



## Burning of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (1808) and the Ensuing Discussion about the Reconstruction (an Archive-Based Study of History)

*Kıyamet Kilisesi Yangını (1808) ve Kilisenin Onarımı Hakkındaki Anlaşmazlıklar (Arşiv Temelli Bir Tarih Çalışması)*

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### Abstract

In the early 19th century, great developments overshadowed the history and the future of Jerusalem in particular and Palestine in general. The most important of these events was the increase in foreign influence in Jerusalem and the great powers' efforts to find a foothold there. The rising European influence came after the French campaign against Egypt. This French campaign warned European countries about Jerusalem's importance, and European countries began to compete to influence that city. These countries considered the denominations in Jerusalem as a means of achieving their goals, using each country as an excuse to protect the followers of a sect in Jerusalem by taking advantage of the weakness the Ottoman State experienced. One of the European rivalry results supporting the Christian denominations in Jerusalem was the escalation of the conflict between them, which later led one of these denominations to burn the Holy Sepulcher's Church. This incident can be regarded as the beginning of a new era of conflict and competition between the European countries over the Ottoman State in general and Jerusalem in particular, hidden behind the Christian denominations in Jerusalem. The Ottoman Empire's policy handled this incident by not taking any side directly. Instead, it limited itself to conducting investigations by reviewing and examining the documents owned by each denomination. The state resorted to forming many committees of Ottoman personalities as well as figures from the competing denominations. By relying on the initial documents drawn from the Ottoman Archives, this study aims to reach the truth of the burning of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the reasons that led to this fire, and an attempt to trace the conflicts that followed the fire and the Ottoman State's policy in dealing with it.

**Keywords:** Church of the Resurrection, Catholics, Orthodox, Armenians, the Ottoman Empire.

### Öz

XIX yüzyılın başlarında, genel olarak Filistin'in ve özellikle Kudüs'ün tarihini ve geleceğini etkileyen büyük gelişmeler yaşanmıştır. Bu bağlamda, en önemli gelişme Kudüs'teki dış etkinin artması ve Kudüs civarında büyük güçlerin var olma çabaları olmuştur. Suriye, Lübnan ve Filistin'deki Avrupa nüfuzu, Mısır'ın Fransızlarca işgal edilmesinden sonra artmıştır. Fransızların doğu seferi, Avrupa ülkelerine Kudüs'ün önemini hatırlatmış, Avrupa ülkeleri Filistin'de söz sahibi olmak için rekabet etmeye başlamıştır. Avrupalılar, Osmanlı Devleti'nin yaşadığı zayıflıktan yararlanarak, Kudüs'teki Hristiyan mezheplerini himaye etme savını ileri sürmüşlerdir. Her bir devlet, Kudüs'teki bir cemaati korumak aracılığıyla bölgede siyasi hedeflere ulaşmayı amaçlamıştır. Avrupalıların rekabeti mezhepler arasında çatışmaları güçlendirmiş, gergin atmosfer, Kıyamet Kilisesi'nin yakılmasına yol açmıştır.

Bu olay, Avrupa ülkeleri arasında Kudüs'teki Hristiyan mezhepleri üzerinden genel olarak Osmanlı Devleti ve özelden Kudüs tarihinde yeni bir çatışma ve rekabet döneminin başlangıcı olarak kabul edilebilir. Osmanlı idaresi, geleneksel politikası bağlamında yangını tarafsız bir şekilde ele almaya çalışmıştır. Her bir mezhebin sahip olduğu belgeleri inceleyerek soruşturmalar yürütmüş, kilisenin onarım ve idare hakkının kime verileceğini komisyonlar aracılığıyla belirlemeye gayret etmiştir. Çalışmamızda, Osmanlı Arşivlerinden alınan ilk elden belgelere dayanılarak, Kıyamet Kilisesi'nde tanık olunan yangına ve hadisenin muhtemel ve kesin nedenlerine değinilmekte, kiliseye dair yaşanan çatışmalar detaylı bir şekilde okumak amaçlanmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** KıyametKilisesi, Katolikler, Ortodoks, Ermeniler, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu.

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## Introduction

The Church of Qiyamah, as the local Muslims and Christians know it, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre known by all Christians, or as the Church of Kamama in Ottoman records, is considered a holy place by all Christians in the world. The sacredness of this structure comes from the fact that the Prophet Isa (Jesus) was born and grew up there. That led to the construction of many temples in the region where Prophet Isa lived. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is one of these structures which possess great importance for Christians.<sup>1</sup>

Because of the religious importance of the region and as a result of the system implemented by the Ottoman State, a large number of religious sects lived in Jerusalem. The Ottoman State regarded each sect as part of the nation without regard to racial characteristics.<sup>2</sup> This system allowed the Ottoman State to observe an equal distance to all sects.<sup>3</sup> Many Christians took refuge in the Ottoman State, especially in Jerusalem, fleeing repressive practices such as religious groups forcing each other to change sects. Within the national system framework, people of every nation and race were present in and around Jerusalem. In addition to Muslims and Jews, there were different Christian groups/communities such as Latin, Greek, Syriac, Armenian, Coptic, and Abyssinian.<sup>4</sup>

