

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESOURCES OF THE ISLAND OF RHODES UNDER TURKISH RULE 1522 - 1911

The conquest of Egypt by the Turks in 1517 made possession of Rhodes in the mind of the latter imperative, since Rhodes was on the route of communications between Constantinople and Alexandria.

Rhodes surrendered to the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire in 1522.² Because the people resisted Sultan Suleiman's forces, they did not receive the privileges which Suleiman accorded the other islands. Unlike Rhodes, the other islands were not in a position to offer either a successful or prolonged resistance to the formidable army of Suleiman; therefore, the privileges granted them entailed, not only political and economic autonomy under Turkish sovereignty, but also the right of maintaining their own fortifications for defense purposes. Their only visible limit was the payment of a yearly tax or *maktou* to cover the cost of Turkish protection.

Rhodes, however, was allowed considerable latitude under the indifferent Turkish regime. Consequently, the Rhodians took advantage of this situation. There was a Turkish governor and a Turkish garrison, but the Rhodians were permitted to trade freely with other parts of the Empire and with Europe, to own land and property, to regulate their own revenues, to appoint their own officials, and to emigrate either to the mainland or to any other part of the world as long as they paid the *maktou*.

The *maktou* was not oppressive, but the mode of collecting it and the arbitrary power given to the governor to fix the value (in piasters) of the lira in his district were unjust and ruinous to the individual as well as to the economy of the island.

The tax was not collected directly by the governor, for he sold the right of collecting it to the highest bidder. The speculator who purchased

1. The records of the 490 years of Turkish occupation are scanty. We have nothing in print beyond the descriptions of occasional travellers and sundry references in histories of Greece, Turkey, and Levant.

2. Rhodes did not receive military help from the West. The bankers of Italy and France were no longer interested in Rhodes. With the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope in 1486, Rhodes lost some of its importance as an entrepot.

the *maktou* usually came from the non-Moslem groups. A speculator bought the *maktou* from the Sanjak of Rhodes. He, in turn, sold it to others at a profit, so that a comparatively small portion of the tax went to the benefit of the state. Farmers, shepherds, tradesmen, and merchantmen were heavily taxed. This tax was especially harsh on the farmers because they could not evade it as did the shepherds.

Reactivation of the agricultural, handicraft industries, and commercial fields was left to the Rhodians, because of the apparent apathy of the Turkish government in taking an active part in the island's development. The economy of the island was disrupted by the Turkish war. Everywhere there were burned houses, devastated villages, and scattered livestock. Not even olive groves or vineyards escaped destruction by Suleiman's army. The best land of the island, especially in the northwestern plain, was not cultivated during the siege of the city of Rhodes, for the farmers moved to the city. Many did not return to their farms after the war, because the task of restoration and the replanting of olive trees and vineyards would have been slow and expensive. Some emigrated to the privileged islands, even though these had a poorer agricultural production than Rhodes; others went to Egypt to seek their livelihood in Alexandria or Cairo. Monetary remittances from the Rhodians who emigrated to Egypt provided the capital that was needed for the rehabilitation of the handicrafts and commerce. The shipping industry was almost completely destroyed. Many of the vessels were commandeered by the Turks and were lost in the campaign of Rhodes. The few ships which succeeded in escaping to friendly Italian ports later served as the nucleus of the rehabilitated Rhodian shipping industry.

A. AGRICULTURE

The agricultural resources of Rhodes were not sufficient to feed its population. Before the conquest of the island by Turkey, the maintenance of an uninterrupted supply line of wheat was the key of Rhodes foreign policy. Undoubtedly, the whole problem of subsistence was always a major one.

In addition to the imperfections of the land tenure system, favorable climatic conditions for the development of agriculture did not exist everywhere. Precipitation variability, together with uncertain duration of the long summer drought, periodically hampered the production of cereals and fruit-tree crops. To the unfavorable growing conditions must be added inefficient traditional methods of cultivation, the poverty of the soil in plant nutrients and organic matter, and a dearth of labor.

Land Tenure :

The land system in Rhodes was patterned after that of the mainland. The three categories of land ownership were the *Vakouf* land, the *Mulk* land, and the *Emiri* land.

Vakouf land was the property (land and buildings) administered for the benefit of religious institutions. Two-tenths of the cultivated land was under this category.

Mulk included lands held in full ownership, generally urban property. The owner of the *Mulk* had certain rights which were protected by the law. He could sell his property, preserving either to himself or to someone else, a perpetual title to it. Three-tenths of the cultivated land were in this category.

Land not claimed by the religious institutions and by the *Mulk* landowners was called the *Emiri*, or domain land. This land technically belonged to the Sultan or Porte, but, actually, it was the property of those who cultivated it. The Porte could claim the land if it were uncultivated for more than ten years. A part of the domain land was assigned to offices controlled by Viziers. Five-tenths of the cultivated land were in this category.

