

A nineteenth-century Ottoman firman issued to the Greek-Orthodox Millet of Dūma al-Shām by Zeina Matar & Ingrid Heck

INTRODUCTION

Description of the Firman

The document which we are presenting here is the second of two Ottoman Firmans purchased in a Damascus souvenir shop about ten years ago¹. The firman, in this case a *hüküm*², is written on paper and dated 1308 H./1890 A.D. It is reasonably well-preserved, and the text has not been corrupted by disintegrating or torn paper, or fading ink.

The gold pounce on the Sultan's cypher or *tughra* has mostly disappeared, but traces of it are still discernible. The invocation to God, or *huwa*, is written at the top of the firman, above the *tughra* of Sultan Abdülhamid II. The measurements of the firman are 79 x 58 cm and the reproduction given here is reduced. The text consists of nine and a half lines written on the recto side. The verso side shows six annotations which appear to be various signatures. The subject matter of the document is briefly described in a later addition and reads as follows: '1308 Firman for the building of a church for our millet in Ma'rūna in the caza of Dūma al-Shām'.

The Vilayet of Syria

This firman was issued during the reign of the 36th Ottoman Sultan, Abdülhamid II, who succeeded to the throne in 1293 H./1876 A.D. and was subsequently deposed in 1327 H./1909 A.D. He is remembered for his absolutism and for the pan-Islamism which characterized his reign, but even more for the promulgation, by a *Hatt-i Hümayun* in 1293 H./1876 A.D., of the first constitution which instituted a two-chamber parliamentary system in the Ottoman Empire³.

Prior to the constitution, the era of reforms which took place in the Ottoman Empire and was known as the Tanzimat Period, had been characterized by the promulgation of the *Hatt-i Şerif*, the Noble Rescript of Gülhane in 1255 H./1839 A.D., and the *Hatt-i Hümayun* or Imperial Rescript of 1275 H./1856 A.D. These proclamations gave new rights to the millets or religious groupings of the non-Muslim subjects of the Empire⁴.

Syria became part of the Ottoman Empire in the early

sixteenth century, under the rule of Sultan Selim I (918-927 H./1512-1520 A.D.). The Ottomans generally kept most of the Mamluk administrative divisions of the area unchanged⁵. Following the Ottoman Conquest of 922 H./1516 A.D., Syria was initially divided into 22 *sanjaqs* but later on into three provinces or *eyalets*: Damascus, Aleppo and Tripoli⁶.

According to Cuinet, who wrote in 1896, the Vilayet of Syria (*Sūriye vilāyeti*) was divided into 4 *sanjaqs* and 22 *cazas*, one of which was Dūma, the area near Damascus which is mentioned in this firman (see Table 1). The Caza of Dūma was bordered on the north by the Caza of Nabk, on the east by the Syrian Desert (*bādiyat al-Shām*), on the south by the *Sanjaq* of Hawran, and on the west by the Caza of Wādī al-'Ajam and the Merkez-Caza of Damascus. At that time the total population of the Caza of Dūma was 66,425 inhabitants, of whom 2,250 were Greek-Orthodox Christians⁷. Cuinet also states that the Caza of Dūma had four churches:

Les églises sont au nombre de 4, dont 3 aux syriens orthodoxes, savoir: une à Hârestat èl-Basal et une à 'Arbin, dans chacune desquelles un prêtre de Damas se rend pour officier tous les dimanches et jours de fête, et une à Ma'rouneh où réside un prêtre; la quatrième église du caza, située également dans ce dernier village, appartient aux grecs unis qui y entretiennent un prêtre à demeure⁸.

The text of our firman indicates that a petition was made by the Patriarchate of Antioch to the Porte on behalf of the population of the small village of Ma'rūna (see map), which is situated in an agricultural area in the Caza of Dūma, known for its gardens and good climate. Ma'rūna was also famous for its mineral water springs, and is described by Cuinet as a 'charmant village d'où la vue domine sur toute la plaine de Damas'⁹. In addition, the village boasted the best quality *summak* (a spice), walnut and fig trees of the region in both quality and quantity.

