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## **The Provisioning of Istanbul with Wheat in Turbulent Times: Yenişehir in Thessaly at the end of the 18th century**

The end of the 18th century is a particularly turbulent time period not only for the Ottoman Empire, but for the whole of Europe as well, especially after the outburst of the French Revolution. Only thirteen years after the humiliating for the Ottomans treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774) Catherine the Great, incapable of hiding her expansionist aspirations, declared anew war against her southern enemy. A few months later, at the beginning of 1788, Joseph of Austria joined the war on the side of Catherine.

Of course that new war of the Ottoman Empire against its neighbors on the north had consequences on all parts of the empire. The region of Yenişehir in Thessaly, on which we aim to focus in the following, was certainly no exception. The main source on which we draw is a judicial record of the *kadi* of Yenişehir extending from *Cemaziyülevvel* 1205 to *Muharrem* 1206, or, put otherwise, from January to September 1791<sup>1</sup>.

In our record there are quite many imperial orders (*fermans*) from the central government relating to the war which is going on to the north frontier of the empire. Some of them refer to the recruitment of cavalry and infantry<sup>2</sup>, others ask for the dispatch of buffalos and horses to be used in the artillery<sup>3</sup>, another one has to do with extraordinary levies because of the war<sup>4</sup>, while another one deals with recruitment of seamen from the *kadi* district of Yenişehir destined for the imperial fleet<sup>5</sup>.

In 1790 Joseph II. of Austria died and was replaced by Leopold II. who was against the ongoing war. Therefore he entered immediately into

1. This judicial record is preserved in the state archives in Kozani (North Greece) under the code number T15.

2. T15/p. 3/b, T15/p. 4/a, T15/p. 34.

3. T15/p. 10, T15/p.11, T15/p. 14/e.

4. T15/p. 42/b.

5. T15/p. 58.

negotiations which were completed in August 1791 with the signing of a peace treaty in Szisztova. A few months later, in January 1792, Russia acceded to the treaty in Jasy. From a copy of an imperial decree issued in 11-20 August 1791<sup>6</sup>, addressing the *kadis* of Sofya, Filibe and Selanik, as well as the rest of the *kadis* and their substitutes (*naibs*) in these regions, we come to know that 2.740 Janissaries from 31 towns—all of the towns are mentioned by name, as well as the number of Janissaries falling to each one's share—were ordered to report themselves to Niş under the command of the Grand Vizier 'Ömer Paşa; nevertheless, because of the peace conclusion between the Austrian and the Ottoman empires the dispatch of the aforementioned soldiers was not necessary any more: *elhaletü hazihi devlet-i 'aliyem ile Nemçelü beynlerinde der-kâr olan şıkak mübeddel-i sulh ve vifak olup müşarileyh maiyetinde* (viz. of the Grand Vizier) *'asakirin lüzümü olmayıp ...*<sup>7</sup>.

Exactly at the same time period, however, the Ottoman government was also confronted with internal enemies, that is the provincial magnates who had started administering their provinces almost as if they were independent states. That was the case with the activities of Tepedelenli 'Ali Paşa and his relatives in the region in question<sup>8</sup>. Typical of the bad climate and the lack of state control over the provinces during this turbulent time period is an imperial edict dated 25 February - 6 March 1791<sup>9</sup> addressing the *kazaskers* of Rumili and Anadolu with regard to the misuse of authority exercised by the governors of these provinces and

6. T15/p. 55/b; given that the treaty was signed in the beginning of August, it is surprising how immediate was the activation that was necessary in order to cancel war preparations like this.

7. "... now, because of the fact that the evident quarrelling between my exalted state and the Austrians was altered to friendly arrangement and agreement, there is no need of the troops to get under the command of the aforementioned Grand Vizier ..." (T15/p. 55/b, lines 14-15); for a brief description of these political events see Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, 5th vol. (1789-1856), Ankara 1988 (5th edition, the 1st one appeared in the year 1947), pp. 14 ff.

8. McGowan, in: Halil İnalçık and Donald Quataert (eds), *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, (paperback edition) 1997, vol. II, pp. 667-668; see also Skiotis, Dennis: "From bandit to pasha: first steps in the rise of power of Ali of Tepelen, 1750-84", in: *International Journal of Middle East Studies* II (1971) 219-244. For some activities of Ali Pasha's son, Velieddin Bey, in the region at this time see T15/p. 13/b, T15/p. 37, and T15/p. 25/a.

9. T15/p. 22.

their substitutes who started discharging and appointing judges of all levels, without this coming within their competence; a *seyhülislam*'s decree as well as an imperial edict were needed for doing so.

Things being what they were, amidst a war period and with a government failing to some extent in keeping its periphery under control, Thessaly on the Balkan peninsula continued being one of the richest regions of the empire in grain production. For that reason, but undoubtedly also because of its easily accessible seaport, namely Volos, this part of the Ottoman Empire played a crucial role both in the provisioning of the Ottoman troops, and, mainly, of the inhabitants of the imperial capital, Istanbul.

In the present study we present the information collected from the aforementioned judicial record, which refers to the provisioning of Istanbul with wheat in the time period under consideration.

The provisioning policy was certainly no innovation of the 18th century, neither was it confined to the Ottoman Empire. On the contrary, it constitutes a main characteristic of many pre-industrial societies<sup>10</sup>. In the Ottoman Empire, in theory at least, the grain surplus of almost every grain producing province was destined exclusively for the provisioning of Istanbul and the army, that is there was a state monopoly on grain. Just because of its size, but certainly also because of its symbolic character, the provisioning of Istanbul with cereals was one of the most significant concerns of the Ottoman administration, so that on the one hand there could be no grain shortage and, on the other, prices could be kept low. In earlier centuries, like the 16th and 17th, the efforts of the state towards that direction were not sheltered under very strict regulations<sup>11</sup>. This situation seems to have changed during the middle of the 18th century, when the *mukayese sistemi* (proportional system<sup>12</sup>) was

10. See Suraiya Faroqhi, "Trade controls, provisioning policies, and donations: The Egypt-Hijaz connection during the second half of the sixteenth century", in: Halil İnalcık and Cemal Kafadar (eds), *Süleyman The Second And His Time*, Istanbul 1993.

