

Venera R. Makaryan

PhD in History

orcid: 0000-0002-8149-5038

THE LEGAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE ARMENIANS IN GREATER SYRIA (XVI-XIX CC.)^{*}

Abstract

This article presents a detailed analysis of the legal status of Armenians in Bilād al-Shām (Northern Country or Land, Greater Syria) as a *dhimmi* and a constituent part of the Armenian *millet*, as well as their socio-economic status as a *ra'iyah* in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries of Ottoman rule.

The evolution of territorial and social governance systems was a direct result of the necessity to administer the conquered regions and populations.

The state classified the population according to religious affiliation, rather than ethno-linguistic identity. Consequently, the non-Muslim population of the empire, which constituted approximately 40 percent of the population in the mid-sixteenth century, was divided into three religious communities or *millets*: Greek Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, and Jewish.

Key words - Millet, sharia, non-Muslim, Ottoman Empire, *dhimmi*, Armenian community, Bilād al-Shām, Aleppo, Jerusalem, Armenian Patriarch.

^{*} Հոդվածն ընդունվել է տպագրության 22.01.2025:

Վեներա Ռ. Մակարյան

Պատմ. գիտ. թեկնածու

ՊԱՏՄԱԿԱՆ ՍԻՐԻԱՅԻ ՀԱՅԵՐԻ ԻՐԱՎԱԿԱՆ ԵՎ ՍՈՑԻԱԼ-ՏՆՏԵՍԱԿԱՆ ԿԱՐԳԱՎԻՃԱԿԸ (16-19-ՐԴ ԴԴ.)

Ամփոփում

Այս հոդվածում ներկայացվում է օսմանյան տիրապետության շրջանում՝ 16-19-րդ դարերում, Պատմական Սիրիայի (Բիլադ ալ-Շամ, Ասորիք) հայերի իրավական կարգավիճակը՝ որպես *զիմմի* և հայկական *միլլեթի* բաղկացուցիչ մաս, ինչպես նաև նրանց սոցիալ-տնտեսական կարգավիճակը՝ որպես *ռայա*:

Նշված ժամանակաշրջանում Բիլադ ալ-Շամի հայերի իրավական և սոցիալ-տնտեսական կարգավիճակը հիմնված էր *զիմմի* ավանդության, հայկական *միլլեթի* շրջանակում սահմանված նորմերի վրա և պայմանավորված էր տեղական վարչակառավարման առանձնահատկություններով:

Այս շրջանում Բարձր Դուռը ժողովրդին դասակարգում էր ոչ թե ըստ էթնոլեզվական, այլ կրոնական պատկանելության, ըստ այդմ՝ կայսրության ոչ մուսուլման բնակչությունը, որն ըստ «Աշխարհագիր մատյաններ» (Tahrir Defteri) փաստաթղթերի, մոտավորապես 16-րդ դարի կեսերին կազմում էր բնակչության 40%-ը, բաժանված էր դավանական երեք համայնքների՝ *միլլեթների*՝ հույն-ուղղափառ, հայ-առաքելական և հրեական:

Բանալի բառեր – միլլեթ, շարիաթ, ոչ մուսուլման, Օսմանյան կայսրություն, զիմմի, հայ համայնք, Բիլադ ալ-Շամ, Հալեպ, Երուսաղեմ, Հայոց պատրիարք:

Венера Р. Макарян

Канд. ист. наук

**ПРАВОВОЕ И СОЦИАЛЬНО-ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКОЕ
ПОЛОЖЕНИЕ АРМЯН В ВЕЛИКОЙ СИРИИ
(XVI-XIX ВВ.)**

Резюме

В статье рассматривается правовой статус армян Великой Сирии (Билад аш-Шам) как *зимми* и составной части армянского *миллета*, а также их социально-экономический статус как *райя* в XVI-XIX веках османского владычества.

В указанный период правовое и социально-экономическое положение армян Билад аш-Шама основывалось на традиции *зимми*, нормах, сложившихся в рамках армянского *миллета*, и было обусловлено особенностями местного управления.

В этот период османские власти классифицировали народ не по этнолингвистическому, а по религиозному признаку, таким образом, немусульманское население империи, которое, согласно по переписи населения (Tahrir Defteri) составляло примерно 40% население в середине XVI в., делилось на три религиозные общины, или миллеты: греко-православную, армянскую апостольскую и иудейскую.

Ключевые слова - *Миллет*, шариат, немусульмане, Османская империя, *зимми*, армянская община, Билад аш-Шам, Алеппо, Иерусалим, армянский патриарх.

Introduction

The Ottoman Empire, as an Islamic state, regulated the legal status of its subjects primarily according to sharia, the Islamic laws. Accordingly, all monotheistic non-Muslim subjects of the empire had the status of *dhimmi*¹. While sharia is the only law recognized by Islam, the Ottoman authorities also made way for the Sultan's legislative power² by promulgating secular laws (Barkey 2005. 13). Consequently, Ottoman justice was predicated upon dynastic and Islamic laws. In this logic, the legal status of the non-Muslim population of the Ottoman Empire and the established norms should be observed within the framework of the *Millet* system, adapted to the Ottoman administration system and also fixed in the secular legislation.

In the case of Bilād al-Shām, it is imperative to consider the role of local administration in determining the de facto status of the local population. The status of the subject peoples of Greater Syria, situated far from the central regions of the empire, was shaped not only by universal laws but also by the governing methods and degree of tolerance of the local authorities.

¹Non-Muslims of the monotheistic faith who are subjected to Muslim domination.

