SUBBTO 68, no. 1 (2023): 165-191
DOI:10.24193/subbto.2023.1.07

PUBLIC RECONVERSIONS TO ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE, 1730–1820

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ABSTRACT. The christianization of Muslims turned upside down the one-way logic of religious conversion under Ottoman rule, which dictated that a non-Muslim (Christian or Jew) could become a Muslim, but a Muslim could not abandon their faith. The conversion of Muslims to Orthodox Christianity constituted thus an act of defiance of Ottoman political order, and the converts were exposed to the charge of apostasy that could cost them their lives. Given the above, it is not surprising that abandoning Islam for Christianity was a marginal phenomenon; it occurred either outside Ottoman territory or after losing an Ottoman region to a Christian state. However, the period between 1730 and 1820 saw the emergence of a particular form of Christianization that was a double conversion; namely, the public renouncement of the Muslim faith by Christian converts to Islam who proclaimed their return to Christianity wishing to wash out the sin of apostasy with an atoning death. Several of them were executed and were hailed by Greek-Orthodox subjects of the sultan as martyrs for the faith. In this study I analyze the dynamics of double conversion from three points of view: that of the makers, that is, of those who promoted reconversion to Christianity at the price of death, provided it with a theoretical framing, and formed networks of training and support for the double converts; that of the actors, namely, of the double converts themselves, of their social backgrounds, and of the reasons behind their fatal decisions; and that of the public, of the various social groups and individuals who witnessed this liminal form of conversion, assessed it and responded to it. The interpretation endeavours to shed light on a radical aspect of Greek-Orthodox confessionalization at a time of intense sociocultural conflict and political upheaval, and to highlight the complexity of responses to, and instantiations of, modernity.

Keywords: Religious conversion, Martyrdom, Counter-Enlightenment, Confessionalization, Socio-cultural conflict, Identity formation.

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The predominant form of religious conversion in the Ottoman Empire was the conversion of Christians and Jews to Islam. The opposite, namely the Christianization of Muslims, usually took place outside the Ottoman territory, in Venice, Malta and other European countries. Conversion of Muslims to Christianity in the Ottoman Empire is rare. Abandoning Islam for another faith was an act of apostasy, for which Ḥanafi Islamic law prescribed the death penalty, unless the apostate repented and re-embraced Islam.[1] The sporadic cases of Christianization on record are, in fact, instances of re-Christianization. They concern Christian converts to Islam who abandoned their adopted faith and returned to their previous one, often paying the price of death for their apostasy. The latter were hailed as martyrs for the faith by at least some of their Christian coreligionists and constituted a substantial part of the so-called neo-martyrs of the Ottoman period.[2]

Until the mid-seventeenth century, most of these occasions relate to Muslim proselytes who were charged with apostasy by former friends, neighbors, and colleagues, and, when faced with the dilemma between adherence to Islam or execution, chose to die as Christians than live as Muslims. Others fall in the category of "contested conversions".[3] A *cause célèbre* in seventeenth-century-Istanbul concerns Nikolaos, a young Christian grocer who pronounced the *şahada*, the Islamic confession of faith, when a Muslim neighbor, who was also his teacher in Ottoman Turkish, presented it to him as a reading exercise. Nikolaos was brought to the kadi, accused of having formally embraced Islam but not acknowledging his new identity, refused to accept Islam and was executed in 1672.[4]

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1 Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 120-159. For Ottoman views and regulations on apostasy in the framework of Sunni confessionalization see Guy Burak, "Faith, Law and Empire in the Ottoman 'Age of Confessionalization' (Fifteenth-Seventeenth Centuries): The Case of 'Renewal of Faith'," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 28 (2013): 1–23; Nabil Al-Tikriti, "*Kalam* in the Service of State: Apostasy and the Defining of Ottoman Islamic Identity," in *Legitimizing the Order: The Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, ed. Hakan Karateke and Maurus Reinkowski (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 131–149.

2 Philippos Iliou, "Pothos martyriou. Apo tes vevaiotetes sten amhpisvetese tou M. Gedeon. Symvole sten historia ton neomartyron," *Historica* 12 (1995): 267-271; Ioannis Zelepos, *Orthodoxe Eiferer im osmanischen Südosteuropa: Die Kollyvadenbewegung (1750-1820) und ihr Beitrag zu den Auseinandersetzungen um Tradition, Aufklärung und Identität* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 295-296.

3 Tijana Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

4 M. de la Croix, *La Turquie chrétienne* (Paris: P. Hérissant, 1695), 327-379; Auguste Carayon, ed., *Relations inédites des missions de la Compagnie de Jésus à Constantinople et dans le Levant au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Ch. Douniol, 1864), 238-239; Vasileios Doukoures, "Mia anekdote dytike pege gia to martyrio toy Nikolaou tou Pantopole," *Gregorios ho Palamas* 72 (1989): 767-775;

But such occasions are rare. Everyday co-existence and interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims carried with it the preconditions for eventual communal and personal strife, yet the latter reached only seldom such dramatic peaks as an accusation of apostasy, let alone a condemnation to death. It must be noted here that the execution of the young grocer was due to a rigorist interpretation of the sharia, and that it took place in the apogee of the fundamentalist *kadızadeli* movement that had prevailed for some time in the Ottoman capital.[5] The seventeenth century witnessed a "bottom-up" wave of Sunni confessionalization that led to an unprecedented disciplinary project aiming at cancelling "evil innovations" and restoring pure Muslim morals. As the story of the young grocer shows, the *kadızadeli*s' zeal had repercussions not only for the Muslims, but also for Christians and Jews. The conversion of non-Muslims, seen as the victory of a purified Islam over fallacy, was propagated with zeal and properly ritualized.

But this confessional awareness was not restricted to the Muslims. It is precisely at the time of the *kadızadeli* movement that we can identify not only the rise of the cult of new martyrs among Christian urban communities, but also the emergence of an assertive, polemical form of re-Christianization: the unprovoked public denouncement of Islam by former converts who desired for themselves a martyr's crown.[6] This paper deals with the social and discursive aspects of this double conversion, which peaked in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in the southern Balkans. I will try to interpret the re-Christianization of Muslims as an indicator and at the same time as an agent of socio-cultural crisis and of the delegitimization of Ottoman rule that preceded the Greek revolution of 1821.

Soterios Balatsoukas, ed., *To neomartyrologio tou Ioannou Karyophylle* (Thessaloniki: Higher Ecclesiastical School of Thessaloniki, 2003), 39-46; Symeon Paschalides, *He autographe neomartyrike sylloge tou monachou Kaisariou Daponte (1713–1784)* (Thessaloniki: Mygdonia, 2012), 207-212; Demetrios Gones and Patapios Kausokalyvites, eds, *Papa-Iona Kausokalyvitou († 1765) neomartyrike sylloge (Eisagoge – Kritike ekdose tou keimenou)* (Thessaloniki: Stamoulis, 2020), 277-301.

5 Eleni Gara and Yorgos Tzedopoulos, *Christianoi kai mousoulmanoi sten Othomaniki Autokratoria: Thesmiko plaisio kai koinonikes dynamikes* (Athens: HEAL-Link, 2015), 215-218, http://hdl.handle.net/11419/2882. On the *kadızadeli*s see Madeline Zilfi, *Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulema in the Postclassical Age (1600-1800)* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988); Marc David Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Marinos Sariyannis, "The Kadizadeli Movement as a Social and Political Phenomenon: The Rise of a 'Mercantile Ethic'?", in *Political Initiatives from the Bottom-Up in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Antonis Anastasopoulos (Rethymno: Crete University Press 2012), 263-289.

