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Charles A. Frazee

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I

THE PATRIARCHATE
AND THE CHURCH UNDER
THE OTTOMANS

IN the early morning hours of 29 May 1453 the Turkish army of Mehmed II forced its way through the walls of Constantinople near the St Romanos gate after a six weeks' siege. Vainly trying to hold back the Janissary attack, the last emperor of Byzantium, Constantine XI Palaeologos, died in battle. For three days, the palaces, homes and churches of the city were at the mercy of the Ottoman army.

The sultan then ordered a halt to the looting and the work of restoration began, since Mehmed wanted this to be the new Ottoman capital. As soon as it was practicable the Greek survivors were moved into the area bordering the Golden Horn, known as the Phanar, and other Christians from the districts about Constantinople were commanded to reside within the city.¹

Of immediate interest to Mehmed was the organization of these Christians into the Ottoman political and social structure. Islamic law and tradition provided his guide. The Christians would be grouped into a *millet*, a 'nation', under the religious and civil authority of their own church leaders. In this way the Ottoman officials could count on using the services of the natural leadership of the Christian communities throughout their domain for their own purposes. The Christian hierarchy thus became, paradoxically, a very important arm of the Ottoman political administration.

Obviously, the choice of a man to lead the Christian *millet* was of great importance to Mehmed. Since he still feared the possibility of western intervention against his conquest, the first requirement

¹ The best and most recent account of the conquest of the city is the volume by Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople, 1453* (Cambridge, 1965).

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for the highest Christian official of the church of Constantinople had to be a strong anti-western, anti-papal bias. He found his man in Georgios Scholarios, known as Gennadios since becoming a monk in 1430, a man of proven ability and noted for his extreme opposition to the Latin church. Gennadios was summoned from a village near Adrianople where he had been taken as a captive after the capture of the city. An assembly of clergy and laity was organized as an electoral body, and Gennadios was chosen to be patriarch without a dissenting vote.¹

The sultan invested the newly-elected patriarch, just as in the past this office had been performed by the Byzantine emperor, with the words, 'Be patriarch with all good fortune. You have our favor in all that you desire, possessing all the privileges which are necessary for your patriarchate. You may also have the Church of the Holy Apostles for your residence.'² In addition, the patriarch and all of the Orthodox clergy were exempted from paying the *kharadj*, the annual tax levied by Muslim rulers on subject Christians.

Thus the status of the patriarch of Constantinople, through the action of the sultan, was actually enhanced by the conquest. Not only was he the religious leader of millions of Orthodox, but he was also *millet-bashi*, 'head of the nation'—the person responsible before the sultan for the Christian population. His situation, however, was a precarious one, for what the sultan could do he could also undo.

Gennadios and his successors were painfully aware that they held office only so long as they retained the good will of their Muslim rulers. Gennadios' first term in the patriarchate ended after only two years; named a second time around 1462 he resigned a year later, while a third period as patriarch, in the summer of 1464, lasted but a few months due to the difficult relations which came to exist between the sultan and himself.³ A pattern was set by Gennadios and

¹ There was no patriarch present in the city at the time of the conquest—the last incumbent, Gregorios III Mammias, unpopular because of his pro-Latin sentiments, had left for Rome in 1451. He died there eight years later.

² *Ιστορία Πολιτική Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* [The political history of Constantinople], in *Turcograeciae*, ed. Martin Crusius (Basel, 1584), I, p. 43.

³ The chronology follows R. Janin, 'Constantinople, le Patriarcat Grec', *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastique*, XIII, 674. George G. Arnakis summarizes

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Mehmed which was repeated through the following centuries. The threat of deposition constantly hung over the head of the patriarchal incumbent—resistance to the sultan's will was a practical impossibility.

