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TRADING POLITICS AND
THE POLITICS OF TRADE

BY
PETER THOMPSON

1993

thesis
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THIS THESIS FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE

BY

PETER JARED THOMPSON

HAS BEEN APPROVED

JANUARY 1994

(b)

TRADING POLITICS AND THE POLITICS OF TRADE:
The Issue of a Direct British Trade at Suez During the Last
Quarter of the Eighteenth Century

Peter Thompson

A Thesis Presented to the Department of Arabic Studies,
The American University in Cairo,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Masters Degree
December, 1993

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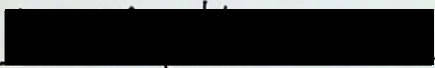
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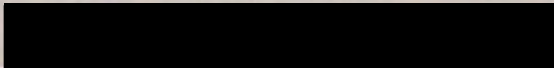
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This thesis is a small accomplishment which owes large debts. Collectively, I am most indebted to the refusal by all who helped along the way to treat it as such. Individually, I am grateful to many.

Dr. Nelly Hanna was a consummate thesis advisor--a professor of commanding erudition, with high expectations, full of dauntless encouragement, and who managed to rein in a mind prone to digression. It is rare to receive such personal commitment. I have been fortunate.

Dr. Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot generously agreed to be a thesis reader despite her tremendously demanding schedule. Dr. al-Sayyid Marsot's comments and clarifications were typically perceptive and most helpful.

Dr. Thabit Abdullah was the final thesis reader. His extremely thorough reading and meticulous comments throughout improved the final draft considerably, although he has no bearing on the shortcomings which remain.

Thanks are due also to the AUC library and its staff.

In a larger sense, this thesis is the product of my masters program, and here the debts grow larger.

To my professors I am particularly grateful. Dr. Nelly's courses were not only thorough and demanding, but taught us to think, to question, to take accepted truths and paradigms and to subject them to fresh scrutiny. Dr. Raouf Abbas contributed to his seminars a nearly encyclopedic knowledge of nineteenth century Egypt and the Middle East. Dr. Hasan Hanafi's discussions and lectures were instructive and inspiring both in and outside the classroom. Dr. Thabit's excellent courses on methodology taught us to recognize and to appraise the craft of historiography, and encouraged us to explore and to form our own notions of what history is and what history should be.

I was saved from administrative quagmires by several members of the department, who have by now acquired saint status. Dr. Elizabeth Sartain, as my department supervisor, guided me through the maze of departmental and university requirements. Dr. Sartain also took the time to remind me over and over of something historians, very ironically, often forget as they specialize--that *the past is relevant*. Each semester Lucy Karim and Madeleine Wissa, at the helm of the office of the Arabic Studies Department, resolved and deflected various administrative snags--deftly juggling student crises, departmental needs, and university regulations.

A final word of thanks is due to my friends in Maadi, nearly all of whom are refugees from South Sudan. With unspeakable grace and humor, they helped keep my self indulgent studies and occasionally trying times rooted in a very sobering perspective.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS..... | iii |
| INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| PART ONE: EGYPT AND BRITISH INDIA--TO MAKE A DEAL..... | 12 |
| Historical and Geographic Background of Red Sea Trade..... | 12 |
| British Trade with Suez, Phase One, 1768-1779..... | 39 |
| British Trade with Suez, Phase Two, 1780-1798..... | 61 |
| PART TWO: CAIRO, ISTANBUL, AND LONDON--TO UNMAKE A DEAL..... | 72 |
| British-Suez Trade in Economic Perspective..... | 72 |
| Mamluk Duplicity..... | 84 |
| The Ottoman Objections..... | 99 |
| Trading Companies and Merchant Rivalries..... | 114 |
| The Labyrinth of Ottoman-European Balance of Power..... | 125 |
| Conclusion..... | 135 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 143 |

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|--|
| AI | Annales Islamologiques |
| EIC | English East India Company |
| IJMES | International Journal of Middle East Studies |
| IJTS | International Journal of Turkish Studies |
| IOR | India Office Records |
| JARCE | Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt |
| JESHO | Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient |
| MES | Middle Eastern Studies |

INTRODUCTION

Historically, one encounters an historical episode that is not only important in its own right, but is intricately linked into a web of related and far-reaching circumstances.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, the British presence in Egypt and various British merchants and administrators

"It is also true that the trade sector carries in itself a great potential for analysis, since it allows us to group the relations between provincial elites, the central administration and the European merchants supported by their governments. Undoubtedly, it is this relationship and its dynamic which determines the overall political scene in the Ottoman Empire during the eighteenth century."

Suraiya Faroghi

... The decision to focus on British trade at Suez requires explanation. Many European traders jockeyed along side the British in the attempt to trade at Suez, and during the years it was active the trade was never an exclusively British privilege. One must also remember that the combined European presence at Suez was dwarfed by the extensive existing Red Sea trade carried out primarily on Turkish and Egyptian fleets. British efforts are singled out, however, because its merchants were the first Europeans to negotiate agreements with the Pasha that allowed British ships to call at Suez. Furthermore, while the British presence in Egypt was quite small compared to other European groups, the French in particular, the European trade at Suez dealt

INTRODUCTION

Occasionally, one encounters an historical episode that is not only important in its own right, but is intricately laced into a rich fabric of related and far reaching circumstances.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, the Mamluk Beys of Egypt and various British merchants and adventurers attempted to open the port of Suez to British ships. This defied a long standing tradition which prohibited European vessels from sailing north of Jidda. For a few brief years the trade existed and in fact flourished before coming to a dramatic close. To fully appreciate the diverse forces which first worked to open Suez to British ships and then demanded the trade be halted, one must explore an exceptionally wide array of events and players both close to and far removed from the port itself. The study offered below explores these issues.

The decision to focus on British trade at Suez requires explanation. Many European traders jockeyed along side the British in the attempt to trade at Suez, and during the years it was active the trade was never an exclusively British privilege. One must also remember that the combined European presence at Suez was dwarfed by the extensive existing Red Sea trade carried out primarily on Turkish and Egyptian fleets. British efforts are singled out, however, because its merchants were the first Europeans to negotiate agreements with the Beys that allowed British ships to call at Suez. Furthermore, while the British presence in Egypt was quite small compared to other European groups, the French in particular, the European trade at Suez dealt

mainly in eastern, notably Indian goods. The merchants of the powerful English East India Company were the predominant European traders working to promote the Suez trade, and therefore require special consideration despite the weak English presence in Egypt.

Several works have already discussed the efforts to open Suez to European trade. However, individually, and even collectively, these sources do not fully explore the significance of the trade, nor the breadth and depth of the forces which worked against it. In particular, Charles-Roux has devoted an entire book specifically to the British trade at Suez¹. Admittedly, it is over half a century old, yet one cannot simply dismiss it as "dated". His research of the European consular records is exhaustive and his attention to the significance of the episode from a European perspective is highly intelligent. However, the importance of political conditions in Egypt, the Ottoman role in the episode, and the odd disinterest of British India (in opposition to certain of its merchants) are neglected.

Daniel Crecelius discusses the European trade at Suez in several excellent articles and in his work on Ali Bey al-Kabir and Muhammad Bey Abu Dhahab, the two Beys credited with first encouraging Europeans to trade at Suez². Prof. Crecelius brings tremendous insights of the political situation in Egypt which had a bearing on the fate of the trade. However, his assessments of

¹ Charles-Roux, *Autour D'Une Route: L'Angleterre, l'Ithme de Suez, et l'Egypte au 18e Siècle*, Paris: 1922.

² Daniel Crecelius, *The Roots of Modern Egypt*, Minneapolis and Chicago: 1981.

the European and Ottoman positions are less thorough--though from his meticulous research and probing analyses one suspects this is a result of choice of focus rather than knowledge or ability. And again, the perspective of British India is not included.

John Livingston and David Kimche discuss the episode as well³. However, Livingston's assessment of Mamluk-European cooperation is enthusiastic to the point of being distorted. Kimche offers, in essence, a capsule, and in many places a careless, summary of Charles-Roux.

Andre Raymond's masterful works on eighteenth century Egypt richly explore the economic, social, and political climate of the time period⁴. While he touches on the issue of European activity at Suez, it is in the context of Red Sea trade in Cairo. From this perspective, the European trade at Suez was not only an exceptionally brief phenomenon, in the big picture of Egypt's economy it was of very little significance, at least quantitatively.

All of the sources relegate the importance of the Ottoman Empire to the periphery--at times a distant one. Ottoman objections to the trade are given a token acknowledgement, however the Empire is presented as too weak to influence the Egyptian Beys

³ John William Livingston, *Ali-Bey al-Kabir and the Mamluk Resurgence in Ottoman Egypt, 1760-1772*, Doctoral Dissertation, Princeton University, 1968.

David Kimche, "The Opening of the Red Sea to British Ships in the Late Eighteenth Century", *MES*, 6 (1972): 63-71.

⁴ Andre Raymond, *Artisans et Commerçants au Caire au 18e siècle*, 2 Vols, Damas: 1973.

and too removed from Europe to be actively involved in the European alliance system. Instead, both the self defeating practices of the Beys and inter-European rivalries are given credit for the trade's demise. Without challenging the importance of the Beys or European balance of power, this study reappraises the Ottoman role in the episode. Seen in a different light, several aspects of Ottoman-Egyptian and Ottoman-European relations suggest the Empire was far more influential in challenging the European trade at Suez than is commonly recognized.

While the sources tend to minimize the importance of the Ottomans, the presence of British India is ignored altogether. They acknowledge that EIC merchants were after the Suez trade, but no attempt is made to investigate why British India, whose strength and ambitions were decisively growing in this time period, so readily agreed to undermine a trade its own merchants had shown was lucrative and insisted should be promoted. This study shifts the existing perspective of the secondary sources away from the Mediterranean, and puts it into the context of Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade--where British India can not be ignored. By doing so, this study raises new and, it is argued, important issues not found in other sources. For example, the India Office Records clearly show that the final destination of the European trade at Suez was not western Europe, the usual interpretation, but Istanbul--a fact which carries with it far reaching implications.

Much of the analysis of this study draws from well known archival material housed in the India Office Records, specifically

the detailed wealth of correspondence among and between the merchants and EIC Directors concerning the Suez trade. Not only did the records provide factual data not found in secondary sources, contemplating the archival material stimulated numerous questions not previously raised and suggested points of contention with existing scholarship of the event and its significance. Most importantly, direct access to the various contemporary reports, documents, and correspondences allowed an understanding of and insights into the episode, the people who created it, and its time period, simply not possible in even the most thorough or inspired secondary source.

In terms of sources, however, this study must admit to at least one grave shortcoming. The lack of Arabic sources and archival material turns its back on a wealth of information and, in regards to archival materials, possibly invaluable data. As a result, a great deal of data about the trade (the exact numbers of European ships which called on Suez, the value of the cargoes, etc) can only be guessed at, while the important role, actions, and concerns of the existing Cairene and Red Sea traders to the new European presence at Suez can not be seen. There is no guarantee that the archives in Egypt shed light on these issues. However, a truly thorough investigation must search into these records.

The first part of this study discusses the schemes of the Beys and the British merchants which resulted in English ships coming to Suez. These schemes were nothing new. European vessels had been active in the Red Sea ever since the Portuguese sailed into the

Indian Ocean, yet few had ventured into the Sea's northern waters. French merchants, the predominant European trading force in Egypt throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, had long clamored for direct access to Suez but had never achieved it. British success, and this is important, hinged on formal, direct negotiations between the Mamluk Beys of Egypt, acting independently of the Porte, and merchants of the English East India Company, acting against official British policy--which respected the Ottoman prohibition of European vessels sailing north of Jidda. In effect, during these decades Egypt and British India promoted their interests in defiance of the interests of the Ottoman and British Empires. The Beys and the British merchants grasped for financial, political, and personal gain with blatant disregard for higher authority.

The second part of the study explores the diverse forces which successfully sabotaged the trade. The primary points of interest are described briefly below.

Although the Mamluk Beys genuinely strove to develop European trade at Suez, the conflicts between the various Mamluk houses prevented any united Mamluk "policy" towards trade--or any other policy for that matter. What remained paramount in the eyes of the individual Beys and their houses was first survival and then predominance over Mamluk rivals. Extracting by any and all means at their disposal the greatest possible amount of wealth, power, and resources was the mission of each house. Developing trade with European merchants was merely one facet of Mamluk power politics--a

volatile and capricious one at that.

Opening Suez to European ships threatened the duties, presents, and extortions formerly paid at Jidda, with direct repercussions not only on the wealth of the city but the considerable expense of maintaining the Hajj. The Porte, as the protector of Holy Cities, was highly sensitive to this issue. More, the Ottoman Empire was decidedly concerned by yet another European encroachment into its territory, and very effectively manipulated the diplomatic channels, both in Egypt and with the European powers, which blocked the schemes of the Beys and the European merchants.

Even more disturbing for the Porte was the prospect of collusion between the Egyptian Beys and individual Europeans. Historians have long allowed the tenuous Ottoman control over the Beys to overshadow the many and varied areas where the Beys themselves and the Mamluks as an institution proved highly useful to the Empire. Allowing the Beys to form alliances and treaties with Europeans, however, directly threatened longstanding Ottoman strategies of administering and controlling Egypt through Mamluk, and other, institutions. Increased trade in particular threatened to enrich the Mamluks to a level the Ottomans simply could not allow.

The success of Ottoman diplomacy in forcing the European nations to control their merchants and to respect Ottoman authority over the northern half of the Red Sea was primarily due to the important role the Ottoman Empire played in the complex balance of

European power. The Ottomans also had an invaluable ally in Sir Robert Ainslee, the British ambassador at Istanbul--a position appointed by the Crown from members of the Board of the English Levant Company. The significance of a Levant Company official as ambassador to the Ottoman Empire is obvious. The Levant Company, dating back to its original sixteenth century charter, owned the sole English right to trade in the Mediterranean, including Egypt--and technically the northern half of the Red Sea. Not surprisingly, the Levant Company (despite the fact it had long neglected its trade with Egypt) struggled to prevent losing these rights to the rival East India Company. Equally important, it was the Levant Company's trade with the Ottoman Empire which was poised to suffer from any Ottoman reprisals against the East India Company's trade at Suez.

Official East India Company policy towards trade to Suez wavered considerably, though various, if not the majority, of EIC merchants traded privately without regard to Company policy. Company policy stated that selling its India goods directly to the Ottoman Empire jeopardized the profits and buying power of the home factory in England. It will be shown, however, that these objections were spurious, and were perhaps designed to subvert the Red Sea route in favor of the Company's trade at Basra. Other factors as well discouraged Company support for the trade. During this time period much of the resources and energies of the East India Company were absorbed in the violent process of forming British India and defending itself from criticisms in England.

Therefore, the Company as a whole did not give the Suez trade the attention, or the diplomatic or military backing, necessary to encourage official sanction by the Crown or the Ottomans. More, the scheme to trade with Suez was merely one of many East India Company schemes to expand and develop trade literally around the world. Compared to other prospects, the profitability of the Suez trade did not always seem worth the investment, especially with the political challenges it faced.

Trade aside, however, the Red Sea and Egypt were very much in the minds of EIC officials for a more practical reason. The Red Sea route via Suez, during those months of favorable winds, offered the East India Company the fastest communications route between London and Bombay. While the EIC and the Levant Company may have worked against the British trade with Suez, all British policy struggled to open the Red Sea to packet boats.

British merchants were not alone in their efforts to open a trade with Suez. French, Venetian, Austrian, Dutch, and Russian merchants struggled to get access to this trade and to navigation rights in all of the Red Sea. By the end of the eighteenth century, American traders were on the scene as well. All this added an additional headache to British policy, which labored not only to develop British trade but to deny trade to rivals, especially in seas which led to British India. The easiest solution to the perceived dangers of a pan-European trade with Suez was to support the Ottoman policy forbidding Europeans to sail north of Jidda--even if this denied England a potentially

profitable trade. Yet concurrently, the British were adamant if any European nation succeeded in obtaining Ottoman approval either to trade at or sail to Suez, the English would obtain equal sanction.

In conclusion, this study highlights the historical significance raised by all the issues discussed above. Intriguingly, this one small and brief episode, the attempt to open a British trade to Suez, adds significant insights to existing concepts of the history of eighteenth century Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, and Europe.

Concerning the negotiations between the British merchants and the Beys, the episode suggests an Egyptian/European discourse far more intimate and active than normally recognized. Ottoman reactions to these intrigues depict a relationship between the Beys and Ottoman officials that goes far beyond the common stereotype of Mamluk anarchy and Ottoman impotence. Ottoman/European diplomacy concerning the Suez trade, and the Ottoman ability to stop it, clearly shows that the Ottoman Empire was a much more integral and important actor in the increasingly complex European balance of power than is generally recognized.

The difficulty Britain, and other European countries, had in controlling their merchants, and the impact the trading companies had on effecting and executing national policies, all portend ominously on the imperialism even then in the making. And finally, by looking at the episode from the most broad perspective, one can easily discern many of the extraordinary features and impacts of

PART ONE: EGYPT AND BRITISH INDIA--TO MAKE A DEAL

Historical and Geographic Background of Red Sea Trade

This section presents background and geographic material relevant to the study of eighteenth century Mamluk-British efforts to open a trade at Suez. Specifically, features of trade and navigation unique to the Red Sea will be discussed as well as the Red Sea's role in the larger world of Indian Ocean trade. An assessment of Ottoman and European developments in the Indian Ocean region and a final overview of eighteenth century Indian Ocean and Red Sea trade are included. At work is an attempt to resist separating the study of British involvement at Suez from its historical foundations and to resist presenting this involvement outside its contemporary context.

Long established trends and patterns of Red Sea trade shaped the efforts of the Beys and the British merchants who schemed for English access to Suez. Nothing illustrates this better than Shihab al-Din Ahmad Ibn Majid's famous sixteenth century treatise on Indian Ocean navigation and maritime trade, *Kitab al Fawa'id fi Usul al Bahr wa'l Qawa'id*⁵. *Kitab al Fawa'id* is divided into

⁵ For a complete English translation, see G R Tibbets, ed and trans, *Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean Before the Coming of the Portuguese*, London: 1971. Tibbets includes appendices and a comprehensive glossary/translation of Arabic naval and geographic terms. Ibn Majid (died c1510) was a well known *mu'allim*, captain/pilot, of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. He was praised by Cedi Celebi, the sixteenth century admiral of the Ottoman Indian Ocean fleet, and is reputed by several sources to have piloted de Gama's ship from Africa to Goa.

the recent (rather than modern) age--features traditionally first attributed to the nineteenth century. These are not characterized by any "new" global interconnectedness, but, rather, through the alarming and expanding industries and technologies of the age, an interconnectedness of unprecedented reach, power, and speed.

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twelve chapters, each devoted to a particular geographic zone of Indian Ocean maritime trade and trade routes. It is highly detailed, and discusses not only routes and navigation, but the merchant groups active in the trade, the types of goods traded and the directional flows of goods and commerce as well. Occasionally, it shares historical antidotes about past traders, ports, times of commercial booms and hardships, infamous voyages--even a discussion of Noah as the first shipbuilder.

Significant to this study is Ibn Majid's attitude towards the Red Sea. He mentions repeatedly that the Red Sea is his particular area of expertise, thanks in part to knowledge and skills passed down to him from his father and grandfather, both Red Sea pilots well versed in the intricacies of Red Sea navigation. Yet as his work unfolds, Ibn Majid is noticeably hesitant to discuss the Red Sea. This contrasts sharply with the book's concerted flaunting, with undoubtedly deserved pride, of Ibn Majid's extensive and, he hints, unrivaled knowledge of Indian Ocean trade and navigation. Whenever his subject matter steers towards the Red Sea, he deflects specific detail by referring the reader to the last *fa'ida*, devoted entirely to the Red Sea. Yet here Ibn Majid's peculiar attitude to the Red Sea is the most glaring. To begin with, he says that Red Sea navigation should not be discussed at all. There is a danger, he warns, that "foolish men [will] attain guidance over it"⁶. What little he is willing to discuss comes only from religious duty. Because of the Hajj, he is resigned to guide as safely as possible

⁶ Tibbets, *Arab Navigation*, London: 1971, p 189.

pilgrims and pilots of pilgrimage vessels as far north as Jidda, the port of Mecca. In regards to navigation north of Jidda, he is absolutely adamant that no information be given--and conveniently disregards the sizable pilgrimage traffic that sails *south* to Jidda from northern Red Sea ports.

The delineation between southern and northern sections of the Sea is clear. Ibn Majid depicts the southern Red Sea as more open to general maritime traffic--because of the pilgrimage traffic and in part because of the relatively more favorable sailing conditions. The northern Red Sea is much more ominous and enigmatic--few pilots know the waters, it is subject to violent and capricious wind patterns, dotted with hazardous coral reefs, and lacks along both coasts ports able to provide provisions, and in particular drinking water. In the northern Red Sea, Ibn Majid is happy to warn, navigation is perilous to even the most skilled and informed pilots.

Also significant, Ibn Majid refuses to acknowledge any trade activity in the Red Sea. "The Sea of Qulzum [the Red Sea]," he admits, "is the most dangerous of the world and yet people use it more than all the seas of the world because of the Ancient House [the Kaaba]."¹ Similarly, of all his anecdotes about flourishing seasons of Indian Ocean trade no mention of the famous medieval

¹ Tibbets, *Arab Navigation*, p 264.

For more on the challenges of Red Sea navigation see George Fadlo Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Medieval Times*, Princeton: 1951; M Albert Krammerer, *Le Mer Rouge* Vol 1 part 1, Cairo: 1929; and the travel literature of anyone who sailed the Red Sea.

Karimi trade is offered⁸. According to Ibn Majid, trade was not, and apparently never had been, a factor in the Red Sea. Yet of all people, Ibn Majid knew better. Given that he claimed his forefathers had been the recognized expert pilots of the Red Sea they assuredly were aware of the Karimi trade and passed down stories about the Karimi fleet--and indeed were likely to have sailed on them. Ibn Majid himself, though he lived when the Karimi fleet had all but disappeared, was a primary candidate to be involved with whatever lingering Karimi fleets existed; yet he never mentions them or any other trading groups⁹.

Only by acknowledging the consistently active, and in certain periods intensely lucrative, Red Sea trade does Ibn Majid's amnesia begin to make sense: he was protecting his interests¹⁰. As a

⁸ Primarily based in Cairo, the Karimi merchants (the origins of the term are obscure, though Goitein suggests Karim is a Tamil word), grouped together in a Karimi fleet that dominated and at times monopolized the Indian Ocean-Mediterranean spice trade via the Red Sea. They flourished, often spectacularly so, during the Fatimid and Mamluk periods, and were in decline by the fifteenth century--Sultan Barsbay (1422-1435) is generally credited with bankrupting the last remaining Karimi merchants. See Eliyahu Ashtor, "The Karimi Merchants," pp 45-56 in his *Studies on the Levantine Trade in the Middle Ages*, London: Variorum Reprints, 1971; W Fischel, "The Spice Trade in Mamluk Egypt" and S D Goitein, "New Light on the Beginnings of the Karimi Merchants" both in *JESHO* 1 (1958): 157-174/175-184; and Ahmad Darrag, *L'Egypte sous le règne de Barsbay*, Damas: 1961.

⁹ In fact, he refers to the Karimi merchants only once, and in passing, when he dates an ancestor of his as having lived "in the beginning of the time of the Karimi". Tibbets, *Arab Navigation*, p 238.

¹⁰ In addition to the discussion of the Karimi merchants cited above, see George Fadlo Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Medieval Times*, Princeton: 1951; M Albert Kammerer, *Le Mer Rouge* 3 Vols, Caire: 1929 (though somewhat dated, Kammerer's work compiles a massive amount of factual data on the

merchant-pilot there is no question that he was involved in Red Sea trade, and thus had good reason to discourage competition by guarding his knowledge of the Sea. Given the valuable personal bonds of trust and friendship between connected groups of Indian Ocean traders, he may in fact have been obligated to keep information about Red Sea navigation as obscure as possible to protect his own standing within his personal trading sphere.

Regardless of his motivations, his overall message is clear: Indian Ocean maritime trade and navigation connects a vast region freely transversed by a diverse and active group of merchants and pilots. The Red Sea, however, was off limits to outsiders. Unless one was performing the Hajj, one should stay out, and for no reason should one venture north of Jidda. This is a recurring theme in the study of Red Sea trade, and one which will reappear frequently in the study below.

To suggest that in the Red Sea shipping and trade networks were more exclusive than those of other Indian Ocean regions does not imply that the Red Sea was removed from Indian Ocean trade. Nor does it imply that the Red Sea was removed from the probing

Red Sea and Abyssinia and doubles as an extraordinary collection of ancient maps and illustrations); George T Scanlon, "Egypt and China: Trade and Imitation," and Riata Rose Di Meglio, "Arab Trade with Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula from the Eighth to the Sixteenth Century", both in D S Richards, ed, *Islam and the Trade of Asia*, London: 1970, pp 81-95/105-135; Archibald Lewis, *The Sea and Medieval Civilization*, London: 1978; R B Serjeant, "Early Islamic and Medieval Trade and Commerce in the Yemen," and Werner Daum, "From Aden to India and Cairo; Jewish World Trade in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries", both in Werner Daum, ed, *Yemen: 3000 Years of Art and Civilization in Arabia Felix*, Frankfurt: 1987, pp 163-166/167-173.

economic interests of eighteenth century British and European expansion. A substantial local trade between Egypt, the Hijaz, eastern Africa, and the Yemen existed. Yet the sources cited above, and many others, clearly, if not emphatically, illustrate the Sea's historical links to eastern trade and its important role in linking eastern and Mediterranean commerce. This is demonstrated decisively by the positive repercussions enjoyed by Red Sea trade following the rise of the Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean, and the Safavid and Mughal Empires of the east¹¹.

The Ottoman Empire first pushed eastward into the Indian Ocean early in the sixteenth century, in fact a mere few decades after Vasco de Gama's voyages led European fleets to the orient¹². Though the direct Ottoman impact on the region was short lived, the long term economic influence was considerable. For one thing, they were a significant consumer of eastern goods. For another, their centuries of relatively stable rule over the Hijaz and efficient maintenance of the Hajj increased the pilgrimage traffic. Considering the large population of Asian pilgrims which existed and the trading activity which followed, and in large part

¹¹ See Ashin Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat*, Wiesbaden: 1979.