11. Lütü Güçer, "XVI. yüzyıl sonlarında Osmanlı İmparatorluğu dahilinde hububat ticaretinin tâbi olduğu kayıtlar", in: *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası*, XIII/1-4 (1951-52), 79-98; Robert Mantran, *Istanbul dans la seconde moitié du XVIIe siècle*, Paris - Istanbul 1962; Mübahat Küçüköğlü, *Osmanlılarda Narh Müessesesi ve 1640 Tarihli Narh Defteri*, İstanbul 1983.

12. See N. Svoronos, *Le Commerce de Salonique au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris 1956, p. 76 of the greek translation: *To Εμπόριο της Θεσσαλονίκης τον 18ο αιώνα*, Athens 1996.

introduced, namely a system according to which the yearly required grain was distributed to each grain producing *kaza* in accordance to the practice of the years before, and thus to its potential<sup>13</sup>. A third period in the practice of provisioning the Ottoman capital started in 1793 with the establishment of the ministry of grain and provisions (*zahire nezareti*), when the quantities of grain brought to Istanbul became inadequate enough to alarm the state and make it take a more active role in the purchase of grain in the provinces<sup>14</sup>. This protectionist policy ended in 1838-1839<sup>15</sup>.

Our judicial records fall into the last years of the period before the establishment of the *zahire nezareti*. In this time period the necessary quantities of grain were obtained in two ways: both by private merchants and by the state itself with state purchases. Recent studies have shown that in the trade conducted with private funds the engaged merchants had to conclude a kind of contract with the state in order to take the permission to buy grain, transport it to Istanbul and sell it in the *un kapani*<sup>16</sup>; these contracts were either collective —it is about the bigger merchants, the so called *kapani tüccarları*, who usually had their own ships for the transport of the grain— or individual ones which were signed by merchants of a more modest financial standing<sup>17</sup>. In our sample we have to do mostly with the latter. Aynural has shown that not only there was not any rivalry between the merchants, both the great

13. Salih Aynural: *İstanbul Değirmenleri ve Fırınları. Zahire Ticareti (1740-1840)*, İstanbul (Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları) 2001, p. 5 ff; I thank Suraiya Faroqhi for drawing my attention to this recent contribution on the provisioning of Istanbul with grain, adding much to our knowledge especially on what happened with the grain after it had reached the capital (see section III of the book).

14. Aynural, *op.cit.*, pp. 80 ff. See also Emile Themopoulou, “L’approvisionnement d’Istanbul en céréales et l’évolution de la contribution de l’*ichtira* au XVIIIe et au XIXe siècles”, in: *Η καθ’ ημάς Ανατολή* 3 (1996) 117-137; I thank I. Mourellos for this bibliographic reference. This last period of the provisioning efforts of the Ottoman state is also described by Tevfik Güran: “The state role in the grain supply of Istanbul: The grain administration, 1793-1839”, in: *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 3/1 (1984-1985) 27-41.

15. Themopoulou, *op.cit.*, p. 119, footnote 4, and Güran, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

16. This is the name of a quarter in Istanbul on the Golden Horn where the Flour-Weigh-House was, namely an office where wholesale trade was conducted not only in grain but in other important wares too; in the documents occurs usually its Arabic counterpart: *kabban-i dakik*.

17. Themopoulou, *op.cit.*, p. 119.

and the smaller ones, on one hand, and the state on the other, but, on the contrary, the latter used every possible way of facilitating the private sector in dealing with this, peculiar it is true, kind of trade.

It is obvious that in the time period under consideration in the region of Yenişehir both ways of buying and carrying grain to Istanbul were engaged, namely private and state funds. But since our documents come from the office of the *kadi* of the region, it is reasonably expected that we will come across cases of grain trade in which the involvement of the local judge or his substitutes was necessary in some way. Indeed, most of the cases refer to individuals who had decided—or so it seems at least at first sight—to engage in the trade which was intended to secure the provisioning of Istanbul with wheat. Let us turn to these sources.

From an imperial edict (*ferman*) dated 16-25 March 1791 we learn that Hasan Efendizade Mehmed, an inhabitant of Çatalca (today Pharsala), in order to buy wheat in the region and transfer it to Istanbul, he went along the following procedure: He filed a petition (*arzuhal*) to the imperial council, in which he articulated his wish to buy 2.000 Istanbul *keyl* of wheat from the *nahiye* of Volos; for that reason he hired the ship of Marko, a Venetian captain, which he would use to transfer his wheat directly to Istanbul (*doğru asitane-i 'aliyeme*), where then he was going to sell it in *un kapanı* to the current price (*ve kabban-i dakikde fūruht*); so he asked for an imperial decree to be issued containing the relevant permission. On this matter the council asked for official information (*isti'lam*) from the customs controller (*gümrük emini*), who in his turn sent in a report (*i'lam*) notifying that a certain Halil Efendi, inhabitant of Volos, would stand security for the purchase and transfer of the grain in question; the security concerned mainly the safety of the quantity of grain en route to Istanbul; one cared greatly about its being legally transferred and not getting lost—read smuggled—on the way. The imperial edict was issued on the basis of this report; it granted the required permission for buying and transferring the grain in question, ordered the local authorities to facilitate the merchant, and finally asked the judge substitute (*na'ib*) of the *nahiye* of Volos to dispatch a report (*'arz ve inha*), after the grain had been loaded, so that a possible purchase of—or part of—the cargo could be avoided<sup>18</sup>. The concern of the Ottoman

18. T15/p. 5/b.

government to anticipate grain smuggling, both inside and outside the country, is evident throughout the document.

