

# **Multilingual Trade Cards and the Power of the Non-Muslim Population in the Ottoman Trade Economy**

by Hakan Akcaoglu

The Ottoman Empire began to lose its former grandeur starting from the 18th century, unable to keep pace with Western industrialization and falling behind in science and technology. The Ottoman Empire, due to its religious conservatism, also failed to catch up with the Western Enlightenment. Lost wars no longer brought spoils, yet the ruling class of the empire did not cut any of its expenses, leading the state to gradually become poorer. After every lost war, the Ottoman Empire granted various privileges to the strong Western states under the system of capitulations. The commercial life of the empire fell under the control of these Western states, and Western merchants were exempted from taxes, exploiting the empire almost like a colony. Particularly after the wars lost in the early 19th century, the trade life of the Ottoman Empire fell into the hegemony of the great Western powers. The increasing taxes impoverished the people, and the non-Muslim population in the empire did not enjoy equal rights with the Muslim population. This was a significant problem, especially for those living in rural areas outside the large cities.

Although the improvement of the situation of the non-Muslim population was a part of every agreement with Western states, the practical applications were never found sufficient. This inadequacy was not only due to the shortcomings of the implementations but also because of the Western powers' use of emerging nationalist movements to instigate trouble. Despite the Ottoman state's efforts to restore internal peace through the Tanzimat and Constitutional movements, unrest never ceased.

## **The Trade Economy and the Influence of Non-Muslim Merchants**

In the Ottoman Empire's large cities, trade was dominated by the non-Muslim population. One of the main reasons for this was that a large portion of the available Muslim population was engaged in military service. Additionally, young Muslims who received religious education were distanced from both commerce and military service. For many years, non-Muslim subjects were exempt from military service, or if they did serve, they were only assigned to auxiliary roles. In contrast, they paid higher taxes than their Muslim counterparts. While the non-Muslim population made up 20–25% of the general population, they were responsible for 60–70% of the total taxes collected by the empire. The literacy rate among Muslims in the empire was less than 5%, whereas the non-Muslim

population had access to their own schools and missionary schools, and in some cases, they could even study in Europe. As a result, they had the opportunity to expand their horizons and communicate more effectively with their European counterparts, increasing their chances of success in trade.

The period's powerful states were England, France, Italy, and Russia. Despite Germany being one of the strongest powers of the time, its influence on the trade life in Ottoman cities was not very visible. Trade with Germany remained confined to the elite class and did not spread to the general population, which had a significant impact on the Ottoman Empire.

By using their commercial privileges, Western powers had formed partnerships with non-Muslim Ottoman citizens they favored, provided them with credit, and granted them consular representation. Muslim Turkish merchants found it difficult to compete in this environment. Some non-Muslim Ottoman citizens, in order to take advantage of the tax exemptions, switched their allegiance to the Western powers and obtained privileges as their citizens.

In the Ottoman Empire, particularly in large cities, non-Muslim merchants began to use promotional and advertising strategies common in Europe. During this period, the most significant advertising tools were wall posters, newspaper and magazine ads, and the beautifully designed invoices and promotional cards of their businesses. Starting in the 1890s, multilingual trade cards began to be used. Initially, the graphic designs of these cards were copied from the famous store cards in large European cities, but over time, unique designs began to emerge. Eventually, skilled designers in the Ottoman Empire also began to specialize in this area.

### **Multilingual Trade Cards in the Ottoman Empire**

The non-Muslim minorities living in the Ottoman Empire were Armenians in the east and Greeks in the west. In the large cities, multilingual shop cards used by businesses were printed in languages corresponding to the population density: Armenian, Greek, Hebrew for Jewish citizens, Bulgarian, and, to a lesser extent, Serbian and Russian. Additionally, Old Turkish (Ottoman) and the international language of the time, French, were always present. Businesses, according to their customer profile, could use their native language first, followed by other minority languages, in addition to Old Turkish and French. These cards could be used for advertising purposes, but they were also given when an order was placed or a down payment was made. Whether for promotional purposes or necessary for

an order, these cards had to be affixed with a fiscal stamp and sealed to make them legally valid, thereby generating additional revenue for the state.

