Inter-Communal Relations and Changes in Religious Affiliation in the Middle East (Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries)

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Religion . . . appears in all different sorts in Syria: Turks, Jews, Heretics, Schismatics, Naturalists, Idolaters; or to be more exact these are genera that have their species in great number, for in Aleppo alone we counted sixteen types of religions of which four were Turks different from each other; of Idolaters, there remains only one sort which worships the sun; of Naturalists, those who maintain the natural essence of God with some superstition concerning cows and who come from this side of the borders of Mogor; and the others without superstitions named Druze, living in Anti-Lebanon under a prince called the Emir. They pay a tribute to the Great Lord, and live in their own manner, naturally. From this one can see how necessary it is to have good missionaries, and virtuous ones, for all the scandals that go on in this Babylon, and learned men to refute so many errors.[1]

There are fourteen Sects or Nations differing from each other completely in Religion, in rite, in language, and in their manner of dressing: seven of these are Infidels, and seven Christians. The Infidels are Turks or Ottomans, Arabs, Kurds, Turcomans, Jezides, Druze and Jews. Among the Turks there are, moreover, several sects and cabals affecting Religious sentiments just as there are among the Jews. The other nations, that is the Arabs, Kurds, etc. are in such a profound state of ignorance that they do not know what they believe. The seven Christianities are the Greeks, the Armenians, the Surians, the Maronites, the Nestorians, the Copts and the Solaires called Chamsis.

One must remark that most of these sects are mixed and confused one among the other, not only in the same country, and in the same Town; but often enough in the same lodgings: those in which Turks, Greeks, Armenians, whose Idioms and Religions are all different, such that one cannot understand another's speech: From this it follows that Turkey is a true Babylon of confusion.[2]

The two texts which provide an epigraph describe with eloquence but without sympathy the extreme diversity of the society of the Middle East in the seventeenth century. The multilingualism, the plurality and resilience of reli-

[1] "Relation des missions de la Compagnie de Jésus en Syrie en l'année 1652. par le Père Nicolas Poirresson," in Antoine Rabbathe, *Documents inédits pour servir à l'histoire du christianisme en Orient (XVI-XIX siècle), 2 vols. (Paris-Leipzig, 1905–1910). I:46.*

[2] Michel Febvre, *Théâtre de la Turquie,* translated from Italian into French by the author (Paris. 1682). The author is a belated partisan of the anti-Turkish crusade.

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gious confessions have not ceased to be emphasized down to our own time. If the authors of the seventeenth century quoted above associated this diversity with the curse of Babel, more neutral notions are used today to describe it: It is the metaphor of motifs in a carpet for Jacques Berque, that of pieces assembled in a mosaic for Carlton Coon, or that of a kaleidoscope for Pierre Bourdieu.[3]

The accelerated and cumulative changes that have taken place since the nineteenth century have not dissolved diverse communities. Neither the emergence of new nation-states nor the diverse utopias that have had their course in the region—Arab nationalism, Panislamicism, Communism to a weak degree—have reduced religious and linguistic diversity. Certain communities became minorities, then disappeared by expulsion (Jews from Iraq and Egypt), by destruction (Armenians in Turkey), or by emigration (Jews, Greeks, Armenians from Turkey as from the Arab provinces turned states). But, inversely, a large number of minorities have become more visible, politicized, even militarized. Far from subsiding, diversity remains the order of the day and what one calls *ethnopolitics* is at the center of public life in most of the region's states.[4]

It is not at all a matter of calling into question these ancient communal divisions which have marked and continue to mark the societies of the Middle East.[5] But until now, studies have more often accentuated national constructions, unitary by nature, or conflicts between minorities and their states (the "minorities' question," after the "question of Christians in the Orient"). From this we have the teleological character of such studies, where the end (often tragic, alas) of the story as it is told determines the selection of facts coming before it. It was appropriate, in order to refine the social history of these regions and to better capture the secular modus vivendi of various religious communities, to orient research in other directions. One such effort has led to the analysis of the social formulas that flourished, however briefly: in other words, the transcommunal experiences that found fertile ground between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly in the towns. Such was the case of cosmopolitanism studied notably by Robert Ilbert for Egypt or by Alcalay for Levantine culture in general.[6] If one admits that social identity

[3] Jacques Berque in *De l'Euphrate à l'Atlas*, (Paris, 19–); Carlton Coon, *The Story of the Middle East*. (2nd edition, 1958). Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociologie de l'Algérie*, (5th éd, 1975).

[4] Milton J. Esman and Itamar Rabinovich, eds., *Ethnicity, Pluralism, and the State in the Middle East*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988). The idea of Ethnopolitics is borrowed from Joseph Rotschild, *Ethnopolitics: A Conceptual Framework*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

[5] For the current state of this issue (minus the state of Israel), see Lucette Valensi, "La Tour de Babel: groupes et relations ethniques au Moyen-Orient et an Afrique du Nord," *Annales, ESC*, no. 4 (juil.-août 1986), 817–838.

[6] Robert Ilbert, *Alexandrie 1860–1960. Un modèle éphémère de convivialité: communautés et identités cosmopolites*. (Paris. Autrement. 1992). Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs. Remaking Levantine Culture*. (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1993.) See also Gilles Veinstein, ed., *Salonique 1850–1918. La "ville des Juifs" et le réveil des Balkans* (Paris. Autrement, 1992). Stéphane Yerasimos, ed., *Istanbul, 1914–1923. Capitale d'un monde illusoire ou l'agonie des vieux empires* (Paris, Autrement, 1992).

