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## Ottoman Official Attitudes Towards American Missionaries

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### Introduction

The history of Turkish-American relations go back to the 1790s when American sailors met with Turks in North Africa (Barbary Coast). During the period between 1800 and 1830s American travelers and merchants frequently visited Turkish harbors, such as Izmir (Smyrna), Alexandria and Beirut. However, official diplomatic relations were not inaugurated until 1830 when the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation was signed in Istanbul and a *charge d'affaires*, David Porter was appointed as the American representative to the Sublime Porte (the Ottoman Court) in 1831.<sup>1</sup>

Along with the commercial relations, American missionary efforts in the Ottoman lands always occupied a high place in the bilateral agenda. In fact, most of the diplomatic conflicts in the nineteenth and early twentieth century Turkish-American relations originated from the American missionaries' gradually expanding activities and the Ottoman attitudes towards them.

This paper, after a brief survey on the expansion of the missionary activities in the Ottoman Empire, will touch upon the main points of dispute between the Sublime Porte and the missionaries under three headings: "Missionaries and

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Ottoman Subjects”; “Missionary Schools and other Facilities” and “Publishing Activities of the Missionaries”. Finally it will evaluate the affects of American missionary activities throughout Ottoman lands.

When the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM, the Board) was formed in Boston by members of the Congregational, Presbyterian and Reformed churches in 1810, its main target was to evangelize the Indians and Catholics on the American continent. However, shortly after its establishment, the Board identified a new target, “evangelization of the whole World”, and started to enlarge the scope of its activities.<sup>2</sup> In accordance with the decision taken in a meeting of the Board in 1818, two American missionaries Pliny Fisk and Levi Parsons were appointed to implement preparatory work in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>3</sup>

The first attempts at missionary work in the Ottoman lands were not directed particularly toward the Muslims, nor to the Oriental Churches, but to the Jews. In November 1819, Fisk and Parsons were sent out to work in Palestine, with their anticipated location at Jerusalem. But their instructions gave them ample range. From the heights of Zion they were to survey, not only the Holy Land, but surrounding countries, and then put to themselves two main questions: “What good can be done?” and “By what means?”. “What can be done for Mohammedans? What for Christians? What for the people in Palestine? What for those in Egypt, in Syria, in Persia, in Armenia, in other countries to which your inquiries may be extended?”<sup>4</sup>

Soon after they reached the Ottoman land in 1821, Parsons died. But Fisk continued his mission. He visited Beirut, Tripoli, Baalbek, Jaffa, Jerusalem, Hebron, Alexandretta and Latakia, collecting information on Turks, Arabs, Kurds, Druzes, Maronites, Greeks and Armenians. He

was able to convert some Armenians including two ecclesiastics, Gregory Wortabet and Garabed Dionysius.<sup>5</sup> Fisk also established a missionary printing house in Malta in 1822 to publish religious books in regional languages such as Greek, Armenian and Arabic.<sup>6</sup>

As the first contacts with the missionaries were welcomed by the Armenian people, the Prudential Committee of the Board resolved to establish a mission among Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in 1829. Accordingly, Eli Smith and Henry Otis Dwight were chosen to explore the field. They started their tour in the spring of 1830, and after more than a year, returned with a mass of new information, regarding both Armenians and Nestorians. In 1831 William Goodell was instructed to proceed to Istanbul to establish a new station in order to work among the Armenians.<sup>7</sup>

Missionary work, which started in the late 1820s in a modest manner, turned into a systematic and large scale activity in the 1840s and reached its climax during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Forty-one missionaries were sent to the Ottoman Empire in 1836. Between 1836-1844, 54 new missionaries were appointed to posts in the Levant.<sup>8</sup> This number reached 137 in 1875, 177 in 1890 and 209 in 1913.<sup>9</sup>

This missionary influx to the Ottoman Empire naturally resulted in a growth in their religious and educational activities. In 1850 there were only seven churches and seven schools under the control of American missionaries in the Empire. Yet by 1860, there were 49 churches and 114 schools; in 1880, 97 churches and 331 schools. Finally in 1913, 163 churches and 450 schools were established and directed by the missionaries. The number of the Ottoman subjects attending those schools ranged from 13.095 in 1880 to 25.992 in 1913.<sup>10</sup>

At the beginning, the relations between the Sublime Porte and the missionaries were peaceful. While there was no

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diplomatic treaty between the Ottoman Empire and the United States until 1830 and the United States was not officially recognized by the Porte, American citizens, including the missionaries, conducted their activities in Ottoman lands under patronage of the British Embassy in Istanbul and through British consulates located in various cities of the Empire. For instance, the missionaries in Beirut received, travel permits (*seyahat tezkeresi*) from the *Porte*, through the British Consulate in that town. This method was valid for those who came to Istanbul before the American Legation was opened.<sup>11</sup>

Early as 1813 the *British Bible Society* had become interested in the spiritual condition of the non-Muslim Ottoman subjects and its members paid visits to the Empire to distribute thousands of copies of the Bible. The *Sublime Porte* did not make any distinction between the British and the American missionaries and evaluated the members of English speaking Protestant churches under the same identity which was “British”. On the other hand, as the British Embassy and consulates had an enormous effect on the Ottoman central government and local authorities, British missionaries did not face any difficulties while traveling in the Empire. Thus Americans benefited from the same privileges as they were bearing documents of protégé signed by British officials.

