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NEW CHRISTIANS: HYPOCRITES OR APOSTATES?

The Conversion of Ottoman Subjects in Eger

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Chapter I

“*The Making of a Vilayet: Questions and New Approaches*,” provides historical background on the formation of Eger vilayet. The initial sections focus on the motivations behind Sultan Mehmed III’s 1596 campaign. Following this, the chapter adopts a comparative approach to discuss the subdivisions of the newly established vilayet and its beylerbeys. It also considers the interactions between Eger vilayet and the surrounding Hungarian settlements. For this purpose, the chapter examines events from the viewpoint of its taxpayer oppidums, primarily focusing on the market town of Miskolc, as well as Rimaszombat (Rimavská Sobota) and Gyöngyös. Additionally, another objective of this chapter is to investigate everyday life in Eger during its last decades. In this regard, it aims to uncover the interactions between the vilayet’s Muslim inhabitants and Christians by utilizing travel books and examining specific historical events, such as the murder case of György Csepellényi. The results of these approaches helps us understand the tolerance and interreligious relations of the society to which the New Christians belonged.

Chapter II

“*Resistance, Adaptation, and Perspectives: New Christians of Eger or New Apostates of Islam*,” as a continuation of the initial chapter, its main objectives include exploring the background processes, the siege, and the surrender of Eger Castle by the Holy League in December of 1687. Paying special attention to the use of Ottoman and Hungarian sources, the chapter presents a multifaceted image of these events. Additionally, at the introductory level, what happened to the Ottoman inhabitants of settlements such as Buda, Szeged, and Pécs after their recapture by the Christian forces is discussed, and the remnants of religious conversion among those who decided to stay there are examined. Another focus is the siege of Eger Castle, which on one hand demonstrates how its inhabitants resisted under the oppression of Beylerbey Rüstem, and on the other hand, the extreme difficulties they endured to survive this conflict, such as eating grass, cats, dogs, and rats—as one might imagine. Furthermore, mainly stemming from the lack of supplies and the impossibility of receiving help from the Ottoman world, as well as the grumblings of the inhabitants and given the conditions, the initiatives for capitulation led the Beylerbey to surrender the castle. After discussing this event, the chapter begins to explore the capitulation document, whose third article allowed those Ottoman subjects to remain in Eger, and details the conversion process of the New Christians, that is, their emergence. The analysis of the first evidence that

survived regarding the early conversions, Turkish names, and households of the New Christians forms one of the core sections of the chapter. In this regard, it addresses the misinterpretations of the initial research on this evidence and focuses on offering new insights and results. Lastly, the chapter provides a detailed account of how the Ottoman sources interpret the events concerning the New Christians.

Chapter III

In the third chapter, “*The Credibility of the Capitulation and Residential Status in 1690*,” one of the initial focuses is on the capitulation document, which was detailed in the previous chapter. In short, the surrender of Eger was aimed at guaranteeing mutual interests: the Ottomans would leave the castle freely and Christian forces would recapture it as agreed. In this regard, those Ottoman subjects who remained in the castle were not in a position to enforce anything; they simply had to accept their fate and the new circumstances. An undated property survey, which has not been previously utilized by scholars for this purpose, shows that the third article—the only one to guarantee that New Christians could keep their properties—was not carried out as stated. The chapter argues this from different perspectives and uses various sources to shed light on this overlooked topic. Additionally, the residential status of New Christians in 1690 is also under examination.

Chapter IV

The fourth chapter, “*Baptisms and Marriages 1688-1696*,” examines the baptisms of those Ottoman subjects who were not baptized for unknown reasons following the recapture of the castle, and those who arrived in the settlement and were baptized there over the years following events like the recapture of Várád in 1692. My approach primarily addresses the baptized individuals’ former identities, as the baptismal records frequently reveal their places of origin and their fathers’ names. Similarly, the marriage records follow this pattern of usage but also help to understand the preferences of New Christian women in their choice of groom. Therefore, in this chapter, I adopt a methodology that focuses not on the number of individuals examined but rather on their experiences, choices, and former identities. My first goal through this analysis is to reveal the connection between those who moved to Eger from Várád to seek shelter or for baptism, whether their parents were from or were born in Eger under Ottoman rule and the intentions of the Ottoman subjects who remained in the castle after the fall of the castle. Thus, it will help to shed light on the reason why around fifty-three families in the beginning chose to stay in Eger rather than leave. The second aim is to use the

baptismal and marriage records to reveal whether they chose partners within their own community or from outside, and in this way, their integration into the community.

