Chapter X

Early Modern Ottoman Istanbul as a Religious Center

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Abstract

The Ottoman capture of Istanbul in 1453 paved the way for the city to become the Ottoman imperial center. It also prepared the ground for the city to become a Muslim center. Distinctly Muslim institutions, such as mosques, madrasas, and dervish lodges, began to appear and gradually dominated the city's skyline, Islamic ideas increasingly defined official ideology and discourse, and Muslim scholars steadily rose to significant positions in the government bureaucracy. But Ottoman Istanbul was never a religious center for Muslims alone. Orthodox Christian, Jewish, Armenian, Catholic, and later Protestant communities all had a rich presence in the city. Christians and Jews had their own officially recognized autonomous communal organizations and religious institutions, practiced their own rituals, and developed their own religious lives in the city, making it just as much of a center for them as it was for Muslims. This chapter explores Istanbul's centrality for the people of the Ottoman empire's many different faiths, the ways developments pertaining to religious communities in the city affected other members of those communities elsewhere in the empire, and how Istanbul's position and significance evolved in particular cases over the course of the early modern period.

> [Sultan Süleyman said to Rüstem Paşa] … a flower appears as beautiful as the number of its colors. Here are Turks wearing white turbans, and Muslims green ones. Next to them are Greeks with blue ones and Armenians with their turbans of a mixture of white-red, blue, and black. Jews wear yellow turbans. This colorfulness is esteemed and adulated. Likewise, God is pleased with the diversity of religions.[1]

Ottoman Istanbul was a religiously diverse city.[2] From the fifteenth century until the twentieth, Muslims generally constituted about half the population of the walled city of Istanbul and its adjacent areas, including Galata, Eyüp, and Üsküdar, while non-Muslims — Orthodox Christians, Jews, Armenians, Catholics, and Protestants — made up the rest.[3] Muslims usually held the upper hand in government and a privileged position in society, but members of other religious communities had their own autonomous organizations and could acquire significant power and position over Muslims and other non-Muslims. Places of worship for different religions were everywhere, and believers of all sorts practiced their faiths. Muslims, Christians, and Jews

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[1] Gerlach, Stephan, *Tage-Buch der von zween glorwürdigsten Römischen Käysern Maximiliano und Rudolpho… an die Ottomannische Pforte zu Constantinopel abgefertigten* (Frankfurt am Main: Zunner, 1674), p. 62. For a Turkish translation, see Gerlach, Stephan, *Türkiye Günlüğü*, trans. Türkis Noyan, ed. Kemal Beydilli (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2007), p. 146.

[2] For the ethno-religious diversity of Istanbul's population, see Eldem, Edhem, "Istanbul: from imperial to peripheralized capital", in *The Ottoman City between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir and Istanbul*, ed. Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman, and Bruce Masters (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 142–58.

[3] Öz, Mehmet, "İstanbul Nüfusu: Fetihten XVIII. Yüzyıl Sonuna Kadar", in *Büyük İstanbul Tarihi* (Istanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür A.Ş., 2015), vol. III, pp. 468–86; and Karpat, Kemal, "İstanbul Nüfusu: XVIII. Yüzyıl Sonundan XX. Yüzyılın Başına", in *Büyük İstanbul Tarihi*, vol. III, pp. 488–519. It is estimated that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, 58 percent of the population were Muslims, while 42 consisted of non-Muslims, predominantly Orthodox Christians, Jews, and Armenians. For this, see Mantran, Robert, *17. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında İstanbul: Kurumsal, İktisadi, Toplumsal Tarih Denemesi*, 2 vols., trans. Mehmed Ali Kılıçbay and Enver Özcan (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1990), vol. I, pp. 45–8. According to one estimate, from the 1840s to the first decade of the twentieth century, non-Muslims constituted a slight majority (between 50 and 56 percent). For this, see Koç, Yunus, "Osmanlı Dönemi İstanbul Nüfus Tarihi", *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi*, 8/16 (2010), 171–99.

participated in different aspects of life, including administration, trade, crafts, banking, and transportation. This made Istanbul a city of Christians and Jews as much as a city of Muslims.

One might even go a step further and say that Istanbul was a religious center for Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike. True, Istanbul was no Mecca and Medina, no Rome, no Jerusalem. It did not figure in the sacred histories of the three Abrahamic faiths. Nor did it house the mausoleums of their eminent figures or attract their pilgrims. Nor yet was it home to all-powerful religious authorities. Istanbul was a religious center in a different sense.

Istanbul's status as an important center for both Muslims and others was linked to its adoption as the Ottoman capital. Because religious communal organizations played an important role in Ottoman imperial governance, especially in the early modern period, what happened in Istanbul could have a major impact on religious communities elsewhere in empire and beyond. The Ottoman government in Istanbul established varied relationships with representatives and members of different religious communities, empowered them, and benefited from their services in extending imperial power. In doing so, the Ottoman government used existing understandings and relationships between the executive authority and the religious communities for their own purposes, but they also improvised and created novel relationships and hierarchies. Though Istanbul's position as a religious center was not universally recognized, and though different religious organizations and groups sometimes challenged the supremacy of their counterparts there, the events in few other cities held such a decisive importance for the followers of so many different faiths. In this chapter, I am going to have a general look at the significance of Istanbul for different Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities from the Ottoman capture of the city in 1453 through the eighteenth century, and explore the various ways in which the city became a center for the followers of different religions.

Istanbul as a Muslim Center

Practices reflecting a Muslim public identity were salient even from the early decades of the Ottoman political enterprise. When the Ottomans captured a Christian city, for example, they either converted the main church into a mosque or built a new mosque in the city center. In some

cities, they also endowed other distinctively Muslim institutions, such as *medrese*s (*madrasa*s) and dervish lodges (*tekke*s). These practices symbolically underlined the Muslim political ascendence. In this vein, when the Ottomans captured Istanbul in 1453, they converted the Hagia Sophia into a mosque. However, Ottoman intervention in the city was not restricted to the Hagia Sophia, nor to the level of symbolism. Rather, from Istanbul's capture until the end of the sixteenth century, the Ottomans implemented wide-reaching policies of reconstruction, repopulation, and state formation that effectively turned the city into a Muslim religious center.

Mehmed II (1444–1446, 1451–1481), the ruler who ended the Byzantine empire by capturing Istanbul, initiated the drive to endow the city with Muslim institutions. In addition to commissioning the large building complex that now bears his name (including a mosque, eight *medrese*s, a hospital, and other amenities), he patronized several other Muslim institutions that were established in empty lots or in the sites of former Christian institutions within the walled city and its vicinity. He also encouraged and helped the elite to support the construction of other Muslim institutions.[4] He and his men set the example for Ottoman sultans, other members of the dynasty (royal consorts and mothers as well as princesses), viziers, military commanders, scholars, and wealthy people in the following period. By the end of the sixteenth century, the walled city of Istanbul had at least 226 mosques and about 160 *medrese*s.[5] These institutions changed the urban landscape of Istanbul and marked its Muslim identity. In addition, they made Istanbul a center for the production and transmission of Islamic religious knowledge and culture.

