Diplomacy, Communal Politics, and Religious Property Management: The Case of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the Early Mandate Period

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The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem might be regarded as the prime Christian institution in the Holy Land for multiple reasons. First, it has had a continuous historical presence in the city since the early days of the church; second, local Christians belonged to the Orthodox creed until the beginning of the nineteenth century, and third, it has praedominium (the predominant position) over the Holy Places. The patriarchate’s status as the central Christian institution is suggested at a symbolic level via the annual ritual of the Holy Fire, where the heads or representatives of the Oriental churches take the light from the Orthodox Patriarch on Holy Saturday. Despite its privileged position, the early Mandate period found the patriarchate in a critical state. The recent change in regime meant the threat of losing ground in relation to the other churches and was viewed by many within the patriarchate’s administration as an opportunity to change the balance of power. In particular, the Arab Orthodox congregation dynamically put forward its claims against the Greek religious establishment over the institution’s centralized and ethnocentric administrative structure, as well as the patriarchate’s management of its extensive religious properties.1 Taking into account the size of

the congregation,\textsuperscript{2} as well as its importance for social operations, this controversy had a political character and, as such, the role of the British administration in its development was crucial.

In the eyes of the Arab congregation, the Greek bureaucracy was the “out-group”; intruders who had usurped the Arab cultural legacy. This dispute was not simply viewed as an intercommunal issue, but more broadly as part of the national struggle for emancipation from foreign rule, both political and religious.\textsuperscript{3} ‘Issa al-‘Issa was editor of the newspaper Filastin, the most influential Arab newspaper in Mandatory Palestine particularly with regards to the anti-Zionist cause and the nation-building process.\textsuperscript{4} He plainly described the state of affairs: “It is true that Palestine is under two mandates, one the British and the other the Zionist, and it is true that the Orthodox community is under three mandates: the British, the Zionist, and, thirdly, the Greek.”\textsuperscript{5} The demands of the laity were for: a) the establishment of a mixed council for the administration of communal affairs, including finances; b) free admission of the Arabs to the hierarchy; and c) substantial participation of the laity in patriarchal elections.\textsuperscript{6}

The Greek establishment viewed these demands as a Trojan horse for the gradual deconstruction of the allegedly Greek national character of the institution. This idea was based on the ethno-phyletist narrative of ellinorthodoxia,
that is, the equation of Orthodoxy with the Greek “Royal Race.” It claimed that all Orthodox patriarchates should remain in Greek hands and be ruled by or have a privileged relationship with the Greek state. Other nations’ claims over the shared religious tradition were treated as an attempt to corrupt religious authenticity. For the practical implementation of ellinorthodoxia, Athens protected all Greek-dominated institutions diplomatically, supported them financially, intervened in their administrative affairs, and had a say in the election of their senior officials. However, the control Athens held over these institutions was limited due to its dependency on the Great Powers, which exercised colonial rule over many countries of the Middle East. Since the beginning of the Mandate, Greece had endeavored to intervene in patriarchal affairs, but in such a way as to not offend the British, who backed Athens’ territorial claims over Eastern Thrace and Asia Minor.

British policy in relation to the Christian communities was determined by the administration’s colonial objectives. The end of Ottoman rule and the subsequent regime change fueled Catholic hopes for a change in the modus operandi of the custodianship of the Holy Places, which had been regulated according to the Status Quo agreement. The British viewed the question as a constant source of interreligious conflict that could potentially open a kind of wineskin of Aeolus, allowing continuous interference by European powers, notably France, in the affairs of the new British “colony.” Therefore, maintaining the Status Quo at any cost was vital to British interests. Despite the fear of conflict, the British administration decided to draw from its colonial experience in India in adopting the divide and rule strategy, in order to prepare the ground for the implementation of the Balfour Declaration. In the case of the Christian communities, this doctrine meant maintaining the Ottoman communitarian

8 Konstantinos Papastathis, “Secularizing the Sacred: The Orthodox Church of Jerusalem as a Representative of Greek Nationalism in the Holy Land,” in Modern Greek Studies Yearbook 30–31 (2016).
9 In this context, the “Status Quo” is generally defined as “the arrangements existing in 1852 which corresponded to the Status Quo of 1757 as to the rights and privileges of the Christian communities officiating in the Holy Places.” Further, these rights and privileges “have to be most meticulously observed, and what each rite practiced at that time in the way of public worship, decorations of altars and shrines, use of lamps, candelabra, tapestry and pictures, and in the exercise of the most minute acts of ownership and usage has to remain unaltered.” (Lionel George Archer Cust, The Status Quo in the Holy Places (1929, repr. Jerusalem: Ariel Publishing, 1980)), 11.
pattern of social operation, that is, the millet system. As a matter of policy, the Palestinian Arab body was not treated as a unified collective group. The political representation of its interests was not recognized on a national basis, but rather on a sectarian one. Within this context, the British had to mitigate the reactions of the indigenous population as a means of stabilizing their rule, that is, they needed to accommodate Arab requests to the best of their ability.

