

The Missionary Expeditions in the Levant during the 16th and 17th Centuries

Samee Hasan (hassansam409@gmail.com)

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Modern History, University of Szeged, Hungary



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Abstract: *The Crusade campaigns were accompanied by the emergence of missionary movements in the Levant, Syria, where their main duties were to provide religious services for the European civil and military communities. After the decline of the stream of Crusade campaigns and the recovery wars fought by the Muslims during the 13th century, the European powers, especially France, tried to find a foothold for themselves in the East and they considered that the best way for that would be to appeal to the hearts of the Christians and the Muslims of the East by providing services, like building schools and hospitals. Although this movement was weak during the Mameluke era, it flourished and grew wider during the Ottoman era, especially in the 16th and 17th centuries. And although the nature of the relations between the Ottomans and the Europeans, in general, were relations of war, nonetheless, the missionary expeditions embodied one of the aspects of diplomacy during that period. The significance of this study stems from this fundamental point, and although the missionary expeditions were present not only in Syria during the Ottoman era, but considering the importance of this region which is still a square of global conflict, we tried to clarify some historical points related to it.*

Keywords: Levant, Missionary Expedition, Ottoman Empire, Syria

Introduction

The appearance of missionary expeditions dates back to the era of the Crusade wars, which accompanied the Crusade campaigns and several missionary groups settled in the coastal cities and ports of Syria. In this early period, the activities of the religious groups were confined to meeting the religious needs of the European civilian and militant communities, such as the performance of the ritual sermons and preaching, along with the cooperation with the governors of the Crusaders' mini-states in all the seized cities and ports. The missionary expeditions also took on the responsibility to take care of the Christian pilgrims that were coming to visit the Holy sites and to supervise their issues. For that purpose, the religious orders of ad-Dawiya and al-Istibariya were established (Hitti, 1959, p.368).

This religious activity accompanied the emergence of the Christian missionary movement that aimed at converting Muslim groups in Syria, and catholicize the Eastern Christian groups and reconnect them to the Papal Church of Rome. On such a basis, a Crusader monk established the Order of Carmelites in 1156 on the Holy Land, whose members spread throughout Syria and Lebanon. This was followed by the emergence of the Franciscans and Dominicans in the early 13th century (Al-Sabbagh, 1989, p.779).

The failure of the Crusades in achieving their goals led the European countries to explore another path in order to win as many supporters as possible among Muslims in a peaceful and friendly manner. In 1270, one of the Dominican bishops, William Tarabulsi, wrote: "To retrieve the Holy Land, we need messengers, not soldiers". The European community accepted the idea enthusiastically and they even started to introduce Arabic language in their education programs. The Pope and the European countries also tried to intercede with the Mameluke authorities for the missionary communities in order for them to be able to enter and settle in the Holy Land by establishing friendly relations, so that the European nationals have the right to work and trade in those areas as well as to facilitate Christian pilgrimage (Restlauber, 1918, p.97).

Brother Roger of the Franciscan province of Aquitaine managed to conduct negotiations on behalf of the King of Sicily and his wife, Queen Sanchez and succeeded in obtaining from Alnaser- Muhammad (1310-1341) some privileges, such as the right of residence for Franciscans in the Holy Land, and their supervision of some Holy Sites (Duweihi, 1890, p. 378).

Their work during the days of the Mameluke state manifested itself with religious activity among the Christian communities in all its churches and in all over Syria, with taking the care of pilgrims, offering hospitality and charity to them (Restlauber, 1918, p.80), in addition to the performance of some activities serving the European political interests in the East, as they had been given the task of conducting

communications between the Pope and the King of France on one part, and the king of Ethiopia on the other. And that was done through the Ethiopian monks that were residing in Jerusalem (Al-Sabbagh, 1989, 774). During the Ottoman domination, the situation of missionary expedition would change and they would play more substantial rule in the relation between the east and the west, as we will see.

Discussion

This part will deal with several topics. Firstly, missionary expeditions that entered Syria during the Ottoman domination over the Levant in the 16th and 17th century and, secondly, we will review their relations with each other, as well as their relations with the ruling circles.

Missionary Expeditions in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries in the Levant

After the Ottoman annexation of the Levant, the Franciscan Order continued to conduct its activities but its influence declined with the emergence of new missionary expeditions. The first of these were the Capuchins: This community emerged in the result of a split inside the Franciscan Order, when a group from inside the sect appeared and called for reforms within the existing system of the Order, and created a special system, which was approved by the Pope Pius X. France had the upper hand in helping this community to enter the Levant. In 1588, the French Ambassador Lancosme managed to receive a permit from the Ottoman Sultan for the Capuchins to reside throughout the Empire and travel between its parts. One of the notables of this sect was the Father François Joseph Du Tremblay, who played a huge role in strengthening the Crusader idea and in launching a relentless campaign against the Turkish merchants of Rome and Florence. In 1625, he was appointed as a supreme governor of the missionary expeditions in the Levant, the lands of Berbers and Canada. He also sent hundreds of Capuchins to Asia Minor, Palestine and Persia, where they established hospitals and monasteries in Jerusalem, Alexandria, Baghdad and Isfahan (Al-Sabbagh, 1989, p.812), while their places of residence in the Levant were particularly in Sidon, Beirut, Tripoli, and Aleppo. (Restlauber, 1918, p 80).

