The Role of the Church in the Construction and Repair of Greek Schools within the Context of the Legal Status of Non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire

This study examines the administrative, legal and institutional role of the Greek Orthodox Church in the construction and repair of Greek schools within the legal system governing non-Muslim subjects in the Ottoman Empire. During the classical period, non-Muslim education developed within the community under the dhimmi status and the Millet System. From the 19th century onwards the modernization, centralization and institutionalization of the Ottoman administration brought about new legal and bureaucratic dimensions to educational activities. The study draws on primary sources, including legal regulations introduced after the Tanzimat and Reform Edicts, the 1869 Regulation on Public Education and on firman records from the Church Registers of the Imperial Council (Bab-ı Asafi Divan-ı Hümayun Kilise Defterleri) covering the period 1864–1912. Through qualitative historical analysis and document examination, it investigates the location of Greek schools, the administrative controls governing the permit and firman procedures and the geographical distribution and institutional characteristics of the Greek educational network. The findings show that some schools were constructed or repaired on church grounds, in church courtyards, on church foundation lands or on episcopal lands. This close relationship between schools and religious institutions demonstrates the continued administrative, financial and legal role of the Greek Orthodox Church and the Patriarchate in education. The findings also show that, despite the administrative and legal reforms of the 19th century, the Ottoman central bureaucracy maintained strict control over school construction in the provinces through the firman and permit procedures.

Keywords: *Ottoman Empire, Non-Muslims, Millet System, Greek Orthodox Church, Greek Schools, Reform Edict, Legal Status, Church Registers.*

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Introduction

It is an undeniable fact that equality is not an inherent feature of human nature and that power can undermine justice in societies unless a public order is established. Therefore, the existence of an authority that balances power on the basis of justice has become an indispensible element of social organization. Since the earliest forms of human interaction and collective life, the need to protect the weak and the vulnerable against the arbitrary exercise of power has brought about the necessity of establishing a legitimate public authority.

In this work, we focus our attention on the Ottoman Empire that has been one of the longest lasting political entities in world history, maintaining its sovereignty for over six centuries in a region characterized by ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. The resilience of the Empire is directly related to the legal order it had established and the mechanisms through which this order functioned. Sultan Osman, upon establishing the Ottoman Empire, founded the office of the

qadi to administer justice. The institution of the qadi was one of the two initial administrative structures of the Empire and this is a clear indication of the importance placed on justice within the Ottoman administrative system. Later rulers continued this administrative and legal tradition, keeping the administration of justice at the centre of the state apparatus. [12]

An Overview of the Legal Status of Non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire

Within the Ottoman administrative and legal order, religious affiliation played a central role in the classification of different communities, preceding distinctions based on lineage or language. Accordingly, Ottoman society was organized into religious communities of Muslims, Greek Orthodox Christians, Gregorian Armenians, Catholics, Protestants and Jews.

The fundamental criterion determining the public status of individuals and communities was not their ethno-cultural origin, but rather their religious and sectarian affiliation. The Ottoman state organised these communities into distinct socio-legal categories, commonly associated with the concept of the *millet*. Drawing upon Islamic legal principles that govern the status of non-Muslim subjects (*dhimmis*), the "*Millet System"* was subsequently developed by the Ottoman administration as an institutional framework serving practical administrative purposes.

The historical traces of this development can be found in the period of the conquest of Constantinople and the reign of Fatih Sultan Mehmed. Following the conquest in 1453, Mehmed II granted the Greek Orthodox Church a considerable degree of autonomy in matters of religious doctrine, worship, and aspects of private law. Accordingly, the Patriarch was granted extensive privileges and authority over the administrative and legal affairs of the Orthodox community, assuming the role of its spiritual and administrative leader within the Ottoman Empire. Similar legal privileges were extended to the Armenian and Jewish communities in subsequent periods. Thus, in the classical Ottoman administrative structure, three major non-Muslim communities, "Millets", were gradually formed as recognised religious groups alongside the Muslim population. These were the Armenians, the Jews and the Greeks, who encompassed all Orthodox peoples such as Bulgarians, Romanians, Albanians, Macedonians and Serbs. Although other Christian communities existed within the empire, including Catholics, Protestants and groups such as Syriac Christians, Nestorians and Copts, they were not recognized as independent millets within the classical Ottoman administrative framework. This was largely

[1]Halit Ongan, Ankara'nın 1 Numaralı Şer'iye Sicili (Ankara's Sharia Register No. 1), TTK Press, A.Ü.D.T.C.F. Publications, Ankara 1958, p. 19.

[2]Ahmet Akgunduz, "The Implementation of Islamic Law in the Ottoman State: Sharia Courts and Sharia Registers", Turker, Vol. X, Yeni Turkiye Publications, Ankara 2002, p. 54.

