

# Catholic Missionary Activity in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire from the Perspectives of State and Convert<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** Catholic Church efforts to convert Christians of the Ottoman Empire accelerated in the early seventeenth century after the establishment of the “Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith” (*Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*) in 1622, and in the remainder of the century missionaries would be particularly successful in winning converts among Ottoman Armenians. This success gradually led to intra-Armenian conflict between Apostolic Armenians and those with Catholic sympathies. This article argues that the topic of Apostolic/Catholic Armenian confessional conflicts is ripe ground for research that builds connections between Ottoman Turkish archival documentation and Armenian narrative sources, many of which remain unpublished. While most previous research has examined the topic from European, Ottoman, or Armenian perspectives, here we present images of Catholic-Apostolic conflict using both Ottoman archival sources and the unpublished Armenian manuscript of an Armenian convert, showing the potential for further integrated studies on the spread of Catholicism among Ottoman Armenians of the early modern period.

**KEYWORDS:** Ottoman Armenians, Catholic missionaries, Mühimme Defterleri, Erzurum, eighteenth century, Armenian chronicles

1. Henry Shapiro is currently engaged in a larger project about the merchant Elia of Erzurum. Wondering if it might be fruitful to conduct research with *Mühimme Defterleri* about Catholic missionary activity in early eighteenth-century Erzurum, he asked Selim Güngörürler at a conference in Budapest, only to discover that Selim had already systematically discovered, transcribed and translated pertinent documents. This article stems from that overlap of interests. We are grateful to the JOTSA staff and anonymous reviewers for their comments and generous support.

## Introduction

One of the ironies of Ottoman history is the nearly omnipresent evidence for mutual habitation, commerce, and cultural interaction between the empire's various religious communities, and the comparative paucity of discussion of other groups in those communities' historical traditions. It would be possible to read many chronicles in Ottoman Turkish without realizing that the empire's population was almost half Christian for much of its history. While Ottoman sultans, soldiers, and viziers appear much more frequently in history writings of the Greeks and Armenians, their historians also tended to be introverted, describing their own networks of churches, monasteries and villages without discussing fellow non-Muslims until a moment of conflict arose.

For most of the twentieth century, the field of early modern Ottoman history was Islamo-centric, focusing on archives and histories written by Muslims, while relatively neglecting the literary output of non-Muslim communities. This has changed in recent decades, particularly with groundbreaking research on Ottoman Greeks,<sup>2</sup> but the early modern Armenian experience in the Ottoman Empire remains understudied.<sup>3</sup> While much lip service is given to the polyglot and multi-religious population of the empire, studies that make connections across different religions' literary traditions are difficult to produce, and historians have only scratched the surface of their potential. This article uses Ottoman Turkish and Armenian sources to shed light on the spread of Catholicism among Ottoman Armenians in the early modern period, a topic that simultaneously drew the interest of the Ottoman state's bureaucrats and Armenian Christian authors.

In 1830 the Ottoman state gave formal recognition to an Armenian Catholic *millet* for the first time.<sup>4</sup> Until that point, the confessional boundaries between Catholic and Apostolic Armenians were somewhat ill-defined, and Armenian Catholics often lived in the shadows and faced periodic outbursts of persecution. While it is well known that Armenian Catholics played a prominent role in the cultural and economic life of the Ottoman Empire and its capital Istanbul even before the nineteenth century, writing the internal history

2. Elizabeth Zachariadou was a pioneer in research on Ottoman Greeks, and recent decades have seen groundbreaking contributions by Evangelia Balta, Molly Greene, Christine Philiou, and many young scholars. It has become a vibrant subfield of Ottoman Studies.

3. One recent contribution in this direction is Henry R. Shapiro, *The Rise of the Western Armenian Diaspora in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire: From Refugee Crisis to Renaissance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

4. Kemal Beydilli, *II. Mahmud Devri'nde Katolik Ermeni Cemâati ve Kilisesi'nin Tamınması (1830)* (Harvard: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, 1995).

of the Armenian Catholics is a difficult venture that usually requires reading between the lines of vehement polemical discourse. Recent decades have seen important discoveries in research on the spread of Catholicism in the early modern Ottoman Empire by scholars like Bernard Heyberger, Bruce Masters, Raymond Kévorkian, and Cesare Santus. Heyberger and Masters have shed light on the spread of Catholicism in the Levant, while Kevorkian and Santus have focused on the Armenians of Anatolia in Istanbul.<sup>5</sup> Ensar Köse has also made rich contributions to research on the Armenian church in the Ottoman Empire using the Ottoman archives.<sup>6</sup> To date, however, historians have not explored the many avenues of research that can be opened by combining Ottoman archival and Armenian narrative sources.

In this article, we will be relying on two unutilized bodies of primary sources to shed light on Catholic missionary activities in the early eighteenth-century Ottoman Empire and the effect these activities had on Ottoman Armenians. The first of these two bodies of sources are passages from early-eighteenth century *Mühimme Defterleri*, or Registers of Important Affairs, which include copies of decrees issued by the Ottoman state. These documents reveal the state's worries about Catholic missionary activities in the empire, and they outline actions taken by the state to hinder the missions.

The other source is the unpublished chronicle of an Ottoman-Armenian Catholic, Elia of Erzurum (1689–1750?). Elia was born into a family of Armenian merchants in a village near Erzurum, where his family's business was based. Jesuits had an active mission in Erzurum, and Elia studied the Catholic

5. Bernard Heyberger and Bruce Masters have done pioneering work on Catholic missionary in Syria, while Raymond Kévorkian and Cesare Santus have both focused on the Armenians of Anatolia. See Bernard Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique* (Rome: Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 1994); Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Raymond H. Kévorkian, "L'imprimerie Surb Ejmiacin et Surb Sargis Zoravar et le conflit entre Arméniens et catholiques à Constantinople (1695–1718)," *Revue des études arméniennes* 15 (1981): 401–16; *Idem*, "Livres missionnaire et enseignement catholique chez les Arméniens entre 1583 et 1700," *Revue des études arméniennes* 17 (1983): 589–99; *Idem*, "Le patriarcat arménien de Constantinople et l'Occident catholique au XVIIe siècle," *Revue du monde arménien moderne et contemporain* 1 (1994): 19–29; and Cesare Santus, *Trasgressioni necessarie. Communicatio in sacris, coesistenza e conflitti tra le comunità cristiane orientali (Levante e Impero ottomano, XVII-XVIII secolo)* (Rome: École française de Rome: 2019). See also contributions on the Ottoman Empire in B. Heyberger, N. Amsler, and A. Badea, *Catholic Missionaries in Early Modern Asia: Patterns of Localization* (Routledge, 2020).

