

Trades in Constantinople in the First Half of the Fifteenth Century

Miki IIDA

This paper will describe the trade in the East Mediterranean Area during the 1430s by analyzing an accounting book written by one Venetian named Giacomo Badoer in Constantinople. He was a Venetian merchant who stayed in Constantinople from early September of 1436 to February of 1440. He had kept an accounting book on all of his business throughout his stay in Constantinople¹. His accounting book has been used in some studies of the Mediterranean history mainly in the context of the European history. This paper takes account of the relation between Constantinople and the surrounding areas such as the Islamic states in Anatolia and Greece by analyzing some of accountings on Badoer's commodities (textiles and pepper) and his communicational network.

From the Later Middle Ages, there have been a lot of commercial documents that were written by merchants in the northern coast of the Mediterranean Area, especially by Italian merchants. Meanwhile, in the Islamic and Byzantine states they didn't write and keep such documents except for the famous Cairo Geniza written by the Jews. Due to these circumstances, studies in social and economic history of the Mediterranean area in the Later Middle Ages have been mainly investigated in the context of the European history². Nowadays some studies provide the new approaches to the economic history of the local Islamic society by analyzing documents written by several languages such as Ottoman Turkish and Italian³.

1 *Il libro dei conti di Giacomo Badoer*, ASV, cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, prima serie, b.958. Dorini & Bertele (eds.), 1956, Roma.

2 Heyd, W., 1967. *Histoire du commerce du Levant au Moyen-Âge*, 2 vols. Amsterdam. French transl. By Raynaud, F., I-II, Leipzig 1885-1886.

Melis, F., 1962, *Aspetti della vita economica medievale*, Siena.

Thiriet, F., 1959, *Romanie vénitien: le development et l'exploitation du domaine colonial vénitien (XII-XVe siècles)*. Paris.

Ashtor, E., 1983. *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages*. Princeton.

Laiou-Thomadakis, A., 1980/81, "The Byzantine Economy in the Mediterranean Trade System: Thirteenth-Fourteenth Centuries", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers XXXIV-XXXV*, pp. 177-222.

3 Reyhanli, T., 1983, *İngiliz Gezinlerine göre XVI yüzyılda İstanbul'da Hayat (1582-1599)*, Ankara.

Zachariadou, 1983, *Trade and Crusade, Venetian Crete and the emirates of Menteshe and Aydin (1300-1415)*, Venice.

Arbel, B., 1995, *Trading Nations: Jews and Venetians in the Early Modern Eastern Mediterranean*. Leiden.

Venetians had influence in the Mediterranean Area after the Crusade. They provided the powerful navy and in the 1082 Byzantine Emperor Alexius rewarded Venetians by issuing the Golden Bull, a charter granting them trading privileges and exemption from tolls of the 32 cities in the Byzantine Empire. After the conquest of Constantinople by the 4th Crusade and the establishment of the Latin Empire, the Latin Emperor gave courtesy to Venetians and also allowed them to enter into the Black Sea for the first time.

In Venice, the trade was regulated by the government. The trade vessels, including the great merchant galleys, were organized into some groups (*muda*) that were managed semi-governmentally. The *Romania muda* visited cities around the Adriatic, the Ionian, the Aegean and the Black Sea. They left Venice in summer and came back by November. In those days, ships could sail only during summer and autumn in the Mediterranean Area, and only during the summer in the Black Sea.

Around 1300, the shifts occurred in commercial practice that have been characterized as a "Commercial Revolution" especially in western Europe. The ways of doing business which became current in the fourteenth century persisted until long after Europe had expanded into America⁴. Resident or sedentary merchants took the place of traveling merchants in the most part of Western Europe and in the Mediterranean⁵. In this paper, the former is called the agent.

Some agents lived in the Islamic states. They were entrusted to sell and buy goods of European merchants and got charges usually of 1-2% and they drew and took up bills of exchange. The business was dealt by many letters of orders, reports of prices, news etc. Usually, the agents were either from the European commercial cities or had the acquaintance there. However, their funds were usually independent of those of merchants lived in the hometown, that is to say, the head offices who entrusted business to the agents. Meanwhile, the related offices shared funds with the head office usually. Agents didn't make contracts only with a merchant in the hometown. (In Venice, accounts were usually settled not on each company but on each parcel.) Some people on his accounting book often made contracts of consignment each other. The same person could become someone's consignee (=agent), consignor, seller or buyer at the same time. The roles in the business might be circulating.

