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Political Use of Conversion in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Context: Some Cases From Salonica

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The purpose of this study is to shed light on a period of time in Ottoman history when conversion policies and practices, influenced by the changes of times and, resulted in unprecedented socio-political directions. In order to do that, some conversion cases from the Ottoman society in Salonica will be presented. Conversion to Islam is of central importance in explaining the rise of empire and its formation in many scholarly studies. It was usually presented as an official policy of Ottoman administration throughout the centuries. The devshirme system and Sufi preaching were considered to be the major instruments of mass conversion to Islam. On the contrary, I propose to look at the conversion issue in the nineteenth century context from a different angle.

As is the case in Islam every religion has naturally sought to attract people to "its own system of teachings and life style. For this purpose, Islamic faith set some rules to promote conversion to Islam. For instance, in the Koran prospective converts are inclwded among the people who can receive the income of *zekat* (obligatory alms).[1] According to Islamic understanding, one's conversion to Islam is not the embracing of a new religion but the return to his original faith, because everybody is regarded to be born in a Muslim faith and without any sin. Therefore, the one who converted to Islam simply returns or reverts to his nature.[2] Another important point is that after the conversion all the previous sins of a convert are forgiven by God. The convert is regarded as innocent as a new-born baby. This understanding of

Islam helps a lot for the promotion of Islam and attracts the people who committed crimes but wanted to repent.[3] Since there is not such an institution as the clergy in the Islamic faith, all the believers in Islam are responsible to introduce Islam to non-Muslims.

No doubt, conversion was the basic process of the spread of any religion. Thus, the history of the phenomenon of conversion to Islam goes back to the early years of the expansion of Islam, when the peaceful convincing of individuals prevailed against the use of force. On this matter Koran says: "Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and godly exhortation, and have disputations with them in the best manner; surely your Lord best knows those who go astray from His path, and He knows best those who follow the right way."[4] The believers in Islam multiplied rapidly in a very short period of time not because of forced conversion but because of the tolerant and convincing nature and simplicity of Islamic teachings.

Like all great religions, Muslims wanted to convert everyone to the faith that they believe to be the only true one. According to Islam, the people of the book are those who still follow one of the older revelations given before Islam, that is Jews and Christians, each of whom have a book to show for their belief. They may keep all their customs and social arrangements, and are quite free with regard to their religion. From the time of the first conquests of Islamic state the tolerant treatment of the non-Muslims was set as a rule in which forced conversion or extermination of non-Muslims was prohibited. The prevailing policy was the attitude of aloofness to the conquered people because the teachings of Koran commend it.[5] Thus, this tradition was followed by almost all of the Muslim successor states. As in the case of Ottoman Empire, for instance, one can find so many Christian and Jewish contemporary and academic accounts which clearly pointed out the tolerant nature of treatment to the non-Muslims.[6]

After the conquest of Constantinople, the Ottomans continued the previous Islamic states' general policy of granting and recognizing the non-Muslim communities' extensive privileges respecting to their internal organization and communal affairs.[7] Since Islam regards Christianity as a religion and respects the Christians as the "people of the book" and the Bible as a holy book and Jesus Christ as a prophet, the Orthodox church was recognized as an official body to supervise both the religious and civil affairs of the community in the Empire. According to Professor Ýnalcýk, protections of the rights of non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire were considered "a command of God and a duty of the State" by the Ottomans from the beginning.[8] Moreover, the Orthodox Church was particularly recognized as the most respected religious community in the hierarchical structure of the Empire.[9] Before the eighteenth century, traditionally the candidate for the Patriarchate was proposed to the Sultan by the holy synod of the Patriarchate, which was believed to be composed of Metropolitans who were mostly close to Istanbul, and thereafter an imperial *berat* (permit) was issued for the confirmation of appointment.[10]

Conversion as a Nineteenth-century phenomenon

Since social, political, cultural and economic conditions of the nineteenth century were changed radically not only in the Ottoman Empire but also all over the world, the phenomenon of conversion to Islam in the nineteenth century Ottoman context was also different from the earlier centuries.

Conversion was a common incident in a plural society such as Salonica, which was divided into several religious groups in the nineteenth century.[11] There is only one condition for conversion to Islam, which requires one to attest that "there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger." However, it became a tradition to have two witnesses present during the attestation. The convert has to learn the basics of Islam in the first place. He/she does not need to change his name but for the male converts circumcision was advised.[12] Although there is no need to do this as a ceremony or before any religious institution or authority, in the nineteenth century Ottoman context, when a person wanted to convert to any other religion, he had to do it in front of the local authorities, including the *mufti,* heads of the Orthodox and Jewish communities and sometimes the foreign consuls.[13]

