

CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS WITHIN THE SAME EMPIRE

KEY QUESTION: How do the French travellers reflect the relationships between Christians and Muslims in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th – 19th century?

Doc. 1. Slave market in Bursa

[...] It was at this place that I also saw how Christians - men and women are sold – under the high ceiling of a covered market place. It is an extremely moving scene to watch them put on benches. The buyers look carefully at the faces and palms of the men and at the whole arms of the women.

[...] the army which recently resided in Greece consisted predominantly of Christians. This means that if the Despot of Serbia is summoned, he sends one of his sons with three thousands mercenary soldiers on horseback, and lately, lots of others from Albania and Bulgaria, also Christians, also people, who do not dare refuse this, have been sent, too. Apart from that, a big number of the slaves participating in the army are Christians as well.

[...] All the people of this land desire to be set free from slavery if they find someone to help them.

Bertrand de la Broquiere (1433)*

*The years in brackets are the years when the travels were made.

Doc. 2. The Ottoman authorities and the Christian religion

[...] how big the appetites of the Turks are when one depends on their mercy. They do not fulfill any wishes unless they are paid in cash and are greedy for money more than any other people in the world [...]. They act like that because a person can remain the governor of a province for only a month or a year and after that he has to go to another province which is a thousand leagues away. That is why, once they are given an opportunity to plunder, even the slightest one, they seize it tightly [...].

[...] The Sultan allows the afore-mentioned Patriarchs to practise their religion as long as he is paid a tax for that. [...]

All Christian religions within Turkey can have their separate churches [...]. This is so because once he conquers a country, he is content with it being obedient and paying all due taxes, he is not bothered with the questions of the soul. For this reason I saw many villages in Thrace which were populated by Bulgarians only or by Vlachs, Serbs, Bosnians, Albanians, Dalmatians, Slavs – all of them sticking to their own Christian religion [...].

Pierre Belon (1547)

Doc. 3. Caravanserai in Niš

Niš is not among the smallest towns in this country. [...] In this town, I stopped to stay at an inn, which the Turks call caravanserai and which provides regular shelter for travellers in these lands [...]. Such inns are open to anybody, rich or poor, sometimes the pashas* and district beys** use them when they travel [...] It is common to feed everybody who stays there and when the time to eat comes, a servant appears with an enormous wooden platter, in the middle of which there is a plate with barley porridge and a piece of meat and, sometimes, with some honey. [...] Travellers are allowed to stay three days there but after these three days have passed, they have to change their shelter.

[...] There is a widespread opinion among the Turks that bearing false witness against a Christian person is a pious act, so they do not wait to be summoned but appear in court out of their own accord.

*Pasha – a high rank in the Ottoman Empire.

**Bay – a Turkish title for "chieftain".

Nicolas de Nicolay (1551)

Doc. 4. Janissaries in the Ottoman Empire

The Sultan keeps 15 000 boys in the different palaces who are raised as pages and taught the Ottoman law and how to use a sword (yatagan) and a short spear and [do] other similar things. These are the „ichoglans“ which means „children of the masters“, who are collected from the Christians as tax every four or five years [...].

Jean Palerne Foresien (1582)

Doc. 5. Together on a working day and on a holiday

[...] villages [in the area of Shumen] half Turkish, half Bulgarian, where Muslims and Christians live together without despising each other, get married, drink together bad wine and break together the Ramadan and the Lent. They know, as well as their priests, only the Cross or Allah, and so on. And that does not make them dishonest people in the least.

Conte D'Hauterive (1785)

Doc. 6. The French view on the Christians in the Ottoman Empire

The Serbs, the Bosnians, or the Bulgarians look to us more preferable because they are reserved in their speech, quite obedient and well-acquainted with Turkish ways and on good terms with most of the population in Turkey.

Ami Boué (1836, 1837, 1838)

Task 1:

- A) Work in two groups. The first group looks for and keeps notes of the conflicts and unequal status of Bulgarians and Turks in the Ottoman Empire as they are revealed in the documents. The second one looks for and keeps notes of the rights of the Christians and their daily interactions with the Muslims as they are revealed in the documents.
- B) Present your observations to the other group and discuss the relationship between Christians and Muslims in the 15th – 19th c. along the following lines:
 - political and religious relationships;
 - every-day life contacts.
- C) Comment on the French travellers' views on the Muslims and the Christians in the Ottoman Empire.

SUMMARY QUESTION: How do the relationships between Muslims and Christians in the Ottoman Empire evolve?