Sometimes the agents stayed overseas more than a few years and had the authority to decide a considerable number of businesses by himself because there was only a slow-footed postal service in those days. In order to catch up with the market, it was essential for agents in overseas to gather every information about their business, especially the local news of the place they stayed. The documents written by the European agents in the Islamic or Byzantine states can also be involved in the information about the local society.

Çizakça, M., 1996. *A comparative evolution of Business Partnerships: The Islamic world and Europe, with Specific Reference to the Ottoman Archives*. Leiden.

4 Lane, F. C., 1973, *Venice, A Maritime Republic*, Baltimore and London, p. 137.

5 Lane, F. C., 1973, *op. cit.* p. 137.

Commodity		Total (perp. car.)	%	Quantity	
woolen cloth	(<i>pano</i>)	66,369	3	27.55	886 rolls + 9 pieces
honey wax	(<i>zera</i>)	21,447	1	8.90	791 kintar 25 ruotoli
velvet	(<i>velude</i>)	22,019	10	9.14	408 boxes + 1 bale
pepper	(<i>piper</i>)	17,774	18	7.38	357 kintar 43 ruotoli
raw silk	(<i>seda</i>)	14,082	6	6.15	3402 libra 6 oncia
copper	(<i>rame</i>)	13,428	21	5.58	773 kintar 23 ruotoli
tin	(<i>stagno</i>)	10,192	16	4.23	167 bundles
gold	(<i>oripele, doble, oro filado</i>)	8,648	16	3.58	(i)
red dye	(<i>cremese</i>)	7,938	7	3.30	4200 libra 11 oncia
silk fabric	(<i>pano de seda, draparia</i>)	7,264	13	3.02	24
indigo	(<i>endego</i>)	6,209	15	2.58	39 ziurlo + 1454 libra
ox leather	(<i>chuori de bo</i>)	4,881	16	2.03	2684 sheets + 189 rolls
wine	(<i>vino</i>)	4,262	18	~2.00	246 barrels including tartaro
olive oil	(<i>olio, oio, hoi, oi</i>)	3,779	20		41 botte
wool	(<i>lana</i>)	3,519	18		214 sacks (689 kintar 77 ruotoli)
brazil wood	(<i>verzi</i>)	2,826	11		(ii)
slave	(<i>teste/a</i>)	2,692	0		40
sheep skin	(<i>lana</i>)	2,587	9		10168 sheets
linen	(<i>lino</i>)	1,855	3	~1.00	(iii)
wheat, millet	(<i>forment, meio</i>)	1,655	9		wheat: 200 moza, millet: 130 moza
seed?	(<i>semenzia</i>)	1,552	17		14 kintar 41.5 ruotoli
ginger	(<i>zenzero</i>)	1,473	20		51 kintar 42.5 ruotoli
clove	(<i>garofai</i>)	1,417	20		9 kintar 45 ruotoli
wire	(<i>fil de fero</i>)	1,399	4		1391 bundles
fustian	(<i>fostagno</i>)	1,397	1		164 rolls
salted pork, fat	(<i>charne de porcho salade, sonza</i>)	1,271	12		437 kintar 35 ruotoli
cork	(<i>suro</i>)	1,092	0		26 miera
silver	(<i>arzeno de piatine, arzeno d'asperi</i>)	839	18		32 libra 11 oncia
alkalin ash	(<i>zenere</i>)	807	14		77.5 sacks
white paints	(<i>biacha</i>)	801	0		78 pails
ermine fur, weasel fur	(<i>fuina, martoto</i>)	765	20		ermine 574, weasel 325
incense	(<i>inzenzo</i>)	608	16		19 kintar 51 ruotoli
lead	(<i>pionbo</i>)	587	6		161 kintar 99 ruotoli
musk	(<i>muschio</i>)	566	6		226.5 sazi
soap	(<i>saon</i>)	421	14		40 kintar 31 ruotoli
alum	(<i>lume</i>)	347	0		80 kintar 7 ruotoli
caviar	(<i>chaviaro, chola di pese</i>)	367	22		23 kintar 3 ruotoli
crossbow	(<i>fusto di balestro</i>)	269	18		1000
paper	(<i>charta</i>)	191	9		5 bales 2 reams
silver candy box, cup	(<i>chonfetiére d'arzeno, taze</i>)	185	15		8
salted fish	(<i>pesse</i>)	159	5		7 barrels (34 kintar 78 ruotoli)
raisin	(<i>zebibo</i>)	137	17		63 kintar 50 ruotoli
sugar	(<i>zucharo</i>)	131	0		2 kintar
board	(<i>tola d'albedo</i>)	114	20		500
cordovan	(<i>chordoani</i>)	88	21		94
glass	(<i>vero</i>)	80	6		2134
rhubarb	(<i>riobarbaro</i>)	57	12		11 libra 6 oncia
steel	(<i>azali</i>)	49	14		240 bundles
alcohol	(<i>archolini</i>)	44	12		800
zedoaria		14	0		33 libra 9 oncia
scammony	(<i>scamonia</i>)	12	12		4 libra 2 oncia
Total		240	872	20	100
(i) Details	oripele (5232 libra 2 onacia)	perp. 8208 car. 13			
	doble (19 oncia 7 tari)	perp. 258 car. 15		oro filado (64 rolls)	perp. 161 car. 12
(ii) Details	2 kintar 34 ruotoli of Alexandria				
	9 kintar 14 ruotoli of Beirut			15 kintar 81 ruotoli of Constantinople	
(iii) Details	linens from Alexandria (109 kintar 47 ruotoli)	perp. 1775 car. 8			
	from Lombardia (60 rolles)	perp. 79 car. 19			