I have selected four registers of conversion dated in the early nineteenth century from Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives in Ýstanbul (BOA) in order to analyze the structure and the process of conversion. Each document refers to persons from different religious groups, Catholic, Jewish, Armenian and Greek Orthodox. The structural style of the documents is typical. All of them were registered for the purpose of requesting *kisve baha* (value of clothes). The depiction of the former religion of the converts was not severe. Most of the time, the terms: "*batýl dinden ihraç"* (exclusion from an unreasoned faith)*, "bu ana kadar kefere hilalinde kalup"* (to this time remaining in the circle of infidels) were used in order to explain the former religion of the converts. There are not much information about the special position, age, marital status of the converts. It can be grasped from the documents that these persons had already converted to Islam at another time and place but wanted to register themselves as the new converts to qualify to get *kisve paha.* We know that the amount of *kisve baha* was 150 *guruº* in the early nineteenth century. Two important ceremonial acts were performed during the process of registry: one was the declaration of conversion by saying the attestation before the judge and the scribes; another one was the circumcision.[14]

Conversion was predominantly an urban phenomenon in the nineteenth century context. Cultural interactions and acculturations were best realized in the cities. Both the mind and the interests of urban people compared to those of rural population were predominantly more assertive and well developed. Therefore, occurrences of conversion cases mostly among the urban population were very normal. On the contrary, the simplicity and conservativeness of rural population in its life style and belief in a way prevented them from becoming pragmatic-interest seekers.

In the nineteenth century context, conversion was an individual private act. If one wanted to convert to any other religion, one could do it in his limits of privacy. However, it was not that clear cut. Most of the time, change of social status, of marital status, the purpose of prevention from abuse, of getting rid of the debts were some of the several most common reasons that affected the process of conversion. When we talk about any purposeful act, we should see politics behind it. We cannot say that the converts were not sincere in their acts and always carried an agenda behind their thoughts and deeds. In fact, we have to give credit to the righteousness of Islam and what it offers to the needs of people. But, when we take the subject of conversion into account as a historical phenomenon, we have to deal with the causes and effects, which directly lead us to the political use of conversion in the nineteenth century Ottoman context.

Was Conversion Forced or Voluntary?

Apart from some nationalist historians of the Balkan states, scholars, after having done much research on the subject concluded that Ottoman state did not coerce the conversion and nor followed the policy of forced-conversion. Conversion to Islam was perceived as an individual's own decision by the state which also saw its role as legitimating and registering the conversion cases. As Eyal Ginio noted rightly at the conclusion of his article on conversion of minors to Islam that external pressures with social and economic considerations always constituted some forms of coercion.[15] When we look for common features of human motivations among converts in the nineteenth century context, political and practical ones prevailed against the emotional and intellectual ones. Although we cannot generalize the economic aspects as the sole causes of conversion, they played a significant role in the process of human motivations. The conversions made under the influence of economic causes were not rejected by the Islamic faith. While the Koran set the rule by allowing the prospective converts to receive the *zekat,* the Prophet Muhammed practiced this rule by providing financial support to some non-Muslims in order to attract their attention to Islam.[16]

This was not a process of forced conversion but that of institutionalized conversion says S. Vryonis.[17] Exercise of social function with an efficacy by the Islamic institutions over the Christian and Jewish institutions provided prestige and propaganda for the prospective converts to Islam.[18] The rise of *sufizm* and spread of the *derwish* orders in these appropriate conditions could be seen as an example of the institutionally well-organized conversion in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Nehemia Levtzion also points out that since the conditions following the conquests provided a kind of psychological superiority to the Muslims, conversion to Islam became a positive-cultural-phenomenon among the conquered people.[19]

Vryonis equates the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans with the so-called Islamization. According to

his point of view, the sole purpose of Ottoman conquests in the Balkans was to gain converts to Islam or in more general terms for the spread of Islam. Naturally, he sees "a picture of cultural change and of a single line movement of Christians and Jews into the fold of Islam."[20] However, to assert that the ideology of Ottoman expansion in the Balkans was Islamization is to twist the historical facts. The centuries following the early conquests clearly reflected that the Ottomans did not use the state's means and efforts to transform all the peoples of Balkans into Muslims. The movement of mass conversion was realized in certain areas where either there was not an institutionalized religious order or the people were under religious persecution. Another point which has been made in the studies is that most of the time conversions were realized for the worldly advantages or to escape from mostly religious persecution. (like in Cyprus and Crete).[21] Religious alienation was another factor which induced some Christian sects to convert to Islam, like the Bogomils. For instance, some religious groups such as the Nestorians, the Monophysites and the Copts living on the borders of Byzantine Empire were under serious religious persecution during the spread of Islam.[22] Most importantly, the Orthodox Church, which must have been seen as the biggest obstacle that stood in front of Islamization, was not destroyed but rather strengthened by the reviving of the ecclesiastical seats in the Balkans. The highest authority of the Orthodox Church, the Patriarchate of Ýstanbul was made an administrative body of the Ottoman state. Therefore, the issue of conversion should be viewed as simply an individual and private act.

