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**The Image of the Turks/Muslims in the Ottoman Greek Press  
1830-1860**

In the 19th c. the Ottoman Government undertook a series of reform measures in order to reorganise the Ottoman state according to a Western European model. One of the results of the reform movement was the evolution of an indigenous press in the Empire.

For the Orthodox Christians of the Ottoman Empire the purpose of the press, as it was put by the pioneer publisher K. L. Hadjinikolaou in March 1835, was to “promote learning, mass knowledge, the discovery of the truth... and the combating of delusion which only grows in darkness and by misinformation and rumours...”<sup>1</sup>.

The importance of the press in publicising news correctly to a wider public was not lost also on such Muslim leaders as the Vali of Bagdad Da'ud Paşa, [last Mamluk leader of Iraq —ruled 1816-1831] Sultan Mahmud II [b.1785-d.1839] and Mohammad Ali [b.1769-d.1849] governor and later viceroy of Egypt, all of whom established their own state —run newspapers in Bagdad, Istanbul and Cairo respectively. By the 1860's all the four officially recognised Millets of the Ottoman Empire i.e., Muslim, Orthodox Christian, Armenian and Jewish had developed their own press. The Muslims had produced eight newspapers. Five of them were state —run, one was semi— official and two were independent<sup>2</sup>. The Orthodox Christians produced thirty-three, all of them independent<sup>3</sup>. The Armenians produced sixteen<sup>4</sup> and the Jews three<sup>5</sup> and as far as I can ascertain all of them were independent.

1. *Mnemosyne* No 1.

2. First listed newspaper *Jurnalul Irak* 1816.

3. First listed newspaper *O Philos ton Neon* 1829.

4. First listed newspaper *Stemaran Bidani Kideliats* 1839.

5. First listed newspaper *Chaare Migrach - Puerte del Oriente* 1846.

### *The Ottoman Greek Press*

The Ottoman Greek press was born outside the Ottoman State. The first Greek language newspaper saw the light of day in 1784 in Vienna. In total, between 1784 and 1830, 18 Greek newspapers and magazines were published outside the Ottoman Empire [5 in Vienna, 3 in Paris, 2 in London and 7 in Corfu]. Moreover, between 1821 and 1830 11 Greek newspapers were published in the revolting provinces of the Ottoman Empire [1 in Galaxeidi, 1 in Vrachori, 1 in Kalamata, 3 in Missolonghi, 3 in Hydra, 1 in Nauplia and 1 in Athens].

After 1830, the Greek language press evolved in three different areas: The kingdom of Greece, the Ottoman Empire and the communities of the Greek diaspora. For the purpose of this paper we shall concentrate on the Ottoman Greek Press. With this term I identify the Orthodox Christian newspapers between (1830-1860) written in Greek (twenty seven newspapers) as opposed to Bulgarian (one newspaper) and Karamanlı Turkish (five newspapers).

### *Who Were the “Turks” in the Ottoman Greek Press?*

Before presenting the image of the Turks in the Ottoman Greek press is important to identify the term “Turk” as it was used in the Ottoman Greek press in the period under review. With the terms Turk and Muslim we define today two distinct categories. The first is secular/political, the second a religious one. In the 19th c. things were quite different and the line between secular, political and religious was not by any means as clear cut as it is today. In the Greek press we often find, for example, the term Τουρκαλβανός [Turkish-Albanian]. What the 19th c. press meant by this word was an Albanian who was a Muslim. Here the word Turk was used as a religious term. Another instance when the word Turk was used with a religious connotation was when there was reference to Christians converting to Islam or mixed marriages between a Christian and a Muslim. In these instances the Christians Τούρκεσαν [became Turks] which, of course, meant they became Muslim. Another use of the word Turk is to signify an uneducated Muslim peasant to distinguish him from an Ottoman who most of the time but not always was a bourgeois and upper class Muslim. Ottoman could also mean a

Muslim in general and after 1856 it begun to be used also to signify the citizen of the Ottoman Empire.

