

ATHONITE TRAVELLING MONKS AND THE OTTOMAN AUTHORITIES (16TH – 18TH CENTURIES)

Aleksandar Fotić

Faculty of Philosophy – Department of History, University of Belgrade

The Ottoman state acknowledged Mt Athos as a separate monastic community, with delimited territory and a degree of internal autonomy. Although they were allowed to keep a lot of their preottoman possessions (*metochia* – large *çiftliks*) they had lost earlier state protection, patronage and donations. New circumstances had forced them to turn on to seek help in a way of regular annual financial contributions from Orthodox vassals, Walachian and Moldavian princes, and later on from Russian sovereigns and dignitaries.¹

The hardest times for monasteries, and not only for those at Mount Athos, came around 1569, when the Ottoman authorities confiscated monastic possessions and then resell them to the same monasteries.² Lacking the means, burdened with increasing debts, the monasteries were compelled to seek support not only from Orthodox rulers, but from anyone willing to lend a hand. If it was not the mentioned crisis that generated alms collecting, it certainly fostered the official establishment and better organization of the so called “begging tours”.

Athonite monasteries took full advantage of the enormous esteem they enjoyed throughout the Orthodox world. Either individually, or on behalf of the entire Athonite community, they would muster smaller or larger groups of travelling monks and send them to various parts within and without the Ottoman Empire. Such a monk was usually referred to as *taxidiotis* in Greek, or as *putnik* in Serbian, meaning the same. They were also known as *pandohoi*, or the monks “receiving everything”. The alms (*milostinja* in Serbian), which was the official term for the collection, were monastery property. Monks were only allowed to make use of it in order to meet travelling expenses. A begging tour was certainly not a simple beggar’s job. Travelling monks from among the priesthood were entitled to offer up prayers for the sick, to confess and grant absolution from sins, or even to display famed relics for public veneration. Such monks sustained the faith of the people and acted as a spiritual encouragement. On receiving alms they would take up the obligation that the donor’s name would be mentioned at monastic ser-

¹ For the relations with Walachian and Moldavian princes, see Năsturel (1986). For the complete picture of donations made to one monastery (Hilandar) from all sides, see Fotić (2000) 182-240.

² On the “confiscation affair”, see Fotić, (1997); Alexander (Alexandropoulos) (1997). Monk Sava Hilandarac (1898) 71, was the first to interpret alms collecting as the consequence of confiscations and redemptions in the times of Selim II.

vices. Contributors were registered in special monastic books, depending on the kind of mention they wanted and the amount they donated.³

It was recorded by the contemporaries that after the mid-17th century some 2,000 monks, who would make between one third and one half of all the Athonite monks, were constantly on the road. Besides receiving alms in cash and in kind, the travelling monks were entitled to receive bequests, also in cash or in kind, and to organize pilgrimages to Mount Athos. Sometime in the 17th century it became a habit to elect the most successful monks, i.e. those who had risen the most, to the office of abbot.⁴

The travelling monks used to carry abbots' letters with them, the epistles addressed to patriarchs (Russian, Serbian), bishops and metropolitans administering the dioceses they had included in their itinerary, to the commanders of provinces, to the men and monasteries of repute, briefly to anyone whose recommendation might have facilitated alms collecting. A *Mélange* written in the second half of the 17th century at Mount Athos contains a series of drafts of the epistles and letters addressed to many named and unnamed persons throughout the Orthodox world.⁵

Surviving documents indicate that during the 16th and 17th centuries permission was needed of the church authorities in other states (Russia, Poland, and Habsburg Monarchy).⁶ What was the situation within the Ottoman Empire? There is no doubt that the Ottoman authorities allowed alms collecting and even levied certain taxes on alms, gifts and bequests (*tasadduk akçesi, parisije, protesii*).⁷ The travelling monks requested certificates and *fermans* from the Ottoman authorities permitting an unimpeded collection of charity. The experience of the travellers coming from the Serbian monastery of Hilandar will be dealt with in this paper. A number of Ottoman documents referring to the problem of alms collecting may probably be found in the archives of other Athonite monasteries.

