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Icons versus Tughra: Eremia Ch‘elebi K‘ēōmiwrchean’s (1637–1695) Textual Passage on Popular Muslim Religious Practices

DOI: 10.55512/wmo635222

Abstract: Armenian polemical literature with Muslims from the early modern Ottoman context is very scarce. Unlike in Safavid Persia, public debates were not encouraged in the Ottoman Empire. Official polemical treatises from the Armenian milieu are lacking; little has survived in the historiographies, neo-martyrological accounts, and poetry about how Miaphysite (non-Chalcedonian) Apostolic Armenians positioned themselves within the cohabitation system of Ottoman society. Even less has survived in Armenian sources about popular Muslim religious practices. Therefore, a brief account of this matter provided by the 17th c. Armenian Constantinopolitan historiographer Eremia K‘ēōmiwrchean acquires great importance. The present article aims to explore the information provided by Eremia on popular Muslim religious practices, not only because it is a rare material preserved in the Armenian sources but, most importantly, because it reveals the topics of religious debates between Christians and Ottoman Muslims in everyday life.

Key words: Muslim-Christian relations, popular religious practice, Eremia K‘ēōmiwrchean, Armenian polemical literature, Ottoman Empire, early modern period

1. Introduction

The passage on popular Muslim religious practices that this paper aims to discuss is found in a 17th c. polemical work written by a lay Armenian Apostolic (Miaphysite, non-Chalcedonian) historiographer and polemicist Eremia Ch‘elebi K‘ēōmiwrchean (1637–1695).¹ He was born in Constantin-

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¹ In the article we follow the transliteration/romanization table of the Library of Congress (LOC) <https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cps/romanization/armenian.pdf> (accessed 12.04.2024).

ople into a wealthy Armenian priestly family that set the tone in the city's Armenian community.² An eyewitness and ear-witness to the events and developments of the environment in which he lived, Eremia, as a historiographer, recorded his time period describing in detail the communal life of the Armenians in Constantinople and the Ottoman Empire in general.

It was the historical period when Armenia was divided between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires by the Treaty of Zuhab in 1638. Years before the Treaty, in 1603/4, many Armenians were expelled by Shah Abbas I (1588–1629) to Isfahan (New Julfa) in Persia, while the spiritual center of the Armenians, the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, remained in the eastern part of Armenia.³ In the Ottoman Empire, Constantinople became one of the most important cultural centers for Armenian communities in the Ottoman lands.⁴ Eremia K'ēōmiwrcean, an integral part of the city's multicultural fabric, devoted his time to documenting important events. Eremia is known for his historiographical work. Not a theologian himself, he also wrote inter-Christian polemical treatises, catechisms, and neo-martyrologies to address issues of extreme importance for inter-communal interactions in the second half of the 17th c. The environment in which Eremia lived was confessionally tense: Catholic missionaries were actively proselytizing among the Eastern Christian communities of the Ottoman Empire. Toward the end of the 17th c., the strategy of crypto-Catholic Armenian priests (graduates of the Urbanian College in Rome, who infiltrated Eastern Christian communities and formed a “Catholic nucleus,” as Timothy Ware⁵ called it) to win non-Chalcedonian Armenians to Catholicism became the main trend in the proselytizing project of Catholic missionaries. In one of his brief polemical pieces called *The Response with God's Help* (*Pataskhani Astutsov*), Eremia Ch'elebi introduced the questions of correct practice that might have been raised by such priests preaching clandestinely from the pulpits of the Armenian Apostolic churches in Constantinople, Bursa, Engür (Ankara), Izmir and other major cities of the Empire with large Armenian populations.⁶

² For Eremia's biography most recently see, AYVAZYAN 2014a. For the complete bibliography of Eremia's works see, AYVAZYAN 2014b: 349–398. See also, SHAPIRO 2022: 197–287.

³ For more on these events see, DAVRIZHETS'I 1990. BOURNOUTIAN 2005–2006.

