

Craft guilds in the Ottoman Empire (c. 1650-1826): A survey

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Abstract

Until recently, historical development of the Ottoman guilds has been explained exclusively with the decline of the Ottoman economy. Some historians have recently rejected this traditional Eurocentric viewpoint and maintained that the historical evolution of these organizations was conditioned primarily by the local conditions and dynamics. In line with the same critical approach, the current article focuses on four major historical developments and argues that the response of the Ottoman guilds to these developments varied considerably from one setting to another, depending on local conditions and dynamics.

1. Introduction

This study is intended to provide an overview of the history of the craft guilds in the Ottoman Empire with special reference to four major developments that affected the evolution of these organizations from the mid-seventeenth century to the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The first one is related to the impact of demographic movements in the aftermath of the “Price Revolution” of the late sixteenth century and the *Celali* rebellions of the same era. The first section attempts to examine the ways in which craft guilds in certain urban centers of the Ottoman Empire responded to the influx of people from the rural areas.

The second development is related to the changing relationship between *ewqaf* (the pious foundations) and craft guilds, a subject that falls in the problematic issue of property rights in the Ottoman Empire. Commercial buildings in which craftsmen practiced their crafts and marketed their products were traditionally attached to the *ewqaf*. However, starting with the eighteenth century, the growing burdens on the state finances due to long-lasting wars led governmental authorities to reassess and revise the traditional policies concerning the *ewqaf*, making in turn the confiscation of *waqf* properties and the seizure of their tax-exempt revenues a usual practice. Accordingly, the second section of the current study attempts to trace the effects of this development upon the structure and workings of craft guilds.

Thirdly, the present article draws attention to the importance of an institutional innovation, namely, *gedik*, a policy that granted to the masters of a particular craft the monopoly right of practicing this craft as well as the usufruct of the equipment located in his workshop. From its inception in the early part of the eighteenth century, the *gedik* ushered in a historical process whereby the members of craft guilds found it more advantageous to practice their crafts as independent craftsmen rather than under the strict surveillance of guilds. Many craftsmen viewed the rights attached to their *gedik* certificates as providing a legitimate ground for adapting to the changing market conditions, which were increasingly becoming unsupported by the traditional dynamics of guild-based organization of production and labor. Where the long-term structural effects of this new practice upon the evolution of craft guilds are concerned, an emergent attitude on the part of the craftsmen during the second half of the eighteenth century merits particular attention. During this period, it appears that many craftsmen began to hold their *gedik* certificates as collateral against credit they received from the merchants, and their failure to pay their debts on time resulted in the sale of these certificates. This development had multiple effects upon craft guilds. On the one hand, after having lost their certificates, master craftsmen sought to practice their crafts outside the area designated for their guilds. On the other hand, the selling of *gedik* certificates enabled people of no artisan background to enter the guilds. Thus the *gedik* not only implied the spatial break-up of the guild system but also significantly affected the hierarchical workings of this system in the long run.

Finally, the current article revisits the question of the janissary involvement in Ottoman craft guilds from the mid-seventeenth century to the abolition of the Janissary Corps in 1826. In this section, a preliminary attempt is undertaken with a view to showing the ways in which the relationship between craft guilds and janissaries evolved in different regions of the Ottoman Empire over the period of nearly two centuries.

2. Some preliminary remarks

At the outset, it is necessary to say a few words about the time limits and geographical coverage of the current study. As far as the time-frame of the this study is concerned, for certain regions of the Ottoman Empire we need to adopt slightly different starting points. For the relevant information about craft guilds becomes frequent enough to allow general

presuppositions with respect to differences in the organization of production and labor at various periods. Accordingly, there are several reasons for choosing the year 1650 as an approximate starting point. First of all, only at around this time does systematic and somewhat complete information about craft guilds in a particular urban setting of the Ottoman Empire (e.g. İstanbul) and detailed original information about similar organizations in certain other cities of the Empire (e.g. Cairo and Damascus), become available. The voluminous travel accounts of Evliya Çelebi, written around 1650s, provide a full description of the craft guilds of İstanbul, and accordingly give us an approximate idea as to the size of the population enrolled in the craft guilds of the capital city (Evliya Çelebi, 1967: 207-336). Secondly, Ottoman social and economic history as a field of research is still living its embryonic stage, and the emphasis of the existing scholarship is placed largely on the well-documented periods and regions of the Ottoman Empire. In this context, the scholarly research on the social and economic history of the Ottoman Empire has concentrated primarily on the post-classical period, that is the period after 1600. During the last few decades, a considerable number of monographs dealing with the macro changes in Ottoman economy during the post-classical era have appeared in Turkish and Western languages, and these studies contain some bits and pieces of information about craft guilds. These findings allow us to draw by comparison and contrast some tentative conclusions as to the workings of the guild system in the Ottoman Empire.

