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INGRID HOUSSAYE MICHIEZI

THE SILK MARKET IN BURSA AROUND 1500 AS IT APPEARS IN THE FLORENTINE BUSINESS ARCHIVES

Bursa is so important that there must be someone there at all costs, as this is the most important place on this sultan's land; it is a place where a lot of business and deals are done.¹

Around 1500, Bursa was a crucial center of silk production and trade. Located in North-Western Anatolia, the Ottoman city served as the point of arrival for caravans conducting precious silks from the coasts of the Caspian Sea. Florentine agents dispatched in the Ottoman Empire by Florentine companies bought a portion of the cargo carried by those caravans. Examination of these companies' accounts books and correspondence reveals the vitality of this business and provides new insight about the mechanisms of the silk trade in Bursa. These commercial sources demonstrate that Florentines depended on Ottoman intermediaries,

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1. HBS Medici Family Collection, Baker Library Special Collections, Harvard Business School, MS547 (from now on HBS MS547), letter to Niccolò Michelozzi, f°87r°, August 1501: “È in *Bursia* che lla inportantia del *tutto* bixogna vi stia l° in ogni modo, che è luogho di porttanza à più che terra di *questo Sultano*; è luogho di faciende e di merchantie asai.” The italics in some of the words transcribed from the ancient Tuscan language indicate, according to the standards, the development of abbreviations in the original text. The translations to English have been made by the author in order to facilitate the understanding of the reader and without literary purposes. Some words or expressions that do not have their current equivalent have not been translated or have been left in the original language, which does not have an impact on the meaning and general understanding of the text.

particularly Jewish merchants and artisans, to acquire silk and participate in the caravan trade.

From the 13th century onwards, the textile industry was the main-spring of Florentine commercial expansion in Europe and the Mediterranean Basin. Florence mainly produced luxury broadcloths made of fine English wools (named the *San Martino* type). The crisis of the wool sector in the first third part of the 15th century led however to a progressive reorientation towards the production of medium quality broadcloths, manufactured with Mediterranean wools (named the *garbo* or *sopramano* type). Simultaneously, silk fabric production became the new mainstay of the Florentine textile industry's luxury sector.² The necessity of importing more and more silk to run the Florentine industry led Florentine companies to expand commercially towards the Byzantine, and subsequently Ottoman, East. Florentine silks were thus as much an engine of trade expansion as the result of business connections established with and in the Ottoman Empire, beginning in the second half of the 15th century to import raw Persian silks to Tuscany.

Scholarship has long neglected Florentine testimonies regarding their activities in and with the Ottoman Empire, particularly those derived from business interactions.³ However, the amount of such documents is significant and their variety in shape, content, and chronology – account books, correspondence, descriptions of journeys, and chronicles – is noteworthy. The Florentine sources are rich in information and provide a new perspective on the economic functioning of the Mediterranean East in the 15th and 16th centuries, revealing new dynamics.⁴

Florence is classically presented as one of the most powerful and illustrious Italian republics of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, thanks, in particular, to its performance in the business world. Nevertheless, its naval weakness and its late arrival on Mediterranean waters made it a second tier power in an East Mediterranean area dominated by Genoa and Venice. The Ottoman markets represented a locus of commercial exchange,

2. About the development of the Silk industry, see Dini, “L’industria serica”; Franceschi, “Un’industria nuova e prestigiosa”, “Florence and Silk”; Goldthwaite, “Le aziende seriche”; Tognetti, “The Development of the Florentine Silk Industry”, *Un’Industria di lusso*.

3. Some exceptions include the works of Hidetoshi Hoshino and of Halil İnalçık which will be quoted later in this paper.

4. Numerous authors underline the importance of European archives in the writing about the economic history of the Ottoman Empire. See Eldem, “Capitulations”; Fleet, *European and Islamic*; Faroqhi, “In Search of Ottoman History”.

but also, for European merchants, a strategic space to circumvent prevailing spheres of influence, which sometimes gave rise to confrontations. The balance of power in the region was constantly evolving, and when Florence began asserting its trade interests with the East, it came into direct conflict with Venetian interests. Deprived of a fleet for a significant portion of this period, Florence was never a naval threat to the Mediterranean powers. However, the military and naval conflicts between Venice and Genoa have, for a long time, obscured Florence's importance on the Mediterranean scene from the eyes of historians. Examination of commercial sources reveals that Venetian and Genoese control of the Mediterranean was, in fact, less absolute than historians have previously maintained. The commercial records suggest that, for almost 80 years, Florence was a real economic power, capable of competing with Venice in the Eastern Mediterranean, and of diverting monopolies by the means of differentiated strategies. Moreover, given that Florentine traders were relatively few in number and that they had no fleet, the importance of the business between Florence and the Ottoman Empire cannot be measured only based on the direct participation of the Florentine traders. Other groups took part in the business between these two States, by land and by sea. These Florentine sources thus facilitate consideration of commercial competition and conflicts, of which also testifies the literary sources.⁵ They shed new light on Florence's place in the Eastern Mediterranean in the 15th and 16th centuries and offer important testimony on the functioning of the silk market in Bursa.

The accounting data of several Florentine workshops regarding silk fabric production reveal that approximately a third of the raw silks used in the manufacturing process, at the end of the 15th century and at the beginning of the 16th, came from Persia. Around 1450, for example, the company Andrea Banchi used such a proportion of Persian silk.⁶ From April 1490 until October 1494, during its first accounting year, the company Iacopo Salviati bought more than 14,565 Florentine pounds of raw silk (about five tons), among which 4,429 pounds (one and a half ton) consisted of Persian silks – a little more than 30% of the total.⁷ All these silks were purchased in the Bursa market.

5. This is particularly apparent in the writings of the Venetian Doges and the Florentine chronicles. See Baron, "The Anti-Florentine Discourses"; Dei, *La Cronica*.

6. Edler De Roover, "Andrea Banchi".

7. Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Archivio Salviati, seria I (from now on Salviati I), registers 400, 409.

Table 1. Silks bought by the Company Iacopo Salviati
(April 1490-October 1494).

Origin of the silk	Quantities (pounds)	Proportion
Persia	4 429.4	30,4%
Spain	4 120.5	28,3%
Abruzzi region	1 806.2	12,4%
Calabria region	1 699.11	11,7%
Vicenza (Veneto region)	974.5	6,7%
Others	1 533.61	10,5%
TOTAL	14 563.3	100%

1 pound of Florence = 0,3395 kg.

The object of negotiation: Persian Silks

Persian silks made their appearance on the Italian markets in the 13th century, when Chinese production ceased reaching Europe. The imports and the Italian dependence on this commodity increased gradually during the 14th and the 15th century.⁸ Sericulture had been established in Persia as early as the 10th century, as shown by the Persian geographer Istakhri, who asserts that silk was produced in large quantities in Tabaristan (Mazandaran).⁹ Marco Polo, in the narrative of his journey, also noted the silk production of Gilan, a province lying along the Southwest coast of the Caspian Sea. During his return through Persia in 1293-1294, he mentioned some Genoese visiting the Caspian Sea where they bought the silk of the Gilan. He also wrote that they were navigating with their own boats and were transporting this precious commodity on land.¹⁰

The largest portion of the raw silks used in Italian industries came from regions located around the South coast of the Caspian Sea, especially the provinces of Karabakh, Shirvan, Gilan, Mazandaran and Khorasan of the Timurid Empire (subsequently Safavid Iran).¹¹ Florentine sources refer mostly to silks named *stravai* (Asterabad), *leggi* (Lahijan), *talani* (Talish)

8. See Edler De Roover, *The Silk Trade of Lucca*; McCabe, *The Shah's Silk*, p. 18-19, p. 29.

9. al-Istakhri, *Kitāb al-Masālik*, p. 179: "Silk is produced in great quantities throughout all quarters of Tabaristan; it is sent, for the greater part, to Amol."

10. See Ciociltan, *The Mongols*, p. 102-103.

11. Herzig, "The Iranian Raw Silk Trade."

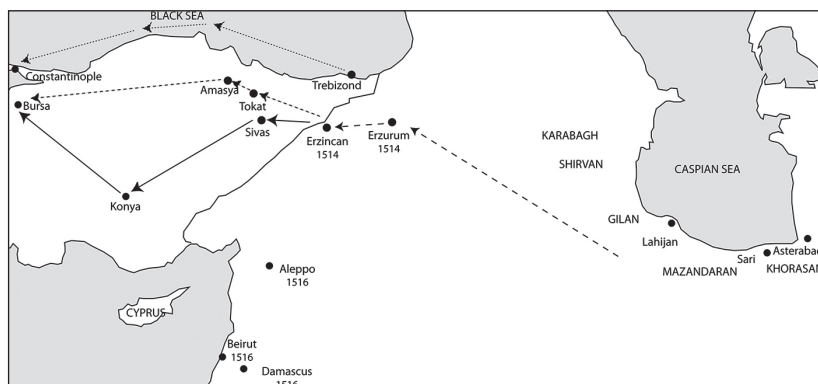


Fig. 1. Origins and itineraries of the Persian silks around 1500 (map of the author).

and *sari* (Sari).¹² The only surviving silk treatise was drafted in Florence around 1450. It dedicates two chapters to the various types of silks then used in the Florentine workshops, and to their prices. It describes the silk named “istravai” as more opaque and rougher than Spanish silk, but points out that, like the latter, it had many functions. The silk *leggi*, lighter than the *stravai*, was mainly used for the weft.¹³ The testimonies of Florentine merchants describe it as of lower quality. For example, Giovanni Maringhi, who was a Florentine agent in the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 16th century, wrote in May 1501 to Piero Venturi, that he bought some *leggi* of such good quality that it was very close to the *stravai*.¹⁴ The prices of the silks in Florence also reflected the quality of the product. The same treatise mentions that Spanish silk was the most expensive, followed by the *stravai*, and then the *leggi*.

12. About the origins of the silks commercialized in Florence see Pegolotti, *La Pratica della mercatura*, p. 208, p. 297-300; Matthee, *The Politics of Trade*; Molà, *The Silk Industry*.

13. See Gargioli, *L'Arte delle seta*, chapters 69 (*Delle compre e tare delle sete*) and 70 (*De' pregi delle sete*).

14. His correspondence for the period 1501-1503 is preserved in Harvard Business School (HBS MS547). See letter to Piero Venturi, f°55r°, May 1501: “E per il presente [...] vi si da fardelli tre di setta leggi chonperata in Bursia per nostro ordine per le mani del nostro Ghazzeto per asp. 59 libra a danari chontanti [...] È una delle così belle sette chome si sia pesata in Bursia dua anni fa d'andare a paraghone della stravai. Sapiatela vendere”!