The practice of this system of land led, not only to the emergence of a few big landowners, but also to the refragmentation of the small land holdings. This segmented character of the land was largely due to the legal system of division of land among the descendants after the death of the owner. The land holdings of the big landholders were not consolidated into one big unit, but were scattered throughout the island.

Landed proprietors in Rhodes were absentee-owners and their estates usually comprised what was called the *beylik* or home farm. The farm had its own barn and sheep stable. In charge of the farm was a bailiff who kept the accounts and acted under instructions from the owner. Besides the bailiff, there were the sheep-herder, the cow-herder, the blacksmith and the farm-laborers. These workers were paid either in goods or in money by the proprietor.

The economic and social status of the tenants depended, not only upon the quality of the farm, but also upon the wealth and character of the landlord. The condition of tenancy varied. In all cases, however, the landlord provided them with a mule or donkey, stable, barn, and seed. Occasionally, the tenants paid the owner a fixed rent of about two bushels of wheat to the acre. This was an unsatisfactory arrangement for the landlord, because in poor years the tenant could not pay, and, in good years, he obtained only his average rent. In cases where the crop was equally divided

with the landlord, the latter in a good year received a high rent. The tenants were also given a small amount of land to sow grain crops for the winter feed of their livestock, and this crop they did not share with the landlord.

The landlord had to keep the tenants, even though they were poor cultivators. Since the tenants knew that the proprietor had to support them, they became lazy and careless. The dismissal of the tenants would have meant the sacrifice of a certain amount of capital to the landlord. Although the landlord was responsible for his tenants, he had no control over the manner in which they cultivated his lands.

It would seem that under such a system the tenants should have prospered, but they did not. Two reasons explain their deplorable economic conditions. First, only the docile remained behind. Aggressive tenants emigrated to Asia Minor where agricultural land was not only plentiful and cheap, but also fertile. Secondly, their religion declared too many feast or fast days, which meant absenteeism from work. Tenants would not labor in the field because the priest had forbidden them to work. Therefore, the strict observance of the social customs by the tenants led them to practice irrational cultivation methods.

The average size of the small land holdings were not more than three acres. The position of the farmers who devoted a great portion of the land to grain culture was made more hazardous, because of foreign competition in cheap grain. On the other hand, the grain farmers had less to fear from invasion than the olive and fruit - trees growers to whom the destruction of their groves either by man or by plant diseases brought irreparable disaster. The prosperous and self - confident peasant was the one who had equally distributed his land among cereal culture and orchard culture.

Types of Agriculture :

Grain culture, with and without irrigation, olive - tree culture, viticulture, fruit-tree culture, and animal husbandry were practiced on the island.

Grain Culture :

Grain farming over much of Rhodes was not an economical undertaking. The Rhodian grain farmer, besides competing with unfavorable growing conditions, had also to compete with imported wheat from the mainland. Wheat was grown nearly all over the island, because every peasant wanted to produce at least a part, if not all, of his grain needs. Most of the wheat was produced by the big landowners.

Owing to variability in annual precipitation, the two - field system was practiced. Cereals were sown in the autumn, wheat on the better land and barley on the poorer. About two - thirds of the remaining land was

left fallow, and one-third was devoted to a vetch crop in the season between crops. The small amount of dung left by flocks of sheep and goats grazing on the stubble and fallow land was the only fertilizer which was used for the cereals.

Although the production of cereals was unsatisfactory, this culture did not lose its importance for the island. The main reason was that its displacement by another culture was hard to effect, since the difficulties attendant upon the introduction of new agricultural techniques were a result of the lack of necessary capital for substitute cultures. Furthermore, the inhabitants were disheartened by the indifference of the Porte toward agriculture. Since the production of cereals did not meet the domestic needs of the people, wheat and other grains were imported from the mainland. Most of the imported wheat was consumed by the urban population of the island.

Olive-culture, viticulture, and fruit-tree culture :

The olive, fruit-tree culture, and viticulture were just as important in Rhodes as in the other areas of the Eastern Mediterranean. Every farmer combined the previously cultures with cereal cultures in order to provide his own bread, olive oil, olives and fruits. Orchards and vineyards of Rhodes, which were an essential feature of sedentary agriculture as opposed to pastoral nomadism, also provided the major export products.

Olive-tree culture:

The olive was an important economic tree on the island, because farmers used its products—olive oil and olives—as a nutrient, lubricant, illuminant, and emollient.

The culture of the olive also suited the political situation of the island. If the farmer abandoned a vineyard for any length of time, the possibility of its being ruined by lack of care would have been greater whereas little damage would have happened to the olive grove itself. Hence, the cultivation of olive trees was held as an inestimable advantage by the Rhodian peasant. If for some reason or another the head of a peasant family had to flee from the village, he could be certain that the means of subsistence for his family would continue to be available and when he returned he could begin where he left off.

