

Religious institutions, communities and practices

The Ottoman Empire encompassed many people of different religions. Allegiance to Islam was crucial for the legitimacy of both the Sultan and the Ottoman elites, but equally important was the need to find ways to integrate non-Muslim subjects. Besides, religious diversity was significantly higher in South East Europe than in the Middle Eastern or African Ottoman provinces.

This chapter tries to reconstruct the central role of religion in the life of the peoples of South East Europe during Ottoman rule. Religion was crucial in political terms. The divide between Muslim and non-Muslim was paramount in the Ottoman social structure, and the non-Muslim subjects were further segregated along religious lines into an Orthodox, a Jewish and an Armenian community [millet]. Religious institutions were crucial in articulating the interests and needs of these communities. The Orthodox Church enjoyed a special relationship with the Ottoman authorities, but religious leaders of other denominations also cooperated with the Ottoman State. Yet, for most people, religion was less an issue of politics and institutions, and more an issue of faith and communication with God. Religious practices were a central part of life for most people, and the sources included in this chapter try to shed light on some of these practices.

A large number of sources tackle the very controversial issue of Ottoman religious “tolerance”. Many historians have insisted on the Muslim nature of the Ottoman Empire and on the fact that it oppressed Christians on religious grounds. Other historians have argued that, at the same time as religious wars waged in Europe and non-Christians were forced either to convert or to emigrate, the Ottomans were much more tolerant. They allowed non-Muslim subjects to keep their religion and even welcomed religious refugees. While both these opinions contain elements of truth, they also bear clear ideological implications, and excessively simplify historical evidence. The sources included in the final section of this chapter aim to help pupils grasp the complexity of religious co-existence and discrimination in the Ottoman South East Europe, and to put them in comparative perspective.

IIIa. The Muslims

III-1. Inscription over the portal of the Suleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul (mid-16th century)

[Sultan Süleyman] has drawn near to God, the Lord of Majesty and Omnipotence

the Creator of the World of Dominion and Sovereignty,

[Sultan Süleyman] who is His slave, made mighty with Divine Power,

the Caliph, resplendent with Divine Glory,

Who performs the Command of the Hidden

Book

and executes its Decrees in (all) regions of the inhabited quarter:

Conqueror of the Lands of the Orient and the Occident

with the Help of Almighty God and His Victorious Army,

Possessor of the Kingdom of the World, Shadow of God over all Peoples,

Sultan of the Sultan of the Arabs and the Persians,

Promulgator of Sultanic Laws [kanun],

Tenth of the Ottoman Khaqans,

Sultan son of the Sultan, Sultan Süleyman Khan

[...] May the line of his Sultanate endure until the End of the Line of the Ages!

Imber, p.75.



Explain the apparent relationship between God and the Ottoman ruler. Was the ruler (and many other rulers who have claimed to be related to God) a true believer or was he trying to manipulate his subjects? What was the role of the ulema in this case?

III-2. Dimitrie Cantemir on the Muslim prayers

Muhammad ordered public and private prayers five times in the 24 hours [of the day] [...].

They take great care about four things when they perform their prayers: 1. To clean themselves; 2. To say their prayers within the ordered limits of time, because if they are finished before or after the right time, they believe that they will have been said in vain and will be unpleasant to God; 3. To make sure that the place is clean, and, if they have any doubts about the cleanliness of the place, put under their feet either a small carpet or their scarf; 4. To direct their faces to the north-south line which they call *kibla* and which they say aims at the temple in Mecca. [...].

The prayers consist of much bowing, kneeling, touching the soil with one's forehead, rising up and praying. [...]

In the big mosques [*cami*], people do not give their place to anyone, not even to the Sultan. Everyone remains unmoving and untroubled in the place he has initially occupied. And, before the prayers have finished, it is forbidden to speak a single word or to move (O, good Lord, how much more pious they are in this respect than the Christians, and with more zeal in honouring God!), and even to spit or to cough unless the need forces you, and when you spit, you shall use a handkerchief, because it is considered improper to spit or to blow one's nose in a clean place.

On Fridays, which, in the dialect of the *Kuran* is

called *cuma* (which means gathering or reunion day), after the noon prayers in the big mosques (which they call *selatin*), the preachers provide teaching for two or three hours. They explain the text of the *Kuran* on a theme previously chosen. To this they add, speaking beautifully, something moralizing according to the circumstances, and embellish it with figures, tropes and metaphors and other rhetorical images. In times of peace, they add something about the fulfilment of justice, about the care of state administration, about the grace of God and about the prevention of the moves and intention of the enemies. And, if it is in, or just prior to a time of war and campaign, the Sultan orders the preachers to speak more often, showing the people and convincing them that the war against the enemies is waged upon for the order of God and his Prophet, and not for worldly riches, or for special gains, fame and human praise, but only for the expansion of the faith, for the glory of God and for the benefit of the whole Muslim people and others.

Cantemir 1987, pp.289-295.



This fragment originates from Cantemir's treatise on the Muslim religion, written during his exile in Russia (1711-1723). He uses the extensive knowledge of Ottoman society he acquired during the two and more decades he spent in Istanbul before 1710.



What rules did a Muslim have to observe during prayers?

Find an argument supporting the 'democratic' nature of the community of Muslim believers (*umma*).

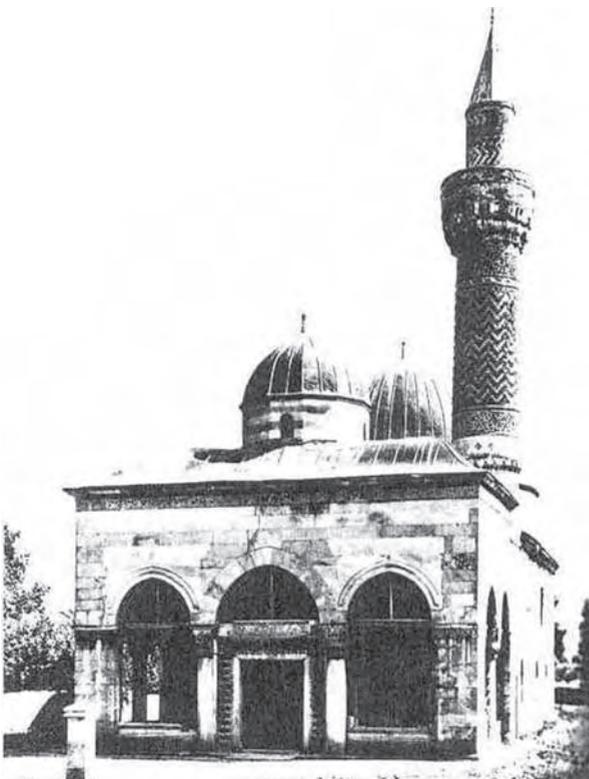
Was the political interference in the religious service justified? Put forward arguments in favour and against this interference. Find examples for such interference in other societies. Does such interference take place in your society?