is formed in relation to others,[7] one can shift attention to focus on the social practices shared by all the groups as well as the places and forms of interaction among groups or among individuals belonging to different communities. There is, finally, the need to consider the experiences of rupture, transgression, and particularly the cases of movements of religious conversion. Few have studied until now such changes in religious affiliation that occurred in various forms between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries: forced conversion, in the case of the Armenian Khamshin of the Trebizond region; voluntary conversion, where Jews are concerned who, having followed the false messiah Shabbatai Sevi, convert like him to Islam in the seventeenth century and are known from now on by the name *Dönmeh*; massive adherence to the shiism of the Iraqi nomads in the nineteenth century; and individual conversion of the innumerable "Christians of Allah" splendidly described by J. and B. Bennassar for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[8] The scope of this topic, subjected to documentary restrictions often impossible to overcome, does not permit us to encompass all of these movements. Conversions to Islam in particular seem to have left little trace in the Ottoman archives. The communal archives are meager. The collections of the churches of the Orient (and those of the missionary orders in the Orient) remain inaccessible. We do not pretend, therefore, to make more than a limited contribution to the study of social relations among the followers of distinct groups and to that of the changes in religious affiliation, in particular by observing conversions to the Roman Catholic Church.[9]

THE WORK OF CONVERSION: GLOBAL REFLECTION

The principal post of observation was that occupied by the Franciscans in the Holy Land. Established in the Middle East since the thirteenth century to guard the Holy Places, they also performed missionary work. They were present in Egypt (Cairo, Damietta and Alexandria), in Cyprus (Arnice and Nicosia), in Syria-Palestine (Jerusalem, St. John of the Mountain, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Arissa, Damascus, Aleppo) and finally in the capital of the empire, Constantino-

[7] Frederik Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Boston, 1969). Jean Loup Amselle and Elikia M'Bokolo, ed., *Au coeur de l'ethnie. Ethnies, tribalisme et Etat en Afrique* (Paris, La Découverte, 1985).

[8] For the Khemchins, work in progress by Claire Mouradian. For the *Dönmeh*, there is an old bibliography and a study in progress on their descendants in the Society of Istanbul. For Iraq, Yitzhaq Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) and of idem, "The Conversion of Iraq's Tribes to Shi'ism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 26:3 (August 1994), 443–63. Bartholomé and Lucile Bennassar, *Les Chrétiens d'Allah* (Paris, Perrin, 1989).

[9] The following pages being the result of research in progress, I underline their temporary character. For an amply documented study treated from the perspective of social history, see Bernard Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique* (Rome, Ecole française de Rome, 1994), in which emphasis is placed upon the region of Alep but which extends well beyond this frame. See also the same author, "Les Chrétiens d'Alep (Syrie) à travers les récits des conversions des missionnaires carmes déchaux (1657–1681)," *Mélanges de l'Ecole Française de Rome*, 100 (1988–91), 461–99.

ple. It is in Jerusalem that all the information concerning their houses is gathered. As the friars of the Holy Land took care to record conversions one by one and then periodically recapitulate these records, the effects of the missionary efforts must be measured over the long term and over a considerable territory.

As a result of the gaps that they contain, we will not grant a rigorous statistical importance to these compilations (in which serial and quantitative history would once have taken delight).[10] The aim here will be only to find in them a few large trends. The clearest was the insignificance of the annual number of conversions in the seventeenth century. One notices only a certain agitation in Aleppo in 1630–31, then in Palestine in the 1670s. Yet between 1627 and 1697 the annual number of conversions did not exceed eight, if the reversions of repentant renegades to Catholicism and of Protestants making the pilgrimage to the Holy Land are excluded. More elevated in the very last years of the seventeenth century and during the first third of the eighteenth century, the annual numbers reached or exceeded 80 in 1715 and in 1727, then fell back to modest levels. With about 1,286 conversions for the years 1698–1767, the average number of yearly conversions was 18. For the following period, 1768–1856, according to calculations done by the friars, the conversions exceeded 3,297 individuals, renegades and Protestants included, an average of 37 a year. The statistics change dramatically (see Table 1).[11]

Table 1 does not fail to surprise, as much by the high number of Muslims converted to Christianity as by the presence of those called Gentiles. The latter were in fact black slaves who came from Africa. The former, included the black slaves brought from Africa and counted as Muslims and renegades of Christian birth: If these two categories are excluded, the conversion of indigenous Muslims remains thus in all likelihood exceptional.

These limited quantitative data, approximate for that which concerned the Franciscans, did not assess the results obtained by other missionary orders present in the region, such as the Carmelites, Jesuits, Capuchins, or Anglicans. The Carmelites, for example, received 48 converts in Aleppo between 1669 and 1681 (that is 3 a year on average); their results were not therefore more spectacular than those of the guardians of the Holy Land.[12] It was the same,

[10] Franciscan archives, Jerusalem: Book of baptisms, marriages and recantations, 1555–1668. Reconciliations and converts, 1707 (this register contains also datum subsequent to 1707). Register of conversions to Catholicism: listed in 1853 by father Giuseppe del Tellaro, but continued until 1990. This register takes up data since the sixteenth century. It is published in part in *Saggio di quel che hanno fatto e fanno i missionari francescani in Terra Santa. Abjure e riconciliazioni ottenuti e battesimi conferiti ad adulti dall'anno 1768 a tutto il 1855.* (Memorie estratte degli archivi di quella missione dal P. Marcellino da Civezza. Florence, 1891). Besides these manuscript registers, I have relied upon published archives: Rabbath, previously cited (see n. 1), and edited by Girolamo Golubovich, *Biblioteca bio-bibliografica della Terra Sancta e dell'Oriente franciscano,* (second set, 14 vols., Florence, 1921–33). We reserve the study of cases of mass conversions for another occasion.

[11] Leonhard Lemmens, *Collectanea Terrae Sanctae ex archivo hierosolymitano deprompta,* 300, in Golubovich, *Biblioteca,* 2nd set, volume 14, Florence, 1933.

[12] Rabbath, *Documents,* II, pp. 86–87.

TABLE I

Conversions and Reconciliations, 1768–1856

Based on Nationality		*Based on Religion*	
Nationality	*Number*	*Religion*	*Number*
Greeks	1,555	Protestants	149
Armenians	1,040	Jews	17
Copts	189	Muslims	220
Nestorians, etc.	110	Gentiles	17
TOTAL	2,894		403

doubtless, with other orders. Together these data furnish at least a clear indication of three kinds of facts: First, conversions were rare; second, the identities acquired at birth were strong; and, third, changes in religious identity were not sought after or difficult. Whether these facts resulted from the efficiency of Ottoman interdictions, the solidity of communal organization, or the timidity of the offer of conversion, is what must be determined.

