TANZIMAT FOR THE COUNTRYSIDE: MIDHAT PAŞA
AND THE VILAYET OF DANUBE, 1864-1868

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ABSTRACT

The dissertation examines the history of the Ottoman Danube province (vilayet) under its first governor, Midhat Paşa (1864-1868). The vilayet was conceived as a “pilot project” for a future comprehensive provincial reorganization and, during Midhat’s governorship, became the site of a sustained “modernization” campaign in the fields of legal and institutional reform, infrastructure, communications, economic development, medical care, hygiene, and urban development. The dissertation surveys the reforms carried out by Midhat’s administration in each of these fields, as well as the impact of these reforms on society. After an introduction and literature review (Chapter 1), the thesis describes the administrative structure of the province, with a special emphasis on the makeup and functions of the important new consultative and judicial councils (mecalis) that were established throughout the vilayet (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 presents two alternative views of Midhat’s reforms – first as rarefied bureaucratic blueprints and second through the experiences of the vilayet’s “ordinary” inhabitants (on whose shoulders most of the physical and financial burden of the reforms was placed). Chapter 4 analyzes selected reform policies and identifies several “governance techniques,” which were found to be characteristic of Midhat’s administrative style. The thesis then provides an assessment of the provincial administration’s efforts to create and promote a supra-ethnic “Ottoman nationalism” (Osmanlılık). Bulgarians – the vilayet’s largest ethnic group – were taken as a litmus test for the success or failure of Midhat’s efforts in this field. It was found that, on the whole, the vilayet reforms succeeded in creating a
substantial pool of pro-imperial sentiment among the Bulgarian population of the province, both among the elites (Chapter 5) and the non-elites (Chapter 6). The final chapter surveys the administration’s attempts to prevent or slow down the development of Bulgarian ethnic nationalism, arguing that, while Midhat’s policies on that issue succeeded in eradicating separatist challenges in the short term, they may have had the opposite effect in the long term.

The dissertation is based on a wide variety of primary sources collected in several archives (İstanbul, Sofia, Ruse, London) and an extensive survey of the relevant scholarly literature.
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***

A shorter version of Chapter Six of this thesis has previously been published under the title “Everyday forms of compliance: subaltern commentaries on Ottoman reform, 1864-1868” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46 (4), October 2004: 730-759.
NOTE ON DATES, PLACES, AND NAMES

The documents on which my work is based are dated according to several different calendars – the lunar Islamic calendar (adjective: hicrî, abbreviation: A.H.), the Ottoman fiscal calendar (adjective: rumî), the Julian (“old style”) calendar still used by some Orthodox Churches, or, in a very few cases, the Gregorian (“new style”) calendar. To avoid confusion but still allow readers to easily identify the archival sources used, I have given two dates for each document quoted in this thesis – first, the original date as it appears in the source (according to any of the above calendars) and, second a “modernized” date – i.e. the Gregorian date that corresponds to the original date used. The two dates are placed in brackets […] and are separated by a forward dash. Thus, a notation of

[27 Receb 1284 / 24 November 1867] should be understood to mean that the original document quoted is dated A.H. 27 Receb 1284, which corresponds to a Gregorian date of 24 November 1867. The same dating system is used when referring to dated newspaper material from the 1860’s and 1870’s, except that for those newspapers whose issues are dated according to the Julian calendar (e.g. the often-quoted Tuna/Dunav), the name of the month is not repeated in the Julian date when it is the same as the name of the month of the Gregorian date. Thus, Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 2 [10/22 March 1865] refers to the issue of that newspaper dated 10 March 1865, Julian date = 22 March 1865, Gregorian date.
A single date appears in brackets behind a document reference only when the document itself is dated according to the Gregorian calendar.

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Bulgarian words, terms, and personal names quoted in this thesis are given according to the Library of Congress transliteration system for Bulgarian. Exceptions were made where an author has published his/her works under a different transliteration in languages that use the Latin script (e.g. Maria Todorova, not Mariia Todorova). Ottoman Turkish words, terms, and names quoted from original courses have been transliterated from the Arabo-Persian script according to the modernized Turkish spelling as given in Redhouse Türkçe-İngilizce Sözlük, (İstanbul: SEV, 1997). Most foreign terms are italicized, except for a few frequently used ones (e.g. paş a, not paş a).

***

Place names are given in their present-day spelling, in the language of the country where they are currently located (e.g. Ruse, not Rusçuk; Niş, not Niş or Nish; Tulcea, not Tolçi or Tulcha). Exceptions are occasionally made when warranted in the context (e.g. in the table listing the subdivisions of the vilayet both present-day and nineteenth-century Ottoman place names are given).
ABBREVIATIONS USED

Archival Collections

**BOA – Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri (İstanbul)**
- BOA A.MKT.MVL. Sadaret Evrak Mektubî Kalemî: Meclis-i Vâlâ
- BOA A.MKT.UM. Sadaret Evrak Mektubî Kalemî: Umum-i Vilayât
- BOA AYN.DEF. Ayniyat Defterleri
- BOA İ.B. İrade Bulgarian
- BOA İ.D. İrade Dahiliye
- BOA İ.MMHS. İrade-i Meclis-i Mahsus
- BOA İ.MVL. İrade-i Meclis-i Vâlâ
- BOA MÜHİMME DEF. Divan-i Hümayun Mühimme Defterleri

**NBKM – Natsionalna Biblioteka “Sv. sv. Kiril i Metodii” (Sofia)**
- NBKM BIA Bûlgarski Istoricheski Arkhiv
- NBKM OO Orientalski Otdel
- NBKM OO OAK Orientalski Otdel, Obshta Arkhivna Kolektsiia

**Dûrzhaven Arkhiv Ruse**
- DAR Dûrzhaven Arkhiv Ruse (Ruse)

Newspapers and other Periodicals

- Chitalishte Chitalishte (İstanbul, 1870-1875)
- Dunavska zora Dunavska Zora (Brâila, 1867-1879)
- Makedoniiia Makedoniiia (İstanbul, 1866-1872)
- Napredûk Napredûk (İstanbul, 1875-1877)
- Narodnost Narodnost (Bucharest, 1867-1869)
- Otechestvo Otechestvo (Bucharest, 1870-1871)
- Sûvetsnik Sûvetsnik (İstanbul, 1863-1865, 1870)
- Svoboda Svoboda (Bucharest, 1869-1874)
- Tuna/Dunav Tuna/Dunav (Ruse, 1865-1877)
- Turtlesia Turtlesia (İstanbul, 1867-1873)
- Vremia Vremia (İstanbul, 1865-1867)

Other abbreviations

- **DÜSTÛR** Düstûr, Birinci Tertib. (İstanbul: Matbaa-yi Âmire, AH 1289).
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. “That indefatigable man” – Midhat Paşa mythologized

In early October of 1864, exciting political rumors began circulating among the citizens of Ruse, an Ottoman town of some 20,000 inhabitants on the southern bank of the lower Danube. Ruse, the rumors alleged, had been chosen to be the center of a great new province that would encompass the former districts (eyalets) of Silistra, Vidin, and Niš – in other words, the entire northern tier of Ottoman Europe from the Balkan range to the Danube. But it was not only the impending administrative elevation of their town that excited the chattering classes of Ruse; rumors also ran wild concerning the figure of the future provincial governor – a certain Ahmed Midhat Paşa, whose arrival in town was said to be imminent. In İstanbul government circles, Midhat was already regarded as a rising star: at the age of 42 still a relatively young civil servant, he had risen through the ranks of the imperial bureaucracy to reach the rank of vezir in 1861 and had been appointed governor of the eyalet of Niš in the same year. But most of his soon-to-be subjects in 1864 Ruse had little specific information on which to form an opinion about Midhat’s personality and politics. He was believed (falsely) to be fluent in “several” European languages, to have been a former Ottoman “ambassador to Italy,” and even to have been chosen for his
new post “by lot.”¹ Some of Ruse’s Bulgarian inhabitants believed (also falsely) that Midhat’s appointment was the Ottoman government’s response to the escalating conflict between their diocese’s Bulgarian parishioners and its Greek bishop.² Others fondly remembered the even-handedness Midhat had shown during his last visit to the region (in the spring of 1857) when, as a relatively junior clerk of the Supreme Council of Judicial Ordinances (Meclis-i Vâlâ-yı Ahkâm-ı Adliye), he had been dispatched to investigate alleged government abuses against the Bulgarian peasantry during the Crimean War as well as an abortive anti-government plot in the Tûrnovo region.³

Some days prior to the scheduled arrival of the new governor, the citizens of Ruse were treated to the spectacle of numerous newly appointed state officials and government contractors descending upon their town to assume their posts. Stati Popov, our eyewitness to the events, recalls the procession of “assistants, sub-governors, directors, inspectors, secretaries, agents – all of them a bunch of people of great education.” These were followed by some twenty medical doctors and a multitude of “engineers, architects, craft masters and apprentices.”

¹ NBKM BIA II A 1042 [n.d.] “Reformatora Metat pasha v Ruse 1866.” This is a short unpublished memoir by Stati Popov, a Bulgarian eyewitness to Midhat’s arrival in Ruse.
It all looked, Popov observed, “as if they were laying down the foundations of a new state.”

Then, just as the town was getting ready for the official ceremony to celebrate Midhat’s now imminent arrival, a bizarre new rumor began to spread like a wildfire – the new governor, it was now maintained, was already in town, having sneaked in incognito, so that he could personally gather some unbiased, first-hand information. “That indefatigable man,” our eyewitness commented, “had come ten days earlier… he had walked up and down the town in disguise; he had found out about everything and inspected everything down to the last shack.”

We have no way of ascertaining whether this account of Midhat’s secret arrival in Ruse is factually accurate or not. But Stati Popov’s memoir is indicative of a problem facing every historian who tries to assess (or re-assess) Midhat’s achievements and his legacy not only as governor of the Danube province but for the Ottoman Tanzimat period in general. The problem is that, to this day, the Paşa’s figure looms too large; his administrative abilities and political acumen have been elevated to an almost mythological status by glowing contemporary accounts and, all too often, by equally laudatory historiographical narratives.

Such idealization typically cuts across ethnic, religious, and ideological lines. For example, the earliest assessments of Midhat’s activities in the Danube province – those written by western European observers in the 1860’s and 1870’s – were virtually unanimous in their praise, regardless of where their authors stood on the politics of the “Eastern Question.” Felix Kanitz, an Austrian

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4 NBKM BIA II A 1042 [n.d.].
5 Ibid.
traveler and a staunch champion of the Bulgarian national cause, called the Paşa a “white raven” in an otherwise incompetent Ottoman ruling establishment and “a spot of light in [the] long-lasting dark night over the European South-East, ... a meteor which suddenly flared up and, as meteors unfortunately do, quickly disappeared.” “If only Midhat had continued as governor of the Danube province for a little longer,” Kanitz intoned, as he praised the Paşa’s cadre policy, attempts to regulate the police force, urban reforms (especially in Ruse), and road-building activities. On the other hand, Stanislas St. Clair, a self-professed “Turkophile” Englishman who owned a country estate near the Black Sea coastal town of Varna and fancied himself an expert on Ottoman affairs, also singled out Midhat as virtually the only contemporary Ottoman statesman worthy of admiration – Midhat, St. Clair wrote, was “energetic in times when energy seems to have deserted the governing classes of Turkey” and a

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6 Kanitz, born in 1829 in an Austrian Jewish family that had moved to Budapest, was perhaps the epitome of the nineteenth-century encyclopedic amateur traveler to the “Orient.” A freelance painter and self-taught geographer, art historian, ethnographer, archaeologist and classicist, Kanitz wrote well-received travelogues on Montenegro and Serbia, before embarking upon a series of journeys (1864-1874) through the Ottoman Danube province. The result was the monumental Donau-Bulgarien und der Balkan; historisch-geographisch-ethnographische Reisestudien aus den Jahren 1860-1875 (Leipzig: H. Fries, 1875); Bulgarian translation as Felix Kanitz, Dunavska Bŭlgariia i Balkanŭt, trans. Mikhail Matliev (Sofia: Borina, 1995).


10 E.g. the replacement of the “incompetent” Süleyman Paşa with the “highly intelligent” Aziz Paşa as sub-governor of Vidin. See ibid., vol. 1, 83, 158-9.

11 Ibid., vol. 1, 119.

12 Ibid., vol. 1, 162-3.

13 Ibid., vol. 1, 125.
“great chemist” in the laboratory of reform.\textsuperscript{14} St. Clair and his co-author, Charles Brophy, lavished special praise on Midhat’s efforts to mobilize the peasant population of the Danube province in the service of his infrastructural projects; they deemed such compulsory measures beneficial inasmuch as they forced the peasant to “assist in the work of his own civilization.”\textsuperscript{15} In fact, St. Clair’s only criticism of Midhat’s policies in Ruse was that they had been too radical or too “Quixotic:” Midhat had pressed on too hard with his reforms and had failed to acknowledge the “fact” that “to make a Duke of Wellington out of a South Sea Islander, something more is necessary than a cocked hat and a pair of spurs.”\textsuperscript{16}

Whether Midhat intended to turn his subjects in the Danube province into dukes of Wellington or not, he certainly managed to please and impress contemporaries of all walks of life and all political persuasions and religious beliefs. This mercurial quality often makes it difficult to pinpoint Midhat’s own political philosophy and personal beliefs, especially at this early stage of his

\textsuperscript{14} Stanislas G.B. St. Clair and Charles A. Brophy, \textit{A Residence in Bulgaria; or, Notes on the resources and administration of Turkey: the condition and character, manners, customs, and language of the Christian and Mussulman populations, with reference to the Eastern question} (London: J. Murray, 1869), 384, 92. St. Clair’s estate was near the village of Dereköy (today Konstantinovo), inhabited mostly by Turkish speaking Christians (Gagauzes); later, he was actively involved in the organization of a Muslim revolt (the so-called Rhodope revolt) against the San Stefano Treaty that created a large Bulgarian state following the Russon-Ottoman war of 1877-1878. See Velko Tonev, \textit{Bûlgarskoto Chernomorie prez Vûzrazhdaneto} (Sofia: Akademichno Izdatelstvo “Prof. Marin Drinov”, 1995), 29.

\textsuperscript{15} This was perhaps the greatest compliment the two authors could bestow given their heavy bias against the non-Muslim inhabitants [\textit{rayah}] of the Ottoman Balkans. The “Bulgarian” in particular they characterized as “a lazy drunkard and a fanatical fetishist.” See Stanislas G.B. St. Clair and Charles A. Brophy, \textit{Twelve Years’ Study of the Eastern question in Bulgaria: Being a revised edition of “A residence in Bulgaria.”} (London: Chapman & Hall, 1877), vi, 287.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 26.
career. Take, for example, his stance on religion. To an anti-clerical Austrian diplomat, Carl Ritter von Sax, Midhat reportedly professed (in 1867) his belief that “[f]orty or fifty years from now, no one will be building churches or mosques any longer – only schools and humanitarian institutions.” At his frequent visits to various schools in the province, the governor often praised non-Muslim schools for having a relatively secular curriculum and criticized Muslim medreses for failing to teach science subjects. But it would be a mistake to interpret such statements as evidence of an overarching “tendency towards secularism” in the Paşa’s political thinking, since, for a different kind of an audience, Midhat cultivated the image of himself as a devout Muslim, who had learned the Koran by heart at the age of 10 (receiving the honorary sobriquet hafız) and kept going back to it regularly for inspiration. Hence a story, for example, that the term for the vocational schools for orphans and “problem children” that he would erect in the Danube province – islahhane – came to him as he was rereading a particular Koranic verse (II:220) in which Muhammad was instructed that the bettering (islahun) of the affairs of orphans was a praiseworthy undertaking. Despite some anecdotal evidence that Midhat’s personal religiosity was initially

18 See, for example, Iurdan Trifonov, Istoriia na grada Pleven do Osvoboditelnata voina (Sofia: Dûrzhavna pechatnitsa, 1933), 256.
19 Davison, Reform, 145.
21 Kornrumpf, “Islahhaneler,” 149.
questioned by some Muslims in the vilayet (he is said to have earned the nickname gâvur (infidel) Paşa in his early months in Ruse),\(^\text{22}\) the governor soon managed to dispel any doubts about his bona fide Islamic credentials – particularly by showing support for pious endowments (vakиф) and dervish lodges (tekke). One Muslim religious figure in the vilayet who fondly remembered Midhat's largesse was the sheikh of a Sufi tekke near Varna. In a 1872 conversation, the sheikh instructed Felix Kanitz to make sure to convey his warmest greetings to Midhat (then Grand Vezir in İstanbul) who, the sheikh said, had become the tekke's main benefactor during his governorship in Ruse.\(^\text{23}\) The Muslims of Pleven were similarly impressed by the fact that Midhat's proposal to build a public hospital ward in their town was implemented as an extension of the vakиф of a local mosque and in close cooperation with the vakиф's trustee (mütevelli).\(^\text{24}\) Such an ability to make reform policies palatable to Muslim traditionalists and/or conservatives would become a hallmark of Midhat's subsequent career and would serve him well during his governorship of Baghdad (1869-1972)\(^\text{25}\) and in later appointments to the highest positions in the imperial

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\(^{22}\) St. Clair and Brophy, *Residence in Bulgaria*, 393, note.  
\(^{23}\) Kanitz, *Dunavska Bălgariia*, vol. 3, 232.  
\(^{24}\) Trifonov, *Istoriia na grada Pleven*, 240-1.  
\(^{25}\) One example was Midhat’s proposal to reform the taxes levied on the produce of the date orchards in the southern region of Basra – the Paşa apparently successfully presented his initiative not as an innovation but as a return to a practice that had been established during the Caliphate of ‘Umar (d. AD 644) and had allegedly been corrupted by recent abuses. Davison has also commented that, although some of Midhat’s policies in Iraq were resisted on religious grounds (as bid‘at), the Paşa’s overall achievements were “impressive,” not least because his reforms were implemented with ample consideration of local customs and practices. See Ali Haydar Midhat, *Tabsıra-i İbret*, 121-2. Davison, *Reform*, 160-3.
bureaucracy in İstanbul. Particularly noteworthy in this later period would be Midhat’s “considerable efforts” to win over high-ranking members of the Ottoman .Resolve (ules) to his constitutionalist views in 1875 and 1876. Employing reasoning widely used by the Young Ottomans and other “Islamic modernists” at the time, Midhat would seek to persuade clerics that the “consultative principle” (\(\text{usul-}\text{u meşveret}\)) of government was not a nineteenth-century European import but an integral feature of early Islamic politics and that, consequently, an institution such as a parliament should have solid legitimacy under Islamic law.\(^{26}\) It is instructive that the theology students (softas) who rioted in İstanbul in May of 1876 (precipitating a change of government and the subsequent deposition of Sultan Abdülaziz) favored Midhat for the position of the Grand Vezir.\(^{27}\)

Another instance in which Midhat managed to convince both parties in a political debate that he was on “their” side was the developing conflict between the Bulgarian Orthodox community and their church authorities, represented by the Ecumenical (but Greek-dominated) Patriarchate in İstanbul. Known in Bulgarian historiography as the “Church Question,” this conflict led, in 1870, to the issuance of an imperial order authorizing the establishment of an autocephalous Bulgarian Exarchate and the subsequent breakaway of most of the Bulgarian-speaking dioceses in the Balkans from the Patriarchate.\(^{28}\) With his appointment to the governorship in Ruse, Midhat was thrust in the middle of this

\(^{26}\) Davison, Reform, 320. See also Ali Haydar Midhat, *Midhat Paşa’nın Hatıraları, Mirat-i Hayret* (İstanbul: Temel Yayınları, 1997), 31-3.

\(^{27}\) Davison, Reform, 325-6.

highly divisive issue. The details of Midhat’s involvement in the Bulgarian Church Question will be discussed in Chapter Seven of this study; for now it would suffice to say that as governor he largely succeeded in creating a public image of himself as a disinterested and even-handed arbiter of the issue, yet privately managed to give key players on both sides of the conflict vague or cryptic indications of his support. As a result of such skillful diplomatic maneuvering, the Paşa was able to remain on excellent terms with the lay and clerical elites of both communities engaged in the struggle – the Greeks in the region of Varna on the Black Sea coast, who remained loyal to the Patriarchate and the Bulgarians everywhere else in the province, who overwhelmingly supported ecclesiastical autonomy and the expulsion of Patriarchate-appointed priests from their dioceses.29

The Paşa’s mythologizing typically revolves around the tropes of justice, incorruptibility and meritocracy. There are stories of Midhat testing his subordinates with orchestrated bribe offers, Midhat surprising corrupt officials with lightning-speed financial audits, Midhat wisely promoting inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony, and so on. A typical example of such mythologizing at work is the following story narrated by Khadzhi Ivan (Ivancho) Penchovich, one of Midhat’s high-ranking Bulgarian confidants, and reported in the memoirs of Pandeli Kisimov (a former political exile and a one-time participant in an abortive anti-government revolt). Penchovich told Kisimov that he was once approached with a particularly tempting bribe offer by a candidate for office in the provincial

29 Ibid., 226-9, 32-44.
administration in Ruse; the good trooper that he was, Penchovich refused the bribe and reported the briber-to-be to Midhat, only to have the governor reveal to him that he (Midhat) had set up the offer in order to test Penchovich’s loyalty. A similarly apocryphal incident designed to highlight Midhat’s exemplary statesmanlike qualities is recounted in Stati Popov’s memoirs: the Ottoman superintendent of the Lovech district, a certain Deli Necip (whom Popov described as a “fiendish Turk from a long line of beys” and a “mighty ogre in his treatment of Bulgarians”), had reportedly arrested and tortured some 50 or 60 peasants from his district on the trumped-up charge of sedition. When Midhat found out about this upon his arrival in Ruse, he not only fired Necip but also immediately freed the alleged rebels (komitas), explaining that he needed to diffuse a potentially explosive situation. “I am acquitting 60 of them today,” the governor is supposed to have said, “lest they beget 600 more tomorrow.”

Even individuals who had been bitterly opposed to Midhat’s policies at the time and who might have been expected to take every opportunity to vilify the Paşa – Bulgarian nationalists, for example – often gave surprisingly nuanced and even outright positive assessments of his legacy. Svoboda, a radical nationalist weekly published in exile in Bucharest beginning in 1870, bitterly complained in one of its first editorials that “the equality that Midhat Paşa had brought to Tuna vilayeti a couple of years ago” had all but evaporated. Another nationalist, Nikola Obretenov, who was an active participant in the 1876 Bulgarian uprising,

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30 See Kisimov, “Medkhat pasha,” 805, note 1.  
31 NBKM BIA II A 1042 [n.d.].  
praised Midhat’s efforts to modernize Ruse (Obretenov’s native city) and to crack
down on corrupt tax collectors and other government officials. 

Perhaps most
tellingly, even when they did pour vitriol on Midhat’s policies (in ways which will
be described later in this chapter), many nationalists tacitly acknowledged the
Paş as a real and very formidable opponent in the battle to win over Bulgarian
“hearts and minds.” Thus a petition by Bulgarian émigré nationalists to the 1867
Paris Conference (which had been convened to find a diplomatic solution to the
Cretan revolt) suggested that “enlightened” Ottoman administrators, such as
Midhat, posed a greater danger to the Bulgarian cause than the unreconstructed
“fanatical” Paşas of old; this new brand of Ottoman reformers, the petition
continued, “know how to supplement their Asiatic oppression with the refined
methods of Western political science” and they might, therefore, seduce
Bulgarians into buying the Tanzimat political agenda hook, line, and sinker.

Zakhari Stoianov, an active participant in the 1876 Bulgarian uprising and the
author of the most celebrated memoir dealing with the formation of the Bulgarian

33 Obretenov was particularly impressed by Midhat’s swift action that put an end
to an embezzlement scheme run by one Trifon chorbadzhi, a tax collector for the
Bulgarian community in Ruse during the 1860’s. Even though, as a result of
Trifon’s arrest, the members of the Bulgarian community in Ruse had to pay
extra taxes to make up for what Trifon had stolen (these extra levies were
informally known as Trifon parasi or “Trifon’s money”), Obretenov reports that
Midhat’s crackdown was widely seen as justified and beneficial for the
community in the long run. See Nikola Obretenov, Spomeni za bûlgarskite
vûzstaniiia (Sofia: Bûlgarska kniga, 1942), 69-70..

34 The text of this document was published in Narodnost, vol. 2, issue 10 [26
January 1869]. The petition asked the representatives of the Great Powers
gathered in Paris to grant autonomy to the Bulgarian-speaking provinces of the
Ottoman empire and was signed by 54 self-styled “Bulgarian notables” (notabili)
– actually mostly wealthy Bulgarian merchants living in Bucharest, Brâila, Galaţi,
and other Romanian cities.
“national liberation” movement, gave an even more concrete expression of these nationalist fears. Writing of the opening of Ottoman bureaucratic ranks to members of the Bulgarian elite during Midhat’s governorship in Ruse, Stoianov argued that if that policy had been broader in its scope and more persistent in its application, the final outcome of Ottoman reform in the Balkans might have been quite different, since the Bulgarians in Ottoman government service invariably became “more loyal to Osman’s throne than the Turks themselves.”

There is every reason to believe that most (but not all, as will be explained below) of Midhat’s superiors at the highest echelons of the Ottoman imperial administration also saw his achievements in Ruse in a very positive light. Åli (Mehmet Emin Åli) and Fuat (Keçecizade Mehmet Fuat) Paşas, the towering Ottoman statesmen of the 1860’s and the architects, together with Midhat, of the vilayet system, were particularly pleased with the way their provincial administration reform plan was being implemented in the Danube province. Fuat gave a glowing assessment of Midhat’s achievements in an 1867 diplomatic memorandum, claiming that the vilayet system had proven to be “a form of administration corresponding altogether to the needs of the country, to the customs of the populations, and to the demands of the concept of civilization which presses upon the empire from all directions,” and Åli was said to have appreciated Midhat’s success in keeping tabs on Bulgarian nationalism, even though he (Åli) may have disliked the governor personally.

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35 Zakhari Stoianov, Zapiski po bûlgarskite vûstaniia (Sofia: Bûlgarski pisatel, ed. 1976), vol. 1, 231.
36 Quoted in Davison, Reform, 157-158.
himself, despite his often ambivalent and fickle attitude towards reforms an
reformers, also appears to have had a high regard for Midhat’s policies in Ruse.
In an apocryphal (but often repeated) story, the Sultan is said to have liked the
ceremony organized for his visit to Ruse (in the summer of 1867) so much that
he was prompted to ask Midhat, tongue-in-cheek, “What place is this?” Upon
being informed that this was the capital of the Danube province of his Sublime
State, the Sultan (who was in Ruse on a stopover en route to Istanbul from an
official tour of European capitals) thanked the governor for his service and for
turning the city he presided over into as modern a place as anything he had seen
in the West. 37 This was, of course, an exaggeration, but it is indicative of the kind
of official accolades that Midhat’s service attracted. It was probably not a
coincidence that, after 1868, the governorship of the Danube province topped the
list of most prestigious provincial appointments for an aspiring Ottoman official. 38

Midhat’s image was presented in particularly positive light when compared to
that of his successors in the vilayet, whose administrations were typically seen as
incompetent and riddled with nepotism. St. Clair and Brophy pronounced Midhat
to be “dead and buried” as a result of his 1868 promotion to the Chairmanship of
the new Ottoman Council of State (Şura-yi Devlet) and flatly declared that, with
his departure from Ruse, “the Vilayet of the Danube has ceased to be a centre of
creation for reforms.” 39 Many Ottoman intellectuals, including the
constitutionalist-minded “Young Ottomans,” echoed that sentiment. In an article

37 Şentürk, Osmanlı Devleti’nde Bulgar Meselesi, 173.
38 Davison, Reform, 157.
39 St. Clair and Brophy, Residence in Bulgaria, 93, 384.
published in the spring of 1869, Ziya Bey opined that the improvements made in the Danube province under Midhat had since been “annulled” by his successor.\footnote{Article in the Young Ottoman newspaper \textit{Hürriyet} (published in London); quoted in Davison, \textit{Reform}, 165.}

In 1871 the German doctor of the hospital ward in Pleven (built in 1865-66) complained that the local administrative council had neglected to fund the ward to the point where it lacked basic surgical instruments; but, the doctor added, that would not have been the case, if Midhat were still in charge.\footnote{Kanitz, \textit{Dunavska Bûlgariia}, vol. 2, 94-5.} A similar anecdote, in which the perceived competence of Midhat’s administration shines by comparison with its successors, was recalled by one Mikhail Khadzhikostov, a member of an aspiring Bulgarian theater troupe in Ruse in the early 1870’s. Khadzhikostov and his fellow actors had decided to stage \textit{Izgubena [Lost] Stanka}, a popular Bulgarian play first published in 1865, but they were concerned that the play’s plot might be deemed subversive by the Ottoman authorities.\footnote{It is hard to see the reasons for the actors’ concerns. \textit{Izgubena Stanka} (written by Iliia Bîškov) was a lachrymose melodrama, which, while certainly rich in political overtones, was emphatically not anti-Ottoman.}

With a great deal of apprehension, the troupe members showed up at the provincial administrative council (\textit{meclis}) expecting tough questioning. As it turned out, they need not have worried – the most senior Ottoman official at the scene asked them only if “lost” Stanka (the play’s female protagonist) was eventually found and, having received the actors’ assurances that that was indeed the case, gave the project the government’s blessing. The author of one account of that story remarked that, had the “cunning and well-educated Midhat Paşa” still been in power in Ruse at the time, the young actors would have had...
their work cut out for them, but, fortunately, dealing with Midhat’s “more ignorant and naive successors” presented no such problems.\footnote{Georgi Chendov, Kogato Ruse beshe Ruschuk: stranitsi iz kulturata i obshtestvennia zhivot na Ruse prez minaliia vek (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Otechestvenia Front, 1985), 36.}

Even after the cataclysms of inter-communal violence that shook the Bulgarian territories in 1876-1877 and even after the establishment of the autonomous Bulgarian principality in 1878, vestiges of Midhat former popularity continued to linger in the territories that had made up the Danube province. Sources tell us of a Bulgarian folk song that praised “Midhat Paşa, that kind soul” \textit{(Midkhat Pasha, blaga dusha)},\footnote{Petûr Karapetrov, “Midkhat Pasha i opitvanieto mu da poturchi bûlgarskite uchilishta,” \textit{Bûlgarska sbirka} 5, no. 1 (1899): 56, note 2.} and anecdotal evidence suggests that, as late as the 1940’s, the Paşa’s photo was still hanging in some branches of the Bulgarian agricultural bank, an institution descended from the Agricultural Credit Cooperatives that were established by Midhat during his governorship in Ruse.\footnote{Comments made by Bilal Şimşir, see Uluslararası Midhat Paşa Semineri, Bildiriler ve Tartışmalar. Edirne, 8-10 Mayıs 1984 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1986), 221.}

\subsection*{1.2. “The wild old panther” – Midhat Pasha demonized}

Ivan Vazov, the grand old man of Bulgarian literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century wrote (between 1881 and 1884) a series of rousing poetic accounts of allegedly “forgotten” Bulgarian national heroes and their respective
sacrifices at the altar of Bulgarian freedom. Among these poems is *Karadzhata* – a gritty and graphic panegyric of the end of Stefan Karadzha, one of the leaders of a failed 1868 attempt to incite a popular anti-Ottoman revolt in the Bulgarian lands. As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven, the Karadzha and his fellow commander, Khadzhi Dimitûr, intended to spark the revolt by landing relatively small bands (*cheti*) of trained revolutionaries onto Ottoman territory from Romania and hoping that the *cheti*’s armed struggle against Ottoman government forces would jolt the masses of Bulgarian peasants into embracing the national cause and joining the fight. That did not happen; instead, the Ottoman army (under the command of Midhat Paşa, who had been temporarily recalled to the Danube province from his new position as head of the Council of State) dealt swiftly and harshly with the revolt. The Karadzha was captured alive (but seriously wounded), tried at a lightning-fast special tribunal, and executed in Ruse.

In crafting the poem’s plot line, Vazov chose to begin with the aftermath of the battle, i.e. with the Karadzha and his *cheta*’s military defeat. The physical remains of our heroes are scattered over the battle field; their chests are being torn by hungry wolves, their dead eyes are being pecked out by “blood-stained eagles,” their sun-baked flesh has fallen prey to swarms of flies. Into this scene

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46 This cycle of poems, called *Epopeia na zabravenite [Epic of the Forgotten]*, is considered to be Vazov’s poetic masterpiece and is included in a number of collected-works editions, e.g. Ivan Vazov, *Sûbrani sûchineniia*, ed. Georgi Tsanev (Sofia: Bûlgarski pisatel, ed. 1955).

47 Details on the activities of the 1868 *cheti* as well as on the Ottoman government’s response to their activities will be presented in Chapter 7.
of death and devastation Vazov introduces the reader to another type of scavenger – Midhat Paşa:

Midhat was satisfied. The wild old panther
Had emerged the victor. And his rotten body
Trembled with joy. He proceeded to erect gallows
In all corners of the country and cries went up
And the poor shepherds were petrified
At the sight of these new and accursed scarecrows.
The children were screaming, full of horror
And the wretched mothers could hardly breathe
Until they could be sure whose body was swaying in the wind.
The terror was universal...
Brother did not dare talk to his brother
The son feared his father
Treachery – that specter from the depths of hell –
Was whispering creepily and spreading the fear.
There was always another body swaying on that rope. 48

Although Karadzhata proved to be one of the less catching of Vazov’s poems, it is indicative of a changing attitude towards Midhat Paşa and his legacy that became prevalent in Bulgarian literature, journalistic writing and, to a lesser extent, historiography around the turn of the twentieth century. In the triumphant narrative of the nation state after 1878, Midhat’s image was quickly transformed into that of an obsolete Ottoman Sisyphus of sorts, an admittedly capable administrator, but someone whose efforts to strengthen the empire never stood a chance against the inexorable forces of national resurgence. Some of the criticisms along these lines are quite predictable. The Paşa’s policies in Ruse were quickly pronounced to have been specifically anti-Bulgarian, his goals “entirely Turkish.” It was alleged that the very term “Danube province” (Tuna

48 My translation. The Bulgarian text of the poem can be found online at: http://www.slovo.bg/showwork.php3?AuID=14&WorkID=917&Level=2
vilayeti) was a product of Midhat’s desire to wipe the very name Bulgaria off the map. (Why did he not call it Bulgaristan vilayeti?, one critic asked, although he ought to have known that it was never a common Ottoman practice to name provinces after ethnic groups – there was never an Ermenistan or a Makedonya vilayeti for example)⁴⁹ In related (and similarly unverifiable) allegations, the governor was said to have instructed the teachers in the Ruse islahhane to cross out the term “Bulgaria” from their geography maps; other stories have Midhat contacting Emperor Franz Josef of Austria in order to argue that Austro-Hungarian consulates in the province should not use the word “Bulgaria” on their official stationery.⁵⁰

But some of Midhat’s earliest Bulgarian critics (at least the ones who wanted to maintain a semblance of objectivity) realized that a simplistic black-and-white portrayal of the Paşa as anti-Bulgarian would lack credibility. These critics had to balance (often quite awkwardly) their denunciations of the alleged ethno-religious bias in Midhat’s policies with a tacit recognition that there may not have been such a bias after all – in that the governor attempted to “denationalize” all communities within the vilayet equally. The same author who had proclaimed that Midhat’s policies pursued “entirely Turkish” goals found himself backpedaling just a few paragraphs later:

[Midhat] wanted, in this century of nationalities, to carry out a political act whose time had long passed, an act that belongs to the centuries of old – he wanted to cause all the various

⁴⁹ The criticism is from Kisimov, “Medkhat pasha,” 800.
nations of the Turkish state to self-destruct, to forget about their national names and all to accept, instead, the name of the state: osmanlis.\textsuperscript{51}

This ambiguity is also evident in the 1872 analysis of Midhat’s tenure as governor written by Liuben Karavelov, one of the most prominent representatives of the nationalist Bulgarian journalistic guild in exile. To be sure, Karavelov accused Midhat of “wanting to strengthen the Turkish element, which could be used to reinforce the Sultan’s power,” but he also protested that the governor’s policies “did not recognize any people’s special rights or any nationality’s special privileges.”\textsuperscript{52} It could be said that the difficulties Bulgarian nationalists initially faced in trying to launch a full-scale intellectual attack on Midhat’s policies stemmed from their own inability to decide whether they wanted to criticize the Tanzimat principle of Osmani\l\i\k in general or Midhat’s attempts to implement it. To gain more traction, the nationalists’ criticism needed to focus on a specific aspect of the governor’s policies that could be decried as properly anti-Bulgarian.

Midhat’s response to the infiltration of the vilayet’s territory by the Bulgarian bands (cheti) of 1867 and 1868 (the suppression of the latter band is the episode to which Vazov’s Karadzhata referred) provided his critics with considerable ideological ammunition. Midhat’s policy in dealing with the cheti is often cited as a prima facie case of his anti-Bulgarian bias. As early as the winter of 1868, a play by the Romanian playwright Iorgu Caragiale (uncle of the future famous Romanian author Ion Luca Caragiale) about the “exploits” of the 1867 bands was

\begin{itemize}
\item[]\textsuperscript{51} Kisimov, “Medkhat pasha,” 800. Emphasis in the original.
\item[]\textsuperscript{52} Svoboda, vol. 3, no 8 [19 August 1872], quoted in Pletn’ov, Midkhat Pasha, 225.
\end{itemize}
being staged in Brăila in front of largely Bulgarian émigré audiences. The play, entitled *The Battle at Vûrbovka between the Bulgarians and the Turks, under commander Filip Totiu*, has an unnamed (but clearly modeled after Midhat) Ottoman Paşa as its main villain. The Paşa’s character is despotic and rabidly anti-Bulgarian: he makes a mockery of the judicial system by presiding over the interrogations and trials of the captured Bulgarian rebels and shamelessly manipulates the courts into convicting them on trumped-up charges.\(^{53}\) That accusation – that Midhat had set up, in effect, kangaroo courts, to deal with the captured cheti members and had even executed “national heroes” without proper trial whatsoever – became the mantra of contemporary Bulgarian critics of the governor and was repeated ad nauseam from the pages of such nationalist periodicals as *Dunavska Zora* and (later) *Svoboda*. The substance of these accusations against Midhat will be examined later in this study; for now, it is important to note that what this line of criticism amounted to was a rejection of the *Tanzimat* narrative of confessional equality and the rule of law – interestingly enough, in Caragiale’s play, the Paşa’s character specifically overrules (and chastises) the character of a lower-level Ottoman official (a judge in the court that is about to try the captured Bulgarian rebels), who proposes to treat the captured band members by the letter of the law.\(^{54}\)

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\(^{53}\) For a literary analysis of Caragiale’s play, see Lûchezar Georgiev, “Za poetikata i khudozhestvenite vnusheniia v dramata na iorgu Karadzhale ‘Bitkata pri Verbovka na bûlgarite s tûrtsite pod komanduvaneto na voivodata Filip Totiu’,” *Almanakh za istoriata na Ruse* 2 (1997).

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 416. In the play, the Paşa tells the judge not to make too much fuss about the proper procedure for interrogating the suspects because “we have many more gâvurs to hang.”
Other Bulgarian criticisms of Midhat Paşa and his policies also began to crystallize in the 1870’s and reached their apogee in the aftermath of the establishment of the Bulgarian nation-state in 1878. Midhat’s proposal (never implemented) to merge the existing schools in the province (which were divided along confessional lines) into a common school system under the supervision of the state was billed as an attempt to “Turkify” the Bulgarian schools and reverse the clock on their progress by forcing them into a union with the “backward” and “fanatical” Muslim schools. Midhat’s reforms were increasingly excoriated as a “smokescreen” and “luster,” masking an anti-Bulgarian core:

Midhat Paşa regarded all Bulgarians as Pan-Slavists and Russian pawns; he considered them the most implacable enemies of the state; … he was seeing everywhere [nationalist] committees; he could not stand the Bulgarian Exarchate – it was like a thorn in his eye and he sought to damage it in any way he could.

A more surprising charge launched against the Paşa by his Bulgarian critics was that he had brought too much (or the wrong kind of) “Westernization” to the Danube province. Midhat was accused (with a considerable degree of exaggeration) of having allowed Ruse in particular to become a veritable nest of depravity and immorality, where “entertaining and magnificent brothels” outnumbered schools and where professional female singers entertained blasé

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56 Kisimov, “Medkhat pasha,” 801.
European travelers and titillated locals in live-music cafes and new hotels or casinos.\textsuperscript{58}

Midhat’s well-known lack of “diplomatic finesse”\textsuperscript{59} also earned him a number of powerful enemies among the Ottoman statesmen of his time. The bitter political and personal animosity between Midhat and Mahmud Nedim Paşa\textsuperscript{60} was the cause of Midhat’s resignation from the governorship of Baghdad in May of 1872. A few months later, Midhat’s zealous investigation of Mahmud Nedim’s alleged embezzlement from foreign loans led to Midhat’s dismissal from his short-lived first Grand Vezirate (October 1872).\textsuperscript{61} Midhat’s relations with Ahmed Cevdet Pasha, the famous historian, jurist and author of the Ottoman Civil Code (\textit{Mecelle})\textsuperscript{62} were hardly better – Midhat and Cevdet clashed repeatedly in the course of drafting the 1876 Constitution, with political arguments degenerating into personal recriminations;\textsuperscript{63} Cevdet finally refused to support the Constitutional

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\parbox{\textwidth}{\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{58} The references are from P. Kisimov’s memoirs, although similar allegations were already being made in the Bulgarian press in Romania during Midhat’s governorship. See Kisimov, “Medkhat pasha,” 802.
\textsuperscript{59} Davison, \textit{Reform}, 360.
\textsuperscript{60} Grand Vezir from September 1871 to July 1872, and from August 1875 to May 1876.
\textsuperscript{62} On Cevdet, see Ebül’ulâ Mardin, \textit{Medeni Hukuk Cephesinden Ahmed Cevdet Paşa: Ölümünün 50nci yıldönümü vesilesiyle} (İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Matbaası, 1946).
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 131-2, 42-43. Ali Haydar Midhat,\textit{ Tabsıra-i İbret}, 149-64. Cevdet accused Midhat of illegal financial dealings and having a poor command of French; Midhat retorted by denouncing Cevdet as a hypocritical stooge of Abdülhamid II and impugning Cevdet’s knowledge of European law.}
\end{flushright}
draft in toto. Later, Cevdet sat in judgment of Midhat at the latter’s 1881 treason trial and, by all accounts, took a hard-line stance against his former colleague. *

Midhat’s relations with two Ottoman monarchs – Abdülaziz (r. 1861-1876) and Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909) – also ended up being quite icy, to say the least. Abdülaziz evidently showed a great deal of appreciation for the achievements of Midhat during the latter’s governorships in Ruse and Baghdad and was even persuaded to appoint Midhat to the Grand Vezirate (1872) on the strength of a single audience, during which the Paşa passionately argued that the Sultan’s favorite (Mahmud Nedim Paşa) and his clique were driving the empire into the ground. But Abdülaziz’s admiration turned to apprehension when Midhat’s overzealous audit of Mahmud Nedim’s finances threatened to implicate the Palace in a corruption scandal and to curtail the monarch’s spending in the

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64 Cevdet was a member of the special tribunal convened to try Midhat by virtue of being Minister of Justice at the time; after the verdict, Cevdet was one of three judges who opposed the commuting of the original death sentences handed down against some of the defendants (including Midhat). For an overview of Cevdet’s attitudes toward Midhat, see Markus Köhbach, “Ahmed Cevdet Paschas Tezâkir und Ma’rûzât als Quelle über das Leben und die Persönlichkeit Ahmed Midhat Paschas,” in *Uluslararası Midhat Paşa Semineri, Bildiriler ve Tartışmalar. Edirne, 8-10 Mayıs 1984* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1986); Ali Haydar Midhat, *The Life of Midhat Pasha: A Record of His Services, Political Reforms, Banishment, and Judicial Murder* (London: John Murray, 1903), 216, 23.

65 Examples of Abdülaziz’s initial esteem for Midhat can be seen in the abovementioned anecdote of the Sultan’s visit to Ruse in the summer of 1876 and in numerous royal honors bestowed upon the Paşa from 1861 to 1872. These included the empire’s highest civilian honor, the Mecidiye order of the first degree, which Midhat received both as vali of Niš and as Grand Vezir, and a ceremonial sword engraved with diamonds, which was awarded for Midhat’s successful military campaign against a resurgent Saudi chieftanship in Najd. See Ali Haydar Midhat, *Life of Midhat Pasha*, 55-61; BOA İ.D. 39821 [29 Şevval 1284 / 23 February 1868]. For the events surrounding Midhat’s 1872 audience with Abdülaziz and his subsequent appointment to the Grand Vezirate, see Davison, *Reform*, 287-8.
future. In the long term, it was, of course, Midhat’s well-known conflict with Sultan Abdülhamid II over the first Ottoman constitution and subsequent implementation of parliamentary rule that would prove to be the Paşa’s undoing.\textsuperscript{66} But for our period, the most significant opposition to Midhat and his reforms from within the Ottoman ruling establishment would come from Kibrislı Mehmet Pasha\textsuperscript{67} and Mahmud Nedim. As will be shown later in this study, there is a direct correlation between the political fortunes of these two men and the amount of difficulty Midhat faced in dealing with the empire’s central government during his tenure in Ruse.

Midhat attributed many of the vicissitudes of his own political career to such personal conflicts and to his “inability” to betray his principles in the interest of purely political goals. In a characteristically self-deprecating quote from a 1877 letter, he wrote:

\begin{quote}
I will admit that my abilities and talents have always been below those of all my friends. That being the case, if there’s one quality that has brought me to the position where I am now, it is the quality of speaking my mind. And likewise, the cause of all ills and difficulties I have experienced in my life has also been this truthfulness and truth-telling.\textsuperscript{68}
\end{quote}

There is, no doubt, a measure of grand-standing in this, from a man who, at the time he wrote those lines, was an embittered political exile. And yet, Midhat’s self-characterization contains more than a grain of truth. His ability to make

\textsuperscript{66} On the events of that period, see Süleyman Kani İrtем, Birinci Meşrutiyet ve Sultan Abdülhamid (İstanbul: Temel Yayınları, 2004).

\textsuperscript{67} For an explanation (from Midhat’s perspective) of the origins of the conflict between Midhat and Kibrislı Mehmet, see Ali Haydar Midhat, Tabsira-i İbret, 21-2.

\textsuperscript{68} See ibid., 353-4, document 22.
personal enemies would haunt Midhat throughout his political career. It is perhaps the ultimate irony that the presiding judge of the 1881 special court (known as Yıldız Mahkemesi) who sentenced the Paşa to death for his alleged role in the murder of Sultan Abdülaziz turned out to be a certain Sürûrî Efendi – a one time judge (kadi) at the Islamic (şer'i) court in Ruse who had dared oppose Midhat's reforms in the Danube province and had been summarily dismissed for that in 1865.

A curious footnote to the story of Midhat's vilification is provided by the relatively recent resurgence of political Islam in Turkey. This process has brought along attempts to challenge the historical legacy of Kemalism and, by extension, to rehabilitate (often in simplistic and/or historically inaccurate ways) the legacy of the Ottoman empire. Not surprisingly, in the Islamist interpretation of nineteenth-century Ottoman history, Midhat Paşa is seen as a villain, particularly for his role in the deposition of Sultan Abdülaziz (May 30, 1876), for his alleged role in Abdülaziz's murder (June 4, 1876) and, later, for his well-known conflicts with Abdülhamid II. Since Abdülhamid has become the darling of Islamists, his most bitter political and personal enemy regularly receives severe tongue-lashings (keyboard lashings?) on Islamist websites. Typically, Turkish Islamist critics of Midhat recycle old Hamidian accusations – the Paşa is said not only to have plotted to overthrow Abdülhamid but to end the Ottoman dynasty altogether and set himself up on the throne of Osman. Midhat is also accused

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69 Midhat supposedly asked his co-conspirators: “What will happen if the ‘House of Osman’ became ‘the House of Midhat?’” (Al-i Osman yerine Al-i Midhat denilse ne olur?).
of planning to appoint non-Muslim governors even to the mostly Muslim Asian provinces, of wanting to destroy the Ottoman army by opening the doors of the Imperial Military College to Christians, and of taking his orders from London (particularly in trying to limit the Sultan’s absolute powers).

Equally ludicrous though more original and, in the eyes of Islamists, probably more odious, is the charge that Midhat himself was a Jewish dönme and therefore a nominal Muslim at best.

The mythologizing of Midhat’s achievements in the Danube province may have taken a more sinister turn in the corridors of Great Power shadow diplomacy of his day. Count Nikolay Ignatieff (Ignat’ev), Russia’s influential ambassador to İstanbul in the 1860’s and 1870’s, is said to have insinuated (perhaps to his trusted friend, Grand Vezir Mahmud Nedim Paşa) that Midhat Paşa’s reforms were steering the Danube province towards a de facto independence from the empire as has been the case with Egypt. A Russian diplomat in the Danube province echoed Ignatieff’s suggestion (and added Âli Haydar Midhat, Tabsira-i İbret, 61-2.


71 I.e., a follower of Shabbetai Tsevi, the supposed seventeenth-century Jewish messiah of Salonica, who had converted to Islam under pressure from the Ottoman government; the term is often used to impugn one’s orthodox Islamic credentials (the dönme, have often been accused of continuing to secretly practice Judaism after their conversion) as well as one’s ethnicity.


Paşa, of Ioannina to the list of Midhat’s alleged political models), by observing that the vali wanted to develop the province economically in order to create an autonomous “principality” for himself. Such allegations had no basis in fact, but they may have played a role in Midhat’s dismissal from the Danube province’s governorship. In 1868, he was relieved of his duties and appointed chair of the newly established Council of State (Şura-yi Devlet). On paper, it was a promotion. In terms of actual political power and decision-making opportunities, it was a setback.

Ignatieff’s comparison between Midhat and the ayans of the early nineteenth century was, of course, disingenuous and motivated by political animosity. Apart from the fact that there is no evidence that Midhat ever entertained any thoughts for an independent (that is, outside the Ottoman civil service) career similar to that of Mehmet Ali of Egypt, the basic social and economic realities in the Danube province made an Egyptian scenario virtually impossible. The tools of Mehmet Ali’s economic power in Egypt – a radical change in landownership patterns to the advantage of a small clique around the governor, the abolition of tax-farming and waqf tax-exemptions, and the creation of state trade monopolies for agricultural goods – were never tested in Tuna vilayeti. More important still,

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74 The allegation was made in a detailed report written in 1873 by the Russian consul in Ruse and published in 1877 as part of a compendium meant to assist the Russian occupation armies in the 1877-1878 war. A.N. Moshnin, “Stet’ia Moshnina o Dunaiskago vilayete,” in Materialy dlia izuchenia Bolgarii. Naepchatany po povelleniiu ego Imperatorskago Vysochestva Glavnokomanduiushchago Dieistvuishcheiu armieiu (Bucharest: Tipografiia D.V. Mancheva, 1877), 44.

the successful consolidation of İstanbul’s hold over the remaining provinces following the Egyptian wars (1832-33; 1838-41) and the Serbian (1804-1815) and Greek revolts (1821-1829) assured that no provincial governor could repeat Mehmet Ali’s most important strategic achievement – the raising of a large and disciplined conscript army.\(^\text{76}\)

Compared to an early nineteenth-century ayan (including Mehmet Ali), a successful Ottoman provincial governor of the second half of the century had to play a political game whose stakes were admittedly smaller, but whose language was subtler and whose rules were more complex. Most of the mythologizing (be it positive or negative, contemporary or historiographical) of Midhat tends to overlook the crucial fact that the Paşa remained a political actor in a bureaucratic structure larger than himself. Despite the wide-ranging prerogatives given to him by the provincial statute, the governor’s freedom of action was in practice circumscribed from at least three different directions: a) from above, where his transparent (if unstated) desire for further career advancement meant that he could not afford a direct confrontation with the central government on major policy issues; b) from below where continued dependence on key non-state actors such as tax collectors or Bulgarian notables made it imprudent to alienate such groups, and c) laterally, where the fact that Midhat was the governor of but one province meant that a number of policies (for example those concerning the building of roads or suppression of brigandage) had to be coordinated with

neighboring provinces to be effective. Consequently, Midhat Paşa cannot be seen as an unproblematic agent of an abstract “will of the state” and his reform policies cannot be evaluated as if they took place in a vacuum, outside the institutional structures of Ottoman politics or the social milieu of the Danube province.

1.3. The Danube province in historiographical perspective

It has been pointed out that historical accounts of the Ottoman Tanzimat period in general and of nineteenth-century Ottoman Bulgaria in particular follow one of two mutually exclusive paradigms. The first can be labeled the “doom and gloom” paradigm—it sees the Ottoman empire as a political entity fundamentally incompatible with the “modern” era of nation states, industrialization, and representative government.\(^77\) This is the paradigm associated with the “modernization theory” works of such prominent Balkanists of the 1950’s—1970’s as Peter Sugar and Charles and Barbara Jelavich.\(^78\) This is also the paradigm of the “national meta-narrative” – shared, for example, by the works of virtually all Bulgarian historians prior to 1989 and, also, by a surprisingly large number of Turkish Ottomanists. Ottoman reform efforts in the nineteenth century, according to the doom-and-gloom paradigm, were nothing more than hopeless efforts to


revive the proverbial “Sick Man of Europe.” They could, by definition, achieve nothing other than providing the final “inevitable steps leading to the [empire’s] collapse”\textsuperscript{79}

The second paradigm, by contrast, portrays the end of the empire as a result of outside forces (e.g. Great Power politics) and not as a matter of self-implosion. For the late imperial period, this approach has the advantage of avoiding the teleological view of Ottoman reform as a dead end. In the hands of sophisticated practitioners, it has produced important re-evaluations of previously dismissed aspects of the history of the Tanzimat and Hamidian periods.\textsuperscript{80} Unfortunately, all too often, this approach can result in an undue idealization of the Ottoman experience – particularly in works suggesting that Ottoman institutions and practices represented a golden age of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional harmony and a healthy, hands-off approach to local self-government that has

\textsuperscript{79} Köksal, “Tanzimat döneminde Bulgaristan,” 234.
\textsuperscript{80} On ideology and imperial “symbolic politics,” see Selim Deringil, \textit{The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909} (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998); Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” \textit{American Historical Review} 107, no. 3 (June 2002). On provincial administration on the “margins,” see Eugene Rogan, \textit{Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850-1921} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). On educational reform, see Selçuk Akşin Somel, \textit{The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1908: Islamization, Autocracy, and Discipline} (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Benjamin Fortna, \textit{Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Another work that will be often quoted in the present study that may be mentioned here is Michael Palairet, \textit{The Balkan Economies c. 1800-1914: Evolution Without Development} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) – although not explicitly concerned with questions of Ottoman policy, it nevertheless provides an innovative view of the economic history of the late Ottoman Balkans.
been proven superior to any subsequent alternatives. This is one of the common shortfalls of a number of works produced by Turkish historians.

1.3.1. Turkish historiography

It should come as no surprise that scholarly assessments of the reforms implemented in the Danube province between 1864 and 1868 tend to differ from one national historiography to the next. And, as Johann Strauss has observed, not all differences in the perspectives of the former rulers and the formerly ruled are due to nationalism\textsuperscript{81} – questions of source availability/choice and research priorities are often just as important. For a long time, republican Turkish historiography had difficulties in conceptualizing nineteenth-century Ottoman Tanzimat reforms and Turkish Ottomanists faced a dilemma between wanting to emphasize the “positive” or “modern” aspects of these reforms and having to present them, ultimately, as a false start undone by the Kemalist denouement. Moreover, as Osman Okyar has noted, the period of reforms presents Turkish historians with the problem of authenticity – by allegedly importing Western legal and institutional models the Ottoman state of the nineteenth century is often perceived to have become less worthy a subject of scholarly inquiry than the “authentic” Ottoman state and society of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century

“classical age.” Still, it can be said that, to most mainstream Turkish
Ottomanists Midhat Paşa remains a figure of heroic proportions – a liberal
reformer who fought to put a halt to the empire’s “decline” by transforming it into
a modern constitutional monarchy. However, in a historiography that has
traditionally privileged center-based approaches, Midhat’s prominent role in the
politics of the imperial center during the 1870’s meant that Turkish historians
have largely “abandoned” the topic of his various provincial appointments to
historians from the corresponding successor states. The proceedings of a

83 Bekir Sütki Baykal, Mithat Paşa: Siyasi ve İdari Şahsiyeti (İstanbul: 1964), passim.
1984 conference in Edirne contain some notable exceptions, but, on the whole, while acknowledging Midhat’s achievements as a provincial administrator, most Turkish historians have claimed that his “real place in history” stems from his role as the de facto powerbroker in the empire in the critical period between May and December 1876 (when Midhat was a minister without portfolio in the cabinet of Mehmet Rüştü Paşa) and particularly from his subsequent appointment to his second Grand Vezirate from December 1876 to February 1877 (the first one was in July-October of 1872). While relatively short – 48 days in all – Midhat’s second Grand Vezirate was indeed a momentous period in Ottoman history, which saw the promulgation, on December 23, 1876, of the first Ottoman Constitution (Kanun-u Esâsi) and which could have changed the course of the empire’s history had the new sultan (Abdülhamid II) not reasserted absolutist authority in the following years. It was Midhat Paşa’s role as the most prominent “Founding Father” of the Constitution that would later earn him a place in the symbolic pantheon of the Turkish republic and a state funeral (or re-burial) with full military honors in 1951.

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88 In June of that year, the government of Prime Minister Celal Bayar requested permission from the Saudi government to exhume Midhat’s remains from their original resting place in Ta’īf; the remains were shipped to Turkey and re-interred
In the few instances in which Turkish historians have addressed the issue of
Midhat’s governorship of the Danube province, they have usually presented it as
an unproblematic success story, so much so that Midhat Paşa is sometimes
referred to as “the founder or modern Bulgaria” and credited with having laid
down the economic and institutional foundations of the country. But this praise
has its limits – as representatives of a national historiography, Turkish authors
have not been immune to the pitfalls of the “doom-and-gloom” teleological view
of Ottoman history. Thus many Turkish historians have echoed the view of their
Bulgarian colleagues that Midhat’s policies in Ruse, as well-conceived and
energetically implemented as they might have been, were ultimately doomed to
fail in the long run. İlber Ortaylı, otherwise one of the most thoughtful historians of
the Ottoman nineteenth century, whose studies on cadre policy in the Danube
province and on local government during the Tanzimat period offer incisive points
for comparison between Ottoman provincial reforms and contemporary
developments in the Russian and the Habsburg Empires, remarked that
Midhat’s policies “failed to bring to life the ideology of Osmanlılık because, in the

(June 26, 1951) at the national cemetery on the Hürriyet-i Ebediye (Eternal
Freedom) hill in İstanbul’s Çağlayan district.
89 E.g. Skënder Rizaj, “Midhat Paşa’nın Rumeli’de Vilayetler Kurulmasındaki
Rolü,” in Uluslararası Midhat Paşa Semineri, Bildiriler ve Tartışmalar. Edirne, 8-
90 M. Tayyib Gökbilgin, “Midhat Paşa,” in İslam Ansiklopedisi (İstanbul: Türkiye
Diyanet Vakfı, 1988-), vol. 8, 272; İlber Ortaylı, Tanzimat Devrinde Osmanlı
91 İlber Ortaylı, “Midhat Paşa’nın Vilayet Yönetimindeki Kadroları ve Politikası,” in
Uluslararası Midhat Paşa Semineri, Bildiriler ve Tartışmalar. Edirne, 8-10 Mayıs
world of nationalism, *Osmanlılık* was stillborn.” While repeating the mantra that Midhat “laid the real foundation of modern Bulgaria,” Ortaylı opined that the governor was fighting a losing battle against the *Zeitgeist* – the time to save the empire had passed and all one could hope for was a return to less turbulent times. Hüdai Şentürk’s otherwise unremitting glorification of the achievements of *Tanzimat* reformers in the Bulgarian provinces are tempered by a similarly resigned note when he observed that:

> No matter how perfect improvements the Ottoman government introduced, it was clear that the Bulgarians would soon begin revolting again [demanding] independence. Not even the application of the first *Vilayet Law* in the Danube province could satisfy the Bulgarians.94

Besides buying, willy-nilly, into the central premise of the “doom and gloom” nation-state paradigm, a few Turkish historians’ works on the question have suffered from what one “insider” critic has called “document-fetishism of the most naive kind possible.”95 This is perhaps too harsh a reproach – with a huge archive at their fingertips, Turkish historians could have been expected to emphasize document-centered approaches. Still, it is undeniable that Turkish historians have often been willing to let the sources “speak for themselves”96 and, ipso facto, have not only neglected analysis but have occasionally disposed of it.

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92 İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğu’nun En Uzun Yüzyılı* (İstanbul: Hil Yayın, 1983), 106.
93 Ortaylı, *Osmanlı Mahalli İdareleri*, 60.
95 The quote is from Halil Berktay’s criticism of “Barkanian history” (Berkty’s term). See Halil Berktay, “The Search for the Peasant in Western and Turkish History/Historiography,” in *New Approaches to State and Peasant in Ottoman History*, ed. Halil Berktay and Suraiya Faroqhi (London: Frank Cass, 1992), 156. 96 Ibid., 150.
altogether. This, unfortunately, is the approach chosen by the most comprehensive treatment of Midhat’s governorship of the Danube province by a Turkish historian to date – Şentürk’s *Osmanlı Devleti’nde Bulgar Meselesi* (1992). Şentürk has surveyed an impressive amount of documentary material (and published much of it as appendices to his work) and, to his credit, has used a number of studies by Bulgarian historians in the field. But his approach is hopelessly statist and it is often impossible to determine whether he is simply quoting a document or endorsing the position expressed in that document. In particular, any acts of Bulgarian discontent with Ottoman rule are depicted in Şentürk’s book in exactly the same terms as they would have been in official nineteenth-century Ottoman correspondence. Popular ferment is instigated by “some rebels who worked to turn people’s opinion against the Ottoman state” and anti-government petitions are signed “by some ignorant Bulgarian peasants” who have been “misled” by Serbian and Russian propaganda.  

97 Anti-government violence in the course of a rebellion is portrayed in extremely graphic terms, but government violence in suppressing the same rebellion is presented euphemistically as a “return of calm.”  

98 When Bulgarian nationalist band members (1867-1868) enter a Muslim village, they “plunge it into [a state of] terror and excitement,” but when Muslim counter-repressions against Christian villages follow they are the work of “some ill-behaved and harmful individuals,

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97 See Şentürk, *Osmanlı Devleti’nde Bulgar Meselesi*, 112, 5, 6, 9, 50, 53 and so forth.

98 Ibid., 120-1, 202.
mainly of the Gypsies' ilk” who start engaging in “all sorts of bad things.”

Şentürk’s uncritical adoption of the language and perspective of his sources greatly detracts from the value of his work and prevents him from offering any but the most simplistic and/or tendentious interpretations of the events he describes. Berktay’s description of the “Barkanian method” is, sadly, all too apposite for Şentürk’s approach:

[I]t is as if he cannot refrain from opening up one treasure chest after another, instead of taking time to reflect, to analyse and synthesise, the documents impose their own order or lack of order upon him, so that he writes gropingly from quotation to quotation.

Another work that needs to be mentioned in this brief survey of Turkish historiography (although, technically speaking it belongs to Ottoman historiography) is the political biography of Midhat Paşa published by his son, Ali Haydar Midhat, first in English in 1903, then in Turkish (AH 1322 / 1904-05), then in French (1908), and, finally in Turkish again (AH 1325 / 1907-1908), but this time in a substantially expanded two-volume format. Predictably hagiographic

99 Ibid., 203-4.
100 Berktay, “Search for the Peasant,” 149.
101 The original English edition is Ali Haydar Midhat, The Life of Midhat Pasha: A Record of His Services, Political Reforms, Banishment, and Judicial Murder (London: John Murray, 1903); the first Ottoman Turkish edition (which is an almost exact translation of the English edition) is [Ali Haydar Midhat], Midhat Paşa’nın hayat-i siyasiyesi, hidemati, şehadeti, (Cairo, AH 1322); the French edition is Ali Haydar Midhat, Midhat-Pacha: sa vie, son oeuvre (Paris: Stock, 1908); and the expanded, two volume Ottoman-Turkish edition is [Ali Haydar Midhat], Midhat Paşa’nın hayat-i siyasiyeti, hidemati, menfa hayati, (İstanbul: Hilal Matbaası, AH 1325), vol. 1 = Tabsira-i İltre, vol. 2 = Mirit-i Hayret. To complicate matters even further, the two Ottoman-Turkish editions have almost identical titles, despite the fact that the one published in İstanbul in 1907-08 is much more detailed and of substantially greater historical interest than the one
in character, the material presented in this work largely deals with the later years of Midhat Paşa’s career, particularly the fateful “year of the three Sultans” (1876) and Midhat’s 1881 trial for treason. Nevertheless, the biography contains a lot of important information concerning Midhat’s governorship in the Danube province. But the historian who tries to use this work faces a problem – even though the earlier English edition is attributed, without caveats, to Ali Haydar, the more detailed (and later) Ottoman Turkish edition names Ali Haydar merely as the “publisher” (naşir) and is presented as an autobiography – the Paşa’s own memoirs, allegedly written clandestinely and smuggled out of the Ta’if prison, where Midhat spent the final months of his life. A recent edition of these “memoirs” appears to accept this version of the book’s authorship, but other historians have rejected the claim. R. Davison maintained that the 1909 Ottoman Turkish edition “seem[s] to be based on memoranda and incomplete memoirs by Midhat, and documents preserved by him, the whole edited by his son.”

Published in Cairo in 1904-1905. In addition, the publication date for the İstanbul edition is sometimes mistakably given as 1909, even though it is clearly dated AH 1325 (February 1907 – February 1908).

102 The subtitle of the English edition describes the book as “Derived From Private Documents and Reminiscences By His Son Ali Haydar Midhat.”

103 Ta’if, in today’s Saudi Arabia, was the location of final exile of Midhat and the ten other former Ottoman officials who had been his co-defendants at the 1881 trial for allegedly conspiring to organize Sultan Abdülaziz’s assassination in 1876; four of the eleven defendants, including Midhat himself had originally received death sentences, but these had been commuted to life imprisonment.


105 Davison, Reform, 449. Davison has also published a more detailed study of the bibliographic history of Midhat’s memoirs, Roderic H. Davison, “The Beginning of Published Biographies of Ottoman Statesmen: The Case of Midhat Pasha,” in Türkische Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte (1071-1920): Akten des
Davison’s interpretation strikes me as the more plausible one – while the fact that the book is written in the third person would not necessarily disqualify it as a genuine autobiography (given Ottoman literary conventions at the time), it appears improbable that a memoir of such a length (over 800 pages in the most recent modern Turkish edition), well-developed structure and detail could have been written secretly in a high-security prison. The problem of authorship does not mean that the work cannot be used as a historical source – factual data in it, in particular, can be easily cross-checked against other material – but it does mean that, as a source of information on Midhat Paşa’s political views, it should be used with the caveat that these views are probably refracted through the prism of the son’s extensive editorializing.\(^{106}\)

### 1.3.2. **Bulgarian historiography**

Bulgarian historians have, in most instances, approached the question of Ottoman modernization reforms in the Bulgarian lands with skepticism that often verged on dismissal. The governorship of Midhat Paşa in the Danube province is not an exception. Until recently, Bulgarian authors’ ability to approach the subject in a dispassionate and scholarly manner seemed to be in reverse proportion to their place on the professional pecking order of the day. One was

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\(^{106}\) In the following pages, I have attempted to keep this caveat in mind when using Midhat’s “memoirs.”
much more likely to encounter balanced evaluations of the impact of Midhat’s reforms in works of local history (kraeznanie)\textsuperscript{107} and in studies written by historians based in the provincial universities\textsuperscript{108} than in the work of the profession’s heavyweights – whether prior to 1944 or after that.\textsuperscript{109} Also, some aspects of the Ottoman reform policies in Bulgaria during the 1860’s and 1870’s have proven more amenable to a balanced assessment by Bulgarian historians than others. One example was the creation (between 1864 and 1867) of a system of agricultural credit cooperatives which is acknowledged to have been largely successful in curbing the disastrous impact of private usurious money-lending and in ameliorating the financial position of the peasantry.\textsuperscript{110} (Midhat’s

\textsuperscript{107} This genre has produced some excellent and detailed studies that are unfortunately undervalued. Some of the kraeznanie works that discuss Midhat’s reforms include Trifonov, \textit{Istoriia na grada Pleven}; Nikola G. Popov, \textit{Opisanie na Ruschuk za vremeto ot 1860 do 1879 godina} (Ruse: Pechatnitsa Dimitur Petrov, 1928); Nikola Lazarkov, \textit{Spomeni iz robskoto minalo na gr. Dupnitsa i selata mu} (Dupnitsa: Pech. Mizhorov, 1924).

\textsuperscript{108} E.g. Georgi Pletn’ov, who spent his career at the University of Veliko Tûrnovo and whose work is not well known, even among Bulgarian historians, despite its high quality.


\textsuperscript{110} Although the crudest Marxist-Leninist works of the 1950’s and 1960’s (e.g. A. A. Popova, “Politika Turtsii i natsional’no-osvoboditel’naiia bor’ba bolgarskogo naroda v 60-kh godakh XIX veka,” \textit{Voprosy istorii} 10 (1953): 10, 53.) initially rejected the usefulness of having a system of agricultural credit at all, claiming that it benefited only the “agricultural and trading-usurping bourgeoisie,” most Bulgarian historians eventually adopted a more positive view of the cooperatives. See Maria N. Todorova, “‘Obshtopoleznite kasi’ na Midkhat Pasha,” \textit{Istoricheski Pregled} 28, no. 5 (1972); Konstantin Kosev, “Sotsialno-ikonomicheski predpostavki na natsionalnoosvoboditel’no dvizhenie v Sofiia i Sofiisko prez 60-te i 70-te godini na XIX vek,” in \textit{Sofiia prez vekovete} (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1989), 204.
credit cooperatives are also unique in that a national institution of the
independent Bulgarian state after 1878 – the Bulgarian agricultural bank –
acknowledged its descent from them).

In general, most Bulgarian historians have accepted as “progressive” Midhat’s policies in the fields of infrastructural, economic, urban and health reform, while roundly denouncing the governor’s alleged anti-Bulgarian bias in more “ideological” fields (e.g. the school reform plans and the suppression of the cheti). Incidentally, this approach misses the fact that it was precisely the infrastructural, economic, urban, and health reforms that had a direct and forceful impact on the lives of the great majority of the Bulgarian inhabitants of the province – while the suppression of the nationalist bands and the school reform program barely made a dent on their collective consciousness.

Regrettably, the question of Ottoman reforms in general and of Midhat’s tenure in Ruse in particular lies in a gray area created by the existing institutional and political fragmentation of the Bulgarian historians’ guild. To this day, there exists a wide gap between the work of Bulgarian Ottomanists on the one hand, and historians of the Bulgarian “national revival” period (Vûzrazhdane) in the nineteenth century on the other. With a few exceptions, the Ottomanists have, until recently, avoided late nineteenth-century topics as politically risky, while the historians of the Vûzrazhdane lack both the tools (language training) and the willingness to approach the history of nineteenth-century Bulgarian society as

111 N. Sakarov, Bûlgarskata zemedelska banka i roliata i v stopanskiia zhivot na Bûlgariia (Sofia: Dûrzhavna pechatnitsa, 1932).
112 For example through the road-building labor levy and various drives to self-finance reform projects – on which see Chapters 3 and 4 below.
part of a larger Ottoman whole. Thus, while the Ottomanists have produced predominantly empirical works (often of irreproachable scholarly quality), the historiography of the Възраждане period has been part and parcel of the national historiography of the post-Ottoman Bulgarian state, with all its inherent biases and methodological limitations. In a manner typical of other “official” Balkan historiographies, Bulgarian historians of the Възраждане “insist on the existence of distinct and incompatible local/indigenous and foreign/Ottoman spheres” and often end up portraying Bulgarian historical actors and Bulgarian social and economic processes as being completely alienated from the Ottoman political context. In fact, it remains possible for a historian of the Възраждане to publish substantial research without even explicitly addressing the Ottoman political context at all. For instance, a recent 800-page-long monograph on the history of a major Bulgarian city (Veliko Tŭrnovo) during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries contains lengthy biographical sketches of all major Bulgarian historical figures in the city, chapters on all local “revolts” against Ottoman rule; information on the Bulgarian schools and churches, sections on the Bulgarian communal organization, reading rooms, women’s club, the city’s theater, bookstores, musicians, and even photographers – but not a single chapter or paragraph on the city’s Muslim population (over 33% of the

113 See Maria N. Todorova, Imagining the Balkans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 181-3.
114 Ibid., 163.
households in 1866), Ottoman garrison, local Ottoman administrative structure (after 1864, Tûrnovo was a center of a sancak), or the Tanzimat reforms. 115

To date, the only extensive studies in Bulgarian historiography of Midhat Paşa’s governorship in the Danube province have been produced by a historian of the Vûzrazhdane period – the late Georgi Pletn’ov, who published a seminal article and a monograph116 on the subject. Pletn’ov works made the most of the sources available to the author (having no training in Ottoman Turkish, Pletn’ov used no Ottoman primary sources other than the few available in Bulgarian translation) and brought forth a number of fresh arguments – the social cost of Midhat’s modernization campaign, the importance of the expansion and ethnic diversification of the bureaucracy, and the complicated, co-evolutionary (as opposed to black-and-white Manichean) relationship between Ottoman reforms and the emergence of a Bulgarian nationalist movement, to name but a few.117 Nevertheless, Pletn’ov’s works suffer from their deficient source base and from the author’s ultimate refusal to question the basic premise of national historiography – namely, the assumption of an organic and historically “inevitable” advent of a Bulgarian liberation movement that rendered Midhat’s efforts to build an “artificial” Ottoman nation futile from the start:

The main reason for the partial failure of Midhat’s reformist activity can be sought in the fact that his activity was being

115 Ivan Radev, Istoriia na Veliko Tûrnovo, XVIII-XIX vek (Veliko Tûrnovo: Slovo, 2000). For the share of Muslim households, see below, Table 7 in Chapter 2.
116 The aforementioned “Administrativno-stopanskata politika na Turskata vlast v Dunavskiia vilaet” (1976) and Midkhat Pasha i upravlenieto na Dunavskiia vilaet (1994).
undertaken in the Danube province, i.e. in the Bulgarian lands and the Bulgarian people’s attitude towards these reforms was of paramount importance. The Bulgarians supported those measures that were in their interest and created favorable conditions for the economic development of our lands, but, at the same time, opposed those measures that clearly had anti-Bulgarian goals.  

Furthermore, Pletn’ov’s article and monograph contain a number of factual mistakes, some of which impact the veracity of the author’s substantive arguments. Because he relied heavily on often poorly informed consular reports, Pletn’ov replicated some of their mistakes. He stated, for example, that, with the introduction of the new judicial councils in the province, “the use of religious law was abolished” – in fact, of course, the šerî courts continued to function alongside the new nizamî courts. Pletn’ov also appears not to have had a clear picture of the membership and election procedure of the new administrative and judicial councils (meclis) established in the province – he claims that “there was parity between Turkish members and members from other nationalities and the elective principle was fully applied.” In fact, the parity of which the 1864 law speaks is between members from different religious, not national or ethnic communities – Muslim vs. non-Muslims, rather than Turks vs. non-Turks. But, as will be discussed in Chapter Two of this study, the law only stipulated that such parity should be the rule among the elected members of the new councils. The ex officio members, who typically outnumbered the elected ones were, of course, overwhelmingly Muslim, ensuring that the Muslim element predominated in all

119 Pletn’ov, Midkhat Pasha, 39.
120 Ibid.
but a few village and kaza councils and in some municipal (belediye) councils.
Pletn'ov’s statement that the “elective principle” was fully applied suggests that he may have been unaware of the existence of ex officio council members altogether. In a similar mistake, Pletn’ov states, incorrectly, that each meclis was to consist of six members – three Muslims and three non-Muslims (these were the numbers for elected officials only). Some of Pletn’ov statements betray an ignorance of basic Ottoman practices and institutions: he asserted, for example, that “in light of the proposed Ottomanization [of the province], the vali and the other representatives of the provincial administration began no longer to speak of Bulgarians and Turks. Instead, the terms ‘Muslims’ and ‘non-Muslims’ appear more and more frequently in the documents,” whereas, of course, it is well-established that religion had been the most commonly used (and indeed, given the way the state functioned, the only logical) basis for distinction between the subjects of the Ottoman state throughout its existence. Ethnonyms were much more sparingly used and, indeed, the one denoting the most numerous ethnic group – “Turk” – had pejorative connotations during most of the empire’s history.

Often, Pletn’ov’s uncritical use of sources leads him to overestimate the strength of the provincial police force and the abilities of the provincial government to use surveillance and/or repression in general. Based upon a Russian consular report referred to by the Russian author Fadeeva, Pletn’ov wrote of the organization of a 60,000-strong “police cordon” that was allegedly formed in order to

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121 Pletn’ov, Midkhat Pasha, 40.
122 Ibid., 41.
safeguard the length of the Ottoman bank of the Danube, whereas Ottoman documentary evidence indicates that the total number of all police forces in the vilayet was less than 3,500 men (and was only briefly raised by Midhat from a starting figure of around 3,250 before being scaled back due to budgetary constraints). Another figure accepted uncritically by Pletn’ov (no doubt because it would seem to support his implicit suggestion that Midhat needed to build a veritable police state in order to keep Bulgarian nationalism in check) is the number of “spies” employed in the vilayet. Based on the guesswork of an anonymous (and hostile to Midhat) note in the contemporary Bulgarian newspaper Makedoniiia, Pletn’ov tells us that these spies probably numbered “more than 2,000 men.” Spies or “secret agents” (hafiye memurları) did indeed exist and were employed by the vilayet administration, but the documentary evidence suggests that they were few and far between.

These are relatively minor points, but Pletn’ov’s analysis also does not stand up to scrutiny on a number of critical issues. For instance, Pletn’ov’s works downplay the extent and significance of Bulgarian cooperation with Midhat

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124 BOA İ.MVL. 23620 [12 Ramazan 1281 / 9 February 1865]
125 For example, a Russian officer who had arrived in Varna in 1867 with the avowed goal to measure the city’s exact geographical latitude had aroused the government’s suspicion from the beginning, but was only assigned several chaperons from the regular (uniform) policemen. After these chaperons reported that the Russian did indeed seem to be spreading “seditious ideas,” the local police chief recommended that they be given some instruction in the basics of “secret surveillance work” and only then asked for the appointment of one spy “who knows Bulgarian” to secretly follow the Russian’s every move. That the services of a spy were requested as a last resort in such a relatively high-profile case in one of the major cities of the province suggests that the dreaded hafiye memuru was a less-common figure than Pletn’ov suggests. BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 61 [27 Receb 1284 / 24 November 1867].
Paş'a’s policies – Bulgarian participation in the new administrative and judicial councils (meclises) in particular is described as limited to a few individuals who had “betrayed their nation” and had earned “the hate of the Bulgarian people.” Interestingly enough, even though the quoted source of these allegations – a 1867 Russian consular report – also claimed that the Bulgarian meclis members had become the object of severe criticism in the Bulgarian press, Pletn’ov was unable to provide examples of such a journalistic crusade. Another Russian consular report – quoted by Pletn’ov to show that the Christian meclis members were passive figureheads whose opinions were never consulted – is actually dated 1862, in other words, two years before Midhat’s arrival in Ruse and, obviously, before the major changes in the membership and prerogatives of the meclises brought about by the Vilayet Law. On the other hand, Pletn’ov is quick to dismiss the more positive evaluations of the meclises in the European press at the time as “fabricated in the governor’s kitchen.”

As this study will show, however, there is ample evidence that Bulgarians across the Danube province quickly understood the value of the new bureaucratic posts available to them after 1864 and began treating them as valuable political commodities – both for the advancement of their own careers and as a means to protect and pursue communal interests (the two were not incompatible).

Another significant charge levied at Midhat’s policies in Ruse by Pletn’ov and others is that one of the primary goals of the implementation of the vilayet system

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128 Ibid., 22-3.
was to undermine the non-Muslim communal associations (obshtini, in Bulgarian) that existed in various degrees of organization in many towns and cities in the region. The Tanzimat statesmen’s plan, it is alleged, had been to eclipse the obshtini by creating state structures—administrative, judicial, and, later, municipal councils—that would pre-empt the establishment of obshtini or render the existing ones useless by assuming most of their functions. But this is, again, placing the cart before the horse. As recent works by Tetsuya Sahara and others have shown, in many locales it was precisely the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms (especially the 1864 provincial law) with their efforts to co-opt, rather than supplant non-Muslim communal institutions that enabled those institutions to evolve from ad-hoc local elite circles into formally organized units in an imperial public sphere. The Bulgarian obshtina in Ruse, which was the subject of Sahara’s study, is a case in point – it was only formally constituted in 1865, largely as a result of the expulsion from of the Patriarchate-appointed Greek bishop of Ruse by his Bulgarian parishioners (for more on these events, see the discussion of the Bulgarian “Church Struggles” in Chapter Seven).

More recently, a new generation of Bulgarian historians has begun the process of revisiting the Ottoman legacy with a more dispassionate eye. No longer working under the constraints of toeing the party line, Bulgarian historians

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129 This argument was made by the Soviet Ottomanist Safrastian and was recycled by Pletn’ov. See Ruben A. Safrastian, *Doktrina osmanizma v politicheskoizhizni Osmanskoj imperii, 50-70 godakh XIXveka* (Erevan: Izd-vo AN Armianskoi SSR, 1985), 50; Pletn’ov, *Midkhat Pasha*, 49.

130 Perhaps the best known (and the most comprehensive) reevaluation of this kind is Maria Todorova’s *Imagining the Balkans*, especially chapter 7 (pp. 161-81), which addresses the issue of the Ottoman legacy to the region.
are beginning to question the old narratives of the Ottoman period as a five- 
centuries-long “black hole” in the development of a primordial Bulgarian “nation.” 
New and balanced regional histories are leading the way, just as they did in the 
period after 1878. There is also a noticeable shift towards previously frowned- 
upon research topics – examples of particular relevance to this work are recent 
studies of nineteenth-century chorbadzhii (Bulgarian “notables,” many of whom 
were pro-Ottoman and anti-nationalist in their politics) and of the fate of Muslim 
minorities in the immediate aftermath of the establishment of the Bulgarian 
nation-state in 1878.

1.3.3. Other historiographical perspectives

Rather predictably, early Western works on the Ottoman nineteenth century 
tended to see Ottoman Tanzimat reforms as little more than a footnote to the 
“Eastern Question.” This is evident from the first Western historical account of

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131 I have in mind here studies like Velko Tonev’s Bŭlgarskoto Chernomorie prez 
Vŭzrazhdaneto (on the history of the northern Black Sea region), or Teodora 
Bakûrdzhieva and Stoian Iordanov’s Ruse. Prostranstvo i istoriia (kraia na XIVv.- 
70-te godini na XIXv.) (Ruse: Avangardprint, 2001) (on the history of Ruse during 
the Ottoman period).
132 Milena Stefanova, Kniga za bŭlgarskite chorbadzhii (Sofia: Universitetsko 
izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski”, 1998); Mikhail Grûncharov, 
Chorbadzhiistvoto i bŭlgarskoto obshtestvo prez Vŭzrazhdaneto (Sofia: 
133 Zhorzheta Nazûrska, Bŭlgarskata dûrzhava i neinite maltsinstva, 1879-1885 
(Sofia: LIK, 1999).
the period – Engelhardt’s *La Turquie et le tanzimat* (1882-1884)\(^{134}\) – to such mid-twentieth century classics as Geoffrey Lewis’s *Turkey* and Bernard Lewis’s *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*.\(^{135}\) Although they might occasionally concede the point of Ottoman agency in shaping the course of reforms (Bernard Lewis, for instance, wrote that “the *Tanzimat* [reforms] were more than a sop to Europe or a pious expression of good intentions by naïve would-be reformers”),\(^{136}\) these authors ultimately agreed that the imperial reform efforts of 1839-1876 were a false start on the road to modernization. They also had little to say on the question of provincial administration in general and of the Danube province in particular.