► **v11. Süleymaniye (Süleyman's mosque) in Istanbul (1550-1557)**



Photograph by Helen Philon

► **v12. 14th century mosque in Iznik (Nicaea)**



Lewis, p.294.



Compare the two mosques. If you had not been provided with chronological indications, how would you have found out which one was older?

III-3. Muslim rationalising the relation between Allah and the rain (1779)

There was no rain for three or four months, so there were massive prayers for rain (such prayers are called *dova*) everywhere in mosques in Sarajevo. But everything has its own reason for Allah does not change His decisions and the high spiritual world is connected with ours. If rain should fall, there is a cause for it, known to astronomers, and prayers for rain are only a symbol of obedience and service to God and not a key reason for rain. If every prayer were to be granted, then the world would collapse, and the secrets would not be revealed to us. But, when the time of rain comes close and someone prays, and the prayer is granted, the person who prayed is called a good man. I, sinful pauper, have heard about one month ago from one astronomer that in one month (which means now) the composition of the constellations will arrive and that the "gate will be open", which means that rain will fall. This was the case. So, some ignorant people started to jump to conclusions, which is all right, but not important, because it will be what Allah wants, no matter whether we want it or not.

Bašeskija, p.235.



Mula Mustafa Bašeskija (1731/1732-1809) spent his whole life in Sarajevo. He was an imam and hatib at the Buzadji haji-Hasan's mosque. Later on, he worked as a scribe (*katib*). Mula Mustafa left a chronicle, an excellent source for the history of the political and everyday life in Sarajevo, Bosnia and neighbouring countries. This text also shows that, in line with the European intellectuals of the 18th century, he was quite critical of the current superstitions. However, this critical attitude did not lead him to question the almightiness of Allah.



What does Mula Mustafa Bašeskija really believe? Does rain have natural or divine causes?

► **v13. Ornamental Koranic inscriptions inside the Eski Cami in Edirne (15th century)**



Hegyi, Zimanyi, colour ill. 90.

► **v14. Turkish lady riding a camel on the pilgrimage to Mekka**



Hegyi, Zimanyi, colour ill. 62.

III-4. Muslim heterodoxy – Bektaşî jokes

A Muslim scholar [hoca] was preaching in a mosque, describing the powers and attributes of God.

– “Allah is neither on the earth nor in the sky, neither to the right nor to the left, and neither above nor in the ocean. In short, he does not have any spatial manifestation, but exists only in the hearts of believers” he said, whereupon a Bektaşî, who was in the audience, could not restrain himself any longer and retorted:

– “O you members of the Community, I plead for your consideration. When I said the other day, that “Allah is not here,” you muttered that I had “turned unbeliever,” whereas, now that the Hoca effendi is saying that Allah does not exist, no one is saying a word.”

A Bektaşî was asked the following: “Why is the world so full of hills and slopes, rocks and mountains? Why is it not flat and smooth everywhere?” “Oh come on, what would you expect of a place that took only six days to create?” was his reply.

Dursun, p.78

 The Bektaşî was a religious brotherhood which claimed to follow the example of Hacı Bektaş Veli, a famous 13th century mystical dervish. While officially closely connected to the Ottoman authorities, and highly influential among the Janissaries, the Bektaşî practiced a mystical (*sufî*) form of Islam, sometimes closer to Shiism than to the official Sunnism of the Ottoman Empire. The Bektaşîs came to represent a particular kind of irreverence for social hierarchies, as well as for conventional rites and rituals – all embodied in innumerable jokes revolving around an archetype of a mostly anonymous Bektaşî *baba* (literally: “father” or “padre”), or sometimes a *dede* (literally: “uncle” or “grandfather”) who is recognized as one of the greatest figures in Turkish humour. As with many other elements of oral tradition, Bektaşî jokes are not easily datable, bearing witness to layer upon layer of social memory.

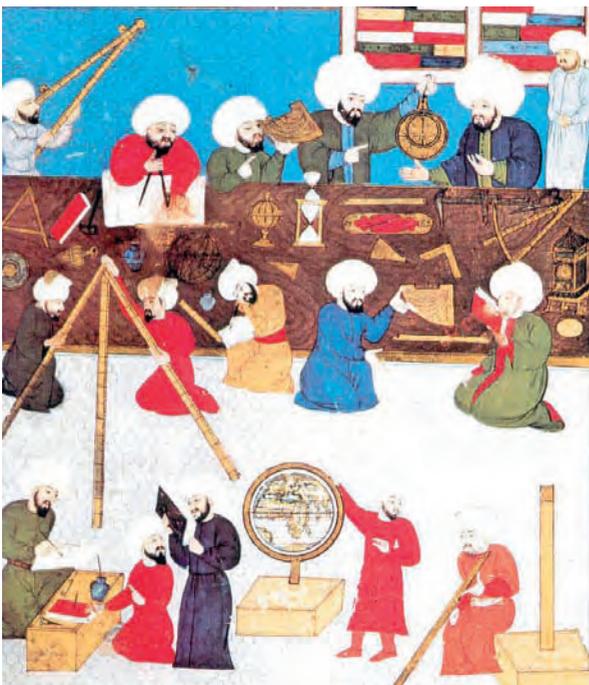


What do you think of these jokes? Did they help mobilise the people against the religious establishment, or were they simply relatively harmless statements of noncompliant individuals?

Do you know of any other forms of religious heterodoxy in South Eastern Europe?

Can mysticism become subversive to official religious institutions?

► v15. Astronomic observatory in Istanbul (c.1580)



Lewis, p.200.



Which of the scientific instruments do you recognise? How many of them do we still use today? Why are only men depicted in the image? Why are all of them bearded? Was it a fashion, a professional requirement or a social sign? Do you think there is a definite reason, or is it simply due to the imagination of the painter? What is your impression of the map represented in the image?