6 Yorgos Tzedopoulos, "Orthodox Martyrdom and Confessionalization in the Ottoman Empire, Late Fifteenth – Mid-Seventeenth Centuries," in *Entangled Confessionalizations? Dialogic Perspectives on the Politics of Piety and Community- Building in the Ottoman Empire, 15th-18th Centuries*, ed. Tijana Krstić and Derin Terzioğlu (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2022), 365-367.

But let us take things from the beginning. Being a performance, the voluntary martyrdom of re-Christianization based on the interaction of three distinct categories of agents: makers, actors, and publics. The makers, those who provided and explained the script for the final – and fatal – conversion, were mainly zealot Athonite monks. As a rule, they did not operate within the organizational framework of the Greek-Orthodox Church, which had become in fact a part of the Ottoman state machinery,[7] but followed a rigorist agenda of their own.

Makers

The ascetic monk Akakios of the *skete* of Kausokalyvia on Mount Athos (d. 1730),[8] a man who was later regarded as the charismatic pioneer of voluntary martyrdom, trained two Islamized Christians for martyrdom in the first decades of the eighteenth century.[9] One of them was an Albanian from Berat (or Vithkuq, according to other sources); on Mount Athos he converted again to Christianity and adopted the monastic name Nikodemos. After being properly prepared for neo-martyrdom, he came back to his place of origin, proclaimed his return to Christianity and was executed as an apostate. His relics were venerated by local Christians.[10]

The re-Christianization of Nikodemos was exploited by the monk and preacher Nektarios Terpos from Voskopojë (Moschopolis) in his battle against Islamization, which was reaching a peak in Albania.[11] Terpos, who was active in

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7 Paraskevas Konortas, *Othomanikes theoreseis gia to Oikoumeniko Patriarcheio, 17os – arches 20ou aiona* (Athens: Alexandreia, 1998); Tom Papademetriou, *Render unto the Sultan: Power, Authority, and the Greek Orthodox Church in the Early Ottoman Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Gara and Tzedopoulos, *Christianoi kai mousoulmanoi*, 90-119.

8 Typically, a skete is a dependency of one of Mount Athos' monasteries, comprising a small number of monks and cottages clustered around its own church. Dimitri Conomos, "Mount Athos," in *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, vol. 1, ed. John Anthony McGuckin (Oxford: Wiley and Blackwell, 2011), 403-404.

9 The *vita* of Akakios was composed by his disciple Ionas. Gones and Patapios, *Papa-Iona Kausokalyvitou sylloge*, 350-380.

10 Gones and Patapios, *Papa-Iona Kausokalyvitou sylloge*, 367-370. For other versions of Nikodemos' martyrdom and questions about the date of his execution see pages 94-95.

11 Gara and Tzedopoulos, *Christianoi kai mousoulmanoi*, 184-187; Konstantinos Giakoumis, "Nektarios Terpos and the iconographic programme of Ardenica Monastery," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 41:1 (2017): 83-85; Antonina Zhelyazkova, "Islamization in the Balkans as a Historiographical Problem: The South-East European Perspective," *The Ottomans and the Balkans: A Discussion of Historiography*, ed. Fikret Adanır and Suraiya Faroqhi (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 241-245.

a multilingual area where Greek was used as a language of written communication, included an account of Nikodemos' martyrdom in his work *Pistis* (Faith) which was written in Greek and published in Venice in 1732. His aim was, as he wrote, to dissuade those who were tempted to convert to Islam and to make them steadfast in the faith of Christ. The re-Christianization of Nikodemos was meant to prove the superiority of Christianity, since it could still produce saints like those of Antiquity, and to underline that, for the proselytes to Islam who repented, the only way to salvation passed through the second conversion of martyrdom.[12]

In his work, Terpos dismissed decisively the tacit toleration of syncretistic "crypto-Christian" practices in a clement spirit of ecclesiastical economy. Instead, he reminded his readers of Christ's pledge in the Gospel, and preached damnation for all who denied Christ, independently of their motives.[13] Interestingly enough, his attack against the multiple identities of Christianizing Muslims echoed, and partly were parallel to, the renewed provisions of the Catholic Church against crypto-Catholicism in the Albanian regions.[14] Without a doubt, the hardening of the position against crypto-Christianity was due to the rise of Islamization in the western Balkans. Moreover, we can assume that Terpos' proximity to the Catholic world contributed to his adopting a strict stance on apostasy (and eventual reconversion) that conformed more to post-Tridentine confessional policies than to the lenient tradition of the economy as practiced by the Orthodox Church under Ottoman rule.[15]

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12 Konstantinos Garitsis, ed., *Ho Nektarios Terpos kai to ergo tou. Eisagoge – kritike ekdose tou ergou tou* Pistis (Santorini: Thesvites, 2002), 265-267. With its emphasis on "salvation and glorification through suffering and passion", the 1744 iconographic programme of the *katholikon* at the monastery of Ardenica in south Albania, of whom Terpos had been the abbot, seems to be inspired by the preacher's fiery teachings – if not directly dictated by him. Giakoumis, "Nektarios Terpos."

13 Garitsis, *Nektarios Terpos*, 233, 319, 327, 328; see also Giakoumis, "Nektarios Terpos," 99-100. Terpos, like the propagators of martyrdom who would follow him, echoed Christ's words from Mt. 10:33: "But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven."

14 Noel Malcolm, *Rebels, Believers, Survivors: Studies in the History of the Albanians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 63-64; Peter Bartl, *Kryptochristentum und Formen des religiösen Synkretismus in Albanien* (Munich: Trofenik, 1967), 118ff; Georg Stadtmüller, "Das albanische Nazionalkonzil vom Jahre 1703," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 22 (1956): 68-91, on pp. 73-74.

15 On the notion of economy (*oikonomia*) as practiced by the Orthodox Church under Ottoman rule see Tzedopoulos, "Orthodox Martyrdom and Confessionalization," 341-343; Socrate Petmézas, "L'organization ecclésiastique sous les Ottomans," in *Conseils et mémoires de Synadinos, prêtre de Serrès en Macédoine (XVIII siècle)*, ed. Paolo Odorico (Paris: Association "Pierre Belon", 1996), 532-549; Dimitris Apostolopoulos, "Les mécanismes d'une conquête: adaptations politiques et statut économique des conquis dans le cadre de l'Empire ottoman," in *Économies méditerranéennes. Équilibres et intercommunications, XIIIe-XIXe siècles*, vol. 3 (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation, 1986), 191-204.