6. E.g. Ensar Köse, "İstanbul Ermeni Patrikliği'nin Osmanlı Hükümeti'yle Münasebetlerine Tesir Eden Dinamikler (18. Yüzyılın İlk Yarısı)," *Osmanlı Medeniyeti Araştırmaları Dergisi* 3 (2017): 1–24; "Bir Hayalin Peşinde Yüz Yıl: Kudüs Ermeni Patrikhanesi'ni İstanbul Patrikliği'yle Birleştirme Çabaları (1650–1750)," *Tarih Dergisi* 63 (2016): 41–88.

faith with them and converted to Catholicism in 1705, when he was about sixteen years old. Eġia went on to have a long and varied career. While his family business was engaged in long-distance trade that spanned across the Ottoman, Safavid-Persian, and Russian realms, his career took a turn when he settled in Safavid Iran and began working for European, and particularly French, interests, chosen most likely as a result of his Catholicism, linguistic skills, and business experience. Eġia was later appointed by the Safavid shah to be an envoy to Europe in 1724, but his mission failed when he was apprehended by Russian authorities and detained in the Russian Empire for twelve years. After being released from his long Russian captivity, he spent time in Europe and Persia, before ultimately returning to his village home in the Erzurum province of the Ottoman Empire. At life's end, he renounced Catholicism and wrote a long, still unpublished chronicle in Armenian about his life and his relationship with Roman Catholic religious orders (Mkhit'arean Monastery Manuscript Library in Vienna MS 980).<sup>7</sup>

Together, Ottoman Turkish archival documents and Eġia's Armenian-language chronicle provide two starkly contrasting perspectives on Roman Catholic missionary activities in the Ottoman Empire: those of a state working to hinder the missionaries, and the memories of a subject of Jesuit indoctrination and conversion. Most research to-date on "global Catholicism" has relied on the records and writings of European Catholics.<sup>8</sup> Here we show the response to Catholic missionary activities on the ground, as described by Ottoman Muslim state officials and Ottoman Christians. While this article focuses on the first decade of the eighteenth century, tensions broke out sporadically, such as instances in 1715 and 1761.<sup>9</sup> We conclude by postulating possible reasons for the greater success of Catholic missionary activities among Ottoman Armenians compared to other Ottoman Christian groups.

7. For a more complete account of Eġia's life and literary corpus see Henry R. Shapiro, "Falling Out of Love with the Franks: The Life and Writings of an Armenian Catholic Diplomat in the Service of Late Safavid Persia," *Iranian Studies* 54 (2021): 573–603. See also A.G. Abrahamyan, *Eġia Karnets 'u Divanə* (Yerevan: Mitk' Hratarakch' ut'yun, 1968).

8. For important efforts to look at early modern Catholicism as a global, not European, phenomenon, see Simon Ditchfield, "Decentering the Catholic Reformation Papacy and Peoples in the Early Modern World," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* (2010): 186–208; and "'Provincializing Europe': the circulation of the sacred and reciprocity in the making of Roman Catholicism as a world religion," in *Reformation und Reformationen*, ed. Kaspar von Greyerz and Anselm Schubert (Gutersloh: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 2022), 177–206.

9. Charles Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans: The Church and the Ottoman Empire: 1453–1923* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 178–89.

## Catholic Missionaries in Ottoman Turkish Archival Documents (*Mühimme*)

A critical turning point in the history of Catholics in the Ottoman lands came in 1622 with the establishment of the “Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith” (*Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*), which soon went on to found the *Collegio Urbano* for training missionaries in 1627.<sup>10</sup> These institutions made gradual progress in winning over Catholic sympathizers among Armenians of the Ottoman Empire, and by the beginning of the eighteenth century the Armenian Catholic population of Istanbul may have been as high as 8,000 out of a general population of 40,000.<sup>11</sup> With widening Catholic influence came increasing tensions between Apostolic and Catholic-leaning Armenians.<sup>12</sup>

By the end of the seventeenth century, tensions had reached a point that the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul was willing to take severe measures to limit the spread of Catholicism among its flock. Cesare Santus, a scholar of global Catholicism, identifies a key moment in those initiatives in an article entitled “*Sheykh ül-islam* Feyzullah Efendi and the Armenian Patriarch Awetik’: A Case of Entangled Confessional Disciplining?” Therein, Santus documents how the highest Apostolic Armenian clergyman of the Ottoman Empire joined forces with the highest Muslim jurist to combat the Catholics, and he marks the Venetian conquest of the Island of Chios in 1694 as a key event in catalyzing cooperation, as it transformed the Apostolic-Catholic Armenian conflict from an internal affair among Christians into a debate with potential geopolitical ramifications in time of war against a Catholic power.<sup>13</sup>

10. See Giovanni Pizzorusso, *Governare le missioni, conoscere il mondo nel XVII secolo. La Congregazione pontificia De Propaganda Fide* (Viterbo: Edizioni Sette città, 2018); and Sebouh D. Aslanian, “The ‘Great Schism’ of 1773: Venice and the Founding of the Armenian Community of Trieste,” in *Reflections on Armenian Identity in History and Historiography*, ed. H. Berberian and J. Daryae (Irvine: Jordan Center for Persian Studies, 2018), 89.

11. On the Catholic presence in Istanbul, see Rinaldo Marmara, *La Communauté Levantine de Constantinople—De L’Empire Byzantin a La République Turque* (Istanbul: Isis, 2012). For the estimate of the Armenian Catholic population of Istanbul in the eighteenth century, see Georg Hofmann, *Il vicariato apostolico di Costantinopoli, 1453–1830: documenti, con introduzione, illustrazioni* (Rome: Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1935), 78–83.

12. There is a rich Armenian-language secondary literature on this conflict, including classic works by Grigoris Galēmkearean. Recently, Meruzhan Karapetean has published a series of important articles describing texts and personages relating to confessional conflict, e.g., Meruzhan Karapetean, “ZhĒ Dari Arajin K’arordi mi Erkkhōsut’iwn,” *Handēs Amsōreay* 123 (2009): 375–476; and “K.Polu Patriark’ner T’ovma vrd. Beriats’i (1603–1658) ew Dawit’ Beriats’i (?–1679),” *Handēs Amsōreay* 133 (2019): 297–393.

13. Cesare Santus, “*Sheykh ül-islam* Feyzullah Efendi and the Armenian Patriarch Awetik’: A Case of Entangled Confessional Disciplining?”, in *Confessionalizations? Dialogic*

Although the intensity of cooperation between the Ottoman state and the Armenian Patriarchate was probably at its high point of coordination between 1692 and 1703 in Istanbul, concerted efforts to repress the Catholics continued sporadically throughout the empire, and they can be followed through investigation of Ottoman Turkish archival documents, particularly the *Mühimme Defterleri*. For example, a decree against Catholic missionary activity was issued to Aleppo in July 1701, with copies also issued to Erzurum, Âmid (Diyarbakir), Tokat, Konya, Kayseri, Ankara, Sivas, Eğin (Kemaliye), Arabgir, Çemişgezek, and Divriği, apparently the broad range of areas where missionaries were known or thought to be active. The decree, addressed to the judge of Aleppo, states that:

In my Well-Protected Domains have emerged some priests associated with the Pope of Rome, and they roam in towns and cities with corrupt purposes and void intentions, invite the Greeks, Armenians, Assyrians, and other dhimmi Nazarenes subordinated to them, convert these from their ancient rites, make these conform to their own sect, and thereby broadcast the spikes of scheming and cheating, and plot the yeast of corruption and disruption. Thereupon, dhimmi subjects came to my Imperial Council and complained. It is vitally necessary to prohibitively inhibit the aforesaid ones and to eradicate the nail of their sedition and the stem of their thought. When my Illustrious Order arrives, you, who is the abovementioned high-judge, shall step in to this demanding affair with full attention, inquire secretly and openly, impede from such wile and scheme the scheming priests, who are affiliated with the Pope of Rome and who by way of travel as well as residence in my Protected Domains seduce and corrupt the Nazarene groups in the explained manner, block their course of corruption, admonish for the reversion of those Greeks and Armenians as well as other dhimmis of the Nazarene nation who, in deception by the schemes and cheatings of the aforesaid ones, quit their ancient sects and defected to the Frankish rite, make them hate and refuse the Frankish sect, likewise, after gathering full knowledge, seize and imprison and submit in name as well as in description to my Gate of State those who in the appearance of priesthood corrupt the aforesaid groups with such cheat if they even henceforward reject prohibition and inhibition and again dare to corrupt. But you shall much refrain from acquiring property with this pretext. That is to say, if it becomes heard that you incline towards seizing property and acquiring goods, consider that you brought punishment upon yourself, so act accordingly with chastity and fairness. Thereon is issued my Sublimely Glorious Decree.<sup>14</sup>

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*Perspectives on Politics of Piety and Community Building in the Ottoman Empire, 15th–18th Centuries*, ed. Tijana Krstić and Derin Terzioğlu (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2021).

