

Traces of Foreign Investment on the Island of Thasos: Zinc Production and Export (1903–1911)

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a multidimensional analysis of foreign capital presence and mining activities in the Ottoman Empire, focusing on the case of zinc production and export on the island of Thasos between 1903 and 1911. The island's rich mineral deposits and strategic location attracted the attention of foreign investors. The primary source of this research consists of documents concerning zinc mining and trade in Thasos, preserved in the Ottoman Archives under the Presidential State Archives of the Republic of Turkey, with a notable concentration from 1903 to 1911. The individual who obtained several of these mining concessions on Thasos was German Frederick John Speidel. Speidel first acquired the operating concession for the island's zinc mines through a contract dated 31 August 1903. The zinc production and trade activities are examined within the framework of the concession awarded to Speidel. The study analyses administrative disputes, the procurement of explosives and mining equipment, environmental regulations, transportation infrastructure, and security policies in detail. Labour needs were met by bringing workers from Greece and Germany, and the extracted zinc ore was shipped to European ports such as Hamburg and Antwerp. This case highlights the economic and political significance of mining activities in the context of provincial governance and foreign investment in the late Ottoman period.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, Thasos, Mining, Zinc.

Taşoz Adası'nda Yabancı Yatırımlının İzleri: Çinko İmal ve İhracı (1903-1911)

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ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda yabancı sermaye varlığı ve madencilik faaliyetlerine dair çok boyutlu bir analiz sunmaktadır, 1903 ile 1911 yılları arasında Taşoz Adası'ndaki çinko üretimi ve ihracatı örneğine odaklanmaktadır. Adanın zengin maden yatakları ve stratejik konumu yabancı yatırımcıların ilgisini çekmiştir. Bu çalışmanın temel kaynağını, T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı'na bağlı Osmanlı Arşivi'nden elde edilen belgeler oluşturmaktadır. Taşoz'daki çinko maden imalatı ve ticaretine ilişkin belgelerin 1903-1911 yılları arasında yoğunlaşmış tespit edilmiştir. Taşoz'daki maden imtyazlarının birkaçını elde eden kişi, Alman Frederick John Speidel'dir. Speidel, adadaki çinko madenlerinin işletme imtiyazını ilk olarak 31 Ağustos 1903 tarihli bir mukavele ile almıştır. Çinko üretim ve ticaret faaliyetleri, Speidel'e verilen bu imtiyaz çerçevesinde incelemektedir. Taşoz Adası'nda yaşanan idari ihtilaflar, maden imalatında kullanılacak patlayıcı madde ve ekipman temini, gevresel düzenlemeler, ulaşım altyapısı ve güvenlik politikaları detaylı şekilde analiz edilmiştir. İşgeli ihtiyacının karşılanması sırasında Yunanistan ve Almanya'dan işçi temin edilmiş, çıkarılan çinko cevheri ise Hamburg ve Anvers gibi Avrupa limanlarına sevk edilmiştir. Bu örnek olay, geç Osmanlı döneminde taşra idaresi, merkez-yabancı yatırımcı ilişkileri ve uluslararası ticaret bağlamında madencilik faaliyetlerinin taşıdığı iktisadi ve siyasi önemi gözler önüne sermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Taşoz, Maden, Çinko

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Introduction

Located in the northern Aegean Sea, the island of Thasos occupies a strategic position due to its proximity to other islands and its geographical location. Owing to its location as well as its abundant aboveground and underground resources, it has historically attracted considerable attention. Thasos is grouped among the Northeastern Aegean Islands—also referred to as the Thracian Islands—alongside Bozcaada (Tenedos), Lemnos, Bozbaba (Aghios Eustratios), Samothrace, and Gökçeada (Imbros).¹ While the island's climate and terrain are well suited to viticulture and olive cultivation—indeed, the island is largely covered with grapevines and olive trees—it is also exceptionally rich in mineral deposits.² Mining has historically played a prominent role on the island. It is known, for instance, that the Phoenicians were among the earliest settlers to exploit Thasos's mineral wealth.³ Mining thus emerged as a key economic activity. This study, however, focuses specifically on the mining operations of the 19th century, with particular attention to zinc extraction and trade that took place between 1903 and 1911.

In the recent literature on Thasos Island and its mining history, several works by Süleyman Kızıltoprak are of particular significance, including "Taşoz", "Osmanlı Devleti Taşra Teşkilatındaki Reformların Taşoz Adası'na Yansımaları", and "II. Abdülhamid Han'ın Dış Politikası ve Taşoz Operasyonu".⁴ These studies provide valuable information regarding both the island itself, and the zinc mining enterprises conducted there. Additionally, Ali Arslan's article titled "Balkanların Anahtarı Önemi Bilinmeyen Ada Taşoz" and Seren Çınar's work "II. Abdülhamid Dönemi Selanik Madenleri" also offer important insights into the island's geographical and administrative features as well as its mining activities.⁵

Unlike the aforementioned studies, the present research focuses exclusively on zinc mining and trade, with particular attention to its role in international shipment and commerce. The main objective of this study is to examine the zinc mining and export activities carried out on the island of Thasos between 1903 and 1911, based on archival sources from the period, and to reveal how foreign investments in the Ottoman provinces took shape, as well as the technical, administrative, and legal frameworks within which these investments were realized. Furthermore, the study offers a multilayered analysis of various aspects of zinc exploitation, including the procurement of tools and equipment used in the processing of the ore, environmental infrastructure arrangements, labour employment, and the international logistics of shipment.

This research aims to make a significant contribution to future studies on both Ottoman mining history and the provincial economies of the late Ottoman period. In particular, it

¹ Habibe Kazancıoğlu, "Musa Kâzım Bey'in (Taşoz Mutasarrıfı) Kaleminden Bir Osmanlı Adası: Taşoz," *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, no. 52 (2020):132.

² Süleyman Kızıltoprak, "Taşoz", *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2011) 40:159.

³ Feryal Tansuğ, *Osmanlı'nın Son Döneminde Adalı Rumlar (İmroz, Limni, Semadirek, Taşoz)*. (İstanbul: Pan Yayıncılık, 2018) 23.

⁴ Kızıltoprak, "Taşoz," 159; Süleyman Kızıltoprak, "Osmanlı Devleti Taşra Teşkilatındaki Reformların Taşoz Adası'na Yansımaları", 1. *Uluslararası Balkan Kongresi- Balkan Milletleri Arasında Etkileşim* içinde., Editör Caner Sancaktar (Tekirdağ: Tasam Yayınları, 2009), 307-334; Süleyman Kızıltoprak, II. Abdülhamid Han'ın Dış Politikası ve Taşoz Operasyonu. (İzmir: Yitik Hazine Yayınları, 2011).

⁵ Ali Arslan, *Balkanların Anahtarı Önemi Bilinmeyen Ada Taşoz*. (İstanbul: Emre Yayınları, 2005); Seren Çınar, "II. Abdülhamid Dönemi Selanik Madenleri" (yüksek lisans tezi, Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi, 2024).

addresses a notable gap in the literature by examining the administrative challenges of conducting mining operations on land designated as waqf (endowment property), the jurisdictional tensions between the central authority and local administration, and the practical implementation of foreign capital in the provinces. Through a historical case study, the research seeks to answer how provincial regions of the late Ottoman Empire were integrated into global economic networks. In this respect, the study offers an original contribution not only to economic history but also to the fields of political and administrative history.

However, before addressing the mining activities—particularly zinc extraction and its export—during the period under study, it is first necessary to examine the process by which Thasos was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire and to outline the island's administrative structure in the 19th century.

1. Ottoman Sovereignty over the Island of Thasos and Its Administration in the 19th Century

The Ottoman Empire's establishment of sovereignty over the island of Thasos was a protracted process. Following the defeat of the Papal fleet, which had occupied the islands of Thasos and Lemnos in 1457, Thasos was conquered by Has Yunus Bey in the same year.⁶ However, the outbreak of the Ottoman–Venetian Wars in 1463 hindered the consolidation of full Ottoman control over the island.⁷ Although Thasos was reoccupied by the Venetians after 1457, Ottoman sovereignty was ultimately secured through the treaty concluded with Venice in 1479. Following the agreement, Turkish settlement on the island began.⁸ Initially, Thasos was administratively attached to the Sanjak of Gallipoli. In 1534, it was incorporated into the Eyalet of the Archipelago (Cezayir-i Bahri Sefid).⁹

Sultan Mahmud II granted the island to Mehmed Ali Pasha of Kavala on 31 March 1813. The island was allocated to Mehmed Ali Pasha to finance the upkeep of the charitable complex (*külliye*) he had established in Kavala.¹⁰ As a result, Thasos came under the administration of waqf directors sent from Egypt, and this arrangement lasted from 1813 until 1902. This period marked a critical phase in the island's governance.¹¹ The primary responsibility of the waqf directors was to manage the revenues of Thasos, which had become the property of the Kavala endowment. In practice, however, they were also entrusted with the island's general administrative affairs. Nonetheless, the concession granted to Mehmed Ali Pasha in 1813 had not originally included such comprehensive authority.¹² The transfer of revenue rights and administrative control to the waqf directors later created complications, particularly following the British occupation of Egypt.¹³ As Britain gradually established its influence over the Egyptian Khedivate, concerns emerged that Thasos itself might also be targeted for occupation. In fact, British naval strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean began to consider

⁶ Elif Erden, "Yakın Dönem Tarihimizde Taşoz Adası" (yüksek lisans tezi, İstanbul Üniversitesi, 2004) 5; Kızıltoprak, "Taşoz," 159.

