

Research Article

Cultural and Religious Diversity in Istanbul in the Sixteenth Century: through the Eyes of German Travellers

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Abstract:

Travel accounts are among the most critical sources for history researchers due to the detailed information they contain. People who travelled to Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century, had recorded various characteristics of the biggest city in Europe at that time. The texts written by Protestant theologians Gerlach and Schweigger provided an especially interesting comparison in a period when conflicts were intense due to religious and cultural differences in Europe. This article will focus on the observations of German travellers in terms of religious and cultural diversity in Istanbul and explore how the Ottoman Empire facilitated such religious and cultural diversity.

Keywords: Travel Accounts, Ottoman, Istanbul, German travellers, religious diversity, sixteenth century

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Introduction

During the second half of the sixteenth century, conflicts between Protestants and Catholics in Europe persisted, and Jews continued to face various pressures. Although peace was achieved within the boundaries of the Habsburg Empire with the Augsburg Reichstags Abschiede (1555), problems remained.¹ At the same time, the situation was different in the capital of the Ottoman Empire, the rival of the Habsburgs. In Istanbul, the largest city in the Mediterranean world, many different religions lived together within certain rules.

The purpose of this article is to present examples of the presence of different religious and cultural groups in sixteenth-century Istanbul as described in some German travel books and to investigate the traditions and laws that provided these diverse communities with their rights. Although there is research on cultural diversity and religious freedoms in the Ottoman Empire, studies based on travel books specifically focused on Istanbul are lacking. The detailed observations in these travel books, which recorded everyday life as if traveling with a camera in the sixteenth century, are invaluable resources for new investigations and discoveries.

Scholars specializing in topics such as tolerance and religious and ethnic diversity in Ottoman and European societies contend that various groups differ greatly in regard to coexistence. While religious diversity causes serious conflicts in European nations, it can be said that Christian, Jewish and other populations continue their lives comfortably in Ottoman society.²

Religious and cultural diversity in the Ottoman Empire is a frequent subject of research. Travelogues provide extensive material for exploring historical aspects of coexistence in diversity, a topic still relevant today. Utilizing these historical materials presents an opportunity to gain new and different perspectives. For example, the religious diversity described in Popović's article about the Via Militaris (Via Traiana) can be traced in detail through German travel literature,

¹ Ferdinand I., Abschiedt Der Römischen Königlichten Maiestat, vnd gemeiner Stendt, auff dem Reichstag zu Augspurg, Anno Domini M.D.L.V., Meyntz, 1555.

² Şener Aktürk, "Osmanlı Toplumunda Dini Çeşitlilik: Farklı Olan Neydi?" Doğu-Batı, Üç Aylık Düşünce Dergisi, Aralık 2010, 133.

particularly in Istanbul, the Empire's capital and a significant destination for diplomats and their prolonged residences.³

In contrast to Popović's work, this article aims to contribute to the literature on cultural and religious diversity by focusing specifically on Istanbul. It also acknowledges the historical context of the Ottoman-Habsburg rivalry and the religious struggles within Habsburg territories. Furthermore, the article discusses whether diversity can be considered a strategic phenomenon within the Ottoman Empire.

Dhimmi Status and the National System

The oldest record of the appointment of non-Muslim clergy in the Ottoman state is a document dated 1399, issued to the Antalya metropolitan area during the reign of Yıldırım Bayezid. The timar book dated 1432 also contains documents related to metropolitan appointments. According to a late-seventeenth-century Ottoman source, Osman Gazi gave permission to the priests of the Margirit Church to use the land near Serez for their churches and villages.⁴

During the reign of Fatih Sultan Mehmed, as in other eras, legal arrangements were made regarding the status of the non-Muslim Ottoman reaya. Mehmed granted administrative, judicial, and legal rights first to the Orthodox Greeks and then to the people of Galata. Thus, the Orthodox Greeks were integrated into the Ottoman administrative system as a congregation under the spiritual and worldly leadership of Patriarch Gennadius. As historian Zinkeisen explains, Mehmed wanted all the ceremonies and traditions to continue as they had during the Patriarch's election. By preserving the Patriarchate in this manner, Mehmed not only safeguarded the church community but also ensured the national and political survival of the Byzantine Greeks.⁵

³ In an article written by German travellers on observations of ethnic and religious elements, especially in Balkan countries, Mihailo St. Popovic focused on travellers' assessments of the cities on the way to Budapest, Belgrade, Nis, Sofia, Plovdiv, Edirne and Istanbul. Popovic also discussed the reflections of differences in Orthodox Liturgical practices in the travel books Mihailo St. Popovic, "Die Rezeption der Religionsgemeinschaften des Osmanischen Reiches in der west- und mitteleuropäischen Reiseliteratur des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts," *Prace Historyczne* 139 (2012): doi:10.4467/20844069PH.12.004.0773.