The limited statistical pertinence of available data rapidly leads one to abandon the macroscopic perspective. Can the microscopic one nevertheless be used? The information that comes to us was distilled. The scribe who compiled the data gathered in Jerusalem retained a date, the place, the proper name sometimes followed by patronymic, the nature of the operation carried out, and finally the nation or rite of origin for each individual in only one line or little more. The circumstances of the conversion are not reported. When these brief announcements are read through the magnifying glass, indications of minor shifts affecting local society can sometimes be discovered. Moreover, the fathers of the Holy Land maintained a regular correspondence with Rome, a part of which has been published. And finally, the guardians of the Holy Land and the monks of other missionary orders periodically wrote reports which, intended for the Roman authorities, provide a summary of the situation. One of the regular rubrics of these accounts of activities concerns the salvation of souls, in other words, conversions, a synthetic rubric which does not revel in narrative or circumstantial detail. Nevertheless, it did furnish the elements of a puzzle for us to assemble.

"OBSERVING THE INFINITESIMAL"[13]: INTERCONFESSIONAL RELATIONS

On the complexity of relations between Christians in the Orient

Let us observe first of all the relations between contiguous areas. Several towns and villages jointly sheltered distinct religious communities of unequal

[13] I borrow here an expression from Leon Werth, *33 jours.* (Paris, 1992).

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numerical strength and which benefited from a more or less solid institutional anchorage. Other than the Turks (the term used to designate Muslims at that time), there was the pairing of Greeks and Armenians in Cyprus and, during the nineteenth century, at Latakia. In the majority of Christians in Egypt, the Copts found themselves a minority in Nazareth among Greeks and Armenians and, at Jerusalem, among the representatives from all the churches of the other religions. Four large cities offered a greater degree of diversity: Aleppo and Damascus, with its followers of the Greek, Armenian, Maronite, Nestorian, and Jacobite churches; Cairo, where Copts, Greeks, Armenians, Abyssinians, Marorites and Jacobites lived together; and finally Jerusalem, where the faithful of all the churches and religions lived and converged.

This proximity facilitated the reciprocal borrowing of social practices and the sharing of customs and values among Muslims and non-Muslims. In this domain the data are remarkably abundant, if not always coherent, in particular with regard to public usages directly open to the gaze of observing foreigners. Travelers and missionaries in the Orient, in effect, never failed to be surprised by the cultural distance that separated them from the indigenous Christians, and, correspondingly, by the homology between their practices and those of the Muslims. On their side, the Turkish authorities bound themselves to maintaining the manifest differences between Muslims and non-Muslims, reiterating prohibitions and regulations, while underlining the degree of osmosis that existed between the socio-cultural practices of the diverse groups. In this manner the non-Muslims spoke the vernacular languages of the empire: Arab, Turkish, or Greek. Christians and Jews, men or women, frequented the public baths. The men, Christian or Jewish, wore turbans. What then made it possible to distinguish them from the Muslims was the presence of colored threads in the fabric used for these turbans.[14] But how did one distinguish Jews from Christians when their headdresses were alike? By their shoes, for those of the former were black or violet and those of the Christians, red or yellow.[15] In their religious practices, the Christians of Syria–Palestine and the pilgrims frequented the same holy places. In certain locations, the Christians of the Orient had to share the same churches, for there was not one to each sect. At the same time, like the Muslims in their mosques, Christians did not tolerate the presence of women in the churches. Again, like the Muslims and contrary to Occidental Christians, the Armenians practiced the sacrifice of sheep. The Copts, whose practice of circumcision and excision linked them to the Muslims, deviated from Catholic norms in many of their social relations: the laws of marriage, the practice of repudiation and divorce, and the marriage of

[14] And still this was not always followed. Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens*, 53, relates that the Christian peasants of Nazareth wore white turbans in 1638.

[15] Febvre, *Théâtre*, 376. See also Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens*, *passim*, on the adoption of Muslim dress by the Christians in order to avoid maltreatment and on the reminders reiterated by the Turkish authorities of prohibitions concerning vestimantary materials.

priests. The reports note that the Christians are divided into the same system of factions as the society at large and that, like it, practice vengeance for honor.[16]

The proximity similarly facilitated relations that ignored confessional frontiers. In 1617, an infant of Catholic Nestorian parents was baptized: The godfather was a Catholic from Marseilles, the godmother a Maronite. Thus, for the five individuals concerned, there were three languages, three rites, two political statutes. Two years later, the child of a Nestorian mother had Maronites for godfather and godmother. Proximity brought promiscuity: Marriage, in effect, clearly appears as the motive for attending two churches or switching to another. These practices sometimes expressed the ratios of comparative strength, the faithful of one minority church being forced to find a spouse among those of the relatively more numerous church.[17] Such practices were favored by geographic mobility, a point which Bernard Heyberger is right to underline: Assigned in principle to a group from birth—a fact which had implications for the payment of taxes—the Christians in towns, like the Jews, moreover, stood out because of their constant movement among the diverse provinces of the Ottoman Empire.[18] Once estranged from his or her place of birth, a person could more easily seek out (or agree to) exogamy. The passage from one church to another could also result from the microstrategies of social advancement: The Greeks and Syrians marrying Latins serving the function of intermediaries were not choosing entry into a larger community but, rather, a change in status which allowed them to escape from the Ottoman system. Many such cases can be observed in the seventeenth century.