When the active *kadi* of Istanbul, İbrahim Beyefendi, wanted to buy 9.000 *keyl* of wheat at the port of Volos and carry it to Istanbul, a slightly different procedure was followed: This time it was not the interested who filed the petition to the imperial council, but the customs controller of Istanbul (*İstanbul gümriüğü emini*) directly submitted a report (*i'lam*) informing for the *kadi*'s intention; at the same time he expounded the latter's contract with a Venetian captain, Vicenco, whose ship he hired to transfer the wheat he bought; the contract in question provided that the ship ought to be loaded within twenty days since its arrival at the port, and that for every further day a daily compensation of fifteen *guruş* should be given to the ship's captain; furthermore, it was agreed upon that a trustworthy man of the businessman-*kadi* would go aboard, because obviously the latter would not take the risk of such a lasting and, no doubt, hazardous voyage; finally, the *i'lam* was asking for the issuing of an imperial decree containing the relevant permission. The *ferman* was issued and contained exactly the same clauses as the previous one<sup>19</sup>.

In another case the judge substitute of the *nahiye* of Volos issued an official report (*takrir*) to the imperial council notifying that a certain Müderris Müstakimzade İsmail hired the ship of the Venetian captain Nevey in order to transfer 9.500 *keyl* of wheat from the port of Volos to Istanbul. The known procedure was followed: information was asked for from the customs controller regarding the issue of the security, on the basis of which, then, the relevant permission was granted containing the same recommendations to the local authorities<sup>20</sup>.

Of special interest is the case of Esseyiid 'Abdülkadir, an inhabitant of Yenişehir-i Fenar, who filed a petition to the imperial council asking for a permission to be granted to him in order to be able to transfer 5.000 *keyl* of wheat from the port of Volos to Istanbul. Some time earlier, on the same purpose, he had hired the ship of the Venetian captain Vicenco Subramuda, from whom he had then taken a valid document drawn up in the Frankish utterance (*efrenci ül-'ibare ma'mu-*

19. T15/p. 9/a, 5 April - 3 May 1791.

20. T15/p. 15/a, 4 - 13 May 1791.

*lunbih kağıt*)—obviously it was the contract they bound themselves with; then he had obtained a *kapan tezkeresi* (certificate of the weighing office) and the ship had sailed; but when it had reached the island of İşkobolos—today Skopelos opposite to Volos—both the captain and the crew had died. Again the customs controller was asked for information; he issued an *i'lam* confirming that it did happen so; he also added that their death was caused by the pest (*ta'un*); further, that the petitioner hired a ship anew from the Venetian captain Antonyo Rako, and that a security was also available. On the basis of this *i'lam* an imperial decree was issued containing the known recommendations to the local authorities<sup>21</sup>. It is worth noting that in his *i'lam* the customs controller underlined the fact that for all the efforts it could not be made known what had become of the *kapan tezkeresi* which was located in the hands of the ill-fated captain. The concern is quite reasonable since such a document could certainly prove to be a small treasure in the hands of a smuggler.

As already indicated, the Ottoman government, aiming at keeping under control the grain trade for the provisioning of Istanbul so that illicit profits and smuggling on the part of the merchants and others could be avoided, had worked out some rules with which all the involved parties had to comply. One of the most basic steps that a merchant had to take was to furnish the captain whose ship he had hired for transferring his merchandise, with a certificate (*tezkere*) issued by the *na'ib* of the *un kapanı* in Istanbul, in which the captain's name, the quantity and the kind of the grain to be transported were noted. After the captain's reaching the port and having the concrete quantity of grain loaded, the *kadi* or his substitute in the region should issue an *i'lam* containing the name and other particulars of the captain as well as the kind and the quantity of the grain loaded; this *i'lam* should be sent to Istanbul to be compared with what would ultimately arrive there. In an imperial decree addressing the *kadi* of Yenişehir-i Fenar<sup>22</sup> annoyance is expressed from the fact that four or five ships loaded with cereals entered the *un kapanı* without their captains having either a *kapan tezkeresi* or an *i'lam*. The *kadi* is ordered to issue an *i'lam* to all captains who have a *kapan tezkeresi*.

21. T15/p. 23/a, 5 - 14 April 1791.

22. T15/p. 2/d, 17 June 1791.

Indeed, in our record thirty such *i'lams* were registered by the *na'ib* of the *nahiye* of Volos in the time period from *Şa'ban* 1205 to *Muharrem* 1206, or from April to September 1791, that is a season most suitable for navigation.

*Cereals (wheat) loaded at the port of Volos and earmarked for Istanbul during the time period from April to September 1791 according to the reports (i'lams) issued by the judge substitute (na'ib) of the sub-district (nahiye) of Volos*

<i>grain holder</i>	<i>quantity in İst. Kilesi</i>	<i>captain</i>
Nakibzade Elhac Sa'dullah Efendi 7.800 Şehir kethüdası zade Yahya Ağa 700 ( <i>Yenişehir-i Fenar eşrafından ve eshab-ı ambardan matlub buyurulan hıntadan – hissesine isabet eden</i> )	8.500	Venetian Dimitri Yan- kovik (it was hired from the former)
Halil Ağa 3.640 (inhabitant of Yenişehir - merchant) Monla Halil 4.580 (inhabitant Yenişehir - merchant)	8.220	Venetian Vicenco
Zeynelabidin Bey 3.500 Topuzlar mültezimi 3.000 ( <i>Yenişeh. eshab-ı ambardan matlub buyurulan hıntadan – hisselerinden</i> )	6.500	Venetian Pavlokovik
Esseyyid 'Abdülkadir Bey ( <i>Tirmova kaymakamı</i> the first ship he had hired was wrecked)	6.000	Venetian Antonyo Rağuzin
Esseyyid 'Abdullah Bey ( <i>Yenişehir-i Fenar müteayyinininden, müderrisin-i kiramdan</i> )	12.000	Venetian Boniceli
Şerabi Damadı Seyyid Mustafa Ağa ( <i>Yenişehir-i Fenar eshab-ı ambardan matlub buyurulan hıntadan – hissesine isabet eden</i> )	3.044	Venetian Antonyo Rağuzin
Elhac Ahmed (merchant) (he bought the wheat of Müftizade 'Ali Monla Efendi, <i>eshab-ı ambardan</i> )	6.500	Venetian Corci Marsek
Haseki Hasan Ağa ( <i>Gümrükçü emini</i> ) 5.590 Mustafa Ağa ( <i>Sofades zabiti</i> ) 2.010 ( <i>Yenişehir eshab-ı ambardan matlub buyuru- lan – hissesine isabet</i> )	7.600	French Revin



