

EFTHYMIOS MACHAIRAS is a historian of the Ottoman Empire with a focus on the insular and maritime worlds of the Eastern Mediterranean. He is currently a postdoctoral research fellow at the Institute of Historical Research of the National Hellenic Research Foundation, where he contributes to the project *A Digital Historical Atlas of Greek Micronesia*, and at the Badisches Landesmuseum Karlsruhe, as part of the research initiative *Archaeology in the Ottoman Aegean: Consuls – Culture – Commerce*. He received his PhD from the University of Crete with a dissertation on the economic and social history of Patmos and its surrounding insular environment. Dr. Machairas’ broader research interests include the history of Greek communities under Ottoman rule, the history of rebellion in the Ottoman Empire, Ottoman archaeology, monastic history and economy, Mediterranean history, and maritime history.

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Efthymios Machairas

Following the Money
A Prosopography of Rodoslu El-Hac Ahmed Ağa
through his Commercial Ventures

Not much is known about the life and times of Hacı Ahmed Ağa of Rhodes, better known on the island for founding his *vakf* library on the upper quarter of the fortified old town¹. His son Ahmed Fethi Paşa is comparatively quite famous. A prominent Ottoman politician, who married a daughter of Mahmud II and served as an ambassador in Vienna and Paris², he appears to be much more connected to the Sultan’s court than his father who was executed³ on the road to Yafa in 1800, while acting as Kaftan Ağası, the leader of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina⁴. However, as I will prove in this chapter, appearances are in this case deceitful. Hafız Ahmed Ağa was not only, as his numerous titles attest to, a man of the Sultan who had him executed, as was the fate of many a powerful Ottoman official, but also a provincial notable and businessman, with an economic strategy congruent of what we know about the Mediterranean maritime trade in the 19th century⁵.

The first clue towards our stated end is the list of titles he bore throughout his life. Hafız Ahmed rose to the rank of *Rikabdar*, i.e the Sultan’s stirrup holder, and the secretary (*yazıcı*) of the *Divan-i Hümayün*, which both attest to his proximity to the center of imperial power⁶. Again not much is known on how he climbed the Ottoman hierarchy, the title of *ağa* suggests involvement in the

1 I beseech the readers to visit the websites of the *vakf*, www.fethipasavakfi.com and www.hafizahmedaga.com. For the catalogue and information on the *vakf* Hafız Ahmed and Fethi Paşa see, Bekir Şahin, Faruk Ağartan (eds.), *Rodos Fethi Paşa Vakfı Hafız Ahmed Ağa Kütüphanesi yazma eserler kataloğu*, T.C Başbakanlık Türk İşbirliği ve Kalkınma İdaresi Başkanlığı Tika, Konya 2010.

2 İbid, p. VII-VIII.

3 While the documents pertaining to Hafız Ahmed Ağas execution are quite nebulous at best, we can be reasonably certain that he was executed on his way back from the Pilgrimage. All the registers used for this article begin with a variation of “*Kaftan Ağalığı ile Hac-i Şerif avdetinde fevt olan Rodoslu Ahmed Ağa...*”. While this does not prove much by itself, the documents used by İbrahim Akkurt in his chapter mention his planned execution and the need to sell off his personal items after his death. This practice is congruent with what we know of *siyaseten katl* and *müsadere* (execution and confiscation) *procedures* in the Ottoman State. The register compiling his personal items that were sold to third parties following his death can also be found in the Ottoman Archive of Istanbul. See BOA.CML.387/158 for the aforementioned register, and BOA.D.BŞM.ZMT.d.13927 for an example of the phrase denoting Hafız Ahmed Ağa’s death on the way back from the Pilgrimage. For *siyaseten katl*, Ali İrfan Kaya, “Siyaseten Katl ve Müsadere Uygulamalarında II. Süleyman Dönemi (1687-1691) Örneği”, Ordu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Araştırmaları Dergisi, Vol. 8 2018, pp. 1 - 8.

4 İbid, and, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi İstanbul (BOA.), EV.HMH.d.6905. “*Haftan ağalığı ile canib-i Hicaz’e ve dar-i Yafa’ya irtihal eden Rodosî El Hac Ahmed Ağanın...*”

5 Elena Frangkakis Syrret, “Greek Merchantile Activities in the Eastern Mediterranean 1780-1820”, in, Elena Frangkakis Syrret (ed.), *Trade and Money, The Ottoman Economy in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, The Isis Press 2010, pp. 307-320, and Gelina Harlaftis, *A History of Greek Owned Shipping, The Making of an International Tramp Fleet 1830 to The Present Day*, Routledge 2005, pp. 2-37.

6 As above, Bekir Şahin, Faruk Ağartan (eds.), *Rodos Fethi Paşa Vakfı Hafız Ahmed Ağa Kütüphanesi...*, p. VII.

janissary corps⁷. Though, given the wider context of the late 18th century Ottoman Empire, he was evidently not a *devşirme* convert⁸. Even more so since his father's name is known as Hasan Ağa⁹. He entered the upper echelons of the Empire's political structure under a patronage network that his father had access to. Indeed his enrollment in the *enderun*, the imperial palace school, seems to be the product of such a connection. However, to the best of my abilities I did not manage to locate any traces of his father's activities.

In spite of this hurdle, it is obvious that Hafız Ahmed Ağa was well situated in many such networks. This is testified by the many pieces of documentation regarding his affairs kept in the Ottoman Archives of the Presidency in Istanbul. We are lucky enough that later in his life his activities were important enough to leave a bureaucratic trail, and that in death, he was wealthy enough for his legacy to continue on in the form of an estate with many and numerous recipients.

