

The Ottoman City
between East
and West
Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul

EDHEM ELDEM
DANIEL GOFFMAN
and
BRUCE MASTERS



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK <http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk>
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA <http://www.cup.org>
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman, and Bruce Masters 1999

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1999

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in Times 10/12 pt [CE]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Eldem, Edhem

The Ottoman City between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul / Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman, and Bruce Masters.

p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in Islamic civilization)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Aleppo (Syria) – History – 17th century. 2. Aleppo (Syria) – History – 18th century.

3. İzmir (Turkey) – History – 17th century. 4. İzmir (Turkey) – History – 18th century.

5. Istanbul (Turkey) – History – 17th century. 6. Istanbul (Turkey) – History – 18th century.

I. Goffman, Daniel, 1954– . II. Masters, Bruce Alan, 1950– . III. Title. IV. Series.

DS99.A56E43 1999

956.2–dc21 98–43855 CIP

ISBN 0 521 64304 X hardback

Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> x
<i>List of maps</i>	xi
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
Introduction Was there an Ottoman City?	1
1 Aleppo: the Ottoman Empire's caravan city BRUCE MASTERS	17
2 Izmir: from village to colonial port city DANIEL GOFFMAN	79
3 Istanbul: from imperial to peripheralized capital EDHEM ELDEM	135
Conclusion: contexts and characteristics	207
<i>Works consulted</i>	215
<i>Index</i>	228

Illustrations

- | | | |
|---|--|---------|
| 1 | Camel caravan passing one of Aleppo's khans as it enters the city. (Postcard, authors' collections.) | page 42 |
| 2 | A view of Aleppo's citadel from the northwest, overlooking the rooftops of Judayda. (Postcard, authors' collections.) | 74 |
| 3 | Panorama of late-seventeenth-century Izmir from the Gulf. (From Cornelis de Bruyn, <i>Reizen van de Bruyn, dorr de vermaardste deelen van Klein Asia, de Eylandin, Scio, Rhodus, Cyprus, Metelino, Stanchio</i> . . ., Delft, 1708 ?, authors' collections.) | 106 |
| 4 | A street scene in early-nineteenth-century Izmir. (From Edmund Spencer, <i>Turkey, Russia, the Black Sea, and Circassia</i> , London, 1854, authors' collections.) | 131 |
| 5 | The steps of Yüksek Kaldırım, leading to the heart of "Western" Istanbul (Pera). (Postcard, authors' collections.) | 146 |
| 6 | The roofs and domes of the Grand Bazaar, with the towering structure of the eighteenth-century Nuruosmaniye mosque and Hagia Sophia in the background. (Postcard, authors' collections.) | 168 |

Maps

1	Aleppo	<i>page</i> 18
2	Izmir	80
3	Istanbul	136

CHAPTER 1

Aleppo: the Ottoman Empire's caravan city

BRUCE MASTERS

Aleppo, the present metropolis of Syria, is deemed, in importance, the third city in the Ottoman dominions. In situation, magnitude, population, and opulence, it is much inferior to Constantinople and Cairo; nor can it presume to emulate the courtly splendor of either of those cities. But in the salubrity of air, in the solidity and elegance of its private buildings, as well as the convenience and neatness of its streets, Aleppo may be reckoned superior to both . . .

Alexander Russell, eighteenth-century English resident¹

The day will come when one must part from you, city of Aleppo.
It is most appropriate that there will be no joy then
For the truth is, beauty can be found here
In her well-built grandeur.
There are all sorts of merchandise to be found here.
The grace of wealth and goods is beyond counting.
But more than this, her water and air are enchanting
As are her river and her buildings.

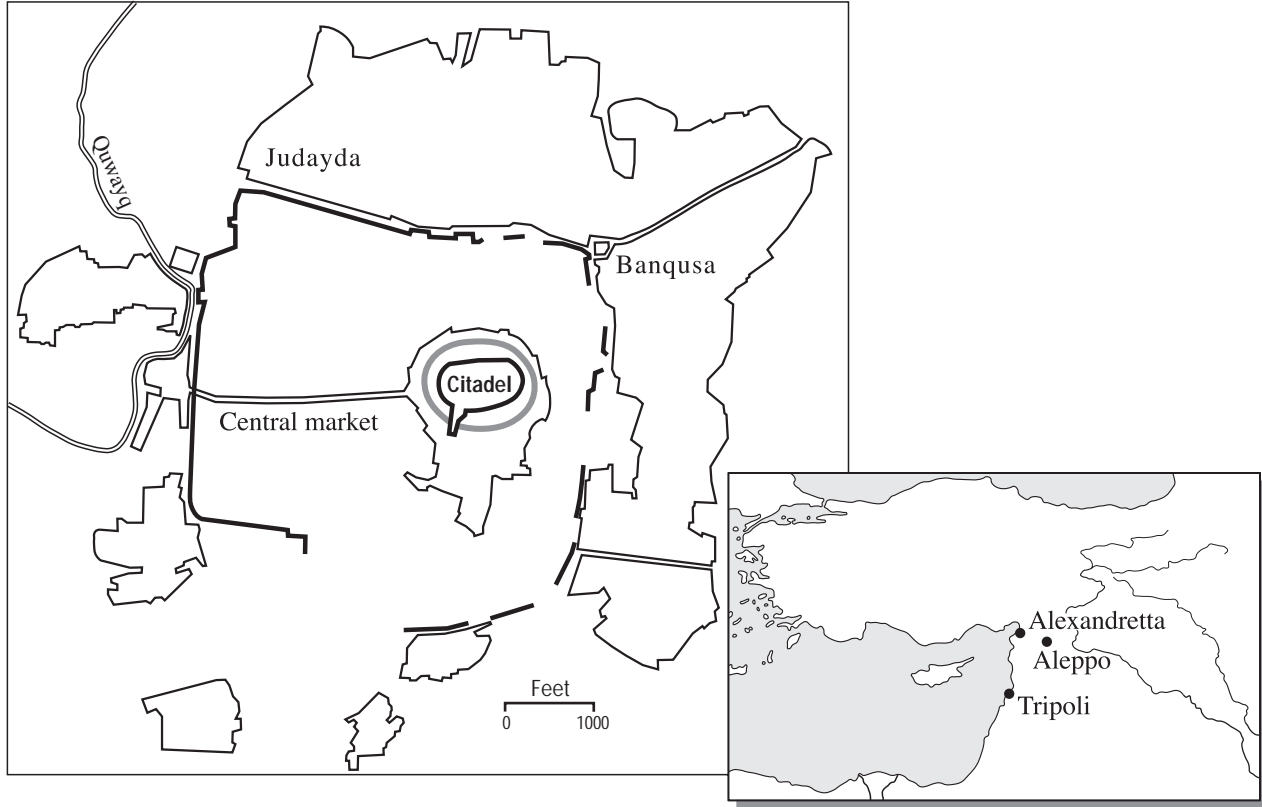
Nâbî, eighteenth century Ottoman divanî poet²

Crowned with an imposing citadel, Aleppo made a lasting impression on all who caught their first glimpse of it during the Ottoman period. Many of the city's houses, mosques, churches, and markets were built of locally quarried stone. This feature provided the city both with an air of permanence and its sobriquet, *Halab al-Shaba'*, "Aleppo, the milky-white." The nickname presumed a pun on the city's name which in Arabic is also the word for milk. This linguistic coincidence, in turn, fit well into the local myth of origin, current in the Ottoman period, that held that the city had been founded when the Prophet Abraham had milked his goats on the citadel mound. In fact, the association of some form of that name to the site goes back to the beginnings of recorded history

In the Ottoman centuries, Aleppo had surrounding gardens, watered by

¹ Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo* (London, 1794), vol. 1, pp. 1–2.