14. MHM.d. 111, hüküm 2224–2231 (sf. 631 / görüntü 319). “Memâlik-i Mahrûsetü’l-mesâlikimde Rim Papa’ya müntesip bazı ruhbanlar zuhûr edip, kasd-ı fâsid ü niyet-i kâsid ile devr-i bilâd u emsâr edip, Rum ü Ermenî vü Süryânî ve sâir bunlara Tâbi ehl-i zimmet Nasârâ’yı mezâhib-i Efrenciye’ye davet ve nicelerin[i] âyin-i kadîmlerinden döndürtüp kendi mezheplerine mütâbaat ettirmekle, Memâlik-i Mahrûse’nde bess-i eşvâk-i mekâid ü ihtiyâl ve dess-i hamîr-mâye-i mefâsid ü ihtilâl etmeleriyle, ehl-i zümmet reâyâ Dîvân-ı Hümâyûn’uma gelip şikâyet etmeğin, mezburların zecr ü men’i ve mih-i fitne vü rişe-i endîşelerinin kal’-u-kam’i

The first noteworthy point about this decree is the broad array of sites in Anatolia to which it was addressed in addition to Aleppo. The sites were almost all noted Armenian population centers, thus implying that the missionaries were targeting Armenians in particular, even if the decree lists “Greeks, Armenians, Assyrians, and other dhimmi Nazarenes.” Secondly, it is noteworthy that state action is not initiated by Muslims or state officials, but rather that “dhimmi subjects came to my Imperial Council and complained”: that is to say, local Ottoman Christians actively sought out state intervention against the Catholic missionaries. Finally, the document orders that the local officials imprison missionaries, showing the seriousness with which they sought to curb their activities. Similar orders were issued to Basra,<sup>15</sup> Baghdad,<sup>16</sup> and Erzurum<sup>17</sup> in the following year (1702), instructing local officials in those areas to expel Catholic missionaries, and in 1703 orders of expulsion of Catholic missionaries were issued to the Greek islands of Naxos and Paros.<sup>18</sup>

In May 1703 another order was issued to Erzurum which describes a former Armenian bishop who had Catholic leanings and began to help the European missionaries. The document states that

. . . the priest named Ehron [Aharon], who was formerly [Armenian] bishop at Erzurum, is again not restrained or prohibited, he instructs the children of the dhimmi Nazarene nation in the Frankish rite and thus cause disruption. Aside from this, it is documented [by the courthouse] that the aforesaid one conforms to the Frankish rite and that his corruption is obvious, and his misbehavior is reported. When my Illustrious Order arrives, you, the abovesaid high-judge, shall imprison at the fortress of Erzurum and notify on the said priest Ehron, who conforms to the Frankish rite,

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mühim ve muktezî olmakla, sen ki mevlânâ-yı mûmâ-ileyhsin, emr-i şerifim vusûlunda bu emr-i lâzîmü`l-ihîmâma takayyüd-i tâm ile kıyâm ve sirren ü alenen tafahhus u isti`lâm edip ol makule Rim Papa`ya mensup olmakla Memâlik-i Mahrûse`mde eğer seyâhat ü eğer ikamet tarîkı ile tavâif-i Nasârâ`ya minvâl-i meşrûh üzere iğvâ vü ifsâd eden rehâbîn-i key-âyîn ol makule hadî`at ü mekîdetten sadd ile mecâryi mefâsid ü mekâsidlerin[i] sedd edip, ve eğer Rûm ü Ermenî vü eğer sâir ehl-i zimmet millet-i Nasârâ`dan mezburların ferifte-i keyd ü ihtiyalleri olmakla mezheb-i kadîmlerin [i] terk ve âyîn-i Efrenc`e intihâl edenlerin rücû`larına tembih ile Frenk mezhebinden tenfir ü tahzîr ve kezâlik sûret-i ruhbanîyette tavâif-i mezbûreyi bu güne hîle vü hud`a ile ifsâd edenler bundan sonra dahi mütenebbih ü münzecir olmayıp yine ifsâda cesâret ederler ise vukuf-ı tam tahsil ettikten sonra ahz ü haps ve isim ü resimleriyle Der-i Devlet-medârıma arz u ilâm eyleyip amma bu takrîble celb-i maldan ziyâde tavakkıy eyleyesin. Şöyle ki, ahz-ı envâl ü celb-i metâ` vech-i ihâle-i meylânın istimâ` olunur ise kendine mücib-i nekâl olacağını mülâhaza edip ona göre `afâf ü intisâf üzere hareket eylemek bâbında fermân-ı âli-şânım sâdır olmuştur. Buyurdum ki . . . fi evâsıt-i S[afær], se[ne 1]113.”

15. A.DVN. 281/97, entry 1.

16. A.DVN. 281/97, entry 2.

17. A.DVN. 281/97, entry 3.

18. MHM.d. 112, page 438, entry 1593. For analysis of comparable orders, see also Cesare Santus, *Trasgressioni necessarie*, 153–54, 317, 352.

instructs the children of the dhimmi Nazarene nation in the Frankish rite, thus causes corruption, and whose misbehavior is obvious.<sup>19</sup>

In this document we see that Catholic missionary efforts were not only winning over Armenian laypeople, but even high clergy, including the former bishop Aharon discussed here.<sup>20</sup> These high clergy would undoubtedly have been in positions to greatly aid the missionaries. Thus, Catholic missionaries sought to win over the high clergy first and foremost, and anti-Catholic forces were particularly eager to imprison men of such influence.

This threat of imprisonment pushed many prominent Armenian Catholics into hiding. The most famous of these was Komitas K'ēōmurchean (1656–1707), who spent several years hidden in Jerusalem and Istanbul in the early eighteenth century, before finally being executed in 1707.<sup>21</sup> Komitas was a priest, poet, and a member of Istanbul's most renowned Armenian intellectual family. He was the younger brother of Eremia K'ēōmurchean, Ottoman Istanbul's first great Armenian author and intellectual. While Eremia was an Apostolic Armenian who lived to a ripe old age as a respected man in the Ottoman Armenian community of Istanbul, his younger brother, Komitas, was decapitated at the explicit request of the Apostolic Armenian Patriarchate. Komitas is the most famous Catholic to be killed during these persecutions because he would later be beatified by the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>22</sup>

Whereas previous documents stated vaguely that “dhimmi subjects came to my Imperial Council and complained” about Catholic missionary activities, in another imperial order sent to Erzurum in mid-May 1706 we gain more information about the local Ottoman Christians who were goading the state to

19. MHM.d. 114, page 146, entry 597. “. . . sâbikan Erzurum'da murahhasa olan Ehron nâm râhip yine memnu' ve münzecir olmayıp ehl-i zimmer millet-i Nasârâ'nın evlâtlarına âyin-i Efrenc'i talim ile ihtilâlâ bâis olduğundan mâadâ mesfûrun âyin-i Efrenc'e mütâbaat ile fesâdı zâhir olduğu hüccet ve bu vech üzere su-i hâli i'lâm olunmakla, sen ki mevlânâ-yı mûmâ-ileyhsin, emr-i şerîfim vusûlunda âyin-i Efrenc'e mütâbaat ve ehl-i zimmet millet-i Nasârâ evlâdına âyin-i Efrenc'i talim ile ihtilâlâ bâis ve su-i hâli zâhir olan mesfur Ehron râhibi Erzurum kalesine hapis ve i'lâm eylesin, diye yazılmıştır.”

