University of North Florida
UNF Digital Commons

All Volumes (2001-2008)

The Osprey Journal of Ideas and Inquiry

2006

In the Lion's Den: Orthodox Christians under Ottoman Rule, 1400-1550

Neil Paradise
University of North Florida

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unf.edu/ojii_volumes

Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons

Suggested Citation
Paradise, Neil, "In the Lion's Den: Orthodox Christians under Ottoman Rule, 1400-1550" (2006). *All Volumes (2001-2008)*. Paper 67.
http://digitalcommons.unf.edu/ojii_volumes/67

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Osprey Journal of Ideas and Inquiry at UNF Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Volumes (2001-2008) by an authorized administrator of UNF Digital Commons. For more information, please contact j.t.bowen@unf.edu.
© 2006 All Rights Reserved

In the Lion's Den: Orthodox Christians under Ottoman Rule, 1400-1550

Neil Paradise

2005 History Paper Prize Winner

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Michael Francis, Associate Professor of History

The Ottoman Empire's conquest of the Balkans and subsequent administration left a perplexing religious legacy. The Islamic Ottoman presence lasted almost five centuries, yet Christianity remained the overwhelming religion of choice in the area. The Ottoman treatment of subject Christians has been long debated, with characterizations ranging from a cosmopolitan haven of freedom to a brutal rule of forced conversion. However, the real picture appears far more complex than these generalizations – the Ottoman relationship with Orthodox Christianity in the Balkans changed over time, depending in part on religious tenets but also largely on the realities and varying situations facing the Ottoman state over time. A glance at the Orthodox Christian church under the Ottoman Empire from the early fifteenth to mid sixteenth century gives a revealing glimpse at some of the changing relationships of conquered Christians to the state.

Accounts of historians from various perspectives have viewed the Orthodox/Ottoman relationship in vastly different lights. Englishman James Ludlow's report on the Janissary system in the late fifteenth century gives an impression of Islamic religious domination. Ludlow emphasizes the harshness of Janissary training and the strict discipline enforced upon new recruits, and gives numerous examples as to the slave-like status these men are reduced.[1] Ogier Busbecq offers a different contemporary understanding from the mid 16th century. The Holy Roman Empire's ambassador writes in glowing terms of the discipline and courtesy of the Janissaries. He also remarks that Janissary detachments are scattered throughout the Empire not only to guard against external threats but also to protect Christians and Jews from the "violence of the mob".[2] The contrast between Ogier's and Ludlow's reactions speaks to dual Western European reactions to the empire during the time period studied, alternating between fear and respect for its successes. As Europe advanced and the Ottoman military and technological advantage became a thing of the past, this strong reaction to the Empire and its subject Christians would fade to relative silence.[3]

Modern historians have offered a more detailed look at the Church / State relationship. Greek historian G. Georgiades Arnakis focused on the Church in Constantinople for an article published in 1953. Arnakis portrays the rights of the Church as legally established and binding, but far from inviolable in practice.[4] He paints a

---

[1] "The Tribute of Children, 1493," July 1998 [cited 2004]. Available from http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/islam/1493janissaries.html., 1.

[2] "The Turkish Letters, 1555-1562," July 1998 [cited 2004]. Available from http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1555busbecq.html., 1.

[3] Mark Mazower, *The Balkans: A Short History,* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), xxxiii to xxxv.

[4] G. Georgiades Arnakis, "The Greek Church of Constantinople and the Ottoman Empire," *The Journal of Modern History* 24, no. 3 (1952): 239.

picture of persecution, citing conversions of churches to mosques, martyrdom of patriarchs in the mid seventeenth century, and characterizes Ottoman authorities as valuing Christians as little more than a tax base to be exploited.[5] Arnakis presents the relationship as a power struggle, by a church "waging a struggle for Christianity" against the "islamicization and turkification" presumably desired by the Ottoman government.[6] Overall, Arnakis views the continued existence of Christianity in Ottoman lands as evidence of the triumph of the Orthodox Church in an unequal religious struggle.