Relations between Christian groups in Palestine were not going in peace; there are many controversies that are as old as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. This element determined Christian groups' relations and ties. The conflict between the communities arose from entry to the Church, ceremonies there, and supervision.<sup>5</sup> There were no disputes between sects when the central authority in the Ottoman State was strong. However, the Orthodox, Latins, Armenians, Copts, Ethiopians, Franciscans, and Greeks have always envied each other and tried to fight over owning holy places. All groups have sought to obtain concessions or remove them from their opponents; moreover, the strife has reached the point of issuing complaints about each other.<sup>6</sup>

At the beginning of the Ottoman period, there was a struggle between Greek Orthodox and Latin Catholics to administer the Holy Sepulcher Church. Ottoman edicts recognized the right of the Greek groups to manage church affairs. From the very beginning, the Ottoman State's policy applied laws that recognize the right of non-Muslims to worship and believe, in addition to the implementation of the

<sup>1</sup> Erdem Demirkol, "II. Abdülhamid Döneminde Kudüs' Te Kilise İmar ve İnşa Faaliyetleri." (Master Thesis, Marmara University, 2007), 39; Zakaria Mohammad. "The Holy Sepulcher and the Garbage Dump: An Etymology." *Jerusalem Quarterly* 50 (2012): 110-111.

<sup>2</sup> Non-Muslim communities lived within the framework of their own unique laws adopted in the Ottoman State and other countries under Islamic rule. For example, in the Ottoman State the state of affairs for the non-Muslims and those who sought asylum was subject to certain laws. This system aimed to form an Ottoman society by gradually creating a sense of citizenship and belonging. Different communities arise from the rich and diverse fabric of the Ottoman society to be well-represented concerning the Islamic rule and the state's general framework. Thus, a relative improvement in recognition of the rights and freedoms of Christians and Jews was visible, compared to the rest of the world. The traditional nation system of the Ottoman State has its roots in the Caliph Umar era. Non-Muslims were made part of the social, political, and economic systems in the Ottoman society through the introduction of laws as mentioned above. In this context, the creation of a private law compatible with the general framework/citizenship of the Ottoman State shows that there is no race/class-based discrimination against non-Muslims. Therefore, it is possible to say that the distinction among the Ottoman rayah has a functional character and that its exclusionary aspect is not strong. KARPAT, Kemal H. *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Ortadoğu'da Millet, Milliyet, Milliyetçilik*. Timaş Yayınları, 2015. 12-15; Hilmi Deradike, *Yahud Al-Quds fi Al-Nisfi Al-Awwal min Al-Qarni Al-Tasi Ashera* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wahda al-'Arabiyyah, 2014), 95-97.

<sup>3</sup> Bilgehan Pamuk, "Osmanlılar zamanında Rum-Ermeni kiliseleri arasındaki ilişkiler (Kudüs örneği)", *Atatürk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi*, (16) (2001): 239-240.

<sup>4</sup> Nawar Al-Juburi, *Al-Nashat Al-Qunsuli a Al-Faransi fi Al-Quds al-Sharif: 1840-1900* (Amman-Jordan: Dar wa Maktabat al-Hamid li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi, 2015), 49.

<sup>5</sup> Jerusalem Heritage (İhyâ'ü't-Turâs Arşivi), Record Number: 320, Document: 7.

<sup>6</sup> Sad Abu Jabir, *Al-Wujud al-Masihî fi Al-Quds khilal Al-Qarnayn al-Tasi' Ashar wa Al-'Ishrin*, 2nd Edition (Lebanon: Markaz Dirasat Al-Wahdat al-Arabiya, 2010), 11.

seniority law, based on previously issued decrees.<sup>7</sup> Since the Greek Orthodox community constitutes most of the Christian community in the Ottoman territories, the Ottoman Empire granted the Greeks the right to govern and administer the church. With this preference, the Ottoman State prevented the establishment of a Western alliance against them. The Greeks also acquired large lands in Jerusalem, which resulted in income through taxation, which played an important role in the Ottoman economy.<sup>8</sup>

With the Armenian community's merger with the Latin community at the beginning of the 17th century, the debate took on a new dimension. These communities obtained privileges, such as making some Holy Sepulcher Church reforms against the Greek community. Consequently, this decision led to the emergence of disputes reemergence between the Romans and Armenians. Armenians objected to granting the right to rule the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to the Greek community, claiming that they had prior edicts/official orders proving their right to rule the Church. However, the Greeks appealed to the Ottoman administration to claim that the Armenians' old edicts were falsified. As a result of the Ottoman authorities' examination, the Armenians' documents were invalid, and the Greek community was more worthy to administer the Church.<sup>9</sup> As a result, the Greek community gained the rights that the Armenian community had. The Greek Church had an influential and important position in the 18th and 19th centuries and controlled some of the Armenian Church's rights.<sup>10</sup>

