

THE EVALUATION OF SOME CLAIMS OF WESTERN
TRAVELERS AND RESEARCHERS ABOUT
THE CRYPTO-CHRISTIANS IN TRABZON (TREBIZOND)
AND ITS VICINITY IN THE XIX. CENTURY

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Introduction

The Black Sea region has been an important place for many nations to establish domination throughout the history due to its geo-strategic location. It is known that the Black Sea region was inhabited by several tribes even before the historic periods.¹ The oldest tribe known to have settled in the region in the mid of the XVI. century is Gashkas.² The following tribe Cimmerians around 695 B.C captured the area between Black Sea Ereğli (Pontos Heraclia) and Trabzon (Trebizond). However, they could not resist against the İskit pressure and had to move to Crimea and its neighbourhood.³⁴ In addition, according to the Georgian sources recorded in IV. B.C. the Kipchaks on the banks of Çoruh (Hapsoros) are claimed to have emigrated to the region along with the Scythians. It is claimed that the tribes who had settled in the eastern Black Sea and had a kinship with the Turks are Cimmerians and Scythians. Furthermore, it is stressed that although there have been different opinions regarding the origins of these tribes, there is strong evidence that they are included in the Turkish cultural circle.⁵

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¹ İ. Kılıç Kökten, "Anadolu'da Prehistorik Yerleşme Yerlerinin Dağılışı Üzerine Bir Araştırma", *AÜDTCF*, X/3-4, 1952, pp. 189-203.

² Ekrem Akurgal, *Anadolu Kültür Tarihi*, Tübitak Yayınları, Ankara 1998, pp. 73-96. They emerged in the area of the north Anatolia which the Hittites called "Upper Land" and had the reputation that they had carried out some campaigns against the lands of the Hittite Empire for nearly three centuries see. Mahmut Pehlivan, *Kaşkaların Eski Anadolu Tarihindeki Yeri ve Önemi*, Atatürk Üniversitesi Yayınları, Erzurum 1991, pp. 8-12.

³ M. Taner Tarhan, "Eski Anadolu Tarihinde Kimmerler", *Eski Eserler ve Müzeler Genel Müdürlüğü I. Araştırma Sonuçları Toplantısı (İstanbul 23-26 Mayıs 1983)*, Ankara 1984, pp. 111-116.

⁴ Zeki Velidi Togan, *Umumi Türk Tarihine Giriş I*, Enderun Kitabevi, İstanbul 1981, p. 35.

⁵ İbrahim Tellioglu, *Osmanlı Hâkimiyetine Kadar Doğu Karadeniz'de Türkler*, Serander Yayınları, Trabzon

From VII. century B. C. onward, with the establishment of the Greek colonies on the southern coast of Black Sea, such as Sinop (Sinope), Samsun (Amisos), Ordu (Kotyora) Giresun (Keresoun) and Trabzon (Trebizond) a new period which deeply affected the history of eastern Black Sea started.⁶ However, at the beginning of VI. B. C. they had fallen under the reign of the Persians, who conquered the eastern part of the region and then had fallen under the domination of the Macedonians in 334 B. C. Yet, the Persian dynasty, Mithridates established the “Pontos State” in 298 B.C in the region. As a result, the ties of the Black Sea with the ancient Greek world started to weaken; because after they declared their independence they refused to admit being the representative of Greece. But Mithridates lost the struggle because of the expansion policy of the Roman Empire and the region fell under domination of the Roman Empire and Trabzon became an important military base for the Roman Empire. During the reign of the Byzantine Empire, the eastern Black Sea started to develop and change both politically and culturally. Due to the administrative importance of the region a new Thema called *Chaldea*, whose center was Trabzon, was founded. Moreover, unlike the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire closely followed the expansionist policies of the Persians in the region and as a result of taking some necessary measures and making some necessary interventions, the Byzantine Empire could have managed to preserve its existence in the region.⁷

After the Byzantine Empire established its domination over the Persians, it started to carry out some religious and socio-cultural activities in the region. For example, in the VI. century it made the Christianity the official religion and made the Greek the official language for worship. As a result of this, some radical changes occurred in the history of the ethnic structure of the region.⁸ In that

2007, p. 16. For instance, Kafesoğlu states that the main body of Scythes are included in the Persian tribes and that the Andronovo culture had spread to the Don River via this tribe and the people living in this region had the kinship with the Turks, as a result, it is possible to say that there is a kinship between the Turks and Scythes, see. İbrahim Kafesoğlu, *Türk Milli Kültürü*, Ötüken Neşriyat, İstanbul 1988, p. 205. Even Grousset, who defends that Scythians descend from Persians, admits that this tribe has many things in common in terms of their language and culture see. Rene Grousset, *Bozkır İmparatorluğu*, çev. M. R. Uzmen, İstanbul 1980, p. 24-26. In relation to this, in the studies of Turkish culture, the accounts of Turkish mythology and the archeological findings obtained from the Turkistan, it is clearly seen that Scythians have a kinship with the Turks see. Bahaeddin Ögel, *Türk Mitolojisi I*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 1993, p. 207; Bahaeddin Ögel, *İslamiyetten Önce Türk Kültür Tarihi*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 1988, pp. 33-35, 54-55, 216.

⁶ Tellioglu, *Doğu Karadeniz’de Türkler*, p. 45.

⁷ Prokopius, *History of The Wars*, II, published by H. B. Dewing, S. Heinemann, London 1979, pp. 531-541.

⁸ Mehmet Bilgin, *Doğu Karadeniz: Tarih, Kültür, İnsan*, Ötüken Yayınları, Ankara 2010, p. 56.

way, it is claimed by some Turkish researchers that some non-Greek⁹ and Turkish groups¹⁰ were also amalgated in the pot of the Orthodox Christianity by losing their identities.¹¹ Telliöđlu asserts that Greeks also started to lose some of the characteristics of their ethnicity through the interaction with these indigenous tribes. As a result, they became the part of the Orthodox community.¹² To him, unlike the Greek ethnicity and culture a new group called *Rum (Romanio)*¹³ apperaed in the region. Thus, he stresses that the term *Rum (Romanio)* should not be understood to refer to the Greek ethnicity but should be used politically for someone who is the subject of the Roman Empire and geographically for the land of the Romans.¹⁴ Paralel to this, Speros Vryonis also thinks that the interpretation of what are apparently geographical terms as denoting ethnic groups has been more harmful than helpful.¹⁵

⁹ Bilgin points to the fact that when the sources giving detailed information regarding the region in the ancient ages are critically read, regarding the Scythians and Cimmerians, who came from the north of the Black sea, and some indigenous tribes of the Anatolia. In his own view, it is clearly seen that the coasts of the Black Sea had been inhabited by the tribes such as nomadic horsemen before the Greek colonization, see. Bilgin, *Dođu Karadeniz*, p. 210. More information regarding these indigenous tribes living in the region before the Greek settlement can be found in some books such as Alexandre Baschmakoff, *La Synthese Des Periples Pontiques*, Geuthner, Paris 1948, pp. 67-69; Strabon, *Cođrafya*, Kitap XII, Parts I-II-III, çev. A. Pekman, İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, İstanbul.1969, p. 1, 23, 33; Ksenophon, *Anabasis*, çev. T. Gökçöl, Sosyal Yayınları, İstanbul 1984, pp. 133,139, 141,144, 148-149, 153, 156, 160-161.

¹⁰ For instance, when the Byzantine Empire put an end to the power of the Bulgarians, a number of these Bulgarians had been settled in the vicinity of Trebizond and around the land on Hapsaros (Çoruh). see. Mükrimin Halil Yinanç, *Türkiye Tarihi Selçuklular Tarihi*, I, İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayınları İstanbul 1944, p. 167. However, Vryonis criticises Yinanç on the ground that Yinanç has lumped together a few events spanning six centuries and even if the cases of supposedly “Turkish” settlement were accurate, they would have made an important change in the etnography of Anatolia. To Vryonis, for examply, the settlement of the Bulgars in the Euphrates region by Justin were not of a considerable size and they were no doubt soon assimilated. Furthermore, Vryonis claims that contrary to Yinanç’s assertion, Avars were settled in the eastern Anatolia by Justin II in 577 on the authority of Muralt, who mentions no Avar settlement on the eastern borders. As for the Bulgars settled in Anatolia by Constantine V in the eighth century, these Turkish groups were fast on their way to becoming Slavs. Furthermore, he asserts that all evidence points to their rapid Hellenization in Anatolia see. Speros Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh Through the Fifteenth Century*, University of California Press, Los Angeles 1971, p. 180.

¹¹ İbrahim Telliöđlu, “Dođu Karadeniz Bölgesinin Bugünkü Yapısına Etki Eden Göçler”, *Karadeniz Araştırmaları*, sy. 5, 2005, p. 3.

¹² Telliöđlu, “Dođu Karadeniz Bölgesinin...”, p. 3.

¹³ Baykara also stresses that the term “Rum” refers to the one used by Arabs for the East Rome/ Byzantine and when the Turks conquered Anatolia, they also named it as the land of of “Rum” and named the people living there as “Rum”. Thus this term refers to the geograpgy rather than referring to the Greek ethnicity see. Tuncer Baykara, *Anadolu’nun Tarihi Cođrafyasına Giriş*, I, Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, Ankara 1988, p. 23

¹⁴ Telliöđlu, *Trabzon Rum Devleti*, p. 6.

¹⁵ Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, p. 45.

Trabzon, located on north eastern part of Anatolia in the Black Sea region has preserved its importance throughout the history; because the town is nearly the only port in the region and its location enables it to reach the inner parts of Anatolia and even over via eastern Anatolia to reach southern Caucasia and Persia.¹⁶ Moreover, the town continued to be a gate between the east and the west from the year 1258 when the international travels were not safe in the Mediterranean to the time when the Black Sea became the *the Lake of the Ottoman*. For instance, the French traveler Rubriquis (1240), English Consul Langley (1292), the Spanish traveler Clavijo (1404) and the priests travelling from India to China and Sumatra all used Trabzon to reach their destinations.¹⁷

It seems that the interest shown towards the region increased not only due to romantic and cultural interest of the European Renaissance and the Enlightenment to the antiquarian period but also due to a different preoccupation interwoven with the political and economic interests of the Western powers such as England to decide whether to preserve the unity of the Ottoman Empire against the expansion of Russia or not in the XIX. century. Therefore, the ones who visited the region were the merchants, consuls, travelers, missionaries, botanists, historians and art historians.¹⁸ In addition, the increasing interest in Trabzon is related to a number developments in the XIX. century, such as the interest in the Persian trade, the opening of the Black Sea to the trade of international trade, the emergence of the steam ships which made the travels much safer, the trade treaty signed with the European powers in 1838, which abolished the custom walls, etc., all of which developments made the town an important spot for the Persian trade in the first two-third of the XIX. century.¹⁹

The purpose of this study is to deal with and analyze some claims of some Western travelers and researchers about the existence of the Crypto-Christians in Trabzon (Trebizond) and its vicinity in the XIX. century. Thus, it is aimed to make some contributions to the political and socio-cultural history of the region. Before discussing the claims made about the Crypto-Christians in Trabzon and its vicinity in the XIX. century, some general information will be given regarding the

¹⁶ Şehabettin Tekindağ, "Trabzon", *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, c. 12/1, MEB Yayınları, İstanbul 1979, p. 456.

