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**An Island Skilled in Sponge Hunting “Symi”(1786 -1909)<sup>1</sup>**

**Sünger Avcılığında Mahir Bir Ada “Sömbeki” (1786 -1909)**

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## Abstract

Sponge hunting was undertaken in the Mediterranean and of the Aegean Sea (the Sea of Islands), Anatolia, Benghazi, Crete, Isporas Islands, Kalymnosis, Cyprus, Lesbos, Egypt, Meis, Tripoli, Symi, Chios, Samos, on the Syrian coasts. The first records of the Ottoman Empire about sponge diving show that sponge fishermen were mostly non-Muslims. The original homeland of the sponge in these lands was the shallow waters surrounding Crete, Rhodes, Cyprus and the western shores of Anatolia. In this study we mainly focus on, the use and problem of the machine, which was called “Skafender- Denayrouze-Supiray”, a new technique for sponge diving on the island of Symi, where sponge diving was widespread in Ottoman territorial waters, and the sponge tax and the surroundings of the Dodecanese, which the Ottomans stated as sponge diving areas, and the economic structure of sponge collecting in the wide Mediterranean waters extending to Africa. Due to the mountainous nature of the island, the working population moved away from agriculture and animal husbandry and turned to sponge diving, which was an economic activity that was carried out in a certain seasonal cycle between the arrival of spring and the onset of winter. With the necessity of a missive applied on the coasts, it was a problem that sponge divers were forced to take permits from every port they went to, and that they were hunted if without a permit with; the steamboat-gunboats, which was initiated by the Greek Government to ensure security in its own waters and to prevent violations, was also put into practice by the Ottoman government, first on the coast of Tripoli, and later, from Symi Island. The data and information used in this study were mainly obtained from the documents in the Presidential Ottoman Archive, official statistics of the period and other publications.

**Keywords:** Eyalet of the Archipelago (Eyālet-i Cezāyir-i Bahr-i Sefid in Ottoman Turkish), Symi Island, Sponge Diving, Taxation, Machine Hunting (Skafender- Denayrouze -Supiray).

## Öz

Süngerçilik ,Akdeniz ve Adalar Denizi(Ege Denizi ) , Anadolu, Bingazi, Girit, İsporas Adaları, Kalimnoz ,Kıbrıs, Midilli, Mısır, ,Meis, Trablusgarp, Sömbeki, Sakız, ,Sisam Suriye kıyılarında yoğun olarak yapılmaktaydı. Osmanlı Devleti'nin sünger avı ile ilgili ilk kayıtları, sünger avcılarının daha ziyade gayrimüslimler tarafından yapıldığını göstermektedir. Süngerin bu topraklardaki asıl vatanı Girit, Rodos, ile Anadolu'nun batı kıyılarını çevreleyen sığlık sulardır. Bu çalışma Osmanlı karasularında sünger avcılığında önemli ölçüde avcılığın yaygın olduğu Sömbeki Adası ve bu adada sünger avı için bir yeni teknik olan “*Skafender- Denayrouze-Supiray*” denilen Osmanlının makine ile sünger avı olarak belirttiği, makinenin kullanımı ve sorununu, sünger resmi ve Oniki Ada çevresi ve Afrika'ya kadar uzanan geniş Akdeniz sularında yaşanan sünger toplayıcılığının ekonomik yapısı üzerinde durulmuştur. Ada dağlık oluşu sebebiyle tarım ve hayvancılıktan uzaklaşarak baharın gelişi ve kışın başlayışıyla belli mevsim döngüsünde yapılan bir ekonomik faaliyet olan süngerçiliğe yönelmiştir. Kıyılarda uygulanan tezkere zorunluluğu ile süngerçilerin her gittikleri limandan tezkere almaya zorlanmaları, yine tezkeresiz avlanmaları sorun olmuş; Yunan Hükümetinin kendi sularında güvenliği sağlama ve ihlalleri önlemek amacıyla başlattığı istimbot-gambot uygulaması, Osmanlı hükümetince de önce Trablusgarp sahillerinde, geçte olsa daha sonra da Sömbeki Adası'nda uygulamaya sokabilmiştir. Bu çalışmada kullanılan veri ve bilgiler ağırlıklı olarak Cumhurbaşkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi'nde bulunan belgeler, döneme ilişkin resmi istatistikler ve diğer yayınlardan elde edilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Cezayir-i Bahr-i Sefid Vilayeti, Sömbeki Adası, Sünger Avcılığı, Vergilendirme, Makine İle Avlanma (Skafender- Denayrouze -Supiray).

## Introduction

The term twelve islands is based on the Turkish translation of the Greek nomenclature Dodecanissas, which the Greeks gave to a part of the island group that were occupied by the Italians in 1912, which is located close to the Anatolian coasts in the southeastern part of the Aegean Sea, which has many large and small islands, and is known by names such as the Menteşe Islands and the Southern Sporad Islands. These islands are Batnoz (Patmos), Lipso, Leros (Leros), Kilimli (Kalymnos), Kos (Kos), Istanbul (Astipalaia/Astropalya), İncirli (Nisiros), İlyaki (Tilos), Simi (Simi), Kerpe (Karpatos) , Herki (Halki) and Kasot (Kasos). Most of them are on the continental shelf, which is the continuation of the landmass of Anatolia, and physically form part of Anatolia. The term Dodeca-nissas (Dodecanese) is used as "Cezâyir-i isnâ-aşer" in Ottoman Turkish as is used in all Western languages (Küçük, 2007, Vol. 33, p. 353-355).

Sponges (Porifera), (Latin, porus (hole) and ferre (to carry)), are invertebrate animals. It is the sister group of Eumetazoa. They live at the bottom of the water by sticking to rocks, animal shells or to the ground. Sponges absorb and filter the water, thus cleaning the water. Then they eat the microorganisms stuck to them. Sponges consist of a fibrous substance and a sticky material. The sticky liquid that the locals call "milk" is the organic part of the sponge. This part is protected by a black membrane-like cover; sea water passes through this cover in order to enter the pores in the wall and carry the necessary elements for the animal's nutrition (Deveciyan, 2020, p. 303). Sponges were divided into in three groups: bath sponges, toilet sponges and hard and thin sponges called simusa. According to Habibzade, there were three types of sponges and if Melat, the first sponge, were many were that year will be very fertile. This is the most valuable type for traders. The other two sponge groups were Çomuha and Mandoruha'dır (Habibzade Rodoslu Ahmet Kemal, 1966, p. 19).<sup>2</sup> Sponge diving begins in May and continues until the end of summer.

### Sponges were hunted in four different ways

1) Diving Device (Skafender<sup>3</sup> - Denayrouze), Divers removed the sponges themselves, and later on, auxiliary tools were added to the work . The device-apparatus called "denayrouze" invented by Auguste Denayrouze allowed the person to dive under the submarine, in use where air was pumped from the surface into a barrel-shaped reservoir and then passed through a pressure regulator placed inside the helmet. Sponge divers' mortality was reduced with this device. While sponge divers could dive down 25-30 fathoms without devices, with the device he could go down to 22-25 fathoms (Cuinet, 1982, p. 379). He also states that the breathing apparatus named “supiray” was a device used for diving during the time of Namık Kemal Bey Who was the Mutasarrıf of Rhodes (Tansel, 1959, p. 492-495).

2) Diving naked and unarmed (Diving without a device).The only instrument used by such divers was a stone that is 30 to 40 centimeters long and weighed around 15 kilograms. One of the ends of this stone was pierced and a rope was passed through this hole. The longer one of these ropes was connected to the boat. The shorter one was attached to the diver's left hand. The diver, holding the head of the stone with both hands, holds his breath and dives with his head heading down. Due to its shape and weight, the stone acted as a rudder and took the diver to the desired point. The diver collected the best sponges that came into view within a radius of thirty to forty meters. The field of view varied between two and three meters depending on the

<sup>2</sup> Other types of sponges are ,fıkulağı ,çuval,kabadıka, skarta (Halikarnas Balıkçısı, 2015, p.94,113,128).

<sup>3</sup> For the review about this machine: Özgün, 2013,p. 429-457. For all parts of the Skafender: Halikarnas Balıkçısı, 2013, p.16).

nature of the seabed and the depth of the water. Hand-picked sponges were hung in a net bag hung around the diver's neck and tied to his waist (Halikarnas Balıkçısı, 2015, p. 108).<sup>4</sup>

As soon as the diver realizes that his power is running out, he gives the necessary signal, that is, "pulls the rope of life" and is taken to the boat immediately. Diving time was about 3 minutes. Boats of divers were called "latini". They were usually two to five ton boats. The crew of these boats consisted of eight to nine people. Those were two rowers, two deck men, five or six divers. Divers, who dive up to 40 fathoms in this way, go deeper if they cannot find enough sponges (Deveciyan, 2022, p. 306).

3-Harpoon, the spear gun used in sponge hunting was a fork-shaped iron with four or five teeth. This fork-shaped pole was attached to the end of a pole, each of which was screwed into it according to the depth of the water. In deep waters that normal poles couldn't reach, a heavier harpoon was attached to the end of a rope with a ring. The harpoon is quickly dropped on the sponge to be taken, and the sponge is torn from its place due to the weight of the tool.

Since spearfishing was generally done when the depth did not exceed 25 meters, it was done by people whose age or health condition was not suitable for diving with a diving suit, or even with alkarna. Spear fishers were the inhabitants of the islands and Anatolian coasts. Their boats were the boats with a capacity of one ton and their crew was 4-5 people: Two rowers, a harpooner 1-2 deck men.

The sponge diver stretched out in front of the boat and look at the bottom of the sea with his "fishing binoculars", a glass attached to the end of a tin cylinder 30 cm in diameter and 50-60 cm in length (Halikarnas Balıkçısı, 2013, p.148). This device left the surface of the water motionless due to the pressure it exerted on the water surface into which it was plunged and allowed the objects at the bottom to be seen . Since this method damaged the sponge, it caused loss of value of the sponge. Therefore, when the fisherman saw the sponge, he dived for it and removed it without damaging it (Deveciyan, 2022, p. 306).