20. For previous mention of this Aharon, see Köse, “İstanbul Ermeni Patrikliği'nin Osmanlı Hükümeti'yle Münasebetlerine Tesir Eden Dinamikler (18. Yüzyılın İlk Yarısı),” 13.

21. For biographies of Komitas, see Maġak'ia Örmanean, *Azgapatum* II (Beruit: Sewan, 1960), 2756–59; and H. Riondel, *Une page tragique de l'histoire religieuse du Levant* (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1929).

22. Concerning Komitas' beatification, see Cesare Santus, “Un Beato Martire Per La Nazione Martire. La Causa di Beatificazione del Sacerdote Armeno Gomidas Keaumurgian (1709–1929),” in *Un mestiere paziente: Gli allievi pisani per Daniele Menozzi*, ed. Andrea Mariuzzo, et al. (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2017), 221–33; and Henry R. Shapiro, “Afterlives of Komitas K'ēōmurchean (1656–1707): Commemorating an Armenian-Catholic Martyr in Ottoman Istanbul,” *Ottoman Studies (Osmanlı Araştırmaları)* LVIII (2021): 81–120.

clamp down on the activities of Catholic missionaries and local Christians who had become practicing Catholics. The order to Erzurum explicitly states that:

. . . the priest named Masrub [Mesrop], who is currently [Armenian] bishop at Erzurum, came to my Blissful Threshold, and notified that in my Well-Protected Domains have emerged some priests associated with the Pope of Rome, they roam in towns and cities with corrupt purposes and void intentions, invite to Frankish sects the Greeks, Armenians, and other dhimmi Nazarenes subordinated to these, convert many of these from their ancient rites, make these conform to their own sect, and thereby broadcast the spikes of scheming and cheating, and plot the yeast of corruption and disruption in my Protected Domains. Dhimmi subjects had previously come to my Imperial Council and complained. . . .

The priest named Ehron [Aharon], who was formerly [Armenian] bishop at Erzurum, is again not restrained or prohibited, he instructs the children of the dhimmi Nazarene nation in the Frankish rite and thus cause disruption. Aside from this, it is documented [by the courthouse] that the aforesaid one conforms to the Frankish rite and that his corruption is obvious . . . Whereas my Illustrious Order was already given that the priest [Aharon] be confined in the fortress of Erzurum and notification thereof be sent, and whereas the aforesaid one became confined, he has been released, because he had financial power . . . [with which to convince] the Civil Magistrates, and he does not refrain from committing transgressions in the explained manner.

He [Mesrop, the current Armenian bishop of Erzurum] asked for my Imperial Hand-writ that the aforesaid priest be confined in the fortress of Ardanuç in the vicinity of Erzurum and that his violations be prohibited and averted as explained. My Highly Glorious Decree is issued for you, the abovementioned vizier, to examine and question this on the spot, and if it [all] has happened as reported, to seize and confine the aforesaid one.<sup>23</sup>

23. MHM.d. 115, hüküm 70 (sf.22). “hâlen Erzurum’da murahhasa olan Masrub nâm râhip Sûdde-i Saadet’ime gelip Memâlik-i Mahrûsetü’l-mesâlikimde Rim Papa`ya müntesip bazı ruhbanlar zuhûr edip kasd-ı fâsîd ü niyet-i kâsîd ile devr-i bilâd u emsâr ve Rum u Ermenî vü sâir bunlara tâbî ehl-i zimmet Nasârâ’yı mezâhib-i Efrenciye’ye davet ve nicelerin[i] âyin-i kadîmlerinden döndürüp kendi mezheplerine mütâbaat ettirmekle, Memâlik-i Mahrûse’nde bess-i eşvâk-i mekâid ü ihtiyâl ve dess-i hamîr-mâye-i mefâsîd ü ihtilâl etmeleriyle, bundan akdem ehl-i zimmet reyâ Dîvân-ı Hümâyun’uma gelip şikâyet ettiklerinde. . . .

. . . sâbîkan Erzurum’da murahhasa olan Ehron nâm râhip yine memnû’ ü münzecir olmayıp ehl-i zimmet Nasârâ’nun evlatlarına âyin-i Efrenc’i talim ile ihtilâlâle bâis olduğundan mâadâ mesfûrun âyin-i Efrenc’e mütâbaat ile fesâdı olan [. . . mürekkep dağılmış . . .] râhibi Erzurum kalesine kale-bend ve i’lâm eylemek üzere bundan akdem emr-i şerîfîm verilip mezbur kale-bend olmuş iken kuvvet-i mâliyesi olmakla ehl-i örf ile [. . . mürekkep dağılmış . . .] kaleden itlak olunmakla vech-i meşruh üzere tecâvüzden hâli olmadığın[ı] bildirip mezbur râhip Erzurum kurbunda olan Ardanuç kalesine kale-bend ve vech-i meşruh üzere ta’addisi men’ u def’ olunmak bâbında hatt-ı? hümâyunun ricâ etmekle, sen ki vezîr-i müşârûn-ileyhsin, mahallinde şer’ile tefahhus u sual edip i’lâm olduğun üzere vaki ise mezburu ahz ü kale-bend eylemek bâbında fermân-ı âlişânım sâdir olmuştur.”

Here the court describes very explicitly that it was none other than the current Armenian bishop, Mesrop, who was demanding state action be taken against Catholic activity in Erzurum, especially at the aforementioned Aharon, showing how the Apostolic–Catholic competition of the early eighteenth century was dividing the Armenian clerical class. As in the famous case of Komitas, here again the Apostolic Armenian church hierarchy was eager to use Ottoman state instruments of coercion to restrain Catholic conversion within their community.