'Osman Ağa ( <i>Yenişehir eşrafından ve eshab-ı ambardan matlub buyurulan zahairden – hissesine isabet eden</i> )	10.000	Venetian Madalina
Seyyid 'Osman Ağa ( <i>inhabitant of Yenişehir-i Fenar</i> )	10.000	Venetian Madalina
Damad Beyzade Emin Bey ( <i>inhabitant of Yenişehir-i Fenar</i> )	7.400	Venetian Anton
Elhac Sa'dullah Efendi ( <i>Yenişehir-i Fenar eshab-ı ambardan matlub buyurulan zahairden – hissesine isabet eden</i> )	5.500	Venetian Basko
Mevlana İbrahim Beyefendi ( <i>İstanbul kadısı</i> )	9.200	Venetian Vicenco (holder of a ferman)
Hasan Efendizade Mehmed Ağa ( <i>inhab. of Çatalca</i> )	11.200	Venetian Marko
Haşim Beyefendi ( <i>Yenişehir-i Fenar eshab-ı alakalarından</i> )	6.000	Venetian Nikola Mosaic
Müstakimzade İsmail Efendi ( <i>inhabitant of Yenişehir-i Fenar - müderris</i> )	8.780	Venetian Nadali
Giridi Mehmed Ağa ( <i>sahib-i sermaye</i> )	7.000	Venetian Yoralimo
Cemcuzzade İbrahim Ağa ( <i>inhabitant of Yenişehir-i Fenar</i> )	9.000	Venetian İstati
Esseyyid Sa'id Ağa ( <i>Golos nahiyesinden</i> ) (he bought it at the current price ( <i>rayiç</i> ) from the <i>nahiye Yenişehir</i> )	4.000	Camlucalı Nikola
Mehmed Ağa ( <i>inhabitant of Golos</i> ) (he bought it from merchants from the <i>nahiye</i> of <i>Yenişehir</i> at the current price)	3.000	İstati veled-i Yorğo (village of Lafkona)
Hasan Ağa ( <i>gümrük emini of Yenişehir</i> ) ( <i>ba ferman-i 'alışan Golos gümrük emini Halil Ağa ma'rifetiyle tedarik eylediği hıntadan</i> )	4.500	Venetian Granovnik
Halil Ağa ( <i>Yenişehirli</i> ) Hasan Ağa	6.000	Venetian Pavlokkovic
Ahmed Ağa ( <i>tüccar ta'ifesinden</i> )	7.300	Venet. Domeniko Koforini
Ahmed Ağa ( <i>tüccar ta'ifesinden</i> )	3.000	Camlıca re'ayasından Anderiya
Ahmed Ağa ( <i>Yanyalı</i> )	5.200	Bülbülce re'ayalarından Yano
İsmail Paşazade Seyyid 'Abdullah Bey ( <i>müderris</i> )	13.000	Venetian Basbal Molina

Halil Efendi (with the help of Hasan Ağa [gümrük emini?] he gathered 5.900, plus 2.500 of Cemcuzzade İbrahim Ağa [Yenişehir eshab-ı 'alakasından])	8.400	Venetian İstati
İlyaszade Halil Efendi (Yenişehir-i Fenar eşrafından ve eshab-ı 'alakalarından)	6.000	Venetian Portolu Levinyo
Halil Efendi	3.000	Neapolitan Filiyol
'Osman Ağa (part of the 100.000 <i>keyl</i> of barley that was requested for the year 1205 from the region of Yenişehir for the provisioning of the imperial army)	8.500 barley	French Alari
<i>TOTAL</i>	205.844 <i>keyl</i> of wheat	

It seems that it was not a common practice of the judicial authorities of Volos to register into their records the *kapan tezkeresi* which was—or should be—brought and produced by the ship's captain; for only in five out of the thirty cases is such a document, namely a *kapan tezkeresi*, registered before the relevant *i'lam* in our record. So, for instance, the *kapan tezkeresi* which was given to the Venetian captain Boniceli, whose ship was hired by the eminent scholar and fund holder (*sahib-i sermaye*) Esseyid 'Abdullah Bey, an inhabitant of Yenişehir-i Fenar, was registered in our judicial record<sup>23</sup>, and contains the following evidence: Firstly the particulars of the merchant, secondly the name of the ship's captain, thirdly the quantity and the kind of the cereal to be loaded (12.000 *keyl* of wheat), and finally the statement that the *tezkere* in question was issued according to a relevant *ferman*; moreover the local authorities are reminded of the assistance and facilitation they should offer for the loading of the quantity in question, of the issuing of the relevant *i'lam* and its dispatch to Istanbul along with a sealed sample of the loaded grain (*memhur nümunesiyle*). The document is signed by the *na'ib* of the Istanbul *un kapani*: *el-fakir 'Abdillatif na'ib-i kabban-i dakik*, a man who held this post throughout the period covered by our record. It is obvious that the sealed sample would be used for comparing

23. T15/p. 6/c.

the quantity of grain that would ultimately arrive in Istanbul, so that the mixture of other elements en route could be avoided<sup>24</sup>.

