

# The New Contours of Salonikan Politics and Production of Multiple Rhetorics during the Eighteenth Century<sup>1</sup>

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## **Introduction**

In the 1750s, Evrenoszade Şerif Ahmed, probably the most powerful superintendent of the Evrenoszade waqf in the eighteenth century, erected a massive clock tower in Yenice-i Vardar to commemorate, glorify and concretize the hazy origins of his family and warriors of the faith [*gazis*] (Lowry and Erünsal 2008: 45-47). The construction of such building to highlight the uninterrupted continuity of a proud lineage represents a new type of symbolism in the Salonikan countryside and a radical departure from the way in which the political figures retained their influence. While the rhythms of socio-political changes dictated a greater need for the articulation of new political symbols and meanings during the eighteenth century, the members of the Evrenoszade household like other local notables took great pains to reinforce their legitimacy in the region. Therefore, the construction of “secular” monumental buildings like clock towers and fountains in the Salonikan towns served as a means of material manifestation of power that was altering to suit the needs of a new social order based on the monetary economy and commercialized agriculture. Somewhat contradictory to these concerted attempts to “secularize” the display of power, the Salonikan power-holders went on to exercise their symbolic authority by providing financial aid to the traditional/religious institutions including neighborhood mosques and local Sufi lodges (Ginio 2003: 168-69). At the same time, the Greek churchmen also did their best to penetrate outlying villages as reflected in the upsurge in the number of churches and sanctuaries across the Salonikan hinterland

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<sup>1</sup> This study is a part of the dissertation project funded by Binghamton University and Forschungszentrum Gotha.

during this period (Moutsopoulos 1966: 55-66). Still, the political competition through these symbols was not confined to the architectural sphere. The obsession with carving out a niche in the Salonikan politics occupied all actors in various domains and engendered multiple political writings, discourses and signifiers.

By emphasizing the *democratizing* production of knowledge and symbols in eighteenth-century Salonika, this study investigates the ways in which the substantive sociopolitical and economic changes generated the conflicting symbols and rhetorics over the ideal social order as well as the new mode of center-periphery integration in the Ottoman lands. It also analyzes how these changes within Salonikan society undergirded the expansion of Salonikan political and intellectual domains that was accompanied by the mobility of scholars, religious functionaries and common people [*ahali*].

### **New Local Patronage Centers and Socio-Political Conditions for the Salonikan Literati**

The increasing mobility of scholars and religious functionaries was indeed the result of the spatial expansion of Salonikan patronage networks in the eighteenth century. As will be seen below, Salonikan religious functionaries and men of learning became active investors in the agricultural and commercial markets during this period. Since Salonikan scholars no longer had to rely on the protection and patronage of the Ottoman state, new forms of patron-client relations shaped both the career paths of these scholars and the articulation of political rhetorics and symbols. With the exception of sporadic financial backings of the imperial center to the Selanik Mevlevihane [Mevlevi cloister] and the Athonite Academy (Runciman 1985: 220), almost all centers of high learning in the region for Muslims and Christians were managed by the local waqf administrations, honorable patrons or communal institutions during the period being studied. As in other parts of the Ottoman Empire, the influential Jews and communal organizations assumed the role to oversee the functioning of the printing houses, Jewish schools and philanthropic institutions especially in the city of Salonika (Heller 1999: 175-76 & 2008: 357-68). True, the limited role of the Ottoman state in providing public services was not new in Salonikan politics and dated back even to the early

stages of the Ottoman domination in the area.<sup>2</sup> Yet the new forms of patron-client relations within the intellectual circuits prevailed over the already existing ones as early as the first decades of the eighteenth century.

The princes of Wallachia and Moldavia and the men of capital outside the Ottoman lands emerged in the early eighteenth century as new powerful patrons who expanded the scope of their sponsorship from the Athonite monasteries to the inlands of Salonika. In the period between 1710 and 1730, Nikolas Mavrokordatos, the prince of Wallachia and Moldavia, made noticeable donations for the functioning of regional schools under the surveillance of bishops or metropolitids in Serres (Vlachou 1935 & Vacalopoulos 1973: 426-27). In the first half of the eighteenth century, the Mavrokordatos family, one of the Ottoman hospodar households of the Danubian principalities, showered funds on the Kozani and Serres schools. Meanwhile, the Salonikan religious institutions such as the Athonite monasteries resorted to Ragusa and Russia to overcome their financial difficulties (Kotzageorgis 2002). In 1745, several Kozanites (probably merchants) in the Hungarian lands formed a collective fund placed at the disposal of the Kozani School (Papakonstantinou 1992). Whether these new patrons continued to offer financial aid to the regional schools well into the late eighteenth century remains unknown. Perhaps they did not because, in the course of the second half of the eighteenth century, the regional schools in Serres and Kozani continued to be beset by acute financial troubles.

As a response, the more-broadly based collective administrations began to assume the management of these schools at the dawn of the nineteenth century. For example, the communal commission in Melnik was organized in 1813 to undertake the school administration.<sup>3</sup> The starry-eyed local groups launched a major initiative aiming at solving intractable economic problems of the schools and indoctrinating “youth and Christian brothers with a set of moral values.” This communal commission was made up of locally influential men who had the capacity to choose honorable and wise teachers for the

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<sup>2</sup> Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi, VIII. Kitap, pp. 66-82.

<sup>3</sup> “Σύστημα ή Διαταγαί. Κατά κοινήν Ψήφον, απάσης της συνελεύσεως, της εν Μακεδονία Πόλεως Μελενίκου” [Administrative Order-by public voting of the Assembly of the Macedonian City Melnik], pp. 35-36.

school. As in the town of Melnik, the wealthy inhabitants of Serres had undertaken the management of their local school and other civic educational institutions by the mid-nineteenth century (Koutzakiotis 2001: 219-52). But the growing influence of notables and wealthy mercantile families over existing patronage connections started much earlier. The merchant brothers Nicholas and Demetrius Takiatzis provided financial support for scholars in the early nineteenth century (Puchner 2012: 188, 232, 238). Not only these wealthy mercantile families but also ordinary Salonikans stepped forward as active agents within the patronage networks. Desperately seeking the new patrons to alleviate their debt burden, the itinerate Athonite monks succeeded in fostering close relations with the people and ordinary inhabitants in the Salonikan districts; especially after the 1750s. They not only traversed through villages to collect alms from peasants, but also melted into the local population through the acquisition of “metochio” farms and orchards in the rural areas. This acclimatization of the local literati into the Salonikan society and the geographical spread of clientelistic chains were also evident in the career path of Ahmed Meşhuri, one of the leading Muslim literati in the city of Salonika.