When the Ottoman Empire and United States finally signed a treaty in 1830, the missionaries as well as other American citizens lost their privilege of being “British” subjects before the Ottoman Court. Since the American legation in Istanbul was not as powerful as the British and the American consulates were not spread around the Empire, the American missionaries continued to seek close relations with the British diplomats in order to secure their presence in Ottoman lands. Parallel to the increase in the missionary

activities in 1830s and 1840s, more and more problems arose. The official attitude of the Sublime Porte towards the missionaries became less ecstatic in succeeding years.

The problems of this period may be classified under three main groups. First, the missionary activities among non-Muslim subjects of the Empire caused an initial reaction from the clergy of the Oriental churches, and eventually became a concern of the Sublime Porte. Second, the opening of missionary schools sometimes caused difficulties. And, third, the scope of missionary publishing activities contradictory to Ottoman law became a field of permanent friction.

### **Missionaries and the Ottoman Subjects**

The Christian population of the Empire was not the primary objective of the American missionaries. The Jews were a tight-knit religious community and thus largely immune to Christian evangelical activities. The Muslims were hindered by the imperative in Islamic law that the punishment for apostasy is death. Therefore, the missionaries soon changed their areas of activity and mostly concentrated on the non-Protestant Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire. This new domain included the Greek and Arab Orthodox community, the Gregorian Armenians and Armenian Catholics, the Druze, the Nestorians and the Maronites who were Arab Catholics.

When the Syrian mission was established in Beirut in the first half of 1820s, its main objective was to conduct religious and educational activities among Christians other than Protestants. The work expanded quickly. In 1827, 13 missionary schools were to be found in and around Beirut with 600 pupils, of which more than 100 of them were girls. The first opposition to the missionaries came during this early

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period. Starting among the Roman Catholics, rather than among the Turks or Armenians, it was particularly directed against the missionary schools and the printing press. In addition to the influence of the Vatican, working through its priests, the French and Russian officials also sought to crush American missionary efforts. With such ecclesiastical interference and the political disturbance of the Greek insurrection in 1826, the situation appeared alarming to the missionaries. In the general lawlessness, houses of some missionaries were plundered. The Maronite Bishop (Patriarch), came down from his monastery in Mount Lebanon (*Cebel-i Lubnan*) and asked his people to drive out the missionaries, threatening at the same time to excommunicate anyone who should rent a house to them.<sup>12</sup>

In 1841, after a peaceful period of 15 years, another serious Maronite reaction occurred in *Mount Lebanon*. The Maronite Bishop, who had earlier applied to the governor of Syria, Zekeriya Pasha, to complain about the “destructive” works among the local population, asked the Ottoman authorities to suspend activities of American missionaries. **When the governor communicated the alarming situation to the capital in Lebanon**, the Sublime Porte delivered a *note verbal* to David Porter, then the United States minister resident in Istanbul, in May 1841 and asked him to urge the missionaries to leave Lebanon. The Porte also emphasized its concerns about the lives of the missionaries should the tensions increase. Porter, however, in his reply to the Porte, stated that the American legation could neither force the missionaries to withdraw from the region nor bear their responsibility.<sup>13</sup>

Thus the missionaries continued their presence in Mount Lebanon. According to Chapseaud, the United States consul in Beirut, the tensions in the region were not caused by the missionaries, and the missionary schools were not located in

the Maronite area.<sup>14</sup> But the facts were different. There was a historical feud between the Maronites and the Druzes who both had a large number of kins living in the *Mount Lebanon*. American missionaries, while building schools in the area dominated by the Druze, were using the intercommunal conflict to protect themselves from Maronite intervention. But the “Druze Shield” failed to protect them, when clashes between the Maronites and the Druze increased in the fall 1841. Along with many Druze buildings, some American mission stations and schools were also destroyed by the Maronites. The Sublime Porte’s warning was critical and the missionaries withdrew from Mount Lebanon to Beirut.<sup>15</sup> They did not initiate any efforts in the region for a couple of years.