## The Rise of Shop Cards and Changes in Later Periods

By the early 20th century, these shop cards had reached their peak both in quality and quantity. However, with the abolition of the capitulations in 1914, the impact of World War I on Europe, and the subsequent migrations and forced departures, these cards lost their former grandeur. Nevertheless, some businesses continued to produce these cards. Following the establishment of the Turkish Republic and the transition from Ottoman Turkish to the Latin alphabet, the use of these cards gradually decreased, though they continued to exist until the 1950s.

## Conclusion and Legacy

These beautifully designed cards, which presented a visual feast, were one of the most significant examples of the multicultural Ottoman Empire of the period. Unfortunately, that colorful mosaic of people has broken apart, and we no longer live in the same country with many of the peoples who once spoke those languages. What remains are these finely crafted cards and some of the handwritten notes on their backs, representing a beautiful legacy of the past.



*Jean K. Galanoudis and Stamatis Nikolaidis*  
*Shoe Trading Sultanhamam Constantinople*  
*4 languages Old Turkish, French, Greek, Hebrew*





*J. Nikitits Erben*

*Gun Merchant Bahcekapi Constantinople*

*4 languages Old Turkish, French, Greek, Armenian*



*Benyamin Araboglu & Fils*

*Depot de Cristaux, porcelaines,  
lamps, Tûnel Galata*

*3 languages Old Turkish,  
French, Greek*

*75 para fiscal stamps on the  
back*







Anastasios Apostolidis  
 Warehouse of Trunks  
 and bags

Sultanhamam Constantinople  
 3 languages old Turkish,  
 Greek, French

مستوفان و مستوفی  
 مخزنه سید محمد علی، غلام احمد، قاضی، بورسلو  
 طیاره خاندان، قریب مال شیشه ریاضه و قند، اما به قند و سانه  
 بر لند  
 غلام محمد، تونل جاده سی ۳۸ و بر کف خانه برده و نورده ۳

ΚΕΝΤΡΙΚΟΝ ΚΑΤΑΣΤΗΜΑ  
 Σ.Β. ΒΕΡΓΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ  
 ΠΑΝΤΟΣ ΕΙΔΟΥΣ ΚΡΥΣΤΑΛΛΙΝΩΝ ΣΚΕΥΩΝ  
 ΠΟΡΣΕΛΑΝΩΝ, ΛΑΜΠΩΝ, ΓΑΖΙΕΡΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΣΠΙΡΤΙΕΡΩΝ  
 ΕΠΙΣΗΣ ΕΙΔΗ ΕΣΤΙΑΒΟΜΕΝΩΝ ΟΙΚΙΑΚΩΝ  
 ΣΚΕΥΩΝ ΚΑΜΠΑΡΕΔΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΠΕΡΟΝΟΜΑΧΕΙΡΩΝ  
 ΠΟΛΗΣΙΣ ΧΟΝΔΡΙΚΩΣ ΚΑΙ ΛΙΑΝΙΚΩΣ  
 ΓΑΛΑΤΑ Όδος Του ννέλ Αρ. 38  
 ΥΠΟΚΑΤΑΣΤΗΜΑ  
 Γαλατά-Πορτσέκ-Καλδερήμ Αρ. 34

MAGASIN CENTRAL  
 S.V. VERGOPoulos  
 DIVERS OBJETS DES VASES EN CRISTAL  
 PORCELAINE, LAMPES, PETROLE & A L'ALCOOL  
 et GRAND CHOIX D'USTANSILES POUR FAMILLES  
 EMAILLES, PLATEAUX, FOURCHETTES & COUTEAUX  
 VENTE EN GROS ET EN DETAIL  
 GALATA Rue du Tunnel N° 38  
 SUCCURSALES  
 Galata, Yuksek - Kaldirim N° 34