Steven Runciman takes a more comprehensive look at the Church under Ottoman rule in his book, published in 1968. Runciman characterizes the "*millet*" system of semi-autonomous self government used by the Ottomans as along traditional Islamic lines, and states the practice was so well known that it was unlikely to have ever been officially written down.[7] He does find codified legal restrictions on Christians, and characterizes them as second-class citizens.[8] He also discusses the Church's ongoing difficulties in maintaining urban churches and establishing schools thanks to Ottoman interference, but he concludes this is as much an inherent result of the Ottoman conception of the place of subjugated peoples rather than any systematic persecution[9]. Runciman finds the problems of the Church to be in large part to difficulties in reorienting a previously decentralized religious organization into an administrative successor to the Byzantine state[10]. The Ottoman state exerts substantial pressure indirectly (and occasionally directly), but Runciman finds Christian difficulties stemming from the second-class stature typical to subjugated minorities in Islamic states.

Recent examinations of the Balkans have used very different approaches to discover a new perspective. Braude and Lewis's collection from a 1978 research seminar builds on Runciman's legacy in examining the status of Christians at particular points in time through various articles. They elaborate that Christian minority status under Islam was a compact between the rulers and ruled – it could be used to keep Christians in their proper place, but also to prevent government abuses. The authors characterize the treatment of Christians by the authorities as variable depending on the circumstances.[11] Overall, the editors summarize the contributions and conclusions on the status of Christians as one governed more often by practical considerations than strict Islamic law. Dennis Hupchick also offers a different perspective on the Church-State relationship in his 1993 article focusing on Bulgarian ethnic awareness. Hupchick describes the church as a "veritable department" in the Ottoman

[5] Arnakis, 238, 243-248.
[6] Arnakis, 245.
[7] Steven Runciman, *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* (London: Cambridge U.P., 1968), 167, 170.
[8] Runciman, 79.
[9] Runciman, 192, 218.
[10] Runciman, 206-207.
[11] Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis eds., *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1982), 9. Braude remarks that enforcement of restrictions depended most on whether the state felt threatened.

government.[12] He also finds active efforts by the Ottomans to assimilate Bulgarian lands through resettlement of Turks coupled with displacement of Bulgarians from towns, though he admits the practice was spotty and inconsistent.[13] Hupchick agrees with earlier historians in that Ottoman policy changed over time, but his contribution to the general debate is his focus on the church as a means of enhancing cultural and ethnic identity. He concludes that the Church promoted Greek Orthodoxy over the interests of its various constituencies, and that the "*millet*" system drowned out competing cultures under Greek ideals.

Perhaps the most profitable starting point in deciphering the status of Christians in the Ottoman Empire is the legal and religious traditions regarding religious minorities the Ottomans inherited from early Islamic law and practice. Early Islamic law took care to impart a special status to people of monotheistic, confessional faiths such as Christianity. The Koran's statement that "there is no constraint in religion" was generally interpreted as an encouragement of tolerance towards specific religions, primarily Christians and Jews.[14] A later passage encouraged Muslims to fight against those unbelievers, but made a specific exception for those who had been given "the Book", who would only be made to pay a tax in recognition of their "humiliated position".[15] C.E. Bosworth describes this as a vision of a contract between conquered unbelievers and Muslims, a confirmation of their subject status.[16] This sort of pointed legal framework is not surprising, given the circumstances in which Mohammed created Islam. Near Eastern minds had always respected the founders of the other great monotheistic faiths.[17] Even Arabia still contained minority communities at the time of Mohammed's death, and it offered precedents such as treaties made with the Christian community of Najrān (who promised aid to the Prophet).[18] As the religious and legal backbone of Islamic behavior, the Koran's tolerance for specific religious minorities was a major factor in the attitude of Muslims to these conquered peoples.

The reality of dramatic Islamic military successes also served to promote a policy of conciliation to conquered peoples. The origin of Islamic tolerance for the practice of other religions seems to stem from the very earliest period of Muslim conquest, as the numerically inferior Muslim Arabs found themselves needing security precautions over their new subjects.[19] The contemporary Muslim Balādhurī shows a striking example of the reality of conquest in the accounts of invasions reaching into India. Infidel religions not exempted from combat unto death (such as Buddhism and especially Hinduism) were theoretically supposed to be either converted or killed, but this was not the case in India. The account reports that, while some massacres did occur, for the most part conquered Indians were accorded the same *dhimma* minority

