

MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF THE WORK AND THOUGHT
OF ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

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No. 24 (August 28th, 2023)

WRITINGS ON THE EMPIRES IN WORLD HISTORY, XX

1924

Arnold J. Toynbee, *The New Turkey. Patriarchs and Grand Rabbi To Go. The Logical Sequel to Khalifate Decision*, in «The Manchester Guardian», Friday, March 14, 1924, p. 16.

See

also

https://www.academia.edu/63203811/Arnold_J_Toynbee_The_New_Turkey_The_Logical_Sequel_to_Khalifate_Decision

THE NEW TURKEY
PATRIARCHS AND GRAND RABBI TO GO
THE LOGICAL SEQUEL TO KHALIFATE DECISION

by Arnold J. Toynbee

The reported abolition of the Greek and Armenian Patriarchates and the Grand Rabbinate of Turkey is doubtless due to the same conscious policy on the part of the Turkish Government which has already led to the repudiation of the Khalifate. In any case, the liquidation of the Khalifate and of these institutions representing other religions is logically all of a piece, for all these institutions stand for an ancient system of society which is built up on bases so entirely different from those familiar to us in the West that it is hardly possible for any Eastern nation to retain them when once it has set out systematically to reorganise its life on Western lines.

All these ancient institutions ignore the distinction between Church and State which has been drawn more and more sharply throughout the course of our own history in the West. They likewise ignore the principles of centralised State sovereignty and of uniformity as between the individual subject or citizens of the State in the eye of the single State law. Middle Eastern society was not constructed in any way upon the Western bases.

The Status of Patriarchs and Rabbi

It is hardly possible to describe the position of these "Millet-Bashis", as the two Patriarchs and the Rabbi were called, in terms of Western political theory. You would be wrong if you described them as heads of religious communities. You would be equally wrong if you classified them as purely civil officials. Their position was neither, or, rather, it was both in one. The Greek or Armenian Patriarch, or, again, the Grand Rabbi, were not merely the ecclesiastical heads of their respective flocks within the Ottoman Empire, but they were

responsible for many social services which we have ceased to regard as falling within the ecclesiastical sphere. They organised education, they dealt with such legal matters as marriage, wardship, inheritance, registration of births and deaths, and they had courts of justice which covered substantially what we regard as the field of civil law. In all these matters the Turks were indifferent to the doings of their non-Moslem subject. As long as they paid their tribute and did not rise in revolt they did not mind in the least how these flocks of cattle, as they considered them, managed their own internal affairs. They displayed none of that jealous determination, so conspicuous in the modern Western State, to assert direct and exclusive control over every inhabitant alike throughout the State territory. Nor did they confine this policy of *laissez faire* to their non-Moslem subjects. The dominant Islamic community was also organised on much the same lines of communal autonomy, with its own schools, its own religious law, and its own courts of justice covering the whole field of civil litigation, under the supreme authority of the Sheikh-ul-Islam, who was head of the Moslem community, until the other day, in the same sense as that in which the Oecumenical Patriarch was head of the Orthodox, the Armenian Patriarch of the Gregorian Christians, and the Grand Rabbi of the Jews. The sovereign power of the Ottoman Empire interfered with the communal life of its Moslem subjects no more than it did with the internal affairs of its Christian or Jewish subjects.

The main distinction was that in the mixed cases between Moslem and Jew, or Moslem and Christian, the case had to be tried before the Moslem courts, since the Moslem community was privileged above the others in the Empire. In the course of the nineteenth century there had been successive attempts to graft the Napoleonic Code upon the religious law of Islam, but there was an inherent contradiction between the two systems, and the Turks are clearly right in thinking that, if they are to reconstitute their society on genuinely Western lines, the only effective course is to scrap the ruins of the old system and lay down new foundations on a completely Western ground-plan.

This does not, however, exhaust the anomaly of the position as viewed from our Western angle of vision, for the Patriarch, Grand Rabbi, Sheikh-ul-Islam, and the rest cannot merely be regarded as the heads of private though powerful associations within the State to which the State delegated the administration of their respective members for educational,

ecclesiastical, and judicial affairs. The abdication of sovereignty on the part of the Ottoman State did not go quite to that length, and a link was maintained between the Government of the Sultan and the cultural autonomy of these communities or "Millets" by giving a double function to the heads of communities, or the "Millet-Bashis".

Ecclesiastical Hostages to Fortune

The Millet-Bashis was not only the head of a private association of his fellow-nationals and co-religionists; he was at the same time an official of the Ottoman State, supported in his authority over his flock by the strong arm of Ottoman power but at the same time held responsible for the good behaviour of his constituents. In the course of history the balance of advantage and disadvantage from the Millet-Bashis's point of view worked out fairly evenly. In normal times the Turkish Power enabled him by its support to levy his rates and taxes and to enforce his judicial decisions. In abnormal times he had to buffer vicariously for the sins of constituents whose action he was unable to control. In 1821, for example, the Greek Patriarch at Constantinople was hanged because the Greek Prince Hyspilanti had crossed the Pruth and the Greek peasantry revolted in Morea. On the other hand, this unfortunate prelate himself and his predecessors since 1463 had enjoyed greater power and privileges under the Ottoman Government than they had ever enjoyed under the previous Byzantine Emperors of their own religion and nationality. This was the old Ottoman method – to leave the subject peoples very much to themselves so long as they behaved as was expected of them, and then to take violent reprisals upon these august ecclesiastical hostages to fortune whose duty it was to keep their flocks in order for the Sultan's convenience.