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**THE OTTOMAN POLICY TOWARDS CHURCH CONSTRUCTION
: THE ISSUE OF CHURCH CONSTRUCTION AND RESTORATION IN
ANTAKYA (ANTIOCH) IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES***

**Osmanlı'nın Kilise İnşasına Yönelik Politikası: 18. ve 19. Yüzyılda
Antakya'da Kilise İnşası ve Restorasyonu Meselesi**

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ABSTRACT

The rules of restoring or building a church in the lands of Islam were determined by Islamic law. It is believed that the Ottoman authorities followed these rules and applied some restrictions concerning construction and restoration of worship areas of non-Muslims. However, this study suggests that, in some cases, Ottoman pragmatism, the domestic and the international economic and political developments, and the Ottoman reforms, especially the Tanzimat Reforms between 1839-1876, forced the state to overlook the Shari'a rules regarding church restoration and construction. Besides these factors, as in the case of Antakya (Antioch), regional political developments that was the control of the city by the governor of Egypt between 1832-1840 and the Muslim reaction to church construction or restoration attempts of non-Muslims were determinant in church construction and restoration process.

Keywords: Church Construction, Ottoman Empire ,Antakya, Antioch, Tanzimat

ÖZ

İslam topraklarında kilise inşası veya restorasyonu ile ilgili kurallar şer'iyeye kuralları ile belirlenmiştir. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun bu kuralları benimsediğine ve kilise inşası konusunda gayrimüslim halka bazı kısıtlamalar getirdiğine inanılır. Ancak, bazı durumlarda, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun çıkarları, içeride ve dışarıdaki politik ve ekonomik gelişmeler ve uygulanan reformlar, özellikle Tanzimat reformları, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun bu kısıtlayıcı kuralları uygulamaya koymamaya zorlamıştır. Bu faktörlerin yanında, bazı bölgesel

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gelişmeler de kilise inşasına dair şer'i hükümlerin uygulanamamasına sebep olmuştur. Antakya kazasında olduğu gibi, 1832-1840 yılları arasında Mısır valisinin şehri işgal etmesi ve Müslüman halkın kilise inşası ya da restorasyonuna dair verdikleri tepkiler kilise inşası ya da restorasyonuna dair kuralların uygulanması ya da uygulanmaması bağlamında etkili olmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kilise İnşası, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Antakya, Antioch, Tanzimat

Introduction:

The Ottoman Empire, 1299-1922, successfully ruled over numerous ethnic and religious groups for centuries by the successful application of the concept of *millets*. The *millet* system was the framework within which the Ottoman state ruled its non-Muslim subjects. The main aim of the *millet* system was approaching the non-Muslims as members of the religious community, not as individuals. The leader of each *millet* community, a patriarch or rabbi, was responsible to the state for their respective community, and to his respective community regarding relations with the state. Through this system, *millet* communities maintained their fiscal and juridical autonomy (Braude, 1998:69). In addition, tolerance to co-existence of different communities and consciousness of inter-communal coexistence were the two main elements that kept the *millet* system functioning until the 19th century. The Ottoman Empire tolerated non-Muslims so long as they did not disturb the peace or go against the Islamic rules and principles. Between 14th and 19th centuries, toleration had yet become a virtue that was deliberately sought. Providing a degree of religious, social, cultural, and ethnic continuity within these communities were important factors for the survival of the religious and ethnic diversity in the Ottoman Empire. This essay examines the attitude of the Ottoman authorities and the Muslim population to the church construction and restoration attempts of the Christians in Antioch in the 19th century. It also indicates the tolerance and non-tolerance of the central administration towards the Christians of the city, when the latter requested a permit for restoration of their churches. The rules of restoring or building a church in the lands of Islam were determined by Shari'a; however, this study suggests that Ottoman pragmatism, the domestic and international economic and politic developments, and the Ottoman reforms, especially the Tanzimat Reforms between 1839-1876, forced the state to overlook the Shari'a rules regarding church restoration and construction. My focus here is the church construction and restoration practices in Antioch in the 19th century to compare how the practices were before and after the Tanzimat Reforms, and to indicate the impact of the regional, the invasion of the city by the Egyptians in the 1830s, and the international developments, the Russo-Ottoman War and the Treaty of Kutchuk Kaynarca in 1774, on application of rules regarding church restoration and construction. Even though the present essay examines Antioch as a case study, the conceptual framework and methodology it proposes and the questions it addresses are relevant to the church restoration and construction issues in other Ottoman cities, in which

Muslims and non-Muslims settled together. Lastly, the essay also touches upon religious life of Christians of Antioch under the Ottoman Empire, which has been ignored by scholars.

