

PROTESTANT WRITINGS ABOUT THE OFFICIAL RECOGNITION AND PROTECTION OF PROTESTANT SUBJECTS IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE (1839–1856)

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Abstract:

This paper considers five documents from the Ottoman Porte in favor of the Protestant Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire, between 1839–1856, all issued during the reign of Sultan Abdulmecid I, then presents responses from Protestant missionaries and missionary societies to these developments. The first official document under consideration is the *Hatt-ı Şerif* of 1839, which officially initiated the *Tanzimat*. Although it did not mention Protestants specifically, the document was considered a first step towards religious freedom for minority religions. In 1847, the Grand Vizier issued an edict essentially granting the Protestants *millet* status in the Empire. In 1850 and 1853, Sultan Abdulmecid issued two *firman*s in favor of his Protestant subjects granting them specific rights and protections. Finally, in 1856 the sultan issued his famous *Hatt-ı Hümayun* containing guarantees of religious freedom for all subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Naturally, Protestant missionaries and their sending agencies wrote about these developments because of their intrinsic significance to their work. Whereas various archival streams will provide differing perspectives, this paper serves as an introduction to the Protestant perspective on these developments.

Keywords: *Protestantism, Sultan Abdülmecit I, Christianity, missionaries, religious freedom.*



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David Hosaflook, Ph.D.

The Protestant Movement in the Ottoman Empire is in its 200th year anniversary. In 1819, the first two missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Levi Parsons and Pliny Fisk, were sent from Boston to Palestine. The British and Foreign Bible Society began working in Ottoman territories even earlier, working on various Bible translations. A 200-years old Protestant Movement can be surprising to some observers of history, for opposite reasons. On one hand, it is surprising that the Movement took so *long* to arrive—approximately 300 years after the Reformation in Western Europe. On the other hand, because Protestant Christianity is still a minority religion in formerly Ottoman-ruled countries, residents of those countries are often surprised to learn that Protestantism came so *early* to their lands. That is, Protestantism is not (as sometimes perceived) merely a post-Cold War novelty, but rather a faith tradition with roots pre-dating many countries' nationalist movements and which provided significant contributions to the educational and linguistic heritage of those countries.

Why did the Protestant Movement take so long to arrive? There are several reasons. First, sixteenth-century Protestants were preoccupied with the “re-evangelization” of European Christians, many of whom Protestants referred to as “Christians in name only” because they were ignorant of the Bible’s teachings. Therefore, Bible translation and the theological education of Christians in Europe required most of their resources, leaving few resources for foreign missions.

The second reason for the belated arrival of Protestantism was Ottoman expansion. The Empire had been consolidating its rule in the Western Balkans since 1391 when it took Skopje. In 1478 Sultan Mehmed II came personally to Shkodra on the Adriatic to secure victory, after his commanders had failed to take the city four years previously.

After Venice conceded Shkodra in 1479, the Ottomans attacked Otranto in a new advance upon Europe. Consequently, as the Reformation was expanding, Western Europe was already taking a defensive posture politically and militarily, making Protestant missions an impractical endeavor in a southeastern direction. This obstacle continued through the height of Ottoman expansion and into the early years of Ottoman decline.

Finally, the Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul was powerful and enjoyed the support of the Ottoman government. The patriarchate opposed Protestant theology, making it difficult for Protestants to find inroads among traditional Christian communities. Despite sporadic attempts to introduce its teachings, the Protestant Movement was not sustained in the Ottoman Empire until the 19th century, as Protestant missionary organizations were being established in Western Europe and the United States of America. Two of the most distinguished such organizations—and the most active in the territories of the Ottoman Empire—were the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS, founded in 1804) and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM, founded in 1810).