These silks were transported via caravan, because the sea route through the Black Sea from Trabzon to Constantinople, which was very active during the Byzantine period, had been gradually abandoned. From the places of production, the silk caravans progressed towards Erzurum and Erzincan.¹⁵ Then, after paying customs duties, they crossed Anatolia from southeast to northwest through Sivas and Konya, or through Tokat and Amasya.¹⁶ The Ottoman conquests during the reign of sultan Bayezid Ist had secured control of these silk routes. The caravans then arrived in Bursa, the Ottoman's first capital after its conquest from the Byzantines in 1326. The fiscal data studied by Suraiya Faroqhi suggests that Bursa had a population of around 40,000 inhabitants,¹⁷ slightly less than half the population of Constantinople.¹⁸ The city was also a major center of silk product production; at the beginning of the 16th century, it was home to approximately one thousand looms, located in either private houses or in major workshops that contained twenty to fifty looms. Slaves comprised a considerable proportion of the workforce. A system of vertical mobility enabled them to win their freedom by weaving a certain quantity of silk products.¹⁹ In the 15th century, when the Florentines became increasingly involved in trade with the Ottoman Empire, the weaving centers were already well established. The weavers of Bursa were committed to the production of luxurious Ottoman velvets (*çatma*) primarily for the internal market.²⁰ However, Florentine merchants also purchased some of Bursa's silk products. In May 1501, Giovanni Maringhi sent to Florence a silk fabric produced in Bursa that he had been appointed to purchase at some previous point by ser Pacie Banbelli.²¹ In

15. Erzurum became an increasingly important customs post for the caravans coming from Persia, third after Constantinople and Smyrna (Izmir).

16. See Hitzel, "Production et techniques;" İnalçık, "The Ottoman Economic Mind."

17. See Faroqhi, *Travel and Artisans*, particularly chapter 7. Even if the author focuses on a later period, the chapter contains numerous interesting points.

18. Regarding the population of Constantinople, see İnalçık, "İstanbul."

19. See Çizakça, "A Short History;" Faroqhi, *Artisans of Empire*; Sahillioğlu, "Slaves." Female workforce was also important: Gerber, "Social and Economic Position".

20. On Ottoman silk fabrics, see Rogers, *Costumes*; Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, *Silks for the Sultans*; Krody, *Flowers of Silk & Gold*; Atasoy, *IPEK*; De Jonghe, *The Ottoman Silk Textiles*; Maury, *À la Cour du Grand Turc*; Monnas, *Renaissance Velvets*; Mackie, *Symbols of Power*, chapter 8.

21. HBS MS547, letter to Niccolò Michelozzi, f°66r°, May 1501: "E alsi per il detto vi mando una pezza di drappo di Bursia belisimo la quale darete a ser Pacie Banbelli che ma la chonmisse più fa; chosta asp. 180 e di ttanti n'avete a valere da llui che sono ducati III e grossi VIII, e di ttanti mettete a nostro e avisate."

October 1501, he also purchased silk commodities used to dress little girls. His letters reveal that these purchases were not episodic because other similar acquisitions had previously been accomplished.²²

“I haven’t been to Bursa yet because the ‘stravai’ caravan hasn’t arrived.”²³

Every year, 300 in 400 camels escorted to Bursa “la ghrande charovana di stravai e di leggi.”²⁴ They drove around 200 *yüks* of raw silk, or about 30 tons of product, into Bursa, which the Florentine traders fervently awaited.²⁵ Their letters reveal constant hope to see the caravans arriving. The rhythm of arrival chanted that of the business in Bursa. Bartolomeo Tebalducci, who operated in Constantinople for the Corbinelli company, wrote in December 1512, for example, that a new silk caravan was expected and that, de facto, he would finally be able to sell faster his woollen broadcloths.²⁶ All the letters of Giovanni Maringhi, who was living in Pera, focus on the arrivals of these convoys, the placement of new quantities of silk on the market, and the influence of the availability of the product on its price. The scarcer the Persian silk became on Bursa’s market, the more its price increased. Concurrently, the arrival of a new caravan would create a price drop. Giovanni Maringhi explained this direct link between availability and price in his letters:

There is no silk left in Bursa, or little, and it sells every day at 69 or 70 aspres the pound for *franchi*, at 63 aspres the pound in cash, and it maintains itself at such prices because the new caravan does not appear. In my opinion it will continue to rise rather than fall and it will remain at these prices for a long time if it does not arrive.²⁷

22. Ibid., f°102r°, October 1501: “Di già abiamo chonmesso in Bursia 4 veste di chamucha per lle fanciulle della sortta ne mandamo l’altra volta, e di *proximo* s’attendono e vi si manderanno, che saranno della bella sortta.”

23. Archivio di Stato di Firenze (from now on ASFI), *Manoscritti*, 94, f°26r°, June 29th 1499: “Per anchora non sono ito in Bursia perché non è giunta la charovana della stravai.”

24. Ibid., f°18r°, April 28th 1499.

25. From Hitzel, « Production et techniques », p. 14: 1 *yük*=154 kgs. In 1513, the Ottoman archives indicate a cargo of 400 *yüks*.

26. ASFI, *Manoscritti*, 94, f°54r°, December 21st 1512: “In fra l’o mese s’atende nuova charovana di sete e gli arà panni istimo s’abino a finire bene per aviso vi sia.”

27. HBS MS547, letter to Niccolò Michelozzi, f°89v°, August 1501: “In Bursia non v’è rimasto seta o pocha, e tutto giorno si vende per lla terra a 69 o 70 asp. libra per li franchi, a 63 asp. libra per *danari* chontanti, e in tali preggi si mantiene che nuova charovana non ne apariscie. È più presto per montare che per chalare che lla mia opinione è che l’abbi a stare in su questi preggi I tempo di diqua se già non ne viene.”

Persian traders from the western part of Iran, mainly Azeri, organized the export of the raw silk before it reached Bursa and exchanged it mostly with western products that Italians imported to the Ottoman Empire.²⁸ This situation lasted until Selim Ist's wars against his Safavid neighbour. Once in Bursa, caravans unloaded their cargo in the central market (*bezzāzistān* or cloth market) and weighed it on scales installed in the caravanserai of cocoons (*Koza Han*).²⁹ After the weighing, a broker – the *simsār*, himself controlled by a representative of the sultan – collected the taxes. Following these formalities, the caravan traders obtained certificates that listed the weight of the silk and the duties they paid. They could then buy locally manufactured products or articles imported by European traders. Fabrics from the European textile workshops predominated in this latter category.³⁰

How merchants purchased precious silks

Selling woollen broadcloths in large quantities

The woollen broadcloths (*panni*) with which Florentine traders flooded the Ottoman markets represented their main “currency.” Indeed, Florentine traders did not transport cash with them; they counted on the sale of their textile products to acquire funds, or make deals. Benedetto Dei, whose papers glorify Florence and deride the Venetians, praised the virtues of such commercial processes:

We are much more powerful than you in goods, because your *Signoria* has and does only in Alexandria, for spices and for cottons and waxes; in which we Florentines are more skilled than you, by the Bursa route, and we give in exchange fabrics of wool and silk, while you give ducats of gold, and I know it very well because I remained 12 years in your Venice.³¹

28. McCabe, *The Shah's Silk*, p. 32. These merchants came mostly from Tabriz, Shamakhi, Saad-tukuru, Gilan and Shirvan, but also from Yazd, Shiraz, Qazvin, Kazerun, Ispahan, Kashan and Sabzevar. Some of them settled in Bursa to serve as agents for their business partners in Persia.

29. Bagbanci, “Formation of the Historical Commercial Centre.”

30. İnalçik, Quataert, *An Economic and Social History*, p. 223-224.

31. Dei, *La Cronica*, f°62v°, p. 134: “no[i] siano assai più potenti in sulla merchatantia che non siete voi, perché la signoria vostra non à e non fà in altro paese che in Alesandria, pe lle spezerie e pe’ i choton e ciere; la qua’ chose no[i] Fiorentini l’abiano più abile di voi, pe lla via di Bursia, e diano pe ll’incontro panni e drappi, e voi date be’ duchatazi d’oro, che llo so benissimo perché sono istato 12 anni a dilungo a Viniezia vostra.”

Giovanni Salviati's registers (1491-1493), preserved in the Salviati Archive in Pisa, enable a reconstruction of the complete trade chain going from the production of woollen broadcloths in Florence to their sale in Constantinople during those years.³² The purchase prices of the broadcloths in Florence closely mirrored their sale prices in the Ottoman Empire. Florentine merchants thus made no profit, and did not include the costs of transportation in final sale prices. The woollen broadcloths merely served as a "currency" that allowed them to acquire the silk that they sold for a profit in Florence. Through different Salviati account books, one can trace a shipment sent to Constantinople from Florence on October 16th 1492, beginning with the purchase of the textile products in Florence and culminating with their sale in Constantinople. This commercial expedition ended definitively about five years later, on July 3rd, 1497, after the Florentine merchants returned and sold the commodities they imported from the East.³³

Marco Bembo, a Venetian merchant, wrote in a letter of 1479 that the people of Bursa knew no other woollen broadcloths than those of Florence, supporting Benedetto Dei's claims about the superiority of the Florentine textile production.³⁴ Some Florentines established themselves in Bursa a few decades before the Ottoman conquest. Bertrandon de la Brocquière, first esquire of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, stayed ten days in the house of one of them. He traveled from Damascus to Bursa in 1432-1433 in a 3,000 camel caravan made up of traders and pilgrims returning from Mecca. After about a fifty-day journey, he reached the city and found Florentine and Genoese traders from Pera interested in purchasing spices in Bursa. He also mentioned the trade of silk fabrics with which numerous craftsmen and shopkeepers in the city were already involved.³⁵ The Bursa judicial cases for 1478-1480 and 1484-1486 that Halil İnalçık studied mention Florentine traders concerned about disputes with Muslims, Jews, and other Italians – mostly Genoese and Venetians.³⁶

The Florentine merchants formed a small group. Some of them settled in Bursa; others traveled constantly between Pera and Bursa, shepherding important broadcloth cargo. Giovanni Salviati always stayed in Pera. He

