



ERC Working Papers in Economics 01/04

May 2002

**BREAD AND EMPIRE: THE WORKINGS OF GRAIN PROVISIONING IN
ISTANBUL DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

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During the sixteenth century, provisionism emerged as a principle tenet of the Ottoman imperial economic system. The Ottoman state established a complex provisioning network that enveloped the Ottoman territories with the Imperial capital, Istanbul, at its center. The purpose of such a network was to provide the prompt supply of raw materials primarily to the capital city and then the other major urban centers of the Empire. The organization of this network included many institutions and policies that governed the production, procurement, transportation, storage, pricing and redistribution of a variety of goods, ranging from such strategic items as grain and salt to tertiary materials such as gall nuts used in the tanning of leather. The Ottoman State policed its territorial possessions to maintain the proper functioning of this provisioning network and “acted as equalizer and balancer of interests and did not hesitate to intervene in case of disruptions in this network”.¹ Starting with the sixteenth century, the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria, the Rumanian principalities, Thrace, Macedonia, Thessaly, Morea, Egypt and several districts of Anatolia were obliged to earmark a large part of their surplus production in grains, sheep, cattle, horses, butter, wax, and timber for shipment to the Ottoman capital.² Thus, the rigid provisionist policies of the state in turn brought about economic interdependence between various regions of the Ottoman Empire and embodied an imperial division of labor that functioned properly and uninterruptedly until the eighteenth century and even some time later. As far as grain is concerned, as McGowan suggests, this policy “would not be . . . relaxed until the Romanian Principalities escaped from effective Ottoman control.”³

The economic developments in the Ottoman Empire during the period, 1600-1800, have been the subject of great scholarly interest for the past several decades. Ottoman specialists have dwelt particularly upon the broader implications of the process by which the Ottoman economy

* I am grateful to Nil Demet Güngör for her contributions to the improvement of this paper.

¹ Rhoads Murphey, “Provisioning Istanbul: The State and Subsistence in the Early Modern Middle East,” *Food and Foodways*, 2 (1988), p. 217.

² Traian Stoianovich, “Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant”, *Journal of Economic History*, 20 (1960), p. 241.

was integrated to the ever-expanding world economy. Accordingly, the dissolution of classical institutions and practices (e.g., *timar*, guilds, fixed price system, etc.) and the emergence of new ones (e.g., *çiftlik*, tax-farming etc.) have been emphasized at the expense of those traditional institutions and practices that have survived this process. Viewing these developments as the symptoms of a growing decentralization and thus decline of Ottoman imperial administration, scholars have argued that the sway of the Ottoman state over the economic realm gradually faded away parallel to the changing political and fiscal circumstances. This line of inquiry, epitomized in yet another version of the decline paradigm, has been characterized by an implicit tendency to view provisionism as an uninterrupted realm in which private enterprise thrived to the detriment of the state's role in the economy. The unremitting supply of essential goods (e.g., grain) especially to the capital city and perhaps less so to other major urban centers has thus been linked to the growing share of private capital in the marketplace and thus to the withdrawal of the state from the economy.⁴ True, the Ottoman state began to pull out its overwhelming presence in the market by not regulating the supply of raw materials to most of the craft guilds, by not strictly observing its just price policy in the market and by no longer protecting the producers from the increasing competition of European goods. But where the people's bread was concerned, the story was different. As the evidence suggests the state continued its protective role, often at the expense of the merchants, in the continuous supply of grain to the local markets and more particularly to the guilds that were engaged in grain-related activities. Especially in the seat of the Empire, Istanbul, this protectionist role became fully articulated, pervading mainly through the marketing and milling of grain to the baking of bread. Thus, the recent scholarship which has convincingly argued for the dwindling role of the state vis-à-vis the merchants in the economy has failed to offer a satisfactory explanation as to how the provisioning of the major urban

³ Bruce McGowan, *Economic Life in Ottoman Europe*, (Cambridge, 1980), p. 12.

⁴ For the share of private capital in the supply of grain to Istanbul, see Lütfi Güçer, "XVIII. Yüzyıl Ortalarında İstanbul'un İaşesi İçin Lüzumlu Hububatın Temini Meselesi," *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası*, 11 (1949-1950), pp. 397-416. It is important to note that Güçer draws attention to the growing size of private capital in the

centers and especially the capital city was (re)structured and operated during the age of transformation.

A recent study attempts to fill this lacuna at least for the case of Istanbul by arguing that the Ottoman state authorities continued to provide the provisioning of the city merely as a way to garner revenue for the state coffers from the sale of grain.⁵ This policy caused in turn the growing neglect of important issues of bread production and thus mounting complaints on the part of the city's populace. Such an argument certainly has its merits but operates through an unfounded assumption that the regulations for bread production had been previously implemented minutely within the context of provisioning. There had been, it is true, certain promulgations (*kanunname*)⁶ that set the standards for bread production. But measuring the extent to which these regulations had been enforced is no less a challenge than knowing the precise amount of flour or number of bread consumed per diem by the city's population. Thus such an approach falls short in explaining the overwhelming involvement of the state with the affairs, be they fiscal or administrative, of the guild of bakers and other grain-related business organizations during the time-period concerned.

The current paper argues that the state's role in provisioning Istanbul did not show any sign of significant deviance from the traditional patterns during the eighteenth century. Rather, those patterns were fully implemented with a view to bringing the commodity chain of grain under the full sway of the state, a tendency configured prominently in the establishment of a central institution, namely, the Grain Administration (*Zahire Nezareti*), in 1793.⁷ The establishment of such an institution as a response to the growing challenges in the realm of grain provisioning testifies at best that the supply of the people's bread remained one of the principal concerns of

grain provisioning of Istanbul but certainly does not downgrade the role of the state in surveillance and control of this network as misrepresented by some scholars. Cf. Murphey, "Provisioning Istanbul", p. 217.