⁴ For the Armenian community in Constantinople in the early 17th c. see, DARANAGHTS'I 1915; SHAPIRO 2022: 147–196.

⁵ WARE 1964: 17–23, 36–37.

⁶ [K'ēōmiwrcean], MS334, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, f. 146v. For the critical edition of the Armenian text and its English translation see, OHANJANYAN 2020: 49–68.

Speaking of the Catholic “innovations”, Eremia complained about crypto-Catholic priests who preached novel practices among the Armenians, attempting to “move the verses of the Psalms and the sermons back and forth... [they command] to say this and not that during the Divine Liturgy, or whether [it should be said] with raised or spread arms, or whether “Glory in the Highest” [should be sung] concordantly or voice by voice, or whether with a covered or uncovered head”.⁷ As an arch-orthodox Armenian Apostolic, Eremia wrote extensively on inter-confessional issues, especially, toward the end of his life, when the situation became more arid due to increased Catholic infiltration into the Armenian flock and the Sultan’s prohibition of Catholic proselytism among his Christian subjects in 1693.⁸

Interestingly, Eremia never wrote polemical works against Muslims or Islam, nor did he write anti-Qura’nic works.⁹ In his *Book of Histories* (*Girk’ patmabanut’eants’*), an unpublished work preserved in the unique manuscript in the Mekhitarist Library in Venice, he describes Muslims in harsh terms calling them “snakes... cunning and insidious”¹⁰ who, like “a vengeful mule,” “would kick when approached from behind and would bite when approached from the front”.¹¹ However, Eremia never wrote directly and specifically against Islam or the worship, customs, or popular religious practices and beliefs of Muslims. The only passage that provides a glimpse of Eremia’s, or, more broadly, Armenians’ views on Islamic popular religious practices as compared to that of Christian ones appears in his major polemical work written toward the end of his life, entitled *Apology of the Armenian Church* (*Jatagowut’iwn Hayastaneayts’ ekeghets’woy*).¹²

In the present paper, through contextualizing this rare textual passage, I attempt to analyze popular Muslim and, to some extent, Eastern Christian religious practices that went hand in hand and equally influenced and informed the multi-religious, multi-cultural environment of the 17th c. Constantinople.

⁷ OHANJANYAN 2020: 54, 66.

⁸ MOTRAYE 1723: 159, 393–394.

⁹ For the overview of the Armenian polemical literature with Muslims see, DADOYAN 2021.

¹⁰ K’ĒOMIWRCHENTS’, MS509, Mekhitarist Library, Venice, f. 235r.

¹¹ K’ĒOMIWRCHENTS’, MS509, Mekhitarist Library, Venice, f. 234v.

¹² The critical edition of this treatise is forthcoming in 2025.

2. The Treatise *Apology of the Armenian Church*

Eremia Ch'elebi's polemical work, the *Apology of the Armenian Church*, is one of the most important and hitherto overlooked texts from the period that introduces the cultural fabric of the late 17th c. Ottoman Constantinople and cross-communal interactions. Recently, I have discovered Eremia's autograph which is not catalogued. It is kept in the Mekhitarist Library in Venice, under the shelf-mark MS 621. To date, we have five copies of this work from Venice, Jerusalem, and Yerevan. Only two manuscripts bear the original title. In other manuscripts, the text appears under various titles, such as *Book of Questions* (*Girk' harts'mants'*, MS3699, St. James' Library, Jerusalem), or the provisional title *Polemics against Clemente Galano*¹³ and the *Book Shield of Faith* (*Girk' vichabanut'yan ěnddēm Kghēmesi Galanosi ev Vahan Hawatoy matenin*, MS1955, Matenadaran, Yerevan).¹⁴ The oldest copy (MS1841 (old. no. 317), dated by the cataloguer to 1695, is preserved in the library of the Armenian Catholic Mekhitarist Congregation of Venice. The cataloguer of the Armenian manuscript collection in Venice, Fr. Barsergh Sargisean, attributed it to another author and suggested a provisional title, *A Collection of Religious and Ritual Orations*.¹⁵ A close reading of the manuscript reveals that it is, in fact, the earliest copy and the refined version of Eremia's book. According to Eremia's autograph MS 621, Mekhitarist Library, Venice. The date of writing is 1694–1695. Eremia did not finish the

