



The Historical Transformation of Safranbolu Saffron: Insights from Ottoman Archival Documents and Travelogues*

Safranbolu Safranının Tarihsel Dönüşümü: Osmanlı Arşiv Belgeleri ve Seyahatnamelerinden Görüşler

İbrahim CANBULAT¹

Özet

Bu çalışma, Osmanlı arşiv belgeleri ve seyahatnameler kullanılarak Safranbolu'da safran tarımının tarihsel gelişimini araştırmaktadır. 16. yüzyıldan başlayarak, bölgesel ekonomide önemli bir yere sahip olan safranın evrimini detaylı arşiv kayıtlarıyla izlemekte ve safran üretimine dair mali belgeleri içermektedir. Araştırma, safran yetiştiriciliği ve ticaretinin şekillendirdiği Safranbolu'nun peyzaj ve ekonomisindeki dönüşümü vurgulamaktadır. Ayrıca, çeşitli dönemlerden seyahatnamelerin safranın sosyoekonomik etkisini nasıl algıladığını ve tarif ettiğini incelemekte, tarihsel uygulamaları modern canlandırma çabalarıyla bağlantılandırmaktadır. Bu çift yönlü yaklaşım, Safranbolu'nun safran mirasını kapsamlı bir şekilde anlamamızı sağlar, tarih boyunca ekonomik önemini ve kültürel yankısını vurgular.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Safranbolu, Safran Tarımı, Osmanlı Ekonomi Tarihi, Arşiv Araştırması, Seyahatnameler, Kültürel Miras.

Abstract

This study explores the historical development of saffron cultivation in Safranbolu, utilizing Ottoman archival documents and travelogues. Starting with the 16th century, it traces the evolution of saffron as a significant aspect of the regional economy through detailed archival records, including financial documents related to saffron production. The research highlights the transformation of Safranbolu's landscape and economy, shaped by the cultivation and trade of saffron. Additionally, it examines how travelogues from various periods have perceived and described the socio-economic impact of saffron, linking historical practices to modern revival efforts. This dual approach provides a comprehensive understanding of Safranbolu's saffron heritage, emphasizing its economic importance and cultural resonance throughout history.

Keywords: Safranbolu, Saffron Cultivation, Ottoman Economic History, Archival Research, Travelogues, Cultural Heritage.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Saffron, often celebrated as the most valuable spice in the world, has not only added flavor and color to dishes but has also played a pivotal role in historical trade and cultural exchanges. This vibrant spice, derived from the stigmas of the *Crocus sativus* flower, is as much prized for its aromatic properties as for its rarity and labor-intensive harvesting process, which involves meticulous hand-picking. The historical journey of saffron spans over four millennia, marking its presence from the ancient civilizations of Greece and Persia to the sprawling markets of medieval and modern Europe.



Figure 1. Safranbolu Saffron, Photo: Serdar Şamlı.

In Turkey, Safranbolu¹ stands out as a historical epicenter for saffron cultivation, integrating this heritage into its economic and cultural fabric. The town's name itself, evolving from 'Zağferanbolu' which denotes a place rich in saffron, highlights the deep-rooted significance of this spice in the region. Through a detailed examination of Ottoman archival documents and an array of travelogues, this study aims to trace the transformative journey of saffron in Safranbolu. It seeks to

¹ The name 'Safranbolu' has undergone several historical changes, reflecting shifts in cultural and economic significance. Originally, the area was known as 'Taraklı Borlu.' In the 18th century, it was renamed 'Zağferanbolu,' indicating the growing importance of the saffron economy, before it was eventually shortened to 'Safranbolu' (Yazıcıoğlu ve Al 29-40). Additionally, (Yazıcıoğlu and Al 34) note historical references to the name 'Dadybra,' which is now considered highly dubious. Recent archaeological findings suggest 'Dadybra' might actually refer to the nearby settlement of Devrek. If these findings are validated, they could necessitate a significant revision of Safranbolu's medieval history. (Gür and Yıldırım).

uncover how this small town in Northern Anatolia navigated the complexities of agricultural innovation, economic shifts, and cultural transformations centered around the saffron trade.

By exploring the narratives preserved in historical records and vivid descriptions from travelers, this paper not only revisits the economic history of saffron in Safranbolu but also illustrates the broader socio-economic impacts that shaped the region's landscape and its people. This dual approach not only enriches our understanding of Safranbolu's heritage but also provides a microcosmic view of the global narrative of saffron, reflecting its enduring legacy and contemporary relevance.

Historically, saffron's story begins in ancient Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean, where archaeological and literary evidence suggests early cultivation. Minoan frescoes from Crete and references in Homer's writings attest to saffron's early prominence in ritualistic, medicinal, and culinary contexts. Andrew Dalby highlights that "Saffron, whose homeland is likely to be Anatolia, was known in the Aegean islands before the eruption of Mount Santorini. When Santorini erupted, the Minoan town of Akrotiri and the murals depicting the saffron gathering there were buried under lava and ash." (Dalby, 2024: 223). Persia (modern-day Iran) later emerged as a pivotal center for saffron cultivation, significantly enhancing the plant's global dissemination via the extensive trade networks of the Silk Road. The Silk Road facilitated the exchange not only of goods but also of agricultural knowledge, enabling saffron to reach distant lands such as India, China, and eventually medieval Europe.

In ancient Persia, saffron held profound cultural and economic importance, featuring prominently in Persian cuisine, traditional medicine, and even religious ceremonies. Persian merchants and travelers subsequently introduced saffron to distant regions, notably the Indian subcontinent. The Kashmir region of northern India became renowned for producing premium saffron, distinguished by its deeper color and intense fragrance. Throughout Asia, saffron's integration into Ayurveda—the traditional Indian medical system—further underscored its medicinal value, wherein it was used to treat ailments ranging from gastrointestinal disorders to mood imbalances.

The medieval era witnessed saffron's journey further westward into Europe, facilitated by Arab traders via the expansive Silk Road network and later intensified through Mediterranean maritime trade. Europe, captivated by saffron's exotic qualities, integrated the spice deeply into its culinary, medicinal, and artistic traditions. Dalby further illustrates saffron's historical significance, noting that it became "The most expensive of the Mediterranean's indigenous spice species" due to the intense manual labor involved in harvesting its stigmas (Dalby, 2024: 223). Saffron found favor in Medieval and Renaissance Europe not only as a luxurious culinary ingredient—featured prominently in dishes such as the famous Spanish paella and Italian risotto alla Milanese—but also as a valuable medicinal agent. Historical texts document saffron's use as a remedy during the devastating plague epidemics, believed to offer protection against contagion. Due to its exorbitant price, saffron even became subject to stringent trading laws aimed at combating widespread adulteration practices, which persist into modern times.

Dalby also provides a Byzantine perspective, noting that saffron's historical roots were deeply embedded in the Cilicia region (modern-day southern Anatolia), stating: "Although its historical origin is said to be due to the limestone depression at Korykos near the coast of Cilicia, saffron was cultivated in various Mediterranean regions." He also describes how political changes influenced saffron trade: "The spread of Islam eventually brought not only Cilicia but also the historic saffron farms of Persia and Kashmir under Muslim control; however, the Byzantine Empire's demand for saffron continued, and saffron was henceforth imported." (Dalby, 2024: 39).

Within this expansive global narrative, Safranbolu emerges uniquely as a historically significant center of saffron cultivation in Anatolia. During the time of the Seljuks and Ottomans, saffron was widely cultivated in the region. Notably, Ibn Battuta (1304-1368), one of the great travelers, recorded that saffron was grown in Göynük. It is known that it was also cultivated in Ottoman-era sanjaks such as Bolu, Kastamonu, İzmir, Adana, Tokat, Şanlıurfa, and Mardin. The sale of 9.705 kg of saffron to England in 1858 highlights the economic importance of Ottoman saffron trade.

However, saffron production gradually declined in the late Ottoman and early Turkish Republican periods due to shifting economic priorities and agricultural trends, continuing only in Safranbolu. By 1913, production had decreased to just 500 kg. Yet, from the 1990's onward, saffron production experienced rapid revitalization due to initiatives by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Karabük Governorate, and Safranbolu local administrations.

Safranbolu saffron holds a protected geographical indication status, underscoring its distinctive quality derived from the local terroir—unique soil, microclimate, and traditional cultivation methods handed down through generations. Local saffron cultivation involves meticulous procedures, from careful soil preparation and precise planting depth of saffron corms to labor-intensive hand-harvesting during the brief autumn flowering period. These traditional practices, although labor-intensive and challenging to mechanize fully, are integral to maintaining the saffron's authenticity, superior quality, and cultural heritage. The commitment of local communities, supported by governmental and academic institutions, has led to increased production and awareness, promoting Safranbolu as a center of excellence for saffron cultivation in Turkey.

The present research paper seeks to trace the detailed historical trajectory of saffron cultivation specifically in Safranbolu, framing it within the broader context of global saffron history.

2. SAFRANBOLU SAFFRON IN OTTOMAN STATE ARCHIVE DOCUMENTS

We learn from the Defter-i Mufasssal-ı Liva-i Bolu² numbered 35 (new: 38) during the Selim II Period (1566-1574) that saffron was grown in many villages of Safranbolu. From this point of view, saffron cultivation is no later than the 16th century. We understand that it goes back as far as a century.

Table 1. Saffron growing villages in Taraklıborlu.

Villages	Resm-i zağferan [saffron tax] ³
Fani	10
Karaca Ağaç	78
Ulugeçit	357
Bağluca	10
Saraycık	560
Candarlu	130
Burunsuz Viran	15
Kaziye	5
Belen	15
Kavak	60

² Detailed land register of Bolu Province.