Within the upper ranks of the church hierarchy, the archbishops and metropolitans who served in the patriarchal offices of the Phanar, a select few, made up the Resident Synod. Its primary function was to advise the patriarch and to serve as the highest court of appeal for the Christian subjects of the sultan. From here, too, the patriarchal candidates were almost always chosen—the Synod, in fact, could complain to the sultan and have a patriarch removed. As might be expected, ambitious and disappointed prelates frequently did not need much of an excuse to bring charges against their chief. In fact, a newly elected patriarch usually took it as a matter of course that his chances of survival were slim—for the rewards of the patriarchate were great and often the temptation too strong and nature too slow for sultan and Synod to avoid terminating the length of service of any patriarch.

Contributing to the instability of the patriarchate was a practice commenced in the late fifteenth century when the Patriarch Markos II Chylokarabis gave the sultan a monetary gift at the time of his nomination. Thus a custom was begun which plagued the church throughout the Ottoman period, for what was once given came to be demanded. Occasionally the patriarchate simply went to the highest bidder. The sultans naturally found this arrangement to their advantage—the more often the patriarchate changed hands, the more 'gifts' came to the imperial treasury. This practice was not limited to the patriarchal office alone; its corrupting influence filtered through the whole of the church hierarchy. In time an annual contribution to the Ottoman treasury was also required—a sum which was continually being set at a higher level.¹

the rights of the Christians as follows, (1) no Christian was to be converted to Islam against his will, (2) the administration of the church was to be free of Ottoman control, (3) church property was left intact and the church retained jurisdiction over marriage and divorce ('The Greek Church of Constantinople and the Ottoman Empire', *Journal of Modern History*, xxiv, Sept. 1952, p. 242).

¹ In 1672 Paul Rycout noted that the patriarchate was in debt seven hundred purses, a sum which was so large that not even the interest could be met easily. It had also

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The officials, lay and clerical, who staffed the church offices were almost exclusively drawn from the Greek community of the capital, the Phanar. Having acquired wealth from commerce and industry certain families here formed a privileged class in the Ottoman capital. Many had come from the island of Chios or from the cities of Asia Minor, some were ethnically Italian, all realized quickly that there were great opportunities in commerce and in the Ottoman bureaucracy, especially as translators. Others chose service in the church as their career. Beginning with the sixteenth century the power of the Phanariotes grew until it was all-powerful in the eighteenth.¹

The policy of a church run by the Phanariotes was obviously one which reflected the attitudes of the aristocratic class from which the higher clergy were drawn; in practice this meant that nothing should be done to disturb the isolation imposed upon the Orthodox population. A strong anti-western sentiment was encouraged. For good reason, the Orthodox prelates were alarmed at the inroads of the Latin church in the Ottoman empire as the result of missionaries sent from Rome and the strong influence wielded by the French embassy at Constantinople. A counter-force was the result of Protestant moves towards the East. Both western churches made strong efforts to form parties favorable to them among the Orthodox churchmen. This only added to an already complex situation at the Phanar.²

Another development within the church during the Ottoman period was the increasing Hellenization of the Orthodox church in the Balkans. The most striking example of this was in the Danubian Principalities, which were filled with Greek tradesmen and officials in the seventeenth century; in their train came Greek churchmen.

become customary for the newly chosen patriarch to seize the property of his predecessor to help his own financial condition (Paul Rycout, *The Present State of the Greek and Armenian Churches*, London, 1679, p. 98).

¹ A French visitor who visited Constantinople in the 1690s noted that the Phanariote laity held all the important positions of the patriarchate save four liturgical offices (Sieur de la Croix, *Etat présent des nations et églises Grecque, Arménienne et Maronite en Turquie*, Paris, 1695, pp. 20, 93, 116).

² For the best general summary in English of the problems between Orthodox and Catholic in a fair presentation to both sides, see Timothy Ware, *Eustratios Argenti, A Study of the Greek Church under Turkish Rule* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 1-33.