⁵ Lynne M. Şaşmaz, "Policing Bread Price and Production in Ottoman Istanbul, 1793-1807," in *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin*, 24 (2000), pp. 21-40.

⁶ The Promulgation of Mehmed IV, issued in 1680 (1041), can be found in Osman Nuri Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umur-i Belediyye*, p. 408. An abridged version of this particular promulgation has been discovered in a library in Çorum and published by A. Uysal under the title of *Zanaatkarlar Kanunu (Kanun-name-i Ehl-i Hiref)*, (Ankara, 1982), pp. 88-94.

the Ottoman rulers for reasons such as the continued legitimacy or public tranquility, and thereby the most tightly regulated aspect of the Ottoman economy until the dawn of modern times. Given this background, the paper looks at the local conditions of grain provisioning as well as some specific institutions that channeled the grain to the consumers in the form of bread in the imperial capital during the second half of the eighteenth century. By shifting the attention to the local conditions, this study not only aims to map out the workings of the interlocking relations between the state and producers but also to catch a glimpse of the material conditions characterizing the daily lives of the laboring populations in Istanbul during the age of transformation.

Government Institutions

The administration of grain provisioning traditionally involved numerous government actors both at the center and in the provinces. During the eighteenth century, there were two principal government offices involved closely with the administration of grain provisioning in the imperial capital. As it had been in the past, the first of these was the office of the judge (*kadi*). The other was the government itself, namely the *Divan-ı Hümayun* (the Imperial Council), which had been the office of last resort in the past but later became increasingly more involved with the local affairs of provisioning. Perhaps another important development during this period was the conspicuous absence, at least in the group of documents surveyed for this paper,⁸ of market inspectors (*muhtesib*). The market inspectors had played a central role in all stages, especially, the control and governance of provisioning mechanisms (e.g., the implementation of the fixed price system (*narh*) and the inspection of production quality) in the capital city in the seventeenth

⁷ Tevfik Güran, “İstanbul’un İfaesinde Devletin Rolü (1793-1839),” in his *19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Tarımı*, (İstanbul, 1998), pp. 15-42. See especially pp. 17-24.

⁸ Documents of this study were obtained from the following documentary collection: *İstanbul Ahkam Defterleri, İstanbul Esnaf Tarihi*, 2 Vols. (ed.) Ahmet Kal’a, İstanbul: İstanbul Araştırmaları Merkezi, 1997-1998. The originals of these documents are located in the Prime Ministry’s Ottoman Archives [*Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi*; BOA] in İstanbul. For all practical purposes, throughout this study these documents will be referred to as BOA, Ahkam Defterleri to be followed by the original catalogue number of the cited document.

century. As shown by the late Robert Mantran, this office had also been responsible for the redistribution of raw materials including grain amongst the guild members.⁹ But during the eighteenth century, these functions of the inspection office seem to have been transferred to the judge and the wardens (*kethüda*) of the guilds. It is very likely that this development was part of the process that led to the total abolition of this institution in 1826 and the establishment of a central institution, namely *İhtisab Nazırlığı*, in its stead with a new work agenda and administrative structure.¹⁰ Until the contrary documented to be true, one can assume that the local judge of Istanbul together with his various agencies (*naib*) throughout the city and the Imperial Council were the primary official mechanisms in charge of the capital city's provisioning.

In principle, the judge of Istanbul was equipped with full authority to administer the provisioning of the city, from the moment when the ships unloaded grain in the harbors to the point when the consumers purchased bread from the local bakeries and stores in the neighborhood. Although he was not directly involved with monitoring and supervising the workings of the provisioning network at the local level, his was the principal office to be resorted to when any disruption occurred in these processes. Thus the active involvement of the judge in provisioning affairs seems to have begun when disruptions in the local mechanisms of grain redistribution or bread production occurred or when disputes arose intra or inter guilds. He was the primary actor in resolving these disputes and producing temporal or permanent solutions. When he was unable to resolve a case, he forwarded it to the Imperial Council. There was also a growing tendency on the part of the bakers, similar to the merchants, to bypass the judge and take their cases directly to the Council, which in turn would issue decrees to be implemented through the hands of the judge.

Once the grain reached Istanbul, various representatives, *naibs*, authorized by the judge of Istanbul, performed on his behalf various obligations. A *naib* (*Kapan Naibi*) presided over the bargaining negotiations in his office, namely *çardak*, where the price of grain arriving at the harbor

⁹ Robert Mantran, *Istanbul dans la Seconde Moitié du XVIIe Siècle*, (Paris, 1962), pp. 143-148 and 318-323.

was determined between the ship captains and the heads of the guilds. This official exacted certain dues in return for his mediating role and charged it not to the guildsmen but to the merchants who brought grain to the harbor. The *naiibs* were also responsible for administering justice in fiscal matters between the merchants and official commissioners, namely, *emins*, in charge of various duties such as storing or weighing the grain at the point of disembarkation. The merchants paid a tax called *resm-i kantariyye* (weighing tax) to the commissioners and the latter were not supposed to abuse their position and exact further payments. It was not unusual during the eighteenth century that the *emins* aligned themselves with the *naiibs* and tended to pressure the merchants for extra payments in cash or in kind, which led the merchants to implore the government to take the necessary measures. In one occasion the ship captains appealed to the Imperial Council with a complaint that the *emin* who was in charge of weighing the flour in the harbor (Kapan) has recently asked them to give 1-2 *kiles* of grain for every 100 kiles (1 *kile*=25,9 kg.) in addition to the standard due (*resm-i kantariyye*). This led the ship captains to appeal firstly to the judge and then to the Imperial Council.¹¹

The arbitrary policies of the government officials in the harbor gained a chronic character during the eighteenth century. Merchants frequently bypassed the office of the judge and appealed collectively to the Imperial Council to file their complaints.¹² The Council, in turn, summoned the merchants and the *emins* together with the *naiibs* to the court on a certain date. The cases on hand suggest that the Council was all too familiar with such incidents and used a generic formula to address the matter: merchants were found justified in their complaints and the judge of Istanbul was ordered to look into the matter. Whether the orders issued by the Council were ever implemented by the judges is hard to say. But the fact that the abuse of the office especially by the *emins* implied alienation of revenues from the state prompts us to believe that the government, plagued by the diminution of revenues at the time, came forward to restore the

¹⁰ İlber Ortaylı, *Türkiye İdare Tarihi*, (Ankara, 1979), pp. 203-204.

