



## **FEATURES OF ECONOMIC LIFE IN THE CITY OF ROSETTA DURING THE OTTOMAN ERA, AN ANALYTICAL STUDY**

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### **Abstract**

Rosetta is considered one of the oldest and most important Egyptian ports, with historical roots stretching back to ancient times. It was mentioned in Strabo's Geography as "Boulbitine," indicating its strategic location at the mouth of the Boulbitine branch (the Rosetta branch). Its name is derived from the Pharaonic name "Rekhyt," used by the inhabitants of the Delta, which gradually evolved into the Coptic name "Rashit" and then to its current name, "Rosetta".

The city began to truly flourish and solidify its urban status during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil in 256 AH/870 AD, taking on a military character and becoming an independent port due to its defensive importance and its role in securing Egypt's northern borders. With the arrival of the Ottoman era in 923 AH (1517 AD) under Sultan Selim I, Rosetta reached the zenith of its glory and economic and commercial importance, being the closest Egyptian port to the capital of the Caliphate, Istanbul, and a key link between international and domestic trade via the Nile River and the Mediterranean Sea. The research subsections consist of:

First: A historical and administrative introduction to the city of Rosetta (Rosetta), exploring its historical roots and strategic location during the Ottoman era. This section examines the Ottoman Empire's control over Egypt, its tripartite system of governance and administration, and the role of the Mamluk emirs in administration and fortifications.

Second: The economic and strategic importance of Rosetta. This section discusses Rosetta as a center for international and maritime trade (the city's golden age), its urban development, and the growth of hotels and trading agencies.

Third: The main sectors of economic life, including agriculture, where the tax farming system continued; industry, where the guild system prevailed and the role of Moroccan artisans in the production of ceramic tiles; trade, encompassing domestic trade and public markets; foreign trade; trade agreements with European countries; and the role of foreign



communities.

Fourth: Factors of prosperity and major transformations. This section examines the role of stability and civil peace in the revival of trade and imports; the beginning of decline and economic changes during the era of Mohamed Ali (the digging of the Mahmoudiyah Canal); and the natural and human factors and their impact on the city's economic activity and future urban development.

**Keywords:** Rosetta, Ottoman era, economic life, Egyptian ports, foreign trade, tax farming system, craft guilds, Rosetta architecture.

### **First: Rosetta: Between Historical Roots and Strategic Location in the Ottoman Era**

The city of Rosetta is considered one of the Egyptian port cities. It was mentioned in Strabo's Geography as "Boulbitine," located at the mouth of the Boulbitine branch (the Rosetta branch)<sup>1</sup>. The name Rosetta is derived from the Pharaonic name "Rekhyt," the name of the inhabitants of the Delta, which evolved into the Coptic name "Rashit," and then later into Rosetta<sup>2</sup>.

The city of Rosetta began to flourish during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mutawakkil in 256 AH/870 AD. It prospered in the third century AH/ninth century AD, becoming a populous city with an important port on the Mediterranean coast. This continued into the Mamluk era, during which Rosetta acquired a military character, increasing its importance and establishing itself as an independent port city. Economic and commercial significance shifted to Rosetta during the Ottoman era, as it was the closest Egyptian port city to Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire<sup>3</sup>.

Arab sources stated that after 'Amr ibn al-'Aas conquered the city of Alexandria, delegations from other cities in Lower Egypt soon flocked to him to declare their

<sup>1</sup> Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed (2016). Rosetta Encyclopedia, 1, History and Military Fortifications, Cairo: Ummah Sciences Foundation for Printing and Publishing, pp. 47-48. 37. Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed. The Rakhito writes history, Great Britain's campaign against rosette in 1807, in light of British archives documents, International Journal of Academic Multidisciplinary Research (IJAMR), Vol. 5, Issue 5, May 2021, pp. 1-17.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the history and location of Rosetta, see: Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed (2016). Rosetta Encyclopedia, 1, pp. 47-48-56:51.

<sup>3</sup> Ghanem, Saeed Rashad Ibrahim. Decorative elements in Islamic buildings in the cities of Fuwa and Rosetta in the Ottoman era, Master's thesis, Faculty of Arts, Tanta University, 2017, p. 6.



submission to the victors of their own free will in search of safety. Rosetta was one of the cities whose ruler, named Qazman, made peace with Amr ibn al-'Aas<sup>1</sup>.

When the 'Abbasid state arose, the Byzantine threat still loomed over it. Like the Umayyad state before it, the Abbasid caliphs fortified their borders, restoring strongholds and fortresses in the region overlooking Byzantine territory<sup>2</sup>. In 239 AH (853 AD), the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil<sup>3</sup> ordered his governor, 'Anbasa ibn Ishaq<sup>4</sup>, to construct a series of fortifications (ribats) along the Nile from Tinnis to Alexandria, and he established a fleet in Egypt<sup>5</sup> to counter the Byzantine threat to the Egyptian borders<sup>6</sup>.

Ahmad ibn Tulun<sup>7</sup> also took an interest in these border regions. The Islamic city was established near the Ribat of Rosetta during the reign of Ahmad ibn Tulun in the year 256 AH (870 AD), after the Canopic branch dried up and Alexandria became isolated, and navigation returned to Rosetta, where it began to flourish during this period<sup>8</sup>.

Rosetta was founded in a military context, with the ribat (fortified monastery) serving as its

<sup>1</sup> Ibn Abd al-Hakam (1914-1920). *Futuh Misr wa A'maluha* (The Conquest of Egypt and its Deeds), Cairo-Leiden, p. 85. Al-Nuwayri al-Iskandari (1968-1976). *Al-Ilmām bi'l-A'lam fīmā Jarat bihi al-Ahkam wa'l-Umūr al-Maqdiyya fī Waq'at al-Iskandariya* (A Comprehensive Account of the Events that Occurred in the Battle of Alexandria), vol. 2, published by Aziz Suryal Atiya, Hyderabad, Deccan, p. 67. Butler (1946). *Fath al-'Arab li-Misr* (The Arab Conquest of Egypt), translated by Mohamed Farid Abu Hadid, vol. 1, Cairo, p. 257. Amelineau (1915). *La Conquete de L'Egypte par les Arabs* (The Arab Conquest of Egypt), Rev. Hist., pp. 119-120.

