

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND THE COMOROS

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Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ile Komorlar Arasındaki İlişkiler Öz

Afrika'nın en küçük ülkelerinden biri olan Komorlar, Hint Okyanusu'nda yer almaktadır. Büyük Komor, Anjuvan, Moheli ve Mayot adalarından oluşan Komorlar Adalarının ilk üçü bağımsız bir devleti meydana getirirken diğeri ise Fransa'nın deniz aşırı sömürgeci konumundadır. Doğu Afrika'da bulunan bu ada devletinde yaşayan yerli halkın neredeyse tamamı Müslümanlardan oluşur. Uzun yıllar jeopolitik konumu sebebiyle Avrupalı devletlerin yakından ilgilendiği Komorlar'ın tarih boyunca ilişkiler kurduğu devletlerden biri de Osmanlı Devleti'dir. XIX. yüzyılda İngilizler ile Fransızların etki ve nüfuz mücadelesine sahne olan Komorlar, Osmanlı Devleti'ne müracaat eden Müslüman ulema ve ileri gelenler vasıtasıyla karşılıklı ilişkiler tesis etmeye çalışmıştır. Buna göre Osmanlı Devleti'nden açıkça yardım isteyen Komor halkı yabancı işgaline karşı bir dayanak noktası teşkil etmeye çalışacaktır. Buna karşılık Bâbîâlî ise Komor Müslümanlarını Batılı sömürgecilere karşı himaye etmek için çeşitli tedbirler alma yoluna gidecektir. Bu çalışmada Osmanlı Devleti ile Komor Adaları arasındaki çok yönlü ilişkiler arşiv belgeleri ile belirli kaynaklar üzerinden incelenmeye ve değerlendirilmeye çalışılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı Devleti, Doğu Afrika, Hint Okyanusu, Komor Adaları.

Relations Between the Ottoman Empire and the Comoros Abstract

Comoros, one of the smallest countries in Africa, is located in the Indian Ocean. Consisting of the Grande Comore, Anjouan, Mwaliand, Mayotte islands, the first three of the Comoros Islands form an independent state, while the other is an overseas colony of France. Almost all of the people in this island state in East Africa are Muslims. One of the states that the Comoros, which has been closely interested by European states for many years due to its geopolitical position, has established relations throughout history is the Ottoman Empire. The Comoros, which witnessed the struggle for influence between the British and the French in the 19th century, tried to establish mutual relations through Muslim scholars and notables who applied to the Ottoman Empire. Accordingly, Comoros, which specifically asked for help from the Ottoman Empire, will try to establish a main stay against foreign occupation for the community. On the other hand, the Sublime Porte would take various measures to protect the Comoros Muslims against the Western colonialists. In this study, the multifaceted relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Comoros Islands will be examined and evaluated through archival documents and specific sources.

KeyWords: Ottoman Empire, East Africa, Indian Ocean, Comoros Islands.

Introduction

Comoros, where is located in the Indian Ocean, north of Madagascar and at the entrance of the Mozambique Channel; consists of four islands named the Grande Comore (Ngazidja), Anjouan, (Ndzuwani), Mwali (Moheli) and Mayotte. At the present time, the first three of these islands constitute the independent Union of Comoros, while the other island is affiliated to France with a special status. The total area of these three islands is 1862 square kilometres. Officially colonised by the French in 1912, the Union of the Comoros gained its independence in 1974 (Ataöv, 1975: 551; Kavas, 2002: 153; Özey, 2016: 18-20).

The capital of the Union of the Comoros, one of the smallest states in Africa, is Moroni, which is also the centre of Grande Comore. The centre of the other islands is Fomboni in Mwali (Moheli) and Mutsamu in Ndzuwani. The people of Comoros largely speak Comorian, a member of the Bantu language family under the influence of Arabic and Swahili. French and Arabic are also recognised as the official languages of the country. Almost all of the population is Muslim and belongs to the Shafī'i sect (Kavas, 2002: 153-154).