²The Sultan's law, or *kânûn*, was not based on sharia, but rather constituted a legal system that was entirely distinct from it. In some respects, as part of the penal code, the Kanun served as a minor supplement to the special rulings of the sharia courts. For more see, **Kunt M.I.**, "Transformation of Zimmi into Askeri," in **B. Braude and B. Lewis** (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, vol. 1, New York, 1982, 58; **Remez N.V.**, "K voprosu o zakonotvorcheskoï deiatel'nostiosmanskikh sultanov v XV–XVI," in **I.V. Zaïtsev and S.F. Oreshkova** (eds.), *Osmanskiï mir I osmanistika, Sbornik stateï k 100-letiu so dñiarozhdenia Tverentínovoï A.S. (1910–1973)*, Moscow, 2010, 269–281.

1. The Regulation of the Legal Status of the Syrian Armenians from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century

1.1. ***Ottoman Millet System and Armenian Millet.*** The Armenians of the Ottoman Empire including Bilād al-Shām constituted an integral part of the Armenian *millet*.³ What is meant by the term “millet” and the Millet system? The term “millet” is derived from the Arabic word “millah” having the meaning: “nation,” “nationality,” “religious community.” In the Ottoman Empire, the term was used to refer to the empire's non-Muslim communities, including the Greek Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, and Jewish communities, which were established on the basis of ethno-religious principles. These communities received the right of certain intra-community autonomy within the framework of the Millet system. In academic circles, the term “millet” is defined as “a form of organization and legal status that arose from the followers of a monotheistic religion (*āhl al-dhimmah*) after their submission to the empire by the treaty granting them protection (*‘aqd al-dhimmah*)” (Barbieri 2013, 3-4; Ortaylı 2002, 218; Chevallier 1982, 159). Accordingly, the Millet system was predicated on a set of regulations for non-Muslim subjects of the Islamic state's monotheistic religion, the *dhimmīs*, the “*dhimmī* tradition”⁴ (Cahen, 1963, 234-238) which established social and personal norms for religious minorities who were considered subjects of an Islamic state. In accordance with this tradition, the Ottoman Empire acknowledged the communal identity of non-Muslims and observed their socio-religious order, yet did not grant them complete autonomy.⁵

The head of the Armenian *millet*, *Milletbaşı*⁶, was the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, the spiritual leader of the Armenians throughout the Ottoman Empire and the legal representative of his people before the Ottoman state. In other words, he

³The modern Syrian-Armenian Apostolic community is also (alongside other Christian communities) regarded as a religious minority, with a spiritual-religious authority that performs judicial and legal functions. This is in accordance with the stipulations set forth by the Syrian Ministry of Justice. The church serves as the community's representative to the state and the state's representative to the community. In fact, the institution of the *millet* is preserved to some extent in Syria. For further details, see Pashayan, Harutyunyan 2011, 13.

⁴For *‘Aqd al-dhimma*, see also, Emon 2012, 323-343; Bosworth 1982, 37-51; Hashemi 2006, 1-26.

⁵Öztürk F., “The Ottoman Millet system”, 79, footnote 44, available at www.journals.istanbul.edu.tr/iugaad/article/download/5000063916/5000059858(accessed on 23.08.2015/).

⁶The Ottoman Turkish terms, in addition to those Arabic terms that are emblematic of the Ottoman era, are inscribed in Turkish transliteration. In other instances, the terms are written in Arabic transliteration.

“implemented secularism in the form of spiritual supremacy, civil functions, which had to correspond to the Ottoman order and ensure the model of land-rent relations in the given community”⁷ (Kharatyan, 2007, 156).

Furthermore, the Armenian *millet* and the Armenians were granted certain rights and powers by the *fermâns* (decrees) and *berâts* (patents) of the Ottoman sultans. The points laid down in these documents have remained largely unchanged and have been reaffirmed in almost all the *fermâns*.

During the Ottoman period, however, the Catholicosates of Cilicia, Aghtamar and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem with their dioceses (about 50 dioceses), as part of the Armenian *millet*, were subject to the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, preserving the intra-ecclesial divisions established until then (Örmanean, 1912, 6). The Armenian dioceses of Greater Syria remained directly subordinate to the Catholicos of Cilicia and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. However, the leaders of these dioceses were regarded as the *wakil* or *murakkhkhaş* (representative) of the Armenian patriarch of Constantinople. The latter assumed the role of local *Milletbaşı*s, each of which was responsible for the implementation of the tax, financial, and legal (in relation to wills, marriages, and property) duties and rights of the people within their jurisdiction⁸.

These facts are confirmed in the preserved Sultan's *fermâns* (issued before the 19th century) regarding the powers given to the Armenian Patriarchs of Constantinople. We find confirmations of the application of these and other points of this *fermâns* in a number of archival documents preserved in Armenian, particularly in various writings of high-ranking Armenian clerics serving within the borders of the Ottoman Empire, including Bilād al-Shām (Makaryan, 2023, 67-71, 160-175). However, as we are well aware of the controversies and different definitions surrounding the use of the term “millet” and the period of the *Millet* system, we take the establishment of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople (1461) and the powers granted to the Armenian Patriarchs and Armenian *millet* as our starting point. We consider this to be a **systemic** step towards coordination, which allows us to set aside the differences on this issue.

⁷ The authority of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople was also extended to all monophysite communities within the Ottoman Empire, including the Syrian Jacobites, Coptic, and Abyssinian communities. However, despite this, each of these communities retained their own spiritual leaders. In accordance with the aforementioned principle, all the Chalcedonian communities were incorporated into the Greek *millet* (Sanjian 1965, 32–33; Ortaylı 2002, 219; Faroghi 2006, 273–274).