[12] Dennis P. Hupchick, "Orthodoxy and Bulgarian Ethnic Awareness Under Ottoman Rule, 1396-1762," *Nationalities Papers* 21, no. 2 (1993): 75.
[13] Hupchick, 77.
[14] Braude, 4-5.
[15] Braude, 5.
[16] C.E. Bosworth, "The Concept of *Dhimma* in Early Islam," in Braude and Lewis, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, 41.
[17] Bosworth, 37.
[18] Bosworth, 42.
[19] Braude, 5.

status, as were Christians and Jews, acknowledging the superiority of Islam and performing other duties for Muslims in exchange for religious freedom. Bosworth adds that over the years the practice of extending *dhimma* status to even polytheistic Hindus became normal.[20] The dramatically successful and speedy Muslim conquests promoted policies of religious freedom to minorities for practical reasons as well as religious. The Ottoman experience would incorporate both religious and practical aspects of this tradition.

The Ottoman dynasty was formed at the turn of the fourteenth century, and differed in some notable respects from earlier Islamic states. Emerging Ottoman society brought with it a somewhat different worldview from established Islamic civilization: the Ottoman dynasty was born from hard-fighting frontier warlords, and this frontier identity remained an important part of Ottoman consciousness.[21] Anatolia remained an insecure battleground, and as late as the fifteenth century the dynasty flirted with collapse. The insecure birth of the Ottoman dynasty, along with its vibrant youth as an expanding state, combined to give it a different perspective on Christian minorities than traditional Islamic states. Kunt points out the basic dividing line in the emerging Ottoman state as a functional distinction between those who pay taxes and those who did not - in other words, a distinction between civilian and military/official.[22] He cites the fifteenth century Ottoman chronicler Asikpasazâde who relates that as certain Christian towns were captured, Christian soldiers thought trustworthy received grants of well-appointed fiefs or were placed (along with Muslims) in fortresses.[23] Inalcik attributes the adoption of Christian elites and military men into Ottoman service as part of the expansionist doctrine of the dynasty, and adds that a conciliatory policy towards Christians made conquest of Christian lands all the easier.[24] The expansionist character of the Ottoman state allowed the pragmatism evident in Islamic policy towards conquered Christians to predominate over strict Islamic law.

Conquest and expansion were not the only considerations, however, and the Ottoman attitudes towards Christians also reflected a desire to expand dynastic power and prestige through the Janissary corps and the *devshirme* system. This novel Ottoman system involved taking captured prisoners and village recruits of young boys and molding them into Ottoman elite soldiers and administrators. Mansel cites Ottoman court sources as identifying the main motivation for the *devshirme* as one of distrust of rival Turks and a desire to centralize dynastic power through using officials with no political connections.[25]

---

[20] Bosworth, 43. This practice was in conformity to the attitudes of contemporary religions: Bosworth, 37, adds that that few Near Eastern empires had sought or achieved religious exclusiveness. Runciman, 77, finds evidence that the Sassanid and Persian empires gave religious minorities considerable autonomy and that it was traditional to group minorities by religion.

[21] İ. Metin Kunt, "Transformation of *Zimmi* into *Askerî*", in Braude and Lewis, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, 56. Kunt, 59, relays a characterization on the Empire by the renowned Halil Inalcik as a dynastic empire with the lone goal of furthering its dominion.

[22] Kunt, 58.

[23] Kunt, 59.

[24] Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire; the Classical age, 1300-1600* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 13.

[25] Philip Mansel, *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire, 1453-1924*, First U.S. Edition.

This explanation seems more plausible than any religious motive, especially as the Ottomans did not crack down on Anatolian Christian minorities when given an excellent opportunity.[26] Moreover, the inescapable reality was that *devshirme* recruitment violated traditional Christian rights, an indication that the Ottomans viewed Islamic principles as secondary considerations.[27] The creation of this uniquely Ottoman system further illustrates that the early Ottoman dynasty was fully able to break from Islamic traditions when it suited dynastic interests.

The Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 consummated the fate of Balkan Christians already under Ottoman domination since the mid fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. The larger coherent Christian society present in the Balkans and the quick pace of conquest relative to Anatolia combined to leave the Orthodox Church well entrenched, and Islam a distinct minority.[28] After the capture of Constantinople and the securance of Balkan areas, the Ottomans faced a novel challenge in ruling an entire region with a majority Christian persuasion.

Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II attempted to solve this problem through lines similar to existing Islamic practice. Mehmed extended the so-called *millet* system of internal autonomy to include the Orthodox Patriarch as head of self-government for all Christians, responsible for taxation, justice, and other matters.[29] This decision was not necessarily a foregone choice – the sultan initially turned to Grand Duke Loukas Notaras for political leadership, and could have simply left the Patriarchate seat vacant.[30] The official establishment of the Eucemenical Patriarchate as head of minority Christians was quite a shrewd choice – it gave the central government one accessible figure to deal with, and served to pre-empt possible Roman Catholic influence in the Balkans.[31] Mehmed's raising of the Patriarchate was symbolically powerful, but fundamentally built upon established Islamic tradition.

(New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 18. Mansel adds only five out of 48 grand viziers since 1453 were ethnically Turkish.

[26] Runciman. 32. Runciman mentions that while the Ottomans allowed absentee bishops to return to their sees, most chose not to despite pleas from the Patriarch. This suggests a certain lack of government concern early in the dynasty for promoting the Islamic faith.

[27] Kunt, 60-61. The official justification for *devshirme* only arrived around 1500.

[28] Speris Vryonis, Jr., "Religious Change and Continuity in the Balkans and Anatolia", in Speris Vryonis Jr., *Islam and Cultural Change in the Middle Ages: [4. Giorgio Levi Della Vida Biennial Conference, May 11-13, 1973, Near Eastern Center, Univ. of Calif., Los Angeles]*(Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975). Vryonis, 129, 133, 137-8, points out that the Balkans possessed self conscious Christian cultural entities, and that they had not suffered the long period of warfare in Anatolia which corresponded to its far higher rate of conversion to Islam.

[29] Runciman, 167.

[30] Braude, 77. – Grand Duke Notaras was the leading Byzantine civil official in the city. He was executed for disloyalty a few days after its fall. Mansell, 9, Points out the Sultan could have left the see vacant, and that his choice was a diehard opponent of the proclaimed Roman Catholic union.

[31] Arnakis, 236-7, mentions the convenience of nominating the respected but anti-union monk Gennadios, and points out the ceremonial implication of Ottoman Empire as Byzantine successor state. Union between Rome and Constantinople had technically been proclaimed in the Council of Florence, but few clergy accepted it.

The empowerment of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in particular was in large measure a change from Byzantine realities. The Patriarchate prior to 1453 had always been first among equals with other egalitarian bishoprics, and had never approached the status of the Pope as a power broker and arbiter.[32] The Church was forced to invent secular institutions for services previously performed by the civil government, resulting in a severe strain on its limited resources.[33] Despite these problems, the Orthodox Church inherited increased prestige from its official role in self-government.[34] The fairly cosmopolitan outlook of Sultan Mehmed II - who went so far in his love of Greek Alexander the Great to commission a biography of himself in the same format and on the same style paper as his copy of Arian's life of Alexander- helped enable the church to adapt.[35] Mehmed's concern for creating a cosmopolitan capital was a genuine offense to some Turks.[36] His readiness to forcibly deport peoples of all flavors to populate it when economic inducements failed – Greek Christians, Jews, Armenians, and Anatolian Turks – showed his concern for both the economic vitality of his cities and pluralism within them.[37] The new responsibilities for the church were thus assumed under a ruler at least partially friendly, a fact which enabled them to be assumed more smoothly.

The resulting arrangement and its legal features are a matter of some controversy. Braude's analysis of the term *millet* commonly used to describe it shows that the word, meaning religious community, was never applied to Christian communities in this timeframe but was used solely to describe either Islam itself, or the communities of prestigious foreign Christians the Ottomans wished to woo. The arrangement was also probably informal and not legally binding.[38] The resulting agreement did, however, feature an

---

[32] Runciman, 9.

[33] Runciman, 206-7. Runciman sees this requirement as a large factor in the inability of the Church to provide tolerable levels of education to much of its priesthood. Education and a Judicial system are two examples of services now required.

[34] Mansel, 10, identifies a diminishing conversion rate to Islam among subject Christians after this change.