The assignment of the "travellers" is described in Ottoman documents as: *cerr etmek*, ("making money through serving as itinerant preacher", the term otherwise used for students of Islamic theology who earned money preaching), *cerr tarikile ... geşt ü gūzar etmeğe çıkmak* ("to go out walking <or riding> ... in the manner of preaching for money"), *dilemek* ("to beg", "to ask for"), *āyinleri üzere manastırlar için sâillik ile sadakın cem 'i ...* ("begging for charity for the monastery according to their religious customs"), *sadakāt-i nāsdan cem ' olunan*

³ Rycout (1679) 229-230; Georgirenes (1677) 99-100; Hofmann (1954) 57; Mendieta (1972) 108-115; Fotić (2000) 221-235.

⁴ Rycout (1679) 230; Hofmann (1925) 145; Sava Hilandarac (1898) 71; Mendieta (1972) 115.

⁵ Georgirenes (1677) 100; Dimitrijević (1922) 21-25, 29; Pajsije (1993) 113; Novaković (1869) 45-57; Fotić (2000) 222, 226.

⁶ *Actes de Chilandar* (1915) No 93; Fotić (2000) 226.

⁷ Kabrda (1969) 72-73, 80-84; Veselá (1973) 452-454, 457-458; Schwarz (1970) 9-13, Nos 59, 117, 211.

nukūd ve eṣyā (“cash and kind collected by begging <from people>”), *manastir-i mezbūr fukarāsı için cem‘ olunan sadakāt ve nüzūri* (“charity and bequests collected for the poor of the monastery in question”).⁸

It is noteworthy that in the ferman of 1589 alms collecting was assigned to the category of “state taxes collecting” (*mīrī rusūm cem‘ine çıkmak*).⁹ That categorization was used probably to provide adequate protection. It is obvious that the monks were collecting money for the benefit of their monasteries. The phrase “collecting of state taxes” is to be understood only in indirect way: that the monks would pay their taxes through collected cash and kind. Alms tax (*tasadduk akçesi*) seems to have made a considerable portion of Athonite liabilities, as suggested by the order of 1600 referring to heavy debts of Hilandar and delayed payments of taxes to the patriarch. Besides “state lump sum” (*mīrī kesīm*) mention is only made of alms tax.¹⁰

Most of Hilandar documents are 18th-century permissions and certificates issued often by low-ranking officials. The monks used to obtain them immediately before starting off or during the journey, and always with one intention: to provide proof they were on authorized assignment (the one which is not unlawful). Far more interesting are the ferman dating from the end of the 16th century. On the one hand, they bear evidence of the rights guaranteed to Hilandar “travellers” by the central government, and on the other hand, they clearly reveal harassment to which the monks were subjected by high- and low-ranking officials or any other Muslims. These ferman were usually preserved in the form of attested copies. Some have almost identical contents but different “travellers” as addressees. It may therefore be inferred that they were intended for a number of destinations in the same time. The importance which the monks attached to such documents may be further illustrated by the fact that a ferman of 1590 was renewed twice (1595, 1604), i.e. whenever a new sultan came to power.¹¹

If the Ottoman authorities assigned alms collecting to the category of “state taxes” it is no wonder that the travelling monks enjoyed certain rights otherwise exclusively reserved for patriarchs, metropolitans and their authorized representatives when collecting taxes in their dioceses. The Ottomans permitted the tra-

⁸ HMAT, 2/160, 11/797, 3/236, 3/239, 3/246a, 3/249, 8/65, 8/96a.

⁹ HMAT, 11/VIII, 11/IX. There is some difficulty in interpreting the term “state taxes” or “taxes belonging to the fisc” (*mīrī rusūm*). Kabrda (1969) 61-65 considered it had included all church taxes and dues levied by metropolitans in their dioceses, whereas İnalçık (1991) 422-424 believes that the category did not include at least the *patriklik* and *mitropolitlik* taxes.

¹⁰ HMAT, 7/55, the regesta in: Boškov - Bojanić (1991) 200, No 84.