New Archival Material

The chapter deals directly with the normative framework regulating the institutional status of the patriarchate. As such, the vast majority of the records used in its research are legal documents and political texts (civil law, diplomatic reports, and correspondence, etc.) written in English and Ottoman Turkish, which were the official state languages, or in Greek, which was the working language of the institution. Documents in Greek include church law and diplomatic reports and correspondence. The sources are extracted from published collections of documents, from the British National Archives, the Greek Foreign Ministry, and the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. They are of great value because they reflect the policy-making of three major players in the affair under discussion. The British had the political power and thus the capability of controlling the land market; the patriarchate was one of the biggest private landowners in the region, a part of whose properties were actually sold or leased; and Athens controlled part of the religious establishment and considered the patriarchate to be a Greek institution bound to adhere to the directions of the Greek state.

The files studied contain archival material, which reveals the views and actions of all parties involved, including the Jewish Agency and the Arab Orthodox congregation. Research with a clearer focus on the Palestinian and


Jewish sources would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the affair, but time, language, and space constraints make this impossible here. Material from the patriarchate is extremely understudied, and with the exception of works by Sotirios Roussos and the author, little attention has been paid to the archives of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Scholars such as Daphne Tsimhoni, Itamar Katz, and Ruth Kark have conducted research in the British Public Record Office regarding the Orthodox Church in Jerusalem. However, none of them have focused on the specific property sales under discussion here.

This chapter suggests that the British administration managed to control the financial affairs of the patriarchate and to sell its land to the Jewish Agency at the expense of the Arab Orthodox population, without putting public order at risk. This affair should be examined in the context of colonialism and the nationalization process given its direct relation both to the Status Quo question and to the dispute between the Greek hierarchy and the Arab congregation with regard to the process of laicizing the church administration.

The chapter is divided into three main parts. The first part is a discussion of church land acquisition and administration; the second part deals with the state policy in relation to religious real estate, and the third part analyzes real estate management in relation to domestic political considerations as well as to diplomatic priorities of the key internal and external players involved, namely the Brotherhood, the Arab Orthodox, the British authorities, and the Greek government.

The Patriarchate’s Administration of Real Estate: A Powerful Lever

The purchase of land in Palestine by the patriarchate served two main purposes: the acquisition of properties for its own use and in order to assert dominance over other denominations in areas of religious significance. The expropriation of properties by Prince Alexandru Cuza in Wallachia (1863) and in Greece

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12 Sotirios Roussos, “Greece and the Arab Middle East: The Greek Orthodox Communities in Egypt, Palestine and Syria, 1919–1940” (PhD diss., SOAS, University of London, 1994).
immediately after its independence, or the blocking of the flow of revenues from the Bessarabia estates because of the Russo-Turkish wars were also factors influencing land acquisition in Palestine. Having property at its disposal allowed the patriarchate to further develop its social work (charity and education) as well as reduce conversions of the native Orthodox population to other denominations.

The patriarchate acquired its properties by exploiting the favorable Ottoman legal framework that applied to land acquisition and administration. According to this framework, the patriarchate could not own private property, but only waqf, that is, pious endowments donated for charitable purposes for the benefit of the “poor,” and typically administered by a religious institution or family trustees. As Kermeli has argued, the church-monastery waqf could only belong to the subcategory of family waqf. In this regard, it should be noted that the patriarchate was structured institutionally as a monastic brotherhood. This status was directly linked to property management: the upper hierarchy could block communal claims to coadminister the waqf properties since the law stipulated that the well-being of the “poor monks” and/or pilgrims was the waqf’s main concern. Thus, various Ottoman legal decrees such as firmans, orders, berats and church regulations designated the patriarch, and mútevellî (administrator-curators of the endowments) as the only competent authorities to manage the waqf properties.

