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The Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Istanbul as an Administrative Organization in the Balkans

ABSTRACT

This article examines the position of the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Istanbul within the Ottoman administrative system, with particular emphasis on its administrative role in the Balkans. It considers the institutional development of the Patriarchate from the reign of Fatih Sultan Mehmet to the 19th century, together with its religious status and civil administrative functions. It also analyzes the effects of 19th-century reforms on the institution and the decline of the Patriarchate's authority following the spread of nationalist movements. Reorganized after the conquest of Istanbul, the Patriarchate became an important intermediary institution through which the Ottoman State administered its Orthodox subjects. The patriarch was held responsible not only for religious affairs but also for ensuring that the community fulfilled its obligations toward the state. This arrangement brought different Orthodox communities in the Balkans together under the framework of the Rum millet. However, the growing influence of the Patriarchate in religious, educational, and legal affairs gradually provoked opposition among Bulgarians, Serbs, Romanians, and other Orthodox communities. The Morea Uprising of 1821 weakened the traditional relationship between the state and the Patriarchate, while the Tanzimat Edict of 1839 and the Reform Edict of 1856 restricted the institution's administrative authority. The 1862 Rum Millet Regulation established the Mixed Assembly, thereby increasing lay participation in the administration while limiting the authority of the clergy. The establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate and the separation of other Balkan churches from the Patriarchate substantially diminished the institution's religious and administrative predominance in the region. Toward the end of the century, the Patriarchate largely lost its traditional position within the Ottoman administrative order and became an institution at the center of political and social conflicts.

Keywords: Balkans, Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Istanbul, Ottoman Administrative System, Rum Millet, Nationalism.

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Balkanlar'da İdari Bir Yapı Olarak İstanbul Rum Ortodoks Patrikhanesi

ÖZ

Bu makale, İstanbul Rum Ortodoks Patrikhanesi'nin Osmanlı idari sistemi içerisindeki yerini, özellikle Balkanlar'daki idari rolüne odaklanarak incelemektedir. Fatih Sultan Mehmet döneminden 19. yüzyıla kadar Patrikhanenin kurumsal gelişimini, dinî statüsü ve sivil idari işlevleriyle birlikte ele almaktadır. Ayrıca 19. yüzyıl reformlarının kurum üzerindeki etkilerini ve milliyetçilik hareketlerinin yayılmasıyla Patrikhanenin otoritesinde meydana gelen gerilemeyi analiz etmektedir. İstanbul'un fethinden sonra yeniden teşkilatlandırılan Patrikhane, Osmanlı Devleti'nin Ortodoks tebaasını yönetmesinde önemli bir aracı kurum hâline gelmiştir. Patrik, dinî işlerin yanı sıra cemaatin devlete karşı yükümlülüklerini yerine getirmesini sağlamaktan da sorumlu tutulmuştur. Bu yapı, Balkanlar'daki farklı Ortodoks toplulukları Rum milleti çatısı altında bir araya getirmiştir. Bununla birlikte, Patrikhanenin din, eğitim ve hukuk alanlarında artan etkinliği zamanla Bulgarlar, Sırplar, Rumenler ve diğer Ortodoks topluluklar arasında tepkilere yol açmıştır. 1821 Mora İsyanı, devlet ile Patrikhane arasındaki geleneksel ilişkiyi zayıflatırken 1839 Tanzimat Fermanı ile 1856 Islahat Fermanı kurumun idari yetkilerini sınırlandırmıştır. 1862 Rum Milleti Nizamnamesi ile Karma Meclis kurulmuş, böylece sivil temsilcilerin yönetime katılımı artırılırken ruhban sınıfının yetkileri daraltılmıştır. Bulgar Eksarhlığı'nın kurulması ve diğer Balkan kiliselerinin Patrikhaneden ayrılması, kurumun bölgedeki dinî ve idari hâkimiyetini önemli ölçüde azaltmıştır. Patrikhane, yüzyılın sonlarına doğru Osmanlı idari düzenindeki geleneksel konumunu büyük ölçüde kaybederek siyasi ve toplumsal çatışmaların merkezinde yer alan bir kuruma dönüşmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Balkanlar, İstanbul Rum Ortodoks Patrikhanesi, Osmanlı İdari Sistemi, Rum Milleti, Milliyetçilik.