Paralleling the building activities in Istanbul were efforts to increase its population. By the time of the Ottoman capture of Istanbul, the population of the city had been depleted by war, epidemic, famine, and the flight of Orthodox Christians seeking to escape Ottoman domination. Intent on returning the city to its former glory, Mehmed II forced many groups from the provinces under his rule to settle in Istanbul, thereby establishing the city's first substantial civilian Muslim

[4] Kafescioğlu, Çiğdem, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), pp. 53–130.

[5] The neighborhoods of Istanbul within the walled city were named after the mosques in them. For a survey of the endowments, including mosques, in the year 1600, see Canatar, Mehmet, *İstanbul Vakıfları Tahrîr Defteri* (Istanbul: İstanbul Fetih Cemiyeti, 2004). Some neighborhoods probably had more than one mosque. For the *medrese*s in Istanbul, see Baltacı, Cahid, *XV–XVI. Asırlarda Osmanlı Medreseleri* (Istanbul: İrfan Matbaası, 1976).

settlements.[6] Mehmed II instituted incentives such as tax remission and property donation to encourage these immigrants and others to stay in the city.[7] The economy flourished, prompting further migration to the city from the late fifteenth century. By the mid-sixteenth century, the population of the walled city is estimated to have increased to about 400,000 and the ratio of Muslims to about 58 percent.[8] Thus, through Mehmed II's program of Muslim institutional development and the accompanying growth of the Muslim population, Muslims and Islam became an essential part of Istanbul's urban culture.

Istanbul's adoption as the Ottoman capital was a gradual process. Not wanting to alienate those of his supporters with roots in the former Ottoman capitals of Edirne and Bursa, Mehmed II was initially hesitant to make Istanbul the new capital of the empire.[9] Istanbul shared the status of capital with Edirne and Bursa for some time, depending on the location of the sultan and his court at any given point. However, with its historical prestige, location, and resources, the city gradually became distinguished as the main capital. As the dynasty began to settle there in more permanent fashion from the mid-sixteenth century, the city became the undisputed imperial capital.

Istanbul's rise as Ottoman imperial capital affected the city's status as a Muslim religious center in two ways. First, the Ottoman dynasty's religio-political claim to represent the caliphate (*khilafa*) strengthened Istanbul's identity as a Muslim religious center. The caliphate could be used and understood in multiple different senses in the premodern Ottoman empire, even by the same actors. It could signify the historical institution that represented the leadership and continuity of the religio-political community established by Prophet Muhammad in Medina.[10] It could also refer

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[6] İnalcık, Halil, "The policy of Mehmed II toward the Greek population of Istanbul and the Byzantine buildings of the city", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 23/24 (1969/1970), pp. 237–9; Mantran, *17. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında İstanbul*, I, 44–5.

[7] İnalcık, "The policy of Mehmed II toward the Greek population of Istanbul", pp. 240–5.

[8] The number 400,000 is an educated guess for the 1530s based on the number of households. Another estimate places the population at between 410,000 and 520,000 in 1550. Mantran, *17. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında İstanbul*, I, pp. 45–6. See also Yerasimos, Stefanos, "16. Yüzyıl İstanbul Nüfusunun Tekrar Değerlendirilmesi İçin Veriler", *Toplumsal Tarih* (1995), 26–27.

[9] Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul*, pp. 16–18.

[10] Buzpınar, Ş. Tufan, "The question of the Ottoman Caliphate in the sixteenth century", in *1516: the Year That Changed the Middle East and the World*, ed. Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn (Beirut: American University of Beirut, forthcoming).

to the regency of God on earth via sacral designation or through spiritual striving and perfecting the human soul.[11] Additionally, it could indicate the strongest Muslim ruler with the power to provide security and order for Muslims and to ensure the implementation of sharia.[12] The Ottoman dynasty's claim to the caliphate and its propaganda in support of that claim were meant to give Ottoman political power a religious guise. The caliphate was expected to increase the dynasty's prestige in the eyes of all Muslims, regardless of their political affiliation, as well as to strengthen the legitimacy of Ottoman rule and to justify certain imperial policies. The Muslim audience within and beyond the empire interpreted the caliphate in multiple different ways and used it to facilitate access to and strengthen ties with the Ottoman dynasty. The Ottoman dynasty's claim to the caliphate conferred on Istanbul, the dynasty's capital and seat, a significant religious status. For those who took that claim seriously, at least, the city was therefore an important Muslim religious center.

This status was further boosted by a second factor: the burgeoning Ottoman bureaucracy and the role of Sunni Muslim scholars within it. In the premodern world, a polity ruling over as diverse a population and as extensive a territory as the Ottomans did needed a bureaucratic apparatus to sustain its power.[13] The development of the Ottoman bureaucracy gained momentum in the second half of the fifteenth century. It was based on the services of scholar-bureaucrats and was centered in Istanbul. The Ottoman government in Istanbul employed scholars who had certified expertise in religious scholarly disciplines. It created a professional career line for them, one that included professorships, judgeships, jurist positions, and administrative, scribal, and financial positions in the center and the provinces. And it directed their training, appointment, and promotion. They fulfilled Muslim scholarly duties such as the production, transmission, articulation, and implementation of Islamic knowledge. In addition, they acted as agents of the

[11] Yılmaz, Hüseyin, *The Caliphate Redefined: the Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), pp. 181–217; Markiewicz, Christopher, *The Crises of Kingship in Late Medieval Islam: Persian Emigres and the Making of Ottoman Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 254–78; Emecen, Feridun M., *Osmanlı Klasik Çağında Hilafet ve Saltanat* (Istanbul: Kapı Yayınları, 2020), pp. 13–87.

[12] Sariyannis, Marinos, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought up to the Early Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 137–42.

[13] Crooks, Peter and Timothy H. Parsons, "Empires, bureaucracy and the paradox of power", in *Empires and Bureaucracy in World History: from Late Antiquity to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Peter Crooks and Timothy H. Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 4–8, 12–18.

government and carried out bureaucratic duties, such as record-keeping, government reporting, tax collection, and diplomacy. By the end of the sixteenth century, the Ottoman central government depended on the services of scholar-bureaucrats across the empire's vast domain, from the Balkans to Yemen and from eastern Anatolia to Egypt, to rule its subjects, Muslim and non-Muslim alike.[14]

Scholar-bureaucrats were expected to embody, in their personal and professional lives, the Muslim religio-legal understanding prevalent in Istanbul and endorsed by the imperial government. Muslim scholars or would-be scholars who aspired to advance in the scholarly-bureaucratic system thus had to follow and adapt to Muslim religio-legal trends in Istanbul. In addition, it behooved Muslim people (and sometimes non-Muslims) who pursued their legal business in the courts in the center and provinces to support their cases with the *fetva*s (*fatwa*s, religio-legal opinions) of the chief jurist (*şeyhülislam*) in Istanbul, who from the mid-sixteenth century was considered the top official in the career line of scholar-bureaucrats.[15] All this strengthened Istanbul's status as a Muslim religious center.

