

An Example of Polemic/Apologetic Literature in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire

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Abstract

The dawn of Islam altered rapidly the balance among monotheistic religions. Their antagonism generated new genres of literature focusing on theological exegesis and polemic argumentation. Following this long tradition, similar texts appeared in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire. Although the aim is to produce argumentation against the thesis of the other side, these texts seldom appear to be in dialogue. However, the Debate held in 1662 between the illustrious leader of the *Kadıızadeli* Vani Mehmed Efendi and the Grand Dragoman Panagiotis Nikousios on Christianity and Islam, is a very rare instance of a face-to-face dialogue. Albeit the banality of their theological points, both sides are very well informed on theology, languages, astronomy and other sciences. The Debate readdresses stereotypes on the *Kadıızadeli* leaders' intellectual depth and depicts the common quests of ottoman Muslims and Christians. Finally, it reconstructs the ottoman intellectual milieu and the production and dissemination of knowledge.

Keywords

Polemic/ apologetic literature, Ottoman, Kadıızadeli, Panagiotis Nikousios, Vani Mehmed Efendi

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INTRODUCTION

Since the spread of Islam, a number of apologetic texts became the focus of research (Ebied 2005: 9-18, Aydın 2012: 18-45, Kaplan 2010: 166-179). Recently however an increased interest in Christian/Muslim apologetic and polemic literature allows us to reevaluate the discourse and concentrate more on its historicity. The famous replies of Ibn Taymiyya, al-Dimashqi and al-Qarafî to the Melkite bishop of Cyprus set the example of the earliest forms of theological debates between Christianity and Islam (Ebied 2005: 14). During the ottoman period apart from the famous fourteenth century treatise of John Cantacouzenos *Against Mohammedanism*¹, written in 1360 (Cantacouzenos 1828, III: 1567) and of the dialogue of the bishop Palamas in Orhan's court (Arnakis 1951: 104-118), many still unknown texts composed during the ottoman period have yet to be examined.

The two early examples mentioned above are representative of the variety of forms such texts assume. As an independent treatise, part of epistolography (letter writing) or even included in the narrative of a chronicle, apologetic/polemical argumentation varies according to the literacy of the author or his intentions. Thus Cantacouzenos' treatise touches upon fine theological questions employing biblical and theological arguments, whereas Palamas' oral debate concentrates on issues more likely to be the concern of a general audience. Issues like Trinity, the belief in Jesus being the Son of God, the Christian abandonment of the Jewish custom of circumcision and the removal from Christian texts of any mention of a prophet after Jesus, are themes that, although pertain to higher theology also define the boundaries between the two religious communities in daily life. Thus clearly categorizing them is not always a clear-cut affair.

Aryeh Kasher (1996: 149-152) discussing Jewish apologetic and polemic literature defines the two different genres. Polemic literature -the word "polemics" derives from the Greek word for war (*polemos*) - entails stern conviction to one's views expressed either verbally or in writing. They primarily aim at strengthening the opinion of sympathizers, while endeavoring to win over the responsive yet still hesitant.

Apologetics on the other hand, as the root of word denotes, (apologia in Greek means justification and defense) is a reaction against attack or defamiation. From a psychological point of view, apologetics would use deduc-

tion and examples to defend their views against a known paradigm. Thus, often apologetics were raised in a mixed culturally environment and sought to bridge gaps between cultures by defending their principles, while using the foundations of the other culture.

APOLOGETIC/POLEMIC LITERATURE OF ORTHODOX ZIMMIS IN THE 16TH CENTURY

The first examples of polemic literature during the first half of the 16th century are the product of two important orthodox religious figures, Pachomios Roussanos and Maximos Graikos.

Maximos Graikos was born in ottoman Arta in 1470 and died in 1556. He studied with the famous Ioannis Moschos (Sathas 1842: 128-135) and completed his studies in the universities of Padua, Florence and Milan. In 1516, the monk Graikos left Mount Athos to teach and work in Russia upon the invitation of the tsar Vasili III Ivanovich. Maximos soon got into controversy with the leaders of the Russian church. As a result, he was imprisoned and tortured (Agios Maximos 1991:76, Heney 1973: 17, Medlin 1971: 131). Most of the work of this prolific writer was produced in the last five years of his life while he was away from the Ottoman Empire and in an environment of subtly animosity towards the Ottomans.

Unlike Maximos who was born and raised in an ottoman milieu but lived all his life abroad, Pachomios Roussanos was born outside the Empire, but he lived in the Ottoman Balkans. Born in the Ionian island of Zante in 1508, Pachomios became a monk at an early age and received his education within the monastic communities. Using as a base the Athonite monastery of Iviron, he travelled extensively, teaching and writing until his death in 1553 (Argyriou 1971: 145).