From 1844 onwards, the Armenian clergy also began to complain about the missionaries to the Sublime Porte. Matteos, the Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul, whom the Ottoman government recognized as the only representative of the Armenian “*millet*” (nation), accused the missionaries of forcing the Armenians to change their religion. During the early years of American missionary activities among the Armenians, the general atmosphere was friendly. Armenians, benefiting from American educational activities in a positive way, welcomed the missionaries. But, as the number of Armenian converts to Protestantism increased, the Armenian clergy changed its previous attitude. In 1839, there were 800 converts, a disturbing number for the Armenian Patriarchate.<sup>16</sup> In order to prevent more Armenians to change their religion, Matteos called all Armenians to cut any sort of relations with the American missionaries and threatened those who were in warm contacts with the Americans, with isolation from the community.<sup>17</sup>

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Moves of the Armenian patriarchate were supported by the Sublime Porte that did not recognize a Protestant *millet*, thus interpreting the existence of Protestant Armenian subjects as illegal. One should also keep in mind that many Armenian Gregorians occupied high places in the Ottoman bureaucracy, and they were in touch with the Patriarchate in opposition to the missionaries. When more complaints from the Armenians reached to the Porte. The Ottoman government once more confronted with the United States legation in Istanbul. In June 1844, Armenians from Erzurum, Trabzon (Trebizond) and Bursa (Broosa) applied to the Porte and wanted the American missionaries to be expelled from their towns. The basic reason of the complaint was conversion. Rifat Pasha, the Minister of Foreign Affairs sent a note to the United States Legation and called for the missionaries' withdrawal. But, as in the Lebanon case, John P. Brown, the American *charge*, stated that he could not urge the missionaries to leave the towns. This time, however, the Porte was more determined and by orders to the local authorities in those three towns, missionaries' conversion efforts were banned and Protestantism among Armenians was once more proclaimed illegal.<sup>18</sup>

Another complaint from Armenians to the Porte came in 1845, when an Armenian woman in Beirut accused the American missionaries of kidnapping her three children and forcing them to change their religion. When the Ottoman governor in Damascus applied to the United States Consul in Beirut for release of these children, he replied that without an official instruction from the Legation in Istanbul, the Consul could not interfere in the affair. The Sublime Porte then sent a detailed note to the American Legation and asked for their cooperation. As soon as the American Consul, instructed from Istanbul, intervened the children were given back to their parents.<sup>19</sup>

Between the years 1844 and 1845, the number of notes between the Sublime Porte and the United States Legation increased. Dabney S. Carr who was appointed as the American minister resident to Istanbul in 1843, dispatched to the Department of State in 1844 and 1845, that the Sublime Porte was not disturbed by the humanitarian dimension of the missionary activities. Carr summarized the three basic objections of the Porte. First, the Ottoman government was against conversion among its Christian subjects and found this practice illegal. Second, the Porte feared that if the number of converts would increase, it would cause an administrative chaos. And third, the increase in the number of protégé documents released to the Protestants in the Ottoman Empire by the United States consuls caused a deep concern to the Porte.<sup>20</sup>

Armenian Patriarch Matteos expelled the Protestant Armenians from the Armenian Gregorian Church in 1846. He also wrote a comprehensive letter of complaint to the Sublime Porte. Therefore the Porte once more applied to the United States Legation and wanted the American minister to stop the activities of missionaries among Armenians. This call, as previous ones, had no affirmative answer from neither the Legation nor from the missionaries.<sup>21</sup>

The Matteos' move against Protestant Armenians created an administrative problem. The Sublime Porte classified the Ottoman subjects according to their religion. There were Muslim, Greek-Orthodox, Armenian, Jewish and Catholic nations (*millet*) in the Ottoman population. Since there was not a Protestant nation recognized by the Porte, those who converted to Protestantism were losing their official identity before the Sublime Porte. Thus, there was no an authority representing them. As the number of converts increased, the problem of identity and representation became more critical. In order to obtain a status of nation, the American

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missionaries during the 1840s ran an intensive campaign through the British Embassy and the United States Legation over the Sublime Porte.

The United Kingdom, who proclaimed herself as the protector of the Protestants in the Ottoman Empire, in seeking the recognition of a Protestant nation status, gave its support to the American missionaries. The British Ambassadors in Istanbul, Stratford Canning (the future Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe) and Lord Cowley in their contacts with Mustafa Reshid Pasha, the Grand Vizier, mostly emphasized the British Empire's will of the creation of Protestant millet. After a period of heavy diplomatic pressures on the Porte, Sultan Abdulmejid issued a imperial order (*irade*) on 15 November 1847 and granted the status. Following the decree, the Protestants of the Ottoman Empire chose a representative (*vekil*) who would in future conduct their relationship with the Sublime Porte.<sup>22</sup> The important points of the order were as follows:

*“To His Excellency,*

*the Pasha Comptroller of the City Revenue,*

*Whereas the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Government professing Protestantism, have experienced difficulty and embarrassment from not being hitherto under a special and separate jurisdiction, and naturally the Patriarch and the heads of the sects from which they have separated not being able to superintend their affairs, and whereas it is in contravention to the supreme will of his Imperial Majesty our Gracious Lord and Benefactor (may Allah increase him in years and power) animated as he is with feelings of deep interest and clemency towards all classes of his subjects, that any of them should be subjected to grievance, and whereas the aforesaid*

