



THE ROSETTA SOCIETY IN THE OTTOMAN ERA, AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF SOCIAL CLASSES, COMMUNITIES, AND CULTURAL INTERACTION

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Abstract

Rosetta stands out as one of Egypt's most important and ancient ports, having played a pivotal role throughout history. It boasts a unique cultural, architectural, and social heritage that reflects the succession of civilizations and nations on Egyptian soil. The city has garnered the appreciation of researchers and scholars due to its unique strategic location at the mouth of the Rosetta branch of the Nile River and on the Mediterranean coast, making it a significant commercial and military center.

Rosetta has witnessed major transformations since its early days as a defensive military outpost during the Abbasid era, through its commercial and urban flourishing in subsequent Islamic periods, culminating in its golden age during the Ottoman era when it served as the closest port to the capital of the Caliphate. This strategic importance and thriving economic activity were reflected in its social and demographic composition, attracting successive waves of immigrants and Arab and foreign communities. These diverse groups and classes formed a unique model of cultural pluralism and social harmony. Therefore, studying the social conditions and social classes in Rosetta during the Ottoman era is of paramount importance. It sheds light on the details of daily life, the network of relationships between the ruling elite and the general population and resident communities, and reveals the mechanisms of social and professional organization that regulated the rhythm of life in this vital port city.

The research structure consists of an introduction that provides a historical and geographical overview of Rosetta's importance and strategic location as an ancient Egyptian port, tracing its development through different eras up to the Ottoman period, and outlining the study's significance and objectives. This is followed by the main sections, which include: The historical, political and urban framework of Rosetta, The Roots and Concept of Social Classes and the Emergence of Craft Guilds, The Social Hierarchy and Classes in Egypt and the Ottoman Era, The immigrant and foreign communities in Rosetta



society

Keywords: Rosetta, Ottoman era, social classes, foreign communities, Arab communities, craft guilds, domestic and foreign trade, commercial agencies.

Introduction

Rosetta is considered one of the Egyptian port cities. It was mentioned in Strabo's Geography as "Boulbitine" situated at the mouth of the Boulbitine branch (the Rosetta branch)¹. The name Rosetta is derived from the Pharaonic name "Rekhyt," the name given to the inhabitants of the Delta. This name evolved into the Coptic "Rashit," and later to Rosetta².

Rosetta began to flourish during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil in 256 AH/870 AD. It reached its peak in the 3rd century AH/9th 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, attracting increased attention and becoming an independent port city. The economic and commercial importance of Rosetta shifted during the Ottoman era, as it was the closest Egyptian port to Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman state³. Arab sources mentioned that after 'Amr ibn al-'Aas conquered Alexandria, delegations from other cities of Lower Egypt soon flocked to him to declare their 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-'Aas⁴.

¹ Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed (2016). Rosetta Encyclopedia, 1, History and Military Fortifications, Cairo: Ummah Sciences Foundation for Printing and Publishing, pp. 47-48.

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

³ 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.

⁴ 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 Muhammad Farid Abu Hadid, vol. 1, Cairo, p. 257. Amelineau (1915). La Conquite de L'Egypte par les Arabs (The Arab Conquest of Egypt), Rev. Hist., pp. 119-120.



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 territory¹. In 239 AH (853 AD), the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil² ordered his governor, 'Anbasa ibn Ishaq³, to construct a series of fortifications (ribats) along the Nile from Tinnis to Alexandria, and he established a fleet in Egypt⁴ to counter the Byzantine threat to the Egyptian borders⁵.

Ahmad ibn Tulun⁶ 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 period⁷.

Rosetta was founded in a military context, with the ribat (fortified monastery) serving as its 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 Egypt⁸, and its proximity to the Mediterranean Sea provided access to the outside world. The city's

¹ Ramadan, Ahmed. *A History of Naval Warfare in the Mediterranean Sea*, Cairo: Egyptian Antiquities Authority, pp. 7-20-21.

² Maher, Suad (1966). *The Governorates of the United Arab Republic and their Remaining Monuments*, Cairo, p. 136.

³ 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.

⁴ Al-Maqrizi. *Al-Khitat*, 1, p. 214.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Forster. *Alexandria*, pp. 185-186.

⁷ Al-Maqrizi, *Al-Khitat*, 1, p. 157.

⁸ 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.



development reflected the importance of fortification for its protection and urban growth. Whatever the reasons for its founding¹, trade played a fundamental role, driving the city's development and expansion. This trade inherently involved the potential for plunder and pillage, necessitating the construction of defensive fortifications, as seen in Rosetta and Alexandria².

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 fleets³, 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 (9th century AD), becoming a thriving, populous city⁴ with an important port. Later, it became an administrative district of Alexandria, boasting a market, a bathhouse, numerous palm groves, and substantial revenue⁵.

During the Fatimid era, Rosetta became a thriving city, and its trade and agriculture flourished⁶, especially after the Fatimids founded Cairo (358 AH/969 AD). Alexandria 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 meters⁷.

In the 7th century AH (13th century AD), Rosetta became a small village, smaller than

¹ Uthman, Muhammad Abd al-Sattar. *The Islamic City*, p. 135.

² Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed. *The fortifications of Alexandria and rosette before the English campaign in 1807*, International Journal of Cultural Inheritance & Social Sciences (IJCIS), Vol. 3 Issue 6, September 2021, pp. 54-76.

³ Uthman, Muhammad Abd al-Sattar. *The Islamic City*, pp. 139-140.

⁴ Al-Ya'qubi (1860). *Countries*, Leiden, p. 338.

⁵ Ibn Hawqal. *Routes and Kingdoms*, vol. 1, p. 90.

⁶ Al-Idrisi (1884). *The Delight of the One Who Yearns to Traverse the Horizons*, Leiden, p. 162.

⁷ 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.



Fuwa¹. Yaqut al-Hamawi² described it as a small town on the sea and the Nile near Alexandria. Ibn Mamati³ 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 houses⁴. This led to a decline in commercial and economic activity during the Ayyubid era, as most of its inhabitants migrated to Fuwa⁵. The district of Rosetta then encompassed Idku and al-Jadida⁶, and it became the administrative district of Fuwa and al-Muzahimtain⁷, with its surrounding areas becoming subordinate to it⁸.

It is worth noting that the difficulties ships faced entering Rosetta through the sandbar obstructing the strait significantly reduced the number of expeditions targeting Rosetta compared to those targeting Damietta and Alexandria⁹.

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 city's inhabitants. Pirates also attacked Rosetta Island again, capturing twenty-five men and women. The Muslims were able to repel them and free the captives¹⁰.

¹ Julwa. A Brief Study of the City of Rosetta, p. 224. Mubarak, Ali. Plans, 11, p. 75. Encyclopedia of Islam, 10/3, p. 112.

² Al-Hamawi, Yaqut. Mu'jam al-Buldan, 4, p. 252.

³ Ibn Mamati (1943). Laws of the Diwans, edited by Aziz Suryal Atiya, Cairo, p. 327.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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, Muhammad (1958). Geographical Dictionary of Egyptian Lands, p. 299.

⁷ Al-Qalqashandi, Subh al-A'sha, vol. 3, p. 407; vol. 4, p. 380.