<sup>2</sup> Ramadan, Ahmed. *A History of Naval Warfare in the Mediterranean Sea*, Cairo: Egyptian Antiquities Authority, pp. 7-20-21.

<sup>3</sup> Maher, Suad (1966). *The Governorates of the United Arab Republic and their Remaining Monuments*, Cairo, p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> On Rabat, see: Al-Maqrizi, Al-Khitat, pp. 73-74; Niebuhr, Carsten, *Journey to Arabia and its Surroundings*, Vol. 1, *Journey to Egypt*, translated and annotated by Mustafa Maher, pp. 17-18, 185-186. Creswell (1952-1959), *Early Muslim Architecture*, Vol. II, Oxford, p. 127.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Maqrizi. *Al-Khitat*, 1, p. 214.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Bakri (1911). *Morocco in the Lands of Africa and the Maghreb*, Paris, p. 37. Al-Tijani (1958). *The Journey of Al-Tijani*, Tunis, p. 6. Ibn Zahira (1969). *The Radiant Virtues in the Beauties of Egypt and Cairo*, edited by Mustafa Al-Saqqa and Kamil Al-Muhandis, Cairo, p. 102. The Ribat of Al-Rosetta is mentioned, and it seems that Clot Bey relied on this in attributing the city to Harun Al-Rosetta. See Clot Bey. *A General Overview of Egypt*, p. 422.

<sup>7</sup> Forster. *Alexandria*, pp. 185-186.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Maqrizi, *Al-Khitat*, 1, p. 157.



nucleus amidst conflict. The influence of war is evident in its urban planning, which was shaped by various factors. Foremost among these was the city's location on the Nile River, the primary source of water, as well as the fertile agricultural lands used for food production.

The Nile River facilitated communication between Rosetta and other cities in Egypt<sup>1</sup>, and its proximity to the Mediterranean Sea provided connections to the outside world. The city's development reflected the importance of fortification for its protection and urban growth. Whatever the reasons for its founding, trade played a fundamental role, driving the city's development and expansion<sup>2</sup>. This trade inherently involved the potential for plunder and pillage, necessitating the construction of defensive fortifications, as seen in Rosetta and Alexandria<sup>3</sup>.

Rosetta served as a military camp, fulfilling the needs of conquering armies and acting as a launching pad for further conquests. The Muslims carefully chose the city's location, ensuring direct land access to their command center and keeping it far from the sea to avoid enemy fleets<sup>4</sup>, especially since they lacked the naval power to defend coastal cities. This contrasted sharply with Alexandria, situated directly on the Mediterranean Sea, which made it vulnerable to numerous raids, invasions, and repeated occupations, particularly from the Fatimid era to the time of Mohamed Ali.

Rosetta flourished in the 3rd century AH (9<sup>th</sup> century AD), becoming a thriving, populous city<sup>5</sup> with an important port. Later, it became an administrative district of Alexandria, boasting a market, a bathhouse, numerous palm groves, and substantial revenue<sup>6</sup>.

During the Fatimid era, Rosetta became a thriving city, and its trade and agriculture flourished<sup>7</sup>, especially after the Fatimids founded Cairo (358 AH/969 AD). Alexandria

<sup>1</sup> Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed (1989). The architecture of the city of Rosetta and its wooden artifacts in the Ottoman era, manuscript of a master's thesis, Faculty of Archaeology - Cairo University, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Uthman, Mohamed 'Abd al-Sattar. The Islamic City, p. 135.

<sup>3</sup> Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed. The fortifications of Alexandria and Rosetta before the English campaign in 1807, International Journal of Cultural Inheritance & Social Sciences (IJCISS), Vol. 3 Issue 6, September 2021, pp. 54-76.

<sup>4</sup> Uthman, Mohamed 'Abd al-Sattar. The Islamic City, pp. 139-140.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Ya'qubi (1860). Countries, Leiden, p. 338.

<sup>6</sup> Ibn Hawqal. Routes and Kingdoms, vol. 1, p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Idrisi (1884). The Delight of the One Who Yearns to Traverse the Horizons, Leiden, p. 162.



declined significantly, and Rosetta, along with Damietta, became important ports and centers of trade. Excavations have confirmed that Rosetta was built during the Fatimid period on the ruins of ancient Bolbitine, as a large number of bronze coins dating back to the Fatimid era were discovered inside twenty pottery vessels at a depth of five meters<sup>1</sup>.

In the 7th century AH (13<sup>th</sup> century AD), Rosetta became a small village, smaller than Fuwa<sup>2</sup>. Yaqut al-Hamawi<sup>3</sup> described it as a small town on the sea and the Nile near Alexandria. Ibn Mamati<sup>4</sup> mentions the taxes levied on incoming merchant ships, as the winds would push the ships into the port, making it difficult to bring them to Alexandria. In such cases, officials from Alexandria would be appointed to assess the tax. This indicates obstacles to trade, placing Rosetta second only to Alexandria in importance. Consequently, it became a "small town," with sand encroaching on the inlet and reaching the roads and houses<sup>5</sup>. This led to a decline in commercial and economic activity during the Ayyubid era, as most of its inhabitants migrated to Fuwa<sup>6</sup>. The district of Rosetta then encompassed Idku and al-Jadida<sup>7</sup>, and it became the administrative district of Fuwa and al-al-Muzahimtain<sup>8</sup>, with its surrounding areas becoming subordinate to it<sup>9</sup>.