Right afterwards the relevant *i'lam* follows<sup>25</sup>, in the margin of which we read: "It is the *i'lam* for the wheat of Seyyid 'Abdullah Bey". Within its text we learn that the aforementioned quantity of 'Abdullah Bey's wheat was weighed and loaded on the ship along with some trustworthy men of his; furthermore, that the captain stated before the court that he assumed the responsibility for delivering the cargo of the ship over to the official in charge of it in *un kapanı*. The document is signed by the *na'ib* of the *nahiye* of Volos: *el-'abd ed-da'i ed-devlet el-'aliye el-'osmaniye Esseyyid 'Ali el-mola hilafeten be-nahiye-i Golos*. It is worth noting that within a period of just six months (April - September 1791) three persons changed in the post of the *na'ib* of the *nahiye* of Volos.

We have already mentioned that within the text of a *kapan tezkeresi* it is noted that this was issued according to an imperial decree; it is obviously the *ferman* granting the relevant permission. It seems, however, that some of the local authorities did not content themselves with this document (the *kapan tezkeresi*) and asked the captains to produce an imperial decree as well. So, in a *ferman* addressing the *kadis* of Selânik and Yenişehir-i Fenar, the state purchaser of Volos (*Golos mu-baya'acı*), the *kadis* and *na'ibs* of the seaports of Rumili from Tekfürdağ to Mora, as well as the superintendents of the ports (*iskele ümenası*), and the rest of the officials (*sa'ir zabitan*) of these ports<sup>26</sup>, it is strictly emphasized that the ships which show up in Volos or other seaports in order to load cereals to Istanbul do not need have an imperial decree as long as they possess a *kapan tezkeresi*; for the quite complicated procedure of having an imperial decree issued would mean considerable delay in the transportation of cereals. The fact, however, that it is mostly *fermans* than *kapan tezkeresis* that are registered in our record suggests that one felt more secure by holding an imperial order than merely a certificate; this must have been the case both for the merchants or the grain holders in general, and for the local authorities of Volos as well.

On the basis of these reports (*i'lams*) we can estimate that during the

24. See Svoronos, *op.cit.*, p. 74.

25. T15/p. 6/d.

26. T15/p. 50/ a, 1-10 August 1791.

space from April to September of the given year 205.844 keyl of wheat (5.270 tons)<sup>27</sup> were loaded at the port of Volos and sent to Istanbul. Given that our record does not cover an entire year, and that, on the other hand, in all likelihood not all the captains were given an *i'lam*<sup>28</sup> —or at least, not all of the issued *i'lams* were registered— we can reasonably presume that the annual contribution of the port of Volos —that is of the *kazas* which sent their grain surplus to this port— surpassed the 5.270 tons, at least in 1791. We shall come back to this issue.

The overwhelming majority of the captains who loaded grain at the port of Volos at the given time period were Venetians or Venetian subjects (23), two of them were Ottoman Christians, two were French, while one of them was Neapolitan. On the other hand, all of the grain holders were Ottoman Muslims. The wording of the *i'lams* registered in our record is a standard one, indicating that a certain tradition existed in drawing up such documents —and, therefore, in the conduct of this kind of trade: The captain of the ship, which was hired by a grain holder or merchant, appeared before the court and stated that he had loaded a certain quantity of the grain of the certain grain holder or merchant, in order to transfer it to Istanbul and sell it there for covering the needs of the inhabitants of the imperial capital; further that the grain was weighed in a right way and that a reliable man of the grain holder or merchant would go aboard; also that the grain would be carried directly to Istanbul and delivered to the officer in charge of it; finally, he asked for the registration of his statement by the court, for the issuing of a *hüccet* (*kadi* document) to the grain holder, as well as an *i'lam* and its dispatch to Istanbul. That the grain holder needed a *hüccet*, that is a legal receipt, strongly suggests that by sending the mentioned quantity of grain he had fulfilled some duty against the government, and needed to be secure from any future claim related to this duty. Here is an example:

(1) *Seyyid 'Osman Ağa'nın hunta i'lamıdır*

(2) *Der-i devlet-i mekine 'arz-i da'i-i kemineridir ki asitane-i 'aliyede mukim 'ibadullahın tevsi'-i akvat-i yevmiyeleri için (3) getürüb*

27. According to Aynural, *op.cit.*, p. 40, for the sake of uniformity and a common weighing standard for the provisioning of Istanbul the Istanbul kilesi was used, equivalent to about 25, 6 kg.

28. See the imperial order in T15/p. 2/d already commented above in p. 135.

*kabbanda rayiciyle fûruht eylemek üzere Yenişehir-i Fenar sükkanından Seyyid ‘Osman Ağa kullarının (4) tedarik eylediği hıntasını nakl ve isale isticar eylediği Venedik kapudanlarından Madalina kapudan (5) meclis-i şer‘e gelüb şöyle takrir-i kelam ve ta‘bir-i sebep (?) ‘an el-meram eder ki halen Golos iskelesinden Ağa-i muma (6) ileyhin tedarik eylediği hıntadan pak ve temiz ve sahih ül-‘ayar damgahı keyl ile tekyil olunarak (7) yalnız on bin keyl-i istanbuli hınta tamamen tekyil ve işbu süvar olduğum sefineme vaz‘ ve tahmil (8) eyledim sefineme irkâb eylediği mu‘temmed ademiyle terfîkân götürüb doğru kabbanda kabzına me‘mure (9) eda ve teslim eylemek üzere ta‘ahhüd ve iltizam eyledim takririm tescil ve ağa-i mumaileyh yedine (10) bir kıt‘a hüccet-i şer‘iye i‘ta ve der-i devlet-i medare i‘lam ediver deyü ilhah ve iltimas etmeleriyle ol ki (11) vaki‘ ül-haldir paye-i serir-i âlâya i‘lam olundu baki emr hazret-i men leh ül-emrindir (12) hurire fil-yevm el-hamis min şehr-i ramazan el-mübarek li-sene hams ve mietin ve elf*

(13) *El-‘abd ed-da‘i ed-devlet-i ‘aliye el-‘osmaniye*

(14) *Esseyyid ‘Ali el-mola hilafeten be-nahiye-i Golos*<sup>29</sup>

It is the notification (*i‘lam*) for the wheat of Seyyid ‘Osman Ağa.