Two hundred years ago, in the sending-off ceremony of the first ABCFM missionaries to Ottoman territories, Pliny Fisk preached from a New Testament text, Acts of the Apostles 20:22–23, in which the Apostle Paul expressed that he expected persecution for his preaching.¹ Fisk and Parsons expected the same response in their mission to Palestine. They knew they would be preaching the Gospel in unwelcoming territory. Whereas in the Protestant viewpoint religion was seen as a personal matter based upon individual conscience, among nationalities of the Ottoman Empire religion was often a matter of national identity and groupthink. This was expressed by a representative of the ABCFM recounting the mission's work between 1819–1839: “*Each race was proud of its nationality and of its religion, which was largely a symbol of nationality.*”² As such, even though ABCFM missionaries were instructed to avoid

¹ *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1820), p. 30.

² N. G. Clark, *The Gospel in the Ottoman Empire. A Paper Read at the Meeting of the A.B.C.F.M., at Milwaukee, October 2, 1878*, (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1878), p. 5.

politics at all costs³, the very nature of their work—evangelization—had intrinsic political implications from the viewpoint of the receivers, no matter how much the missionaries attempted to portray conversion as an individual matter.

Over the years, hundreds of Protestant missionaries, colporteurs, linguists, and educators went to the Ottoman Empire. Hundreds more individuals, locals, became associated with the missionary societies in various capacities and relationships. Their correspondence, both official and unofficial, provides a massive source of information about the late-Ottoman period from their viewpoint. One of the key themes in the writings of the Protestants about their mission was the theme of opposition or persecution, and their subsequent interactions with government authorities to win greater religious freedom. This paper intends to summarize the Protestant responses to five significant official decrees issued between 1839 and 1856, under the reign of Sultan Abdülmecit I, all of which affected Protestant enterprise.

1. The Imperial Rescript of Gulhane (1839). This edict, called the *Hatti Sherif*, was related to the official initiation the *Tanzimat* at the beginning of Abdülmecit's reign. It contained guarantees of life, honor and fortune, property rights, legal rights, rights concerning military service, etc. The edict stated: “*These imperial concessions shall extend to all our subjects, of whatever religion or sect they may be; they shall enjoy them without exception.*”⁴ Though this edict did not mention Protestants specifically, it was an important first step towards religious freedom for minority religions. The Porte desired to make these concessions known to European powers, in the aftermath of the recent favorable intervention of European powers in the Empire's conflict with Muhammad Ali. Furthermore, in the text of the edict, it was prescribed that the edict should be “*officially communicated to all the ambassadors of the friendly powers resident at Constantinople.*” The edict was proclaimed ceremonially in the sultan's Rose Chamber, in the presence of the European diplomatic community.

³ “Minutes of the Third Annual Meeting,” *The First Ten Reports of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions with other documents of the board*, (Boston: ABCFM, 1834), p. 38-42.

⁴ J. C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East. A Documentary Record: 1535-1914*, (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1956), p. 113-116.

Naturally, Protestants welcomed this, because their new converts had been experiencing “severe trials” and an order had been secured from the previous sultan to expel Protestant missionaries.⁵ Prof. Mehmet Dogan described that the edict hinted at religious equality,⁶ which it did, but the ABCFM would interpret it with much more optimism than a mere hint. They later described it as “*the Magna Charta of Turkey, — the first in a series of concessions that has ended with the guarantee of religious liberty throughout the Empire to a degree hardly known even in Europe, outside of the British Isles.*”⁷ In a different source, the ABCFM interpreted the edict idealistically as the beginning of the downfall of Mohammedanism in Turkey, and one which the most rigid followers of the Koran viewed as a “fatal concession” that would change the political climate.⁸ Despite this optimism, there was also skepticism. In their writings Protestants expressed a pragmatic question: Would the edict be honored and acted upon, especially in regions further away from the capital?

As the years passed, optimism and skepticism were replaced by discouragement, as Protestant missionaries and converts continued to experience opposition, being a religious community functioning without the explicit recognition of the government. The most concerning source of opposition was the Armenian Apostolic Church, who opposed their constituents who embraced Protestant teachings. This brings us to the second edict.