CONCLUSION

In the works which we have consulted for this article and which deal with the subject of millets and their organization in the Ottoman Empire, we have not

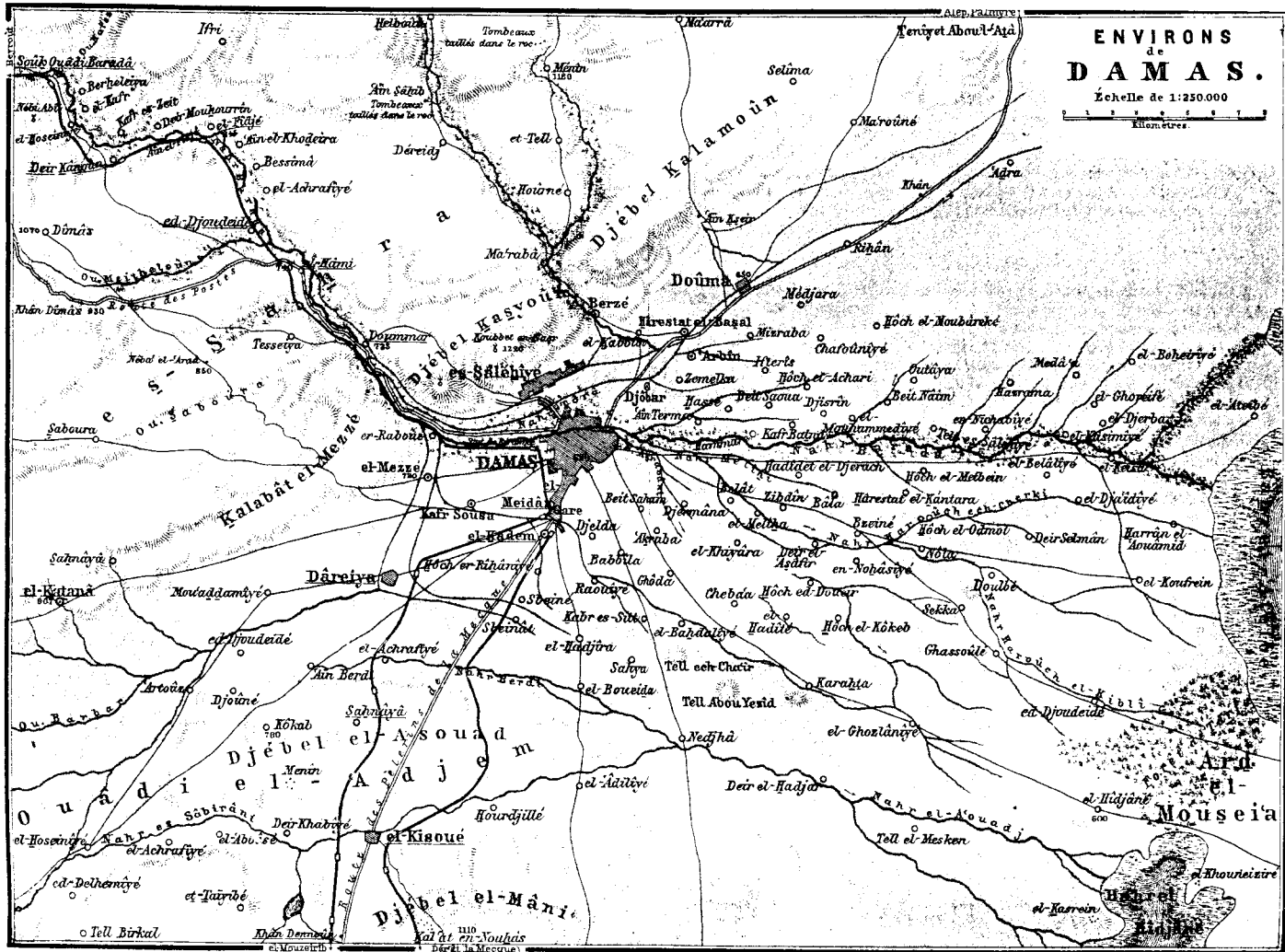


Fig. 1. Map of Damascus and surroundings, showing the position of Dūma in relation to Damascus (from *Palestine et Syrie. Routes principales à travers la Mésopotamie et la Babylonie. L'île de Chypre. Manuel du voyageur* par Karl Bædeker, 4th edition, Leipzig/Paris 1912), between pp. 314-5.

found any evidence about the church of Ma'rūna¹⁰, but future studies on the Bilād al-Shām might produce some new material on the Vilayet of Damascus, the Caza of Dūma, and maybe even the village of Ma'rūna. In view of the relatively small number of firmans from the nineteenth century published so far, this document represents an important addition to the corpus of available texts, and broadens our understanding of a major period in Ottoman history, that of the Tanzimat. More importantly perhaps, this firman is a valuable piece of evidence in the history of Syria as a Turkish Province, a chapter about which all has certainly not yet been said.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TRANSLITERATION

For the transliteration the rules laid down by Sir James William Redhouse, in his *Yeni Türkçe-İngilizce Sözlük. New Redhouse Turkish-English Dictionary*, Istanbul: Redhouse Press, 1968, have been followed.