On the other hand, 1826 has been adopted as a concluding date mainly because of its symbolic significance. The date of the abolition of the Janissary Corps marked an important stage in the transformation of the Ottoman Empire from its pre-modern to modern phase since this development heralded the *de jure* beginning of the Tanzimat era. But the actual date adopted does not really matter; much more important is the process this date is supposed to symbolize. As it finds expression in the words of a prominent historian, this was the '[f]irst step towards the break up of old, well entrenched institutions' among which were soon to be included craft guilds, which had been the principal organizations of production and labor throughout the Ottoman territories since the classical age (Lewis, 1968: 99). Once the Janissary Corps were abolished, the Ottoman bureaucracy assumed full control of the state and tried to transform it to a more secular basis (with less control over the social and economic institutions). In this process, craft guilds, most of which had already been dissolved into individual enterprises, not only lost most of their traditional privileges in receiving raw materials and enjoying various government subsidies, especially in the realm of taxation, but also were subjected to the newly crafted reform projects of the Tanzimat regime on

the economic plane. Perhaps more importantly, they suffered a major setback due the fatalistic effects of the commercial treaty signed with Great Britain in Balta Limanı in 1838, a subject well-covered by the contemporary scholarship. This agreement radically revised the existing rates of customs dues on imports and exports in favor of the foreign merchants, and increased the comparative advantage of foreign goods over the domestic manufactures in the Ottoman market to a considerable extent. In the early part of 1860s, the Tanzimat government created the Industrial Reform Commission with a view to reorganizing the craft guilds of the Empire into several major “corporations.” This attempt to revitalize the traditional forms of production and labor had only limited success and the abolition of this commission sealed the fate of the craft guilds as a whole (Yıldırım, 1998).

As far as the geographical coverage of the present study is concerned, due to my linguistic limitations and inaccessibility to certain materials, the study of the Empire’s provinces and cities with regard to the major topics of discussion in this study is necessarily uneven. Apart from certain reflections on the Balkans, the focus of the present article is skewed towards the regions contained within the borders of Modern Turkey and Syria. The capital city of the Empire, İstanbul, receives disproportionate attention due to the richness of the available material. Also the reason for reserving more space for the Balkans among the Ottoman provinces is that a considerable amount of research concerning guild organizations has evolved in this area over the past few decades. Though it was not my intention at the planning stages of this project, the final product, in some ways, offers some comparative insights into the historical development of different regions and societies of the Ottoman Empire.

The study of Ottoman guild history has been traditionally dominated by a state-centric perspective that has subsumed the human side of guilds in favor of their institutional side. Thus the students of Ottoman craft guilds have tended to emphasize the administrative and financial functions of these institutions at the expense of their economic and social functions. Accordingly, they have paid little or no attention to the problems of craftsmen as producers and people. There is no doubt that the denial of an agency to the producing populations of the Ottoman Empire will continue to prolong the difficulties in reconstructing the normal course of Ottoman pre-industrial craft production in particular, and, tracing the economic history of the Ottoman Empire in general (Faroqhi, 1989: 90; İslamoğlu-

İnan, 1987). In the absence of such attempts, there is no way of breaking up the established Orientalist notion of Islamic society with its assumption that the Ottoman social and economic system changed little if at all in the course of centuries, except where European intervention disturbed its functioning. It is now widely believed that only after the complete undoing of this thesis will the Ottoman Empire be given its proper place in world history. It is to this critical tradition that the current study aims to contribute.

Throughout this article the term ‘craft guild’ refers to urban industrial organizations in which manual workers or handicraft production as a whole were organized by the members of the same occupation who provided each other with mutual support. The genesis of craft guilds in Ottoman imperial lands cannot be precisely dated or located. However, it is established that craft guilds, which abode by the above principle, existed with minor or major differences in almost all major towns and cities of the Ottoman Empire around the mid-17th century. But, the evolutionary path these organizations followed individually over the period under consideration has not been traced for any one city of the Empire. Neither has there been any attempt to track down from a comparative perspective the structural changes that craft guilds underwent throughout various regions of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the major questions of research chosen for this project address relatively the most important developments that affected the structures of craft guilds concomitantly in various cities of the Ottoman Empire during the period under consideration. Since the majority of our sources are typically insensitive to local variations and historical changes, the present inquiry is limited to the available literature that provides us with somewhat compatible information in order to draw some preliminary comparisons of these developments in various regions of the Ottoman Empire.

3. The effects of demographic forces on craft guilds in the 17th century

As a ‘world economy’ during the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Empire included in its geographical coverage an area stretching from the Austrian frontiers to the shores of the Caspian Sea throughout which the big commercial centers such as Belgrade, Bursa, Adrianople (Edirne), Cairo, and Aleppo grew at an impressive rate. İstanbul was the largest metropolis in the world between 1560 and 1730 (Murphey, 1990: 115). Cairo and Belgrade slightly differed from each other, and competed with İstanbul in their growth rate. On the other hand, a city like Kayseri, which was the second largest city of Anatolia with a population of 33,000 (not including the tax-exempt persons), was within the same order of

magnitude with Amsterdam, Utrecht and Barcelona (Faroqhi, 1987: 43). At the turn of the seventeenth century, many Ottoman cities were in a process of unprecedented urban growth, a trend that had been set during the period of Süleyman the Lawgiver (1520-1566).

It is now agreed by most students of Ottoman social and economic history that unprecedented developments occurred in the demographic outlook of the Ottoman Empire from the Balkans to the Arab Provinces during the period from the second half of the sixteenth century to the mid-seventeenth century. This demographic transformation was caused as much by a sheer increase in population as by the growing rate of migration to the urban centers. The rural and agrarian nature of the Ottoman society faced the first major challenge posed by this secular trend of population growth, which went hand-in-hand with a wholesale urbanization movement, a process that was simultaneously underway throughout the entirety of the European continent. In the course of this process a whole set of “push” and “pull” factors combined to produce a massive population influx to the Ottoman urban areas. These factors included among others the growing insecurity of the countryside and the ever-increasing pressure of the Ottoman governmental authorities on the tax-paying subjects for further taxes. The increasing volume of remunerations (*Bid'at*) by the provincial officials and local notables (*ayan*) further exacerbated the difficulties in the provinces. Halil İnalcık estimates an average increase of 80 per cent in the urban population of the Ottoman Empire during this period (İnalcık, 1973: 159).