Antioch: From Early Christianity to Ottoman Empire

Antioch, or Antakya in Turkish, was a very prominent city during the ancient times. The city is located in south-central Turkey and along the northwest border with Syria. Antakya had a special place among the significant centers of the Hellenistic, Roman, and Early Byzantine worlds. It was one of the greatest religious and economic centers in the middle ages, but it was quite different from other great Greco-Roman cities due to its mixed culture and demography (Downey, 1961:3-11). During the Roman period, the population of the city reached over half a million, and it had all the amenities and facilities of a big city, such as a big amphitheater, public baths, aqueducts, sewage system, granaries, weapons factory and schools (Kasaba, 2006:207).

Hosting people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, being an important trade center, being located in a region where Eastern and Western cultures came together made Antakya a significant propaganda center for the expansion of Christianity (Demir, 1993: 33). Upon witnessing the rapid growth of the new Christian community in Antioch by the apostles in Jerusalem, they send Barnabas, a Jew of Cypriot origin, to the city to observe things. Under the guidance of Barnabas and with the help of Paul and Peter, a new Christian community was formed in the city, the name of “Christians” was firstly used to refer to that community, and that community developed into a powerful church in Antakya. As a result of their journeys, Antakya became one of the most respected religious centers in the Christian world.

The ecclesiastical organization was not completely formed until the 4th century. When the Roman Empire accepted Christianity as the official religion of the empire, it became necessary to organize a church, whose organization would be parallel to that of the lay government. Under that organization efforts, the empire grouped together the bishops under the bishop of the metropolis of the province; and these metropolitans were also grouped together based on the great lay dioceses, which had been instituted by Diocletian, under the leadership of the bishop of the capital of the diocese (Runciman, 1968: 20-21). It was due to these efforts that the geographical boundaries of Antioch, which included present-day Syria, Iraq, southeastern Turkey, Lebanon, Iran, and India were set at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, and the bishop of Antioch, together with the bishops of Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Alexandria, were recognized patriarchs (Runciman, 1968: 20). However, not all of the Christians living under the dominance of the Patriarch of Antioch accepted the decision of Chalcedon. The Christians disregarded the Patriarch of Antioch and established their own churches, called Jacobite, and labeled the Orthodox who accepted the hegemony of the Patriarch of Antioch as Melkites.

The city hosted different people from different nationalities and religions during the Byzantine period. Three languages, Greek, Latin, and Aramaic were spoken in the city during the 4th century. Greek writing was used in the city until the Arab conquest. During the time of the first caliph, Abu Bakr, the Muslim army started its conquests outside of the Arabian Peninsula. Therefore, Muslims troops captured Damascus in 635, Antioch in 637, and Jerusalem in 638 (Lazarev, 2006: 73-74). Most scholars studying Antakya agree that a new period began after the Muslim conquest of the city. During this period, the city lost its Roman/Byzantine and Christian character. After the conquest, the socio-political structure of the city changed. The demographic character, the culture, and the urban settlement structure of the region underwent a definitive transformation in the early middle ages (Zavagno, 2009: 4). As Downey states: “this [the conquest of the city by the Muslims] brings to an end the history of Antioch as a city of the Greco-Roman world” (Downey, 1961: 578).

Different Islamic dynasties, the Umayyads, Abbasids, Tulunids, Ikhshidids, and Hamdanids, controlled the city until the re-conquest of the city by the Byzantine Empire in 969. Following the conquest of the city, the Byzantine Empire imposed Byzantine canonical practices and the Greek rite, and tried to strengthen the religious and ideological relations by establishing close imperial control over the Melkite Church in Antioch (Lazarev, 2006: 84). In addition, the Byzantine Empire resorted to religious cleansing in the cities which had been occupied by Muslims in the 630s, so some of the Muslims who were settled in Antioch were forced to move after 969 (Kennedy, 2006: 185). However, the city was recaptured by another Muslim state, the Anatolian Seljuks in 1084.

The conquest of Antioch and Jerusalem by the Turks urged the Latin Christians to embark upon a crusade to bring these significant cities back under Christian domination. In the late 11th century, the city was captured by the Crusaders. The purpose of the Crusaders was to oust the Turks from Anatolia, to bring the Holy Lands under control of Christians, to put an end to the Seljuk policies preventing Christians and travelers from reaching Jerusalem, and to dominate the trade routes which had been under control of the Turks for a long time (Demir, 1993: 63). Bohemund I entered Antioch in June 1098. After the capture of the city, the Crusaders massacred Turks, and plundered their houses. It is believed that about 10,000 residents were killed (Demir, 1993: 70-71). Because of his efforts during the capture of the city, the Eastern representative of the Pope appointed Bohemund I as Antioch Crusader Princeps in 1100 that has been considered to be the foundation of the Antioch Crusader Principality (Bahadır, 2014: 89-90).

