



WORKSHOP

How to talk about the non-Muslim experience in the Ottoman society: From narrating community life to integrating plurality

July 13-14, 2009

Zentrum Moderner Orient, Kirchweg 33, 14129 Berlin

Convened by

Vangelis Kechriotis (Fellow of *Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe*, Berlin)

The study of the non-Muslim communities in the Ottoman Empire over the last thirty years has received increasing attention. Yet, this field of research seems to suffer from four major problems:

Firstly, a lack of comparison, resulting from the perspective to treat different non-Muslim communities of the Ottoman Empire separately from each other. Studies of the Armenians, Assyrians, Greeks, Jews, Maronites, Copts, and other communities are usually not related to each other and framed in research perspectives that mirror the boundaries of academic disciplines, pre-Ottoman genealogies or the ideologies of post-Ottoman nation states.

Secondly, an axiomatic relationship to Muslim communities in most studies considers the experiences of non-Muslims from the outset as different. Consequently, their experiences are addressed separately from those of Muslims also in areas where the population generally may have shared more or less similar concerns and cultural, social, economic or political differentiation may be stronger in other realms than denominational belonging.

Thirdly, a limitation in sources in the case studies generated within the field of Ottoman studies, where sources are often limited to consular and missionary reports or to state administration. In terms of language, Ottoman Turkish, Arabic and Western European languages and top-down perspectives are privileged on the expense of other avenues of communication used by the particular populations. Therefore the intricacies of community life tend to be ignored and the political or cultural attitudes of these communities are considered as monolithic in character.

Fourthly, a problem of adequate categories that match both the historical circumstances and the political implications of notions such as *dhimmi*, minority or community.

The workshop "How to talk about the non-Muslim experience in the Ottoman society: From narrating community life to integrating plurality" invites for a discussion of these shortcomings and the possibilities of a more comprehensive methodological configuration that would take advantage of the insights gained by individual cases. The aim is not to proceed to a holistic approach that eliminates differences and peculiarities nor to one that derives from the perspectives of the current nation states, but an attempt to contribute to the debate on citizenship and plurality from the perspective of the non-Muslim experiences in the Ottoman Empire. The workshop accordingly addresses four major methodological concerns:

Ein gemeinsames Forschungsprogramm

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- i) Questions of terminology: terms such as ‘minority’, ‘community’ which are colloquially used to describe experiences of non-Muslims are contested and have to be problematized. Even the term *dhimmi* might be misleading as it suggests a kind of uniformity in the way the ruling elite used to deal with the non-Muslims, which again is not the case.
- ii) Issues of field boundaries: A simple parallel examination of the literatures focusing on only one among the different confessional groups on the ground that most of these groups used a distinct language, would not resolve the methodological failing, as the problem lies in the conditions of their production.
- iii) Issues of power relations reflected in the sources: the abundance of archival documentation in Ottoman Turkish, Arabic or western European languages in most cases has its own limits, as it tells us more about how the ruling elite or the great powers perceive the different populations, leaving very little space for the voice of the subaltern to emerge.
- iv) Issues of multiple identities have often been described as forms of syncretism, heterodoxy or heresy, that may also not be appropriate categories to address social life and interaction with the local Muslims, other non-Muslim communities, or groups such as the Levantines, foreigners and other communities. The liminal experience of all these groups has been idealized, demonized or neglected, depending on the ideological stance of the observer.

The workshop is scheduled to proceed for two days, July 13-14, 2009. It invites scholars who have studied diverse aspects of the non-Muslim experience to reflect through their own research on the methodological concerns described above.

The workshop is held within the framework of *Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe*, a joint research program of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, the Fritz Thyssen Foundation and the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. It is organized in co-operation with the Zentrum Moderner Orient, where it will take place.

The workshop shall provide an informal and intensive discussion. It is structured in four panels, with two sessions each. Each session consists of two presentations and a discussion. Participants are invited to present the main arguments of their papers in 10-15 minutes. The two presentations will be followed by a discussion that will be introduced by a brief comment of the discussant. Therefore, participants are kindly asked to send their contributions at least ten days before the workshop to eume@wiko-berlin.de.

The four sessions will evolve around the following themes:

- Day 1:
 - i) Legal and administrative aspects affecting non-Muslim experience
 - ii) Non-Muslim responses and adaptations to administrative necessities
- Day 2:
 - i) Perspectives and images of missionaries, Levantines, foreigners and heterodox
 - ii) Cultural and historiographical accounts of the end of the Empire

Schedule**July 13, 2009**

9:30-13:30 h **Legal and Administrative Aspects Affecting Non-Muslim Experience**
Discussant: **Walid Saleh** (University of Toronto; Fellow of EUME 2008/09)

Vangelis Kechriotis (Boğaziçi University; Fellow of EUME 2008/09), *How to Talk About the Non-Muslim Experience in the Ottoman Society: An Introduction*

Johann Büssow (University of Halle), *Seeing Like the Ottoman State: Governing Plural Societies through Corporatism*

Coffee-Break

Selçuk Dursun (Istanbul; Fellow of EUME 2008/09), *“Be Productive and Multiply!”: Administrative and Economic Aspects of Ottoman Population Policies in the 19th Century*

Nora Lafi (Zentrum Moderner Orient), *The Civic Representation of the Non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire between Old Regime and the Municipal Reforms of the Tanzimat Era*

14.30-18 h **The Non-Muslim Responses and Adaptations to Administrative Necessities**
Discussant: **Guðrun Krämer** (Freie Universität Berlin)

Richard Wittmann (Orient Institute-Istanbul), *Plurality and Agency in Legal Affairs: Greeks, Armenians, and Jews in 17th Century Istanbul*

Heleen Murre (Leiden University), *Ottoman Christianity from the Perspective of Globalization: Apostasy or 'a House Built on Sand': Jews, Muslims and Christians in East-Syriac texts (1500-1850)*

Coffee-Break

Rossitsa Gradeva (American University-Blagoevgrad), *'Orthodox Christians and Jews and the Ottoman Authority in the Balkans: The Cases of Sofia, Vidin and Rusçuk, 15th-17th Centuries'*

Magdi Guirguis (Kafr Al-Shaikh University), *The Limits of Community and Representation before Religion and Minority: Copts in 18th Century Ottoman Egypt*

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9:30-13:30 h **Plural Identities: Levantines, Strangers and Heterodox**
Discussant: **Sinan Antoon** (NYU; Fellow of EUME 2008/09)

Ismael Montana (Northern Illinois University, Fellow of EUME 2008/09), *Redefining Bori Practice in al-Timbuktawi's *Hatk al-Sitr*: Infidelity (Kufr) or Another Dimension of the African Diaspora?*



Marc Baer (University of California, Irvine; Zentrum Moderner Orient), *Converted Jews and Muslim Revolutionaries: The Dönme of Salonika*

Coffee-Break

Edhem Eldem (Boğaziçi University), *The Inevitable Otherness of Non-Muslims in Late Ottoman History*

Malte Fuhrmann (Fatih University), *The Well-Known Strangers - European Immigrant Milieus as an Integral Part of Ottoman Society*

14.30-18 h

Cultural and Historiographical Accounts on the End of the Empire

Discussant: **Sherene Seikaly** (American University in Cairo; Fellow of EUME 2008/09)

Orit Bashkin (Chicago University), *Iraqi Jews as Ottoman Subjects*

Vahe Tachjian (Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung Berlin), *Deconstruction of the Ottoman Past: the Armenian Case in the 1920s*

Florian Riedler (Zentrum Moderner Orient), *Nostalgia for Cosmopolitan Istanbul*

Conclusions

Stand 29.6.09