The entry of Islam into Comoros coincides with the period of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan in the VIIth century. According to the most widespread of the different narrations, two Comorians travelled to Medina in that period and became acquainted with Islam, and when they returned to their homeland, they preached Islam to the people. Likewise, Arab sailors operating in the Indian Ocean from the VIIth century onwards spread Islam in these islands, which they frequently touched and called as “Qumr” or “Jazāir al-Kamer” (Moon Islands) (Kavas, 2002: 153-154; Özey, 2016: 19; Kavas, 2021: 311).

In the 18th century, a small Ismaili community living in Oman settled in the Comoros. Furthermore, when the Buwayhids, who had been in Iran from the Xth century onwards, captured Shīraz in 934, some of the Sunni Arabs here migrated to the Indian Ocean islands off the coast of East Africa (Kavas, 2002: 154; Kavas, 2021: 311-312). After the Boudies branch of the Shirazis seized power in Iran, a large part of the population migrated to Zanzibar, some to Kilva, and others to the Grande Comore (Muhammad, 2009: 23).

On the other hand, during this period, migrations from the Persian Gulf and South Arabia to the Comoros also increased the Muslim population in the islands. After the establishment of The Kilwa Sultanate by Ali bin Isā of Shīraz in 975, the Comoros

Islands would also come under its rule. It is also widely rumoured that one of the Fatimid dignitaries who went to Comoros from Egypt in the XIth century settled in Anjouan. Thus, a new generation called “makoas” emerged from the marriage of local women with Arabs and Iranians. Those who had not yet accepted Islam were called “kafir” (Kavas, 2002: 154; Kavas, 2021: 311-312).

In addition to Arabs, Bantus who came from the interior of the continent; Arabs from Oman, Hadhramaut and Shiraz; Indonesian Malays; Malagasy peoples of Madagascar and Indian Gujaratis live in Comoros. However, those of Arab origin, called “ustaarabu”, constitute the noble class. Therewithal, both the administrators and the people widely use Arabic and Swahili (Kavas, 2002: 154, Kavas, 2021: 310-311). There are four major tribes in the Comoros Islands. The most important of these can be listed as Pirusa, Fwambaya, Mdombozi and Masela. However, there are various disputes about the origins of these tribes. Accordingly, the origin of these communities is attributed to the Shi’razis, Iraqi Persians, Jordanian and Khā’il Arabs (Sekāf, 1994: 48). Undoubtedly, the interaction of different cultures in the region has created the Swahili civilisation in the region extending from Somalia to Kenya, Tanzania to Mozambique, Madagascar to Comoros Islands in East Africa, which is an important part of the Islamic world (Özköse, 2021: 171). Although between 1500 and 1505 the Portuguese landed on the island of Ngazidja (Great Comoros), which was under the rule of the Kilwa Sultanate for many years, they could not hold on against the migrations coming from Shiraz. Between 1530 and 1550, the people of Shīraz, who established a new administration in the Comoros, named the common ruler of all the islands as “Sultan Tībe” (Kavas, 2002: 154-155, Kavas, 2021: 312). For instance, the rulers of Comoros have various nicknames such as Mafe, Bedja and Mebedja. After the spread of Islam, names such as Tybe (Tībe), Sheikh, and Mugni-mkuu began to be widely used (Sekāf, 1994: 48). In this sense, it should be noted that in 1557, some 20 local sultanates were established in the other three islands, 12 of which were in Ngazidja. However, their number decreased to 15 as of 1620. In Comoros, where the French also wanted to establish sovereignty from the 18th century onwards, neighbourhood sultanates such as Bamboa, Itsandra, Bûde, Havâil and Hamammed came to the fore politically. Just like the French, the British also wanted to dominate the Comoros and Captain Nathaniel North occupied a part of Ngazidja in 1701. (Kavas, 2002: 154-155, Kavas, 2021:312).

Relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Comoros

According to Turkish and Arabic records, there are four large islands that make up the Comoros Islands: Grande Comore (Ngazija/Ngazidja), Anjouan (Ndzuwani/

Henzevan/Hinzuan/Johanna), Mwali (Mwali/Mohella), Mayotte (Şakir, 1988: 12-24; Karpat, 2017: 87-88). In addition, as far as we can determine, the first person to mention Comoros in the Ottoman Empire was the famous cartographer and navigator Muhyiddin bin Hacı Mehmed, i.e. Pîrî Reis (Bostan, 2007: 283-285), who lived in the 16th century (Özen, 2006: 124; Sevrans, 2019: 52). Accordingly, Kitâb-ı Bahriye provides various information about the location of Comoros, their relations with the Portuguese, the unique lifestyles of the locals and Muslims, their administrative and political structures, slave trade and vegetation cover (Kavas, 2007: 13-14; Kavas, 2019: 259, Kavas, 2021: 311).

In the words of Pîrî Reis, Madagascar Island, which the locals called “Tinku” and the Portuguese called San Lorenzo (Saint Laurent), was named “Grande Comore” by the first Arab geographers. Later, with the change of the name of this place, sailors travelling in the Indian Ocean gave the name of Grande Comore to the largest of the archipelagos in the north. In fact, as Pîrî Reis stated, the Comoros Islands, which consisted of four islands, were called Mû’alî (Mwali), Mâğûtâ (Mayotte), Zuvânî (Anjouan) and Kazîce (Ngazidja) by the natives (Kavas, 2017: 49; Kavas, 2021: 363-365).

As mentioned above, East Africa, which was divided into colonies between the British, French and Germans in the 19th century, covers an extremely large region extending from the Gulf of Aden to Sudan, from the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea coast and the Zambezi. Accordingly, in addition to those included within the borders of the African continent, there are various island countries in the Indian Ocean. These are Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles. Likewise, the islands of Mayotte, which is an extension of Reunion and Comoros, are also overseas colonies of the French (Özey, 2016: 1; Özköse, 2021: 163).

It would be appropriate to state that close relations have been established between the Comoros Islands, almost all of which are Muslims, and the Ottoman Empire, especially in recent periods (Gençoğlu, 2019: 948).

Relations between the Ottoman Empire and Comoros began in the colonization process of the islands in question. In the 19th century, the kingdoms of Sakalava and Merina in Madagascar, which claimed rights over the Comoros Islands, asked for help from the French (Özey, 2016). Thereupon, the French, who occupied Mayotte Island in 1841, did not give the Muslim people the opportunity to practice their religion. They even mistreated the Muslims on the island and destroyed the mosques in Mayotte (Kavas, 2019: 206). From 1843 onwards, the French began to look for opportunities to colonise the Grande Comore (Ngazija), Anjouan and Moheli islands. In 1848, the British opened a consulate in Anjouan (Henzevan) Island and appointed

Joseph Napier as its head. Undoubtedly, it should be emphasised that during this period, a fight between the British and the French for the share of the Comoros began. Sultan Abdullah of Anjouan, who ascended the throne in 1855, established close relations with the British consul William Sunley. In addition, Sunley, who started plantation agriculture and sugar production, succeeded in obtaining various concessions from Sultan Abdullah (Karpas, 2017: 88).

Sultan Abdullah of Anjouan organised a special army by procuring labour from Mozambique in line with the demands of the British. He also armed his slaves and settled in a private mansion outside the capital Mutsamu. This situation led to the formation of a new social order in Henzevan based on capital and wage labour. Sultan Abdullah, who initially governed his country with the help of the Henzawan High Council, attempted to eliminate the Muslim ulema under the pressure of the British in the following period (Karpas, 2017: 88).