Davison’s monumental *Reform in the Ottoman Empire* was one of the earliest comprehensive works on the history of the empire in the nineteenth century to emphasize the role of domestic Ottoman dynamics in the conception and implementation of the *Tanzimat* reforms.\(^{137}\) Meticulously researched, Davison’s monograph remains the standard reference work for any student of this period in the empire’s history to the present day. Interpretatively, one of Davison’s main contributions to the field has been his insistence that the success or failure of the “men of the *Tanzimat*” cannot be evaluated based upon their ability (or willingness) to pursue abstract political ideals such as “liberalism,”

“constitutionalism,” or “democracy.” Instead, Davison argued convincingly, the main goal of the Tanzimat statesmen was not ideological but practical – “to preserve the Ottoman Empire by reinvigorating it” – while their “temperament, customs, and education” predisposed them to favor non-radical solutions in their struggle to achieve this goal.\textsuperscript{138} This, in my opinion, is an important insight, even when talking about the political goals and governing style of Midhat Paşa – arguably the Tanzimat’s most principled constitutionalist and most radical reformer. In fact, as I will show in a separate chapter of the present study, most of the “governance” techniques Midhat brought to the Danube province can best be understood as acts of political give-and-take in which the pursuit of ideological goals was carefully calibrated against considerations of the impact of proposed reforms on a supposedly delicate social fabric. And often, of course, any pursuit of ideological goals had to take a back seat to administrative contingencies, such as budgetary crises and foreign threats.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 405-6.
CHAPTER 2: THE SETTING

2.1. The land

The new vilayet of Danube, which Midhat was to govern, consisted of the former districts (eyalets) of Vidin, Niš, and Silistra. Its territory was close to 92,000 km². At its greatest extent, the province measured just over 700 km from east to west (from Sulina in present-day Romania to Kuršumlija in present-day Serbia). On a north-south axis, the vilayet measured anywhere from about 190 km in the west (between Kudelin in present-day Bulgaria and Vranje in Serbia) to over 270 km in the east (between Tulcea in Romania and Cape Emine, Bulgaria), narrowing to about 120 km in its center (between Svishtov and the Shipka pass, Bulgaria).\(^\text{139}\)

On a current political map of Southeastern Europe, the Danube province would have stretched from near the Kosovo-Serbian and Macedonian-Serbian borders in the west to the Romanian and northern Bulgarian Black Sea coast in the east and from the Danube river in the north to the crest of the main Balkan range and the upper Morava and Struma river valleys in the south, covering a substantial part of present-day southeastern Serbia, all of northern and much of southwestern Bulgaria, the Romanian Dobrogea plain, and a tiny sliver of Macedonia.

\(^{139}\) Distance measurements from http://www.mapcrow.info/.
The main geographic feature of the province was the Lower Danubian plain – a fertile area of alluvial and loess-covered flatlands rising in terraces about 50 feet over the Danube river and gradually ascending to meet the foothills of the main Balkan range. The Danubian plain is almost nowhere entirely flat but consists mostly of low hills and plateaus. The foothill region just to the south of the Danubian plain is known in Bulgarian as the Predbalkan. It consists largely of low ridges running in a south-to-north direction from the Balkan mountains to the Danubian plain. The Predbalkan ridges separate the valleys of several rivers (Timok, Ogosta, Vit, Osûm, Iantra, and Lom being the larger ones from west to east) that originate in the Balkan and flow more or less due north to the Danube. The only Danube tributary that cuts a gorge through the main Balkan range is the Iskûr river in the west central part of the province. Because of its sheltered terrain, the Predbalkan had traditionally provided greater security for its inhabitants than the Danubian plain; consequently, some of the vilayet’s more densely populated regions were located there. To the east and northeast, on the other hand, repeated wars and other disturbances throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as well a harsher, steppe-like climate had combined to produce lower population densities. This was the historical region of Dobrogea, stretching roughly from a line connecting the towns of Silistra on the Danube and Balchik on the Black Sea in a northeasterly direction to the Danube delta. Whereas in the east the vilayet’s southern border followed the Balkan range all the way to the sea, in the west it curved south to include two sizeable regions south of the Balkan – the sancaks of Sofia and Niš. The first of these
regions included the highest mountains in the province (the Rila massif), several stretches of high plain (containing the towns of Sofia, Samokov, and Kiustendil), and a section of low hills (called Kraishte) in the west surrounding the upper Struma river valley. The Niš district consisted of more hills and low mountains, but also encompassed the fertile valleys of the Nišava and upper Morava rivers, where its largest towns were located.

Because of its soil composition and continental temperate climate, much of the lower Danubian plain was (and still is) ideally suited for the cultivation of grains. Wheat was by far the main crop in the province, with red autumn wheat being the most widespread variety, but durum wheat also cultivated in the Dobrogea and along the Black Sea coast.\textsuperscript{140} Corn, barley, millet, rye, and oats were also grown (in much smaller quantities), as were fruit, beans, cabbage, and cash crops, such as tobacco and hops.\textsuperscript{141} Grapes, the most important cash crop, were typically fermented into wine or distilled into rakiia brandy for personal consumption or for sale.\textsuperscript{142} Wheat was the main export crop and, in fact, ever since the liberalization of Ottoman exports in 1838, the Danubian plain had been emerging as a major exporter of grain.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{140} According to Moshnin, Midhat’s government attempted to encourage the spread of durum wheat cultivation to other parts of the province, but did not succeed. Moshnin, “Stet’ia Moshnina,” 51.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 55-60.

\textsuperscript{142} Commercial wine and brandy making was a localized activity in the vilayet – for climatic, as well as for religious reasons. Nevertheless, where it did occur it often accounted for a major segment of a town or a region’s output and trade. In Pleven, for example, wine and rakiia were the town’s main “exports” to the surrounding countryside, where grapes were not grown. Trifonov, Istoriiia na grada Pleven, 181-2.

\textsuperscript{143} See Palairet, Balkan Economies, 62, Table 3.1. for export figures.
In common with the rest of the Ottoman and post-Ottoman Balkans in the
nineteenth century, the rural economy of the Danube province was characterized
by a relative abundance of land and a relative scarcity of labor. It is unlikely that
almost half of the vilayet’s arable land remained uncultivated at any given time,
as some sources have suggested,\textsuperscript{144} but the basic fact of superabundance of
land is well attested – and was, generally speaking, misinterpreted by
contemporary Western observers as a matter of wastefulness in the farming
methods and “laziness” of the farmer population.\textsuperscript{145} Yet the estimates of grain
yields to seed have been deemed “respectable” by European standards at the
time and farm output and farming techniques have been called “superior” to
those in neighboring Balkan lands such as Serbia.\textsuperscript{146} The predominant form of
land ownership in most of the province was the individual small owner’s farm.
Since the promulgation of the 1858 Land Law peasant cultivators throughout the
vilayet’s territory had been largely successful in legalizing their \textit{de facto}
ownership of their family plots. Large estates (çiftlik) using hired and/or
sometimes quasi-enserfed labor may not have been “almost absent” from the
province as Moshnin claims\textsuperscript{147} – there were still quite a few of them in the
western districts of Niš and Vidin as well as in the northeastern district of Tulcea
– but they were nowhere near as prevalent as elsewhere in the Ottoman Balkans
(Macedonia, Thessaly), either in terms of their share of total properties or in

\textsuperscript{144} Moshnin, “Stet’ia Moshnina,” 35.  
\textsuperscript{146} Palairet, \textit{Balkan Economies}, 59.  
\textsuperscript{147} Moshnin, “Stet’ia Moshnina,” 38.
terms of their acreage. As a percentage of the total cultivated area, çiftlik lands made up from about 10% in the Sofia region to just over 20% in the northeast.

The northern foothills of the main mountain range – the aforementioned Predbalkan – constituted practically the only part of the vilayet outside the main cities that could be characterized as densely populated and whose farming methods were intensive. The region around the city of Tûrnovo in particular was characterized as “the most cultivated corner of Bulgaria.” This was also the center of the vilayet’s booming proto-manufacturing textile industries, where the economies of entire towns, such as Kotel, Triavna, Troian, and, most importantly, Gabrovo were dominated by woolen textile manufactures. The products of these trades – rough woolen cloth (aba), finer woolen cloth (shaïak) and woolen decorative braid (gaitan) were sold on the internal Ottoman market, often as part of large government contracts (woolens manufactured in the Bulgarian provinces were used to make the uniforms for most soldiers in the Ottoman army). Although the textile centers in the Danube province could not match the output of their counterparts south of the Balkan range and in the Rhodope mountains (Edirne province), they were nevertheless impressive – by 1870’s the vilayet produced close to 70 metric tons of shaïak (some 150,000m²) and 460 metric tons of gaitan per year.

149 Palairet, Balkan Economies, 43-4.
150 Ibid., 60.
151 See ibid., 71, Table 3.3.
Its location along the Lower Danube naturally meant that the Danube vilayet was a territory of considerable geo-strategic and geo-economic interest to the Ottoman government – not only as a sensitive borderland but also as a vital commercial link with continental Europe. During Midhat’s tenure, the question of finding and developing an optimal overland route from the Danube to the Black Sea had acquired a particular significance, with the increase of passenger and cargo traffic along the Danube. For most of its lower course, the Danube flows in a general west-east direction, approaching the north-south Black Sea coast at an efficient (from the point of view of shipping interests) right angle. The river reaches its southernmost point at Svishtov, where it curves slightly to the northeast. But in the eastern part of the vilayet, near Cernavoda, the Danube, having reached a point that is about 30 miles due west from the sea, turns sharply north-northwestward and runs roughly parallel to the shore, for about 75 miles, until finally turning east again near Galați and splitting into the many channels of its delta. Since the Black Sea’s single most important port (İstanbul) and trade route (the Bosphorus straits) are both situated in its south-western corner, navigating the Danube’s northerly turn meant lost time and profitability for any vessel sailing from Central Europe to İstanbul and onwards, or vice versa. One potential solution to that problem was to build an overland link from a point near Cernavoda to the seaport of Constanța. Such a route would shorten the journey from İstanbul to Budapest, Vienna, and other points on the Danube by

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152 The issue of the growing economic and cultural ties of the Lower Danube region with Central Europe has been explored in Virzhiniia Paskaleva, *Sredna Evropa i zemite po Dolnii Dunav prez XVIII-XIX v: sotsialno-ikonomicheski aspekti* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1986).
some 200 miles. There was a more ambitious shortcut—from the town of Ruse on the river to the port of Varna on the sea. This had been the route of choice for passenger traffic ever since Habsburg companies began offering steamer service along the Danube in 1835.153 Passengers boarded a ship in Vienna, Budapest, or Belgrade, sailed downriver to Ruse, changed to an overland (horseback or oxcart) mode of transportation to Varna, and then boarded another steamer to İstanbul. The Ruse-Varna route was about 350 miles shorter than the all-river route through the delta and some 150 miles shorter than the Cernavoda-Constanța route. The potential benefits of having a quick and efficient transportation link along either one of these routes were not lost on the Ottoman government or on private European and Balkan commercial interests—and the railway, nineteenth-century’s most potent symbol of progress, was naturally the preferred solution.

2.2. The people

2.2.1. Overall numbers

According to the AH 1285 (1868-1869) official yearbook (salname) for the Danube province, the vilayet had 1,023,509 male inhabitants, broken down by region in the following way:

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153 Pletn’ov, Midkhat Pasha, 113.
Table 1: Population figures from the AH 1285 Provincial Salname

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlements</th>
<th>Total males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruse sancak</td>
<td>833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varna sancak</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidin sancak</td>
<td>434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia sancak</td>
<td>711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tûrnovo sancak</td>
<td>453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulcea sancak</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niš sancak</td>
<td>549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>3,623</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlements</th>
<th>Total males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>234,526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>79,458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>149,905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>171,505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>175,918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>57,062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>155,135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,023,509</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are two major problems with the above figures. First, the census carried out during Midhat’s governorship (beginning in 1866) had been somewhat inconsistent in its approach to counting the female inhabitants of the province: females were counted in the cities and towns (kasabat), but not in the villages (kurra). Furthermore, by the time of the printing of the AH 1285 salname, the 1866 census was not yet completed for all villages. In order to be able to report a complete set of figures, the authors of the salname used the current census counts where available (i.e. for all cities and towns and for many villages), but figures from the last census (AH 1263, or 1846-47) for those villages for which current data was not available. These 1846-47 figures were then adjusted for population growth, but we do not know by what factor. The authors of the salname also assumed that females outnumbered males by 2%, leading them to

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154 Source: Tuna vilayeti salnamesi sene 1285, (Rusçuk: Tuna vilayeti matbaası, AH 1285), 101.
155 154,935 in the original but that is obviously a miscalculation since adding up the component numbers for Muslims and non-Muslims in the Niš sancak yields a total of 155,135
156 1,023,309 in the Salname, the mistake stemming from the miscalculation of the subtotal for the Niš sancak (see previous note)
state that the overall population (male and female) of the province must be “over 2,100,00.”

But the sex-ratio assumption utilized in the salname is not borne out by other demographic studies of the late-nineteenth century Balkans. Palairet has shown that censuses undertaken by post-Ottoman Balkan states after 1878, as well as the next Ottoman census (1881-1893) invariably show a slight (two to eleven percent) surplus of males. In fact, this is confirmed by the 1866 census as well – in areas where females were counted (for example in the cities), their numbers were less than those of the men by 4.4% on average. Using this corrected sex-ratio multiplier (instead of the one employed by the AH 1285 salname) yields the following overall population figures:

Table 2: Overall population figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total males (AH 1285 Salname)</th>
<th>Total population (sex ratio = 100M:95.6F)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruse sancak</td>
<td>234,526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varna sancak</td>
<td>79,458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidin sancak</td>
<td>149,905</td>
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<td>Totals</td>
<td>1,023,509</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

157 Tuna vilayeti salnamesi sene 1285, 101.
158 Palairet, Balkan Economies, 10-1.
159 Using the 1866 census registers, Todorov was able to show that, in the cities of the Ruse and Tûrnovo sancaks, males outnumbered females by a ratio of 1000 to 956 on average. See Nikolai Todorov, “Données démographiques sur la population urbaine de la province Danubienne (Tuna Vilâyeti) en 1866,” in Économie et sociétés dans l’Empire ottoman (fin du XVIIIe-début du XXe siècle): actes du colloque de Strasbourg (1er-5 juillet 1980), ed. Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont and Paul Dumont (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1983), Table 4.
This total figure just under 2,020,000 is slightly lower than the estimate given in
the AH 1285 salname, but demographic and economic historians agree that
official figures should be increased to account for inevitable census
undercounting. Palaiiret’s final estimate, adjusted for such undercounting, places
the total population of the Danube vilayet in 1864 at 2.04 million people.

2.2.2. Population growth and urbanization

Using a series of population data derived from a wide variety of sources,
including Ottoman salnames and contemporary European studies, Palaiiret
was also able to compile a sequence of overall population figures for various
regions of the Balkan peninsula in the 1860’s and 1870’s. This sequence has
been used here to estimate the rate of population growth for the Danube
province in the same period. Table 3 uses Palaiiret’s figures, increased by 9.55%
(to compensate for the fact that Palaiiret subtracted 9.55% from his raw figures in
order to eliminate the population of the sancak of Tulcea, which was a part of the
Danube province, but which he excludes from his study because it eventually
became a part of Romania). The figures for 1851 and 1864 are the combined
estimates for the Ottoman territorial units (sancaks) that subsequently became
parts of the Danube province; the figures after 1869 continue to include the Niš

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160 Palaiiret, Balkan Economies, 3-14.
sancak, although it was formally no longer included in the Danube province after that time.

Table 3: Population trends for the Danube province\textsuperscript{161}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population (including Tulcea and Niš sancaks; millions)</th>
<th>% Growth (annualized)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>-0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1851-1875 average population growth (per annum) 1.9%

Longer term comparisons also show significant population growth rates – relative to the figures of a 1830 census, for instance, the population in 1869-1870 had risen by over 100 percent. A large portion of that increase should be attributed to the Tatar and Circassian immigration movements of the early 1860’s (on which see Chapter 7 below) but the indigenous population of the region had also likely grown at a respectable rate during this period – perhaps in the neighborhood of the 50% that characterized the neighboring vilayets of Edirne and Thessaloniki (both of which were less affected by immigration than the Danube vilayet).\textsuperscript{162}

Notwithstanding the considerable growth of its cities since the end of the ayan age, the Danube province remained a largely rural place throughout the 1860’s and 1870’s. According to the AH 1290 provincial salname, only one of the

\textsuperscript{161} Source: Ibid., 12, Table 1.3. I have added 9.55% to Palaiiret’s figures in order to compensate for his exclusion of Tulcea sancak.

\textsuperscript{162} Nikolai Todorov, \textit{The Balkan City, 1400-1900} (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), 321.
vilayet’s six sancaks at the time – Varna – had over a fifth of its inhabitants living in settlements that were classified as towns and cities. Everywhere else, villagers made up over 80% of the population (almost 86% in the sancak of Tûrnovo).

Table 4: Percentages of urban and rural population by sancak, AH 1290

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sancak</th>
<th>Urban %</th>
<th>Rural %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruse</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>81.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidin</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>81.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tûrnovo</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>85.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>83.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulcea</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>81.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varna</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>76.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even these lopsided figures, however, probably overstate the extent of actual urbanization in the province – since they were based not on any quantitative or functional definition of what constitutes a “town” versus a “village,” but simply counted as “urban” the inhabitants of all kaza and nahiye centers in the province. Many settlements which were thus classified as “towns” were, in reality, little more than glorified villages – Chilia in the northeastern corner of the Tulcea sancak was counted as a “town” by virtue of being the center of a nahiye, although it only had 701 inhabitants according to the AH 1290 salname. Other “urban” centers with less than 2,000 inhabitants each included Novi Pazar (1,030), Constanța (1,228), Mahmudie (1,054), Isaccea (1,704), Hirsova (1,546), Radomir (906 taxable inhabitants), Belogradchik (641 taxable inhabitants), Sulina (345 taxable inhabitants), and Mangalia (314 taxable inhabitants).

163 Source: Ibid., 322, Table 38.
inhabitants).\textsuperscript{164} Of the forty-five locations in the vilayet cited as cities (kasabat) in a 1866 statistical table published by Todorov, thirty-one (69\%) had populations under 5,000. Put together, these accounted for over 40\% of the population that Todorov’s study counted as “urban.”\textsuperscript{165}

Thanks to Todorov’s well-documented study, we have a rather precise picture of the size and ethno-religious diversity of the cities in the Danube province as well as of the socio-economic status of the urban population. While the vilayet did not have any urban centers to match the size of the largest cities in the Ottoman Balkans, such as Salonica (population 50,000 by 1865) and Plovdiv (over 35,000 in 1878), or of the capitals of neighboring Balkan states, such as Bucharest (122,000 in 1859), Athens (41,000 in 1861), or even Belgrade (24,600 in 1866), the Danube province still boasted a relatively dense network of mid-sized cities and towns. The largest of these were the provincial capital Ruse; Shumen, the seat of the largest army garrison in the vilayet; Pleven, the commercial center of the west-central Danubian plain; Varna, the largest seaport in the province; and the sancak centers of Vidin, Sofia, and Tûrnovo. Table 5 gives the population figures for the fifteen largest cities and towns in the province (excluding the sancak of Niš, data for which seems to have been absent from the document used by Todorov),\textsuperscript{166} according to the 1866 census.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 345-6, 60, Tables 54, 55, 62.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 346, Table 56.
\textsuperscript{166} Had data for the sancak of Niš been included, at least one and possibly even two cities (Niš and Leskovac) from that district would have made it to the above list.
The lack of large cities on this list was, as noted by Todorov, offset by the comparatively large number (eleven) of cities in the 10,000 to 20,000-inhabitants range. A comparison with Greece and Serbia might serve to illustrate this point. While both of these countries, as was mentioned above, had capitals larger than the vilayet’s largest cities in the 1860’s, they nevertheless seem to have been relatively less urbanized than the Danube province, due to their shortage of mid-sized cities. Other than Athens, Greece had only two cities with population in the 10,000 to 20,000 range according to its 1861 census,\(^{167}\) and Serbia had none in that range other than Belgrade even in 1866. In fact, if the entire Danube vilayet had been a part of Serbia in the 1860’s, it would have contained the second through twenty-second largest cities in that imaginary state.\(^{168}\)

Table 5: Population of the largest cities, sorted by size (1866)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Sancak</th>
<th>Taxable Population(^{169})</th>
<th>Total Population(^{170})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ruse</td>
<td>Ruse</td>
<td>10,338</td>
<td>20,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Shumen</td>
<td>Ruse</td>
<td>10,060</td>
<td>19,816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Pleven</td>
<td>Ruse</td>
<td>7,793</td>
<td>15,296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Vidin</td>
<td>Vidin</td>
<td>7,664</td>
<td>15,100 (est.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Varna</td>
<td>Varna</td>
<td>7,537</td>
<td>14,850 (est.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Sofia</td>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>6,770</td>
<td>13,350 (est.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Tûrnovo</td>
<td>Tûrnovo</td>
<td>6,529</td>
<td>12,884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Vratsa</td>
<td>Vidin</td>
<td>6,524</td>
<td>12,850 (est.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Svishtov</td>
<td>Ruse</td>
<td>6,053</td>
<td>11,915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Samokov</td>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>5,663</td>
<td>11,150 (est.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Dobrich</td>
<td>Varna</td>
<td>5,648</td>
<td>11,150 (est.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Tulcea</td>
<td>Tulcea</td>
<td>5,477</td>
<td>10,750 (est.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Lovech</td>
<td>Tûrnovo</td>
<td>5,043</td>
<td>9,843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Razgrad</td>
<td>Ruse</td>
<td>5,026</td>
<td>9,723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Tûrgovishte</td>
<td>Ruse</td>
<td>4,812</td>
<td>9,438</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{167}\) Ibid., 334, Table 49.
\(^{168}\) On the urban population of Serbia, see ibid., 338, Table 52.
\(^{169}\) Source: Todorov, The Balkan City, 345, Table 54.
\(^{170}\) Source: Ibid., 360, Table 62.. Figures in italics are my estimates based on the taxable population figures given in the previous column.
2.2.3. Ethnic and religious diversity

The population of the Danube province, as it was created in 1864, exhibited a great degree of ethnic and religious diversity. The main ethnic and religious groups in the vilayet were the Orthodox Christian Bulgarians and the Sunni Muslim Turks, but smaller groups included the Sunni Tatars and Circassians (immigrants from lands recently conquered by the Russian empire in the Crimea and the Caucasus respectively), the Roma (Gypsies), who were split into Muslim and Christian sub-groups, Sephardic Jews, Orthodox Romanians and Greeks, and Gregorian Armenians. There was also a plethora of even smaller insular communities such as Pomaks (Bulgarian-speaking Muslims), Gagauzes (Turkish-speaking Christians), Bulgarian Roman Catholics, Shiite (Bektashi and Alevi) Muslims, Russian Old Believers, Ukrainian Cossacks, Ashkenazi Jews, Protestant Armenians, etc. Not surprisingly, the precise proportions of the different ethnic groups in the Danube vilayet are a subject of some controversy. Contemporary (1860’s and 1870’s) figures from consular and other European sources tend to vary according to the political sympathies of the source. A French diplomat (Lois Obaret) estimated that the ratio of non-Muslims to Muslims in the Danube province in the early 1870 was about 52:48, while the Russian statistician V. Teplov put the same ratio at 74:26. Such figures are obviously

171 These ratios are based on the figures quoted in Pletn’ov, Midkhat Pasha, 57-8.
less reliable than official census data and their value as historical sources has been justly questioned by Karpat and others.\textsuperscript{172}

The first official Ottoman figures for the Danube vilayet that show a breakdown of the population on the basis of religion come from the AH 1285 (1868-1869) provincial salname. These figures, as was shown above, were based on the results of the as-yet-incomplete 1866 census, supplemented with older census data for some localities. For a few years thereafter the vilayet salnames did not include such figures (they are absent, for example, form the AH 1289/1872-1873 yearbook) but in AH 1290 (1873-1874) their publication resumed. The figures from the AH 1290 salname provided the material for Todorov’s table for the religious diversity in the Danube province by sancak. Finally, in 1874, the complete data from the census started by Midhat in 1866 were published in the provincial newspaper; these also included a population breakdown along ethnic and religious lines. These three sets of data are summarized in Table 6 below.

The 1874 results from the 1866 census also constitute the only authoritative data set for the ethnic (as opposed to religious) diversity in the Danube province as a whole (for the cities, again, we have a much better grip on this issue, thanks to the documents published in Todorov’s study). According to these figures, Bulgarians made up 51.7% of the vilayet’s population; Turks – 34.3%; Tatars and

Circassians (combined) – 5.6%; Roma (Christian and Muslim combined) – 2.9%; Greeks – 0.7%; Jews – 0.5%; Armenians – 0.2% and other unidentified non-Muslim groups smaller groups – 4.1%. These figures should certainly be taken with a grain of salt – the number given for the Tatars and Circassians, for example, seems unrealistically low in light of what we know of the extent of the immigrations of these people to the Danube province. Nonetheless, the official figures seem to correspond rather closely to the estimates given in some recent studies on the question and are more reliable on average than the statistics provided by consular and other European sources at the time or the tendentiously high number for the Bulgarian population – 2.38 million – quoted in the official multivolume *Istoriia na Bûlgaria* (whose authors appear to have doubled the figure from a 1875 census, although it already included females).

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174 Sahara, for example estimates (for 1874) that Bulgarians accounted for 49% and Turks for 34%. See Tetsuya Sahara, *An Eastern Orthodox Community During the Tanzimat: Documents From a Register of the Bulgarian Society in Ruse (1860-1872)* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1997), 19, 52, Table 2.

175 See Pletn'ov, *Midkhat Pasha*, 55-8; *Istoriia na Bûlgaria*, vol. 6, 77.

176 *Istoriia na Bûlgaria*, vol. 6, 76.
Table 6: Religious diversity by sancak

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sancak</th>
<th>AH 1285 provincial salname(^{177}) (males only)</th>
<th>AH 1290 provincial salname(^{178}) (males only, except for Ruse sancak)</th>
<th>Final figures from the 1866-1874 census(^{179}) (males only)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Muslims</td>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>Non-Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niš</td>
<td>100,625</td>
<td>54,510</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidin</td>
<td>124,567</td>
<td>25,338</td>
<td>156,079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>147,095</td>
<td>24,410</td>
<td>154,014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tūrnovo</td>
<td>104,273</td>
<td>71,645</td>
<td>114,588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruse</td>
<td>95,834</td>
<td>138,692</td>
<td>120,863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varna</td>
<td>20,769</td>
<td>58,689</td>
<td>15,797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulcea</td>
<td>17,929</td>
<td>39,133</td>
<td>44,258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>610,892</td>
<td>412,417</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sancak</th>
<th>AH 1285 provincial salname(^{177}) (males only)</th>
<th>AH 1290 provincial salname(^{178}) (males only, except for Ruse sancak)</th>
<th>Final figures from the 1866-1874 census(^{179}) (males only)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent Non-Muslims</td>
<td>Percent Muslims</td>
<td>Percent Non-Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niš</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidin</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>80.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>86.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tūrnovo</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruse</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varna</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulcea</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>59.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One essential fact about the distribution of the main religious groups in the vilayet that is highlighted by the figures presented in Table 6 is the predominance of Muslims in the eastern half of the province and the predominance of non-Muslims in the west. The seven sancaks of the province are arranged in

\(^{177}\) *Tuna vilayeti salnamesi sene 1285*, 101.

\(^{178}\) Todorov, *The Balkan City*, 323, Table 39.

\(^{179}\) *Tuna/Dunav*, vol. 10, no. 94 [6 October 1874], quoted in Pletn’ov, *Midkhat Pasha*, 57.
geographic order (from west to east) in the table, which allows us to see the gradation clearly. The Muslim element was at its lowest in the western districts of Vidin and Sofia (17-19% and 14% respectively) and at its highest in the two eastern districts of Varna and Tulcea (60-69% and 73-74% respectively). The two central districts of Tûrnovo and Ruse were almost mirror images of each other as far as religious diversity was concerned, with Muslim to non-Muslim ratios of 40:60 in Tûrnovo (the more western of the two districts) and 60:40 in Ruse (the more eastern). This characteristic distribution of Muslims and non-Muslims in the vilayet was well known at the time, both to Ottoman authorities and to foreign observers. Kanitz commented (no doubt with some degree of exaggeration) that he only saw one “purely Turkish” family living in the countryside of the Vidin sancak in 1871 – the family of a Turkish estate (çiftlik) owner near the village of Sinagovtsi;\(^{180}\) while in the east (especially in the almost exclusively Muslim regions of Deli Orman, Tuzluk, and Gerlova) he found “only Turks” and failed “to meet a single Christian soul for days.”\(^{181}\) The presence of unquestioned Muslim majorities in the eastern half of the province provided Ottoman authorities with an important (if ultimately ineffective) argument during the lead up to the Berlin Congress of 1878, which was about to determine the extent and borders of the autonomous Bulgarian principality that was to be carved out of the former Ottoman possessions in the central Balkans. In fact, it was Midhat Paşa himself – at that time an exiled former Grand Vezir with no

\(^{180}\) Kanitz, *Dunavska Bûlgariia*, vol. 1, 145-6. Kanitz did, of course, see Tatar and Circassian settlements in the west.

\(^{181}\) Ibid., vol. 3, 45, 59.
formal authority to speak on behalf of the Ottoman government – who penned the earliest and best known proposal for dividing the territories north of the Balkan range based upon their demographic makeup. Midhat’s article, “The Past, Present, and Future of Turkey,” was published in the French and British press as well as in separate pamphlet editions and was submitted to the attention of Disraeli’s Cabinet in the lead-up to the Berlin Congress.  

Midhat’s broader historical arguments in this article (e.g., his defense of Ottoman rule as an agent of tolerance and progress in the Balkans) will be discussed in a later chapter. For now, it would suffice to sketch the basic outline of his partition plan. From his position of someone who “had governed for several years the provinces of the Danube,” Midhat reminded his readers that:

[I]t should be borne in mind that among the Bulgarians, for whom so keen an interest is being evinced, there are more than a million of Mussulmans. In this number neither the Tatars nor the Circassians are included. These Mussulmans did not come from Asia to settle in Bulgaria, as is commonly believed: they are the descendants of the Bulgarians who have been converted to Islamism as the time of the conquest and in the following years… To desire to tear this million of inhabitants from their firesides, and to condemn them to be driven out of their country, constitutes, in my eyes, the most inhuman act that could be committed… I do not believe that the Christian religion allows it, and… besides, we no longer live in times in which it could be said to the Mussulmans: ‘Become Christians, if you wish to remain in Europe.’

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In order to prevent this “most inhuman act” from occurring, the ex-governor proposed that the Greater Bulgaria created at San Stefano be divided not along an east-west line as the representatives of the Powers were getting ready to do in Berlin (with the north becoming autonomous and the south receiving some sort of “special-regime” status within the Ottoman empire), but along a north-south line corresponding to the demographic division between the Bulgarian Christian majorities in the west and the Muslim Turkish majorities in the east. Such a line, Midhat proposed, could be provided by the Iantra river – the twenty-six kazas to the west of it (including Tûrnovo) being “from 60 to 80 per cent” Bulgarian could become the future Bulgarian state, but the kazas to the east (including Ruse, Shumen, Razgrad, Silistra, and the entire sancaks of Varna and Tulcea) should continue to “belong exclusively to the Ottoman empire:

[T]here the proportion [of non-Bulgarians] is about 80 per cent., and may be analysed thus: 70 per cent. of Mussulmans, and the remainder Greeks, Armenians, Germans, Lipovans [Russian Old Believers], Kazaks [Cossacks], Wallachs, Bulgarians and others.\textsuperscript{184}

To effect a partition along the existing ethno-religious divide would, in the eyes of Midhat, have the added advantage of allowing the remaining minorities on both sides of the new border to “exchange their properties” against the properties of the opposite minority on the other side and to immigrate to the state ruled by their co-religionists, if they were so inclined. But, if his proposal was not implemented, Midhat had a dire warning for Europe:

\textsuperscript{184} Midhat Paşa, “The Past, Present, and Future of Turkey,” 991.
To desire to-day that those who for four centuries have held sway should be governed by those who yesterday were obeying them, when the latter are their inferiors in intelligence [sic], is clearly to seek to create in the Balkan peninsula a state of things such as would disturb Europe for another generation; for the Bulgarian Mussulmans, before quitting their country and yielding up their lands and goods will plunge into a bloody contest, which has already begun and which will continue; but which, were it stifled, would spring up anew out of its ashes to disturb Europe and Asia.185

Aside from the snide remark about Bulgarian intelligence, Midhat's words would soon prove to be prophetic. The Treaty of Berlin did include the Muslim regions of the eastern half of the former Danube province in the Bulgarian principality, but required the new state to build guarantees of minority rights in its future constitution. About 80,000 of the 150,000 Muslims who had emigrated during the 1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman war did return to the principality, bringing the total figure of the Muslim minority in Bulgaria to 750,000 (about one third of the total population and almost half of the population in the eastern districts). But, over the next few decades, the promises given these people at the Berlin Congress were not realized. Nazûrska, who has examined in detail the minority policies of the Bulgarian state in the first decade of its existence, concluded that, for that period

No minority could boast that its religious functions had not been restricted by the state. The means for such interference were … erecting obstacles to the minorities’ free choice of their religious leaders, government claims on minorities’ communal land and buildings, scarce state funding or no funding at all.186

185 Ibid.: 989-90.
186 Nazûrska, Bûlgarskata dûrzhava, 64.
The Bulgarian Turks, in particular were not given “a place in the institutional structure of the state” and were subjected to “systematic pressure” including pressure to immigrate to the Ottoman empire, while Bulgarian-speaking Muslims (Pomaks) and other potentially “assimilable” minorities, such as Vlakhs and Gagauzes were targeted by a “Bulgarianization” campaign.\textsuperscript{187} Other studies of the minority question in the immediate aftermath of 1878 have reached the same conclusion.\textsuperscript{188}

A final question that should be explored before we conclude our survey of the vilayet’s demographic patterns concerns the nexus between ethno-religious diversity and settlement patterns. Knowing what portion of the population lived in settlements that contained multiple ethnic and religious groups could provide an indication of how much contact Muslims and non-Muslims, Bulgarians, Turks, Romas, Tatars, Circassians, etc., had with each other in their daily lives. That, in turn, could serve as a useful gauge for the extent of the challenge Midhat Paša’s administration faced in attempting to translate the integrative Osmanlı project into specific reform policies in the province.

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 235-6. On post-1878 state policies vis-à-vis the Gagauzes (in their stronghold of Varna), see also Borislav Denchev, \textit{Varna sLED Osvobozhdenieto: edno zakûSNialo vûzrazhdane na bûlgarshtinata} (Sofia: Anubis, 1998), 76-103, 85-200.

\textsuperscript{188} Lory’s analysis of Bulgarian minority policies in the last decades of the nineteenth century have led him to conclude that “Bulgarian Muslims continued to be the victims of discrimination, but now this happened under the aegis of the law;” Lory also compared unfavorably the minority policies in the Bulgarian Principality with those implemented in Eastern Rumelia (a “unique model of toleration in the Balkans”). See Bernard Lory, \textit{Le sort de l’héritage ottoman en Bulgarie: l’exemple des villes bulgares, 1878-1900} (İstanbul: Isis Press, 1985), chapter 2, passim.
Thanks mainly to Todorov’s monograph on urban history, we know most cities and towns in the Danube province had “highly intermixed” populations.\textsuperscript{189} In fact, just nine relatively small towns (out of 45 surveyed by Todorov), encompassing just barely over 10\% of the vilayet’s urban population, showed majorities of over 80\% in favor of a single religious or ethnic group.\textsuperscript{190} The other 90\% of the urban population in the province lived in settlements that were veritable microcosms of the multiethnic, multi-religious Ottoman empire. Table 7 provides an illustration of this diversity, by listing the relative shares of the major ethnic/religious groups in the vilayet’s fifteen largest cities. By virtue of the composition of their populations, the cities and towns were the primary loci of day-to-day interaction between members of the various ethnic and religious communities living in the Danube province. They were the scenes of that “daily integration” of their inhabitants through “coexistence, [shared] economic activities, and city administration,”\textsuperscript{191} which the Tanzimat statesmen, Midhat included, ostensibly sought to foster through all their reforms. Even historians espousing the opposite view – namely, that the multi-ethnic and multi-religious urban environment in the province may have served to reinforce, not suppress, separate ethnic identities –

\textsuperscript{189} Todorov, The Balkan City, 349.
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid. These were the towns of Gabrovo, Drianovo, Triavna, and Gorna Oriakhovitsa (non-Muslim / Bulgarian majority) and Nikopol, Mangalia, Dobrich, Medgidia (Muslim / Turk and Immigrant majority).
have been forced to admit that these identities were not “exclusive” or incompatible with a sense of belonging to a wider Ottoman society.\textsuperscript{192}

Table 7: Ethnic/religious group percentages per city (1866)\textsuperscript{193}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Bulgarian</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>Muslim Immigrant</th>
<th>Roma</th>
<th>Armenian</th>
<th>Jewish</th>
<th>Catholic/other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruse</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shumen</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleven</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidin</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varna</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>41.6\textsuperscript{194}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tûrnovo</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vratsa</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svishтов</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samokov</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dobrich</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulcea</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>49.5\textsuperscript{195}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lovech</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Razgrad</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tûrgovishte</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But does that mean that the cities and towns were the only places in the vilayet where Muslims and non-Muslims interacted on a daily basis? Was the urban setting the only setting in which the Osmanlılık project could be expected to bear fruit? What about the villages, where, as we saw above, between 75 and

\textsuperscript{192} As Todorov put it (awkwardly), the coexistence of ethnic and religious groups in the cities can be considered “an essential element in the development of a Bulgarian ethnic awareness that avoided any special emphasis on national egoism and exclusiveness.” See Todorov, The Balkan City, 351.

\textsuperscript{193} Source: Ibid., 350, Table 58. The column headings are those used by the original census table from which Todorov’s data came.

\textsuperscript{194} Greeks and Turkish-speaking Christians (Gagauzes). The census table quoted by Todorov listed the Varna Greeks together with the Bulgarians, but provided a note indicating the numerical breakdown between the two communities. See ibid., 353-4.

\textsuperscript{195} Tulcea had large Greek and Romanian communities and a smattering of smaller groups such as Ukrainian Cossacks and Russian Old Believers (Lipovan). Most of the “others” listed in this column would have belonged to those groups.
85 percent of Midhat’s subjects lived? What percentage of villages could be considered religiously or ethnically mixed?

One source that does provide extensive data on village population diversity (albeit in a very non-systematic form) is V. Teplov’s Materialy dla statistiki Bolgarii, Frakii i Makedonii, published in St. Petersburg in 1877. An appendix in Teplov’s study contains kaza-by-kaza tables of all villages in the Danube province and the number of “Bulgarian,” “Turkish” and “Other” households in each village. Teplov, who had previously been employed by the Russian embassy in İstanbul, claimed to have based his data on official Ottoman statistics from the 1866 census, European travelers’ accounts (notably F. Kanitz’s Donau-Bulgarien und der Balkan), and data gathered from local informants. Karpat justly criticized the population figures supplied by Teplov, pointing out that his political agenda (a desire to strengthen Russia’s diplomatic case for declaring war on the Ottoman empire in 1877) had led him to inflate the number of Bulgarians and deflate the number of Muslims in the province. These criticisms are valid, but they are irrelevant to my specific use of Teplov’s data here. As Karpat himself acknowledged, the main source of bias in Teplov’s work comes from his use of different multipliers to determine the average size for Bulgarian versus non-Bulgarian households. This should not prevent us from

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196 V. Teplov, Materialy dla statistiki Bolgarii, Frakii i Makedonii s prilozheniem karty razpredeleniiia narondonaseleniia po veroispovedaniiam (St. Petersburg: 1877), 101-205., Appendix 1, “Spisok naselennykh mest’ Dunaiskoi Bolgarii.”
197 See Karpat, “Ottoman Demography,” 211.
198 Teplov set (apparently at random) the average household size for Turkish families at five, but at between six and nine for Bulgarian families, depending on the locality.
resorting to Teplov’s data for the purpose of establishing the degree of village population diversity because a) Teplov’s tables generally list the number of households, rather than individuals in a given village and b) in any case, our goal in using his data is not to obtain any absolute figures for village population, but rather to determine the degree of ethno-religious diversity in individual villages. Although Teplov undoubtedly had an incentive to inflate the overall numbers of Bulgarians in the province (by tinkering with the household multipliers) he probably stood to gain nothing from misrepresenting the ethno-religious makeup of individual villages – actually, given the fact that his book might foreseeably be used by Russian armies in the impending war in order to plan their logistical operations (e.g. from which village to get provisions), this is probably the field in which Teplov’s data should be deemed most reliable.

With these caveats in mind, I have used Teplov’s tables to compile a dataset of the religious diversity of the sancak of Ruse (Table 8). This is the district for which Teplov’s data is most complete, but it is also particularly useful for our purposes, because (as was shown above) it covers much of the transitional zone between the mostly non-Muslim western sancaks and the mostly Muslim eastern sancaks. Presumably, similar levels of village diversity would have existed in most of the sancak of Tûrnovo, while lower diversity levels would have been the norm in the other five sancaks.
Because Teplov’s method of listing “other” (non-Bulgarian, non-Turkish) households is inconsistent from one kaza table to the next, the only practical way of using his data in mapping village population diversity was to dispense with the ethnic component altogether and compile a dataset of village religious diversity with two basic categories, “Christian” and “Muslim” (the members of the vilayet’s Jewish community lived almost exclusively in the towns and cities and therefore can be excluded from this calculation), with the understanding that both of these categories included multiple ethnic groups – therefore villages listed in Table 8 as “Muslims only” could include Turks, Crimean Tatars, Circassians, Roma, Pomaks, etc., while villages listed as “Christians only” could include Bulgarians, Romanians, Greeks, Gagauzes, etc.

What emerges from Table 8 is that, while rural regions in the province were certainly more “segregated” than the cities and towns, they also afforded a potentially fertile ground for the implementation of imperial integrative policies. Especially in the vilayet’s transitional east-central zone, there were significant numbers of mixed Christian-Muslim villages (close to 50% in three of the nine kazas in the sancak of Ruse and more than two-thirds in a fourth kaza) and a great many of these villages belonged to the “very diverse” and “moderately diverse” categories – in other words they included two full-fledged ethno-religious

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199 In some tables (e.g., the one for the kaza of Ruse) the “other” column is designated “Circassian” and numbers for additional ethnic groups (Tatars, Roma) are given in a separate column. In other tables (e.g., the one for kaza Svishtov) the “other” column is left unspecified and individual entries contain ethnicity data (e.g., “6 Tatar [households]”). Other tables still (e.g., the one for kaza Shumen) have the “other” column designated “Tatar” and list further ethnic groups (Circassian, Roma) separately.
communities, as opposed to a handful of Muslims in a sea of Christians or vice versa. These villages, just as much as the towns and cities, could become “ground zero” for Midhat’s reforms.

The information that can be gleaned from the sources also suggests that the intermingling of ethnic and religious groups reached all the way down to the level of individual streets or houses. This is true both of the cities/towns of the province as it is of the villages. It is true that many urban centers had neighborhoods (mahalle) that were considered “Bulgarian,” “Turkish,” “Armenian,” “Jewish,” and so forth. But even when these were truly monolithic in terms of their ethnic and/or religious composition, they were usually outnumbered by “mixed” mahalles – in Ruse, for instance, only five of the city’s twenty-five mahalles have been deemed to be ethnically “pure” during the second half of the nineteenth century (these included a Jewish, Armenian, and three Turkish mahalles). In rural settings, too, the material at our disposal indicates that Muslims and non-Muslims often lived side by side. As an example, one of the legal cases that I have examined in Chapter Six, revealed that a Muslim arsonist from Belac, a village in the kaza Vranje (in the district of Niš), who set fire to his father’s house also managed, inadvertently, to burn down the house of Christian neighbor next door

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201 BOA AYN.DEF. 919, p. 97 [17 Cemaziülevvel 1284 / 16 September 1867].
Table 8. Village religious diversity in Ruse sancak (excluding kaza centers)\(^{202}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kaza</th>
<th>Total villages</th>
<th>Christian only</th>
<th>Muslim only</th>
<th>Christian-Muslim</th>
<th>No data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruse</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svishtov</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikopol</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleven</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Razgrad</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tûrgovishte</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shumen</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutrakan</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silistra</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kaza</th>
<th>Percent Christian only</th>
<th>Percent Muslim only</th>
<th>Percent Christian-Muslim</th>
<th>Percent no data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruse</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svishtov</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikopol</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleven</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Razgrad</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tûrgovishte</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shumen</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutrakan</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silistra</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kaza</th>
<th>Christian-Muslim villages</th>
<th>Very diverse (% of all kaza villages)</th>
<th>Moderately diverse (% of all kaza villages)</th>
<th>Minimally diverse (% of all kaza villages)</th>
<th>Ratio unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruse</td>
<td>40 (43%)</td>
<td>11 (12%)</td>
<td>18 (19%)</td>
<td>9 (10%)</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svishtov</td>
<td>24 (67%)</td>
<td>7 (20%)</td>
<td>13 (36%)</td>
<td>3 (8%)</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikopol</td>
<td>28 (44%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6 (9%)</td>
<td>3 (5%)</td>
<td>19 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleven</td>
<td>23 (48%)</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
<td>5 (10.5%)</td>
<td>5 (10.5%)</td>
<td>11 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Razgrad</td>
<td>21 (16%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tûrgovishte</td>
<td>6 (14%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
<td>2 (5%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shumen</td>
<td>26 (17%)</td>
<td>9 (6%)</td>
<td>12 (8%)</td>
<td>5 (3%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutrakan</td>
<td>8 (19%)</td>
<td>2 (5%)</td>
<td>3 (7%)</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>2 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silistra</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
<td>1 (2.5%)</td>
<td>1 (2.5%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend:
Very diverse = One religious group outnumbers the other by 25% or less.
Moderately diverse = One religious group outnumbers the other by between 75% and 25%.
Minimally diverse = One religious group outnumbers the other by 75% or more

2.3. The administrative structure of the vilayet

2.3.1. Subdivisions

Administratively, the 1864 Provincial Statute (nizamname) divided the vilayet of Danube into seven constitutive units called sancaks. The cities that were chosen as sancak centers were, from west to east, Niš, Vidin, Sofia, Tûrnovo, Ruse, Varna, and Tulcea. Each of the seven sancaks, in turn, encompassed a varying number (between five and nine) of smaller administrative units called kazas. At the bottom of the vilayet's administrative hierarchy were the individual towns (kasabat), villages (karye), or village clusters (nahiye). Attempts to faithfully translate the terms for these administrative units into various European languages have led to a great deal of confusion. The official French translation of the Provincial Statute offered “arrondissement” for sancak and “canton” for kaza; İnalçık has used “county” for sancak and “sub-county” for kaza; Ali Haydar Midhat’s biography of his father adopted “district” for sancak, “canton” for kaza, and “commune” for nahiye; and there are many other variant translations and permutations of these. In order to avoid confusion, I have generally kept the

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203 The nizamname’s original text can be found in BOA İ.MMHS 1245 [11 Cemaziülevvel 1281 / 12 October 1864], and in an officially sanctioned French translation, Loi constitutive du département formé sous le nom de Vilayet du Danube, (Constantinople: Imprimiere Centrale, 1865). More recently, the text of the nizamname was published (in Latin transliteration) in Şentürk, Osmanlı Devleti’nde Bulgar Meselesi, 253-71.

204 See Loi constitutive du département formé sous le nom de Vilayet du Danube.


original Ottoman terms throughout this study. Where translations have been provided, it should be clear from the context which type of unit they refer to.

None of the vilayet’s constitutive parts were new in name – what was new was their arrangement in a hierarchical unit that was larger and more comprehensively “organized” than anything that had previously been attempted during the Tanzimat period in the field of provincial administration. Sancaks (a.k.a. livas) had been a unit of Ottoman provincial administration for several centuries, and kaza was, of course, the term used to designate the fields of jurisdiction of individual Islamic (şer’î) courts since the conquest. Since the early 1840’s, as Tanzimat statesmen struggled to find a workable way to reorganize the way the empire’s provinces were governed, the territories of the sancaks in the Balkans had been repeatedly redrawn and their administration had been entrusted, in turn, to civilian tax collectors (muhassil) appointed from İstanbul (1840-1841), military field army commanders and/or officers (kaymakam) appointed by them (1841 till the early 1850’s), and civilian governors with broad executive powers (after 1858). Prior to 1864, sancaks had been grouped together into mid-sized units called eyalets or mutasarriflik.\textsuperscript{207} It was three such eyalets – Niš, Vidin, and Silistra that were merged together in 1846 to form the vilayet of Danube. Most of the new province’s seven sancaks, therefore, had existed as such in the old eyalets (the notable exception was Ruse, which had not been a sancak center before). The vilayet’s forty-five kazas were also largely

\textsuperscript{207} For a brief summary of Ottoman efforts at provincial reform before 1864, see Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, \textit{History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), vol. 2, 83-8.
inherited from the old regime – *kaza* as administrative units (as opposed to as judicial districts) had existed since 1840 – but their number and boundaries had changed several times during the *Tanzimat* period. Shortly before the establishment of the *vilayet*, for example, a new *kaza* had appeared on the map of the Dobrogea as a result of the founding of the town of Medgidia (Mecidiye), built to accommodate arriving Tatar and Circassian refugees from Russia.\(^{208}\) In 1861, the town of Constanța on the Black Sea had been elevated to a *kaza* status because of the impending building of a railroad there.\(^{209}\) During Midhat’s tenure, two new *kazas* were erected for the growing towns of Botevgrad (Orhaniye) and Tutrakan, bringing the total number of *kazas* in the province to forty-seven.\(^{210}\) Also at the discretion of the government, the territory of individual *kazas* could be modified and villages could be transferred from one *kaza* to another. Thus, the creation of the *kaza* of Tutrakan in March of 1866 led to a bout of redistricting within the Ruse *sancak* – not only were 41 villages transferred to the newly created *kaza* from the neighboring regions of Ruse, Razgrad, and Silistra, but more than a hundred other villages throughout the *sancak* were transferred from the jurisdiction of one *kaza* to that of another. Altogether, 152 villages (almost as many as a quarter of all villages in the


\(^{209}\) NBKM OO Fond 112, a.e. 2980 [12 / 24 November 1861].

\(^{210}\) Botevgrad is located northeast of Sofia, Tutrakan between Ruse and Silistra on the Danube river. The two *kazas* must have been established sometime in early 1866, since an article from the April 22, 1866, issue of the provincial newspaper refers to them as “newly-created.” *Tuna/Dunav*, vol. 2, no. 64 [10/22 April 1866].
sancak) were affected by the shuffle.\textsuperscript{211} Table 9 provides a summary of the vilayet's administrative structure, after the creation of the two new kazas in 1866.

\textsuperscript{211} BOA İ.MVL. 24943, lef. 7 [irade: 25 Safer 1283 / 8 July 1866]. One hypothesis that I attempted to test as part of this study was that these transfers of villages from one kaza to another were motivated by political goals – e.g. by the goal of making the resulting kazas more uniform in terms of the ethno-religious makeup of their populations. A village-by-village analysis of the village transfers (cross-checked with population data for the villages from Teplov and other sources) was conducted but the results showed no identifiable pattern behind the changes. The kazas of the Ruse sancak, in other words, remained roughly as diverse in ethno-religious terms as they had been before.
Table 9: Sancaks, Kazas, and Nahiyes in the Danube Province (1868)\(^{212}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Kazas</th>
<th>Nahiyes</th>
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<td>Ruse</td>
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<td>Novi Pazar (Yeni Pazarı) – to Shumen</td>
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<td>1. Sofia (Sofya)</td>
<td>Blagoevgrad (Cuma) – to Dupnitsa</td>
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<td>Breznik (Preznik) – to Radomir</td>
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<td>Gorna Oriakhovitsa (Rahoviçe) – to Tûrnovo</td>
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<td>3. Lovech (Loçça)</td>
<td>Triavna (Travna) – to Gabrovo</td>
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<td>4. Sevlievo (Selvi)</td>
<td>Troian (Turuyan) – to Lovech</td>
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<td>5. Omurtag (Osman Pazarı)</td>
<td>Kotel (Kazgân) – to Omurtag</td>
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<td>Varna</td>
<td>1. Varna</td>
<td>Suvorovo (Kozluca) – to Varna</td>
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<td>2. Dobrich (Hacıoğlu Pazarçığı)</td>
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<td>2. Constan a (Köstence)</td>
<td>Isaccea (İsakça) – to Tulcea</td>
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<td>Cernavodâ (Boğazköy) – to Medgidia</td>
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<td>Totals</td>
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<td>17 nahiyes</td>
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\(^{212}\) Source: *Tuna vilayeti salnamesi sene 1285*, 100.
2.3.2. Offices, institutions, elective processes

The basic internal organization of the government of the Danube province – as set forth in the vilayet’s Statute and as revised in the 1871 General Provincial Law\(^{213}\) – has been examined in detail by a number of scholars and is well known.\(^{214}\) I will, therefore, confine myself here to providing a brief summary of its main characteristics. At its top level, the provincial administration consisted of a number of officials appointed from İstanbul – the governor (vali), the overseer of the provincial justice system (müfettiş-i hukkâm), the chief financial officer (muhasebeci), the director of correspondence (mektubcu), the director of real estate records (defterdar or defter-i hakanî müdürü) and officials in charge of public works (nâfi’a), agriculture (ziraat), foreign affairs (umur-i ecnebiye), and census and cadastral surveys (tahrir-i emlâk). In subsequent years, as Midhat’s reforms were beginning to take shape, other vilayet-wide offices were added to that list: the superintendent of the vocational schools for orphans and homeless children (İslahhaneler naziri); the director of telegraph works and stations (telgraf müfettişi); the chair of the Danube river navigation board (İdare-i nehriye); the chair of the Immigration commission (Muhacirîn komisyonu); the director of the agricultural credit cooperatives (Menafi-i umumiye sandıkları); and the registrar of

\(^{213}\) The text of the 1871 Provincial Law was published in DÜSTÜR, 608-24. The modifications the 1871 law made to the provisions of the 1864 nizamname are highlighted in the footnotes of Şentürk’s translation and are also briefly summarized in Davison, Reform, 158-60; and Ortaylı, Osmanlı Mahallî İdareleri, 63-4. I will refer to some of these modifications later in this chapter.

\(^{214}\) Davison, Reform, 142-51; Sahara, An Eastern Orthodox Community, 14-9; Şentürk, Osmanlı Devleti’nde Bulgar Meselesi, 168-73; Ortaylı, Osmanlı Mahallî İdareleri, 56-62.
the “Statistical Commission” (Divan-i istatistik). These top provincial officials were aided by a number of deputies (muavin) and scribes (kâtib), and most had subordinates in the sancaks as well – for instance the provincial defterdar had a staff of one deputy in Ruse and one clerk in each of the seven sancaks; each of those clerks, in turn, had a deputy and two secretaries of their own. Where appropriate, provincial officials also had professional staff such as engineers, physicians, land surveyors, etc.

As Davison has rightly noted, the appointed vilayet officials listed above “had a curious double responsibility, both to the appropriate ministry in İstanbul and to the vali.” This was certainly true on paper – the individuals who occupied these posts technically had to be nominated by the respective department in İstanbul. Thus the muhasebeci was nominated by the Ministry of Finance and was “fully answerable” to it. The foreign affairs officer for the province was appointed by the Foreign Ministry (1864 nizamname, Article 10), the overseer of the law courts – by the Şeyhülislam (Article 16), the public works officer – by the Ministry of Public Work (Article 11), the agriculture officer – by the Ministry of Agriculture (Article 11) and so on. Furthermore, some of the vilayet’s officials apparently remained on the payroll of their ministry or department while in office – when the salaries of all employees of the Defterhane in İstanbul were reduced

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215 Şentürk, Osmanlı Devleti’nde Bulgar Meselesi, 172-3; Tuna vilayeti salnamesi sene 1285, 21.
216 Tuna vilayeti salnamesi sene 1285, 24.
217 Davison, Reform.
218 The wording in the original is Maliye Nezaret-i Celilesi’ne karşı doğruan doğruya mes’ul. See Şentürk, Osmanlı Devleti’nde Bulgar Meselesi, 254 (Article 7).
by one sixth in March of 1867, the reduction also applied to the provincial
defterdar in Ruse and his subordinates.\textsuperscript{219} We do not know whether this division of responsibilities was intended by Fuat and Midhat Paşas (the \textit{nizamname}'s authors) to be a check on the \textit{vali}'s power. In practice, however, it appears that as governor Midhat had a virtual free hand in all bureaucratic appointments in the province – as will be shown in the sections on cadre policy below. The one area in which a separation of powers of sorts was observed was the military – although the \textit{vali} was in charge of the provincial police forces and border patrols, he had no authority over the military chain of command in the Imperial Second Army (which was stationed in the \textit{vilayet}, with its headquarters in Shumen), nor is there evidence that Midhat ever had (or sought to have) any influence in military appointments.

More interesting than the \textit{vilayet}'s appointed officials (and arguably more important historically) were the various administrative and judicial councils (\textit{meclis}) that were set up in the new province. Both types of \textit{meclis} were organized along the same principle, namely, bringing together “ex officio” and “elected” members for the purpose of advising \textit{vilayet}, \textit{sancak}, and \textit{kaza} executive officers (the administrative \textit{meclises}), or adjudicating civil or criminal lawsuits (the judicial \textit{meclises}). The proportion of appointed to elected members was fixed in the 1864 \textit{nizamname} for each type of council. Thus, the highest administrative council in the province – the \textit{Meclis-i İdare-i Vilayet}, sitting in Ruse – was to have a total of six elected and four ex officio members (the \textit{Müfettiş-i

\textsuperscript{219} NBKM OO, fond 112A, a.e. 529 [30 Muharrem 1284 / 3 June 1867].
Hukkâm, the Muhasebeci, the Mektubcu and the foreign affairs officer), in addition to the governor himself who chaired its sessions. The highest judicial council – the vilayet’s Appellate Court or Meclis-i Temyiz-i Hukuk – was to have six elected members and one ex officio member (the Müfettiş-i Hukkâm who was the presiding officer of that court).²²⁰

Both types of councils were arranged hierarchically, following the administrative divisions of the province itself. The judicial meclises in particular functioned as fully fledged courts of law and were organized in a fairly elaborate legal system that operated side by side with the existing Islamic courts in the vilayet. This new (nizamî) legal system is of considerable historical interest and its workings and structure will be examined in a separate chapter (Chapter 6).

Another type of meclis that will be discussed in greater detail in another section of this study is the Provincial General Assembly (Meclis-i Umumî-i Vilayet) – a body made up entirely of regional delegates that met once every year in Ruse to discuss important reform proposals submitted by the governor or (very significantly, in my opinion) by the delegates themselves. I shall argue (in Chapter 4) that the Meclis-i Umumî played a critically important role in the governing of the vilayet – both as a source of much needed local feedback for the administration’s policies and as a clearinghouse for locally generated policy ideas.

Setting aside, for now, the nizamî courts and the Provincial General Assembly, the rest of this chapter will focus mostly on the administrative (idare)²²⁰

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²²⁰ 1864 Danube Province nizamname, Articles 13, 19.
meclises, with the understanding that much of what will be said about their membership and election procedures also applied to other types of councils as well. These idare meclises had mostly advisory functions and were, like the judicial meclises, organized hierarchically, with separate councils advising the vali in Ruse, the kaymakams of the seven sancaks, and the superintendents (müdürü) of the forty-five kazas. Farthest down, at the village level, “Councils of Elders” (İhtiyar Meclisi) made up entirely of elected members advised the village headmen (muhtar). Although the Provincial Statute did not expressly authorize the upper-level idare meclises to act as “control organs” for the decisions of the lower ones, in practice the Meclis-i İdare-i Vilayet, routinely reviewed decisions or resolutions passed by the idare meclises at the sancak and kaza levels.221

One final type of meclis that was not mentioned in the 1864 nizamname but was, in fact, introduced in many places in the Danube province shortly after Midhat’s appointment was the municipal (belediye) council. Although both Davison and Ortaylı seem to suggest that the first provincial belediye meclises in the Ottoman empire were established only after the passage of the general Vilayet Law in 1871, documentary evidence indicates that Midhat’s administration had been working on the establishment of belediyes in the larger cities of the Danube province since the fall of 1865. In September of that year, the provincial government sent a proposal to the Porte for the creation of municipal councils, first in the cities of Ruse, Varna, Constanța, Tulcea, Sofia, Vidin, Tūrnovo, and Niš. The regulation (tâlimatname) resulting from this proposal stipulated that the

221 Ortaylı, Osmanlı Mahalli İdareleri, 72.
belediyes would be responsible for municipal infrastructural works (such as the paving of streets), enforcing hygiene regulations, monitoring the observance of fair practices in city markets, and operating municipal services such as fire departments and street lights. The members of the belediyes (like those of other meclises) were to be split among those serving ex officio and those elected by the city’s taxpayers.\textsuperscript{222} This first set of belediye meclises may have been operational by the Spring of 1866;\textsuperscript{223} by 1868-1869 belediyes had been formed not only in all sancak capitals in the province, but also in all but three of its kaza centers.\textsuperscript{224}

One very important principle in the 1864 nizamname that was widely trumpeted by Ottoman statesmen at the time as the fulfillment of promises made in the Hatt-i Hümayun of 1856 was the principle of equal representation of Muslim and non-Muslim meclis delegates. In reality, as has been pointed out by virtually all historians who have examined the Danube province nizamname and the subsequent general Law of the Vilayets, the incorporation of that principle in the letter of the law was highly problematic. For one thing, the proviso for equal quotas for Muslims and non-Muslims only applied to the elected meclis members (âza-yi müntahabe) and not to the entire membership of the councils. Secondly, even for these elected members, the requirement of equal representation was not applied systematically in the 1864 nizamname across all types of meclis – the

\textsuperscript{222} BOA İ.MVL. 24362 [24 Cemaziülâhir 1282 / 14 November 1865].
\textsuperscript{223} Pletn’ov, Midkhat Pasha, 50.
\textsuperscript{224} According to the first printing of the Provincial Yearbook (salname) only Pleven, Vratsa, and Mangalia still lacked belediyes at that date. See Tuna vilayeti salnamesi sene 1285.
administrative councils on the kaza level, for example, were exempt from it, as they included only three elected members of unspecified religion. The upshot of this complicated wording of the statute was that Muslims were practically ensured of having a majority in most meclises in the province – since, of course, the ex officio council members were mostly Muslim – regardless of whether they constituted a majority in the population of a given locality. Only in a few kazas and nahiyes of the Predbalkan region (e.g. in towns such as Gabrovo and Traivna, where the population was nearly 100% ethnic Bulgarian) did non-Muslims end up holding numerical majorities in local kaza and belediye meclises. This fact did not escape the attention of European observers at time, who singled out the de facto Muslim control of the meclises as the system’s Achilles’ heel. It was certainly true that in those councils that had relatively large numbers of ex officio members (e.g. the idare meclises from the vilayet to the kaza level), Muslim members outnumbered their non-Muslim counterparts regardless of the demographic situation of the locality that the meclis in question was supposed to represent. The 1871 revision of the system made the idare meclises even less representative by generally lowering the quotas of elected members in them.

225 1864 Nizamname, Article 62. This provision was “corrected” in the 1872 general Vilayet law but it had remained in effect throughout Midhat’s tenure as governor.
226 On the predominance of Bulgarians in these councils, see Kanitz, Dunavska Bûlgaria, vol.1, 294.
228 The 1871 law reduced the number of elected members in each of the administrative meclises at the vilayet and sancak levels from six to four, but
But it should also be said that, for those councils that had few ex officio members (e.g. the judicial meclises, each of which only had one ex officio against four to six elected members, or in the belediyes that had two ex officio members against six elected ones), the principle of equal quotas among elected members could cut both ways. The belediyes are particularly interesting in this regard, since their first statute (late 1865) stipulated that their elected members should reflect the millet composition of each town – and there were several non-Muslim millets against a single Muslim one. In fact, as Sahara’s study of the membership of belediyes in the Balkans during the 1870’s has revealed, non-Muslims were indeed generally under-represented (relative to their share of the population) in municipal councils in the predominantly Bulgarian western districts, but they were overrepresented (sometimes dramatically) in the belediyes of cities in the predominantly Muslim eastern half of the province.

Figure 1 on page 268 of this study provides a summary of the composition of the vilayet’s administrative and municipal councils.

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229 That statement does not apply to the village İhtiyar meclises, since they were segregated along religious line by law – i.e., in religiously mixed villages separate Muslim and non-Muslim İhtiyar meclises existed side by side.

230 See Tetsuya Sahara, “The Belediye Organization in the Balkans: The Formation of Belediye Councils and The Communal Affiliations of Their Members According to Provincial Yearbooks [In Japanese],” Jinbun Gakuho (Tokyo), no. 306 (2000): 124-30, Table 5. I am grateful to Mr. Jun Akiba for bringing this article to my attention and for translating the table headings for me. An English summary of the findings in article can also be found in Tetsuya Sahara, “The Making of the Modern Municipal Government in the Ottoman Balkans: The Distribution and Religious Structure of Municipal Councils as seen through the Provincial Yearbooks” (paper presented at the January 2000 Meeting of the Japanese Association of Eastern European Studies (AEES), Tokyo, Aoyama Gakuin University, 2000).
The election system provided for in the 1864 nizamname was highly convoluted and its effective franchise very narrow. In general, the system came closest to being (somewhat) democratic on the village or town quarter (mahalle) level, while elections for higher echelons of the meclis hierarchy were more restrictive and more tightly controlled by the government.231

At the village/mahalle level, all males older than 18 years who “had ties” (ashab-i alâka) to the village, were Ottoman subjects, and paid at least 50 piastres in direct yearly taxes could elect village headmen and members of the local “Council of Elders” (İhtiyar Meclisi). The qualifications for standing for village office, on the other hand, included being a male Ottoman subject thirty-years-old or older, with “ties” to the locality, and paying at least 100 piastres in direct taxes per year (Article 67). Village or mahalle elections took place once every year and their results were subject to verification by the respective district superintendent (kaza müdürü).232

At the kaza level, members of the administrative or judicial councils were elected every two years, not directly but by an electoral commission comprised of the kaza müdürü, the kadi, the müfti, the imam, kaza scribes, and the religious leaders of all non-Muslim communities represented in the district. This electoral commission was charged with drafting a list of suitable candidates (Ottoman subjects, older than 30 years of age and paying at least 150 piastres per year in direct taxes; if at all possible, they also had to be literate) and submitting them to

231 See Ortaylı, Osmanlı Mahalli İdareleri, 82-4.
232 1864 nizamname, Articles 67-69.
all İhtiyar Meclises in the district’s villages and town quarters. At this stage, these preliminary election lists contained three times as many names as the number of seats that were up for grabs and the candidates proposed in them were equally divided between Muslims and non-Muslims. The preliminary lists were then vetted out, first, by the İhtiyar Meclises (whose aggregate votes were used to eliminate a third of the names on the lists), and, second, by the kaymakam of the sancak in which a given kaza was situated (the kaymakam eliminated half of the names on the truncated list and the remaining third of the original lists were considered elected).  

The same cumbersome procedure was repeated to “elect” members for the sancak- and vilayet- level meclises – electoral lists containing three times the necessary number of candidates were drafted by the ex officio members of the council for which the elections were to be held, then a similar negative “electoral” process of elimination took place: first the members of meclises one level down the hierarchy voted to eliminate one third of the names on the electoral lists, then the executive officer one level up the hierarchy eliminated half of the remaining names at his discretion. An attempt to summarize the rules of the electoral process in graphic form is made here in Figure 2 (p. 269). Higher property qualifications applied to the candidates for each consecutive meclis level – those being considered for seats on the vilayet-level councils, for example, had to pay at least 500 piastres in direct taxes each year. Finally a “special article” appended to the 1864 nizamname limited the time in office for the elected

233 1864 nizamname, Articles 71-75.
members of all meclises in the province to one two-year term. An exception was made for delegates to the Provincial General Assembly, who could be reelected on a yearly basis.

With such a complicated and government-controlled election system and with their largely advisory and consultative functions, it is little wonder that the provincial meclises have often been dismissed by historians of the period as a "travesty" of popular representation. But such criticisms miss the point – the new system was not meant to be democratic or representative in the first place. In fact, a brief look at the "pre-history" of Tanzimat meclises reveals an intriguing institutional background that had more to do with local facilitation of the central government’s functions than with decentralizing political authority or providing "representative" local input into government policies.

The first local councils of the Tanzimat period were established during the government’s brief experiment in direct tax collection (1840-1841) and were designed not as policy-making, or even consultative bodies, but as a kind of local census committees. Originally known as Meclis-i Muhassilin, these councils had to prepare the population and property rosters that were to form the base for the future equitable tax system promised in the 1839 Gülhane Edict. Although the direct collection experiment proved to be a financial disaster and the government reverted to farming out the major taxes in 1842, the councils were retained and,

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234 Davison, Reform, 149; for a contrasting view, see Şentürk, Osmanlı Devleti’nde Bulgar Meselesi, 169.
235 These rosters were compiled to become the well-known Temettüat registers. See Mübahat Kütükoğlu, “Osmanlı sosyal ve iktisadi kültür kaynaklarından Temettü Defterleri,” Belleten 59, no. 225 (August 1995).
as Memleket Meclises, existed until 1864. By the late 1850’s, however, it was becoming clear that, from the government’s perspective, the current set-up of the existing meclises was becoming a liability. That much was revealed, for example, during the famous inspection tour of the Balkan provinces by Grand Vezir Kibrisli Mehmet Paşa in 1860. One of the primary conclusions of the Grand Vezir’s inspection was that members of Memleket Meclises were often complicit (with inept and/or corrupt governors) in the maladministration of the provinces. Due to the lack of specific regulations regarding their composition, elective procedures, duties, and terms in office, the meclises had become, in the words of a British diplomat, “dens of thieves,” whose “Augean stables” required immediate cleaning. Cliques of local notables (Muslim and Christian alike) had secured a virtual stranglehold on meclis membership in many localities and had managed to make themselves the primary causes of popular dissatisfaction – the Kibrisli received no less than 170 petitions against a single Bulgarian member of the Leskovac meclis and 239 petitions against two members (also Bulgarian) of the meclis in Pirot. In Vidin, Berkovitsa, and Pirot, the Grand Vezir found the existing meclises so “defective” that he felt compelled to abolish

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237 On that event, see Davison, “Ottoman diplomacy,” 105-7.
238 “Reports received from Her Majesty’s Consuls relating to the Condition of the Christians in Turkey, 1860,” in House of Commons Accounts and Papers, 1861 (London: Harrison and Sons, 1861), document 16, Inclosure 2, p. 66 (Consul Ricketts in Niš to Ambassador Bulwer).
239 Ibid., document 24, p. 99 (Consul J.E. Blunt in Skopje to Ambassador Bulwer).
them altogether and reinstate them with new members; in Niš and several other places, he confined himself to dismissing individual *meclis* members.\(^{240}\)

We do not know to what extent the 1864 provincial reform was informed by the findings of the 1860 inspection. It is likely, however, that Fuat and Midhat Paşas’ design of the functions and election procedures for the *meclises* in the Danube province were at least partly concerned with eradicating the problems discovered by the Kâbrislî four years earlier. From their perspective, therefore, the overall goal as far as the *meclises* were concerned was not to make these institutions more powerful (e.g. as “checks” on the authority of a governor) – it was to make them more amenable to state control under the guidance of appointed officials. Nor was the goal to make the *meclises* more representative. Although sympathetic European observers at the time liked to see the provision for equal representation of non-Muslims in the councils as the fulfillment of the promises made in the 1865 *Hatt* (indeed, Fuat Paşa made numerous declarations to that effect), it is likely that the real goal of the reform, from the Ottoman government’s point of view, was to ensure that the *meclises* would no longer be hijacked by narrow local interests. The “equality” principle could just as easily have been incidental to the practical imperative of keeping the councils under government control as it could have been an expression of ideological goals. Ortaylı, whose study of local administration institutions during the *Tanzimat* period remains the most comprehensive one to date, has voiced a similar opinion when he stated that, from the perspective of the imperial

\(^{240}\) Ibid.
government, the *meclises* were considered an institutional avenue for easier implementation of governing principles and policies conceived (as before) in Istanbul, rather than as a means for soliciting the political participation of people’s representatives.\(^{241}\)

Seen from this angle, the reconstituted system of *meclises* set up in the provincial *nizamname* of 1864 and later enshrined in the Law of the Vilayets was successful – it established a clear (albeit convoluted) system of elections, ensured that appointed (rather than elected) officials would have a commanding position in all but the lowest-level councils, and managed to co-opt local elites into the *Tanzimat* vision of reforms (rather than give them an amorphous institutional platform to exercise unchecked power, as the previous system had done). The new arrangement also set limits on the terms in office for elected members (although it remains unclear to what extent these limits were enforced) and decoupled the legal from the advisory functions of the old *Memleket Meclises*. As I shall argue in more detail in later chapters, the new *meclises* were also a qualified success in a broader sense – they channeled the political activities of a substantial portion of the ethnic Bulgarian elites into an institutional framework that was reliably Ottoman and secured for the empire the allegiances of a large number of Bulgarians who could now think of themselves as state officials, no matter how limited their actual political power.

\(^{241}\) Ortaylı, *Osmanlı Mahalli İdareleri*, 74.
2.3.3. Cadres and cadre policies

Amalgamating the bureaucracies of the three former eyalets and finding suitably trained (and suitably loyal) cadres to staff the many rungs of the new vilayet’s administrative ladder were two of the most pressing tasks that Midhat had to face upon his arrival in Ruse. From the outset, the governor seems to have followed a two-pronged strategy in his cadre recruitment policies: a) bringing in “outsiders” – usually technocrats with scarce skills, such as engineers and medical doctors, or handpicked personal advisors, and, b) determining which of the existing low- and mid-level civil servants in the old eyalets were “competent” (ehliyetli) and “trustworthy” (emniyetbahş) enough to continue serving in the new administration. The “outsiders” were mainly brought in from either İstanbul or from Midhat’s previous appointment at Niš. Their highly visible entry in town impressed many of the inhabitants of Ruse. Stati Popov, whose memoir was quoted in the first chapter of this study, commented that the new governor seemed to be bringing with him enough outside officials to set up an entire “new state.”\textsuperscript{242} Nikola Obretenov was also struck by the number of “bureaucrats, physicians, engineers, pharmacists, and translators” that were descending upon the new vilayet capital.\textsuperscript{243}

Despite the provisions in the 1864 nizamname stating that various İstanbul ministries, rather than the governor, were responsible for nominating and/or appointing certain provincial officials, and despite the occasional interference from his superiors in İstanbul on behalf of this or that candidate for a sinecure

\textsuperscript{242} NBKM BIA II A 1042 [n.d.]
\textsuperscript{243} Obretenov, Spomeni za bûlgarskite vûzstaniia, 68.
position in the vilayet’s administration, Midhat seems to have had a virtual free hand in staffing decisions upon his arrival in Ruse. Not only did he begin his tenure with a complete set of hand-picked sancak kaymakams, but he was also apparently able to nudge into retirement the old Mufettis-i Hukkâm (technically, the vilayet’s second highest-ranking official and an appointee of the Şeyhülislam’s office) and summarily dismiss the first provincial Mektubcu (appointed by the Finance Ministry). The only type of hiring decisions that appear to have been taken with minimal involvement by the governor were those concerning medical, engineering, and other technical personnel that required highly specialized skills – these were usually made upon the recommendation of the corresponding training institution in İstanbul. But in the hiring of most political/bureaucratic functionaries Midhat had the decisive voice. In the aforementioned shuffle at Mufettis-i Hukkâm’s office, for instance, the new appointee (Necib Molla) was confirmed only after Midhat had expressed a

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244 BOA.A.MKT.UM. Dosya 873, Vesika 79 [17 Cemaziülevvel 1282 / 7 October 1865] – a personal request by Fuat to Midhat Paşa, recommending that a retired secretary of one of the infantry regiments in the Ottoman army be appointed to “any available” district superintendent’s office (kaza müdürlüğü) within the Danube province.

245 See Şentürk, Osmanlı Devleti’nde Bulgar Meselesi, 169.

246 BOA İ.D. 37109 [9 Zilkade 1281 / 5 April 1865]. The old mufettis, Nazif Molla, ostensibly retired for “health reasons” (ma’zeret-i vücuda), but Midhat’s biography by his son makes it clear that the real reasons were political. See Ali Haydar Midhat, Tabsira-i İbret, 45.

247 BOA İ.D. 37120 [13 Zilkade 1281 / 9 April 1865]. Senih Efendi was sacked for “incompetence.”

248 A typical example was the hiring of pharmacists for the new hospital wards in the vilayet (see Chapter 3 for more details). In the spring of 1865, the provincial government informed the Porte of its need for pharmacists and requested that the Imperial Medical School (Mekteb-i tibbiye-i şahane) recommend several candidates; three recent graduates of the school’s pharmacology program were recommended and appointed. BOA İ.D. 37215 [7 Zilhicce 1281 / 3 May 1865].
positive opinion on his candidacy. Davison’s statement that, as governor, Midhat “seems to have been able to influence the selection even of those [provincial officials] appointed directly from İstanbul” appears to be well corroborated by the documentary evidence. Many of the high-ranking government employees in the Danube province were the governor’s hand-picked men – individuals who had worked for Midhat during his stint at Niš or whom he had taken under his patronage while in office in Ruse and who would, in many cases, follow him after 1868 in his subsequent appointments as Grand Vezir and governor of Baghdad. Some of those individuals would later be able to use the administrative experience they had gained in the Danube province as a springboard to moderately distinguished bureaucratic careers. Examples of such protégés included Midhat’s closest Bulgarian confidant, Kadzhi Ivan (Ivancho) Penchovich of Ruse, who was a member of the central provincial Administrative Council (Meclis-i İdare-i Vilayet) between 1865 and 1868 and would later serve for a number of years on the Ottoman Council of State (Şura-yi Devlet); İsmail Kemal Bey, one of the editors of the provincial newspaper and future leader of the Albanian independence movement; Ahmed Midhat Efendi, the other editor of Tuna/Dunav and future famous Ottoman writer/journalist, and many others. It terms of their ethnic origin, Midhat’s “had-picked” advisors were as diverse as the empire itself and that diversity has generally defeated historians’ efforts to

\[249\] BOA İ.D. 37109 [9 Zilkade 1281 / 5 April 1865].
\[250\] Davison, Reform, 153.
\[251\] For a more comprehensive list, see ibid., 153-4.
\[252\] The inner circle of Midhat’s subordinates included an Armenian (Oodian Efendi, the first Foreign Affairs officer of the vilayet), an Albanian (İsmail Kemal), a Greek
paint Midhat’s staffing policies as pro this or anti that ethnic group. Davison’s verdict that “[a]pparently there were no Bulgars in any other than minor posts in the vilayet” does not stand up to scrutiny, as Bulgarians were well represented in the highest-level meclises in the province (the Provincial Administrative Council included two Bulgarians, the Provincial General Assembly had over ten Bulgarian delegates), as well as in appointed positions (three of the vilayet’s kazas had Bulgarian müdürs in 1865; at least two of the cities in the province also had Bulgarian government physicians). Bulgarian officials in the administration were decorated for their service and several (including the aforementioned Penchovich) were promoted to positions in the central imperial bureaucracy upon Midhat’s elevation to the chairmanship of the Council of State in 1868.

Despite the high profile of an appointment in the empire’s “model” new province, it would be reasonable to assume that not all of Midhat’s “outsider” appointees were thrilled to leave behind the cosmopolitan atmosphere of İstanbul for a life in the relatively small and still decidedly provincial town of Ruse. Such reluctance may explain why, in the first months after the establishment of the vilayet, several key officials were brought in from the empire’s capital on a strictly provisional basis, with the promise that they could go back to their old posts in

(Yanko Efendi, the first chair of the vilayet’s Commercial Court), a Croat (Midhat’s secretary, Kiliçiyan Vasıf), a German (Wagman Bey, the superintendent of the vilayet’s railways), a Ukrainian Cossack “renegade” (Sadık Paşa Chaykovski, the commander of the kazak alayı in Shumen), several Polish engineers, etc.

253 Davison, Reform, 154.
254 See Pletn’ov, Midkhat Pasha, 48-9.
İstanbul once they had got the institutions of the new provincial bureaucracy off the ground. 255

Important as they were, the “outsiders” could not be the only solution to the governor’s cadre problem. The officials at the lower and middle levels of the provincial bureaucracy – the kaza superintendents (müdür), the scribes in the various district meclises, the managers of the local branches of the Agricultural Credit cooperatives, the police (zâbita) officers, etc – were often holdovers from previous administrations. But to say that there was a degree of cadre continuity in the establishment of the provincial bureaucracy is not to say that the bureaucratic transition from the old eyalets to the new vilayet was smooth and conflict-free. In fact, there seems to have been a sizeable purge of “incompetent” officials in the immediate aftermath of Midhat Paşa’s appointment in October 1864. For example, in a memorandum to the Grand Vezirate dated 10 July, 1865, Midhat commented that “the majority” (ekserisi) of the kaza müdürs had been dismissed as a result of the establishment of the province and the only ones allowed to remain at their posts were those who were “proven to be trustworthy” (bittecrübe emniyetbahş). In the same letter, the governor also conceded that “very many” of the lower-level officials (especially police officers) under the old eyalet regime had been in a state of limbo in the months following the establishment of the vilayet, as there had been no certainty whether their

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255 For example, Yanko Efendi, a member of the Imperial Commercial Court in İstanbul, was appointed on such a temporary basis (no specific time period was mentioned) to be the chair of the future provincial Commercial Court in Ruse; in the meantime, Yanko’s seat on the Imperial court was being held for him and he was expected to return after he had organized the provincial court. BOA İ.D. 37205 [1 Zilhicce 1281 / 28 April 1865].
positions would be retained under the new system. At his inaugural speech before the first session of the Provincial General Assembly in March of 1866, Midhat also singled out the removal from office of incompetent müdürs as one of the key achievements of his administration.

Many government officials of the ancien régime had been established and locally popular figures, whose dismissal had to be handled in a delicate and diplomatic way. The case of İbrahim Paşa, the former governor of the eyalet of Silistra illustrates the kind of political brinksmanship that was required in such cases. İbrahim, an illiterate “old-school” Ottoman statesman had built a reputation for honesty and even-handedness in his dealings with members of the various ethnic groups in his district. In the fall of 1864, İbrahim was the only former eyalet governor who did not come to Ruse to greet the new vali, remaining conspicuously absent from Midhat’s inauguration ceremony. Obretenov’s memoirs describe in some detail the elaborate ruse the new governor had to resort to in order to get rid of İbrahim: soon after taking charge, Midhat sent what seemed to be a goodwill mission to Silistra, inviting the old Paşa to visit Ruse on a specially dispatched steamboat and with the inducement of “valuable gifts.” The next day saw the staging of a magnificent ceremony worthy of a state visit – İbrahim was met by a uniformed parade squad, military marching band, and a carpeted pier at the Ruse port. As a further sign of respect, Midhat personally boarded the ship and helped İbrahim down the bridge; an official coach then whisked the two men to the governor’s residence. What

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256 NBKM OO, Fond 112, a.e. 2996 [15 Safer 1282 / 10 July 1865].
257 Text of the speech in Tuna / Dunav, vol. 2, no. 58 [20 March / 1 April 1866].