Maximos' and Pachomios' works are both apologetic and polemical. Maximos wrote polemic works in old Slavonic against what he conceived to be the enemies of orthodoxy, i.e. Latins, heretics and Muslims. Drawing on the long anti-muslim tradition² Maximos endeavors to refute Muslim arguments on Jesus and his death and to respond to accusation that Christian sources concealed the coming of Prophet Mohammed. The Quranic quotations he employs are less based on byzantine sources and more on the Latin translations of the Quran (Burman 1998: 715-716). The undertone of the treatises

displays the physiological impact of the ottoman conquest on both the author and his potential readership. In his *Reply of a Christian against Muslim blasphemy* (Saint Maximus 2012: 57-92) Maximos realizing the danger of religious syncretism attempts to fortify orthodox faith. Whether polemic or apologetic Maximos' treatises permeate a popular eschatology. He argues that similar to other empires of the past, God will wipe off Muslims and heretics and restore the orthodox kingdom upon orthodox repent. These arguments well into circulation by the 16th century aimed at inspiring hope to Christians. The influence of the works of Maximos outside the literary circles is a controversial issue. Undoubtedly writing in old Slavonic indicates that ottoman Christians were not his target audience.

Similarly inaccessible in a sense was the work of Pachomios Roussanos. Writing in archaic literary Greek he did not aim at the catechism of the poor and illiterate. One of the recurring themes of Pachomios is the fear of islamization, a reality he faced while travelling around the Ottoman Empire (Argyriou 2013: 134). Pachomios was a prolific writer. The most comprehensive of his polemic works is titled *With Regard to the Orthodox faith and the faith of the Saracens*. It addressed a fictitious Orthodox nobleman "who was let to be fooled by this poisonous snake" without yet denouncing his faith (Argyriou 2013: 135). In the Introduction, the author purports the reasons for writing the treatise. The main body is divided into two parts. The first is apologetic and expounds the Christian dogma on Trinity and Jesus and draws on a number of byzantine texts. The second part has a polemic character based almost exclusively on one source, Riccoldo da Monte di Croce's *Contra Legem Sarracenorum* written in Florence at around 1300 (Costigliolo 2014: 130)³. The text that was delivered to the emperor Manuel II in 1358 was Kydonis' translation from Latin into Greek. Finally Bartolomeo Picerno translated this text into Latin with a new title, *Confutatio AlCorani seu Legis Saracenorum* and he published it in Basel in 1505. Pachomios used this version enriched with his own personal account (Karmires 1935: 242-265).

Both Maximos and Pachomios, despite their intentions to counteract the increasing islamization, were not eventually influential. The medium of languages they used in their apologetic and polemic works -Slavonic and archaic Greek-, and the very few numbers of manuscripts and printed editions point out to mainly scholarly use.

THE DEBATE BETWEEN PANAGIOTIS NIKOUSIOS AND VANI MEHMED EFENDI IN 1662

I/ Manuscripts and dissemination

The next similar work of an Orthodox would not appear for almost a century. In 1662 Panagiotis Nikousios, a man of erudition, well respected in the Porte and an associate of Fazıl Ahmed Köprülü, conducted a two day debate with one of the most influential men in the Ottoman court, the illustrious Vani Mehmed Efendi (Zilfi 1986: 257-258) a member of the *ulema* and the leading figure of the puritanical *Kadıızadeli* movement. The first day, the two men discussed astronomy, whereas the second day was devoted to theology.

Unlike previous works, the debate recorded by either Nikousios himself or a person in his entourage, circulated widely. There are at least four different manuscript versions and a total of eleven known manuscripts⁴: MS Patmos, St. John Monastery 371 (early 18th century); MS Athens, National Historical Museum- collection of the Historical and Ethnological Society of Greece (late 18th century); MS Zagora, in the Public Library of Zagora - codex 11 and 117 (18th century) and MS Jerusalem, in the Holy Sepulcher codex 90 (undated) (Sariyannis 2016: forthcoming). The last manuscript is currently unavailable to researchers. However Sakkelion published in 1863 the MS Patmos (1868: 361-371) that was bound at the end of a codex containing the intralingual translation to common Greek of the famous apologetic work of Kantakouzenos. The title of this manuscript is: *Debate of the most noble and wise, the most intelligent translator Mr. Panagiotou, with one of the wise teachers of the Muslims in Constantinople, [held] during the 1662nd year of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ*. It is not accidental that the two texts were found together as the redactor of Cantakouzenos was the Cretan theologian and teacher Meletios Syrigos, who was also Nikousios' mentor. In the title of the MS Patmos the name of Vani Efendi is not mentioned (1868: 361). Sakkelion also published the MS Athens in 1889. In this version the name of 'Vanli Effendi' is mentioned: *Debate between Panayiotakes Mamonas, Grand Interpreter and the first Christian serving the Ottoman kingdom and a certain Vanli Efendi, a Muslim instructor of the Turks* (Sakkelion 1889: 235-73). The Athens manuscript contains short treatises on Judas and on Christ' resurrection and an eulogy on Panagiotis Nikousios ornamented with anecdotes. The aim of the eulogy was to enhance the reader's sympathy towards the main