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attributed to their relatively small population size and limited political influence.[3][4]

Besides freedom of belief and conscience, these recognized religious groups enjoyed a considerable degree of legal autonomy in the realm of private law, while in that of public law they were subject to the provisions of Islamic law governing dhimmis. More particularly, personal, family and inheritance matters of non-Muslim individuals were generally subject to the religious and customary norms of their own communities. In this context, matters directly related to the religious and social life of these communities were considered internal affairs and were generally exempt from direct state intervention, including disputes arising from family law, the appointment and dismissal of clergy and the management of places of worship. Such matters were left to the discretion of spiritual leaders and community representatives, allowing disputes to be resolved by community courts, also known as "spiritual councils." However, despite this judicial autonomy, non-Muslim subjects frequently brought before the Ottoman Sharia courts disputes concerning personal and property matters,

[3]The concepts of "millet" and "millet system" in Ottoman administrative and legal history have been the subject of considerable methodological debate. Some scholars argue that the millet system did not exist as a formally established institutional structure during the classical period of the Ottoman Empire. According to this view, Ottoman administrative practice cannot be understood as an autonomous form of "legal pluralism," since non-Muslim subjects (reaya) were regarded primarily as taxpayers directly accountable to the state rather than as communities administered through their religious leaders. This interpretation emphasizes the central administrative role of the Ottoman tax-farming (iltizam) system in the governance of non-Muslim subjects and the broader administration of the empire's diverse population (see Macit M. Kenanoğlu, Osmanlı Millet Sistemi: Mit ve Gerçek, Klasik Publications, Istanbul, 2012, pp. 10–16).

Other scholars acknowledge the de facto existence of an administrative structure relevant to a "millet system", but argue that during the classical period the specific term "millet" did not appear in Sharia registers with the institutional meaning it acquired in later centuries (see Nuri Adıyeke, "Islahat Fermanı Öncesinde Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Millet Sistemi ve Gayrimüslimlerin Yaşantılarına Dair," Osmanlı, vol. 4, Istanbul, 1999, p. 255 et seq.). These interpretations can be questioned as they rely on a limited range of period-specific sources and do not fully account for the legal and political transformations that followed the Tanzimat and Reform (Islahat) Edicts. Prime Ministry Ottoman archival documents and particularly late period Sharia registers contain references to communities as the "Rum Milleti" (Greek Nation) and the "Ermeni Milleti" (Armenian Nation), demonstrating the use of these terms in official records. For further discussion, see Kemal H. Karpat, An Ottoman Statesman and Scholar: Ottoman Population and Social Aspects, Brill, Leiden, 2002, pp. 112–118, and Halil İnalcık, The Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire (1300–1600), vol. 1, Eren Publishing, Istanbul, 1997, pp. 85–92.

[4]Gulnihal Bozkurt, The Legal Status of Non-Muslim Ottoman Subjects in Light of German-British Documents and Political Developments (1839-1914), 2nd Edition, TTK Publications, Ankara 1996, pp. 9-13. Among the non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman State, the Greek Orthodox community attained a privileged and hierarchically superior position. One of the most notable historical indications of this privilege was the fact that the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate was granted administrative authority over the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, a site considered sacred throughout the Christian world. For a detailed examination of this subject, see Ihsan Satis - Muhammed Ceyhan, "A Register Belonging to the Greek Community in Jerusalem: Church Register Number 10 (Holy Sepulchre)", Belgeler, Volume 33, Issue 37, Ankara 2014, pp. 21-51. For further discussion of the socio-legal status of non-Muslims under Ottoman rule, see also Yavuz Ercan, Non-Muslims Under Ottoman Rule: Social, Economic, and Legal Status from the Foundation to the Tanzimat, Turhan Kitabevi, Ankara 2001.

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including marriage, divorce, alimony, inheritance, estates, foundations, wills and gifts.[5] The legal regime applied to non-Muslim subjects who brought their cases before Ottoman Sharia courts, whether out of legal necessity or by their own choice, involved certain procedures and principles that differed from those applied to Muslims. These differences stemmed partly from Islamic legal doctrine concerning dhimmis and partly from financial and administrative considerations. It would be methodologically misleading to interpret these differences as a restrictive system that operated entirely to the detriment of non-Muslim subjects. This legal differentiation also provided a basis for a degree of autonomy that helped protect religious beliefs and practices. For example, since the consumption of wine and pork were not prohibited by Christian religious norms, contracts and commercial transactions involving these products among members of the Christian community were recognized as valid under Ottoman law and received legal protection. In contrast, a Muslim who engaged in such transactions, even when trading with a non-Muslim, could be held legally liable and subjected to criminal sanctions, since the consumption and trade of these same goods were religiously prohibited for Muslims. Another example of these differing legal regimes was the principle that non-Muslims could not testify in court against Muslims. This restriction became one of the most widely criticized aspects of the Ottoman legal system, particularly by European states and Christian subjects of the empire.[6][7][8]

When examining the legal status of dhimmis under Islamic legal doctrine, certain restrictions on political rights and access to public office become apparent. These restrictions largely remained in place in Ottoman administrative practice until the proclamation of the Kanun-ı Esasi (Basic Law) and the establishment of the First Constitutional Era. However, the limited political rights of non-Muslims should be considered in the broader context of the pre-constitutional period, when Muslim subjects, apart from those holding public office, also lacked direct political rights based on participation in government. At the same time, non-Muslims were not entirely excluded from the Ottoman administrative and military organization. Since the early periods of the empire, although not generally incorporated directly into the regular army units, dhimmis served in various military and administrative capacities, including as timarlı sipahi (fief-holding cavalry), voynuk and martolos, and received certain exemptions in return for their services. Moreover, even before the Tanzimat reforms, Phanariot Greeks and Armenian bureaucrats/amiras held important

[5] Bozkurt, op. cit., pp. 9-13.