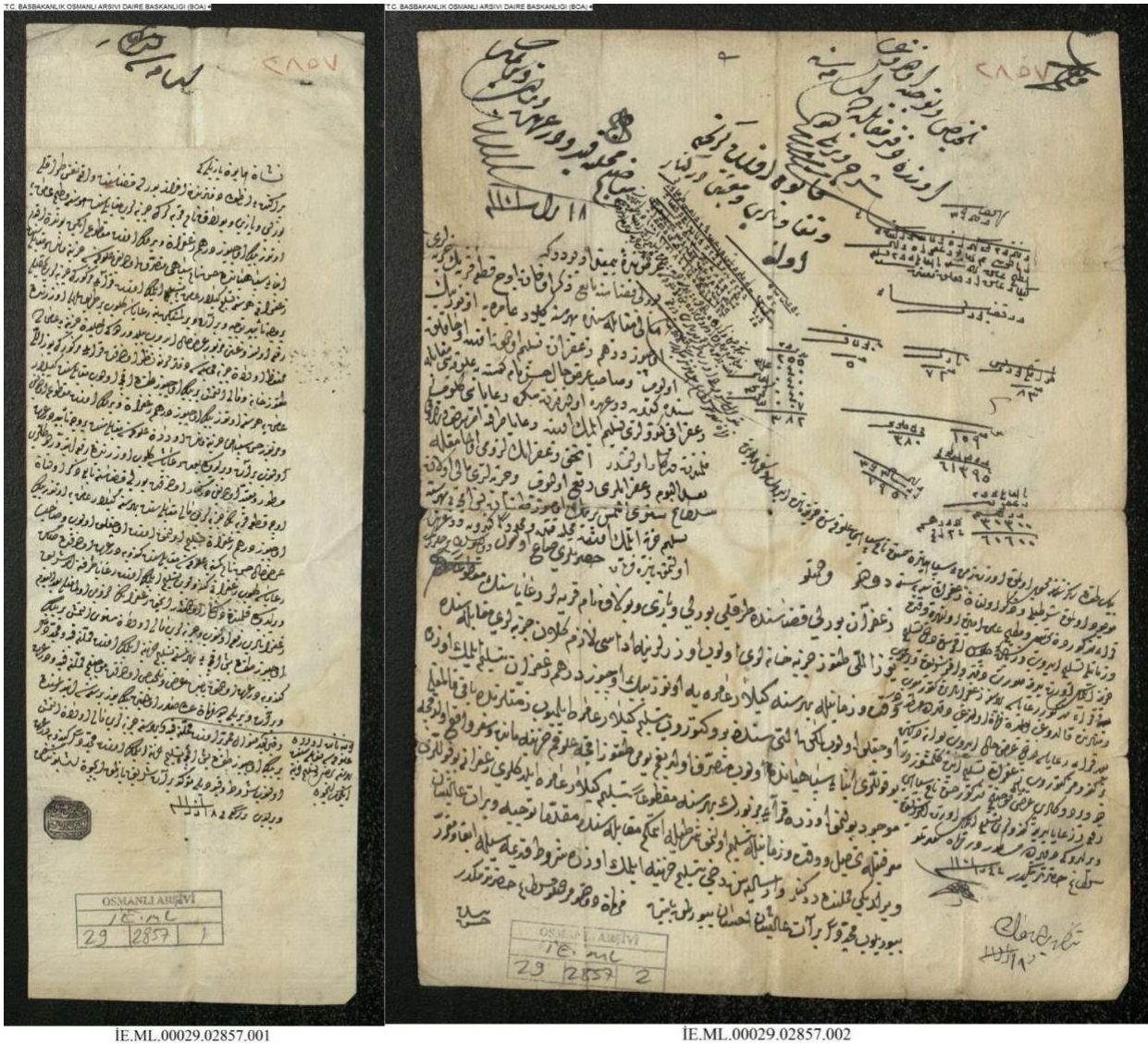
³ It's plausible that the tax on saffron, like other agricultural products, could have been around 10 percent, aligning with the *öşür* or tithe tax. This tax was typically set at one-tenth of the agricultural produce, which includes crops like saffron (Yurtseven 154). Saffron, being a valuable commodity, would have been an important source of revenue through taxation. If so the total value of saffron can be found as around 70,000 akçe (580 kurush) per annum...

İ. Canbulat

Menisa	15
Yortan	15
Kızılım kavi	37
Cüneydler	38
Delü Ak	30
Otamişlar	50
Gülveren	561
Dörtbölük Tokatlı	2
Viran	
Arucak	15
Arıcık	71
Öküzviran	25
Ödemiş	15
Sırcalı	500
Sorguncuk	130
Çomakviran	15
Değirmencik	275
Moğul	40
Tefen	10
Deliler	33
Alınviran Pelidviran	112
Bürnük	120
Pelidviran	310
Dörd Bölük	280
Sarıyanı	15
Yazı	500
Konarı, Kirpe, Çerçen ve Akviran	1400
Akçakilise	40
Bağluca	600
Kızılım viran	100
Bulak Kırac	200
Dâna	15
Aktaş	15
Karıt	10
Altıntas	5
Öylebeli	120
Total: 6,959	

6959 akçe (silver coin) /120= 57.99 kurush.

From TK.GM.d_38 registry in the Taraklıborlu section (images 266-332 and pages 288-350).



A century later, in two documents dated 30 and 31 12.1689 (18 and 19 Rabi al-Awwal 1101 Hijri) and numbered IE.ML.00 29-2857-2 briefly

In the Zagfaranborlu district, the rayah of the villages of Taraklıborlu, Yazı and Bulak have 159 [83 households from Taraklıborlu, 72 households from Yazı, 5 households from Bulak] and are required to deliver 30,300 dirhams of saffron to the Head of Pantry every year in return for the 61,395 akçe jizya they must pay. However, since they did not make the delivery, they remained in their embezzlement.

The duty of the rayahs in these villages to collect the saffron that they had to deliver to the Head of Pantry and to deliver it on time was given to Hasan, one of the sipahis⁴, in return for leaving the daily nine acres of barley to the treasury and being ready for the expedition and giving him a certificate. And even the rayah was given a sipahi named Hasan in accordance with their wishes, saying, "Until this moment, we have taken it ourselves and delivered the saffron", and the sipahi named Hasan was ref and ordered to deliver them to the hands of the rayahs. However, since

⁴ The *sipahi* (Persian: سپاهی *sipâhi*, Turkish pronunciation: [sipa:hi]) were professional cavalymen deployed by the Seljuk Turks and later by the Ottoman Empire.

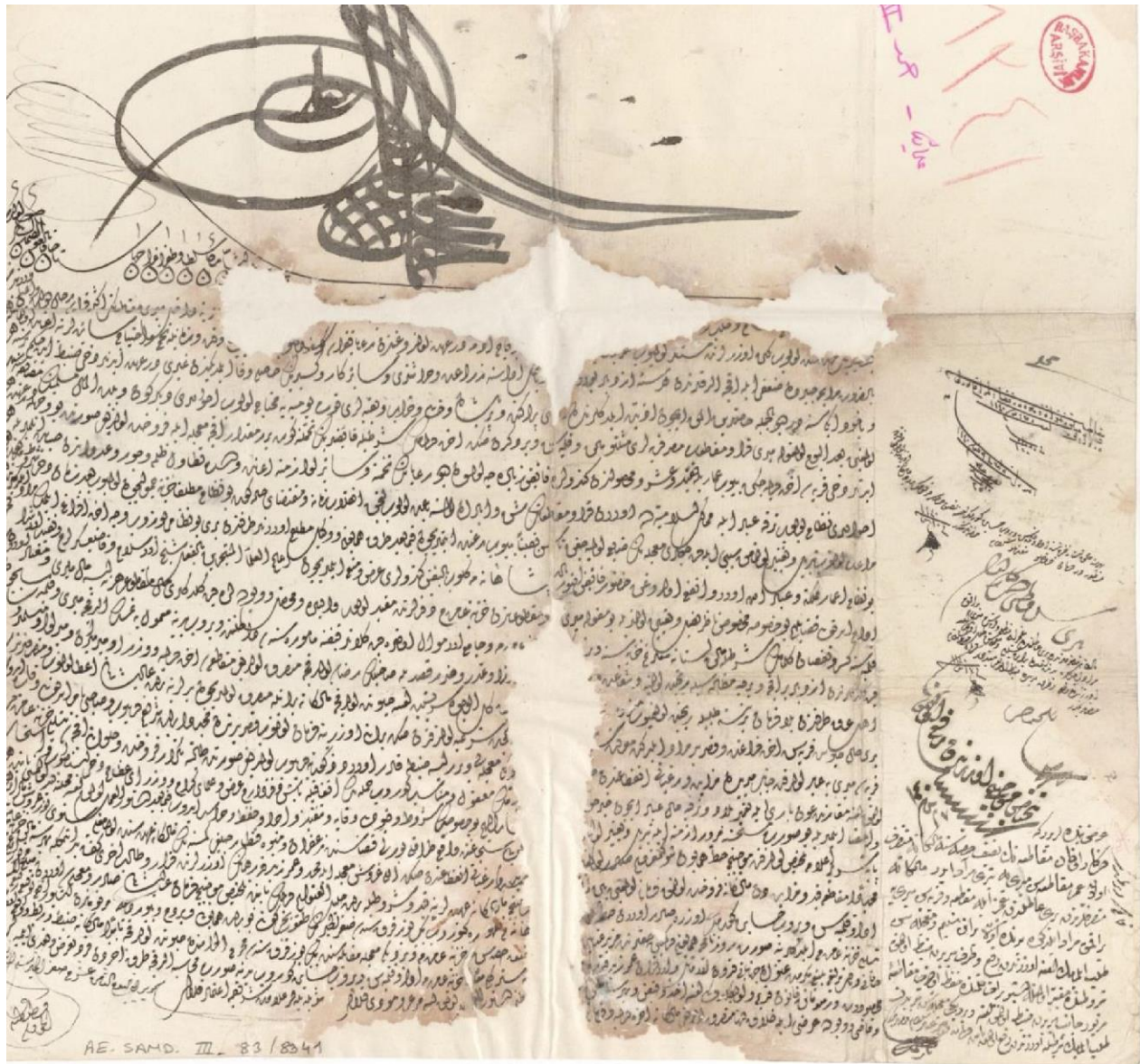
there is no need for saffron, and after that, saffron will be refused and the jizya will be the *malikhane* of the annual 61395 kurush.

It has been reported that they must pay. And the task of collecting 61,395 kurush every year and delivering them to the treasury again, a memorandum on the re-issuance of Sipahi Hassan.