⁸ Ibn al-Athir, Al-Kamil, vol. 11, p. 198. Al-Dawadari, Kanz al-Durar, vol. 7, p. 155. Al-Maqrizi, Al-Suluk, p. 163.

⁹ Al-Mas'udi, Mu'jam al-Buldan, vol. 2, p. 781. Al-Watwat, Mabahij al-Fikr wa Manahij al-'Ibar, vol. 1, p. 225.

¹⁰ Atiyya, Aziz Suryal (1983), Kitab al-Ilmam bi'l-A'lam, Alam al-Fikr, vol. 2, p. 127 and following.



The fourteenth century witnessed the rise of a new power in the Near East: the Mongols. News of their advance reached Sultan Barquq in 788 AH (1386 AD)¹. The power of the Ottoman Turks also increased, and clashes between them and the Mamluks began to take on a new and dangerous form, particularly during the reign of Sultan Qaitbay². He paid close attention to the border regions, regularly visiting them, including Alexandria, Rosetta, and Damietta, to inspect fortresses and strongholds and to assess the conditions of the inhabitants³.

Interest in Rosetta increased⁴ during the Mamluk era, as it became an independent port city during the reign of Al-Nasir Mohamed Ibn Qalawun⁵. It became one of the Nastawri districts⁶, 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 Nile⁷ by Fayruz Al-Rumi Al-Arami⁸.

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 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 Baybars⁹, and he built a wall around it

¹ Tarkhan, Ibrahim, *Misr fi 'Asr Dawlat al-Mamalik al-Jaraksah*, p. 72.

² See: Ibn Iyas, *Bada'i' al-Zuhur*, vol. 1, Cairo, pp. 138-227-298; al-Sakhawi (d. 1304 AH/1887 AD), *al-Daw' al-Lami' fi A'yan al-Qarn al-Tasi'*, vol. 3, p. 274.

³ Ibn Iyas. *Bada'i' al-Zuhur*, 2, pp. 160-173-175-177. Al-Sakhawi. *Al-Daw' al-Lami'*, 6, p. 206.

⁴ Al-Qalqashandi. *Al-Khitat*, 4, p. 390. Al-Maqrizi. *Al-Khitat*, 1, pp. 72-73.

⁵ Al-Maqrizi. *Al-Suluk*, 1/1, pp. 74-129.

⁶ The Nastrawiya: named after Nastrawiya or Nastrouh, north of Lake Burullus, which was the capital of the district. See Tusun, Omar. *The Historical Atlas of 1934*.9.

⁷ Ibn Daqmaq (1893). *Al-Intisar li-Wasitat Aqd al-Amsar*, 5, 1st ed., Cairo, p. 114. Al-Maqrizi. *Al-Suluk*, 2, pp. 74-129.

⁸ Al-Sakhawi (1354 AH/1953 AD). *Al-Daw' al-Lami'*, 6, p. 176.

⁹ 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.



it to protect it from raids¹.

Sultan al-Ghuri also ordered the construction of a wall along the coast and watchtowers to defend the port², 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 Damietta³. 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 held⁴.

When Egypt became an Ottoman province in 923 AH (1517 AD), Selim I⁵ 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. He praised it as a vital Egyptian port, and from then on, it became a populated city⁶, 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 time⁷.

¹ See: Ibn Taghribirdi, Al-Nujum, 15, p. 334. Ibn Iyas, Bada'i' al-Zuhur, 3, pp. 155-156.

² 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 (IJCIS), Vol. 1, Issue 2, September 2019, pp. 52-69.

³ 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.

⁴ Wasfi, Naeem Zaki. International Trade Methods, p. 91.

⁵ 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, Muhammad (1977). The Ottoman State and the Arab East, Cairo, p. 16.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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).



First: The historical, political and urban framework of Rosetta

Any civilizational renaissance in a place is closely linked to the political, social and economic conditions of the place in which it arises. Therefore, these conditions have sometimes positively and sometimes negatively affected the level of rise and fall of progress and the highest civilization in Egypt throughout its ages, especially during the period of Ottoman rule over it, which lasted for about three centuries (923-1213 AH/1517-1798 AD)¹.

The Ottomans failed to impose their culture on the Arab states. Under Ottoman rule², the peoples retained their languages, cultures, and traditions. The Ottomans pursued a policy of simplification, provided these countries continued to meet their annual obligations. In accordance with this policy, the Ottomans did not attempt to obstruct the movement of people from one Arab country to another throughout their rule. This policy allowed many North Africans and Levantines³ to settle in Egypt. 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 Magnificent⁴, according to the "Suleimanname" (a legal code), as their establishment required considerable time.

The cities of Rosetta and Alexandria witnessed a fusion of Ottoman, Egyptian, and Moroccan arts, as Rosetta was the closest port to Istanbul. The artistic and architectural richness of these cities clearly reflects their economic, artistic, and architectural development. Rosetta, being the primary port in Egypt, received more attention than all

Bulugh al-Arab by al-Sa'di, Al-Majalla al-Tarikhiya, 22, Cairo, p. 397. Farid, Muhammad. 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.

¹ Ramadan, Mustafa (1983). Ottoman Egypt, Cairo, Al-Hussein University Library, pp. 8-9.

² Al-Shinawi, Abdul Aziz. Europe at the Beginning of the Middle Ages, 1, p. 549.

³ Anis, Muhammad (1962). The Egyptian School of History, Cairo, p. 13. Abu Ta'ila, Muhammad (1963). Egypt's International Center from the Ottoman Conquest to the Present, Cairo, p. 5. Abd al-Rahim, Abd al-Rahim Abd al-Rahman (January 1978). The Role of the Maghrebis in the History of Egypt during the Ottoman Era, Moroccan Historical Journal, 10-11, Tunis, p. 77. Khalifa, Rabie Hamed (1984). The Arts of Cairo in the Ottoman Era, Cairo, p. 77.

⁴ 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, Muhammad. History of the Ottoman State, Cairo, p. 78. Maher, Suad. Mosques of Egypt, Vol. 5, p. 5.



other Egyptian ports. Consequently, the city¹ flourished and became a major commercial hub throughout the Ottoman era. This period saw the emergence of numerous commercial agencies, caravanserais, covered markets, houses, palaces, bathhouses, mills, and various industrial facilities, each with its own distinct function.

Since social life is closely linked to economic life, and thus to the subject of this study, it is necessary to clarify the most important features of the social landscape in these aforementioned cities during the Ottoman era. It is worth noting that the Ottoman state did not attempt to Ottomanize the Egyptian people—that is, to impose Ottoman culture upon them—nor did it attempt to link them to the Ottoman court².

Second: The Roots and Concept of Social Classes and the Emergence of Craft Guilds

The roots of the concept of social class can be traced back to the Greek philosophers. Aristotle discussed the different patterns of political organization³. The state is composed of classes, the first of which are the farmers, followed by the workers and merchants, then the laborers and warriors, in addition to the class of advisors and judges. Classes are also divided into a wealthy class, a poor class, and a middle class, as well as into the class of notables, the class of the people, and the class of slaves.

Plato⁴ viewed society as divided into three classes: artisans, warriors, and intellectuals. Ibn Khaldun further divided society according to profession, lifestyle, and type of dwelling⁵. Each class occupied a specific social position, obligating them to perform certain duties and tasks, and granting those defined and known rights and privileges in relation to other groups⁶.