Elena Frangkakis Syrett, well known for her work about the economy of Izmir in the 18th and 19th centuries, once told me that what made her work about Izmir stand out was her ability to follow the money¹⁰. It is precisely this methodology that I will use for this chapter as well. Hafız Ahmed Ağa was a man of many ventures, of both commercial and political nature. Even more befitting, much of his business activity seems to be situated in Izmir at the time of the city's rise as one of the most important Mediterranean port-cities¹¹. As such, it is my firm belief that "following the money", that is deciphering and connecting the many clues that are left about Hafız Ahmed Ağa's economic life, is the most efficacious manner in which his life and works will come to the fore. Aiding in this quest, are the numerous defters compiled after his death, containing detailed lists of his various pieces of property and tax farms (*mukatas* or *iltizams*), as well as scattered documents about his governmental and mercantile activities¹². Combining the two sources will paint a picture of an Aegean maritime merchant, who used his position in the Ottoman government to enhance and deepen his abilities to accrue and accumulate capital. The registers I am referring to were not compiled by mistake. Rather, they were a product of what we must assume was the process of the Ottoman State, confiscating and auctioning off his property after his execution¹³. A piece of information that might in itself provide some idea on why he was executed in the first place. Putting this matter aside for now, we shall try

to put his life in perspective, by starting off with his most important source of income, the tax farms he leased from the Ottoman State.

In total Hafız Ahmed Ağa seems to have had shares in, or held in their totality, 11 tax farms¹⁴. This concerned the taxes of the region of Anatolikos¹⁵, better known for the capsizing of some of the Ottoman fleet on its shores during the battle of Lepanto¹⁶. Moving north he benefited from half the farming of the taxes on wax candles in Izmir and its dependencies. Held a share in the *iltizam* for cotton in Gelibolu and Istanbul, while holding half the tax farm for the dues of old Istanbul, meaning the customs due of the Dardanelles¹⁷.

The rest of his tax farms seem to be situated in what is modern day Bulgaria, starting with Dupnica, where he farmed half of the taxes of the town and the villages surrounding it. More importantly, at the time of his death he held ½ and ⅓ of the tax farm on the *ağnam resmi*, the sheep tax of Filibe and Pravadi (modern day Plovdiv and Provadia) respectively¹⁸. Through other documents we can also surmise that at least at times he also benefited from farming the taxes on tobacco from the same area¹⁹. The important element here is that both Provadia and Plovdiv have historically served as customs checkpoints and market towns, meaning that they acted as commercial outlets for both the products coming into them from the countryside, as well as for merchants who plied their trade along the balkan trade routes²⁰. Provadia, after all, was the largest Balkan outlet of Ragusan trade and held a very significant colony of Dubrovnik merchants, which had even formed as an organisation with legal presence²¹. In other words, Hafız Ahmed took care to purchase tax farms at strategic locations which allowed him to maximise his profit on the specific item or items that were included in his tax farm.

Further, to the Bulgarian north and along today's borders with Serbia, Hafız Ahmed held the tax farm for the salinas of Lom, Berkovitsa, Chiprovitsi and Montana²². The last three towns were rich in minerals, with no direct access to the Sea, hence these salinas were in actuality salt mines. The salt extracted from those towns ended up in their port on the Danube, Lom, to find its way to the market. Salt was one of the most important monopolies of the Ottoman State, and made up a sizable piece of

7 For the evolution of the Janissary corps, see Cemal Kafadar's Thesis, Cemal Kafadar, "Yeniçeri-Esnaf Relations: Solidarity and Conflict", M.A Thesis, McGill University, 1981 and also the article by Cemal Kafadar, "Janissaries and Other Riffraff of Ottoman Istanbul, Rebels Without a Cause?", International Journal of Turkish Studies, Vol. 13 2007, pp. 113-134.

8 See Cemal Kafadar, "Yeniçeri-Esnaf Relations: Solidarity and Conflict", M.A Thesis, McGill University, 1981.

9 As above, Bekir Şahin, Faruk Ağartan (eds.), *Rodos Fethi Paşa Vakfı Hafız Ahmed Ağa Kütüphanesi...*, p. VII. In the aforementioned catalogue Hafız Ahmed's father is stated to be Mehmed Ağa. However my esteemed colleague, İbrahim Akkurt, see his chapter in the book you are holding, makes the case that Hafız Ahmed father was Hasan Ağa, based on his tombstone in the Murat Reis Cemetery in Rhodes and the inscription on the water fountain of the Library.

10 See, Elena Frangkakis Syrett, *The Commerce of Smyrna in the Eighteenth Century (1700-1820)*, Akhens 1992.

11 BOA, EV.HMH.d.6905, which is the register of his properties compiled after his death by the State clearly puts the brunt of his immovable properties in Izmir. For Izmir see, Elena Frangkakis Syrett, *The Commerce of Smyrna...*, pp. 23-41.

12 For the *iltizam* system see, Linda T. Darling, *Revenue-raising and Legitimacy: Tax Collection and Finance Administration in the Ottoman Empire, 1560-1660*, Brill 1996.

13 Tüncay Ögün, "Müsadere", İslam Ansiklopedisi, Vol. 32, TDV, İstanbul 2006, pp. 67-68.

14 BOA.ML.VRD.d. 5114 and BOA. D.BŞM.d.6659.

15 Ibid.

16 İdris Bostan, "Fetvanın Osmanlı Yönetimi ve Toplum Üzerindeki Etkisi: Ebussuûd Efendi'nin Kıbrıs ve İnebahtı Fetvaları", Tarih Dergisi, Vol. 76 2022, p. 46.