Born in Salonika sometime before 1784, he started his education, as many aspirant Muslim Salonikan students at that time, at a primary religious school [*medrese*] in Salonika (Çeltik and Aydemir 2007: 262-72). Shortly after his graduation, he became a chief spokesperson of the powerful tanners’ guild [*debbağlar babası*], before being appointed the clerk of the inspector of Filibe [Filibe Nazırı]. In the following years, he rose high in the service of *voyvodas* and *mütesellims* [tax collectors] in several places. Thanks to his ties with the Şeyhülislam Arif Hikmet (chief authority in religious affairs), he took up a teaching post [*müderrislik*] in Edirne. No doubt, the acquisition of these various posts led him to accumulate a significant amount of capital with which he was able to buy farmland [*çiftlik*] in the Salonikan countryside. He spent his last years on this farmland, gave Persian lessons and compiled a collection of poems [*divan*]. From the very beginning of his career, not only his education but also his personal connections played a determining role in his advancement in the state hierarchy and his acquisition of farmland. The acquisition of a *çiftlik* by Ahmed Meşhuri shows that he was an active investor in the agricultural market. In their approach to reading treatises and

chronicles, Ottoman historians tend to regard society as divided into clearly demarcated lines, each estate serving a particular function in the maintenance of divine order and balance (Mardin 1962: 75-107). According to this reading, the scholars, religious functionaries, judges, clerks, teachers and preachers with an active literary command carried out their own business in their own domains separated from the agricultural and commercial spheres. Nonetheless, even a cursory look at the court records shows that most of the religious functionaries, scholars and literati in Salonika like Meşhûri showed an inclination to infiltrate the commercial and monetary networks during much of the eighteenth century: Mehmed Çelebi was an active investor in the credit and agricultural markets.<sup>4</sup> Imam Osman Efendi, a prayer leader in Karaferye, was a good investor in the credit market too. Almost four-fifths of his inheritance was somehow tied-up in loans.<sup>5</sup>

As such, it was the combination of material and cultural dynamics that inculcated the Salonikan literati a sense of civic pride and shared regional identity. Probably for this reason, the Salonikan poets Meşhûri Ahmed and Hasan Akif devote a number of verses to the Salonikan buildings, beauties and historical events in the region. Nevertheless, the civic pride and the idea of regionalism were woven into the canvas of asymmetrical power relations. Mehmed Emin Efendi, the prayer leader [*imam*] of the Yakub Paşa Camii in the city of Salonika, had less reason to consider himself as a part of Salonikan society.<sup>6</sup> Although he had held a prestigious office in the mosque, he owed many debts to the Salonikan creditors and left behind only few animals when he died before the summer of 1753. Judging by the relatively unchanging daily stipends [*yevmiyes*] of waqf functionaries despite the price fluctuations, this Mehmed Efendi was probably not the only one who was directly frustrated by the income irregularities and the low level of emoluments. Like Christian schools in the region, the Muslim waqfs and their public functionaries as a whole experienced similar financial hardships. The prayer leader of the Çelebi

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<sup>4</sup> Karaferye Sharia Court Records (hereafter cited as KS) 73/89.

<sup>5</sup> KS 105/62.

<sup>6</sup> Salonikan Sharia Court Records (hereafter cited as SS) 83/75.

Sinan Bey mosque was entitled to receive a daily salary of only 13 akçes.<sup>7</sup> Mehmed Halife, the clerk of the same mosque and its waqf, was also granted a salary of two akçes.<sup>8</sup> Mehmed Halife, however, was well aware that although his salary was not so high by Salonikan standards, he was able to use his personal clientalist networks to assure a lower ranking *ulema* position for his son(s).

As far as the Salonikan districts were concerned, the acquisition of positions through patronage continued to be a common phenomenon during the eighteenth century. At the end of 1780 when a certain Osman Halife, a religious functionary of the mosque [*mescid*] endowed by Kara Kemal, died without heirs [*bila-veled*], Seyyid Molla Mahmud was appointed to the same post.<sup>9</sup> The insertion of the phrase “bila-veled” into the registers of bestowals was probably not a random practice. With their personal connections, the men of learning as well as other educated incumbent functionaries of the Church and endowments in the region secured entry for their personal dependents into the ranks of local administration, a process that certainly intensified the strife over extant positions during the eighteenth century.

### **From Salonika to Vienna: The Expanding Intellectual Space**

Disappointed with the low level of salaries and the slowing of upward mobility, Salonikan students and scholars more and more followed the routes to the new education and commercial centers opened by wandering merchants during the eighteenth century. An increasing number of Salonikan merchants settled in Vienna after the 1730s. While the commercial power of these families became visible in the Habsburg capital during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, numerous Salonikan students also visited the city. Up to the last decades of the seventeenth century, the Salonikan scholars and merchants especially went to Istanbul and the cities across the Apennine Peninsula like Padua, Venice and Bologna to keep up their scholarly careers. By the end of the eighteenth century, socially ambitious Salonikans, however,

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<sup>7</sup> KS 67/15.

<sup>8</sup> KS 65/197-2.