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Introduction

Following Fatih Sultan Mehmet's conquest of Istanbul in 1453, the Ottoman state undertook the formal organization of the religious and administrative structures governing its non-Muslim communities. This process emerged from the necessity to establish a new administrative framework consistent with the Ottoman polity's conception of universal empire.[1] Within this broader imperial framework, the restoration of the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate[2] should be interpreted not merely as an expression of religious tolerance, but as a calculated political strategy aimed at forging a mutually beneficial alliance. By integrating the Christian population into a centralized administrative order and simultaneously positioning the Orthodox world in opposition to the Catholic West, this policy contributed to the fragmentation of wider Christian unity. From this perspective, the conquest constituted not only a significant religious turning point for the Rum Orthodox Church, but also the inception of its political and administrative reconfiguration.

In the immediate aftermath of the conquest, one of Fatih's foremost priorities was the revitalization of the city, a goal that necessitated the cultivation of cooperative relations with its Rum inhabitants. As an initial measure toward this end, it was proclaimed that those who had fled following the conquest would be permitted to return, while residents whose homes had been appropriated would be provided with alternative dwellings.[3]

1. The Revival and Authority of the Patriarchate

At a subsequent stage following the conquest, Fatih Sultan Mehmet undertook measures to ensure the orderly continuation of Orthodox religious life. To this end, he facilitated the election of Georgios Kurtesis Scholarius as patriarch under the name "Gennadios," thereby investing him with both spiritual and civil authority over the Orthodox Christian population of the empire. In doing so, Fatih established Gennadios as the supreme Orthodox authority in religious as well as administrative affairs.[4]

Gennadios's appointment to the patriarchate in the aftermath of the conquest provides important insight into the principal considerations underlying Fatih Sultan Mehmet's policy toward the patriarchal institution. Above all, the Sultan appears to have sought to prevent collaboration between the Orthodox community and the Catholic West, thereby consolidating his own political authority. At the same time, the patriarchate offered an effective institutional mechanism through which the Ottoman state could exert greater influence over the organization and affairs of its Orthodox subjects. Gennadios himself was widely regarded as one of the leading theologians, jurists, and philosophers of his age, yet he was equally distinguished as a prominent opponent of ecclesiastical union with the Catholic West, a question that had become one of the most divisive issues of the late Byzantine period. Shortly before the conquest of Istanbul, he had withdrawn from public life as a consequence of his disagreement with the Byzantine Emperor on this matter and had embraced a more secluded religious existence as a priest. For Gennadios and his supporters, his elevation to the patriarchate after the conquest signified the Orthodox community's liberation from Catholic pressure and its renewed capacity to regulate its affairs in accordance with its own doctrinal convictions. Within this framework, union with the Catholics was understood to have been decisively repudiated, while obedience to the Sultan, despite his status as a non-believer from the Orthodox perspective, came to be regarded as politically necessary. Consequently, while the Sultan was acting in accordance with the political logic of the age by undermining the possibility of broader Christian unity, he was simultaneously strengthening both the authority of the patriarchate and the loyalty of Orthodox subjects to the central state. The patriarchate, for its part, sought to recover the prestige it had lost within the Christian world by aligning itself with the power of the Ottoman Empire and its ruler. In return, the Ottoman state expected, above all, the patriarchate's

[1] The content of this article is based on two of my studies. See Ramazan Erhan Güllü, *Patrik Meletios Metaksakis ve İstanbul/Rum Ortodoks Patrikhanesi (1921–1923)* (İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2017); Ramazan Erhan Güllü, *Türkiye'de Gayrimüslimlerin Yönetimi: Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e* (İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2018).