¹¹ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 8/244/796.

¹² BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 2/115/385.

situation when the loss posed a significant threat to the Central Treasury. As a matter of fact, two years after the Grain Administration was created in 1793, the government resorted to the creation of an independent treasury (*Zahire Hazinesi*) for this institution with a view to keeping a close eye on the revenues generated by grain provisioning.¹³ In this context, the fees exacted by various official commissioners in the port were also clearly defined in the charter for the establishment of the Grain Treasury. There the scheme of fees and taxes was redrawn with a view to restricting the room for the officials to maneuver.

What made the job of the local *kadi* and his agents more complicated during the period under consideration was the circulation of many official decrees, held by certain individuals to operate independently in the market. These official decrees –secured from the government-- authorized these people to purchase grain from the harbor or produce bread without any affiliation to a guild. Often the guild members appealed directly to the government to rule out these documents and take measures to ban the holder of these decrees from interfering in their business. In such cases the government called on the parties to present their cases and the decision on these grievances was then passed on to the judge to be implemented and monitored. Another important source of confusion had to do with the way the official documents issued during the reign of a sultan was not recognized during the reign of another. The original decrees were not annulled but the holders had to ask for their renewal when a threat emerged.¹⁴ The second half of the eighteenth century was a period during which such instances precipitated.

One area to look at for the precipitation of such problems was the tax-farming policy of the Ottoman state at that time. The provisioning of grain to the city was not insulated from the official policy of the state to turn its resources of revenue to tax farms (*mukata*) during the eighteenth century. Many offices involved with the reception, taxation, redistribution and supervision of the grain supply were farmed out to the private entrepreneurs for a short-term

¹³ Yavuz Cezar, “Osmanlı Devleti’nin Mali Kurumlarından Zahire Hazinesi ve 1795 (1210) Tarihli Nizamnamesi,” *Toplum ve Bilim*, 6 (1978), pp. 11-156.

¹⁴ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 4/119/368.

(*iltizam*) or on a life-long basis (*malikane*). The extent to which the administration of these offices was exposed to misuse and abuse of the tax-farmers is yet to be traced by Ottoman specialists and the measures taken by the state to curb such tendencies can only be speculated for the moment. As the research of several scholars has already demonstrated, the state had adopted confiscation as a major method to suppress tendencies on the part of government figures to increase their fortunes and had even expanded it to retain the properties of charitable foundations by the late eighteenth century. Had it not been for the constant application of confiscation, it would be impossible to finance comprehensive war efforts let alone the growing expenses of the bureaucracy during this century.¹⁵ A detailed study of the history of tax-farming along the lines drawn by Çizakça for the seventeenth century¹⁶ is needed for the eighteenth century, which would illustrate the frequencies in the requisition and resale of tax-farms by the state. The results of such a study would then be used to discern the general patterns to the workings of tax-farming and then perhaps make some extrapolations on the degree to which the provisioning-related offices were exposed to government interference during the eighteenth century. Münir Aktepe documented many years ago that the state acted liberally in changing the status of a tax-farm from that of a short-term (*iltizam*) to life-long (*malikane*) or vice versa, depending on the circumstances.¹⁷ There is no good reason to assume that the grain-related offices were insulated from this pragmatic behavior of the state.

Ship Owners and Captains (*Ashab-ı Sefayin, navluncılar*)

The ships in charge of transporting the grain from the locus of expropriation were either hired by the state from various foreign shipping agencies or operated individually by private merchants who were contracted this job through a formal agreement. In the eighteenth century, both methods seem to have prevailed. The documents surveyed for this paper divide the ships

¹⁵ Mehmet Genç, "XVIII. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Ekonomisi ve Savaş," *Yapıt*, 4 (1984), p. 60.

¹⁶ Murat Çizakça, "Tax-Farming and Financial Decentralization in the Ottoman Economy, 1520-1697," *Journal of European Economic History*, 22 (1993), pp. 219-250.

¹⁷ Münir Aktepe, *Patrona İsyam (1730)*, (İstanbul, 1958), p. 4.

arriving at the imperial dockyard in terms of their size into two types, small and large. The grain sold to the bakers were transported primarily by large ships from the distant locations while small ships carried grain from the nearby regions (Tekirdağ etc.) to be sold primarily to the parties who were not affiliated with the guild of bakers. There was no strict observation of a predetermined list of prices (*narh*) and the prices were determined on the basis of multiple cost factors, ranging from shipment charges to the various fees paid by the ship captains upon arrival. The ships, operated by private merchants, did not unload the grain until the bargaining process was complete. Although there was no written rule as to who were to purchase the grain, it was customarily agreed that the shipments would be delivered to the members of the bakers' guild (*Habbazan*). From the mid-eighteenth century, it became a pattern that certain individuals, not affiliated with a particular guild, appeared at the point of disembarkation and tried to negotiate with the ship captains to receive grain. When the ship captains, authorized by the state, failed to deliver the grain to the guild of bakers they were held financially accountable for the losses.