¹⁷ Kudret Emiroğlu, "Dünyadan Bakınca Trabzon", *Bir Tutkudur Trabzon*, yay. İ. Günday Kayaoğlu, Ömer Cıravoğlu, Cüneyt Akalın, YKY, İstanbul 1997, p. 235.

¹⁸ Emiroğlu, "Dünyadan Bakınca Trabzon", p. 237.

¹⁹ Stefanos Yerasimos, "XIX. Yüzyılda Trabzon Rum Cemaati", çev. İsmet Akça- Didem Daniş, *Bir Tutkudur Trabzon*, YKY, İstanbul 1997, pp. 285-286.

town before the Ottoman conquest and after the Ottoman conquest in order that the subject can be clearly understood.

1. Trabzon before the Ottoman Conquest

To Cahen, the incursions of the Turkish tribes into Anatolia can be divided into two stages: the first one is the incursions into the deep parts of Anatolia that lasted until the Malazgirt Battle in 1071, However, after these incursions were over, they did not try to settle there and went back to their bases in the east. Unlike this, after the Malazgirt Battle, Turkish groups started to settle in Anatolia. Shortly, after the Malazgirt Battle between Alp Arslan and Roman Diogenes, the emperor of Byzantine Empire, the gates of Anatolia were completely opened for the Turks.²⁰ Following the Malazgirt Battle, the Byzantine Empire started to lose its authority not only in every part of the Anatolia but also in the eastern Black Sea where the Turkish tribes had the domination.²¹

It is understood that the region of northern Asia Minor was exposed to the upsetting effects of the Turkish invasions during the latter half of the 11th century during the reign of VII Ducas (1071-78), and the whole of the coastal region lying from Ereğli (Heraclia) to Trabzon as well as the hinterland around Yeşilirmak (Iris) and the lower Kızılırmak (Halys) were raided and plundered by the Turkish tribes. After the conquests of 1080, in this political climate, the demographic structure of the eastern Black Sea considerably changed in favour of the Turks through the settlements of the Turkish tribes in the places such as Artvin-Gümüşhane-Bayburt, except for Trabzon and its vicinity.²²

At the beginning of the XIII. century when Constantinople was taken by the Latins during the IV. Crusade campaign, the center of Orthodoxy was plundered and raided by the Latins and the Komnenos dynasty had been overthrown for nearly twenty years. The two members of this overthrown dynasty, Alexios and David appeared in Georgia and they founded a state on the Black Sea, the center of which is Trabzon.²³

During the reign of Alaaddin Keykubad (1220-1237) one of the results of his campaigns towards the eastern Black Sea was to abolish the Beylik of

²⁰ Claude Cahen, *Osmanlılardan Önce Anadolu'da Türkler*, e Yayınları, İstanbul 1979, p. 82; Mustafa Kafalı, *Anadolu'nun Fethi ve Türkleşmesi*, Atatürk Kültür Merkezi, Ankara 1998, pp. 8-10.

²¹ Telliöğlü, *Doğu Karadeniz'de Türkler*, p. 81.

²² Telliöğlü, *Doğu Karadeniz'de Türkler*, p. 82.

²³ Telliöğlü, *Trabzon Rum Devleti (1204-1461)*, Serander Yayınları, Trabzon 2009 s. 23.

Mengücekoğulları. Thus the State of Türkiye Seljuk became the neighbour with the Greek State of Trebizond on the south eastern border of the Black Sea.²⁴ When the Mongols defeated the Seljuks in Köseadağ in 1243²⁵ the Seljuks became subject to the Mongols and the Greek State of Trabzon having taken side with the Seljuks²⁶ also had to admit the domination of the Mongols.²⁷ From the mid of the XIII. century onwards when the relations between Byzantine Empire and the Greek State of Trabzon weakened, the Greek State of Trabzon could not succeed in stopping the Turkish advance in the west of mountainous region after Sinope was taken in 1264 by Muineddin Pervane.²⁸

From the last quarter of the XIII. century onwards, Chepnis started to appear in the western part of the Black Sea owing to the increase of the Mongol influence in Anatolia.²⁹ Chepnis moved to the west during the first invasion of the Seljuks and most of them settled in Paphlagonia and also on the borders of Kingdom of Trabzon, which led to Sinope's having been taken by the Seljuks.³⁰ In the XIV. century Chepnis advanced the eastern part of the Black Sea and took the area of Plibanoties (Harşit) valley.³¹ Meeker also points out that by the late XIII. century there were a great number of Chepni Turks living in the western part of the region around Sinope. The advance of the Ottomans between the years 1419-1428 started to threaten the existence of the Greek State of Trabzon and caused the Ottomans to consider Trabzon within their domain.³² Even though the Greek State of Trabzon did struggle to stop the threat of the Ottoman through the collaboration with both the Catholic world and the Akkoyunlu State, it did fail and eventually in 1461 Trabzon was captured by II. Mehmed and became the part of the Ottoman State.³³

²⁴ Osman Turan, "Bayburt", *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, c.II, MEB Yayınları, İstanbul 1961, pp. 365-367.

²⁵ İbn Bibi, *El Evamirü'l-Ala'ıye*, II, yay. M. Öztürk I, Kültür Bakanlığı, Ankara 1996, pp. 64-72; *Anonim Selçukname*, yay. F. N. Tuzluk, Atif Yayınları, Ankara 1952, p. 32.

²⁶ Cahen, *Anadolu'da Türkler*, p. 144.

²⁷ Emile Janssens, *Trebizonde en Colchide*, Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, Bruxelles 1969, p. 80.

²⁸ Kazım Dilcimen, *Canik Beyleri*, Ahali Matbaası, Samsun 1940, p. 18.

²⁹ Tellioglu, *Doğu Karadeniz'de Türkler*, p. 124.

³⁰ Tellioglu, *Doğu Karadeniz'de Türkler*, p. 125.

³¹ Anthony Bryer, "The Tourkokratia in the Pontos: Some Problems and Preliminary Conclusions", *Neo Hellenika*, I, Texas 1970, p. 42.

³² Tellioglu, *Trabzon Rum Devleti*, p. 125.

³³ For more detailed information regarding the conquest of the town, see. Heath W. Lowry, *Trabzon Şehrinin İslamlaşma ve Türkleşmesi (1461-1583)*, ^{see} Demet Lowry- Heath W. Lowry, Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul 1981, pp. 6-16; Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*, Published by W. C. H Eckman-R. Manheim), University of Princeton New Jersey, 1992, p. 195; *Kritavulus Tarihi (1451-1467)*, çev. Ari Çokona, Heyamola Yayınları, İstanbul 2013, pp. 513-521.

2. Trabzon after the Ottoman Conquest

When Trabzon was conquered, all the towns between Giresun and Hopa, which were once within the domain of the Greek Sate of Trabzon became the land of the Ottomans and they were organized under the administration unit called *Sanjak*³⁴ Referring to Orhonlu, Bostan states that from 1461 to the end of the XVI. century, the policy of the settlement both into the town and out of the town, mostly through exiles, had been applied, but the voluntary settlement had taken place in Trabzon as well.³⁵ However, there have been different accounts about the conquest of the town and what happened to the people living there.³⁶ However, upon the authority of Tursun Bey, Lowry argues that the accounts about the conquest of Trabzon should be critically read and that he asserts that the accounts given by some authors such as Fallmerayer, Finlay, Miller, Babinger and Janssens based on the authority of Chalcocondyles are not reliable. In addition, he alleges that the accounts and observations of Tursun Bey, the most prominent of the Ottoman historians and who was the only witness of the conquest should be dealt with carefully in that he is the only one who says that the local people of Trabzon stayed in the town and did not move out of the town. Lowry thinks that the accounts of Tursun Bey refutes the opinions of Chalcocondyles and Fallmerayer.³⁷ In addition, before the conquest of the town what we know about the people of Trabzon is the information obtained by the Spanish traveler Pero Tafur, Who visited the town in 1436-38. Tafur says that the number of people living in Trabzon is 4.000.³⁸ But Bryer known for his studies on the Black Sea acknowledges that the number given by Tafur is supposedly not too low when the

³⁴ M. Hanefi Bostan, *XV. ve XVI. Asırlarda Trabzon Sancağında Sosyal ve İktisadi Hayat*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 2002, p. 7.

³⁵ M. Hanefi Bostan, "XV. ve XVI. Yüzyıllarda Trabzon Şehrinde Nüfus Hareketleri ve Yerleşim Yerleri", *Bir Tutkudur Trabzon*, haz. İ. Gündoğ Kayaoğlu, Öner Cıraoğlu, Cüneyt Akalın, YKY, İstanbul 1997, p. 113.

³⁶ For more detailed information about Trabzon after the conquest, see Lowry, a.g.e., pp. 5-6; İonannes Doukas, *Bizans Tarihi*, yay. Vladimir Mirmıroğlu, İstanbul Fethi Derneği, İstanbul, 1956, p. 211; J. Philip Fallmerayer, *Trabzon Rum İmparatorluğu'nun Tarihi*, (*Yazarın Geschichte des Kaiserthums von Trapezunt* eserinin A. C. Eren tarafından T.T.K adına çevirisi yapılan neşredilmemiş nüsha, yer no: 4/86, pp. 272-273; Mehmed Neşri, *Kitab-ı Cihan-nüma*, yay. F. R. Unat-M. A. Köymen, Atatürk Kültür Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, Ankara, 1987, p. 753; *Ayıkpaşaoğlu Tarihi*, yay. Atsız, Ötüken Neşriyat, İstanbul 1992, p. 208, William Miller, *Trebizond: The Last Greek Empire*, A. M. Hakkert, Amsterdam 1968, p. 106; George Finlay, *The History of Greece and of the Empire of Trebizonde*, William Blackwood and Sons, London 1851, p. 494; Janssens, *Trebizonde en Colchide*, p. 158.

³⁷ Lowry, *Trabzon Şehrini İslamlaşması*, pp. 14-15.