17 BOA.ML.VRD.d. 5114 and BOA. D.BŞM.d.6659.

18 Ibid.

19 BOA.AE.SSLM.III.210/12446.

20 For Ottoman Plovdiv see Grigor Boykov, *Ottoman Plovdiv: Space, Architecture and Population (14th-17th Centuries)*, Austrian Academy of Sciences 2024, pp. 73-75, also see, Halil Inalcık and Donald Quataert (eds.), *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, Vol. 1, 1300-1600*, Cambridge University Press 1997, pp.264, 457. For Provadia, İbrahim Etem Çakır, "XVIII Yüzyılın Ortalarında Pravadi Kazası", in Zafer Gölen, Abidin Temizler (eds.), *Balkan Tarihi*, Vol.1 2015 , pp. 125-141.

21 Zlatar Zdenko, *Dubrovnik's merchants and capital in the Ottoman Empire 1520-1620. A quantitative study*, Isis Press 2010, pp. 135-138.

22 Machiel Kiel, "Berkofça", İslam Ansiklopedisi, Vol. 5, TDV 1992, pp. 510-511 and Yonca Köksal, Davut Erkan, *Sadrazam Kıbrıslı Mehmet Emin Paşa'nın Rumeli teftişi*, Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınevi 2007, pp. 240-244.

its budget²³. Consequently, being a tax farmer on the dues of salt is not only very profitable, but also a politically important position, being the mediator of one of the most important items between the central state and the periphery.

Before moving forward, we should note here that the proceeds of these tax farms belonged to pious foundations of Mecca and Medina. This would explain the reason that some of the *evkaf* properties of Hafız Ahmed seem to be devoted to the Damat Ibrahim Paşa pious foundation²⁴. The pious foundation of Ibrahim Paşa and his wife Fatma Sultan was a part of the pious foundations of the Two Holy Cities, the *Evkaf-i Haremeyn*²⁵. It would then stand to reason if in return for being granted the tax farm of the aforementioned salt mines Hafız Ahmed undertook to expand the holdings of the *Evkaf-i Haremeyn*, given how important they were for its incomes. Namely Hafız Ahmed seemed to have devoted one soap workshop, one slaughterhouse, one scale for the measurement of olive oil and one han, all in the city of İzmir, to pious foundation of the Two Holy Cities, through the Ibrahim Paşa Foundation, essentially repaying the aforementioned institution, albeit in the long run, for granting him its salt mine tax farms. In retrospect, Hafız Ahmed's position as leader of the *Hac* (*kaftan ağası*), might be connected to his standing with the *vakfs* of Mecca and Medina.

On a more interesting note, all of Hafız Ahmed's salina tax farms were directly connected to the Danube via Lom. This is probably not a coincidence. A portion of the salt mined or gathered along the same river, ended up in the salt storage of the *Fethülislam* fortress, modern day Kladovo, which also guarded its banks²⁶. There, according to the registers at our disposal, Hafız Ahmed owned fish farms²⁷. This raises the possibility that along with his salt tax-farming activities, Ahmed Ağa ran a salted fish business. In fact, Hafız Ahmed's tax farm in Anatolikos can also be identified as a fish farm, strengthening the argument. Istanbul's *esnaf* and working folks seems to have constituted the prime market for such a venture, since salted fish constituted a long lasting and mostly cheap protein source. This orientation towards the market of the Ottoman capital seems to be complementary to Hafız Ahmed's other commercial efforts, as we shall see below.

Finally, the subject of our investigation held tax farms for the ports of three towns on the Black Sea, Balcık, Karaharman and Kavarna allowing him to benefit from their customs dues²⁸. However,

it is arguable that farming the taxes of port towns along the maritime trade routes of both the Dardanelles and the Black Sea was a means to an end, rather than the objective itself. This piece of evidence should be evaluated within the larger context of Hafız Ahmed Ağa's economic strategy and commercial ventures.

On top of being a prolific tax farmer Hafız Ahmed Ağa seems to have been involved in the provisioning of Istanbul with cereal²⁹. A license from 1795 shows Hafız Ahmed purchasing cereals, “with his own capital”, from Yafa which are to be shipped and sold directly to Istanbul and sold at the current price the State has set for the provisioners of the city³⁰. Moreover, he seems to be a business partner of Fırtına Ahmed Reis, a local shipowner from Rhodes who our sources show to be active on the trade route between Rhodes, Egypt and Istanbul³¹. One top of that, Hafız Ahmed Ağa, Fırtına Ahmed, and the former governor of Kos, Kapudan Paşa and finally Grand Vizier, Cezayirli Hasan all

29 For the provisioning of the Ottoman capital see, Candan Türkkan, *Feeding Istanbul: The Political Economy of Urban Provisioning*, Brill 2021, also Lynne Marie Thornton Sasmazer, *Provisioning Istanbul: Bread Production, Power, and Political Ideology in the Ottoman Empire, 1789-1807*, Indiana University 2000.