Changes in affiliation were frowned upon by the communities of origin, which sought to defend themselves by every available means, including the presentation of a denunciation before the Ottoman authorities. It was often displacement that, loosening communal ties, allowed the individual to take such a step. Conversion was much more possible when the religious community was distant: It was in the Holy Land that the Copts of Egypt became Latins and in Cairo, in contrast, that the Armenians of Syria–Palestine converted to the Latin rite. The Jews from the Holy Land, from Livorno or from Ancona, came to Cairo or Alexandria to embrace Christianity. A Jewish rabbi from Safi [Fr: Safed] converted and received, with baptism, the name Jean-Baptiste. But the "persecutions" to which the Jews subjected him were

[16] Rabbath, *Documents*, II, p. 71, on the vengeance of honor. There are innumerable notes on the practice of circumcision and excision among the Copts, polygamy, repudiation and other practices judged aberrant by the Latin monks, in their reports sent to Rome. See Rabbath, *Documents*, I, pp. 13, 54, 55, and so forth.

[17] Because of the lack of Catholics in Bethlehem, the intermediaries of the Latin service were married to Greek schismatics. Some of these were reconciled, while others remained faithful to their own church; see Golubovich, *Croniche o vero annali*, vol. 6–7, p. 133.

[18] Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens*, 26.

such that he returned to Judaism. In 1631, weary of war, he took himself to Cairo with his wife and children to enter again into the bosom of the Church. All of his family, seven persons, was finally brought to Christianity through the care of the Franciscans.[19]

The practices of interconfessional matrimony did not fail to raise disturbing questions for the Roman clergy. To what church did the children of mixed couples revert? Was it permissible for a faithful member of the Catholic Church to take communion in a schismatic church? What sanctions should one inflict upon ambivalent Catholics? In 1712 a Catholic of Bethlehem found himself in debt to a Turk. An Armenian agreed to pay his debt in return for compensation; he obtained in exchange the hand of the daughter of a Catholic without having to provide the dowry (for in the Orient, men brought the dowry). The Armenian promised to become a Catholic and to marry in the Latin church. In fact he did neither. The marriage was celebrated in the Armenian church in the presence of the bride's father. The Custodian of the Holy Places, violently opposed to such deviations, deprived the Catholic of the sacraments. The latter pleaded, and the Custodian therefore imposed on him the punishment that he must hold the candle at the door of the church during a particularly busy day, Christmas in this case. In Rome, the prefect of *Propaganda fide* found the punishment normally inflicted on the excommunicated and on public blasphemers, too severe and dangerous, as it might attract the attention of the Turks and provoke troubles. The affair ended without result.[20] It revealed, however, the diversity of relations and interests which linked the members of different religious confessions with each other.

This contiguity and familiarity among individuals of varied confessions also lead to syncretic practices which troubled the Franciscan friars. In Jaffa, in 1766, there was only one Catholic (Franciscan) church. The number of its faithful rose to 134, all Oriental. It was a small and homogenous congregation as a result, without the intrusion of Frankish merchants and other European Christians as is frequently the case in the ports. The situation was not as simple as it seemed, however; for Catholics were Latin (45), Maronite (32), and Greek (57). Thus, the Catholics who followed the Eastern rite did not wish to follow their parish priest in the Latin rite for the practices of Lent, and they continued to eat fish and drink wine. Worse, they came to take sides with

[19] Franciscan Archives from Jerusalem, book of baptisms, marriages, abjurations and reconcilliations, fol. 69. Similarly in 1716, a Jewish convert, returned "to his sect" because of violences exercised by the Jews, rejoins the Church in Alexandria (Franciscan Archives of Jerusalem, Reconcilliations . . . 1st part. Alexandria). In Golubovich, *Biblioteca*, 2nd series, vol. 4, pp. 365–6, contains vexations undergone by the reconciled Greeks from the Greek schismatics and requests for help from the Frankish consuls and merchants.

[20] Golubovich, *Biblioteca*, 2nd series, vol. 4, pp. 225, 249.

the local schismatics: "An insolent and seditious people, they freely permitted themselves to become incited by the schismatics into pillaging the almshouse and doing violence to the friars."[21]

The city of Acre provided another case illustrative of another form of confusion. The Franciscans of the Holy Land, according to a report by one of their number, had two parish churches for the 168 faithful there, one for the Orientals of the Latin rite, the other for French and other European merchants. Yet there were still two other Catholic churches, each with its own clergy and neither dependent on the Franciscans: one for the Greek Catholics, the other for the Maronites. The first had 1,000 parishioners; the second, 200. There were, finally, the schismatic churches. The Greek Catholics freely consented to being godparents to the children of schismatics or to offering their children and their vows to the schismatic churches. Taking a spouse from among the schismatics, they then consented to allowing their children to be educated in the schism. Greeks as well as Maronites did not rigorously respect the fasts of their (Latin) rite and when required to observe them, retorted that they benefited from an exemption of the Holy See. The friar who reported all this complained that for several years a Syrian monk (we may surmise a Jacobite) named Fargialla heard the confessions of Christians from all the nations, assisted at marriages in private homes against the will of the curates of the diverse parishes, celebrated mass at the Maronite church with Latin pomp, and to top it all brought about confusion because the unfortunate Franciscans were powerless in the face of this mixture of forms, whereas the faithful seemed to find surer paths to salvation in the melange. What is revealed by the indictments of this type sent to Rome year after year is the strong religiosity of this group of Christians despite differences of dogma along with the similarity of the social practices among the faithful.[22]

Let us move on to Nazareth, where the rivalries between Catholics made the situation more confused. Trouble was not expected in a city which in 1766 had only one Catholic church, that of the Franciscans. The parish was served by three Arab missionaries and numbered about 870 faithful, the majority among them of the Latin rite (nevertheless joined Syrian, Copt, Maronite, and Greek Eastern Catholics who received the Roman sacrament but who were no less subjected to a particular regimen by virtue of the encyclical of Benoit XIV). The danger came, this time, from the Catholic priests of the neighboring towns. Thus, when the Greek Catholic bishop from Cana paid a visit in August, his arrival was well noted, for he was accompanied by a deacon and a sub-deacon. In the church filled with followers, he ordered the Greek Catho-

[21] *Ibid.*, 2nd series, vol. 2, p. 46.