S. V. Vergopoulos–Central Store

Various objects crystal, porcelain lamps

Tunel–Galata–Yuksekkaldırım

3 languages old Turkish, Greek, French





*Theodore Chryssomalis*

*Dentiste Sirkedji*

*4 languages Old Turkish, French, Greek, Armenian*



*Konstantinou N. Volovini*

*Crystal lamps Mega Glass store Galata*

*3 languages old Turkish, Greek, French*





*Tamianos Papazian*  
*Shoe Maker*  
*Mahmout Pacha*  
*5 languages*  
*old Turkish,*  
*Armenian*  
*French, Greek,*  
*Hebrew*



*A. & G. Gallerini*  
*Construction Materials Tophane*  
*4 languages old Turkish, French, Greek, Armenian*





P. Macastar

Metals

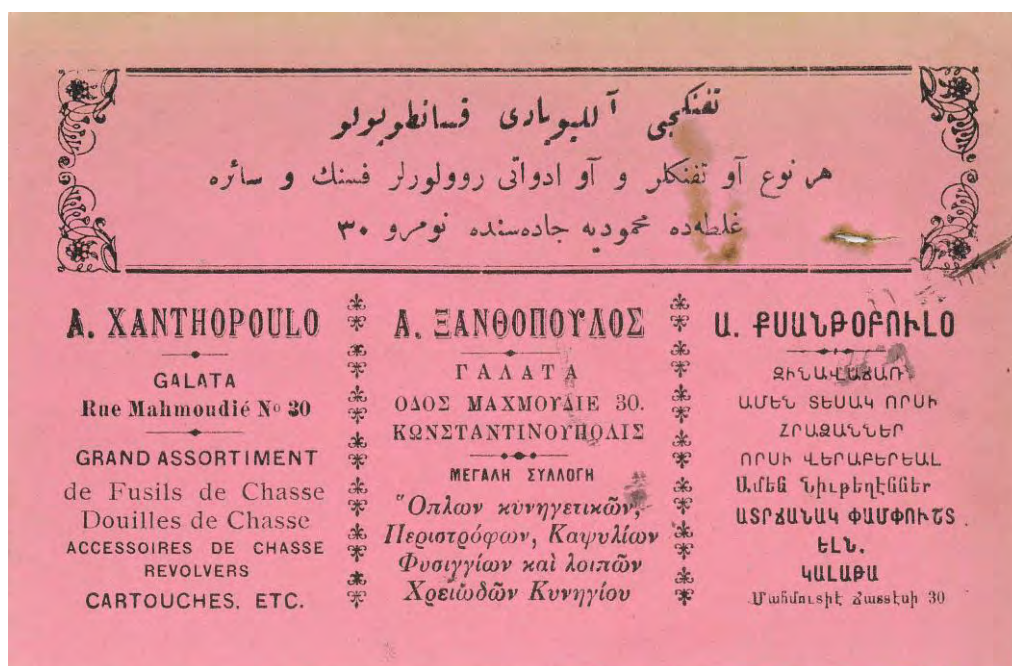
Rue Mahmoudie

Galata

4 languages old

Turkish, French,

Greek, Armenian



A. Xanthopoulos

Hunting shells, shot guns

Galata

4 languages old Turkish, French,

Greek, Armenian

60 para fiscal stamps on the back









# دوقتور محمد فرید

اوپراتور و ژینه قولوزیست یعنی قادین خسته لقلری و لثوطة  
بودفعه پارسدن در سعادته عودتله هر کون اوکله دن صکره لاله لی جامع شریفی  
قارشو سنده ۱۵ نومرو لی دیقرا ن الله و یردی اجزا خانه سنده بولنوب مراجعت  
ایدن خسته کافی اصول جدیده اوزره تدایو ایدر و فقرا مجانا معاینه اولمقد در