¹² For more on the Portuguese presence in the Indian Ocean see K N Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, London: 1985, pp 70-80; Niels Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, Chicago: 1974, pp 110-153; Eric Marco, *Yemen and the Western World*, London: 1968, pp xii-10.

financed, the Hajj, this is significant¹³.

Concurrent with Ottoman eastern expansion, and equally important, were the rise of the Mughal dynasty in India and the Safavid Empire in Persia¹⁴. These dynasties were marked by initial periods of political stability which encouraged economic growth and provided security to long distance transportation and communications. Centralized power increased the wealth and purchasing power of the three empires and concurrently facilitated expanded agricultural and industrial production. Ottoman expansion and wealth, in particular, created expanded markets in the Empire's provincial cities and especially the imperial capital of Istanbul¹⁵.

¹³ Nearly every source dealing with Red Sea trade after the rise of Islam comments on the role of trade in the pilgrimage and conversely the effect of the pilgrimage on Red Sea trade. See Jacques Jomier, *La Mahmal et la Caravane Egyptienne des Pèlerins de la Mecque*, Caire: 1952. The travel accounts describe it as well. For example, see Suraiya Faroghi, "Red Sea Trade and Communications as Observed by Evliya Celebi," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 5 & 6 (1991): 87-108; Carsten Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia and Other Countries on the East*, London: 1792, pp 227-231.

¹⁴ For background on the Mughal and Safavid Empires see S M Ikran, *Muslim Civilization in India*, New York and London: 1964; Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India*, Delhi: 1986; a less imaginative interpretation is C A Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870*, Cambridge: 1988; and Roger Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*, Cambridge: 1980.

¹⁵ Andre Raymond has decisively challenged the traditional interpretation of Ottoman urban commercial and economic decline. See his, *Grand Villes Arabes à l'Époque Ottomane*, Paris: 1985; *Great Arab Cities in the Sixteenth through the Eighteenth Centuries*, New York and London: 1984 (this is not an English translation of the first mentioned source); and "The Ottoman Conquest and the Development of the Great Arab Towns", *IJTS* 1 (Winter 1979-80): 84-101.

The rise of these three Muslim Empires strongly influenced Indian Ocean and Red Sea trade despite the fact these developments are generally allowed to be overshadowed by the arrival of Europeans fleets¹⁶. However, Europe's involvement in Indian Ocean trade was extremely important, both in the short and the long term, and must not be slighted.

A few renegade episodes during the Crusades aside, the Portuguese were the first Europeans to enter Asian waters, arriving at the close of the fifteenth century¹⁷. The Portuguese quickly established strong naval bases at Goa and Diu and other ports along a strategic arc from east Africa to China and remained the predominant European power in the Indian Ocean, if not the

¹⁶ One of the more provocative studies of the impact of Europe on the Indian Ocean region is Ashin Das Gupta's eloquent and highly intelligent study, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat, c1700-1750*, Wiesbaden: 1979. Janet Abu-Lughad attempts, with limited success, to form a similar argument in *Before European Hegemony; The World System AD 1250-1350*, New York: 1989. Her conclusion that "Europe pulled ahead because the 'orient' was temporarily in disarray," (p 18) is hardly convincing, though her overall thesis, that given the scope and breadth of ancient and medieval world trade a "world economy" obviously existed before the rise of Europe, is well taken.

¹⁷ The most notorious of these was a daring and short lived episode masterminded by Renaud de Chatillon. His band carried their dismantled boats in pieces by camels over the Sinai dessert, reassembled them, and proceeded for about a month to wreck havoc and misery up and down the Red Sea. They plundered ports, commandeered trading ships, looted pilgrimage caravans, sacked Mecca, kidnapped several Yemeni sheikhs and ulama. They were promptly captured and slaughtered by Salah al-Din's navy under the command of Admiral Loulou. See Gary La Viere, "The Crusader Raid in the Red Sea in 578/1182-1183", *JARCE* 14 (1977): 87-100; Krammerer, *Mer Rouge*, Vol 1 part 1, pp 59-62. La Viere is convinced that had the crusaders focused on dominating the Red Sea, and had diverted the Red Sea trade away from Cairo, the effective power of Salah al-Din and his successors would have been crippled.

predominate global sea power, until the seventeenth century, when the fleets of the Dutch and later the English trading companies gradually overpowered Portuguese naval strength and Dutch and English trading prowess commercially out maneuvered the Portuguese merchants¹⁸.

The European trading rivalries both among themselves and with local merchants, and a rise in local and European piracy in the Indian Ocean (and the Red Sea and Persian Gulf in particular), interfered with the region's trade and commerce, but did not lead to European monopolization of them¹⁹. To the contrary, it was during this period that Indian Ocean trade expanded, for reasons discussed above, much to the benefit of non-European merchants²⁰. Compared with the great volume of Indian Ocean trade, the amount carried by Europeans via the Cape route initially was not

¹⁸See Steensgaard, *Asian Trade*, Chicago: 1974; Chaudhuri, *Trading World*, London: 1985; and Jonathon I Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade*, Oxford: 1990.

¹⁹ "The Portuguese impact on the Asian [trade] structure was lost in the richness of the Indian Ocean." Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants*.

²⁰ It is disturbing to so readily adopt European/non-European classifications. However, distinguishing between the various merchant communities active in Indian Ocean trade is a grave challenge. "Indigenous" or "native" does not work since merchants were often both transitory and foreign in whatever region or port under discussion. "Muslim" certainly is inappropriate considering the sizable Hindu, Armenian Christian, and Jewish merchants active in Indian Ocean trade. "Local" can only be used when focusing on a particular region or port, and more than that European merchants became "local" with time. "Non-European" is particularly vague, and, even worse, hints of an Eurocentric orientation, yet since this section is concerned with distinguishing the evolution of pre-existing Indian Ocean trade from the impact of the European presence it seems the best worst alternative.

significant, and in this regard the presence of the European fleets added to the local trading networks rather than merely diverting goods to the new Cape route.

This is particularly clear in the Red Sea during the Ottoman period, when the Red Sea was the primary trade route between Istanbul and Surat²¹. Despite the lure of this rich trade, European activity in the Red Sea was extremely limited. In part victim to the challenges of Red Sea navigation and further restricted by the intense resistance of the inhabitants of the Red Sea ports, the Portuguese, and the Europeans to follow, were not able to influence Red Sea trade as effectively as in the Persian Gulf and key parts of the Indian Ocean. Nor were the Portuguese able to establish a commercial blockade at the Bab al Mandhab, the narrow mouth of the Red Sea (their strategy when attacks on Aden failed). Furthermore, as the east-west flow of trade gradually came to favor the Cape route, Yemen's coffee trade provided the Red Sea with a commercial good that more than made up for its losses in the transit trade between the east and Europe²².

²¹ See Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants*. Though nearly all the sources maintain that this Red Sea trade was carried on relatively small boats and changed hands several times along the route, especially at Jidda, C Heywood claims he has evidence that a direct Surat to Suez fleet existed and was furthermore conducted on ships much larger than usually believed. See his, "The Red Sea Trade and Ottoman Waqf Supports for the Population of Mecca and Medina in the later Seventeenth Century", in Temimi, ed, *La vie sociale dans les provinces arabes à l'époque ottomane*, Zaghuan: 1988, pp 165-184.

²² A highly informative, and entertaining, history of coffee is R Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses*, Seattle and London: 1985. A fascinating contemporary account of the actual workings of the Mocha coffee trade is found in Peter Boxhall, "The Diary of a Mocha Coffee Agent", in Serjeant and Bidwell, *Arabian Studies*, Vol 1, pp

The political forces in the Indian Ocean region did little to challenge the European presence. Chaudhuri argues rather convincingly that the Persian, Indian, and Chinese empires had reason to focus their military energies on maintaining domination over their lands, not their seas²³. He also notes that since these empires had tremendous internal agricultural and industrial resources, self-sufficient markets, and an internal tax base they did not depend on maritime commerce or revenues. As a result, the European naval presence alone was of no immediate economic or political threat. More, for those in power the ethnicity and commercial methods of the merchants who managed imports and exports was immaterial²⁴.

The only sustained non-European naval challenge to the Portuguese and later European positions in the Indian Ocean, chronic piracy aside, came from the Ottoman and Omani fleets²⁵.

102-118; Eric Marco, *Yemen and the Western World*, 1968, pp 3-9.

²³ Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization*. See also Ramkrishna, *The Rise and Fall of the East India Company*, New York: 1974, pp 139-298.

²⁴ Though in China it was not immaterial.

²⁵ See Robert Mantran, "L'Empire Ottomane et le Commerce Asiatique aux 16e et 17e Siècle," in D S Richards, ed, *Islam and the Trade of Asia*, London: 1970, pp 169-179; Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*, London: 1973, pp 126-130; Halil Inalcik, "The Ottoman Economic Mind and Aspects of the Ottoman Economy," in M A Cook, ed, *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*, London: 1970, pp 207-218.

See also Patricia Risso, "Muslim Identity in Maritime Trade: General Observations and Some Evidence for the Eighteenth Century Persian Gulf/Indian Ocean Region", *IJMES* 12 (1989): 381-392; Risso, *Oman and Muscat: an early modern history*, London and Sydney: 1986; Juan R Cole, "Rival Empires of Trade and Imami Shiism in Eastern Arabia, 1300-1800", *IJMES* 19 (1987): 177-204.

The Ottoman Empire, as has been mentioned, entered the Indian Ocean region nearly simultaneously with the Portuguese, beginning in 1509²⁶. Well acquainted with naval-economic confrontations in the Mediterranean, they quickly entrenched themselves along both Red Sea coasts, and won a tenuous control over the Yemen²⁷. Their success, however, changed in the Indian Ocean. Various Ottoman fleets attempted to dislodge the Portuguese from their strongholds, but none was successful. Ultimately, an unofficial, and occasionally contested, equilibrium was reached where the Ottomans maintained a presence in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf while the Portuguese exploited to the best of their ability Indian Ocean naval traffic. The decline of Portuguese power, and the concurrent rise of the Dutch and English trading companies, did not dramatically change this equilibrium.

More significant than the mere presence of European ships and merchants in the Indian Ocean were the profound European alterations in the actual methods by which trade and commerce were conducted. These fall under the immediate changes generated by Portuguese fighting power and those which gradually evolved during

²⁶ In 1509 the Mamluk Sultan, encouraged by the Venetians, petitioned Selim I to send naval forces to the Red Sea to fight against the Portuguese. The Ottoman Sultan complied, however he was not interested in protecting Mamluk interests but in overthrowing the Mamluk Sultanate.

²⁷ See for example, Palmira Brummett, "Competition and Coincidence: Venetian Trading Interests and Ottoman Expansion in the Early Sixteenth Century Levant", *New Perspectives on Turkey*, #5 and 6, (Fall 1991): 29-52. Brummett suggests that part of the rationale for Ottoman expansion in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean was specifically aimed at controlling markets, customs duties, and maritime routes.

the rise of the European trading companies.

Commercial dealings among local traders were maintained through long term, often multi-generational relationships between merchant groups, very often merchant/family groups networking across the links of Indian Ocean and Mediterranean trade²⁸. A breach of trust or honesty severely, and usually permanently, jeopardized a trader's access to credit, favorable prices, and safe passage and storage of her or his goods²⁹. And though the European merchants too faced these conditions, they, and the Portuguese in particular, added military aggression and intimidation to their commercial dealings³⁰. De Gama's immediate reaction to his cool reception at Goa was typical of European expansion: he bombed the port until it surrendered.

In short, initial European trade in the Indian Ocean was an armed adventure against relative strangers. Chaudhuri says,

²⁸ See S D Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society, The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, Vols 1 and 2, Berkeley: 1967; Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution*, 1974, pp 22-59 (Steensgaard's interpretation of Van Leur's description of a pre-European "peddler" trade in the Indian Ocean is both intelligent and informative. However, the "peddler" stigma connotes an unwarranted trace of condescension and does not easily explain, to use the most obvious example, the sophisticated and voluminous Karimi trade--certainly not a peddler trade, even on a grand scale); Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization*, London: 1985.

²⁹ It is worth noting that within Europe, and most regions of the world, similar trading practices existed. A very clear example is Steven Kaplan, *Provisioning Paris: Merchants and Millers in the Grain and Flour Trade During the Eighteenth Century*, Ithaca and London: 1984.

³⁰ Niebuhr, in the late eighteenth century, noted the militant and aggressive "nature" of the East India companies. See *Travels through Arabia*, pp 378-384.

"It [the European commercial techniques] was a system in which the use of political power and armed force was inseparable, both doctrinally and in terms of every-day practice, from the more normal form of commercial activities."³¹

Only over time did personal relationships develop. More, the Portuguese demanded protection costs from the ports and traders under their control--previously a privilege of political powers³². The non-European merchants could not contest Portuguese firepower, though they quickly adapted (armed themselves) to the new maritime realities. Without military intervention from the political powers of the region, merchants and ports were generally left to deal with the Europeans on their own, which created new European and non-European trading links which co-existed with the non-European trade already in existence.

Portuguese decline did not merely usher in different European powers operating in similar fashion to replace them. During the seventeenth century, primarily Dutch, British, and French merchants formed trading companies which were given charters by their home countries granting commercial monopolies over the country's trade with particular regions. With time, these companies turned commercial advantage and thirst for profits into remarkable networks of long-distance trade supported by highly systematic methods of accounting and investment. Chaudhuri is perhaps the most eloquent in his assessments of the influences of

³¹ Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the East Indian Company, 1660-1760*, Cambridge: p 19.

³² See Steensgaard, *Trade Revolution*; Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization*.

these trading houses.

"The contribution of the European East India Companies to the evolution of modern world trade was in many ways unique. Operating through formal bureaucratic structures, the chartered companies of the seventeenth and eighteenth century helped to integrate the scattered and self-contained economic regions of pre-industrial trade into a well-defined pattern."³³

This is not to imply that previous and non-European trading practices were mindless or inefficient--even the most ancient long distance trade was sophisticated, in real terms not relative ones. Nor is it to imply that all trading companies saw profits. In fact, many failed and even the most successful periodically flirted with bankruptcy. Yet those companies given monopoly rights to Indian Ocean regions almost without fail saw periods of immense profits. Building from the solid financial foundations from which they were formed and then using the increasingly profitable eastern trade to garner political clout at home (aimed to protect their monopolies) and military and naval strength in their ports and along their trade routes (to exploit trade), the companies and their merchants amassed sizeable, at times staggering, fortunes. The companies became not only financial ventures, but political bodies wielding their own armed forces--most clearly illustrated by the English East India Company's outright conquest of India.

The growing strength of the companies significantly enhanced their ability to dominate trade, yet the companies were ever linked to the familiar, pre-existing trade patterns and routes. India and the eastern Indian Ocean continued to receive the greatest amount

³³ Chaudhuri, *Trading World*, p 19.

of European interest and trading activity³⁴. The Persian Gulf, active in the lucrative Persian silk trade, attracted relatively strong European attention as well³⁵. The Red Sea, except for fluctuating European participation in the coffee trade at Mocha and a limited transit trade to Jidda, largely remained the domain of non-European commercial fleets and merchants.

To summarize, from the sixteenth century on, new developments influenced Indian Ocean trade and commerce. The wealth and general stability generated by the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires increased the volume of Indian Ocean trade--and created an active and lucrative flow of goods between Surat and Suez. The arrival of European fleets had a grave long term effect on the region's merchants and commerce yet the short term effects were less severe. The Red Sea and the Persian Gulf continued to be active in the transit trade with the Mediterranean and other points west and the coffee trade compensated for the spice trade diverted to the Cape route. The Red Sea remained a distinct region whose maritime commerce was conducted by local fleets. The greatest transformations in Indian Ocean trade came with the addition of military force in trading relations and the rise in power of the European trading companies.

Before turning specifically to the eighteenth century, it is perhaps appropriate to clarify that Europe did not act solely on

³⁴ Chaudhuri, *Trading World*, p 98.

³⁵ Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization*, pp 85-100.

the Indian Ocean region without being acted upon in return³⁶. Western studies tend to focus on the economic and political repercussions of the European trans-oceanic expansions as if Europe acted in a vacuum, dictating its terms to a mute world. It is more accurate to conceive of European expansion as complex dialogues between diverse groups whose language, inflection, and content fluctuated over time. These were dialogues between individual people. Furthermore, while economic, political, ideologic issues may have been at the forefront, cultural exchanges were active as well--consumer tastes, fashions, lifestyles (clearly demonstrated by the British "nabobs": East India Company merchants who, at least temporarily, assumed Indian dress and manners), religious and philosophical orientations and the like.

Raymond Schwab offers perhaps the best, and one of the few, studies of the intellectual and cultural impact of the east on

³⁶ European scholars generally focus on the economic significance of the long distance European trade with the Americas and the East, especially their contributions to European state building and the rise of capitalism and industrialization. Surely one of the most brilliant and influential of these studies is Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System* 2 Vols, New York: 1980. Fernand Braudel attempts to add 'material' and social repercussions of long distance trade in his equally important and impressive, *Capitalism and Material Life* 2 Vols, New York: 1982. Significantly, the repercussions of expansion were immediately realized by Europeans far removed from the process itself and led to markedly different perspectives on social, economic, and political issues. The two obvious examples are Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* 2 Vols, R H Campbell and A J Skinner gen eds, Oxford: 1976; and Malthus' *An Essay on the Principle of Population* 2 Vols, superbly edited by Patricia James, Cambridge: 1989.

European mentalities³⁷. Schwab notes,

"Thus,...the West perceived it was not the sole possessor of an admirable intellectual past. This singular event occurred during a time period [of rapid European commercial expansion] when everything else was likewise new, unprecedented, extraordinary."³⁸

He goes on to say,

"Among the upheavals created by linguistics...we should remember this one: the continent of the Hindus, the Chinese, the Sumerians, regained--with all the grandeur of its metaphysical tradition...and with all the weight of its intellectual seniority...the power to question us."³⁹

Indirectly, Paul Hazard adds an amusing anecdote,

"Banned in France, put on the Index, torn to pieces and burnt as impious, blasphemous, calculated to stir up rebellion against the sovereign authority, and to subvert the basic principles of civil government, the book [Abbé Raynal's, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*] went through twenty authorized editions, not to mention numerous pirated ones."⁴⁰

Schwab and Hazard are not mentioned here to mitigate or detract from the overwhelmingly exploitative disposition of Europe in the history of these exchanges, but to acknowledge that the east was an active participant in the process of European expansion and that one of the aspects of this expansion was cross-cultural

³⁷ Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*, New York: 1984.

³⁸ Ibid, p xiii.

³⁹ Ibid, p 19.

⁴⁰ Paul Hazard, *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, Cleveland and New York: 1963. p 96.

exchange⁴¹.

In terms of specifically eighteenth century conditions of Indian Ocean and Red Sea trade, two related themes are predominant: 1) the overall decline in Red Sea trade, both local and transit, caused by various disruptions in supplies and demands in India, Egypt, and the Ottoman Empire; and 2) the victory of British vessels in "the struggle for freight" at the expense of local and other European fleets⁴².

Raymond and Tuchscherer agree that the volume of Red Sea trade, both local and long distance, declined substantially throughout the eighteenth century with one period of recovery from around mid-century to 1780⁴³. Their conclusions are substantiated

⁴¹ There are, of course, the familiar charges of western cultural and intellectual imperialism existing side by side economic and political imperialism. However, the attempt here is to distinguish the actions of the western powers from the reactions of individual westerners, as people, to contact with the east.

⁴² This interpretation, which relies heavily on Das Gupta, sharply contradicts Chaudhuri, who maintains that because of the commercial skills of the European trading companies, "Production and consumption, both in Europe and Asia, undoubtedly increased....It might even have led to hitherto unutilized resources being brought into fresh use." Chaudhuri, *The Trading World*, p 19. The expanding markets of China, Southeast Asia, the Americas, and Europe may have led to an overall rise in Indian Ocean trade. However, this clearly favored the Cape and far eastern routes. Furthermore, in regards to reinvigorating "unutilized resources", the overall impact of the European Companies was to undermine and then decimate indigenous industries, resources, and economic capabilities. See especially Ramkrishna Mukherjee, *The Rise and Fall of the East India Company*, New York: 1974, pp 299-392.

⁴³ See Raymond, *Artisans*, Vol 1, pp 98-100; and Tuchscherer, "Activités des Turcs dans le commerce de la Mer Rouge au XVIII^e siècle", in Panzac, *Les villes dans l'empire Ottoman: activités et*

by the India Office Records and travel accounts, both of which describe Red Sea trade as very much reduced during the eighteenth century compared to former times. Furthermore, the interest of EIC merchants in Red Sea trade was rekindled during the third quarter of the eighteenth century, the decades Raymond and Tuchscherer claim saw an increase in the region's trade.

At mid-century non-European merchants and fleets may have enjoyed a boon in trade. However, access to India goods largely, though never completely, depended on British India. Fatefully for the Red Sea, the predominance of British shipping outside the Red Sea allowed the EIC to decide which routes would carry the bulk of the India trade⁴⁴. In terms of the east-west transit trade, the Cape route was increasingly preferred, and the EIC exerted tremendous efforts to make sure it stayed open--in 1781 an EIC official passionately exclaimed to Lord Hillsborough, "...we must consider the Cape of Good Hope as the Gibraltar of India."⁴⁵

sociétés, Marseilles: 1991. Both base their conclusions on assessments of the Cairo inheritance records of Red Sea merchants.

⁴⁴ In visualizing these shifts and trends over time the graphs provided by three different studies are invaluable. Chadhuri's *The Trading World of Asia* presents graphs of the total annual value of imports and exports handled by the EIC--and other useful material. Das Gupata (*Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat*) counts the ships leaving Surat during the first half of the eighteenth century and designates ownership and destination. Thabit Abdullah's dissertation, "The Political Economy of Merchants and Trade in Basra", charts similar information in regards to Persian Gulf shipping throughout the entire century. Together they show a dramatic increase in trade via the Cape route, a relative increase in the Persian Gulf and Basra, and a decline in the Red Sea.

⁴⁵ See Vincent Harlow and Frederick Madden, *British Colonial Developments, 1774-1834: Select Documents*, Oxford: 1953, pp 5-7. The documents presented clearly illustrate the EIC's obsession with

The Cape route did not seriously interfere with Red Sea trade as long as Mocha's lucrative coffee trade compensated for the diversion of the Sea's spice trade and as long as Surat favored the Red Sea route in its trade with the west--the Ottoman Empire in particular. By the second half of the eighteenth century, however, Indonesian and West Indian coffee began to cut into Mocha's previous monopoly over the plant, while concomitantly, the decline of Surat was replaced by the rise of Bombay, where the EIC fleets favored the familiar Persian Gulf route at the expense of the Red Sea. There is a great irony here that the very success over the centuries of Red Sea ports and merchants in discouraging European and English shipping proved a liability once English shipping, devoted to the Cape and Persian Gulf routes, became predominant.

It is important to keep in mind that British shipping was not something that was simply "inflicted" by the EIC onto non-British merchants. It was generally admitted that the English ships were faster and more reliable than other vessels and thus more advantageous to use. However, the primacy of British shipping continued to add to the strength and the size of the English fleets, and as a result the EIC, with unquestionably adverse effects on non-British trade and merchants.

Ironically, British merchants, too, were adversely affected by the primacy of the Cape route and the rising power of the EIC. To the Cape route.

understand this the distinction must be made between the EIC's Company trade, which generated profits for stockholders, and the private trade of its employees, which functioned, when done honestly, outside the Company's books⁴⁶. For stockholders the wealth of India made the EIC a reasonably solid investment. The lure of the EIC as an employer, however, was not the modest salaries offered but the opportunity to engage, with the Company's blessings, in local trade. As a result, EIC employees, on every level, worked under dual loyalties: to the interests of the Company versus the thirst for private gain. On one hand, the East India Company was primarily concerned with east-west trade⁴⁷. On the other hand, the Company's private trade was focused on the comparatively smaller scale local markets. Obviously, connections with the Company gave the private traders great advantages and vast amounts of information not available to outside competitors, yet many of the same obstacles which the Company placed in front of non Company traders and many of the threats to local trade posed by the Company were felt by its private traders as well.

⁴⁶ For example see Chaudhuri, *Trading World*, pp 208-213.

⁴⁷ The all ocean route, though much longer than the Red Sea and Persian Gulf routes, avoided the customs charges, anchorage fees, and political disputes incurred when EIC cargoes passed through waters and lands not under its control. The Red Sea was particularly susceptible to these types of costs. Also, channelling the bulk of its cargoes to London enriched the home office, which sold the goods for profit, and supplied raw goods to British industries, the textile industry in particular, and thereby boosted the country's domestic and export economy. This in particular was the EIC's trump card in justifying its lucrative monopoly on the India trade to critics in the Parliament and elsewhere: that the EIC was the backbone of Britain's domestic industry and trade.

Although one can point to distinct periods and places of decline, Red Sea trade in the eighteenth century was far from paralysed. Throughout the century, the Omani commercial fleets remained active. Musqat effectively capitalized on a brief trade boom through Basra at mid-century, and Omani ships dominated the bulk of Persian Gulf-Red Sea shipping⁴⁸. In the Red Sea Hindu, Arab, and Turkish merchants continued to dominate the trade and shipping⁴⁹. Of the Europeans active in the region the British were clearly dominant⁵⁰.

The most significant European trade in the Red Sea continued to be its highly fluctuating participation in the Mocha coffee

⁴⁸ Thabit Abdullah, "The Political Economy of Merchants and Trade in Basra", p 100; p 185. Of the 1760s boom in trade Abdullah comments, "A spectacular increase in English shipping and the rise of the Musqat fleet acted as the backbone of this boom." For more on the rise of the Musqat fleet see Caluin H Allen, Jr, "The State of Musqat in the Gulf and East Africa, 1785-1829", *IJMES* 14 (1982): 117-127.

