

MULTIDIMENSIONAL RELATIONS BETWEEN SULTAN ‘ABD AL-ḤAMĪD II AND POPE LEO XIII AND THE REFLECTIONS OF THESE RELATIONS IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND ROME

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Abstract

The last quarter of the 19th century was a period of good relations between Rome and Istanbul, with the Ottoman Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II (1876-1909) on the one side and the Roman Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) on the other. The many Catholics living in the Ottoman Empire were an important factor in their cooperation. The correspondence between the Pope and the Sultan intensified during this period. The two parties were not indifferent to each other’s important days and provided mutual gifts. This study predominantly references the Ottoman Archive Documents and news from Istanbul and the European press at that time in addition to basic sources.

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Methodologically, descriptive and comparative approaches are extensively used.

Key Words: Pope Leo XIII, Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II, Ottoman, Rome, Pontifical Maronite College

Introduction

The 19th century was one of the most difficult periods of the Ottoman Empire. Although the Ottoman Empire reached its greatest limits, it was able to keep elements of different religions and sects together within it. However, the loss of land along with regression affected non-Muslim religious structures. For example, Greece, which declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1830, established an independent church, but the Istanbul Orthodox Patriarchate recognized a separate Greek Orthodox Church only in 1850. Thus, after the development of an independent state, a separate church was formed. The opposite situation occurred in the Bulgarian Church. The Bulgarian Exarchate, which was established in 1870 due to pressure from Russia, was not recognized by the Istanbul Orthodox Patriarchate for many years.¹ Unlike the Greeks, the Bulgarians gained an independent state only after an independent church. In addition to the Orthodox Church, another important Christian sect in the Ottoman lands was the Catholics. They were divided into two groups: Catholics who were Ottoman citizens and Catholics who were foreigners and were more often called Latins. While Catholics with foreign status were mostly under the administration of Catholic countries and papal authorities, Catholics such as Catholic Armenians and Catholic Assyrians were mostly members of the Eastern Catholic Churches (Uniate). In a milestone for Eastern Catholics, Catholic Armenians broke off their relations with the Patriarchate in Kumkapı in 1830 and had a separate patriarchate administration with the permission of the

¹ Ivan Zhelev Dimitrov, “Bulgarian Christianity”, *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*, ed. Ken Parry (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 55-56; Peter Petkoff, “Church-State Relations under the Bulgarian Denominations Act 2002: Religious Pluralism and Established Church and the Impact of Other Models of Law on Religion”, *Religion, State & Society* 33/4 (December 2005), 320.

Ottoman Empire.² The fact that these groups, which were mostly monophysites, separated from their ancient churches and established a separate patriarchate revealed a different situation. Because they were not like the Latins, their appointments were carried out by the Ottomans, whereas their spiritual affairs were conducted through the Papacy. However, the intervention of the Papacy in the civil affairs of the congregation from time to time caused quarrels within the Uniate Church and problems between the Papacy and the Ottoman Empire. These problems, which started in the second half of the 19th century, were greatly reduced during the reign of Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd in the last quarter of that century. However, the news in the European press during this period, especially due to the Armenian events, is mostly reflected as anti-Christianity rather than a political problem.³

Some Westerners, such as Müller who observed the event on the ground, stated that the problem was political rather than hostility to Christianity and that it stemmed from the dream of establishing a separate state for the Armenians.⁴ When the Archival Documents of the period are examined, it is clear that many Christians in the Ottoman Empire lived comfortably, and even Christian statesmen held duties in the highest office of the State.⁵ On the other hand, the relations between the Vatican and Istanbul are also an important indicator. Contrary to the claims of the mainstream newspapers of the 19th century, this study will discuss the point that Muslims do not have a problem with Christians in the context of the relations between the Pope, the highest spiritual leader of the Catholics, and Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd.

In the literature on the subject, Rinaldo Marmara’s work titled *Vatikan Gizli Arşiv Belgeleri Işığında Türkiye ile Vatikan: Diplomatik İlişkilere Doğru/Secondo Documenti dell’Archivio Segreto Vaticano Verso le Relazioni Diplomatiche tra la Santa Sede e la Turchia* contains important information about the Papacy and Ottoman relations in the period of Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II. This work has been discussed in

² Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), *Hatt-ı Hümayûn [HAT]*, no. 1333, Folderno. 52025.

³ *The Times*, “The Armenian Question” (28 September 1895), 5.

⁴ Georgina Max Müller, *Letters from Constantinople* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897), 131; Philip Mansel, *Konstantiniyye: Dünyanın Arzuladığı Şehir 1453-1924*, trans. Şerif Erol (İstanbul: Everest Yayınları, 2008), 448.

⁵ Ercan Karakoç, “Osmanlı Hariciyesinde Bir Ermeni Nazır: Gabriyel Noradunkyan Efendi”, *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi* 7/25 (March 2010), 157-177.

light of documents in the Vatican Archive.⁶ In an article titled “Turkey-Vatican Relations from the Ottomans to the Republic” written by Ahmet Türkan, historical Ottoman-Vatican relations are discussed. In the study, which draws upon the Ottoman Archive Documents, the period of Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II is generally handled from a diplomatic point of view.⁷

In the book titled *Beyaz Diplomasi: Arşiv Belgeleri Işığında Osmanlı-Vatikan İlişkileri* by Tacettin Kayaoğlu,⁸ there are documents on mutual gifts, including medals and letters of goodwill between different Ottoman sultans and popes, including Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II and Pope Leo XIII. In the content of the book, some Ottoman Archive Documents were selected, and their Turkish equivalents were written in the Latin alphabet. However, no comments or evaluations were made on the documents. In our study, only the relations between Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II and Pope Leo XIII are discussed. The originals of the Ottoman documents were used, and an evaluation was made by comparing the archive documents with other sources in addition to the local and foreign press of the period.

In this study, the relations with all popes during the reign of Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd as well as his relations with Pope Leo XIII are discussed in more detail in the context of education, religious institutions, and historical artifacts as well as diplomatic relations. The contributions of Azarian Efendī and Şābūnĵizādah Louis Alberi, both of whom were members of the Eastern Catholic Church (Uniate), in the relations between the Sultan and the Pope are examined in a multidimensional way. Primary sources are used extensively, including the Ottoman Archive Documents as well as foreign newspapers of the period, especially *The Times*. Additionally, archive documents and newspapers of the period are evaluated and compared.

⁶ Rinaldo Marmara, *Vatikan Gizli Arşiv Belgeleri Işığında Türkiye ile Vatikan: Diplomatik İlişkilere Doğru/Secondo Documenti dell'Archivio Segreto Vaticano Verso le Relazioni Diplomatiche tra la Santa Sede e la Turchia* (İstanbul: Bahçeşehir Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2012).

⁷ Ahmet Türkan, “Turkey-Vatican Relations from the Ottomans to the Republic”, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IJHSS)* 5/5 (May 2015), 148-163.

⁸ Tacettin Kayaoğlu, *Beyaz Diplomasi: Arşiv Belgeleri Işığında Osmanlı-Vatikan İlişkileri* (İstanbul: Fide Yayınları, 2007).