The primary objective of the social class system was to ensure the rights of members of the

¹ Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed. The manifestations of the planning and urbanization of rosette – Egypt, (16th:18th century), International Journal of Academic Multidisciplinary Research (IJAMR), Vol. 3 Issue 1, January 2019, pp. 31-42.

² Al-Shinawi, Abdul Aziz (1983). Al-Azhar: Mosque and University, p. 155.

³ See: Ahmed, Gharib Sayed (1970). Social Classes, Alexandria, pp. 14–15.

Lipset, M. S. (1872). Social class, International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, New York, p. 290.

⁴ See: Plato, The Republic, translated by Fouad Zakaria, Cairo, pp. 140-141.

⁵ Ibn Khaldun, Abu Zayd Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad Wali al-Din al-Tunisi (732-808 AH/1332-1406 CE) (1960). The Muqaddimah, edited and annotated by Ali Abd al-Qadir Wafi, Cairo, Vol. 3, p. 931.

⁶ See: Mahjoub, Muhammad Abduh (1976). Political Anthropology, Alexandria, p. 193.



same profession to join professional guilds. The emergence of these guilds was a result of revolutionary and religious movements¹.

The wars and disasters that befell the world in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the shift of a large part of Indian trade after the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope route, and the competition of European goods with local products, had a great impact on the formation of guilds². Hence, the owners of the same industry formed a guild to supervise them and everything related to the affairs of that industry. This helped the guild to have a pedagogical and social role because of the connection and cooperation it created among the people of the industry, and because it was keen to preserve³ for them a decent level of morals and a dignified life.

Craft guilds became a feature of Islamic civilization⁴, attracting Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Subjects pledged their allegiance to these guilds more than to the ruling authority⁵. The guild leaders played a role in conveying government orders to their members⁶, contributing to maintaining order⁷, and carrying out government-mandated tasks⁸. These guilds also played a vital role in safeguarding the interests of individuals in Rosetta⁹. They

¹ Izz al-Din, Amin (1967). *A History of Social Class in Egypt*, Cairo, pp. 31-32.

² Gibb, Hamilton and Harold Bowen (1971). *Islamic Society and the West*, vol. 2, translated by Ahmed Abdel Rahim Mustafa, Cairo, pp. 140–141. Othman, Hassan and Muhammad Muhammad Tawfiq (1942). *A History of Egypt in the Ottoman Era, Al-Mujmal fi al-Tarikh al-Misri (A Summary of Egyptian History)*, Cairo, p. 273.

³ Othman, Hassan. *A History of Egypt in the Ottoman Era*, p. 272.

⁴ Lewis, Bernard (1940). *Islamic Syndicates*, translated by Abdel Aziz al-Douri, *Al-Risalah Magazine*, 350, p. 696.

⁵ Gibb, Hamilton and Harold Bowen. *Islamic Society and the West*. p. 126; Harraz, Sayyid Rajab. *An Introduction to the History of Egypt*, p. 38; Abd al-Latif, Layla. *Studies in the History and Historians of Egypt and the Levant during the Ottoman Era*, p. 57.

⁶ Al-Jabarti, Abd al-Rahman ibn Hasan Burhan al-Din al-Jabarti al-Hanafi, d. 1240 AH/1825 CE. *Wonders of Antiquities in Biographies and News*, 3, p. 17.

⁷ Raymond, André (1974). *Chapters from the Social History of Ottoman Cairo*, translated by Zuhair al-Shaib, Shaib, Cairo, p. 15.

⁸ Al-Jabarti. *Wonders of Antiquities in Biographies and News*, 3, pp. 225–226; Lahita, Muhammad Fahmi (1939). *Economics for Egyptians*, Cairo, p. 178. Gibb, Hamilton and Harold Bowen. *Islamic Society and the West*, p. 137; Abd al-Latif, Layla (1987). *Egyptian society in the Ottoman era*, Cairo, p. 38.

⁹ Haridi, Salah Ahmed (1983–1984). *Economic and Social Life in the City of Rosetta during the Ottoman Era, Al-Majalla Al-Tarikhia (The Historical Journal)*, 30–31, Cairo, p. 349.



were distinguished by their own internal regulations, which defined the relationships between their members and between them and the ruling authority. Each guild had its own unwritten constitution, comprised of inherited customs and traditions¹.

These guilds worked to develop and train craftsmen, preserving the craft from extinction by training new generations through a hierarchical career path consisting of the master craftsman, the foreman, and the apprentice. The master craftsman was the head of the guild, possessing intricate knowledge of its every detail. A sheikh was elected from among these masters for each guild. The foreman was a hired worker, usually living with the master, whose employment lasted between three and five years, after which he would become a master craftsman. The apprentice lived with the master and pledged obedience. The master would provide him with technical training in the craft, a process lasting seven years, after which a practical exam was held. If the apprentice passed, he became a foreman².

Craft guilds played a significant and prominent role in organizing and unifying artisans, especially when compared to the fragmentation that characterized peasant life. This perhaps explains why groups of peasants sometimes sought to join these guilds whenever they faced increased injustice or oppressive rule³.

These guilds wielded considerable influence in Egyptian society at the time, largely due to their large numbers. This afforded them a degree of political power, as the heads of these guilds enjoyed significant authority and had the right to access the Pasha⁴.

¹ Abdul Ghani Al-Hanafi, Ahmed Shalabi (1978). *Awdah Al-Isharat fi man Tulay Misr wa Al-Qahira min Al-Wuzara wa Al-Bashas* (The Clearest Indications Concerning Those Who Ruled Egypt and Cairo from Among the Ministers and Pashas), edited by Abdul Rahim Abdul Rahman, Cairo, p. 17.

² Haridi, Salah Ahmed (1985). *Al-Hiraf wa Al-Sina'at fi 'Ahd Muhammad Ali* (Crafts and Industries in the Era of Muhammad Ali), Alexandria: Dar Al-Ma'arif Al-Jami'iya, pp. 42, 46.

³ Izz Al-Din, Amin (1967). *Tarikh Al-Karabat Al-Misriyya min Nushatha ila 1919* (A History of the Egyptian Working Class from its Origins until 1919), Cairo, p. 32.

⁴ Montrane, Robert (1970). *Al-'Aqabat bayna Al-Qahira wa Al-Istanbul ila Al-'Uthmani li-Misr min al-Qur'an Al-'Ashab ila Hatta Al-'Ashab* (Relations between Cairo and Istanbul during the Ottoman Rule of Egypt from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century), translated by Al-Shaib, Zuhair, Al-Majalla (The Journal), No. 158, Cairo, p. 60.



Third: The Social Hierarchy and Classes in Egypt and the Ottoman Era

During the Ottoman period, social classes were divided into seven classes¹, two of which were considered the upper class and the lower class. Revisiting Aristotle's classification, we observe that the upper class consisted of warriors, military officers, and judges, who comprised the seven corps². The lower class consisted of farmers, laborers, merchants, and other workers. Plato's classes (craftsmen, warriors, and intellectuals) placed the upper class solely on warriors, while craftsmen and intellectuals constituted the lower class. The intellectuals included scholars, sheikhs, and religious figures. Each class was further divided into professional guilds³, each managed by a sheikh or elder⁴.