⁴⁹ "L'organisation de commerce en Mer Rouge était fondée sur un strict partage des zones d'activité; les commerçants et navigateurs installés en Egypt ne dépassant pas en général vers le sud, tandis que la navigation dans la partie méridionale de la Mer Rouge était un quasi-monopole des navires et des négociants du Yemen, de l'Arabie et des pays riverains de l'Océan Indien." Andre Raymond, *Artisans et Commerçants au Caire au XVIIIe Siècle*, p 117. See also Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants*; Michel Tuchscherer, "Activités des Turcs dans le commerce de la mer Rouge au XVIIIe siècle", in Daniel Panzac, ed, *Les Villes dans l'Empire Ottoman: activités et sociétés*, Marseilles: 1991; Daniel Panzac, "International and Domestic Maritime Trade in the Ottoman Empire During the Eighteenth Century", *IJMES* 24 (1992): 189-206.

⁵⁰ Nearly all the travellers' accounts comment on the preponderance of British shipping and trade among European rivals. For example, the great Danish adventurer, Carston Niebuhr, commented, "Since the extension of their conquests in India, they [the EIC] have engrossed almost the whole trade of the Red Sea". See his *Travels through Arabia and Other Countries in the East*, Beirut: 1892, p 384.

trade, a trade still largely dominated by the Cairene coffee merchants⁵¹. Here, too, the prospects for British merchants were problematic. Increased alternative sources for coffee in Indonesia and the West Indies strained Yemen's coffee trade with Europe (and eventually with the Middle East and the Ottoman Empire), as did the questionable activities of the British merchants in Mocha--a subject which clearly illustrates the conflicts between Company and private trade.

Because of their relative seclusion from the eyes of the EIC Board in India and their connection to a trade of immense profits, the British Mocha agents were often, and at times recklessly, underhanded in dealing with their own employers⁵². The most

⁵¹ Eric Marco, *Yemen and the Western World*, pp 3-17; Patricia Risso, "Muslim Identity", *IJMES* 12 (1989): p 384 (Risso contends that the Mocha merchants gave reduced duties to the British in an attempt to stimulate the coffee trade, causing heated objections from the Cairene coffee merchants); and especially the EIC Records of the Mocha factory, G/17/3, 1741-1815. Unfortunately, a considerable portion of these records are so faded they are virtually illegible.

In 1773, Francis Dickinson, the EIC's Mocha agent reported that the 'Turks' had controlled seventy-five per cent of the season's coffee crop (13,500 bales compared to the EIC's 3,000 bales); half the Turkish purchases went to Jidda, the other half to Basra. Peter Boxhall, "Diary of a Mocha Coffee Agent," in Serjeant and Bidwell, *Arabian Studies*, Vol 1, pp 102-118. See also Raymond, *Artisans*, pp 131-133; 144-149; and 464-469.

⁵² The appointment to Chief of the Mocha Factory was highly coveted, and came directly from the Bombay president. Intrigues and indiscretions often surrounded the appointment and tenure of the Chief. Furthermore, Chaudhuri cites widespread embezzlement and cost-cushioning by the EIC Mocha merchants (*Trading World*, pp 368-369) that occasionally forced the Mocha Factory to shut down. Carston Niebuhr, the great Danish adventurer, claimed a more active private trade among the EIC merchants than official Company trade which undermined the Company's position and profits in the trade. See his *Travels in Arabia and Other Countries in the East*, Beirut: 1892, p 404.

popular abuse was to sell coffee to the EIC at prices well above the cost they had negotiated from the Yemeni growers. This meant, in effect, that the Mocha Factory, as did other factories, acted as an independent, and a particularly rapacious, broker rather than a representative of the EIC.

The Factory records also suggest that Factory directors were inclined to make lavish charges to the Company for elaborate furnishings and supplies which had a bad habit of disappearing each change of directorship--inspiring new unauthorized charges to replace them⁵³. A letter of 1751 actually warned an EIC captain headed to Mocha that the Factory was so run down he would, upon arrival, likely prefer to stay on ship⁵⁴.

One particularly outraged, and anonymous, merchant at Mocha complained to the Board of Governors about an EIC "broker" who, in alliance with the governor of Mocha, had amassed an outrageous fortune through fraud, extortion, tampering with the account books and was intent on ruining Company and non-Company merchants

⁵³ Documents in IOR G/17/3 Egypt and the Red Sea trace an investigation in 1741 of C Crommelin, Mocha Agent, by the Bombay Directors. Under the supervision of the officers of EIC *Prince of Wales*, Crommelin was to inventory the furnishings of the factory and account for discrepancies. It clearly was not the first time the Directors had been forced to investigate the condition of furnishings of the Mocha factory. For the entire incident see ff 10; 71; 75; 77; 85-87. Crommelin first denied furnishings were missing, then blamed Banyan merchants for stealing them during the off season when the Factory was closed. No formal charges against Crommelin are recorded, however he was recalled from Mocha.

⁵⁴ IOR G/17/3, Egypt and the Red Sea, f 98.

alike⁵⁵. While the abuses described above allowed individual British merchants at Mocha (and factories elsewhere) to amass considerable fortunes, they did little to promote EIC interests, and occasionally forced the Factory to close down.

The reduced volume of Red Sea trade is important to acknowledge, yet should be kept in perspective⁵⁶. Demand for eastern goods via this route may have dropped and trade routes shifted; the purchasing powers of the Ottoman Empire, the main consumer of the Red Sea trade, may have diminished (though this has not been proven), however at no time did the trade disappear⁵⁷. Instead, the drop in Red Sea trade, the diverse merchant communities and political groups tied to that trade, and the growing ambitions and powers of the East India Company merchants all combined to put new pressures on a trade already facing grave

⁵⁵ IOR G/17/3 Egypt and the Red Sea. He went on to say the Surat and Bengal merchants were "beggars" because of his practices and called guilty party: "one rapacious Broker who Monopolizes the whole English trade of the port".

⁵⁶ Also, in cultural terms it is important not to allow economic, or military, decline to cast a pall over entire regions or societies. For example, concomitant with the rising political and economic challenges facing the Ottoman Empire was a noticeable cultural florescence in various Ottoman domains. The best broad assessment of this is Nehemiah Levtzion and John O Voll, eds, *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*, Syracuse: 1987.

⁵⁷ This point, however, should be qualified especially since it has been so frequently incorporated into this study. During the eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire's overall imports from Europe increased, at times dramatically. See, for example, R Murphy, "Conditions of Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean: An Appraisal of Eighteenth Century Ottoman Documents for Aleppo", *JESHO* (1990): 35-50; and Ralph Davis, *Aleppo and Devonshire Square*, London: 1967. This, however, does not necessarily reflect a rise in the Empire's purchasing power.

strains. While the EIC may have favored other routes, the Red Sea trade, as this study shows, increasingly tempted the Company's private traders. And although these merchants, with the benefit of direct links to the EIC, the predominant commercial and naval force in the western Indian Ocean, were in some respects best prepared to meet these challenges, the association proved to be a mixed blessing⁵⁸. More, non-European and European merchants alike were not about to leave the outcome uncontested.

⁵⁸ Pointing to eighteenth century English 'hegemony' in the Indian Ocean region can be misleading. The EIC, to be sure, was the predominant commercial and naval force and its power steadily grew over the century as its strangle hold on the resources of the region, and of India tightened. Yet its position was never guaranteed, was contested continually on a vast array of fronts, and was never taken for granted by the British, nor anyone else. The British may have looked at their Indian Empire with a great deal of inward smugness and self-righteousness, yet outwardly they viewed external (and internal) threats with a marked degree of concern, if not paranoia.

British Trade with Suez, Phase One, 1768-1779

The first phase of British trade with Suez began in 1768, when overtures made by Ali Bey al-Kabir, the leading Egyptian Bey at the time, encouraged the East India Company to re-explore the possibilities of directly sailing to Suez⁵⁹. The phase ended in 1779, when mounting Ottoman opposition to the trade encouraged a violent bedouin and Mamluk attack on a sizable caravan carrying goods belonging to various European merchants from Suez to Cairo. Those merchants who survived suffered considerable economic loss and physical duress. The event was traumatic enough to bring the European-Suez trade to a close, and to keep European merchants wary of the Suez trade up until the French invasion⁶⁰.

⁵⁹ "British" is a problematic term after the rise of British India, when "British" interests and policies generated in London did not always, and typically did not, reflect "British" interests of the East India Company's government in Bombay. Similarly important distinctions exist between "British" merchants who were members of the EIC and the cumulative heading, which includes merchants of the various British trading companies and the renegade merchants, called "interlopers" by EIC officials, trading illegally outside charter monopolies. An attempt will be made to clarify when appropriate.

The best study of Ali Bey is Daniel Crecelius, *The Roots of Modern Egypt*, Minneapolis and Chicago. See also, John William Livingston, "Ali-Bey al-Kabir and the Mamluk Resurgence in Ottoman Egypt, 1760-1772", PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1968; Lusignan, *A History of the Revolt of Ali Bey*, London: 1784.

⁶⁰ The following assessment of this first phase, and the subsequent study of the second, leans primarily on the records of the East India Company, specifically those contained in the series G/17/5, G/17/5A, and G/17/3 all titled "Egypt and the Red Sea". Gaps in, and relevant information found outside of, the records are filled in by the travel accounts and secondary sources.

The most comprehensive of these secondary sources is F Charles-Roux, *Autour D'une Route: L'Angleterre, l'Isthme de Suez, et l'Egypte au XVIIIe Siècle*, Paris: 1922. See also Halford Lancaster Hoskins, *British Routes to India*, New York: 1928; Daniel Crecelius, *The Roots of Modern Egypt*, Minneapolis and Chicago: 1981. Citation

This initial phase is marked by conflicting opinions among the East India Company officers about the benefits of a trade with Suez and the utility of establishing a communications route to London via Egypt. The English Levant Company as well held opposing views⁶¹. The Levant Company held the official English charter to trade with the Ottoman Empire, including Egypt. They had all but given French merchants uncontested predominance in Egypt and in certain periods of the eighteenth century did not have a single merchant residing there. Nevertheless, the issue of EIC goods passing through Egypt was an infringement on their monopoly. Furthermore the diplomatic channels between England and the Porte functioned through the Levant Company's ambassador to Istanbul, further complicating disputes by the Porte against the merchants and vessels of the East India Company.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, George Baldwin, the Levant Company's resident merchant in Egypt, slavishly worked to promote the Suez trade, while Sir Robert Ainslee, Levant Company British ambassador to Istanbul, labored to thwart it--and the decidedly uncooperative schemes of his Cairo agent. Concomitantly, EIC Red Sea merchants, ever anxious to escape the growing customs rates and extortions demanded by the authorities in Jidda, freely visited Suez whenever they were confident their

of journal articles will follow as they are used.

⁶¹ The best source for the Levant Company is A C Wood's excellent and extremely thorough *A History of the Levant Company*, New York: 1964. See also Davis: *Aleppo and Devonshire Square*, 1963

cargoes, and persons, would be welcomed.

David Kimche opens his study on the European-Suez trade by declaring:

"...[the] pride of place in the drama...goes to the French and British merchants, the hard, thrusting men of the East India Company, the Levant Company, and the Compagnie d'Orient et des Indes...."⁶²

The Mamluk Beys would have begged to differ. As early as 1768 Ali Bey al Kabir pressed the Ottoman Pasha to produce a firman allowing European ships access to Suez⁶³. Later that year an anonymous report entitled *Observations of Re-establishing of a Trade from India to Suez* was submitted to the EIC Board of Directors to alert the Company of this development, stressing, among other things, that the Beys, as opposed to the Pasha in Jidda and the Sherif of Mecca, could be "reasoned with"⁶⁴.

Other issues raised in the report echoed the familiar EIC concerns about the Suez trade, namely political instability in Egypt, the Ottoman Sultan's opposition to European navigation north

⁶² David Kimche, "The Opening of the Red Sea to European Ships in the Late Eighteenth Century," *MES* 6 (1972): 63-71. Kimche's article is intelligent in some respects, curious in others. First, he is rather careless on several accounts. One example: the merchants of the Levant Company, with only one exception, may have been "hard, thrusting men", but they were doing everything in their power to thrust EIC trade out of Egypt. Second, the absence of archival sources seriously limits his investigation. Third, his historical interpretations are Euro-centric to an extreme.

⁶³ Crecelius, *Roots*, pp 70-71; and his "Unratified Commercial Treaties" p 71.

⁶⁴ IOR, G/17/5A, Egypt and the Red Sea, f 434.

of Jidda, and its potential effects on the home factory in London. A recent EIC petition to the Porte seeking permission to trade with Suez had been, in fact, rejected--a decision, according to the report, greatly influenced by protestations from the authorities in Jidda, intent on protecting their commercial interests. The EIC was also concerned about costs and repercussions of the Suez trade on London exports to Turkey. Despite the length of the transoceanic routes, the few stops made along the voyage freed it from the customs duties, anchorage charges, and political disputes incurred when freight passed through regions not controlled by the Company. The Red Sea route through Egypt was particularly susceptible to these kinds of costs. However, the report also pointed out that eastern goods exported to the Ottoman Empire from England were always more expensive, and thus sold for a smaller profit, than goods channelled through the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. This was seen as an equalizing factor in terms of transportation costs. The Red Sea trade was also attractive because it paid for Indian goods in specie--an important factor to the chronically cash-short Company coffers⁶⁵.

At this juncture, the EIC Board of Directors made no moves in regards to the Suez trade, though events soon took matters into their own hands. In 1769, the bellicose Scottish adventurer James

⁶⁵ One way EIC merchants transferred capital back to England was to lend out cash reserves to European merchants repayable to their London accounts. While effective for the needs of the merchants, it led to chronic cash flow problems for the Company.

Bruce arrived in Jidda from Cairo⁶⁶. During the evenings, Bruce, his new friend Muhammad "Topal" (Bruce's spelling), and the few other EIC captains at Jidda would convene at (barricade themselves inside) Captain Thornhill's residence and commiserate about the hardships and abuses of the Jidda trade⁶⁷. A letter from Captain Scott to Captain Marlow expressed these sentiments:

"In former years the merchants reaped great benefit from the large advance which they received on the Piece Goods they exported from Bengal and Ports belonging to the English....this source of Wealth being dried up which it has been from the following circumstances. The Trade to Persia has been ruined by War; the Trade to Juddah by mere oppression and villany [sic] of Government which required nothing to check it but the impressing on them a proper knowledge of the British Nation."⁶⁸

Thornhill, captain of the *Bengal Merchant*, was particularly anxious to revive trade and avoid the port of Jidda altogether. Bruce, a burly 6' 4" and an accomplished horseman and marksman, was a man of great arrogance and action. While at Cairo he had impressed Ali Bey with his strength of character and was confident he could be of service to the Jidda merchants. He confided to

⁶⁶ See Bruce's memoirs, *Bruce's Travels* 5 Vols, Edinburgh, 1790; also C F Buckingham's edition of *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*. Secondary sources which study Bruce's travels include Charles-Roux, *Autour D'une Route*, pp 29-42; Hoskins, *British Routes*, p 9.

⁶⁷ James Bruce, *Bruce's Travels*, Edinburgh: 1790, Vol 1 p 190; pp 290-291. Topal is described by Bruce as captain of "one of the large Cairo ships trading to Arabia". His apparently active participation in the scheme suggests that non-Europeans as well wanted to bypass Jidda. This is a highly intriguing development. Unfortunately, source material does not allow this to be investigated further.

⁶⁸ IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, f 9, Scott to Marlow, August 17, 1776.

them, Captain Topal included, that he would negotiate a deal with Ali Bey opening Suez to their ships if (and he was careful to stress the issue) the captains would guarantee the vessels would arrive. Captain Thornhill, for his part, pledged that "the instant" the agreement was settled he would send the *Bengal Merchant* to Suez⁶⁹.

Bruce, intent on discovering the source of the Nile (the "climbing Mount Everest" of his day) did not return to Cairo for several years. Though he eventually secured the agreement as promised, Ali Bey, in the meantime, continued on his own to lure European trade towards Egypt⁷⁰. When the Porte commanded him to invade the Hijaz and restore to power the Ottoman choice for Sherif of Mecca, Ali Bey used the occasion to re-secure European trading rights in Jidda. He sent Balthazar Rossetti, the brother of Ali

⁶⁹ Bruce, *Travels*, Vol IV p 291.

⁷⁰ Livingston is particularly enthusiastic about Ali Bey's economic policies with Europeans, yet he tends to exaggerate them. "In order to underpin economically the position of his mamluk party, Aly Bey fostered European commerce, strenuously enforced laws protecting Christians and merchants, encouraged Syrian Christian merchants to immigrate to Egypt, issued new coins to facilitate commerce, and--most important of all--attempted to reopen the defunct Red Sea route as the chief channel of trade between Europe and India. His conquest of the Hejaz and Syria was, in part, a step toward fulfilling his grandiose scheme of restoring Egypt's old place in international trade, and thereby restoring the Mamluk Sultanate of old." "Ali-Bey al-Kabir", Princeton, from the abstract. While perhaps valid in principle, Livingston's assessment is rather strong. Ali-Bey may have nursed grand dreams, but he certainly was in no position to orchestrate, let alone pull off, such a grand design. The European trade was merely one of several sources of his most needed commodity: cash. Furthermore, the Red Sea route was hardly "defunct" and the bulk of European trade at Suez was aimed at channelling Indian goods to Asia Minor not Europe.

Bey's long time friend the Venetian merchant Carlo Rossetti, as customs officer, and ordered Muhammad Bey Abu Dhahab, his favorite Mamluk, right hand man, and the leader of the Mamluk expedition, to protect European interests⁷¹.

As yet, however, European ships dared not sail for Suez. When the Mamluk forces returned to Egypt, not long after their occupation of Jidda, the abuses of the Jidda customs house flourished as before⁷². Bruce returned to Cairo in 1773 and promptly discussed the Red Sea trade with Muhammad Bey Abu Dhahab, who had recently usurped power from his master. Bruce and Muhammad Bey negotiated through two separate sessions, and emerged with enticing prospects for both sides.

There was no inherent reason for Muhammad Bey to prefer an English, rather than any other European, trade at Suez--indeed, the treaty did not exclude other European merchants from Suez. However, beyond Bruce's initiative, the English merchants had a strong voice with the Bey because of the position of British India. Muhammad Bey was after customs revenues. He already had access to the sizeable non-European customs dues paid at Suez. The EIC merchants, however, were the best European source to generate new revenues. If Muhammad Bey had any concerns about the impact of his treaty on the non-European merchants in Egypt and the Red Sea, his actions certainly did not reflect them.

⁷¹Ibid, p 118-119; see also, Crecelius, *Roots*, pp 66-69.

⁷² Crecelius suggests that a few Venetian ships may have called on the port. See his "Unratified Commercial Treaties", p 71.

Specifically, the agreement stated that English ships would be welcomed at Suez; that the English, much to the satisfaction of the Beys, would endeavor to promote the trade; that the normal customs duty of 14% would, for English ships, be reduced to 8%; and that the Beys would demand no presents from the British merchants¹³. Muhammad Bey dispatched a firman to Mocha notifying the merchants and the local authorities of the agreement, while Bruce relayed the good tidings to Captain Thornhill and the EIC Board of Directors¹⁴. Thornhill, true to his word, immediately sent the *Minerva*, lieutenant Greigs in command, to Suez--probably, given the Red Sea wind patterns, arriving in early 1774 (Bruce is not clear on the date)¹⁵.

Meanwhile, Captain Thornhill at Calcutta aggressively worked to capitalize on his new access to Suez. With associates Robert Halford and David Killiean he established the *Suez Adventure*, a

¹³Bruce, *Travels*, Vol IV, p 632.

¹⁴ Bruce advised British merchants that once at Suez to seek secure lodging at either of the three French or the one Italian trading houses. (The existence of these European trading houses suggests that while European ships were not welcome at Suez, European merchants were free to buy and sell goods at the port.) Bruce further warned that any goods could be brought to Suez except coffee. Ibid, Vol IV, p 633.

¹⁵ The voyage of the *Minerva* is not recorded in the EIC records nor is it mentioned in the secondary works consulted. However, as a spontaneous voyage undertaken by a single captain there is no reason for it to exist in the Factory records, and since Bruce's facts, when able to be verified, consistently match up with EIC records, there seems no reason to doubt his word.

small joint stock company expressly aimed at the trade with Egypt¹⁶. In November, 1774, the fledgling stock company petitioned the Board of Directors for an EIC ship to accompany the *Bengal Merchant* to Suez¹⁷. The Board, deferring to the enthusiasm for the project of Governor-General Warren Hastings, newly arrived to India, complied. The *Culladore* schooner was commissioned to accompany the voyage and to survey and draw maps of the Red Sea--in order to free future voyages from reliance on local pilots¹⁸.

The fate of this adventure is contested in both secondary and primary sources. All agree that no sooner had the voyage set sail that the *Culladore* was lost in a storm¹⁹. Some accounts claim that the cargo vessel, the *Bengal Merchant*, was lost as well, yet Bruce claims that the *Culladore* was promptly replaced by another vessel,

¹⁶ See Bruce, *Travels*, p 633; Charles-Roux, *Autour*, pp 42-45; Kimche, "Opening of the Red Sea", p 67; Livingston, "Ali Bey", p 125.

¹⁷ IOR, G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, f 4.

¹⁸ Under the instructions of the Suez Adventure, Mr. John Shaw was given authority over the unloading and the selling of the cargo; now Captain Greig had complete authority over the voyage itself, though he was encouraged to seek Shaw's advice when necessary. Still wary of the reception awaiting at Suez, the Instructions specified several alternative plans in case the situation there turned ugly: they were allowed to seek harbor at either Tor or Qusayr, and were instructed that if even rumor reached them anywhere along the voyage that Suez was not receptive to their trade they should call off the enterprise and sell their cargo at Jidda. For a copy of the "Instructions of Suez Adventure to Mr. John Shaw and Captain William Greig" see Bruce, *Travels*, Vol IV, p 633.

¹⁹ The instructions of the voyage required Shaw and Greig to sell the *Culladore* at Mocha once the voyage was over, possibly suggesting the ship was nearing retirement age or was otherwise unseaworthy.

under the command of a Captain Moffat, and that the voyage reaped considerable profits in Cairo⁸⁰. George Baldwin, a rather notorious merchant of the Levant Company who was to play a significant role in events to come, also reported, though well after the fact, that the voyage was successful⁸¹. These statements are contradicted by India Office records which describe a failed attempt in 1774 to trade with Suez, and a memo from Hastings to Muhammad Bey which apologized for the lack of English trade at Suez and attempted to reassure the Bey that vessels would soon arrive⁸². Regardless of fate of the *Bengal Merchant*, the collective evidence suggests that the initial trading voyages to Suez met with both success and failure. Regardless, the fate of these early attempts did not keep British ships away from Suez in the years which followed.

Throughout 1775, Governor General Hastings labored to promote the Suez trade. He not only supported and invested in the "Suez Adventure", his authority in India gave implicit Company sanction to the trade. In fact, and very definitely overstepping his authority, he personally signed a "Treaty of Navigation and

⁸⁰Ibid, p 633.

⁸¹ IOR, G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, f 369.

⁸² See Charles-Roux, *Autour*, pp 42-51; Hoskins, *British Routes*, pp 7-9. See also IOR G/17/5 f 41-42, a letter from Hastings, written at the end of 1776, informing the home office that attempts in 1774 to trade with Suez failed because of "unavoidable accidents which happened to the vessel."

Commerce" between the EIC and the Beys of Upper and Lower Egypt⁸³. The treaty reiterated the agreements concluded between Bruce and Muhammad Bey Abu Dhahab, with an additional clause granting and protecting rights to send packets across Egypt, and again asserted the desire by all parties to promote the Suez trade.

Within the Company, however, the familiar debates continued. In August 1776, Captain Marlow of the *Coventry* reminded Hastings of the former prosperity of the "Gulfs trade" [trade with the Persian Gulf and Red Sea], so lucrative that "I need only to allude to them to induce this board to adopt any measures which may be necessary to recover and promote that commerce."⁸⁴ Marlow further stated that the best way to recover the trade was to utilize, *as before*, native merchants.

Three months later, Mr. Francis, a veteran Red Sea trader, offered several interesting points⁸⁵. He clarified that it was the Company's Bengal and Calcutta merchants who were the most desirous of a trade with Suez, in part to compensate for fees they were forced to pay to the Bombay and London offices and for their inability to develop trade with the Indian interior⁸⁶. In defence

⁸³ A copy of the agreement is in IOR G/17/5A, ff 31-35. See also Charles-Roux, *Autour*, pp 42-52.

⁸⁴ IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 18-20.

⁸⁵ IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 21-40.

⁸⁶ Francis doesn't attempt to explain this inability, though Mukherjee Ramkrishna, *The Rise and Fall of the East India Company*, New York: 1974, pp 299-392, shows that among other factors the EIC decimated local Indian industries, destroying Indian buying/consuming power along with it.

of the Suez trade, Francis contended that the goods traded through the "Gulphs" route were not the same "assortments" as those shipped to Europe--and therefore could not jeopardize English export manufactures of Indian goods. More, he pointed out that merely extending the destination of the Red Sea ships from Jidda to Suez in itself could not possibly effect the existing trade other than make it more secure and profitable. He reminded the Board that Indian goods were bought with specie (specifically, he said, either Venetian sequins or German crowns) and that what goods might come to Bombay could be used to settle accounts (as opposed to cash payments) with the Armenians, "Moors", and Europeans trading there.

Francis, as did Captain Marlow, recommended using Armenian and "Moorish" traders-- "better suited", Francis said, to dealing with the merchants and authorities in Cairo. Apparently concerned about the physical safety of English merchants, he stressed the hazards of the Red Sea voyage--another reason to utilize non-English traders. The issue of enlisting non-English traders and vessels to carry out the EIC trade with Suez explains the consistent reference to "re-opening", "re-establishing" the Suez trade in the India Office Records. It is clear that the EIC was no stranger to Suez. However, during the second half of the eighteenth century, English merchants strove to trade directly at the port. This development was new. For the remainder of the century, EIC officials and merchants would debate the merits of the Suez trade, falling back on the same tired arguments. However, the actual merits or potentials of the trade quickly took second place

to more pressing concerns developing far away from India.