1. Internal and External Factors in Relations

In the last quarter of the 19th century during the reign of Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II, Ottoman relations with the Holy See continued to be semiofficial. During the reign of Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II (1876-1909), there were three popes in Rome in different periods. These included Pope Pius IX (1846-1878), Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903), and Pope Pius X (1903-1914). Among them, the most intense contact was between Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II and Pope Leo XIII.⁹

The relations between Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II and Pope Leo XIII were more colorful, intense, and multidimensional than previous periods as far as the Ottoman and the Holy See were concerned. It can be said that these relations were generally positive, albeit with some exceptions. Both internal and external factors are important. The failure of the Ottoman Empire in the war with Russia in 1877-1878 and the Berlin Treaty (1878) made Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II and Pope Leo XIII draw closer. The increase in Russian influence in the Balkans was against the Holy See as much as the Ottoman Empire. In particular, the orthodoxization policy by Russia in the regions where it expanded its dominance was one of the most important factors that increased anxiety. Bedros Efendī (Stephan Bedros X Azarian; 1826-1899), a member of the Council of State (*Shūrā-yi Dawlāb*), was sent to the Holy See by ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II to discuss the Russia issue with the authorities in Rome. It was decided that the two parties would act together against Russia.¹⁰

The Pope attached so much importance to the war between the Ottomans and Russia that he even asked the age of ‘Uthmān (Osman) Pasha (1832-1900) and appreciated his defense in Plevna. Bedros Efendī was sent to Rome because of Pope Leo’s inauguration so that he could congratulate Pope Leo on behalf of the Sultan.¹¹

When we look at the Ottoman Archive Documents on the subject, two issues draw attention. The first is the congratulations to Pope Leo

⁹ Ahmet Türkan, “Sultan II. Abdülhamit Dönemi’nde Papalıkla İlişkiler”, *Sultan II. Abdülhamit Dönemi Sempozyumu 20-21 Şubat 2014, Selanik İç ve Dış Siyaset Bildiriler* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2014), 322.

¹⁰ BOA, *Yıldız Tasnifi Perakende Hariciye Nezareti Maruzatı [Y. PRK. HR]*, no. 3, Folderno. 5; *The Globe*, “Turkey’s Internal Affairs” (29 May 1877), 1; *The Times*, “The Vatican” (16 May 1878), 5.

¹¹ Türkan, “Turkey-Vatican Relations from the Ottomans to the Republic”, 152.

on the friendship of the two sides. The second is that because they were under Ottoman citizenship, Catholics were loyal to the state. In this regard, the Pope's advice to the Ottoman Catholics was very effective in terms of maintaining that loyalty.¹²

2. The Contribution of Patriarch Azarian

The promotion of Patriarch Hassoun as a cardinal was one of the important developments for Eastern Christians. Since Basilios Bessarion (1403-1472), there was no appointment of an Eastern Christian to cardinal.¹³ However, the promotion of Andon Bedros IX Hassoun (1809-1884) to this authority without informing the Ottoman state drew the reaction of Sultan ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd II. Aware of this situation, Pope Leo XIII sent Cardinal Vincenzo Vannutelli (1836-1930) to Istanbul to convey his message. Vannutelli explained that the promotion of Hassoun to cardinality was important for Eastern Christians and that this would benefit the Ottoman state. Ottoman government officials stated that they reacted not to bring Hassoun to a higher religious level but because of a procedural error. As a result of the negotiations, the Hassoun issue was resolved, and the reactions to Hassoun being a cardinal were abandoned.¹⁴

After Hassoun, Catholic Armenians chose Stephan Bedros X Azarian as their new patriarch. Later, Patriarch Azarian went to Rome with the permission of the Sultan. After the necessary ceremony was held by the Pope in Rome, Azarian returned to Istanbul. The election of Azarian as a patriarch also made Pope Leo happy. Therefore, the Pope gave Azarian various medals to be presented to Ottoman state officials. The owners of these medals were Saʿīd Pasha (the Minister of Foreign Affairs), Jawdat Pasha (the Minister of Justice), Agob Pasha (the Minister of Treasury), Rāʾif Efendī (Beglikjī-yi Dīwān-i Humāyūn), and Zīwar Beg (the Director of Sects [*Madbāhib*]).¹⁵

¹² BOA, *İ. HR*, no. 276, Folderno. 16827.

¹³ Charles A. Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans, The Church and the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 269.

¹⁴ Türkan, "İstanbullu Kardinal Hasun Efendi'nin Osmanlı ve Katolik Dünyasında Bıraktığı Etki", *Türk-İslam Medeniyeti Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi* 16 (2012), 195-196.

¹⁵ BOA, *HR. TO*, no. 530, Folderno. 83; *İrâde Dabîliye [İ. DH]*, no. 1027, Folderno. 80963.

Having received the patriarchal certificate (*Barāt*¹⁶) from the Sultan, Azarian Efendī was dealing with the affairs of his own community and was also interested in the issues of the Eastern Catholics. In the context of the Eastern Catholics, the Patriarch Azarian is an important figure who made an impact on the last quarter of the 19th century.

The influence of an important person in the good relations between Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II and Pope Leo should not be underestimated. This was the Catholic Armenian Patriarch Stephan Bedros X Azarian (1881-1889). Azarian, who was known as a “diplomatic patriarch”, had a significant impact on the relations between Pope Leo and Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II. Because of his ability, a French academician said that there were three diplomats in the East, and one of them was Azarian. He had many printed works and spoke eight different languages.¹⁷

Indeed, Azarian’s influence in the bilateral relations between Pope Leo XIII and Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II cannot be ignored.¹⁸ He delivered the Sultan’s gifts and letters to Pope Leo.¹⁹ From time to time, he helped the Ottoman government solve the problems of the Eastern Catholics. On February 17, 1887, Azarian met with Pope Leo XIII in the Vatican. The Pope congratulated Patriarch Azarian for solving the problems of Catholic Armenians. He also thanked Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd for granting all kinds of religious freedom to Christians.²⁰ In addition to being valuable in the eyes of both the Pope and the Sultan, Azarian gained the respect of the Eastern Catholics. In particular, efforts to find a middle way for church problems relieved the Ottoman government. One example is the Assyrian church debate in Mosul regarding the Ottoman Empire’s struggle about whether the churches belonged to Orthodox or Catholic Syrians.²¹ Both Christian groups claimed their right to the church. In the resolution of the issue, the Ottoman government benefited from Azarian’s views. Azarian was called to the

¹⁶ *Barāt (Berat)* is the official document given by the sultan stating that an appointment or exemption has been provided.

¹⁷ Armenian Catholic Church, “Biographies Past Catholicos Patriarchs”, (Accessed June 1, 2021).

¹⁸ BOA, *Yıldız Sadaret Hususi Maruzat [Y. A. HUS]*, no. 272, Folderno. 79.

¹⁹ *Şabâh* (Rajab 12, 1310/ January 30, 1893).

²⁰ *The Manchester Guardian*, “The Papacy” (February 17, 1887), 8.

²¹ BOA, *Sadaret Mektubî Kalemi Mübimme Evrakı [A. MKT. MHM]*, no. 491, Folderno. 65.

Sublime Porte in 1886, long negotiations were held, and a solution was obtained with his efforts.²²

3. Letters of Condolence

When referring to popes in the Ottoman official correspondence, the term “Rim Papa”, which means “Pope in Rome”, was used.²³ However, after the period of the Sultan ‘Abd al-Majid, the words “His Holiness” were used more often. Statements about the Pope appear not only in official documents but also in the newspaper pages of the period.²⁴

When we look at the official correspondence in the period of Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II, the following expressions are used that have the same meaning as “His Holiness”: “Haşmetli Papa Hazretleri”, “Haşmetli Papa Cenapları”, “Papa Cenapları”, “Papa Hazretleri”, and “Haşmetli Papa”.²⁵ These expressions were frequently used, especially in the letters Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II wrote to Pope Leo. For example, Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II sent a condolence letter to the spiritual council in the Vatican on the death of Pope Pius IX. Thereupon, the Vatican delegation sent Monsignor Antonio Maria Grasselli to Istanbul for ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd’s kindness. One of Graselli’s aims was to convey to the Sultan that Pope Leo XIII was the new pope. Graselli came to Istanbul and had good discussions with ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II. These developments further enhanced the good relations between the Vatican and the Ottomans.²⁶

Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II paid close attention to issues related to the relatives of Pope Leo. When Pope Leo’s older brother passed away, he sent this condolence telegram: “I have heard with great sadness the death of Jean Pecci. I would like to express my condolence for this death.”²⁷

²² BOA, *Meclis-i Vükela Mazbataları [MV]*, no. 11, Folderno. 76.