¹³ Clemente Galano a Teatine missionary to Armenia, Clemente Galano (1611–1666), who attempted to prove that the Armenian Apostolic Church used to be one with the Roman Catholic Church. Galano 1650, 1658, 1690.

¹⁴ The book *Shield of Faith* (*Vahan Hawatoy*) (not to confuse with Mekhitarist Father Mik'ael Ch'amch'ian's (1738–1823) treatise with the same title) was the colloquial name of the book of the Capuchin friar and a missionary to the Levant Justinien de Neuvy known also as Michel Febvre, Michele Febure. The actual name of the book was *Praecipuae objectiones quae vulgo solent fieri per modum interrogationis a Mahumeticae legis sectatoribus, Judaeis et haereticis Orientalibus adversus catholicos earumque solutiones* (Romae: Typis de Propaganda Fide, 1679). It was translated into Armenian in 1681 and published in Rome. Justinien spent most of his life in Aleppo (1664–1687). For more on him see, HEYBERGER 2017: 579–588.

¹⁵ MS1841 (old. no. 317), Mekhitarist Library, Venice. In the catalogue of Mekhitarist Library it is preserved under the name *Hawak'umn kronakan ew tsisakan charits'* [Collection of Religious and Ritual Orations], SARGISEAN 1924: 1296–1303.

A later hand changed the date in the catalogue to 1696 in pencil, perhaps to conceal the fact that this manuscript is the earliest copy of Eremia K'ēōmiwrchean, who died in 1695. However, even if the cataloguer tries to hide this fact (or not), he mentions that this work might even be an autograph of an unknown author.

book; he died in 1695, leaving some chapters incomplete or completely blank. In the pages of the book, he mentions that he was old: “And if this work of ours written in our old age, will be trampled upon according to their [i.e. Armenian Catholics] former manner, I hope in Christ, that I wrote it for the sake of God, and my work will not be ruined...”¹⁶ The incomplete chapters of the autograph are copied identically in all other copies. The chapters that the author left blank in his autograph are missing in other copies as well.

The *Apology of the Armenian Church* is fashioned in the form of questions and answers. The author addresses various questions, thirty to be exact, posed by well-to-do (crypto)Catholic and crypto-Protestant Armenian youth, to which he attempts to respond in colloquial language and in a more casual manner, using examples not only from the Scripture but also from everyday practices of and encounters with religious and confessional “others.” Most of the questions relate to the orthopraxy issues in the Armenian Church, such as the length of the Armenian Divine Liturgy, the rigorous abstinence during the Great Lent, the manner of giving the Kiss of Peace in the Armenian Church, the practice of blessing of grapes on the Feast of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary in the Armenian Church, the uselessness of pilgrimage to the holy sites and many other issues.¹⁷

The whole work is dedicated to inter-confessional and intra-Christian issues and does not necessarily reflect the accusations against Christian Armenians coming from the Muslims of the city. Interestingly, in the twentieth chapter, which discusses the accusations against the Armenians of idolatry because of their veneration of icons, for the first time Eremia Ch’elebi turns to the Muslims to describe their popular religious practices, such as the veneration of the imperial signature and the imperial banner with Muslim symbols on it, and equates them with the Christian veneration of the icons. His interlocutors are still Armenian Catholics (perhaps also Armenian Lutherans), but he mentions that since Catholics also venerate icons, and even more than Miaphysite Armenians, it seems to him that his interlocutors learned it not from Martin Luther and his followers, who did not accept icons and saints, but from contemporary Muslims who also rejected the veneration of icons.