Sunley, who differed with the ulema in Henzevan, was dismissed by the London administration, but he was patronised by Sultan Abdullah. The ulema and notables of the city, who were disturbed by this situation, applied to Istanbul for the restoration of the old social order. Hence, clergymen and notables of the society, most of whom were of Arab origins, such as Sayyid Abdurrahman ibni Sultan Ulvi, Sayyid Mekuibni Sultan Ahmad, Muhammad ibni Kadi'l-Muslimin, Ali ibni Sheikh Ahmad, Sayyid ibni Sheikh Ali, Sayyid Abu Bakr bin Abdi Rab, Fazil ibni Ali Kadi'l-Muslimin and Imam Abu Bakr bin Ali sent a letter addressed to Sultan Abdulaziz. Calling Sultan Abdulaziz "the successor of the Prophet and the protector of Mecca and Medina, the holder of the supreme caliphate and the head and leader of the Muslim Ummah", the prominent Muslim leaders of the island's population stated that the Christians were oppressing them and trying to prevent them from following the Sharia. Thus, they would ask the Caliph Sultan Abdülaziz to patronise the Muslim subjects in the Comoros and save them from extinction (Karpas, 2017: 88-89). In line with the contact established with the ulema of Henzevan from the 1860s onwards, Sayyid Muhammad bin Sultan and his brother Sayyid Abdullah bin Sultan, who belonged to the ruling family of Comoros, visited the Ottoman Sultan Sultan Abdulaziz, whom they regarded as "the protector of Islam and the sultan of Muslims", and asked him for help (Kavas, 2019: 260-261). As we have already pointed out, since Sultan Abdullah of Anjouan had submitted to the British since 1862, Sayyid Muhammad and Sayyid Abdullah, who were assigned to convey the demands of the Muslim people to Istanbul, first travelled to London. Seyyid Muhammad and Seyyid Abdullah, who aimed to complain to the British consul Sunley to his own state, also met with the Ottoman Ambassador to London, Kostaki Musurus Pasha of Greek origin (Kuneralp, 1970: 421-435). In addition, their expenses would be covered by the Ottoman

Empire during their stay. Seyyid Muhammad and Seyyid Abdullah, who would later go to Istanbul and directly ask for help from the sultan, received great attention from Sultan Abdülaziz (BOA, No: 29/1254; Kavas, 2006: 13, 52; Gençoğlu, 2018: 169; Kavas, 2021: 312-313).

On the other hand, Sayyid Abubakar Efendi, a muderris sent to Cape Town in 1863 by Sultan Abdülaziz to provide religious education to the people (Baktır and Eraslan, 1994: 276-277), also mentioned Comoros while talking about Madagascar Island. "There are a few islands called Comoros to the north. There are still Muslim inhabitants in this place, but the non-Muslim savage tribes are in sympathy with the Religion of Islam because they are morally related and similar to the people of Islam." Ebubekir Efendi states that there are Muslims living in the Comoros and draws attention to the fact that other tribes are inclined towards Islam (Münif, 1281: 115; Gençoğlu, 2018: 169).

On 3 September 1863, according to the London Ambassador Musurus Pasha's report to Istanbul, Sayyid Muhammad and Sayyid Abdullah, two of the Comorian princes currently there, gave important information about their homeland. Accordingly, Anjouan Island, which had been captured by the French in 1843, had been under Muslim control for 70 years. According to the oral statements, Sultan Abdullah, who took over the administration of the island with the support of the British, was the older brother of Sayyid Muhammad and Sayyid Abdullah (Münif, 1281: 104). However, he did not abide by the agreement he made with his brothers and acted against the Sharia and did not obey the laws to be applied for the protection of the country. He also prevented the Muslim population of approximately 200,000 people from fulfilling their worship. In addition, Sayyid Muhammad and Sayyid Abdullah, who mentioned that the British increased their influence in the Comoros, stated that although the ships belonging to Muslims were destroyed on Moris Island, they were compensated. Sayyid Muhammad and Sayyid Abdullah, who were apparently also aware of Sayyid Abubakar Efendi, who was sent here to teach the Muslim people living in the Cape of Good Hope about religious matters, pointed out that one of the ulema should be sent here for the Ottoman Empire to penetrate the Comoros. Sayyid Muhammad and Sayyid Abdullah stated that they wanted to come to Istanbul and convey this situation to Sultan Abdülaziz personally, and since they knew Arabic and English, their employment on behalf of the Ottoman Empire was deemed appropriate by Musurus Pasha and notified the Bâbîâlî.

It was decided that the Ottoman Empire should cover the 15-20 lira expenses of the princes, who were understood to be requesting a letter of advice from Sultan Abdülaziz to take them to Comoros, as well as the provision of accommodation in both

London and Istanbul. (BOA, No: 574/61).