character of the debate while restoring his reputation.⁵ Sakkelion considers this version as a direct copy of the autograph manuscript as the language is closer to 17th century literary Greek unlike the vulgar Greek of the previous copy. However Sakkelion was not aware of the two manuscripts in the Library of Zagori (MS Zag11 and MS Zag117). Although these manuscripts are undated, the language is closer to 17th century colloquial Greek and the text follows meticulously -with some variations- the MS Patmos. The title of these two manuscripts *Debate of the wise Grand Dragoman, the Christian Panagiotis excellent first counselor of the Ottoman kingdom and the first Christian interpreter of the Ottoman rule with a certain Muslim Vani, a teacher of the Turks, translated from the dialect of the Turks*. The mention in the Zagori manuscripts of a retranslation of the text to Greek from a Turkish version is important for the dissemination of the Debate and the circulation of knowledge in the Ottoman Empire.

The text was popular, at least among Christians, as it was already published by the late 17th century. De La Croix⁶, (1715: 247-260) in his book *Etat Present des Nations et Eglises Grecque, Armenienne et Maronite en Turquie* omitted the astrological debate and published in 1695 a summary of the theological discussion. The title of the French text relates the name of Vani Efendi and stresses his importance: *Dialogue de Panaiotti Nicussio, interprete de la Porte Ottomane, avec Vanni Efendi, Docteur de l'Alcoran, & predicateur ordinaire de Sultan Mehemet IV* (De La Croix 1715: 247).

The debate and the fate of the text seem to be well known to contemporary authors. Cantemir mentions that the debate was published in Venice and that since it was in wide circulation, he does not include the text (Cantemir 1734, III: 261). He commends on the outcome of the debate mentioning that since the famous Molla Kabiz incident in 1527, it is the first time that a Christian defended his dogma and went unharmed (Cantemir 1734, II: 181, Krstić 2011: 93). Writing in the 18th century Cantemir deliberates that the Sultan Mehmet IV was Nikousios' protector instead of the Grand Vezir. This is a frequently repeated *topos* in many 18th century Greek biographies. Hypsilantes for example gives a similar narration in his own chronicle -completed sometime after 1789 (Hypsilantes 1870: 164).

II/ The actors and the set-up of the debate

The introduction of the dialogue is a rare opportunity to observe the dissemination of knowledge among ottoman elites. The debate was initiated by Fazıl Ahmed's curiosity, when he saw a celestial and a terrestrial globe in the library of Ebu Sa`id Efendi in Eyüb. This is probably Ebu Sa`id Efendi son of Mehmed Es`ad Efendi and grandson of Hoca Sa`deddin Efendi. He served three times as şeyhülislam and he was exiled for his involvement in politics. He died in 1662, after the July debate (Ilmiyye Salnamesi 1916: 345, 360, 370-71). According to the manuscript: "in July of 1662 the third day of the holiday of the Turks [it is the Kurban Bayram 10-13 Zilkade 1072], the emperor [the sultan] went to the cami of Eyüb" (MS Zag11: fol.1). The text mentions that this was previously the church of Saint Mamas (Hasluck 1929, 1: 82-83). In the house of Ebu Sa`id Efendi, the Grand Vizier Fazıl Ahmed reviewed the affairs of the state in his Divan. Accompanied by a number of officials, among them Vani Mehmed Efendi, a personal protégée of Fazıl Ahmed Köprülü, the Grand Vizier strolled around the library, 'that had more than 10,000 books the ancestors of Ebussaid had collected as they served as teachers of the emperors Selim and his son and grandson, Süleyman and his son Selim' (MS Zag11: fol.1)⁷. Apart from the books, two globes, a 4 feet in diameter terrestrial globe and a 2 feet celestial one of heaven adorned the place. Both had Latin characters and circles the astrologers attribute to heaven and the stars. This set of globes might have been the two Mercator globes presented to the Sultan Murad III in 1579. A representation of a terrestrial globe is in a miniature of the *Shahnama* of the astronomical observatory of Takiyyudin Efendi (*The Cambridge History of Science* 2003: 659, Casale 2010: 195). According to the text, the imperial commissioner asked Vani questions about the celestial circles, the meridian and the equator. Vani -a wise man according to the text- answered well, however the commissioner was not satisfied and he wanted more solid answers. Then Ebu Sa`id proposed to summon the next day Nikousios to explain the Latin letters on the globes. As many present praised Nikousios' erudition Vani Mehmed offered to convert him to Islam. Then Vani said "I can persuade him within an hour, with words and proofs, to leave the faith of Christians and accept ours'. The commissioner laughed and said 'Wise Vani, do not think it will be a simple task, many in the past to make him a Turk [Muslim]. I have tried and my father too but we accomplished nothing.'" (MS Zag11: 2).