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Christian sects' conflicts acquire a new dimension, transforming from an internal issue into an international one. The basic players behind these disputes were France, which alleged Catholic protection, and Russia's alleged orthodox protection. From the provisions of treaties signed by the Ottoman State with these countries, it is possible to understand the truth about this. Although disputes have existed since ancient times, they have not reached a significant degree during periods of power and superiority of the Ottoman Empire. Yet, they have increased as the state started to lose power. At the beginning of the 19th century, strife between Christian sects over the administration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre became a means for the forces seeking to take advantage of the administrative vacuum in Jerusalem to interfere in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>11</sup>

The troubled administrative situation of the Ottoman Empire in general and in Jerusalem in particular allowed European countries to intervene in it under the pretext of protecting their countries' pilgrims who come during the Hajj season from attacks due to Jerusalem's disruption's administrative situation.<sup>12</sup>

France's expeditions to Egypt and the Levant (Syria) played a major role in attracting Russia and Britain's attention to the Middle East. The Ottoman documents show that there was a great competition between Western countries, especially France and Russia, and Britain, which followed them, in an attempt to obtain concessions-privileges in Jerusalem under the pretext of protecting the rights of sect members. A document in the legality court records documented a request from monks/Franciscan monks subject to France in Jerusalem. They demanded to have their requests, to restore the areas under their administration,

<sup>7</sup> Directorate of State Archives. "Kudüs'te Hristiyan Mezhep ve Milletlerin İdaresi (*Administration of Christian Denominations and Communities in Jerusalem*)", *Hazine-i Evrak Arşiv ve Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1(1) (2019): 57.

<sup>8</sup> Yasemin Avcı and Ömer Yazıcı Özdemir "Kudüs Kamame Kilisesi: Hıristiyanlığın Merkezinde Osmanlı Mirası ve Statüko Meselesi" *Cumhuriyet tarihi araştırmaları dergisi*, 15(29) (2019): 44.

<sup>9</sup> BOA, HAT. 1361-53655. (H-29-12-1222/M-27-02-1808); BOA, TS. MA. E. 866- 11. (H-21-03-1222/M-29-05-1807); Directorate of State Archives. "Kudüs'te Hristiyan Mezhep ve Milletlerin İdaresi (*Administration of Christian Denominations and Communities in Jerusalem*)", *Hazine-i Evrak Arşiv ve Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1(1) (2019): 106; Yurdakul, İlhami. "Kudüs Kamame Kilisesi'nde Ermeniler ile Rumların Dini-Siyasi Nüfuz Mücadelesi ve 1740 Tarihli Ferman." *Vakanüvis-Uluslararası Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1.Spec. issue (2016): 238-262. 252.

<sup>10</sup> Bilgehan Pamuk, "Osmanlılar zamanında Rum-Ermeni kiliseleri arasındaki ilişkiler (Kudüs örneği)", *Atatürk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi*, (16) (2001): 237.

<sup>11</sup> Yasemin Avcı and Ömer Yazıcı Özdemir "Kudüs Kamame Kilisesi: Hıristiyanlığın Merkezinde Osmanlı Mirası ve Statüko Meselesi" *Cumhuriyet tarihi araştırmaları dergisi*, 15(29) (2019): 47-48.

<sup>12</sup> Fatima Salim Al-Tarawneh, "Al-Wad 'Al-Idari fi Al-Quds Al-Shareef 1740 -1821", *Al-Jamia Al-Urduniyyah, Amman*,43 (3) (2015): 1607.

through the French Ambassador in Istanbul approved by the Ottoman authorities. The priests justified their wishes by stating that they were afraid of wreckages and destruction of buildings that could disturb the pilgrims visiting the holy sites.<sup>13</sup> Another document indicates the extent to which France used the pro-French priests in Jerusalem. France appealed to the Ottoman Empire through her ambassador in Istanbul. In the petition submitted by the ambassador, he complained that the Mufti of Jerusalem was causing difficulties for priests under France's auspices. Therefore, France asked to dismiss the Mufti and not attack or interfere with the priests, who were subject to France. Moreover, the petition mentioned the treaties signed between the Ottoman – French sides that recognized the right to protect her people's affairs in Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup>

In the first quarter of the 19th century, France neglected religious issues due to the French Revolution events and the French engagement in the war in Europe in parallel with these events. The neglect led to an increase in Orthodox clergy's influence in Jerusalem, thereby reducing France's influence on the Ottoman State and causing loss of value in Catholic priests' status. Taking advantage of France's weakening influence in the East, Russia gradually took control of the sacred sites.<sup>15</sup>

### **Burning of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre**

While the Ottoman State was busy resolving the Wahhabi invasion of the Hejaz, a fire broke out in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the morning of Wednesday, September 30, 1808, and could not be extinguished for two days. The effects of and the vacuum caused by the Wahhabi rebellion became evident through the fire.<sup>16</sup> Most Christians described this fire as a great disaster. The incident was described as a disaster because of the suspicion that they set on fire the western section of the church that was under the Armenian authority.<sup>17</sup> The fire in the Chapel of Saint Helena, which was overseen by the Armenians, then spread rapidly, destroying the interior of the building, causing the columns supporting the dome to crack. However, the majority of Christian sects accused the Armenians of starting the fire. Others accused some Greek Orthodox priests of having lit wood while drunk and then tried to extinguish the flame by pouring alcoholic drinks on it, thus playing a critical role in spreading the flames and causing the sad event to occur.<sup>18</sup> But most sources unanimously suggest that it was the Armenians who caused the fire to start.