<sup>9</sup> KS 99/24-2.

tried their luck in other education centers particularly in the flourishing Salonikan towns, Bucharest, Budapest, Iasi and Vienna.<sup>10</sup>

Daniil Philippidis was one of the students from Thessaly who chose to continue his career outside Salonika after attending lectures at the Mount Athos. He spent some years in Izmir, Istanbul, Bucharest and Iasi, and then together with Grigorios Constantas published his book *Γεωγραφία Νεωτερική* (Geografia Neoteriki) in Vienna in 1791 (Trencsényi and Kopeček 2006: 73-74). In most respects, the career line of Constantas was very similar to that of Philippidis. He was born in Thessaly and then travelled to the Mount Athos to receive monastic education. Afterward, he moved to Bucharest where he gave lectures in the 1780s. After spending some years in Vienna, Padua and Halle, he returned to his hometown. During the second half of the eighteenth century, the Habsburg capital proved to be the most important destination for the Greek-speaking Ottoman immigrants who mostly came from the Salonikan deeper hinterland, primarily from Kozani, Serres and Serfice. Their integration into the new patronage centers outside the Ottoman lands opened, if not guaranteed, both the gates of the Phanariot networks in Istanbul and the Danubian principalities and their entrance into the Athonite Academy as well as regional schools around Salonika. As an increasing number of pupils made their way to the centers outside the Ottoman lands for their studies, these regional schools also turned into new education centers for these graduates with an ambition to advance their careers. One of these students was Eugenios Voulgaris who, after schooling in Padua, went on to teach first in Ioannina and then easily found a position at the Kozanite School in the 1750s with a higher stipend (Demaras 1972: 136-37 and Mackridge 2009: 84-87). He then taught at the Athonite Academy in Salonika; and after spending some years in Leipzig and Halle, he finally resorted to the court of the Catherine II by introducing himself as "Slaviano-Bulgarian by origin, Greek by birth, Russian by inclination."

Voulgaris was neither a schizophrenic nor a groveler, but was speaking as a typical eighteenth-century scholar in the Ottoman Balkans who had a capacity and aspiration to exploit the growing, if not quite new, patronage linkages. Moisioudax, one of the Voulgaris' disciples at the Athonite Academy

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<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Turczynski. (1959); Δελιαλής. (1948).

in Salonika (Glycofrydi-Leontsini 2012: 66-70), started his book, *Θεωρία της Γεωγραφίας* (The Theory of Geography), with the analysis on the spherical geography and different climate zones of the earth. He extols the ongoing shift of the Ottoman geographical mind (Dankoff 2004: 219-24) from the Terra Sigillata to the broader geographical space (Μοισιόδακας 1781: 1-10). This shift was coterminous with the spatial expansion of these existing patronage networks and the ascending mobility of Greek-speaking Ottoman scholars in a much wider area. Moisioudax followed a quite complex career line closely akin to that of his teacher Voulgaris: after enrolling in the Athonite Academy in Salonika, he set out for Padua and Venice. He then published his famous book *Απολογία* (Apology) in Vienna and gave lectures both in Jassy and Bucharest (Nicolaidis 2011: 160-62). It was exactly this porous space where the Salonikan province became embedded, more and more, into the mental maps of scholars, as exemplified in the writings of the same Moisioudax. When he penned a treatise [πραγματεία] about the youth training and published it in Venice around 1779, he certainly had his uncongenial experiences in Salonika and Jassy with the scholarly circles in mind, because throughout the text he presents the pedagogy as an alternative “method” to the established system for the required rectification of moral values (Kitromilides 1992: 21-22).<sup>11</sup> In fact, Moisioudax’s analysis of the “ideal education system” shows that the spatial expansion of patronage networks precipitated the multiplication of political debates about the ideal social order in the Ottoman lands. From the 1790s onwards, the scholars and editors of the Viennese newspapers thus turned their careful eyes to the controversial debates in the whole Rumeli and Salonika. On 15 June, 1811, the editors of *Hermes o Logios* [*Ερμής ο Λόγιος*], for instance, published an article about the most appropriate variety of Greek for use in scholarly publications.<sup>12</sup> In 1797, the Greek newspaper *Εφημερίς* in Vienna quite closely followed the imperial efforts to suppress the violent

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<sup>11</sup> For a scholarly conflict in the city, Φωκίων Κοτζαγεώργης, “Όψεις πρώιμης νεωτερικότητας: Οι διαμάχες στηχριστιανική κοινότητα της Θεσσαλονίκης” [Aspects of Early Modernity: Disputes within the Christian Community of Thessaloniki], pp. 459-63.

<sup>12</sup> *Ερμής ο Λόγιος* [Hermes o Logios], June 15, 1811, pp. 190-97.



rebellion of Pazvantoğlu that infested all of Rumeli.<sup>13</sup> On Tuesday 9 March 1819, another Greek newspaper *Ελληνικός Τηλέγραφος* published in Vienna also reported that the head of a beheaded Salonikan notable Şehbenderoğlu was exposed to the eyes of all in Istanbul after the locals began to grumble about his policies.<sup>14</sup> The curious readers were informed by the newspaper that this military magnate [*derebeyi*]<sup>15</sup> had wrought havoc in the area around Salonika, and many complaints had been lodged against him. As will be seen below, the use of the derogatory term “*derebeyi*” (lords of the valley) by the newspaper’s editors to refer to the notable Şehbenderoğlu was not a coincidence.

### **The Production of Multiple Political Visions and Discourses**

In the early nineteenth century, the Viennese press and a variety of scholars began to use the fluid vocabulary of the Enlightenment in order to interpret the political and social affairs of the Ottoman provinces. What Greek-speaking Ottomans had read about Salonika from the Viennese newspapers in the second half of the eighteenth century was limited to unreliable trade data for the region and currency exchange rates in the Ottoman market. Similarly, the consular reports captured the echo of Salonikan voices only in times of full-blown bread riots, popular uprisings and natural disasters. But, as the century drew to a close, the many winds of *Zeitgeist* started to blow toward a new system of meanings that engendered a wide variety of cherished ideals like the rational administration, the central government and the control over notables.

Almost at the same time, these winds reached the Ottoman lands where the political debates over the need for a new Ottoman administration caught particular attention of wider sectors of the society. At the turn of the

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<sup>13</sup> *Εφημερίς* [Efimeris], March 24, p. 279; *Εφημερίς*, March 31, p. 306 and *Εφημερίς*, April 17, p. 353.

<sup>14</sup> *Ελληνικός Τηλέγραφος* [The Hellenic Telegraph], March 9, 1819, p. 91.