As for the various social classes and strata at that time, they all came after the aristocratic class, which consisted of Ottomans, Mamluk beys⁵, and some merchants. These classes included scholars, merchants, artisans, peasants, non-Muslims living under Islamic rule (dhimmi), Bedouins, and various other communities⁶.

The Ottoman Turks: occupied the top of the social hierarchy and enjoyed considerable power. At their head was the Pasha⁷ residing in Cairo⁸. This class lived in complete

¹ Zaki, Ahmad. *The Social History of Egypt*, Cairo, p. 361. Aristotle had previously identified these seven classes as farmers, laborers, hired workers, warriors, marshals, and judges. See: Ahmad, Gharib Sayyid. *Social Classes*, pp. 14–15.

² Harraz, Sayyid Rajab (1970). *An Introduction to the History of Modern Egypt*, Cairo, p. 33.

³ Abd al-Latif, Layla (1979). *Studies in the History and Historians of Egypt and the Levant during the Ottoman Era*, Cairo, p. 60.

⁴ The title of the head of the sect was Ra'i, Wali, or Pir. See: Gibb, Hamilton, and Harold Bowen. *Islamic Society and the West*, pp. 132–137.

⁵ Beys are the plural of Bey, a Turkish word from Büyük, meaning chief or headman, and also meaning prince, ruler, or chief. See: Ali, Mustafa Barakat Muhsin. *A Study of Script, Titles, and Functions in the Surviving Foundation Inscriptions of Ottoman Buildings in Cairo*, Master's Thesis, Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo University, 1408 AH/1988 CE, pp. 462-464.

⁶ Harraz, Sayyid Rajab (1970). *An Introduction to the History of Modern Egypt from the Ottoman Conquest to the British Occupation (1517-1882)*. Cairo: Dar al-Nahda al-Arabiya, p. 32.

⁷ Pasha: It is likely derived from the Turkish word "baş ağa," meaning elder brother. Egypt has known this title since the 8th century AH (14th century CE). It is an official honorary title befitting a person's status in society and is associated with both civilians and military personnel. Towards the end of the Ottoman era in Egypt, there were multiple Pashas; the ruler of Egypt was not the only Pasha. Ali, Mustafa Barakat Muhsin, *A Study of Script, Titles, and Positions Through Founding Texts*, pp. 398-402.

⁸ Volney (1994), *Three Years in Egypt and the Levant*, translated by Edward al-Bustani, Cairo, Part 1, p. 70.



isolation from Egyptian society and did not learn Arabic or interact with the general population¹.

The Mamluks: They generally formed a distinct class, even after Egypt became part of the Ottoman Empire². They held some important military positions and, like the Ottomans themselves, did not mix with the Egyptians. However, with the Ottoman conquest, the power structures were modified, diminishing the authority of local powers, especially the Mamluk emirs. A key objective of this was to ensure Ottoman control over the tax system through its representatives in the province. Despite this, this class enjoyed immense wealth and influence³, with some becoming powerful figures who wielded absolute authority. They relied on Coptic Christian scribes to collect taxes from the peasants⁴.

Scholars: occupied the top of the social hierarchy, ranking after the Mamluks and princes. They enjoyed a distinguished social position, wealth, and the respect of all classes. Most of them came from the working class and held judicial, educational, teaching, and charitable endowment positions. They had a special place with the masses, as many of them stood alongside the common people during times of crisis to work towards resolving them. They also played a mediating role in reconciling the various factions of society, including the Mamluks, and they redressed grievances because the princes and rulers feared and respected them⁵. Since the ruling authority and the scholars needed each other, and therefore mutual support in every way, many scholars in the twelfth century AH (eighteenth century AD) reiterated the saying that the legitimacy of the authority rested on adherence to Islamic law, the application of its rulings, and heeding the advice of scholars⁶.

The merchants: They represented a large group that included a number of wealthy people

¹ Haraz, al-Sayyid Rajab (1970), *An Introduction to the History of Modern Egypt*, p. 32.

² Andre, Thevet (1984). *Voyage en Egypt 1549-1552*, L'institut Francais Darchéologie Orientale du Caire, p. 173.

³ Hanna, Nelly. *The Culture of the Middle Class in Ottoman Egypt (16th-18th centuries)*, translated by Abbas, Raouf, special edition, Egyptian-Lebanese House, pp. 70-71.

⁴ Volney. *Three Years in Egypt and the Levant*, p. 76.

⁵ On the scholarly class in the Mamluk and Ottoman eras and their value, see al-Jabarti, Abd al-Rahman. *Wonders of Antiquities*, Cairo: Dar al-Shaab Press, Part 1, p. 77 and following. al-Shinawi, Abd al-Aziz (1986). *The Ottoman State*, pp. 229-232.

⁶ Hanna, Nelly. *The Culture of the Middle Class*, p. 216.



who had an excellent social position. They were concentrated in the areas adjacent to the markets or inside these markets. They were mostly the ones who practiced foreign trade in addition to domestic trade, and they formed huge fortunes. As for the rest of the merchants, they were of average means, but they lived at a higher and more prestigious level than the class of craftsmen and farmers¹.

Peasants: They represent the vast majority of Egyptian society at that time, and are considered the lowest class of this people, as they suffered a lot from injustice and torture, especially under the application of the agricultural tax system, where the peasant would cultivate the land without owning anything from it or making much profit, due to the usufruct ownership of this land imposed by the tax system².

Craftsmen: Their situation was relatively better than that of the peasants, and there was a kind of social solidarity among the members of each industrial group, which resulted from the system of craft guilds on the one hand, and from the nature of the career progression on the other hand, which required those wishing to learn to stay with their teachers for long periods³.

These statements reveal the features of the social and class structure that characterized Egyptian society under Ottoman rule. This system was clearly reflected in the shape of the social pyramid and the sharp differences between the various classes of the people. Society in that era was divided into an upper and privileged aristocratic class that monopolized power, influence, and prestige. At the forefront of this class was the ruling elite, represented by the Ottoman Turks, headed by the governor or "pasha" residing in the Cairo Citadel, alongside the Mamluk princes "beys" who maintained their status and military and administrative influence, as well as a limited group of wealthy merchants who possessed enormous fortunes. This ruling class was characterized by its complete and almost total isolation from the fabric of Egyptian society. Its members did not seek to learn the Arabic language or integrate with the masses and the common people. Rather, they lived in an ivory tower, separate in their culture, language, and interests from the general populace. In

¹ On the state of trade during this era, see: Abd al-Rahim, Abd al-Rahim Abd al-Rahman (1990). Chapters from the Economic and Social History of Egypt in the Ottoman Era, pp. 145-179.

² For information on the conditions of peasants during the Ottoman era, see: Abd al-Rahim, Abd al-Rahim Abd al-Rahman (1986). The Egyptian Countryside in the Eighteenth Century, p. 10 and following.

³ For information on the industrial system and craft guilds during the Ottoman era, see Amin Ezz El-Din (1967). History of the Egyptian Working Class, p. 7 and following.



contrast, all other segments and broad categories of the people came in a subordinate position below this aristocratic apex, encompassing a wide variety of local social strata. Such as scholars and religious men, merchants and agency owners, manufacturers and craftsmen belonging to professional guilds, as well as the vast majority of hardworking peasants, the People of the Book, the desert Arabs, and the foreign and Moroccan immigrant communities that settled in major cities and ports such as Rosetta, this diverse base formed the backbone of social and economic life amidst heavy burdens and strict class divisions.