According to the information given by Münif Mehmed Pasha (Uçman, 2003: 270-271; Doğan, 2006: 9-12), Sayyid Muhammed and Sayyid Abdullah, who appealed to Sultan Abdülaziz to warn their sovereign not to sell these islands to Europeans, had Abyssinian skin and resembled their ancestors, the Arabs. They were also not fat and of medium height. Colonel Sayyid Muhammad, who was a member of the Assembly in Comoros, was probably 35 years old, and Sayyid Abdullah, who was said to speak French, was between 25-30 years old and had been educated in a school in Anjouan that provided education according to new methods (Münif, 1281: 104-105). On 6 August 1864, according to İsmail Bey's notification to the Bâb-ı Asafî Mektubî Kalemî, Seyyid Muhammed and Seyyid Abdullah, who belonged to the clan ruled by the Muslims in the Comoros Islands, were good and well-mannered people and it was pointed out that they should be treated with respect and love (BOA, No: 749/9). Similarly, since Sayyid Muhammad and Sayyid Abdullah, the rulers of Comoros, who were decided to be sent to Basra and were understood to return to their country from there, were respected guests, they were instructed to be provided with convenience in every port they would pass through (BOA, No: 524/65, BOA, No: 590/85, BOA, No: 592/71). As stated by Dr. Mehmet Korkmaz, it was decided to send Seyyid Muhammad bin Sultan and Seyyid Abdullah bin Sultan, the sons of the ruler of the Comoros Islands, who were hosted in Istanbul, to their homeland with the Bursa and İzmir corvettes to be shipped to Basra (Korkmaz, 2019: 93). One of the duties of Bursa Corvette Cavalryman Kaymakam Ahmed Bey was to deliver a letter containing some recommendations to Sultan Abdullah of Anjouan upon their arrival in Comoros and to warn him on behalf of Caliph Sultan Abdülaziz in order to prevent him from persecuting his people by following the suggestions of European states (Eraslan, 1992: 400; Kavas, 2007: 18, Kavas, 2019: 262).

Since the Suez Canal had not yet been opened at the time in question, the corvettes of Bursa and İzmir were to sail to the Cape of Good Hope after visiting Spain and Brazil and finally reach Basra. Similarly, according to the instructions given by the Bâbîâlî, it was decided to visit Arab and African ports along the route. However, since the Comorian princes Sayyid Muhammed bin Sultan and Sayyid Abdullah bin Sultan were deemed inconvenient to return to their homeland on the corvettes Bursa and İzmir, it was decided to send them by another means (Korkmaz, 2019: 93). In the words of former Ambassador Prof. Dr. Ahmet Kavas, Sayyid Muhammad and Sayyid Abdullah were surprised that the Ottoman authorities had information about their homeland during their stay in Istanbul. This is a clear indication that the information in Pîrî Reis' Kitâb-ı Bahriye was also taken into consideration by the Bâbîâlî (Kavas, 2007: 18). As a matter of fact, the requests for help from the Muslims of Comoros

in a distant geography resonated with the state in Istanbul. In this way, the Ottoman Empire would try to take the necessary measures to protect the people who were subjected to ill-treatment (Kavas, 2006: 13, 52; Gençoğlu, 2018: 169).

However, Sayyid Ali, the grandson of Sultan Ahmed, who succeeded Sultan Ahmed in the Grande Comore (Kamer) Island in 1875, had to come to an agreement with the French and accept their patronage. In addition, Sayyid Emir Muhammad bin Abdullah, the legitimate heir of the Comoros Islands, who is known to have arrived in Istanbul as of 2 August 1877, reported that the government to which he was entitled had been usurped by his uncle Selim and his son Abdullah II and requested help from the Bâbiâlî. Sayyid Emir Muhammad bin Abdullah, who declared his loyalty to the Ottoman Empire and stated that he had been removed from the throne he was heir to by deceit, would ask for the patronage of Sultan Abdulhamid II. Accordingly, Sayyid Emir Muhammad bin Abdullah, who underlined that it would be very important to take the Comoros, where approximately 200,000 Muslims live, under the administration of Sultan Abdulhamid II, stated that his uncle Selim and his son Sultan Abdullah II persecuted the people and entered into agreements with French by accepting French patronage. Sayyid Emir Muhammad bin Abdullah, who stated that poverty had become widespread among the people in the face of these persecutions that had been going on for 30 years and that he himself had been threatened with death and driven away from his homeland, pointed out that if Sultan Abdulhamid II sent two frigates of the navy to Comoros, this place could be made one of the provinces of the Ottoman Empire and he himself could be appointed as the administrator (BOA, No: 516/83, BOA, No: 618/18).