The Society of Jesus was founded in the city of Rome in 1540 by some teachers at the University of Paris, who gathered around Ignatius Duloyola of Spanish origin, the purpose of this assembly was to evangelize the Catholic faith all over the world, to bring the Protestants back to their fold and to prevent the spread of the new doctrine in Europe through its educational activities and its establishment of schools and colleges. This community put itself under the guidance and leadership of the Pope, vowing to obey him. The members of this sect did not limit their activities to just being Papal messengers to Europe, but extended them to the boundary of India, China, Japan, the America, in addition to the Middle East, particularly Syria, where they arrived in 1578 (Duweihi, 1951, 276-277).

One of the main places of their residence in Syria was Aleppo were they first appeared in 1626, when Fathers Gaspar Manilla and John Stela arrived in the city. After that, they established themselves in Damascus in 1643, in Tripoli and Sidon in 1644 (Hatoum, 1959, p.19).

The Carmelite order: This sect flourished in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, especially after Pope Gregory XV established the Propaganda Complex in 1622, which intended to organize and manage missionary expeditions as well as to lead a common struggle against the protestant secessionists for returning them back under the Papal supervision. They established themselves in Aleppo, Syria in 1626, and then moved from there to the Cedar Mountains in Lebanon and then to Tripoli (Restlauber, 1918, p.84).

Their Work

After identifying the missionary expeditions in Syria, it is necessary to refer to the most important tasks assigned to them and to their accomplishments.

Preaching among the Eastern Christian groups, such as the Romans, Armenians, Syriacs, the Maronites and the Nestorians, called them to unite with the Papal Church and to embrace its religious principles and rituals (Al-Sabbagh, 1989, p.822). According to some documents, someone called Isaac, who was originally from the city of Mosul and one of the disciples of the Capuchins in the second half of the seventeenth century, preached and proselytized in favor of the Papacy, and the documents describe him as a man of knowledge and skill in Syriac, Arabic and Turkish languages (Osterreichisches Staatsarchive, V.K.23 (1526-1584). The religious sermons for the missionary expeditions and their followers among the easterners were held either in

small churches set up by the missionaries in their monasteries or in the places of their residence or in the churches of the European consulates. These churches were generally very poor and simple, sometimes they were using the same oriental churches, and it is noted that The Maronite Church of Aleppo, Mar Elias, had a special preaching system, according to which the preaching was done week by week, firstly a week for the Jesuits, then the Capuchins, the Franciscans, and in the fourth week for the Carmelites (Totel, 1958, p.19).

The missionaries did not only preach, but also tried to get closer to the people of the country by various means, considering that the personal relationships might be the cornerstone of religious links. Besides that, they were also focusing on the national clergy, where they were assigning their representatives on the chair of the vacant Patriarchate. The documents show that at least the Church of Aleppo, Antioch and the Syriac Patriarchal Center were associated with the Papal throne, whose consent was conditional upon their appointment (Osterreichisches Staatsarchiv, V.K.23 (1526-1584).

Education: Missionaries used the education mainly as a means of attracting population. For example, the Capuchins established their schools in Lebanon, while the Franciscans were the pioneers in this field in Jerusalem in 1622. The documents indicate that the main materials that were taught were the Old and the New Testament, History, the medicine books of Ibn Sina and the geometry books of Eclauds (Osterreichisches Staatsarchiv, V.K.23 (1526-1584). In addition to the preaching and teaching, they were working in agreement with the Pope of Rome and the King of France to send some of those who had shown a good attitude to the new faith to pursue their studies in France or Rome. The Pope Gregory had already established a school for the Maronites in Rome in 1584, while Pope Sixtus V had arranged an income for them (Duweihi, 1951, p.333). The documents also indicate that the nephew of the Patriarch of Antioch Ignatius was one of the students at the schools of Rome in 1694. (Osterreichisches Staatsarchiv, V.K.23 (1526-1584).

The Relations between the Missionary Expeditions and the Ruling Authorities

The Ottoman empire had agreed to protect the missionary expeditions and had allowed some of them the right of owning property in some of the Holy Places, the protection of the pilgrims and the supervision of their issues, as well as they were allowed to hold religious sermons in their churches, and the restoration of these churches (Al-Sabbagh, 1989, p. 833). Nonetheless, such relations overwhelmed with security were in state of continuous oscillation for several reasons, the main of which was: The relations of the Ottoman Empire with the European states.

The strained relations between the Ottoman Empire and Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had a political reflection and impacted on the status of missionary expeditions. In 1537, while the wars with the Venetians were ongoing, the authorities of Jerusalem ordered the arrest of the Franciscan monks in Mount Zion, the Holy Sepulcher and the Church of Bethlehem, and they were imprisoned and then transferred to Damascus for three years (Al-Sabbagh, 1989, p. 880).