⁸ This was one of the clauses of the Sultan's *fermâns* (issued even before the 19th century) regarding the powers of the Armenian Patriarchs of Constantinople. Kharatyan 2007, 156; Cohen 1982, 12–14.

1.2. **Tax Policy.** It is worth noting that the three main administrative-legal bases mentioned above, namely Islamic law, secular legislation and local authority policy, on which the status of non-Muslims in the empire was defined, can be best understood through the lens of tax policy. Thus, the Ottoman Empire, a classic country of the Islamic world, adopted a typical tax policy that determined the place and role of the subject peoples in the multi-ethnic empire. As is well known, the main tax that distinguished Muslims from Christians, imposed by the sharia on Christian and Jewish subjects of medieval Islamic power, was the *jizyah*. One of the powers granted to the Armenian patriarchs was that the patriarch and fifteen churchmen were exempted from paying the *jizyah*, *avarız*⁹, and *tekâlif-i örfiyye*¹⁰ taxes. Furthermore, according to Jerusalem shariacourt records in the sixteenth century, the new communities of Jerusalem, the Catholics and the Maronites, as well as the Armenians as an ancient *millet*, were exempted from paying the *jizyah*, and there is no mention of the latter ever paying *jizyah* (Cohen 1982, 14). The fact that the Armenians of Jerusalem had tax immunity from the payment of the *jizyah* during the mentioned period is also due to the fact that the local Armenians did not form a separate secular community: the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem had refused to organize a secular community separate from the church, in accordance with Ottoman legislation (Tsimhoni 1984, 356). Siruni notes that some *amīrā*¹¹ houses were also exempted from some taxes by special *berâts* (Siruni 1970, 89-90).

In addition to paying the *jizyah* and a variety of other taxes that the Armenians of the Empire had to pay as *dhimmī* and as subjects in general, they were also obliged to pay a tax as members of the Armenian *millet*. Each member of the Armenian *millet* was obliged to pay the *i'âne-imillīye* (national tax, assistance) type of tax to his nation and community, religious, educational, charitable, and supporting institutions and enterprises, under the name of “national tax (*i'âne-imillīye*)”. A special paragraph in the Armenian *millet* Constitution, approved by the Ottoman government in 1863 (T'ananyan; Masayuki 2007), formulated the “national tax” in the following way: “Every national adult who has an income is obliged to contribute to the national expenditure” (Vardan 2004, 487).

⁹ A type of tax (in Ottoman Turkish, adventure, misfortune) of the Ottoman Empire, originally collected during wars in the form of food or compensated by labor. Later it became permanent and was collected in money (Vardan 2004, 79–87).

¹⁰ The term *tekâlif* (burden, weight) and “*örfiyye*” (*according to custom*) collectively refer to a multitude of taxes, which were imposed in accordance with the prevailing circumstances or at the discretion of the ruling monarch. For more see, Tabakoğlu 2011.

¹¹ The term was used to refer to the representatives of the affluent Armenian upper class in the Ottoman Empire.

1.3. *Armenians in the Ottoman Court.* with regard to the legal standards of the Armenians of the Empire, in addition to all non-Muslims, can be observed in the Ottoman judicial system. Thus, in accordance with the grant of authority to the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, the *Millet* courts were established with the purpose of adjudicating matters pertaining to intra-communal and Christian inter-communal disputes. However, for the settlement of these matters, as Ottoman subjects, non-Muslims of the empire also had the right to choose the shariacourt. In such instances, the decisions of the Muslim judge, the *qādī*, were based on Islamic law.

One of the points pertaining to the *fermâns* concerning the powers granted to the Armenian *millet* and the Armenian Patriarch was that cases involving Armenians and matters of sharia should be referred to the Imperial Diwan (*Dîvân-ı Hümâyun*). The central government was also empowered to overturn the verdicts of community and shariacourts.¹²

The records of the sharia courts have been studied separately with the aim of identifying any violations and discriminatory practices towards non-Muslims throughout the empire, and as early as the seventeenth century a phenomenon known as "textual discrimination" ¹³ is noticeable. This phenomenon has already been corroborated by a considerable number of scientists and is also documented in the records of the seventeenth century Sharia courts of Aleppo, which we have studied. ¹⁴ An examination of the aforementioned documents reveals that at the conclusion of the names of Christians and Jews, the terms *al-naṣrānī* (Christian) or *al-yahūdī* (Jew), *al-rūmi* (Greek) are necessarily appended. This is done in order to indicate the religious and ethnic identity of the individuals in question. In contrast, for Muslims, religious or ethnic identity is not a factor that is indicated (Masters 2001, 32). However, the distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim was not limited to this. When recording non-Muslim male names, such as Poghoswalad Azar (Poghos son of Azar), the distinguishing word for a non-Muslim male name is *walad*, which translates as "boy." In the case of Muslims, male names are written in the following way: for example, Mūsā ibn Ibrāhīm. Instead of the word *walad*, the words *ibn*, *bin*, or *banū* are written, with the same meaning (Bey 1898, 35; Al-Qattan 1996, 194). In the case of male names that were applicable to both Muslims and non-Muslims, the scribes spelled them incorrectly in the case of non-Muslims in order to facilitate the distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim individuals.

¹² For more information see, Makaryan 2016.

¹³ For more information, see Jennings 1975, 53, Al-Qattan 1996.