The Crusaders ruled the city for 170 years, they could not establish a strong and uniform nationality. At the beginning of 1268, the Mamluk sultan, Baybars, organized a campaign firstly to occupy Yafa, and then to capture Antakya. He surrounded the city on May 15th 1268. After three days of siege, he ordered an attack

on Antioch. His army occupied the city without confronting any resistance. After the occupation of the city, the Christian dominance that had lasted for 170 years came to an end, and Antakya has remained under Muslim control since the disappearance of the Antioch Principality (Demir, 1993: 79). The occupation of Antioch by the Mamluks is considered as the beginning of the collapse of Christianity in North Syria. Thereafter, Antioch never enjoyed the prosperity it had during the antique age. In the 15th century, a traveler, Bertrandon de la Broquiere, states that the population of the city had decreased and its demography had changed. There were only 300 houses in the whole city whose dwellers mostly consisted of Turks and Arabs (Demir, 1993: 80). After that time there was no attempt to recover or to rebuild Antioch. After the Ottoman conquest of the city in 1516, the commercial and social life of the city relatively improved comparing to the Mamluk period. Some of the Christians who had been forced to leave the city return to the city. Under the Ottoman rule, they were allowed to restore the ancient churches that had existed before the Ottoman conquest.

The Issue of Church Construction in the Ottoman Empire:

Ottoman rulers applied some restrictions concerning worship areas of the non-Muslims (*dhimmis*). According to the Pact of Umar, *dhimmis* were not allowed to build new worship areas after the Islamic conquest of their region. The Pact of Umar legalizes only the non-Muslim religious buildings that had already been built before the Islamic conquest. *Dhimmis* were allowed to use their old places of worship, but they were not allowed to build new ones. When they wanted to repair and restore their legally recognized worship places, they were strictly warned not to make any additions, or not to make substantial changes in the original structure of the worship buildings (Peri, 2001: 53).

On the other hand, according to Hanafi School of jurisprudence, which was the predominant one in the Ottoman Empire, and fatwas of the prominent Ottoman jurists and muftis, non-Muslims were allowed to build a new church in the areas, in which located in a certain distance from the Muslims settlements and inhabited only by non-Muslims. However, it was not permitted to construct a new church in cities and in the areas where a mixed population of Muslim and non-Muslims lived together. According to Ebu Hanife, the founder of the Hanafi School of Jurisprudence, Muslim rulers can provide a permission to non-Muslims for the restoration of houses of worship that were in a poor condition if they surrendered their cities to Muslim armies. His pupil Abu Yusuf, d. 798, claimed that referring to the practices of the first four caliphs, the house of worships of non-Muslims should not be destroyed if they agreed with Muslim armies to surrender their cities. Even though they were permitted to restore their house of worships, it was prohibited to build a new house of worship or to continue to the construction of a house of worship that had already started (Gradeva, 1994: 17).

The issue of church construction was brought in front of muftis by Muslim who posed questions to the muftis about the norms of Islamic law. The muftis issued many fatwas regarding that issue. One of the earliest fatwas regarding church construction and restoration in the Ottoman Empire was provided by Molla Hüsrev in the mid-15th century. In his fatwa, it is pointed out that non-Muslim could not build a new church in the abode of Islam (*dar'ul Islam*), but they were allowed to restore the churches that had been existed before the Ottoman conquest of the region (Koyuncu, 2014: 105). In Another fatwa given by a prominent grand mufti, Ebu's-Suud Efendi, in the 16th century, the same points were emphasized. He also claimed that Muslims could pull a church down, which was rebuilt thereafter the Ottoman conquest of the area.

“Question: When the Sultan of Islam conquered a Christian fortress, there was no church in its suburbium. Following the conquest, the infidels arrive and settle in the area and erect a church by claiming "we had a church here from the days of yore," can the Muslims lawfully pull the building down?

Answer: Yes, if Muslims performs the Friday noon service in the fortress (Düzdağ, 1998: 165-166).”

The earliest fatwa examples concerning the construction of a new church in towns and villages, in which located in a far distance from Muslim cities or areas populated by Muslims were issued in the 17th century. In the fatwas issued by Çatalcalı Ali Efendi (1674-1686), Şeyhülislam Yasincizade Abdülvahab Efendi (1828-1833), Mekkizade Mustafa Asım Efendi (1818-1819, 1823-1825 and 1833-1846), it is stated that the non-Muslims (infidels) of the villages and small towns could erect a church in their areas with the permission of the Sultan if the area was inhabited only by non-Muslims and located in a far distance from the areas populated by Muslims (Çatalcalı Ali Efendi, 2014: 277; BOA, HAT. DN: 1006/42212-A; BOA, HAT. DN: 775/36351-B; BOA,HAT. DN: 775/36353).