Albeit the aim of the text, which was to actually glorify Nikousios, his importance in politics has been downgraded in Ottoman sources. Silahdar's mention of his participation in the negotiations in Crete (Silahdar 1928: 517-19) falls sort to the wrath of Venetian sources that held him responsible for the loss of Crete (Nani 1687, 2: 496). Cantemir (1734, III: 258-261) relates the story of Nikousios' cunning plan to deceive Morosini. In return for his services Nikousios the *divan-i hümayün tercümanı* also increased his influence in Orthodox Church affairs. Bayraktar (2012: 201-204) analyzed his extensive power in re-establishing the Orthodox Church in Crete and Çolak discussed his determining role in the drafting of the hatt-i şerif that granted to the Orthodox possession of the Bethlehem church of Nativity and of the church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem (2015: 105). In 1662 Nikousios got involved in the refutation of the Calvinist Confession of the former Patriarch Kyrillos Loukaris and he financed the publication in Holland of the Orthodox *Omologia* that presented the Orthodox dogma against Calvinism (*Orthodoxos Omologia* 1662: 5).

Nikousios was of a humble descent. He was born the son of a furrier in 1613 or 1621 on the island of Chios (Sariyannis 2016: forthcoming). Meletios Syrigos educated him from an early age in Latin, Italian, French, German, Greek, Arabic, Persian and Ottoman. Information that he allegedly studied mathematics and astronomy in Italy (Greene 2002: 178) cannot be confirmed. In 1644, Nikousios was probably working as a translator for the embassy of the Holy Roman Empire (Sathas 1868: 331). After his role in the siege of Kandiye, he was given the title of the Grand Dragoman until his death in 1673.

Nikousios was also an astrologer and an expert on Kabbala (Koutzakiōtēs 2011: 139-201). Cantemir and Hypsilantis relate at least two of his predictions during the siege of Kandiye and the fall of Kamenets (Cantemir 1734, III: 262, Hypsilantis 1870: 165). He even predicted his own death in 1673 while accompanying Fazıl Ahmed in the expedition to relieve Khotin. He invited Fazıl Ahmed to his tent at the sixth hour of the night to witness: "a strange thing, though not without sorrow and grief" (Cantemir 1734, III: 262). When the Vizier arrived he was informed of Nikousios' death and of his last wish to be buried in Istanbul, something reserved only for Sultans (Kermeli 2013: 451). The Vizier granted his last wish and Nikousios was buried in the -recently renovated by him- monastery of Panagia, in Heybeliada (Mazarakis 1860: 323).

III/ The theological debate

According to the text, the theological debate was the result of Nikousios' erudition on astronomy. His breadth of knowledge impressed many dignitaries, including the cousin of Fazıl Ahmed, Hüseyin Ağa (this must be Amcazade Köprülü Hüseyin Pasha) who promised wealth and high positions to Nikousios in the event of his conversion (MS Zag11: 3). Vani Mehmed did not attend the *sohbet* -on this day- held at the Vizier' palace, thus all agreed to continue the discourse the following day (MS Zag11: 3). As it was accustomed, the Grand Vizier rewarded Nikousios for his knowledge with a great amount of golden coins.

The next morning, the Grand Vizier invited to the debate the *kadıasker* of Rumeli, the *kadıasker* of Anadolu and Vani Mehmed Efendi who arrived with his pupils. Then an impressive verbal duello commenced between Nikousios and Vani Mehmed Efendi on the function of meridian and of equator in determining the latitude and longitude of cities; on astronomical measurements and the new astronomy of Tycho. What is astonishing is the breadth of the famous *ulema's* knowledge on these subjects, in a debate with moments of tension vividly depicted in the text. Nikousios more than once had to exhibit self-restrain, knowing that any hint of blasphemy could be detrimental.