4) Trawl Net (Dredge): It was a net with an iron mouth, used for dredging the seabed to hunt crustaceans such as oysters, mussels, and scallops. The dimensions of the trawl net vary according to the tonnage of the sailboat using it, and indeed this tonnage was quite variable. The length of the iron bar was 4-8 meters and its weight was between 23 and 300 kg. Trawl net was fixed to the ship that raised all its sails. In this way, the trawl net drifting rapidly destroyed the sea plants and fish by digging into the sea bed. Trawl net crew was usually 4-5 people. They lifted the trawl net four or five times a day on a levered spinning wheel. Trawl net sailed generally operate in places far from the coast where the bottom of the sea was less rough or where the depth of the bottom reached 30 fathoms. In 1881, this method was banned, but; permission was granted by decree in 1885 (Deveciyan, 2022, p. 307-308).

Once the sponge was taken out of the sea, it was useless. It was a black mass with a fishy smell. First of all, it was necessary to remove the permeable membrane surrounding it and empty the milk out of it. To do this, after the sponges were arranged on a string like rosary beads, they were kept in water for a while. Twelve hours later, the permeable membranes were removed with a knife. This should be done rapidly without waiting After this process, the sponges are trampled on the bulkwark of the boat with bare feet. In the end, the sponges were washed with plenty of water so that there was no trace of the gelatinous substance. If

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<sup>4</sup> This bag is called Apoşi.

this process was not done, the texture of the sponge would darken and the sponge would rot (Deveciyan, 2022, p. 308).

Sponges have a variety of uses. Although it is used in various industries today, it was generally used for cleaning purposes during the Ottoman Empire. Evliya Çelebi described the island very well in the 17th century. The region conquered by Sultan Süleyman Han consisted of three castles. The people were the people of Sultan Suleiman; paid tribute. The Small Castle was one of built by the Order of the Hospitaller Knights of St. John on Rhodes and there was a castle warden and foot soldiers in the castle. People wore black "maniletke" hats. They dived 100 fathoms into the sea, and they hunted sponges by diving (Kallek,2002, Vol .26, p 353).<sup>5</sup> They pulled out some items from the wrecks of sinking ships as if they were placed with their hands. Diving into the sea like a crocodile, these people almost aimed at their targets with their legs with the sponge-cutting "awl" tool on their waist. They did not give a girl to those who do not dive 100 fathoms among themselves. ( Evliya Çelebi,1935, p. 232 ). Evliya Çelebi, who also gives information about the diving of the people, states that they give the news of what is at the bottom with the olive oil they take in their mouths, the water bubble that rises to the surface of the sea by giving air to their mouths at the bottom of the sea. He emphasized that all of them were created for this job and that they could find a needle at the bottom of the sea. Evliya Celebi, who stated that the people were also skilled as frigates (sailors), writes that the pirate ship that hunt their ships cannot catch up with this people, and they dive into the sea and sink ships that were hostile to them with a “burku”. He indicated that the ladies were wearing a white turban and a clerk's turban on their heads, and their dresses are in the form of a white shirt. There was no field or garden. They collect their water in cisterns (Evliya Çelebi, 1935, p. 233).

Choiseul-Gouffier, who described the island in the XVIII century, although it produced excellent grains and wines in ancient times; he wrote that there was absolutely no agricultural land on Symi Island, which was a barren rock. In the Middle Ages, one of the branches of business that has survived on the island of forests, which has since disappeared, was boat building. Sumbtiki Port, which was called sumbek in Turkish, meaning "no ship can reach", was the place where coastal boats were constructed.<sup>6</sup> Even so, the island of Symi, which once fed a large number of goats, now had no other production than sponges and no industry other than their fishing, the sponges of this place were also quite abundant. Formerly Symio (Syme) was close to several small islands. The public is famous in the art of diving today; men who want to marry women get married after proving their diving skill. Another branch of trade was in coral and sponge fishing, which was abundant in the sea and the dives they made to take advantage of shipwrecks. A few years before, the owner of a ship that sank near Chios managed to empty the sunken ship completely, agreeing to share what he could get from the ship with the local divers (Choiseul-Gouffier, 1782, p.113).

The island was formed by cliffs, and these cliffs also allowed for ports. This island, whose population was mostly Greek, consisted of 3000 households (1312 Cezayir-i Bahr-i Sefid Salnamesi, p. 245). Cuinet gave valuable information about Symi Island at the end of the XIX century.

*”The small village of Symi, where divers currently live, was in a state of disrepair; their houses were just poor huts. Symi has two ports, one in the north, with a wide and easy*

<sup>5</sup> The Turkish word for “kol” and “aç”, which is said in the people's mouth as “kolaç” a decollate in accordance with the original, is of course a measure of length and is the distance between the middle finger tips of the two arms that are opened to the sides.

<sup>6</sup> Şemsettin Sami stated that they produced a kind of boat called "Elharke", apart from that very light and fast called Sumek. This art ended with the depletion of forests ( Şemsettin Sami, 1316,Vol,5, p. 2694).

*entrance and can accommodate large ships. Symi District had a population of approximately 9,000, of which 200 were Muslims, 8,750 Greek Orthodox and 50 Catholics*“(Cuinet, 1892, p. 397-398).

The main source of livelihood was the production of wine, oil and above all sponge fishing, which was practiced in various districts and regions of the Sanjak of Rhodes and especially in Meis Island on the coast of Karamania. This fishery, which had been producing good results for two decades, annually provides large quantities of sponges, both fine and common, exported to France, Germany, Austria, England, Russia . Unfortunately, this prosperous industry, which was almost the sole source of income for many absolutely unproductive small towns, presents serious dangers. It was also known that even since the adoption of the "Denayrouse" device, some divers had suffered loss of health in each fishing campaign, often caused by imprudence. In fact, the inventor of this device, on the machine Manuel du Plongeur d'Ia, for regulating his descent without fully considering the indicators of the manometer placed on it, recommends 22 to 25 fathoms, while he advised not to go deeper (35 - 40 fathoms) (Cuinet, 1892, p. 379).

Another foreigner, Collas, describing the island at the end of the 19th century, wrote that the people of Symi were entrepreneurs, good sailors, and had a very commercial spirit. Between May and September, 190 boats were actively engaged in this business on the island. Traders went to Marseille and Trieste during the winter to sell the sponges they caught ; they sold their ships and sponges. They got 375,000 francs from their 100 to 300 tons of sponge exports. Considering that the total trade capacity of the island was 725,000 francs, it can be seen how important the sponge trade was in this figure, about 50% (Collas, 1861, p. 229).

**Table 1:** Number of Sponge Hunting Boats in the Aegean Islands

Island	Number
Kalymnos Island	254
Symi Island	190
Herkit Island	65
Meis Island	40
Leroz Island	30
Astropalya Island	12
Ilyaki Island	7
Kashot Island	2
Total	600

Reference : Collas,1864, p. 231; Örenç, 2006, p. 517; Çoruh, 2009, p. 80.

While the number of boats on the island in the 19th century was 190, it was given as 235 in 1894 at the end of the century. Habibzade Ahmet Kemal from Rhodes stated that 150 ships were engaged in this business (Habibzade Ahmet Kemal from Rhodes, 1996, p.19).

Table 2: Number of Boats in Symi Island in 1894.

Sponge Boats	Number	
Boat with Machines	50	Their size was from 3 to 15 tons.
Diving Boat	38	
Dredger Boat	106	
Harpoon Boat	41	
Total	235	
Boat Carrying Food	30	
Goods-supplies Transport and Fishing	100	Only one of them was 50 tons. The others were relatively small.
Total	365	

Reference :1312 Cezayir-i Bahr-i Sefid Salnamesi, p. 249-250.

There is no information in the archive documents about the situation of those who operated the sponge boats. We see from the novels of the Fisherman of Halicarnassus that this business is monopolized by certain individuals. (Halikarnas Balıkçısı , 2015, p.55) . In particular, Habibzade Ahmet Kemal from Rhodes describes the monopolization of this business as follows:

*“There are five or six people on the island who are so rich in capital that fifteen to twenty thousand people are crushed under their arbitrary rule. By confronting a thousand kinds of dangers in six or seven months, the captains deliver the sponge, which they can hunt among dangerous and devastating waves and volatile storms, to that profiteer's hands a month or two after returning to the island. So, they ship these sponges to various parts of London, Germany, Vienna, France and foreign countries”.*

On the contrary, the inhabitants of the island are extremely dissolute. In winter, when they return to the island, they waste the money they have earned with a thousand kinds of effort and effort, living in disgrace by crawling around the corners of the tavern. With the arrival of summer, as always, they turn to the barbarians they are doomed to and supply the capital the ships need. (Habibzade Ahmet Kemal from Rhodes , 1996, p. 19-20).

Due to the scarcity of agriculture and animal husbandry activities, the source of livelihood on the island was directed to sponge and boat building. From the sponges obtained here, 375,000 francs were

obtained annually from the sales made to Europe. While the sponge trade increased competition with its accelerating commercial structure, it became more important becoming island's most important source of livelihood.