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By 1721 the native Rumanian boyars had all been removed and Greek Phanariotes were appointed *hospodars*, or princes of the area. Large amounts of land came to be owned by the church, especially by monasteries, which were more numerous here than in any other Balkan land.¹

The Serbs and Bulgarians were also made aware of the centralization and Hellenization policies of the Phanar in the eighteenth century. For some time, the church of Constantinople had claimed the right to intervene in those churches—a privilege which, in theory, was a part of ancient Byzantine practice. Thus the patriarch was called ‘ecumenical’, i.e. extending over the Balkans, Russia, and the areas of the Middle East where the Byzantine liturgical rite was followed. This universal jurisdiction was first challenged in the Balkans during the tenth century.

The Bulgarian church evangelized by Greek clergy from Constantinople for a time had hesitated between the Roman pope and the Greek patriarch. As part of the contest, the pope agreed to recognize the head of the Bulgarian church as a patriarch independent of Constantinople in 927. Eventually, the Bulgarian patriarch settled at Ochrid, where he retained his title until the Byzantine conquest of that city in 1020. The patriarchate had then been reduced to a simple archbishopric. The Latin occupation of Constantinople in 1204 enabled the Bulgarians to set up a new patriarchate—this time with the see city at Tirnovo—which lasted until the Turkish conquest of Bulgaria in 1393.

The same Latin conquest of Constantinople allowed the Serbians to assert their nationality while the patriarchate was in foreign hands. Thus, Stephen II established a Serbian metropolitanate in the thirteenth century which was raised to the dignity of a patriarchal see at Peć in 1346 by the great Stephen Dushan. At first the patriarch of Constantinople had reacted to this move by excommunicating the Serbians for their temerity, but after some twenty years, in 1375, the autonomy of the church was recognized.

¹ See Gerasimos Konidaris, ‘Η Ἑλληνική Ἐκκλησία ὡς πολιτιστική δύναμις ἐν τῇ ἱστορίᾳ τῆς Χερσονήσου τοῦ Αἰμοῦ [The Greek Church as a civilizing force in the history of the Balkans] (Athens, 1948), pp. 89 ff.

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This brings up the interesting question of the validity of the claims of the patriarch of Constantinople to universal jurisdiction in the Balkans. In the eyes of the Byzantines and the Greek people even to the present, the patriarchate was a supranational institution—whoever occupied the see of Constantinople was not just the head of Greek Orthodox Christians, but the spiritual leader of all eastern Christians not found in the other ancient patriarchates. The Serbians and Bulgarians obviously put this claim to the test when they set up national patriarchates with one of their own race holding the position. In their view such a national patriarch would be separate from, if not equal to, the Greek patriarch of Constantinople. There is ample evidence that the claim to ecumenicity by Constantinople was heavily dependent on Byzantine political and military power; when the latter failed, as in 1204, decentralization of the church in the Balkans followed.

At any rate, the strong position of the Greeks with the Ottomans in the eighteenth century allowed them then to make the following moves during the rule of the Patriarch Samuel. In September 1766 the Serbian patriarchate of Peć was suppressed, and in January 1767 the Bulgarian church was absorbed with the forced retirement of Arsennis, archbishop of Ochrid.¹

The Serbian church had already suffered a number of hard blows ever since the national armies had been struck down at Kosovo in 1389. The continued conflict between the Habsburgs and Turks was an ever-present reminder to the Serbs that their position might be relieved. When the Austrian armies reached Serbia in 1689, the Serbs joined them; when the Habsburg force had to retreat, 37,000 Serbian families went with it, including the patriarch, to settle around Karlowitz inside Habsburg boundaries. Peć, however, continued to have its Serbian bishop until Samuel took it over. The Bulgarian church of Ochrid had been threatened by the Greeks already in 1737 but was able to resist at that time. Once the churches were in the hands of Greek prelates, the Hellenization of these Slavic

¹ R. Janin, *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastique*, xiii, p. 681. The Serbian patriarchate had been abolished soon after 1459 and restored again in 1557 owing to the influence of the Serbian-born Grand Vizir, Mehmed Sokolovich.