Generally speaking, the literary historical character of a Christian child who was converted to Islam is not a new symbol of the depiction of the Islamization process in the modern Balkan literature.[23] The popular mind in the most part of the Balkans with the help of actualist history textbooks has seen the issue of conversion as a process of official coercion imposed upon the people of the region by the Ottoman rule. According to Maria Todorova, the process of conversion to Islam during the five centuries of Ottoman rule has to be seen mainly as the result of the voluntary decisions made by individuals.[24] In the nineteenth century, conversion to Islam became more and more an individual experience and a personal choice. Most of the time issue of conversion remained a hidden phenomenon and completely individualistic private experience. Since Islam does not require one either to make official his/her conversion or to make it publicly known, converts chose to remain unknown unless they had some political agenda or economic interest. We learn of their existence from the summaries of lawsuits and brief registrations of converts' names on the *°er'iye sicils* (Ottoman judiciary court records). Since conversion changes one's legal status almost completely, the ties of paternity, inheritance, marriage and the ownership of slaves are also abolished accordingly. In fact, these registers of conversion refer to the converted people who one way or the other needed to make official declaration of their conversion in the court. There are several reasons behind their intention

of registration. At this point, I argue that individualistic political implications occupied an important part of these reasons. Registering his/her conversion in the Ottoman Muslim court consolidated the convert's belief and involvement in the Muslim community. "The declaration in the court was probably made as a result of the wish to have documentary proof to hand, possibly to show to persistent poll-tax (*cizye*) collectors"[25] says Eyal Ginio about the conversions in the eighteenth century context. However, for the nineteenth century the reasons to register in the Muslim court were various. These were political sympathies, cultural similarities, admiration for Islamic morals, social advantages, political promotion, exemption from taxes, admiration for doctrinal clarity and social pressure.

Causes of Conversion

In a general sense, conversion requires a process of preparation in which environmental causes were very active. The personal motivation and the state of mind of the new converts in the changing political and socio-economic conditions of the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire have to be taken into account. The prospective convert's social status, economic condition, intellectual capacity, religious indoctrination, worldly interests and marriage were the basic aspects of causes for conversion.[26] Richard Clogg cited the following ten reasons from a contemporary account, which induced the Christians voluntarily to embrace Islam:

"1) for the love of civil liberty, 2) in consequence of the fatigues of slavery and particular vexations, 3) to enjoy the luxurious privileges of polygamy, 4) to preserve their property from Muslim usurpation, 5) to enjoy freedom in their manner of dressing, 6) to get rid of a capital condemnation, 7) to free their children from slavery, 8) from want of religion, a sentiment of honour, 9) from a taste for arms, and often with a design to avenge himself on a Turk who has ill treated him, 10) from despair, or from a state of drunkenness".[27]

We look first at the impact of money given to the converts as *kisve baha* (150 guruº in the early 19th century). This should be considered as a gift of honor from the government rather than an instrument of appeal for conversion. *Kisve baha* which was awarded upon conversion given for buying clothes was not other than a sort of financial grant handed out to the new converts. The amount of sums normally awarded was varied according to the conditions of time (such as inflationary processes in the Empire) and the social status of the converts.[28] Nikolay Antov asserts that Ottoman government's treatment to the new converts differed and more money was allotted to converts "who had higher social status prior to their conversion and some who were of special importance to the Porte.[29] The amount of *kisve baha* in the early 19th century economic conditions of Ottoman Empire was a great amount of money for the converts, since the amount of *kisve baha* as 150 *guruº* was exceeding the rate of poll-tax (for the middle category of *cizye* payers the rate was 24 *guruº*) five or six times. It is generosity toward non-Muslims, care for the needy and

pretended holiness of life that especially promoted the conversion in the cities. Making the religious charity buildings (like *imarethanes*) even more active centers for relief and needs of the poor people regardless of their religious etiquette in the cities provided suitable space for the promotion of Islam.

As was the case in other parts of the Empire, conversion cases in Salonica were quite frequent particularly in the early nineteenth century, since the population of the city consisted of three different religious groups.[30] Converts (both Christians and Jews) to Islam were provided with financial and moral support in the form of either paying all the debts of the converts or providing great security and protection against all offences. This protection and practice of paying of debts were frequently exploited by the non-Muslim population, when they needed either to get rid of enormous debts or to get protection against their own community's rather strict rules. It was very easy for a Christian or a Jew in those cases to declare that he had converted to Islam, because when he said that he had become a Muslim, his former community had no authority over him.[31]

Consul Blunt reported the following incident relating to Christian apostasy from Salonica:

"A Greek *reaya* who presented himself to the Pasha saying that he wished to embrace the Mohammedan faith. His Excellency told him to go and reflect, and gave him a week to consider. The man who is a native of Ionina returned still resolved to abandon his faith, but the Pasha having in the meanwhile made inquiries respecting this individual, and finding that he wished to become a Muslim purposely to escape the payment of some trifling debts. His Excellency rejected him".[32]

In former years, all the debts of a prospective convert had generally been paid by the Muslims; after that the individual was accepted as a true convert to Islam.[33] The above apostasy case clearly defines the position of the Ottoman authorities towards the status of Christian people in Ottoman society. In other words, depiction of the Ottoman authorities' aggressive behavior towards the Christian *reaya* in which the former perceive the latter as potential candidates for Islamisation, as found in a number of accounts, need closer examination. Islam does not allow conversion of Christians to Islam by the sword or by persecution, but rather recognizes both Christians and Jewish people as the "people of the book" and allows them to continue to exercise their faith undisturbed as long as they acknowledge their submission to the authority of the state. On this issue, Kemal Karpat says:

"The government regarded itself as the protector of Christians and of their right to abide by their chosen faith, and infringements of the right by Muslim subjects was punished. If, indeed, the Ottoman government had wished to force non-Muslims to convert to Islam during its four hundred years of absolute rule over the Balkans, it had the means to do so. The intact survival of a great variety of non-Muslim groups in the Empire … is the best proof of the freedom of religion and culture that existed during the Ottoman rule".[34]

Another factor was the desire to avoid payment of taxes. It has been pointed out in some studies that espe-

cially the *cizye*[35] (poll-tax) was used as an instrument by the Ottoman state to force non-Muslims to convert to Islam. Since *cizye* tax required to be paid in cash, in some regions, it was difficult for the people to pay it. That is why, it has been said, mass conversion was realized in some poor districts in order to avoid this tax. Ottoman government's adoption of a new collection method which "the community leader of a particular region or town was appointed to collect the tax and deliver it to the treasury in lump-sum" was a proof that the Ottomans did not use the cizye tax as an instrument to force non-Muslims to convert to Islam.[36] Noblemen were the first to embrace Islam in the Balkans in order to retain their property and social status.[37] However, they had to pay 2.5 percent of their property as *zekat* to the state or poor people. Also, male converts had to take the obligatory military service into account when they embrace Islam. From the conquest of the Balkans in the 15th century to the end of the Empire, there was no policy of forced conversion. "Most of the great Balkan families and smaller *týmar* holders converted to Islam during the 16th century not as the result of Ottoman pressure, but in consequence of their realization that this was a necessary first step on the road to becoming full Ottomans" says Stanford Shaw on this issue.[38]

When in the 19th century the Ottoman government decided to abolish *cizye* tax and to apply compulsory military service also upon the non-Muslim subjects according to the Tanzimat reforms, they protested against the new regulation saying that the *cizye* tax was preferable to the military service.[39] The argument which asserts that the non-Muslims of the Empire choose to convert to Islam because of the heavy tax burden upon their shoulders is nonsensical. On the other hand, the fact that the amount of *cizye* tax in the nineteenth century was not a heavy burden on the non-Muslims was dealt with by several studies.

Indeed, the *cizye* tax continued to be exacted under the name of *bedel-i askerî,* the tax for the exemption of non-Muslims from military service, which was made mandatory to all citizens of the Empire after the Tanzimat. When voices were raised against the new measure of compulsory military service for non-Muslims by the leaders of Christian and Jewish communities, the old *cizye* tax was re-named as the *bedel-i askerî.* According to an Ottoman document dated 1835, the number of non-Muslims held responsible for the *cizye* tax in Salonica was as follows:[40]

Table 1 The number of non-Muslims held responsible for the *cizye* tax in Salonica in 1835.

Non-Muslims	Alâ, (rich) 48 guruþ	Evsat (medium rich) 24 guruþ	Ednâ (lower) 12 guruþ	Total
Christians	250	1280	655	1185
Jewish	205	862	2840	3907
Total	455	2142	3495	6092

According to the document in the *sicils* of Salonica, Sicil, 229:110, 3 ª*evvâl* 1250.

Now, from the above numbers, we can draw some conclusions. In 1835, the number of rich Christian people who paid 48 *guruº* was greater than the number of rich Jewish people. Most of the Jewish *cizye* tax payers were categorized lower level, while most of the Christians were in the medium rich category. If we compare the numbers with the overall numbers of the Christian and Jewish population of Salonica in 1839, 1,185 out of 13,000 Christians (9 percent) were held liable for *cizye* tax while the rate for the Jewish population was 3,907 out of 25,000 (15.6 percent). The above facts, which are based on contemporary sources, clearly show the fair division of the *cizye* tax collection in the Empire in the nineteenth century even before the Tanzimat changes. These figures also refute the overlapping assertions and generalizations about unjust measures in *cizye* tax collection system in the present literature.

Apostasy from Islam

Another important subject was the apostasy from Islam. Though this was a rare occurrence, in some special periods of the history of Ottoman Empire such as the Greek uprising and under extraordinary conditions, there occurred some Muslim apostasy cases particularly in Crete.[41] The practice of allowing the literally converted Christians to repent under the condition of public manifestation of their repentance goes back to the early 14th century when the first wave of Islamic conquests occurred in Anatolia and the Balkans.[42] In the ordinary times, apostasy from Islam was unspeakable and even a crime which required the punishment of death penalty. According to the traditional Islamic law of apostasy, being an apostate requires one to deny Allah's divinity and attributes partners to Allah, deny that Muhammad is the Prophet and reject the holy book, the Koran.

