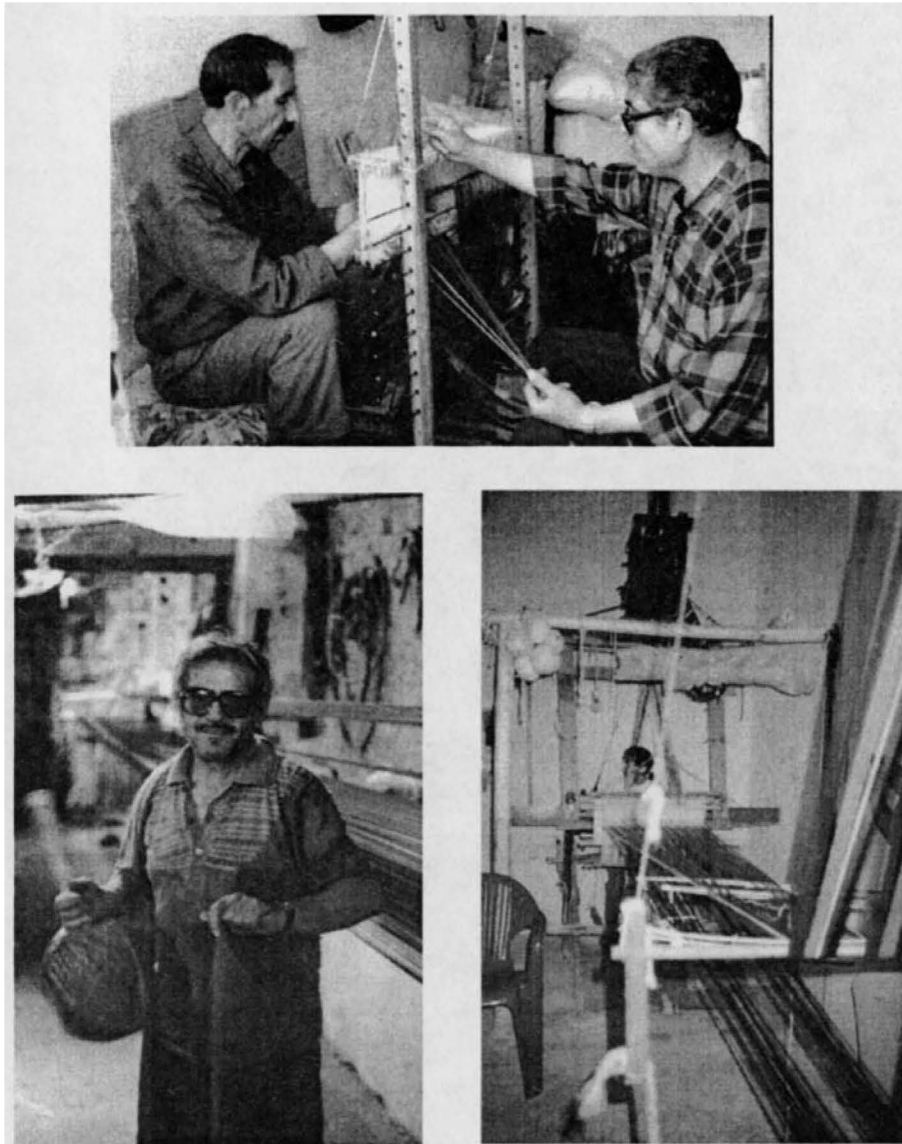
The original Ottoman system of *gedik*, or crafts trades, usually operated within a Guild (*hirfet*) system that was both similar to and different from the European model. Craftsmen achieved their *gedik* through an apprentice system of training, following which they could set up shop on their own and practice their speciality. The Guilds or *hirfet* were chartered by the Ottoman government to produce a required product, but they did not control all production. There was no formal legal code that licensed and regulated guilds (Inalcik, 1994). Individual capitalist-entrepreneurs could contract for labor or product through Guild members, or operate independent putting-out systems of craftsmen themselves outside of the Guilds. The Ottoman craft production system had in some ways a less formalized relationship to Ottoman bureaucracy and was generally more flexible than the European guild system (Faroqhi, 1995) in terms of control of the craftsmen and their freedom to practice their trade. However, Ottoman guilds and independent craftsmen were also more subject to the whims of the Ottoman government that took no interest in the economic benefits of trade but instead viewed the supply needs of the army and court as preeminent over profitability and even survival of a manufacturing community. Depending on the period and the community, a guild might include Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Ottomans, or it might include only members of just one religious community.