Against this background it is legitimate to ask how these secular trends of population growth and urbanization were mirrored in the character of craft guilds throughout the urban centers of the Ottoman Empire. Did they prop up new trends of expansion and development in the manufacturing sectors in Ottoman urban areas? In what ways did the urbanization process affect the property relations in cities and, accordingly, the presence of crafts and craftsmen in these locations? These are rather general questions, each of which deserves a whole dissertation to cover. In what follows, there is a preliminary attempt to form an agenda towards this direction, which may be used to design micro projects on each of the themes under consideration.

To begin with, it is true that the vast majority of the population in Ottoman cities were craftsmen of one sort or another in the mid-seventeenth century. Carpenters, tailors, weavers, masons, spinners,

shoemakers, tanners, blacksmiths, and bakers filled the towns and cities. However, this assessment should not lead us to conclude that urbanization in its Ottoman context presented the same image as that of its Western European counterpart where the concentration of the urban population in crafts and trades arises as the principal feature. As Suraiya Faroqhi argues for Kayseri; “[Q]uite a few of the townsmen were not craftsmen or merchants at all, but made their living by cultivating gardens, vineyards and even fields. Gardens and vineyards tended to be more profitable in the vicinity of a town” (Faroqhi, 1987: 54). Since there are not many monographs dealing with what Rhoads Murphey calls the “spirit of Ottoman Urbanism,” it is difficult to hypothesize a general argument based on Suraiya Faroqhi’s observations on Kayseri for the entirety of the Ottoman Empire (Murphey, 1990: 128). But, Özer Ergenç’s study of Ankara also shows that agriculture constituted a major source of subsistence for many people in this city during the classical age (Ergenç, 1995: 15-52, 89). Thus, it may be tentatively argued that agricultural pursuits of various sorts were always present in and around Ottoman cities to accommodate the migrant populations into the framework of the urban economy in the seventeenth century Ottoman Empire. Given the scanty nature of statistical information, it is hard to postulate the size of migrant populations and the extent to which these people were accommodated into industrial or agricultural sectors. It may be argued on the basis of impressionistic evidence that this rate varied from one setting to another depending very much on the role of a particular urban economy in the international and local trade. The available sources allow us to establish some tentative parameters to speculate on the nature of change caused by the immigrant populations in various towns and cities of the Ottoman Empire.

Craft guilds in Ottoman urban centers were not as rigidly structured organizations as traditionally assumed. And if there was some degree of rigidity, it certainly changed from one type of craft to another, depending on the size and nature of the capital involved and the links of a particular craft to local and international markets. In this respect, the established crafts such as tanners, shoemakers, saddlers or tailors were probably stricter in their principles than donkey-shavers, plumbers or porters (Mantran, 1962: 367). On the other hand, the crafts such as goldsmiths or silversmiths were traditionally confined to family circles. Therefore the admission of unskilled people to the guilds was contingent primarily upon the specificities of each craft. Thus, in a city like İstanbul, when the newcomers were barred from entering the crafts at their will, they tended to take up jobs, such as vendorship, that demanded no special prerequisites (e.g. capital, skills etc.) (Mantran, 1962: 369). A cursory overview of the published documents points to the growing presence of vendors in the

commercial life of İstanbul in the eighteenth century (İstanbul Ahkam Defterleri, 1997-98). They seem to have concentrated on the selling of silk-clothes and other finished textile products, especially of British patent. On the other hand, a large proportion of the labor force required for the public works, especially during the “architectural campaign” of Sadrazam Damat İbrahim Pasha, was recruited from *amele pazarları* (labor markets) where the majority of the unskilled laborers, consisting primarily of emigrants, were readily available for employment (Aktepe, 1958: 25-32). That still remains a prevalent form of labor recruitment in the construction sector in İstanbul, and many other big cities, for that matter.

As early as the end of the sixteenth century, the improvement in market conditions both at the domestic and international levels brought about a visible expansion of craft production. For example, the number of brocade workshops in İstanbul, which had been officially fixed by the State at 100, increased to 318 in a short period of time (İnalçık, 1973: 158). Starting with the early seventeenth century, certain other developments of a largely administrative nature further enhanced the role of the guilds in the market. The set of rules, called *ihtisab* regulations that had customarily determined, among many other things, the number of shops for each craft, began to lose their traditional assertive role in the market. Mübahat Kütükoğlu’s research reveals that craft guilds commenced to play a more active role in the decision mechanism by which the number of shops was determined during the seventeenth century (Kütükoğlu, 1986: 60). Craft guilds usually decided to open new shops and workshops or close them down according to the vicissitudes of the market. In the former case, the emigrants were probably viewed as less of a challenge by the established craftsmen, and their admissions to craft guilds were couched by the latter. But as in the case of the tinsmiths of İstanbul, the attempt to open more shops than the need of the market was curbed by the masters on the ground of ‘*bais-i ihtilal*’ (attempt to rebel) (Kütükoğlu, 1986: 60). A series of documents published by Ahmed Refik present a good number of similar cases where the Ottoman governments collaborated with the craft guilds in order to eliminate the threats posed to the existence of these institutions (Refik, 1988). As will be discussed in the following pages, the emergence of the *gedik* practice in the capital city around 1727 was originally intended to protect the members of craft guilds against the increasing involvement of unguilted individuals in

crafts. And, thanks to the effective manipulation of governmental support, the craft guilds of İstanbul maintained their primacy in the realm of production and labor in this location for a relatively longer period than other parts of the Ottoman Empire.