It is the report (*‘arz*) of the humble well-wisher to the well established house of the state: The Venetian captain Madalina, who has been hired by the slave<sup>30</sup> Seyyid ‘Osman Ağa, an inhabitant of Yenişehir-i Fenar, in order to transport the wheat provided by the latter and bring it (to Istanbul) and sell it in the *kapan* at its current price, so that the daily nourishment of God’s people who stay at the exalted threshold<sup>31</sup> be extended —this captain came to the court of law and expressed his intention speaking in the following manner: “From the wheat provided by the aforementioned ağa from the port of Volos I have weighed entirely only ten thousand Istanbul *keyl* of wheat by measuring it with a pure, clean, standard and stamped *keyl*; then I have had it loaded to this ship of mine which I steer. Accompanied by a reliable man, sent by him aboard on my ship, I undertook the obligation to carry (this quantity of wheat) directly to the *kapan* and deliver it to the officer who is in charge

29. T15/p. 7/d.

30. Probably a Janissary since he bears also the title of an ağa.

31. Scil. Istanbul.

of it there. Please, have my statement registered, give a legal document (*hüccet-i şer'iyе*) to the aforementioned ağa and dispatch an *i'lam* to the central house of the state". Thus he spoke with repeated and importunate requests; that is the actual state of the case. A notification (*i'lam*) was made to the highest throne. I have nothing else to add, since the order belongs to the one who has the right to order. Written on the fifth day of the blessed month Ramadan of the year one thousand two hundred and five.

The well-wishing slave of the exalted Ottoman state,

Esseyid 'Ali, authorized by the chief judge for the sub-district of Volos.

From this *i'lam* we can hardly draw any conclusions about who this Seyyid 'Osman Ağa was, apart from his being an inhabitant of Yenişehir-i Fenar and, of course, a well-off man. For it is quite obvious that only those holding some funds could participate in this sort of trade. In some other *i'lams*, however, it is mentioned explicitly that the man who hired the ship for the transportation of a particular quantity of grain is a merchant: Thus, Halil Ağa and Monla Halil were both merchants, inhabitants of Yenişehir (Yenişehir *sükanından ... nam taciran*), who hired a ship to carry to Istanbul 3.640 *keyl* of wheat the first, and 4.580 *keyl* of wheat the second; it is not mentioned in the *i'lam* from whom they bought these quantities of grain<sup>32</sup>.

There is a series of *i'lams*, however, in which the grain holders who hired a ship to transfer a certain quantity of wheat to Istanbul are described as "eminent, illustrious" and "holders of containers and storehouses" (Yenişehir *eşrafından ve eshab-ı ambarından ...*) from whom it was asked to deliver certain quantities of wheat (*matlub buyurulan hıntadan*): Thus, Nakibzade Elhac Sa'dullah Efendi hired a ship in order to load 7.800 *keyl* of wheat, which constituted his share (*hissesine isabet eden*) in the wheat that was asked from the storehouse holders of Yenişehir<sup>33</sup>. As one can conclude from the table above, most of the grain holders of that year hired a ship themselves in order to carry their share to the *un kapamı* of Istanbul. In one case, however, we learn that

32. T15/p. 5/a.

33. T15/p. 3/a.

the merchant Elhac Ahmed (*tüccar ta'ifesinden*) bought 6.500 *keyl* of wheat from Müftizade 'Ali Monla Efendi, who was a storehouse holder, in order to carry it to Istanbul<sup>34</sup>. Was this the share of the storehouse holder who, instead of hiring himself a ship and carrying it to Istanbul, preferred to sell it to the above mentioned merchant? Or was his share a different one which he sent somehow to Istanbul, and he had another 6.500 *keyl* of wheat left in his storehouses which he sold to this merchant? We cannot know.

From our observations hitherto we can come to the following conclusion: Although the procedure described above looks very much alike with the one followed by the independent merchants engaged in the trade for provisioning the imperial capital, it seems that at this particular space of time the great grain holders of the region of Yenişehir were ordered by the central government to sell their wheat to the *un kapanı*. For this aspect pleads firstly the wording of many *i'lams*<sup>35</sup>; secondly, as already mentioned, the fact that the holder of grain was given a *hüccet* certifying that he delivered a certain quantity of grain and thus securing him from any later arbitrary claims.

Illuminating in this context is an imperial order dated 23 June - 1 July 1791<sup>36</sup> addressing only the *kadi* of Yenişehir. From its content we come to know that it was issued after a petition of the *kadi* Mehmed 'Ataullah, who was then *hububat nazırı* (superintendent of the cereal grains) in the Ottoman capital. In the foreword of the document emphasis is laid on the importance of the issue of provisioning Istanbul with cereals; then the eminent people of Yenişehir (Yenişehir *müte'ayyinan ve eshab-ı 'alakasından*) are asked to deliver 278.500 *keyl* of wheat from the crop of the year 1205 according to each one's share, just like it happened the previous year<sup>37</sup>; then the way in which the grain is to be dispatched is defined: Those among the above mentioned eminent people who are in a position to transfer their share to Istanbul (*der-i 'aliyeme nakla iktidarı olanlar*) should, with the help both of the court (*şer'*) and

34. T 15/p. 7/a.

35. See the table above: *matlub buyurulan, hissesine isabet eden ...*

36. T 15/p. 33/a.

37. Lines 19-20 of the document: *sene-i sabıkta olduğu üzere*, which means that each one's share had been determined the year before, and it would remain the same this year too.