These three villages (Taraklıborlu, Bulak and Yazı) pay 96,960 grams with the calculation of 30,300 dirhams, 1 dirham equals 3.2 gr, in return for 61,395 kurush, which are the jizya of the rayah. I calculate its value as 511,625 kurush with 1 kurush equals 120 akçe.

The document, dated September 26, 1727, begins with the words "In the Sanjak of Bolu, vâki' in the Taraklı Borlu kazâ, saffron and fruit weighing are not under the manor of any person, but one hundred kurush of goods and newly *mukâta'a*⁵ registration and auction to be a manor sale to be ordered". The document was approved by Ahmed II's tughra (peace be upon him). I am publishing this document and the subsequent ruling on the change of ownership of the below, with the transliteration of Metin Asar, an expert in the Ottoman State Archives.

⁵ Under the Ottoman Empire, *Muqata'ah* or *Mukata'a* were *hass-ı hümayun* [imperial domain], parcels of land owned by the Ottoman crown. These were distributed through the *iltizam* [tax farm] auction system; rights to collect revenue from the land were sold to the highest bidder, eventually for the life of the buyer. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muqata%27ah>



Place: AE.SAMD.III / 83-8341-0 Dated: H-27-08-1140 (8 April 1728)

Transliteration:

The person named Ömer was the governor of the Zağferan Kantarcılık Mukataa⁶ in the Taraklıborlu district of Bolu, where he was the governor, was confiscated by the miri.

Memalik-i mahrûsatı'l-mâlik-i şâhânemde vâkî' Şâm ve Halep ve Diyarbekir ve Ayıntâb [Antep] ve Malatya ve Adana ve Tokat cânîplerinde vesâir mahallerde vâli ve muhassıl ve voyvodaların taht-ı iltizamlarına dâhil mîrî mukâtâ'âtın ekserî kurâsı ricâl-i devlet ve a'yân-ı vilayetten bazı kimesnelerin uhdesinde olup lâkin üzerlerinde müstakar olmayup her biri bir tarikle bir senede bir kaç adama der'uhde olduğundan re'âyâ fukarâsı gözedilmeyüp ve kuvvetleri İçün vakt ü zamanıyla tohum vesair ihtiyâc-ı sâirelerine i'ânet olunmamağla bi'z-zarûre mürâbaha cebirden za'fı ile akçe aldıklarından her sene izdiyâd bulan istirbâhın edâsına zirâ'at ve hirâsetleri vesâir kâr u kisbleri hâsılı vefâ eylemediğinden gayri der'uhde edenler dahi zabt edeceğim bir sene ve yâhud iki senedir deyü bi'l- cümle hâsılların almak için eziyet eylediklerinden ekseri parakende ve perişan ve hâli ve harâb ve bakiyyeleri kuvvet-i yevmiyey muhtâc olup ahvâlleri diğer gün ve Beytül-mâl-i müslimînin müzâyakasına sebep olmağın ba'de'l-

⁶ Tax farm.

yevm ol makûle kurâ ve mukâta'ât mısır karyeleri misillü malın ve kalemiyesin verdikden sonra âhara verilmemek şartıyla fâizlerinin tahammülüne göre birer mikdâr akçe-i mu'accele ile fûrûht olunduğu surette bu vecihle der'uhde edenler dahi âhara verilmeyeceğin bilüp imâriyla takayyüd ve öşür ve mahsûlünden kendülere fâiz ziyadece olsun deyü re'âyânın tohumuna ve sâir levazımına i'ânet ve kesb-i tetâvül-i zaleme ve cevri u adavetten sıyânet eylemeleriyle ahvâlleri nizâm bulup tereffüh-i ibâdları ile memâlik-i İslâmiyede olan kurâ ve mukâta'anın şen ve âbâd olmasına bâ'is olup ancak inkılâb-ı zamân ve muktezây-ı hâle göre bu nizâm mutlakâ Hazine cem'i için olmayup bade zamân dahi meşrûat-ı mezkûre mürâ'ât olunup tebdil ve ta'yîr olunmamak sebebi ile verecekleri mu'accelenin zâyî olmayacağı nâsın yakînen bilüp rağbet etmeleri için fîmâ ba'd taraf-ı hümayûnum ve vekîl-i mutlakım olanlar tarafından biri bu nizâmı bozup vech-i âhare ifrâğ eylemek murâd eylediklerinde bu nizâm i'mâr-i memleket ve ibâdullahı evlâ ve enfa' olduğun bilüp huzûr- fâizü'n-nûr-i pâdişâhâneme gelüp bî'n-nefs kendüleri arz ve men' eylemeleri için a'lemü'l-ulemâi'l-mütebahhurîn bi'l-fi'l Şeyhülislâm ve Kadiaskerlerim ve nakîbü'l-eşrâfım edâmallâhü te'lâ fezâilehüyü bu husûsa mahsûs nâzır nasb ve ta'yîn olunmalarıyla ol makûle kurâ ve maktû'ât dan Hazîne-i âmirem defterlerinde mukayyed olup vâililere ve muhassıl ve voyvodalara veregeldikleri mâl-i maktû'u her ne ise mâl-i mîrî ve mu'tâd olan kalemiyese kesr ü noksanı gelmemek şartıyla malın Âsitâne Sa'âdetim Hazinesine verenler ke'l-evvel Hazîne-i Âmireme ve câmi'ü'l-emvâl olanlara vere gelenler kemâ fi'l- evvel kabzına memura senedi dâhilinden verip yerine ma'mûlün bih temessük aldıkça mîrî ve kalemiyesi için veregeldiklerinden izdiyâd bir akçe ve bir habbe mutâlebesiyle rencide olunmaya ve şefâ'at ve ricâ ve tağallüb ve cevri u ezâ ve gadr u zarar kasdıyla sâhibinin rızası olmadıkça mutasarrıf olduğu kurâ âhara verilmeye. Ve vüzerâ ve mîr-i mîrân ve mütesellimler ve sâ'ir ehl-i örf tarafından bilâ fermân bir nesne talebiyle rencide olunmayup mefrûzü'l-kalem ve maktû'u'l-kadem min külli'l-vücûh Serbestiyet üzere hayûnet oldukça malikâne berâtıyla mutasarrıf olmaları için yedlerine ber-vech-i mâlikâne berât-ı âlîşânım i'tâ olunup ve mutasarrıflarından biri hâl-i hayûnetde karyesin âhara ferâğat ve kasr-ı yed-murâd eylediklerinde ma'rifet-i şer' ve hüsn-i rızasıyla hüccet-i şer'iyye olunduktan sonra berâtı üzerine fermân olunup kasr yedinden müceddeden berât-ı şerifim verilüp ve sâhibi biemrillâhi te'âlâ vefât edip karyesi mîrîyeâid olundukda cânib-i mirîden müzâyede ve ragabâtı inkıtâ'ından sonra sâyirin vereceği mu'accele verip ise zabta kâdir evlâd-ı zükûruna verilüp olmadığı sûrette talibine tekrâr fûruht ve hulûleti akçesi teslim-i Hazîne-i Âmirem olunmak üzere mukârenet-i avn-i bârî ile ta'mîr-i bilâd ve terfih-i hâl-i iyâd için hayırhâhân-ı devlet-i aliyem ma'kûl ve münasip görüp cümlelerin ittifakıyla Başdefterdârım arz ve ulemây-ı kirâm ve vüzerây-ı izâmım istisvâb ve istihsân ve imzâ etmeleriyle bu suret-i müstahsene mürur-i ezmine ile tebdil ve tağyir olunmayup nâzırûn-ı müşârûnileyhim bu husûsun şûrût ve kuyûdunu vikâye ve tenfîz ve icrâ ve hıfz u hirâset edip fî mâba'd düstûru'l-amel olmak üzere mahalline kaydolanması bâbında pâye müşîr-i i'lâma telhîs olundukda mücebince hatt-ı hümayûn-ı şevket-makrûnum sâdır olmağın binâ'en alâ zâlik Bolu Sancağı'nda vâkî Taraklı Borlu kazasında zağferan ve meyve kantarcılığı kimesnenin mâlikâne uhdesinde olmamağla senevî yüz guruş mal ile müceddeden mukâta'a kayd ve müzâyededen mâlikâne fûrûht olunmak fermânım olmağın beyne'n-nâs def'atle müzâyede ve ragabâtı inkıtâ'ından sonra elli guruş mu'accele ile Mehmed ve Ömer zîde kadruhümânın üzerlerinde karâr ve tâlib-i âhari keff-i yed etmekle beher sene malın Hazîne-i Âmireme edâ ve kalemiyesin verip hesabın görmek üzere sâdır olan hatt-ı hümayûn-ı şevket-makrûnum mücebince mâlikâne uhdelere kayd ü şûrûtuyla berât-ı celîlü'l-unvânım verilmek bâbında telhis mücebince fermân-ı âlîşânım sâdır ve mu'accesesi olan meblağ-ı mezbûr elli guruşu teslim-i hazîne-i âmirem eylediklerine suret-i ruznâmçe-i hümayûnum verilmeğın haklarında mezîd-i inâyet-i pâdişâhânem zuhura getürüp bin yüz kırk senesi saferu'l-hayrının dokuzuncu günü (9 Safer 1140/26 September 1727) bu berât-ı hümayûnu verdim ve buyurdum ki merkûmândan işbu râfi'-i tevki'-i refi'u'ş-şân-ı hâkânî ve nâkıl-i yarlığ-ı belîğ-ı mekremet unvân-ı cihânbanî kıdvetü'l-emâsil ve'l-akrân Ömer zîde

kadruhü mukâta'a-i mezbûrun nısf hissesin Hazîne-i Âmireme verdiği mu'accele mukâbelesinde bin yüz kırk senesi Muharremü'l-harâmından hayûnet olundukça te'yîden Mâlikâne zabt u rabt ve vâki' olan mahsûlât ve rûsûmâtın kânun-ı kadîm ve evvel geldiği üzere ahz u kabz ve beher sene malın dört taksit ile müşterekli ma'an Hazîne-i Âmireme edâ ve kalemiyesin verip hesâbın görüp yerine suret-i muhâsebe aldıkça taraf-ı âhardan ferd ta'arruz ve ta'addî eylemeyeler. Ve kadı ve voyvoda arzı ile hilâf-ı inhâ mutasarrıf olduğu mâlikâne âhara verilmeye. Ve fermânım olan kasr-ı yed meşrûtunu düstûru'l-amel olmak üzere mer'î ve mü'eddâ kılalar. Şöyle bileler alâmet-i şerifime i'timâd kılalar.