TRANSLITERATION OF THE FIRMAN

1. *destūr-i mükerrrem müşir-i müfahhar-i nizām ül-'ālem müdebbir-i umūr ül-cumhūr bil-fıkr aş-sāķib mütem-mim-i mehāmm ül-enām bir-rā'ī aş-sā'ib mümehhid-i bünyān üd-devle ve'l-ikbāl müşeyyid-i erkān üs-sā'ade ve'l-iclāl el-mahķük li-zuyūf 'awā'if ül-mülk ül-a'lā 'asa-ķir-i nizāmīye-i şāhānem müşirānından Sūriye vilāyeti vālisi olub muraşsa'-i 'oşmānī*

2. *ve birinci rütbe-i mecādī nişān-i zī-şanlarını hā'iz ve hāmil olan vezirim Muştafā 'Aşım Paşa adāma Allāh ta'ālā iclālahu ve ķidvet ül-'ulemā ül-muhāķķikīn Dūmā ķazāsı nā'ibi ve müftisi zīda 'ilmuhumā ve mefahir ül-*

معود الله سبحانه وتعالى فلا تنزهه ولا تمنهه بدينه معروفه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه
 انما في رويته في ارضه وارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه
 برحمه لوزينه لاطول ارضه وارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه
 والوجه به بركونه محذور لاطول ارضه وارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه
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 من كانه ارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه
 في طوبى لمن وبنوه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه
 من شهر صفر الخيرة من ارضه وارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه وارضه في ارضه

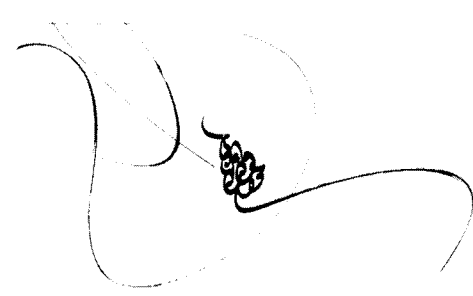


Fig. 3. The firman concerning the reconstruction of the church in Ma'ru'na. Lower part (lines 3-10).

DIVISION ADMINISTRATIVE DU VILAYET DE SYRIE

SANDJAJQ	CAZAS	CHEFS-LIEUX de CAZAS	NAHIÉS	VILLES, VILLAGES, etc.	
				par CAZAS	par SANDJAJQ
I Châm-i Chérif chef-lieu : Damas	Damas	Damas		55	431
	Ba'albék	Ba'albék		76	
	Béqâ'a ul-'Aziz	Mo'allaqa	Djébél Djénin..	67	
	Ouâdi ul-Adjém	Qatana		86	
	Hasbèya	Hasbèya		19	
	Râchèya	Râchèya		16	
	Nabk	Nabk		30	
Doumâ	Doumâ		32		
II Hamah	Hamah	Hamah		140	405
	Homs	Homs	Qosêir. — Iki-Qepoule.	135	
	Hamidiyèh	Hamidiyèh		50	
	Sélimiyèh	Sélimiyèh		80	
III Haourân ch.-l. : Chéikh-Sa'ad	Chéikh-Sa'ad	Chéikh-Sa'ad		20	258
	Qonéitra	Qonéitra		75	
	Basr el-Harir	Basr el-Harir		17	
	Déra'a	Déra'a	Bosra	38	
	Djébél Haourân		'Abirèb — Saleh — Chohba	75	
	(Djébél Druzi)	Souéida	Lâhiteh — Salkhad — Medj- del — Ormân — Siem.		
	Adjloûn	Irbid	Adjloûn	33	
IV Ma'an ch.-l. : Karak	Karak	Karak		17	25
	Tafilèh	Tafilèh			
	Ma'an	Ma'an		8	
	Salt	Salt			
4 Sandjaq	22 Cazas		13 Nahies	1119 Villes, Villages, etc.	