of Esseyid Mehmed Bey who was appointed *sürsat nazır*<sup>38</sup>, load their wheat on an appropriate ship and, under the escort of a reliable man of theirs, send it to the *kabban-i dakik (un kaparı)*, where they should sell it to the bakers (*habbaz*), receiving their money from them in cash; those, however, who are not in a position to dispatch their share to Istanbul on their own (*der-i 'aliyeme nakl iktidan olmayanlar*) should sell it at the current price of the town (*rayıç-i belde*) to Mevlana Esseyid Hüseyin, who was the chief deputy of the descendants of the Prophet in the *kaza* of Yenişehir (*Yenişehir kazasından nakib ül-eşraf kaymakamı olan*), from whom they should then receive their money in cash; then the so gathered grain should be sent to the *kabban-i dakik* with the help both of the court and of Mevlana Esseyid Hüseyin. Furthermore the *kadi* is ordered to cooperate with the *sürsat nazır*; he is also ordered to make sure that the grain sellers are being paid; and finally he should never forget to issue an *i'lam* notifying the captain's name and the quantity of the dispatched grain, so that the purchase of grain to third parties and to infidels could be avoided.

We must underline the fact that the eminent people of Yenişehir who were asked to deliver their wheat to Istanbul are mentioned all by name, a fact which means that some kind of inquiry preceded the issuing of this order. It is evident that the inquiry took place on the spot and was aiming at the registration of those people holding great quantities of grain, apart, of course, from the merchants. Such people could be, for instance, tax farmers, fief holders and administrators of pious foundations. The fact that a state official, the *sürsat nazır*, is involved certainly means that at least in this case we have to do with a compulsory sale of grain at a certain fixed price. That is why the eminent people in question divided the requested quantity of grain in shares according to each one's means.

On the other hand, the involvement of the chief deputy of the de-

38. Lines 21-22: ... *bu defa sürsat nazır ta'yin olunan ... Esseyid Mehmed Bey ... ma'rifetiyle* ... We learn more details about him from another imperial order —T15/p. 35/a, which bears exactly the same date, that is 23 June - 1 July 1791— where he is referred to solely as a superintendent (*nazır*) responsible for the transfer of the grain asked to be delivered by the eminent people of Yenişehir (lines 4-6). In our opinion, it is not quite clear whether Esseyid Mehmed Bey was appointed as *sürsat nazır* for this particular occasion, or if he also undertook this duty besides his mainly acting as a *sürsat nazır*.



scendants of the Prophet in the matter of the provisioning of the Ottoman capital brings to mind the idea that Istanbul was for the Ottomans what were Mecca and Medina for the Muslims in general. Certainly the Ottomans did go on providing for the two sacred towns of Islam, but this they did following a tradition they took over from their predecessors, while the provisioning of Istanbul was something entirely of their own.

At any rate, we now know that the holders of great quantities of wheat in the region of Yenişehir were obliged in 1204 and in 1205—perhaps in earlier years too—to send each certain quantities of wheat for the provisioning of Istanbul. It is most likely that the Ottoman government turned to this solution because the involved independent merchants did not suffice to cover the—probably augmented because of the war—need in wheat: If it was going to burden the peasants with more compulsory purchases of wheat (namely *iştira – mübaya‘a*), it would rather force the grain holders of the region to sell a part of their stores to the *un kapanı*. We are in the middle of a war period, but nowhere in our documents the slightest hint exists that this wheat was destined for the imperial army. The involvement of the *sürsat nazır* does not necessarily mean that the described procedure was *sürsat*, that is “a transaction which formed “an aid” to the army’s provisioning by peasants agreeing to sell certain foodstuffs”<sup>39</sup>; it might well be that this official, who was in the region performing his duties because of the war, was asked to help the *kadi* with this case.

The fact that merchants from the Yenişehir region were now and then involved surely means that even in this sort of strictly supervised, quasi trade enterprise there were some profit margins.

As already mentioned, except for the “private” and “voluntary” involvement in the provisioning of Istanbul, there also existed the compulsory purchase of grain by state purchasers at prices lower than those of the market; of course, this method of provisioning of the capital had direct impact on the peasants. From an imperial decree dated 3 August 1791<sup>40</sup> addressing the *kadi* of Yenişehir, the *Golos mübaya‘acısı*, and the notables of the region, we come to know that this year, and

39. İnalçık Halil – Quataert Donald (eds.), *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, paperback edition 1997, vol. 1, pp. 96-97.

40. T15/p. 56/a.

probably the previous years as well, state purchase of grain took place in the region of Thessaly. According to this decree a state purchaser (*mubaya'acı*), a certain 'Abdürrahman, was installed at the port of Volos; we know that he was not a native of the region, for a few days after this decree another one arrived<sup>41</sup> from which we come to know that the purchaser in question died a natural death and the *kadi* of Yenişehir made out a list (it is called *mikdar defteri*) recording the estate of the deceased which was handed over to the town's *bedestan*; after the wages of the people who assisted him (they are called *bölükbaşılar* and *çokadaran*), his established debts, and the funeral expenses were paid off, the remaining estate of a total value of 4.402,5 *guruş* was deposited in the *bedestan* to be taken over later by a specially appointed agent (*mübaşir*), who should then deliver it to the heirs of the deceased in Istanbul.