It is interesting to note that the Greek press was quite aware of the secular nationality of other Muslim nations such as the Arabs, the Kurds, the Albanians, the Iranians and the Bosnians but they never refer to a separate Turkish nation. The Turkish language too is seen more as a lingua franca spoken as a second language by the people of the Ottoman Empire and as being the official language of the Government and the bureaucracy rather than a language belonging to a particular ethnic group. In 1851, for example, the printing press *Anatole*, which belonged to Evangelinos Misaelides and specialised in the printing of Karamanli and Ottoman books as well as the long running Karamanli newspaper *Anatole*, advertised the forthcoming publication of a Turkish-Greek dictionary. In the advertisement it was stressed how important was for the Greeks to learn the Turkish language, for their advancement in the bureaucracy and described Turkish as a mixture of "Arabic and Persian"<sup>6</sup>.

When reading the Ottoman Greek press it becomes quite clear that those Greeks who wrote in it and those who read it had no clear idea about the existence of a secular Turkish nation distinct from Islam. It is also useful to remember that the period under review [1830-1862] coincides with the period of the Tanzimat which had a great impact on the life of the various peoples who lived in the Empire. The brief presentation of the image of the Turks/Muslims in the Ottoman Greek press which follows must be seen in that context.

### *The Image of the Sultan and his Government*

If I were asked to summarise the image of the Sultan and his Government in the Ottoman Greek press in one sentence I would call them the champions of progress. The newspapers are full of praise for the courageous decision of their Emperor to reform the state in a democratic direction. The editor of the newspaper *Mnemosyne* of Smyrna, Hadjini-kolaou, for example, as early as 1835 commended the Sultan's efforts to stamp out maladministration and pointed out that the decline of the Empire had its roots in the total absence of democracy and liberal

6. *Telegraphos tou Vosporou* No 378 (17.3.1851).

institutions. He also reminded his readers that the revolution of 1820 [sic] happened only because of the extreme desire of people to live in a democratic state and have the liberty to enjoy their ancestral values<sup>7</sup>. Twelve years later the press still supported wholeheartedly the Sultan and the Government. For example, Samiotakis, the editor of another newspaper published in Smyrna, *Amaltheia*, in an editorial regarding the political situation in the Ottoman Empire wrote in 1847 that the present policies of Sultan Abd'ul Mecid were brave and philanthropic and that he himself was a true friend of the people. He also wrote that the new policies of the government towards the subject peoples were very objective and constructive and this was in direct opposition with their previous policies. Because of this dramatic change in the attitudes of the Government the editor of *Amaltheia* urged the Greeks of the Empire to co-operate fully so that together with the government they could build a new future for all the inhabitants of the Empire of which after all the Greeks were the most ancient<sup>8</sup>. By 1853 the faith of the Ottoman Greeks in the determination of the Sultan to carry out the reform programme remained unshaken; the capability and wish, however, of his Government to enforce it began to look questionable. The editor of the Constantinople paper *Telegraphos tou Vosporou*, Ksenis, for example, wrote that one of the tasks of his newspaper would be to expose bad administration and embezzlements so that the Central government would be forced to take action in accordance with the courageous and philanthropic directions given by H. M. the Sultan<sup>9</sup>.

The Ottoman Greek press made it quite clear to its readers that the reform programme depended, objectively, besides the Sultan, on very few people in the Government. For example, when the Grand Vezier Reşit Paşa died in January 1858 the Greek press was full of articles about his life and contribution to the reform programme. Reşit's death, they wrote, was not the death of a man but the death of a whole system. It was also written that his death came at a time when he had begun to persuade even his enemies of the correctness of his actions; he was able to ask for concessions from all parties and to present painful truths even

7. *Mnemosyne* No 1.

8. *Amaltheia* No 428.

9. *Telegraphos tou Vosporou* No 500.

to the Sultan. His determination in his work, it was added, succeeded in persuading both the Sultan and the people, who in turn gave him the undertaking to connect the interests of Turkey with those of Europe and introduce such reforms as were deemed necessary by the progress of the times<sup>10</sup>.

The Ottoman Greek press in its Court reports presented a Sultan who cared for all his subjects indiscriminately and actively supported the reforms. He is reported, for example, as visiting the houses of Greek dignitaries, attending Christian weddings and taking part in the May parade. The Sultan's tour of the Empire in 1850 in the Aegean region, mostly inhabited by Greeks was also given great publicity. The Sultan and his family were also presented as taking a great interest in public secular education. He is presented, for example, as attending examinations at the military school, founding the Medical Academy etc. while his mother is reported as inaugurating new secular schools for Muslims and especially Muslim girls. The Sultan was also portrayed as a patron of the Greek/Western type of Art and he was, for example, reported as commissioning the building of a theatre. Great prominence was also given to his active support of business enterprises for instance in the purchase by him and other members of his family of shares in the new Ottoman steamship company.