Then Vani turned to Panagiotis and asked: Since you know all that why don't you become a Muslim? Panagiotis replied: I was born a Christian and I want to remain a Christian. And Vani said: However I have promised to make you a Muslim today. Answer me! Do you consider Jesus as God or as a prophet, like we do? Panagiotis replied: As God. Then all attending were disturbed hearing such a great blasphemy. (MS Zag11: 7)

During the theological dialogue Vani Efendi exhibited his meticulous knowledge on issues of Christian Dogma. Vani's first question is whether Nikousios was a Nestorian or a Jacobite Christian (MS Zag 11: 8). Then they discussed the Quranic verses on the Immaculate Conception. Vani Mehmed's exposition of Jesus' life -based on the Quran and the hadiths- ended with the miraculous escape from the Cross-, as a clear sign of God's favor. "You see, added Vani, in our Books we honor Jesus and accept him as a Prophet and not as God." (MS Zag 11: 9). Nikousios replied using John's Gospel, on the life and death of Jesus to conclude that Jesus -after the crucifixion- joined God in Heaven. At

the sound of the last statement Vani Mehmed moaned about the blasphemy and a new round of questions started, this time about the books of the New Testament.

Vani: Alas! Blasphemy. Who wrote this Gospel?

John, answered *Panagiotis*, the disciple of Christ.

Vani: Do you have only this one or there are others?

Four Gospels we have, but there are one, as all four of them say the same thing, answered *Panagiotis*.

Vani said: Since they say the same thing why [do you have] four; one was not enough?

Once more, it is one, replied *Panagiotis*, because each one of them was written in a different language and then John the Evangelist translated them in Greek. Thus we have all four as a true one. (MS Zag11: 10)⁸

The dialogue continues as a battle of wits with Vani Mehmed asking why parts of the New Testament foreseeing the coming of the Prophet Muhammad were excluded from the Bible. The argument centered on the meaning of the word *Parakletos*, an attribute Muslims consider to be a manifestation of the Prophet Mohammed's coming. This is an old discourse based on the Gospel of John 14:15 and the Quranic Surah 61:6 (Anthony 2016: 255-278, Cucarella 2015: 243). The discourse is so well known that the Grand Vizier scolds Nikousios: "Have you [Panagiotis] forgotten your Arabic not to know that one of the names of our Prophet is Ahmed which means *Parakletos*?" (MS Zag11: 10).⁹ Nikousios explained that *Parakletos* is the Holy Spirit sent to the apostles to make them wise, a statement that "got [the audience] very upset and they started spitting to their bosom, as if they heard a blasphemy" (MS Zag11: 11).

The text goes beyond formal manifestations to express emotions with the audience not merely listening but actively participating with exclamations or questions. For example, as arguments and counter arguments traversed, the Rumeli Kadiasker Minkarizade Yahya Efendi –from February 1662 to October 1662 (Silahdar 1928: 229)- replied with a quote from the Testament saying 'God does as he wishes' (MS Zag11: 12).

The next stage of the 'battle' is about linguistics. Vani Mehmed argued that Christians corrupted the New Testament in the same manner Jews corrupted

the Old Testament. To prove his point he asks why, although the Gospel of John is written in Greek, the last words of Jesus on the Cross, are in a different language (MS Zag11, 11).

Vani asked: what is the language of Ĕli, Ĕli, Lama, Sabachthani? Panagiotis replied: Hebrew. No, it is Syriac [Aramaic] said Vani' (MS Zag11: 11)

The argument dragged on until Nikousios explained that the Jews after the Babylonian exile spoke a language mixed with Syriac, attested "by the so called Babylonian Talmud". Then Vani wondered why these words too were not translated to Greek -as the rest of the Gospel- but they remained in Hebrew.

Because, answered Panagiotis, these are the last words of Jesus. Thus the Evangelist recorded them verbatim. Their meaning is: "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?". (MS Zag11: 11)

Nikousios added:

The words [Ĕli, Ĕli, Lama, Sabachthani] have another mystical and more precise explanation stemming from the science of Kabbalah. They embody great mysteries that only those who know this occult science can understand. You know –your most wise one- the great depth of *cefr* [*djafir*], which is the said Kabbalah. (MS Zag 11: 12)

Thus Nikousios exposes his knowledge of Kabbalah and most importantly of *ilm-i cefr* (speculations on the numerical value of letters) showing competence in Ibn 'Arabi's treatises widely used in ulema circles (Fahd, "Ĥurūf"; Fahd, "Djafir"; Yurdagür 1993: 216-218). Kâtib Çelebi utilized *ed-Dürretül-Bâduatü mine'l-Cifri'l-Câmia of Muhyî al-Dîn b. 'Arabî* (2007: 612) and Ibn Kemâl-pashazade (d. 940/1534) in his *Sharḥ al-mî'in* (Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı, MS Ahmet III 1609/3, fol. 46), mentioned that these sciences were practiced by the greatest spirits of humanity such as Hermes (= Idris), Plato, Pythagoras, Thales and Archimedes.