²³ BOA, *Dîvân-ı Hümâyûn Sicilleri Mübimme Defterleri (A. DVNSMHM.d)*, no. 7, Folderno. 1555.

²⁴ *Başîrat* (Rabî‘ al-awwal 3, 1289/May 11, 1872); *Jarîdab-ı Ḥawâdith* (Muḥarram 18, 1284/May 22, 1867).

²⁵ BOA, *İrade Taltifat [İ. TAL]*, no. 26, Folderno. 12; *İ. TAL*, no. 71, Folderno. 27; *İ. TAL*, no. 73, Folderno. 47; Bâbiâli Evrak Odası Evrakı [BEO], no. 539, Folderno. 40368.

²⁶ BOA, *İ. HR*, no. 276, Folderno. 16813.

²⁷ BOA, *Yıldız Sadaret Resmî Maruzat Evrakı [Y. A. RES]*, no. 10, Folderno. 23.

Pope Leo responded to Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd’s condolences with this telegram: “The condolence of the honorable Sultan due to the death of our brother has been highly appreciated by us. I sincerely thank you for the continuation of your supreme reign and wish you happiness.”²⁸

There were communication problems from time to time because there was no official relationship between the Ottoman Empire and the Holy See. The negotiations in Istanbul generally took place through the French embassy. However, sometimes Papal authorities’ desire to meet directly with Ottoman state officials drew a harsh reaction from France.²⁹ Likewise, the fact that the Ottoman ambassador in Italy wanted to meet with Pope Leo XIII and other Papal authorities caused a communication problem. Due to the problem between the Italian state and the Holy See, Pope Leo XIII did not want to meet with the ambassadors in Italy. This was even more apparent in the appointment of the Ottoman ambassador to congratulate the new Pope. In return for the visit of the Pope’s deputy in Istanbul, the Sultan appointed the Roman ambassador for congratulations. However, Pope Leo XIII did not accept any envoy in the Italian state. The envoy obtained this impression from the cardinal at the head of Propaganda Fide. Upon this occurrence, the Ottoman ambassador requested the appointment of the Ottoman consul in Rome from the Porte. According to the ambassador, the consul not only knew a few of the cardinals but also had close relations with Monsignor Franchi.³⁰

Friendly relations between the Ottoman and Holy See continued despite diplomatic difficulties. When we consider the past years, it is clear that the Ottoman consulate in Rome was established due to the problem between Italy and the Holy See. Yanko Fotiyadi Pasha, the Ottoman Ambassador to Italy, explained the reasons for the establishment of this consulate. According to him, many citizens lived in Rome, and most of them were clergy. Therefore, it would be appropriate to establish a consulate to meet their needs and maintain close contact with the Vatican. This request of Fotiyadi Pasha was

²⁸ BOA, *Y. A. RES*, no. 10, Folderno. 23.

²⁹ Marmara, *Vatikan Gizli Arşiv Belgeleri Işığında Türkiye ile Vatikan*, 5.

³⁰ BOA, *Hariciye Nezareti Mütenevvia Kısmı Evrakı [HR. MTV]*, no. 202, Folderno. 4.

approved by Sultan ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, and a consulate was established in Rome in 1871.³¹

4. Mutual Gifts and the Pope’s Jubilee

Another detail observed in the Ottoman-Vatican relations was the reciprocal courtesy between ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II and Pope Leo XIII. For instance, when Cardinal Vincenzo Vannutelli came to Istanbul in 1880, he presented a mosaic table with a letter written by Pope Leo XIII.³² In return, ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II sent gifts and letters to the Pope many times. The most striking of these was the ring sent to Pope Leo XIII by ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II in 1887.

Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II also showed great interest in Pope Leo’s jubilee ceremony. We can take a closer look at this jubilee ceremony, which had an important influence in Rome in the second half of the 19th century. The jubilee ceremony, which lasted from the spring of 1887 to the beginning of 1888, took place after great preparations.³³

Considering Pope Leo’s policies in general, he was an important success in opening the Catholic Church to the outside. This situation drew attention at the ceremonies held in the Vatican. The gifts presented at the jubilee of the Pope in 1887 are a good example. The gold ewer and basin given by Queen Victoria, the crown given by the German emperor, and the diamond ring given by Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II are among the most important.³⁴

In the press of the period, all the preparations in the Vatican were discussed. The most remarkable news in the press was related to the gifts presented to the Pope. A few of these news items can be mentioned. For example, the German Emperor presented two gifts to the Pope as a gift for the jubilee. One of them was a mitre set with precious stones that was worth 20,000 francs. The second was a set of mass robes with a value of 30,000 francs offered by the Empress. The Queen of Saxony, Carole, gifted a beautiful basin worth 5,000 francs.

³¹ BOA, *İ. HR*, no. 254, Folderno. 15151.

³² BOA, *Y. A. HUS*, no. 164, Folderno. 49.

³³ Bernard O’Reilly, *Life of Leo XIII, From an Authentic Memoir Furnished by His Order* (New York: The John C. Winston Company, 1903), 603.

³⁴ John Ireland, “Leo XIII., His Work and Influence”, *The North American Review* 177/562 (September 1903), 363.

The Prince of Bavaria Regent presented a pair of stained-glass windows representing Popes Gregory and Leo.³⁵

Austria, which has a dense Catholic population, also gave great importance to the Pope’s jubilee. *The Times* tells about the great preparations for the jubilee in Austria as follows:

The 50th anniversary of the Pope’s ordination as priest will be celebrated by the Catholics in Austria-Hungary with great pomp. Several pilgrimages to Rome have been organized, and Pope will receive numerous beautiful and costly gifts from the Emperor, the members of the Imperial family, the Austrian and Hungarian aristocracies, the ecclesiastical bodies, and other corporations. These gifts are now being exhibited at the Austrian museum here, and among them is a collective offering from all the Archdukes, which attracts special attention. It is a magnificent reliquarium in silver of great artistic value dating from the end of the 15th century and is enclosed in a velvet case, which bears outside a golden plate with the names of all the Archdukes, the list being headed with the name of Crown Prince Rudolph. The reliquarium contains 365 relics, one for each day of the year and in the order of the calendar.³⁶

The jubilee took place despite several concerns due to the tension between the Holy See and the Italian government. *The Times*, in an article titled “Italy and The Pope’s Jubilee” dated January 3, 1888, mentions the end of the jubilee without a negative demonstration. The newspaper also added that the strict measures taken by the Italian government bothered people.³⁷

There is also news in *The Times* about the gift of Sultan ‘Abd al-Hamīd II. In a piece titled “Turkey and the Vatican” dated January 10, 1887, the following information is given:

Monsignor Azarian, Patriarch of the Catholic Armenians, who will leave for Rome on the 19th inst., will be the bearer of an autographed letter from the sultan to the Pope congratulating His Holiness on the occasion of the jubilee anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood. The Patriarch will also take presents, including a very valuable diamond ring, from His

³⁵ *The Times*, “The Pope’s Jubilee” (October 11, 1887), 5.

³⁶ *The Times*, “The Pope’s Jubilee” (October 10, 1887), 6.

