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Separation and conflict: Syriac Jacobites and Syriac Catholics in Mardin in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

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From the sixteenth century onwards, the Syriac Jacobites living in the Ottoman empire were confronted by the propaganda of Catholic missionaries. As a result of this propaganda, a Syriac Catholic patriarchate was established in the late eighteenth century, and the Syriac community was divided into two. A merciless conflict ensued between Orthodox Syriacs, aligned with the main Church, and the Catholic Syriacs. While this conflict occurred in all places where Syriacs lived, it was most intense in the city of Mardin, the location of the patriarchal centre of Syriac Jacobites. The Jacobites struggled to prevent both the Catholicization of their community, and also the Catholic takeover of their churches, monasteries and cemeteries. At various times and for various reasons, the Ottoman empire and certain European states felt the need to intervene in this conflict. Continuing almost uninterrupted throughout the nineteenth century, this conflict adversely affected the Syriacs, and also precipitated their modernization.

Introduction

The 'Jacobite' or Syrian Orthodox Church came into existence in the middle of the sixth century when the monk Jacob Baradaeus established a Monophysite Church with its own hierarchy alongside the official Chalcedonian Church.[1] In the seventh century, Muslims took control of the region where the Syriac Jacobites lived.[2] Relations between Muslim rulers and their Christian subjects were generally good, with Christians continuing to serve in the bureaucracy and influencing Muslim intellectual currents, and in the twelfth century the Syriac Jacobites even experienced a cultural and religious

1 A. S. Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity* (London 1968) 175–84; V. Arthur, 'The origin of the Monophysite Church in Syria Mesopotamia', *Church History* 42 (1973) 19–25; see also: R. Browning, *Justinian and Theodora* (London 1987).

2 Syriac Jacobites lived at the time and continue to live in a region centred in Upper Mesopotamia, encompassing parts of the modern countries of Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. Important cities included Mardin and Diyarbekir in southeastern Turkey, Aleppo in Syria, and Mosul in northern Iraq.

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'renaissance'.[3] However, the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century led to a decline in the region, and as a result the Syriac Church became a closed community. It was at this time, in the year 1293, that the Syriac patriarch moved his see to the monastery of Deyruzzafaran, near Mardin, because Syriac Christians lived in particularly high concentrations in this region.[4] With the Ottoman conquest in the sixteenth century, the Syriac Church entered a new phase in its history because it came to be incorporated into the Ottoman system for non-Muslim affairs, the *millet* system.

The *millet* system

Despite current debates regarding its precise definition,[5] the *millet* system refers generally to the Ottoman state system that recognized autonomy for non-Muslim communities in religious, cultural, juridical and educational affairs. It has its roots in the *dhimma* status which in Islamic law recognized non-Muslim 'People of the Book' (including Christians and Jews), organized their relations under Islamic rule, and provided certain guarantees for the observance of their beliefs.

When the Ottoman State was first founded, its relations with its non-Muslim population were organized in accordance with the *dhimma* status. During the reign of Mehmed II who conquered Constantinople in 1453 certain modifications were made, resulting in the *millet* system. According to this system, non-Muslims were grouped primarily by religion, but secondarily by region and language, and were tied to the Ottoman political-administrative system as members of *millet*s whose administrative centres were in Istanbul (Constantinople). Sultan Mehmed wanted his newly conquered capital to be the focal point in every respect, and this included making Istanbul the administrative centre for all Christians living within Ottoman borders. Before the conquest, the only patriarchate in the Byzantine capital was Greek Orthodox, which did not represent all Christian communities. In order for the large Armenian population to be represented, Mehmed established an Armenian patriarchate and appointed the bishop of Bursa as patriarch in 1461. Thus, all Christians within Ottoman borders could be governed from Istanbul through these two patriarchs.[6]

Under the *millet* system that appeared during the reign of Mehmed II, the possibility of establishing an order in accordance with its own customs was given to each community, which was free to organize all its own religious and internal affairs. While the Churches were able to avail themselves of these freedoms, their involvement in politics was forbidden. Conversely, the State could not interfere in the communities' religious affairs. However, since religious leaders had administrative responsibilities at the same time, the state could intervene in their elections. Each community could elect its patriarch

3 For an overview see P. Kawerau, *Die jakobitische Kirche im Zeitalter der syrischen Renaissance. Idee und Wirklichkeit* (Berlin 1960).

4 G. Akyüz, *Deyruzzafaran Manastırının Tarihi* (Mardin 1997) 35–6.

5 For these debates see: B. Braude, 'Foundation myths of the millet system', in B. Braude and B. Lewis (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire. The Functioning of a Plural Society* (New York 1982).

6 İ. Özcoşar, *Bir Yüzyıl Bir Sancak Bir Cemaat 19. Yüzyılda Mardin Süryanileri* (Istanbul 2008) 53.

and synod, and submit its choice to the state for approval. With the sultan's confirmation, the patriarch could begin his duties. The synod, with the patriarch at its head, would be concerned with all the community's issues. Civil matters, such as marriage, divorce and inheritance, were organized and administered through the community's own religious and juridical system. Certain minor cases would be heard in courts established within the Church and according to ecclesiastical laws, and sentences would then be carried out in their name by the Ottoman state.[7]