A second milestone in the making of voluntary martyrdom is the work of the monk Ionas of Kausokalyvia (d. 1765), a disciple of Akakios. Unlike Akakios, Ionas did not train any prospective martyrs. He collected and translated in the Greek vernacular *vitae* of previous martyrs, originally written in an archaic Greek language, and composed *vitae* of new martyrs like Nikodemos.[16] The activity of Ionas helped establish the script of re-Christianization *via* martyrdom, as evident in the *vita* of Konstantinos (d. 1742), whose story is also documented in Italian and Russian sources. Konstantinos, the pastor of the Russian *chargé d'affaires* Vishnyakov in Istanbul, converted to Islam after a row with the diplomat. Some days later he repented, declared his return to Christianity and was executed in front of a large public in the Ottoman capital.[17] It seems that his martyrdom triggered confessional zeal among the Orthodox: according to our sources, his reconversion inspired the priest-monk Anastasios to violently rebuke an Islamized Christian who had become a preacher at the Yeni Cami of Istanbul, to revile Islam and to invite the Muslims to convert to Christianity to save their souls. After he rejected to embrace Islam to save his life, Anastasios was martyred in his turn as an instigator of apostasy and reviler of the dominant religion. Ionas did not fail to compose his *vita* and add it to his collection.[18]

The activity of Ionas provides a link between martyrdom and socio-cultural conflict. He was an ardent supporter of *anabaptism*,[19] a rigorist movement that had swept the Greek-Orthodox craftsmen of Istanbul in the mid-18th century and, for a brief time, had prevailed in the Patriarchate, too. In all probability, the movement was fed not only by commercial and confessional competition between Orthodox and Catholics, but also to intra-Orthodox conflicts: the power struggles inside the Patriarchate, the reaction against the emergence of a secular culture among the upper social strata of the Orthodox community in the Ottoman capital, and the guildsmen's claim to assume the leadership of the community at the expense of Phanariot archons.[20] However, the orbit of the

16 On Ionas and his extensive martyrology see Gones and Patapios, *Papa-Iona Kausokalyvitou sylloge*.

17 Gones and Patapios, *Papa-Iona Kausokalyvitou sylloge*, 331-332. According to Ionas, the martyr's name was Konstantios and his execution took place in 1743. The correct name and time of Konstantinos' death have been established with the help of Russian and Italian sources. See the relevant bibliography in Gones and Patapios, *Papa-Iona Kausokalyvitou sylloge*, 84-87.

18 Gones and Patapios, *Papa-Iona Kausokalyvitou sylloge*, 332-334. For other sources on Anastasios' martyrdom see pages 87-88.

19 Gones and Patapios, *Papa-Iona Kausokalyvitou sylloge*, 51-58.

20 Euangelos Skouvaras, "Steleteutika keimena tou 18ou aionos (kata ton anavaptiston)," *Byzantinisch-Neugriechische Jahrbücher* 20 (1970): 50-228, on pp. 52-54; Athanasios Komnenos Hypselantes, *Ta meta ten Alosin (1453-1789)* (Istanbul: I. A. Vretos, 1870), 370; Theodore Papadopoullos, *Studies and Documents Relating to the History of the Greek Church and People under Turkish*

movement reached a wider audience mainly through its connection to a zealot preacher-monk of Constantinople who said to perform miracles and to have the gift of prophecy.[21] This is why the issue of *anabaptism* unleashed a fierce social, cultural and political struggle in the Ottoman capital, which has been documented in various libels (mostly in verse) against the movements' leaders, one of whom was Ionas.[22]

The *anabaptists* required that the Catholics and Gregorian Armenians who embraced Orthodoxy be re-baptized; their confessional zeal, together with the glorification of Islamized Christians who returned to Christianity *via* martyrdom, reveal strict understandings of conversion and reconversion to Orthodox Christianity. It is this institutionalization of identity, focused on ritualized speech acts and performances, that places the anabaptist project squarely in the framework of European confessionalization, much like the *kadızadeli* movement of the previous century. The spread of both rigorist movements, the Muslim and the Orthodox, among the craftsmen and merchants in the Ottoman capital puts into relief common patterns of "confessionalization from below",[23] as well as comparable processes of class formation and identity-building.

The decisive step in the making of voluntary martyrdom was taken in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century by a group of Greek-Orthodox theologians and monks who had played a leading role in the fundamentalist movement of the *kollyvades* on Mount Athos.[24] They published extensive compilations of neo-martyrs' *vitae* in the vernacular; they formulated a theory of voluntary martyrdom in print, urging Christian converts to Islam to re-convert and pay the price of double apostasy with a sanctifying death; they created networks for the recruitment and training of potential martyrs; they

Domination (Aldershot: Variorum, 1990²), 276; Dimitris Apostolopoulos, "Koinonikes dienexeis kai Diaphotismos sta mesa tou 18ou aiona: He prote amphisvitese tes kyriarchias ton Phanarioton," in idem, *Gia tous Phanariotes: Dokimes ermeneias kai mikra analytika* (Athens: Greek National Research Foundation, 2003), 31-44; Elif Bayraktar Tellan, "The Patriarchate of Constantinople and the 'Reform of the Synod' in the 18th Century Ottoman Context," *Chronos* 39 (2019): 7-22.

21 Kaisarios Dapontes, "Historikos katalogos," in *Mesaionike vivliotheke*, vol. 3, ed. Konstantinos Sathas (Venice: Chronos, 1872), 129.

22 Skouvaras, "Steleteutika keimena," 94-227; Papadopoullos, *Studies and Documents*, 265-392; Joseph Vivilakis, *Auxentianos Metanoemenos* [1752] (Athens: Academy of Athens, 2010).

23 Compare with Tzedopoulos, "Orthodox Martyrdom and Confessionalization," 365-366.

24 On the *kollyvades* see the extensive work by Ioannis Zelepos, *Orthodoxe Eiferer*. See also Socrates Petmezas, "On the formation of an ideological faction in the Greek Orthodox Church in the second half of the eighteenth century: The Kollyvades," *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique moderne et contemporain* 2 (2020), http://journals.openedition.org/bchmc/416. On the connection between the *kollyvades* and re-Christianization *via* voluntary martyrdom see particularly Zelepos, *Orthodoxe Eiferer*, 293-310.

used martyrdom and its cult as a weapon in the struggle against secularization and Enlightenment; and they deployed confessional death as a marker of identity in the formation of zealot Greek-Orthodox community.[25]

They did not mince their words. "You must go to the place where you denied Christ, renounce the religion you have embraced, confess the faith of Christ, and by this confession shed your blood and die," wrote the monk Nikodemos Agioreites in his address to converts to Islam, contained in the prologue of *Neon martyrologion* (New martyrology, 1799), the seminal work on Orthodox neo-martyrdom under Ottoman rule.[26] And he explained: "Sooner or later, you will die. Turn the necessity into diligence and use death to gain eternal life […]. This, dear brethren, is a profitable business; […] you sell blood, you buy heaven."[27]

Symbolic capital, according to Pierre Bourdieu, is the only valid form of accumulation when economic capital is not recognized.[28] Indeed, economic profit is banished in Nikodemos' book *Chrestoetheia* (Christian Morality, 1803). There, Christian peasants and craftsmen (merchants are considered a priori sinful) are urged to refrain from any pursuit of wealth and to confine themselves to the bare subsistence of their family and to helping the poor.[29] The craftsmen and scholars who take pride in their wisdom and success, wrote Nikodemos, are committing a grave sin in putting human wisdom before that of God.[30] This was not only a recourse to traditional moral teachings; it was also a reaction to the rise of a prosperous mercantile class dealing with international trade and supporting secular education.[31] As such, it constituted an indirect but articulate attack against economic and cultural change promoted by the agents of mercantile capitalism and secularization.

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[25] See also Yorgos Tzedopoulos, "Rejoicement, Defiance and Contestation: Contextualizing Emotional Responses to Greek-Orthodox Voluntary Martyrdom in the Long 18th Century," in *Balkan Society in Turmoil: Studies in the History of Emotions in the "Long" 18th Century*, ed. Ivan Părvev [*Yearbook of the Society for 18th Century Studies on South-Eastern Europe* 4 (2021)], 21–41.