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İbrahim Paşa did not know was that, during this spectacular ceremony in Ruse, Midhat’s men in Silistra were taking over the government offices there, in effect remodeling the local government structure to conform to the new provincial statute. Five days later, when İbrahim returned to Silistra, he was stunned to see a new kaymakam sitting in his former offices. Faced with a fait accompli of that magnitude, the old governor retired to his estate in the countryside, never to be a factor in provincial politics again.²⁵⁸

Another intriguing matter related to the vilayet’s administrative cadres and cadre policies has to do with the resistance against some of the provisions of the 1864 nizamname that was apparently organized by some high-ranking members of the new provincial bureaucracy. Midhat’s biography mentions Sürûrî Efendi, the judge of the Islamic (şerî) Court in Ruse, and Senih Efendi, the provincial Mektubcu as the main culprits in this alleged resistance. Ironically, both of these men had been previously vetted out by the governor but had apparently managed to disguise their “opposition” to the spirit of reforms. Ali Haydar Midhat’s account is short on details, but it does tell us that Sürûrî in particular had been concerned about the provisions in the nizamname that would have given members of the judicial meclises some degree of oversight of the decisions of Islamic courts. Sürûrî reportedly told sympathetic listeners in the vilayet’s administration – including, apparently, the first provincial Mufettiș-i Hukkâm (the aforementioned Nazif Molla) and the Ruse müfti (a certain Mehmet Efendi), that, if implemented, these legal provisions would amount to the closing down of şerî

²⁵⁸ Obretenov, Spomeni za búlgarskite vúzstaniia, 75-6.
courts and the evisceration of şeriat legal principles. In the absence of documentary evidence available to me, it is difficult to confirm whether this episode constituted a real, ulema-led challenge to Midhat’s authority and the principles of reform, or whether it was merely a personal conflict overblown for political reasons by a partisan source. As was mentioned earlier, Sürûrî Efendi also turned out to be the presiding judge of the 1881 special tribunal that sentenced Midhat to death – therefore, Midhat’s son and biographer would have had an added incentive to portray Sürûrî as someone bearing a personal grudge against his father. In any event, the individuals in question were quickly dismissed and the incident – whatever its scope and causes – seems not to have had any immediate consequences.

A final aspect of cadre policies that needs to be addressed here is the provincial administration’s approach to choosing the elected members of the various meclises in the vilayet. As we saw in our discussion of the election system, the provincial nizamname assigned the governor and the kaymakams of the seven sancaks important roles in the “electoral” process (by giving them the right to conduct the final selections from the electoral lists). Moreover, the electoral process described in the provincial statute was such that, if proper procedure were to be followed, these elected posts would have to be filled from the bottom up – from the village through the kaza and sancak to the vilayet level – since officials from inferior levels participated in the election of meclis members at the upper levels (See Figure 2). But, from the very beginning, it was clear that

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the main source of urgency for Midhat’s administration would be the organization of the upper echelons of the new provincial government. What that meant was that provisional “elected members” of the vilayet- and sancak-level meclises had to be found, at least until the first round of elections could be held. Consequently, Midhat set out to appoint such meclis members pro tem very shortly after his arrival in Ruse. In early December of 1864, the governor proposed the elevation of two Muslims and two non-Muslims (ethnic Bulgarian) to the new Meclis-i İdare-i Vilayet, noting that the search for two other members was ongoing. Significantly, the two Bulgarians – Khadzhi Ivan Penchovich of Ruse and Khadzhi Iordan Nikolov of Elena – remained on these posts for the duration of Midhat’s tenure in the Danube province; in other words, their initial selection by the governor ensured their repeated “election” in subsequent years, despite, the nizamname provision limiting an elected official’s terms in office.

The search to fill other “elected” posts in the higher-level meclises continued through the first few months of 1865 and was conducted with the mediation of “trusted” members of the local elites. We have, for example, a letter written by the aforementioned Khadzhi Iordan Nikolov to Nikola Mikhailovski (then a head teacher of the Bulgarian schools in Veliko Tûrnovo), urging him come to Ruse and accept a post as an “elected” member of the provincial appellate judicial council (Meclis-i Temyiz-i Hukuk) and supervisor of the Bulgarian portion of the projected provincial newspaper. “Let me know immediately if you would like to

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260 BOA A.MKT.MVL Dosya 246, Vesika 34 (12 B 1281 / 11 December 1864). The Muslim members that were appointed with the same decree were Ahmed Efendi (former chair of the Ruse commercial court) and a certain Molla Ağa from Sofia.
take up these posts,” Khadzhi Iordan wrote, “so I can tell Vali Paşa to summon you [officially].”

But the rush to appoint “elected” members to the high-level councils does not mean that efforts were not being made to initiate proper electoral procedures for the village, town quarter, and kaza meclises. In fact, the first instructions for holding elections for village headmen councils of elders went out to the districts in early December of 1864 – less than a month after the establishment of the vilayet. The document urged villagers to hold elections within three days of receiving it and explaining the new procedures to the populace, but the earliest actual election protocol I was able to locate dates from February 3, 1865 and indicates that the inhabitants of the Dervent quarter of the city of Veliko Tûrnovo elected two headmen and ten members of ihtiyar meclisi “in accordance with the new procedure” to serve for the year AH 1281. It was, nevertheless, an impressively short implementation time, reflecting the high priority the administration placed on getting the new meclis hierarchy under way.

261 NBKM BIA II B 2662 [24 February / 8 March 1865].
262 NBKM BIA II A 3403 [9 December 1864]. The document is handwritten in Bulgarian and was obviously meant to be read out in public, judging from the letter size and the unnatural print-like hand.
263 NBKM BIA II A 3427 [7 Ramazan 1281 / 3 February 1865]. It should be noted that the election took place well into the year for which it was held (Ramazan is the ninth month of the hicri year), and it is not clear from the document whether the officials elected were meant to serve a full calendar year or only until the end of AH 1281.
3.1. The Danube province as a “success story”

It seems appropriate to begin the chapter about the nature and scope of the reform policies implemented in the vilayet by presenting them as a series of unproblematic positive achievements. This, as we have seen, is the “traditional” narrative of Midhat’s governorship – even Bulgarian historians usually give the Paşaa high marks for his efforts to “modernize” the province. It is also a narrative that echoes the self-congratulatory pronouncements of the official provincial newspaper, Tuna/Dunav and of the various ordinances, regulations and other “blueprints” which present the administration’s own vision of its reforms. In the following paragraphs, I shall give a somewhat condensed version of this “success story,” with references mostly from Tuna/Dunav (many of these references can also be found in Pletn’ov’s monograph which uses the provincial newspaper as one of its main sources).

With the legal framework in place and with a core of supporters gathered around him in Ruse, Midhat began a modernization program, designed to make the vilayet the showcase of Ottoman reform. Among his top priorities was the task of improving the infrastructure and communications of the province. Midhat’s accomplishments in this field are often cited as an example of the
beneficial impact the reforms had on the economy of the vilayet\textsuperscript{264} and, by extension, on the welfare of the population. The Paşa’s record was impressive indeed: in the three-and-a-half years of his governorship, more than 3,000 km of roads and over 1,400 bridges were built.\textsuperscript{265} The major roadways were built in the new chaussée style with more durable macadamized pavement and trees planted on both sides.\textsuperscript{266} Railroads were also a priority: the vilayet already had one functioning stretch of railroad when Midhat arrived in Ruse – a line between the Danube port of Cernavoda and the town of Constanța on the Black sea. This line had opened in 1860\textsuperscript{267} (making it only the second railway line in the Ottoman empire, trailing the İzmir-Aydın line by a few months) and was built and operated by a British company. The second – economically, much more important – line in the province was completed (also by a British company) during Midhat’s governorship, on November 7, 1866.\textsuperscript{268} On that day, the vali personally rode the first train that traveled along all of the line’s length.\textsuperscript{269} Trains had, however, made their debut along the finished stretches of the Ruse-Varna tracks more than an year before the line’s official completion. In September 1865, for

\textsuperscript{264} See, for instance Palairet, \textit{Balkan Economies}, 41-2; Pletn’ov, \textit{Midkhat Pasha}, 109-10.
\textsuperscript{265} Baykal, \textit{Mithat Paşa}, 19; Fadeeva, \textit{Midkhat Pasha}, 25; Ali Haydar Midhat, \textit{Life of Midhat Pasha}, 38; Sahara, \textit{An Eastern Orthodox Community}.
\textsuperscript{266} By the end of 1867, the Ruse-Türnberg, Lom-Niš, Niš-Sofia, Sofia-Ihtiman, and Pleven-Botevgrad-Sofia roads were all chaussées. \textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 3, no. 232 [3/15 December 1867].
\textsuperscript{267} See Strashimir Dimitrov, Nikolai Zhechev, and Velko Tonev, \textit{Istoriia na Dobrudzha}, vol. 3 (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1988), 188.
\textsuperscript{268} The opening of the Ruse-Varna railroad was announced in \textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 2, no. 121 [30 October / 11 November 1866]; the date for the İzmir-Aydın line is from Lewis, \textit{The Emergence of Modern Turkey}, 184.
\textsuperscript{269} Bakûrdzhieva and Iordanov, \textit{Ruse. Prostranstvo i istoriia}, 113.
example, four locomotives were regularly in service and a total of eight stations were functioning.\textsuperscript{270} There is also evidence that Midhat had ambitious plans for a further expansion of the railway network in the province and had proposed the building of several more lines (for example, one between Tûrnovo and Svishtov, and another one between Pleven and the Danube),\textsuperscript{271} but he did not remain in office long enough to see these plans through. Telegraph stations also spread in the province,\textsuperscript{272} as the linking of all 47 kaza centers by “the wire” was made an official policy goal; by the end of February 1867, the telegraph stations in 34 of these centers were working and the rest were under construction.\textsuperscript{273}

These infrastructural improvements were to be the cornerstone of a comprehensive program to boost the vilayet’s economy. In the economic sphere, Midhat seems to have favored strongly protectionist policies, although his freedom of action in this field was severely constrained by the Capitulations system. Stati Popov recalls that the administrators, down to the lowest level, were banned from wearing clothes made from imported fabrics and that “the shoe-sellers were ordered not to have any foreign-made shoes in their shop-

\textsuperscript{270} Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 29 [15/27 September 1865]

\textsuperscript{271} The latter line was originally intended to terminate at Nikopol, the closest Danubian port to the city of Pleven, but Nikopol’s terrain made that impractical; instead, according to Kanitz, Midhat’s administration began preparations to build a brand new port town (to be called Sultaniye) which would serve as the terminus of the line. Work on both the line and the port had already begun when Midhat left his post in Ruse in 1868, but was subsequently abandoned. Kanitz, Dunavska Bûlgaria, vol. 2, 49, 83-5.

\textsuperscript{272} Some telegraph lines existed in the region before the creation of the vilayet; the first telegraph message in the empire was sent from Shumen to Istanbul in 1855. Lewis, The Emergence of Modern Turkey, 185.

\textsuperscript{273} Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 154 [26 February / 10 March 1867].
windows." Exclusive government contracts (mostly for producing cloth for army uniforms) were one of the underlying causes for the strong growth experienced by the textile industry of the vilayet during the 1860’s. The provincial administration also actively encouraged the development of trade, and Midhat personally made yearly inspections of the largest trade fair (panayir) in the province, held near the town of Tûrgovishte. In January 1868, the fair grounds were fenced and the building of a great number of shops to replace the old stalls began – although the report of the vilayet’s administrative council ruefully remarked that the trade carried out at the fair remained mostly wholesale and largely confined to imported manufactured goods.

Also linked to the efforts to boost the vilayet’s economy were a number of policies designed to facilitate transportation. Midhat had experimented with opening a public road transportation company during his earlier stint as governor of theeyalet of Niš, and now used that experience to establish both coach and steamship companies in the vilayet. The Ruse coach company (Şirket-i Araba) offered passenger service and mail delivery and began operating in early April 1865 along the busiest trade route in the province (the chaussée between Ruse and Varna), with a fleet of some 40 carts and 50 teams of horses making calls at ten stations. The company was financed by the sale of 100 shares, each worth 2,000 piastres; it was promoted as a “patriotic” investment – with

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274 NBKM BIA II A 1042 [n.d.]
275 Palaireset, Balkan Economies, 72ff.
276 BOA İ.MVL. 26288 [6 Zilkade 1284 / 1 March 1868].
277 Sahara, An Eastern Orthodox Community, 20.
278 Announcement of the opening, route, and ticket price tariffs in Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 9 [28 April / 10 May 1865]
announcements that the governor and even the Sultan’s Privy Purse (Hazine-i Hassa) had put in orders for shares. 279 Within a few months, the company had expanded its operations to cover the towns of Svishtov and Tûrnovo and had increased its capital by 50% in order to finance its future growth. 280 By August 1865, the company had expanded its services to include the transportation of cash and the optional insurance for goods in transit; it had also synchronized its mail delivery schedule with the schedules of the ships of the Austrian First Danube Steamship Company (Erste Donau-Dampfschiffahrts-Gesellschaft) sailing out of Ruse and Varna. 281 By January 1866, the coach company had expanded further, linking the vilayet’s capital with Pleven, Sofia and points in the southwestern part of the province (Samokov, Dupnitsa, Kiustendil); more shares had been issued to bring the total capital of the company to 400,000 piastres and plans were underway to add service routes to Vidin and Kotel. Also in early 1866, the Ruse and Niš coach companies were merged, making road transportation service available on all major new roads in the province, from east

279 BOA İ.D. 37383 [5 Safer 1282 / 30 June 1865]. The Palace Treasury bought ten shares for a total of 20,000 piastres.
280 NBKM OO, Fond 112, a.e. 1462 [18 Zilhicce 1281 / 14 May 1865]. Unlike the initial offering, in which investors had the option to pay for shares in several installments over a period of time, the fifty new shares had to be paid for up front in order not to make the entire operation “subject to delays” (duçar-i te’hir). See also Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 10 [3 / 15 March 1865].
281 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 25 [18/30 August 1865]. The Austrian company was founded in Vienna in 1829 and had begun providing regular services along the lower Danube in 1834. By the 1860’s it had achieved a near monopoly in the transportation of people and goods along the river.
The combined company after the merger operated 133 carts and had over 150 teams of horses.\textsuperscript{282} The provincial government also tried to challenge the Austrian First company in its virtual monopoly over steamship traffic along the lower Danube. A state river transportation company (İdare-i Nehriye) headquartered in Ruse was first proposed in the spring of 1865.\textsuperscript{283} In July 1866, discussions were underway to purchase used ships for the future company from Egypt (where the Egyptian state railway company was operating steamships along the Nile).\textsuperscript{284} That deal appears not to have gone through, but, by the fall of the following year (1867), the administration had placed a firm order for the delivery of two ships from Austria\textsuperscript{285} and had designated a portion of the income from the fees collected at two of the largest annual commercial fairs in the vilayet for the future company’s upkeep.\textsuperscript{286} Within a few years, the İdare-i Nehriye operated four steamers (one of them named Midhat) as well as a number of barges, and had a well-stocked shipbuilding and repair facility (complete with steam engines and an iron foundry) near the port of Ruse.\textsuperscript{287} Despite Midhat’s best intentions, however, the İdare-i Nehriye was never able to become a viable competitor to the 120-ship fleet of the Austrian Erste Donau-Dampfschiffahrts-Gesellschaft.\textsuperscript{288} The same fate was

\textsuperscript{282} Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 48 [26 January / 7 February 1866].
\textsuperscript{283} Bakûrdzhieva and Iordanov (Ruse. Prostranstvo i istoria, 114.) claim that the river transportation company was in fact operational in 1865 but that is not supported by the documentary evidence I have examined (see next note).
\textsuperscript{284} BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 6 [25 Safer 1283 / 8 July 1866].
\textsuperscript{285} Tuna/Dunav, vol. 3, no. 236 [17/29 December 1867]
\textsuperscript{286} Bakûrdzhieva and Iordanov, Ruse. Prostranstvo i istoria, 114.
\textsuperscript{287} Ibid., 109, 14.
\textsuperscript{288} See Pletn’ov, Midkhat Pasha, 113-4.
shared by an earlier private steamboat company established by a partnership of two Bulgarian merchants in Ruse in the summer of 1867. Although the company received the governor’s blessing (Midhat was present at the ceremony for the arrival of its first ship from Austria and personally christened it Beginning), the company was not a commercial success and was soon dissolved.289

Also very high on the list of priorities in Midhat’s modernization program were the measures directed at the cleaning, “beautification,” and general “de-Orientalization” of the vilayet’s urban centers. Pleven provides a good example of the scope of reforms implemented in the average provincial town during Midhat’s tenure. Between 1865 and 1867, its main north-south thoroughfare was widened, straightened, and repaved; a number of small workshops lining the old street were demolished in order to make room for the new “Broad Street” (shirok sokak); a small square with a fountain was added, and the government building (konak) was repaired and expanded.290 Work on similar projects was set underway in Tulcea,291 Constanța,292 Lovech, Elena, Botevgrad,293 Balchik,294 Samokov, Dupnitsa,295 and Medgidia,296 as well as in many other sancak and kaza centers in the province. The conference rooms for the new administrative and judicial meclises, being among the primary venues where new government

289 An account of the inauguration ceremony of the company’s ship was published in Tuna/Dunav, vol. 3, no. 213 [27 September / 9 October 1867].
290 Trifonov, Istoriia na grada Pleven, 240.
291 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 34 [20 October / 1 November 1865].
292 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 42 [15/27 December 1865].
293 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 66 [20 April / 2 May 1866].
294 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 82 [15/27 June 1866].
295 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 99 [14/26 August 1866].
296 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 135 [18/30 December 1866].
institutions met the “gaze of the people” (en zar-i halk), were furnished in a manner “befitting the dignity of the state” in 1865 and refurnished as the need arose in 1867-1868. In larger cities, particularly in the provincial capital (Ruse) and main port (Varna) even more ambitious projects occupied the attention of the new city councils (belediye). In Ruse, trees were planted along the major streets; in Varna, a public garden was built and the old trash dumping site just outside the city was abandoned for a new one, further away. Gas lamps made their debut in the streets – in 1866 it was decided to increase their number in Ruse from 50 to 150 and, eventually, to 350. New street lights also surfaced in Tulcea and Dobrich. Official street names and numbers for all buildings were introduced first in Ruse and later in other cities and the express approval of the local authorities became mandatory for all new construction in the cities within a few months of Midhat’s appointment. Ruse and other major urban centers also saw the opening of government-sponsored firefighting squads. Kanitz, who had the chance to observe the Tûrnovo fire department in 1871 was favorably impressed and opined that even “Constantinople [firefighters] probably did not have such excellent equipment until the latest catastrophic fire there.”

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297 BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 42 [4 Rabiülevvel 1284 / 6 July 1867].
298 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 5 [31 March / 12 April 1865].
299 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 66 [20 April / 2 May 1866].
300 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 118 [19/31 October 1866].
302 Bakûrdzhieva and Iordanov, Ruse. Prostranstvo i istoriia, 48.
303 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 2 [10 / 22 March 1865].
304 Kanitz, Dunavska Bûlgariia, vol. 1, 204-5.
Ruse in particular grew at a feverish pace after its selection as the administrative center for the new province. In late 1864-early 1865, it received a veritable wave of new inhabitants, chasing the lucrative government jobs created by the city’s new status. Most of the new officials who settled in the town were, naturally, Muslims, but Ruse’s growing importance as the seat of the provincial government served as a magnet for migrants from a variety of ethnic and religious groups. The city’s Bulgarian community (for which figures are most readily available) shows the extent of this population growth – in 1866 the number of births registered in Ruse’s Orthodox churches was up by almost 45% compared to 1864 (the year just before the creation of the Danube province). The increased natality figures are even more impressive if we take into account the fact that 1866 was a year in which Ruse was hit hard by a cholera epidemic that took a number of lives (the mortality figures in the same church registers show nearly 90% more deaths in 1866 than in 1864).\(^{305}\)

The city’s center reflected its growing importance, with a number of new government buildings, including a monumental konak that housed the offices of most top-level provincial officials and included a large conference room for the meetings of the Provincial General Assembly and various other events.\(^{306}\) The new konak represented a substantial expansion of the old government building in town and its construction (to the tune of 40,000 piastres) was one of the very first projects undertaken by the new administration – approval for it was secured within days of Midhat’s

\(^{305}\) See Bakûrdzhieva, Ń Bulgarskata obshtnost, 15, 21-2.

\(^{306}\) Bakûrdzhieva and Iordanov, Ruse. Prostranstvo i istoria, 90.
appointment.\textsuperscript{307} Other notable new buildings in Ruse included a telegraph station, a railway station and inspectorate, the governor’s residence, a coach station for the Şirket-i Araba, and, last but not least, a large new prison built in the immediate vicinity of the main government buildings.\textsuperscript{308} Ruse also saw a boom in its hospitality and entertainment industries – in 1867, it had no less than twenty hotels and restaurants, as well as more risqué establishments such as a dance hall and a casino catering (at least according to the official line) to European travelers en route to İstanbul.\textsuperscript{309}

Another casino was built at the other terminus of the railway line, in Varna, next to the new public garden,\textsuperscript{310} while more new prisons, barracks and police departments appeared in many towns and cities of the province.\textsuperscript{311} New locations for produce markets were designated in Ruse, Svishtov, Nikopol, Oriakhovo, Lom, and Vidin.\textsuperscript{312}

During his governorship in Niš (1861), Midhat had established a vocational boarding school called islahhane for orphans and “problem children” in that city. In April 1865, plans were already underway to build another such institution in Ruse; 60 children were awaiting the construction of the building in temporary

\begin{footnotesize}  
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\item\textsuperscript{307} BOA İ.MVL 23364 [27 Cemaziülevvel 1281 / 28 October 1864].
\item\textsuperscript{308} Bakûrdzhieva and Iordanov, Ruse. Prostranstvo i istoriia, 91-6.
\item\textsuperscript{309} Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 133 [11/23 December 1866].
\item\textsuperscript{310} Tuna/Dunav, vol. 3, no. 174 [14/26 May 1867].
\item\textsuperscript{311} BOA İ.MVL 24016 [22 Safer 1282 / 16 July 1865]; BOA İ.MVL 24410 [10 Receb 1282 / 29 November 1865]; BOA İ.MVL 25887 [10 Cemaziülevvel 1284 / 9 September 1867].
\item\textsuperscript{312} Tuna/Dunav, vol. 3, no. 205 [30 August / 11 September 1867].
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shelters. An inn located on one of the new roads and a hotel (itself called “Islahhane”) in Ruse both had their income dedicated to the support of the new institution. The Ruse islahhane was completed in October 1867 and, amid great celebrations, opened its doors to about 80 children. At the same time, another islahhane – apparently set aside for orphaned children of the Tatar and Circassian immigrants, most of whom had been domiciled in the Dobrogea plain in the northeast of the vilayet – was being built in Constanța. Although the Constanța branch closed down shortly after it opened (in late 1867 or early 1868), its pupils were transferred to the Ruse islahhane, bringing its enrollment up to about 160. Given that the older Niš branch housed over 200 pupils at the time, it is likely that about 400 male children and adolescents lived, ate, attended classes, and learned crafts at these institutions in the latter years of Midhat’s governorship. The boys were being prepared for careers as tailors, shoemakers, typographers (in the new vilayet printing press), rail track attendants, or weavers of woolen cloth (aba). A select few were sent to İstanbul, where they were employed in the imperial gunpowder works and the naval yard, while others traveled to Paris in order to learn “European” crafts, such as mechanized textile manufacturing, metal welding, and cosmetics (the first such

313 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 4 [24 March / 5 April 1865]; vol. 2, no. 119 [23 October / 4 November 1866].
314 Chendov, Kogato Ruse beshe Ruschuk, 13; Sahara, An Eastern Orthodox Community, 20. On the dedication of the income from the inn and the hotel, see Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 27 [1/13 September 1865]; vol. 2, no. 135 [18/30 December 1866].
316 Ibid., 153.
group was sent to Paris in the spring of 1866 and was made up of six islahhane students and a chaperon). Finally, in the fall of 1867, a fund-raising campaign for a projected islahhane for girls was inaugurated, with the Paşa and his wife being among the first donors. As of the end of January 1868, a sum of 93,000 piastres was collected for the construction of the girl islahhane and, although Midhat was not in office long enough to see its opening, that institution did indeed become operational in the early 1870's. By 1874, about 60 Muslim and non-Muslim young women lived and attended classes at the kiz islahhanesi, studying subjects such as piano-playing and French.

In the winter of 1865, only months after his arrival in Ruse, Midhat ordered the building of new hospital wards in some of the major cities of the province. The Paşa's stated intention was to make the best out of the insufficient number of physicians in the vilayet, who used to complain that they spent more time traveling from village to village than examining patients. By the end of 1866, seven hospital wards had opened their doors to patients in Ruse (two hospitals, one of which had a special section for female patients), Pleven, Dobrich, Tulcea,

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317 On student life and career options in the islahhanes, see ibid., 152; Şentürk, Osmanlı Devleti’nde Bulgar Meselesi, 176-8; and reports in Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 58 [20 March / 1 April 1866]; vol. 2, no. 135 [18/30 December 1866]; vol. 3, no. 202 [20 August / 1 September 1867].


Vidin, and Sofia. Hand in hand with the spread of hospitals went a vigorous campaign to vaccinate the vilayet’s population against smallpox. Quarantines were used (with no apparent success) to prevent future outbreaks of cholera epidemics, of the kind that had struck Ruse and other cities in 1865 and 1866. Near the end of Midhat’s tenure as governor, the first steps were taken towards the coordination of the entire health establishment in the vilayet and an inspector general of all hospitals in the province was appointed.

Among the most noteworthy new institutions in the Danube province were the agricultural credit cooperatives (memleket sandıkları or menafi sandıkları), one of which was established in every kaza center in the vilayet within a year of its creation. Based on an experimental memleket sandığı that Midhat had set up in the town of Pirot in 1863, the credit cooperatives were, according to some

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321 Specially appointed physicians were routinely sent on “vaccination missions” in order to inoculate (forcibly, if need be) the children in selected localities. Tuna/Dunav published the results of these missions in vol. 1, no. 27 [1/13 September 1865] (971 children vaccinated in the kaza of Zlatitsa); vol. 1, no. 49 [2/14 February 1866] (over 100 vaccinated children in the region of Tulcea); vol. 3, no. 254 [21 February / 4 March 1868] (740 children in the kaza of Shumen vaccinated), etc.
322 Reports on the cholera outbreak can be found in Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, nos. 21, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30 [21 July / 2 August 1865 – 22 September / 4 October 1865]. Despite the quarantine, the 1865 cholera epidemic killed over 200 people in Ruse.
323 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 3, no. 254 [21 February / 4 March 1868]. The inspector was a certain Fano bey, a Frenchman in the service of the Porte.
324 This English term is borrowed from Davison, Reform, 152. Other authors use the term “agricultural (or “agrarian”) banks.” See Ali Haydar Midhat, Life of Midhat Pasha, 38; Sahara, An Eastern Orthodox Community, 20.
325 The report of the opening of the last cooperative (in Kustendil) is published in Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 48 [26 January / 7 February 1866].
authors, modeled on the network of rural credit unions that Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen had been establishing in Prussia since the late 1840’s.\textsuperscript{326} The documents at our disposal do not allow us to confirm or deny the Raiffeisen connection, but they do indicate that Midhat viewed the creation of the cooperatives as one of the main priorities of his administration. Already in mid-February of 1865 (less than four months after the formation of the vilayet) the bylaws of the proposed memleket sandıkları, along with samples of the forms they were to use when receiving deposits and granting loans, were being sent to the kaymakams of the seven sancaks. Also at that time, official ledgers of the cooperatives were being printed at the government’s press in Ruse.\textsuperscript{327}

These cooperatives were not the first instance when Tanzimat statesmen had experimented with setting up a system for providing agricultural credit,\textsuperscript{328} but they were the first credit institutions which raised and allocated their capital on a purely local basis and, as a result, proved to be much more approachable and “consumer friendly” than the old centralized credit system. The avowed purpose of the cooperatives was the elimination of corrupt money lenders (murabahacı) who had heretofore been the only practical source of credit in the countryside. The murabahacis’ venality and lack of scruples were notorious, and the exorbitant interest rates they demanded from their peasant clients (up to 60% per

\textsuperscript{326} Stiliian Chilingirov, Midkhhat Pasha i zemedelskite kasi (Sofia: Dobromir Chilingirov, 1942), 44.

\textsuperscript{327} NBKM OO, Fond 20, a.e. 470 [19 February 1865]

\textsuperscript{328} The imperial “Public Works Treasury” (Nafia hazinesi) and the regular “Public Works Fund” (Nafia sermayesi) earmarks in the imperial budget had been used occasionally as sources of agricultural credit since 1843. See Tevfik Güran, 19. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Tarımı Üzerine Araştırmalar (İstanbul: EREN, 1998), 46, 148-52.
annum) were widely seen as a cause of rural impoverishment in the region. The credit cooperatives offered an alternative to the *murabahaci* by creating locally raised pools of capital, which were then made available as loans to farmers at relatively low interest rates. According to their statute, the credit cooperatives charged a fixed, non-compounded interest rate of one per cent per month (12 % per annum) and were obligated to extend credit to every peasant in the *kaza*, who had contributed to the raising of their capital and who could furnish an eligible guarantor and demonstrate need. Individual credit decisions were made by a board of four elected “trustees” per branch.

By most accounts, Midhat’s credit cooperatives were a spectacular success: within two years of their establishment (March 1867) their combined capital had exceeded ten million piastres and in another ten years (1878) it had grown by further 150% to reach 25.8 million piastres. Judging from the amount of interest collected by the cooperatives in the fiscal year 1282 (March 1866-March 1867), the peasants in the *vilayet* were quick to take full advantage of the opportunity to obtain cheap credit. In that year, the *memleket sandıkları* in the Danube province gave out more than three million piastres of loans—a remarkable figure given that the average loan amount was a few hundred

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330 Published in *Tuna/Dunav*, vol. 1, nos. 7-9 [14/26 April – 28 April / 11 May 1865].
331 Pletn’ov, *Midkhat Pasha*, 133.
333 According to Pletn’ov (*Midkhat Pasha*, 133), the cooperatives collected 366,890 piastres in interest on loans in that year. At interest rates of 12 percent, that translates to at least 3,057,416 piastres of loans outstanding (probably more than that, since Pletn’ov’s interest figure is net of administrative expenses).
Midhat’s cooperatives, in fact, made agrarian credit so readily available that even the clandestine Bulgarian nationalist organization that began to be established in the province in the early 1870’s hatched a scheme to take advantage of them. In the lead up to the 1876 April uprising some of the organization’s leaders began urging peasants to take loans from the credit cooperatives and use them to buy weapons for the upcoming revolt; they promised that a future independent Bulgarian state would write off such loans. To be sure the credit cooperatives were not a magic wand that could solve the problems of rural indebtedness in the province – some scholars have raised questions about their usefulness as a stimulus for the region’s agriculture, and others have wondered whether the “cooperative” nature of the sandıkları was not simply a smokescreen for the imposition of a new effective tax on the vilayet’s population. But, overall, the cooperatives came to be seen as one of Midhat’s crowning achievements in the vilayet and a major part of his positive legacy. They earned the governor the reputation of “the father of the agricultural banks in

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335 Pletnov, Midkhat Pasha, 133-4. After 1878, the legislature of the Bulgarian Principality did indeed discuss the possibility of writing off such loans, but never enacted a law to that effect.
337 Pletnov, Midkhat Pasha, 134.
338 Todorova, “Obshtopoleznite kasi;” Chilingirov, Midkhat Pasha i zemedelskite kasi.
Turkey” and “founder of the best-developed credit cooperatives in the Balkans."  

The cooperatives’ capital was used not only to provide private loans, but also to fund several government projects aimed at introducing a greater degree of mechanization to the vilayet’s agriculture. Such was the case, for example, of the 1868 purchase (from “London”) of horse-driven harvesters and threshers for the needs of the vilayet’s sancaks and kazas. Admittedly, such initiatives were rather modest in scope and often misdirected, but they were nonetheless a reminder of the growing importance of the cooperatives as an independent source of funding for reform measures in the countryside.  

Yet another one of Midhat’s administrative innovations that would have far reaching consequences was the government printing press in Ruse. Delivered from Vienna in January or February of 1865 and equipped with typesets of Arabo-Persian, Cyrillic, and Latin characters, the printing press would remain in continuous use until 1877 and would produce not only innumerable government forms, blanks, brochures, and other official paperwork, but also hundreds of books, and, most significantly, the first officiose provincial newspaper in the Ottoman empire. The memorandum to the Sublime Porte, in which Midhat outlined the need for the establishment of the printing press, suggests that fears

339 Davison, Reform, 152, note 34.  
340 NBKM OO, Fond 112, a.e. 204 [6 Receb 1285 / 23 October 1868]. The proposal to import these machines will be examined in more detail in the following chapter.  
341 E.g., they were typically aimed at improving the practices of the (relatively few) large commercial agricultural estates (çiftlik) in the province, rather than of the much more numerous small family farms.
of Russian influence among the vilayet’s non-Muslim groups loomed large in the governor’s mind. Many books used in Bulgarian schools and churches, Midhat argued, were being imported from Russia – they inevitably contained “praises and prayers to the Russian emperor and dynasty.” Much better, then, to have such books printed locally and have “His Majesty [the Sultan] adorn their prefaces.”

And, indeed, there is evidence that the official printing press was used in a massive government campaign to supply ideologically trustworthy prayer-books to Christian churches – by the spring of 1868, 1,649 Gospels and other ecclesiastical books in Bulgarian had been printed there and donated to churches throughout the province. Primers for Bulgarian schools were also printed (some 2,000 by March 1865, according to a newspaper report) and distributed free of charge to “poorer” school districts. For more than a decade, the Ruse printing press would churn out “useful” books (including both government-sponsored and commercial editions), making it the single largest publisher of literary works in the Bulgarian language at the time. Another

342 BOA, İ.D. 37115 [10 Zilkade 1281 / 6 April 1865].
343 BIA II A 761 [9 July 1868]
344 Tuna/Dunav, year 1, no. 3 [17/29 March 1865].
345 St. Kutinchev, Pechatarstvoto v Bülgariia do osvobozhdenieto: prinos kûm kulturnata istoriia na Bûlgariia (Sofia: Dûrzhavna pechatnitsa, 1920), 36-8. Commercial book publishing began very soon after the establishment of the vilayet printing press, and aspiring authors and booksellers were encouraged by advertisements published in the provincial newspaper to contract the services of the press at prices “10% lower than anything they would pay elsewhere” An early example of these ads appeared in Tuna/Dunav, year 1, no. 5 [31 March / 12 April 1865].
346 Many of the Bulgarian books produced in the Ruse printing press dealt with popular religious subjects. Examples included A stone fell from the sky or an epistle of our Lord Jesus Christ (1867); The Miracles of the Most-Blessed Virgin Mary (1867); A scripture containing the wisest sermons of our Holy Father
function of the printing press that should not be forgotten was its role as the producer of countless proclamations and orders (tenbihname) intended for distribution among the vilayet’s population. These ranged from stern prohibitions and regulations on specific issues – such as the intentional burning of barns in the countryside, or the practice of arranged marriages – to mass printings of supposedly curative prayers for cholera victims.

And, of course, the printing press also produced Tuna/Dunav, the bilingual official newspaper whose first issue appeared on March 15, 1875. The

Anastasios, patriarch of Alexandria (1866); A book of prayers to the holy martyr St. Mine to be said on the occasion of a lost possession, and to the most holy martyr St. Antip on the occasion of a toothache or other diseases (1867); The Rock of Faith, a defense of Orthodoxy and a warning against Catholic and Protestant missionaries, written by a Russian bishop (1867); many printings of the Christian Catechesis (two in 1866 alone), etc, etc. Many school textbooks were also produced by the printing press, including the abovementioned Bulgarian primer sponsored by the provincial administration and a joint Turkish-Bulgarian primer (editions in 1866 and 1867) written by Ivan Chorapchiev, Tuna/Dunav’s Bulgarian editor. But the press also published some of the most popular works of Bulgarian fiction in that period, including Iliia Blûskov’s Izgubena Stanka (1867) and Ziochesta Krûstinka (1870) and Vasil Drumev, Neshtastna familiia (1873), as well as books of more practical nature, such as A Course in Business Arithmetic, or, the simplest methods for calculating interests and profits, for Everyone who is familiar with the four arithmetic operations (1868), and Bulgarian translations of the Ottoman Commercial (1866) and Penal (1867) Codes. Titles and publication data for all Bulgarian books printed in the Ruse press can be found in Valerii Pogorelov, Opis na starite pechatani bûlgarski knigi, 1802-1877g (Sofia: Dûrzhavna pechatnitsa, 1923); and Man’o Stoianov, Bûlgarska vûzrozhdenska knizhnina (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1957-1959).

347 NBKM BIA II B 927 [5 Safer 1282 / 30 June 1865]
348 Bakûrdzhieva, Bûlgarskata obshtnost, 21.
349 Physically separate editions (but containing the same information) were published in Ottoman Turkish (Tuna) and in Bulgarian (Dunav); the Bulgarian edition is the one that I have used throughout this work because of its better state of preservation – a near complete set of Dunav’s issues can be found in the National library in Sofia, whereas holdings of Tuna in Turkish libraries are fragmented and sketchy (especially for the period that is of most interest to me).
provincial newspaper’s editorials tirelessly promoted the Osmanlilik ideal of inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony under the benevolent shadow of the Sultans and extolled the virtues of the Tanzimat reforms or of specific reformed institutions. But the newspaper, of course, was much more than a mere propaganda venue for the authorities. It published business-related news and information from across the vilayet (the current prices for food staples in the different regions of the province, for example), as well as private advertisements by various retailers and craftspeople from Ruse and other cities. Also important (though ignored by historians) was Tuna/Dunav’s role as a purveyor of sensational and/or risqué stories from the vilayet and beyond. Besides the regular crime chronicle from the province, there was also the “Private matters” (Chastni raboti) rubric, which featured “human interest” reportages ranging from the bizarre (e.g., the story of a woman from the town of

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350 From March 1865 to January 1866 Tuna/Dunav was published as a weekly, after that as a semi-weekly. Publication of the newspaper ceased in June 1877, with the beginning of the Russo-Ottoman war. See Stoianov, Búlgarska vúzrozhdenska knizhnina, vol. 1, 443-4.
351 Ogniana Mazhrakova-Chavdarova, “Vestnik ‘Dunav’ – propagandator na vilaetskata sistema sred bûlgare,” in Sbornik v chest na akademik Khristo Khristov (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1988). This remains the most comprehensive analysis of the political line advanced in the editorials of Tuna/Dunav, despite the author’s hostile approach to the source.
352 That became a regular column in the newspaper beginning with its seventh issue (April 1865).
353 The first such advertisements appeared in vol. 1, no. 9 of Tuna/Dunav [28 April / 10 May 1865]. In that issue, we learn that a Mr. Carl Voitich has sugar and “Hungarian flour” for sale at his store in Ruse “at moderate prices” and “all levels of quality;” while a Mr. Yanko Solomon, offers his services as a binder of books and business registers “at a modest price and with a rather nice binding.”
354 Euphemistically titled “Journal of Adventures” (zhurnal na prikliucheniiata), the crime chronicle was featured prominently in Tuna/Dunav since its very first issues.
Pirdop, on the southern edge of the vilayet, who had reportedly given birth to a stillborn child with two heads, a tail and “wings”) to the unabashedly soap-opercatic (e.g. the lachrymose story of the unrequited love of a Romanian prostitute for a Ruse youth). The steady supply of such juicy bits no doubt kept the reading public titillated and circulation numbers up, but it had a broader importance as well. By separating the “human interest stories” originating from the province from those happening elsewhere and giving priority to the former, *Tuna/Dunav*’s accounts no doubt contributed – perhaps more effectively than official pronouncements ever could – to the formation of an “imagined community” among its readers.

By early 1866, the provincial newspaper’s editors were claiming that they had 1,500 paying subscribers. Overall circulation figures are hard to come by with any degree of certainty, but already in its twelfth issue, the newspaper reported

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355 *Tuna/Dunav*, vol. 2, no. 123 [6/18 November 1866]. The article also mentions that, as soon as word of the event reached the authorities, an exhumation of the child’s body was ordered, since “it would be a pity not to be able to study such a miracle;” by the time the exhumation was conducted, however, the body had decayed completely.

356 *Tuna/Dunav*, vol. 3, no. 208 [10/22 September 1867]. When her beloved refused to marry her the woman poisoned herself, was taken to the Ruse hospital, but could not be saved. The newspaper account used the story as a cautionary tale about the dangerous way in which “the passion of love engulfs people nowadays” and the “often pitiful consequences of excessive amorous infatuation.”

357 The term and the argument here are, of course, borrowed from Benedict Anderson’s well-known book about the origin of nationalism. To be sure, for Anderson, the nation was the “imagined community” par excellence; yet he was also keenly aware that multinational empires too could use and have used the tools of “print capitalism” in an attempt to create their own “official nationalisms.” See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread on Nationalism*, revised and expanded ed. (New York: Verso, 1991), 37-47, 83-113.

358 *Tuna/Dunav*, vol. 1, no. 47 [19/31 January 1866].
that the printing press had reached its production capacity at 2,000 copies per issue.\textsuperscript{359} Other than to subscribers, \textit{Tuna/Dunav} was offered for sale at designated outlets in all sizeable towns in the province, as well as at two booksellers in İstanbul.\textsuperscript{360} Circulation data, however, cannot be taken as a straightforward indication of the newspaper’s popularity or lack of popularity – it has been pointed out that many of the subscribers may have been less-than-willing government officials and, also, that the provincial government deliberately priced \textit{Tuna/Dunav} lower than its potential private competitors (both Bulgarian and Ottoman) published in İstanbul.\textsuperscript{361} Nevertheless, the provincial newspaper undoubtedly enabled Midhat’s government to reach a fairly wide and varied audience, both within the \textit{vilayet} and outside. \textit{Tuna/Dunav} also launched the careers of two soon-to-be prominent Ottoman journalists and public figures, Ahmed Midhat Efendi and İsmail Kemal Bey, who shared the duties of editor (on the Ottoman side) of the newspaper from 1865 to 1868.\textsuperscript{362} Finally, in December 1867 and January 1868, the government printing press in Ruse produced a

\textsuperscript{359} The report stated that, with so many document forms, laws and regulations, and books to print, two thousand copies of the newspaper per issue was the absolute maximum the press could churn out, even though it was working “day and night.” \textit{Tuna/Dunav}, year 1, no. 12 [19/31 May 1865].

\textsuperscript{360} \textit{Tuna/Dunav}, year 1, no. 18 [30 June / 12 July 1865].

\textsuperscript{361} For these criticisms, see Mazhdrakova-Chavdarova, “Vestnik Dunav,” 87.

\textsuperscript{362} Both Ahmed Midhat and İsmail Kemal went on to have distinguished careers – the former as one of the best-known Ottoman writers, the latter as a leader of the Albanian national movement. İsmail Kemal also published a memoir – \textit{The Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey}, ed. Sommerville Story (London: Constable, 1920) – which contains some important information regarding Midhat’s governorship in Ruse. The provincial newspaper also had two Bulgarian co-editors, Ivan Chorapchiev and Stoil Popov, whose careers will be discussed in Chapter Five.
short-lived monthly educational-didactic magazine entitled *Istochnik mneniia* ("Source of opinion") and edited by İsmail Kemal. Its only two issues contained articles on topics such as Ottoman history, human anatomy and physiology, the movement of the Earth, etcetera.

### 3.2. The reforms seen “from below” – mechanisms of popular mobilization

For the inhabitants of the province, peasants and city dwellers alike, Midhat’s modernization reforms represented, above all, a never before seen intrusion of state power on their pockets, bodies, and minds. To be sure, the people of the vilayet had known forced labor and mounting fiscal pressures before – most recently during the Crimean War – but these were never before so firmly bound to a pervasive government rhetoric of progress and modernization which sought to convince the lower classes that their participation in the reform policies would result in the improvement of their own economic and social situation. “In our time,” Midhat told the members of the vilayet assembly at their convocation in March 1866, “the benefit of the people is the benefit of the government and vice

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363 The magazine was, in all likelihood, bilingual (like *Tuna/Dunav*), but I was only able to locate (in the National Library in Sofia) copies of its Bulgarian edition. *Istochnik mneniia* is the Bulgarian title. T. Sahara, apparently also unable to find a copy of the Ottoman edition has suggested that the magazine was published only in Bulgarian, which seems inconceivable to me. See Sahara, *An Eastern Orthodox Community*, 43.

versa," while the provincial newspaper regularly published articles urging peasants, for example, not to resist the road-building labor duty because “the deterioration of roads is a disaster for the individuals and their property,” and not to give false testimony in the new nizamî tribunals because their procedural rules were so “perfect” that the truth invariably came out in the end. Moreover, never before had the Ottoman state tried to extend its disciplinary hold over such wide segments of society, conscripting, as it did, socially marginalized groups such as prisoners, orphans, and vagrants. New mechanisms of state power were put in place which, in Timothy Mitchell’s words, “sought to work not only upon the exterior of the body but also ‘from the inside out’ – shaping the individual mind.” The following paragraphs outline the nature and application of some of these mechanisms.

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365 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 58 [20 March/1 April 1866].
367 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 28 [8/20 September 1865].
369 In the following discussion, I have deliberately avoided discussing Midhat’s policies aimed at suppressing brigandage, reforming schools, or any field of his activities that can be construed as driven solely by ideology – instead, my goal is to focus on the allegedly ideologically neutral modernization “improvements” – roads, hospitals, hygiene, orphanages – in which, according to Foucault, the disciplinary power of the modern state can be most clearly seen. See Michel Foucault, “Two Lectures,” in Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 97-100.
3.2.1. Roads, railroads, telegraphs

The new network of roads was built entirely through a mandatory levy on the labor of the vilayet’s peasants and townsmen. Each kaza was responsible for the construction of a certain stretch of road, usually the distance on the territory of the kaza itself. Thus, on the road from Tûrnovo to Ruse, the inhabitants of the kaza of Tûrnovo worked on a “12-hour-long” stretch; those from the kaza of Ruse had to build a 5-hour-long tract. On the road between Pleven and Biala the kazas of Svishtov, Lovech, and Nikopol were responsible for 3, 2, and 3 “hours” respectively, the rest had to be done by the peasants from the kaza of Pleven.\textsuperscript{370} These amateur road building crews were asked to cut through hills (sometimes using explosives),\textsuperscript{371} fill ravines, and build bridges come sun, rain, sleet, or snow.\textsuperscript{372} Apparently, no season was off limits when it came to road building, since issues of the provincial newspaper from November, April, August, and January all contain reports of work in progress.\textsuperscript{373} On one of the major roadways (between Ruse and Silistra) that was designed to be exemplary “for the whole empire,” 10,000 people were employed on any single day.\textsuperscript{374} Local authorities on the kaza and nahiye levels were periodically authorized by the vilayet’s administration to raise and deploy the workforce required for road-building

\begin{flushleft}\textsuperscript{370} Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 34 [20 October / 1 November 1865].
\textsuperscript{371} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{372} Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 68 [27 April / 9 May 1866].
\textsuperscript{373} E.g. Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 34 [20 October / 1 November 1865]; vol. 2, no. 68 [27 April / 9 May 1866]; vol. 2, no. 99 [14/26 August 1866]; vol. 2, no. 142 [11/23 January 1867]; vol. 3, no. 230 [26 November / 8 December 1867].
\textsuperscript{374} Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 68 [27 April / 9 May 1866].\end{flushleft}
projects on their territory, using police force, if necessary.\textsuperscript{375} Since corvée labor had been officially abolished at the outset of the \textit{Tanzimat} (1839) and the abolition was confirmed by Midhat Paşa upon his arrival in Ruse,\textsuperscript{376} the peasant workers in the road-building crews were to be paid a wage of six piastres (\textit{guruş}) per day.\textsuperscript{377} But the system appears to have been subject to considerable abuse, due both to government tardiness in providing the funds for such wages and to the venality of local intermediaries such as foremen and engineers.\textsuperscript{378}

Moreover, on a number of occasions, we hear (in \textit{Tuna/Dunav}) of peasants' supposed willingness to forego the payments they were due for their services. In May 1865, for example, the governor of the \textit{kaza} of Omurtag is said to have "reminded" the peasants of their obligation to repair a local road, which they did free of charge.\textsuperscript{379} In December of the same year, when the provincial government furnished only a small part of the funds necessary for the repair of a bridge near Sofia, the local population somehow raised the rest of the sum between themselves.\textsuperscript{380} Bridges, in general, seem to have been heavily subsidized by such local labor "donations." "At the behest of the government," the inhabitants of some villages near the town of Kiustendil (in the southwestern part

\textsuperscript{375} One such call to the local authorities to mobilize the population to work on the main Ruse-Shumen-Varna thoroughfare was published in \textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 1, no. 1 [3/13 March 1865]. Since the weather was "favorable," and the local people "without much work at this time of the year," the \textit{müdür}s of all \textit{kazas} along the road were instructed to "collect road crews in the shortest possible time" and to put them to work.


\textsuperscript{377} On the official wage, see Fadeeva, \textit{Midkhat Pasha}, 25-6.

\textsuperscript{378} St. Clair and Brophy, \textit{Residence in Bulgaria}, 27.

\textsuperscript{379} \textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 1, no. 10 [3/15 May 1865]

\textsuperscript{380} \textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 1, no. 42 [15/27 December 1865].
of the vilayet) rebuilt a bridge without pay; then, apparently finding this not to have been an adequate expression of their patriotism, they went on to repair a number of other bridges along the same road. Other peasants from the same region repaired a bridge for pay and then planted 6,060 trees along the road leading up the bridge free of charge.\footnote{Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 99 [14/26 August 1866].} More bridges that were built or repaired at no expense for the government included one on the chaussée near Pleven (not only was payment “declined,” but the population also raised 28,500 piastres for materials),\footnote{Tuna/Dunav, vol. 3, no. 230 [26 November / 8 December 1867].} another one over the Maritsa river on the road from Ihtiman to Pazardzhik, and at least three more in the kaza of Radomir.\footnote{Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 99 [14/26 August 1866].} Along the road from Kiustendil to Pernik some 31,000 trees were planted by the population, apparently without a penny’s loss to the vilayet treasury.\footnote{Ibid.} In August 1866, the inhabitants of the kaza of Sofia “donated” over 100,000 piastres for the building of some 20 small bridges on the Sofia-Pleven chaussée\footnote{Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 99 [14/26 August 1866].} and, in February 1867 they “donated” an additional 200,000 piastres for a large six-arched bridge over the Iskûr river.\footnote{Ibid.} In the spring and summer of 1865, the population of the villages along the proposed road between Tûrnovo and Razgrad “donated” to the government all the building materials necessary for the construction of two major bridges over the lantra and Rositsa rivers.\footnote{BOA İ. MVL. 25533 [23 Şevval 1283 / 28 February 1867]. BOA İ. MVL. 24071 [6 Rabiülevvel 1282 / 29 July 1865].}
The claim that people in the province willingly and “joyfully” provided their free labor to the government is belied by plentiful documentary evidence (in addition to common sense). Internal memoranda occasionally mention instances of foot-dragging (if not outright resistance), which are forcefully condemned. An April 1865 letter from Midhat to the müdür of Omurtag (Osman Pazari), for instance, expressed the governor’s astonishment at the fact that the inhabitants of that town had repeatedly failed to supply the materials for the construction of a nearby road. In extremely terse terms (by Ottoman standards), the letter insisted that the people who would “benefit the most” from such a road were none other than the citizens of Omurtag itself; therefore, they had to send the required amount of timber to the construction site “immediately and without delay” (heman bilâ te’hir).\(^{388}\) A memorandum of the Ministry of Finances dated October 1864 – only days after the creation of the vilayet – casts further doubts on Tuna/Dunav’s propaganda claims, by suggesting that the provincial government intended to “save” a substantial part of the road construction costs from the very beginning. The memorandum states that 150,000 piastres of the funds necessary for the construction and repair of roads in the financial year 1281 (March 1865 – March 1866) were projected to be paid by the “people” (ba’dezin ahaliden istihsal olunmak üzere) and, therefore, three of the sancaks in the province – Vidin, Tûrnovo, and Niš – were to return 50,000 piastres each from their budgets to the Imperial Treasury in order to make up for that expected windfall.\(^{389}\)

\(^{388}\) NBKM OO, Fond 112, a.e. 1596 [2 April 1865].  
\(^{389}\) NBKM OO, Fond 112A, a.e. 263 [11 Cemaziülevvel 1281 / 12 October 1864].
Having mobilized its citizens for the task of building the transport infrastructure, the provincial administration also charged them with maintaining and safeguarding the new roads. A provincial ordinance of December 3, 1867, stipulated that road guardians (*yol bekçileri*) should be appointed for the entire length of the roads of the *chaussée* type. Each road guardian was to receive a salary from funds raised by the local community and was to reside in a house built by the inhabitants of the villages and towns “benefiting” from his services. The road guardians were allowed to carry arms and each of them responsible for the safety and upkeep of a stretch of road (two hours’ worth of travel on horseback), having been given the authority to call on local elders to raise workers for repairs or militiamen for the suppression of brigands. The initial proposal called for the appointment of some 200 such “guardians,” each with a salary of 1,200 to 1,500 piastres per year.\(^{390}\)

The inhabitants of the province were also drafted to erect telegraph poles and build the telegraph stations. In Balchik, the townspeople spent about two months of the busy agricultural season (June-August 1866) working on such a project; financing was provided by donations they themselves had raised.\(^{391}\) In Samokov and Dupnitsa, all funds necessary for the building of the respective stations were furnished by the local “notables.”\(^{392}\) The provincial newspaper tells us that, like their counterparts working on the roads, the workers building the telegraph

\(^{390}\) BOA İ. MVL. 25981 [3 Cemaziülâhir 1284 / 2 October 1867]. The proposal was approved and the text of the ordinance appeared in *Tuna/Dunav*, vol. 3, no. 232 [3/15 December 1867].

\(^{391}\) *Tuna/Dunav*, vol. 2, no. 82 [15/27 June 1866]; vol. 2, no. 92 [20 July / 1 August 1866].

network would also occasionally “decide” to go beyond the call of duty: those in Balchik, for example, apparently felt the urge to build a new konak in addition to the telegraph station.  

The railroad between Ruse and Varna was, strictly speaking, only partly a government project. In 1864, the right to build the line was given as a 99-year concession to a British shareholders’ company (the Rusçuk and Varna Railway Company). Still, the government of the Danube province made sure that cheap peasant labor was always available for such a strategically important project - fifteen thousand workers are said to have worked on the railroad during the two years of its construction.  

Although railroads are usually seen as emblematic signs of modernity, presenting the inhabitants of the Ottoman empire who were fortunate enough to live near one with their first glimpse of modern technology, the Varna-Ruse line seems to have been (at least initially), a clear technological and commercial failure. By the time it opened along its entire length (November 1866), the line had already been the site of several accidents, which had claimed the lives of at least six people. Doors of cars had opened, causing passengers to fall out, cables holding cars together had been torn apart, leading to roller-coaster slides downhill, and at least two derailments had been

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393 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 92 [20 July / 1 August 1866].  
394 See Popova, “Politika Turtsii,” 56; Useful material on the building of the line can also be found in two books written by one of the company’s engineers. See Henry C. Barkley, Between the Danube and Black Sea: or, Five years in Bulgaria (London: J. Murray, 1876); idem., Bulgaria Before The War During Seven Years’ Experience of European Turkey and Its Inhabitants (London: J. Murray, 1877)  
396 Bernard Lewis, for example, has opined that, for an entire generation of Turks, the “The Sirkeci railway terminus in İstanbul [was] the ante-room to freedom and modernity.” See Lewis, The Emergence of Modern Turkey, 185.
reported. The number of cattle killed by passing trains had been so great that in September of 1865 the railway company had to announce that it will provide no compensation to owners of livestock killed on the tracks. During the first two weeks after the line’s completion and official opening, there were two new derailments and two fires caused by sparks from the machine’s exhaust – in one instance, the passengers had to extinguish the flames by themselves. All these accidents, as an article in Dunav admits, caused “too many people” to be afraid of the railroad and to avoid using it. The problems persisted after the official opening ceremony – a mere month later (in late November 1866), the railway had to close for repairs which did not, however, succeed in improving its safety record. Government concerns over possible acts of sabotage against the line by disgruntled peasants led to the publication of a decree containing severe punishments for individuals damaging or threatening to damage the line;

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397 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 31 [29 September / 11 October 1865]; vol. 2, no. 64 [10/22 April 1866]; vol. 2, no. 78 [1/13 June 1866].
399 Ibid. How great a technical failure the line was is best revealed by what happened when the first snow of the year (1866) covered the tracks. Although the locomotives were equipped with special implements designed to shovel away snow in front of the train, these turned out to be quite useless, since, as it turned out, no switches or side tracks had been installed on any of the line’s stations, including the two termini. The celebrated railway was, in other words, a single track on which the locomotives had to be driven in reverse gear on alternating legs, pushing, rather than pulling the cars in one of two directions. See Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 125 [13/25 November 1866].
400 Derailments, fatal collisions, and other major problems continued to be reported in Tuna/Dunav after the railroad reopened in the spring of 1867 – e.g., in vol. 3, nos. 187 [28 June / 10 July 1867]; 206 [3/15 September 1867]; 220 [22 October / 3 November 1867]; 236 [17/29 December 1867]; 249 [4/16 February 1868].
the same decree also criminalized construction work and storing of flammable materials near the tracks.\textsuperscript{401}

3.2.2. Urban reform

What the roads were for the peasant, city hygiene and beautification were for the town-dweller. The new city councils’ (\textit{belediye}) official duties included the improvement of the urban infrastructure (paving of streets, providing street lights, etc.), monitoring the availability of foodstuffs in city markets and preventing hoarding and other shortages, preventing tampering with weights and measures and other such tasks.\textsuperscript{402} But the \textit{belediyes’} first task appears to have been to mobilize the population for an unprecedented cleaning campaign. Food vendors and their stands were banned from the streets, as were stray domestic animals, the slaughtering of livestock and the disposing of domestic waste.\textsuperscript{403} Shop owners were made responsible for the daily sweeping of the portion of the street which was adjacent to their property; villagers who drove their carts into the cities now were legally required to clean the excrements of their animals before heading back home.\textsuperscript{404} The new pavement, sidewalks, and lights along the city

\textsuperscript{401} Tuna/Dunav, vol. 3, no. 187 [28 June / 10 July 1867].
\textsuperscript{402} BOA İ.MVL. 24362 [24 Cemaziülâhir 1282 / 13 November 1865].
\textsuperscript{403} Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 2 [10/22 March 1865] (ban on street vendors, disposal of waste, and slaughtering of livestock in the streets); vol. 1, no. 42 [15/27 December 1865] (ban on stray animals).
\textsuperscript{404} Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 2 [10/22 March 1865]; vol. 2, no. 68 [27 April / 9 May 1866].
streets had to be paid for by those who would “benefit” from them, in other words, by all property owners along the street.\footnote{In extreme circumstances, the city council could waive the share of those who could prove their poverty. \textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 1, no. 42 [15/27 December 1865].} Burials within the city borders and burials in shallow graves anywhere were prohibited; new cemetery sites were designated at a safe distance from the settlements, and the population was ordered to build fences around the old graveyards in order to prevent animals and people from contracting infections.\footnote{\textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 1, no. 3 [17/29 March 1865]; vol. 1, no. 19 [7/19 July 1865] The inhabitants of Vidin built a fence and a trench around the old Turkish cemetery in town, and “in accordance with the government’s urgings” did some landscaping work on the cemetery grounds as well. See \textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 2, no. 66 [20 April / May 1866].} In accordance with the then prevalent miasmatic theory of disease, certain industries (such as leather processing) were deemed dangerous from a hygienic point of view and their practitioners had either to move their shops to specially designated places outside the cities or close them down altogether. In 1866, the representatives of the tanners’ guild in Ruse were summoned to the government building, where they were informed that the government was giving them a short notice to sell their existing inventories and relocate outside the city; the tanners’ request for an extension was denied and many tanneries were forcibly shut down.\footnote{\textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 2, no. 68 [27 April / 9 May 1866].} Fourteen tanneries were eventually moved east of the city, where they joined the previously relocated slaughterhouses.\footnote{Bakûrdzhieva and Iordanov, \textit{Ruse. Prostranstvo i istoria}, 109.} Incidentally, these measures appear to have had a disastrous impact on the leather industry of Ruse – the tax collector of the city tanneries even brought a civil lawsuit against the provincial government for
Overhauling existing arrangements for sewage disposal according to “modern” hygienic standards was also very much the task of individual city dwellers: in Varna, for example, all property owners were ordered to equip their buildings with new sewage pits instead of continuing the old practice of draining raw sewage in the streets through special holes in their houses’ walls.

Regularizing city street layouts and the “de-Orientalization” of the urban fabric was also among the priorities of Midhat’s provincial administration. However, as Zeynep Çelik’s study of nineteenth-century İstanbul has shown, the Ottoman approach to such projects was typically cautious and ad hoc in nature, eschewing the grand designs of high nineteenth-century urban modernism symbolized by Hausmann’s “rebuilding” of Paris. The cities of the Danube province were no exceptions to this piecemeal approach. In Ruse, the provincial administration drew up a map showing how the modernized ideal street grid of the city should look – but, when it came to implementation, its tactics were decidedly unhurried. Outright changes to the street layout were few and occurred mostly in the few empty spaces available – for example along the

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409 See BOA, İ.MVL 24999, lef. 1 [28 Safer 1283 / 12 July 1866].
410 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 66 [20 April / May 1866].
412 Bakûrdzhieva and Iordanov, Ruse. Prostranstvo i istoria, 47.
shores of the Danube, where a new embankment boulevard was built.\textsuperscript{413} The main mechanisms through which the new city council attempted to “make room” for urban reform included trying to buy out properties that infringed upon the ideal city plan\textsuperscript{414} and, more ingeniously, by promulgating an ordinance prohibiting any repairs of structures that were currently located where an “ideal” street should be (the hope, it seems, was that without the benefit of repairs, the offending parts of those buildings would eventually crumble, making room for the proposed new streets).\textsuperscript{415} Understandably, such regulations were met with considerable popular resistance and with increased distrust of the city councils’ actions (during the 1870’s, the citizens or Ruse are said to have grown so cynical about the belediye’s urban reform agenda that they often accused the council of starting fires in order to clear up space for street “regularization”).\textsuperscript{416}

The costs of municipal and urban reforms, like the costs of the new road and telegraph networks, were routinely passed onto their “end users” – in other words, to the urban dwellers themselves. The frequent references in Dunav to peasants foregoing payment for their work on the roads are matched by equally frequent mentions of townspeople raising the funds for municipal projects, and often providing the labor and materials necessary to complete such projects, all in an ostensibly voluntary and often “enthusiastic” way. A report on the state of infrastructural reforms in the Tulcea region (in the north-eastern corner of the province) published in December 1866, provides several examples of such

\textsuperscript{413} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{414} Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 66 [20 April / May 1866].
\textsuperscript{415} Tuna/Dunav, vol. 3, no. 187 [28 June / 10 July 1867].
\textsuperscript{416} Bakûrdzhieva and Iordanov, Ruse. Prostranstvo i istoria, 47.
projects – a levy protecting the town of Sulina from floods, the pavement of streets in the center of Constanța, and the construction of government buildings (konak) in Măcin and Hirsova.\textsuperscript{417} This situation was repeated in other cities in the province as well – in Pleven, for instance, all urban renewal projects the government undertook in 1865 (including the straightening and paving of the main street) were completed through a de facto labor duty of twenty days imposed on all able-bodied citizens.\textsuperscript{418}

Additionally, city dwellers now faced more regulations, requiring them, for example, to notify the city council of the size and shape any new building they proposed to erect on their land and to keep the area around the construction site clean and open to city traffic.\textsuperscript{419} And, unlike any previous Ottoman administration in the region, this one took interest not only in how private citizens built their houses and places of business, but also in what these houses and places of business looked like: at least two new city ordinances made it incumbent upon local government officials to impress upon the population the necessity of investing in expensive stone fences and tile-covered roofs, while discouraging cheap alternatives such as thatch roofs and wattle-fences (denounced for being unsightly and hazardous).\textsuperscript{420} As was the case with the ill-conceived building repair ordinance discussed above, the administration’s policy in promoting certain building designs shows a peculiar (and, in light of Çelik’s work on urban

\textsuperscript{417} Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 135 [18/30 December 1866].
\textsuperscript{418} Trifonov, \textit{Istoriia na grada Pleven}, 240.
\textsuperscript{419} Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 2 [10/22 March 1865]; vol. 1, no. 42 [15/27 December 1865]; vol. 3, no. 203 [23 August / 4 September 1867].
reform in İstanbul, one is tempted to say “typically Ottoman”) combination of a strategic modernist vision and a tactical avoidance of unduly intrusive measures. This, however, does not mean that Midhat’s government lacked the means to enforce its reform policies.

3.2.3. Police and law enforcement

It is difficult to overstate the importance which Midhat Paşa’s administration attached to having an effective provincial police force. The governor himself admitted that the police took up a larger share of the provincial budget than all civil and financial officials combined – yet, he refused to contemplate the reduction of the force even under the most intense pressure from İstanbul to cut budgetary expenses.421 In one of his first policy proposals, the new governor outlined a plan for reforming the existing police detachments in the province. Like most of Midhat’s policy initiatives, this one too was grounded in detailed local knowledge and was backed by a conservative financial scheme designed to make it palatable to a central government in dire fiscal crisis.422 By changing the ratio of regular versus mounted policemen, the proposal argued, it would actually be possible to increase the overall numbers of the police force by 10 percent, while reducing expenditures for its maintenance by over 100,000 piastres per

421 E.g. in a reply to the Grand Vezirate, written in August of 1866. See BOA İ.MMHS. 1317, lef. 2 [22 Rabiülevvel 1283 / 4 August 1866].
422 See the following chapter for a discussion of these governance techniques.
year. But the most intriguing aspect of the police reform project was the plan to restructure the duties of the police officers (zaptiye) themselves. A portion of the zaptiyes in the province (originally ninety, but that number was expected to grow) were to be retrained as enforcers of the new reform policies and regulations, particularly in the vilayet’s cities. Renamed “inspection officials” (umur-i teftişiyê memûrlerî), these policement were given broad powers to monitor citizens’ compliance with their numerous new duties in the fields of city sanitation and “beautification” – they were, for example, to be on the lookout for unlawful emptying of sewage, disposing of trash, failure to sweep outside one’s house or shop, blocking traffic, etc. Minor offenders could be fined on the spot, whereas more serious deviations were referred to the city council, and, if need be, to the local criminal court. The inspectors also had a role to play in enforcing the new policies for removing various undesirable human elements (such as vagrants and beggars) from the city streets and putting them to good use in the new îslahhane and prisons. Specifically, the “inspectors” were given the authority to arrest: 1) all strangers and beggars who appeared to be physically ill – these were to be sent either to their respective places of birth, where the local community was expected to take care of them, or to a special ward of the new provincial hospital in Pleven (if their place of birth was unknown); 2) all able-bodied male beggars – those visibly over twelve years of age – were to be placed in the custody of “the government” in order to be used for “better purposes,” whereas those under 12 were headed for the îslahhane; 3) all female

\[423\] BOA İ.MVL. 23620 lef. 2 [3 Şaban 1281 / January 1865].
beggars of good health – who were also to be returned to their respective mahalles or used to do “suitable work” for the government.\textsuperscript{424} The inspectors were also apparently responsible for preparing periodic accounts of crimes and accidents that had occurred in the province and sending these accounts for publication in the provincial newspaper. \textit{Tuna/Dunav} regularly published such crime and accident chronicles, often under the heading “Journal of adventures,”\textsuperscript{425} but occasionally under the more revealing title of “Journal submitted by the teftişiye officers.”\textsuperscript{426}

The reformed police force was undoubtedly a powerful tool in the political arsenal of the provincial administration. The provincial zaptiye and the urban teftiş were often the point men of Ottoman power. Kanitz, who traveled around the vilayet a few years after the end of Midhat’s tenure stated the obvious in commenting that:

The zaptiye was the true ruler of European Turkey; the peasant knew and feared him and him only. The policeman carried the state’s orders into the villages, interpreted them, collected taxes, assisted the engineer and was always better informed than him or than any other government official… The zaptiye was an administrative official, tax-collector, engineer, policeman, and often judge. To be on good terms with him… was the goal of all Bulgarian village notables; [in short], the zaptiye was the true embodiment of the Sultan’s authority.\textsuperscript{427}

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{424} A detailed description of the responsibilities and powers of the police “inspectors” can be found in the statute for the provincial belediye councils, published in \textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 1, no. 42 [15/25 December 1865].
\item \textsuperscript{425} Bulgarian – \textit{Zhurnal na priklucheniiata}.
\item \textsuperscript{426} Bulgarian – \textit{Zhurnal, daden ot teftishite chinovnitsi}. One example can be found in \textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 2, no. 132 [7/19 December 1866].
\item \textsuperscript{427} Kanitz, \textit{Dunavska Bûlgaria}, vol. 1, 120.
\end{itemize}
Midhat’s administration in the Danube province was an early pioneer of certain practices and institutions which marked a significant change in the way the Ottoman state treated previously marginalized social groups such as prisoners, orphans, and beggars. Among these practices, the use of prisoners’ labor in reform projects throughout the vilayet was the most visible one. It should be said that the idea of imprisonment as a punishment for any crime is unknown in classical Islamic law (although the Ottoman justice system had long provided for a punishment called kürek which involved various periods of forced servitude in the Ottoman navy), and that the very availability of a large pool of prisoner labor was a byproduct of Tanzimat legal reforms (the Penal Code of 1858 had significantly expanded the scope of offenses punishable by imprisonment). Our contemporary narrative sources indicate that the prison population of the vilayet was used extensively – Stati Popov recalls approvingly seeing prisoners “smashing stones or carrying around bricks for the construction of this or that building” in Ruse; while Nikola Obretenov comments on the efficiency with which work gangs made up of the inmates of the city’s prison demolished slaughter-houses, tobacco shops and other structures that stood in the way of the administration’s city modernization plan. Obretenov also mentions the use of prison labor in the government printing press, where inmates performed the

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428 NBKM BIA II A 1042 [n.d.].
429 Obretenov, Spomeni za bûlgarskite vûzstaniiia, 79.
most demanding menial work. Prisoners were also trained in craftwork such as shoemaking (kunduracılık) and tailoring (terzilik) in preparation for “useful” work for the authorities – in the Ruse prison twenty inmates who had been convicted of less serious crimes and who were well-behaved (edepsiz olmayan) were being trained under police supervision to produce shoes and uniforms for the vilayet’s police force. Bakûrdzhieva and Iordanov also point out to the indispensability of prisoner labor to the urban reform projects launched by Midhat’s administration in the provincial capital. According to their study, it had become common practice for those sentenced to shorter terms of incarceration (for example those found guilty of misdemeanors and other petty crimes) to be employed at various government construction sites in Ruse. Incidentally, the increased use of the labor of prisoners probably had a positive impact on their living conditions, as administration officials realized that better prisons could translate into higher prisoner productivity. Hence a 1866 government report on the state of the Vidin prison (the largest in the province) observed that the appalling mortality and morbidity rates due to poor living conditions there were “reducing the usefulness” of its inmates. The report went on to suggest that each

430 Ibid., 50.
431 NBKM OO, Fond. 112, a.e. 2058 [15 Zilkade 1281 / 12 April 1865]. The document also mentions that a similar training program had already been implemented in the Niš prison.
432 Prisoners, for example, are said to have been employed in the demolition of Ruse’s former tanneries and slaughterhouses, which were being forcibly relocated outside of the city. See Bakûrdzhieva and Iordanov, Ruse. Prostranstvo i istoriia, 109.
433 Ibid., 90.
prisoner be issued a new set of warm clothes and a blanket – all manufactured in
the province’s other famous disciplinary institution, the islahhane.\footnote{The report on the Vidin prison can be found in BOA İ.MVL 24680 [22 Zilkade 1282 / 8 April 1866].}

The islahhane (usually translated as “orphanage” but perhaps better
understood in its literal meaning of “house of improvement” or “house of
correction”) was, in many ways, the quintessential Foucauldian institution. Like
the prisons, the islahhane largely “paid for itself” through the labor of its inmates.
To be sure, there was a spate of commercial properties whose income was
dedicated to the upkeep of the islahhanes in the province (including Ruse’s
premier new hotel, the eponymous “Islahhane Hotel”) and Midhat’s
administration did launch a widely publicized campaign to raise funds for them.\footnote{Even the Sultan’s Palace Treasury joined the list of donors by pledging 80,000 piastres for the construction of the Ruse islahhane. See BOA İ.D. 37383 [5 Safer 1282 / 30 June 1865]. Lists of private donors were conspicuously published in several issues of Tuna/Dunav, for example in vol. 1, no. 19 [7/19 July 1865], where we learn that Midhat himself had donated 7,500 piastres for the project.}
But it was still the sale of student handiwork – mostly military uniforms, shoes,
and woolen cloth – that provided the bulk of the daily operating expenses of the
islahhanes.\footnote{Kornrumpf, “Islaahhaneler,” 150; Pletn’ov, Midkhat Pasha, 168-70.} Not only did the vilayet’s “houses of improvement” generate
revenues on a daily basis, but they were also conceived as veritable factories for
cadres for many of the new public or semi-public businesses in the province.
Islaahhane “inmates,” for instance, were trained to become blacksmiths and cart
makers for the provincial coach company, technicians for the new naval repair
yard in Ruse, sailors for the proposed provincial steamship company, typesetters
for the provincial printing press, and railroad employees on the Ruse-Varna line.  

There were several different ways which could lead an adolescent boy from the vilayet to the ıslahhane. Most commonly, he would have been what today would be called a “problem child” – a homeless and/or a beggar, who had been apprehended by the newly-appointed police “inspectors” or sent to the ıslahhane directly by the inhabitants of a local community. There was no requirement that he be an orphan, in fact, if the observations of St. Clair and Brophy are to be believed, the ıslahhanes contained few orphans, since extended families typically acted as surrogate parents in case a child lost his or her parents.439 On the other hand, poor families from the entire vilayet were legally allowed to abandon the children they could not support and send them to the Niš ıslahhane.440 Other groups of children who could be sent to that institution included underage criminals and even elementary school students who were determined to be habitual truants.441

437 Pletn'ov, Midkhat Pasha, 169.
438 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 21 [21 July / 2 August 1865]; vol. 1, no. 42 [15/27 December 1865].
439 St. Clair and Brophy (Residence in Bulgaria, 392) suggest that this was by far the most common scenario in the rural areas of the province.
441 See Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 135 [18/30 December 1866]. In the latter case, the first instance of truancy would be punished by an official reprimand of the child and its parents by the city council; the second offense was punishable by “incarcerating” the child’s father (presumably for a short term); and only the third offense would land the child in the ıslahhane.
Once in their new home, the students were divided into classes, according to the craft they were assigned to study. They were taught to read and write either in Ottoman or in Bulgarian, and were assigned to craft instructors, appointed by the ıslahhane's director. The students slept in common halls, ate in a common kitchen, and underwent regular health examinations in the ıslahhane's infirmary. At the end of each year, they took a public exam in reading, writing and mathematics; those who performed exceptionally well could even be hired in minor posts of the vilayet's government. For the great majority, however, the decision of whether they would be permitted to advance from one “grade” to the next, seems to have been made on the basis of the craft samples each of them submitted for inspection to the ıslahhane's director every year. Informal “competitions” in shock-work were encouraged and, occasionally, local officials gave small monetary prizes to the winners.

The production of marketable goods such as clothes or shoes was an important priority in the ıslahhane – but it was not the only priority. Just as important, I would argue, was the production of disciplined individuals. As an example of the scope of this effort, we may quote the letter one fourteen-year-old student in the Niš ıslahhane wrote to the editorial board of Tuna/Dunav in order

442 Ibid.
443 *Tuna/Dunav*, vol. 2, no. 114 [5/17 October 1866].
444 *Tuna/Dunav*, vol. 3, no. 172 [7/19 May 1867]. Nine ıslahhane students are said to have been appointed to clerical positions in Ruse, on the basis of their exam performance.
445 Ibid.
446 *Tuna/Dunav*, vol. 1, no. 17 [23 June / 5 July 1865].
to protest an earlier report published in the newspaper challenging the legitimacy of his “record” in shock-work shoemaking:

Some time ago, my friends and I began to learn on our own how to cut and stitch shoes. When Süleyman Paşa, the kaymakam of Niš, heard of this he did not believe it. His Excellency came one day to the islahhane, placed a policeman to watch over me as I worked, and ordered that policeman to give me one gold lira coin if I managed to make three pairs of shoes. I made the shoes and took the coin. Even though your newspaper reported on this matter in its thirteenth issue, your report also stated that I used a machine to make some of the stitches on those shoes. That is not true – no machines at all are used in making that kind of shoe, so, as a result of your report, I became saddened, because my prestige among my friends was being trampled upon. You should be aware that when the kaymakam and [another official] came to visit the islahhane, I personally cut and made five pairs of shoes in one day – right before their eyes and without using any machine. I beg you to publish my letter in your newspaper, so I may yet save face among my friends [my emphasis].

To have used a machine, the student implied, would have been tantamount to cheating and would have destroyed his reputation amongst his peers – and precisely because he was aware of those consequences, he never would have attempted to cheat in the first place. Characteristically, in publishing the letter, the paper editors praised both the student’s achievement itself and the competitive and “patriotic” spirit that had been sparked amongst the islahhane’s students: “the little rivalries that appear amongst them as each tries to show his zeal and desire to excel in the arts and crafts (the editors wrote) are a great sign of progress.”

Thus the islahhane’s desired disciplinary effect on its students

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447 Ibid.
448 Ibid.
was not merely incidental to the imperative of producing cloth, uniforms, shoes, etc. The inculcation of an ethic of discipline and industriousness could be just as important a goal as production itself.

3.2.5. Hospitals

The Danube province’s new hospitals represented another mechanism for dealing with the problematic (from the administration’s point of view) social groups in the vilayet. *Tuna/Dunav* variously refers to these institutions as “hospitals for the poor,” “hospitals for the travelers,” or “hospitals for the immigrants.” These terms, as one article explained, were by no means undeserved: it seems to have been a matter of common knowledge that any sick person who could afford to call a doctor to his or her home would do so.  

Clearly, the main difference between private medicine, (of which *Tuna/Dunav* has little to say) and clinical medicine was the economic status of their clienteles. The connection is further illustrated in the case of the new hospital in Pleven, which opened on the premises of an old Muslim “soup-kitchen” for the poor that had fallen into disarray. The establishment of the hospital did not, however, mean that the “soup-kitchen” would have to be closed down; what happened, in

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449 *Tuna/Dunav*, vol. 3, no. 205 [30 August / 11 September 1867].
effect, was that the two institutions were fused into one, in which the treatment of
the sick and the feeding of the “blind, old, and lame”\textsuperscript{451} went hand in hand.

Like the \textit{islahhane}, the hospital was intimately connected with the new
system for cleaning the cities from beggars and vagrants. One of the obligations
of the police “inspectors,” it would be recalled, was to send male beggars of all
ages who were found to be sick to the Pleven hospital.\textsuperscript{452} Confinement in the
hospitals, like confinement in the \textit{islahhane}, was, in some cases, used as a
punishment for misdemeanors – especially when the crime was judged to have
been caused by insanity. Thus, when a certain Simeon from Pleven cut with an
ax the wires of the local telegraph station, and explained that he had done so
because “the voice of the wire” had demanded his money, his punishment was
twofold: his money was confiscated and he was ordered to be put in the hospital
for as long as it might take for his condition to “improve.”\textsuperscript{453}

The ward for female patients, which was a part of one of the two Ruse
hospitals, presented special problems. Here, a balance between confinement
and concealment had to found and the delicate task of having male doctors
examine female patients had to be faced. Part of the proposed solution was the
introduction of an all-female group of intermediaries between the patient and the
doctor: female nurses, cleaners, laundry and kitchen workers. Another part was
the severe limitation of the patient’s contacts with the outside world: visitations
were permitted only to next-of-kin female relatives and, even for them, had to be

\textsuperscript{451} \textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 1, no. 21 [21 July / 2 August 1865].
\textsuperscript{452} \textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 1, no. 42 [15/27 December 1865].
\textsuperscript{453} \textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 3, no. 155 [1/13 March 1867].
approved by the hospital director; when allowed, they were to take place in a special room under the watchful eye of a nurse. The patient, who had already surrendered her clothes upon being admitted to the hospital, could not accept any gifts, food or clothes from her visitors. She was also not allowed to take walks in the hospital yard, where she could be seen by patients in the male wards.  

3.2.6. The little things

Decrees and ordinances were also used in order to mobilize the population for what the authorities often presented as special or emergency measures. One example was the rather amusing 1867 decree of the Provincial İdare Meclisi against crows. Destroying the crops and polluting the cities, the crows were proclaimed a public enemy, which every citizen of the vilayet should fight. Formally, every male citizen of the province was required to submit to the government the corpses of two crows (specially appointed officials were dispatched to receive the dead birds). Crows not personally killed by the person who was submitting them were graciously accepted nevertheless. In the cities, however, killing two crows could prove to be a problem, since there was a ban on the use of firearms – the use of traps and nets was recommended instead.  

In an equally bizarre pest extermination drive, the kaymakam of Tulcea attempted

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454 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 144 [18/30 January 1867].
to draft the city’s population for the purpose of ending a locust invasion that had
left the streets covered with a layer of the vile insects’ eggs. The citizens were
ordered to collect these eggs and bury them in their backyards, destroying any
larvae that might have hatched in the meantime. As with the crows, a citizen had
to demonstrate that he or she had fulfilled a certain extermination quota before
he/she could be discharged of further obligations.\footnote{\textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 1, no. 34 [20 October / 1 November 1865].}
CHAPTER 4: GOVERNANCE

4.1. Rationalities and practices in the context of Ottoman reform

No historian of the Ottoman Tanzimat period can escape the fact that the particular shifts in “governmentality” that he or she is studying occurred first at the level of political discourse/ideology and only then at the level of practical policy-making. The great reform edicts of 1839 and 1856 and the various legislative acts in between those dates and in the subsequent two decades constituted a series of normative texts that clearly (or so it seemed) spelled out a new and comprehensive rationale for Ottoman imperial power – one based on the general acceptance of the Western notions of individual legal rights and technical and military progress, but also on the rejection of the Western view of the Ottoman empire as the embodiment of oriental stasis, civilizationally incapable of swallowing the bitter pills that would raise the “Sick Man of Europe” from its deathbed. Partly because of this seemingly undeniable historical primacy of reformist discourse and reformist rationalities over practice, the question of governance in the Tanzimat period has always, until very recently, been reduced to a question of “implementation.” Were the promises embodied in this or that proclamation or piece of legislature truly implemented or did they remain a “dead letter?” Indeed, the very establishment of the Danube province is typically interpreted as a matter of implementing a programmatic reason of state.
Many of the policies carried out by Midhat’s administration can be seen, according to this argument, as the Ottoman state putting its money where its mouth was and making good on “promises” it had given in previous years. Had the *Islahat Fermanı* of 1856 not promised infrastructural improvements in the provinces, a more equitable tax collection system, and the restructuring of the “Provincial and Communal Councils, in order to ensure fairness in the choice of the Deputies of the Mussulman, Christian, and other communities”?⁴⁵⁷ Had the principle of equal representation of religious groups in these “councils” not been part and parcel of the ideology of *Osmanlılık*?⁴⁵⁸

Without denying the importance of ideology, my goal in the following paragraphs would be to look at some of the key governance techniques used by Midhat Paşa’s administration in Ruse as ideology-neutral practices.⁴⁵⁹ This approach allows us to see that, in many cases, the administration opted for policies in which abstract ideological principles were at the very least *tempered* by practical or local considerations. The governor’s own extensive “fact-finding”

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⁴⁵⁷ See, for example, Davison (*Reform*, 142), who quoted this passage and commented that, from 1856 to 1864, “nothing was done along this line.” An English translation of the *Islahat Fermanı* (*Hatt-i Hümayun*) of 1856 can be found in Edward Hertslet, *The Map of Europe by Treaty; showing the various political and territorial changes which have taken place since the general peace of 1814* (London: Butterworths, 1875-1891), 1243-9.