Tahrîran fi'l-yevmi's-sâmin aşere fî safer'l-hayr sene erbe'ûne ve mi'ete ve elf
1140 Safer 18/5 October 1727.

Brief Translation:

The person named Ömer was the governor of the Zağferan Weighing *Mukata'a* in the Taraklıborlu district of Bolu, where he was the governor, was confiscated by the miri.

In the well-protected domains of our sovereign, including Damascus, Aleppo, Diyarbekir, Antep, Malatya, Adana, and Tokat, most of the imperial tax farms are under the administration of state officials and local notables. However, these assignments are not stable, frequently transferring multiple times within a year without properly considering the needs of the poor peasants. As a result, the peasants are forced to purchase their necessary supplies at high prices due to these frequent changes, which impair their agricultural productivity and overall livelihoods.

Recognizing these issues, it has been decided that like the tax farms in Egyptian villages, once a tax farm is assigned, it will not be reassigned. Those who manage these tax farms are expected to assist the peasants by providing them with seeds and other necessities to protect them from exploitation and injustice, thus ensuring their conditions improve and contributing to the prosperity and flourishing of the lands within the Islamic dominions.

This regulation is not intended to be permanent and may be adjusted as required by changes over time or circumstances. Those wishing to change this regulation must present themselves and their case before me, assured that this regulation is in the best interest of the state and its subjects.

Moreover, regarding the saffron and fruit weighing *mukata'a* in the Taraklı Borlu district of Bolu Sanjak, it has been reassigned with a hundred kurush annual payment, and after the cessation of bidding, fifty kurush is to be paid immediately by the current holders, Mehmed and Ömer, with subsequent annual payments to the Imperial Treasury.

This directive, issued on the ninth day of Safer in the year 1140 (26 September 1727), ensures the continuous support and protection of the peasants and the proper management of the tax farms. It mandates that the conditions, restrictions, and rules concerning these matters be duly observed and preserved without alterations, under the supervision of appointed officials to ensure their implementation and enforcement.

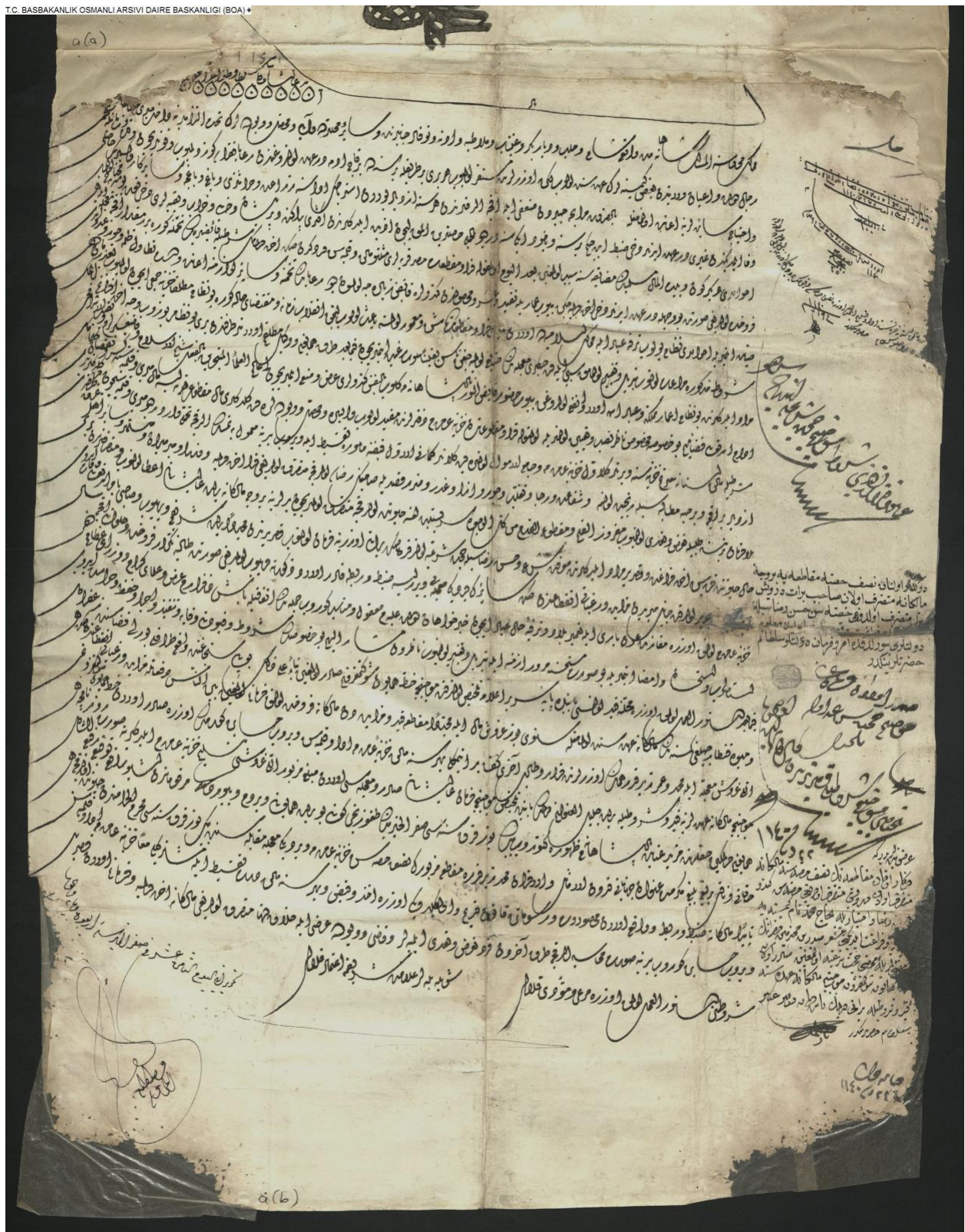
In a state of freedom, those managing the *mukataa* are granted a *malikane* (hereditary fief) decree by our exalted order, allowing them to manage their affairs independently. If one of the managers wishes to relinquish control of his village and reduce his responsibilities during his lifetime, after legally documenting and obtaining consent according to religious law, a new decree will be issued on this berat (certificate), renewing the permissions. Should the holder pass away and the *malikhane* reverts to the state, then after stopping public auctions and other bidding processes, if an immediate cash payment is made by the others, the right may be transferred to the children capable of management; otherwise, it will be offered again for public auction. In view of the repair and improvement of the country and the betterment of the people's conditions, our esteemed

government finds this suitable and agreed upon by our Chief Financial Officer, the honorable scholars, and grand viziers, endorsing it without changes or alterations. This decree is issued to ensure the enforcement and protection of these terms and conditions moving forward, to be registered accordingly.

In the Bolu Sanjak, Taraklıborlu District, where no one holds the saffron and fruit weighing⁷ *mukataa* as a *malikhane* right, it has been re-registered and auctioned off as a *malikhane* with an annual payment of one hundred kurush. Following the auction and the cessation of bidding, Mehmed and Ömer, who have been confirmed as holders, are required to pay fifty kurush immediately. They must pay this amount annually to the Imperial Treasury and submit an accounting of their revenues. This order is issued, making it known that due care and favor of our sovereign will be shown towards those who comply, dated the ninth day of Safer in the year 1140 (26 September 1727).

⁷ Original “*kantarcılık*”.

T.C. BASBAKANLIK OSMANLI ARSIVI DAİRE BASKANLIĞI (BOA) •



AE.SAMD.III /142 -13731 - Dated: H-22-12-1140 (30 July 1728)

Transliteration:

Bolu Sancağında Taraklıborlu Kazasındaki Zağferan ve Meyve Kantarcılığında Taraklıborlu Kazasındaki Zağferan ve Meyve Kantarcılığı Mukataası'nın nısf hissesine malikine mutasarrıf olan Derviş Mehmed'in hissesini rızasıyla Mehmed'e ferağaeylediği