[26] Nikodemos Agioreites, *Neon martyrologion* (Venice: Nikolaos Glykys, 1799), 21.

[27] Nikodemos, *Neon martyrologion*, 25. See also the remarks by Iliou, "Pothos martyriou," 275-276.

[28] Pierre Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1980), 200-201.

[29] Nikodemos Agioreites, *Vivlion kaloumenon chrestoetheia ton christianon* (Venice: Nikolaos Glykys, 1803), 144. On the economic mentalities of the Greek-Orthodox see the seminal article of Spyros Asdrachas, "He oikonomia kai oi nootropies: He martyria tou Chronikou ton Serron, tou Nektariou Terpou kai tou Argyre Philippide," *Tetradia Ergasias* 7 (1984): 91-125.

[30] Nikodemos, *Vivlion kaloumenon chrestoetheia*, 145-148.

[31] Philippos Iliou, *Koinonikoi agones kai Diaphotismos: He periptose tes Smyrnes*, trans. Ioanna Petropoulou (Athens: EMNE-Mnemon, 1986); Paschalis Kitromilides, *Enlightenment and Revolution: The Making of Modern Greece* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 264-266.

Martyrdom was also contrived as a weapon against political change associated with European Enlightenment and the French Revolution. The scholarly monk Athanasios Parios, the leading figure of Greek counter-Enlightenment,[32] juxtaposed the "false freedom" of the French republicans with what he saw as genuine freedom, i.e. the choice of martyrdom over compliance.[33] Athanasios' argumentation was, in fact, complementary to the elaborate attack against political liberalism in the *Didaskalia patrike* (Paternal instruction) by the patriarch of Jerusalem Anthimos, a pamphlet that was printed in 1798 and became notorious for preaching loyalty to the Ottoman regime.[34] Furthermore, apart from juxtaposing the "atheist Europeans" to the self-assertive piety of the Greek-Orthodox martyrs,[35] Athanasios almost included in their ranks the French prelates and abbots who fell victim to the guillotine. The only thing that prevented this inclusion, he wrote, was that they were Catholic.[36] Despite his confessional strictness, Athanasios' statement considerably widened the canon of martyrdom beyond the limits set by the tradition and the cultural memory of the Orthodox Church. In this way, he turned martyrdom into the marker of a European-wide divide between *ancient régime* and revolution.

It is no wonder, then, that the makers of voluntary martyrdom did nowhere challenge Ottoman legitimacy. Athanasios himself was an ardent supporter of the Ottoman *status quo*, in which he saw the manifestation of God's will for the salvation of the Greek-Orthodox.[37] His ire was directed at the close connection between the Enlightenment and the formation of a new Greek national identity.[38] In the *vita* of the prelate and monk Makarios Notaras, the most prominent trainer of voluntary martyrs, Athanasios drew another clear juxtaposition between three interconnected pairs of opposites: "Greek race [*genos*]" *vs.* "Christian race", "new philosophers" *vs.* Orthodox monks, and secular instructions *vs.* preparation for martyrdom.[39]

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32 Kitromilides, *Enlightenment and Revolution*, 297-300.

33 Athanasios Parios, *Apologia christianike* (Leipzig: Naubert, 1805), 10, 19-33.

34 Anthimos Ierosolymon, *Didaskalia patrike* (Istanbul: Pogos Ioannes ex Armenion, 1798).

35 *Neon leimonarion* (Venice: Panos Theodosiou, 1819), part 2, 82 (the one-volume book is divided into two parts with separate page-numbering).

36 Parios, *Apologia*, 33.

37 Tzedopoulos, "Rejoicement, Defiance and Contestation," 32.

38 Paschalis Kitromilides, "'Imagined Communities' and the origins of the national question in the Balkans," *European History Quarterly* 19 (1989): 149-192; Stratos Myrogiannis*, The Emergence of a Greek Identity (1700-1821)* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012). See also Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021[2]).

39 *Neon chiakon leimonarion* (Athens: Nea hellenike eos, 1930), 200.

Re-Christianization via martyrdom opened new vistas of conflict. The theory of martyrdom, as expounded by Nikodemos Agioreites, based on a rigorist and selective interpretation of Christian canon law,[40] much like the interpretation of the sharia by the *kadızadeli*s one and a half century earlier. This posed a challenge to the Church. On the one hand, the glorification of apostasy from Islam could endanger the delicate position of the Church as an imperial institution; on the other, the cult of martyrs challenged the claim of the Church to exercise control over the religious practices of the faithful. According to Athanasios Parios, the veneration of the martyrs of double conversion as saints did not depend on their recognition as such by the Church but on the spontaneous worship of the faithful.[41] Even more blatant was Nikodemos' contempt of ecclesiastical conformism in favor of confessional zeal. In the *vita* of Polydoros (d. 1794, Kuşadası), he recounted that the would-be martyr rejected the offer of the authorities to let a priest talk with him (with the aim of bringing him to reason) saying that he knew his faith better than any priest and he did not need anyone to instruct him.[42] He had already been instructed by Makarios Notaras, his trainer in martyrdom.

The discursive elaboration of voluntary martyrdom went together with the formation of networks for the detection, recruitment, and training of potential martyrs. This was a complex operation requiring strict selection procedures, logistical infrastructure, financial management and reproductive activities. Starting from Makarios Notaras' charismatic leadership in preparation for martyrdom in the late eighteenth century,[43] the operation was developed further in the next decades until it reached the sophistication of a rationalized productive activity. At the *skete* of Timios Prodromos of Iveron Monastery on Mount Athos, where

[40] Yorgos Tzedopoulos, "Orthodoxoi neomartyres sten Othomaniki Autokratoria: He synkrotese tes praktikes kai tes hermeneias tou homologiakou thanatou," (PhD diss, University of Athens, 2012), 70-75, 339-340; Zelepos, *Orthodoxe Eiferer*, 306-308, 312; Iliou, "Pothos martyriou," 276, 280. The selective use of Church history and canon law in the *Neon martyrologion* stands in sharp contrast to a canonical text of the fifteenth century, attributed to an authority no less than Gennadios Scholarios, the first patriarch of Constantinople after its restitution by the Ottomans. In the canonical text, the process for the re-acceptance of apostates to Christianity – most probably with a special view to those who had been previously Islamized – was modified to allow for much milder expiations than the Byzantine tradition. Marie-Hélène Blanchet, "Une acolouthie inédite pour la réconciliation des apostats attribuée au patriarche Gennadios II. Édition princeps et commentaire," in *The Patriarchate of Constantinople in Context and Comparison*, ed. Christian Gastgeber et al. (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2017), 183-196.

[41] Panteles Paschos, *En askesei kai martyrio* (Athens: Armos, 1996), 81–82.

[42] Nikodemos, *Neon martyrologion*, 280-281.

