

## OSMANLI DEVLETİNDE DEBBAĞLAR

*Miyase KOYUNCU\**

### ÖZET

Osmanlı Devleti'nde şehirli üretici kesimi esnaf temsil eder. Ham maddeden tüketici eline ulaşan nihai ürüne kadar tüm üretim aşamaları esnaf loncaları ve devlet tarafından denetim ve control altında tutulmaya çalışılmaktadır. Bu çalışmada Osmanlı esnafına bir örnek olarak İstanbul'daki debbağların faaliyetleri ve sorunları üzerinde durulmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Osmanlı, esnaf, debbağ, İstanbul.

## TANNERS IN OTTOMAN STATE

### ABSTRACT

In Ottoman Empire the artisans are representatives of the producer section of the cities. From raw materials to the product at the hand of consumers all process of production have been under the control and inspection of both the state and the guilds. In this study the activities and problems of tanners tried to be studied as an example of Ottoman artisans.

**Key Words:** Ottoman, artisans, tanner, Istanbul.

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### ***Introduction***

In order to use any kind of hides and skins for various purposes, the process of protection of leathers from being spoiled, with the help of chemical substances is called “tanning” which is “debbaglik”, “tabaklik” or “sepicilik” in some regions in Turkish. The modern usage of the word for this process is called “leather manufacturing”.

In this work, the concern is tanning activities in 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. The activities in 19th century are mentioned very briefly in the conclusion. Inevitably the main focus became activities of Istanbul tanners due to the scarcity of sources about Anatolian tanners. First of all, the question of to what extent tanners gained the characteristics of futuwah ideas and what the connections and implications of *ahi* spirit among tanners will be tried to be answered. Since the problem of area of establishment and problem of price within the difficulty of obtaining raw material have affected densely to tanning activities, these problems have constituted considerable parts of the work. Brief information on tanning agents and activities which demand high discipline are important to see the difficulty of tanning crafts and to understand the characteristics of these craftsmen. The varieties of leather were deduced from the lists of price regulations. The trade of leather work and activities of tanners in Anatolia -to some extend- does not become the part of concern. The purpose of the study is to show some characteristics of one of the most important crafts in Ottoman Istanbul.

### ***The relations of tanners with ahi organization***

The tanning activities are regarded as the first developed profession in Anatolia as it is indicated by some researches. Ahi Evran, a sufi leader, was evaluated as the founder of tanning activities. The real name of Ahi Evran was Sheyh Nasruddin Ebu'l Hakayik Mahmud b. Ahmed 566-660/ 1171-1262.<sup>1</sup> When he had settled in Kayseri, he attempted to establish a tannery within the support of Seyh Evahuddin Kirmani. The remarkable point is that Ahi Evran was at the same time, the founder of *ahi* organization. It can be said that *ahi* organization was the branch of futuwah organization in Anatolia. Futuwah is an Arabic word in literary sense; it signifies generosity, chivalry, strength and magnimity. In fact it based on Sufism.<sup>2</sup> The main backbones of the principles of Ottoman artisans should be searched on the futuwah organization. The concept of futuwah is

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<sup>1</sup> N. Çağatay, **Bir Türk Kurumu Olan Ahilik**, Ankara 1989, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> F. Köprülü, **Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvıflar**, Ankara 1976, p. 211.

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enlarged to include a whole complex of ethical values, such as obedience to God, moral restraint, loving affection for one's fellow-men, self denial and self contemptin relation with others.<sup>3</sup>

The most important necessity to participate in *ahi* organization was to have a profession in any craft. The characteristics of *ahis* were helping to everybody, preventing injustice and seing the faults of others, not speaking badly of them, nor coveting their material goods, honour or soul, nor defaming them. The origin of the word "*ahi*" has not ben completely determined. The travel account of Ibn-i Battuta was the first source to give information on "*ahi-fityan*", found the origin of the word "*akhi*" in the Arabic word "*akh*"<sup>4</sup> (brother), and so the word *ahi* means "my brother". However, the well-known Turcologist, Jean Deny, has pointed out that the word might come from an old Turkish word "*aqi*", meaning generosity or chilvary.<sup>5</sup> Infidels, fortune tellers, habitual wine drinkers, bath attendants, public criers, weavers, surgeons, hunters, tax collectors in prime necessities were excluded from the *ahi* organization. The reasons of exclusion of these people were different. For example, infidels and fortune tellers were excluded due to their unbelief or violation of basic commands of sharia. The reason for the butchers and hunters was their contact with blood and they were considered cruel and impure. However in time, this rule was broken. By taking over the futuwah<sup>6</sup> as an ethical and cooperative ideal from the *ahis*, artisans made its orders the fundamental framework of their guilds. When many artisans began to gather around *ahi* organization, the discipline and organization of artisans came under easier and more effective control mechanism. The artisan organization spread firstly by the form of tanning craft which based on strong rules by *ahis* in and around Kirsehir. This organization later contained other crafts. In this sense it can be said that tanners became the carriers, in a word the missionaries of *ahi* ideas and rules among other artisans. Every artisan class tended to make their own private organization. In "Futuvvetname" of Yahya Ibn-i Khalil and Nasiri, and also Osman Nuri saw it as a part of the tariqah of sufis. The *ahism* was considered