ՏՕԲ. ՄԷԶՄԷՏ ՖԵՐԻԴ  
ՕԲԵՐԱԹԵՐ ՎԷ ԺՆԻԷ ԳՕԼՕԺԻՍԹԵԱՆԻ  
ԳԱՏԵՆ ԽԱՍԹԱԼԵԳԼԻԳԵ ՎԷ ԼԱՎՈՒԹԱ

Պու սէֆա Բարիգսէն Տէրի սաա-  
սէթէ ափսէթլէ հէր կիւն էօյլէսէն  
սօնրա Լալէլի ծամիի շէրֆի գաւ-  
շուրնսա 15 նօմէօյլ Տիգրան Աւ-  
րափէրսի էֆգախանէսիսէ պուր-  
նրա միւրաճաաթ իսէն իսաաթէ-  
կեանր ուսուլը Տէսիսէ իւզէրէ Թէ-  
սափի իսէր վէ ֆրգարա մէծճանէն  
մուսյէնէ օլընմագսա սր:

ΔΟΚ. ΜΕΧΜΕΔ ΦΕΡΙΔ  
ΟΠΕΡΑΤΟΡ ΒΕ ΣΙΝΕΚΟΛΟΓΗ ΓΙΑΝΙ  
ΚΑΔΗΝ ΧΑΣΤΑΛΗΓΗ ΒΕ ΛΑΟΥΤΑ

Που δεφά Παριζδέν Δερισαατετէ  
αβδէτλε γέρ χόυν εοϊλεδέν σόνρα  
Ααλελί δζαμιτ σεριφι καρσθηηδά  
15 νομερολγ Δικράν 'Αλλα/θερδ'  
εδζζαχανεσινδէ πουλουνηπ μέυρα  
δζαατ ιδέν γαστεχινγ, ούσοσλη δζε-  
διδε εύζερε τεδαβι ιδέρ βε φηκαρά  
μεδζδζάνεν μουαγενε όλουνυαχδάδηρ

Dr. Mehmed Ferid  
Operator & Gynaecology

3 languages old Turkish,  
Armenian, Turkish  
with greek alphabet  
(old Karamanli language)

لَوْ تَرَىٰ سَاعَتَكَ لَكَ بِكَ وَنَتَقُ بِنِي

نصیب حیرت و حیا و محرومی

فهرست ساعته و قور دون و نجوهارت مغانه شی کشته و دانته ایلر صابیلوز

استانبوله محفظه جبرازا یعنی نمر ۴۴ و ۴۶

MAISON D'HORLOGERIE  
BIJOUTERIE JOAILLERIE

ՎԱՃԱՆՈՒՍՈՒՆ  
ՆԱԱԽՈՒՄ ԽԱՃԵԶՎԵԺՎԵԺԻԱՆԵՐԻ

Հ.ԻՄՆԵՍԼ Ի 1875  
ԱՄԵՆ ՏԵՍԱԿ ԺԱՄԱՅՈՅՈՅՔ.ՇՆԹԱՅՔ  
ԵՒ ԳՈՐԳԱՆԵՂԷՆԵՐ  
Կր ծախսուին մեծ և փոքր քանակությամբ  
44,46 ՄԱՀԱԶԱԺԻԼԱՐ ՓՈՂՈՑ 44,46  
Կ.ՊՈԼԻՍ

קטלוג די הורלוגים צימירי וזולתיר  
קטלוגס די הורו די מודו קורטי  
צנדית חין גרוקו חין חין דימין  
קטלוג מוזיקלעכער 44, 46  
פונדירט חין 1875  
דינסט חנטיכופ

CHAINES D'OR  
EN TOUS GENRES

NACIB K. DJEZVEDJIAN & FILS  
CONSTANTINOPLE  
44,46 Rue Mahfazadjilar 44, 46  
FONDÉE EN 1875

MONOPOLE DE LA MONTRE LONGINES

Nacib K. Djezvedjian & Fils

Gold chains, Jewelry

4 languages old Turkish, Armenian, Hebrew, French



Bezidian Brothers  
Papeterie  
Galata Constantinople

4 languages  
old Turkish, Greek,  
Armenien, French







*Ghrisezhorites Brother  
Beyoglu  
3 languages old Turkish,  
Armenian, Hebrew*



*Garabed M. Pusgolian  
Antiques Grand Bazaar  
4 languages old Turkish, Armenian, Greek, French*