General Gallieni, who had previously fought against the Muslim insurgents in Madagascar, would occupy Grande Comore and change the name of the island to San Lorenzo, establishing sovereignty here in exactly 10 years. However, the statements in a document dated 30 May 1883 refer to the Muslims of Saklawa in Madagascar, who were trying to unite with the Muslims of Comoros. According to the news published in *De Bats* and *Reform* newspapers, the Muslims in Comoros and Madagascar were determined to resist the French with the material and moral support of the Ottoman Empire. According to the information delivered to the Ottoman State's Foreign Ministry on 12 August 1886, the French government informed the British government on 26 July 1886 that it had taken the islands of Grande Comore, Anjouan and Moheli under its complete protection (BOA, No: 318/103, BOA, No: 90/131, BOA, No: 111/66, BOA, No: 62/14, BOA, No: 62/16, BOA, No: 32/98). Therefore, in 1886, the French, through Catholic missionaries, eliminated Sultan Abdullah III and established sovereignty on Anjouan Island. Thus, after successive occupations, the entire Comoros Islands, including Grande Comore, Mayotte and Anjouan, came

under French colonisation.

Sultan Abdulhamid II, the Yesruti Order and the Comoros

During this period, the Yesrutîya branch of the Shâzelîye order, which fought against both European states and local collaborators in the Comoros, also had important ties with the Ottoman Empire (Martin, 1988: 197; Karpat, 2017: 439). In fact, the founder of the Yesrutî branch, Sheikh Ali Nureddin of Tunisia (Kavas, 2013: 499-500), was a student of Sheikh Muhammad bin Hamza Zafir al-Madanî, one of the most important advisors of Sultan Abdülhamid II (Sırma, 2013: 54, 60, 69; Özdemir, 2017: 21, 30, 41, 59; Kaya, 2021: 71-91) (Karpat, 2017: 439). The Yesrutîya branch of Shâzelîism has spread from Syria and Palestine to Lebanon, Jordan, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique and Comoros (Kavas, 2009: 17, 32, Kavas, 2013: 500; Yaşar, 2020: I, 8, 55, 107-108, 100, 114). In Comoros, where half of the Muslims in the country belong to a sect, the names that pioneered the spread of Yesrutism are Abdullah Dervish and Sheikh Saïd Muhammad Ma'rûf (Kavas, 2009: 31-32, 35).

Comorian Ebuleys Sheikh Abdullah Derviş, who belonged to a noble family, completed his first religious education in Zengibar, then travelled to Akkâ and stayed here for a while. He then visited the Kaaba and became a pilgrim, and during his years in Palestine, he became a follower of Shaykh Ali Nureddin and joined Yesrutism. After returning to Comoros, Sheikh Derviş assumed the caliphate of Sheikh Nureddin and carried out religious activities in Itsandra (Kavas, 2009: 33; Yaşar, 2020: 104-105).

Sheikh Ma'rûf, who was born in 1852 or 1853 in Grande Comore, was originally from Yemen. Sheikh Saïd Muhammad Ma'rûf, whose family travelled from Hadramawt to Comoros, took Qur'anic lessons in Comoros and then went to Zangibar to complete his education. Although he was initiated into the Qâdiriyya sect through Shaykh Üveys whom he met here, he would join the Yesrutî sect when he returned to the Comoros. Sheikh Ma'rûf, who followed Ali Itibarî's lessons for a while, visited Kaaba with his family and performed the pilgrimage. Sheikh Ma'rûf, who met Abdullah Dervish from Comoros on his return from the pilgrimage, was influenced by his Sufi indoctrination and started to preach Yesrutism. Although he first belonged to the Alawiya branch of the Shâzelîya, he opened a Yesrutî zawiyah in Moroni and started to preach. Sheikh Ma'rûf, who also gathered a large number of followers in Comoros, later settled in Anjouan Island (Martin, 1998: 197, 199-201; Vikør, 2000: 455-456; Kavas, 2009: 32-33; Yaşar, 2020: 105).