This is not to say that Istanbul's position as a Muslim religious center was never challenged. Some of the other independent Muslim polities of the day do not seem to have been impressed by Ottoman claims to the caliphate and to leadership of the global Muslim community. The Shiite Safavids rejected the Sunni conception of the caliphate and promoted the idea that the leadership of Muslims belonged to the imams, the descendants of Ali b. Abi Talib (d. 661).[16] The Mughals, though ostensibly Sunni, showed no inclination to recognize the Ottomans as their leaders or Istanbul as a Muslim center to be watched, visited, or venerated.[17] Nor did the North African Sa'di dynasty, who made their own claims to the caliphate and rejected the primacy of the Ottomans and Istanbul.[18] In addition to these independent polities, some Muslim communities under Ottoman

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[14] Atçıl, Abdurrahman, *Scholars and Sultans in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), esp. pp. 1–8, 49–58, 119–33.

[15] Repp, Richard C., *The Müfti of Istanbul: a Study in the Development of the Ottoman Learned Hierarchy* (London: Ithaca, 1986), pp. 297–304; White, Joshua M., "Fetva diplomacy: the Ottoman *şeyhülislam* as trans-imperial intermediary", *Journal of Early Modern History*, 19 (2015), 199–221.

[16] Arjomand, Said Amir, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 109–21.

[17] Faroqhi, Suraiya, *The Ottoman and Mughal Empires* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), pp. 118–23.

[18] Cory, Stephen, "The man who would be caliph: a sixteenth-century sultan's bid for an African empire", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 42/2 (2009), 179–200.

rule refused to recognize the Ottomans as the leaders of all Muslims. A case in point are the Kızılbaş communities in Anatolia and the Balkans, who generally rejected the sharia-based Sunni interpretations of Islam and refused to attribute any special role to the Ottoman dynasty in Islamic history. If pushed to define a leader for Muslims, they tended to designate the Safavid shah in Iran.[19] Moreover, the followers of the various messianic movements with a leader/messiah other than the Ottoman sultan rarely recognized Istanbul as a religious center.[20]

Outside of these larger polities and movements, there were also challenges to the supremacy of the Ottomans and their capital at the individual level. Scholar-bureaucrats' distinguished position was predicated upon a particular understanding that considered politics, religion, and law to be in conjunctive symbiosis and inseparable, but not everyone accepted this understanding. For some, the authority to produce and articulate religio-legal knowledge arose not from one's association with the government but from one's ability to derive knowledge from scriptural and authoritative historical sources. For example, on many different occasions, scholars and common people in the empire's Arabic-speaking provinces questioned the competence of scholar-bureaucrats to articulate religious knowledge and refused to recognize them as leaders.[21] In their opinion, Istanbul, the center of scholar-bureaucrats, did not appear as a religious center and held no privileged position as far as religious knowledge was concerned.

Istanbul as an Orthodox Christian Religious Center

[19] Karakaya-Stump, Ayfer, *The Kizilbash/Alevis in Ottoman Anatolia: Sufism, Politics and Community* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), pp. 220–55; Yıldırım, Rıza, "The Safavid-Qizilbash ecumene and the formation of the Qizilbash-Alevi community in the Ottoman empire, c. 1500–c. 1700", *Iranian Studies*, 52 (2019), 449–83.

[20] Ocak, Ahmet Yaşar, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Zındıklar ve Mülhidler* (*15.–17. Yüzyıllar)* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2013), pp. 305–16.

[21] Burak, Guy, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law: the Hanafi School in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 101–21, 163–206; Ayoub, Samy A., *Law, Empire, and the Sultan: Ottoman Imperial Authority and Late Hanafi Jurisprudence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 31–55.

The Orthodox Christian community had a distinctive position in Ottoman Istanbul. Orthodox Christianity had been the official religion in the Byzantine empire, and Orthodox Christians constituted the overwhelming majority of the population of its capital. The Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul cooperated with the Byzantine administration and had spiritual authority over all Orthodox Christians in the imperial realm. Thus, under Byzantine rule, Istanbul was indisputably a Greek Orthodox religious center. Although the proportion of the city's Greek Orthodox population declined after the Ottoman conquest, it remained significant — about 21 percent in 1477.[22] From the perspective of the Orthodox Christian community, the arrival of the Ottomans meant the loss of their privileged position and the renegotiation of their status and that of their church. Still, new arrangements under the Ottomans ensured that Istanbul continued to be a religious center for Greek Orthodox Christians in the city and beyond.

The Ottomans retained the Patriarchate and used it to administer the affairs of their Orthodox Christian community. By keeping the old church structure in place, they were able to exert control over the political and religious tendencies of their Christian subjects — for example, by preventing Orthodox Christian subjects from warming toward Catholicism and/or colluding with the Catholic Western powers. In addition, having the clergy consent to Ottoman rule helped legitimize that rule in the eyes of the empire's Christian subjects. Probably with these or similar considerations in mind, Mehmed II appointed Gennadios Scholarios (d. c. 1473), who had led the opposition to the attempts of union with western Christianity before the Ottoman conquest, as the patriarch in 1454. According the Greek historian Kritoboulos of Imbros (d. c. 1470), who wrote about Mehmed II's reign, Mehmed II gave Gennadios many "rights and privileges", including "the rule of the church and all its power and authority, [which was] no less than that enjoyed previously under the emperors".[23] Gennadios's appointment marked the beginning of a long-lived institutional arrangement for the relationship of the Orthodox Christian community with the Ottoman government.

The nature and limits of the Patriarchate's authority under Ottoman rule is the subject of some debate. Some historians, taking their cue from Kritoboulos's statement above, have argued

[22] This percentage, for the walled city, is derived from the summary table of the population of Istanbul in 1477 in Öz, "İstanbul Nüfusu", p. 475.

[23] Kritoboulos, *History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, trans. Charles T. Riggs (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), pp. 94–5.

that the Patriarchate was granted total authority in administering the affairs of the empire's Orthodox Christians. In this view, the Orthodox Christians constituted a separate autonomous group (*millet*) with the patriarch as its head.[24] More recently, however, scholars have begun to question the extent of patriarchal power and Greek Orthodox autonomy. Some have argued that the Ottoman administration did not clearly distinguish between its subjects on the basis of religion, noting that most Ottoman laws and regulations concerned all subjects regardless of their religion. While they accept that the patriarch in Istanbul was granted some powers over Orthodox Christians, they argue that these were not so extensive as to justify the claim that Greeks constituted an autonomous *millet*, something which did not occur until the nineteenth century.[25]

What, then, can be said about the authority of the patriarch of Istanbul under the Ottomans? And what did it mean for Ottoman Istanbul to be an Orthodox Christian religious center, a point of attention for Orthodox Christians from Istanbul and elsewhere?

The Ottoman government evidently recognized the Patriarchate of Istanbul as an imperial institution and the patriarch of Istanbul as an imperial official, as illustrated by the government's appointment of the patriarchs. A recent study on the appointment diplomas (*berat*) of the patriarchs clarifies the nature of their authority.[26] The government imposed duties on the patriarchs, who, for example, usually had to make a one-time payment (*pişkeş*) upon being appointed and an annual payment to the imperial treasury thereafter.[27] In addition, the government granted the patriarchs power, rights, and immunities. For example, the patriarchs in Istanbul had the exclusive right to select and nominate the lower clergy for appointment. They oversaw the practice of Orthodox Christianity and had the right to punish religious infractions by Orthodox clergy and common

[24] Runciman, Steven, *The Great Church in Captivity: a Study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the Eve of the Turkish Conquest to the Greek War of Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 165–85; Pantazopoulos, N. J., *Church and Law in the Balkan Peninsula during the Ottoman Rule* (Thessalonike: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1967), pp. 22–6.