¹⁴ For more information, see Makaryan, Kecho 2016.

example, non-Muslim men were not permitted to have long hair or beards, and some were only permitted to have moderate mustaches. To grow a beard, a man needed to acquire permission from the local ruler, which constituted a further form of bribery (Vardan 2004, 20). In this manner, the rulers effectively assumed guardianship over the affluent non-Muslims of the city, emulating the actions of the local European consuls who similarly looked after their fellow nationals (Bodman 1963, 45; Na'yisah 1986, 625).

During the reign of Asad Pasha (r. 1744-1758) from the Azm dynasty, the Christians of Damascus were permitted to select their attire. Women even wore a green *jubah* (an outer garment with wide sleeves), and, as is well documented, Christians were prohibited from wearing green and dark blue garments, Jews were forbidden to wear yellow, and Samaritans were prohibited from wearing red (Na'yisah 1986, 625). It should be noted that, prior to this period, women were only permitted to wear garments of these colors beneath the covering of their clothing (Al-Dimashqī 1930, 53-54). The aforementioned relative freedom extends not only to local Christian women but also to Muslim women. The celebrated Russian traveler and physician A. Eliseev, who traveled to various countries in Asia Minor in the 1860s, observed that the life of Arab women in Syria and Palestine was happy. They were more appreciated by their husbands, were more intelligent and knowledgeable than the "Ottoman" (i.e. Turk) women, and were able to walk freely and even talk with men (Eliseev 1888, 88).

In the Ottoman Empire, the non-Muslim population differed not only in appearance but also in the external decoration of their houses (Safrastyan 1964, 405-407). A Turkish chronicler Shanizade gives interesting information about the construction of houses, which, although generally related to Istanbul, also expresses the discriminatory attitude of the ruling circles of the empire towards non-Muslim peoples: "according to the ancient tradition, the length of Muslim buildings was 12 *arşın*, and for the *ra'iyah*¹⁵ - 10 *arşın*, more was forbidden. With only 10 *arşın* allotted to the buildings of the *ra'iyah* class, the plot on which the building was constructed was very narrow, the space between the buildings was also narrow, and the buildings were low" (Safrastyan 1964, 250; P'ap'azyan 1999, 43). Also, the *ra'iyahs* were also not allowed to construct buildings out of stone and mud.

In the province of Aleppo, the houses of upper-class Christians usually had a courtyard. Unlike the houses of Muslim merchants, they did not have a separate section of the house for women or another house separated by a yard, a *harem*. The only

¹⁵ In the Ottoman Empire the entire society was thus divided into two distinct groups: the *askyars* and the *ra'iyahs*. Each group was organized into a separate social order. From the seventeenth century onwards, the Turks began to use the term *ra'iyah* only to refer to non-Muslims (P'ap'azyan 1999, 275).

exceptions were those houses that originally belonged to a Muslim (Russel 1997, 32-40). The houses of ordinary Armenians consisted mainly of a living room, a large pantry, and a cellar. In the living room, all members of the household ate and slept together, sometimes with guests. In summer they slept in the yard or on the roofs because of the heat (Sarafian 1957, 189).

Nevertheless, a portion of the Syrian Armenian population, particularly the Armenian *khwājas* and *çelebîs*, was permitted to construct high and aesthetically pleasing private residences. According to Al-Dimashqi, in Damascus, from the period of the Azm dynasty, “Christians began to build houses, palaces, and halls, a phenomenon that had not previously occurred” (Al-Dimashqī 1930, 63-64). This was an exceptional phenomenon, both in terms of the historical period and in comparison to other regions of the empire, particularly the central regions.

The most compelling evidence of the veracity of the aforementioned assertion can be found in the architectural legacy of Christians in Saliba, Al-Husrom, Al-Zabbal, Al-Sisi, and Al-Yasmin alleys in the Judaida, Aleppo’s Christian neighbourhood.¹⁶ These structures exemplify the distinctive architectural style of Aleppo. The construction of these old Arab houses with spacious courtyards, *liwās* (atriums), and magnificent reception halls commenced at the beginning of the seventeenth century and continued until the end of the nineteenth century (Semerdjian 2019, 38). It is of significant importance to note that the architectural style of houses in Aleppo, and in particular in the Armenian Judaida quarter, was significantly influenced by the private houses built by the Julfan¹⁷ Armenians who settled in Aleppo from the latter quarter of the fifteenth century to the early sixteenth century.

2.1 The Prominent Armenian Class in Ottoman Syria (Çelebîs, Şarrāfs, Amīrs)

In the Ottoman Empire, Christians and Jews were tolerated by the authorities not only as People of the Book, but also because of their significant contributions to the development of the Ottoman economy. Despite the legal and moral advantage enjoyed by Muslims, Christians in the empire, particularly Armenians, were able to engage in various economic sectors and occupy significant and sometimes leading positions. The

¹⁶For more information about this quarter, see Semerdjian 2019.

¹⁷Old Julfa (Jugha in Armenian) was a prosperous Armenian city situated in close proximity to the Araks River, approximately 20 miles to the southeast of the city of Nakhichevan. Following the burning of Jugha by Shah Abbās I (r. 1587–1629) in 1604, the local Armenian population (approximately 300,000) was relocated by the Shah to a city in the vicinity of Isfahan, which was named Nor Jugha (Aslanian 2011, 1).

Armenians of Syria played a significant role in the empire's trade, particularly in the context of the commercial importance of several mercantile cities in Syria itself. The abolition of privileges previously granted to Italian merchants by the Byzantine Empire in favor of non-Muslims of the empire, namely Armenians, Jews, and Greeks, had a significant positive impact on the commercial activities of Syrian Armenians during the Ottoman period (Inalcik and Quataert 1994, 209).