² Mene Mengi, *Divan Şirinde Hikemî Tarzın Büyük Temsilçisi, Nâbî* (Ankara, 1987), p. 24.



Map 1 Aleppo

the now largely vanished Quwayq River, but they lacked the verdant appearance of Damascus's Ghuta. From a distance, the city struck most visitors as austere and with little charm. All whose impressions have survived commented on its solidity, order, and cleanliness. Few besides Nâbî, however, penned odes to its beauty. The Aleppines themselves responded to the somber vision their city projected. In their poetry and folk-sayings, they evoked and then carefully cultivated a self-image of themselves as townsmen blessed with sobriety, frugality, and honesty. Most foreign visitors agreed the stereotype was appropriate. These were traits suitable for inhabitants of a city whose renown was vested neither in political nor cultural greatness, but in its trade.

Aleppo's importance as a commercial center in the Ottoman period arose both from its geographical setting and historical developments. The city's probable beginnings stretch back to the origins of urban life in the Middle East. Aleppo was already a major regional market center at the beginning of the second millennium B.C.E., when the archives of the Hittites and of those of the kingdom of Mari recorded its name as Halab or Khalappa. One reason for the city's longevity was its tell (the artificial mound upon which its citadel now sits) which was buttressed by several smaller, surrounding hills. Together, they provided one of the best defensive positions in the region. Adding to its defenses, the Quwayq and underground wells provided an abundant and dependable water supply to the site. The combination proved irresistible and guaranteed the location's almost unbroken habitation. Often devastated by marauders, Aleppo was always rebuilt.

The wider geography of the region also served to establish Aleppo as a commercial center. The city is almost equidistant from the Euphrates and the Mediterranean Sea which together provided a route water borne traffic could follow with only a short dry land portage passing by Aleppo. The wisdom of this route was evident to many and it formed the most traveled path for trade along the fabled Silk Road between Asia and Europe from at least the early Bronze Age until the arrival of the Ottomans. Adding to the viability of the site, extensive areas of fertile soil surround the city. Beyond them, lie the olive and mulberry orchards of the hill country to the west, and southwest. Aleppo's craftsmen fashioned the fruits of these into soap and silk cloth, the quality of which gained a regional reputation for excellence. To the north, east, and south, the region's diverse tribal peoples: Bedouin, Kurds, and Turkomans, utilized the steppe lands bordering the desert as pasturage for their herds. The tribals sold wool, meat, and rugs to the city-dwellers and provided the pack-animals and the expertise necessary for the caravan trade. They, in turn, were consumers of the manufacture of the city's renowned tent, sword, and saddle-makers. This symbiotic relationship between "desert and sown" allowed Aleppo to function as a desert "port city." But at the same time, resources of water and easily accessible food, coupled with a defensible location, afforded the city's inhabitants an

independence from the tribal chieftains who often interfered in the politics of the less self-sufficient market towns to Aleppo's north or south, Killis and Hama.³

Despite its geographical advantages and antiquity, Aleppo rarely served either as the pre-eminent economic or political center of greater Syria. Usually, a more successful rival – Antioch in the classical period, Damascus in most of the Muslim centuries – overshadowed it. After its occupation by a Muslim army in 637, Aleppo stood on the borders of Christendom and Islam. During the Crusades, Aleppo's citadel which was rebuilt by the Zangids (1128–83) and strengthened by the Ayyubids (1183–1260) stood as a bulwark of Islam against the Franks who held nearby Antioch. The Crusaders besieged the city on several occasions, but its garrison, secure behind the citadel's walls, was able to resist until help arrived. Aleppo was not as lucky with invaders from the east. The city was sacked with much of its population killed or carried away into slavery by the forces of Hülegü (1260) and then Timur (1401). In between, a particularly devastating outbreak of the bubonic plague struck its population in 1348. Nonetheless, people returned and rebuilt the city after each trauma.

Following the Crusades and again in the wake of Timur's devastation, the Mamluk dynasty (1260–1517) with its capital in Cairo sought to revive Aleppo as the northern anchor of the realm. Enjoying the patronage of the Mamluk beys, the city entered into a period of prosperity, previously unparalleled in the Muslim centuries. Although the shift in trade routes that would bring this about were already in motion before Timur's visitation, the prolonged peace that followed it provided the necessary climate for commerce to flourish. An important boost to Aleppo's position as a commercial center came with the fall of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia to the Mamluks in 1375. With the destruction of Ayas, its port city, merchants carrying Asian merchandise to the Mediterranean shifted their route south to Aleppo. In recognition of Aleppo's position in its expanding trade network, the Venetian senate appointed a vice-consul to the city by the end of the fourteenth century, in time to witness the city's sack by Timur. That office was upgraded to a full consulate by 1422.⁴ The principal products the Italians sought in Aleppo's markets were ginger and pepper from India and the East Indies (earning the town the nickname, "Little India"), Iranian raw silk, and Syrian cotton. The leading European exports to Syria in this period were Italian silk cloths, tin, and specie.

Although Damascus remained the paramount provincial capital of greater Syria throughout the Mamluk period, Aleppo benefited architecturally from the patronage of the Mamluk beys who built mosques and

³ Yusuf Halaçoğlu, *XVIII. Yüzyılda Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun İskân Siyasetleri ve Aşiretlerin Yerleştirilmesi* (Ankara, 1988); Dick Douwes, *The Ottomans in Syria: A History of Justice and Oppression* (London, 1999).

⁴ Eliyahu Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ, 1983), pp. 121, 325.

madrassahs, and perhaps more importantly for the city's commercial future, embarked on a building program to expand and improve the city's markets. This patronage reflected their recognition that Aleppo was already beginning to surpass Damascus as the regional emporium for Asian products. This development had not occurred out of any conscious policy the Mamluks had implemented, but rather came from the growing insecurity on the alternative land routes. The overland caravan routes from the Hijaz and Baghdad that had helped to make Damascus and its satellite port of Beirut major Levantine emporia in the early Mamluk period were increasingly plagued in the fifteenth century by a resurgence of Bedouin military power and were no longer entirely safe or reliable.

