Labour Migration and Economic Conditions in Nineteenth-Century Anatolia

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The economic and social history of Anatolia in the nineteenth century, or indeed in any other part of the Ottoman period, remains largely unwritten, despite the existence of a growing number of interesting articles and monographs which throw light on particular aspects of it. Indeed the depth of our ignorance is such that it is not so much a matter of questions remaining unanswered, as of the questions themselves still being unformulated. One issue that one would have thought would have been the subject of vigorous debate is the extent to which economic conditions in the rural areas and small towns of central and eastern Anatolia contributed to the great outburst of intercommunal conflict in 1894–95 known as the Armenian Massacres. In fact writing on the massacres has focused almost entirely on the political and moral aspects of what occurred, even though the most accessible primary source, the British government’s Blue Books, are studded with suggestive references to underlying economic problems in the districts where trouble occurred.

For most of Anatolia except for its western fringes the economic and political changes of the mid- and late nineteenth century – the growing involvement of the Ottoman Empire with the emergent world economy and the increased centralization of government – seem to have brought harm rather than benefits. And especially was this so in eastern Anatolia which, for the purposes of this article is defined as the six so-called ‘Armenian’ vilâyets of the 1890s (Sivas, Mamuretülaziz, Erzurum, Bitlis, Diyarbekir and Van), together with the northern portion of Aleppo and the vilâyet of Trabzon which stretched along the eastern half of the southern shore of the Black Sea. Those parts of this region which did have access to outside markets, that is the districts along the Black Sea coast, had little to export, whilst the vast land-locked interior which was almost without roads, let alone railways, lacked the means to export the agricultural and mineral goods it was capable of producing in large quantities. Imported manufactures, on the other hand, which had a more favourable value to weight ratio, were able to penetrate in significant quantities. The result was a persistently adverse balance of trade,
MAP
ANATOLIAN VILÃYETS, 1890 (AFTER CUINET)

Area defined as "eastern Anatolia" for the purposes of the article
LABOUR MIGRATION IN 19th CENTURY ANATOLIA

even when invisibles (such as the earnings of the transit trade from Persia) are taken into account. Even more serious was the heavy burden of taxation and the drain of tax revenue year after year to Istanbul, unbalanced by any compensating government expenditure (other than on administration), save here and there at a few military centres such as Erzurum. The result was a chronically, and progressively more deeply, depressed regional economy, in which most, if not quite all, forms of economic activity other than subsistence agriculture were constricted by lack of markets and continuous deflation. Eastern Anatolia was thus unable to provide an adequate livelihood for its steadily increasing numbers, especially in such pockets of dense population as the Black Sea littoral and the plains around Harput and Muş, giving rise to desperate impoverishment and forcing those who could to seek work elsewhere.4

That this situation was already in the process of development by the 1860s is clear from the very detailed British consular reports of that decade. At that stage, however, things were not nearly as bad as they were to become by the later 1880s and early 1890s. Various factors contributed to the worsening of an already bad situation. These included the effects of the war of 1877–78 and the famine of 1879–80 which followed it, and viciously deflationary changes to the currency imposed by the central government (also in 1879–80) without any heed for their social consequences. They also included a heavy fall in the prices of products that could be got to market in response to changes taking place in the wider international economy. Also there was an increased tax burden, and a substantial reduction in the value of remittances received from those who found employment outside the region. A full analysis of the east Anatolian economy in the later nineteenth century is, however, beyond the scope of a single essay. In the present piece it is therefore intended to concentrate upon the last of these factors, which preliminary indications suggest was one of the most important variables determining the economic (and social) fortunes of the region.

Certainly there was no doubt in the minds of the British consular representatives in the East of the significance of the money sent or brought home by the tens of thousands of labourers and artisans who went to find work elsewhere. Repeatedly in their reports they stressed its significance in introducing some liquidity into a region that was constantly being drained of specie by a chronically unfavourable balance of payments. Without it, they reported, peasant families would be even less able to meet their fiscal obligations than they were already, purchasing power for goods and services of whatever nature would be yet further reduced, and the means would cease to be available to pay for even the very modest quantity of goods which the eastern provinces imported from outside.5 It is the argument of what follows that in the 1860s out-migration and remittances were on a very
large scale, large enough to bring considerable relief to the regional economy. However in the following decades both contracted sharply, and it will be suggested that the scale of the contraction was large enough on its own considerably to exacerbate the parlous economic situation which had come to prevail in the East (and indeed probably in most of Anatolia) c.1890, and which provided the context in which the Armenian massacres occurred. It seems probable that deteriorating economic conditions lay behind the apparently increasingly predatory behaviour of the nomadic and semi-nomadic Kurds towards the settled population (especially its Christian elements), about which so many complaints reached the ears of the British consuls. Even more certainly the desperate poverty of the mass of the sedentary population of whatever religion produced an increasingly powerful resentment against those who controlled the retail trade and local money lending, almost all of whom were Armenian Christians – a feeling which in turn, whether spontaneously or not, eventually extended to the Armenian community as a whole.

Migration out of eastern Anatolia in search of better opportunities elsewhere was nothing new in the period with which we are concerned. For those living along the Black Sea coast, or having relatively easy access to it, Istanbul must always have been the main destination and certainly there were both Greeks and Armenians from Trabzon in the capital as early as 1540. However for those living further south, in the deep interior, reaching the Ottoman capital involved an intimidatingly long and difficult overland journey. It is therefore probable that before the second quarter of the nineteenth century Diyarbekir, and above all Aleppo, beckoned much more strongly. South eastern Anatolia, as far off as Erzurum and Van, was one of the main areas upon which the latter drew to maintain and increase its population, and not only Armenian and Turkish speaking Muslim villagers, but also Kurdish and Turcoman tribesmen, were to be found there in considerable numbers throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Of one particular group of seventy seven Armenians from Sasun, the mid seventeenth century sources cited by Bruce Masters specifically record that they had left their villages because the land there could no longer support them.

In the mid, and even the later, nineteenth century both Diyarbekir and Aleppo still attracted migrants from the interior regions of eastern Anatolia. In 1880 Nestorians from the region south east of Lake Van were reported as customarily going to both places for employment on a seasonal basis, and in the previous October a petition from the Gregorian Armenian community of Aleppo to the British ambassador in Istanbul bore 1250 ‘signatures’ of people who claimed to be natives of ‘Saroun’ (= Sasun?), Muş, Van, Arapkir and elsewhere. Some years later, moreover, in 1896 many Armenian Christians in the villages near Van itself were in great distress because they
had been unable to go to work in Diyarbekîr as usual. However even if the
damage done to the textile industries of these two cities by western import
competition has apparently been much exaggerated, changing patterns of
trade must have greatly reduced the employment opportunities they could
offer compared to earlier times, and thus their relative attractiveness to
migrants.

We shall see that from the 1860s onwards a number of quite new
destinations for migrant labour were beginning to open up. All the same,
however, there is no doubt that when, around or perhaps rather before the
middle of the nineteenth century, the scale of the outward migration from
the East increased very substantially, it came to be heavily concentrated on
Istanbul. The latter had long been by far the largest urban centre in the
Ottoman world, but in the nineteenth century a variety of factors combined
to enhance its relative importance. In particular there was the growing
centralization of political authority there from Mahmut II’s reign onwards;
the expansion in the size of the central bureaucracy as the reform movement
got underway; and the expenditure in the capital of funds derived from
foreign borrowing and of the increased tax revenues collected in the
provinces that resulted from these developments. All this gave a great boost
to the economy of a city whose principal raison d’être was as a seat of
government, and where an extraordinarily high proportion of the population
derived its livelihood directly or indirectly from the government. The huge
influx of foreign soldiers, sailors and their hangers-on in the Crimean War
of the mid-1850s also temporarily created boom conditions with a
correspondingly increased demand for labour, as did the redevelopment of
large parts of the city in the wake of the enormously destructive fires of
1865 in Stambul and 1870 in Pera. In addition the early 1870s, especially
1871–73, saw a tremendous surge of business confidence in the capital, in
part fuelled by the government’s foreign borrowing, with numerous new
banks and other enterprises, many with western participation, being set on
foot. Despite rather poor trading conditions a great deal of money was being
made out of financial dealings with the Porte, and many large residential
and commercial building projects were being undertaken, especially in and
around Pera.

