

THE ROLE OF COURT TEXTILES IN OTTOMAN-VENETIAN RELATIONS

Osmanlı-Venedik Ticari İlişkilerinde Saray Kumaşlarının Yeri

Cemile TUNA

Asst. Prof. Dr., Altınbaş Üniversitesi, cemile_tuna@yahoo.com

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Venedik Cumhuriyetinin Balkanlar, Ege, Karadeniz, Bizans İmparatorluğu ve Anadolu Beyliklerinden Aydınoğulları ve Menteşeoğullarıyla 13.yüzyılda başlayan ticaret yapma serbestileri, Osmanlı Devletinin 1453 yılında Konstantinopolis'i fetih etmesiyle sona ermiştir. Yeni kurulan Osmanlı Devleti ve güçlü Venedik Devleti arasında başlayan ikili anlaşmalar süresince siyasi ve ticari ilişkiler, sanat ve kültür etkileşimleri güçlenerek yüzyıllar boyunca devam etmiştir. Osmanlı Sultanları XVI. ve XVII. yüzyıllarda çeşitli tarihlerde Venedikli tüccarlara serbest ticaret lehine 'ahdname'(kapitülasyon) garantileri bağışlamışlardır ve imtiyazlı tüccarlar, Osmanlı kara ve deniz sınırları içinde serbestçe ticaret yaparak lüks ve kaliteli batı mallarının ülkeye girmesini sağlamışlardır.Venedik'ten İstanbul'a ulaşan malların önde gelen kalemlerini İstanbul'da Ali Kurna olarak bilinen(a.ligorna) filigranlı kağıtlar, Murano Adası camları ve damask, brokar, kadife gibi kıymetli ipekli kumaşlar oluşturuyordu. Osmanlı Sultanlarının seçtikleri lüks ipekli kumaşlar sadece teknik bir beceri ürünü değil, ait oldukları dönemin dinsel, siyasi ve sosyal düşünce dünyasının ekonomik bir simgesi olmuştur. Venedik Lagun atölyelerinde yüksek işçilikle dokunan ipekli kumaşlarda kullanılan geleneksel Osmanlı desenleri, kırmızı renk ve altın işlemler Venedik dokuma tekniği ve Osmanlı zevkini yansıtmaktadır. Saray tarafından görevlendirilen hassa tacirleri tarafından sipariş edilen (Venedik, Florantin) İtalyan kumaşları Osmanlı narh defterlerinde ve Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi envanterinde kayıtlıdır. Kaftanlar, döşemelikler, el yazma cilt kapaklarında Venedik kadifesi, telli diba, atlas, münakkaş kemha, zerbaf gibi kıymetli ipekli kumaşlar kullanılmıştır. Saraydaki kadife kaftanlardan sadece ikisinin Osmanlı kadifesi, diğerlerinin altın telli çatma Venedik kadifesinden olması Osmanlı Sultanlarının beğenilerinin göstergesidir. Bu bağlamda; Venedik, Osmanlı siyasi, ekonomik ve kültürel ilişkileri kumaşlar üzerinden irdelenecektir.

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The liberties given by Anatolian seigneuries and Seldjuk Empire to the Republic of Venice to trade freely in Balkans, Mediterranean, Aegean and Black Sea regions have temporarily been suspended with the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire in 1453. The commercial and political relations between the newly established Ottoman State and the Republic of Venice have lasted for centuries along with the artistic and cultural interconnections. During the 16th and 17th century, several Ahdnames (Capitulations) have been given to Venetian merchants by the Ottoman Sultans, opening the land and sea of the Empire for free trade of luxurious quality western goods by the privileged merchants. The main items reaching from Venice to Istanbul were consisted of watermarked papers known as Ali Kurna (a.ligorna) in Istanbul, glass from Murano Island and valuable silk textiles such as damasks, brocade and velvet. Luxurious silk textiles have not only been the outcomes of an intricate technology but also the symbols of religious, political and social concepts, along with the national economies. The traditional Ottoman patterns, red colour and golden embroideries used in the silk textiles woven in Venetian Lagune workshops with exquisite details reflect the Venetian weaving technique along with an Ottoman taste in arts. The Italian (Venetian, Florentine) textiles ordered by the Court were bought by specific merchants, reporting directly to the palace. These orders were meticulously recorded in Ottoman books and inventories in Topkapı Palace Museum. Fabrics like Venetian velvet, embroidered brocade, satin, embroidered silk and gold-threaded silk were used in caftans, upholstery and manuscript covers. The fact that only two of the Palace caftans were original Ottoman velvet and the rest were golden-threaded Venetian velvet, indicates the high interest towards Italian textiles.