► v16. Popular hero Nasreddin Hoca



Hegy, Zimanyi, colour ill. 75.



Do you know any stories about Nasreddin Hoca? How is he presented in these anecdotes?

How popular are stories about Nasreddin Hoca in your own country? When were his stories first published in your language? Ask your friends or family members what they know about Nasreddin Hoca.

IIIb. The Christians

III-5. Election of Gennadios Scholarios as the first Orthodox Patriarch after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople (1453)

On the third day after the fall of our city, the sultan celebrated his victory with a great, joyful triumph [...]

He issued orders for the election of a patriarch, according to custom and protocol, as our patriarch had passed away sometime earlier. The high clerics who happened to be present and the very few members of the church and of the lay population designated the scholar George Scholarios, and elected him patriarch under the name Gennadios. [...] Our custom and traditional ceremony prescribed that the Christian emperor should present the newly elected patriarch with a golden crook. Thus this rascal of a sultan tried to pass himself off as the emperor of our City by imitating our Christian emperors: he invited Gennadios to dine and converse with him, receiving him with great honours. They spoke at length and the sultan promised the world to him. When the time came for Gennadios to leave, he was presented with that expensive crook and was asked to accept it.

Melissenos, p.133-135.



Before the conquest of Constantinople, Scholarios had been one of the leaders of the Orthodox opposition against the Union of Florence (1439), where the Byzantine Emperor John VIII had decided to subordinate the Orthodox Church to the Pope in exchange for Catholic help against the Ottomans.



What were the interests of Mehmed II in establishing Gennadios as Patriarch?

► v17. Ottoman silver bowl with a Greek inscription, used for Orthodox rituals (16th century)



Benaki Museum, Athens.

III-6. The French traveller Pierre Lescalopier about the St. Sava Monastery in Serbia (1574)

On the twenty first [of March] we arrived in Uvac, a small Turkish town. From there we saw the St. Sava monastery, a monastery of Serbian monks. They were dressed in black, spoke Slavonic and lived by the Greek rites. They brought us a large arm bone of St. Sava to kiss. They claimed to have his whole body. We saw Jews and Turks kissing this bone with the same respect as Christians and giving more donations to charity. These monks pay tax [*harač*] to the Sultan. Our courier [*čauš*] told us that a Turk who came one day to collect the tax did something evil to the monks and dropped dead at the monastery doors. They gave us oil and leek soup to eat, as well as some fish and whole-grain bread.

Samardžić, p.135.



What forms of piety prevailed among the Orthodox? Were they specific only to the Orthodox population?

Why did the believers of the other religions respect the Serbian Orthodox relic? (This is the area where the religions intermingle). What is the reason for this? Do you know of any similar examples from another part of Europe/world or from another era?

III-7. Paul of Aleppo about the Moldavian churches (mid-17th century)

His [former Prince Stephen the Great] palaces, bath, gardens and the big high church with its soaring high domes are in Vaslui. All around this church are vaults and semi-circular arches, and inside there are paintings and icons of all the saints. At the door, over the lower wall, the last judgement is painted in gold and lapis lazuli, with Moses leading Ana and Caiapha along with all the other Jews to our God. These paintings are ugly. They are followed by paintings of another kind; paintings of Turks wearing white turbans on their heads, big velvet gowns of different colours, with long hanging sleeves, woollen yellow veils, and dervishes being chased and mocked by devils. Satan is in front wearing a hat on his head. One of the devils is mocking him and is shown snatching his hat off his head. This is how the entire interior is painted.

The architecture is beautiful. On the calotte of the central dome is the face of our Lord Jesus Christ [...]. Outside the church's gate hangs a big bell.

The churches in this country consist of three parts: the first part is outside with a door, and is reserved for women; the second part is divided by a wall and a door, and is reserved for the believers; and the third part, also divided by a wall and a door, is reserved for the Prince and his court.

Călători, VI, p.29.



What role did the church paintings of the Turks in Moldavia play in religious life? How could

such paintings have existed in a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire? Is this an example of Ottoman religious tolerance?

Compare the hierarchical structure of the interior of the Moldavian churches with the situation in the Muslim mosques described in source III-2.

► v18. Voroneț monastery in Moldavia (built 1488, external frescoes from 1547-1550)



<http://www.users.cloud9.net/~romania/vor/Voronet.html>

► v19. Last supper scene - fresco from Stavronikita Monastery, Athos (1546)



Koliopoulos-Chassiotis, p.169.

III-8. Kosmas the Aitolian calling on Christians to educate their children

And you, parents, give your children a Christian education, teach them to read and write. Do what you have to do to set up a school, find a teacher and pay him to teach your children for it is a grave sin to leave them blind and illiterate; let not your sole concern be to leave them riches and property so that they can eat and drink after your death and remember you. It would be better to leave them poor and educated rather than rich and illiterate.

Menounos, p.173.



Kosmas the Aitolian (1714-1779) was a revivalist missionary, particularly active in Western Greece and Albania, but also connected to Athos. His appeals to combine education with Orthodox piety and religious practices are typical of an early brand of South East European enlightenment.



Do you agree with the statements of Kosmas the Aitolian (especially the last one)? Why does he think that education is of such importance?

Discuss whether such an attitude furthered social progress.

III-9. Kiril Pejčinović about tensions between Orthodox villagers and priests (1816)

I see them in some villages, may God protect me, it is very rough! I can't call them Christians or infidels. They eat and drink on Good Friday and Good Saturday, during the Great Fasting [...], commit sins, curse, beat each other, and on Easter day wait for the Holy Communion [Eucharist]. And the poor priest [who] has eight villages to attend, does not know where to go first. He runs from one village to another, with another man carrying the Holy Mysteries for him.

I even feel sorry for the poor Christians, because they wait for the priest until noon to bring the Eucharist. So they shout: "The priest is late, was it this or was it that?!" Others say: "Let's beat him so that he is not late again!" And those of them who are chor-

badjis, a bit richer, they say: "Not that way, if we beat him the zabit will punish us, but rather – gathered as we are now – let us first go and bring a ram (sheep) to the aga or the Pasha, then beat up the priest and kick him out, and find another one, even if he lives further away". Yet another richer peasant [kmet] says about the other priest: "That one too takes big contributions, forget it. This one comes late but takes less. He also sings for free and waits for the money for years. While the other priest collects his reward from Turks if you don't pay to him".