[22] *Ibid.*, 2nd series, vol. 1, pp. 89, 103, and so forth, on the marriages between schismatics and Catholics or on the frequenting of schismatic churches by Catholics, in the 1630s. See also vols. 11–12, p. 19 for the same years.

lics, in the presence of their two curates, not to take communion *in azimo,* for the sacraments of the Latins were worthless. He excommunicated the two curates and insulted the head Franciscan who had, nonetheless, just offered him hospitality.[23] This case was not an isolated one. In truth, the conflicts between friars had less to do with reasons of dogma than with their dual competition for followers, on the one hand, and for the access to the material resources that came from the faithful in the fees paid to Eastern priests for confessions and the absolution of sins.

Concurrent Clergies

Since the fall of Byzantium, the churches of the Orient have been maintained without a state of the same rite supporting them from the outside. This is a paradox which has often been emphasized. In their situation they must find outside support sufficient to assure their permanence but not such that it will lead to their dissolution. The presence of Latin clergy was a menace in this regard (since its ultimate vocation was to reconcile the Eastern Church with Rome and to bring an end to the schism) all the more so in that it supplied no institutional support to the Eastern clergy, although each tightened its alliances.

It is not our place here to follow the detail of events in the multiple quarrels which divided the Christians. It is sufficient to point out the regularities, to observe the major tendencies. The Franciscans of the Guardian of the Holy Places were dependent upon Rome from a religious and institutional point of view but not from a diplomatic and political point of view. In order to defend themselves before the Sublime Porte, they appealed for mediation by the ambassadors of France and of Venice and, since the Serenissina remained a power in the region, by France alone thereafter. On a local scale, the consul of the French nation in this or that port might also defend the Franciscans before the agents of Turkish authority.

The Greek church, for its part, enjoyed a numerical and institutional superiority in the capital of the empire and in Asia Minor, as it did in the Holy Land and in Syria–Palestine. Thus, it found itself the most menaced when its followers defected in favor of the Latins; it also contended with the Franciscans over the guardianship of the Holy Places. Being in no position to seek an exterior source of political support until the nineteenth century (until the entry of Russia in the affairs of the Middle East), the Greek church could, on the other hand, flatter the Turkish authorities and denounce, in the case of the Latins' missionary work, a truly subversive policy. In general, the Ottomans insisted, in effect, on seeing their subjects registered in their *ta'ifa,* translated by the Latins as sect and nation and called *millet* in the nineteenth century.

[23] *Ibid.,* 2nd series, vol. 2, 2nd part, p. 47.

This communal organization assured both the collection of taxes and the judicial, philanthropic, and educational circumscription of non-Muslims. Although they did not maintain close surveillance of their subjects, the agents of the Ottoman authority did penalize, when they learned of such occurrences, those who changed churches. In particular, the transfer to Latin Catholicism (or to Anglicanism, moreover) adds another disorder and another menace; for the Greeks asserted to the Ottoman authorities that this meant becoming Frankish and thus escaping Turkish authority by entering under the protection of a foreign state, France in this case. To this denunciation, according to the Franciscans, the Greeks added arguments which managed to gain the sympathies of the Ottoman authorities. They urged the Turks to pass sanctions and to have the Porte renew the prohibition against changing churches. The question of guarding the Holy Places remained in other respects the apple of discord between the Franciscans and the Greek church, with episodes of overt crisis which we shall not report here except to note that there were many of them. This is not to say, however, that there were no periods of truce between Latins and Greeks.

Less powerful than the Greek church, the Armenian, Jacobite, and Nestorian churches generally maintained relations of less conflict with the Latins. Yet when the need arose, these other churches used the same weapons to defend themselves, while the Latins, acculturated by their stay in the Orient, had no other weapons to counter with. The history which follows illustrates the mechanism of this daily strife. In 1631, an Armenian friar from Bethlehem wished to switch to the Roman Church. To avoid alerting his nation, he was rushed to Nazareth. But the news of his apostasy spread. Forming an alliance against the Latins, the Greeks and Armenians presented a plea to the pasha, asserting that the Franks, in converting the Greeks of Bethlehem en masse, were preparing a veritable reconquest of the Holy Land. The Greek *drogman* insisted that the pasha should force the renegades to return to their original religion and make them pay tribute. The Armenians, in their turn, accused the Latins of blaspheming against Islam and of bribing followers in order to obtain their conversion. Following these denunciations, the pasha ordered the imprisonment of all the Catholic friars of Jerusalem. In order to reestablish order, the monks' superior had to buy the favor of the pasha.[24]

When in turn they saw themselves threatened by the invasion of Carmelite, Jesuit, and Capuchin missionaries, the Franciscans put into action a strategy borrowed from the Christians of the Orient: They mobilized the faithful (in 1710, they encouraged the drawing up of a petition signed by the representa-

[24] Giovanni di Calaorra, *Historia chronologica della provincia di Syria, et Terra Santa di Gierusalemme,* translated from Spanish (Venice, 1684).

tives at Aleppo of the Chaldeans, the Armenians, the Maronites and the Greeks), to send to the consul of the French nation and the Roman authorities, protesting against the Turkish threat (of pressure and forced conversions) in order to keep the Franciscans' monopoly of missionary activity in the region.[25]

THE OFFER OF CONVERSION AND ITS SOCIAL EFFECTS

Conversion is not a univocal operation by which an individual X passes from religion A to religion B. First, the conditions that motivate X are varied. Second, the procedures of conversion are similarly varied. Third, the conversion is not always irreversible.

The Conversion as Seduction: "Caresses and Kindnesses"

We have already seen some of the social conditions that assisted passage from one church to another: marriage, proximity, entry into a more numerous community or alliance with the powerful, and so forth. Some of these movements mentioned here appear to be spontaneous and do not result therefore from a sustained action on the part of the clergy.

