

## NOTES ON THE ORTHODOX COMMUNITY (*RUM*) IN OTTOMAN CYPRUS (1580-1640)

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### Özet

#### Osmanlı Kıbrıs'ndaki Ortodoks Cemaati Üzerine Notlar (1580-1640)

Bu yazının amacı, 1571 yılından sonra Kıbrıs adasında Müslüman- Ortodoks (Rum) ilişkilerini, temel olarak Osmanlı arşiv belgelerine, Lefkoşa Mahkemesi tutanaklarına göre sunmaktır. Adanın fethinden sonra Müslümanlar ile Ortodokslar arasında çok yönlü ve geniş bir ilişki mevcut olduğu belgenmektedir.

**Key words:** *Müslümanlar, Rumlar, Kıbrıs, Lefkoşa, Cemaat*

### Abstract

This paper is based mainly on Ottoman archival documents. After 1571, Ottoman governments intend to set up with non-Muslim groups of island in good intention to settle their administration in the island. Many non-Muslims, including that of Orthodox community, come to Islamic court of Nicosia to solve their problems. From these documents, we see that Ottoman officials did not behavior against them in prejudice in every topic.

**Key words:** *Muslims, Orthodox community, Cyprus, Nicosia, Religious communities.*

My paper's aim is to present a short glance about Muslim-Orthodox relations during 1580-1640 years and to give brief information on the Orthodox community (*Rum*) in Ottoman Cyprus in the light of the court registers of Nicosia. The paper is mainly based on the court registers of Nicosia, currently kept at the archive of *Awqaf* in Nicosia. After 1571, when Ottomans conquered the island from Venetians, Ottoman Muslims first met the Orthodox Christians in Cyprus.<sup>1</sup> I remark that this word still has mystery and mixed meaning from the Ottoman point of view. In the first Ottoman census dated 1572, they were registered as non-Muslim subject who owes obedience and tribute

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<sup>1</sup> Further information on *Rum*, Lewis 1998, 10-11.

to the empire (*zimmi*).<sup>2</sup> Sometimes they were identified as religious community who rejected main principles of Islam (*kefere*) or a religious sect who bound to the Orthodox Church (*reaya kefere taifesi*). In fact, Ottomans have met other religious sects such as Catholic and Jacobite in Limassol and Nicosia cities in 1572. Geographically, *Rum* word was mainly Anatolian peninsula, not Greece or the Greek nation (*Yunan/ Ellas*). One of the first activities by Ottoman governments was to pasify the Catholic Church in Cyprus, because they had sympathized with Latin states. The new policy by Ottoman governments was to establish close friendship with Orthodox community of Cyprus and to continue mix-cultural structure of the island by integrating them with Muslims.

First settlers from Anatolia were settled in Cyprus as a government policy to colonize the island after 1571. Most of them were Muslim-Turks from Central Anatolia while a few settlers were non-Muslim from Anatolian peninsula. As new rulers of Cyprus, Muslim settlers set up Islamic institution of Ottomans in the island and Nicosia city was made a government center where Islamic-Ottoman court was set up to solve disputes among all islanders and to prepare all official documents.<sup>3</sup> Now these documents prepared by Nicosia Islamic court provide us with valuable information on Muslim and Orthodox relations as expressed by the late Ronald C. Jennings.<sup>4</sup> With a settlement project planned by Ottoman sultan Selim II, Ottoman government invited all Muslims and non-Muslims from Anatolia to settle in the island, because the island will get prosperous by agricultural activities of the Anatolian agriculturalist.<sup>5</sup> Government officials say that the settlers must take agricultural tools while going to the island. Many Muslims were full of various agricultural tools and animals. In Cyprus, local government assigned to them houses and cultivable lands for establishing of these politic and affluence policy. Ottoman archival documents show that for first days the disputes on lands took place between local population and new settlers. Local Christian population sometimes opposed against new Muslim settlers. One of them was Orthodox Christians of Cyprus although they invited Ottoman army to the island to occupy from Venetians.<sup>6</sup>

From personal names of Orthodox written in Ottoman Turkish into the court registers it seems that some Turkish Muslim personal names such as Murad, Balı, Bahshı, Arslan, were given to them as well as some other some personal names in Hebrew like Elyas, Yasef, and also some Orthodox personal names by Ottoman clerks. In the official registers their names were written in a different form in letter than those of Muslims. Especially female names of Orthodox also are interesting. No Orthodox woman who took Muslim-Turkish personal name was seen in the court registers.