[25] Braude, Benjamin, "Foundation myths of the *millet* system", in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1982), 69–88; Kenanoğlu, M. Macit, *Osmanlı Millet Sistemi, Mit ve Gerçek* (Istanbul, Klasik, 2017), pp. 49–82.

[26] Çolak, Hasan and Elif Bayraktar Tellan, *The Orthodox Church as an Ottoman Institution* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2019).

[27] For a discussion of the inception of the payment of *pişkeş* by the patriarchs and its transformation from one-time payment to an annual payment in the late seventeenth century, see ibid., pp. 33–4.

people. They and their deputies had the right to authorize marriages and divorces, to hear legal cases, and to accept testamentary gifts, at least so long as Orthodox Christian subjects willingly sought the services of the Church in these matters. They could impose patriarchal taxes on Orthodox Christian subjects and were entrusted to collect state taxes. If the patriarchs or their representatives needed to seek guidance or use coercive force in their dealings with their subjects, they had the right to ask for help from other imperial officials.[28]

Considering the financial arrangement between the appointed patriarchs and the government, some scholars have characterized the prerogative of the patriarchs as a type of tax-farm.[29] Their appointment diplomas certainly read like tax-farming contracts, listing financial obligations in return for the rights of tax collection. However, such a reading does not do full justice to the various types of relationships that these appointment diplomas constructed between the Orthodox Patriarchate on the one hand and the patriarchs in Istanbul, their community, and the Ottoman government on the other. For example, for many Orthodox Christians, the Patriarchate represented state authority in most situations, as its representatives collected taxes for the imperial treasury. It also held the autonomy and power to define and implement religious dogma and practice, which meant that many Orthodox Christian believers would have had to heed the patriarch's word and recognize his seat, Istanbul, as a religious center.

But the authority of the Orthodox Patriarchate and patriarchs in Istanbul was not universal. Though some have suggested that the patriarchs in Istanbul had authority over all Orthodox Christian communities under Ottoman rule from the fifteenth century onward, this is likely a projection of nineteenth-century realities onto earlier centuries.[30] In reality, their reach was more limited. As Hasan Çolak has recently shown in his study on the relationships the Orthodox patriarchates of Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria had with the Ottoman central administration and the Patriarchate in Istanbul, these eastern patriarchates had separate structures and were not

[28] For example, see the appointment diplomas of the Istanbul patriarchs Jeremias I (issued in 1525) and Jeremias III (issued in 1720) in ibid., pp. 71–2, 86–90.

[29] Papademetriou, Tom, *Render unto the Sultan: Power, Authority, and the Greek Orthodox Church in the Early Ottoman Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 107–75. See also İnalcık, Halil, "The status of the Greek Orthodox patriarch under the Ottomans", *Turcica*, 23 (1991), 407–36; Kenanoğlu, *Osmanlı Millet Sistemi*, pp. 82–92.

[30] Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, pp. 176–7.

under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate in Istanbul.[31] The appointment diplomas of the patriarchs in Istanbul give a list of the cities and towns under their jurisdiction, and these lie predominantly in central and western Anatolia, the Aegean islands, and the Balkans, thus excluding many regions under Ottoman rule where Orthodox Christians lived.[32] Absent from these lists are the cities of the eastern patriarchates (i.e., Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria) and their environs, as well as some regions in the Balkans, such as Peć and Ohrid, which had separate patriarchs. Thus, although Ottoman arrangements ensured the continuation of Istanbul's status as an Orthodox Christian religious center by empowering the Patriarchate and patriarchs in the city, other centers of the same type maintained their existence and independence from Istanbul in other cities under Ottoman rule.

However, the extent of the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul was not static, but varied in connection with changes in its internal administration. For example, from the late seventeenth or the eighteenth century, a number of Orthodox Christian families, mostly in Istanbul's district of Fener (and thus known as Phanariots, after the district), increased their influence in the Ottoman administration. In addition to being actively involved in finance and trade, the Phanariots had close relationships with different branches of the Ottoman bureaucracy. They provided translators to the Imperial Council and the office of the Grand Admiral and had influence in the internal administration and international diplomacy of the empire. In addition, they monopolized the governor positions in two autonomous provinces, Moldovia and Walachia. They used their economic and political power to interfere in the Patriarchate's affairs, to patronize patriarchs they favored, and sometimes to have one of their own elected as patriarch.[33] They also used their influence to augment the status of the Patriarchate. As Phanariot power in government grew, the Patriarchate of Peć and Ohrid, whose reputation had been tarnished in the eyes of the

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[31] Çolak, Hasan, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East: Relations between the Ottoman Central Administration and the Patriarchates of Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2015), pp. 86–108.

[32] For example, see the appointment diploma of Cosmas III, the patriarch of Istanbul, issued in 1714, in Çolak and Bayraktar Tellan, *The Orthodox Church as an Ottoman Institution*, p. 80.

[33] Philliou, Christine M., *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), pp 5–37. For the change in the administration of the Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul in relation to the rise of Phanariot power, see Bayraktar Tellan, Elif, "The Patriarchate of Constantinople and the 'Reform of the Synod' in the 18th century Ottoman context", *Chronos*, 39 (2019), 7–22.

Ottoman government by the War of the Holy League (1683–1699), came under the spiritual authority of the Patriarchate of Istanbul in 1766–1767.[34] Probably in connection with this rising Phanariot influence, the Patriarchate of Istanbul also became involved in tax-farming activities and gradually developed a certain supervisory role over the eastern patriarchates, though these remained outside its spiritual jurisdiction.[35]

Istanbul's status as an Orthodox Christian center was sometimes threatened. During the reign of Süleyman I (1520–1566), probably in the late 1530s, a public debate began over the legality of keeping the Christian churches in Istanbul active. From the perspective of the Sharia, it was argued, if a land was brought under Muslim rule through coercion (rather than voluntary agreement), all the places of worship there should be converted to mosques or else demolished. In response to this argument, and desiring to avoid a general persecution of Christians and the destruction of church buildings, the Orthodox patriarch sought to prove that the Christian population of Istanbul had secretly cooperated with Mehmed II before the Ottoman conquest.[36] Another challenge to the authority of the Patriarchate was the spread of Catholic and Protestant missionary activity from the sixteenth century. As will be discussed below, these missionaries targeted Orthodox and Armenian Christians and tried to distance them from the authority of their respective spiritual heads in Istanbul and elsewhere. In such cases, the Ottoman government usually supported the Orthodox and Armenian patriarchs against the missionaries.[37]

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[34] Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East*, pp. 137–44; Greene, Molly, *The Edinburgh History of the Greeks, 1453 to 1768* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 157–61; Bayraktar Tellan, "The Patriarchate of Constantinople", p. 19.