A major factor that hampered the work of the ship captains was related to the changing attitude of the state to the craft guilds in the city. The declining role of the state in the supply of raw materials to the other guilds led the members of these guilds to rely growingly on the material supplied by the merchants. The guildsmen in return marketed their manufactured goods according to the market principle. On one occasion, the merchants who brought grain to Istanbul from a distant location by their ships complained to the Imperial Council that they had been buying sail cloth from a workshop in the old dockyard (*tersane-i atik*) but recently the members of the sail-cloth makers' guild stopped selling them the sail-cloth and they began to sell it to a store that belonged to some Frenchmen (*Fransa milletinden bir efrençi karhanasına idhal ve kendüye şerik edüp*). This in turn pushed them to search for ways to obtain sail-cloth from other areas which caused delays in their operations.¹⁸

Millers (*Hınta Döğici, Değirmenci Esnafı*)

As it had been in the past, the state strictly controlled the number of mills operating throughout the city during the eighteenth century. The mills (mainly horse-driven) continued to be established in areas in the close vicinity of the port where the grain was unloaded with a view to reducing the cost of transportation. But the evidence suggests that the construction of a new mill was not a favorable practice during this period. It was only when the number of mills in a given district failed to cater to the needs of bakers in this location and such a necessity was verified by the bakers themselves that the local judge or his representative took the proposal for the establishment of a new mill to the Imperial Council. The latter took into account a number of factors to make its decision for the construction of a new mill in a given location since a new mill meant the reallocation of the grain earmarked for the guildsmen operating there. The amount of grain to be given to the guildsmen was determined against the size of the populace of a district. The state calculated the amount of grain arriving in the city's ports on the basis of the needs of each district and readjusted this amount according to the changing size of this district's population, which might have also resulted in the establishment of new bakeries in this particular location. Each bakery was allocated 4 *kiles* of grain per day and when another mill was established in a location, this amount could be adjusted by an increase of 1 *kile* per day. The officials apparently kept their accounts on the basis of the daily amount of grain delivered to the bakers and calculations were made accordingly.¹⁹

The major quarters of the city had mills operating independently of the guilds. And those mills usually belonged to the foundations. The decision to build a bakery next to these mills rested with the Imperial Council.²⁰ In small districts the guildsmen usually had a mill annexed to their bakeries. The bakers, in other words, had to mill the grain into flour by themselves. Producers were authorized to own two horses to be used in the operation of the mill. These horses were

¹⁸ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 8/67/212.

¹⁹ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 1/98/439.

²⁰ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 5/330/974.

attached to the *gedik* (the fixed capital) of the bakery under consideration.²¹ The standard number of grinding stones (*horos*) for each mill operating in the city, whether annexed to bakeries or run as independent businesses, had traditionally been limited to four. The adding of another stone to a mill required special permission of the Imperial Council. In such a case, a mill (annexed to a bakery) located in Bebek, after renovation, was granted permission to increase its number of grinding stones from four to five. The authorization took place after tortuous negotiations between the warden of the guild of bakers, the warden of the millers and the local judge. After the permission was approved by the Imperial Council, it was stated as a provision at the end of the document that this case should not set a precedent for the other millers and any appeals for adding another grinding stone to an existent mill should be forwarded to the Imperial Council for consideration.²²

Bread-Makers (*Habbazan, Etmekçiler*) and the Other Grain-Related Craftsmen

There is not any precise information available about the number of bakers. Nor is there any quantitative data on the bakeries in greater Istanbul during the eighteenth century. Given the fact that every bakery was registered with the Office of Head Accountant (*Başmuhasebe*),²³ a perusal of these sources would provide us with relevant figures. This will be attempted in the later stages of our research. For the time being, certain parameters can be established on the basis of available information concerning various districts. In Kartal for example there were eight bakeries,²⁴ while in Büyük Çekmece the number was limited to two.²⁵ In Eyüb, there were six bakeries²⁶ while in Silivri the number was four.²⁷ In Şile, the number of bakeries was seven.²⁸

²¹ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 11/295/907.

²² BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 11/166/508. It should be mentioned that there was a guild specializing in the installment and repair of grinding stones, which was called “yapucular esnafı”. They were located in Eyüb. BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 5/308/924.

²³ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 3/152/572.

²⁴ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 1/98/439.

²⁵ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 7/43/139.

²⁶ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 1/217/977.

²⁷ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 7/82/259.

²⁸ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 7/102/312.

The principal actors in the production of bread were organized in the guild of bakers (*habbazan*). The members of the guild received the grain from the port (*Kapan-ı Dakik*) and took it to the mills in their own district. Typically, seven Muslim and seven non-Muslim guildsmen amongst the elders had to be present together with the warden and *yığitbaşs* of the guild at the point where the grain was unloaded and discharged to the guild.²⁹ Each master was then assigned a fixed amount of grain and was supposed to take it to the miller. The guild members were subjected to a series of rules and regulations as set in their rule-book (*nizamname*). Each religious group within the guild elected their own administrative heads (*yığitbaşs*), who cooperated closely with the guild warden (*kethüda*) in legal and administrative cases that involved the guild as a whole. The wardens were elected and deposed through cooperation between the guild members and the judge. In cases of conflict, the two parties appealed to the Imperial Council for intervention.³⁰ It should also be mentioned that the dismissal of a guild master from the guild of bakers followed more or less the same procedure.³¹ The relations between the guilds and the Imperial Council on issues of grain allocation and taxation, among others, were coordinated by the wardens who worked in close cooperation with the *yığitbaşs*. The elder masters of the guild (*esnaf ihtiyarları*) were also involved with the administrative affairs of the guild. They usually accompanied the warden and *yığitbaşs* in front of the judge or the Imperial Council.

In most of the districts, the bakers were organized in a local guild. When a problem emerged, the masters acted in unity through their administrators and took decisions collectively. As in the case of the bakers in Eyüb, when the bread produced by the bakers within the walled city began to be marketed in their field of operation, the masters from each bakery came together to discuss the matter and eventually took their grievances against the bakers guild of the walled city to the Imperial Council.³² If the problem posed a common threat to all the bakers, the administrators of the bakers guilds in two or more districts cooperated to resolve the matter.