The population of the city was clearly growing strongly, especially
during the mid-nineteenth century decades, rising from around 400,000 in
the 1840s to over 800,000 in the 1880s, although interpretation of the
published data to arrive at more precise figures is fraught with difficulties.
Given the unsatisfactory state of public health, and the low expectation of
life that accompanied it, this growth could only have come from
immigration. Undoubtedly immigrants to Istanbul came from all parts of the
Empire, and indeed at certain periods from outside it as well, but at least by
the period with which this article is concerned two particular regions, which
shared a number of the same geographical, economic and social
characteristics, seem to have contributed a disproportionately large number.
One of these was the East and South East of Anatolia, and the other was
Rumelia, especially western Rumelia, that is the provinces of Manastir,
Yanya and Işkodra. There were, of course, a variety of other areas in the
Ottoman world from which there was significant rural-urban migration.
However for most of them there was a sufficiently attractive and accessible
‘local’ metropolis which was able to absorb a majority of those who had to,
or wished to, leave their villages. Thus from the Hauran such people went
mainly to Damascus; from Mount Lebanon they went to Beirut; and from
the Aegean Islands and from south western and western Anatolia, from at
least as far inland as Konya, to Izmir. A relatively small proportion of them,
therefore, ended up in the capital.

Of the two areas from which Istanbul drew most heavily for its
immigrants, Rumelia was clearly both much closer and had a larger
population. However, the inhabitants of the Balkans had a much wider
choice of emigration opportunities than did those from the East. The
prosperous port city of Salonica was reasonably accessible, and from it a
short sea journey would take them not only to Istanbul but also the whole
Marmara region including Bursa, as well as to İzmir and the districts along
the coast and inland from it where export orientated commercial agriculture
was developing rapidly by the 1860s. They could also go north to Serbia and
Rumania. They were thus less heavily dependent on the capital as an outlet
than the Easterners came to be.

The existence in Istanbul by the 1860s and later of a disproportionately
large number of immigrants from the geographically very distant eastern
Anatolia was remarked upon by numerous contemporaries. It has also
attracted the attention of a number of historians, as has the tendency for
particular types of employment to be dominated by men from particular
localities. Thus at least until 1896 the famous hamals tended to be
Armenians from the Van region, kayıkçis were mostly Greeks and Lazes
from the Black Sea coast, cooks and watchmen came from Sivas, whilst
Georgian speaking Muslims from near the Russian border were frequently
found as attendants in the hamams and there was even supposed to be a
village which supplied the best coffee-makers. In addition large numbers of
Christians, Greek and Armenian, found employment in construction, the
workshops of the traditional manufacturing sector, in building and in petty
huckstering and retailing.

What made possible, or at least facilitated, this flow of population from
the Far East of Anatolia to Istanbul was the enormous expansion of shipping
services along the Black Sea coast, from the mid 1830s onwards
increasingly in the form of steamers. According to figures collected by the British consul, the volume of shipping clearing the port of Trabzon rose from an average of 15,225 tons a year in the early 1830s to 61,664 tons a year twenty years later, 177,861 tons a year in the early 1870s and 483,732 tons a year in the early 1890s. By 1882 the steamships of five different companies called weekly at Trabzon, and steamship clearances which had already approached 300 a year before the end of the 1860s were nearly 400 yearly. Between 1888 and 1891 clearances were well over 500 a year! Samsun was also extremely well served, whilst by 1870 even Giresun had four steamers a week in each direction and Ordu three. Certainly all these were primarily freight carrying vessels but, in addition to a limited number of cabin passengers carried in some comfort, most of them also took much larger numbers (up to several hundred per voyage) who endured spartan conditions huddled on the decks. With so many sailings, those arriving at the ports would not have had to wait any length of time for a steamer, and once on board, depending on the schedule of the particular ship, would have been in Istanbul after only a few more days.

As for the cost, the price of a deck passage must surely have come down substantially between the 1830s and about 1850, but thereafter it fluctuated considerably in response to the degree of competition prevailing between shipping companies. In the late 1860s a cartel formed by the Austrian, Turkish, French and Russian operators succeeded in keeping rates relatively high, a single ticket from Trabzon to Istanbul costing the equivalent of LT 1.21 per head in 1867. In the early 1880s LT 1.1 seems to have been the norm, but in 1884 in response to increased competition from British ships it fell to only half that, whilst in 1894 there was a sharp reduction from a high LT 1.375 to less than LT 1. The cost of travelling from Samsun does not emerge from the Consular Reports but must have been lower. Even the cheapest of those fares were not insignificant when they are compared with the net incomes of peasant farmers or wage earners in the East, but they were easily within the ability of a family to save or borrow in order to send one of its members off to the capital.

Once travel by sea from the Black Sea ports to Istanbul became readily and cheaply available, migration thither from the interior districts of eastern Anatolia became a great deal easier. Instead of a walk of up to 2,000 km. or more over paths and rough tracks, which would have taken a minimum of seven or eight weeks, the journey could be made in less than half the time. From most of the area that was to become the vilayets of Sivas, Mamuretülaziz, and even from Diyarbekir, the most accessible port was Samsun, whereas from Erzurum, Muş, Bitlis and Van, Trabzon was nearer. Loaded pack animals travelling as part of a caravan could cover the distance from Bitlis and Van to Erzurum in nine and twelve days respectively in the
early 1890s, whilst from Erzurum to Trabzon (327 km) took a further ten days, although the second half of the journey would have been slower before the opening of a proper road some twenty years before. A few years earlier the completion of another road from Harput to Sivas was said to have reduced the journey time from the first named to Samsun from twenty to thirteen days. Small groups of men on foot carrying little save food for their journey could presumably have travelled more quickly. All told, therefore, the entire journey from (say) Van to the capital (over 750 km. by land and a further 1,240 km. by sea) might take as little as three weeks, whilst from Erzurum it could be done in two or even less.

The increased employment opportunities in Istanbul, and the much reduced journey times from eastern Anatolia resulting from the development of regular steamer services along the Black Sea coast, together seem to have turned what had been a regular but fairly small movement of labour into a substantial torrent. It also made feasible, possibly for the first time, migration of labour not only on a permanent or semi-permanent basis, but also on a seasonal one. It became practicable for men to spend the autumn and winter months earning a wage in Istanbul, and the spring and summer working on a family holding located along the upper Euphrates or in the vicinity of Lake Van. Others apparently went in the spring to work in the market gardens and farms in the countryside surrounding the city and returned home in the autumn. Amongst those actually in Istanbul long-stay migrants must have far outnumbered seasonal workers, but in any particular year a majority, and sometimes a very large majority, of those travelling were seasonal workers. Variations in the demand for labour in the capital, as one would expect, seem to have affected seasonal (and therefore usually casual) workers more acutely than those with regular employment, so that the numbers of men travelling on a seasonal basis fluctuated more violently than the comings and goings of long-stay workers.

As for those who left the region for longer periods, probably few if any departed intending to stay away permanently, although the high death rate in the unhealthy city environment must have ensured that significant proportion never returned for that reason alone. Some, for whatever reason, remained in Istanbul indefinitely but it seems to be the case that eight to ten years represented a typical period of residence for a long-term migrant. Those who survived long enough seem to have gone back to their home villages very occasionally for long visits, and eventually to have returned there for good, the more fortunate and successful with sufficient money saved to buy some land. European observers repeatedly commented on these patterns of behaviour and the employment records of manual staff working for the Imperial Ottoman Bank bear them out, at least in part. Whether the families these long-stay migrants left behind were normally
their own wives and children, or their parents and siblings, is a question, and there may have been differences in this respect between the practice in different parts of the region and between different communities. Thus, for the Muslims of Rize, McCarthy found no evidence in the demographic record that those leaving had wives in their villages to whom they periodically returned, whilst the British consul at Erzurum remarked that emigration of young men from Harput to Istanbul and elsewhere led to the avoidance of early and imprudent marriages. On the other hand, according to Karpat, *gurbetçis* [temporary migrants] from the Black Sea coast were usually married, and Lynch noted that those going from Van usually left brides behind.25 Whether there was any significant movement of females to match that of males seems extremely doubtful, although when movement from eastern Anatolia to the capital was halted by the government in the autumn of 1894 some of those prevented from travelling were said to have been the wives of men working in Istanbul who had been intending to join their husbands.26