⁴ M. Macit Kenanoğlu, "Zimmî," *DİA*, c.44, 438-440.

⁵ Johann Wilhelm Zinkeisen, *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches in Europa, Zweiter Theil* (Gotha, 1854), 3-16.

The text of Mehmed's edict to the Galatans reveals that the scope of the autonomy granted is consistent with Islamic law. This contract provides non-Muslims with freedom of religion and worship, along with guarantees for the safety of their lives and property, in accordance with Islamic law.⁶

In *Tarih-i Selânikî*, there is an interesting example, both in terms of the maintenance of ancient traditions and its dhimmi law. Accordingly, on 25 Rebî'ulevvel 1004 (28 November 1595), Tatar Khan Gazi Giray sent Ahmet Ağa and some of his men to Istanbul and requested that the zimmi named Ermene for the province of Boğdan be brought to voivodeship.

"... Vilayeti Boğdan re'âyası kadîmî Pâdişâh-ı cihan-penâh - hallede'llahu ta'âlâ mülkehû- hazretlerine isyân itmeyüp, mutî u munkad ra'iyet oğlı ra'iyeti olup, âbâ vü ecdâd-ı izâmlarınun perverde-i ni'met ve adl ü dâdları ola-gelmiş kullarıdır, kadîmü'z-zemândan içlerinde hükûmet iden Ermene nâm zimmi asl u nesl beğ-zâdelerinden olan mezbûr Ermene'yi kanûn-ı kadîm üzere voyvodalığa sene ber-sene otuz yük akça maktû' harâc-ı şerîyye üzere recâ iderler ..."⁷

As stated in this short text in the *Tarih-i Selânikî*, the people of Bogdan have been obedient to the Sultan since ancient times. He was one of the noblemen named Ermene, who had been ruling them since ancient times (kadîmü'z-zeman). In accordance with the old law (kanun-ı kadim), it was proposed to bring it to the voivodeship for thirty burdens per year. On the same issue, the Polish king supported him, and the province of Bogdan Voivodeship was given to Ermene by the Sultan.

In these lines, two different concepts are referenced and highlighted. The first one is 'kadîmü'z-zeman,' which means 'the concept of old times.' It indicates that long-standing traditions, such as governments being politically considered, were maintained. The second concept is 'kanûn-ı kadim,' meaning 'the old law,' which, in this context, refers to a financial issue. It is evident that the Ottoman Empire made an effort to maintain past practices in both administrative and economic matters. This structure, based on implicit law, allowed people to preserve their cultural and religious traditions.

⁶ İlber Ortaylı, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Millet Sistemi," DİA, cilt: 30, 66-70.

⁷ Selânikî Mustafa Efendi, *Tarih-i Selânikî* (1003-1008/1595-1600), ed. Mehmet İpşirli, C. II, 540-541.

German Protestant Observers

The second half of the sixteenth century was the Lutherans' research periods on Orthodox. Theologians and humanists, including prominent people such as Martin Crusius and Stephan Gerlach, dealt with divine issues as a team. David Chytraeus had collected and published information on eastern churches for more than fifteen years. It was unknown which churches existed in the Turkish Empire. Chytraeus constantly questioned his trustworthy men there, demanding that the news sent from Greece and Anatolia be sufficient and that all the Middle East and Ethiopia should be investigated. The growing expansion of a world centred in Europe was also stimulating people's curiosity about foreign countries and peoples.⁸

Protestants had insufficient knowledge of eastern churches. They were amazed at the presence of churches in Istanbul and the East. The religion of Islam allowed Christianity to survive where it conquered. Besides, the Greek and Eastern churches conflicted with the papacy and the Roman churches, just like the Protestants.⁹ Gerlach's and Schweigger's observations in Istanbul have played an important role in providing the information needed by Protestant theologians. At the same time, they kept valuable records in reflecting the religious and cultural diversity at that time, thus becoming relevant historical sources.

Starting with Hans von Siltberg, there are quite a few German travel narratives about the Turks. To research these travel books, it is necessary to examine the original texts and evaluate them within their historical context. Only in this way can valuable information be accessed. It is well known that some of the travel books have used other resources excessively. For example, Heidi Stein states that the travel book of Johann Wild and Lubenau has taken parts from Schweigger completely.¹⁰ Emrah S. Gürkan, who examined the Mediterranean journey of Reinhold

⁸ Daniel Benga, "David Cytraeus 1530 -1600 Als Erforscher und Wiederentdecker der Ostkirchen: Seine Beziehungen zu orthodoxen Theologen, seine Erforschungen der Ostkirchen und seine ostkirchlichen Kenntnisse," (Erlangen, 2001), 285.

