

Franchised Trade of the Lower Danube: An Attempt on the Identities and Business Partnerships of Licensed Local Muslim Merchants and the Istanbul-Based Oligopoly of Kapan Merchants

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This paper studies the questions of self-rule and the state intervention in the Danubian Principalities, and the socio-economic life of a late frontier society against the backdrop of the eighteenth-century wave of internal colonization by Ottoman Muslims, mostly of Janissary background. In collaboration with the local native elite, the Ottoman authorities suspended all kinds of activities of the non-local traders and granted trading rights to a limited number of Muslim merchants who were authorized to make trade in the region under conditions dictated from above. At least in principle, the result was an unprecedentedly intensified princely and state control and creation of monopolistic trading rights in two main trade circuits of the Danube: Regional commerce franchised to a limited number of licensed (fermanlı/serhadlı) merchants of the Danubian basin and imperial trade granted to an Istanbul-based oligopsony of kapan (public sale) merchants. Thus, Principalities turned into restricted if not a forbidden trade zone except for the chartered companies of Muslim merchants from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. Based on the study of the valuable registers of authorized merchants into the Principalities, the present study aims at exploring the somehow highly neglected commercial activities, business partnership and identities of Muslim merchants in the regional and imperial trade of the Danubian basin.