¹¹ HMAT, 11/VIII, 11/IX – two attested copies, both dating from 1589; 12/1/17 – 1595, the renewed 1590 *hükm*, published in: Fotić (1998); 8/65 – 1604, renewal of the same, 1590 *hükm*. The listed rights are known from 18th-century metropolitans’ *berāts*: ... *kendü nefislerin eṣkiyādan tahlis etmele tebdil-i cāme ve kisve edüb ālāt-i harb götürdüklerinde ...*, see Kabrda (1969) 45-46.

velling monks to ride horses or mules, to “change clothing out of fear” when passing through dangerous parts, to “wear clothes in the fashion of infidels”, even to carry arms (... *mīrī rusūm cem ‘inde iken atlarına ve katırlarına kimesneyi dahl u ta ‘arruz etdirmeyesiz ve havflarında tağyīr-i cāme eyledüklerinde āyīn-i kefe-re üzere olan libāslarına kimesneyi dahl u ta ‘arruz etdirmeyüb ...; ...götürdükleri yat u yaraklarına ve bindükleri atları ve katırlarına ... hilāf-i emr zulm u ta ‘addi eyledükleri vāki ‘ ise men ‘ ü def‘ edüb ...*).¹²

Those, apparently uniform, fermans seem to have been obtained before the journey so that harassment, no doubt expected, might be averted. They were produced to be shown to local officials as a proof the monks were under protection. They were addressed to all the *beylerbeyis* and *kādīs* in the European part of the Empire. Besides banning the violation of all the listed rights (horse riding, changing of clothes, carrying of arms), neither was anyone allowed to seize wax gathered for the church of Hilandar, the action usually justified by the explanation the wax would have been “burnt”, i.e. destroyed. The monks also requested protection against slander and rigged trials: “They plant certain affairs on us, saying: ‘you are insulting our faith and our persons’, and then some appear as plaintiffs, some as witnesses, and others verify their credibility” (... *ve bize ba ‘zı nes-neler isnād edüb dīnümüze ve ağımuza şetm eylediñüz deyü kimi şāhid ve kimi müzekkī ve da ‘vāci olurlar deyü ...*).¹³

There were disobedient monks who refused to hand the collection over to the monastery. Such an instance was the reason that Hilandar dared to appeal for the sultan’s intervention, although the Empire was in the middle of war crisis. In the beginning of June 1697, when the Empire was occupied with northern borders, the monks set off for Edirne, the imperial army headquarters. They lodged a complaint against some unnamed monks who, backed by persons from ‘*asker tā ‘ifesi* and others, were causing them a considerable damage by refusing to hand over the money and goods collected as charity. The *kādī* of Thessaloniki was promptly ordered from the camp to investigate the case. On finding the accusations well-grounded, he was to track down the culprits and prevent the appropriation and embezzlement of alms and bequests. The collection was to be delivered to the abbot.¹⁴

An insight into the above mentioned fermans from the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century undoubtedly expands our knowledge of the status and rights enjoyed by the Orthodox clergy. The Ottoman state took good care that the influx of its revenues be kept steady at all times. This should account for the privileges granted to “travellers”. These documents, however, raise few further questions. If simple monks, not metropolitans or patriarchs, or wealthy merchants,

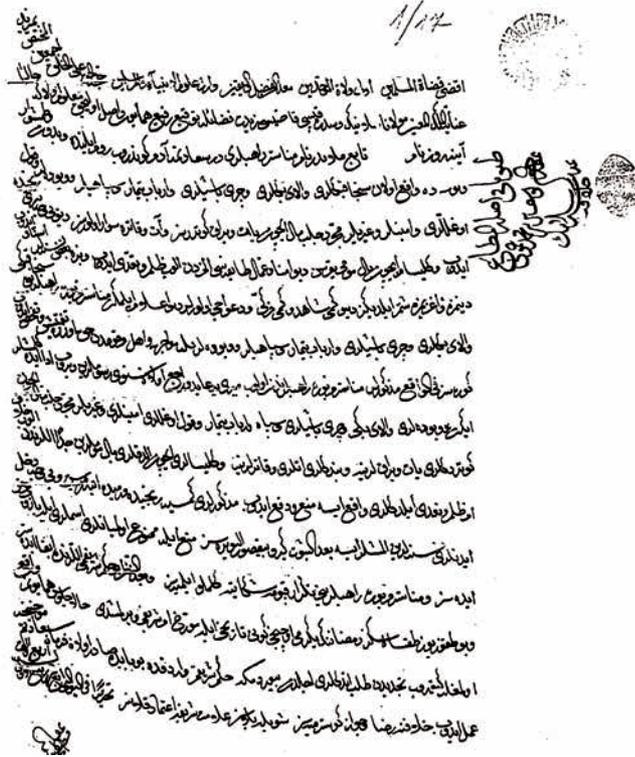
¹² HMAT, 11/VIII, 11/IX, 12/1/17, 8/65; Fotić (1998) 304-305.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ HMAT 8/96a; Fotić (2000) 230.