Figure 1 Commodities

Giacomo Badoer trades about 51 sorts of commodities (Fig.1). While examining his accountings, it has become clear that European products, of which 87.64% are textiles such as woolen, silk or cotton textiles, have a little less than the 50% of all. Woolen textile is more than 60% of European textiles. The high quality woolen textiles are 88 rolls sold for 11,950 perpero 5 carati⁶, which are only 9.8% by quality and 18% by sums of all woolen textiles. With regard to the woolen textiles in the accounting book, Badoer concentrated his energy on the *bastard* cloth sold at between 60-100 perpero per roll (Fig. 2). The *bastard* cloth is second or middle class textile similar to those of Brescia, Parma, Vicenza and Wervicq (Vervi)⁷. Hoshino indicates

	Fri.	Man.	Pad.	Ven.	Vic.	Bre.	Par.	Com.	Val.	Mal.	Alo.	Ver.	<i>bastardo</i>
price per roll (perp.)													
0- 20									1				
20- 40								20	44				
40- 60				5		25				50	6		9
60- 80	4	1					4				12	70	97
80-100	13	10	59		9	1	1					17	182
100-120	1	1	8										8
120-140	12		5										
140-160	20	8		5									
160-180	5	6											
180-200	11	3											
200-220	2												
220-240													
240-260		1	6										3

Fir. = Firenze	Ven. = Venezia	Par. = Parma	Mal. = Mallorca
Man. = Mantova	Vic. = Vicenza	Com. = Comine (Frlanders)	Alo. = Alost (Frlanders)
Pad. = Padova	Bre. = Brescia	Val. = Valencia	Ver. = Wervicq (Frlanders)

Figure 2 Price of European woolen clothes per roll

that in Firenze, the woolen textile industry had been transforming its character from the high quality production into those of the middle class quality, for example, the *Garbo* cloth⁸ during the second half of the 15th century⁹. He explains this phenomenon by the increase of a great demand for these middle class woolen textiles in the *Romania*¹⁰ or *Turchia* market, that is, in the Ottoman Empire after the middle of the 15th century. In Badoer's accounting book, the price of the *Garbo* cloth is within the same range of the middle class textiles, too¹¹. He sent

6 Perpero and carati are Byzantine money. 1 perpero = 24 carati.

7 Hoshino, H., 1980, *L'arte della lana in Firenze nel Basso Medioevo*, Firenze, p. 274.

8 The *Garbo* cloth was made of Italian or Mediterranean wool. Until then, they had made high quality woolen textiles of the wool from England. The most famous one was *San Martino* cloth.