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<sup>2</sup> *Cyprus Population and Land Survey dated 1572*, no. 63.

<sup>3</sup> Erdođru 2001, 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> Jennings 1993, 132.

<sup>5</sup> Altınay 1926, doc. 51.

<sup>6</sup> *12 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri*, I, 17.

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The Ottomans generally call religious communities in their religious names, excluding Orthodox, Armenians, Gypsy, Jewish and Syrian.<sup>7</sup> The late Ronald C. Jennings says that the word *Rum* was not written officially into Ottoman court registers.<sup>8</sup> But in the period of 1580-1640 I found only one word *Rum* in a document of manumission of the registers. Someone named Petro son of Hristofi who originally from Anatolian peninsula (*an asl Rum*) was mentioned in this document. In the later periods this word frequently passed in the documents such as Orthodox community (*Rum milleti*) or Orthodox subject (*Rumiyan*). I think that its real meaning is lying in the administration understanding of Ottoman governments, because they want to connect strictly between all Muslim and non-Muslim communities in the island to supply multi-cultural structure in the Islamic context of the law.

Muslim Cypriots have met with Orthodox in various disputes documented in the Ottoman court in Nicosia city. Almost all Orthodox applied to the court to solve their disputes. We know that they came from Kyrine, Famagusta, Limassol, Lefka, Bafhos, Tuzla and other places of the island. From the archival documents it seems that Orthodox have engaged in trade, agriculture, religious and official matters. Generally they were wine merchant, tavern keeper, architect,<sup>9</sup> soldier, baker, seamen, interpreter, doctor<sup>10</sup> and agriculturalist by profession. A few were international merchant. Orthodox clergy also have traded as local merchants. Nicosia city was main trading center for all communities.

Quarters located at Nicosia city were not homogenous structure in early Ottoman period. Islamic law allowed non-Muslims to live in a Muslim quarter. However, non-Muslims, including Orthodox, were not expelled from their quarters. Instead Ottoman government made new settlers settled into old Venetian Quarters regardless of former structure. So multi cultural life began in Cyprus with them. After the conquest new Muslim quarters were also established in both Nicosia and in Famagusta cities. In fact quarter's names passing in the documents do not define their religious situation, but although the government gave settlement permission to every religious community in quarters, they settled in the same quarters due to the life style. Even some Orthodox population went to Armenian quarters to settle and to live there. This mixed-structure had continued in long period in Nicosia. Famagusta's situation was more different from those of Nicosia. In 1571, Ottoman government bought all houses related to non-Muslims located in the fortress of Famagusta and they were with the imperial order vacated because of their resistance to Ottoman army.<sup>11</sup> Now, I remark that a few Orthodox families were transferred from central Anatolia, in particular from Qaraman

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<sup>7</sup> In particular see *The court registers of Nicosia, no. 4.*

<sup>8</sup> Jennings, 1993, 132.

<sup>9</sup> Jennings 1993, 155-56.

<sup>10</sup> *The court registers of Nicosia, no. 4, 123.*

<sup>11</sup> *12 Numarah Mühimme Defteri, II, 266-267.*

province to the island after 1571 by Ottoman governments. Ottoman documents show that they continue close relationship with those of central Anatolia and maintain strictly cultural and commercial ties with them. Ottoman government practiced an integrating policy for all Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Cyprus.