It was quite the reverse with the monks who came from Europe to do missionary work. They did offer conversion, although this offer, could not be made openly. Their action had to remain not only discreet but take forms that reflected varying degrees of subtlety. Less subtle was the conversion administered without the knowledge of the interested parties, as reflected in the words of Father Alexander of Rhodes, who came to Persia in 1659:

> The first and principal fruit which our missionaries have begun to pick from this excellent field are the baptisms of a great quantity of little children, when they are near death; they can do this easily, all the more so in that the parents themselves bring them to our missionaries in hope that they might procure a remedy for the life of the body. . . . The harvest of these innocent souls is all the richer as the number of small children who die is great. It was recorded that in one single year some forty thousand children died in Aspahan; and besides, a single priest for his part baptized five or six in one day.

Cases such as this were frequent throughout the region with which we are concerned here. The epidemics of smallpox and of the plague, which re-

[25] Golubovich, *Biblioteca*, 2nd series, vol. 4, p. 49–50 and 376–7.

[26] Rabbath, *Documents*, II, p. 310–1. For the version in its entirety, see *Relation de la mission des Pères de la Compagnie de Jésus établie dans le Royaume de Perse par le R. P. Alexandre de Rhodes: dressée et mise au jour par un Père de la même Compagnie* (Paris: Henault, 1659). The same friar, in a letter to a priest of the same company, at Lyon, in 1658: "Ordinarily I frequent the villages to seek out the little sick children, and to give them Holy Baptism when there is no remedy. We send these little angels into Heaven" (Rabbath, *Documents*, II, p. 85). See also Febvre, *Théâtre*, 516. In the archives of the Franciscans of Jerusalem, Registro delle conversione al cattolicismo, 1853, the year 1626 in Cairo.

mained murderous and recurrent, were particularly favorable to gestures of despair, by which even the Muslim parents still hoped to save their children by entrusting them to the Christians.[27] The plague also incited renegades to seek reconciliation in order to find salvation and to die in peace.

The friars however generally used less direct means. They applied themselves to attracting the faithful of other churches or of other religions by gaining their confidence. One method was to use their technical or scientific knowledge. Medicine was one such knowledge that allowed them to attract the favor of the Turkish authorities when these benefited from efficacious treatments; at the same time it also furnished a pretext for entering the homes of Christian families and putting in a good word while providing remedies.[28] One such priest at Aleppo prepared a simple trilingual book in French, Latin, and Arabic in order to officiate among Arabic speakers and treat sick Christians for free, offering them medicine instead of the "supernatural" remedies such as water said to be St. Ignacious's, for "unnatural" illnesses due to Turkish or Christian sorcerers.[29] He attracted young Jews "by means of a few glasses and mathematical favors, designed to tame them into listening to us speak of our mysteries." His efforts were in vain, since the parents would irrevocably break off these suspicious relations. He had better success with young Greeks, who wanted him to exhibit his mathematical instruments, "globes, spheres, cards, triangular glasses" and who came voluntarily on Sundays and feast days to share his company.[30]

More subtle and more systematic was the exhortation of high-ranking clerics, for their "reconciliation" could sway all of their followers. The chase after influential people was constant, especially within those churches weakest from an institutional point of view and least endowed with material resources. There is a rich record which cannot be opened here. It will suffice to observe, as does Bernard Heyberger, that the heads of the Eastern churches, profoundly immersed in their society, were often the descendants of families of notables and participants in factional rivalries. Being swayed towards Catholicism could be useful as a strategy to reinforce their local power. To promise conversion could mobilize resources with which to prevail over another competitor for an important position.[31] Transferring to the Roman Church could

[27] See Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens*; Rabbath, *Documents*, II, pp. 86–87: in 1669, 1674, 1675, for the baptisms administered by the Carmelites at Aleppo. Franciscan Archives of Jerusalem, Registre Tellaro, years 1626, etc., where the renegade, Turkish, Coptic parents entrust their children who are at the point of death.

[28] Febvre, *Théâtre*, 516, on the relations between the exercise of medicine and missionary work.

[29] Rabbath, *Documents*, I, p. 53, excerpt. [30] *Ibid.*, 62.

[31] Heyberger, Les Chrétiens, 119–37, and in particular p. 129. For three cases of the conversion of prelates richly documented, see Golubovich, *Biblioteca*, 2nd series, vol. V. See also Robert M. Haddad, "On Melkite Passage to the Unia: The Case of Patriarch Cyril al-Za'im (1672–

thus be for superficial reasons and have no effect on the mass of followers. The fact remains that certain prelates paid with their lives for their shift in churches.

Of greater social significance, the work of teaching in schools won young souls to the Latin church or gave them the means to remain attached to it. All of the Franciscan houses maintained a school to teach Catholic children between the ages of six and eleven. The Franciscan house in Constantinople received children from Jerusalem and Bethlehem who, once tutored in Turkish, could then serve as intermediaries in the Holy Land. The missionaries had to overcome the difficulties of the Arabic language because they could not preach without mastering it. One complained about the "scabrousness" of this language and the ridicule they received from the Copts when pronouncing it badly or for not knowing the correct theological terms and concepts necessary for the work of conversion.[32] But they made sure that the teaching was done in Arabic.

Such pedagogical effort was extended by the manufacture and the distribution of books of piety, at first as manuscripts, for printing had not yet penetrated into the Ottoman Empire. At Aleppo in the seventeenth century, Father Chézaud prepared "devotional books which he had composed in Arabesque or Armenian languages in number. . .. He had to write them all by hand, there being no presses in Syria."[33] Subsequently, books printed in Arabic were imported from Europe by the case, an activity that became all the more pressing as the challenge made by the reformers, English most notably, was taken up after the end of the seventeenth century.[34] In 1731, these reformers began to distribute books printed in Arabic, including the Bible, in Jerusalem. The Guardian of the Holy Places purchased copies in order to burn them, except for two copies which he sent to Rome even he emphasized the urgency of schooling children so that they might resist temptation.[35]

An even more ambitious activity of the reformers was sending young Eastern Christians to Europe, to such institutions as the College of the Maronites, the Urbain college in Rome, or even to France where the king decided to open a seminary at Marseilles, which accepted three pupils from each Christian Levantine nation. In the end it was found preferable to take them at the Jesuit college in Paris. When Coptic children could not be recruited,

1720)," in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, eds. *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire, II. The Arabic-Speaking Lands* (New York-London: Holmes and Meier, 1982), 67–90.