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*Protestants, in conformity with the creed professed by them, do form a separate community, it is His Imperial Majesty's supreme will and command that - for the sole purpose of facilitating their affairs, and of securing the welfare of said Protestants, the administration thereof should be henceforward confided to Your Excellency, together with the allotment of the taxes to which they are subjected by law, that you do keep a separate register of their births and deaths in the bureau of your department, according to the system observed with regard to Latin subjects, that you do issue passports and permits of marriage, and that any person of established character and good conduct chosen by them to appear as their agent at the Porte for the transaction and settlement of their current affairs, be duly appointed for that purpose..."* <sup>23</sup>

After the proclamation of the order, American missionaries in Istanbul sent a letter to the British ambassador at Istanbul and offered their "sincere congratulations on the successful termination of (*his*) efforts in behalf of the Protestant subjects of the Porte." The missionaries depicted their gratitude in the following sentences:

*"Through the humane interposition of his excellency, Sir Stratford Canning, the Protestant subjects of Turkey found substantial relief from the persecutions under which they were then suffering; and since, by the untiring efforts of your Lordship, the very important point has been conceded for them, that in regard to liberty of conscience and the enjoyment of civil rights, they shall be placed on the same footing with all other Christian subjects of the Porte."* <sup>24</sup>

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The Protestant *irade* brought relief and a more conducive climate for the Protestant subjects of the Porte. Yet it did not curtail the American missionary activities in the Ottoman Empire.

### **Problems Arising from the Missionary Schools and Other Facilities**

Missionary work spread in the Ottoman Empire through two means: mission stations and missionary schools. After the establishment of a mission in Istanbul as a center for all missionary activities in the Ottoman Empire, more stations were opened in Asian and European Turkey. Stations in Trabzon (1835), Erzurum (1839), Aintab (1849), Marash (1855), Adana, Aleppo, Tarsus, Hadjin, Alexandretta, Kilis, Salonica (1850) and Izmir (1859) were established.<sup>25</sup>

Alongside the missionary churches and stations, missionary schools were established widely in various parts of the Empire. This extensive educational activity caused problems mainly stemming from two different levels. The first problem was the reaction of local population and local authorities to the missionary establishment. The second and more important problem, was the attitude of the Sublime Porte, which was basically formed through local reactions.

All missionaries after 1840, who applied the Sublime Porte to obtain travel permits, were warned not to build schools in the mountainous areas. The Sublime Porte, as explained in a note to the United States Legation, was trying to prevent the missionaries from any kind of local assaults, because of their educational efforts. Therefore the Sublime Porte repeatedly stated that it had no responsibility of the well-being of Americans who without an imperial permit committed to build schools.<sup>26</sup> Parallel to the building of more

missionary schools, the notes of complaint from the Sublime Porte to the Legation increased. The American minister resident Carr, in one of his dispatches to the State Department in 1848, stressed the change in the attitude of the Sublime Porte towards Americans in a negative way and confessed that the missionaries, who behaved solely independent from any authority, either Ottoman or American, would cause more complaints in future.<sup>27</sup>

The missionary schools were a permanent matter of dispute throughout the nineteenth century because their numbers, and size increased. Beginning in 1860s, the American missionaries initiated the building of high schools and colleges all in certain urban centers of the Ottoman land. With the opening of the colleges, more Ottoman students, mostly non-Muslim, attended these facilities, and more estates owned by Ottoman subjects went under the control of American missionaries. These two factors incited the Porte to move against the missionaries.

The first college initiated by the Americans was opened in Beirut in 1866 under the name of Syria Protestant College. (It became American University of Beirut in the twentieth century). The language of instruction was Arabic and the people in the region got a chance to take education in medicine and pharmacy as well as social sciences.<sup>28</sup> Leaving aside minor local objections, the Beirut College did not attract any reaction from the capital. However, when Cyrus Hamlin, a senior missionary, who received a generous financial contribution from an American businessman, Christopher R. Robert, he intensified his efforts to built an American college out of a small seminary in Bebek, Istanbul. But the Sublime Porte refused to give required permits to open a college and to construct buildings.

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Although not stated officially in any correspondence between the Porte and the American Legation, one of the reasons of this attitude was the Sublime Porte's discontent with the opening of such a comprehensive foreign educational institution in its capital. This step, could be followed by the European powers such as France and Russia. The establishment of foreign colleges for non-Muslim pupils would create a new area of conflict between the Ottoman Government and the "Great Powers". Secondly, the Sublime Porte had a great concern about the "negative" effects of the curricula of such institutions on its non-Muslim subjects. Some of the Western values such as liberalism and nationalism, which could have "destructive" reflections on a multi-national empire were to be kept away from the Ottoman subjects. If the role of graduates from American colleges in the rise of Bulgarian, Armenian and Albanian nationalism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century is taken into consideration, one might understand the sensitivity of the Sublime Porte.