²⁹ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 2/80/271.

³⁰ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 6/122/345.

³¹ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 5/340/1007.

Such cases usually involved the growing circulation of unauthorized grain through the merchants. The guilds of two districts filed charges against the merchants (*mubtekir*) and the bakers who purchased grain from them.³³ The members of guilds from multiple locations joined forces also when there was a discernible tendency on the part of the populations to make their breads in their homes. Such tendencies among the populations attracted the attention of the bakers especially when the non-guilded individuals appeared in the marketplace selling bread in baskets. These tendencies were commonplace especially in times of *kaht ü gala*.³⁴ This is not to suggest that the relations between all the bakers guilds throughout the greater Istanbul were organic. In districts with limited number of bakeries, the grievances between the bakers were resolved in the court of the judge usually with the participation of guild administrators from the neighboring location.³⁵ There was also some degree of cooperation between the masters of the bakers guild and the master of guilds specializing in other baked products such as *börek*, *çörek*, *gözleme*, *simit*, *lokma* etc. There is no evidence to argue that the latter guilds were subordinate or administratively attached as *yamak* to the bakers guild. To the contrary, the documents suggest that these guilds were rather autonomous in their administrative and fiscal affairs. But, in certain cases when a member of the *börekçi* and *çörekçi* guild attempted to open a new shop or shops without the authorization of his guild, the administrators of the *börekçi* guild sought the cooperation of the bakers guild in pursuing legal action. In such a case, when a few individuals who owned several shops in the market of Karaman (*intra muros*) tried to open a few others, the wardens and *yığıtbaşıs* of the *börekçi* guild filed their complaint to the judge and then to the Imperial Council in the company of the wardens, *yığıtbaşıs* and elders of the guild of bakers.³⁶

The bakeries within which the bread-makers practiced their craft belonged to charitable foundations and the turning of a foundation property to a bakery required the special permission

³² BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 1/217/977.

³³ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 7/117/354.

³⁴ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 2/227/763.

³⁵ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 7/43/139.

³⁶ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 4/119/367.

of the Imperial Council. The master bakers as tenants of bakeries were banned from making any structural change in these buildings. When a tenant wanted to expand his work space or rebuild an additional oven he had to negotiate with the principal administrator of the foundation (*nazır*) and occasionally with the acting administrator, namely (*mütevelli*) who was in fact not supposed to modify the original contents of the foundation charter (*vakfiyye*).³⁷ The administrators of the foundations were also responsible for the transactions over the shares to bakeries. In a specific case, one of the five shareholders to a bakery deceased and the *mütevelli* having requisitioned the share of the deceased sold it immediately to another individual without holding an auction. The holders of the other four shares complained to the *naib* of Kartal (attached to the judge of Üsküdar) that the amount paid by the new holder was far below (75 *kurus*) the real value and therefore the sale should be renewed and be realized by an auction. Despite the objections of the first buyer, the auction was held and the share was sold for quadruple the previous price (280 *kurus*). The new auction was not recognized by the first buyer until the Imperial Council intervened to officially endorse the second transaction.³⁸

The bakeries were designed in a way that enabled the bakers to sell their products directly from their workplace. But most bakers marketed the bread through the neighborhood shops (*bakkal, helvacı, leblebici* etc.). They were also authorized to establish certain number of outlets (*iskemle*), whether mobile or fixed, in various markets of the city and in pre-designated points (*mahall-i mu'ayyen*) outside their district. The average number of outlets permitted for a bakery seems to have been eleven³⁹ which included both outlet shops and mobile agents. The proposal for instituting an outlet was submitted to the guild administration either by the baker himself or by the members of other guilds who needed a supplier of bread within or around their market. The proposal was reviewed by the guild administrators and often approved after certain requirements were met. The final decision for the establishment of an outlet store, however,

³⁷ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 1/161/717.

³⁸ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 4/131/411.

³⁹ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 3/152/572.

remained with the administrator of the foundation to which the commercial building belonged. The documents surveyed for this paper suggest that new outlets were usually created in the markets of guilds upon the demand of the members of the guild operating in this market. For example, the guild of cloth-printers (*basmaçılar*) in Yeni Kapu had been receiving their bread from a bakery in Haseki. But recently the members of this guild requested that there was an urgent need for the establishment of a bread shop in their work area. This request was approved by the administrator of the Ayasofya foundation on the provision that the members of the cloth-printers' guild would make a payment of 3 akçes per day to the foundation, the proprietor of the building where the cloth-printers (*basmaçılar*) were located. An outlet store for the bakery in Yeni Kapu was established in a location designated by the cloth-printers within the building, from which the bread, carried by horses from the bakery in Yeni Kapu, was supplied to the guild members.⁴⁰ It emerges as a pattern in the documents that such outlets received bread from the bakery twice a day, one in the morning and another one in the evening.⁴¹

During the eighteenth century, the proprietorship of nearly all the bakeries in the city belonged to charitable foundations, whether private or public. The bakers rented out these buildings through a contract signed individually with the administrators of the foundations (*naẓır*). The bakers showed an affidavit to rent the building but they apparently did not have to bring guarantors to sign the contract. During the time period concerned, the tenants of bakeries often faced difficulties in paying their rents on time but in either of the cases surveyed for this paper, the foundation administrators did not seem to have invoked the question of guarantors. When conflicts arose over the question of rent between the tenants and the proprietors, the latter appealed firstly to the local judge and, if the case did not settle, to the Imperial Council. For instance, the proprietor of a bakery located in Haslar complained to the Council that his tenant had not paid his rent for a long time. The Council brought the case to the attention of the local judge and ordered him to make sure that all the rents that had not been paid until then be paid in