³⁷ *The Times*, “Italy and the Pope’s Jubilee” (January 3, 1888), 5.

Majesty to the Pope, as well as decorations for various Cardinals. It is believed that Monsignor Azarian will be made Cardinal on the occasion of his visit to Rome.³⁸

In news from the same newspaper titled “The Sultan and the Pope” on February 15, 1887, the following information is reported:

The Armenian Patriarch will be received by the Pope at noon tomorrow, when he will present to His Holiness a diamond ring as a present from the Sultan, as well as the decorations lately conferred by His Majesty upon the various prelates. The latter will afterward receive decorations from the Pope himself.³⁹

The satisfaction and excitement of the Pope due to the gift from the Sultan drew attention both in the letter he wrote and in the information given by Azarian. The documents in the Ottoman Archives also contain detailed information on this subject. The Catholic Armenian Patriarch Azarian Efendî conveyed the Sultan’s gift to the Pope. When the Pope received the ring, he stated that he was honored and commented on its beauty to the people around him. In addition, Cardinal Parocchi presented his appreciation for the ring, saying that its stone was a rare artifact and even more superior than the gift sent to the Pope a year before by the German Emperor.⁴⁰

The assignment of Azarian by the Sultan to present the gifts brought joy to the Catholic Armenian community. They stated that this was an honorable behavior for them by the Sultan.

5. Thanking the Sultan from the Pope

The Catholic Armenian Patriarch Azarian Efendî informed the Sultan about the developments in Rome. In his speech before the Pope, he briefly underlined the following points. He was proud to be a citizen of the Ottoman Empire and to convey the gift of the Sultan to the Pope. He was grateful to Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II for giving favor to all his people. The greatest ambitions of the Sultan were the welfare and happiness of his people. They had great freedom in carrying out their religious worship, and this was a situation to be envied by the Christian people of many countries. Therefore, they prayed for the Sultan’s long life and for his happiness to increase. His appointment to

³⁸ *The Times*, “Foreign News, Turkey and Vatican” (January 10, 1887), 6.

³⁹ *The Times*, “Foreign News, The Sultan and the Pope” (February 15, 1887), 5.

⁴⁰ BOA, *Yıldız Perakende Sadâret Maruzâtı Evrakı* [Y. PRK. A], no. 4, Folderno. 71.

this duty, which was a means of pride, was the result of the Catholics' loyalty to their Sultans and the Sultan's satisfaction with the Catholics in turn.⁴¹

After Patriarch Azarian finished his speech, he stated his loyalty to the Pope and demanded his prayer. Then, the following speech was delivered by Pope Leo:

We are happy to receive the letter and gift you have been assigned by the Sultan (Padişah hazretleri) to deliver to us. We are extremely grateful and thankful for the Sultan's friendly feelings for us. The mentioned supreme feelings are proven by medals given to some cardinals and priests. We take pride in seeing that the extraordinarily important task given to a Catholic patriarch is the result of Catholics' loyalty to the Sultan. We are confident that the Catholics will not leave their loyalty, which is a sacred duty. We fully believe that Catholics' loyalty will increase much more, as we witness that they are being tolerated too much in terms of religious freedom. It is evident that satisfaction with religious freedom will bring about better works. We ask you to express our feeling in the presence of the Sultan, and we wish his happiness to increase. Therefore, we pray to you and to all Catholics from your Patriarchate. May God accept our wishes.⁴²

Patriarch Azarian did not return to Istanbul immediately after delivering the Sultan's gift and letter in the Vatican. According to him, his duty had good results not only in the Vatican Palace but also among many top foreign diplomats in Rome. He stayed in Rome for another twenty days and then visited Lyon and Paris.⁴³

Azarian also visited the Ottoman ambassador before leaving Rome. The letter sent by the Ottoman ambassador from Rome to Istanbul is important. In his letter, the Ambassador stated that he was interested in Azarian and that they talked about the ceremony in the Vatican. According to what Azarian told the ambassador, the gift of any president was not discussed as much as the gift of Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II.⁴⁴

⁴¹ BOA, *Y. PRK. A*, no. 4, Folderno. 71.

⁴² BOA, *Y. PRK. A*, no. 4, Folderno. 71.

⁴³ BOA, *Y. PRK. A*, no. 4, Folderno. 71.

⁴⁴ BOA, *Hariciye Nezareti Siyasi Kısım Evrakı [HR. SYS]*, no. 1769, Folderno. 54.

Azarian's travels in Rome and other European cities and the gift of the Sultan to the Pope were the subject of many domestic and foreign newspapers of the period, as well as archival documents. According to the news of the *Şabâh* newspaper published in Istanbul, Azarian, who conducted a series of meetings in Rome in March 1887, is reported to have moved to Paris and had meetings there. Azarian had a special meeting with the Emperor of Austria in Vienna during his visit in 1887. An Ottoman Pasha was present with Azarian at the feast given later.⁴⁵

After a long journey, he returned to Istanbul with "Varna Post". Then, he went to Yıldız Palace and presented the letter sent by the Pope to the Sultan. Azarian also went to the Porte and had a meeting with the Grand Vizier and presented him with medals sent from the Vatican.⁴⁶ *The Times* reported the following news: "The Armenian Catholic Patriarch Azarian, on his return from his mission to Rome to present the Pope with a gift of a valuable ring from the Sultan and Turkish orders to Cardinals, has brought an autographed letter of thanks from Leo XIII. He will be received in audience by the Sultan this week."⁴⁷

In the aforementioned section, what Pope Leo meant by the medals given to the cardinals was the gifts given by Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II. Pope Leo had sent a special gift to Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II and medals to some Ottoman officials. The gift brought to the sultan by the Istanbul Deputy of the Pope was a mosaic table. Deputy Pope Monsignor Vincenzo Vannutelli also brought a letter from Pope Leo to convey to the Sultan.⁴⁸ Rejoicing, Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II sent medals to high-ranking Catholic clergymen along with a special gift to the Pope. These were Cardinal Simoni, Cardinal Nina, Pope Istanbul deputy Monsignor Vincenzo Vannutelli and Abbot Antuan Vigo.⁴⁹

Like the jubilee ceremonies in 1887-88, the Pope's jubilee in 1893 drew great attention. Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II paid close attention to the celebrations commemorating the Pope's attainment of the bishopric. For example, in 1893, Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II presented a decorated box to the jubilee for the fiftieth year of Pope Leo's reign as

⁴⁵ *Şabâh* (Rajab 17, 1304/April 11, 1887).

⁴⁶ *Şabâh* (Rajab 21, 1304/April 15, 1887).

⁴⁷ *The Times*, "Turkey, Constantinople April 20" (April 21, 1887), 5.

⁴⁸ BOA, Y. PRK. A, no. 4, Folderno. 71.

⁴⁹ BOA, İ. HR, no. 225, Folderno. 13183.

bishop.⁵⁰ Azarian brought a letter to the Pope along with a gift. Considering the news received from Rome, Azarian was treated as an extraordinary ambassador and, although not official, as the representative of the Sultan. He was accompanied by Armenian clergy and other civilians in Rome and elsewhere in Italy.⁵¹

There were two gifts from the Sultan. The first was a valuable snuff box, and the other was a religiously valuable inscription. The value given to the Pope’s jubilee can be seen in the preparation of the gift. Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II did not initially like the snuff box that was prepared to be presented to the Pope. According to the Sultan, the value of the gift was too low for the Pope. Therefore, the Sultan requested the removal of the stone in the middle of the snuff box and the placement of precious large stones on both sides and in the middle. When the Ottoman Archive Documents are examined, it can be seen that the preparation of the gift was completed after many official correspondences.⁵²

Another gift from the Sultan was the Inscription of Abercius, which contained valuable information in terms of early Christianity. We can take a closer look at this gift.