³⁸ Pero Tafur, *Travels and Adventures (1435-1438)*, trans. by Malcolm Letts, Harper & brothers London 1926, p. 131.

sudden deaths or plague in the town was taken into consideration and that the number of the population of Trabzon must have amounted to 6.000 in the XIV. century, but just before the conquest the population of the town had decreased to 4.000-5.000.³⁹

To Lowry, due to lack of some reliable statistics about the population of Trabzon, it is more reasonable to accept the estimated number of 4.000/5.000 given by Tafur and Bryer. In addition to this, he asserts that in the first *tahrir* of Trabzon after the conquest of the town this estimated number of the population of the town given by Tafur and Bryer must have increased with the new settlers in the town.⁴⁰ From the date of 1461 to the end of the XVI. century there are four *tahrir defter*s, which are dated as 1486, 1520, 1554 and 1583. According to the first *tahrir defter* of 1486, the estimated number of both Muslims and non-muslims in the town is 7574 in total, 761 of whom are *mustahfiz* (a soldier in charge of defending a castle) and *azeban* (a military class).⁴¹

In 1486 the population of the Muslims was %26.73 while the population of the non-muslims is %73.27. Moreover, the Muslims lived in the area surrounded by the walls while non-muslims lived mostly out of the walls of the town and in the suburbs of the east and the west.⁴² In 1520, one community, 23 parishes including *mustahfiz* and *azeban* used to live in Trabzon and the total population of the town was 7753, %22.19 of which was Muslims and %77.18 of which was non-muslims. Bostancı states that in the period of 34 years between 1486–1520 the population of the Muslims decreased at the rate of %17.73 while the non-muslim population increased at the rate of %8.72. To Bostan, the major reason for the decrease in the Muslim population results from the termination of the transfer of the population due to the war with the Safevis and the Memlukes and in addition to that, the reason of the population transfer out of the town must have played another role in that as well. In 1554 the population which consisted of 44 parishes and one community reduced to 6.525, %46.16 of which was Muslims and %53.284 of which was non-muslims. As is seen, in the period of 34 years between 1520–1554

³⁹ Bryer, "Tourkokratia in the Pontos", p. 37. Bryer also gives more detailed information about the population of Trebizond in his article "Greeks and Türkmens: The Pontic Exception", *DOP* 29, (1975), pp. 113–148. In this article, Bryer asserts that the population of the Greek State of Trebizond was 200,000–250.000 see. Bryer "Greeks and the Türkmens", p. 121.

⁴⁰ Lowry, *Trabzon Şehrinin İslamlaşması*, p. 18.

⁴¹ Bostan, *Trabzon Sancağında İktisadi ve Sosyal Yaşam*, p. 137.

⁴² Bostan, *Trabzon Sancağında İktisadi ve Sosyal Yaşam*, p. 161.

whereas the Muslim population increased at the rate of %75.11 the Christian population decreased at the rate of %71.73. Bostan argues that the reason for the increase in the Muslim population and decrease in the Christian population resulted from the settlements both into town and out of the town.⁴³

In 1583, the population of Trabzon which consisted of 54 parishes, one community and *mustahfiz* and *azeb* (a military class) amounted to 10.984, %55.38 of which was Muslims and %44.62 of which were Christians. In the period of the 97 years between 1486–1583 the Muslim population increased at the rate of % 200,39 whereas the Christian population decreased at the rate of % 13.22. To sum up, it is understood that in the period of 97 years the general population of the town increased from 7.574 to 10.984. In percentage, this increase is equal to % 45.02.⁴⁴ Bostan asserts that it is mainly related to the settlement policy followed by the Ottoman State between the years 1540–1566.⁴⁵ However, Lowry states that the reason lying behind coercive resettlement in the years of 1540's is that many Christians were exposed to coercive resettlement due to the ethnic imbalance in the *tahrir defter* of 1520 and they were replaced by many new emigrants in Trabzon.⁴⁶ Moreover, he alleges that in the XV. and XVI. centuries the population increase in favor of the Muslim population must have resulted from the Islamization of the inhabitants in the town on the basis of patronyms of the converts in the *tahrir defters*. In that sense, Lowry claims that most of the converts who took the name of Abdullah (the slave of God) are Christians and so it is much easier to find out who converted to Islam.⁴⁷ However, Bostan argues against Lowry pointing to the fact that on the contrary to what Lowry claims in the *tahrir defters* between 1486–1583 there has been no record of the information showing that the persons having taken the name of Abdullah are the converts; because in the years between 1486–1583 the names of the new Muslims were not registered or they were registered under their Christian names. Moreover, he states that according to archive records between 1486-1583, the number of the persons who converted to Islam is 10, 8 of whom were men and, two of whom were women. In addition, out of these ten persons, the names of the fathers of only two persons are Abdullah

⁴³ Bostan, "XV. ve XVI Yüzyıllarda Trabzon Şehrinde...", p. 150. For more detailed information about the population statistics of Trabzon between the XV. and the XVI. centuries, see. Bostan, "XV. ve XVI Yüzyıllarda Trabzon Şehrinde...", pp. 153-171.

⁴⁴ Bostan, "XV. ve XVI Yüzyıllarda Trabzon Şehrinde...", p. 150.

⁴⁵ Bostan, "XV. ve XVI Yüzyıllarda Trabzon Şehrinde..." p. 150.

⁴⁶ Lowry, *Trabzon Şehrinin İslamlaşması*, p. 144.

⁴⁷ Lowry, *Trabzon Şehrinin İslamlaşması*, p. 119.

and one of these was registered as a slave.⁴⁸ Furthermore, in his book, Bostan also states that some of the new muslims had taken the original Turkish names such as *Balyan, Hoşkadem, Doğan, Balaban, Uğurlu, Turak, Timur, Budak, Gazı, Arslan, Aydın, Tengrivermiş, Karagöz, Bali, Karaca, Şahkulu, Pervane, Memi, Kurd, Durmuş, Bhara, Eyne Bey, Kıya, Turali* and it should be noted that some of the names of the non-muslims have original Turkish names as well. Moreover, the names of some places where non-muslims live within the Sanjhak of Trabzon are Turkish. Thus under the light of this information Bostan points to the fact that Christian Turks had been living in the region just before the conquest.⁴⁹

As can be seen, the ethnic structure or the ethnicity of the Pontos region is a complicated issue to talk about. In addition, there have been some different opinions and hypotheses adopted by both Turkish and Western researchers regarding the population of the inhabitants of Trabzon and the issue of conversion after the conquest of the town in 1461. However, it should be noted that as Meeker states that even though the Pontic people were able to keep their own faith before the incursions of the Turks, large numbers of them were eventually inclined to convert to Islam. In time, they and the Turks merged to form the Black Sea Turkish population, especially at the end of the XVI. century. Moreover, by the late XIX. century around four-fifths of the population of the eastern coastal region were Muslims and the very large majority of these were Turkish-speaking.⁵⁰ The regions in which Greek-speaking populations descended from the Byzantine period survived into the XIX. century. In this sense, Pontos was the most important region.⁵¹

3. The Claims Related to the Crypto-Christians in Trabzon and its Vicinity in the XIX. Century

In the works of some Western travelers and researchers regarding the religious structure of the town in the XIX. century are there some claims about the existence of the Crypto-Christians. This issue emerged in some villages in the vicinity of Trabzon after the Islahat Edict (1856) when some people declared

⁴⁸ Lowry, *Trabzon Şehrinin İslamlaşması*, pp. 320-321. For more detailed information related to the names of the new Muslims and their patronyms see. Bostan, *Trabzon Sancağında İktisadi ve Sosyal Yaşam*, pp. 337-346.

⁴⁹ Bostan, "XV. ve XVI Yüzyıllarda Trabzon Şehrinde...", p. 545.

⁵⁰ Micheal E. Meeker, "The Black Sea Turks: Some Aspects of Their Ethnic and Cultural Background", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, II, (1971), p. 340.

⁵¹ Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, pp. 448-449.

that they were Christians and it gained an international dimension when those demanded the help of foreign consuls.⁵² Rightly, Bryer states that the *Tanzimat* was only the beginning of the end but a better date is 18 February 1856 when the Sultan Abdul Mecid neatly anticipated the Treaty of Paris 30 March by issuing the *Hatt-i Hümayun* and after 1839 there were no martyrs⁵³, for the Porte reaffirmed the principle of freedom of religion within the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁴ As a result of giving new rights to Christians in the Ottoman Empire, they felt more secure. Even though they were Christians they pretended to be Muslim in order to benefit from the advantages of being a Muslim. When the social, political and economic conditions became appropriate for them, they emerged out of their woodwork to declare themselves. Thus they demanded help from the Western powers to investigate the matter and the the British Consulate asked for a detailed report about the condition of the supposed Crypto-Christians from the consul in Trabzon⁵⁵ Following this, this issue not only became the agenda of the Ottoman Empire but also came to the agenda of the Western countries which followed it very carefully.

Bryer in his article “The Crypto-Christians of the Pontos and Consul William Gifford Palgrave of Trebizonde” mentions that the first evidence about secret Christianity in Kurum lies in the archontic house dated 1825, which was built to accommodate both faiths. In addition to this, he states that the earlier reference to them seems to be made by Smith and Dwight, two American divines, who passed through Trabzon in 1833.⁵⁶ On the way to Trabzon Smith gives some accounts about the cultivators and the inhabitants in the vicinity of Trabzon and he says that the inhabitants of that valley are not Laz but of Greek descent and that many of them have been professedly converted to Mohammadanism. However, according to information given to him by a reliable authority it is a

⁵² Yılmaz, *Batlı Seyyahlara Göre Trabzon (1808-1876)*, Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans tezi, Trabzon 2006, p. 88.

⁵³ Significantly, the traditional punishment of the apostasy, for instance, death for a Muslim who converted to another religion, was replaced by the politically arranged attitude see. İlber Ortaylı “Tanzimat Döneminde Tanassur ve Din Değişirme Olayları”, in: *Tanzimat’ın 150. Yıldönümü Uluslararası Sempozyumu*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara 1994, pp. 481-487.

⁵⁴ Anthony Bryer, “The Crypto –Christians of the Pontos and the Consul William Gifford Palgrave of Trebizonde”, *Peoples and Settlement in Anatolia and the Caucasus, 800-1900*, XVII. Kısım, Varioum Reprints, London 1998, p. 15.

⁵⁵ Bryer gives detailed information about how the Crypto-Christians emerged based on some consular reports, see. “Crypto-Christians”, pp. 35-67.