The passage in which Eremia speaks of popular Muslim religious customs is a small but dense one written in the 17th c. colloquial Armenian with

¹⁶ MS1841 (old. no. 317), Mekhitarist Library, Venice, f. 27v.

¹⁷ The list of the debated questions is found in MS1841 (old. no. 317), Mekhitarist Library, Venice, ff. 2v–3r. MS 533, St. James’ Library, Jerusalem, ff. 103r–v.

admixture of Armeno-Turkish (Turkish written in Armenian script) words and expressions. It is worth noting that in the Eremia's autograph manuscript (MS 621, Mekhitarist Library, Venice, ff. 103v–104v) this passage is missing, but it is included in the refined version of this work, in the MS1841 (old. no. 317), Mekhitarist Library, Venice. From this brief passage, one learns that Eremia Ch'elebi had a first-hand information about popular Muslim worship, customs, and superstitions. As a Constantinopolitan Armenian from a well-connected wealthy family, he moved in the high society of the city. At the age of twelve, he began working in the family business — a bakery in the city market. In the same year, he began writing his *Diary* (*Öragrut'iwn*), a detailed, lengthy document about the life and condition of the Armenian community in Constantinople.¹⁸ The information he gives in his books should be considered credible, assuming he was an attentive person who meticulously documented everything. In the passage in question, he also mentions his trip to Jerusalem in 1665. We know that at the age of thirteen, he made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem between 1649 and 1650 with his custodian, a wealthy Armenian who owned bakeries in Constantinople, Mahtesi Ambakum (d. 1658), and his wife.¹⁹ In late 1664, however, Eremia traveled from Aleppo to Jerusalem and back to Constantinople, which he reached in 1665. He speaks of this trip in a brief passage on popular Muslim religious practices. The reason for Eremia's visit to Aleppo and Jerusalem was to persuade the Armenian Bishop Eghiazar Aynt'apets'i (1612–1691), who was Eremia's teacher and friend, to abandon his idea of establishing an anti-Catholicosate and to separate the Armenian communities under Ottoman jurisdiction from the Armenian spiritual center in Etchmiadzin.²⁰ Eremia failed to convince Eghiazar, but the latter eventually failed as well, since a decade after the death of the Armenian Catholicos in Etchmiadzin, Yakob Jughayets'i (1655–1680), Eghiazar was invited to become the Catholicos of all Armenians and was consecrated in 1681, thus ending the provocative anti-Catholicosate in Jerusalem. It was on his way to meet with Eghiazar that Eremia met the Capuchin friar and missionary to the Levant Justinien de Neuvy (1664–1687) in Aleppo in 1664 and engaged in polemics with him on the orthopraxy of the Armenian Church. They particularly polemicized on Clemente

¹⁸ K'ĒŌMIWRČEAN 1939. IVANOVA 2017: 239–260.

¹⁹ K'ĒŌMIWRČEAN 1939: 309–310.

²⁰ Eremia describes these events in his hitherto unpublished book *Taregrakan patmut'iwn* [Annals] see, EREMIAN 1902b: 474. SANJIAN 1965: 104–109.

Galano's seminal treatise against the Armenians. Eremia mentions this debate in his polemical work *Apology of the Armenian Church*.²¹ As noted above, the same polemical purpose was behind Eremia's passage in the *Apology* describing Muslim popular religious practices that he saw and heard in Constantinople and elsewhere in the Ottoman lands.