Chapter V

“*Does your pagan soul want to become a Turk again?*: *The Investigation Report of 1709*,” the final chapter before the conclusion, examines two key events to clarify whether the New Christians had intentions of leaving Eger and their Christian faith for the Turkish side, and how they adapted to their new surroundings and religion. The first event is a record from 1701, the *Historia Domus* of Jesuits, which helps to uncover the reactions of New Christians to the changing circumstances after the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699, and the claims by Eger to accuse them of hypocrisy. Another source, an investigation report from 1709, helps to reveal the cases of certain New Christians who left Eger for the Turkish side following offers from Turkish individuals such as merchants, a former Janissary, and an interpreter. This report assists us examine the motivations, longing for their former Muslim identity, strength in the Christian faith, and roles of the individuals, such as in the case of András Borbély, who abandoned Eger and his Christian faith for the Turkish side, where he will be examined as a father and husband. It also explores the sense of community among the New Christians nearly twenty-two years after the recapture. Neither document has been approached in the ways this chapter discusses; therefore, the results I reach are crucial for truly understanding the events concerning the New Christians.

Conclusion

In the present dissertation, I examined the events of New Christians from various perspectives, primarily questioning whether they were hypocrites or apostates. My aim in raising this question lies in the fact that our understanding of life, religion, and historiography shapes our approach to them. Therefore, adopting a one-sided approach and more importantly, utilizing archival sources without conducting source criticism on those that were inherently shaped by the biases of the era significantly influence the conclusions of the scholarship. Consequently, this is one of the main reasons for the difficulty in understanding and evaluating this topic.

I have often discussed the arguments and conclusions of researchers on New Christians, that overgeneralizations and oversimplifications lead to misinterpretations of events and, in some cases, even prevent the analysis of archival sources. Thus, my aim was to evaluate the history of the New Christians from different points of view, so that I do not

repeat the same methodological deficiencies. Therefore, in each chapter I focused different stages of New Christians. In this final conclusion of the dissertation, I will summarize and conclude my findings which I have detailed at the end of each chapter.

In order to make this versatile analysis of events, I conducted a study of an earlier period and discussed the construction process of the Eger vilayet and its interactions with the surrounding Hungarian settlements. Although I aimed for the first chapter to be an introductory chapter that explores the historical background of Eger before its recapture in 1687, I also focused on how interfaith dialogue occurred in Eger. In this way, I managed to reveal different aspects of the behavior of Eger's Muslims towards Christians. There was not enough data to make concrete and exact conclusions on this specific topic, but I utilized what I had in depth. I studied the travel books, such as those by Daniel Speer, whose experiences and observations during his captivity and subsequent visits to Eger helped me understand the diversity and flexibility in everyday life. Moreover, the case of György Csepellényi, I believe, also demonstrated how visible the interfaith connections were in Eger. By utilizing this scarce evidence, I stated that the vast majority of New Christians, who were inhabitants of the Eger vilayet, were not strangers to the diverse Christian and Hungarian way of life and culture. Therefore, when we make assumptions about their reasons for staying in Eger, I suggest that we should also consider their resilience and accommodation to society from this perspective. Consequently, this can help us understand that the first converts among the New Christians were mostly not "adventitious" to Eger.