Based on the practices in available documents, one could claim that social and economic restriction on non-Muslims applied differently in different regions until the Tanzimat Reforms, which promised equality before the law for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Up until these reforms, the Ottoman pragmatism and major domestic and international political developments played a crucial role in the issuance of a permit by the central administration to build a new church or to repair a damaged one. Gradeva states that "the analysis of the available data about non-Muslim places of worship confirms the already well-established picture of a relative flexibility and pragmatism in the application of the theoretical legal framework; this flexibility led at times even to the construction of new places of worship, but, on the other hand, to the taking over or demolition of churches, both owing to political considerations and both contrary to the stipulations of the law" (Gradeva, 2012: 137). Therefore, pragmatic considerations of the central

government, such as the need to keep non-Muslim subjects loyal to the state, getting support of non-Muslim subjects at times of war, and preventing foreign countries being influential among these groups forced the central government to overlook some of the restriction regarding the church construction and restoration in the areas in which dominantly settled by non-Muslims between the 17th and 19th centuries (Gradeva, 2012: 162). For instance, in order to strengthen the position of Greek Orthodoxy against Catholics, the Ottoman government allowed them to construct new monasteries in Albania and Bosnia between 16th and 18th centuries. That policy perfectly fits with the Ottoman pragmatism. There were also numerous monasteries and churches built in Bulgaria between 15th and 17th centuries. Kiel claims that the numbers of the churches and monasteries built in the Balkans higher than the number of churches that had remained from the pre-Ottoman period (Kiel, 1995: 185-195).

The procedure of getting permission for repairing a church started with the appearance of the representatives of the non-Muslim in the kadı court to declare the need for repair. Regarding restoration or rebuilding new churches, the kadıs relied on a variety of sources: the central administration's orders and instructions, the so-called Pact of Umar, legal opinions (fatwas) of Ottoman şeyhülislams and other muftis. Therefore, the kadı forwarded that request to the central administration. However, that was not the only way to request a permit since the Christians could directly send petition regarding church construction to the Ottoman central government. There was a standardized text, which the applicants explained that the house of worship in question had been in their control from either the time of the Ottoman Empire or, it had existed before the Ottoman conquest. It was also emphasized that the building in question was in use by the community since olden times, which usually referred to pre-Ottoman period. Therefore, one can conclude that the oldness of the house of worship was the most important determinant to get the permission from the central government for restoration or rebuild of it. Prior to the declaration of the permission for the construction, the central administration took into consideration the religious homogeneity of the region, in which the church would be repaired. If the area was inhabited only by non-Muslims and it was further away from any settlement inhabited by Muslims, the permission of building or restoring a new church could be given by Ottoman authorities. Other points mentioned in the petition for restoration requests were the demography of the area where the house of worship located, and the current condition of the building prior to the restoration. In response to the petition, the central government sent an order for inspection of the house of worship to determine whether the condition of the place fit the requirements of the Sharia. Following getting an approval from the central government, the representatives of non-Muslim communities applied to the court again for the request of an inspection. The inspection (keşf) was carried out mostly by kadı, and sometimes his assistant, naib, could join him. The most important rule before carrying out that inspection was getting authorization of the central government; otherwise, the kadı and his naib could face punishment due to

carrying out the inspection without the authorization of the central government. The court also appoints a commission consisted of a naib or katib (scribe), and in some cases, builders, architects, and some other unspecified expert witnesses in order to both inspect the building and get the public opinion about the building. Following their inspection, a report indicating the detailed description of the building, the condition of the building and the part needed to be repaired was sent to the court (Gradeva, 2012: 149-153). During the restoration, the non-Muslims communities had to repair their churches based on suggestions and conditions of the report given by that committee. At the end of the restoration, the central administration or the local court could send officials for final inspection in order to make sure that the size and structure of the building were not changed, and the rules were followed.

In some cases, non-Muslims bribed officials to obtain permission for restoring or building a new church, especially when they wanted to rebuild churches with a problematic history. They did bribe not-only officials involving in that procedure, but also some of the local people, involved in the commission, to secure false testimonies. However, if the central administration realized that a church was restored without permission, or the permission was provided by bribed officials, the central administration punished these officials and demolished the repaired church. In addition, a building was pulled down in case of any changes in its structure, size, and materials that used to build the building.

In the case of fire, earthquake, and other natural disasters, the non-Muslims were mostly allowed to rebuild their churches and monasteries. However, that was not the case all the time due to the political and religious upheavals as well as the increasing influence of Kadızadeli and like-minded groups in Ottoman politics, especially in the 17th century. These developments led to changes in the relations between Muslims rulers and the non-Muslim population, and the state strictly applied Islamic law, particularly regarding church restoration or rebuild in the 17th century. For instance, some of the churches and synagogues were destroyed or damaged by the great fire of 1660 in Istanbul. Some of the muftis, the most important one Vani Efendi, who also served as a grand mufti, interpreted that event as a warning to the Muslims, and ordered that the destroyed churches and synagogues were not permitted to be rebuilt and restored. In addition, the state took advantage of that fire to complete the Valide mosque complex in that area (Köse, 2016: 71).