The purchased properties were both urban and rural. As James Finn, the British consul in Jerusalem (1846–63), noted: “besides maintaining without diminution its ancient property, ... [the patriarchate] has for several years past pursued a scheme of buying up houses, or shops, or waste ground, or even fractions (kirfits [sic] or twenty-fourth parts) of such properties all over the

15 Katz and Kark, “The Church and Landed Property.”
city indiscriminately, till it is believed that more than a quarter of the whole [within the city walls] has come into their hands as free-hold purchase.\textsuperscript{20} Moreover, certain patriarchal officials, such as Archimandrite Nikiforos or Priest Benjamin, proceeded to make large acquisitions of properties outside the walls of Jerusalem (for example in present-day Rehavia, Talpiyot, Katamon, the Mount of Olives), which were further improved through plantation and cultivation. In the early 1920s, the patriarchate had become the trustee of vast plots of real estate, estimated at about 631 properties.\textsuperscript{21} According to Tamari, the patriarchal waqf together with the Russian land endowments were more numerous than “Muslim, Jewish and Catholic endowments put together.”\textsuperscript{22} Katz and Kark identified 355 of these properties, of which 176 alone covered an estimated 36,779 metric dunams (one dunam is equal to 1,000 square meters).\textsuperscript{23} Of the total area of 900 dunams in the Old City of Jerusalem, 317 dunams belonged to the patriarchate.\textsuperscript{24}

The British Financial Commission: An Ambiguous Intermediary

In 1920, the patriarchal debt amounted to 500,000 Egyptian pounds (\textit{L.E}) (\textit{L.E} 1 equaled £1), which led to the institution of the threshold of bankruptcy.\textsuperscript{25} Patriarchal debt had risen as a result of several main developments; the flow of pilgrims to Jerusalem had waned during the World War I, Russian support had ceased after the October Revolution, and poor administration and endemic corruption had led to the borrowing of large sums on high interest rates. Revenues could cover neither the principal nor the interest on the loans, and the patriarchal property was under moratorium and facing being confiscated.

In this state of affairs, Patriarch Damianos considered the sale of real estate to be the only effective measure as contracting a new loan in order to settle the debt would probably add to the financial burden of the church.

\textsuperscript{22} Tamari, “Issa al Issa’s Unorthodox Orthodoxy,” 21.
\textsuperscript{23} Katz and Kark, “The Church and Landed Property,” 385.
Selling properties outside of the city walls, situated in today’s western Jerusalem, served three purposes. First, sales would neutralize Arab Orthodox demands for the coadministration of the institution. Since land management and the revenue it generated were said to fuel the congregation’s opposition, the sale of properties would lead to reduced Arab interest in questioning Greek authority. Secondly, Damianos estimated that the income from these sales would be sufficient to pay the debt as well as to maintain a bank reserve, which would provide annual interest covering the basic needs and liabilities of the patriarchate. Last but not least, he was concerned about the new city planning regime, according to which the patriarchal agricultural holdings would become urban plots, thus increasing the burden of land taxes.  

Following this line of thought, Damianos made a provisional agreement with the Jewish-owned Palestinian Land Development Company (PLDC) for the sale of a large portion of the Nikiforia estate, where the Talpiyot neighborhood was created. Moreover, the synod authorized the sale of a large property in Jaffa Market as well as the rest of the agricultural properties in Jerusalem. However, High Commissioner Herbert Samuel did not approve Damianos’ plans, which were in any case inaccurate. The mandatory authorities decided instead to manage the sale of immovable property themselves. Indeed, the Orthodox Patriarchate Ordinance of 1921 stipulated the appointment of a commission for the liquidation of debts that would have full control over the patriarchal finances. Specifically, the commissioners would decide on the management of all properties and their revenues, and would have the right to sell real estate or contract loans and assume the direct administration of any department, property, or operation of the patriarchate. In short, the British could decide for the institution without its consent and enjoy immunity for their actions. By gaining financial control, they acquired power over the Jerusalem Orthodox Church. The commission’s operation under this colonialist normative framework was not founded solely on an orientalist line of thought, but was also fueled by British cautiousness towards Damianos, who had been accused by his fellow clerics of maladministration, and, worse, for expropriating patriarchal revenues for personal use. The British were well-informed of various real estate transactions such as the renewal of leases in Jerusalem at a very low