[35] Mansel, 6. Inalcik, 89, points out Mehmed officially termed himself sovereign of the Byzantines (Romans) and Muslims. Arnakis, 247, notes that he supervised gifts of cash to the church until 1467.

[36] Mansel, 24, reports that for anonymous historians writing in simple Turkish, Constantinople was a city of "torments and distresses".

[37] Robert Mantran, "Foreign Merchants and the Minorities in Istanbul during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", in Braude and Lewis, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, 128. Runciman, 168, calls co-operation of the Greeks "essential" to the Imperial economy, as the Turks were not adept at commerce, seamanship, and preferred an urban to an agricultural lifestyle. Heath W. Lowry, *Studies in Defterology: Ottoman Society in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1992), 57, agrees that the policy of forced deportation reflected not only an awareness on Mehmed on the importance of trade and commerce, but the care with which he introduced missing religious groups suggests an interest in developing cosmopolitan centers.

[38] Braude, 70, 74, summarizes that the lack of an explicit term for internal Christians in such an organized beauracracy as the Ottoman suggests the absence of an instutionalized policy towards Christian. Runciman, 170, adds that its unlikely any new constitution-type document was ever written down, as the general provisions of such arrangements for religious minorities were well known enough already. Braude, 79, adds a search of church archives in 1519 found no legal document spelling out its rights.

understood relationship: Christians would be taxed more heavily than Muslims, were faced with restrictions on gaining property, saw lawsuits involving Muslims tried in Muslim courts, and had the danger of the *devshirme* involved as well.[39] Legal contests involving Christians and Muslims were further tilted in the latter's direction as Christians could not legally give testimony, as their failure to recognize the true light of Islam was felt to be proof of defective morality.[40] These precepts, while probably not officially written down, were understood and applicable to the subject Christian population.

The pressures of rapid Ottoman expansion in this period also resulted in a surprising tolerance of Christians in quasi-official state positions. Christian military men who the Ottomans felt could be loyal were particular beneficiaries during this period of overstretched Ottoman resources[41]. Lowry's analysis of tax receipts for newly conquered Greek areas in 1461 shows that *timars* (Ottoman fiefs) were granted to not only Muslims who had assisted in the conquest but also to local Christian lords[42]. Lowry suspects these Christian allies were incorporated to help subdue the region until normal Ottoman administrative practices could be put in place.[43] Kunt points out that while these Christian soldiers often converted, it was an individual choice, and that some preferred to assert their leading place by changing their names but retaining their Christian religion.[44] The reality that at least some Christian soldiers were incorporated into the Ottoman military structure following conquest speaks volumes as to the relative autonomy and favorable conditions for Christianity under this period. Mihailovic, a former Christian serving with the Sultan's army in the mid 1460s, supports this supposition through his praise of Ottoman justice in general and in practice.[45] The realities of such rapid expansion as the empire experienced under Mehmed II led to a fairly liberal policy towards at least

[39] Runciman, 79. Runciman, 189, relates that the experience of 1520 when Selim I was dissuaded from converting all Constantinople's churches when reminded of their quasi legal rights showed these precepts could protect Christians also.

[40] Bosworth, 49.

[41] Kunt, 55. Kunt shows the practice of incorporating Christian soldiers persisted as late as the mid 1500s.

[42] Lowry, 140-1. Lowry actually examines the region in an around Trebizond, located in northern Anatolia. However, Trebizond was a recent conquest (1461), and remained a strong center of Orthodox religion and Byzantine culture during the preceding Turkish conquest of Anatolia. Its conditions thus approximate the Balkan experience fairly well.

[43] Lowry, 143.

[44] Kunt, 59-60. Kunt cites the example of two *timar* holding brothers converting while a third remained Christian, and an example of a man changing his name and being referred to as "Kafin Timuntas", or Timuntas the infidel, signifying his retention of his native religion.

[45] Konstanty MichaŽowicz, *Memoirs of a Janissary* (Ann Arbor: Published under the auspices of the Joint Committee on Eastern Europe, American Council of Learned Societies, by the Dept. of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Michigan, 1975), 29, 188. Early in his account the author praises the "great justice" of the heathens, and later on relates how Christian peasants ordered to provide logistical support for the army by following it and selling food were always given fair prices. The translator has doubts on whether Mihailovic personally witnessed some of the material in said chapters, but the latter example is one he may well have. If the details cannot be asserted as authentic, the general impression of a Christian who ends his memoirs with an exhortation for a war to liberate Christians is a very favorable one as far as Ottoman fairness to minorities goes.

some Christians in recently conquered areas.