International and Regional Developments Impacted Church Construction in Antioch under the Ottoman Rule

Besides Islamic law, Ottoman pragmatism and domestic and international political developments play role in state's decision to provide a permit to non-Muslims to restore and rebuild aa church. In the 18th and 19th centuries, there were two significant developments regarding providing permission to build new places of worship to non-Muslims. The first development was the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca,

which was signed between the Ottoman Empire and Russia in 1774. Taking into consideration of the articles of that treaty, the treaty has been considered a turning point in Near East. After defeating the Ottoman Empire, the Russians gained strategic territories around the Black Sea, achieved a special position in Moldavia and Wallachia, gained privileges to extend her commercial activities in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, and obtained a right to open Russian consulates at any place in the Ottoman territories (Davison, 1976: 464). As a result of that treaty, the poor military and political power of the Ottoman Empire was revealed while Russian's international power strengthened. The most important and controversial articles of that treatment were the ones, number seven and twelve, that provided Russia a right to protect Greek Orthodox community and Greek Orthodox churches throughout the Ottoman Empire. In addition, the right of constructing an Orthodox church in Istanbul promised a hope for other Christians subjects, who wanted to build a church in their region (Davison, 1976: 463-483).

The second significant development was the Tanzimat Reforms between 1839 and 1876. The first great reforming edict of that era was the Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane (the Imperial Rescript of the Rose Chamber), which was promulgated in 1839. The main principles of that decree can be separated into three parts: the welfare of the Ottoman subjects; administration and government; and the status of non-Muslim subjects of the Empire. The most remarkable part of that decree was the promise of equality before the law for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike (Ma'oz, 1968: 4-11). It is important to mention the fact that the time of the proclamation of the decree coincided with the Egyptian occupation of Syria, so the Ottoman administration desired to get the support of Western powers against the rebellious governor of Egypt. Non-Muslims gained new rights in the Ottoman Empire after the promulgation of another decree, the Hatt-ı Hümayun, in 1856. This decree confirms the main principles of the previous decree, which was all distinctions based on race, religion, and language was removed. One of the results of these reforms was to provide permission to non-Muslims to build a new place of worship. However, Bruce Masters claims that a hint of the older tradition remained in the clause for the building of new churches as non-Muslims were asked to get a permission from the central government before they built their places of worships, especially in the areas in which they shared with Muslims (Master, 2004: 138).

In addition to these turning points regarding provide permission for non-Muslims to build churches, there was a regional turning point in Antakya that was the occupation of the Syrian provinces of the Ottoman Empire by the Egyptian governor. Following their control of the region, Ibrahim Pasha, son of the governor of Egypt, removed restrictions on the building of new churches and permitted Christians to practice their faith openly. During the Egyptian rule, many Christians moved to quarters of Antakya, and they were allowed to construct a new church in the district of Cenine where Greek Orthodox and Muslims lived together (Kılıç, 2004: 82). After the Ottomans retook control of the city in 1840, the Greek-

Orthodox asked for permission to repair the church which would be accepted by the Ottoman rulers in the 1850s (BOA, HR.MKT. DN: 30/52).

Christian Population in Antioch and the Condition of the Churches:

Following the occupation of the city by the Mamluks, the Christians were forced to leave the city. They returned to the city almost a century after the occupation of the city by the Ottoman Empire. All the inhabitants living in the quarters of Antakya between 1527-1570 were Muslims, and there were no non-Muslim inhabitants registered in the city's records concerning population. Non-Muslims are firstly encountered in the registers of 1678. Based on these records, there were 11 houses inhabited by non-Muslims. 4 of these households were located in the quarter of Tut, 2 houses each in Kantara, Sofular, and Şirince, and one house in the quarter of Mahsen (Ainsworth, 1885: 75). The population of the non-Muslims in the quarters of Antakya increased in the following centuries. Based on the available documents, one could say that the non-Muslim population in Antakya increased in the 18th and 19th centuries, but there was no neighborhood inhabited exclusively by a single non-Muslim group (Çapar, 2017: 98).

Travelers provide substantial information on churches in Antakya, especially St. Peter's church located close to the east gate of Antakya. The church that was actively used by Greek Orthodox derived its name from Apostle Peter who preached the Word of God in Antioch for the first time. He resided both in Antioch and Jerusalem until his departure for Rome. Following the steps of Apostle Peter, the Apostles Barnabas and Paul taught a number of people their discipline. Their disciples in Antioch were the first to be called Christians that would later spread over the world (Neale, 1873: 200). Following the Ottoman occupation of the city, the Ottoman authorities granted that church to Greek Orthodox in 1580. However, with the initiative of the representative of Vatican in Syria and assistance of the French consular in the region, Catholics seized the control of the church in 1846. In 1863, the church was restored with the permission of the central administration. The interesting point in the restoration of the church was that it was restored with the request of Pope Pius IX, and was funded by Napoleon III, which indicates the religious significance of the church for the Catholic world (Kireççi, 2001: 79). Abraham Parsons, who had been in the city in the 1770s, describes the church by saying "the walls are very strong, and are yet in such a state, that, with little repair, they may last many hundred years, but the roof has fallen in so long since, that the oldest inhabitant now living does not remember any part of it standing; and yet the Greeks here have no other place of worship, nor will the Turks suffer them to build any, nor to repair this, without paying such a sum of money as the Greeks of Antioch could not raise, even at the expense of all their fortunes" (Parsons, 1808: 70). The church was small, around fifteen paces broad, and twenty in length, and it did not have a door.