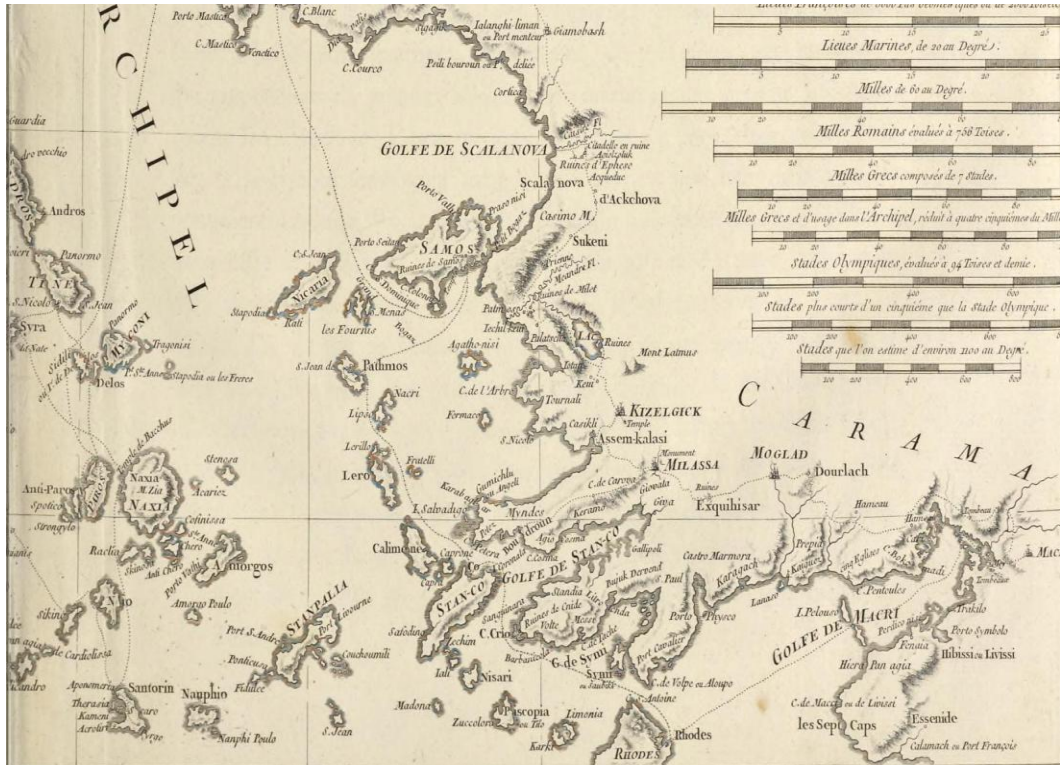
### **The Endless Fight: Sponge Tax and Sale**

An important type of tax at the beginning of the 19th century was “*Miri Mübaya*”. This tax was the collection of basic foodstuffs such as grains and meat, which were needed by Istanbul, by officials over the price determined by the state, not on the fixed price. This island was seen as an “*ocaklık*” in the Ottoman Empire. The usage areas of the term “*ocaklık*” in the Ottoman Empire were diverse. It was most commonly used to express the sanjaks with the status of “*ocaklık*”, which were found in the administrative organization. *Ocaklık* sanjaks were of two types: government and *yurtluk-ocaklık* sanjaks. According to this, *ocaklık* sanjaks were places left to local *beys* or *emirs* whose services were seen during the conquest by names such as government, *yurtluk-ocaklık*, mostly their own lands. Sanjaks referred as "government" were given by means of ownership, and sanjaks of *yurtluk-ocaklık* were given by means of barley and sanjak property. The government did not make census (*tahrir*) in the sanjaks, which was a requirement of the *timar* system, and that means, there was no *timar* and *zeamet* allocation in such sanjaks (Kılıç, 2017, p.317). In the document dated April 11, 1786 (11 Cemazielahir 1200), 15,000 sponges were to be delivered for 1197 in total, 3000 kurus as *has* and 12,000 kurus for coarse sponge, which was given by Symi *Reaya* as an *ocaklık* for the palaces. For the years 98 and 99, 30 kurus sponge orders were placed; *ruzmançe* was issued. The public demanded that they be exempted for the amount requested for the year 98 sponges (BOA, C..SM.. 39, 1978). This was the only document requested to send sponges to the palace in the archive documents. We do not know whether the palace requested sponges from the region in other years, as there is no document to this effect in the archive.

During the Ottoman period, regulations came to the fore in terms of operating and legislation in the seas. The first of these was the Regulation on the Export of Mussels and Oysters in Dersaadet and Bilâd-ı Selâse, which was issued in 1871 (Deveciyan, 2022, p. 454). After the establishment of the Ottoman Public Debt Administration, provisions were made regarding the Istanbul Fish House and its affiliated institutions in the Regulation on the Dersaadet and Tevâbii Fishhouse Administration (*Dersaadet ve Tevâbii Balıkhanesi İdaresi Nizannamesi*) in 1882. The Regulation of Zabita-i Saydiye, which was adopted in the same year, was important in terms of both its content regulating the entire sector and the fact that it had been a source for the legislation of the Republic period for a long time. With this regulation, provisions were made for fishing in the sea, and hunting in forest and other lands. In this framework, people who wanted to collect seafood were required to obtain a license from the officials of the places where they were located. The fee for licenses to be issued in the name of fishermen and valid for one financial year was determined as half *mecidiye*. Apart from this, a tax of 20% was to be collected from saltwater fish and 10% from freshwater fish. In addition to these financial provisions, there were provisions for the protection of fish species. Accordingly, those who continued to hunt during periods when fishing and consumption were prohibited for various reasons would have their fishing equipment seized and fined between one quarter and one lira (Koç, 2006, p. 275-278).



Map: South Anatolia



Reference : [Choiseul-Gouffier, 1782](#)

It is possible to define tax farming as a general model by weeding out the basic elements that emerged from the various changes it has undergone throughout its long history: We can define the state as an element consisting of legal and/or şer‘î tax elements, which are usually limited to a certain place. It is the transfer of the taxation of *mukātaa* units to the *mültezims*, with a reliable surety, who will accept the profit and loss for a limited time (bond) in return for a certain annual price, which is open to competition, often determined by auction, and a part of which is requested to be paid in advance. The identities of *mültezims* as a social group, the degree and nature of the competition between them, their relations with the guarantors, the duration of the right to taxation, the determination of the amounts to be paid and down payments, the payment methods have varied throughout history ( Genç, 2000 , Vol 22, p. 154).

The first concession regarding the hunting and exportation of sponges was given to Ohannes Gabaryan, one of the Ottoman *reaya*, on 12 July 1846 (18 Rajab 1262), for four years, as he provided surety and necessary conditions. This concession included the extraction and export of corals and sponges from Valagorkin, Avret island, Karso-Fermanye, Iskenderun, Tripoli, Beirut-Sayda coast and Rhodes Island on the island of Crete. It would be possible for the *mültezim* to carry out this trade with a license to be given to him from the Supreme Council for Judicial Ordinances (*Meclis-i Vala-yı Ahkam-ı Adliye*). The Ottoman Empire had not yet prepared a regulation on the taxation of sponge, as it was a new product. This caused some problems in exports. In order to prevent possible troubles and income losses, the state had decreed that a tax of 20% should be charged on such products and nothing else should be demanded until a new regulation was formed. This tax rate was later systematized as 1/5, namely, "humus" for sponge. Such *mukātaas*, which were given to Tax Farming (*iltizam*), were put out to tender again, sometimes because they had more or less income than expected, depending on their development over time. In these tenders, tax farming was sold

either to its former owner or to a new person (Haydar, 2009, p. 85). The taxation system of Symi Island was dependent on Rhodes.

The first document that comes to the archive is related to taxation. The people of Symi, who toured the wide Mediterranean coast, spread sponge fishing to a very wide area. In the document dated 22 December 1850 (17 Safer 1267), the government in the Lebanese Province added the wood that the people of Symi Island hunted on the shores of Syria (Beriyetuşşam) to the pier for each boat and added the wood they brought from there, and demanded a fee of 110 cents in total, including a license of 13 cents. Sponge divers wrote a petition asking for the removal of the wood (hattab) tax at least to eliminate the trouble, they experienced from this situation, that this fee was heavy for them because it was received in the region under the name of “chamber tithe” (*oda öşri*). Since wood and coal taken from the Jaffa District were taxed, it was stated that no tax will be requested from the timber and coal to be taken from the forests under the control of the owners of the region, with effect from the year 68. It was accepted to inform the Finance Chamber with the letter sent from the *Eyalet-i Meclis-i Kebir* for the sponge and wood taxes and the situation would be assumed by the treasury (BOA, C..ML..57 , 2615). In the document dated 3 June 1850 (22nd Recep 1266), a notification was made with a copy written by the treasury so that the Symi sponge divers living in Tripoli of Beirut Customs was not taxed again due to the tax being collected from the sponge they take the sea. Even though the exported goods were transferred to the Board of Accounting, the situation was informed to the Governor of Sayda and the Minister of Finance, since 160 kuruş was collected as tax (BOA,A. }MKT.MHM. / 754 , 56).

Sponge fishing also meant the population could not be fully determined in the region (Habibzade Rodoslu Ahmet Kemal, 1966, p.18).<sup>7</sup> In the document dated July 23, 1883 (9 Muharrem 1311), it was stated that since the census conducted on the island of Symi together with Elyaki of the Eyalet of the Archipelago, it was the result of a population exceeding 20 thousand, but only 5912 of them were written. In the document sent to the Eyalet of Archipelago from the Council of State, it was requested that the population registrations were not declared finished. When the people of the islands demanded a permit for sponge fishing, it was emphasized that this document should not be given and the necessity of obtaining a population permit was emphasized. Documents related to the subject were also sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Garp Vilayeti* (Wester Province) and the *Mutasarrıflık* of Crete, Tripoli and Bengehazi. (BOA, MV. , 75, 60 ). Again, upon the decision communicated, it was requested from the Ottoman Public Debt Administration to give a license for the sponge fishing until the beginning of March until the end of February. In the meantime, the condition that the licenses granted for the fishermen who continued to fish sponge and not to put the Ottoman and foreign capitalists, who were their suppliers, in a difficult situation, should be valid until the end of the year, had been reported from the *Maliye Nezareti* (Ministry of Finance) ( BOA,DH.ID.. / 36 , 4-60).