The most important olive area was the northern section of the island. Extensive groves were to be found in the villages of Trianda, Afandou, Archangelos, and Malona. Besides olive trees planted in groves, a considerable number of them were scattered in the fields of the other cultures.

The use of nurseries was unknown. When a farmer wished to plant

an olive tree, he would either replant an old trunk or plant a young shoot. The transplanted old trunks started to yield fruit after the 16th year. The new plants yielded fruit after the 12th year. The practice of irrigation of the olive-tree was irregularly practiced on the northwest plain, but that of manuring was universally neglected. Olive trees were never manured unless some flocks of sheep came by chance to the grove.

Pruning was not practiced. The peasant either did not know the art of pruning or felt that pruning a tree would reduce its yield. Grafting was also little known. The smallest branches were grafted by incision and the largest between the bark and trunk.

The practice of intercropping olive trees with barley, oats, and vetch robbed them of moisture and plant nutrients. The common harvesting method of shaking the branches of trees with a pole was destructive, since the young branches which would have given fruit the following year often were broken off.

From the foregoing it becomes clear why olive oil production was low. The yield of the olive even under prudent cultivation does not result in a good crop. This condition was accentuated when little or no care was given to the tree.

Viticulture :

Viticulture spread throughout the northern section of the island and it formed a very important and intensively exploited branch of agricultural activity. Agricultural malpractices that characterized the cultivation of the olive trees were not to be found in the vineyard areas. Inter-planting was avoided in order to make available a maximum of soil moisture. Fertilization and pruning of the vines was practiced.

The Sultana vine was introduced from Asia Minor in 1838. Its cultivation spread quickly following an attack of phylloxera in French vineyards. There was no difficulty in disposing of the crop as the wine-makers of Europe required currants for the manufacture of wine. In the course of time, however, the European vineyard growers brought phylloxera under control, after which a serious economic crisis arose in the island. The crisis coincided with the economic depression that occurred in the Eastern Mediterranean after the Greek-Turkish war of 1897.

How far the planting of vines encroached upon the arable land of Rhodes, thus curtailing the growth of cereals, is a difficult question and one to which perhaps no definite answer can be given. Probably much of the land formerly devoted to cereal culture before the import of grains from the mainland became general was diverted to vineyards. This would

appear to be a reasonable assumption, but it must be regarded as one for which no conclusive proof can be given.

Fruit-tree culture :

The most important of the cultivated fruit-trees were the fig and citrus. The production of citrus-fruit was concentrated on the east coast between the villages of Archangelos and Massari, where alluvial soils are fertile and well-drained. Irrigated orange and lemon orchards were grown in the Malona village area. Citrus-fruit were not grown as widely as the grape, because only a few places had the necessary climatic and edaphic conditions.

Although the fig tree was cultivated nearly everywhere to a small extent, the most important production center was the village of Soroni.

B. ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

Mixed farming did not exist. Hot summers made grazing very difficult and the cost of irrigated fodder crops prohibitive. Cattle were used for working the farms and animal husbandry was confined to the fallows and the village pastures. Animal fodder was scarce. Farmers were often in conflict with shepherds because of the depredations of their flocks among crops and forested areas.

Sheep and goats :

The raising of sheep was most common in the less advanced agricultural sections of the island, especially the southern section. Sheep were raised by shepherds who, in contrast with those of the mainland of Turkey, had a fixed establishment in the mountain villages. These shepherds and their families migrated from one pasture area to another. Some of them even carried their flocks across the water to Anatolia where better pasture lands were available during the summer. Since they had a fixed winter place, it was possible for them to protect the flocks against cold winters.

Breeding of sheep for one particular line of production was not generally practiced, and sheep were usually kept for the production of meat, milk, fat and wool. Sheep milk was used for cheese, and for the production of butter, both for local consumption. Since the wool was coarse and short, it was not exported, but it was used to make articles of apparel and carpets.

Goat herding was generally practiced in the hilly areas of the drier sections of the island which were covered with brushwood and low shrubs. Goats thrived in localities where other types of livestock would starve. From goat's milk a good grade of butter was made, but goat's cheese was inferior in quality to that made from sheep milk. Domestic goats kept by families in the outskirts of villages were carefully selected to provide milk.

In general the development of agriculture was beset by many problems, sociological, technical and economic. On the sociological side there were the social organization and land tenure. On the technical side there were production problems inherent in a fragmented system of farming and the over-riding influences of the climate with its long, hot, dry season. On the economic side there was competition for the markets of Rhodes from the farmers on the Turkish mainland. Rhodes had all the disadvantages of intensive cultivation without any of the advantages.