[35] Clogg, Richard, "The Greek *millet* in the Ottoman Empire", in Braude and Lewis, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, 185–207. See also Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East*, pp. 140–1. Macit Kenanoğlu distinguishes between the structure of spiritual and administrative authority. He suggests that although the eastern patriarchates were spiritually independent from the Patriarchate of Istanbul, especially from the eighteenth century, they were administratively under its jurisdiction, as the Ottoman government granted it supervisory rights over all patriarchs. Kenanoğlu, *Osmanlı Millet Sistemi*, p. 87

[36] For a *fetva* referring to the public debate over the legal status of the churches in Istanbul and the relevant government investigation in 1538/39, see Ebussuud, *Ma'rûzât*, ed. and trans. Pehlul Düzenli (Istanbul: Klasik, 2013), pp. 240–1.

[37] Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East*, pp. 112–33; Kenanoğlu, *Osmanlı Millet Sistemi*, pp. 143–5.

Istanbul as a Jewish Religious Center

The history of Istanbul's Jewish community differed from that of its Muslim and Orthodox Christian communities in significant respects. Istanbul gained its status as a center of Jewish religious life after the Ottoman conquest of the city, when Jewish settlers were brought in from other parts of the Ottoman realm, from Anatolia and the Balkans. But these settlers were soon joined by migrants from further afield, from the Iberian Peninsula and parts of central Europe. This made the city's Jews a more diverse group than its Muslim and Orthodox Christian communities, and while Istanbul soon became a center of Jewish religious life, the Jewish authorities and community in the city never developed as firm a hold over their coreligionists elsewhere in the empire or beyond. They also developed a unique and relatively decentralized relationship with the Ottoman government, one that would set them apart from the Ottoman Muslim and Orthodox communities.

As part of Mehmed II's efforts to increase Istanbul's population, Rabbinic and Karaite Jewish groups in different cities in Ottoman Anatolia and the Balkans, including Bursa, İznik, İzmit, Ankara, Sofia, Edirne, and Thessaloniki, were settled in Istanbul. Many of these were Romaniotes, Jews who had formerly been subjects of the Byzantine empire and spoke Greek. In 1477, Jews constituted a little over 11 percent of the population in the walled city.[38] During the reign of Bayezid II (1481–1512), and especially in the 1490s, additional waves of Jewish migration arrived from the Iberian Peninsula, as Jews and former Jews (Marranos) were driven out by the Reconquista. The Ottomans welcomed these Sephardic Jews, who spoke Spanish and differed from the Romaniotes in their social and religious practices, to their lands, perhaps in hopes of benefitting from their extensive networks to augment the empire's international trade, and they were settled in different parts of the empire. Many came to Istanbul, and more arrived in the first decades of the sixteenth century, increasing the ratio of Jewish people in the city and eventually making Sephardic Jews the dominant element in the Jewish community there. The city also became home to a small community of Jews who had been exiled from central Europe in the fifteenth and

[38] Öz, "İstanbul Nüfusu", p. 475.

sixteenth centuries, the Ashkenazi. These Jews mixed with the city's Romaniote and Sephardic Jews and never formed a separate unit.[39]

Mehmed II appears to have sought to connect the Jewish community to the Ottoman government through a structure similar to that of the Orthodox Patriarchate, designating Moses Capsali (d. 1495), a prestigious member of the city's pre-Ottoman Romaniote community, as *hahambaşı* (chief rabbi), the head of the Jewish community.[40] Capsali was probably given authority and rights similar to those enjoyed by the Orthodox Patriarch; in return, he was required to collect and remit to the Ottoman treasury the annual lump-sum *rav akçesi* (rabbi tax), which was comparable to the annual tax paid by the Orthodox Patriarch.[41] However, this arrangement, which worked so well in the Greek Orthodox case, proved untenable. The Sephardic Jews — who maintained their own Iberian communal structures and tended to form separate, decentralized communities — looked down upon Romaniotes and were thus reluctant to recognize Capsali as their leader,[42] while his fellow Romaniotes contested his religious and financial authority.[43] Further complicating matters, in practice, the chief rabbi had hardly any authority over Jews outside Istanbul. Upon Capsali's death in 1495, Elijah Mizrahi (d. 1526) succeeded him as chief rabbi; but recognizing his lack of authority, he renounced the duty of collecting the *rav akçesi*. After Mizrahi's death, the Ottoman government seems to have accepted that its Jewish

[39] For the Jewish population in Istanbul, see Rozen, Minna, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul: the Formative Years, 1453–1566* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 45–54; Shmuelevitz, Aryeh, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire in the Late Fifteenth and the Sixteenth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), pp. 11–14.

[40] Because of the lack of relevant sources from the fifteenth century, historians usually rely on accounts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to reconstruct the relationship of the Jews with the Ottoman government during this period. Hacker, Joseph R., "Ottoman policy toward the Jews and Jewish attitudes toward the Ottomans during the fifteenth century", in Braude and Lewis, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 117–19.

[41] Epstein, Mark A., "The leadership of the Ottoman Jews in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries", in Braude and Lewis, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 103–6.

[42] For the Sephardic communities in Istanbul, see Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community*, pp. 77–86.

[43] For example, the Karaite Jews in Istanbul did not want to have Capsali interfering in their financial affairs. For this, see Epstein, "The leadership of the Ottoman Jews", p. 104. For examples of challenges to the religious authority of the chief rabbi in Istanbul, see Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community*, pp. 70–4.

communities would not accept a single, overarching religious head, and it did not appoint a replacement.[44]

Because Jewish groups in the Ottoman empire did not have a centralized religious organization or a supreme religious leader, the government often dealt with them individually, assigning them rights and responsibilities similar to those of Orthodox Christians, but at the group rather than the collective level. Jewish groups had the right to choose their own religious leaders and to carry out their religious rituals without any outside interference. Their courts could handle internal legal matters, with the exception of criminal cases, and the judgements they handed out were backed by the power of the state.[45] But the Ottoman government did treat these groups as a collective in some matters, such as the *rav akçesi*, which was levied on all the Jews in a particular city as a lump sum. In the absence of a chief rabbi, the government appointed a non-religious person, usually elected by the local Jewish communities, as the representative (*kahya* or *kocabaşı*) of all the Jews in a given city.[46] These representatives mediated between the Jewish people of the city and the government and organized the collection of the *rav akçesi* and other taxes, such as the *cizye*, a poll tax paid by non-Muslims.

Given the decentralized nature of authority among Ottoman Jews, the city of Istanbul enjoyed no special religious status. But that did not mean it lacked influence. Developments and influential figures in the capital of the empire, where diverse and vibrant Jewish groups settled from the late fifteenth century, affected Jewish life outside Istanbul in various ways. For example, the city was home to a number of Jewish scholars who were famous for their knowledge of Jewish law, *halakhah*. These scholars commanded broad respect and authority among Ottoman Jews, and they issued opinions (*responsa*) on particular matters. Jewish groups and courts across the empire acted upon the opinions of these respected scholars and made arrangements for enforcing them

[44] Epstein, "The leadership of the Ottoman Jews", pp. 106–7. See also Doğan, Hatice, "Hahambaşılık", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi, EK-1* (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2016), 513–14.