The Catholics were not, however, without recourse, and the document suggests that it was their “financial power,” presumably their ability to bribe, that enabled Aharon to go free. In his research on missionary activity in the Ottoman Empire, Cesare Santus analyzes a French letter from a Catholic convert from Erzurum written some years beforehand that mentions the controversy about Aharon. The letter notes that “. . . Erzurum is now divided into three factions: the . . . Armenians; . . . the Franks; . . . [and] those who do not want to appear either as Armenians or Franks.” Santus’s research shows how Ottoman officials very consciously sought to profit off the Catholic missionaries and their sympathizers, and how French diplomatic power—in addition to bribery—helped their mission in Erzurum survive.<sup>24</sup>

Mühimme entries document further complaints against Catholic activity two years later in Aleppo. According to one document dated March 1708 and addressed to the authorities in Aleppo, French missionaries were working in secret to proselytize Ottoman Christians:

. . . currently, some Franks from the French nation alter their attire, disguise themselves, and roam cities and towns, some in the attire of physicians and some in the appearance of priests. A few of such Frenchmen have currently established themselves in the metropolis of Aleppo, and firm news have been received that they, as occasion serves, seduce and pervert the dhimmi subjects to defect to the Frankish rite. Whereas you, who are the above mentioned vizier and the aforementioned high-judge, were already admonished with Illustrious Orders for this pressing matter, the further emanation of this affair as explained originates from your lowly consciousness regarding the state of affairs in governance! Therefore you are [hereby] reprimanded and entitled to scolding. Hence, when my Illustrious Order arrives: you shall take great care to step in to this demanding affair with full attention, inquire secretly and openly, eject and drive away from Aleppo the wily Franks who have been residing in Aleppo for five-to-six years in the appearance of either physicians or priests, and remove the wile of their corruption. This is to say, henceforward, from such pervert corruptors if a single soul is found in your area of jurisdiction, know it to be destined that your apology and answer will fall on deaf ears and that you will be responsible and punished. For you to act accordingly with perception and vigilance, my Highly Glorious Decree is issued.<sup>25</sup>

24. Cesare Santus, *Trasgressioni necessarie*, 313–14.

25. MHM.d. 115, page 532, entries 2346–53. “. . . hâlâ Fransız tâifesinden bazı Frenkler tagyî-i hey’et ü tebdîl-i kıyâfet edip kimisi etibbâ zeyninde ve kimisi rehâbîn sûretinde devr-i

This document explicitly describes how Catholic missionaries would hide their identities, using disguises and trying to pass off as physicians. Similar descriptions exist in an edict issued to Sivas a few months later (July 29–August 7).<sup>26</sup>

Collectively, we see from these documents that the Ottoman state was actively attempting to repress Catholic missionary activities throughout the empire in the first decade of the eighteenth century. While the Apostolic Armenian Patriarchate and the empire's Muslim *Şeyhülislam* did not always cooperate with the close concert described by Santus for the period from 1692–1703, sporadic cooperation continued in localities throughout the Ottoman Empire for years thereafter. Most, if not all, of the Ottoman Empire's anti-Catholic activities in the following five years seem to have been initiated by the complaints of Apostolic Armenian churchmen, for whom the confessional divide were more important than linguistic or ethnic solidarities. This prompted Catholic missionaries to work underground, living in hiding and using disguises, and it also prompted some Ottoman-Armenian Catholics to flee the empire, seeking safe refuge in, for instance, the Russian Empire.<sup>27</sup>

### The Testimony of an Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Armenian Catholic Convert

Despite all of the fervent threats and promises of anti-Catholic measures made by judges across the Ottoman Empire, as described in the above-mentioned documents, the survival of a Catholic minority among the empire's Armenian

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bilâd u emsâr ve hâlen ol makule Fransızlar'dan birazı mahmiye-i Halep'te temekkün ü karar edip fırsat buldukça ehl-i zimmet reâyâyı âyin-i Efrenciye'ye intihâl için iğvâ vü idlâl etikleri yakıynen haber almamakla, siz ki vezîr-i müşârun-ileyh ü mevlânâ-yı mûmâ-ileyhsin[iz], mukaddemen bu madde-i ammâre? için evâmîr-i şerîfe ile tembîh olunmuş iken bu emr kezâlik? vech-i meşruh üzere sudûru ahvâl-i bilâdiyeye dâir umûrda sukut-ı şuurunuzdan neş'et etmekle matrah-ı hitâb u müstehakk-ı 'itâb olmuş[nu]zdur. İmdi, emr-i şerîfîm vusûlunda bu emr-i lâzımü'l-ihitimâma takayyüd-i tâm ile kıyâm ve sırren ü alenen tefahhus edip Fransız tâifesinden eğer etibbâ vü eğer rehâbîn sûretinde varıp beş-altı seneden beri Halep'te temekkün eden Frenk-i keyd-âhenkleri Halep'ten ihrâc ü ib'âd ile mekâid-i fesatlarınm def' ü ref'ine dikkat-i tam eyleyesin[iz]. Şöyle ki, bundan sonra ol makule müfsidîn-i dalâlet-âyinden havza-i hükümetinizde nefis-i vâhid bulunur ise özür ve cevâbınız ısga olunmayıp mesul ve mu'âkab olacağımızı mukadder bilip ona göre basîret ve intibâh ile hareket eylemeniz bâbında fermân-ı âlişânım sâdır olmuştur."

26. MHM.d. 115, page 633, entry 2777. Bruce Masters has studied a similar document issued at the same time. See Bruce Masters, "The Millet Wars in Aleppo, 1726–1821: An Ottoman Perspective," in *Aleppo and its Hinterland in the Ottoman Period*, ed. Stefan Winder and Mafalda Ade (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 130–51.

27. See Elizabeth Tajirean, "Astrakhani Hayots' Patmut'iwits' (ZhĒ Dari Arâjin K'arord)," in *Armenian History Materials in the Archives of Central Europe*, ed. Gabriella Uluhogian (Yerevan: Sargis Khachents', 2001).

populations demonstrate that the patriarchate and state ultimately failed to stop the missionaries from making lasting inroads. Why is it that the missionaries and Catholic-leaning Armenian priests and laymen were able to succeed, even in the face of imprisonment and even execution? The case of Komitas implies that Catholicism may have had a particular appeal to the intelligentsia, as Komitas hailed from Istanbul's most famed Armenian learned family, and his hagiographies emphasize the intellectual appeal of Catholicism.<sup>28</sup> As noted in the research of Bernard Heyberger about Ottoman Christians in Syria-Lebanon, Catholic leanings were usually an elite phenomenon, something more common among the educated and affluent.<sup>29</sup>

One group that could benefit from Catholicism in ways that transcended the spiritual and intellectual sphere was merchants. There was great benefit to being a Catholic Armenian merchant, as European merchants seem to have preferred working with local Catholics of the Ottoman and Safavid realms, and because Armenian merchants travelling in Italy were sometimes asked about their views and harassed if they did not conform to Catholic Orthodoxy.<sup>30</sup> Since persecution of Catholics sporadically took place in the Ottoman Empire, while harassment of Apostolic Armenian could take place in Europe, the contrast motivated some merchants of the Ottoman and Safavid realms to switch confessions according to the needs of the moment, becoming Catholic while travelling in Europe, then reverting to the Apostolic confession in Istanbul or Isfahan.<sup>31</sup> Other merchants would have been true believers in Catholicism. There is no contradiction, after all, between following self-interest and believing that the path of self-interest is righteous.

The above-mentioned merchant Elĭa of Erzurum (1689–1750?) was a true believer in Catholicism for most of his life, and in his unpublished chronicle, he tells the story of how he converted as a youth in Erzurum under the influence of European missionaries. Elĭa explains that he was initially exposed to

28. E.g., Step'anos Avk'ereants', *Allah'in aziz kulu K m rceants Der Gomidas kahanaynın vark  ve Nahadagut n *, (Trieste: Self-published with permission of Mikhit'arean publishing house, 1798), 10–13.