like Ragusans, were granted such rights, to whom else from *zimmī* category were similar privileges granted and in what measure? What else was included by the state in the category of direct or indirect collecting of “state taxes”? Answers to these questions will wait to be found in some other documents.

Appendix



(Copy of the ferman, HMAT, Turcica, 12/1/17)

[1] Akzā kuzāt ul-müslimīn evlā vulāt ul-muvahiddīn ma'den ul-fazl ve-l-yakīn vāriş-i 'ulūm ul-enbiyā ve-l-mürselīn hüccet ül-hakk 'ale-l-halk-i ecme'in el-muhtaş bi-mezīd-i [2] 'ināyet ül-melik ül-mü'in mevlānā Selānik ve Sidrekapsī kādīsi zīdet fezā'ilühü tevķī'-i refī'-i hümāyūn vāşil olcaķ ma'lūm ola ki hālā [3] Áynaröz nām [ceziresine?] tābi' Hīlāndar nām manāstır rāhibleri Der-i Se'ādet'üme adam gönderüb Rūm-ili'nde ve Budūn ve Ŧemeşvār [4] ve Bōsna'da vāķi' olan sancakbeğleri ve ālāybeğleri ve çeribaşıları ve erbāb-i timar [ve] sīpāhiler ve voyvodalar

ve *kul-* [5] oğulları ve emînler ve gayriler mücerred celb-i māl için yat u yarağ götürürsüz ve at ve *katıra süvâr olursuz deyü bî-vech bizi rencide* [6] *édüb ve kilîsâmuz için bal-mûmi yaqarsız deyü ümenâ ve 'ummâl tâ'ifesi elimüzden alub zulm u ta'addî édüb ve bize ba'zî nesnelere isnâd édüb* [7] *dînümüze ve ağımuza [?] şetm eylediñüz deyü kimi şahid ve kimi müzekkî ve da'vâcı olurlar deyü i'lâm eylemegin manâstır-i mezbûre râhiblerini sancağbeği* [8] ve *âlâybeğleri ve çeribaşları ve erbâb-i timar ve sipâhiler ve voyvodalar ile muvâcehe ve ehl-i vukûfdan haqq üzere tefîş ve tafahhüş édüb* [9] *göresiz fî-l-vâkı' mezkûrler manâstır-i mezbûre râhiblerinden olub mîriye 'âid ü râci' olan senevî rusûmların vèrüb edâ edegelmişler* [10] *iken vöyvodaları ve âlâybeği ve çeribaşları ve sipâh ve erbâb-i timar ve kul-oğulları [ve] emînleri ve gayriler mücerred celb-i māl için* [11] *götürdükleri yat u yarağlarına ve bindükleri atları ve katırlarına ve kilîsâları için aldıkları bal-mûmların cebren ellerinden alub hilâf-i* [12] *emr zulm u ta'addî eyledükleri vâkı' ise men' ü def' édüb mezkûrleri kimesne rencide ü remide étdirmeyesin ve bî-vech dahl* [13] *édenleri nesnelerin almışlar ise ba'd es-subût girü bî-kuşur alıvèresiz men' ile memnû' olmayanları isimleri ile yazub ve 'arz* [14] *édesiz ve manâstır-i mezbûre râhiblerini tekrâr Kapuma şikâyete gelmelü eylemeyesiz ve ba'd en-nazar bu hükm-i şerîfümü ellerinde ibkâ édesiz* [15] *ve bu tokuz yüz toksan sekiz Ramazân'nuñ yiğirmi üçüncü günü târihi ile müverrah emr-i şerîfüm verilmışdi hâlâ culûs-i hümayûnum vâkı'* [16] *olmağla getirüb tecdidin taleb etdükleri ecilden buyurdumki hükm-i şerîfüm vâduğda bu bâbda şâdir olan fermân-i se'âdetüm mücebince* [17] *'amel édüb hilâfına rızâ u cevâz göstermeyesiz şöyle bilesiz 'alâmet-i şerife i'timâd kılasız. Tahriren fî-l-yevm ur-râbi' şehri Rebi' ül-evvel li-sene erba' ve elf.*