⁷ Erden, "Yakın Dönem Tarihimizde Taşoz Adası", 5.

⁸ Kızıltoprak, "Taşoz," 159.

⁹ Arslan; Balkanların Anahtarı, 13-14; Kazancıoğlu, "Musa Kâzım Bey'in (Taşoz Mutasarrifi) Kaleminden Bir Osmanlı Adası: Taşoz," 133-134; Tansuğ, Osmanlinin Son Döneminde Adalı Rumlar, 43.

¹⁰ L. Hirschowicz, "The Sultan and the Khedive, 1892-1908," *Middle Eastern Studies* 8, no. 3 (1972): 298.

¹¹ Kızıltoprak, "Taşoz," 160.

¹² Kızıltoprak; "Osmanlı Devleti Taşra Teşkilatındaki Reformların Taşöz Adası'na Yansımaları", 317.

¹³ Kızıltoprak: "Taşoz," 160.

Thasos a favorable location, especially in light of its proximity to Macedonia and the growing regional tensions there.¹⁴

The administrative reforms of the 19th century also had an impact on the governance of Thasos. Following the 1864 Vilayet Law, the territories of Rumelia were reorganized into six administrative provinces: Selanik (Thessaloniki), Edirne (Adrianople), İskodra (Shkodër), Yanya (Ioannina), Manastır (Bitola), and Kosovo.¹⁵ During this period, issues concerning the administration of Thasos prompted the Governor of Selanik to dispatch forces to the island under the command of Emin Pasha, the Kaymakam of Kavala, in order to reestablish Ottoman authority and maintain public order. Consequently, in 1902, administrative control of Thasos was transferred from the Egyptian waqf officials and placed under the jurisdiction of the Selanik province. Only the management of the endowment affairs was left in the hands of the waqf foundation of Mehmed Ali Pasha of Kavala.¹⁶

The physical geography of the island of Thasos, as well as its proximity—just 11 nautical miles—to the city of Kavala, is of particular significance.¹⁷ Due to its strategic location along interconnected maritime routes, Thasos served as a key transit point, and in this context, the port of Kavala played an important role in the island's export activities. The navigational distance between Kavala and Thasos, where ships could anchor or dock, was approximately 19 kilometers. Additionally, the Panagia Port, located in the northeastern part of the island, functioned as a secure harbor for Thasos. Owing to its proximity to these ports, the island maintained strong commercial ties, and its connection with Kavala had a considerable influence on its trade dynamics. Notably, the commercial development of Thasos was shaped by the appointment of waqf administrators from Egypt, as well as by the fact that many of Egypt's high-ranking officials, merchants, and even the governor himself resided in Kavala.¹⁸ The fact that the island of Thasos possessed agricultural and industrial products also influenced commercial activities in the region due to the European states' demand for raw materials. Indeed, in the 19th century, commercial activities on the island of Thasos were generally concentrated in forestry, agriculture, and mining. Since the present study focuses specifically on zinc production and trade on the island, it is essential to first provide an overview of mining operations in the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century.

2. Mining in the Ottoman Empire in the 19th Century and the Disputes over Mining Operations on the Island of Thasos

Mineral resources, which held significant importance for the Ottoman treasury, were incorporated into the *mukataa* system, whereby their revenues were directly allocated to the state. In both Anatolia and Rumelia, legal codes were issued to regulate the operation and supervision of mines under state control, and all commercial activities were expected to be

¹⁴ Metin Ünver, "Ege ve Doğu Akdeniz'de Statükonun Korunması: Osmanlı Devleti, Yunanistan ve Büyük Güçler (1864-1909)", *Coğrafya, Tarih ve Uluslararası Hukuk Boyutlarıyla Küresel ve Bölgesel Denklemde Ege ve Doğu Akdeniz içinde.*, Editör Mahmut Ak-Haluk Alkan-Metin Ünver, (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayımları, 2021), 232.

¹⁵ İsmail Arslan, "19. Yüzyılda Balkanlar'da Bir Liman Şehri: Kavala," *History Studies* 2, no. 3 (2010): 26, http://dx.doi.org/10.9737/hist_123.

¹⁶ Kazancıoğlu, "Musa Kâzım Bey'in (Taşoz Mutasarrıfı) Kaleminden Bir Osmanlı Adası: Taşoz", 134-135.

¹⁷ Tansuğ, *Osmanlı'nın Son Döneminde Adalı Rumlar*, 30-31.

¹⁸ İsmail Arslan, "19. Yüzyılda Balkanlar'da Sosyo-Ekonominik İlişkiler: Drama Sancağı Örneği (1864-1913)" (doktora tezi, Ege Üniversitesi 2009) 212-213.

carried out within a prescribed legal framework. During the classical period, mines were operated through three main methods: *iltizam*, *emanet* and *malikâne*.¹⁹ In principle, the Ottoman state maintained absolute sovereignty over all mineral resources.²⁰ Indeed, the period up to the second half of the 19th century is often referred to as the classical era of Ottoman mining law, during which little structural change occurred.²¹ In the 19th century, however, foreign investment in Ottoman lands increased significantly, particularly as a result of trade agreements signed with European powers. These investments extended across various sectors, including the construction of railways and ports, and mining was no exception.²² A prominent example of such foreign involvement in mining activities can be seen in the concession granted on the island of Thasos.

The reform process that began in the aftermath of the 1839 *Edict of Gülhane* had far-reaching effects on the administrative, military, and economic structures of the Ottoman Empire. These reforms also extended to the field of mining. As part of institutional restructuring, the *Ma'âdin-i Hümâyün Meclisi* (Imperial Council of Mines) was established in 1842. Its primary purpose was to determine the technical and legal principles that would govern mining operations and to present these proposals to the sultan. Following the establishment of this council, a major legislative development occurred with the promulgation of the 1861 Mining Regulation.²³ This regulation, which can be regarded as a significant innovation, contained provisions on geological surveys, extraction procedures, taxation methods, and the role of engineers in the mining sector. One notable clause of the 1861 regulation was that it allowed foreigners to become shareholders in mining companies founded by Ottoman subjects. In response to evolving needs, further revisions were introduced in subsequent years, including the granting of the first mining concession to foreigners in 1867. Additional amendments to mining regulations were later enacted in 1869 and 1910.²⁴

Wars, uprisings, and reform efforts that took place throughout the 19th century had a profound impact on the economic structure of the Ottoman Empire. Mining, which had emerged as a key sector within the Ottoman economy, was adversely affected by these developments. As a result, the Empire faced a number of challenges in the mining industry. Although reforms in mining legislation were introduced in an attempt to address these problems, several issues persisted. These included the abuse of concessions by entrepreneurs who exploited legal loopholes, a general lack of technical expertise in the field of mining, and the insufficient capital held by private investors seeking to operate mines. All of these factors contributed to the weakening of Ottoman mining operations in the 19th century.²⁵

¹⁹ Abdülmecit Mutaf, "Tanzimat Döneminde Osmanlı Maden İşletmeciliği Prodesürü," *History Studies* 2, no.2 (2010): 294, http://dx.doi.org/10.9737/hist_111.

²⁰ Kaya Göktepe, "Osmanlı Madencilik Sektöründe İşgücü Yetersizliğine Bir Çözüm: Mahkûm Emeği (1839-1918)," *History Studies* 10, no. 5 (2018): 56, 10.9737/hist.2018.621.

²¹ Fahrettin Tızlak, *Osmanlı Döneminde Keban-Ergani Yöresinde Madencilik* (1775-1850). (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1997) 8.

²² Ertan Gökmen, "II. Abdülhamit Dönemi Maden İmtiyazları (1878-1899)," *Belleten* 71, no.262 (2007): 969, <https://doi.org/10.37879/belleten.2007.969>.

²³ Gökmen, "II. Abdülhamit Dönemi Maden İmtiyazları (1878-1899)", 972.

²⁴ Mehmet Bayartan, "XIX. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Madenlerinin Coğrafi Dağılışı," *Osmanlı Bilimi Araştırmaları* 10, no.1 (2008): 138.

²⁵ Yaşar Öcal, "19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Madencilik Sektörünün Sorunları," *OTAM*, no. 44 (2018): 193.

