

## **Venetian powers of attorney as a source for Ottoman commercial history in the early modern period**

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In the first half of the seventeenth century hundreds of Ottoman merchants, mostly Sephardic Jews and Muslim Turks, registered documents of power of attorney (it. procura) in the consular court of the Venetian embassy in Istanbul. With these documents, they appointed legal representatives (it. procuratori) residing in Venice to conduct a multitude of tasks on their behalf, including debt recovery, legal representation, the management of business, and inheritance proceedings. This so-far-neglected historical source includes a myriad of information about Ottoman international commerce in the early modern period, especially regarding the conduct of trade, on which we notoriously possess few sources. Documents of powers of attorney show the social and religious identity of the Ottoman merchants engaged in international trade and their proxies, the goods exchanged, the forms of business association and institutions employed by the merchants, and their trade networks in foreign countries. Furthermore, the wide use of Venetian powers of attorney by Ottoman merchants testifies to the circulation of these instruments, the product of a Medieval Venetian notarial culture, among businessmen belonging to different political and religious communities.

This presentation analyzes the use made by Ottoman merchants of these instruments in the years 1600s-1630 offering an overview of the most important legal and economic information they provide to the study of Ottoman international trade in the early modern period. It compares among powers of attorney employed by Christians, Jewish, and Muslim merchants and it focuses on the types of agency relations established by these documents and Ottoman trade networks between Istanbul and Venice. I argue that Jewish and Muslim merchants widely employed powers of attorney while disregarding other Venetian institutions, such as insurance contracts, because of the ubiquity of agency (tr. vekalet) in the commercial and legal life of the medieval and early modern Islamic world.