When the argument evolves around miracles, Vani Mehmed also employed the *cefr* science to argue about the superiority of the Quran that 'in itself constitutes a miracle' (MS Zag 11: 12). As Nikousios momentarily lost his temper in the mention of false prophets, the two scholars expounded on the amount of miracles performed by Jesus and the Prophet (MS Zag11: 12). Vani Mehmed Efendi reiterated the miracles of Prophet Mohammed, one of

which was the splitting of the Moon into halves that went through his shirt cuffs, to be reunited in the sky (MS Zag 11: 13). Nikousios replied that he also read the story in *seri` nebi* (this must be *Siyer-i Nebi* of Mustafa b. Yusuf Erzurumlu based on the Arabic biography of the prophet written by al-Waqidi (748-822) [Keskioglu 1996:44]). He expressed though his doubts since; there were no other recordings of the event. Then Vani Efendi faced with Nikousios' skepticism, he employed the miracle of Quran.

And Vani [said]: The verses of our new Gospel [Quran] is 600 and in each one there are 3 obvious miracles; the first miracle is the eloquence of the speech, which all the poets of the Arabs cannot imitate and all have agreed that they are holy words and not man-made, as you know all too well from the histories. The second one is the miracles narrated in our Gospel that explain the other Gospels. The third miracle is [narrating] the future, as the *ilm-i cefr* shows. Therefore we have 1800 miracles, what do you have to say about it? (MS Zag 11: 14)

Exhausting the issue of miracles, the conversation turned once more to linguistic arguments. The issue was a saying in the Old Testament, predicting the coming of the Prophet Mohammed, according to Vani. Nikousios questioned the originality of the saying and he inquired about Vani Mehmed's sources. Vani's reply that "a Syrian called Solomon' a teacher of the Jews" (MS Zag11: 14) informed him, unleashed in Nikousios, the Christian sentiments against the Jews: "It is a habit of the Jews to lie, especially to foreigners. I do not remember the quote in any part of the Old Testament. What does it mean? (MS Zag11: 14)". Obviously, Nikousios' statement is rather shady, as this is a famous quote in Deuteronomy 33:2: "God came from Sinai and revealed himself from Seir; he appeared from Mount Paran with myriads of holy ones at his right hand" (Cucarella 2015: 240). It constituted a well-known argument in the Muslim-Christian polemic literature. The location of Mount Paran or the Desert of Paran -otherwise known as Pharan or Faran- is a matter of dispute. It is placed in a wide area from Mount Sinai up to the Hejaz. According to Qarafi, Paran is the mountain of Banu Hisham thus associating the area to Mecca (*Ajwiba*, 699- 700 quoted in Cucarella 2015: 240). Vani Mehmed used the same argumentation to correct the misinterpretation of the Jew Solomon:

God manifested himself in Sinai through the Mosaic Law; he was glorified in Sier via David the King and Prophet; and he was illuminated in Pharad (Farad) through the Expected messiah. Whereas I knew that

the Jew was wrong: firstly because he mispronounced Pharab (Farab) for Pharad (Farad) and secondly because he compared David to Moses and even made him higher [in rank]' (MS Zag 11: 15).

Nikousios insisted that there is no place called Pharab (Farab) to add that there is a place near Palestine called Pharan and another one over the Oxus River in Central Asia (he used the term Great Scythia) called Farab. He further commended that this was the place where the famous Muslim scholar equal to Aristotle and Plato, comes from, referring to Farabi (MS Zag 11: 15). The non-conclusive argument ended with Vani Efendi's persistence that the term Farab is the Syriac version of Mecca (MS Zag 11: 15).