In the Ottoman Empire, the structural problems of 19th-century mining operations were most clearly manifested on the island of Thasos. This was due, in part, to the island's unique administrative status. While Thasos was traditionally known for its rich marble quarries, the island also contained significant deposits of other minerals, including zinc and iron.²⁶ Before the island was placed under the administration of the charitable foundation (waqf) established by Mehmed Ali Pasha, these mines had been operated directly by the Ottoman state. Thasos had long been a site of active mineral extraction, and evidence suggests that the Ottoman authorities sought to make use of its mining potential. For example, an imperial edict issued in 1720 ordered that no obstacles be placed before the local population in their efforts to exploit the island's mineral resources. In 1735, a government official (*mübaşir*) and a miner were dispatched to the island to survey its deposits.²⁷ However, during the waqf administration period, mining activities were largely neglected. Toward the end of the 19th century, renewed applications for licenses to operate existing mines and to explore new ones led to increasing competition over the mineral resources of Thasos.²⁸

Conflicting claims emerged regarding the exploration and operation of mineral resources on the island of Thasos. One notable example involved a merchant named Petro Mavemi, who applied for a license to operate a copper mine on the island. His application revealed the legal ambiguity surrounding mining rights in Thasos. When Mavemi submitted his request, the waqf director instructed him to apply to the Khedivate of Egypt. However, in a memorandum dated 1884, the Ottoman Ministry of Trade noted that while Thasos had been ceded to the Egyptian administration, the existing Mining Regulation (Maden Nizamnamesi) did not clarify how mining activities on the island should be handled, and requested further guidance on the legal procedure to be followed.²⁹ Such jurisdictional ambiguities reappeared in subsequent years. For instance, in 1889, a request for a mining exploration license was submitted following the discovery of a new mineral deposit. The Ministry of Finance forwarded the issue to the authorities in Selanik (Thessaloniki). Halim Pasha, the trustee (*mütevelli*) of the endowment established by Mehmed Ali Pasha, applied for the concession to be granted to him. His request was approved by the Grand Vizierate (*Sadaret*) on 20 April 1889, and it was decided that the same concession procedures applied elsewhere in the Empire would also be enforced in Thasos. Eventually, Halim Pasha's claim resurfaced. However, as tensions escalated between the Ottoman Empire and Egypt—exacerbated by increasing British pressure—the Ottoman authorities were ultimately not permitted to operate the mines on the island. These disputes highlighted the complex and contested nature of sovereignty, legal jurisdiction, and foreign influence in the administration of Thasos's mineral wealth.³⁰

With the aim of operating the mines on Thasos, the Khedivate of Egypt requested a concession from the Ottoman Empire and included the island's mines—alongside the right to exploit the forests—within the scope of a 15-year contract awarded to the Sakızlı İsaki brothers through public bidding. Not stopping there, the Khedive planned to send the Italian consul Mayno to Thasos and decided that the island's mines would begin to be operated after August 1896. Although two Greek individuals who had obtained a mining concession from the

²⁶ Arslan, *Balkanların Anahtarı*, 31.

²⁷ Erden, "Yakın Dönem Tarihimizde", 110.

²⁸ Arslan, *Balkanların Anahtarı*, 48.

²⁹ Erden, "Yakın Dönem Tarihimizde", 111.

³⁰ Arslan, *Balkanların Anahtarı*, 48.

Khedivate traveled to Thasos and initiated mining activities, they were forced to withdraw when they encountered opposition from the island's local Greek population. As previously noted, the authority to grant mining concessions on Thasos was held by the Khedivate of Egypt. Despite objections from the Ottoman Empire, the Khedive treated the island almost as his own private possession and granted licenses to those who applied for mineral exploration. However, no actual mining operations were carried out during the period in which the island was administered as a waqf under the Khedivate. This was due to the ongoing disputes between the Ottoman Empire and the Khedivate of Egypt over the legal ownership of Thasos.³¹

The administrative status of the island of Thasos gave rise to a contentious process regarding the operation of its mines. In particular, when several individuals—including Edwars, Edward Andon, Halim Pasha, and Petro Mavrini—submitted applications for mining licenses related to the island's copper deposits, the Ministry of Finance referred the matter to the Meclis-i Vükelâ (Council of Ministers), seeking guidance on how to proceed given the island's unique administrative arrangement. In response, a memorandum issued in 1889 stated that the provisions of the 1887 Mining Regulation (Maden Nizamnamesi) would also apply to the mines located on Thasos. However, it was also decided that a significant portion of the island's mines—specifically four-fifths (4/5)—would be transferred from the Mining Administration to the waqf, and that the tendering of mining operations would be overseen by the Mining Council (Meclis-i Ma'âdin).³² Moreover, when the merchant Petro Mavrini sought to obtain a license from the Khedivate of Egypt to operate a mine on Thasos, the Governorate of Thessaloniki reported the matter to the Sublime Porte (Babîâli). In its reply, the central government declared that the Khedivate of Egypt had no authority to issue mining licenses for the island.³³ In this disputed situation, the requests for concessions by those seeking to operate various mines led to the emergence of the administrative structure of Thasos. However, the notification by the Province of Thessaloniki to the Sublime Porte, stating that the Khedivate of Egypt was not authorized to grant licenses, was an indication of the Ottoman Empire's centralization policy during this period. Although the mines on the island of Thasos belonged to the Ottoman Empire, since the administration of the island was under the Khedivate of Egypt, contradictions regarding the mines arose; nevertheless, this situation continued until 1902, when the island of Thasos was attached to the Province of Thessaloniki.³⁴

Although contradictions arose due to its special status, as previously noted, the mining regulations were also applicable to mining operations on the island of Thasos.³⁵ With the commencement of administration by the Governorship of Thessaloniki in 1902, in accordance with the centralization policy, only the management of the island's waqf affairs was left to the Mehmed Ali Pasha Waqf, while administrative and judicial matters were carried out by the Governorship of Thessaloniki.³⁶

³¹ Arslan, *Balkanların Anahtarı*, 49.

³² Çınar, "II. Abdülhamid Dönemi", 38.

³³ Kızıltoprak, *II. Abdülhamid Han'ın Dış Politikası*, 235.

³⁴ Çınar, "II. Abdülhamid Dönemi", 38.

³⁵ Çınar, "II. Abdülhamid Dönemi", 38.

³⁶ Kızıltoprak, *II. Abdülhamid Han'ın Dış Politikası*, 265.

2.1. Zinc Mining on the Island of Thasos and Its Opening to Foreign Investment

Although zinc is only the 23rd most abundant element in the Earth's crust, it is one of the most widely used and consumed metals. It is typically found in association with other minerals such as copper, silver, gold, and iron.³⁷ An examination of the mineral wealth and diversity of the island of Thasos reveals that mining operations for copper, silver, gold, and especially zinc were carried out intensively.

Mining operations on the island of Thasos were conducted based on scientific methods. In fact, the analysis of ore samples collected by Fischbach in 1903 revealed that the copper extracted from Thasos contained trace amounts of gold. As a result, a decision was made to conduct an on-site examination of the mineral deposits, and Fischbach was assigned to carry out this task on the island.³⁸ In the nineteenth century, when mining exploration was carried out in accordance with scientific principles, foreign investments in mining operations on the island of Thasos increased. Foreign investors could be found not only in the mining area of Thasos but also in many other locations. However, the person who obtained various mining concessions on Thasos was Frederick John Speidel.³⁹

In fact, before explaining the concession granted to Speidel, it should be noted that in the nineteenth century, mining production on the island of Thasos, particularly the European states' demand for raw materials, had an impact on the region's economic activities. To clarify this situation, it would be appropriate first to address the political and economic factors that influenced the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. Indeed, during his tenure as governor, Mehmed Ali Pasha undertook administrative, military, and economic reform movements in Egypt.⁴⁰ Through the reforms he carried out, Mehmed Ali Pasha contributed to the development of Egypt in administrative, social, and economic fields. For this reason, he increased his political influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Having strengthened Egypt by establishing a navy and introducing military reforms to create a modern army, Mehmed Ali Pasha provided assistance to the Ottoman Empire in suppressing the Greek Revolt.⁴¹ In the subsequent period, Mehmed Ali Pasha, having gained political strength, initiated a revolt

³⁷ *Dünyada ve Türkiye'de Çinko*, Hazırlayan İbrahim Dinlen, (Ankara: Maden Tetkik ve Arama Genel Müdürlüğü, 2023) 2.

³⁸ Togay Seçkin Birbudak, "Alman Mühendis Wilhelm Fischbach'ın Osmanlı Devleti'ndeki Madencilik Faaliyetleri," *Journal of Universal History Studies* 7 no.1 (2024):15, <https://doi.org/10.38000/juhis.1383980>; Detailed information is also available regarding the travel arrangements of Fischback, who was appointed to Thasos by decision of the *Hazine-i Hassa* (Imperial Privy Purse). According to the records, Fischback traveled from Kavala to Thasos via the port quay and from there passed through the Bulgarian side, the landing stage, and continued on the Yanina (Ioannina) and Potamia routes toward Candia. It is known that the journey he covered took approximately 36 hours. However, as reported by the Mining Director, the full round trip undertaken by Fischback—starting in Istanbul, passing through Thessaloniki and Kavala, and finally reaching Thasos for the purpose of conducting a geological survey—amounted to a total travel time of 280 hours. Consequently, an allowance of 4,200 *kuruş* was paid to cover his travel expenses. Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA.) Maliye Nezareti Emlak-i Emiriyye Müdürlüğü (BOA. ML.EEM.), 441/26, p. 1-3, (25 Mart 1319 [7 April 1903]).