It is worth noting that the difficulties ships faced entering Rosetta through the sandbar

<sup>1</sup> These bronze coins (money) were discovered by the mission of the Islamic and Coptic Antiquities Sector of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, and their number is (2220) pieces.

<sup>2</sup> Julwa. A Brief Study of the City of Rosetta, p. 224. Mubarak, Ali. Plans, 11, p. 75. Encyclopedia of Islam, 10/3, p. 112.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Hamawi, Yaqut. Mu'jam al-Buldan, 4, p. 252.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Mamati (1943). Laws of the Diwans, edited by Aziz Suryal Atiya, Cairo, p. 327.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Mas'udi. Mu'jam al-Buldan, 2, p. 781. Al-Watwat. Mabahij al-Fikr wa Manahij al-'Ibar, 1, Q. 3, folio 225, manuscript in Dar al-Kutub no. 359 Q.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Dimashqi. Nukhbat al-Dahr, p. 231. Al-Mas'udi. Mu'jam al-Buldan, 2, p. 781. Wasfi, Na'im Zaki (1965). (1965). International Trade Routes and Stations between East and West in the Late Middle Ages, Cairo, p. 91.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Armani, Abu Saleh. Churches and Monasteries, p. 11. Al-Jadida: One of the ancient villages, near Rosetta. Its name in the seventh century AH was Al-Jadida, which changed to Al-Jadida. See Ramzi, Mohamed (1958). Geographical Dictionary of Egyptian Lands, p. 299.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Qalqashandi, Subh al-A'sha, vol. 3, p. 407; vol. 4, p. 380.

<sup>9</sup> Ibn al-Athir, Al-Kamil, vol. 11, p. 198. Al-Dawadari, Kanz al-Durar, vol. 7, p. 155. Al-Maqrizi, Al-Suluk, p. 163.





obstructing the strait significantly contributed<sup>1</sup> to the smaller number of expeditions targeting Rosetta compared to Damietta and Alexandria.

The external threat to Rosetta persisted throughout the Mamluk era. Pirates habitually raided and plundered the city, often anchoring their ships. These pirates were frequently killed by the local inhabitants. Pirates also attacked Rosetta Island again, capturing twenty-five men and women. The Muslims were able to repel them and free the captives<sup>2</sup>.

The fourteenth century witnessed the expansion of the influence of a new power in the Near East, namely the power of the Tatars, whose news reached Sultan Barquq in 788 AH (1386 AD)<sup>3</sup>. The power of the Ottoman Turks also increased, and clashes between them and the Mamluks began to take on a new and dangerous form, especially during the reign of Sultan Qaitbay<sup>4</sup>, who paid great attention to the border regions and used to visit them, including Alexandria, Rosetta and Damietta, to inspect the fortresses and strongholds, as well as to survey the conditions of the population<sup>5</sup>.

Interest in Rosetta<sup>6</sup> increased during the Mamluk era, as it became an independent port city during the reign of Al-Nasir Mohamed<sup>7</sup> Ibn Qalawun. It became one of the Nastawri districts<sup>8</sup>, and a lighthouse was built there by Sultan Al-Malik Al-Zahir Baybars Al-Bunduqdari, and below it a tower built by Salah Al-Din Ibn Aram on the bank of the Nile<sup>9</sup> by Fayruz Al-Rumi Al-Arami<sup>10</sup>.

It also contributed to the launch of Sultan Barsbay's campaigns, which ended with the conquest of the island of Cyprus and its subjugation to Mamluk sovereignty in (829

<sup>1</sup> Al-Mas'udi, Mu'jam al-Buldan, vol. 2, p. 781. Al-Watwat, Mabahij al-Fikr wa Manahij al-'Ibar, vol. 1, p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> Atiyya, Aziz Suryal (1983), Kitab al-Ilmam bi'l-A'lam, Alam al-Fikr, vol. 2, p. 127 and following.

<sup>3</sup> Tarkhan, Ibrahim, Misr fi 'Asr Dawlat al-Mamalik al-Jaraksah, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> See: Ibn Iyas, Bada'i' al-Zuhur, vol. 1, Cairo, pp. 138-227-298; al-Sakhawi (d. 1304 AH/1887 AD), al-Daw' Daw' al-Lami' fi A'yan al-Qarn al-Tasi', vol. 3, p. 274.

<sup>5</sup> Ibn Iyas. Bada'i' al-Zuhur, 2, pp. 160-173-175-177. Al-Sakhawi. Al-Daw' al-Lami', 6, p. 206.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Qalqashandi. Al-Khitat, 4, p. 390. Al-Maqrizi. Al-Khitat, 1, pp. 72-73.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Maqrizi. Al-Suluk, 1/1, pp. 74-129.

<sup>8</sup> The Nastawriya: named after Nastrawiya or Nastroh, north of Lake Burullus, which was the capital of the district. See Tusun, Omar. The Historical Atlas of 1934.9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibn Daqmaq (1893). Al-Intisar li-Wasitat Aqd al-Amsar, 5, 1st ed., Cairo, p. 114. Al-Maqrizi. Al-Suluk, 2, pp. 74-129.

<sup>10</sup> Al-Sakhawi (1354 AH/1953 AD). Al-Daw' al-Lami', 6, p. 176.



AH/1426 AD). It suffered from attacks by the ships of the Knights Hospitaller on the island of Rhodes during the reign of Sultan Jaqmaq in the year (843 AH/1439 AD). In the year (855 AH/1451 AD), Sultan Jaqmaq sent a large garrison to protect the frontier, and he reinforced it in the following years, which confirms the existence of a fortress in which the garrison was stationed. Sultan Qaitbay renewed it in the year (884 AH/1479 AD). It is clear that this fortress is the watchtower of Al-Zahir Baybars<sup>1</sup>, and he built a wall around it to protect it from raids<sup>2</sup>.