INTRODUCTION

Republic of Venice, once known as *La Serenissima*, has been the center of Mediterranean commerce for a very long period (from 697 to 1797) with its well-established marine culture and international diplomacy. Venetian merchants, under the influence of Marco Polo's fantastic stories gathered for 24 years in his Far East quests and collected in the manuscript named *Il Millione*, have spread their commercial field from Mediterranean to Central Asia, until India and even China. New cultures and resources increased the impact of the commerce between West and East. Both Mongolians and Venetians "flattened" the World: Venetians over the seas with their ships and Mongolians with their revival of the Silk Road, over the land. In a flat world full of interactions, goods and ideas surprisingly connected to each other, while Empires grew and widened their territories. (Bergreen Laurence, 2018, 19)

Import of cheap Chinese silk towards Mediterranean had drastically increased. Silk caravans would pass the Central Asian roads and reach Solgar and Kefe ports in Crimea, Ayaş in Anatolia and there, the silk would be bought by Italian merchants (İnalçık Halil, 2016, 222). The bales of silk brought to Europe would turn into silk textiles in weaving workshops established in Toscana and Lucca in 1250's. Republic of Venice, as a powerful naval empire, has sustained a strong commercial relationship with the Chinese, Byzantine and Seldjuk Empires, as well as Anatolian seigneurie's for centuries. Spices, perfumes, precious Stones, wines and especially textiles started their journey from Far East or Middle East and along Silk Road and Wool Road, reached their final destination: Venice. Located in the West but feeding from the East, Venice has been the commercial melting pot of different languages, different traditions and different cultures.

The silk textiles were introduced to Europe in the early Middle Ages, where textile was used as a political instrument and commercial subject by *Constantinople*. The precious textiles woven with golden threads based on traditional figures were produced in the silk weaving centers of Byzantium under the reign of Justinianus (around 560 AD). Being the foundation elements of Byzantine economy, these silk textiles were then sent to West as gifts or export items with the mediation of Venetian merchants. During the 10th Century, every Venetian ship coming to Istanbul harbor was supposed to pay 2 *nomisatas* as tax, yet any ship which would leave with commercial goods was obliged to pay 15 *nomisatas* instead. (...) However, following the Sicilian-Norman King Roger the Second's quest to Thebes and Korinthos (Greek cities under Byzantine reign), many silk weavers were carried to Palermo in order to teach their handcraft. With this transfer of knowledge, silk weaving was spread to the West (Demirkent Işın, 2005, 168). These masters shared the Byzantine knowledge and silk weaving technique with their colleagues in Palermo, Sicily; in workshops under the control of Muslim rulers. Thus the textile industry in Italy has developed with an Eastern touch.



