

**Tom Papademetriou, *Render Unto the Sultan. Power, Authority, and the Greek Orthodox Church in the Early Ottoman Centuries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2015. xi + 288 pp. Cloth.**

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### **Book Review**

Tom Papadimitriou's book on the history of the Greek Orthodox Church during the early Ottoman centuries constitutes a complete effort to analyze the historical realities regarding the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and the institution of the Church in early Ottoman history from an economic perspective. As the author notes in his introduction, a new reality emerges from the analysis of the archival sources: the Ottoman state considered the Greek Orthodox Church ecclesiastical hierarchy primarily as tax farmers for cash income rather than as community leaders.

In the first chapter of the book, "The millet system revisited," the author extensively examines the issue of the term *millet* in Ottoman history, especially during the first centuries of the Ottoman Empire. The chapter begins with a well-structured literature review of the term millet, with special emphasis on how contemporary historiography has reshaped our understanding of the term. In the first part of the chapter, traditional historiography, which mainly focuses on the relationship between Sultan Mehmet II and Patriarch Gennadios, is analyzed. In the second part of the same chapter, the revisions of contemporary historiography are analyzed, while the issues between

community/Church/Ottoman state are also addressed to prove their complexity. As the author rightly pronounces, this literature review and the focus on the revisions of contemporary historiography are essential to the issue that is tackled in the following chapter. The author argues that any discussion that is concerned with the status of the Greek Orthodox Church in the Ottoman state must begin with an understanding of the Ottomans themselves regarding the population for which they were administratively responsible.

As the author himself notes, the book is a continuation of the contemporary historiographical revisions, especially those of M. Macit Kenanoğlu, and is an effort to bring out a more representative narrative of the way the Ottoman administration handled the Greek Orthodox Church. At the same time, the book places the economic and tax relationships between the Ottoman state and the Church within their historical framework. In the chapters to follow, the author presents a reanalysis/reinterpretation of the primary sources. The emerging picture is that the Ottoman state did not envisage a single and uniform millet. Instead, fully understanding the realities of the era, as well as making the most of past practices, their administration model appears to favour co-existence

and power-sharing with the high priests of the Greek Orthodox Church. This ascertainment seems to confirm the contemporary historiographical approaches for a dynamic relationship between the high priests and the Ottoman state, a relationship that is consistently present in many studies through the analysis of the *berats* that the Ottoman administration granted the high priests.

In the second chapter, “İstimalet, Ottoman methods of conquest, and the Greek Orthodox Church,” the author describes the process through which the Church, and especially the ecclesiastical personnel, as well as the bishops and the monks, were included in the Ottoman economic framework through constant negotiations that resulted in special agreements, which were, at their core, of an economic nature. The chapter begins with a documentation of the situation in relation to the Church in the latter Byzantine era. It notes the importance of the ecclesiastical institution in Byzantine Asia Minor, and it continues by exploring the contact of the local bishops with the emirs that ruled the area. One such example, which is examined amongst many others, is the case of Bishop Matthaïos and the emir of Aydınoğulları Umur Pasha. Posing the question as to why the emir allowed the bishop’s activity—the bishop after all represented an enemy state in the emir’s area—the author aptly answers that the emir’s reasons were mainly economic and were related to the income sources that he probably had. Furthermore, in order to strengthen his argument, the author examines the introduction of ecclesiastic men in the *timar* system of the Ottoman state, a matter that re-establishes the situation between the Church and the state in an economic framework and introduces the high priests into the pre-Ottoman and Ottoman economic administrative system. The monasteries of the Greek Orthodox Church are highlighted in this chapter as one of the most important arguments in historicizing the economic relationships between Church and Ottoman state. Here, the author successfully highlights the monasteries of Mount Athos as entities that participated in constant negotiations with the Ottoman state, aiming to keep their assets. On the other hand, the Ottoman state was motivated by the constant income gained by maintaining the monasteries’ assets.