The debate continued in this manner until the evening (in the orthodox tradition the evening starts after the 9th hour, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon). According to the text, Fazıl Ahmed seeing the crowds waiting to receive judgment left the room. Nikousios followed him to get some rest. However Vani Mehmed with the Rumeli *kadıasker* followed him and asked one more question with regard to the direction of Ayasofya mosque. Vani Mehmed argued that unlike the other churches Ayasofya is not facing the E. of Aries [this is the direction of Jerusalem] but it is placed in the E. of Capricorn towards Mecca. This, he insisted, was yet another sign predicting the coming of Islam. In his own words:

If it [Ayasofya] was facing the E. of Aries, we would have to demolish it and turn it into a mosque, as we did with the church of Holy Apostles [the Fatih mosque] and other famous churches of yours. (MS Zag 11: 16).

The Debate ended abruptly when the Grand Vizier sensing the storm approaching, sent away urgently the people gathered for judgment. He asked Nikousios whether he had more to say or he had decided to become a Muslim to receive yet again a negative reply. In the end, "All stood silent and as dinner was served Nikousios left the room". (MS Zag 11: 16)

CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding the difficulty to establish beyond doubt whether this Debate actually happened, and taking into consideration the reasons behind the reproduction of this text –which is two-fold; to eulogize Panagiotis Nikousios, and to set up an example of a steadfast Christian model- there are many indi-

cations supporting the historicity of the event. For example, the dates in the text correspond to the Muslim religious festivities of the year 1662. Secondly, the presence of the two globes in the house of Ebu Sa`id Efendi, grandson of Hoca Sa`deddin Efendi -the man who set up the short lived observatory of Takiyyudin Efendi- further reaffirms the story. Finally the mention of the then young relative of the Grand Vizier Hüseyin Ağa (later to become Amcazade Köprülü Hüseyin Pasha) strongly indicates that the Debate in the form of an ottoman *sohbet* is a historical fact. Finally the information that the Debate was translated in Turkish indicates a diverse audience.

Furthermore the aim of this debate which was actually to convert Nikousios, corresponds to the Zeitgeist of mid-17th century ottoman society. It was well known that Vani Mehmed Efendi had a reputation of a moralist and an influential mediator of religious conversion (Rycaut 1686, 2: 154, 315, Galland 1881: 1/112). Apart from numerous anonymous reports of conversions found in chronicles, celebrity conversions to serve the interests of the dynasty are a norm. In 1666 Vani Mehmed Efendi's efforts to spread Islam would be crowned with the conversion of Sabbatai Tzevi. Moreover David Baer quoting Abdi Pasha's *Vekâyi` nâme* (fol. 291a in Baer 2008: 134) describes the circumstances surrounding the conversion in 1669 of the Jewish physician Moses renamed as Hayatizade Mustafa Fevzi Efendi, who became the head physician of the Porte. This conversion was an omen -according to Hasan Ağa- (Hasan Ağa, *Cevahir et-Tarih*, Revan 1307, fol. 170b in Baer 2008: 158) of the felicitous news of the conquest of Kandiye. Thus, the Debate between Panagiotis Nikousios and Vani Mehmed Efendi is very likely to have taken place, as its description fits the milieu and the personality of the actors.

In comparison to the apologetic/polemic literature of the previous century, the Debate between Nikousios and Vani Mehmed is a rare instance of dissemination of knowledge among Ottoman elites. Albeit the commonality of the theological arguments that add nothing more to the existing literature, what is of great interest for the historian is the depth of knowledge both intellectuals exhibited on the main tenants of the Christian and Muslim dogma. Vani Mehmed utilizes information gathered from his encounters with Syrian Jews and Armenians and his own studies on Muslim exegetic literature. Nikousios, on the other hand displayed an advanced level of knowledge on *Siyer* and *Cefr* reflecting his intellectual depth. Similarly what is common to both is their

reliance to a holistic approach towards knowledge that encapsulates both oral and written information.

Both employed arguments from the *ilm-i cefer* to illustrate their point, indicating thus a shared intellectual milieu influenced by the millenarian ideas of the approach of messianic time. Koutzakiōtēs discusses Panagiotis Nikousios' messianism, arguing that he translated Sabbatai Tzevi's messianic testament. This translation became the basis of the Armenian, Turkish and Italian translations. Moreover Nikousios used the planets, astrological signs, the Kabballah, the Quran and ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs to propagate the Christian 'truth' and predict the end of the world (Koutzakiōtēs 2011: 178-179).

It is not accidental that Nikousios adopted as his house herald, the caduceus of Hermes, a short staff entwined by two serpents surmounted by wings which indicated negotiation and it was also the astrological symbol of the planet Mercury important in alchemy (Mazarakis 1860: 324).

Finally, the text is a rare instance to witness how ottoman *sobbet* was conducted, revealing the emotions of those debating and of the audience. More than once, the fine line between intellectual freedom and blasphemy enhanced the suspense, producing a manuscript stripped from the dryness and formality of polemic texts.