The history of weaving in Italy can go back to a textile industry established by the Muslim rulers of

Sicily in Palermo in the eleventh century. After the conquest of Constantinople by the Latin Kingdom in 1204, many artisans and Craftsmen left the city and moved to safe and prosperous cities such as Venice. Those weavers were not only Greek, but also Jewish and Sicilian, joining many other immigrants from neighboring cities in Southern Italy. Thus Italian cities including Lucca, Florence, Genoa and Venice became the center of the silk industry and exported silk products all across Europe. From twelfth century the archives, one learns that various kinds of silk textiles such as brocade (*kemha*), velvet, satin (*atlas*) and taffeta were woven in Lucca. (Okomuro Sumiyo, 2016)

The Republic of Venice has earned trade rights on Byzantine countries for its subjects as early as 998. While acquiring one fourth of Imperial land with the IVth Crusade, it has also established a strong trade empire in the *Levant* with separate agreements with each and every state in Anatolia and in the Mediterranean (Turan Ş, 1968, 248). With several rights such as residence, harbor, storage and dock-building for its subjects, the Republic of Venice has created a smaller model of their government in Constantinople, the transit and local trade center connecting the Silk Road to Mediterranean. This smaller model of the republic was governed by a director called Bailo, whose office was situated in Balkapanı Han in Asmaaltı, (Eminonu, Istanbul) right next to the wine cellars and warehouses of Venetian merchants. The Bailos would spend their summer in Vigne di Pera (vineyards of Pera). Pera, in Greek, just like Turkish, would stand for “the opposite shore” and the modern name of Pera, “Beyoglu” is also derived from Bailos (Sezgin Sabri Çağrı, 2013, 3,4).

Analysis of the Relationships with the Ottoman Empire

The same historical era witnessed the trade of silk, spices, raw cotton, grains, carpets, ceramic, pearls and precious metals from Levant, Iran, Egypt and Anatolia towards Venice; while salt, timber, linen, wool, velvet, Baltic amber, Italian corals, fine textiles, glass, silver and olive oil would spread from Venice towards East. The ashes for glass production and the colorful, vivid dyes for Florentine textiles would be imported from Anatolia; on the other hand, the alum was mined and then imported from Chios and Yeni Foça under Genoese control (Yılmaz Nevzat, 2017). The liberties given by Anatolian seigneuries and Seldjuk Empire to the Republic of Venice to trade freely in Balkans, Mediterranean, Aegean and Black Sea regions have temporarily been suspended with the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire in 1453.

Following the conquest of Istanbul, despite the changes on Empires, the new ruler of Byzantium, the Ottoman Empire has sustained the commercial connections with the Republic of Venice. As the connections developed, the Republic of Venice has also worked on ameliorating its rights and privileges with the newly established Empire. Despite their differences on institutional structures and geography, both states worked for the common purpose of economic gains from the Mediterranean trade system.

While Istanbul was announced as the capital of the Empire and Fatih the Conqueror was self-titled as the sole heir of the Roman Empire, the Italian art and artists were closely followed by this new Emperor. Gentile Bellini was commissioned by the Venetian Senate to Fatih the Conqueror to paint his portrait. Bellini, bringing precious Italian textiles as gifts to Fatih, planted the first seeds of interest towards Italian textiles in Fatih’s mind; and this interest was kept alive all along his reign (1451-1481). According to archives, in 1472, six thousand ducats worth silk textiles have been purchased, and throughout the Empire, Bab-ı Ali (Sublime Porte of Istanbul) has frequently bought auroserici (gold-threaded) textiles from Venice. Venetian craftsmen weaved Ottoman Palace’s designs (*alla turca* Italian patterns) to textiles, often using the favorite color of Turks: Red; and then imported these goods to Ottoman market.

With the *Ahdname* (*capitulation*) offered in 1479, Republic of Venice has been given the liberty of trade in Ottoman harbors as well as the right to have a Bailo in Istanbul in return of 200 thousand ducats per year. Although the political relations have been interrupted due to temporary wars between the Ottoman Empire and the strongest marine state of Europe, the trade never ceased a day in the aim of protecting the economical welfare of their people. During the 16th and 17th century as well, several *Ahdnames* have been given to Venetian merchants. The most extensive of these renewed privileges has been signed following the Karlowitz Treaty. This detailed capitulation document with 33 articles, covered the rights of corps-diplomatique and merchants separately.