The Ottoman government with its multitude of officials was perceived by the press as generally corrupt and the Sultan's efforts to remedy this situation were followed closely. The Ottoman Greek press, for example, gave great publicity to "the firman against luxury" issued in 1835. According to the press the firman ordered that "no official was allowed to go to his office followed by a multitude of servants and packets of tobacco and a *narghile* as if he was going to a banquet. The custom to offer coffee from the coffee pot in public offices was abolished; that throng of employees who decorate the ante-rooms of all the offices and live mostly from the gratuities which everyone is forced to give them in order to reach the official they want to see, will not bother anyone any more and they will not jeopardise any negotiation by blocking the doors to the offices; from the simplest manager to the highest officer everyone will have to behave with modesty and even the

10. See for example *He Hemera* No 122 (3/15.1.1858).

Grand Vezier is forbidden to have more than two or three servants and more than three coffee pots". The editor of *Mnemosyne* commented that this wise measure would benefit the people in two ways: "firstly it would constrain luxury and secondly it will abolish bribery, so common amongst the Turks, and when they clear the ministries of all the unnecessary rabble the ministers will be paid by the state an adequate salary so that they won't embezzle anymore"<sup>11</sup>.

The Sultan was presented in general as trying his utmost to impose democratic principles on the Empire which meant first and foremost the equality of all his subjects. The principle of equality between Muslims and non-Muslims is opposed to Quranic law and was considered by most Muslims as a betrayal of the Faith. Avdı Paşa of Grasach, for example, is quoted as late as 1860 in the Ottoman Greek press saying that "the Christians are made to be the slaves of the Ottomans for ever"<sup>12</sup>. The Sultan, himself, was considered by many Muslims to be directly responsible for these sacrilegious attacks on their religion and customs. The Ottoman Greek press reported such opposition which sometimes reached revolutionary proportions as when, for example, the Sherif of Mecca led a revolt in 1856 which spread in Mecca and in Yemen. The Greek press also reported attempts to assassinate the Sultan, usually reprinted from *Takvim-i Vakayi*, the official Ottoman newspaper.

On the whole the Sultan and his ministers were presented by the reformist editors of the Ottoman Greek press as the agents of change and committed supporters of progress and the democratic principles despite fierce opposition from local governors, government officials and the Muslim masses.

### *Local Governors, Government Officials, Muslim Masses*

The first thing that strikes one when reading the Ottoman Greek press in the period 1830-1862 is the reports of overwhelming and uncontrollable violence directed against the life and property of Christian men, women and children from their Muslim compatriots, their

11. *Mnemosyne* No 4.

12. *He Hemera* No 316.

local governors and the police. There are, first of all, reports of gang robbery and piracy. Of rape and murder of women, girls and boys. Of attempted Islamisation. Of extortion by local governors and tax collectors. Of cruel anti-Christian practices such as killing priests in order to bury them in the foundations of new mosques and desecrating Christian cemeteries, of all sorts of humiliations suffered by Christian people of all walks of life who wrote to the Greek Press of their experiences.

Much of the violence seems to have been a reaction to the *Hat - i Şerif of Gülhane* and the *Hat - i Hümayun* and especially those articles that were considered an affront to Islam. For example, a correspondent of the newspaper *He Hemera* wrote in 1856 about the public reading of the *Hat - i Hümayun* in Elmalı of Asia Minor: "The *Hat - i Hümayun* is hardly understood by the Ottomans here, who are anyway scarcely different from beasts in their ignorance. The kadi read it in the Governor's house and the notables heard it. But all the [Muslim] people understood was that they were forbidden from now on to call the Christians *giaur* and *kaffir*. After that the curses *giaur* and *kaffir* became even more common"<sup>13</sup>. In other parts of the Empire Christians suffered a similar or worse fate. A report from Konya, for example, written in 1855 describes an attack of the Muslim population against the Christians of this place which resulted in robbing their houses and raping women<sup>14</sup>. Another letter from Serajevo in 1856 relates how the local Ottomans besieged for a whole month the Latin church there trying to burn it down and how the intervention of Hurşit Paşa of Bosnia who had gained a reputation as a protector of Christians, stopped them from doing so<sup>15</sup>. Most enraging for the Muslim population, as one deduces from the newspaper reports, was the permission given to Christians to worship publicly by putting, for example, bells in their churches. The usual reaction by the local Muslims was the killing of the local priest. The Beys of Bosnia took first place in the reports of Muslim atrocities by allegedly using Christians either for bayonet practice or for hunting —as the hunted animal<sup>16</sup>. In Jedda, it was reported that the [alive] Chief of the

13. *He Hemera* No 46.