Of course, formal Guild structure is no more in Gaziantep. Until about 1994 there was a textile craft association director (*Başkan*) who was a respected elder of the textile community. When the last *Başkan* died, he was not replaced, because it was felt that the community had grown too small to require a formal director. The *Başkan* was responsible for allocation of resources and labor, but in practice mainly was called on to arbitrate disputes if and when they occurred.

Entire communities of putting out system production can still be seen in several places, notably in towns and villages around Denizli and Aydin in southwestern Turkey, (Erdogan, 1996) to a lesser extent along the Black Sea, and also in Gaziantep in the Southeast. In many of these communities most of the production (but not all) has been converted from traditional textiles to modern products such as toweling, curtains or sheeting, woven on power looms, but still housed and owned in family compounds. Only since the Turkish economic boom of the 1980s have a number of individual weavers expanded their production into modern factory systems. Ancient cottage industry skills have thus spawned a textile and apparel manufacturing boom of immense proportions that is transforming the towns and cities of southern and western Turkey.

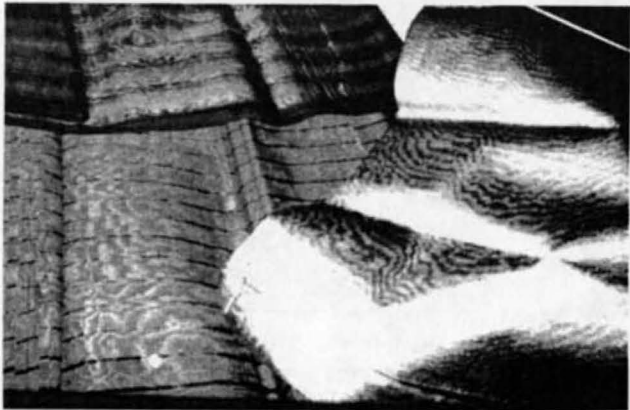
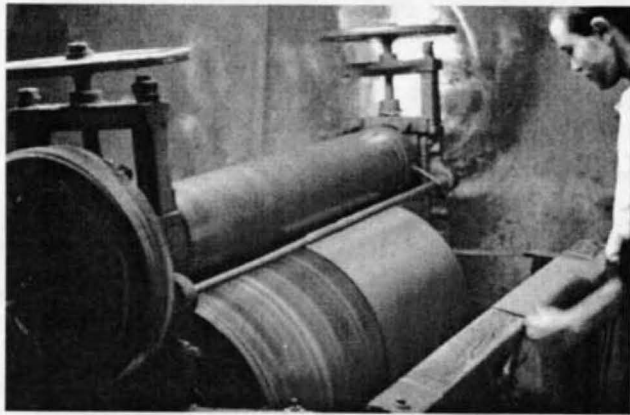
In Gaziantep, too, many families that were once involved in the weaving of traditional cloth are now owners of factories producing printed textiles, lace curtains, socks, underwear, and blue jeans, sweaters and other clothing. However a few have stayed with the old production as either managers of putting out systems or craftsmen within such systems. In Gaziantep there remained as late as 1999 about 165 looms still producing traditional cloth. Of this number about 3/4 are handlooms. Since about seven sets of hands are involved in preparing the warps, wefts and looms for weaving, and in finishing the woven cloth, this represents a significant body of skilled workmen. Those who stay with this work do so for various reasons. For some older craftsmen it is the only work they know. For others, it is the family business. But for some it is the love of the traditional cloth, and the desire to preserve a tradition they view as peculiarly Turkish. And by this tradition I mean that these people care about both the making of the cloth and the system of producing it.