[43] Zelepos, *Orthodoxe Eiferer*, 302-304. On Makarios' role as a martyrs' "anointer" (in the martyrological sources *aleiptes*, trainer of athletes) see also *Neon chiakon leimonarion*, 194-204.

four Christian converts to Islam were trained for martyrdom between 1814 and 1818, the division of labour was the following: the monk Nikephoros, who was in charge of the operations, evaluated the prospective martyrs and delivered the most promising ones to Akakios, his superintendent (*epistates*), who attended to their training in ascetic practices that would strengthen their steadfastness in the face of death. After the training, the monk Gregorios accompanied and supported psychologically the would-be martyr on the journey to the place of confession (and, hopefully, execution), making use of connections with like-minded Christians who provided easy and cheap transport, accommodation and food. After the execution, Gregorios attended to the purchase and transfer of the martyr's relics to the *skete*, while he also provided first-hand information to a fourth monk, Onouphrios, who composed the *vita*.[44]

As a rule, these operations took place outside the hierarchical structures of the Church and the Orthodox communities, which they penetrated horizontally through non-institutionalized networks of sympathizers who facilitated the circulation of books and martyrs' relics. This was an identity-making process based on shared knowledge and secrecy. Through his correspondence, Makarios Notaras created and maintained channels of contact with the martyrs' relatives, gave information about the relics, and organized the distribution of copies of Nikodemos' *Neon martyrologion* with the advice of caution: "Pray, give them [the copies] to familiar and cautious persons in a mindful manner, so that nothing harmful takes place."[45] After all, to support martyrdom was to support the commitment to a grave offence against the religious-political order.

Neon leimonarion (New spiritual pasture, 1819) was the second book devoted to martyrdom.[46] As the *Neon martyrologion* of Nikodemos twenty years before, it was written in vernacular Greek. This time, it was the product of the collaboration between the scholarly monks Nikodemos Agioreites, Athanasios Parios, Makarios Notaras, and Nikephoros Chios. The book is impressive for the collective effort of its editors to include as many recent martyrdoms as possible, followed by meticulous documentation of each case (including reports of eyewitnesses or beneficiaries of miracles) for reasons of validation and proof of the martyrs' sanctity. The above show that the making of martyrdom was not just a pouring of "new wine in old bottles", but a radical endeavor comparable

[44] Onouphrios Agioreites, *Akolouthiai kai martyria ton hagion endoxon tessaron neon hosiomartyron Euthemiou, Ignatiou, Akakiou kai Onouphriou* (Athens: He philomousos Lesche, 1862). For additional sources on the activity of this group see Konstantinos Nichoritis, *Sveta Gora – Aton i bălgarskoto novomăčeničestvo* (Sofia: Akademično Izdatelstvo "Prof. Marin Drinov", 2001), 180–182.

[45] *Neon chiakon leimonarion*, 341-345.

[46] *Neon leimonarion* (Venice: Panos Theodosiou, 1819).

to an "invention of tradition" in terms of Eric Hobsbawm.[47] Its main point was not simply to glorify the martyrdoms of the past, but to organize them, together with those of contemporary times, into a cohesive whole that re-shaped the past for the needs of a present purpose: to legitimize and promote voluntary confessional death as a vehicle for the formation of a community of fundamentalist piety that would oppose secularization and liberalism and even assert itself against ecclesiastical conformism.[48] The words of David Sabean about a German visionary at the time of the Thirty Years' War, apply also to the makers of voluntary martyrdom: "we will not handle [them] correctly by asking about the structure of [their] ideas; rather the issue is to understand [their] ideas as structuring."[49]

Actors

The documented cases of re-Christianization *via* martyrdom for the period between 1700 and 1821 are about 40 to 50, with a significant peak in the early nineteenth century.[50] The martyrdoms took place in the cities and ports of the southern Balkans, with a particular density in the islands of the Eastern Aegean and the city ports of Western Anatolia. The circumstances of the martyrs' death and veneration are documented in hagiographical texts, polemical treatizes, texts of European travelers and missionaries, and entries in sharia court records. A careful cross-examination of the texts that takes into account their diverge narrative functions shows that as a rule the martyrs' *vitae* display much factual overlap with the other categories of sources and that their descriptions of everyday life, social relations, and court procedures are accurate.[51]

But who were those martyrs of reconversion? The analysis of the sources shows that most of them were young men from the lower social strata, mainly immigrants in the cities and ports around the Aegean, placed at the margins of the stratified Christian communities: wage workers, minor craftsmen, servants, sailors, young men who broke away from abusive fathers or masters. As it seems, the motives for their conversion to Islam were expectations of social inclusion and better fortune.

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47 Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-14. Of course, this should not be taken to mean that the martyrdoms evoked in the works are fictitious.

48 See also Zelepos, *Orthodoxe Eiferer*, 305-308.

49 David Warren Sabean, *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 91.

50 See also Iliou, "Pothos martyriou."

51 On this issue see also Tzedopoulos, "Orthodox Martyrdom and Confessionalization," 336-337.

This was not novel *per se*: for the non-Muslim subjects of the sultan, Islamization had always been a means to improve their social position. But now the divide between faiths was deeper and the cost of conversion was higher. The second half of the eighteenth century saw the transformation of the empire's confessional communities into "proto-national" collectivities with separate institutions, social hierarchies, productive activities, and fiscal obligations, particularly in the Balkans. To this we must add the politicization of Muslim-Christian relations due to Ottoman defeats at the hands of the Russians and to the unfavorable position of the Islamic empire *vis-à-vis* Christian Europe.[52] In this polarized context, some converts to Islam found themselves doubly alienated as defectors in the eyes of the Christians and opportunistic proselytes in the eyes of the Muslims. When conversion fell short of expectations, an eventual return to Christianity could, at least, mend a part of the damage. The words of a Christian convert to Islam in front of the provincial council of Volos (Golos) from 1853 shed light on this impasse: "I became a Muslim, but I remained hungry and naked, and could find no bread, now I want to go back to my old religion."[53]

By 1853, in the midst of the Tanzimat reforms, eventual reconversions to Christianity were treated much more mildly than fifty years before,[54] when open apostasy invited execution. In the framework of Greek-Orthodox fundamentalism, the requirement of Christian confessional penance interweaved with the provisions of Islamic law on apostasy and was seamlessly internalized in terms of voluntary martyrdom. A few of the converts to Islam, plagued by guilt and social frustration, took refuge in an ideology of martyrdom that gave meaning to life through the transcendence of death and expectations of sanctity.

Let us take three cases that highlight the above.

The young man Nannos (d. 1802), an immigrant from Thessaloniki, had settled in Smyrna (İzmir) with his father, a shoemaker, and his elder brother. According to his *vita*, he spent his everyday life in his father's shop, where he and his brother worked, ate, and slept. When, after a row with his father, Nannos converted to Islam and vanished from the workshop, his relatives' first thought was that he was arrested by the authorities on the street because he did not have any certificate of having paid the poll-tax that was levied on

52 Gara and Tzedopoulos, *Christianoi kai mousoulmanoi*, 72-74.

53 Selim Deringil, "'There Is No Compulsion in Religion': On Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire: 1839–1856," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42:3 (2000): 563.

54 Gara and Tzedopoulos, *Christianoi kai mousoulmanoi*, 227-228; Selim Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 74; Turgut Subaşı, "The Apostasy Question in the Context of Anglo-Ottoman Relations, 1843-1844," *Middle Eastern Studies* 38:2 (2002): 1-34.

non-Muslims.[55] Is seems that before his conversion to Islam Nannos was living a life at the fringe of the Greek-Orthodox community and of Ottoman categories of subjecthood, much like an "illegal immigrant" of today.[56]

A little time after his conversion, Nannos met his cousin on the street and greeted him, but the latter did not return the greeting. And, when some Christian migrants from Thessaloniki who knew him saw him dressed in his old Christian clothes, they required him to stop walking around as one of them. Finally, Nannos went to the kadi's court and declared his return to Christianity. Despite the efforts of the Ottoman authorities to make him change his mind, he stayed firm in his decision and suffered the death penalty.