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peoples went on apace. Church schools made the use of the Greek language common throughout the Balkans. The Serbs and Bulgarians who sought an education in these institutions ended by considering themselves Greek. Nor was the process of Hellenization limited to the church and education. Large numbers of Greek merchants and craftsmen had emigrated to all the major cities of the Balkans setting up a Greek bourgeois society there. Thus in financial and social affairs, as well as in educational and ecclesiastical matters, the eighteenth was the Greek century.¹

While education played the major role in keeping the Greek language alive and the people aware of their Hellenistic heritage during the whole Ottoman period, a veritable renaissance of Greek letters began anew in the eighteenth century. The patriarchate was a strong advocate of this intellectual movement. Greek schools were established in Vienna, Odessa, Corfu, Moscow, Leipzig, Bucharest and Jassy. The same was true in the Ottoman Empire; there were two colleges in Constantinople, three at Ioannina, two in Thessaloniki, and one each in Adrianople, Philippopolis, Mount Athos, Kastoria, Schatista, Maschopolis, Kozani and Serrai. Everywhere Orthodox churchmen were involved in the rebirth of the national spirit.²

The official policy in the eighteenth century, as dictated by the church at Constantinople, remained geared to the *status quo*, contented with educational and social progress, shying away from the more dangerous field of talk concerning political independence. Then the French Revolution broke out, and reports concerning it circulated slowly but surely into the Ottoman hinterland. The more

¹ On the Serbian church, see Charles Jelavich, 'Some aspects of Serbian religious development in the eighteenth century', *Church History*, xxiii (1954), pp. 144, 152. The church of Montenegro alone remained independent of the patriarchate. The first Greek had been appointed to the patriarchate of Peć in 1737 at the insistence of the Dragoman Alexandros Mavrokordatos on the plea that the Serbs could not be trusted. The Phanariotes began a policy which led to the exclusion of any Serbian nationals in the episcopacy. See Jean Mousset, *La Serbie et son Église, 1830-1904* (Paris, 1938), pp. 36-40.

² Charles Eliot, *Turkey in Europe* (London, 1906), p. 310; Charles Diehl comments, 'She (the Greek Church) has given more thought, perhaps, to Hellenism than to religion' (C. Diehl, 'The Greek Church and Hellenism' in *Greece in Evolution*, ed. G. F. Abbott, London, 1910, p. 56).

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active Greeks, members of the rising merchant class, could not help but be influenced by the dramatic news and assess their own situation.

A document appeared in Constantinople in 1789 entitled *Paternal Teaching*. It was signed by Anthimos of Jerusalem but was probably the work of the later Patriarch Gregorios V. The document is a polemic against revolutionary ideas, calling on the Christians 'to note how brilliantly our Lord, infinite in mercy and all-wise, protects intact the holy and orthodox faith of the devout, and preserves all things'. It warns that the devil is constantly at work raising up evil plans; among them is the idea of liberty, which appears to be so good, but is only there to deceive the people. The document points out that political freedom is contrary to the Scriptural command to obey authority, that it results in the impoverishment of the people, in murder and robbery. The sultan is the protector of Christian life in the Ottoman Empire; to oppose him is to oppose God.¹

The church authorities in the capital had an opportunity to prove their devotion to the Sultan Selim III when the English fleet under Admiral Duckworth appeared off Constantinople in 1807. The Patriarch Gregorios V himself, with pastoral staff in hand, led a thousand Greek workers to help construct fortifications against the western invaders. The Ottomans could not have failed to appreciate the loyalty of their subjects at such a moment. What they could not see in the future was that the French Revolution had opened the door to fundamental changes which their system could not survive. The waves of revolution had reached the Balkans, inspiring men to devote their lives to freedom and liberty under their own government. At the time neither the sultan nor the patriarch could fathom the meaning of this spirit.