Memalik-i mahrûsatü'l-mâlik-i şâhânemde vâki' Şâm ve Halep ve Diyarbekir ve Ayıntâb [Antep] ve Malatya ve Adana ve Tokat cânîplerinde vesâir mahallerde vâli ve muhassıl ve voyvodaların taht-ı iltizâmılarına dâhil mîrî mukâta'âtın ekserî kurâsı ricâl-i devlet ve a'yân-ı vilayetten bazı kimesnelerin uhdesinde olup lâkin üzerlerinde müstakar olmayup her biri bir tarikle bir senede bir kaç adama der'uhde olduğundan re'âyâ fukarâsı gözedilmeyüp ve kuvvetleri için vakt ü zamanıyla tohum vesair ihtiyâc-ı sâirelerine i'ânet olunmamağla bi'z-zarûre mürâbaha cebirden za'fı ile akçe aldıklarından her sene izdiyâd bulan istirbâhın edâsına zirâ'at ve hirâsetleri vesâir kâr u kisbleri hâsılı vefâ eylemediğinden gayri der'uhde edenler dahi zabt edeceğim bir sene ve yâhud iki senedir deyü bi'l- cümle hâsılların almak için eziyet eylediklerinden ekseri parakende ve perişan ve hâli ve harâb ve bakiyyeleri kuvvet-i yevmiyeye muhtâc olup ahvâlleri diğer gün ve Beytûlmâl-i müslimînün müzâyakasına sebep olmağın ba'de'l-yevm ol makûle kurâ ve mukâta'ât mısır karyeleri misillü malın ve kalemiyesin verdikden sonra âhara verilmemek şartıyla fâizlerinin tahammülüne göre birer mikdâr akçe-i mu'accele ile fûrûht olunduğu surette bu vecihle der'uhde edenler dahi âhara verilmeyeceğın bilüp imâniyla takayyüd ve öşür ve mahsûlünden kendülere fâiz ziyadece olsun deyü re'âyânın tohumuna ve sâir levazımına i'ânet ve kesb-i tetâvül-i zaleme ve cevri u adavetten sıyânet eylemeleriyle ahvâlleri nizâm bulup tereffüh-i ibâdları ile memâlik-i İslâmiyede olan kurâ ve mukâta'anın şen ve ma'mûr olmasına bâ'is olup ancak inkılâb-ı zamân ve muktezây-ı hâle göre bu nizâm mutlakâ Hazine cem'i için olmayup bade zamân dahi meşrûat-ı mezkûre mürâ'ât olunup tebdil ve ta'yîr olunmamak sebebi ile verecekleri mu'accelenin zâyî' olmayacağı nâsın yakinen bilüp rağbet etmeleri için fîmâ ba'd taraf-ı hümayûnum ve vekîl-i mutlakım olanlar tarafından biri bu nizâmı bozup vech-i âhare ifrâğ eylemek murâd eylediklerinde bu nizâm i'mâr-i memleket ve ibâdullaha evlâ ve enfa' olduğun bilüp huzûr- fâizü'n-nûr-i pâdişâhâneme gelüp bi'n-nefs kendüleri arz ve men' eylemeleri için a'lemü'l- ulemâi'l-mütebahhîrîn bi'l-fi'l Şeyhülislâm ve Kadiaskerlerim ve nakîbü'l-eşrâfım edâmallâhü te'lâ fezâilehüyü bu husûsa mahsûs nâzır nasb ve ta'yîn olunmalarıyla ol makûle kurâ ve maktû'âtın Hazîne-i âmirem defterlerinde mukayyed olup vâlilere ve muhassıl ve voyvodalara veregeldikleri mâl-i maktû'u her ne ise mâl-i mîrî ve mu'tâd olan kalemiyese kesri ü noksanı gelmemek şartıyla malın Âsitâne Sa'âdetim Hazinesine verenler ke'l-evvel Hazîne-i Âmireme ve câmi'ü'l-emvâl olanlara vere gelenler kemâ fi'l-evvel kabzına memura senedi dâhilinden verip yerine ma'mûlün bih temessük aldıkça mîrî ve kalemiyesi için veregeldiklerinden izdiyâd bir akçe ve bir habbe mutâlebesiyle rencide olunmaya ve şefâ'at ve ricâ ve tağallüb ve cevri u ezâ ve gadr u zarar kasdıyla sâhibinin rızâsı olmadıkça mutasarrıf olduğu kurâ âhara verilmeye. Ve vüzerâ ve mîr-i mîrân ve mütesellimler ve sâ'ir ehl-i örf tarafından bilâ fermân bir nesne talebiyle rencide olunmayup mefrûzü'l-kalem ve maktû'u'l-kadem min külli'l-vücûh Serbestiyet üzer hayûnet oldukça malikâne berâtıyla mutasarrıf olmaları için yedlerine ber-vech-i mâlikâne berât-ı âlişânım i'tâ olunup ve mutasarrıflarından biri hâl-i hayûnetde karyesin âhara ferâğat ve kasr-ı yed murâd eylediklerinde ma'rifet-i şer' ve hüsn-i rızasıyla hüccet-i şer'iyye olunduktan sonra berâtı üzerine fermân olunup kasr yedinden müceddeden berât-ı şerifim verilüp ve sâhibi biemrillâhi te'âlâ vefât edip karyesi mîrîyeâid olundukda cânib-i mirîden müzâyede ve ragabâtı inkıtâ'ından sonra sâyrin vereceği mu'accele verip ise zabta kâdir evlâd-ı zükûruna verilüp olmadığı sûretde talibine tekrâr fûruht ve hulûleti akçesi teslîm-i Hazîne-i Âmirem olunmak üzere mukârenet-i avn-i bârî ile ta'mîr-i bilâd ve terfih-i hâl-i iyâd için hayırhâhân-ı devlet-i aliyyem ma'kûl ve münasip görüp cümlelerin ittifakıyla Başdefterdârım arz ve ulemây-ı kirâm ve vüzerây-ı izâmım istisvâb ve istihsân ve imzâ etmeleriyle bu suret-i müstahsene mürur-i ezmine ile tebdîl ve tağyir olunmayup nâzırûn-ı müşârûnileyhim bu husûsun şürûat ve kuyûdunu vikâye ve tenfîz ve icrâ ve hıfz u hirâset edip fî mâba'd düstûru'l-amel olmak üzere mahalline kayd

olunması bâbında pâye müşîr-i i'lâma telhîs olundukda mûcebince hatt-ı hümâyûn-ı şevket-makrûnum sâdır olmağın binâ'en alâ zâlik

Bolu Sancağı'nda vâki' Taraklı Borlu kazâsında zağferan ve meyve kantarcılığı kimesnenin mâlikâne uhdesinde olmamağla senevî yüz guruş mal ile müceddeden mukâta'a kayd ve müzâyededen mâlikâne fûrûht olunmak fermânım olmağın beyne'n-nâs def'atle müzâyede ve ragabâtı inkıtâ'ından sonra elli guruş mu'accele ile Mehmed ve Ömer zîde kadruhümânın üzerlerinde karâr ve tâlib-i âhari keff-i yed etmekle beher sene malın Hazîne-i Âmireme edâ ve kalemiyesin verip hesâbın görmek üzere sâdır olan hatt-ı hümâyûn-ı şevket-makrûnum mûcebince mâlikâne uhdelere kayd ü şûrûtuyla berât-ı celîlü'l- unvânım verilmek bâbında telhis mûcebince fermân-ı âlîşânım sâdır ve mu'accesini olan meblağ-ı mezbûr elli guruşu teslim-i hazîne-i âmirem eylediklerine suret-i ruznâmçe-i hümâyûnum verilmeğın haklarında mezîd-i inâyet-i pâdişâhânem zuhura getürüp bin yüz kırk senesi saferü'l-hayrının dokuzuncu günü (9 Safer 1140/26 Eylül 1727) bu berât-ı hümâyûnu verdim ve buyurdum ki merkûmândan işbu râfi'-i tevki'-i refi'u's-şân-ı hâkânî ve nâkıl-i yarlığ-ı belîğ-ı mekremet unvân-ı cihânbanî kıdvatü'l-emâsil ve'l-akrân Mehmed zîde kadruhü mukâta'a-i mezbûrun nısf hissesin Hazîne-i Âmireme verdiği mu'accele mukâbelesinde bin yüz kırk senesi Muharremü'l-harâmından hayûnet olundukça te'yîden Mâlikâne zabt u rabt ve vâki' olan mahsûlât ve rûsûmâtın kânun-ı kadîm ve evvel geldiği üzere ahz u kabz ve beher sene malın dört taksit ile müşterekli ma'an Hazîne-i Âmireme edâ ve kalemiyesin verip hesâbın görüp yerine suret-i muhâsebe aldıkça taraf-ı âhardan ferd ta'arruz ve ta'addî eylemeyeler. Ve kadı ve voyvoda arzı ile hilâf-ı inhâ mutasarrıf olduğu mâlikâne âhara verilmeye. Ve fermânım olan kasr-ı yed meşrûtunu düstûru'l-amel olmak üzere mer'î ve mü'eddâ kıllalar. Şöyle bileler alâmet-i şerifime i'timâd kıllalar.

Tahrîran fi'l-yevmi's-sâmin aşere fî safer'l-hayr sene erbe'ûne ve mi'ete ve elf El-kostantiniyye-i mahrûsa

18 Safer 1140 / 5 October 1727

Brief Translation:

In the domains of our glorious sovereign, specifically in regions like Damascus, Aleppo, Diyarbakir, Antep, Malatya, Adana, and Tokat, many of the state-controlled tax farms are under the stewardship of state officials and local notables. However, these are not permanently managed, often changing hands multiple times within a year, leading to neglect of the peasant farmers' needs. These farmers are left without timely aid for seeds and other necessities, forced to buy at high prices due to the monopolistic practices of these temporary holders, which impact their agricultural productivity and overall livelihood.

Given the distress this situation causes to the peasants and the potential harm to the public treasury, a reformation is decreed. This reform mandates that once tax farms are leased, like the system used in the Egyptian villages, they will not be reassigned. The lessees are required to assist the peasantry in acquiring necessary supplies, thereby stabilizing their conditions and ensuring the prosperity of the lands.

Regarding the saffron and fruit weighing *mukataa* in the Taraklıborlu District of Bolu Sanjak, Dervish Mehmed, who had rights to half of this *mukataa*, has consented to transfer his share to Mehmed. This arrangement includes immediate cash payment and is part of the broader reforms aimed at improving agricultural productivity and the well-being of the peasants.

The new regulations aim to ensure that these *mukataa* are not exploited for short-term gains by their holders and that their management contributes positively to the welfare of the community and

the state treasury. This system of governance and stewardship is to be maintained without alteration, ensuring its effectiveness over time.