<sup>3</sup> D. Breebart, **The Development and Structures of The Turkish Futuwah Guilds**, Michigan and London 1961, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> In this paper, I prefer to use "*ahi*" instead of *akhi*.

<sup>5</sup> The *akhi* must open his face (friendliness), his door (hospitality), and his table-cloth (generosity), on the other hand he must close his eyes ( not ot see things forbidden to be seen), his tongue ( to refrain from insulting or deceiving anybody), and the belt of his shalvar (to refrain from immoral deeds and remain chaste) **Ibid**, p. 120; Çağatay, **ibid**, p. 224.

<sup>6</sup> G.G. Arnakis, "Futuwwa Traditions in Ottoman Empire", **Journal of Near Eastern Studies**, vol. XII , n. 4, Ekim 1953, p. 234.

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to be the tariqah and the shayh-ism to be the haqiqah. Cagatay and Breebart did not accept this idea and Breebart claims that fityan did not ascend to the gnosis of and absorption in the Absolute Reality, which is the ultimate goal of the mystics. The futuwah order took over the practical rules of moral and ethical perfection but did not identify itself with the extreme other worldliness of dervishes.<sup>7</sup>

The tradition that Ahi Evran within the devoted title of “veli” had occupied tanning led to the appreciation of him as a patron saint (pir) of tanners. Moreover, Ahi Evran was regarded as a leader of all *ahis* and so, tanners gained an influential power and prestige among other artisans. The geneology of many Turkish tanners were rested upon Ahi Evran and then the geneology was brought to Zeyd-i Hindi as pir of all tanners.<sup>8</sup> Evliya Celebi saw all tanners and saddlers in everywhere he visited in connection with Ahi Evran. He claims that the tanners of Anatolia saw Ahi Evran as their patron saint but the real pir was Zeyd-i Hindi. These tanners were proud of the owner of one old leather flag on green stick. The story of Evliya follows that this old leather flag was a *sahtiyani* belt in front of “Gave-i Ahenger” that made defense against Dahhak with using that flag. Tanners were so much proud of having and protecting this flag.<sup>9</sup> Osman Nuri rejects the story of Evliya Celebi by justifying his own ideas with another interesting story. He asserts that the flag of tanners was “Direfs-i Gavvani” which had been plundered from Persians in a war at the time of khalife Omer. It is impossible for tanners to have such a historical compact (vedia).<sup>10</sup>

The most remarkable trace of *ahism* in a craft organization was the existence of man who is responsible in the administrative framework, called “*ahi* father<sup>11</sup>” who was at the highest position also among the *ahis*. By giving the tax registers of 890/1485 and 992/ 1584 as an evidence, Suraiya Faroqhi claims that there is no reference to the connection between seyhs of Ahi Evran and tanners’ guilds in 15th and 16th centuries. According to her, for this reason, since description of *zawiya*<sup>12</sup> included a listing of sources of income which supported

<sup>7</sup> Breebart, *ibid*, p. 140.

<sup>8</sup> **İslam Ansiklopedisi**, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, İstanbul 1998, p. 530.

<sup>9</sup> Evliya Çelebi, **Seyahatname**, İstanbul 1938, p. 484.

<sup>10</sup> O. N. Ergin, **Mecelle-i Umur-i Belediye**, İstanbul 1995, vol.I, p. 522.

<sup>11</sup> “... debbağın-i Kasımpaşa’da vaki debbağhanede olmalarıyla kadimü’l-eyyamdan bu ana gelince hırfet-i mezburemün ahi baba tabir olunur debbağbaşısı...” BOA, İstanbul Ahkam Defterleri, no:3, p.335, dated by 4 January 1755.