<sup>15</sup> The use of the term *derebeyi* became widespread particularly in the early decades of the nineteenth century. On the term *derebeyi*, see Robert Walsh, Eliakim Littell, John Jay Smith, *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science and Art* (New York & Boston: 1833), p. 292; *Journal of a nobleman: comprising an account of his travels, and a narrative of his residence at Vienna, during the Congress* (Colburn and Bentley, 1831), pp. 208-211; J. M. Tancoigne, *A narrative of a journey into Persia and residence at Teheran: containing a descriptive itinerary from Constantinople to the Persian capital* (London: 1820), pp. 23-28.

nineteenth century, some Ottoman scholars and bureaucrats, as their European counterparts, started to praise the new system of the Ottoman administration and military techniques of the Ottoman army (Hatemi and Beydilli 1986). No longer were the eighteenth-century agents of the indirect system of rule seen as the legitimate heads of local communities. Rather, they were now regarded as the backward and ignorant oppressors. According to the nineteenth-century historian and statesman Ahmed Cevdet Paşa,<sup>16</sup> in the 1810s Salonika and its adjacent hinterland were under the direct control of rapacious oppressors [*mütegallibe*], namely, local notables who were then expelled and replaced by Ottoman officials whose loyalty was beyond question.<sup>17</sup> Yet for the perspicacious Salonikan poet Hasan Akif, the representatives of Ottoman officialdom were nothing but alien bureaucrats who were not as skillful as local notables in winning the hearts of Salonikans.

Indeed, Akif praised the local potentates, especially Şerifzade Emin Bey and Yusuf Ağa, as the local men of benevolence whereas he questioned the legitimacy of Ottoman governmental intrusion in local affairs. He frowned upon Mehmed Emin Paşa, known as Ebu Lubut, who was charged with winning over the rebels in the Salonikan countryside. “[The Ottoman capital], he wrote, appointed this animal-like, oppressive commander from the Druze Mountains to Salonika.”<sup>18</sup> In contrast to Cevdet who put all the blame on the notables and potentates in the region, Akif eulogized the same notables as wise and brave rulers of the region. All of Rumeli, he exclaimed, lived peacefully under the authority of beneficent Ismail Ağa and his son Yusuf Bey. But the pride in being a member of autonomous Salonika does not necessarily suggest the complete rejection of Ottoman rule by Salonikans. Ahmed Meşhûri, a Salonikan native, acted as a spokesman for some elites within the Ottoman establishment who shored up the centralist policies against local forces. He did not conceal his support for the centralist policies particularly for the abolition of the janissary corps (Çeltik and Aydemir 2007: 268). For him,

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<sup>16</sup> For a general overview on the Cevdet’s glittering career and his thoughts about the nature of the “modern” Ottoman state, see Neumann (1999).

<sup>17</sup> Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, *Tarih-i Cevdet 10.Cilt*, p. 147.

<sup>18</sup> Akif Hasan Efendi Selanikli, *Divan*, Milli Kütüphane Yazmalar Koleksiyonu-Ankara, 30a-35b.

Sultan Mahmud II extricated the Ottoman realm from the misdeeds of mutinous janissaries. One might think that as a loyal member of the Ottoman officialdom, this Salonikan poet had expectedly a strong sympathy for the Sultanic efforts to reassert central control over the provinces. But, Akif who execrated the Ottoman commander as a tyrant had less reason to consider himself as an Ottoman official. Even so, he did not shy away from glorifying the same sultan as an auspicious ruler and eulogizing the Ottoman officials like Selim Paşa.<sup>19</sup> Given that the janissaries constituted a significant portion of the local population, Akif certainly knew that both the abolition of the janissaries and the centralization attempts of Sultan Mahmud were having serious repercussions on the nature of Salonikan society. Nonetheless, his poem does not mention the presence of janissaries in the Salonika even once. Nor does he speak of the political role of Albanians even though the rising power of his own patron Yusuf Ağa relied on his alliance with the Albanian soldiers of fortune (Conder 1830: 297).

No doubt, Hasan Akif voiced the concerns of Salonikan power-holders over the changing political calculus in the region during the first decades of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, he opposed to the meddling of the imperial center into the Salonikan domain the boundaries of which were drawn mainly-but by no means exclusively-by the provincial notables composed of native sons. On the other hand, as a client of the locally prominent family, Akif treated the symbolic power of the Ottoman center as a pivotal political tool to corrode the rampant military authority of janissaries and Albanians.<sup>20</sup> In several of his poems, he presented a constructed narrative reformulating not only the center-periphery relationship but also the congruent processes of inclusion and exclusion from the imagined Salonikan society. The debate over the true members of the society was much evident in the contemporary language controversy over the appropriate variety of Greek for use in educational and scholarly writing. This controversy began in the

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<sup>19</sup> Akif Hasan Efendi Selanikli, *Divan*, 31a-b.

<sup>20</sup> At the time when Akif compiled his poems, the reformist Sultan Mahmud II swept away the janissary corps. At first glance, Akif might seem to find unnecessary to mention about the activities of janissaries. But, the fact that his poems cover the historical events even before the 1820s lends support to the view that he excluded the janissaries from the historical narrative of city in order to eradicate their presence from the Salonikans' consciousness.

1780s as a dispute between exponents of the use of Ancient Greek and those who advocated the use of vernacular Greek in scholarly publications (Jusdanis 2011: 118-30). What initiated this controversy was not the “language question.” True, linguistic conservatives were somehow tied to the ecclesiastical elites and phanariot patrons who struggled to maintain their grip on multi-centered knowledge production and political actions. Yet, not all members of the elite can be regarded simply as the rivals of vernacularist movement.

Two scholars who had imbibed the idea of the vulgarization of language for the well-being of community were Katartzis and Christopoulos. In spite of their attachment to the Phanariot patrons, they vehemently defended the simplification of language. Voulgaris, who we met above, was an aspirant scholar determined to establish archaic Greek as a language of writing and education whereas his new education methods at the Kozanite School and Athonite Academy irritated the existing scholarly circles in the region. His pupil Moisiodax gave lectures in the courts of the so-called conservative Phanariot households. Unlike Voulgaris, Moisiodax was a passionate adherent of vernacular in both education and writing. As Peter Mackridge accurately notes, there is no simple correlation between conservatism or radicalism in social attitudes and their counterparts in linguistic matters (Mackridge 2009: 72-78).<sup>21</sup> The members of the elite undertook many initiatives to hold onto their cultural privileges backed by the Orthodox Church while the vernacularists aimed at the democratization of knowledge by attempting to open up high culture to large numbers of people. From the very beginning, the language dispute thus centered on the uphill political struggle over who was eligible to get education and who was not, who was a true member of the society and who was not.