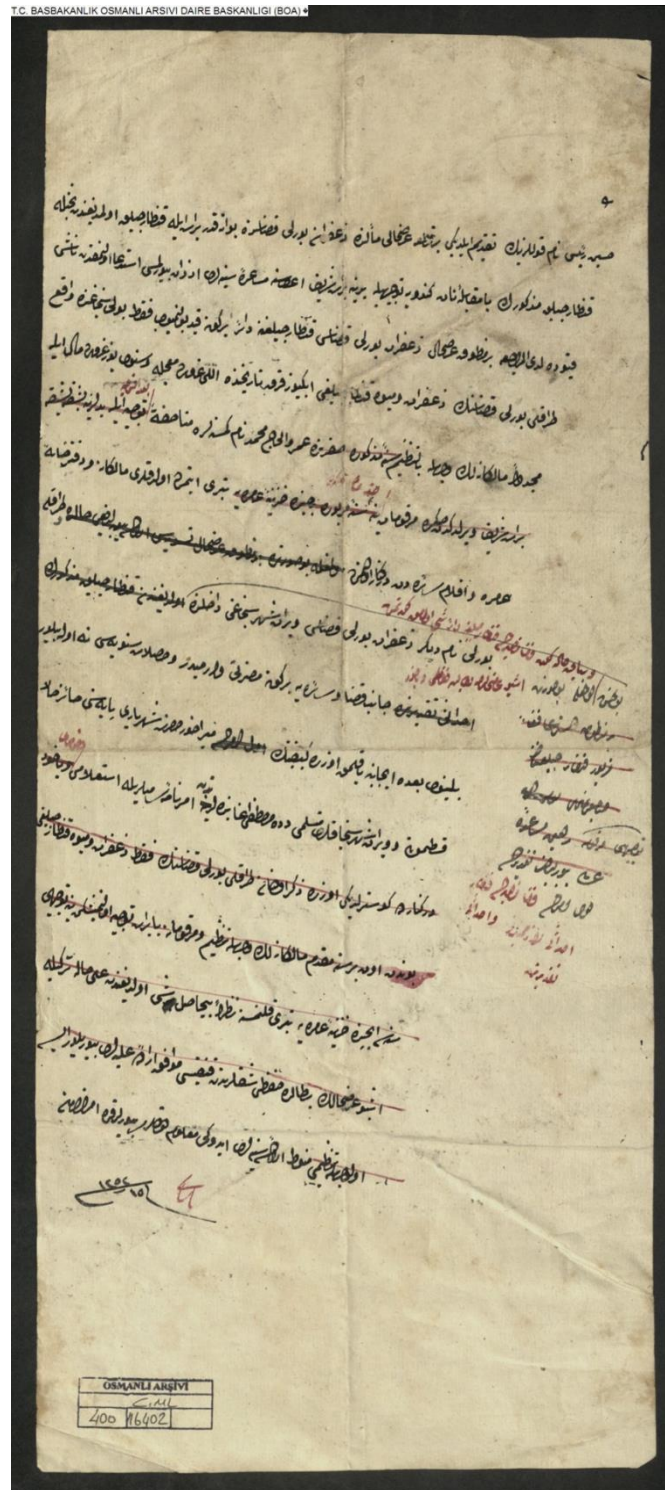
Issued on the ninth day of Safer in the year 1140 (26 September 1727), this decree orders that all related administrative and judicial authorities comply with and enforce these reforms without deviation, ensuring the proper management of the *mukataa*, the fair treatment of the peasants, and the prevention of any form of exploitation or injustice.

18 Safer 1140/5 October 1727

Since the Zagferan and Fruit weighing in the Taraklıborlu district in the Bolu Sanjak were not under anyone's responsibility as a mansion, it was decreed to sell them as a mansion with a thousand kurush per year with a *mukataa* registration and auction. After the auction between the people, it was decided on the persons named Mehmed and Ömer with a fifty kurush due [down payment]. The persons paid the amount of fifty kurush, which was a down payment, to the Treasury and received the grace of the sultan. And they were given this imperial edict on 9 Safer 1140/26 September 1727. Namely, If the said Mehmed *zâde kadriühü*⁸ takes the deductions and taxes as before and gives his *malikhane* to my treasury in four installments every year, and sees his account, no one will commit assault or encroachment. And to give the estate of which he was the governor with the supply of the Qadi and the voivode. And let the terms of renunciation and renunciation, which are my edicts, be in force to be duly implemented. And they will make it my sign to be confident. 18 Safer 1140 / 5 October 1727.

An interesting spelling pattern was followed in both documents. In the introduction of the documents, it is explained at length why *muqataa*'s are necessary and how executed. Then the main subject is moved on, and this text is either added to the main text. This application is a format used at that time.

⁸ "Zide kadruh" is used instead of prayer as his power and reputation to be increased.



C.ML.00400.16402.001

About a century later, in the request of Hüseyin Reis [C.ML 400-16402 / dated H. 15.4.1252 (30.7.1836)], he asked for the granting of the weigher and the acquittal of the weigher in return for the grains, mentioning that there was no license (decree) and weigher in Zagferanbolu until this moment. When we look at the records, it is seen that the *zaghferan* and fruit weighing of the *Taraklıborlu* district were given to Ömer and Hadjie Mehmed as a manor in half in 1240 with 50 kurush due and 100 kurush per year, and since the mansion and the bookstore were also registered, which they left back to the Treasury in the year and nothing was obtained, is there a excuse for the accident? And what could be its annual revenue? It is asked to be known and then taken care of.

When we examine the books of the following villages from the dividend books of 1261/1845, it is recorded that saffron was cultivated in the villages of Akviran, Bulak, Çerçen, Çıraklar, Kadibükü, Rehber, Konarı, Oğulviran, and Yörük's Davutobası, Karacatepe, Köprübaşı, Memikli, Sarıahmetli, Geren, etc., which were in the status of a district at that time.

3. SAFRANBOLU SAFFRON IN TRAVELOGUES

Simeon of Poland

Simeon of Poland (1584 - 1639) was an Armenian traveler and church deacon, born in Zamość, Poland, to Armenian parents originally from Crimea. Between 1608 and 1619, Simeon undertook extensive travels through the Ottoman Empire, journeying across Moldavia, Wallachia, Rumelia, and ultimately reaching Constantinople (Istanbul). His accounts offer a vivid portrayal of urban life, architecture, commerce, and social dynamics within the Ottoman lands, highlighting cities like Bursa, Mudanya, and other towns along the Sea of Marmara and the Aegean coast.

His travelogue, titled *Ughegrut'iwñ* ("Travel Notes"), holds considerable historical value due to his unique perspective shaped by Armenian heritage and multilingual proficiency. Unlike many Western travelers, Simeon interacted closely with local communities, gaining deeper insights into daily life, social structures, and cultural practices of the Ottoman population. The inclusion of Turkish, Persian, Arabic, and Polish terminology alongside Classical and early Modern Armenian reflects the diverse cultural environment of the empire, enhancing the authenticity and richness of his observations.

Today, Simeon's travel account remains an essential resource for scholars interested in the Ottoman Empire's cultural, social, and urban history during the early 17th century. His detailed and culturally nuanced descriptions provide historians with rare glimpses into everyday Ottoman life, intercultural exchanges, and regional identities, offering invaluable context for understanding the broader historical landscape of the period.

Travelogues are increasingly accepted as an important source in historiography besides documents. In *the Travelogue of Simeon of Poland (1608-1619)*, among the impressions about Tokat, it is stated that "This is the place where the most saffron is extracted in Asia and it is exported to India as the best commodity. Even if the pound of saffron is sold for thirteen – fourteen franks⁹, depending on the year, the weight is drawn by the wax needed for its preservation rather than the saffron."¹⁰ in the same years, saffron was also grown in Safranbolu, but we understand that City of Tokat was a very important saffron production center. I have not (yet) been able to find any information about how saffron cultivation developed in Tokat in the following years.¹¹ Maybe lost importance and Safranbolu gained pace.

Uluslu İbrahim Hamdi Efendi: a Biography¹²

İbrahim Hamdi Efendi (1680 - ?) was born in the small village of Küçük Enduz in Ulus, Bartın. He came from a family deeply involved in agriculture, with his father, Seyyid Bayram Çelebi, serving as a timarlı sipahi—a type of feudal cavalryman. His formal education commenced in his

⁹ 1 French frank's value was 0.6189 gr gold in mid of 17th century (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_frank) By today's gold price 1 gr saffron costs around 5₺ that is very low. Today in Safranbolu retail price of saffron is 500₺/gr.

¹⁰ (P. Simeon 210) (Simeon of Poland). Interestingly, this chapter is omitted in the George A. Bournoutian translation. (Simeon)

¹¹ In the foregoing discussion, numerous references to Tokat's saffron economy were noted. However, a thorough search of the Ottoman archival records did not yield any documents that substantiate such a significant economic presence of saffron in Tokat.

¹² The information for this biography was primarily derived from the following works: (Ak, İbrahim Hamdi), (Ak, Bartınlı İbrahim Hamdi ve Atlas'ı), (İbrahim Hamdi Efendi) and (Çalışkan). Each source provided valuable insights into Hamdi Efendi's life and contributions to geography.

hometown and was further enriched by accompanying his father on various military campaigns during the reign of Sultan Mustafa II (1695-1703). These travels exposed him to diverse regions, notably Yanova and later Timișoara (Temeșvar), where he settled after Yanova was captured in 1696. In Timișoara, he studied under notable scholars such as Şeyh Selim Dede, Hacı Eyüp Efendi, and Piri Ahmed Efendi, receiving a comprehensive education that would later influence his scholarly contributions.

During his early adult years, İbrahim Efendi balanced his military responsibilities with commercial ventures, notably in the mercury trade from Austria to various Islamic countries, in collaboration with his friend Nişovalı Zaim. Despite his military obligations, he remained actively engaged in intellectual pursuits and scholarly circles, laying the groundwork for his later geographical studies.

İbrahim Hamdi Efendi is renowned for his significant contributions to Ottoman geography, particularly through his seminal work, the “Atlas,” penned between 1729 and 1750. This two-volume geographical treatise provides exhaustive details about his native village, the broader Ottoman territories, and beyond. The “Atlas” encompasses geographical descriptions and incorporates insights from his extensive travels and academic studies, marking a significant milestone in Ottoman cartographic history.

Following the loss of Tamişvar (Timișoara) in 1716, İbrahim Efendi relocated to Hotin (present-day Ukraine), where he assumed various administrative roles, including that of the scribe to the governor. His duties also extended to diplomatic engagements, especially with the Lipka Tatars, through which he utilized his linguistic skills to facilitate communications and strengthen diplomatic ties.

İbrahim Hamdi Efendi’s death is speculated to have occurred post-1762, the last known reference in his works. His contributions to Ottoman geographic literature are invaluable, characterized by original observations and meticulous descriptions of the regions he explored. His works exemplify the rich blend of empirical knowledge and the scholarly traditions prevalent in the Ottoman intellectual milieu of the 18th century.