⁹ Walter Engels, "Salomon Schweigger: Ein Ökumenischer Orientreisender im 16. Jahrhundert (Der Aufenthalt eines deutschen evangelischen Predigers in Konstantinopel und im Orient und seine Rolle als Verbindungsmann zwischen den deutschen Lutheranern und der griechisch-orthodoxen Kirche während der Jahre 1578–1582)," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 7, no. 3 (1955): 224.

¹⁰ Salomon Schwieger, *Zum Hofe des türkischen Sultans*, ed. Heidi Stein (Leipzig: Brockhaus Verlag, 1986), 218.

Lubenau, reveals contradictions, especially about sea travel and distances.¹¹

On the other hand, high tension, which was the result of the rivalry between the Holy Roman Empire and the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century, was able to turn into big wars with the smallest spark. Özgür Kolçak tells the story of the translator and diplomat Hidayet, who combined Turkish, German, Christian and Muslim identities in his personality. Hidayet's life ended tragically, as did the lives of others.¹² What happened to Malvezzi, the first ambassador in Istanbul, was a painful incident that Habsburg embassy members could not forget. For this reason, the records of those who came to the Ottoman lands with the diplomatic mission were of great value because of the political tension, and they needed to be realistic.

Gerlach and Schweigger's travel books are essential for understanding the religious and cultural diversity of sixteenth-century Istanbul. As part of the diplomatic mission, these books highlight religious people and institutions, reflecting their theological purposes.

Religious Diversity in Istanbul

Historians such as Barkan, İncalcık, Braudel and Yerasimos researched the population of sixteenth-century Istanbul. The important issue in this article is the number of religious structures. In a document titled "Beschreibung zur Stadt Konstantinopoli", dated 1589 in the Fuggerzeitung records, it is noted that there are 442 churches in Istanbul.¹³ There are similarities between the figures given here and the numbers of certain buildings and streets given in the Reinhold Lubenau travel book.¹⁴

¹¹ Emrah Safa Gürkan, "50 Günde Devr-i Bahr-ı Sefid: Königsbergli Lubenau'nun Kadırgayla İmtihanı," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları / The Journal of Ottoman Studies* XLIII (2014): 273-300.

¹² Özgür Kolçak, "From Frontier Diplomacy to Imperial Embassy: A 16th Century Diplomatic Odyssey or the Mysterious Exploits of Marcus Scherer/Hidayet," *TAD* 39, no. 67 (2020): 139-214.

¹³ Ergün Özsoy und Klaus Wolf: *Fuggerzeitung über die Stadt Istanbul zum Jahr 1589. Erstedition und historische Einordnung*. In: *Zeitschrift des historischen Vereins für Schwaben*. 115. Band (2023), S. 131-142.

ÖNB(Österreichische Nationalbibliothek) Cod. 8962 - 282r-283r, "Gleichsals seyndt 442 Kürch Inn bemelter Stadt darinnen die Christen Ihren Gottes dienst verrichten mögen. Wölche die Türggen Clysse nennen." <https://fuggerzeitungen.univie.ac.at/zeitungen/cod-8962-282r-283r> (erişim: 05 Haziran 2022).

¹⁴ Reinhold Lubenau, *Beschreibung der Reisen de Reinhold Lubenau*, ed. W. Sahn (Königsberg: Ferd. Beyers Buchhandlung, 1914), 140. Reinhold Lubenau, *Seyahatnamesi*, çev. Türkis Noyan (İstanbul: Kitap Yayinevi, 2012), 181.

In the Istanbul census of Şeyhülislam Zekeriya Efendi, there were 743 churches in Istanbul towards the end of the sixteenth century.¹⁵ Geza David made a comparison with Şeyhülislam Zekeriya Efendi, the records of a Jesuit priest and the numbers given by Yahya Efendi about the number of churches in Istanbul.¹⁶ Research and discussions on the exact number of structures and the determination of the population of Istanbul in various periods have not been completed.¹⁷ Multiple numbers with strange similarities seem to have travelled from document to document. However, the absolute truth is that different groups have lived together in Istanbul throughout history, and in the sixteenth century, churches belonged to different groups in Istanbul. German travelers visited some of these churches and recorded their observations. In this study, we would like to particularly emphasize the evaluations authored by Gerlach and Schweigger, who arrived in Istanbul as the first Protestant preachers and meticulously documented their observations.