As for the Orthodox, the court registers show that Orthodox and Muslims make a claim against to each other in the court. As Orthodox men have complained about Orthodox women, Orthodox women complained about Muslim men. Orthodox men complained about Orthodox men, Orthodox women complained about Orthodox men. Orthodox men were against Muslim men, Muslim men were against Orthodox women. Indeed everyone complained about everyone. Moreover European non-Muslim merchants to Cyprus also have complained about Cypriot Orthodox men in the court of Cyprus. The court was always open for all subjects who seek justice. The documents clear that there was no any limitation for any community. Nicosia has a military consul for security of the island and a governor-general who to govern the island from the city.

Orthodox in Cyprus were both citizen and peasant. They have a lot of disputes with the cavalrymen (*sipahi*) in rural areas. Orthodox tavern keepers were in Nicosia city to sell wine and grape juice. I remark that trading wine was forbidden for Muslim merchants according to Ottoman law. Some of them were engaged in international trade with Anatolia, Syrian cities like Tripoli, Aleppo, and Damascus. Istanbul was also important trade and religious center for them. Vineyard profession among them was fairly widespread. For ancient times, grape juice and wine of the island were famous for non-Muslims. Islamic law allowed non-Muslims to sell and to drink wine in taverns. Orthodox merchants opened taverns in Nicosia and Famagusta cities and in the rural areas. They constructed special storehouses for wine and houses for grape juice. There were wine cellars with large earthenware jar in the lower part of their homes. Orthodox wine merchants bought an official permission for trading of wine from the state for a while. They must avoid selling wine in the sacred days for Muslims. However, according to Ottoman law, Orthodox merchants who buy and sell wine without an official permission will be punished. Cavalrymen sell wine in the rural areas though the law prohibited it, because it was a profitable profession. High-level officials, including judges and governor-generals, struggle to stop this illegal trade, because the Koran forbids Muslim rulers to sell wine. Sometimes cavalrymen demand extra money from Orthodox wine merchants in illegal manner. An opinion on this topic was issued by Abdurrahman efendi, an official expounder of Islamic law of Cyprus. In his official opinion he pointed out that if an Orthodox wine merchant paid a tax imposed on grape juice (*öřr-i řıra*) to his cavalry man once a year, cavalry man will not again demand an extra and illegal tax imposed on security by police (*subařılık*) from him both in cash and in money for that year. When Murad IV prohibited selling and drinking wine in the empire, local Ottoman officials closed all taverns in Cyprus. Orthodox wine merchants had suffered from bad situation. A tavern in the Fish market Quarter of Nicosia city that was run by a certain Orthodox Baralimo was closed by the order at once. In this

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circumstance Baralimo demanded to re-pay his money from the state treasure that he had paid it in advance for two years for selling wine in Nicosia. In this complex situation many Orthodox wine merchants lost their money whether or not completely practice the official prohibition in Cyprus. In fact this former dispute took place between Muslims and non-Muslims in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Muslims always watched Orthodox who drink wine and pretend to understand them. They freely drink wine at taverns providing that they should respect to Ottoman laws and customs. Sometimes Ottoman officials had a dispute with drunken Orthodox persons because of their drunkenness. Two sides always exploited this topic. An Orthodox man made a complaint against his son-in-law by claiming that he had been drunk and then beaten his sister that is his wife. He knows that drunkenness was a fault to Ottoman law.

One of the disputes among Muslim and Orthodox communities was to transfer property and goods. Some Orthodox Cypriots came to the court for business and made court officials confirm their commercial activities by written official documents. From the documents it is clear that purchasing and selling of movable goods and immovable property in the court was more. In these years, houses, gardens, fields and irrigation rights related to Orthodoxy was transferring at the court either Muslims or others. Orthodox men sometimes in force save agricultural lands belonging to Orthodox women. Land disputes also took place among them. Muslims sometimes possessed their lands illegally. Orthodox persons sell their immovable properties either Orthodox or Muslims. Dr. Jennings says that Muslims had hold possession seventy percent of the lands and properties because they were more active than others. A lot of houses belonging to Orthodox persons in Nicosia frequently changed hands. As aforementioned the non-Muslims of Famagusta were pushed back from the castle. Their houses were bought by the Ottoman government in 1571. However, they have resisted to the Ottoman army during the siege.