This aspect of debate was itself a phenomenon of early modernity that created the expansion of the political domain in Salonika. The boundaries of this domain came to be set indeed by the jarring of meanings and diverse, but not mutually exclusive, political interests. The eighteenth-century consular reports and foreign newspapers reduced the Salonikan politics into the

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<sup>21</sup> However, Kitromilides has considered the language controversy as a product of the rising ethnic consciousness among the Orthodox communities in the Balkans. See Kitromilides. (1990).

fruitless acts of janissaries as well as viziers; and thus paid special heed to the voices of Salonikans only in time of bread riots. But, the expanding domain of politics involved broader sectors of the society, as will be seen below.

### **The Expanding Political Domain and Decision-Making Processes**

In local matters as diverse as tax allocation, security, public health and provisioning, Salonikans gained the political right to make decisions affecting them. Leafing through court records, one also gets the impression that the consensus and approval of the people [*ahali*] and Christian subjects [*reaya* or *varoş reayaları*] were counted by the local officials in many cases related to the management of public affairs. Whether the public decisions were officially taken by “the honorable representatives of the people” or the religious functionaries, the people eventually evolved into a political society in the management of local affairs during the eighteenth century. The voices of people were not easily brushed aside by the court scribes. When they calculated tax shares and drew up the local budget of Karaferye in the 1770s and the 1780s, they had to obtain the approval not only from the notables [*ayan*] but also from the *çiftlik*-holders (landholders) and Christian subjects of the town [*varoş reayaları*].<sup>22</sup> Almost forty years earlier, the scribes of the same region, did not give weight to the consent of people in the distribution of local expenses and communal taxes.<sup>23</sup>

Whether consensual or controversial, the people devolved authority to local priests, notables or *kocabaşıs* who established themselves as the spokesmen of inhabitants especially in the process of the apportionment of taxes and provisioning. In 1747, the transfer of rights to the non-Muslim and Muslim deputies of several villages was easily transplanted into the Karaferye courtroom where the representatives appeared before the judge to approve the local budget.<sup>24</sup> In the spring of 1748, the Muslim and Christian deputies [*vekils*] of people in Karaferye once again appeared in the courtroom and pledged to take full responsibility for the maintenance of order around

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<sup>22</sup> KS 98/97 and KS 99/52-56.

<sup>23</sup> See KS 65/188 and KS 65/192.

<sup>24</sup> KS 73/43-45.

commercial roads.<sup>25</sup> They further reinforced their pledge not only by standing security for each other but also by promising to pay 3.000 guruş [*nezir*] should they breach the vow. But it is not clear whether Salonikans paid the money pledged to the treasury if the pledge was violated.

Exemplified by the frequent participation of the well-to-do *reaya* and *ahali* into the imperial mechanisms of petitioning, the people gained an institutionalized political capacity and determined who could distinguish “good from bad” and who could not, or who could pay the designated amount of taxes and contributions and who could not. They bypassed the networks of *kocabaşıs* and metropolids throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>26</sup> In 1764, the villagers from the Salonikan countryside appealed avidly to the Ottoman authorities and solicited assistance from the state in order to settle their disputes with money-lenders.<sup>27</sup> True, from time to time, the Salonikan judge and other dignitaries brokered relationships between the Salonikan peasants and state authorities. As a supervisor of the endowment of Gazanfer Ağa, the Babüssade Ağası (the chief white eunuch of palace), for instance, lobbied in Istanbul on behalf of peasants of this waqf when the Salonikan officials and outlaws harassed waqf villages around Kessendire in 1747.<sup>28</sup> But, in many other cases regarding the collective tax allocation and maintenance of security, it was exactly the *reaya* or *ahali*, neither metropolids nor local notables who conveyed the communal disputes into the circles of imperial decision-makers after the 1740s. To what degree the local ecclesiastical authorities or other educated elites contributed to the wordings of these complaints remains unclear. But what one can say with certainty is that the rising political power of the people in the Salonikan province during the second half of the eighteenth century set the tone of local politics and enfeebled the authority of the existing political structures.

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<sup>25</sup> KS 73/90-1.

<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Ottoman Orders for Rumeli-Rumeli Ahkam Defterleri (hereafter cited as RA) 5/11-33, RA 7/35-120, RA 7/139-511, and RA 9/187-631.

<sup>27</sup> RA 21/167-467 dated Cemaziyelahir 1178.

<sup>28</sup> RA 5/141-566.



Most scholars misleadingly tend to equate the rising political power of people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the development of a commercial bourgeoisie that allegedly tarnished both the legitimacy of state and its existing political distribution mechanisms (Keyder 2008: 41-59).<sup>29</sup> In this context, Edhem Eldem's comments on the political competition between mercantile groups and the Ottoman political system are worth quoting at length (Eldem 1999: 194):

[The] gradual divorce between the Ottoman state and its would-be bourgeoisie was a rift of a social and economic nature, but it also implied a political shift in allegiances of the utmost importance for the future of the Empire. For what underlay the frustration of the "economically progressive" non-Muslim element was the realization that any hope for direct access to political power as a backing for socio-economic status was becoming more remote than ever, due to the crystallization of an almost exclusive restriction to Muslims of access to the spheres of legitimate political power.

Like many other scholars in the field, Eldem has attributed the paramount role to mercantile elites in the proliferation of commercial and monetary networks in the eighteenth-century Ottoman lands. True, the philanthropic activities of mercantile families irritated the ecclesiastical authorities and instigated most of the squabbles over the role of bourgeoisie in the political domain" (Chatzipanagioti-Sangmeister and Kappler 2010: 219-22). Yet, not all social groups shared these feelings favorable to the mercantile families. The authors of *Rossagglogallos* [Ρωσσαγγλογαλλος], for example, fulminated against the merchant families and leveled criticism against their incorporation to the tentacles of the Ottoman system through bribes and usury (Kitromilides 1999: 340-43): like the leading Phanariots and *kocabaşis*, they used their wealth to buy privileges from the Ottoman center. Despite these polemics, the Salonikan inhabitants in the eighteenth century saw the personification of

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<sup>29</sup> See also Masters. (2004).

commercialization and monetization in the greedy money-lenders rather than in merchants.