Bruce Masters (Masters2001, 51) notes that although the number of Armenian merchants was relatively small, they contributed to the development of Syria's trading cities, utilizing their extensive connections with Amsterdam and India. Among the Armenian merchants, the Armenian *khwājas* engaged in the silk trade should be singled out, in whose hands were the main levers of the silk export, and who competed very successfully with the European (particularly the Venetian) merchants (Hovhannisyan 2004, 141; Hourani 1992, 220, 235-326). They were powerful enough to influence the Lebanese silk market (T'op'uzyan 1986, 33-34). Arab historian Adel Ismail identifies the competition of Armenians in the silk trade as the primary factor contributing to the decline of the silk trade in Lebanon from the mid-seventeenth century (Ismail 1958, 134). He notes that Armenians transported the major portion of Syrian and Persian silk to France at their own expense. Additionally, King Louis XIII of France (r. 1610-1643) extended patronage over the Armenian merchants arriving in France from the East by a special proclamation (Mik'ayelyan 2003, 321).

Among the Armenian merchants of Aleppo, the Julfan merchants from Isfahan held a prominent position. They exerted a dominant influence on the economy of Aleppo, with a particular focus on the silk trade and a strong presence in the city's most prominent Ottoman and Armenian institutions¹⁸ (Semerdjian 2016, 7). Nevertheless, as a consequence of the significant influx of Armenians from the cities of Akn and Arabkir in Western Armenia through the 1740s, the influence of the Julfan merchants in trade diminished (Sanjian 1965, 46, 49-50). MahtesiKirakos, a prominent figure in the silk trade from Aleppo, was responsible for the export of select silk products from Armenian villages in the vicinity of Antioch to Europe, primarily to Holland and Italy (Siwrmēean 1950, 272). In 1616, his sons, the Aleppo-Armenian KhwājaPetik and Sanos, assumed control over the enterprise. In order to conclude a contract with the locals for the sale of raw silk in Amsterdam, KhwājaPetik acted as "Her Majesty the Queen's authorized person (*Āmīn*)" of Holland in Syria (Siwrmēean 1950, 288-290; Mik'ayelyan 2003, 321; Aslanian 2011, 68).

Consequently, the Armenian merchants, designated as *khwāja*, constituted the elite of the Armenian community. The most prominent of these individuals, upon attaining a

¹⁸ For further information on the role of New Julfa Armenians in the silk trade of Aleppo, see, Aslanian 2011, 67-68.

certain position, were granted the title of *çelebî*, which bestowed upon them considerable honor, renown, and prestige both within the Armenian community and among state circles (Siruni 1970, 491). *Çelebi*'s family gained considerable influence within the ruling regime, providing financial support to the sultan's courtiers and, on occasion, the sultan himself (Zulalyan 1980, 243-244).

In the eighteenth century, the *amîrs* assumed the role previously held by the Armenian *çelebis*. The *amîrs* were successful in a variety of financial roles, including money changers (*şarrâf*), bankers, and stockbrokers. The majority of them received their education in foreign countries, including Germany, France, and Italy (Madden 1862, 129). In general, non-Muslim *şarrâfs* acted as intermediaries between the traditional Ottoman and European capitalist economies (Chernichenkina 2010, 416). The Armenian *şarrâfs*, who had already established a dominant presence in the region during the seventeenth century, were regarded as patrons of the local Ottoman *pashas* (Chernichenkina 2010, 408-409). Each *pasha* was under the patronage of an Armenian or Jewish *şarrâf*. The authority of the *şarrâfs* extended beyond the direct control of the *pashas*, yet they played an important role in the local administrative system. As the *pasha* was obliged to remunerate his position, he was therefore required to borrow from the *şarrâf* before receiving the revenues from the *eyalet* (Herbert, Bodman 1963, 32). In order to emphasize the role and importance of the Armenian *şarrâfs* for the Ottoman Empire, Leo (Leo 1934, 247) writes as follows: "And it is this capital that becomes a ladder by which the members of the infamous *ra'iyah* rise from the pits of their fall to such peaks where they were already dictators of will, and where they were taken into account even by the sultan, 'The shadow of Allah,' himself".

From the early eighteenth century onwards, the *amîrs*, began to assume a significant role in the governance of the *millets*, both in terms of spiritual and civil affairs.

The positions of the Armenian *amîrs* were reinforced in the nineteenth century as a consequence of the internal political transformations that occurred within the empire. These developments were precipitated by the shortcomings of the Ottoman authorities in the realm of foreign policy at the outset of the century. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Armenian *şarrâfs* gained significant influence in collaboration with Muslim officials (Stamatopoulos 2006, 257; Chernichenkina 2010, 410-411). They financed the expenses of the patriarchate, church, and national institutions, thereby acquiring the power to impose their will upon the *millet*. Gradually, the *amîrs* became more powerful than the officially recognised patriarch, whom they had already nominated (Sanjian 1965, 36). The Armenian *amîr*'s class became the support of both the Catholicos of Cilicia and the patriarch of Jerusalem, as well as diocesan leaders and the *wakil* priests (representative), who were nominated and appointed by the Armenian *amîrs*. The latter enjoyed the patronage of the provincial administration and other authorities (Mik'ayelyan 2003, 332; Örmanean 1912, 142-144).

Furthermore, each Armenian *khwāja*, *çelebî*, or *amîr* assumed the role of patron to one or more *âghâs* or *effendis* (gentlemen), who, as a result of their elevated status, were able to operate with a certain degree of autonomy, thereby contributing to the collective advancement of the community. Additionally, they were patrons of Armenian literature, education, crafts, and the arts.