<sup>12</sup> For detailed information on Akhi Evran Zawiya, look at İ. Şahin, “Osmanlı Devrinde Ahi Evren zaviyesinin hususiyetine dair bazı mülahazalar”, **Ahilik ve Esnaf**, İstanbul, İstanbul Esnaf ve Sanatkarlar Birliği yay., 1986, s. 160-169

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sheyhs and dervishes, the absence of any such reference makes it seem very likely that the sheyhs were not very influential among Ottoman tanners. For if matters had stood otherwise, the sheyhs were probably drawn a steady if modest income from the gifts of tanning guilds throughout the empire.<sup>13</sup> However in this period the principal elements of the *ahi* groups and the Turkish guilds are so much resemble each other, although differences exist in the structure and details of ceremonies. The basic corresponding points between *ahis* and Turkish guilds are the futuwah traditions, such as the ethical and moral injunctions, particularly the emphasis on earning one's own living by taking up a craft, spiritual guidance by an elderly member, the shadd ceremony, the communal meal, the ritual of hair cutting and so on. Besides, in fact as the date of establishment of artisan guilds is not very clear and documents on 15th and 16th centuries are scarce, the relation between tanners and sheyhs of Ahi Evran can be understood from the point of view of the connections with professions rather than the transference from *ahism* to the guilds. Tanners and other leather guilds constitute the principal source in this subject as they preserved *ahi* tradition in purest form.<sup>14</sup>

The guilds within the principles of *ahism* can be restricted to the 16th century due to the obscurity of history of futuwah in later times. Although it is known that the moral principles of futuwah like honesty, just treatment to everyone continued in craft organization in 17th and 18th centuries. The *berats* in 1780, 1782, 1822, 1823 and 1842 indicate that seyhs of *zawiyas* sometimes need state's affirmation especially at the beginning of loosely connection of artisans with the post of Ahi Evran.<sup>15</sup> There are definite indications that in 18th century guilds lost the strict orders of futuwah. In the second half of 19th century despite the differences in rituals and practices, the craft guilds preserved certain characteristics of futuwah guilds. It seems that in 18th century the responsibilities of *ahi fathers* passed to an official called *kethuda*, who manages the relations between the guilds and Ottoman administration. *Yigitbasi* was secondary official between *kethuda* and the guild members. All previous functions of sheyh and *naqib* like the administration of the common fund were later times taken over by the *kahya* and *yigitbasi*. According to Breebart, another reason for the dissolution of futuwah order of the guilds is the establishment of *lonca* as an alternative for

<sup>13</sup> S. Faroqhi, *Towns and Townsmen of Ottoman Anatolian*, Cambridge 1984, p. 154.

<sup>14</sup> Breebart, *ibid.*, p. 216; Çağatay, *ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>15</sup> For example, BOA, Cİ 1922- 9 CA 1197/12 Nisan 1782.

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the place of meeting of the guild members.<sup>16</sup> In addition to this, Çağatay claims that as in 17th century authority of non-muslims became widened and also the number of crafts and craftsmen increased, the distinction between Muslims and non-muslims in guild organization was faced with the abolishment. Without the distinction between different religions, new organization called *gedik* was established.<sup>17</sup> *Gedik* is a Turkish word and means monopoly and privilege. In a brief sense, it signifies the authority to function a craft or trade.<sup>12</sup> Osman Nuri gives two reasons for the decline of futuwah ideals. He claims that the old ceremonies demanded higher standard education. However, in fact the practicing of rituals, the formal education was not necessary. It can be learned from predecessors. The second reason is that the membership side by side of Muslims and non-muslims in one guild necessitated the relinquishment of specifically Muslim religious ceremonies by the guilds.<sup>13</sup> The affiliation of craftsmen to Janissaries was also important cause for the decline. Janissaries began to occupy with crafts and trade in 17th century. Within them, the order of Bektashi came into the scene. With *loncas*, it is clear that *ahism* lost its power and influence on artisans. According to Yusuf Halaçoğlu, in the example of Adana artisans, the relations of artisans with *ahi* organization were not directly but in the form of payment to the waqf.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, it can be argued that the organic link between artisans and *ahi* organization was born -to some extend- due to the needs of time.

In early periods of Ottomans the needs of nomadic Turkic tribes whose main occupation was animal breeding, for the market place to exhibit their leather productions had forced them to settle down near to the city centers where bazaars were established. Within this, both tribes provided unification with the city inhabitants from economic point of view and leather manufacturing including tanning

<sup>16</sup> Breebart, *ibid*, p. 217.

<sup>17</sup> For *gedik* look at; Sıdkı, **Gedikler**, İstanbul 1325/1907; Süleyman Sudi, **Defter-i Muktesid**, İstanbul 1307/1890; E.D. Akarlı, "Gedik: implements, mastership, shop usufruct and monopoly among İstanbul artisans, 1750-1850", **Wissenschaftskolleg Berlin Jahrbuch**, 1986; M. Koyuncu, "The Institution of Gedik In Ottoman İstanbul, 1750-1850, unpublished M.A. thesis, Boğaziçi University, İstanbul, 2001; A. Kal'a, *Gediklerin Doğuşu ve Gedikli Esnaf*, **Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları**, 1990, v. 67; A. İnan, **Gedik Hakkı**, unpublished Phd dissertation, İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, İstanbul, 1994; A. Akgündüz, "Osmanlı Hukukunda Gedik Hakkının Menşei ve Gedik Hakkıyla İlgili Ebussuud'un Bir Risalesi", **Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları**, sayı 46, İstanbul 1987, s.149-165.