Information on Christian tax receipts also shows an interesting pattern in terms of Ottoman relaxation of restrictions on Christians. Lowry's analysis of receipts in the Balkan district of Radifolo (97.5 % Orthodox) shows that the average tax rate per Christian household increased 31.8% between 1465 and 1478.[46] Lowry notes that in 1465 Muslim households, and those of new converts to Islam, were exempt from a major tax (the *resm-i cift*). However, he finds that in 1478 the few Muslim families that converted and the immigrant Muslim households found their exemptions removed and were forced to pay the tax, approximating their burden to that of Christian families.[47] This suggests that an active economic promotion of Islam was halted due to the need for revenue to fund the continuing Ottoman campaigns. The burden of the *devshirme* also appears to have been borne by prisoners of war rather than subject Christians during this expansion[48] Overall, the problems and pressures of conquest likely resulted in a relatively pressure free experience for Christians and the church.

The turn to consolidation by successive Ottoman sultans witnessed a reversal of some of these trends. Trabzon revisited shows that by the 1486 receipt the local Christian auxiliaries had been transferred to Albania in return for Janissaries and some other Christian *timar* holders, but by 1515 all the *timar* holders are Muslims and fully half are Janissaries, and a typical Ottoman pattern of administration emerges.[49] Mihailovic's claim that the sultan garrisons all his fortresses with Janissaries or government forces is thus belatedly satisfied.[50] The fate of incorporated Christian auxiliary cavalry and of *timar* holders in Trebizond is repeated throughout the newly conquered Balkan regions – strong in numbers after the conquest, Christian military forces have largely disappeared by 1515 as the Ottoman government finds itself able to absorb its conquests.[51] The consolidation of Ottoman authority, evident here to the disadvantage of empowered Christians, resulted in changes elsewhere as well.

The pressure on Christians in the capital was reflective of a continuing one on Christianity in the cities. Ottoman Muslim influence was highly focused in urban areas. Out of a Balkan population 80% Christian and only 19 % Muslim by around 1520, 85% of total Muslim homes were concentrated in 10 out of 28 Balkan districts.[52] Furthermore, nine of the twelve most important urban centers in the Balkans had substantially more Muslims than Christians already by the year 1478, a point which graphically

[46] Lowry, 167. Lowry examines *tahrin defters*, which are taxes due to local landlords. These have inherent limitations in not mentioning taxes paid to the sultan; however, they are appropriate for a primarily agricultural focus and for intertemporal comparisons. The figures I use here are his conversions of the tax rate in Ottoman currency (which was devalued) into the more stable florin – thus, the effective increase in taxes on the buying power of Ottoman subjects.
[47] Lowry, 173-174.
[48] Mihailovic, 157, mentions that the *devshirme* system used captured prisoners of war first and avoided taking subject boys if the former haul was big enough – while again the evidence that he saw such practices first hand is not compelling, the fast pace of Ottoman conquest would logically reduce the pressure of *devshirme* on subject Balkan Christians.

[49] Lowry, 140-143.
[50] Mihailovic, 151, for his comment.
[51] Lowry, 146.
[52] Vryonis, 130-131.

documents that cities were the focal centers of Islamic power.[53] Case studies in Saloniki and Trabzon confirm that the Muslim population in each was overwhelmingly forced migrants[54]. Focused government efforts to move Muslims to Trabzon continued at least well into the first half of the sixteenth century.[55] These findings show a focused and ongoing effort by the Ottoman government to maintain a particular balance in important cities, one featuring minority religions but as importantly maintaining a Muslim majority.[56] The impact of this focus manifested itself in very different experiences Orthodoxy in rural areas as compared to the cities.