C. INDUSTRY

The economy of the island was chiefly agrarian, with almost 80 per cent of the working population being engaged in the cultivation of the soil and its associated activities. Industry, insignificant and backward, was mainly dependent on agriculture. The city of Rhodes had most of the cottage industries, potteries and shipyards.

Handicrafts :

A complete picture of the handicraft industries is impossible, because of the lack of information. Some clues, however, in the journals of travellers and in consular reports give an inkling of the types of handicrafts which were practiced. The two major industries were of ceramic and cottage handicrafts.

The making of brocades, and of silk and linen apparel employed a considerable number of workers. Local and imported textile fibers were incorporated in the manufacture of apparel. Embroideries were used to adorn skirts, curtains and bed-spreads. The patterns which were most original consisted of diamond shaped figures of the richest colors. Most of the production was used locally.

The textile industry started to decline when factory-made brocades and cotton goods became easily available to the inhabitants. Displaced workers found employment in the cotton mills of Turkey and Greece.

Ceramics industry :

The ceramics industry was initiated by the Knights of St. John in Lindos when they brought Persian and Damascene potters captured by the Knights aboard a ship enroute to Lebanon from Greece. The sand in Lindos was suitable for glazing, and these potters succeeded in making pottery products which were highly sought after by the Europeans. The industry was transferred to the city of Rhodes by the Turks.

The most outstanding characteristic of the Rhodian pottery was a peculiar red pigment, coralline in color, which was applied in such a

manner that it stood out in relief. Designs were mainly those of the Turk's favorite flowers — roses, carnations, and hyacinths.

The industry thrived under the Turks. There was a market for its products, not only in Turkey but also in Europe.

Shipbuilding:

The shipbuilding industry, utilizing local timber, prospered until the middle of the 19th century. The principal types of ships were naval vessels for the Porte and sponge-fishing boats for the fishermen of the islands of Kalymnos, Chalki, and Simi. When the forests were depleted of their good timber, many of the shipbuilders emigrated to Greece to work in the shipyards there.

D. SHIPPING

Circumstances which helped the Rhodians to expand the shipping industry were the indifference of the Turks to commerce, financial assistance given to Rhodians by Egypt, and the apparent susceptibility of the Turkish officials to bribery.

Rhodians benefited from the development of trade between the island and the mainland, because ten per cent of the working population was engaged in shipping. They replaced the Franks and Venetians as the leading merchants. Their small vessels sailed throughout the Mediterranean region and connected the port of Rhodes with other parts of the basin.

E. COMMERCE

It is difficult to give a satisfactory survey of the trade of Rhodes. The information supplied by the consular reports is often deficient. Furthermore, trade statistics prior to 1909, are totally lacking. Some of the principal imports were sugar, rice, wheat, animal products, and textiles, while the principal exports were dry beans, fruits, hides, olive oil, olives, wine, and sponges.

Turkey was the leading importer of agricultural products for the island. The major exporters of manufactured goods were Austria - Hungary, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Italy. The bulk of the trade was under the control of the merchants of central Europe, who succeeded in capturing the Turkish and Jewish market by consigning goods direct via Trieste in subsidized Austrian vessels. La Credit Lyonnais, La Banque de Salonique, the Anglo - Egyptian Bank, and Die Deutsche Orient Bank provided the merchants of Rhodes with credit.

The port of Rhodes became an important *entrepot* because sail - pro-

pelled vessels stopped at Rhodes on the journey from the ports of the Levant to Greece. The coming of steamers replacing sail, however, decreased the importance of Rhodes as a port of call since steamers could ply the waters of the Mediterranean without having to take on supplies at Rhodes. Stops were made only if a cargo had to be picked up, and even the establishment of a *lazaretto* (warehouse) did not increase the number of vessels that called at the port.

Since the Turkish government did not actively participate in the economic development of the island, attachment of the island to the Turkish Empire proved to be a great boon to the Rhodians. The mainland provided the islanders not only with foodstuffs and other commodities but also with more alternative opportunities than the home region. Many Rhodians — farmers, carpenters, masons, shipbuilders, and traders — emigrated to the mainland to seek employment. It was not very difficult to find jobs in the cities of Smyrna and Constantinople or to purchase farms in the vicinity of the cities. Not all of the emigrants, however, went to Asia Minor. A small number of them emigrated to other parts of the Empire, namely Egypt and Levant.

Under the political, economic and geographic conditions, the Rhodians wisely utilized the opportunities provided them by the geography of the island. They engaged in commerce and were successful in returning to the island some of the transit trade which formerly had made the port of Rhodes prosperous.

Income earned from shipping and from exports, together with the monetary remittances from abroad, enabled them to lead a comfortable life despite unjust tax collection methods.

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