Nikolay Todorov, who studied the craft guilds in the Balkan Provinces of the Ottoman Empire on the basis of judicial records, has documented the presence of a large group of unguilded craftsmen in various Bulgarian cities (Todorov, 1983: 118). He explains this situation through the fact that these craftsmen were “artisans who had come from surrounding villages and cities, or had arrived from outside settlements, and by the turn of the sixteenth century they had formed a considerable stratum in the major urban areas of the region” (Todorov, 1983: 119). The members of the craft guilds in Sofia and Ruse never retained an indifferent attitude towards the practitioners of their crafts outside the organization of guilds. In a specific incident, the shoemakers of Ruse petitioned the local state authorities that “several persons alien to the estate” who were not members of any craft-guild were making boots and shoes (Todorov, 1983: 119). In another case, the furriers of Sofia sent representatives to the capital city, İstanbul, in order to report the unguilded activities of “alien” people (Todorov, 1977: III/4). The essence of their complaint focused on the fact that these “alien” craftsmen were buying the skins suitable for processing at a higher rate than usual prices. The same complaint was echoed in the petition of the cap-makers requesting that “all artisans to observe the established order in both the supply of the raw materials and in the production of the goods” (Todorov, 1983: 119). In his study of this region, Peter Sugar argues that the members of craft-guilds adapted to the changing vicissitudes of the market in a different way in the eighteenth century. “The majority of guild members tried to organize themselves both within and outside the guild structure, thereby weakening the guilds even further” (Sugar, 1977: 228). The eventual outcome of these developments was that many crafts, organized formerly in guilds, came to be practiced by artisans of no guild affiliation. The crafts, which were not affected by these developments, were those that produced only for the demands of the Sublime Porte such as the woollen cloth makers of Salonica, who remained the main suppliers of the clothing of the Janissary Corps (Genç, 1994: 59-61). Unlike the craft guilds in İstanbul, the guilds in various Balkan cities failed to manipulate the support of the Ottoman state in order to ward off various threats to their existence (e.g. internal migration, price fluctuations etc.). Although their appeals to İstanbul proved to be inconclusive most of the time, craft guilds in the Balkan towns and cities continued to invite the Ottoman governments to intervene in case of arising problems for the rest of the eighteenth century.

The seventeenth-century Bursa holds a special place in the history of Ottoman craft guilds not only because it is one of the best-documented areas of the Ottoman Empire as far as craft guilds are concerned, but also because this city provides us with a picture where craft guilds coexisted together with other organizations of industrial production, principally the putting-out system. The silk industry, which has traditionally been the chief sector dominated by craft guilds, provided the major arena in which the non-guild individuals including women and children were accommodated into the production sphere in their homes with no direct affiliation with craft guilds. Although it is legitimate to ask whether or not craft guilds in some ways participated in the nexus of putting-out production, the available sources do not permit us to pass any judgements on this issue. A large group of merchants were involved with the organization of the silk production and they also fulfilled the tasks of both hiring the labor and investing the capital. Thanks to the growing domestic and international demand, the silk industry provided an environment where the co-existence of these two forms of production was reconciled during the seventeenth century (Faroqhi, 1989: 117). The economy of Bursa eventually experienced a significant growth rate in this period.

The presence of independent artisans is documented to have been yet another feature of the realm of silk manufacturing in Bursa (Gerber, 1988: 53). Unlike in Sofia and Ruse where the unguilded figures originated from the surrounding villages and towns, in the case of Bursa they came out largely from within the craft guilds in the city. There is no doubt that the relatively stronger position of merchants in the silk industry contributed a great deal to this situation since they were the real media in the supply of raw material to the manufacturers. In most other cities of the Ottoman Empire, notwithstanding whether the city had specialized in the production of a particular item, craft guilds were the only institutions that could purchase from the state agents the pre-determined quantity of 'raw-material' necessary for their crafts. Unlike the silk sector, the leather production which constituted the second great manufacturing sector in the city was almost all organized in craft guilds of tanners in the seventeenth century. The members of the tanner guild in Bursa received their raw materials under the supervision of their guild administrators, and eventually marketed their finished products under the surveillance of their guilds.

A rather similar situation existed in eighteenth-century Aleppo, where the putting-out system in the silk industry thrived thanks to the merchants and was later replaced by the 'factory-system'. The fortune of Aleppo turned sour at the beginning of the eighteenth century when the collapse of rural and small-town production made Aleppo a place "crammed with refugees from an insecure countryside where chances of making a living were extraordinarily slender" (Faroqhi, 1989: 94). But from the second quarter of the eighteenth century, the silk industry was revitalized thanks to the merchants who began to commission their demands to the guild-free artisans. On the other hand, the textile industry of Aleppo, encouraged by the large market demand, employed most of the incoming population as wage-laborers. As Abraham Marcus shows, the majority of the artisans in the textile industry worked on demand, and craft guilds in this sector met only the demands of the internal market in the second half of the eighteenth century (Marcus, 1989: 164-165).