Islamic law was essential and binding in Ottoman relations with Europe. (...) For any capitulation to be viable, a pardon (*aman*) given by the highest Islamic authority was officially registered and offered in return to a pledge of amity by the non-muslims. Most of the time, these pledges were considered as a form of alliance by the Ottomans. Capitulations (*Ahdname*) were arbitrary, yet the privileges of these capitulations were binding in a divine level (İnalçık Halil, 2000, 237-238).

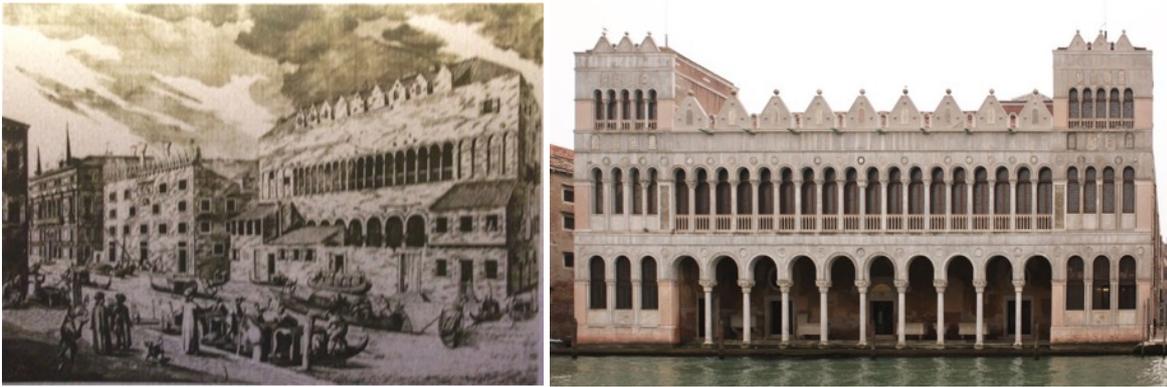
Venetian merchants have freely imported raw commodities like fleece, raw silk, cotton, hemp, silkaline, leather, fur, wax, litharge (natural lead oxide), alum and ash (for glass production) from Ottoman harbors. "Records show that Venetian, Genovese and Florentine merchants have made large transactions from Bursa market (...) These merchants usually live in Galata, sending their agents to Bursa (...) The purchase of silk was mostly advanced with gold and silver coins, yet mostly frieze is used as an exchange instrument. With this aspect, Bursa (...) has also gained the role of a warehouse of European wool for Easterners. (Oğuz Burhan, website)

Despite the privileges given to Venetian merchants, the Ottoman governors were shaping the Ottoman-Venetian relations in the favor of the rapidly growing Muslim Merchant community in order to support their activity and protect their interests. Ottoman governing body was well aware that the capitulations offered to Venice and other European states were not only favoring the European merchants, but also required the protection of rights for the Muslim merchants in European markets (Atçıl Zahit, 2016, 38). The first reciprocal liberty of trade favoring the Ottoman Empire could only be signed after the Ottoman-Venetian war in 1416-1418. In this *Ahdname* dated November 6, 1429, written by Çelebi Mehmed and addressed to Doc Tommaso Mocenigo, it was clearly stated that Turkish merchants and subjects were going trade equally and freely –without any interruption- in *Signoria's* lands.

(...) Because Venetian-woven wool and silk textiles were not only popular in Europe but also considered precious goods in the Near East, Ottoman governing body and other members of authority were sending special requests to Venetian workshops, even to the extent of sending couriers to bring fabrics from Venice. An exemplary letter from Murad the 3rd to Doc Pasquale Cicogna, dating July 14, 1589, states that golden-threaded textiles essential to the Ottoman treasury have always been specially woven in Venetian workshops; and the following package of 2000 yards of fabric should be handed to Hazineedar (Treasurer) Mustafa, who was sent solely for this purpose. (Turan Şerafettin, 1968, 248-252)