From the economic point of view the important thing about these migratory movements, at least as far as the East was concerned, was that excess labour was siphoned out of the region, and purchasing power was transmitted back from Istanbul and the other places where the out-migrants found employment. Nevertheless, how large a proportion of the population of the East travelled outside the region in search of work at some time in their lives, and what proportion might have been absent at any one time, it is impossible to know. In any event the sources make it quite clear that migrant labour did not derive in equal proportions from all areas and all communities. Some sent a much higher percentage of their young men than did others, either because a local tradition of migration had become established at some stage or because of a particularly acute mismatch between population and the locally available resources, as seems to have been the case in the *cazas* of Egin and Arapkir (Mamuretülaziz), and some of the districts south of Lake Van. Apart from the districts just mentioned others which seem to have provided particularly large numbers of emigrants were the fertile but densely populated plains of Harput and Muş, and the narrow coastal strip between the Black Sea and the mountains which lay along its southern shore. Also, whilst there is no question that both Christians and Muslims went to Istanbul and elsewhere in search of work, the number of the former who did so, if not absolutely greater was certainly greater in relation to their total numbers, if only because conscription took off many young Muslims who might otherwise have become migrant workers. There was therefore much variation across the region. However in some limited districts the proportion of the entire adult male population away at any particular point in time might be very high indeed, approaching
or even exceeding the one quarter to one third figure suggested for some
districts of Manastir sancak in Rumelia in 1869. Thus slightly earlier in the
century as many as ten per cent of the male population of some Muslim
villages in the Rize area left in only two years as a combined result of
migration and conscription, whilst the well informed British consul
Palgrave thought (c. 1870) that emigration was reducing ‘the efficient’, that
is able-bodied, male population of Van, Kayseri and other districts by five
or six per cent a year. In 1880 it could be said of Egin and Arapkir that there
was hardly a family not represented by at least one member in the capital
and, doubtless with some exaggeration, that few save women, children and
old men were to be met with in the streets in either place. According to
Cuinet, writing in 1890, 12,000–15,000 of the 131,400 Armenians of both
sexes registered as living in the vilâyet of Bitlis (that is the equivalent to
one-fifth or one quarter of the males), were at that time actually in Istanbul
or elsewhere. And from one single Christian village in the plain of Muş in
1896 no fewer than a hundred men had gone to Istanbul leaving their
women and children behind.27

As for the absolute numbers travelling from the East to Istanbul in
search of work, in 1867 Palgrave reckoned that departures from Trabzon by
sea for the capital were 30,000 to 35,000 yearly and from Samsun a further
20,000, ‘most of them workers, porters and the like ... in search of
employment’. And he added that the numbers had been running at this level
for several years past, and had been even higher at the time of the Crimean
War. This author has found no comparable estimate for any earlier year, but
the number of passengers leaving Trabzon in 1862 just on British ships,
which were neither as numerous nor as regular as French, Austrian, Russian
or Ottoman ones, are certainly compatible with Palgrave’s global figure for
1867, and indeed with an even higher one, 40,000 or more.28 However,
nor in the 1860s nor later were Trabzon and Samsun the only ports
sending migrant workers to Istanbul. Rize, at this particular time, may have
been despatching them eastwards to Transcaucasia rather than westwards,
and smaller ports such as Ünye and Tirebolu probably provided relatively
few.29 On the other hand we have noticed above that by 1870 numerous
steamers called at Ordu, and especially at Giresun, and both were certainly
the embarkation point for considerable numbers. Almost nothing emerges
about how many used the former, but the latter was linked by a track of sorts
(and later a road) to the inland district of Şebinkarahisar whose inhabitants
had a notoriously high propensity to seek work elsewhere. In 1879, when
the numbers leaving the other Black Sea ports were a very great deal lower
than they had been twelve years earlier, 6,553 passengers left Giresun by
steamer alone, most of them, although not all, bound for Istanbul.30
Altogether these other ports must therefore have added substantially to the
combined total of 50,000–55,000 which, according to Palgrave, left Trabzon and Samsun for the capital, and probably we should be justified in adding as many as 20,000 more on account of them. We arrive, therefore, at a grand total of 70,000–75,000 annually travelling by sea to Istanbul from eastern Anatolia in 1867 and for some years previously.

Of course the accuracy of the passenger figures just cited, and of the much more detailed ones available for later years,31 is a question. However we may note that one observer (in 1870) believed that many more people travelled on the Black Sea ships than actually paid for tickets.32 The figures provided by the shipping companies to the British and French consuls, and from which they compiled their statistics, are therefore likely to have been rather, and perhaps substantially, below the true totals. Against this must be set the fact that inevitably at least some passengers were travelling for purposes other than work (for instance the haj), and that others did not go the whole way to Istanbul but disembarked at intermediate ports. However, one particular group who are irrelevant for our purposes, and whose inclusion would have artificially inflated the figures for the movement of labour, that is Ottoman soldiers being transferred to and from the eastern garrisons, are invariably mentioned separately in the sources and have been eliminated. The 1867 estimate of 70,000–75,000 travelling westwards from the Black sea ports in search of employment is thus likely to be somewhere near the truth.

Even this figure, however, does not provide a full account of labour migration from the East in the direction of Istanbul because of the certainty that some at least continued to make their way there the entire distance on foot. Yet it seems reasonable to believe that by the start of the last third of the nineteenth century it was relatively few. Certainly it cost less in money terms: c.1880 it may have been possible to get all the way to or from the East on foot spending only some Ps 40–45 (LT 0.4 – LT 0.45) for food and lodging in each direction, when the steamer ticket from Trabzon alone cost Ps 110 (LT 1.1).33 But the longer time required meant a loss of earnings, so that in the end it was not necessarily really cheaper by a very large margin, and it may have been significantly more dangerous. It is true that two of the three Kurdish labourers employed by Cyrus Hamlin at the time of the building of Robert College (1869–71) returned to their homes 'beyond the Euphrates' on foot. But the detail in which Hamlin recounted their story suggests that he thought it unusual, and when Captain Burnaby discussed his forthcoming journey from Istanbul to Van with an Armenian priest in 1876, he was told that 'hardly anyone' went the whole distance by land and that he would do better to take the ship to Trabzon. Certainly a quarter of a century later, when the government expelled many Armenian workers from Istanbul in 1896, European observers took it for granted that they were
bundled onto shipboard for their return to the East rather than despatched along the roads.34

Finally, if we are to try to assess the economic importance to the Anatolian East of the out-migration of labour, we must also try to bring destinations other than Istanbul and its environs into the equation. As noted above, a number of new opportunities were becoming available by the 1860s. There were, for instance, a number of quite separate areas elsewhere in Anatolia where the commercial farming of export crops required an increasing number of labourers, especially at peak seasons. One of these was the Izmir region, but most authorities agreed that in this case the main sources of migrant labour were the Aegean islands and the nearby regions in the direction of the Anatolian plateau. Some Easterners probably made their way there, although I have found no references to them having done so which suggests that their numbers were not large. Another area of expanding commercial agriculture was around Bursa, and there, according to the British consul Sandison, Kurds and Lazes (the former from along the Euphrates, the latter from ‘beyond Trebizond’) already comprised the bulk of the migrant labour force before the end of the 1850s. Their numbers must have become quite considerable with the passage of time, but the vast majority surely travelled via the Black Sea ports and Istanbul and will thus have already been counted. On the other hand those who went to the third area of commercial crop production, the Çukurova, will equally certainly have gone direct by land so that they at least must be added to the total already arrived at. However the main development of the Çukurova came later in the century, and even in the later 1860s the number of workers able to find employment in the region is likely to have been quite small.35