³⁹ Kızıltoprak, *II. Abdülhamid Han'ın Dış Politikası*, 237.

⁴⁰ Mehmet Kocaoglu, "Kavalalı Mehmet Ali Paşa İsyancı (1831-1841)", OTAM 6, (1995), 198, https://doi.org/10.1501/OTAM_0000000243.

⁴¹ Güven Dinç, "Mehmet Ali Paşa İsyancının Antalya'ya Etkileri (1831-1833)", *Belleten* 80 no.289, (2016), 859, <https://doi.org/10.37879/belleten.2016.857>.

between 1831 and 1841. Although this revolt was of an internal nature, it became a significant external issue.⁴² Indeed, following the revolt of Mehmed Ali Pasha, Mahmud II secured support by signing the Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi with the Russians in 1833 and the Treaty of Balta Limanı with the British in 1838.⁴³ However, through this treaty, Britain continued to seek commercial benefits from Ottoman territories. This situation, as an extension of the economic activities of the European states, created a system that operated to the detriment of the Ottoman financial structure. This, in turn, was reflected in the amount of taxes.⁴⁴ While the British obtained commercial privileges from the Ottoman Empire through the 1838 Treaty of Balta Limanı, the Germans also took action, and the Hanseatic League, which was fundamentally based on an economic union, sought to benefit from the privileges granted by the Treaty of Balta Limanı and ultimately concluded an agreement with the Ottoman Empire in 1839.⁴⁵ In the following years, Germany's search for raw materials continued. Meanwhile, foreign investment in mining production increased between 1902 and 1911. Although Germany did not hold a significant place in Ottoman foreign trade until the 1880s, its economic expansion within the Ottoman territories grew until 1909. Deutsche Bank took the lead in this expansion. Indeed, Deutsche Bank, being the largest German bank, served as guarantor in the construction of railways, which held an important position in the administrative and military structure of the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁶ In particular, with Germany's acquisition of the Baghdad Railway concession, maritime traffic between the Ottoman Empire and Germany was also affected, and this situation increased the interest of German shipping companies in the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁷ With the influence of the maritime transportation factor, the value of the Thasos mines as a source of raw materials increased. Considering all these aspects, it is evident that they played a role in Speidel's process of obtaining a mining concession. Indeed, Monsieur Speidel first obtained the concession for the operation of zinc mines through the contract dated August 31, 1903.⁴⁸

In 1904, the *Hazine-i Hassa* (Imperial Privy Purse) emphasized the importance of granting Speidel priority in receiving a new mining concession on the island of Thasos. This urgency was partly due to the approaching month of Ramadan, during which the Sultan was expected to distribute **salary** to the soldiers, and revenue from the concession was seen as a potential source of funding for this purpose.⁴⁹ As noted by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1904, if the zinc, iron, lead, and copper mines on Thasos were awarded to Speidel, he would pay the

⁴² Kocaoğlu, "Kavalalı Mehmet Ali Paşa İsyancı", 207.

⁴³ Umut Çevik, "Kavalalı Mehmet Ali Paşa'nın Valiliği Döneminde (1805-1848) Mısır'da Uyguladığı Tekel Ekonomisi", *Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi İnsan Bilimleri Dergisi* 3 no.2, (2022), 249. <https://doi.org/10.51533/insanbilimleri.1111018>.

⁴⁴ Donald Quataert, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu 1700-1922*. Çeviren Ayşe Berktaş, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 2016), 190-191; Özge Togral, *19. Yüzyılda Doğu Akdeniz'de Kaçakçılık*. (İstanbul: Selenge Yayıncılık, 2021), 21.

⁴⁵ Burak Çitir, "Finans ve Emperyalizm: Osmanlı Coğrafyasında Alman Bankaları (1897-1914)", *Selçuk Türkiyat* 56, (2022), 181. <https://doi.org/10.21563/sutad.1222246>.

⁴⁶ Cenk Reyhan, "Türk-Alman İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Arka Planı (1878-1914)", *Belleten* 69 no.254, (2005), 245-246. <https://doi.org/10.37879/belleten.2005.217>.

⁴⁷ Özlem Yıldız, "20. Yüzyıl Başlarında Beyrut Limanında Deniz Ticareti", *Tarih ve Güncel Atatürk ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi Dergisi* 4, (2019), 74.

⁴⁸ Kızıltoprak, *II. Abdülhamid Han'ın Dış Politikası*, 237.

⁴⁹ Kızıltoprak, *II. Abdülhamid Han'ın Dış Politikası*, 238.

treasury an advance of 40,000 Ottoman liras. Additionally, he committed to paying a 12% ad valorem tax (*resm-i nisbi*), as well as an annual payment of fifteen kuruş per *cerib* (a land measurement unit), as *resm-i mukataa*. However, Speidel was not the only applicant seeking to obtain the concession to operate the zinc mines on Thasos. According to a communication from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the same year, the Austrian Consul in Kavala, Viks, also applied to the *Hazine-i Hassa* for the right to operate the mines on its behalf. He offered the same terms—12% tax and an annual fee of fifteen kuruş per *cerib*—but proposed a smaller advance payment of 20,000 Ottoman liras.⁵⁰

Compared to Viks's offer, the fact that Speidel was prepared to pay an advance of 40,000 Ottoman liras made his proposal more financially advantageous. On the other hand, when the possibility of awarding the Thasos mining concession to Viks instead of the German national Speidel was raised, Topçu Krispi expressed his concerns about granting the concession to Speidel. He argued that the Germans, who were already gaining control over mining operations on Thasos, might later seek to establish a coal station on the island for their own strategic purposes—or possibly transfer control to the British. Therefore, he cautioned that granting the mining concession to Speidel could pose risks.⁵¹ Despite these objections, the mining rights were ultimately awarded to Speidel. Moreover, the tax revenue generated from the zinc mining concession on Thasos was collected and recorded separately by the *Emlak-i Hümâyün* (Imperial Estates Administration). According to the decision of the *Emlak-i Hümâyün Commission* dated 18 December 1904, a payment of 1,000,500 kuruş was delivered to the treasury.⁵²

However, in 1905, two formal letters of protest (*protestoname*) were submitted to the *Hazine-i Hassa* by Adolf Viks, a subject of Austria-Hungary, and Belfaridis, a French national, concerning the concession of various mines on the island of Thasos, including zinc, argentiferous lead, and copper (*nühas*) deposits. According to the documents, Belfaridis had attempted to explore and extract zinc, copper, and argentiferous lead in five villages on the island, including Kastro and the village of Bulgar. In doing so, he brought to the surface the unresolved administrative dispute over the island's governance. After the conflict between the Ottoman Empire and the Khedivate of Egypt had been resolved, the mines on Thasos were transferred to the *Hazine-i Hassa*, and a license was issued to the German national Speidel. However, even after the license was granted to Speidel, it was revealed that the concession in question had previously been divided between and exported by Viks and Belfaridis. The reassignment of the operating rights exclusively to Speidel further deepened the controversy surrounding the exploitation of the Thasos mines.⁵³

⁵⁰ BOA.ML.EEM. 486/33. p. 5.

⁵¹ Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA.) Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Arzuhal Jurnal (BOA. Y.PRK. AZJ.), 46/124, (29. Z.1320 [29 March 1903]).

⁵² BOA. ML. EMM.490/5, (7 Kanun-ı evvel 1320 [20 December1904]).

⁵³ Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA.) Hariciye Nezâreti İdare Evrakı (BOA. HR.İD.), 1348/44, p.5- 6, (28 Teşrîn-ıânî 1320 [11 December 1904]).

2.2. Tools and Equipment Required for Zinc Processing

Various tools and equipment were used in mining operations. In the case of zinc processing on the island of Thasos, the use of explosive materials was essential—one of the most notable being gunpowder. According to a report submitted to the Police Directorate of the Selanik (Thessaloniki) Province in November 1903, the *Emlak-i Hümâyün* (Imperial Estates Administration) arranged for the shipment of 200 *okka* (approx. 256 kg) of stone gunpowder and 400 boxes of fuses to be delivered to the local government in Selanik. The shipment, intended for use in zinc mining on Thasos and conducted in accordance with regulatory procedures, was loaded onto a sailing vessel, as reported to the Artillery Directorate (*Tophane-i Amire Müşirliği*).⁵⁴ Considering the date, it is evident that a substantial quantity of stone gunpowder and fuses had been delivered to the island prior to the formal awarding of the zinc mining concession to Speidel.