¹ Text as in Theodore H. Papadopoulos, *Studies and Documents Relating to the History of the Greek Church and People under Turkish Domination* (Brussels, 1952), pp. 143–5. See also Dionysios Zakythinos, 'Η Τουρκοκρατία: Εισαγωγή εις την Νεωτέραν Ιστορίαν του Έλληνισμού [The Turkish rule: An introduction into the recent history of Hellenism] (Athens, 1957), p. 82.

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CHAPTER 2

PRELUDE TO REVOLT

THE revolutionary spirit which was born in nineteenth-century Greece was not the result of any single cause, but resulted from a series of interacting forces. First, there was the example of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, which whetted the nationalism of subject people everywhere. Then there was the continued success of Russian arms against the Turks which commenced with Peter the Great. The Greeks, suffering from Turkish rule, could not help but rejoice at every victory of this strong and powerful Orthodox state against their common enemy. After the Treaty of Kuchuk Kaynarca in 1774, the Russians had received the right to intervene in the Ottoman lands on behalf of the Balkan Orthodox. Greek sailors were allowed to use the Russian flag—the bonds between the two people were constantly being drawn tighter.

Another factor promoting dissatisfaction was the increasing wealth of Greek merchants and shippers, as a result of their taking over the position of the French in the Eastern Mediterranean following the Napoleonic Wars. Economic prosperity burgeoned for them, yet politically and socially they were aware of their second-class status as Ottoman citizens—a sentiment of exasperation resulted, which made them turn to thoughts of revolution.

This economic revival among the Greeks was paralleled by an intellectual movement of major proportions. Immediately the names of Rhigas Pheraios and Adamantios Korais come to mind. Both were men of great talent and irrepressible national spirit. Pheraios, once secretary of the Hospodar of Wallachia, had been educated to read French, German and Italian; he was musician, poet, philosopher and military tactician. But all of the talents of this versatile man were centered on the rebirth of an independent Greece. In his travels about central Europe and the Balkans he distributed revolutionary tracts to the Greeks, formed secret societies and left the spark of nationalism burning in the hearts of those who caught his spirit. His great *War*

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Hymn, dedicated to freedom, is still one of the most popular patriotic literary pieces of his countrymen in modern Greece. To a life spent in activities devoted to his country, Rhigas added his own blood, when, in 1798, he was executed by the Turks in Belgrade.

Adamantios Korais, equally inspired by the future of Greece, was of a different stamp. He was a scholar, not a politician, a man who looked to the intellectual heritage of Greece as the basis of a new independent nation. Living in Paris during the French Revolution, he was thrilled by its lofty declarations on the nature of man. Korais edited and translated the authors of ancient Greece, forming a library of twenty-six volumes which he believed demonstrated the everlasting vitality of the Hellenic spirit. He was the first to use modern Greek as a literary language. In his commentaries on the selections in his library, Korais incorporated the thoughts of a man imbued with the ideals of the Enlightenment. These books passed from hand to hand wherever Greeks lived and served to inspire his countrymen with thoughts of national glory. He lived in Paris until 1833, having seen his dream of an independent Greece come true.

Another who shared in the intellectual awakening of the Greeks prior to 1821 was Anthimos Gazis, the editor of *Mercur savant*, first published in Vienna in 1811. This was a literary magazine, devoted to Greek interests, which enjoyed considerable influence among Greeks all over Europe, but especially in Bucharest. Here was to be found a large community of Greeks committed to political as well as intellectual progress. The Wallachian capital contained a large Academy, a Philological Society, and was the home of two important contributors to Greek letters, Georgios Gennadios and Metropolitan Ignatios of Arta. A clear influence on the Greek spirit was the renaissance in Serbian literature led by Dimitrije Obradovich, as well as the military example given by Serbian warriors in their struggle against the Janissaries which began in 1804. A factor of real significance for the Orthodox church was that the men engaged in the literary revival—both among Greeks and Serbs—were seeking inspiration from the secular humanistic spirit of the West. Towards the church they were frequently very critical, for many of them believed it stood in the way of progress.