32. Salviati I, 397, 398 and 399.

33. Salviati I, 362, 363, 364, 369 and 399.

34. See Sopracasa, "Les marchands vénitiens."

35. See La Brocquière, *Le Voyage d'outremer*, particularly p. 131-137.

36. Other sources refer to the Florentine presence to Bursa: see Lowry, *Ottoman Bursa*; Yerasimos, *Les Voyageurs*.

used agents in Bursa like Maso Fronti who oversaw the sale of his broadcloths, or Sandro Rucellai who shipped them from Pera to Bursa.³⁷ Giovanni Maringhi did the same. He settled in Pera with an employee who assisted him, and had an agent based permanently in Bursa.³⁸ The latter, Giovanni Gazzetti, made the purchases, and a young boy, Bernardo Risaliti, escorted the goods to the capital.³⁹ These merchants formed a small, interconnected world revealed in their correspondence, account books, and travel narratives. For instance, Giovanni Maringhi kept accounts in Giovanni Salviati's registers, and affixed his testimony in a paper drafted in Pera dated November 16th, 1493, preserved in one of Giovanni Salviati's registers. This paper refers to a statement made by Giovanni Salviati, then bedridden from the plague. Close to the death, he recognized a debt contracted with Lorenzo Ridolfi, another Florentine merchant, whose balance did not appear in his account book. Maringhi, like other Florentine merchants, wrote inside the paper in his own hand validating Giovanni Salviati's words.⁴⁰ Thus, Maringhi was already in Pera in 1493, eight years before the first traces of his correspondence. He traveled frequently between Florence and Constantinople. Some years later, in 1497-1498, Maringhi accompanied Bonsignore Bonsignori and Bernardo Michelozzi during their stay in the Levant.⁴¹ They stayed in Bursa for more than ten days, hosted by Tommaso Fronte – none other than Maso Fronte,

37. Salviati I, 397, f°36d: “Panni di chonto di Francesco Gherardi proprio, debono avere [...] asp. 4 800; sono per lla monta di 4 cholonbini chorsivi vendé in Bursia Maso Fronti per me più di [...] E detti panni chondusse Sandro Rucellai.”

38. HBS MS547, letter to Niccolò Michelozzi, f°87r°, August 1501: “che ttorni [Bernardo Risaliti] in ogni modo perché Giovanni Ghazetti chome arà servito l'an[n]o che noi lo rafermamo che sarà al primo di giannaio proximo se ne vorrà tornare e bisognerà vi mandi Lionardo, e Risalito rimarrà qui apresso a di me, e senza l'° qui apresso a di me non posso fare. E in Bursia che lla inportantia del tutto bixogna vi stia l'° in ogni modo che è luogho di portanza à più che terra di questo Sultano; è luogho di faciende e di merchantie asai siché adoperate torni presto acciò non n'abbi senpre a digrosare brichate che me ne bisognerebbe torre l'° altro in ogni modo.”

39. Ibid., letter to Piero Venturi, f°55r°, May 1501: “E per il presente à portatore Bernardo d'Antonio Risaliti nostro giovane vi si da fardelli tre di setta legi chonperata in Bursia per nostro ordine per le mani del nostro Ghazzeto per asp. 59 libra a danari chontanti [...] E alsì questo dì di Bursia abbiamo avuto dal nostro Ghazzeto avere chonperato di nuovo somma di setta leggi per asp. 60 libra tenpo 3 mesi, chosa belissima che per vostro chonto ne disengnio l' fardelli.”

40. Salviati I, 397, f° XXIX. See Houssaye Michizenzi, “Les milieux d'affaires florentins.”

41. Maringhi was the son of a sister of Bernardo Michelozzi, himself brother of Niccolò Michelozzi, who was Lorenzo de' Medici's secretary. Regarding Maringhi, see Houssaye Michizenzi, Lassalle, “Étoffes et vêtements.”

the correspondent of the deceased Giovanni Salviati.⁴² The travelers described Bursa as a center of the silk industry whose products they nevertheless considered lower in quality than those produced in Italy. They left Bursa with a Genoese, Giovanni Battista Larcario, who knew Turkish and Greek.⁴³ The testimonies left by Florentine travelers and merchants reveal their links and underline their common interest: selling in Bursa textile fabrics manufactured in Florence, and buying Persian silk. Giovanni Maringhi emphasized this interest in a 1501 letter:

In Bursa there are continuously 150 *some* of *stravai* and *leggi* silk and many *sari* and soon more are expected; and for now no price has fallen, but I am on a track to take a significant amount and put in it all or part of the woollen fabrics I have from you and Neri and Giovanni Acciaiuoli in Bursa, and by adventure I will still put in it some money in order to make a nice sum, and I feel that this will go forward in every way.⁴⁴

It was really a question of converting broadcloths into silk (*presto potrebbono diventare setta*).⁴⁵ In 1503, a company of *battilori* (gold thread weavers) led by Alessandro di Antonio Gondi commissioned Antonio Miniati, settled in Pera, to inspect the content of a cargo of woollen broadcloths that had been previously entrusted to their deceased agent. They had already received 400 florins and three *stravai* silk burdens, but insisted on investing every penny in silk:

Copy of a commission given in Pera to Antonio Miniati in a letter of September 27, 1503 about the heirs of G^{no} Gondi, from which there was a commission from the hand of Giovanbatista Ghondi as procurator of his other brothers.

† Yhs. Day September 27, 1503.

Dear Antonio. About the death of Giovanni Ranolli, to whom God has granted forgiveness, we need to tell you a little about the things you still have to do for us about our woollens as from them you will be notified.

42. Maso is the nickname of Tommaso.

43. Borsook, "The Travels."

44. HBS MS547, letter to Niccolò Michelozzi, f^o75v^o, June 1501: "In Bursia si trova chontinovamente 150 *some* di seta *istravai* e di *legi* e *sari* assai e di *prosimo* vi se ne attende delle altre; e *per* anchora non vi s'è rotto *pregio* alchuno, ma io sono in sù una certta pista di pigliarne *somma* e di mettervi dentro o *tutto* o *parte* *panni* mi trovo di *vostro* e di Neri e di *Giovanni* *Aciaiuoli* in *Bursia*, e *per* *avventura* vi metterò anchora qualche dette e danari in maniera sarà buona *somma*, e stimo andrà avanti in ogni modo."

45. *Ibid.*, letter to Neri Venturi, f^o63r^o, May 1501: "Io n'ò mandati in *Bursia* di questi [*panni*] à portato *Lionardo* XII *balle*: 7 *sopramani* e 5 *bastardi* che là aranno buona fine e presto potrebbono diventare *setta* aparendovi la nuova *charovana* che dichono saranno 200 *some* di *stravai*."

We sent a commission to Girolamo **io some times ago of 65 *garbo* woollen broadclothes, 23 *san martino* woollen broadclothes, 2 clear red, 1 deep *paonazzo* and also 22 b[raccia] of deep *paonazzo* and 12 b. of *luchesino* in 2 coupons and also approx. 54½ broadclothes of London; and everything was in 18 bales as you will see in his books; and also there was in the foresaid bale 163 0/3 b. of damask of various colours; of which he said in his letters he have finished all of them or good part of them, and that little things remained, so we think that he finished everything, and we had already from this operation 400 *larghi di grosso* in gold money cash in 20 thousand *akçe*, and also 3 burdens of *stravai* silk which was worth 46 523 *akçe*, that is to say 66 523 *akçe* about this account. And in this letter, there is one to the consul in which it is written that everything must be delivered to you and what you have to do. And we beg you, if there are still merchandizes to finish you finish them, if there are any debtors get the money back, put an end to everything. And every money you will get back through this operation, you will invest it in *stravai* silk, or you will exchange it for merchandizes by the Ragusa route, and you will also send the silk by this way, and you will tell us in order to make the insurance.⁴⁶

Giovanni Maringhi estimated that he needed around 600 woollen broadcloths a year. He therefore constantly encouraged his Florentine business partners and workshop managers to produce more. In Pera, he impatiently awaited the caravans coming from Florence through Ragusa (*solecitateli e poi solecitateli che vanno molto adagio e al mandare*).⁴⁷

46. ASFI, Gondi, 36, f°233: “Coppia d’una chomessione data in Pera a Antonio Miniati in una lettera de di XXVII di settembre 1503 attenente alle rede di G^{no} Ghondi da qualli se n’ebbe chomessione di mano di Giovanbatista Ghondi come procuratore ditti altri fratelli. † Yhs addi 27 di settembre 1503. *Carissimo Antonio*. Rispetto alla morte di Giovanni Ranolli, a cchui Iddio abbi fatto perdono, bisogna vi si dice un pocho di brighe anchor per noi facciate delle *nostri* lanauoli come da lloro sarete avisati. Noi li mandamo a chomessione Girolamo **io più fa panni 65 di gharbo, 23 panni di samartino, 2 rosati, I° paghonasso schuro e più b.22 di panno paghonazzo schuro e b. 12 di luchesino in 2 tagli e più ca. 54 1/1 di panni di Londra; e tutto fu in balle 18 come per e’ sua libri vedrete; e più fu in detta balla b. 163 0/3 di domaschino di più cholori alla vi^a; delle qualli *tutte* robbe ci discie per più sue lettere averne finito tutti o buona parte d’essi, e che pocho di chosi li restava di modo giudichiamo *tutto* abbi auto sua fine, e di ggìa abbiamo auto per tal chonto *larghi* 400 di g° in oro chontanti in asp. 20 mila, e più 3 fardelli di seta stravai che montava asp. 46 523, netti fu asp. 66 523 quello s’è auto per questo chonto. E perché in questa sia I^a al chonsolo per lla quale se li discie e c’ogni mobile si trovassi a voi chonsegni tutto, e che da voi preggi portasse doppia, el che voi chosse fate. E vi preghiamo sendovi robbe a finire diate loro fine, sendovi debitori a risquotere andiate dritto alli ritratti chossi sendovi altre merchantie, a tutto diate rechapito. E hogni danaro chontro che vi pervenissi per tal chonto in mano ciello inciettate in seta stravai o li date a chanbbia sopra robbe per la via di Rauggia, e chossi mandate le sete per detta via, e ciello fate intendere rispetto al fare della sichurta.”