9 Hoshino, H., 1980, *op. cit.* pp. 231 ff.

10 Usually, the *Romania* means Anatolia, Greece, the Black Sea and the Aegean, while the Levant refers historical Syria and Egypt.

11 between 60-100 perpero per roll.

Commodities	Quantity	Total (perp. car.)	
<i>bastard</i> cloth (woolen cloth)	25 rolls	1,999	7
woolen cloth of Padova	11 rolls	1,345	23
of Firenze	7 rolls	1,140	12
of Wervicq	1 rolls	80	0
of Alost	1 rolls	45	0
other woolen clothes	11 rolls	1,309	21
velvet	14 cassette	773	0
fustian	10 rolls	60	0
white paints	40 pails	420	0
gold thread	10 rolls	30	0
ruby	1	100	0
wine from Candia (malmsey)	7 barrels	161	0
wine from Candia	15 barrels	374	10

Figure 3 Commodities for Adrianople

much European woolen or silk textiles to Adrianople, where the Ottoman Empire had established his capital since 1365 (Fig. 3). It suggested that the Ottoman city played an important role in the Mediterranean trade.

The prices of pepper per *kinter* fell down and the quantity increases at the beginning of 1439¹² (Fig. 4). Ashtor observes the same phenomenon in the Levant market and reasons that it was a sort of the counteraction resulted from the death of Mamluk Sultan Barsbay (1422-38) who had monopolized the spice trade in his clan¹³. However, that cannot be applied immediately to the *Romania* market. There is no enough reason for the low price of pepper in the *Romania* area now. Suffice it to say that the *Romania* and the Levant could be connected by the price fluctuation of pepper. Until very recently, hypothesis of the trade routes has been alternatively analyzed. The two historical areas in the East Mediterranean Area, that is, the Levant and the *Romania* have been studied to contrast each other conventionally. For example, it's often said that if one of them got in such calamity as war, political change or natural disaster, the goods from the East would be transported to another. However, the simultaneous trends of pepper price in the Levant and the *Romania* that are observed on Badoer's accounting book may be a key to reconsider the historical frameworks of the Mediterranean Area in the later Middle Ages.

Badoer's trade business isn't a mere "the East-West trade" which means dealings only in the luxury goods like spice, expensive clothes, raw silk or slaves between Constantinople and Venice. Other than the luxury commodities above, there're many inexpensive ones such as

12 There're only a few dealings of spices on Badoer's accounting book except for the pepper. Pepper 26, clove 5, ginger 4, incense 4, musk 3, rhubarb 1, *zedoaria* 1, scammony 1.

13 Ashtor, E., 1975, "Profits from the trade with the Levant in the fifteenth century", *BSOAS* 38, pp.268 ff.

	Date	price per <i>kintar</i> (perp. car.)		notes
1436	11. 8	68	22.5	bought in Bursa for perp. 63 car. 16 per <i>kintar</i>
	11. 8	68	22.5	
	11. 15	71	18	
1437	7. 1	56	12	sold to a Russian for perp. 60 per <i>kintar</i>
	7. 1	56	12	
	7. 4	56	12	
	8. 3	57	12	
	10. 9	60	0	
	10. ...	60	0	stolen from the shop on 10 Nov. sent to Messina
	11. 8	63	0	
	11. 19	63	0	
	11. 25	62	0	bought by barter of the woolen clothes with a <i>moro</i> bought in Bursa for perp. 57 car. 22 per <i>kintar</i>
	12. 17	65	0	
	12. 28	63	0	
1438	9. 15	54	12	sold to Andres de Rosia for perp. 53 per <i>kintar</i>
	9. 17	55	0	sold to an Armenian for perp. 53 per <i>kintar</i>
	12. 1	30	0	by the consignor's order, fell into the other's possession for perp. 62 per <i>kintar</i>
	12. 9	50	0	
	12. 13	52	0	
	12. 13	52	0	
	12. 16	52	0	
1439	2. 11	41	6	for 4 <i>kintar</i> 61 <i>ruotoli</i> , bought by barter of the woolen clothes
	2. 18	42	0	
	2. 18	42	0	
	2. 18	42	0	
	2. 20	47	0	
	2. 20	43	0	by the consignor's order, handed over to someone
	9. 1	40	0	
	10. 30	42	0	
	12. 30	39	12	
1440	1. 19	send from Caffa