28/6/73  
 Nissim Moutal & Co  
 نسیم موטال و شرکاسی  
 غلامه : یکی جامع : تونل سوقاق : نومرو 67  
 سرلی و چینغو اوانی؛ خردوات؛ آلودونیوم؛ غاز اوجاتلری مع تفرعات؛ بللوریه؛ پورسان و سائرہ  
 נסים מוטאל אי קומפ"  
 גלצטע, לייני-דזאמי, קאנזאנס טונל "67  
 קינדקליריחה, הינגזניק, פורקליזן, ציליריחה, גלזירזק, לזוננזיוס היטק"  
 NISSIM MOUTAL & Co  
 Galata,  
 Yéni-Djami, rue du Tunnel, 67.  
 QUINCAILLERIE, ÉMAILLÉS,  
 PORCELAINES, VERRERIE, ALUMINIUMS,  
 RÉCHAUDS A PÉTROLE  
 ET ACCESSOIRES EN TOUS GENRES  
 ΝΙΣΙΜ ΜΟΥΤΑΛ & Σας  
 Γάλατα,  
 Γενή Δξαμή, ὁδὸς Τουνέλ, Ἀρ. 67  
 ΧΟΥΡΔΑΒΑΤ, ΕΜΑΓΕ,  
 ΠΟΡΣΕΛΑΝΑ, ΓΙΑΛΙΚΑ, ΑΛΟΥΜΙΝΙΟΥΜ,  
 ΓΑΖΙΕΡΕΣ  
 ΚΑΙ ΗΛΙΚΑ ΠΑΝΤΟΣ ΕΙΔΟΥΣ



*Nissim Moutal*

*Porcelain lamps*

*Galata*

*4 languages old Turkish, Hebrew, Greek, French*

*60 para fiscal stmps on the back*

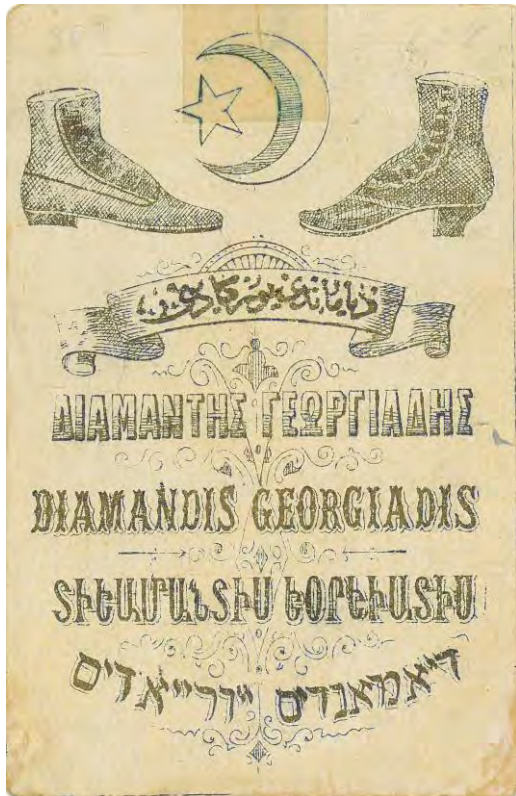
M. Stone.  
 Der gestohlene Kuss. — Le baiser volé.  
 — Zloděj — Det stjålne Kysset.  
 قوجو پينجی اوغلی  
 م. نوع ماکیه تمیرجیسی - استانبول - جادریجلر جاده سندہ نومرو ۱۲۷-۱۲۰  
 ΚΟΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΣ Γ. ΠΕΧΙΝΔΖΙΟΓΛΟΥ  
 ΕΠΙΔΙΟΡΕΩΤΗΣ ΠΑΝΤΩΝ ΕΙΔΩΣ ΜΗΧΑΝΩΝ  
 ΣΤΑΜΒΟΥΛ, ΤΣΑΔΗΡΑΖΗΛΑΡ ΤΣΑΔΔΕΣΙ ΑΡ. 128-130  
 ԾԶԾ ՓԷՇԻՆԺԻՕՂԼՈՒ  
 ՀԻՐ ՆԷՎ ՍԱԹԻՆԱ  
 ՔԱՍԻՐԶԻՍԻ  
 ԻՍՏԱՆԲՈՒԼ  
 ՉԱԾԵՐՇԼԱՐ ԶԱՏԵՍԻ  
 Ն.Ո. 128-130  
 CONSTANTIN G. PECHINDJIOGLOU  
 Mecanicien & Reparations  
 en tous sortes des machines  
 STAMBOUL  
 TCHADIRDJILAR DJADDÉSI  
 NO. 128-130