Richard Pococke, who visited the region in the 1730s, claims that there were remains of three or four churches in Antakya. Saint Peter and Paul churches were two of these remaining churches located at the eastern hill at north. Although the locations of these churches were inconvenient, the Greeks decided to build the church in that location due to the fact that Saint Peter or Saint Paul either lived or preached the gospel there. Another church in Antakya was the church of Saint John, where the Greeks had their service every Sunday and holiday, brought an altar, and buried their dead near it. The last church that was mentioned by Pococke is the church of Saint George. He states that the Greeks claimed that the church belonged to them, but they allowed another Christian community of the city, the Armenians, to make use of it (Pococke, 1745: 192).

Another observation was made by a Russian traveler, Basil Gregorovitch, on the St. Peter Church in the mid-18th century. He reported that Christians performed their divine service on Sundays and holidays in the cave in which the church was located. During the hot days and whole nights, the Turkish shepherds drove their flocks into this cave. The priest and some Orthodox Christians came to the church for the purpose of cleaning all the filth and performing divine service. The traveler claims that when their service ended, the cave was again occupied by the Turkish shepherds. It is a fact that the church was located on the mountain and has been described as a cave by other missionaries and travelers as well. However, his observation of the church was used mostly by the Turkish shepherds as resting area does not match with the information provided by other travelers (Neale, 1873: 208).

The Issue of Church Construction and Restoration in Antioch:

Christians made several requests and attempts for both construction and repair of houses of worship in Antakya. We see such permissions in court records, documents issued by the central governments, and travelers' accounts. The Christians living in Antioch shared their neighbors with Muslims, and most of their churches located in the areas where Muslims and non-Muslims settled together. That condition complicated the process of getting permission to repair their old church building and forced them to strictly follow all of the abovementioned steps of the procedure to get a permission. Another problem that the Christians of Antioch faced was the reaction of the Muslims in the city. In the pamphlet of memoirs of the Patriarch of Antioch, Methodius, which was translated from Russian to English, there is an information on the request for the construction of a church in Antakya. The request was made by Abu-Sabbas, a pious Christian, in 1813. He asked for permission to build a church at his own expense from the Sultan. He possibly claimed that there had been a church existed in that place from the days of yore. The Sultan gave him a decree to this effect, and he was about to set to work. However, the mullah of the city opposed that decision by accusing Abu-Sabbah of having the

intention to build not a temple but a fortress. It is reported that "the sovereign believed the mullah, and hanged the pious Christian for his godly intention, together with three priests and a deacon, who was also impeached by the mullah of evil designs against the Sultan's power. From that time divine service is performed, as before, in the cave of the Turkish shepherds" (Neale, 1873: 208).

Another traveler also noted the reaction of Muslims in Antakya against the attempts of Christians at building churches. Buckingham, who had been in Antakya in the early 19th century, claims that "the Christians have made several unsuccessful efforts to build a church for themselves here; but, though they are not wanting in wealth, and successive *firmans* have been obtained from Stamboul [Istanbul] for that purpose, yet, the fanaticism of the Turks and some unfortunate fatality which they think attached to the town itself, has hitherto always obstructed its execution. They resort, therefore, to a cave on the east of the town for the performance of their religious duties, in which they are additionally devout, from the apparent persecution under which they live, in this respect as well"(Buckingham, 1825: 558).

Getting permission to repair old church building became easier for non-Muslims after the promulgation of the Tanzimat Reforms in 1839. However, the Christians still had to follow the procedure, and both the Ottoman authorities in the region and local Muslims closely supervised the repair of churches. The local Muslim population sent several reports to Istanbul to inform the central government of ongoing church construction. A document written in 1845 demonstrates that the Christians, called *Isevi taifesi* ("Community of Jesus"), in the district of Celine built a new house on the property of the mosque. The house was used for the purpose of teaching the Bible and to teach children the principles of Christianity. However, the house was built without the permission of the administrator of the *waqf*, Süleyman Ağa. What is more, Christians, for some reason, extended that building without getting any permission and transformed it into a church. At the end of the document, the city council urged the central government to take necessary actions to address these developments (BOA, HR. SYS. DN:15/27/1). In another report sent to central government by local Muslims it was stated that that room had been granted to the Greek Orthodox community by Ibrahim Pasha, the son of governor of Egypt, Mehmed Ali Pasha, who invaded and ruled the Syrian provinces of the Ottoman Empire in the 1830s, for the purposes of providing them a place to study Bible (BOA, A.)MKT.UM. DN: 118/81). Since the Egyptian governor ruled the city in the 1830s, the Greek Orthodox probably did not feel necessary to get permission from the central government in Istanbul. They very possibly transformed that church without following the required procedure since the Egyptian governor allowed non-Muslim to repair or build a house of worship. With that report, they wanted to prove that the building had not been a church from olden times, and it had been granted by the occupant governor in the 1830s. In addition, since the Ottoman Empire retook control of the city in 1840, the local Muslims wanted the central administration to demolish the building that had transformed into a church.