In Damascus, craft guilds also prevailed over the entire domain of industrial production, and prevented the outsiders from penetrating into their realm. Hence the city was the meeting place of the pilgrims, the economic activity was boosted mainly by those craft guilds that produced solely to meet the demands of the pilgrims numbering to thirty thousand a year (Rafeq, 1976: 157). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, craft guilds, especially the ones involved in the textile production, faced the competition of various foreign goods such as British textiles. But as the city has been closed to the outsiders for religious reasons, e.g. its location to Mecca, the only threat to the city's stable economic life during the late seventeenth and eighteenth century came from the members of local janissary garrison, which will be discussed below. The coming of British textiles, which challenged the predominant role of the craft guilds in the late eighteenth century, was mediated largely by merchants and peddlers, who tailed to the Hajj caravans. As Abdul-Karim Rafeq argues, the local Christians who visited Europe also participated in the importation of foreign goods, principally textiles (Rafeq, 1976: 158). The massive flow of British textile imports in the Levant began somewhere around the mid-eighteenth century, until then craft guilds, which were involved in production for long-distance commerce throughout the Ottoman cities and towns, continued to dominate the realm of textile production in this area.

4. The relationship between *ewqaf* and craft guilds

The second major development that struck a major blow upon the primacy of craft guilds in the realm of production took place in the nexus of property relations. Commercial buildings in the Ottoman urban areas, such as *bedestans* and *çarşıs*, where the majority of the craftsmen

practiced their crafts and marketed their products belonged traditionally to the *ewqaf*. Therefore even the slightest change in the policies of the Ottoman governments concerning these institutions had a major bearing upon craft guilds. Many studies have emphasized the pivotal role of the *ewqaf* in the social and economic life of Ottoman cities. But the relations of these institutions with craft guilds have not attracted the attention of Ottoman specialists. In one of the most comprehensive studies on the Ottoman *ewqaf*, John Barnes has discussed the historical development of these institutions in relation to *tariqas*, mosques and the Janissary Corps, but he has treated the economic functions of these institutions only in passing notes.

The *ewqaf* were created in the towns and cities of the Ottoman Empire from early on by the Sultans, their mothers and high ranking state officials. These institutions being financially as well as administratively autonomous were responsible for the construction of the cultural and commercial complexes in the conquered cities (İnalçık, 1973: 142-143). Among the types of commercial buildings were *bedestans*. As was the case with Jerusalem, the construction or renovation of a *bedestan* became a salient feature of Ottomanization of the conquered city (Cohen, 1989: 6-8). Having built a *bedestan* with the coerced labor recruited from local populations, the Ottoman conquerors would build shops around the outside of the central *bedestan*. Each group of shops, branching out and lining both sides of a road, would form a single market to be occupied by the members of a single craft or by merchants selling the same type of goods (İnalçık, 1973: 142-143). In most of the Ottoman towns and cities in the Balkans such as Tatar Pazarcık, Plovdiv, Sarejova, Sofia, Skopje, Manastir, Serres and Salonica, trade centers grew around the *bedestans*. So, indeed, as İnalçık puts it; “apart from political formative elements of the Ottoman Islamic city, the main urban zones including the *bedestan-çarşı* or central market place were brought into existence under the *waqf-ımare*t system” (İnalçık, 1990: 9) The shops and other spaces occupied by the crafts and trades in the city would be attached to the *ewqaf*, which would demand in return a certain amount of rent from craftsmen and traders. These rents provided the basis of a *waqf*'s income, which would be spent in addition to certain philanthropic goals in the maintenance of these commercial buildings.

Around the mid-seventeenth century, the Ottoman state officials as well as the local notables growingly began to use the *ewqaf* for the

realization of their mundane projects. As the taxation policy of the Ottoman state was geared toward financing long-lasting wars, many irregular taxes, in time, were turned into regular taxes. In evasion of these taxes, the officials and notables began to invest their fortunes in the establishment of commercial buildings (*musaqqafat*) such as bazaars, shops, baths, depots, workshops, bakeries, and mills in the name of a *waqf*, which secured for them and their heirs a steady source of income. They also launched a campaign to take over, via tax-farming and other methods, the governance of existing buildings that were of a commercial nature and which had seized to generate any revenues to be used in financing certain social services.

On the other hand, the same period saw the growing tendency on the part of the state authorities to turn in the collection of state revenues to the tax-farmers (*mültezim*). The method of tax-farming became more appealing when the Ottoman military machinery proved to be inefficient vis-à-vis its rivals by the long-lasting wars (Cezar, 1986: 71-73). The urgent cash needs to finance these wars and to upgrade the Ottoman army resulted in the extension of tax-farming to the remote sources of Ottoman budgetary. In this new fiscal scheme, even the administration of commercial buildings that were attached to the *ewqaf* of the Ottoman Sultans, Mother Sultanas and state officials was gradually rented out to highest bidders at auctions. Where further sources were needed, one of the harshest policies of the Ottoman state, namely confiscation (*müsadere*) was there to assist the governmental authorities. Yavuz Cezar has shown that confiscation became an established practice during the eighteenth century, especially in its last quarter, by means of which the inheritance of the wealthy individuals, officials and private alike, was seized by the governments with a view to be turned to revenue-generating units (Cezar, 1986: 110-111). Cezar cautions us not to overstate the role of this practice, but it may be hypothesized that it contributed, if only to a certain extent, to bringing down the revenues of many commercial buildings under the control of the tax-farming class. Thus, the rental regime, to which each craft guild located in a *bedestan* was traditionally subjected to, was transformed to a new basis whereby the rents, which had traditionally been determined by the current-market rates, became subjected to the will of the tax-farmers.