29. See Heyberger, *Les chr tiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la R forme catholique*, 241–72.

30. For an example from Rome, see Grigor Daranaĭts'i, *Zhamanakagrut'ıwn Grigor Vardapeti Kamakhets'woy kam Daranaĭts'woy*, Ed. Mesrop Nshanean (Jerusalem: Tparan Aġak'At'orots' S. Yakobeants', 1915), 381–82. For a broader analysis, see Cesare Santus, "Wandering Lives: Eastern Christian Pilgrims, Alms-collectors and 'Refugees' in Early Modern Rome," in *A Companion to Religious Minorities in Early Modern Rome*, ed. Emily Michelson and Matthew Coneys (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 237–71.

31. For examples among the New Julfa merchants, see Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 61–63.

Catholic ideas during his early education. He would recount what he learned at home, much to his father's approval, as his father was a merchant who deemed the Catholics to be honest men.<sup>32</sup> Elia was impressed with the European Catholics' skillfulness and cleverness. He wrote:

When I saw [the European Catholics'] handiworks, their pure, solid, beautiful, un-attainable, dexterous, [and] inventive deeds, I was thinking: Was not God with them, was He not giving them so much grace, [with the result] that such amazing things come from their hands? On account of such thoughts, my love [for them] was increasing, day and night I was consumed and afflicted with love for them, and I was wanting to go to their country to learn from them, from their graces, and to become filled with grace, like them.<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately, Elia is not more precise in listing what European arts particularly impressed him, but he clearly articulates his youthful dream of traveling to Europe, France in particular.<sup>34</sup> He would not actually realize the plan until much later in his life, at which time he would meet with great disappointment.

Although Elia explicitly states that his father shared his pro-Catholic sympathies, it was only after his father's death in 1705 that Elia made an official "conversion." Given the sometimes ambiguous line between Apostolic and Catholic Armenians in the early modern Ottoman Empire, what do we mean here by conversion? Elia explains it in the following fashion:

After mourning for [Elia's father], the son of my paternal uncle Łazar Margari held our guardianship. There at the time was a Jesuit *padre*, whose name was Fr. Petros Rik'art,<sup>35</sup> on account of which, without delaying, Łazar sent me to him. When I entered [to see him] and kissed his right [hand], he did not accept me. The next time [it was] in vain, but the third time he received and accepted me with love. He began to ask me about Christian doctrine. After listening completely to the answer, forthwith he had me profess the Roman declaration of faith, and he had me confess. This was my first confession, which I did for him. He offered the Mass and communed with the body of Christ. Then I began to teach and to preach. Immediately I was kindled and inflamed with love for this Jesuit padre. In my leisure time I would write concise

32. Mkhit'arean Monastery Manuscript Library of Vienna (W) MS 980, 6b.

33. W 980, 6b–7a. “Նայն ես իբրև տեսանելի զձեռագործս նոցա հստակ, հաստատ, զեղեցիկ, անհասանելի, հնարագործ և հնարագիտ արարս նոցա առելի ի մտիք, եթէ Աստուած ոչ էր ընդ նոսա, ոչ տայր նոցա այսքան շնոր, որ այսքան զարմանալի իրս յելանէ ի ձեռաց նոցա, վասն այսպիսի մտածմանէս յաւելոյր սէրն իմ, տիւ և գիշեր հաշելի և մաշելի սիրօքս նոցա և ցանկայի զնալ յերկիրն նոցա առ ի յուսնիլ ի նոցանէ, ի շնորհացն նոցա և լինել շնորհաւոր, որպէս նոքայ:”

34. For a contemporary description of Europe written by an Ottoman Catholic Maronite, see the travelogue of Hannā Diyāb: Hannā Diyāb, *The Book of Travels*, ed. Johannes Stephan, trans. Elias Muhanna, 2 vols (New York: New York University Press, 2021).

35. For more about Pierre Ricard (1657–1717), see Cesare Santus, *Trasgressioni necessarie*, 143, 326, 331, 364–65.

notebooks on Christian dogma. I would present them to the padre, who would distribute [them] to the newly converted people. Three months did not pass, [before] I had 24 orthodox souls, men and women, great and small. When the padre saw the abundance of my graces, he appointed me lecturer over 24 students, but I did not remain long in the city. It was necessary to depart and to go on a journey for the work of commerce . . .<sup>36</sup>

In this passage, Elia is explicit in noting that it was a Jesuit missionary who inducted him into the Catholic faith. It was important for European missionaries to find local intermediaries, translators, and helpers, and in this passage Elia describes the zeal with which he assumed such a role. While his collaboration with this particular Jesuit was interrupted by his travels as a merchant, one thing that Catholic missionaries and Armenian merchants had in common was dispersed networks which spanned empires. Elia would meet with missionaries again soon in his travels, as his family's movements in trade overlapped with the missionaries' journeys to spread the faith.

Elia's subsequent travels would carry him to Ganja (in modern Azerbaijan), Diyarbekir, Tabriz, Baghdad, and Istanbul. In every locality Elia would seek out Catholic missionaries from Europe. In his chronicle he describes how in Ganja, he found both Capuchins and Jesuits from Poland who helped him to further his Catholic education:

After seeing them, I wanted to read Frankish. A master, the above-[mentioned] Capuchin Patrits'ios was appointed over me, because he was near to our inn. First I learned the Latin Mass. Day by day he was increasing my graces, and he kindled my love for the *padres*. I was not taking care for commerce, nor for learning anything else, but I only wanted night and day to be with the padres. Before sunrise I was going first to the Capuchins. I was serving two Masses, [then] from there I was going to the Jesuits. There also I was assisting with three Masses, until the last Mass ended, [when], with the approach of lunchtime, I was going to the inn. I would eat lunch and [then]

36. W 980, 8a–9a. “. . . զկնի սգոյ նորա կալաւ հոգաբարձութիւն մեր իմ հորոյսօր որդի Ղազարն Մարգարի ժամանակին անդ կայր ճեզուիտ պատրի մի, որոյ անունն Պ. Պետրոս մակ յիջարս, վասն որոյ առանց յապաղելոյ առաքեաց զիս Ղազարն առ նայ, մինչ մտի և համբուրեցի զայն նորա ոչ յնկալաւ զիս, միսս անգամս հարևանցի, բայց երրորդ անգամս ընկալաւ սիրով և ընդունեց զիս, սկսեց հարցանել յինէն զքրիստոնէական վարդապետութիւն, զկնի լսելոյ զլիակատար պատասխանն իսկոյն դաւանեցոյց զիս զհոսուական դաւանութիւն և խոստովանեցոյց զիս, այս էր իմ առաջի խոստովանութիւնն, որ արարի նմայ, մատոյց պատարագ և հաղորդեցոյց մարմնոյն Քրիստոսի. այնուհետև սկսեցի ուսուցանել և քարոզել, առժամայն վառեցայ և բորբոքեցայ սիրովս այս ճեզուիտ պատրոյս պարապ ժամանակս զրէյի զտետրունս կարճառօտ զքրիստոնէական վարդապետութիւնս, մատուցանելի պատրոյն, որ բաժանէր նորահաւատ ժողովրդոցն, ոչ անցաւ ամիս 3, որ ունեցայ 24 հոգի ուղղափառ այր և կին, մեծ և փոքր իբրև տեսաւ պատրին առաւելութիւն շնորհաց իմոց, կարգեց զիս դպրապետ 24 աշակերտացս վերայ, բայց ոչ յերկար մնացի ի քաղաքիս, հարկ եղև յելանել և գնալ ի ճանապարհ ի գործս վաճառականութեան . . .”