Regarding the same building, another report sent in 1853 stated that the Christians attempted to transform a one-room house belonging to a mosque *waqf* called Ihsaniye Cami Vakfi in the district of Cenine into a church by claiming that the building had been an ancient church (BOA, A. MKT.UM. DN:118/81; BOA, A.MKT.MVL. DN:57A/ 73). Local people were complaining about the increasing activities of the Greek Orthodox aimed at the construction of new churches. The local people claimed that several houses belonging to the Ihsaniye Cami *waqf* were demolished by the Christians for the purpose of construction of new churches (BOA, HR. MKT. DN:56/53). They demanded the central administration to stop the ongoing construction of houses of worship carried out by the Greek Orthodox (BOA, MVL. DN:124/59). In the cases when Muslims and non-Muslims disagreed on the issue that if the building was a church or not in the days of yore, Muslims had to prove their claims that the building had not been a church before the occupation of the city by the Ottoman Empire; otherwise, the non-Muslims would continue to use that building as a house of worship. This example shows us that completing the permission procedure could last for years, and the reaction of the Muslim population living in the same quarter with non-Muslims was still determinant in the completion of the church repair, even after the promulgation of the Tanzimat Reforms. We do know that the rooms converted to churches were not demolished by the central administration since the same building was damaged by an earthquake in 1872. Russia and the Patriarch of Antioch paid close attention to the restoration of the church in 1872. Even though the Ottoman central administration issued a permit for restoration and appointed an architect to restore the church, Russia, considering herself as protector of Greek Orthodox, dispatched Russian engineers and architects for the restoration of the church in Antioch (BOA, I.H. DN:15405). Following the completion of the restoration, the building, which had been constructed in Byzantine style, lost its Byzantine characteristic as it was restored based on Russian architectural style (Naseh, 2003: 6).

The Greek Orthodox asked for help from Russia to convince the Ottoman Empire to allow them to build new churches. In fact, the expanding Russian influence on the Middle East was not Russians priority in its imperial goals until the 19th century. However, Russians began to show more interest on Middle East under the leadership of Catherine, when Russians embarked on ‘Oriental Project’, which had the aim to be more influential in the Levant, protector of Greek Orthodox communities living in Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, and Armenia, and to prevent Christian Powers of Europe to be protector of the Holy Places. During the Russo-Ottoman war of 1768-1774, Syria entered into the field of conflict between these two forces. The Russian fleet moved to the Mediterranean to support any revolts against Ottoman central government in the Levant. The major outcome of that support came when the Druzes, which revolted against the Porte in 1773, were able to capture Beirut with the help of the Russian troops in 1774. The war ended with the decisive victory of Russia, but the Russians did not ask to keep Beirut as it had been a policy of expediency in supporting local revolts which assisted the defeat of

the Ottoman Empire. In addition, Catherine's main purpose was still to control Constantinople and the Straits, so the Russians interests on Arab lands had to wait until next century (Hopwood,1969: 4-12). At the same time, the articles of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca allowed Russia to protect rights of Greek Orthodox living in the Ottoman territories. The Patriarch of Antioch and Jerusalem had a close relationship with Russia before that treaty since they played an important role in the development of the Russian church in the 16th and 17th centuries. However, after that treaty, the Russians both strengthened their relationship with these churches, had an opportunity to put pressure on the Ottoman Empire to prevent anti-Orthodox propaganda in the Holy Places, helped the Greek Orthodox to repair or build new churches in their areas, and appointed agents and opened consular in Syria and Palestine in the first half of 19th century.

In a letter sent to the Russians by the Patriarch of Antioch in 1842, he openly requested help from the Russians. In the letter, it is pointed out that "having stated our conditions as well as we could, we apply to all you Orthodox inhabitants of the Russian Empire, that, moved by heartfelt pity and Christian compassion towards the shocking misfortunes of the most ancient See of Antioch, you would graciously receive our above mentioned deputed Archbishop and his fellow travelers, and that you would be generously pleased to afford succor in so important and saving an action as that of supporting Orthodoxy in Syria, each according to his means, in order that we may be enabled to renew and repair the churches and monasteries which have decayed and been deserted, to establish printing presses, and to institute Christian schools for the education of the clergy and other Orthodox Christians, that we may not appear in every respect the last among other nations" (Neale, 1873: 211).