In the case of an apostate being a woman, the punishment would be imprisonment until she repents to Islam. As is the case of conversion to Islam, apostasy from Islam was also a private individual act and does not need to be made public. However, its reflections and practices in the Ottoman society did not support this. Most of the time, apostates wanted to declare their intention of apostasy from Islam in public or before the certain authority or to the people under social, economic, political and moral pressures, even though they had already known that the consequences will be severe according to the Islamic law. The following case is very illustrative:

"A monk of the Oriental Church named Pappa Isaiah, presented himself before the Council at Serres, about two months since, and apostatized to the Muslim faith, and took the name of Isa Efendi. He repented shortly after and went to Mount Athos and from there to Greece. He returned a few days since to Serres, and presented himself to the Greek bishop of that place and told him of his determination of recanting before the whole Council. The Bishop advised him not to do this. The monk would not however follow the Bishops advice but presented himself before the Council, dressed

as a monk, and declared himself a Christian. Ömer Pasha and the Council were horror-struck and ordered that the monk should be immediately beheaded. The bishop reminded the Pasha of the Sultan's promise in favor of the Christians, and the Monk was imprisoned."[43]

In this later case, two important facts can be discerned according to Consul Blunt: first, the monk accepted Islam in order to protect himself against the unjust persecution of the Greek Bishop of Serres, and secondly, many of the Bishops and clergy of the Greek Church were warm advocates of martyrdom.[44] Therefore, since the clergy wanted to expel him from the church when the monk converted to Islam, they had no influence over him. After he decided to return to his faith, the clergy purposely let him present himself as a convert from Islam before the Council, although they had already known what the decision of the Council would be.

One who converted to Islam had made himself subject to Muslim law. Thus, since his legal status was changed, it was illegal for him/her to return to his original faith. If this does happen, he becomes an apostate in the eyes of his adopted religion, and the Islamic law was enforced against him. In the case of a woman embracing Islam, it was also illegal to marry a non-Muslim man. If the conversion of a woman had happened after marriage, she had to persuade her husband to convert to Islam in order to legalize the marriage. If she failed to do, the contract of marriage would not be valid. However, the opposite arrangement was not illegal. A Muslim man was free to marry with a Christian or Jewish woman without renouncing of her faith. The change of legal status after conversion to Islam according to the Islamic law provided opportunities for the non-Muslims to use conversion for political purposes. Most of the time, conversion to Islam was used by the non-Muslim woman who wanted to end the marriage contracts. By this way, a woman not only divorced from he husband easily, but also got a new legal protection for herself due to her inclusion to the Muslim community.

Conversion from Islam to the Christian or Jewish faith was prohibited; and if this would have happened, the punishment according to Islamic law was the death penalty. When a person who converted to Islam, decided to return to his previous faith and declared it in front of the authorities, the first act was to persuade him or her by giving meaningful and convincing answers to the questions raised by the person. If this effort failed and the person insisted on his apostasy from Islam, the punishment of the death penalty was carried out by the authorities.[45] In 1844, with the continuous efforts of British Ambassador to Ýstanbul Lord Canning, new effectual measures were taken by the Ottoman government to remove the punishment of the death penalty for apostasy cases, replacing it with imprisonment.[46]

The misperception by Westerners of apostasy cases and of severe punishment for apostates results from Westerners' established background and perception of apostasy in their own religion, that is, in most cases, Christianity. In Christianity, apostasy was not an act

which calls for the death penalty, as it does in Islam. The perception was that in the Christian religion, one could convert from one sect to another very easily (for instance from Orthodoxy to Protestantism); this was called apostasy and in the nineteenth century did not merit a severe punishment. Maybe the apostate was excommunicated from his own community. Since the boundaries between the Christian sects (Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant) had been drawn precisely, the conversion from one sect to another was a serious act but did not require the death penalty in the nineteenth century context.[47] However, in Islam, while conversion from one sect to another is not a serious matter mainly because Islam is not divided into several sects in terms of the fundamentals of faith and accepting or changing the sect is not regarded as apostasy. The term "apostasy" in the Islamic context is used only for the cases of conversion to any other religion; and the punishment of this action is death. Now, in this context, the accounts in Western literature about apostasy cases in Islam might most probably seem severe and the critiques of Islam and of Islamic rules might also be excessively severe. Generalizing from their own background and understanding of the issue, they might look at apostasy cases, say, in the Ottoman Empire, from a distance and might not comprehend the issue in its Islamic context. As a result, the punishment for apostasy in Islam continued to be regarded as a very cruel practice in the minds of the Westerners.

According to Islam, apostasy from Islam to any other religion is the most serious attempt and is considered as a total rejection of the truthfulness of the Islamic faith and consequently requires capital punishment. On the contrary, conversion from Christianity to any other religion and even within Christianity from one sect to another is very common and to some extent acceptable. This difference in perception and also the protective measures established by the Islamic state for converts from other religions might have been confusing for Lord Canning who tried too much to change the practice of Islam wholeheartedly.