The story of Nannos puts into relief some of the contradictions that divided the society of Smyrna and allowed us to take a closer look at the world of poor migrant artisans limping along in the port city and trying to make up for their lack of economic means and social capital with the coalescence around networks of kinship and origin. Nannos emerges as the personification of the impasses experienced by persons of his class and age: in Smyrna, the city of wealth and inequality, of opportunity and dashed hopes, poverty and its closed horizons were most difficult to endure. On the other hand, the choice of Islamization with its necessary consequences, the cutting off from the stifling but familiar cocoon of relatives and neighbors, was not always manageable. It is on this background that voluntary martyrdom, already postulated by its preachers as both a penance and a passage to sanctity, could sometimes acquire the status of a heroic transgression, a rebellion that resorted to absolute metaphysical truth and renounced a world of frustrated expectations. Martyrdom became an iterative process that fed off its own growth: the veneration of some martyrs prompted others to follow in their footsteps and exchange their social obscurity for a prominent place in communal memory. This is what some critics of

[55] The tax reform of 1691 changed the poll tax (*cizye*, in Greek sources, *charatsi*) from a communal to a personal obligation: the tax was now assessed on an individual basis and in three categories, depending on the taxpayers' income. Most importantly, Christians or Jews who moved were required to carry with them the receipt for the tax's payment, which they had to show to the authorities whenever requested. This strict procedure of social control against non-Muslims made the poll tax a symbol of personal inferiority. Gara and Tzedopoulos, *Christianoi kai mousoulmanoi*, 68-69; on the tax reform see Marinos Sariyannis, "Notes on the Ottoman Poll-Tax Reforms of the Late Seventeenth Century: The Case of Crete," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 54 (2011): 39-61.

[56] *Neon leimonarion*, part 1, 221-232; Elias Nikolaou, "Anekdoto engrapho tou archeiou tes metropoleos Samou peri tou martyriou tou hag. Ioannou tou Thessalonikeos († 1802)," *Apopseis* 6 (1992): 403-410.

voluntary martyrdom referred to when they charged the would-be martyrs with obstinacy and arrogance.[57]

The stories of the double converts trace trajectories of movement, if not restlessness. It would be naive to ascribe them, as the martyrs' *vitae* often imply, to psychological unease and pangs of remorse. Rather we should see in them the interplay between three factors: the generalized mobility around the ports of the Aegean, boosted by international trade, the socioeconomic conditions of poor migrants, and their quest for social inclusion and self-realization. The migrants who were cut off (or had broken with) kinship networks were more likely to convert to Islam; conversion, however, was no guarantee of social success.

Demetrios from a village in the Peloponnese left his family to escape poverty as well as conflict with his stepmother and became a builder, going from place to place in search of work, until he came to the town of Tripoli (Tripoliçe), became a servant in the household of a Muslim barber and converted to Islam. As it seems, his conversion did not produce the expected results. After some time he left again, went to Smyrna and later to Magnesia (Manisa), worked at a coffee-house in Moschonesia (Ayvalık Adaları) and became a barber at Aivali (Ayvalık), until he met the monk Makarios Notaras on the island of Chios. Makarios, building on the young man's restlessness and frustration, trained him for martyrdom and sent him back to Tripoli. There Demetrios proclaimed his reconversion to Christianity and was executed in 1803.[58] Twenty-five years later, the Protestant missionary John Hartley was told that "the plague had never visited the town of Tripoli since the martyrdom of a certain individual".[59] It is very probable that this individual, transferred with this martyrdom from social marginality into protection-granting sanctity, was our Demetrios.

Another missionary, Charles Williamson, described in two letters from Smyrna the martyrdom of Athanasios (d. 1819), a poor Christian from Ainos (Enez) in Thrace who had converted to Islam while in the service of a Muslim. After a row with his master, he left for Mount Athos and later came to Smyrna, the place where he had denied Christianity, renounced Islam and was beheaded as an apostate. Here is an excerpt from Williamson's letter:

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[57] Adamantios Koraes, *Prolegomena stous archaious ellenes syngrapheis*, vol. 2 (Athens: MIET, 1988), 409-410; Konstantinos Veinoglou, "Historia tes en Nea Epheso oikogeneias Veinoglou," *Mikrasiatika Chronika* 12 (1965): 418-419.

[58] *Neon leimonarion*, part 1, 237-249.

[59] John Hartley, *Researches in Greece and the Levant* (London: Seeley and Sons, 1831), 57-58.

> *The Turkish guard instantly threw buckets of water upon the neck of the corpse and dissevered head, to prevent the multitude of expecting Greeks from dipping their handkerchiefs in his blood* […]. *The body* […] *was afterwards given up to the Greeks and buried in the principal Churchyard.* […] *In such a circumstance it is difficult to say who is the most culpable, the Turks or the Greeks? The Turks are savages always ready to shed the blood of a Christian. But how abominable that a Church, a Christian Church, should refuse mercy to a once fallen member!*[60]

Williamson's orientalist analysis was wrong. From other sources we know that the Ottoman officials had tried to save the convert's life: they attempted to persuade the offended Muslims that Athanasios was mad and thus not accountable for his actions, and they gave him the option to go free and live elsewhere as a Christian (or crypto-Christian).[61] At the same time, the monk who had accompanied Athanasios from Mount Athos handed to the metropolitan and to the Greek-Orthodox notables letters by an Athonite abbot calling them to gather the Christians and hold prayers for Athanasios to succeed in his goal. But the monk delivered the letters only after Athanasios had renounced Islam in the sharia court, because "[…] if they received them earlier, they might prevent the martyr, as they did with others".[62] Neither the Ottoman authorities nor the Church welcomed declarations of apostasy from Islam to Christianity that caused inter-communal friction and threatened public order.

The martyrdom of double conversion required an impressive effort of persistence and endurance. This is evident in the cases of would-be martyrs who recanted before the court. Understandably, their stories have left no trace in the martyrological literature of the period; but they are mentioned in the sharia court records, a fact that testifies both to the dynamics and the complexity of voluntary martyrdom.[63] The above is well illustrated in an episode from the *vita* of Nannos, which will sum up the analysis on the actors of confessional death.

The tenacity of Nannos in rejecting any comeback (even a nominal one) to Islam after he had declared his Christian identity led some Ottoman officials to conceive the idea of getting rid of the troublemaker by putting him on a ship leaving for Algiers. To make the plan abort, Nannos asked for and received a deadline to decide whether to return to Islam; when the deadline expired, the

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60 Richard Clogg, "A little-known Orthodox Neo-Martyr, Athanasios of Smyrna (1819)," *Eastern Churches Review* 5 (1973): 35.