In another case, the Greek Orthodox of Antakya wanted the Russian consulate in Aleppo to convince Ottoman authorities to construct a new church in Antakya. In 1852, the consulate of Russia in Aleppo asked the Ottoman officials to provide permission to the Greek Orthodox to build a new church close to their district. In the document, it is pointed out that the closest church to them was about an hour distance from the city proper which made it necessary to build a new church close to their area. This document clearly demonstrates how Russia was involved in domestic policies of the Ottoman Empire and how it protected and supported the Greek Orthodox of the Empire (BOA, HR. SYS. DN:1786/11).

Getting permission for the restoration of prominent old churches was more uncomplicated. The restoration of the Greek Orthodox Church, one of the most important and oldest one in the town, in 1849 indicates that following the basic rules of the procedure to be granted a permit for church restoration was sufficient to get permission. The Greek Orthodox living in Antioch sent a petition (arzuhal) to the central government to get a permit for the restoration of the church. The community

followed the aforementioned procedure for obtaining the permission to restore their church. The central government issued permission for restoration to the Greek Orthodox community in Antioch with the condition that the dimensions of the old building would be preserved the same. In addition, the central government appointed an observer to supervise whether the conditions were strictly adhered to. It was clearly stated by authorities that any deviation would lead to the destruction of the building (BOA, HR. MKT. DN: 30/52). However, after the promulgation of the Hatt-ı Hümayun, in 1856, all restriction regarding the church construction and restoration were completely removed by the central administration. Non-Muslims were permitted to make any additions to their churches. The available archival sources demonstrate that the Greek Orthodox of Antioch were allowed to expand the Greek Orthodox Church building by adding a school, stores, and an office for the Patriarch of Antioch in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (BOA, DH. MKT. DN: 937/2; BOA, BEO. DN: 1605/120335; BOA, BEO. DN: 1632/122362; BOA, BEO. DN: 1710/128232; BOA, BEO. DN:1762/132130).

Another non-Muslim group, the Armenians living in the quarters of Antioch, made efforts to establish a new church in close proximity to the areas in which they inhabited. They informed the central administration that the closest Armenian church in Antakya located far away from them, so they wanted to convert a house into a church in 1847. There was no information whether that building had been an ancient church or monastery in the document. The Armenians were granted permission, but the Muslims in the city, especially the ones living in the quarter called Sofular in which the church would have built, objected to that decision as Muslims constituted the majority of the population of the quarter. The objection of Muslims came up with results as the central administration sent an order to the governor of Aleppo to request the Armenian community to build their church in a more appropriate area, which means in an area where inhabited mostly by non-Muslims (BOA, A:MKT. DN: 66/12).

Allowing non-Muslims, the second-class subjects or the infidels, to keep some of their house of worships, and, despite to difficulties, to repair and even erect a new one is a good instance of Ottoman toleration towards non-Muslims subjects. It should be emphasized that the status of Muslims and Jews in Christian Europe, and even non-Catholics in Catholic countries between the 14th and 19th centuries were in no way comparable to the status of non-Muslim in the Ottoman Empire, even they faced some restrictions in their social, religious and economic lives.

Since the Ottoman Empire was ruled by Islamic law, non-Muslims had to follow some certain rules for restoration of their houses of worship. It is clearly indicated that non-Muslims were not allowed to build a new church in the Ottoman Empire, but they could restore their old churches with the condition of not changing its structure, size, and dimension. However, the practices in available documents point out that the rules on church construction and restoration were applied differently in different regions. The main factors in the different application of these

rules in different regions were demography of the area in which the church would be build and the Ottoman pragmatism. Christians were allowed to build a new church in the areas, in which located in a far distance from the Muslims settlements and inhabited only by non-Muslims, while they were not allowed to build a new church in the areas where Muslims and non-Muslims lived together. That is why, there were numerous examples of building a new church in the Ottoman Balkan, while there was not an instance of building a new church in Antioch until the 1830s. In addition, pragmatic considerations of the central government caused the central government to overlook some of the restriction regarding church construction and restoration in the areas in which dominantly settled by non-Muslims between the 17th and 19th centuries.

In addition, major domestic and international developments played a crucial role in the issuance of a permit by the central government to build a new church or to repair a damaged one. The Russo-Ottoman War, the occupation of Syrian provinces of the Ottoman Empire by the governor of Egypt, the Tanzimat Reforms were the main development that affected church restoration and construction in Antioch in the 18th and 19th centuries. Even these developments eased to get a permission regarding the restoration of their churches or building a new one, the Christian population of Antioch had to deal with the reaction of the Muslim population as they shared same quarters with them. However, the reaction of Muslim population during the Ottoman Empire turned into neither an attack against nor persecution of non-Muslim residents of the city.

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