Despite the commercial prosperity Aleppo enjoyed, the final decades of Mamluk rule were despotic and often cruel for its inhabitants. Aleppo's citizenry were, therefore, not at all sorry when the army of the Ottoman Sultan Yavuz Selim I (1512–20) defeated the Mamluk Sultan, Qansuh al-Ghawri, on the field of Marj Dabiq in 1516. After the battle, the local notables welcomed the Ottoman sultan with feasts that lasted several days and gifts of silken robes. With the conquest of Syria and Egypt a year later, the entire eastern littoral of the Mediterranean was firmly in Ottoman hands, leaving the Ottoman state as the only major Muslim Mediterranean power. Sultan Kanûnî Süleyman (1520–66) extended Ottoman hegemony even further, to Iraq and both coasts of the Red Sea. With Ottoman suzerainty projecting over the sea lanes and caravan routes to the east, the Empire had become a world power, ready to challenge the expansion of European interests into the Indian Ocean.⁵

The replacement of one sultan by another did not initially signal any major revision of Aleppo's historical political subordination to Damascus. Following the precedents established by the Mamluk regime, the Ottomans placed Aleppo under the authority of Damascus's governor. This decision most probably reflected several realities. First, the Ottomans were politically conservative and rarely altered pre-existing administrative practices in the regions they conquered. This was especially true for regions that were already under a Muslim government at the time of their conquest. In addition, Damascus held the prestige both for having once served as Islam's capital under the Umayyads (681–750) and as the principal starting point for the annual pilgrimage caravan to the holy city of Mecca. It would be reasonable, therefore, for the sultans to recognize Damascus's regional position by naming its governor as the paramount governor of Syria. But events would prove that decision short sighted.

With the accession of Süleyman to the Ottoman throne in 1520, the governor of Damascus, the former Mamluk Janbirdi al-Ghazali, rose in

⁵ Palmira Brummett, *Ottoman Seapower and Levantine Diplomacy in the Age of Discovery* (Albany, NY, 1994).

rebellion, declaiming that his oath of fealty to Selim did not extend to his son. The officer in charge of Aleppo, Karaca Ahmed Paa, refused to follow al-Ghazali's standard. When the Damascene forces reached the city, he barred the city's gates and rallied the townspeople to support the Ottoman claim to Aleppo. Damascus was soon after subdued and sacked by an Ottoman army sent to relieve Aleppo. Perhaps in recognition that the Empire needed an alternative power center in Syria to forestall any equally ambitious governor in Damascus, Aleppo was upgraded to a full provincial capital by 1534, with its governor and chief judges appointed directly from Istanbul and responsible, in turn, to authorities in Istanbul rather than in Damascus.⁶

The treasury of the province, however, remained linked to that of Damascus for some time to come, under the rubric of the *Arabistan defterdari*. This office was located in Aleppo, but held the responsibility for the collection of all the revenues of greater Syria and northern Iraq until 1567.⁷ Besides a generalized Ottoman tendency toward bureaucratic inertia, the reasons for the maintenance of the older Mamluk practice in regards to revenue are unclear. Even more uncertain are the reasons why Aleppo was chosen to house it over Damascus. That decision, however, continued to confuse the issue of the individual prerogatives of each provincial governor in Syria. After the separation of the two provincial treasuries, the governors of Damascus would periodically claim the right to collect taxes in Aleppo's hinterlands. This situation was aggravated by an unequal balance of forces available to each governor. For most of the sixteenth century, the sultans garrisoned their special infantry units in Syria, the janissaries, primarily in southern Syria: Damascus, Palestine, and along the hajj route, rather than in relatively tranquil northern Syria.⁸ As such, the province of Aleppo was continually subjected to forays by Damascus based troops to collect taxes while its governors were either hard pressed to respond or completely impotent to stop them.

The sixteenth century: becoming Ottoman

Before their conquest of Syria, the Ottomans had accumulated several centuries of experience in empire building. This led them to absorb newly

⁶ There is some debate as to when the province was divided. In their classic *Règlements fiscaux ottoman: les provinces syriennes* (Beirut, 1951) Robert Mantran and Jean Sauvaget state the separation occurred right after the revolt, but İ. Metin Kunt published in his *The Sultan's Servants* (New York, NY, 1983) a document from the Ottoman archives that indicates that all of greater Syria, and even Adana, were still under the jurisdiction of a governor general in Damascus in 1527.

⁷ Uriel Heyd, *Ottoman Documents on Palestine, 1552–1615* (Oxford, 1960), p. 42.

⁸ Adnan Bakhit, "Aleppo and the Ottoman Military in the 16th Century," *Al-Abhath* 27 (1978–79): 27–38.

conquered territories in either of two ways. Either they incorporated the territories directly into their provincial administration, or they left them in the hands of regional political elites who predated the conquests. In the latter case, the locals collected revenues in the sultan's name, but otherwise enjoyed a high degree of regional autonomy. By contrast, the first method always entailed a careful survey of the territory conquered and its subsequent subdivision into agricultural units (*timars*). These *timars* might consist of entire villages which the state would assign to loyal, often Turkish-speaking, cavalymen as salary in return for military service. Through this method, the cash-strapped state could avoid paying its military with coin. At the same time, the fiscal system helped to incorporate the conquered region into the body-politic of the empire through the settlement of individuals faithful to the sultan. In the Balkans, this process could hasten a cultural Turkification of the local population as in the case of parts of Bulgaria, or their conversion to Islam, as happened in Bosnia and Albania.

The absorption of Syria into the Ottoman Empire presented challenges different from those previously experienced by the state. Historically, the Empire had expanded as a result of *gaza* (holy war) into the Christian Balkans, or wars against other Turkic dynasties in Anatolia with whom the Ottomans shared a language and a political culture. With the conquest first of Syria, then Egypt, and later still Iraq, the Ottomans found themselves ruling over a subject people who, even though they were fellow Muslims, were heirs to a sophisticated urban culture, expressed in the Arabic language. The Ottomans arrived in Syria with an equally well-articulated vision of Islam and the political nature of the sultanate, as well as with a rich, secular, artistic culture of their own. The Ottoman tradition had evolved in Anatolia under the influence of myriad, and very diverse, traditions: Persian, Byzantine, Turkic, Mongol, but had drawn little direct inspiration from the Arab lands. As a result, the Ottomans and their new Arab subjects could have divergent understandings of what it meant to be Muslim. Of course, Ottoman culture also contained a strong strain of Sunni legalism which the Ottoman elite shared with urban Syrians. Significant differences existed even there, however, as the Syrian Muslims historically followed the Shafa'i school of Islamic law while the official law school of the Ottoman state was Hanafi.

Although all the Syrian lands were surveyed almost immediately following their conquest, the Ottomans showed some initial ambivalence about which provincial system was to be implemented. After al-Ghazali's revolt in 1520, however, the provinces of Damascus and Aleppo were provided with Turkish-speaking Ottomans as governors and the *timar* regime was instituted. The application of the conventional Ottoman patterns of provincial governance drew interior Syria securely into the

Ottoman orbit.⁹ Their provincial administrations were headed by Turkish-speaking Ottomans and Turkish-speaking cavalrymen were settled in many of the villages of the provinces of Damascus and Aleppo. The governors of other Arabic-speaking provinces were often drawn, by contrast, from local elites: mamluks in the case of Egypt and Baghdad, tribal chieftains in the provinces of Tripoli in Lebanon and Basra in Iraq.