People of the Dhimma: Egyptian society included many groups, such as the Coptic Christians, who constituted the majority of the Dhimmis¹, as well as the Jews, who enjoyed a degree of freedom and tolerance that allowed them to play a tangible role in trade and to form, along with other subjects of the state and foreigners, a strong network of relationships based on shared interests and mutual benefit². There were also Greek Orthodox, Armenian, Maronite, Catholic, and Protestant communities. The Ottoman system applied the principles and rulings of Islamic law to these minorities according to the Hanafi school of thought³.

The Arabs or Bedouins: The vast majority of them lived in the desert and isolated places and lived in constant migration. They had a single way of life and customs and traditions that governed them through the head of each tribe, who is known as the sheikh of the tribe. They had a direct influence on different aspects of life. Some of them would constantly raid trade caravans and cut off their routes. We also find some of them who settled in cities and established kinship ties with the people of these cities⁴.

The dual role and nature of life of the Arabs or Bedouins during the Ottoman era are evident. They constituted an influential and vital element in the social, security, and

¹ For information on the conditions of Coptic Christians during the Ottoman era, see Mohamed Afifi (1992). *The Copts in Ottoman Egypt*, Cairo: Egyptian General Book Organization, p. 27 and following.

² Shuman, Mohsen Ali (2000). *The Jews in Ottoman Egypt until the Nineteenth Century*, History of the Egyptians series, Cairo: Egyptian General Book Organization, vol. 2, pp. 255-256.

³ See Okasha, Tharwat (1983). *Egypt in the Eyes of Foreigners*, Cairo: Dar Al-Maaref, vol. 2, p. 18 and following. A number of oil paintings depict the clothing of each religious group are also included.

⁴ For more on the role of Bedouins in the cities of Lower Egypt at that time, see Samira Fahmy Ali. *The Role of the Bedouin of Lower Egypt in the History of Ottoman Egypt (923-1213 AH, 1517-1798 AD)*, PhD dissertation, Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University, 1989, p. 10 and following.



economic equation of the country. The details of their lives are revealed through their nomadic lifestyle. The vast majority of Bedouins settled in desert regions and isolated areas, living in constant motion in search of pasture and grazing land, maintaining a strict Bedouin lifestyle and unified traditions and customs that governed their affairs. These societies were subject to a precise and interconnected social system headed by the "tribal sheikh," who held ultimate authority and was primarily responsible for managing the affairs of his tribe, resolving their disputes, and representing them before the authorities or other tribes. As for their security and economic impact, the Bedouins played a recurring and influential role in public life. On the one hand, some of them posed a security challenge by launching continuous raids on trade caravans and disrupting trade routes, which negatively impacted the security of land routes and the flow of goods. On the other hand, the relationship with the urban population was not severed. Rather, we find a group of them who went down to the cities and settled there, in harmony with its people through marriage and kinship ties, which created a social overlap between the elements of the desert and the urban population in the regions of Lower Egypt.

Fourth: The immigrant and foreign communities in Rosetta society

They were distinguished by their large numbers during that period, as Egypt at that time included many different and diverse nationalities. We see consuls and merchants of all nationalities, as well as some communities that settled and established themselves in Egypt, including the Turks, the French, the Levantines, and the Moroccans. They mostly lived in neighborhoods that were known in some cases by their names¹.

This passage reveals the cosmopolitan and diverse nature of Egyptian cities and major ports during the Ottoman era. Foreign and immigrant communities constituted a fundamental and prominent element in the demographic and economic structure of society. Their presence was characterized by a multitude of nationalities and diversity. This period witnessed a significant increase in the number of immigrants from various nationalities,

¹ For further information on these communities and their varying conditions during this period, see Al-Ghannam, Zainab Muhammad. *Communities and Their Role in the Economic and Social Life of Egypt During the Ottoman Era (1517-1798 AD)*, PhD dissertation, Faculty of Humanities, Al-Azhar University, Cairo, 1988, p. 5 and following. Also see Zehni, Ilham Muhammad (1991 CE). *Egypt in the Writings of French Travelers*, p. 295 and following.



including foreign consuls and merchants, in addition to communities that settled permanently, such as the Turks, French, Levantines, and North Africans. Regarding settlement and residential segregation (private quarters), these communities generally tended to reside and congregate in independent residential areas, often known by their names (such as "community quarters" or "agency"). This lent a distinctive cultural and social character to the cities where they settled, such as Rosetta and Alexandria.

The social strata of Rosetta included sheikhs, scholars, and religious figures; laborers and craftsmen; and farmers. Rosetta's society also comprised Muslims, Christians, and Jews, in addition to newcomers such as Moroccans, Syrians, and Turks from most of the country's cities.

The Turks worked in various trades and were known by the name of their hometown¹, the Jews worked in commercial agencies², and some were ship captains³ and merchants⁴.

Rosetta was also a fertile land for many residents of the country's cities to live in and work in many crafts, such as the people of Burullus⁵, some of whom worked in the manufacture and trade of copper⁶, and the people of Menoufia, some of whom worked in the manufacture and trade of oil⁷, as well as the people of Upper Egypt⁸, Damietta⁹, Mahalla al-Kubra¹⁰, Edfina¹¹, Manzala¹, Beheira², and Baltim³, to name but a few.

¹ Some of them were attributed to the Morea (Morani) and Salonica (Salaniki). See: Document dated 1 Jumada al-Awwal 1047 AH (1637 AD), Register 54 (Rosetta Court), Register 12, Article 479, p. 167, Register 14, Article 19, p. 5 (Alexandria Court).

² Document dated 21 Jumada al-Thani 1047 AH (1637 AD), Register 54 (Rosetta Court).

³ Document dated 19 Dhu al-Qi'dah 955 AH (1548 AD), Register 1, Article 25, p. 7 (Rosetta Court), Document dated 15 Jumada al-Thani 1047 AH (1637 AD), Register 54 (Rosetta Court).

⁴ Document dated 198 Dhu al-Qi'dah 955 AH (1548 AD), Register 1, Article 14, p. 4 (Rosetta Court).

⁵ Al-Shuni Endowment Document, lines 52–284.

⁶ Document dated 19 Rabi' al-Thani 1047 AH (1637 AD), Register 54 (Rosetta Court).

⁷ Document dated 9 Rajab 1047 AH (1637 AD), Register 54 (Rosetta Court) in the name of al-Manufi al-Zayyat.

⁸ Document dated 18 Rajab 1047 AH (1637 AD), Register 54 (Rosetta Court) in the name of Ibrahim ibn Ahmad al-Sa'idi.

⁹ Mustafa George Waqf document, line 1; document dated 28 Rajab 1047 AH (1637 AD), Register 54 (Rosetta Court), where it appears in the name of Badr al-Din al-Uthmani al-Dumyati; Fatima bint Darwish al-Sabbagh Waqf document, dated 15 Sha'ban 1281 AH (1865 AD), lines 13-14 (No. 2164 Waqf).