The demand of the state took different resolutions from different areas where sponge fishing carried out had also received a great reaction. In the document dated February 26, 1868 (11 Shawwal 1284), it was referred to the Supreme Council for Judicial Ordinances from the Eyalet of the Archipelago, where it was requested that the tax license obtained because the inhabitants of Symi and Kalimyoz Islands went to the coasts of Syria, Cyprus, Crete and Rhodes to collect sponges. It was also stated that there is no mention of tax

<sup>7</sup> In his work written in 1915, Habibzade Rhodeslu Ahmet Kemal Bey attributed the inability to get a complete result from the census to the fact that the population fled to other parties as a result of the encouragement of the local Council of Elders called "Dimongrondia". The island had a population of about 15,000.

in this region where it is located (BOA,MVL , 802 , 8).The Syrians decided to send a deputy to seek their rights. In the document dated 14 October 1885 (5 Muharrem 1303), the representative of the people of Symi, Yorgi Fladaki and the other deputy, petitioned to Ağa Bityos Zalgar in order not to give separate fishing license for Cyprus and Crete and for all regions of the Ottoman Empire to the sponge boats of the fishermen during the periods spent in different seas, together with the fishing that started at the beginning of May. (BOA,ŞD, 2915 , 45).

The reason for this first restriction on unlicensed fishing in Crete and Cyprus waters in the document dated July 2, 1887 (June 20, 1303) was that two deputies sent from Symi Island to Istanbul complained about the increase in taxes on sponges. The primary purpose of these people during the negotiations was to fish without a permit and without a permit in all areas suitable for hunting in the Mediterranean Sea, including Crete and Cyprus. The proposal of the deputies on the subject was: “The regulation on the right of a boat to settle from whichever island it belongs to and the fees related to it should be collected in the same place; and the taxes should be the same as the places that can settle is amended. They stated that the current amount of sponge taxes before the tax exemption of Crete and Cyprus would not justify the Syrians. In addition, they stated that sponge fishing does not occupy an important place in Crete and Cyprus, no boat can make a living by fishing here, and the information that the lack of taxation in Greece harms commercial competition is false. They also stated that since Greek boats had to be fished not in Greece, but in Ottoman waters, they did not have the power to compete by extracting more sponges than ours, whereas since the people of Symi started to hunt as soon as they got their supplies, they had to pay the taxes they were liable to pay on the spot.” Also emphasizing that there is no need for tax reduction, that Kalymnos and Herkit sponge fishermen complain about, and that, like the Greek fishermen, the people of Symi are paying the taxes without any trouble until spoilers infiltrate among them; it was stated that this job is to ensure the validity of Crete and Cyprus thanks to the permits to be given from Rhodes, and to ensure that all taxes are paid to Crete, and to pocket the extra income of at least 8-10 thousand liras.” (BOA, DH.MKT, 1550, 64) As the tax problem was not fully clarified, a *kaymakam* was requested to be appointed as soon as possible. The Ministry of Internal Affairs requested that the *kaymakam* appointed to Symi Island, which had been ruled by a deputy for a long time, after the death of *Kaymakam* Said Bey, should be sent as soon as possible, since the first inhabitants of the islands in the region were victims. Since the *kaymakam* did not receive a response to the documents sent to the center for his election as soon as possible, it is stated that the British government would be asked for help, although the secrecy of this situation was important. With the documents sent by the Deputy Governor of Eyalet of the Archipelago Tevfik Bey, it was also requested to send an answer about the charge to be collected from sponge fishermen (BOA, DH. ŞFR. , 138 , 87). In the document that came one month later, the Deputy of the people of Symi and Herkit Islands of the Eyalet of the Archipelago, Ağa Yito Zagura and Ağa Yito Semyanidi made it compulsory for those who would go to these regions to hunt for sponges in the sea border of Crete and Cyprus, to obtain a license from the *Mutasarrıf* of Rhodes. Those who wanted to hunt from the waters of Crete and Cyprus, which hunted without a permit in Rhodes, were not held responsible for this permit, and the people to whom the law would be applied were asked to do what is necessary, as this situation was contrary to the provision. For the coastal border sponge fishing of Crete and Cyprus Islands, the Ottoman's re-registration permit from the places that want to fish sponge on other coasts and islands was not sufficient, and the government in the region was required to take another permit, in the record in the 2nd addendum (attachment) of the 2nd article of the **Nizamname of Zabıtayı Saydiye**, which came into effect in 1882. Cyprus Island sponge fishermen also opposed this situation and asked their

*mutasarrıf* to cancel the situation because they were obliged to take a permit even though they were the people of the border navy (BOA,DH.MKT,1445,57).

While the tax debate was going on, it was stated that the people who were oppressed under the heavy financial tax burden were already engaged in the sponge business and were unable to pay it. In the document dated 3 November 1887 (16 Safer 1305), they declared a petition given by the representatives of the people of Symi and Herkit Islands for sponge fishing on the sea coast of Crete and Cyprus in the document written to the Ministry of Finance and informed the Eyalet of the Archipelago they were *reaya*. Despite the declared situation of the sponge boats, these people, to whom they made some explanations, were asked to consider the poor state of those who go sponge fishing. A one-time amnesty for confiscation of the boats and tools that the sponge fishermen took with them, and contentment with the application of the tax was implemented by the *mutasarrıfluk*. The *mutasarrıfluk*, on the other hand, informed with the telegram sent by Sava Pasha, at the request of the deputies of the people who did not comply with the rules and were enforced (BOA, DH, MKT, 1460, 25).

It was not only Ottoman citizens who complained about the motion; citizens of foreign states did not hesitate to complain about this situation through their consulates, as with everything else. In the document dated 25 December 1887 (9 Rebiülahir 1305), the Ministry of Finance stated that the complaints were unfounded, that the sponge boats that are going to hunt sponges in Crete, Cyprus and Egypt, starting from Symi, are compelled to take a permit from the *Mutasarrıfluk of Rhodes* and that the citizens of the Austrian State are also treated the same with the sent documents to the *Dahiliye Nezareti* (Ministry of Internal Affairs) it was asked that the necessary actions should be taken into implementation (BOA,DH.MKT.1471 , 92). In the document sent to the Ministry of Finance dated 18 July 1888 (9 Zilkada 1305), the fact that the ambassador of the Austrian State was compelled to take a permit from the Mutasarrıfluk of Rhodes was the subject of a complaint by the embassy. In the documents coming from the *Hariciye Nezareti* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the Austrian sponge divers on Symi Island requested the cancellation of the permit, and since they did not receive the appointed permit, their documents had to be sent again. As it is understood from a piece of petition given by the people, who were notified from the island to the Eyalet of the Archipelago, it was understood that this provision was requested to be fully implemented and reported to the Ministry (BOA, DH.MKT. /1522,105).

The situation started to become serious and the property and sponges of the boatmen who did not implement the bill began to be confiscated. Due to the complaints received by the people and *Beys* of Symi and Herkid Islands in the document dated January 5, 1888 (20 Rebiülahir 1305), in the examination carried out, sponge fishing in inland waters such as Rhodes Island was guaranteed that they committed a crime against them. A request was sent to the place where the seized boats and sponges were located for the return of their goods. Although no response had been received regarding this situation yet, it was also stated that the people were forced to sell their boats due to the aforementioned bill (BOA, DH, MKT, 1475, 3).

While the discussions were going on, the commission sent by the people of Symi Island for the reorganization of the sponge missive in the document dated March 5, 1888 (21 Cemazeyilahir 1305) was sent to Istanbul again. They also wanted to have a meeting to solve the problem related to the tobacco administration. The expected response from Istanbul was given, and a statement was made as follows: "If customs duty has been collected once in one place, it is definitely not possible to collect customs duty a

second time if you go to another place" (BOA, DH, MKT. / 1491-98). In the documents sent towards the end of March, it was stated that the cash (fixed) tax collection procedure in the Dodecanese islands of Kalymnoz, Leryoz, Karyot and Patmos will not cover Meis, Symi and others. In this way, a reduction of the tax amounting to 12 thousand kuruş was requested. (BOA, DH.MKT. / 1497 , 50). In the document that came one month later, the tax was canceled. In the document written to the Eyalet of the Archipelago, it was stated that the licenses obtained from Rhodes in the past were valid if the Symi and Herkit sponge divers were fishing in Crete, Cyprus and Egypt. However, it was stated that if sponge divers load their boats from Symi, they should get a license from this island has been put into practice once again (BOA, DH.MKT. / 1504, 60).

The enforcement of the missive resulted in restrictions on poachers and the confiscation of boaters' property when caught. In the document sent to the *Şura-yı Devlet* (Council of State) dated 7 August 1888 (29 Zilkade 1305), they complained that the people of Symi and Herkit islands were compelled by the Rhodes government to obtain a license for sponge fishermen to extract sponges from the waters of Cyprus and Crete. In the interviews made after this, it was determined that the sponge fishermen went to Crete and Cyprus to hunt sponges without a missive. Since it was known that they went to other places by other means, in order to avoid losses in the income of the missive, the revenues of the aforementioned Crete and Cyprus missives were combined with the revenues of Symi Island, and this situation was reported to the Ministry of Finance. It was requested to act in accordance with the Regulation of Muhrez (*Muhrez Nizannamesi*)<sup>8</sup> regarding the fishermen from Symi and Herkits who hunted in Cyprus and Crete waters, and to return the sponges, boats and tools, which were confiscated on the pretext that a team of people hunted in these waters without a missive. The verdict of the aforementioned decision was reported with the documents sent to Eyalet of the Archipelago by Ministry (BOA, DH. MKT. / 1530, 38).