Sultan al-Ghuri also ordered the construction of a wall along the coast and watchtowers to defend the port<sup>3</sup>, after relations between the Ottomans and the Mamluks deteriorated and he received news that Sultan Selim had prepared some 400 ships and was heading towards Alexandria or Damietta<sup>4</sup>. Al-Ghuri encouraged foreigners to settle in the ports, including Rosetta, particularly Venetians, after they had been prohibited for military reasons since the Ayyubid era. Thus, Rosetta in the Mamluk period was merely a military port and had no administrative function as it had previously held<sup>5</sup>.

When Egypt became an Ottoman province in 923 AH (1517 AD), Selim I<sup>6</sup> entered Cairo. On May 31st, he proceeded to Alexandria and from there to Rosetta, where the cannons of its citadel saluted him as the imperial ships approached<sup>7</sup>. He praised it as a vital Egyptian

<sup>1</sup> Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed. Documenting the archaeological excavations in the castle of rosette – Egypt, International Journal of Academic Multidisciplinary Research (IJAMR), Vol. 5, Issue 6, June 2021, pp. 95-126.

<sup>2</sup> See: Ibn Taghribirdi, Al-Nujum, 15, p. 334. Ibn Iyas, Bada'i' al-Zuhur, 3, pp. 155-156.

<sup>3</sup> Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed. The fortified fence around rosette, field study in the maps of the French campaign 1798-1801, International Journal of Cultural inheritance & Social Sciences (IJCISS), Vol. 1, Issue 2, September 2019, pp. 52-69.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Iyas. Bada'i' al-Zuhur, 5, p. 114. Al-Maqrizi. Al-Khitat, 1, p. 74. Al-Zahiri (1894). Zubdat Kashf al-Mamalik wa Bayan al-Turuq wa al-Masalik, published by Paul Rouis, Paris, p. 108. Ibn al-Ji'an (1898). Al-Tuhfa al-Saniyya bi Asma' al-Bilad al-Misriyya, published by Mortz, Cairo, p. 138.

<sup>5</sup> Wasfi, Naeem Zaki. International Trade Methods, p. 91.

<sup>6</sup> Ibn Iyas, Bada'i' al-Zuhur, vol. 5, pp. 206-354-409. Al-Jabarti. Al-Jabarti, Abd al-Rahman ibn Hasan ibn Burhan al-Din al-Jabarti al-Hanafi, d. 1240 AH/1825 CE. 'Aja'ib al-Athar fi al-Tarajim wa al-Akhbar - Tarikh al-Jabarti, Arab Statement Committee, vol. 1, p. 18. Anis, Mohamed (1977). The Ottoman State and the Arab East, Cairo, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Ibn Iyas. Bada'i' al-Zuhur, 5, pp. 206-354-407. Sulayman, Ahmad al-Sa'id (1979). Ta'sil ma warada fi al-Jabarti min al-Dakhil, Cairo, p. 36. Maher, Su'ad. Masajid Misr, 5, p. 4.



port, and from then on, it became a populated city, attaining significant economic importance thanks to its port, one of Egypt's most important on the Mediterranean coast. Before Selim I left Egypt, he established the political framework for governance, and the financial and judicial systems were later finalized during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, according to the "Suleimanname" (a legal code), as their establishment required considerable time<sup>1</sup>.

## **Second: The Economic and Strategic Importance of Rosetta**

Many nations and kingdoms fell under the control of the Ottoman Empire<sup>2</sup>, either through conquest or by surrender. The keys too many countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa were entrusted to it. Among the countries that submitted to its rule was Egypt, which was conquered by the Ottoman Sultan Selim I. He defeated the Mamluks, led by Tumanbay, at the Battle of Ridaniya in 923 AH (1517 AD)<sup>3</sup>, and then ordered Tumanbay's execution by hanging at Bab Zuweila. From that date onward, Egypt was subject to the Ottoman Empire. After Selim I's conquest of Egypt, he established a system of governance that would ensure its perpetual subjugation. He entrusted the reins of power to three authorities, each of which competed with the others to achieve its objectives. These authorities were

<sup>1</sup> Al-Rafi'i (1951). History of the Nationalist Movement and the Development of Government Systems in Egypt Al-Rafi'i (1951). History of the Nationalist Movement and the Development of Government Systems in Egypt, Vol. 1, 3rd ed., Cairo, pp. 15-16. See also Abd al-Rahim, Abd al-Rahim Abd al-Rahman (1977). Bulugh al-Arab by al-Sa'di, Al-Majalla al-Tarikhiya, 22, Cairo, p. 397. Farid, Mohamed. History of the Ottoman State, Cairo, p. 78. Maher, Suad. Mosques of Egypt, Vol. 5, p. 5, Vol. 1, 3rd ed., Cairo, pp. 15-16. See also Abd al-Rahim, Abd al-Rahim Abd al-Rahman (1977). Bulugh al-Arab by al-Sa'di, Al-Majalla al-Tarikhiya, 22, Cairo, p. 397. Farid, Mohamed. History of the Ottoman State, Cairo, p. 78. Maher, Suad. Mosques of Egypt, Vol. 5, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> To learn about the Ottoman state from its formation and rise to its end, see Shalabi, Ahmad (1982). Encyclopedia of Islamic History and Islamic Civilization, Volume 5, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, Cairo: Egyptian Renaissance Library, pp. 666-767. Hilal, Rida (1416 AH, 1999 AD). The Sword and the Crescent: Turkey from Anatürk to Arian - The Conflict Between the Military Establishment and Political Islam, Cairo: Dar Al-Shorouk, pp. 27-45.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Ramal, Ibn Zambal (1998). The Last of the Mamluks, The Incident of Sultan Al-Ghuri with Selim the Ottoman, edited by Amer, Abdel Moneim, The Second Thousand Books Series, Cairo: The Egyptian General Book Authority, p. 253.





the governor, the Ottoman garrison army, and the Mamluks<sup>1</sup>. This system was completed by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent after he ascended to the throne following the death of his father, Selim I, in 926 AH (1520 AD).