The situation of the Syriac Jacobite Church in the Ottoman empire

The region inhabited by Syriac Jacobites fell under Ottoman rule in 1516, about fifty years after the formation of the *millet* system. However, the Syriac Jacobites were not represented as an independent community within the *millet* system of the classical administrative structure of the Ottoman empire. The most important reason for this was that the Syriac Jacobites did not have representatives in Istanbul, since they had neither a community nor a Church organization in the capital. Consequently, they had to be represented by either the Greek Orthodox or the Gregorian Armenian patriarchate. All the official sources show that the Syriac Jacobites were represented by the Gregorian Armenian Patriarchate, and it was through this institution that their contact with the Ottoman capital and bureaucracy was mediated.[8] The Ottoman sources do not reveal why Syriac affairs were handled through the Armenian, and not the Greek Orthodox, Patriarchate. However, the reason was undoubtedly that both the Syriac Jacobites and the Gregorian Armenians were Monophysites rejecting the council of Chalcedon.[9]

Nevertheless, this did not mean that the Syriac Church was dependent on the Armenian patriarchate in every respect. The Syriacs were completely independent in terms of internal affairs, within their own Church hierarchy. However, they could not communicate directly in their relations with the Ottoman capital; official correspondence on matters related to the Syriacs had to pass through the Armenian patriarchate. This was most evident in patriarchal elections. While Syriacs selected their patriarch within their own Church hierarchy and rules, approval from Istanbul came through the Armenian patriarchate. In 1826, for example, when a *ferman* (decree) was issued approving patriarch Gevergis, the reason for issuing the *ferman* was stated as: (this *ferman* has been issued upon) 'the petition made by the patriarch and synod of the Armenians of Istanbul ....'[10] This dependence, adhered to in relations with the capital, was less strictly applied regarding local administrators, and Syriacs could generally be represented directly by their own communal representatives without mediation by Armenians.

7 B. Eryılmaz, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Gayrimüslim Tebaanın Yönetimi* (İstanbul 1996) 18–20.

8 Özcoşar, *Mardin Süryanileri*, 52–62.

9 İ. Ortaylı, 'Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Millet Sistemi', *Türkler* 10 (Ankara 2002) 218.

10 Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (The Ottoman Archives of the Prime Ministry, hereafter cited as B.O.A.), '998 Numaralı Divân-ı Hümayûn Defterleri Kataloğu' Gayr-i Müslim Cemaatlere Ait 10 No'lu Defter 1277-1324, 71.

Catholic missionaries in the Ottoman empire

Shortly before Constantinople was captured by the Ottomans, the most important issue in relations between Byzantium and the Europeans was the unification of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches. After Sultan Mehmed II conquered Istanbul, he firmly sought to hinder attempts to unify these two Churches, for strategic reasons. Thus he appointed an opponent of unification, Gennadios II, as patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church.[11] A process began with this policy of the sultan which complicated the lives of the few Catholics living in Istanbul, as well as the Catholic missionaries within Ottoman borders. This policy continued under the next two sultans, with slight modifications according to the changing relations with Catholic European states. While the papacy and Catholic Orders continued to seek the establishment of relations with Orthodox Christians in the east, they began to find a more accepting environment during the reign of sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (1520–66).

In order to use the conflict between France and the Habsburgs to the Ottomans' advantage and deepen the divisions between European states, sultan Suleiman supported France, the weaker state, against the Habsburgs. Developing relations between the Ottomans and France began the process through which France became the protector of all Catholics within Ottoman borders. In 1534 the first official French ambassador, Jean de la Forêt, travelled to Istanbul, and within one year succeeded in signing a capitulation agreement that not only granted certain commercial privileges to France, but also indirectly secured French protection for Catholics within Ottoman borders.[12] According to this agreement, 'Merchants, agents, delegates, and all others servants of the king would not be molested or judged by Muslim officials and would enjoy freedom of worship.'[13] With this agreement, renewed at various times, most importantly in 1569, priests who were to serve Catholic Christians could be sent to Ottoman lands.[14]

As a result, Catholic missionary activity was facilitated within the Ottoman empire. The priests, who according to the agreement could come for the purpose of serving the existing Catholic population, did not confine themselves to this duty alone, but began striving intensely to ally Orthodox Christians with the pope. With this aim in mind, Jesuits, Franciscans and Dominicans began to organize missions within the Ottoman realm.[15] Catholic missionaries' activities aimed at Orthodox Christians, such as opening churches and schools, troubled both the communities and the Ottoman authorities, but when challeged they could rely on France to intervene.

11 S. Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity. A Study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the Eve of the Turkish Conquest to the Greek War of Independence* (Cambridge 1985) 168.

12 For capitulations see: Maurits H. van den Boogert, *The Capitulations and the Ottoman Legal System: Qadis, Consuls and the Beratlıs in the 18th Century* (Leiden 2005).

13 C. A. Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans: the Church and the Ottoman Empire, 1453-1923* (New York 1983) 28.

14 Ibid., 24–69.

15 Ibid., 73–7.

The confrontation between Syriac Jacobites and the Catholics

It was also in the sixteenth century when the areas where Syriacs lived came under Ottoman control, and that Catholic missionaries began to operate in the area, specifically focusing on Eastern Christians. The earliest Syriac contact with the pope and Catholics was recorded in 1555, when the Syriac patriarch Abdullah sent one of his own students, the priest Musa of Savur, to Rome with a manuscript of the Syriac Bible for printing. According to Syriac sources, Musa also took letters of recommendation to give to the pope, although we do not know what these letters contained.[16] Western sources note that Musa met with the pope and accepted Catholicism. The Syriac Bible was printed with the patronage of Ferdinand of the House of Habsburg.[17]