The conversion of churches into mosques gives an excellent indication of the different experiences in rural and city Christian life. Even during the relatively cosmopolitan rule of Mehmed II, numerous Christian churches in Constantinople were converted into mosques.[57] The story of church takeovers was similar for most any town the Turks settled, excepting only purely Christian districts.[58] However, churches and monasteries in rural areas were left largely untouched. Monasteries were generally allowed to maintain (with tax exemptions) holdings in physical proximity to the monastery, while absentee holdings were stripped or heavily taxed.[59] In one case, 13 of 15 property confiscations in the Trabzon and adjoining Macuka valley district were from the city itself, while the two most important monasteries in the valley lost no property.[60] Even architectural examinations of churches during this period find that large churches matching the scale of medieval Byzantine churches were "inevitably" built away from urban areas, while the more advanced dome structure was found only in rural areas.[61] All these findings

---

[53] Vryonis, 132. The three Christian exceptions were Athens (99.5 % Christian), Nicopolos (62.3 %), and Trikala (41.5 versus 36.3 Muslim). The city of Saloniki was had a small Muslim margin over Christians (25.2 to 20.5), but was unique in having a majority Jewish population. Mansell, 48, notes that the population of Constantinople retained a steady 58/42 Muslim/Christian ratio for much of Ottoman history, a feature he ascribes to deliberate government policy.

[54] Lowry, 52-54. These two cities are important as former major Byzantine centers, along with the capital.

[55] Lowry, 55. Lowry identifies discrete stages in the Muslim repopulation of Trabzon in particular (having surrendered, it was a viable, intact, but Greek city after its subjugation). First, free land grants were offered to encourage voluntary settlement – this attracted some Muslims, but not gentry or skilled labor. Secondly, specific individuals were deported for leadership reasons and to maintain a social balance. Third, groups of craftsmen were deported.

[56] The importance of this balance can be seen in particular attention paid to importing Christians to essentially empty Constantinople, and Muslims to perfectly healthy but overwhelmingly Greek Trabzon.

[57] Arnakis, 245. Arnakis notes 12 churches converted during the lifetime of Patriarch Gennadius, who is thought to have died in 1473.

[58] Runciman, 192.

[59] Lowry, 250. Lowry examines monasteries in Mt. Athos and the Matzuoka region near Trabzon. Absentee holdings could be in cities or countryside, but monasteries were located predominantly in the latter. Lowry, 241-2, further reports that Mt. Athos itself, with its rural concentration of 20 monasteries, enjoyed a very favorably low tax rate while its varied holdings were taxed much more greatly.

[60] Beldiceau, as referenced in Lowry, *Studies in Defterology: Ottoman Society in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, 154-7. Beldiceau generalizes that urban monasteries in this comparison lost all their properties, while major rural ones did not.

[61] Curcic, "The Byzantine Legacy in Architecture in the Ottoman Balkans", in Lowell Clucas, *The Byzantine legacy in Eastern Europe* (Boulder; New York: East European Monographs; Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1988), 61, 67-68. Curcic, 61,

suggest an Ottoman move against not religious buildings in general, but specifically ones located in urban areas or with particular wealth. These conversions are a telling sign of the much more trying Christian religious experience in Ottoman cities.

The significance of these policies towards Christian religious institutions is great. Mosques served as icons of Imperial legitimacy, and converting opulent churches into Muslim building proclaimed the power and prestige of the dynasty.[62] Moreover, these actions reinforced the subjugation of Christianity to Islam, a focus well reflected by the Ottoman mania for church bells.[63] The erasure of competing religious sounds asserted the subjugation of other religions to Islam and the superiority of Islam over them, as did the practice of confiscating high profile monastery wealth. While Christian religious buildings were allowed to remain for the most part, Ottoman efforts ensured they would not be competitors to of Islamic ones in terms of grandeur or opulence, but clearly secondary.

The status of Ottoman Christians changed over time, and would continue to change during the forthcoming Islamic religious revival, but there remains discernable a broad view of Christian status in the actions of Ottoman authorities in this period.[64] Particular treatment of Christians varied according to changing situations in the Ottoman state.[65] However, the overall view of the Orthodox Christian relationship *vis-à-vis* victorious Islam remained constant. Christians were offered a social contract, but one that permanently marked them as second-class citizens. The Ottoman relationship with Christians delineated particular limits for them in experiencing their faith and limits to their rights as citizens. While acceptance of an inoffensive and less visible Christianity brought a place in Islamic society, and the particular details of that place changed over time, Ottoman attitudes ensured Orthodox Christians' place in their empire remained secondary.