Another new destination of the 1860s was Egypt, where the expansion of cotton growing in the Nile Delta from the time of the American Civil War onwards pulled in workers both from Upper Egypt and from countries to the North East. It is unclear how many went there from the area with which we are concerned, but some certainly did.36 A final set of new possibilities was created by the development of Russia’s Transcaucasian provinces, especially by the construction of railways and the growth of towns there. Some of the movement of Ottoman Christians across the border was inspired by religious or political motives. Indeed in the aftermath of the 1877–78 war, and again as inter-communal tensions worsened in the mid-1890s, most of it may have been in response to such factors. However earlier on economic motives seem to have predominated. Greek villagers from around Gümüşhane are described as having customarily gone to Russia for seasonal work each spring, ‘their district offering but few agricultural resources’. However, it was not only Christians who went to seek employment in Transcaucasia, for in 1872 the British vice-consul at
Trabzon noted that both Christians and Muslims were going there to work at railway building, and on other enterprises. For 1867 Palgrave estimated the number of those going from Trabzon to Russia via Batum and Poti at 24,000 and others must certainly be added for Rize, and perhaps for some of the more westerly ports as well. If we make some allowance for these, and for the fact that some Ottomans also reached Transcaucasia across the land frontier, a minimum figure of 30,000 travelling to Russia in 1867 seems likely.\(^{37}\) In all, therefore, in that a year at least 100,000 people went from the East either to Istanbul or to Russia to find work. To this something more must be added for those who went south-westwards by land to the Çukurova and to Aleppo, as well as for those who reached Egypt. The numbers were unquestionably far smaller, but if we add a further 15,000 to account both for them we shall surely not be exaggerating. Altogether, therefore, out-migration in 1867 cannot (on the basis of Palgrave’s figures) have been less than 110,000–120,000, and might have been significantly more. However how much of this was permanent or semi-permanent migration, and how much merely seasonal, is an issue to which we must now turn.

Unfortunately there is no published information available on the number of those of East Anatolian origin living in Istanbul, Aleppo, Transcaucasia or elsewhere. In the case of Istanbul, however, there are some population data which provide us with at least some help, although we may remember the comment of Ahmet Vefik in 1870 that ‘the industrial population of [the] capital is so floating and variable as to make it most difficult for anyone to lay down its numbers’.\(^{38}\) According to the censuses of 1844 and 1857 the number of bekârs, or temporarily resident bachelors, living in the city, increased from 75,748 at the former date to 94,119 at the latter. This last figure represented 39.5 per cent of the recorded male population of the city, and although large is very likely to have been an underestimate. In any event it must have increased substantially over the next decade since the generation or so after the Crimean War saw a huge growth of Istanbul’s total population, much or most of it deriving from the arrival of temporary migrants from the provinces.\(^{39}\) Any 1867 figure for the successors of those counted as bekârs in the two censuses just cited can only be guesswork but it would surely have been at least 120,000, even without making any allowance for under-enumeration. The true number, even excluding seasonal workers who are clearly not included in the various counts of the city’s population, must have been significantly higher. Of course not all of them came from the East of Anatolia for we have seen that there was a substantial inflow to the capital from other areas, but there is every reason to think (for reasons indicated elsewhere)\(^{40}\) that Easterners were by far the largest single group. It should also be remembered that not all of those who
took ship from the Black Sea ports actually found work in Istanbul itself, and that a proportion went on to the developing villages along the Bosphorus not then counted as part of the city, into the surrounding countryside, or to Tekirdağ, Ismit and (as we have already noted) Bursa. Some, if not very many, may even have gone as far as the hinterland of İzmir. For a total of all those from the East in Istanbul and the Marmara region as a whole, living there on a semi-permanent basis but retaining contact with their home villages, 100,000 is probably a very conservative estimate.

However, unless the number was far higher, which does not really seem likely, it follows that in a year like 1867 when perhaps as many as 75,000 people travelled to Istanbul by sea from the Eastern Black Sea ports to find work, the great majority of those making the journey must have been short stay or seasonal migrants. It is simply not possible that the comings and goings of a population of around 100,000 long-stay migrants, even if it was growing very fast, could have accounted for more than a small part of this movement. How many arrivals per annum would have been required to ‘support’ the long-stay colony in Istanbul and the Marmara region obviously depends on one’s assumptions about the size of that colony, its rate of growth, prevailing mortality rates and the average length of the period spent away from the East. The number, however, is unlikely much to have exceeded 20,000. It therefore follows that of the 70,000–75,000 people who were arriving annually from the East in the mid 1860s somewhere between 50,000 and 60,000 were seasonal workers who would return again after only a few months.

As for the number of East Anatolians in Transcaucasia, all we have to guide us is our estimate of at least 30,000 departures a year based on Palgrave’s 1867 estimate for Trabzon alone. The sources also leave the impression that the average length of stay was much shorter than in Istanbul. Even so, however, the number of those there at any one time in the late 1860s cannot have been less than 30,000–35,000. In fact it may well have been nearer 40,000.

The main reason why workers were attracted to Istanbul from other regions of the Empire was first and foremost because the level of money wages was higher there. A good deal of scattered information is available on wages in the late Ottoman period, but, although it has not yet been subjected to analysis in a way which is helpful in the present context, there is no doubt about the existence of wide regional disparities. Thus, for the years immediately on either side of 1870, daily rates in the capital for ordinary unskilled labour seem on average to have been at least one third higher than those prevailing at Trabzon. British consular officials recorded that such people could earn from Ps 6 to Ps 9 and Ps 10 a day in Istanbul, according
to whether they were rated as third, second or first class labourers, compared to a maximum of Ps 5–6 in the Black Sea port. For skilled or semi-skilled building workers such as masons, carpenters and painters the differentials were greater still. However both wages and prices at Trabzon and elsewhere on the Black Sea coast were themselves higher than those prevailing in the interior regions of the East, again by as much as a third according to consul Palgrave. This is an assessment which is in part confirmed by reports that in 1866 gangs of workmen in the Ergani mines were paid from Ps 3 to Ps 5 a day, whilst ‘ordinary workmen’ in Diyarbekir received Ps 4 a day; that in 1879 (by which time there had been some upward movement because of the Russo-Turkish war) mining labourers in Konya vilâyet received Ps 5 a day; and by information from Kayseri in 1880 that the unskilled rate was Ps 4–5 per day.42

The difference between the level of wages in Istanbul and those regions in which so many of the migrant workers had their homes was thus considerably more than one third, perhaps as much as double, whilst it is likely that work was more continuously available in the capital so that actual earnings would have been larger by an even wider margin. Of course the cost of living was higher in the capital, but the migrant labourers lived lives of such intense frugality, living in communal lodgings and eating the cheapest of foods, that it does not seem likely that this factor was sufficient to offset the higher money wages. In any event, the other reason which drove labourers from the East to seek work outside the region was not so much that wages were so low within it but that for most of them paid work was simply not available at any wage, least of all during the winter months. In the villages there were few opportunities, whilst in many of the towns much of what work there was seems to have been taken up by recently arrived immigrant groups from Russia who were flooding into the Empire in the 1860s and later, many of whom were ‘settled’ or, as it often amounted to, left to survive as best they could, in eastern Anatolia. Most of the hamals in Trabzon in the late 1860s and early 1870s, for instance, were Circassians and Nogay Tartars.43 It was this absolute shortage of employment in the East which explains the continuance of an outward movement to places where the wage differential was very much less marked than in the case of Istanbul, or indeed hardly existed at all. Thus throughout the early 1870s daily wage rates at Aleppo were no higher than they were at Trabzon, that is a maximum of Ps 6, whilst in the Çukurova they were usually less and in some years much less, as the still small and inelastic market for labour was repeatedly swamped by more people seeking seasonal work than could be employed at the wages usually prevailing.44

All the contemporary foreign observers who commented on the phenomenon of migrant labour agreed that those who left the East to find
work elsewhere sent back or took back to their home villages a considerable part of what they earned. The money saved was either hoarded until required, or was lent out in diminutive loans at high rates of interest but doubtless often on very dubious security. Much of it was in due course literally carried back to the East by men returning temporarily or permanently to their villages. Hamlin’s Kurds, dressed as beggars so as to avoid unwelcome attention, wore concealed leather girdles in which to hide the gold coins they were taking home. But it also seems that long-stay workers remitted their savings indirectly, between their home villages. The more successful and affluent may have used the sarrafs to do this but probably most entrusted their money to someone they thought they could trust who was travelling. Thus in December 1894, 15 Armenians from the Dersim who were working in Aleppo between them gave LT 90 (an average of LT 6 each) to a young man who was accompanying a trading caravan returning to their home district, only to have it stolen by one of the muleteers. The probability that men journeying back to eastern Anatolia were carrying money doubtless explains many of the often murderous assaults on humble people using the roads in that region, which became especially numerous in periods when law and order were poorly maintained such as the few years after 1878 and again towards the middle of the 1890s. The seven Armenian labourers of Toprakkale killed by a band of Kurds in June 1895, soon after they had crossed the frontier from Russia where they had been working, provide one example among many from that period.35