6. Gift of Abercius’ Inscription

Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II sent the Pope a religiously important gift, the Inscription of Abercius. The two parts of this inscription were found in 1883 by the British archaeologist William Mitchell Ramsay in Phrygia (the city of Hieropolis) in Turkey. Today, this place is located in the district of Sandıklı, Afyon province in western Turkey. It is exhibited in the Lateran Museum.⁵³

The Inscription of Abercius, the oldest historical monument in the Eucharist, has great theological significance in the context of the

⁵⁰ BOA, *BEO*, no. 132, Folderno. 9885.

⁵¹ *The Manchester Guardian*, “The Pope’s Episcopal Jubilee” (February 22, 1893), 8.

⁵² BOA, *BEO*, no. 130, Folderno. 10392; *BEO*, no. 132, Folderno. 9885.

⁵³ Markus Vinzent, *Writing the History of Early Christianity: From Reception to Retrospection* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 97, 101; Margaret M. Mitchell, “Poetics and Politics of Christian Baptism in the Abercius Monument”, *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, ed. David Hellholm et al. (Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), 1744; Musei Vatican, “Inscription of Abercius” (Accessed May 20, 2019).

history of the church doctrine.⁵⁴ The importance of the Inscription of Abercius to the Eucharist is detailed as follows:

The Eucharist is the living presence of Christ in the Church. The Lord's passion led to his transformation into food for humanity (cf. 1 Cor 10:16; 11:23ff). One of the traditional symbols of this mystery is the fish. The most ancient reference on the subject is found in the celebrated epigraph of St. Abercius, a bishop of the second century: '...he abundantly feeds me with fish from clear waters..., which the chaste virgin takes and offers each day to her friends so they can eat it with choice wine together with bread.'⁵⁵

Abercius, the Bishop of Hieropolis (Denizli), printed the inscription at the end of the 2nd century at the age of 72. The inscription consisted of 22 verses describing the life and deeds of Abercius. One of the most important events in his life was his journey to Rome.⁵⁶ His epitaph speaks of the glorious seal in connection with baptism.⁵⁷ The following text is included in the translation of the inscriptions of Abercius:

The citizen of an eminent city, this monument I made whilst still living, that there I might have in time a resting place for my body. My name is Abercius, the disciple of the holy shepherd having Paul [as my companion]. Everywhere faith was my guide and everywhere provided as my food the fish of exceeding great size and pure whom the spotless virgin caught from the spring, who feeds his flocks of sheep on the mountains and in the plains, who has great eyes that see everywhere. This shepherd taught me the Book worthy of belief. It is he who sent me to Rome to behold the royal majesty and to see the queen arrayed in golden vestments and golden sandals. There also I saw the people famous for their seal. And I saw the plains of Syria and all its cities, and also Nisibis when I crossed the Euphrates.

⁵⁴ J. Quasten, "Abercius, Epitaph of", *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Michigan: Gale, 2003), 1/20; M. R. P. McGuire, "Epigraphy, Christian", *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Michigan: Gale, 2003), 5/286.

⁵⁵ The Holy See, "Synod of Bishops XI Ordinary General Assembly the Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church" (Accessed January 20, 2020).

⁵⁶ Quasten, "Abercius, Epitaph of", 1/20.

⁵⁷ F. X. Murphy, "Symbolism, Early Christian", *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Michigan: Gale, 2003), 13/667.

Everywhere I met brethren in agreement, and faith ever gives this food to his disciples to eat, having the choicest wine and administering the mixed drink with bread. I, Abercius, standing by, ordered these words to be inscribed, being in the course of my seventy-second year. Let him who understands these words and believes the same pray for Abercius. No one shall place another tomb over my grave; but if he does so, he shall pay to the treasury of the Romans two thousand pieces of gold and to my beloved native city Hieropolis, one thousand pieces of gold.⁵⁸

6.1. Şābūnjizādah Louis Alberi’s Report on the Inscription

Another important person to be considered in the relations between Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II and the Pope is Louis Şābūnjizādah (1838-1931). Şābūnjizādah, a Maronite pastor, was educated at Propaganda Fide in Rome.⁵⁹ After various duties, he entered Yıldız Palace in 1891 and advised Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II for 18 years. He reviewed newspapers published in Arabic, French, and Italian languages in the foreign press and reported them to Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II. Şābūnjizādah, who also met with the Pope’s deputy in Istanbul from time to time, had important consultations with him.⁶⁰ Since he had a deep knowledge of Christianity, he gave important information about this subject to Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II. In his report to the Sultan, he made the following evaluations about “The Inscription of Abercius”:

It is admirable for our sultan to strive for the discovery and preservation of ancient artifacts in his property. The famous tomb of St. Abercius is also one of the valuable discoveries. St. Abercius was a bishop who lived in the second century AD and had important knowledge. Because he was very enthusiastic about travel, he would travel to places known in his time. He also wrote a travel book about the places he visited. When he came to his hometown (Sandıklı), he wrote inscriptions on the walls of the tomb he had built for himself. In these writings, there

⁵⁸ The Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN), “Eucharistic Belief Manifest In the Epitaphs of Abercius and Pectorius” (Accessed January 4, 2020).

⁵⁹ Rogier Visser, *Identities in Early Arabic Journalism: The Case of Louis Şābūnji* (Inowroclaw: Totem Press, 2014), 163.

⁶⁰ Sabuncuzade Louis Alberi, *Yıldız Sarayı’nda Bir Papaz*, ed. Mehmet Kuzu (İstanbul: Selis Kitaplar, 2007), 134.

was some historical information about science, the emergence of Christianity, the status of Christianity until its time, and the spiritual leadership of the popes. His body was buried in this tomb after Abercius's death. This tomb remained under the ground as time passed, and it was discovered ten years ago by archaeologist Ramsay in a stream in Sandikli (a district of Afyon province). It is stated by archaeologists that this inscription has much importance compared to ancient works. Because this inscription is considered as the sum of travel book, religious and natural sciences that were available at that time. It is understood that the person who owns this work wants to do something by imitating the pyramids in Egypt. If they found a way to transfer this work to the London Museum, they would not refrain from paying the necessary cost.⁶¹

Louis Şābūnjizādah, who gave information to the Sultan about the process, was against sending the inscription to Rome. According to him, the Catholic Armenian Patriarch and Museum (*Mūzah-yi Hümāyūn*) Director Hāmdī Beg were in a bad alliance. Azarian, who was going to Rome during the year of his appointment to the bishopric of the Pope, would give the inscription to one of the scientists in Europe. It was a great mistake to take precious stones from their places and take them to other places. This situation was similar to destroying pages of an ancient history book. The best thing for the Ottoman government was to preserve this inscription.⁶²

Considering the overall report of Şābūnjizādah, it is clear that he was concerned with Abercius' inscription. He even wrote the same text in the inscription and gave it to the Sultan. First, Şābūnjizādah was against the transfer of this inscription to Rome through the Patriarch Azarian. It is not fully understood whether he had personal anger toward the Patriarch. However, the negative thoughts about Patriarch Azarian suggest that he might have personal anger. When we look at the Ottoman Archive Documents, it is understood that this inscription would be sent to the Holy See through official channels, and there are interviews with Cardinal Mariano Rampolla del Tindaro (1843-1913). This inscription was sent to Pope Leo as a result of correspondence

⁶¹ BOA, *Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Tabirrat-ı Ecnebiye ve Mabeyn Mütercimliği [Y. PRK. TKM]*, no. 27, Folderno. 2.