This absorption of Aleppo into the Ottoman Empire introduced a new class of individuals, Ottoman, i.e. Turkish-speaking, soldiers and bureaucrats into the city's population mixture. These were collectively called "*rijal al-Bab*" (men of the gate)¹⁰ by the native Aleppines. Although twentieth-century Arab historians often see these Ottomans as occupiers and the precursors of later European imperialists,¹¹ it is not at all evident that Arabic-speakers in Aleppo in the first centuries of Ottoman rule considered their new masters to be completely alien. They clearly recognized, however that the "Ottomans" were ethnically differentiated from themselves as is indicated by their general assignation of "*Rum*" (Anatolian) to the Ottomans. That difference was especially noted when Ottoman jurists proposed interpretations of Islamic law that ran counter to the tradition of law as practiced in the Arabic-speaking urban centers.¹² The actual Arabic word for "Ottoman," either '*Uthmani*' or '*Uthmanli*,' was rarely used in Aleppo until the eighteenth century.

The differences and similarities that existed between these two formidable Sunni cultures, one articulated in Ottoman Turkish and represented by the "men of the gate," and the other in Arabic, no doubt created ambivalence for the contemporary Syrians over their incorporation into the Empire. While the Mamluks and their predecessors had relied on the Muslim intelligentsia of Syria's cities to define the state, the Ottoman sultans already had a Turkish-speaking Sunni elite to advise them on matters pertaining to law and political traditions. Rather, it was up to the Syrians to negotiate a middle ground for themselves that would allow for the maintenance of their positions of influence through service to the state. But Syria's own Islamic traditions and history also gave it a pedigree the Ottoman could not ignore,

⁹ Margaret Venzke, "Syria's Land-Taxation in the Ottoman 'Classical Age' Broadly Considered," in *V. Milletarası Türkiye Sosyal ve İktisat Tarihi Konresi: Tebliğler* (Ankara, 1990), pp. 419–34.

¹⁰ This reflects a commonplace Ottoman synecdoche for the Sultan in that his authority is represented as the "bab-ı Hümayûn" (Imperial Gate) and predates the general western metaphor for Ottoman government, "the Porte" which was derived from the High Gate (bab-ı âli) of the Grand Vezir. See Fatma Müge Göçek, *Rise of the Bourgeoisie, Demise of Empire: Ottoman Westernization and Social Change* (Oxford, 1996), p. 23.

¹¹ For example, D. 'Abdallah Hanna, *Harakat al-'amma al-dimashqiyya fi al-qarn al-thamin 'ashar wa al-tasi' 'ashar* (Beirut, 1985).

¹² Michael Winter, "A Polemical Treatise by 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi against a Turkish Scholar on the Religious Status of the *Dhimmi*," *Arabica* 35 (1988): 92–103.

nor the Syrians forget. Some sort of balance had, by necessity, to be reached by both sides.¹³

Surprisingly, perhaps, linguistic differences between ruler and ruled never apparently engendered ethnic conflict, at least not until the late nineteenth century. This has at least two plausible explanations. First, the Muslims in the city regarded the regime in Istanbul as being legitimately Muslim and its sultan was, therefore, their sultan. Here the role of Muslim Holy Law (*Şeriat*) as the ideological underpinning of the state was crucial in winning the allegiance of the sultans' Arab subjects. A second, and perhaps equally important reason was that the Ottoman administration in Aleppo had, at its fringe, a large number of local people who benefited from that regime's control of their city. The Turkish-speaking governors were rotated so frequently that some of those assigned to the city never arrived. In their stead, effective administration was administered by the *kaim-makam* (literally, "standing in the place of") and the *muhasil* (tax-collector), both of whom were often of local origin. Similarly, while the chief kadi of the city was always a Turkish-speaking appointee from the capital, most of his lieutenants, as well as the city's lesser kadis were local Arabs. In this way, the Aleppines were able to mediate the Ottoman centuries, taking over the *de facto* running of their city, even while serving under the supervision of the "men of the gate."

Yet there can be no question that the presence of these official Ottomans from Istanbul had an impact on the city in ways that the presence of the Mamluk emirs had not. Aleppo's Muslim elite sent their sons to be educated in the madrassahs of Istanbul and other Anatolian religious centers, especially Konya. The inevitable result was an "Ottomanization," i.e. Turkification, of much of the popular culture of Aleppo as the two languages and traditions came face to face in daily interactions. Typical of this hybridization, Syrian mosques built in the Ottoman period reflected Ottoman architectural tastes: Byzantine domes and pencil-shaped minarets, but retained indigenous architectural details in their wall tiles and the characteristically Syrian black and white striped exteriors. They were, in effect, like the elite who helped design and later staffed them, both Ottoman and Syrian. From music to food, from political and legal theory to coffee-house entertainment, in the sufi religious orders that flourished in the city and the religious heresies adopted by villagers in the countryside, there was little in northern Syrian culture that was not in some way influenced by the cross-fertilization from Anatolia, a process accelerated by Ottoman control of both sides of the linguistic divide between Arabs and Turks.

Having secured Aleppo as an integral province of the Empire, the

¹³ I derive this conception of mediation between two cultures from Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, 1991), p. x.

Ottoman elites viewed the city and its commerce as a good investment for both this world and the next. Over the course of the first decades of Ottoman rule, successive governors added greatly to both the city's skyline and commercial infrastructure. Hüsrev Paşa in 1546 and Mehmed Paşa in 1556 established pious endowments (*waqf*) which financed the construction of new mosques in the Ottoman style. Mehmed Paşa, established a *waqf* for the caravansary (*khan*), known locally as the Khan al-Gumruk in 1574. The Khan al-Gumruk was the city's largest commercial edifice and served as the residence for many European merchants over the following three centuries. Yet another governor, Behram Paşa, established both a mosque and extensive market complex in 1583. All told, construction in the first half century of Ottoman rule more than doubled the commercial core of Aleppo, called by locals simply "the city" (*al-madina*). This mercantile hub included fifty-six separate markets and fifty-three caravansaries.¹⁴ Together, the new construction, when added to that formerly erected by the Mamluks, lay at the city's commercial heart. This commercial core consisted of over a square kilometer of interlocking streets, filled with shops, workshops, mosques, baths, and caravansaries, all under one contiguous roof. The Aleppo *suq* was a marvel to all who visited the city, and in their minds it was surpassed only by Istanbul's famed *Kapalı Çarşı*.