¹⁰ Document dated 29 Rajab 1047 AH (1637 AD), Register 54 (Rosetta Court).

¹¹ Document dated 18 Jumada al-Ula 1047 AH (1637 AD), Register 54 (Rosetta Court).



As for social life in Rosetta, the social structure of the groups that lived in Rosetta, including the people of Rosetta itself, consisted of the men of administration, who were at the head of these groups. This group enjoyed broad material and moral advantages over all other groups. The administrative positions were distributed among the Turks and the Mamluks. The governor of Rosetta was at the head of this apparatus, and he was subject to the Sanjak of the Lake. Then there were the men of the Arabs who were responsible for preserving its fortress and defending it, and the two divisions of the Sipahi and the Jawishiyya were responsible for protecting internal security. Then there was the sheikh of the Arabs, who was the head of the Arabs in Rosetta and was responsible for any actions by them that disrupted security⁴.

As for the major merchants, given the increasing commercial activity in Rosetta since the beginning of the Ottoman era, a class of major merchants emerged, belonging to various nationalities. In addition to Egyptians, this class included Greeks, Moroccans, Syrians, and Europeans. This class enjoyed a prominent social standing within Egyptian society and had extensive business activities throughout the country. They were responsible for import and export operations and possessed substantial capital, which enabled them to establish a distinguished social position within Rosetta society. They then connected with their counterparts in Cairo and other cities, acquiring agencies and engaging in significant business activities. Each merchant had agents in other Egyptian cities⁵.

The class of small merchants, on the other hand, had small capital and limited trade. Some resorted to partnerships to expand their capital, and through this, some members of this class were able to improve their financial standing, and some even managed to join the ranks of the major merchants⁶.

The administrators and merchants had a prominent social influence in Rosetta society, and were financially capable because their products were popular in Egyptian society at that

¹ Document dated 3 Rajab 1047 AH (1637 AD), Register 54 (Rosetta Court), mentioning the name of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Muhammad Ja'bub al-Manzali. Also, the al-Manzali endowment deed dated 26 Shawwal 1336 AH (1918 AD), No. 4926/46 (Endowments).

² Document dated 20 Rajab 1047 AH (1637 AD), Register 54 (Rosetta Court).

³ Document dated 3 Safar 956 AH (1549 AD), Register 1, Article 256, p. 126 (Rosetta Court).

⁴ Former Rosetta Customs Register, last page.

⁵ Document dated 17 Rabi' al-Awwal 1004 AH (1595 AD), Register 6, Article 157, p. 62 (Alexandria Court).

⁶ Abd al-Rahim, Abd al-Rahim Abd al-Rahman. Chapters from the History of Egypt, pp. 145-183.



time. In fact, these crafts gave their names to the families who worked in them, and these families still bear the names of these crafts to this day. There is the Al-Fassasi family, which was the family that made mosaics, the Al-Manadili family that made handkerchiefs, the Al-Assal family, which was the family whose members made honey and prepared it for sale, and the Al-Sayigh, Al-Kahki, Al-Dakhakhni, Al-Hamami, and Al-Sinan families, and other crafts that the people of Rosetta worked in, and the owners of these crafts were another social class¹.

The society of Rosetta included many foreign communities in varying numbers, such as Greeks or Cypriots, whose pirate activity did not prevent their presence in the port, and the Rawdas, who submitted to the state at the beginning of the 16th century. The society also included some Levantines, both Muslims and Christians, some of whom worked in trade, and each of them had a role in the commercial activity of the city. The most prominent foreign communities were²:

The Venetians: Venice formed the first commercial center in Rosetta. The Ottoman state had adopted a policy of concluding treaties and granting privileges to some European countries with the aim of stimulating trade and increasing investments in its lands³. Venice was one of the first of those countries, as Selim I concluded a treaty with it (1517 AD), stipulating the continuation of the privileges they had obtained, that its merchants be treated fairly and that none of them be harmed in all the ports of Egypt, and that they not be forced into a specific trade, and that their consul had the right to try his citizens⁴. This was followed by an order from Suleiman the Magnificent with the same meaning. However, the deterioration of the state's situation with the interference of the Mamluk princes in political and administrative affairs and the increase in the influence of the Jews in the city greatly harmed what the Ottoman administration aspired to, and other such events.

¹ Abd al-Rahim, Abd al-Rahim Abd al-Rahman. Chapters from the History of Egypt, pp. 170-171.

² See: Ibrahim, Nasira Abd al-Mutajalli. Alexandria in the Ottoman Era, p. 250 and following.

³ Dell, Charles (1947). Venice: An Aristocratic Republic, translated by Ahmad Izzat Abd al-Karim, Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, p. 151. Darwish, Mahmoud (2001). The Golden Venetian Ducats in the Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria, Studies and Research in Islamic Archaeology and Civilization, Supreme Council of Antiquities, Book Two, p. 174.

⁴ Abd al-Aziz, Omar (1975). Alexandrian Society in the Ottoman Era, Alexandrian Society Through the Ages, Alexandria University, pp. 322-323.



The Jewish control of customs¹ and most of its important positions from the mid-16th to the mid-18th century led to the disappearance of several states that had previously held privileges within the Mamluk state, namely Genoa and Venice. Despite Ottoman administration decrees allowing the Venetians to maintain their status, the Venetian consulate and its merchants relocated to Cairo to facilitate trade and commerce, free from Jewish influence, as their influence had surpassed that of the state².

In their dealings with Venetian merchants, the Jews employed a policy of flooding them with goods to the point where the Venetians were unable to pay. Then, Jewish officials (who were also commercial agents for other Jewish merchants) would levy exorbitant taxes on the Venetian merchants in the city. The Venetians even had a caravanserai in Rosetta³.

The French: France exploited the Ottoman Empire's policy of commercial openness with some European countries and its agreement with Venice, renewing the privileges granted to it during the Mamluk period. In 1528 AD, it secured guarantees of freedom of residence and movement for its subjects by land and sea, along with a pledge not to interfere with their churches or impose property taxes on them. This was further reinforced in 1535 by a treaty of friendship and trade, which included customs and tax exemptions and the right of reciprocity. Trade between Rosetta and Marseille flourished⁴.

While relations between France and the Ottoman Empire during the 16th century were characterized by strength, shared interests, and political, economic, and military cooperation, the situation differed in the 17th century. France pursued a policy of sending missionary expeditions to the East, alongside expanding its economic activity. This coincided with both France and the Ottoman Empire being preoccupied with internal turmoil⁵.

For numerous reasons, relations between the two sides became strained. France had usurped Venice's place in Mediterranean trade, with French ships transporting goods to and

¹ Zahni, Ilham (1991). *Egypt in the Writings of French Travelers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Center for Documentation and Contemporary Egyptian History, Cairo: Egyptian General Book Organization, p. 116.

² Yutaka, *Venetians in Alexandria*, p. 136.

³ Combe, Et. (1928). *Alexandria musulme*, p. 155. *Inscription Arabe d'un khan Ottoman a Rosette*, p. 119.

⁴ Sulayman, Abd al-Hamid. *History of Egyptian Ports in the Ottoman Era*, p. 295. Zahni, Ilham. *Egypt in the Writings of French Travelers*, pp. 11-27.