[6] Bozkurt, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

[7] Ercan, op. cit., p. 12

[8] Ercan, op. cit., p. 250. Despite criticism by European states of certain procedural rules governing non-Muslims in the Ottoman judicial system, the final judgments rendered by the courts did not necessarily discriminate between parties on the basis of religious affiliation. For instance, numerous disputes between Muslims and non-Muslims heard by the Bursa Qadi Court throughout the eighteenth century resulted in rulings against Muslims. This suggests that the qadis based their decisions on the principles of equity and the available evidence rather than on the religious affiliation of the parties. For a detailed analysis, see Ali İhsan Karataş, Osmanlı Devleti'nde Gayrimüslimlerin Toplum Hayatı –Bursa Örneği-, Gökkubbe Publications, Istanbul 2009, pp. 257-260.

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positions and exercised considerable influence within the Ottoman diplomatic, financial and administrative apparatus, undertaking significant official and semi-official functions.[9]

This legal and social structure remained largely in place for centuries, with periodic additions and minor regulatory changes. The nineteenth century marked a turning point, as the Ottoman Empire underwent profound bureaucratic, military, and economic changes that brought about significant transformations to its legal system in general and the millet system in particular. The process gained momentum with the proclamation of the Tanzimat Edict, which aimed to reduce inequalities in the legal status of subjects belonging to different millet communities and to move from the traditional dhimmi status towards a more inclusive model of "Ottoman citizenship" (Ottomanism). The adoption of the principle of equality before the law between Muslim and non-Muslim subjects required the introduction of a common legislation applicable to both groups, as well as the establishment of new judicial institutions to enforce it. Classical Sharia courts operated according to Islamic legal principles and were not suited for the application of these new laws derived from European legal models. For that reason, Nizamiye courts were established to handle civil and criminal cases. During this period, the reception of European law accelerated and efforts were made to establish a more secular and egalitarian legal order that would allow different ethnic and religious communities to participate in legislative and judicial processes. This judicial restructuring was shaped in part by external political pressures and failed to fully satisfy either the Muslim or non-Muslim communities directly affected by the process. The legal reforms of the nineteenth century did not fully meet social demands, while the coexistence of traditional institutions and modern judicial structures created a dual legal order that gave rise to new administrative and legal conflicts. Despite these institutional changes, codification efforts and the expansion of Nizamiye courts, non-Muslim subjects continued to bring before the Sharia courts disputes concerning personal, family, and inheritance affairs. Late-period Sharia registers provide concrete evidence of this continued trust in and preference for the Sharia courts among non-Muslim subjects.[10][11]

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[9]Gul Akyilmaz, "The Political and Administrative Rights of Dhimmis in the Ottoman State and the Innovations Brought by the Tanzimat and Reform Edicts", Turkish-Armenian Relations from Yesterday to Today, Ed: Idris Bal-Mustafa Cufali, Nobel Publications, 1st Edition, Ankara 2003, p. 95.

[10]Bozkurt, op. cit., pp. 2-5. For a detailed examination of the judicial reorganization introduced in the Ottoman Empire during the Tanzimat period, see:Ekrem Buğra Ekinci, Tanzimat ve Sonrası Osmanlı Mahkemeleri, Arı Sanat Publications, Istanbul 2004, pp. 125-233.

[11]Despite the introduction of Western style courts and the adoption of Western legal principles and laws in the Ottoman Empire, Sharia registers contain examples showing that non-Muslim subjects continued to prefer Sharia courts.

Education among the Greeks during the Classical Period and within the Framework of the Millet System

Following the conquest of Istanbul in 1453, the Ottoman state developed a system of religious and social administration, commonly known as the "Millet System", to govern the empire's diverse population. As part of the initial arrangements associated with this system, Fatih Sultan Mehmed recognized the religious, legal, and socio-cultural position of the Greek community through the berats (warrants) and ahidnâmes (covenants) granted to the Phanar Greek Patriarchate and the Patriarch of the time, Gennadios Scholarios. Although these ahidnâmes did not contain explicit provisions specifically concerning educational institutions, the broad administrative and judicial autonomy granted to the Patriarchate provided the Greek community with the opportunity to develop its own educational structures. It was in this context of autonomy that the Greeks could establish their own schools, determine their curricula, and appoint their teachers.[12][13]