⁴⁰ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 6/241/675.

a lump sum and the tenant jailed for several days.⁴² Not all the tenants were as lucky. In yet another occasion, when a tenant operating a *çörekçi* shop failed to pay his rents for a certain period of time, he was evacuated forcefully by the *mütevelli* of the foundation. The members of the *çörekçi* guild, who seemed to have not objected to this act at the beginning, went on to file a complaint to the local judge when the *mütevelli* rented out the shop to someone who had no formal affiliation with the guild of *çörekçiler*. They argued that such an act violates the principles according to which this shop was established. These principles stipulate that the shop could only be operated as a *çörekçi* shop and rented to an individual with formal affiliation to the guild of *çörekçiler* (*çörekçi fırını olmakla ibka ve taifei mezbureye icar*). The guildsmen asked that the official document stipulating these conditions had been burned in a fire and therefore should be renewed. The arguments and requests of the guildsmen seem to have been honored and the shop was retained with a view to being rented out to a member of the guild.⁴³

The delays in rent payment increased the potential for intervention by external forces, be they the foundation administrator or the bullies from the neighborhood. Many documents that address the grievances of the bakers with the outsiders (*hamdest* or *naebi*) in front of the Imperial Council cite the prompt payment of rents as the primary reason why those outsiders should be prevented from intervening in the affairs of a baker. In such an incident, a baker who had been regularly making his rent payments to a foundation appealed to the local judge with a complaint that some individuals had recently begun to threaten to evacuate his bakery.⁴⁴ Forced evacuation or threats of such nature were not unusual during the period concerned. One of the major reasons that prompted certain individuals to resort to such an action was the failure of the bakers to pay their debts (*ma'lumu'l mikdar deynun mukabili*) on time.⁴⁵ It was also of common occurrence

⁴¹ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 7/43/139.

⁴² BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 7/45/146.

⁴³ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 4/156/482 and 4/258/783.

⁴⁴ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 2/44/161.

⁴⁵ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 11/261/803.

that a baker was threatened by the other bakers for closely observing the set price for bread.⁴⁶ For the above case, although there is no specific reference to the cause of threat, the judge apparently issued an official decree (*ilam*) to stop the harassment and intervention, but to no avail. The case was then brought to the attention of the Imperial Council which granted an official decree to the baker.⁴⁷

Although the presence of a guild signified for solidarity among the practitioners of the same craft, the guildsmen behaved opportunistically when conditions were favorable. When a bakery was closed down temporarily because of intervention, the bakers in the neighborhood attempted to take advantage of the situation by increasing the volume of production in their shops. It was also not unusual that the owners of neighborhood shops brought bread from bakeries from a different district to sell in their shops.⁴⁸ It was also a common occurrence that when a bakery underwent restoration or renovation, other bakeries tried to seize its various outlets throughout the district. But the official rule stipulated that the bakery preserve its rights to these outlets and continue to sell bread when it resumed its work.⁴⁹

Since the income derived from those commercial buildings was used by foundations to finance certain charitable services, such as to meet the expenses of a *zawiya* or a mosque, the people (e.g. *zawiya* members or the elders of a community) who were directly affected by a disruption in these services appealed to the local judge and in some cases directly to the Imperial Council to eliminate the sources of disruption. Such disruptions were certainly not identified with the forceful evacuation of a baker from his building alone. They occurred when another baker in the neighborhood or in the vicinity began to sell bread in the field of operation designated for the bakery whose revenues benefited the mosque or the members of the *zawiya*.⁵⁰ The bakers responded to such situations in a variety of ways. They seem on the whole not to have sought the

⁴⁶ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 9/161/597.

⁴⁷ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 2/44/161.

⁴⁸ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 9/126/453.

⁴⁹ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 7/90/285.

⁵⁰ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 1/1/1.

assistance of the guild when they were subjected to interventions that involved the failure to pay a debt. Such collaboration between a baker and the guild administration occurred primarily when a bakery was established outside the knowledge of the guild in the vicinity of the bakery concerned. In districts where there were only a few bakeries and no particular guild structure to the relations between the bakers, such threats were warded off through coordinated action between the proprietors of the bakeries and the bakers. The administrators of foundations tried to curb any attempt that would endanger their sources of income. In such a case, the *mütevelli* of a foundation in the district of Çekmece-i Kebir, who owned two bakeries in this location, mobilized his tenants (bakers) to prevent the opening of a new bakery in the area. The construction of this new bakery was apparently financed by the *shaiikh* of a religious order (Gülşeni Shaiykh), who argued in the courtroom that the rent from this bakery would be used to pay for the expenses of the people affiliated with his order. When the bakers and the foundation administrator took their case to court, the judge failed to reconcile the differences of the two parties and no solution was reached.⁵¹ The case was then forwarded to the Imperial Council, which ordered an inquiry into the matter and asked for the opinions of the local religious scholars (*ulema*) and the leading members of the community to be taken.⁵² When this inquiry was completed, the decision was taken in favor of the Gülşeni Shaikh who had already built the bakery. Ironically, several years later, the same figure appeared before the Imperial Council for the reason that he had been unable to collect the rent for this bakery for a long time and he failed to evacuate his tenant from the building. As before, he managed to secure a decision in his favor.⁵³

A striking feature of the bakers guild during the eighteenth century was the neatly defined fields of operation of each bakery. The evidence suggests that a bakery in a given district often had rights to supply bread to other districts through mobile and fixed agencies. In the case of a

⁵¹ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 5/286/868.

⁵² BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 5/289/877.