From 1774 to 1776, three or four British ships unloaded cargoes, passengers, and packets at Suez. The exchanges were made peaceably enough between all involved, facilitated in part by the growing involvement of the Syrian Greek Catholic community based in Damiette⁸⁷. One notable exception occurred in 1776, when the EIC *Swallow* arrived at Suez with passengers en route to England but without goods to trade--thus without customs duties to pay⁸⁸. The Beys were not amused and forced heavy bribes from Col Capper and company before they were allowed to pass through Egypt. Baldwin later informed the EIC Board:

"It [granting the English passengers safe passage] was not, however, obtained upon this occasion without a great deal of difficulty, as the government of Egypt had been flattered with the expectation of great lucre from a flourishing commerce that was to be introduced to Suez, and were not pleased at affording a mere unreciprocated conveniency to the English of passing through their city....When the loaded

⁸⁷ See Raymond, *Artisans et Commerçants* Vol 1 p 154; pp 483-496; Andre Bittar, "La dynamique commerciale des Grecs-Catholiques en Egypte au XVIII^e siècle", *AI*, 26 (1992): 181-196; Crecelius, "Attempts by Greek Catholics to Control Egypt's Trade with Europe in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century", in Abdeljalil Temimi, ed, *La vie sociale dans les provinces arabes à l'époque Ottomane*, Zaghouan, 1988; and Crecelius, "Damiette in the Late Eighteenth Century", *JARCE* 27 (1990): 185-190. The Syrian Greek Catholic community, based in Damiette, had, by the mid eighteenth century, well established commercial links with Suez, Syrian ports and French merchants--who carried on a lucrative and illicit grain trade between Damiette and Marseilles. The Beys appointed many of them to oversee the Egyptian customs houses, displacing Jewish officials. These positions and diverse trade links gave the Syrian Greek Catholics a powerful influence over Egypt's trade, and the Beys gave them license to promote trade with European merchants.

⁸⁸ See Baldwin's account in IOR G/17/5, *Egypt and the Red Sea*, f 101; also Charles-Roux, *Autour*, pp 51-62.

ships [later] arrived, the government was satisfied."⁸⁹

Despite the small numbers of British ships involved in these early years, the value and volume of the cargoes were significant enough to alarm the port of Jidda. The Jidda authorities, watching their precious customs duties and presents sail away to the Egyptian Beys, were outraged and immediately sought redress from the Porte.

In turn, the Ottomans did issue a firman in 1774 reiterating the ban on European ships sailing north of Jidda but were not concerned with enforcing it⁹⁰. In Istanbul, the Porte offered only mild remonstrances about the trade to Mr. Murphy, British ambassador--and made no rebuttal of Murphy's contention that Suez, as a port of the Ottoman Empire, was open to English trade by rights of the Capitulations⁹¹. However, by the beginning of 1777, when twenty-eight bales of EIC goods reached Istanbul from Cairo, the Ottoman position began to change⁹². These twenty-eight bales vividly reminded the Porte that the Egyptian-English, and the Egyptian-European, trade was active and was growing. From this point on, Ottoman opposition to the trade and to European

⁸⁹ IOR G 17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea. f 101. Furthermore, Warren Hastings' official apology to the Beys for a lack of trade at Suez, usually interpreted as a sign that the initial trading vessels did not reach Suez, very well may have referred to the incident with the *Swallow*.

⁹⁰ Crecelius, "Unratified Treaties", pp 73-74; n 18 p 74.

⁹¹ This is according to George Baldwin, IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, f 369.

⁹² Ibid.

navigation in the northern Red Sea returned and intensified.

The issue of the Suez trade, however, became immensely complicated by the arrival to Cairo and Istanbul respectively of two Levant Company men who would greatly influence the events to come. In 1776, George Baldwin, a newly consigned Levant Company merchant arrived at Cairo from London with a modest bundle of goods to trade. An intensely industrious and persevering man, he soon won a modest salary from the EIC in return for managing and safeguarding the flow of EIC packets criss-crossing Egypt. Beyond that, Baldwin had grand designs for the trade of Egypt, and for the next twenty-two years was the self-appointed, indefatigable, champion of English trade with Suez.

In the same year Sir Robert Ainslee replaced Murphy as ambassador to the Porte. Murphy had approved of the British trade at Suez. Ainslee, however, feared Ottoman reprisals against the trade (a trade essentially benefitting the rival EIC) that could damage the Levant Company's trade and standing with the Ottoman Empire, and compromise England's delicate political position with the Porte. Ainslee remained an unwavering opponent to the Suez trade. For the remainder of the century, Ainslee and Baldwin engaged in an open, occasionally covert, increasingly heated and personal battle over the fate of the British trade to Suez⁹³.

In May 1777, the Porte issued yet another firman forbidding

⁹³ Primary documentation of their relationship is scattered throughout the G/17/5 and G/17/5A Egypt and the Red Sea series. See also, Crecelius, *Modern Roots* and his "Unratified Commercial Treaties between Egypt and England and France, 1773-1794", *Revue d'Histoire Maghrebine* 12 (1985): 67-104.

the Suez trade and in a show of resolve ordered Ottoman subjects to seize any and all European ships sighted north of Jidda, to confiscate their cargoes, and to imprison all passengers and crews⁹⁴. The Porte attempted to intimidate would be European traders by informing Ainslee of a 100,000 strong tribe of bedouins, hostile and predatory, which freely roamed along the northern Arabian Red Sea coasts. Ainslee quickly convinced the English Foreign Minister to respect the firman, and by July Bengal had received copies of the Porte's protests against the trade. Deferring to the British government's relations with the Ottoman Empire and the Levant Company's monopoly on Ottoman trade, the EIC officials chose to accept the closure of Suez to trade, but did request that the ambassador in Istanbul work to secure rights to send packets via Egypt. Unfortunately, packets and cargoes were most efficiently and profitably sent in conjunction with one another--and furthermore the Red Sea communications route, while speedy, was decidedly more expensive than the Cape route. Both these factors worked against separating purely communications activity from trading activity. Nevertheless, at this point at least the official policies of all those concerned (the Ottomans, the British Government, and both the Levant and the East India Companies), declared an end to the British trade with Suez. The Porte promptly issued a memo to Ainslee declaring its satisfaction with the cooperation of the King in the matter--and suggested

⁹⁴ For an English translation of the firman see, IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea f 141-143.

English packets be carried through Egypt by Turkish carriers, though for security reasons this obviously was unacceptable⁹⁵.

Enforcement of policy, however, proved another matter entirely. Ainslee, while determined to protect Levant Company interests, strove laboriously throughout his term to protect the life and property of all English subjects--no matter which trading company they belonged to or how frustrated he was about their behavior. Well aware of the potential problems in enforcing the ban, Ainslee secured a pledge from the Ottomans not to enforce the firman until 1779 to allow news of the firman to reach India and allow the EIC time to enforce the ban⁹⁶. Yet by doing so he inadvertently encouraged the trade to continue as before.

Meanwhile, more European vessels than ever continued to sail towards Suez⁹⁷. In his correspondences with his home government, Ainslee grew increasingly exasperated by the reckless behavior of the English and European merchants, in particular George Baldwin, who tirelessly pestered officials in London, India, and, in particular, Ainslee to challenge the Ottoman stance on the Suez trade. However, those who may have sympathized with Baldwin did

⁹⁵ For a translation of the memo see IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, f 152.

⁹⁶ In 1778, Ainslee admitted to Foreign Minister Lord Viscount Weymouth that undisclosed merchants had offered him bribes of 10,000 piasters (most probably Spanish piasters, or dollars) a year and more if he won for the EIC rights to trade with Suez. IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 197-199.

⁹⁷ For example, IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, f 193, where Ainslee, writing in 1778, tells of rumors that thirteen European ships called on Suez harbor the previous year.

not have the political muscle to change policies. The official stance of the British Government, championed by Ainslee and the Levant Company, continued to support Ottoman rights to regulate the commerce of the northern Red Sea (and ignored Baldwin's objections that the Capitulations granted--and they in fact did--English trade to all Ottoman ports). Both in London and Bombay the EIC refused to waver from their assertion that the Suez trade would undermine the Company's London exports (despite Baldwin's arguments to the contrary⁹⁸). Ainslee not only refused to be swayed by Baldwin's enthusiasm for the Red Sea route, he repeatedly struggled to contain the ambitions of his agent in Egypt and to force him to defend Company policy⁹⁹.

Though often accused of subverting Company policies, Baldwin never admitted to encouraging EIC merchants to call on Suez once the prohibition against the trade was reaffirmed. He justified his role in the continuing trade activity as merely assisting, as he was bound to do, his countrymen once they had arrived, and bitterly complained that he'd been forced to relinquish consignments, negotiated with EIC merchants in 1778, worth twenty lakhs of rupees

⁹⁸ Intriguingly, the one issue never raised by Baldwin, despite his range and depth of arguments was that no one objected to the English trade at Basra. As with the Suez trade, the EIC goods sent to Basra were intended for Ottoman markets and were therefore as much a threat to London's exports to Turkey as Suez was. In fact, since the Bombay merchants had developed the Persian Gulf route, supplanting the Red Sea-Surat route, the Basra trade was the primary challenge to the London goods. This will be discussed in more detail in Part Two.

⁹⁹ For example see IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 108-110.

per annum¹⁰⁰. Baldwin remained steadfast that he followed Company policy no matter his objections to it, and that his efforts to promote the Suez trade was a reflection of his loyalty to the best interests of the Company. Ainslee, for one, remained unconvinced.

Baldwin was particularly proud of his exploits of 1778, suggesting his diligence and prompt actions were the backbone of the British victory over the French in India¹⁰¹. Baldwin apparently had heard early rumors of an official declaration of war between the two countries. He immediately dispatched a messenger to Suez instructing the EIC vessel there, about to set sail for India, to remain in harbor until it received further instructions. In Alexandria, he confirmed the news of war from freshly arrived merchants, and shot off another messenger to Suez alerting the English captain of the news. As a result, the EIC was informed of the war before the French, and was able to capture the ill-prepared French stronghold at Pondicherry--probably the final straw leading to British hegemony over France in India.

Though Baldwin never received the recognition or compensation he felt he deserved for his role in the English victory, the incident made it soberingly clear to the British and Bombay Governments the utility of the Suez communications route and the

¹⁰⁰ IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, f 370. Using Abdullah's conversion ratio (see his "The Political Economy of Basra") this converts to about 200,000 lbs sterling.

¹⁰¹ The event is mentioned several times in the records, see for example, IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 371-372, Baldwin's report to the EIC stockholders; also his contemporary report to the Government Office, IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, f 102.

potential threat involved if an enemy controlled it. As a result, the negotiations in Istanbul to allow the communications route via Suez continued.

The illicit European trade at Suez continued as well. By 1779, Ainslee wearily confided to Lord Weymouth that he did not see any way to prevent the trade, especially since the EIC merchants were getting around the ban by simply sailing under different colors, and furthermore suggested that Baldwin was exacerbating the situation by "tampering" with the French¹⁰². For its part, the EIC genuinely was not promoting the trade. Its members active at Suez were merely exercising their rights to trade privately. And though this private trade carried with it numerous forms of violations of Company policies, and other abuses, Company officials, engaged in the private trade themselves, generally refused to meddle.

The Ottomans grew increasingly impatient over the continuing, and in fact thriving, trade and held Ainslee accountable¹⁰³. Ainslee, truly a master diplomat, deflected the Porte's accusations of blatant British disregard to Ottoman authority by rationalizing in various ways¹⁰⁴. He frequently contested reports of English trade at Suez, saying they were either untrue or exaggerated. He claimed ships were only carrying packets and passengers (which the Porte had tacitly allowed); he even suggested vessels were simply

¹⁰² IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 235-236.

¹⁰³ IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 208-210.

¹⁰⁴ For example see IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 211-212.

"lost" or hadn't heard about the recent firman. And most ingeniously, he implied that some of the boats were British patrols trying to enforce the ban. His diplomatic skills, however, were being stretched to the limit--at one point, in exasperation, he confessed to the Reis Effendi that he was *trying!*¹⁰⁵

The turning point came in 1779, when the Porte issued yet another, even more menacing, announcement that it intended to enforce the firman against the Suez trade. Concomitantly, it sent a strongly worded *Hatti Sherif* to the Pasha in Egypt forbidding the trade and threatening punishments to all those who either encouraged or turned a blind eye to it:

"The Sea of Suez is destined for the noble Pilgrimage to Mecca. To suffer Frankish ships to navigate therein or to neglect opposing it, is betraying your Sovereign, your Religion, and every Mohammanadan; and all those who dare to transgress, will infallibly find [sic] their punishment in this world and the World to come."¹⁰⁶

The Beys, seeing time was running out chose not to back away from the trade until Ottoman attention was diverted elsewhere, the usual method of contradicting Ottoman policy. Fatefully, and most probably spontaneously, they chose to follow the firman to the letter.

Two Dutch ships (or English ships flying Dutch colors, the reports vary) arrived at Suez in 1779 carrying mostly British

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ For a complete translation of the *Hatti Sherif* see IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 292-297.

goods, merchants, and passengers¹⁰⁷. The caravan carrying the cargoes and passengers to Cairo was attacked and plundered by bedouins without resistance from the Mamluk escort. The ten Europeans travelling with the caravan were stranded in the desert--seven died. The two ships at Suez were stormed and the crews imprisoned. Only through great diplomatic efforts on Ainslee's part, aided by hefty bribes and presents, were the survivors of the ordeal released, though their losses were never compensated for.

The incident sent shock waves through the European merchant community active in the Suez trade, and more effectively than any firman or Company directive brought the trade to a dramatic stop. Increased political instability in Egypt (in fact one of the causes of the plunder of the caravan) did little to restore the confidence of the European merchants. And here the first phase of the British trade with Suez is closed.

¹⁰⁷ The incident received copious attention in the records. For Baldwin's and Ainslee's accounts see ff 249-250; for Brandi's report to Ainslee, ff 237-239 all in IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea.

British Trade with Suez, Phase Two, 1780-1798

The second phase of British trade at Suez can be dated from 1780, when European merchants and governments attempted to re-establish and redefine their interests in Egypt, and 1798, when George Baldwin, on the eve of the French invasion, finally abandoned his dreams of promoting English trade at Suez and left Egypt forever. During this period the lessons of the first phase of trade were ever in the minds of the European merchants and governments: 1) that the Suez trade was possible and was potentially highly profitable; and 2) that Egypt was an obvious strategic link between the Mediterranean and India.

The period emerged as an ironic antithesis to the developments of the first phase. Where previously politics and diplomacy had been unable to contain the ambitions of the Beys and individual merchants, throughout the second phase the merchants were unable to maneuver in the increasingly belligerent political and social atmosphere of late eighteenth century Egypt and Europe. A successful trade agreement between the Beys and the French government was rendered meaningless when the Ottomans launched a military expedition against the Beys in 1786. By the time Baldwin, aided by the Venetian merchant Carlo Rosetti, secured a similar treaty for the British in 1796, political dissension in Egypt and the wars in Europe had already brought Egypt's trade with Europe to its knees.

Remarkable in this phase was the tenacity of the Beys and the

European merchants. Despite the crumbling political scene in Egypt, individual Mamluks, Murad and Ibrahim Bey in particular, continued to plot commercial alliances with European merchants. The incident of 1779, when the European caravan crossing the desert between Suez and Cairo was violently attacked by bedouins, may have caused the European merchants pause, yet they were ever poised to rush back to Suez once encouraging signs of stability and friendship reappeared. During the last two decades of the century, however, those signs were ambiguous at best, capricious at worse, and often blatantly misleading.

Ainslee must have greeted the 1779 bedouin attack on the European caravan with at least a small degree of relief. Although the laborious and painstaking task of saving the lives and then winning the release of those Englishmen who had survived fell on his shoulders alone, it was widely believed that the problem of the Suez trade had been at last settled. The issue of the Red Sea route, however, was to continue to plague Ainslee. Soon after the Dutch affair, the English vessel *Coventry* and a sister ship arrived at the upper Egyptian port of Qusayr where a Mr. Wooley, carrying important packets, landed and began the journey to Cairo¹⁰⁸. Outside the city he was arrested, stripped of his packets and belongings, and sent in chains to Istanbul, pressing Ainslee into

¹⁰⁸ For more on the importance of Qusayr during this period see Crecelius, "The Importance of Qusayr in the Late Eighteenth Century", *JARCE* 24 (1987): pp 53-60; Charles-Roux, *Autour*, pp 81-86.

yet another round of negotiations aimed at saving the life of a countryman¹⁰⁹. Eventually Wooley was released, despite the outrage of the French ambassador who publicly demanded he be executed. The issue of packets passing through Egypt was unresolved, and would keep Ainslee busy for many years to come, especially since the French and British wars in India had proved the utility of the Red Sea communications route. James Capper, a colonel in the EIC was one of the leading advocates of securing the Red Sea route, and publicly blasted the British government's failure to secure it--which he claimed had cost the lives of hundreds of British soldiers who had died in Indian campaigns fought long after treaties of peace with France had been secured¹¹⁰.

Despite the interruption of trade after 1779, the issue of trade to Suez was not completely resolved either. Unable to win Levant or East India Company approval for the Suez trade from his post in Cairo, in the early 1780s Baldwin set out to Istanbul and later to London to lobby in person¹¹¹. In his absence, a

¹⁰⁹ See Ainslee's report to the EIC Directors, IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 249-250.

¹¹⁰ See James Capper, *Observations on the Passage to India through Egypt*, London: 1785; and Charles-Roux, *Autour*, p 202.

¹¹¹ Baldwin attempted to prove to the EIC directors that the Red Sea route did not jeopardize the EIC's interests in London by showing that the volume of London's exports to Turkey had been greatest during the years the Suez trade had been active. Significantly these years coincided with the years the Basra trade was interrupted by the Persian occupation, which further suggests the importance of the Persia Gulf route in the EIC's trade with the Ottomans. During his London meetings Baldwin also declared, "The trade to Turkey by the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, Mr. Burke has said in the Ninth Report to the House of Commons, was the greatest and perhaps best branch of India trade, and observing that it has

relatively unknown and vaguely peculiar merchant in Alexandria, Robert Hughes, attempted to promote British merchant interests in Baldwin's absence. Early in 1781, Hughes initiated a long, and one-sided, dialogue concerning Egypt and the Suez trade with Peter Mitchell, secretary to the Board of Directors of the EIC¹¹². According to Hughes, the political mood in Egypt had calmed down and the previous Suez trade was free to resume. He lamented that four English merchants in Alexandria bound for India had left for Aleppo and the Persian Gulf route rather than cutting across to Suez. He even went so far as to claim he had official "command" from the Porte which allowed English packets and passengers to pass through Suez--an outright and, at this point, rather dangerous lie¹¹³. More curious still, Hughes became increasingly paranoid about the European community in Egypt, in particular the Dutch--whom he was convinced had hired two spies to pose as German tourists in order to scout out Cairo and the Red Sea¹¹⁴.

British merchants remained wary of Suez, and Egypt in general, yet new debates about the Suez route and European interests in Egypt once again cropped up among the EIC Board members. In 1783, the *Proceedings of the General Quarterly Court of Directors* confirmed that the number of packets being sent via Cairo was

very much diminished, laments the loss of it to the resources of Bengal." IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, f 122.

¹¹² See IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 328-364.

¹¹³ IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, f 361.

¹¹⁴ IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, f 337-338.

greater than the Company ever expected¹¹⁵. In 1785, Henry Dundas, whom Crecelius describes as "the dominant personality on the new Board for Indian Trade", issued the *Speculations on the Situation and Resources of Egypt*, the most comprehensive report on the subject since the reports of 1768¹¹⁶. In it Dundas expounded on the agricultural, commercial, and industrial wealth of Egypt--claiming Egypt, after meeting all internal needs, exported 1000 shipfuls of surplus goods a year. In an accolade to Egypt's wealth of trade and economic potential typical of those made by European observers, he exalted,

"This is the resort of all Traders of the World. It seems a common center of Universal Commerce. The Coin of all the World is current here."¹¹⁷

Though Dundas was at least partially sympathetic to Baldwin's hopes for a re-established Suez trade, new French designs in Egypt placed Baldwin's schemes back on track far more effectively than his own lobbying. In 1785, Ainslee was presented with a stolen copy of a trade agreement made between Murad Bey (and later Ibrahim Bey) and Chevalier de Truguet, a special envoy dispatched in 1784

¹¹⁵ Dundas Papers #16, copied in IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 365-366.

¹¹⁶ Crecelius, "Treaties," pp 78-79.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Prophetically, Dundas also warned of the threat of the newly independent American colonies, which he predicted would quickly become the greatest political and economic competitor to the British Empire. He claimed, though surely or at least in part sarcastically, that it would be better to give Egypt to France rather than lose the American colonies.

by the French government to secure a treaty with the Beys¹¹⁸. Truguet had also won the backing of Yussif Kassab, the Syrian Greek Catholic who had acquired tremendous power and wealth as Egypt's chief customs agent. Under Kassab's tutelage, and profiting from the vast experience of the long established French merchant community in Egypt, Truguet's commercial strategies were extremely astute, especially when compared with British efforts.

For example, Hastings' treaty of 1775 had focused on securing political guarantees that would protect English control over all facets of shipping, storing, transporting, and exchanging goods, and the like. Given that in Egypt the cooperation or at least non-interference of a range of non-political parties was essential in order to trade successfully, Hastings' treaty was poorly designed. The French treaties of 1785, however, were far more conducive to the realities of Egypt¹¹⁹. They merely began with the political approval of the Beys and then continued to negotiate with the other critical players. Truguet formed a second treaty with Yusuf Kassab, which strategically secured a French ally in the customs

¹¹⁸ For the events surrounding the French treaty see Charles-Roux, *Autour*, pp 156-172; Crecelius, "Treaties", pp 75-78. The EIC records include, IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea ff 211-212; 435-438; and G/17/5A f 91.

¹¹⁹ Copies of the Truguet's, Hastings' and Baldwin's treaties are discussed in Crecelius, "Treaties," pp 67-104 (the treaties themselves are presented on pp 85-104). Given Crecelius' typically thorough discussion on the events leading up to the signing of the treaties, it is somewhat surprising that he doesn't analyze the significant differences in both their content and their approach. Ainslee's copy of the treaty is found in IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 423-429.

house. The treaty gave Yusuf virtual power of attorney over French interests in Egypt and bound him to promote and protect French interests (and lives) with the ruling powers. The final and truly brilliant treaty was with Sheikh Nasr Shahid, leader of a powerful bedouin tribe of Sinai, in which the sheikh pledged to escort and protect the caravans transporting French goods and passengers to and from Suez and Cairo. The British treaty had left the matter of protection to the Beys, who repeatedly proved to be unreliable.

Ainslee was perturbed by these developments, but was also reasonably certain the French attempts to trade at Suez would fail. While he worked to sabotage the French schemes in private sessions with the Reis Effendi, he calmly predicted to Foreign Minister the Marquis of Carmenthen that the French intrigues with the Beys would prove the last straw which would prompt the ever threatened Ottoman military expedition against Egypt¹²⁰. Even if the French treaty stood, Ainslee felt certain he could force the Porte allow equal concessions to the British.

The EIC, however, was alarmed. Their interests in India felt threatened by French activity in the Red Sea, and Company directors were not about to leave the fate of French schemes with the Beys solely in the hands of the Levant Company ambassador. Henry Dundas quickly turned to Baldwin, fortuitously on hand in London, and strong armed the British government into appointing him consul

¹²⁰ IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 435-438.

general of Egypt¹²¹. This for a region that had gone without any sort of official British representation for several decades¹²². The Levant Company was outraged--it had sole authority to appoint officials in Egypt--but the British government overrode their objections. Ainslee in particular was incensed that his nemesis had been given a position of both authority and prestige. Regardless, the appointment was made and Baldwin was quickly dispatched to Cairo to win a British treaty giving British merchants trading rights at least equal to those of the French.

The French were not able to take advantage of their new treaty¹²³. As Ainslee had predicted, in 1786 the Ottomans launched an expedition under the command of Hasan Pasha which briefly reestablished Ottoman authority over Lower Egypt. This effectively nullified the French treaty with the Beys, though the French merchants and freshly arrived Baldwin immediately attempted to negotiate new ones with Hasan Pasha¹²⁴. The Pasha, however, refused to allow them to trade with Suez without the approval of the Porte, and European activity at Suez continued to be suspended.

¹²¹ For a copy of the official crown appointment see IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 459-462.

¹²² IOR G/17/5A, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 28-32. In addition, Baldwin was rehired by the EIC to oversee packets. See also Crecelius, "Treaties", pp 78-79; Charles-Roux, *Autour*, pp 227-230/238-250.

¹²³ See Ainslee's assessments of the French position in IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 451-458.

¹²⁴ See Charles-Roux, *Autour*, pp 186-200; Crecelius, "Treaties", p 79. Baldwin claimed that the French had offered Hasan Pasha \$60,000 dollars to allow the trade. See IOR G/17/5A, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 99-102.

The Beys quickly returned to power following the departure of the Ottoman forces, yet the European trade at Suez did not recover despite various efforts to revive it. Ismail Bey attempted to lure the French back to Suez, but the merchants remained wary¹²⁵. As the English traveller Eyles Irwin commented,

"...It is observed that a spirit of dissipation and gaming has crept in among the [French] merchants"¹²⁶.

The passage between Suez and Cairo was becoming increasingly dangerous because the Beys were not paying protection costs to the Bedouin tribes, and faced with reduced trade activity from all Red Sea merchants, the Suez customs house demanded increasingly voracious duties¹²⁷. Charles-Roux places the English vessel *Venus* at Suez in 1787 and Crecelius the French *Prince de Conde* in 1789, yet all sources agree that European cargoes no longer unloaded at Suez¹²⁸.

Neither did the English or other European merchants seriously attempt to develop a trade at Qusayr, which during the 1780s and '90s briefly replaced Suez as Egypt's main Red Sea port¹²⁹. In

¹²⁵ Valuable quantitative information on French activity in this time period can be found in Jean-Batiste Trécourt, *Memoirs sur l'Egypte*, 1791, Caire: 1942.