<sup>12</sup> Çağatay, *ibid*, p. 112.

<sup>13</sup> Breebart, *ibid*, p. 218.

<sup>14</sup> **Ahilik ve Esnaf**, İstanbul Odalar ve Esnaflar Birliği Yayınları, İstanbul 1986, p.79.

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activities found suitable place for its development. The leather crafts was one of the most important branches of manufacturing bringing life to the trade of cities like Istanbul, Kayseri, Edirne, Ankara, Bursa and Konya.<sup>15</sup> From the point of organization, according to the kinds of raw materials, the level of manufacturing process, quality of production, and economic power of purchasers, the artisan organization appears a kind of mosaic. Although there were some differences due to the demography and economic conditions, the model and structure were same in every city. However the connections with the branches of same craft between regions or around the all country were very rare. The only exception was tanning activities. Even if their connection was not very strong, almost all tanners in every city were under the moral leadership of Ahi Evran.<sup>18</sup> The sheyh of Ahi Evran zawiya in Kırşehir was considered leader of all tanners in the country.<sup>19</sup> They seemed to be responsible for all activities of craftsmen, especially tanners. If craftsmen did not work properly, the sheyhs of Ahi Evran Zawiya had a right to close their shops.<sup>20</sup>

Raw hides and tanning agents were available, to a greater or lesser degree, in most part of Anatolia; it appears that the manufacture of leather gave rise to a considerable degree of regional specialization. Kayseri, Goynuk, Konya, Manisa were important tanning centers. Suraiya Faroqhi justifies this regional specialization by using indicating conscripts. She asserts that it is inexplicable that a merchant should have taken a few pieces of *sahtiyan* all the way from Kayseri to Edirne.<sup>21</sup>

### *The Problems of Tanners and Tanneries*

#### *a) Problem of Area of Establishment*

There are two important issues concerning the tanning activities which were densely stressed in documents. One problem deals with the area of establishment of tanneries. It is certain that tanneries were tried to be established outside the cities or towns, along

<sup>15</sup> M. Akdağ, *Türkiye'nin İktisadi ve İctimai Tarihi*, Ankara 1971, vol. II, p. 174.

<sup>18</sup> M. Genç, "Osmanlı Esnafı ve Devletle İlişkileri", *Ahilik ve Esnaf*, İstanbul 1986, p. 114.

<sup>19</sup> F. Taeshner, "İslam Ortaçağında Futuvva (Fütüvvet Teşkilatı)", çev. F. Işıltan, *İFM*, vol. XV, n. 1-4, 1953-54, p.24; A. Gölpınarlı, İslam ve Türk İllerinde Fütüvvet Teşkilatı ve Kaynakları, *İFM*, vol. XI, n.1-4, 1949-50, p.84; G.G. Arnakis, "Futuwwa Traditions in Ottoman Empire", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. XII, n. 4, Ekim 1953, p. 246-247.

<sup>20</sup> BOA, Cevdet İktisat, 783, 20 R 1240-17 Kasım 1824.

<sup>21</sup> S. Faroqhi, *ibid*, p. 169.

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the costs of sea or rivers away from settlement area. However, by the time within the development of cities and towns, tanneries remained in the boundaries of the quarters. This affected densely the lives of the inhabitants in a negative way and bad smells within the remaining parts of chemicals began to threaten health of inhabitants. For instance, Andre Raymond stressed that in Cairo tanneries were frequently moved as a city grew in size, because the smells generated by the tanning process made the town quarter where these workshops were located rather unpleasant to live in.<sup>22</sup>

In Istanbul, Mehmed II had constructed 360 tanneries in Kazlıcesme. The most important factor to choose Kazlıcesme as a center of tanning activities was the abundance of subterrean water. Moreover, it seems that as Mehmed II considered the possibility of rapid expeditions to Balkans, he aimed to gather the manufacturing of leather works in a center for the needs of his army. In Kazlıcesme Mehmed II gathered not only tanneries but also all activities concerning with the leather works. For example, there were 33 slaughterhouses, a candle factory (mumhane), a catgut factory (kirishane).<sup>23</sup>

In a document dated by 1109/1698,<sup>24</sup> the disadvantages of slaughterhouses and tanneries in the city were clearly pointed out. It was claimed that since Mehmed II had seen inappropriate to slaughter buffalo or sheep, he ordered to be built 33 slaughterhouses and devoted them to the waqf of Ayasofya.<sup>25</sup> As opposed to this old law and tradition, in Istanbul and in the town of Eyup some slaughterhouses and tanneries were established. The inhabitants of the city were oppressed due to the bad smell. Moreover, the fear of the danger of plaque and of fever is apparent in document. Within this official decree, slaughtering activity within its partner activities tried to be limited with the area of Yedikule as it had happened since Mehmed II.