After Abdullah, Ni'matallah was chosen as patriarch (1557–75); in terms of the complexity of relations between Syriac Jacobites and Catholics this was an interesting period. Problems had started within the community during Abdullah's patriarchate, and as a result Abdullah had moved to the church of the Virgin Mary in Diyarbekir. We can see from the Syriac sources that the main reason for the problems was the desire of Syriac laymen to intervene in the Church hierarchy. The problems must have continued, because Ni'matallah also preferred to remain in Diyarbekir. An important sign that problems increased during Ni'matallah's patriarchate is that a decision was taken to prevent laymen from convening a council in order to intervene in Church affairs. This decision was not sufficient to settle the matter, and in the process Ni'matallah converted and announced before the Ottoman pasha in Diyarbekir that he had become Muslim. Syriac sources suggest that the reason for his conversion was Muslim pressure, but according to Western missionaries coming to the region in this period, it was because of problems within the community. While Syriac sources state that the patriarch later recanted and returned to his former religion, Western sources indicate that he became Catholic, escaped to Rome and found refuge with the pope. In this period, Leonardo Abel of Malta, pope Gregory XIII's representative to the Eastern Churches, met with Ni'matallah in Rome and received information about the Syriacs before going to the east. The information Ni'matallah provided must have led the pope to think that the Syriacs would align themselves with him. Thus, when Abel arrived in Diyarbekir and sought to meet the new patriarch, in his bag he carried a robe to give to the patriarch as a sign of his subjection to the pope.[18]

After Ni'matallah, his brother David Shah was chosen as patriarch (1576–91). Although David Shah continued trying to resolve the problems within the community, he was not successful. Consequently, he did not agree to meet with Abel in Diyarbekir. Relying on information given by Abel, conflicting views exist on the reasons for the meeting not taking place according to Syriac and Western sources. According to the

16 H. Dolabani, *Antakya Süryani Kadim (Ortodoks) Kilisesi Patriklerinin Özgeçmişi*, trans. G. Akyüz (from Syriac to Turkish), (Istanbul 2006) 142–3.

17 Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans*, 61–2.

18 Dolabani, *Patriklerinin Özgeçmişi*, 143–4. Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans*, 74–8.

Syriac sources it was due to the objections of Muslims and Ottoman officials, whereas the Western sources claim it was because of problems within the community, in particular the lay leaders' fear that a meeting with the pope's representative would lead to the conversion of the community. While the patriarch was not prepared to meet Abel personally, he did send a representative, the priest Abdunnur, who met Abel in a monastery. According to Abel, this meeting involved a discussion of certain matters of faith, and ended without an agreement.[19]

After the death of David Shah, problems within the community continued, and between 1597 and 1640, there were simultaneously three claimants to the patriarchate.[20] At the same time, although direct relations with the pope had ceased, the community was forced to deal with the activities of Catholic missionaries based in Aleppo. François Picquet, who was appointed consul of Aleppo in 1652, began work immediately, promising French protection and support to all Christians who joined with Rome. Picquet saw the Syriac Jacobites, weakened because of the problems mentioned above, as the community most susceptible to missionary activities, and thus worked towards influencing them. Finding a Syriac priest named Akhijan who had accepted Catholicism, he arranged for the Maronite patriarch to ordain Akhijan as a bishop, and pursued official Ottoman channels to have him recognized officially as Syriac Catholic patriarch. While French sources mention an imperial diploma issued by the Ottomans recognizing this appointment, it seems unlikely, because in the seventeenth century the Ottoman State had not yet officially acknowledged communities changing their sects.[21] Existing laws did not allow this, and Ottoman foreign policy would not accept Orthodox citizens converting to Catholicism and thus entering French patronage. The Syriac interpretation of the Akhijan incident is that the French consulate sought to have him recognized as bishop of Aleppo, applying pressure on the patriarch of the time, Hbed Mişoha (1661–86), but the patriarch refused.[22]

Until the seventeenth century, Syriac patriarchs had to deal not only with the problems of laymen interfering in Church affairs and struggles over the patriarchate, but also with Catholics based in Aleppo. In the eighteenth century inner-communal problems appear to have decreased; the Syriac patriarchs were at least able to move back to the patriarchal centre in Mardin, and problems with the lay community were largely resolved. However, with the return of the patriarchal centre to Mardin, Syriacs now had to face the activities of missionaries based in Mosul, who were also administered by the pope's representatives and were patronized by the French consuls.[23]

19 Dolabani, *Patriklerinin Özgeçmişi*, 143–4; Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans*, 75.

20 Dolabani, *Patriklerinin Özgeçmişi*, 145–6.

21 Despite extensive archival research, I have been unable to locate such a document.

22 Dolabani, *Patriklerinin Özgeçmişi*, 148.

23 H. Aboona, 'How and when Catholicism was imposed on National Churches of Mesopotamia', accessed 15 June 2011, http://www.atour.com/education/20010303a.html. On missionary activities in Mosul, see S. D. Shields, *Mosul before Iraq like bees making five-sided cells* (New York 2000) 49.

Catholic missionary activities in Mardin and the schism

In the seventeenth century, Catholic missionaries based in Mosul were engaged in intensive activities in Mardin, but these were directed mostly towards Armenians. For example, the Capuchins began to work in Mardin in 1630 and succeeded in converting some Armenians to Catholicism. Michel Nau, a Jesuit priest, also worked in Mardin from 1681 until his death in 1683. Dominican priests appear later in Mardin between 1759 and 1779.[24] In fact, the efforts to Catholicize the Armenians in Mardin resulted in almost all the Gregorian Armenians becoming Catholic by the nineteenth century. The Syriacs seem to have been little influenced by these activities, and in fact they reacted strongly against them from the beginning.[25] Their commitment to their Church, as well as their recent experiences, caused them to take a rigid attitude towards the Catholic missionaries, for the Syriac Jacobites had witnessed the Nestorian community, their neighbours, becoming divided because of such activities. Indeed, the Chaldean patriarchate had been established in the sixteenth century as a result of this division.[26] The Armenians, their other neighbours, were also facing similar problems, and consequently the Syriac Jacobites hardened their stance against the Catholic missionaries.