¹²⁶ Eyles Irwin, *Voyage up the Red Sea*, 1780, Vol II p 85.

¹²⁷ See Crecelius, "The Importance of Qusayr in the late Eighteenth Century", *JARCE*, 24 (1987): p 55.

¹²⁸ Charles-Roux, *Autour*, pp 299-316; and Crecelius, "Treaties", p 80.

¹²⁹ Ibid, pp 53-60. See Stanford S Shaw, *The Financial and Administrative Organization and Development of Ottoman Egypt*, Princeton: 1962. Shaw's Table X, p 107, compares customs revenues

1791, a Major MacDonald of the EIC did scheme with Ibrahim Bey to promote a trade at Qusayr but nothing materialized¹³⁰. Even Ainslee's long fought success in winning Ottoman approval for English packet boats to land at Suez did not inspire the British merchants, although Baldwin remained irrepressible as ever¹³¹. In 1796, with essential and unacknowledged help from Carlo Rosetti, Baldwin signed a treaty (basically a carbon copy of Truguet's treaty) with Murad and Ibrahim Beys¹³². But again, the EIC vessels did not come. In fact, by 1793 the European trading activity in all of Egypt had declined so considerably due to instability in Egypt and war in Europe, the British government recalled Baldwin--although Baldwin continued to execute his duties until 1796, claiming he had never received his discharge, and stayed on in

of the Egyptian ports for most of the Ottoman period. See also Shaw, *Ottoman Egypt in the Age of the French Revolution*, Cambridge, Ma: 1968, p 138; and Raymond, *Artisans*, Vol 1 pp 125-126.

¹³⁰ Crecelius, "Treaties", pp 81-82; and Crecelius, "The Importance of Qusayr", p 58. Considering the long caravan/Nile route between Qusayr and Cairo, the dangers faced by European merchants and trade along this route were even more grave than in Suez. Eyles Irwin personally, and painfully, observed this during his harrowing journey between Qusayr and Cairo made in 1777. "...how we shall reach the capital [Cairo], through the disorders of a country agitated by opposing factions, and laid waste by the sword of rebellion, we are at a loss to determine. Danger besets us on every side." See Irwin, *A Voyage up the Red Sea* Vol I p 326.

¹³¹ IOR G/17/5A, Egypt and the Red Sea, f 91.

¹³² A copy of the treaty is found in IOR G/17/5 ff 473-475; see also Charles-Roux, *Autour*, pp 317-329; Crecelius, "Treaties", pp 80-81; Crecelius also provides a copy of the treaty in *ibid*, pp 98-103.

Egypt until the eve of the French invasion¹³³.

¹³³ Charles-Roux, *Autour*, pp 299-316; and Crecelius, "Treaties", p 80. Crecelius points out the irony that Baldwin secured the treaty he had been sent to negotiate and speeded packets which greatly helped the British seizure of Ceylon and Batavia after the British government had formally dismissed him.

PART TWO: CAIRO, ISTANBUL, AND LONDON--TO UNMAKE A DEAL

Part one presented a general chronology of the rise and demise of British trade at Suez, and introduced the various players active in the episode. Part two explores more fully the forces behind the failure of the Mamluk Beys and British merchants to sustain the trade.

British-Suez Trade in Economic Perspective

The first task is to quantify the economic impact of the trade in order to assess which groups were poised to benefit or suffer. Primary source material makes this a painfully daunting task. The customs and import/export figures available for Egypt, and even those available specifically for Suez, do not single out the cargoes brought to Suez by British vessels¹³⁴. The archives of the Suez and Jidda customs houses may hold the answers. However, as yet they have not been fully explored--indeed, whether the Jidda records (a potential gold mine of information about Red Sea trade) are even extant, and if so available to researchers, is not known. The India Office Records, so valuable in Das Gupta's and Abdullah's work on Surat and Basra respectively, do not quantify or qualify the British trade to Suez. Baldwin did not reside in Cairo in an official capacity until long after the trade had stopped. His voluminous correspondences were not concerned with Company record

¹³⁴ The most comprehensive study of Egypt's economic records is Stanford S Shaw, *The Financial and Administrative Organization and Development of Ottoman Egypt, 1517-1798*, Princeton: 1962; and Raymond, *Artisans*.

keeping but rather in rebutting criticisms of the Suez trade and expounding on the potentials of British trade in Egypt. Jidda generally had an EIC resident, but he was not responsible for maintaining records or diaries of the port's activity. Even the Mocha Factory records, in part because of their poor condition, rarely give information beyond fragmented documentation of the coffee trade. A further consideration which obscured the British trade with Suez from the EIC records was that it was private trade existing outside the Company's official domain.

Various travel accounts mention the Suez trade. As a whole, however, travel literature is useful in substantiating other primary sources, but it is not an appropriate source from which to establish detailed, reliable analysis of any given place or event¹³⁵. When studying trade activity one must acknowledge the dangers of drawing general assumptions from piecemeal or isolated data--both of which typify the information given in travel accounts. Profs. Das Gupta and Abdullah have clearly shown that the volume of trade which reached any given port fluctuated dramatically, at times spectacularly, from season to season. Therefore, general trends and long term averages can only be calculated from detailed year by year data collected over a long period of time. In the case of the Suez trade, detailed

¹³⁵ Perhaps the greatest utility of the European travel accounts has generally gone unnoticed: the nature of the observations richly illustrate the social ethics, habits, customs, mores, etc of the home country or region of the traveller and as such offer extraordinary information to social historians of Europe.

information and longevity of European activity are both noticeably absent. Nevertheless, by collectively utilizing all the available sources, one can piece together a very general indication of the economic significance of the British trade at Suez and draw cautious conclusions from them.

The British trade at Suez was active for an exceptionally brief period. James Bruce and the India Office Records indicate that one vessel, the *Minerva*, may have arrived in 1774, and at least one vessel, if not the *Merchant of Bengal* another unnamed one, definitely landed in 1775. From 1776 on, however, the picture is less clear. Most EIC correspondences dealing with the Suez trade reported and re-reported events years after the fact. Figures vary from person to person and even figures given by the same person often contradict themselves from year to year. The greatest challenge, however, is not counting the English ships arriving at Suez but distinguishing which carried cargoes and which were mere packet boats.

One document saves the issue from being completely muddled. When George Baldwin was in London in the early 1780s trying to rally EIC support for the Suez trade, he ambitiously presented a report directly to the stock holders¹³⁶. In it, and almost as an aside, he listed the British ships which had landed at Suez during the years the trade was active. According to Baldwin, in 1776, the

¹³⁶ One gets the impression Baldwin was not merely covering all the bases but had become frustrated by the repeated dead ends he had faced from the EIC Board of Directors. See IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 370-372.

Dolphin and *Swallow* arrived but carried only packets (in an earlier letter to the EIC Board Baldwin claimed that one "small" cargo ship arrived in 1776¹³⁷). From January to May, 1777, six ships, apparently "large" ones, arrived laden with goods, packets, and passengers from India. From June through August of that year an unspecified number of ships carrying packets and passengers only arrived. In the spring of 1778, seven cargo ships landed, with an unspecified number of packet ships that spring and following summer. In 1779, two packet ships safely landed, but the only cargoes that arrived were freighted on the two Danish ships pillaged by the bedouins and Mamluks. Adding to this the information from outside sources, the overall picture indicates that from 1774-1779 roughly seventeen British ships carrying cargoes landed at Suez, with the vast majority of activity occurring in the years 1777 and 1778. To this an indeterminable, but apparently small, number of other European ships landed cargoes and packets. After 1779, the EIC records suggest that French, Venetian, Austrian, and Russian ships landed at Suez, but British cargoes apparently avoided the port, and the vessels of all the nations were primarily packet boats.

Because the tonnages and cargo values of a given British ship unloading at Suez cannot be determined from the sources, quantifying the amount of customs fees extracted from the English trade can only be done indirectly and imprecisely. The issue is further complicated because various sources use an array of

¹³⁷ IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, f 369.

different currencies in placing a value on customs and goods. Without the means to determine reliable exchange rates, the relative worth of these assessments admittedly is limited.

For example, according to James Capper the Beys who promoted the British trade at Suez were after the annual customs dues collected at Jidda from EIC ships--some 200,000 pounds sterling annually¹³⁸. Unfortunately, this figure cannot be verified and it is hazardous to assume that all EIC ships, and therefore all EIC duties paid at Jidda, sailed directly to Suez during those years the port was open to them. However, 200,000 pounds sterling is a substantial amount and helps to explain the Beys' eagerness to collect the customs duties of EIC cargoes--and the outrage of the Jidda authorities when EIC ships bypassed their port.

Figures taken from information at Suez are highly problematic as well. Bittar states from research on the Syrian Greek Catholic community in Damiette that the European trade at Suez for 1778 was 1,000,000 *pataques*¹³⁹. Using the 8% customs duties negotiated by the Hastings' treaty, this would add 80,000 *pataques* to the revenues of the Suez customs house. Dividing this by the seven ships reported to have traded at Suez that year and multiplying the result by the fifteen ships (not counting the two which were outright confiscated in 1779) active at Suez, one can very roughly suggest a gross 131,420 *pataques* collected at Suez. Again, these are significant amounts.

¹³⁸ Capper, *Observations on the Passage*, p v.

¹³⁹ Bittar, "La dynamique commerciale", *AI* (1992): p 195.

From a different angle, James Bruce reported that in 1768 nine English ships were anchored at Jidda each holding cargoes worth an average 200,000 pounds sterling¹⁴⁰. Using this as an admittedly problematic average, it would give each British vessel at Suez a potential of 16,000 pounds sterling customs fee due, and by extension 241,000 pounds collected during the life of the English-Suez trade, the bulk of which was collected in two short years. Granted, all the totals offered above are seriously problematic and are intended to be indicative only. Not only do they rely solely on questionable and unverifiable assessments of trade volumes and average worth of cargoes, they do not factor out the value of cargoes not sold in Egypt and thus subject to different customs dues. Yet even a cautious appraisal indicates that the British trade at Suez paid significant amounts of customs dues.

Equally problematic is an assessment of the profits gained by the British merchants. The rumors of profits (no exact figures are known) during the first voyages were 100-120%¹⁴¹. Again using Bruce's average this would give the British merchants an extraordinary 200-240,000 pounds gross profit each voyage. Obviously, the profits could not have been this high--certainly not for all the British ships which traded at Suez. The figures and the rumors, no matter how imperfectly, do suggest and in a very general way clarify the wealth to be gleaned from the trade of even

¹⁴⁰ Bruce, *Travels*, Vol 1 p 266.

¹⁴¹ Various primary and secondary sources report this. For example see Crecelius, "Treaties", p 72.

a handful of ships, and this is the important point. Even if the actual customs and profits earned were only a fraction of the above totals it is clear that the Beys, the Syrian Greek Catholic customs agents, and the individual British merchants were richly rewarded by the European-Suez trade and had every reason to promote it¹⁴².

Outside information as well strongly suggests that the profits, and therefore the customs duties, of the trade were, or at least commonly were believed to be, most lucrative. Merchants were repeatedly willing to dole out considerable sums in order to win support for and access to the trade. Baldwin claimed that in 1778 he had consignments from EIC merchants worth twenty lakhs annually¹⁴³. He also claimed that Mr. Whitehall, an English merchant hoping to establish a relatively small scale trade in Egypt, was willing to pay the Beys 500 German crowns merely to open an Agency in Cairo¹⁴⁴. Furthermore, Baldwin reported that during the Ottoman expedition against the Beys the French offered Hasan Pasha 60,000 "dollars" (probably Spanish dollars) if he would allow a French trade at Suez¹⁴⁵. Even Ainslee was a target for those EIC merchants thirsty for access to Suez--he confessed to Lord Weymouth

¹⁴² Yusif Kassab amassed such an outrageous fortune as customs agent he was forced to flee Damiette for Europe. See Bittar, "La dynamique", *AI* (1992): 181-196.

¹⁴³ IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, f 370. Using Dr. Abdullah's exchange ratios this converts to about 200,000 lbs sterling a year.

¹⁴⁴ IOR G/17/5A. This is further interesting in that Mr. Whitehall does not appear to have had the authority to create an Agency.

¹⁴⁵ IOR G/17/5A, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 99-102.

he had been offered annual pay-offs of 10,000 piasters (not to be confused with today's Egyptian piaster; this was most probably Spanish piasters, Spanish dollars¹⁴⁶) from various merchants if he won EIC rights of trade at Suez¹⁴⁷. Finally, every report submitted to the EIC Board written by a merchant or captain familiar with the Suez trade was unanimous in its conviction that the Suez trade was potentially lucrative and definitely worth pursuing.

The above suggests the economic importance of the British-Suez trade to those directly connected with it--the Beys, the customs agents, and the British merchants. The next task is to determine if its economic impact touched on the trade of the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, or the Mediterranean. This is an attempt to ascertain, given the diverse objections raised against the trade from merchants and political powers far distant from Suez, its far reaching economic significance. Although many of the objections to the trade were concerned about the *potential* ramifications of the English-Suez trade (to be investigated later), this section is concerned with the significance of the trade that was actually carried out.

Before proceeding, one point on the potential ramifications of the English-Suez trade should be pointed out. Indeed, promoting Egyptian-eastern trade was an objective of the Beys and

¹⁴⁶ See chapter one of Raymond's *Artisans*, which deals exclusively with the currencies in use in eighteenth century Egyptian and eastern Mediterranean trade.

¹⁴⁷ IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 197-199.

participating European merchants. It is misleading to assume, however, that merely establishing British trade at Suez would in itself perpetuate an increase in its volume. The amount of additional goods the Egyptian markets, and markets beyond, could absorb is not clear. From the EIC records one can see that certain India merchants hoped to restore the Red Sea trade to former greater volumes but that it could be done, that the demand for it existed, was never a foregone conclusion¹⁴⁸. With this in mind it is especially expedient to focus on the actual, not the potential, impacts of the trade.

In terms of the Red Sea, the British trade with Suez had little to no significance on existing volumes or goods traded. Compared with the overall volume of trade in the Sea--the Mocha-Suez coffee trade, the active provisioning trade between Egypt and the Holy Cities, and the pilgrimage trade itself (which Shaw claims carried the bulk of the Indian-Egyptian trade¹⁴⁹)--a handful of European ships arriving at Suez with India goods was not a critical issue¹⁵⁰. Furthermore, as Mr. Francis, the EIC merchant, pointed

¹⁴⁸ The proposals for the Suez trade all state that its success hinged on Istanbul's buying power and thirst for goods and the ability to sell EIC goods at lower prices than the European and especially non-European competitors.

¹⁴⁹ Shaw, *Ottoman Egypt in the Age of the French Revolution*, Cambridge, Ma: 1968, n 179, p 138.

¹⁵⁰ The total numbers of non-European ships active in the Red Sea can be more precisely mentioned. Shaw states that in the second half of the eighteenth century Suez and Qusayr received between 160-300 ships a year; as a whole this represents a significant portion of total Red Sea trade (missing only trade coming north to Jidda that was not passed along to Egypt), though the cargoes would have been carried on different ships along

out merely extending the port of call from Jidda to Suez did nothing to alter the existing nature of Red Sea trade, especially since the British merchants, with some exceptions, appear to have left the coffee trade between Mocha and Suez in the hands of the non-European merchants¹⁵¹.

Although the Red Sea trade as a whole was not adversely affected by a European trade at Suez, the port of Jidda was an area acutely threatened by this development. Whatever increased customs duties had been collected in Suez thanks to direct European trade had been taken directly from the pockets of the Jidda customs house. Likewise, whatever further inducements the Suez officials and Beys were winning from the European merchants were given at the expense of the Jidda authorities. Jidda's outrage over these developments is readily understandable--Niebuhr stated that the authorities in Jidda had smugly predicted English vessels could never manage the perilous voyage to Suez, adding to their outrage when the ships in fact sailed past their port:

"They [the British captains] then threatened to forsake the harbor of Jedda, and to send their ships straight to Suez. The Turks and the Arabs, considering the navigation of the Arabian Gulph as the most dangerous in the world, paid no attention to these menaces."¹⁵²

The captains and pilots who ferried goods from Jidda to Suez were poised to lose potential freight charges as well.

different parts of the voyage. See Ibid. Also Raymond, *Artisans*, Vol 1 pp 129-148; Tuchscherer, "Activites", pp 321-353.

¹⁵¹ IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 21-40.

¹⁵² Niebuhr, *Travels*, p 386.

Unfortunately, within the limitations of the sources consulted these captains and vessels exist only in the background--one cannot identify them individually or gauge how they reacted (although since the freight charges between Jidda and Suez appear to have been generally high, the captains must have reacted strongly)¹⁵³.

In summary, the greatest impact of the British trade at Suez was not quantitative--it merely rearranged the way northern Red Sea trade functioned. This rearrangement was not significant in terms of the gross trade of the Sea. However, it adversely effected the authorities in Jidda and the non-European northern Red Sea merchants and captains. Though the reaction of the merchants and the captains cannot be heard, the objections of Jidda rang loud and clear in Istanbul.

If the overall volume of Red Sea trade was not significantly affected by the British-Suez trade, its influence on Indian Ocean trade was by extension insignificant as well. As in the Red Sea, merely extending the reach of English ships from Jidda to Suez had no bearing on Indian Ocean trade whatsoever, and there is no indication that the brief episode increased Egyptian/Mediterranean demand for eastern goods. In the Mediterranean, too, the issue of which ships carried goods to Suez was basically immaterial. Granted, if the Suez trade gave East Indian companies a foothold in Mediterranean trade, the existing companies and merchants were

¹⁵³ Trécourt states that the freight charges between Jidda and Suez were so high that the earnings of one season more than paid for the entire cost of building a boat. See Jean-Baptiste Trécourt, Gaston Wiet, ed, *Memoirs sur l'Egypte*, Le Caire: 1791, p 19.

threatened. But in terms of the English-Suez trade that actually occurred, the threats were not substantial.

In conclusion, one can easily see that the British trade at Suez significantly benefitted the Beys, the Egyptian customs officers, and the British merchants--at the expense of the authorities, the merchants, and the captains at Jidda. In terms of the trade that actually existed, the repercussions of six or seven British ships trading at Suez in any given year were minuscule in comparison to the volume of the regions' overall trade networks, carried out predominantly by non-European merchants. However, the British ships which traded at Suez were a clear example of the potential wealth of the trade, and encouraged various EIC merchants and officials to lobby Company support for it.

With all of this in mind, the extraordinary efforts made by officials in Jidda, the Ottoman Empire, England, the Levant and East India Company, and nearly all of Europe to work against this trade becomes not only intriguing, but remarkable. The evidence indicates that the impetus for these objections, and for the eventual closure of the trade, did not lie solely in economic factors. Rather, to understand the intense concern of Ottoman and European officials over the British-Suez trade and its ultimate demise, one must explore a tangled web of economic, political, and personal intrigue.

Mamluk Duplicity

Up to now, this study has referred to certain Egyptian Mamluks individually and their collective position of power in Egypt very generally. To appreciate the methods and ambitions of the Mamluks who attempted to open Suez to Europeans, however, and to understand the social, economic, and political conditions in Egypt which shaped and limited Mamluk schemes to develop and promote the Suez trade, one must first discuss the transformations within Mamluk society during the Ottoman period and the challenges it faced, and in large part created, unique to eighteenth century Egypt¹⁵⁴.

Where in Syria the Ottomans chose to liquidate the Mamluk system, in Egypt the Mamluks continued to be a military and political force. No conclusive explanation has been given for this Ottoman strategy, though it is clear that certain advantages were to be gained from it. For an expanding empire ever stretching its military and financial resources, coopting the military strength of conquered regions was often preferable to simply obliterating it. Furthermore, a coopted Egyptian Mamluk system offered the Ottomans not only a strong military force but a self-financed and self-trained one--this must have been quite appealing especially given Egypt's rich resources and geographic position. The Mamluks were a potential check to ambitious, independent-minded Ottoman Pashas--a chronic problem for the Sultans throughout their domains, especially in wealthier provinces. Moreover, links with North

¹⁵⁴ One of the authorities on Mamluk Egypt is David Ayalon. See his *The Mamluk Military Society, Collected Studies*, London, 1979.

Africa, the African interior, and Arabia made Egypt a province which, given enough military strength, could enforce and extend Ottoman control--in effect to act as an arm of the Sultan's power in Istanbul. This, in fact, more than once proved to be the case. Mamluk and Ottoman forces in Egypt were several times sent against the Hijaz when the Porte wanted to restore order or prop up pro-Ottoman officials. Similarly, Mamluk and Egyptian Ottoman forces were sent to fight in the Sultan's wars on both the European and Persian fronts.

For the Ottomans, allowing the Mamluk institution to survive was beneficial as long as they remained only a check on the Pasha's power and not an open threat to it¹⁵⁵. For the Mamluk institution itself, however, being coopted into the Ottoman system had grave side effects¹⁵⁶. For one, where Syria previously had been a convenient and non-threatening place to weed out unwanted Mamluk elements, during the Ottoman period Upper Egypt served this function¹⁵⁷. Upper Egypt very quickly began to form its own power structure, often creating quite industrious and ambitious Mamluk/bedouin alliances which could potentially threaten Lower Egypt and the capital of Cairo. Especially in the eighteenth

¹⁵⁵ For Ottoman-Mamluk relations in the sixteenth century see Peter Holt, *Studies in the History of the Near East*, London: 1973, pp 177-219. See also Holt, "Pattern of Egyptian Political History from 1517-1798", in Holt, ed, *Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt*, London: 1968.

¹⁵⁶ The best study of this is David Ayalon, "Studies in al-Jabarti", *JESHO* 3 (1960): 148-174/275-325.

¹⁵⁷ Ayalon, "Discharges from Service," *Collected Studies*, 1979, pp 25-50.

century this proved to be a decisive development.

As former Mamluk structures were strained the formation of the *bayt*, the Mamluk household, became more important¹⁵⁸. The *bayt* embraced a Mamluk and his Mamluks. The female daughters and slaves of the Mamluk were paired with his Mamluks creating a tightly knit family structure. Obviously, intermarriages of this sort were nothing new, yet as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries passed, the formations of these kinship based *bayts* came to solidify the power of a particular Mamluk--who lived in direct competition or alliance with competing *bayts*. During the Mamluk Sultanate hierarchies of Royal Mamluks, Mamluks of the Amirs and the *halqas* had been established in the interest of central authority. In the Ottoman period, the *bayts* became political centers in themselves. Alliances between various *bayts* established Mamluk factions that often were quite powerful, yet these factions were fraught with inner rivalries and jealousies that worked against a central or unified power base.

By the eighteenth century, the factions were increasingly able to contest Ottoman authority, although the continuing in-fighting within and between the factions did not allow them to supplant it¹⁵⁹. The Ottomans developed various means, some of them quite

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, pp 288-290.

¹⁵⁹ The best primary source on Mamluk power and in-fighting in the eighteenth century are the Damurdashi chronicles. See Abd al-Wahhab Bakr and Daniel Crecelius, eds, *Al-Damurdashi's Chronicle of Egypt, 1688-1755*, Leiden: 1991. Bakr and Crecelius provide not only an English translation, but exhaustive explanations and definitions of background and related events, people, regions, and Arabic and Turkish terms. See also al-Jabarti, French translation

ingenious, by which to manipulate new Mamluk strength, but they were never able to re-establish clear Ottoman authority, and the Mamluks themselves remained their own worst enemies. And despite the relative power of the Mamluk *bayts*, they were no match individually or collectively to the imperial strength of the Sultan's forces¹⁶⁰. The Mamluks may have increasingly contested the Pasha's authority, and were well aware of the Porte's military commitments to various fronts, however the Beys at no time wished to prompt an Ottoman expedition against them.

Within Egypt, the Pasha maintained control over Mamluk inheritance by legitimating succession, a formality the Mamluks accepted until the closing decades of the eighteenth century, when nearly all the *bayts* were headed by "renegade" Mamluks competing outside the Ottoman system. In doing so, the Pasha was not only able to impose heavy inheritance taxes (the *hulvan*), but was able to choose which Mamluk would receive his master's wealth and power. This added significant resources to the Ottoman treasury and allowed the Pasha to play competing Mamluks off one another¹⁶¹. The Mamluks were also well aware that the Ottomans controlled the

Mansour Bey, et al eds, *Merveilles et histoires*, Caire: 1948.

¹⁶⁰ William Browne, an English traveller, claimed the *bayt* of Murad Bey, with 1,700 Mamluks, was the largest and strongest in 1796. This is nothing compared to the size of the Empire's forces. See his *Travels in Africa, Egypt, and Syria, 1792-1798*, London, 1799: p 91.

¹⁶¹ See Crecelius, *The Roots of Modern Egypt*, Minneapolis: 1981, p 28. Crecelius states that by manipulating the *hulvan* the Pasha was able to more than compensate for losses in direct payments to the Porte.

slave trade between central Asia and Egypt, which made them vulnerable to Ottoman authority in Istanbul, though this was not necessarily reflected in Mamluk behavior towards the Pasha in Cairo¹⁶². The Ottomans also charged the Mamluks with overseeing the Cairo pilgrimage to Mecca. This not only freed a portion, but not all, of the Ottoman forces usually bound to protect the caravans, but considering the monumental task and expense of provisioning and protecting the caravans, this duty--a distinction of honor difficult to refuse--diverted and undoubtedly exhausted at least a share of Mamluk energies and resources. Even when the Mamluks had assumed nearly all of the administrative functions of Egypt, the Ottomans, by protecting their right to ratify the appointment of the chief Mamluk, known in the eighteenth century as the *Sheikh al-Balad*, were able win additional deference to the Sultan.