It was not just the Ottomans who recognized Aleppo's commercial importance in the sixteenth century. In 1545, the Venetians transferred their consul for Syria from Damascus to Tripoli, closing down their direct operations in Damascus, and from Tripoli to Aleppo in 1548. This move came in recognition that the pepper and other spices from the East Indies were increasingly following the Persian Gulf/Euphrates route, rather than using the Red Sea passage that had favored Damascus. But Aleppo's markets also offered another attraction – silk. Iranian silk from the Caspian Sea region of Gilan was especially prized by the Europeans, but locally produced silk from Antioch and the Euphrates, and from further afield in Anatolia was also available. Local weavers preferred the silk from Bursa and Tokat above all others and so they were rarely in competition with European bidders for Iranian silk. But their willingness to pay high prices for Anatolian silk often caused supply problems for the Empire's other silk weaving centers such as Istanbul and Bursa.¹⁵

The presence of the silk market in Aleppo in the sixteenth century was not new. The city had emerged as the market of choice for the Armenian merchants bringing Iranian silk to the west in the fifteenth century. The reason for their choice of Aleppo over its competitors was largely pragmatic; it was closer to their center in Julfa on the Araxes River, the current border between Azerbaijan and Iran, than other comparable emporia. It

¹⁴ André Raymond, *Grandes villes arabes à l'époque ottomane* (Paris: 1985).

¹⁵ Damascus, Awamir al-Sultaniyya (hereafter AS), Aleppo vol. II, p. 124.

was also safer as central Anatolia often proved to be a violent place in the fifteenth century. Although these merchants remained loyal to Aleppo throughout the sixteenth century, a changing economic and political climate in the seventeenth century would tempt them toward Aleppo's emerging rival for the trade – Izmir.

The attraction of Aleppo's silk market was fueled by an upturn in the demand for silk in Europe as local textile manufacturing increased in northwestern Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. In London alone, it was estimated that the number of people employed in the manufacture of silk cloth rose from three hundred in 1600 to over ten thousand in 1640.¹⁶ To supply the growing demand for raw silk, English and French merchants sought to challenge the virtual Venetian monopoly over the Levant trade. The French established consular representation in the city by 1557. In 1581, the English Levant Company received its charter from Queen Elizabeth I, marking the beginning of a long and profitable relationship between it and Aleppo.¹⁷

Damascus was listed as one of the cities in which the Company was chartered to operate, but no company factor ever took up residence there. Rather, the first Levant Company consul in Syria arrived in Tripoli in 1583. A vice-consul, William Barrett, settled in Aleppo in the same year. By 1586, Aleppo was designated as the consul's chief residence for Syria, a reflection of the city's central role in the silk trade. Aleppo remained the Company's headquarters in Syria until the Company itself was dissolved in 1825. In the last decades before the Company's demise, however, the consulship in Aleppo was often vacant. The Dutch, following their European trading rivals, established a consul in Aleppo in 1613, but they never established a major trading presence in Aleppo. Rather, they preferred Izmir where they concentrated their commercial activity in the Levant. The lack of a consistent Dutch presence in Aleppo has been ascribed to the uncertainties of the silk trade in Syria and to the fact that the Dutch lacked the broadcloth which the English and French successfully bartered for silk in Aleppo. They, therefore, had to pay for their purchases in Aleppo with cash. Faced with a potential bullion drain if they were to remain competitive in Aleppo, the Dutch specialized instead on the primary products available in Izmir.¹⁸

Aleppo had won its place as an international emporium largely because of its convenience for the caravans from the east. It was already an

¹⁶ Alfred Wood, *A History of the Levant Company* (London, 1935), p. 76.

¹⁷ Ralph Davis, *Aleppo and Devonshire Square: English Traders in the Levant in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1967).

¹⁸ G. R. Bosscha Erdbrink, *At the Threshold of Felicity: Ottoman–Dutch Relations During the Embassy of Cornelius Calkoen at the Sublime Porte, 1726–1744* (Istanbul, 1975); Niels Steensgaard, "Consul and Nations in the Levant from 1570 to 1650," *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 15 (1967): 13–55.

established commercial center when the Europeans arrived in the Levant, thanks to the investments made by the Mamluk emirs in its commercial infrastructure. It could offer such amenities as public baths and well-maintained caravansaries, as well as protection, to the merchants traveling with the caravans. Other incentives for traveling merchants to choose the city's markets as their final destination were the fine locally produced cloth, soap, and leather work. These goods, as well as coffee brought into the city by pilgrims returning from the hajj, were purchased by the merchants from Iran or India and transported back on the camels which had brought the silk from Iran or indigo and printed cotton cloth from India via Basra. Despite the availability of these other goods, the major draw for the Iranian merchants was silver. Both local merchants and the Europeans were willing to pay for Iranian silk with bullion, although the English, in particular, sought to avoid doing so if at all possible. This created a continual eastward drain of specie throughout the Ottoman period, a potentially damaging economic reality of which the sultans were aware.¹⁹ But while they reduced tariffs on imported bullion to encourage its import into their realm, the Ottomans never forbade its export.

As long as the potential for profitable exchange remained possible, the caravans continued to wind their way to Aleppo carrying Iran's silk and the Europeans followed suit. One of the disadvantages facing Aleppo for trade with Europe, however, was that it, alone among the Levantine commercial cities that thrived in this period of exchange between East and West, was not a port. Initially, the Europeans opted to use the port facilities offered by Tripoli. Tripoli was, however, ultimately unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. The most compelling were its distance from Aleppo, eight days by donkey or camel, and the conditions along the routes to the city. There were two possible caravan trails that led from Aleppo to Tripoli: an interior one that passed through the towns of Hama and Homs and a coastal one along the Mediterranean littoral. The first option, although a part of the hajj route and, therefore, subject to the surveillance of, and protection by Ottoman forces, was often exposed to Bedouin attacks. The coastal route was not much safer as it was subject to exaction by Alawi clans operating out of their mountain redoubts.

Further weakening Tripoli's attraction for the Europeans was its government. For most of the sixteenth century, members of the Sayfa family held the governorship of Tripoli. This family provided the Turkoman paramount chieftains of the Kisrawan region of present day Lebanon and could raise a sizable army of mounted kinsmen at their beck and call. The family, their clan, and clients were only intermittently under direct Ottoman control as

¹⁹ Naima, the Aleppo born seventeenth-century Ottoman historian, warned of the consequences of this silver drain in his history. Lewis Thomas, *A Study of Naima*, ed. Norman Itzkowitz (New York, 1972), pp. 144–45.

they had become adept at using the central government's weakness to promote their own interests. Outside the direct control of the Porte, they extracted as much revenue as they could from the Europeans. They then used this cash to secure their political position, by proffering bribes to Istanbul and gifts to their retainers.²⁰

Faced with the drawbacks inherent in using Tripoli as a port due to its rulers and distance from Aleppo, the Europeans surreptitiously began to use the bay at Alexandretta (Iskenderun) as an anchorage for their ships. Despite the fact that its shoreline was a swamp infested by mosquitoes, the bay was only a three or four day mule journey from Aleppo. Furthermore, the pleasant hill town of Antioch broke the journey and provided shelter from marauders. Alexandretta held another advantage in that it was under the direct administration of the governors in Aleppo. Despite imperial orders to the contrary, they generally looked the other way as the Europeans off-loaded their goods in the bay. The motive behind this lax attitude was transparent. The governors could collect customs duties on the European imports twice: once in Alexandretta and again in Aleppo.