During the classical Ottoman period, Greek schools operated with a degree of institutional and financial autonomy from the central administration. Their expenses were covered by the Patriarchate, income from foundations (metochion) attached to churches and donations from wealthy merchants and other prominent members of the Greek community. Greek served as the language of instruction, preserving Orthodox culture and the Greek philosophical heritage, while the curriculum focused mainly on religious texts, Christian theology, grammar and basic arithmetic. The Ottoman central administration generally left the curricula, teaching staff, and instructional materials of Greek schools under the authority of the community, treating educational matters as part of its internal affairs and religious autonomy. [14]

The most prominent institutional example of this period was the Mekteb-i Kebir (Phanar Greek Orthodox College) that was founded shortly after the conquest in 1454 and operated under the patronage of the Patriarchate. The institution did not solely train the clergy but also played an important role in the education of the Phanariot elite, whose members later assumed significant administrative responsibilities in the Ottoman foreign affairs bureaucracy, translation offices as well as in the administration of the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia.[15]

[12]Steven Runciman, The Great Church in Captivity: A Study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1968, pp. 165-170.

[13]Nikolaos I. Pantazopoulos, Church and Law in the Balkan Peninsula During the Ottoman Rule, Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki 1967, pp. 45-52.

[14]Osman Ergin, Türkiye Maarif Tarihi (History of Turkish Education), Vol. 1-2, Eser Printing House, Istanbul 1977, pp. 660-665.

[15]Andreas M. Kazamias, Education and the Quest for Modernity in Turkey, Allen & Unwin, London 1966, pp. 98-102.

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Tanzimat Reforms and the Education of the Greeks within the Framework of Change

In the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire underwent a profound transformation in its approach to governance and institutional organization under the influence of Westernization and the Tanzimat reforms. In the field of education, this transformation was reflected as the gradual shift in the status of non-Muslim communities' right to establish schools. That is, from a traditional privilege granted by the ruler to a public, equal, and legally defined right. The principle of equality before the law proclaimed in the 1839 Tanzimat Edict contributed to the development of a legal framework for educational activities. Issued after the Crimean War, the 1856 Reform Edict further defined the educational rights of non-Muslim communities and placed them within a context of state regulation and international commitments. Particularly, two significant changes were introduced by the following provision: "Every community is authorized to open schools for the education of the sciences and arts for those belonging to its own sect and nation, provided that they are under the supervision of the state". First, it formally recognized the legal right of the Greek community to establish educational institutions. Second, it explicitly affirmed the state's authority to supervise these institutions, marking a shift from the earlier practice that left educational affairs largely to the communities themselves. [16][17]

The 1869 Regulation on Public Education was formulated under the supervision of Saffet Paşa who was a prominent figure of the Ottoman educational reforms. The regulation brought greater order to the Ottoman educational system and defined the legal status of non-Muslim schools. Under Article 129 of the regulation, Greek schools were classified as Mekteb-i Husûsî (Private Schools). Furthermore, it required Greek schools to issue a permit from the Ministry of Education or from local education councils before opening, stipulated that teachers must hold the necessary qualifications and introduced mechanisms for the inspection of textbooks to ensure that their contents did not conflict with public order, state security or general morality. [18][19]

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Greek community of the Ottoman Empire experienced a significant expansion of educational activity, influenced both by the independence of Greece in 1830 and by Western European Enlightenment ideas spread through Greek merchants. During this period, an extensive network of schools developed in Istanbul, Anatolia, and the Aegean islands. These institutions were organized into three main levels. *Primary education (Dimotika / Parthenagogeia)* consisted of schools established at the neighborhood and village levels. There, pupils received instruction in literacy, religious knowledge and basic mathematics. It is during

[16] Roderic H. Davison, Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1963, pp. 52-59.
[17] Düstur, 1st Series, Vol. 1, Istanbul: Matbaa-i Âmire, 1289, pp. 12-14 (1856 Reform Edict Text).
[18] Mahmud Cevad Ibnü's-Seyh Nafi, History of the Organization and Activities of the Ministry of Public Education, Matbaa-i Amire, Istanbul 1330, pp. 95-102.
[19] Selçuk Akşin Somel, The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire (1839-1903), Brill, Leiden 2001, pp. 215-224.

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this period that Girls' schools (Parthenagogeia) became an important force in the modernization of the Greek community. *Secondary Education (Astiko-Scholeia / Gymnasia)*: These schools were established in urban centers with the financial support from wealthy merchants and provided advanced instruction in subjects such as Classical Greek, French, philosophy, logic and history. In Istanbul, prominent institutions such as the Zografyon, Zapyeon and Ioakeimion became important centers of intellectual life. *Vocational and Religious Higher Education*: Established in 1844 through the joint efforts of the Patriarchate and private foundations, the Halki Seminary (Heybeliada Ruhban Okulu) became a major center for theological education and leadership in the Eastern Orthodox world. It provided instruction in Christian theology, Eastern languages and literature. [20]