These Ottoman maneuvers partially compensated for revenues and authority lost to the Mamluks but did not redefine the power structure of Egypt, which was basically left to the increasingly weakened authority of the Pasha and the increasingly internecine competition between Mamluk factions. The Ottomans did make various attempts to restore central control in the second half of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth. However,

¹⁶² Ibid, p 29. Intriguingly, there seems to be no indication that the Porte ever seriously considered blocking off the slave traffic to Egypt, even when the Mamluks were at their most rebellious. This may or may not have to do with Ottoman respect for the traditional "right" to purchase of slaves or the profits reaped from the slave trade in Istanbul.

they were successful only in the presence of sizable Ottoman military force, much needed by the Porte in regions elsewhere¹⁶³. When Ottoman forces withdrew, the Mamluk factions simply reappeared. Part of the problem lay in the quasi-independent regions of Upper Egypt, a place of refuge for rebel Mamluks. Ottoman forces could chase rebel Mamluks from the Delta and the capital, yet they were not willing to undertake the major expeditions necessary to flush them out of Upper Egypt--and even if they had, it would have been impossible, as Napoleon was to learn, to get at those Mamluks who sought refuge among the bedouin tribes. Another problem was that the Mamluks had penetrated into the Egyptian janissary corps, leaving the Ottomans without a military establishment in Egypt singularly loyal to the Sultan. Maintaining Ottoman authority, therefore, required a permanent show of military force that the Porte was not willing to commit.

As a result, as the eighteenth century unfolded Ottoman central control became diffused while Mamluk infighting not only failed to replace Ottoman central authority but added to the breakdown of the functions of government. Mamluk demands for taxes and resources became ever more rapacious and exacted with increasing brutality. If traditional Mamluk society can be described as a one-generational aristocracy supporting a Sultanate, eighteenth century Mamluk society can be regarded as a one-generational parasitic oligarchy intent on strengthening a given

¹⁶³ Stanford S Shaw, *Ottoman Egypt in the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge, Ma: 1962, p 5.

bayt without regard for short or long term conditions in Egypt. During the last decades of the century, the increasingly violent breakdown of political control was exacerbated by economic decline, periodic outbreaks of plague which cruelly ravaged the province and Cairo in particular, and several seasons of low Nile flooding which brought about subsequent crop failures and horrific periods of famine¹⁶⁴.

Against this gruesome backdrop two features of the second half of the eighteenth century are apparent: 1) successful, however brief, centralized power under Ali Bey al-Kabir (1769-1773) followed by Muhammad Bey Abu Dhahab (1773-1775); and 2) Mamluk collusion with European merchants¹⁶⁵. Despite their short lived bids for power, Ali Bey and Muhammad Bey established the *Sheikh al-Balad* as a legitimate political office, as opposed to an Ottoman honorific, which wielded a degree of central control that had not been felt for many decades. The ability, and most often the inability, of their successors, Murad, Ibrahim, and Ismail Beys, to

¹⁶⁴ The best study of Egypt's economic position in the eighteenth century is Raymond, *Artisans*. Also valuable are several of his related articles, eg "L'impact de la pénétration Européenne sur l'économie de l'Egypte au XVIIIe siècle", *AI* 18 (1982): 217-235; and especially "The Economic Crisis of Egypt in the Eighteenth Century", in Udovitch, *The Pre-Modern Middle East. The classic overall history of this period is the first hand account of al-Jabarti. See Merveilles, Caire: 1888. See also Bakr and Crecelius, Damurdashi Chronicles, 1991; Raymond, Artisans; Crecelius, Roots; and Peter Gran, The Islamic Roots of Capitalism, Austin: 1979.*

¹⁶⁵ Of the many histories of Ali Bey the best is Dan Crecelius, *The Roots of Modern Egypt*, Minneapolis and Chicago: 1981. This contains also the only thorough history of Muhammad Bey. See also John Livingston, "Ali Bey al-Kabir", PhD dissertation, Princeton University: 1968.

function as *Sheikh al-Balad* in large part undermined the extent of centralized control present in Egypt during the final decades of the century.

Although a small European merchant community had existed in Cairo since the sixteenth century (and long before the Ottoman period as well), Ali Bey appears to have been the first Mamluk to have entered a serious, extended dialogue with them. Although various secondary sources point to these dialogues, the extent to which the Mamluks and the European merchants interacted throughout the second half of the eighteenth century is often down played. To better understand the nature of Mamluk-European dialogues it is perhaps beneficial to illustrate some characteristics of these contacts.

The following scene between James Bruce and Muhammad Bey Abu Dhahab vividly illustrates that the typical notions of the Mamluks existing in ignorance of the outside world are unfounded:

"... 'I have, Sir' said I [Bruce], 'a number of countrymen, brave, rich, and honest, that trade in India, where my King has great domains.' He [Muhammad Bey] said, as half to himself, 'True, we know that....'." ¹⁶⁶

Another exchange between the two is often cited in secondary sources. When Bruce was about to depart for London, Muhammad Bey asked him to join his ranks and campaign in Syria against Ali Bey. When Bruce refused, Muhammad Bey assumed business obligations prohibited Bruce from extending his stay in Egypt. When he learned that the only "occupation" Bruce could admit to was travelling,

¹⁶⁶ Bruce, *Travels*, Vol IV p 630.

Muhammad Bey mused:

"Ali Bey, my father in law...often observed there was never such a people as the English....I never understood this til now, that I see it must be so, when your King cannot find other employment for such a man as you, but sending him to perish by hunger and thirst in the sands or to have his throat cut by the lawless barbarians of the desert...."¹⁶⁷

Furthermore, there is plentiful evidence that the contacts between the Europeans and the Mamluks were frequent and at times intimate. Lusignan, claiming to have been a friend of Ali Bey's since boyhood, published a history of the Bey popular throughout Europe¹⁶⁸. Nearly all the sources cite Carlo Rosetti, the Venetian merchant and long time resident of Cairo, as a close confidant of the leading Beys, Ali Bey in particular.

Madame Magallon, along with her husband, M Magallon, was another long time European merchant/resident of Egypt. Mme Magallon was previously married to a Venetian merchant who owned a large counting house in Upper Egypt¹⁶⁹. Over the years this merchant developed close contacts with various Beys and offered to them his counting house as a place of protection and refuge during the frequent outbursts of infighting between the

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, Vol IV p 649.

¹⁶⁸ According to Lusignan, at the age of ten he and his brother fled religious persecution in Europe and sought refuge with relations in Damiette. His uncle was in the service of Rahib Pasha, in whose entourage he befriended the young Ali Bey. In 1769 Ali Bey contacted Lusignan in Europe asking him to return to Egypt and enter his service. Lusignan arrived in 1771 and stayed with Ali Bey for the few remaining years of the Bey's life. Lusignan, *The Revolt of Ali Bey*, 1784.

¹⁶⁹ Probably in Qus. For a full account of Madame Magallon see Charles-Roux, *Autour*, p 179. She is also mentioned in Hoskins, *British Routes*, p 51.

Beys. Mme Magallon maintained contacts with these Beys after her husband died and even after she remarried. Moreover, she continued to shelter these Beys in her counting house whenever they asked for protection. Keeping in mind the violence of Upper Egypt throughout much of the eighteenth century, a situation which encouraged Europeans to avoid the area, Mme Magallon's contacts with the Upper Egyptian Beys becomes all the more significant.

In Cairo, Mme Magallon was a frequent visitor to the harems of several of the leading Beys. She reportedly was a close friend of the favorite wife of Murad Bey, and regularly was invited to afternoon teas, and probably baths, and various evening soirees. Mme Magallon passed along presents of European toiletries in order to ingratiate herself with the women of the harems and to help secure her and her husband's standing in Egypt¹⁷⁰. According to Charles-Roux, she was not above flirting with the Beys themselves¹⁷¹. In these ways Mme Magallon developed a far more intimate relationship with the women of power in Egypt than her husband did among the Beys¹⁷². In fact, the French government

¹⁷⁰ One should not assume that Mme Magallon's relationship with the women of the harems was strictly self-serving. Although we do not know the exact number of years she resided in Egypt, her tenure was apparently quite long, close to three decades. After so many years, and with very few European women to socialize with, it seems very likely that Mme Magallon developed sincere friendships within the harems.

¹⁷¹ Charles-Roux, *Autour*, p 179.

¹⁷² During M. Magallon's twenty-eight years in Egypt, he no doubt came to know various Beys and merchants quite well. However, there is no evidence that he fraternized with them on the social level enjoyed by Mme Magallon within the harems.

asked Magallon to postpone his retirement in order to capitalize on his and Mme Magallon's close friendships with the Beys to help Truguet win the French commercial treaties with Egypt¹⁷³.

From Baldwin's correspondences it is obvious that all of the European merchants were in frequent contact with the Beys, and indeed heatedly competed to get their attention and win their confidence. He also was extremely wary of the emerging contacts between the Beys and various Russian merchants and adventurers, further complicated by claims that some of the Russians and Mamluks were related¹⁷⁴. John O'Donnell, one of the survivors of the caravan pillaged in 1779, personally petitioned Ibrahim Bey by letter from Europe in an effort to win compensation for his losses and maltreatment--he was not successful¹⁷⁵. And in the marked increase of European travellers to Egypt, Africa, and Arabia, the Mamluks willingly supplied invaluable letters of introduction and safe conduct to these adventurers--Bruce and Niebuhr, in particular, were well served by these letters which more than once not only afforded them protection but saved their lives.

If not close to the Beys, the travellers all shared gossip about them and were well familiar with the conflicts between the leading Beys, the tense relations between the Beys and the Porte,

¹⁷³ Hoskins, *British Routes*, p 51.

¹⁷⁴ For example see IOR G/17/5A, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 47-53. Ibrahim Bey and Maximo Kaskaciou, a Georgian officer sent to Egypt, claimed they were related. See also, Gran, *Islamic Roots*, 1979, p 16.

¹⁷⁵ IOR, G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 260-267.

and the Beys' power over the Ottoman Pasha. The bulk of their information undoubtedly came from their merchants hosts. However, the overall picture of the European travellers is one of easy familiarity, or at least pretended insights, into Mamluk affairs. For example, Volney, the well known French adventurer, assumed the insight to comment:

"...In such a society [Mamluk Cairo], a fixed and regular state of affairs is impossible; and the incessant jarring of the incoherent parts must give a perpetual vibration to the whole machine: this is what continually happens among the body of the Mamlouks at Cairo....¹⁷⁶"

Many other examples exist.

As has been seen, it is from these dialogues that the British trade at Suez was established. The effects of these exchanges on the relationship between the Mamluks and the indigenous merchants is not clear. This point, however, is noteworthy considering that the Beys, and the Janissary corps as well, were often directly active in trade and the merchant community.¹⁷⁷ Evidence confirms

¹⁷⁶ C F Volney, *Travels through Syria and Egypt in the Years 1783, 1784, and 1785*, Westmend, England: 1972, Vol I, p 157.

¹⁷⁷ Raymond and Tuchscherer have clearly shown this in their researches on inheritance. The travellers reported this as well. Bruce stated, "These Janissaries [active between Jidda and Egypt] lived upon the very bowels of commerce." See Bruce, *Travels*, Vol II p 128.

Niebuhr insightfully perceived a separate body of "trading janissaries". "I have had occasion to speak of the trading janissaries. Those are properly merchants, who have enrolled themselves among the janissaries that they might be protected by the privileges of that body..., but they perform no military duty and receive no pay. Such a janissary is independent of the civil magistrate and amenable to no judges but the officers of the military body to which he belongs. He also enjoys an exemption from the payment of custom-house dues....I have seen likewise some ship captains and pilots who had enrolled themselves among the janissaries solely to acquire importance, and to secure the

that the Mamluks and the Cairene merchant community had strong and long established links. However, the attempt to deal directly with the Europeans does not seem to have been a Mamluk effort to switch alliances, but merely to supplement, to expand, their sources of trade revenues.

While Mamluk-European relations during the second half of the eighteenth century were notably active, and at times intimate, it must be said that they saw conflicting and contrary patterns of behavior. Ali Bey and Muhammad Bey proved that European ties could be advantageous. Their brief years of power allowed the Suez trade to be established and briefly flourish, to the benefit of the Beys' coffers. However, given the overall instability of the time period, and despite whatever friendships and agreements existed between the Beys and the merchants, the Beys were operating completely in self-interest. The most accurate description of Mamluk behavior towards the Europeans (and towards the Porte and towards one another as well) undoubtedly would be: "pragmatic duplicity"¹⁷⁸. Loyalties, treaties, and agreements were encouraged when expedient and were then disregarded the instant a Bey felt it was in his interest to do so. The tantamount interest of the Beys

protection of this powerful body, who are always ready to support and defend a brother janissary; for such janissaries did not share the privileges of their Turkish brethren." Niebuhr, *Travels*, p 237.

¹⁷⁸ Credit here is due to Dr. Nelly, who suggested the "pragmatic" part of the description.

in the European merchants was obvious: money and gifts¹⁷⁹--and in the case of the Russian consul during the Ottoman expedition of 1786, diplomatic cover¹⁸⁰.

If the Beys must be given the credit for encouraging and establishing the British trade at Suez, they must also shoulder the brunt of blame for its demise--and indeed for much of Egypt's social and economic hardships of the eighteenth century. The absence of central authority, which the Beys and Ottomans created together, seriously handicapped Egypt's ability to trade effectively--the essential protection of caravan routes, the respect for life and property, and the maintenance of fair customs and tax rates could not be counted on in this time period.

Enthusiastic EIC merchants had attempted to win support of the Suez trade in part by assuring the Bombay and London Directors that the Beys were "reasonable", as opposed to the rapacious officials at Jidda. The reality, however, was that the Beys, facing economic conditions in Egypt which increasingly relied on trade to offset declines in native crafts and industries, were willing to lure trade to Suez, and to accept generous gifts in exchange for allowing European merchants to establish themselves in Cairo, and

¹⁷⁹ According to Capper, who had first hand experience, the presents most valued by the Beys were short, double barrelled, silver mounted pistols. Also popular were porcelain Chinese bowls, small French gold repeating watches, lace shawls and pieces of muslin. "These gifts will ensure great respect and keep your baggage intact unsearched." Capper, *Observations*, p 10.

¹⁸⁰ IOR, G/17/5A, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 47-53. Baldwin claimed that during the expedition the Russian consul declared the Mamluks were under the protection of the Empress Catherine--Hasan Pasha was not impressed.

then extracted all possible profits from the trade irregardless of treaties, agreements, or legalities¹⁸¹. This is not to suggest that the Mamluks were blind to the self-defeating side effects of their actions or were oblivious of long term goals. The very attempt to develop European trade at Suez was aimed at long term activity. Nevertheless, the intense rivalries between the Mamluks and their *bayts* forced short term gains to surmount any and all long term objectives--one can argue that in the all-or-nothing competition between the individual Mamluks there could be no long term objectives. Survival was everything and depended upon the utmost monopolization of resources. The above helps to explain the fateful decision of the Beys in 1779 to plunder the European cargoes bound from Suez to Cairo rather than peacefully interrupt the European-Suez trade until Ottoman attention was diverted elsewhere. It also explains the wariness of the British and European merchants to return to Suez in the 1780s and '90s--and makes one pause that they actually considered returning. As Prof. Crecelius summarizes:

"That the plans Ali Bey and Muhammad Bey had for increasing the level of European trade through Suez did not succeed can be laid to their own shortsightedness, to the instability of the mamluke reigns in general and despotism and tyranny of the immediate successors...."¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ For the economic conditions of eighteenth century Egypt, see Raymond, *Artisans*; "L'impact de la pénétration Européenne sur l'économie de l'Egypte", *AI*, (1982): pp 217-235.

¹⁸² Crecelius, *Roots*, p 176.

Ottoman Objections

Although the above suggests that the European trade at Suez was destined to self-destruct regardless of outside actions or concerns, this can only be appreciated with the benefit of hindsight. Ottoman officials who opposed the trade had no guarantee about its ultimate fate, and were intent on using diplomacy and force, if necessary, to stop it.

This section explores the various Ottoman objections to the trade. Contrary to most sources, it does not minimize the significance of these objections by assuming they carried no weight in Egypt or Europe. Instead, a reappraisal of Ottoman-Egyptian relations is explored in an attempt to better understand the Ottoman role in the demise of the European trade at Suez. Furthermore, this section investigates why, considering the daunting and diverse challenges facing the Empire at the time, the issue of European trade at Suez received so much Ottoman attention.

There are two areas to explore. First, the official Ottoman objections which pointed to the religious importance of the region, the loss of revenues suffered at Jidda, and the long respected ban on European shipping north of Jidda. These were directly outlined in a document presented in 1777 to the British ambassador at Istanbul. The document stated that the coasts extending from Mecca and Medina were "sacred"; that it was "unfair" to deny Jidda and the Holy Cities the customs revenues now paid at Suez; and that European navigation in the northern Red Sea compromised the

authority of the Ottoman Empire over its subjects.¹⁸³ Concurrently a *Hatti Sherif* against the trade was sent to the government in Egypt. It stated,

"The Sea of Suez is destined for the noble Pilgrimage to Mecca. To suffer Frankish ships to navigate therein or to neglect opposing it, is betraying your Sovereign, your Religion, and every Mohammeden; and all those who dare to transgress, will infallibly finds [sic] their punishment in this world and the World to come..."¹⁸⁴

Second, the underlying concerns, less directly stated but which clearly illustrate that the Ottomans were well aware of various Ottoman political and economic interests threatened by European activity at Suez.

While most secondary sources dismiss the official Ottoman position as spurious (or undermine its significance by assuming the Ottomans were powerless to defend their stand), it is argued here that a closer look proves the contrary.

The religious objections, rather than the issues of Ottoman self-interest, will be discussed first because they are the objections the Ottomans first raised and publicly rallied behind. These religious concerns about European activity in the north Red Sea are the most frequently disregarded in both primary and secondary sources. However, in doing so the sources are guilty not only of short sightedness but of encouraging to a degree double standards. One must remember that religious issues were an

¹⁸³ The English translation of the document can be found in IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 141-143.

¹⁸⁴ See IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 292-297.

integral and perpetual part of Ottoman-European relations, capitulations, and treaties and were instigated from both sides. In the same way European powers lobbied in Istanbul for access to and authority over particular Christian holy places in Palestine, and sought tutelage over particular Ottoman Christian groups, the Ottomans sought to preserve their religious prestige as the world's predominant Muslim power and protector of the Muslim Holy Cities¹⁸⁵.

That the Ottomans took seriously their role as protector of the Holy Cities and overseer of the Hajj is hardly refutable¹⁸⁶:

"The pilgrimage provided the Ottoman state with the annual opportunity to demonstrate its temporal authority, to show its colors, to assert its identity as the paramount Islamic state."¹⁸⁷

However, by pointing out that European ships had for centuries called on Jidda, the closest port to Mecca, it has been assumed that the Ottomans did not really have religious objections to European maritime activity in the north Red Sea--and if they did

¹⁸⁵ For first hand documentation see J C Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East Vol 1: A Documentary Record, 1535-1914*, Princeton: 1956.

¹⁸⁶ Abdul-Karim Rafeq and Karl Barbir clearly show the Porte's concern over the Hajj in their research on the Damascene pilgrimage caravan. Indeed, they suggest the maintenance of the caravan was one of the primary concerns of Ottoman administration of Syria. See Rafeq, *The Ottoman Province of Damascus, 1723-1783*, Beirut: 1966; and Barbir, *Ottoman Rule in Damascus, 1708-1758*, Princeton: 1980.

¹⁸⁷ Barbir, *Ottoman Rule*, 1980, p 108.

the objections were not legitimate¹⁸⁸. While it is impossible to gauge exactly how strong religious objections played into the Ottoman stance against European navigation north of Jidda and the British trade at Suez, a closer look does suggest that the objections should not be disregarded.

It was, however paradoxically, advantageous to draw European trade to the port because customs duties paid at Jidda in part served to help maintain the Holy Cities and the Hajj. Furthermore, since Jidda and the southern Red Sea, as Ibn Majid clearly showed, was historically more open to ships and fleets from far away regions, receiving European vessels at Jidda did not go against any established precedents or traditions--in fact, Baldwin hinted that pilgrims took delight in tormenting European merchants at Jidda. From the Ottoman perspective, pilgrims headed north to Jidda generally were Asian Muslims who were not subjects of the Empire. Therefore European activity in the southern Red Sea was witnessed predominately by non-Ottoman subjects who had little influence on the Sultan's religious prestige within the Empire.

European ships sailing north of Jidda, however, even if it technically meant sailing away from Mecca and Medina, carried

¹⁸⁸ This was George Baldwin's constant rebuttal to the issue of Ottoman religious sensitivity towards the English-Suez trade. Hoskins argues that the Ottoman Empire was against the British trade at Suez not for religious reasons but because it might upset the Persian Gulf route. Why the Ottomans would prefer one to the other, especially given that the Red Sea was decidedly active in the India-Ottoman trade and that the British-Suez trade flourished during the Persian occupation of Basra, which all but closed the Ottoman-India trade via the Persian Gulf, is not explained. See Hoskins, *Routes*, p 16.

immediate ramifications. It *did* disturb long standing precedents and established tradition--and did so in a region clearly attached to the Empire. Allowing European ships free rein along all of the Red Sea very definitely, and blatantly, infringed on the Sultan's religious prestige. As an isolated incident in a fairly remote area of the Empire this would, perhaps, lessen its significance. Many thousands of Ottoman subjects, however, travelled to the Hijaz to perform the Hajj each year, and the attention of all Ottoman Muslims turned towards Mecca and the Red Sea on a daily basis. The issue, therefore, of European shipping north of Jidda was no small, or isolated, matter. Furthermore, one must acknowledge that religious issues were increasingly at the heart of the great debates over eighteenth century Ottoman reforms. The issue of European trade at Suez came during a time period when religious issues in Istanbul were particularly sensitive on both the political and popular level, all of which adds credence to the Porte's religious objections to European maritime activity in the northern Red Sea¹⁸⁹.

The subsequent official Ottoman objections to the trade are tied to religious issues as well. It is obvious why officials in Jidda would cry foul when European ships bypassed the port and paid

¹⁸⁹ For example see Madeline Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety*, Minneapolis: 1988; Robert W Olson, "Jews, Janissaries, Esnaf and the Revolt of 1740 in Istanbul: Social Upheaval and Political Realignment in the Ottoman Empire", *JESHO* 20 (1977): 185-207; Norman Itzkowitz, "Men and Ideas in the Eighteenth Century Ottoman Empire" and R C Repp, "The Altered Nature and Role of the Ulama" both in Thomas Naff and Roger Owen, eds, *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History*, London and Amsterdam, 1977: pp 15-26/277-287.

customs dues and gifts at Suez. This alone, however, does not explain why Ottoman officials in Istanbul would rally behind Jidda's cause. The Ottomans, for example, made no efforts to interfere with the rerouting or fluctuations of European trade from, say, Aleppo to Izmir or from Tripoli and Alexandretta to Beirut. However, in 1774, when the Pasha at Jidda and the Sherif of Mecca complained to the Porte that European ships were sailing to Suez, a firman was immediately issued forbidding it. That the firman was ignored is most probably due to the insignificant numbers of English and European ships calling at Suez. When the numbers increased, however, and the Jidda officials complained once again in 1777, a second firman was promptly and more forcefully issued--and Ottoman pressure against the Suez trade continued until it stopped. Ottoman concerns that Jidda was losing revenues can only be explained by its position as the port of Mecca. Jidda, the Ottomans were adamant in defending, needed and deserved the customs duties of Red Sea trade because of the port's importance to the Hajj. Furthermore, the Ottoman refusal to allow any European ships to sail north of Jidda, even those carrying only passengers and packets, suggests the Sultan was legitimately concerned with his religious standing and that allowing European access to the northern Red Sea was potentially damaging.

While the official objections to the British trade at Suez centered on the issue of European navigation north of Jidda,

underlying objections based on self-interests were at work as well¹⁹⁰. To fully explore them, one must look beyond the standard argument that the Ottomans were too weak to assert central authority over Egypt. Instead, it is useful to reappraise Egypt's role as an Ottoman province and to reflect upon Ottoman policy towards Egypt as exactly that--a policy, a strategy, and not merely knee jerk reactions to Mamluk ambitions or impotent futility towards a powerful province.

Despite the acknowledged richness of Egypt, the "heart" of the Ottoman Empire, without question, was Istanbul and the surrounding regions of Anatolia and Ottoman Europe¹⁹¹. The political aspirations of Ottoman officials were closely tied to the Imperial

¹⁹⁰ One possible repercussion of the British trade at Suez was the British control of Red Sea shipping at the expense of local fleets--the fate of the Persian Gulf. The Ottomans did not voice this concern in its dialogue with the British ambassador, yet it would be interesting to see if it played in their decision. Among other things, it would help determine the points of contention between those Ottomanists who are convinced that the Empire had a strictly hands off policy towards trade, for example see Mantran, "L'Empire Ottoman", in Richards, *Trade of Asia*, pp 172-174; and those, championed by Suraiya Faroghi, who suggest the Ottomans had a much more active economic policy--see her "Merchant Networks and Ottoman Craft Production", in *Urbanism in Islam Vol I*, Tokyo, 1989: pp 85-133. Also important is Inalcik, "The Ottoman Economic Mind and Aspects of the Ottoman Economy", in Cook, *The Economic History*, pp 207-218.

¹⁹¹ See Inalcik, *The Classical Age*; also relevant is Claude Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, London: 1968, p 85: "It was almost outside the Arab world that the Islamo-Turkish society of Asia Minor was to take shape...", and pp 256-257: "...history bears witness to some sort of Turco-Persian symbiosis, whereas it never achieved a Turco-Arab one." See also Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, London: 1991, p 225; "The place of the Arab provinces in the empire must be seen in the context of this preoccupation with the Balkans and Anatolia."

capital and the neighboring provinces¹⁹². Even the venerated position of al-Azhar existed outside the Ottoman *ilmeye* religious-educational system¹⁹³. All of this suggests that Egypt, however rich in resources, was far removed from, although certainly aware of, the fray of Ottoman culture and power politics centered in Istanbul.

With this in mind, as viewed from Istanbul the issue of whether the Pasha or the *Sheikh al-Balad* wielded more power was a moot point as long as Egypt's role as a province functioned as intended¹⁹⁴. Egypt was expected to contribute to the Imperial

¹⁹² See Evliya Celebi, Robert Dankoff translator, *The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman*, Albany: 1991; Cornell Fleisher, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire*, Princeton: 1986; and Andre Tzieze, "Mustafa 'Ali's Description of Cairo", Wien: 1975.