2. Edict of Grand Vizier Reshid Pasha (1847). This was an order written to the Pasha Comptroller of City Revenue, prescribing that Protestant subjects in the Ottoman Empire should be recognized as a separate religious community and that they be protected from any interference from the Armenian patriarch in either temporal or spiritual concerns. This was important because more than one year

⁵ Clark, *The Gospel in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 5.

⁶ Mehmet Doğan, “American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) and ‘Nominal Christians’: Elias Riggs (1810-1901) and American Missionary Activities in the Ottoman Empire” (PhD diss.), University of Utah, 2013, p. 80.

⁷ Clark, *The Gospel in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 5.

⁸ *Historical Sketch of the Missions of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in European Turkey, Asia Minor and Armenia*, (New York: John A. Gray and Green, 1866), p. 33

previously, on July 1, 1846, the first Protestant church in the Ottoman Empire was established officially at Istanbul. It was an Armenian Protestant church.⁹

This edict of 1847 essentially granted the Protestants *millet* status in the Empire, accomplishing several things in particular

- 1) It recognized the difficulties Protestants had encountered because they lacked a special jurisdiction.
- 2) It recognized that the patriarch was unable to superintend the Protestants' affairs.
- 3) It prescribed that the Protestants should be treated as a separate community, for taxation, civil registrations of births, deaths, marriages, and issuance of passports.
- 4) It prescribed that "*they be enabled to exercise the profession of their creed in security, and that they be not molested one iota, either in that respect, or in any other way whatever.*"¹⁰

It is no surprise that this edict was welcomed by Protestants with even greater optimism than the 1839 edict. Its translation was immediately published in the next Annual Report of the ABCFM.¹¹ Protestant sources reported that two British ambassadors, Sir Stratford Canning and Lord Henry R. C. Wellesley Cowley, had worked to negotiate this recognition. Therefore, the ABCFM expressed their gratitude to Canning and Cowley stating, "*How seldom do men in high diplomatic stations bring their names, as in the present instance, into an honorable association with events, which the Christian historian will never suffer to be forgotten!*"¹² On December 12, 1847, eight American missionaries in Turkey wrote Lord Cowley a letter of thanks, asserting that through his diplomatic work, "*the Protestant subjects of Turkey found substantial relief from the persecutions under which they were then suffering.*"¹³ Cowley replied to them

⁹ *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1856), p. 88-91.

¹⁰ English translation from: *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1848), p. 142.

¹¹ *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1848), p. 141-142.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 141-46.

¹³ *Ibid.*

with a letter on December 28, 1847, praising their zeal, prudence, and patience that characterized all their activities in Turkey. He urged them to use their influence to prevent any further quarrels between Protestants and the Armenian Church from which they had withdrawn.

Despite the official recognition of Protestants, the ABCFM reported in 1848 that there were still instances of persecution of Protestants in places far from the metropolis, and even within the metropolis in more subtle forms. Protestant complaints about these abuses continued to reach the ear of the Porte and prompted the third decree under consideration in this paper.

3. The first firman of Sultan Abdülmecit I, related to the Protestants (1850).

This edict, issued just three years before the onset of the Crimean War, extended the 1847 order of the Grand Vezir, adding the much-needed gravitas of a sultan's firman. The firman decreed explicitly that the Protestants in the Ottoman Empire should enjoy the full and free exercise of their religion.¹⁴ Specifically:

- 1) Christian subjects who embraced the Protestant faith had suffered by not having their own separate and special jurisdiction.
- 2) The sultan wished to extend his compassion to all classes of his subjects.
- 3) The sultan wished the Protestants, who were already a separate community, to live in peace, quiet, and security, without any interference from other religious communities.

In addition to these points, the firman addressed practical considerations such as Protestant cemeteries. In 1857, Sultan Abdülmecit personally granted one hectare of land for a burial ground at Feriköy in Istanbul, a gift to the embassies of the leading Protestant powers of the time. This was a precedent that other Protestants would appeal to later. For example, Gerasim Kyrias (1858–1894), the first ordained Albanian Protestant preacher and founder of the Albanian Evangelical Brotherhood (established

¹⁴ For the original copy of the firman, see SALT Istanbul: Records of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (https://www.archives.saltresearch.org/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=3862464&silolibrary=GEN01, accessed January 20, 2016); *See also*: “Translation of the Firmân of His Imperial Majesty Sultân 'Abd-El-Mejîd, Granted in Favor of His Protestant Subjects.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 3 (January 1, 1853): 218–220.