47. HBS MS547, letter to Niccolò Michelozzi, f°87v°, August 1501.

He expressed his disappointment when the quantities were too low, articulating his desire to receive between 12 and 15 bales of broadcloths from every manufacturer he was dealing with in every caravan.⁴⁸ Every bale contained approximately four to five broadcloths, which meant that he expected every producer to send between 48 and 75 broadcloths in every caravan. In another letter, he explained that he hoped for 150 to 200 broadcloths from two Florentine workshops.⁴⁹ These quantities correspond to the diverse shipments listed in the account books of the Salviati Company of Florence. From June 1482 to May 1508, the company made 26 different shipments to the Ottoman Empire, sending 1,646 broadcloths of varied qualities, which had been purchased from various Florentine workshops.

Some of the products received in Constantinople were sold directly in Constantinople. Nevertheless, an important quantity left the capital for Bursa in order to supply the local market and serve as a currency, or in order to be exported further – to Persia, in particular. Every market was specific and had its particular clientele who asked for precise qualities and colors.

And the wool fabrics, make them be the way I told you and also the colour, the quantity and the touch, because the last ones I received from you were very short and weak; make them hit so that they have a good shape, and take care to put two more pounds of wool, because with the price I will always catch them up to you.⁵⁰

Maringhi gave Florence's *lanaioli* some advice regarding the quality of the broadcloths expected on the Ottoman Empire's markets. He highlighted, for example, the necessity of putting sufficient wool in the broadcloths to make the fabric resistant. He insisted that producers follow his stipulations (*vi priegho non usciete de mia avisi*) and he made recommendations regarding colors and shapes, mostly supporting the use of reds

48. Ibid., f°80v°, July 1501: “*Ser Nicholò charisimo, e gli'è neciesario che voi solecitate e li Ghalilei e chonpa. Alsi Piero Ventturi e chonpa. Perché mi pensavo per questa charovana che è venuta avere in fra tutti e due n' cento panni. Non n'è stato nulla. Solecitate e di poi solecitate che inportta assai, che per ogni charovana doverebono mandare 12 o 15 balle per uno.*”

49. Ibid., f°81v°, July 1501: “*aspettavo per la charovana di Luigi Gherardi l° 150 o 200 panni da choteste dua ragioni. Non n'è suto nulla! Attendoli cholla prima charovana. Che Iddio le mandi salvi!*”

50. HBS MS547, letter to Piero Venturi, f°61v°, May 1501: “*E' panni fate sieno al sengnio dettovi e alsi di cholore e di bontta e di toccho, che gli u[]timi ebbsi da voi sono tornati moltti chortti e deboli di stiena; fateli pichiare di tteiaio acciò abino buona mano, e non vi churate di metervi più dua libre di lana che chol pregio ve li rifrancherò senpre.*”

(clear to reddish purples) and greens.⁵¹ He expressed his satisfaction when the quality was good and sometimes communicated his disappointment.⁵² He promised to manufacturers that he would sell important cargo at very good prices, if they followed his recommendations.⁵³ Occasionnally, he attached fabric samples to his letters so that his correspondents could produce broadcloths of the quality, shape, and color in demand on the Bursa market.⁵⁴

In Bartolomeo Guanti's register, kept in Bursa between 1484 and 1488, green and blue shades predominated. Nevertheless, around 25 years later, in 1511, the author of a letter written in Pera mentioned the importance of the color red in Bursa. In fact, he asked that every cargo of woollen broadcloths he received contain a quarter of red (*rossi*), a quarter of reddish purple (*paonazzi*), a quarter of leek green (*verde porro*), and a quarter of darker green (*verde bruno*) fabric.⁵⁵ Around the same time, in 1512-1513, Bartolomeo Tebalducci also emphasized the importance of red shades for the market of Bursa. He underlined the differences between Constantinople and Bursa. In Constantinople, the colors were more varied.⁵⁶ The clientele

51. Ibid., letter to Francesco Galilei, f°56r°, May 1501: "Datevi di buona voglia che ttali panni àranno perfetto fine ma vorebbe esere dentro uno rosetto pure dua, non vi churate di farne assai di questi rosseti che ci ànno buono ispaccio, e rossi e rosseti e pagonazzo e fanno vendere degli altri panni assai, che di nuovo vi priegho non usciate de mia avisi cioè, in ogni sei panni: I° rosso, I° rosseto, I° pagonazzo, I° chapo di picchio, I° verde bruno, l'altro sia chome voi volete."

52. Ibid., letter to Francesco Galilei, f°56r°, May 1501: "li u[]timi panni che io ebbi da voi di vostro lavoro furono I^a chosa in superlativo grado;" Ibid., letter to Neri Venturi, f°63r°, May 1501: "Questi panni che voi avete mandato di presente per Lionardo sono poveri anzi poverissimo."

53. Ibid., letter to Francesco Galilei, f°63v°, May 1501: "Avevi lana in botegha per 120 panni, I^a chosa in superlativo grado che mi piacìe somamente, e se saranno al segno me li disegniate ve li farò andare di pregio più sù che nessuno altro panno abbi avuto anchora da voi [...] stimo darvi chagione di fare questo anno meglio di 300 panni."

54. Ibid., letter to Francesco Galilei, f°64v°, May 1501: "E alsì in questa sarà dua sagi di panni in su quali vorrei ne faciesi fare 5 o 6 panni di ciaschuno cholore, cioè panni 10 e 12 in tutto metà di ciaschuno, e vedete di chogli apunto chome e' saggi, e alsì non vi churate di metervi più II o III libre di lana per panno, fateli pichiare bene di ttelaio e chondugli bene chome voi solete, e mandateli chome prima potete che se saranno al segno dettovi ve gli farò andare di pregio che voi vi maraviglierete [...] stimo gli farete volentieri per esere cholori facili e di pocho pregio che gli voglio per Bursia."

55. ASFI, Manoscritti, 94, f°44r°, June 14th 1511, the name of the author is unreadable: "E' panni rossi e cholori per Bursia [...] c[i]oè ¼ rossi, ¼ pagonazi, ¼ verdi porro e qualche verde bruno e simili cholori che sieno finì io ve gli venderò chon guadangnio asai."

56. ASFI, Manoscritti, 94, f°63r°, June 24th 1512: "avendone a mandare fate sieno migliori che questi ultimi e cholorati, cioè verdi bruni, verdi porri pieni, pagonazzi, uno

was also different. People in Constantinople wanted mostly woollen broadcloths, but the presence of the sultan's court allowed them to also sell expensive silk fabrics. By contrast, people in Bursa wanted almost only woollen broadcloths. Nevertheless, despite Bursa's own important silk industry, Florentine agents managed to sell in Bursa some silk fabrics (*drappi*) produced in Florentine workshops.

Dealing with Turkish and Jewish drapers in Bursa

Florentine merchants did not buy precious silk from the Persians or Azeris directly. They bought merchandize from Turkish and Jewish drapers who sold it for the best prices. European traders did not penetrate into the domestic trade and remained dependent on local intermediaries. To obtain significant quantities, Florentine agents in Bursa had to be very attentive to the market and cultivate relationships with drapers. Indeed, Giovanni Maringhi's letters indicate that silk lots disappeared very quickly from the Bursa market. In May 1501, for example, he told Neri Venturi that there were only thirty silk lots in Bursa, which would sell within four days.⁵⁷ Numerous competitive buyers awaited the caravans escorting the silk:

Because the land here [Bursa region] every day wants 5 silk burdens because it consumes them, and Constantinople also consumes a lot, and the Genoese want a certain amount, and also ours need it; so there are enough consumers!⁵⁸

Maringhi's statements indicate that the main silk buyers were the silk manufacturers of Bursa (*la terra propria*) and Constantinople (*Costantinopoli*), as well as the Genoese (*Genovesi*), and Florentines (*nostri*). His letters do not mention the Venetians, who, in fact, managed to get hold of silk from other caravan outlets located further south.⁵⁹ Until the middle of the 15th century, the Venetians bought silk on the Black Sea markets

rosso per balla; di tutti rossi per Bursia", then in March 1513, f°82r°: "avendo a mandare al paese, mandate tutti panni rossi istretti samza nesuno altro cholore perché non c'anno chomdigione salvo per Bursia e vogliono tutti rossi."

57. HBS MS547, letter to Neri Venturi, f°63v°, May 1501: "In Bursia ve ne mancho di 30 some [di seta] che n'a[n]drà tutta in 4 giorno."

58. *Ibid.*, letter to Niccolò Michelozzi, f° 80v°, July 1501: "Perché la ttera prop[r]ia ogni giornno vuole 5 ffardelli di seta che li chonsuma, e Chostantinopoli anchora ne chonsuma assai, e Gienovesi ne vogliono somma, e alsì de' nostri anche ne àno di bisongnio siché chonperatori c'è assai!"

59. See Molà, *The Silk Industry*.

(Tana, Trebizond) and in Constantinople.⁶⁰ The loss of their privileges and of access to the territories beyond the Bosphorus Strait, a result of Ottoman conquests, changed their silk supply chains. The markets of Damascus and Aleppo became the main silk supply centers for the Venetians. Caravans from Persia also arrived there, through Bitlis-Diyarbakır-Mardin.⁶¹ They loaded the silk in the port of Tripoli and sent it to Venice through the State galleys (the Beirut line). Silk was the Venetians' main trade commodity in Aleppo in the 16th century.⁶²

The multitude of craftsmen and traders in Bursa included people from very different horizons. Halil İnalçık underlined the activities of the Arabic traders of Damascus and Aleppo who sold their commodities – essentially dyestuff, spices, camlets, and silk – to the craftsmen and merchants of Bursa, and also to numerous Jews from Constantinople.⁶³ Bursa also served as a hub for the trafficking of spices. Merchants arrived there from faraway places such as India. This domestic trade, much more significant than the maritime trade, was mainly run by Turkish, Jewish, and Greek merchants and craftsmen.⁶⁴

European merchants had to deal with – and were completely dependent upon – these merchants and craftsmen.⁶⁵ Outside forces intervened regularly, however. On July 15th, 1505, for example, Florence's consuls of the sea recommended to Florentine traders that they avoid concluding deals with Jews because of the numerous complaints they had received.

Item, considered and understood for arguments and information of more merchants, how much damage followed and follows to the aforesaid nation, in the parts of Romania, of the deals that are made about the silks with the Jews of the place, and about the weighing of the silks at another weight than the one of the Great Lord; have similarly deliberated and decided:

60. See Doumerc, "Les Vénitiens à La Tana".

61. McCabe, *The Shah's Silk*, p. 32.

62. See Ashtor, *Levant Trade*; Banat, Ferguène, "La production et le commerce;" Masters, *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance*, "Aleppo;" Molà, *The Silk Industry*; Vallet, *Marchands vénitiens*.