¹⁹³ See Madeline C Zilfi, "Elite Circulation in the Ottoman Empire: Great Mollas of the Eighteenth Century", *JESHO* 26 (1983): 318-364; Norman Itzkowitz, "Men and Ideas in the Eighteenth Century Ottoman Empire", in Thomas Naff and Roger Owen, eds, *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History*, London and Amsterdam, pp 15-26; Richard Repp, "Some Observations on the Development of the Ottoman Learned Hierarchy", in Nikki R Keddie, ed, *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis*, Los Angeles, 1972: 17-32; also interesting is Jon E Mandaville, "Usurious Piety: The Cash Waqf Controversy in the Ottoman Empire", *IJMES* 10 (1979): 289-308.

¹⁹⁴ It should be noted that Egypt did not necessarily define itself in Ottoman terms either. For more on the religious, social, and economic climate of late eighteenth century Egypt, see Nelly Hanna's excellent study of Cairo, *Habiter au Caire, la maison moyenne et ses habitants aux XVII et XVIII siècle*, Caire: 1990; Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, "The Wealth of the Ulama in Late Eighteenth Century Cairo", and Raymond "Les Sources de la Richesse Urbaine au Caire au Dix-Huitieme Siècle", both in Naff and Owen, *Renewal and Reform*, 1977: pp 205-216; 184-204. Several other related articles exist, for example, Marsot, "The Political and Economic Functions of the Ulama in the Eighteenth Century", *JESHO* 16 (1973): 130-154; Raymond, "The Economic Crisis of Egypt in the Eighteenth Century", in Udovitch, *Society*.

treasury, and during the second half of the eighteenth century these contributions were noticeably neglected¹⁹⁵. However, its other contributions continued unabated, which mitigated, or at least postponed, direct action from the Porte.

These other contributions were considerable. Foremost, Egypt contributed extensively to the provisioning the Hajj and supervised the great Cairo pilgrimage caravan to Mecca--one should remember that the maintenance of the Hajj was not a one-month-a-year concern but instead demanded round the clock attention. In addition, Egypt consistently supplied grains and other food stuffs to Istanbul, as well as native crafts, industries, and resources¹⁹⁶. Furthermore,

¹⁹⁵ See Shaw, *Administrative Organization*. Not only did the amounts of the annual tributes decline, and often were not sent at all, other expenditures to the Porte decreased as well. For example, the value of Egypt's various gifts to Istanbul (sugar, falcons, cloth/carpets, leather, etc) fell from roughly seven million paras in 1595 to roughly 1.8 million in 1765, to a little over 800,000 paras in 1797. See *ibid*, Table LIX, p 271. Interestingly, Egyptian expenditures to the Holy Cities skyrocketed over the Ottoman period, from 4.3 million paras in 1595 to nearly twenty-seven million in 1765 to over twenty-nine million in 1797. This, of course, does not suggest the money actually went to provisioning the Hijaz, but instead was an easy area to embezzle funds. See *ibid*, Table LVIII, p 268.

¹⁹⁶ Even this function should not be overstated. Istanbul had significant other sources from which to provision the capital and the surrounding Anatolian provinces. The extraordinary traveller Evliya Celibi related an insightful and amusing anecdote about Egypt's role in provisioning the Empire. A conflict rose between the Istanbul butchers and the Egyptian merchants as their vessels formed lines to follow the White Sea fleets. The butchers were allowed to sail ahead of the Egyptians--who complained bitterly. Because the Egyptians dealt in grains and not in "blood", and since they annually paid 11,000 "purses" customs duties, they expected a more prominent position. The butchers, however, retorted that the Egyptians hoarded grain to inflate prices, were "usurers", and then proceeded to list all the foodstuffs easily available to the Empire from its Anatolian and European provinces. The butchers were allowed to sail ahead of the Egyptians. See Evliya Efendi, *Travels*

Cairo channelled the trade of the east, Arabia (including the massive Yemeni coffee trade), and Africa to Istanbul¹⁹⁷. The province itself was self-sufficient and was removed from hostile borders.

In short, Egypt was one of the most maintenance-free, resource-loaded provinces of the entire Empire. The key to capitalizing on Egypt's wealth with the least direct investment, however, lay in the *absence* of strong central control. The Ottomans were acutely aware that strong centralized control over Egypt could, and historically did, jeopardize or redirect Egypt's contributions away from Istanbul by allowing provincial leaders the wealth and strength to contest Ottoman sovereignty. Here the decision to allow, and actually foment, competition for power between the Beys and the Pashas not only makes sense but becomes ingenious.

Without question, during the closing decades of the eighteenth century Mamluk-Pasha rule was not working in the favor of the Porte¹⁹⁸. However, its reaction was far from passive or weak. As

in *Europe, Asia, and Africa*, trans by the Ritter Joseph von Hammer, New York, 1974, pp 136-137.

¹⁹⁷ An excellent source on Egypt's trade with Africa during this time period is Terence Waltz, *Trade between Egypt and Bilad As-Sudan, 1700-1820*, Caire: 1978.

¹⁹⁸ The IOR documents, the traveler accounts, and all the secondary sources typically depict the Pasha during this time period as a hapless prisoner in the citadel. See Bakr and Crecelius, *Damurdashi's Chronicle*; Crecelius, *Modern Roots*, which states the Pashas were "mere spectators" in the affairs of Egypt (p 5); De Tott praised, though with typical sarcasm, Racub Pasha, the Vizir to the Sultan, but admits that as Pasha of Egypt, he had been no match for the Beys, see Baron de Tott, *Memoirs of Baron de Tott*

expected by European and Mamluk observers alike, once the Egyptian expenditures to the Porte were consistently interrupted, the Cairene pilgrimage became no longer safe, and the balance of power between the Pashas and the Mamluks deteriorated completely, the Ottomans responded with a show of force. Furthermore, in planning the invasion, the Porte sought the advice of Jazzar Ahmad Pasha, an old cohort of Ali Bey al-Kabir¹⁹⁹. This suggests that the Ottomans knew well that current realities in Egypt required new strategies of rule²⁰⁰. One of the new realities was Mamluk collusion with the

2 Vols, New York: 1973, Vol I pp 28-29.

¹⁹⁹ Al-Jazzar (the Butcher) led a remarkable and notorious career in Egypt and Syria. Mikhayl Mishqa in his provocative memoirs says, "Yet even in the worst of his [al-Jazzir's] infamy he maintained equal treatment of his subjects of different religions, for he would imprison Muslim ulama, Christian priests, Jewish rabbis, and Druze elders alike. Similarly, in applying different types of excruciating torture to them, he made no distinction among them...." See Wheeler Thackston, *Murder, Mayhem, Pillage, and Plunder*, Albany: 1988, p 26.

²⁰⁰ Al-Jazzar's recommendations to the Porte are interesting. As for the expedition, he strongly advised it be carried out in complete secrecy--so that the Beys would not merely retreat to their strongholds in Upper Egypt, and also so the Beys would not use their contacts with the merchants and nobles in Istanbul, and even within the Porte, to create popular sentiment and foment unrest against the expedition in "the streets and barbershops" of the Imperial capital.

In regards to the restructuring of Ottoman rule over Egypt, he stated from the outset that the Ottomans should not bother unless they were serious about it, and were willing to commit to a long term restructuring. Specifically, he recommended the Beys be either arrested or permanently banished and all wealth and properties confiscated; the tax farms be reassessed (though not village organization); the Janisarry corps be regrouped and stationed in every important town and village; and to win the support of the Sheikhs at Al-Azhar and especially the Sheikh al-Bakri. See Stanford S Shaw, *Ottoman Egypt in the Eighteenth Century; The Nizamname-i Misir of Cessar Ahmad Pasha*, Cambridge, Ma: 1962.

European merchants directed at the trade with Suez. The expedition was a clear signal that if the Mamluks refused to suspend the trade, and the European governments couldn't control their merchants, that the Ottomans were prepared to act directly.

While the Ottomans never officially pointed to Mamluk-European ties in their objections to the Suez trade, given the increasingly recalcitrant behavior of the Beys it surely must have been in play. Robert Ainslee, for one, was convinced concern over the Beys was at the heart of Ottoman objections to the Suez trade. In a letter dated June 17, 1770, Ainslee stated this outright to Peter Mitchell, secretary to the EIC London Board of Directors²⁰¹. Baldwin, and other European merchants in Egypt, freely admitted that the Porte was concerned about their collusion with the Beys but chose to regard the Beys, not the Sultan, as the *de facto* sovereigns of Egypt. Given the turbulent political situation in Egypt at the time, the Porte had good cause to subvert Mamluk-European cooperation. However, if the Porte was worried about the ambitions of the Beys, it had equal suspicions about the intentions of the European powers and said so to the Ottoman officials in Cairo:

"Historians inform us that the Christians, an enterprising and artful race, have from the earliest times constantly

²⁰¹ IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 203-205/228-232. Ainslee also stated he had proposed to the Reis Effendi that armed British packet boats be stationed at Suez which could keep the Beys in check and monitor foreign intrigues in Egypt. This proposal was similar to the British naval patrols of the Persian Gulf already in existence (See Thabit Abdullah, "Political Economy"). Although Ainslee suggested the Reis Effendi was interested in the scheme, this seems doubtful.

made use of deceit and violence to effect their ambitious purposes. Under the guise of merchants they formerly introduced themselves into Damascus and Jerusalem; in the same manner they have since obtained a footing in Hindustan, where the English have reduced the inhabitants to slavery; so now likewise encouraged by the Beys, the same people have lately attempted to insinuate themselves into Egypt, with a view no doubt as soon as they have made maps of the country, and taken plans of fortifications, to attempt the conquest of it."²⁰²

Not only did the Ottomans have as evidence the European merchant-Mamluk collusion and the information gleaned from their own intricate spy networks, there was also the ever increasing traffic of European "tourists" and travellers to Egypt. Although the European powers insisted that its subjects had right to visit Ottoman domains, the Ottomans accused these travellers of spying on Ottoman lands, which, of course, they were. Some were outright spies, like Baron de Tott, Carston Niebuhr and many others who were sent out by their governments on fact finding missions--or as in the case of the very reticent, if not terrified, Henry Grenville were charged by Royal order to snoop into the behind the scenes Ottoman affairs in Istanbul²⁰³. Others were indirect spies, like James Bruce, Volney, and again many others, who by publishing

²⁰² This translation of a portion of the Hatti Sherif sent to Cairo in 1779 comes from Col. Capper, *Observations on the Passage to India*, 1785, p viii. See also IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 292-297. The Beys apparently were not concerned about European designs on Egypt--or possible negative repercussions on Egypt's trade and commerce by increased European activity.

²⁰³ See Henry Grenville, *Observations sur l'état actuel de l'Empire Ottomane*, Andrew S Ehrenkreutz, ed, Ann Arbor: 1965. Henry, younger brother of the more famous George Grenville, did not relish his charge to spy on the Ottomans, and rather sheepishly began his report with a long explanation of the difficulty and dangers of prying into Ottoman affairs.

accounts of their travels gave European powers detailed information about Ottoman domains.

Ottoman charges that European powers were plotting the take over of Egypt were equally insightful, although it took war in Europe and the audacity of Napoleon to actually bring it about. The Europeans themselves were fueling rumors of European designs on Egypt. Many of the travellers called for their countries to invade Egypt, and both the travel accounts and the Indian Office Records consulted in this study are full of various European accusations against France, Britain, and Russia of planning to conquer Egypt.

In summary, official Ottoman objections to the British trade at Suez can be linked to concerns over religious prestige and the maintenance of the Hajj. Unofficial objections point to concerns that the Mamluk Beys could make a bid for outright control over Egypt by enriching and empowering themselves from the Suez trade and additional links with European merchants; and mistrust of European intentions towards Egypt²⁰⁴. Combined these objections were strong enough to resist repeated European diplomatic efforts to open the northern Red Sea to their vessels and facilitated the Porte's decision to launch a military expedition against the Beys

²⁰⁴ Unfortunately, from the sources consulted it is not possible to gauge if, or how strongly, concerns (voiced either in the Porte or by Egyptian and Red Sea merchants and captains) about the economic interests of Ottoman subjects played in Ottoman objections to the European trade at Suez. It is interesting, however, that Jabarti, who was usually quite perceptive about unusual events, especially those that went contrary to traditional practices, made no reference to the European trade at Suez. Similarly, Profs. Marsot and Hanna agree that from the sources and documents they have studied, the Egyptian ulama did not mention the trade either.

when matters had gotten out of hand.

In the sixteenth century, the English Levant Company was granted a royal charter and given an Ottoman license to trade in the Mediterranean Sea.¹ The Levant Company quickly joined the fray and began trading in spices, silks, and other goods with the East. The company's success was due to its monopoly on trade with the Levant, which gave it a significant advantage over other merchants. The company's trade was so successful that it became one of the most powerful economic entities in England.

¹ See A. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1962. For an interesting first-hand account of the company's activities in the Levant, see John Sanderson, *The Levant Company*, London: 1931.

Trading Companies and Merchant Rivalries

It has been suggested previously that the Mamluk Beys were in part their own worst enemies in terms of the failure to sustain the European trade at Suez. Equally apparent is that the European trading companies and individual English and European merchants played a similarly decisive role in the trade's demise. Not only did British merchants fail to convince the EIC or Levant Company to establish an official trade at Suez, the private trade, very rarely meddled with by the companies, was left to collapse as well. These are issues largely ignored in the secondary sources.

Many factors were in play. The English Levant Company was at odds with the English East India Company. Robert Ainslee was at odds with George Baldwin. And, intriguingly, there is evidence that merchant rivalries in India prejudiced the EIC policy towards the Red Sea not in favor of the Cape route (the stated Company policy) but the Persian Gulf.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, the English Levant Company was granted a royal charter and given an Ottoman capitulation to trade in the Mediterranean Sea²⁰⁵. The Levant Company quickly joined the fray of long established Ottoman, Venetian, French, and many other merchants trading in regional imports and exports and especially the lucrative east-west spice

²⁰⁵ See A C Wood, *A History of the Levant Company*, New York: 1964. For an interesting first hand account of one of the early Levant Company merchants active in Egypt, see John Sanderson, *The Travels of John Sanderson in the Levant, 1584-1602*, London: 1931.

trade. For various reasons, trade with Egypt was never a major concern of the Levant Company. Early on, it had found Cairo an expensive emporium in which to maintain a factory. The keen savvy and bargaining skills of the Cairene merchants apparently made wrangling profits difficult, especially with the long established Venetian and French merchants further challenging the English position²⁰⁶. Some Levant Company merchants, however, complained that the Company was to blame for its lack of Egyptian trade. "If it rayned [sic] gold [in Alexandria]," lamented one Levant Company merchant in an often cited quote, "wee [sic] should not think it worth the while to goe [sic] and fetch it."²⁰⁷

Instead, while cheaper French cloth, and other factors, allowed French merchants to dominate Europe's trade with Egypt, and the entire Ottoman Empire, the Levant Company in 1754 closed its Cairo consulate altogether, leaving its remaining merchants to trade under the protection of the Dutch Factory²⁰⁸. Clearly, the Levant Company developed its interests at Aleppo and then Izmir with the markets of Ottoman Anatolia and Syria, not Egypt, in mind²⁰⁹. Therefore, when the Porte raised its objections to the British trade at Suez, the Levant Company had strong reason to

²⁰⁶ Wood, *History*, p 32.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p 125.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, pp 106; 131-140; 156.

²⁰⁹ See Necmi Vilker, "The Emergence of Izmir as a Mediterranean Commercial Center for French and English Interests, 1698-1741", *IJTS* 4 (Summer 1987): 1-8; Ralph Davis, *Aleppo and Devonshire Square: English Traders in the Eighteenth Century*, London: 1967.

forsake the interests of their one merchant in Cairo, George Baldwin, in the interest of their other factories across the Empire.

Underlying the official stance of the Levant Company were its hostilities towards the East India Company. Not long after the Levant Company had established itself in the Mediterranean in the late sixteenth century, the discovery of the Cape route created a whole new group of early seventeenth century European charters and monopolies focused on eastern trade. With time, patterns formed which saw the East India companies supply Europe with eastern goods predominately via the Cape route, while the Levant companies traded European goods, and eastern goods exported from Europe, to the Mediterranean. In short, not only did the creation of these separate, competing companies obstruct a direct, European exchange of trade between the east and the Mediterranean, it led to the overshadowing of the previously powerful European Levant companies in the face of the extraordinary wealth of Asia²¹⁰.

The EIC trade at Suez challenged these traditional spheres and patterns of exchange. It brought the interests of the English Levant Company and the English East India Company directly to a head. Significantly, however, these companies chose not to rethink the strong divisions between them or to explore the possibilities of a cooperative link between the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean

²¹⁰ Somewhat ironically, the impact of the Cape route on European merchants in the Mediterranean was in many respects stronger and more immediate than its effect on non-European Indian Ocean merchants.

trade (despite the lure of the rich India-Ottoman trade existing outside *both* of their trading spheres²¹¹). Instead, both sides, for decidedly different reasons, chose to cling fast to the status quo.

Although one can only speculate on the possible ramifications had the English Levant and East India Companies joined forces, the reaction from both sides not only prohibited cooperation, the issue of the EIC trade at Suez merely added to the hostilities²¹². The two companies continued to work against one another. The court cases contesting grievances between the two dragged on unabated, and by the eighteenth century the Levant Company (older, once more powerful, but now clearly fading) had the further humiliation of dramatically reduced profits and the prospects of bankruptcy looming in the very near future²¹³. Despite the legitimate claim from Baldwin that as a Levant Company merchant he had the right to trade with anyone in Egypt--including EIC merchants, the unprecedented and complicated legalities, let alone the underlying prejudices and jealousies involved, made the issue much too troublesome for the Company to tackle, let alone resolve.

In contesting the EIC trade at Suez, the Levant Company deftly turned to its one, and about the only, area where it held power

²¹¹ See Panzac, "Domestic and International Maritime Trade".

²¹² It is interesting to note that the other European Levant and East India companies, the French in particular, reacted similarly. They remained ever hostile and none ever joined forces.

²¹³ Ibid, p 156. In 1767 it was even forced to petition the Crown for emergency financial aid. That the EIC would soon face similar financial difficulties was no consolation at the time.

over the EIC: its diplomatic functions at the Porte.

Ironically, as the Levant Company's strength as a trading force weakened, its political significance as the official British representative to the Ottoman Empire increased dramatically as the emerging European states and alliance systems took hold and European powers maneuvered with the Ottomans for economic concessions and political position²¹⁴. In this respect, the Levant Company, even though it could never boast of Empire, had dominant advantages over the EIC in determining the fate of the Suez trade. Indeed, when the Levant Company charged the EIC of infringing on its monopoly rights in Egypt--ignoring Baldwin's loud protestations that it was *his* trading rights as a Levant Company merchant that the Levant Company was infringing upon--and alarmed the British government to the political repercussions of the EIC trade at Suez, official British policy quickly sided with the Levant Company.

The East India Company, both in London and Bombay, raised surprisingly little objections to the intrigues of the Levant Company. When official British policy prohibited the trade, the EIC enthusiastically joined the bandwagon. As has been repeatedly noted, the official EIC stand was that the Suez trade hurt the profits of the home factory in London. Even though the rebuttals of those who supported the trade easily showed that this was not true, and in fact was somewhat ludicrous, the EIC Directors would not waver and stubbornly clung to this argument in ruling against

²¹⁴ In part it was the added financial burden of maintaining a large diplomatic/political body that crippled the Company's financial strength.

the trade. To fully understand their willingness to abandon the Suez trade and toe the British government's line one must probe into the intricate relationship between the EIC and British politics.

Among various political and economic circles in London, the EIC, and its monopolies, were intensely unpopular²¹⁵. Within a political system where corruption was largely expected and tolerated ("...not an orgy of corruption, but a fragile balance between public and private interests expressed in the system of 'political connection' and 'political management'..."²¹⁶), the economic and political abuses of the EIC were increasingly resented and contested by those who felt locked out of the rich rewards of the east selfishly hoarded by the EIC Directors. There were also the continuous debates on the effects of the EIC trade on England's domestic work force and monetary policy, as well as the humanitarian issues of British India's abuses against native Indians²¹⁷.

The EIC responded by trying to curb its internal corruption

²¹⁵ The best study of this is Lucy S Sutherland, *The East India Company in Eighteenth Century Politics*, Oxford: 1952; also William J Barber, *British Economic Thought and India, 1600-1858*, London: 1975; and Mukherjee, *Rise and Fall*, 1974.

²¹⁶ Sutherland, *Eighteenth Century Politics*, 1952, pp 51-52.

²¹⁷ Adam Smith was particularly critical. He pointed out the contradiction between the EIC merchants, loyal (supposedly) to the Company and the home sovereign, and the EIC's duty as sovereign of India, with loyalty to the people of India. The result of this contradiction, he gleaned with typically acute perception, would be the destruction of India. See Barber, *Economic Thought*, 1975, pp 85-100

and soften its image as an elitist, parasitic, merchant fraternity. Indeed, in the middle of the eighteenth century Clive, the EIC's great military hero, successfully defended charges questioning his conduct in India and the legitimacy of his acquired, and enormous, riches (and subsequently was knighted). Several decades later Warren Hastings, the great statesman of the Company, guilty of substantially fewer abuses than Clive, was financially ruined and personally disgraced by his drawn out impeachment²¹⁸. Similarly, each time the EIC charter was subject to reapproval, the powers and privileges of the Company were trimmed, although heavy bribes and loans from the EIC to the Crown and heavy EIC representation in Parliament assured the monopoly rights would not be stripped away completely.

In the face of these challenges, it is readily understandable why the EIC would so willingly give up an area of potentially lucrative trade at Suez. Not only was the Company already under fire on several fronts in London, the issue of Levant Company rights and Ottoman-British relations were not imbroglios the Directors wished to enter. Furthermore, the EIC had numerous other trading schemes under foot far removed from the meddlings of Cairo, Istanbul, or London--for instance China and the northwest coast of the Americas, where the protestations of the Manchurian Emperor and the Native Americans were, for the time being at any rate, safely

²¹⁸ Bold action, lauded praise from the Directors and the Crown, and later charges of abuse is a common feature in the biography of the leading EIC figures. An intriguing assessment of the Hastings' impeachment is the first hand account of Thomas Macauley, *Warren Hastings*.

beyond the ears of London²¹⁹.

While the above explains some of the forces which touched official Levant and East India Company policy, the behavior of individual merchants acting in behalf of personal self interest was at work as well. This study has mentioned Baldwin, Thornhill, Hastings and others who worked to promote the Suez trade, and traded privately when Company policies refused to sanction the trade. Merchant rivalries, however, on the level of private trade also worked to sabotage the British trade at Suez.

As has been shown, Robert Ainslee, the British ambassador at Istanbul, was the most significant single British merchant (it must be remembered that Ainslee was a merchant first, ambassador second) in opposition to the Suez trade. He claimed to act for the good of the Company. However, it is interesting to note that his predecessor, Robert Murphy, did not oppose the Suez trade, and in fact pointed to the Capitulations in defence of it. Here the issue of timing is important to consider. The first British ships to call on Suez arrived as Murphy was preparing to quit Istanbul for London²²⁰. Part of his defense of the trade can be seen as merely a lack of concern over it--he was leaving and the issue did not

²¹⁹ On EIC trading interests with China see Chaudhuri, *Trading World*, p 98. See also Harlow and Madden, *Colonial Developments*, p 46. The EIC's grand scheme was to expand trade in China, open trade with Japan, connect Asian trade with the remote northwest coast of the Americas, and by discovering a Northwest Passage across the American continent extend the EIC's reach literally around the globe. See *ibid*, pp 21-24.

²²⁰ Murphy did not survive the trip home, and died in Italy soon after leaving Istanbul.

directly touch him.

Ainslee, however, arrived in Istanbul just as the Suez trade was gaining steam. While clearly loyal to the interests of the Crown and concerned as ambassador with the well being of all British subjects, Ainslee was also determined to use his tenure to capitalize on his right to trade privately. Ainslee the merchant was directly threatened by potential Ottoman reprisals prompted by the continued British activity at Suez. Furthermore, during these years European merchants in Istanbul were struggling to open up the rich Black Sea trade to European merchants--and made it clear that the controversy over the Red Sea trade was not going to interfere²²¹. The IOR resolves one question beyond doubt: Ainslee's objections to the Suez trade increasingly became personal--a blatant move to counter the ambitions of George Baldwin, a man Ainslee grew to mistrust, dislike, and publicly criticize.

One of the more interesting aspects of the contemporary debates over the Suez trade has yet to be discussed in secondary sources. Intriguingly, they unanimously disregarded the issue of the EIC's trade with Basra and the Persian Gulf²²². Opponents of the Suez trade pointed to infringements on Levant Company rights, the economy of the Cape route, the needs of the EIC factory in

²²¹ See Panzac, "International and Domestic Maritime Trade".

²²² One of the few, if not only, detailed studies on eighteenth century Persian Gulf trade is Thabit Abdullah, "The Political Economy of Merchants and Trade in Basra, 1722-1795", PhD Dissertation, Georgetown University, 1992.

London. Yet aside from a few statements from Baldwin, none of the proponents of the Suez trade pointed out that the Persian Gulf route carried all of these concerns. It traded with Aleppo, the legal sphere of the Levant Company, was subject to various customs duties in Iraq and Syria, and shipped Indian and eastern goods directly to the Ottoman Empire at the expense of the Company's London exports.

George Baldwin indirectly substantiated this. In defense of the Suez trade he attempted to prove to the EIC London Directors that the exports of the home factory to Istanbul dramatically increased during the Persian siege of Basra--when EIC trade there was interrupted and concomitantly the Suez trade briefly flourished²²³. He also showed that once Basra reopened the London exports to Istanbul declined to previous levels. This suggests that the Persian Gulf route, not the Red Sea, was the real threat to London exports to the Ottomans. Intriguingly, not only did the EIC Directors refuse to acknowledge this, by forming objections proven groundless by the Basra trade, they blatantly created spurious, even hypocritical charges against the trade at Suez.