The considerations that promoted the Armenians to set fire to the Church disputes between Christian sects were possible causes, as highlighted in the information presented above. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Christian sectarians intensified their conflicts with France, which has taken an active role in Western countries' context, especially with its support for the Latins and Russia, which has assumed the Greek Orthodox community's patronage. Conflicts increased between the two sects, and both sects managed to obtain special privileges. The Greek Orthodox community rose to a dominant position among other sects. The attitudes of foreign countries disturbed the Armenian community, causing a group to burn the Church to change its administration's status quo.<sup>19</sup> Aref al-Aref stated The Armenians prevented the Romans and Latins from entering the church to put out the fire, and when they entered it, it was too late; the fire had destroyed everything in that section and turned it to ashes.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Jerusalem Hertiage (ihyâ'u't-Turâs Arşivi), Record Number: 284, Document: 22,23,24; Nichola Al-Khoury and Shehada Al-Khoury, *Khulasat Tareekh Kanisat Ourashalem al-Orthodhoksiya* (Jerusalem: Matbat Baiet Al-Maqdis, 1925), 179-180.

<sup>14</sup> BOA, HAT. 1349- 52713. (H- 09-09-1221/M-20-11-1806); BOA, HAT. 269-15715. (H-29- 12-1221/M-09-03-1807).

<sup>15</sup> Nawar Al-Juburi, *Al-Nashat al-Qunsuli al-Faransi fi al-Quds al-Sharif: 1840-1900* (Amman-Jordan: Dar wa Maktabat al-Hamid li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi, 2015), 63.

<sup>16</sup> Nichola Al-Khoury and Shehada Al-Khoury, *Khulasat Tareekh Kanisat Ourashalem al-Orthodhoksiya* (Jerusalem: Matbat Baiet Al-Maqdis, 1925), 356.

<sup>17</sup> Sad Abu Jabir, *Al-Wujud al-Masihi fi Al-Quds khilal Al-Qarnayn al-Tasi' Ashar wa Al-'Ishrin*, 2nd Edition (Lebanon: Markaz Dirasat Al-Wahdat al-Arabiya, 2010), 14.

<sup>18</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem: City of Three Faiths*, trans. Fatima Nasr, Sotoor (London: Ballantine Books, 1998), 559- 560.

<sup>19</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem: City of Three Faiths*, translate: Fatima Nasr, Sotoor (London: Ballantine Books, 1998), 560.

<sup>20</sup> Aref Al-Aref, *Al-Mufassal fi Tareekh Al-Quds*, 5th edition, v.1 (Jerusalem, Matbaa Al-Maaref, 1999), 363.

After the fire, different Christian congregations set up tents on the church site to protect it from looting and attacks. According to the sources, Jerusalem's scholars and intellectuals also protected the Church of Qiyamah from any attacks. Such as Hasan Efendi Al-Husayni, the Hanafi Mufti of Jerusalem, Naqib Al-Ashraf Omar Efendi Al-Husayni, and others.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Dispute over the Restoration of the Church**

With Russia's support, the Orthodox community's leaders requested the Sultan to repair the Church. At the beginning of 1809, Sultan Mahmud II issued an edict/imperial decree accepting the relevant request.<sup>22</sup> The decree emphasized that the repair should not include work such as expansion and upgrading of the building. Along with this enactment, the Greek Orthodox had the right to manage the dome's repair on their own, previously managed collectively, ignoring Catholics' role. Thus, the conflict between the sects became more intensified.<sup>23</sup>

The Orthodox began the construction and repair process in May 1809. The Armenian and Catholic leaders opposed this process and reported their complaints related to the Greek congregation and their relevant objections to the Ottoman State.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the question of repairing the Church became one of the priority goals of various Christian communities. Followers of Armenian and Catholic groups provoked Muslims to block the repair work. Thus, construction stopped for some time. At this stage, an atmosphere of sectarian tension dominated Jerusalem, things got out of hand, and the administrators lost control.<sup>25</sup>

With the decree issued by the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II and the approval of both groups, Tahir Efendi has been commissioned to investigate all documents produced since the era of Yavuz Sultan Selim and Kanuni Sultan Suleyman to ensure that the documents are reviewed by reliable persons and bringing an end to the conflict.<sup>26</sup> After examining the documents, Tahir Efendi gave the Greek community the right to manage and repair the Church, as before the fire.<sup>27</sup> After that, a committee appointed to damage assessment reported that it needed a total of 500 bags of akche (silver coin) for the repair. It commissioned the task to a civil servant from the Greeks for restoration works.<sup>28</sup> These decisions annoyed the Armenians, and they refused to accept the state authorities' decisions and reported a new objection to the Ottoman State.<sup>29</sup>