[45] Shmuelevitz, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 41–7.

[46] For more on these Jewish representatives, see Shmuelevitz, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 28–9; Hacker, Joseph R, "Jews in the Ottoman empire (1580–1839)", in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. VII: *The Early Modern World, 1500–1815*, ed. Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 845–6.

through spiritual sanctions and the help of Ottoman ruling authorities. In some cases, these scholars could issue opinions that concerned the status and acts of people outside the imperial borders, especially Jews and former Jews who had remained in the Iberian Peninsula.[47]

Istanbul was also home to many particularly prominent members of the Jewish community who had close access to the halls of power. Jewish physicians played a significant role in the medical services in the Ottoman empire,[48] and physicians such as Hekim Yakub, Ibn Sanchi, and Moses Hamon held important positions in the Ottoman court.[49] Though Jewish physicians began to lose their dominant position in the palace medical cadre in the seventeenth century, physicians of Jewish origin who converted to Islam, like Hayatizade, continued to serve in the top medical positions in the Ottoman palace, and such figures maintained their ties with and occasionally provided help to their former community.[50] In addition, well-to-do Jews with extensive networks within and beyond the empire, like Joseph Nasi (d. 1579), or Jewish women, who acted as agents for the ladies of the Ottoman harem, often had easy access to the sultans and other influential officials, and they used this access to plead on behalf of individual Jews and Jewish groups in Istanbul and beyond.[51]

Despite these connections, the Jewish community in Istanbul experienced some difficult times under Ottoman rule. Around the same time as Orthodox Christians faced the threat of losing

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[47] Shmuelevitz, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 41–47; Hacker, "Jews in the Ottoman empire (1580–1839)", pp. 846–7. For examples of *responsa* illustrating the authority of rabbis and *halakhah* for Jews in Istanbul and elsewhere, see Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community*, pp. 309–73.

[48] Murphey, Rhoads, "Jewish contributions to Ottoman medicine, 1450–1800", in *Jews, Turks and Ottomans: a Shared History through the Twentieth Century*, ed. Avigdor Levy (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 61–74; Afyoncu, Erhan, "Osmanlı Hekimbaşıları ve Hassa Hekimleri", in *Osmanlılarda Sağlık*, ed. Coşkun Yılmaz and Necdet Yılmaz (Istanbul: Biofarma, 2006), vol. I, 85–98; Veinstein, Gilles, "The Ottoman Jews: between distorted realities and legal fictions", *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 25 (2010), p. 54.

[49] Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community*, pp. 202–3, 208–9.

[50] The conversion of Jewish physicians was part of a drive on the part of the Ottoman court that resulted in the conversion of many influential figures, including Sabbatai Zevi, in the second half of the seventeenth century. Baer, Marc David, *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), esp. pp. 132–8; Küçük, Harun, *Science without Leisure: Practical Naturalism in Istanbul, 1660–1732* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020), pp. 149–52.

[51] Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community*, pp. 204–12; Ben-Naeh, Yaron, "Ottoman Jewish courtiers: an oriental type of the court Jew", *Jewish Culture and History*, 19 (2017), pp. 3–4.

their churches, in the late 1530s, the Jews faced a similar problem. The threat, outlined in the previous section, had to do with allegations that these communities had resisted the Ottoman army's conquest of the city in 1453. Much like the Christians, the Jews sought to protect their synagogues by proving that they had not resisted the Ottoman army but actually helped it to enter the city.[52] Perhaps even more trying was the great fire of 1660, which destroyed the Eminönü neighborhood, where a significant part of Istanbul's Jewish community resided. After the fire, the Ottoman government issued a decree ordering the Jews in the neighborhood to sell their property to Muslims and to relocate to Hasköy across the Golden Horn.[53] The neighborhood's Jews abided by the decree, and Eminönü soon became a flourishing hub of Muslim life with the completion of the Yeni Valide royal mosque complex, the construction of which had started in 1597. Despite such situations, the Jews of Istanbul maintained the vibrancy of their community life and preserved their connections with the government and other elements in the city. From the seventeenth century, many Jews in Istanbul participated in the empire's expanding trade with Europe, acting as brokers, bankers, partners, and translators. In a similar vein, Jewish merchants had a special relationship with the Janissaries and a virtual monopoly over providing supplies to the army.[54]

Istanbul as an Armenian Religious Center

Like Greek Orthodox Christians, Armenians had a longstanding institutional structure that presided over religious ritual, hierarchy, and affairs within their community. At the top of this structure were the catholicates, whose heads, the catholicoses, had the independent right of distributing holy oil and designating bishops. The patriarchates occupied a lower level in the hierarchy, the patriarchs receiving their spiritual mandate from the catholicoses. Three

[52] Veinstein, "The Ottoman Jews", pp. 59–61.

[53] Yıldız, Kenan, *1660 İstanbul Yangını ve Etkileri, Vakıflar, Toplum ve Ekonomi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2017), pp. 180–92. See also Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, pp. 81–91.

[54] Jamgocyan, Onnik, *Les banquiers des sultans: Juifs, Grecs, Français et Arméniens de la haute finance; Constantinople, 1650–1850* (Paris: Les Editions du Bosphore, 2013), 71–83; Hacker, "Jews in the Ottoman empire (1580–1839)", pp. 850–4; Ben-Naeh, "Ottoman Jewish Courtiers", pp. 4–8, 14–16.

catholicates, in Etchmiadzin, Sis, and Akhtamar, regulated the religious and spiritual affairs of Armenians in eastern, central, and southern Anatolia. The patriarchate of Jerusalem also had a prestigious position with authority over Armenians in Syria and Palestine.[55] But Istanbul held no special place in this system, at least not originally.

That changed with the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul, which played a critical role in the rise of a substantial Armenian community in the city. Mehmed II brought some Armenian groups to the city, while others migrated there of their own accord. By 1477, Armenians constituted about four percent of the population in the walled city, and five percent of the population in the walled city and Galata.[56] According to an eighteenth-century Armenian tradition, Armenians were recognized as a distinct community with their own church from 1461; they had a relationship with the Ottoman government similar to that of the Orthodox Christian and Jewish communities, with one of their own, Bishop Joachim, appointed as patriarch. Some historians cast doubt on this account and instead date the beginning of the appointment, by the Ottoman government, of an Armenian patriarch to the first half of the sixteenth century.[57] Whether in the fifteenth century or the sixteenth, once this connection between the Armenian community and the government was established, as in the cases of the Orthodox patriarch and Jewish chief rabbi, the Armenian patriarch would have had rights over the Armenian community, including the right to regulate religious rituals, collect alms, and oversee the community's religious endowments, as well as financial obligations toward the government, such as the payment of an appointment fee (*pişkeş*) and an annual tax.