63. See İnalçık, "Bursa." The author also refers to an Arabic merchant who served as debtor for a Florentine one in 1479.

64. See Eldem, "Capitulations".

65. Benjamin Arbel shows clearly that, in the domestic trade of the Ottoman Empire, the Venetians depended heavily on Jewish traders. They collaborated with the Jews as long as their position of strength in the exchanges between the Empire and the West remained, and as long as they could hold a position of strength with the local suppliers. This situation began to evolve in an unfavorable way for the Venetians at the beginning of the 16th century. See Arbel, *Trading Nations*.

that nobody of the aforesaid nation or considered as from the aforesaid nation, will be authorized in the future to make any silk deal with any of the aforesaid Jews or Hebrews, nor to make any weighing of the silks at another weight than the one of the aforesaid Great Lord, under penalty and punishment of one hundred golden florins, for any time, and for any deal and weight.⁶⁶

If available sources fail to shed light on the heart of such conflicts, they convey some sense of the importance of these local intermediaries and of the low position of western traders who had to face high commission rates and important time credits. In his relation to the Senate of 1564, Daniele Barbarigo, Venetian ambassador, refers to the strong position of the Jews in Ottoman markets. They were fixing the value of the goods while bartering and benefiting from commission rates amounting to 18% a year!

Few of our merchants are in Constantinople, and I am surprised that they are also there, or, to put it better, that some of them are sending there their capital, being handled in the way I see it; selling and buying in a way, which I have seen nowhere else negotiating merchants with so much disadvantage, not finding to sell, except to Jews in a six months period, eighteen per cent a year; and neither otherwise do they want to understand it, and with all that they take, it takes three months and more to get the money back, even if we had to have it immediately in cash; and when we make barter, the Jews decide the price of both sides.⁶⁷

How did it work concretely? From Constantinople, Giovanni Maringhi served as an agent for multiple Florentine companies. He received orders

66. ASFI, Consoli del mare, 9, Ordinamenti della nazione fiorentina in Romania, 15 juillet 1505, f°7r°: “Item, considerato et inteso per querele et informatione di più mercatanti, quanto danno sia seguito et segua alla prefata natione, nelle parti di Romania, de’ bazzarri che del continovo si fanno delle sete con li hebrei del paese, et del pesare dette sete ad altro peso che del gran signore; hanno similmente deliberato et provveduto: che à nessuno della prefata natione o compreso sotto nome di tale natione, sia lecito in futuro fare alchuno bazzaro o merchato di sete con alcuno delli sopradetti giudei o hebrei; né fare pesare dette sete ad altro peso che del prefato Gran Signore, sotto pena et alla pena di *fiorini* cento larghi d’oro in oro, per qualunque volta et per qualunque bazzaro e peso.”

67. Daniele Barbarigo, Baylo of Constantinople, 1564 in Albèri, *Relazioni degli ambasciatori*, p. 53: “Si trovano in Costantinopoli pochi nostri mercanti, e mi faccio meraviglia che anche quelli vi stiano, o, per dir meglio, che alcuno vi mandi i suoi capitali, essendo maneggiati nel modo che io vedo; vendendosi e comprandosi con una forma, che in niun altro luogo ho veduto a negoziare mercanti con tanto disavvantaggio, non trovando da vendere, se non ad ebrei a tempo di mesi sei, con tagliar le ditta a diciotto per cento all’anno; nè altrimenti la vogliono intendere, e con tutto che si tagli la ditta, si sta mesi tre e più e riscotere li denari se ben li doveriano avere di contanti immediate; e quando si fanno baratti, li ebrei fanno il prezzo dell’una e dell’altra.”

to buy silk, which he forwarded to his agent in Bursa. According to the availability of the commodity, the latter sent cargo to Pera, often escorted by a young boy still in training (*giovane*). Meanwhile, Maringhi tried to buy as many lots as possible to increase his profit from resale in Florence. In the same manner, Giovanni Salviati managed to purchase 6,250 pounds of silk (more than two tons) between 1491 and 1493.

Florentine merchants mainly bought silk from the Turkish and Jewish drapers of Bursa who controlled the market. Business records contain no references to direct sales between Persian or Azeri traders and Florentines. Although Ina Baghdiantz McCabe mentions the occasional presence of Armenians silk importers in the archives of Bursa, the correspondences and account books of the Florentines make no reference to them.⁶⁸ In fact, the Armenian traders began replacing the Persian and Azeri Muslims in the silk import market somewhat later, during the reign of Shah Abbas (1588-1629).⁶⁹ Currently available sources and published works lack sufficient information to precisely analyze the process of the sale of the silk from its arrival in Bursa to its resale to Italian merchants.

The sellers who emerge from Bartolomeo Guanti's account book between 1484 and 1488, and from the correspondence of Maringhi, were indeed mainly Turkish and Jewish drapers. In September 1403, Maringhi wrote to inform one of his business partners in Florence about a silk purchase in Bursa through a Jewish intermediary. The price of the silk, including the price of the raw silk ($61\frac{1}{2}$ *akçe* a pound) and the commission (*utile*) of the Jew ($7\frac{1}{2}$ *akçe* a pound), was 69 *akçe*. The commission rate represented a little more than 10%. The Italian agents who acquired the silk also had to pay customs duties that oscillated between 2 and 5%.

† Day September 22, 1503.

Day 11th of last month, I send you my last letter through Pagolo Pasquini; I do not have any other letter from you. This one to tell you that I am restlessly expecting your silk from Bursa. It had to leave Bursa the 21st of this month according to the notifications, and it had some difficulties to arrive because the Jew had some worries. He seems to be free of it, and as I am telling you, it could appear from hour to hour. As soon as it will get here, we will get it on its way, and we will send you the notification and

68. McCabe, *The Shah's Silk*, p. 33.

69. Around 1600, Shah Abbas altered the royal monopoly on the silk trade. He decided that the Armenian traders who had recently settled in the North of Persia (particularly in Isfahan-New Julfa) were the most desirable agents to manage the export of its silk. See Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean*; Herzig, "The Rise;" Matthee, *The Politics of Trade*; Sanjian, *The Armenian Communities*.

the account and the debt receipt that will be missing will be taken on your silk. The silk costs initially 61 *akçe* ½ and the commission of the Jew is 7 *akçe* ½ per pound, a total of 69 *akçe*, which is a good deal. As soon as it will arrive, we will do the inventory, make the calculations and we will send you everything.⁷⁰

Jewish and Turkish drapers, from Bursa or from Constantinople, also represented the majority of the Florentine merchants' clientele. The portion of one of Maringhi's letters extracted below mentions the sale of woollen broadcloths (entire piece or coupon) to three Jewish drapers: two in Constantinople and one in Bursa. The broker was also Jewish.

On day 19 of this month we sold 33½ *pichi* of woollen broadcloths, that is to say 16 *pichi* of woodpecker green and 17½ p. of bastard clear red to Bigliamino Allamano, Jew, draper in Constantinople for *akçe* 1 302.

On day 25 of this month we sold four woollen broadclothes to Iusuffio di Bacciacci, Jew, draper in Constantinople, at 1 587 *akçe* a piece, usual time, broker Aionne Lungo.

The same day we sold to the same Iusuffio four bastard woollen broadclothes at 1 400 *akçe* a piece, usual time, and also 19½ p. of clear red woollen broadcloth.

In Bursia we finished eleven woollen broadclothes to Isache Tapiero, Jew, draper from there, at 1 595 *akçe* a piece.⁷¹

As previously mentioned, the sale of woollen broadcloths was at the heart of the Florentine merchants' silk purchasing enterprise. In a letter dated October 31st, 1512, Bartolomeo Tebalducci explains that they sold

70. HBS MS547, fragment n°3, Settembre 22nd 1503: “† Addi XXII di settenbre 1503. Addi XI° del passato per Pagholo Pasquini vi schriisi l'ultima mia [...] Questa per dirvi che lla seta vostra l'atendo d'ora in ora di Bursia che doveva partire di Bursia alle XXI° di questo sechondo gli avisi, ed è penata tanto a venire perché e'l g[i]udeo à 'uto un pocho di gharbuglio. Pare n'è libero, e chome è detto d'ora in ora può chomparire. E subito chome ci sarà si metterà in chamino e manderà 'viso e chonto e nota de' resto che mi mancherà per voi vi si traranno in su detta vostra seta, la quale seta chostò di primo chosto asp. 61½ e l'utile del g[i]udeo sono asp. 7½ per lib.; in tutto asp. 69 ch'è bonissimo merchato. Chome ci sarà farassene leghaggio e gitterassene e'l chonto e tutto vi si manderà.”

71. *Ibid.*, letter to Neri Venturi, f° 68r°, June 1501:” Addi XVIII° detto finimo pichi 33 ½ di panni detti cio'è pichi 16 chapo di *picchio* e p. 17 ½ di panno rosetto pure bastarddi a Bigliamino Allamano ebreo drappieri in Chostantinopoli per asp. 1302. Addi 25 detto finimo panni IIII° sopra a Iusuffio di Bacciacci, ebreo drappieri in Chostantinopoli per asp. 1587 pezza, tenpi ordinari, sensale Aionne Lungo. E addi detto finimo a detto Iusuffio panni III bastardi per asp. 1400 pezza, tenppo ordinari, e più p. 19 ½ di panno rosetto di detti chonti. Di Bursia abiamo e finito di poi panno XI° sopra a Isache Tapiero, ebreo drappieri di lì per asp. 1595 pezza.”

broadcloths to get cash, or at least to obtain silk.⁷² In other words, the broadcloths were their means of procuring silk by barter, by cash payment, or by payment on credit – the three types of payment recorded in the commercial documentation related to Bursa. To buy the silk on several months' credit, indeed, gave Florentine agents the time to sell their broadcloths. In June 1501, Maringhi informed ser Niccolò Michelozzi that his agent in Bursa just acquired a certain quantity of silk, and he had four or five months to pay for it in Venetian ducats.⁷³ The sale of the broadcloths and the purchase of the silk were therefore closely linked. Often the same drapers were both clients and suppliers.