One of my aims in this work was to detail the background process of the surrender of Eger Castle to Christian forces, taking into account both sides of the events. Therefore, utilizing Ottoman sources such as chronicles and campaign *mühimme* registers, I showed that given the chaotic situation on the frontier, the Commander-in-Chief, Süleyman Pasha, attempted to reinforce and aid the castle but could not succeed, mainly because of internal conflicts and problems in the army. From this perspective, I have completed the studies in Hungarian historiography that I discussed throughout the dissertation; In fact, supporting Eger was on the Ottoman agenda. The Ottoman sources analyzed in this dissertation had mostly already been transcribed and studied in Turkish historiography; however, less attention was paid to comparing these with the other side of the events concerning Eger Castle. Therefore, with my research findings, I was able to offer new insights into the field.

One of the main objectives was to comprehend the decision-making process of Ottoman subjects—especially why they decided to stay in Eger rather than move to Várád with their kin. In order to address this issue, I utilized Ottoman sources that were particularly concerned with this topic. According to these sources, the main reason for their “apostasy” was that they did not want to leave their property, had difficulties in transporting their goods or bad weather conditions. Additionally, the late comments in the letters from beylerbeys stated that perhaps they were “deceived” into staying there.

I came to the conclusion that each of these claims contains a portion of the truth. It was almost the end of December, and in this cold, harsh weather, they had to leave the castle; whether they had enough wagons or not, as Silahdar stated in his chronicle, this may have affected their decision to leave. Furthermore, their immovable properties, which could not be quickly sold under chaotic circumstances, may also have influenced their decision. The elderly, children, and weak women would likely also stay, given their conditions.

Another explanation for their stay in Eger, as discussed in the fourth chapter, involves those Ottoman subjects who moved to Eger from Várád and other locations. Among them were individuals whose parents had been inhabitants of Ottoman Eger and/or who were themselves born there. I suggest that Eger was simply their home, where they had established their lives, which influenced their decision to relocate there; those who came to Eger likely did so to reunite with their acquaintances and familiar surroundings. Consequently, if we consider this suggestion, it may shed light on the decision of those who chose to stay after the recapture.

Scholars and archival sources often mention the third article of the capitulation, noting its influence on the decision-making process of New Christians to stay in Eger. I support this viewpoint, as it should have had an effect; however, it is also important to consider that this article was not carried out as stated. In the third chapter, alongside the residential status of New Christians, the articles of the capitulation document are analyzed in depth. Using an undated property survey that had previously been used only by István Sugár to identify New Christian individuals, I showed how New Christians lost their property following the recapture of the castle. Thus, even if this opportunity had an influence on their decision to stay, in the end, they did not benefit from it.

The term “New Christians” refers to those Muslim Ottoman subjects who converted to Christianity in Eger; however, this conversion did not happen all at once. As the study

showed, the number of New Christians increased over time. For example, when new members of this community were baptized in 1693, the circumstances differed from those in 1687. Thus, when making general statements about them and their events, our approach should be undertaken with caution. Generalizing events within the community, rather than shedding light on specific details, may lead to misinterpretations. In the fifth chapter, I discussed two different events which had significance important for this dissertation.

The first stemmed from a record dated 1701 from *Historia Domus*. This record was genuine, but an important part of the event was the result of its writer's misreading. Because, as explained, former Alaybey László Báthori, had no connection with "hypocrisy;" instead, he had conflicts with his estates. However, the scholarship, instead of conducting source criticism on this record, accepted as it was and used it in their works. The problem with this misinterpretation is that scholars even linked this event with the happenings of 1706-1709, when the Turks came to Eger; such New Christians were seen as continuously intending to leave Eger because they could not adapt to this new life and its surroundings. It is argued that such serious claims should always be questioned and need to have valid evidence. My contention in this case is that the recording is not strong evidence; therefore, we cannot use it to prove that these "hypocrites" "escaped" from Eger to the Turkish side, because the expected Ottoman aid to capture the castle would not arrive.

The second, and from my perspective most important event, was the investigation report of 1709. Through this report, I had the opportunity to examine the testimonies of eighteen New Christian individuals and other subjects they mentioned. Researchers mostly interpreted this document as an interesting event or as a tool to identify New Christians in their lists. Their approach, as I have explained above, was also to link this event with the record of 1701 and the letters of beylerbeys in which they asked Ferenc Rákóczi to send the "converted Ottoman subjects" to the Turkish side. Thus, this approach is not as useful as focusing on each individual's experience of refusing or accepting the offers of the "enticer" Turks.