According to a report submitted to the Police Directorate of the Selanik (Thessaloniki) Province on 17 October 1904, a substantial quantity of explosive materials intended for zinc processing on the island of Thasos was prepared for delivery. The shipment included 16,000 *okka* (approx. 20,480 kg) of stone gunpowder, 200,500 boxes of fuse-grade (*kaviye*) gunpowder, 4,000 *okka* (approx. 5,120 kg) of additional stone gunpowder, and 800 boxes of fuses. These materials were handed over to Captain Hasan Ağa and loaded onto a sailing vessel for delivery to the local government in Selanik. The *Tophane-i Amire Müşiriyeti* (Imperial Artillery Directorate) specifically instructed that all necessary precautions be taken to prevent any misuse or irregularities during the shipment.⁵⁵

In 1906, according to a report submitted to the Police Directorate of the Selanik (Thessaloniki) Province, a large quantity of explosives imported from Europe and stored in the powder magazine (*baruthane*) was prepared for dispatch. The shipment included 10,000 *okka* (approx. 12,800 kg) of *faveye emniyet barutu* (safety-grade blasting powder), 5,000 detonator fuses specifically designed for this powder, 5,000 *okka* (approx. 6,400 kg) of *kaviye barutu* (high-strength gunpowder) to be used with 100,000 percussion caps, as well as 10 crates of percussion caps and 9 crates of fuse cords. These materials were entrusted to Lieutenant İbrahim Efendi to be delivered securely to the local government. According to the *Tophane-i Amire Müdüriyeti* (Imperial Artillery Directorate), İbrahim Efendi subsequently loaded a total of 15,000 *okka* of stone gunpowder, 9,500 percussion cap fuses, an additional 3,000 *okka* of stone gunpowder, and 200,500 fuse detonators onto a sailing vessel, which was then dispatched to the island of Thasos.⁵⁶

Explosive materials and related products required for zinc production on the island of Thasos were transported to the mining sites under supervision on various dates. However, the quantity of these materials varied significantly over time. For example, in 1907, a shipment consisting of 5,000 *okka* (approx. 6,400 kg) of *faveye emniyet barutu* (safety-grade blasting

⁵⁴ Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA.) Zabıtiye Nezâreti Belgeleri (BOA. ZB.), 466/76, (19 Teşrîn-i evvel 1319 [1 November 1903]).

⁵⁵ BOA. ZB. 466/117, (1 Mart 1320 [14 March 1904]).

⁵⁶ BOA. ZB. 467/72, (3 Temmuz 1322 [16 July 1906]).

powder) and 20 percussion caps, which had been stored at the *Baruthane-i Amire* (Imperial Powder Magazine), was reported to the local government. The materials were handed over to Lieutenant İbrahim and loaded onto a German-flagged steamer named *Larosa*. The Selanik Provincial Council was informed that the chief of security (*ser-zabıta süvari*) had been instructed to ensure the safe and secure arrival of the shipment, with no room for negligence.⁵⁷ Although strict measures were taken to guarantee the secure transport of explosives used in zinc processing, a subsequent inventory check revealed that several boxes of fuses were missing. Lieutenant İbrahim, who had overseen the transportation of the materials to the island, declared that he had delivered the entire shipment without any shortages. Following this discrepancy, the *Tophane-i Amire Müşirliği* (Imperial Artillery Command) was notified, and an investigation into the missing fuses was initiated.⁵⁸

As all of the above examples illustrate, significant precautions were taken to ensure the safe transport of explosive materials required for zinc production. However, a separate dispute arose concerning the customs exemption for the tools and equipment necessary for mining operations. According to the terms of two separate contracts signed between the *Hazine-i Hassa* (Imperial Privy Purse) and the German commercial firm owned by Speidel, the tools and equipment to be used in the extraction of minerals on the island of Thasos were to be exempt from customs duties. Accordingly, an application was made to the Ministry of Trade and Public Works (*Ticaret ve Nafia Nezareti*) requesting the return of a deposit that had been collected at customs. Subsequently, the *Şûrâ-yı Devlet* (Council of State) affirmed the necessity of this customs exemption and endorsed the return of the previously collected duty. With the intercession of the German Embassy, emphasis was placed on the importance of the Council of State reviewing the matter. Specifically, Article 6 of the contract regarding zinc mining stipulated that all tools and equipment used in the production of zinc would be exempt from customs duties.⁵⁹ However, separate contracts had been issued for each type of mine, and it remained unclear which mine the deposited customs fee pertained to. Therefore, the matter was referred to the Ministry of Finance (*Maliye Nezareti*), which in turn noted that, according to a response from the General Directorate of Customs in Selanik (*Selanik Rüsumat Baş Müdürlüğü*), it could only be clarified to which mine the imported and taxed materials belonged by examining the relevant mining ledger. The Ministry requested that the ledger be sent for verification of the recorded deposit. In an official note dated 30 September 1911 and sent from the Ministry of Finance to the Selanik Customs Directorate, it was stated that although the customs deposit for the necessary tools and equipment had been recorded in 1910, the official responsible—Rıza Efendi—had fallen ill and had failed to transfer the ledger to the island. Moreover, no other recorded deposits were noted in the book. Nevertheless, due to Article 6 of the contract concerning zinc production, which stipulated a right to exemption, the case was referred back to the Ministry of Finance, and the formal presentation of the deposit receipt was deemed necessary.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ BOA. ZB. 384/14, (19 Teşrîn-i sâni 1323 [2 December 1907]).

⁵⁸ Arslan, *Balkanların Anahtarı*, 107.

⁵⁹ Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA.) Babıâli Evrak Odası Evrakı (BOA. BEO.), 3963/297155, p.1, (30 Teşrîn-i evvel 1327 [12 November 1911]); BOA. BEO. 3963-297155, Lef 3, (17 Za. 1329 [9 November 1911]).

⁶⁰ BOA. BEO. 3963/297155, p.3, (17 Za. 1329 [9 November 1911]).

Moreover, in zinc production, not only explosive materials such as fuse cords and *faveye* powder were used. As in the case of other types of mining, one of the most critical elements in zinc extraction was the supply of wood. Consequently, the procurement of timber and firewood for mining operations brought the issue of exploiting the forests of Thasos to the fore. A dispute arose between the mining contractor and the *waqf* administration concerning the use of these forest resources. Citing the need to rehabilitate the island's forests as a pretext, the Khedivate of Egypt brought Henri Bouyan (*Hanri Buyan*), a forestry instructor at the Sarajevo School of Forestry—who had also received permission from the Emperor of Austria—to Thasos in an official capacity.⁶¹ As previously noted, during the zinc production process, explosive materials such as fuse cords and gunpowder were imported at different intervals and in varying quantities according to operational needs.

2.3. Environmental Arrangements on the Island of Thasos Related to Zinc Production and Export

It is important to note that appropriate environmental arrangements were made in areas where mineral deposits were located in order to facilitate mining operations. Specifically, *kârhane* (processing workshops) were constructed near the mining sites. In addition, furnaces were needed to process the ore extracted in its raw, earthy form.⁶² To reduce the transportation costs of the extracted zinc ore, it was planned to ship it in dried form, which necessitated the construction of kilns resembling lime furnaces.⁶³

In addition to other infrastructural needs, the use of electricity also became necessary for the illumination of mining facilities. Although archival documents generally do not refer explicitly to the use of electricity for zinc mining operations, they do mention, in broader terms, the role of electricity in the development and maintenance of the Thasos mines.⁶⁴ As stated in the sources, electric lighting emerged as part of the environmental adjustments made to facilitate ore extraction at the mining sites. Furthermore, the utilization of water sources on the island of Thasos also became a matter of concern. Speidel altered the course of a water supply intended for use in the mining operations, which led to discontent among the local inhabitants. In fact, in 1906, several residents of the village of Kazavit traveled to the provincial capital of Selanik (Thessaloniki) to protest that the water supply specific to their village had been diverted for use in the Sotiros mining complex. The villagers were reportedly so distressed by this alteration that they considered abandoning their village altogether. Following their complaint, authorities took care to ensure that no action contrary to the law would be taken.⁶⁵ As a result, the matter was reported by the Selanik Provincial Administration to the Inspectorate of the Rumelia Provinces (*Rumeli Vilayeti Müfettişliği*).⁶⁶ In order to prevent any

⁶¹ Arslan, *Balkanların Anahtarı*, 107–108; BOA. BEO.2653/198925, (22 C. 1323 [24 August 1905]); Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA.) İrade Hususi (BOA.İ.HUS.), 132/63, (22 C.1323[24 August 1905]).

⁶² BOA.ML.EEM. 533/58, p.5 a.(a), (12 Nisan 1321 [25 April 1905]).

⁶³ BOA. ML.EEM. 533/58, p.5 a., (29 Mart 1321 [11 April 1905]).

⁶⁴ Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA.) Dâhiliye Nezâreti, Mektubi Kalemi Evrakı (BOA.DH. MKT.) 1147/89, p. 2 (5. M. 1322 [22 March 1904]).

⁶⁵ BOA. BEO.2764/207275, (25 Z. 1323 [31 January 1906]).