So one person says this, another says something else, [...] they all profane against the priest who is their spiritual mentor, who baptised them in the name of the Holy Trinity and married them, will bury them and who is their father and more than a parent to them. They don't fast, they speak profanities against the priest and wait for the Eucharist until noon. And I, the sinful and undignified Kiril, who is more sinful than all of them and who committed a sin by accusing them, so I, the sinner, saw them talking like that, saw it and did not like it, so I told them: "Why do we Christians wait until noon? Why don't we just cut bread, pour wine on the bread and not wait for the priest? They tell me: "What the priest brings us is not bread and wine, but the blood of Christ. That's why we wait until noon, for we have heard from the elders that, without it, one can't be alive." And I tell them: "Who tells you this, the priest?" He says to me: "The priest has not told us anything so far. Such words never left his mouth. He prefers rather to come with us to a wedding, to a picnic, to dances, hunting, to a party, to buy and sell something. As for teaching, we don't ask for it nor does he offer to teach himself." So I, the sinner, saw that the guilt was on both sides: on the Christian side because they do not ask the priest, and on the priest's side because he does not teach them anything, not even the little he may know. I see he does not care for the duty he took upon himself and which hangs around his neck."

Odbrani, II, pp.14-16.



Describe the religious feelings of the peasants. What did they believe in? In what way did their religion differ from the official religion? What were the reasons for their religious particulari-

ties? (Poverty, lack of education, a deeper consideration for religious matters?).

Why were the peasants critical of their priests? Was their position justified? Argue in favour of both sides.

IIIc. The Jews

III-10. Letter of Isaac Tzarfati, Rabbi of Edirne (Adrianople), to the Jews in Central Europe (mid-15th century)

My brothers and my masters, having prayed to God to grant you peace, I wish to relate to you the circumstances under which the young Rabbi Zalman and his companion Rabbi David Cohen came to me. They recounted to me all the ordeals, harsher than death, which our brothers, the sons of Israel who live in Germany, have undergone and still endure; the decisions taken against them, the martyrs, the expulsions, which take place every day and compel them to wander from country to country, from town to town, endlessly, without any place accepting them [...]

When they arrived here in Turkey, a land on which the wrath of God has not weighed heavily, when they saw the peace, the tranquillity and the abundance which holds sway in these lands and when they saw that the distance between Turkey and Jerusalem is short, and may be traversed overland, they were overcome with great joy and they said: without any doubt if the Jews who live in Germany knew a tenth of the blessings which God has bestowed on His people of Israel in this land, neither snow nor rain, neither day nor night, would be of consequence until they had journeyed here.

They have asked me to write to the exiles, to the Jewish communities which reside in Germany, in the towns of Swabia, of the Rhineland, of Styria, of Moravia and of Hungary, to inform them how agreeable this country is. [...] When I realised that their desires were disinterested, I decided to acquiesce in their entreaties, for I would like to give Israel the opportunity of acquiring its just deserts...

Shaw, pp.31-32.



Anti-Jewish persecutions intensified after the Black Death epidemics of the mid-14th century not only in Germany, but in most Western and Central Europe. Combining religious prejudice, economic competition and social exclusion. These persecutions compelled a significant number of Jews to seek refuge in safer and generally less densely populated countries such as Poland, Lithuania and the Ottoman Empire.



Could any country in the world be as perfect as the text describes? Are the advantages of living in the Ottoman Empire, as described, fair and truthful? Are there possible disadvantages missing? Why was the writer trying to persuade Jews to move to the Ottoman Empire?

III-11. Elijah Capsali about the prosperity of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire under Mehmed II

In the first year of the Sultan Mehmed, King of Turkey [...], the Lord aroused the spirit of the king [...], and his voice passed throughout his kingdom and also by proclamation saying:

'This is the word of Mehmed, King of Turkey, the Lord God of Heaven gave me a kingdom in the land and commanded me to number his people the seed of Abraham his servant, the sons of Jacob his chosen ones, and to give them sustenance in the land and to provide a safe haven for them. Let each one with his God come to Constantinople the seat of my kingdom and sit under his vine and under his fig tree with his gold and silver, property and cattle, settle in the land and trade and become part of it.'

The Jews gathered together from all the cities of Turkey both near and far, each man came from his

home; and the community gathered in the thousands and ten thousands and God assisted them from heaven while the king gave them good properties and houses full of goods. The Jews dwelled there according to their families and multiplied exceedingly [...]

Because the Jews feared the Lord, He gave them prosperity and in the place wherein formerly in the days of the Byzantine king there were only two or three congregations, the Jews multiplied and increased and became greater in number than forty congregations, and the land did not let them settle together because their property was so great. The congregations of Constantinople were praiseworthy. Torah and wealth and honour increased among the congregations. In the congregations they praised the Lord, the fountain of Israel, the doer of great wonders. They opened their mouth in song to heaven and blessed the Lord, all the servants of the Lord who stand in the house of the Lord in the night seasons.

Shaw, pp.30-31.



It is obvious that Elijah Capsali, writing in the 16th century about events which had happened in the second half of the 15th century, is less interested in historical accuracy than in reinforcing the traditional Jewish morality. Therefore, his text abounds in paraphrases from the Old Testament (e.g. Genesis 13:6, 34:10; Exodus 1:7, 1:21; Psalms 68:27, 134:1 etc.).



What were the intentions of the writer? What was he trying to achieve by writing this document? In what way did he try to make a connection between the two religions? Find out what is special about the role of Abraham in Islam and Judaism.

What elements lend weight to the argument that the speech attributed by Elijah Capsali to Mehmed II is historically inaccurate?