⁵³ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 7/45/146.

bakery located in Rumelihisar, the owner had an outlet in Fener but a tenant of a bakery located in Sariyer began bringing his bread to this location for sale. When the issue was brought to the attention of the local *kadi*, the latter ordered an inquiry into the matter. It was found that the owner of the bakery in Rumelihisar had been promptly fulfilling his responsibilities by bringing bread of full content (*tammü'l vezn*) to Fener in the summer and winter seasons (*sayf ü şitada*) and therefore should be protected from the intervention of the others.⁵⁴ It should also be mentioned that during this period, the bakeries in Üsküdar, Galata, and Fındıklı were sending their bread via small boats to Ortaköy to the detriment of the business of the bakeries in this district.⁵⁵

The growing size of the city's population and thus the construction of new houses directly affected the business of certain bakers. Those whose bakeries had been previously accessible to people seemed to have lost some business. Accordingly, they resorted to the creation of outlets in various parts of the district and the city. Such attempts caused serious conflicts between guild members since the dispatch of mobile agents to the other parts of the city outside the knowledge of the guild was interpreted as a direct violation of guild principles. In one particular incident, the tenants of two bakeries located in Çekmece-i Kebir appeared before the Imperial Council for the reason that one of them had his bakery in a location that prevented him from finishing the selling of his bread that he had been producing per day. So he began to send vendors to other parts of the district to market his bread. The other baker began to prevent the vendors from marketing bread in his field of operation, which caused the first baker to take his case to the judge. Having failed to resolve their conflict in the courtroom, the two bakers were summoned to appear before the Council, which issued in turn a decree in favor of the second baker.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 9/198/731.

⁵⁵ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 5/279/846.

⁵⁶ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 7/43/139.

The ways in which the bakers or members of any other grain-related guild for that matter structured their argumentation on a particular case before government officials sheds light on the mind-set of the producers in the city. The guild of *çörekçiler* made a collective appeal to the Imperial Council in 1778 because certain individuals had begun to open, outside the knowledge of the guild, *çörekçi* shops in the residential area which were not suitable for the establishment of such shops. The first time they appealed to the judge, they argued that the opening of such shops involved the risk of fire and therefore should be prohibited. Apparently the first plea of the guild was inconclusive and further shops were opened. This time the guild took the case directly to the Imperial Council and argued that the presence of these shops not only involved the risk of fire in the neighborhood but also contradicted the principles of the guild. They supported their case with a further argument that the opening of such shops would result in the shortage of grain and then a rise in bread prices, which seems to have prompted the authorities to take action on the matter.⁵⁷

The fire hazard was often quoted in the documents as one of the reasons why the establishment of a new bakery should not be permitted in a given district. When a guild authorized its members to open a bakery elsewhere, it paid particular attention to the fact that the location was protected from fire hazard. In cases when the guild members attempted to establish shops without guild permission, the guild could object to such attempts on the grounds that the location posed a fire risk. In one particular case, when two enterprising figures attempted to open new *çörekçi* shops within a residential area, the guild administrators filed a complaint to the local judge on the grounds that such an attempt to open shops in a residential area involved the risk of fire and should be prevented or else it would set a precedent for others.⁵⁸ It should also be mentioned that the question of fire was raised when someone attempted to open a shop in a market where wood-related crafts were located. There is one interesting case in which an individual rented a space, previously used for the manufacturing of pistols, to turn it to a *gözdemeci*

⁵⁷ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 9/212/794.

shop. The guild of *çörekçiler* opposed this attempt on the grounds that the opening of this shop would threaten the business of shops in the market which were occupied by craftsmen specializing in *kundakçı, vezneçi, kutucu* etc. The warden of the guild stated that “*dükkan mezkurda lokma ve gözlemcilik işlenmek iktiza eder ise mażallahu teala ateş isabeti mukarrer olur...*”⁵⁹

Various guilds that specialized in baked products were not supposed to intervene in the work of one another. The guild of bakers were prohibited to produce *simit* or *çörek* while the those specializing in the production of *simit* and *çörek* were not permitted to produce bread. These interferences were considered to be direct violations of guild order.⁶⁰ The appearance of the bakers individually in front of the judge and even the Imperial Council occurred also when a baker was accused of infringing on the rights of guilds specializing in other baked products. Such a case occurred when a baker in Galata complained to the Imperial Council that the members of the *francalacı* guild (*francala* or *has ekmeğ*: lighter loaf made from a finer flour) have been pressuring him to sell the *gedik* of his bakery; they threatened him that they would otherwise not let him sell his *francala*. Due to this threat the bakery which belonged to the *Evqaf-ı Hümayun* had to remain closed for a year. The reason of the contenders was that the production of *francala* in Galata was the business of the guild of the *francala* makers and the establishment of a bakery and the production of *francala* could not take place outside the knowledge of the guild of *francala* makers. The Imperial Council concluded the case by prohibiting the baker to produce *francala*. He was granted an official decree to continue his business and sell regular bread (*nan-ı aziz*)⁶¹ according to the daily set price (*narh-ı rużi*).⁶²

Little is known about the relations between the guild masters and the journeymen and other laborers within the workplace. One document on hand suggests that in the year 1787, the

⁵⁸ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 5/23/72.

⁵⁹ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 4/119/368.

⁶⁰ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 7/82/259.

⁶¹ There were several kinds of bread produced by the bakers. The most common was the “sacred bread” (*nan-ı aziz*) which had to weigh between 100 and 110 *dirbems* (1 *dirbem*=3-4 gr.). The bread had to be full in content (*tammü'l vezn*) and white (*beyaz*). BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 5/340/1007.

⁶² BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 7/273/840.

wardens of the guild of bakers and millers made a collective appeal to the Imperial Council that many of their laborers had recently returned to their native lands and that there was a significant shortage of labor. They stated that the departure of so many laborers had nothing to do with the payment of wages as they had always made prompt payment to the laborers. Since the shortage of labor hampered their work, they argued that the state should take measures to prevent the departure of laborers. They also pondered on the possibility that their workers be considered for exemption from participating in military campaigns.⁶³

Where the relations within the workplace are concerned, perhaps the most striking feature of the bakers guild was the unity in action amongst the members of different ethno-religious backgrounds. Unlike other guilds with both Muslims and non-Muslims members, the bakers guild seems not to have experienced a significant strife between these two well-defined groups. A piecemeal explanation for this situation consists in the fact that the members of this guild continued to be dependent on the state for their raw materials.