14. *Ibid.*, No 31.

15. *Ibid.*, No 45.

16. *Ibid.*, No 163.

police organised the massacres of hundreds of Christians<sup>17</sup>.

The Ottoman Greek press was careful to report every effort of the Ottoman government to punish such Muslim behaviour in order to calm Christian anxieties. For example, a letter from Scodra in Northern Albania (to the *Newspaper of Agram* —reprinted in the Ottoman Greek press), informed Greek newspaper readers that Ottoman armies had arrived to punish Ottoman violence against the Catholics<sup>18</sup>. In other cases as in the case of the Chief of the police in Jedda, the Ottoman government arrested him and some other Muslims responsible for the massacre of the Christians there and condemned them to death against the wishes of all the local Muslims, who hailed the condemned men as heroes and martyrs of the Muslim faith<sup>19</sup>.

The Christians, according to what was published in the Ottoman Greek press, sympathised with the Government's problems in implementing the reform programme in the face of such overwhelming Muslim opposition. In August 1856, for example, a letter from Serajevo to the *Austrian Newspaper* reprinted in the Greek press praised the good intentions of the Sultan and his Government but commented that "the *Hat - i Hümayun* is impossible to implement because the Turks are and insist on remaining backward"<sup>20</sup>. A letter writer from Asia Minor at the other extreme of the Empire was of the same opinion. He wrote that "no-one amongst the Christians wants to diminish the excellent intentions of the Government but its [Muslim] employees are so prejudiced and unenlightened and we are here so far away from the eye of the Capital that the orders of the Sublime Porte arriving here either remain unimplemented or they are used against the poor *rayas*"<sup>21</sup>. Even in the Capital itself the Sultan and his Government seemed to have found it difficult to protect the lives of the Christians as an irate gentleman reported in the Ottoman Greek press. "The Ottoman people" he wrote in 1856 "have become intolerable in Constantinople. Every day they commit murders, robberies and beat people up even in broad day-light

17. *Ibid.*, No 178.

18. *Ibid.*, No 54.

19. *Ibid.*, No 182.

20. *Ibid.*, No 48.

21. *Ibid.*, No 46.



and the Government is powerless”<sup>22</sup>.

The inequality of Justice awarded to Muslims and non Muslims seems to preoccupy a lot of letter writers and the reporters of the Ottoman Greek press. After the promulgation of the *Hat - i Hümayun* which stressed equality of all Ottoman subjects before the law the subordinate Millets were observing closely the legal cases where Muslims were accused of wrong doings against Christians. The Ottoman Greek press often received letters of complain about Muslims who although guilty were not punished by the Ottoman courts. A case that caught the popular imagination was the case of a Bulgarian girl called Nedelia. She was abducted by a Turkish Pasha, called Salih, who, when he had no more use for her turned Talih<sup>23</sup> and had her killed. The case of the daughter of Varna [town in Bulgaria], as it became known, became front page news from April until October 1856. This case attracted interest not least because it was eventually referred to the newly founded Grand Council of Justice. This was a development of the Ministry of Judicial Pleas, which was created by Mahmut II. In the Grand Council of Justice all four Millets had the right to appoint representatives. It was an interesting coincidence that the Orthodox Christian appointee was Stephanaki Vogorides who was actually a Bulgarian. The case of the murdered girl had reached the Grand Council of Justice, in June, after a lot of pressure put on the Government by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Orthodox Christian leadership intervened after the ordinary Ottoman courts had found Salih Paşa innocent and it became clear that the Ottoman judges were not ready to award equal treatment both to the Orthodox Christian Bulgarian parents of the murdered girl and the Ottoman Pasha. Finally, in October, the trial ended. The Ottoman Greek press reported that the aide de camp of Salih Paşa, who had murdered the girl by strangulation was condemned to death and four of his employees, who attended the murder were sentenced from five years to six months in prison. Although the person really responsible for the death of the girl, Salih Paşa, had already escaped with only a reprimand from the Turkish judge, before the case reached the Grand Council of Justice, the outcome of the trial was very encouraging for the non

22. *Ibid.*, No 40.