While the good relations between the Ottoman Empire and France are illustrated in the several interventions of the latter in favor of the Latins or the missionary expeditions, when the French kings as part of two separate agreements in 1536 – 1673 ensured the full protection of the properties and lives of the Latin Christian communities. This, undoubtedly, was due to the good relations between them, since the Ottoman Empire was viewing France as an ally against Venice and Austria (Rabaa, p76.)

Relationships of Missionary Expeditions with the National Clergy

Various ethnic and non-Muslim peoples were subjected to the Ottoman state, which adopted a special system in the administration of its affairs, which was called the Millet system that included the Greek Orthodox (Rums), the Armenians and the Jews. Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror was the founder of this system by putting the whole Orthodox Church under the authority of one Patriarch and called the Orthodox community, the Rumi Millet. Concerning the Armenian Church, which was called the Gregorian Church, or Armenian Orthodox Church, the Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror appointed the Bishop Hovagim in Bursa as its president and gave him the title of Patriarch of Istanbul. Moreover, all of them, including the Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul, the Chief rabbi of the Jews, and the Patriarch of the Orthodox had several privileges such as the right of establishing a court and a prison under their authority with all the civil powers related to their sects. It was natural for these to perceive the activity of missionaries among their own subjects negatively, as the

conflict was manifestly religious and the first manifestation of the conflict was over the holy places and their supervision, which in the 18th century became a global issue known as the Eastern question.

The conflict between the Latins on one side, and the Orthodox Rums and Armenians on the other, began since the beginning of the Ottoman invasion of Syria. In 1538, the Franciscan monks asked for the tomb of the prophet David that had been turned into a mosque, and despite the mediation of King Francois on their behalf, the Franciscans' requests were rejected. This made the Armenians to take over some of the holy places in the same year, which had been in the hands of the Latins. Nonetheless, the struggle over the Holy Places did not take ruthless form until the seventeenth century, when disputes arose between the Rums, Latins and Armenians over the ownership of the Church of Bethlehem and the Cave of Birth. And what caused the inflammation of the conflict was the increasing Rums influence due to their Patriarch Tinovan (1608-1644) and Dozithos 1660 -1670 (Al-Sabbagh,1989,p.781).

The documents, which sent in 1694 by Ignatius, the Patriarch of Antioch, who converted to Catholicism, as well as the ones of Basil Isaac, Archbishop of the Levant, to the Pope, indicate the intensity of the horrors and hardships they faced as a result of the prosecutions and accusations against them by the Orthodox Patriarch (Osterreichisches Staatsarchiv, V.K.23 (1526-1584). This clearly shows that the conflict was a struggle for sovereignty, influence and an attempt of gaining as much power as possible within the Ottoman Empire.

The Relations between Missionary Expeditions

There is very limited information available about the relationship between different missionary expeditions and because they served similar objectives and interests, the general presumption would be that they should have been on complete agreement and solidarity between themselves, but that is not fully true. The various differences between the European countries led to contradictions and conflicts between missionary expeditions, and in times, this even led to disagreements within the same missionary expedition.

The first major conflict was inflamed between the Franciscans and the Jesuits, the reasons for which were that the Franciscans felt that the Jesuits had the same religious doctrine and principles as they did, so most probably they considered them as direct competitors for them. The Franciscans had long been on the field alone, enjoying the support of the Pope and the European Catholic countries, and then a new strong sect appeared that wanted to remove them from this field and take their place. Nonetheless, in reality, the struggle at its core was political more than of being religious, since France was backing the Jesuits to serve its goals at the expense of the Franciscans who were supported by Venice and were serving the latter's interests.

This contradiction became clear and more evident in Constantinople in the early seventeenth century and in Aleppo at the end of the same century. The Jesuits demanded that they should be appointed as the priests of the French consul and the supervisors of his church, instead of the Franciscans, whom they accused of being Spanish and being enemies of the king and his state, along with other accusations. In 1674, the French consul gathered the members of the missionary groups, and reminded them of the necessity of union and the danger of division and tried to convince them that what the Jesuits received did not harm the interests of the Franciscans. (Al-Sabbagh.1989, 831)

As the documents indicate, sometimes the disputes exceeded the range of missionary expeditions, like in 1694, when the Catholic Patriarch Ignatius of Antioch sent a letter to the Pope asking him to intercede with the king of Spain to release one of his catholic priest who had been arrested by the prince of Cadiz after being accused in heresy. Nevertheless, probably this arrest happened because the Spanish authorities were looking at them (the Catholics of the East) with suspicion, and were aware of their subordination to the King of France, notwithstanding with the fact that both sides were Catholics (Osterreichisches Staatsarchiv, V.K.23 (1526-1584).

Conclusion

In spite of the major contradictions between east and west during the era of the post-modernism and the religious character which overwhelmed on the both sides at that time, the missionary expeditions remains as one of the diplomatic characters which had a huge role in civilizations cross- fertilization, as well as transferring humanitarian epistemology between nations through educational institutions and the determination of the its monks. Even though, the persecution of the Ottoman authority upon them did not

stop their influence over the Easterners and that led to the Syrian renaissance in 19th century and emergence of the elite intellectuals who were raised on the hands of missionaries, their heritage remains until now.

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