Under these circumstances, each Christian congregation supported by a western state wanted to take on the Church's administrative responsibility and set out to engage in repair works. Therefore, it became necessary for the Ottoman State to intervene. The Sultan ordered the establishment of a committee to

<sup>21</sup> Adel Manna, *Liwa al-Quds fi Awasit Al-Ahd Al-Othmani: Al-Idara wa al-Mujtama* (Beirut-Lebanon: Muassasat Al-Dirasat Al-Falastiniyyah, 2008), 26; Nichola Al-Khouri and Shehada Al-Khouri, *Khulasat Tareekh Kanisat Ourashalem al-Orthodhoksiya* (Jerusalem: Matbat Baiet Al-Maqdis, 1925), 179-180.

<sup>22</sup> BOA, HAT.1651-8.(H-29-12-1223/M-15-02-1809); Directorate of State Archives. "Kudüs'te Hristiyan Mezhep ve Milletlerin İdaresi (Administration of Christian Denominations and Communities in Jerusalem)" *Hazine-i Evrak Arşiv ve Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1(1) (2019):135-137.

<sup>23</sup> Sami Kılıç and İhsan Satış "Osmanlı Arşiv Vesikalarına Göre Hıristiyan Cemaatlerin Kamame Kilisesi İle İlgili Tartışmaları", *History Studies*, 3, (3) (2011): 233.

<sup>24</sup> Sad Abu Jabir, *Al-Wujud Al-Masihi fi Al-Quds khilal Al-Qarnayn al-Tasi' Ashar wa Al-'Ishrin*, (Lebanon: Markaz Dirasat Al-Wahdat al-Arabiya, 2010), 14-15; Nichola Al-Khouri and Shehada Al-Khouri, *Khulasat Tareekh Kanisat Ourashalem al-Orthodhoksiya* (Jerusalem: Matbat Baiet Al-Maqdis, 1925), 180.

<sup>25</sup> Musa Sroor, "The Real Estate Market in Jerusalem between Muslims and Christians (1800-1810)." *Oriente Moderno*, 93(2) (2013), 599.

<sup>26</sup> BOA, HAT. 771- 36188. (H-29-12-1225/M-25-01-1811).

<sup>27</sup> BOA, HAT. 771- 36190. (H-29-12-1225/M-25-01-1811); Directorate of State Archives. "Kudüs'te Hristiyan Mezhep ve Milletlerin İdaresi (Administration of Christian Denominations and Communities in Jerusalem)", *Hazine-i Evrak Arşiv ve Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1(1) (2019): 153.

<sup>28</sup> Directorate of State Archives. "Kudüs'te Hristiyan Mezhep ve Milletlerin İdaresi (Administration of Christian Denominations and Communities in Jerusalem)", *Hazine-i Evrak Arşiv ve Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1(1) (2019): 145.

<sup>29</sup> Bilgehan Pamuk, "Osmanlılar zamanında Rum-Ermeni kiliseleri arasındaki ilişkiler (Kudüs örneği)", *Atatürk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi*, (16) (2001): 241.

resolve disputes and problems among the Christian denominations.<sup>30</sup> The committee's names show the importance of the issue at the Ottoman State level and international level.<sup>31</sup> The Ottoman delegation consisted of Judge of the Army Rumeli Mir Izzet, Acting Judge of the Army in Anatolia Halil, Shaykh al-Islam Mawlana Durrizade al-Sayyid Abdullah, Minister of Imperial Mint Ahmet Shakir Pasha, Nakib al-Ashraf al-Sayyid Zayn al-Abidin, Intendant of Fatwa Gurbanizade Muhammad Rashid, Sayyid Sulaiman of Kavala from the Jerusalem elites, Rais al-Kuttab Mustafa Muzhir/Madhhar, Chief Sergeant Ibrahim, Registrar of Diwan al-Humayun Ahmad Afif and First Secretary of Diwan al-Humayun Muhammad Sayyid.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the committee's efforts to resolve the problem among Christian groups, it could not produce favorable results for the parties. Thereupon, the committee added members from both sides. The Armenian delegation consisted of the following people: Assistant Patriarch of Jerusalem, Father Bukus Veled Karkud Usyus Veled Karabeti Sarraflar Kahyası Karabeti Sarraf Afnas Veled Uzun Armini, Sarraf Kirkor Veled Kifodek, Sarraf Kesber Veled Kofrik, Sarraf Kalemi Oğlu, Anton Veled Mikail, Sarraf Canik Veled Simon, Sarraf Cacador Veled Marudos, and Sarraf Manuel Veled Mikardıç Nam.<sup>33</sup>