The effects of these developments on the members of craft guilds who practiced their crafts in these commercial buildings were wide and varied. The master-craftsmen and other shopkeepers in the formerly *waqf*-held buildings found that their contracts, namely *muqata'a* and *ijarateyn*, signed with the trustees of the *ewqaf*, were deemed void and subject to new regulations. The craftsmen were also confronted with the ever-growing pressure of the tax-farmers for extra fees. The combined effects of these

developments resulted in craftsmen abandoning their shops. This meant actually a serious drawback as far as the spatial unity of craft guilds, provided by the idea of *bedestan* or *çarşı*, was concerned. The resistance of the craftsmen against the tax-farmers took the form of appealing to custom and *shari'a*, Islamic law. At the very beginning of the nineteenth century, in the face of ever-growing pressure from the tax-farmers, the representatives of craft-guilds filed a complaint petition to the *Divan-ı Humayun*. The master-craftsmen showed their *gedik* documents as their proof of ownership of the tools and equipment located in their workshops, and argued that this new development could devastate not only their lives but disrupt the economic life of the Empire as a whole. A decree was issued to prevent the tax-farmers from interfering in the affairs of craftsmen and other shopkeepers (Akarlı, 1986: 226-227).

5. The policy of *gedik*: A means for protecting craft guilds

In addition to the developments recounted above, there was yet another source of problem for the craftsmen that persisted since the late sixteenth century, namely the increasing number of unskilled individuals practicing clandestinely the crafts traditionally confined to the members of craft guilds. During the eighteenth century these complaints became even more pronounced in the Ottoman documents. In these documents, all craftsmen from tailors to silk spinners appealed to the *Divan-ı Humayun* for help in “eradicating the enemies of order” (BOA/Cevdet İktisat 955, 991). As a response to the increasing tendency on the part of the non-guild individuals to penetrate into their realm, the members of craft guilds developed, in cooperation with the governmental authorities, the policy of *gedik* whereby the master-craftsmen registered their tools and equipment in their names with the *kethüda* (steward) of their craft-guilds, who was the coordinator of the relations of the craft guilds with the government (Akarlı, 1986: 225). The importance of this policy consists in its confirmation of the monopoly right of master craftsmen over the production of a particular item, or their role in the production process of a certain item. The ideal formula was intended to fix and stabilize the number of master craftsmen specialized in the production of a particular item (Ergin, 1922: 656). From its introduction to the economic life of İstanbul in 1727-28, the *gedik* licence, given to the master-craftsmen with the endorsement of the local judge, was transferable from father to son. The workshops or the shops where the tools and equipment were located

and where the craftsman practiced his trade were left outside the sphere of the individual rights covered by the *gedik* licence. In other words, the *ewqaf*, either run by private administrators (*mütevelli*) or tax-farmers (*mültezim*), continued to be the sole agencies entitled to the rental revenues of commercial buildings. The master-craftsmen who were authorized to receive *gedik*-licences were given, only by implication, the usufruct of breaches in the traditionally designated area of their guilds in order to carry out their activities. But, once a master claimed the actual ownership of the implements, he was automatically emancipated from the spatial restrictions of the guild system, and was enabled to move his craft to wherever spot was most convenient. This development I think, played the most crucial role in dissolution of craft guilds in İstanbul, by breaking the traditional spatial unity of craft production in the long-run.

The *gedikization* of craft guilds was not a process unique to İstanbul during the eighteenth century. As we learn from Abraham Marcus, craft guilds in Aleppo resorted to the same practice in order to secure a monopolizing position over the production process by 1750 (Marcus, 1989: 178-179). Unlike İstanbul, the term *gedik* was used only to imply “the right to practice a certain trade or craft in a particular shop or establishment,” whereas for “the right to use tools and equipment” the people preferred to use the common term of *taqwima* (Marcus, 1989: 178). In practice, when people were transferring their *gedik*-licences, both rights were transferred to the prospective craftsman. The transfer issue emerges as a significant problem in this context. Although the conditions under which the transfer procedure during the early period were to be carried out have not been sufficiently documented for either İstanbul and Aleppo, there is some evidence showing that the inheritance from father to son was initially the only way of transference of *gedik* in both cities. Within craft guilds, the restrictions on promotion such as a certain duration of time to work as journeyman hampered the advancement of skilled journeymen, while the subordination of these figures within the guild hierarchy was sustained by the fact that when a vacancy opened up, the immediate relatives of a master would be the first to be considered for this position. Nikolay Todorov, who points to the important role the *gedik* came to play in the economic life of the Balkan provinces, mentions that this way of transfer was the predominant practice in this region during the eighteenth century. The author does not provide any more different information than what we know for the cases discussed above (Todorov, 1983: 114).