Fig. 4. Table showing the administrative division of the Vilayet of Syria. Taken from Vital Cuinet, *Syrie, Liban et Palestine. Géographie administrative, statistique, descriptive et raisonnée*, (Paris 1896), p. 304.

amâcid ve'l-ekârım a'zâ-i meclis zîda mecduhum tevķtî-i refî'i hümâyün vâsıl olaçaq

3. *ma'lûm ola ki Şam-i şerîf dâhilinde Dûmâ kazâsına tâbî' Ma'rûna kıaryesindeki Rûm ehâlisinden ma'bedleri olduğundan tûlan on sekiz ve 'arzan on iki ve irtifâ'en on zirâ' olmak üzere muceddeden bir bâb kilise inşâsına ruhsat i'tâsı hakķında*

4. *Anıakya Rûm paıtrikliğinden vukû' bulan istid'â üzerine sebķ eden isti'lâma cevâben mevrûd mazbaıa-i millete nazaran kıarye-i mezkûrede efrâd-i cemâ'et yirmi beş hane de yüz dört nüfûsdan 'ibâret olub kilise-i mezkûruñ mülk (?)*

5. *bir 'arşa üzerine etrâf-i arba'a dıvârları kârgîr ve sakfı kıubbeli olarak inşâ ve meşârif-i muħammenesi olan on biñ ğurûşuñ ihdâ-i merķûme taraftarından i'âneten tesvîye ve i'tâ kıılmacağı*

6. *ve ol bâbda bir ğüne mahzûr olmadığı anılaşılması olmasıyla keyfiyyet taraıf-i eşraf-i pâdişâhâneme 'arz ile lede 'l-istizân kilise-i mezkûruñ ol vechle inşâsına müsâ'ade-i seniye-i*

7. *mülûkânem erzân kıılınarak emr-i hümâyün-i şâhânem şeref-sunûh ve şudûr eylemiş olmağın ruhsatı hâvî*

dıvân-i hümâyünümünden işbu emr-i celîl ül-kaderim işdâr ve i'tâ olundu sizki vâlî-i müşâr ve nâ'ib ve müftî ve sâ'ir

8. *mümâ ilayhim siz sâlif üz-zıkr kilisenin bir minvâl-i muħarrer tûl ve 'arz ve irtifâ'ı zirâ'larını tecâvüz etmemek ve meşârif-i inşâ'ıyesi dahî balâda gösterildiğı vechle tesvîye olunmak üzere binâ ve inşâsına mümâna'at olunmaması ve bu vesîle ile kimesnenin cebren*

9. *aķça toplanılmak veyâhod âhar şüretle iz'âc olunmak mişillü muğâyır rızâ-i şâhânem hâlât vukû'a getirilmemesi ğuşuşlarına dikķat ve ğılâfından bigâyet teħâşı ve mücânebet eylesesiz tahrîren fî'l yevm el-hâdî*

10. *min şehr şefer el-ħayır li-sene şemân ve şelâş mie ve alf el-Kıustantîniye el-mahrûse*

TRANSLATION

1. [To] His Excellency the Right Honourable and Glorious Minister, Regulator of the World, Director of the Affairs of the People, who has managed the Affairs of the People with penetrating insight, and who has, with correct vision of state matters, successfully planned, and sustained the Pillars of the Sultanate¹¹, and whose worthiness has gained the favours

of the Sovereign, he who is one of the Generals of my Imperial Army and the Governor (*vālī*) of the Province of Damascus;¹²

2. [To] My Vizier Muṣṭafā 'Āṣım Pasha¹³, may God Almighty make his glory last, who possesses and bears (both) the Osmani Order and the Mecidi Order¹⁴, and to the Foremost of the Learned Ulemas;

[To] the Deputy Judge (*nā'ib*) and the Muftī of the Caza of Dūma¹⁵ — may their knowledge increase — and to the Glorious and Noble Members of the Council (*meclis*) — may their Glory accumulate.

When the Elevated Imperial Order arrives,

3. let it be known that it concerns the authorization to rebuild a church which is one of the places of worship of the Greek-Orthodox inhabitants, and which is located in the village of Ma'rūna¹⁶, belonging to the Caza of Dūma in the *Bilād al-Shām*, and which has a length of 18 *dhirā'*, a width of 11 *dhirā'* and a height of 10 *dhirā'*¹⁷,

4. according to the report (*maẓbaṭa*) of the religious community — which, as the answer to an earlier official request (*isti'lām*), was considered the basis for (another) request (*istid'ā'*) made by the Greek-Orthodox Patriarchate in Antioch — the said village consists of the members of a community of 25 houses, that is 104 individuals. The aforementioned church,

5. which is a building consisting of 4 brick walls and a domed roof, has to be (rebuilt) on a piece of land (belonging to the members of the community). The estimated cost of 10,000 *ghurūsh*¹⁸ is to be settled through the donations (*ihdā'*) and endowment (*i'ānet*) of the abovementioned (members of the community).