Traditionally, historians of the eighteenth-century Ottoman have argued that the money market was dominated by the Christian minorities and European dealers. But this was not the case in Salonika. The money-lenders did not consist only of the non-Muslim bankers and big banking firms [*sarrafs*]. Nor did these creditors constitute a legally defined estate. Admittedly, throughout the eighteenth century the fortunes of these big Salonikan bankers rose dramatically at the same time that the tax-farming system consolidated their relationship with the Ottoman political elite (Salzmann 1995: 198-208). Urquhart's (1833: 26) comments on the Ottoman local administration offer interesting details of the bankers' operations:

...There is scarcely a community of Turkey which is free from debt. The lenders were bankers of the pashas, who thus monopolized the produce of districts, or they were Turks, possessed of the capital, which they advantageously employed in farming branches of the revenue, or in loans to Greeks-their quality of Mussulmans giving them facilities for enforcing payment, securing to them the protection of the governors, and enabling them, besides the large interest for their money, to exact services of all kinds from the villages indebted to them.

His observations show that since high-ranking Ottoman officials held lucrative tax farms in Salonika in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they employed debt mechanisms to control peasants. Thus, the *sarrafs* (bankers) accredited by the Ottoman government acted as financial intermediaries between tax farmers and peasants during this period.

### **Political Practices and Official Rhetoric(s): Between Money and Morals**

The scandal revolving around the Jewish banker Mişon in 1797 also provides a valuable clue as to how deeply the money-lenders were ingrained



into the Salonikan social fabric.<sup>30</sup> Although Mişon was an accomplished banker in the city, in the 1790s he faced difficulties in managing payment flows precisely. His inability to keep the funds safe set off shock waves among local inhabitants. What worried the Salonikan officials however was not the collapse of Mişon's bank but the fact that he had collected a considerable amount of money from the Salonikan endowments, orphans' funds and women. As in many previous cases regarding debt settlements, state officials thus felt obliged to offer help to those small-scale money-lenders, investors, and ordinary Salonikans.<sup>31</sup> In actual fact, the collapse of Mişon's bank was hardly a shocking event for the Salonikan officials, because throughout the eighteenth century they gained enough experience to settle similar disputes between money-lenders and peasants. No matter how effectively they were settled, all these disputes in turn gave the state bureaucrats considerable leeway in the redefinition of the state rhetoric over the ideal social order in Salonika.

Anyone with access to capital could be an active money-lender in Salonika, so the incessant political debates over the social status of these creditors and their operations in the market had much to do with the new political capacity of people: the state had to share power with men whose power mainly came from economic and financial activities rather than military ones. Ironically, it was exactly the same activities that rejuvenated the old ethos of the state as an ultimate guardian of people rights. In 1757, when Mehmed Ağa, the supervisor of a Salonikan endowment, filed a petition to the Ottoman authorities, he used the changing rhetoric in his petition perfectly to save the waqf peasants from the harmful clutches of money-lenders.<sup>32</sup> In his well-crafted petition, he described the peasants as innocent individuals who had no choice but to borrow from these money-lenders to pay their fiscal burden [*tekalifleri sebebiyle*]. In this case the petitioner explicitly put the entire onus for peasant indebtedness on the inordinately heavy burden of taxation

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<sup>30</sup> The Prime Minister Ottoman Archives-Istanbul (hereafter cited as BOA), Cevdet Maliye 2144/46 dated Muharrem 1212.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, RA 7/139-511, RA 5/11-33 and RA 43/167-696.

<sup>32</sup> RA 12, 296/989, dated 1170.

and exonerated peasants by defining them as innocent and passive debtors.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, almost everyone in Salonika knew that the tax payments were only one of the reasons that pushed Salonikans to receive credit from the Salonikan creditors. The rise in consumerism and monetization of economy did not only offer new market opportunities for ordinary Salonikans but also increased their dependence on the complex credit networks. It is exactly for this reason that uncollected credits appeared as a growing source of dispute between villagers and Salonikan money-lenders as early as the 1750s. As the villagers from Pazargah Nahiyesi did in 1775, peasants habitually requested mediation from the Ottoman officials to reach a settlement with money-lenders for the consolidation of their debt in yearly installments.<sup>34</sup>

At a time when the Salonikan peasants felt the need for state support against money-lenders, they always made the same statement: “we don’t have the power to pay our debt:” While the state authorities had to share power with local inhabitants in eighteenth-century Salonika, the new role of the state authorities as permanent caretakers of peasantry in the changing socio-economic environment triggered the convergence in the interests of the Ottoman government and ordinary inhabitants. Thus, from the standpoint of eighteenth-century Salonikans, the state continued to function as a strong preserver of the prevailing order. For Salonikan monasteries, too, the maintenance of local order ensured the valuable protection offered by the state authorities in a society in flux. As the Athonite monasteries boosted their rural and urban investments in the Salonikan countryside throughout the

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<sup>33</sup> Even in the seventeenth century, the ecclesiastical authorities, as a part of the Ottoman officialdom, were well aware of the ongoing monetization in the workings of ecclesiastical institutions. But, they chose to link the indebtedness of the Patriarchate to the immoral behaviors of individuals and the concurrent increase in the tax burden: “the Synod of hierarchs convene to deal with various ecclesiastical matters that need correction, especially with the enormous indebtedness of the Great [Orthodox] Church created by the “thrice-deposed and eternally anathematized Gregorios the Stravo-Metropolitan of Amasia. He disturbed the peace of the Church and caused great damage to the “community of hierarchs” and to all Orthodox Christians. As a consequence, the Church is faced with a debt of 100 loads which must be dealt with for the sake of the well-being of the Orthodox and the honor of the Christian name.” Nomikos Michael Vaporis. (1975). “Codex (B’) Beta of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople: Aspects of the History of the Church of Constantinople,” Holy Cross Orthodox Press, pp. 77-79.