When our compatriot Ulus İbrahim Hamdi, an important Ottoman geographer of the 18th century, came to our region to visit his mother in 1729-1730, he also stopped by Safranbolu.¹³

Transliteration:

Zağfranbolı: altmış beş derece tul ve kırk bir derece yirmi dakika arzda on iki mahallesi ve dört camii iki hamamı ve hancer hoca mükellef bir han yapırmışdır bir viran kal’ası ve Yauz köyü [Yazıköy] Eflani tarafın Rum keferesi karyeleri ve şehirlünün ekserinde bağ evleri olub yaz günlerinde bağlara naklideler ve zemininde zağfran eyü olmagla tarlası gayet zikıymettir mesela İstanbuli kile buğday ekilür tarlaya bir kaç gurus virirler vilayeti sengistan [taşlı] ve cezire [etrafı su ile çevrili] gibi olmagla toprak azizdir ve oldukça ulema ve meşayih [şeyhler] vardır ve zağfran sebebile ekseri halkı hacıdır lakin hakikten kabe- i şefifi gören hacılardan değil zira gayet şerir ve hilekar ve kezzab [çakal, sahtekar] ve bivafa ademlerdir Kastamonu halkına galibdirler beher hal bir akçelik soğan tohumunu hilesiz vermez ve etraf kazalarda gezüb ahmak türklerin ellerinden balmumunu ucuz beha ile alub zağfranı anınla mülemma iderler ve zağfranın arasına uspur [aspir] şükufesin ilhak idüb bir tel zağfrana on tel uspur zam idüb hezar düruğ-i kazibe ile furuht iderler keزالık boyacıları kalıp ve sabunu murdar don yağı ile yapub iki kat İzmir behasına fūruht iderler her hafta Eflani ve Ulus ve Bartın pazarına ol meta-i mekruhlerin götürüb vafir adem aldadırlar ve kal’asının etrafında hüdayiperver üzerlik nebatı biter ve Zağfranbolı’nın üzümüne

¹³ Canbulat 106-109.

nazir ve taklit kabul etmez bir salkımın eline alub yerken parmakların birbirine yapışur ve lez ve leziz ve terkabuk gayet ala olup ki Rumeli'nde öyle üzüm görmedik.¹⁴

Translation:

Zagfranboli: Longitude sixty-five degrees and latitude forty-one degrees twenty minutes¹⁵ in the supply twelve quarters and four mosques, two baths and a *hanjar* Hodja [Cinci Hoca] built an inn with a ruin and Yauz village [Yazıköy] The Greek heathen village of the Eflani side and the vineyard houses in most of the cities are transported to the vineyards on summer days and the field is very valuable with good saffron on the ground, for example, Istanbul bushels of wheat are sown in the field, a few kurush pays, stony sanjak, surrounded by water, the earth is saintly and there are many ulema and sheikhs and most of the people are hadjis because of saffron, but they are not hadji who see the Kaaba from the truth, because they are very evil and deceitful and liars and unfaithful are Adams, they are victorious over the people of Kastamonu, they do not give a single acre of onion seeds without deceit, and they wander around in accidents and are fools. From the hands of the Turks, the bee wax is cheap; buy it and apply to saffron and add ten threads of safflower to one saffron thread they sell it with a thousand kinds of lies, same as dyers mold and make soap with dirty tallow oil sell twice the price of Izmir's, every week they take those abominable materials to Eflani and Ulus and Bartın markets and deceit many Adams and around Zaghfranboli's citadel there are grape plants devoted to God grow and When you eat alub in the hand of a bunch that does not accept imitation of grapes, your fingers stick together and it is delicious and delicious and tin skin is very good, which we have not seen such grapes in Rumelia.¹⁶

Although the information from Simeon's impressions that the wax was used as preservative protects the merchants of Safranbolu to a certain extent, it remains clear that they were very "liars". In the 19th-20th centuries, we can find brief but important information about Safranbolu saffron in travelogues:

William Francis Ainsworth (5 November 1807 – 27 November 1896) was a British scholar born into an intellectual family. After studying medicine and pharmacy at the University of Edinburgh, he joined its academic staff, later pursuing studies in geology and mining in Paris. Between 1835 and 1837, Ainsworth traveled extensively through Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia as part of the Euphrates Expedition led by Colonel Francis Rawdon Chesney, primarily in search of coal deposits. His detailed notes from this journey were published in his book, "*Research¹⁷ in Assyria, Babylonia, and Chaldea*," in 1838 upon his return to England.

Ainsworth revisited Anatolia in 1838, subsequently publishing his further observations in 1842 in the work "Travels and Research in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea, and Armenia." During this second journey, he passed through northern Anatolia, visiting Safranbolu. His impressions of Safranbolu highlight its economic vitality tied directly to saffron cultivation: "It provides its main

¹⁴ (Yaman varak 312).

¹⁵ Geographical Coordinates in Atlas-ı İbrahim Hamdi Efendi: Ulus İbrahim Hamdi Efendi has the knowledge, equipment and rulers to measure the coordinates of these settlements very precisely. Based on the 11 settlements known today, we calculated a deviation of 0.20 degrees in longitude circles. In this calculation, it is important to note that the settlements are different from the place where Ulus İbrahim Efendi made the measurement. For example, the geographical coordinates of Safranbolu, which also changed for the central time, may have been measured by Ulus İbrahim Efendi at a different point, for example, in the Castle. The big difference is seen in the circles of latitude. In the latitude circles, there is an average difference of 31.91 degrees between the values given by Ulus İbrahim Hamdi Efendi and the values given today. A large reason for this difference is that, starting in 1884, the Initial Meridian was determined to pass through the Greenwich Observatory. In the year 1142 Hijri (1729-30), the initial meridian was 25d 40' 32" according to Greenwich, which is considered the westernmost in Europe and passes through Fortunate Island in the Azores Archipelago and should be 25d 40' 32" in the West at 31.91 degrees. Closest settlement to this location It is located as Flores Island in Portugal. The longitude of this island is given as 31.27m.

¹⁶ (Yaman varak 312).

¹⁷ Özgün yazım.

trade from saffron, which has enabled the place to develop so much and gave it its old name Flaviapolis and its new name Zafaran Boli... We returned to Bulak Village by another road that passed through well-kept fields, most of which were covered with saffron in bloom along the way." These firsthand descriptions offer valuable insights into Safranbolu's historical economic foundations and landscape during the late Ottoman period.¹⁸

Andreas David Mordtmann (11 November 1811 – 31 December 1879) was a German orientalist, born into a middle-class family in Hamburg. After initiating his studies at Johanneums Science School, his education was unexpectedly interrupted. He later served as a member of the Hamburg Senate. At the suggestion of the renowned geographer Carl Ritter, Mordtmann translated a manuscript of the *Kitâbü'l-Mesâlü'l-Mesâlik ve'l-Memâlik*, significantly contributing to orientalist scholarship. Eventually settling in Istanbul, he taught geography, statistics, and ethnography at Mekteb-i Mülkiye¹⁹, and served for ten years as a judge at the newly established Commercial Court.

During his journey through Anatolia, Mordtmann visited Safranbolu on October 21, 1837. He described the town's commercial and industrial activities in detail, remarking: "There are tanneries, *sahtiyan*²⁰ factories, and many shoemakers, as well as saffron, which gives the city its name." His observations underscore Safranbolu's significance as a commercial and trade center and document the importance of saffron cultivation to the town's identity and economy during the mid-19th century.²¹

Dr. Ernst Axel Clemens von der Nahmer (1827–1888) was a German physician and traveler known for his detailed observations on the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century. Originally from a notable Prussian family, Nahmer pursued a medical career and served as a military physician before extensively traveling throughout Anatolia and the broader Ottoman territories. His travel accounts offer detailed insights into local customs, economic conditions, urban settlements, and rural landscapes.

Von der Nahmer visited Safranbolu in 1873, meticulously documenting the town's architectural characteristics, its vibrant marketplace, and daily life. Unlike earlier travelers, he notably emphasized saffron cultivation and its economic importance to Safranbolu, observing carefully the local methods of harvesting, processing, and trade of saffron. His account provides a more comprehensive understanding of saffron's historical and economic importance in Safranbolu, complementing the relatively brief references by earlier travelers like Mordtmann and Ainsworth.

Von der Nahmer's observations are thus significant for historians, offering valuable context to Safranbolu's socio-economic conditions during the late Ottoman era, particularly the town's relationship with saffron cultivation and commerce.

Dr. von Düring Pasha²² and I rode our horses from Kastamonu to the West, to the Gök-Irmak and then to the Araç-Su, and we were on our way to Safranbolu, a strange city where nature lovers would love its landforms, soil and people. As scientists say, this place should not have taken its name from the Persian plant "Saffron", which was intensively cultivated in the vicinity, it was called "Theodorianopolis" in Byzantium. Saffron was very great in the art of cooking during the Middle Ages, but in Germany it is known - only from fairy tales - that an important part of its exports,

¹⁸ (Ainsworth 65).

¹⁹ Faculty of Administrative Sciences.

²⁰ Morocco leather.

²¹ (Mordtmann 253).

²² Ernst Carl Eduard Camille von Düring-Pascha (6 May – 23 December 1944) was a dermatologist and pedagogue. Beginning in 1898, he worked as a syphilis specialist at the School of Health in Istanbul and at the Gülhane Military Medical Academy.

especially to Constantinople, is the dried female organs of saffron, a genus of crocus [: *stigma*]. We wanted to go to the sea [Black Sea] via Safranbolu.²³

Richard Leonhard (1870–1916) was a German geographer and archaeologist who served as the director of the German Archaeological Institute in Istanbul in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He made three research trips to Asia Minor, with his third expedition in 1903 focusing on Paphlagonia. His findings were later published in *Paphlagonia: Reisen und Forschungen im Nördlichen Kleinasien*, a significant work covering both archaeology and regional history.

Leonhard's notes on social life are as important as his extensive archaeological research. While visiting Safranbolu on October 16, 1903, he observed, "I don't know if saffron occupies an important place in its exports." This uncertainty contrasts with the more definite observations of earlier travelers such as Ainsworth and Mordtmann, who noted saffron as a key economic product. Leonhard's remark suggests that by the early 20th century, saffron's role in Safranbolu's economy may have already diminished, or it was not as prominent in trade records. His observations provide a valuable perspective on the shifting economic dynamics of the region at the turn of the century.²⁴

Ewald Banse (23 May 1883 – 31 October 1953) was a German geographer, historian, ethnologist, and orientalist scholar. He was known for his extensive studies on Turkey and his systematic division of the country into ten geographical regions. In 1919, he published *Die Türkei*, a comprehensive geography book in which he referred to the Western Black Sea sub-region as Paphlagonia.

