THE AWQAF OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN ALEPPO DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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At the suggestion of Dr Abdul-Karim Rafeq, I conducted a preliminary study of the waqf accounts of the Armenian, Greek Catholic, Maronite and Suryani (Jacobite), communities in Aleppo between 1805 and 1832.1 These registers are stored at the Syrian National Archives in Damascus together with the registers of the law courts of Aleppo,2 and consist of several volumes of the accounts of the various communities as submitted annually to the Muslim religious authorities by their bishops. The exploitation and management of urban waqf primarily involved the collection of rents from various shops and houses at a time when the bishops themselves still had sole responsibility for waqf administration. This lasted until the implementation of the provisions of the Hatt-i Hümayün of 1856, when a committee of laymen was set up to assist the bishops and patriarchs. By the end of the century the lay committee had taken charge of all aspects of waqf management, including leasing property, collecting rents, drawing up accounts, preparing reports, registering changes with the authorities, and paying taxes.

The new methods of waqf management introduced at that time are also reflected in the archives, both in the accounts and in the method of presentation. For many centuries, numerical data was arranged horizontally. The data provided by the documents for the renting of shops and houses belonging to the various Christian communities of Aleppo was essentially numerical and statistical. Data relating to real estate, amount of rents, taxes, expenses, the price of different materials, tenants, and quarters were registered in a serial manner which revealed

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1 The Greek Catholic community of Aleppo had overtaken the Greek Orthodox in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is not clear whether the documents relating to the Syriac and Armenian churches concern the Catholic or Orthodox communities. The Armenian Catholic millet was created in 1830: see page 463 above.

2 See Brigitte Marino, Tumuki Ukawara and Da’d al-Hakim, eds., Catalogue des registres des tribunaux ottomans conservés au Centre des archives de Damas, Damas, Institut français d’études arabes/Centre des Archives de Damas, 1999.
the functioning of traditional urban religious institutions. Studies of the ways in which awqaf were exploited reveal much about such diverse topics as the occupation of urban space, waqf revenues, the coexistence of different communities, methods of payment, the different currencies in use, and the conditions and methods in which exploitation took place at different levels. Ijar rents in various parts of the city show differences between city quarters and other regions. Higher levels of revenues were also derived from farming contracts, while there is also information on the more traditional hikr contracts.

The early nineteenth century was a period of bitter and often violent conflict between the Catholic and Orthodox communities, although both could still be regarded as part of a single community in human, sociological and economic terms. This period was marked by the growing hegemony of the Greek Catholics, who took over most of the city’s churches. In March 1821 there were riots marking the beginning of the Greek war of independence, after which the Ottoman authorities in Aleppo allowed Catholic priests to perform baptism and marriage ceremonies for their parishioners in recognition of their loyalty to Islam and the state and as a punishment for the ‘treason’ of the Orthodox. The departure of the Catholics from the city in the first part of the eighteenth century because of persecution by the Orthodox had had a profound effect on local and state finances. The Catholics were among the city’s leading merchants, whose contribution both to trade and to the jizya was sufficient to encourage the ‘ulama and other Muslim notables to press the qadi to persuade the Catholic clergy to return to Aleppo, where they would be able to practice their own rites. By this time the Greek Catholics greatly outnumbered the Greek Orthodox in the city: seven hundred families as against thirty-five. Despite that, and despite the intervention of the local authorities, the Greek Catholic church was not formally recognized as a separate millet by the Ottomans until 1848.3

That these accounts exist with the degree of continuity and detail presented here may indicate the beginning of a new administrative situation for the communities involved. The accounts of each year occupy between two and three pages and are found in different registers, and were included with the accounts of the Muslim waqf. In 1227

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