Nevertheless, the contacts of the American minister in Istanbul, Edward Joy Morris within the Sublime Porte eventually enabled a positive result for the missionaries, and the objection to establish an American College in Istanbul was withdrawn. But, the Ottoman objection for the place of the school continued to be a point of dispute. The Sublime Porte, namely Ali Pasha, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, was against the construction of a college building at Rumelihisari, the land which was bought by the missionaries solely for that purpose. Rumelihisari was then a quarter largely occupied by Muslims and such an institution was likely to cause more problems. In Istanbul, certain quarters, such as Pera, Fener and St. Stephanos were the places where non-Muslims lived and the Sublime Porte wanted to limit the churches, mission stations and missionary schools within those areas.<sup>29</sup>

Soon the building place of the Istanbul College became a subject of the bilateral diplomatic relations. The United States Secretary of State William Seward gave a note to the Ottoman minister resident in Washington, Blacque Bey, in the summer of 1868 and asked him to persuade the Sublime Porte to allocate the aforementioned estate in Rumelihisari for the college building.<sup>30</sup>

Keeping in mind that the major donor for the College was an notable American businessman, it is easier to understand the basic motive behind Seward's intervention. Just after this note to Blacque Bey, the Department of Navy instructed Admiral Farragut, commander of the United States Mediterranean Squadron, to move Istanbul on the deck of an American frigate and to "show his utmost effort" in the favor of a construction permit. Farragut's mission in Istanbul in August 1868, resulted with an happy ending for the American missionaries. The Sublime Porte allowed the missionaries to build the school, which would be named Robert College because of Christopher Robert's contribution.<sup>31</sup>

The establishment of Robert College gave an impetus to other initiatives. During the period between 1871-1903, seven more American Colleges, American Girls' College in Istanbul, Euphrates College in Harput (Kharput), American College in Van, Central Turkey College in Marash, St. Paul College in Tarsus, Anatolian College in Merzifon (Marsovan) and International College in Izmir (Smyrna) were opened.<sup>32</sup>

The Establishment processes of all the American colleges caused some minor problems with the local authorities, but those difficulties were solved by peaceful means. However, in 1880's and 1890s, two major problems emerged. These problems were intertwined with Sultan Abdulhamid's centralized educational reforms and the American connection with Armenian nationalism.

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Sultan Abdulhamid, ascended to the Ottoman throne in 1875, centralized the whole power in his hands. The Sublime Porte, which was the main center of government for almost 50 years, lost its privileges to conduct internal and diplomatic affairs alone. Abdulhamid, who found a correlation between the foreign intervention of the “Great Powers” and the increasing number of national insurrections of non-Muslim Ottoman subjects, decided to cut their means of external support. Along with some other measures he banned the transfer of property and the granting of new building permits for missionary schools. For the schools already built, he utilized new school laws that established standards for teacher certification, the curriculum, and the physical facilities of the school. Under the new law, some American schools had to be closed because the teachers could not produce the necessary credentials.<sup>33</sup>

The American missionaries, claiming the right to unrestricted operation of three categories of schools; those owned and taught by American citizens, those owned and directed by Americans but taught by the Ottoman subjects, and those owned and taught by the Ottoman subjects with a subsidy and some supervision from Americans. The American legation vigorously defended the missionary claims on the first category, while it held that schools in the third group, the majority of the American schools in the Empire, had no recognizable rights which could be protected by the United States government. The status of the second group of schools remained obscure. In addition, the American legation in its correspondence with the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs, repeatedly stressed that the newly organized schools should submit their programs of study, their textbook lists, and the diplomas or certificates of their teachers to the examination of the Turkish authorities, but objected for the same measures for existing schools.<sup>34</sup>

When Armenian nationalists started a large scale insurrection in major towns of central and Eastern Anatolia in 1890, the Ottoman attitude towards the missionary schools sharpened. This was because most of the American schools in these sensitive areas had Armenian students and Armenian teachers who were in contact with the rebels. The crisis came in 1893-1895 when the American colleges in Merzifon, Harput and Marash and the houses of some American missionaries were damaged during the Ottoman army's intervention. In addition, some of the Armenian teachers were arrested under the accusation of helping the rebels.<sup>35</sup> For the destruction of Anatolian College in Merzifon in 1893, the Ottoman government paid 500 Turkish pounds to the United States Legation in Istanbul, granted a permit for rebuilding of damaged parts, and released two Armenian teachers after the reports of confirmation prepared by Jewett, the American Consul in Sivas and Newsberry, secretary of the American Legation.<sup>36</sup>

However, for the destruction of Euphrates College in Harput and Central Turkey College in Marash in 1895, the process did not follow in the same manner. American missionaries, through the American Legation, wanted the Ottoman Government to pay an indemnity of 100,000 dollars for the damages in those two colleges.<sup>37</sup> But the Ottoman Government did not accept the responsibility of the damage and refused to pay an indemnity.<sup>38</sup> On December 4, 1895, the United States Senate resolved that the President should issue a report about the damages to American citizens' property in the Ottoman Empire to the Senate.<sup>39</sup> Following this resolution, President Cleveland gave a long report to the Senate in which he affirmed that no American citizen had been injured during the incidents, but a damage around 100,000 dollars had been occurred. The President also informed the Senate that he had instructed three battleships,