⁶² BOA, *Y. PRK. TKM*, no. 27, Folderno. 2.

with some related people and ministries. First, Patriarch Azarian sent a letter to the Prime Ministry with a request to take the inscription to Rome as a gift from the Sultan. One of the most remarkable points in the official petition of Patriarch Azarian is the statement that he himself had a role in the discovery of this inscription.⁶³

6.2. Sending the Inscription from Istanbul to Rome

When Azarian’s petition was sent to the Yıldız Palace through the Prime Ministry, it was said that it was appropriate to send the gift on behalf of the Museum (*Müzab-yi Hümāyūn*). Later, in the official letter from the Prime Ministry to the Ministry of Education, it was requested that the museum take over the process.⁶⁴

Regarding this subject, the Museum Director Ḥamdī Beg summarized the process as follows in his official letter to the Ministry of Education:

This inscription, which was brought to the museum in Istanbul from Sandıklı upon the request of the Catholic Armenian Patriarch Azarian, consists of nine lines. The gift of this inscription, which is important for the Christian religion, is appropriate for the museum. In return, Patriarch Azarian informed us that the Pope would also give precious books to the Museum.⁶⁵

After the positive opinion of the Ottoman statesmen, it was decided to send the inscription to the Holy See by ship on February 1, 1893. The inscription, which was placed in a specially made chest, was handed over to the Catholic Armenian Patriarchate, Ṭāshjiyan Efendī, and the officers were asked to provide convenience at the customs.⁶⁶

As a result, despite the negative approaches of Louis Şābūnjizādah, Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd’s willingness to gift the inscription to the Holy See had an important reflection in the relations between the Papacy and the Ottoman Empire. This positive atmosphere is also seen in the Roman newspapers of the period. For example, the newspaper *Le Moniteur de Rome* described the process of bringing the inscription to

⁶³ BOA, *BEO*, no. 141, Folderno. 10510.

⁶⁴ BOA, *BEO*, no. 146, Folderno. 10910.

⁶⁵ BOA, *Maarif Nezareti Mektubû Kalemi [MF. MKT]*, no. 159, Folderno. 143.

⁶⁶ BOA, *MF. MKT*, no. 159, Folderno. 143.

Rome in detail. In the same newspaper, the behavior of Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II was described as delicate and generous.⁶⁷

Abercius’ inscription was an important agenda in the British press as much as in Rome in the last quarter of the 19th century. The discovery of the book by William Mitchell Ramsay of Scotland affected this. Ramsay, who was awarded a gold medal by Pope Leo in 1893, was mentioned in the United Kingdom at that time. A remarkable point is that it was the agenda in England ten years before the inscription was brought to Rome. Durham Bishop and the British theologian Joseph Barber Lightfoot made a speech about Abercius’ inscription and Ramsay at the Church Congress. *The Times* gives the following news in a column titled “Church Congress”:

The Bishop of Durham read the first paper, in which he dealt mainly with two discoveries. Speaking of the inscription on a tomb discovered by Mr. Ramsay in 1883, he said, though comprising only 22 lines, it is full of matter illustrating the condition and usages of the Church in the latter half of the second century. Abercius declares himself to be a disciple of the pure shepherd who feeds his flocks on mountains and plains. This shepherd is described as having great eyes which look on every side. The author says, likewise, that the shepherd taught him ‘faithful writings,’ meaning, doubtless, Evangelical narratives and the Apostolic Epistles. The writer tells us that he went to Syria and crossed the Euphrates, visiting Nisibis. Everywhere he found comrades –that is, fellow Christians. Faith led the way, and following her guidance, he took Paul for his companion- or, in other words, the Epistles of the Apostle were his constant study. The miraculous incarnation and the omniscient, omnipresent energy of Christ, the Scriptural writings, the two Sacraments, the extension and catholicity of the Church –all stand out in definite outline and vivid colours, the more striking because this is no systematic exposition of the theologian, but the chance expression of a devout Christian soul. A light is thus flashed in upon the inner life of the Christian Church in this remote Phrygian city...⁶⁸

⁶⁷ *Le Moniteur de Rome*, “Rome, Très Saint Père” (February 26, 1893), 3.

⁶⁸ *The Times*, “The Church Congress” (October 2, 1884), 6.

As a result, Azarian’s gifts to the Pope in Rome in 1877 and 1893 on behalf of the Sultan made the relations between the Vatican and Istanbul even better. In addition to hosting Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II Patriarch Azarian in his palace, he later honored him by increasing his salary from 2550 guruh to 4000.⁶⁹

7. The Development of Catholic Institutions in Istanbul

As a result of the good relations between Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II and Pope Leo, the number of Catholic institutions in the Ottoman Empire increased considerably. One of the most important examples of this is Istanbul.⁷⁰ There are many documents on the subject in the Ottoman Archives. Some of these Catholic groups are the Frères,⁷¹ Lazarists,⁷² Saint Jean Chrysostome,⁷³ and Order of Friars Minor Capuchin.⁷⁴ From time to time, the deputy of the Pope in Istanbul visited these schools.⁷⁵ The deputy of the Pope also visited many cities other than Istanbul and the Catholic institutions there. The Ottoman government was aware of the visit and gave orders to the city’s rulers to help Bonetti and show respect.⁷⁶

The problems of these Catholic institutions were solved by the state, and a medal was presented to the administrators of institutions by Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II.⁷⁷ The Sultan ordered the building of a new church next to the schools.⁷⁸

The historian Frazee describes the development of Catholic institutions in Istanbul as follows:

During the sultanate of Abdulhamid II, from 1878 to 1909, the role of the apostolic delegate in Istanbul was enhanced. The Latin archbishop considerably overshadowed the civil head of the Latin community, since the duties of the Latin consuls, after

⁶⁹ BOA, *BEO*, no. 499, Folderno. 37385.

⁷⁰ O’Reilly, *Life of Leo XIII*, 388.

⁷¹ BOA, *BEO*, no. 2152, Folderno. 161343.

⁷² BOA, *BEO*, no. 173, Folderno. 12903; *Y. A. HUS*, no. 272, Folderno. 37.

⁷³ BOA, *İrade Adliye ve Mezabib [İ. AZN]*, no. 80, Folderno. 41; *Y. A. RES*, no. 151, Folderno. 1.

⁷⁴ BOA, *Hariciye Nezareti Tabirrat [HR. TH]*, no. 151, Folderno. 79.

⁷⁵ BOA, *Yıldız Parakende Evrakı Zabtiye Nezareti Maruzatı [Y. PRK. ZB]*, no. 22, Folderno. 67.

⁷⁶ BOA, *BEO*, no. 765, Folderno. 57361.

⁷⁷ BOA, *İ. TAL*, no. 265, Folderno. 24.

⁷⁸ BOA, *İ. AZN*, no. 4, Folderno. 25.

the Tanzimat legal reforms, had been assumed by the Ottoman bureaucracy, and the lay consuls' activities became more ceremonial than substantial. The apostolic delegate was responsible for supervising the eleven Latin Catholic parishes in existence in Galata and its environs. He also kept watch over the larger number of educational institutions which now served several thousand students in the capital. In addition, he was charged with the direction of the Catholic orders which were involved in staffing hospitals, orphanages and asylums. At that time, there were eleven religious orders of men located in sixty-one houses, totalling five hundred and twenty-eight priests and brothers. Catholic women's orders numbered fifteen in fifty-four houses holding six hundred and seventy-four sisters. Thirty Catholic schools were in operation, extending from primary institutions to colleges.⁷⁹

Another example of Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd's tolerance of different religions was the opening of a new synagogue in Haydarpaşa, a district of Istanbul. Upon the request of prominent Jews, the Sultan allowed the construction of the synagogue in the Haydarpaşa district. Despite the objections of the residents around the synagogue, the Sultan did not retreat from this decision and prevented any incident by sending a group of soldiers at the opening of the synagogue. Therefore, the Jews also named this synagogue "Hemdat", not only because it meant "mercy of Israel" but also because it was similar to the name of Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II. They expressed their gratitude to the Sultan by using this name.⁸⁰ Considering the attitude of Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II throughout his reign, he was tolerant of all religious groups.