1892), appealed for a Protestant cemetery in Korchia when the son of a Protestant Albanian colporteur, converted from the Greek Orthodox church, was denied burial in the city's Orthodox cemetery.¹⁵

Protestant reaction to this firman was much like the previous edict. The BFBS published an English translation of the firman in 1851, noting that it would be difficult to find any document more important to their work.¹⁶ As time progressed, however, they complained that in distant provinces, local governors were not complying with the sultan's edict, utilizing different levels of bureaucracy to hamper and delay the Protestants' efforts.

The number of Protestant churches in the Empire was steadily increasing. In 1856 William Goodell reported that the first Protestant church in Constantinople, formed in 1846, had become three, while in the whole empire there were approximately thirty organized Protestant churches.¹⁷ Some of these churches continued to face threats as serious as execution for those converting to Christianity from Islam. Between 1843–53 there were at least four cases of executions in the Ottoman Empire for the alleged crime of religious apostasy.¹⁸ British author William F. Wingfield documented this phenomenon after his tour of northern Albania in 1853. Wingfield observed that Albanian Christians were allowed to maintain their traditional religion upon the payment of a yearly tax; but converting to Christianity from Islam, or converting back to Christianity after having pretended to embrace the Islamic faith for pragmatic reasons (such as inability to afford the tax) was punishable by death. Wingfield illustrated the difficulties with a story of two pseudo-Muslim, crypto-Christian peasants whose bishop encouraged them to openly proclaim their true faith in Christ.

¹⁵ Gerasim D. Kyrias, "Korchia", *Missionary News from Bulgaria* (no. 42), December 12, 1892, p. 2-3. For more information about the issue of Protestant cemeteries, see: BFBS Archives, Alexander Thomson Correspondence Inwards (ATCI), Gerasim Kyrias to Alexander Thomson, 4 March 1893, 20 March 1893, 31 May 1893.

¹⁶ *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1851), p. lxxiii–lxxiv.

¹⁷ *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1856), p. 88-91.

¹⁸ Heather Sharkey. "Assessing the Legacy of the Ottoman Reform of 1856: Possibilities, Impossibilities, and Situational Changes in Religious Freedom." *PluRel: en blogg om religion og samfunn*, Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/nelc_papers/10 (30.12.2013, Accessed in December 26, 2018)

When they did, they were imprisoned and tortured. One escaped and the other was released to live free in Mirëdita after the intercession of foreign consuls and the bishop.¹⁹

Protestant missionaries continued to appeal to their nations' diplomats in Istanbul, whose official complaints to the Porte crescendoed as the Crimean War was looming. The sultan took these complaints seriously, especially since he was seeking the support of Britain and France, countries demanding equal rights for Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians. These complaints influenced a fourth official edict, the second firman to be issued by the sultan himself.

4. The second firman of the Sultan related to the Protestants (1853).²⁰ This second firman of Sultan Abdülmecit I did not provide notable new rights to the Protestants, but was intended to reinforce the first. It was to be sent directly to the local governors, and employed strong language to emphasize the seriousness with which the first sultan's edict had been issued. It refreshed his orders that local governors execute his edict strictly and without exception. Again, this new firman was strongly welcomed by missionaries and by the diplomatic community.

The interplay between missionaries, diplomats, and the Porte created perceptions that Christian missionaries were tools of the British Empire and the growing American enterprise, working to further the aims of Western political imperialism. Missionaries, however, were often naive in their political understanding. Their majority of the content of their reports focused on the spiritual-religious climate and their specific accomplishments, but sometimes their reports delved into local politics, with simplistic, novice, and idealistic analyses. This clumsiness on political issues is a strong argument against the notion that they were wittingly complicit with the agendas of their foreign governments. They may have been being used unwittingly as tools of their governments' agendas, but they themselves believed the opposite. They thought the

¹⁹ William F. Wingfield, *A Tour in Dalmatia, Albania, and Montenegro*, (London: Richard Bentley, 1859), p. 149, 163–165.