61 Konstantinos Doukakes, *Megas synaxaristes*, vol. 4 (Athens: Kollarakes and Triantaphyllou, 1892), 270, 275.

62 Doukakes, *Megas synaxaristes*, 273.

63 Tzedopoulos, "Rejoicement, Defiance and Contestation," 26.

ship had already sailed. During his stay in prison, Nannos was acquainted with another prisoner, a poor Christian sailor who had been imprisoned for wearing red shoes, a garment that, as it seems, was restricted for Muslim sailors and for Christian sailors serving in the Ottoman navy.[64] Given that dress regulations were crucial as a visible marker of social (and religious) categories,[65] this could have severe repercussions. In the past, transgressors of sumptuary laws had even been forced to choose between formal conversion to Islam or execution.[66] In one of his sumptuary decrees, Sultan Selim III (1761-1808) ordered that offenders be executed.[67]

In the discussions between Nannos and the sailor, as given in the *vita*, the latter seemed to take his imprisonment lightly: he had no money to give, he argued, so his captors had nothing to gain from him. Moreover, while he was incarcerated, he was fed free of charge. After his release, he concluded, he would go to sea again and would again wear red shoes whenever he liked.[68] It is of no great importance whether things happened as described in the *vita*; what matters is that the story, real, half-real, or fictitious, was persuasive. Readers could recognize in the sketch of the sailor a kind of insolent and sometimes deviant behavior pattern typical for the social environment of the ports and boat crews. The sailor of the story had committed the offence with the aim to appropriate and display personal status. His getting away with imprisonment and punishment would probably add the flavor of having defied and ridiculed the authorities.

Nannos, on the other hand, was portrayed as having fooled the authorities not to escape, but to receive punishment as a reward. This active and often manipulative quest of confessional death, documented not only in the martyrs' *vitae* but also in accounts of travelers or even of those who did not see in

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64 William Eton, *A Survey of the Turkish Empire* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1801[3]), 98; Komnenos Hypsylantes, *Ta meta ten Alosin*, 764.

65 Donald Quataert, "Clothing Laws, State, and Society in the Ottoman Empire, 1720-1829," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29 (1997): 403-425; Suraiya Faroqhi and Christoph Neumann (ed.), *Ottoman Costumes: From Textile to Identity* (Istanbul: Eren, 2004); Madeline Zilfi, "Women, Minorities and the Changing Politics of Dress in the Ottoman Empire, 1650–1830," in *The Right to Dress. Sumptuary Laws in a Global Perspective, c.1200–1800*, ed. Giorgio Riello and Ulinka Rublack, 393-415 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

66 Matthew Elliot, "Dress Codes in the Ottoman Empire: The Case of the Franks," in Faroqhi and Neumann, *Ottoman Costumes*, 107; Krstić, *Contested Conversions*, 149-150; Gara and Tzedopoulos, *Christians and Muslims*, 213.

67 Zilfi, "Women, Minorities," 398. For such an execution that took place during the reign of Selim III see Eton, *A Survey*, 98. The obvious orientalist bias of the author should not lead us to dismiss his account as exaggerated, particularly when we have supporting evidence.

68 *Neon leimonarion*, part 1, 226-227.

voluntary martyrdom but superstition and arrogance, shows more than anything else that the martyrdom of double conversion was neither self-evident nor expected.

Publics

"Slaughter me, ağa, so that I may become a saint" (*sphaxe me, aga mou, n' agiaso*).[69] The irony of this Greek proverbial phrase indirectly shows the reaction of many Christian subjects of the sultan to voluntary martyrdom that triggered social unrest, threatened communal hierarchies, and provoked tension between Christians and Muslims.

Re-Christianization *via* martyrdom ignited strong reactions that cut across the social spectrum. For some, the voluntary martyrs were saints; for others, they were ignorant fanatics.[70] Understandingly, the most violent attack against martyrdom and its cult came from a radical fraction of Greek Enlightenment. The anonymous author of a libel written in Smyrna in the early nineteenth century used the typical metaphor of light *vs.* darkness to sketch the contrast between secularism and religious zeal. On the one side he placed the new scientific and philological books that, he said, aimed at enlightening the Greek community; on the other side he listed some recent religious publications mostly from the milieu of the *kollyvades*, like the *Neon martyrologion* of Nikodemos Agioreites, which, he claimed, were intended to keep the community in the darkness of ignorance, an easy prey to corrupt Church prelates.[71]

The makers of martyrdom often speak of a sharp distinction between "martyr-lovers" and "martyr-haters". It is doubtful that the split was as clear-cut as that. Yet reconversion at the price of death could not pass unnoticed: it forced people to take sides and brought forth contestation. In fact, the reception of voluntary martyrdom helps us shed light on ideological strife and social conflict.

There is strong evidence of the emotions provoked by martyrdom and of the martyrs' veneration. Some examples of the latter we saw earlier in the accounts of the Protestant missionaries Hartley and Williamson. Men and women, mostly of the medium and low social strata, tried to obtain or have access to a part of the martyrs' relics or even to drops from their blood in the hope of

[69] *Ağa* was an honorific title for military commanders and individuals of wealth and high social status. Harold Bowen, "Agha," in *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, accessed March 13, 2023, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004206106_eifo_SIM_0361. In the proverbial phrase the term denotes in general the Ottoman authorities and power holders.

[70] Tzedopoulos, "Rejoicement, Defiance and Contestation," 30-32.

[71] Paschalis Kitromilides, "Ideologikes synepeies tes koinonikes diamaches ste Smyrne (1809–1810)," *Deltio Kentrou Mikrasiatikon Spoudon* 3 (1982): 32.

protection and salvation-bringing miracles.[72] Protection could be extended even to the whole community, as we saw with Demetrios, whose martyrdom was thought to safeguard the town of Tripoli from the plague. It seems that there was a strong connection between the pool of "supporters" of martyrdom and the social milieu that opposed the role of wealthy merchants in communal affairs, as well as liberal education, and claimed communal leadership for the guilds.[73]

It is no coincidence that the highest density of reconversions to Christianity (and respective martyrdoms) is to be found in the region of western Asia Minor and the nearby islands, places that were often theatres of intra-communal conflict. In 1819, the guildsmen of Smyrna, with the help of the Church, forced the closure of the liberal school *Philologikon Gymnasion* that was supported by Greek-Orthodox merchants and scholars of the Enlightenment. The conflict is indicative of the socioeconomic and cultural cleavages that were at play.[74] In the nearby island of Chios, the direction and ideological orientation of the local school was a matter of conflict between Athanasios Parios, one of the major proponents of martyrdom, and those who were in support of a secular-minded education.[75] It is no coincidence that at the same period the voluntary martyrdom of Markos (d. 1801 on Chios) split the inhabitants of the island into two opposite camps, with many refusing to recognize him as a saint.[76]

The cult of the new martyr-saints reveals an urge for the protective enclosure and sacralization of the community. This was not only a reaction against secularism, liberalism, and Enlightenment, but also a step outside established socio-cultural patterns and institutions: as it seems, the Church and its teachings were sometimes insufficient to satisfy this quest for communal regeneration. Yet re-Christianization *via* martyrdom also constituted a challenge for the Ottoman socio-political order. As we saw, it did not contest its legitimacy. But the martyrs' renouncement of Islam at the price of death, together with the public veneration of their apostasy, were clear instances of defiance. A closer look on the history of Christian martyrdom during Ottoman rule shows that this form of defiance had already emerged in the past, always in periods of local or generalized crisis; but in the long eighteenth century it assumed an unprecedented intensity.[77]

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72 Tzedopoulos, "Rejoicement, Defiance and Contestation," 33-36.

73 Ibid., 32.

74 Iliou, *Koinonikoi agones*; Kostas Lappas, "Dyo stichourgemata schetika me ten koininike krise ste Smyrne to 1819," *Ho Eranistes* 21 (1997): 259–283.