III-12. Jewish revivalism: the case of Sabbatai Zevi (1666)

[...] we proceed to the next [year – 1666] wherein we are to present you with a short narrative of Sabatai Sevi, the Jews' pretended Messiah, who first appeared at Smyrna, and there gave out he was their Messiah, relating the Greatness of their approaching Kingdom, the strong hand whereby God was about to deliver them, and gather them from all the parts of the World. He was a broker's son, born at Smyrna, a notable proficient in the Hebrew and Arabick [sic] tongues, but being banished for a Tumult in the Synagogue, he wandered up and down Greece for a time, and going at length to Jerusalem, he there met with one Nathan a cunning sophist; who, taking upon him to be Sabatai's prophet, he was so bold as to predict, that one year from the 27th of Kislau, the Messiah should appear before the Grand Signior⁵¹ to prepare for his reception. When he arrived at Smyrna, and took the title of Messiah openly upon him, he put forth his declaration to all the nations of the Jews to that purpose: But [...] some of his own nation opposed him as an impostor, yet he carried his point and then declared he was called by God to visit Constantinople, where the greatest part of his work was to be accomplished. But the vizier⁵², upon his arrival, thought fit to clap him up in a loathsome prison, from whence he removed him afterwards to the Dardanelles; whither the Jews, from diverse remoter parts, flocked to him in great numbers, and where he had time to compose his new method and worship. For the Jews now dotting more and more upon him, and of whose madness the Grand Signior by this time having received diverse information, ordered that he was to be brought before him, and the Sultan not going to be put off without a miracle, proposed that Sabatai should be stripped naked, and set as a mark to his dexterous archers, and if the arrows pierced not his body, then he would believe him to be the Messiah, but Sabatai declining

⁵¹ Term used by Europeans to designate the Ottoman sultan, at that time Mehmed IV (1648-1687).

⁵² Fazil Ahmed Köprülü Pasha, Grand Vizier 1661-1676.

the trial, was necessitated to turn Mahometan to save his Life. However most of the Jews affirming it was not so, but that his Shadow only remained on Earth, and walked with a white head, and in a Mahometan habit, while his Body and Soul were taken up into Heaven, there to reside till the time appointed for the accomplishment of these wonders; the Cochams⁵³ of Constantinople condemned this belief as damnable, and enjoined them to return to their ancient worship, upon pain of excommunication.

Jones, II, pp.175-176.



What was the motivation of Sabbatai Zevi? Did he really believe that he was a Messiah? Comment upon the end of his "career". Why did he convert to Islam?

Why did the Jews follow Sabbatai Zevi? Was such a movement specific only to the Jews? Do you know of any similar messianic movements in the history of your people?

Assess the way the Sultan handled the case of Sabbatai Zevi. What was his goal? Was he successful?

► **v20. Jewish doctor – French engraving (1568)**



Nicolay, p.182.



Why do you think that the French engraver/traveller considered it important to represent a Jewish doctor? Were there also doctors from other ethnic or religious backgrounds in the Ottoman Empire?

Is there any connection between the clothes of the Jewish doctor and the inferior status of non-Muslims, as seen also in texts III–19 and III–20?

III d. Religious co-existence and discrimination

III–13. Religious dialogue during the captivity of Gregory Palamas (1354)

He [the imam] began saying that they [the Muslims] accept all the Prophets, Christ and the four books

⁵³ Term used to designate the elders of a Jewish community.

descended from God⁵⁴, one of which is the Gospel of Christ. And, in ending, he said: [...] "And you, why do you not accept our Prophet and do not believe in his Book which has also descended from heaven?" I an-

⁵⁴ The Pentateuch, the Psalms, the New Testament and the Koran.

swered him: "You, as well as we, have a custom [...] to accept and to adopt nothing as true without testimonies [...]. Christ, besides the many great miracles he has accomplished, had also been testified for, by Moses himself and by the other prophets and he is the only one, in all of eternity, to be proclaimed, even by you, the Word of God; and the only one in all of eternity to be born of a virgin. The only one, in all of eternity, to have risen to heaven and to have remained immortal. We hope that he will come back to judge the living and the resuscitated dead. I only say about him what you Turks already admit. Therefore, we believe in Christ and in his Gospel. Concerning Mehomet, however, he has not been testified for by the prophets and has not accomplished anything extraordinary or memorable that should make us believe in him. That's why we don't believe in him and neither in the book from him".

The Imam [tassiman] was troubled by these words, but defended himself by saying: "In the gospels there were things said about Mehomet and you have cut this testimony. And besides, starting from the depth of the Orient, he has come to the west as a victor, as you can see" [...].

"[...] It is true that Mehomet, starting from the Levant, advanced as a victor to the Ponant; but this had been done through warfare, swords, pillages, oppressions and killings. Nothing of which originates from God, who is good [...]. Did Alexander not start from the west to finally make the entire Orient his subject? In other times, many others have launched their expeditions and have dominated the whole universe. However, nobody gave up his soul, as you have to Mehomet. And besides, he [Mehomet], although using force at the same time as recommending enjoyment, captured only a part of the universe. The teachings of Christ, on the contrary, by rejecting almost all of the sweet things of life, has embraced all the extremities of the universe and has ruled in the middle of those who fight him, and this without using any violence, always ending victorious over the violence opposed to him, and hence has defeated the world.

The Christians there, sensing the rage rising in the Turks, made a sign for me to abandon this

speech. But I, still wanting to bring serenity, said to them with a light smile: "If we agreed with each other, we would share the same dogma. Let the understanding understand the purport of what has been said". And then one of them said: "There will come a time when we shall all agree".

Phillipidis-Braat, pp.154-157, 160-161.



During his captivity under the Ottomans (1354-1355), Gregory Palamas (for details see the explanatory note in text I-6) had several theological discussions with Muslims and Jews, one with Orhan's nephew Ismael and one with scholars sent by Orhan himself. In a letter to his congregation in Thessaloniki, he also recollects another discussion with a Muslim imam in the neighbourhood of Nicaea. Although Palamas is adamant in displaying his own arguments, his narrative also includes many of the Muslim arguments against the Christian faith and testifies to the complexity of religious relationships in the territories conquered by the Ottomans.



What do you think of the eagerness of the Ottoman Turks to discuss religious issues with their prisoner?

What do you think of the arguments displayed in these discussions? Could such arguments explain, in part, the conversions to Islam which occurred after the Ottoman conquest?

III-14. Co-existence of various religious communities in Ottoman towns (ca. 1660)

[Belgrade]

On the banks of the river Sava there are three Gypsy [*Kıbtî*] neighbourhoods [*mahalle*], and on the banks of the river Danube there are three neighbourhoods of Greek [*Rum*] unbelievers, as well as Serbs and Bulgarians (also living in three neighbourhoods). Right by the fortress is a neighbourhood of Jews, those belonging to the seven communities known as the Karaim Jews. There is also a neighbourhood of Armenian unbelievers, but there are

no Frankish⁵⁵ or Hungarian neighbourhoods, nor any bailos or consuls of theirs. All the rest are Muslim neighbourhoods, so the families of the followers of Muhammad possess all the best, most spacious and airiest areas, located on the high or middle ground of the city.