Catholic missionary activities directed towards the Syriac Jacobites were more effective at the end of the eighteenth century. The Catholic missionaries had begun to find ways to move more freely within the Ottoman empire, which was no longer powerful enough to protect the Christians within its realm against Catholic missionary activities. Benefitting from the weakness of the Ottoman empire, France and the papacy sought to impose the idea that, in the words of one present-day commentator, 'If the Syriac Orthodox want to continue to exist as a live witness of their traditions, ... there is no other real option but to join the Catholics.'[27] In fact, the Syriacs were important for both the papacy and France for political reasons, although the weapon and the means of their struggle were theological.[28]

In 1782 the Catholics seized an important opportunity to Catholicize the Syriac Jacobites. After the death of the Syriac Jacobite patriarch Gevargis IV of Mosul in 1781, the Syriacs began the process for an election of the new patriarch. The election period was difficult because debates became fractious. Furthermore, at this election, a conflict arose between Michael Jarweh, the metropolitan of Aleppo, and Matay, the

24 S. Aydın, 'Anadolu'da Hıristiyanlığın Dönüşüm Faaliyetlerinin Doğu Hıristiyanlığı Üzerindeki Etkisi ve Modernleşme' (paper presented at the *Uluslararası Anadolu İnançları Kongresi*, Nevşehir, Turkey, 25–28 October 2000) 77–8.

25 V. A. Çerme, 'Ermeni Katolik Kilisesi'nin Kurucularından Melkon Tazbazyan'ın Hayatı (1654-1716)', *Tarih ve Toplum* 184 (1999) 37–43.

26 Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity*, 212-18; K. Albayrak, *Keldanîler ve Nasturîler* (Ankara 1997) 104–15.

27 E. R. Hambye SJ, 'Doğu Süryani Hıristiyanlığı'nın Dünü Bugünü Yaşam Mücadelesi ve Yeniden Doğuşu', in J. Moliter (ed.), *Kildaniler ve Doğu Süryani Kilisesi*, trans. E. Sever (Istanbul 2004) 77.

28 B. Nelhans, *Asuri Arami Kildani, Süryani Adlandırmalarının Dünü Bugünü Üzerine* (Södertälje 1990) 47.

metropolitan of Mosul, in 1782. Usually the process included the participation of all bishops, and the Holy Synod was convened for the election of the patriarch. The bishops then elected one of themselves to be patriarch after a series of lengthy discussions. In the 1782 election, Michael Jarweh was elected as patriarch by the bishops who supported him, without waiting for the arrival of other bishops. Consequently, metropolitan Matay and other bishops objected to this election. Metropolitan Matay, who was supported especially by the bishops of Tur Abdin,[29] called for another election by assembling a new synod in the church of Mar Yuhanon in Qeleth. At its conclusion, metropolitan Matay was elected as patriarch. An important part of the election process was also to secure the confirmation of the Ottoman authorities. Matay and his supporters managed to receive a *ferman* from the State ratifying the patriarchate of Matay.[30]

Michael Jarweh, who was not recognized as patriarch, made contact with the Catholic missionaries in Syria. Seizing this opportunity, the pope nominated Michael Jarweh as the Syriac Catholic patriarch over the Syriacs who had separated from the Church of the Syriac Jacobites for various reasons. The patriarchate of the Syriac Catholic Church was thus established.[31] Syriac Jacobite sources suggest that Michael Jarweh was already a Catholic before the election took place, although if so he did not proclaim it.[32] After this schism, the Syriac Jacobites began to refer to their Church as 'Syriac Ancient' (*Suryoye Kadmoye*), both to distinguish themselves from the Syriac Catholics and to emphasize that they were in fact older than their recent rival.[33]

The official recognition of the schism by the Ottoman empire

The activities of the Catholic missionaries in the Ottoman empire generated a variety of problems for both the Eastern Christian communities and the empire itself. While the communities which were exposed to Catholic missionary propaganda developed strategies to protect themselves, the new Catholic community undertook activities in order to gain legitimacy from the State. These activities resulted in the official recognition of Catholicism by the Ottoman empire in the nineteenth century. This occurred independently of the Syriacs, but also led to the official recognition of the Syriac Catholic patriarchate which appeared after the division of the Syriac Church. This official recognition by the Ottoman empire was prompted by concern regarding the struggles between the Gregorian Armenians and the Catholic Armenians during the reign of Mahmud II (1808–39). During this period, Catholic propaganda aimed at the Gregorian Armenians resulted in discord in the Armenian community.

29 The mountainous region east of Mardin, where numerous Syriac monasteries are located. In Ottoman sources it was referred to as Jebel-i Tur.

30 Dolabani, *Patriklerinin Özgeçmişi*, 162–4.

31 See Y. Ercan, *Osmanlı imparatorluğunda Bazı Sorunlar ve Günümüze Yansımaları* (Ankara 2002) 14–15.

32 Dolabani, *Patriklerinin Özgeçmişi*, 163.

33 A. Günel, *Türk Süryanileri Tarihi*, 35.

The Gregorian Armenians took drastic measures against the Catholic movement to the point of a blood feud, but the Catholics tried to overcome this resistance by appealing to European countries, especially France. An acute problem arose, since the classic Ottoman social structure was being eroded by the conflicts among Christian communities and between these communities and the Ottoman State, which in turn led to tension with European states.[34] For the Ottomans a resolution was urgently needed.