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(*San Francisco, Marblehead and Minneapolis*) to visit Ottoman ports in order to prevent any further assaults to the American citizens and to secure an indemnity for the losses.<sup>40</sup> After the Presidential report, the Senate in 27 January 1896, passed a resolution, drafted by Senator Shelby M. Cullom, Chairman of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, which called the President to initiate the necessary steps to obtain indemnity from the Ottoman Government.<sup>41</sup>

The problem of indemnity remained unsolved until 1901, when an American cruiser Kentucky was sent to the harbor in Izmir with orders to sustain pressure on the Ottoman Government until the payment was made. This military threat worked in the United States' favor and the Ottoman Government paid 100,000 dollars to the United States Legation in June 1901.<sup>42</sup>

The same scenario was repeated in 1904. When the Ottoman authorities closed some American schools and arrested some Armenians whom were naturalized United States citizens, President Roosevelt sent a powerful fleet to the Izmir harbor and in the United States minister Leishman, in his audience with the Sultan, mentioned the possibility of a bombardment of Izmir. As a result, Armeno-Americans were released and the schools were permitted to open.

However, they did not enjoy normalized conditions until Sultan Abdulhamid was overthrown from power and a constitutional government was formed in 1909. The details of this period will be taken up in the concluding part.

### **Publishing Activities of the Missionaries**

Another dimension of the missionary work in the Ottoman Empire was publication and distribution of religious and

educational books and pamphlets. The printing house in Malta that was established by Pliny Fisk in 1822, published 350.000 copies of different books in Greek, Italian and Armeno-Turkish within just nine years. The printing house was moved to Izmir in 1833 and to the mission center, Istanbul in 1852. After serving in *Pera* for 20 years the printing house that was named the Bible House, was moved once more to *Riza Pasha Yokusu*, a region very close to the Sublime Porte.<sup>43</sup>

From its establishment to 1860, the number of pages of the books published and distributed by the missionaries were more than 21,000,000. While the majority of the books were on religious subjects, some popular magazines and scientific books were also published. For instance, *Avedaper*, a politico-cultural magazine in Armeno-Turkish was printed by the missionaries.<sup>44</sup>

Publishing activities, which targeted the non-Muslim subjects of the Empire, did not disturb the Sublime Porte. However, in the 1860s, some Muslims converted to Christianity as a result of missionary efforts, and the Bible House began to publish books in Turkish for the use of Muslims. Consequently, the Sublime Porte started to impose restrictions on missionary publications. At the same time, a general concern towards all foreign publications, including the ones distributed by Russians and Greeks, calling the Orthodox population to seek independence from the Ottoman Empire, arose in the Sublime Porte in 1860s. As a result, the Porte enforced new regulations for printing activities of the Ottoman subjects and the foreigners.

Ali Pasha, Minister of Foreign Affairs sent a circular to all embassies and legations in Istanbul on 27 November 1862, stating that the Sublime Porte will censor all books with contents of political or religious propaganda.<sup>45</sup> The effects of this

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new regulation were seen in a short time. Beginning with the first months of 1863, the Ottoman authorities started to collect books published by foreigners, including a vast number of missionary publication that created discontent among the Americans. The scope of this uncomfot increased when officials from the Ottoman police department (*Zaptiye Nezareti*) sealed a book shop owned by missionaries and confiscated some books in July 1864. When the American minister resident, Morris, applied to the Sublime Porte for return of the books, Ali Pasha replied that the missionaries largely distributed material among the Muslims containing false knowledge about Islam, and therefore such activities will not be allowed by the government.<sup>46</sup>

The Sublime Porte enlarged the restrictions by an Act of Publication that was entered into force at the end of 1864. According to the new legal regulation, all published materials, either printed in the Ottoman Empire or imported from foreign countries, were subject to the prior control and permission of the Sublime Porte for their distribution.<sup>47</sup> Morris, who visited Ali Pasha several times on behalf of the American missionaries, was told that the Sublime Porte was not against any religious material such as the Bible that was freely published and distributed. However all Christian propaganda against Muslims would not be tolerated.<sup>48</sup>

The restrictions on the publications were eased in the first half of the 1870, parallel to the intensive efforts of the American, British, French and Russian diplomatic missions. But, when the Bulgarian revolt erupted in the Spring of 1875, more restrictions were enforced. According to a new regulation, all publications were subjected to the approval of the Ministry of Public Instruction before their printing. Moreover, a sentence of identification was to be placed in the front page of the publication indicating its character, such as

scientific, religious, or literary. The major objection against those new rules came from the missionaries who unsuccessfully asked the Sublime Porte to make an exception for the publications that were ordered before the regulation.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the strict limitations, the missionaries continued their publication activities with or without permission of the Porte. This attitude only increased the disputes with the Porte. In 1880s, Ottoman authorities began to confiscate missionary books at customs. Although some publications, containing solely religious subjects, were returned to the owners due to the American Legation's initiatives, some of them with a political content were kept and even destroyed by the Porte.<sup>50</sup> For instance in 1880, an American missionary from the Church of Missionary Society, without permission of the Sublime Porte, imported some religious books to Istanbul and hired an Ottoman Subject, Hoca Ahmet Efendi to translate the publications to Turkish. When the Porte heard this act, the books were confiscated by the police and the translator was sentenced to fifteen years in prison.<sup>51</sup>