The reign of Abdülhamid II (1876–1909) marked the beginning of the security oriented Ottoman approach toward the Greek schools. The Greek state sought to strengthen its influence upon the Greek population within Ottoman territories in line with its expansionist policy, known as the Megali Idea (Great Idea). These efforts raised concerns that Greek schools could become centers of nationalist propaganda. In particular, the portrayal of Ottoman territories as belonging to the Greek historical heritage in history and geography lessons and the recruitment of teachers directly from Athens were viewed by the Ottoman authorities as potential threats to state security. In response, the Ottoman administration introduced stricter inspection and control measures. Greek schools were required to teach Turkish and Ottoman history and geography, with Muslim Turkish teachers appointed to deliver these specific subjects. Numerous Greek schools that failed to comply with the regulations or operated without official permits were closed. Restrictions were also imposed on the employment of teachers who had graduated from the University of Athens or held Greek citizenship. Only Ottoman citizens whose diplomas had been approved by the Ministry of Education were permitted to teach.[21][22][23]

During the classical period of the Ottoman Empire, educational activities had largely remained under the control of the very communities. From the nineteenth century onwards these activities acquired a new legal and bureaucratic dimension as the empire underwent a process of modernization, centralization and administrative institutionalization. Among the non-Muslim subjects, the Greek Orthodox community was particularly well positioned to benefit from the educational opportunities and legal autonomy available to these communities due to its demographic strength and socio-economic and cultural

[20]Dimitrios Stamatopoulos, "Reforming the Patriarchate: The 1860 General Regulations", Ottoman Reform and the Greek Community, Isis Press, Istanbul 2006, pp. 135-142.

[21]Bayram Kodaman, Abdülhamid Era Education System, Turkish Historical Society Publications, Ankara 1991, pp. 120-128; Sophia Vouri, Ekpaideusi kai Ethnikismos sta Valkania: I Periptosi tis Makedonias (1870-1912), Athens 1992, Paraskinio, pp. 88-95.

[22]Mehmet O. Alkan, "Education in the Process of Modernization from the Tanzimat to the Republic", Modernization and Westernization, Iletisim Publications, Istanbul 2000, pp. 145-155.

[23]Yahya Akyuz, History of Turkish Education (1000 B.C. - 2012 A.D.), Pegem Akademi, Ankara 2012, pp. 230-238.

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resources. As a result, the Greek community established an extensive and long-standing network of schools throughout the empire.

Examples of Church School Repair and Construction

The historical developments outlined above indicate that the rights of Greek subjects in the Ottoman Empire to establish and operate educational institutions changed significantly over time. Although mass education and public-oriented educational institutions were limited during the classical period of the Ottoman administrative structure, the Greek Patriarchate and its affiliated church network played a central role in organizing and managing education. The institutional change that was introduced with the Tanzimat Edict became even more pronounced with the 1856 Reform Edict, in terms of the legal and autonomous rights it provided. During this period, the Greek community, as other non-Muslim communities, gained the opportunity to establish secular or civil schools. Although most of the newly established educational institutions operated under independent legal entities and civil societies, the traditional structure that was centered on the role of the Patriarchate in education retained its influence. In some regions, schools continued to be established under the church hierarchy, financed by church resources and located within the courtyards of places of worship. During this period, increasing external diplomatic pressure contributed to a quantitative expansion of educational activities among non-Muslim communities. Alongside schools operating with administrative permits and official authorization, a considerable number of unauthorized educational institutions also began to function. Gradually, the Ottoman bureaucracy sought to bring these institutions under control through a licensing system. Despite these changes, the Greek Patriarchate and its affiliated religious institutions continued to maintain the educational role and influence they had inherited from the Classical Period, including institutions operating without a license. The table presented below illustrates this historical and institutional continuity through concrete data. [24]

In the context of the legal and administrative procedures introduced by the Ottoman Empire for non-Muslim educational institutions after the Reform Edict, Table 1 presents a breakdown of schools established within church premises and supported by church funds. The data show that the Greek schools constructed or repaired were often located in church gardens, on church foundation plots or on episcopal lands. This indicates that the Greek Orthodox Church that served as the community's religious and social leader since the Classical Period continued to play a central role in the establishment, maintenance, and hierarchical supervision of schools during the modernization processes of the 19th century.

[24]Muhammed Ceyhan, Acquisition of Property and Foundations by Non-Muslims in the Ottoman State (18th Century), Ankara University Institute of Social Sciences, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Ankara 2016.

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On the other hand, the fact that all procedures were carried out through a Sultanic Firman and that even buildings constructed without a permit were subject to administrative licensing, reflects the Ottoman central bureaucracy's efforts to keep educational activities within state control and legitimacy. These construction activities were concentrated mainly in the provinces of Edirne, Manastır, Yanya, Selanik and the Aegean Islands. They document the educational and socio-cultural activity of the Greek community within the Ottoman administrative borders, with different types of educational institutions, including primary schools, high schools, and girls' schools.

To illustrate more clearly the procedures for obtaining permission to repair or construct the schools listed in the following table, we present below the firman record concerning the school built in the garden of St. Nicholas Church in Dedeağaç.