The problem was ultimately resolved by the recognition of the Armenian Catholics as a *millet* (confessional community) in 1829, followed by the official recognition of the Armenian Catholic patriarchate with a *ferman* issued in 1831. Additionally, the Maronite Catholics and the Greek Catholics were aligned with this patriarchate,[35] followed by the Chaldean and the Syriac Catholics. The problems between the Gregorian Armenians and the Catholic Armenians during the process of official recognition of Catholics in the Ottoman empire were replicated between the Syriac Jacobites and the Syriac Catholics.

Although the Ottoman government officially recognized Catholicism and established a Catholic Patriarchate, the schism among the Syriacs had not yet been recognized. This was the most serious obstacle for the resolution of the problems. In 1835, the Syriac Jacobites presented a petition (*ariza*) in which they asked the Syriac Catholics not to intervene in the Syriac Jacobite community in any way. In the same year, the Syriac Catholic plenipotentiary also presented a petition in which they asked the State to recognize them as a community distinct from the Syriac Jacobites. Faced with these two petitions, the State was obliged to engage with the problem originating from the separation of the Syriac Jacobites and the Syriac Catholics. The result was that the Ottoman empire issued a *ferman* officially recognizing two separate Syriac communities. In the words of the decree: 'The Syriac *millet* from the people of my exalted State, living in Diyarbekir, Jebel-i Tur, Mardin, Mosul, Baghdad, Aleppo, and Damascus are separated into two groups. The first one is called Syriac Jacobites. The other one is called just Syriac.' Thus, the Syriacs were officially divided into two groups, the Orthodox Syriacs, who were called 'Syriac Jacobites', and Syriac Catholics, who were called only 'Syriacs'.[36] The *ferman* continues: 'The Syriac Jacobites from these two classes headed by the Armenian plenipotentiaries and the Syriacs headed by the Catholic plenipotentiaries are not dependent on each other and they do not have the right to interfere with each other.'[37]

According to this *ferman*, while the Syriac Jacobites' dependency on the Gregorian Armenian patriarchate continued as it had earlier, the Syriac Catholics were dependent on the Catholic plenipotentiary and consequently on the recently-established (Armenian) Catholic patriarchate. However, the problem between these two communities did not

34 T. Çerme, 'Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Misyoner Faaliyetler', *Yaba Edebiyat* (January–February 2004) 10.

35 G. Bozkurt, *Gayrimüslim Osmanlı Vatandaşlarının Hukukî Durumu (1839-1914)* (Ankara 1996) 42.

36 B.O.A., '998 Numaralı Divân-ı Hümayûn Defterleri Kataloğu' Gayr-i Müslim Cemaatlere Ait 15 No'lu Defter 1251-1329 (hereafter cited as B.O.A. GM 15).

37 B.O.A., GM 15.

end, and the state felt the need to intervene further in the conflicts and to emphasize frequently that the Syriac Jacobites were dependent on the Gregorian Armenian patriarchate and the Syriac Catholics were reliant on the Catholic patriarchate.[38]

The conflict after the schism

In the nineteenth century, the most important problem for the Syriacs in Mardin was the division of the community as a result of the influence of Catholic missionaries and the relentless struggle between the newly emerging Catholic community and the 'ancient' community. The problem between these two communities was experienced in Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, and Rakka,[39] but the conflict was most intense in Mardin, the centre of their patriarchate. This conflict, which began with the appointment of Michael Jarweh as the Syriac Catholic patriarch by the pope in 1782, continued to develop, causing the two Syriac communities who had shared the same religion and the same Church for many centuries to harbour hostile feelings towards each other.[40]

Among the local Christian communities, it was the Syriac Jacobites who reacted most strongly to the Catholic missionary activities beginning in the seventeenth century.[41] They referred to the Catholicized Syriacs as *maghlubin*, 'the defeated', since they considered being Catholicized as a betrayal of faith.[42]

The official recognition of Catholics within the administrative system of the Ottoman empire did not solve the problem among the Christian communities. The conflict between the Catholics and the various Orthodox Churches continued throughout the nineteenth century. It is possible to analyse the problems between Syriac Catholics and Syriac Jacobites by focusing on two key issues: conversion, and the sharing of churches and cemeteries.

The conversion of the Orthodox to Catholicism

As mentioned above, the activities of the Catholics against Syriac Jacobites began before the division of the community. The fact that the Catholic missionaries organized themselves in Aleppo and Mosul, where the Syriac Jacobites lived in dense concentrations,[43] suggests that some Syriac Jacobites were already Catholicized before the Michael Jarweh election. Some sources indicate that the Catholic missionaries had begun to be influential

38 Mardin Şer'iye Sicilleri, no: 253, 126. (The court register of Mardin in the Ottoman empire period no: 253, hereafter cited as M.Ş.S.).

39 B.O.A., '998 Numaralı Divân-ı Hümayûn Defterleri Kataloğu' Gayr-i Müslim Cemaatlere Ait 8 No'lu Defter 1251-1329, 27–8.

40 W. F. Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia*, II (London 1842) 115.

41 Aboona, 'National churches of Mesopotamia'.

42 Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity*, 214.

43 Aboona, 'National churches of Mesopotamia'.

among the Syriacs living in Aleppo since 1762.[44] Michael Jarweh himself, who played a key role in this division, was from Aleppo and should be considered within this context. Moreover, there were already Catholicized Syriacs in Mardin and its environs. Nevertheless, there was not a very dense population of Syriac Catholics at that time.[45] The fact that Syriac Catholics reached a population large enough to constitute a patriarchate soon after the separation cannot be explained only through the participation of Catholicized Syriacs before the division. Possibly the bishops who supported Jarweh during the patriarchate controversy influenced their communities in support of their ideas. The bishops who separated from the Syriac Jacobites together with Jarweh probably convinced some members of their communities in the regions of their episcopacy to join the Catholic Church.