Salomon Schweigger listed the churches and monasteries in Galata and Pera: St. Franciscus's church and monastery, St. Peter's church, Notre Dame church, St. Görgen, St. Benedict, St. Anna, St. Johann, and St. Clara. He noted that these were religiously connected to Rome and that prayers were conducted in Latin. Greeks also had their churches, the most important being the Lady of the Golden Fountain, known as Chrysopigi (unser Fraw zum Goldbrunnen). Additionally, there were five or six churches where worship was conducted in Greek. Schweigger's statements indicate that both Catholic and Orthodox churches existed in the Galata district.¹⁸ Salomon Schweigger states that the Armenian Patriarch had a special place in Constantinople and that a beautiful large Greek Church and monastery was allocated to the Armenian Patriarchate. He notes that there are only two or three monks here, and the residence of the Patriarch is just nearby. Schweigger visited the Armenian Patriarchate

¹⁵ Zeki Arıkan, "Şeyhülislam Zekeriya Efendi'nin İstanbul Sayımı," *Tarih Boyunca İstanbul Semineri*, 29 Mayıs-1 Haziran, Edebiyat Fakültesi Basımevi, İstanbul, 1989, 56.

¹⁶ Geza David, "Maximilian Brandstetter'in İstanbul yolculuğu, 1608-1609," in *I. Uluslararası Osmanlı İstanbul Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, ed. Feridun M. Emecen ve Emrah Safa Gürkan, (İstanbul: 29 Mayıs-1 Haziran 2013), 87-105.

¹⁷ Yunus Koç, "Osmanlı Dönemi İstanbul Nüfus Tarihi," *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi* 8, no. 16 (2010): 171-199.

¹⁸ Salomon Schweigger, *Ein neue Reyßbeschreibung auß Teutschland Nach Constantinopel und Jerusalem*, (Nürnberg, 1608), 132.

on a winter day, but only mentioned the unusual warming method he had seen about the Patriarchate.¹⁹

During Stephan Gerlach's activities in Istanbul, his relations with the Orthodox Patriarchate were very close. In addition to exchanging ideas on religious issues between the Patriarchate and the German embassy, there were also exchanges involving the sale of manuscripts, candles, wine, and historical artifacts. For example, in January 1574, the Greek pastor Volkard brought a marble inscription to the embassy building. Shortly after, on February 2, blessed candles were brought to Ambassador Ungnad from all the monasteries and churches of the city, and a duka had to be paid for each candle.²⁰

Although the Habsburg embassy committee was strictly inspected, Gerlach, as understood from his diary, comfortably left the Elçi Han and visited both the Patriarchate and other churches in Istanbul. This interesting situation is noteworthy given the typically tense Ottoman-Habsburg political relations. It should be considered that the Ottoman state, which kept delegations sent by the Habsburgs under strict control, was monitoring these trips. One of the key characteristics of Ottoman policy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the support of Protestants and Calvinists.²¹ The activities of the Protestants, which were often in conflict with the Catholics, were in line with the Ottoman political strategy.

Gerlach visited Panagia Church on 6 June 1574, watched the funeral in this church and depicted the ceremony in detail. The priest performed the ceremony with a priest from another church. Gerlach noted that fresh fruits and nuts were distributed to the public after being blessed with prayers and incense. However, he did not hear that the people were blessed.²²

¹⁹ Salomon Schweigger, *Ein neue Reyßbeschreibung auß Teutschland nach Constantinopel*, 121-122.

²⁰ Stephan Gerlach, *Stephan Gerlachs des Älteren Tage-Buch der von zwei glorwürdigsten römischen Kaisern, Maximiliano und Rudolpho, an die Ottomanische Pforte zu Constantinopel abgefertigten und durch den Wohlgebornen Herrn Hn. David Ungnad zwischen dem Ottomanischen und Römischen Kaiserthum glücklichst-vollbrachter Gesandtschaft*, ed. Samuel Gerlach (Frankfurt am Main, 1674), 45-46.

²¹ Halil İnalçık, "Modern Avrupa'nın Gelişmesinde Türk Etkisi," in *Osmanlı ve Dünya: Osmanlı Devleti ve Dünya Tarihindeki Yeri*, ed. Kemal Karpat (İstanbul: Ufuk Kitapları, 2000), 81.

²² Stephan Gerlach, *Stephan Gerlachs des Älteren Tage-Buch*, 58.

Gerlach also encountered people who were taken from Germany as prisoners, as is common in Dernschwam's travel diary. Prisoners brought from other countries to Istanbul in the sixteenth century were a part of everyday life. For example, the Sultan had 60 servants, and one of them was Mahmut von Graz, the son of Schertlin, who lived in Augsburg and came there from Graz.²³

Gerlach stated that on September 19, 1574, along with Dr. Arnold Manlius, he went to a church in Galata named Hrisopeyi, where he watched a ritual from beginning to end. He explained each stage of this ritual in detail, mentioning that a monk and four priests were in attendance. He described the choir, the chants, the congregation, and the rituals performed. Gerlach recorded everything from the church officials present and the depictions used to the Greek words spoken aloud.²⁴

On September 26, 1574, Gerlach went to the church named Ayie Pantes (Allerheiligsten) with Christoph Pfister and Rietmann. Once again, he described the stages of a ritual in the church, including the bread and wine used in the ceremony, noting the incense, hymns, and utterances. He observed that the name of the Pope was never mentioned, even though the patriarchs were named. He also learned that women marrying French or Spanish men were excommunicated.²⁵