Orthodox clergy applied to the court for various reasons. One of them was for the election of monks in Orthodox villages. In fact these elections made in the context of the Orthodox law, but some Muslims hopes to select their candidate as a monk, because the clergy was exempted from all taxes according to Ottoman law. They had lands to let to Muslims. They were engaging in trading, sometimes, accused of robbery, rape, and killing by Muslims. For this reason the court agents summoned them to the court to arrogate. Orthodox church agreed to preserve his community from illegal pressure because of Islamization policy by Ottoman governments. In this situation the church first planned to keep in reserve women who were connected with the church. Because some Orthodox women got married with Muslims and finally they have been a Muslim. An Orthodox woman from Tuzla region got married with a Muslim Cypriot man and after a short time she divorced his husband. For such a widow Orthodox Church forbid her to enter to the church. She applied to the court to solve her problem and she demanded an official written document showing she was still Orthodox from the court. A certain Ciryako from Agro village was excommunicated from his church because of the clergy

pressure. He also selected the same way. In fact the church forbid them to convert to Islam and to get married with any Muslim man. We reckon from the documents that the conversion to Islam among them between 1580-1600 years was seldom in number. In this period only two Orthodox men entered to Islam officially. One of them was a child aged ten years from Ortaköy village, while the other was an adult man named Nikolu son of Yorgi from Hirsofu region.

The disposal of the lands possess in mort main to Orthodox Church was one of the other important problems. Some Orthodox clergy wanted to seize these lands by force and local Muslims resisted their illegal applications for the lands. An event took place in Inehorya village. Orthodox bishops were collecting extra money from their community as a tax. This event passed to the court. As an Ottoman practice after 1571, many monasteries of Cyprus were assigned to cavalrymen as a fief or were sold to a few persons. For example Dellapayis monastery in Kyrine region had been given to a certain Orthodox Medaye son of Peşkali by the court. More ready money was hold by a few Orthodox bishops. There was a money relation between local Ottoman rulers and Orthodox bishops who was very rich. Bafhos governor Mustafa bey has borrowed much money from a bishop to spend for dockyard and prisoners of war.

Serious problems took place between cavalry men and Orthodox peasants in the rural areas in particular in the year of 1580. The men sometimes seized their money by force and in addition they demanded them extra money as tax. In a village an Orthodox man did not pay extra money as tax to the man because his son was not registered into the official tax register as a taxpayer. The man again demanded money from his father as a tax named '*resm-i adiyे*'. Finally the court rejected the demand by the man. Sometimes cavalrymen rented a part of their fief to an Orthodox contractor. Two sides raise a question in rent money. A few men did not want to assign lands to Orthodox women whose fathers were died. We know that number of the Orthodox cavalrymen was few in the island. Architect Andon son of Petre who was an Orthodox was a cavalry man in Bafhos region and he handed over agricultural lands in a few measure to an Orthodox Hristofi in return of four thousand aspers. Celuce villagers settling in Bafhos were in dispute with their cavalryman. The cavalryman says that Orthodox Celuce peasants who belonged to him must not leave his village without his permission. If they abandoned the village, they should pay a tax imposed on leaving his lands uncultivated (*çift bozan resmi*). Finally they made peace together in the court. In fact most Cypriot villagers left their villages in those years and escaped from their cavalrymen because of misadministration and heavy taxation. They came to Nicosia city and it's surrounding. However, this city was exempted from agricultural taxes paid by villagers. A legal opinion was issued by the expounder of Islamic law of Cyprus about this topic. It was pointed out in this official document that villagers who lived in another village for 35 years did not pay any tax named *çift bozan* to the men. The cavalrymen never demanded such a tax from villagers who had no animal for agriculture and fertile lands. It is clear

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that most villagers were under the pressure of the cavalrymen in the late period of the sixteenth century.