²⁰ E.D.G. Prime, *Forty Years in the Turkish Empire; or, Memoirs of Rev. William Goodell*, (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1877), p. 483-485.

political situation was being used by God as a tool to allow them to preach the Gospel more freely and to appeal to the consciences of more individuals, without threat of persecution. An example of this perspective unfolded in 1855. The Grand Vizier himself, Ali Pasha, accepted a copy of the Bible, presented by the United States Minister on behalf of the American and the British and Foreign Bible Societies.”²¹ The missionaries embraced this story with enthusiasm. Then, in 1856 something happened which the missionaries described as “*a marvel of marvels*” – Sultan Abdülmecit himself met Benjamin Barker, the chief representative of the BFBS in Turkey, and received a Bible from him. It was proclaimed to be “the first Bible ever placed in the hands of an Ottoman sovereign.”²²

As with the previous edicts, the strong language of this firman did not resolve all the problems the Protestant community was facing. Irrespective of the sultan’s firmans of 1850 and 1853, Protestant churches continued to complain about threats, even executions. In the Protestant view, the weakness of the previous two firmans was that they protected existing Protestants but stopped short of explicitly protecting those who converted from Islam to Christianity. This leads us to the final edict under consideration in this paper, an edict issued just after the conclusion of the Crimean War.

5. The *Hatt-ı Hümayun* or *Hatti sherif* (1856) (the Ottoman Reform Edict). Like the Imperial Rescript of Gulhane in 1839, this was not an edict specifically mentioning Protestants, but provided a general guarantee of religious freedom for all subjects of the Ottoman Empire. At this time, the British minister Lord Stratford de Redcliffe had enormous political clout. He used his influence to apply rigorous pressure to secure religious liberty. He was a sixty-nine years old career diplomat, in his third post as British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. He believed the Porte was in Britain’s debt,

²¹ William Canton, *A History of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, vol. II, (London: Murray, 1904), p. 292–293.

²² Ibid.

having expended “gigantic efforts and enormous sacrifices”²³ on the Ottoman Empire’s behalf (an estimated 22,182 British soldiers eventually died in the Crimean War²⁴). In 1856 De Redcliffe wrote forcefully to the Ottoman Porte: “*The British Government distinctly demands that the Muslim who turns Christian shall be as free from every kind of punishment as the Christian who embraces the Muslim faith.*”²⁵

It is perhaps not possible to evaluate the objective and subjective effects this pressure had upon the Ottoman Reform Edict of 1856, but we may note the following phrases from the edict: “*Energetic measures will be taken to insure the freest possible exercise of every religion ... No one will be molested on account of his religion, and no one forced to change his religion.*”²⁶

Again, the edict did not explicitly guarantee safety to Muslims who converted to Christianity, but the Protestant community still welcomed the edict warmly, in the context of the end of the war. In fact, the ABCFM reported that that edict would affect the future history of the Ottoman Empire even more widely and more deeply than any other result of the Crimean war.²⁷

It has not been the intention of this paper to evaluate the extent or effects of foreign diplomatic pressure upon Sultan Abdülmecit I, related to his issuance of five edicts in favor of his Protestant subjects. Whether he was motivated by political pressure or by his own convictions about religious freedom, what is certain is that the Protestants were grateful for his actions. When he died, the ABCFM’s Annual Report eulogized his death. They announced his death as being in God’s divine control. They praised him for enacting policies which had promoted their work. They noted that he had helped to secure conditions for a Muslim to freely investigate Christianity and even to

²³ Quoted by Lord Clarendon on September 17, 1855, cited in: Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society* v. 2, (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899), p. 150.

²⁴ Micheal Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Encyclopedia of Casualty and Other Figures, 1492–2015* (fourth ed.), (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2017), p. 180.