75 Kitromilides, *Enlightenment and Revolution*, 304.

76 *Neon leimonarion*, xv–xvi.

77 Tzedopoulos, "Orthodox neomartyrs," 309 ff.

Remarkable evidence on the challenge posed by re-Christianization *via* martyrdom offers by the physician and scholar Michael Perdikares, a man whose critical stance to Enlightenment was rooted more in political loyalty than in religious fervor.[78] Perdikares emphasized religion as a dominant factor of collective identity that could effectively repel both the "defilement of French philosophy" and the appeal of revolutionary action. But his stance was combined with a genuine repulsion against mysticism, fanaticism and superstition that owed much to Enlightenment. Perdikares' view on religion was in fact worldly-minded. He understood institutionalized religious plurality as a factor that could guarantee the maintenance of the Ottoman *status quo*. This is why he was hostile to any form of religious conversion, from Judaism to Christianity or from Christianity to Islam, which could lead to problems of integration into the new community and destabilize the smooth reproduction of the religious-political system.[79] But what weighed most on his mind was public re-Christianization and its repercussions. Too cautious to speak directly of voluntary martyrdom and of its delegitimizing potential, he referred disparagingly to the Christian converts to Islam who sought to "come back to their previous religion with abundant tears for having renounced it earlier".[80]

Conclusions

Perdikares was right in recognizing that the rupture of re-Christianization *via* martyrdom tended to destabilize Ottoman order. Of course, the legitimacy of Ottoman rule was not challenged in the martyrological texts, where the faithful are urged to regard the taxes they must pay to the authorities, and particularly the poll-tax levied on the non-Muslims, as a ticket to paradise.[81] However,

[78] On Perdikares see Kitromilides, *Enlightenment and* Revolution, 292–293; Ioannis Zelepos, "'Sy de egenou lipopatris.' Zur Entwicklung vornationaler Identitätsmuster in Südosteuropa. Der 'osmanischorthodoxe' Heimatbegriff von Michailos Perdikaris (1766–1828)," in *Schnittstellen. Gesellschaft, Nation, Konflikt und Erinnerung in Südosteuropa. Festschrift für Holm Sundhausen*, ed. Ulf Brunnbauer, Andreas Helmedach, Stefan Troebst (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2007) 189–200.

[79] Leandros Vranoussis (ed.), "Regas e kata pseudophilhellenon. Anekdoton ergon tou Michael Perdikare (1811)," *Epeteris tou Mesaionikou Archeiou* 11 (1961): 112-114, 165.

[80] Vranoussis, "Regas," 109-110.

[81] Nikodemos, *Neon martyrologion*, 13. Compare this with one of the teachings of the eighteenth-century Christian preacher Kosmas Aitolos: "like the martyrs who shed their blood and bought heaven, […] the Christians buy heaven with the money [the taxes] they pay." Ioannes Menounos, *Kosma tou Aitolou didaches kai biographia* (Athens: Akritas, 2002), 187.

renouncing Islam for the sake of going back to Christianity and claiming as a right the punishment awaiting the apostates instrumentalized the requirements of the sharia and subverted the nexus of toleration and inequality that defined the position of the non-Muslims.

This did not openly contest the Ottoman order, but it gave a serious blow to its prestige. It is no wonder that the Ottoman authorities not only were reluctant to proceed with the executions, but also tried to find out the instigators of the martyrs' apostasy or at least prevent acts of public veneration of the dead as saints. The persistence of the double converts transformed them in the eyes of many from offenders to heroes, from passive victims to agents of self-formation, while the execution they claimed as a reward emphasized – and in a way evoked – the "ubiquity of death and violence" in the confirmation and destabilization of power relations.[82] Public reconversion to Christianity was not an open act of political revolt; nevertheless, it manipulated, and in the end subverted, the fundamental inequality between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Open re-Christianization was also a fundamentalist reframing of Christian cultural memory, shaped by the accounts and the worship of ancient martyrs, into an identity-building project.[83] The martyrs' successive – and in the end fatal – appropriation of identities (from Christian to Muslim and back to Christian) formed a circle of experienced and rejected extroversion, of sin and sacrificial atonement, that was meant to enclose and sacralize the Orthodox community. This was evident in the martyrs' extrovert corporality. Contrary to the pious censorship imposed on the bodies, mouths, and minds of the faithful in Nikodemos' *Chrestoetheia*, the martyrs displayed – and suffered – a physical and verbal aggression that culminated in their physical extermination. After that, their bodies, filled with symbolic capital, poured out their plenty in a eucharistic distribution: limbs, blood, and clothing were venerated as miraculous relics by the faithful.

For Athanasios Parios, the "martyrophiles" (*philomartyres*) who fell on the corpse of Demetrios (d. 1802) to get an amount of his spilled blood, a part of his clothes or a limb of his body, were "martyrs by volition" (*martyres te proairesei*).[84] Participation in the martyrs' cult was meant to form new communities of piety inside Ottoman Orthodoxy in the face of deepening socioeconomic divides.

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82 Matthew Recla, "Autothanatos: The Martyr's Self-Formation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82:2 (2014): 472–494, on p. 473.

83 Elizabeth Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory. Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). On cultural memory see Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1992), especially pp. 48-59.

84 *Neon leimonarion*, part 2, 111.

Based rather on experiences of cultural crisis and liminality than on established social structures, and construed around the rite of passage that was martyrdom, those communities in the making were in fact manifestations of *communitas*, "a spontaneously structured relationship which often develops among luminaries, individuals in passage between social statuses and cultural states".[85]

The proponents of martyrdom instrumentalized it against secularism, Enlightenment, and nationalism. But their effort was marked by their own encounters with modernity. They embraced the very methodologies and conceptual categories their opponents also used: the printed word, the polemic argumentation, the use of the vernacular, the formation of identity, and – most of all – the positive connotation of religious-cultural change and renewal.[86] Voluntary martyrdom tended to destabilize established hierarchies: it challenged the absolute power of the Church in things confessional and undermined *de facto* Ottoman legitimacy. Most of all, however, reconversion to Christianity *via* martyrdom became an arena of contestation, a – directly or indirectly – debated issue that reflected and reshaped sociocultural conflict. We must bear in mind that, when Athanasios Parios stressed the spread of the cult of new martyrs,[87] he was less describing reality than he was seeking to impose it.

In the 1930s, Manouel Gedeon, an official of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and prominent historian of the Great Church, scorned re-Christianization *via* voluntary martyrdom as "Athonite-Japanese hara-kiri".[88] Ironically, his words echoed the most violent attacks of anticlerical Enlightenment more than a century before. But the complexity of voluntary martyrdom shows that, rather than a mere display of zeal for the faith, it was an imprint of conflicting experiences and understandings of historical change.

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85 Victor Turner, *Revelation and Divination in Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1975), 22. On the notions of liminality and *communitas* see also Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977[2]). On the use of *communitas* in the analysis of martyrdom see John Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563-1694* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 89-91.

86 See also Zelepos, *Orthodoxe Eiferer*, 306-310.

87 Paschos, *En askesei kai martyrio*, 82.

88 Manouel Gedeon, *Historia ton tou Christou peneton, 1453-1913*, ed. by Philippos Iliou, vol. 2 (Athens: MIET, 2010), 78-79; Iliou, "Pothos martyriou," 277-284.

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