⁶⁶ BOA. BEO. 2768/207528, p.1, (1 Muhamrem 1324 [25 February 1906]); BOA. BEO. 2768/207528, p. 2 (12 Şubat 1321 [25 February 1906]).

further disruption, the grievances of the villagers were eventually brought before a court of law.⁶⁷

In the export of minerals from Thasos—particularly zinc—establishing a secure transportation network was of primary importance. In this regard, the construction of a customs pier near the area of Karyolofa, located in the vicinity of the Yeni Hisar quay, was proposed to facilitate mineral exports. Accordingly, in 1904, a formal petition bearing the signature of S. Kovis was submitted to the local administration on behalf of the mining contractor, Speidel, requesting permission for the construction of the pier.⁶⁸ The Port Authority subsequently informed the Selanik (Thessaloniki) Provincial Administration that a technical delegation should be dispatched to the site to conduct a feasibility inspection. Upon review, it was concluded that there were no objections to the construction of the pier. Following the assignment of security personnel to ensure a safe environment, the request to build the new pier approximately 500 meters inland from the existing harbor was approved.⁶⁹ Thus, the necessary logistical and security measures were taken to ensure the safe shipment of the zinc produced on the island.

Moreover, there was no official building designated for the *Taşoz Madeni Hümayun* (Imperial Mine of Thasos) staff. In 1907, the Selanik Commission of Imperial Estates (*Selanik Emlak-ı Hümayun Komisyonu*) was informed of the expenditure of 75,950 kuruş for the purchase of a plot of land and the construction of an administrative office suitable for the partial accommodation of the appointed official and his family.⁷⁰ As previously noted, the installation of electricity, lighting, and the construction of the pier were all undertaken with the aim of facilitating the safe and efficient shipment of zinc from the island.

2.4. Labour and Employment for Zinc Production

The workforce employed in the zinc mining operations on the island of Thasos increased gradually in accordance with growing demand. Initially, around 400 workers were employed. This number later rose to 700, and eventually reached 1,000 labourers engaged in zinc production. In certain periods, the number of workers even exceeded this figure. During times when local labour shortages were experienced, workers were brought in from Greece and Germany to meet the staffing needs of the mining enterprise.⁷¹ In fact, although the Mining Regulation included the provision that “workers employed in the mine cannot be subjects of foreign states,” the tax-farmer Speidel requested permission for Greek and German nationals to work in the mine. While this request carried the possibility of causing various problems, such as increasing the number of foreign nationals arriving on the island, leading to social unrest, and disturbing the demographic balance, Abdulhamid II nevertheless granted permission for Speidel to employ foreign workers in the mine. At this point, the interests of

⁶⁷ BOA. BEO.2764/207275, (25 Z. 1323 [20 Şubat 1906]).

⁶⁸ BOA. DH. MKT.809/45, (24 L. 1321[13 Ocak 1904]); Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA). İrade Bahriye (BOA.İ. BH.) 6/20, p. 3. (29. Ş. 1322 [8 November 1904]).

⁶⁹ BOA. İ.BH. 6-20, Lef 3. (29. Ş. 1322 [8 November 1904]).

⁷⁰ Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA.) Yıldız, Mütenevvi Maruzat Evrakı (BOA. Y.MTV.), 301/124, (24 B. 1325 [2 September 1907]).

⁷¹ Kızıltoprak; *II. Abdülhamid Han'ın Dış Politikası*, 237.

both the Ottoman Empire and Germany came to the fore. In the sphere of political rivalry, Germany aimed to establish a foothold on the island of Thasos against the French in Serres and Drama, as well as the British in Kavala.⁷² On the other hand, the reason why the Ottoman Empire responded positively to the requests of the tax-farmer was to avoid harming its developing relations with Germany.⁷³ In addition to German and Greek miners, it is known that Cretan Greeks also worked in the mining operations of Thasos. However, due to the political atmosphere of the period, those traveling to the island of Thasos were kept under surveillance.⁷⁴ At this point, the Cretan Question was particularly influential. Indeed, the tension between the Muslim and Christian population on the island erupted into a revolt in Chania in 1896.⁷⁵ The uprising in Crete ostensibly emerged with demands for privileges and reforms.⁷⁶ Despite all the efforts of the Ottoman Empire, on 13 February 1897 Greek soldiers under the command of Prince George arrived in Crete, after which the Greek government sent Colonel Vassos to occupy the island of Crete on behalf of the king.⁷⁷ However, when the Commander of the Greek forces, Vassos, declared in February 1897 that he had taken Crete on behalf of the Greek King, the European powers began to occupy the island.⁷⁸ On 12 April 1897, the Ottoman Empire declared war on the Kingdom of Greece, and when the Kingdom of Greece suffered a major defeat, it accepted the autonomy of Crete.⁷⁹ Attempts at the annexation of Crete to Greece continued until 1908. Although the Sublime Porte strove to prevent Greece's attempt to occupy the island of Crete and to reach a solution that would safeguard its own sovereign rights, in 1909 the protecting powers of Crete—Britain, Russia, France, and Italy—delivered a note to the Sublime Porte, expressing their views regarding the order and status of Crete.⁸⁰ In such a context, it was deemed necessary to pay attention to the Cretan Greeks arriving from Crete. In 1906, the Rumelia Governorate (*Rumeli Mutasarrıflığı*) notified the General Inspectorate of the Rumelian Provinces (*Rumeli Vilayeti Müfettişi Umumiliği*) that special attention should be paid to Cretan Greeks arriving on the island. Specifically, thirteen individuals identified as Cretan Greeks arrived aboard the *Jupiter*, a steamship belonging to an Austrian company operating between Selanik and Kavala, and obtained permits (*tezkeres*) to travel directly to Thasos. Authorities emphasized that the behavior and activities of these individuals should be closely monitored during their stay on the island, and that the local administration on Thasos should be informed. Some of these individuals reportedly went to work at the Yenihisar mining site on the island. However, after working for a few days, many of the Cretan Greeks left Thasos, citing various pretexts.⁸¹ This demonstrates the necessity of

⁷² Kızıltoprak, *II. Abdülhamid Han'ın Dış Politikası*, 256.

⁷³ Kızıltoprak, *II. Abdülhamid Han'ın Dış Politikası*, 257.

⁷⁴ BOA.TFR.I.SL. 102/10163, p.1 (8 S. 1324 [3 April 1906]).

⁷⁵ Cemal Tukin, "Girit", *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1996) 14:90.

⁷⁶ Nükhet Adıyeke, "Osmanlı Kaynaklarına Göre Türk-Yunan İlişkilerinde Girit Sorunu (1896)", *Çağdaş Türkiye Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi 1* no.3, (1993):337.

⁷⁷ Ayşe Nükhet Adıyeke ve Nuri Adıyeke, *Osmanlı Dönemi Kısa Girit Tarihi*, (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2021). 230.

⁷⁸ Adıyeke, "Osmanlı Kaynaklarına Göre Türk-Yunan", 339.

⁷⁹ Adıyeke ve Adıyeke, *Osmanlı Dönemi Kısa Girit Tarihi*, 239-240.

⁸⁰ Tukin, "Girit", 90.

⁸¹ It was revealed that the primary objective of the Cretan Greeks who arrived to work in the Thasos mines was not long-term employment, but rather to briefly engage in mining labor before crossing over to the mainland regions heavily populated by Greeks. For this reason, the Rumelia Governorate (*Rumeli Mutasarrıflığı*) emphasized that the Thasos-Kavala coastal line should be placed under constant surveillance. Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA.) Rumeli Müfettişliği, Selanik Evrakı (BOA.TFR.I.SL.) 102/10163, Lef: 1 (8 S. 1324 [3 April 1906]). Although some records specify that these individuals came to work at the Yenihisar mine in particular, Ottoman

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keeping Cretan Greeks under surveillance in the political atmosphere of the period. Moreover, the documents do not explicitly state that Cretan Greeks were employed in zinc mining. However, considering that multiple mining operations were carried out on Thasos and that Monsieur Speidel also brought in workers from Greece, it is possible to say that Cretan Greeks, albeit to a limited extent, worked in zinc production.

In addition to the labourers employed for zinc production, particular attention was given to ensuring the secure transport of the extracted ore. To that end, it became necessary to deploy security personnel at the port where shipments were to be made. For example, in 1904, the construction of a customs pier near the area of Karyolofa, adjacent to the Yeni Hisar quay on Thasos, was proposed.⁸² As part of this initiative, discussions arose regarding whether forestry and mining officials, along with law enforcement officers, should be stationed to ensure the safety of the area between the new pier and the existing one.

Subsequently, it was reported by the mining contractor that, in addition to officials from the Public Debt Administration (*Düyûn-ı Umûmiye*) and the Customs Administration (*Rüsumat İdaresi*), a major, a gendarme, and a police officer were stationed at the Yeni Hisar pier.⁸³ In the following years, greater emphasis was placed on security at various mining sites throughout the island. In particular, due to the increasing number of foreign steamships docking at Thasos in 1905, measures were taken to ensure that the transportation and trade of minerals were conducted within a secure framework. For example, guards were to be appointed in Tolos and Hasravat. In Tolos, two guards were to be hired at a monthly wage of 250 kuruş each, and a clerk, also responsible for overseeing the warehouse (*sandık eminliği*), was to be appointed with a salary of 300 kuruş. Similarly, in Sotiros—as in Hasravat—a guard was to be stationed with a monthly wage of 20 kuruş. Details regarding these positions and their associated salaries were reported to the Ministry of Finance Commission on 27 October 1905.⁸⁴ Through these measures, the zinc produced on Thasos was able to be transported both swiftly and securely. However, as noted, the wages of the personnel employed for this purpose constituted a significant additional cost.