go back there again. I would remain until evening. Then, I would return to the inn in sorrow, since night was coming. I was endeavoring, such that when it became light, I would go again to them. In this way two or three months passed.<sup>37</sup>

While Eḷia was able to mingle frequently with the European missionaries in Ganja, in some other places his life intersected with the anti-Catholic persecutions described in the Ottoman Turkish documents quoted above, and they prevented Eḷia from the free association with missionaries. Eḷia writes that in Baghdad “I didn’t find a padre, because there they were waging the above[-mentioned] persecution against them.”<sup>38</sup> This took place sometime after his conversion in 1705, but before his arrival in Istanbul in late 1707 or in 1708. Later in Istanbul, Eḷia angered friends and family because his eagerness to consort with the Catholic missionaries put them in danger because of the anti-Catholic persecutions taking place. Eḷia recounts that

There were here in the city many padres, but I was not able to go to them because of great fear which remained from the above[-mentioned] persecution, which shook and startled all of the residents of the city, because much time had not passed since the great persecution. This was that persecution in which they martyred Fr. Komitas K’ēdmurchean [and] delivered sixty leaders of the Armenians to the prison called T’arskhana, with [those] being held captive. I counted all this fear for nothing on account of love for them. I merely wanted to see them. I yearned and strived, but I did not know their place and there was no one who guided me. I was weeping and mourning and seeking them. My Lazar was reprimanding me and frightening me, and he was warning me to desist and to be silent. He was saying not to utter such a thing in the mouth because you might be the cause of your destruction and ours. It was, in fact, so, as I was requesting and imploring from some to bring me to them. They were articulating the same thing and saying: you don’t take care for yourself, but we don’t want to lose our heads. Disappointed on all sides, I was without means. Not even with so many words of advice was I taking fright or ceasing from love, but I was always seeking [them]. Ceaselessly I was doing [this to] our friends, acquaintances,

37. W 980, 9a–9b. “Ձկնի տեսութեան սոցայ կամեցա կարդալ ֆռանկեար, կարգեցա ի վերայ իմ վարպետ վերո Քափուշին Պատրիցիոսն, քանզի նայ մերձ էր մեր պանդոկին, նախ յուսայ դպրութիւն լաթինաց պատարաքին, օրստօրէ յաւելոյր զշնորհքն իմ և բորբոքիւր գտերն իմ ընդ պատրեացն ոչ հոգայի վասն վաճառականութեան և ոչ յուսանելոյ զայլ ինչ, այլ միայն ցանկայի տիւ և գիշեր լինիլ ընդ պատրիսն յառաջ, քան թէ ծագել արևուն գնայի նախ առ քափուշինս, սպասատրելի երկու պատարաքին, անտի գնայի առ ճեզուիթոսն, անդ ևս սպաստորութիւն անելի երեք պատարաքին, մինչ վճարիւր վերջի պատարագն, մերձենայր ճաշն, զայի ի պանդոկն, ուտելի ճաշ և դարձեալ գնայի անդ, մնայի մինչ ի իրիկուն, սպայ թէ դարձեալ դարձնայի ի պանդոկն տրտում, թէ գուգայ գիշեր. փութայի թէ յերբ լուսանայ, որ դարձեալ գնամ առ նոսա, այս օրինակաւ եղև ամիսս երկու և կամ երեք:”

38. W 980, 11b. “Եւ անտի գնացի ի Պատոսատ, բայց անդ ոչ գտի պատրի, քանզի վերո հալածմանէն վարելլին գնասս:”

and countrymen. Even my Łazar—who was not able to enervate me with his words—began to curse and to hate me.<sup>39</sup>

At the end of his trip to Istanbul, Elĭa finally succeeded in finding the Catholic missionaries' safe house in Galata, thanks to help of a knowledgeable merchant. Elĭa explains that

I reflected and found a means. [There was] a man from Akhalts'kha, a musk salesman, who was called Łukas Őĭli. He was roaming to every province and city selling his sweet-smelling oil. I implored him much, that he might bring me to the *padres*, but he refused on account of the great danger. I said if you are merely afraid, show me from far places. He said there is a spy positioned at the head of every street. After many entreaties, he accepted to show [me], though only at a position far away. In secret from Łazar we crossed the sea and went to Galata. With passwords, he showed [me]. By God, I went and found it. When I entered into their hall, immediately the above[-mentioned] Polish Fr. Ővhanĕs appeared. I was so happy. After kissing his right [hand], embracing, and hugging one another, he said: Oh child, God sent you to me, because behold it is three months since I have come here from Poland, [and] I have seen no one except for you on account of the fear and great danger. None of our [people] can come to us, [but] now you were able to come to me. He was surprised, recognizing my great love. He caressed me and said, I have remained without means, because I wanted to go to Yerevan, [but] there was no one to guide me. There are so many ambassadors of kings and great merchants, and they have translators and functionaries. But no one was taking him on the journey with a caravan. I gave good news to him, [saying] that Łazar is with me. We will depart in a few days. He became most delighted. When I returned and explained to Łazar, he said such ugly words and disparaged me . . .<sup>40</sup>

39. W 980, 11b–12a. “Գոյին աստ ի քաղաքիս բազում պատրիս, բայց ոչ կարելի գնալ առ նոսա վասն մեծ յերկուղէն, որ մնացել էր վերոյ հալածմանէն, զի սասանեալ դողայր ամենայն բնակիչքն քաղաքին, քանզի շատ ժամանակ չէր անցել ի մեծ հալածմանէն, այս այն հալածու մն էր, որ Քօմուրճոնց տէր Կոմիտասն նահատակեցին, վաթսուն գլխաւորացն Հայոց մատնեցին ի Թարսխանայ անուանեալ բանտն ընդ գերեալսն էս այս ամենայն յերկիւղն ոչինչ համարելի վասն սիրոյն նոցա, միայն և եթ կամելի տեսանել գնոսա. ցանկայի, փութայի, բայց էս ոչ զհիտելի նոցա տեղն և որ ոչ որ էր, որ առաջնորդէր զինձ, իբրև լայի և սզայի և խնդրելի գնոսա: Իմ Ղազարն սաստեր և ահացուցաներ զիս և խրատէր դադարիլ և լռել և մի արտաբերել ասէր այդպիսի բան ի բերանւոյդ, զի սիրուցե պատճառ լինիս կորուստ անձին քոյ և մեր: Այս իրաւի այնպէս էր առ յումեքէ, որ խնդրելի և աղաչելի տանիլ զիս առ նոսա, նոյն վերոյ բանն արտաբերելին և ասելին դու ոչ հոգաս վասն քոյ, բայց մեք ոչ կամիրք կորուսանել զգլուխս մեր, յուսահատեալ ամենից կողմանց մացի անճարակ ոչ թէ այսքան խրատական բանիքս յերկեայ և կամ դադարեցայ ի սիրոյ, այլ միշտ խնդրելի և անդադար առնելի զբարեկամս, զճանօթս և զհամաքաղաքացիս մեր, նայն իմ Ղազարն, որ ոչ կարէր բանիք թուլացուցանել զիս, սկսէր անիծաբանել և ատել զիս:”

40. W 980, 12b–13a. “Խորհեցա հնար գտի այր ոմն ախլցխեցի մշկածախ, որոյ Ղուկաս օղի առձայնիւր, որ իւր անուշահոտ յուղն ծախելով շրջագայիւր ամենայն (գաւառն, քաղաքն), շատ աղաչեցի նմայ, որ զիս տանէր առ պատրիսն, բայց ոչ առաւ

This passage shows the depths of the tensions and fears caused by efforts to curb the spread of Catholicism in Istanbul. Spies were stationed on the street near the missionaries' residency, and entry into their safe-house required passwords. Local Catholics were terrified because of the recent execution of Komitas and other prominent Catholics.