By 1590, the Europeans were almost exclusively using Alexandretta as their port for Aleppo. It was not until 1593, however, that an imperial order established a customs station there. Both the governor and local merchants in Aleppo welcomed this move which they had helped to engineer. It was bitterly resisted by the Sayfas who rightly saw the transfer as greatly reducing the attraction of their home base for trade. They succeeded in getting a counter-order closing Alexandretta down in 1605, but Aleppo was in open rebellion in that year and did not heed the Porte's directive. A second order was issued in 1609. The Europeans found the closure of Alexandretta intolerable and acted in a rare show of solidarity to bring pressure on the authorities in Istanbul for a reversal. Their efforts worked, as the customs station in Alexandretta was restored to operation in 1612.²¹ From that date until 1939 when it was annexed into the Republic of Turkey, Alexandretta remained Aleppo's chief outlet to the Mediterranean. Although the Europeans built warehouses, homes, and even churches in Alexandretta, there was no local interest in developing the site and the port remained for most of the Ottoman period little more than a European village, a way station on the road to Aleppo.

The silk trade of the seventeenth century

Two major challenges to Aleppo's prosperity emerged at the start of the seventeenth century. The first was locally based, brought on by the rebellion

²⁰ Abdul-Rahim Abu-Husayn, *Provincial Leaderships in Syria, 1575–1650* (Beirut, 1985), pp. 11–66.

²¹ London, PRO, *Calendar of State Papers: Venice* (London: 1900, 1904), vol. X, p. 318; vol. XI, pp. 267, 284.

of the Kurdish chieftain Ali Canpulatoğlu. The second was unleashed by Shah Abbas (1587–1629) who sought to divert Iranian silk away from the Ottoman Empire, his ideological enemy. Although the rebellion of Ali Canpulatoğlu arose out of a personal grievance, it was also linked to Aleppo's importance as a commercial center. Ali and his uncle, Hüseyin, had achieved a local renown that extended beyond their home town of Killis by organizing the defense of Aleppo against the janissaries from Damascus who had continued their tax-collecting activities in Aleppo throughout the sixteenth century. In 1599, Aleppo's governor, Hacc Ibrahim Paşa, petitioned Istanbul to establish a permanent janissary garrison in the citadel. The beneficial effect of the sultan's having granted Ibrahim Paşa's request was immediate. The new garrison succeeded in resisting the Damascus based troops that year, but with the governor's removal from office in the following year, the garrison was disbanded and chaos returned.²²

Hüseyin's tribesmen were drawn into the conflict in 1601 and again in 1603. In recognition that his forces were all that stood between order and anarchy in Aleppo, the sultan granted him the governorship of Aleppo province in 1603, the first local figure to be so honored. His elevation was bitterly opposed by the governor already in place, Nasuh Paşa, who reportedly fumed that if the sultan had appointed a black slave to replace him, he would acquiesce but he could not do so for a son of the Canpulats. This remark was interpreted by contemporary Ottoman historians as representing the resistance of a member of the Ottoman military elite to a tribal upstart. His resistance was more than verbal, however. In order to claim his office, Hüseyin's troops had to fight their way into the city. The question of which governor would command the citadel was eventually resolved by a delegation of local notables who insisted that the sultan's writ be recognized and Nasuh Paşa withdrew.

The step of awarding a Kurdish chieftain the governorship of one of the Empire's largest cities came, no doubt, as the sultan recognized that his administration no longer possessed the military might to secure his vast domains. Indeed this period in Ottoman history witnessed a series of provincial revolts known collectively as *Celâli* in which the very future of the dynasty was threatened. In response, the state had to rely on locally recruited military forces to maintain a semblance of order in the provinces, even if that meant a reduction in the sultan's ability to claim absolute sovereignty. Hüseyin's well-armed Kurdish kinsmen had moved to fill the political void in northern Syria and the state reciprocated by awarding him a governorship. Istanbul remained wary of Hüseyin's local power-base, however, and shortly thereafter, ordered him to aid the Ottoman campaign against Iran in 1605. Before his Kurdish forces could arrive at the front, the

²² Bakhit, "Aleppo and the Ottoman Military in the 16th Century."

Ottoman army suffered a major defeat at Urumia. When Hüseyin showed up on the battlefield after the debacle, the angry, defeated general accused him of treason. He was summarily executed and his head sent to the Porte.

The leadership of the clan passed to Ali, who raised the standard of revolt in revenge for what he considered to be the unjustified execution of his uncle. Seeking to secure the trade routes of northern Syria, Ali quickly moved southward and defeated the rival Sayfa family. In control of northern Syria and with Aleppo as his capital, Ali entered into direct negotiations with the various European consuls in the city, guaranteeing them that trade would be protected and unlawful exaction and bribery ended under his regime. For two years the sultan played a careful diplomatic game with Ali. At one point, he even recognized Ali's governorship of Aleppo. But as soon as the sultan could raise an army to suppress the rebel, he dispatched it against Aleppo in the autumn of 1607. Defeated on the field of battle, Ali accepted the Ottoman terms for surrender. He was taken to Rumania where he held a titular government office until his execution for treason in 1610 at Belgrade.²³

After Ali's ignominious departure from the region, the Canpulatoğlu clan split in two when one collateral branch moved to Lebanon where they would re-emerge as the Druze clan of Janbulad. The remainder of the family stayed in the Jabal al-Kurd, astride the current Syrian-Turkish frontier, where they dominated the politics of Killis down through the eighteenth century. Although Ali has remained a mythic hero in the Kurdish ballads sung in the Killis region until the present, the Kurds never again posed a serious challenge for the political dominance of northern Syria. Nevertheless, the period of the Canpulatoğlu rebellion demonstrated to the Ottoman leadership that Aleppo was far too important to be allowed to slip into autonomy, much less independence. To ensure this, the Ottoman state rotated the city's governors frequently to disallow precisely the type of power base that governors were able to establish for themselves in other parts of the sultan's Arab domains. While this policy helped to heighten the political anarchy in the city's streets in the eighteenth century, it prevented the rise of any locally based political force that could challenge directly the sultan's ultimate authority over the city and its inhabitants. For the sultans, institutionalized anarchy was better than order, especially if political order might lead to secession.