However, having reached a high position, as Leo notes, the Armenian does not cease to be a slave, bearing the epithet of an “infidel (*kāfir*)” and many other such contemptuous and blasphemous names. Instead, the slave owner is compelled to “bow his head before his slave” (Leo 1934, 247).

2.2. Armenian Artisans and Peasants in Bilād al-Shām

In the case of Bilād al-Shām, the major cities and port towns were engaged in trade, while the exploration sector included the largest number of villages and towns. The Armenians of Syria had a longstanding reputation for their proficiency in a variety of craftsmanship disciplines. The Armenian community of Aleppo demonstrated its expertise in a range of crafts, including jewelry, nacre making, dyeing, tailoring, weapon making, baking, parchment and paper cleaning, vegetable oil and chemical dye production, etc. (T’op’uzyan 1986, 35-36; Mik’ayelyan 2003, 322; Hovhannisyan 2004, 141).

A notable part of Syrian Armenians were peasants, the majority of whom resided in the Armenian settlements of Northern Syria. Local Armenians were renowned for their horticultural expertise. The principal commodities produced in these regions were olives and olive oil, wine and vodka, tobacco, cotton, and so forth (Al-Ghazī 1923, 107-108). Although sericulture was a common practice in almost all the villages of the coastal areas of Syria, the silkworm breeders of Bitias in particular gained a considerable reputation in Northern Syria due to the quantity of their products and their expertise in raising silkworm (Mik’ayelyan 2003, 328). In general, the raw silk produced by the Armenian peasants of Syria, “Iskenderûn silk”, was renowned for its high quality. A portion of the silk was exported to France and other countries, while the remainder was utilized in the silk factories of Aleppo, Damascus, and Antioch (Mik’ayelyan 2003, 328).

Therefore, the Armenians of the northern regions of Syria were predominantly engaged as feudal dependent peasants (*marāba*) on the estates of landlords, with ownership of the land varying from half to one-third, one-fourth, or less of the plot (Mik’ayelyan 2003, 327-329).

In the second half of the sixteenth century, the estates of the landowners of the Antioch region, including many Armenians, were placed under the hereditary management of the Turkish *âghâs*, who were not accountable even to the *pasha* of Aleppo (Ch'olak'ean 2009,4-5). The estates were under the protection of city authorities who, in turn, were under the protection of state officials. *Âghâs* resorted to a variety of fraudulent practices to acquire lands, villages, and vast estates. The aghas responsible for the *waqf* endowment department engaged in arbitrary confiscation of the native people's estates. A significant number of settlements, lands, springs, mills, and pastures were confiscated from Armenian villagers. The Armenians of the plains and watery areas are particularly affected, with some becoming feudal dependent peasants, others migrating from the region, and a third group moving to mountainous and isolated regions inhabited by Armenians (Ch'olak'ean 2009,5).

The influence of Turkish *âghâs* in the region declined significantly following the conquest of Syria by Ibrâhîm Pasha of Egypt (r.2 September 1848 – 10 November 1848) in the second half of the nineteenth century. As a result, the local Armenian *âghâs* became prominent figures, whom the local Armenians referred to in Armenian as *perun/paron* (i.e. sir) and their wives as *verpetken/varpetkin* (i.e. master-woman). *Perun* was the patron of the village, acting as the host of the Ottoman authorities, the tax collector, and the ordering of *fermâns* for the spiritual and educational needs of the community (Ch'olak'ean 2015, 308). Among the Armenian *âghâs*, Ayse Manchik was renowned in Garaturan, Hakob agha Abelyan in Kyorkyun, and Sergo agha in Kesab, were able to secure not only the confiscation of Turkish *âghas* estates but also assumed responsibility for the collection of various taxes and dues (Ch'olak'ean 2015, 125).

The system of feudal land ownership had a detrimental impact on the socio-economic situation of the peasantry, who constituted a significant proportion of the Syrian population. The peasantry, who were the primary producers in the Arab countries, were particularly affected by this system, resulting in their destruction. Some data on the population exodus from rural areas has been preserved. One such region is Aleppo, which, due to its favourable climatic conditions, was one of the relatively developed regions not only of Syria, but of other Arab countries. The data indicate that in the seventeenth century, the Eyalet of Aleppo comprised 3,200 villages, whereas by the eighteenth century, this figure had declined to 400 (Siwrmēan 1946, 51; Russel 1997, 199). The phenomenon of peasants leaving their plots of land and fleeing to big cities was a common occurrence throughout the empire during the aforementioned period. This has entered the history of Turkey as the years of the "Great Flight" (Büyük Kaçgun).¹⁹

¹⁹For more information, see Tunus 2019.

Conclusion

In the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries, the legal and socio-economic status of the Armenians of Bilād al-Shām was largely determined by three key factors: the tradition of *dhimmī*, the norms defined for the Armenian *millet*, and the peculiarities of local administration.

During the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries, the Ottoman authorities' policy towards the Armenians of the Empire was based on religious principles rather than national ones. The *Millet* system was the most effective method for the Ottoman authorities to control the limited rights of non-Muslim subjects and to conceal the discrimination against them.

The comparative increase of the Armenian population of Bilād al-Shām and the high level of preservation of national and cultural values observed in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries can be attributed to certain freedom and favorable economic conditions provided to non-Muslims by the local administrative system. The pervasive presence of foreign officials in a number of cities of Bilād al-Shām, their influence on the activities of local government bodies and the way of life of society, as well as the role and weight of the local Armenian aristocracy in the development and management of Syrian cities contributed to the relatively free self-management of national and religious communities.