26 Historical and diplomatic archive of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AYE)/43/1, “Patriarch Damianos to Mavroudis, Head of the 2nd Political Department of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” October 12, 1920.
27 Papastathis, “Church Finances in the Colonial Age.”
price\textsuperscript{29} and the “giveaway” of valuable assets in Bethlehem\textsuperscript{30} and in Crete.\textsuperscript{31} British suspicions about Damianos’ credibility were confirmed when on the date of the commission’s establishment, Damianos contracted an overdraft from the French bank Crédit Lyonnais. The amount was LE 32,075 and it bore an interest rate of 7 percent compounded quarterly, which raised the patriarchal debt even higher.\textsuperscript{32}

The sale was not cancelled, but merely postponed until the commission’s establishment so that it could control the sum of money.\textsuperscript{33} In principle, the commission did not oppose the sale of land to a Zionist organization. Given their strong financial position, the Jews were at that time the main group who were both interested in acquiring land and able to afford it. The underlying problem was that such a transaction carried the risk of dislodging the existing residents, triggering an Arab protest. Therefore, the commission asked for assurances that the rights of tenants and lessees would be respected, as well as those of the occupants of houses, who were entitled to free accommodation by virtue of their being parish priests. Before the settlement of these claims, the transfer could not be allowed.\textsuperscript{34} To this end, the commission’s chairman, J. B. Barron, communicated to the president of the PLDC, Dr. Jacob Thon, that the ratification of the sale was subject to the following amendments: a) the encashment had to be credited to the account of the commission; b) the purchase price had to be settled in cash, not by bills, notes of hand, or other forms of negotiable paper issued in the past by the patriarchate; and c) any existing contract between the patriarchate and the tenants or lessees had to be respected.\textsuperscript{35}

The names and the sizes of the plots within Jerusalem (Talpiyot area) that were sold are provided in table 11.1. Together with these properties, some other
plots of land (Janzir and Fuga; Marj Sarqui and Marj Charbi) were sold to the PLDC. The agreed price for all of the land amounted to LE 206,115.99, and was to be paid in installments.\textsuperscript{36} It was decided that not all of the properties were to be urban properties, that is, within the city walls, or estates attached to Holy Places or Orthodox monasteries and churches. This is why the great majority of the properties on lease status were agricultural land parcels.\textsuperscript{37} In 1920, when the patriarchate began negotiations, the price for these estates had been fixed at LE 500,000, payable in cash, and a year later the price was reduced to LE 300,000.\textsuperscript{38} Due to “felonious interventions from outside and inside the patriarchate,”\textsuperscript{39} as well as to the attitude of the purchaser, who took advantage of the patriarchate’s urgent financial problem, the price was further reduced.\textsuperscript{40} The commission finally changed the terms of the transaction, namely the rate and time period of the six installments.\textsuperscript{41} The overall amount received from the sale of land during the first year of the commission’s operation was estimated to have reached LE 57,837.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{AYE/B/35/4}, Jerusalem (1924), “Report of the Commissioners on the Finances of the Orthodox Patriarchate for the Six Months ended August 31, 1923.”

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{AYE, 2nd Department, File Jerusalem 1, “Antonios Spiliotopoulos’ Report concerning the current state of affairs in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Convent of the Holy Sepulchre to the Council of the Holy Sepulchre Association,” Athens, April 20, 1929.}

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{AYE/48/4: Palestine Mandate – Patriarchate of Jerusalem, “Greek Consul in Jerusalem to the Greek Foreign Office,” no. 496, August 15, 1928.}

\textsuperscript{39} These “interventions” referred to the mistaken appropriation by the government of patriarchal land close to Jaffa Gate (32,000 square pics). This dispute had its roots in Ottoman times. In 1910, the patriarchate made this part of Nikiforia available to the mutessarif of Jerusalem on the condition that it would be used only for the erection of governmental offices. Although the patriarchal condition was rejected, thus rendering the gift void, the mutessarif proceeded to the registration of the area as governmental land. This registration, despite the Ottomans not gaining possession of the land at any time, was the reason why the commission mistakenly excluded this plot from the sale to the PLDC (\textit{TNA: CO 733/151/15, “Dispute between the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Government of Palestine in regard to a plot of Land forming part of the Nikiforieh Property”).