After the division, however, the population of the Syriac Catholic Church gradually increased as a result of the Catholic missionaries' continued activities directed at the Syriacs. It is reported that five Jacobite bishops converted to Catholicism and became affiliated to the Syriac Catholic patriarchate during this process.[46] The division that occurred among the Syriac communities caused the Syriac Jacobites to adopt a defensive attitude against missionary propaganda, and the Syriac Catholics to make efforts to increase the size of their communities. As time passed, the conflicts between the Syriac Jacobites and the Syriac Catholics became part of the broader hostility between Catholics and Orthodox in the Ottoman empire, due to both the *millet* system and to the disputes between the Gregorian Armenians and the Catholic Armenians. On the one hand, the Ottoman empire tried to sustain and protect its *millet* system and, on the other, it sought to avoid confronting its Christian communities and the major European powers that protected them.

Within this broad frame the antagonism between the two communities was exacerbated by conflict between the Gregorian Armenians and the Catholic Armenians centred in Istanbul; at the same time, the Syriac Jacobites and the Syriac Catholics sought power through the support of the Gregorian Armenian patriarchate and the Catholic Armenian patriarchate respectively. Syriac Jacobites often complained to Istanbul through the Armenian patriarchate about those individuals who converted to Catholicism as a result of missionary activities: 'While the Syriacs are of the same religion as the Armenians, the Catholics try to make the Syriacs living in Diyarbekir, Mardin, Mosul, Damascus, Aleppo and Rakka and their surroundings convert to the Catholic religion.'[47] A *ferman* which was sent to the governor of Diyarbekir in May 1839 mentions the previous complaints about the problem; similar complaints were made in June 1819 and in January 1836 and, thereafter, a second *ferman* was proclaimed in order to resolve the conflict, but the complaints were repeated again in June 1837. According to yet

44 Poona, 'Doğu Süryani Hıristiyanlığı', 55.

45 Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity*, 214.

46 Özcoşar, *Mardin Süryanileri*, 102.

47 M.Ş.S., no: 253 Evahir-i Safer 1255 (May 1839).

another complaint dated 1839: 'those who had to be punished among the Armenians[48] convert to Catholicism in order to avoid punishment.'[49] In response to this complaint, a further *ferman* was proclaimed, according to which the Ottoman administration stated that it considered conversion from one religion to another to be a destructive factor for its social, administrative and economic structures. Another reason for this aversion to conversion was the evident conflict and disagreement, and ultimately social unrest, it caused among the Christian communities.[50] Additionally, this *ferman* stated that while previous conversions were to be tolerated, further changes would henceforth not be allowed. However, as the same problems were addressed in two further decrees dated August 1840[51] and January 1843,[52] it is clear that conversion could not be prevented.

Another significant problem emerged between the Syriac Jacobites and Syriac Catholics in 1853, when Anton Semheri, metropolitan of the Syriac Catholics of Mardin, was elected as patriarch of the Syriac Catholics after the previous incumbent died in 1851. The new patriarch's first act was to move the centre of the patriarchate from Aleppo to Mardin.[53] This situation would be seen by the Syriac Jacobites as a threat, since having the Catholic patriarchal centre for the Syriacs in Mardin could have attracted more Syriac Jacobites to the Catholic Church. This radicalized the Syriac Jacobites against the Syriac Catholics, so that in 1898 Ephrem II Rahmani, the patriarch of the Syriac Catholics, felt compelled to move the patriarchate to Beirut as a result of the hostile attitude of the Syriac Jacobites.[54]

Conversions by the Syriac Jacobites did not only occur because of Catholic propaganda, but also because of disagreements among members of the community and the desire for power within the community. Parry[55] mentions Mutran Yunus, a Syriac Jacobite metropolitan imprisoned in the monastery of Deyruzzafaran for three years because of a disagreement with the patriarch, because he wished to convert to Catholicism.[56] A similar event occurred in the village of Salah in the vicinity of Midyat in the early

48 Here 'Armenians' includes all Orthodox Christian communities represented by the Armenian patriarchate in Istanbul.

49 According to the *millet* system, the Christian communities had their own internal legal systems and their own courts where cases were heard. It was to avoid these courts' sentences that some individuals converted to Catholicism.

50 M.Ş.S., no: 253 Evahir-i Safer 1255 (May 1839).

51 M.Ş.S., no: 253, Evasıt-ı Cemaziyelahir 1256 (August 1840).

52 M.Ş.S., no: 242, Evasıt-ı Zilkade 1258 (January 1843).

53 G. Akyüz, *Mardin İli'nin Merkez ve Civar Köylerinde ve İlçelerinde Bulunan Kiliselerin ve Manastırların Tarihi* (Istanbul 1998) 84.

54 Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity*, 37.

55 In 1892, Oswald H. Parry visited the areas where Syrian Jacobites lived within the Ottoman empire on behalf of an Anglican institution in England called the 'Syrian Patriarchate Education Society'. Parry visited the Syrian monasteries and churches and made a report for the Syrian Patriarchate Education Society.