30 BOA.C.BLD.28/1367. “Sabıka Rikabdar-i Şehriyari Rodosı Ahmed Ağa kulları sair tüccar misillü kendi sermayesiyle Yafa iskelesinden kırk bin kile / hinta iştira ve doğru Asitane-i Saadet'e gönderüb sairleri misillü fiyatla anbar-i amireye bey' ve ita etmek şartıyla sairlere / buyurulduğu gibi kendüye dahi emr-i ali inayet buyurulmuşunu taraf-i çakerinden istida etmekle nefis-i [ink blot] miri ve tüccar marifetiyle / Asitane-i Saadet'e külliyetlü zahire celbi matlum ve meram ve bu hususun itmamı bi'l taharri ve al tahkik rabt ve tensik olunan şurut ve kuyud nizama müraat ve ihtimam ile husulpezir olacağı ve areste-kayd ifham olmakdan naşı ol havalıdan miri / ve tüccar ve ashab-i sefain ve iktidar marifetiyle iştira ve Asitane-i Saadete celbine ikdam ve itina olunacak zehaire dair / mukaddem ve muahhar sadır olan ahkam-i müñife ve o emrin şurut ve kuyud ve nizamına sairleri misillü mumaileyh tarafından dahi / riayet ve miri ve tüccar mübayaatına halel ve tahayyür ve Yafa bazarına kesret üzere nüzul edecek zehaire mevacic / ilel ve taksir olmamak halatına ziyade dikkat ve celbine taleb olduğu kırk bin kile hinta pak ve münkah olmak ve kaç kita / sefine isticar eder ise mikdar-i hamulesi vezni ve kapudanı isim ve şehrini taraf-i kullarına ihbar ve defterindekiye bad-el sebt çakerinden / takdım olunan takrir mücebince her bir kita sefine için başka emr-i ali ısdar ve ol emr-i şerifle Yafa iskelesine tesyar olunub / iskele-i merkumdan iştira ve sefaine tahmiline dair şurut ve kuyud ve nizamı havı mukaddem ve muahhar sadır olan emr-i ali muccebince sair / tüccar misillü Yafa İskelesinden rayiciyle mübayaa eylediği hinta-i münkaha her bir sefineye tahmil olundukda Yafa kadısı tarafından sefinenin / kapdanı isim ve şehrini ve hamulesinin mikdar ve gemini zahr-i emr-i alışana ilam ve hüccet ve Yafa'da zehairi mübaşırı ve mübayaacı-i hacedandan / seyyid Mehmed Reşidi efendi tarafından dahi bir kita' bu vechle irsaliye tezkeresi itasına mübaderet olunmak ve sefayin-i merkumenin / hamulesinden bir kilesi hilal rahda adalara ihraç ve berati ve müstemin sefinelerine nakl ve furiht olunmayub doğru Asitane-i Saadete / anbar-i amireye teslim ve emr-i şerif-i merkume kabzını müşar anbar emini ilam ve sairlere virildiği fiyat üzere mevkufatdan / hesap ve mevkufat bendeganeyle akçesi zahire sermayesinden tamamen ita ve emr-i şerif-i merkum ve irsaliye tezkeresi mevkufatda hıfz / olunmak ve kırk bin kile huntanın tekmlinde kaç kita' sefaine tahmil olunmuş ise keزالık Yafa kazısı sicillatından her bir sefinenin mikdar-i hamulesini ve kapudanının isim ve şehrini tarihleriyle ihraç ve işbu emr-i alinin zahırına ilam ve huccet ve mübayaacı-i mümaileyh / dahi defterinden kayıplarını ihraç ve tarihleriyle bu surutda irsaliye tezkeresi ita edüb cümlesinden sonra tahmil olunan / sefine ile işbu emr-i ali ve irsaliyesi tezkeresi geliüb kullarına teslim ve defterindekiye tatbık ve kaydı balasına şerh virüb / kalemine irsal ve hıfz ve emr-i şerifin kaydı terkin olunmak şartıyla Yafa kazısı ve zahire mübaşırı ve mübayaacı hacedandan / seyyid Mehmed Reşidi efendi ve Yafa gümrükçüsü Ebu-Bakr efendi kullarına hitaben bir kita emr-i ali ısdarı babında emr ü ferman hazret-minlehülemrindir”.

31 BOA.C.İKTS.13/638 and BOA.C.BH.243/11264.

23 Mehmet Demirtaş, “Osmanlı Devletinde Tuz Üretimi ve Dağıtımı”, Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi, Vol. 3 2004, pp. 23-28.

24 For the *vakf* of İbrahim Paşa and its relation to the *Evkaf-i Muharemayn* see, İsmail Bekci, Ali Apalı and Nilüfer Karataş, “Evkaf-i Haremeyn Muhasebeciliğinde Damad İbrahim Paşa Evkafı”, Muhasebe ve Denetime Bakış, Vol. 15 2015, pp. 11-32.

25 Tufan Buzpınar, Mustafa Küçükbaşı, “Haremeyn”, İslam Ansiklopedisi, Vol. 16 1997, pp. 153 - 157.

26 Filiz Yıldırım, “15-16. Yüzyıllarda Tuna Havzasında Tuzlalar Ve Tuz Hukuku”, Turkish Studies - International Periodical For The Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turcic, Vol. 9 2014, pp. 1172-1174.

27 BOA, EV.HMH.d.6905. “...Müteveffa-i muma ileyhın hali üzerinde olunduğu Sultan Mahmud Han Gazi evkafından Fethülislam'da vaki nehir-i Tuna'da dalyan malı nısf hissesi... Müteveffa-i muma ileyh hal-i hayatında halilesi Saliha kadına furiht eylemiştir Sultan Mahmud Han Gazi evkafından Fethülislam'da vaki nehir-i Tuna'da dalyan malı nısf hissesi...”.