> *"To the Governor of Edirne, Reşid Paşa, who is among the governors of Rumelia and the holder of the third-rank Mecidi Order and the fourth-rank Osmani Order -may his honor be continuous- and to the Mutasarrıf of Dedeağaç Sanjak, Hasan Refet Bey, who is among the distinguished people of the Ottoman State with high honor and the holder of the second-rank Osmani Order -may his high rank be continuous- and to the Naib of Dedeağaç from the mudarrises, Mevlana Faik Efendi -may Allah increase his knowledge- and to the person who is a member of the council -may his reputation and honor increase-, it is my order:*
>
> *The two schools located within the garden of the church in Dedeağaç Town, one reserved for boys and the other for girls, are not sufficient to accommodate the children currently present. Regarding the petition from the Greek Patriarchate for the addition of a new floor to the boys' school and the allocation of this school to girls, the conversion of the girls' school to be used as a primary (elementary) school from now on, and the granting of a permit for the construction of a new school building reserved for boys, it has been referred to the Council of State. As a result of the examinations, according to what is understood from the content of the petition: it is requested to expand the schools in the church garden because they are narrow. In this framework, it is requested to add a new floor 20 meters long, 10 meters wide, and 11 meters high to the school reserved for boys, to convert the ward reserved for girls into a primary school, and to construct a new 2-story school building made of stone-brick-concrete, 25 meters long, 15 meters wide, and 13 meters high, reserved for boys, within the mentioned garden. It has been stated that the 100,000 kurush required to be spent for the expansion and reconstruction of these buildings will be provided by a person from the Greek Community and will be paid from the money kept in the Ottoman Bank. There are 2,310 people belonging to the Greek Community in 728 households in Dedeağaç Town, other than other nations, and it is understood that there is no obstacle in the addition and construction of the mentioned schools. It has been stated that after the completion of the construction, in order for the schools to be opened, the provisions of the previous decisions existing regarding Istanbul and the Greek Patriarchate attached to it, along with the Ministry of National Education Regulation, must be followed. A mazbata (official report) has been given by the Civil Service Department of the Council of State for the fulfillment of the supreme order (the Sultan's order) required regarding the additions and new constructions to be made*

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to the named schools. In accordance with the permission given by the supreme sultanate authority regarding how the work will be done, this supreme order has been given by the Imperial Council, which includes the construction permit.

You, who were the governor, mutasarrıf, naib, and other administrators. On the condition that the widths of the mentioned schools do not exceed the amounts declared above and that the construction costs are covered in the manner written above, there is no obstacle to the construction of the schools; it is ordered that no akçe or dirham be taken from anyone on this occasion, that no one be disturbed in other ways, and that care be taken not to allow any situation contrary to the Sultan's order and approval to arise. 8 September 1908". [25]

This firman, issued on the 8th of September 1908, provides a detailed account of how non-Muslim communities in the late Ottoman Empire managed their educational activities and construction projects under state supervision. Issued in response to the educational needs of the Greek community of 2,310 members in Dedeağaç, the document shows how the location of the school within the church garden reflected the close relationship between religious and educational spaces. It also illustrates the bureaucratic procedures involved in obtaining permission, from the Patriarchate to the examination by the Council of State (Şura-yı Devlet) and the Sultan's final order.

The precise dimensions specified in millimeters and the reference to the use of "stone-brick-concrete" in the construction of the new two-storey building reflect the detailed regulation of construction and the use of modern building materials at the beginning of the 20th century. The fact that the project was financed by a philanthropist belonging to the Greek community rather than through the state budget, with the funds transferred through the Ottoman Bank, sheds light on the financial arrangements of the period. Finally, the requirement to comply with the Ministry of Education Regulation when opening the buildings demonstrates the state's continued supervision of community schools. Finally, the prohibition of bribery and arbitrary tax collection in the last section reflects the Ottoman understanding of justice and its stated concern with protecting the rights of the community.

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[25] Republic of Turkey Presidency State Archives, Ottoman Archives (BOA), A.DVNS.KLS.d. (Church Registers of the Imperial Council's Non-Muslims Bureau), no: 5.

Table 1. *Examples of Schools Constructed or Repaired in Greek Church Gardens and Courtyards in Different Regions After the Reform Edict*

Row No	Document Type	Date	Name of the Church Whose Garden Had a School Newly Constructed or Repaired	Name of the Settlement
1	Firman	1864	School building constructed in the church garden [School and church name not specified in the document]	Cezair-i Bahr-ı Sefid Province Midilli Island Molova District Vatusa Village[26]
2	Firman	1870	Primary school newly constructed on the plot of the church in the village	Edirne Province Malkara District Yaplagün Village[27]
3	Firman	1873	School constructed in the church garden [School and church name not specified in the document]	Manastır Province Görice District[28]
4	Firman	1884	For the repair and reconstruction of the primary school and priest's room [School and church name not specified in the document]	Edirne Province Havsa District Village name not specified[29]
5	Firman	1885	Construction of a high school building on the plot belonging to the St. George Church Foundation	Edirne Province Gelibolu District Village name not specified[30]
6	Firman	1885	Repair and reconstruction of the high school building in the garden of Christ Church	Edirne Province Edirne Central District Village name not specified[31]
7	Firman	1887	Construction of a school on the plot of St. George Church	Edirne Province Gümülcine District Village name not specified[32]
8	Firman	1887	Girls' school constructed in the church garden [School and church name not specified in the document]	Edirne Province Kırk Kilise District Bilaca Village[33]
9	Firman	1894	Repair of the old school in the church garden [School and church name not specified in the document]	Yanya Province Pogun District Vişţene Village[34]

[26]BOA, A.DVN.MHM.d. (Registers of the Imperial Council's Mühimme Bureau): no: 262.
[27] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 1.
[28] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 1.
[29] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 2.
[30] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 2.
[31] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 2.
[32] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 3.
[33] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 3.
[34] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 3.