⁴⁵⁸ Ortaçlı, *İmparatorluk En Uzun Yüzyılı*, 106.

missions within the vilayet and the annual meetings of the Provincial General Assembly (Meclis-i Umumî-i Vilayet) provided the institutional framework for the collection of such local knowledge and its translation into policy, while the notion of “model” or “trial-and-error” implementation of many of the reforms supplied the means for gauging local reactions and, if necessary, “changing course” accordingly. My argument here is that although Midhat and the “technocrats” he brought to Ruse undoubtedly had an ideological vision of what needed to be done in the province, that vision was open to the input of local society (local elites, to be precise), and the closer one examines policymaking on a “microhistorical” level, the clearer the existence of such a feedback loop becomes.

4.2. “Humble travels” and local knowledge

The importance which the new provincial administration attached to the collection of detailed local knowledge to inform and guide policy cannot be overstated. Governance based on local knowledge, and the corresponding tolerance of local variations and lack of institutional uniformity were, of course, time-honored Ottoman traditions. During the Tanzimat era, these traditions were not only

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460 See Daniel Goffman, The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 101-5. Among the many studies that touch upon various aspects of Ottoman administrative and military flexibility/pragmatism during the empire’s “classical age” (sixteenth century) are: Halil İnalcık, “Ottoman Methods of Conquest,” Studia Islamica 2 (1954); Gábor
not abandoned, but, on the contrary, were successfully embedded in the reformers’ political discourse. This should not come as a surprise – the German, Austrian, Italian, and Russian “reformist conservatives” of the nineteenth century (whose political philosophy was very close to the hearts of Tanzimat statesmen; closer, arguably, than the abstract principles of liberalism) recognized and celebrated the collection of local knowledge and local “tradition” as the bedrock for their plans for state-controlled social change. Moreover, in a curious twist of the standard Orientalist narrative at the time, European observers, conservatives and liberals alike, argued that Ottoman reforms in particular could not be based on “universal” principles but had to proceed from local knowledge. Sir Henry Bulwer, the British ambassador to the Ottoman empire from 1858 to 1865, made no bones about this in a 1860 circular letter instructing British consuls in the empire to report on the condition of the country:

> It sometimes happens that notwithstanding bad and inefficient laws, a semi-barbarous people is tolerably well governed; and that sometimes, notwithstanding good laws, it is governed execrably [...] it also not infrequently happens that good laws in theory, are not good laws in practice, – as being unfitted to the peculiar population to which they are applied; – whilst where races and religions are intermingled, the task of government will become still more complicated and difficult; since that which would be favourable to one class of the inhabitants, might appear to be, and actually be, unfair and unfavourable to another. To form a right

judgment in these mattes, local knowledge is most essential. 461

There can be little doubt that Midhat and his superiors in İstanbul saw the challenges of “bringing” the Tanzimat to the provinces along these lines. The dilemma was (to use again a line by Grand Vezir Fuat Paşa that was already quoted in a previous chapter) to find a form of administration “corresponding altogether to the needs of the country” and “to the customs of the populations.” 462

In order to find out what those “needs” and “customs” were, the Tanzimat statesmen had turned to the practice of “inspection tours” – the sending of specially appointed imperial “inspectors” (müşettiş), often endowed with plenary powers, to ascertain the situation on the ground in this or that province or to investigate specific complaints. Especially in the early 1860’s, as Davison has noted “the müfettiş became a familiar figure in the Balkans and Anatolia.” In the Bulgarian lands, there was the 1859 inspection tour of Süleyman Paşa, former governor of Bursa, who was charged with surveying the general condition of the Danubian plain and examining “the people’s thoughts” in view of the “situation of Serbia.” 463 A few months later (in the spring and summer of 1860) the Balkans were again visited by a high-ranking Ottoman inspector – this time the current Grand Vezir, Kibrıslı Mehmet Paşa. The Kibrıslı’s well-known tour took him to

462 Quoted in Davison, Reform, 157.
463 BOA İ.B. 65 [3 Ramazan 1276 / 25 March 1860]. The “the events in Serbia” that the document refers to are the restoration of the Obrenović dynasty (December 1858) and the subsequent renewal of Serbian claims for the withdrawal of Ottoman garrisons from Serbian fortresses.
most of the regions that would later come to comprise the Danube province, as well as to some Macedonian eyalets.  

Midhat Paşa himself, it would be recalled, had used his successful performance as müfettiş in several inspection tours during the 1850’s as a springboard for his early career. It should come as no surprise, then, that as governor of the Danube province and in subsequent provincial appointments, Midhat became known for his meticulous attention to local detail. In his three and a half years in Ruse, he made countless visits to virtually all corners of the province. The Paşa’s peregrinations (faithfully documented on the pages of Tuna/Dunav) show a striking determination to tailor the substance and style of his reform policies to conditions on the ground. Within a couple of months of his appointment (November 1864), Midhat had visited Lom and Niš; in March of 1865 he was in Constanţa; in April – in Shumen; in May – in Tûrnovo. In July and August 1865, the governor embarked on a tour of the western part of the province, visiting the cities of Pleven, Sofia (twice), Vidin, Vratsa, and Niš; in

464 Davison, Reform, 105-6.
465 The first of these tours (six months in 1850) took Midhat, at that time a junior clerk in of the Meclis-i Vâlâ, to Damascus and Aleppo, where he investigated allegations of abuses by the customs officials in these cities as well as (unrelated) allegations against the then-commander of the Ottoman Arabia Army (and future Grand Vezir) Kibrıslı Mehmet Paşa. Midhat’s second and third inspection tours (1855 and 1856) were to the Balkans – to the eyalets of Silistra and Vidin, where he gathered evidence about the misdeeds of their governors (Mirza Said and Muammer Paşaş), and to the city of Tûrnovo, where he inquired into the causes of an unsuccessful Bulgarian anti-government conspiracy. See Ali Haydar Midhat, Tabsıra-i İbret, 21-7. Şentürk, Osmanlı Devleti’nde Bulgar Meselesi, 122-3. On Midhat’s mission in Vidin, see BOA İ.B. 63, lef. 3 [4 Şaban 1273 / 30 March 1857].
October of that year we see him touring the central and eastern regions of the vilayet, making stops in Sevlievo, Tûrnovo (a second visit in a five-month period), Razgrad, Shumen, and Varna.\textsuperscript{467} These tours would continue unabated for the rest of Midhat’s tenure. The paper trail of these “humble travels” (as the Paşa himself referred to them in one document)\textsuperscript{468} is a series of extremely detail-oriented memoranda and policy proposals, some of which will be discussed in the paragraphs below.

One illustrious example of Midhat’s attention to the collection of local knowledge is his meticulously researched proposal for the creation of the system of agricultural credit cooperatives. In this proposal, Midhat reveals that his extensive travels throughout the vilayet have convinced him that it would be impractical to have a province-wide blanket solution to the problem of raising enough capital for the credit cooperatives. Instead, he suggested a combination of regional schemes: collecting a one-time extra tax on agricultural products in those areas where the harvest had been good, while requiring farmers to plant certain additional acreage of crops in areas where the harvest had failed (the fruit of these additional fields would then be sold and the proceeds used as operating capital for the cooperatives).\textsuperscript{469} Significantly, in the process of acquiring local knowledge, the provincial administration proved to be quite tolerant of local policy

\textsuperscript{467} Pletn’ov, Midkhat Pasha, 42-3.
\textsuperscript{468} The phrase Midhat used was azimet-i acizanem. See BOA İ.MVL. 24134, lef. 3 [6 Zilkade 1281 / 2 April 1865].
\textsuperscript{469} BOA İ.D. 36970 [11 Ramazan 1281 / 8 February 1865]. Specifically, five percent surtax on grains was to be collected in the sancaks of Niš, Sofia, and Vidin, while the peasants of the Silistra, Tûrnovo, and Varna sancaks were to plant extra crops for the following year.
initiatives and attuned to popular concerns and complaints. Such flexibility went a long way in ensuring that the reform proposals that were eventually approved had a reasonable chance of success. In the proposal for the credit cooperatives, for instance, Midhat stated that he had initially contemplated raising the tax rate in selected regions by 10%, but the idea had been met with considerable resistance in the sancak of Vidin, where it was tested for a brief period of time – the proposed increase in the tax rate was consequently reduced to 5%.

Another example of how Midhat’s “humble travels” and the local knowledge gathered through them directly influenced policy is provided in a memorandum the governor wrote to the Grand Vezirate in April 1865. Having just completed a trip to the Black Sea town of Constanța, Midhat was struck by the prevalence of vacant plots of land in the very center of town, some of them with newly built but deserted houses or workshops. Overenthusiastic plans for development of Constanța in previous years were largely to blame for that state of affairs. In 1862, the town had become the Black Sea terminus of the railway line from Cernavoda and local authorities, hopeful of a rapid spurt of economic growth, had divided most of the vacant land within the town’s borders into plots and had offered these plots for sale to the public. The railway had indeed come to town but the economic growth had not – when Midhat visited Constanța it was still a virtual village of 80 households. Only a small fraction of the plots of land that the local authorities had put for auction over the previous three years had been sold. Midhat’s investigation into the circumstances of these failed auctions established that the problem was not the lack of interested buyers, but the terms of the offers
the plots had been offered not as unrestricted property with a title deed (hüccet) but as a life-lease property with a usufruct deed (tapu). This, the memorandum concluded, deterred potential buyers concerned about the difficulties in inheriting or otherwise transferring ownership of such land. A further complication had been the brief speculative rush to buy such plots immediately after they had been offered for sale (perhaps in the expectation that the property boom promised by the government would materialize). Since the local authorities had managed to sell a few plots at “exorbitant” (fahiş) prices at the beginning, they were now hoping to match these and refused to sell the plots at the current (lower) market price. The solution proposed by the governor’s memorandum was twofold: 1) since the land in question is within the town’s boundary, it should, according to the provisions of the 1854 Land Law, be treated as fully fledged unrestricted property (mülk) and sold with a title deed, 2) bowing to the dictates of the market, each plot is to be offered at an auction only once and to be released to the highest bidder, whatever the price, provided the money is paid immediately.\footnote{BOA İ.MVL. 24134, lef. 3 [6 Zilkade 1281 / 2 April 1865]}

Like the proposal for the creation of the credit cooperatives, the Constan memorandum illustrates what I would argue was a tendency towards micromanaging and under-delegating inherent in Midhat’s style of governing. Even with the Paşa’s extensive travel schedule such a management style could prove to be a handicap – one can imagine that there were simply too many local problems and peculiarities in the province for one man – no matter how energetic
– to survey and address effectively. Fortunately for Midhat, he had an important institutional ally in the process of collecting local knowledge – the Provincial General Assembly. That body will be the subject of the next section in this chapter.

4.3. The Provincial General Assembly

The most important institutional venue for hearing local policy proposals in the vilayet were the annual meetings of the Provincial General Assembly (Meclis-i Umumî-i Vilayet, hereafter abbreviated PGA). In a lengthy memorandum he wrote shortly after assuming the post of governor of the province of Syria (in January 1879), Midhat called the establishment of such an institution “one of the most essential provisions of the Provincial Law [of 1868]” and bemoaned the fact that none had ever been convened in Syria prior to his arrival.\(^{471}\) Midhat’s appreciation for the institution of the PGA, understandable as it is given his experiences as a provincial governor, is not shared by current scholarship on Ottoman reform. İlber Ortaylı’s work on the development of local government institutions during the Tanzimat period, which contains the most thorough evaluation to date of the role of the PGA’s, offers a rather critical view of the institution.\(^{472}\) Like many Turkish historians of the Tanzimat period, Ortaylı is implicitly concerned with the origins of parliamentarism in the Ottoman empire.

\(^{472}\) Ortaylı, Osmanlı Mahalli İdareleri, 89-92.
and argues that provincial general assemblies were little more than a false start in that direction. To be sure, Ortaylı is entirely correct in his contention that a number of features in the PGA’s structure, prerogatives, and operating procedures fell short of the standards set by corresponding institutions in some Western European countries at the time. In the Danube province and elsewhere in the Empire, PGA delegates had almost no control over the agenda of their meetings (that was set by the governor); they could not vote down a proposal put forth by the provincial government but exercised a merely advisory role; their meetings, except for the opening sessions, were not open to the public, etc. etc.  

But parliamentarism, it seems to me, is the wrong yardstick against which to measure the institution of the Meclis-i Umumî, since it was never meant to act as anything like a provincial parliament (although some contemporary observers and present-day historians sometimes referred to it as such) or as a check on the vali’s executive powers. The Provincial Statute (Article 29) specifies the following four fields in which the PGA was competent to advise the government:

1. The building and maintenance of roads and public buildings, and the “investigation and discussion into the people’s desires” in that field (my emphasis),
2. The study of the particular measures needed to protect the roads,
3. Discussions into the measures needed to expand and facilitate the agriculture and commerce within the vilayet,
4. The “particulars surrounding [proposed] changes and adjustments to the taxes” collected in the vilayet.

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473 Ibid.
474 Pletn’ov, Midkhat Pasha, 44.
475 Ahalisinin müsted’ayâtı in tedkik ve müzakeresi.
476 Elviye ve kaza ve kura vergilerinin ta’dil ve tesviyesine dair hususâtın mütalaası.
Given that mandate, it seems unwise to dismiss \textit{a priori} the \textit{Meclis-i Umumî} as a mere generator of paperwork and a place where the delegates would simply gather to hear the Paş'a's drawn-out speeches.\textsuperscript{477} My reading of a number of memoranda arising out of the annual meetings of the PGA in Ruse between 1866 and 1868 suggests that, for that period at least, the assembly's advisory role was taken seriously both by the provincial government and by the delegates themselves. While no actual minutes of assembly sessions were found in the course of this study, these memoranda (representing resolutions adopted and passed on for approval to the Grand Vezirate) indicate that the PGA played a crucially important role in fine tuning government policy, serving both as a clearinghouse for locally-generated proposals and also as a reality check for overambitious reform undertakings coming from the governor and his entourage. In both of these functions, the provincial delegates\textsuperscript{478} played a critical role. They presented and defended local funding requests and administrative proposals they had brought to Ruse from their respective constituencies and advised the \textit{vilayet}'s government on the feasibility or lack of feasibility of its own reform plans in each particular locality. The following examples may serve as an illustration of the important role played by the PGA.

\textsuperscript{477} Ortaylı, \textit{Osmanlı Mahalî İdareleri}, 90-1.
\textsuperscript{478} Articles 82 and 27 of the 1864 Provincial Statute regulated the procedure for selecting representatives to the annual meeting of the PGA, by stating that each \textit{kaza} should send four electors (two Muslims and two non-Muslims) to the corresponding \textit{sancak} center one month ahead of the scheduled PGA meeting; the combined electors of all \textit{kaza} within the \textit{sancak} would then choose (by an open vote) three PGA delegates amongst themselves. See also Ortaylı, \textit{Osmanlı Mahalî İdareleri}, 89-90.
During its inaugural session in March-April 1866, for instance, the assembly approved three motions sent to it by the local administrative councils (*idare meclisleri*) of Varna, Dobrich, and Sofia. Each of these documents proposed the creation of a shareholders’ company in order to finance certain reform measures. The motion from Varna expressed concern that “despite the continuous increase in prosperity,” there was no place in the city in which a guest or a business traveler could stay; consequently it proposed the building of a hotel. This undertaking was estimated to cost 4,000 (gold) Ottoman *liras* and the Varna *meclis* suggested it should be financed through the floating of 400 shares with a nominal value of ten *liras* each. The administration of Dobrich, on the other hand, proposed the establishment of a public company in order to finance the importation of agricultural machinery which, they claimed “could be successfully used on the Dobruca plains, due to the richness of the soil.” They suggested the raising of 100,000 piastres through the issue of 400 shares valued at 250 piastres each. Finally, in Sofia, the public company proposed by the local *meclis* was to fund the building of a sugar factory, which could utilize the “abundant local crop of sugar beet.” The raising of 300,000 piastres in the form of 300 shares of 1,000 piastres each was proposed.\(^{479}\) In this case, as in many others, the Provincial Assembly served as the venue for incorporating local input into policy making.

A similar dynamic could be seen in the PGA’s discussions (at its 1868 meeting) of a series of local memoranda (*layiha*) about the need to improve the

\(^{479}\) BOA İ.MVL. 26134, lef. 3 [24 Cemaziülâhir 1284 / 23 October 1867].
vilayet’s agriculture by importing farming machines from Europe. There seemed to have been little disagreement among the delegates and the provincial authorities that government support for the introduction of such machines, particularly of harvesters and threshers would provide a welcome boost to large-scale commercial (chiftlik) farming. But there were numerous practical questions in translating that vision into a concrete policy. Which regions in the province were suitable for the deployment of such machines? Of the several types of machines available on the market, which ones would be most effective to operate and maintain locally, given the availability of cadres, fuel, and spare parts? What methods of harvesting and threshing were currently used in the various regions of the province and how much of an improvement in productivity would the machines actually provide? Those were the questions discussed (and ultimately answered) by the PGA delegates. Thus, it was determined that of the 48 kazas in the province, 33 were flat enough to allow for the successful deployment of the machines in question. It was also determined that threshing techniques used by the population, especially in the Tulcea region, were detrimental to overall farm productivity and that, consequently, the introduction of mechanized threshers would be a very worthwhile undertaking. As for the particular type of machine that would be best suited to local needs, it was decided (again, one must assume, on the strength of delegates’ testimony) that horse-drawn units would be preferable to steam-powered ones, not only because of the latter’s higher
price, but also because of the lack of qualified operators and mechanics in the villages. 480

Sometimes the government only became aware of the existence of “disorder” through the information brought up during the meetings of the Meclis-i Umumî. At the 1867 session, for example, delegates presented several local complaints regarding the appointment and functions of field-keepers (köy bekçileri) – a neighborhood-watch type communal crime prevention force of one or several men per village, whose main task was to protect the villagers’ crops from theft. As it became clear during the deliberations of the meclis, the field-keepers’ responsibilities and appointment procedure had never been subject to government regulation in the past. That, the complaints stated, had opened the door to so much haggling (pazarlık) and other irregularities accompanying their selection, that, in the end, the field-keepers were bringing greater harm (mazarrat) than benefit (fayda) to the village economy. Would it not be better to adopt a “strict regulation” (kaide-i kaviye) and a rulebook (talimat) and to use the new government printing press in Ruse to print and disseminate these to the four corners of the vilayet? The administration agreed. 481

The great confidence that Midhat Paşa and his superiors in İstanbul placed in the Provincial General Assembly as a policy-making and policy-reviewing instrument can be illustrated by the Meclis’s pivotal role in crafting a proposal to restructure the organization of border patrol stations (karakolhane) along the

480 NBKM OO Fond 112, a.e. 204 [6 Receb 1285 / 23 October 1868].
481 BOA A.MKT.MVL. Dosya 349, Vesika 51 [14 Şaban 1284 / 11 December 1867]. The Meclis-i Umumî memorandum is dated October 19, 1867.
Serbian and Romanian borders. That proposal was significant because it went against the grain of a long-standing Ottoman reluctance to allow non-Muslims to bear arms in the service of the state (despite promises to that effect made in the 1856 *İslahat Fermanı*) by suggesting that the border patrol stations should henceforth be manned by a mixture of all ethnic groups in the border region. According to the proposed rotation plan, every male in the border regions, Muslim or non-Muslim, was expected to serve as a border guard for one month every ten years, that burden being deemed “not too troublesome or heavy.”

Again, although the details are sketchy, it seems clear that the function of the *Meclis-i Umumî* in that case was to provide the provincial authority with much-needed feedback regarding the feasibility of their reform plans.

Local knowledge was indispensable not only in formulating policy but also in the task of surveillance and policing of problem areas or populations. The new street numbers, useful as they were in facilitating mail delivery, were also handy as pointers for the precise deployment of police forces charged with arresting alleged criminals. Likewise, Midhat’s inspection tours of the province were often aimed at putting local knowledge into concrete “law-and-order” measures. One of the governor’s first destinations outside of Ruse was the district of Kurşumlija (Kurşunlu) in the southwestern part of the Niš sancak, where over 1,000 armed Albanian villagers had effectively wrested a sizeable enclave away

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483 E.g. in breaking the Bulgarian “Svishtov committee” that had been set up as a support structure for the 1867 armed bands (more on this episode in Chapter 7). During their interrogations (see BOA, İ.MVL. 25929 [24 Cemazıülevvel 1284 / 22 September 1867]), all suspects in this case were asked to provide the exact street addresses of their co-conspirators.
from central government control and had, for over a year, turned away tax
collectors, disregarded their duties in military provisioning contracts, and let
government invitations to settle their grievances fall on deaf ears. In his report
on the issue, Midhat stated that some of his advisors in Ruse had suggested
that, instead of traveling to the troubled kaza, he should summarily fire its
Ottoman müdür in order to please the insurgents. Adamant to find the root of the
problem, however, the governor did go to the region and sought the opinion of
Albanian leaders in the neighboring region of Leskovac. It was only in this
manner, Midhat says, that he was able to identify the root of the problem (in this
case, the head of a single Albanian tribe, who was inciting Albanian villagers to
revolt) and devise a solution (a military expedition made up of over 100
policemen, one battalion and two companies of the regular army and two
cannons, quickly “persuaded” the Albanians to disperse).  

4.4. Regulations and categorization

As the preceding discussion has shown, Midhat’s administration was often open
to the idea of fine-tuning its policies according to local conditions. But it would be
quite misleading to interpret this attention to local knowledge and local detail as a
blanket acceptance of endless administrative diversity. On the contrary, the new
governor seems to have viewed excessive diversity in administrative practices as

484 BOA İ.D. 36825 [18 Receb 1281/ 18 December 1864]. The events in
Kurşumlija will be discussed in greater detail Chapter 7.
one of the root causes of Ottoman backwardness. Hence regulation – the attempt to standardize, harmonize, and “order” the way in which government conducted its business throughout the province – became a crucially important element of Midhat’s agenda.

It could hardly have been otherwise: the very term Tanzimat could be translated as “regulations” and, indeed, nearly five centuries of Ottoman rule in the region had left a rich accretion of diverse “traditional” government practices, institutions, legal privileges, etc., all of which needed streamlining (in the eyes of Midhat and his advisors, at least). Many of the governor’s reform proposals betray a certain amount of exasperation at the degree of administrative disorder he had inherited from the old regime. Thus a March 1866 memorandum on the projected changes to the tax system in the province spoke bemusedly of the wildly varying “traditional” methods of collecting some of the minor rüşumat taxes:

Let us take, for example, the market dues (bacpazarı). In some places in the province, these are collected at the rate of one fortieth part of the value of animals sold at markets, but, in other places, the tax bearing that name is collected as a handful of the goods in each produce cart going to the markets. Elsewhere still, for instance in some mountain passes, a fee called bacpazarı is collected from travelers who pass through. Yet in other places, the term bacpazarı is used to denote fees collected from gambling establishments set up at market fairs; or the taxes collected by city dwellers to pay the public wake-up drummers (davulcu) during Ramadan. Such a confusion and disorder is incorrect and unacceptable. The same can be said about other rüşumat taxes.

The rüşumat taxes, unlike the agricultural tithes and the poll-taxes on non-Muslims, had no canonical basis; many had originated as “extraordinary” imposts in earlier periods but had later become regular levies.
taxes, whose collection is not conducted under universal rules and under a common rate. For instance, the pig and boar tax (canavar resmi) is levied in some places as a fixed fee of 200 para on each animal sold... but elsewhere it is calculated as a percentage of the animal’s market price. The resim on the sale of wood is likewise collected in countless different ways, and the fair tax (panayır resmi) is different for each fair. There are no clear rules for collecting the taxes on weighing produce (kantar resmi) or for collecting fees for public criers (dellaliye resmi) either and that gives rise to much confusion and difficulty.486

Regularizing this suddenly-apparent administrative chaos became a matter of utmost importance to the new provincial government. Detailed regulations (tâlimatnâme) were produced for a staggering variety of activities, from the abovementioned culls of crows and collections of locust eggs to the transportation of prisoners along the vilayet’s new roads.487 But such regulations were designed not only to deal with diverse administrative practices; they were also often linked with the government’s attempts to control an unwieldy social fabric. The tâlimatnâmes dealing with the problems of categorizing various social groups and social practices are of particular interest because they clearly show the scope of the administration’s modernist vision.

A proposal for levying property taxes on the nomadic Roma (Gipsy) population provides a good illustration of Midhat’s conviction that regulation and categorization can bring government control over social groups previously considered ungovernable. Crafted when Midhat was still governor of the eyalet of Niš (but subsequently applied to the whole of the Danube province), the proposal stated that in “previous years” there had not been any “uniform and

486 BOA İ.MVL. 24943, lef. 5 [27 Şevval 1282 / 15 March 1866]
487 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 55 [9/21 March 1866]
fixed method” (*usûl-i muttaride ve mazbute*) for collecting taxes from the Roma.\(^{488}\) Such lack of regulations, the proposal continued, had cost the Imperial Treasury dearly in uncollected revenue\(^{489}\) To rectify the situation, Midhat’s plan called for categorizing the Roma into five neat income brackets (based upon the results of the partially completed census that the governor had launched in the district) and imposing fixed tax rates on the members of each of these brackets.\(^{490}\) Not only did this proposal impose an orderly categorization upon what must surely have been an unevenly distributed continuum of personal incomes, but it also retroactively “remedied” the problems caused by the old regime’s lax approach to the issue of Roma taxation. It was decided that, until all the arrears for the province were collected, each adult Roma male should have to pay a 50% surtax on top of the regular rate for his income bracket. It is intriguing to compare Midhat’s proposal with the reaction it elicited from the Ministry of Finance in İstanbul, since the two differ quite markedly in their estimation of the ability of the Ottoman state to effectively tax the Roma. The bureaucrats from the Ministry of the Finance did not exactly oppose the governor’s proposal (who could oppose a measure aimed at increasing revenues?) but reminded Midhat of the practical difficulties that the government had traditionally encountered in trying to collect taxes from that group. For one

\(^{488}\) BOA İ.MVL 23252, lef. 1 [22 Rabîülâhir 1281 / 4 September 1864].

\(^{489}\) It was estimated that the 3,500 male Roma of the Niš eyalet who were old enough to be subject to the property tax “owed” the state over 270,000 piastres in arrears from previous years.

\(^{490}\) Each of the members of the three wealthiest categories had to pay 50, 40, and 30 piastres per annum, respectively; the members of the two lowest income categories had to pay 20 and 10 piastres each. (The top three categories had 500 members each, while the bottom two categories had 1,000 members each).
thing, they wrote, as a nomadic people, the Roma rarely had much in the way of permanent housing or landholdings; instead, their property consisted mostly of movable objects such as the “small tools of their trades and animals” that were notoriously easy to conceal from census takers and tax collectors alike. Moreover, the Roma were a people (kavim) that was of a generally backward and “gloomy” “natural disposition;” they were not “accustomed to permanent settlement and habitation.” For all those reasons, the Ministry of Finance memorandum concluded, the best way to collect taxes from the Roma was not by imposing a blanket regulation, but by being flexible according to local conditions (her yerin haline ve usûlûne göre işi uydurub). Although, as we saw, that was an argument for which Midhat had shown (and would continue to show) a considerable amount of respect, in this case he disagreed.

Categorization as a government technique continued to feature prominently in the Paşa's policy proposals after his appointment as governor of the vilayet of Danube. One of the earliest (and most ambitious) tâlimatnâmes published by the new administration sought to regulate engagement and wedding celebrations. The tâlimatnâme divided prospective brides and grooms into four categories, (according to the wealth of their families), and then proceeded to set extremely detailed standards for the type of wedding party each of these categories was entitled to have – including specific regulations of the number and value of bridal gifts, the number and kind of the dishes to be served, and the type of
entertainment allowed (down to the number of musicians).\footnote{The wedding party regulation was published in \textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 1, no. 11 [12/24 May 1865].} Hard as it is to believe, there seems to have been a serious attempt to implement this regulation – one civil lawsuit which I have examined contains a complaint against a police inspector in the city of Niš for his excessive zeal in enforcing the new wedding rules (he was said to have overstepped the limits of his authority by appearing uninvited at people’s wedding parties, chasing away the hired musicians, and examining the food on offer).\footnote{BOA AYN. DEF. 919, p. 20, hüküm 211 [13 Rabiülevvel 1283 / 26 July 1866].} It should also be said that the rationale for that seemingly bizarre \textit{tâlimatnâme} was a thoroughly modern concern – the administration appeared worried that organizing wedding parties was proving to be too heavy a financial burden, especially on the Muslim population of the \textit{vilayet}. Weighed down by the canonical requirement of giving marriage gifts (\textit{mehr}) and by the social expectation of throwing lavish wedding parties, many Muslim families were putting off the marriages of their sons and daughters. Even though a previous imperial regulation had outlawed the giving of excessive gifts as \textit{mehr}, the problems had continued. Lurking behind the provincial \textit{tâlimatnâme} was a concern not only with the protection of public morals (unable to get married, many young women were said to be turning to prostitution),\footnote{\textit{Kurvarstvo} in the Bulgarian text of the \textit{tâlimatnâme} published in \textit{Dunav}.} but also with \textit{dénatalité} and demographic balance. Rather ominously, the \textit{tâlimatnâme} declared that many Muslim village women were remaining single well into their twenties.
The extremely ambitious nature of the administration’s approach to regulating the social is also evident from what could have been its first communication of policy priorities to the vilayet’s public. In December 1864/January 1865, just weeks after Midhat’s arrival in Ruse (and three months before the publication of the first issue of Dunav), a circular proclamation (in Turkish and Bulgarian) went out to all corners of the province, detailing the rules for levying a new but soon-to-be ubiquitous penalty – the monetary fine (ceza-yi nakdiye). The novelty of the government imposing fines for minor offenses, or for failing to follow the new rules of behavior, is illustrated by the fact that the authors of the Bulgarian version of the original proclamation could not come up with a suitable translation for the Ottoman term, but simply transcribed it (zhiza-inaktie); a proper Bulgarian equivalent (globa) was not found until the same set of prohibitions was printed in the second issue of Dunav three months later. Together with the abovementioned corps of “inspection officials,” the fines undoubtedly put some “teeth” (at least in the urban centers) behind the countless new regulations emanating from the vilayet capital. Failures to follow such regulations constituted the bulk of the transgressions punishable by fines. Examples included being out in the streets in violation of the standard curfew imposed in the main cities in the province, failure to carry a lamp when walking the streets between sunset and the curfew hour, slaughtering livestock or leaving animal carcasses inside

494 Copy of the proclamation can be found in NBKM BIA II 2884 [Kanun-i evvel 1280 / December 1864–January 1865].
495 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 2 [10/22 March 1865].
496 The curfew began at two o’clock ezani time; i.e. two hours after sunset every day.
settlement boundaries, maintaining latrines that were less than completely
covered from view, throwing out dirty water in the street, not sweeping the area in
front of one’s shop or house, erecting any kind of a building in the cities without
securing a government permit, etc, etc. Fines were also to be levied for
disobeying the various tâlimatnâmes regulating the weights and measures used
in provincial markets and fairs – for example, for continuing to use the traditional
endaze length unit instead of the officially sanctioned arşin.497 But the fines’
reach also extended (or at least was meant to extend) into activities that had
heretofore been strictly off limits to government regulation. Parents (fathers, to
be precise) would now be subject to fines if their children were “caught”498 playing
in the streets(!), or if they failed to report daily to their schools or (for those who
were being apprenticed to study a craft) to their masters’ workshops. The
proclamation even required that urban children walk to school “quietly and
peacefully” and not play pranks on the passers-by; if they failed to do that, their
fathers would be held legally responsible again.

Having registered its population, the provincial government moved on to
registering and categorizing the population’s property. One of the first targets
was the registration of livestock. In the spring of 1867, Midhat’s administration
began sending blank animal registration tezkeres to the districts. Printed (in
Turkish and Bulgarian) by the new government press, these blanks were to be

497 An endaze (elbow) was equal to about 26 inches; an arşin (Ottoman “yard”) was about 28 inches.
498 The proclamation does not specify who was allowed to “catch” such delinquent children, but it seems reasonable to assume that the corps of urban teftiş inspectors (whose creation was already under way) might have been entrusted with that task.
distributed to the village headmen, who would then invite the villagers to come forth and declare their animals. Each livestock owner would then receive a filled out and sealed certificate for each animal, listing the species, sex, age, color, special marks, etc. No animal lacking such tezkere could be legally sold or slaughtered in the province from that date forward.\footnote{BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 36, hüküm 21 [21 Muharrem 1284 / 25 May 1867].}

4.5. Trial and error – the concept of “models”

The Danube province itself was explicitly conceived as a “model” (nümûne) for the application of the administrative, legal, and fiscal reforms that were being implemented in it. The expectation of the Ottoman government was that the new territorial unit would serve as both a showcase and a proving ground for an impending empire-wide reorganization of provincial administration. This was stated very clearly in the proposal for the creation of the province, which proclaimed that “the useful lessons learned through our experience there, would be applied to other places [in the empire] in very short order.”\footnote{Tecrübe yolunda yapılan şeyin müşahede-i menafiyle az zaman içinde sair yerlerde dahi ittihzâma müsaraat kilınacağî. BOA İ.MMHS. 1245 [12 Cemaziülevvel 1281 / 13 October 1863].}

Testing the feasibility of proposed new policies in limited “pilot” territories was an enduring characteristic of the Tanzimat statesmen’s approach to governance. The case of the Sixth District of İstanbul (which was designated an “experimental area” for urban and municipal reform in 1857) is perhaps the best known
example of this approach although, as some historians have argued, the peculiar ethno-religious makeup of the Sixth District made its use as a working model for future municipal reform somewhat problematic.\textsuperscript{501} In the field of provincial administration, pilot policy implementation had already become the norm prior to 1864. An early and largely abortive provincial reform plan (launched in 1845) had selected the sancaks of Gelibolu and İzmir as “model” regions, in which the impact of new institutions and practices was to be gauged safely before their application could spread to other parts of the empire.\textsuperscript{502} The institution of elected village headmen (\textit{muhtar}) – a cornerstone of nineteenth-century Ottoman efforts to expand the government’s ability to survey, police and tax the population – had also been pilot-tested: it was first implemented in the district of Kastamonu in 1833 and then gradually extended to other provinces.\textsuperscript{503}

The cautious approach to implementing new policies that is exemplified by the widespread use of pilot or test cases, is a matter that awaits further study. Budgetary constraints and a shortage of trained cadres undoubtedly played a significant role in convincing Tanzimat statesmen to proceed in a piecemeal fashion.\textsuperscript{504} But it should also be pointed out that the preference for limited and/or staggered policy implementation predates the worst financial difficulties faced by the Ottomans by two decades or more. It is also unclear whether the top architects of the Tanzimat reforms had been fully aware of the limitations posed

\textsuperscript{501} Çelik, \textit{Remaking of Istanbul}, 47-8.
\textsuperscript{503} Musa Çadırcı, “Türkiye’de Muhtarlık Teşkilâtının Kurulması Üzerine Bir İnceleme,” \textit{Belleten} 34, no. 135 (1970).
\textsuperscript{504} Shaw and Shaw, \textit{Ottoman Empire}, 90.
by the shortage of trained bureaucrats in the 1840’s and 1850’s. If one is to accept the prevalent view of the Tanzimat project as a massive attempt to consolidate and centralize political power in the imperial government (at the expense of the local power brokers who were so prominent in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century), one must also acknowledge that the reliance on models and pilots slowed down and complicated this process of centralization – not least by ensuring that some lack of uniformity in administrative, legal, and fiscal practices continued to exist in the Ottoman empire for many years after 1839.

From the perspective of the imperial government, the Danube province did, in fact, fulfill its role as a “model” reasonably well. Not only was the Danube provincial charter used, with minor modifications, as a template for individual provincial charters of new vilayets all over the empire, but it also became the basis for the comprehensive new provincial law (also known as the “Law of the Vilayets”) in 1867. Nor were the “lessons” learned in Ruse limited to the nizamname. Specific bureaucratic regulations that had been developed by Midhat’s administration (dealing, for example, with the duties of certain types of state employees) were also distributed to newly created provinces, and successful policy initiatives, such as the agricultural credit cooperatives and the provincial newspaper, were widely copied. A telegram sent from the Grand

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505 Ibid. By the end of 1865, three additional vilayets were established (Bosnia, Erzurum, and Aleppo), with three more following in 1866 (Damascus, Tripoli, and Edirne), and 13 more in 1867.

506 See, for example, BOA AYN. DEF. 920, p. 6, hüküüm 7 [11 Safer 1283 / 24 June 1866], which refers to the sending of such regulations from the Danube province to the new vilayet of Trablusgarp (present-day Tripoli, Libya).
Vezirate to the Danube province in May of 1867 went as far as to require that all new policy regulations and instructions produced and implemented there be sent to all new vilayets that were about to be created as a result of the promulgation of the 1867 law.\footnote{BOA A.MKT.UM. Dosya 973, Vesika 96 [25 Muharrem 1284 / 29 May 1867].} But as common as this testing and diffusion of reform ideas was, it was not automatic. Some of the policies pioneered under Midhat (for example, the livestock registration scheme described earlier in this chapter) were deemed too difficult to implement everywhere and, consequently, their initial transfer was limited to one or two other “advanced” provinces – typically, Edirne, Bosnia, and occasionally Damascus.\footnote{After its introduction in the Danube province, the livestock registration policy, for example, was only implemented in Edirne and Bosnia, “for the time being.” See BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 36, hüküm 21 [21 Muharrem 1284 / 25 May 1867].} In any case, however, the long-term goal was to use the experience of the Danube province as the basis of future empire-wide policies.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the concept of running “model” or “pilot” versions of proposed reforms loomed large in the new “governmentality” espoused by Midhat and his aides. A model farm (nümûne-i çiftlik) was set up on a plot of land near Ruse personally purchased for that purpose by the governor – it featured modern agricultural machinery, such as steam-driven combines, threshers and grain-mills (all imported from England with funds from the provincial budget) as well as experimental crops such as cotton, rapeseed, and new grape varieties. Midhat’s intention in creating the model farm was that large-scale private landowners in the province would be persuaded to adopt the
machinery and cultivation techniques they would have witnessed there.\textsuperscript{509}

Wherever possible, the administration embarked upon new reform projects by initially limiting their application to one or few “pilot” areas or units. Thus, when the vilayet administrative council received (in January 1868) a petition by some iron-smelters from the city of Samokov asking permission to update their technology to a more efficient one that would allow them to extract more metal from a given amount of ore, it replied by authorizing the building of just one new smelter as a “model” (\textit{nümûne olarak}), with the option to build more if the experiment was deemed a success.\textsuperscript{510}

It seems significant that the initiative for proceeding with certain reform policies in a piecemeal fashion and for relying on the experience of limited implementation and “models” often came from the provincial administration itself, not from the imperial center. The creation of municipal councils (\textit{belediye meclisleri}) in the main cities of the vilayet is a case in point. A general decision to introduce such councils had apparently been made during the 1864 consultations between Midhat, Âli, and Fuat that had led to the establishment of the Danube province. A year later (September 1865), the administrative council of the province passed a resolution to proceed with the creation of \textit{belediyes}, or, to be more precise, of a single \textit{belediye} in Ruse. Although “the time had come” to set up municipal councils in Varna, Constanța, Tulcea, Ruse, Niš, Sofia,


\textsuperscript{510} BOA MÜHİMME DEF. 262, pp. 260-261, hâkûm 843 [10 Şevval 1284 / 4 February 1868].
Vidin, and Tûrnovo, the memorandum argued that, for the time being, only one such council should be appointed because “with the experience gained from one location it would be safer and more appropriate to introduce [belediyes] everywhere else.”

Other institutions whose “trial” beginnings in the Danube province under Midhat led to broader, in may cases empire-wide, implementations included the islahhanes (in 1867 a common statute for future islahhanes in the Ottoman empire was published that was clearly derived from the practices of the institutions of this type islahhanes in the vilayet)\(^\text{512}\); the bilingual provincial newspaper (it became the model for such publications as Zawra in Baghdad, Edime in the eponymous province, and many others);\(^\text{513}\) and the agricultural credit cooperatives (whose success in the Danube province launched spin-offs all over the empire).\(^\text{514}\)

One final characteristic of the notion of “trial” implementation of reform policies during Midhat’s tenure in Ruse deserves mention here. “Trial” or “pilot” projects could often serve as litmus tests for the feasibility or usefulness of “Western” administrative practices in the Ottoman context. It was not enough that a certain policy, institution, or technology had been shown to work elsewhere; it also had to be tested under local conditions as well. This applied

\(^{511}\) evvel emirde bir mahalda tecrübe ile ba’dehu ta’mimi daha münasib ve eslem olacağından. BOA İ.MVL. 24362 [irade: 24 Cemaziülâhir 1282 / 14 November 1865; memorandum of vilayet’s administrative council: 6 Cemaziülevvel 1282 / 27 September 1865].

\(^{512}\) See Kornrumpf, “Islahhaneler,” 150-1.

\(^{513}\) See Mazhdrakova-Chavdarova, “Vestnik Dunav.”

\(^{514}\) Güran, “Ziraî Kredi Politikasının Gelişmesi.”
equally to concrete elements of “modernization” such as agricultural machinery, as it did to intangibles, such as representative institutions. In the abovementioned memorandum on the creation of the belediyes, for example, the vilayet council observed that, while municipal bodies had long existed in Europe (Avrupaca), it would just “not be sufficient to copy their organization in its entirety and in all places here.” The authors of the memorandum attached a much greater weight to the fact that belediyes were “just now beginning to be created in the Sublime State” – and it was this lack of local experience with such institutions that called for a staggered implementation.  

4.6. Casting policy into the language of the Tanzimat

The provincial newspaper, Tuna/Dunav, was the primary venue through which Midhat’s administration could formulate and circulate its narrative of benevolent modernization and promotion of inter-communal harmony. It is easy to dismiss that narrative as crass Tanzimat propaganda, but, at the same time, we should acknowledge the novelty (in the Ottoman context) of the very existence of such a governance technique. To put it another way, whereas in previous decades an Ottoman governor may very well have tried to reassure his superiors in İstanbul (in official correspondence) that the society under his jurisdiction was made up of politically quiescent, willing tax-payers, unlikely to fall

515 E.g. NBKM OO Fond 112, a.e. 204 [6 Receb 1285 / 23 October 1868].
516 See the aforementioned reference to BOA İ.MVL. 24362.
prey to pernicious foreign or secessionist sentiments, now these reassurances were made in a public forum (albeit one completely controlled by the state) and were addressed at least in part to the very members of society whose political behavior and sentiments they purported to describe. Thus Midhat’s administration tried to elicit the compliance of the readers of Tuna/Dunav by assuring them that their peers all over the vilayet were already showing such compliance in droves.

A case in point are the newspaper’s descriptions of the various instances (discussed above) of town and village communities throughout the province providing free labor for the building of the new roads, bridges, telegraph lines, urban redesign projects, etc. Common sense (and some documentary evidence) suggests that the labor “donations” in question were the result of government pressure on local communal leaders and even outright withholding of the legally prescribed workers’ wages. But the articles in Tuna/Dunav portray such episodes in a very different light – they are presented as proof-positive evidence of Midhat’s subjects’ “joyful” support of the administration’s policies.\textsuperscript{517} And, the articles made sure to emphasize, such “joyful” compliance was not always simply a matter of personal or economic self-interest: “love of the fatherland” (otechestvena liubov) might equally induce the people of the vilayet to build a levy protecting their town from the Danube floods as well as less immediately

\textsuperscript{517} E.g. in Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 99 [14/26 August 1866] and in other articles quoted above.
utilitarian structures such as government headquarters or prisons.\footnote{These examples are taken from a report on the progress of the infrastructural works in the Tulcea region, published in \textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 2, no. 135 [18/30 December 1866]. The citizens of Hirsova are even said to have "petitioned" the government to allow them to repair (for free) the administrative building in their town which had become "ruined and dilapidated."} Furthermore, even when they needed the (initial) “encouragement” of local authorities, the people could typically be counted upon to appreciate the fruit of their labor after it was completed. The citizens of Sulina and Chilia\footnote{Nowadays Chilia Veche in Romania.} in the Danube delta might have been slow to warm up to the idea of building a raised \textit{chaussée} through the swamps separating their towns, but, once they had built it, they “became grateful and happy and began praying for God to grant a long life to Our Tsar [Sultan] and Sovereign.”\footnote{\textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 2, no. 135 [18/30 December 1866]} The services provided by the \textit{vilayet}’s population at large to accommodate Tatar and Circassian immigrants were likewise trumpeted from the pages of \textit{Tuna/Dunav} as evidence of the existence of an “exemplary public spirit” among Midhat’s subjects.

Textual formulation of policy also tended to change as it moved up the ladder of the provincial bureaucracy. In general, officials in the lower and middle echelons of the \textit{vilayet}’s administration appear to have been more constrained by the requirement to “speak \textit{Tanzimat}” than their colleagues at the highest levels – especially when the latter had to submit policy proposals for approval by İstanbul. It is occasionally possible to trace the discursive evolution of a given policy initiative as it moved up the system. For example, in the fall of 1864, the \textit{mutasarrif} of Vidin asked the treasury for a grant of 20,000 piastres to build a
mosque, a school, and a police station in a new village that was being constructed for the Circassian immigrants to the Belogradchik kaza. The village was to be named Osmaniye and its 250 houses were being built gratis by the inhabitants of the kaza. The mutasarrif described the importance of the village in the following way:

The aforementioned village’s location is exceedingly fine and distinguished. Since it lies on the main route through which bands of brigands pass hither from Serbia, the building of such a village on such a spot would bring about numerous advantages and would completely ensure the security of [all] the inhabitants of the kaza.\(^{521}\)

The Meclis-i Vâlâ in İstanbul reviewed the proposal and approved it. But, in drafting their own memorandum on the issue (the memorandum that was submitted for final approval by the Sultan), the members of that body rephrased the mutasarrif’s original narrative in a number of significant ways:

According to this communication [the mutasarrif’s letter], the aforementioned village will be located at the main passageway to Serbia and, therefore, it would be of great benefit to assemble and settle down such an Islamic entity (heyet-i İslâmiye) there. For their part, the services and help of the kaza inhabitants [who built the houses of the new village free of charge] can be seen as a propitious sign of two things. First, the settled population feels a sense of citizens’ solidarity (vatandaşlık) emerging between themselves and those who have sought refuge under the all-merciful shadow of our august Sovereign [i.e., the Circassian immigrants] and is happy about that, and, second, the settled population’s attitude towards their government and country is one of most perfect patriotism (hamiyet) and loyalty (sadakat).\(^{522}\)

\(^{521}\) BOA İ.MVL. 23336, lef. 2 [25 Rabiülevvel 1281 / 28 August 1864].
\(^{522}\) BOA İ.MVL. 23336, lef. 1 [8 Cemaziülevvel /9 October 1864].
What started, in other words, as a relatively straightforward Realpolitik explanation of the importance of the new village at the local level was retold as a triumphalist panegyric of the state of interethnic/interfaith harmony that allegedly existed in the region.

The “correct” use of reformist language was also extremely important in describing the attitudes of the “people” (ahali) towards the Ottoman government in general and towards the Tanzimat reforms in particular. State-produced memoranda typically paint a rosy picture of ahali enthusiastically embracing reforms and being fully conscious of the long-term policy goals behind these reforms. Consider, for example, the already mentioned three local proposals for the establishment of public companies to finance the building of a hotel in Varna, the importation of agricultural machinery in the Dobrogea, and the creation of a sugar factory in Sofia. Each of these had started as a very practical economic proposal, evidently pushed by local elite groups looking for a solid investment and the opportunity to make a quick profit. Yet, when the central government approved these proposals, it recast their apolitical, dollars-and-sense discourse into a glowing account of popular self-identification with the imperial reform program in general:

The tendency and inclination of the people (ahali) of the province to want to establish such companies are a much appreciated sign of their approval of the beneficial and praiseworthy measures and efforts to improve the economic foundations of the province and to increase its general progress.\(^{523}\)

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\(^{523}\) BOA AYN. DEF. 920, p. 68, Hüküm 63 [3 Ramazan 1284 / 29 December 1867].
Just as instructive as the instances when the provincial administration chose to use the language of the Tanzimat were those few occasions when it failed to do so. An example of the latter course can be provided here by a discussion of an announcement produced in the vilayet’s printing press in January 1868 that describes in some detail the functions of the new village headmen (muhtar) and village “Councils of Elders” (İhtiyar meclisi) and the procedures for their election.\(^{524}\) The document – representing the provisions of the 1864 vilayet nizamname, as Midhat’s administration chose to communicate them to its non-elite subjects – reveals some subtle, yet telling shifts in emphasis and language relative to the Urtext, as well as some key omissions. An attempt to summarize these differences has been made in the following two paragraphs.

The announcement, not surprisingly, spent a lot of time explaining the mechanics of the election process – who can vote, who can be elected, can the meclis members and mayors be re-elected, even what “electing” itself means (i.e., explaining that if ten people want candidate A and eight people do not want him, then candidate A is elected). Yet, it failed to mention the nizamname’s provision for specific property qualifications for voting and running for office (50 piastres in yearly taxes to vote; 100 piastres in yearly taxes to be elected). Instead, the announcement declared that those elected had to be “of good and decent character” – an altogether different line from the official legal requirement

\(^{524}\) DAR Fond 59, Opis 1, a.e. 102, p. 91 [1/13 January 1868]. This document is in Bulgarian, but it must also have been produced and distributed in Ottoman Turkish as well.
which simply stated that they should have “ties” to the village. A more significant departure from the text of the law was made in those sections of the announcement dealing with the role of ihtiyar meclisi members in the elections of higher (kaza) level meclis representatives. While the 1864 nizamname had again used the “ties-to-the-village” formula to describe the individuals who were eligible for election to the kaza meclis es, the 1868 announcement was much more specific – it instructed village council members that only the names of local “ağas and chorbadzhii” (Muslim and non-Muslim notables, respectively) ought to be put on the electoral lists they were expected to draft. This was a pretty clear indication of the kind of meclis members the government preferred to see elected – the possibility of suggesting individuals who fell outside of these two categories (but might conceivably have “ties to the village”) was not even mentioned.

The announcement was also fairly short in describing the functions of the new village headmen and councils, emphasizing their fiscal role (such as tax-collection and tax-distribution) and their disciplinary functions as intermediaries between the state and village society – it stressed, for example, the obligation of the headmen and village meclises to convey administrative orders and prohibitions to villagers “without delay” and to make sure such orders were duly obeyed. Largely missing from the text of the announcement, however, (but prominent in the nizamname) were a set of provisions for what we may call rudimentary village self-government. For instance, according to the nizamname, the ihtiyar meclises would have legal arbitration authority (in cases of civil

\footnote{karyede ashâb-i alâkadan}
disputes not serious enough to be addressed by a court), but this is barely hinted at in the announcement. The announcement was also completely silent about a provision in the *nizamname* that specifically extended that arbitration authority of the village councils to cases of inter-confessional disputes.\footnote{526} In the same vein, the announcement mentioned, in passing, that the headmen and village *meclises* should carry out “things useful to the village, should there be any,” but failed to inform the villagers of the *nizamname*’s well-defined procedure for calling up all members of the village councils in a given locality (regardless of religion) to discuss “matters of importance to the entire village in the municipal and agricultural sphere.”\footnote{527} Both of these provisions, if implemented, would have resulted in acts of communal political activity that, however limited in scope, would at least have included all confessional groups in ethnically mixed villages and *mahalles* and would have created some semblance of a public sphere that transcended religious divides—and was not that one of the stated objectives of *Osmanlılık*? But instead of promoting the provisions of the law that may have advanced that objective, Midhat’s administration emphasized those functions of the new local government structures that remained clearly segregated along confessional lines (e.g. tax collection) or that were confined to the sphere of maintaining law and order or carrying out government initiatives and prohibitions.

The misrepresentation of the provisions of the 1864 *nizamname* that is reflected in this document is too extensive and unidirectional to have been accidental. Without making too much of it, we can speculate that the fact that the

\footnote{526}{1864 *nizamname*, Article 64.}
\footnote{527}{Ibid.}
administration failed to “speak Tanzimat” on such a delicate point appears to cast a shadow of a doubt over the sincerity of its reformist rhetoric.

4.7. Self-financed progress

The 1860’s were a time of severe fiscal and monetary crisis for the Ottoman state. The Crimean war had proved financially disastrous for two reasons. First, the need to finance the war expenditures forced the Ottoman government to expand dramatically its earlier experiment with paper money (kaime) as a means of internal borrowing. Predictably, the flooding of the market with kaime led to its steep devaluation. After yet another large emission was issued in 1861, the market price of paper money fell as low as a quarter of its nominal value. In 1862, the resulting protests forced the Ottoman government to launch an emergency program for retiring the existing kaime. While the penetration of kaime in the provinces had remained rather limited, retiring the remaining amount of paper money was among the economic priorities of Midhat’s administration.

Another major economic problem faced by the Ottoman government during the 1860’s was the empire’s unmanageable foreign debt. By the second half of the decade, the Ottomans were borrowing merely in order to keep up with the repayments of previously contracted loans. That the empire would soon default

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528 The program was financed with loans from the Anglo-French Imperial Ottoman Bank. See Şevket Pamuk, A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 209-11.
on its loans was clear to most contemporary observers. Attempts to curb external borrowing were constantly undertaken during Midhat’s time in office. It was inevitable that the Danube province, regardless of its flagship status in the vilayet world, would suffer some negative impact from the policy of fiscal austerity that prevailed in Ottoman finances since early 1866. While during his first one-and-a-half years in Ruse, Midhat appears to have been given a green light in money matters, beginning in the summer of 1866 that fiscal lenience was reversed and the governor found himself under severe pressure to curb expenses and to conduct reforms “on the cheap.” It seems that the June 5, 1866, elevation of Mütercim Mehmet Rüştü Paşa to the Grand Vezirate and the simultaneous appointment of Kibrisli Mehmet Paşa (Midhat’s old enemy) to the chairmanship of the Supreme Council of Judicial Ordinances (Meclis-i Vâlâ-yı Ahkâm-ı Adliye) played a major part in this change of policy. Whereas under the previous cabinet (that of Fuat Paşa, Midhat’s patron and the co-author of the vilayet reform) the budget of the Danube province appears to have been sheltered from the empire’s financial turmoil, now it had to bear the full brunt of the economic austerity policies pursued by the Imperial center.

529 Ibid., 213-4.
530 For example, by the government of Mütercim Mehmet Rüştü Paşa (1866-1867), whose circular letters to the provinces had expressly rejected further foreign borrowing as a means to balance the imperial budget. See BOA AYN. DEF. 920 pp. 11-12 [23 Rabiülevvel 1283 / 5 August 1866].
531 The appointment of Kibrisli Mehmet was part of a government reshuffle in İstanbul that included the replacement of Grand Vezir Fuat Paşa with Mütercim Mehmet Rüştü Paşa. For the date, see Mehmet Seytdanlioğlu, Tanzimat Devrinde Meclis-i Vâlâ (1838-1868), 2 ed. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1999), 202.
There were early warning signs that the days of abundant funding for reform projects would soon come to an end. As early as December 1865, for example, a memorandum from the Grand Vezirate cautioned Midhat and the kaymakams of the seven sancaks to curb the enthusiasm of “some civil servants” who would propose the construction of all sorts of new government buildings in the cities. In the past, the Grand Vezirate wrote, such overzealous modernizers had made their case of how important this or that proposed building would be. In the present regime of budgetary economies (tasarruf), however, the central government vowed to keep spending proposals on a tight leash. It ordered that no new construction be initiated if there was no established need for it (as verified by the Ministry of Public Works) and advised the provincial authorities to freeze construction on all current building projects, except for the most urgent repair works.\textsuperscript{532}

Similar cuts of funding for future reform projects became almost chronic during Midhat’s last few years in Ruse. But more was at stake than money for new construction – on several occasions the salaries of some or all vilayet officials were reduced (sometimes drastically) due to the budgetary squeeze and the lack of cash in the Imperial Treasury. One particularly strong impulse towards fiscal “tightening” came in the summer of 1866. In a series of memoranda during that period, the empire’s Supreme Council (Meclis-i Vâlâ) urged all regional governors, and Midhat Paşa in particular, to suggest what could be done to decrease government spending as much as possible without,

\textsuperscript{532} NBKM OO Fond 26, a.e. 4039 [28 Receb 1281 / 17 December 1865].
though, “contradicting the provisions of the Provincial statute.” Such orders from İstanbul were clearly a source of considerable friction between the provincial and central levels. One letter from the Grand Vezirate to Midhat expressed dismay that the governor had replied to the original order to cut costs by “becoming sad and dispirited.” In particularly sharp terms (by the sanitized standards of Ottoman diplomatic correspondence), the central government reminded Midhat that, from time to time, the Supreme Council might take decisions that would be contrary to his wishes, but that this was no reason for the governor to neglect his duties. The letter also stated that the Council’s decision had not been motivated by any “personal animosity” against Midhat, but rather by reasons of state – a clear reference to the recent appointment of Kibrislî Mehmet Paşa as chair of the Meclis-i Vâlâ. Eventually, after a heated written exchange and the sending of a special emissary from İstanbul to Ruse, Midhat agreed to cut expenses in the province by about 3,250 purses (1,625,000 piastres) per annum. Assuming (conservatively) that the base for this reduction was the 30,000 purses figure estimated as the total administrative, 

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533 BOA AYN.DEF. 920 pp. 11-12 [23 Rabiülevvel 1283 / 5 August 1866].
534 BOA AYN.DEF. 920 p. 11 [6 Rabiülevvel 1283 / 19 July 1866].
535 That emissary was a certain Süleyman Bey, an officer of the military police. Apparently, he was sent to Rusçuk in mid-August 1866 in order to pressure Midhat into reducing the number of the provincial police officers in the vilayet. Midhat had earlier (August 4, 1866) rejected that course of action (even while he grudgingly accepted some reductions in the salaries of administrative officials, including himself). In the end, after what must have been a considerable amount of arm-twisting, Midhat agreed (August 19, 1866) to eliminate just two companies (200 people or about 6%) of the police personnel in the province. See BOA İ.MMHS. 1317, lef. 1 [18 Rabiülâhir 1282 / 30 August 1866].
536 Ibid.
legal, and policing outlays for the Danube province at the time of its creation\textsuperscript{537} (i.e. assuming that the provincial government apparatus had not grown at all between 1864 and 1866), this represented an almost 11% contraction in provincial expenses. Understandably, such budget cuts severely restricted the ability of the provincial government to pursue its reform programs.

More salary cuts were in stock for the vilayet’s officials in March 1867. At that time, as part of an empire-wide measure to reduce the budget deficit, the salaries of all employees of the Finance Ministry who made less than 10,000 piastres per month were reduced “temporarily” by one sixth. In the Danube province, these salary reductions impacted all employees of the vilayet’s cadastral office (Defter-i Hakanî), including land surveyors and title deed scribes.\textsuperscript{538}

Yet another round of budgetary tightening that undoubtedly placed a great strain on Midhat’s efforts to build an efficient and loyal provincial bureaucratic apparatus came just a few months later. In June 1867 the governor received (and reluctantly implemented) an order from İstanbul to reduce the salaries and pensions of all civil servants. The reductions were not trivial – bureaucrats making under 10,000 piastres per month would see their salaries cut by one-sixth (17%); those making between 10,000 and 20,000, by one-fifth (20%); and those making over 20,000, by one-fourth (25%).\textsuperscript{539}

All this, of course, meant that, in his later years, Midhat frequently had to devise schemes for “self-financing” his reform projects – in other words, he and

\textsuperscript{537} See BOA İ.MMHS. 1245 [11 Cemaziülevvel 1281 /13 October 1864] and note 93 to this chapter below.

\textsuperscript{538} NBKM OO Fond 112A, a.e. 529 [30 Muharrem 1284 / 3 June 1867].

\textsuperscript{539} NBKM OO Fond 26, a.e. 4027 [8 Safer 1284 / 11 June 1867].
his advisors in Ruse had to find ways of passing the costs of many reform proposals onto the vilayet’s inhabitants. The most common way of achieving that goal was to introduce new (usually small) taxes and fees for a whole host of economic and personal activities that had previously remained “untapped” as sources of revenue. Consider, for example, the proposal to establish the vilayet’s first belediye in Ruse in the fall of 1865. As it turns out, the funds for the new organization’s operating budget would come almost exclusively from newly designated local sources – for instance, from a fraction of the fees collected for allowing new building construction in the cities according to a new Building Regulation (ebniye nizamnamesi); from a two-piastre surcharge on the passport and exit visa fees paid by travelers passing through the port of Ruse; from a new fee collected from the city’s butchers (whose shops would be relocated outside the city in an easily monitored slaughterhouse), and so on.\(^\text{540}\) Or consider the aforementioned 1867 proposal for the appointment of road guardians (yol bekçileri) – the funds for the salaries of these 200 or so new state employees would not be paid by the Imperial Treasury in İstanbul, but would be raised by the levying of a small (one piastre per household) new fee, payable annually.\(^\text{541}\) Likewise, when the vilayet’s Provincial General Assembly discussed the proposal to import agricultural machines and tools from western Europe in 1868, it did not ask the Treasury for a grant to cover the costs – instead, it observed that the capital of the vilayet’s credit cooperatives had risen to a level high enough to allow the necessary sum to be “borrowed” from there. Borrowed, that is,

\(^{540}\) BOA İ. MVL. 24362 [24 Cemaziülâhir 1282 / 13 November 1865].
\(^{541}\) BOA İ. MVL. 25981 [3 Cemaziülâhir 1284 / 2 October 1867]
because the PGA also suggested that the new machines (and the services of their operators) should be rented out to interested farmers for a fee, until such time that the money spent on the machines’ purchase (and the training for the operators) could be recouped. Only after the new machines had thus “paid for themselves” would they be auctioned off to individuals willing to keep them in good working order and operating within the kaza borders.\footnote{NBKM OO Fond 112, a.e. 204 [6 Receb 1285 / 23 October 1868].} The new monetary fines (ceza-yi nakdiye) that were discussed earlier in this chapter also provided a convenient pool of capital that could be tapped for reform projects. In February 1866, for example, funds from accumulated fines were used to provide clothing for prisoners in Vidin and Niš;\footnote{BOA İ.MVL. 24680, lef. 2 [15 Ramazan 1282 / 1 February 1866].} in March 1868, such funds were being used to finance (in part) the building of an entirely new prison inside the fortress of Vidin.\footnote{BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 80 [15 Zilkade 1284 / 9 March 1868].}

One rather creative scheme that the vilayet’s administration used time and again to secure funding for its policies was to “self-finance” certain aspects of its reform projects and then to claim that the resulting “savings” ought to be spent locally, rather than remitted back to the Imperial Treasury. In March of 1865, for instance, the provincial government informed the Ministry of Finance that it had received about 1.2 million piastres’ worth of “voluntary donations” from the population of the sancak of Sofia in connection with the settlement of Circassian immigrants (muhacir) in the region.\footnote{On the Tatar and Circassian migrations, see Chapter 7.} The “donations” were in the form of houses built gratis; grains, firewood, and domestic animals provided to the...
muhacirs at no cost; and “unclaimed” reimbursement for transportation expenses. Since the same amount of funds – 1.2 million piastres – had previously been transferred from the Imperial Treasury to the vilayet’s budget (in expectation that the costs for the settlement of the muhacirs would have to be paid in full), one would have expected that these funds would now be returned back to the center. But this is not what happened – in fact, Midhat’s government was able to convince the Ministry of Finance that the “savings” should be split, with one million going back to the treasury and 200,000 being allocated to cover the cost of a spate of sundry reform projects in Sofia (the building of a hospital and a new public bath, the paving and repair of city streets, etc).546

The same “creative accounting” technique also came in handy when Midhat’s administration was trying to ward off demands for personnel reductions in 1866-1867. For example, one of the curious line items on a list of proposed budget reductions penned by the vilayet’s accounting department under pressure from İstanbul, concerned the salaries of land deed officials (arazi memurleri). The entire amount that had previously been paid to such officials (12,900 piastres per month or 154,800 piastres per year) was now cut out of the budget and claimed as “savings” that the provincial administration had realized. But does that mean that there was no one left in the province to issue the population with land title deeds? Not at all; in fact, a note in the document reveals that neither the number of arazi memurleri in the province nor their salaries would actually be reduced – they would simply be paid from the “document fees” (varaka bahası) they

546 BOA İ.D. 37050 [17 Şevval 1281 / 15 March 1865].
collected from those wishing to obtain a deed. All this, of course, amounted to little more than robbing Peter to pay Paul as far as the empire’s finances as a whole were concerned (presumably the “document fees” in question would have been payable into the Imperial Treasury anyway, so their appropriation to pay the salaries of the title deed officials simply shifted the financial burden from one revenue source to another). But it was nevertheless a technique that Midhat’s administration was able to use surprisingly often. In March of 1866, it informed the Meclis-i Vâlâ that it intended to reduce the number of state-employed tax collectors (tahsildar) in the province by a third (from 280 to 190), arguing that the practice of contracting private tax collectors (mültezim) obviated the need for keeping that many tahsildars on the government’s payroll. But that did not mean that the funds “economized” through the reduction in the number of tahsildars would go back to İstanbul – instead, the vilayet’s administration proposed that they be used to hire more police “inspectors” (teftiş memurleri) throughout the province as well as increase the salaries of a number of low-ranking provincial officials.

The upshot of all these external pressures and internal efforts to “self-finance” and implement reforms “on the cheap” was that the financial burden of all but a small fraction of Midhat’s reform policies was placed squarely on the shoulders of the vilayet’s “ordinary” people. It is true that the creation of the Danube province itself was a costly undertaking for the imperial budget – the new expanded bureaucracy of the vilayet was projected to be about 43% more expensive than

547 BOA İ.MMHS. 1317, lef. 5 [18 Rabiülâhir 1282 / 30 August 1866]].
548 BOA İ.MVL. 24630, lef. 1 [24 Şevval 1282 / 11 March 1866].
the combined bureaucracies of the three former eyalets that it would replace, and, when increased expenses for the salaries of Midhat's new police force are taken into account, that figure was likely to be even higher. Still, the day-to-day costs of reforms that were covered by the state were very small: financial audits of the papers of several sancaks performed by vilayet's accounting department in the spring of 1867 revealed that the amount of “extra-budgetary expenses” incurred was less than one per cent of all government expenses/revenues. The rest was paid by the population – in the form of new taxes and fees, “foregone” payments for labor services performed, or direct contributions to government fund-raising campaigns.

549 BOA İ.MMHS. 1245 [11 Cemaziülevvel 1281 / 13 October 1864]. The combined salary expenses for the three eyalets had been 6.4 million piastres per year; the projected salary expenses for the new vilayet were 9.175 million piastres per year.

550 This was a category that included all kinds of administrative expenses, other than those earmarked for officials’ salaries and military appropriations; it can, therefore, be loosely equated with the cost of reforms.

551 In the sancak of Niš, expenses associated with reform policies amounted to slightly over 46,750 piastres for the fiscal (rumî) year 1282 (March 1866-March 1867); the total expenses and disbursements for the same period were 9,009,800 piastres. In the sancak of Varna, reform-related “extra-budgetary” expenses for the rumî months of Kanun-i Sani and Şubat 1282 (13 Jan –12 Mar 1867) were a mere 10,867 piastres, out of 1,277,800 piastres of total expenses/disbursements. See NBKM OO Fond 112, a.e. 5240 [9 Cemaziülevvel 1284 / 8 September 1867]; NBKM OO Fond 112, a.e. 1343 [25 Haziran 1283 / 7 July 1867].
CHAPTER 5: THE BULGARIAN PRO-IMPERIAL ELITES

5.1. A nation of traitors?

The theme of betrayal occupies a prominent place in Bulgarian national consciousness and historiography. The belated (by Balkan standards) development of Bulgarian nationalism and the rather modest scope of dramatic revolutionary action generated by Bulgarian nationalists against the Ottoman state have all too often been attributed, at least in part, to the insidious actions of “traitors.” Traitor history is, predictably, a reductionist and masochistic genre which demonizes any and all behavior opposed to the Bulgarian national cause as contrary to one’s “natural” group loyalties. What is more, traitor history regards not only the predilection for betrayal but also a host of other anti-qualities, such as treachery, small-mindedness, servility and political quietism as hallmarks of a putative Bulgarian “national character” and, just as importantly, as legacies of the Ottoman period in Bulgarian history. Traitors have been called “the purest product of [Ottoman] imperial policy” and symptoms of the “slave mentality” that had allegedly afflicted the Bulgarian national psyche during centuries of oppression at the hand of the Turk.552 Homegrown traitors have

552 See, for example, Simeon Ianev, “Edin ‘nравствен’ fenomen v bûlgarskata istoriia,” in Panteon na chernoto bezsmûrtie: predateli i predatelstva v bûlgarskata istoriia, ed. Toncho Zhechev and Elena Grozdanova (Sofia: Bûlgarski pisatel, 1993). Virtually every problem of modern Bulgarian society
been blamed for the failure of abortive anti-Ottoman revolts in 1835, 1856, 1868, 1875, and 1876. In fact, during the first decades after the establishment of the Bulgarian principality (1878), accusing one’s opponents of having betrayed this or that “national hero” during Ottoman times became a common tool of character assassination. One recent study revealed that no less than forty-six different individuals have, at one time or another, been accused of having betrayed Vasil Levski (executed by the Ottoman authorities in 1873) in dozens of fabricated scenarios.  

The 1884 publication of Zakhari Stoianov’s celebrated memoir Zapiski po búlgarskite vûstaniia (Notes on the Bulgarian uprisings), marked a milestone in the development of the discourse of traitor history in its Bulgarian incarnation. The Zapiski’s lasting impact arguably lay in Stoianov’s claim that the post-1868 autonomous Bulgarian nation-state had been taken over by those who had played no part in the events that led up to its establishment, while the real national “heroes” had been sidelined and forgotten. The idea had an obvious and immediate appeal to a wide variety of individuals and constituencies in the

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553 Dimitûr Panchovski, Predatelite na Vasil Levski (Sofia: Litera Prima, 1996).
554 In the introduction to the first volume, for example, Stoianov challenges “those prudent devotees of common sense” who dismiss the “revolutionaries” as irresponsible hotheads, to quote a single example of their lives as members of the Ottoman elite in which they had shown even the smallest element of “self-sacrifice” and “heroism.” “We admit (Stoianov writes), that Their Honors were practical people, who knew the value of their soul, labored day and night so they could leave something to their children and grandchildren, and were good Christians, but their entire lives, with some minor exceptions, revolved around the well-being of their own gut.” Stoianov, Zapiski, vol. 1, 10-1.
1880’s, who felt they had been left out of the power structures of the new state. In effect, the Zapiski problematized (and politicized) the issue of pre-1878 Bulgarian elites and their overwhelming lack of support for the nationalists’ cause.

The current chapter takes up the theme of elites and their relationship to the nation-building project by assuming that pro-imperial and anti-nationalist views and behavior exhibited by ethnic Bulgarians in the late Ottoman empire constituted an act of rational political choice. This, in other words, is an attempt to analyze the politics of pro-imperial groups without a reference to the analytically vacuous categories of betrayal and national psyche. Trailblazing attempts in this direction have been made by Georgi Pletn’ov and, more recently, by Milena Stefanova and Mikhail Grûncharov. Such works contribute to the broader re-evaluation of the legacy of the late Ottoman period in the Balkans, which is currently under way. Yet, virtually all recent works on pro-imperial elites in Ottoman Bulgaria have focused on the traditional notables (chorbadzhii). Important as the notables were, they constituted but one sub-section of the pro-imperial Bulgarian elites; other groups, such as the native Bulgarian bureaucrats in the Ottoman civil service and the pro-imperial Bulgarian intelligentsia, were just

555 Characteristically, Stoianov was later given a prominent role in the commission that investigated individual claims to pobornik (veteran of the “national liberation” movement) status.
556 See Georgi Pletn’ov, Chorbadzhite i bûlgarskata natsionalna revoliutsiia (Veliko Tûrnovo: Velikotûrnovski universitet “Kiril i Metodii,” 1987); Stefanova, Kniga za bûlgarskite chorbadzhii; Grûncharov, Chorbadziisti voto.
557 See Adanir and Faroqhi, “Ottomans and the Balkans.” On the economy, see Palairet, Balkan Economies. On urban and social issues, see Lory, Le sort de l’héritage ottoman en Bulgarie.
as important but have not received a fair shake in the historiography. As a corrective, the rest of this chapter will examine the career paths and the sociopolitical outlook of selected representatives of each of these three groups – *chorbadzhii*, bureaucrats, and intellectuals – during the 1860’s and 1870’s. We will then trace the strategic shift of allegiance from empire to nation that many members of these groups underwent in 1877-1878 (when the collapse of the Ottoman political framework became imminent) and will conclude the chapter by analyzing the legacy of the former anti-nationalists to the Bulgarian nation state.

It should be mentioned at the outset that this chapter’s focus on the elites is not meant to suggest that their political views ought to be given greater credence than the views of the non-elites. In fact, the question of how “ordinary” men and women in the Danube province responded to Midhat Paşa’s reform policies is of paramount importance to this study. The political outlook of the non-elites (so far as it can be gleaned from the records of the new *nizamî* courts) shall be addressed in the next chapter.

### 5.2. New opportunities: Aleksandûr Exarch

The career of Aleksandûr Stoilov Boioğlu is emblematic of the new opportunities that the *Tanzimat* era brought to members of the native Bulgarian elites within the empire, as well as of the complex ideological evolution that such opportunities could inspire. Born circa 1810 in a well-to-do family in Stara...
Zagora, Aleksandûr took on the religious title *Exarch*, claiming (apparently fraudulently) that it was an epithet used by his ancestors. An initial education in Bucharest and travel to Vienna, Budapest, and Munich led Exarch to a stint in Paris, where he studied first mathematics and then (as a holder of an Ottoman government grant), medicine. There, in what appeared to be the classical scenario of “imbibing” Western ideas in preparation for “transmitting” them to the “East,” the young Bulgarian immersed himself in the intellectual life of the French capital, becoming a minor figure on the *salon* circuit and establishing particularly close ties with members of the Polish *émigré* community, including Prince Czartoryski. Exarch’s contacts soon cost him his stipend and, in 1841, he volunteered to become a guide and translator to Adolphe-Jérôme Blanqui, a French economist sent to assess the causes and consequences of the Niš peasant revolt on 1840. Upon the completion of that mission, Exarch returned to Paris and began lobbying European governments to intervene in support of the Bulgarians in the Ottoman empire. The Polish exiles apparently had not left a lasting impression on Exarch, since he now (1847) wrote a letter to the Russian emperor (whom he called “the image of God on Earth” and a “modern redeemer”), offering his services as a paid promoter of Russia’s interests in the

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558 See Iliia Todev, ed., *Koi koi e sred bûlgarite XV-XIX v.: 501 imena ot epokhata na osmanskoto vladichesvo* (Sofia: Anubis, 2000), s.v. “Ekzarkh, Aleksandûr,” 98-9. During Aleksandûr’s early career, before the title *Exarch* became associated with the top cleric of the autocephalous Bulgarian church, it was commonly used to refer to the Bishop of Tûrnovo.

559 Some of the petitions and memoranda written by Exarch are preserved in his private papers in the National Library in Sofia – see NBKM BIA II A 5484; II A 5485 (letters to emperor Nicholas 1); II A 5508 (to Queen Victoria); II A 5496; II A 5619 (to Âli and Reşit Paşa respectively).
Balkans. As a Bulgarian from a “distinguished family,” Exarch wrote, he would be able to liaise with the Porte on all issues concerning the Bulgarian population of the empire, channel all Russian aid to the Bulgarian lands (such as church books and utensils), and establish a printing press in İstanbul that could be used to Russia’s advantage. At this point, Exarch’s long-term political goals clearly involved an all-inclusive Balkan federation under a Russian aegis.\footnote{NBKM BIA II A 5485, p. 14.} He did not get the proposed all-embracing powers as the spearhead of Russian diplomacy in the Balkans, but he did receive a grant to open the printing press in İstanbul, where he settled in 1848 and began publishing a newspaper.\footnote{Tsarigradski vestnik (1848-1863) – one of the first Bulgarian periodicals and the longest-lived one prior to 1878.} That, however, turned out to be the most radical point on Exarch’s political trajectory – his newspaper became known for its decidedly non-radical, sedate journalism (although it did espouse the demands for an independent Bulgarian church), and his newly-found loyalty to the Ottoman empire was recognized both by his Bulgarian associates and by the growing circle of his high-level Ottoman patrons. In the late 1850’s, for example, he developed and submitted to the Porte an educational reform project calling for the creation of unified schools for children of all Ottoman religions and nationalities. If they shared the same desks and listened to the same lessons, Exarch argued, the children would be able to “free themselves from national and racial prejudice” and would “strengthen the Ottoman empire and send it on the road to civilization.”\footnote{Quoted in Dimitrov, “Opiti za denatsionalizatsiia,” 379.}
Just how far Exarch’s political views had changed can be seen by a proposal he wrote in 1860 to the Grand Vezir Reşit Paşa on the question of how better to secure the loyalties of the Bulgarian subjects of the empire. This proposal was still radical – it spoke, for instance, of the need for an elected Ottoman parliament and an army open to Christians (neither demand was realized until the end of the Tanzimat period) – but it was radical in a politically constructive way. Whereas in his 1847 letter to the Russian emperor Exarch had essentially pledged his support for the cause of hastening the destruction of the Ottoman empire, the 1860 proposal asked for the more effective implementation of the Tanzimat reforms. Many of the proposals Exarch communicated to the Grand Vezir in 1860 – equal representation of Christians in the court system, equal access to all civil posts, equal opportunities for admission to the Imperial professional schools, etc. – were not inimical to the priorities of the Ottoman reformers like Midhat and Fuat Paşas; indeed, most of these proposals would soon be written into the 1864 Statute of the Danube province. Even more significantly, Exarch’s 1860 letter also included (just as his education reform proposal had done) an impassioned defense of what was arguably the central goal of Ottoman reform – the transcending of ethnic/national animosities and the forging of a viable imperial supra-ethnic identity (Osmanlılık):

When a man comes to this earth, he does so neither as a Turk, nor as a Bulgarian, Albanian, Greek, Jew, or Armenian – he is in the state in which God created him, namely, a man; and it is only the sentiments that his mother teaches him that inspire him to become a Turk, Bulgarian, Albanian, Jew, or Armenian. He has both vices and virtues in his heart, and it is through education that he’ll learn to suppress
the former and practice the latter. Now, Turkey today is composed of its different races which hurl themselves against each other only because of their individual ingrained prejudices, hatreds, repulsions, and fanaticisms. If there is to be a real fusion of interests, of country, of independence, of nationality, it is the duty of the Sublime Porte to research the means to eliminate all the causes of mutual isolation and, by calming down the separatist sentiments, achieve, in the end, one indivisible nationality.\footnote{NBKM BIA II A 5492, page 8.}

Aleksandër Exarch’s ideological evolution is not understandable from within the teleological paradigm of the “emergence” of Bulgarian nationalism. It cannot simply be discounted as a middle-age “de-radicalization,” for it must be remembered that during his “radical” years, Exarch was well into his late 30’s – certainly considered a “mature” age by nineteenth-century standards. It seems reasonable to assume, instead, that in his turning away from nationalist ideas and towards pro-imperial ones, Exarch was responding to the changing political and economic realities of the early 1860’s. The end of the Crimean war in the Ottoman Balkans had brought about not only the temporary ebb of Russian power, but also an economic upturn and an increased level of security and central government control of the countryside. This was also the period when members of the Bulgarian elite, such as Exarch, became the recipients of very real opportunities (both for enhancing their social standing and for plain old enrichment) – afforded to them by the implementation of the \textit{Tanzimat} reforms. Exarch appears to have put his printing press to good commercial use, when he secured (perhaps in 1868) a government contract to print Bulgarian prayer books.
for distribution to all churches in the Danube province.\textsuperscript{564} In 1869 or 1870, Exarch joined the growing number of ethnic Bulgarians employed in the Ottoman civil service and was appointed secretary of the Ottoman embassy in Paris. A letter he wrote from there (to an unknown addressee) illustrates the complete transformation of his political views since his mission as Blanqui’s translator – from a wholehearted supporter of the Bulgarian insurgents in 1841-42, Exarch had become an adamant opponent to any nationalist revolutionary activity, having, for instance, this to say on the topic of the 1867 and 1868 Bulgarian \textit{cheti} and their attempt to foment an anti-Ottoman revolt:

\begin{quote}
Two years ago, in Rusçuk, our nation showed its brave rejection of the foreign influences and the rebellious insinuations of certain criminals [i.e. the \textit{cheti}]. Glory is due to Midhat Pasha who has worked so hard for the betterment of the Danube \textit{vilayet} – in this case too he wisely and perceptively foresaw the great evil that was about to befall us and that could potentially bring great harm to the country.\textsuperscript{565}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{564} NBKM BIA II A 761. This a letter from the Bulgarian communal organization (\textit{obshtina}) in Ruse to its counterpart in Razgrad dated July 21, 1868. The letter mentions that 1,649 Gospel and Acts books printed by Aleksandûr Exarch’s press and paid for by the Ottoman government had been donated to Bulgarian churches in the province. The government was interested in printing its own “trustworthy” Bulgarian prayer books because of worries that Bulgarian churches were being inundated by ecclesiastical literature published in Russia and donated to Bulgarian dioceses in the empire. Midhat Paşa himself, as we saw in Chapter 3, was very concerned about the circulation of such Russian-printed prayer books and singled it out as one of the most important reasons behind his decision to establish the official printing press in Ruse. The irony in the case is that Exarch now used his printing press in order to publish materials which the Ottoman government employed in its own propaganda war against Russian Pan-Slavism, although that same printing press was originally (in the late 1840’s) bought with Russian money and was no doubt intended to be an outpost of pro-Russian propaganda in the heart of the Ottoman empire.

\textsuperscript{565} NBKM BIA II A 5677. This letter is not dated but, based on events it mentions, was probably written in late 1869 or early 1870.
The fact that members of the Bulgarian elite such as Exarch could be persuaded that the *Tanzimat* project was feasible and that a long-term multiethnic Ottoman society was not a chimera was indeed a significant achievement. The broader the segments of the Bulgarian elite that could be won over to the pro-imperial camp, the more marginal would any nationalist group seem and the less chance of success would a home-grown nationalist program have. This fact was not lost on the nationalists themselves.

5.3. *The chorbadzhii*

The village and town notables (*chorbadzhii*; sing., *chorbadziia*) are the only segment of the Bulgarian pro-imperial elite that has been the subject of extensive study. Yet the *chorbadzhii* have proven to be an extremely difficult group to define with any degree of analytical precision. Initial attempts to describe them in class terms and to link them to particular “exploitative” and “non-productive” economic practices such as tax-collection or money lending have been unproductive. For one thing, most individuals to whom their contemporaries

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566 For the most exhaustive and up-to-date treatment of the historiography of the *chorbadzhii*, see Grüncharov, *Chorbadzhiistvoto*, 5-21.