<sup>34</sup> SS 130, 67-68, dated Receb 1189. In fact, all these debt arrangements were the installment agreements: SS 130, 54-55, dated Cemaziyelahir 1189; SS 130, 26-27.

eighteenth century, they needed to receive assistance from the Ottoman government in this period more than ever (Kotzageorgis 2002).<sup>35</sup>

In 1777, when the Athonite monasteries sent a petition to Istanbul, they were quite sure how vigorously the Ottoman authorities were going to uphold their claims against money-lenders.<sup>36</sup> Even after this intervention, the thorny problem of unpaid debts continues to come up in the correspondences between the Athonite monasteries and Ottoman government.<sup>37</sup> Six years after the aforementioned petition, the Ottoman officials, monasteries and the Patriarchate all agreed upon the monastic regulations (Typikon of 1783), laying out a blueprint for the management of local affairs at the Mount Athos (Papachrysanthou 1999).<sup>38</sup> The first thing that emerges from a close reading of these regulations is that the precepts of this charter deal principally with the mobility of monks and their economic connections rather than with their religious-educational activities. The formulation of this charter reinforces the assertion that the monetization of Salonikan economy gave rise to the intrusive policies of Ottoman authorities in Salonika. As such, not long after the Typikon of 1783, the Ottoman authorities leaned in favor of imposing stricter control over the Salonikan countryside. On one occasion, the imperial authorities were called upon to interfere in the affairs of the Sidrekapsi region in order to alleviate unrest in the tax farm of the Sidrekapsi mine held by Serezli Yusuf Ağa, the munificent patron of Akif.<sup>39</sup>

The interference of the central government into the Salonikan political sphere on behalf of peasants explains why the Salonikan poet Akif took such pains to legitimize the role of his notable patron in politics so vigorously. It was within this political atmosphere that Akif could not explicitly question the

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<sup>35</sup> BOA, Cevdet Maliye 184/7701, dated 1240.

<sup>36</sup> RA 31/99-407, dated Zilkade 1191.

<sup>37</sup> RA 40/154-451, dated Receb 1198.

<sup>38</sup> According to Hasluck (1924: 46-47), the regulations imposed on the Athonite monasteries should be interpreted as a means of control of the widespread commercialization and monetization affecting all monasteries. He is probably right, because the Patriarchate ordered that “the accounts of the Athonite community should be ratified by the Council of the Patriarch and that money lent by monks should be put interest inside, not outside, the community.”

<sup>39</sup> BOA, Hatt-ı Hümayun 38/1543, dated 1234.

official rhetoric of the state even though he voiced strong opposition to the state's intrusion into local affairs. He knew very well that the imperial institutions perpetuated the old metaphor of the passive *reaya* (flock), according to which the docile Ottoman subjects could be corrupted only by the malpractices of malicious outsiders and harmful dignitaries.<sup>40</sup> For example, the Ottoman chronicler Şemdenizade Süleyman criticized the hotheaded Muhsinzade Mehmed Paşa for taking oppressive measures against the outlaws rather than chastising their chiefs as an "example" to their fellows.<sup>41</sup> Such an outright condemnation reveals that the Ottoman state bureaucracy and Salonikan power figures did not cease to place responsibility for the deterioration of public order on local strongmen.

It was also this rhetoric that underlay the formulation of the local representation mechanisms and the functioning of the aforementioned public vows [*nezirs*]. Considering the fact that Salonikans never paid the money they pledged, these vows probably served as an ideological signifier in eighteenth-century Salonika to remind the locals of the "actual controller of the political system," namely *kocabaşıs*, local elites and religious authorities. The articulation of this signifier hence took place within the existing system of broad meanings, emphasizing the protection of the soul against the external temptations not only for individual virtuousness but also for the well-being of society. This emphasis on anthropocentric dynamics cannot be simply characterized as evidence of ideological inertia and Ottoman traditionalism. Quite to the contrary, it continued to offer a flexible repertoire that satisfied the changing needs of both state agents and ordinary Salonikans on a wide range of occasions.

As the monks in Mont Athos despairingly resorted to Istanbul to reach a compromise with each other and lighten their financial burden around 1783, the Patriarch Gabriel blamed "the profligate and irreconcilable demands" of Athonite monks for ceaseless quarrels among the monks. Ecclesiastical tracts about the adornment of women and dowry inflation that were widely

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<sup>40</sup> Mü'minzade Seyyid Ahmed Hasîb Efendi. "Ravzatü'l-kübera," ed. Mesut Aydınar, Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu, p. XXXII and "Destârî Sâlih Târihi," ed. Bekir Sıtkı Baykal, Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu, pp. 9-11.

<sup>41</sup> Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi. "Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi Târihi Mür'it-Tevârih II.B," ed. Münir Aktepe, İstanbul Edebiyat Fakültesi Matbaası, pp. 85-86.

circulated in the Salonikan countryside after the 1750s also testify to the mindset of the churchmen (Kalinderis 1951: # 53).<sup>42</sup> In 1767, the Patriarch Samuel I Chatzeres, for instance, formulated the changing social hierarchies in terms of moral values. As a constituent component of Ottoman officialdom, the churchmen utilized the anthropocentric rhetoric to demonstrate their willingness to maintain social distinctions.<sup>43</sup> The patriarch was thus insistent on ascribing the primary cause of the escalation of *trachoma* (premarital gifts) and unequal provision of dowry on the “miasma of vanity and extravagance.” While advocating probity and modesty to curb the visibility of new social actors in the public space, he took up his pen to defend the natural order of things: the people should know their proper place within social hierarchy. While a good dowry was a hook to secure a prestigious marriage, the growth of dowries at marriage contributed to the symbolic power of “parvenus” families in Salonika and thus threatened the existing social hierarchy.<sup>44</sup>

Almost a half-century prior, the Patriarch Samuel Nektarios Terpos reflected on the relationship between growing social tensions and the need to keep the Christian faith intact (Valetas 1971). Kosmos the Aetolian, another itinerant preacher in the 1760s, also saw speculation and selfishness in the commercial market as the most urgent moral problems threatening the existing social order (Michalopoulos 1940). According to him, the commercial activities of Jews were the primary reasons for the deterioration of moral order. While travelling across the villages in Thessaly, Thrace and Salonika, he undoubtedly saw the deep-rooted anxiety of some social groups about the widespread commercialization, monetization, rising role of money-lenders and the ongoing pressures of Islamization especially among Albanian groups. It may therefore be no coincidence that he had caustic things to say about the

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<sup>42</sup> Δημήτριος Γκίνης. (1996). “Περίγραμμα ιστορίας του μεταβυζαντινού δικαίου” [The Outline of History of Post-Byzantine Law], Athens, p. 230.