According to Evliya Celebi, in twelve quarters of Istanbul there were 700 tanneries and 3000 people occupying with this craft. Because of the high number of this artisan group, they were at the higher position in front of the law and they had much more privileges.

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<sup>22</sup> A. Raymond, **Osmanlı Döneminde Arap Kentleri**, çev. A. Berktaş, Tarih Vakfı Yurt yay., İstanbul 1995, p.132.

<sup>23</sup> R. Ekrem Koçu, **İstanbul Ansiklopedisi**, İstanbul 1966, vol.8, p. 4325.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted from O. N. Ergin, **ibid**, vol. II, p. 794-5.

<sup>25</sup> A document sent to Istanbul Court dated by 13-23 July 1692, quoted from Ahmet Refik Altınay, **Onikinci Asrı Hicride İstanbul Hayatı**, Türk Tarih Encümeni Külliyyatı yay., İstanbul 1930, s.9.

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Osman Nuri asserts that since tanners had opportunity to work together at the same place as a community, they had ability to protect themselves against the state and police more effectively than other artisans. *Subasi* could not enter into their shopping district as well as chief of police.<sup>26</sup> Evliya Celebi's story also justifies Osman Nuri's claim. After stressing the high number of tanners, he says that there are many bully employees who are dragon of men among tanners. If one killer or robber falls into this group, they never hand over him to any ruler. Besides, that killer cannot escape from their hands. They appoint that poor man to the occupation with the feces of dog. Therefore, he becomes penitent and pure and owner of a craft.<sup>27</sup> This is not only the specific qualification of tanners of Istanbul but also of Edirne.<sup>28</sup> In addition to this, tanners were complaining due to being too distant to the center, even if they had some opportunities to sell their finished productions in tanneries. This distance problem also affected -to some extend- the price of the hides and skins whether raw or tanned. Robert Mantran insisted that in 17th century the reason for being at distant place was tanneries dependence to the wholesalers of leather with the manufacturers of shoes rather than the dependence to the state itself.<sup>29</sup>

### *b) Problem of Price*

All regulations concerning to tanners' activities took place in guild nizams arranged by the craftsmen and approved by the state.<sup>30</sup> Who slaughtered an animal, who worked as a tanner, who bought

<sup>26</sup> O. Nuri Ergin, *ibid.*, p. 625.

<sup>27</sup> İstanbul'un dört mevleviyet yerinde 12 mahalde debbağ kârhaneleri vardır. Bunlar içinde nice sahbaz isciler vardır ki adam ejderhasidir. Eger iclerine bir kanlı yahud bir harami dusse asla hakime teslim etmezler. Ol kanlı onların elinden halas dahi olamaz. Biçareyi köpek necisi idman etmeye tayin ederler. İster istemez ta'ib ve tahir olup nihayet bir kâr sahibi olur. Evliya Celebi, *ibid.*, vol.I, p. 594.

<sup>28</sup> Debbağhanede 5000 kadar Ahi Evran köceği, feta ve tuvana, serbaz şebbaz yiğitler çıkar. Bir katil içlerine girse hakim onlara varamaz. Fakat katil dahi onlardan kurtulmayub gürdman olarak dibagatla taib müstağfer olub ustad-ı kamil olur. *Ibid.*, vol.III, p. 463.

<sup>29</sup> R. Mantran, *17. Yüzyıl ikinci yarısı İstanbul, Kurumsal, İktisadi ve Toplumsal Tarih İncelemesi*, Ankara 1990, vol.II, p. 62.

<sup>30</sup> For example, "Mâruz- ı dâ-i devletleridir ki mahmiyye-i İstanbul'da tacirler kethüdası İsmail veyiğitbaşları el hac Mustafa ve ustalarından diğer Mustafa ve Konyalı Mehmet ve el hac Mehmet ve el hac Abdullah ve Mustafa bin Mahmut vesâirleri meclis-i şerde Tosyalı muhayyeri Mustafa mahzarında bizim nizam-ı kadimümüz metaimuz olan sahtiyani debbağ taifesi taşradan mahmiye-i mezbureye getürdükte resm-i gümrüğü edadan sonra doğru tacirhanede lonca nam mahalle gelüp Tosya tüccarınun alaka ve medhalleri olmamağla metaimuza karışagelmeyüp hırfetimiz erbabınun gayri metaimuza karışmakdan men olunmuş iken..." İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri, n.24, p.15 dated by 19 June 1726.