On 31 January 1575, Gerlach went to see the grave of Sultan Selim, who passed away in December 1574. The grave was located near the Hagia Sophia under a beautiful tent. Later, the tomb of the Sultan would be built in the same place. On 6 March, on the occasion of Easter, the Patriarch performed his traditional ritual every year and prayed. Gerlach describes the Easter ceremony in a few pages in detail.²⁶

Gerlach had the opportunity to briefly visit some mosques. On March 14, 1575, he went to Hagia Sophia, where a Turkish religious teacher was fluently explaining something. According to Gerlach, the audience fell to the ground in reverence. He was impressed by Hagia Sophia, stating that this building has no match. Unfortunately, Gerlach's visit was cut short when two men came and escorted them out.

²³ Stephan Gerlach, *Stephan Gerlachs des Älteren Tage-Buch*, 52.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 85-87.

On May 1, 1575, Gerlach visited Christoph of Lehistan; just below the house was the residence of the French ambassador. From there, they walked on foot through the gardens to the Piyale Pasha mosque. Near the mosque, an old woman approached them. She spoke a little German and had been taken captive as a young child during the siege of Vienna. In front of the mosque, they also saw a deep baptismal stone with two marble handles.

Gerlach also conveys the intrigues surrounding the patriarchal selection in Istanbul. He states that Metrophanes, who was three patriarchs before Patriarch Jeremias, went to Rome, befriended the cardinals, and kissed the Pope's foot. Metrophanes lost his position after opposing Kantakuzen. He was subsequently deported to the Sacred Mountain Athos. The next Patriarch, Jeremias, replaced him. According to Gerlach, Jeremias was appointed due to his friendship with Kantakuzen's son, suggesting that Kantakuzen influenced the patriarchal selection. Kantakuzen also held responsibility for the distribution of Istanbul's customs and salt. This indicates the interplay between patriarchal election and political relations.²⁷ Gerlach's report asserts that Kantakuzen chose the Patriarch. The previous Patriarch was displaced because he had not paid enough money. The Mihail Kantakuzen mentioned here, known as *Şeytanoğlu* (son of the devil), was executed in 1578.

On April 24, 1578, Schweigger and Gerlach went to the Caramania district near the city walls (present-day Samatya district), where they watched the Georgios celebration at the St. Georgios church. Gerlach reports that the people there spoke Turkish, but their pastors knew both languages. From there, they went to the place where Kantakuzen's books were sold, and Gerlach acquired a New Testament.

Gerlach briefly notes the distinction Turks make between Lutherans and Papists. The Turks perceive Lutherans as being closer to accepting Islam than Italians, so when taking someone as a prisoner, they inquire whether they are Papist or Lutheran. He also mentioned that the Greeks had more superstitions than the Papists. As is common in his diary, his judgments fluctuated between good and bad, depending on the state of his relations with the Greeks.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid., 55.

²⁸ Ibid., 92.

On April 30, 1578, he went to Hasköy to visit the former Patriarch Metrophanes. He brought greetings from the ambassador and asked if there were any unpublished manuscript books in Metrophanes' library in Heybeliada. The ex-Patriarch suggested that they could go together one day to review the books there. Through Theodosius, they discussed various matters, such as the marriage of the former Patriarch, as well as the priests Kantakuzen and his son Andronicus Kantakuzen.

On 8 May 1578, they attended the Greek festival held in Ipsomation (Samatya).

Although Gerlach and Schweigger left us these multicultural and colorful descriptions, they could not achieve their theological goals. Asaph Ben-Tov states that theologians have attempted to understand the Orthodox and have overestimated the ideal of ancient Greek times.²⁹ Protestants, including Dernschwam, could not fully understand Orthodox people, often describing them as ignorant. However, they overlooked or chose not to acknowledge the strong political relations between the Patriarchate and the Ottoman state and the consequences of those relations.

The issue of food and drinks was also notable for German travelers. Even though it was periodically banned, wine was produced and sold in Istanbul. One of Busbecq's men, who was appointed as an ambassador in Istanbul in September 1561, died from the plague. With Busbecq's entourage, who stayed at the Elçi Han in Çemberlitaş, the fear of disease transmission spread, causing great alarm. During this time, Suleiman the Magnificent, who had become increasingly religious in his old age, forbade the consumption of wine not only for Muslims but also for Jews and Christians. Busbecq and his men argued that drinking water, to which they were unaccustomed, could make them ill. Ultimately, during meetings held in the palace, the opinion of the pashas – who believed that Busbecq and his men would not survive without wine – prevailed, and they were allowed to supply the wine they needed. Busbecq noted that most of the fishermen were Greeks rather than Turks. Turks only ate fish they knew to be clean and did not eat snails, turtles, or frogs. Some Greeks, like the Turks, also avoided these animals. A Greek boy serving Busbecq did not eat shellfish, saying it was a sin. If he committed this sin, he would have to forfeit two months' earnings as a penalty. Busbecq