Despite the Ottomans eliminating the Mamluk state in Egypt politically, Sultan Selim did not eliminate the remaining Mamluk princes, but rather pardoned them, content with the defeat they suffered. The Mamluk princes during this period constituted an important element of governance and administration in Ottoman Mamluk Egypt, a term coined by some modern historians to indicate the importance of the Mamluk role<sup>2</sup>.

The Ottomans recognized the importance of Rosetta, so every governor was required to visit it and inspect its fortifications. When Mohamed Pasha visited Rosetta, accompanied by the honor guard that received him, he went to the siege there and found it to be exceptionally well-constructed and equipped with complete weapons and ample supplies. He bestowed gifts upon the soldiers, guards, religious officials, and residents stationed there<sup>3</sup>.

From that time onward, Rosetta became a vital commercial center for international maritime trade with Istanbul and the Ottoman territories on the Aegean Sea. It served as a crucial hub for those traveling from Alexandria to Cairo via the Rosetta branch of the Nile, or directly from the sea to Cairo. It became the closest port to Istanbul<sup>4</sup> and experienced its golden age, reaching its greatest extent and size by 1777, with its coastline stretching a league<sup>5</sup>.

The Ottomans took great care of Rosetta after their conquest of Egypt, which was reflected

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<sup>1</sup>Al-Iskandari, Omar. Hassan, Salim (1410 AH, 1990 AD). Pages from the History of Egypt, The History of Egypt from the Ottoman Conquest to the Present Time, revised by Sefdj, A.J., Cairo: Madbouli Library, p. 59 and beyond.

<sup>2</sup> Khalifa, Rabie Hamed (1992). Aspects of Artistic Life in Ottoman Cairo: A Study of Artistic Trends and Their Impact on Architectural Decoration Arts, Journal of the Faculty of Arts - Cairo University, Special Issue 57, pp. 282-283.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Bakri, Mohamed ibn Abi al-Surur al-Bakri al-Siddiqi (1979). Kashf al-Kurbah fi Raf' al-Talaba, edited by Abd al-Rahim Abd al-Rahman, Egyptian Historical Journal, p. 340.

<sup>4</sup> Sarhank, Ismail. News Facts in Maritime Countries, 2, p. 80. Encyclopedia of Islam, 10/3, p. 111.

<sup>5</sup>(A farsakh is three miles, equivalent to 4800 meters.) Its width is a quarter of a farsakh (1200 meters). See: Ibn Manzur, Abu al-Fadl Jamal al-Din Mohamed ibn Mukarram al-Afriqi al-Misri al-Ansari al-Khazraji (2003). Lisan al-Arab, Dar Sader – Beirut, letter F (farsakh). Mubarak, Ali. Al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiyya, 11, p. 75.



in its economic activity, urban development, and architectural advancements. Numerous hotels and trading posts were built, trade flourished, and it became one of the most important trading ports on the Nile<sup>1</sup>.

Rosetta played a vital role in foreign trade during the Ottoman era, receiving goods from France, Syria, Morocco, and other countries. Domestic trade took place in markets where merchants from other cities exchanged agricultural products with Rosetta merchants, or through buying and selling via agencies.

Foreigners and Moroccan merchants also played a significant role, primarily through their commercial activities. They had trading agencies in Rosetta and contributed to the city's development. Crafts continued to be practiced after the Ottoman conquest, with Moroccan artisans, who had settled in Egypt, attempting to revive the Mamluk school of artisan production. They crafted glazed tiles, commonly used for covering interior walls and some facades<sup>2</sup>.

Under Ottoman rule, Egyptian society was stratified, with the ruling class distinguished by its independence from other social classes, the high social standing of its members, their advanced economic status, and their considerable influence. Urban dwellers enjoyed special privileges and were divided into various groups, such as merchants, artisans, and intellectuals. Each of these groups had its own customs, traditions, and a sheikh responsible for the conduct of its members. The general population, representing the majority of Egyptians, suffered greatly from their heavy burdens, in addition to their isolation from other segments of society<sup>3</sup>.

During this period, the regions and cities of Lower Egypt were not isolated from the events and conditions unfolding in the country, particularly those occurring in Cairo and their resulting positive or negative consequences. Some of these cities became active and experienced cultural leaps that resembled or even surpassed those in Cairo. This is what we see in some cities that represent a link with the outside world, such as cities that have ports like Alexandria, Rosetta, Damietta... and those cities that represent a major crossing point

<sup>1</sup> Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed. (2003). *The Antiquities of Minya Through the Ages*, Center for Archaeological Research and Studies, Minya University, Second Edition, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Hassan, Nevin Mustafa. (1999) *Rosetta in the Ottoman Era, a Historical and Documentary Study*, Cairo: Dar Al-Thaqafa Al-Amaliya, p. 316.