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skins, who made it leather, who produced leather garments, shoes and so on was determined in these nizams.<sup>31</sup> The number of workshop and craftsmen are determined.<sup>32</sup>

Alongside the problem of workshop areas, the tanners' another important problem was increase in price. The difficulty of obtaining raw material, unjust distribution and stocking activities of profiteers, secret export, the conditions of winter, distance of tanneries from market place were significant factors on the increase in prices of hides and skins even though generally the fixed price (*narh*) which was arranged by a commission called *ehl-i hibre*. In fixing of the prices, the prices of productions of leather were written on kadi sicills and thus, according to the quality of leather and of craft, the deception both for buyer and seller were being prevented.<sup>33</sup> The level of qualification was important when price was concerned. For instance, a document dated by 1502 stresses the defection on the leather products due to the carelessly made tanning activities. It is claimed that the lack of fat leads to the drying of leather and it is broken easily, and affected from water. As this gives harm to the public, it was ordered to behave according to the old laws and traditions.

The need for raw material was a well known problem both for Anatolia and Istanbul. As the production of Istanbul would not respond the needs of consumption, for example, in 17th century raw hides and tanned skins were brought from Rumili and Anatolia to Istanbul. On the issue of the bringing of raw and tanned hides and skins to the capital, there is only one document dated by 1180/1766 in Osman Nuri's account; however these materials were coming to Istanbul also in 17th century because Eremya Celebi mentions from the unloading of hides in Eminonu.<sup>34</sup> In reality the tanners possessed the right to acquire all the hides which was accumulated in slaughter houses. In the late 15th and early 16th centuries some *ihtisap* regulations specify the manner in which the butchers were to clean

<sup>31</sup> "...Hazret-i Eyyub selhanelerine tâbi olan dekaikinde... kadimisi üzere vakf-ı mezbur hududı dahilinde ve havalisinde olan selhanelerde koyun zebh idüb yağ ve derilerini mumhane ve debbağlarına virip ahar mahallerde zebh olunmamak..." BOA, İstanbul Ahkâm Defterleri 2/308/1027, **İstanbul Ahkâm Defterleri İstanbul Esnaf Tarihi 1**, İstanbul Külliyyatı VIII, yay. haz. A. Tabakoğlu, A. Kal'a vd., İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi yay., İstanbul 1997, p.58-59, dated by 16-24 August 1748.

<sup>32</sup> For example, in İstanbul there were totally 47 butcher shops. BOA, İstanbul Ahkâm Defterleri, 7/131/397, **ibid**, p. 60, 61, v.II, dated by 18-26 October 1764.

<sup>33</sup> Akdağ, **Türkiye'nin İktisadi ve İctimai Tarihi**, vol.II, p. 175.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted from R. Mantran, **ibid**, p. 60.

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the hides before the leather was delivered to the tanners.<sup>35</sup> By this, the purpose was to provide a regular supply of undamaged hides for tanners.

The hides and skins were distributed according to the capacity of artisans' instrument and workshops. The complaints of poorer artisans indicate that some wealthier tanners did not content themselves with the allotment of hides and skins. To increase their share, the wealthier masters began to turn gardens and similar places to tanneries. By this, they increased their share and as a result, the whole system of guild supervised distribution of raw materials was disorganized. For this reason, to protect their share many poor tanners wanted rescripts from the state but it did not work too much.<sup>36</sup> Besides, some engrossers bought large stocks of skins and salted them away. At some later date, when prices had been driven up, the wholesalers attempted to sell the contents of their store houses to the tanners. Thus, artificial scarcities were created, which caused serious problems for poorer tanners.<sup>37</sup> The frequency of rescripts forbidding the purchase of hides by outsiders before the local market saturated may be regarded as a proof of unlawful solutions by tanners for the supply of raw material. It is interesting that within the sale of the hides coming from outside, the sale of hides of sacrifice also was forbidden.<sup>38</sup>

Akdağ claims that since tanning activities and leather crafts were bringing liveliness to the trade of cities, state was usually struggling with the regulation of prices, the sale of raw and tanned skins and hides.<sup>39</sup> The conflict on the issue of prices was inevitable between butchers and tanners. For instance, when butchers tended to increase the prices, tanners lost their economic power so much as they could not afford to pay rent of their shops. Tanners demanded the interference of state to this issue and with the official decree butchers were warned and old fixed prices were reappointed.<sup>40</sup> Besides, by

<sup>35</sup> Ömer L. Barkan, "XV. Asrın sonunda bazı büyük şehirlerde eşya ve yiyecek fiyatlarının tesbit ve teftişi hususlarını tanzim eden kanunlar", **Tarih Vesikaları**, 1942, vol. III, p.168.