Without any direct evidence it is difficult to know how much the average migrant worker sent or took home. However, in the case of those in Istanbul, unskilled casual labourers earning the rate ascribed to those of the first class, that is Ps 10 per day, and working for 250 days a year,46 would have earned a total of Ps 2,500, that is LT 25 a year. This is reasonably well in line with the estimate of the British consul in Manastir that migrant workers from his district earned an average of LS 12/LT 13.2 during the six summer months when days were longer and working would have been more continuous than during the winter. No doubt some of the long-stay migrants, such as those employed as field labourers on farms in the countryside, did not earn as much as Ps 2,500 a year – around Bursa in 1860 ordinary field labourers earned Ps 8 to Ps 10 a day in summer, but only half that rate in winter. However, many certainly earned considerably more. On the one hand they included a significant number who already possessed or came to acquire some skills, particularly in the building trades as carpenters, bricklayers, masons and so on,47 even the lowest class of whom earned Ps 15 a day according to a British consular report of 1872. Hamals, of whom there were many thousands, were paid by the job rather than the day, and were supposed to do substantially better than ordinary labourers, as also
were kayıkcıs who were likewise very numerous. On the other hand it also seems reasonable to assume that many, although obviously not all, of those engaged in craft and retailing activities, made more than manual labourers. As for those few who somehow secured regular employment with a foreign firm, they might be paid up to twice as much as a casual labourer could expect to earn, even in the absence of any particular skills. Thus the Armenian hommes de peine, most of them from the province of Sivas, employed by the Imperial Ottoman Bank at its siège central in Galata, normally started at either LT 36 or LT 48 a year, on top of which they received an annual bonus of LT 3 or more every 31 December, and wage increases every few years. To assume average gross earnings of LT 10.5 in six months for seasonal workers (more of whom in the case of Istanbul came for the winter than for the summer) seems reasonable, but LT 25 in a full year for long-stay migrants at a time when employment was abundant is clearly too low. Somewhat more, possibly LT 27.50 will therefore be a better basis for our calculations. Bearing in mind that those working in Istanbul were exempted from taxes which had to be paid even by extremely poor people in the provinces, and the extreme frugality of the migrant worker living away from his family, it seems reasonable to suppose that one third (more or less) of these gross earnings could be saved for remission to the East. It follows, therefore, that on average those away from home for only short periods, that is seasonal workers, took back about LT 3.5 a year per head, whilst long-stay workers were able to remit LT 9 a year each. If anything these estimations probably err on the side of caution.

Those working in Transcaucasia probably made slightly less than those who went to Istanbul. An estimate deriving from 1880 suggests that the 4500 or so Nestorians from the Urmia region of Persia who went to Russia to work as day labourers or artizans in Tiflis and the Caucasus earned around LS 100,000 a year, or just over LS 22/LT 24.2 per head. Wage levels in Transcaucasia were probably somewhat higher in 1880 than they had been ten or twelve years before, so this information suggests that average remittances by those going to Russia would have been less, perhaps by ten per cent, than the level we have just suggested for Istanbul. Another estimate, again for rather later on, was that the 60,000 seasonal workers from Azerbaijan who crossed into Russia every year c.1900 took home 30 Rubles a head, the equivalent of LS 3.16 or LT 3.48 each.

We can now proceed to making rough estimates for the total amounts taken or sent back to eastern Anatolia by those working outside the region. As may be seen in Table 1, in the case of Istanbul and nearby places, on the basis of a long-stay colony of 100,000 remitting an average of LT 9 per annum each and 55,000 seasonal workers taking back LT 3.5 each, we arrive at a total of LT 900,000 + LT 192,500 = (in round figures) LT 1.11
### TABLE 1
**ESTIMATES OF REMITTANCES TO EASTERN ANATOLIA BY MIGRANT WORKERS**

#### (1) c.1867

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of workers</th>
<th>Remittances per head</th>
<th>Total remittances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Istanbul and Marmara region</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-stay workers</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>LT 9</td>
<td>LT 900,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seasonal workers</td>
<td>55,000</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>192,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transcaucasia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-stay workers</td>
<td>22,500</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>182,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seasonal workers</td>
<td>12,500</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>39,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other places</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Çukurova, Aleppo, Egypt etc.</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>LT 1,414,125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### (2) Early 1890s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of workers</th>
<th>Remittances per head</th>
<th>Total remittances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Istanbul and Marmara region</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-stay workers</td>
<td>67,000</td>
<td>LT 6.75</td>
<td>LT 452,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seasonal workers</td>
<td>18,000</td>
<td>2.625</td>
<td>47,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transcaucasia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-stay workers</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>(110,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seasonal workers</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>(</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other places</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Çukurova, Aleppo, Egypt etc.</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States of America</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>88,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>LT 797,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** See text of article and references there given.
million. For those going to Russia, assuming as plausible ‘guestimates’ 22,500 long-stay workers remitting LT 8.1 per annum each, and 12,500 seasonal workers taking back LT 3.15, we must add a further LT 182,250 + LT 39,375 = LT 221,625, or let us say LT 220,000 in round figures. And finally we must add something for those in the Çukurova, in Aleppo, in Egypt and anywhere else. Here, particularly, we are in the dark, both in terms of numbers and the likely size of the average remittance, but if we add a further LT 100,000 we shall surely once again be erring on the side of caution.

On fairly conservative assumptions, both in respect of the number of migrants and of the average remittance per capita, the total of remittances to eastern Anatolia on account of migrant labour alone around 1867 must, therefore, have been at least LT 1.42 million, and may well have been more. Of course the total value of funds returned to the region by ‘exiles’ living outside it would have been larger because there were also the profits of the numerous Armenian traders and shopkeepers of eastern origin who carried on business in towns all over the Empire, part of which were often used to buy land, build fine houses and finance comfortable retirements in their home towns and villages. Both Kayseri and Arapkir were particularly noted for the number of merchants they produced, whilst Egin was famous as the original home of many sarrafs and bankers whose splendid mansions gave it a highly distinctive appearance. The profits of trade and finance should not be forgotten, but they will not be considered here because our concern is with the economic and social significance of labour migration rather than with mercantile endeavour or total capital flows. The question of how significant to the economy and society of the East remittances of LT 1.42 million may have been is one to which we shall return at the end of this article.

The year 1867 does, however, seem to have represented a high water mark in the flow of labour from east to west. Late in 1869 Mr. Watson of the British Embassy in Istanbul wrote that the labour market there was overstocked by the number of arrivals from the East, and by the early 1870s there was no doubt that the number of workers departing from the Black Sea ports had stabilized at a much lower level. As may be seen from Table 2, over the years 1869–76, passenger departures from Trabzon, which in 1867 had been 30,00–35,000 for Istanbul alone, averaged only half as many (17,401 p.a.) for both Istanbul and Russia. It is true that the former figure was for departures by steam and sail, and the latter by steamers only. However it is not possible that the difference can be accounted for by an increase in passengers travelling by sailing ships, since the numbers of these clearing Trabzon were diminishing rapidly: indeed in the years 1873–75 there were respectively only 27,25 and nine of them. At first the reduction in the number of those travelling would have mostly been accounted for by
These figures exclude soldiers and ‘religious’.

Sources: Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (Paris), CCC Trébizonde 9: états de navigations/états maritimes. MAE (Nantes), Trébizonde 82: états du commerce de Trébizonde.

fewer seasonal migrants, but in 1871 and especially in 1873 substantially more men returned from Istanbul than departed thither suggesting the beginnings of a shrinkage in the permanent colony of long-stay migrants. Given the relatively small contribution to total remittances contributed by the seasonal migrants, however, these developments may not have greatly affected the scale of the former before the onset of the great crisis of the Ottoman state in the autumn of 1875.