Despite their status as *dhimmīs*, the Armenians of Greater Syria were able to achieve notable success due to their close religious and cultural ties with the West, their proficiency in Western languages, and their capacity for self-education. Overcoming universal inequality, discrimination, and barriers, they were able to attain the status of the economic elite on the scale of Bilād al-Shām and the entire Ottoman Empire.

Venera R. Makaryan – the author of approximately 20 scientific articles, the author of one monograph, and the co-author of one additional monograph. Her research focuses on Armenian-Arab relations in the medieval and premodern eras, the status of Armenians in Greater Syria, and the description and study of Arabic manuscripts.

Bibliography

1. Abd al-Karim R. 1990: "Public Morality in the 18th Century ottoman Damascus," in *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 55-56, 180-196.
2. Al-Dimashqī, Khūrī Mikhāyil Barik 1930: *Tārīkh al-Shām (1720-1782)*, Al-Bāshā, Qusṭantīned., Wathā'īqtārīkhīyah līl-kursī al-malikī al-Ānṭākī, 2, Lebanon.
3. Al-Ghazī, Kāmil ibn Ḥusayn ibn Muṣṭafā Bālī al-Ḥalabī 1923: *Nahr al-Dhahab fī tārīkh Ḥalab*, al-juz al-āwal,
4. Al-Qattan N. 1996: "Textual Differentiation in the Damascus Sijil: Religious Discrimination or Politics of Gender," in A. Sonbol (eds.), *Women, the Family and Divorce Laws in Islamic History*, New York, 191-201.
5. Aslanian S.D. 2011: *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean*, Berkeley, New York, London.
6. Barbieri S. 2013: "Ottoman Millet System and National-Cultural Autonomy. A Distance Dialogue," (*European Consortium for Political Research 41st Joint Sessions*), Mainz, 11-16
7. Barkey K., 2005: "Islam and Toleration: Studying the Ottoman Imperial Model," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 19(1/2), *The New Sociological Imagination II*, 5-19.
8. Bey S.Sh., Turkey, and Armenia and How They Happened; Press of C.B. Woodward Company, St. Louis, 1898.
9. Bodman Jr., Herbert L. 1963: *The Political Factions in Aleppo 1760-1826*, Chapel Hill.
10. Bosworth C.E., 1982: "The Concept of Dhimma in Early Islam," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, vol. 1, 37-51.
11. Cahen Cl. 1963: "Dhimma", *Enciclopedie de l' Islam*, vol. 2, Paris, 234-238.
12. Chernichenkina N. I. 2010: "Osobennostiformirovaniakreditnoisistemy v Osmanskoimperii," in I.V. Zaitsev and S.F. Oreshkova (eds.), *Osmanski miroismanistika, Sbornik statei k 100-letiu so dniarozhdenia Tverentinovoi A.S. (1910-1973)*, Moskva, 406-416.
13. Chevallier D. 1982: "Non-Muslim Communities in Arab Cities," in B. Braude and B. Lewis (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, vol. 2, New York, 159-165.
14. Ch'olak'ean Y. 2009: *K'esapibarbari*, Yerevan.
15. Ch'olak'ean Y. 2015: *K'esap*, 1-2, Lebanon.
16. Cohen A. 1982: "On the realities of the Millet System: Jerusalem in the Sixteenth Century," in B. Braude and B. Lewis (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, vol. 2, New York, 7-18.
17. Çolak H. 2017: "The Nature and Limits of Toleration in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire," *Historisch Tijdschrift Groniek*, 217 - Midden-Oosten, 378-388.
18. Eliseev A. V. 1888: "Polozhenie zhenshchiny na Vostoke," *Severny Vestnik* 8, 1888, 49-88.
19. Emon A. 2012: "Religious Minorities and Islamic Law: Accommodation and the Limits of Tolerance," in A. Emon, M. Ellis and B. Glahn (eds.), *Islamic Law and International Human Rights Law*, Oxford, 323-343.
20. Faroqhi S. (ed.) 2006: *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, vol. 3, 1603-1839, Cambridge.
21. Febvre M. 1682: *Theatre de la Turquie, où sont représentées les choses les plus remarquables qui s'y passent aujourd'hui touchant les Mœurs, le Gouvernement, les Coutumes et la Religion des Turcs; et de treize autres sortes de Nations qui habitent dans l'Empire Ottoman*; Paris.
22. Hashemi K. 2006: "The Right of Minorities to Identity and the Challenge of Non-discrimination: A Study on the Effects of Traditional Muslims Dhimmah on Current State Practices," *International Journal on Minority & Group Rights* 13 (1), 1-26.
23. Hitti Ph. 2002: *History of the Arabs*, London.
24. Hourani A. 1992: *A History of the Arab Peoples*, Grand Central Publishing, New York-Boston.
25. Hovhannisyan N. 2004: *Arabakaner krneripatmut'yun*, 2, Yerevan.
26. Inalcik H., Quataert D. 1994: *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1600*, vol. 1, Cambridge.
27. Ismail A. 1958: *Histoire du Liban du XVII^e à nos jours*, vol. 1 Beirut.