28 BOA.ML.VRD.d. 5114 and BOA. D.BŞM.d.6659. “...Mukataa-i hasha-i Kavarna ve tevabi emaneten idare ile ber vech-i tahmilat hasılatı..., Mukataa-i İskele-i Balçık-i muharremi-i bedel-i iltizamı..., Mukataa-i İskele-i Karaharman-i muharremi idare ile hasılatı...”. For the *kaza* of Balçık see, Machiel Kiel, “Balçık”, İslam Ansiklopedisi, Vol. EK-1, TDV 2020, pp. 165 - 167.

held in tandem one three mast ship’s shares³². We will return to this association between the former Sadrazam and Kapudan Paşa Ahmed Paşa and the main character of our article at a later point. For now it is enough to stress his involvement in Ottoman shipping and maritime trade.

Indeed according to another defter compiled after Hafız Ahmed Ağa’s death he seems to have had half the shares of a ship called “Mühürdar” held alongside someone called Tekfur Naima Ali Mehmed and captained by a cretan, Hüseyin Avelonakis³³. It is within this context that we should interpret his investment into the tax farms of the Black Sea and the Dardanelles. In fact, Hafız Ahmed Ağa owned three çiftliks near the Black Sea port town of Kavarna, and another eight çiftliks in today’s Eastern Thrace, in the area around Çorlu³⁴. Given his activities and participation in the provisioning of Istanbul, we can assume that he would use his ships to import and sell cereals from his own çiftliks in and around the Black Sea, to the Ottoman capital. Moreover, from the same defter we learn that Hafız Ahmed owned rice fields in Plovdiv³⁵, which was one of the main rice suppliers of Istanbul³⁶. It would stand to reason if the rice he grew in the area also ended up in the Capital. What Hafız Ahmed seemed to pursue more than just turning a profit from his tax farms was control. In purchasing the mukatas of the aforementioned portside towns, he could exert greater influence upon the hubs from which his wares were shipped. The same can be said about his share in the custom dues of the Dardanelles. Not only would it allow him to ship cotton from Gelibolu to Istanbul cheaply, but it would also allow him access into the Ottoman capital’s market from his activities in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Based on how the *iltizam* system worked, we can theorise that the agents who would have sub-leased the tax collection from Hafız Ahmed, would have acted as his men on the ground when it came to looking after and conducting whatever business was necessary for his shipments. Even more importantly, Hafız Ahmed Ağa, as the ultimate tax collector, could evade the tax for the goods he was exporting, or at the very least regain it through the income of *iltizam*.

In short, the picture that emerges depicts a businessman who operates along two main geographical axes. The first is the trade route that runs along the Danube and encompasses Hafız Ahmed Ağa’s salina tax farms, his fish farms upon Fethülislam, to finally flow into his çiftliks and port tax farms along the Black Sea. The second, we shall see, stretches from the Levant, to Rhodes and then Izmir. Both end in the sizable market of Istanbul. What we can say for sure then is that

32 BOA.AE.SSLM.III.157/9431. “*Sadîr-ü Sabık Hasan Paşanın Fırtına El Hac Ahmed kapudan ile münasafeten bir kita’ kalyon keزالık kapudan-i merkum ile süvarisi reis ve Kapıcıbaşı Rodoslu / Ahmed Ağa ile rub’ - rub’ olarak bir kita üç direkli sefine hisseleri olub sefineyn-i mezkûründen zıkr olunan kalyonun nısıf hissesini on bin / guruşa ve uç direkli sefinenin rub hissesini dahi üç bin beş yüz müşteri merkûm Hacı Ahmed kapudan iştiraya taleb ve mebalîğ-i merkûmenin nısıfını ber vech-i beşlik eda ve nısıf-i ahirini dahi ba-avne-i sübhane tala’ abd-i şerîfeden teslim eylemek üzere iştirasına taleb ve râğib etdüğü / malum devletleri buyuruldukda ber minval-i meşruh kapudan-i mumaileyh fûruhtu ve bahasının mevacib-i kesirine murad için tertibi muvaffık irade-i aliye ise / emr-ü ferman devletlü saadetlü sultanım hazretlerindir*”

33 BOA.D.BŞM.ZMT.d.13927. “...*Mühürdar sefinenin nısıf hissesi mutasarrıfı Tekfur Naima Ali Mehmed kapudanın zemini...*”

34 BOA, EV.HMH.d.6905.

35 Ibid.

36 Aleksadar Shopov, “Cities of rice: risiculture and environmental change in the Early Modern Ottoman Balkans”, *Levant: The Journal of the Council for British Research in the Levant*, Vol. 51 2019, pp. 169-183.

Hafız Ahmed Ağa seems to be profiting and utilising the same economic trends, trade routes, and strategies his christian-islander compatriots are using. He is a shipowner who deals in the bustling Mediterranean and Black Sea cereal trade of the late 18th and 19th centuries. Simultaneously, he invests his money in tax collection, much like the Greek shipowning notables of the Archipelago which was his place of origin, albeit at a much grander scale, afforded by his place in the Ottoman hierarchy. More importantly though, he seems much like them, to be following the trade routes and the money to Izmir.

According to our registers, most of Hafız Ahmed Ağa’s properties, *vakf* or privately owned, were situated in Izmir³⁷. In total he either owned fully or held portions in twelve houses in the various non muslim quarters of the city, two hans, one hamam and one slaughterhouse³⁸. More vital to our synthesis however, are the two soap making workshops and one olive oil mill he held. The largest of what seems to be two soap workshops was turned into a *vakf* with part of the income being funneled for the upkeep of his library in Rhodes³⁹.