6. (As) there are no objections in this matter to the submission to me of a request for permission (to rebuild), my Imperial Majesty's permission is given for rebuilding the said church in this way,

7. my illustrious (written) order, which was issued by my imperial Divan¹⁹ contains the permission of the Imperial Rescript.

O ye, the aforementioned *Vālī*, Deputy Judge (*nā'ib*), Mufti, and all other (dignitaries) mentioned,

8. (you) must make sure that the aforementioned church does not exceed the given length, width, and height. As long as the amount of the building costs is paid in the manner stated (above), then you must make sure that the reconstruction goes ahead and that it is not hindered.

On this occasion, you are responsible

9. that no incident, which could run counter to my Imperial consent, is to take place, such as collecting money by force or any other molestation. You should be extremely cautious about such offences and abstain from them (yourselves).

10. The redaction (was completed) on 11 Şafar 1308²⁰ in Constantinople the Protected.

NOTES

¹ The first firman was published in *Manuscripts of the Middle East*, Volume 2 (1987), pp. 42-44.

² See U. Heyd, 'Farmān', *EI*².

³ J. Deny, 'Abd al-Hamīd II', *EI*².

⁴ See R.H. Davison, *Reforms in the Ottoman Empire*, New York: 1973, Glossary p. 409.

⁵ P. Hitti, *History of Syria*, London: 1951, pp. 661-677.

⁶ Davison, *op. cit.*, p. 409.

⁷ V. Cuinet, *Syrie, Liban et Palestine*, Paris: 1896, see the section entitled 'Caza de Douma', pp. 431-436, especially p. 431. In 1927, R. Dussaud wrote in his *Topographie Historique de la Syrie Antique et Médiévale* (published in Paris): 'Ma'rūnē, sur les premiers contreforts de l'Antiliban, dépend encore de Douma' (p. 281).

⁸ Cuinet, *op. cit.*, p. 433.

⁹ Cuinet, *op. cit.*, p. 435.

¹⁰ This includes for instance D. Chevallier, 'Non-Muslim Communities in Arab Cities', in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, edited by B. Braude and B. Lewis, Volume II: The Arab Speaking Lands, New York: 1982, pp. 159-165; B. Spuler's various contributions on the Orthodox Churches in the *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift*; H. İnalcık's *The Ottoman Empire. The Classical Age 1300-1600*. Translated by N. Itzkowitz and C. Imber, London: 1973 and S.J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 2 volumes, Cambridge: 1976, as well as J. Matuz, *Das Osmanische Reich*, Darmstadt: 1985 among others.

¹¹ See J. Hell, 'Bāb', *İslām Ansiklopedisi*.

¹² On Syria as a Turkish Province, see Hitti, *op. cit.*, pp. 661-677.

¹³ Muṣṭafā 'Āṣım Pasha, governor of Syria since 1306/1888-89, died in office in 1309/1891-92, cf. Mehmed Şüreyyā: *Sicill-i 'Osmānī*, vol. 4, Istanbul 1315/1897-98, p. 487.

¹⁴ In a communication made to Prof. B. Kellner-Heinkele by the Director of the Institut für Wissenschaftliche Ordenskunde, Dr. Kurt G. Klietmann (Berlin), the *Order of the Ottoman Empire* was the highest order in the Empire; it was divided into 5 classes, and only in the 1st class was it decorated with precious stones. The *Order of Mecid* was also divided into 5 classes (letter dated 19 October, 1989).

¹⁵ See map for the location of Dūma and the village of Ma'rūna.

¹⁶ See note 7 above.

¹⁷ This is most probably what is known as *al-dhirā' al-mī'māriyya* of about 79.8 cm. For further details see W. Hinz, *Islamische Masse und Gewichte*, Leiden, 1955, p. 59.

¹⁸ *Ghurush*, 'a piastre, the one hundredth part of a Turkish pound'. J.W. Redhouse, *A Turkish and English Lexicon*, Constantinople: 1890.

¹⁹ On the *Dīvān-i Hümayun* or Imperial Council, see İnalcık, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-97 and glossary p. 219.

²⁰ The date is for Hijra year and corresponds to 26 September 1890.

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