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10	Firman	1895	Construction of a new school building in the courtyard of St. Constantine Church	Edirne Province Edirne Central District Village name not specified[35]
11	Firman	1896	School constructed in the church garden [School and church name not specified in the document]	Edirne Province Dimetoka District Kuleliburgaz Village[36]
12	Firman	1901	School constructed in the church garden [School and church name not specified in the document]	Edirne Province Mürefte District Ganos Village[37]
13	Firman	1902	Construction of a new school building in the bishopric garden [School and church name not specified in the document]	Edirne Province Mürefte District Village name not specified[38]
14	Firman	1902	Construction of a school in the garden of St. Panaya Church [Reconstruction of an old school located elsewhere in the garden of St. Panaya Church]	Yanya Province Ergiri Sanjak İstokopol Village[39]
15	Firman	1902	Repair of the school in the garden of St. George Church	Cezair-i Bahr-ı Sefid Province Misi (Meis) Island[40]
16	Firman	1903	Repair and reconstruction of the school constructed in the church garden [School and church name not specified in the document]	Edirne Province Tekfurdağı Kaza Çiftlikönü Village[41]
17	Firman	1903	Repair of the school in the garden of St. Constantine Church	Cezair-i Bahr-ı Sefid Province Misi (Meis) Island[42]
18	Firman	1903	Construction of a new school building in the garden of the Virgin Mary Church	Selanik Province Nevrekob District İstarhite Village[43]
19	Firman	1904	Granting a permit to a school constructed without a permit in the church garden [School and church name not specified in the document]	Selanik Province Kesendire District Valta Village[44]
20	Firman	1907	Repair of the school located in the garden of St. George Church	Edirne Province Kırkkilise Kaza

[35] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 3.
[36] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 3.
[37] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 4.
[38] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 4.
[39] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 4.
[40] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 4.
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[42] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 4.
[43] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 4.
[44] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 4.

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				Pınarhisar Village[45]
21	Firman	1907	Repair of the old school building in the garden of the Metropolitan Church [School and church name not specified in the document]	Manastır Province Alasonya District Kiliseli Village[46]
22	Firman	1907	Construction of a new school building in the garden of St. Kyriaki Church	Manastir Province Serfice Town[47]
23	Firman	1908	Construction of a new school building in the church courtyard [School and church names not specified in the document]	Edirne Province Ortakoy District Ilıca Village[48]
24	Firman	1908	Repair and reconstruction of the school built in the church courtyard [School and church names not specified in the document]	Edirne Province Dedeagac District[49]
25	Firman	1908	Repair of the school located in the courtyard of the Aya Nikola Church	Edirne Province Gümülcine District Karaagac Village[50]
26	Firman	1909	Construction of a new school building in the Hristos Church courtyard	Province of the Archipelago (Cezayir-i Bahr-ı Sefid) Lemnos Island Varoz Village[51]
27	Firman	1909	Repair of the school in the Panaya Church courtyard	Yanya Province Cerakoviste Subdistrict Varbazis Farm[52]
28	Firman	1909	Construction of a new school building in the church courtyard [School and church names not specified in the document]	Manastir Province Kozana District Velişne Village[53]
29	Firman	1912	Repair and reconstruction of the school built in the church courtyard [School and church names not specified in the document]	Province of the Archipelago (Cezayir-i Bahr-ı Sefid) Lemnos Sanjak Imbros Island Eşkinid Village[54]

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[45] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 4.
[46] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 4.
[47] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 4.
[48] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 4.
[49] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 5.
[50] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 5.
[51] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 5.
[52] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 5.
[53] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 5.
[54] BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 6.

30	Firman	1912	Repair and reconstruction of the school built in the church courtyard [School and church names not specified in the document]	Edirne Province Ahtabolu District Atik Vasilikoz Village[55]
31	Firman	1912	Construction of a new school in the church courtyard [School and church names not specified in the document]	Kosovo Province Gostivar District Viranciste Village[56]

Firstly, the table may be examined in terms of the spatial and institutional relationship between schools and churches. In all 31 examples listed, school buildings were constructed or repaired on church gardens, church courtyards, church foundation plots or episcopal lands (for example, Row No: 5, 10, 13, 14). These examples show that the close physical and administrative relationship between education and the church continued within the Greek community. The location of school buildings on land owned or managed by the church or its foundations also provides concrete evidence of the administrative, financial and legal supervisory role exercised by the Greek Orthodox Church and the Patriarchate over Greek schools.