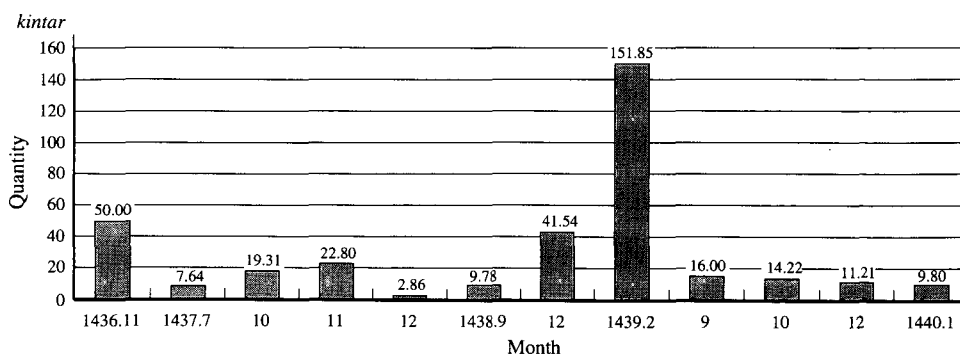
Figure 4-1 Price of pepper per *kintar* (1436.11-1440.1)

Figure 4-2 Quantity of pepper trade (1436.11-1440.1)

leather goods, provisions or daily necessities in Badoer's accounting book (Fig.1). Moreover, he had much business relations not only in Constantinople and Venice, but also with the other neighboring cities, for instance, the cities along the coast of the Black Sea, the Aegean, in Southern Italy or Anatolia (Fig. 5).

City	Total of commodities (perp.)	%
Adrianople	7,839	30.67
Alexandria	4,990	19.52
Trabzon	2,145	8.39
Bursa	1,847	7.23
Messina	1,630	6.38
Beirut	1,396	5.46
Caffa	1,165	4.56
Messina and Zaragoza	845	3.31
Zaragoza	694	2.71
Candia	614	2.41
Samsun	492	1.92
Tana	429	1.68
Galipoli	420	1.64
Rodhos	329	1.29
Thessaloniki	301	1.18
Rodosto	243	0.95
Damascus	170	0.66
Modon	13	0.55
Total	25,562	100

Figure 5 Commodities to other cities

As to the buyers and the sellers in Constantinople, the network of Giacomo Badoer was ranged in people in various scale of business. In Constantinople, he sold his commodities for 122,040 perpero 11.5 carati in all and there're 184 buyers on Badoer's accounting book, and so the average purchase equals about 663 perpero. However, there're some gaps in business scale among buyers. About 78% of the commodities sold in Constantinople by him are the European textiles, and there are pretty limited buyer of these textiles, including the Jews, the Muslims and the Byzantine subjects whose businesses are large in scale (Fig. 6). The Byzantines are often bankers, too. The top 20 buyers purchased about 60% of the European textiles (= about 50% of all commodities) sold in Constantinople by Badoer. Moreover, they sometimes also the sellers of the commodities from the East (South East Asia, Indian Ocean, Persia) or from the North (Russia, Klim Peninsula, Bulgaria, Kav Kaz) (Fig. 6), so there could have been a sort of barter systems among them and Badoer.