3. Muslim Popular Religious Practices through the Eyes of Eremia K'ēōmiwrchean

Eremia's method of discussing popular Muslim practices is to compare and equate the Christian veneration of icons with Muslim aniconism and the veneration of calligraphy and other objects of worship. Eremia's focus is not only on the objects of worship but also on the religious behavior of the worshippers. His point is that Christians do not worship icons but the saints depicted in them, seeing them as windows into divine reality. The veneration of divine things is also manifested through the human body by kissing or kneeling before the object through which divine reality shines, by touching it with the forehead, or by placing it on the head. This behavior is common to Jews, Christians, and Muslims.²² Eremia mentions that Muslims worship in this manner the *tughra* (seal and signature), the calligraphic emblem of the Arab, later Ottoman, rulers.²³ For the same reason, they worship silver and copper coins bearing the same emblem of the sultans.²⁴ In the same way, Eremia equates the worship of icons with the Muslim worship of Muhammad's handprint/signature (*pençe*). It is well known that in Ottoman diplomatic documents, the *pençe* was not only the print of Muhammad's hand but also a mark affixed to the margins of official documents issued by viziers and other higher officials from the Ottoman chancery.²⁵ It seems that because of the icons, Muslims accused Christians, including Armenians, of being idolaters (*putperest*), to which Eremia responds by pointing to the Muslim custom of venerating the crescent-painted banner (*sancak*) by praying to it with tears and trembling. To their contempt for the worship of the cross, Eremia responds by calling them to acknowledge their worship of Ali's two-

²¹ MS1841, Mekhitarist Library, Venice, f. 43r.

²² On shared popular religious practices see, CUFFEL 2024.

²³ For more on *tughra* see, *The Encyclopedia of Islam* 2000: 594–599.

²⁴ Some samples of such coins can be found in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* 2000, pl. XXVI.

²⁵ *The Encyclopedia of Islam* 1995: 293.

edged sword, called *Zulfiqar* or *Zilfiqar*, stamped on green flags, walls of houses and mosques.²⁶ He responds to the kissing of church doors by pointing out that Muslims kiss the leather cover of the Qur'an. All of Eremia's objections are framed so as to seem convincing to him, for he mentions at the end of his passage on Muslim practices that he has conversed with many Muslims and has made the same arguments to them many times.²⁷

Interestingly, in this small passage, Eremia speaks specifically about some Armenian Church customs and Ottoman manifestations of Islamic customs, but he also addresses pan-Christian worship practices and pan-Islamic objects of worship in general. However, some of his sentences are ambiguous. For instance, Eremia writes that Muslims called "us" water-worshippers, but it is not clear whether the pronoun "us" refers to Christians in general or to Armenians in particular. If "us" as water-worshippers referred to Christians, Eremia may have been alluding to Christians' visits to ayazmas (Gr. ἁγίασμα, holy spring) — a practice that was similarly popular among Muslims,²⁸ since ayazmas were shared places of worship and pilgrimage in the multi-cultural Ottoman society. If "us" referred specifically to Armenians, it may have been an allusion to the popular Armenian religious custom of "vardavar" (lit. feast of roses) on the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord, during which Armenians pour water on each other.²⁹ Whatever the case may be, Eremia did not elaborate more on this matter.

When talking about the Ottomans' behavior during natural disasters, Eremia takes the opportunity to share his own memories of the events, such as the fire of Constantinople in 1645. He was a nine-year-old boy when the fire engulfed the city and burned down the Armenian Church of St. Sargis. Eremia described watching the church burn and the tears rolling down the faces of his father and grandfather.³⁰ In this connection, he responds to the accusation of water worship by recalling an Ottoman practice related to Muhammad's mantle (*hırka*). According to him, when a fire broke out in the city, Muslims would soak the mantle in water, place it in a glass bowl

²⁶ For the various types of flags Eremia mentioned see, in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* 1986, Pl. XVIII.

²⁷ On conversations between Muslims and Christians about religion see, PFEIFER 2022: 133–165.

²⁸ K'ĒŌMIWRCHEAN 1913: 49. On water as a space of worship among Jews, Christians, Muslims see, CUFFEL 2024: 28–32.

²⁹ MARR 1905: 53–58. KHARATYAN-ARAKELYAN 2005: 201–226.