With the document dated 22 November 1888 (18 Rebiüevvel 1306), the treatment of sponge fishermen compelled by the Rhodes Government was asked whether it would also be applied to those who were from the islands of Symi and Herkit, who received a permit to hunt sponges in Crete and Cyprus, and who equipped their boats in Symi Island. However, the tax to be demanded from the Austrians was reported to the Ministry of Finance. Even though the consulates of the Austrian and Hungarian states on the island of Symi declared that the coercion on the island was in compliance with the "*Muhrez Nizannamesi* " to some extent, they wanted the cancellation of the excess tax collected in violation of this regulation (BOA, ŞD. / 2536 , 27-3). The removal of the excess tax by the Rhodes government also received support from the *Mutasarrıfluk* of Chios (BOA, ŞD. / 2536 , 27-4). The Eyalet of the Archipelago was notified to act in accordance with the *Regulation of Zabita-i Saydiye*, which came into force in 1882, and to return the licenses, sponges and boats of individuals that were engaged in fishing when they were fished in waters without a missive, and this decision was made by the decision of the Council of State (BOA, ŞD. / 2536 , 27-6).

Sponge hunting was not limited to the Aegean and Mediterranean islands; when it expanded to Egypt, taxes were brought to these regions as well. Mandurihi was on the Egyptian coast, between the Egyptian and Ottoman Sea borders, and was excluded from Egyptian territorial waters as it was a sponge fishing area. Since the invention of the sponge tax, the license to hunt here was given from the Eyalet of the Archipelago. In the document dated July 25, 1886 (23 Shawwal 1303), it was stated that taxes would be

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<sup>8</sup> This regulation was created for everyone to benefit from animals that do not belong to anyone, such as fish and animals that can be hunted.

demanded by the Egyptian Administration from the machinery and diving boats that were hunting sponges in places more than 10, 11 miles away from the coast of Crete to the Egyptian coast, by taking sponge missives from the islands of Kalymnoz, Symi and Herkit on the islands around Rhodes and on the islands known as Isparot. A report was sent to the Eyalet of the Archipelago in order to do what was necessary (BOA, DH.MKT. / 1357, 4). In the document dated February 24, 1889, it was requested that the tax collected from the sponge fishing areas in Egyptian waters be abolished in accordance with the document delivered by the regional officials by the Eyalet of the Archipelago. A telegram was sent from Symi Island to the Grand Viziership and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (BOA, HR.TO., 532, 76) to abolish the tax applied to the boats to be used in sponge hunting. In the document written to the Ministry of Finance dated 9 November 1890 (26 Rebiül before 1308), it was requested from the Symi District in the Eyalet of Archipelago that practices that would not harm the treasure were made to those who went to sponge fishing on the Egyptian coast. (BOA, DH.MKT. / 1779, 86). In the document dated January 3, 1891 (22 Cemazievvel 1308), it was accepted that the documents given by Meşayih Arban, located on the Mandurihi coast of Eyalet of Archipelago, would be considered as an official letter, a missive. It was also emphasized that there should be an officer on the Mandurihi coast to issue a missive by the Egyptian Government so that sponge divers who would go to Egypt and try to get a missive would not be aggrieved. It was stated that although the sponge fishermen received a bill of exchange by paying taxes to the civil servants in accordance with the regulation, they were not obliged to give money to Meşayih Arba (BOA, DH, MKT. / 1797, 28).

The customs duty to be applied to the sponge also caused problems for a long time. Despite all the measures that were taken by the Ottoman state, taxmen could not prevent the sponges hunted and exporting them to Europe by taking them to the islands of Kalymnoz and Symi, which were exempt from customs duty (Çoruh, 2009, p. 87). For this reason, the treasury suffered significant losses. A solution was sought for this situation, and one of the islands of Kalymnoz and Symi was accepted as the center and an administrative committee consisting of an officer, a deputy, two clerks and two guards was sent here. Thanks to the records they would keep, those who exported unlicensed sponges would be identified and heavy fines would be imposed. Again, as in the "tobacco" tax, it was decided to pay an amount of money under the name of "*ihbariye*" to informants who would collect information from these officials. The sponge being exported to Europe was divided into three grades. 1/10 of the quality (*Halis*) sponge had buyers in countries such as France, Germany, Austria, America and Russia (Örenç, 2006, p. 510). The *okka* of this first quality sponge was 200 kuruş in 1854, 220 kuruş in 1855, 300 kuruş in 1856, and 325 kuruş in 1858. The most important buyer of sponge was England, and 2/3 of the best quality sponge was going to this country (Örenç, 2006, p. 511).<sup>9</sup>

Looking at the data from 1855 to 1859, it is seen that good quality (*a'lâ*) sponge cost-between 200 and 325 kuruş, medium quality (medium) sponge cost between 40 and 100 kuruş, and low quality (ednâ) sponge cost between 28 and 30 kuruş. In the aforementioned period, good quality sponge could find buyers for 10 liras, medium and low-quality sponge could find buyers for 2 to 1 lira (Örenç, 2006, p. 512). Especially due to the weight of the cleaned and uncleaned sponge, there were also problems. In the 19th century Ottoman state, sponge was an important export product in the foreign trade of İzmir (Smyrna) Port. In the

<sup>9</sup> *Kıyye (Okka)* is a measure of weight used in the past. It is also called Kıyye-i atika. It is now 1282 grams.

document dated 26 July 1895 (3 Safer 1313), it was requested that 8% customs duty be taken from the Ottoman State for sales to a foreign country and 1% tax if sales will be made again within six months. It was accepted that the sponges imported and exported to the island are regulated by the Island Customs Administration, provided that only tax-free sponge fishing is prevented. According to the law, sponges were brought to Symi and not taxed, and after the cleaning procedures were applied, 1% customs duty was requested from those that was exported to foreign countries and 8% from those that was sold in the domestic market (Velay, 1978, p.457). Although there were several types of sponges cleaning process, since there was a 20% loss during this process, sponge fishermen also complained about the tax practices made in this way. Since it is known from the interviews conducted with the *Izmir Rüşumat Nezareti* (custom services) that sponges coming to the island were usually brought for cleaning, it was stated that the tax of 8% is not appropriate for the sponges being exported after the inspection is made, and the tax for raw sponge is quite heavy. It was especially emphasized that the sponges brought to Symi Island were generally hunted in Ottoman waters and that this was the livelihood of the people of the Eyalet of Archipelago (BOA, ŞD. / 585, 30).

In the document dated 20 September 1905 (20 Recep 1323), it was requested not to charge 8% customs duty on sponges to be exported to Symi Island from other regions. Meanwhile, in the documents sent from the Council of State and Tanzimat Office (*Tanzimat Dairesi*) to the Eyalet of Archipelago, it was stated that the sponge should not be charged for tax and that the sponges to be exported from Symi Island would be registered by the custom services (BOA, MV., 112, 18). According to the information sent from the administration of Symi Island and other places at the beginning of October 1905, it was requested that the transaction be made taking into account the *mazbata* of the Tanzimat Office. It was stated that the sponge is not accepted as a commodity, and trading in this way will lead to smuggling of goods to other places, thus increasing the demand for sponge more (BOA, BEO / 2677, 200759).

After one year, the discussions continued for the tax to be applied to the sponge officially. In the document dated 14 February 1906 (19 Zilhijja 1323), the people of Symi stated that they could not pay the 8% customs tax applied to the sponges to be brought outside to Symi Island and the surrounding regions for cleaning, and that they wanted to sell their goods to Greece. The people stated their complaints to neighborhood representative about allowance for the sale of sponges from the island via Egypt with a petition. In the census written to the Eyalet of Archipelago, by *Rüşumat Emaneti* (custom services) it was stated that no tax will be levied on the islands of Symi and around, 8% customs duty will be applied to domestic sales 1% will be applied to abroad sales, asking them to implement the decision made by the Council of State here.

Sponge boaters who wanted to make a living expanded their routes starting from the Dodecanese Islands, Crete and Cyprus with the coastline extending along Syria, Egypt and Lebanon, and continued as far as the Mediterranean and North African coasts with the state's mandate method. We see that the license (permit certificate), missive (paper stating permission for a job) and taxation given to boats for sponge fishing continued in almost every region after the transition to the Republican period.<sup>10</sup> For the sale of sponges, 1% customs duty was applied to those sold abroad and 8% for domestic products. For this purpose, due to the high domestic tax, the islanders preferred to sell their products mostly to foreign countries.

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<sup>10</sup> Taxes related to hunting (Saydiye) constituted a very important source of income in the 1902 budget. A.Du Velay, 1978, 438. For taxation in the Republican Period: 1924 (April 6, 1340) Law No. 445, " *Zabitayı Saydiye Nizamnamesi* for Land and Sea Hunting", Article XI, Article XII – Article XIII (Deveciyan, 2022, p.438 -439).

### Transition from the Traditional Method to the Machinery

In the second half of the XIX century, new developments occurred for the sponge industry, which has a guided structure in foreign trade. The first of these was a technological advance, the invention of diving equipment called "scaphandres". Following the introduction of scaphandres in the sponge industry, the amount of time sponge divers spent on the seabed to collect sponges increased. During this period, the divers were provided with the air they needed during the dive with the help of the pumps on the boats on the sea surface, thus increasing significantly the time they could be underwater.