The inheritance distribution of an Orthodox who was dead was in disorder. According to the Ottoman law the inheritance of Orthodox was assigned to the church in theory. But some officials such as officials concerned with distribution of inheritance have interfered with this distribution in their selfish purpose. If the heirs proved the status with proof, inheritance would pass to them. An Orthodox man from Megri, a small town in southern Anatolia, managed to seize the inheritance belonging his brother in Nicosia at the court. Some commercial disputes among them were heard by the method of compromise in front of the judge in testimonies of two adult men. Lending money was also fairly widespread within Orthodox community. With regard to Ottoman law, a written testament made by Orthodox in the court was in law in force. Petro from Nicosia got back his loan from Petro with testimonies of two adult men.

Beating, wound, robbery and cursing were the other disputes between two communities. Every two sides were striving to protect their respect, in particular women. A Muslim man brought a suit against an Orthodox man, claiming that he was beaten. In this case the court received statements by one Muslim man and one Orthodox man as a witness. A Muslim man from Kaymaklı village brought a suit against an Orthodox man. He claims that he raids his home and beats him. Two Orthodox adult witnesses were received in the court to settle the dispute. They confirmed the event at the court. Indeed the aim of this dispute was to gain money from each other. Orthodox woman from Eglence village claims to be beaten by an Orthodox man. The woman applied to the court to have the rights of her. Two Muslim men talked against her in the court. Orthodox men also informed to the court personal that the woman was unrely. In fact all women whether Orthodox or not watches each other to gain a respect and money in the Ottoman law. It must be pointed out that the cursing was widespread among them. A suit concerning an Orthodox who lived in *Kızılbaş* village of Nicosia was discussed in the court. Ottoman law allowed Orthodox women to divorce from their Muslim husbands. A Orthodox woman named Cıryako received his dowry and maintenance allowance from husband and divorced him.

There were lending and borrowing money between Orthodox and other religious communities of Cyprus. Furthermore we know that European merchants were also trading cotton and cotton fabrics from the island. One of the *bailos* of France in Cyprus brought a suit against an Orthodox merchant in the court because of the usury. *Bailo* himself came to the court and explained his official statement in Turkish. It is well known that there was an interpreter who translated from Greek to Turkish, official language of the court. One of the other European merchants who applied for safety in Nicosia has engaged in a trustee for small boy whose father rejected Islam. Ali, one of the Qaraman Muslims, paid over amount of money to three Orthodox men sent to the

island from Anatolia. A few Orthodox men were the guarantors of a Jew contractor. In addition a few Orthodox men had set up a company in Koukla area.

There also exist some paying difficulties in taxes such a tax imposed on wine as capitation tax, land tax, provisions for the army march, a tax imposed on leaving lands of uncultivated the state treasure by Orthodox. However some of them was accustomed not to pay their taxes legally imposed on them. They ran away from the island either to other places of the empire or to the outside of empire. Also they who were in the island must pay in commune their taxes unless Orthodox taxpayers who were dead were not cancelled an entry from the official tax registers. In this situation they paid either their interpreter or yourself. The governments were accustomed to demand taxes from them for the taxpayers of the community who died from plague and who converted to Islam. At the beginning of the 17th century Jalali rebels had reached to the island and caused losses within all communities of the island.

Attorney ship and trust institutions were in validity for Orthodox community. The court was protecting Orthodox orphans and their properties from hungry persons. The court sometimes confirmed Orthodox marriages that took place in the church. They could leave their trousseau for their children in the court. For instance Baba Mihal, an Orthodox Cypriot man, and his wife Hristiye left a lot of cotton fabrics as trousseau to their sister Maria. In conclusion, from the court registers it seems that Cypriot Muslims' attitude toward the Orthodox community was fairly softly. There was no prejudice against them.

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