Apart from being an individual action, conversion to and apostasy from Islam, especially in the 19th century, became an important political and diplomatic issue between the Ottoman Empire and Great Britain. British Ambassador to Ottoman Empire, Lord Stratford Canning, used the issue of apostasy from Islam as a political instrument to gain the sympathy of the non-Muslim subjects of the Empire. His intention was to induce the Ottoman government to abolish the law which required the death penalty for apostasy from Islam. At the end, "although Canning did not achieve the abolition of the law, he did obtain an agreement that it would not be used in future.[48]

Generalizations reached under the influence of current politics, observable in many Greek books regarding Ottoman practices need to be clarified in light of contemporary evidence. For example, the following case cited by Blunt was a very good indication of changes in the thinking of the people in Salonica:

"In a recent case of a Greek woman's embracing Islam, prior to the ceremony, Vasif Mehmet Pasha called

the Molla and told him to speak with all due respect for the Greek bishop, who would be present, and that when asking the woman if she with free will left her religion, he must say the 'Christian religion' and not the religion of '*gâvur*'".[49]

Conversion of Jews to Islam and Christianity was another problem that the Ottoman government became involved in. Though forced cases were not encouraged but prohibited by Islamic law and the Ottoman government, social and economic considerations paved the way in some cases of conversion to Islam.[50] In cases of forced conversion, the Ottoman policy was precise and further strengthened by the Tanzimat reforms. Local officials were ordered to prevent forced conversion and forced converts were liberated by government intervention.[51] Similarly, there occurred, though very rarely, conversions from the Jewish faith to Christianity under the influence of growing Protestant missionary activities in the Empire.[52] In such cases, the Jewish opposition to their renegades was apparent. Since the Jewish religious leaders had power and authority over all sorts of internal affairs in the community, their response was to counterbalance apostatic tendencies by persuasion, threat of excommunication, corporal punishment and detention. It is also clear that the Jewish authorities got the Ottoman government help for enforcement and intervention whenever they needed.[53]

We should not disregard genuine spiritual transformation as one of the motives for conversion to the Muslim faith. The role of the impact of simplicity, moral and doctrinal clarity of Islam embodied by der-

vish orders have to be taken into account. However, it is hard to speculate about these motives by showing evidence from the conversion registers. The standard expressions like "I saw light" in the registers most probably referred to the common format of the document.[54] Another point was the Ottoman's policy of the acceptance of skilled or high status converts to the government's ranks regardless of the sincerity of conversions. In some cases, the social position of a non-Muslim was used by the Ottoman authorities to obtain the sympathy of the non-Muslims. The case of the conversion of Sabbatai Zevi best illustrates this. The apostasy of Sabbatai Zevi was a well-known story of conversion to Islam. An article[55] written by Geoffrey L. Lewis and Cecil Roth discusses the political aspects of the cause of Sabbatai Zevi's embracing Islam. I would like to mention it here because of the assertion's relevance to the subject of this paper. According to the authors, Ottoman government in some way induced him to accept Islam ostensibly of his own free will in order to have achieved a mass conversion of the great body of Ottoman Jewry, "a feat which had baffled even Muhammad." By presenting his conversion "as the result of his having suddenly seen the light", Ottomans wanted to show the correctness of the Islamic faith. On the other hand, this occasion provided an opportunity for Sabbatai Zevi to "present the conversion as a spontaneous action within a messianic setting, as a part of the necessary fulfillment before the ultimate glorious consummation." Thus, we can see in this seventeenth

century conversion story the collateral use of the conversion issue as a political instrument.

Conclusion

One thing which is clear in the accounts which deal with the conversion issue in the Ottoman Empire is that conversion to Islam neither followed a process of indoctrination nor did it utilize force. Ottomans also did not choose to employ force for the propagation of Islam. There is a clear need to distinguish the phenomenon of conversion in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries from the one in the nineteenth century. The process of conversion to Islam during the conquest of Anatolia and the Balkans can be viewed as "Islamization", it involved a communal or group conversion with a vast territorial expansion. However, in the nineteenth century Ottoman context, conversion was a rather slow process, involving individuals and families in mostly urban settings. This was a process of interaction and acculturation in which the converts either consciously chose to undergo a meaningful change as "reorientation of the soul" or accepted Islam under the impact of mostly socio-economic and socio-political reasons.

Notes:

*Paper presented at the Fourth Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting, Florence & Montecatini Terme 19 – 23 March 2003, organised by the Mediterranean Programme of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute.

1 See the related works of eminent Turkish historians such as Ö. L. Barkan, I. H. Uzunçarþýlý, M. T. Gökbilgin, H. Ýnalcýk and K. Karpat who most of the time emphasized the role of state policies and Turkic colonization in the Balkans Koran, sura 9, verse 60.

2 Koran, sura 7, verse 172.

3 I would like to mention here a contemporary phenomenon which is the spread of Islam in the US prisons especially among the Afro-American inmates.

4 Koran, sura 16, verse 125.

5 Arnakis, "The Greek Church of Constantinople and the Ottoman Empire", *Journal of Modern History,* v. 24, n. 3, (September 1952), p. 238.

6 T. Papadopoulos, *Studies and Documents Relating to the History of the Greek Church and People under Turkish Domination,* 2nd edition, (Hampshire G.B.: Variorum, 1992) pp. 1-26. Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople, 1453,* (Cambridge, 1965), C.A. Frazee, *The Orthodox Church and Independent Greece, 1821-1852,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) pp. 1-8.