<sup>36</sup> S. Faroqhi, **ibid**, p. 158.

<sup>37</sup> İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri, n.154, p.32, dated by 18 May 1825; This is very clear in the document in BOA, İstanbul Ahkam Defterleri, A. Tabakoğlu, **ibid**, p.300-301 dated by 2-11 August 1761.

<sup>38</sup> O. Nuri Ergin, **ibid**, vol I, p. 391.

<sup>39</sup> The prices were determined according to the kind of animals seasonally. As an example look at BOA, İstanbul Ahkam Defterleri, 8/178/567, A. Tabakoğlu, **ibid**, p. 152-153 dated by 9-18 March 1769.

<sup>40</sup> BOA, İstanbul Ahkam Defterleri, 4/23/64, A. Tabakoğlu, **ibid**, p.117-118 dated by 8-17 August 1755.

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shearing the wools of sheep butchers gave economically harm to the tanners because in fact the right of sale of wool belonged to tanners.<sup>41</sup>

Large parts of the productions of leather were given to the government as an account at lower price. The impact of Ottoman administration on the production of leather was not very strong. The prohibition to the export was only on the certain types of leather which had significant importance on the issue of military needs due to the being materials of war. It is clear that the export of high quality leather was forbidden while standard wares intended for everyday consumption. It shows that the needs to the court and inhabitants of Istanbul were the main reason for limitation, and at times for the prohibition of export trade in leather.

#### *Tanning agents and tanning activities*

Nut-gall (mazi) and acorn-hulls from valonia oaks (palamut) were indispensable tanning agents. As in the case of raw hides, sale of tanning agents to European merchants was creating problem because it was leading to increase in price. In addition to leather tanned by means of these vegetable tanning agents, there were also tawed leathers.<sup>42</sup> Alum was not always an easily marketable commodity. The obligation of officially fixed price in some circumstances was giving harm to the tanners' business. There was also conflict between the sellers of alum and tanners due to unjust increase in prices. It is not certain that there was transference from tanned leather to tawed leather because of the scarcity of valonia oak and relative abundance of alum. In many decree state ordered to send valonia oak to Istanbul in order to respond capital city's needs. If the capital city's artisans did not need it, they could sell to other cities.<sup>43</sup>

In tanneries there were at least 15 or 20 workers under the direction of one master. In every tannery, there were one mill for the grinding of valonia oak and a well. Firstly, skins and hides were washed in abundant water and then, laid down in lime pits. After a while, remaining particulars containing hairs burnt by lime, fats and meat were scratched by a special knife called *kaveleta*. Hides and

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<sup>41</sup> BOA, İstanbul Ahkam Defterleri, 3/360/1297, A. Tabakoğlu, **ibid**, p.105-106, dated by 15-24 March 1755.

<sup>42</sup> John W. Waterer, 'Leather', **History of Technology**, ed.by Charles Singer, London 1957, vol.II, p. 149.

<sup>43</sup> "...husule gelen palamudun cümlesi tüccar yediyle deraadete gelüb...debağ esnafı işlerine yarayacak palamudu iştira eyledikten sonra fazla kalur ve esnafın işlerine gelmeyerek almaktan istinkaf eyledikleri marifeti şer'i ve esnaf marifetiyle mütebeyyin olur ise ol vakitte bu tarafdan diyar-ı ahre furuht olunmasına ruhsat verilmek..." BOA, Cevdet İktisat, n.585, dated by 5 February 1827.

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skins were put on to each other between the particulars of valonia oak, nutgall, and feces of dog and of chicken. When this process was completed, hides were rescratched by *kaveleta*. All of these processes continued so that hides were come to the desired quality. At the end, these tanned skins as kosele, sahtiyen, mesin were fattened by animal fats not to be broken. After softening the hides and skins, they were dyed a variety of colours according to the demand of consumers. The Istanbul price regulations published by Barkan distinguished five varieties of red (kirmizi, al, gulnari, narenci, erguvani), nefli and limoni.<sup>44</sup> In this text there is no indication as to how these colours were achieved.