The Greek delegation consists of the following people: the Metropolitan of Thessaloniki Baramsus Veled Yani, the Metropolitan of Nicaea Atnasyos Veled Anton, the Steward of the Patriarch of Jerusalem Atnayos Veled Loriki, the Treasurer of the Patriarch of Jerusalem Kardus Veled Anton, Dimitraki Veled Manual Sarraf Lapek Veled Karaca Yuki Veled Silubek Hirastov Veled Marodi, Anana Veled Kiryako Anesti, Tokoros Veled Esminat Wa Niyabut.<sup>34</sup>

It appears from the Ottoman delegation's names that the state officials were aware of the importance of the issue and believed that its solution was necessary to prevent intervention by other powers to protect citizens' rights. The Ottoman State established a committee consisting of Greeks and Armenians to collect documents belonging to each group. Then it was aimed to categorize the documents by looking at their condition. Finally, with the participation of both parties' members, the committee aimed to evaluate the issue by listening to arguments from them and concluding an agreement in line with the ecclesiastical law.<sup>35</sup>

After several meetings organized by the delegation, Sultan Mahmud II issued a decree to decide on this issue. According to the reports transferred to him, he noted that the dispute between the Christian communities revolved around three issues: the first concerns the Habsh, the Copt, and the Syriac sects' subordination, so should they follow the Romans or the Armenians? The Armenian community said that the group in question had been acting with them since time immemorial and that the Greeks' claim was false. Based on decisions sent to the Judge of Jerusalem that emphasized that the Abyssinians were subject to the Armenians, it resolved the issue. The second disputed issue was about visitors and where they could stay. This issue was referred to the edicts issued for both groups during the reign of Sultan Selim I.<sup>36</sup> The most important subject in the mentioned conflict is the repair of the Church of Kamama, which was burned in 1808. The opinion fallacy, according to the Sultan's order, both groups should repair the shared places jointly, and independent sites should be repaired by those having the authority to do so. The Sultan was the only person qualified to decide in this dispute. According to Sultan Mahmud II, the edict showed that the dispute in question was critically important. As for the right to repair the Church, the Sultan granted

<sup>30</sup> BOA, HAT. 526 – 25776. (H- 29-12-1225/M-25-01-1811).

<sup>31</sup> BOA HAT. 153-25. (H-10-10-1228/M-06-10-1813). 1.

<sup>32</sup> BOA, A. DVNSKLS. D. 9. (H- evahir-i Cemaziyelewwel 1226/M-18-06-1811). 67.

<sup>33</sup> BOA, A. DVNSKLS. D. 9. (H- evahir-i Cemaziyelewwel 1226/M-18-06-1811). 63.

<sup>34</sup> BOA, HAT. 1523-25. (H-10-10-1228/M-06-10-1813). 2; Abdullah Çakmak, "Osmanlı Kudüs' ünde devlet ve toplum (1798-1841)". PhD Thesis, Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi, 2019, 184.

<sup>35</sup> BOA, HAT. 526 – 25776. (H-29-12-1225/M-25-01-1811).

<sup>36</sup> Abdullah Çakmak, Osmanlı Kudüs' ünde devlet ve toplum (1798-1841). 2019. PhD Thesis. Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi: 184-185.

the Greek community within the framework of the former decisions and orders such repair conducted according to the structure's previous state and conditions.<sup>37</sup>

The Shaykh al-Islam appointed Haramayn Awkaf Inspector Pashmaccizade Seyyid Muhammed Zeki as muwalla<sup>38</sup> to examine Sultan Mahmud II's edicts after much research and several meetings held by the Ottoman delegation and in the presence of the representatives of both sides. Also, Case Clerk of the Judge of Istanbul Mehmet Nuri was appointed as the deputy of Muwalla. The clerk from the Imperial Council Echelon Mustafa Reşit was commissioned as mubashir.<sup>39</sup> Sayyid Muhammad was also appointed as deputy architect.<sup>40</sup>

According to an Ottoman document, the mission of the delegation consisted of two articles:

1. Supervise the implementation of the Sultan's decisions, which were reached by holding many meetings and consultations between the Ottoman Authority and the bodies representing the conflicting parties and ensuring that they are not violated.

2. Determination of the costs arising from the repair of the section administered by the Armenians and carrying out the repair without violations.<sup>41</sup>