<sup>43</sup> “Λόγοι πατριωτικοί απλοσύνθετοι, για τη σκλαβιά της γυναίκας και για το χαλασμό του γένους, στηλιτευτικοί της προίκας και τον εμπορικού γάμου, κηρυγμένοι στα 1767 από τον πατριάρχη Σαμουήλ Χαντζερή” [Patriarchal Arguments on the Slavery of Women, Deterioration of Genus, Dowry and Marriage proclaimed by the Patriarch Samuel Chatzeres], Athens, pp. 69-82.

<sup>44</sup> For similar observations, see Paul Sant Cassia and Constantina Bada. (1992).

activities of new rising groups and even shouted out threats against the Jews.<sup>45</sup> He preached for the holding of weekly markets on Saturdays (the Jewish Sabbath) rather than on Sundays (a day of resurrection), a measure that could impede the extension of the influence of “sordid Jews” in the region.” The rhetorical tendency underlying the relationship between arising evil moral values and alarming social metamorphoses gathered pace especially after the emergence of the so-called Kollyvades movement. This revivalist movement was ostensibly sparked by the simple theological debates among the Athonite monks whether the monks should perform the memorial services on Saturdays or Sundays (Metallinos 1994: 24-34).

Parallel to the claims of contemporary Wahhabi moralists over the reactualization of the prophetic model, the preachers as well as monks affiliated with this Kollyvades movement from the mid-eighteenth century onwards supported the reputed irrefutable need for moral betterment among Christians through a return to the true roots of Orthodox Christianity. In the second half of the eighteenth century Nikodimos and Makarios, the compilers of *Philokalia*, conceived the consumerism, indulgence and materialism as a threat to Christian morality (St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain & St Makarios of Corinth: 156):

...Everything not strictly necessary is a hindrance to salvation-everything, that is to say, that does not contribute to the soul's salvation. It is not food, but gluttony, that is bad; not money, but attachment to it; not the world's delights, but dissipation; not the clothes worn only for covering the body, but those are excessive and costly; not the wealth, but avarice may prevent this salvation.

The exponents of this movement were thus intent on injecting elements of humility or moderation in daily life, frequent communion as well as spiritual exercises into the official Orthodox Christianity (Khoury 2007: 256-74 & Hieromonk Patapios and Archbishop Chrysostomos 2006): the more a man

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<sup>45</sup> The negative rhetoric against the Jews was deeply influenced by the political struggles between Jewish and Christian communities over the tax allocation in Salonika. See, for instance, BOA, Cevdet Maliye 136/5826, dated 1241.

uses moderation in his life, the more he is at peace, for he is not full of cares for many things-servants, hired laborers and acquisition of cattle. A careful reading of the magnum opus of Nikodimos and Makarios, *Philokalia*, discloses the fact that such Hesychastic claims point to the fear of social changes in an expanding political domain where the church was no longer able to monopolize the production of ideology and knowledge. According to Nikodimos and Makarios, it was not the ecclesiastical authorities but the ordinary members of community who had the explicit responsibility to contribute to the regeneration of faith and moral values. Although these ideas at first glance seem to have undermined church authority, the rhetorics of the Kollyvades movements resolutely solidified the position of the church and old notable families that continued to imagine the social fabric as a collectivity of common faith, descent, and morality. According to the Kollyvades leaders, neither wealth nor the display of power, but the well-defined moral values could determine the social status of the ordinary individuals in the legitimate political-religious domain whose boundaries and definitions were still set by the ideological shepherd of the community.

### **Conclusion: The Center-Periphery Relationship or Salonikan Politics?**

Most Ottoman intellectuals in and outside the Ottoman lands at the turn of nineteenth century projected themselves as the enthusiastic proponents of better government and real carriers of European political theories, whether influenced by the Ottoman system of meanings or the Enlightenment ideas of state and politics. Their goal was to build up a social image in the public mind as the new spokesmen for some sectors of the Ottoman society and diaspora communities. It was their rhetoric that the power of knowledge production was in their hands while the local polemicists in Salonika seem to have had no other option than to follow the path paved by these prominent scholars. This prevailing rhetoric has been taken by modern scholars as one of the indicators for the control of the imperial center and diaspora thinkers over the ideological and political formulations in an Ottoman provincial setting.

One must, however, be very careful not to perceive this bipolar scheme of the Ottoman intellectual word as representing reality. The rumors and polemics within “imperial” and “diasporic” spheres were closely intersected with and permeated into the Salonikan politics in the eighteenth century. The

tone and boundaries of the Salonikan politics cannot be understood simply by means of binaries between Ottoman and Western, enlightened and traditional, local and imperial, Salonikan and Viennese, or diasporic and native. While equivocating on these binaries and the Istanbul-centric understanding of the Ottoman political spheres, recent scholarship has invented another fluid concept of Ottomanization to understand the reconfiguration of political authority in the provinces. That the process of Ottomanization entailed a significant degree of rapprochement between the local elites and the imperial center in the middle period has been argued by Ariel Salzman and Dina Khoury, albeit on different grounds. Although the idea of Ottomanization has brought a new understanding to the structured encounters between the imperial agents and indigenous subjects, it has also conceptualized local politics as a product of the center-periphery relationship.

However, findings of this study show that provincial politics entailed various agents and more complex processes than the term Ottomanization suggests. These agents of change and politics such as the Ottoman officials, merchants, money-lenders, ecclesiastical authorities, scholars and peasants did not work in isolation from one another. A substantial increase in the number of political agents does not point to the ebbing away of the legitimacy of the Ottoman state and dynasty in the region. The dynamics of change of large-scale sociopolitical systems affecting the decisions of Salonikans also gave the Ottoman elites and bureaucrats an opportunity to legitimize their political presence *ideologically*. Ironically, it was the Salonikan money-lenders and indebted peasants who imbued the state with a moral urge to control these dynamics.

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