

The making of corporate bodies in the late Ottoman Empire: Law, property and Greek communal institutions in Istanbul

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Abstract

Greek Orthodox communities were part of a major drive towards modern institutionalization in the late Ottoman Empire. Many of them established churches, schools, and philanthropic associations, contributing to a transformation of the institutional landscape of the empire's towns in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Focusing on Istanbul, this paper traces how this development was shaped on the legal level to explore the ways in which non-Muslim corporate bodies integrated into the Ottoman framework and the challenges associated with this integration. It follows this development over the management of communal property which emerged as a defining platform on which corporate bodies were tangibly formed and their connection to the legal sphere was played out. The paper delineates the layers of this connection with regard to both the buildings of these institutions and their revenue-bringing properties. Engaging in a comparative examination of communal administrative mechanisms and the Ottoman legal system, the paper follows the intricate trajectories regarding the making of communal corporate bodies in a modernizing empire.

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