<sup>3</sup> Scholars of the French Campaign (2002). *Description of Egypt, Cairo of the Mamluks*, translated by Al-Shaib, Mona Zuhair, Part 11, Cairo: The Egyptian General Book Organization, pp. 7-8.



for pilgrimage journeys, where these journeys may have stayed for rest and to be supplied with the necessary provisions, as the annual pilgrimage to the Islamic places in the Hijaz and Jerusalem was one of the driving factors for commercial activity via the land routes<sup>1</sup>. Some of these cities played a significant cultural role, becoming meeting points for foreign communities. They were also attractive to native inhabitants from various social classes and backgrounds. Among the most prominent of these cities was Rosetta<sup>2</sup>. This city became a major commercial center, drawing many traders and those seeking related professions and jobs. This led to the flourishing of commerce, resulting in a population increase and a rise in population density. Consequently, urban expansion was necessary, explaining the active construction and architectural flourishing in the city, evident in its diverse architectural styles, encompassing religious, social, and civic buildings<sup>3</sup>. Since the development and urban growth of any region is closely linked to its economic conditions, the Ottoman state paid great attention to some of these cities, both economically and politically and administratively, and considered them a special administrative region, which made them enjoy a distinguished administration, and made them have a special governor who was under the supervision of the Sublime Porte in Istanbul and was appointed by the Ottoman Sultan<sup>4</sup> and was known as the Kapudan<sup>5</sup>. Rosetta<sup>6</sup> occupied a prominent economic position during this era, due to its strategic

<sup>1</sup> Abaza, Farouk Othman (2001). The shift of global trade to the Cape of Good Hope and its impact on the northern coasts of Egypt during the sixth century AD, a paper presented at the symposium (The Northern Coasts of Egypt Through the Ages), History of the Egyptians Series, No. 200, prepared by Ramadan, Abdel Azim, Cairo: The Egyptian General Book Authority, p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> Abdel Wahab, Hassan (1934). Kashani in Arab Antiquities in Egypt, Journal of Engineering, Year 14, Issue 11-12, Cairo, December 1, p. 290.

<sup>3</sup> Hertz, Max (1909). A Glimpse into the History of Ottoman Architecture and Other Arts in Egypt, translated by Bahgat, Ali, Cairo, p. 241.

<sup>4</sup> Hassan, Nevin Mustafa (1999). Rosetta in the Ottoman Era: A Historical and Documentary Study, reviewed and introduced by Al-Sarouji, Mohamed Mahmoud, Alexandria: Dar Al-Thaqafa Al-Ilmiya, p. 141.

<sup>5</sup> The term "qabudan" or "qabdan" refers to a naval commander. Each port in Egypt during the Ottoman era had a qabudan; for example, there were qabudans for the ports of Rosetta, Alexandria, Damietta, and Suez. Abdul Latif, Laila (1987). Administration in Egypt during the Ottoman Era. Cairo: Ain Shams University Press, p. 452.

<sup>6</sup> Rosetta is an Egyptian town on the coast of the Nile near Alexandria. It is one of the Egyptian cities situated on a great sand dune on the bank of the Nile, a bank that was once one of the most remarkable parks in the



location on the Mediterranean coast and its proximity as the closest Egyptian port<sup>1</sup> to the Ottoman capital. This was further facilitated by the numerous trade concessions granted by the Ottoman state to various consuls and foreign communities at the time<sup>2</sup>. Rosetta experienced its golden age during this period, specifically in 1777 CE (AH), reaching its zenith in terms of grandeur and expansion. The city stretched for approximately three miles along the Mediterranean coast and nearly a mile in width<sup>3</sup>, the construction of numerous commercial buildings, such as hotels, caravanserais, and bazaars (traditional markets), flourished<sup>4</sup>. This is evidenced by the increasing population and the diversity of its inhabitants' origins, nationalities, and religions. The economic improvement is also reflected in the proliferation of handicrafts, the wealth of merchants, and the construction of various buildings<sup>5</sup>.

### **Third: Main Areas of Economic Life**

We can observe the economic conditions during the Ottoman era through the main economic sectors of that time: agriculture, industry, and trade<sup>6</sup>.

Regarding agriculture, it did not differ significantly from what prevailed in other Egyptian cities at the time. The Ottomans maintained the status quo established during the Mamluk era, except that they implemented the tax farming system for managing these lands<sup>7</sup>. As for

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world. For more on its history, development, civilization, and geography, see al-Hamawi, Yaqut, Mu'jam al-Buldan, vol. 1, p. 46; al-Himyarī, Ibn 'Abd al-Mun'im (1975), al-Rawd al-Mu'attar fi Khabar al-Aqtar, ed. 'Abbas, Ihsan, Beirut: Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, p. 134; Ramzi, Mohamed (1994), al-Qamus al-Jughrafi, vol. 2, p. 300.

<sup>1</sup> Sarhank, Ismail (1895). News Facts about the Countries of the Seas, 2, Cairo, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> Haridi, Salah Ahmed (1983-1984 AD). Economic and social life in the city of Rosetta in the Ottoman era, Egyptian Historical Journal, Issue No. 31, 30, p. 334.

<sup>3</sup> Richard, Pococke (1943). A description of the east and some other countries, London, 11, p. 171.

<sup>4</sup> Haridi, Salah Ahmed. Economic and Social Life in the City of Rosetta, p. 329.

<sup>5</sup> Gsbrid, Bear (1969). Studies in the History of Modern Egypt, Chicago, p. 137.

<sup>6</sup> Hreidi, Salah Ahmed (1992). Administration in Alexandria during the Ottoman era, Arab Historical Journal for Ottoman Studies, Tunisia, Issue 5, 6, p. 412.

<sup>7</sup> The tax farming system is a developed version of the provincial system, which the Ottoman state found implemented in some of the countries it conquered and then transferred to Egypt. This system is not subject to government officials, but rather any Mamluk prince, member of the military garrison, or Arab contractors undertake the collection of taxes levied on land or other assets for a specific period, based on an agreement



industry, it relied on a system of craft guilds<sup>1</sup>. The term "guild" refers to a group of craftsmen bound by close social ties and a distinct economic unit. Solidarity prevailed among its members in times of prosperity and adversity, and its members enjoyed a degree of freedom within their profession through their self-governance<sup>2</sup>.