8. The Financial Support to Religious Institutions

The religious days of the Christians and Jews were given great importance in the Ottoman Empire. When the Ottoman Archival Documents are examined, it is seen that this was more intense during the reign of Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II. The so-called "‘Aṭīyyah-'i Saniyyah"⁸¹ was given to Christians on Easter and other feast days,

⁷⁹ Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans*, 230.

⁸⁰ Stanford J. Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic* (London: Macmillan Press, 1991), 204.

⁸¹ Bestowed by the Sultan.

while the Jews were given more on the Passover holiday.⁸² In turn, the heads of religious groups sent letters thanking the Sultan for his assistance. In 1901, such thanks came from the patriarchs of the Greeks, Armenians, Bulgarians, Assyrians, and Catholics. The Patriarchs thanked Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II for his help to the orphans and their poor children on Easter.⁸³

In addition to the religious days, the Ottoman Empire provided assistance to the institutions of other religious members as well as Muslims in need. A few of many examples of Catholics can be mentioned. For example, Catholics living in the city of Sivas in the Ottoman Empire began building a school for their children but could not complete it. They requested help, and in a short period of time, with the permission of Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II, necessary assistance was provided.⁸⁴ Similarly, the girls’ school under the supervision of the Catholic Armenian nuns in Ankara was assisted, and the needs of the students were met.⁸⁵

8.1. Pontifical Maronite College in Rome

Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd’s support for Catholic Christians was also apparent outside the borders of the state. For example, financial support was given to the religious institution of the Catholic Mekhitarists in Venice, and medals were given to the monks in the monastery.⁸⁶ In the same way as in Venice, financial support was provided to the Pontifical Maronite College in Rome by the Sultan in 1891. In addition, the Mekhitarist college on the Island of San Lazzaro in Venice included a photograph of the Sultan, the Sultan’s signature (*tugbrā*), and an Ottoman *sanjaq*.⁸⁷ Especially during the award ceremonies held at the college, prayers were given to the Ottoman Sultan.⁸⁸

The history of Pontifical Maronite College in Rome dates back to the 16th century. The college was opened in 1582 under Pope Gregory XIII (1572-1585). This educational institution where Jesuit fathers served

⁸² BOA, *İ. AZN*, no. 65, Folderno. 30.

⁸³ BOA, *Yıldız Perakende Adliye ve Mezâhib Nezâreti Maruzâtı [Y. PRK. AZN]*, no. 21, Folderno. 79.

⁸⁴ BOA, *İrade Hususi [İ. HUS]*, no. 25, Folderno. 23.

⁸⁵ BOA, *MV*, no. 23, Folderno. 24.

⁸⁶ BOA, *İ. DH*, no. 1037, Folderno. 81599.

⁸⁷ BOA, *BEO*, no. 3788, Folderno. 284028; *HR. TO*, no. 407, Folderno. 17.

⁸⁸ BOA, *Y. A. HUS*, no. 239, Folderno. 7.

played an important role in both the Maronite Church and the Eastern studies in the West.⁸⁹ This college was an important source of contact between Rome and the East. Students came from the East to adopt a significant number of Latin theology and practices. Important books were published thanks to the printing press set up there. Significant manuscripts of the Maronites were printed and changed to suit Latin practice.⁹⁰

Important students were also trained in this college. The Biblical scholar and linguist Gabriel Sionita, Abraham Ecchellensis, and the famous orientalist Joseph Simon Assemani, who was responsible for the Vatican Library, are among its most famous students.⁹¹ However, the Maronite College in Rome was suppressed by the armies of Napoleon in 1808. In 1891, Pope Leo XIII erected this college in Rome with the Maronite Bishop Elias Hayek.⁹²

The documents in the Ottoman Archives show that Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II was interested in this college. It was through the sub-governor (*mutaşarrif*) of Lebanon that the Sultan knew the subject. The *mutaşarrif* stated in his letter that the Pope provided a significant amount of money for the college to be built in Rome, and it would be appropriate for the Ottoman to provide such financial aid. The reason why the *mutaşarrif* made such an assessment was the result of his meeting with the Maronite Patriarch. The Ottoman government first conducted research on the purpose of the school. As a result of the evaluations, it was thought that the school would contribute to the education of Maronite youth, so it was deemed appropriate to give 10,000 francs.⁹³

Ottoman statesmen were interested in the opening of colleges. It is noteworthy that the Ottoman ambassador in Rome corresponded with the Sublime Porte in Istanbul in many telegraph correspondences. The messenger’s telegram dated December 17, 1891, contains the following information: “The content of his speech addressing the Maronite clergymen by Pope Leo XIII about the reopening of the old Maronite

⁸⁹ Elias Youssef El-Hayek – Seely Joseph Beggiani, “Maronite Church”, *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Michigan: Gale, 2003), 9/198.

⁹⁰ Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans*, 138-139.

⁹¹ El-Hayek – Beggiani, “Maronite Church”, 9/198.

⁹² El-Hayek – Beggiani, “Maronite Church”, 9/198.

⁹³ BOA, *MV*, no. 66, Folderno. 35.

College built in Rome in 1584 by Pope Gregor XIII will be published by the Catholic newspapers this evening.”⁹⁴

The close attention of the Ottoman State to this college in Rome was not left unrequited by the authorities of this educational institution. They also expressed their thanks to the Ottoman State in every way for these favors. Deputy Maronite Patriarch Bishop Elias Hoyek came to Istanbul shortly after the opening of the college and met with the Grand Vizier. During his meeting with the Grand Vizier, Bishop Elias stated that they were grateful for the assistance given to the college and the medal given to the Patriarch by Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II. He also stated that awarding medals to other Maronite notables and clergymen would honor them.⁹⁵ Soon, medals were given by Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II.⁹⁶

The officials of the Maronite college in Rome were not indifferent to the official ceremonies in the Ottoman Empire. They wrote Arabic poems about the ceremony called “julūs-i humāyūn” in memory of the Sultan’s throne and sent them to Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II. In addition, both the director of the Maronite College and the director of the Antonian Catholic College in Rome went to the Ottoman ambassador of Rome to the Sultan’s “julūs-i humāyūn”.⁹⁷

9. Mutual Cooperation in the Balkans

Increasing the influence of Russia through the Orthodox Church in the Balkans was a situation against both the Ottoman Empire and the Holy See, so there was close cooperation on both sides. The Holy See helped the Ottomans in this regard, mostly suggesting that Catholics living in the Balkan region did not attempt to rebel. These suggestions were made in the time of both Pope Pius IX and Pope Leo XIII. Here, Cardinal Franchi, who conducted an active policy on behalf of the Holy See, attracted attention. Another important person was the Catholic Armenian Patriarch Azarian. For example, in a letter sent to Patriarch Azarian by Cardinal Franchi on April 20, 1877, the following issues were emphasized. The Ottoman State official Safvet Pasha made a request to the Patriarch Azarian about the Catholics in the Balkans.

⁹⁴ BOA, *HR. TO*, no. 536, Folderno. 61.

⁹⁵ BOA, *İ. DH*, no. 1260, Folderno. 98944.

⁹⁶ BOA, *İ. TAL*, no. 210, Folderno. 53.