Banse's observations on Safranbolu provide another perspective on the town's historical and economic setting. His note about Safranbolu states: [insert note]. His classification of the region as Paphlagonia highlights the continuity of historical geographical terminology in early 20th-century scholarship. Like other scholars before him, Banse contributed to a growing body of knowledge on Anatolia's geography, economy, and cultural identity, situating Safranbolu within a broader historical and regional context.

Wheat, cotton, fruit and rice in the lower parts of the Gök River; tobacco in the upper parts, as well as silkworm farming, viticulture, winemaking, tobacco cultivation and saffron cultivation in the valley strips of Araç Stream and Ulu Çay are the most valuable sectors. Moreover, the flat land between Samsun and Istanbul has allowed many cities to be established in this region. One of them, Safranbolu, the western settlement of Paphlagonia, has become the center of Anatolian saffron culture, based on majestic yellow[?] crocuses; He sends this spice, which is used in eastern cuisine and pharmacy, to Istanbul. The city finds expression with its gardens and streams located in the curves of various canyons crossed by bridges, and houses that seem to be stacked on top of each other. There are about 20,000 Greek inhabitants here. The asphalt-paved road leading from Bartın delivers agricultural, livestock and forestry products processed by water mills and tanneries, from saffron to grain, from fruit to leathers.²⁵

Dr. Ernest Nowack (9 October 1891- 7 March 1946), a Czech Austrian geographer, conducted research in the Paphlagonia region between 1926 and 1927. His expedition covered the Karadeniz Ereğlisi–Samsun–Ankara triangle, and the results of his research were later published in the *Geographical Review*. While it remains unclear who supported the trip, it is known that Dr. Nowack was affiliated with the Albanian Scientific Institute at the time.

²³ (von der Nahmer 306).

²⁴ (Leonhard 142).

²⁵ (Banse 84-85).

His observations provide critical insights into the shifting agricultural economy of Safranbolu in the early 20th century. Nowack noted: "The cultivation of saffron, which gave its name to the town, used to occupy an important place in the economy of the region, but today it has almost declined to the point of extinction. Cotton farming, on the contrary, is gaining a lot of success." His account offers a valuable perspective on the economic transformation of the region, marking the decline of saffron cultivation and the rise of new agricultural industries.²⁶

General Review of the Travel Accounts

Throughout our research, we have studied and reviewed the travelogues of various travelers who visited Safranbolu over different periods, providing valuable insights into its historical and economic landscape, particularly in relation to saffron cultivation.

William Francis Ainsworth (1807–1896), a British geographer and scholar, visited Safranbolu during his 1838 journey through northern Anatolia. His observations highlight the economic significance of saffron, stating: "It provides its main trade from saffron, which has enabled the place to develop so much and gave it its old name Flaviapolis and its new name Zafaran Boli... We returned to Bulak Village by another road that passed through well-kept fields, most of which were covered with saffron in bloom along the way."

Similarly, Andreas David Mordtmann, a German orientalist, visited Safranbolu on October 21, 1837, and noted: "There are tanneries, *sahtiyân* factories, and many shoemakers, as well as saffron, which gives the city its name." His account underscores the town's role as a commercial hub in the mid-19th century.

Dr. Ernst Axel Clemens von der Nahmer, a German physician and traveler, visited Safranbolu in 1873 and provided a more detailed account of saffron cultivation, documenting the local methods of harvesting, processing, and trading. His observations contribute a deeper understanding of saffron's role in the local economy, complementing the more general notes of his predecessors.

Dr. von Düring Pasha, in his travels through the region, described Safranbolu as a place with a striking landscape and a rich cultural identity, but he questioned the connection between the town's name and the Persian plant, despite acknowledging its historical significance in the spice trade. He remarked that saffron was highly valued in medieval cuisine, particularly in Constantinople, where dried saffron stigmas were exported.

Richard Leonhard, a German geographer and archaeologist, visited Safranbolu on October 16, 1903, and questioned whether saffron still played an important role in the town's exports. His uncertainty suggests that saffron's prominence in Safranbolu's economy was already diminishing by the early 20th century.

Ewald Banse, a German geographer and ethnologist, also studied the region extensively and classified Safranbolu as part of Paphlagonia in his 1919 book *Die Türkei*. His observations detail the region's agricultural output, noting that saffron, alongside wheat, cotton, fruit, and tobacco, was one of the most valuable sectors. He described Safranbolu as the center of Anatolian saffron culture, exporting the spice to Istanbul, and characterized the town by its gardens, streams, and distinctive architecture.

Dr. Ernest Nowack, a Czech Austrian geographer, researched Paphlagonia between 1926 and 1927 and noted a clear decline in saffron cultivation: "The cultivation of saffron, which gave its name to the town, used to occupy an important place in the economy of the region, but today it has almost declined to the point of extinction. Cotton farming, on the contrary, is gaining a lot of success." His

²⁶ (Nowack 88).

observations provide a valuable perspective on the region's economic transition, marking the shift from saffron to new agricultural industries.

These travel accounts collectively reveal the gradual decline of saffron cultivation in Safranbolu, from a thriving economic resource in the early 19th century to near extinction by the early 20th century. While earlier travelers like Ainsworth and Mordtmann described saffron as central to Safranbolu's identity, later observers such as Leonhard and Nowack noted its diminishing role. Their records provide an essential historical perspective on the socio-economic transformations in Safranbolu over time.

Tokat Versus Safranbolu: The Shifting Saffron Economy

The historical trajectory of saffron cultivation in Tokat and Safranbolu presents an intriguing contrast shaped by economic, environmental, and socio-political dynamics. Simeon of Poland's early 17th-century account suggests that Tokat was a major center of saffron production, with its high-quality saffron being exported as far as India. However, there are no surviving Ottoman archival documents confirming the extent of saffron cultivation in Tokat beyond this period. In contrast, Safranbolu's historical record is well-documented, with extensive archival sources and travel accounts affirming its status as a persistent hub of saffron production from at least the 16th century onward. One possible explanation for Tokat's decline could be linked to the *Celali* Uprisings²⁷, which devastated much of Anatolia in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, causing socio-economic collapse, depopulation, and agricultural decline. Meanwhile, Safranbolu, though affected by *Celali*-related unrest, seemingly benefited from population influxes during this period, which may have supported the labor-intensive nature of saffron cultivation. Additionally, shifting global trade routes and the expansion of saffron production in regions such as Iran and India might have diminished Tokat's role as an export center. While these factors provide plausible explanations, the absence of direct evidence regarding Tokat's decline necessitates further research. The contrast between these two cities highlights the resilience of Safranbolu's saffron economy, which managed to sustain itself despite broader economic transformations. (Osen 161) (Canbulat ve Asar, Hamide Hatun Vakfı / Osmanlı Devlet Arşivleri Belgelerinden Kargir Han ve Çifte Hamam 205-207)

4. SAFRANBOLU SAFFRON TODAY²⁸

In recent years, the cultivation of Safranbolu saffron has seen a resurgence, with it being recognized by both local farmers and government bodies as its potential to support the regional economy through high-value agricultural production and agritourism. Modern techniques and scientific agricultural approaches have been introduced, aiming to increase and guarantee the historically known high-quality saffron production of Safranbolu. Initiatives such as controlled irrigation systems, optimized planting calendars, and the use of organic fertilizers have been used to improve the growing conditions of *Crocus sativus*, or saffron crocus, without compromising the natural properties of saffron.

In addition, the local government of Safranbolu promotes the saffron harvest as a cultural event and invites tourists and culinary enthusiasts to participate in the harvest, which takes place between the end of October and the beginning of November. In addition to preserving traditional saffron cultivation methods, these efforts turn the process into a cultural experience, bridging past traditions with future possibilities. The integration of saffron cultivation with tourism has opened

²⁷ (Akdağ).

²⁸ In 1923, in the *Treatise* of the Safranbolu Chamber of Industry and Commerce to Ankara 3.200 Ottoman lira worth of 60 *çeki* (total 21,9 kg) saffron exportation is written. (Yazıcıoğlu ve Al 71).

new economic avenues for the region and has become a model for other agricultural communities that aim to value historical products for sustainable development.²⁹

CONCLUSION

The historical narrative of saffron cultivation in Safranbolu is significantly enriched by the detailed scrutiny of Ottoman archival documents and travelogues in this study. These sources illuminate the economic and cultural dimensions of saffron in the region, tracing its presence back to at least the 16th century and highlighting its pivotal role in the local and regional economies. Archival records from the Ottoman period show that saffron was not only a staple of agricultural production but also a significant commodity for trade, with notable exports to places like India and Constantinople. The mention of saffron in the travelogues further complements the archival data, providing a broader understanding of its economic impact and the social perceptions surrounding this valuable crop across different periods. Travel writers of the time often noted the quality and economic significance of Safranbolu's saffron, painting a picture of a region whose identity and economic prosperity were closely tied to this spice. Such accounts are invaluable for understanding the shifts in saffron's prominence over the centuries, particularly its decline in the late Ottoman era and its resurgence in modern times with the support of various agricultural initiatives. This study not only revisits the historical pathways of saffron cultivation in Safranbolu but also discusses its socio-economic implications today. By integrating historical data with contemporary efforts to revive saffron farming, it offers a comprehensive view of how historical practices can inform and enhance modern agricultural and economic strategies.

Ultimately, this examination underscores the importance of saffron to the cultural heritage and ongoing economic development of Safranbolu, providing a compelling example of how a region's historical products can be leveraged for sustainable growth and cultural preservation. This case study serves as a model for other regions with similar historical agricultural products, suggesting paths forward for integrating historical cultivation into modern economies while respecting and preserving cultural heritage.

²⁹ https://www.academia.edu/40447220/Osmanlı_Saraylarında_Safranlı_Yemekler



Figure 2. Pioneers of the Safranbolu Saffron Renaissance Celebrate Terra Madre Day in the Bazaar, 15 December 2009. The event was attended by local saffron farmers, the Governor, and staff from the Department of Agriculture.

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