56 O. H. Parry, *Six Months in a Syrian Monastery* (London 1895) 130–3.

1900s: one of two arguing families living in this village converted to Catholicism in order to secure the support of the Syriac Catholic Church against the other family.[57]

Both communities claimed to be the legitimate heirs of the Syriac Church. In this respect the Syriac Catholics found themselves in a more difficult situation because Rome was making demands to bring their practices into line with the Latin convention. This in turn left them open to accusations by Syriac Jacobites that they were abandoning their ancient traditions. These problems were most acute during the pontificate of Pius IX, who was a fervent supporter of centralization.[58] The decisions of a council held in the year 1888 show that in the face of Roman pressure the Catholic Syriac bishops were attempting to steer a middle course: they accepted the Latin position that all priests should be celibate but balked at giving Rome a say in the election of the patriarch.[59]

The problem of churches and cemeteries

Another important contentious issue in the conflict following the separation was the sharing of churches and cemeteries. In fact, this problem was common among all communities divided as a result of the influence of Catholic missionaries in the Ottoman empire. For example, the conflict over the sharing of churches between Nestorians and Chaldeans, who appeared as a separate community when some of the Nestorians converted to Catholicism in the sixteenth century, continued even into the second half of the nineteenth century.[60]

The Syriac Catholics laid claim to the property of the Syriac Jacobites, their former community, although they were no longer Jacobites. The disputes occurred soon after the schism. Interestingly, Michael Jarweh chose the monastery of Deyruzzafaran, the Syriac Jacobites' patriarchal centre since 1293, as the Syriac Catholic patriarchal centre.[61] This represented a challenge to the Syriac Jacobites, a move which was aimed at disrupting the community which had not yet converted to Catholicism.

Although this attempt failed, the Syriac Catholics continued in their struggle to wrestle Deyruzzafaran from the Syriac Jacobites. When the Syriac Catholics understood that they could never overcome the Syriac Jacobites because of the latter's larger population, they appealed to the authorities in Istanbul in order to solve the problem. By 1839, they seem to have succeeded in gaining permission to hold religious ceremonies in Deyruzzafaran, because, according to one Western traveller, both communities would hold their ceremonies there at the same time but in separate spaces.[62] It was undoubtedly through the influence of the Roman Catholic Church that the Syriac Catholics were able to secure this permission. However, this was not enough to keep the Syriac

57 G. Akyüz and Ş. Aktaş, *Bakısyan (Alagöz) Köyü'nün Tarihçesi* (Mardin 2004) 96–7.
58 Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans*, 232–3.
59 Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans*, 295.
60 B.O.A., MKT. UM., 301/79.
61 Ercan, *Günümüze Yansımaları*, 14.
62 Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches*, 116.

Jacobites away from the monastery. It seems to have been only a temporary solution, because in 1850 the Syriac Catholics again attempted to make Deyruzzafaran their patriarchal centre, but they failed once more in their attempt because of the strong reaction of the Syriac Jacobites.[63]

Failing to take possession of Syriac Jacobite churches, the Syriac Catholics made use of some private properties in Mardin as churches. Although this was forbidden according to the laws of the Ottoman empire, neither the empire nor the Syriac Jacobites reacted against this situation since both wanted to avoid a reaction from France, which supported the Catholics.[64] On the other hand, the Syriac Catholics did not give up attempts to take over the Syriac Jacobites' churches at any opportunity, and each time these incursions caused conflict. The churches in Mardin which were at the centre of the conflict included those of Erbain ('The Forty') and Mart Shamun within the city and Mar Mihail near the city. The Syriac Catholics first occupied the church of Mart Shamun but were forced to leave it; they thereupon tried to settle in Erbain Church, but again they failed because of Syriac Jacobite resistance.[65]

Besides the problem of Syriac Catholics laying claim to the churches, the fact that they buried their dead in Syriac Jacobite cemeteries also led to complaints about them to the State. Thus, a *ferman* dated January 1843 and issued to Elias, the patriarch of the Syriac Jacobites, stated that the interference by the Catholics with the churches and cemeteries of the Syriac Jacobites had to be prevented in accordance with the laws of the State.[66]

The implementation of the decree presented difficulties for the Catholics, who were now forced to look for new places to bury their dead. The garden of a house owned by Matran Anton, the Catholic plenipotentiary in Mardin, was in 1844 used as a cemetery for the Syriac Catholics. Although they were permitted officially by the authorities to make such accommodation for cemetery space, they faced other problems. For instance, Toma, the representative of Matran Anton, bought a piece of land belonging to a Muslim south of Matran's house in order to expand the cemetery. This resulted in an argument because it did not accord with Ottoman law which prohibited the use of land owned by a Muslim for such purposes. Amid these debates, the Syriac Catholics demanded the use of one of the three churches mentioned above. The Catholics received the response from the state that the three churches had always belonged to the Jacobites, and therefore could not be given to the Catholics.[67]

The problem was finally resolved by an 1844 *ferman* of the sultan stating that 'as the Catholics are subjects of my supreme royalty, it is not right that they remain without a cemetery.' Thereafter, they were permitted to make use of land purchased

63 Özcoşar, *Mardin Süryanileri*, 108.

64 Aboona, 'National Churches of Mesopotamia'.

65 İ. Armale, *Türkiye Mezopotamyasında Mardin*, trans. (from Syriac), T. Karataş (Södertälje 1993) 33.

66 M.Ş.S., no: 242, Evasıt-ı Zilkade 1258 (January 1843).

67 B.O.A., HR.MKT., 7/32.

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from Muslims as cemeteries.[68] An order by the governor of Mosul appeared approximately four months after this decree mentioning Matran's house as a church, and stating that no one should interfere with the religious ceremonies of the Syriac Catholics.[69]

However, since the intervention by the Catholics in Orthodox churches and monasteries was the main item on the agenda when the Syriac Jacobite patriarch, Petros, made an official visit to Istanbul in 1852, we can see that the problem still existed at this time.[70]

In the wider context of these ecclesiastical tensions, it is noticeable that France frequently intervened in the disputes between the Syriac Catholics and the Syriac Jacobites in favour of the Syriac Catholics. Such intervention occurred, for example, during a confrontation between the two communities over a church in Midyat in 1852. According to an Ottoman foreign affairs report in that year, a French priest undertook advocacy for the Syriac Catholics before the courts. Although the decision in the case is unclear, a French *chargé d'affaires* complained afterwards that the judge had insulted the French priest. Thereupon an order was sent to the governor of the region requesting that the French priests be treated carefully in terms of the agreements between the Ottoman empire and France.[71]