567 As an example, one can quote Meininger’s dubious distinction between the *chorbadzhii* and the rich merchant class – the *chorbadzhii* are said to have grown rich “in ways resented by others and portrayed as illicit by Bulgarian progressives” (money lending, tax farming, land speculation) and to have championed “primitive and exploitative economic practices,” which set them apart from the “new business class” and its “productive” economic activities. Thomas
referred as chorbadzhii were rarely engaged in a single type of economic enterprise, but typically made their fortunes from a combination of entrepreneurial, financial, and mercantile activities. Moreover, in its nineteenth-century usage, the term chorbadzhiia could be applied as an honorific to any prosperous businessman, or, in a negative sense, it could be applied by nationalist activists to describe “any influential Bulgar, regardless of class, who failed to measure up to their standards of patriotism.”

The present consensus among Bulgarian historians is to use functionalist sociological criteria to define the chorbadzhii as a group. According to this approach, the notables are defined by their role as mediators between the Ottoman authorities and local society rather than by their class status.

Economically, the notables were intimately concerned with the preservation of the imperial framework. As is well known, following a brief attempt to set up a centralized tax collection system during the 1840’s, the Ottoman state reverted back to the old practice of farming out most of the major taxes and setting up collective quotas for localities, rather than taxing its subjects individually.

There have been conflicting assessments of the overall economic impact of

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Meininger, *Formation of a Nationalist Bulgarian Intelligentsia*, 43.

Pletn’ov, *Chorbadzhiite*, 3-10.


Ottoman tax farming, but it undoubtedly remained a profitable enterprise for those involved in it. Moreover, the *chorbadzhii*’s economic activities were rarely confined to their duties as tax collectors, but typically also included trade, landowning, money lending, or, in a few cases, manufacturing. In each of these endeavors, the notables would have been the direct beneficiaries of the Ottoman economic upturn following the end of the Crimean War. In their mercantile activities, for instance, they would have profited from the nearly 75% drop of the freight index (relative to the first half of the century) that came with the greater internal security of the 1860’s and 1870 and with Midhat Paşa’s new road network; in their proto-industrial activities they would have benefited from the boom in the Bulgarian textile industries (stimulated by a rapidly expanding Ottoman market); in their position as money lenders they would have been aided by the growing monetarization of the Ottoman tax system, etc.

The documentary record leaves no doubt that many prominent Bulgarian *chorbadzhii* were deeply invested (literally) in the reform policies of Midhat Paşa and his administration. Stefan Karagiozov (Karagiozoğlu), a prominent Tûrnovo notable and entrepreneur, had loaned (through his trading company in İstanbul) some 300,000 piastres to the Ottoman government in the summer of 1866, in order to cover a deficit in the budget of the Tûrnovo *sancak*. Several months earlier, another Tûrnovo *chorbadzhiiia* turned financier – Khadzhi Pavel – had

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571 Exploitative and “highly regressive” according to Şevket Pamuk, *The Ottoman Empire and European Capitalism, 1820-1913: Trade, Investment, and Production* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 89. “Predictable” and less prone to “over-taxing” according to Palairet, *Balkan Economies*, 47.


573 NBKM OO Fond 179, a.e. 478 [27 Rabiülevvel 1283 / 8 August 1866].
furnished the government a loan of 100,000 piastres for the same purpose. 574

Other Bulgarian notables had secured various lucrative state contracts – to supply meat and other products to the government-regulated İstanbul market; to deliver provisions for the needs of the Second Imperial Army (headquartered in Shumen, in the eastern part of the Danube vilayet); or to provide uniforms for the growing police force in the province. 575

It is also important to note, however, that the chorbadzhi’s social status brought with it certain communal responsibilities, in addition to the opportunities for enrichment. The notables were engaged in running communal schools, supporting churches and monasteries and adjudicating small-scale disputes among members of the local community. They were also the first to be held accountable in cases which, under Ottoman law, called for a collective punishment of an entire locality. 576

This peculiar position of the chorbadzhi vis-à-vis the Ottoman state was instrumental in shaping the strategy and tactics of their political behavior. It would be incorrect to characterize that behavior as entirely quietist and unquestioningly loyal to any and all government policies. The correspondence of Georgi Popsimeonov (Anagnosta), a prominent chorbadzhiia and a district representative (kaza vekili) of the Bulgarians of the Veliko Tûrnovo region (north-

574 NBKM OO Fond 179, a.e. 569 [10 Şevval 1282 / 26 February 1866].
575 As early as 1862, a Bulgarian chorbadzhiia (Khadzhi lovancho Ağa) complained that he had not received all the funds (almost 22,000 piastres) he was owed as a contractor (kontratocu) for the procurement of police uniforms in the eyalet of Tûrnovo. NBKM OO Fond 179, a.e. 537 [26 Zilkade 1278 / 25 May 1862].
576 Elena Grozdanova, Bûlgarskata selska obshtina prez XV-XVIII vek (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1979), 175.
central Bulgaria) from 1826 to 1869 illustrates the complexities of the notables’ social and political outlook. In their letters to Popsimeonov, most of the town and village chorbadzhii in the district identified strongly with their respective communities and were willing – up to a point – to defend the interests of these communities in conflicts with representatives of the state. We see, for example, the notables endorsing all sorts of popular complaints about Ottoman officials: for failing to pay for food and lodging while billeted in their villages; for illegally requisitioning livestock from Bulgarian peasants, and generally for oppressing the “poor people.” Other complaints the notables endorsed concerned the boorish behavior of Ottoman troops during the Crimean war campaigns – suggesting that the chorbadzhii did not shy away from defending their fellow villagers or townspeople even when the offender was the imperial army during wartime.

The notables also acted in defense of the economic welfare of their communities – for instance by requesting extensions on village tax payments on account of poor harvests or by demanding that certain villages be exempted temporarily from the obligation to supply the army with provisions. At the same time, however, it is clear that for the most part the political priorities of the chorbadzhii were in unison with those of the Ottoman state. The letters show that the notables had “zero tolerance” for breaches of the law and disturbances of the social order within their communities. Often it was the Bulgarian notables who

577 NBKM BIA II A 3266.
578 NBKM BIA II A 3256
579 NBKM BIA II A 3578; II A 3574; II D 306.
notified the authorities of acts of hooliganism or brigandage,\textsuperscript{580} regardless of whether the culprits were Muslim/Turkish\textsuperscript{581} or Christian/Bulgarian.\textsuperscript{582} The chorbadzhii also did not hesitate to call upon the coercive power of the state when they needed it – Popsimeonov’s correspondence preserves several letters in which village chorbadzhii appealed to the Ottoman authorities to send police officers, who would assist the notables in their tax-collecting duties.\textsuperscript{583}

The winning over of chorbadzhii’s loyalties was undoubtedly one of the major successes of the Tanzimat reforms in the Bulgarian lands. When we compare the notables’ active role in early-nineteenth-century rural revolts and other disturbances (e.g. in 1821, 1835, 1841, and 1850) to their general lack of involvement in the abortive nationalist plots of 1867, 1868, 1875, and 1876, we see a clear trend away from separatist or seditious activities. While chorbadzhii (or, as they were locally known, knezove) accounted for most of the leaders of the Niš and Vidin peasant revolts in 1841 and 1850, they were conspicuously absent from the cheti of the 1860’s and the April uprising of 1876.\textsuperscript{584} From a political liability to the Ottoman state in the first half of the century, the Bulgarian notables had become the staunchest supporters of the status-quo by the 1860’s. This was arguably the result of a domestic Ottoman policy which crystallized

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item NBKM BIA II A 2564
\item NBKM BIA II A 3564
\item NBKM BIA II A 3583
\item NBKM BIA II A 3559; II A 3527
\item This trend was first identified by Pletn’ov (Chorbadzhiite, 110-8). A more recent prosopographic study (quoted in Grüncharov, Chorbadzhiistvoto, 118) of the participants in the April Uprising of 1876 found that only three percent of the individuals involved in the uprising could be classified as chorbadzhii. On the 1841 and 1850 Niš and Vidin revolts, see also Halil İnalcık, Tanzimat ve Bulgar meselesi (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1943).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
(especially after the Crimean War) in a way that assured the chorbazhii that their own interests would be enhanced by their participation in the Tanzimat reforms. Tax farming was there to stay, and so was the communal distribution of the tax burden; a brief attempt (in 1857) to regulate the selection of chorbazhii, fix their maximum term in office, and mandate accountability proved ineffective, and the persistence of legal provisions for collective communal punishment continued to provide an incentive for the notables to participate in the surveillance and policing of their own communities. In the long run, the only significant intrusion of the Ottoman state upon the economic basis of the chorbazhii's power was the campaign against usurious money-lending, which culminated in the creation of Midhat Paşa's aforementioned network of agricultural credit cooperatives. Yet, compared to the improved economic opportunities in other fields, the state's crackdown on usury would have been a small price to pay. Last but not least, the Vilayet Law's provision for opening up the new provincial administrative and judicial councils to non-Muslims benefited the chorbazhii by providing them with the cherished opportunity to become full-fledged government officials and further enhance their standing in local society.

585 The 1857 regulation is known in Bulgarian historiography as "Kanunname for the chorbazhi status from in the district of Tūrnovo." See Stefan S. Bobchev, "Kanun-name ot 1857g. za chorbadzhilûka v Tûrnovskiia sandzhak," Spisanie na BAN 23 (1923).

586 See, for instance the decrees – published in Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 29 [15/27 September 1865] – that stipulated that collective financial and penal retribution could be exacted the inhabitants of villages or towns whose inhabitants failed to identify the perpetrators of certain crimes that had occurred on their territory. Crimes so punished would include barn burning, giving succor to rebels, or boycotting the annual road-building labor duty. See also NBKM OO, Fond 112A, a.e. 2204 [10 January 1868].
The meclises, as we shall see later in this chapter, provided the chorbazhii with an important new venue for legitimizing their standing in society. Outwardly, the chorbazhii projected their political power through symbols and behavior that were unmistakably Ottoman. They cherished their minor civil service decorations (mostly the Mecidiye order of the fourth or fifth degree) and the sabers, pistols, or ceremonial fur coats presented to them by the local pasha. One particularly overzealous individual even wore a hand-shaped patch made of gold-thread on his overcoat – in remembrance of the fact that the Sultan had placed a hand on his shoulder at an audience that had taken place years ago. As trivial as such symbolic expressions of their close ties to the empire may seem, they were an important part of the chorbazhii’s social status – often just as important as a chorbazhiia’s actions. Thus one participant in a 1860 delegation of Bulgarian petitioners to the Grand Vezir Kãbrislã Mehmet Paãa, (writing 37 years after the fact) had only sketchy recollections of the actual demands presented in the petitions, but remembered very well that one of the chorbazhi petitioners had received a pat on the back while kissing the Paãa’s hand – “a sign of being regarded with special favor.” Interestingly, the symbolic value of such imperial accoutrements lingered on even after the establishment of the nation state – as evidenced by the debate that took place in the Bulgarian constitutional assembly in April 1879 on the question of whether orders and decorations granted by other jurisdictions could continue to be worn

588 Pandeli Kisimov, “Istoricheski raboti. Nasheto knizharstvo i pechatarstvo ot predi polovin vek,” Bûlgarska sbirka 5, no. 6 (June 1898).
in the autonomous Bulgarian principality. In the course of debate, it became clear that most of the delegates supporting the continued display of foreign decorations had themselves been the recipients of such decorations from the Ottoman state – typically by virtue of having served in Ottoman government circles.\textsuperscript{589}

The intangible underpinnings of the \textit{chorbadzhi}'s power were no less Ottoman in character. Stoian Gruiioğlu, the most prominent notable in the town of Kazanlûk, was in the habit of addressing his fellow \textit{chorbadzhi} in his native Bulgarian, but switching to Turkish instantaneously when talking to his social inferiors, even (or especially) when they were Bulgarian. On official occasions, such as his regular visits across town to the residence of the local Ottoman \textit{müdür}, Gruiioğlu liked to travel in style – in Ottoman style. According to contemporary accounts, he would put together a veritable procession featuring a street-caller, a pipe-holder, prominent members of the local Bulgarian community, and, significantly, an Ottoman policeman, all of whom followed him obediently.\textsuperscript{590} The inclusion of a police officer as a symbolic and practical expression of the linkages between notable and state power was often replicated in the travel retinues of other prominent \textit{chorbadzhi}, such as Georgi Popsimeonov.\textsuperscript{591}

\textsuperscript{589} The minutes of these debates have been published in \textit{Protokolite na uchreditelnoto bûlgarsko sûbranie v Tûmovo}, (Plovdiv: Knizharnitsa na Khr. G. Danov, 1879), 289-90.


\textsuperscript{591} Grûncharov, \textit{Chorbadzhiistvoto}, 141.
The narratives lending political legitimacy to the notables occasionally involved instances of past service to the local community. Gruioğlu’s preeminence in Kazanlûk reportedly originated in a successful complaint he had launched against the oppressive local ayân Karaferili Mehmet Ağa in the early 1830’s. Even thirty years later, Gruioğlu still quoted the story in order to back up his claims to be the legitimate representative of the Bulgarian community in the town.\textsuperscript{592} In some localities, the close ties between the most prominent notables and the Ottoman authorities were reflected in the terminology used to describe the former – in Pleven, for example, they were known as \textit{konashki chorbadzhii}, after the Ottoman term used to describe a local administrative building (\textit{konak}).\textsuperscript{593}

Besides being decidedly pro-imperial, the politics of the Bulgarian \textit{chorbadzhii} were also remarkably local. The failure (or refusal) of successive Ottoman provincial bureaucracies to regulate the election of notables or set limits to their terms in office meant that, in many localities, the \textit{chorbadzhii} entrenched themselves in virtual hereditary oligarchies. Unsurprisingly, the resulting worldviews were deeply fragmented. In 1860, a fellow townsman who had just returned from İstanbul urged Gruioğlu to follow the lead of the Bulgarian colony in the capital and have the local priest omit the name of the Ecumenical Patriarch from the Sunday prayers. In response, Gruioğlu said (in Ottoman-Turkish) that he cared not one bit what the İstanbul Bulgarians were up to since his only responsibility was to the community of Kazanlûk. But, Gruioğlu added, he was willing to let his interlocutor organize the dropping of the Patriarch’s name from

\textsuperscript{592} Stefanova, \textit{Kniga za bûlgarskite chorbadzhii}, 36, 105.
\textsuperscript{593} Trifonov, \textit{Istoriia na grada Pleven}, 345-7.
the service, provided that would not contradict the “opinion of the state” (*devletin efkâr*) on the issue or expose Kazanlûk (and Gruioğlu personally) to the wrath of the Ottoman authorities.594 Another example of Bulgarian notables’ close self-identification with their immediate locality to the detriment of any broader national loyalties comes from a court case concerning the murder of two Circassian immigrants in the Samokov region south of Sofia in December of 1865. During the subsequent interrogations it became clear that the *chorbadzhiia* of the Bulgarian village on whose territory the murders had taken place had organized a futile attempt to carry the bodies of the victims across the village border and dump them onto the territory of another (and also ethnically Bulgarian) village. The notable explained his behavior by saying that he had been greatly ashamed that such a ghastly crime could have taken place “within our borders” (*bizim sınırimizda*) – meaning, clearly, the borders of his own village (for more on this case, see next chapter). Their concern with local issues also led the *chorbadzhii* to confine their political activity to the most immediate level of the Ottoman bureaucracy. The abovementioned letters to the Tûrnovo kaža vekili, Georgi Popsimeonov, are remarkable in this regard because not a single one of them contains a mention that a previously expressed request or complaint had been repeated or followed-through by its *chorbadzhii* authors. Stefanova has argued that such reticence on behalf of village notables shows that they generally felt

politically secure enough to voice their opinions/concerns locally, but were very hesitant to push any matter beyond the *kaza* level.\(^{595}\)

### 5.4. Beyond the *chorbadzhii*: the bureaucrats and the pro-imperial intelligentsia

Just as the Bulgarian *chorbadzhii* sought to redefine their relationship with the Ottoman state as a result of the application of the *Tanzimat* reforms, they found their position within the Bulgarian communities of the empire challenged by the emergence of new elite groups. To be sure the notables themselves had never formed a cohesive unit – in most locales, various rival *chorbadzhii* factions (contemporaries used the Ottoman term *taraf* (side) to describe them) had coexisted and competed for power for many years. But during the late 1850’s and early 1860’s the political fray in many Bulgarian communities was joined by altogether different *tarafs* – members of the artisans’ guilds, schoolteachers, nouveau-riche merchants, proto-industrialists and other arriviste groups, all of whom vied for power with the *chorbadzhii*. This struggle has often been characterized as one between a loyalist *chorbadzhi* caste and a nationalist intelligentsia or artisanate.\(^{596}\) In fact, it seems more correct to describe it as a series of local clashes over the perquisites of communal leadership as they were

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\(^{595}\) Stefanova, *Kniga za bûlgarskite chorbadzhii*, 66.

understood in the Ottoman imperial context. Neither side ever called for the overthrow of the empire. Even if we take such political causes as support for communal schools and the expulsion of Patriarchate-appointed bishops as a yardstick of nationalist feelings (a very doubtful premise in itself), it is impossible to characterize either side as pro-nationalist. The notables did indeed oppose the expansion of the schools in some localities (Elena, Troian, Vidin, Dobrich) and resisted attempts to remove Patriarchate bishops in others (Sofia, Tŭrnovo), but in most places they championed these causes. On the other hand, the allegedly nationalist artisans and petit-bourgeois were just as willing to sabotage the schools financially when that became expedient in the course of their rivalry with the *chorbadzhii*. It also seems significant that both parties made attempts to win over the Ottoman authorities to their side, using rhetoric that was often extremely instructive – the “young” anti-notable party characterized their opponents as an entrenched parasite group sucking away the lifeblood of the peasant and referred to them as “janissaries” or “hetaerists” – obviously highly politically charged epithets. For their part, the *chorbadzhii* used the authorities’ paranoid fear of Russian Pan-Slavism to portray their opponents as Russian agents. In any case, the great majority of such conflicts centered on the issue of control over communal finances, rather than any broader policy matters.

598 Ibid., 46-7.
599 See, for example, the Bebrovo court case discussed in the following chapter.
600 E.g. an article in *Turtsiia*, vol. 1, no. 32 [27 February / 11 March 1865].
601 This course of action was taken by the *chorbadzhii* in many locations – e.g. Gabrovo, Shumen, Ruse, etc.; see Pletn’ov, *Chorbadzhiite*, 44-5.
By the mid-1860’s and early 1870’s the negative impact of these intra-elite struggles was beginning to be felt in many localities; in some Bulgarian settlements it had even led to the complete paralysis of community functions. Schools had been suspended because of disagreement over financial disputes in a number of important towns, such as Tûrnovo, Kotel, and Tûrgovishte, while in other towns bitter internal debates, often accompanied with brawls and other types of violence, had taken place.

It was in this political climate that the Ottoman government began implementing the provisions of the 1864 provincial nizamname. From the perspective of the Bulgarian elites, the most important innovation that was inaugurated as part of the vilayet system was, without a doubt, the provision for greater representation of non-Muslims in the provincial meclises. No matter how restrictive the franchise or how convoluted the “election” system, the various administrative and judicial councils in the Danube province marked an important watershed – for the first time in the history of the empire a normative legal act ensured that sizeable numbers of non-Muslims would hold positions at all levels of provincial bureaucracy. To be sure, there had been provisions for the inclusion of some non-Muslim members in the pre-reform meclises of the 1850’s and early 1860’s (the so-called Memleket Meclisleri), but it was only in the 1864 nizamname that these provisions were made systematic (i.e., subject to the same principle of inter-confessional “equality” among elected members) and

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602 Ibid., 50.
603 E.g. in Silistra and Pleven in the early 1870’s. Stefanova, Kniga za bûlgarskite chorbadzhii, 77-8.
universal (i.e., they now applied to all administrative and judicial councils in the province). The creation of the vilayet of Danube was, in other words, the decisive event that opened the doors of Ottoman government service to a sizeable cohort of ethnic Bulgarians. These newly-minted Bulgarians-cum-Ottoman-bureaucrats constitute the next important “anti-nationalist” social group whose views shall be addressed in this chapter.

It bears repeating here that the actual political power of the Bulgarian meclis members was often negligible. As we have already seen, because of the provisions for including ex officio members in most meclises, Bulgarians could muster a majority of seats only in a handful of municipal and kaza councils. And since they had been elected as representatives of their particular local communities, the Bulgarian council members’ opportunities for vertical promotion within the Ottoman bureaucracy or their chances of getting assigned to positions elsewhere in the empire were rather circumscribed. Measured by these criteria, the position of these Bulgarian bureaucrats recalls that of certain “native” segments of European colonial bureaucracies – for example the Indians in the administration of the British Raj or the evolués in the French West African colonies. Such groups have been studied extensively, especially in regard to their role in the corresponding anti-colonial movements, yet the Bulgarians in the Ottoman civil service have been consigned to virtual oblivion.

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There are numerous reasons for that omission. Apart from being prime targets for the slings and arrows of “traitor history,” the bureaucrats are considered by many historians to have been mere figureheads, lacking any political power (understood as the ability to make or influence decisions or policies). Strashimir Dimitrov, for example, maintained that “the non-Muslim representatives in the meclises did not dare oppose the all-powerful […] governors, and their presence in the councils was usually a formality.”\(^605\) Some contemporary Bulgarian observers voiced similar doubts.\(^606\) But, with or without “actual” political power, there is ample evidence to suggest that the meclis posts allocated to non-Muslims – in the Danube province as elsewhere in the empire – were quickly accepted by the respective communities as valuable political commodities. The intensity of local debates on the question of who should represent which community in the meclises suggests that, for all their limitations, these bodies were not perceived to be irrelevant by the actors on the ground. Secularists argued with religious leaders (both among different religious communities and within each community) over who is better suited to fill “their” meclis posts; non-Muslims from the European provinces, eager to turn their demographic strength into political clout, clamored for the abolition of the principle of equality between Muslim and non-Muslim meclis members, while non-Muslims from the Anatolian and Arab provinces, concerned with the

\(^{605}\) Dimitrov, Zhechev, and Tonev, *Istoriia na Dobrudzha*, vol. 3, 166.

protection of their minority status, vehemently opposed any changes in the quota system.\textsuperscript{607} But the most heated rivalries (described by İlber Ortaylı as “very jealous and competitive”) typically occurred among the various non-Muslim communities and centered around the issue of how the blanket quotas for non-Muslim meclis delegates ought to be distributed.\textsuperscript{608} In this regard, the Bulgarian provinces (and the Danube province in particular) were not an exception: struggles with other non-Muslim communities over meclis seats seem to have accounted for a substantial portion of the political activities of Bulgarian obshtini in the late 1860’s and early 1870’s. Between 1865 and 1869, for example, the “Bulgarians of Ahîçelebi” (now Smolian, in the Rhodope mountains), wrote at least three different petitions to the district governor of Plovdiv, urging him to replace various members of their town’s meclis – some because they were “tyrannical” (albeit Bulgarian), others because they were simply Greek.\textsuperscript{609} As late as February 1876, the Bulgarian community of Shumen was locked in a heated political struggle with the city’s Armenians over the distribution of the non-Muslim meclis seats. The Bulgarians (reportedly with the support of the Turkish community) demanded that their growing demographic strength in Shumen be recognized by giving them the right to elect two delegates to the judicial (deavî) and one delegate to the administrative (idare) council. The Armenians, however, were quick to realize that the demand for increased Bulgarian representation could only mean that they stood to lose one of their own council members and

\textsuperscript{607} For examples, see Ortaylı, \textit{Osmanlı Mahallî İdareleri}, 75-8.
\textsuperscript{608} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{609} NBKM BIA II A 2504; NBKM BIA II A 2506; NBKM BIA II A 2507.
insisted that the “old custom” of electing one Armenian and one Bulgarian member to both meclises be preserved.\textsuperscript{610} There were occasional appeals (usually made by members of the clergy) for Bulgarian meclis members to act as representatives of all Christians (as opposed to all Bulgarians) in their respective region, but these probably fell on deaf ears.\textsuperscript{611}

It would be fair to say that the architects of the provincial reform of 1864 never envisioned that the meclises would become the bone of political contention among the empire’s minority groups. The difference in categories is instructive: while Ottoman statutes spoke of Muslim and non-Muslim council representatives, the political struggle on the ground was fought along ethnic lines. As the Bulgarian bishop of Preslav (the diocese of which Shumen was a part) put it:

\begin{quote}
The question of which particular individuals would be elected to the [Shumen] meclises does not interest me very much. What does interest me a lot is that the local Bulgarians get a second representative in the daviye (i.e., in the local judicial meclis).\textsuperscript{612}
\end{quote}

Before we rush, however, to expose the irony of a supposedly integrative imperial policy resulting in the reinforcement of the ethnic divisions it was meant to transcend, we should ask if this particular form of politicization undermined or strengthened the empire’s legitimacy in the eyes of the minority communal leaders (Bulgarian, Armenian, Greek, etc.) who vied for the meclis posts. I would argue that the very fact that the meclis appointments were so hotly contested

\textsuperscript{610} DAR Fond 43K, Opis 1, a.e. 12.
\textsuperscript{611} DAR Fond 43K, Opis 1, a.e. 953, pp. 52-53. A Bulgarian bishop appealed to the Bulgarian representative in the idare meclis in Razgrad to “represent and protect the needs of the entire Christian populace of the town and district.”
\textsuperscript{612} Ibid.
indicates that the greater part of the Bulgarian socio-economic elite was focused firmly on the Ottoman political arena as the legitimate venue for addressing grievances and advancing communal goals. By providing blanket quotas for non-Muslim members, the meclis election procedures served to channel the energies of non-Muslim communities towards political struggles that were fought within the Ottoman framework and, for the most part, amongst themselves.\textsuperscript{613} This was, no doubt, an unintended outcome, but it was probably not entirely undesirable from the perspective of the imperial center.

Other developments precipitated by the establishment of the provincial meclises can also be described as falling under the same rubric (unintended, but ultimately “useful” from the perspective of the Tanzimat reformers). The creation of local collectivities that transcended existing confessional (millet) units was one such development. For all their fragmentation along ethnic and religious lines, some meclises did at times take it upon themselves to speak as representatives of their locality writ large, and ventured to enunciate and defend interests shared by all communities in the corresponding town or region. To be sure, this was a problematic claim given the preponderance of appointed bureaucrats in most provincial meclises and, as Ortaylı has argued, turning the meclises into councils of local representatives was far from being the intention of the framers of the

\textsuperscript{613} Some of those struggles centered on already existing tensions (such as the tensions between the Bulgarian and Greek communities in the vilayet, which had developed as a result of their conflict over the Bulgarian Church movement); others were brand new (for example the aforementioned conflict between Bulgarians and Armenians in Shumen, where there is no indication of any previous tensions between the two communities).
Nevertheless, it was a claim that was made and made convincingly on occasion. In December 1865, for example, a dispute had arisen in Ruse over the proposed replacement of the government physician (memleket tabibi) in the city. The incumbent, a certain Dimitraki, was a native of Ruse and had the proper qualifications (in the form of a diploma from the Imperial Medical School in İstanbul). It emerged, however, that Dimitraki had failed to serve his term as a military field doctor upon his graduation (this was a requirement for all graduates of the Medical School) and had instead gone straight to civil service. Upon finding out about this, the Ministry of War demanded the doctor’s recall from the city and his placement with a military unit in Arabia. Dimitraki’s recall, however, was firmly opposed by Ruse’s administrative (idare) meclis. In what was, in Ottoman chancery terms, a very terse letter, the members of that council expressed their great sadness at hearing the news that their beloved physician was being recalled and another one was going to be appointed “by İstanbul.” They claimed that, in his six years of service, Dimitraki had been available “anytime he had been needed, by rich and poor, by big and small alike.” He had shown, they wrote, remarkable courage during the recent cholera epidemic, forsaking his safety and convenience in order to keep up with his rounds visiting the sick. Then came the important claim:

He is a man of praiseworthy morality. All of us – all people, all occupations – are very pleased and content with him. His sending to İstanbul now has been a cause of sadness.

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614 Ortaylı, Osmanlı Mahalli İdareleri, 74.
615 BOA I.MVL. 24679, lef. 7 [30 Receb 1282 / 19 December 1865].
It is important to realize that although the letter of the Ruse meclis belonged, stylistically, into the time-honored Ottoman genre of the petition (arzuhal), it was a petition of a new kind. Significantly, no other organization in Ruse at the time could claim to speak on behalf of the entire urban community in the way the meclis could. Even though the city had several functioning communal organizations at the time, they were all organized along confessional lines (like virtually all organizational life in the Ottoman empire) – e.g. a Jewish communal organization,616 a Bulgarian communal organization,617 etc. But a petition from any of these millet units would certainly have carried less weight with the authorities than the letter from the meclis, and might even have been dismissed as a statement of narrow ethnic or confessional interests (Dimitraki was Bulgarian).618 In enunciating its objections to Dimitraki’s dismissal, the meclis may have been defining a community that had no other institutional voice at the time.

The fledgling Bulgarian journalistic guild also expressed a keen interest in the meclises and the political struggles that developed around them. A series of articles in the Bulgarian-language press in İstanbul emphasized their authors’ conviction that the meclis posts could prove to be a valuable asset for the Bulgarian communities of the empire – if only the “right” people were elected to them. Turtsiia – perhaps the most solidly conservative and pro-Ottoman of all

617 See Sahara, An Eastern Orthodox Community.
618 In the end, the demand to reinstate Dimitraki was backed by Midhat Paşa himself, and the doctor was allowed to return to Ruse and resume his post.
Bulgarian newspapers, was the first to put the question of the new bureaucratic posts in the context of the ongoing conflicts between the “old” chorbadzhii on the one hand and the “young” artisans, merchants, and intellectuals on the other. 

Turtsiia urged the election of “capable” and “educated” individuals to fill the Christian/Bulgarian quotas in the new meclises and opined that, should the councils be allowed to become mere “cabals of notables,” they would be much less useful to the authorities than meclises made up of merchants, teachers, and other loyal intellectuals. At the same time, the article continued, it was the duty of the eligible Bulgarian electorate not to elect “utopians and rebels.”

Vremia, another staunchly pro-Ottoman newspaper criticized the passive attitudes of the Bulgarian members of the Sofia administrative council and suggested that that passivity may have been due to the fact that the members in question were the erstwhile chorbadzhii. Vremia’s article went on to propose that Bulgarian candidates for the councils should be subject to educational qualifications designed to eliminate the “illiterate” old notables.

Numerous other sources suggest that the new posts in the imperial bureaucracy conferred upon their holders considerable symbolic power and prestige within local Bulgarian society. Here, for example, is how a merchant who had been exiled from the empire for ten years described his return to his native city of Tūrnovo in 1872:

I discovered that a new generation had grown up: the schoolchildren of my youth [...] were now mustachioed young men, tradesmen and shop-owners, while those of my own age [...] were guild masters, well-to-do merchants, and

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619 Turtsiia, vol. 1, no. 32 [15/27 February 1865].
other prominent citizens, i.e. people with families and of considerable substance; some of them even held the very high rank of azas (members) in idare meclisi; my former school teacher [...] was [even] a deputy director at the belediye.  

Finally, even though the format of the original Ottoman documents issued by the new administrative and judicial councils does not allow us to assess the extent and nature of individual members' involvement into the decision-making process, there are reasons to suspect that the Bulgarian meclis members rarely acted as mere yes-men. Their reluctance to challenge openly the opinions of the local paşa or müdür in meclis deliberations is often commented upon, but it was probably a sign of caution, rather than of political impotence or ineffectiveness. There is enough evidence to suggest that, in behind-the-scenes diplomacy (the kind that still counted for a whole lot in the vilayet), the Bulgarian delegates to the meclises were both skillful and effective representatives of their communities' interests. In the course of the political struggles for the establishment of an autonomous Bulgarian Church, for instance, it was often the opinion of trusted Bulgarian meclis members that eventually persuaded Ottoman

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622 That is the case because the councils did not keep minutes and had no provisions for recording dissenting opinions among their members.
623 See Pletn’ov (Midkhat Pasha, 52-4) for a selection of skeptical contemporary opinions (mostly attributed to Russian consular and journalistic sources) regarding the effectiveness of Bulgarian delegates to the meclises. Similar doubts were voiced several years earlier (1860), in a series of British consular reports solicited by an inquiry of the British ambassador in İstanbul regarding the condition of inter-communal relations in the Ottoman empire. See “Condition of the Christians in Turkey, 1860,” in House of Commons Accounts and Papers, 1861, document 4, Inclosure 2, p. 12, document 7, Inclosure, p. 28, document 15, Inclosure 1, p. 59, document 16, Inclosure 2, p. 66.

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authorities to throw their support behind the anti-Patriarchate parties in a number of the vilayet's cities.\textsuperscript{624} Bulgarian meclis members were also heavily involved in shaping government policies on the question of school reform – it is likely that Midhat Paşa's decision to shelve his project for merging the existing confessional schools in the province was influenced by the fact that prominent Bulgarian members of the vilayet's administration (such as Nikola Mikhailovski and Ivan Khadzhi Penchovich) eventually turned against the project in late 1867 early 1868, having supported it previously.\textsuperscript{625} The opinion of these trusted advisors (which they were apparently able to express freely and without jeopardizing their future careers) is likely to have carried greater weight as far as Midhat was concerned than the journalistic criticisms of his plan coming from the Bulgarian press.

Contrary to the opinion expressed by Pletn’ov and other Bulgarian historians, Bulgarian meclis delegates generally appear to have had the fortitude to act as defenders of local communal interests even in potentially risky situations. In Sofia, for instance, three Bulgarian azas stood up in defense of a local school teacher who had been accused (by members of the pro-Patriarchate party in the “Church struggle”) of inciting his students to riot against the government.\textsuperscript{626} Other very prominent Bulgarian state employees in the province – such as Iordan Khadzhi Nikolov from Elena, a representative in the highest provincial council

\textsuperscript{624} That topic will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7.
\textsuperscript{625} See Pletn’ov, \textit{Midkhat Pasha}, 173.
\textsuperscript{626} See the memoir of Kosta Mikhailov, published in Petûr Dinekov, \textit{Sofiia prez XIX vek do osvobozhdenieto na Bûlgaria, Materiali za istoriïata na Sofiia} (Sofia: Bûlgarski arkheologicheski institut, 1937), 150. The incident in question probably took place in 1861 or 1862.
(Meclis-i İdare-i Vilayet) in Ruse – also received high marks from their Bulgarian contemporaries for behaving independently during meclis sessions and supporting the Bulgarian Church movement.\textsuperscript{627} At the very least, many Bulgarian council members were able to use their inside knowledge of the workings of the system for the benefit of their respective communities. One of the abovementioned Bulgarian azas from Sofia, Dimitër Traikovich, is known to have kept a private correspondence with members of the Bulgarian obshtina in the nearby town of Samokov, advising them on the best ways to obtain concessions from the Samokov Ottoman authorities on issues of communal importance.\textsuperscript{628}

The new bureaucratic posts attracted Bulgarians from a wide variety of social and economic backgrounds. First, (and despite the hopes of the contemporary Bulgarian press to the contrary), many former chorbadzhii were elected council members. Prominent examples include the two Bulgarian representatives in the highest administrative council of the Danube province (the Meclis-i İdare-i Vilayet), Khadzhi Ivan Penchovich and Khadzhi Iordan Nikolov, as well as the most famous Sofia notable, Khadzhi Manio Stoianov. Other career paths that might lead Bulgarians to Ottoman bureaucratic service were more circuitous. Take, for example, Nikola Mikhailovski, a holder of a doctorate from the Historical and Philosophical faculty of Moscow University and long-term head teacher in Tûrnovo. Disgusted with the negative impact that the rivalry between various Bulgarian elite factions was having on the schools of his district, (in 1864, it

\textsuperscript{627} In a letter by Khristo Arnaudov to Georgi Khesapchiev in Gabrovo. BIA II A 259 [27 December 1870 / 8 January 1871]
\textsuperscript{628} Dinekov, Sofiia prez XIX vek, 145-54.
would be recalled, all schools in Tûrnovo had to be shut down for a year due to lack of funding), Mikhailovski came to the conclusion that only the strong arm of the Ottoman state could truly modernize the Bulgarian educational system. In 1865, therefore, he accepted a position on the vilayet’s Education Council and supported wholeheartedly Midhat Paşa’s aforementioned project for the creation of a unified non-confessional school system in the province. Around that time, Mikhailovski also became a passionate proponent of Šafárik’s theory of the Turkic origin of the Bulgarians – and thus he could faithfully claim that his pro-imperial political views were very much in keeping with the demands of the “century of nationalities.”

Mikhailovski is a good example of what I would call a Bulgarian pro-imperial intellectual – someone who supported Midhat’s policies not out of utilitarian or self-serving career considerations, but because he was apparently genuinely attracted to the principles behind these policies. Very similar considerations

629 See Todev, Koi koi e sred bûlgarite, s.v. “Nikola Mikhailovski,” 171.
630 In his 1842 work Slovanský národopis, Pavel Josef Šafárik (1795-1861), the famous Slovak ethnologist and Slavic philologist, had advanced the theory that the ethnogenesis of the Bulgarians had been shaped by numerous invasions of nomadic people of “Mongol-Turkic-Finnic” descent – Bulgars, Huns, Avars, Khazars, Magyars, Pechenegs, etc. These invasions, Šafárik wrote, had resulted in the substantial “de-slavicization” (entslowenisierung) – both “racial” and linguistic – of the Slavic groups who had lived in the area prior to the nomads’ onslaught. Šafárik’s theory was put to political use in the second half of the nineteenth century mainly by Serb nationalists, desiring to “prove” that the Serbs were the only pure southern Slavs, while Bulgarians were, at best, miscegenated Slavs. But, as Mikhailovski’s case shows, the opposite ideological use of Šafárik’s theory was also possible – i.e., it could be used by pro-Ottoman Bulgarians as a “scientific” justification for their political views.
631 On Mikhailovski’s fascination with Šafárik’s theory, see Georgi Iakimov, Pantelei Kisimov, zhivot i deinost: Prinos kûm izsledvaneto na ideiata za tursko-bûlgarskiia dualizûm prez Vûzrazhdaneto (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo “Prof. Marin Drinov”, 2003), 217.
shaped the career of Todor Shishkov, the other Bulgarian who served on the provincial Education Council. A graduate of the Sorbonne, Shishkov shared Mikhailovski’s conviction that the future of Bulgarian education lay in its integration into a reformed imperial system. What I would like to emphasize about both Mikhailovski and Shishkov, however, is that they considered themselves modernizers, not conservatives – and certainly the unified educational system they proposed appears more “modern” than the disparate and ramshackle confessional schools that it was intended to replace. It was just that the modernity that individuals like Mikhailovski and Shishkov envisioned was not the modernity of the nation state. To be sure, their proposed curriculum for the new system did make room for the teaching of each ethnic group’s language and history – but, at the same time, its main emphasis was on enabling every student in the province, regardless of ethnicity, to master Ottoman Turkish. Only by learning the official imperial language, the proposal argued, could Bulgarians and other non-Muslim groups hope to have successful careers in the future. This was indeed a long-term imperial vision.

Another illustration of the fact that Bulgarian pro-imperial intellectuals were not backward reactionaries but forward-looking modernizers is the career of Ivan Chorapchiev. Born in Koprivshtitsa, a proto-industrial town which was considered to be a stronghold of “Bulgarianness,” Chorapchiev was hired as a teacher of French (the quintessential “modern” subject) by the Bulgarian schools in Ruse in 1865. Soon thereafter, he was appointed to be the Bulgarian-

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language editor of *Tuna/Dunav*. Not only did Chorapchiev participate, in his new capacity, in writing the newspaper editorials that glorified and legitimized Midhat’s policies, but he also translated several Ottoman legal codes into Bulgarian (these translations were published by the vilayet’s printing press) and had a successful second career as the author of school textbooks – including one of the first introductory French textbooks for use in Bulgarian schools, as well as several primers of Ottoman Turkish for Bulgarian children.\(^{633}\)

Since the posts in the *meclises* were not incompatible with a career in business or trade, they also drew established or aspiring Bulgarian industrialists and merchants. One example is Stefan Karagiozov, who used his position as delegate in the Tûrnovo administrative council to obtain government concessions for his alcohol and matches factories, turning them into some of the most successful business ventures in the province.\(^{634}\) Karagiozov also owned a silk processing factory equipped (in the early 1870’s) with twenty steam-driven spinning machines that processed 500,000 *okkas* of cocoons each year.\(^{635}\) Dimitûr Traikovich, a member of the *idare meclisi* of the Sofia *sancak*, was one of the most successful long-distance merchants in town.\(^{636}\) Finally, the new posts in the imperial bureaucracy attracted their share of sheer political opportunists. The most colorful example is that of Dragan Tsankov, a former activist of the short-lived (and, in the eyes of most mainstream Bulgarians, rather scandalous)

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\(^{633}\) See Pogorelov, *Starite pechatani bûlgarski knigi*.

\(^{634}\) The factory opened in February 1866; see *Tuna/Dunav*, year 2, no. 55 [March 9/22, 1866].

\(^{635}\) *Istoria na Bûlgaria*, vol. 6, 53.

Bulgarian Uniate movement, which attempted (in 1860-1861) to resolve the Church question by converting Bulgarians to Roman Catholicism, and future (post-1878) leader of the radical pro-Russian faction of the Bulgarian Liberal Party. In between those two extremes Tsankov embraced the vilayet reforms and had a distinguished career as a bureaucrat in a variety of provincial government offices (1864-1873). 637

The career paths of the ethnic Bulgarians in Ottoman civil service were, as we mentioned earlier, somewhat circumscribed. Only the most politically astute among them were able to use their appointments as a springboard to careers at the higher levels of the imperial bureaucracy. 638 But within the provincial administration itself, all but the highest vilayet posts were fair game for an ambitious Bulgarian state employee. Dragan Tsankov was promoted from his early clerk-level appointments 639 to deputy district governor (muavin-i kaymakam) for Niš in 1868, and Vidin in the early 1870's. Petûr Zlatev's stint as an informal advisor to Midhat Paşa was followed by a promotion to the position of muavin-i kaymakam for the sancak of Vidin and subsequent elections as an aza of the highest criminal and administrative councils in the Danube province. Most, if not all, of the ethnic Bulgarian deputies in the first Ottoman parliament (1877-8) had

637 See Margarita Kovacheva, Dragan Tsankov: obshestvenik, politik, diplomat do 1878 (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1982).
638 One such individual was Midhat Paşa’s trusted Bulgarian confidant, the aforementioned Khadzhi Ivan Penchovich, who went on to become a long-term member of the Ottoman Council of State (Şura-yi devlet) after 1868 and even managed to install his son in a minor sinecure in the Danube province in 1876. See Napredûk, vol. 10, no. 78 [24 January 1876].
639 At various points from 1864 to 1868, Tsankov had been employed by the vilayet’s passport service, the administration of the printing press in Ruse, and the Danube Navigation Commission.
also had former administrative experience in various provincial meclises during the 1860's and 1870's. Likewise, there were numerous former or current Ottoman bureaucrats among the 35 lay delegates to the 1871 inaugural assembly of the newly-recognized Bulgarian millet, which was convened to draft the "constitution" of the autonomous Bulgarian Exarchate created in that year.

Because much of the contemporary (and subsequent scholarly) discussion of the Bulgarian bureaucrats' historical importance revolved around the question of whether they had any "real" political power, they have often been characterized as inconsequential at best or, at worst, complicit in enabling the Ottoman government to hide old absolutist practices behind the veneer of representative government. It seems unreasonable to me to dismiss such an influential cohort as irrelevant and unfair to brand all its members as hypocritical or malicious. The Bulgarians who gained access to posts in the Ottoman bureaucracy may not have been among the most influential delegates of their

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640 Of the five ethnic Bulgarian MPs from the Danube vilayet, four had previously served in Midhat’s provincial administration – the brothers Dimitraki and Stefanaki Teodorovich of Tulcea (former members of the administrative and commercial meclises of the sancak of Tulcea), Petăr Zlatev, Khadzhi Iordan Nikolov (formerly a member of the Meclis-i İdare-i Vilayet in Ruse and later deputy governor of the Tûrnovo sancak), and Zakhari Khadzhi Giurov (former member of the municipal council in Samokov). See Napredûk, vol. 9, no 120 [4 March 1877]; Kisimov, "Medkhat pasha," 804, note 2.

641 e.g. Zakhari Khadzhi Giurov; Khadzhi Ivan Penchovich; Khadzhi Manio Stoianov, Nikola Mikhailovski, etc. See Protokoli na Bûlgarskiat Naroden Sabor v Tsarigrad prez 1871g, (Sofia: Sv. Sinod, 1911), passim.

642 For a representative skeptical view of the Bulgarian meclis delegates’ freedom to express their views in the councils, see some of the reports prepared by Naiden Gerov, Russia’s diplomatic agent in the city of Plovdiv (vilayet Edirne). Naiden Gerov, Iz arkhivata na Naiden Gerov; pisma, dokladi i materiiali za vûzrazhdienieto na bûlgarskiia narod, ed. T. Panchev (Sofia: Bûlgarska Akademiia na Naukite, 1911), vol. 1, 457-60, 64, 90.
respective meclises, but they were undoubtedly attracted to government service and seem to have believed that it conferred upon them increased social prestige, to say nothing of a steady salary. On the nationalist side of the fence, an astute and observant commentator such as Zakhari Stoianov did, as we saw in Chapter One, acknowledge that the incorporation of members of the Bulgarian elite into the administrative structure of the Ottoman provinces through the institution of the meclis was not just a symbolic or insignificant political gesture on behalf of Tanzimat statesmen:

If the Ottoman government, instead of persecuting the young forces of Bulgaria, had chosen to open the door for them to various civil and military positions, in other words if we had a greater number of Ivancho and Iordancho efendis, then the empire would still exist today and the crescent would still be waving over Sofia and Plovdiv. [...] The Ottoman government tried to kill the [Bulgarian] intelligentsia by exiling it Diyarbekir, but it would have done much better to turn that intelligentsia into efendis, since we know from experience that all those Bulgarians in Ottoman government service, with all their decorations, turned out to be without exception men or rotten character, and were more loyal to Osman’s throne than the Turks themselves.  

5.5. The dualists

Our discussion of the pro-imperial groups among the Bulgarian elite during the 1860’s and 1870’s would not be complete without a mention of the so-called

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643 This is likely a reference to the abovementioned Khadzhi Ivan (Ivancho) Penchovich and Khadzhi Iordan (Iordancho) Nikolov.
644 Stoianov, Zapiski, vol. 1, 231.
dualists – the proponents of the idea that the Ottoman empire should be
reorganized along lines similar to those of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise
(Ausgleich) of 1867. There is some reason to doubt the sincerity of the original
dualist proclamation – the well-known 1867 “Memorandum” (Memoar) to Sultan
Abdülaçiz, which proposed that the Ottoman monarch should assume the title of
Tsar of Bulgaria and delegate most of the day-to-day aspects of government in
the Bulgarian provinces to a semi-autonomous Bulgarian assembly and cabinet,
in exchange for retaining overall Ottoman sovereignty and control over military,
financial, and foreign policy matters. These doubts stem from the fact that at
least some of the authors of the 1867 “Memorandum” (a self-styled “Secret
Bulgarian Central Committee” in Bucharest; more information about their
activities would be provided in Chapter 7) were simultaneously engaged in
organizing the armed band (cheta) of 1868. Once the demands of the dualist
“Memorandum” had been made public on the pages of the Bulgarian periodical
press, however, they attracted a more sincerely pro-Ottoman following.
Especially illustrative in this regard are the ideas of Todor Ikonomov, a on-and-off
journalist, teacher (in the towns of Shumen and Tulcea) and activist in the

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645 There is voluminous Bulgarian literature on the dualist movement. See,
among others, Aleksandur Barmov, “Taen tsentralen Bûlgarski komitet: Obrazuvane i pûrvi period ot razvitieto mu,” in Aleksandûr Burmov: Izbrani
proizvedeniia v tri toma (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, c.1974); idem, “Taen
tsentralen Bûlgarski komitet: Vtori period ot sûshtestvuvaneto mu;” idem,
“Chetnicheskoto dvizhenie v Bûlgaria prez 1867;” Mikhail Dimitrov, “Komitetût na
‘starite’ (Dobrodetelnata druzhina),” in Bûlgaria 1000 godini, 927-1927 (Sofia:
Izd-vo na Ministerstvo na narodnoto prosveshtenie, 1927); Ivan Kasabov, Moite
spomeni ot vûzrazhdaneto na Bûlgaria s revoliutsionni idei (Sofia: Pechatnitsa
P.M. Bûzaitov, 1905); Pandeli Kisimov, Istoricheski Raboti: Moite Spomeni
(Plovdiv: Pechatnitsa Edinstvo, 1897).
Bulgarian church struggles. Ikonomov adopted the idea of Ottoman-Bulgarian dualism as a result of a series of personal and political disappointments, including an acrimonious conflict with the members of the Bulgarian obshtina Shumen, where he had served as a school teacher, and the defeat of his ideas for the organization of the future Exarchate at the Bulgarian millet assembly of 1871. These disappointments, combined with Ikonomov’s deep seated suspicion of Russian imperial designs in the Balkans, led him to embrace the idea of a dual Ottoman-Bulgarian state and to claim that: “Our national interests demand that we try to prevent or delay as much as possible the dissolution of the Ottoman empire.”

In late January of 1876 (several months before the outbreak of the April uprising), Ikonomov wrote a letter to his former sworn enemy and current Grand Vezir Midhat Paşa, urging him to accept a dualist settlement as the only way of guaranteeing the Ottoman empire would continue to have a presence in the Balkans in the future. Bulgarians, Ikonomov wrote:

know that the only reason they have been able to preserve their ethnicity and religion is the fact that it has always been the Ottoman policy to give all conquered peoples equal rights, and not to allow one nationality’s aggrandizement at the expense of another, as the Greeks desired in the past and still desire today. Bulgarians can see that their unification is not yet ripe, has not yet been completed; it requires maybe another decade and it will never bear fruit, except under the continuing integrity, sovereignty and strength of the Ottoman state.

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646 Toncho Zhechev, Bûlgarskiïat Velikden ili strastite bûlgarski (Sofia: Narodna mladezh, 1976), 363.
647 NBKM BIA Fond 19, a.e. 76 [14 January 1876].
The reference to “unification” in the second sentence of the above quote reveals the true attraction of the dualist solution to a cool-headed pragmatist such as Ikonomov. Having spent most of his career in the eastern and north-eastern regions of the vilayet, often in cities where ethnic Bulgarians were a minority, (such as Shumen and Tulcea), Ikonomov knew very well that the Bulgarian nationalists’ claim to those regions as inalienable parts of the future nation-state was not supported by the demographic facts on the ground. 648 (Ikonomov could not, of course, have foreseen the massive emigration of Muslims from Bulgarian Principality as it was established in 1878 – an event that greatly simplified the task of “Bulgarianizing” the east). 649 Other Bulgarian intellectuals shared Ikonomov’s concerns and remained faithful to the dualist idea even after the April uprising had seemingly marked the point of no return in the process of imperial dissolution. In September 1876, with the specter of Russian intervention was looming on the horizon, Pandeli Kisimov, the likely author of the original 1867 dualist memorandum, wrote to Midhat Paşa again, urging him to reconsider the dualist solution. 650 Neither Ikonomov’s nor Kisimov’s efforts produced any official response – in fact, as we saw in Chapter Two, Midhat’s 1878 article, The Past,


650 Kisimov, Istoricheski Raboti: Moite Spomeni, 123-4.
Present, and Future of Turkey, seemed to realize their worst fears by proposing the carving out of the eastern districts of San Stefano Bulgaria and returning them to the Ottoman empire, on account of their mostly Muslim population.

5.6. The anti-nationalists’ legacy to national Bulgaria

One of the most intriguing (and under-researched) aspects of the story of the Bulgarian “anti-nationalist” elite groups is their political legacy to the nation-state after 1878. There is no contradiction here: the establishment of the autonomous Bulgarian Principality in that year did not mean that the former chorbadzhii, bureaucrats, and other former loyalist groups were defeated or sidelined. In fact, a great many members of these groups were able to argue successfully that use their administrative experience during the Ottoman period entitled them to participate, first in the provisional Russian administration (1877-1879), and then in the political hierarchy of the Bulgarian Principality itself.  

In this strategic allegiance shift from the empire to the nation, these individuals were greatly helped by the widespread shortage of administrative personnel that faced the new Bulgarian state. But, once they were safely ensconced in their new offices, the former anti-nationalists did not forget their roots overnight; on the contrary, they seem to have brought a number of elements of Ottoman administrative

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651 On the cadre and legal continuity from the Ottoman to the provisional Russian administration, see Mariia G. Manolova, Normotvorcheskata deinost na vremennoto rusko upravlenie v Būlgariia (1877-1879) (Sofia: CIELA, 2003).
culture to the political life of the Principality and to have contributed to the key
debates that shaped the new state in ways that were more than a little indebted
to their imperial past. The rest of this chapter will attempt to sketch out these
contributions.

With only a few exceptions,652 the members of the anti-nationalist groups
examined above coalesced around the emerging Bulgarian Conservative Party in
the immediate aftermath of “Liberation.”653 The Conservatives’ ideology and
policy goals (like those of their political opponents, the Liberals), crystallized in a
rather dramatic fashion during the deliberations of the Bulgarian Constituent
Assembly in Veliko Tûrnovo, from February to May, 1879. Presented with a
ready-made Russian project for a constitution, the Assembly voted to elect its
own constitutional committee, which was to develop a separate project. In the
event, of the fifteen deputies elected to the constitutional committee, no less than
ten had “former administrative experience prior to 1879.”654 The committee
submitted a draft constitution proposal to the full Assembly on March 21, 1879;
after a series of stormy discussions, that draft proposal’s most important
provisions were rejected, although a few of its articles were eventually inserted in
the final text of the constitution.655

652 E.g. Dragan Tsankov.
653 For an analysis of the policies of the Conservative party (and these policies’
roots in the pre-1878 period) see Iordanka Gesheva, “Ideologiiia i programi na
Konservativnata partiia (1879-1886g.),” *Istoricheski Pregled* 42 (1986).
654 Petko St. Petkov, “Bûlgarskiat proekt za konstitutsiiia ot 1879 godina,”
655 See *Protokolite na uchreditelnoto sûbranie*, passim.
The constitutional committee’s rejected proposal became something of a rallying cry for the individuals who would later emerge as the leaders of the Conservative Party. An analysis of the proposal reveals numerous similarities between the political ideas/worldview of its authors and the specific kind of “governmentality” that characterized the typical Ottoman reformer of the Tanzimat period. The first similarity concerns the suspicious and paternalistic attitude towards “ordinary” people in general, and the Bulgarian “masses” in particular. As our discussion of the elements of the Ottoman modernist discourse in Chapter Seven will show, the stereotypical image of the “Bulgarian” in late Tanzimat times had been that of a loyal and trustworthy agriculturalist, but one who, by the same token, could hardly be trusted with too much administrative or decision-making responsibilities. That simplistic view of the allegedly apolitical hoi polloi had little basis in reality (as will be shown in Chapter Six), but it was nevertheless prevalent not only among Ottoman bureaucrats but also among members of the pre-1878 Bulgarian elite: throughout the 1860’s and 1870’s, for example, a number of *chorbadzhii* argued against expanding educational opportunities for rural Bulgarian children because “too much” schooling could corrupt the peasant’s morals and cause him to question his rightful place in the world as a “goat-herder and farm laborer.”\(^{656}\) Bulgarian dualists, who sought to persuade the Ottoman administration that their co-nationals were the most dependable ethnic group in the empire, used similar tropes in describing Bulgarian “simplicity” and “trustworthiness” and contrasting

\(^{656}\) Pletn’ov, *Chorbadzhiite*, 35.
these qualities to the treachery of their “renegade” Balkan neighbors.657 Given these attitudes, it is hardly surprising that when, in 1879, the former anti-nationalists / current Conservatives faced the question of whether Bulgarian peasants would make good electors and office holders, they overwhelmingly answered in the negative and voted to limit political participation of the “masses” in the affairs of the new state. The idea that only a tiny minority of the population is fit to govern or to elect was, to some extent, a reflection of the real deficiency of educated men and women in the Principality – in the months right after “Liberation,” for instance, the provisional Russian administration had been forced to set the salaries of Bulgarian officials in its ranks at four hundred percent their Ottoman levels, in response to the scarcity of native cadres who had the necessary managerial talent and experience.658 But the Conservatives’ paternalism was also clearly influenced by the experiences many of them had had while serving in the imperial Ottoman administration prior to 1878.

The Conservatives’ low expectations of the public’s ability to participate in any potential democratic process were embodied in their rejected constitutional proposal of 1879. The centerpiece of that proposal was the including the provision for a bicameral legislature, with the balance of power strongly tipped in favor of a Senate, which would be partly appointed by the monarch and partly elected through a system of very restricted franchise (the proposed election

657 See several relevant passages in the 1867 dualist “Memorandum to Sultan Abdul Aziz” of 1867, text in Българско възраждане: хрестоматия по история на България, ed. Христо А. Христов and Николай Генчев (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1969), 324-32.
658 Crampton, Bulgaria 1878-1918, 180.
system for Senators, incidentally, was very similar to the electoral procedures for the provincial meclises in the Ottoman empire as defined by the Vilayet Law.) When their first draft was voted down by the full Assembly, the Conservatives countered by offering to replace the Senate with a “Council of State” – a body of “notables” and “experts,” that would be responsible for overseeing the legislation passed by the elected National Assembly. In the subsequent parliamentary discussions, a Liberal delegate asked exactly what a Council of State was supposed to do and why the new state needed such an institution. In response, Khadzhi Ivan Penchovich, Midhat Paşa’s former protégé and confidant and current Conservative delegate from Ruse, assured his Liberal colleagues that he, for one, knew exactly what a Council of State did and why it was useful – since he had been a member of one for eleven years. The Council of State in question was, of course, the Ottoman Şura-yi Devlet.

If the paternalist and oligarchic tendencies evident in the Conservatives’ proposals to saddle the new state with a non-democratic Senate or a Council of State do not resonate well with present-day political sensibilities, then their ideas in the fields of interethnic relations and minority rights appear much more laudable and decidedly modern, especially compared with the bigoted and chauvinistic attitudes of their Liberal opponents. In the Constituent Assembly itself, the right of the non-Bulgarian (mostly Turkish) representatives, to have the debates simultaneously translated to them in Turkish (so that they might participate fully in the Assembly’s deliberations) was defended by a few lonely

659 Protokolite na uchreditelnoto sùbranie, 297.
A recent authoritative study of the history of the ethnic minorities in the formative years of the Bulgarian nation-state confirmed that Conservative governments (1879-1880; 1881) had a much better record of respecting minority rights and promoting interethnic peace and tolerance than their Liberal counterparts (1880-1881; 1883-1885). Undoubtedly, the fact that many leading Conservatives had administrative experience working in the multi-ethnic Ottoman bureaucracy of the 1860’s and 1870’s made them more tolerant of diversity. We know that those Bulgarian politicians who had begun their careers in Midhat Paşa’s administration during the 1860’s were often among the most vocal defenders of the rights of Muslim and other minorities in the Bulgarian nation-state a few decades later. In his capacity as a member of the Bulgarian parliament in 1891, Nikola Mikhailovski, for example, adamantly opposed a bill that would have introduced mandatory school instruction in Bulgarian for all citizens, regardless of their ethnicity. Mikhailovski, who, as we saw earlier in this chapter, had been deeply involved in Midhat’s efforts to reform the educational system of the Danube province in the 1860’s, now argued that:

Everyone is free to educate their children in any language they like […] Our laws merely require literacy, i.e., for citizens to be able to read and write in any language […] now we are being asked to depart from that principle, but only to the detriment of the Turks. Why should some [citizens] be treated in one way and others differently?  

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661 Ibid., 234.  
662 Quoted in Lory, Le sort de l’héritage ottoman en Bulgarie, chapter 2, n. 83.
It should also be said that, regardless of their political views, most Bulgarians who had had any administrative or professional experience during the Ottoman period found themselves in an extremely marketable position in the young Bulgarian Principality. Due in part to the emigration of its Muslim population, and in part to the fact that the provisional Russian administration had opted for the creation of an “extremely swollen bureaucratic apparatus” (of the kind to which its members “had gotten used to” in Russia663), the new state faced an acute shortage of native bureaucratic cadres. At the same time, the Russians found (to their surprise) that existing Ottoman administrative subdivisions, laws, and taxes were “quite logical” and “progressive”664 – thereby further increasing the value of anyone who had any experience government experience under the ancien régime. This oversized bureaucracy gobbled up “almost the entire Bulgarian intelligentsia” – primary teachers and poets became city mayors and district court judges, while properly trained administrative cadres were worth their weight in gold.665

The old Ottoman cadres that had morphed into Conservatives also managed to preserve their status as “notables” into the new national arena. It was largely in this capacity that they continued to exercise an influence in society and politics that was out of proportion to their numbers. Prominent Conservatives virtually monopolized the ear and sympathies of the influential consuls of the European Powers – mostly because their liberal political opponents seemed too radical by

663 Ibid., 68.
664 Manolova, Normotvorcheskata deinost, 44.
665 In 1880 Eastern Rumelia is said to have had only four or five properly trained jurists; see Lory, Le sort de l’héritage ottoman en Bulgarie, 69.
the European standards of the day. One Conservative leader summed up the matter in a speech on the floor of the Constituent Assembly, by arguing that Europe would be better disposed to hear the voices of established “notables” than of newly-minted parliamentarians:

In today’s Europe, the opinion of a ‘notable’ – a rich and respected community leader – carries much greater weight than that of an MP, who, for all the Europeans know, might be a radical, a socialist, etc. In this day and age, after the barbarities of the Paris Commune and after the attempted assassinations of well-nigh all the European monarchs, the radicals, socialists, and others like them are not viewed favorably. 666

With the benefit of hindsight, the Conservatives’ project for a constitution may actually have been better suited to the needs of the country than the amended Russian proposal that was eventually adopted. A survey of the surviving delegates of the Constitutional Assembly twenty years after the fact revealed that the great majority of them considered the rejection of the conservative project to have been a grave political mistake. 667 Before being suspended only two years after its promulgation, the liberal Tûrnovo constitution of 1879 had proven to be virtually unworkable – its application, short-lived as it was, had resulted in the succession of no less than seven Cabinets and two Parliaments. 668 The political arrangement that replaced the Tûrnovo constitution (an interlude of near-absolutist monarchical rule, known in Bulgarian historiography as the regime of the Pûlnomoshtiia) in fact incorporated some of the key Conservative proposals

667 Petkov, “Bûlgarskiat proekt za konstitutsiia.”
668 Crampton, Bulgaria 1878-1918, 94.
that had been rejected in 1879. By 1881, a mostly appointed Council of State was indeed sitting in Sofia – and, true to form, one of its members was Khadzhi Ivan Penchovich.  

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6.1. Problematic and sources

Roderic Davison described the reforms of the *Tanzimat* period in the Ottoman empire as a modernization campaign whose momentum came “from the top down and from the outside in.” There can be little doubt about the basic historical veracity of this characterization. Ottoman reform was indeed the brainchild of a small, albeit influential, portion of the imperial bureaucratic elite and its direction and timing were undeniably influenced by foreign diplomatic pressure (in the context of the so-called “Eastern Question”). But by characterizing, correctly, the *Tanzimat* as a state-led, elitist project, Davison’s argument enters an interpretive vicious circle which seems to be more a reflection of twentieth-century political sensibilities than of nineteenth-century realities. A “top-down” political project, according to this argument, is by definition less likely to succeed than a project that has “vigorous popular support.” And, since we know that the project in question ultimately failed to stop the breakup of the empire, it must indeed have lacked such support.

It may be objected that the breakup of the Ottoman state itself was also a “top-down, outside-in” event in that most of the empire’s post-Tanzimat territorial losses were the direct result of military defeats (in 1878, 1912 and 1918) that

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671 Ibid.
were, at best, indirectly related to popular support (or lack thereof) for the reform program. Indeed, as we become “less enamoured of the methods by which nation states were created, made homogenous and praised for their virility in the crude, brutal and Darwinian intellectual climate of the early twentieth century,” the very notion of multiethnic empires’ incompatibility with modernity appears anachronistic and retroactively built upon a historical contingency. A number of recent studies have criticized the earlier attempts to fit “the ungainly body of late Ottoman history to the Procrustean bed of modernization theory” and have shown that Ottoman reformers’ proposed solutions to the dilemmas of empire were often more complex and original than we have been led to believe.

The present chapter will attempt to address the question of popular attitudes towards Midhat’s reforms in the Danube province by asking whether these reforms made a tangible impact on the cognitive and epistemological worlds of the vilayet’s non-elite inhabitants. This is not a trivial question. A large body of scholarly literature maintains that no such impact existed, especially in regard to the non-Muslim communities. Davison’s seminal study, for instance, claimed that the Tanzimat reformers’ “most signal failure” lay in their inability to popularize their supra-national ideology of Osmanlilik. Kemal Karpat has argued that the Tanzimat had a profound and positive impact on the political culture of Ottoman Muslim groups (e.g. by making it possible for Turks to eventually embrace

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673 Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*, 3.
Kemalism), but no impact on Christian ones.\footnote{Kemal Karpat, “The Ottoman Rule in Europe from the Perspective of 1994,” in Studies on Ottoman Social and Economic History: Selected Articles and Essays (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 504.} Bulgarian historians have likewise maintained that Midhat’s policies ultimately failed to “register” with his subjects – in the case of the Bulgarians, because they had already “awoken” to their true national identity, and, in the case of the Turks, because of their proverbial “Muslim fanaticism” and “religious conservatism.” Echoing a comment made by one of Midhat’s earliest Bulgarian critics (the journalist Liuben Karavelov) who had stated as early as 1872 that the Paşa had changed people’s hats when he really ought to have been changing people’s heads, the historian Georgi Pletn’ov wrote that during his governorship in the Danube province:

Midhat Paşa failed to do the most important thing, which would have guaranteed the success of his reforms – he failed to change the thinking of his contemporaries, their conservatism, he failed to overcome the antiquated religious principles and ideas.\footnote{Pletn’ov, Midkhat Pasha, 225-6.}

Such blanket generalizations naturally invite scrutiny. Were the ordinary Bulgarians in the vilayet really as alienated from the political life of the empire and hell-bent upon secession regardless of Ottoman reform efforts?\footnote{This, as we saw in the survey of the scholarly literature in Chapter One, seems to be the consensus of the otherwise antagonistic Bulgarian and Turkish national historiographies. See Istoriia na Bûlgariia, vol. 6, 32-8; Khristov, Bûlgarskite obshtini prez Vûzrazhdaneto, 130; Şentürk, Osmanlı Devleti’nde Bulgar Meselesi, 87.} Were ordinary Muslims really “instinctively” opposed to change on religious grounds? Is it possible that the sustained efforts to “modernize” the provincial institutions,
legal system, infrastructure, communications, medical care, hygiene, and urban development left no imprint on “hearts and minds”?

Moreover, even if the meta-narrative of “rise of nations” is temporarily set aside, we are still left with the question of whether the Ottoman state of the 1860s was at all capable, both technologically and institutionally, to engage in any sort of effective transmission of ideas to its subjects. Despite being a relative commercial success, *Tuna/Dunav*, the provincial newspaper, could not have reached more than seven or eight of every one thousand inhabitants of the *vilayet*. The miniscule size of the reading public undoubtedly limited the impact of the newspaper as a propaganda outlet. Most state-to-subject communication would have occurred, as in earlier periods, through the public reading of government edicts by policemen (*zaptie*) and town-criers (*tellâl*), or through the word-of-mouth of informal social networks – which typically relied on the mediation of local notables. The two great avenues of state-led enculturation (or disciplining, depending on the perspective) – the conscript army and the school – were simply not available as such to Ottoman reformers of this period. The military and educational experiences of the empire’s subjects varied so greatly depending upon their religious and ethnic affiliation (not to mention gender), that the overall institutional setup of the army and school system(s) in the 1860’s probably undercut rather than reinforced the stated ideological goal of the reforms – the promises made throughout the *Tanzimat* period to allow non-Muslims to serve in the army were never realized, and education remained
dominated by confessional schools, which were not subject to government regulation. \footnote{678}

There is, finally, the question of timing. Undoubtedly, most individuals, regardless of their social status can be counted upon to modify their behavior over time according to the expectations of the prevailing political power, especially in situations in which the individuals come into direct contact with the agents or institutions of power. But insofar as many of Midhat’s reform policies in the Danube province involved a certain degree of change in state expectations of ideal/proper subjecthood, the readiness with which “ordinary” men and women became aware of these changed expectations and learned to “speak Tanzimat”\footnote{679} should tell us something about the public’s own expectations regarding the viability of the reform program, and, ultimately, of the Ottoman state itself. It is true that the official proclamation of the Tanzimat had occurred some three decades earlier and we should not be surprised to find that certain key desiderata of the reform program (such as legal inter-confessional equality) would have entered public discourse by the mid-1860’s. But it must be emphasized that that the events described in this chapter took place in the

\footnote{678} See Davison, Reform, 94-5; Fortna, Imperial Classroom, 10. This makes for an interesting contrast with Mehmed Ali’s Egypt, where both mass conscription and an experiment (however brief) with government education were introduced in the 1820’s and the 1840’s respectively. For critical reassessments of Egyptian “modernization” in these fields, see Fahmy, All the Pasha’s Men; Mitchell, Colonising Egypt, especially 69-74.

\footnote{679} I am greatly indebted here to Stephen Kotkin’s discussion of “speaking Bolshevik” as a form of mandatory discursive self-identification “game” in Stalinist Russia. Of course, this is not meant to suggest that there was any ideological or institutional similarity between Stalinism and Ottomansim. See Stephen Kotkin, Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), chapter 5.
context of institutions (*nizami* courts) and practices (criminal interrogations) which were typically only one to three years old at the time. Apart from some commercial courts and courts specially designed to hear cases involving non-Ottoman subjects, the establishment of the *vilayet* of Danube marked the first instance in which a distinct hierarchy of judicial bodies separate from the Islamic (ṣerî) courts was instituted in the Ottoman empire outside of the capital. And nothing in the abstract declarations of the 1839 and 1856 reform edicts could have taught a litigant how to behave in the new courts or what to say under interrogation. Yet, the legal stratagems and exculpatory stories examined below demonstrate a degree of awareness of concrete, clearly contextualized current policies that goes well beyond the level of passing knowledge of reform basics.

As we shall see, the inhabitants of the Danube province – including the Bulgarians – turn out to have been much better attuned to the dominant state discourse than they are assumed to have been by historians dismissive of *Tanzimat* ideological production altogether.

The records of the *nizami* courts that make up the bulk of the evidence for the present chapter remain one of the most inexplicably underutilized Ottoman sources. Although the pioneering work of Khaled Fahmy has demonstrated the great potential of "reformed" or "secular" courts’ records as sources for the social

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history of nineteenth-century Egypt, there has been, to date, little comparable research based on the structurally similar Ottoman nizamî court records. For Ottomanists, “court records” are still usually synonymous with the so-called sicil registers containing summaries of cases heard in the Islamic şer’î courts throughout the empire. The contributions of sicil scholars to Ottoman history are unquestioned – indeed, certain sub-fields such as women’s history, urban history, land tenure, local politics, to name but a few – have been revolutionized or even created ex nihilo by their pioneering work. Yet, many such scholars have become acutely aware of the inherent limitations of their source of choice.

Commenting upon the imaginative use of legal records by European medievists, Ottoman sicil scholars have conceded that, because of the specifics of the şer’î court protocol, the typical sicil entry “cannot match” the richness of an Inquisition trial record. The most often cited deficiencies are the

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683 For a discussion of the methodological problems of using sicils as a historical source, see Dror Ze’evi, “The Use of Ottoman Shari’a Court Records as a Source for Middle Eastern Social History: A Reappraisal,” Islamic Law and Society 5, no. 1 (1998).
684 I have in mind here the outstanding studies of Natalie Zemon Davis, Carlo Ginzburg, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, and others.
685 Haim Gerber, “Muslims and Zimmis in Ottoman Economy and Society: Encounters, Culture and Knowledge,” in Studies in Ottoman Social and Economic Life / Studien zur Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im Osmanischen Reich,
absence of direct quotes from the court proceedings, the stilted formulaic language, and the shortage of information about the litigants’ motivation and the social background in which the cases occur.\textsuperscript{686}

By contrast, the \textit{nizamî} court records of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century provide in abundance the kind of raw “social history” data whose absence in the \textit{sicils} is often seen as regrettable. The interrogation reports (\textit{istintakname}) attached to many \textit{nizamî} court cases are especially valuable in this regard. Unlike virtually any other type of Ottoman legal source, the interrogation protocols are verbatim accounts of what was said during the investigative process. As such, these documents contain the first-person narratives of bona fide non-elite social actors, which have proven so elusive in other types of Ottoman sources, including \textit{sicil} records. The interrogations, therefore, provide a precious glimpse into the “intellectual, moral, and fantastic worlds”\textsuperscript{687} of the protagonists in the \textit{nizamî} legal process and allow us to apply Carlo Ginsburg’s emic, non-statistical “microhistorical” approach to the study of these subaltern social actors.

That is not to say that the \textit{nizamî} court records pose no interpretative problems as historical sources; they do. One has to keep in mind the caveat that


legal sources in general tend to describe real or inferred breaches of “normal”

social behavior. There are pitfalls in trying to reconstruct a social reality from
documents, which often “distort the picture in favor of the extraordinary.”

Natalie Davis’s verdict that court interrogation records are problematic because
the seemingly unadulterated voice of the “people” they present is actually guided
and directed at every step by the interrogator also applies, although in the
cases I have read the “guiding” tends to cut both ways. Finally, one specific
limitation stems from the manner in which the Ottoman archives in İstanbul are
organized: the cases that are most readily available to the researcher tend to be
either those that involve the most serious types of crimes, or those that were
most complicated from a legal standpoint. My sources, in other words, do not
constitute a “random sample,” and, to the extent possible, I have tried not to use
them as such.

688 See Amy Singer, *Palestinian Peasants and Ottoman Officials: Rural
administration around sixteenth-century Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1994), 120. The quote reflects Singer’s methodological
concerns about the mühimme registers upon which her work on sixteenth-
century Palestine is based, but it strikes me as applicable to the nineteenth-
century nizami court records as well.
689 Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers
690 The most accessible cases are those from the irade collections (particularly
BOA İ.MVL.) which, however, contain only those lawsuits that had required
Sultanic approval (irade). In order for a criminal lawsuit to have required an
irade, it had to have met one of the following two conditions: a) the penalty
prescribed by the courts in the case was death or, b) the penalty prescribed by
the Penal Code for the case had, for any reason, been commuted to a lighter
one. In the first type of cases, an irade was needed in order to carry out the
execution; in the second, to authorize the sentence reduction.
6.2. The legal context

A full discussion of the complexities of Ottoman criminal law in the late nineteenth century is beyond the scope of this study. My remarks here are intended simply to introduce the basic terms and concepts which are essential to understanding the legal cases discussed below.\(^{691}\)

The criminal law applied in the Danube province during the 1860’s was a blend of Islamic (şeriat) and state-issued (kanun) regulations, practices and institutions. Islamic (şer’î) courts operated side by side with the new nizamî courts. There were, however, a number of significant differences between these two types of institutions.

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An Islamic court can be described as the institutional extension of the person of the judge (kadi) – a Muslim religious scholar formally trained in the principles of jurisprudence (fîkh). In theory, a kadi was not required to base his decisions on any specific legal text, but rather on his comprehensive knowledge of fîkh; in practice, most Ottoman kadîs followed closely one of several şeriat manuals that effectively codified the legal views of the Hanafi branch of Islamic law.\(^{692}\) Each

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şerî court had its own geographical area of jurisdiction but all were, in principle, equal and able to rule as institutions of last instance on every matter referred to them. The Ottoman şerî court system should not be thought of as an ossified throwback to the empire’s “Golden age” in the sixteenth century – in fact, as was shown most recently by Jun Akiba, it was undergoing substantial changes during the Tanzimat period. Nevertheless, as this chapter is most interested in the coexistence of şerî and nizamî courts in the Danube province, it focuses more on the “traditional” elements in şerî jurisdiction.

In matters of criminal law, the şeriat made a basic distinction between offenses seen as violations of “private rights” (hukuk-i ibad) and those seen as infringements upon “God’s rights” (hakk-i Allah). Crimes belonging to the former category included homicide and wounding; those in the latter category included fornication, highway robbery, theft, alcohol consumption, polytheism etc. The important practical implication of this distinction was that, in dealing with a crime that violated “private rights,” a şerî court would give the injured party (as opposed to political authorities) the central role in the prosecution and sentencing process. Thus, in cases of crimes against “private rights,” şerî courts could impose either retaliatory (kîsas) or compensatory (diyet) penalties depending on the wishes of the plaintiff(s), while crimes against “God’s rights” called for specific “fixed” (hadd) punitive penalties.

By contrast, the *nizamî* courts in the *vilayet* could be described as bureaucratic judicial councils, in that they were staffed by a mixture of appointed government officials and “elected” local notables.\(^{694}\) In fact, the very term “*nizamî* (or *nizamiye*) courts” is used here merely as a convenient shorthand, since the non-şerî or “secular” courts in the Ottoman empire were not officially known by that name until the promulgation of the general Provincial Law in 1868 or (according to some researchers) even until the final reorganization of the Ottoman justice system in 1879.\(^{695}\) But the legal bodies that are referred to here as *nizamî* courts did constitute an important new beginning in Ottoman legal history and, semantics aside, one must agree with Rubin’s assessment that “[w]hen viewed as a process rather than an event,” the 1864 Statute for the Danube province was the “defining moment in the emergence of the *Nizamiye* system as a whole.”\(^{696}\) As set up in the *vilayet*, the new courts marked the first instance in which a comprehensive system of non-şerî tribunals had been established in any part of the empire outside the capital. As was mentioned in Chapter Two, the pre-1864 *meclises* did have judicial functions, but these were exercised in a rather haphazard manner. In fact, of the thousands of complaints and petitions collected by Grand Vezir Kibrisli Mehmet Paşa during his 1860 inspection tour of the Balkan provinces, a great many dealt with abuses in the

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\(^{694}\) Ortaylî, *Osmanlı Mahallî İdareleri*, 70-92. The franchise system for electing members to the *nizamî* courts was the same as the one used to elect members of the administrative councils. That system was discussed in Chapter 2 of the present study.


\(^{696}\) Ibid.
exercise of the judicial powers of local meclises.\textsuperscript{697} A series of reports by British consuls into the state of Ottoman provincial administration in 1860 also overwhelmingly recommended that the meclises be stripped of their judicial powers and a system of proper courts be instituted in their stead. (The reports cited the lack of clear procedural guidelines and the absence of provisions for appealing a verdict as the main shortcomings of the existing system).\textsuperscript{698} Indeed, one can confidently say that, as far as the Ottoman government was concerned, judicial reforms were not incidental to the creation of the vilayet of Danube but, on the contrary, were among the most important “innovations” to be tested in the new province.

Unlike their şerî'î counterparts, the nizamî courts were expected to adhere strictly to the provisions of a state-produced normative legal document – the Ottoman Penal Code of 1858 (henceforth OPC). Procedurally, the main difference between the two institutions lay in the degree of their involvement in the investigative process: while a kadi was merely required to hear the testimony proffered to him by rival litigants, a nizamî court actively gathered evidence through interrogations, sometimes aided by the police, but often on its own through ad hoc interrogation committees made up of several court members. A nizamî court could impose certain penalties, e.g. hard labor (kürek) which had no place under şerî'î law. Finally, the nizamî courts in the vilayet of Danube were

\textsuperscript{697} Davison, Reform, 105-7.
parts of a hierarchical institutional structure that mirrored the bureaucratic organization of the province itself. In its original version (as established in the 1864 Provincial Statute), the vilayet’s nizamî justice system consisted of separate tribunals for civil and criminal cases on the vilayet and sancak levels and of joint civil/criminal tribunals at the kaza level. Avenues for appeal were provided in the Statute from the lower to the upper-level nizamî courts, but not from the şer’î to the nizamî courts. The evidence from the nizamî court records that I was able to examine suggests, however, that in practice şer’î court decisions were as routinely submitted for review and/or appeal to courts in the nizamî system as decisions that originated from within that system itself.\textsuperscript{699} Figure 3 at the end of this study (page 270) provides a chart of the vilayet’s legal system according to the 1864 Statute, including avenues for appeal. That system was operational in the province throughout Midhat’s years in office. Outside of our period of interest, but worth mentioning here, were the changes of the legal system introduced with the general “Law of the Vilayets” in 1868. The most important of these changes were, a) the amalgamation of the civil and criminal branches of the original system into joint appellate courts (known as divan-i temyiz or meclis-i temyiz) at the vilayet and sancak levels and, b) the provision for including legal experts in those higher-level courts.\textsuperscript{700}

\textsuperscript{699}The cases preserved in the BOA İ.MVL. and BOA A.MKT.MVL. in particular allow us to trace the unfolding of each lawsuit through the justice system.
\textsuperscript{700}See Ortaylı, \textit{Osmanlı Mahallî İdareleri}, 85.
Described in this way, the coexistence of two disparate sets of judicial norms and institutions may appear self-contradictory and unworkable. In practice, however, the elements of şeriat and kanun meshed together to form a stable legal environment. Article 1 of the 1858 Penal Code laid the groundwork for the compromise:

It concerns the State to punish offenses against private persons, by reason of the disturbance such offences cause to public peace, equally with those directly committed against the State itself. And by reason thereof, the present Code determines the different degrees of punishment, the execution of which has by the [şeriat] been committed to the supreme authority. Provided always that the following provisions shall in no case derogate from the rights of private persons given to them by the [şeriat].

In order to understand the importance of that passage, let us take as an example the prosecution of murder trials. The şeriat, as was mentioned above, regards homicide as a violation of private rights. Consequently, it gives the victim’s relatives (who are deemed to be the “injured party”) the prerogative to initiate prosecution, select the type of punishment, or absolve the offender of punishment altogether. Strictly speaking, the şeriat allows the state to punish a murderer independently from the victim’s relatives only when the killing has taken place in a context of certain other offenses (for example, highway robbery) that fall under the rubric of violation of the “rights of God.” That meant that the payment of “blood-money,” for example, was considered a sufficient penalty for murder under şer’i rules. It is not difficult to see that a “modernizing” state

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dedicated to expanding its own authority, promoting public order, and, last but not least, maximizing its prison population, (it was used, as mentioned earlier in this study, as a readily available labor force for Midhat’s infrastructural projects), may have found this provision problematic. The 1858 Penal Code addressed the issue by opening a new legal avenue that, in effect, enabled both the state and the kinship group to stake their claims against a murderer. In what scholars have called the system of “dual trial” the victim’s relatives' right to choose between a monetary (blood-money) and retaliatory (execution) punishment was guaranteed, but, if they opted for the former alternative, the state could then re-try the offender in a nizâmî court and sentence him/her to up to 15 years of hard labor.  

Besides resolving the fundamental conflict between private and public claims, the system of dual trial also effectively bypassed certain practical problems inherent in criminal prosecution according to Islamic law. Proving intent, for example, is difficult under şerî rules, since it is contingent mainly upon the type of weapon used in committing the crime (for example, no murder by strangulation could be judged to have been intentional, since the human hand is not a lethal weapon in itself). The 1858 Penal Code did not explicitly challenge the şerî

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702 Rudolph Peters used this term to refer to the criminal justice system of nineteenth-century Egypt. At least until the establishment of the so-called Mixed Courts in Egypt (1876), the fundamentals of the Egyptian and Ottoman legal systems were similar enough to justify my borrowing of the term. (Egypt, of course, remained an autonomous Ottoman province until World War 1). See Rudolph Peters, “Murder on the Nile: Homicide Trials in 19th Century Egyptian Shari’a Courts,” Die Welt des Islams 30 (1990): 115.