The sources provide no information about where the negotiations took place – perhaps in the *Han* or in the drapers' workshops. The language in which the negotiations were conducted is also unknown. According to Pierre Belon, who journeyed in the Levant between 1546 and 1549, three languages were used in Bursa: Spanish among the Jews, Greek, and, most commonly, Turkish.⁷⁴ Although Giovanni Maringhi underlined that some from his employees knew Turkish, Italian traders regularly relied on the services of interpreters.⁷⁵

A very profitable commodity

From Bursa to Florence: a six-month trip

Once purchased, the silk was packaged in tangled skeins (*scagne*) that were grouped into burdens (*fardello*) that weighed an average of 250 pounds (around 85 kg). A burden included between twenty and thirty tangled skeins.

I am reminding now the intentry of eight burdens of silk for the company of Girolamo Guanti and for Neretto Neretti [...]

72. ASFI, Manoscritti, 94, f°55r°, October 31st 1512: “Avendo a mandare mandate tutti panni [...] mandandoli in questo modo se nel'arà subito in su ritrare in danari o in tanta seta al mancho.”

73. HBS MS547, letter to Niccolò Michelozzi, f°77v°, June 1501: Addì 23 di questo Giovanni Ghazzetti à chonperato in *Bursia* soma di setta *istravai* insieme chon altre e dicie essere la più bella setta che mai abbi chonperato, poi che gli è in *Bursia* per asp. 65 libra per il tempo di III^o mesi pagati in 5 a dare tutto ducati .”

74. This underlines the extent of Sephardic immigration to the Ottoman Empire after their expulsion from Spain in 1492. See Belon, *Voyage au Levant*, livre III, chap. 50, p. 523.

75. On interpreters, see Rothman, *Brokering Empire*.

Of number 1, 225 pounds of Florence, 24 skeins
 And of number 2, 226 of the above, 29 skeins
 And of number 3, 219 of the above, 28 skeins
 And of number 4, 221 of the above, 28 skeins
 And of number 5, 229 of the above, 25 skeins
 And of number 6, 223 of the above, 34 skeins
 And of number 7, 230 of the above, 27 skeins
 And of number 8, 226 of the above, 20 skeins
 In number 8 there are 30 *pichi* of *paonazzo* taffeta, 40 *picchi* of *vergato*,
 eight belts, three *becche* for 1/6 *picco* of green velvet
 And of number 9, 231 of the above, 27 skeins
 And of number 10, 226 of the above, 26 skeins
 They left Bursa to Pera by the name of God and of good completion this
 day, March 15th 1484.⁷⁶

The burdens were protected by several layers of canvas (*camicie*) and wrapped with ropes.⁷⁷ Once purchased and packed in Bursa, the silk was escorted to Pera. This first leg of a long trip could be covered by sea. On January 27th, 1485, Bartolomeo Guanti sent two bundles of commodities from Bursa to Pera on the boat of a Ragusan sailor.⁷⁸ The port used was certainly Mudanya's, located on the coast of the Sea of Marmara, around thirty kilometres from Bursa. The passage across the sea did not last more than two or three days. By land, the same trip took around eight days.⁷⁹ Pierre Belon's observations during his journey confirm information found in Florentine sources.

We can go from Bursa to Constantinople by sea or by land. The land road is five to six days long, but by water it takes only two or three days. And from

76. ASFI, Corporazioni religiose soppresse dal governo francese, 79, 208, f°23: "Ricordo apresso leghagio di fardelli hotto di seta di chonto di Girolamo Ghuanti e chomp. e di Nerotto Neretti [...]: Di n°1 lib. 225 firenze schagne 24; e di n°2 lib. 226 di detto schagne 29; e di n°3 lib. 219 di detto schagne 28; e di n°4 lib. 221 di detto schagne 28; e di n°5 lib. 229 di detto schagne 25; e di n°6 lib. 223 di detto schagne 34; e di n°7 lib. 230 di detto schagne 27; e di n°8 lib. 226 di detto schagne 20; nel n°8 v'è picchi 30 di tafetta paghonazo, picchi 40 di *verghato*, otto cinti, tre *becche* per piccho 1/6 di velluto verde; e di n°9 lib. 231 firenze schagne 27; e di n°10 lib. 226 di detto schagne 26. Partino di Burxa per Pera chol nome di Ddio e di buono salvamento *questo* di XV di marzo 1484."

77. Ibid., f°45 left. The sources do not reveal if the product was packaged in this way at the moment of the purchase or if Florentine merchants repackaged the silk for the transport.

78. Ibid., f°22 left: "Una mandata a Lionardo Salvucci in Pera *questo* di XXVII di gennaio di balle due [...] per charichare in sulla nave di Biagio o altro navelio per chon-sengnare in Pera [...] Le dette balle 2 sono charichate sulla nave di Biagio da Raugia."

79. HBS MS547, letter to Niccolò Michelozzi, f°78r°, July 1501: "La quale setta i[n]tendo qui al più lungo in tra otto giorni che subito chome ariverà si spaccierà."

the city of Bursa to the Propontide Sea there is only half a day's journey. We will pass in a village located on the shore of the gulf or siné of La Montanée [Montaneia/Mudanya] [...] The Great Lord usually holds there two fustas, sailed by Janissary slaves, who never fail to leave on Wednesdays, if the storm does not delay them. One leaving from Montanée, the other from Constantinople, and lead those who want to come and go from Bursa to Constantinople.⁸⁰

A Florentine merchant always escorted the precious commodity, often traveling via Ragusa in a caravan, then to Ancona by sea, before arriving in Florence.⁸¹ The quotation below references a shipment from Bursa to Florence via Ragusa of four burdens of silk in January 1486.

Day January 13, 1486.

I sent this day, to Florence through Ragusa to Lorenzo Salvucci and the company of Girolamo Guanti of Florence and for their account: four burdens of *stravai* silk, indicated with the forward sign with numbers 1-2-3-4, and packaging fabrics in wax cloth and ropes and with a black canvas, they are indicated with numbers 9-10-11-12, inside 902 $\frac{3}{4}$ pounds of Bursa; and in number 1, 34 skeins, 247 pounds of Florence; number 2, 36 skeins, 249 pounds; number 3, 32, 249 and in number 4, 30, 250 pounds; the foresaid I sent from Bursa to the foresaid Lorenzo with a five thousand *akçe* fee, that is to say 5 000. May God lead it to good completion!

For 58 *akçe* and half a pound from Bursa, and for ropes, wax canvas and packaging and customs [...] 44 *akçe* a burden, which amounts between cost and fees to 53 882 *akçe* with storage.

And more the *** two horses for the young boy to ride it costs him 950 *akçe*.⁸²

80. Belon, *Voyage au Levant*, chap. 50, p. 523.

81. HBS MS547, letter to Niccolò Michelozzi, f°81v°, July 1501: “Ieri partì di qui la setta per Andrinopoli, la quale abbiamo achomandata a Nichola Gharzotti e Radi Bratti raugiei, che sono qualli che chonduchono e’ panni da Raugia in qua, e gli abbiamo achomandati sopra ad loro e a lloro spese che li chonduchino d’Andrinopoli insino a Raugia, e diamo loro d’ogni soma asp. 500 insino chondotte diretto in doana di Raugia, e li chomerchi di Raugia e di Chastelnuovo. Ordiniamo a Iacopo di Giuliano li paghi lui, e se ne vagli qui danno i da nostri di chostù chome bene gli viene, simile de’ noli di Raugia in Anchona. E ordiniamo al predetto Iacopo che subito di li la spacci per Anchona quando bene dovessi spendere el nolo doppio e l’adrizzi a Lippo in Anchona al quale Lippo ordiniamo che subito la mandi chostù in Firenze insieme cholle lettere.”

82. ASFI, Corporazioni religiose soppresse dal governo francese, 79, 208, f°101: “A dì XIII di gennaio 1485 [=1486]. Mandai questo [di] a Firenze per via di Raugia per Lorenzo Salvucci e Girolamo Ghuanti e chomp. di Firenze e per loro chomto: III° quattro fardelli di seta stravai segnata dello avante segno di segno di n°1-2-3-4 e d’involture in panno incierato e ‘nchavanate ed è nero in sulla chamicia, sono segnate di n°9-10-11-12, entrovì lib. 902 $\frac{3}{4}$ di Bursa a paghamento, e nel n°1 schagne 34 lib. 247 firenze, n°2 schagne 36 lib. 249, n°3 32 249 e ‘l n°4 30 lib. 250; la quale mandai spacc[i]ata di Bursa e al detto Lorenzo ditti per le spese asp. cinque mila c[i]oè 5 000. Iddio per tutto la chomduca a buom salvamento! Per asp. LVIII° e mezzo libra spacc[i]ata di Bursa e

The silk could also go through Lecce following a caravan route up to the Albanian coast (Valona/Avlona, now Vlorë), a crossing of the channel of Otranto to San Cataldo/Lecce, and a convoy from the Apulia to Florence. It was a very long overland route which was nevertheless the most used at the time. Valona, under Ottoman rule, was then the capital of a sanjak, and the only important port owned by the Ottomans on the Adriatic, until the fall of Durazzo/Durrës in 1501.⁸³ On this route the Florentines had obtained guarantees from the sultans and the Sanjak-bey of Valona, and in December 1405 Bernardo Rucellai was elected as *emino* (consul) of Valona.⁸⁴ Some documents – one of Bartolomeo Tebalducci's letters from November 1512, for example – also refer to a direct sea connection from Constantinople to Livorno. Tebalducci mentions such a trip undertaken on a Biscayan boat.⁸⁵ In the 15th century, boats and sailors of Atlantic origin were increasingly important in the Mediterranean Sea. They rarely traded in their own names and mostly acted as maritime carriers for Italian and Catalan merchants.⁸⁶

After a trip that combined sea and land itineraries and could last six months, the silk finally arrived in Florence. Following the payment of a tax (*gabella*), the cargo was placed in the offices of the *arte della seta* (the guild of the silk weavers) where it was weighed before being brought to the workshop (*bottega*).

As far as you have seen, until this day I did send to our agents 35 burdens of silk, between *leggi* and *stravai*, which are worth a world of money, and truly dear ser Niccolò, I believe that we are going to do great.⁸⁷

*per chorde, chamicie incierato e lleghatura e passo e chavar*orngi asp. XLIII^o fardello, che monta in tutto tra chosto e spese asp. 53 882 choll'ostallaggio. E più li dette *** chavagli due per suo chavalchare del gharzone li chostono asp. 950.*"

83. These two ports then became Ottoman support points for attacking Venetian ships. See Fine Jr., "The Late Medieval Balkans" (chapter 10); Ducellier, *La façade maritime de l'Albanie du Moyen Âge*; Stoianovich, "A Route Type"; Vatin, "Itinéraires"; Veinstein, "Avlonya (Vlorë)."