⁵⁶ Bryer, “Crypto-Christians”, p. 31.

mere pretence because they practice neither circumcision nor any any of the rites of the Moslem religion and they are secretly attached to the Greek church and they have priests to perform its rites for them. In the following sentences, Smith goes on to say that their names taken from the Old Testament are a common ground between Muslims and Christians.⁵⁷ Although Bryer does not mention it in his article, Bijişkyan, who made a visit to the town in 1817, made some references to these Crypto-Christians. For instance, Bijişkyan gives some accounts regarding them and he mentions that there is a group called *Gromtsi* among the Greeks and they are half-Muslim and half-Christian. To him, even though these people are sincere Christians, they practice deception. In addition, he states that the faith of these people who never change from one generation to another is alike.⁵⁸ As can be understood from the accounts of Bijişkyan, he makes some criticisms about the insincere attitude of these people. Unlike Bijişkyan, Smith points out that though he is inclined to the opinion that sincerity even in a false faith is more favourable to the admission of truth than hypocrisy or skepticism, he would still suggest that the cord which binds these people to the forms of Christianity may advantageously be seized by a missionary to attach them to its spirit.⁵⁹ The clear accounts of Smith actually can be interpreted to verify the important role of the missionary activities upon the conversion or apostasy cases in the following years, especially after the *Tanzimat* and *Imperial Edicts*. Actually, in the liberal atmosphere of the *Tanzimat* the missionaries caused many Christians to convert their sects such as *Protestant* or *Catholic* and in the later years they also paved the way for many communities (although they are Christians) having lived under the Muslim identity for a long time to convert to their own faith. Türkan on the authority of the Ottoman archives points to the fact that the most important factor that lies behind it is undoubtedly the supporters of these missionaries such as England, France and America.⁶⁰ For instance, in the accounts of Smith this can clearly be observed. Namely, before leaving Trabzon, Smith focuses on the suitability of the town for the missionary station to be established. Furthermore, it is very interesting for him to suggest that it be a suitable place to establish a missionary station for the Greeks rather than the Armenians, for the large number of the

⁵⁷ Eli Smith, *Researches of the Rev. Eli Smith and H. G. O. Dwight in Armenia Including A Journey Through Asia Minor, and into Georgia and Persia with A Visit to the Nestorian and Chaldean Christians of Oormiah and Slams*, Vol. II, Crocker and Brewster, Boston 1833, p. 319.

⁵⁸ P. Minas Bijişkyan, *Pontos Tarihi*, çev. Hrand D. Andreasyan, Çiviyazıları İstanbul 1998, p. 114.

⁵⁹ Smith, *Researches of the Rev. Eli Smith and H. G. O. Dwight*, p. 320.

⁶⁰ Ahmet Türkan, *Osmanlı'da Kripto, Hristiyanlar*, Kitapevi, İstanbul 2012, pp. 18-19

former is very high not only in Trabzon but also in the other parts of the country.⁶¹ As can be seen from these accounts, Smith points to the suitability of Trabzon for their station in terms of the high population of the Greeks in the town rather the Armenians.

Smith also makes some comments on the Greeks living in Trabzon stating that they descend from the genuine Greek race referring to the accounts about the existence of their ancestors on the southern shore of the Euxine (The Black Sea) and goes on to say that there might have been several Greek colonies along the coast to the westward. In addition, to him, a missionary station in Trabzon might give them a great chance to extend their arms far and create a good effect in that direction. As is seen, the activities of the Protestant missionaries just before the *Tanzimat* in Anatolia can give us a clear idea of their interest in the non-muslims who are the *rayas* of the Ottoman Empire. Especially, as is pointed out by Smith, their interest in Greeks is more obvious since they outnumber other non-muslim groups. Moreover, his claims about the ethnic origins of the Greeks are not objective; because as has been mentioned before, the Black Sea has always been the place where too many indigenous tribes and the communities had lived and Milesians from the Western Anatolia is only one of those who settled and established the first commercial colonies in the region. Thus, his accounts based on the idea that Trabzon was established by the Greeks does not reflect the truth. In addition, the great interest of the Western travelers and researchers under the influence of the Hellenic culture on which Western culture is based seems too effective in their accounts related to the Ottoman lands as in the example of Trabzon. Therefore, it can be said that the missionaries seem to have played a crucial role to awaken the Christians. In this context, for instance, Cyrus Hamlin, one of the outstanding names of the Protestant mission in İstanbul, once wrote: *There appears to be a shifting of the sands, not only from Christianity to Islam and vice-versa, but also among the other religions of Ottoman society.*⁶²

Besides the Protestant missionaries, the Catholic missionaries are seen to have played an important role among the missionary activities carried out in Trabzon as well. For instance, in the XIX. century, when the demographic structure of the Armenians is examined in the town, it seen that the Catholic Armenians had more population when compared with the Protestant Armenians because of the old

⁶¹ Smith, *Researches of the Rev. Eli Smith and H. G. O. Dwight*, p. 326.

⁶² Cyrus Hamlin, *Among the Turks*, American Track Society, New York 1877, p. 85

Catholic missionary activities in the town.⁶³ For instance, within the framework of the Catholic missionary activities, a group of Mekhitarist (Mihitarist) from Venetia came to Anatolia in 1848 and established a school in Trabzon. Similarly, in 1852 the French nuns also founded a school in which 60 students could attend. Frères des Écolés Chrétiennes missionaries carried out some activities and established a school in the town in 1881 as well. Moreover, five of these missionaries had been working as a teacher at that school in 1885.⁶⁴

Smith also gives his estimation about the population of Trabzon based on the number of the households. To him, the number of Greek households is nearly 500, Armenians 250 households, Catholic Armenians 80-90 households and the Muslims are 3.500-4.000 households. By referring to the person who gave him information about the population of the town, he points out that the population of the town is not more than 15.000.⁶⁵ In addition to Smith, some estimations of Western travelers and consuls related to the population of Trabzon can be given as examples. For instance, the French consul Outrey, giving the physical details of the parishes in Trabzon, states that the parishes in Trabzon contain 25.000 inhabitants. The estimation of English consul James Brant in 1835 is nearly similar to Outrey. Brant says that the population of Trabzon is between 25.000-30.000, 20.000-24.000 of whom are Muslims, 3.500-4.000 of whom are Greeks and 500-2000 of whom are Armenians. Another American Protestant missionary Southgate, who visited the town in 1837, gives different numbers about the population. To him, in the castle there have been 5.000 Muslim households equal to 25.000 people and besides these, the Greeks are 2.500, Armenians are 1.200, the Catholic Armenians and the Franks are 300. Thus the total population of Trabzon is 27.000. For the year 1839, based on the number of the households, Texier estimates that the number of the households of Muslims are 6.000, the Greeks' households are 1.500 and the Armenians' households are 500. The total number of the households in Trabzon is 8.000. Another traveler Ainsworth points out that the estimations of the travelers regarding the population of the town are the subject of conflict and he estimates that the population of the town is 25.000. Referring to the archbishop Constantin, Falmerayer, who stayed in Trabzon

⁶³ Özgür Yılmaz, "XIX. Yüzyılda Misyonerlik Faaliyetleri Çerçevesinde Trabzon Ermenilerine Bir Bakış", *OTAM*, 21, 2007, p. 199.

⁶⁴ Musa Şaşmaz, "Alfred Biliotti'nin 1885'teki Raporuna Göre Trabzon Vilayetinde Eğitimin Durumu, *Tarih ve Toplum*, 163, 1997, pp. 49-52.

⁶⁵ Smith, *Researches of the Rev. Eli Smith and H. G. O. Dwight*, p. 323.

for a long time, says that Turks are 5.000 households, the Greeks are over 400 households, Armenians are nearly 300 households, Catholic Armenians including the Franks are 98 households. To him, the total population of the town is roughly 30.000-33.000.⁶⁶

For the latter half of the XIX. century, for instance, in 1854 Sandwith estimates that the population of Trabzon is 20.000 without giving any details about the population of the ethnic groups. For the year of 1858, Mordtman says that the population the Trabzon is 60000 in total. To a consuşar report in 1860, the Muslims are 40.000, the Greeks are 10.000, the Armenians are 3.600 and the others are 2100, the total population of Trabzon is 55.800. Besides these estimations, in 1879 Barkley estimates that the total population of Trabzon is 37.000. Cuinet gives the estimation of 37.000 regarding the population of Trabzon in 1891. Lynch, who visited Tabzoon in 1893 estimates that the total population of the town is 45.000.⁶⁷

Smith also recommends that as well as in the interior parts of the region they establish a station in Gümüşhane and it might be an important branch for them.⁶⁸ Why Smith gives importance to the establishment of a station in Gümüşhane should be evaluated well. As Bryer points out, the villages such as Torul, Zigana,

⁶⁶ Özgür Yılmaz, *Tanzimat Döneminde Trabzon*, Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Bssılmamış Doktora Tezi, Trabzon 2012, pp. 44-46. Yılmaz gives detailed information regarding the population of Trabzon between 1803 and 1893 based on the estimations of the Western travelers and consuls see. *Tanzimat Döneminde Trabzon*, p. 47. Yılmaz also gives a demographic development of Trabzon between the years 1810-1900 referring to Bryer and Winfield, see. *Tanzimat Döneminde Trabzon*, p. 49. The demography of Trabzon in the second half of the XIX. century can be followed by the Trabzon Province Yearbooks, which started to be issued in 1869. For example, for the years between 1869-1881, the male population of Trabzon is as follows: in 1869, the Catholics are 397, the Armenians are 1.264, the Greeks are 1.776 and the Muslims are 5.723, which is equal to 9.180. In 1870, the Catholics are 409, the Armenians are 1486, the Greeks are 1603 and the Muslims are 5961 (the total population 9.459). For the years between 1871-1875, the Catholics are 414, the Armenians are 1349, the Greeks are 1630 and the Muslims are 6409 (the total population is 9.802). For the years between 1878-1879 and 1881, the Catholics are 487, the Armenians are 1609, The Geeks are 1799, and the Muslims are 6.450 (the total population 10.383) see. Yılmaz, *Tanzimat Döneminde Trabzon*, p. 52.

⁶⁷ Yılmaz, *Tanzimat Döneminde Trabzon*, p. 47.

⁶⁸ Smith, *Researches of the Rev. Eli Smith and H. G. O. Dwight*, p. 326.