703 OPC, Article 172.

principle of inferring intent but simply brushed it aside: in the nizamī lawsuits I have examined, premeditation was established by looking at the entire available body of evidence (hence, for example, most murders committed during a quarrel were deemed unpunished). Another practical accomplishment of the dual trial system was the lowering of the standard of proof required for conviction. In the absence of confession, the şeriat requires the testimony of at least two “credible” eyewitnesses to the crime (or to a confession) in order to convict; in practice certain crimes, (e.g. fornication) require such a high standard of proof as to make them practically non-punishable.\textsuperscript{705} The nizamī courts, on the other hand, could and did convict criminals on the basis of circumstantial evidence and mutually-conflicting witness testimony in addition to confessions. Moreover, since in most cases the interrogations predated the şerî case hearings, a confession was usually witnessed by enough people (interrogators, court clerks, auxiliary personnel) to make conviction a certainty in the şerî case as well.\textsuperscript{706} Finally, the 1858 Penal Code explicitly criminalized numerous practices on which the şeriat was either completely silent,\textsuperscript{707} or which it was practically incapable of prosecuting on account of its strict evidence requirements.\textsuperscript{708}

A brief look at the lawsuit summaries inscribed in the so-called Ayniyat registers for the Danube province suggests that the application of the system of

\textsuperscript{705} Peters, “Sharia and the State,” 167.
\textsuperscript{706} Peters, “Murder on the Nile,” 112-3.
\textsuperscript{707} For example, slander (other than the slanderous allegation of fornication which is a \textit{hadd} crime), bribery, etc.
\textsuperscript{708} For example, embezzlement which did not fit into the şerî definition of theft, since the latter required that the stolen goods be kept locked and hidden. Peters, “Sharia and the State,” 153.

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dual trial did indeed enable Midhat's administration to prosecute criminals more “vigorously” and to achieve a high rate of incarceration. Table 10 lists the main scenarios in which the state was able to modify “unsatisfactory” şerî outcomes in murder cases through a recourse to the nizamî courts.
Table 10: Prosecution of murder cases under the system of “dual trial”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>şer‘î court outcome</th>
<th>nizamî court action</th>
<th>nizamî court outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plaintiff wins case but agrees to receive blood-money (<em>diyet</em>) as settlement</td>
<td>Automatically re-try case</td>
<td>Conviction under Article 174 of <em>OPC</em> to lengthy terms of hard labor (to be endured after the offender had paid the <em>diyet</em> to the victim’s relatives.) (^{709})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plaintiff fails to win case because of insufficient evidence</td>
<td>Re-open and re-investigate case.</td>
<td>Conviction, often by virtue of a new evidence or “confession” obtained under interrogation. (^{710})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No şer‘î lawsuit because victim had no known relatives</td>
<td>Try case as a court of first instance.</td>
<td>Conviction. (^{711})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim’s relatives do not initiate a şer‘î lawsuit, or, having initiated one, retract it and pardon the offender</td>
<td>Try case as a court of first instance.</td>
<td>Conviction (^{712})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>şer‘î case canceled because plaintiff accepts settlement in the form of “peace money” (<em>bedel-i sulh</em>) in lieu of <em>diyet</em>. (^{713})</td>
<td>Re-try case</td>
<td>Conviction. (^{714})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{709}\) BOA AYN.DEF. 919, p. 98 [18 Cemazılevvel 1284 / 17 September 1867]; BOA AYN.DEF. 919, p. 126, hüküm 710 [18 Şaban 1284 / 15 December 1867].

\(^{710}\) BOA AYN.DEF. 919, p. 65 [3 Zilhicce 1283 / 8 April 1867]. In that case, the relatives of a murder victim could produce no eyewitnesses to the act and resorted to asking the şer‘î court to force their suspect to take an exculpatory oath (*tahlif*) – the suspect did that and was accordingly proclaimed innocent; however, during the subsequent nizamî interrogation he “confessed” that he had killed the victim by mistake. He was convicted of unpremeditated murder and sentenced to fifteen years of hard labor (*OPC*, Article 174).

\(^{711}\) BOA AYN.DEF. 919, p. 72 [9 Muharrem 1284 / 13 May 1867]: Ca’fer, the murderer of a nomadic Roma victim was convicted according to the Penal Code, based upon the testimony of two policemen who allegedly overheard him confess (it is not clear whether this occurred in the context of an interrogation or not). However, because of the victim’s itinerant lifestyle, no relatives could be found; consequently, no şer‘î lawsuit could take place. The nizamî court convicted Ca’fer of unpremeditated murder (instead of premeditated one) because, the court said, Ca’fer needed to remain alive in case any relatives of the victim came forth and wished to exercise their şer‘î rights.

\(^{712}\) BOA AYN.DEF. 919, p. 7 [18 Muharrem 1283 / 2 June 1866]: despite having been pardoned by the relatives and thereby fully exculpated according to the şeriat, the suspect was nevertheless re-interrogated and convicted to 15 years of hard labor (*OPC*, Article 174).

\(^{713}\) Unlike “blood money” which was a canonically fixed sum, “peace money” could be any amount mutually agreed to by the litigants, usually through the court’s mediation (*tavassut*).
The *nizamî* courts also proved instrumental in enabling the Ottoman political authorities to avoid certain cumbersome *şeriat* procedures and rules. One example is the canonical mass exculpatory oath (kasame) – while still prescribed by Muslim jurists in homicide cases against unknown suspects, the evidence suggests that in practice the *kasame* was rendered obsolete by *nizamî* investigative practices. Another example involves homicide cases in which the crime was committed by more than one accomplice – in such instances the *şeriat*'s exceedingly complex rules on establishing complicity were bypassed in favor of the much simpler prescription of the Penal Code and accomplices.

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714 BOA AYN.DEF. 919, p. 106 [5 Cemaziülâhir 1283 / 15 October 1867]: a murder suspect and his victim’s wife agreed to settle the case by payment of “peace money” before any formal *şerî'î* sentence was passed); the *nizamî* investigation nevertheless found the suspect guilty of unpremeditated murder. (*OPC*, Article 174).

715 BOA AYN.DEF. 919, p. 127 [18 Şaban 1284 / 15 December 1867]: as part of a homicide case against unknown perpetrators, the plaintiff sought the opinion of the office of the Chief Müfti (*Şeyhülislâm*) in İstanbul as to how the *şerî'î* lawsuit could proceed. In response, the Müfti’s office recommended the enactment of a *kasame*, whereby the plaintiff would select 50 male villagers and ask the court to require each one of them to swear that he was innocent of the crime. However canonically correct, the *Şeyhülislâm*'s recommendation remained a dead letter – instead of executing the *kasame* procedure the authorities conducted *nizamî* investigation, at which it “became known” that a certain villager had fatally shot the victim during a quarrel.

716 The plaintiff[s] must prove what each of the accomplices did, whether each accomplice acted willfully, and whether each of the accomplices’ acts, if committed separately, would have resulted in death; it is the combination of these variables, plus the timing of the death relative to the attack, that decides how the criminal liability should be apportioned. See Peters, “Murder on the Nile,” 106-7.

717 *OPC*, Article 175: anyone who “has assisted a murderer in the committing of a murder” was to be punished by from three to fifteen years of hard labor.
were often tried and sentenced according to the *kanun* even when the main culprit had already been convicted according to the *şeriat*.

6.3. Law and modernity

It has been observed that legal reform played a uniquely ambivalent role in the *Tanzimat* modernization project. Partly because they were unwilling to antagonize the powerful religious establishment, the *Tanzimat* reformers typically tempered their support for new legislation with an essentially conservative historical analysis steeped in nostalgia for the lost glory days of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when “rules of the *şeriat* were always perfectly observed.”

In effect, that meant that social change based on classical liberal notions such as legal equality and guarantees for natural rights had to be presented as a return to former practices and that, consequently, the *şeriat* became politically unassailable. Of course, the brisk pace of legislative activity in the post-1839 period suggests that most *Tanzimat* statesmen clearly saw the *şeriat* as an inadequate normative basis for their reform programs. Nevertheless,

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718 BOA, AYN.DEF. 919, p. 44 [29 Cemaziülâhir 1283 / 8 November 1866]: two suspects (father and son) confessed that the son had held the victim’s hands, while the father slit the victim’s throat. That confession was used in a *şerîî* case against the father, while the son was sentenced as an accomplice according to *OPC* Article 175 without any reference to the *şeriat*.

even the most dedicated “Westernizers” balked at the idea of an outright attack on the authority of Islamic law.\textsuperscript{720}

It would be misleading, therefore, to describe the process of creating the \textit{Tanzimat} legal codes as one of wholesale “borrowing” from European (usually French) models.\textsuperscript{721} Some of the legislative landmarks of the \textit{Tanzimat}, such as the Land Law (1858) and the Civil Code (1870-1877) have been rightfully celebrated as original syntheses of Islamic and “Western” legal norms and principles. But even in criminal law, the “borrowing” model is only of limited use. Most of the 1858 \textit{OPC} may indeed have been copied from a 1810 French Penal Code, yet, as we saw above, the incorporation of the all-important Article 1 made the resulting criminal justice system a unique and, (considering that, with some amendments, the \textit{OPC} remained in force until the end of the empire and beyond), highly durable arrangement. Moreover, the privileged position of the şeriat and the persistence of Islamic courts meant that legal reform was not accompanied by any significant process of cadre change within the judicial establishment. Reformist bureaucrats did not supplant medrese-trained ulema as the chief administrators of law in the empire. In fact, there was a significant degree of cadre continuity from the şer’î to the nizami courts: as can be seen from the graph in Figure 3 at the end of this chapter, members of the ulema – from the local kadı to the province’s chief âlim (the mufettiş-i hukkâm) – presided

\textsuperscript{720} Hıfızı Veldet, “Kanunlaştırma Hareketleri ve Tanzimat,” in \textit{Tanzimat I: Yüzüncü yıldönümü münasebetile} (İstanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1940); Bozkurt, “The Reception of Western European Law in Turkey.”

\textsuperscript{721} For a recent critique of the explanatory value of the concept of “legal borrowing” during the \textit{Tanzimat} period, see Rubin, “Ottoman Modernity,” chapter 1, 3-8.
over all nizamî courts in the Danube province by virtue of the regulations of the provincial statute. Furthermore, as David Kushner has demonstrated, members of the ulema continued to enjoy a preeminent place in the reformed Ottoman judicial system, even after its final major reorganization in 1879.\textsuperscript{722} It is true that the provincial reorganization of 1864 was met with some initial resistance by a few members of the ulema in the vilayet of Danube, but such resistance was neither widespread nor long-lasting.\textsuperscript{723}

Given the coexistence of şerî and nizamî legal institutions and processes it seems all but impossible to pinpoint “objective” elements of modernity in the Ottoman judicial system during the Tanzimat period. Max Weber’s famous analysis of Islamic law (“kadi justice”) as the epitome of a pre-modern (“patrimonial”) social system and as the opposite of substantive, rational, and predictable modern Western law\textsuperscript{724} has been shown not to correspond to Ottoman historical realities. Ottoman kâdis appear to have followed a well-defined set of substantive rules; their decisions were not arbitrary but, on the contrary, showed a great deal of consistency between similar cases; the “state” not only did not intervene at will in the judicial process, as it is expected to, in a “patrimonial” system, but routinely deferred to the authority of the court.\textsuperscript{725} By the same token, while the 1858 OPC may seem to be an intrinsically modern text

\textsuperscript{722} David Kushner, “The Place of the Ulema in the Ottoman Empire during the Age of Reform (1839-1918),” \textit{Turcica} 19 (1987): 61-2.
\textsuperscript{723} see, for example, the incident with Sürûr Efendi, kadi of Ruse in 1864-1865, that was described in Chapter 1 above.
\textsuperscript{724} On Weber’s theory of legal systems, see Max Rheinstein, ed., \textit{Max Weber on Law in Economy and Society} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), passim.
from a Weberian point of view, its application in the courts fell somewhat short of the strict Weberian standards of predictability and repeatability. As will be shown below, the cases heard in the ostensibly modern \textit{nizamî} courts remained subject to a considerable amount of “extra-normative” judicial reasoning and consideration of “special circumstances,” such as the social status of the litigants.

In the end, the link between Ottoman legal reform and “modernity” can be seen most clearly and unambiguously at the level of contemporary discourse. The political powers-that-be in the Danube province consistently presented the new legal system as a qualitative break with the past. Specifically, the \textit{nizamî} institutions and practices were promoted as a corrective to the \textit{şeriat}’s perceived softness on certain crimes (such as murder) and clumsy evidence protocols.\footnote{The “barbaric” \textit{hadd} penalties prescribed by the \textit{şeriat} for certain crimes aroused the indignation of European observers but appear not to have worried Ottoman reformers – and, in any event, their application had been practically discontinued (with the exception of flogging) by the time the reform period began. See Peters, “Sharia and the State,” 170-1.}

Here, for example, is how an article in the provincial newspaper sought to persuade potential criminals that “in our day and age” crime no longer paid off:

Some criminals delude themselves by thinking that they would not be caught and that punishment could only be meted out if [according to the \textit{şeriat}] they themselves confess, or if two witnesses testify to their guilt. So, they decide that they would deny everything in court, and, if they have accomplices, all make a pact about what they would say, thinking that, as they committed their crime in secret, it would be impossible to prove. Others, not knowing the degrees of punishment prescribed by law for their crimes, think that it [the punishment] would be something light. There are also those, who reflect on what has happened in previous times and make the mistake of thinking that they
could find protection or intercession before the law from the notables or from some government officials.

All such plans fall apart during the interrogations (istintak) which take place in the new courts. The rules of the interrogations and the courts are not as simple as some people think. In these courts, there take place long and detailed examinations and investigations of every crime – big or small – so that the truth is invariably revealed. Moreover, thanks to the corps of inspectors (müfettiş) dispatched to every place, day and night, secretly or in uniform, all events everywhere are easily made known.727

Here, the juxtaposition with “what has happened in previous times” creates the sense of historical rupture that is at the heart of every modernist discourse. The article’s anonymous author uses phrases – “big or small,” “day and night,” “all events everywhere,” “invariably” – that emphasize the omnipresence and omniscience of the new legal system. Because a nizamî court never fails to reveal the “truth” (by virtue of its superior investigative tools) and to mete out the harsh sentences prescribed by the Penal Code, its main role shifts from the punishment to the prevention/deterrence of crime.

The self-righteous tone of the newspaper article was often echoed in the nizamî courtroom itself. In the following interrogation protocol for example, a murder suspect (a certain Ahmed Hamzaoğlu) has just attempted to reverse a previously made confession, claiming that he had been forced to falsely incriminate himself. The interrogators were not impressed:

Q: No one ever confesses simply as a result of [being subjected to] force and intimidation. And nowadays especially, governments don’t trick criminals like you, or greater or smaller ones for that matter, into confessing by the use of force. If you persist in your denial, we shall officially send

727 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 28 [8/20 September 1865].
you to the police (polis). There you’ll suffer in vain. Don’t do this to yourself. Repeat here the confession you made in Razgrad [the town where Ahmed was first interrogated] and we will find you an easy way of making peace with the deceased’s relatives!

A: I won’t confess; put me in the police!
Q: Do you know what police means? Even if you regret this [decision] afterwards and even if you deny your guilt for 80 years, it’s of no use – you are already condemned…
A: I know [what the police is] – it’s the prison (hapis). When I confessed my head was completely confused.
Q: No, the police is not the prison. But it is [such] an extremely narrow and cold place, into which one can be squeezed, that you would be finished there. Besides, no headache or drunkenness can be so great as to make one [wrongly] confess to such a great crime.\(^{728}\)

It would be obvious that all the key elements of the language of the Tanzimat reforms are present in the interrogators’ words above. There is a sense of a troubled past (when “force and intimidation” may indeed have been the government’s tools in extracting false confessions) but also a clear sense that that past has been decisively transcended. The key phrase marking the transition from the pre-modern to the modern is “nowadays” (şu zamanda). It is inconceivable, as a matter of principle, that the state nowadays would have tortured a suspect, because torture is incompatible with the Tanzimat concept of law as a guarantee not only of public order, but also of justice and individual rights. The beauty of this discursive device, of course, is that it is unaffected by the actual continuity of the practice of torture;\(^{729}\) in fact, the irony of the above

\(^{728}\) BOA İ.MVL. 25897, lef. 10 [25 Şaban 1283 / 2 January 1867].
\(^{729}\) Torture has been called “the most typical kanun innovation” (Gerber, State, Society, and Law, 68) and appears to have been routinely used in criminal cases in pre-Tanzimat times. It is true that the OPC (Article 103) outlawed the use of torture but, judging by the numerous instances in which suspects attempted to reverse their previous confessions by claiming that they been “cheated” into
dialogue is that the very rejection of the possibility that torture could have occurred is made in the context of intimidating the suspect with thinly veiled references to future torture (the tribulations to be suffered at the "police").

Of course, it would be naïve to expect that the Ottoman state’s interlocutors across the interrogation line accepted wholeheartedly the idealized official vision of the new justice system. Ahmed, the suspect in the murder case quoted above, seems to have viewed it all as a monolithic disciplinary force whose finer distinctions were irrelevant to him (hence the striking equation of “police” and “prison”). But, regardless of their “real” attitudes towards the reforms, the ordinary men and women of the Danube province proved quite skillful in playing the new judicial game, negotiating with state power, and using the peculiarities of the “dual trial” legal system to their advantage in court. This was a noteworthy achievement.

providing them, the practice seems to have continued in the nizamî courts as well. Occasionally, we find specific allegations of torture: for example, a rape suspect alleging that his previous confession had been extracted by the interrogators’ use of pepper vapors (biber tütsüsi), tweezers, and tongs (BOA A.MKT.MVL. Dosya 312, Vesika 45 [26 Şevval 1283 / 3 March 1867]); or a murder suspect claiming that the investigators had forced him to stand on his feet for two days without allowing him to sit or lie down (BOA İ.MVL. 25824 [9 Receb 1283 / 17 November 1866]).
6.4. “I want him punished” : exploring new legal opportunities

On the night of October 20, 1866, a certain Lambi from the town of Svishtov on the south bank of the Danube was mortally wounded in front of his own house. When the horrified neighbors gathered around the house, they saw that Lambi’s body had been repeatedly slashed at the chest and stomach. A doctor at the scene declared that the wounded man was beyond saving and, indeed, Lambi died several hours later.

At first glance, the legal case seemed clear-cut. The victim himself (he had remained conscious after the attack), his mother and his sister had all claimed that the murderer was the local policeman, Salih b. Ebubekir. But when the relatives brought forward a şer’î lawsuit against Salih, (14 May 1867), the case was dismissed due to the lack of independent eyewitnesses to the crime. The policeman’s legal victory, however, was only temporary. He faced a determined opposition, particularly in the face of Simeona, Lambi’s mother. Undeterred by the dismissal of the şer’î case, Simeona wrote a petition to Midhat Paşa himself, requesting that the case be re-tried in a in nizamî court (7 November 1867). Her request was granted and the first round of interrogations began on November 10, 1867, in Ruse.

The first fact of the case that became reasonably well established was that, on the night of the murder, Salih had spent a substantial amount of time at a

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730 All documents relating to this case: BOA A.MKT.MVL. Dosya 349, Vesika 38 [11 Şaban 1284 / 8 December 1867].
tavern (*meyhane*) near Simeona’s house, getting increasingly drunk. He had repeatedly sent the tavern owner’s young son to the house with instructions to call Elenka (Simeona’s daughter and Lambi’s sister) to the *meyhane*. Even under far more innocent circumstances, however, a respectable unmarried woman would have avoided taverns at all cost, so Salih’s advances were firmly rejected. After a final helping of wine, Salih decided to advertise his virtues as a suitor himself and made his way towards Simeona’s yard, where he started calling out Elenka’s name. At this point, Lambi, who had been away from home, came back and confronted the intruder. Looking through the house’s window, mother and daughter clearly saw how Salih drew out his policeman’s knife, repeatedly stabbed Lambi, and fled the scene.

For his part, Salih denied the accusations and underlined the fact that, as he had been acquitted of the crime at the şer‘î hearing, he would only accept a “guilty” verdict if any eyewitnesses to the crime were to come along, i.e., if the şer‘î standard of proof was met:

A: What can I say, sir – let those people [the eyewitnesses] come here; then I’d be resigned to God’s orders and the Sultan’s law\(^\text{732}\) Let them prove (*isbat*) where they saw me and how I injured him, then, I’d agree…

It is ironic that Salih, who, in his duties as a police officer, would have had some involvement in the administration of the new *nizamî* justice, had apparently failed to grasp its underlying principles. He seems to have regarded his interrogation

\(^{731}\) As attested to by the tavern owner, his son, and a fellow Muslim customer by the name of Hüseyin who said he was embarrassed by Salih’s inebriation in front of the Christians present at the *meyhane* (*Hristiyanlardan utandım*).

\(^{732}\) *Allah‘in emrine ve Padişah‘in kanununa raziyım.*
as an extended and unnecessary repeat of the şerî hearings. Despite the interrogators’ repeated offers to help him get reconciled with Lambi’s relatives, Salih continued to base his defense upon the absence of canonically credible eyewitnesses and to insist that he had not a “grain” of knowledge about the murder. Moreover, in terms of his overall tone and comportment in court, the policeman failed to show even a modicum of respect for the requirements of Tanzimat speak. He repeatedly referred, for example, to the crime as “the death of some infidel (gâvur),” although he would undoubtedly have been aware that the extirpation of that pejorative term was a matter of Tanzimat state policy, pursued vigorously by Midhat Paşa’s administration.

The policeman’s poor choice of strategy was in stark contrast to the behavior of his main opponent. Simeona pursued all her legal options vigorously and shrewdly. In her letter to the governor she explained that she believed that Salih had been wrongfully acquitted and that she wanted him tried according to the “Imperial Penal Code.” In court, she repeated that all she wanted was for Salih to be punished in accordance with the law. Simeona correctly assessed the fact that the standard of proof in a nizamî court was different from the one in its şerî counterpart, and that, consequently, discursive choices which had no place before a kadi could prove decisive during an interrogation. Her testimony was based on dramatism – dramatic description, dramatic story-telling and dramatic action. Describing Lambi’s wounds, she related her own horror at the sight of her

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733 The interrogators offered Salih to reconcile him with the relatives and pleaded with him not to cause further complications to the case (bir takım teklifât’a hacet bırakmalı) and to admit that the murder had been a drunken accident (sarhoşluk halîyle bir kaza).
son’s intestines spilling out of his abdomen. Intriguingly, Simeona portrayed Salih not only as a cruel and calculating murderer, but also as a person recklessly indifferent to the certainty of his own upcoming punishment:

A: [after the first stab] my son and we began screaming and, when some neighborhood girls approached, Salih rushed to the yard door [trying to escape]. But then, telling himself: “I’d be put in chains one way or another; let me at least kill him completely,” he turned around, stabbed my son again in the stomach and pulled out his intestines. [Lambi] died eight or ten hours after that. Oh, my son!

The crux of Simeona’s accusations was her claim that “emboldened by grief” she had rushed out of the house to her son’s aid and had hit Salih with a walking stick, leaving an injury mark on his head. During the şer’î hearings, such an injury mark would not have been considered as evidence; during the nizamî case, however, Simeona was taking no chances – as her cross-examination with Salih drew to a close, she reached out and knocked off his fes hat, pointing out, (in the words of an astonished court scribe), that the wound mark was indeed where she had predicted it would be.734

The court hardly needed more persuasion. It found the defendant’s repeated denials “futile” (vahi) and recommended a sentence of 15 years of hard labor.735 The interrogators rebuffed Salih’s demands for canonically attested eyewitness testimony as irrelevant to the new court rules:

734 Heman merkum Salih’ın başını açıb irae eylemiş ve filhakika eser-i cerh görülmüş.
735 OPC, Article 174 (unpremeditated murder).
Q: You are right to say that such a murder case requires [eyewitness] proof according to the şeriat; however, according to the new rules it can be decided by clues and circumstantial evidence!\[736\]

We have no way of knowing through what mechanisms Simeona obtained her superior legal knowledge. Svishtov was a prosperous commercial center and the education level of its inhabitants was probably higher than the average for the Danube province. Yet, we have no reason to believe Simeona was literate or that her socioeconomic status was anything but average.\[737\] Her behavior suggests that, less than two years after the establishment of the vilayet, its new legal framework was already intimately understood and proactively taken advantage of by Midhat Paşa’s “ordinary” subjects.

6.5. “My knowledge doesn’t reach that far”: defensive strategies in the interrogation game

To be sure, unlike Simeona, most of the “subjects” we see in the nizamî criminal cases were caught up on the receiving end of the new Ottoman justice system. The stories told in the context of legal self-defense are significant not only for their literary merits (however considerable) but also because they reflect aspects

\[736\] Böyle katl maddesi şer’an isbata muhtac ise de, nizamen emare ve serrişte ile tutulur!

\[737\] Simeona “signed” the interrogation protocol by her fingerprint, which was usual for illiterate litigants. As for her socioeconomic status, the only indication we have is that her husband had been paralyzed for years and could not work – in a patriarchal society that would have been a heavy economic blow.
of the contemporary social consensus on certain key dichotomies such as normalcy/deviance, culpability/innocence, credibility/incredibility. In Davis’s words, each such story incorporates “choices of language, detail, and order needed to present an account that seems true, real, meaningful and/or explanatory.”

Let us begin with the most common discursive strategy. Almost invariably, the interrogated persons chose an overall tone and comportment which emphasized their complete submission to the judicial process and their willingness to accept its decisions, whatever they may be. Police officer Salih’s arrogance with the interrogators is not matched in any other case I have read and even he, it would be recalled, pledged his resignation to the “will of God and the Sultan’s law” if the case were proven to his satisfaction. Outright challenges to legal procedures or to the courts’ impartiality were rarely voiced and, when they were, proved ineffective.

When they spoke of the probability that they would be found guilty, most suspects used phrases like “I would be resigned to my punishment” (cezama razi olurum), “I would be in the wrong” (kabahattî olurum), “there would be nothing left for me to say” (diyeceği olmaz), “what can I do – I shall suffer [my punishment],” (ne yapalım, çekeriz). This symbolic obedience was also expressed through the suspects’ frequent professions of judicial naïveté and the implied concession that the court knows what is “best” for them. “My knowledge doesn’t reach that far” (benim ilmim lâhik değildir), “do as

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738 Davis, Fiction in the Archives, 3.
739 See the Kapucuk case, quoted below, in which one of the suspects claimed that the court had shown excessive leniency towards the village notables, while being too harsh on “us poor people.”
you see fit!” (nasıl bilürseniz öyle icra ediniz), and “it will be as you decide” (sizin bileceğiniz şeydir) are some of the typical terms used.  

Such claims of ignorance and submission merit a degree of skepticism. For one thing, they were often parts of larger defensive strategies through which the accused sought to portray themselves as gullible rather than malevolent and their actions as misguided rather than outright criminal. On 17 April 1866, for example, a certain Halil b. Fatah was being interrogated in Leskovac (now in Serbia) in connection with his role in helping his son evade the military draft. Halil had paid a substitute to serve in lieu of his son (not an offense in itself) but, instead of notifying the local authorities of the change, had arranged for it to take place “in secret” as the new recruits were marching towards their base. Upon being arrested, Halil panicked and claimed that the switchover had taken place with the consent of the recruits’ supervisor, Süleyman Ağa, whom he [Halil] had bribed in order to have him turn a blind eye to the affair. Since the investigation failed to corroborate the bribery allegation, Halil was taken to court for falsely accusing Süleyman of having accepted a bribe.  

Halil did not dispute the defamation charge, but said that he had transgressed only because he saw that the prospect of military service had made his son extremely “anguished.” As for the bribery accusation:

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740 BOA A.MKT.MVL. Dosya 275, Vesika 93 [22 Receb 1282 / 11 December 1865]; BOA A.MKT.MVL. Dosya 312, Vesika 47 [27 Şevval 1283 / 4 March 1867].
741 BOA İ.MVL. 25186 [17 Cemaziülevvel 1283 / 27 September 1866].
742 OPC, Articles 68 and 213 (defamation).
A: I made it because, in my fear, I thought: “I have done a really bad thing!” [i.e. by hiring a substitute]
Q: What were you afraid of, [...] that made you say those things?
A: It was on account of my own stupidity (budalalığımdan) and fear. I was afraid that they would put me in prison and would take my son away.

Halil’s defensive strategy, in other words, was to claim that the crime of which he stood accused (the bribery story) was nothing but an “ignorant” knee-jerk reaction to his realization that he had failed to follow proper procedure in the substitution (“I have done a really bad thing”). That defense proved to be effective. The central criminal court of the Danube province recommended that his punishment be reduced from the six-year imprisonment (kalebendlik) term prescribed by the OPC to the much lighter one of exile (nefy) for two years to a place within the same district. The reasons for that leniency were precisely those emphasized by Halil’s self-defense: “paternal devotion,” combined with “ignorance of the law.”

Although neither one of these arguments was formal legal grounds for reducing a criminal sentence according to the Penal Code, the court was apparently satisfied with Halil’s mea culpa. Incidentally, I find it intriguing that Halil presented his motives for trying to “keep” his son in emotional rather than economic terms. Peasant resistance to military service is often interpreted along economic lines: nineteenth-century French peasants, for instance, are said to have resorted en masse to buying off their sons from the army draft, simply because “labor [was] scarce and expensive”

743 Hasb’el-ebu-i şefkatımdan ve ahkâm-i kanuniyeyi ârif olmamasından.
loss of a son’s labor and its implications to the household’s economy may well have shaped Halil’s actions as well – but he chose to emphasize non-economic explanations in his defensive strategy.

“Gullibility” defenses proved effective in numerous other cases. A married woman savvy enough to have juggled at least two simultaneous extra-marital affairs (one of them with the village priest) managed to convince the court that she was “ignorant” of the consequences of setting a neighbor’s house on fire – the court ruled that, “being a woman [she] could not have known the provisions of the law” on that matter and substituted the death penalty prescribed for her actions by the OPC with a 10-year imprisonment at a place “suitable for women.”

A peasant who had ably marshaled an entire village into collecting a bribe for a state official was characterized in the court decision as being one of the “dumbest” (sebûkmağız) inhabitants of the village and found to have been incapable of “foreseeing the consequences of his actions” – that qualified him to have his prison sentence commuted to one of exile. Clearly, regardless of whether they were actually aware of the exact provisions of the law in each case, each of these litigants managed to exploit the court members’ cultural assumptions regarding the kind of knowledge “women” or “peasants” were likely or unlikely to have.

745 BOA İ.Mvl. 25852, lefs. 42,50 [4 Rabiülâhir 1284 / 5 August 1867]; incidentally, the reduction of the penalty because the offender was a woman, although commonly practiced, had no normative basis in law; on the contrary, Article 43 of the OPC stated that “no distinction shall be made between the two sexes as regards punishment.”

746 BOA İ.Mvl. 26059 [8 Receb 1284 / 5 November 1867].
The telling of exculpatory stories was another commonly-used defensive strategy. Often, such stories followed the “property-defense” narrative model. In this model, the narrator’s peaceful daily routine (plowing the fields, herding sheep, guarding a village forest, etc.) is interrupted by an intruder, who is usually an outsider such as an inhabitant of a neighboring village or a member of an ethnic community popularly associated with crime. The narrator observes the intruder attempting to steal the narrator’s (his master’s; his community’s) property, is seized by concern, (rage) and approaches the intruder trying to reason with him. That is to no avail and before long the two parties are locked up in a heated “quarrel” (münaza) or “struggle” (mülade). Often, it is the intruder who allegedly strikes the first blow, thus making the “property-defense” story into a proper “self-defense” one.

747 E.g. the Roma (Gypsies) or Circassians. Ethnic stereotyping (especially against the Roma) was common among interrogators as well. One defendant’s protestations of innocence were bluntly dismissed by the court members with the following words: “Look here: you are a Gipsy (ulan, kibitsin), so don’t waste our time with your denials!” BOA İ.MVL. 25897, lef. 10 [25 Şaban 1283 / 2 January 1867].

748 BOA İ.MVL. 24852, lefs. 8-11 [24 Şevval 1282 / 12 March 1866 to 28 Zilhicce 1282 / 14 April 1866]: a murder on an estate farm [çiftlik] near Sofia, in which three Bulgarian farm workers confronted three Circassians who allegedly had entered the çiftlik forest with the intent of stealing firewood; in the ensuing fight one Circassian was killed. Another example can be found in BOA İ.MVL 24852 lefs. 35-40 [17 Şaban 1282 / 5 January 1866 to 24 Şevval 1282 / 12 March 1866] – in that case the underlying crime had taken place when two Bulgarian had caught up with several Circassians who, the Bulgarians alleged, were trying to steal their sheep; after a short chase the Bulgarians murdered two of the Circassians. In BOA İ.MVL. 25897 [13 Cemaziülevvel 1284 / 12 September 1867], on the other hand, the “property-defense” model is reversed: this time the intruder has killed the person who had caught him red-handed stealing – accordingly, the suspect’s defense recasts the intruder/himself as an innocent bystander, and the “quarrel” as a gratuitous assault by an overzealous property owner.
Trying to deflect blame away form oneself and redirect it towards one’s enemies, accusers or, as the case might be, accomplices was another recurring defensive strategy. In modern legal jargon this may be called “credibility defense” and the accusations and counteraccusations involved in it provide us with treasure troves of information concerning local politics and the “fault lines” of village society. I have described two such cases in detail in the following section. For the time being, I would only stress that nizamî court suspects tended to construct such stories with reference to concrete Tanzimat reform policies. Thus, a certain Yusuf b. Emrullah, a suspected arsonist from the Niš district, explained that his fellow villagers bore a grudge against his family because:

we never stop working with the little that God has given us. That is why, when the government recently distributed paper money (\textit{kaime}),\footnote{This probably refers to the pre-1852 period, when Ottoman \textit{kaime} was an interest-bearing treasury bill used as a governmental monetary tool for internal borrowing rather than modern paper money proper. See Pamuk, \textit{Monetary History}, 209-11.} our household alone received 1,000 piastres, while the rest of the village combined got only 800 piastres.\footnote{BOA İ.MVL. 25852, lef. 41 [9 Receb 1283 / 17 November 1866].}

In one stroke, Yusuf emphasized both his family’s disproportionate contribution to state finances and his enemies’ petty jealousy at the family’s economic success. In another case, a suspect conceded that he had indeed participated in the theft of livestock from his employer, but specified that his accomplices, and not himself, were the real instigators. The suspect illustrated his ambivalence towards the crime by describing the remorseful reflection (\textit{tefekkür}) that had
seized him after the sheep had been stolen – until finally he split from his
accomplices and went into hiding.\textsuperscript{751}

Occasionally, exculpatory strategies took the form of entire alternative
accounts of the facts of the case. This was a road on which the suspects had to
tread lightly, since it inevitably involved some form of denial of the interrogator’s
version of the crime. An individual caught in the possession of forged coins
tested that he had received these as change from someone else and had kept
them, thinking they were “antiques” (\textit{antika}).\textsuperscript{752} A villager accused of stabbing his
sister-in-law and then burning her face in his fireplace claimed that the deceased
suffered from epilepsy and fell in the fire herself (he later retracted that claim).\textsuperscript{753}
A patricide suspect told the interrogators that his father had been an avid hunter
who would fiddle around for hours with his favorite rifle until the inevitable
“accident” finally happened.\textsuperscript{754}

Even seemingly straightforward confessions were usually given a defensive
twist. The most typical wording of a confession, “I/we yielded to the devil”
(\textit{şeytana uydum/uyduk}) suggested an attempt to dissociate oneself from the full
extent of the blame.\textsuperscript{755} Moreover, confessions were rarely unqualified and could
even be used in conjunction with reaffirmations of one’s good character. One

\textsuperscript{751} NBKM OO Fond 169, a.e. 694 [4/26 June 1868].
\textsuperscript{752} NBKM OO Fond 112A, a.e. 1603 [2/14 July 1868]. This may have been a
“believable” story: the trade in antiques was a growth sector in the economy the
nineteenth-century Ottoman Balkans. See Khrishtov, ed. \textit{Dokumenti za bûlgarskoto vûzrazhdane ot arkhiva na Stefan I. Verkovich}, passim.
\textsuperscript{753} BOA İ.MVL. 25824 [18 Safer 1284 / 21 June 1867].
\textsuperscript{754} BOA A.MKT.MVL. Dosya 275, Vesika 93 [22 Receb 1282 / 11 December
1865].
\textsuperscript{755} The use of this expression in the context of criminal confessions predates the
\textit{Tanzimat} period by several centuries. See Heyd, \textit{Ottoman Criminal Law}, 244.
arrestee avowed that he had indeed stolen some merchandise from an itinerant trader, but he proudly refused to testify against his suspected accomplice in the crime. He may have stolen, the suspect said, but he was not “the kind of man who would unjustly throw others to the flames.”

6.6. “They did not listen to me” : narrating rural conflict in strategic terms

Let us now turn from our general discussion of defensive strategies to a more detailed examination of two criminal cases which, in my view, illustrate the particularly skillful way in which Midhat Paşa’s “subjects” managed to use the nizami legal process in order to embroil the state in their own local political struggles. The first case began on December 27, 1865, when the bodies of two Circassian immigrants were discovered in the vicinity of the Bulgarian village of Kapucuk, kaza Samokov (in the Rila mountains south of Sofia).

A police officer and an official from the kaza criminal court were dispatched to the crime scene. They ordered all male villagers to reconvene in the village square on the following day (29 December) and “associate themselves with a guarantor (kefil).” Although during the Ottoman “classical age,” the guarantor in suretyship (kefalet) arrangements was chiefly responsible for ensuring that a person accused of a

756 BOA A.MKT.MVL. Dosya 312, Vesika 47 [27 Şevval 1283 / 4 March 1867].
757 All documents relating to the Kapucuk case: BOA İ.MVL. 24852, lefs. 35-40 [17 Şaban 1282 / 5 January 1866 to 24 Şevval 1282 / 12 March 1866]; this archival unit also contains the correspondence for two other (unrelated) criminal cases.
crime would be available to appear in court at a later date, in the Kapucuk case, the kefalet system functioned more like a communal check on “deviant” behavior – the guarantors, who had to be from among the “trusted and notable” (mu’temed ve mu’tebir) men in the village, were asked to provide either concrete alibis or statements of good character for each villager. In the event, no less than nineteen males (out of a total village population of about 40 households) failed to find such guarantors and were arrested and sent to the court in Samokov. There, two marathon rounds of interrogations and re-interrogations took place (4-22 January 1866). My comments below necessarily focus only on selected aspects of the case.

Kapucuk was a typical mountain village, divided into several hamlets set some distance apart. Judging by the occupations of the arrestees, most villagers made a living as either shepherds or coal peddlers. The most prominent village notable, and a pivotal figure in the case, was one Angel (pronounced än’gel, not än’jl) çorbacı – a livestock merchant, who bought sheep and animal products from the villagers and then resold them in the neighboring towns. The victims’ relatives named no suspect and did not appear at the nizami investigation at

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758 Heyd, Ottoman Criminal Law, 238-40.
759 BOA I.4MVL. 24852, lefs. 40-41.
760 That, of course, is the Ottoman rendition of the Bulgarian honorific chorbadžhiia; the outlook and politics of the individuals who bore that designation was discussed at length in the previous chapter. I have kept the Ottoman version of the term here, since the documents I shall be referring to are in Ottoman Turkish.
all, consequently, the case began as one against an unknown offender. In effect, the inhabitants of Kapucuk were asked to produce the murderer(s) from amongst themselves – and in doing so they were bound to reveal the existing “fault lines” inside their village.

The first man to testify was Angel çorbacı himself. An endnote to his interrogation protocol reveals that he was not summoned as a witness in the case, but came to court secretly (hafiyen) and of his own accord. On that occasion, Angel volunteered to become a guarantor for three of the nineteen men then in custody, but emphatically refused to vouch for the trustworthiness of the remaining sixteen. That begged the question:

Q: Why would you not become [their] guarantor? Are these bad men?
A: These are not good men. They do not listen to me; they do things as they see fit.
Q: In what way do they not listen to you?
A: They did not listen to me when the Sultan’s road was being built!

Out of the sixteen villagers who had allegedly shown such “road-building disobedience” (yol kazmakta adem-i itaat), Angel singled out three as especially “suspicious.” In the end, it was these three men who were convicted of the crime.

The sixteen villagers to whom Angel refused to become guarantor saw the events surrounding the investigation in a rather different light. Almost unanimously they testified that the çorbacı and his henchmen were using the

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761 Interestingly enough, the victims’ relatives did initiate two separate şerî’i lawsuits after the nizamî interrogations were over. The protocols of the şerî’i hearings (BOA İ.MVL. 24852, lefs. 38-39) are dated January 24, 1866.
lawsuit in order to settle old scores. The suspects described the suretyship episode as a chaotic affair: three of them claimed that they had found guarantors from among “the people,” whom the authorities had refused to recognize as legitimate; one said that he had been apprehended after becoming separated from his chosen guarantor “in the mêlée” (kalabalıkta); another one testified that he had arrived late in the village (since he lived in a remote hamlet) and was therefore summarily arrested. One arrestee spoke for all when he described his frustration in the following terms:

A: I have no knowledge of this matter. But I know [this:] they gathered together and arrested the poor people, while the çorbacıs are walking around [free]. It is them you should bring here and interrogate! Even if I stay imprisoned here like this for five years, I would still know nothing.

For our purposes, the most significant part of these men’s testimony was their explanation of Angel’s refusal to vouch for their innocence. Most claimed that the village notable bore a “grudge” (garaz) against them and at least four described the reasons for this grudge in virtually the same words: “he would not become our guarantor because he wanted us to sell our sheep to him cheaply, and we did not agree.”

Let us analyze this exchange of recriminations between Angel and the sixteen suspects. Certainly, both sides formulated their claims so as to make them believable in the eyes of the interrogators. What I find more intriguing is that both narratives were linked to concrete aspects of the reform program that was being implemented in the vilayet of Danube.

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762 Bizden ucuz hayvan satın almak isteyüb vermediğimizden kefil olmuyor.
The villagers’ allegation that Angel had tried to buy their sheep at below-market prices could be linked to recent changes in the policy of assessing the small livestock tax (ağnam resmi). Like other rusumat taxes, the ağnam resmi underwent a process of “regularization” and monetarization during the Tanzimat period. In 1840, a uniform tax rate per sheep/goat was set up throughout the empire, although in practice regional rate variations persisted. In 1856-57, the tax assessment policy was changed again in order to recognize the wide variations in the market prices throughout the empire. Henceforth, the ağnam resmi tax rate would be announced yearly for each region based upon annual surveys of local market prices.\(^\text{763}\) Certainly, one village notable’s small-scale machinations were unlikely to affect government revenue in any material way, but, as a matter of principle, an individual trying to depress the price of sheep was harming (after 1856-57) not only the sheep producers but also the state directly.

The “sting” behind Angel’s allegations, on the other hand, should be clearer in the context of this study. He tried to undermine the detainees’ standing by claiming that they had resisted participating in Midhat Paşa’s road building program. As our discussion in Chapter Three demonstrated, this initiative was arguably Midhat’s most cherished pet project. Like most able-bodied adult males in the Danube province, the villagers of Kapucuk would have been required to contribute a certain number of their workdays each year for the construction or

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improvement of roads in their district. Failure to participate in such a high-profile reform project would undoubtedly have seemed highly reprehensible in the eyes of the government. By claiming that the sixteen suspects had engaged in “road-building disobedience,” Angel was, to be sure, impugning their “patriotism” in some abstract sense. But beyond that (and, we must presume, rather more damagingly) he was also directly questioning their compliance with the policy priorities of this governor and this provincial administration.

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It may be objected that I have mis-represented stories that could have been factually true as elaborate schemes to achieve this or that litigant’s goal. In fact, there is no contradiction here: even if Angel had indeed tried to extort cheaper sheep from his fellow villagers, his opponents nevertheless faced real discursive choices in telling that story. And, vice versa, even if the sixteen suspects had indeed failed to report for their road-building duty, Angel’s choice to highlight that particular offense of theirs remains significant. The broad outlines of these stories may appear “traditional,” but their real discursive power lay in their references to specific reform policies. In other words, both parties’ choices of “language, detail, and order” made perfect sense in the political context in which the interrogations took place.

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For example, the villagers’ portrayal of Angel as an exploitative and vindictive tyrant followed the familiar trope of an idealized Ottoman state acting as a protector of its primary producers/taxpayers from the encroachments of corrupt local strong men (a.k.a. “the circle of justice”). See Metin Heper, The State Tradition in Turkey (Northgate: The Eothen Press, 1985), 25-6.
From the point of view of a small village, such as Kapucuk, the case of the two dead Circassians undoubtedly represented an episode of heightened intrusion by the provincial government into local life. For a brief moment in time, the Ottoman state had come to Kapucuk – literary through dispatching the Samokov meclis representatives and figuratively through the process of interrogation which looked inquisitively into the minutiae of local conflict. And the fact that the state “listened” also meant that it could it be won over and embroiled in village politics. Angel, for example, professed his shame that such a ghastly crime could have occurred “within our [village’s] borders” and even avowed that he had organized an unsuccessful attempt to bury the bodies beyond these borders. The state’s intervention in local politics had not been actively solicited but, once it had taken place, it was too precious an opportunity to miss. How else can we interpret Angel’s refusal to exculpate sixteen of his fellow villagers if, as seems clear, he knew from the start that only three of them had been actually involved in the crime? What about the other thirteen? They were kept incarcerated in Samokov away from their homes for more than a month. They would have needed no clearer illustration of the “capillary” power structure in

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765 Fear of communal punishment, rather than shame, may have motivated Angel’s actions. Collective punishment is a well-known şerîî penal provision. In principle, the practice was discontinued during the Tanzimat period (OPC contains no reference to it); in reality, there were attempts to reintroduce it in certain specific cases – in 1868, for instance, a printed proclamation informed the citizens of the Danube vilayet that henceforth the responsibility for payment of damages for arson would be shared by “the whole village” if the arsonist was not found. See NBKM OO Fond 112A, a.e. 2204 [28 Ramazan 1284 / 23 January 1868]. For the use of collective punishment in pre-Tanzimat Ottoman law, see Heyd, Ottoman Criminal Law, 308-9.

766 Foucault, “Power/Knowledge,” 96.
Kapucuk – Angel’s ability to conspire with the state against them was demonstrated to them on an existential level. Yet, the thirteen arrestees managed to strike back by providing their own narrative of the events. Like the çorbacı, the villagers told an unmistakably “modern” Tanzimat story – employing reformist terminology, appealing to an idealized reformist mentality, and constructed with reference to reformist expectations.

6.7. “Against the wishes of the people” : the local politics of character assassination

We can see similar strategies at work in another case focused on another deeply divided village: Bebrovo, tucked away in the northern folds of the main Balkan range in the region of Veliko Tūrnovo. Here an intriguing, if slightly farcical, series of accusations and counter-accusations took place in the winter of 1865.\(^{767}\) The main protagonists in the case were a certain villager by the name of Stefan Bakırcıoğlu and the local district superintendent (kaza müdürü), Necib Ağa. The formal “crime” addressed in the case was Stefan’s allegation that Necib had tried to poison him. The verdict, in a nutshell, was that no such poisoning attempt had taken place and that Stefan’s claim constituted slander (iftira) against Necib. This was a relatively minor offense, but the legal case arising out of it became quite complicated – it made its way through the entire

\(^{767}\) All documents relating to this case: BOA İ.MVL. 23896 [17 Muharrem 1282 / 12 June 1865].
court hierarchy of the Danube province, elicited a personal response and sentencing recommendation by the governor himself, and was ultimately decided by the highest appellate court in the empire (the Meclis-i Vâlâ) and a Sultanic decree.

Stefan had claimed that the “poisoning” had taken place on the evening of January 31, 1865, at an informal meeting of some villagers at the müdür’s house. Necib had ordered coffee for his guests and the local coffee-maker was carrying around a tray full of coffee cups. When Stefan’s turn to take a cup had come, the coffee-maker allegedly steered Stefan’s hand towards a “specially marked” portion. Taking a sip, Stefan said he felt a burning sensation in his mouth and throat and immediately realized he had been poisoned. He then allegedly stumbled out of Necib’s house, felt extremely sick and repeatedly vomited along his way home, leaving him in no doubt that he had been the victim of an elaborate and pernicious plot masterminded by the müdür. Unfortunately for Stefan, witness testimony to confirm his story was not forthcoming. His neighbors did say that Stefan had seemed unwell that night, but they also suggested that his vomiting may have been induced by the baking soda solution he had taken (presumably as an antidote). The witnesses also reported several instances surrounding the incident, during which Stefan’s behavior had been, to say the least, bizarre: he had, for example, the presence of mind to dispatch his wife, daughter and son-in-law back to Necib’s house, instructing them to look for the regurgitated matter he had left behind and collect it as evidence! (He was convinced that “his enemies” would have already buried or otherwise concealed
these traces of their crime; and indeed, his relatives found nothing). On the following morning, Stefan (now miraculously recovered) confronted some villagers at the coffeehouse and insisted on showing them “traces” of the poison on his tongue – traces that remained invisible to everyone but himself. The witnesses were unanimous on one point: Stefan had stayed at Necib’s house until the end of the soiree, taking not one but up to three cups of coffee and leaving in visibly good health. The coffee-maker summed up the matter rather generously by calling Stefan “an old man whose memory has failed him.”

Why, then, did it take a run through the entire Ottoman judicial system to resolve a case where all the evidence pointed in one direction? In fact, Stefan’s guilt was never the issue – the problem was that, in the course of the investigation, it became clear that the “poisoning” episode was but a symptom of a deeper and, from the government’s perspective, more worrying malaise that was affecting the village of Bebrovo.

The interrogations were concluded on February 13, 1865. On March 8, the criminal court of Tûrnovo acquitted all defendants and found Stefan guilty of defamation. Pursuant to articles 168 and 213 of the Penal Code, the court recommended a sentence of hard labor for three years. That opinion was seconded by the provincial criminal court in Ruse (7 April) and seemed headed for another routine review and implementation by the governor. Midhat Paşa, however, refused to rubberstamp the court decision. Instead, he produced a petition sent to him by some twenty inhabitants of Bebrovo (including Stefan himself and the current town headman, Kolyo) and directed against Necib Ağa
and his clique. That document is written in Bulgarian and is dated 30 January 1865 – the day before the “poisoning” episode occurred. The petition claimed to speak on behalf of all inhabitants of Bebrovo, whom it described as “oppressed and extremely frustrated” by Necib and his three aides – Khadzhi Stancho, Shishko Petûr, and Simeon. The members of this “wicked” quartet were compared to “Janissaries” – a politically explosive term, since Sultan Mahmud II’s destruction of the notorious Janissary corps (1826) was celebrated during the Tanzimat period as “the Auspicious Event” (Vak’a-i Hayriye) and was regarded as the historical sine qua non of Ottoman reforms. The petitioners claimed that Necib, Stancho, Petûr, and Simeon had usurped for a number of years all key intermediary posts between state and village society in Bebrovo, Necib serving as kaza superintendent and his cronies rotating as headmen (muhtar), village treasurers (kabzımal), and collectors of various taxes for the state (tahsildar) or for the church (epitrop). The result was, allegedly, the embezzlement and dissipation of both state revenue and the “poor” villagers’ property. But the supplicants’ most serious accusation was yet to come:

Two days ago, we received the mayoral signet seals for the outlying neighborhoods of our village. Before giving these seals to the villagers, Necib Ağa and Khadzhi Stancho stamped them here and there for their own benefit. Some of the villagers objected [to that], but found themselves in trouble because these two raised hell, took the seals away from the chosen muhtars, selected instead some of their own followers and gave the seals to them, so that their own interests may be advanced. Thus they reshuffled the village elders’ councils (ihtiyar meclisi) everywhere, against the

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768 Bulgarian: tsarshtinata, i.e. what belongs to the Tsar (Sultan).
769 Bulgarian: siromashiiata, i.e. what belongs to the poor people.
villagers’ wishes creating confusion and anxiety. Finally, today they planned to do the same in Bebrovo itself [as opposed to the outlying hamlets]: they reshuffled the twelve members of **ih	iyar meclisi**, created a panic at the government building, apprehended our mayor and demanded our seals – all against the wishes of the people.

This paragraph holds the key to understanding the conflict in Bebrovo. The village was not split along class or ethnic lines.\(^{770}\) The power struggle was a distinctly local one and should be described micro-historically within the context of **Tanzimat** reforms of village administration. The main thrust of this particular aspect of the reforms was towards the “officialization” and, to some limited extent, the democratization of the minor local-bureaucracy posts that had previously been occupied on an unregulated/informal basis by members of the village elites.\(^{771}\) The changing function of the signet seal (**mühür**) was perhaps the best illustration of that shift. In the pre-**Tanzimat** period, the **mühür** was a private object, typically bearing the owner’s name or initials. By contrast, the **Tanzimat** produced the “official” signet seal – an object pertaining to a position, rather than an individual. Bearing no personal name, a typical official seal could read, for example, “primary mayor of the village of Bebrovo.”\(^{772}\)

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\(^{770}\) The petitioners’ claims to represent the “poor people” of Bebrovo should not be misconstrued in class terms: all but one of the signatories of the petition were wealthy enough to possess personal seals, all were literate (as evidenced by handwritten signatures), three were priests, two were **khadzhis** (i.e. had performed the pilgrimage to Jerusalem), and one (Kolyo) was the local village **muhtar**. The conflict was not an ethnic one either, nor was it presented as such – the petition was aimed equally against the Albanian **müdür** and his Bulgarian henchmen.


\(^{772}\) **muhtar-i evvel-i karye-i Bebrova**. This is indeed one of the seals with which the petition against Necib is signed; it is only during the interrogations that we learn the name (Kolyo) of the actual person behind this seal.
delivered to every village in the Danube province, the new seals were designed to embody the incorporation of village administrative posts into the *vilayet*’s bureaucratic hierarchy, as well as to facilitate the transition of office from one elected incumbent to the next. It strikes me as particularly appropriate that the conflict in Bebrovo revolved around the control over such symbolically charged objects. In this context, the alleged usurpation of the official mayoral seals by Necib’s party was tantamount to a revolution on a microscopic scale – and as such must have struck Midhat Paşa as a particularly grievous example of political obstructionism. To be sure, the accusations of “corruption” in the form of embezzling tax revenues were a serious matter – but the “seal business” (*mühür maddesi*) was more serious still. Rather deliberately, the supplicants made the case that their enemies’ actions had effectively put Bebrovo and its environs beyond the control of the state. Implicit in that was the suggestion that the authors of the petition were patriotic whistleblowers who had done the state a favor – and perhaps deserved a favor back.

Midhat Paşa seems to have read the petition along these lines. His letter to the Supreme Court in İstanbul recommended that Stefan’s penalty be reduced from hard labor to the much lighter one of temporary exile. The Paşa conceded that Stefan was indeed an “objectionable and seditious” (*uygunsuz ve müfsid*) man deserving of some sort of punishment. Yet this punishment, Midhat argued, should not be based on the full severity of the Penal Code’s provisions because
Stefan’s accusations belonged in the domain of “private law.” While it would normally “do no harm” to try a slander case such as Stefan’s under the OPC, it “should not be forgotten” that “de jure” (hal-i zahirisi) the case remained a private one. Moreover, if Stefan was guilty, the müdür and his men were no saints either:

Some of the villagers have also drafted a petition and expressed a complaint designed to prevent the capricious and tyrannical (hodserane ve gaddarane) actions of the said official [Necib]. This complaint has been neglected and no benefit has been derived from it…

Although the governor’s intervention was couched in legal terms, it was motivated by political considerations. The summary of the case published in the crime chronicle of Dunav explained the causes for the leniency shown Stefan in political terms as well: although unquestionably guilty of slander, he had been “seeking to establish his rights” against an unjust state official.

The Bebrovo petition proved to be an effective defensive weapon for Stefan. As we saw in the Kapucuk murder trials, purely local political conflicts could be presented in such terms as to elicit the sympathies of the reformist bureaucratic cadres staffing the nizamî courts. The Bebrovo petitioners did better that that – they managed to embroil no lesser a figure than the top provincial bureaucrat into their “micro-historical” conflict. Midhat was clearly more concerned about the allegations put forth in the petition than about any part of the “poisoning” case per

773 hukuk-i şahsiye. The term usually refers to şer’î law, although in this case there is no evidence that Stefan ever filed a şer’î lawsuit against Necib. (Moreover, as Midhat’s letter correctly noted, “private law” makes no provision for the crime of “slander” as such).

774 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 18 [18/30 June 1865].
se. As in Kapucuk, these allegations struck a nerve because they suggested that key reform policies were being sabotaged. And no matter how insignificant in scale, such sabotage could not be tolerated.

6.8. Everyday forms of compliance

In defining “everyday forms of resistance” James C. Scott suggested that his famous concept had two distinct (if overlapping) dimensions. On the one hand, there is the physical aspect of resistance made up of activities such as: “…foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on.” But these “Brechtian” or “Schweikian” acts of physical resistance do not tell the entire story: the struggle is not merely “over work, property rights, grain, and cash. It is also a struggle over the appropriation of symbols, a struggle over how the past and present shall be understood and labeled, a struggle to identify causes and assess blame, a contentious effort to give partisan meaning to local history.”

The evidence I have presented in this chapter contains, for the most part, descriptions of behavior that fits into the category not of “resistance,” but of its opposite – compliance. As a particular type of relationship between individuals and political power, compliance makes for a notoriously difficult historiographical subject since writing about it necessarily involves assessments of such

intangibles as personal motivation and “willingness” (resistance, on the other hand, never seems to need a motivation). As an illustration, one only needs to recall the controversy caused by Daniel Goldhagen’s recent book which attempted to make a specific claim regarding the nature of “ordinary” Germans’ compliance with the Third Reich’s extermination project. A much more fruitful avenue for exploration, it seems, would be to speak of symbolic compliance – the willingness to modify discourse and behavior in accordance with what political power expected (or assumed) an individual to say and do in order to demonstrate his or her bona fide status as trustworthy suspect, witness, and “subject” in general. It is in this regard that Scott’s analysis of the symbolic/discursive, elements of the “struggle” strikes me as relevant to the topic of compliance as well as resistance. For, as the nizamî court officials soon discovered, there was more than one way to be compliant and to “speak Tanzimat.” Was a suspect to be corrected if he believed that the “police” was “prison”? Was an elderly Christian woman to be allowed to single-handedly convict a police officer? Was the testimony of one notable more believable than that of thirteen “common” folk? Was an offender to be given special consideration because his local adversaries had behaved in a “Janissary” way? These were not simple questions in that they involved not merely the finding of the “truth,” but, above and beyond that, the practical definition and redefinition of the course of Ottoman reform on a micro level. In the process, the court became the arena for a process of practical

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negotiation and of ironing out the differences between the official vision of the Tanzimat and its many subaltern understandings.  

Methodologically, then, the contribution of this chapter has been to examine the system of "dual trial" not on the basis of its normative texts, but on the level of practice. As we saw, the nizamî court records of the Danube province in the 1860’s abound with references to legal procedures, practices, and arguments that fell outside the provisions of the 1856 Penal Code which was largely the "blueprint" for the system. In its application, the law proved to be much less monolithic than in its letter, largely because of the great skill with which litigants throughout the social spectrum deployed key elements of the Tanzimat discourse in their defensive (and offensive) legal strategies.

Empirically, what I think this survey of the workings of the reformed judicial system in the vilayet reveals is the great ability and willingness of Midhat Paşa’s subjects to play the new interrogation game. There is no evidence that popular attitudes to the new criminal justice system were split along ethnic or religious lines. Specifically, despite the national meta-narrative’s expectations to the contrary, there is nothing to suggest that the ethnic Bulgarian inhabitants of the province shied away from the new legal opportunities provided by the nizamî courts or in any way regarded the reformed Ottoman justice system as illegitimate and/or teetering on the brink of collapse. On the contrary, the fact that the Bulgarians in the province learned the complex rules of the nizamî

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777 This argument is influenced by Ussama Makdisi’s incisive analysis of the “crisis in Ottoman representation,” in his The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 105-8.
interrogation so quickly suggests that, at least into the late 1860’s, most of them regarded the imperial framework of which the interrogations were a part as a political arrangement that was likely to endure in the foreseeable future.
CHAPTER 7: NATIONALISM AND THE PAŞA

7.1. Ottoman modernism versus Bulgarian nationalism

No other aspect of Midhat Paşa’s policies in the Danube province would become as important in shaping his legacy there, or as controversial and divisive from a historiographical perspective, as his efforts to suppress any and all expressions of nationalist sentiment (particularly Bulgarian nationalist sentiment) in the province. In theory, there can be no doubt that ethnic nationalism posed a major ideological challenge to Midhat’s policies, in that it rejected the very premise on which these policies were based – namely that Ottoman rule (in its reformed and enlightened Tanzimat reincarnation) could, if given the chance, bring progress and prosperity to the Danube province. Balkan nationalist “meta-narratives” in particular were completely antithetical to the Tanzimat doctrine of Osmanlılık, since they maintained that the Christian populations in Ottoman Europe were civilizationally a part of the West, held captive in the Orient by a historical accident. But to say that Bulgarian nationalism presented a potential ideological and discursive challenge to Midhat’s policies is merely to state the obvious; instead, my goal in this chapter would be to trace the extent to which nationalism was or was not an actual political force in the Danube province between 1864 and 1868. To put in differently, we need to gauge the degree of popular support for the nationalists’ program among the Bulgarian communities in the vilayet.
I contend that the 1860’s and early 1870’s were a period in which ethnic Bulgarian nationalism and supra-ethnic Ottoman Osmanlılık coexisted as rival modernist ideologies and competed for the “hearts and minds” of the Bulgarian communities in the Danube province. Ussama Makdisi has remarked that “Ottoman modernization ... was as much a project of power within the empire as it was an act of resistance to Western imperialism,”778 and, indeed, many of Midhat’s policies were shaped at least in part by concerns over domestic legitimacy. In its frenzied road building program, in its urban reforms, in its “model” farm running state-of-the-art imported machinery, in its “ordered” nizamî courts, etc., the administration’s goal was not only to improve the vilayet’s transportation, public health, agriculture, or the administration of justice. It was just as important to demonstrate to the public that the Tanzimat and Tanzimat statesmen (as opposed to any potential nationalist alternatives) could be bona fide agents of modernity and progress. The provincial newspaper regularly published triumphant accounts of the happiness and contentment that Midhat’s subjects were experiencing (or ought to be experiencing) as a result of the countless expressions of government beneficence that were being lavished upon them. One particularly eager correspondent’s report even claimed that:

Those living in the districts surrounding the Danube province see all the [improvements] and are getting envious of the condition of the citizens of that province; they openly say that they would like to become part of the vilayet’s jurisdiction

and profess their jealousy of the happiness of the vilayet’s inhabitants.⁷⁷⁹

Far from wanting to leave the empire to form their own nation-state, the Bulgarians, in this vision of things, would flock to the vilayet system. This was wishful thinking and propaganda to be sure, but it nevertheless shows how the reforms could be deployed as a weapon in the larger ideological struggle against Bulgarian (and other) nationalism(s). While nationalist discourses alleged, following the arguments of European Orientalists, that the “Sick Man of Europe” would never rise from his deathbed and should be put out of his misery, the Tanzimat reformers hoped to use the example of the Danube province to argue that “the empire was not stagnant but independently moving – and dragging all Ottoman subjects – toward modernity.”⁷⁸⁰

Makdisi’s arguments about “Ottoman Orientalism” as a reformist discourse that sought to “nationalize (Ottomanize) the empire”⁷⁸¹ and usher it into the modern age are certainly easier to apply to the margins of the state; and it is no coincidence that some of the most exciting recent work on bringing Ottoman modernism to the provinces has focused on far-off regions such as Transjordan, Yemen, and Albania, that had been only tenuously integrated (if at all) in the administrative structure of the empire in pre-Tanzimat times.⁷⁸²

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⁷⁷⁹ Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 82 [15/27 June 1866] (report from the district of Kiustendil).
⁷⁸¹ Ibid.: 771.
⁷⁸² See, for example, Rogan, Frontiers of the State; Thomas Kühn, “An Imperial Borderland as Colony: Knowledge Production and the Elaboration of Difference in Ottoman Yemen, 1872-1918,” The MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies 3 (Spring 2003); Isa Blumi, “Beyond the Margins of Empire: Issues
province was not on the margins; it was, geographically, economically, and historically, an integral part of the empire’s Balkan core. Thus, the discourse that Tanzimat statesmen had to craft here – I will refer to it as “Ottoman modernism” – was somewhat different than Makdisi’s “Ottoman Orientalism.” In the vilayet of Danube, Ottoman modernism sought to justify the claim that the Tanzimat reforms would bring (or were already bringing) the benefits of progress and modernity to all their subjects – and, in this it was indeed similar to claims that were being made at the time at the Arab periphery. But what made “Ottoman modernism” different was that it lacked the dimension of ethnic superiority that, according to Makdisi’s controversial arguments, was part and parcel of “Ottoman Orientalism.” On the contrary, in this province, with its majority non-Muslim population, the main discursive challenge was to counter the European orientalist and Bulgarian nationalist claims that Ottoman rule had been an obstacle to the development of Balkan society and that, in the “century of nationalities,” an entity such as a “model” reformed province was an exercise in futility.

One important part of Ottoman modernism’s riposte to such allegations was a historical argument that contrasted the relative order and prosperity of the late Tanzimat period (especially the years after the end of the Crimean War) with the anarchical age of the ayans that had preceded it.783 In the Balkan provinces in

Concerning Ottoman Boundaries in Yemen and Albania,” The MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies 3 (Spring 2003).

783 The ayan age was the Ottoman empire’s “long eighteenth century” (from 1699 to 1812), traditionally seen as a time of collapse of central authority and of periods of virtual anarchy in the countryside (most notoriously in the Balkan provinces in the decade between 1793 and 1802); more recently the legacy of the ayan age has been undergoing considerable reevaluation. For an overview,
particular, whose population had undeniably suffered terribly in the internal struggles between the ayans’ armies, unruly Janissaries, and freelance organized criminals of various ethnic origins and religious persuasions (kûrdzhali, delibashii, khaiduti, klephtoi, etc), this argument posited that Ottoman reform had single-handedly brought the state back from the brink of collapse. By stemming the tide of anarchy through such decisive actions as the suppression of the ayans and the destruction of the Janissaries, the argument went, the Ottoman state (in its new Tanzimat reincarnation) had redeemed itself and shown its ability to modernize. Kıbrıslı Mehmet Emin Paşa (three times grand vezir in the 1850’s and early 1860’s) put that point succinctly in a conversation with a British diplomat in the summer of 1860:

In respect, however, to the extent to which anarchy still prevails, you must confess [...] that we have, again, reason to congratulate ourselves. You can remember the time when we were emerging from a far more chaotic state of things; when, to instance only our European provinces, they were, with some solitary exceptions, all of them in arms against each other, or against the authority of the Sovereign, whom the Pashas of Epirus, Widdin, and Rustchuk, and the Servians, Bosnians, and Albanians held equally at defiance. But order is now the rule and anarchy the exception. Give

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see Bruce McGowan, “The Age of the Ayans, 1699-1812,” in An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); a more in-depth analysis with a focus on the Balkans is Vera Mutafchieva’s, Kûrdzhaliisko vreme, 2 ed. (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1993).

Mutafchieva, (Kûrdzhaliisko vreme, 383-7) provides a gruesome summary of the devastation visited upon the central Balkans by these groups in the last quarter of the eighteenth and the first few years of the nineteenth century.
us but fair play, and doubt not we can defend our rights and regenerate our Empire.\(^\text{785}\)

Midhat Paşa himself was one of the most ardent advocates of this view. In an article he published in the French and British press (June, 1878) from his European exile, he wrote that:

\[\ldots\] the condition of Turkey, such as it was before the [1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman] war, compared with what it was thirty years earlier, discloses the happy change which had taken place in the state of the country; it was an astonishing transformation, so great that in any other country a century of effort would have appeared insufficient for its realisation.\(^\text{786}\)

This type of historical argument was the core component of the discourse of Ottoman modernism in the province. A second element of that discourse was the claim (often repeated by vilayet officials, including Midhat himself), that the Bulgarians’ “national character” made them ill prepared for autonomous or independent statehood. Ottoman bureaucratic correspondence of the 1860’s, which is full of examples of ethnic stereotyping, generally described Bulgarians as a people of “solid” (mazbut) and “time-tested” (mücerred) morals, who were mostly loyal to the empire and not easily swayed by nationalist ideas into “taking the road to sedition and excitement.”\(^\text{787}\) By their “nature” (tab’an ve hulkatan) they were said to be of “calm disposition” (sukûnet ashabından),\(^\text{788}\) although “Greek propaganda” and “Russian intrigue” could occasionally induce them to

\(^{785}\) “Condition of the Christians in Turkey, 1860,” in House of Commons Accounts and Papers, 1861, document 5, Inclosure (Consul General J.A.Longworth in Belgrade to Ambassador H. Bulwer).


\(^{787}\) BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 32 [9 Muharrem 1284 / 14 May 1867].

\(^{788}\) BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 58 [18 Receb 1284 / 15 November 1867].
make trouble. But these same qualities, Ottoman reformers argued, could become liabilities should the Bulgarians ever contemplate creating and running their own state. In his 1878 article (whose aim was to influence the European statesmen gathered at the Berlin Congress to pare down the size of San Stefano Bulgaria), Midhat stressed that “of the Bulgarians it is estimated that 50 per cent. are labouring men and not less than 40 per cent. shepherds, herdsmen, mowers, &c.” Moreover, the Paşa added:

It is not out of place ... to mention that the Bulgarians, in intellectual respects, are very backward; what I have said of the progress made by the Christian races does not affect them; it is the condition of the Greeks, Armenians, and others. 789

There can be no doubt that, to a certain extent, this skepticism about the ability of Bulgarians to govern themselves reflected real shortages of educated cadres with the requisite skills and experience. But Midhat’s statement also reflected the long-standing paternalistic attitude of the Ottoman political classes towards the empire’s subjects. The convoluted three-step election process for meclis members, in which popular choice (itself limited by property qualifications) was twice subjected to bureaucratic “approval,” is instructive in this regard. Furthermore, even as it was opening up new meclis positions to non-Muslims, and even as it was hiring individual Bulgarians to relatively high positions in the vilayet bureaucracy, Midhat’s administration kept voicing its reservations that enough Bulgarians with the necessary administrative qualifications could be found to fill up those positions. In June of 1867, as was already mentioned, the

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provincial administration voiced its opposition to the center’s plans to create municipal councils in towns beyond the vilayet capital and a few sancak centers. In no uncertain terms, the provincial administrative council (*Meclis-i İdare-i Vilayet*) urged the central government to postpone such an extension of the belediyes – because, it claimed, there was a shortage of men possessing the required “zeal and public spirit” (*erbab-i gayret ve hamiyet*) in the smaller kaza centers – especially where representatives of the non-Muslim groups were concerned.\(^\text{790}\)

Incidentally, the number of municipal council seats in question was six per council (distributed according to the relative numbers of each millet in a given town). In other words, the Ottoman bureaucrats in Ruse did not believe that even a handful of Bulgarians from each town of the vilayet could be entrusted with relatively routine administrative tasks at the most local level of government.

The third element of the reformers’ modernist discourse in the Danube province was a boilerplate Metternichian rejection of revolutionary activity of any kind, coupled with an equally standard conservative discourse of gradual change towards progress under the aegis of an enlightened reformist elite. The provincial newspaper relentlessly extolled the twin virtues of “calm and tranquility” (*spokoistvie i tishina* in Bulgarian). That lugubrious euphemism was used liberally to encourage political quietism and condemn any activity that smacked of sedition or a desire to revise the political status quo in the province. The unconditional maintenance of “calm and tranquility” was billed as the

\(^{790}\) BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 64, [19 Safer 1284 / 22 June 1867].
necessary precondition for the gradual economic and “moral” progress that would inevitably result from the reforms. In its very first editorial, Tuna/Dunav proclaimed:

Those whose minds are at least a little cultivated know very well that a country’s [...] tranquility, its perfect security and the gradual development of its material and moral condition are predicated upon the principle of legal responsibility [and] the proper upbringing and education [of its citizens]. We can only benefit from that principle when everyone makes it his own sacred duty to respect the laws of the empire and to obey them. It is in the countries where such respect and obedience are most prevalent, that the [economic] improvements, security, and prosperity are most advanced. In a country in which an educated public has charted its course with understanding and according to its own customs, it is unnecessary [for the government] to resort to compulsive measures to keep such a public to its duties; rather, this happens naturally, as everyone has a vested interest in preserving the social order.\(^{791}\)

This vision of “moderate progress within the bounds of the Law” (to borrow a term made famous by Jaroslav Hašek) is easy to satirize in retrospect. But, in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, it had impeccable credentials. On the political spectrum at the time, it was situated squarely within the new brand of reformist conservatism that had begun to take hold in Europe since the 1850’s. John Gillis has remarked that, for European conservatives of this period “resistance to change was giving way to the desire to control and shape events for conservative purposes.”\(^{792}\) Hence the emergence of conservative reform programs – like the ones implemented during the 1850’s and 1860’s in Napoleon

\(^{791}\) Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 1 [3/15 March 1865].
\(^{792}\) John Gillis, The Development of European Society, 1770-1870 (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 274.
III’s France, Cavour’s Piedmont, Bismarck’s Prussia, and Disraeli’s Britain. For Ottoman 
*Tanzimat* statesmen this brand of forward-looking reformist conservatism was a natural fit – it offered the prospect of a gradual and controlled social and political change, emphasized pragmatism at the expense of ideology and, perhaps most importantly from the Ottoman perspective, promised to prop up the existing political system against revolutionary change. “You will see, gentlemen,” Cavour had declared in 1852, “how reforms carried out in time, instead of weakening authority, reinforce it; instead of precipitating revolution, they prevent it.”

To be sure, Ottoman reformist conservatives did not take all their political cues from their European counterparts (championing nationalism, for example, proved to be a winning strategy for conservatives in the “national unification” scenarios of Germany and Italy, but was strictly off-limits in the context of trying to keep a multinational empire together), yet the ideological affinity between the two movements is unmistakable. Âli Paşa’s description of the political tactics of the *Tanzimat* reformers, with its uneasy rhetorical marriage of “progress” (notice the steam-engine metaphor) and social control, echoed the concerns of many a European conservative at the time:

> [O]ur speed is limited by our fear that our steam-boilers may burst. Our reforms must be carried out slowly and gradually, and must not be accompanied by thunder and lightning.  

If the *Tanzimat* modernist discourse in the Danube province was intended, at least in part, for a Bulgarian audience, the next question that might be asked is

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793 Quoted in Ibid., 276.  
how effective it was in that role. We already saw in previous chapters that loyalty (or rather heterogeneous loyalties) to the empire was/were widespread among members of the Bulgarian communities in the province, elites and non-elites alike. There can be no doubt that the breadth of this pro-imperial sentiment was partly due to Bulgarians’ acceptance of the arguments of Ottoman modernism. Numerous editorials in the Bulgarian press of the 1860’s and 1870’s voiced their authors’ agreement with the historical analysis and vision for the future put forth by Ottoman reformers. Turtsiia, one of the İstanbul-based Bulgarian newspapers with closest ties to the Ottoman government was a predictable and reliable advocate of the pro-imperial position. It regularly celebrated Ottoman reform for having opened up new opportunities for the “Christian people of the empire,” “both in the government administrative councils, and on the road to success in general.”

Turtsiia also emphasized the need for proceeding carefully towards political and social change, echoing the concerns of Ottoman reformist conservatives. “Has anyone ever seen a kingdom be so successfully transformed in such an urgent fashion [as the Ottoman empire],” one editorial asked and then opined that:

The reforms that Europe is so impatiently awaiting and that the peoples of Turkey are hoping to see cannot be implemented overnight. In order to be successful, they have to take into consideration the countless and varied needs of all the citizens of the empire. Most importantly, the reforms must take into account the existing political sentiments – they must take care not to inflame inter-communal passions but must, on the contrary, put to rest all negative prejudices based on religion and ethnicity. And everyone can agree


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that such a task requires long-term careful work, political maturity and wisdom.\textsuperscript{796}

But \textit{Turtsiia} was not the only Bulgarian-language newspaper to voice such sentiments. The law-and-order anti-revolutionary ideal of preserving “calm and tranquility” that was promoted by \textit{Tuna/Dunav} found a receptive audience among Bulgarian journalists from a wide variety of political persuasions, including some political exiles who wrote for the generally more radical Bulgarian press in Romania. Pandeli Kisimov, whom we have previously seen as one of the leaders of the Bulgarian dualist movement, found a platform for his increasingly moderate and pro-Ottoman views when he took up the position of editor for the Bucharest-based newspaper \textit{Otechestvo} in 1869. In a bitter polemic with the radical nationalist weekly \textit{Svoboda}, Kisimov denounced the nationalists’ calls to revolution for the establishment of a Bulgarian nation-state as a recipe for disaster. Using the French revolution as an example, Kisimov wrote that nations and republics had been the sites of the “the most horrendous atrocities in history”\textsuperscript{797} and that, consequently, it would be a grave mistake if Bulgarians were to heed nationalism’s siren call:

Those who are calling for revolts, bloodshed, axes, and other similar things can only be jealous people, who cannot tolerate our nation’s [current] prosperity, the success of our Church [movement] and our unity. Their bloodthirsty thoughts and flippant beliefs are not supported either by old or by new Bulgaria. The Bulgarian people will resist [the revolutionaries’] temptations and will carry on with its pure national agenda.\textsuperscript{798}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{796}“Sichki sa súglašiavat,” \textit{Turtsiia}, vol. 3, no. 38 [18/30 March 1867].
\textsuperscript{797}Quoted in Iakimov, \textit{Pantelei Kisimov}, 261.
\textsuperscript{798}\textit{Otechestvo}, vol. 1, no. 37 [17/29 April 1870].
\end{footnotes}
There was also a receptive Bulgarian audience for the historical analysis of the *Tanzimat* discourse. In a broader sense, articles in the mainstream Bulgarian press in İstanbul often acknowledged the generally benign role of Ottoman rule in the Bulgarian lands over the centuries. Its “benevolence,” wrote Petko Slaveikov in 1872 “has enabled us to preserve both our religion and our [sense of] nationality.” In most mainstream Bulgarian literary works of the 1850’s and 1860’s, the period of Ottoman reforms is presented in a rather positive light, often using the same arguments that we find in the writings of Ottoman statesmen themselves. Whether explicitly or implicitly, many Bulgarian writers portrayed the *Tanzimat* as a renewal of the Ottoman imperial covenant after the disastrous exceptionalism of the age of the *ayans*. In the popular drama *Neshtastna familiia* (first published in 1860), Vasil Drumev offered this view:

The successors of the glorious Ottoman throne, who were in general characterized by their great love of humanity and magnanimous attitude towards their subjects looked at the intolerable atrocities of the inhumane janissaries, the *kûrdzhalii*, etc. with extreme sorrow and endeavored to stop these atrocities by peaceful means. But when finally the spite and disobedience of these groups reached its apex, the glorious predecessor of the current Sultan lost all patience with them and had them exterminated.  

The melodramatic stories of love and suffering that captivated audiences in the early years of the development of Bulgarian theater – Blûskov’s *Izgubena Stanka* (1866) and *Zlochesta Krüstinka* (1870), as well as Drumev’s *Neshtastna familiia* – were all set during the *ayan* age. So was N. Kozlev’s epic poem *Cheren Arap i Chitalishte*, vol. 3 no. [15 May 1872].

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799 *Chitalishte*, vol. 3 no. [15 May 1872].
Khaidut Sider (1868), which celebrated Bulgarian resistance against the marauding irregulars’ bands of the late eighteenth century by describing an allegorical fight between a Bulgarian hero and a Muslim kûrdzhaliia villain (“Black Arab”), whose depredations had blighted “the flat Danubian plain,” but whose slaying brought peace to the land and made progress possible once again:

Let the merchants, formerly worried about their profits
Start trading and sending merchandise again
Let their caravans, with fancy goods, with expensive silk fashions
Roll and rattle on the roads, moving again without fear.
Their enterprise shall again receive valuable goods with no harm
Their families shall be certain that they would come back home safe.  

The moral of the story is clear – now was the time to capitalize on the economic opportunities provided by the peace and security of the Tanzimat age, not the time to engage in revolutionary action. The memories of the ayan times were still etched deeply in the Bulgarian collective consciousness by the time Midhat arrived in Ruse, but these memories actually worked in favor of his reform program, not against it. An old Bulgarian man whom Kanitz met during one of his travels in the vilayet in the early 1870’s recalled the abuses of the ancien régime, when “all villagers, with everything they owned were at the mercy of any passing

801 First published in Obsht Trud (Bolgrad, Ukraine), vol. 1, no. 3 [1868].
802 In chapter seven of his Neshtastna familia, V. Drumev, for example, asked the rhetorical question: “[w]hat Bulgarian would fail to shed a tear when he recalls the misfortunes that our great-grandfathers have suffered at the hands of the kûrdzhalii?”
Turk” and gave thanks for the fact that “since then the fate of the rayah had changed in such a happy way.”

If the fortunes of Ottoman modernism among the Bulgarian inhabitants of the Danube province were indeed dialectically linked to the fortunes of Bulgarian nationalism, then it is imperative to assess the degree to which the policies of Midhat’s administration succeeded in assuaging (or, conversely, failed to assuage) certain grievances particular to the Bulgarian communities in the vilayet. This is not a matter of endorsing Liah Greenfeld’s over-simplistic theory of existential ressentiment and its allegedly central role in the development of “Eastern ethnic nationalisms,” but simply a means of gauging the impact of Ottoman reforms on the Bulgarian public’s willingness (or reluctance) to entertain ideas about radical political change. In the following few sections of this chapter, I will examine two areas in which Midhat’s policies touched upon issues of great concern for the majority of his Bulgarian subjects – the so-called Bulgarian Church Question and the settlement of Muslim immigrants/refugees on the territory of the Danube province.

803 Kanitz, Dunavska Bûlgariia, vol. 1, 150.
7.2. The Church question

As commonly understood by most Bulgarians in the 1860’s and early 1870’s, “the Bulgarian question” was the question of obtaining autonomy not of the Bulgarian nation from Ottoman political rule, but of the Bulgarian church from the Greek-dominated ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul. In the mainstream Bulgarian press of the time, as well as in private correspondence, the terms “our people’s question” (narodniat ni vûpros) and “our people’s affairs” (narodnite ni raboti) referred to one thing only – the Church “struggle.” Bulgarians from the provinces wrote their friends or relatives in Istanbul, asking for the latest news about the “people’s affairs” – meaning the latest turn of Ottoman policy vis-à-vis the Bulgarian church demands.  

The celebrated Bulgarian communal organizations (obshtini) cropped up in cities and towns first and foremost as coordinating structures in the struggle against the local Patriarchate bishops, and sometimes even as surrogate church boards in places where those bishops had been expelled or ostracized. The priorities of the great majority of politically active Bulgarians in the 1860’s were perhaps best summed up by Khristo Tûpchileshtov, a well-off Bulgarian merchant in the Ottoman capital and a champion of the Church independence movement. In a private letter, dated

805 E.g. letters by V Khris’tov from Shumen to Khristo Arnaudov and Todor Iliev in Istanbul; NBKM BIA Fond 31, a.e. 2, pp. 7; 16.
806 This was the case, for example, in Ruse (see Sahara, An Eastern Orthodox Community, passim.) and Niš (see BOA İ.B. 80/1 [12 Şevval 1278 / 12 April 1862]). On the obshtini in general, see Khris’tov, Bûlgarskite obshtini prez Vûzrazhdaneto, passim.
February 1867, Tûpchileshtov had this to say on the question of political versus religious “freedom”:

Let’s assume that the non-Muslims in the Turkish empire were granted political rights tomorrow. What good are those political rights going to be to us, when our spiritual-political head is a Rum [Greek]? Would he not usurp our new rights on behalf of his own people? And would not our enemies be strengthened as a result, so they can oppress and skin us even more thoroughly than they have done in the past?  