Essentially, however the most valuable conclusion is that contrary to the historiographical discourse depicting the 17th century as a period of Islamic fanaticism, the Debate between Panagiotis Nikousios and Vani Mehmed Efendi is civil and intellectually stimulating, a rare opportunity to glimpse at ottoman intellectual activities and the dissemination of knowledge in a multiethnic, multi confessional millenarian environment.

Endnotes

- ¹ Published in Basel in 1543, it was translated to common Greek in 1635 by Meletios Syrigos.
- ² Maximos was influenced by the works of Niketa Byntios, Ioannis Cantacouzenos and Nicolas de Cues. Argyriou 2013: 140.
- ³ Riccoldo an Italian Dominican monk was an emissary to the court of the Ilkhanid Arghun Khan in 1289.
- ⁴ I would like to thank Dr. Chariton Karanasios for this very valuable information and for providing me with the microfilm of the two MS Zagori manuscripts.
- ⁵ One of the main blemishes was the involvement of Nikousios to the apprehension of

the church of Saint James by the Armenians in 1658. Today the church is the See of the Armenian Patriarch (Chalkiadakis 2015: 25).

- 6 De La Croix became the secretary of Charles Marquis de Nointel the ambassador of the French King Louis XIV in Istanbul. He stayed in Istanbul from 1670-1680.
- 7 Hasan Can, the ancestor of the family served under Selim I. His son Hoca Sa`deddin was the teacher of Murad III and served him and Mehmed III. Hoca Sa`deddin's son Mehmed Efendi served as şeyhülislam of Mehmed II and Ahmed I.
- 8 The Gospel of Mathew was written in Hebrew or Aramaic.
- 9 Rycaut, book III, 81 mistakenly relates the name to a soldier sect of wine drinkers in Bosnia.

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Yeniçağ Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Bir Apolojist/Reddiye Örneği

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Öz

İslamiyet'in doğuşu, monoteist dinler arasındaki dengeyi hızla değiştirmişti. Dinler arasındaki antagonizm, teolojik yorum ve tartışma odaklı yeni edebi türler meydana getirdi. Bu geleneğin devamı olarak Erken Modern dönem Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda da benzer metinler ortaya çıktı. Amacı diğer tarafın tezlerine karşı çıkan savlar yaratmak olan bu metinler pek diyaloga girmiş görünmemektedir. 1662 yılında meşhur *Kadızedeli Vani Mehmed Efendi* ile Baş Tercüman Panagiotis Nikousios arasında İslamiyet ve Hıristiyanlık konusunda yürütülen Münazara ise, bu konudaki yüz yüze diyalogların nadir bir örneğidir. Teolojik savlarının sıradanlığına rağmen, her iki tarafın da teoloji, lisan, astronomi ve diğer bilimlerdeki bilgisi oldukça derindir. Münazara, *Kadızedeli* önderin entelektüel derinliği hususundaki klişeleri gözden geçirir, Müslüman ve Hristiyanların ortak arayışlarını ortaya koyar. Nihayet, Osmanlı entelektüel ortamı ile bilgi üretimi ve yayılmasını yeniden inşa eder.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Apoloji literatür, reddiye, Osmanlı, *Kadızedeli*, Panagiotis Nikousios, Vani Mehmet Efendi

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Об одном примере полемической / апологетической литературы в Османской империи начала нового времени

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Аннотация

Возникновение ислама быстро изменило баланс между монотеистическими религиями. Их антагонизм породил новые жанры литературы, посвященные богословской экзегезе и полемической аргументации. Как продолжение этой давней традиции, подобные тексты появились и в Османской империи начала нового времени. Хотя целью этих текстов является постановка аргументации против тезиса другой стороны, они редко выглядят как диалог. Однако дискуссия по христианству и исламу, состоявшаяся в 1662 году между знаменитым Кадизадели Вани Мехмедом Эфенди и главным переводчиком (драгоманом) Великой Порты Панайотисом Никусиосом, является очень редким случаем личного общения. Несмотря на банальность их богословских взглядов, обе стороны очень хорошо осведомлены в богословии, языках, астрономии и других науках. Дебаты дают возможность пересмотреть стереотипы об интеллектуальной глубине лидеров Кадизадели и отражают общие поиски мусульман и христиан Османской империи. Наконец, они позволяют реконструировать османскую интеллектуальную среду и судить о производстве и распространении знаний.

Ключевые слова

Апологетическая литература, Османская империя, Кадизадели, Панайотис Никусиос, Вани Мехмед Эфенди

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