23. Salih ve Talih = The pious and the sinful.

Muslim population of the Empire because it became known that now there was a higher level of appeal in the courts where Muslims and non-Muslims were treated equally.

The Christians felt that the greatest difficulty in imposing universal justice and equality in the Ottoman Empire was Muslim fanaticism. The Ottoman Greek press was full of such examples. A correspondent from Kydonia, for example, writing in June 1856 described to Greek readers an old Ottoman custom taking place in Attalia of Asia Minor. According to him when Christians came out of Christmas mass, the Ottomans would force them to clean their stables<sup>24</sup>. Another correspondent from Elmalı writing in August 1856 described another Ottoman custom of the area. It seems that early on Easter Sunday a throng of Turkish children and young men would go into the Christian houses and collect the straw mats that they used to cover their floors, beating up the owners if they resisted. Then during Easter mass they would burn the mats outside the Church and shout: "this is what the Easter of the Christians smells like". In addition the Turks were attaching nettle leaves to their clothes with a needle and were walking around saying "May the needle be nailed into the eyes of the unbelievers and may the nettle leaves be forever their bed". In 1856 the Christians of Elmalı encouraged by the *Hat-i Hümayun* complained to the Governor about these degrading practices. According to the newspaper correspondent, he replied "laughing in the ingenious way of the Turks, that it didn't matter at all and he was going to tell the Muslim people not to do it some other time"<sup>25</sup>.

Another example of Muslim fanaticism given in the Ottoman Greek press was the killing and subsequent burial of priests in the foundation of new Mosques. This custom, however, the papers made it quite clear, was practised only by Kurds against Armenians in the province of Kurdistan<sup>26</sup>.

Finally, the desecration of Christian cemeteries by Muslim mobs occupied from time to time the pages of the Greek press. For example, on the 27th of December 1856, some students of the Military academy led by their officer, went into the French cemetery and broke all the

24. *Ibid.*, No 41.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*, Nos 110 and 113.

crosses off the graves. The Government in most cases offered its apologies. In this case, the Government offered full restitution. Reşit Paşa, the Grand Vezyr, visited the French Ambassador to apologise, the Minister of war visited the desecrated cemetery, the officer in charge of the students was downgraded and imprisoned and the students were expelled from school. Moreover the Headmaster of the Academy went in full uniform to the French Ambassador to apologise<sup>27</sup>.

There was one group of Turks/Muslims who had a consistently good image in the Ottoman Greek press. They were the Ottoman intellectuals and, first amongst them, the colleagues of the Greek journalists who worked in the Ottoman newspapers. The Greek press supported the Ottoman publications by encouraging their public to buy them. When, for example, Ağâh efendi and İbrahim Şinâsı started the publication of *Tercümen-i-Ahval* in 1860 the Ottoman Greek press not only advertised it but urged its readers to read it. The Ottoman Greek press also advertised some books written in Ottoman Turkish and Grammars and Dictionaries for the Turkish language which it urged Greek readers to learn.

### *Conclusion*

The image of Turks/Muslims in the Ottoman Greek press between 1830-1862 is varied and is directly related to the extent that they supported or prevented the reform of the Empire. The Sultan and his ministers were presented very positively because they were considered to be agents of change. On the other hand the image of government officials was a negative one as they were presented as corrupt and an obstacle to change. The Muslim masses were presented as unenlightened and fanatical and again as obstacles to the modernisation of the Empire. What the Ottoman Greeks found most upsetting about the Turks/Muslims was their unwillingness to change, their unwillingness to accept democratic principles, to see the non Muslim inhabitants of the Empire as equals, to arrest the corruption of the government machinery. It is interesting to note that the Ottoman Greek press did not generalise when speaking about the Turks/Muslims and they always made a point of

27. *Ibid.*, No 71.

showing that the government —also Turkish/Muslim— tried in most cases to offer restitution for wrong-doings effected by Muslims against Christians. The Ottoman Greek press saw great merit in the Government's efforts to bring about the necessary preconditions for a democratic government in the Empire which they wholeheartedly supported and they were very keen to co-operate with those Turks/Muslims who they believed were genuinely interested in modernising the Ottoman Empire, their common home.