As for the relations of the bakers with the merchants; the guild of bakers began to conduct its business more intensively with the merchants during the eighteenth century. The grievances between the two parties focused not so much on the quantity or quality of the grain as on the content of the coinage used in transactions. The bakers purchased the grain from the merchants in the Kapan and usually made their payments in the form of gold coinage of various sorts such as “*Macar, yıldız ve Tunus ve bunun emsali altın*” that were circulating freely in the market. In several occasions, the merchants complained to the Imperial Council that the gold coins given by the bakers were usually poor in content (*zayıf and nakisü'l vezn*) and they were not accepted by the people in the Danubian provinces (Akkirman, Karahürmet, Köstence, Münkälibe and Varna). Therefore, they had to turn these gold coins into *akçes* and then purchase gold of good content in which case there was a discrepancy of 15-20 *kurus* in every 100 *kurus*. They argued that the price of grain should continue to be set according to the gold standard but the bakers should use white

⁶³ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 11/244/747.

akçe in their transactions with the merchants.⁶⁴ A similar petition was submitted by the merchants who brought grain from Egypt. They mentioned that they have been purchasing grain from the producers in this region with white *akçe* and gold (*tammü'l vezn*) but when they sold their loads in Istanbul the buyers made their payments in gold of poor content (*Islambol ve Mısr Altunları ve Macar ve yaldız ve Tunus misülliü altunlar*). When they exchange those gold coins with white *akçes*, they were losing 15 to 20 *kuruş* in every 100 *kuruş*.⁶⁵ The Imperial Council which did not offer any solution in the first case decided to recall all coins with poor contents to be handed in to the local money changers (*sarrafs*) or to the Imperial Mint in order to be melted (*noksan kıratını sahib rayiç bahasından tenzıl ve tebdil ve bedelini sağ ve sahib akçe kabz eylemek üzere*).

As it had been in the past, the merchants were also frequently referred to as *madrabaz* or *mubtekir* in the documents, meaning that they were involved in illicit activities. Leaving aside the cases of long-distance merchants, there were many cases when the local merchants availed themselves of any shortage of bread in the market and began to transport bread from neighboring locations. In the same vein, many local merchants also began to appear frequently on the commercial routes, selling barley and hay to the travelers. These prompted the authorized dealers in barley and hay to appeal directly to the Imperial Council to prevent the merchants from interfering in their business.⁶⁶

CONCLUSIONS:

Despite the increasing problems in the procurement of the necessary supplies of grain from the Black Sea coast and the Danubian provinces, the state continued to lay claim to the grain produced in these locations. When the problems reached a level that made it impossible for the state to rely on the procurements from these locations, the authorities did not hesitate to create new areas elsewhere in the Empire to supplement the amount of grain needed by the army,

⁶⁴ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 6/272/780.

⁶⁵ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 6/280/806.

⁶⁶ BOA, Ahkam Defterleri, 1/268/1197.

the palace and the population of the city. The eighteenth century was a period during which such relocations were frequently employed in response to the changing political and fiscal circumstances in various parts of the Empire. Thus Istanbul seems to have experienced periodic shortages but not undergone a chronic dearth throughout the eighteenth century. Generally, the continued involvement of the state in surveillance and control of the grain provisioning might have benefited the central treasury, contributed to the lasting of the public confidence in the sultan's authority and also eliminated the risk of rebellion. But as far as the purpose of the current study is concerned, such involvement not only distinguished the historical trajectory of the commodity chain of grain from that of other raw materials but also ensured the continued existence of grain-related guilds in the city while many other guilds had to succumb to the pressure of the market. In other words, the gradual withdrawal of the state support from the other craft guilds left them at the mercy of the market principle to which many failed to adapt. These guilds eventually disappeared while the guild of bakers successfully adapted themselves to the tide of change thanks to unwavering state support.

The guild of bakers enjoyed many privileges furnished by the state during the eighteenth century. As the evidence suggests, the Imperial Council became more accessible to the bakers of the city and became increasingly involved with the daily affairs of the city. In this context, the bakers were defended against the administrators of charitable foundations who often attempted to increase the rents of the commercial buildings (e.g., bakeries) and began to exert significant pressure upon the bakers as tenants. The bakers were also protected against the tax-farmers who seem to have retained the administration of many government offices, including those that coordinated the relations of the guilds with the government. Furthermore, in contrast to the other guilds, especially those that produced exclusively for the external markets, where the ethnic and religious differences between the members came to the surface and began to plague the intra-guild relations, the bakers guild seems to have provided a setting for the peaceful co-existence of individuals of various ethno-religious backgrounds. And lastly, the *gedik* practice which brought

about the disruption of the hierarchical order of many guilds seems not to have dealt a significant blow to the bakers guild, as the state tended to allow the bakers guild to increase the number of *gedik* quotas by opening new bakeries and thereby enabling the journeymen and apprentices to advance in their careers.

In the light of these facts, and in the premature stage of this research, it is the contention of the present author that the Ottoman rulers saw the proper functioning of the imperial institutions and practices to provide for the people's bread as a prerequisite to the lasting of the Empire. This intriguing relationship between the bread and the empire, as concretely manifested in the policies of provisionism, in turn, marked the rooting of an unequal exchange between an imperial capital, that growingly became a parasitic city, and the provinces that became growingly impoverished to turn into locus of discontent. This unequal exchange remained unchanged despite the shrinking borders of the empire during the long nineteenth century and even shortly thereafter.