Kurum⁶⁹, Stavri⁷⁰, and Santa⁷¹ as described as “Christian heartlands”⁷² lie on the summer road from Trabzon and the supposed Crypto-Christians naturally must have drawn the attention of the numerous Western travelers and missionaries who crossed the Pontic Alps into Armenia. Namely, it is understood that the existence of such Crypto-Christians in the region would be a good target audience for the future activities of the missionaries. Meeker also asserts that some villagers such as Kurumlis set a good example of the fact that even though they were registered as Muslims and had the Muslim identity in their relations with the state they go on to practice their Orthodox faith and rites.⁷³ Besides these, Smith also gives some information about the peasants inhabiting around Trabzon. He mentions that as far as they were told, they were of the Greek race and spoke Greek language.⁷⁴ He goes on to say that as has been already mentioned, they are of the Muslim

⁶⁹ The most interesting group of the Crypto-Christians that drew the most attention of the Western travelers and researchers are the Kurumlis living in the district of Gümüşhane. The Kurumlis, having been engaged in mining, had hidden their real faith for a long time. In some sources it is said that they pretended to be Muslim in order to benefit from the mining privileges in 1650's, see. Yorgo Andreadis, *Neden Kardeşim Hüsnü*, çev. Gülden Tuysan, Belge Yayınları, İstanbul 1992, p. 67.

⁷⁰ During the Ottoman period it is the name of the place in the north of Gümüşhane, in which Crypto-Christians lived and also the name of the people living there see. Özhan Öztürk, *Karadeniz Ansiklopedik Sözlük*, c. II, Heyamola Yayınları, İstanbul 2005, p. 1037.

⁷¹ It is in the northern part of Gümüşhane (Argyropolis) and it was one of the seven Greek parishes which was abandoned during the population exchange in 1923. It is now called as “Dumanlı”, see. Öztürk, *Karadeniz Ansiklopedik Sözlük*, c. II, p. 1009.

⁷² Bryer, “Crypto-Christians”, p. 32.

⁷³ Micheal E. Meeker, *İmparatorluktan Gelen Bir Ulus, Türk Modernitesi ve Doğu Karadeniz'de Osmanlı Mirası*, çev. Tutku Vardağlı, Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul 2005, p. 179.

⁷⁴ Most of the Western travelers remark on the subject of language which these people speak and they state that they mostly speak Greek. However, some Turkish researchers point out that the traces of the Orthodoxy can still be observed in the district Of and its environs, because when the Christianity was adopted, the inhabitants in the district had to learn the language of the church, and even if they converted to Islam, they found it very difficult to give up using that language. According to the accounts of the Greek researchers based on the church records, the Christianized population of Of had been made up of the Turks before the Ottomans. That group, whose mother tongue is Turkish had learned Greek, which is the worship language of the church which they belonged to. During the reign of Ottomans, the whole of the population had converted to Islam since the XVI. century and also had not forgotten that language they had been using for a long time. In addition, Tellioglu alleges that the inhabitants of Of does not consider the Greek names of the places as a threat and does not regard them as a different ethnicity, either, see. İbrahim Tellioglu, “Of Tarihinin Dair Bazı Gözlemler”, *Karadeniz İncelemeleri Dergisi*, 18 (2015), p. 106. However, Margarita Poutouridou, the Greek researcher, stresses the fact that the existence of the Ofli Muslims whose mother tongue was Pontic Greek preoccupied many local Greek scholars of the XIX. century. To Poutouridou, these researchers attribute the apostasy of Of valley to the religious oppression. In addition, it is argued that the Ofli sacrificed their orthodox faith in order to retain their language and customs see. Margarita Poutouridou, “The Of Valley And The Coming Of Islam: The Case Of The Greek-Speaking Muslims”, *Deltio Kentrou Mikrasiatikan Spoudan*, 12, 1997-98, p. 50.

religion though they are still secret Christians. Smith also gives the examples of the districts of Sürmene and Of, about 6 hours east of Trabzon where there are many Greek Muslims. To him, in this district there are 30 or 40 villages, three-fourths of which were formerly Christians. Smith explains that the Christian population in the district due to the oppression of the Turks had to convert to Islam long ago, but despite this they still speak Greek. Bryer points to the fact that those people commonly assumed to be the descendants of Christians converted to Islam through force, but despite this they went on practicing their old faith. However, Bryer stresses the fact that actually the origins of the Pontic Crypto-Christians can be attributed to the establishment of the Highland Greek refugees in the late XVII. century.⁷⁵

As can be understood from the accounts of Smith, he seems to have carried out a detailed research not only in Trabzon but also in the vicinity of Trabzon so as to understand the ethnic and religious structure of the region and collect some information to be used for their missionary activities in the future. In his book, Meeker also deals with the confusing question of who Oflus really are⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Bryer, "Tourkakatia in the Pontos", p. 47-48. To Bryer, it can be explained as follows: the breakdown of the Pashalik administration, the rise of the Derebeys, the establishment of Greek communities in the high and remote parts of the valleys, the apostasy of only Greek areas until the XX. century, the emergence of Crypto-Christians on a large scale and the rise of the Greek silver mining community of Gümüshane (Argyropolis). Moreover, he underlines the fact that to some extent all these factors are interconnected, see. Bryer, "Tourkakatia in the Pontos", p. 43.

⁷⁶ There are different opinions about the origins of Oflus. For instance, Hasan Umur states that when the Greeks came to Of, it was not an unpopulated district and he also adds that there had been some inhabitants and those were the Turks. The Greeks assimilated them through their civilization, literature and their religion. Umur also points to the fact that undoubtedly among Oflus do exist some people whose ancestors are the ancient Turks, see. Hasan Umur, *Of ve Of Muharabeleri*, Güven Basımevi İstanbul 1949, p. 6; Some researchers assert that the first indigenous tribes in the region were Hittite, Saka and Khaldi, who descend from the Turkish tribes and those had a very long history when compared with the Greeks, see. Haşim Albayrak, *Of ve Çaykara*, Feriştat Yayınları, İstanbul 1990, p. 108; Cahen points out that Pontus is the last region to welcome the a large number of the Turkish tribes in Anatolia and they plundered in the mountains above Trebizond as early as 1057 and they were in the suburbs of the town in 1073-74, see. Claude Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, trans. by Jones Williams, London 1968, p. 70-73; Meeker says that several centuries were to pass before any extensive settlement of the Pontos took place, see Meeker, "The Black Sea Turks", p. 338. Stefanos Yerasimos puts forward a different idea about it. To him, according to the Ottoman records, this region had been the most Christian-populated area in Anatolia since the XVI. century. However, it was too difficult to say that those people in the Orthodox faith were Greeks at that time, because it is known that they descend from Tzans (in the Canik District) and the Laz (in Lazistan) who belong to the Christianized groups of the Georgians and spoke a different local dialect, though they generally spoke Greek, and they had several customs peculiar to themselves. In addition, it is necessary to add the Greek colonists and the ones who come from the grand Hellenized Byzantine families, who settled in the region especially during the period of Trebizond Empire. In addition, Yerasimos stresses that soon after the Turkish conquest some part of the Tzans and the Laz converted to Islam, some part of them like

and he puts forward the idea that Oflus represented the formation of a local state society as a result of complicated process of conversion or apostasy, migration and transformation. To him, as the historic traces are preserved by means of the local customs and traditions, like the other pastoral inhabitants on the eastern shores, they have become every sort of polemic.⁷⁷ Moreover, Meeker mentions that the conversion of the Christians and the migrations of the Muslims increased continuously during the XVII. century and probably a large number of Christians might have been said to convert to Islam rather than the individual cases. Even if Oflus were officially registered as Muslims, it is possible to think that the population of Of might have had different trends of faith, but the real reason does not seem like that, because the regular increase in the number of the Muslims in the district caused the population of the Christians to decrease sharply and this was mostly related to the tradition of departures from the district and the conversion. Meeker acknowledges that the signs of the transformation can be easily be seen towards the end of the XVII. century. Namely, the Christians through conversion or apostasy and the Muslims through transformation merged to create a new state society.⁷⁸ On the other hand, Bryer alleges that he followed some Pontic scholars who carried out researches on the region in terms of using the term “apostasy, but he acknowledges that there are some interesting aspects about the whole affair, for there is no literary or monumental evidence to indicate that there is any Greek settlement in Of and Tonya during the middle ages and therefore he suggests that it be further investigated.⁷⁹

The second Western traveler to mention the Crypto-Christians in the region is the British geologist Hamilton, who visited the town in 1836. While he was giving some information about the inhabitants of the villages around Trabzon, he mentions that the most interesting thing that drew attention both in the town and in the closer mountains of the town is the fact that there were some Greek Turks or Turkish Greeks. Hamilton claims that these people, though actually Christians,

Oflus, who converted to Christianity under the influence of the nationality in the XIX. century adopted a faith between Islam and the Christianity, see. Stefanos Yerasimos, “Pontus Meselesi”, *Toplum ve Bilim Dergisi*, sy. 43-44 (Güz 1988- Kış 1989), p. 34.

⁷⁷ Meeker, *İmparatorluktan Gelen Bir Ulus*, p. 171.

⁷⁸ Meeker, *İmparatorluktan Gelen Bir Ulus*, p. 179.

⁷⁹ Bryer, “Tourkakraia in the Pontos”, p. 45–46. Moreover, Bryer states that when the two valleys emerged into light of record with the XV. century registers, they had a high proportion of Christians to Muslims, but on the other hand there was no bishopric of Of and no contemporary İskender Pasha is otherwise recorded see. Bryer, “Tourkakraia in the Pontos”, p. 46.

secretly practice the religious rites of the Greeks. In addition, having adopted the official religion of the state they practice circumcision and also attend the mosques very cautiously. They attend all the ceremonies that the Muslims attend as well.⁸⁰ In the accounts of Hamilton, unlike the others, he is the first to mention the existence of the Crypto-Christians in Trabzon. From his accounts, it is understood that there have been some Crypto-Christian living in Trabzon as well. Moreover, Hamilton puts forward some allegations regarding the origin of these groups, To him, they might be the descendants of the Macrons (an indigenous ancient tribe), who performed circumcision, but they were not aware of their past and they think that they had this tradition from the Muslims.⁸¹ It is seen that like most of the travelers he explicitly tries to make some ethnic evaluations and analyses referring to the ancient historical background of the town.

Another Western traveler who visited Trabzon towards the end of the first half of the XIX. century is Joseph Wolff, a Protestant missionary like Smith and Dwight. Wolff states that besides Turks and some European Christians, the town is inhabited by the Armenians and Greek Christians, In addition, he alleges that in and around Trabzon are there great numbers of villages inhabited by Greeks who outwardly profess the Muhammedan religion, but they secretly practise Christianity. To him, they have carried it on since the establishment of *Muhammedanism* in Constantinople. They have their own priests, who, in secret, are ordained by the Patriarch of Constantinople, and by the Bishop of the Greek church in Trabzon.⁸² Under the light of the accounts of the Protestant missionary Wolff, it is seen that the priests of the Crypto-Christians living in the district are secretly ordained and it can be claimed that there are some Crypto-Christians around Trabzon. Another point to be focused on here is that it is possible to say that these groups started to declare themselves before the Imperial Edict (Islahat Fermanı). However, he does not mention the existence of the supposed Crypto-Christians in the villages of Santa, Kurum and Stavri in the district of Gümüşhane.