[32] Golubovich, *Biblioteca,* series 2, vol. 7, pp. 213 and 216 (date, 1631). Another testimony on the difficulties "in cultivate a language wholly wild and barbaric in its pronunciation and its letters, whatever grace it may have in its manner of expression" (Rabbath, *Documents,* II, p. 59).

[33] *Ibid.*, I, pp. 52–53, Poirresson (1652).

[34] *Ibid.*, I, p. 519, for Syria in 1698. Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens,* 404–8 on shipping books.

[35] Golubovich, *Biblioteca,* 2nd series, vol. 2, p. 18.

Ethiopian ones were sought.[36] Here again competition was fierce from the Anglicans, who had created an Eastern college at Oxford to educate young Greeks recruited from Smyrna. By this multiform strategy, the Roman clergy sought to reduce the cultural distance separating them from the Christians of the Orient and to have religious conversion accompanied by material and symbolic responses that could consolidate it.

The Procedures

The greatest number of individuals received into the bosom of the Roman church was formed from adults who belonged to an Eastern church. The Franciscans, as well as the members of other missionary orders, considered most of the new converts to be schismatics whom it was necessary not to convert but to reconcile. Reconciliation presupposed, according to the terms used by the scribes, that the interested parties "abjure their errors" or "detest their errors" before "entering into the bosom of the church" or to "embrace the Catholic faith." It is not known whether, for ordinary believers, these formulas resulted in a particular ceremony and to what degree the new converts were supposed to know the nature of the errors which they were to "detest." The fathers knew what they were condemning in the dogma of the Eastern churches. But did the neophytes? One might suppose that questions of dogma were not what moved them the most. Be that as it may, the same procedure was not imposed on children, who merely received an affiliation upon birth: Their entry into the Roman church consisted, thus, of baptism and the attribution of a proper name.

However, not all neophytes were from the Eastern churches. In exceptional cases, some Muslims did embrace the Catholic faith. They were indiscriminately labeled Turks, whether they were Arabophones or Turkophones or even Ethiopian or Abyssinian blacks. Turks coming from the provinces of the Ottoman Empire had to undergo a three-stage conversion: catechization, baptism, and the attribution of a proper name. For security reasons they were then immediately sent to Christendom. The same procedures were used for blacks, except they were not transported to Christendom.

The questions of how catechization was conducted and what it consisted of remain to be explained. When a renegade who had begun a family in Islamic lands wanted to return to Christendom, that person had to give instruction to his wife before requesting baptism. The *Pater noster,* the *Ave Maria,* the

[36] Rabbath, *Documents,* I, pp. 517–544. For Rome, Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens,* 423. The following are opened in succession: a Greek college in Rome, 1576; an Armenian and Maronite college, in 1584; a college for Orientals attached to the Congregation de la Propaganda Fide in 1622. See G. C. Anawati, "The Roman Catholic Church and Churches in Communion with Rome," 389, in A. J. Arberry, *Religion in the Middle East, I, Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge, 1969), 347–422.

Credo and the ten commandments then formed the doctrinal stock of knowledge of the neophyte.[37]

The Social Effects of the Offer of Conversion: "They Limp with Both Feet"

According to the report on the state of the Guardianship established in 1715 (after an outbreak of the plague which had decimated the population), the number of Eastern Catholics (excluding the Franks residing temporarily in the region) was less than 2,000. These figures rose strongly thereafter, passing 10,000 in 1760 (if one eliminates the overvalued figure for Aleppo) and continued to rise in 1765,[38] certainly a remarkable progression. But the figures remained modest in strength, compared with those of the Christian population of the East or, *a fortiori,* to those of the regional populations as a whole.

It remains difficult to evaluate the cumulative social effects of these conversions, for the friars themselves emphasized their fragility—fragility when these converts were at the point of death, notably in times of plague,[39] fragile also for indigents attracted by the assistance the Latins offered them but for whom reconciliation did not include their co-religionists. Conversion is a nearly impossible task when converts must be furnished with letters of recommendation, provisions of food and money, and the payment of their immediate passage to Christendom to remove them from the threats of reprisal.[40] Conversion was not only impossible but also a loss when the fathers succeeded in reconciling a prelate only to have him lose his flock because his followers were protesting that they did not wish to change rites or when a rival gained the favor of the Turks and dismissed the neophyte.[41] Any any rate it is certain that conversion to Latin doctrine which promoted reconciliation and sought the unity of Christian believers in fact created heterogeneity and accentuated religious diversity. In Jerusalem in 1761, out of 632 Catholics of diverse nations, 144 were Maronites and followed their own rite although this was true in principle only, for certain Maronite families respected neither their own rite nor that of Rome and made a "*mescuglio* of one and the other," above all concerning Lent. Other Catholics had descended from the "reconciled" of a more or less recent date, Greeks being the greatest number of them and

[37] Calaorra, *Historian,* 759. The same catechisation in 1627, in Arabic, for a "mora" who had married a renegade Sicilian, in Golubovich, 2nd series, vol. 7, p. 129.

[38] Golubovich, *Biblioteca,* 2nd series, vol. 4, pp. 410–18. Missing are the "souls" of which the Capuchins from several parishes assure us. In 1731, the author of another report on the state of the custodianship counts 3,353 souls, including the Franks. (I, vol. 2, p. 19.) For 1727, 1760 and 1764, see 138–141 and 178–227.

[39] Golubovich, *Biblioteca,* vol. VIII, p. 309, for the year 1636.

[40] Golubovich, *Ibid.,* vol. VII, "Chroniche," pp. 22, 73. See also pp. 129–134 for the year 1627; 181–2 for the year 1630; pp. 216–7 for 1631.