Why is the issue of *gedik* so important? As this document provided the individual craftsman with more room for manoeuvre, including the right to practice his craft wherever he wanted, this annulled the traditional principle that the members of a craft guild had to exercise their crafts in

the same location, in the same *bedestan*. The opening of single shops and workshops outside the working-area of a craft, or practicing crafts at home, for that matter, which existed as a trend in cities like Bursa, became a widespread practice in İstanbul in the eighteenth century. To curb this tendency, craft guilds often appealed to the government for the opening of workshop and shop blocs. As a response to such a petition by the shoe makers guild of Üsküdar, a new shopping area was designated and opening shops outside this area was prohibited (BOA/Cevdet Belediyeye 52). But the main problem that heralded the process of dissolution of the craft guild began when the members of craft guilds began to use their *gediks* as collateral against the loans they took from the merchants. As Akarlı shows in his article, the failure of the master-craftsman's payment of his loans resulted in the selling of his implements at an auction to the highest bidder (Akarlı, 1986: 226). This would mean the entrance of an outsider to the craft guild either as a journeyman who had not been promoted due the limited number of *gediks* in a craft guild or somebody who had no experience or training as an apprentice or journeyman. Similar situation would occur when the members of a deceased master-craftsman's family would inherit his *gedik* and sell it to unrelated individuals. Despite these problems, the *gedik* continued to exist as a major mechanism for designating the monopoly right of a master to a certain craft until the mid-nineteenth century. But, by then, the majority of the master craftsmen had already used the rights attached to their documents to assume full independence and as we showed in the section on *waqf*, the changes in the policy of the central government on *waqf* had already caused them to set up their workshops in areas where they pursued their crafts with no obligation to any other party but themselves alone.

6. Janissary involvement in Ottoman craft guilds

To many contemporaries, the deformation of the Janissary Corps through the marriage of janissaries and their integration to civic life and so on seemed to be a crucial factor in the social, economic and political decadence of the Ottoman Empire since this development actually meant the weakening of one of the pillars on which the Ottoman State rested. It was due to this particular development that the military institutions of the state began to be filled with the people of *reaya* origin, who were considered inferior and had never been allowed to enter before into the military ranks.

At the beginning of the 17th century craft activities, and accordingly craft guilds, was one of the areas of civic life to which the janissaries were compelled to infiltrate. The reason for that was very much related to the fact that they were not entitled to any kind of income when they were married and preferred to live outside their barracks. The following lines from Halil İnalçık should be taken as the starting point for any discussion of the janissary factor in the history of craft guilds (İnalçık, 1973: 158-159):

“The entrance of *kapıkulu* troops [janissaries] into the town-guilds was another factor in the decline of the Ottoman guild system. Their military privileges freed them from the control of the *muhtesib* and *kadı*, enabling them to alter the guild structure to their own advantage. They frequently ignored the officially fixed market price, lowered quality, and opened shops wherever they wished, without first receiving a master’s certificate. They frequently forced established masters to take them into partnership and divide the profits, and worst of all their large scale profiteering in raw materials went unpunished. All these factors played a major part in the deterioration of the traditional guild-structure and the decline of the Ottoman crafts in general”.

In the seventeenth century, the only city of the Ottoman Empire where the janissaries are documented to have been involved extensively in the crafts was the capital city, İstanbul (Mantran, 1962: 393). Osman Nuri has reprinted several documents showing extensive presence of the janissaries in the industrial life of the city during the eighteenth century (Ergin, 1922: 617-625). In fact there is abundant historical evidence to confirm the view that janissaries forced themselves into the craft sectors of İstanbul. After all İstanbul was the place where the janissaries had been continuously in close touch with craft guilds due to their role as *zabitas* in controlling and checking their activities. In this context, I would like to put forward two hypotheses to be tested. Firstly, it may be argued that there was an intrinsic relationship between the ‘army-tax’ (certain number of craftsmen to be supplied by each craft guild to the army) that craft guilds had to supply and the welcoming of the janissaries by craft guilds. In other words, craft guilds might have accepted the janissaries on the condition that they would be the ones to participate as craftsmen in military campaigns (Ergin, 1922: 631). Secondly, it is also feasible as an argument that the established master-craftsmen of a craft guild allowed the entrance of the janissaries to their guilds simply to provide protective services against the outsiders (*hamdestler*). It is known that after the seventeenth century, many janissaries began to organize themselves in local units with the participation of native recruits, who were called *yerliyya*. And the function of these institutions was only social and political. The major question, on the other hand, is to what extent this phenomenon can be said to have characterized the other urban centers of the Empire. In places like Cairo, Damascus, Salonica, Aleppo and even Sofia, where the large janissary

garrisons were built during the classical age, the above developments probably occurred during the same period or later. These two tentative arguments await further research in order to be discarded or validated.

Although there is very little information as to the craft activities of the janissaries in the above cities for the seventeenth century, we know much about the social and political functions of janissaries during the post-classical era. In cities like Cairo and Damascus, the role of janissaries was not so much in the practice of crafts than in the exploitation of the craftsmen and merchants. Andre Raymond, who relates the declining role of Cairo in international trade to these activities of Janissaries points to their increasing number in craft guilds in the eighteenth century (Raymond, 1974: 149-156). Pascual traces the beginning of janissary entrepreneurship in the economic life of Damascus to the 1630s (Pascual, 1984). By that time, a large number of janissaries appeared as the owners of warehouses and mills as well as being active traders and speculators. On the other hand, Rafeq's research not only confirms Pascual's findings but also adds a new dimension to it in that the janissaries had achieved not only monopolistic urban wealth but had extended their influence to the countryside as well (Rafeq, 1975: 302-307). The most interesting aspect of Janissary activities in the Damascane economic life as well as in Aleppo was their concentration in craft guilds such that of the butchers and other food-related crafts. In Damascus, the craft guild of the butchers and other food-related craft guilds dominated the central quarter of the city through which the pilgrims passed their way to the Holy cities (Rafeq, 1975: 304). It is clear that the Janissaries had occupied only certain guilds in Damascus and Aleppo. As their role as protectors of the wealthy and the local *eshraf* came first, their involvement with crafts seems to have been only to reinforce their political position.