[...] There are a total of two hundred and seventeen⁵⁶ mosques [mihrab], but [only] the Sultan's mosques from which the special call for Friday prayers are proclaimed, as well as the vizieral mosques and the mosques of the local gentry and notables are described [below].

[...] There are nine churches or monasteries, all told, where they conduct their evil rites. There are temples for the Greek, the Armenian, the Serb, the Bulgarian, and the Jews, but no houses of idolatry for the Franks or the Hungarians.

[...]

[Sarajevo]

Churches - Every church is small, there are no churches with bells. The churches of the Serbian and Latin Christians are in good condition. The Franks and the Greeks also perform their religious rituals in these churches. There is also one Jewish synagogue.

Evliya Çelebi, pp.195-198.



Compare Evliya Celebi's assessment of the Christian churches in Sarajevo with the description of the Moldavian churches by Paul of Aleppo (this chapter, source III-7).

III-15. Relations between Orthodox, Catholics and Lutherans in Bulgaria and Wallachia (1581)

The following was noted by the apostolic visitor in conclusion to hearing a few Catholic merchants

⁵⁵ Common Ottoman name for people coming from Western Europe, including Catholics and Protestants.

⁵⁶ Like many numbers in Evliya Celebi's narrative, this figure is certainly exaggerated.

speaking of the condition of the Catholics in Bulgaria and Wallachia.

The visit of Silistra and Provadia, allowed by our ruler by means of the letters by the highly praised monsignor, [cardinal] of Como on March 11, 1581. On the day of December 5, Ragusan merchants [...], who live in a place on the Danube called Silistra near the locals of Deristor, two days away from Varna, have introduced themselves. The land is called Dobrogea, in old times it was called Moesia. The languages spoken are Bulgarian and Illyric. [It is] ruled by the Sultan on the other side of the river, and in front of the land in question, lies Wallachia, tributary to the Turks. The above-mentioned Bulgarians are Orthodox; they have churches, priests and bishops. They said there are only 10 Catholic families [which are] of Ragusan nationality. They do not have churches or diligent priests, but they have brought with them from Ragusa, together with those from Provadia, which is two days away from Silistra, a man called father Nicolo Godini of Antivari. A man of great humanity; he officiates here for six months, with an income of 100 thalers⁵⁷ a year.

They ask if they are allowed to go to the Orthodox churches to pray and honour their sacraments with their devotion; if they are allowed to receive the holy sacrament of baptism and of penance when dying, from the Orthodox priest. They also ask permission for a young Catholic man who had been living with a young Orthodox girl, promising to marry her and have her children, to withdraw his promise with a clear conscience. They also said that, when going over the Danube towards Transylvania, they discovered many Lutherans of German nationality in Wallachia who would always try to talk about their faith and give free books on their perverted faith [...]. Silistra [is] at a distance of two days from Provadia and [lies] on the Danube. There are 1,500 houses of Christians and Pagans there. There are eight Catholic houses which house 40 persons, all of them Ragusan merchants. At this moment, they have brother Celestino as chaplain, with a salary of 2,000 *akçe* a year. They are good Christians [even

⁵⁷ Big silver coins coming from Central or Western Europe.

though] they do not have a church. Mass is served in a room. They were promised to be allowed to build a small house that would be their church. Apart from the chaplain, they do not have another sacerdotal official. The chaplain has been in service here for three years and everybody speaks well of him. He is here for six months, and the other six months of the year, he is in Târgoviște, at the monastery.

Călători, II, p.504.



What questions did the Catholics in Bulgaria and Wallachia ask the apostolic visitor? What kind of practical difficulties do these questions raise? Try to figure out what the apostolic visitor might have answered.

III-16. Fetva of Ebu's-su'ud on Muslim Shiites (mid-16th century)

Question: Is it licit, according to the Holy Law [shari'a], to fight the followers of the Safavids⁵⁸? Is the person who kills them a holy warrior, and is the person who dies at their hands a martyr?

Answer: yes, it is a great holy war and a glorious martyrdom.

Question: Assuming that it is licit to fight them, is this justified simply because of their rebellion and enmity against the [Ottoman] Sultan of the People of Islam, because they drew the swords against the troops of Islam?

Answer: They are rebels and, from many points of view, infidels.

Imber, p.86.



Ebu's-su'ud (c.1490-1574) was a scholar widely respected by Süleyman. He held the office of chief jurisconsult [*şeyh-ül-Islam*] for almost three decades. His rulings [*fetva*] exerted a lasting influence on Ottoman society.

⁵⁸ The Safavid dynasty ruled Persia from 1502 to 1736, imposing a radical Shiite version of Islam which, in the 16th century, was extremely appealing to many Ottoman subjects from Anatolia.



What do these rulings reveal about the limits of Muslim solidarity?

Compare the attitude of the Ottomans towards the Muslim Shiites with the 16th century wars between the Catholics and Protestants.

III-17. Imperial order preventing "Frankish" proselytism among the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia (1722)

The Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul and its dependencies, called Ohannes, have petitioned my Imperial Residence for the issuance of my orders to prevent the Frankish rite heresy which is current among the Armenians of Erzurum, Diyarbakir and Tokat. Things are about to calm down and get organized. However, some Frankish priests disguised as medical doctors, or something else, reside there and mix with the rich people and the notables. Unaware, the notables take them for physicians and help them in all their endeavours. Thus, according to the Patriarch, the Frankish priests work incessantly to provoke the local Armenians and pervert them in converting them to the Frankish rite. He petitioned that the Franks not be allowed to reside there as physicians or anything else. Also, the poor subjects should be protected against their provocation and should be left alone. Therefore the Imperial Ferman is issued in line with his petition.

BOA, CA 3126.



What do you think of the fact that both the Armenian Patriarch Ohannes and the Sultan labelled all Westerners "Franks", and did not bother with the various denominations covered by "Frankish rite heresy"?

III-18. Ottoman authorities in Bosnia arbitrate between Orthodox and Catholics (1760)

After that, we examined this extremely difficult situation and finally sent the word of our arrival to the

vice-Pasha [kehaya bey] through an agent. He gave permission for our visit, so our dean and new guardian from Fojnica Monastery left for his house. His last words were: "If you want to win this lawsuit, you must, first of all, pour twenty bags of money into the state treasury"; (that is around 2,600 Venetian gold coins).