In general, when Bulgarians of the 1860’s used the metaphors of the “yoke” (*igo*) and “slavery” (*robstvo*) to describe their current situation, they were much more likely to refer to the Patriarchate’s control of their church affairs, than to Ottoman political rule. Thus one prominent member of the Bulgarian community in İstanbul, speaking at a prayer service for three exiled leaders of the movement for an autonomous church in May 1861, vowed to “continue the sacred struggle for our liberation from the Phanariote slavery” (*fanariotskoto robstvo*) and expressed his confidence that the Bulgarian cause will ultimately “prevail over this persecution and oppression to which the Phanariotes have subjected us.”

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808 The “yoke” and “slavery” would become stock images in the lexicon of official Bulgarian nationalism after 1878 – this time used, of course, to describe Ottoman political rule.

809 A term used to refer to the Patriarchate as an institution or to Greek clergy in general; it is derived from the name of the İstanbul district (*Fener/Phanar*) where the Patriarchate’s headquarters are located.

810 Nikov, *Vûzrazhdane na bûlgarskiia narod*, 198. The speaker on that occasion was Todor Burmov, at the time a prominent Bulgarian journalist and publisher; he
and Methodius in 1861, a Bulgarian teacher from Sofia lambasted the Patriarchate:

Oh, Phanar! you devilish bunch! The day will come for you to give account to the highest Judge – first for burning our Slavonic books and for trampling upon us morally and spiritually, second for still trying, under the pretext of protecting the Christian faith [...] to misrepresent the graces and freedoms that our beloved Father-Tsar has bestowed upon us as somehow being contrary to our Church!

The beloved “Father-Tsar” in question was, of course, the Ottoman Sultan Abdülmejid, whose flower-bedecked portrait hung above the speaker during the ceremony, sharing center stage with an icon of Sts. Cyril and Methodius and also, rather incongruously, with a painting of the AD 863 conversion of the Bulgarian prince Boris to Christianity.811

Members of the Greek Patriarchate clergy were routinely the subjects of much opprobrium in the Bulgarian literature of the 1860’s and 1870, including in some of its most popular works. At best, Patriarchate priests and bishops are portrayed as utterly indifferent to the needs of their flock – as in Iliia Blûskov’s Izgubena Stanka, in which the Phanariote bishop of Shumen callously rebuffs a plea by the main protagonists to assist them in the search for an abducted young Bulgarian woman.812 At worst, members of the Greek clergy are presented as lecherous perverts – as in Todor Ikonomov’s Lovchanskiiat vladika, in which a

would later (in 1879) become the first Prime Minister of the autonomous Bulgarian Principality.

811 Speech by the Sofia teacher M.K. Bubotinov delivered on May 24, 1861 in Sofia; report in the newspaper Sûvetnik, (İstanbul) vol. 2, no. 10 [May 1861].
812 Iliia R. Blûskov, Izgubena Stanka; povest (Sofia: Dûrzhavna pechatnitsa, c.1928).
philandering Bishop of Lovech and his horny vicar (also Greek) have seduced the wife of a Bulgarian merchant,\(^{813}\) but are caught in the act by the aggrieved husband and almost lynched by a righteously indignant Bulgarian crowd, (with the husband commenting that “to hang any Greek bishop is to do a great service to his diocese”).\(^{814}\) In such literary works, the corrupt and immoral Phanariote characters are often unfavorably contrasted with even-handed and considerate Ottoman government figures. In the abovementioned *Izgubena Stanka*, for example, the Ottoman Paşâ is informed ex post facto that two relatives of the abducted eponymous heroine (Stanka) have had to take justice into their own hands and re-abduct Stanka from her captors (killing a few of them in the process); the Paşâ not only wholeheartedly endorses these vigilante actions but also avows that he would have helped the relatives get justice if only he had been informed of the matter earlier.\(^{815}\)

It should be mentioned here that the movement to establish an autonomous Bulgarian Church has proven to be one of the most ideologically charged topics in Bulgarian historiography. Early treatments of the “Church struggle” portrayed it, in my view correctly, as a project quite unrelated to Bulgarian nationalism. In fact, the first serious comprehensive study of the Church Question (by Petûr Nikov, one of the doyens of the Bulgarian historical profession before 1944) argued that, during the last few decades of Ottoman rule, the establishment of a

\(^{813}\) Lest there be any ambiguity as to the play’s political agenda, Ikonomov also made the character of the wife Greek; she is essentially being pimped out to the bishop by her (Greek) mother.

\(^{814}\) Todor Ikonomov, *Lovchanskijt vladika; ili belia na lovchanskijt sahatchiia* (Bolgrad, Ukraine: 1863).

\(^{815}\) Blûskov, *Izgubena Stanka*. 
national Church was the Bulgarian political movement par excellence, dwarfing in importance the nationalist movement. The Ottoman Sultan’s ferma of 1870, granting the Bulgarians the right to create their own autocephalous Exarchate and recognizing them as a separate millet, was, in Nikov’s analysis, the key event in nineteenth century Bulgarian history, a “Bulgarian Magna Charta.” But Nikov’s views were replaced, beginning in the 1950’s, by the rigidly doctrinaire works of communist Bulgaria’s “official” historians, who maintained that the “Church struggles” were but a first “stage” in a broader “national liberation movement.” Dimitûr Kosev, one of the most faithful expounders of the party line from that period, wrote the editorial comments for a 1971 reprint of Nikov’s classic work, in which he blasted Nikov for failing to grasp that the successful end of the “Church struggles” in 1870,

in no way accomplished the main task of the Bulgarian national-democratic revolution, viz. the liquidation of the Ottoman feudal-despotic system and the wresting of national independence, the political and social liberation of the Bulgarian nation.

A full refutation of this view of the movement for autonomous church as a “first stage” in a national liberation project is beyond the scope of this study. It would suffice to say that the documentary evidence suggests that most individuals who were involved in the “Church struggle” were not openly in favor of the idea of an autonomous Bulgarian polity, nor did they think of political “liberation” as the natural next step in their demands. When they gave an

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816 Nikov, Vůzrazhdane na bûlgarskiia narod, 274.
817 Dimitûr Kosev, “Predgovor” in Ibid., 14.
indication of their future political goals, most of these Bulgarians talked about confronting the older generation of established notables (the *chorbadzhii*, discussed in Chapter Five) over matters of communal representation within the existing Ottoman political institutions; they did not talk of breaking away from Ottoman political rule altogether. V. Khristov of Shumen summed up the prevalent view when he remarked (in a private letter) that he expected the “Church question” to be followed by a “*chorbadzhii* question,” in which the old notables’ claim to be the unquestioned representatives of Bulgarian communal and religious interests before the Ottoman authorities would come under attack from “younger” groups within Bulgarian society. Events on the ground would soon prove Khristov right – in fact during the early 1870’s there were several mini-revolutions against entrenched notables in Bulgarian communities throughout the vilayet. In the town of Troian, for example, a popular demonstration of artisans and shepherds from surrounding villages “brought down” a clique of local *chorbadzhii* in 1871.

The newspaper *Turtsiia* expressed similar views about the nature of the political struggles that lay ahead for Bulgarians in the Ottoman empire. In a 1865 editorial, *Turtsiia*, welcomed the provision for non-Muslim representation in the administrative and judicial *meclises* in the Danube province, but also voiced a concern:

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818 NBKM BIA Fond 31, a.e. 2, p. 16 [16 January 1872].
But a meclis staffed by a cabal of chorbadzhii, steeped in the greatest ignorance, can be of no use to the administration. Such a cabal would surely act only with its own interests in mind and would paralyze all the efforts of the ministers of H.M. the Sultan, causing countless problems for the kingdom.  

It was up to the Bulgarians in the vilayet, the editorial concluded, to show themselves “worthy” of their new role as participants in institutions of the government – by electing “smart and educated” representatives to the new councils and by stepping up the instruction of Ottoman Turkish in their schools in order to prepare Bulgarian youths for future government careers. Like Khristov’s letter, in other words, the Turtsiia editorial regarded the Church Question as a step on the road to fuller integration of the Bulgarians in the reformed Ottoman imperial framework, not as a step on the road to their breaking away from the empire.

7.2.1. Midhat’s policies on the Church question

As was mentioned in Chapter 1, Midhat’s administration and the Paşa himself faithfully implemented the official Ottoman policy of procrastinating and trying to appease both sides in the conflict between the Bulgarians and the Patriarchate. Such skillful maneuvering in the conflict’s muddy waters had not always been Midhat’s forte in previous years. During his governorship of the Niš eyalet, for

820 “Predi niakolko vreme Visokata Porta...,” Turtsiia, vol. 1, no. 32 [27 February/11 March 1865]
instance, he had generally turned a blind eye (and a deaf ear) to repeated
Bulgarian petitions calling for the removal of bishop Kalinikos from that diocese.
Kalinikos had been forced to flee the city of Niš and retreat to Leskovac
sometime in 1860 or in 1861, but had left behind a vicar who continued to collect
church taxes and fees for the bishop in absentia. Midhat appears to have tried to
broker a compromise between the two parties when tensions came to a head in
the spring of 1862, but the rejection of his plan by the anti-Kalinikos faction and
the threat of riots in Niš quickly changed his mind. 821 Two Bulgarian chorbadzhii
leaders were arrested, a demonstration demanding their release was “dispersed”
using police force, and, eventually, three members of the anti-Patriarchate
movement in Niš were exiled to Anatolia, even though their trial found that they
had been guilty of nothing more than using “a few seditious words” (bazi
mefasid-i kavliye), for which the law provided no “clear” (sarih) penalty. 822

During his governorship of the Danube province, however, Midhat’s approach
to the Bulgarian church question became more nuanced. While showing even-
handedness and reticence to comment on the issue in public, the governor often
used private conversations with partisans on both sides of the conflict to assure

821 Midhat’s proposed compromise seems to have called for Kalinikos to issue a
permit (izinname) to the Bulgarian obshtina in Niš, authorizing its members to
perform religious services such as weddings and wakes in his absence. In
exchange, the Bulgarians were required to continue paying church taxes to the
bishop. The obshtina members angrily rejected the plan, stating that they
needed no permits from Kalinikos and promising to take the bishop to court if
they ever came “face to face” (ruburu) with him. The obshtina’s letter (BOA İ.B.
80/1, lef. 4 [6 Ramazan 1278 / 7 March 1862]) made it clear that nothing short of
the removal of Kalinikos and the sending of another bishop would bring the
situation to a close.
822 BOA İ.B. 80/1, lef. 3 [16 Şevval 1278 / 15 April 1862].
them tacitly of his support (and intimate that that support was an expression of official government policy). Significantly, Midhat tended to be more liberal in his declarations of support to members of the side that had numerical advantage in any given locality. Thus, in Sofia, whose Christian population was nearly unanimous in its opposition to the patriarchate-appointed bishop Dorotheos, Midhat secretly encouraged Dorotheos’s opponents to continue withholding payment of the church taxes they owed to the bishop. The governor even appears to have suggested to his Bulgarian interlocutors in that case that the Sultan had already privately “recognized” the Bulgarians as a separate millet, deserving of its own separate church – several years before such a recognition would actually take place (1870). Meanwhile, in the heavily Greek-speaking, strongly pro-Patriarchate region of Varna, Midhat flatly refused to make concessions to the Bulgarian anti-Patriarchate minority. During a visit to the town of Balchik (in the diocese of Varna) in November 1865, the governor ordered a temporary halt in the construction of an anti-Patriarchate church and rebuffed the request of the small Bulgarian community in town to be granted access to a vacant Greek church as a temporary place of worship. In a letter to the Patriarchate, the Greek bishop of Varna, Joachim (Ioakimos), expressed his complete satisfaction with the behavior of Midhat in that instance; clearly,

823 For a summary of the conflict between the Bulgarian community in Sofia and Dorotheos, see Dinekov, Sofiia prez XIX vek, 98-101.
824 Ibid., 234 (document 44). Dimitûr Traikovich, one of the leaders of the Bulgarian community in Sofia and a member of the local judicial council indicated in a private letter (which he begged the recipient to keep confidential) that he had had a secret conversation with Midhat to that effect; Traikovich also suggested that the Bulgarian leaders in the town of Samokov should seek similar assurances from Midhat in their own struggle against the bishop of Samokov.
Joachim wrote, the vali’s actions ought to be read as a sign that the Patriarchate could count on the Porte’s continued support in dealing with the Bulgarian challenge. The provincial government expressed a similar willingness to back the pro-Patriarchate party in the diocese of Vidin, where the Bulgarian elite was divided in its position on the Church question, while the numerous ethnic Romanian community in the countryside was at best ambivalent towards the prospect of finding itself under Bulgarian ecclesiastical rule. No doubt sensing the weakness of the secessionist side in the region, Midhat Paşa did not hesitate to back the efforts of the Patriarchate Bishop Paisios to have his local Bulgarian opponents exiled.

Three further episodes may be quoted here to illustrate the approach that Midhat’s administration took in response to the ever-widening rift between Patriarchate bishops and their Bulgarian flocks. In Ruse, the vilayet’s center, and in the large and important cities of Tûrnovo and Silistra, the administration finally took a decisive stance in the matter and threw its support behind the anti-Patriarchate side. But in fact, in each of these three cases, overwhelming

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825 The anti-Patriarchate party in Balchik had evidently complained that they had been forced (due to the lack of their own church) to use the ground floor of their school building as a makeshift temple; they had also claimed that the church which they were petitioning to use had not been in active use for some years. See Nikov, *Mitropolit Ioakim*, 249-61 (letters 12 and 13).

826 Paisios had managed to “convince” one of the leaders of the Bulgarian anti-Patriarchate party, the teacher Miletich, to leave town in 1865; when Miletich’s followers gathered to protest his departure in the courtyard of the main Vidin church, the Ottoman kaymakam (no doubt acting with Midhat’s authorization) sent army troops to break up the demonstration and arrested several prominent members of the Bulgarian community, who had opposed Paisios. They were sent to Ruse for an interrogation, but were not, apparently, charged with any crime. See Nikov, *Vůzrazhdane na bûlgarskiia narod*, 238-9.
popular pressure had, in effect, turned the local Patriarchate-appointed bishops into virtual figureheads before Midhat took sides. In Ruse, Bishop Sinesius had been banned (by a decision of the Bulgarian *obshtina*) from entering the city’s main church since 1860, a practically autonomous Bulgarian church organization had been created in 1861, and, in January 1864, an Ottoman attempt to restore Sinesius to his position had led to riots. At that point, Sinesius had been forced to seek shelter in the Ottoman governor’s headquarters (*konak*), where he remained until Midhat’s arrival, several months later. It would have been abundantly clear to the new governor that Sinesius would not be accepted by his parishioners under any circumstances. Indeed, Midhat made no attempt to persuade the Ruse Bulgarians to seek reconciliation with the bishop, but only demanded that Sinesius be given access to his residence (but not to the church), instead of having to remain in the *konak*.\textsuperscript{827}

A similar situation obtained in Tŭrnovo, where a decade-long conflict between the local Bulgarian community and its Patriarchate-appointed clergy culminated in early 1867, when angry crowds laid siege to Bishop Gregorios’s residence and sent him fleeing for his life to the neighboring village of Arbanasi. Here, again, the administration’s hand was clearly forced by events on the ground. Midhat had failed to address repeated earlier requests (1865-1866) by members of Tŭrnovo’s Bulgarian community to facilitate Gregorios’s dismissal; now, however he must have realized that the extent of popular discontent with the bishop required official intervention. Consequently, Midhat urged the central

\textsuperscript{827} Ibid., 236-8. Sinesius was soon withdrawn and Ruse, like many other towns and cities in the *vilayet*, effectively slipped away from the Patriarchate’s control.
government in İstanbul to put pressure on the Patriarchate to withdraw Gregorios.  

Finally, in the diocese of Silistra, the administration was also compelled to take a decisive stand in the conflict between the local pro- and anti-Patriarchate parties, even though it clearly would have preferred to stay above the fray. By the fall of 1866, the Bishop of Silistra, Dionysios, had, for all intents and purposes, been reduced to being a persona non grata in much of his see – members of the anti-Patriarchate Bulgarian party in the city and in several predominantly Bulgarian villages in the diocese had physically prevented him from conducting liturgies, collecting church taxes, and issuing marriage, baptism, and death certificates. An official visit to Silistra to investigate the matter (1866) convinced Midhat Paşa that Dionysios's opponents had the strength of numbers on their side – consequently, the governor “convinced” the bishop to retreat to the city of Tulcea (also in the Silistra diocese), where a more ethnically diverse Christian community (including Greeks, Romanians and Moldavians) would be willing to accept him.  

To be sure, in his role as a provincial governor, Midhat was not in a position to offer a comprehensive solution to the Bulgarian Church Question. Nevertheless, the Paşa's policies on the issue earned him a substantial amount of goodwill among the Bulgarian communities in the vilayet. They convinced

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828 Ibid., 226-9. As was the case in Ruse, the withdrawal of the last Patriarchate appointed bishop marked the effective secession of the Tūrnovo diocese from the Patriarchate.

829 Ibid., 234-5. Dionysios remained in Tulcea until the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870.
many leaders of the Bulgarian church movement that the new governor was a reasonable and sympathetic partner in their struggle against the Patriarchate. It is indicative that some of the petitions addressed to Midhat on the Church Question had received the imprimatur of (and sometimes were even directly organized by) prominent Bulgarian members of the vilayet’s bureaucracy. Such was the case, for instance, of a collective petition initiated in 1865 by Stefan Karagiozov (a member of the Tûnovo idare meclisi) on behalf of the members of the Bulgarian community in Tûnovo, asking the governor to speed up the removal of bishop Gregorios from the city. Another Tûnovo petition (submitted in August 1866), summarizing the Bulgarian church demands and reminding Midhat that “in accordance with the Sultan’s beneficence, since all nations in the Sublime State were given equal rights, so too the day has come for us Bulgarians to have everything that the Greeks have,” also had the support of prominent Bulgarians involved in the institutions of local government. The same was true in Ruse, where Bulgarian members of the vilayet’s highest administrative and judicial councils – including Khadzhi Ivan Penchovich, Midhat’s closest Bulgarian protégé – figured prominently among the signatories of several petitions (1865-1866) calling for the removal of Sinesius. Individuals like Karagiozov and Penchovich could now use the clout they had by virtue of holding positions in the provincial government in order to speak in defense of the Bulgarian cause. It was perhaps the observation that the demands for an

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830 Pletn’ov, Midkhat Pasha, 185-6.
831 Text in BIA II A1342 [8/ 20 August 1866].
832 Pletn’ov, Midkhat Pasha, 185-6.
independent Church had such a widespread support among all sections of the Bulgarian population, including among individuals whose loyalty to the empire was beyond reproach, that might explain why Midhat’s position on the issue ended up being sufficiently conciliatory to Bulgarian demands in most regions of the province. Besides accepting as fait accompli the mini-revolutions that had ousted several Greek bishops from their dioceses, the governor also relaxed long-standing prohibitions on the tolling of church bells in several cities in the province, accepted the right of Bulgarian obshtini to control their religious affairs, and rebuffed the Patriarchate’s demands to limit the printing of Bulgarian language gospels in the vilayet’s printing press. Perhaps most importantly, the Paşa had evidently come to the conclusion that the resolution of the Bulgarian Church question was directly tied to the fortunes of Bulgarian nationalism. In the immediate aftermath of the crossing of the 1868 Bulgarian cheti, Midhat, now elevated to the position of Grand Vezir, informed the British consuls in Ruse and Belgrade that, in his opinion, the Bulgarians’ religious demands should be granted in order to “keep them grateful to the Sultan’s authority and cool towards revolutionary propaganda.” All in all, despite local variations and reversals, the administration’s policies succeeded in decoupling the Church Question from the “national” question in the minds of most Bulgarians in the vilayet. But in

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833 e.g. in Ruse and Pleven, see ibid., 188-9.
834 Ibid.
835 Quoted in Zina Markova, Chetata ot 1868 godina: po sluchai 150-godishnинata ot rozhdeniетo na Khadzhi Dimitur i Stefan Karadzha (Sofia: Izdatelство на BAN, 1990), 118.
836 That much is all but acknowledged by Pletn’ov (Midkhat Pasha, 191). But Pletn’ov of course remained skeptical that Midhat’s “tolerant” attitude vis-à-vis the
another area – the settling of Muslim immigrants in the province – the actions of Midhat’s administration actually provided grist for the nationalists’ mill.

7.3. The Tatar and Circassian migrations

7.3.1. Background and scope

It is estimated that a total of 3.8 million Muslims emigrated from areas of Russian imperial expansion in the Crimea, the Caucasus, and Central Asia in the 130 years between 1783 and 1913. The destination for the overwhelming majority of these immigrants/refugees was the Ottoman empire. Many ethnic groups were involved in the process, but two are of particular interest for this study – the Tatars of the northern Black Sea littoral, who made up the bulk of the immigrants (muhacir) during the early to mid-nineteenth century, and the Circassians (Adyge) of the Western Caucasus, who arrived en masse as refugees in the early 1860’s.

The first large population movement of Tatars (Turkicized descendants of the Mongols of the Golden Horde) from the Russian to the Ottoman empire dates back to the aftermath of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1787-1792, when about

demands of the Bulgarian Church movement had any lasting impact on the popularity of Bulgarian nationalism.

100,000 Crimean Tatars left their homes as a result of Russian village resettlement policies.\textsuperscript{838} In the early nineteenth century, smaller Tatar migrations accompanied many of the wars between the two empires. During the 1806-1812 war, over 10,000 Nogai (Kipchak-speaking) Tatars fled their ancestral steppes in Bessarabia (Buçak), which was annexed by Russia according to the Treaty of Bucharest, and relocated to the Ottoman Balkans. After the Crimean War (1853-1856), between 20,000 and 40,000 Crimean Tatars sought passage to the Ottoman empire on departing French, British and Ottoman ships. Fear of Russian reprisals for the Tatars’ alleged support for the troops of the anti-Russian coalition during the war was the primary driving force behind this wave of migration. But the real peak of the Tatar migrations took place in 1860-1861, when as many as 50,000 Nogai Tatars from the Kuban and Stavropol districts (north of the Caucasus) embarked on a technically voluntary hijra to the land of the Sultan-caliph. En route to Crimean ports, from which they hoped to continue their journey to the Ottoman empire, these Nogais sparked an even larger wave of emigration by Crimean Tatars, so that, between 1860 and 1861, fully two-thirds (200,000) of the Tatar population of the Russian Tauride Province in the Crimea left the peninsula, permanently altering the ethnic makeup of the northern Black Sea coast. The Russian government may not have played as pro-active a

role in starting this round of Tatar migrations as it would in the case of the forced
expulsion of the Circassians and other Caucasian mountaineers just a few years
later (see below), but neither did it discourage the Tatars from leaving.
Continuing Russian government attempts to “persuade” the Nogais to abandon
nomadism, unscrupulous land seizures by Russian estate owners in the Crimea,
and the comments of Tsar Alexander II to the effect that “voluntary [Tatar]
emigration should be considered as a beneficial action calculated to free the
territory from this unwanted population” could hardly make the Tatars feel
welcome in their own homes.

Most of the Adyge migrations proper occurred during the early 1860’s
(peaking in the fall and winter of 1863-1864), although smaller groups of Muslim
Caucasian peoples (e.g. Abkhazians and Chechens) continued to flee their
homelands for the relative safety of the Ottoman empire well into the early
1870’s. 839 Although they had generally remained neutral during Shamil’s revolt
(1834-1859), the Circassian tribes were subjected to a brutal forced expulsion
program carried out by the Russian Caucasian Army between 1861 and 1864.
During those years, Russian troops systematically destroyed Circassian villages
in the northwestern Caucasus and confiscated the livestock of their inhabitants,

839 Despite ethnographers’ efforts to highlight the fact that the real Adyge were
but one of the Caucasus’ many peoples, in popular Russian usage the term
cherkes was often used to refer to any Muslim inhabitant of the Caucasus
regardless of his/her actual ethnicity. For more information on Russian
perceptions of the cherkes, see Susan Layton, “Nineteenth-Century Russian
Mythologies of Caucasian Savagery,” in Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands
and Peoples, 1700-1917, ed. Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini
(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 84. Incidentally, a similar
conflation of terms existed in Ottoman usage, in which all immigrants from the
Caucasus were sometimes classified as muhacîn-i çerakise.
eventually forcing hundreds of thousands of Adyge to flee to the port cities on the Black Sea. From there, they were shipped in abysmally crowded conditions to the Ottoman empire. As a campaign of ethnic cleansing, the Russian operation against the Circassians achieved its goals – one recent study estimated that no more than 10% of the original Circassian population remained in the Caucasus in the wake of the Russian “operation.” As in the case of the Tatars, there is a considerable lack of clarity over many of the key statistics concerning the Circassian and other Caucasians’ migrations. Estimates of the overall numbers of displaced Circassians, for instance, range from about 500,000 to 2 million (with Karpat and Jaimoukha arguing for a figure at the high end of this range).

Chaotic and crowded conditions in holding centers on both ends of the journey and especially during the sea voyage from Russian to Ottoman ports produced appalling suffering and horrendous transit mortality rates among the Tatar and Circassian immigrants. Although precise figures are not available, some consular reports about the 1860-1861 wave of Tatar immigrants estimate that as many as a third of them may have perished on their way. This estimate

840 Amjadi Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook* (London: Curzon Press, 2001), 69. From a pre-1860 Adyge population of between 1.5 and 2 million, only 150,000 to 200,000 are said to have remained within the borders of the Russian empire after the migrations were over.

has been rejected as unrealistically high,\textsuperscript{842} but even by the most conservative reckoning mortality rates were staggering. Of the 300,000 or so Tatars who left Russia between 1856 and 1862, only about 250,000 were recorded by the Ottoman government as safely arrived and settled.\textsuperscript{843} The transit mortality rates for the Circassian migrants were likely even higher than those for the Tatars, given the circumstances of the Circassian exodus from the Caucasus. Estimates range from about 20\%\textsuperscript{844} to a chilling but highly unlikely 80\%.\textsuperscript{845}

Like the number of people displaced from the Crimea and the Caucasus, or the number of people who perished during the journey, the number of immigrants who arrived and were settled in the Danube province remains a matter of considerable controversy in the literature. Pinson’s study of the Tatar immigration to the Balkans quotes a 1862 report of the Ottoman Immigration Commission (\textit{Muhacirin komisyonu}) that listed a total of almost 143,000 Muslim immigrants as domiciled “on the banks of the Danube” (\textit{Tuna sevahilinde} – in other words, on the Danubian plain from the Vidin region in the west to the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{842} Pinson, “Ottoman Colonization,” 1046.
\item \textsuperscript{843} Figures for the out-migration rates from Russia are based on Williams, “Hijra and Forced Migration,” while the Ottoman government figures are from an 1862 report of the Ottoman Immigration Commission (\textit{Muhacirin Komisyonu}) quoted in Pinson, “Ottoman Colonization,” 1046. It should be said that the \textit{Muhacirin Komisyonu} figures are for the total Muslim immigration from Russia and would have included Circassians, Chechens, Abkhazians, and other Caucasian ethnic groups; nevertheless, for the period in question, the overwhelming share of the immigrants would have been Tatars. Quataert estimated the overall Tatar out-migration figures from 1856 to 1863 to have been around 400,000 people, but that number is not supported by Pinson’s documentary evidence. See Quataert, “The Age of Reforms, 1812-1914,” 794.
\item \textsuperscript{844} Ayhan Kaya, “Political Participation Strategies of the Circassian Diaspora in Turkey,” \textit{Mediterranean Politics} 9, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 223.
\item \textsuperscript{845} Şentürk, \textit{Osmanlı Devleti’nde Bulgar Meselesi}, 99.
\end{itemize}
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Dobrogea plain in the east). The Immigration Commission’s count did not have a breakdown by ethnicity, but we may assume that the great majority of these immigrants in 1862 would have been Tatar (since the Circassian migrations peaked in 1863-1864). Over the years of Midhat’s tenure in Ruse, one would have expected this 1862 figure to have increased, boosted by the influx of Circassians and other Caucasian peoples. But the provincial census launched in 1866 (whose final results only became available in 1874) placed the combined number of all Muslim immigrants in the province at only about 126,000. This discrepancy in the official figures between 1862 and 1866/1874, is not easy to reconcile, even if one allows for the fact that immigration movements continued (albeit on a diminished scale) during the years in which data for the census was being collected and that, consequently, the census figures likely underrepresented the actual immigrant population. Secondary migrations of some Tatar and Circassian muhacirs originally settled in the Danube province to places elsewhere in the empire may account in part for the difference, as may continued high mortality rates (there are reports of epidemic disease outbreaks among Circassian refugees after their initial arrival on Ottoman soil, i.e. after they would have been entered in the count of the

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847 The census figure was actually 63,398, but that referred only to male Muslim immigrants. Assuming that the immigrants’ population exhibited similar characteristics in regard to sex ratios and census undercounting as the vilayet’s population in general, we can use Palairet’s 1.955 multiplication factor to arrive at a total estimated muhacir population in the Danube province of slightly under 126,000 by 1874. The official census results were published in Tuna/Dunav, vol. 10, no. 94 [6 October 1874]; for Palairet’s methodology in determining the multiplication factor, see Palairet, Balkan Economies, 8-12, Tables 1.2 and 1.3.
Immigrant Commission. \(^{848}\) With all these caveats in mind, it seems reasonable to put the total number of Muslim immigrants in the Danube province during Midhat's time in office at somewhere between 140,000 and 150,000 people, of whom about 80,000 – 90,000 were Tatars and rest the Caucasian (mostly Circassian). \(^{849}\)

7.3.2. Settling the immigrants – state policies and popular attitudes

The typical Tatar or Circassian immigrant arrived in the vilayet by steamboat through the Black Sea ports of Varna and Constanța or through the Danube port of Tulcea. Thereafter, he or she usually traveled by oxcart or even on foot to the towns and villages of the Dobrogea plain, which absorbed the majority of the muhacirs. The greatest concentrations of immigrants in the province were all in the Dobrogea – in the city of Dobrich (Hacıoğlu Pazarcıği), in the new town of Medgidia (Mecidiye, which was purpose-built to accommodate arriving Tatars

\(^{848}\) Tonev, Búlgarskoto Chernomorie, 47.

\(^{849}\) These figures are broadly in line with the numbers that have been accepted in more recent Bulgarian sources, such as Dimitrov, Zhechev, and Tonev, Istoriiia na Dobrudzha, vol. 3, 190; Nazürska, Búlgarskata dūrzhava, 26-7; Tonev, Búlgarskoto Chernomorie, 47. On the other hand, Kemal Karpat’s estimate of about 600,000 Circassians and a similar number of Tatars immigrating to the Ottoman Balkans between 1860 and 1876 seems highly inflated to me, especially since Karpat claims that most of these 1.2 million immigrants were domiciled in the Danube province. See Kemal Karpat, Ottoman Population, 1830-1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 64-70.
and Circassians), and in a host of new villages. A smaller but nonetheless significant number of immigrants was dispatched to points further west in the province, courtesy of the Austrian First Danube Steamship company, which had offered to transport them at no charge (no doubt in order to curry favor with the authorities). Those immigrants typically disembarked in the ports of Lom and Vidin and were then settled in the northwestern corner of the province, near the Serbian border.

Some European observers at the time, and many Bulgarian historians in later decades, maintained that the Ottoman government’s immigration policy in this period was pursuing larger strategic objectives. The settlement of most of the Tatar and Circassian muhacirs near sensitive border areas of the Danube province is seen as a case in point – the Ottomans, it is alleged, attempted to erect a Muslim barrier in the way of potential Russian invasions (through the Dobrogea plains) and to drive a Muslim wedge between “free” Serbia and the Bulgarian subjects of the Sultan in the northwest. These claims cannot be completely dismissed, but they should be put in perspective. In the first place, Ottoman refugee policies gave greater incentives, at least on paper, to immigrants choosing to settle in Anatolia, not in the empire’s European provinces. A 1857 Refugee Law guaranteed immigrants twelve years of tax-

850 On the building of Medgidia (Mecidiye), see Karpat, “Ottoman Urbanism.”
851 Todorov, The Balkan City, 345, Table 54. After Dobrich (Hacıoğlu Pazarcı, Bazargic) and Medgidia (Mecidiye), the cities with largest immigrant populations were Varna, Balchik, Tulcea, Babadag, and Provadia – all located in the northeastern part of the vilayet.
852 Kanitz, Dunavska Būgaria, vol. 1, 126.
853 Ibid.
exempt status upon arrival if they resided in Anatolia, but only six years if they resided in the Balkans. Although the practical application of the law was somewhat different from its letter, with Muslim immigrants to the Balkans often receiving ten-year and occasionally even fifteen-year tax exemption periods, the provision still indicates that, as a matter of official policy, the Ottomans were not simply using the Tatar and Circassian *muhacirs* as a demographic shield against the threat of Russian invasions or Balkan nationalisms. Moreover, the distribution of immigrants *within* the Danube province may have been more a matter of land availability, rather than of Ottoman imperial mischief – both the northeastern and the northwestern corners of the *vilayet* were among its least populated regions. The Dobrogea plain in particular had been the site of frequent warfare during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – in the Russo-Ottoman wars of 1768-1774, 1787-1791, 1806-1812 and 1828-1829, as well as in internal *ayan* struggles between the 1780’s and the 1810’s. Most of these conflicts had triggered population movements away from the region, sometimes to more secure areas elsewhere in the Ottoman Balkans, but sometimes out of Ottoman territory altogether. In the wake of the 1828-1829 war, for example, some 100,000 ethnic Bulgarians had left the Dobrogea for Bessarabia at the instigation of the Tsarist government, which was anxious to increase the Christian population of this recently (1812) acquired province.

The northwestern corner of the province had likewise seen substantial episodes

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of ethnic Bulgarian emigration in the years immediately preceding the arrival of the Tatars and Circassians. Hundreds of Bulgarian households from the Niš district had relocated to Serbia in 1861-1862, and over 10,000 Bulgarians from the district of Vidin had left for the Crimea at the invitation of the Russian government in July of 1863. 856

It should also be said that if the Ottoman government really intended to use the Tatar and Circassian muhacirıns in order to “dilute” the region’s Bulgarian population and thereby counter the potential threat from nationalist or separatist sentiments, it made little sense to domicile them in the Dobrogea and in the northwest. In the northwest, Muslim Turks already made up the majority of the urban population (as they did in most other regions of the vilayet), while ethnic Romanians came a close second to the Bulgarians in rural areas, especially in the districts of Vidin, Lom and Oriakhovo. 857 In the Dobrogea, Muslim Turks predominated in both urban and rural settings (and had done so since at least the mid-sixteenth century). 858 In the Dobrogea kazas that received the bulk of the Tatars and Circassians in the 1850’s and 1860’s (Constanța, Medgidia, Mangalia, Babadag, Balchik, Varna) Muslims already outnumbered non-Muslims

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856 Şentürk, Osmanlı Devleti’nde Bulgar Meselesi, 148-62. 857 The Romanians (commonly referred to as Vlachs) in these regions should not be confused with the “mountain Vlachs” (Aroumanians) found in many parts of the southern and western Balkans; the Romanians in the Vidin, Lom, and Oriakhovo regions are relatively recent (since the late-eighteenth century) and mostly voluntary migrants. See N. Zaiakov, “Isticheski prichini za formirane na vlashkoto naselenie vuv Vidinsko,” Būlgarska etnologiia 21, special issue (1995). 858 Dimitrov, Zhechev, and Tonev, Istoriiia na Dobrudzha, vol. 3, 32-3; Tonev, Būlgarskoto Chernomorie, 46-7.
before the immigrants’ arrival, sometimes by overwhelming majorities.\textsuperscript{859} Therefore, the settlement of the \textit{muhacirs} in the northeastern part of the province did not create a new Muslim majority there, it simply cemented an already existing majority. If the Ottomans wanted to use the Tatars and Circassians as a demographic wedge, they would have done better to domicile them in the central and southwestern part of the \textit{vilayet} or along the northern approaches to the Balkan range, where Bulgarians did predominate. To be sure, some immigrants were indeed settled in or near such Bulgarian strongholds,\textsuperscript{860} but their numbers were limited and certainly paled in comparison with the numbers of their fellow refugees who found new homes in the Dobrogea. Only in the summer of 1868, following the suppression of a sizeable band of Bulgarian nationalists, did Midhat Paša apparently turn to the idea of selectively settling immigrants (especially Circassians) in mostly Bulgarian areas – and these plans were never realized because of Midhat’s promotion to the chairmanship of the Council of State.\textsuperscript{861}

Moreover, there is ample evidence that throughout the nineteenth century the Ottoman government had actively tried to prevent the Bulgarian population of the lower Danubian plain from leaving the empire and had done its best to induce

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\item V. Tonev (\textit{Bûlgarskoto Chernomorie}, 47-8) has juxtaposed the 1866/1874 Ottoman census count for these districts with Russian consular figures for the Tatar and Circassian refugees settled in each district; what emerges is that in the \textit{kaza} of Constanţa, for instance, Muslims may have outnumbered non-Muslims by fifteen to one before the arrival of the immigrants; in \textit{kaza} Mangalia, the ratio may have been five to one.
\item E.g. in the purely Bulgarian town of Gabrovo, as evidenced by the 1865 protest of its inhabitants against their Circassian “guests;” the protest is discussed in greater detail later in this section.
\item Midhat shared his plans to “create Circassian colonies in the forests of the [northern Balkan] range” in a conversation with the French consul in Ruse (August, 1868). Pletn’ov, \textit{Midkhat Pasha}, 209.
\end{enumerate}
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those who had left to come back. Such was the case, for example, with the tens of thousands of Bulgarians who had tried emigrate from the Dobrogea to Russian Bessarabia at the end of the 1828-1829 war – not only did the Ottoman authorities stop the stream of would-be emigrants as soon as they gained control of the region (following the evacuation of the Russian army in 1830) but they also offered a generous incentive package to those Bulgarians who had stayed, including direct subsidies, grants for agricultural tools, and low-interest loans.\footnote{Dimitrov, Zhechev, and Tonev, \textit{Istoriia na Dobrudzha}, vol. 3, 167.}

In 1862-1863, the Ottoman government adopted a similarly generous policy towards the several thousand Bulgarian peasants from the region of Vidin who had emigrated to Russia in the months before, but wished to return to their homes because of the lukewarm Russian reception and poor Crimean lands they received. These Bulgarian “returnees” were given a blanket imperial pardon (for leaving the empire without passports), and a free steamboat ride back to Vidin (the Ottoman government had contracted several Austrian ships and tugboats to transport the Bulgarians back from the Crimea and Odessa). Once back in their homes, the Bulgarians were granted public lands and draft animals (since most of them had sold all their possessions before leaving for Russia), multi-year tax exemptions, and a permission to stay in other villagers’ houses for a year or more until they could get back on their feet.\footnote{On Ottoman policies towards the 1862-1863 Bulgarian “returnees” from the Vidin region, see Şentürk, \textit{Osmanlı Devleti’inde Bulgar Meselesi}, 157-60.} This aid package was comparable to what would be offered to the Tatar and Circassian \textit{muhacirs} a few months/years later, and the fact that it was given suggests that Ottoman
politicians at the time were reluctant to lose any group of tax payers, regardless of their ethnic and religious affiliation, or any lingering doubts about their loyalty to the empire.

Whatever role it may have played in the government’s plans, the arrival of the Tatar and Circassian *muhacir* s had a major and direct impact on the daily lives of the “native” inhabitants of the Danube province – Muslims and non-Muslims alike. At a minimum, the “natives” were required to build houses for the new immigrants and provide them with necessities such as seed for sowing, domestic animals, and agricultural tools. When immigrants arrived at their intended destination in the winter or spring season, the local population was also required to supply them with food until harvest time; if the immigrants arrived too late in the agricultural season to be able to plant their own crops, the locals were responsible for providing them with enough provisions to last until the following year’s harvest.\(^{864}\) The lion’s share of the burden lay, of course, on the shoulders of the inhabitants of those villages or towns in which Tatar and Circassian *muhacir* s were to be domiciled, but other communities in the *vilayet* were not exempt from labor duties and miscellaneous imposts related to the settlement of the immigrants. For example, in the immediate aftermath of the Crimean War (1856), the inhabitants of the *kaza* of Lovech were required to build their “share” of houses (140 by their own estimate) for arriving Tatar refugees in the town of Cernavoda, some 180 miles away. In order to comply with this demand, the people of Lovech had to put together a veritable expedition of 33 oxcarts and

\(^{864}\) Pinson, “Ottoman Colonization,” 1054.
over 100 laborers.\footnote{NBKM OO Fond 179, a.e. 2185 [9 Muharrem 1273 / 9 September 1856].} It is not known whether such long-distance projects continued under Midhat’s governorship, but it seems clear that the muhacir question remained an issue of pressing concern (and a considerable nuisance) to the majority of the vilayet’s “native” inhabitants.

Although in principle the expenses for the settlement of the muhacirs were to be covered by the imperial government, there is plenty of evidence that in practice the authorities often failed to reimburse communities throughout the province for the services they had provided for the arriving immigrants. As was the case with the building of the roads, one often hears of entire villages “foregoing” payment that was due to them for such services, suggesting that the system was open to considerable abuse. An official report put the figure of “savings” from allegedly unclaimed expenses related to the building of houses for the Circassian immigrants in just one of the Danube province’s seven sancaks (Sofia) in a single year at around 1.2 million piastres.\footnote{BOA İ.D. 37050 [17 Şevval 1281 / 15 March 1865].} In 1866, Tuna/Dunav gratefully acknowledged the inhabitants of at least four different villages in the province, who had likewise “donated” labor, livestock, and materials to their new Tatar and Circassian neighbors to the tune of between 20,000 and 38,000 piastres per village.\footnote{Tuna/Dunav vol. 2, no 99 [14/26 August 1866]; vol. 2, no. 149 [8/20 February 1867].} There are also indications that the monetary allowances paid to some immigrant communities in the first months after their arrival were
raised from local “donations” whose voluntary character was highly suspect.\textsuperscript{868}

Some government money did trickle down to the local providers of labor and services for the settlement of the \textit{muhacirs} (mostly to skilled house builders),\textsuperscript{869} but the overall sums paid were woefully small – for instance, in the \textit{sancak} of Tûrnovo, only 33,888 piastres was spent on draft animals and agricultural implements for the needs of the new immigrants during the entire financial (\textit{rumî}) year of 1281 (March 1865-March 1866). That translated into twenty-two pairs of oxen, 76 carts, 19 iron plows, and a few miscellaneous small tools.\textsuperscript{870} The Tatar \textit{muhacirs} in the Sofia \textit{sancak} received the marginally better (but still paltry) sum of 68,373 piastres for the purchase of oxen during the financial year 1280 (March 1864-March 1865).\textsuperscript{871} In order to save money, the authorities even insisted that much of the aid the immigrants did receive ought to be treated as loans, rather than as grants. The abovementioned aid for the Tatars in the Sofia district was originally conceived as a loan and its recipients were expected, after a few years, to return to the authorities the actual draft animals they had been given; only in the summer of 1866 did the provincial administration realize that this was

\textsuperscript{868} In the abovementioned case of the Abkhazians domiciled in the Lovech region, the document authorizing such allowances to continue mentions that the money necessary to fund the program would be paid “directly” (\textit{yeden biyed}) by the Lovech \textit{meclis} – since local administrative councils generally did not have their own discretionary budgets, that suggests that the money was/would be raised from donations. NBKM OO Fond 179, a.e. 2189 [31 Temmuz 1285 / 12 August 1869].

\textsuperscript{869} As evidenced by several receipts I was able to locate in the Sofia archives, e.g. NBKM BIA II A 2651 [1/13 August 1864]; NBKM BIA II A 2655 [n.d.].

\textsuperscript{870} NBKM OO Fond 179, a.e. 522 [9 May 1867]

\textsuperscript{871} BOA İ.MVL 25114 [20 Rabiülâhir 1283 / 1 September 1866].
impractical and write off these loans.\textsuperscript{872} But other types of aid that had a longer life expectancy than oxen and horses – for example durable goods, such as ploughs and shovels – continued to be treated as loans and were collected back, usually after the expiration of the immigrants’ tax exempt period.\textsuperscript{873} All in all, a report of the Immigration Commission declared that, by the end of the financial year 1282 (March 1866), the revenues from the tithe and other taxes paid by the Crimean and Caucasian refugees in the Danube province had reached the level of expenses incurred for the continued settlement of new immigrants. In other words, as far as the imperial treasury was concerned, by the early 1866 the \textit{muhacirs} were no longer a net financial drain on state resources.\textsuperscript{874}

But this budgetary triumph came at a considerable social cost. It would be unfair to put all the blame for Ottoman attempts to do \textit{muhacir} settlement on the cheap on Midhat’s shoulders – there is evidence that the practice of “inducing” local communities to “donate” their labor, produce, and even cash in order to “welcome” the new arrivals from the Crimea and the Caucasus was well established under his predecessors in the late 1850’s and 1860’s.\textsuperscript{875} Yet, it is surprising that a politician as concerned with the social impact of his policies as Midhat took few or no measures to alleviate the burden which the reception of the immigrants placed on the “native” inhabitants of the \textit{vilayet}.\textsuperscript{876}

\textsuperscript{872} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{873} See BOA İ.MVL 25360, lef. 1 [26 Receb 1283 / 4 December 1866].
\textsuperscript{874} BOA İ.MMHS 1317, lef. 2 [18 Rabiülâhir 1283 / 30 August 1866]
\textsuperscript{875} Pinson’s study of the Tatar migrations to the Ottoman Balkans contains several examples of such expressions of “public spirit” on behalf of the settled communities in the province. Pinson, “Ottoman Colonization,” 1054-6.

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Given the fact that local communities bore the brunt of the costs for the Tatars’ and Circassians’ settlement, it should come as no surprise that the muhacir question became a major source of popular discontent in the Danube province. But there was an important distinction in the popular perceptions of the immigrants. In the vilayet’s countryside, the Tatars were largely welcomed by Christians and Muslims alike – at least after the hardships related to their initial reception had passed.\(^{876}\) By the time Midhat assumed his duties in Ruse, the Tatars in the province were typically seen as benign hardworking agriculturalists who were either potentially assimilable, or already on their way to being assimilated in local society, both economically and culturally.\(^{877}\) There is anecdotal evidence that many Tatars soon learned Bulgarian and “earned the esteem of the Slavic population.”\(^{878}\) Although some Tatar settlements still reminded European observers of “villages in Africa,”\(^{879}\) others were said to be making “progress every year.”\(^{880}\) Tatar farmers and craftsmen were welcomed in the vilayet’s markets and fairs, where they “traded honestly and peacefully.”\(^{881}\) On the other hand, the immigrants from the Caucasus, and the Circassians in particular, were met with considerable hostility and soon gained notoriety as marauders and livestock thieves (indeed some of the measures adopted by Midhat’s government in order to curb the theft of livestock in the province

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\(^{876}\) Ibid., 1057.
\(^{877}\) Kanitz (*Dunavska Bûlgariia*, vol. 1, 123) even reported that most of the Tatars settled in the northwest of the province had, by the early 1870’s, abandoned their traditional dress and begun wearing Bulgarian-style clothes.
\(^{878}\) Ibid.
\(^{879}\) Ibid., vol. 1, 106.
\(^{880}\) St. Clair and Brophy, *Residence in Bulgaria*, 214.
explicitly mentioned the Circassians as the main source of the problem). The accounts of European travelers and/or residents in the Ottoman Balkans are virtually unanimous in describing the fear and loathing the Circassians’ generated among the settled population of the vilayet, although they disagreed on how widespread the Circassians’ depredations were and on whether these depredations were the result of the economic ruin the immigrants had suffered or of a putative cultural (or even “racial”) disposition to criminality.

These overwhelmingly negative attitudes towards the Circassians were not altogether unexpected – Russian views of the Muslim peoples of the Caucasus also centered around the tropes of wildness (dikost’), propensity to pillaging, and resistance to “civilization.” But, as Susan Layton has observed, at least in the minds of Russian literati, “the Circassian” had also become something of a prototypical “noble savage.” Portrayals of the Caucasian mountaineers in Pushkin’s A Prisoner of the Caucasus (1820) and in later works by Lermontov and Tolstoy struck a typically Orientalist balance between the aforementioned

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882 See, for example, NBKM OO Fond 20 a.e. 823 [9 Şevval 1288 / 22 December 1871].
884 St. Clair and Brophy (Residence in Bulgaria, 22, 219) maintained that “poverty and even absolute hunger are the mainsprings of the robberies [the Circassian] commits,” although they also deemed it a mistake that the Ottoman government had “tried to convert a race, essentially warlike and by no means industrious, into ploughmen.” Kanitz, on the other hand, blamed Circassian “propensity to disobedience, robbing and thievery.” (Dunavska Bûlgaria, vol. 1, 124).
885 Both Lermontov and Tolstoy had personal experiences of fighting in the Caucasus; reflections on those experience can be found in Lermontov’s A Prisoner of the Caucasus (1828) and Circassians (1828), and Tolstoy’s The Raid (1853), A Prisoner in the Caucasus (1872), and Hadji Murad (1904).
negative or “primitive” qualities on the one hand, and images of nobility and bravery on the other; some Russian authors even framed their praise of the kind of stateless freedom of the “Circassian” as an oblique criticism of the absolutist regime of the Tsars.\textsuperscript{886} This romanticized view of the Circassians did not, however, follow them to their new homes in the Danube province. Gone, for one thing, was the majestic mountainous setting. Gone, too, was the proud self-sufficiency the mountaineers had enjoyed in their native Caucasus. Journalistic and travelers’ accounts from the 1860’s paint a gloomy picture of the Circassian communities in the \textit{vilayet}. Kanitz, to give but one example, was appalled by the abject poverty of the Circassian neighborhoods in the town of Kula (Adliye), west of Vidin, with their “half-ruined little houses covered by rotting straw.”\textsuperscript{887} The sight of another Circassian settlement (Derventköy, located in the hills south of Tûrgovishte) prompted Kanitz to comment that he had rarely seen “so much poverty and gloom in one place.”\textsuperscript{888} That sentiment was echoed by St. Clair and Brophy who, despite doing their best to keep the idealized vision of the proud Circassian mountaineer alive, could not avoid making the observation that the actual Circassian villages in the \textit{vilayet} were “always poor” and that Circassian lands were “almost worse cultivated than those of the Rayah.”\textsuperscript{889} The Ottoman government itself – including Midhat Paşa’s provincial administration – was also alarmed by the poverty of the arriving immigrants from the Caucasus. That

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{886} For a review of representations of Circassians and other Caucasian peoples in Russian literature, see Layton, “Caucasian Savagery.”
\item \textsuperscript{887} Kanitz, \textit{Dunavska Bûlgaria}, vol. 1, 150.
\item \textsuperscript{888} Ibid., vol. 3, 67.
\item \textsuperscript{889} St. Clair and Brophy, \textit{Residence in Bulgaria}, 217.
\end{itemize}
concern prompted the administration to begin distributing small monetary allowances to immigrant communities whose economic situation was deemed particularly precarious. In the winter of 1864-1865, for instance, a letter from the vilayet’s administrative council authorized a direct subsidy of 20 para (half a piastre) per person per day for several thousand Circassians settled in the districts of Oriakhovo and Belogradchik in the northwestern corner of the province. The letter cited the Circassians’ “extreme poverty” (aşırı fukara el-hal) as justification for the policy. 890 Other immigrants from the Caucasus were also granted temporary monetary aid – the several thousand Abkhaz refugees domiciled in the vilayet received about 100,000 piastres in 1867. 891 Another document reveals that hardship allowances were still being distributed to over 500 Abkhazian immigrants settled in the Lovech region as late as the summer of 1869. 892

Whatever its causes, it seems clear that the popular animosity towards the Circassians transcended ethnic and religious boundaries in the region. 893 In the predominantly Muslim kaza of Dobrich (Hacıoğlu Pazarcağı), specially appointed policemen had to be dispatched for several months in 1864-1865 in order to protect the newly settled Circassian immigrants there; presumably the

890 NBKM OO Fond 112, a.e. 1877 [11 Ramazan 1281 / 7 February 1865].
892 NBKM OO Fond.179, a.e. 2189 [31 Temmuz 1285 / 12 August 1869]. The adult Abkhazians received 30 para per person per day, the children 20 para.
893 St. Clair and Brophy, Residence in Bulgaria, 218-9.
Circassians needed such protection from the local population. Muslims in Dupnitsa were also reportedly fed up with Circassian crime and blamed the immigrants for “ruining the tranquility” of their town. Anti-Circassian feelings were also rampant in many Bulgarian communities in the vilayet, where specific complaints against the Circassians – that they were stealing villagers’ produce from the fields or robbing travelers of their horses and other possessions – were often mixed with a general rejection of the idea that the burden for the settlement of the muhacirs should be borne by the native population (instead of the government). In April 1865, for example, the citizens of Gabrovo sent a special representative to the Ottoman kaymakam in Tûrnovo to plead for the relocation of the Circassians who had been domiciled in their town a year earlier. The letter accompanying the Gabrovo representative declared that:

We received the [Circassians] last fall as guests (musafiri) and the people gave them all the food they needed and firewood as well, hoping that in the spring they would go somewhere else; but they are still here, and the people have had enough of them. A few days ago, our people gathered together and told us [the town notables]: “we built houses for the Circassians, we fed them for six months and kept them warm in the winter, but we are telling you now that we have reached a point where we cannot even feed our children, let alone the Circassians.” Therefore, as we see that the people cannot tolerate this situation any longer, we ask you

894 BOA İ.MVL 24751 [18 Cemaziülevvel 1282 / 9 October 1865].
895 Lazarkov, citing eyewitnesses, recorded the following curses addressed to Circassian immigrants by the “native” Turkish inhabitants of Dupnitsa: “May God give you troubles!” (Allah belânizi versin!), “Would that you will disappear!” (Eksik olaydıniz!) and “You ruined our peace and quiet!” (Rahatımızı bozulduñuz!). See Lazarkov, Robskoto minalo na gr. Dupnitsa, 33.
to ... prove that to the kaymakam, and hopefully he can remove them from here. 897

Such words and actions belied the official line that the immigrants should be welcomed (or were being welcomed) with open arms. Since the Ottoman Danubian plain had already absorbed close to 100,000 Tatars over the decade prior to 1863-1864, it is reasonable to assume that popular goodwill towards immigrants in general was already running low by the time the Circassian migrations reached their zenith – and Circassian lifestyles apparently did nothing to remedy that situation. It is worth mentioning in this regard that some of the most detailed works of Bulgarian local history (kraeznanie), based, as they were, on eyewitness accounts, often singled out the settlement of the Circassians as the beginning of the end for interethnic peace and harmony in the region. Lazarkov’s account of the history of Dupnitsa in the last decades of Ottoman rule offers a sharp distinction between the state of affairs prior to the arrival of the Circassians – when the “life for the Bulgarian had become altogether bearable” and “the Turks had become milder in character and friendlier in their attitudes towards the rayah” – with the situation after the Circassians came – when “the daily life of the Bulgarians became tenser and fearful,” the “tranquility was compromised” and “the heart of every Bulgarian was plunged in great sorrow.” 898

Trifonov’s history of Pleven also suggests that the Circassian migrations in the region had long-term negative consequences for the interethnic and inter-religious peace in the region. “In the first years of Midhat’s governorship ...

897 NBKM BIA II A 294 [27 April / 9 May 1865].
898 Lazarkov, Robskoto minalo na gr. Dupnitsa, 32-3.
before the brunt of the Circassian ravages,” Trifonov writes, the “constant interrelations between Bulgarians and Turks” in Pleven had brought in a sense of communal feeling and even a measure of cultural fusion between the two main ethnic groups. But the arrival of the Circassians (a “predatory mountaineer tribe”) upset this delicate balance and would, from that point forward, always “prevent the [Bulgarian] population from enjoying its growing material well-being.”

Ivan Khadzhiiski, the doyen of Bulgarian sociology and ethnography in the 1930’s also singled out the Circassians as the single major source of Bulgarian discontent during the last decade of Ottoman rule. Khadzhiiski contended that there existed a direct and causal relationship between the presence or absence of Circassians in a given locality and the strength of the Bulgarian nationalist movement in that locality during the 1870’s. “Before the arrival of the Circassians,” one of Khadzhiiski’s eyewitness interviewees told him, “no one [here] ever thought of raising a revolt. But after they came, we could no longer live in peace, we could no longer stand it. Life became unbearable.”

Despite the official policy of welcoming the muhacirs, even members of the Ottoman governing class appear to have had second thoughts about the ability of the Danube province to assimilate the immigrants, or about the wisdom of the settlement policies implemented in the vilayet. Again, the Circassians, rather than the Tatars, were seen as the main culprits. Many “enlightened” provincial

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899 Trifonov, Istoriia na grada Pleven, 237-43.
901 Ibid., 319.
bureaucrats abhorred some of the “primitive” customs that the Circassians had
brought with them – particularly the practice of owning and trading slaves, which had been outlawed in the Ottoman empire during the early years of the 
Tanzimat period. Kanitz witnessed the frustration experienced by the Ottoman müdür of Novi Pazar at having to deal with numerous disputes between 
Circassian slave owners. The müdür accused the Circassians of “cheating” local 
Turks into participating in slave exchanges (suggesting that that there was at 
least some degree of collusion by the local population in the practice) and 
compared the Circassians’ overall impact on the region to that of a “plague.”

By the early 1870’s similar views of Circassian “incorrigibility” were beginning to 
find their way into internal Ottoman government correspondence. A 1871 
memorandum by the provincial administrative council to the authorities in the 
sancak of Varna discussed quite matter-of-factly the notion that Circassian 
immigrants had remained unable to participate in “the blessings of civilization” 
(ni’met-i medeniyet) and had failed to “fully abandon their savage nomadic ways” 
(adet-i vahşiyanı bedeviyyeti tamamıyle terk edemediklerinden). The 
memorandum made no bones about the fact that Circassian theft of livestock had

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902 Although the extent and nature of Circassian slaveholding is a matter of 
conjecture, it appears that most Circassian slaves were brought into the Ottoman empire by their masters at the time of their immigration, but some sources also 
suggest that Circassian families (perhaps driven by poverty) occasionally sold their sons and daughters into slavery after their arrival in the vilayet. See Kanitz, 

903 Ibid., vol. 3, 259.
left the native population “harmed and irritated” (*mutazarrir ve bihuzur*) and had disrupted local agriculture.\(^{904}\)

The sectarian tensions brought about by the Circassians would remain largely dormant until the Bulgarian uprising of 1876 and the subsequent war with Russia, but their seed was planted during the years of Midhat Paşa’a governorship. In the aftermath of the suppression of the 1867 Bulgarian *cheti*, Midhat took the decision to include Circassians in his proposed “emergency forces” (*ihtiyat askeri*) – a Muslim village militia that was created in order to assist regular army units in dealing with future Bulgarian bands.\(^{905}\) Some sources even indicate that the governor selectively recruited Circassians (because of their “martial” qualities) for the new *ihtiyat* force.\(^{906}\) In light of the near-universal popular resentment against the Circassians and of official misgivings about their potential to be “civilized,” Midhat’s decision to start arming them as part of his militia program has to be ranked among the most problematic legacies of his tenure in Ruse. The governor seemed convinced that he could control the Circassian militia members and prevent them from using excessive force or attacking non-combatants.\(^{907}\) This may have been partly true in the short run but, within a few years’ time, the arming of the Circassians would prove to be a costly mistake,

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\(^{904}\) NBKM OO Fond 20, a.e. 823 [9 Şevval 1288 / 22 December 1871].

\(^{905}\) On the *ihtiyat* militia, see Ali Haydar Midhat, *Tabsıra-i İbret*, 70-1, and pages 257-9 of the present chapter

\(^{906}\) This was the opinion expressed in reports by the Prussian and Belgian consuls in Ruse, quoted in Pletn’ov, *Midkhat Pasha*, 193.

\(^{907}\) see *Chetata na Khadzhi Dimitûr i Stefan Karadzha: chuzhdestranni dokumenti*, ed. Zina Markova, Ogniana Mazhadrakova, and Doino Doinov (Sofia: Dûrzhavno izdatelstvo “Petûr Beron”, 1988), 180. [a 1868 report by R. Dalyell, the British consul in Ruse].
since it all but ensured that future Bulgarian nationalist provocations could quickly escalate into full-scale sectarian conflicts. That indeed is what happened in many of the regions affected by the 1876 Bulgarian April uprising, when Circassian militias and irregulars (başibozuk) were widely used and were often involved in the worst atrocities perpetrated against the Christian civilian population.\textsuperscript{908}

### 7.4. Interfaith and interethnic relations

Before turning our attention to the activities of the Bulgarian nationalist bands of 1867-1868 and the authorities’ response to them, it might be useful to provide a brief survey of the state of everyday interfaith and interethnic relations in the Danube province at the time. It should be said at the outset that my purpose in the following paragraphs is not to idealize the state of these relations or to paint an overly rosy or unrealistic picture of Muslim-Christian or Turkish-Bulgarian interaction at the popular level. The lack of large-scale inter-communal conflicts in the province could just as easily have been a sign of insufficient integration of the various ethnic and religious communities, rather than of genuine harmony. As a British consular agent stationed in Salonica in 1860 commented, “the

\textsuperscript{908} So notorious was the behavior of Circassian militiamen and irregulars in 1876, that both the San Stefano and Berlin treaties of 1878 mandates their expulsion from the territory of the Bulgarian Principality. The first census conducted after the creation of the new state (1879) recorded only about 100 Circassians still living there. See Nazûrska, \textit{Bûlgarskata dûrzhava}, 27.
Mussulman and Christian population live peaceably towards each other, not from motives of affection or sympathy, but, because of their mutual dislike, they avoid each other as much as possible.”

There were plenty of legitimate communal grievances against continued inequalities, despite the promises of the Tanzimat. Christians objected to the ongoing ban on using bells in their church services, the inequality “in the opportunity to hold public office” and the alleged (but not confirmed by documentary evidence) refusal to accept their testimony in şer’î courts. Muslims were unhappy about the burden of military service (which fell on their shoulders only) and about the practice of using the lion’s share of local tax revenues for the needs of the central government in İstanbul. There was widespread prejudice on both sides against smaller ethnic and religious groups such as the Roma (be they Muslim or Christian) or the Jews.

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910 Davison, Reform, 115-7.

911 For a rather partisan view of the reactions to the inequalities in military service, see St. Clair and Brophy, Residence in Bulgaria, 162-73.


913 Even government memoranda described the Roma as prone to spending their lives in “wasting their time here and there” (şurada burada imrar-i vakt eylemeleri) as well as “naturaly predisposed to be in a depressed and gloomy condition” (hulkât-i tabiiyeleri icabînca hal-i bed ve tiregüzar). See BOA İ.MVL 23252 lef. 1 [22 Rabiülâhir 1281 / 4 September 1864].

914 An instructive example is provided by a letter (to the board of the Bulgarian school in Vidin), in which pupils from the school demanded that the board take measures to stop the (occasional) enrollment of Jewish children in the school (BIA İ A 1686 [n.d.]). The young petitioners complained that their Jewish classmates would mock Christianity and threatened to boycott classes if the Jewish pupils were not immediately expelled. To make their point, the Bulgarian students observed that “The Jews are cursed by God and hated by all people, even the Gypsies chase them away.”
All these dormant (and not so dormant) grudges and animosities notwithstanding, it is important to provide an antidote to the “national history” meta-narratives (both Bulgarian and Turkish) by emphasizing that the majority of daily interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Danube province during the 1860’s were not necessarily antagonistic. Contemporary accounts provide a wealth of examples of amicable coexistence and often outright cooperation between the major ethnic/religious groups in the region in a wide variety of fields. In Pleven, the town’s Bulgarian and Turkish notables regularly paid social visits to each other; their wives cooperated in the preparation of meals; mutual cultural influences were seen also in wedding celebrations and other festivities.\(^{915}\) In Dupnitsa, it was customary for prominent Bulgarian and Jewish citizens to visit their Muslim neighbors in their homes on the dates of the major Muslim holidays (İd el-Adha and İd el-Fitr) in order to congratulate them.\(^{916}\) In many cities, prominent members of the non-Muslim millets (even those who did not sit on one of the local councils) were customarily invited to official functions, such as the annual banquets celebrating the Sultan’s birthday;\(^{917}\) conversely, prominent local Muslims and Muslim government officials were often guests of honor at cultural events organized by the non-Muslim communities – for example at Bulgarian school graduation ceremonies\(^{918}\) and local theater productions.\(^{919}\) Muslims occasionally acted as legal guardians for the children of

\(^{918}\) Ibid., 156.
\(^{919}\) Ibid., 276.
their Christian neighbors in şer’î courts,\textsuperscript{920} or provided other legal “favors” such as suretyship (kefalet) to their Christian acquaintances.

European travelers to the Danube province also attest to numerous instances of friendly or neighborly interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims. Religion-based residential and dietary proscriptions that might have been expected to segregate the two groups were often ignored. Kanitz, for example, reports seeing Turkish military men “conversing pleasantly” with Bulgarian merchants as they played games of chance, smoked pipes, and drank wine and brandy (rakiia) in a new guesthouse in the western town of Kula (Adliye).\textsuperscript{921} Even popular religious beliefs featured some measure of Muslim-Christian syncretism, as certain superstitions, such as the belief in vampires, were shared by all inhabitants of the province. A report in Tuna/Dunav’s crime chronicle, dated April 1866, illustrates that point – it related that a certain Halil (a Muslim) from Veles was the “vampire slayer” of choice for the Christians of Kiustendil.\textsuperscript{922} Another example of a ritual which brought members of the Muslim and non-Muslim communities of the vilayet together (albeit in a less than willing way) was the customary celebration of the Christian feast day of St. John the Baptist. As part of the festivities of that day, groups of young Bulgarian men from each village or city quarter would ritually “seize” individual notables, merchants, artisans, or any

\textsuperscript{920} E.g. in BOA AYN.DEF. 919, p. 98 [18 Cemaziülevvel 1284 / 17 September 1867].
\textsuperscript{921} Kanitz, Dunavska Bûlgariia, vol. 1, 97.
\textsuperscript{922} Tuna/Dunav, vol. 2, no. 61 [30 March / 11 April 1866]. The investigation into that particular incident revealed that Halil had personally spread word of the alleged vampire in expectation that he [Halil] would then be hired by the inhabitants of the town to deal with the situation.
other members of the local rich-and-famous scene (without regard for their religion), and, after some ritual dragging (vlachugane) through the streets, would get their “victims” wet in the nearest stream, river or lake, no doubt commemorating the act of baptism. The draggers’ preference for the well-heeled members of the community was not coincidental, since the “dragee” was expected to offer a modest amount of “ransom” in order to avoid a thorough soaking. P. Kisimov, whose memoirs include a description of the practice, tells us that in most villages, the draggers’ first victim of choice would be the local Muslim police superintendent (subaşı), while in the cities even the highest ranking Ottoman officials – müdürs, kaymakams, and even the provincial governor himself – were considered fair game. Some time after Ruse became the capital of the Danube province (Kisimov does not recall the precise date), the Bulgarian communal association in the city even made some use of the ritual in order to raise a few Ottoman liras for its cash-starved schools. Bulgarian “draggers” paid a visit to the konak, collected Midhat Paşa and a number of other top provincial bureaucrats, and escorted them to the banks of the Danube, where the two parties engaged in a friendly haggle over the precise amount of “ransom” to be paid.  

In economic activities, too, there is abundant evidence of cooperation between Muslims and non-Muslims. The archives of the notable Bulgarian Khadzhitoshev family of Vratsa contain references to no fewer than eleven close Muslim business associates that the family had between 1802 and 1827 – some

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923 see Pandeli Kisimov, “Istoricheski raboti: Stari narodni obichai,” Bûlgarska sbirka 6 (1899).
of them clearly men of considerable local importance, as evidenced by their titles 
(pasha and molla). In the 1850’s and 1860’s, the books of virtually all prominent 
Bulgarian merchant houses reveal their extremely close ties with Muslim (and 
other non-Bulgarian) suppliers, distributors, or clients. The Istanbul-based firm of 
Khristro Tuchileshtov, for instance, maintained correspondence with Turkish, 
Greek, Italian, and Ottoman Jewish partners throughout the 1860’s. Another 
Bulgarian trading company that was active in the same period – the Gabrovo-
based “Stancho Arnaudov and Sons,” had long-standing business relationships 
with at least twelve Muslim partners in the cities of Edirne, Turnovo, Sevlievo, 
and Pleven. In the prosperous Danube port town of Svishtov, it was 
considered “common occurrence to put together Turkish capital and Bulgarian 
entrepreneurial skills to form a joint venture” – for example, a company owned by 
a wealthy Muslim citizen and his Bulgarian partner operated a rental tugboat on 
the Danube, as well as a mill and bakery in town.

Muslims and non-Muslims in the Danube province also “cooperated” in 
breaking the law. I will have more to say on Muslim-Christian organized crime 
and brigandage in the vilayet later in this chapter. For now, we can posit that 
individuals from different ethnic and religious groups often appear in the 
documentary evidence as partners in unorganized or opportunistic crimes. This 
was the case, for instance, in a 1867 robbery case in which a Muslim and a

924 Nepokorni podanitsi na Sultana: dokumentalen sbornik, ed. Petur Petrov 
925 See Nachov, Khristo P. Tuchileshtov, 19. 
926 As revealed by a company register book; see Khadzhiiski, “Bit i dushevnost 
na nashiia narod,” 161. 
Christian stood accused of jointly breaking into several livestock pens in the Dobrogea and stealing sheep from their (Christian) owners. Even prostitutes in the major cities of the province apparently worked in religiously mixed “teams:” a lawsuit involving a certain Tota, a Ruse prostitute of Bulgarian origin mentions that she had adopted a Turkish pseudonym (nam-i diğer) – Ayşe – in order, presumably, to fit in. Nor did Muslims and non-Muslims hesitate to join forces when engaging in “everyday forms of resistance” and subversion of political authority, especially where shared communal interests were at stake. Kanitz had an occasion to be on the receiving end of such cooperation, when the two mayors of a religiously mixed village in the Târgovishte region jointly stonewalled his demands to provide him with horses for his journey (even though those demands were backed by a royal ferman, demanding everyone’s cooperation with the traveling Austrian geographer). On many other occasions, we see evidence of Muslims and non-Muslims routinely presenting a united front before the provincial authorities in defense of common political interests. A group of Bulgarians from the town of Triavna petitioned the government, asking that two Muslim members of the district meclis in Târnovo – Mastun aşa and Haci İbriyam – be kept in office, since their previous service had earned them “the people’s gratitude.” In the religiously mixed villages in the eastern and east-central parts of the vilayet, Muslims and non-Muslims wrote joint petitions, requesting tax

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928 BOA A.MKT.MVL. Dosya 312, Vesika 16 [25 Şevval 1283 / 2 March 1867].
929 BOA AYN.DEF. 919, pp. 126-127 [18 Şaban 1284 / 15 December 1867].
931 NBKM BIA II A 1156 [n.d.] The document is undated but was probably written after the vilayet reform since it refers to the provincial governor as vali.
breaks and other special considerations for their villages or regions. One example is a petition by the inhabitants of the village of Kûshla (Kışla), in the sancak of Tulcea, in which they requested that their village be exempted from payments of the tithe for the fiscal year 1281 (March 1865-March 1866), on account of being hit by a plague of locusts; when, several years after the original petition, Midhat’s administration nevertheless demanded that the people of Kûshla make back payments for the tithes of that year, the Muslim imam of the village, its two mayors (one Muslim, one Christian), and three Christian notables objected in a sternly worded new petition, stating, among other things, that they were still in possession of the original order (nizamname) that had authorized the exemption.  

932 A most spectacular example of joint Muslim an non-Muslim resistance against shared economic oppression in the region is provided by the peasant riots in the Smolian (Ahı Çelebi) area of the neighboring vilayet of Edirne. In the fall of 1865 over 1,800 Muslim and non-Muslim rural textile workers in that area took up arms in protest against the abuses perpetrated by unscrupulous cloth merchants (for whom they did putting out work in a proto-industrial arrangement), as well as against the proposed monetarization of their tithes. 933 The Ottoman commissioners sent to investigate the situation were nearly lynched by a 2,000-strong angry mob of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims (pomaks), Turks, and Christian Bulgarians, who gave the officials a five-point list of grievances that they wanted

932 NBKM OO Fond 169, a.e. 152 [3 Kanûnusani 1278 / 15 January 1872].  
933 See the reports on the course of the revolt by the Russian consul in Plovdiv, published, most recently, in Nepokorni podanitsi, 149-54, documents no. 1-5.  

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resolved in order to prevent further bloodshed. It took nearly four months (from November 1865 to March 1866) and government concessions on virtually all rebel demands for the situation to quiet down.  

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Some additional insight into the state of interethnic and interfaith relations in the Danube province can be gleaned from the following survey of crimes committed there between 1865 and 1868. Our information about these crimes comes from legal case summaries preserved in the İstanbul archives. I examined a number of such cases, looking for those in which the ethnic and religious identity of both the perpetrator and the victim of the crime could be positively established. An attempt was also made to include cases that cover different months and years of Midhat’s governorship, as well as different regions of the vilayet. Eventually a small sample (n=79) of cases that meet these conditions was identified and analyzed (see Table 11).

Two caveats should be mentioned before we delve into the analysis of the criminality data. First, due to the nature of the sources, all crimes in the sample are serious felonies – murders, robberies, rapes, etc. Second, because of the peculiarities in the way the sources identify the litigants, it has been necessary

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934 Ibid.
935 The case reports in BOA AYN.DEF. and BOA A.MKT.MVL., on which the sample is based typically specify the ethnic identity of Tatar, Circassian, and other muhacir litigants; Roma litigants; and litigants that are foreign (non-Ottoman) subjects. But for individuals who do not fall under any of these categories, the only distinction that is easily made is between Muslims and non-Muslim (based on the names). As a rule, Jews are also easily identified (again based on names), as are Armenians, but none of the crimes in the sample involved any members of those relatively small minority groups.
to use a combination of ethnic and religious categories in our analysis – thus

*Muslim*, as defined here, excludes *muhacirs* (all of whom were Muslim) and also excludes members of the Roma community (most of whom were Muslim). The latter two groups have been treated as separate categories. *Christian* has been used as a category in lieu of “non-Muslim,” since the sample does not contain any crimes committed by or against members of the *vilayet*’s Jewish community. Despite these categorization problems, however, an analysis of the sample reveals some interesting patterns. First, the majority (two-thirds) of the crimes in the sample were committed within the boundaries of the same group (as defined above), and only one third involved perpetrators and victims belonging to different groups. Muslims committed slightly more crimes than Christians (44% versus 40%), and were slightly less likely to be the victims of crimes than Christians were (35% versus 45%), despite comprising a smaller share of the population. (Non-immigrant, non-Roma Muslims probably made up no more than 33% of the *vilayet*’s population). That discrepancy is probably a reflection of the easier availability of weapons among the Muslim community. The number of crimes committed by members of the Roma community (8%) does seem to be significantly higher than the Roma’s relative share of the population (2.9% according to the 1866 census), but so does the number of crimes committed against Roma victims (5%). Moreover, like everyone else in the province, the Roma appear to have committed crimes mostly against members of their own group – that is the case with three out of the six crimes in the sample that had a Roma perpetrator. A more intriguing finding of the survey concerns the Tatar
and Circassian immigrants – a group which, as was mentioned above, has often
been singled out as particularly violent and crime-prone (especially the
Circassians). In our sample, the share of crimes committed by immigrants (8%)
is probably not significantly different statistically from their share of the population
(5.6% in 1866 according to official figures, but likely higher). But the *muhacirs*
appear to have been the *victims* of crime in a disproportionately high number of
cases (15%) – and they were almost equally likely to be targeted by Muslims (4
cases) and by Christians (5 cases). One way, perhaps, to reconcile this
observation with the fearsome image that the *çerkes* enjoyed in the Danube
province is to consider the types of crimes included, by necessity, in our sample
– these are generally graver than the theft of livestock and other petty robberies
of which the Circassians were most often accused.
Table 11. A sample of crimes committed in the Danube province, 1865-1868.\textsuperscript{936}  
Sample size: n=79

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perpetrator</th>
<th>Victim</th>
<th>Incidents in sample</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 victims Tatar; 1 Circassian; 1 unspecified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 victim Tatar; 4 Circassian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>perpetrator unspecified immigrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>perpetrator Circassian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 victim Tatar; 1 Circassian; 1 unspecified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 Circassians against British subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>perpetrator Austrian subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Crimes committed by Muslims       | 44% |
| Crimes committed by Christians    | 40% |
| Crimes committed by Immigrants    | 8%  |
| Crimes committed by Roma          | 8%  |
| Crimes committed against Muslims  | 35% |
| Crimes committed against Christians| 45% |
| Crimes committed against Immigrants| 15% |
| Crimes committed against Roma     | 5%  |

| Crimes committed within same group| 67% |
| Crimes committed between different groups | 33% |

\textsuperscript{936} Sources: a sample of 79 criminal cases from BOA AYN.DEF. 919 and BOA A.MKT.MVL. A complete list of the cases in this sample can be found in the Appendix at the end of this chapter. Every effort has been made to avoid double counting of the same case.
7.5. The nationalist challenge and the imperial response

7.5.1. “Customary nowadays”: political discourses on brigandage

Since the main challenge that Bulgarian nationalists were able to mount against Midhat’s government came in the shape of the relatively small bands (cheti) of 1867 and 1868, it may be useful to examine first the state of “ordinary” apolitical (or at least non-nationalist) brigandage in the province at the time, before delving into the activities of the cheti. The emphasis in the following paragraphs will be on Ottoman perceptions of the nature and causes of such brigandage, and the appropriate strategies for dealing with it. Outlining the scope of the problem and the political and discursive tools which the state had at its disposal in addressing it will then allow us to ask the following questions: Could Midhat’s government have used a “traditional” narrative to frame the nationalist challenge as brigandage in a new garb (in which case a correspondingly “traditional” rationale for suppressing it could have been found)? Or did the administration have to invent an entirely new narrative?

Organized crime in the Danube province in the 1860’s was widespread and not confined to any single ethnic or religious group. It most commonly took the shape of highway brigandage. Although the figure of the brigand (Turkish haydud, Bulgarian khaidutin) has been the subject of much idealization in Balkan
historiography and has been posthumously endowed with both Robin-Hoodian\textsuperscript{937} and proto-nationalist qualities,\textsuperscript{938} in reality brigandage in the region was thoroughly opportunistic and ideology-free. Other than a robust disregard for established authority (this characteristic was, incidentally, shared by Muslim and non-Muslim \textit{hayduds}),\textsuperscript{939} brigands had no specific political agenda.\textsuperscript{940} No ethnic, religious, or social group in the \textit{vilayet} was immune from the danger of becoming a victim of organized crime. It is unlikely, for example, that the following account from \textit{Tuna/Dunav}'s crime chronicle would have raised any eyebrows at the time it was published:

Eight individuals entered the house of Milan in the village of Semiz-Ali in the \textit{kaza} of Pazarcık [Dobrich], stole some of Milan’s goods and fled; on the following morning, these same individuals caught up on the road with the daughter of Molla Mehmet and her friends, who were coming back home from a wedding in the village of Kadıköy; the brigands stole the girls’ gold and other things they were carrying, and fled.\textsuperscript{941}

\textsuperscript{937} See, for example, Dimitrov, Zhechev, and Tonev, \textit{Istoriia na Dobrudzha}, vol. 3, 242-3., which contains several examples of \textit{khaiduti} allegedly punishing rich Bulgarian \textit{chorbadzhii} and tax-collectors and defending the poor peasants. Characteristically, all of these examples come from self-serving post-1878 memoirs and/or unverifiable oral testimonies of the \textit{kahiduti} themselves.

\textsuperscript{938} Ibid., 244.

\textsuperscript{939} Kanitz, for example, describes an encounter he had (in 1872) with one “infamous” Muslim \textit{haydud} – a certain Ali Pehlivan – in the Deliorman region in the northwest of the Danube province. Trying to dissuade the brigand from robbing his party (or worse), Kanitz’s Ottoman police escort had said that the European geographer was a “head engineer” of the Sultan himself. In response, Ali Pehlivan “said a few dismissive words about the Sultan.” Kanitz, \textit{Dunavska Bulgariia}, vol. 3, 264.

\textsuperscript{940} as observed by Voillery, “Structures sociales et renaissance bulgare,” 244.

\textsuperscript{941} \textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 2, no. 135 [18/30 December 1866].
It was perfectly possible, in other words, for the members of the same criminal band to attack, within a few hours, a Christian man (Milan) and the daughter of a Muslim cleric. This opportunism is even better illustrated by the activities of one three-man *haydud* band from the Samokov and Zlatitsa regions (southeast of Sofia). Here is a summary of the band’s exploits, as revealed during the trial of one of its members:

All three of the band’s members were mountain Vlachs (*Ulah*) from the Rila mountains. Their victims over a two-year period included other Vlach shepherds, Bulgarian and Turkish farmers, an Armenian merchant and his Ottoman (likely Turkish) bodyguard. Individuals who aided and abetted the band’s criminal activities included a Bulgarian innkeeper, a Vlach dairy owner, and several Turkish gun dealers.  

Banditry in the *vilayet* was as opportunistic in its choice of tactics as it was in its choice of targets. To be sure, criminal gangs most often made their living by robbing travelers on the road (committing the şer’i hadd crime of *kat-i tarîk*). But in border regions they also engaged in smuggling, especially of excise and monopoly goods such as salt. The extent of cross-border smuggling operations can be gauged by the fact that, when one organized gang of salt smugglers was discovered by the authorities in the Niş region in February 1868, its members were able to hold off the attacks of the special customs police force that was sent to apprehend them for several hours (in what the source describes as a running gun battle), before managing to retreat across the border.  

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942 Case summary in BOA AYN.DEF. 919, p. 58 [17 Ramazan 1283 / 23 January 1867].
943 BOA AYN.DEF. 919, p. 141 [23 Şevval 1284 / 17 February 1868].
another incident in which a village (Makresh) near the Serbian border south of Vidin had been the site of a “bloody battle” between Ottoman border guards and a substantial band of Serbian brigands (presumably smugglers) in 1864; the latter were repulsed only with “great [Ottoman] losses.”

The cities and towns of the Danube province were not free of organized crime either. Even Ruse, the seat of the provincial government, suffered from the activities of a criminal gang composed, interestingly enough, of several Ottoman artillery soldiers (including a corporal) and seven local citizens. At first sight, it may seem that that particular gang was organized and operated along ethno-religious lines – all its members were Muslim Turks and its targets of choice included two churches, one in the city of Ruse itself and the other in a neighboring village. But, as the investigation into the case revealed, although the gang’s membership may have been ethnically and religiously uniform, its support structure was not – its five named accomplices included an Albanian, a Bulgarian, a Roma, and two Turks. Furthermore, two other individuals to whom the gang members sold the goods they were stealing (and who knew they were buying stolen property, including, one may suppose, Church property) were both Bulgarian.

Incidentally, quite a few other documents mention soldiers “turning to the road of brigandage,” suggesting that that was a fairly common occurrence.

944 Kanitz, *Dunavska Bûlgariia*, vol. 1, 144.
945 BOA AYN.DEF. 919, p. 160 [29 Zilkade 1284 / 23 March 1868].
946 E.g. a report of the capture of a deserter soldier from the region of Razgrad, who had been making a living by committing acts of highway robbery: see NBKM OO Fond.112, a.e. 2061 [13 Şaban 1292 / 13 September 1875].
Just as they cooperated in “ordinary” illegal activities (as was shown above), members of different ethnic and religious groups in the vilayet also cooperated in committing acts of organized crime. The salt-smuggling band mentioned above is a case in point – of its two members killed by the police, one was reported to be a Muslim and the other a Christian.\(^{947}\) In the wake of the Crimean war, Christian-led and Muslim-led haydud gangs operated jointly in the Varna-Shumen-Dobrich triangle for years and with relative impunity. Both had religiously-mixed membership and support structure.\(^{948}\)

Although many organized bands in the region were active in geographically limited regions (often within the borders of a single kaza), others were decidedly long-range affairs. One “notorious” bandit who had been active in the region of Tekirdağ, on the Sea of Marmara, was eventually arrested near Plovdiv in the province of Edirne, south of the Balkan mountains, and was then sent to Sofia, in the Danube province, about 400km from Tekirdağ, where several private lawsuits were pending against him for robberies he had committed earlier.\(^{949}\) Thus, the geographic mobility of the 1867 and 1868 Bulgarian nationalist bands was hardly unique.