Disputes between the Syriac Jacobites and the Syriac Catholics decreased after the latter began building new churches. The first place used by the Syriac Catholics as a church in Mardin was Matran Anton's house, as mentioned above. In time, the Syriac Catholics extended their existing churches and built new ones as their numbers increased in Mardin. An application by the Syriac Catholic bishop of Istanbul to extend a church owned by the Catholics was accepted in June 1858. A *ferman* sent to the administrator and the judge of Mardin urged them not to raise difficulties and not to demand any payment because the necessary permission for extending the church within the defined dimensions had been given.[72]

Matran Anton's house accommodated also a church known as the church of the Virgin Mary;[73] the garden was used as a cemetery. A centre for the patriarchate was built near this church at the end of the nineteenth century. Additionally, the Syriac Catholics began to build a monastery named after Mar Afram at the western gate of Mardin and finished it in 1884.[74] They also constructed a new church named Mar Osyo on the eastern side of Mardin.[75]

68 M.Ş.S., no: 242 Evail-i Safer 1260 (March 1844).
69 M.Ş.S., no: 242 Cemaziyelevvel 1260 (June 1844).
70 B.O.A., DVN., 92/39.
71 B.O.A., HR. MKT., 46/75.
72 M.Ş.S., no: 235 Evahir-i Şevval 1274 (June 1858).
73 Armale, *Mardin*, 33.
74 Akyüz, *Manastırların Tarihi*, 82–90.
75 Armale, *Mardin*, 33.

Conclusion

Evaluating the results of Catholic missionary activities against the Syriac Jacobites as a whole, two main results appear. The first is that the Syriac community was divided into separate Jacobite and Catholic communities, which then came into conflict with each other, leaving behind a legacy of dissolution, hostility, and various identity issues. The other, more positive, outcome is that it was through such Catholic missionary activities that Eastern Christians started to engage more fully with the Western world; indeed, we can say that the process of modernization for the Syriac community began with these missionary movements. There were, of course, other factors contributing to both outcomes; the main aim of this paper has been to examine the process of Catholic missionary activity as a dynamic in this regard.

The Church has always been a unifying factor for the Syriac community, from ancient through medieval to modern times, although occasionally they have experienced considerable internal conflict over, for example, the election of a patriarch. One of the most important effects of the Catholic missionary activities on the Syriac Jacobites was the deconstruction of the Church organization.

Always deeply loyal to their beliefs, the Syriacs reacted strongly against Catholicization, and this reaction turned into ongoing hostility between the two Syriac communities. The nineteenth century was experienced by the Syriacs as a century of conflict. However, this confrontation also started a new process of development for the Syriac Jacobites. They reorganized their Church system more rigidly and rearranged the relationships between the Church and the community; the patriarchate adopted a central administration and as a result the appointment of metropolitans, bishops, and priests was carried out more carefully. A notable outcome of this centralization was that patriarch Petros probably began to collect taxes, called *lemmê* in Syriac, and took a census of the population in 1872.[76]

The Syriacs, who had become a minority following the emergence of Islam and had turned inward following the crusades and the Mongol invasions, began to be engaged with the outside world during this process. They established a representative office of their patriarchate in Istanbul in order to communicate directly with the government.[77] Furthermore, in seeking a degree of political power to counterbalance French support for the Catholics, the Syriac Jacobites began initiating contact with other European countries and they opened contacts with various societies in England through the Protestant missionaries, such as the Syrian Patriarchate Education Society. It may seem counter to their purposes that they sought the support of the Protestants against the Catholics, but this can be explained by the fact that the Protestants practised a less intrusive missionary strategy than that of the Catholics. Patriarch Petros' visit to England in 1874 became a turning point in relations between England and the Syriac Jacobites; specifically, an

76 *Lemmê Book* (1870), Archive of Erbain ('The Forty') Church in Mardin.

77 E. Metin, 'İstanbul Güzel ve Hain Dost', *HETO, Süryani Edebiyat Dergisi* 1(1999) 34.

important stage of Syriac modernization in the nineteenth century was the acquisition of a printing press and the subsequent production of books.

The use of technology and scientific methods by the missionaries contrasted with their veritable absence in the Ottoman empire and highlighted the necessity for modernization. The missionaries presented models to Christian communities of regional modernization and the development of foundations such as schools, hospitals, and small-scale handicraft factories. These examples influenced the Syriac Christians especially in the cultural sphere. Some members of the Church thought that Old Syriac, or even Hebrew and Greek, should be taught and they dreamed of recreating the ancient 'School of Edessa'.[78] The impact of the process of modernization on education can be seen even more clearly in the school that the Society of Syriac Brothers inaugurated for Syrian Jacobites in Diyarbekir in the year 1879.[79]

A further important outcome of the missionary activities was that some Syriacs began to question the relevance of the Church and its traditional rituals in the modern world. These suspicions regarding the Church played an important role in the rise of ethnic Syriac nationalism by motivating Syriacs to search for a unifying factor other than the Church. Based on this new conceptual framework, appeals were made to all 'Syriac' Churches to leave aside religious differences and unite.[80] Syriac intellectuals defined Syriacs no longer by religious criteria but through a common 'Assyrian' nationality. This situation resulted in a new and acute division in the twentieth century between secular nationalists and pious Church members.

78 Parry, *Six Months*, 113–14.

79 Özcoşar, *Mardin Süryanileri*, 426.

80 M. Fuat Çıkkı, *Naum Faik ve Süryanı Rönesansı* (Istanbul 2004) 67.