With the help of the diving equipment and the protective clothing worn, the negative effects of the low ambient temperature of the underwater on the body temperature of the divers were partially reduced. The sector, which started in the spring and ended in the winter, continued throughout the year (Yürekli, 2012, p. 35). Another aspect of the business was that the rapid increase in the amount of sponge recovered by the machine causes sponge divers to consume the known sponge reserves underwater in a very short time, and therefore to search for different sponge reserves. Again, people who hunted sponges with traditional methods and machines and earn their living from this work have turned against each other. A group of divers from Symi, who were against sponge fishing with machinery, started a revolt at the beginning of May and destroyed the machinery used for sponge fishing. In the document dated 5 May 1884 (9 Recep 1301), the cavalry of the Kos steamboat in Rhodes sent a telegram about the conflict between the two groups diving and fishing sponges with a machine on Symi Island. 40 divers smashed the door of the shop of a machine trader named Yorgi; raided the government house and destroyed some places. Ten zaptieh were injured while trying to intervene in the incident. It was reported that after receiving the news that the angry group was going to pour gas and burn the government house, the zaptieh put bayonets and took the governor and officers to the pier with difficulty. It was stated that the people have destroyed all the machinery selling shops and the households with machinery, and smashed the machinery there; due to this revolution, some zaptiehs and the *mutasarrıf* bey, who was left on the island to maintain order, had to spend the night on the island of Rhodes. The Greek warship *Nüzhet Ferry*, who stayed in Lemnos for two days and returned to Symi, also sends documents (Şukka) about the situation (BOA, Y.MTV. , 14,55). Upon the incident that occurred among sponge divers in Symi Island on May 5, the Italian Consul in İzmir sent his assistant to Symi Island (BOA, İ.DH. / 915 , 72663). Five days later, in the telegram sent by Hakkı Pasha, the Governor of the Eyalet of the Archipelago, detailed information was given about the events. 6000 people gathered from among the sponge fishermen on Symi Island, came to the quarantine office at four in the morning, sent a spokesperson group consisting of 15 tradesmen, chosen among them, and expressed their wishes, and awaited the result from the meeting with the administrators. In the meantime, they looted the shops selling sponge materials with machines. The *Bidayet* (Initial) court gathered together with the elders' councils and the mukhtars and demanded the punishment of those who carried out this plunder. A battalion of soldiers gathered by Rhodes *Mutasarrıf* on the island from the ferry (BOA, Y.MTV. 16 , 61). About this stampede and developments, the Austrian Consul of Rhodes and the deputies of the Izmir Consul of the Italian State came to the island (BOA, Y.MTV. 16 , 61 -2). It is obvious that this issue, which was mentioned as a revolution in the documents, disturbed the peace on the island. This rebellion confronted people who continue to work with machines and the traditional method. Although the state suppressed the rebellion, hunting with machinery continued.



The people of Herkit Island, who received the news that machine hunting had been abolished in the Eyalet of the Archipelago, sent a telegram stating that this situation would harm them in the document dated 7 March 1895 (10 Ramadan 1312). Four months later, the head and members of the councils of elders of Symi and Herkit Islands sent a telegram on behalf of Symi and Herkit Islands, informing them that the trade would pass to Greece with the ban on sponge fishing by machine. The subject underlined especially in the telegram was that the annual tax paid to the treasury for the machines would be wasted, since the sponge manufacturers who used these machines in the Ottoman Empire would sell them to Greece because they could not use the machines. This telegram was sent from the Eyalet of the Archipelago to the Ministry of Finance. For this purpose, it was requested that the prohibited sponge machines be allowed to be used again (BOA, DH.MKT, 387 , 101).

Greek fishermen continued to hunt in Ottoman waters. In the document dated March 31, 1902 (21 Zilhicce 1319), the decision that was given by the State to ban sponge fishing for foreigners in Ottoman waters was annulled. Although it was stated in the documents sent from the Ministry of Finance Civil Service; this decision was postponed by the Tanzimat Office. The documents related to this situation are included in the Regulations of Zabita-i Saydiye and the Commercial and Naval Code, which came into force in 1882. The Ministry of Finance was notified about the situation (BOA, DH, MKT, 464, 37). In the document dated 13 June 1902 (6 Rebiülevvel 1320), it was stated that since one third of those who are engaged in sponge fishing on the Tripoli coast are Greeks, hunting with this tool is prohibited, but the Greeks, who do not use it in their own waters, did this job in Tripoli, since their fishing with the skafender tool caused great damage to the sponge fields (BOA). , DH.MKT. / 523 - 58). In the document written to Tripoli Province, it was stated that the Greek ship stayed in the area where it had two guns and 80 officers for a while, and the boatmen continued to hunt with machinery on Symi Island and Kalymnoz Island (BOA, DH.MKT. / 523 , 58-3).

On April 29, 1902 (20 Muharrem 1320), machine fishing was stopped in the waters of Cyprus, Crete, Tunisia, and Egypt, due to the fact that the sponge fields would no longer be able to grow sponges<sup>11</sup>. Documents were sent from the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Minister of Internal Affairs for the re-opening of this type of hunting in the Eyalet of the Archipelago. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a letter requesting permission to lift the ban to the Ministry of Finance) (BOA, Y.MTV, 229, 24).

The boatmen of Symi caused turmoil in Alaiye Port due to the ban on sponge fishing with machinery. In the document dated May 10, 1908 (12 Recep 1326), the Symi Island sponge fishermen were sent a response to the telegram issued from the Erkan-ı Harb and the Naval Supervision through the Alaiye Port Authority. In the telegram sent and submitted with the signatures of five people taken from Konya Province, it was stated that as a result of the examination of about 90 sponge boats, hunting of some sponge divers was prohibited, as they had 27 banned machines. It was stated that events occurred when this news was received; about 100 people came to the port with weapons and created a brawl. When the materials of several of these boats were examined by coming to the port, it was seen that Martin, Tira and Tut were in the boats, so the officers and the boaters got into a fight. It was reported that the boatmen escaped into the sea, and they went to the beach and went back to sea after taking water. It was reported from Alaiye Port that this event should be eliminated urgently and that many people will suffer in this way (BOA, BEO, 3371 , 252770). Although the Marmaris Gunboat wanted to prevent this unrest of Symi Island, it still did not come; therefore,

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<sup>11</sup> Sometimes sponges disappear because they are sick. This is called "Olet" disease. Halikarnas Balıkçısı, 2015, p. 98.

it was stated that the incident was reported to the Mutasarrıflık of Teke ( BOA, BEO, 3371, 25270-4). In another incident that took place around Antalya. On July 2, 1908, a document written from the Ministry of Navy informed the Ottoman Public Debt Administration that the captains from Symi hunt sponges with a machine on the coast of the former Antalya and Köprüpazarı. The Marmaris Gunboat quickly went to the incident area and transferred the situation to Konya Province (BOA, DH,MKT, 464, 37-305).

It was reported that machine hunting is banned one after the other in places on the Mediterranean coast. We mentioned that machine hunting was banned in Tripoli District in 1902. The smugglers had primarily chosen the tax-exempt waters of Crete and Cyprus as their hunting grounds. Upon being realized, the smugglers chose Manduihi Bay (for tax-free hunting), this time in western Egypt (to avoid the restrictions imposed by the governor of Rhodes). Sponge fishermen from Rhodes came to Crete and Cyprus, and later to Mandurihi, were found to be trying to hunt there despite the invalidity of their licenses, and a quarantine officer was sent to the bay to prevent such fishing. In the document dated 28 March 1907 (15 March 1323) written to the Ministry of Internal Affairs from the Governor of Eyalet of the Archipelago, it was stated that the fishing is prohibited by machinery in the Tripoli Province, and the sponge boaters are obliged to take a missive (BOA, DH.MKT. / 523, 58- 51 ). In the document dated 16 June 1908 (5 Cemazievvel 1325), it was stated that hunting with machinery is prohibited on the coasts of Egypt and Cyprus (BOA, DH.MKT. / 523, 58-55). In the document dated February 3, 1907 (21 Kanun-i Sani 1322), it was stated that sponge divers are obliged to take a permit and pay taxes in accordance with the law, that the boats hunted by machinery are kept under surveillance, and that there is no crop this year due to the heavy destruction of the sponge fields. For this purpose, it was requested not to give a permit to those who were caught machine hunting before; the situation was written from the Tripoli Province to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BOA, DH.MKT. / 523, 58-52). After the prohibition of hunting with machinery, it was stated that the skafender was not a tool like a trawl net in the document dated December 27, 1909 (14 Kanun-i Evvel 1325), and the related ban was lifted (Çoruh, 2009 , p.84).

The rebellion that broke out in the center of the island in 1884 brought sponge divers and machine divers face to face. A military force was brought to the island from the center of Rhodes as a result of the brawl that broke out with the looting of the shops selling machinery. As a result of this incident, those involved in this incident were punished, and the process of collecting sponges by machine was prohibited due to its harmful effects. There was a shift from areas where there was a sponge ban to areas where there was no ban, and the people of Symi, who earned their living from this job, tried to continue their livelihood by hunting in more remote areas. Although the harms of hunting with machinery were known, the fact that it was released again in 1909 shows that the state could not act decisively in this business.

### **Preservation of Shores and Divers**

Sponge fishing along the line from the Mediterranean Sea to the coast of North Africa, especially with the start of machine sponge hunting, we see that the states' control mechanism was felt thoroughly. Since the fishing of sponges posed a risk in and of itself, regardless of the method, ships such as gunboats and steamboats (*istimbot*), which would also provide treatment services for the divers who went sponge fishing

together with the protection of the shores, started to operate, and we see that the expenses of these ships were collected from sponge taxes.<sup>12</sup>

Sponge fishermen of the Ottoman Empire, who were their own people, aside from those, another factor that created a real problem to deal with was the sponge boats belonging to Greece. In the document dated February 20, 1888 (7 Cemazielahir 1305), the Ministry of the Navy was asked to check the sponge boats that will come to the Eyalet of the Archipelago from the Greek coast, as every year, in order to hunt sponges. Here, "*Sarıyer Vapurı*" started to work in order to take and confiscate the tools and various materials of those who did not have a permit. Since it was known that this ferry, which would tour the coast of the province, consumes 300 *tonlito* of coal, an application was made by the cavalry officer of the ferry to supply and bring it.<sup>13</sup> Upon the documents submitted to the ministry, it was requested to cover 300 liras, which was the cost of coal, from the sponge tax income. It was ensured that the fee was sent to the treasury of the Bengehzi Provincial Ministry and in this way the fee was charged (BOA,DH.MKT. / 1487, 22).