The establishment of an Armenian patriarchate in Istanbul gave rise to confusions and frictions within the Armenian church and clerical hierarchy. The Ottoman government likely appointed the first patriarch of Istanbul out of a desire to have a representative in the city to mediate its relations with the Armenian community, and the Istanbul patriarchate would have had spiritual and administrative authority over most Armenian groups in western Anatolia and Rumelia.[58] But

[55] Bardakjian, Kevork, "The rise of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople", in Braude and Lewis, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 93; Seyfeli, Canan, *İstanbul Ermeni Patrikliği: Kuruluşu ve İdari Yapısı* (Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2019), pp. 58–65.

[56] Öz, "İstanbul Nüfusu", p. 475.

[57] Bardakjian, "The rise of the Armenian Patriarchate", pp. 89–92.

[58] Bardakjian, "The rise of the Armenian Patriarchate", pp. 91–4.

the position of the patriarchs of Istanbul relative to the catholicoses of Etchmiadzin, Sis, and Akhtamar and the patriarch of Jerusalem was always a point of contention. Because of their position at the imperial center, and the access to the government that came with it, the Istanbul patriarchs could push for a say in the selection and appointment of all Armenian clergy, including catholicoses and patriarchs, in the empire. The three catholicoses and the patriarch of Jerusalem, however, had tradition on their side, and they were reluctant to recognize the patriarch of Istanbul as a higher authority.[59]

It appears that from the early seventeenth century, waves of Armenian migration from eastern to western Anatolia, spurred by the period's Celali rebellions, strengthened Istanbul's position as an Armenian religious center. These migrations swelled the ranks of Istanbul's Armenian population, and Istanbul became a significant center of Armenian literary production for the first time.[60]

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Armenian entrepreneurs in Istanbul increased their profile in the economy of the city and the empire. They participated in diverse economic activities, including banking, industrial production, and crafts. [61] Taking advantage of their ties to Armenian communities in India, Safavid Iran, and Europe, some of Istanbul's Armenians, especially those with links to Iran, participated in long-distance trade and amassed great wealth.[62] Istanbul's Armenian bankers played critical roles in the Ottoman tax-farming system, acted as private financiers for top officials, and established control over the imperial treasury.[63] The presence of such rich and influential Armenian men, known as *amira*, with easy

[59] Bardakjian, "The rise of the Armenian Patriarchate", p. 93; Kenanoğlu, *Osmanlı Millet Sistemi*, pp. 131–2; Ercan, Yavuz, *Kudüs Ermeni Patrikhanesi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1988), pp. 26–8.

[60] Shapiro, Henry R., "The great Armenian flight: migration and cultural change in the seventeenth-century Ottoman empire", *Journal of Early Modern History*, 23 (2019), 67–89.

[61] Barsoumian, Hagop, "The dual role of the Armenian *amira* class within the Ottoman government and the Armenian *millet* (1750–1850)", in Braude and Lewis, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 171–84.

[62] Jamgocyan, *Les banquiers des sultans*, 33–69; 89–105; Cutillas-Ferrer, Jose, "Armenians, diplomats, and commercial agents of Shah Abbās: the European journey of Khvāja Safar (c. 1609–14)", *Journal of Persianate Studies*, 11 (2018), 1–28; Aslanian, Sebouh David, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: the Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 66–85.

[63] Jamgocyan, *Les banquiers des sultans*, 113–27; Pamuk, Şevket, "The evolution of financial institutions in the Ottoman empire, 1600–1914", *Financial History Review*, 11 (2004), pp. 21–5; Yaycıoğlu, Ali, *Partners of the Empire:*

access to the heights of government increased the significance of Istanbul for Armenians in other parts of the empire. The *amira* could easily solve problems for anyone and facilitate access to significant privileges from the government. Under these circumstances, the powerful *amira* increased their influence over the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul and became involved in the selection of the patriarchs.[64] Buoyed by their support, the Patriarchate in Istanbul gradually gained leverage over its spiritual competitors in Etchmiadzin, Sis, Akhtamar, and Jerusalem, and by the end of the eighteenth century, it seems to have had authority over all Armenian churches in the empire.[65]

Istanbul as a Catholic and Protestant Religious Center

Unlike the religious communities discussed above, Catholic and Protestant Christians in the Ottoman empire were not officially recognized as distinct communities until the nineteenth century. Because of this lack of official status, they did not have a religious and administrative organization centered in Istanbul and affiliated with the imperial government. Their numbers grew over time, as missionary activity from the sixteenth century onward gradually increased the numbers of the empire's Catholics, and later Protestants, mostly at the expense of the empire's Orthodox and Armenian Christian communities. Enjoying the diplomatic support of European powers, Catholics and Protestants had influence in the empire and affected the Orthodox and Armenian communities in different ways.

The earliest Ottoman Catholics were the Genoese merchant community that had settled in Galata during the Byzantine era. Following the Ottoman capture of Istanbul, they immediately contacted Mehmed II and reached an agreement that allowed them to preserve their churches and

the Crises of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), pp. 80–1, 97–9.

[64] Dadyan, Saro, *Osmanlı'da Ermeni Aristokrasisi* (Istanbul: Everest Yayınları, 2011), pp. 85–97.
[65] Bardakjian, "The rise of the Armenian Patriarchate", p. 95.

freely practice their faith.[66] However, this agreement did not recognize Catholic Christians as a separate community or allow them to form an organization with other Catholic groups under Ottoman rule. This contrasts with the situation of Eastern Christians, such as Maronites, Nestorians, Chaldeans, Copts, and Syriac Christians, who were recognized as separate entities, but who similarly lacked their own special administrations linked to the Ottoman government;[67] instead, in some cases, especially those involving communication with the central government, they were considered under the jurisdiction of the Armenian patriarch in Istanbul.[68] Catholics in the Balkans were not given the opportunity to organize as a separate religious community either; the Orthodox Patriarchate treated them and their churches as falling under its jurisdiction, and it tried to have them share in the state and religious taxes imposed on Orthodox Christians.[69]

A turning point in the history of the Ottoman Catholic community came with the establishment of missionary orders, such as the Jesuits and Capuchins, and the start of major foreign proselytizing activities in Ottoman lands after the Council of Trent (1545–1563). Missionaries collected information about the beliefs and institutional structures of Muslims and Christians, provided services such as education and health, and worked to bring new members to the Catholic Church. While they were able to gain the sympathy of and convert some Armenian and Orthodox Christians in Istanbul and other parts of the empire,[70] their larger goal was to prepare the ground for the union of the Eastern churches with the Catholic Church. For this reason, the missionaries had a special interest in developing relations with the Orthodox and Armenian patriarchs in Istanbul. Jesuit missionaries, for example, collaborated with many Orthodox

[66] İnalcık, Halil, "Ottoman Galata, 1453–1553", in *Première rencontre internationale sur l'empire Ottoman et la Turquie moderne*, ed. Edhem Eldem (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1991), pp. 17–27; Fleet, Kate, *European and Islamic Trade in the Early Ottoman State: the Merchants of Genoa and Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 128–9; Eldem, "Istanbul: from imperial to peripheralized capital", pp. 149–50.

[67] Kenanoğlu, *Osmanlı Millet Sistemi*, pp. 143–54.

[68] Seyfeli, *İstanbul Ermeni Patrikliği*, pp. 120–31.