Although he was held in high esteem in Anjouan, he returned to Moroni with his entourage when he was criticised and insulted by the city's famous Shafi'i qadi, Sheikh Fazil bin Ali Mbangva, at a Friday greeting in the presence of Sultan Ali bin Umar

(Martin, 1998: 200; Kavas, 2009: 33-34). Sheikh Ma'rûf, who blamed Sultan Ali for collaborating with the French and openly opposed the sale of fertile lands on the island to foreigners, soon began not to mention the monarch's name in the sermons (Martin, 1998: 200; Karpát, 2017: 439). Thereupon, Sultan Ali, who collaborated with the French and Germans, ordered the elimination of Sheikh Ma'rûf (Martin, 1998: 200-201). Thereupon, Sultan Ali's men will follow and capture Sheikh Ma'rûf and throw him into the sea to die. Sheikh Ma'rûf was saved by the chance of boarding an Indian ferry passing by and took refuge in Nosy Be Island of Madagascar. He stayed here for a while, and travelled first to Mayotte Island and then to the Grande Comore Island. Sheikh Ma'rûf, who later settled in Zengibar, spread Yesrutism in the islands of Pemba and Mafia (Kavas, 2009: 33-34). Sheikh Muhammad bin Ahmed bin Abubakir al-Hunzuvânî, also from Comoros, spread Shâzelism in Tanzania and Kile Island (Martin, 1998: 200; Karpát, 2017: 439; Kavas, 2009: 34).

After a while, the French allowed Shaykh Ma'rûf to return to Moroni. When he returned to his homeland, he opened the Mirereni Zawiyah here and carried out religious activities until he died in 1905 (Martin, 1998: 201; Vikør, 2000: 455; Kavas, 2009: 34-35). As we have mentioned before, after these activities were carried out in Comoros, 50% of the Muslim population adopted Shâzeli/Yashrutî, 40% Kâdirî, and 10% Rifâiye and Aleviye. (Kavas, 2009: 34-35; Yaşar, 2020: 105-106) In the end, the Comorian Muslims, who continued to resist the French for many years, established sovereignty through some 20 local sultanates. As we mentioned before, they also established various political, commercial and diplomatic relations with the Portuguese, French, British and Germans in addition to the Ottoman Empire. However, in 1909, as a result of Leon Humbolt's pressures, all local leaders were eliminated (Özey, 2016: 20). Thus, by 1912, the Comorian people were completely colonised. Later, The French, who connected the Comoros Islands to Madagascar, left the country administratively and economically backward, leading to serious impoverishment of the people (Ataöy, 1975: 551; Kavas, 2021: 315).

Some Works Published in the Ottoman Empire on the Comoros Islands

It would be appropriate to mention that various books and articles were also published about the Comoros, of which the Ottoman Empire had significant information and important relations. In this sense, Münif Mehmet Pasha, who published an article titled "Comoros Islands" in Mecmûa-i Fünûn in August 1864, draws attention to the fact that the people speak Arabic, Persian and Swahili. Münif Mehmed Pasha, who also gives remarkable information about the history, geography and social order of the Comoros, states that the country is divided into 22 administrative units in total and governed by different governors. Accordingly, there were 16 sanjaks