The cloth still produced in Gaziantep is produced in a system of independently owned and managed workshops, some in homes and some not, depending on the nature of the production task. The 165 weavers, who operate looms ranging from seven harness to jacquard handlooms and a variety of power looms are part of a compartmentalized production system that also includes six other specialities: the makers and threaders of harnesses and reeds, warp winders, warp finishers (including ikat tying and sizing), dyers, loom preparers, and fabric finishers.(Plate 2)



2. Three textile craft specialties: *tarakci* --makers and threaders of harnesses (top); *mezekci*--(above left) preparation of warps (ikat tying, sizing, and rolling warp balls) *Dokumaci*--(above right)Weavers. In this instance a jacquard loom operated by this family for more than 100 years.

One particular craft specialty that is quite distinctive is the finishing of the rep weave *alaca* cloth. The effect achieved is *moire* patterning, and it is probable that the methods used in Gaziantep are the last surviving instance of the effect sometimes referred to as "watered" silk. The techniques used have been described by sixteenth century travelers for whom this method was associated with the production of camlets, the fine, soft mohair (later, mohair and silk) fabric then highly prized in Europe, and originating in Anatolia. The technique used by Ottoman



3. Procedure for moire finishing. Top, yardage is sprinkled with drops of water. Center, cloth is pressed two layers together. Facing inner surfaces will receive moire patterning. Bottom, *alaca* cloth with moire finish.

craftsmen to achieve the watered finish was of great interest to European visitors. (Busbecq, 1633) The process involved, and involves, two steps: watering distributed unevenly, so that large drops moisten some spots and other areas remain dry. The cloth is folded and left to cure overnight, under a board held down by heavy weights. The next day it is pressed. The system I documented used a large heated cylinder (*cendere*). The cylinder is essentially smooth but not perfectly shaped, and so the pressure it gives is slightly uneven, which may contribute to the pressed moire patterning. However, the craftsmen insisted that the irregularity of the dampness



in the cloth was the primary cause of the irregular “watered” design, since the degree of dampness would cause variance in the compressability of the cloth. The result is a *moire* pattern that does not repeat, since it is not dependent on the variations in the repeating turning of a cylinder as is the case in European *moire*. However, there was another method of pressing the cloth practiced until 1992 when the last workshop closed. This involved beating the cloth with mallets, an ancient method that would surely not produce a repeating pattern.(Plate 3)

Continuance of the traditional putting out system is dependent on the continuance of each speciality, and for this reason the survival of the craft is in serious danger. At present there is only one dye workshop left, run by a man in his late seventies. Since I did my research, one of the pair of harness makers and threaders that I documented has died, and the other has consequently retired, since it is a two-man task. While there are others who thread harnesses, there is only one more workshop for producing new harnesses for handlooms. Today the *kutnu* and *alaca* production systems are struggling to survive. Although there is a market for their traditional cloth, the entrepreneurs are also constantly trying to find new ways to redesign it for new markets in a changing world. However, the real crisis is in the availability of skilled workers. In many parts of Turkey I have observed that the only practitioners of handweaving left are old, with no younger generation coming up to replace them. Yet in Gaziantep I did see young craftsmen and apprentices, though most of the workers are aging. In some crafts there are not enough young apprentices to replace those who are retiring or dying. Sooner or later one of the essential crafts will be lost, and the whole system will fall. So the craft will inevitably shrink and fade away unless there is outside support. The head of and the application of pressure. The cloth is opened out at length and sprinkled liberally with drops of water, using a whisk. The water is purposely the largest putting out system, who has worked hard to preserve this craft, claims that what is needed most is social security and health benefits for the self-employed cottage industry workers and educational support for an apprentice program . Cottage industry workers are currently not eligible to join and pay into government retirement and health programs available to factory workers. He claims that if this were to change, and if a training program could be organized with government support as is done for other crafts, there would be no shortage of workers. This cloth is part of Turkish heritage, much as tartan is part of Scottish heritage. Perhaps before it is too late something will be done to save this craft; but perhaps not.



4. Dye workshop, left. Display of *kutnu* and *alaca* cloth and traditional costume, right.

*All photographs by the author.*

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