84. See Masi, *Statuti delle colonie*, p. 154; Müller, *Documenti sulle relazioni*, p. 242, p. 253-254, p. 342-343; Stefani, *I Diarii di Marino Sanudo V*, p. 615.

85. ASFI, Manoscritti, 94, f^o60r^o, November 23rd 1512: "in fra IIII^o giorni parte di qui la nave buschaina per Livornno charicha di choranta [sic] o 40 tavole di ciambelotti e 25 in 30 fardelli di seta."

86. See Heers, "Le commerce des Basques".

87. HBS MS547, letter to Niccolò Michelozzi, f^o84r^o, August 1501: "E chome per isperienti arete visto, insino a questo dì io ò mandato a nostri chomettenti 25 fardelli di setta tra leggi e stravai che vale uno mondo di danari, e veramente charo ser Niccolò, credo ci faremo apposti."

During its journey, the price of the silk had increased significantly. In Bursa, the Florentines bought silk for between 59 and 70 *akçe* per pound, depending on the offer, the competition, and the product's quality. The gold-ducat of Venice was the reference currency, worth approximately 52 or 53 *akçe*.⁸⁸ Bartolomeo Tebalducci's letters mention another gold currency, the ashrafi mamluk dinar, which had a value between 40 to 43 *akçe*.⁸⁹ It had less value than the Venetian ducat, but it was strong in the Ottoman Empire, on the eve of Selim Ist's conquest of the Mamluk lands. Its presence testifies to the liveliness of the business connections between the Ottomans and the Mamluks.⁹⁰

A silk burden was thus bought in Bursa for around 15,000 *akçe* or 290 ducats. In January, 1493, Giovanni Salviati completed two silk purchases, one of 23 burdens (approximately 5,750 pounds or almost 2 tons) and the other of two burdens (500 pounds or 160 kilos); he spent 58 *akçe* per pound for the first one and 61 per pound for the second.⁹¹ According to calculations made by Hidetoshi Hoshino from the account book that Bartolomeo Guanti kept in Bursa between 1484 and 1488, the latter bought more than 4,795 silk pounds (approximately 1 628 kg) for more than 6,022 florins (*fiorini larghi*) or about 290,000 *akçe*.⁹² On average, the price of a silk pound was around 60 *akçe*. While the price of woollen broadcloths seems to have been stable, the price of the silk pound only increased. Guanti paid around 60 *akçe* per silk pound from 1485 to 1490, but by the turn of the century Giovanni Maringhi was paying around 70 *akçe* per pound and Bartolomeo Tebalducci paid as high as 87 *akçe* per silk pound of *sari* silk (not the most expensive) in 1512.⁹³

Merchants also bore the costs of transporting the commodity and various additional expenses, estimated at 19% of the purchasing costs in the case of Bartolomeo Guanti. Nevertheless, they made significant profits. Maringhi claimed a profit of 70 to 80 ducats for every burden of silk he

88. See for example Salviati, I, 398, f^o9v^o, July 7th 1492: "Fa debitore Alfieri e creditore chassa di d. 351 d'oro [...] vagliono asp. 52 per ducato." In June 1512, from Tebalducci's letters, it was worth 53 *akçe*.

89. On June 24th 1512, he wrote that he sold twelve broadcloths at 37.5 ashrafi mamluk dinar a piece in Bursa. This currency was worth 40 to 41 *akçe*. In January 1513, it was worth 43 *akçe*. See ASFI, Manoscritti, 94, f^o63r^o, 79r^o, 81r^o.

90. See İnalçık, "Bursa."

91. Salviati, I, 398, f^o25r^o-v^o.

92. See Hoshino, "Il commercio fiorentino."

93. In June 1512, a pound of silk was worth 85 *akçe*, 78 *akçe* in October 1512, March 1513, and May 1513. See ASFI, Manoscritti, 94, f^o55r^o, 57r^o, 81r^o, 82r^o.

sold to merchants or craftsmen (*lanaioli*, *setaioli*) in Florence. This corresponded to a profit margin of 20%.⁹⁴ In Florence, the silk could be directly sold to the textile workshops, but also to the trade companies, which then sold it to the workshops. In this way Alamanno and Iacopo Salviati, who headed the Salviati trading company of Florence, sold two burdens of *stravai* silk of 247 and 246 pounds to Iacopo Salviati's workshop. They received the merchandize on July 27th, 1490 by a convoy coming from Lecce. They bought it for 727.10.0 florins (*fiorini larghi*) and resold it for 861.11.3 (*fiorini larghi*). They thus realized a 15.5% profit of 134.1.3 florins (*fiorini larghi*).⁹⁵

The theft of a silk burden and the involvement of the sultan

Thus, the Persian silk market was necessary for the Florentine textile industry and was also very lucrative. Silk was a precious commodity that could bring both considerable profits and significant losses. The 1501 theft of a silk burden reveals the importance of this trade for relations between Florentine merchants and the Ottoman sultan.

In August 1501, two Florentine traders escorting silk from Pera to Florence (Bernardo Risaliti and Francesco Ciocci) marked a stop at Novi Pazar (Serbia) on the road leading to Ragusa (*luogho v'è 'l circha a mezza via tra Andrinopoli e Raugia*).⁹⁶ This was a prosperous area frequented by numerous traders, from Ragusa in particular.⁹⁷ During the night, someone stole a silk burden (silk of Lahidjan) bought in Bursa by the Florentine traders. An order of the Sublime Porte, confirmed by its calligraphic monogram or Tuğra (*uno chomandamento dalla Portta cholla 'ttesta del*

94. HBS MS547, letter to Niccolò Michelozzi, f°87r°, August 1501: "Che è ferma speranza [sic] della setta mandata s'abbi per guadagniare 70 o 80 duchati per ffardello sendo vero li avisi sono di chostà ne' preggi si trovava la setta."

95. Salviati, I, registers 363, 400, 401.

96. Caravans consisting of mules or horses followed this itinerary between Constantinople and Ragusa: Andrinople (Edirne) – Plovdiv (Bulgaria) – Skopje (Macedonia) – Novi Pazar (Serbia) – Sarajevo (Bosnia). See Pinelli, "Florentine Merchants."

97. Some 16th-century travel narratives give some insights about Novi Pazar. On his trip to Constantinople in 1534, Benedetto Ramberti made a stop at Novi Pazar "cioè nuovo mercato [...] questo è bazar assai celebre, et grande pieno di mercatantie et di boteghe così de Turchi, come de Christiani. Vi stano mercatanti Rhagusei et altri. appresso vi passa un'acqua molto bella et chiara: laquale non molto poi entra in la Morava." Likewise, on the road from Venice to Constantinople in 1573, Philippe du Fresne-Canaye visited Novi Pazar "ville grande et commercante, placée entre de hautes montagnes, mais dans un endroit de plaine assez large, où passe une eau belle et claire qui entre ensuite dans la Morava." See Ramberti, *Libri*, f°6v°; Canaye, *Le Voyage au Levant*, p. 31.

Sultano sopra), was sent to Novi Pazar to help resolve the problem by locating the stolen silk and/or the thieves (*sopra a detto luogho che se riteni el ffordello di seta leggi e li ladri*). Giovanni Maringhi hoped to find at least a part of the stolen silk burden. He sent Tomasino, his young apprentice (*l'uomo ch'io v'ò mandato è Tomasino, è allievo nostro di diqua, huomo tutto nostro*) to Novi Pazar, accompanied by a slave of the sultan Bayezid II. He was ready to spend 25 to 30 ducats to find the silk and had promised a good tip to both men (*s'è promesso loro buon beveragio*).⁹⁸

In his successive letters, Maringhi regularly mentioned that he had received no important news about the stolen silk burden until March 1502 when he sent a letter to ser Niccolò Michelozzi.⁹⁹ In this letter, he explained that the slave of the sultan who had previously gone to Novi Pazar, had to leave Constantinople three or four days later to go there again. He had with him a letter from the sultan that ordered the men of the village to pay the Florentines 15,000 *akçe*. Some people of Novi Pazar had already been identified as owing this amount in a verdict pronounced some time previously. The sultan also commanded the local authorities (*a dua chadi e uno sobasci luoghi tenenti*) to punish those men. The Florentine merchants obtained this letter through the intermediation of a “friend” (*a otenere questa lettera v'abbiamo avuto hamicho*). It cost them ten and a half Venetian ducats. Tomasino was again sent to Novi Pazar with the Sultan's slave. If the slave managed to recover the silk, he would receive 1,500 *akçe*, but absolutely nothing if he failed to recover it. Maringhi also expressed gratitude for the services of their interpreter (*il nostro dragomano*), Battista, paying him 8 to 10 ducats. Maringhi remained hopeful of either recovering the burden or the amount of 15,000 *akçe* because of the sultan's interest in resolving the conflict. Maringhi indeed asserted that the sultan's benevolence extended beyond these events and concerned in a general way the Florentines and their activities (*il Sultano ci dimostrò in questo e in ogni nostri affari di volerci bene e amare tutta nostra nazione chordialmente*). Ultimately, the Florentines managed to recover approximately two thirds of their investment. This episode illustrates the importance of this market for the Florentines and the involvement of the Ottoman authorities.

98. HBS MS547, letter to Niccolò Michelozzi, f°87r°, August 1501.

99. Ibid., letter to Niccolò Michelozzi, f°125r°, March 1502.

Italian merchants had a deep impact on Bursa and the Silk market. They contributed to both its enrichment and to its fall. The city of Bursa took advantage of very significant customs duties, estimated at 120,000 ducats in 1487, at 100,000 in 1508 and at 130,000 in 1512 just before Selim Ist's embargo.¹⁰⁰ Duties then collapsed in 1521, falling to 40,000, as a result of the increased price of raw silk because of very high European demand, and because of the competition created by the increased importation of silk fabrics.¹⁰¹ Among the Italians, the Genoese and the Venetians had established themselves in these places over several centuries, trading in Tabriz from the very beginning of the 14th century.¹⁰² The Florentines arrived later, around the first third part of the 15th century, but they managed to impose themselves thanks to their textile production and the Venetian-Ottoman wars. On the Ottoman markets, competition between Italian merchants for the purchase of raw materials and the sale of finished products was very strong.¹⁰³ In Bursa, Florentines competed with the Genoese and local merchants and craftsmen.