Izmir was one of the primary hubs of the Mediterranean olive oil and soap trades in the 19th century. Riding on the wave of market demand created by the French, competing industries began to emerge in the Ottoman empire in places such as Chios, Crete and Izmir, creating a huge demand for olive oil to be processed in *sabunhanes* and then shipped out to be sold in the internal Ottoman market or Europe⁴⁰. Hafız Ahmed seems to have adapted to the soap manufacturing trade, benefiting from olive oil shipped to Izmir from all over the empire, by building two soap manufacturing workshops on an important hub, upon a trade route he was already active on. Being a mid way point between the Black Sea, Istanbul and Rhodes, we can summarize that Izmir served as a primary port for his commercial endeavours, given the emerging importance of soap trade in the long 18th century⁴¹.

It goes without saying then that Hafız Ahmed Ağa follows the model of what we historically considered to be the Mediterranean merchant. Following market trends and demand, diversifying his investment into several trades, while also dispersing his property and tax farms geographically in order to truly create a solid capital base and protect himself from market fluctuations. Though this strategy did not evidently protect him from the Sultan’s execution order, we should note that perhaps the Ottoman State did recognise what seems to be his knowledge of maritime affairs.

Selim III’s efforts to renew the Ottoman fleet have been well studied in contemporary literature. During his reign more than 40 new ships were built and the existing fleet was outfitted with state of the art maritime technology imported from France and England⁴². Hafız Ahmed seems to have been part of that process as well. In 1799 his tax farm on the wax candles of Izmir and its dependencies was

37 BOA, EV.HMH.d.6905.

38 Ibid.

39 BOA.EV.HMH.d.6905.

40 As above, Elena Frangakis Syrett, *The Commerce of Smyrna ...*, Akhens 1992, pp. 120.

41 Ibid.

42 Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New The Ottoman Empire Under Selim III (1789-1807)*, Harvard University Press 1971, pp. 150-166.

charged with submitting the necessary funds for the provision of materials for the Ottoman Navy⁴³. Although, we do not know how involved Hafiz Ahmed was in this process, given his proximity to the Sultan it probably was no mere coincidence. Two possibilities emerge.

Since Hafiz Ahmed Ağa was invested in shipping, it would not be out of place to suggest that he was given a stewardship role in the construction of the new Ottoman fleet. This would be congruent with what seems to be his son's appointment as *nazir*, overseer, of the building of a sloop on behalf of the Imperial Arsenal in 1816/7⁴⁴, during the reign of Mahmud II, implying a sort of family specialization. More than likely, the timing, just one year before Hafiz Ahmed's execution, seems to denote a first attempt from the Ottoman State to seize some of his assets. To investigate his removal from power though we first have to explore Hafiz Ahmed's ties to the Harem.

In the same year which saw the seizing of Hafiz Ahmed's Izmir tax farm incomes for the benefit of the Imperial Arsenal, he seems to have been appointed as executor of the estate of the late Ümm-Gülsüm Sultan, daughter of Zahide and Abdülhamid I⁴⁵. This seems to suggest a measure of proximity to Abdulhamid's family and consequently the Harem. More importantly in 1790 Hafiz Ahmed purchased some of his properties in Izmir which initially belonged to Turgudlu's voyvoda, Halil Ağa, before being confiscated. However, these pieces of property were ultimately linked to the Valide Sultana's estate and it is from the Queen Mother's *kethuda* that Hafiz Ahmed purchases them.

Indeed, a connection with Abdulhamid's I household would fit the overall pattern of Hafiz Ahmed's life. Hafiz Ahmed was closely connected to the Grand Admiralty and Cezayirli Hasan Paşa with whom he co-owned shares in the aforementioned three masted ship. Moreover, in a temporal sense his prominence in historical records aligns with the period coinciding with the naval reforms led by the very same Ottoman official, who must have acknowledged Hafiz Ahmed's expertise in this field as an islander and shipowner engaged in Mediterranean trade⁴⁶. This aligns with the fact that Cezayirli Hasan Paşa was a key figure in Abdülhamid's inner circle, as he had essentially thwarted an earlier coup to replace him with Selim⁴⁷. This would tie Hafiz Ahmed, through his association with his patron, Gazi Hasan Paşa, with Abdulhamid's inner circle and family. It would stand to reason then that his fate was connected to their rise and fall from power.

Küçük Hüseyin Paşa was serving as the Kapudan Paşa at the time of Hafiz Ahmed Ağa's execution. He was a childhood friend of Selim III and ultimately the person that replaced Cezayirli Gazi Hasan Paşa⁴⁸, with whom Selim III did not see eye to eye due to the former's association with Abdülhamid I. This flow of events brings to the fore two distinct but clashing possibilities. The simplest of the two would be that with Cezayirli Hasan Paşa disfavorably appointed as kazaşker of Rumelia⁴⁹, his supporters in the imperial center were no longer protected. This would mean that the new Grand

43 BOA.AE.SSLM.III.31/1778.

44 BOA.D.BŞM.d.8327.

45 BOA.HAT.267/15512.

46 For the role of the arsenal of Rhodes in the renovation of the Ottoman Fleet see, Tuncay Zorlu, *Innovation and Empire in Turkey : Sultan Selim III and the Modernisation of the Ottoman Navy*, I.B Tauris 2011, pp. 23, 55.

47 As above, Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New...*, p. 14.

48 As above, Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New...*, p. 88.

49 Mahir Aydın, "Cezayirli Gazi Hasan Paşa", *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 7,TDV 1993, p. 501-503.