The table also sheds light on the Ottoman administrative system and its mechanisms of bureaucratic control, during the 19th century efforts of centralization and institutionalization. The fact that all the entries are based on archival records of the "Firman" type (Church Registers of the Imperial Council) indicates that the construction of non-Muslim schools was subject to a central authorization procedure. The record concerning a school that was built without a permit and subsequently received official authorization (Row No: 19) further demonstrates that the Ottoman bureaucracy monitored educational construction in the provinces and sought to bring such activities within the control of administrative and legal procedures.

In terms of geographical distribution, the examples are concentrated primarily in the Balkans and the Aegean Islands. At the provincial (vilayet) level, construction and repair permits are found predominantly in the Edirne Vilayet (Malkara, Gelibolu, Havsa, Gümülcine, Kırk Kilise, Dimetoka, Mürefte, Tekfurdağı, Ortaköy, Dedeağaç, Ahtabolu), the Cezair-i Bahr-ı Sefid Vilayet (islands of Midilli, Meis, Limni, İmroz), and the Manastır, Selanik, Yanya, and Kosova vilayets. This geographical distribution illustrates the extent of the reconstruction of educational infrastructure following the Reform Edict (Islahat Fermanı), particularly in the Balkan regions and the Aegean Islands, where the Rum (Greek Orthodox) population was concentrated.

The table also reveals diversity in educational levels and institutional types, including primary schools, high schools, and girls' schools. The documents show that educational activities were not limited to basic village schools but also included high school level institutions (Row No: 5, 6) and girls' schools (Row No: 8). This variety points to the development of the Greek community's

[55]BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 6.
[56]BOA, *A.DVNS.KLS.d.* no: 6.

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educational institutions and organizational capacity during the last quarter of the 19th century.

Finally, the chronological distribution of the examples indicates an increase in the number of documents after 1864, particularly from the mid 1880s to 1912. This development suggests that the expansion of educational activities during the reign of Abdülhamid II was accompanied by the continued operation of bureaucratic procedures for the authorization of school construction involving non-Muslim subjects.

Conclusion

The Ottoman Empire's ability to maintain ethnic, religious and cultural diversity throughout its six centuries of rule was based on the legal order it established and its flexible application. The Ottoman Empire's approach to governance was rooted upon the principle of justice and reflected in the establishment of the office of the qadi during the reign of Sultan Osman. It developed further following the conquest of Istanbul, when Fatih Sultan Mehmed granted berats and privileges to the Greek Orthodox Church and the Patriarchate, laying the foundations for the administrative and legal framework later associated with the "Millet System".

During the classical period, the Greek community enjoyed considerable autonomy in matters of internal community education, worship and private law within the context of its dhimmi status. From the 19th century onwards, the modernization and centralization policies of the Ottoman state brought changes to this established legal and administrative framework.

The analysis of 31 archival documents dating from 1864 to 1912, drawn from the Church Registers of the Imperial Council, shows that the Greek schools constructed, repaired or reopened during this period were located on church gardens, church courtyards, church foundation plots or episcopal lands. This demonstrates that, although educational activities could be organized through secular and independent institutions, they continued to rely on the physical and administrative structures of the church. The location of schools on church property also indicates that the Greek Orthodox Church retained an important role in their administration and institutional organization throughout the 19th-century modernization process.

The principle of equality before the law introduced by the 1839 Tanzimat Edict and the guarantees provided by the 1856 Reform Edict changed the legal framework governing the establishment of schools by non-Muslim communities. The 1869 Regulation on Public Education further defined the status of these institutions as "Mekteb-i Husûsî" (Private School), introducing requirements concerning permits, teacher qualifications and curriculum supervision. The construction and repair of Greek schools in the provinces through Sultanic Firmans demonstrate the Ottoman central bureaucracy's efforts to regulate educational activities through state control and legal authorization. The fact that schools constructed without a permit could subsequently undergo administrative

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review and receive authorization through a firman further illustrates the relationship between community educational needs and state supervision. Moreover, the documents include not only primary schools but also high school level institutions and girls' schools, reflecting the range of educational institutions established by the Greek community during the last quarter of the 19th century.

The chronological distribution of the archival documents reveals a significant increase in the number of firmans from the mid 1880s to 1912. During the reign of Abdülhamid II, measures such as making Turkish, Ottoman History, and Geography compulsory subjects and supervising teachers arriving from Athens were introduced in response to Greece's expansionist policies. At the same time, the construction and authorization of Greek schools continued to proceed through established bureaucratic procedures.

Despite the political and social changes of the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire continued to recognize the educational and religious activities of its non-Muslim subjects while regulating them through centralized administrative procedures. In the case of the Greek community, the church's property and foundation structures remained closely connected to the organization of education, while the state maintained control through its permit system. This relationship illustrates the coexistence of established communal institutions and increasingly centralized administrative practices in the regulation of non-Muslim education during the late Ottoman period.

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