⁹⁷ BOA, *HR. TO*, no. 94, Folderno. 45; *İ. HR*, no. 264, Folderno. 15810.

When this request was delivered to the Vatican, Cardinal Franchi was assigned to this task, and calls were made to the Mirditë Catholics. Cardinal Franchi condemned the Mirditë Catholics' rebellion efforts and called for calm. Franchi wanted the Mirditë Catholics not to rebel against the Ottomans as a requirement of their religion. If they tried to attempt a revolt and did not heed the Pope's order, a sanction would be imposed by the Church. These instructions from Franchi were reported to all clergy in Albania.⁹⁸

Another letter from Cardinal Franchi concerned Mirditë Catholics in Shkoder. There was a priest among the Shkodra who caused confusion. Complaints about the movements of this priest were made to the Holy See officials by the Ottoman State. Therefore, Cardinal Franchi acted in line with the request of the Pope and gave instructions to Shkodra and Bar Bishops. As a result, the attitude of the priest who caused confusion was condemned, and it was stated that attempting to revolt against the Ottoman Empire was completely against the consent of the Pope.⁹⁹

The instructions that the Holy See sent to the Albanian Catholics in 1883 are also important. During this period, Pope Leo XIII sent a letter to the Shkodra Latin Archbishop and made great efforts to prevent the rebellion of Albanian Catholics. In this letter, Pope Leo stated that it was a religious duty for all Catholics to rely on the Ottoman state, especially Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II. Those who opposed it would be considered sinful and traitors according to Catholicism. In a letter he sent to Azarian, the Archbishop of Shkodra talked about his activities. As a result of his efforts, the Pope's instructions were read in all Catholic churches, and sermons were made by the priests accordingly. In the continuation of his letter, the Archbishop explained in detail that he had been constantly giving advice to his community for loyalty to the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰⁰

Pope Leo's advice to Catholics in the Balkans was welcomed by Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II. He also helped the Pope solve the problems of Catholics in many places, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia. Reviving the Latin Episcopal in Skopje and opening a

⁹⁸ BOA, *HR. TO*, no. 518, Folderno. 61.

⁹⁹ BOA, *HR. TO*, no. 518, Folderno. 76.

¹⁰⁰ BOA, *Y. A. RES*, no. 20, Folderno. 58.

church there was one of the most important indicators of this.¹⁰¹ Due to the attitude of Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II, many Catholic bishops sent letters of thanks to Istanbul. The Skopje Catholic bishop deputy Francisco (Fransko) was one of them.¹⁰²

However, in many parts of the Balkans, the rebellion of Orthodox society against the Ottomans was observed under the influence of Russia, although much less so in the Catholic context. In addition to the special efforts of Pope Leo XIII, the Deputy of the Pope in Istanbul, Patriarch Azarian, and some cardinals contributed greatly to this.

10. The Death of the Pope

The Ottoman Foreign Minister Aḥmad Tawfīq Pasha (1845-1936) went to Rome in May 1903 to present the gifts of Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II to the Pope and interviewed him. Later, the Foreign Minister met Pope Leo XIII in Saint Pierre Square. As the Pope entered the church, the crowds there shouted, “Long live the Pope”. The Ottoman Minister was accompanying him during that visit. The Pope then turned to the minister and said, “Long live Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd”. In his letter to Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II, Aḥmad Tawfīq Pasha says that the honor of the Pope was unprecedented.¹⁰³ In June of the same year, Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II wanted to send a gift to the Pope, and Bonetti (Apostolic Delegate in Turkey) was informed of this. It is understood from the Ottoman Archive Documents that Bonetti, who received the gift, left Istanbul on June 29, 1903.¹⁰⁴ Taking the journey time between Istanbul and Italy into account, Bonetti is unlikely to have given the gift to the Pope in person. In July 1903, Pope’s disease began to mention in the news titled “The Illness of the Pope”.¹⁰⁵ *The Times* reported the passing of the Pope in its article titled “Death of the Pope” dated July 21, 1903. Under the headline, it stated that Pope Leo passed away at four in the afternoon and briefly included his policies regarding the Papacy period.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ BOA, *Yıldız Perakende Umum Vilayetler Tabirâtı [Y. PRK. UM]*, no. 61, Folderno. 29; *HR. SYS*, no. 123, Folderno. 23.

¹⁰² BOA, *Dabiliye Nezareti Mektubi Kalemi [DH. MKT]*, no. 2358, Folderno. 12.

¹⁰³ BOA, *Y. PRK. HR*, no. 33, Folderno. 25.

¹⁰⁴ BOA, *Y. PRK. HR*, no. 7, Folderno. 13.

¹⁰⁵ *The Times*, “The Illness of the Pope” (July 17, 1903), 3; *The Times*, “The Illness of the Pope” (July 18, 1903), 7; *The Times*, “The Illness of the Pope” (July 20, 1903), 3.

¹⁰⁶ *The Times*, “Death of the Pope” (July 21, 1903), 5.

Pope Leo, who served a quarter century, passed away at the age of 93. The Ottoman ambassador in Rome reported the Pope's death to the Porte on the telegram dated July 20, 1903.¹⁰⁷ Later, a letter was written to Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II by the council of cardinals about the Pope's death. Thereupon, the Sultan decided to write a letter of condolence for the death of Patriarch Leo. In addition, due to the election of the new pope, the Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs Naum Efendi was decided to attend in the ceremony held in Pangaltı Church on August 15, 1903.¹⁰⁸ After a while, a congratulatory letter was sent to the new Pope by the Sultan. Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II continued relations with the new Pope Pius until 1909 when his duty ended.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

This paper has shown that a multidimensional relationship was established between Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II and Pope Leo XIII. Letters written by both Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II and Pope Leo expressed the sincerity of both sides. Medals given to officials in different fields were also factors that reinforced this sincerity. The Sultan gave medals to both Catholics in the Ottoman Empire and many clergymen in the Vatican, especially cardinals, while the Pope also gave medals to both Ottoman officials and religious leaders of the Ottomans. In general terms, the Ottoman Catholics brought the Sultan and the Pope together on common ground. In addition to providing freedom to Catholic institutions, Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II occasionally provided financial assistance to them. These aids were sometimes to Catholics within the Ottoman Empire and sometimes outside the Ottoman borders. The colleges of the Mekhitarists in Venice and the Maronites in Rome are among the best examples. While Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II provided a free religious life to the Catholic citizens of the Ottoman Empire, Pope Leo XIII encouraged them to be loyal to their state. Pope's advice to the Balkan Catholics, especially those with intense problems, was very valuable for the Ottomans. Here, a question can be asked whether there was any problem between the two. The answer to this is, of course, that some problems arose from time to time. However, both

¹⁰⁷ BOA, *Y. A. HUS*, no. 452, Folderno. 91.

¹⁰⁸ BOA, *Y. A. HUS*, no. 454, Folderno. 39.

¹⁰⁹ BOA, *Y. A. HUS*, 454/39; *Hariciye Nezareti Mütenevvia Kısmı Belgeleri [HR. MTV]*, no. 202, Folderno. 12; *HR. MTV*, no. 202, Folderno. 13.

sides found a way to reconcile in a short time due to their wisdom. The most important feature of this period is that even the problems that seem great could be solved by mutual dialog. As a result, sincere relations between the Sultan and the Pope were influenced by mutual goodwill as well as external factors. The Inscription of Abercius in the Lateran Museum and the presence of the Maronite College in Rome are among the most important pieces of evidence showing the level of relations between Sultan ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd II and Pope Leo at that time. These are important examples from the past to the present in terms of expressing the feeling of living together on common ground despite different religious and political thoughts.

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