[2] In this study, the term "Rum" will be used to refer to ethnic Rums and Orthodox Christians who were subjects of the Ottoman State, based on its usage in Turkish. The term "Greek" will be used to refer to those who became citizens of Greece following the country's establishment.

[3] Robert Mantran, *İstanbul Tarihi*, trans. Teoman Tunçdoğan (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2015), 213.

[4] Theodore Papadopoullos, "Orthodox Church and Civil Authority," *Journal of Contemporary History* 2, no. 4 (October 1967): 201–2.

loyalty. The relationship that emerged may therefore be understood as a mutually advantageous political arrangement: in the years that followed, the Ottoman state employed the patriarchate both to regulate relations with its Orthodox subjects and to incorporate Orthodox populations in newly conquered territories, while the patriarchate supported this policy in the expectation that it would broaden the communities subject to its authority.[5]

These practices contributed to the expansion of both Ottoman state authority and patriarchal influence. Nevertheless, this did not imply that the Patriarchate regarded Ottoman rule as fully legitimate or intrinsically just. On the contrary, from an early stage it represented Ottoman dominion to its community as a form of "infidel" and "foreign" rule, while also acknowledging the juridical subordination (mâ-dûn) of Orthodox Christians within the Ottoman order. During the Ottoman period, the Patriarchate likewise commemorated as "martyrs" numerous individuals believed to have died while defending their Orthodox faith under conditions of coercion and pressure. Even so, this ideological posture did not translate into opposition to Ottoman political sovereignty, nor did it preclude the Patriarchate's continued loyalty to the state. With only occasional exceptions, relations between the Ottoman state and the Patriarchate remained fundamentally structured by the alliance-based framework outlined above[6].

This pattern remained operative throughout Fatih's reign and, with substantial continuity, endured until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the accelerating processes of Westernization and the emergence of ethnic tensions among the empire's diverse communities began to transform its underlying foundations.

Within the Ottoman system for the administration of non-Muslim communities, the authority of the Rum Patriarchate was significantly enhanced. In the Ottoman administrative lexicon, the term "Rum" denoted not merely an ethnic designation, but the broader body of Orthodox Christians affiliated with the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Istanbul. This category encompassed Bulgarians, Serbs, Slavs, Romanians, Wallachians, Orthodox Albanians, Arabs, Georgians, and even the Anatolian Orthodox, or "Karamanlis," who would later establish a separate patriarchate during the Turkish War of Independence. In practical terms, therefore, "Rum" functioned largely as a synonym for "Orthodox." Accordingly, the patriarch occupied the position of the highest religious and political authority over the Orthodox Christian population of the Ottoman state. As primus inter pares within this cosmopolitan body, he also served as the guarantor of the community's conduct vis-à-vis the state and as the intermediary through whom the directives of the central authority were communicated.[7]

The Ottoman mode of governing its non-Muslim subjects, conventionally described as the millet system, did not constitute a form of communal autonomy or a "state within a state," as it is often portrayed. Rather, it operated according to an administrative and fiscal rationale more accurately characterized as a "spiritual tax-farm system" (ruhânî iltizam sistemi). By entrusting the Patriarchate with responsibilities relating to tax collection and the maintenance of public order, the Ottoman state effectively integrated this religious institution into the structures of central administration.[8] The Patriarchate's extensive authority over the Orthodox population gradually drew the attention of both civil and ecclesiastical aristocratic factions within the community, thereby generating the conditions for sustained struggles over power and influence. Because the Ottoman state dealt directly with the patriarch and a limited number of senior metropolitans, this administrative arrangement occasionally gave rise to distinct institutional practices within the Patriarchate itself. One notable manifestation of

[5] G. Georgiades Arnakis, "The Greek Church of Constantinople and the Ottoman Empire," *The Journal of Modern History* 24, no. 3 (September 1952): 235–50; Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity: A Study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the Eve of the Turkish Conquest to the Greek War of Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 165–70.