Though he was afraid and reluctant, Lazar ultimately agreed to help Fr. Övhanēs. As described in the Ottoman Turkish documents above, travel for Fr. Övhanēs required disguises and subterfuge. Elia explains how the missionary's foreign appearance represented an obstacle to free movement:

If this padre resembled in countenance, manners, language, and garb the men of our country, then it would have been possible to bring him without fear. But he was red-dish, with blue eyes, the clothes of a Pole, and he didn't know the language. Moreover he was not obedient to us.<sup>41</sup>

When Elia and his family arrived with the missionary at the customs house of Erzurum, they tried to disguise him, putting him in a hood and telling him to mill around at the back of the crowd. After narrowly making it past the officials with their disguised Catholic missionary, Elia rejoiced, writing, "Behold my omnipotent God delivered us from great danger."<sup>42</sup>

In this instance, Elia and his family survived their dangerous relationship with the Catholic missionaries. In the long run, Elia's Catholic zeal opened up great opportunities for him across empires, opportunities afforded by the global networks of Catholic missionaries and European states, while also ulti-

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յանձն վասն մեծի վտանգին, ասի եթէ յերկնչիս միայն թէ հեռու տեղաց ցոյց տուր ինձ, ասաց ամենայն փողոցաց զլուխն կայնէցուցած է լրտես, յետ բազում թախանցանացս յանձն առաւ, միայն թէ հեռու տեղաց կողմն և կամարթն ցոյց տալ, գաղտ ի Ղազարէն անցաք զծօփս և գնացաք ի Ղալաթայ, նշանաբանիք եցոյց գնացի Աստուծով և գտի մինչ մտի ի սրահն նոցա, արժամայն պատահեցաւ վերո լէհեցի պր. Օվանէսն, որ թէ որքան ուրախացայ զկնի համբուրելոյ զաջս նորա և ողջագորելւո և փարելոյ զվրիսմաբք ասաց՝ Օվ որդեակք Աստուած առաքեց զքեզ առ յիս, քանզի անայ 3 ամիս է, որ եկել եմ ի Լեհաստանու աստ, ոչ որ տեսի բացի քէն վասն յերկուդացն և մեծամեծ վտանգին, ոչ որ իշխել ի մերոց գալ առ մեզ, արդ դու որպէս իշխեցիր գալ առ յիս, զարմանայր ճանաչելով առաւել սերն իմ, զբզուեր զիս և ասեր ժապեղ էլի անճարակ, քանզի կամելի գնալ Երևան, ոչ որ էր, որ առաջնորդէր ինձ, այսքան թագաւորաց դեսքանք և մեծամեծ վաճառականք կան և ունին թարգմանս և պաշտոնեայս, բայց ոչ որ ճանապարհորդէր գնայ ընդ քարուանի միոջ, արետիս ետու նմայ, թէ Ղազարն ընդ իս է, այս մօտ ատուրցս յերանեմք, ուրախացաւ յոյժ, մինչ դարձաւ եւ պատմեցի Ղազարին, թէ որքան տգեղ խոսս ասելով անարգեց զիս . . .”

41. W 980, 13b. “Եթէ նմանիր, այս պարտիս դիմօք վարուք լեզուօք և հանդերձիք մեր յերկրի մարդոց (նմաներ) ևս էր հնար և կարելի տանիլ զայս առանց յերկուդի, այլ սայ էր շէկ, աչքն կապուտ, հաղերձն լեհաց, լեզու ոչ գիտէր, նայն ոչ հնազանդիր մեզ:”

42. W 980, 14a. “Ահայ Աստուածն իմ ամենակարօն այսպէս զերծոյց զմեզ ի մեծամեծ վտանքէ:”

mately leading to his undoing, as years later French officials would cause his downfall and imprisonment. The tale of his later career can be found elsewhere,<sup>43</sup> but here for the first time we present descriptions of his conversion and fears surrounding the anti-Catholic persecutions in the Ottoman Empire.

## Conclusions

The two bodies of sources analyzed above complement each other closely. While the Ottoman Turkish documents describe how Apostolic Armenians lobbied Ottoman courts across the empire to imprison and clamp down on Catholics—thus implying the wide reach of Catholic missionary activities—Eliā's chronicle documents the effects the missionaries had on an Armenian merchant from a village near Erzurum. Despite the persecutions organized against the Catholics, Eliā remained faithful to the missionaries for years, doing all in his power to assist them in their efforts to spread Catholicism among Armenians of the Ottoman and Safavid realms, even going so far as to disguise and smuggle a Polish missionary across the breadth of Anatolia, from Istanbul to Erzurum. This article has focused on the first decade of the eighteenth century, but further outbreaks took place later in the century as well.

What do these documents suggest about the reason for Catholic missionaries' particular success among Ottoman Armenians compared to other Christian groups in the empire? Eliā's story suggests the appeal of Catholicism to merchants and to the highly educated, but the numbers of Catholic converts suggests that it must have had a broader appeal across diverse social groups, and it does not explain popularity among the Armenians in particular. While the matter deserves further exploration, it is possible that the mass migrations of Armenians in the seventeenth century from areas of high concentrations of ecclesiastical infrastructure (eastern Anatolia) to areas of insufficient infrastructure (western Anatolia and Thrace), as well as conflicts and instability within the Armenian ecclesiastical centers may have made the Armenians more susceptible to Catholic inroads than Greeks or other non-Muslim groups.<sup>44</sup>

While European, Armenian, and Turkish scholars have all made distinct contributions to the history of the Armenian Catholics, they have all tended to rely on distinct source bases. This article has endeavored to show that this topic is ripe for linguistic collaboration and the integration of sources across cultural traditions. While it was common for diverse groups of Ottoman Christians and Muslims to live side by side, yet ignore each other when writing history, there were moments—particularly moments of conflict—when their

43. See Shapiro, "Falling out of Love," 19–28.

44. For description of the seventeenth-century context and Armenian mass migrations, see Shapiro, *The Rise of the Western Armenian Diaspora in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*.

attentions all focused on common events. The Apostolic-Catholic conflicts of the eighteenth-century represent just such a moment.

Armenian-Catholic history is important, because in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many of the most prominent Ottoman-Armenian merchants, authors, and state officials would be Catholics, including Mik'ayēl Ch'amch'ean, the eighteenth-century historian, and Vartan Paşa, an Ottoman official who has been argued to have written the first Turkish novel in Armeno-Turkish.<sup>45</sup> Many other prominent men of culture alternated between confessions, such as the great churchman and historian Malak'ia Örmanean, who was a Catholic in his youth then switched to the Apostolic camp. It is the rich cultural legacy of Armenian Catholics in the spheres of commerce, letters, and statecraft in the Ottoman Empire that makes these glimpses of their early history and persecution particularly valuable. This article aims to partake in a broader process of pulling the Armenian Catholics out of the shadows and into the cultural history of the early modern Ottoman Empire.

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45. Vartan Paşa, *Akabi Hikayesi: İlk Türkçe Roman, 1851*, ed. Andreas Tietze (İstanbul: Eren, 1991).