2.5. Zinc Production and Export on the Island of Thasos

The production of zinc on the island of Thasos by foreign investors holding concession licenses became a prominent component of the Ottoman Empire's foreign trade. In addition to the extraction and refinement of zinc from the Thasos mines, environmental and logistical arrangements also played a critical role in its shipment. The international transportation network had a significant impact on both the production process and the timely delivery of zinc. For this reason, the construction of a pier capable of supporting large-scale export operations was deemed necessary. Following a license application, a new pier was built behind

archival documents generally refer to them more broadly as Cretan Greeks who arrived to work in the mines of Thasos. BOA. TFR.I. SL. 102-10163, Lef: 2. (3 Nisan 1322 [16 April 1906].

⁸² BOA. DH. MKT.809/45. (14 Kanun-ı evvel 1319 [27 December 1903]; BOA. İ.BH. 6/20, p.3.

⁸³ BOA. İ.BH. 6/20, p. 3.

⁸⁴ BOA. BEO.2708/203069 (19 N.1323 [17 November 1905]).

the Yeni Hisar harbor, and law enforcement officers were deployed to ensure its security.⁸⁵ As previously stated, the safe and efficient shipment of refined zinc was of utmost importance. The frequent departure of large shipments aboard foreign-flagged vessels reflected not only the volume of exports but also the scale of production. For instance, in 1904, 1,260 tons of ore extracted from the Thasos zinc mines were shipped to Europe aboard the *Sekiros*, a steamer belonging to a German shipping company. This shipment was examined and verified by the Imperial Consulate General in Frankfurt.⁸⁶ According to the sales documentation for the export and proceeds of this 1,260-ton zinc shipment, it was found that 360 tons were delivered to the city of Hamburg and 900 tons to the city of Antwerp for sale via a commercial firm based in Frankfurt. From the 360 tons sent to Hamburg, a loss of 1,374 units was recorded based on a waste deduction of three per thousand. As for the 900 tons delivered to Antwerp, it was reported that the net pure zinc content amounted to 877,532 kilograms, with a residue of 22,468 kilograms categorized as waste. Furthermore, of the 877,532 kilograms, only 348,863 kilograms were determined to be pure zinc. In comparing the initially shipped quantities to the refined outputs, an average material loss of 8% was observed. The market price of pure zinc per ton in London was listed as 22 British pounds, 13 shillings, and 69 millimes, corresponding to 444.819 German marks per ton. After deducting 51.1369 marks for additional costs, the final net price per ton was calculated accordingly. In addition, freight charges of 14,221 (currency not specified) and 75 centimes per ton were recorded for the 1,260-ton shipment. The *Emlak-ı Hümâyun Commission* ruled that the proportional zinc tax (*rüsum nisbisi*) would be collected by the respective consulates (*sehbenderlik*) at the port of delivery and accounted for in the sales documentation over a defined period.⁸⁷

The German-language sales invoice submitted by the tax farmer (*mültezim*) was issued by a commercial firm based in Germany. The document bore the signature of the local contract registrar (*mukavelat muharriri*) and was duly approved by the relevant consulate (*sehbenderlik*). It was stated that the commercial firm in question was large and reputable, and therefore the sales invoice could be deemed reliable. Upon review of the reported discrepancy of 22,468 kilograms categorized as waste (*fire*), it was concluded that this figure actually corresponded to the amount of pure zinc. The price listed for this quantity, after deducting relevant expenses, was determined to be 51 marks, 13 schillings, and 69 millimes. However, concerns were raised regarding the stated prices, the expense figures, and the recorded waste difference. The *Emlak-ı Hümâyun Commission* announced that the matter would be subject to further discussion, particularly concerning the acceptance of the freight cost figure of 14,221 marks and 75 centimes, as recorded in the sales documents. This was noted explicitly by the Chief Clerk (*Kalem Müdüri*) of the *Emlak-ı Hümâyun*.⁸⁸ As indicated, while zinc produced on the island of Thasos had found its place in international markets, profit and loss margins were closely examined and evaluated throughout the export process.

⁸⁵ BOA. İ.BH. 6/20, p.3.

⁸⁶ BOA. ML.EEM. 533/58, p. 5 b.(a) (9 Şevval 1322 [17 December 1904]).

⁸⁷ BOA. ML.EEM. 533/58, p. 5 a(a), (6 Kanun-ı evvel 1320 [6 January 1905]).

⁸⁸ BOA. ML.EEM. 533/58, p. 5 a (a).

It should also be noted that the expenses related to zinc production were closely tied to the physical characteristics of the zinc being exported. Specifically, the zinc extracted from the mining site contained carbonate. It was exported to Europe in this carbonate form, directly after extraction. This approach was advantageous for both the treasury and the tax farmer (*mültezim*). It was believed that if the extracted zinc were first processed in kilns resembling lime furnaces to reduce its moisture content before shipment, transportation costs would be significantly lower.⁸⁹ Taking into account every detail—including shipping expenses—it was anticipated that exporting the material at a reduced weight would result in lower costs and consequently higher profits.

The profitability in question was directly related to the quantity of zinc extracted from the mining sites. Seasonally, both zinc production and sales opportunities increased. Indeed, this is clearly reflected in the sales ledger maintained by Speidel for the Thasos zinc mine. Based on figures from 1906 and 1907, it is evident that zinc exports were particularly high during the months of June, August, and September. This trend correlates with the high concentration of zinc in the ore extracted during these months.⁹⁰ The greater the quantity of zinc extracted, the greater the volume that could be transferred to international markets.

Moreover, zinc exports from the island of Thasos increased significantly from year to year. For instance, during the 1904/1905 fiscal year, a total of 8,672 tons and 60 kilograms of zinc were shipped from the island, whereas in 1905/1906, this figure rose sharply to 24,757 tons and 968 kilograms.⁹¹

In 1906, 278 tons and 800 kilograms of roasted zinc obtained from the Voves mine, and an additional 510 tons and 790 kilograms of zinc that had been processed and roasted in a factory, were prepared for shipment. In addition, from the *Komarya Maden-i Hümâyunu* (Imperial Komarya Mine), 908 kilograms of zinc were exported, along with 340 tons of roasted zinc and 1,146 tons and 470 kilograms of zinc from the *Sotiris Maden-i Hümâyunu* (Imperial Sotiris Mine). These quantities were transported to the Port of Hamburg aboard a steamer operated by the Deutsche Levant Lines Company.⁹²

Description	Shipping Company / Vessel Name	Port of Destination	Date of Shipment	Processed & Calcined Zinc (tons)	Total Tonnage (tons)
From Voves <i>Maden-i Hümâyun</i> , subject to 5% <i>resm-i nisbiye</i> (proportional tax)	Deutsch Levant Lines, <i>Milos</i> steamer	Hamburg	20 October 1908	1110	1110

⁸⁹ BOA. ML.EEM. 533/58, p. 5 a(a).

⁹⁰ Çınar, "II. Abdülhamid Dönemi", 43.

⁹¹ Çınar, "II. Abdülhamid Dönemi", 46.

⁹² BOA. ML.EEM. 675/58, p.1, 2 (18 Rebiü'l-ahir 1324 [11 June 1906]).

From Sotiros (Sotiroz) Maden-i Hümâyun, subject to 12% <i>resm-i nisbiye</i>	Deutsch Levant Lines, <i>Milos</i> steamer	Hamburg	20 October 1908	314	314
			Total	1424	1424

Table 1: Zinc Shipment to the Port of Hamburg via the *Milos* Steamer of the Deutsche Levant Lines on 20 October 1908

As indicated in Table 1, a substantial shipment of zinc was exported on 20 October 1908. According to the report submitted by the *Kolağası* (Senior Captain) serving as the Imperial Mine Officer (Maden-i Hümâyun Memuru) on Thasos, a total of 1,424 tons of zinc ore—1,110 tons from the *Voves Maden-i Hümâyunu*, subject to a 5% *resm-i nisbiye* (proportional tax), and 314 tons from the *Sotiros (Sotiroz) Maden-i Hümâyunu*, subject to a 12% *resm-i nisbiye*—was processed at the factory in the village of Hamidiye and calcined before being shipped to the Port of Hamburg aboard the *Milos*, a steamer operated by the Deutsche Levant Lines Company.⁹³ On 7 November 1908, an additional shipment of zinc ore was exported to the Port of Hamburg via the *Pera*, another steamer belonging to the Deutsche Levant Lines Company.⁹⁴ The quantity of zinc ore shipped in this instance amounted to 2,326 tons. It was also noted that 149 tons of unprocessed or roasted zinc were received.⁹⁵ However, since the type of zinc (raw or calcined) determined the applicable rate of *resm-i nisbiye*, the classification of the shipped zinc was of particular importance for taxation purposes.⁹⁶

Description	Vessel Name	Shipm ent Year	Destination Port	Unproce ssed Ore (Stone Form)	Processed & Calcined in Factory	Total Ore	T o n s
				Tons	Tons	Tons	Tons
From Sotiroz (Sotiroz) Imperial Mine	The <i>Pera</i> Steamer of the Deutsche Levant Lines Company	1908	Hamburg	220	.	320	540
From the Sotiroz (Sotiroz) Imperial Mine, subject to a 12% <i>resm-i nisbiye</i>	The <i>Pera</i> Steamer of the Deutsche Levant Lines Company	1908	Hamburg	17	86	.	103
Komariye	The <i>Pera</i> Steamer of the Deutsche	1908	Hamburg	.	.		149

⁹³ BOA. ML.EEM. 721/28, p. 1. (7 Teşrîn-i evvel 1324 [20 October 1908]).⁹⁴ BOA. ML.EEM. 720/81, p. 1. (25 Teşrîn-i evvel 1324 [7 November 1908]).⁹⁵ BOA. ML.EEM. 720/81, p. 2. (25 Teşrîn-i evvel 1324 [7 November 1908]).⁹⁶ BOA. ML. EEM. 720/68. (29 Kanun-ı evvel 1324 [11 January 1909]).