[6] Paraskevas Konortas, "Tarihi Uzlaşma'dan Entente Cordial'e?: İstanbul Ortodoks Patrikhanesi ile Osmanlı İdaresi Arasında İdeolojik ve Siyasi Amaç Birliği (15. Yüzyıl Ortası–16. Yüzyıl Sonu)," trans. Yaman Aksu, in *Tarihî, Siyasi, Dinî ve Hukuki Açıdan Ekümenik Patrikhane*, ed. Cengiz Aktar (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2011), 61.

[7] Richard Clogg, "The Greek Millet in the Ottoman Empire," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, vol. 1, *The Central Lands*, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1982), 185–93; Victor Roudometof, "From Rum Millet to Greek Nation: Enlightenment, Secularization, and National Identity in Ottoman Balkan Society, 1453–1821," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 16, no. 1 (May 1998): 11–48.

[8] M. Macit Kenanoğlu, *Osmanlı Millet Sistemi: Mit ve Gerçek* (İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2007), 59–70.

this development was the period known as "yerondismos,"[9] which commenced in 1741 and continued until the promulgation of the 1862 regulation, thus marking a significant departure from earlier patterns of governance. During this period, certain metropolitans and aristocrats known as the Phanariots (Fenerli Beyler) came to wield considerable power within the Patriarchate. This governing body controlled appointments to offices affiliated with the Patriarchate.[10] As a consequence, the Phanariots came to occupy a position of considerable influence within the Rum community. They were drawn from the prominent families that governed Wallachia and Moldavia between 1711 and 1821. Within the broader Ottoman imperial order, patriarchs and members of the loyal clergy likewise played a significant role in consolidating Phanariot power.

2. The Patriarchate's Hegemonic Policies

Over time, the authority exercised by the Rum Patriarch of Istanbul over the broader Orthodox population enabled the Rum community to establish a marked cultural predominance over other Orthodox groups. This predominance manifested itself across multiple spheres, most notably in religious life and education. Although the term "Rum" frequently functioned as a synonym for Orthodoxy, ethnic Rums not only outnumbered many other Orthodox communities but also maintained effective control over the patriarchal institution. Even after the emergence of ethnic identities and the spread of nationalist ideologies, they sought to preserve this privileged position, thereby generating tensions, particularly between the Patriarchate and non-Rum Orthodox groups. As liberal and nationalist currents gained strength within these communities, the Patriarchate's attempts to preserve the existing order in defense of its authority further intensified these conflicts.[11]

In order to preserve its institutional position, the Patriarchate maintained close relations with the Ottoman administration. For this reason, liberal and nationalist reactions among the Orthodox population were initially directed less against the Ottoman state than against the Patriarchate, with which these communities stood in a more immediate administrative relationship. Notwithstanding such tensions and criticisms, the Patriarchate continued to exercise considerable influence over Orthodox Christians living under Ottoman rule. Although the administrative reforms of the 19th century partially circumscribed its authority through commissions and other communal bodies, it nevertheless remained the supreme institution within the Orthodox community.[12]

As Ottoman expansion continued, particularly in the Balkans, newly incorporated Orthodox populations were incorporated into the Rum community under this administrative framework. This development considerably enlarged both the patriarch's sphere of influence and the scope of his authority. The Patriarch occupied the apex of all institutions affiliated with the Patriarchate, including those concerned with religious and educational affairs. Schools were financed through ecclesiastical property and taxes, as well as through donations from Rum foundations and affluent members of the community, while the books used in these institutions were selected by a commission established by the Patriarchate.[13] Matters of personal status, including marriage, divorce, and inheritance, likewise fell directly within the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate and its affiliated metropolitan sees. In this respect, the Patriarchate became, at least indirectly, integrated into the judicial order of the Ottoman state.