As for trade, it was divided into domestic and foreign trade. Domestic trade consisted of the exchange of goods from different regions of Egypt between cities in public markets held on a specific day of the week. Buyers and sellers from all over would gather there to conduct buying and selling, sometimes through barter, whether of agricultural or manufactured goods. It is worth noting that Rosetta (Rosetta) did not have markets specifically for domestic trade in the conventional sense; rather, it served as a warehouse for trade from European countries and the peoples of Syria.<sup>3</sup>

As for foreign trade, the nature of Ottoman rule played a significant role in stimulating this type of trade. The Ottoman state did not impose restrictions on the movement of people and their various economic activities in any of the countries under its rule<sup>4</sup>. The Ottoman state granted freedom of trade between its provinces and various countries, both east and west, for both imports and exports. However, it prohibited the export of certain goods from its provinces, such as coffee, grain, and gunpowder.<sup>5</sup>

The Ottoman state also strived to establish trade treaties and agreements with European countries in an attempt to compensate for some of the financial losses and burdens Egypt suffered as a result of trade caravans diverting from its lands to the Cape of Good Hope

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between this individual and the tax collector, acting on behalf of the government. Abdul Rahim, Abdul Rahim Abdul Rahman (1986). *The Egyptian Countryside in the Eighteenth Century*. Cairo: Madbouli Library, pp. 92-93.

<sup>1</sup> The origins of this system predate the establishment of Ottoman rule by a considerable period. It is believed that the guilds emerged as a result of certain revolutionary movements within Islamic society, such as the Qarmatian movement, where craft guilds arose as opposition groups to the ruling authority. Abdul Latif, Laila (1988). *Studies in the History and Historians of Egypt and the Levant*, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Shinawi, Abdul Aziz (1983). *Al-Azhar Mosque and University*, Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Library, 1, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> Girard (1978). *Encyclopedia Description of Egypt, Economic Life in Egypt in the Eighteenth Century*, translated by Al-Shaib, Zuhair, Cairo, Volume 4, Part 1, p. 210.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Sabbagh, Laila (1977). *The Moroccan presence in the Mediterranean East in the modern era*, Egyptian Historical Journal, Issue 7-8, Cairo, January, p. 81 and beyond.

<sup>5</sup> Steff (1979 AD) *Encyclopedia Description of Egypt, The Global Financial and Administrative System in Ottoman Egypt*, translated by Al-Shaib, Zuhair, Cairo, 5, 2, p. 166.





route. Among the first of these treaties was the one concluded with merchants from Venice, Italy<sup>1</sup>. This was followed by numerous treaties and agreements with France, England, and the Netherlands, in addition to the application of some of the provisions of these treaties to other Arab countries<sup>2</sup>. These treaties granted European merchants the freedom to trade in Egypt with all types of goods without incurring any harm<sup>3</sup>.

The location of Rosetta (Rosetta) at the mouth of the Nile and its Mediterranean coastline played a crucial role in making it a major trading city. Cities possessing these advantages benefit significantly from the revenues generated by this trade. This is evidenced by the remarkable progress and prosperity Rosetta achieved, becoming the leading Egyptian port during this era and boasting numerous Ottoman-era buildings, most notably mosques, caravanserais, and shops.

#### **Fourth: Factors of Prosperity and Major Transformations:**

The civil peace imposed on the region brought a degree of stability and unity, erasing the effects of the Mamluk state's decline and the accompanying turmoil and chaos. Internal trade flourished, agriculture thrived, and the population began to grow again. Egypt and Syria provided a third of the Ottoman treasury's total revenue, and epidemics and famines ceased. However, this prosperity was short-lived.

Before the end of the 10th century AH (16<sup>th</sup> century AD), the situation reverted to its pre-conquest state of crisis and instability. The Ottoman state's adherence to medieval social and economic systems, thought, and civilization imposed limitations on this temporary prosperity. Consequently, this prosperity was not accompanied by any fundamental development in agricultural relations, neither in terms of rural production tools nor in terms of the prevailing production relations within society.

The era of Mohamed Ali marked the beginning of Rosetta's decline. On May 8, 1807,

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<sup>1</sup> For information on the city of Venice and its political and economic conditions, see Dale, Charles (1948). *Venice: An Aristocratic Republic*, translated by Tawfiq, Ahmed Ezzat Abdel Karim, Cairo: Dar Al-Maaref, p. 5 and following.

<sup>2</sup> For information on treaties and their role in the policy of openness towards European states, see Al-Shinawi, Abdul Aziz (1986). *The Ottoman State: A State Wronged*, Cairo, Anglo-Egyptian Library, Part 2, 2nd Edition, p. 700.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Sabbagh, Layla (1987). *Foreign Communities in the Levant during the Ottoman Era in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Beirut, p. 51.



Mohamed Ali ordered the digging of the Mahmoudiyah Canal in 1819<sup>1</sup>. This canal, a branch of the Nile River, began near the village of Atf, passed through Alexandria, and emptied into the Mediterranean Sea<sup>2</sup>. It allowed Nile water to reach Alexandria via the lake and served as a waterway for merchant ships traveling between Alexandria and the Nile. The canal and the city of Mahmoudiyah were named after Sultan Mahmud II of Istanbul.

The Mahmoudiyah Canal caused trade to shift to Alexandria. Although Mohamed Ali established various factories in Rosetta<sup>3</sup>, they did not compensate for the loss of trade. Rosetta suffered the same fate as the ancient city of Boulbitine: its inhabitants abandoned it<sup>4</sup>, its houses and mosques crumbled, its markets closed, and it was buried under sand<sup>5</sup>.