7 See H. A. R. Gibb and H. Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West: A Study of the Impact of Western Civilisation on Muslim Culture in the Near East*, vol. I, (London: Oxford University Press, 1950). pp. 215-16. Philip Hitti, *History of the Arabs,* (New York, 1951) p. 716. There are several explanations of this issue in the literature: that Mehmet the Conqueror granted the privileges because of his policy over Europe which served to split Christianity into two camps or his financial considerations which served to collect more tax from the non-Muslims or that Constantinople was not captured by force but surrendered by capitulation. For the elaboration of the above arguments see T. Papadopoulos, *Studies and Documents Relating to the History of the Greek Church and People under Turkish Domination,* 2nd edition, (Hampshire G.B.: Variorum, 1992) pp. 1-26. On this issue see also G. Georgiades Arnakis, "The Greek Church of Constantinople and the Ottoman Em-

pire", *Journal of Modern History,* v. 24, n. 3, (September 1952), pp. 235-251, Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople, 1453,* (Cambridge, 1965), C.A. Frazee, *The Orthodox Church and Independent Greece, 1821-1852,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) pp. 1-8. According to Inalcik "from the beginning Ottomans followed a policy of tolerance and protection of the Orthodox Church. This policy proved to be beneficial to both the Church and the new rulers." See, Halil Ýnalcýk, "The Turks and the Balkans", *Turkish Review of Balkan Studies,* v. 1, (1993), p. 20.

8 Halil Ýnalcýk, "The Turks and the Balkans", p. 18.

9 Gülnihal Bozkurt, *Gayrimüslim Osmanli,* p. 32. Timothy Ware, *Eustratios Argenti, A Study of the Greek Church under Turkish Rule,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964) p. 2.

10 Gülnihal Bozkurt, *Gayrimüslim Osmanlý,* p. 29, T. Papadopoulos, *Studies and Documents,* p. 41.

11 For more details of the Salonican society in the early 19th century see, Bülent Özdemir, *Ottoman Reforms and Socail Life: Reflections from Salonica, 1830-1850,* unpublished PhD thesis, (The University of Birmingham, 2000)

12 "*ihtida*" in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfý Ýslam Ansiklopedisi,* v. 21, pp. 554-558.

13 Bülent Özdemir, *Ottoman Reforms,* p. 268. See also, Ýlber Ortaylý, *Osmanlý Toplumunda Aile,* (Ýstanbul: Pan Yayýncýlýk, 2000) p. 94.

14 BOA, Cevdet Adliye, No.1115, 2083/I, 2083/II, 1735.

15 Eyal Ginio, "Childhood, Mental Capacity and Conversion to Islam in the Ottoman State" in *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies,* n. 25, (2001) p. 115.

16 "*ihtida*" in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfý Ýslam Ansiklopedisi,* v. 21, pp. 554-558

17 Speros Vryonis Jr., "Religious Change and Continuity in the Balkans and Anatolia from the Fourteenth through the Sixteenth Century" in Speros Vryonis Jr. (Ed.) *Islam and Cultural Change in the Middle Ages,* (Wiesbaden, 1975), p. 135.

18 Saying that *devºirme* system was another means of conversion appears to be a false assertion, especially for the Greeks because Greeks were not taken as *devºirme* until the late 17th century. As it was the case for the Jewish subjects. If the *devºirme* system is considered to be the instrument of conversion, why did it target only the rural population and almost all Slavs and Albanians? See, P. Wittek, "*Devshirme* and *Shari'a"* in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies,* n. 17, (1955), pp. 271-278 and V. L. Menage, "Devshirme", EI, v. 2.

19 N. Levtzion, "Towards a Comparative Study of Islamization" in N. Levtzion (Ed.) *Conversion to Islam,* (London, 1979), pp. 1-9.

20 Speros Vryonis Jr., "Religious change", p. 138.

21 Stavro Skendi, "Crypto-Christianity in the Balkan Area under the Ottomans", in *Slavic Review,* v. 26, (1967), p. 229.

22 Ali Köse, "Ýslamýn Ýlk Devirlerinde Yayýlýþ Þekilleri" in *Akademik Araptýrmalar Dergisi,* n. 2, (1999), pp. 45-75.

23 Eyal Ginio, "Childhood, Mental Capacity and Conversion", p. 91.

24 Maria Todorova "The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans", in L. Carl Brown, (Ed.) *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East,* (New York, 1996) p. 65. See also other articles in the same volume, Carl Brown (Ed.), *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East,* (New York, 1996)

25 Eyal Ginio, "Childhood, Mental Capacity and Conversion", p. 97.

26 Hüseyin Peker, *Din Deðiþtirmede Psiko-sosyolojik Etkenler,* unpublished PhD thesis, (Anakara Üniversitesi, Ýlahiyat Fakültesi, 1979) pp. 28-46.

27 Cited in Richard Clogg, "A Little-known Orthodox Neo-Martyr, Athanasios of Smyrna, 1819", *Eastern Churches Review,* v. 5, n. 1, (Spring, 1973) p. 30.