In this manner, the Patriarchate came to occupy a position of marked dominance over Orthodox communities throughout the Balkans. In many regions, the Rum language was used both as the language of worship in churches and as the language of instruction in schools. Because the Ottoman state generally refrained from intervening in the patriarch's activities within the hierarchical order it

[9] Elçin Macar, *Cumhuriyet Döneminde İstanbul Rum Patrikhanesi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004), 42–43.
[10] See also Zeynep Sözen, *Fenerli Beyler: 110 Yılın Öyküsü (1711–1821)* (İstanbul: Aybay Yayıncılık, 2000), 45–178.
[11] Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, "Osmanlı Devleti İçerisindeki Hıristiyanlar ve Yahudiler," trans. Halil Erdemir and Hatice Erdemir, *Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi* 2, nos. 4–5 (February–July 2000): 185–86; Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856–1876* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 13–14.
[12] Benjamin Braude, "Foundation Myths of the Millet System," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, vol. 1, *The Central Lands*, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1982), 69–88.
[13] İlay İleri, "Azınlıkların Eğitimi I," *OTAM: Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi* 17 (2005): 311–28.

had established, the Patriarchate was able to employ this authority over other Orthodox groups in furtherance of a broader policy of Hellenization.

This tendency was further reinforced from the 18th century onward, when the Patriarchate increasingly came under the influence of both the civil aristocracy and a clerical oligarchy. During this period, it evolved beyond a purely spiritual institution into a locus of economic and political power. The Phanariots, who held key positions within the Ottoman bureaucracy as interpreters and as rulers of Wallachia and Moldavia, exploited their intermediary role between European diplomacy and the Sublime Porte in order to secure control over the Patriarchate. In turn, this aristocratic stratum advanced a policy of Hellenizing the Church, thereby intensifying cultural pressure on other Orthodox communities, particularly Bulgarians and Serbs, and contributing to the deepening of national divisions in the period that followed.

3. Opposition to the Authority of the Patriarchate

Among the Balkan Orthodox communities, the Bulgarians emerged as the most vocal opponents of the Patriarchate's policies. Lacking effective religious and political representation within the Ottoman system, they came increasingly under Rum dominance and, by the eighteenth century, widely perceived the Patriarchate's policies as oppressive and assimilatory. In response, they began to pursue the establishment of a national church independent of the Rum Patriarchate. Even in regions where Bulgarians constituted the majority, religious services were often conducted in Rum, and schooling for Bulgarian children was likewise provided in that language. Although these conditions did not prevail uniformly in every locality, they were sufficiently widespread to generate sustained grievance. Many Bulgarians accordingly came to regard this situation as a threat to their ethnic identity, even while remaining committed to Orthodoxy. As opposition to the Patriarchate expanded, the Bulgarian national movement initially organized itself not against the Ottoman state, but against the Rum Patriarchate. In this process, Bulgarian clergy generally assumed a leading role in the formation of Bulgarian national consciousness. A similar pattern may be observed among the Serbs, Romanians, and Albanians. For these Orthodox communities, the Ottoman order appeared as a system that protected their faith while simultaneously exposing them to Hellenization through the powers vested in the Patriarchate. Consequently, their separation from the Ottoman state in the 19th century emerged first and foremost through demands for religious autonomy from the Rum Patriarchate rather than through direct national protest against the state. The nationalist movements of the 19th century thus eroded the Patriarchate's integrative authority across the Balkans, and many Balkan Orthodox Christians increasingly came to regard it less as a religious center than as an instrument of Hellenization and cultural assimilation.

4. The Patriarchate Begins to Lose Its Authority

Relations between the Ottoman state and the Patriarchate were not always harmonious. Movements among the ethnic Rum population directed against the Ottoman state also weakened the Patriarchate's authority. The 1821 Morea Uprising effectively ended the alliance of "loyalty and surety" that had linked the Ottoman state and the Patriarchate. The rebellion was understood as evidence that the Patriarchate had failed in its role as guarantor of its community and was therefore regarded as an act of official betrayal. In this context, the execution of Patriarch Gregory V in 1821, after he was held responsible for the uprising, was seen not as an exceptional measure but as a penalty consistent with the logic of the existing system. The arrangement had rested on the expectation that, in return for the authority granted to the Patriarchate and its privileged position over other Orthodox Christians, the patriarch would secure the loyalty of his flock to the state. From the state's perspective, he had failed in this essential duty and was punished accordingly.