So, we saw that our efforts would collapse unconditionally if we didn't give him this excessive amount of money.

Consequently, before facing our opponents in the court of law, we met the Pasha and the vice-Pasha. Out of necessity, we promised to give them whatever it took to calm them down and to get their protection. On the other hand, Greek⁵⁹ leaders offered a big amount of money (much bigger than ours) to the same Pasha to pass judgment under conditions of their ferman [Ottoman charter]. In view of the fact that we didn't have enough money, we have taken a credit from the state treasury.

First of all, the judge read the documents of our opponents and examined their essence. After that, the judge asked the Greek Metropolitan (he was there together with the Patriarch) to say what he really wanted through this lawsuit. He responded: "I demand that these fraternities be obedient and obey all that is written in this charter [ferman], issued by our exalted Sultan, and all that is being said now." Then the judge asked us: "What do you cite as a reason for disobedience to your opponents?" Our dean responded: "It has been almost three hundred years since the exalted Sultan Mehmed conquered Bosnia and we have never had anything in common with the Greeks, because they have one religion and we another. This can clearly be seen in this hatti-sherif [another kind of Ottoman charter] and in other documents and charters issued by merciful Sultans. From that moment onwards we have always had the freedom to practice our Latin religion".

Having heard this, the judge issued the verdict immediately: "The Patriarch and the Metropolitan do not have any rights over you, fraternities and Roman Catholics. They should not and dare not de-

mand any money tax or anything else from you, because the ferman cannot be higher than the hatti-sherif".

And so this trial came to an end. The Metropolitan went away in shame (God wanted it that way). O Brother, you just can't do business with the Turks without money!

Benic, pp.187-190.



Compare this text with the previous source on the Frankish rite heresy: in both cases the Ottoman authorities barely understood the particulars of the Christian faith. Do you think they had similar difficulties in distinguishing between the different branches of Islam? (The same question can be asked of the sensitivity of the Christian authorities towards the inter-Muslim divisions).

What were the relations between the two Christian churches in Bosnia? Whom did they respect more: the Ottoman authorities or the "related" Christian Churches?

What are the writer's objections against the Ottoman authorities and the Orthodox Church?

III-19. Imperial restrictions for non-Muslims (1631)

According to the Holy Law [*shari'a*] and the Law, the Christians [*kafir*] must be recognisable by their clothes and appearance as being inferior. They are not allowed to ride horses, wear clothes made of silk and satin or to put on sable coats and hats. Their wives are not allowed to wear clothes similar to those of the Muslim women or to put on yashmaks made of Persian cloth. Still, for some time now, this law has not been obeyed and, with the permission of the judges, the Christians and Jews have started going out dressed in expensive luxurious clothes.

As for their wives, they do not step down off the pavement to give way to the Muslim women they meet at the market. On the whole, both men and women wear much better clothes than the Muslims. This shows that they do not consider themselves inferior. Thus, it is absolutely essential that these or-

59 Orthodox.

ders be announced once again to ensure that they are obeyed.

Georgieva, Tzanev, p.121.



Why were the restrictions for non-Muslims so harsh? Why didn't the Christians obey them? Do you think that such restrictions could be fully enforced in mixed religious environments?

III-20. Execution of an Orthodox wearing improper clothes (1785/1789)

Likewise, in the aforementioned month [Muharrem] on the 21st day, when our glorious master [Sultan Abdulhamid I] was travelling incognito he saw a Greek infidel. The Greek wore yellow shoes, a kaf-tan of flowery design, a long gown and a fur-striped coat as well as a shawl. He [the Sultan] called the executioner. The Greek was about to be hanged, but the Sultan ordered his decapitation instead.

Taylesanizade, p.419.



Compare texts III-19 and III-20. What were the crimes of the Greek who was executed?

III-21. Imperial order about a church built without permission in Stanimaka, near Plovdiv (1624)

The Governor of the vakif village Stanimaka informs us in his letter that the Christians in this village have built a big new church, decorated with marble and other materials, against the Holy Law.

The Governor has tried to answer to the complaints of the Muslims without any success and he is now asking for a royal order to be issued in order to destroy the church in question. The destruction will satisfy the prescriptions of the religious laws of the country.

So, I order that on receiving this, you should investigate the matter and see to the destruction of

the newly-built church as long as it is really a new one and not one that has existed for a long time. I also order that you not allow anyone to protest or to disobey the Holy Law and My Sultan's order.

Georgieva, Tzanev, pp.120-121.



What were the arguments used to destroy the church in Stanimaka?

III-22. Christian intolerance against people living as inter-faith couples (Cyprus, 1636)

Milu, son of Andoni of the village Çeliye in the district of Tuzla, says: "Up until now, like my ancestors, I have belonged to the Christian group [*millet*]. I have not become a Muslim. I am an infidel [*kafire*]. When I wished to perform our false rites at the church, the monks, who were our priests, prevented me from entering saying, "You married a Muslim". It is probable that when I perish they will not bury me in accordance with infidel rites. I want a memorandum showing that I am an infidel!"

Jennings 1993, p.142.



Why did the Christian monks prevent Milu from entering the church and refused the sacraments to him?

What do you think were the reasons for this attitude? Were they justified? Take into consideration the fact that Muslim Law prohibited a Muslim woman from marrying a non-Muslim man, while Orthodox canon law only denies communion to an Orthodox Christian who marries a non-Christian.

III-23. Religious regulations in Transylvania (1653)

[Part I, title I]

Article 2. The four official religions, according to the regular decisions of the country, should, from now on, be maintained forever as official. The offi-

cial religions are as follows: reformed Evangelic (in vulgar language - Calvinist), Lutheran or Augustan, Roman-Catholic, Unitarian or Antitrinitarian. From now on, they are to be granted free practice in their accustomed places in accordance with the laws of the country [...].

Article 3. Besides the four official religions, in matters of faith and of religion, no private people of any social status and no assembly should dare or make any renovation or separation, under the penalty of infidelity [...].

Article 4. Judaism, starting with old times, not only has it not been counted among the four official religions, but it has also has been forbidden by the public laws of the country under the sanction of severe punishment. Those who have been found guilty of it, have been punished according to the law. It is hereby decided for them to be forever punished as were those before them [...].

Article 8. It has been decided that no one is to be allowed to force a community, the serfs, the people in his house or anybody under their command to join his religion, by means of violence or threat with violence, and neither should the landlord of another faith occupy the village or the city church, introduce or impose priests of another religion, or allow priests of his religion to officiate holy mass on any occasion: under penalty of 200 florins⁶⁰ [...]