At the beginning of the latter half of the XIX. century the next traveler who arrived in Trabzon is Frederick Walpole. He does not provide detailed information about the existence of the supposed Crypto-Christians in the region; nevertheless,

⁸⁰ Hamilton, *Researches in Asia Minor Pontus and Armenia*, Vol. I-II, John Murray, London 1842, p. 240.

⁸¹ Hamilton, *Researches in Asia Minor*, p. 240.

⁸² Joseph Wolff, *A Narrative of a Mission to Bokhara to Ascertain the Fate of Colonel Studdart and Captain Comolly*, New York 1845, p. 98.

he makes some remarks on them in his book. To him, he was given very little information about the people living in Trabzon; because these people are more interested in commerce than any other matter. However, as far as he was told by some people, it is said that there are Greeks among the population of the town, and they have Muslim names and live in secluded mountains, and practice the rites of Greek religion.⁸³

As is seen, while some travelers mention the existence of the Crypto-Christians in or around Trabzon before the *Tanzimat* and in the following years after the *Tanzimat*, some do not provide any information about them. For instance, Sandwith, who visited the town in 1854 during the Crimean War, is one of those. Although Sandwith gives a detailed account of the mines in the district of Gümüşhane (Argyropolis), he does not mention the existence of any of the Crypto-Christians in the region. He even states that all the miners are Greeks from the district of Krom, not far from Gümüşhane, and these people are sent to work at all the mines in the Ottoman lands.⁸⁴ Therefore, it is very interesting for him not to mention any of the Crypto-Christians, though Krom, as has been mentioned before, is considered as one of the heartland districts supposed to have been inhabited by the Crypto-Christians. Like Sandwith, some travelers such as Ainsworth, Wagner and Layard do not remark on them, either.⁸⁵ In this context, Bryer rightly alleges that it is a working hypothesis that these people might have adopted a secrecy of faith around the capture and brief occupation of Gümüşhane (Argyropolis) in Chaldea in 1829. However, Bryer states that the clue to their origins can be better found in an unrelated event of the same period. By 1829 the famous declining silver mines of Gümüşhane were in their last gasp and were closed. After the mines closed by stages there were several options open to those Greeks who, by not paying *harac* or any other service, were now neither officially Christian nor Muslim. In addition, while some went to Russia, others went to work in the mines at Ak Dağ in 1832⁸⁶ and to the alum mines of the

⁸³ Frederick Walpole, *The Ansayrii and the Assassins: With Travels in the Further East in 1850 to 1851, Including A Visit to Nineveh*, Vol. II, R. Bently, London 1851, p. 235.

⁸⁴ Humpry Sandwith, *A Narrative of The Siege of Kars, and of the Six Months' Resistance by the Turkish Garrison Under General Williams to the Russian Army*, John Murray, London 1856, p. 36.

⁸⁵ W. F. Ainsworth, *Travels, and Researches in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea, and Armenia*, Vol. I, John W. Parker, West Strand, London 1842, pp. 396–397; Moritz Wagner, *Travels in Persia, Georgia and Koordistan*, II, Hurst and Blackett, London: 1856, pp. 286–295; Austen Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon; with Travels in Armenia, Kurdistan and the Desert*, Harper and Brothers, New York 1853, pp. 1–8.

⁸⁶ For more detailed information about the Crypto-Christians at Ak Dağ, see. Ahmet Türkan, *Osmanlıda Kripto, Hristiyanlar*, Kitabevi Yayınları, İstanbul 2012, pp. 77-104.

north of Koloneia (Şebinkarahisar) significantly taking their special status⁸⁷ with them. For example, referring to Jennings, who benefited from the judicial records for Matzouka (Maçka), Bryer proposes that the bulk of the Crypto-Christians of the Pontos owe their origin to this special status in relation to a Chaldean mining economy.⁸⁸ Bryer suggests that it is probable to say that embracing both faiths as in the example of the people in Pontos and having become Crypto-Christians started nearly at around the period of the Russian capture and the brief occupation of Gümüşhane in 1829 because none of the 25 travelers who visited the region mention them between the years 1796 and 1833.⁸⁹ In other words, after the mines were closed, it seems that Kurumlis, for instance, wished to embrace not the best of the worlds, but obligation to neither. Moreover, they looked not to the Church, but instead they turned their face to the Western Powers to preserve their special position.⁹⁰

In this sense, Russia showed great interest in some non-muslim groups for the purpose of putting a barrier to England on the Indian route. That's why Russia always got in touch with those groups and provided every sort of support to realize its aim. As can be seen, especially from the accounts of the missionary travelers, the spiritual, social and economic seperation had already started in the region long before the *Imperial Edict*, because by means of the efforts made and the activities carried out by Russia, Crypto-Christians started to declare themselves and convert to Christianity.⁹¹ However, it should be noted that the great number of declarations took place after the date of 18 February 1856, when Sultan Mecid neatly anticipated the Treaty of Paris of 30 March bu issuing *Hatt-i Hümayun*. The effect of both was that the Porte reaffirmed the principle of freedom of religion within the Ottoman Empire, and a watching brief to see that it was not left a dead

⁸⁷ Regarding the special status of Kurumlis, Türkan states that the Kurumlis kept their real faith secret for a long time and in some sources it is reported that Kurumlis started to practice deception so as to benefit from the mining economy because the Ottoman State would not grant the right to non-muslims to run the mines, for the mines had a strategic importance. In addition to this, in the reports of the Ottoman inspectors, it is reported that the Kurumlis practiced deception due to some other reasons, see. Türkan, *Kripto, Hristiyanlar*, p. 145.

⁸⁸ Bryer, "Crypto Christians", pp. 32-33.

⁸⁹ Bryer, "Crypto Christians", p. 31.

⁹⁰ Bryer, "Crypto Christians", p. 33.

⁹¹ For instance, in the despatch dated on April 1867 Palgrave, the British Consul in Trabzon, mentions that because of the increase of the Russian influence in the region, especially soon after the Crimean war some families declared themselves Christian, and many of them adopted a sort of Russian naturalization, see. Bryer, FO195/812 in "Crypto Christians", p. 66.

letter was transferred from the Russian Tsar to the victories of the Crimean War. Thus, some supposedly registered as Muslims emerged out of the woodwork to declare themselves under British and French and Russian protection. In addition, *Tanzimat* was just the beginning of the end because as is pointed by Bryer, a better date was 1856 when the *Islahat Edict* was declared⁹², for the death sentence not being practised⁹³ and the declaration of *the Islahat Edict* gave the opportunity to some groups of secret Christians to declare themselves. For instance, soon after the the declaration of *Islahat Edict*, the secret Christians in Trabzon gave petitions to the consulates of England, France, Austria, Russia and Greece and demanded that the Ottoman State accept them as Christians.⁹⁴ As is stated by Palgrave, in that sense, Russia seems to have played an important role in it. Actually it is possible to say that these groups were being used as a pawn for the political and economic purposes of the Great Powers, especially for Russia aiming to expand the south of the Black Sea and Caucasus. On the other hand, England, trying to secure its commercial route in India, showed a great interest in the issue. For instance, the British Embassy asked for detailed information about the issue from the English consul in Trabzon.⁹⁵

Besides Russia and England, it is possible to say that another country that has influence on the Greeks in Trabzon is Greece. Even if it not as strong as Russia, because of the policies she followed, she managed to have an influence on the Greeks in Trabzon. For instance, Yerasimos states that after a while the interest of the Greeks in Trabzon towards Russia changed in favour of Greece, the Greek consuls influenced the Greeks and as a result of this, the people started to identify themselves with the interests of Greece.⁹⁶ The Greek Elites, who are well-educated

⁹² Bryer, "Crypto-Christians", p. 15.

⁹³ Even though the Ottoman State orally promised not to give any death penalty to the ones who converted, the practice of the death penalty continued in some places, because the authorities took the reactions of the Muslims into consideration and they also thought that it would be against the Sharia see. Gülnihal Bozkurt, *Alman ve İngiliz Belgelerinin ve Siyasi Gelişmelerin Işığında Gayrimüslim Osmanlı Vatandaşlarının Hukuki Durumu*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara 1996, p. 130.

⁹⁴ Türkan, *Kripto Hristiyanlar*, p. 29.

⁹⁵ Stevens gives a detailed information regarding the Kurumlis. In his despatch he remarks that the Turkish government should do something to satisfy the needs of Kurumlis because most of them are likely to emigrate to Russia and also adds that in the recent months several of them have become the subjects of Russia and the present Russian consul in Trabzon are eager to provide passports for them see. FO524/10 in "Crypto-Christians", p. 35.

⁹⁶ Stephanos Yerasimos, "La Communauté Grecque de Trabzon Au 19 Siecle", *CIEPO, Osmanlı Öncesi ve Osmanlı Araştırmaları Uluslararası Komitesi - VII. Sempozyum Bildirileri*, Ankara 1994, p. 265. In addition, Yerasimos points out that the educational organisation in the Greek school in Trabzon was considered as necessary in order to connect the education with the education in Athen. Thus, in 1840 a primary school

and have international connections are deeply affected by the notions of the French Revolution and the Greek revolt, which is the result of this. The majority of the people living in the Province of Trabzon did not have a national awareness until the middle of the XIX. century. The national awareness is the artificial product of the period after the *Tanzimat*.⁹⁷ Thus, soon after Greece was established, it started to become the spokesman of Hellenism both politically and culturally. In this sense, Greece became one of the important factors that affect the situation of the Orthodox Greeks.⁹⁸ The Greek consul in Trabzon did not hesitate to be the defender of the Greek irredantizm (expansionist nationalism). For instance, the French consul in his report clearly states how the Greeks in Trabzon openly voiced and defended the Crete revolt saying that they are very eager to see that the Turks would be expelled from the island.⁹⁹ In addition to the foundation of Greece and the policies followed, one of the actual factors that have an effect on the eastern Black Sea Greeks are the developments in the educational field in connection with Greece.¹⁰⁰ In XIX. century the new elite class who are educated and wealthy, especially under the leadership of the teachers, the doctors and the merchants used the schools along with the churches in order to spread the nationalism among the Orthodox Christians. In order to legalize the creation of this new ethnic group historically, especially the educationalists made great efforts and many students were sent to Athen. When they returned, they would teach Xenophon and classic Greek. In this sense, for instance, in his accounts about a school he visited in Gümüşhane, Southgate says that he was deeply affected when he witnessed that the children in that school could speak Greek as well as the children in İstanbul.¹⁰¹

was established and a person from Athen came to the school in 1850. Moreover, in the western, eastern and the southern part of the Trabzon three schools were opened see. Yerasimos, "La Communaute Grecque de Trabzon", p. 293.