²⁹ Asaph Ben-Tov, "Turco-Graecia. German Humanists and the End of Greek Antiquity – Cultural Exchange and Misunderstanding," in *The Renaissance and the Ottoman World*, eds. Anna Contadini and Claire Norton (Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 181-195.

observed that Greek priests assessed sins based on their severity and forgave sinners according to the amount of money received. While staying in Büyükkada for three months due to the plague, Busbecq met Metropolitan Metrophanes, the head of the Heybeliada (Chalchis) monastery. Busbecq described Metrophanes as a well-educated person who was attempting to unite the Latin and Greek churches.³⁰

Observations about Jews in Istanbul

One thing that attracted the attention of travel writers in Istanbul was the Jews and their free participation in public life. Particularly notable in the narratives is the influence of Jewish doctors, both due to their professions and their place in society, contributing to the city's diversity. As Reinhold Lubenau reported, while passing through Budin on his way to Istanbul, Jews occupied one street, while Christians inhabited the adjacent one. The number of Turks was small because they preferred to build their houses by the river below.³¹

Muslim Turks and non-Muslims have lived together since the foundation of the Ottoman state. Salomon Schweigger stated that, although he did not see Jews in the city, he was told that approximately 20,000 Jews lived in Constantinople. They settled within the city walls, on the streets leading to the palace, somewhere close to the harbor reserved for them. In the upper part, Greeks lived both inside and outside the walls, and their districts extended to Palatium Constantini.³² Turks settled among Jews and Greeks. Although there were mostly Greeks in the southern areas, Turks were also scattered among them.³³

Hans Dernschwam, an important employee of the Fugger company, was in Istanbul from August 26, 1553, to March 8, 1555. They traveled from Istanbul to Amasya on March 9, 1555, with Ambassador Busbecq to present gifts and engage in negotiations with the Sultan. Dernschwam returned to Vienna from Istanbul on July 3, 1555, after returning from Amasya.³⁴ In his diary, Dernschwam described people from different cultures in Istanbul, notably writing extensively about

³⁰ Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq, *Vier Sendschreiben*, 535.

³¹ Reinhold Lubenau, *Seyahatnamesi*, çev. Türkis Noyan (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2012), 110.

³² Today, Balat.

³³ Salomon Schweigger, *Ein neue Reyßbeschreibung auß Teutschland nach Constantinopel*, 133.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Jews. According to Dernschwam, there were countless Jews from all nationalities, speaking different languages. He noted that when Jews were expelled from a country around the world, they would go directly to Turkey.³⁵ These Jews spoke German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Czech, Polish, Greek, Turkish, Syriac, New Aramaic, and other languages. Dernschwam states that, regardless of their native language, the Jews spoke the language of the nation they were in and wore long dresses and caftans, which were mostly the clothes of Turks, Italians, and Greeks.

Dernschwam's records indicate that there were 42 Jewish schools in Istanbul, possibly more, attended by children from diverse backgrounds. He writes that Jews lived freely in Turkey and traveled where they wanted to trade. The journal provides various figures about the population based on tax records. Accordingly, in 1553, the number of Jews in Istanbul was 15,035, while the total number of Christians from different groups was 6,785.³⁶ Dernschwam states that the Jews in Istanbul had connections to the whole world; they came from every place on earth, and there were no Jews who had not met or traded with those in Istanbul. However, Dernschwam's views on Jews are prejudiced, as he claims that Jews act as agents of the Turks in Christian countries.³⁷ Thirty years later, Schweigger repeated what had been written about medicine and doctors. The fact that the Sultan's physicians were Jewish, did not speak Greek or Latin, and were considered ignorant suggests that these opinions were likely repeated and transferred among writers. What distinguishes Schweigger from others is that he recorded his comments in a very detailed manner.

In response to Dernschwam's remarks about the Sultan's Jewish physicians in Istanbul, years later, a Jewish physician wrote a letter to the German ambassador regarding epidemics and treating embassy employees. Gerlach's diary includes a Latin letter written to Ambassador David Ungnad by a Jewish doctor named Haim Abenxuxen from Portugal, who lived in Istanbul. The letter details treatments for plague fever (*Morbum Epidemicum*). The doctor successfully treated a boil on the cook Jacob von Landshut.³⁸

³⁵ Hans Dernschwam, *Tagebuch einer Reise nach Konstantinopel und Kleinasien (1553/55)*, ed. Franz Babinger, çev. Jörg Riecke (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2014),

³⁶ Dernschwam, *Tagebuch einer Reise nach Konstantinopel und Kleinasien*, 108.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

³⁸ Stephan Gerlach, *Stephan Gerlachs des Älteren Tage-Buch*, 245.