[Title 8]

Article 1. [...] the Wallachian people have not been counted in this country, neither among the privileged estates, nor among the religions. Those who have not been counted among the official religions [...] are tolerated [...] for the advantage of the country.

Constituțiile, pp.47, 49, 50, 58.

⁶⁰ Originally a gold coin issued in the kingdom of Hungary after the model of Florentine coins. However, the text does not refer to this particular gold coin, but only to the current monetary unit in the kingdom of Hungary and in the principality of Transylvania at the time.



The Approved Constitutions (Constitutiones Approbatae) were enacted by the Diet of the Principality of Transylvania during the reign of George Rakoczy II (1648-1660). In fact, they systematized regulations enforced in the principality of Transylvania since the 16th century, and sometimes even earlier. Note that discrimination affected not only smaller minorities, but also the Orthodox Wallachians, who formed the majority of the population in the principality of Transylvania.



Was there religious freedom for all inhabitants of Transylvania? Argue both in favour and against the religious settlement that existed in 17th century Transylvania.

III-24. Anti-Jewish conclusion of the Ston bishopric synod in Ragusa (1685)

Devil's limbs, those who crucified Christ, enemies of the Christian name, robbers, those who bewitch, those who suck civilised human blood as a venomous snakes, they started gathering in this bishopric a couple of years ago. We humbly pray for God's justice to destroy them all, as being a just judge out of celestial clouds. We command all the people under our care not to share a flat with Jews in their houses, neither to serve them without our written permission, all that under the threat of being excommunicated. My sons avoid even talking to them except for trading purposes or having necessary unavoidable contacts. Be aware that they're the enemies of the Christ's cross and you, being Christ's limbs, push away the Devil's limbs.

Stulli, p.31.



What were the accusations against the Jews? What restrictions did the bishops try to enforce?

III-25. Privilege for a Jew in Ragusa (1735)

[...] Simon, the son of Vital Vitali, is a real and truth-

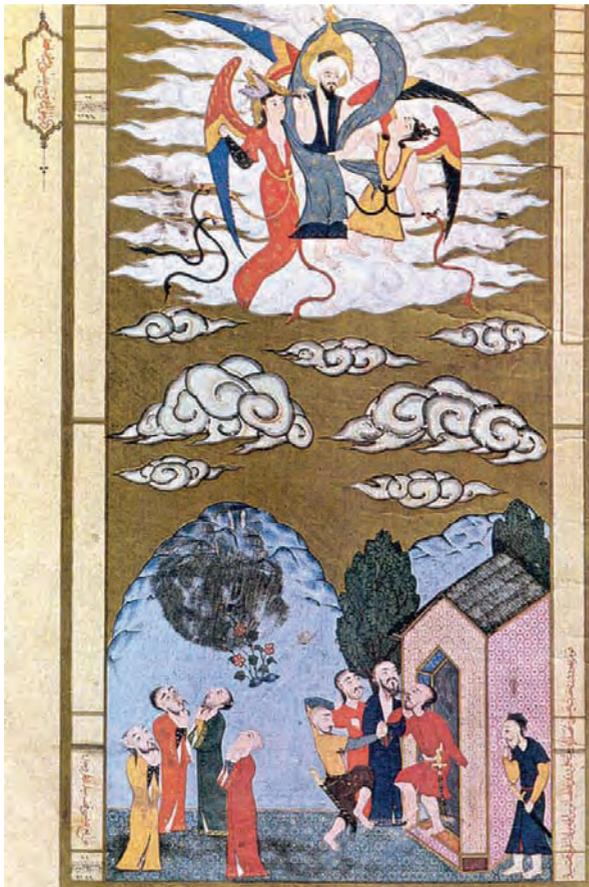
ful subject of this Republic and therefore he has all the privileges and graces of all our other subjects. We wish him to enjoy all the grace that our subjects enjoy in the entire world.

Stulli, p.41.



Compare this privilege with those of source III–24. What could have been the reasons for the different attitudes of the civil authorities?

► **v21. Ottoman miniature of the Ascension of Christ (1583)**



And, p.54.



How is Christ represented in this Ottoman miniature? Why? Have you ever seen Christian representations of the Ascension? What do you think?

III–26. Martyrdom of St. Kyranna in Thessaloniki (1751)

This is what the Janissaries did during the day. During the night, the jailer would hang her up from her armpits even though her hands were already chained. He would pick up a piece of wood at hand and hit her mercilessly until he was tired, and they would leave her hanging in the cold of winter, as it was winter then. One Christian who saw this, waited for the right moment and when he understood that the jailer's fit of anger had passed, went and talked to him and got permission to take her down. The Saint woman had such patience, tranquillity and silence that it seemed as if she were not the one suffering. Her whole spirit and concentration were in the heavens. There were other Christians held in the prison, Jews and some Turkish women on account of dishonourable acts, and they too accused the jailer of a lack of mercy, and of lacking the fear of God, because he was torturing a woman who had done him no wrong. That Christian never stopped reminding the prison guard of God's judgment (since he was not shy towards him) [...]. He spoke in order to appease him and make him stop causing suffering to the Saint Woman. But Satan had turned his heart to stone and no matter how much they begged him, he tortured her even more. The Janissaries, who used to torture her on a number of occasions, tried hard to get her to eat so she would not die. Sometimes they gave her raisins, sometimes dates. The Saint however would refuse to eat, so they tried to open her mouth by force but were unable to do so.

Synaxaristis, pp.336-337.



Kyranna, a young girl from a village called Avussoka, near Thessaloniki, defied the attempts of an Ottoman Janissary to seduce her. In order to break her resistance, the Janissary had her imprisoned and tortured. After a hunger strike, she died in Thessaloniki prison on February 28.



Would Kyranna, as a Christian, have been more exposed to the abuse of the Janissary than a Muslim girl?

Why do you think that the fellow prisoners tried to help Kyranna? Were the religious differences impedi-

ments in this respect? Do you know of any other examples of human solidarity across religious boundaries?

Why did Kyranna choose to undertake the hunger strike?



Overall questions on chapter III d

Comment on the combination of religious tolerance and discrimination in the early modern world. Compare the situations in the Ottoman Empire, in Transylvania and in Ragusa. How do these situations compare with the modern world?