Shah Abbas proved a more serious challenge to Aleppo's status as a major commercial center than did Canpulatoğlu Ali Paşa. At the close of the sixteenth century, the Europeans no longer found the cost of spices

²³ Abdul-Karim Rafeq, "The Revolt of Ali Pasha Janbulad (1605–1607) in the Contemporary Arabic Sources and its Significance," in *VII. Türk Tarih Kongresi: Kongreye Sunulan Bildiriler* (Ankara: 1983), pp. 1515–34; William Griswold, *The Great Anatolian Rebellion 1000–1020/1591–1611* (Berlin, 1993); Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: the Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca, NY, 1994).

available in Aleppo's markets to be competitive with those on offer in either Lisbon or Amsterdam as the cost of sea transport had finally undercut that of the caravans.²⁴ Instead, they began to focus their acquisitive intentions in Aleppo almost entirely on Iranian silk. This is not to say that spices no longer followed the ancient trade routes to the Mediterranean. For at least another century and a half, spices and coffee brought by caravan were still cheaper in Syria than those brought into the Levant by European ships. Nevertheless, although the English factors continued to monitor the costs of spices and coffee in Aleppo throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, silk, either Iranian or Syrian, was the principal commodity of interest for the English merchants in Aleppo. Other items purchased in the city's markets, locally produced raw silk and cotton yarn, as well as gallnuts from Kurdistan, were of secondary importance and most probably would not have alone drawn European traders to the city.

The ambitions of Shah Abbas threatened Aleppo's central role in the silk trade as he sought to divert the transport of Iranian silk away from his arch-rivals, the Ottomans. He was abetted in this by the actions of European trading companies, such as the English East India Company and the Netherlands VOC (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*), which held charters from their respective governments for trade in the Persian Gulf, but not the Mediterranean. The stock-holders of these companies viewed the prosperous Iranian silk trade as an integral component of the Indian Ocean trading zone and they sought to divert the shah's silk to Persian Gulf seaports from where it could be loaded on to their ships. Their attempts were resisted by the smaller English Levant Company and its sister Dutch *Directie van den Levantschen Handel en de Navigatie op de Middellandsche Zee* (Directorate of Levantine Trade and Navigation in the Mediterranean).

All the cards were in Shah Abbas's hands, however, and for a decade between 1619 and Shah Abbas's death in 1629, very little Iranian silk reached Aleppo.²⁵ Faced with a dramatic demise of the silk trade in Aleppo, the Europeans contemplated closing down their operations in the city. The French and Venetians attempted to open their own direct trading links to Iran, but the more powerfully armed Dutch and English commercial fleets denied them access beyond the Straits of Hormuz. The French, in particular, began to view Lebanese raw silk as a practical substitute for that of Iran and many French trading houses shifted their factors to Sidon and Tripoli so as to be closer to its source. The English, almost alone, maintained a stoic presence in Aleppo, but their factors suffered sustained losses on their investments for over a decade. With Shah Abbas's death,

²⁴ C. H. Wake, "The Changing Pattern of Europe's Pepper and Spice Imports, ca. 1400–1700," *Journal of European Economic History* 8 (1979): 361–403.

²⁵ Niels Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution of the Seventeenth Century: the East India Companies and the Decline of the Caravan Trade* (Chicago, IL, 1973).

however, trade resumed its former channels, largely due to the wishes of the Iranian merchants, and Aleppo re-emerged, as the primary market for Iranian silk.

The chief purveyors of Iran's silk in this period were members of the Armenian community of New Julfa, that had been built by Shah Abbas outside of his capital, Isfahan, after he had destroyed the original Julfa. Abbas enhanced the central role the Julfa merchants already played in the trade by giving them a virtual monopoly over the marketing of his country's silk output. In this way, he established the merchants of New Julfa as "his merchants" whom he apparently hoped would increase his revenues while reducing those that would accrue to the Ottoman Treasury.²⁶ Their importance to Aleppo's trade was recognized by the Ottoman authorities who by 1690, granted the Julfa community in Aleppo several exemptions from customary Muslim legal practice in regards to paying the tax assessed on non-Muslim (*jizya*) and inheritance procedures,²⁷ and by the English Levant Company factors who referred to all Iranian merchants indiscriminately as "Chefalines" in their letters.

The court records of Aleppo provide evidence, however, that Anatolian Armenians and Christian Arabs from Aleppo were also involved in the trade, traveling to Iran on their own, or as agents for Muslim investors in Aleppo. Interestingly, Muslim merchants from either side of the frontier rarely traveled between the two often warring states. There were isolated exceptions to this observation, as in the case of the disposition of the estates of two Iranian Muslim merchants who died en route to Aleppo from Baghdad in 1610 and the registration of a settlement of a trade agreement between a merchant and his two Aleppo Muslim agents who had returned from Iran to the city in 1707.²⁸ These are, however, exceptions that accentuate the general trend. The paucity of such cases registered in the courts when compared with a very active Muslim involvement with trade to Egypt or India, for example, is striking. This suggests that Muslim merchants on either side of the Sunni-Shi'a religious divide were wary about crossing into the domain of the "heretic," although Iranian Shi'a merchants continued to visit Baghdad and were found even as far afield as Bursa.²⁹

In return for Iran's silk, the Europeans offered the Armenians silver specie or woolen broadcloth. The broadcloth was used in Syria to make

²⁶ R. W. Ferrier, "The Armenians and the East India Company in Persia in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," *Economic History Review* 2nd ser., 26 (1973): 38–62; Vartan Gregorian, "Minorities in Isfahan: the Armenian Community of Isfahan, 1587–1722," *Iranian Studies* 7 (1974): 652–80.

²⁷ Damascus, Aleppo Court Records, vol. XXXIV, p. 206.

²⁸ Istanbul, BOA, Maliyeden Müdevver (henceforth MM) 7439, also reported by Halil Sahillioğlu, "Bir Tüccar Kervanı," *Belgelerle Türk Tarihi Dergisi* 2 (1968): 63–69; Damascus, Aleppo Court Records, vol. II, p. 117.

²⁹ Haim Gerber, *Economy and Society in an Ottoman City: Bursa, 1600–1700* (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 117–21.

outer garments for both men and women, and in Iran as cheap floor coverings. The almost insatiable demand for broadcloth in the Levant helped fuel a nascent English textile industry. By the end of the seventeenth century, the English clearly dominated the European side of the trade in Aleppo. Laurant d'Arvieux, the French consul in the city in 1683, estimated France imported a million livres of goods from Aleppo, while England's trade amounted to six million. This total trade volume for France was further reduced to only 400,000 livres in value by 1700.³⁰ The decline of French commercial activity in Aleppo was the apparent result of several conditions: the increasing availability of Iranian silk in Izmir, the re-deployment of French merchants to exploit the Lebanese market, and the inability of French broadcloths to compete with the English product among the Aleppine consumers. In contrast, Aleppo accounted for almost half the total imports to London from the eastern Mediterranean carried by the Levant Company in the second half of the seventeenth century. Aleppo's importance for England's trade was reflected by the number of Englishmen acting as factors in the city. Henry Maundrell, the English chaplain to the Levant Company in the city, reported over forty of his countrymen resident there in 1697, while only sixteen French merchants and two Dutchmen lived in the city.³¹

We learn from the city's Islamic court records that there were resident merchant communities in the city from North Africa, India, and Bukhara, as well as the Europeans and the Iranian Armenians. The Indian community, in particular, seems to have received a degree of official recognition from the Ottoman state. In 1639, they produced a *fatwa* (judicial ruling) from Aleppo's mufti which stated that all the members of the community were Muslim and therefore exempt from paying the *jizya*.³² Such non-Ottoman Muslim communities were, for the most part, composed of small-scale peddlers whose economic activity was overshadowed by that of the Europeans and the Armenians. There was at least one exception to this generalization as well, however.