Fulfilling the orders at the end of the Hijri year 1228, the committee examined the Church in the presence of representatives of Christian communities, investigated its surface area, and determined the areas owned by the communities, prepared documents to avoid conflict, and calculated the costs of restoration.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the Sultan's efforts to settle the ongoing dispute between the Christian denominations in Jerusalem, the dispute remained; nothing has changed even after the decree's issuance, and the committee started its activities until a disagreement emerged. The Armenians accused the Greek community of removing places allocated to them to prevent Armenian visitors.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the dispute spread so far as to include lands and churches in Beit Sahur in Bethlehem.<sup>44</sup> According to the documents, although the Sultan's proclamations and the agreements available in the ecclesiastical court records in Jerusalem recognize the respective rights of all persons and groups concerned, it was the Judge of Jerusalem who led to the dispute. While the Greeks and Armenians jointly held the keys to the Northern Holy Cave church's gates, the Judge of Jerusalem gave the Greeks the keys to the Armenians, which angered the Greeks.<sup>45</sup> The Greek community protested the incident before Mawla/Molla Muhammad Nuri. After investigating the matter and meeting with the Judge of Jerusalem, Muhammad Nuri asked Suleyman Pasha, the Governor of Damascus, to resolve the matter and immediately issue an order stopping the Judge. Suleyman Pasha issued an order explaining the truth of what Muhammad Nuri Efendi said and the invalidity of what the Judge of Jerusalem did. The relevant order included a decision on the removal of the Judge from his post.<sup>46</sup> As a result, these documents are evidence of Western countries' influence on civil servants and dignitaries through their Christian representatives in Jerusalem.

<sup>37</sup> BOA, A.DVNSKLS.d. (evahir-i Cemaziyelevvel 1228/M-27-05-1813) 67.

<sup>38</sup> Muwalla: responsible person charged with investigating and evaluating disputed matters in religious judgement, Sami Şemseddin. Kamus-ı Türki (İstanbul: İdeal Kültür Yayıncılık, 2017), 1109.

<sup>39</sup> Mubashir: a person who once executed an order of the government with a notification to the relevant people, or was an officer tasked with the duty of collection of property. Sami Şemseddin. Kamus-ı Türki (İstanbul: İdeal Kültür Yayıncılık, 2017), 978

<sup>40</sup> BOA, HAT. 1523 – 25. (H-avasit-I muharrem 1228/M-18-01-1813). 1; BOA, HAT. 1521- 21. (H-21-01-1228/M-24-01-1813).

<sup>41</sup> BOA, HAT. 1523 – 25. (H-21-01-1228/M-24-01-1813).1.

<sup>42</sup> BOA, HAT. 1523 – 25. (H-fi awasit muharrem 1228/M-18-01-1813). 2.

<sup>43</sup> BOA, HAT. 1272 – 49332. (H-29-12-1228/M-23-12-1813).

<sup>44</sup> Jerusalem Hertiage (İhyâ'u't-Turâs Arşivi), Record Number: 318, Document: 112.

<sup>45</sup> BOA, HAT. 1525- 30. (H-15-02-1229/M-06-02-1814).

<sup>46</sup> BOA, HAT. 1523 – 25. (H-fi awasit muharrem 1228/ M-18-01-1813). 12.

### Increasing Foreign Influence

It is worth noting that the role of foreigners who attempted to take advantage of the Ottoman Empire's conditions gradually increased. As mentioned in an Ottoman document, the French role in Jerusalem is noticeable. The French ambassador agent sent a report to the Sublime Porte after the state assigned the Greek community to repair the Church. The French complained that their people faced mistreatment, preventing them from visiting holy places. The report also called for a review of the decree giving the Greek Orthodox community the right to restore the Church and participate in the restoration. But an important point that arose from this decree was the confirmation of the right of followers of Christian denominations to acquire property in Jerusalem, especially in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The report noted that the blocking of Christians' right to acquire property is inconsistent with the treaties signed between the Ottoman State and France.<sup>47</sup>

The point of view presented by researcher Abdullah Cakmak<sup>48</sup> on the report's subject appears to be accurate. According to Abdullah Cakmak, Western states tried to ensure that Christian people owned lands in Jerusalem by claiming that they had the right to repair the Church of Qiyamah. As it appears in the report language, France tried to show herself as equal, crossing the knowing boundaries in raising her claims. Sultan Mahmut II's answer to the French acting chief of mission is very important and is as follows: the Sultan's response to the French maslahatguzar is as follows:

*The fact that the said charge d'affaires put forward this claim, which he has never spoken about until now, shows that the issue is not the Kamama church and its other aims.*

*(Maslahatguzar-ı mersumun şimdiye değin buna dair harf teferru etmeyip bu defa iddiaya kıyama, Kumame olmayıp niyet-i uhralarına vesile-i mukaddemeden gayrı bir mana verilemez.)<sup>49</sup>*

The presented statement is evidence that Sultan Mahmud II sensed the Western danger toward Jerusalem, which would increase with the Crimean War.

Foreign intervention in Jerusalem was not limited to France, which was a pioneer in this regard. Russia gained influence by taking advantage of France's weakness. After the Sultan's decision granting the Orthodox Greeks the right to repair the Church of Qiyamah (Kumama), asking the Greek community to cover the Church's repair costs. However, they could not pay for the requested amount by the said congregation.<sup>50</sup> Since Russia was at war with the Ottomans in 1812 and France between 1812 and 1814, Jerusalem's Patriarch did not request help from Russia's Tsar. However, there was a significant development in Jerusalem in administrative issues, and Russia strengthened her interest in Jerusalem. After the emergence of the danger caused by Napoleon in 1814, this interest increased, and the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Polikarpos (1808-1827), requested financial support from Tsar Alexander, reporting that anti-Orthodox activities were a source of concern and harm.<sup>51</sup> The anti-Orthodox activities referred to Catholic activism amplified through French propaganda. The Patriarch's letter included warnings concerning France's ambition to urge the Catholic people to obtain privileges regarding the repair of the Church of Qiyamah due to the Greek's default in covering the costs of repairs, the right to which was granted by Sultan Mahmud II. In the letter, the Tsar was informed about the delivery of the necessary payment to the Orthodox.<sup>52</sup> After Tsar Alexander's order to collect donations for the Kamama Church's

<sup>47</sup> BOA, HAT. 1241 – 48258. (H-29-12-1227/M-03-01-1813).