The most important piece of information we draw from the order of 3 August 1791 is that the inhabitants of the *kaza* district of Yenişehir looked on the state purchases of grain for the provisioning of Istanbul as a sort of taxes which along with other taxes the notables of the region allocated, according to the practice of the 18th century, among the tax payers of the *kaza*: it is all about the *iştira*, a matter which up to now had quite a fair scholarly treatment. An instance of an unfair allocation of these taxes gave rise to a conflict between the inhabitants of Tirnova, a big village belonging to the *kaza* of Yenişehir, and the notables of this *kaza* who were apparently responsible for this allocation: The inhabitants of this village applied to the imperial council about the following issue. They had in their hands a legal decision (*hüccet*) of Müftizade 'Ömer, the *kadi* of Yenişehir, dated 27 January 1790, according to which the *zimmis* Dimitri veled-i Kalo and Margiriti veled-i Todoraki, acting as representatives of the inhabitants of this village, had stated before Esseyid Ahmed –who was *şehir kethüdası*– and the chief men (*viücuhi ehaliden*) Zeynelabidin Bey and Mehmed Bey the following: Though initially, according to the practice of the region, only 500 *çift* were assigned to Tirnova as their share in the “state purchases” (*mubaya'at-i miriye*), the “war allocations” (*mürettebat-i seferiye*), and the rest of the taxes (...ve sa'ir evamir-i 'aliyemle vand olan tekâliften) in the *kaza* of Yenişehir, some time ago the chief men of the *kaza* assigned them 1002

41. T15/p. 59/b, 21-30 August 1791.

*çift* as their share in the “state purchases”, thus being greatly unfair to them; after repeated conflicts, however, they reached an agreement providing that their village would continue to contribute to the taxes with 500 *çift*, and additionally they would have to pay 2.000 *guruş* annually for the “expenses of the country” (*masarif-i vilayet*). The *hüccet* containing the compromise was registered into the *mevkufat* section of the finance department of the central government, and an imperial decree dated 28 November - 7 December 1790 was issued accordingly. Acting contrary to this decree the aforementioned state purchaser causes them great damage by bringing back into force the previous way of their contributing to the taxes. On this issue the *defterdar* ‘Osman submitted a “marginal note” (*derkenar*) according to which the present order was issued renewing the previous orders, and commanding compliance with the *hüccet* in question, that is the 500 *çift* contribution and the yearly 2.000 *guruş* payment.

It seems quite evident that the state purchaser of Volos, though not a native of the region, at some point of his service there, started playing the game of power correlations of the region, and cooperating with the chief men of the *kaza*, took their part against a mainly Christian village like Tirnova, increasing their share in the tax burdens of the *kaza*. Its Christian inhabitants, however, succeeded in finding justice not only on a local level —*hüccet* of the *kadi*—, but on the central government level as well. If this was an illegal way for a state purchaser to increase his income, that is by being partial in the allocation of the taxes, the legal way was his right to buy grain for himself at the same fixed (low) price that he bought on behalf of the state; the quantity he could thus buy came up to one tenth of the state purchase<sup>42</sup>.

### Conclusions

According to Aynural, in peace times the provisioning of Istanbul depended mostly on the Danube region and the Black Sea coast. At the same time purchases of grain with the *mubaya‘a* system were made in the Mediterranean regions mainly for storing it in state storehouses in Istanbul as a precaution in case of shortage in the winter months. The

42. See Svoronos, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

Mediterranean cereals were generally more long-lasting, and thus suitable for storing, than those from the northern regions.

On the contrary, in war times the grain from the north was earmarked for the provisioning of the imperial army, while the needs of the inhabitants of the imperial capital were covered from the Mediterranean. Indeed, this seems to be the case in all the documents we have examined during the given time in the region of Thessaly. Both in the documents issued by the central government and in those issued by the local judges it is explicitly mentioned that the wheat to be transported is destined for Istanbul. In an exceptional case of an *i'lam* we hear that a certain 'Osman Ağa loaded 8.500 *keyl* of barley on the ship of a French captain; this cargo was part of 100.000 *keyl* of barley asked for from the region of Yenişehir for the provisioning of the imperial army.

The study of the mentioned documents showed that the provisioning of Istanbul with wheat at the given time was made possible both by a kind of a strictly state-controlled trade, and by imposing a sort of taxes called *mubaya'at-i miriye*. While the latter method could be taken for granted in some way, since it was actually a tax imposed on the peasantry, that was not the case with the state-controlled trade. It seems that this kind of trade was so little lucrative, that only a few people would risk to engage in it. Thus, we have seen the Ottoman government, for two consecutive years, issuing orders according to which the grain holders of Yenişehir were forced to sell their wheat to the *un kapani*. Whether this procedure was called *sürsat* or not, it is certain that, in effect, it was a go-and-sell practice. However, in the case of its really being called *sürsat*, it is very interesting that this method of provisioning was not connected, in this instance, with —or only with— the Ottoman army or some fortress, but with —or also with— the inhabitants of Istanbul. Well, of course, one might reasonably say that Istanbul was the Ottoman fortress par excellence, since it carried a major symbolic character.

This situation, namely both the apparent insufficiency of the state purchases and the reluctance of the grain holders to engage voluntarily in the kind of trade that was roughly described above, led the Ottomans to such practices and finally, two years later, to the establishment of the *zahire nezareti* in 1793.

The overwhelming majority of the ships that were hired to carry

wheat from Volos to Istanbul, belonged to Venetian captains, a fact which can undoubtedly be correlated with the war activities of the time. An Ottoman ship, and in particular one loaded with such valuable cargo, was certainly in greater danger than a Venetian one. On the other hand, all the grain holders involved in the provisioning trade in question were Ottoman Muslims.

Judging by the here examined documents of the official bureaucracy –both central and local– we can conclude that in the middle of a war time and a partial lack of state control over the provinces, the system of provisioning Istanbul with cereals seems to have been working to a very great extent. For, at all events, 205.844 *keyl* (or else about 5.270 tons) of wheat were loaded at the port of Volos and sent to the bakers of Istanbul and the table of the Istanbulus. For all the uncontested difficult situation prevailing, the Ottoman government finally succeeded in continuing a long-standing tradition of provisioning the imperial capital, and thus preserving its notion of finance administration and ultimately its image vis-à-vis both its subjects —be it just those of the capital— and itself as well.