In 1645, an Indian merchant named Muhammad Nasir was involved in lengthy negotiations over the customs duties for which he was assessed in Aleppo. From the testimony registered locally and a final ruling on the case registered in Istanbul, we learn that he served as an agent for an Indian prince named Mir Zarif. For his patron, Muhammad Nasir had brought 50 loads of indigo worth 12,500 *ghurush* that were sold in Istanbul and another 40,000 *ghurush*-worth of unspecified Indian goods shipped out of Alexandria for Venice. Returning from Venice, he had imported goods worth 60,000 *ghurush* that he intended to take by caravan to Basra and from there

³⁰ Adel Ismail, *Documents diplomatiques et consulaires relatifs à l'histoire du Liban et pays du Proche Orient du XVIIe siècle à nos jours* (Beirut, 1975), vol. III, p. 203.

³¹ Henry Maundrell, *Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem at Easter 1697* (London, 1832), p. 148.

³² Damascus, Aleppo Court Records, vol. XXI, p. 213.

to India.³³ The volume of those transactions dwarfed anything registered by either European or Iranian merchants in the seventeenth century, but at the same time, it survives as the only recorded example of a large-scale transaction conducted by an Indian merchant in the city.

As significant as “international” trade was to Aleppo’s commercial fortunes in the seventeenth century, it should not overshadow our appreciation of Aleppo’s role as a regional trading center in the same period. Although the seventeenth century was clearly more violent for northern Syria than the preceding century of Ottoman rule, the two centuries taken together represent what might be termed a *pax ottomanica* in the region. Tribal elements were largely kept in check by Ottoman troops and trade moved, more or less, freely throughout the Empire. As a result, merchants from throughout the Empire visited the city bringing linen cloth and rice from Egypt, coffee from Yemen, dried fruits and silk cloth from Damascus, mohair from Ankara, and woolens from both Mosul and Salonika. Aleppo was, in turn, renowned for the quality of olive oil available in its markets and its by-product, soap, was exported as far afield as Cairo and Istanbul. It also had a reputation for the high quality of its *alaja* cloth, a satin mixture of cotton and silk. Contracts registered in the courts, in turn, speak of Aleppo-based merchants who set out for India, Iran, Baghdad, Egypt, and the numerous smaller market towns of southeastern Anatolia. Although this side of Aleppo’s commercial life was rarely noted in the letters that the European factors wrote home, we must assume based on the preponderance both in the volume of contracts relating to such “internal” trade and the amounts of money involved when compared to similar registry of contracts from the Iranian–European silk trade, Aleppo’s prosperity in this era was linked to the former, even though the latter provided the basis for the city’s international reputation.

The city’s attraction to foreign merchants was undoubtedly aided by the relative tranquillity it enjoyed after the revolt of Canpulatoğlu Ali Paşa. In 1657, the city’s governor, Abaza Hasan Paşa rose in revolt against the newly installed grand vizier, Köprülü Mehmed Paşa. His revolt was put down in 1659 and Wolfgang Aigen, a German merchant resident in the city, reported that commerce in Aleppo, was only marginally affected by the insurrection and quickly returned to its normal routine after the rebel governor’s death.³⁴ A decade after the revolt, the incomparable Turkish traveler, Evliyâ Çelebi, visited the city on his way to the holy cities in the Hijaz. He described it as a bustling commercial city where all sorts of goods were available and that boasted sixty-one mosques, 217 Qur’an schools, 5,700 shops in the central market, 7,000 gardens, 105 coffee-shops (one of

³³ Damascus, Aleppo Court Records, vol. XXIV, pp. 202, 212; Istanbul, BBA, MM 2765, p. 100.

³⁴ Wolfgang Aigen, *Sieben Jahre in Aleppo (1656–1663)*, ed. Andreas Tietze (Vienna, 1980), pp. 99–101.

which he claimed could seat 2,000 patrons at a time), and 176 Sufi convents. Its people, he said, were frugal and god-fearing, even if the Arabic they spoke was inelegant.³⁵

Evliyâ gave the city's population at the time of his visit as 400,000. Although Aleppo's commercial fortunes in this period were reflected in the city's population which reached its zenith in the second half of the seventeenth century, this was, like much of what Evliyâ reported in his account, an exaggeration. Nevertheless, the city's pull, coupled with the push of a growing insecurity in the countryside, helped fuel an expansion in the population that was unparalleled in the city's history until the twentieth century. From approximately 80,000 inhabitants in the last decades of the sixteenth century, the population grew steadily, despite recurring and often devastating visitations of cholera and plague, to about 120,000 at mid-seventeenth century.³⁶ This would make Aleppo the third largest urban center in the Ottoman Empire, after Istanbul and Cairo.

Given the high mortality rate caused by disease, this large urban population had to be sustained by a steady influx of rural migrants from throughout southeastern Anatolia and northern and central Syria who sought protection, fortune, or both, within the city's walls. Correspondingly, this rural to urban migration helped to fuel a downward cycle leading to a major depopulation of much of rural Syria, a situation that became a cliché in Western descriptions of the region. Typical is the following made by the Abbé Carré who visited northern Syria in 1672:

A very old man, who was nearly a hundred years old, told me that this country used to be one of the richest, most fertile, and well-populated parts of all Syria, and that, when he was young, he could count 50 towns and 400 villages, which now lay in ruins for a stretch of fifteen or twenty leagues around. This was due to the bad government of the Ottoman empire, whose policy was to destroy the country for fear of strangers mastering it, as I have remarked with astonishment throughout the empire. They seem by this means to contribute to their own ruin, for they now have nothing left but their chief towns, and even these could not subsist without the help of foreign nations, who by their trade, merchandise, caravans, and travelers contribute the principal revenues of those places.³⁷

Although the Abbé's observations of rural population decline are confirmed by Ottoman sources, he was wrong about the lack of Ottoman concern over rural flight. Provincial towns and villages flooded Istanbul with petitions asking to have either their tax assessments reduced or, failing that, the right to collect taxes from former residents who had moved to Aleppo. Despite Ottoman secular (*kanun*) law to the contrary, Islamic law

³⁵ Evliyâ Çelebi, *Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnamesi*, ed. Mehmed Zillioğlu (Istanbul, 1984). vol. IX, pp. 151–55.

³⁶ André Raymond, "The Population of Aleppo in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16 (1984): 447–60.

³⁷ Abbé Carré, *The Travels of the Abbé Carré, 1672–74* (London, 1947), vol. I, pp. 40–41.