⁹⁷ Georgios Nakracas, *Anadolu ve Rum Göçmenlerin Kökeni*, çev. İbrahim Onsunoglu, Belge Yayınları, İstanbul 2005, p. 180.

⁹⁸ Gerosimos, Augustinos, *Küçük Asya Rumları, Ondokuzuncu Yüzyılda İnanç, Cemaat ve Elmisine*, çev. Devrim Evcı, Dipnot Yayınları, Ankara 1997, pp. 308-311.

⁹⁹ İsmail H. Demircioğlu, "İngiliz Konsolosu Palgrave'e Göre 1868'de Trabzon Konsoloslukları", *Trabzon ve Çevresi Uluslararası Tarih- Dil-Edebiyat Sempozyumu Bildirileri (3-5 Mayıs 2001)*, c. I, Trabzon Valiliği İl Kültür Müdürlüğü Yayınları Trabzon 2002, p. 489. Actually, the idea of establishing the Pontus State in the northern Black Sea emerged during the foundation of Filik-i Eterya' and when the Greece won her independence see. Yusuf Sarımay, "Pontus Meselesi ve Yunanistan'ın Politikası", *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, c.12./3 (1995), pp. 1-77

¹⁰⁰ Özgür Yılmaz, "Pontus Meselesinin Tarihsel Kökenleri: XIX. Yüzyılda Trabzon Rumları Üzerine", *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, XXXI, 2008, p. 174.

¹⁰¹ Bryer and others, "The Pontic Greeks Before the Diaspora", *The Post-Byzantine Monuments of the Pontos*, St. Edmundsbury Press, Aldershot 2002, p. XXIV.

In fact, the accounts of the majority of the XIX. century travelers do not provide much information to signify any relations between the Pontic Greeks and Greece. However, W. J. Childs, who visited Anatolia at the beginning of the XX. century sets a good example. He narrates an incident when he was in Samsun saying that a boy came towards him carrying a collecting-box and asked for a contribution for the aid of the Hellenic navy. The boy told him that the aid is not only for the navy but for the navy of all Hellenic people. Moreover, the traveler mentions that Samsun can not descend from the old Greek Amisus (Samsun), but its people are largely Ottoman Greeks. Besides this, much of the trade and wealth are in their hands. Moreover, he stresses that like all foreign Greeks they look to Greece and contribute money to it, especially to its navy with open-handed generosity; because they hope that the Greek Empire will be reestablished and Constantinople will be the capital again. Childs also adds that they had subscribed 12.000 pounds for the naval service and they were preparing another contribution.¹⁰² The accounts of Childs clearly indicate that the Ottoman Greeks in the eastern Black Sea have the strong feelings of nationalism towards Greece and identify themselves with her. Moreover, it is very striking that they freely ask for and collect money in the streets for the Greek navy despite the fact that they are the subjects of the Ottoman Empire.

Similar to what is narrated above by Childs, in an Ottoman document dated 10 May 1902, it is stated that an Orthodox priest named as Kirilus had been trying to provoke the Stavris. According to the report, even though that person pretended to be the subject of the Ottoman, although he was in fact Greek from the Korfu island and he was collecting money from the Stavri community for the Philiki Etheria¹⁰³, which is the Greek national organisation. He even caused some Muslims to convert to Christianity. All these developments created much concern

¹⁰² W. J. Childs, *Across Asia Minor on Foot*, William Blackwood and Sons, London 1917, p. 13.

¹⁰³ This organisation emerged so that Greeks could realize their Megali idea. It was founded in Odessa in 1814. It first became known with the ideas of the foundation of a Greek State and revive the Empire of Byzantine in the XVIII. century as a secret revolutionary organisation. The Russian Tsar Alexander was declared to be the secret leader of the organisation. The priority was given to establishing an independent country for the Greek nation. After it was realized, the west and the east Thrace (Trakya), Salonica (Selanik), Aegean islands, the Twelve island, Crete, south Albania, the west Anatolia and Cyprus would be annexed to it. Then the foundation Pontus Greek State would be relaied in the region of Black Sea and finally Constantinople (İstanbul) would be captured and the Byzantine Empire would be reestablished see. Gülbadi Alan, "Anadolu'daki Yabancı Okullar ve Pontusçuluk", *Başlangıçtan Günümüze Pontus Sorunu*, ed. Veysel Usta, Serander, Trabzon 2007, pp. 175-176.

for the governor of Ankara.¹⁰⁴ As is seen, this event sets a good example to show how some Greek priests also carry out some activities in the region in favour of Greece.

Undoubtedly, the emergence of Crypto-Christians and conversions in large groups caused some reactions among Muslims. This reaction can easily be seen in the lines of “*Long Street has turned to mud/ The Kurumlis have turned infidel*” gibed by local local Turks. These people who emerged as secret Christians in 1857 and throughout the XIX. century had a number of names in Pontos such as *Kurumlis, Stavriatoi, Santaoi* or *closet-Christians*.¹⁰⁵ However, Muslims were aware of the existence of such Crypto-Christians.¹⁰⁶ This is valid for the places where these groups lived together with the Muslims.¹⁰⁷ It can be said that the reactions of the Muslims against these groups might arise from the application of the representative of the Crypto-Christians to the British Consul Alex Stevens or as Hamilton states, from the existence of the Crypto-Christians in the center of Trabzon. However, both in the accounts of the travelers and despatches of the British Consul in Trabzon, no information is provided about whether the conversions led to some upheavals among the inhabitants in the town or not. Moreover, White draws the attention to the nature of the secret character of the Crypto-Christianity and remarks as follows:

“The meaning and value of secrets change and are negotiated and renegotiated regularly. Secrets and secrecy are social acts, constantly aware of audiences and publics [...]. When we realize how poorly secrets are kept, how selective and managed tellings leak information to a wide variety of audiences, it seems clear that secrets ironically are ways of making information known”.¹⁰⁸

Thus, it should not be surprising that the authorities and the people of Trabzon were not disappointed when in 1857 some of the Kromlides declared their return to Christianity. The last traveler to remark on the Crypto-Christians in the districts of Of and Sürmene is H. F. B. Lynch, who visited the town in the year of 1893. Even though nearly none of the travelers and researchers

¹⁰⁴ Selim Deringil, *İktidarın Sembolleri ve İdeoloji*, YKY, İstanbul: 2007, p. 110.

¹⁰⁵ Bryer, “Crypto Christians”, p. 16.

¹⁰⁶ İlber Ortaylı, “Tanzimat Döneminde Tanassur ve Din Değişirme Olayları”, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda İktisadi ve Sosyal Değişim, Makaleler*, c. I, Turhan Kitapevi, Ankara 2004, pp. 315-316.

¹⁰⁷ Yılmaz, *Batılı Seyyahlara Göre Trabzon*, p. 91.

¹⁰⁸ Louise White, “Telling More: Lies, Secrets, and History”, *History and Theory*, 39, 2000, p. 22.

provide no information about the Crypto-Christians inhabiting in the district, it seems interesting that Lynch remarks on them in his work at the end of the XIX. century. Any travelers' and researchers' not remarking on them can be interpreted as the fact that the affair might have lost its appeal for most of the Western powers parallel to their social and economic interests.

First of all, he states that there villages in Trabzon, the population of which are Muslims and they resent being called any other name than *Osmanlı*. Lynch also stresses that their Greek origin is determined both by history and the traditions and they retain some of them.¹⁰⁹ Except for the other travelers and researchers, probably Lynch is the first one to remark that those people are actually integrated into the Ottoman society and they never imagine being called any other name than *Osmanlı* whereas the other travelers do not mention such an integration. In the following lines, especially he gives some accounts of the villages of Sürmene and Of lying on the east of Trebizond. Lynch asserts that those Greeks are now known for their theological eminence just as they are formerly under the reign of the Greek Empire of Trebizond.¹¹⁰ Moreover, Lynch writes that

“...with this difference, that whereas in those days they supplied the Church with bishops, it is now mollahs that they furnish to Islam. Yet, fanatical as they are, they still hold to certain customs which connect them with the old faith they once served with distinction, and have no doubt, since persecuted with equal zeal.”¹¹¹

Lynch goes on to say that here in the case of an illness a Madonna image is put above the sick-bed in order to recover from the illness. In addition, he mentions that the sufferer sips the forbidden wine from the old cup of the Communion, which is considered as an invaluable object by all the people. However, when they are asked why they do so, they can not give a reasonable answer.¹¹² As can be understood, unlike the other travelers, Lynch stresses the fact that the inhabitants in the districts of Of and Sürmene retain some of their old customs unconsciously. Namely, he does not refer to the fact that they perform the rites of their old faith secretly. On the contrary, he implies that the practices and rites of their old faith are incorporated into the new one. Similarly, Umur also focuses on the fact that

¹⁰⁹ H. F. B. Lynch, *Armenia- Travels and Studies*, Vol. I, Khayats, Beirut 1965, p. 11.

¹¹⁰ Lynch, *Armenia*, p. 11.

¹¹¹ Lynch, *Armenia*, p. 11

¹¹² Lynch, *Armenia*, pp. 11-12.

after the Ottoman conquest, in Trabzon and its vicinity between the years H. 921 (M. 1515) and H. 991 (M.1583), the Islam and Turkishness especially during the last 30 years had increased and become dominant in the lower parts of Baltacı and Solaklı. Apart from the small groups of the Christians here and there, he stresses the fact that it is reasonable to admit that there were also the ones who converted to Islam and participated in the Turkish society. To Umur, this participation and conversion do not violate the purity of the Turkish race, because such things can be observed for all the nations in the world as well and none of the nations has been able to preserve its ethnic purity.¹¹³ Similarly, Meeker states that the descendants of the Christians must have considerably served to profess Muslim, because based on the Trabzon Province Yearbook (TVS) dated 1888, he mentions that despite the fact that many people speak Turkish, sometimes some of the courses are given in Greek in the theological schools (medrese) of Of.¹¹⁴

To some researchers, whereas the classical Ottoman/Islamic law puts a death sentence for the converts from Islam, the rulers in the *Tanzimat* period chose to remain silent when they confront such cases; because they worked hard to “avoid the imperial headache”, referring to Deringil.¹¹⁵ However, contrary to what is claimed, in the studies based on the Ottoman archives it is clearly seen that the authorities made great efforts and tried to take some measures against the cases of the conversions. For instance, it can be said that one of these people is Ahmet Şakir Pasha, who worked as a general inspector in Anatolia. During his inspection travels, he wrote a great number of detailed reports about the matter based on the thoughts of the persons to whom he had assigned duty in the region. Moreover, in the file of the reports are there some telegraphs, reports or the petitions about the subject of conversion. In the *Layihâs* written by him, he points out that the education level of the people and their religious knowledge be raised, the new

¹¹³ Hasan Umur, *Of Tarihi*, Güven Basımevi, İstanbul: 1951, p. 20.