²⁵ *The Sixty-First Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, (London: Benjamin Pardon, 1865), p. 135.

²⁶ Cited in “The Firman of 1856, Conceding Religious Liberty”, *Church Missionary Intelligencer* (London: Seeley, 1864), p. 210.

²⁷ *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1856), p. 77-78.

convert, with less risk of injury to his person or his liberties than ever experienced before. And they expressed great fears that the new sultan might reverse the policies of religious toleration, but noted that so far there had been no indications of such a reversal.²⁸

²⁸ *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1863), p. 122-123.

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صورت فرما دیل انشاء سعادت عنوانه

دستور کرم شیر محمد نظام العالم سر برابره ظهور با انکار کتب مخم مهام الانام بادای الهاب ممد بنیاد ارضه والاقتیال شیدار کاد السعادة والاجلال المحفوظ بقصود
 عواطف الملك الاعلی حاله سعادت تم صبغه شیری وزرم محمد پاشا ادم افعال اجلا توفیق رفیع الهی بونم واصن اوجی معلوم او کونجودون بید برده بر خستانه نهضت ذهاب
 وسالک اولاد هرستانه شدمی قر بر نفا رت منزهه وسفله نخته اولاملدی و ترک و کون ایتمه اولدی نه اهاب غیبه لرینک بطریقه ورؤساکی باطبع پوندرک
 اشدریه باقر مدقلمی همنه کز درک مضایقه و عربت چککه بونز قدرته کانه صنوف بیو حقدنزه در کار اولاد کان بر ایا بروری و رحمت سینه شاهانم اقتضا سنجیه
 هیچ بر صفتک دوچار اضطراب اولسه رشای شید ایانم اود فیضه و مرقوم حسب لزج ابرجه بر جماعت اولدی نزه مجرد نهیل و اصلاح امور لرجه حر
 استحقاق اسباب راحت و اینتلی اراد را محمدا ملوکانم اقتضاسند ادر بقه بنا بونرک اچلدنزه و کز درینک دخی معنده و شفقند بر ایمیله و اهل
 عمر آدم بر دستاره و کین نایله تقیه اولونب کز وی صبغه شیر کی معنده بونز دره و جماعت مرقومک نفوس دفراره دخی و کیکه تحت ناسو بیخ
 اودر نه صبغه لر نزه حفظ اولونب قوتوان و دقاندری و کین مرقوم موقبله اوله قید و اشراف قضی و بول نرکانه و اذدواج و حضرتانه
 و باب عالیجه و سازماد مغلو اود جو معاصرت مخصوصه له و کین مرقومک و کانه مخصوص هر چه مور و بفره له اوزرینه ابر اولقی خصوصیه
 اوزرینه مع تقوا بر شایانم مغلو اولسه و غیره دیوانه هم بوندره شید امر جیلن القدرم اصدار و اعنه اوشدر ابدی سکه شید
 مشار الیه سه بالا دیار اولدنی اوزره نظام مذکورک حرف بجز ابراسید مروت کزه و جزیه قزلبی ماه له نظام مخصوصه نخته اودر نزه
 انک خارجزه بر شی یا بر اهل اذدواج و حضرتانه و دخی قزلبی اچکده کز اولر نه بر کونارم و خرج ادر اهلای و نیزه دولتمینه اولان
 سازماد مغلو بر نرک دخی کانه مصالح و در قدرینه و جهاد تمینه دتر اولاد معاصرتین هر دو تهنیلک حقدنزه معاونت لاندنک ایقام و کز درینک
 ملل سازه طرفند آیدینه و امور مصالح دینو لرینه و الخاص دینی و دینوی هیچ بر ایشدرینه قطعاً مدخله ایزر بیوب انا اهلای اصول نه هیه لرینه بقدر
 اولدر و کز بو بوزنه و کز جهات سازه اید زره قدر رجیده ایزر بدرک بر و فر مطلب اشکال و ساز حضور اینتلیه اقام و دقت اولغی درک
 الاقتضا و کیکدر واسطه سله مصالح و اقتدرینی باب عالیله عمره و افادیه نادونه اولدی اراد سینه ملوکانم تقضاسند ابروک معلوم در ایتدی
 اودر نه اشیوار علیک لم ایجا ایدر محله فی ابله بید مرقوم بر نزه ایضا اولدره احکام سینه سنک دائماً و سخرافاً انفاذ و ابراسی
 خصوصه اهتمم و درق رقیب ایلر سز شید بر سر سعادت شریفه اعمده بقدره سخی برافاً فی اواسط شهر محرم الحرام سنه
 سبع و ستمه و نایمه و اقصه

