Economy and Trade / Important trading hubs

In the wake of rapid industrialisation and the expansion of international trade, many ports around the Mediterranean, the Middle East and Europe grew into bustling economic hubs. Due to the increasing transfer and exchange of commodities and the introduction of steamship services, the most important ones – whether for export, import or transit trade – underwent state-of-the art modernisation, generally supported by European investment and built by European firms. Ports had close strategic links with the main trading centres inland as well as across the seaways. Like the former, they were characterised by an ever-increasing multi-ethnic and multi-faith population. In many places, foreign minorities lived and worked peacefully with and alongside local residents, while at the same time preserving their own distinct culture, language and faith. Typically, specific communities specialised in specific aspects of the economy and maintained their own intra-regional or international networks.



Working Number: UA 060

Name: Shipping at Constantinople

Holding Museum: Sharjah Art Museum / Sharjah Museums Department

Date: 1910

Materials: Watercolour

Curator Justification: Istanbul’s location between Europe and Asia has always given it particular strategic and economic importance, especially as it lies on the only sea route that connects the Black Sea with the Mediterranean. By the early 20th century, it was the Ottoman world’s largest port city.



Working Number: GR 036

Name: Firman

Holding Museum: Benaki Museum

Date: Hegira 1234 / AD 1819

Materials: Paper and ink

Curator Justification: Many non-Muslim Ottomans – Greeks, Armenians and Jews among them – worked as translators and employees of European merchants active in Middle Eastern ports and cities. This firman with the tughra (imperial monogram) of Sultan Mahmud II dated August/September 1819 legislates for such employees in Smyrna.



Working Number: RO 020

Name: A market in Bucharest

Holding Museum: National Museum of Romanian History

Date: 1869

Materials: -

Curator Justification: This bustling market scene in Romania gives a good impression of traditional outdoor trading. Itinerant rural traders and peddlers offer their produce, poultry, animals and other wares from simple baskets, stalls or carts. Women played a crucial part in all aspects of trade, either at the forefront or behind the scenes.



Working Number:	UK 164
Name:	A view of London
Holding Museum:	Victoria and Albert Museum
Date:	1860-1870
Materials:	Albumen prints mounted on glass
Curator Justification:	In the 19th century, London became the largest port and city in the world, counting 6 million citizens from the United Kingdom, Europe and all over the world in its midst. Its port handled 8 million tons of goods in 1880, while its city exerted powerful, financial and political influence at home and abroad.