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Alexandreia, no 2, June 1924 (AYE/B/35/4: Jerusalem (1924)).}

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{AYE/B/35/4: Jerusalem (1924), “Report of the Commissioners on the Finances of the Orthodox Patriarchate for the Financial Year ended August 31, 1922.”}

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{TNA: CO 733/200/4, “Report on the Finances of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem for the Financial Year, 1926–1927.”}
## Table 11.1  
*Land sold to the PLDC*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Area in sq. pics (approximately 0.574 sq. meters)</th>
<th>Equivalent in acres</th>
<th>Equivalent in dunams</th>
<th>Price per sq. pic (LE)</th>
<th>Total value (LE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthimos</td>
<td>32,289</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>20.32</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>64,578.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antiochos</td>
<td>30,378.8</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>19.12</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>60,757.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrysanthos and Nektarios</td>
<td>22,456.5</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>14.11</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>16,842.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourra</td>
<td>22,652.2</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>22.40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>16,326.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>107,776.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>17.12</strong></td>
<td><strong>75.95</strong></td>
<td><strong>525</strong></td>
<td><strong>158,504.08</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


However, the PLDC did not adhere to the terms of their agreement and asked for an extension in order to complete the payment.43 This request was granted by the commission, and in accordance with the agreement made in June 1923, the company undertook to bring the payments made by December 31, 1923, up to the sum of LE 99,115.99, and to submit by the same date new and better proposals for the liquidation of the balance of LE 107,000.44 The interest on the overdue payments was reckoned at the rate of 6.5 percent.45 Another important aspect of the affair is that the members of the Arab Orthodox Congress in Haifa (July 1923), which represented a great majority of the lay community, declared their confidence in the financial commission and requested its extension, in spite of the sales of land to the PLDC.46 Throughout the 1920s, a large part of the Nikiforia estate was gradually sold or leased piece by piece to various

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44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Bertram and Young, 275–76.
Moreover, during the same period other plots of land outside of the city walls (for example, on King George Avenue, King David Street, Rehavia) were sold on very bad terms. In light of this, the patriarchate accused the commission of maladministration, renounced its decisions, and demanded its disestablishment. Furthermore, the commission was responsible for the surrender of patriarchal land to the municipality, without compensation, for the construction of new roads on King George Avenue and Talbieh Road, as well as for the widening of existing roads such as West Nikiforia road, Birkat al-Sultan Road, Harririeh Road, and Lower Janzier Road. The aggregate value of the plots taken amounted to LE 30,176.89. During the 1930s, the patriarchate leased 122 dunams in the Rehavia quarter to the Jewish National Fund (JNF), as well as 67 dunams in the Mamilla commercial district and Ben-Yehuda Street. After the partition of Palestine, under heavy pressure and facing the threat of having its properties confiscated by the State of Israel as allegedly “abandoned property,” the patriarchate leased another 509 dunams located on Talbieh Road and in Rehavia to the JNF “for much less than their market value.” Israel further developed the policy of leasing church-owned land after the 1967 War by exploiting the patriarchate’s fear of losing its rights over the Holy Places.


50 TNA: CO 733/142/16, “Attorney General N. Bentwich to the Chief Secretary: Claim by the Orthodox Patriarchate against Jerusalem Municipality,” October 22, 1926.


British Policy on Church Land Administration and the Greek Proposal

In 1919, the Greek government offered a loan to cover the patriarchate's debt. The Greek loan would allow the patriarchate to pay all its dues without either losing its property or putting the institution under extreme financial pressure. For over twenty years, the clergy had been in a very poor state;\(^\text{54}\) church buildings could not be renovated without external funding\(^\text{55}\) and many church-funded schools were closed down. The major conditions put forward by the Greek government for the loan were the deposition of Patriarch Damianos, who was considered pro-Arab, and the enactment of new regulations that would allow the election of a patriarch with ties to Athens. The British were aware of the Greek plans, and according to Athens' diplomatic representative in Jerusalem, Georgios Tzormpatzoglou, British high officials such as the military governor of Jerusalem, Ronald Storrs, were not against the implementation of these regulations.\(^\text{56}\) However, after Damianos' refusal to resign, Athens backed out, requesting that the patriarch never act "without the knowledge and approval of the local representative of the Greek government, to the orders of which [Damianos] had from now on to adapt his administrative policy. The patriarchate should become a dependency of the Consulate."\(^\text{57}\) Another important condition was the mortgaging of the entire ecclesiastical property to the Greek state.\(^\text{58}\) However, the Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, refused the Greek loan\(^\text{59}\) despite the fact that the financial advisor to the Palestine government, Colonel Gabriel, "expressed himself in full agreement with the representative of the National Bank of Greece."\(^\text{60}\) The British therefore decided instead

\(^{54}\) AYE, 2nd Department, File 57.1: League of Nations Mandate for Palestine and Patriarchate of Jerusalem, "Greek Consul in Jerusalem to the Greek Foreign Office," no. 77, March 1, 1927.