Figure 1. Copy of the firman of Sultan Abdülmeccit I related to the protection of Protestants (1850).

TRANSLATION OF THE FERMAN OF HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY

SULTAN ABD UL MEDJID,

GRANTED IN FAVOR OF HIS PROTESTANT SUBJECTS.

To my Vizier Mohammed Pasha, Minister of Police at my Capital, the honorable Minister and glorious Counsellor, the Model of the world, and Regulator of the affairs of the Community, who, directing the public interests with sublime prudence, consolidating the structure of the empire with wisdom, and strengthening the columns of its prosperity and renown, is the recipient of every grace from the most High. May God prolong his glory.

When this sublime and august mandate reaches you, let it be known that,

Whereas, hitherto those of my Christian subjects who have embraced the Protestant faith have suffered inconvenience and difficulties, in consequence of their not being placed under a separate and special jurisdiction, and in consequence of the Patriarchs and Primate of their old creeds, which they have abandoned, naturally not being able to administer their affairs;

And whereas, in necessary accordance with my Imperial compassion, which extends to all classes of my subjects, it is contrary to my Imperial pleasure that any one class of them should be exposed to trouble;

And whereas, by reason of their faith, the above mentioned already form a separate community, it is therefore my Royal compassionate will, that, by all means, measures be adopted for facilitating the administration of their affairs, so that they may live in peace, quiet, and security.

Let then, a respectable and trustworthy person, acceptable to, and chosen by themselves, from among their own number, be appointed, with the title of «Agent of the Protestants», who shall be attached to the department of the Minister of Police.

It shall be the duty of the Agent to have under his charge, the Register of the members of the community, which shall be kept at the Police. The Agent shall cause to be registered therein all births and deaths in the community. All applications for passports and marriage licences, and special transactions of the community that are to be presented to the Sublime Porte, or to any other department, must be given under the official seal of this Agent.

For the execution of my will, this my Royal Mandate and August command has been specially issued and granted from my Imperial chancery.

Hence, thou the Minister above named, in accordance with the explanations given, will execute, to the letter, the preceding ordinance: except that as the collection of the capitation tax, and the delivery of passports, are subjected to specific regulations, you will not do any thing contrary to them. You will not permit any thing to be required of them on pretence of fees or expenses, for marriage licenses, or Registration.

You will see to it that like the other communities of the Empire, in all their affairs and in all matters appertaining to their cemeteries, and places of worship, they should have every facility and needed assistance. You will not permit that any of the other communities should, in any way interfere with their rites, or with their religious concerns, and, in short, in no wise with any of their affairs, secular or religious; that thus they may be enabled to exercise the usages of their faith in security.

And it is enjoined, upon you not to allow them to be molested an iota, in these particulars, or in any others, and that all attention and perseverance be put in requisition, to maintain them in quiet and security. And, in case of necessity, they are permitted to make representations regarding their affairs through their Agent to the Sublime Porte.

When this my Imperial will, shall be brought to your knowledge and appreciation, you will have this august Edict registered in the proper department, and cause it to be perpetuated in the hands of the above mentioned subjects, and you will see to it that its requirements be always executed in their full import.

Thus be it known to thee, and respect my sacred signet.

Written in the holy month of Moharrem A. H. 1267 (Nov. 1850).

Given in the protected city of Constantinople.

Figure 2. The English translation of firman of Sultan Abdülmecit I (1850).