28. Jennings R. 1975: "Women in Early 17th Century Ottoman Judicial Records: The Sharia Court of Anatolian Kayseri," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 8(1), 53-114.
29. Kharatyan A. 2007: *Kostandnupolsi hay hamaynk'ē*, Yerevan.
30. Kunt M.I. 1982: "Transformation of Zimmi into Askeri," in B. Braude and B. Lewis (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, vol. 1, New York, 55-67.
31. Leo 1934: *Khojayakan kapitalēyevnraqaghaqakan-hasarakakanderēhayerimej*, Yerevan.
32. Madden R. R. 1862: *The Turkish Empire, in Its Relations with Christianity and Civilization*, vol. 2, London.
33. Makaryan V. 2016: "Haykakan Milletikazmavorumēev K. Polsi Hayots' patriark'neri iravasut'yunnerē (XV-XIX)," *Journal "Ejmiadzin"*, August, 11-132.
34. Makaryan V. 2023: *Patmakani Sīriayihayerē ō smanyanshrjanum (XVI-XVIII)*, Yerevan.
35. Makaryan V., Kecho M. 2016: "Sharia dataranneri ardzanagrutyunnerē halepahayut'yankargavichakiveraberyal (17-19-rd darer). Ėstmashtots'yan Matenadaran araberenvaverageritvayalneri", *Banber Matenadaran* 23, 194-208.
36. Masters B. 2001: *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World*, Cambridge University Press.
37. Mik'ayelyan V. (ed.) 2003: *Hay gaght'ashkharhipatmutyun (mijnadaricminchev 1920)* 2, Yerevan.
38. Na'yisah Y. 1986: *Mujtama' hmadinah Dimashq*, vol. 2, Damascus.
39. Örmanean M., 1912: *Hayots' ekeghets'in*, Constantinople.
40. Ortaylı İ. 2002: "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Millet Sistemi Türkler," vol. 10, Ankara, 216-220.
41. Öztürk F. 2009: "The ottoman Millet system," *Güneydoğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi* 16, 71-86.
42. P'ap'azyān A. 1999: *T'urk'akan vaveragerē Hayastaniev hayerimasin (XVI-XIX)*, Yerevan.
43. Pashayan A., Harutyunyan L. 2011: *Sīriayi hay hamaynk'ē ar dihimnakhndirner*, Yerevan.
44. Remez N.V. 2010: "K voprosu o zakonotvorcheskoï deiatel'nostiosmanskikh sultanov v XV-XVI," in I.V. Zaitsev and S.F. Oreshkova (eds.), *Osmanskii mir I osmanistika, Sbornik statei k 100-letiu so dñiarozhdenia Tverentinovoi A.S. (1910-1973)*, Moscow, 269-281.
45. Russel A. & B. 1997: *Tārikh Halab al-ṭabi'ī fī al-qarn al-thāmin'ashar 1-2, Khālīd al-Jabītī* (trans.), Aleppo.
46. Safrastyan A. (ed) 1964: *T'urk'akanaghbyurnerē Hayastani, hayeriev Andrkovkasimyszoghovurdnerimasin*, vol. 2, Yerevan.
47. Sanjian A. 1965: *The Armenian Communities in Syria under Ottoman Dominion*, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
48. Sarafian K. 1957: *A Brief History of Aintab*; Printed in the United States of America.
49. Semerdjian E. 2016: "Armenian Women, Legal Bargaining, and Gendered Politics of Conversion in Seven-Teenth and Eighteenth Century Aleppo," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 12(1), 2-30.
50. Semerdjian E. 2019: "Armenians in the Production of Urban Space in Early Modern Judayda," in *Aleppo and its Hinterland in the Ottoman Period / Alep et sa province à l'époque ottoman Aleppo: Social, Economic and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia* 124, Leiden, 28-61.
51. Siruni H. 1970: *Polis ewirderē*, vol. 2, Beirut.
52. Siwrmēan A. ark'., 1946: *Patmutiwn Halēpihayots' 2*, Beirut.
53. -1950: *Patmutiwn Halēpihayots' 3* (K'nnakan 1355-1908), Paris.
54. Stamatopoulos D. 2006: "From Millets to Minorities in the 19th Century Ottoman Empire: an Ambiguous Modernization," in S.G. Ellis, G. Halfadanner, A.K. Isaacs (eds.), *Citizenship in Historical Perspective*, Pisa, 253-273.
55. Tabakoğlu A. 2011: "Tekâlif-i Örfiyye," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, TDV İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi, available at [TEKÂLÎF - TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi](http://www.parliament.am/library/sahmanadrakan%20barepoxumner/Tananyan.pdf).
56. T'ananyan G.: *Azgayin Sahmanadrutyun Hayots*, available at <http://www.parliament.am/library/sahmanadrakan%20barepoxumner/Tananyan.pdf> (accessed on 19.05.2017).
57. T'op'uzyan H. 1986: *Sīriayiev Libanani haykakangaght'ojakhneripatmut'yun (1841-1946)*, Yerevan.

57. Tsimhoni D. 1984: "The Armenians and the Syrians: Ethno-Religious Communities in Jerusalem," *Middle Eastern Studies* 20(3), 352-369.
58. Tunus O. 2019: "Yüzyilda Osmanli Devleti'ndekiBüyükKaçgun'unNedenveSonuçlari," *Int. Journal of Management Economics and Business*, 15 (2), ZonguldakBülent Ecevit Üniversitesi.
59. Ueno M. 2007: "The First Draft of the Armenian Millet Constitution," *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 23(1), 213-251.
60. Vardan L. 2004: *HarkerëÖsmaneanewParskakankaysrutiwnnerunmēj*, A-I, Beirut.
61. Wyszomirski M. 1975: "Communal Violence: The Armenians and the Copts as Case Studies," *World Politics* 27(3), Cambridge, 430-455.
62. Zulalyan M. 1980: *ArevmtyanHayastaně XVI-XVIII darerum*, Yerevan.