Selim Ist, the blockade and the end of the direct importations of silk

The politics of sultan Selim Ist disrupted Bursa's – and consequently Florence's – direct supply of Persian silk. Battling against the Safavids, the Ottoman sultan declared a commercial blockade, closing the Ottoman borders to any traffic from Persia.¹⁰⁴ Selim seized the silk stocks of Persian merchants in Bursa and deported the merchants to Constantinople or to Rumelia in 1513. He forbade the import and the sale of Persian silk, on pain of fines or of seizure of property. Persian traders tried to bypass this blockade by diverting their trade through the Mamluk territories, but after 1515, the Ottomans' managed to assert strict control, before gradually subjugating the Mamluk sultanate. The blockade prevented Persian traders and Muslim Ottoman subjects from selling Persian commodities. The only ones to be partially exempted from this blockade were the Armenians and

100. See Çızakça, "A Short History."

101. See İnalçık, "The Ottoman Economic Mind."

102. See Jacoby, "Western Commercial;" Petech, "Les marchands italiens;" Prazniak, "Tabriz."

103. See Braude, "International Competition;" Çızakça, *Sixteenth-Seventeenth Century Inflation*.

104. About the blockade of Selim Ist see Bacqué-Grammont, *Les Ottomans*; Floor, *The Economy*. The Florentine sources consulted do not include any testimony from that period.

the Jews, because they were perceived to be less receptive to Safavid religious propaganda. The measures taken by Selim Ist were very unpopular and had disastrous effects; his son, Soliman, abolished them when he came to power in 1520. He freed and indemnified Persian traders, while continuing to strengthen State control over the sale and the distribution of silk. In Bursa, the shortage of raw material had increased prices spectacularly, leading to traders' ruin, the closure of workshops, and the loss of a very important tax income. Numerous Persian traders abandoned the place for the benefit of new intermediaries, mainly Armenian traders. Concurrently, sericulture and the weaving of cotton velvets developed.¹⁰⁵ Caravans and workshops returned gradually to their normal speed. In the observations he made during his 1546-1549 journey in the East, Pierre Belon wrote that the silk was always at the heart of Bursa's wealth.

The wealth of Bursa comes from silk, for not a year goes by without a thousand camels bringing silk from Syria and other countries of the Levant being unloaded there; and the silks there are prepared, spun, woven, and put into various works and various dyes, in various ways, because the Turks wear their velvet clothes in various colors, as also are interwoven with gold and silver, and properly shaped.¹⁰⁶

Selim Ist's politics had substantial consequences for Florentine merchants. According to Patrick Chorley's calculations, the Ottoman exports of numerous Florentine companies fell from 42% to 13% between 1518 and 1544.¹⁰⁷ Silk supplies also declined in an important way during the 16th century, mainly because of the closure of Bursa's market. However, changes also occurred in the raw silk market, which moved towards the Italian peninsula and closer to the manufacturing workshops. Florentine silk manufacturers imported more and more silk from Calabria. Besides, sericulture had developed in Tuscany and in the neighbouring regions (Marche, Abruzzo). The registers of the silk manufacturer Agnolo Del Caccia, preserved in the archives of the Hospital of the Innocents of Florence, clearly illustrate this evolution. Between 1479 and 1483, he mainly purchased silks coming from around the Caspian Sea (42%). Between 1498 and 1508, he began to mainly purchase Calabrian silk (56%), even if numerous lots of Persian silk (14%) still appeared in his registers. His purchases from 1508 until 1512 included almost no Persian silk – no more than 2% of his purchases. Persian silk disappears completely from

105. See Faroqhi, *Travel and Artisans*.

106. See Belon, *Voyage au Levant*, chap. 43, p. 516.

107. See Chorley, "The Volume of Cloth Production", "Rascie."

his register during the reign of Selim Ist and does not reappear until 1527. He bought very significant proportions of Calabrian silk and also procured silks from Marche and Tuscany.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the reopening of the silk trade after the Safavido-Ottoman conflict did not mark a return to the earlier dynamic. In fact, in 1569, the list of the weights and tare weight used by the *Arte di Por Santa Maria* mentions no Persian silks.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, some silk and gold thread workshops in Florence still used Persian silk. Between March 1514 and October 1522, the *battilori* Giuliano and Pier Francesco da Gagliano used more than 35% Persian silk (*stravai e sari mescolate*) to manufacture their golden threads. They imported more than 848 pounds (almost 288 kilos) of Persian silk out of a total 2,383 pounds (809 kilos).¹¹⁰ However, they no longer purchased this silk on the Bursa market. The Florentine merchants were unable to remain active in this market. They withdrew from it and bought most of their Persian silk on the European markets in Venice, where the Venetians traders resold portions of their imports of Persian silk. They also resorted increasingly to intermediaries from Ragusa and Ancona who shipped their cargo to Ottoman markets and sold them Persian silk. The register of insurances held by Raggio di Nofero Raggi from 1523 till 1526 highlights the key roles these intermediaries played in transporting products toward the Ottoman East.¹¹¹ Numerous ships navigated the passage between Ancona and Pera loaded with Florentine broadcloths; others went via Ancona and Ragusa following the overland route. If Nofero Raggi ensured cargoes leaving from Livorno towards the Ottoman Empire or returning, it was not anymore about silk. The political situation and resulting fallback solutions ended the direct purchase of silk on the Bursa market.

Conclusion

Over eighty years, Florentine merchants managed to provide the Florentine textile industry with Persian silks, buying them directly on the Bursa market. To do so, they imported incredible quantities of textile

108. Archivio dell'Ospedale degli Innocenti di Firenze, registers 12361, 12381, 12384 and 12385.

109. See Morelli, *La Seta fiorentina*. The author refers to the competition between different silk production centers in the Italian peninsula. She also underlines the absence of Persian silks from the second half of the 16th century.

110. Salviati, seria IV, 51.

111. Salviati I, 70. This register contains the memories of the insurance policies he released.

products to the Ottoman markets, which they used as a currency to buy silks. Their trade thus consisted in exchanging Florentine products, mainly woollen broadcloths, for different modalities. They could sell them directly for cash, barter them for silk, or acquire silk on several months' credit to give themselves time to sell their broadcloths.

As Florentine merchants made no direct contact with Persian silk carriers, they depended on intermediaries. Their main contacts, who bought their products and supplied silk, were the Turkish and Jewish craftsmen of Bursa. Through their connections, networks and skills, the Jews progressively became key to Florentine trading in the Ottoman Empire. The conflicts between the Venetians and the Ottoman Empire gradually allowed the Jews to replace the Venetians as intermediaries between East and West. Indeed, once these wars ended, the Venetians never restored their position in trade with Constantinople and the Balkans.¹¹² Their success even worried Venetian authorities, who complained repeatedly to the Ottoman powers, in particular during the 1550s and 1560s, denouncing the seizure of certain supplies by the Jewish merchants, in particular wool and products stemming from the textile industry.¹¹³ The situation in Bursa also highlights the role of local communities of merchants in the international economy.

During that time, Florence was able to compete with Genoa and Venice on Ottoman markets. Bayezid II made the Ottoman markets wide open to Florence and encouraged imports, which was also a way for him to fight against Venice. During the long wars that marked the end of Mehmed II's reign and the beginning of the reign of Bayezid II, mostly from 1463 to 1479 and then from 1499 to 1503, the sultans significantly favored Florentine traders.¹¹⁴ Venice, the sultans' principal maritime rival, was their main trading partner in the Mediterranean area. Promoting Florence thus served as a means of overcoming this dependence. At the height of the tensions between Venice and the Ottomans, the Ottomans expelled many Venetians from government houses in Pera and installed Florentines instead.¹¹⁵ Florence thus received particular favors that significantly augmented its trade in Ottoman commercial areas. The wars Selim Ist carried out against his Safavid neighbour cut off Florentine merchants' direct

112. See Arbel, *Trading Nations*, in particular chapter one.

113. Simon, "Contribution."

114. Gallotta, "Venise et l'Empire ottoman."

115. Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire*.

supply of Persian silks. The Florentine traders, who were closely dependent on the sultans' politics, had clearly a fragile position in Ottoman markets.

The trade of Persian silks highlights a long-distance network, from the coasts of the Caspian Sea until Florence. Persian and Azeri carriers escorted the silks to Bursa where they came under the control of Bursa's Jewish and Turkish craftsmen who sold them to the Florentine merchants, who exported them to Florence. In this process, every actor in the network performed his own task and the connection between these different actors, on the commercial platform, allowed Florence's textile industry to use the Persian silks.

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Ingrid Houssaye Michienzi, *The Silk Market in Bursa around 1500 as it appears in the Florentine Business Archives*

Around 1500, Bursa was a crucial center of silk production and trade. Located in North-West Anatolia, it served as the point of arrival for caravans conducting precious silks from the coasts of the Caspian Sea. Florentine agents dispatched in the Ottoman Empire by Florentine companies bought a portion of the cargo carried by those caravans. Examination of these companies' accounts books and correspondence reveals the vitality of this business and provides new insight about the mechanisms of the silk trade in Bursa. These long-neglected commercial sources demonstrate that Florentines depended on Ottoman intermediaries, particularly Jewish merchants and artisans, to procure silk and participate in the caravan trade.

Ingrid Houssaye Michienzi, *Le marché de la soie à Bursa vers 1500 d'après les archives commerciales florentines*

Vers 1500, Bursa était un centre crucial pour la production de soieries et le commerce de la soie. Cette ville située au nord-ouest de l'Anatolie était le point d'arrivée des caravanes convoyant les précieuses soies depuis le pourtour de la mer Caspienne. Les agents florentins présents dans l'Empire ottoman achetaient une importante quantité de ces soies grèges. L'examen de leurs livres de comptes et de leurs correspondances révèle la vitalité de ce commerce et éclairent d'un jour nouveau les mécanismes du marché de la soie de Bursa. Ces sources commerciales, longtemps négligées par l'historiographie, démontrent à quel point les agents florentins dépendaient d'intermédiaires ottomans, particulièrement de marchands et artisans juifs, pour se procurer la soie et participer au trafic caravanier.