\(^{55}\) AYE, 2nd Department, File Jerusalem 1, "Antonios Spiliotopoulos' Report concerning the current state of affairs in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Convent of the Holy Sepulchre to the Council of the Holy Sepulchre Association," Athens, April 20, 1929.

\(^{56}\) AYE/43/3 (1920): "Tzorbatzoglou to the Greek Foreign Office," no. 11629, November 14, 1919.

\(^{57}\) AYE/43/4 (1920): "Statement of the General Consul of Greece in Jerusalem Mr. G. Tzorbatzoglou conveyed to His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Mr. Damianos by Archimandrite Epiphanios, Secretary of the Holy Synod."


\(^{59}\) TNA: T 1/12483, "J. Tilley to the Secretary of the Treasury," no. 17753/M.E. 44.A., February 12, 1920.

\(^{60}\) TNA: FO 371/4240, "Greek Ambassador (D. Caclamanos) to Curzon of Kedleston," no. 4907, December 2, 1919.
to rule the patriarchate themselves via the creation of the financial commission that took full control over the management.

The question that reasonably arises is why the patriarchal bureaucracy accepted the restriction of its powers and competencies to a minimum, conceding financial management to the commission. First and foremost, the patriarchal debt was under moratorium, and the danger of the latter’s revocation was evident. In the event of this, the patriarchate would lose all of its immovable property, and thus would cede its ability to perform its religious and social mission. Such a state of affairs would inevitably threaten the cohesion of the church and obstruct the clergy from performing their duties in the Holy Places. On the other hand, the dominance of Damianos and his apparatus within the brotherhood was still contested by a significant opposing faction that had important links to the Greek political and religious power networks. The support eventually given to Damianos by the British would have been put at risk had he not consented to their plans. In other words, it was a give-and-take agreement through which Damianos consolidated his authority within the church in return for accepting the government’s proposal. The fact that Damianos opposed the commission later should not be read as a sign of disingenuousness, but should rather be attributed to the commission’s policy of blocking him from any access to patriarchal revenues. In any case, as early as 1923, Damianos had eliminated all dissenting voices within the patriarchate and thus was no longer as reliant on the British for securing his rule.

Two interconnected factors influenced British policy for establishing the commission: the Status Quo of the Holy Places and the dispute within the Orthodox community between the Greek hierarchy and the Arab laity. In particular, the acceptance of the Greek loan would have diminished the role of the British government as the diplomatic patron of the Orthodox Patriarchate, in favor of Communist Russia, as Lloyd George himself had proclaimed at the San Remo Conference (April 1920). The new administration’s image would have suffered could it not support an important religious institution under its protection and had to accept Greek support. More importantly, it would have been an additional argument for the French government to preserve its traditional status as the diplomatic protector of the Catholic community within the Ottoman Empire under the capitulation regime, the abolition of which was a prime aim of London. At that time, negotiations between the Great Powers

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61 *AYE* /29/1, “Greek Consul General in Jerusalem to the Greek Foreign Office,” no. 129, April 22, 1921.

concerning the operation of the mandate were at a standstill due to disagreement on the structure and competencies of the future commission responsible for the Holy Places. A Greek hold over the patriarchate with blessings from the British would have meant the emergence of a new actor in the religious power plays within Palestine, signifying a change in circumstances regarding the administration of the Holy Places. This alteration, however, instead of breaking the traditional state of affairs (that is, each community should be under the protection of a state power), would have effectively led to its maintenance. Instead of restructuring the Status Quo agreement in line with the postwar political landscape, the acceptance of the Greek initiative would have resulted in the reproduction of the antebellum institutional framework as defined in the Berlin Treaty (1878), making room for other states to claim protective rights over their nationals as well. The British did not intend to open a Pandora’s box but rather to eliminate the specter of other states’ presence in Palestinian affairs.