Every spring, about seventy merchants would come to Venice to provide the endless orders of the Ottoman Palace and in autumn, with their departure, another group of merchants about the same number would come again to continue the trade (Mumcu Serap, 2014, 20). Both the merchants sent from the court and other individual Turkish merchants would stay in temporary inns within the city and various conflicts due to language, religion, culture and daily habits arose among these merchants and the locals. The oldest record from these merchants requesting a separate, permanent lodging system would date to 1571 and following their request, in 1621, the *Colleigo* of Venice has assigned *Casa del Duca di Ferrera* Palace to Turkish merchants in return of a monthly fee. This palace of Byzantine-Arabic and Medieval Italian architecture was located near *Canal Grande*, and a special signage "Turcarum Emporio" was put at the entrance, changing the name of the palace to "Fondaco Dei Turchi".

The term *Fondaco* found its meaning as "inn, caravanserai" in Turkish-Islamic World, depicting the character of a hotel as well as a shop; thus, Fondaco Dei Turchi in Venice consisted of an inn for the Turkish merchants as well as a storage area for their commodity and a basic shopping center facilitating exchanges... The basement of the building included storage areas and shops, while the two upper stories were dedicated to bedrooms. Each bedroom was consisted of a furnace and a bunk bed. In the Eastern side, a large room was transformed into a small mosque. A separate area in the ground floor was furnished with fountains for the ablution. The façade looking over *Canal Grande* was also modified to facilitate the loading of goods while also the roof was equipped with 9 additional vents. (Turan Şerafettin, 1968, 247-265). This building providing the storage, trade and lodging for Turks was actively used for 217 years, until the departure of the last Turkish merchant in 1838. Although turned into a Natural History Museum (*Museo Civico di Storia Naturale*), the building is still widely known as *Fondaco Dei Turchi*.



The Italian (Venetian, Florentine) textiles ordered by the Court were bought by specific merchants, reporting directly to the palace. These orders were meticulously recorded in Ottoman books and inventories in Topkapı Palace Museum. Fabrics like Venetian velvet, embroidered brocade, satin, embroidered silk and gold-threaded silk were used in caftans, upholstery and manuscript covers. The fact that only two of the Palace caftans were original Ottoman velvet and the rest were golden-threaded Venetian velvet, indicates the high interest towards Italian textiles.

Various examples in Topkapı Palace which was the main export source for the Italian textiles in the 15th and 16th century, represent the importance of Italian silk for the Empire. In the Museum collections, Italian fabrics, especially velvet pieces are far more numerous than any country's fabrics. Many of these fabrics have been used in Caftans, underlining the admiration of the owners. (...) Velvets would be the second in the silk fabric ranking of Venice: Gold-threaded brocade (Zerbeft) was first, and right after velvets would come faille (silk damask). Velvets would be ranked among themselves as well, according to the layers of pile, the type of golden thread and the amount of gold. The most luxurious velvets were woven with two, even three levels of pile (pile-on-pile) and ornamented with large golden bastings, as well as metal textures. (...) The Italian velvet caftans that survived until the modern day are made with the best fabrics on these rankings (Atasoy Nurhan, 2001, 182-183). A sign of power and status, heavy Venetian velvets and *kemhas* have been used in these caftans.



The Italian silk weaving industry developed in direct relation to silkworms imported from Bursa, for there did not exist a silkworm production facility in Italy. The Ottoman Empire's capital back in 1326, Bursa, the city of silk was a vivid center for silk production. The Genovese and Italian merchants living in Galata, had recently renewed their right to use "bulla" -in other words the right to trade silk- by

paying very high amounts of Money to Orhan Gazi (Gökçen Rezan Peya, *Dünya Sanatı Dergisi*, 20017, 86-87). Selling raw silk and buying silk textiles, easily supplying the luxurious requests of the Palace and merchants and located near the capital, Bursa has become the weaving center of the era. Around the year 1500, Bursa used to welcome five to six Persian camel caravans every year, each carrying minimum 1200 loads (about 100-200 tons) of silk worth nearly one million gold ducats each. (...) Bursa was mainly dominated by its connection to the Ottoman Palace and partly depended on markets of İstanbul; however, it was also an important center of international trade. In the city, which housed an active guild system, silk was processed into numerous kinds of precious textiles like velvet, *kemha*, satin. Among the main categories of silk weaving, heavy *kemhas* –woven and adorned with gold and silver- were the most valuable. (Tuna Cemile, 2016, 146)