Rosetta began to lose its role as a major intermediary port for trade starting from the era of Mohamed Ali, as the coastal “stone” ports replaced the “river mud” ports. The digging of the Mahmoudiya Canal (1819) by Mohamed Ali, then the digging of the Suez Canal and the establishment of Port Said during the reign of Said Pasha (1859), was the beginning of the decline of Rosetta and Damietta as river ports. Likewise, the development of land transport means such as railways and roads, in addition to the lower cost compared to river transport, had an effect on the exit of the ports of Damietta and Rosetta from the commercial field. And if Damietta retained some of its status as a result of performing

<sup>1</sup> This canal was dug on the site of the old Canopic branch and was named after the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud. Sabri, Mohamed (1930). Egypt from Mohamed Ali to the present day, Cairo, p. 500. Clot Bey. A General Overview of Egypt, p. 422. See also: Tusun, Omar (1925). Geography of Egypt on the History of the Nile, Cairo: The Scientific Complex. (2012). The History of the Ancient Canal of Alexandria and the Mahmoudiyah Canal.

<sup>2</sup> Ainsworth, William Harrison (1853). The New Monthly Magazine, London: Chapman and Hall, pp. 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> See Tusun, Omar (1925). Military Industries and Schools during the Reign of Mohamed Ali, 3rd ed., Cairo, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> The population of Rosetta was thirty-five thousand people, and after the canal was dug, it became between fourteen and fifteen thousand. As for the population of Alexandria, it was five thousand and became forty thousand.

Vaujany, De. (1985). Alexandria et la Basse Egypte, Paris: Librairie Plon, p. 210. Sonnini, C. S. (1800). Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt, London, pp. 135-136. Denon, V. (1807). Voyage dans la basse et la haute Egypte pendant les campagnes du general bonaparte, Paris. Inatitute Francais d'Archaeologie Orientales, 1989, p. XIII.

<sup>5</sup> Vaujany. Alexandria et la Basse Egypte, p. 210.



other industrial, craft and administrative functions, then Rosetta did not rise again<sup>1</sup>.

Rosetta was doubly isolated from the outside world, first by Alexandria, and then by both Alexandria and the capital due to advancements in transportation. It no longer served as an intermediary between the central capital and its seaport, as the connection became direct. The railway line connecting Rosetta to its rival further solidified its isolation from the capital. Anyone coming from Cairo had to pass through Alexandria or Damanhur to reach Rosetta. Thus, the city became confined to its peninsula, surrounded by waterways on three sides: the sea to the north, the river to the east, and the lake to the southwest, in addition to a sea of shifting sands to the south.

Instead of becoming factors of prosperity and parallel development, these bodies of water have become threats to the city's very existence. After the construction of the Aswan High Dam, the sea swallowed the silt that the river had previously deposited on its banks. The river no longer provides its bounty, and the lake, like other lakes in northern Egypt, is suffering from pollution and extinction due to harsh drainage operations carried out without regard for ecological balance. In addition to all these natural and human factors related to urban development policies, other factors have negatively impacted Rosetta's economic activity. These include: the constant sandstorms that engulf the city and encroach upon urban areas, covering much of the agricultural land and housing; the abundance of surrounding tourist areas and its proximity to the river from the east and west, which hinders the development of an agricultural hinterland; the impact of the climate due to Rosetta's location and its surrounding bodies of water, characterized by high temperatures, aridity, and exposure to sand and dust, which has damaged agricultural production; and the deficiencies of Rosetta's navigable estuary, surrounded by sandbars extending into the sea, formed by the waves, which increase the difficulty and danger of navigation.

Rosetta was abandoned in favor of Alexandria, and despite all that, perhaps some of the disadvantages had advantages. The difficulty of maritime navigation associated with the Rosetta estuary was one of the reasons why it was not subjected to the repeated invasions that Damietta was not spared from. Consequently, Rosetta was preserved with its houses and mosques dating back to the Ottoman era, which distinguishes it from other Egyptian

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Qadi, Jalila Jamal (1999). *Rosetta, Rise, Flourishing, Decline*, Cairo: Dar Al-Afaq Al-Arabiya, pp. 229-232.



cities. It also provides many possibilities for future development if we do not leave the urban environment prey to deterioration<sup>1</sup>.

### **Conclusions:**

- This research examines the features of economic life in Rosetta during the Ottoman era. The economic prosperity of Rosetta during this period was evident in several key areas, as reflected in historical sources and documents. The most important findings can be summarized as follows:
- **Commercial Prosperity and Central Location:** Rosetta became a prominent international trading center and a hub for maritime trade with Istanbul and Anatolia, in addition to receiving goods arriving from France, Syria, and Morocco. The city reached its golden age in 1777 CE when it was at its greatest extent and development.
- **Architectural Activity Linked to the Economy:** The economic and commercial boom was directly reflected in urban development. The city witnessed the construction of numerous caravanserais, hotels, qaysariyyas (covered markets), shops, and grand mosques, reflecting the wealth of the merchants and the diversity of their origins and nationalities.
- **Agricultural Organization and Tax Farming:** The Ottomans maintained the existing agricultural system while implementing the "tax farming" system for land administration and tax collection, utilizing the agricultural resources surrounding the Nile branch.
- **The Guild System:** Industries and handicrafts in Rosetta relied on the "guild system," where artisans enjoyed social solidarity, economic unity, and self-governance within their respective professions. This system also benefited from the contributions of resident Moroccan artisans who revived the art of tile making and wall coverings.
- **Free Trade and Treaties:** The Ottoman state's policy of allowing free trade across its provinces and concluding trade treaties with European countries (such as Venice and France) contributed to the flow of goods and the flourishing of markets, despite the ban imposed on the export of certain essential commodities such as coffee, grain, and gunpowder.

<sup>1</sup> Al-Qadi, Jalila Jamal. Rosetta, Rise, Flourishing, Decline, pp. 233-234.