In the next chapter, which is concerned with the relationship between high priests and the Ottoman state, “The all-holy tax farmer. The İstanbul Rum Patriği as *mültezim*,” the author examines particular incidents between members of the ecclesiastic hierarchy and analyses how these incidents fit into the framework of economic relationships with the imperial ruler by establishing the high priests as an income source for the Ottoman state. Examining ecclesiastic documents as well as documents of the Ottoman administration for specific incidents of contestation, either for one ecclesiastic jurisdiction or for a high priest, the author introduces the Church’s activity in a framework of constant economic returns to the Ottoman state with various forms of taxes. He also notes that along the lines of the same framework, from the middle of the sixteenth century, the situation that had been formulated did not represent a single powerful ecclesiastic institution that practiced administrative power, but rather it represented the conflicting interests of ecclesiastic men who, depending on the financial remuneration promised to rulers, were trying to use the Ottoman power to prevail or establish their position. This, he concludes, highlights the limitations of the power of the Ecumenical Patriarch, the man who was the leader of a strictly hierarchical institution.

In a subsequent chapter, “Ottoman tax farming and the Greek Orthodox Church,” the author uses specific examples to argue that the Greek Orthodox Church, as represented by the high priests, was an important tax farm. As he notes in the beginning of the chapter, if we are to consider the Ecumenical

Patriarchate as a tax farm similar to all the other tax farms in the Ottoman state, then our perception about the status quo and the position of the Church in the Ottoman state changes. Masterfully analyzing the tax farming system of the empire and noting its importance for the finances of the Ottoman state, a state which was gradually transforming into a more administratively bureaucratic system, the author highlights that the ecclesiastic hierarchy operated exactly within this framework: an income tax farm that collected and return taxes to the state. After converting the three-year tax collection annuities to life ones (*malikane*), the high priests, who were in theory elected to their seats for life, continued to operate as tax farmers. On the grounds of this argument, the institutionalization of the annual amount (*pişkeş*) is also introduced, thus establishing the Church, in the Ottoman state's understanding, as an important tax farm in the framework of the tax farming system's operation (*iltizam*). It became an institution financially important for the Ottoman state, responsible for collecting tax income and returning it to the state.

In the last chapter of the book, "Competition and corruption. Sultan, Patriarch, and Greek elite", before the conclusion, the author examines the activity of a surfacing elite in the Orthodox community, mainly in relation to the position and the operations of the high priests and doubts about the power and jurisdiction of the latter. This development, according to the author, can be included in the broader Ottoman framework, since the old administrative class of the empire was gradually restricted by the emergence of a specialized administrative bureaucracy. Arguing on the grounds of this parallel course, the author compares examples of Ottoman and ecclesiastic historiography, like the *Dialogos* of Damaskenos and Counsel for Sultans by Mustafa Ali, which seem to have striking resemblances as to the causes of the differentiations occurring in the empire and the intense activity of the elites. Another such example, the author explains, is their common ascertainment of a declining path for both state and Church due to the corruption and bribery that was taking place. The analysis of the case of Michael Kantakouzenos and the financial as well as political action, both in relation to the Patriarchate and the Ottoman administration, is an excellent example of the action of an economic elite that seems to create new specifics in relation to the Church.

In his conclusions, the author notes that the alternative interpretation that this book offers in relation to the Church and the Ottoman state focuses on an understanding of the ecclesiastic seats and their occupants as income sources for the Ottoman state, a situation which created a framework of constant competition and conflict between the contenders and their supporters. The author finally suggests that we should focus on the economic aspect of the relationship between the Church and the Ottoman state and not on politics, as this will give us a more holistic understanding of Ottoman and ecclesiastic practices. As the author suggests, his analysis can also become the framework under which we can interpret the seventeenth century, as it will enable a better interpretation of the publications that refer to that particular century.

The author has based his study on substantial archival and secondary literature research and argues for a new interpretation of the historical sources regarding the Greek Orthodox Church and the Ottoman state. This book is an invaluable source for understanding the economic relationship between the Church prelates and the Ottoman state during the difficult early Ottoman centuries. The author's main position reinforces the revisions of historiography regarding to the status of the Greek Orthodox Church in the Ottoman state and emphasizes their economic relationship. The arguments are built on

plethora of sources, both unpublished and published, which the author appears to have meticulously analyzed, and shows how economic factors were the motivating force for the relationship between the Church and Ottoman state.