³⁰ EREMIAN 1902a: 368. AKINEAN 1933: 32. K'ĒŌMIWRCHEAN 1913: 141.

sealed by the Sultan's fingers, and a horseman would bring it and sprinkle it on the fire to extinguish it. It is also not clear which mantle of the Prophet Eremia mentions, *Hırka-i Şerif* or *Hırka-i Saâdet*.³¹ It may have been the *Hırka-i Saâdet*, which was kept in a golden box or case in the Topkapı Palace and was especially revered by the sultans as a symbol of the caliphate. Grand viziers took it on military campaigns, Ahmed I (d. 1617) took it with him wherever he went, and there were *Hırka-i Saâdet* processions in the palace during Ramadan as part of the ceremony to visit this holy relic.³² More importantly, Ahmed I started the practice of slightly dipping the mantle into a bowl and distributing the water among his close people.³³ There was also a custom of dipping one of the neck buttons of the mantle into rose water. This water, called the *Water of the Blessed Mantle* (*Hırka-ı Saâdet Suyu*), was believed to have medicinal and miraculous properties. Perhaps Eremia is referring to this water when he recalls the fire incident. Most likely, he was an eyewitness to this interesting practice, but remained unsatisfied because he thought it was highly superstitious and useless.³⁴

The last Muslim popular belief that Eremia compared with the Christian veneration of icons was the veneration of the Covering of Kaaba (*Kâbe örtüsü*). He reported that the Covering was designed and sewn in Constantinople and that he himself saw the crowd of thousands praying before it in 1665. In reality, they were praying to the name of Muhammad, which Eremia refrained from writing and instead wrote “the Unmentioned”. Indeed, the first embroidered golden row on the Covering mentions Allah’s two names “Merciful to servants” (*Ya Hannan*) and “Tremendous in giving” (*Ya Mannan*). Muhammad’s name is embroidered in gold in the second row, which reads that Muhammad is the Messenger of God. The idea that Eremia wanted to convey was that Muslims did not pray to the cloth but to the name,

³¹ *Hırka-i Şerif* is the Prophet Muhammad’s mantle, which he gave to Umar and Ali before his death to deliver to Uways al-Karani, who wanted to visit the Prophet but could not. This relic is kept in the special octagonal mosque in the Fatih district of Istanbul, named *Hırka-i Şerif Cami*.

³² *Hırka-i Saâdet* is the Prophet’s mantle that he gave as a gift to the poet Qa’b ibn Zubayr in return for the poem the latter recited when Muhammad embraced Islam.

³³ Nurhan Atasoy, “*Hırka-i Saâdet*”, *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/hirka-i-saadet> (accessed 11.08.2024).

³⁴ There were other fires in Constantinople. The one in 1660 is called the Great fire. See, BAER 2004: 159–81. For Eremia’s experience of this dreadful event see, *Patmut ’iwn* 1991; EREMIAN 1902a: 367–369.

seeing it as something that represented God and the Prophet Muhammad, just as Christians did not worship the images or icons but the one(s) that the images symbolized, that is, the Trinity, the saints, and the blessed ones.

The original Armenian text and its English translation, which I provide below, give a more complete picture and convey the discourse around Christian icons within the multi-cultural Ottoman society.