The Ottoman Court has been the main purchaser of silks produced in Bursa. In the documents Fahri Dalsar published in his book *Bursa'da İpekçilik* (Sericulture in Bursa), one might see that the record dating to 1513 (...) states that 25.200 coins-worth silk for the Treasury has been bought from one Hacı Yunus; and another record dated 1575 lists the orders of the Palace as “100 taks-worth high and middle quality fabric, 50 taks of dotted velvet, 400 taks of plain ornamented velvet” and similar varieties of textiles. The Ottoman Palace considered these fabrics as diplomatic gifts. Many of them have been offered to Italian envoys or sent to city governors as symbols of Ottoman grace. Among the gifts that Sultan Bayezid the 2nd sent to Venetian Signoria were Bursa silks, including *brotello d'oro* (golden lined silk) and camelhair textiles. (Atasoy Nurhan, İpek, 2001, 186)

Several registries recorded the prices of Bursa silks upon their quality and unique designs. For instance, a golden-embroidered silk fabric called *Şahbenek*, was sold for 18 coins of gold. According to this record, the fabric costed 2 golds per meter. (V: 177) Same registry records a good quality fabric for 2.000 coins. (...) While silk textiles were expensive all along the 15th and 16th century, the prices skyrocketed towards the end of 16th century. In 1575, quality fabrics such as *kemha* and satin were sold for 100 coins per *endaze* (65cm). At the beginning of 17th century, Venetian textiles were widely purchased around the Empire and the prices were even higher than the local products. For instance, red French satin was 240 coins per *endaze*, while its equivalent produced in Bursa was only 140 coins (Dalsar Fahri, 1960, 160). This era marks the weaving of traditional motifs (from Ehl-i hiref) by Venetian artisans with golden and silver threads, using a more developed technology. Hence came the Venetian monopoly in the textile world. Luxurious silk textiles have not only been the outcomes of a more developed technology but also the symbols of a change in religious, political and social concepts, along with the national economies. The change in the gold and silver threads' quality by the inclusion of other elements such as copper, has marked the status of Ottoman national treasury in the same period.



The Ottoman sericulture and silk weaving could not cope with the European silk industry in the 17th and 18th century. The protective measures of Italian city-states and the narrowing of local market have caused a setback in the demand on silk and the workshops serving the Palace have ceased to exist. Venetian merchants, despite the British and Dutch trade pressure continued to feed the Ottoman market with cheaper, thinner fabrics such as silk-cotton and silk-linen; yet this trade has come to an end with Napoleon's conquest of Venice in 1797.

CONCLUSION:

Silk weaving technique lost in Venice has been revived by artisans towards the end of 19th century; using patterns of the past with modern interpretations and developed machinery. Precious luxury textiles woven as clothing and upholstery are symbol goods of the Venetian economy.

19th Century witnesses the economic pressure from the West and a decline in the production and quality of silk production in the national industry. On the other hand, Anatolian regional weaving – using traditional methods- have lasted until this day, without being affected by economical ups and downs. The textile industry revived by the founding of the new republic has become –and still is- the main export source of Turkey, yet the traditionally woven pieces are lost and forgotten within time, sharing a similar fate with the Palace fabrics, losing against the global trading. The rich textile resources of Ottoman Empire can now be seen in Topkapı Palace Museum.

These fabrics as a shared heritage of Ottoman and Italian cultures, used side by side in the Ottoman Court can unfortunately not be distinguished from each other. The typological classification of fabrics based on location, material, weaving technique and the analysis on the dyeing materials should be scientifically implemented. With a collaboration of museums, universities and NGO's, several examinations, researches and published papers could be able to clarify this essential question.

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