in Grande Comore, 4 in Henzevan and 2 in Moheli (Münif, 1281: 104-118). At the same time, the flag of the Comoros has a crescent star, similar to the Turkish flag. Münif Mehmed Pasha, who stated that the people were engaged in maritime and trade, stated that there were about 9,000 soldiers in the army. In addition, the vast majority of the organised and trained Comorian army consisted of Negro slaves. Also, there were 16 small warships in the navy, each of which had 12 cannons and 60-70 sailors. American and German officers served in the Comorian army. In fact, a man named Hacı Halil Bey from the Ottoman Empire also served as an officer in the Comorian army. Besides having been here for 15 years, he had been naturalised as a citizen and was known and loved by the people (Münif, 1281: 104-118). Similarly, Avanzâde Mehmed Süleyman Bey's article titled "Komor Adaları ve Ahali-i Mahalliyesi" (Comoros Islands and its Local People) dated 13 May 1909 and published in the journal Maarif provided significant information about the British and French occupation of the Comoros (Avanzâde, 1909: 274-275). Another work titled "Afrika'da Âlem-i İslâm Külliyyatından: Komor Adaları" (From the Collection of Islamic World in Africa: Comoros) written in 1923 by officer, writer, diplomat and philatelist İsmail Hakkı Tevfik (Okday) Bey, son of Ahmet Tevfik Pasha, one of the last grand viziers of the Ottoman Empire, is also a work that we should mention related to the subject. According to information mentioned by Okday the people of the Comoros Islands, which consist of the islands of Nagazidya, Yuhana, Mohelu and Mayut, are Muslims. Giving information about the origin, customs, social structure, educational status and population of the people, Okday states that Islam entered Comoros in the VIII century. From the IXth century onwards, the Islamisation process of the islands accelerated with the migration of İsmâ'îlîs belonging to Shi'ism. He also states that a prince belonging to the Fatimids travelled to Comoros in the 19th century and became the ruler. In general, Islam was accepted in the XIVth century thanks to an unknown Arab. However, it should be emphasised that the dates and the ways in which each island accepted Islam differed from each other. For instance, after the conquest of Nagazidya Island by the Sultanate of Kilwa in the 16th century, the locals accepted Islam. Again, the islands of Mayut and Mohelu would establish important relations with Muslims in the following periods (Tevfik, 1339: 1-62). The entry of Islam into the Comoros was mostly thanks to the merchants and sailors who settled or travelled to the islands. Accordingly, Muslim Arabs, Persians and Indians enabled the Comorian people to accept Islam through the commercial and marriage ties they established. In fact, during this period, in addition to the increase in the population, the marriages with the daughters of the ruling families made Arabs and Iranians especially influential in the administration of the country. However, it is not possible to talk about a single ruler in Comoros. Because different local sultans administered the administration in each island. Likewise, these local administrators struggle with each other to be the absolute ruler of the Comoros, whom they call

“Sultan Tiba” (Çiftçi, 2010). As the European states such as England, France and Germany started to expand their spheres of influence in the Comoros from the XIXth century onwards, the local sultans were directly influenced. Although the local people showed all their hospitality towards the Westerners, they would face the danger of being displaced from their lands after a while. Likewise, the European states, which supported the rulers they favoured in line with their own interests, exerted serious pressure on the administrators, dismissed them from office and even sent them into exile in countries such as Djibouti and Tanzania (Çiftçi, 2010). On the other hand, despite Britain and Germany, France established sovereignty in Comoros through missionaries. They will also try to spread Christianity by opening various missionary schools on the islands and starting education. Especially the French, who settled in Mohelu Island, tried to Christianise the people as well as the administrators. Therefore, we can state that the Comoros, who were initially subjected to the persecution of Madagascar pirates and slave traders, were later crushed under the armed power of Europeans. So much so that, although certain rebellion movements were seen among the Comoros during this period, they were colonised and turned into an object of slave trade because they could not resist heavy weapons and warships (Çiftçi, 2010).

Conclusion

The spread of Islam in Comoros, the archipelago country of East Africa, dates back to ancient times. In this sense, Comoros, which incorporates many cultures such as Arab, Persian, Swahili and Indian, is also home to a rich civilisation. Many different Muslim dynasties successfully ruled in Comoros, where many local sultanates were established until the modern period. In addition to the neighbouring Muslim countries, they also established political, economic and commercial relations with Portugal, France, Britain and Germany.

Muslims were persecuted in Comoros, which became the target of European states that wanted to colonise the continent from the 19th century onwards. Thereupon, the Islamic ulema, who requested help from the Ottoman Empire, pioneered the beginning of official mutual relations. The Ottoman Empire, which tried to protect the Muslims of Comoros, especially against the colonial activities of the French and the British, endeavoured to establish a presence in the Indian Ocean against the imperialist states. In this sense, it is possible to state that the mutual relations that gained great momentum during the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz and Sultan Abdülhamid II formed the basis of the friendship that continues even today.

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