Levant Lines Company							
From the Voves Imperial Mine, subject to a 5% <i>resm-i nisbiye</i>	The <i>Pera</i> Steamer of the Deutsche Levant Lines Company	1908	Hamburg	220	487	827	1534
						Total tons	2326

Table 2: Zinc Shipment to the Port of Hamburg via the *Pera* Steamer of the Deutsche Levant Lines Company in 1908⁹⁷

As indicated in Tables 1 and 2, a substantial quantity of zinc was shipped to the Port of Hamburg in 1908 via various steamers operated by the Deutsche Levant Lines Company. In the following year, 1909, an additional 1,801 tons and 470 kilograms of zinc ore were exported to the Port of Hamburg aboard another vessel belonging to the same German company.⁹⁸ Although no shipment was recorded aboard the *Tenedos*, another vessel of the Deutsche Levant Lines, in that same year, a separate export was made to the Port of Antwerp.⁹⁹ According to a report submitted by the Assistant Mine Officer (Maden Memuru Muavini) of Thasos to the Ministry of the Imperial Privy Purse (Hazine-i Hassa Nezareti) on 28 April 1909, a total of 507 tons and 830 kilograms of zinc ore extracted from the Thasos mines was sent to the Port of Antwerp. The type and quantity of the exported ore were duly registered in the customs records (Rüsumat) of Thasos.¹⁰⁰

As indicated, the volume of zinc exported through international trade was substantial. However, incidents such as fires in the mines directly affected the market price of zinc. In November 1909, a fire broke out in the Sotiros mine after 6 p.m., reportedly due to deliberate ignition with gas and resin inside two of its galleries. This incident raised concerns that zinc prices would decline as a result. The district governor (kaza kaymakamı), the mining tax farmer (mültezim), and several officials immediately visited the site, and a formal investigation was initiated. It was feared that the fire might have a detrimental impact on zinc prices. At the time, one ton of zinc was valued at 28 lira, but there was concern that the price could drop as low as 17 lira per ton.¹⁰¹ The Director of the Emlâk-ı Hümâyün in Selanik (Thessaloniki) reported to the Ministry of the Imperial Privy Purse (Hazine-i Hassa Nezareti) that the mining tax farmer had encountered financial hardship due to the fire.¹⁰² The sheer scale of zinc exports underscores the considerable volume of production. Furthermore, insurance played a key role in ensuring the safe shipment of zinc. The zinc mining operation held under concession by Speidel incurred substantial insurance costs between 1904 and 1908. Mines subject to a 5% *resm-i nisbiye* (proportional tax) generated especially high premiums due to the large quantities exported. Not only the 5%, but also the 12% *resm-i nisbiye* mines were insured for zinc

⁹⁷ BOA. ML. EEM. 720/81. (25 Teşrin-i evvel 1324)

⁹⁸ BOA., ML.EEM. 734/58. p.1-2. (12 Şubat 1324 [25 February 1909]).

⁹⁹ BOA., ML.EEM.747/4, p.1. (28 Nisan 1325 [11 May 1909]).

¹⁰⁰ BOA., ML.EEM.747/4, p.2. (28 Nisan 1325 [11 May 1909]).

¹⁰¹ BOA., ML.EEM. 721/83, p.1.

¹⁰² BOA., ML.EEM. 721/83, p. 2. (30 Teşrin-i evvel 1324 [12 November 1908]).

shipments transported between 1904 and 1908 to no fewer than 26 coastal destinations, including Seriphos, Hainaut, Skyros, Dyle, Lesbos, Glengoil, and Naxos. The total amount paid for insurance coverage of these shipments was recorded as 38,55.15.¹⁰³

Every aspect of zinc production on the island of Thasos—from extraction to transportation to the port and ultimately its sale on international markets—was subject to close supervision. Within this framework, the insurance system played a pivotal role as a principal mechanism ensuring the security of trade.

Conclusion

This study, using the example of zinc production and exportation on the island of Thasos between 1903 and 1911, has comprehensively revealed the multilayered nature of mining activities at the provincial level in the late Ottoman period, along with the dynamics of foreign investment. The findings are significant not only from an economic history perspective but also in terms of administrative and legal structures.

First and foremost, it has been established that the ongoing administrative status disputes between the Ottoman central administration and the Egyptian Khedivate over Thasos had a direct impact on mining operations on the island. The uncertainties regarding the granting of concession rights on the island, which was under the waqf authority of the Khedivate, created diplomatic and legal tensions between investors and Ottoman institutions. However, although contradictions arose in mining operations on the island of Thasos, which possessed a special status, the Ottoman Empire did not relinquish control over mining concessions in line with the centralization policy of the nineteenth century. Indeed, while the administration of the island's waqf affairs was entrusted to the Mehmed Ali Pasha Waqf, administrative and judicial matters were carried out by the Governorship of Salonica, and in disputed situations regarding mining concessions, the Governorship reported the matter to the Sublime Porte. On the other hand, although privileges were occasionally granted to the tax-farmer in zinc mining operations, the Mining Regulation applied throughout the empire was also enforced in zinc mining operations on Thasos, and the intervention of foreign states was not permitted under the centralization policy of the central administration.

The activities carried out within the framework of the zinc mining concession granted to Speidel reflected the capital structure and international connections of the period, while also demonstrating the economic activities between Germany and the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. Indeed, in Germany's search for raw materials during this period, zinc mining operations on the island of Thasos occupied a distinct place. Moreover, the mining concession granted to Speidel was not only related to the economic policy of the period but also reflected the relations between the Ottoman Empire and Germany. In fact, Germany continued its economic expansion within the Ottoman territories until 1909 and broadened its sphere of influence in Ottoman foreign trade. The shipment of zinc to ports such as Hamburg and Antwerp clearly illustrates this situation.

At the same time, the importation of explosives, mining tools, and labour from Europe for zinc production reveals how an investment carried out in the Ottoman provinces became part

¹⁰³ Çınar, "II. Abdülhamid Dönemi", 45.

of a global economic network. The volume of zinc produced on the island of Thasos and its shipments to the ports of Hamburg and Antwerp demonstrate that zinc ore produced in Ottoman territories was integrated into the European industrial production chain. The study also revealed the traces of technological transformation in the provinces through environmental regulations and infrastructure investments made during the zinc production process. Elements such as the use of electricity, the construction of lime kilns, and port and pier infrastructure were significant not only in terms of production efficiency but also in relation to the local population of the region. In particular, practices such as the diversion of water sources illustrate the social impacts of mining investments in the provinces.

Finally, the research reveals that the security forces established to ensure safety in the mines, such as the gendarmerie and police, demonstrate how provincial security was restructured around private investments. Particular importance was attached to keeping Cretan Greek workers under surveillance. In this regard, following the outbreak of the revolt in Chania in 1896 and the arrival of Greek soldiers in Crete under the leadership of Prince George in 1897, the European powers occupied the island. Therefore, when evaluated in the context of the political concerns and ethno-political tensions of the period, it becomes clear that the Ottoman provinces were not only spaces of economic activity but also arenas in which security strategies were redefined.

This study contributes to the literature in several respects: First, by presenting a micro-historical example of foreign capital investments carried out in the Ottoman provinces, it details how mining activities were conducted on lands under waqf status. Second, through issues such as administrative contradictions in the implementation of mining law and customs exemptions, it demonstrates how the Ottoman state balanced legal flexibility with economic priorities. Third, by tracing the process from the production to the sale of zinc, it documents firsthand, through archival sources, how a mine reached the European market from the provinces.

Future research may use the framework developed in this study to comparatively examine similar mining investments on other Ottoman islands. Moreover, the impact of foreign investments on the island and the role of the central administration in this process can be analysed in greater detail. At the same time, labour mobility and ethnic diversity in the mines may provide new perspectives for understanding the socio-economic dynamics of late Ottoman society.

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