Admiral sooner or later moved in to dispatch Gazi Hasan Paşa's followers and replace them with his own, thus bringing an end to Hafiz Ahmed's rise and life. If this is indeed the case, then Hafiz Ahmed would have been able to enlist his ties with the Harem to his favour. His superior Küçük Hüseyin was married to one of the daughters of Abdulhamid I⁵⁰. Thus, he would have been able to nullify, by virtue of his position and power, whatever connection Hafiz Ahmed had with this part of the former Sultan's family. This would also explain why a complaint, albeit failed, was launched against him by one of Abdülhamid's daughters in order to effectively remove him from his position of executor of the estate of Ümm-Gülsüm Sultan⁵¹.

Alternatively, it might have been Napoleon who was the catalyst of the events to come. At the time of the French invasion of Egypt, Küçük Hüseyin seems to be spearheading, along with the Chief Eunuch, the faction which lobbied for the war to end and relations with France to be restored⁵². Should Hafiz Ahmed's relations with the New Kapudan Paşa not have been adversarial, it would be reasonable to assume that Hafiz Ahmed Ağa's fortunes would have been tied to this group. The argument is strengthened by accounting Ahmed Ağa's shipping activities, which were more than likely disturbed due to war. Afterall, the olive oil and soap trades were largely dependent on the French market. Perhaps then, the French invasion of Egypt and Syria might have been the catalyst for his execution. The outbreak of the war meant that the political tide was rising against the pro French party of the court. Inversely, the position of the pro Russian and English faction was enhanced⁵³. It would not be out of the realm of possibility that the latter might have struck out to weaken their enemies' positions by taking out some of their agents and relocating their wealth. If that was the case though, it is arguable that Hafiz Ahmed had taken measures to mitigate the damage that would have been dealt to his fortune and family.

Hafiz Ahmed Ağa's *müferidat* register contains forty nine entries referring to pieces of immovable property⁵⁴. Nine of those properties were turned into *vakfs* and sold by means of *icareteyn*⁵⁵ to women in Izmir⁵⁶. We must assume that those women were wealthy widows of Izmir, doing business with *vakf* real estate property⁵⁷. His holdings contained in this particular defter that were turned into *vakf* reach twenty out of the said forty nine properties⁵⁸. The Ottoman State must have had little incentive to confiscate *vakfs* that had been sold as *icareteyn* to third persons, specifically the five women that appear as Hafiz Ahmed Ağa's clients. His family then continued benefiting from a part of the incomes of these properties, as managers of his pious foundation after his death. More importantly,

50 As above, Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New...*, pp. 87-88.

51 BOA.HAT.267/15512

52 As above, Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New...*, p. 374.

53 As above, Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New...*, pp. 367 - 377.

54 BOA, EV.HMH.d.6905.

55 For the practice of selling through *icareteyn*, Ahmet Akgündüz, "İcareteyn", *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 21, TDV 2000, pp. 389 -391.

56 BOA, EV.HMH.d.6905.

57 For a case study in the business practices of Ottoman Women see, Işık Tamdoğan, *Les modalités de l'urbanité dans une ville ottomane : les habitants d'Adana au XVIIIe siècle d'après les registres des cadis*, unpublished Doctoral Thesis, EHESS, Paris 1988.