Be-makâm-i Kōstantiniyye el-maħrûse

[Certification on the right margin:]

Ṭıbbk mā fî âşluhu-l-muṭâ'. // Namağahu el-fakîr Yûsuf bin Pir Mehmed el-müvellâ // be-medîne-i Selânîk // hilâfeten.

[Illegible seal]

Translation:

(To) the most just among the *kādîs* of the Muslims, the best among the governors of the monotheists, the mine of virtue and knowledge, the inheritor of the wisdom of the prophets and the apostles, evidence of truth for all people, surrounded with the augmented grace of the Ruler the Helper, (to) our Lord, the *kādî* of Thessalonica and Siderokapsi – may his virtue increase!

When this exalted imperial sign arrives, let it be known that the monks of the monastery named Hilandar, which is a dependent of the [peninsula] called Holy Mountain, have now sent a man to my Threshold of Felicity and notified me:

“*Sancaḳbeḡis, ālāybeḡis, eribaḡis, timar*-holders, *sīpāhīs, voyvodas*, imperial ‘slaves’, *emīns* and others in [the *beḡlerbeḡiliks* of] Rumelia, Buda, Temesvar and Bosnia, merely in order to extort [our] possessions, harass us unjustifiably saying: ‘you carry arms with accessories and ride horses and mules’. Taking away beeswax intended for our church saying: ‘you burn it’, *emīns* and ‘*āmils*’ perpetrate injustice and oppression against us. They plant certain affairs on us, saying: ‘you are insulting our faith and our persons’, and then some appear as plaintiffs, some as witnesses, and others verify their credibility.”

[I have ordered:] Ensure that the monks of the said monastery confront *sancaḳbeḡis, ālāybeḡis, eribaḡis, timar*-holders, *sīpāhīs, voyvodas*, and that legal experts justly look into and investigate [their allegations]. If the said are indeed the monks of the said monastery, as long as they pay regularly the annual taxes that belong and are due to the state, you are to prevent and forbid *voyvodas, ālāybeḡis, eribaḡis, sīpāhīs, timar*-holders, imperial ‘slaves’, *emīns* and others, from doing them injustice and damage contrary to the order, by forcibly taking their arms with accessories, mounted horses and mules, and beeswax for their church merely in order to extort [their] possessions. You are to forbid anyone from bothering and harassing them. If those who have interfered unjustifiably took something that is theirs, once the case is proven, you are to make them restore it fully. You are to list the names of those who should be dissatisfied with the banning-order and to send it [to the Porte]. Ensure that the monks of the said monastery have no need to come again to the Porte to complain. After looking into it, place this honourable order of mine in their hands.

They have been given my [Murad III’s] honourable order dated the 23rd day of *Ramaḡān* 998 [26 July 1590 / 16 July Old Style].

Now, as on the occasion of my accession to the imperial throne they have brought [the ferman] and requested its renewal, I have ordered: when my honourable order comes, act upon my fortunate ferman issued in this matter. You are not to assent to and permit any action contrary to it. Thus you are to know. You are to place reliance on the noble sign. Written on the 4th day of the month of *Rebi’ ūl-evvel* of the year 1004 [7 November 1595 / 27 October Old Style].

In the residence of Constantinople, well-protected.