Thereafter, however, there can be no question but that it did so very seriously. During the crisis years of state bankruptcy, war, a depreciating paper currency and general economic crisis (1876–79), the Trabzon passenger figures show that movement of labour to Istanbul fell to very low levels. Indeed in these years those returning (33,336) outnumbered those leaving (16,550) by two to one. And although after the period of acute upheaval had run its course the number of departures recovered partially, at an average of only just over 13,000 a year for 1879–84 they did not even
reach the level of 1869–75, let alone that of 1867. In 1882, indeed, recorded departures by steamship were down to no more than 9731. In 1885, and again in 1887–89, it is true that the figures were much higher, but even so (bearing in mind that some uncertain proportion of them will have been going to Russia), those bound for Istanbul must have been more than a third fewer than in 1867. In any event the upsurge was only temporary and the number of passenger departures had subsided again by 1890, the last year in our continuous series Some kind of confirmation of the very low figure for the years around 1882–83, and so by extension for the rest of the series cited in Table 2, is the information relating to the latter year from a different source that individual travellers on the road between Erzurum and Trabzon numbered about 10,000 in each direction, most of them ‘labourers proceeding to or returning from Constantinople and other countries where they find work’. As for the other Black Sea ports we are, it is true, almost without information, but Cuinet’s figure for the number of passengers clearing Samsun (by steam and sail) in 1889–90 suggests that departures had declined by at least as large a proportion there as at Trabzon. In addition the generally very low level of movement is confirmed by a comment of the vice-consul at Van in his report for 1888 that, on account of adverse economic conditions in the capital, what he described as the surplus inhabitants of the district where he was stationed were beginning to give up their annual exodus thither. Another comment, in 1893, again from Van, that ‘there is now much less of temporary immigration or moving to Constantinople for the purpose of earning a small competence than formerly’, confirms that matters had not improved five years later. The large total (21,264) recorded the following year (1894), seems to have been occasioned by the prospect of an exceptional demand for labour to repair the damage caused by the great earthquake which had struck in July, destroying part of the Grand Bazaar and causing extensive damage elsewhere in the city. On the basis of total departures from Trabzon by steamer in 1883–90 and 1894, it appears that between the mid 1880s and the mid 1890s the number going to Istanbul from all the Black Sea ports taken together must have averaged around 30,000 a year. And if for some years in the later 1880s it had been rather more than this average, for a considerable period in the later 1870s and early 1880s it had been much less.

The most serious aspect of the post-war situation in Istanbul, as far as the villagers of eastern Anatolia were concerned, was the permanently reduced employment prospects there. The boom years of the later 1860s, and to a lesser extent of the early 1870s, never returned, and for a generation the economy of the capital was more or less chronically depressed, deprived as it was of the stimulus imparted by a net import of foreign capital which had characterized the years of heavy government borrowing abroad. Many
of its formerly wealthy inhabitants had been impoverished by the bankruptcy of 1875, the depreciation of the kaima and the loss of much of Rumelia. There seem to be no figures available for the foreign trade of the capital distinct from those for the Empire as a whole, but there is no doubt that for most of the period between the late 1870s and the mid 1890s it was languishing badly. There were various reasons for this but the most important was said to be Istanbul’s progressive loss of its entrepôt functions in respect of other parts of the Near East, as direct commercial links were developed between the countries of Western Europe and such provincial ports as Salonica, Beirut, Basra and Bushire. This had been going on since before the Russo-Turkish war and as a result goods which had once passed over the wharves of Istanbul no longer came anywhere near it, and profits which had once accrued to its merchants were lost, so that more and more firms went out of business or moved away.63

Year after year the combined effects of a stagnant or declining foreign trade, falling commodity prices and deteriorating terms of trade, and a succession of political crises in Egypt, the Balkans or elsewhere, conspired to lower the level of business activity in general. Thus the Director General of the Imperial Ottoman Bank apologized to his superiors for the disappointing financial results achieved during 1884 which, he said, were the inevitable result ‘de l’état languissant dans lequel notre place végète depuis tant d’années’. The next year (1885) he told them that ‘toutes les branches du commerce ont été cruellement éprouvées, et notre place a eu à déplorer un grand nombre de suspensions de paiements et de faillites de maisons de commerce et de banque’. 1886 was even worse, and 1887 little better. A few years later the Bank’s internal Annual Reports were repeating a similar litany of gloom. 1891 was not a good year, but in 1892 business stagnation was even more complete with no real improvement in 1893, whilst in the following April the statisticians calculated that in just over four years the prices of six major Ottoman export commodities, upon which the prosperity of a significant sector of the commercial community depended, had fallen by proportions ranging from 15 per cent in the case of wool to no less than 83 per cent in that of raisins!64 In view of all this it is not surprising to learn that the population of the city was almost static between 1885 and 1906,65 and that building activity, which was of particular importance in employing migrant labour, was at a considerably lower ebb than it had been before 1875. There were few redevelopments of any importance during the last quarter of the century. In Pera the construction of grandiose apartment buildings gave way to the building of much more modest row houses, whilst the neglect of routine maintenance by even the well-to-do long remained all too evident.66

What made the problem of finding employment in Istanbul particularly
difficult for outsiders was that the local supply of labour had been largely increased by the huge influx of refugees from Rumelia in 1877–78. Most of these people were eventually resettled in Anatolia, but a proportion of them took up permanent residence in the capital where, according to a contemporary observer, they ‘eked out a precarious existence by casual labour in an over-stocked market’. Their numbers, moreover, were continually recruited in the years that followed by a stream of Muslims obliged to abandon their homes in the new Balkan states by the hostility of their Christian rulers. It was, therefore, not just that the casual and labouring jobs, skilled and unskilled, which had been available in such numbers to migrants from eastern Anatolia (and elsewhere) in the later 1860s were less numerous in the 1880s, but that a large proportion of that lesser number was now taken up by the refugees.

The action of the Porte in ordering the provincial authorities to halt the movement of labour to Istanbul in the autumn of 1894, when as we have seen, on account of the recent earthquake, more men than usual were making their way thither, needs to be seen in this context. Coming at a time of increasing government anxiety about Armenian separatism and just after the suppression of the Sasun rebellion, it might be supposed that official motives for this action were strictly political. However it does not seem that it was directed only against Armenians travelling to Istanbul, for the reports of the British consuls refer to ‘poor people’ being stopped without distinction of community. It therefore appears likely that the government’s concern was as much socio-economic as it was political, in that it feared that the prospects of additional employment in site clearance and rebuilding would suck in far more labour than could actually be employed that way, which would have resulted in the creation of a potentially dangerous pool of unemployed and discontented people at the heart of the Empire. Some indication of how fierce the competition for jobs in the capital had become by the last decade of the century is provided by the comments of foreign observers on the events which followed the seizure of the Imperial Ottoman Bank by Armenian terrorists in August 1896. Sir Charles Eliot commented, à propos the hamals of Istanbul, that Kurds and Armenians were ‘competitors and rivals’ in what he termed the carrying trade of the city. There must therefore be a strong suspicion that the bloodthirstiness of those ‘Lazes and other wild Asiatics’, who played so prominent a part in hunting down and killing Armenians in the streets, owed a good deal to the knowledge that they were destroying not only the despised gâvr but also rivals for scarce employment. Certainly most of the Armenians killed, according to Mr Herbert of the British Embassy, were migrant labourers who earned their living as porters, dock labourers, office caretakers and the like, whilst Sir Edwin Pears reported that gangs of assassins were recruited
by the circulation of rumours that if the Armenians could be got rid of their jobs would become available ‘for Turks and Kurds from the interior’. And in the event it became notorious that most of the employment vacancies that resulted both from the 5,000–6,000 casualties of the massacre, and from the sending of thousands more Armenians back to their homes in the East, were taken up by Muslims from the same region.69

In view of all this it is not surprising to find contemporary comment confirming that, for many people at least, wages in Istanbul in the late nineteenth century were falling. In 1883 a consular report described labour in the capital as being ‘plentiful and cheap’, while in 1891 vice-consul Fitzmaurice remarked from Van on the reduced level of remittances that were the result of the lower wages that those who had gone to Istanbul to work were now able to earn.70 There seems to be no confirmation, moreover, for the finding of Boratav and his collaborators that the war years of the late 1870s had seen a sufficiently large upward movement in money wages for their level to have remained well above that of the earlier period, despite fifteen or more years of decline in the 1880s and 1890s. Whether or not the procedure adopted by these authors is appropriate to the purposes of their article, which is to throw light on the movement of Ottoman wages in general, it cannot reveal much about their course in any particular place – and least of all in the capital which is very poorly represented in the data available to them.71 Certainly the very large increase in the supply of labour in Istanbul as a result of the influx of refugees from Rumelia makes it unlikely that wage rates increased in terms of silver, although what happened to nominal wage payments in the years of monetary disorder (1876–79) when kaime drove all forms of metallic currency almost entirely out of circulation for ordinary day-to-day purposes is still obscure. Besides, in view of the economic conditions prevailing in the capital at this time, whatever the decline in wage rates, it is likely that total earnings fell even more markedly because of less continuous working. By the same token the profits obtained in the craft, petty retailing and service activities pursued by so many long-stay migrants, and about which even less is known than about wages, are also likely to have declined.