Moreover, the uprising engendered a climate of suspicion within the Ottoman state not only toward the Patriarchate but also toward the Rum population more broadly. This development resulted in a marked decline in the community's standing before the state and in the gradual transfer of its privileged bureaucratic positions to the Armenian community, which was widely designated as the "Loyal Subjects" (Tebaa-i Sadıka). Following the establishment of an independent Greek state in 1830, the Patriarchate found itself situated between the centralizing imperatives of the Ottoman administration and the emergent political ideals emanating from Athens. Having already been compelled to recognize the autonomy of the Serbian Church in the 1830s, the Patriarchate sustained one of the most serious challenges to its "ecumenical" authority when the Church of Athens, founded in 1833, formally detached

itself from its jurisdiction.[14] Although the Patriarchate withheld formal recognition of this new ecclesiastical center until the 1850s, the Church of Athens progressively consolidated and extended its authority. Operating under the close supervision of Greek state officials, it emerged as a key institutional instrument of Greek state policy and nationalist ideology. Within Greece, both the monarchy and successive governments consistently conceived of the Church of Athens as an ecclesiastical body subject to state oversight and direction.[15]

This crisis inaugurated a reformist era directed toward the reorganization of the empire's non-Muslim subjects within the broader ideological framework of "Ottomanism." The Tanzimat Fermanı (Hatt-i Sharif of Gülhane, or Tanzimat Edict) of 1839 and the Islahat Fermanı (Edict of Reform) of 1856 initiated a process through which customary privileges were gradually recast as a form of "constitutional autonomy." From the outset, however, the Rum Patriarchate resisted both the Edict of Reform and the institutional reconfiguration it entailed. Although it acknowledged that the Rum community had forfeited many of its former privileges in the aftermath of the Greek uprising and that these could no longer be preserved in their previous form, it nevertheless sought to maintain a position of relative superiority vis-à-vis other non-Muslim communities, particularly within the Orthodox sphere. Accordingly, the Rum Patriarch and the Holy Synod, both of which stood to lose a considerable measure of their existing authority, opposed the proposed reforms and sought especially to obstruct the implementation of the draft regulations. In 1857, when the government requested that the Patriarchate prepare a draft of the new regulations, the Patriarchate delayed compliance, since, unlike the Armenian Patriarchate and the Chief Rabbinate, it proved unwilling to accommodate itself to the emerging system. The Rum Patriarchate thus resisted not only the internal redistribution of authority within its own community but also any transformation liable to erode its elevated standing among the empire's non-Muslim populations. More broadly, religious authorities apprehensive about the diminution of their power continued, from the promulgation of the Edict of Reform onward, to contend that the ancien régime better served the interests of the state.[16] Even segments of the Rum community that opposed direct governmental intervention in the affairs of the Patriarchate continued to lend it their support. Several Rum newspapers similarly endorsed resistance to the edict and underscored the Patriarchate's importance for the Ottoman Empire. Collectively, these tensions contributed to the deepening of a broader institutional and political crisis.[17] The administrative crisis, which deepened following the resignation of Patriarch Cyril VII in 1860, precipitated a series of significant reforms, undertaken in part under pressure from the Western powers. In 1862, the Rum Millet Regulation (Rum Milleti Nizamnamesi) was promulgated and brought into force, thereby formally abolishing the long-entrenched oligarchic structure known as "Yerondismos." Its most consequential innovation was the establishment of the "Mixed Assembly" (Karma Meclis), which incorporated lay representatives into the administrative apparatus. In so doing, the regulation curtailed the clergy's unrestricted authority over civil affairs and sought to institute a more professionalized and accountable mode of governance. It further aimed to secure a greater role in the administration of the Patriarchate for the educated and propertied strata of the Balkan communities, particularly merchants and intellectuals. At the same time, however, these reforms generated new tensions between clerical and lay factions within the church.[18]

The establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870 marked the Patriarchate's most significant loss of both authority and congregation.[19] As was the case with many other Orthodox communities, the initial phase of the Bulgarian separation from the Ottoman State emerged in the form of opposition to the authority of the Patriarchate. The territorial boundaries of the independent Bulgarian Church,

[14] Münir Yıldırım, *Yunanistan ve Ortodoks Kilisesi* (Ankara: Aziz Andaç Yayınları, 2005), 72–74.
[15] Gerasimos Augustinos, *Küçük Asya Rumları: 19. Yüzyılda İnanç, Cemaat ve Etnisite*, trans. Devrim Evci (İstanbul: Dipnot Yayınları, 2011), 167–68.
[16] Gülnihâl Bozkurt, *Alman–İngiliz Belgelerinin ve Siyasî Gelişmelerin Işığı Altında Gayrimüslim Osmanlı Vatandaşlarının Hukukî Durumu (1839–1914)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1996), 171.
[17] E. P. Engelhardt, *Türkiye ve Tanzîmat: Devlet-i Osmaniye'nin Târih-i Islahatı 1826'dan 1882'ye*, trans. Ali Reşad, ed. Erol Kılınç (İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2017), 163–65.
[18] Roderic H. Davison, "The Millets as Agents of Change in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, vol. 1, *The Central Lands*, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1982), 319–37.
[19] Ramazan Erhan Güllü, "Bulgar Eksarhlığı'nın Kuruluşu ve Statüsü," *Gaziantep Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 17, no. 1 (2018): 350–61.

established following its separation from the Patriarchate, largely corresponded to those of the autonomous entity that would later evolve into an independent Bulgarian state. The recognition of the Exarchate marked a crucial turning point in this process, representing a significant milestone on the path toward Bulgarian national independence.[20] Established by an imperial edict issued by Sultan Abdülaziz, the Bulgarian Exarchate formally terminated the spiritual and administrative monopoly of the Patriarchate in the Balkans. Although it represented a break from the Patriarchate's religious authority, the Exarchate functioned as a distinct administrative entity that remained under the sovereignty of the Ottoman state. This institutional separation gave rise to enduring disputes, particularly concerning the control of ecclesiastical properties and educational institutions throughout the Balkan region.

Following the Bulgarian case, the Patriarchate was similarly compelled in 1885 to acknowledge the autonomy of the Romanian Orthodox Church. In practice, however, the Romanian Church had already effectively separated from the Patriarchate as early as 1865, despite the latter's refusal to recognize this development. The eventual recognition in 1885 thus signified the formal acceptance of an already established independent ecclesiastical authority.[21] This development represented a further erosion of the Patriarchate's authority. Consequently, those Orthodox Christian communities that were not classified within the Rum millet under the *Nizamname* had, to a considerable extent, emancipated themselves from the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate.

During this period, Sultan Abdulhamid II regarded the administrative authority of the Patriarchate as an integral component of central governance, while simultaneously seeking to prevent it from evolving into an autonomous political entity. In this respect, the Sultan's views largely aligned with those of the Patriarchate's clergy, both of whom supported the preservation of its traditional authority as exercised in the classical period. However, it was not possible to maintain this power after the constitutional regulation (nizamname) was enacted. The crisis of 1890 further demonstrated the impossibility of reversing this transformation. Although the Sultan and the Patriarchate shared similar ideological positions, they diverged significantly over the implementation of the new regulations, ultimately placing them in direct opposition. The situation escalated as civil representatives also expressed their discontent, and the Patriarchate responded by closing its churches in protest, citing the curtailment of its ecclesiastical privileges. Concerned about the potential for European intervention, the Sultan conceded to certain demands put forward by the Patriarchate, leading to the incorporation of additional provisions and privileges into the *Nizamname*. In this context, regulations governing the arrest and trial procedures of clergy were introduced as part of the Patriarchate's broader effort to preserve its "special administrative status" within the Ottoman system. Consequently, the Ottoman State was compelled to maintain this arrangement. Despite these concessions, the Patriarchate's authority over other Orthodox communities—particularly in the Balkans—had already been significantly diminished. More broadly, the reform policies pursued by the Ottoman State contributed to a gradual erosion of the Patriarchate's institutional power and influence.[22]