⁵ Zahni, Ilham. *Egypt in the Writings of French Travelers*, pp. 28-37.



from Venice. The French also established the French National Inn, founded by Edward Wartley Montagu between 1769 and 1776 AD¹.

Over time, France's influence in the city grew, and it began requiring ships arriving at the port to fly the French flag. By the mid-17th century, the French community's disregard for the Ottoman administration and its representatives in the city had reached the point of violating explicit agreements and contracts registered in the Sharia courts².

The English: By the mid-16th century, the number of English people in the city had increased. England followed France in concluding treaties with the Ottoman Empire, such as the 1553 AD treaty, which granted its subjects the same privileges as French subjects, including freedom of residence in ports such as Suez, Alexandria, Rosetta, Bulaq, and Damietta, and facilitated entry and exit from the port in exchange for paying customs duties. In the first half of the 17th century, the number of English people increased significantly, and over time, the English presence in the city and the scale of their businesses there became increasingly apparent³.

Moroccans: Moroccan merchants constituted a large segment of the merchant class in Rosetta. Many of them became renowned figures who played a significant role in the trade of the port city and Egypt in general. Many also joined the military and held important positions and trades in the port.

On all levels, Moroccans influenced cultural aspects, particularly in the spread of Sufism. Many Moroccan scholars and students of Al-Azhar settled in Egypt, where they had a more active and prosperous section in the mosque due to the numerous endowments provided by Moroccan merchants. Moroccans also contributed to the dissemination of books in Egypt by copying them and were active in both domestic and international trade⁴.

¹ This khan has now disappeared. See: Coppin (1647). *Bouclier de L'Europe, avec un realetion des voyageurs faits dants la Turquie, la barbarie, et l'Egypte*, p. 169. Binos (1777). *voyage, I–II*, p. 252. Irwin (1777). *Series of adventures*, p. 359.

² Ibrahim, Nasra Abd al-Mutajalli. *Alexandria in the Ottoman Era*, pp. 252-256.

³ Sulayman, Abd al-Hamid. *History of Egyptian Ports in the Ottoman Era*, pp. 296-298.

⁴ See: Abd al-Rahim, Abd al-Rahim Abd al-Rahman (1990). *Chapters from the Economic and Social History of Egypt in the Ottoman Era*, *History of the Egyptians Series*, 38, Cairo: Egyptian General Book Organization, p. 373. Rizq, Yunan Labib and Muhammad al-Muzayyin (1990). *History of Egyptian-Moroccan Relations from the Beginning of the Ages until 1912*, *History of the Egyptians Series*, 34, Cairo: Egyptian General Book Organization, pp. 158-203.



They worked in trade and industry, and some served as translators in commercial transactions and in the courts¹. They formed their own guild, headed by a sheikh², and some Moroccans were named after the cities they came from³.

The Jews: When Sultan Mohamed the Conqueror entered Constantinople (1453 AD), he opened the way for merchants and craftsmen to move there. One of the effects of the privileges he granted to the Jews of Europe was that in the year (1477 AD), (647) Jewish families migrated to Constantinople, followed by the migrations of Jews from Spain, Italy and Portugal, until in the year (1535 AD) the Jewish population of Istanbul reached (8070) families, and their activities were concentrated in trade, usury and industry. The Ottoman administration welcomed the spread of the Jews and their migrations to the various ports of the state, including Rosetta. As a result of the privileges that the Jews received, their merchants became the great men of the state, and they formed a cash and commercial capital that they invested in loans with usury⁴.

Under the Ottoman Empire, Jews found opportunities that had eluded them during the persecution of Christians in Europe. Their experience of coexistence with previous Ottoman sultans, facilitated by their expertise in medicine, languages, and weaponry, led them to migrate to Ottoman lands, joining the existing Jewish community known as the Rabbanites, the most prominent Jewish group.

Jews engaged in various trades, including currency exchange and other commercial activities. Among the wealthiest were customs officials and some worked as goldsmiths. Their residences and buildings in Rosetta (Rosetta) increased significantly, with most of the houses near the main street being Jewish-owned. They excelled in administration and translation, thanks to their proficiency in foreign languages, which qualified them to work as translators in customs and the city court. This enabled them to establish connections that facilitated business ventures outside Egypt through commercial agents, allowing them to amass considerable wealth. This wealth allowed them to compete with established

¹ Document dated 10 Jumada II 973 AH (1566 AD), Register 8, Article 173, p. 504 (Alexandria Court).

² Document dated 26 Rabi' al-Awwal 1052 AH (1642 AD), Article 9 (Rosetta Court).

³ Some were called al-Maghribi al-Isfaqisi or al-Maghribi al-Ghariyani, or simply after their city. See: Document dated 5 Jumada al-Awwal 1047 AH (1637 AD), Register 54; Document dated 8 Jumada al-Awwal 1047 AH (1637 AD), Register 54 (Rosetta Court); and the al-Shuni Waqf document, lines 27, 91, and 98.

⁴ See: Raymond, André. Chapters from the Social History of Ottoman Cairo, pp. 683-686-687. Shaw, S. Ottoman Egypt, p. 94.



merchants, driving some out of the city, and granted them access to high-ranking foreign officials, such as consuls. The Jews' status did not remain unchanged. The administration grew weary of their numerous shortcomings and began to curtail their influence. With the decline of the Jewish community in the 17th and 18th centuries AD, consuls issued decrees appointing non-Jewish translators, replacing Jews with Christians in this role—a further deterioration of their standing.

It is noteworthy that Jews buried their dead in Alexandria's cemeteries. When the bodies of Jews from Rosetta were being transported to Alexandria for burial, the deceased was permitted to be accompanied by four people: family members, servants, or gravediggers. The family paid the guards of the Rosetta cemetery half a piaster, and any additional amount was subject to the customary fee. This practice applied only to the deceased Jews of Rosetta.

The Christians: They mastered the honey trade and excelled in jobs that depended on reading, writing, and arithmetic, such as office workers and money changers. Therefore, they were keen to buy paper for writing, but they did not have the full opportunity until the administration became reluctant to hire Jewish employees¹.

Strong social ties developed among these groups through trade and mutual benefit. The interconnectedness of the people of Rosetta was evident, and intermarriage became common between the sons and daughters of Rosetta and the sons and daughters of the Arab communities from the Levant and North Africa. Social bonds also developed between the sons of Rosetta and the daughters of the foreign communities residing in Rosetta. Indeed, Menou, the third commander of the French campaign, was captivated by a woman from Rosetta when he was governor of the city, converted to Islam, and married her.

Furthermore, the daily interaction with the Arab and foreign communities that spread throughout Rosetta and lived in its neighborhoods, and whose members engaged in professions that impacted the daily life of Rosetta society, had a significant influence on the customs and traditions of Rosetta society.

Fifth: Features of Social Interaction and Civil Peace in Rosetta

¹ Abdul Karim, Nariman (1996). *The Treatment of Non-Muslims in the Islamic State, History of the Egyptians Series*, 90, Cairo: The Egyptian General Book Authority, p. 93.