4. The Original Text and the Translation of the Passage from the *Apology of the Armenian Church*

a) Armenian original

[91ա] Քսաներորդ, որք ասեն, թէ զի՞նչ են սրբոց պատկերս յեկեղեցիս անօգուտ և անպատշաճ: Ահա զայս ուսեալ է ի տանկաց ասել ի մերում ժամանակիս: Քանզի ամենայն լատինացիք ունին զպատկերս սրբոց, զոր միթէ՞ ոչ տեսանեն ի Ղալաթեայ: Միթէ՞ Լուսէրն իցէ զայս ասողն, և բնաւ իսկ տանիկ: Արդ, լուր, ո՛վ նշտասէր, զի տանիկ հակառակ պատկերաց, և թէ տեսանեն զքուխտ մի անկաճ ի գետին, զայն վեր առնուն, և ոչ թէ միայն զբաժ քուխտ, այլ և անգիր ևս: Ինքեանք թեոմա՞հի պատկերաց և խէթիւսերիֆի քուղրային պատիւ առնեն: [91բ] Ինքեանք անարգեն զպատկերս և անխեղձայն փենչէին մեծարանս առնեն: Ինքեանք ներհակ պատկերաց, և զլուսնանկար ալէմն ամենուրեք արմա բարձարացուցանեն: Ինքեանք մեզ զծաղր առնելով՝ արհամարհեն վասն պատկերաց, և շորեղէն սանճաղին սալալաթ մատուցանեն: Ինքեանք զմեզ հայիոյեն պուրփէրէսդ ասելով, և յանուն քագաւորի կտրեալ արծաթ կամ պղինձ վերապատուեն: Ինքեանք ասեն՝ պատկերք ի դատաստանի ի պատկերահանացն հոգի պահանջեն, և ի տեսանել զսանճաղ անխեղձայն՝ վաղվադեալ լալով, դողալով յոտին կանգնեալ՝ երկիր պագանեն: Ինքեանք զխաչ արհամարհեն և զսուրն երկսայրի Մուրթուզայ Ալոյն պատիւ տան, և կանաչ շորով և չուխայիվ ի գլուխս վեր ամբառնան՝ ի նշան տանկութենէ իւրեանց, և յորմս տանց և մզկրաց և ի վեր դրանց նկարագրեն: Ինքեանք զսեկ գրեանց համբուրեն, զհամբոյր մեր ի դրունս եկեղեցւոյ կատակեն: Ինքեանք մեզ ջրապաշտ [92ա] ասեն, և յինքեանք զանխեղձայն խըրգան ի ջուր քացեալ, և լնուն յաման ապակի, կնքեալ մատամբ արբունի, առեալ սպասաւոր մի հեծեալ փութացուցանէ, յորժամ հրկիզուրին լինի ի քաղաքիս սրսկեն ի հուր, և այլ առաւել ևս բորբոքի: Ինքեանք զմեզ նախատեն, կատակեն վասն սրբոց պատկերաց, իսկ յորժամ տեսանեն զքեպէ օրթուսին, զրոհք բազմուցեանց դիմին ի տեսիլն աղաղաղելով ի մօտոյ և ի

հեռուստ' էլֆ, էլֆ սելավաթ գոչեն շարեղէն լաթերաց, որոյ վերայ գրեալ զանուն անյիշելոյն: Զոր Իստամպօլ ձեռեցին, կարեցին, և նոր ուղարկեն անդ ի Քէլպէ, և էլֆ, էլֆ, որք ի հեռուստ աղաղակեն, ես իսկ լուա և տեսի ի շամ ՌՃԺԴ. (1665) քիվն' յես դարձին իմ ի սուրբ Երուսաղեմայ հանդիպեալ: Եւ ընդ բազումս բազում անգամ խօսակցեալ այսպիսի պատասխանիս տուեալ եմ նոցա: Վասն որոյ զայս խոկացողք կամ ի բերան բերողք տանկաց առակերտեալք են, անմիտք և յանմտաց վարժեալք և ուսեալք, կոյրք և կուրաց հետևեալք, թերամիտ և թերահաւատք, անկատարք ընդ անկատարիս, զան գրաստական և գնան գրաստական:

b) English translation

[91r] Twentieth, to those who say, “What are the icons of saints in the churches — useless and improper?” Behold, in our time they have learned to say this from the Muslims (*tachkats'*), for all the Latins have icons of saints — do they not see [their icons] in Galata? Is it that [only] Luther says it, and the Muslims do not?