Stephan Gerlach notes that on May 31, 1575, many Jews who had put counterfeit money into circulation were arrested and taken to court, where they were punished by striking their bellies, backs, and soles, and also fined. Despite such incidents, Jews are loved and respected in Istanbul. Doctor Beydus, Doctor Salomon, and The Great Jew Joseph are among those with whom the Sultan shares his closest secrets. Some other Jewish men and women are privy to the most confidential issues of the Sultan and pashas. Just as Kantakuzen took on the salt customs business, Joseph is also managing customs work related to wine sales.³⁹ While discussing the Sultan's pharmacy in Topkapı Palace, Salomon Schweigger notes, in a section influenced by highly biased thoughts, that Turks, Greeks, and Jews are not very knowledgeable about these issues. A German-origin pharmacist learns that candies and cookies are made in pharmacies. A pharmacist in the Imperial Embassy reports that he has visited pharmacies in Istanbul and did not find them superior to those in his own country. Schweigger notes that the physicians in the palace are Jewish and describes them as charlatans who lack basic knowledge, using only simple methods such as cupping.⁴⁰

Diversity as a Political Strategy

Reflecting the traditions of the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Roman Empire—traditions upheld by the Ottoman Empire—traditionally governed local governments were not ignored. The Ottoman Empire maintained its policy of preserving the existing structure while incorporating the requirements of its political strategy. More precisely, under the national system, dhimmi law and ancient traditions were applied in a harmonious and pragmatic approach, aligned with the state's political strategy.

A Janissary named Ostrovian Constantine provided examples of how Turks collaborated with non-Muslims and demonstrated equitable treatment of Christians. He stated that Ottoman sultans were committed to ensuring the well-being of Christians and the less fortunate in society.⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid., 96.

⁴⁰ Salomon Schweigger, *Ein neue Reyßbeschreibung auß Teutschland nach Constantinopel*, 152.

⁴¹ *Memoiren eines Janitscharen oder Türkische Chronik*, ed. ve çev. Reneta Lachmann, yorum. Claus-Peter Haase, Reneta Lachmann, ve Günter Prinzing (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1975), 145.

After the beginning of Ottoman political history, significant accumulation occurred during the expansion into Balkan territories and the transformation of the state into an empire with the conquest of Constantinople. Traditional Turkmen culture, the diverse structures of Anatolian society, relations with the Byzantine Empire, and the legacy of the Roman Empire created a unique mixture. This blend resulted in a distinctive Ottoman state tradition and strategy. One interesting example is that Catalan soldiers who initially came to fight for Byzantium ended up joining Ottoman forces under the leadership of Osman Bey.⁴²

Another facet of the Ottoman administration's political strategy was the tolerance of non-Muslims, which was also seen as a source of power. The clearest statements on this subject are included in the diary of Adam Wenner from Crailsheim. Wenner listed the sources of power for the state established by the Turks. First, he saw the tradition of the Sultan's eldest son ascending the throne; secondly, he recognized the importance of unity among Muslims; and thirdly, he noted that, although Turks were very eager to spread their religion, they neither interfered with people who did not share their beliefs nor forced them to convert or punished them for their different beliefs, as was done in Christian states. He writes that they did not attempt to impose their religion. Wenner also states that the Turks' attitudes caused people to feel close to them, leading to less resistance to their administration; people preferred Turkish sovereignty because they knew the consequences of coming under the rule of other states. Listing fifteen items in total, Wenner wrote "Administriren scharppffe Justitiam" as the tenth item, stating that the Turks' legal rules were strict.⁴³ It was very common in German travel books to use practices in Turkey as examples to criticize the situation in their own countries. This is especially evident in texts written by anti-Pope Protestants. The main purpose was to bring criticism, using the Ottoman Empire and the Turks as counterexamples.

Lubenau states that people of different cultures are treated equally in Istanbul. In his book, he writes that what he likes most about the Turks is the orderliness of their law enforcement officers in the cities and their

⁴² Feridun Emecen, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Kuruluş ve Yükseliş Tarihi (1300-1600)* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2015), 33.