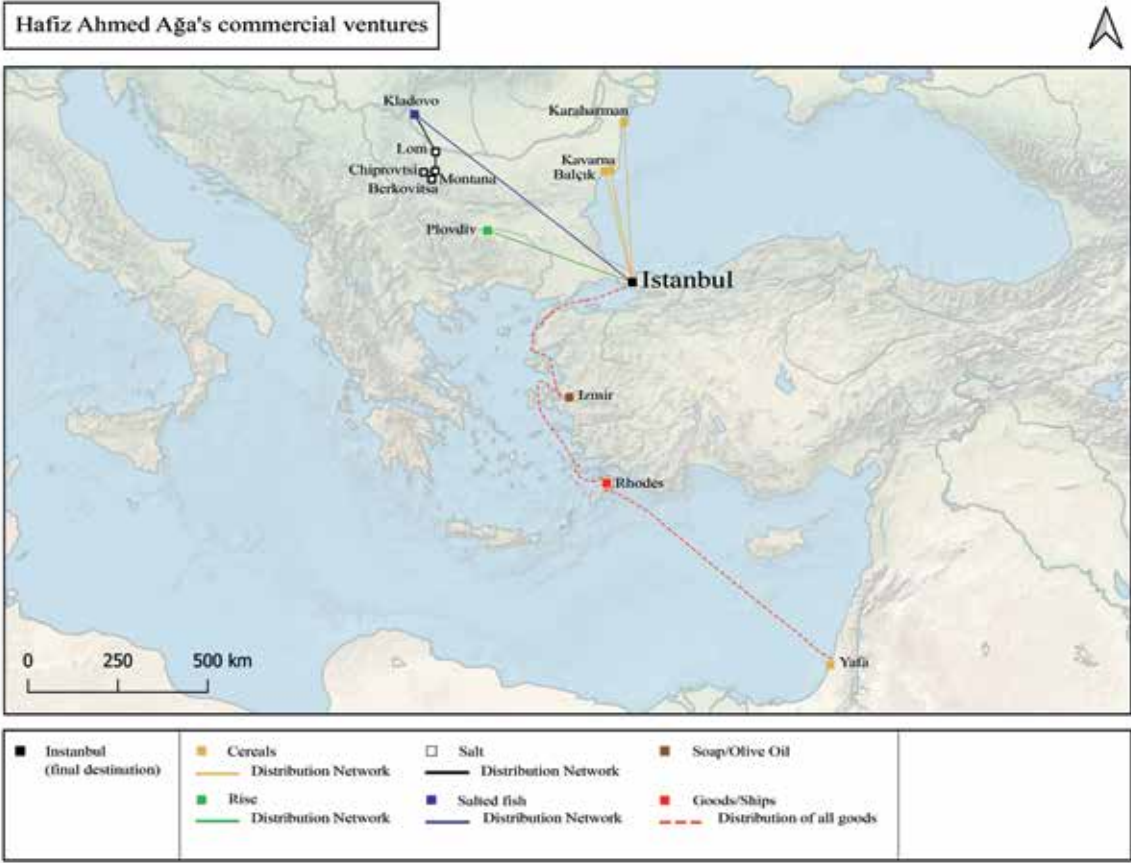
58 BOA, EV.HMH.d.6905

eight out of the forty nine properties he sold, in what were probably mock sales to his wife Saliha and daughter Ayşe⁵⁹. It is interesting that most of those properties he bequeathed, in this manner to his female relatives, are his çiftliks⁶⁰. This was done more than probably as a means to provide his wife and daughter with a stable source of income, either by directly exploiting the land and its produce or by renting it out. We can also theorise here that these properties were also protected from confiscation, since at least on paper they did not belong to him anymore. As such we can theorise that more than half of his fortune in landed properties survived the confiscation process and continued benefiting his *vakf* or his family. Such practices were overall common in the Ottoman Empire, as it has been shown time and time again that high officials did not create pious foundations out of their good will alone but also to protect their legacy and fortune in case they were executed and their personal property confiscated, which was a fate all too common in the Ottoman court⁶¹.

To conclude, we can theorise with a fair bit of certainty that Hafız Ahmed Ağa was not just an Ottoman high official, content by merely profiting from his high station in Istanbul and his proximity to the Sultan's court. Even though it is indisputable that it was this very position that afforded him the opportunity to benefit as heavily as he did from the tax farm system, his shares of *iltizams* and *mukatas* seem to serve a dual purpose. Not only were they carefully selected sources of income, but also served to strategically enhance his commercial reach, network and capital, as shipowner and maritime merchant along the Black Sea-Istanbul-Izmir and finally Rhodes trade route. His tax farms of the *iskeles* of the ports of Balçı, Kavarna and Karaharman allowed him greater control and perhaps a way to lessen the effects of taxation on his shipments from the çiftliks of the same region, his holdings in Plovdiv and along the Danube. The same can be said about his custom dues tax farm in the Dardanelles, allowing him control and cheap access to Istanbul from the South. His investment into buying up several properties and building soap workshops, olive oil mills and other commercial infrastructure properties in Izmir, set him up with a base of operations in strategic Ottoman port town which was only then emerging but which would be come to be central in the soap, olive and cereal trade of the Mediterranean. These dynamics are cemented by his capacity as ship owner. Tracing the network of his economic activities, as well as the traces of his pious works we are also able to place him along the cadre of the Ottoman Grand Admiralty, which seems to be a position even his son profited from, and perhaps sketch his possible ties to the Ottoman harem.

In short, Hafız Ahmed Ağa seems to fit the model of an Aegean shipowner and maritime merchant. He follows the market trends and diversifies his investments both geographically and in kind while ensuring that those investments bolster his already existing activities. At the same time his pious foundations provided him with social capital in the locals where his property was concentrated. Finally through the very same *vakfs* he apparently managed to salvage some of his fortune when he was executed on Selim's orders, while at the same time protecting the livelihood

of his wife and daughter by mock-selling to them important income producing pieces of property. It is not so ironic then that despite his apparent death at the hands of his executioner and the confiscation of his tax farms and some of his properties, his economic strategy and *vakf* all but assured his legacy. After all it's no mere coincidence that one obscure Greek historian at the start of his career has elected to investigate Hafız Ahmed's life and work in the piece he wrote for the book you are holding.



One final aspect that emerges when looking into Hafız Ahmed's life, is the role of Muslim shipping in Mediterranean maritime trade. Long has Ottoman and Greek historiography been chained to the chariot of interpreting economic maritime activities as being solely a Greek - Christian affair. The case of Hafız Ahmed Ağa illustrates the role of muslims and the merchant fleet of Rhodes, which should by no means be diminutive. More specifically, what seems to emerge is a picture where Ottoman high officials who we do not often think of as merchants or ship owners, like the Kapudan Paşa, seem to be heavily engaged not only in the economy of the provisioning of Istanbul but also Mediterranean trade as we know it. To be clear further research is required if we are to elucidate the role of muslim officials, Rhodian shipowners, captains and merchants in the wider Ottoman and Mediterranean context. However, the case of Hafız Ahmed Ağa and his associates clearly shows that this might be a worthy cause.

59 Ibid. "Halilesi Saliha ve kerimesi Ayşe hatunlara fûruht..." Ayse his daughter, was probably named after Hafız Ahmed's mother, also Ayşe Hatun. In the very same defter she appears co-funding some of her son's works in Izmir. The water fountain bearing her name is also mentioned as "Asitane'de çeşme-i ma lezziz".

60 Ibid.

61 For the subject of the legal status of vakf see the monumental study of Ahmet Akgündüz, *İslam Hukukunda ve Osmanlı Tatbikatında Vakıf Müessesesi*, Osmanlı Araştırmaları Vakfı Yayınları, 2013.

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