Conclusion

After the conquest of Istanbul, the Rum Patriarchate of Istanbul was revived as an Ottoman administrative unit and strategic partner; it became one of the most strategic administrative institutions used by the Ottoman State to govern its subjects throughout its rule in the Balkans. However, the

Patriarchate's use of the administrative powers it received from the state as a means of hegemony over other groups, particularly in the Balkans, has caused several problems. The nationalist movements that emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries, coupled with the state's struggle to maintain its traditional structure, strained relations. The ongoing process led to the collapse of the administrative alliance between the state and the Patriarchate. The Patriarchate, which the Ottomans regarded as a high-level

[20] Christ Anastasoff, "Bulgaria's National Struggles," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 232, no. 1 (March 1944): 101–6.
[21] Hadi Belge, "Balkan Tarihi'nin XIX. Asrında Yaşanan Bir Sorun: Adanmış Manastırlar Meselesi," *Vakanüvis: Uluslararası Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 74.
[22] Ramazan Erhan Güllü, "İstanbul'da Ermeni-Rum Kiliseleri Krizi ve Ermenilere Tanınan Yeni İmtiyâzlar (1890–1891)," *OTAM: Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi* 38 (Autumn 2015): 31–54.

institution and whose patriarch held the status of "Head of the Community (Millet Başı)," had by the turn of the century become a church at the center of conflict.

The promulgation of the 1862 Rum Millet Regulation marked a significant phase of institutional modernization for the Patriarchate. However, this transformation also altered its character, shifting it from an internal administrative mechanism of the empire into an international political actor engaged in nationalist struggles and claims to ecumenical authority. In this regard, the post-1862 period provides clear evidence of the Patriarchate's evolution from a predominantly religious institution into a diplomatic and political entity, particularly within the context of the Balkans' nation-building processes.

Declarations / Beyanlar

Author Contributions / Yazar Katkısı

The author is solely responsible for the conception and design of the study, the collection and analysis of the sources, the interpretation of the findings, and the preparation of the manuscript.

Çalışmanın tasarımı, kaynakların toplanması ve analizi, bulguların yorumlanması ve metnin hazırlanması tek yazar tarafından gerçekleştirilmiştir.

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Ethics Committee Approval / Etik Kurul Onayı

This study is based on historical documents, published sources. It does not involve human participants, personal data, surveys, interviews, or experimental procedures; therefore, ethics committee approval was not required.

Bu çalışma tarihî belgeler, yayımlanmış kaynaklar ve yazara ait kişisel fotoğraflara dayanmaktadır. İnsan katılımcı, kişisel veri, anket, görüşme veya deneysel uygulama içermediğinden etik kurul onayı gerektirmemektedir.

Research and Publication Ethics / Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği

The author declares that the study was conducted in accordance with the principles of scientific research and publication ethics and that all sources used in the study have been appropriately cited.

Yazar, çalışmanın bilimsel araştırma ve yayın etiği ilkelerine uygun olarak hazırlandığını ve yararlanılan bütün kaynakların usulüne uygun biçimde gösterildiğini beyan eder.

Declaration on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence / Üretken Yapay Zekâ Kullanım Beyanı

The author declares that no generative artificial intelligence tools were used in the research, analysis, interpretation, or writing of this article.

Yazar, bu makalenin araştırılması, analizi, yorumlanması veya yazılması sürecinde üretken yapay zekâ araçlarının kullanılmadığını beyan eder.

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