

The Language of Interaction between Muslim and Orthodox Christian Intellectuals: Correspondence of Chrysanthos Notaras

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While the Ottoman scholarship is overwhelmed by statements that showcase the religious, linguistic, and ethnic diversity of the Ottoman society, the language that enabled the interaction of these diverse groups has suffered from lack of interest. This lack of interest is particularly striking as far as the interaction between Muslim and Christian intellectuals connected to several bases of power are concerned. While the more official sources such as the documents produced by the imperial or the ecclesiastical chanceries are often silent on this issue, more personal sources such as letters portray a lively picture of transcultural interaction between Ottoman Muslim and Orthodox Christian intellectuals. This paper relies on private correspondence of the patriarchs of Jerusalem in the archives of the metochion of the Holy Sepulchre, currently preserved in the National Library of Greece. Comprising mostly of the correspondence between the patriarchs of Jerusalem and several influential Orthodox men of power such as the Phanariot lay elites, these funds also contain some letters written by or to several Muslim intellectuals who also occupied positions of power. Focusing on some letters written in Greek and Turkish among the documents of Chrysanthos Notaras, the patriarch of Jerusalem (1707-1731), this paper has three major aims. First, it lays out the language adopted by the correspondents and discusses whether we can talk about a common Ottoman language of transcultural interaction. Second, it discusses the relationship between the power and knowledge that these intellectuals possessed. Third, it asks the question of whether interaction of the aforementioned intellectuals facilitated projects with regard to the formation and circulation of knowledge through translation and printing activities in the Ottoman Empire.