*Constantin G. Pechindjioglou*

*Machine reparations*

*4 languages*

*old Turkish, Greek, Armenian, French*



*Diamandis Georgiadis*

*Shoe and boots*

*5 languages old Turkish, Armenian,*

*Hebrew, Greek, French*

آلینا فیدیس و سُرکاسی — مانیفاتوره مغازه سی —  
 در سعادت چاقاخیلارده سنبللی خان نومرو ۲۶ — تلفون: ۱۹۰۹ استانبول

**ΑΛΓΙΑΝΑΚΙΔΗΣ & ΣΙΑ**  
**ΚΑΤΑΣΤΗΜΑ ΜΑΝΙΦΑΤΟΥΡΑΣ**  
 ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥΠΟΛΙΣ, ΤΣΑΚΜΑΚΔΗΛΑΡ, ΖΟΥΜΠΟΥΛΛΟΥ ΧΑΝ, ΑΡ. 26

**ALYANAKIDES & C<sup>IE</sup>**    ԱԼԵԱՆԱԿ և ՇԻՐԵԲԵԱՆՈՐ  
**MAGASIN DE MANUFACTURES**    ՄԱՆԻՖԱԿԵՐՈՐԱ ՄԱԴԱՉԱՍԱՐ  
 TCHAKMAKDJILAR, ZUMULLU HAN, № 26    ՉԱԿՄԱԿՃԻԼԱՐ ՋՈՒՄՈՒԼԼՈՒԻ ԽԱՆ Ն. 26  
 CONSTANTINOPLE    ՍՏԱՄԲՈՒԼ  
 Télégrammes: ALYANAK CHUREKIA Stamboul  
 Téléphone: Stamboul № 1909  
 ԿՄՈ. Ո. Ի. ԱԲՈՐՈՍՅԱՆ

*Alyanakides*

*Manufacturers Store*

*Cakmakcilar Constantinople*

*4 languages old Turkish, Greek, Armenien, French*



☆ اوتل كوچك آسيا ☆

غازينو لوقانطه قرائخانه عومى \* ازמיד حميديه جاده سى نومرو ۱۷

☆ شركا قارنيك بيضيان و حوونان اوسكهانيان ☆

<p>Պ Ա Ն Դ Ո Կ</p> <p><b>Փ Ո Ք Ր Ա Ս Ի Ա</b></p> <p>Գազինո - ճաշարան - ընթերցարան</p> <p>— ( Ի Ջ Մ Ի Տ ) —</p> <p>📍 Համիդիե ճամբարի թիվ 17</p> <p>—————▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶—————</p> <p>Տնօրին ՅԱՆՁՆԱԿԱՏԱՐՔ</p> <p>Գ. Պէյազեան - Յ. Ոսկանեան</p>	<p>ΞΕΝΟΔΟΧΕΙΟΝ</p> <p>Η ΜΙΚΡΑ ΑΣΙΑ</p> <p>Καφενεῖον - Μαγειρεῖον - Ἀναγνωστήριον</p> <p>— ΝΙΚΟΜΗΔΕΙΑ —</p> <p>📍 Ὁδὸς Χαμιδιῆ Τσατσὶ Ἀρ. 17</p> <p>—————▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶—————</p> <p>Διευθύνται - Προμηθεύται</p> <p>Κ. Μπεγιαζιάν - Ο. Οσκανιάν</p>
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HOTEL ASIE MINEURE · Rue Hamidié No. 17 ISMID

Direction et Commissionnaire Karnig Beyazian · Hovnan Osganian

*Hotel Asie Mineure*

*İzmid (Nikomedia)*

*4 languages old Turkish, Armenien, Greek, French*