### *Varieties of leather*

There were three different kinds of called, sahtiyen, mesin, gon. The highest qualified and most precious was sahtiyen which possessed international renown. In Hungary Turkish leather-sahtiyen became so famous that Hungarian tanners became the guardian of the spread of this craft. For example, they went to France to teach tanning craft.<sup>45</sup> There are many stories that Europeans attempted to espionage to learn the details of sahtiyen manufacturing.<sup>46</sup> In late 16th century documents, sahtiyen was regularly mentioned among the goods whose export was forbidden. Sahtiyen seems to have been considered as war material since it was usually mentioned with horses, arms, grain, beeswax, and cotton.<sup>47</sup> While mentioning from the materials of war, Parry noted that in order to overcome difficulties of windage, the Ottomans wrapped their cannon balls in sheep skins, thus making the fire of their guns more accurate.<sup>48</sup>

The guild of sahtiyen merchants was in Mercan Bazaar. In accordance with the decree at the hands of mercants, artisans of tanning and sewing, the hides tanned in Istanbul and those coming from Anatolia and Rumeli as material for every kind of shoes were gathered at Mercan Bazaar after the payment of customs charges.<sup>49</sup> Mesin was relatively cheaper than sahtiyen. Gon was made out of buffalo or cattle hides. It can be argued that restriction on gon were not widespread, for example Carter mentions on skin trade in

<sup>44</sup> Barkan, *ibid*, p. 333.

<sup>45</sup> L. Fekete, "Osmanlı Türkleri ve Macarlar", *Bellekten*, 13, 52, 1949, p. 701.

<sup>46</sup> *Türkiye'de Deri ve Kösele Sanayi*, Türk Ticaret Odaları, Sanayi Odaları ve Ticaret Borsaları Birliği, Ankara 1958, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Faroqhi, *ibid*, p. 167.

<sup>48</sup> V. J. Parry, "Materials of War in Ottoman Empire", *Studies in Economic History*, ed. by M. A. Cook, Oxford University Press 1970, pp 224.

<sup>49</sup> İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri, no:25, dated by 1180/1766, quoted from O.N. Ergin, *ibid*, vol. II, p. 650.

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Dubrovnik at the period between 1500 and 1700 and he adds that together with tanning, other tanning allied trades such as saddlery, fur dressing, and slipper making were developed in Dubrovnik.<sup>50</sup> From the price regulations, it can be seen the differences of prices are according to the quality of the leather and also differences between the high, moderate and low quality same kind of leather.

### **Conclusion**

Alongside Kazlıcesme, it is known that there were tanneries in Eyup, Kasimpasa, Tophane, Uskudar and Beykoz. The leather manufacturing was one of the most widespread and developed branches of profession in Ottoman Empire. Tanners were the most typical example of artisans within *ahi* spirit. Especially in red and yellow sahtiyan, Turkish tanners remained in Europe without competitors. In the second half of the 19th century, the crafts and manufacturing of leather were at the highest position and artisans of this craft were the richest artisans. In 19th century they began to lost their power and prosperity. Tanneries came to the degree of being idle wholly. There were two reasons for the decline; as opposed to the tradition and laws, butchers went so far in gaining profit from the sale of wool, in fact the right of that sale belonged to the tanners. Moreover, the sale of hides to the outsiders led to increase in prices. These existed in former centuries but in 19th century the density of the misuse heightened and tanners came to the level in which they had no power to purchase any hides. The abolishment of *gedik* system also affected to the decline. It should not be forgotten the inability to compete with the rapidly developing European manufacture. In order to give the privileges and prestige of tanners who made service directly to the military power since four-five centuries, some laws were being brought into operation. The sale of hides was taken under the direction of Ministry of Finance.<sup>51</sup>

Before this, in 1864 to develop leather industry, commission of reform (Islahat Komisyonu) was established. Within this commission, the concessions of *gedik* were rebrought. The unification of tanners in five different places of Isatnbul was aimed. With 2000 kise gold capital, tannery company (Debbaglar Sirketi) was established to manufacture at the same quality with European leather.<sup>52</sup> This company improved the production but as a result of

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<sup>50</sup> F. W. Carter, **Dubrovnik(Ragusa: A Classic City State)**, London and Newyork 1972, p. 361.

<sup>51</sup> A document dated by 1284/1867, quoted from O.N. Ergin, **ibid**, vol.II, p. 724-7.

<sup>52</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 725.

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inability to protect the concessions of gedik, in a brief time company was dispersed.

It should not be ignored that the regulations on sanitary conditions increased in 19th century. Within the regulation quarantine in 1838, laws on afforestation of the environment of tanneries and sending of all tanneries and slaughterhouses to outside the city were made. The importance of the control of clearness of these workshops was usually emphasized. In a document dated by 1891, Ministry of Internal Affairs ordered obligatory existence of an official who is responsible from the control of clearness of tanners and slaughterhouses.<sup>53</sup>

In the 19th century generally small factories and administrations continued to leather manufacturing but only for local market. The leather factory of Beykoz was established at the time of Mahmud II and it continued its activities also in the republican era as a state organization. Kazlıcesme protected its fame being leather manufacturing center until 1993. From that date, all leather industry within modern foundations was gathered in Aydinlikoy, Tuzla.

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<sup>53</sup> **Ibid.**, vol.VI, p. 3154.

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