While existing sources can not clearly explain the EIC's double standards between Basra and Suez, various documentation suggests a possible explanation. Prof. Abdullah's research shows that an active Company and private trade existed between Bombay and Basra--the Bombay government even sent ships periodically to patrol

²²³ IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, f 122. Meaning that the Suez trade did not interfere with the London exports to Istanbul.

the Gulf and Shatt al-Arab to protect the region's trade²²⁴. Mr. Francis, an EIC Red Sea trader, stated that it was mainly the Bengal merchants, feeling the added financial demands and political strength of Bombay, who were after the Suez trade²²⁵. What this implies is that the Bombay merchants, capitalizing on their stronger and more direct voice with the Bombay and London Directors, protected their interests in the Persian Gulf by working against the Suez trade. This conclusion suggests a plausible explanation for the very curious discrepancies between Company policy towards the Persian Gulf and Red Sea routes.

Collectively, the evidence points to very strong and diverse objections to the British trade at Suez voiced by British merchants and British trading companies alike. It suggests that inter-company rivalries and thirst for profits among merchants was decidedly fierce and competitive. More, it suggests the Suez trade lured merchants cut off from the established spheres of Levant and EIC trade who were quickly, and rather easily, foiled by their colleagues. Scheme and broker as they might, the British merchants interested in Suez faced an array of opposition not only in Egypt, Istanbul, and Europe, but from their own colleagues and countrymen as well.

²²⁴ Abdullah, "Political Economy", pp 60-62; Aleppo merchants in 1781 even agreed to pay half the cost of the British patrols: *ibid*, p 115.

²²⁵ IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 21-40.

The Labyrinth of Ottoman-European Balance of Power

In order to understand the cold shoulder given by the European powers to their merchants calling for the recognition and protection of the trade at Suez one must place the Ottoman objections to the trade within the context of the complex European balance of power. By failing to do so, it is easy to misjudge the importance and the weight of the Ottoman position. This is no easy task. It immediately challenges an effort to step away from the traditional and predominant "Ottoman Empire vs Europe" dichotomy, and instead to picture the Ottomans as an active and, indeed, integral member of the European alliance system. Richard Murphy follows the standard historical argument when he claims:

"As a starting point it must be emphasized that at no time prior to the Napoleonic age must we seek the compliancy in trading matters that naturally emerged [after 1799]...World conditions in the nineteenth century necessitated greater reliance on international diplomacy and transformed the Ottoman's relationship with the major European powers."²²⁶

What Murphy is suggesting, of course, is that Ottoman-European diplomacy was basically insignificant prior to the nineteenth century. Given that European trade with the Ottoman Empire was founded on political-economic agreements manifested in the Capitulations, it seems very objectionable to state Ottoman-European diplomacy as significant only after 1799²²⁷. Virginia Askan gives a sensible and important reply when she states:

²²⁶ Richard Murphy, "Conditions of Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean: An Appraisal of Eighteenth Century Ottoman Documents from Aleppo", *JESHO* (1990): 35-50.

²²⁷ For the Capitulations see Hurewitz, *Diplomacy*, pp 1-11.

"The eighteenth century was a time of intense diplomatic activity as evidenced by the number of surviving embassy reports from the period. Ottoman statesmen, chosen primarily from the scribal bureaucracy after 1699, negotiated treaties, traveled to European courts, and fashioned Ottoman diplomatic practices for a new era of fixed boundaries....The evidence is available in the libraries of Turkey, in embassy reports, translations of European newspapers, and small essays on the European diplomatic system, among others."²²⁸

Furthermore, upon reflection it seems impossible to point to a time when Ottoman-European diplomacy (from the political marriages between Ottoman princes and Byzantine princesses, to the fifteenth century French-Ottoman alliances against Italy, to the sixteenth and seventeenth century Capitulations and beyond) was not significant²²⁹.

Discussing the Ottoman Empire and the European balance of power also touches upon the issue of Ottoman "decline", a very thorny subject in the historiography of the Ottoman Empire--and one that lurks within all the secondary sources. For the purposes here, it is perhaps best to clarify that the very real challenges, both internal and external, facing the Ottomans did not occur in a vacuum. Meaning, 1) if the Empire was in decline, and in various aspects it is certainly difficult to argue it was not, decline was

²²⁸ Virginia Aksan, "Ottoman Political Writing", *IJMES* 25 (1993): 53-69.

²²⁹ For example see Inalcik *Classical Age*, and especially his, "The Turkish Impact on the Development of Modern Europe", and Kemal Karpat, "Ottoman Policy with Europe", both in Kemal H Karpat, ed, *The Ottoman State and Its Place in World History*, Lieden: 1974. For an excellent, and typically sharp-witted criticism of the double standards rampant in western historiography of the Middle East see Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, "The History of Muhammad Ali: Fact or Fiction?", *JARCE* 25 (1978): 107-112.

not the only thing happening²³⁰; and 2) decline was relative and was not happening in the Empire alone--two obvious, though probably objectionable, examples: it was during this time period when Great Britain lost thirteen of its American colonies and France was about to sink into civil war²³¹.

The European merchants who aspired for a Suez trade took for granted that their home governments would accept the Beys as the legitimate sovereigns of Egypt, and would legitimize the European trade at Suez by ratifying the various agreements made with the Beys. On the surface their confidence is understandable. Opinion in Europe widely mocked the strength of the Ottoman Empire; for Europe it was not an issue of if the Empire would fall but when and which European power would most gain²³². The European merchants in Egypt saw little reason for their home governments to worry about Ottoman reactions to their dealings with the Beys. By doing so, however, they seriously miscalculated the nature of Ottoman-

²³⁰ The real issue for historians is not whether or not decline existed, but to qualify it, to give it meaning, to put the issue of Ottoman decline into the analysis of change over time, for example during the Tanzimat era, when signs of Ottoman reassertion are evident, and World War One, when the Ottomans proved to be a far more formidable foe than the Allied powers had ever anticipated. (See David Fromkin's excellent and, though exclusively from the European sources, exhaustively documented, *A Peace to End All Peace*, New York: 1989.)

²³¹ Conveniently western sources tend to herald these two events as something singularly positive.

²³² It is interesting to contrast the attitudes towards the Ottoman Empire of de Busbecq, a sixteenth century European ambassador to the Porte (see Edward Seymour Forster, *The Turkish Letters of Ogier Gheselein de Busbecq*, Oxford: 1968), and W E Eton, *A Survey of the Turkish Empire*, 1798, New York: 1973.

European relations.

The collective consensus in Europe was that the best way to assure a given European power did not gain from infringements on Ottoman domains was to make sure the territoriality of the Empire remained intact²³³. It is important to remember that this was a calculated decision by powers thirsty to expand. Europe was not humoring the Ottoman Empire by respecting its existence, and obviously several wars between the Empire and Russia and Austria-Hungary tested the diplomatic and military waters²³⁴. Individually, however, European powers were ever wary of collective responses to aggression against the Ottomans--and as the eighteenth century unfolded were further burdened with various domestic social and economic crises at home and chronic inter-European wars, which ravaged not only the continent but the European colonies across the globe as well²³⁵.

²³³ While in general overlooking the significance of the Ottoman Empire in European diplomacy, Derek McKay and H M Scott do offer a limited discussion in their *The Rise of the Great Powers, 1648-1815*, London: 1983, especially pp 230-242. More credible is E Ingram, *Commitment to Empire: Prophecies of the Great Game in Asia, 1797-1800*, Oxford: 1981, pp 195-235. For background on Ottoman-European relations see Inalcik, *Classical Age*; Inalcik, "The Turkish Impact on the Development of Modern Europe" in Kemal H Karpat, ed, *The Ottoman State and its Place in World History*, Leiden, 1974: pp 51-60.

²³⁴ McKay and Scott make the astute observation that in the Ottoman-Russian wars of the second half of the eighteenth century a clear victor does not emerge, yet a decisive loser does--neither of the antagonists but rather Poland. See their *Great Powers*, London: pp 230-242.

²³⁵ And if one can say that the Ottoman Empire in part owed its longevity to its role in the European alliance system--as opposed, say, to the Moghul or Safavid Empires--one can point to several European powers who owed their survival to the protection

In this regard, much of the hesitation to acknowledge the Beys as rulers of Egypt was prompted by European fears of European reactions. Both Great Britain and France worried that strong moves in Egypt would give license to Russian or Austria-Hungarian aggressions against Ottoman Europe²³⁶. In the India Office Records, the increasing paranoia among merchants over the designs of various other European merchants and travellers is readily apparent. For example, Baldwin was particularly concerned about Russian collusion with the Beys, and claimed that in 1785 the new Russian consul in Cairo was afforded extravagant protection by the Beys "to the outrage of all other consuls"²³⁷. In Istanbul, Ainslee was more concerned with the French, whom he knew were granting the Porte substantial military aid, and the Italians, whom he charged with encouraging the Beys to plunder European goods, then bought the stolen goods at reduced prices, shipped them off to Italy and earned rich profits²³⁸. Robert Hughes, an English merchant at Alexandria and Europhobe *par excellence*, imagined

of the alliance system.

²³⁶ For the combined Russian, British, French interests/concerns over the Red Sea and European balance of power see Charles-Roux, *Autour*, pp 289-298; 299-306; and 307-316 respectively. See also Crecelius, "Treaties".

²³⁷ See IOR G/17/5A, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 47-53. More, Baldwin rather hysterically claimed the Russians were attempting to force all European merchants to evacuate Egypt.

²³⁸ See IOR G/17/5A, Egypt and the Red Sea ff 59-63 and IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 203-205.

European spies and schemes at every turn²³⁹.

Along side inter-European concerns, there is also ample evidence in the primary sources that Great Britain placed serious importance on its relations with the Ottoman Empire. For example, when James Bruce first complained to Muhammad Bey Abu Dhahab about the rapacity of the authorities in Jidda, the Bey retorted, "Why don't you beat down Jidda about its ears?!" To which Bruce humbly (for Bruce very out of character) replied, "It's not part of our domains...²⁴⁰". Considering the British had convincingly beaten down the ears of India, large areas of southeast Asia, and the Americas it is obvious that the issue was not that Jidda was not a British domain. The issue was that Jidda was an Ottoman domain.

An incident in Jidda which occurred a few years later similarly illustrates Britain's concerns with its relations with the Ottomans. In 1776, Captain Scott of the EIC's *Alexander* was sent to Jidda to improve the Company's trade relations there. Instead, Scott found the Jidda officials as insulting and demanding as ever. In a fit of pique, Scott returned to ship, drifted into the harbor, cleared the decks and proceeded to bomb the town. As has been noted, this was not an uncommon European reaction to uncooperative ports--similar incidents across the globe were frequent and, in British eyes, rather unimportant. Scott's report of the incident to his Bombay superiors, then, illustrates the

²³⁹ See IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 337-338; f 353; and f 361.

²⁴⁰ Bruce, *Travels*, Vol IV, p 630.

bombing of Jidda, during this time period at any rate, was a different matter entirely²⁴¹. The voluminous report, whose length he repeatedly apologized for, explained the incident in painstaking detail. And while he was certainly not repentant about his actions (his report remained determinedly bellicose throughout), his obvious concern about the reaction of the Bombay authorities and the possible repercussions that might ensue from the incident are noteworthy. Scott's report makes clear that not only was he responsible for his actions, the EIC and the government of Great Britain were responsible as well. And it is equally clear to whom they were responsible: the Ottoman Empire.

Other examples of European respect for the Empire are easily gleaned from the correspondences of Robert Ainslee. While the military might of a particular power was typically a deciding factor in European-Ottoman diplomacy, in day to day life in Istanbul, and throughout the Ottoman Empire, Europeans treaded cautiously and were quick to defer to Ottoman and local authority in order to protect life and property. In the frequent negotiations between Ainslee and the Reis Effendi, aimed at releasing imprisoned British subjects or confiscated British property, the British ambassador did not simply march into the Reis Effendi's office and demand redress. Instead, Ainslee was forced to follow established, and often laborious, diplomatic channels. Ainslee's reports also make clear that it was Ottoman corruption and fondness for bribes that won the release of British subjects

²⁴¹ See IOR G/17/5, Egypt and the Red Sea, ff 5-9; and 10-18.

and their property, not British strength or intimidation.

Even when the French government, in 1785, initiated a direct treaty with the Mamluk Beys, the move was immediately nullified when the Ottomans launched their military expedition against the rebel Beys. With a renewed show of Ottoman force, neither the French nor Baldwin dared to defy the Ottoman prohibition of the European-Suez trade. Crecelius concludes:

"Each [Great Britain and France] had already become concerned by the Habsburg and Russian drives into eastern Europe and had already committed themselves to the Ottoman Empire....Both European governments felt that any small gains it might make in the area of the Red Sea would be taken as a pretext by the Russians and Hapsburgs for their further penetration into the eastern European provinces of the Ottoman Empire."²⁴²

It took revolution in France, war throughout Europe, and the audacity of Napoleon to finally bring European designs on Egypt to a head. Yet even when the French invaded Egypt outright in 1798, they were quick to assure the Porte that they did so only to restore stability and with the Sultan's sovereignty in mind. The Porte was not convinced²⁴³. Across the Empire French merchants and

²⁴² Crecelius, *Roots*, p 177.

²⁴³ Sonini, the loquacious French adventurer was sorely disappointed by the outcome of the French expedition. He had prophesized, "But with what superior splendor will Egypt shine by becoming a colony of France?...It will be the centre and emporium of the commerce of the universe. The ancient cradle of the arts and sciences will become the theatre of their power; and the abode of infancy will be the scene of their astonishing growth and perfection....Uniting the various productions dispersed through our ancient colonies, Egypt will be the epitome of them all; while its proximity to Europe will give it incalculable advantages. Humanity will not, as in the other colonies [ie British India], have to shed tears over the luxuries of a prolific soil." See C S Sonini, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, London: 1800, pp 397-398.

property were imprisoned and confiscated, the Sultan immediately declared war against France, and the Egyptians, decidedly unimpressed with Napoleon's magnanimous assurances and proclamations, quickly turned the French occupation into a nightmare for the occupying forces²⁴⁴. In the aftermath of the occupation, the previous French domination of Europe's trade with Egypt and the Ottoman Empire was obliterated and never again recovered to former levels²⁴⁵.

Although Great Britain worked actively (and in fact more than it cared to) with the Porte in forcing the French out of Egypt, it did not use its influence to champion the Suez trade. Instead, British policy focused more than ever on keeping closed, not on opening, the Red Sea to European ships and commerce²⁴⁶. Without question, EIC merchants and vessels took advantage of increased British patrolling of the Red Sea for their personal commercial gain, however government policy advocated strategic, not economic,

²⁴⁴ See Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*, 1956, Napoleon's Proclamation to the Egyptians, p 63. "Peoples of Egypt, you will be told that I have come to destroy your religion; do not believe it! Reply that I have come to restore your rights, to punish the usurpers, and that I respect more than the Mamluks, God, his Prophet and the Quran."

For the occupation, see S Moreh, ed and trans, *Al-Jabarti's Chronicle of the First Seven Months of the French Occupation of Egypt*, Leiden: 1975. It is incredible, given Egypt's rich resources, that historians so readily credit the French failure in Egypt solely on Nelson's victory over French supply lines in the Mediterranean.

²⁴⁵ See Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy*; Islamuglu-Inan, ed, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy*, Cambridge: 1987.

²⁴⁶ See Thomas E Marston, *Britain's Imperial Role in the Red Sea, 1800-1878*, Hamden, Ct: 1961.

interests in the region. These strategic initiatives stated that it was in Great Britain's best interest to neutralize maritime activity in the Red Sea, not promote it. This remained Great Britain's strategy throughout the nineteenth century. And when the all out efforts of British diplomacy could not obstruct the building of the present day Suez Canal, its defensive strategy in case of hostilities in the region was to sink ships in the Canal until all naval passage was blocked²⁴⁷.

It is clear that the British merchants who hoped their home government would recognize the autonomy of the Beys and would champion the cause of the Suez trade were very disappointed. European interest in Egypt was on the rise and few contested its potential resources and strategic geo-political importance. Yet Istanbul, not Cairo, held the day. Ultimately, not even the conceit of Napoleon could change that.

²⁴⁷ See Marston, *Imperial Role*.

Conclusion

In retrospect, it seems extraordinary that the issue of a small British trade at Suez elicited such an overwhelming, diverse, and decidedly negative response. When one considers the insurmountable obstacles the trade faced one must sympathize with George Baldwin, who, not knowing the full array of obstacles he faced, labored so furiously for so many years to promote it. In the narrowest sense, the issue seemed to hinge merely on neutralizing, or ignoring, the protestations of the authorities in Jidda and the existing Red Sea merchants and fleets, the only groups clearly and directly poised to lose out by a few European ships sailing directly to Suez. Yet the repercussions of the European trade at Suez, both in terms of the activity that briefly existed and the potentials for it to expand, set off objections that rippled in ever wider circles that eventually encompassed the imbroglio of the Ottoman-European alliance system.

It is tempting to try to proclaim a clear victor in this great battle to subvert the European-Suez trade, yet the task is as difficult as the relevant players are diverse. In the short term, it is obvious that the Beys themselves were the key antagonist which paradoxically defeated itself. They opened the port of Suez to British ships and then a few short years later scared off European activity by allowing, if not encouraging, the bloody attack in 1779 on the European caravan travelling from Suez to Cairo. Finally, in the internecine political disintegration of the closing decades of the eighteenth century, the Beys undermined all

efforts to revive the trade--and indeed undermined and bankrupted nearly all of Europe's trading activity in Egypt, and seriously damaged Egypt's domestic economy as well.

The Ottomans, too, can claim a substantial role in the demise of the Suez trade. It was the Ottoman stance towards Egypt that allowed the Beys to briefly win free rein in the province--with all its fateful and chaotic results. Also, the firm Ottoman objections to the trade were immediately championed by the trading companies and the British government, who, however ineptly, struggled to control their merchants. And while the Ottoman expedition of 1786 further confirmed that they had no intention of losing the resources of Egypt to Mamluk-European collusion, or to freely allow European fleets predominance in the Red Sea, the Porte grievously miscalculated the events to follow. The former political status quo did not return to the province, and once the expedition was recalled nothing stood in the way of continued political disintegration or the ambitions of the French. Once Napoleon invaded Egypt, British policy towards the Red Sea immediately became more aggressive.

The efforts of the Levant and East India Companies and the British government to undermine the Suez trade are important to acknowledge, yet they, in fact, were clearly the least decisive factors in the failure of the British trade at Suez. This goes against the reasoning of nearly every other secondary source. Yet from the documents it is clear that Robert Ainslee could rant against Baldwin and the EIC merchants all he liked. The Levant

Company could win the British government's condemnation of the trade--while the EIC mostly ignored it. Proclamations, threats, commands could be issued and reissued in quadruplicate. Regardless, the merchants kept coming. The British traders repeatedly defied the instructions of their employers and their sovereign, and seemed to have had no intention to follow them as long as the Suez trade was open and winning profits.

In the short term, Baldwin was only concerned with the Ottomans, and quickly decided they did not have the power or the inclination to stop the British trade at Suez. As for the East India Company merchants, they seemed oblivious of the Porte altogether. Again, it was the Mamluks, reacting to Ottoman pressures, who effectively halted the trade. Only at this point did the British merchants depend on the commercial and diplomatic backing of the Companies and the home government to reopen the trade--a backing, of course, they never received. In summary, Prof. Crecelius states it well, though perhaps out of sequence, when he comments:

"Despite the encouragement given to this [the Suez] trade by a succession of Qazdughli amirs, plans to bring English or French ships directly to Suez from India remained frustrated by the apparent lack of understanding in the commercial and political significance of this route by government ministers in both London and Paris, by the adamant refusal of the Ottoman government to permit ships north of Jidda, by the dependent status of Egypt as nominally a province of the Ottoman Empire, and by the inept policy of the Qazdughli amirs themselves, who encouraged the merchants with trade agreements, but tyrannized them with violence and ruined them with frequent demands for gifts and loans and the imposition of excessive customs charges."²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ Crecelius, "Treaties", p 69.

In the growing power and ambition of the British Empire, it is intriguing that the British government wished to neutralize the Suez trade and the Red Sea region and not capitalize on them--although its merchants, happily tagging behind the British patrols, saw to that. While European abuses against the Capitulations were brewing all across the Ottoman Mediterranean, Great Britain stubbornly undermined the rights of British and European merchants to trade at Suez--an issue that nearly drove Baldwin mad. The fact that the British, and the French, deferred to Ottoman demands at the expense of their own rights of Capitulations is noteworthy, in some respects extraordinary, and is perhaps unprecedented.

In the larger issue of European economic penetration, this episode stands out as clear exception to developments happening across the globe. Where Prof. Abdullah clearly shows the impact, both economic and political, of English merchant activity in Basra in the eighteenth century, and Prof. Raymond describes the impact of eighteenth century European economic penetration on Egypt as a whole, in Suez the opposite occurred. The attempt was made to open Suez to European ships, yet it failed. Similarly, all the attempts by Baldwin and EIC merchants to promote Red Sea trade failed as well. Not until French-British geo-politics came to head during the French invasion did the traditional Red Sea merchants taste the full effects of European economic expansion. The episode further serves as a reminder that the European economic penetration of Egypt can not be viewed solely by examining trading activity in the Mediterranean. A steady presence of European merchants in the

Indian Ocean and Red Sea had an eye on trade with Egypt, despite all the obstacles involved.

British policy towards European activity in the Red Sea resoundingly echoed the attitude of Ibn Majid: stay out; other than the pilgrimage there is no reason to come. Egypt and Europe, however, would not allow it. When the Suez Canal cut a new path between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, virtually overnight, became one of the most international waterways in the world²⁴⁹. At this point, British and European activity in the Red Sea became decisive. The economic strength of Jidda was nearly ruined by the failure of European ships to call on the port. As in the Persian Gulf, British fleets came to dominate the Sea's shipping--and after the British occupation of Egypt in the late nineteenth century, the carrying of pilgrimage traffic from both Suez and British India as well. As yet, no studies have attempted to explore the impact of these developments on the non-European merchants and fleets of Egypt and the Red Sea. However, they must have been grave. For an exceptionally active trading region, one which had withstood European economic penetration for centuries, when it finally did arrive, it did so very suddenly and in full force.

Beyond the issue of the Suez trade, this study challenges several existing assumptions about eighteenth century Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, and Europe. The active dialogue between the European merchants and the Beys clearly suggests that the

²⁴⁹ See Marston Thomas, *Imperial Designs*.

"isolation" of eighteenth century Egypt (at least of the Egyptian elites) is overstated. In terms of the Ottoman Empire, their reactions (actions) to the European trade at Suez and their determination and ability to work against it, both in Istanbul and Egypt, challenges the familiar picture of Ottoman impotence in the face of Mamluk-European intrigue. More, the episode shows an Ottoman-European rapport that goes beyond traditional notions of Ottoman decline or Ottoman diplomacy existing on the fringe of the European alliance system. The mad scramble of European merchants and powers to scheme with the Beys and the Porte; to develop commercial and diplomatic ties at the expense of all European rivals; to accuse and mistrust the designs and intentions of competing European powers all portend developments of the nineteenth century. This suggests that the "unique internationalism" of the nineteenth century is not properly dated, and that the hallmark year of 1798 needs to be clarified, if not completely reassessed²⁵⁰.

One final note is in order. Several studies have suggested that the rising power of the Beys, and the interactions between the Syrian Greek Catholic community and the European merchants during this time period conveniently mirror developments among urban

²⁵⁰ What is interesting here in terms of historiography is that 1798 has been reassessed by numerous scholars of eighteenth century Egyptian and Ottoman history. However, until the histories of the nineteenth and twentieth century acknowledge these reassessments and incorporate them into their analyses, the full fruit of these valuable studies of the eighteenth century will not be realized. More, studies of nineteenth and twentieth centuries will continue to draw from distorted notions of historical background.

notables, and the growing ties between Christian minorities and European merchants in the Syrian provinces²⁵¹. It is argued here that this interpretation is not helpful. The Syrian example, in a very simplified form, is that local families and power groups were able to contest Ottoman central authority. Concomitantly, growing commercial relations between Christian groups and European merchants eventually contested economic and social balances of power between Muslims and Christians.

The Egyptian case is much different. The Mamluk power system which evolved in Ottoman Egypt does not compare with the situation of the ayan of greater Syria. True, in Egypt European merchant contacts with Christian minority groups were noticeable. However, the rising economic power of the Syrian Greek Catholics had more to do with Mamluk policy than ties with Europe. And while in Syria the conclusion is that indigenous elements were able to acquire increasing wealth and power, Raymond shows quite decisively that in Egypt, indigenous Egyptians were increasingly losing out to non-Egyptian elements. Instead, perhaps it is more useful to

²⁵¹ For example see Bittar, "Le Grec Catholiques"; Gabriel Piterberg, "The Formation of an Ottoman Egyptian Elite in the Eighteenth Century", *IJMES* 22 (1990): 275-289. For the arguments of decentralization in strictly Syria and European-Christian relationships see, for example, Bruce Master's excellent *The Emergence of European Economic Dominance in the Middle East*, New York: 1988; Abraham Marcus, *The Middle East in the Eve of Modernity*, New York: 1989; Harik Iliya, *Politics and Change in a Traditional Society; Lebanon, 1711-1845*, Princeton: 1968; Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, eds, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, New York: 1982; Karl Barbir, "From Pasha to Efendi: the Assimilation of Ottomans into Damascene Society, 1516-1783", *IJTS* 1 (Winter 1979-'80): 68-83; and Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi, eds, *Conversion and Continuity; Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, 8th-18th Centuries*, Toronto: 1990.

acknowledge that throughout the eighteenth century both greater Syria and Egypt witnessed lessened Ottoman central control. And each reacted not in concert but in turn.

David Kimche concludes his article on the European efforts to trade at Suez by stating:

"It was...the dreams, plans, and projects of the [European] merchants and travellers of the second half of the eighteenth century which first cleared away some of the cobwebs which had all but obliterated the Levant and the Red Sea region from Western eyes."²⁵²

In closing, this study argues that the significance of this episode is not merely, or even mainly, its influence on Europe. More, it contests the notion of a Middle East "obliterated" from European awareness and suggests that the "cobwebs", in fact, did not exist.

²⁵² David Kimche, "Opening of the Red Sea", p 69.

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