¹¹⁴ Meeker, *İmparatorluktan Gelen Bir Ulus*, p. 182.

¹¹⁵ M. Fatih Çalşır, “Conversion and Apostasy In “The Tanzimat State” : *Case of Selim Ağa*, Tarih Okulu, sy. V, 2009, p. 113; Selim Deringil, “There Is No Compulsion in Religion’: On Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire: 1839-1856” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42/3 (2000), pp. 547-575. Deringil points out that on the date of 16. February 1898 the Trabzon Province reported to Ahmet Şakir Pasha that some people as a result of the deceptions of the priest would convert to Christianity. Up on this an investigation was started in the places mentioned but it was stated that the investigation be carried out on a small scale with the concern that the priests might show the matter under a different light and they would not hesitate to apply to the foreign consulates. One and a half year later, the Trabzon Province would report that the rumours are not true. However, it led to a considerable uneasiness on the side of the authorities see. Deringil, *İktidarın Sembolleri*, p. 107.

schools be opened and the quality of education in the schools and the boarding schools to be opened and in the industrial schools be raised as well. Besides these, he recommended that the schools to increase the religious awareness of the people be opened and the Muslims should not need the obligation to attend the Christian and foreign schools.¹¹⁶ Similarly, in Trabzon the authorities were seeking for some solutions regarding the matter. For example, in a report written about the conversions in the Trabzon Province, it is highly stressed that while the education is given in modern schools in line with the principles of modern education in the places where Greeks and Armenians live, let alone the schools there has been no masjid for the Muslims to give religious knowledge.¹¹⁷ Besides this, according to the Ottoman documents, the Ottoman State closely followed the cases of conversions and exiled the converts to the places where the Muslims are densely-populated.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, the Ottoman State registered the people as “mutanassır” in Gümüşhane town and its vicinity in order to prevent them from their conversion to Christianity just because of the fact that a militray service is not demanded from the non-muslims. Thus, it did not exempt them from the militray service. Especillay in Anatolia, the Ottoman State seems to have focused on the issue more seriously and closely followed the situation of these people through writing to the provinces so that the foreign countries could not manipulate them as a political means.¹¹⁹

Ortaylı also states that freedom of the choice of religion and conscience reached such a degree in the XIX. century that some groups who converted to Islam officially but to keep their real faith secret did not hesitate to declare

¹¹⁶ Mehmet Bilgin, *Trabzon Vilâyetinde Çift Din Taşınanlar*, Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Basılmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İstanbul 2010, pp. 175-176.

¹¹⁷ Bilgin, *Çift Din Taşınanlar*, p. 183. For instance, in a report despatched to the Ministry of Education by Savfet Pasha who carried out some investigation in Gümüşhane on 15.09.1863, it is said that the Greeks and the Armenians built a big and a modern primary school in Gümüşhane and in these schools the education is given in Greek and Armenian and some lessons such as mathematics and geography are given as well. The Muslims formerly had a school with one room but now there has been no trace of it. In addition, Savfet Pasha states that after 1848 when the mines were closed the inhabitants living in Gümüşhane became much poorer and the people called “Buçuk İslamiyet” are living in the vicinity of Gümüşhane. Accordingly, he recommends that a school (sıbyan mektebi) be opened in order to teach religious subjects, to reinforce their religious knowledge, to teach science and improve the education. Bilgin, *Çift Din Taşınanlar*, p. 183. For more detailed information see. Bilgin, *Çift Din Taşınanlar*, pp. 183-187.

¹¹⁸ Türkan, *Kripto Hristiyanlar*, p. 29. For more detailed information about the attitude of the Ottoman Empire towards the conversion or tanassur see. Türkan, *Kripto Hristiyanlar*, pp. 22-39.

¹¹⁹ Kemal Saylan, *Gümüşhane-İdari, Sosyal ve Ekonomik Tarih (1850-1918)*, Gümüşhane Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul 2014, p. 141.

themselves to convert to their own faith. Even if it is considered as *Tanassur* (being Christian) by the Islam Sheria, it was seen that it was not evaluated and regarded like that.¹²⁰ As far as it is understood, the situation of the Crypto-Christians in Pontos, due to some social, economic and political developments on the side of England such as the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and not replacing any consul after Palgrave, Trabzon seems to have lost the interest of England. The recognition of 12.000-30.000 Kurumlis as Christians would only come to the agenda in 1910, but through the diplomatic efforts of Russian and French rather than England. In Bryer's words, it seems that it has resulted from the fact that becoming a Christian lost its appeal because Christians had to do their military obligations and they had the hope of Russia capturing Trabzon to be realized five years later.¹²¹

Conclusion

Trabzon has always consisted of several ethnic groups since it was founded. One of these ethnic groups has been the Christians. This Christian community have always drew the attention of Western travelers and researchers. Western travelers and the researchers seem to have been preoccupied with the existence of the Christian population after the Ottoman conquest of the town in 1461 and have questioned what happened to them. In the studies carried out by some of them, it is mostly observed that they are in favour of the idea that the Christian population was forcibly exposed to Islamisation and Turkification after the Ottoman conquest. To them, most of the Christians had to apostasize and convert to Islam. In other words, they generally base their claims and arguments solely on the conversion or apostasy ignoring the other factors such as the coercive settlement policy of the Ottoman Empire, social, political and economic factors, all of which are interwoven with one another. Therefore, some fanatic and extremist arguments should be used with caution so as to be able to understand and make more objective analysis on the subject.

As the Ottoman Empire started to lose power and got weaker, especially in the XIX. century some cases of being Christian (*Tanassur*) are observed to have taken place in Trabzon and its vicinity. Firstly, it should be noted here that nearly

¹²⁰ İlber Ortaylı, "Tanzimat Döneminde Tanassur ve Din Değişirme Olayları", in: *Tanzimat'ın 150. Yıldönümü Uluslararası Sempozyumu*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara 1994, p. 481.

¹²¹ Bryer, "Crypto Christians", p. 29.

no reference is made to the existence of the Crypto-Christians in the accounts of Western travelers and researcher before the XIX. century. As far as it is seen in the accounts of the travelers, the earlier references to them date back to 1812 when Bijişkyan visited the region. No traveler except Bijişkyan remarks on them until the Campaign of 1828-29 is over. Therefore, it is not accidental for some missionary travelers to mention them after this date; because during the brief occupation of Russia in Gümüşhane, Russia got in touch with the Christians inhabiting in the region. Thus, it seems that there is a close link between the the War of 1828-29 and the references made to Crypto-Christians in 1830's in the accounts of some travelers.

Secondly, when compared with the other travelers, Protestant missionaries such as Smith, Wolf and Southgate seem to have showed great interest in the Crypto-Christians and give more detailed information about them. Especially, the accounts of Smith provide some important clues and help us understand the role of the missionaries about how these groups can be an important target audience to be manipulated for the Protestant mission. Thus it seems that they try to form an ethnic origin for these people claiming that they come from the Greek race and speak Greek as most of the Western travelers tend to repeat in their works in the XIX. century so as to realize their objectives and ease their work. Similarly, when giving information about the inhabitants in the region, Hamilton is observed to be establishing some links between the ancient indigenous tribes in the antiquarian period and the people living in Trabzon and its vicinity. Furthermore, unlike the others, in the accounts of Hamilton, even though he does not mention his source, he makes some remarks on the existence of some Crypto-Christians inhabiting in Trabzon. This allegation needs questioning and needs further research in the studies to be carried out in the future. Moreover, in a later date of 1893, unlike the other travelers, Lynch takes a look at the matter in a different way. It is seen that he makes more objective narrations on the inhabitants of the town pointing out that these people do not imagine being called any other name than *Osmanlı* and states that they are amalgated in the pot of the *Osmanlı* culture and they do practice the rites of their old faith just without being aware of them. In fact, it can be said that though given in a later date, the accounts of Lynch give more plausible answer to the endless and insoluble arguments that have been put forward relating to the demography and the ethnic structure of the region. More probably, it might be better to mention the blend of several cultures integrated into one another during

the course of the history rather than make some remarks on the continuity of only one ethnic group.

It should be stressed here that the rights granted to non-muslims in 1839 (*Tanzimat*) and 1856 (*Islahat Edict*) contributed to the increase in the morale of the non-muslims; because in this liberal atmosphere they felt more secure to declare themselves and tend to convert to their real faith in order to gain some social and economic benefits from Great Powers rather than prefer to be an earnest Christian. For instance, even though the Kurumlis converted to Islam in the XVII. century in order to get the mining concession, not paying *haraç* and exempt from the military service, on a large scale they tended to declare themselves openly and convert to their real faith, especially when the mines lost its economic attraction in Gümüşhane in the first half of the XIX. century. Thus, as far as it is reflected in some native and Western studies, it is possible to say that the Crypto-Christians inhabiting in such districts as Kurum, Santa, Stavri and Torul converted to their real faith so as to gain some social and economic benefits, especially after the mines were closed. As a result of some of socio-economic changes that took place in the region, these people had a tendency to abandon their region through the motivation of Russia or to be able to get a new status. It should be also noted that some Western consulates such as England, France and Russia took a close look at the matter and sent some regular reports to their embassies in Constantinople when the matter was hot for their own socio-economic interests. Besides these consulates, it seems clear that Greece also closely watched the matter and paid careful attention to it.

It seems that the information collected by the travelers and researchers have politically been used as well. In this sense, the two political aims which these researches served for should be focused on. The first one is that the Crypto-Christians in the region have become known on the international platform and their existence and their life styles have been deciphered. This seems to have been used in order to awaken the Christianity in the region. The second one is that as in the example of Greece she developed some approaches through the contact with her kins and co-religionists within the context of her expansionist nationalism and the Megali idea policies regarding the manipulation of these groups. In the XIX. century, the activities carried out in the region regarding the Pontic Greeks' identifying themselves with Greece clearly indicates it. Thus, as a result of these activities, it is understood that the artificial Pontus issue, which still keeps its actuality

in the present time was revived and brought to the international platform. In order to analyse the issue more deeply, it is necessary to take the political background of the issue into consideration, carry out some comparative studies in which the information provided by the travelers and researchers and the Ottoman archive documents are comparatively studied, to put forward the existence of the Crypto-Christians in terms of the statistical data in the region in an objective way and to study their place in the other ethnic groups. With such comprehensive studies, the real face of the Pontus issue can be deciphered.

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