[69] Greene, *The Edinburgh History of the Greeks*, pp. 36–42. See also Frazee, Charles A., *Catholics and Sultans: the Church and the Ottoman Empire, 1453–1923* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 31–45.

[70] Vassileva, Elmira, "Ottoman Istanbul from the perspective of the Catholic missionaries in the post-Tridentine period (end of 16th–17th centuries)", in *Osmanlı Istanbulu IV*, ed. Feridun M. Emecen, Ali Akyıldız, and Emrah Safa Gürkan (Istanbul: İstanbul 29 Mayıs Üniversitesi, 2016), 289–311; Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans*, pp. 88–102; Greene, *The Edinburgh History of the Greeks*, pp. 139–46.

patriarchs, including Mitrophanis (1565–1572), Raphael II (1603–1607), and Neophytos (1602–1603 and 1607–1612), and also with Armenian patriarchs, including Hovannes III (1600–1601) and Khatchatour of Sivas (1642–1643). However, many Orthodox and Armenian Christians opposed the idea of union. So too did the Ottoman government, which supported them and hindered the activities of the missionaries and helped in the removal of pro-union patriarchs in the early modern period.[71]

Protestants also sent missionaries to the Ottoman empire. The Ottoman government seems at first to have tacitly welcomed them, pleased by their anti-Catholic fervor. In Ottoman Hungary, for example, missionaries of various Protestant denominations, including Lutherans and Calvinists, were so energetically active that by 1570, Protestants constituted the majority in the region.[72] Like Catholics, Protestants sought ways to convince the Orthodox and Armenian patriarchs in Istanbul to collaborate with them. In this vein, for example, Stephan Gerlach, who served in Istanbul from 1573 to 1578 as the Protestant preacher of the embassy of the Austrian David Ungnad, collected information about the Orthodox and Armenian communities and tried to establish a connection between the Orthodox patriarch Jeremias II and Lutheran priests in Tübingen, though Jeremias II and his circle never showed any inclination to accept Lutheran beliefs.[73] Protestant activities bore fruit in the early seventeenth century, when they managed to secure the support of the Orthodox patriarch Cyril Lukaris for their cause. However, the reaction of Orthodox Christians against Loukaris's pro-Protestant attitude and the slander Catholic

[71] Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans*, pp. 128–32; Bayraktar Tellan, Elif, "The Patriarch and the Sultan: the Struggle for Authority and the Quest for Order in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Empire", Ph.D. dissertation, Bilkent University, 2011, pp. 50–52. The Ottoman anti-union stance seems to have become more complex in the nineteenth century, when the Ottomans started trying to curry Western favor by giving Catholics a freer hand, perhaps in an effort to counterbalance Russia's influence over Orthodox communities in the Balkans. Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans*, 223 – 31, 239–55.

[72] Fodor, Pál, "The Ottomans and their Christians in Hungary", *Frontiers of Faith: Religious Exchange and the Constitution of Religious Identities, 1400–1750*, ed. Eszter Andor and István György Tóth (Budapest: Central European University and European Science Foundation, 2001), pp. 137–43.

[73] Beydilli, Kemal, "Önsöz: Stephan Gerlach, Türkëye Günlüğü (1573–1578)", in Stephan Gerlach, *Türkiye Günlüğü*, pp. 20–1.

missionaries levied against him convinced the Ottoman government to depose and then execute him in 1638.[74]

Although Istanbul did not have substantial Catholic or Protestant populations — with the exception of the Catholic community in Galata — and did not house government-recognized religious heads of these groups before the nineteenth century, it nevertheless held an important place in the lives of people of both faiths. Because they lacked government recognition, Catholic and Protestant communities and missionaries relied in their operations on the support of the diplomatic representatives of European powers with friendly relationships and trade agreements with the Ottoman government. They turned to these representatives to advance their interests and communicate and solve their problems with the Ottoman government, with Venice and France acting as patrons of Catholics and England and the Dutch Republic supporting the Protestants.[75] As these representatives were all based in Istanbul, the empire's Catholic and Protestant communities and missionaries remained strongly tied to and in regular communication with the city, making it an important center for them, just as it was for the empire's other faiths.

Conclusion

Considering that the overwhelming majority of the people in the Ottoman ruling class were Muslims and that Islam and the Muslim community had a privileged position in Ottoman social life and official ideology, one can characterize the Ottoman empire as an Islamic empire. Istanbul, the capital of the empire, reflected the privileged position of Islam and Muslims. Distinctly Muslim buildings — the building complexes of mosques, *medrese*s, and dervish lodges — marked the city's skyline. Muslim scholars distinguished for their Islamic knowledge carried prestige,

[74] Kermeli, Eugenia, "Kyrillos Loukaris' legacy: reformation as a catalyst in the 17th century Ottoman society", *The Muslim World*, 107 (2017), 737–53.

[75] Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans*, pp. 67–73, 84–5, 92–4; Vassileva, "Ottoman Istanbul", pp. 293–4; Krstić, Tijana, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 134–7; Goffman, Daniel, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 206–13.

occupied significant positions in the bureaucracy, and could influence social and political developments related to Muslims and others in Istanbul and elsewhere. Official discourse, too, always underlined the significance of Islam for the legitimacy of Ottoman rule and stressed the government's commitment to implementing Islamic precepts and realizing Islamic ideals.

However, the ethno-religious composition of the people under Ottoman rule and the limitations of the pre-modern tools of domination appear to have convinced the Ottomans to follow a pluralist policy toward other religions and their religious communal organizations. Instead of destroying others' existing religious structures and imposing something new, they chose to build relationships with non-Muslim communities by means of their own religious organizations. To this end, they encouraged and/or allowed Orthodox Christians, Jews, Armenians, and, later, Catholics and Protestants to settle and nurture a vibrant religious life in the imperial capital, Istanbul. Generally speaking, non-Muslim communities had their officially appointed heads, whether clergy or laymen, in Istanbul, enjoyed autonomy in defining doctrine and organizing ritual, and possessed the right to have their legal cases (except for criminal cases) heard and their civil transactions (such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance) processed and recorded in their own courts. Where needed, the Ottoman government used the coercive power of the state to support the heads of its non-Muslim communities and to protect their communal structures. This pluralist policy of the Ottomans ensured that Istanbul became a center not only for Muslims but also for Christians and Jews.

The distinctive characteristics of different religious communities, such as their varying demographics and organizational structures, altered the way they related to and integrated with the Ottoman imperial system. Where Orthodox Christians and Armenians had a relatively centralized organization under the control of their patriarchs in Istanbul, Jewish groups had a more decentralized structure; meanwhile, Catholics and Protestants did not have an empire-wide or regional communal organization of their own, at least not one recognized by the Ottoman government, until the nineteenth century. These communities were not static; nor were their relationships with the government. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, Armenian and Orthodox laymen in Istanbul gained economic strength and access to the Ottoman ruling class. With this came political power, and they thus began to dominate their communal hierarchies, augmenting their power both within and outside Istanbul. Notwithstanding the transformations different communities' relationships with the city underwent over time, Ottoman

Istanbul preserved its position as a center for the followers of different religions until the nineteenth century, and even into the twentieth.

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