In sum, it can be said that the janissary involvement in the crafts and craft-guilds took various forms throughout Ottoman towns and cities. In the capital city, the janissaries seem to have been involved with crafts early on and they also appear as the leaders of several major revolts (1730 and 1807) in which they managed to draw some of the journeymen to their side (Olson, 1976; Olson, 1978; Cevdet Paşa, 1302-1309/1884-1892). In Damascus and Aleppo, the janissaries, from the beginning, were compelled to the food-related crafts, and eventually craft guilds of that sort came exclusively under the dominance of the janissaries. In Cairo, the janissaries were politically very active and the reign of Mehmed Ali

marked their total elimination. The year 1826 marked the abolition of the janissary corps in the Ottoman Empire. Given this active involvement of the janissaries in various aspects of urban life including crafts and craft guilds, the impact of the abolition of this institution in 1826 should be reconsidered to reassess the historical development of such manufacturing centers as İstanbul, Damascus and Aleppo.

7. Conclusion

The history of craft guilds from the seventeenth century to the third decade of the nineteenth century remains uncertain for the most part. Given the limited scholarly interest in the topic, and the absence of relevant archival material such as the private records of craft guilds, it is rather difficult to overcome this uncertainty and attempt to reconstruct the 'normal' course of pre-industrial craft activities. The current paper dwelt on four major developments that combined to affect the evolution of craft guilds from the mid-seventeenth century to the early part of the nineteenth century. We outlined the nature of that impact in a generalized model that is meant to serve as a background for the more detailed account of historical change that was experienced by the Ottoman craft guilds. Carlo Poni has made the argument for the craft guilds in Bologna that "according to the types of tools, raw materials, techniques, different movements of the body and the hands, different ways of buying and selling, each trade and craft had different traditions, social practices, a different identity and status in society, and a different culture of work" (Poni, 1989: 80-81). Perhaps similarly, each and every craft guild in the Ottoman cities followed an evolutionary pattern of its own since each craft and trade assumed a different identity and culture of work. In this respect, each craft guild probably had a different response to demographic changes, and adopted a different attitude towards the state when the latter seized to secure a viable environment for their existence, for example by modifying its traditional policies in the realm of charity.

Scholars are studying vigorously the social and economic history of the Ottoman Empire during the post-classical era. The ways in which civic organizations such as craft guilds were affected by the changing international and local conditions will hopefully be more illuminated in the years to come. Our preliminary treatment of various areas of the Ottoman Empire shows that the response of local craft guilds to various developments was in some ways determined by the nature of local economic and regional conditions. For example, the Bursa silk industry absorbed the incoming populations through the hands of merchants who sought to expand or change industrial production to suit market

requirements and to increase profits. They accordingly employed the emigrants in the realm of the putting-out system. Although this constituted a challenge to the very existence of the craft guilds in this sector, they seem not to have been drastically affected by this development, something conjured up by the favorable market conditions. On the other hand, craft guilds in Sofia encountered a rather skilled group of emigrants who immediately opened up shops and commenced practicing crafts such as shoe-making. The complaints from the guilds remained ineffectual and the single artisanal workshops became the dominant form of production throughout most of the Bulgarian cities of the Empire in the eighteenth century. The patterns observed in the craft guilds of Aleppo, Damascus, Salonica and especially İstanbul also differ significantly from each other. The same assumption holds true for the other developments treated in the subsequent sections.

In brief, in the age of European expansion, Ottoman society was functioning along the lines of its own dynamics but, at the same time, was influenced by forces that had begun to invade its markets. The institution of the craft guild is only one example of the kind of responses that were devised in the face of the threat posed by these forces. Due to the lack of historical documentation, our discussion could not be extended to include the changes taking place within the structure of craft guilds. But a thorough analysis is bound to show that the dislocations in the power relations between the members of craft guilds and between craft guilds and the other elements of the Ottoman State and society were also commonplace within craft guilds. In that respect, the romanticized view of guilds as agencies of social solidarity and craft-honor, which is the prevalent norm among the specialists of “guild studies”, should be replaced by a more realistic and documentable categories of scholarly research.

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Özet

Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda esnaf loncaları (c. 1650-1826): Bir yazın taraması

Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda üretimin örgütlendiği temel birimler olan loncaların tarihsel gelişmesi, son zamanlara kadar Osmanlı ekonomisinin geçirdiği dönüşümle açıklanmaya çalışılmış ve bu kurumların onaltıncı yüzyıl sonundan itibaren kesintisiz bir çöküş süreci yaşadıkları görüşü yaygın kabul görmüştür. Son dönemde bazı tarihçiler, loncaların gelişimini Avrupa eksenli bir bakış açısıyla açıklamak yerine yerel şartları ve dinamikleri göz önüne alarak bu kurumların gelişiminin tek bir çizgi izlemeyip bölgeden bölgeye hatta şehirden şehire farklılıklar gösterdiğini ortaya koymuşlardır. Bu makale benzeri bir bakış açısıyla loncaların tarihine yön vermiş dört ana gelişmeyi ele alarak, loncaların bu gelişmelere verdikleri tepkilerin yerel şartlara bağlı olarak ciddi farklılıklar gösterdiğini tartışmaktadır.