In the document dated September 10, 1900 (15 Cemazielevvel 1318), it was stated that a steamboat was requested from the Tripolitania Province to prevent the boats engaged in sponge fishing without a permit, and it was requested that the coal cost of the ship which was 4000 lira out of a total of 5000 lira collected from Basra, Ioannina, Eyalet of Archipelago and Beirut Provinces and the rest namely 1000 liras paid from the Treasury in cash. A telegram was sent to the local revenue office (defterdarlık) regarding the rapid delivery of 20 thousand kuruş. In the document written to the Ministry of the Navy, it was stated that it is important to send the steamboat to prevent the sponge fishing boats fishing without a permit. However, it was stated that although the ferry arrives in the region, it is waiting at the port, and it is important for the start of operation to prevent lawlessness and for the protection of the coast. In order to transfer the money quickly, a notification was made from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Ministry of Finance (BOA,BEO,1547,115986).

Ensuring security in North Africa was made possible by patrolling ships there. According to the document written to the Ministry of Internal Affairs dated March 7, 1906 (March 14, 1322), two gunboats such as the Şems Ferry were needed in the waters of Tripoli, and because these ships consumed 500 tons of coal, the coal should be prepared immediately; it was requested that the coast be protected by land and sea and that sponge fishing should be kept under control; the situation was reported to the Mutasarrıflık of Bengehzi(BOA, DH.MKT. / 523 – 58-16 -17). The Ministry of Internal Affairs reported that the destruction of sponge production can only be prevented by a ferryboat (BOA, DH.MKT. / 523 , 58-20).

Not only was the Ottoman ferry patrolling the coasts of North Africa, but also Greek ships were sailing in these waters. In the document dated June 22, 1905 (June 9, 1321) written by the Mutasarrıflık of Bengehzi, it was stated that the ferry named "Firidi" with 30 crew, cavalry officer and 2 cannons sailed for the treatment of fishermen (BOA, DH.MKT. / 523 - 58-7). In the document sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a year later, it was stated that this ferry sailed more than three miles offshore to help the fishermen whose health was in danger (BOA, DH.MKT. / 523 , 58-33). Since the Ottoman government did not want this ferry, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent documents to the Tripoli Province to remove the "*Firidi*", who was sent by the Greek government to protect the Greek boatmen, from the region (BOA, DH.MKT. / 523 , 58-55). In the first week of July in 1906, when this ship overturned in Greek territorial waters, it was asked to

<sup>12</sup> Gunboat or ganbot is the name of small warships with one or more guns. An *İstımbot* is a small boat, a lifeboat sized, powered by steam.

<sup>13</sup> *Tonlito* is a unit equal to a ton used to indicate the load that ships can take. Ton is a unit of weight of one thousand kilograms.

the Tripoli Province *Mutasarrıflık* of Benghazi whether if it had committed a violation (BOA, DH.MKT. / 523 , 58-33). The Naval Ministry immediately sent the necessary order to help the sinking ship from Rhodes Island (BOA, DH.MKT. / 523 , 58-36).

The Greek government continued to send ships to the region under the pretext of helping the fishermen, even though the Ottoman Empire did not view it positively. In the document dated 22 June 1906, it was reported that the Greek-flagged "Isnauru" ferry, which departed from the Piraeus Port with 4 guns and 88 guns, started to operate instead of the sinking Firidi ferry. This ship was also requested to perform hospital duty by waiting three miles offshore (BOA, DH.MKT. / 523 ,58-31). It was stated that the Greeks continued to fish outside their own territorial waters, especially in the line extending to Tripoli, and they did this to earn their living (BOA, DH.MKT. / 523 , 58-12). The Greek Government stated that this ship is for the needs of the fishermen; it was stated that there is a military janitor who will also provide hospital service on the ship (BOA, DH.MKT. / 523 , 58-13 ).

It was also reflected in the documents that the ferries cruising in North Africa in order to provide security and prevent violations caught the boatmen and confiscated their goods. In the document written to the British Embassy dated 9 June 1906, it was reported that the Tatsparhi ferry and the Şems Ferry<sup>14</sup> under the auspices of the Benghazi Sanjak captured the Ottoman fishermen. It was stated that some sponges were also detained, and that the fishermen were caught during smuggling two miles from the coast, while the coast guard officer also confiscated the tools and equipment on board. Since this situation was against the law, the Minister of Finance was informed. Since it was known that the Ottoman ship belonging to Symi Island was caught by the Şems Ferry and its goods were taken during sponge fishing, and it was known that both vessels carried the Ottoman flag, it was stated that those who were caught had to apply to the Ottoman courts by law (BOA, HR.TH.. / 334 , 128).

When we came to Symi Island from the sponge fishing area in North Africa, we see that the ships started to work in order to ensure safety and prevent machine fishing. Although this situation was implemented for security purposes and to prevent violations; it was received negatively by some people. In the telegram sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs from Symi Island, which was subject to Samos, dated 26 June 1906, in some boats that were traveling between Eyalet of the Archipelago and Anatolia for six months, a machine was secretly put on the boats with "*Hır Usulünü*" to hunt sponge they were caught<sup>15</sup>. It has been stated that this work will be prevented by patrolling a ship on the sea route from Samos to Symi, and that this ship, which can be withheld, will ensure safety at sea (BOA, HR.ID, 2121,55). Two weeks later, we see that the first headman of Symi (Muhtar-ı Evvel) Mihail Bünyamin, addressing the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in his petition to the Eyalet of Archipelago, criticizing the ferry that was traveling for security reasons. It was stated that although these boats were taken for the purpose of providing tracking and transportation on behalf of the state in the Sea of Islands for six months, they didn't work properly and caused damage to the state treasury. It was also emphasized that it caused destruction in the sponge breeding areas. In this way, while

<sup>14</sup> Naval Arsenal (Tersane-i Amire), also carries out the repairs of the ferries patrolling the North African coasts. On 7 August 1906 (25 July 1322), it was reported that the Şems Ferry was repaired in Tripoli. It was stated from the center that there is no ship that draws less water in Naval Arsenal (Tersane-i Amire), like the Nüzhet ferry, and that this ferry will be repaired and sent as soon as possible. (BOA, DH.MKT. / 523 , 58-38).

<sup>15</sup> We do not have information about the method mentioned here.

these seas, where the people's livelihood was provided, were usurped; this work was requested to be stopped as soon as possible (BOA. HR.İD, 2121, 56).

Apart from security, patrol ships also served to prevent illegal sponge exports. In the document written to the Ministry of Internal Affairs from the Kalymnoz District Governorate, Chios and *Mutasarrıflık* of Eyalet of Archipelago dated September 5, 1906 (16 Recep 1324), it was requested to prevent the export of sponge fished by machine boats around Ostropalya, Kaşot, Kerpe, Crete and the surrounding islands. In order to prevent this illegal export, a fast-moving ferry was requested from the Ministry of Navy (BOA, BEO 2907 ,218001). A year later, the same request was emphasized again. In the document dated September 3, 1907 (25 Recep 1325), it was stated that the prevention of sponge fishing with prohibited tools in and around Symi Island and the preservation of the coasts in this state depend on the sending of a fast-moving ferry. The Ministry of Finance was requested to pay 370 thousand kuruş for this work, with the notification made from the Eyalet of Archipelago to the Ministry of the Navy and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (BOA, BEO, 3136 , 235182).

In order to prevent the increase of violations and machine hunting from the island, the security that was tried to be provided by small boats as of July 1906 was requested to be made on a larger scale as of December 21, 1909 (8 Dhul-Hijjah 1327). It was stated that many sponge fishermen needed treatment during sponge fishing with the recommendation of the District Governor of Symi, and that the life of the mechanics was endangered from time to time. For this purpose, after the hunters departed from the port to collect sponges, they were requested to be supported by a doctor and a hospital ship full of medical supplies. A tahrirat sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Eyalet of Archipelago showed that the matter was referred to the Ministry of the Navy. The Minister of the Navy liked the idea, and it was reported that it was decided to appoint a ship that was serving as a guard ship in the waters of Eyalet of Archipelago as a hospital ship (BOA, DH.MV, 53,40).

The Greek Government did not hesitate to accompany the Turkish government, which was considering ensuring the safety of the beaches by means of the ferries waiting at certain points on the coast and in the open sea for the treatment of divers and the protection of the seas. While the boats were successful in preventing the hunting with the machine, the boatmen's properties were confiscated in cases where it was against the law, and the situation was brought to the court.

### **Shipwrecks**

The first response of the Ottoman State regarding the wrecked ships was to assign captains or officers from the relevant navy to explore the wreck area and remove the shipwreck, and to inform the managers of the shipwreck area to help these officers (Kocaoğlu, 2019, p. 189). In the document dated April 17, 1716 (24 Rebiülahir 1128), the payment of 1800 kuruş given for the removal of the shipwrecks in the galleons belonging to the year 1128 of the sixty divers from the residents of Symi Island was made. It is reported to the *Kapudan Pasha* (grand admiral) Abdurrahman Pasha, from the Mutasarrıflık of the Sanjak of Rhodes, that the divers received their wages (BOA, AE.SAMD.III / 50 , 4953). Another shipwreck removal process was in the book that gives the names of the forty divers requested from Symi Island in the document that came eight months later. In the letter sent to Mustafa Pasha for the Imperial Navy, 100 people were needed and 60 of these divers were asked to be taken from Symi Island (BOA, AE.SAMD.III / 129 , 12695).