It might have been supposed that the economic development of Russian Transcaucasia, which was accelerating from the 1880s onwards, would have provided the people of eastern Anatolia with at least a partial compensation for the decreasing opportunities and declining wages they encountered in Istanbul, but in fact it does not seem to have done so. The repeated references in the consular Trade Reports of the later 1860s and early 1870s to labourers going to Russia, cease in the following decade.72 On the one hand it seems that the improvement in the means of communication, both within Transcaucasia itself and to the north of the Caucasus, made it
possible for labour from southern Russia to reach the region and work there on a seasonal basis in a way that had not been possible earlier.\textsuperscript{73} On the other hand much the most important focus of development was the city of Baku and its oil fields, and these were of much easier access (across the Caspian Sea) from northern Iran than from the main emigrant areas of Anatolia. It was therefore primarily the Iranian rather than the Ottoman rural poor who satisfied the demands of the expanding Transcaucasian economy for foreign labour in the years 1880 to 1914.\textsuperscript{74} Certainly some movement from eastern Anatolia to Russia in search of jobs continued, and still did so in the early twentieth century when Louis Rambert commented on men from Tirebolu and other parts of the Black Sea coast going to work in the tobacco plantations of the Caucasus.\textsuperscript{75} However in the early 1890s, as the Ottoman authorities became increasingly concerned about the infiltration of Armenian terrorists from across the border with Russia, they took to refusing re-admission to those who left their territory and wanted to return, which was obviously a disincentive to seasonal or temporary migration. The sharp rise in the number of Armenians leaving for Russia from 1893 onwards, on which the British consular officials remarked, was primarily a movement of entire families who had sold or abandoned their land and houses and did not intend to return.\textsuperscript{76} The availability of work on the Kars railway, which was under construction in the mid 1890s, was doubtless an encouragement for them to go, but the main reason was the deteriorating political situation as a result of which many no longer felt safe in their own homes. The fact that considerable numbers were also reported as going to Iran, where the prospects of making a living can hardly have been any better than in the districts from which they came, confirms this conclusion.\textsuperscript{77}

According to the Russian census of 1897 there were then 86,323 Ottoman subjects living in the governorates of the Caucasus region (mostly in Kars, Kuban and Kutaiss), but the large number of females in this population (32,273 out of 86,323) suggests that most of it was accounted for by the recently arrived Armenian family groups just referred to. However, some indication of the number of temporary and seasonal workers is provided by the 21,777 surplus of males over females. In fact it is likely that many of these too were unattached young men who had also recently left Ottoman territory not intending to return, but even if this were not so it still seems an inescapable conclusion that the total of temporary and seasonal workers was lower in 1897 than it had been thirty years before. In all likelihood it was much lower.\textsuperscript{78}

If Transcaucasia was unable to provide compensation for shrinking opportunities in Istanbul in the 1880s and 1890s, nor was Aleppo whose economy was not particularly prosperous in the last two decades of the
century and which for part of them was deeply in the doldrums. The Çukurova, on the other hand, was providing an increasingly important outlet. Here, as we have seen, expansion in the cultivated area, and the commercial production of cotton and grain, had begun somewhat earlier, but development was accelerating markedly in the 1880s and 1890s. Increases to the permanently settled population of a formerly very sparsely inhabited area derived mainly from the settlement of former nomads and Muslim refugees from outside the Empire, but there also grew up a demand for extra labour at the busy seasons of the year. This was met by a growing supply of seasonal agricultural workers, with different groups (or possibly the same groups) of men from the North and North East appearing south of the mountains in time for the spring ploughing, summer harvesting and so on. Those arriving for the harvest of 1891 were described as being Armenians and Kurds, and the heavy dependence of the Çukurova economy upon them was made manifest a few years later. In the spring of 1896, in the aftermath of the wave of massacres that had afflicted much of the region from which they came, none appeared, and the result was a heavy drop in that year’s harvest of both grain and cotton. There was also a movement, particularly of Armenians, into the towns of the area, of which Adana was much the most important, and which accordingly developed as an essentially Armenian settlement. However the spring migrants of 1891, referred to above, reportedly numbered only 5000 or so. It does not seem, therefore, that the demand for labour in the Çukurova was yet large enough to compensate for the reduced opportunities elsewhere. Besides the very short seasons during which labour was required may have limited the districts from which it was worth men’s while making the journey there – in 1909 those coming to bring in the barley harvest were said to have travelled only from the Maraş area. With no possibility of travelling any way other than on foot it would have taken longer to get from Van to Adana than from Van to Istanbul.

Nor, finally, was Armenian migration to the United States of America, which came mainly from the Harput area, yet of much significance in an economic sense, for no more than 1,500 people had gone there by the end of the 1880s. As the numbers increased the British vice consul at Harput revised his estimate of the moneys being sent back across the Atlantic rapidly upwards from LS 30,000/LT 33,000 in 1888 to as much as LS 80,000/LT 88,000 in 1892, but even this latter figure could only make up for a small part of the reduced flow of remittances that were the result of declining numbers of migrant labourers leaving eastern Anatolia as a whole and the lower wages they were earning.

How these various developments of the period after the Russo-Turkish War affected the total value of the funds remitted to eastern Anatolia by
migrant workers it is impossible to measure with any pretence at accuracy. Nevertheless their impact must have been very substantial. Let us assume (on the basis of the figures for the flow of migrant labour cited above) that by the early 1890s the size of the long-stay colony in Istanbul and its general environs was smaller by one third than it had been c.1867, and that the number of seasonal migrants was down by two thirds. Also that there had been a reduction in average remittance per head of 25 per cent. As is shown in Table 1, we would then have 67,000 long-stay workers remitting LT 6.75 per annum each, and 18,000 seasonal migrants remitting LT 2.625, i.e. LT 452, 250 + LT 47,250 = LT 499,500. Let us also assume that remittances from Transcaucasia were only half what they had been in 1867, that is LT 110,000. Thirdly let us assume that an increased flow of earnings from those going to the Çukurova offset a decline in remittances from Aleppo and elsewhere, so that the 1867 figure of LT 100,000 for the various ‘other’ destinations remains appropriate. Finally we may add in the LS 80,000/LT 88,000 suggested by the consul at Harput for remittances from the United States for 1892. We will then arrive at a very roughly estimated grand total of LT 797,500 (let us call it LT 800,000) a year for remittances into eastern Anatolia in the early 1890s by those finding work outside it. This is only just over half (about 56 per cent) of the LT 1.42 million estimated for c.1867. And just as the earlier set of estimates probably erred on the side of caution in arriving at a figure for the value of remittances in 1867, so these are more likely to have understated than overstated the extent to which they had fallen in the following quarter of a century.