[*Certification on the right margin:*]

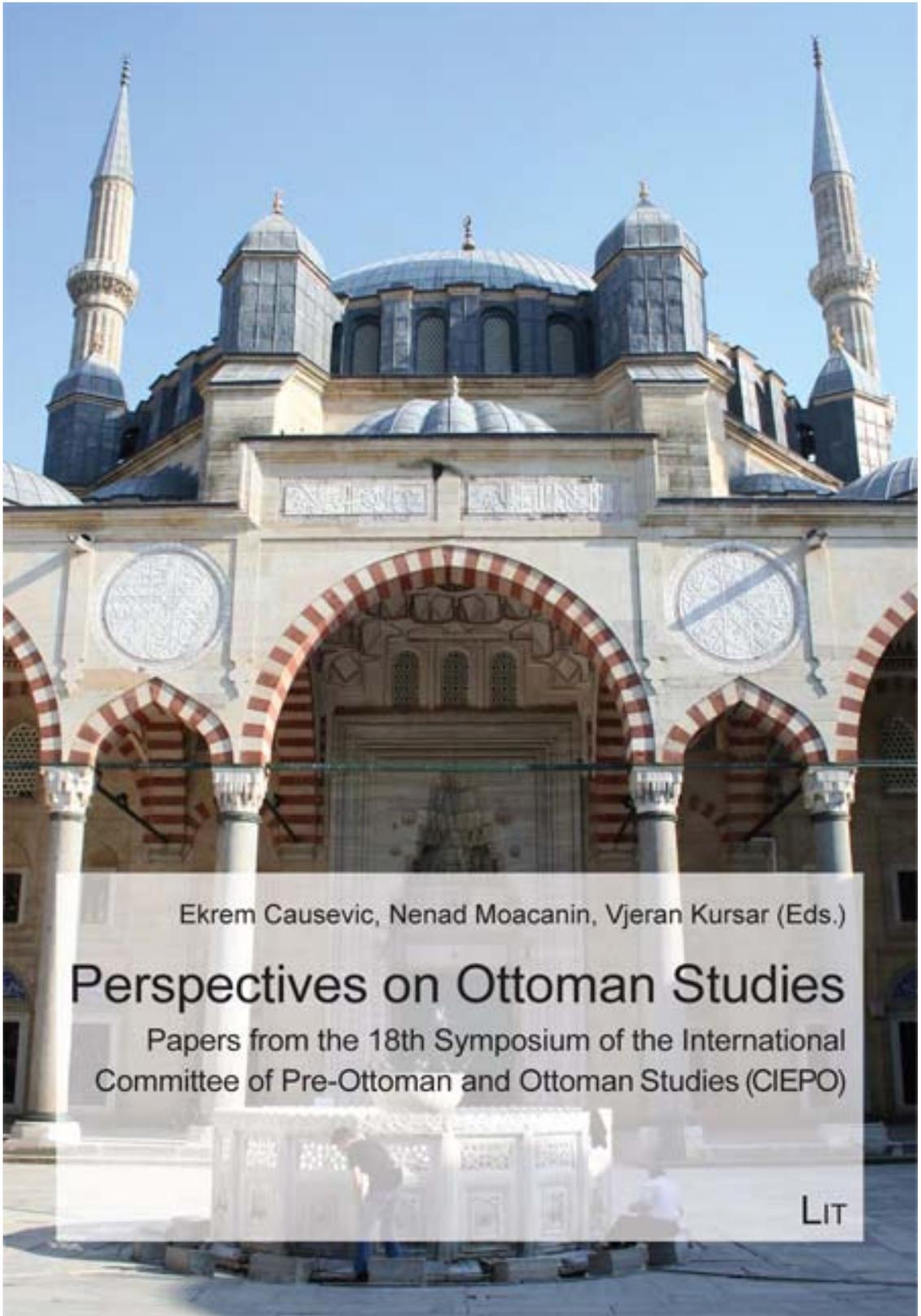
Fully matching with what is in the original that is to be abided by; this has been written by humble Yusuf, son of Pir-Mehmed, *nā’ib* at the city of Thessalonica.