Rosetta witnessed a unique model of social pluralism¹ and civil peace among its inhabitants from all classes and Arab and foreign communities. In addition to the Moroccans, the Rosetta community included Venetians, Cypriots, Levantines and others, Muslims and Christians. The community also included some Levantines, some of whom worked in trade and each of them had a role in the progress of the trade movement². The most prominent of the communities was the Moroccan community³, as Moroccan merchants formed a large sector of Rosetta's merchants, as many of them became famous and had a great role in the trade of the port and Egypt in general. Many of them also entered the military sector and also took over important jobs and crafts in the port.

On all levels, Moroccans had a significant cultural impact, particularly in spreading Sufism. Many Moroccan scholars and students of Al-Azhar settled in Egypt, where they had a more active and prosperous section due to the numerous endowments provided by Moroccan merchants. Moroccans also contributed to the dissemination of books in Egypt, copying them and playing a prominent role in both domestic and international trade⁴. They worked in commerce and industry, and some served as translators in commercial transactions and in the courts⁵. They formed their own Sufi order, headed by a sheikh⁶, and some Moroccans were named after the cities they came from.

Rosetta was not merely a transient commercial and military outpost; it was a melting pot where diverse human elements, social classes, and immigrant communities (both Arab and European) mingled. This great diversity gave rise to a complex network of

¹ Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed. Social pluralism and civil peace in rosette – Egypt, (16th -18th century), International Journal of Academic Multidisciplinary Research (IJAMR), Vol. 2 Issue 11, November 2018, pp. 79-87.

² Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed. Foreign communities in rosette and its economic and political role during the ottoman rule, International Journal of Cultural Inheritance & Social Sciences (IJCISS), Vol. 2 Issue 3, March 2020, pp. 42-69.

³ See: Ibrahim, Nasra Abd al-Mutajalli. Alexandria in the Ottoman Era, p. 250 and following.

⁴ See: Abd al-Rahim, Abd al-Rahim Abd al-Rahman (1990). Chapters from the Economic and Social History of Egypt in the Ottoman Era, History of the Egyptians Series, 38, Cairo: Egyptian General Book Organization, p. 373. Rizq, Yunan Labib and Muhammad al-Muzayyin (1990). A History of Egyptian-Moroccan Relations from the Beginning of the Ages until 1912, History of the Egyptians Series, 34, Cairo: Egyptian General Book Organization, pp. 158-203.

⁵ Document dated 10 Jumada II 973 AH (1566 AD), Register 8, Article 173, p. 504 (Alexandria Court).

⁶ Document dated 26 Rabi' al-Awwal 1052 AH (1642 AD), Article 9 (Rosetta Court).



interrelationships based on coexistence, daily interaction, and the exchange of benefits, thus imbuing Rosetta society with a cosmopolitan character that was both open and disciplined.

As for the diverse human fabric of Rosetta: Rosetta represented a melting pot where diverse segments of Muslims, Christians, and Jews blended together, alongside Arab and European immigrant communities such as Venetians, Cypriots, Levantines, French, and English. The most prominent and influential Moroccan community was distinguished by its commercial and military activity, translation services, and the establishment of its own religious order headed by a "Sheikh." This community played a significant role in cultural and religious outreach through the dissemination of Sufi orders, support for the Moroccan section at Al-Azhar, and the copying of books. This transcended the boundaries of isolated residence, fostering deep and continuous social interaction. This interaction manifested in professional and economic integration within markets and agencies, widespread intermarriage between the people of Rosetta and the Arab and foreign communities, and a social flexibility resulting from daily interaction and mutual understanding.

The Moroccan community played a pioneering and pivotal role in Rosetta. It was one of the most important human, cultural, and economic pillars that directly contributed to enriching the social life of Rosetta and Egypt as a whole. Their role is evident in their extensive commercial and military activity, through assuming leadership roles and sensitive professions, providing translation and administrative services in major operations and Sharia courts, and establishing an institutional framework by founding their own sect, represented by a "Sheikh of the Sect," with affiliation to their hometowns. They also played a role in cultural and religious influence by spreading Sufi orders, supporting the "Moroccan Riwaq" at Al-Azhar with substantial endowments, and undertaking the dissemination of knowledge and intellectual discourse through the meticulous copying and circulation of books. As for the dimensions of social interaction and civil peace, the presence of these communities and classes transcended the boundaries of isolated geographical residence, evolving into a deep and continuous social interaction. This was manifested in professional and economic integration through the intertwining of interests in agencies, markets, and ports, thus reinforcing interdependence and the stability of civil peace. Extensive cases of intermarriage, daily closeness, and kinship between the people of Rosetta and the Arab and foreign communities demonstrate the gradual blending of



cultures and the societal flexibility resulting from daily interaction to create a common language of understanding and shared living traditions that have made the city a model of creative peaceful coexistence despite differences in languages, nationalities, and religious backgrounds.

Conclusions

The political, administrative, and military conditions of Rosetta were characterized by its subordination to the Ottoman state through organizational frameworks such as the "Suleimannname" law and the local administration under the Sanjak of the Lake. This included the concentration of internal security forces and defensive fortifications to protect the port city. Simultaneously, a social and class structure existed, comprising at its apex the ruling elite of Ottoman Turks and Mamluk princes. This was followed by the middle and professional classes, including scholars, religious figures, merchants, and various craft guilds with a precise hierarchy of roles. Below these were the popular and marginalized classes, such as peasants, non-Muslims living under Islamic rule (dhimmi), and Bedouin tribes. Furthermore, a vibrant presence of foreign and Arab communities, such as Moroccans, Syrians, Venetians, French, and English, contributed to a cosmopolitan character, reinforced by their social integration, intermarriage, and daily interaction with the city's inhabitants. This was complemented by a dynamic economic and commercial life, exemplified by the port, import and export activities, and agricultural, industrial, and artisanal activities that have immortalized the names of Rosetta families to this day.

A study of the social and class conditions of Rosetta during the Ottoman era yielded several notable findings, which can be summarized as follows:

- **The Nature of the Class Structure:** Like other Egyptian societies under Ottoman rule, Rosetta was characterized by clear class distinctions. At the top was a ruling aristocracy comprised of Ottoman Turks and Mamluk princes, who lived in isolation from the local social fabric. This was followed by middle and lower classes that included scholars, merchants, artisans, and farmers.
- **The Centrality of Craft Guilds:** Guilds and trade associations played a crucial organizational and social role in Rosetta. They were not merely frameworks for training artisans and regulating production quality; they also formed a social safety net, protecting the interests of their members and regulating their relationship with the



ruling authority. 3. Multiculturalism and Immigrant Communities: Rosetta reflected a unique cosmopolitan character thanks to the settlement of large numbers of Arab (North African and Levantine) and foreign (Venetian, French, and English) communities, in addition to Jewish and Coptic communities. These groups lived in their own neighborhoods and districts and actively contributed to stimulating trade and the economy.

- **Social Interaction and Intermarriage:** Despite administrative and cultural differences between the elite and the general population, and between the various communities, Rosetta witnessed widespread social integration, intermarriage, and daily interaction between its residents and the Arab and foreign immigrants, which gave Rosetta society a flexible and open character.
- **The role of internal migrations:** The human diversity in Rosetta was not limited to those coming from outside the country, but extended to include attracting large numbers of people from different regions of Egypt (such as the people of Burullus, Menoufia, Upper Egypt, Damietta, and Mahalla), who engaged in local professions and crafts and enriched the economic and social life of the port.