28 Nikolay Antov, *Aspects of Balkan Islamization in the Light of Petitions for Conversion, 1670-1750,* Unpublished MA thesis, (Bilkent University, 2000)

29 Ibid., p. 21.

30 It is interesting to note that according to a statistics made on Bursa, numerical density of conversion cases was in the highest level between 1800 and 1850. See, Osman Çetin, *Sicillere Göre*

Bursa'da Ýhtida Hareketleri ve Sosyal Sonuçlarý (1472-1909), (Ankara: TTK Yayýnlarý, 1999) p. 34.

31 FO 195 / 240 Blunt to Canning 21 August 1845.

32 FO 195 / 240 Blunt to Canning 21 August 1845.

33 For the practices in the 17th and 18th centuries see, Nikolay Antov, *Aspects of Balkan Islamization,* p. 30.

34 Kemal Karpat, "The Situation of the Christians in the Ottoman Empire: Bulgaria's view", *International Journal of Turkish Studies,* v. 4, n. 2, (1983), p. 261.

35 The *cizye* was a religious poll-tax introduced by the Ottomans upon conquest. *Cizye* was levied upon adult males. Children, women, poor people, crippled, blind and old men, clerics were exempted. See, H. Ýnalcýk, "Djizya", EI 2, II, p. 562.

36 Halil Ýnalcýk, "The Turks and the Balkans", p. 23.

37 Halil Ýnalcýk, "Stefan Duþan'dan Osmanlý Ýmparatorluðuna: XV. Asýrda Rumeli'de Hristiyan Sipahiler ve Menþeleri", in *Osmanlý Ýmparatorluðu: Toplum ve Ekonomi,* (Ýstanbul: Eren Yayýnlarý, 1993) p. 93.

38 Stanford J. Shaw, "The Ottoman View of the Balkans", in Charles and Barbara Jelavich, (Eds.), *The Balkans in Transition,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963) p. 65.

39 See, Bülent Özdemir, *Ottoman Reforms and Social Life: Reflections from Salonica, 1830-1850,* unpublished PhD thesis, (The University of Birmingham, 2000) p. 84.

40 Salonica Sicils, 229:110, 3 Þevval 1250.

41 See, A. Nükhet Adýyeke and Nuri Adýyeke, "Yunan Ýsyaný Sýrasýnda Girit'te Ýrtidat Olaylarý" paper was presented in XIVth Congress of Turkish Historical Association, 9-13 September 2002, Ankara.

42 Stavro Skendi, "Crypto-Christianity in the Balkan Area under the Ottomans", in *Slavic Review*, v. 26, (1967), p. 228

43 FO 195 / 240 Blunt to Canning 21 August 1845.

44 For the importance of the advocacy of neo-martyrdom by the local clergy in the nineteenth century, see, Richard Clogg, "A Little-known Orthodox Neo-Martyr, Athanasios of Smyrna, 1819", *Eastern Churches Review,* v. 5, n. 1, (Spring, 1973), pp. 28-36.

45 According to Kemal Karpat, if one willingly converts to Islam that makes one subject to Muslim law, which can naturally be enforced against one when one decides to return to one's previous faith. See Kemal Karpat, "The Situation of the Christians in the Ottoman Empire: Bulgaria's view", *International Journal of Turkish Studies,* v. 4, n. 2, (1983), pp. 259-266.

46 FO 78 / 555, Canning to Aberdeen, 23 March 1844.

47 See Timothy Ware, *Eustratios Argenti, A Study of the Greek Church under Turkish Rule,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964) pp. 16-33.

48 For the discussion of the issue see, Turgut Subaþý, *Anglo-Ottoman Relations and the Reform Question in the Early Tanzimat Period 1839-1852: With Special Reference to Reforms Concerning Ottoman non-Muslims,* unpublished PhD thesis, (The University of Birmingham, 1995).

49 FO 195 / 240 Blunt to Canning 3 May 1844.

50 It was clearly stated in a *ferman* dated 1836 that the forced conversion to Islam was strictly prohibited by the Ottoman government. See Sicil 232:21, 14 *Cemaziyelevvel* 1251.

51 There are several cases in Consul Blunt's reports regarding forced conversion and liberation according to the government regulations. For instance, "A boy of nine years of age, taken by some Turks and persuaded to apostatise. When he was brought before the Council he declared that he was a Christian and was liberated." See FO 195 / 240 Blunt to Canning 21 August 1845.

52 Hayyim J. Cohen, *The Jews of the Middle East, 1860-1972,* (Jerusalem: Keter Press, 1973) p. 167.

53 Albert E. Kalderon, "Turkish Jews of Istanbul and Missionary Activities During the Reign of Mahmud II", *Turcica,* v. 14, (1991), pp. 91-109.

54 BOA, Cevdet Adliye, No: 1735, 2083/I, 2083/II, 1115.

55 Geoffrey L. Lewis and Cecil Roth, "New Light on the Apostasy of Sabbatai Zevi", *The Jewish Quarterly Review,* v. LII, n. 3, January 1963, pp. 219-225