Had the British accepted the Greek loan, the patriarchate would have become, in practice, an institution under the absolute control of Athens. In turn, Arab Orthodox reactions would have triggered a highly unwelcome development in a time of extreme social unrest directed against the administration (for example, the Nabi-Musa Riots of 1920 and the Riots of May 1921). For the British authorities, safeguarding public order was the key to stabilizing power. More importantly, the British handling of the affair should be interpreted within the context of the strategy, mentioned earlier, of further developing existing internal divisions within the society. Society was not seen as a coherent collective body, but as a summation of distinct entities differentiated from each other along sectarian lines. By allowing Athens to take full control of the patriarchate, the British would have instead given a further boost to the close identification between the Arab Orthodox and Muslim communities. In other words, it was in their best interest to support the cause of the congregation, whose elite members played an important role in domestic politics


and actively participated in the national struggle. This way, the Arab Orthodox would be more likely to adopt a more compliant stance towards their rule. Rejecting the Greek offer was therefore imperative because it contributed to the creation of an image of the British as a guarantor of the legitimate rights of the Arab Orthodox, who would then have nothing to fear from the application of the Balfour Declaration.\footnote{Konstantinos Papastathis, “To keno exousias sto Patriarcheio Ierosolymon, 1917–1918” [The power vacuum within the Orthodox patriarchate of Jerusalem, 1917–1918], Historica 51 (2009): 364–66.} In conjunction to this, the possibility of an Arab Christian uprising would be another significant argument for the French to maintain their privileges established in the Status Quo agreement, hence disputing the absolute dominance of the British in the region.

Concluding Remarks: Between Political and Financial Issues

From a political perspective, the British established the commission due to the political significance of the financial management of the patriarchate’s immovable property at the time of Jewish expansion in Palestine. In the event that the commission had not been formed, after the rejection of Athens’ offer of a loan, the patriarchate would have had two options: either declare bankruptcy or proceed to the sale of its real estate. The first option would signify the loss of every single patriarchal property, which would have to be ceded to the creditors. In that case, the Zionist immigrants at the time of the third aliyah (1918–23) would have missed the opportunity to purchase land, a part of which was in the symbolic center of their community, Jerusalem. It should be noted that in 1918, Jewish organizations had begun buying portions of the debt in order to demand the foreclosure of the mortgaged properties after the end of the moratorium.\footnote{AYE /B/35 (g), Special File Jerusalem, Mission of K. Korizis, “Greek Consul in Alexandria to the Greek Foreign Office”; File B/35 (g), Special File Jerusalem, Mission of K. Korizis, “London Embassy to the Greek Foreign Office,” no. 5757, July 27, 1918.} The value of the promissory notes acquired was estimated to be between LE 150,000 and 200,000.\footnote{AYE /42/4, “Greek Consul General in Jerusalem to the Greek Foreign Office,” no. 268, July 8, 1921.} However, this assessment was far from accurate. The debt purchased was rather small in comparison to the portfolio of the other creditors, who amounted to 1,900 individuals and institutions.\footnote{TNA: T 161/269, “Report of the Commission on the Finances of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem together with the Statements of the Accounts as at the 13 of March, 1926, Appendix VII” (attached to the Dispatch of F. M. Plummer to L. Amery), May 12, 1926.} The second option for the patriarchate would have been the
direct sale of extended tracts of land to the Zionist Commission. The British Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, had already rejected this idea, however.\textsuperscript{70} Taking into account the national claims of the Arab population, as well as the congregation's reactions against any transaction without its consent, the sale of real estate had to be controlled so as to avoid social unrest. The establishment of the financial commission was therefore a necessary measure. It facilitated the recovery of land for the Zionists and secured necessary funding for the settlement of the patriarchal debt. In addition, it controlled transactions by not allowing sales of extended land estates and diminished the possibility of further Arab upheaval against the government. In this regard, the struggle of the Orthodox laity against the Greek hierarchy should not be underestimated. As Angelos Anninos pointed out, looking back at his service as the Greek consul in Jerusalem (1921–22) where he closely followed patriarchal affairs, the British would have never given away the financial management and control of patriarchal real estate transactions. These elements had been the key to British dominance over both the hierarchy and the lay community, since the dispute between them remained closely tied to patriarchal assets and the distribution of the revenues therefrom.\textsuperscript{71} Disturbing the financial balance would have meant surrendering a degree of power, a move the British were not willing to make.

\textsuperscript{70} TNA: T 1/12483, “J. Tilley to the Secretary of the Treasury,” no. 177153/M.E. 44.A., February 12, 1920.

\textsuperscript{71} AYE/42/4, “Greek Consul in Jerusalem to the Greek Foreign Office,” no. 241, June 23, 1921.