Finally we have to address the question of what a fall in the value of remittances from around LT 1.42 million to only LT 800,000 a year would have actually meant for the economy and society of the Anatolian East. No statistics for the gross regional product are available, nor in a context in which so much economic activity was subsistence based would they tell us much if they were. There are, however figures for the amounts due in taxation from the various vilâyets. For 1866–67 the total liability for direct taxation of the four huge vilâyets of Diyarbekir, Erzurum, Sivas and Trabzon which then accounted for most of the East as we have defined it, may be estimated at LT 954,600. By 1889/90 the corresponding figure for the seven smaller vilâyets into which the four had been divided was LT 1,675,000, with the amounts actually collected probably being slightly less in each case. It appears therefore that at the earlier date our estimate for the remittances from migrant labour were sufficient to pay the direct taxes due from the eastern vilâyets one and a half times over, whereas by the early 1890s they were scarcely enough to cover half of it. Since there is no reason to suppose that there was any improvement in the region’s balance of visible trade (rather the contrary), and there was certainly no significant increase in
government spending or any large imports of capital, most of the shortfall must necessarily have been squeezed from the consumption of a population already desperately poor, or found by the progressive realization of what few capital assets the population possessed. Nor can there be any doubt of the adverse effects of this on the regional economy. Most obviously demand, and thus the prices, of goods marketed locally (including those of the livestock products of the pastoral Kurds) were forced downwards. The already very limited opportunities for paid employment were further reduced, and the dependence of villagers and townsmen alike on the credit provided by shopkeepers and money-lenders was progressively increased.

The tensions which produced widespread and often sanguinary outbursts of popular rage amongst Muslims against the Armenians in the east (and other parts) of Anatolia in the mid-1890s were not, of course, purely economic in origin. But like other episodes of inter-communal violence, for instance in Mount Lebanon and Damascus in 1860, and the Druze rebellion in the Hauran in 1895–96, there is good reason to think that economic factors played an important role. The present article has focused on only one aspect, albeit an important one, of the socio-economic history of eastern Anatolia in the second half of the nineteenth century. There are plenty of other aspects which require investigation before we can fully understand the background to those dreadful events, and without such an understanding little progress is likely to be made in understanding why events in the east took the course they actually did.

NOTES

1. It is impracticable to provide an adequate introduction to the relevant literature in the present context, but a starting place is provided by H. Inalcik and D. Quataert (eds.), An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire 1300–1914 (Cambridge, 1994) of which Part IV relates to the nineteenth century. As the title suggests, this work is not just about Anatolia, but there is much about Anatolia in it and it has an excellent bibliography.
2. The general situation outlined below probably applied also in the Central Anatolian vilayets of Kastamonu, Ankara and Konya: these, however, are less well documented in the sources utilized for this article. For the extent of the various vilayets, see the map on p.2.
3. For the textile industries of the region’s towns which still had markets outside the region, and which even underwent some expansion at certain periods, see D. Quataert, Ottoman Manufacturing in the Age of the Industrial Revolution (Cambridge, 1993), esp. pp.61–71.
4. The brief characterization of the economy of Eastern Anatolia in the preceding and succeeding paragraphs derives mainly from the British consular reports. A full version of the argument involved will be the subject of another essay.
5. Accounts and Papers (hereafter A and P) 1867 LXVII (Erzurum Consular), pp.446 and 451; 1884–85 LXXXIX (Trebizond Consular), p.644, 656–7; 1891 LXXXVIII (Erzurum Consular), p.346. 1892 LXXXIV (Kharput Consular), p.616. 1898 CVI (Turkey No.1), p.207. In the last of these Vice-Consul Crowe quotes an Armenian villager in the plain of Muş as saying that ‘whilst at Constantinople he could support his family by his earnings ... and pay his taxes, but since his return he could not make ends meet.’


8. A and P 1880 LXXX (Turkey No.4), p.804; and 1881, C (Turkey No.6), p.719.


10. The population of Aleppo seems to have dropped in the mid-nineteenth century, but to have recovered somewhat by 1890; that of Diyarbekir dropped heavily between c.1840 and 1890.


14. Historically, as noted above, south-eastern Anatolia had had two such local metropolises in the form of Aleppo and Diyarbekir, but by the second half of the nineteenth century neither were able to absorb sufficient numbers to prevent large-scale migration to more distant destinations.


17. Public Record Office, London (hereafter PRO), FO 526/12, f.496.


24. Banque Ottomane, Bulgur Palas Archives (BPA): Volume entitled ‘Personnel du siège central’ (destroyed in 1986, but photocopies in the author’s possession). This recorded, amongst other matters, congés accordés to the many Armenian manual workers from the East employed by the Bank and which varied in duration from two or three months to several years. In most cases they were only taken once or twice during a period of ten to fifteen years’ employment.


29. Ünye had one steamer a week in 1869 and at least some passenger traffic. A and P 1870 LXIV (Anatolian Coast Consular), pp.534–5.


31. See Table 2 on p.20 above.


33. The amount cited was what the government gave demobilized soldiers for the purpose of returning home: A and P 1880 LXII (Turkey No.23), p.821. (I owe this reference to Paul Brandon). For the cost of a steamer ticket, see above p.7.


40. See above, p.6.


44. A and P 1872 LVII (Aleppo Consular), pp.284, 291. 1873 LXIV (idem), pp.770, 782. 1874
46. 250 days a year seems more realistic than the 300 a year used by Consul Palgrave in his calculations of total earnings in A and P 1871 LXVIII (Industrial Classes, Further Reports), pp.726–7. Hamlin says that in the winter of 1869–70, during the building of Robert College, ‘there were often three, four or five working days in each week’. *Life and Times*, p.460.
47. In the building of Robert College (1869–71) half the masons employed were Greek, the other half Armenians from Van. Hamlin, *Life and Times*, pp.458–9.
49. By contrast equivalent employees at the Bank’s Stambul branch were mostly from Muş. BPA, Volume entitled ‘Registre du personnel des agences A’ (destroyed in 1986 but photocopies in the author’s possession).
52. Sir Edwin Pears, who lived most of his adult life in Istanbul, stated that Armenian workers often remitted as much as three quarters of their wages to their families. This does not seem credible, but he may have had in mind domestic servants and others who received free board and lodging as part of their total remuneration and would not therefore have needed to spend much of their cash earnings. Sir E. Pears, *Life of Abdul Hamid* (London, 1917), p.254. Another long time resident of Istanbul provides calculations which imply that Armenian hamals saved over half their earnings, but this also seems too high. Dwight, *Constantinople*, p.152. Around 1970 Turkish migrant workers in the EEC saved about half of their net earnings: T. Ciller, ‘The Economics of Exporting Labour to the EEC: A Turkish Perspective’ in E. Kedourie (ed.), *The Middle Eastern Economy* (London, 1977), p.183, n.8.
55. See below pp.27–8.
57. At this time only Russian and Ottoman ships went eastwards from Trabzon as well as westwards. Between them they carried an average of some 9,700 passengers a year outbound from Trabzon during 1869–76, so it may be arbitrarily but reasonably supposed that half of these, say 4850 out of the 17,401 leaving Trabzon in total, went to Russia rather than to Istanbul: see sources to Table 2 on p.20.
62. Average of all steamer departures from Trabzon 1883–90 and 1894 = 18,251 p.a. Deduct half of those using Russian ships (2,265 p.a.) = 15,986. Add 40 per cent of Trabzon for Samsun (6,400 p.a.) and the other ports (6,400 p.a.) = 28,786 p.a.


67. A and P 1896 XCVI (Turkey No.6), pp.198–9, 213.


71. The last such reference was in 1881. A and P 1882 LXX (Trebizond Consular), p.768.


73. C. Issawi, The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914 (Chicago and London, 1971), pp.50–2. Entner, Commercial Relations, pp.59–61. According to the Russian census of 1897 there were nearly 25,000 Persian subjects in Baku but only a few hundred Ottoman ones: Premier Recensement Général de la Population de l’Empire de Russie, redigé par N. Troinitsky (2 Parts, St Petersburg, 1905) Table XIA.


75. According to Consul Graves at Erzurum even individual men going to Russia ‘nominally’ to seek seasonal work often did not return: A and P 1896 XCV (Turkey No.3), p.899.


77. Premier Recensement Général, Tables XI and XIA.


81. See the map on p.2.

82. The 1866–67 estimate derives from details found in Archives Nationales (Paris), 207 AQ/232 D2: budget documents for 1292 (1876–77); and A and P 1870 LXV (Mr Barron’s Report on the Taxation of Turkey), pp.574, 589, 619. For 1890, see Turquie d’Asie, I pp.39–40, 177–8; II 348–9, 657; III 445, 554–5, and 685.