[41] *Ibid.,* vol. VII, "Croniche" p. 22, vol. 11–12, p. 71–72 for the case of Cyprus, in 1639.

TABLE 2

The Effects of the Offer of Conversion

City	*1715*	*1727*	*1760*	*1765*
Jerusalem	285	295	632	961
Bethlehem	438	592	1,000	1,030
St. Jean	46	49	95	90
Rama	30	46	78	95
Acre	21	130	25	168
Jaffa	40	134		
Nazareth	85	852	652	870
Damascus	181[a]		4,615	
Aleppo	75		[30,000][b]	
Alexandretta	10		12	
Tripoli			207	
Latakia			100	
Sayda			1,200	
Larnaca	107		194	
Licosia	13		10	
Alexandria	44		4	
Rosetta	28		287	
Cairo	298		1,500	
Fayoum	30	6		
TOTAL	1,731	1,334	10,351	3,214

TABLE NOTES: [a]Does not include reconciled Greeks.
[b]This overvalued number is not used.

Syrians, Armenians, Copts, and Chaldeans comprising the others. Conversion, by all evidence, did not transform any of them into a docile troop united in the one faith. Each conserved his or her original religious affiliation, doubled by a new Latin identity.

The religious and social framework that the Latins provided was not sufficient to create communities capable of enduring the reproducing, nor did it anchor their catechism in the minds of their followers. Alongside the conversions which they succeeded in obtaining and the repentence of renegades which they were pleased to report, the friars never ceased to note the setbacks which they suffered. In 1639, in Jerusalem, a Syrian from Aleppo who had been forced to take the turban in Cairo had lived as a Muslim for fourteen months. He wished to be reconciled and was. At his request, he was sent to Venice in order to remain faithful to the Church. But when he returned to Aleppo, he fell back into abjectness, "*ritorno al vomito di nuovo.*"[42] In 1702,

[42] *Ibid.*, 2nd series, vol. 11–12, p. 80.

in Old Cairo, Maria Omm Rohhme, "Goffita" (presumably a Copt), a Catholic, fell back into the Goffite errors.[43] The fruit of the labors of all the missionary orders together was weak, remarked the Guardian in 1711. There were few perfect reconciliations but many imperfect ones, continuing to frequent the church of their nation.[44]

Barriers to Conversion

It is true that the switch to Catholicism presented risk that discouraged candidates from converting. Sometimes, pursued by the members of their original church, candidates had to flee to another town or to Christendom, and clerics had to be hidden in a Latin monastery or with the Maronites of Lebanon.[45] At other times, denounced to the Turks, clerics found themselves offered the choice between death and conversion to Islam, as happened to the Armenians in the early years of the seventeenth century. "Faith appears to be truly unsteady in that nation," commended the Ambassador of France, "since of ten Armenians, nine have become Turks, and one only suffered death."[46] At least they wavered.

The Guardian of the Holy Places had recourse in 1727 to a similar metaphor, "claudicant in duas partes"; they needed a custom-made rite, part-Latin, part-Greek. In truth, he continued, the reconciled seek less the purity of faith than the protection of the Franks. The friar concluded that what the reconciled say cannot be credited; these people "are neither cold nor hot." He denounced their comings and goings between religious practices that satisfied the principles of no single orthodoxy.[47]

The French Revolution and the imperial period caused the loss of territory to Catholic friars historically associated with French power. This troubled many, and the reconciled Greeks of Jerusalem and of the rest of the Holy Land went back, in great numbers, it seems, to the schismatic church, even if this meant returning later again to be reconciled with Rome. The nineteenth century inaugurated a new competition between the diverse indigenous religious groups who attempted to reform their methods and to improve the training of their clergy to better resist the pressures of missionaries from all orders.[48] When the Anglicans arrived on the Oriental scene in the 1840s, followed by other reformed missionaries, the offer of conversion produced a variety of

[43] Franciscan Archives in Jerusalem. Reconciliations, 1st part, Old Cairo.

[44] Golubovich, *Biblioteca*, 2nd series, vol. 4, p. 157.

[45] Rabbath, *Documents*, I, p. 55, concerning an Armenian bishop retired to Cappadoce (p. 95 concerns a Jacobite bishop of Aleppo).

[46] *Ibid.*, I, p. 126, Letters from the Ambassador of France at Constantinople to the Minister of Louis XIV, 1706–1707. Golubovich, *Biblioteca*, 2nd series, vol. 1, 1634, on the incarceration of reconciled members who are denounced to the Turks by the Greeks.

[47] Golubovich, *Biblioteca*, 2nd series, vol. 14, p. 141.

[48] C. H. Malik, "The Orthodox Church," in A. J. Arberry, *Religion in the Middle East*, I, 297–346, and notably 317.

effects and increased the unrest of the faithful. The Jews, Greeks, and Latins of Jerusalem, Damascus, Aleppo, or Acre, who had temporarily been tempted by Protestantism, came to embrace the Catholic faith between 1849 and 1862.[49] These back-and-forth movements expressed a powerful religious agitation and[50] a fierce competition between indigenous churches to rejuvenate their practices, but doubtless also the attraction that the Occidental powers exercised from that time on.

Despite all this, the diversity resulting from conversion was not reduced. When the Sultan in 1831 recognized the legal existence of the Greek, Armenian, Chaldean, Syrian, and Coptic Uniat churches (notably to contain Russian influence), he consecrated this heterogeneity and finally domesticated the groups reunited with Rome by making a place for them within the traditional plan of the religious communities of the Empire.

[49] Franciscan Archives of Jerusalem, register of Tellaro.

[50] On that which affects the Jews, see Arie Morgenstern, "Messianic Concepts and Settlement in the Land of Israel," in Richard E. Cohen, ed., *Vision and Conflict in the Holy Land* (Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, Jerusalem, 1985), 141–62, and the debate which follows, pp. 163–89. Sherman Lieber, *Mystics and Missionaries. The Jews in Palestine. 1799–1840* (Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 1992).