On the other hand, Badoer had a large number of buyers and sellers who dealt rather small business with him. He often dealt in such trade as retail by the cash payment. Although the

Names of the buyers	Additional notes	A	B	A+B (perp.)	C	(perp.)
Maistro Elia	Jew	23	74	7633		
Slaiman	Jew	12	111	5891	honey wax	2587
Anastaxo de Danili and his son Musi [Musa]	Jew	34	9	4752	raw silk	6238
Elia Dedimari	Jew	19	44	4599	honey wax	2548
•					raw silk	1125
					pepper	1584
Joxef Salia [Satia]	Jew	24	18	4358	indego	1771
					red dye	2335
Costantin Varda Zuchinda	(Byzantine?)	60		4235		
Jachomo and Zuan Andrea de Canpi	living in Adrianople	34		3780		
Toma Spinola	banker (Genovese?)	40		3538	honey wax	168
					raw silk	3819
					pepper	5615
Nicholoxo d'Aste	draper	65		3285	red dye	1488
Azi Baba	turkish	9		2742	pepper	331
Jael	employee of Choza Muxalacf	20		2442	indego	1694
Elia de Davit	Jew		47	2164	honey wax	285
Zorsi Cunba and his sons	(Byzantine?)	36	10	1854	honey wax	1129
					ox leather	224
Nicholo de la Chola		18		1684		
Caloiani Vasilico		6	1	1517		
Catelan Amidei		16		1479		
Vielmo Portella	Catalan	30		1467		
Dimitri Glivani and Jani Zuchinida	draper (Zuchinida)	16		1234		
Lunardo Spinola	(Genovese?)	6	2	1175	honey wax	1354
					copper	1061
					indego	841
Costa Macrimali	draper (Byzantine?)	13		1019		

A: Purchase of woolen cloth B: Purchase of silk fabric C: Sale of commodities to Badoer

Figure 6 Buyers and sellers in large scales

Byzantine Emperors and merchants had tried to safeguard the retail trade from Italian competition¹⁴, Italians also played an important role in the small-scale trades in Constantinople. For example, he sold some rolls of cloth to the tailors and to the artisan who makes stockings¹⁵.

By the way, how can Constantinople of the 1430s be characterized by analyzing of Giacomo Badoer's accounting book? Badoer sold commodities to those limited people of big business by wholesale, so there isn't enough evidence in his accounting book to tell whether the commodities were sold in Constantinople or re-exported to the other cities. However, it is suggested that they weren't much in demand only in Constantinople. For example, Adrianople and Bursa, the capital and the former capital of the Ottoman Empire of those days were situated

14 Laiou-Thomadakis, A., 1980/81, *op. cit.*, pp. 211 ff. Chrysostomides, J., 1970, "Venetian Commercial Privileges under the Palaeologi", *Studi Veneziani* 12, pp. 298 ff.

15 Dorini & Bertele (eds.), 1956, *op. cit.*, c.13, c.14, c.71.

only about 200 km and 100 km from Constantinople. As was mentioned above, Badoer was very successful in these cities. Therefore, the Ottoman market could be too prosperous to ignore for the merchants in Constantinople.

It has been said that in the after the 13th century, Anatolia became chaotic by the rivalry of Turkish Emirates, so the trade through *Romania* was diminished. However, the political upheavals don't always synchronize with the economic situation for some reason. At first, not a few cities became prosperous along the caravan routes of central Anatolia under the Islamic dominations at that time¹⁶. In the 14th century, the routes extended to the west, and some cities such as Bursa became important spots for the trade¹⁷. Secondly, according to the Islamic tradition, the rulers were to let commerce activate by protecting merchants and their properties. For such purpose, the ruler constructed caravansaries in town or along the trade route and issued *amân* that guarantees to take merchants so on under the ruler's protection. Thirdly, for the sea route, the Europeans dominated the navigation and they could transport safely by sea¹⁸. In Badoer's accounting book, there wasn't any record of troubles on the sea such as pirates during his stay for three and a half years in Constantinople. In consideration of those aspects, Constantinople can be characterized as an intermediate city in the 1430s.

There is much documented information about the local commercial history neither all the East Mediterranean Area nor of Constantinople (Istanbul) in the 15th century. In Badoer's accounting book, there are also many records about the dealings in bills of exchange. For further studies, it is essential to analyze his business in exchange and to compare with the other commercial documents written in the different culture spheres.

16 Inalcik, H., 1973, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*. London, p. 121.

17 Inalcik, H., 1973, *op. cit.* pp. 121 ff.

18 Runciman, S., 1965, *The Fall of Constantinople*, Cambridge, pp. 100 ff.