⁴³ Adam Wenner, *Ein gantz new Reysebuch von Prag auß biß gen Constantinopel das ist: Beschreibung der Legation und Reise, welche von der Roem. Kaeyser Ahmet, So Anno 1616 angefangen und Anno 1618 gluecklich verricht und voellig abgelegt worden* (Nürnberg, 1622), 124-127.

meticulousness in the fulfillment of justice. They give everyone their due within three or four days and allow everyone, whether Turkish, Jewish, Arab, or Christian, the opportunity to voice their own case.⁴⁴ Lubenau states that the cases of Turks, Christians, and Jews are resolved through mutual hearing in the Court, where the Ottoman state ruled. According to his account, Christians living in Istanbul—whether Catholic, Greek, or Armenian—approach the Ağa, the leader of the Janissaries, during religious festivities or ceremonial occasions to request the provision of one or two Janissaries. These Janissaries stand guard at the door of the church, allowing the congregation to worship without any obstacles or harm, thanks to the protection they provide. A Janissary is paid 8 Asper per day for this service.⁴⁵ At least for this century, it is understood that Janissaries had duties to protect non-Muslims, as indicated by accounts found in travel literature. When Busbecq first saw Janissaries in Budin, they stated that they had responsibilities to protect Christians and Jews against possible harm from others.⁴⁶

Salomon Schweigger accomplished his pilgrimage to Jerusalem after completing the mission of Sinzendorf, using a passport he received from the Ottoman state along with some German nobility. The information he recorded during this sea voyage is invaluable, providing details about people, places, ships, winds, and more. At the same time, his explanations of his own ideas and knowledge help us better understand that period. Schweigger states that Germans and Europeans can defeat the Turks if they unite. He notes that the Turks' forces are not their own, saying that God sent them to punish Christians, using them as a whip, stick, or broom for cleaning and removing sins.⁴⁷

Heidi Stein states that Schweigger published his travel notes knowing they would be of interest. Before Schweigger, there was no such book describing the Turks, other than the German translation of Busbecq's work in 1596. The comprehensive work of Stephan Gerlach would only be printed by his grandson in 1674. Pharmacist Lubenau bought some parts from Schweigger. According to Stein, Schweigger's work was accepted as

⁴⁴ Reinhold Lubenau, *Seyahatnamesi*, çev. Türkis Noyan (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2012), 26.

⁴⁵ Lubenau, *Seyahatnamesi*, 205.

⁴⁶ Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq, *Vier Sendschreiben der Türkischen Botschaft, welche von Kaiser Ferdinand I. an Solimann ihm aufgetragen worden* (Nürnberg, 1664), 21.

⁴⁷ Salomon Schweigger, *Ein neue Reyßbeschreibung auß Teutschland nach Constantinopel*, 155.

a travel book in German-speaking countries but was essentially the first comprehensive report on the Turks.⁴⁸

When the Ottoman Empire began its political development as a smaller state, its leaders were well aware of the importance of maintaining political balances. İnalçık states that the administrative and cultural forms adopted in the conquered territories were derived from Middle Eastern civilization and political traditions. The basic economic principles of the Ottoman state were based on the traditional view of the state and society found in Middle Eastern empires, which had existed since ancient times.⁴⁹

Under the heading of Turkish tolerance, Karl Teply highlighted examples of the religious freedom offered to those living in Istanbul by referring to Busbecq and Gerlach. Teply's report, based on Busbecq, indicates that the Turks treated the local population according to their customary manner.⁵⁰ The system of the nation was based on dhimmi law and supported by some ancient Middle Eastern and Roman traditions.

Conclusion

The travelogues of Germans who visited the Ottoman Empire reveal the colorful structure of Istanbul. These diaries and travelogues, written almost like historical novels, should be evaluated together with consideration of the authors' perspectives. These travelers often criticized the society they observed and sometimes envied it. The truth lies between these two viewpoints. The culture of living together with differences should not be seen as an idealized structure that always functioned smoothly. The pragmatic reason different religions and cultures could coexist in the Ottoman Empire was due to a blend of practices from the Roman Empire and old Middle Eastern state traditions, both of which had economic and political dimensions. The fundamentals of Islamic dhimmi law provided the legal infrastructure, thus supporting both political-strategic objectives and religious and financial practices. This approach was one of the main political strategies of the Ottoman Empire. Various aspects of this multicultural structure, called the national system, can be seen in detail in German travel accounts. The issue of living with diversity seemed to have found its own solution in Istanbul, the largest city of the sixteenth century. Compared to other examples of its time, it is possible to

⁴⁸ Salomon Schweigger, *Zum Hofe des türkischen Sultans*, ed. Heidi Stein (Leipzig: Brockhaus Verlag, 1986), 219.

⁴⁹ Halil İnalçık, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Klasik Çağ (1300-1600)* (İstanbul: YKY, 2006), 14.

⁵⁰ Karl Teply, *Reisen ans Goldene Horn* (Stuttgart: Steingrüben Verlag, 1968), 295.

say that the 'Istanbul model' stands at an inspiring point. Protestant German theologians Gerlach and Schweigger did not fully understand the connection between the Ottoman political system and Orthodox Christianity, leading them to accuse Orthodox Christians of being ignorant.

Orthodox clergymen themselves sometimes expressed this accusation. However, the issue is more complex. Indeed, the pretext of ignorance was a convenient reason for Orthodox clerics to say 'no' to the Protestants.

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