I approached this document as a belated declaration of conversion for New Christians, a test of faith exploring why they converted, what they thought of Islam and the Sultan, and the extent to which they felt part of society. I paid great attention to the details to demonstrate how each individual's situation differed from others and was unique at the same time. From the example of András Borbély, I detailed the social roles of a New Christian man, as the

father and husband. One can conclude that the number of those who left was much less than those who refused or heard the offers of the Turks. When we approach the milieu of the New Christian community in 1709, we see that there was a close connection among them, regardless of gender and age, with both old and young in touch.

It is very important to understand that Ferenc Borbély, who was born four years after Eger's recapture, did not understand his father's decision to become a Muslim and go "again" to the Turkish side, nor did his wife Ilona Kovács, who was also a former Muslim, a New Christian like her husband. On the other hand, it is a crucially important fact that even within a family living under the same roof, opinions and feelings about religion and life varied. The young, accommodated life as Christians but under the shadow of their parents' old memories and the former Muslim community. Therefore, my conclusion is that, even around 1706-1709—nearly twenty years after the recapture—New Christians maintained a sense of community despite these differences; and contrary to the course of years, there were still feelings towards Islam, and interestingly, even towards the Sultan who did not care about their situations, as a New Christian woman stated.

It became clearer with the above-mentioned event that the number of people who left in response to the Turks' offers, though somewhat important, is not as remarkable as the unique experiences of the individuals who chose to leave and their reasons for doing so. Therefore, through this dissertation, I have always focused on the details and experiences, and placed man and his surroundings at the center of my arguments. One of the last example for this approach was applied in the analysis of marriage records. When we consider the marriages solely as numbers, it appears that almost half of the New Christian couples between 1688 and 1696 were married to each other. However, when we evaluate the records to see how many widows were and whether they married New Christian men or other Christians from Eger, this question reveals that these women most likely made their marital decisions considering the pasts of their new husbands. From this perspective, my conclusion is that they were seeking the same comfort they had experienced in their past marriages with Turkish men, both spiritually and culturally.

The events of New Christians of Eger indeed have a great importance to understand the situation of Ottoman subjects subsequent to the recapture of those settlements by Christian forces. Despite our best efforts, we can honestly say that no one has the ability to truly know another's faith; but in the case of these New Christians, approaching from

different perspectives, examining the documents in depth, the events of the persons concerned, as well as the Eger administration, the chroniclers, the Ottomans and the “enticer” Turks — helped to fill a certain gap in the archival sources and to clarify to some extent the intentions of the subjects. In the present dissertation, I examined an event that has already been studied by scholars; yet it has not been approached in detail. I introduced various aspects of the lives of New Christians from the first day of their conversion until some of their re-adoption of a former Muslim identity. This is a fantastic example of how identities are shaped over the course of events. It can finally be concluded that they were the New Christians who were both hypocrites and apostates at the same time.

Suggestions

I believe that our understanding of the transitions in the religious and cultural identities of New Christians will become much clearer if more research focuses on the situation of Ottoman subjects who remained on Hungarian territory following the loss of Ottoman sovereignty. In this way, we will have the possibility to make comparisons, observing how those former Ottoman subjects managed their lives under similar conditions during the same period.

Main Sources and Limitations

Apart from the other additional archive materials I used, the main sources from which I have benefited the most during the research and writing of this dissertation, and upon which I build my arguments, include Ottoman chronicles, property surveys (*Urbaria et conscriptiones*), the *Historia Domus* of the Jesuits of Eger, and the Parish Registers of Eger. I considered only the parish registers dating from 1688 to 1696. After examining the registers from 1696 to 1723, I could not find any significant entries that would change the course of events or alter the arguments. Additionally, between 1688 and 1696, only a few entries were recorded regarding the deaths of New Christians; considering their number, and content, I have not focused on these records.

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