

Economy and Trade

The 19th century saw a crucial change in the economic relationships between the Arab and Ottoman world and Europe. In the wake of industrialisation, Western European states increasingly competed in their trade connections with the region to secure both vital raw materials and markets for their products. Meanwhile, the economies of countries in south-eastern Europe – either Ottoman provinces or under Ottoman suzerainty – were legally obliged to focus on providing the empire with products, mostly raw materials. Beyond the Mediterranean, France and the UK vied for access to and control of vital trade routes to India, both in the Red Sea and the Arab-Persian Gulf. From around the middle of the 19th century, the economic and therefore political European penetration of North Africa and the Middle East intensified. As early as 1838, in the Anglo-Ottoman Convention signed at Balta Liman, all Ottoman monopolies in foreign trade had been abolished, with the result that all commodities produced in the empire could now be exported. At the same time, British merchants were now allowed to settle and trade anywhere in the empire. In time, other European states obtained similar agreements from the Ottoman sultans. Subsequently, trade relations with Western Europe were characterised increasingly by particularly British, French and, later, German involvement in the economic activities of the region. Trade with south-eastern Europe meanwhile took on new forms in the wake of Greece, Serbia and later Romania declaring their independence. Attempts by several local rulers in the Southern Mediterranean to meet the challenges of European economic infiltration with reform soon led to increasing financial dependency on European powers. By the end of the 19th century, this provided the latter with a pretext to seize varying degrees of indirect or direct political control, particularly in Egypt but also in Algeria and later Tunis, which became French colonies. Meanwhile, in the Arab-Persian Gulf, the British went about destroying the traditional indigenous trading networks, keeping the French at bay and increasingly imposing their commercial and political will on local rulers. In conclusion, economic relations between Europe and the Arab and Ottoman world at large throughout the 19th century and beyond were characterised by Europe's growing commercial, financial and eventually political penetration.

More:

Commodities

Trading routes

Important trading hubs

Financing trade



Panoramic view of the Isthmus of the Suez, tracing the canal between the two seas

1855

National Library of France
Paris, France

Louis Maurice Adolphe Linant de Bellefonds



View of Constantinople

1851

Benaki Museum
Athens, Greece
Constantinos P. Kaldis
Engraving on paper



Suq al-Hamidiyya, Damascus

Covered market constructed in the shape of an arcade turning it to the worldwide longest arcade of the fin de siècle

1910

Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum, State Museums
Berlin, Germany



Maria Theresa Dollar

Hegira 13th century / AD 19th century

Sharjah Heritage Museum/ Sharjah Museums Department
Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (Sharjah)

Unknown

Silver