One of the interesting examples of the Ottoman attitude towards missionary publication took place in 1883. Lewis Wallace, the United States minister in Istanbul, applied to the Ministry of Public Instruction to obtain a permit for republishing the Bible, which was out of print in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>52</sup> Getting no answer from the department, Wallace this time applied to the Sublime Porte with a *note verbal*. The Porte, in its reply to Wallace, stated that the Ottoman Government would allow republishing of the Bible only if a sentence, "Solely for the Use of Protestants" was printed in the first page of the book. Wallace, asserting that such a statement could not be found in any of the copies of Bible, which was translated into 250 languages, rejected the Sublime Porte's

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condition.<sup>53</sup> Therefore the publication of the Bible was stopped in the Ottoman Empire.

The American missionaries sometimes applied to the Ottoman Government to seek redress for their confiscated books. But the Sublime Porte mostly did not make any payments and took an attitude of negligence against such applications. Like other activities of the missionaries, the publishing efforts continued to be a source of dispute at the end of the nineteenth and in the first years of the twentieth centuries.

### **Conclusion**

After the foundation of a constitutional government in 1908, the Ottoman attitude towards the American missionaries became more positive. John G. Leishman, the United States ambassador in Istanbul, wrote in his reports to the Department of State that the constitutional government would not only contribute to the development of the Ottoman society but also ease the pressures over the American citizens, including the missionaries.<sup>54</sup> Early statements on the rights of education and publication, from the members of the new government were satisfactory for the missionaries. In late September 1908, the restrictions on printing and distribution of books and limitations for travels of the missionaries were abolished.<sup>55</sup>

The new rule in the Empire was welcomed in the United States Congress too. The Senate and the House of Representatives passed resolutions, in which they congratulated and wished good luck to the new Ottoman government.<sup>56</sup> The changing atmosphere also gave a new impetus to the missionary activities mostly in the Eastern provinces of the Empire. Old schools were renovated and new ones were opened. The number of the American schools in the Empire

reached 209, and the number of pupils enrolling in those schools reached 25.922 in 1913.<sup>57</sup>

However, as the Great War started in 1914, the official Ottoman attitude towards all foreigners once more changed. At the beginning, the American missionaries, as citizens of a neutral power had some privileges compared to the British or French. But, after 1917, parallel to the United States' accession to the War, they were also subject to heavy restrictions.

The long adventure of the American missionaries in the Ottoman Empire ended in 1918 with the *de facto* collapse of the Empire. After 4 years of chaos in Anatolia, Mustafa Kemal founded the Turkish Republic in 1923. This was the opening of a new period for missionary activities in the region, and the circumstances were not easier than before.

#### **Abbreviations:**

BOA: *Babakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* (Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives) Sultanahmet, Istanbul, Turkey.

C.H.: *Cevdet Hariciye*

I.S.K.D.: *Irade-i Seniyye Kayıt Defteri*

CR: Congressional Record, Washington D.C., U.S. Governmental Printing Office.

FR: Foreign Relations of the United States, Washington D.C., U.S. Governmental Printing Office.

NARA: National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland, USA.

M-46: Despatches from U.S. Ministers to Turkey to the Department, 1818-1906.

M-99/96: Notes to the Turkish Legation in the United States from the Department.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> John P. Brown, "An Audience with Sultan Abdul Mejid", *The Knickerbocker*, XIX, (June 1842), 497.

<sup>2</sup> A.C.A Schneider, *Letters from Broosa Asia Minor* (Pennsylvania: 1846), 39.

<sup>3</sup> Uygur Kocabasoglu, *Kendi Belgeleriyle Anadolu'daki Amerika* (Istanbul:Arba, 1989), 22.

<sup>4</sup> William E. Strong, *The Story of the American Board*, (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1910), 80.

<sup>5</sup> H.G. Dwight, *Christianity Revived in the East* (New York: Baker & Scribner: 1850), 10-11; Strong, *op.cit.* 84.

<sup>6</sup> Kocabasoglu, *op.cit.* 33.

<sup>7</sup> Dwight, *op.cit.* 19-21.

<sup>8</sup> H. G. Dwight, *Constantinople, Settings and Traits* (New York:Harper&Brother, 1916), 227.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Daniel, *American Philantrophy in the Near East 1820-1960* (Athens:Ohio University Press, 1970), 94.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph L. Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East: Missionary Influence on American Policy 1810-1927* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 17; Daniel, *op.cit.* 94.

<sup>11</sup> William Goodell, *Forty Years in the Turkish Empire* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1883), 99.

<sup>12</sup> Strong, *op. cit.* 83-84.