<sup>48</sup> Abdullah Çakmak, "Osmanlı Kudüs'ünde devlet ve toplum (1798-1841)". PhD Thesis, Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi, 2019, 185.

<sup>49</sup> BOA, HAT. 1241 – 48258. (H-29-12-1227/M-03-01-1813).

<sup>50</sup> Bilgehan Pamuk, "Osmanlılar zamanında Rum-Ermeni kiliseleri arasındaki ilişkiler (Kudüs örneği)", *Atatürk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi*, (16) (2001): 242.

<sup>51</sup> Derek Hopwood, *The Russian presence in Syria and Palestine, 1843-1914: Church and politics in the Near East* (London: Clarendon Press, 1969), 13

<sup>52</sup> BOA, HAT. 1241 – 48258. (H-29-12-1227/M-03-01-1813).



renovation, a letter was sent to the Russian Ambassador to Istanbul G.A Stroganov, communicating the Orthodox and Greek complaints about the Catholic attacks.<sup>53</sup>

The most important reason why the dispute continued and turned into a crisis was that each group had a feeling that certain guarantor states supported it. Sultan Mahmud II put forward a new effort to decrease the growing tension between Christian communities to sense the danger. In 1817, he issued a new edict, giving the Greek Orthodox the right to repair the Church and reinforcing the old decisions.<sup>54</sup> However, this decision did not end the disputes; the Russians felt the need to move forward in Jerusalem, thus preventing France and Britain from becoming the region's dominant forces. In 1819, Russia established her first consulate in Jaffa, a port city that welcomed Russian pilgrims arriving in Jerusalem. Therefore, it is possible to say that Russia achieved the title of protector of the Orthodox at the Ottoman State level with these and similar steps.<sup>55</sup>

### Conclusion

Jerusalem included a mixture of different races and religions with all its sects due to the policy of tolerance practiced by the Ottoman Empire. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem was a source of the new, old conflict between the Christian sects' followers over the right to administer them. However, these conflicts were not very apparent during the period of the Ottoman Empire's power. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century on, the controversy began to shift from being an internal Ottoman affair to becoming an international conflict. France was keen to obtain the right to protect Catholics. On the other side, Russia was keen to obtain the right to protect the Orthodox. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a competition took place between France, Russia, and Britain to obtain concessions in Jerusalem through their sects. They were benefiting from the state of weakness in the Ottoman Empire.

One of the dispute's escalations between the Christian sects and the countries supporting them was the Armenian community burning the church. They did this after finding themselves without a supporter, while France supports the Catholics, and Russia supports the Orthodox. They wanted through setting the church on the fire to obtain rights for them in the church.

Immediately after the fire, the Ottoman Empire granted the Orthodox the right to restore the church. This decision was a reason to reignite the dispute over the so-called issue of church restoration. The Ottoman Empire followed a new policy to solve the worsening of the problem. The Ottoman Empire wanted to quickly resolve the dispute to prevent European countries from interfering in their internal affairs. As a result, they formed several committees consisting of important Ottoman personalities and representatives from the conflicting sects to investigate the documents on which each party relies to attribute a truth.

Despite all the Ottoman efforts, it did not lead to an end to the dispute. It can be said that the escalation of the dispute in Jerusalem between the Christian sects were caused by each party's feeling that there is a strong state that offers it support and protection. There is also no doubt that the competing countries were not concerned with Jerusalem's Christian communities' interests. This competition is part of the attempt to compete for the Ottoman Empire's legacy and gain a foothold in Jerusalem. The disagreement that arose after the fire made Jerusalem an arena for competition between the Western powers, and Jerusalem's identity changed from religious to political.

<sup>53</sup> Melikşah Arslan, "Suriye ve Filistin'de Rus Mevcudiyeti ve Osmanlı Siyaseti (1847-1914)" (PhD. Thesis, Hacettepe Üniversitesi, 2019), 41.

<sup>54</sup> Directorate of State Archives. "Kudüs'te Hristiyan Mezhep ve Milletlerin İdaresi (Administration of Christian Denominations and Communities in Jerusalem)", *Hazine-i Evrak Arşiv ve Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1(1) (2019): 174.

<sup>55</sup> Derek Hopwood, *The Russian presence in Syria and Palestine, 1843-1914: Church and politics in the Near East* (London: Clarendon Press, 1969), 13-15.

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