**Table 3:** Symi Divers to Work in Removing Sinking Galleons in 1716

Number	Crew	Crew
1	Kirkast Reis veled-i İstmat	Nikol veled-i Andon
2	Reis veled-i İstmad	Luka Kambur
3	Ecma Yorgi Captain (reis) veled-i Nikid	Yorgi veledi Yakumi
4	Yorgi Mustaki veled-i Yaku	Kati veled -iMoholodi
5	Yani Klad Veled Lezsekid	Minhal veled-i Kulmbiri
6	Bibi Mincal Kunması	Konrodlu bibi Cura
7	Other bibi Mencal Sarı	Kostulu Almiyo
8	Bibi Minvalako veled-i Ratayani	Kıncal veled-i Burkandi
9	Ecma Kuri Veled-i bibi Fecal	Temre Cuvaş veled-i Nikola
10	Mincal Yani	Yani veled-i Hayket
11	Yorgi Ramov	Sunged veled-i Yorgi
12		Nikol veled-i Aksunku
13		Nikto veled-i Fasat
14		Yorgi veled-i Akabru
15		Yani veled-i Katzi
16		İstibdar veled-i Anton
17		Mincal veled-i Nikola
18		Tekbet veled-i Nikola
19		Yani veled-i Nikola
20		Yani veled-i Anton
21		Yorgi veled-i Mencal
22		Mencal veled-i Nikola
23		Other Mencal veled-i Yani

24		Yani veled-i İstimat
25		Kosti veled-i Nikset
26		Yani veled-i Koçara
27		Yani veled-i Fistaki
28		Mencal veled-i Yorgi
29		Other Yani veled-i Kosti
30		Other Yani veled-i Fimal
31		Nikete veled-i Vasil
32		Kosbit veled-i Nikola
33		Yorgi veled-i Kosti

Reference : BOA, AE.SAMD.III / 50 , 4953 and BOA,AE.SAMD.III / 129 , 12695.

The process of removing the materials of the sunken galleons belonging to the Naval Arsenal (Tersane-i Amire) in front of the Çeşme Fortress, which belonged to the Imperial Navy, was given to the manager Murâbitzâde Hacı Hüseyin Kaptan in Rhodes Island. He requested Kalymnoz and Symbeki divers who were skilled in this work for the shipwrecks. In the document dated November 15, 1770 (26 Recep 1184), the ship that would remove the wreck was arranged; since it was still winter, the three-masted galleons of the navy in Boğazhisar, called "Konratı", were asked to go to Lemnos Island and took out the scavenged lengers, cannons and shellac tools at Çeşme Harbor opposite Chios Island. For this purpose, a verdict was sent regarding the divers to be assigned to the service of Murabitzade Hacı Huseyin Captain, one of the Pergandi Captains, and other matters. 10 people from Kalymnoz Island and 10 people from Symi Island were provided. After the removed ones were sent to Naval Arsenal (Tersane-i Amire), it was requested that the remaining pieces be sent to Istanbul as soon as possible before winter comes. Two days later, in the judgment written to *Kapudan Pasha* (grand admiral) Cafer Pasha and one of the former grand viziers, Ali Pasha, the Guard of Seddülbahir (Çanakkale), it was ordered that the situation was urgent, that the cannon, iron, etc. tools in the port were removed and sent urgently to Istanbul by three-masted ships by going to Çesme Port without wasting any time (Baykara Taşkaya, 2021, p. 357).

In the document dated 7 July 1797 (12 Muharrem 1212), it was requested that the shipwreck of a state-owned frigate and a swallow ship under the command of the survivor Halil Kaptan are to be excavated on the shores of Kapudağı, which sank eight years ago. With the allowance for this operation, Hacıoğlu Mehmed Çavuş, who was sent from the Naval Arsenal (Tersane-i Amire), was provided to remove the shipwrecks. Two skippers and a scuba diver, 22 iron cannons and 7 pieces of lenger iron were brought out of the sea and delivered to the shipyard. This time, a second time by the same person, a piece of bronze ball with a diameter of one and a half vukuyye and 5 pieces of iron ball with diameters of 1 or 2 were removed from the frigate guns; and was delivered to Naval Arsenal (Tersane-i Amire) along with the çavuş's letter. Apart from the wrecks here, bronze-iron cannons of various diameters and 6 cannons were registered with the

shipyard and necessary notifications were made to the Chief Accountant. *İlmuhaberi* (certificate of receipt of delivery) was delivered to the Shipyard Port, and the situation was notified to the Head of the Provincial Treasury(BOA, AE.SSLM.III 116 , 7074).

Not only ship materials and ammunition collected from shipwrecks but also skafender tool, which was initially reacted to, was used to removal of shipwrecks itself. In the document dated January 23, 1904 (5 Zilkade 1321), the Governor of the Eyalet of the Archipelago, Abidin, three months ago, permission was requested to bring a scafender machine from Symi to extract the iron that a British steamer, on which the Egyptian Khedive was on, had dropped into the sea in front of Rhodes. After the completion of the iron removal process, it was especially emphasized that the necessary precautions should be taken to prevent sponge removal by this machine, and the British Consul of Rhodes Island was also informed about it (BOA, DH.MKT. , 812 ,58).

Assistance was requested from the people of the island for the removal of materials from the sunk wreckage of galleons, frigates, etc., which were used as warships in the Ottoman Empire, and the shipwrecks were removed. The people of Symi, who were masters in diving, showed great success in the removal of Ottoman shipwrecks. It was noteworthy that the divers of the region are all non-Muslims besides being skilled at this job.

### **Between Livelihood and Death**

Apart from being a very arduous diving profession, it could also result in death. The sinking of kayaks and boats could cause accidents and deaths at sea from time to time. We can learn from the documents that the aid money collected due to the accidents that occurred in this way was given to the families of the individuals.

In the document dated July 2, 1899 (15 Rebiülevvel 1317), news of the accident came with the delivery of the memorandum sent from the Greek Patriarchate to the Eyalet of Archipelago. Some people from the people of Symi Island, who drowned as a result of the sinking of the ship they boarded while fishing for sponges in the waters of Tripoli, were asked to help those families in need of help (BOA, DH.MKT. . / 2224, 64). Another accident news came a year later. According to the document dated March 19, 1900 (17 Zilkade 1317), the ship of 47 people from Symi Island, who went at night to hunt for sponges with sailboats, collided with the British ferry "Knifsol" going to Tripoli. 43 people died in the collision. The state became a tool to help the families of these people. According to the *tahrirat* sent to the Eyalet of Archipelago, it was understood that the needs of the families of the people who died on the ship from Symi were requested to be met (BOA, DH.MKT., 2320, 59). On April March 16, 1901 (25 Zilkade 1318) and April 8, 1901 (18 Zilhicce 1318) related to this work, assistance was collected from the settlement Department of the Eyalet of Archipelago and delivered to the State Property Department. It was requested to examine and send the amount of aid (iane) collected from the province. It was ensured that the money collected is given to the families of the people who perished on their way to Tripoli waters to collect sponges, from the people of Symi Island in appropriate amounts ( BOA, DH.MKT. / 2469 ,119- BOA, BEO ,1632 , 122399).

It was also the case that the properties of the sponge boats were stolen while they were hunting or while they were cruising. In the document sent to Hasan Ağa, the Muhassılı of Chios, dated 13 October 1901 (29 Cemazielahir 1219), it was stated that Mike Reis Veled-i Yani Zimni(non-Muslim) and his five crew



members (melhah) were busy digging sponges out of the sea at Zeytinburnu, and that twelve bandits came from İzmir in a Bireme type boat by overwhelming the boat, they usurped 200 kuruş cash, goods. Since it was known that the bandit robbed many people throughout the night, precautions were requested. It was also emphasized that those who did this work should be caught immediately and the necessary punishments should be given. Regarding the situation, documents (Emir-i ali) were sent to the Regent of Chios, the Voivode of Izmir and the Minister of Lesbos (BOA, C..DH../ 281 , 14031).

In cases where divers died, it was important whether people had a fishing permit or not, and the situation of the person's debts was shaped accordingly. In the document dated September 7, 1901 (23 Cemazielevvel 1319), a document was sent from the Ottoman Public Debt Administration due to the death of people named Nikola Maril and Katitin İsbontin, who went to Symi Island to hunt for sponges in Tripoli waters, by drowning. With the letter sent from the İzmir Public Debt Administration, the debt of 31 liras of these persons to the Symi Island Public Debt Administration was sought to be paid. It was stated that the individuals did not have a license. In such events, it was stated that the necessary action would be taken according to regulation of *ahkâm (ahkâm nizamnamesi)* issued for sponge fishing. Since the deceased person's debt cannot be canceled, the directorate collected the 31 lira debt of the individuals as a record of deterioration (Tergin Record ) (BOA, ŞD. / 397,45).

As there are risk factors in every job, various problems such as sponge boats' accidents, boats being hijacked, etc. could be encountered. In cases of death, the state collected aid for the families of the divers, and tried to catch the criminals in cases of extortion.

### Conclusion

Although the numbers of the people of Symi varied according to the years, they earned their living from sponge fishing with an average of nearly two hundred boats. Due to the rugged and mountainous nature of the geography and the lack of possibility of agriculture and animal husbandry on the island sponge fishing gave life to this area. The people of Symi Island, who carry out sponging activities depending on Rhodes Island, wanted to sell their sponges to the foreign country without paying taxes. In particular, the state imposed a ban on sponge hunting without a permit, since sponge fields damaged by overhunting. With the proclamation of the Tanzimat, the state had not yet established a healthy tax system. In this process, the transformation of sponge fishing into an international and profitable trade caused some measures to be taken in this regard. After the emergence of machine hunting, sponge fishing was desired to be tied to a certain order, and it was continued with temporary solutions such as banning sponge fishing with regulations and permitting it again after a while. The state employed gunboats and steamboats as patrols in order to ensure that sponge diving on the wide coastline of the Mediterranean and North Africa was carried out on certain bases, to protect the coastline of the sea and to make the fishermen safer. Sponge, which constitutes half of the island's most important source of income and foreign trade, was sold to European states via the Port of İzmir , which was the export point, and from Symi Island.

At the same time, the people of Symi also participated with the government to remove sea wrecks, and successfully worked in the removal of sunken ships in Çeşme and in various other areas. In the documents we came across in the archives, we see that all of the divers who unearthed the wrecks were non-Muslims. In addition to this, in the waters of North Africa, the Arabs were engaged in sponge diving. We have been able to follow through archive documents that this people, who earned their living from the art of diving throughout history, unfortunately also suffered from sea accidents and injuries. The state tried to help the

families of the deceased by collecting aid from the public. In our article, every detail of sponge diving on the island has been tried to be explained as much as possible from the archival documents and examination works that provide the primary material, and the effect of this business on the Ottoman economy has been detailed.

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