Author's Note

Turkish occupied names and regions are used, except where a source cites the Byzantine or Latin name. Anatolia comprises modern day Turkey. Trabzon is Trebizond, a city in North-Eastern Anatolia. Saloniki is Thessaloniki, a city in the Thrace region

---

notes that the vast majority of churches were allowed to continue in their original function, but that then again the vast majority of these were of relatively modest scale. Curcic, 67-8, also suggests that Turkish regulations played a role in church construction, noting the proliferation of domes after the new Balkan nations declared independent. His evidence suggests opulent urban churches were most likely to be converted; plain, rural churches least likely.

[62] Howard Crane, "The Ottoman Sultan's Mosques: Icons of Imperial Legitimacy", in Irene A. Bierman, Rifa'at Ali Abou-El-Haj, and Donald Preziosi, *The Ottoman City and its Parts : Urban Structure and Social Order* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: A.D. Caratzas, 1991), 173-243, offers a look at the importance of mosques to the Ottoman dynasty.

[63] Curcic, 68-69. Curcic classifies Turkish reaction against bells as supremely harsh and rigorously enforced. He says the only surviving belfries did so because they were converted into mosques.

[64] See Kunt, 63, for more on the Islamic religious revival.

[65] Braude, 438. Braude points out that Ottoman archival sources show an unsurprising trend: A need to reinforce restrictions on Christians was apparently felt in times of public distress and wartime.

of modern day Greece. Constantinople is referred to by the Ottomans and by Turks today as Istanbul – I've retained the Byzantine name because my focus lies during its transition from Byzantine to Turkish capital. I also refer to the author of "Memoirs of a Janissary" in a Latin form (as Mihailov) for simplicity's sake. Any references to "Christians" are meant to indicate specifically Orthodox Christians – Armenians had their own patriarchate, and are outside the scope of this paper. The Near East refers to the modern day Middle East, Iraq, and Iran.

References

Arnakis, G. Georgiades. "The Greek Church of Constantinople and the Ottoman Empire." *The Journal of Modern History* 24, no. 3 (1952): 235-250.

Bierman, Irene A., Rifa'at Ali Abou-El-Haj, and Donald Preziosi. *The Ottoman City and its Parts : Urban Structure and Social Order.* New Rochelle, N.Y.: A.D. Caratzas, 1991.

Braude, Benjamin, and Bernard Lewis, eds. *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society.* New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1982.

Clucas, Lowell. *The Byzantine Legacy in Eastern Europe.* Boulder; New York: East European Monographs; Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1988.

"The Turkish Letters, 1555-1562." July 1998 [cited 2004]. Available from http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1555busbecq.html.

Haddad, Robert M. "Constantinople Over Antioch, 1516-1724: Patriarchal Politics in the Ottoman Era." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History [Great Britain]* 41, no. 2 (1990): 217-238.

Hupchick, Dennis P. "Orthodoxy and Bulgarian Ethnic Awareness Under Ottoman Rule, 1396-1762."*Nationalities Papers* 21, no. 2 (1993): 75-93.

Inalcik, Halil. *The Ottoman Empire; the Classical Age, 1300-1600.* New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973.

Lowry, Heath W. *Studies in Defterology: Ottoman Society in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries.* Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1992.

"The Tribute of Children, 1493." July 1998 [cited 2004]. Available from http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/islam/1493janissaries.html.

Mansel, Philip. *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire, 1453-1924.* First U.S. Edition ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.

Mazower, Mark. *The Balkans : A Short History.* New York: Modern Library, 2000.

MichaŽowicz, Konstanty. *Memoirs of a Janissary.* Ann Arbor: Published under the auspices of the Joint Committee on Eastern Europe, American Council of Learned Societies, by the Dept. of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Michigan, 1975.

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. London: Cambridge U.P., 1968.

Vryonis Jr., Speris. *Islam and Cultural Change in the Middle Ages: [4. Giorgio Levi Della Vida Biennial Conference, may 11-13, 1973, Near Eastern Center, Univ. of Calif., Los Angeles]*. Edited by Near Eastern Center, University of California. Los Angeles ed. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975.