Now, listen, o truth-loving one, that Muslims are against icons, but if they see a piece of paper on the ground, they lift it up, and not only a written paper, but also an unwritten [one]. They are the enemies of icons, but they themselves honor the imperial signature of the Imperial Edict (*khēt'isherifi t'ughra*, Trk. *Hatt-ı Şerif-i tuğra*). [91v] They dishonor icons, but they themselves honor the claw/hand (*p'ēnch'ē*, Trk. *pençe*) of the Unmentioned (i.e. Muhammad).³⁵ They are against icons, but they themselves elevate the crescent-painted flag (*alēm* Trk. *alem*) everywhere as an emblem (*arma* Trk. *arma*). They despise us mocking [us] because of icons, but themselves say a prayer (*salavat'* Trk. *salavat*) to the banner (*sanjagh* Trk. *sancak*) made of cloth.³⁶ They blaspheme us calling idolaters (*put'p'ērēst'* Trk. *putperest*), but themselves venerate silver and copper [coins] cut in the name of the king. They say [that] because of the icons the iconographers' souls will be charged on doomsday, but when they see the banner (*sanjagh* Trk. *sancak*) of the Unmentioned, they worship it instantly crying and standing up in shiver. They despise the cross, but they themselves honor the two-edged sword of Murtazâ³⁷

³⁵ Refers to Muhammad's handprint/signature, honored among the Muslims as a relic.

³⁶ Here Eremia speaks about *Sanjak-i Şerif* (The Prophet's Banner).

³⁷ The name of Ali, meaning “reverend”.

Ali,³⁸ and [stamping it on] green cloth and drapery (*ch'ukha* Trk. *çuha*): they put it over their heads as a sign of their Muslimness, and they decorate [with the sign of Ali's sword] the walls of the houses and mosques. They are used to kissing the leather (*sek*) of the Scripture (i.e. Qur'an), but they make fun of our kissing the church doors. They call us water-worshippers [92r] while themselves soak the mantle (*kharga* Trk. *hırka*) of the Unmentioned³⁹ and put it [i.e. the water] into the glass vessel sealed by the imperial fingers. And a horseman servant hastens, takes it [i.e. the water] during a fire in the city to sprinkle it upon the fire [to extinguish it], but [because of that] the flames blaze even more. They scorn us, make fun of us because of the icons of saints, but when they see the *Covering of Kaaba* (*k'epē ort'usi* Trk. *Kâbe örtüsü*)⁴⁰, the crowd rushes towards it to view it, shouting from near and far, "[Have] thousands, thousands [times] mercy" (*ēlf, ēlf selavat* Trk. *elf, elf salavat*)⁴¹ they shout to the ragged cloth on which the name of the Unmentioned is written, which is cut and sewed in Istanbul, and then sent to Kaaba. And "thousands, thousands" (*elf*), those who shout from faraway. And I heard and I saw it one morning (*şam* or *akşam*) of the year 1665, catching [the glimpse of] it on my way from Jerusalem.

And many times, while conversing with many [Muslims], I have given them such answers. Therefore, those who think and speak like this have learned it from the Muslims (*tachkats'*). Ignorant followed by ignorant! Blind followed by blind! Crackbrains and skeptics, defectives [communicating] with defectives! They come brutish and go brutish!

³⁸ Here Eremia means Zulfaqar or Zulfiqar, which was the two-edged sword of Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. Zulfaqar was frequently depicted on Ottoman war flags, used mainly by the Janissaries and Ottoman cavalry in the 16th and 17th cc.

³⁹ Refers to Muhammad's mantle, that is *Hırka-i Şerif*, or *Hırka-i Saâdet* venerated as a relic.

⁴⁰ The Covering of the Kaaba, or *Kisve-i Şerif*. It is the fabric that covers the Kaaba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It is changed during Hajj, on the 9th day of the month of Zijian every year, according to the Islamic calendar. The cover with golden embroidered calligraphy inscriptions on it is black, woven from a silk fabric. It is manufactured from forty-seven strips of cloth.

⁴¹ Literally means "a thousand of prayers," but in Islamic tradition it is a prayer asking for the mercy of God.

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