<sup>13</sup> NARA, M-46, May 16, 1841.

- <sup>14</sup> NARA, M-46, Aug. 1, 1841.
- <sup>15</sup> NARA, M-46, Oct. 1, 1841.
- <sup>16</sup> Goodell, *op.cit.* 132.
- <sup>17</sup> Strong, *op.cit.* 105; Grabill, *op.cit.* 13; Dwight, *op.cit.* 269.
- <sup>18</sup> BOA, C.H., 2 C. 1260 (Jun. 19, 1844); 8 C. 1260 (Jun. 25, 1844).
- <sup>19</sup> BOA, C.H., 24 M. 1261 (Feb. 2 1845).
- <sup>20</sup> NARA, M-46, Dec. 9, 1844; Mar. 27, 1845.
- <sup>21</sup> NARA, M-46, Mar. 1, 1846.
- <sup>22</sup> Dwight, (1850) *op.cit.*, 252-285; William Goodell, *The Old and the New or Changes of Thirty Years in the East*, (New York:1854), 83.
- <sup>23</sup> Dwight, (1850) *op. cit.* 285-286.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 287.
- <sup>25</sup> James Barton, *Daybreak in Turkey* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1908), 138.
- <sup>26</sup> NARA, M-46, Aug. 7, 1843.
- <sup>27</sup> NARA, M-46, Aug. 2, 1848.
- <sup>28</sup> Grabill, *op.cit.* 24.
- <sup>29</sup> Howard Joseph Kerner, **Turco-American Diplomatic Relations 1860-1880** (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University (unpublished Ph. D Thesis, 1948), 160-171.
- <sup>30</sup> NARA, M-99/96, Jul. 1, 1868.

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- <sup>31</sup> Kerner, *op.cit.* 181.
- <sup>32</sup> Grabill, *op. cit.* 26.
- <sup>33</sup> Daniel, *op. cit.* 114.
- <sup>34</sup> Kerner, *op. cit.* 115.
- <sup>35</sup> NARA, M-46, Feb. 5, 1893; Frederick Davis Greene, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1896), 35-39.
- <sup>36</sup> NARA, Apr. 27, 1893; Jul. 5, 1893.
- <sup>37</sup> NARA, M-46, Nov. 27, 1895.
- <sup>38</sup> NARA, M-46, Dec. 4, 1895.
- <sup>39</sup> F.R., (1895), 1256.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 1256-1265.
- <sup>41</sup> C.R., Senate, Vol:28, 54-1, (1895-96), 959-96.
- <sup>42</sup> NARA, M-46, Jun. 12, 1901; BOA, ISKD, 30 N. 1317, No: 1269.
- <sup>43</sup> Uygur Kocabasoglu, *Osmanlı İmparatorlugunda XIX. Yuzyilda Amerikan Yuksek Okullari* (Ankara: Mulkiyeliler Birliđi Vakfi, 1988), 270-271.
- <sup>44</sup> Daniel, *op. cit.* 102.
- <sup>45</sup> NARA, M-46, Nov.27; Dec.11, 1862.
- <sup>46</sup> NARA, M-46, Jul. 23, 1864.
- <sup>47</sup> NARA, M-46, Jan. 15, 1865.
- <sup>48</sup> NARA, M-46, Oct. 18, 1865; May 17, 1866.

<sup>49</sup> NARA, M-46, Jun.30, 1875.

<sup>50</sup> NARA, M-46, Apr. 29, 1881; Dec. 18, 1881; Apr. 25, 1882.

<sup>51</sup> NARA, M-46, Jan.4, 1880.

<sup>52</sup> NARA, M-46, May. 15, 1883.

<sup>53</sup> NARA, M-46, Jun. 13, 1883.

<sup>54</sup> NARA, M-46, Aug. 20, Sep. 28, 1908.

<sup>55</sup> NARA, M-46, Sep. 28, 1908; F.R., (1908) 755-756.

<sup>56</sup> F.R. (1908), 753-754.

<sup>57</sup> Daniel, *op. cit.* 94.

â€œOttoman Official Attitudes towards American Missionaries.â€ Turkish Yearbook 30 (2000): 191-212. Print.â€ â€œTrouble Wherever They Went: American Missionaries in Anatolia and Ottoman Syria in the Nineteenth Century.â€ The Muslim World 92 (2002): 287â€“313. Print. Download Citation on ResearchGate | OTTOMAN OFFICIAL ATTITUDES TOW ARDS AMERICAN MISSIONARIES | (Members of various American missionary organizations, mainly affiHates of American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM, the Board) started LO visit the Levant region in the second deeade of the nineteenth century. Moving out from Beiro, the missionaries...Â Accordingly, this artiele evaluates the causes and process of the change in the Otloman official atlitude towards the American missionaries.) Do you want to read the rest of this article? Request full-text. Citations (9). References (7). Responding to American Missionary Expansion: An Examination of Ottoman Imperial Statecraft, 1880â€“1910. Thesis. Jan 2012. Emrah Sahin.