[*Illegible seal*]

REFERENCES

- Actes de Chilandar*. (1915). [Documents in Slavic languages], publiés par L. Petit et B. Korablev, *Vizantijski Vremennik* XIX.
- Alexander (Alexandropoulos), J. C. (1997). "The Lord Giveth and the Lord Taketh Away: Athos and the Confiscation Affair of 1568-1569", *Mount Athos in the 14th-16th Centuries (Athonika Simeikta 4)*, Athens, 149-200.
- Boškov, V. - Bojanić, D. (1991). "Sultanske povelje iz manastira Hilandara. Regesta i komentar za period 1512-1601" (Sultans' Charts from the Monastery of Chilandar. The Regesta and Commentaries for the Period 1512-1601), *Hilandarski zbornik* 8, 167-213 [in Serbian Cyrillic].
- Dimitrijević, St. (1922). "Dokumenti hilendarske arhive do XVIII veka" (The Documents from the Archive of Hilandar up to the 18th Century), *Spomenik SKA* LV, 20-31 [in Serbian Cyrillic].
- Fotić, A. (1997). „Sveta Gora u doba Selima II“ (Mount Athos during Selim II's Rule), *Hilandarski zbornik* 9, 143-162 [in Serbian Cyrillic].
- Fotić, A. (1998). "Najpoznatiji hilendarski ferman" (The Most Renowned Ferman from Hilandar), *Hilandarski zbornik* 10, 299-309 [in Serbian Cyrillic].
- Fotić, A. (2000). *Sveta Gora i Hilandar u Osmanskom carstvu XV–XVII vek* (Mount Athos and Hilandar in Ottoman Empire 15th –17th Centuries), Beograd [in Serbian Cyrillic].
- Georgirenes, J. (1677). *A description of the present state of Samos, Nicaria, Patmos and mount Athos...*, London.
- HMAT. Hilandar Monastery Archive, *Turcica*, 2/160, 3/236, 3/239, 3/246a, 3/249, 7/55, 8/65, 8/96a, 11/VIII, 11/IX, 11/797, 12/1/17.
- Hofmann, G. (1925). "Athos e Roma", *Orientalia Christiana* 19, V-2, 139-183.
- Hofmann, G. (1954). *Rom und der Athos. Briefwechsel zwischen dem Missionar auf dem Athos Nikolaus Rossi und der Kongregation de Propaganda Fide*, Roma.
- İnalçık, H. (1991). "The status of the Greek Orthodox patriarch under the Ottomans", *Turcica* XXI-XXIII, 407-436.
- Kabrda, J. (1969). *Le système fiscal de l'Eglise orthodoxe dans l'Empire ottoman (d'après les documents turcs)*, Brno.
- Mendieta, E. A. de. (1972). *Mount Athos. The Garden of the Panaghia*, Amsterdam.
- Năsturel, P. Ș. (1986). *Le Mont Athos et les Roumains. Recherches sur leurs relations du milieu du XIVe siècle à 1654*, Roma.
- Novaković, St. (1869). "Prilozi k istoriji srpske književnosti. III. Jedan stariji svjetovni zbornik ćirilovski" (Towards the History of Serbian Literature.

- III. An Old Profane Mélange in Cyrillic Script), *Glasnik Srpskog Učenog Društva* VIII/XXV, 19-63 [in Serbian Cyrillic].
- Pajsije, Patrijarh. (1993). *Sabrani spisi* (Collected Writings), ed. T. Jovanović, Beograd [in Serbian Cyrillic].
- Rycaut, P. (1679). *The Present State of the Greek and Armenian Churches Anno Christi 1678*, London.
- Sava Hilandarac. (1898). *Sveta Gora* (Holy Mountain), Beograd [in Serbian Cyrillic].
- Schwarz, K. (1970). *Osmanische Sultansurkunden des Sinai-Klosters in türkischer Sprache*, Freiburg im Bresgau.
- Veselá, Z. (1973). "Les lettres des Sultans ottomans gardées dans les archives du monastère Ste Catherine de Sinäi", *VII Türk Tarih Kongresi (Ankara 25-29. IX 1970)*, c. II, Ankara, 452-458.



Ekrem Causevic, Nenad Moacanin, Vjeran Kursar (Eds.)

Perspectives on Ottoman Studies

Papers from the 18th Symposium of the International
Committee of Pre-Ottoman and Ottoman Studies (CIEPO)

LIT