Nor were the size and organization of the 1867 and 1868 cheti exceptional relative to those of similar bands in the region at the time. The Panaiot Khitov and Filip Totiu cheti of 1867 had only a few dozen members each – less than the aforementioned salt-smuggling band on the Serbian border, which was over fifty

\(^{947}\) BOA AYN.DEF. 919, p. 141 [23 Şevval 1284 / 17 February 1868].
\(^{948}\) Nepokorni podanitsi, 191-8, documents 1-12.
\(^{949}\) BOA AYN.DEF. 919, p. 151 [8 Zilkade 1284 / 2 March 1868].
men strong. Indeed a province-wide survey of organized brigandage done in the summer of 1866 listed Bulgarian nationalist organizations only as secondary and tertiary concerns. The biggest current challenge, the report stated, was a band of over sixty ethnic Greeks that was active at the southwestern fringes of the vilayet in the region of Blagoevgrad. In terms of the sheer military challenge they posed to the government, the 1867 cheti also paled in comparison with the large band of the Muslim haydud Kıvrıkoğlu, which had been terrorizing travelers in the Tûrnovo, Svishtov, and Pleven regions for several years prior to its final suppression in the summer of 1865. Defeating Kıvrıkoğlu and his men took the efforts of “all policemen” in the area and two battalions of the regular army. And even the danger posed by the larger cheti of 1868 (led by Khadzhi Dimitûr and Stefan Karadzha) was surely dwarfed by the en masse revolt of the Albanian population of the kaza Kuršumlija (Kurşunlu) in the southwestern part of the Niš sancak in 1864-1865. That revolt had involved over 1,000 villagers, who had taken up arms against the government and had effectively wrested control of their district from the Ottoman government for several months, refusing to pay taxes, send recruits to the army or recognize the officially appointed Ottoman district superintendent (müdür). As was mentioned earlier, Midhat Paşa was eventually able to “pacify” the Albanians, but not before dispatching multiple

950 BOA AYN.DEF. 919, p. 141 [23 Şevval 1284 / 17 February 1868].
951 The members of that band are said to have been Rum, a term which generally refers to Orthodox Christians (of any ethnicity), but, given that the same document also lists, as lesser sources of concern, a group of fifteen “Bulgarian (Bulgar) "collaborators of Rakovski" and a “Bulgarian (Bulgar) committee in Bucharest,” it seems that Rum is here used in its more colloquial meaning of “Greek.” See BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 7 [23 Safer 1283 / 6 July 1866].
952 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 1, no. 19 [7/19 July 1865].
regular army units (both mounted and infantry), a police battalion, and even some artillery to the mountain passes near Kuršumlija.\footnote{BOA İ.D. 36825 [18 Receb 1281/ 18 Dec 1864].} No action organized by the Bulgarian nationalist movement in Serbia and Romania during Midhat’s tenure in Ruse ever came close to the events at Kuršumlija in terms of the sheer military challenge it posed to Ottoman authorities.

Given its prevalence in the region, it should come as no surprise that brigandage had come to be regarded as an endemic (rather than exceptional) threat in official discourses. The presence of haydud bands was seen regrettable but “customary nowadays” (âdet-i cariye),\footnote{BOA A.MKT.MVL. Dosya 275, Vesika 68 [18 Receb 1282 / 8 December 1865].} and a fairly standardized nomenclature for describing acts of organized crime had been developed. Government correspondence describes bandits as irredeemable members of the “rebels’ ilk” (eşķiya gürühundan),\footnote{E.g., BOA AYN.DEF. 919, p. 151 [8 Zilkade 1284 / 2 March 1868].} just as some women were described as irredeemable members of the “prostitutes’ ilk” (fahiše gürühundan). “Habitual” (âdi) brigands were accorded several special mentions in the Ottoman Penal Code, where being engaged in “continual crimes and misdemeanors” (cinayet ve şekavet-i müstemire) was regarded as an aggravating factor in cases or murder (Article 173) and highway robbery (Addendum to Article 62).\footnote{DÜSTÛR, vol.1, 549-550; 574. The 1888 English translation of the OPC is rather loose in these cases, rendering the original Ottoman term as “persons habitually addicted to such offenses” in one instance and as “professional criminals, known to be such by their antecedents” in another. See OPC, 27, 75-6.} Beyond the letter of the law, however, the “famous” bandit (meşhur haydud) had been a fixture of
the popular imaginations in the region for decades. Some meşhur hayduds were indeed lionized by their contemporaries (as opposed to by later historians wishing to portray them as Bulgarian national heroes) as protectors of the poor and small – the haydud Dimitûr “Kılıçlı” Kotev (a Christian), for instance, appears as the hero in several Bulgarian folk songs from the Dobrogea region, where he spent most of his “career” until his capture and execution in 1861.957 Another celebrated meşhur haydud in what would become the Danube province was the infamous Solak Mustafa (a Muslim), whose power in the region between Varna and Shumen in the late 1850’s was so great that he could convene at will meetings of village mayors, instructing them in advance what goods and services they were expected to deliver to him and his band.958 Unsurprisingly, contemporary observers believed Solak Mustafa to be an ayan in the making and compared him to Pazvantoğlu of Vidin.959

All this means that, by the early 1860’s, Ottoman statesmen had at their disposal a specific type of political discourse that they used to describe brigandage and sedition. It was a discourse that accepted the existence of organized crime as a “very ancient thing” that could never be completely eradicated, try as the authorities might. But, in acknowledging the endemic nature of brigandage, the government’s discourse also trivialized it – since it was a “habitual” phenomenon, brigandage could hardly be a major threat to the existence of the empire. From a propaganda point of view, therefore, one might

958 Nepokorni podanitsi, 195-6, document 7. [26 March 1859].  
959 Ibid., 192, document 2.
have expected that Midhat’s administration would try to portray the 1867 and 1868 Bulgarian cheti as variations on the old meşhur haydud theme. But that, as we shall see in the next section, was not the case.

7.5.2. From meşhur haydud to komita: the cheti and their suppression

Bulgarian historians, long concerned with establishing the credentials of the 1867 and 1868 cheti as bona fide representatives of the “national liberation movement,” have devoted an extraordinary amount of time and energy to elucidating the organizational background, political affiliations, and military activities of these relatively small bands. No attempt will be made here to survey the full scope of that voluminous literature; instead, only a brief summary of the main events surrounding the crossing of the cheti will be provided, largely as a background to our subsequent discussion of the administration’s response to the challenge posed by the bands.

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The first of the 1867 bands, under the command of Panaiot Khitov, numbered thirty people. Khitov’s *cheta* crossed the Danube river into Ottoman territory on April 18, 1867 and proceeded to traverse the Danubian plain, reaching the safety of the Balkan mountains in mid-May. Even though it passed through the predominantly Muslim region of the Deli Orman, Khitov’s *cheta* somehow managed to avoid being detected – mostly, as far as we can tell, by carefully bypassing all villages on its way and by failing to fire a single shot. Once in the mountains, the *cheta* briefly split in two parts, one of which encamped near Kotel while the other made its way east, to the vicinity of Sliven. 961 By that time, the authorities had finally caught word of the existence of the *cheta* and had duly dispatched regular army units and irregular troops to “smoke it out;” the government’s efforts were, however, frustrated by the band’s rapid retreat west along the Balkan range and toward the Serbian border. By mid-June Khitov and his men were safely out of Ottoman territory, without having suffered any casualties or having engaged in any hostilities.

The members of the other 1867 band – led by Filip Totiu – were more successful in drawing attention to themselves. Totiu’s *cheta* crossed the Danube on May 17 near Svishtov (i.e. at a point further west than Khitov had). With only twenty five men under his command, Totiu could hardly pose any significant military challenge to the Ottoman forces in the province. But he and his comrades were reportedly eager to “draw blood” – which they did by murdering five Muslim shepherd boys (aged between eight and ten), whom they

961 *Istoriia na Bûlgaria*, vol. 6, 246.
encountered in the fields around Svishtov. Totiu’s *cheta* then moved south in the direction of Sevlievo, but was hunted down and surrounded in the hills near the village of Vůrbovka (Tusa Balkani), midway between the Danube and the central Balkan range. There, Totiu’s men fought a battle with Ottoman regular troops and village irregulars (19 May), in which about half of the members of the *cheta* were killed and several others captured. Totiu himself was wounded but managed to slip away with his few remaining comrades. Eventually, the rump *cheta* reached the Balkan mountains and (after a few more skirmishes with Ottoman forces) managed to escape into Serbian territory.

Ali Haydar Midhat, perhaps anxious to embellish his father’s achievement in suppressing the *cheti*, has left us a rather exaggerated account of the impact of Totiu’s band. Ali Haydar’s book claims that the *cheta* had been joined by numerous Bulgarians from Svishtov and its vicinity, reaching (by the time of the Vůrbovka battle) the size of “180-200” men. In addition, Ali Haydar alleges that the *cheta*’s crossing had led to the spontaneous formation in various corners of the province of several other Bulgarian bands (each of them “ten to twenty men strong”), whose members began terrorizing the village population of the districts of Tûrnovo and Sevlievo, causing “Muslims to hide from the Christians in the mosques and Christians, fearful of Muslims, to seek safety in churches.”\(^\text{962}\)

Şentürk, rather typically, has repeated Ali Haydar’s account almost word for word.\(^\text{963}\) But in reality Totiu’s *cheta* was unable to convince any Bulgarian villagers to join its cause, despite making a considerable effort to do so. In fact, if


\(^{963}\) Şentürk, *Osmanlı Devleti’inde Bulgar Meselesi*, 203.
one believes some of the reports in *Tuna/Dunav* about the band’s progress, Bulgarian peasants not only gave Totiu a cold shoulder but occasionally pursued and fought the *cheta* themselves.\(^{964}\) The failure of the band to attract any followers from the *vilayet*’s ethnic Bulgarian population was a fact well known to the authorities at the time (it was confirmed by several captured *cheta* members during their interrogations)\(^{965}\) and widely acknowledged by Bulgarian historians.\(^{966}\) The only tangible support that Totiu’s band did receive came from the so-called “Svishtov committee” – a clandestine organization made up of a few dozen Bulgarian youths from the Danubian town of that name. The formation of the “Svishtov committee” has been the object of many studies,\(^ {967}\) whose findings need not be repeated here. Suffice it to say that the committee was organized by individuals who were appraised of the plans to land the 1867 *cheti* and formed their organization with the specific purpose of providing support for Totiu and his

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\(^{964}\) E.g. *Tuna/Dunav*, vol. 3, no. 181 [7/19 June 1867], which contains a report of a skirmish between the remnants of Totiu’s band and the Bulgarian inhabitants of a village near Zlatitsa; the villagers, who were said to have been armed with wooden clubs and other makeshift weapons, ended up killing one of the *cheta* members and capturing another one.

\(^{965}\) E.g. in the testimony of Tsani Boyadzhi Georgiev, one of the band members captured at Vûrbovka. He related that despite the *cheta* members’ efforts to secure the cooperation of Bulgarian villagers (often at knife or gun point), they could not find a single individual willing to help them and were reduced to roaming “from village to village and from field to field” (*köyden köye ekinlikten ekinliğe*) looking for food. See BOA İ.MVL. 26070, lef. 4 [16 Rabiülevvel 1284 / 18 July 1867].

\(^{966}\) See, for example, Pletn’ov, *Midkhat Pasha*, 201.

men. In the event, however, only nine of the members of the committee actually met and joined Totiu’s cheta at the previously agreed upon rendezvous point.\textsuperscript{968}

The response of Midhat Paşa’s administration to the infiltration of the 1867 cheti was swift and severe. Having received a telegraphic dispatch about the crossing of Totiu’s band, the governor immediately boarded a steamship from Ruse to Svishtov, accompanied by two hastily assembled companies of regular forces from the Ruse garrison.\textsuperscript{969} From Svishtov, Midhat traveled to Tûrnovo, where he gathered more troops (by the time of the Vûrbvoka battle, Totiu’s cheta was being chased by no less than four companies and two battalions of regular army troops as well as an untold number of irregulars).\textsuperscript{970} Fearful that more cheti crossings might be in the works, the governor also scrambled a special “rapid deployment” army detachment to patrol the Danube border and asked for the reconstitution of one of the two vilayet police companies that had been previously disbanded in the spirit of budgetary cuts.\textsuperscript{971}

Once the immediate challenge posed by Totiu’s cheta had passed and it had become clear that its crossing would not precipitate a massive Bulgarian revolt, Midhat turned his attention to the question of punishing those who had been involved in the events. A “temporary tribunal” (muvakkat meclisi) made up of three Muslim and four non-Muslim judges (including three Bulgarians) was convened in Tûrnovo to try captured band members and their alleged

\textsuperscript{968} See the aforementioned testimony of Tsani Boyadzhi Georgiev in BOA İ.MVL. 26070, lef. 4 [16 Rabiülevvel 1284 / 18 July 1867].
\textsuperscript{969} Ali Haydar Midhat, Tabsıra-i İbret, 64.
\textsuperscript{970} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{971} BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 34 [14 Muharrem 1284/18 May 1867].

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accomplices. Midhat appears to have been particularly concerned with the existence of a “committee” within the vilayet’s borders; therefore, he made a second trip to Svishtov in early June, where he had between 50 and 60 suspected members of that committee arrested and brought before the Tûrnovo tribunal. Meeting in the presence of the governor himself, as well as several European consuls, the Tûrnovo tribunal returned about a dozen death sentences and sent nearly 40 individuals (mostly those implicated in the Svishtov conspiracy and other collaborators of the cheta) to various terms of hard labor, exile, or imprisonment. A substantial portion of the arrestees were found not guilty and released.

972 The precise number of death sentences handed down by the court remains unclear. The Ottoman documents available to me reference just two – that of Tsani Boyadzhi Georgiev and another band member by the name of Traiko – but consular reports examined by Pletn’ov mention that during its first session (June 5), the tribunal sentenced two other captured cheta members to death. At least two more cheta members – those directly responsible for the murder of the five Muslim children – were also reported to have been sentenced to death and executed in Svishtov. Other cheta members were also sentenced to death if they had been captured in battle or had been carrying arms. See BOA İ.MVL. 26070 [13 Receb 1284 / 10 November 1867]; İ.MVL. 26079 [17 Receb 1284 / 14 November 1867]; Pletn’ov, Midkhat Pasha, 200-1; Ali Haydar Midhat, Tabsira-i lbret, 66-8.

973 BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 60 [26 Receb 1284 / 23 November 1867] mentions two sentences of hard labor for life, eight sentences of hard labor for fifteen years, eighteen sentences of hard labor for ten years, and one sentence of imprisonment for three years. It is unclear how many of these were against individuals from the Svishtov committee and how many were against cheta members proper. All sentences were to be served in Diyarbekir in eastern Anatolia. Another document, BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 59 [24 Receb 1284/ 21 November 1867] mentions further punishments that are specifically said to apply to members of the Svishtov committee – two more sentences of imprisonment for fifteen years in the Diyarbekir fortress; one sentence of hard labor for seven year, to be served at Vidin; one sentence of permanent exile abroad, with no right to return to “Bulgaria” (that was pronounced against a person who was born in Romania), one further sentence of exile (term not specified) to Ankara, and two
The fate of the larger 1868 Bulgarian cheta was similarly grim. Led by Khadzhi Dimitûr Asenov and Stefan Karadzha and numbering 125 men, it crossed the Danube on the night of July 6, 1868, near the mouth of the Iantra river. The imperial government, concerned with the ability of Sabri Paşa (Midhat’s replacement as governor) to deal swiftly and decisively with the challenge, quickly recalled Midhat from his new duties as chair of the Council of State and dispatched him back to the vilayet. As it turned out, the Porte need not have worried – by the time of Midhat’s arrival in Ruse (July 15), the cheta had been thoroughly defeated. It had been forced to wage almost daily battles with Ottoman forces, first with irregulars and later with numerous detachments from the regular army. Moreover, the 1868 cheta, like its 1867 counterparts, had failed to elicit any measurable support from the vilayet’s Bulgarian communities – although, unlike Totiu’s men in 1867, its members had not committed any atrocities against the civilian population. When Midhat left Ruse for Gabrovo and Tûrnovo (the administrative centers closest to the cheta’s path), the rebels had been decimated in four major skirmishes (at the villages of Karaisen, sentences of exile to Mount Athos (the last two were against monks who were judged to have provided shelter for cheta members in their monastery).

This seems to be the consensus figure among Bulgarian historians, although some studies have suggested the actual number of cheta members was slightly higher. See Ogniana Mazhdrakova-Chavdarova, Natsionalno-revoluotsionni borbi na bûlgarskiia narod, 1828-1878 (Sofia: Abagar, 1997), 162. cf. Plamen Chakûrov, “Rusenski dokument za chetata na Khadzhi Dimitûr i Stefan Karadzha,” Almanakh za istoriïata na Ruse 1 (1996): 189.

This is acknowledged in Midhat’s biography and in the initial reports by Sabri Paşa on the cheta’s progress. See Şentürk, Osmanli Devleti’nde Bulgar Meselesi, 210.
Patresh, and Vishovgrad and in the Kanlı Dere area east of Sevlievo), had lost one of their co-leaders (Stefan Karadzha who was heavily wounded and captured in one of the battles), and had been reduced to some 30 survivors. Nevertheless, Midhat managed to claim some credit for the suppression of the band, since the final battle against it (at the Buzludzha peak in the central Balkan range), at which most of the remaining cheta members including Khadzhi Dimitûr were killed, took place under his, rather than Sabri’s, command.

The legal action taken against the (relatively few) surviving cheta members and their alleged collaborators in 1868 closely mirrored the measures taken against Totiu’s band a year earlier. Muvakkat tribunals were set up again and, by one authoritative count, returned 23 death sentences and nine sentences of lengthy terms of hard labor against captured band members.

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The defeat of Khadzhi Dimitûr’s cheta at Buzludzha on July 18, 1868, marked the end of the Bulgarian nationalist challenge to Ottoman rule during the 1860’s. The cheti fiascoes also forced the émigré leaders of the nationalist movement to rethink their tactics and to begin contemplating the creation of “internal” clandestine revolutionary cells inside Ottoman territory. But the efforts to set up such an internal organization would take a number of years and would not bear fruit until the outbreak of the April uprising of 1876. To contemporary observers, Midhat’s measures against the 1867 and 1868 cheti appeared to be a triumph.

978 Mazhdrakova-Chavdarova, Natsionalno-revoliutsionni borbi, 163; Istoriiia na Bûlgariia, vol. 6, 258-60.
979 See Markova, Chetata ot 1868 godina, 115.
Nevertheless, as I will argue later in this chapter, the Ottoman government (and
Midhat personally) committed several important errors in their suppression of the
cheti – errors which, in the long run, may have outweighed the immediate
success of the Paşa’s policies. Before delving into a discussion of these errors,
however, it may be useful to examine briefly the international status quo in the
region in 1867 and 1868, as it had a decisive role in shaping Ottoman policies
towards the cheti movement.

7.5.3. The “cauldrons of revolt”

From the end of the Crimean War to the mid-1860’s the Ottoman Balkans had
remained fairly peaceful and the Tanzimat statesmen’s hand in the region
relatively unconstrained by foreign pressure. Except for the de facto union of the
Principalities with the election of Alexandru Ioan Cuza as prince of Moldavia and
Walachia in the winter of 1859,\footnote{980} and several minor conflicts with Montenegro
(1861-1862),\footnote{981} there had been no significant diplomatic crises in the Balkans.
But already by the beginning of 1866 there were signs that the international
situation in and around the region might be taking a turn for the worse. In
February of that year a parliamentary coup in Bucharest brought down Prince
Cuza and led to the election of Karl (Carol) of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen as the

\footnote{980} See Charles Jelavich and Barbara Jelavich, The Establishment of the Balkan
\footnote{981} Shaw and Shaw, Ottoman Empire, 149-51.
new monarch of the Principalities – despite vehement Ottoman opposition and threats of military intervention.\textsuperscript{982} A few months after the Romanian constitutional crisis, a massive revolt of the Greek Orthodox inhabitants of Crete threatened to tear the island away from the empire and to bring it in union (\textit{enosis}) with the independent Greek state. The Cretan revolt raged for nearly a year, with Greece actively backing the rebels with weapons and volunteers from the mainland.\textsuperscript{983} Not only were the Ottomans in danger of losing Crete, but they also had to face the humiliating prospect of being unable to guarantee the safety and security of the island’s considerable Muslim population. Unsurprisingly, criticism of the government over its handling of the Cretan question became one of the rallying cries of the emerging Ottoman constitutionalist movement (“the Young Ottomans”) in İstanbul journalistic circles and in exile.\textsuperscript{984} Finally, in the fall of 1866, the government of Prince Mihailo Obrenović of Serbia renewed its claims that the Ottoman government should evacuate its last remaining military garrisons from the fortress of Belgrade and from a few other military outposts in the country. These garrisons represented the last vestiges of Ottoman sovereignty over the Serbian principality (which was still technically subject to the

\textsuperscript{982} Ottoman opposition to the Hohenzollern succession in Romania was due mostly to the fact that many high-ranking \textit{Tanzimat} statesmen (including then Grand Vezir Fuat Paşa, and Āli Paşa, who led the Ottoman delegation in the negotiations over Carol’s recognition) clung to the illusory hope that, with the removal of Cuza, the union of the Principalities could be dissolved and effective Ottoman suzerainty over them re-imposed. Ottoman politicians were also understandably upset at the prospect of a member of a European royal family taking over what most of them still considered to be “an integral part” of their empire. See Davison, \textit{Reform}, 158, n. 53.

\textsuperscript{983} Shaw and Shaw, \textit{Ottoman Empire}, 151-2.

\textsuperscript{984} For Young Ottoman reactions to the Cretan revolt, see Davison, \textit{Reform}, 208, 12.
Porte) and their preservation was a matter of considerable symbolic importance for the imperial government. Nevertheless, Prince Mihailo and his Prime Minister Ilija Garašanin were able to bring the Ottomans to the negotiation table and to convince them to begin withdrawing all imperial troops from Serbia (in exchange for the right to continue to have the Ottoman flag flown over the evacuated fortresses).\textsuperscript{985}

The next year, 1867, brought the Ottomans no respite from their political and diplomatic troubles in the Balkans. Relationships with France, a close Ottoman ally since the Crimean war, had been deteriorating due to Napoleon III’s backing of the Romanian coup and his initial willingness to support the Cretan revolt. Now, in February 1867, the French government delivered a memorandum to the Porte which demanded a better implementation of the promises made in the 1856 *Hatt-i Hümayun*, in order to prevent future crises similar to that in Crete.\textsuperscript{986} Moreover, despite the satisfactory (for them) resolution of the fortress question, the Serbs also continued their confrontational policies vis-à-vis the empire. Border incidents were common throughout the summer of 1867, with the most serious provocations occurring in August, when large groups of armed men carrying Serbian flags and, in some cases, wearing Serbian military uniforms, made repeated incursions into Ottoman territory, only to withdraw back to Serbia.


\textsuperscript{986} Davison, *Reform*, 235.
as soon as the Ottomans were able to deploy forces against them.\textsuperscript{987}

Throughout the year, the Serbian government maintained not-so-secret contacts with members of the Bulgarian nationalist movement. In January, Serbian representatives signed a pact with Bulgarian exiles in Belgrade, entitled “[a] program for political relations between the Serbo-Bulgarians / Bulgaro-Serbs [sic] and for their future cordial interactions.” The pact pledged Bulgarian support for the creation of a joint Serbo-Bulgarian state under the rule of the Obrenović dynasty.\textsuperscript{988} In July and August (not long after the defeat of Totiu’s cheta), the Garašanin government put together an armed contingent of no less than 600 Bulgarian volunteers and stationed them near the town of Zaječar, within a few miles from the Ottoman border. These volunteers made several brief incursions into Ottoman territory, but were eventually withdrawn further away from the border under the threat of Ottoman reprisals.\textsuperscript{989} Finally, in the fall of 1867, the Serbian government accepted Russian funding to start training yet another military detachment of Bulgarian volunteers. Enrolled in a separate section of the Serbian Artillery academy, the detachment included most of the surviving members of the 1867 Khitov and Totiu bands and numbered close to 200

\textsuperscript{987} A report on the August border incidents claims that the intruders numbered over 400 on one occasion and about 150 on another. See BOA İ.MMHS. 1430, lef. 3 [31 Temmuz 1283 / 12 August 1867].
\textsuperscript{988} Istoriia na Bûlgaria, vol. 6, 239.
\textsuperscript{989} The volunteer detachment is known in Bulgarian historiography as the “Zaječar cheta” (Zaicharska cheta) and is often portrayed as a bona fide element of the “Bulgarian national liberation movement,” despite clearly being under the thumb of the Serbian authorities (many of the volunteers even served under the Serbian flag and wore Serbian military uniforms). See Mazhdrakova-Chavdarova, Natsionalno-revoliutsionni borbi na bûlgarskiia narod, 1828-1878, 153-4.
men.\textsuperscript{990} Its disbanding in June 1868 sent scores of its members to Romania, where they joined the Khadzhi Dimitûr / Stefan Karadzha cheta.

Perhaps most worryingly for the Ottomans, there were signs in 1866-1867 that Russia, their old nemesis, was attempting to pursue a more aggressive Balkan policy once again. Prevented from openly interfering in Ottoman affairs by the provisions of the Treaty of Paris, Russia was nonetheless able to exercise considerable diplomatic (and symbolic) pressure over the Porte. In the spring of 1867, a “pan-Slavic Congress” comprised of eighty-one delegates met in St. Petersburg as part of an all-Russian ethnographic exhibition. Although Bulgarians were represented at the Congress by just one delegate (on par, for example, with the Lužice Serbs – a tiny Protestant Serbian minority in Prussia), the event did manage to raise anxieties in İstanbul and Ruse.\textsuperscript{991} Also in 1867, Russia presented the Porte with a plan for future reforms it (the Porte) ought to undertake, ostensibly in order to ameliorate the condition of its non-Muslim subjects. Unlike the aforementioned French memorandum of that year, some of whose suggestions were actually used in crafting the vilayet Law, the Russian proposal amounted to a recipe for “dividing the empire into autonomous regions based on nationality” and would have led, in Fuat Paşa’s words, to the creation of “Etats désunis de Turquie.”\textsuperscript{992}

\textsuperscript{990} Ibid., 155-7.
\textsuperscript{991} see S.A. Nikitin, “Slavianskie s”ezdy shestidesiatykh godov XIX veka,” in Slavianskii sbornik; slavianskii vopros i russkoe obshchestvo v 1867-1878 godakh, ed. Nikolai M. Druzhinin (Moscow: 1948).
\textsuperscript{992} Davison, Reform, 235.
In this atmosphere, it is hardly surprising that Midhat’s administration had become highly apprehensive – even paranoid – of any sign of revolutionary or seditious activity among the *vilayet*’s Bulgarian communities. As early as the summer of 1866, the administration had gotten word of the creation in Bucharest of “Bulgarian committees” (*Bulgar komiteleri*),993 and, during the following two years, the tone of its correspondence with the center on the “committee” question ranged from concerned to hysterical. At the height of the Romanian succession crisis, Midhat kept receiving memoranda from the Grand Vezirate that stressed the importance of the province under his control as a “most delicate” region in the “heart of Bulgaria,” and emphasized that it was the governor’s duty to make sure that the revolutionary atmosphere in the Principalities would not be allowed to spill over across the Danube.994 In September of 1866, the provincial administration received a translation of a Bulgarian nationalist pamphlet that had been circulating in the Niš and Prizren regions. The Grand Vezirate’s note accompanying the translation dismissed all its claims as nothing more than foreign ploys to “sow the seeds of discord”995 among the empire’s peoples, but added that, given the international situation, such provocations ought to be taken seriously:

Nevertheless, due to the revolutionary times (*takallübat-i asriye*) in which we live, we can observe all over the world that the cauldrons of revolt are simmering and boiling over (*fesad kazgânları kaynayub coşmakta*), therefore, we cannot be absolutely sure that this kind of intrigues would remain

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993 Information in BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 7 [23 Safer 1283 / 6 July 1866].
994 BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 3 [13 Muharrem 1283 / 28 May 1866].
995 *neşr-i tohum-i fesad olunmakta*
completely without an effect. Especially given the fact that the Cretan affair has recently become more complicated, […] should further troubles arise elsewhere in the country, that would inevitably serve to resurrect the old theories that the Sublime State, allegedly, is suffering from internal difficulties.\footnote{BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 19 [7 Cemaziülevvel 1283 / 17 September 1866].}

The autumn of 1866 brought some relief for these Ottoman anxieties, notably by the peaceful resolution of the Hohenzollern accession in Romania. But the worried tone continued to be a feature of the official correspondence between the center and the vilayet well into 1867. The Bulgarian Dualist memorandum of late February of that year (on which I will have more to say later in this chapter) elicited no official response but undoubtedly served to remind the authorities in the province of the existence of the dreaded “Bulgarian committee” in Romania (the memorandum’s self-avowed author); the administration consequently redoubled its efforts to denounce the “committee” as a puppet of Russian foreign policy.\footnote{An article in \textit{Tuna/Dunav}, vol. 3, no. 169 [26 April / 8 May 1867], reprinted a material from the İstanbul-based French-language newspaper \textit{Courrier d’Orient}, which had claimed that “there has never existed such a Bulgarian committee [in Bucharest]; instead, there was a meeting of a few people a hundred feet away from the Russian embassy [in İstanbul].”}

\footnote{BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 32 [9 Muharrem 1284 / 14 May 1867].}

In early May, just days before the crossing of Totiu’s band, Midhat’s report of his recent trip to the Gabrovo region again sounded a worried note – “malevolent” (bedhah) elements were presenting “certain trifling events” as “horrible calamities.”

Therefore, even the usual amount of brigandage in Bulgaria, when put in excited and embellished terms, will give certain pernicious hands the pretext to deceive public opinion.\footnote{BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 32 [9 Muharrem 1284 / 14 May 1867].}
In response to such challenges, Midhat urged the Porte to speed up its approval of his request to station a naval ship on the Danube; he also mentioned the need for the Ministry of Defense to send special instructions to the military commanders in the vilayet instructing them how to deal with said “malevolent” elements.\textsuperscript{999} The administration’s paranoia reached a fever pitch in July and August of 1867, due to the abovementioned saber-rattling along the Serbian border,\textsuperscript{1000} the apprehension and killings of two “committee” members aboard the Austrian ship \textit{Germania} in Ruse (on August 8),\textsuperscript{1001} and, last but not least, the discovery of an alleged Serbian plot to assassinate Midhat himself (in late August).\textsuperscript{1002} In the fall of 1867 and winter of 1868, the tone of government

\begin{footnotes}
\footnoterefname{Ibid.}
\footnoterefname{The incursions of the so-called “Zaječar cheta” caused considerable consternation in the vilayet. The commander of the Vidin garrison sent two battalions of reservists and two canons to the border region where the incursions had taken place, and Midhat shipped several squadrons of cavalry from Ruse to Vidin in order to assist in the effort. See BOA İ.MMHS. 1430, lef. 3 [30 July /12 August 1867].}
\footnoterefname{On this rather bizarre episode, see Ali Haydar Midhat, \textit{Tabsira-i İbret}, 73-75; Pletn’ov, \textit{Midkhat Pasha}, 195. The two victims were Nikola Voivodov (a Bulgarian) and Tsviatko Pavlović (a Serb), who were allegedly on their way from Gala in Romania to Belgrade, from where they hoped to organize a band that would join the “Zaječar cheta.” Midhat was apparently alerted to the fact that Voivodov and Pavlović were on board the \textit{Germania} by one of his “secret agents” (\textit{hafiye memurleri}) who were assigned to spy on the émigré communities in Romania and, with the blessing of the Austrian consul in Ruse, was able to order his police forces to board the ship in Ruse’s harbor; in the ensuing battle, Voivodov and Pavlović were killed.}
\footnoterefname{BOA İ.MVL. 26048 [5 Receb 1284 / 2 November 1867] That last episode involved a certain Yovan Milosavljević, a Serb living in Ruse, who had expressed a desire to embrace Islam and had sought to enter Midhat’s entourage, apparently hoping to be able to assassinate the Paşa. Unbeknownst to Yovan, however, he was under the surveillance of several members of Midhat’s secret police, on suspicion of being involved in anti-government activities. Yovan was finally arrested in late August 1867, when the Bulgarian secret agent who had gained his trust tricked him into writing a recommendation letter for him to the}
\end{footnotes}
memoranda calms down a bit, but one still gets the impression of an administration operating in near permanent crisis mode – there are reports of further gatherings of armed forces along the Serbian border;\textsuperscript{1003} suspicious activities by alleged Russian agents on the territory of the vilayet;\textsuperscript{1004} captured “harmful and dangerous” pamphlets containing Bulgarian poetry;\textsuperscript{1005} further troop mobilization campaigns,\textsuperscript{1006} etcetera, etcetera.

In the face of so many real and imagined crises and “provocations,” Midhat’s administration response to the challenge posed by the 1867 and 1868 cheti could hardly be expected to be calm and measured. In fact, as the next section will show, that response contained a number of mistakes and overreactions that proved very costly in the long run.

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\textsuperscript{1003} BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 58 [24 Receb 1284 / 21 November 1867].
\textsuperscript{1004} BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 61 [27 Receb 1284 / 24 November 1867]. The agent in question was one Necalik Aksalon (sp.?) – a Russian officer who had arrived in Varna on an officially approved cartographic mission (surveying longitudes), but who, according to police reports was “ignorant of the art of geometry” and was carrying “harmful documents” instead of proper surveyor’s tools.
\textsuperscript{1005} BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 58 [18 Receb 1284 / 15 November 1867].
\textsuperscript{1006} BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 75 [24 Şevval 1284 / 18 February 1868].
7.6. The administration’s mistakes in dealing with the cheti

None of the mistakes committed by Midhat Paşa’s administration in dealing with the cheti were military in nature. In fact, no one expected any Ottoman response to the incursion of armed separatist bands on the empire’s sovereign territory to be anything less than overwhelming – and no one, including European observers[^1] and even Bulgarian critics of the administration,[^2] questioned the government’s right to use all forces at its disposal in order to defeat the cheti. Thus it would be the political and discursive mistakes of Midhat’s policies that will be our main focus here.

The first of these mistakes was the administration’s failure to use the discourse of “habitual” brigandage in talking about the cheti. As we saw above, that discourse had previously allowed Ottoman authorities to trivialize acts of political sedition, without limiting the government’s ability to suppress such acts ruthlessly and efficiently. Could Midhat have used the ready-made rubric of endemic or “habitual” brigandage in order to similarly minimize the importance of the cheti? In fact, there is some evidence that the governor’s initial reaction to the cheti challenge was precisely along these lines. The administration’s first communiqués to the vilayet’s population, shortly after the crossing of Totiu’s band in 1867, portrayed the cheta members as ordinary brigands and their leaders as nothing more than meşhur hayduds. The proclamations sent out from

[^1]: Pletn’ov, Midhat Pasha, 207.
[^2]: Such as Pandeli Kisimov, then editor of the newspaper Otechestvo, who wrote a letter to Midhat in July 1868 to that effect. See Iakimov, Pantelei Kisimov, 227-228.
Ruse, to be read to the rural inhabitants of the province, stated that the goal of the *cheti* was “to kill Turks as well as Bulgarians, as many as they can, without discriminating; to steal their money; and to engage in pillaging.” The *cheti* leaders were said to be amongst the “ancient” (*vekhti*) brigands and were described matter-of-factly as common criminals – medium height, dark eyes, yellowish moustache, gunshot marks on the arm, etc. There was no mention of any political goals the *cheti* might have had or of any organization that might have been behind them. The usual inducements were given to secure local cooperation in capturing the brigands – those who would seize or kill the *hayduds* were promised all their weapons and money (the proclamations assured their audience that the *cheti* were carrying a significant amount of cash), as well as “big presents” from the government.\(^\text{1009}\)

But these early proclamations also sounded a few ominous notes that did not seem to fit with the traditional brigandage narrative. Addressing those who would deign to aid and abet the rebels, the one proclamation cautioned that:

> At present (*po natoiashtemu*), those who see the brigands and hide them, are viewed differently from other common *haydud* aides; in these times that we live in, the crimes committed by such people are seen as very heavy. The royal *Kanun-name* sentences them to perish.\(^\text{1010}\)

\(^{1009}\) Text of the proclamation in NBKM II B 2989 [n.d.]

\(^{1010}\) Ibid. Incidentally, this statement is incorrect as far as the law goes. The *OPC* provided (in Article 63) that the punishment for willingly aiding and abetting armed bands in the countryside would be hard labor for between three and fifteen years, not death.
Another statement in the same proclamation that also departed from the discursive conventions for describing “common” brigandage came at the very end of the document:

[Be advised that] whoever as much as slaps a Christian on the face shall be chastised with a harder-than-the-usual chastisement, and those who dare to do any such thing will receive a terrible punishment; make sure you understand that well.  

The subtle shift in emphasis that is evident in these passages of the proclamation can also be traced in official correspondence. While an initial report by Midhat to the Porte had described Khitov and Totiu’s bands as “some common people who had dared to steal and murder in those places” (halkından olhavalide gasb-i emval ve katlı nufusa mütecasir olanlar), a response from the Grand Vezirate corrected that rather nonchalant attitude by insisting that the cheti represented something more than common thievery and road brigandage (oralardaki vukuat âdi hırsızlık ve kat-ı tarık yolunda olmayúb). Even with the feared mass Bulgarian revolt failing to materialize and with the remnants of the cheti holed up in the Balkan mountains, reconnaissance reports about their whereabouts continued to stress that the bands represented a worse threat than their much-reduced numbers might suggest – thus, for example, an August 1867 report cautioned that the remaining 25 or so members of Khitov’s cheta continued wearing “that notorious tinplate sign on their heads” (bazılarının başlarına ma’hu’d teneke alâmetleri bulunmuş) – a reference to the crude hat

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1011 Ibid.
1012 BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 34, [14 Muharrem 1284/18 May 1867].
pins in the shape of a lion, which were worn by the *cheta*’s leaders.\(^{1013}\)

Subsequent proclamations to the inhabitants of the *vilayet* continued to paint a portrait of the *cheti* that was very much at odds with the “habitual” banditry discourse. In a printed proclamation dated June 20, 1867, for example, the authorities did a veritable flip-flop on their earlier assertion that the *cheti* members were nothing more than common thieves and murderers:

> Although it may seem, based on their actions, that these people [simply] want to kill people and steal money, their real intention, in fact, is not to make *haydudluk*; no, their one and only goal is to use their mischief in order to cause Turks and Christians, who are at present living together like brothers, to fall out with each other and to start fighting.\(^{1014}\)

One year later, a proclamation instructing the citizens of the province to hunt down the 1868 Khadzhi Dimitûr and Stefan Karadzha bands offered almost exactly the same language:

> These rebels talk about planning to rob and murder any Turks and Christians they meet, but their [actual] goal is completely different; they want to sow a hatred between Turks and Christians in order to have them start hating each other, however, the [Christians] who live in our *vilayet* want nothing more than to [continue to] get along with the Turks and to live with them together, like brothers.\(^{1015}\)

Then, there was the indiscriminate use of the term “committee,” or “Bulgarian committee,” to describe the organizational structure behind the 1867 and 1868 bands. The articles in *Tuna/Dunav* dealing with the *cheti* refer to their organizers

\(^{1013}\) BOA İ.MMHS. 1430, lef. 3 [31 Temmuz 1283 / 12 August 1867]
\(^{1014}\) NBKM OO OAK 251/23 [8/20 June 1867].
\(^{1015}\) NBKM BIA II B 2982 [8/20 July 1868].
The numerous ostensibly “spontaneous” (but in fact solicited by Midhat’s administration) protests against the bands by various Bulgarian communities in the province were also addressed to a “central secret Bulgarian committee” or to a “so-called Bulgarian secret committee in Romania.” No wonder, then, that the terms “committee” (komite) and “committee member” (komita or komitaci) quickly gained currency (both in Bulgarian and in Ottoman Turkish) as categories qualitatively different from the plain old haydud.

But which “committee”? The inability (or unwillingness) of Midhat Paşa’s administration to answer that question with any degree of precision constitutes its second important mistake in responding to the cheti challenge. Throughout 1867 and 1868, the administration appears to have had a very rudimentary understanding of the internal political and organizational divisions within the Bulgarian immigrant communities in Romania and Serbia. But in fact, as Bulgarian historians have shown time and again, there was not one “committee” but rather several Bulgarian émigré groups during the late 1860s, which had very different political goals and tactics and whose leaders rarely saw eye to eye or, indeed, rarely maintained any contact with each other.

1016 E.g. Tuna/Dunav, vol. 3, no. 181 [7/19 June 1867] asks whether “the Bucharest secret committee” had foreseen that their cheti would be met with such resistance by the Bulgarians living in the vilayet; Tuna/Dunav, vol. 3, no. 180 [4/16 June 1867] published a “protest” by a captured cheta member against “the Bulgarian committee in Bucharest” for sending him to certain death.

1017 Tuna/Dunav, vol. 3, no. 182 [11/23 June 1867] (protest from the Tûrnovo sancak); vol. 3, no. 186 [25 June / 7 July 1867] (protest from Ruse); vol. 3, no. 187 [28 June / 10 July 1867] (protest from the Lovech kaza); vol. 3, no. 198 [6/18 August 1867] (protests from Varna and Tulcea); etc.
There was, first, the *Dobrodetelna druzhina* (*Benevolent Society*), based in Bucharest and descended from an earlier organization called the Bulgarian *Epitropiia* (*Trusteeship*) established in January 1854. The main activity of the *Dobrodetelna Druzhina* was the raising of funds for various charitable, educational, and religious causes; its political goals, to the extent it had any, were very vaguely formulated – “to ameliorate the bitter fate of our oppressed brethren in Turkey.” To be sure, the organization had dabbled in revolutionary action (or rather, in the funding of revolutionary action) during the Crimean War, when it had tried unsuccessfully to mobilize a detachment of Bulgarian volunteers in order to aid a possible Russian invasion across the Danube.\(^{1018}\)

But, for most of its existence, the *Druzhina’s* political goals were moderate and its tactics gradualist. Made up mostly of wealthy Bulgarian merchants, whose outlook has been characterized as “by no means radical,”\(^{1019}\) the *Druzhina* was strongly pro-Russian in its policies.\(^{1020}\)

A second Bulgarian émigré organization that in some instances competed and in others cooperated with the *Dobrodetelna Druzhina* was the *Odesko Bûlgarsko Nastoiatelstvo* (*Bulgarian Trusteeship in Odessa*). Established in 1858, this was another virtual club for the well-heeled mercantile elite. The

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\(^{1018}\) On the history of the *Dobrodetelna Druzhina*, see Dimitrov, “Komitetût na starite,” especially 746-7, 57.

\(^{1019}\) Meininger, *Formation of a Nationalist Bulgarian Intelligentsia*, 37.

Nastoiatelstvo’s politics were generally pro-Russian (like those of the Druzhina), but it would prove itself ready to finance a broad range of cultural, educational, and political projects, with or without Russian approval.1021

Thirdly, there was the loosely organized and fluid nationalist revolutionary group proper, gathered around Georgi Rakovski, which, after an unsuccessful attempt to organize a Bulgarian military corps in Belgrade in 1862, had reconstituted itself in Romania in December 1866, under the unwieldy name of Vûrkhovno Narodno Taino Bûlgarsko Grazhdansko Nachalstvo (Supreme Popular Secret Bulgarian Civil Leadership). On January 1, 1867, the Nachalstvo had adopted its leader’s latest revolutionary plan, calling for the sending of small Gorski Cheti (“forest armed bands”) into Ottoman territory, and hoping for a Garibaldian scenario, in which the Cheti would become the nucleus of a mass popular revolt. Although it had previously championed the idea of a South Slavic federation for some years, by 1866-1867 Rakovski’s group had firmly embraced the idea of full Bulgarian independence, to be won with no help from abroad.1022

Last but not least, there was the one Bulgarian organization that did call itself a “committee” – a “Secret Central Bulgarian Committee” (Tæn Tsentralen Bülgarski Komitet), to be precise. Founded in Bucharest during the summer of 1866, in the midst of the Hohenzollern crisis, the Committee was initially a mere

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1021 The Nastoiatelstvo supported, for instance, the organization of a Bulgarian paramilitary contingent in Belgrade in 1862; a proposal for the creation of a Serbo-Bulgarian federation in 1867; the 1868 Cheta of Khadzhi Dimitur and Stefan Karadzha; and the preparation work for the April uprising of 1876; at the same time, it continued sponsoring a variety of cultural and educational causes, most notably the Bulgarian literary society in Brâila (founded in 1868). See Genchev, Bülgarsko vûzrazhdane, 336-8.

1022 Ibid., 316-8, 27-30.
diplomatic proxy of the Romanian government in its attempts to avoid an
Ottoman invasion that might oust the newly-elected King Carol. The members of
the Committee had signed an act of “Holy Coalition” between Romanians and
Bulgarians, pledging to undertake what would amount to a Bulgarian diversionary
action (using Rakovski’s *cheta* tactics) on Ottoman territory in the case of an
Ottoman-Romanian war. With the peaceful resolution of the Romanian
succession crisis in the fall of 1866, the Committee had lost its raison d’être (not
to mention its source of funding) and seemed destined for the proverbial ash
heap of history. In February of 1867, however, its members did find a new
common cause – the idea of Ottoman-Bulgarian dualism, modeled after the Dual
Monarchy arrangement unveiled in the Austro-Hungarian *Ausgleich* of February
8, 1867. Soon thereafter, they drafted the Committee’s most famous document –
the Memorandum addressed to “His Imperial Majesty, Sultan Abdul Aziz Khan,
our most clement Master and Father,” in which they urged the Ottoman Sultan to
“strengthen” his empire by granting his Bulgarian subjects broad autonomy. In
exchange, the Memorandum offered continued Ottoman sovereignty over the
Bulgarian provinces (with the Sultan assuming the title of Bulgarian Tsar), as well
as Ottoman control over the foreign affairs, finances, and defense policy of the
proposed dualist state.\footnote{For the history and ideology of the Secret Committee, see Burmov, “Taen
tsentralen Bălgarski komitet: Obrazuvane i pūrv period ot razvitieto mu;” idem,
“Taen tsentralen Būlgarski komitet: Vtori period ot sūshtestuvvaneto mu.” The
text of the dualist Memorandum is published in full in *Būlgarsko vūzrazhdane:
khristomatiia po istoriia na Būlgaria*, document 161, 324-32.}
Aleksandûr Burmov, one of the first Bulgarian historians to address the question of the formation and development of the Secret Committee, has argued that Midhat Paşa was too well informed of the different fractions among the Bulgarian émigré community to have believed that a single “committee” stood behind both the 1867 and 1868 cheti, as well as behind any number of smaller nationalist “threats.” Burmov proposed the hypothesis that Midhat consciously avoided making distinctions between Bulgarian nationalist organizations, in order to discredit all of them with a single propaganda campaign.\footnote{Burmov, “Taen tsentralen Bûlgarski komitet: Vtori period ot sûshtestuvvaneto mu,” 95.} It certainly seems that Midhat’s failure to distinguish between the Secret Committee, the Dobrodetelna Druzhina, the Rakovski group, and the Odessa Nastoiatelstvo was not the result of ignorance. Rakovski, for example, was a figure well known to Ottoman authorities at the time,\footnote{As revealed, for instance in BOA AYN.DEF. 920, p. 7 [23 Safer 1283 / 6 July 1866].} the Secret Committee members made no bones about the existence of their organization in the Memorandum they submitted to the Sultan in March 1867 (signing both the French and Bulgarian version “C.S.B., Comité secret bulgare”\footnote{Burmov, “Taen tsentralen Bûlgarski komitet: Vtori period ot sûshtestuvvaneto mu,” 83.}), and, in any event, Midhat’s well-developed network of spies would probably have provided him with much better information about the organizational and ideological diversity among Bulgarian nationalist groups than he let out.\footnote{By 1868 even some of the European diplomatic representatives in the region were aware of the existence of different Bulgarian émigré organizations, as} And yet, the governor persistently referred
to an umbrella “committee” (or, just as inaccurately, a hierarchy of committees comprising a single revolutionary organization) that, he proclaimed, was the sole Bulgarian trouble maker as far as the administration was concerned.

It is quite possible that Midhat had calculated that the image of a monolithic Bulgarian nationalist movement spearheaded by a vaguely defined “committee” would be more advantageous to his own career. Some of the possible considerations along these lines were decidedly short-term in nature. At the time of the crossing of Totiu’s band, for example, Sultan Abdülaziz was expected to visit the vilayet in a matter of weeks (on the return leg from his European tour), and Midhat may have calculated that it would be to his advantage to be able to claim on that occasion that he had delivered a mortal blow to the one and only seditious organization that had been stirring trouble in the province. Indeed, the Sultan’s visit went on without a hitch and Midhat received the royal commendation he was after. But more was at stake than mere protocol – by overemphasizing rather than underemphasizing the strength, organization, and centralization of the Bulgarian nationalist movement, Midhat may have sought to reverse some of the budgetary restrictions that had been forced upon him since 1866. Midhat wasted little time, for instance, in demanding the rehiring of most of the police inspectors (teftiş), whose jobs had been cut in 1866. “The budgetary reductions carried out last year,” he wrote in September 1867, “were a temporary measure; now, according to the requirements of our times, [the inspectors’]

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1028 See Markova, Chetata ot 1868 godina, documents 127-128, 221-4.
duties in defending the country and enforcing the laws have become, from our point of view, that much more important." The Paşa was also able to use the incursions of the Bulgarian cheti as a pretext to increase the authority of the provincial governor’s office in general. In February 1868, he secured the issuance of a royal decree (ferman), authorizing him to assume plenipotentiary powers in the vilayet in cases of emergency. Midhat did not have an occasion to invoke these extraordinary powers during his few remaining months in office, but the ferman’s very existence was a thorn in the side of his rivals and political opponents, and may have provided ammunition for Count Ignatieff’s charge that Midhat was turning the Danube province into an independent enclave under his personal rule. The crossing of the 1868 cheta of Khadzhi Dimitûr and Stefan Karadzha gave the Paşa a further opportunity to remind the Porte of the importance of his own reform proposals – especially those that had been put on the backburner for various administrative and budgetary reasons. Hence the detailed memorandum that Midhat wrote after the cheta’s defeat, which resurrected several initiatives that had been near and dear to the governor’s heart but had previously made little headway with the central government (e.g. the proposal for a more vigorous school reform).1031 And, finally, the exaggerated threat of a supposedly united Bulgarian nationalist movement no doubt enabled the governor to secure (in the fall of 1867) an easy passage for

1029 See BOA İ.MVL. 25972, lef. 2 [25 Cemaziülevvel 1284 / 24 September 1867].
1030 For the provisions of the ferman, see Pletn’ov, Midkhat Pasha, 203-204.
1031 The text of that memorandum (in Bulgarian translation) was published in Todorov-Khindalov, Vûzstaniia i narodni dvizheniia, document 46, 150-7. [27 Rabiülâhir 1285 / 17 August 1868].
his plans for the creation of a village militia that would be specifically tasked with nipping future acts of sedition in the bud (more on this policy below).

If, indeed, Midhat played up the threat of Bulgarian nationalism for purely political reasons, then this must surely count as one of the most serious blunders of his governorship. For the 1867 and 1868 bands were not organized by the same organization and did not share the same political goals. The cheta of Khadzhi Dimitûr and Stefan Karadzha in 1868 is particularly interesting in this regard, since it was put together by the dualist Bulgarian “Secret Committee” in Bucharest and its political mandate was, therefore, quite different from the mandates of the Khitov and Totiu bands of the previous year. The leaders of the 1868 cheta even carried a letter to Sultan Abdülaziz, which essentially endorsed the demands made in the dualist memorandum of February, 1867, and rebuked the monarch for having thus far failed to heed these demands:

[S]ince Your Majesty did not deign to hear the complaints and desires of your loyal Bulgarian subjects set forth [in the Memorandum], we found ourselves in the extreme necessity to take weapons in our hands and to cross the river of blood, in order to appear before You with a blood-stained face, not yet as before an enemy, but as before our beloved Master, in order to inform you of the wishes and true desires of the Bulgarian people […] In taking up arms today, not only do we not wish to reject your Supreme rule, but, on the contrary, we want to amalgamate it with our people’s dear interests, so that no one would be able to shatter it in the future. 1032

To be sure, it would have been difficult for Midhat to give much credence to such half-baked loyalist statements, coming from a document found in the pockets of

1032 Dunavska zora, vol. 1, no. 41 [2 September, 1868].
the dead members of an armed band that had been fighting pitched battles against government troops. But by continuing to dismiss the “komitacis” as nothing more that Russian pawns that had set out to destroy the ethnic peace in the region (although the 1868 komitacis had not attacked the civilian Muslim population), the Paşa managed to antagonize and radicalize even those portions of the Bulgarian émigré community who could, with greater imagination, have been engaged in a political dialogue. By the following year (1869), the Bulgarian dualist camp had collapsed and most of its former members had begun to gravitate to openly nationalist and revolutionary positions.\footnote{In the summer of 1869, for example, a number of the former leaders of the dualist Committee were in Geneva, talking to such luminaries of European revolution as Mazzini, Herzen, and Bakunin and taking their advice to abandon dualism in favor of a more hard-line nationalist ideology. See Aleksandur Burmov, “Bulgarskoto natsionalno revoliutsionno dvizhenie v bûlgarskata emigratsionna burzhoaiziia prez 1867-1869 g.,” in Aleksandur Burmov: Izbrani proizvedeniia v tri toma (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, c.1974), 154-7.}

Even more importantly, Midhat’s misrepresentation of the nature and goals of the cheti movement tended to dilute and discredit the very real expressions of anti-nationalist sentiment expressed by many Bulgarians within the vilayet. The private correspondence of numerous leaders of the Bulgarian Church movement, for instance, suggests that they were genuinely appalled by the appearance of the cheti, which, they feared, might indirectly hurt their cause. Khristo Tûpchileshtov, the wealthy İstanbul-based merchant who had been involved in the Bulgarian Church question since its inception, made the following comments about the 1867 cheti in a private letter:
May God smite that Russian committee that darkened our face in front of our government and jeopardized our Church question over which we have been laboring for so many years! This matter will cause the ruin of a few of our innocent yet naive compatriots who may have gotten all worked up about it and may have become entangled in this web... Hopefully, the Sublime State, in its prudence and wisdom, shall see that we as a community are not responsible for this business and shall fill us all with joy by resolving our Church question.¹⁰³⁴

But such credible expressions of opposition to the bands could hardly be heard over the loud chorus of a string of transparently orchestrated “letters of protest” which Midhat’s administration solicited from its Bulgarian subjects. Scores of these “protests” were published in *Tuna/Dunav* after the defeat of both the 1867 and 1868 bands, often accompanied by letters of gratitude to the authorities for having put down the revolt.¹⁰³⁵ Undoubtedly, not all Bulgarian signatures gathered under these documents were coerced, but, overall, the “protest” campaign was directed by the administration in an extremely heavy handed way – Bulgarian notables and *meclis* members were being summoned by the authorities to local *konaks* in order to draft and sign the letters; police officers and/or officials in the government coach company were on hand to take the protests to neighboring villages, where more signatures were to be collected; recalcitrant community leaders were walked past the gallows erected for the execution of captured *cheti* members until they “changed their mind” and signed,

¹⁰³⁵ References for the 1867 “protests” can be found in note 240 to this chapter; for the 1868 “protests,” see *Tuna/Dunav*, vol. 4, no. 294 [17/29 July 1868]; vol. 4, no. 295 [21 July / 1 August 1868]; vol. 4, no. 298 [31 July / 12 August 1868].
and so forth. As a result, the “protests” were dismissed as a sham both by most European observers.

Another aspect of the administration’s response to the cheti that quickly became the object of criticism were the court proceedings against the captured band members. The pro-nationalist Bulgarian newspapers published in Romania led the charge by denouncing “Midhat’s” extraordinary (muvakkat) tribunals as arbitrary and illegal, and asking why the cheti members had not been tried in the regular nizamî courts. As a matter of historical fact, such criticisms were misplaced, since muvakkat tribunals had been used often by the authorities in the region to deal with serious cases of brigandage since at least the mid-1850’s. For instance, numerous accomplices of the meşhur Muslim rebel leader Solak Mustafa had been tried by a muvakkat tribunal in 1859. Midhat’s administration itself had previously put together a temporary tribunal in the fall of 1865 to try five captured members of a Serbian-Bulgarian haydud band that had terrorized the district of Kula in the sancak of Vidin. In both of these cases, the muvakkat tribunals had meted out swift and severe punishments, including death sentences, just as they would do during the trials of the 1867 and 1868

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1036 See, respectively, Pletn’ov, Midkhat Pasha, 202-203; Pletn’ov, Chorbadzhiiite i bûlgarskata natsionalna revoliutsia, 133
1038 Nepokorni podanitsi, 195, document 6. [23 March 1859]
1039 BOA A.MKT.MVL Dosya 275, Vesika 68 [18 Receb 1282 / 8 December 1865].

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cheti members. The charge that Midhat singled out Bulgarian rebels for a particularly harsh legal treatments also does not stand up to scrutiny. The crime chronicles of the provincial newspaper show that the administration showed zero tolerance for Muslim rebels and brigands as well – in the spring and summer of 1866, for example, “notorious” Muslim bandits were publicly hanged in Ruse, Varna, and Dobrich.\textsuperscript{1040} In fact, Muslim perpetrators of violent acts against Christian victims were pursued and punished with special vigor during the cheti years, since the administration was eager to reassure its non-Muslim subjects that it was evenhanded and non-discriminating in matters or law and order.\textsuperscript{1041}

Moreover, however dubious their institutional status, the muvakkat tribunals were clearly bound by the existing laws in the empire, as the punishments they handed out were generally consistent with the prescriptions of the 1858 Ottoman Penal Code.\textsuperscript{1042}

But, as is often the case, perceptions are more important than realities – and there can be little doubt that Midhat’s administration failed to convince a substantial part of the vilayet’s public of the fairness and legality of the judicial proceedings before the 1867 and 1868 muvakkat tribunals. As was the case with

\textsuperscript{1040} Tuna / Dunav, vol. 2, no. 55 [9/21 March 1866].

\textsuperscript{1041} One example of the hard line that Midhat took against Muslim criminals is the story (pointedly mentioned in Ali Haydar Midhat’s biography of his father) of a certain Mehmet Çavuş, a provincial police officer who was swiftly convicted and executed by a firing squad for murdering a Bulgarian villager and his wife in the region of Tûrnovo. The murder took place in the immediate aftermath of the crossing of the 1868 cheta. See Ali Haydar Midhat, Tabsıra-i İbret, 67-8.

\textsuperscript{1042} BOA İ.MVL 26070 [13 Receb 1284 / 10 November 1867]. Of the eight guilty sentences listed in this document, only one was not based on a specific provision of the OPC; the punishments in the other seven cases were in line with Articles 55-58 and 62-63 of OPC, which deal with armed acts of sedition, organizing armed bands, and acts of aiding and abetting brigands.
the Bulgarian “protests” against the cheti, the main culprit here seems to have been the governor’s overzealous approach. Although it is unlikely that Midhat himself convicted and sentenced detainees single-handedly,\textsuperscript{1043} his presence at the tribunals’ sessions and his thinly veiled demands that the defendants be pressed into confessing that they were sent by the “Slavonic committees in Bucharest and Chisinau,”\textsuperscript{1044} greatly undermined the credibility of the legal proceedings in the eyes of many outside observers. Indeed, the dispatches of some European consuls indicate that they viewed the muvakkat tribunals as kangaroo courts and the cheti members’ trials as miscarriages of justice, in which the guilt of the accused was presumed to be proven from the outset.\textsuperscript{1045}

But the most serious mistake committed by Midhat and his administration in response to the challenge posed by the Bulgarian bands was the decision to start organizing a new type of village militia (\textit{ihtiyat askeri}),\textsuperscript{1046} shortly after the crossing of the 1867 cheti. Convinced that the “Slavic committees in Russia and Bucharest” would continue their attempts to destabilize the empire and concerned that the army’s regular troops would be inadequate to the challenge of a mass Bulgarian revolt, the governor proposed that all Muslim males between the ages of 15 and 60 who were not presently serving in the regular armed forces (\textit{nizamiye askeri}) or in one of the many subdivisions of the reserves (\textit{redif},

\textsuperscript{1043}For these allegations, see note 260 above.
\textsuperscript{1044}Pletn’ov, \textit{Midkhat Pasha}, 201.
\textsuperscript{1045}This was the opinion, for instance, of the Prussian consul in Ruse, Kalisch, quoted in Pletn’ov (\textit{Midkhat Pasha}, 206).
\textsuperscript{1046}The Ottoman term \textit{ihtiyat askeri} literally means “emergency troops,” but I have generally used the phrase “village militia” instead, because it provides a more faithful description of the nature and duties of the new force than the official designation does.
müstahfızlık) should became eligible for enlistment in the new militia. The members of ihtiyat units were expected to be available for military training several times each year (on “off days”). They would not receive any pay for their service, except when they needed to be deployed outside the territory of their home kaza (in which case, a nominal wage would be provided). The ihtiyat’s only duty, apparently, was to be ready to engage and harass future rebel bands in the countryside until the arrival of regular army and police troops.\textsuperscript{1047}

The proposal to create this new village militia amounted to a massive government-sponsored campaign of arming the Muslim communities in the province. Already by the fall of 1867, some 40,000 rifles were ordered from İstanbul and, by the spring of 1868, most of these had been distributed to the towns and villages of the vilayet. More rifles for the new force were procured from the existing police arsenals in the province.\textsuperscript{1048} Midhat’s plans for the development of the provincial ihtiyat corps were quite grandiose – he reportedly told von Sax, the Habsburg consular agent in Ruse, that the ultimate goal was to have about a tenth of the total male population of the vilayet enrolled in the militia. According to von Sax’s calculation, if that goal were to be achieved, the provincial government would have at its disposal a 150-thousand-strong Muslim force, armed and ready to stamp out any Bulgarian separatist movement. “The

\textsuperscript{1047} Ali Haydar Midhat, \textit{Tabsıra-i İbret}, 70-1.
\textsuperscript{1048} BOA İ.B. 90 [27 Rabiülâhir 1284 / 28 August 1867].
Christians,” von Sax added, tongue-in-cheek, “naturally do not need any arms, because they would be protected by the Turks.”

What Midhat opted for, in other words, was the arming of one of the major religious groups in the province in order to prevent future seditious activities that were expected (as everyone understood) to come from members of the other major ethno-religious group. It is a matter of speculation whether the Paşa realized that such a policy might turn out to be a recipe for disaster. Certainly the not-too-distant Ottoman experiences in Lebanon and Syria could have provided him with a cautionary note in this regard. But if Midhat was at all aware of the potential that his policies might kindle the flames of sectarian strife, he chose to disregard that danger and pressed on with the militia plan – despite the fact that the military challenge posed by the cheti had been negligible, despite the lack of a measurable Bulgarian response, and despite the quick restoration of calm in the region. It was a myopic policy and one that, arguably, would hasten the end of Ottoman rule over the central Balkans less than a decade after Midhat’s departure from Ruse. The ihtiyat militia was formally disbanded in 1872, but its creation had set a dangerous precedent. During the 1876 Bulgarian April uprising, for example, the deployment of Muslim (often Circassian) militia-type irregular units against Bulgarian villages that had joined

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1049 See Dokumenti za novata istoria na bŭlgarskiia narod iz Vienskite dŭrzhavni arkhivi, ed. Petûr Nikov and Stoian Romanski, Dokumenti za bŭlgarska istoria, vols. 5-6 (Sofia: Bŭlgarska Akademiia na Naukite, 1948-1951), vol. 6, 197.

1050 For an insightful analysis of the events in the Lebanon, see Makdisi, The Culture of Sectarianism, especially 51-95, 118-45. For a short summary, see Shaw and Shaw, Ottoman Empire, 142-4.

1051 Ali Haydar Midhat, Tabsıra-i Îbret, 71.
the revolt would prove to be the main factor that caused the conflict to escalate and, in some locations, assume the proportions of a full-scale inter-communal war. Of course, it would be foolish to look for a direct causal link between Midhat’s policies in 1867-68 and the events of 1876. But there can be no doubt that the governor’s measures against the cheti planted the seeds of more than a few future Ottoman troubles in the region. As one of Midhat’s subordinates in the vilayet administration is said to have remarked in 1867, the Bulgarian nationalist movement “is nothing serious at present, but the harsher our response against it, the more of a challenge it will become in the future.”

The comment is attributed to the Vidin mutasarrif, Aziz Paşa, quoted in Pletn’ov (Midkhat Pasha, 207).
APPENDIX: Criminality Sample Sources (see Table 11)
Part 1: From BOA AYN.DEF 919

Christian perpetrator against Christian victim:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location in Defter</th>
<th>AH date</th>
<th>Type of Crime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p. 3 up</td>
<td>8 Muharrem 1283</td>
<td>house robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 18 mid</td>
<td>1 Rabiülevvel 1283</td>
<td>rape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 20 mid</td>
<td>13 Rabiülevvel 1283</td>
<td>robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 20 low</td>
<td>13 Rabiülevvel 1283</td>
<td>slander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 40 mid</td>
<td>16 Rabiülâhir 1283</td>
<td>robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 65 up</td>
<td>3 Zilhicce 1283</td>
<td>murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 79 low</td>
<td>29 Safer 1284</td>
<td>murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 84 low</td>
<td>24 Rabiülevvel 1284</td>
<td>robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 98 up</td>
<td>18 Cemaziülevvel 1284</td>
<td>murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 99 low</td>
<td>23 Cemaziülevvel 1284</td>
<td>murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 126 mid</td>
<td>18 Şaban 1284</td>
<td>murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 127-128</td>
<td>20 Şaban 1284</td>
<td>robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 141 up</td>
<td>8 Şevval 1284</td>
<td>murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 141-142</td>
<td>9 Şevval 1284</td>
<td>murder</td>
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Christian perpetrator against Muslim (non-immigrant) victim

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Location in Defter</th>
<th>AH date</th>
<th>Type of Crime</th>
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Christian perpetrator against Immigrant victim

<table>
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<th>Type of Crime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p. 12 mid</td>
<td>7 Safer 1283</td>
<td>murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 12-13</td>
<td>n.d. (after 7 Safer 1284)</td>
<td>murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 19 up</td>
<td>3 Rabiülevvel 1283</td>
<td>murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 106 up</td>
<td>16 Cemaziülâhir 1284</td>
<td>murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 113 mid</td>
<td>4 Receb 1284</td>
<td>murder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Roma perpetrator against Christian victim

<table>
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<th>Location in Defter</th>
<th>AH date</th>
<th>Type of Crime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p. 37 up</td>
<td>26 Cemaziülevvel 1283</td>
<td>robbery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Roma perpetrator against Muslim (non-immigrant, non-Roma) victim

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location in Defter</th>
<th>AH date</th>
<th>Type of Crime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p. 99 mid</td>
<td>22 Cemaziülevvel 1284</td>
<td>rape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 128 low</td>
<td>21 Şaban 1284</td>
<td>rape</td>
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</table>

Roma perpetrator against Roma victim

<table>
<thead>
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<th>AH date</th>
<th>Type of Crime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p. 72 up</td>
<td>9 Muharrem 1284</td>
<td>murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 83 mid</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location in Defter</td>
<td>AH date</td>
<td>Type of Crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 112 low</td>
<td>1 Receb 1284</td>
<td>murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 123 up</td>
<td>2 Şaban 1284</td>
<td>murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 131 mid</td>
<td>24 Şaban 1284</td>
<td>rape</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immigrant perpetrator against Christian victim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p. 95 up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immigrant perpetrator against Muslim (non-immigrant) victim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p. 116 up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immigrant perpetrator against Other (British citizen) victim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p. 24 mid</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Muslim (non-immigrant) perpetrator against Muslim (non-immigrant) victim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>p. 19 mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 46 mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 75 low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 95 mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 97 low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 115 up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 116 up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 126-127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 127 mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 131 low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Muslim (non-immigrant) perpetrator against Christian victim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p. 65 low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 94 low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 121 mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 121 low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 126 up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Muslim (non-immigrant) perpetrator against Immigrant victim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p. 83 up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 142 low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other (Austrian citizen) perpetrator against Christian victim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p. 53 mid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**APPENDIX: Criminality Sample Sources (see Table 11)**

Part 2: From BOA A.MKT.MVL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Muslim (non-immigrant) perpetrator against Christian victim</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>AH date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D290/V51</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>D312/V25</td>
<td>25 Şevval 1283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D312/V47</td>
<td>27 Şevval 1283</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Muslim (non-immigrant) perpetrator against Muslim (non-immigrant) victim</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dosya/Vesika</td>
<td>AH date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D246/V51</td>
<td>7 Şaban 1281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D246/V77</td>
<td>10 Şaban 1281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D275/V47</td>
<td>18 Receb 1282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D275/V93</td>
<td>22 Receb 1282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D290/V1</td>
<td>11 Safer 1283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D290/V70</td>
<td>19 Safer 1283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D299/V23</td>
<td>7 Cemaziülevvel 1283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D299/V47</td>
<td>10 Cemaziülevvel 1283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D299/V75</td>
<td>12 Cemaziülevvel 1283</td>
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<td>D299/V78</td>
<td>13 Cemaziülevvel 1283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D312/V28</td>
<td>26 Şevval 1283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D349/V22</td>
<td>4 Şaban 1284</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Muslim (non-immigrant) perpetrator against Immigrant victim</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dosya/Vesika</td>
<td>AH date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D299/V22</td>
<td>7 Cemaziülevvel 1283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D312/V57</td>
<td>28 Şevval 1283</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Christian perpetrator against Christian victim</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
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<td>D290/V62</td>
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<td>D290/V63</td>
<td>17 Safer 1283</td>
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<td>D290/V74</td>
<td>19 Safer 1283</td>
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<td>D299/V12</td>
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<tr>
<td>D299/V72</td>
<td>12 Cemaziülevvel 1283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D299/V74</td>
<td>12 Cemaziülevvel 1283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D312/V15</td>
<td>25 Şevval 1283</td>
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<tr>
<td>D312/V45</td>
<td>27 Şevval 1283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D312/V78</td>
<td>29 Şevval 1283</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Christian and Muslim perpetrators against Christian victim</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dosya/Vesika</td>
<td>AH date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D312/V16</td>
<td>25 Şevval 1283</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roma perpetrator against Roma victim</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dosya/Vesika</td>
<td>AH date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D349/V16</td>
<td>4 Şaban 1284</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSIONS

Midhat Paša’s governorship of the Danube province was a period of momentous importance for the future of Ottoman rule in the Balkans. As a modernization campaign, Midhat’s achievements were impressive indeed, but this side of his reforms is fairly well-known, and would hardly have merited a separate study. What is generally missing from the historiography – and this is the gap this work has sought to fill – is a discussion of the social impact of Midhat’s policies that might lead to a comprehensive re-assessment of his legacy to the vilayet. It is easy enough to dismiss as teleological the national meta-narrative that sees the Midhat years as an interesting, but ultimately inconsequential flicker of administrative brilliance set against the bleak background of decades (or centuries) of mismanagement and oppression, leading to the empire’s inevitable end. But what kind of an alternative can one offer in place of this long-discredited “rise-of-nations” paradigm?

It seems futile to attempt to characterize the reforms implemented in the vilayet between 1864 and 1868 as a clear-cut “success” or a clear-cut “failure.” Nor can one simply draw a balance sheet of individual policies that were successful versus others that were not. This has all too often been the fall-back position of studies that reject the simplistic “doom and gloom” approach but that nonetheless end up counting as “positives” the more tangible results of the reforms (the new roads, the cleaned cities, the suppression of brigandage, etc) and as “negatives” the alleged failures in reshaping individuals’ consciousness.
and inculcating the doctrine of *Osmanlılık*. That, I think, is a false distinction. As this study has tried to show, in many cases the long term impact of Midhat’s reforms proved to be quite different from the intent behind them, or, indeed, from the initial estimates of their chances of success or failure.

Let us take, for example, the issue of the infrastructural projects. On a macro-economic scale, the new roads, railroads, telegraphs, coach and steamship companies undoubtedly had a positive impact – and were widely trumpeted as proof of the potential of Ottoman modernization in the countryside. But because Midhat’s administration so often operated under the shadow of İstanbul-imposed fiscal austerity, it opted for an implementation strategy that placed the burden of these infrastructural projects on the shoulders of the population. The imperative of “self-financing” not only stretched the administration’s creativity, but also placed significant new demands on the vilayet’s taxpayers. Total tax and fees receipts rose by 10% in Midhat’s first year in office1053 and continued climbing throughout his stay in Ruse. As long as the provincial economy was growing, the overall tax burden remained, in Palairet’s words, “not oppressive by European standards of the day.”1054 But already by the end of Midhat’s governorship, and particularly after 1869, a period of recession/stagnation exposed critical weaknesses in the system. Tax-farmers (previously among the staunchest supporters of the political status quo) began having difficulties in collecting the amounts they had placed bids for and started

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1053 BOA İ.MMHS 1317, lef. 2 [18 Rabiülâhir 1282 / 30 August 1866].
drifting away from pro-imperial positions.\footnote{1055} Ordinary vilayet citizens, faced with ever increasing state demands on their labor and finances, began seeing the efficiency of the new provincial system as a sign not of progress but of oppression,\footnote{1056} and started dreaming of alternatives. Unsurprisingly, the nascent Bulgarian nationalist movement of the 1870’s made inroads in the countryside by promising economic as well as political liberation.

Thus an issue that is usually considered to have been among Midhat’s most positive achievements may have undermined the empire’s viability in the longer run. But the law of unintended consequences could also have the opposite effect where other reform policies were concerned. Consider, for instance, the doctrine of Osmanlılık. Almost everything that the administration did suggests that, rhetoric aside, it took a very dim view of Osmanlılık’s prospects: it often expressed skepticism that enough non-Muslims possessed the necessary administrative skills to participate in politics in the first place; its setup of the provincial meclises rarely gave non-Muslim representatives any real voice in the

\footnote{1055} The fiscal data collected by Draganova show that the collection deficits (the difference between the amount contracted at auctions and the amount actually collected) for two of the major taxes in the Danube province – the vergi and the bedel-i askeri – rose from less than 50,000 piastres for the entire province in AH 1282/1283 (1865-1866) to almost 400,000 piastres in AH 1286 (1869-1870), and to 350,000 piastres in AH 1287 (1870-1871). See Slavka Draganova, Materiali za Dunavskiia vilaiet (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1980), Table 15, 24-7.

\footnote{1056} See, for example, a June 1868 letter from Dimitûr Biserov (a Bulgarian teacher in Dupnitsa) to Stefan Verkovich. Verkovich, who resided outside the Danube province, had asked Biserov for his impressions of the vilayet system’s impact; Biserov responded that it was worse than the “time of the Janissaries” and then proceeded to describe the efficiency with which the government now collected the previously-neglected license fees for the sale of alcohol. Khristov, ed., Dokumenti za bûlgarskoto vûzrazhdane ot arkhiva na Stefan I. Verkovich, document 275, 343.
decision-making process; the election instructions it sent to the vilayet’s villages and towns obscured precisely those provisions in the provincial nizamname that would have created truly integrated local organs of government; its memoranda in response to the incursions of the cheti betrayed a paranoid view of the two largest ethnic groups in the province (Bulgarians and Turks) as ready to fall on each other’s throats, etc. In the one instance in which Midhat’s administration did seek to implement a specifically pro-Osmanlılık policy – its ill-fated attempt to merge the existing school systems in the vilayet – its efforts were half-hearted at best and quickly fizzled in the face of Bulgarian opposition. But does that validate Davison’s view that the doctrine of Osmanlılık was the “most signal failure” of the Tanzimat reforms, or that “many Christians moved out of a separate millet consciousness into a nationalist consciousness without ever having wholly accepted Osmanlılık”?¹⁰⁵⁷ Not at all – as the experience of the Danube province showed, the imperial integration ideology could still succeed, even if it did not succeed exactly on its own terms.

That, it seems to me, is the lesson of chapters Five and Six of the present study. Midhat’s Bulgarian subjects no doubt realized that the role they were offered in the vilayet experiment was not that of equal partners. Consequently, none of them rushed to become Osmanlis or took seriously Tuna/Dunav’s predictions about the impending fusion of the empire’s nationalities. But to say that Bulgarians realized that they would have to play second fiddle in the new regime is not to say they rejected or shied away from the offer. As meclis

¹⁰⁵⁷ Davison, Reform, 407-8.
members, they may not have had the power to force their opinion through, but they certainly had a chance to influence policy — and, in some of the new institutional venues, such as the GPA, their influence was not only not automatically rejected but, on the contrary, was actively solicited by the administration. Moreover, the meclis posts, as we saw, became valuable political commodities in various new kinds of Bulgarian intra-elite struggles (e.g. between the old-style notables and the upstart merchants, bureaucrats, and pro-imperial intellectuals) or inter-communal conflicts (e.g. between Bulgarians and the İstanbul Patriarchate). All of these conflicts, no matter how severe they may have seemed to the parties involved, actually strengthened the Ottoman imperial framework, for they took place within it, not outside of it. A similar argument can be made regarding the non-elites — although they undoubtedly resented Ottoman rule just as they would have resented any other political system that collected taxes and demanded submission, "ordinary" Bulgarian peasants and townspeople appear to have been well-attuned to the key principles of Tanzimat ideology and, when the need arose, could demonstrate convincingly their symbolic compliance with it. In this sense, despite its authors' misgivings about its chances, Osmanlılık turned out to be somewhat of a success after all — the watered-down version of it that was embodied in the vilayet's institutions and administrative practices did not "fuse" nationalities but did manage to convince the great majority of Bulgarians in the province — elites and non-elites alike — that the reformed imperial stage was still a worthwhile venue for their political and legal action/participation. Armed with the discourse of "Ottoman modernism," the
political opportunities of the meclises, the legal opportunities of the nizamî courts and, last but not least, with the carrot of a huge imperial market and the economic opportunities it afforded, Midhat’s administration did put together a viable alternative to Bulgarian nationalism and managed, in the short run at least, to marginalize the nationalists’ political goals and tactics.

Can one, then, argue that Midhat’s policies in the Danube province, far from being inconsequential, actually created a new stable equilibrium in the region – an equilibrium that would only be upset some 8-10 years later by events happening on a larger world stage, rather than by internal challenges? In his study of the Bulgarian communal organization in Ruse, Tetsuya Sahara asked virtually the same question, but answered it in the negative. In terms of its social implications, Sahara argued, the vilayet system:

> can be regarded as the Ottoman way of distorting the civil society model, that is, replacing the equality of individuals with the equality of religious communities. By introducing the principle of religious equality, the Ottoman reformers opened the way for a possibility that social cleavage spread along the line of religious affiliation.¹⁰⁵⁸

But Sahara’s argument misses the point. It is a rehashing of the old criticism about the alleged “dualism” of the Tanzimat reforms (i.e. they perpetuated old religious millet categories, while seeking to create a new supra-religious, supra-ethnic identity). But “social cleavage” along religious lines had always existed in the Ottoman empire and, in any way, the idea that a viable civil society could only be built on the principle of individual (rather than communal) equality seems

¹⁰⁵⁸ Sahara, An Eastern Orthodox Community, 18.
rather Eurocentric or, to be more precise, “nation-centric.” Nevertheless, Sahara’s question is important – just how stable was the new balance brought about by the vilayet reforms and what factors, ultimately, brought it down in the north-eastern part of the Ottoman Balkans?

Without attempting to provide a comprehensive answer to this question (a lot of things, after all, changed between 1868 and the outbreak of the Russo-Ottoman war in 1877), this study has tried to show that some of Midhat Paşa’s policies in the Danube province may, ironically, have contributed to the unraveling of the system he worked so hard to create. The settlement of the Crimean and Caucasian muhacirs, for example would turn out to have disastrous consequences for the interethnic peace in the region, although in that case Midhat himself can hardly be faulted with failing to foresee an outcome that was many years in the future – and, in any event, on this issue he was more the executor of policies made at the imperial level than an independent policy maker.

But the long-term failures surrounding the suppression of the 1867 and 1868 cheti can be placed squarely at the Paşa’s doorstep. His refusal to differentiate between the moderate and radical wings of the Bulgarian émigré community (and to open a dialogue with the former) contributed to the premature demise of the idea of Ottoman-Bulgarian dualism and pushed the entire Bulgarian nationalist movement onto more hard-line “irreconcilable” positions. Likewise, the creation of the ihtiyat village militia set a dangerous precedent inasmuch as it opened the possibility that future challenges launched by Bulgarian nationalists against the political status quo, no matter how limited their scope, could lead to full-scale
inter-communal conflicts, over the course of which the government would have little or no control.

Midhat’s legacy for the Danube province (and for the future Bulgarian nation state) is, therefore, complex and riddled with controversy. On the one hand, his reforms ushered in a period that cannot be dismissed simply as a short “breathing space” for an empire that was otherwise inexorably marching on the road to oblivion. The synthesis between new policies and social responses, over which the Paşa presided, could have proven to be more durable, had the usual contingencies – fiscal pressures, cadre shortages, foreign intrigue, etc. – not intervened. Yet, although Midhat did indeed succeed in making the Danube vilayet a showcase for the potential of Tanzimat reforms to bring modernization to the countryside, this success came at a considerable social and political cost – a wounded but radicalized Bulgarian nationalist movement and a population increasingly disgruntled by the demands placed on their bodies and pockets by an activist state. That would turn out to be an explosive combination.
### Figure 1. Composition of the Administrative councils in the Danube Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vilayet Administrative Council (Meclis-i İdare-i Vilayet)</th>
<th>Elected members:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chair: Vali</td>
<td>1864: 3 Muslims + 3 non-Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex officio members:</td>
<td>1871: 2 Muslims + 2 Non-Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Müfettiş-i Hukkâm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhasebeci</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mektubcu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umur-i Hariciye Müdürü</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sancak Administrative Councils (Meclis-i İdare-i Liva)</th>
<th>Elected members:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chair: Kaymakam</td>
<td>1864: 3 Muslims + 3 non-Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex officio members:</td>
<td>1871: 2 Muslims + 2 Non-Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kadi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Müfti</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Muslim religious leaders (Bishop, Rabbi)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sancak muhasebeci</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sancak director of records (Tahrirat müdürü)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kaza Administrative Councils (Meclis-i İdare-i Kaza)</th>
<th>Elected members:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chair: Kaza Müdürü</td>
<td>1864: 3 members (religion not specified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex officio members:</td>
<td>1871: 2 Muslims + 2 Non-Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kadi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Müfti</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Muslim religious leaders (Bishop, Rabbi)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaza kâtibi (correspondence official)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village &quot;Councils of Elders&quot; (İhtiyar meclisleri)</th>
<th>City Municipal Councils (Belediye meclisleri)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chair: imam or village priest</td>
<td>Appointed members:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- From 3 to 12 elected members</td>
<td>Chair (Reis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In Muslim villages, members are Muslims only; in Christian villages, members are Christians only; in religiously mixed villages, separate Muslim and non-Muslim councils exist side by side.</td>
<td>Deputy (Muavin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elected members:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 members (balance must reflect the millet makeup of the city)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ex officio members (&quot;consultants,&quot; no vote):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Town engineer (müḥendis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Town doctor (memleket tabibi)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: For the administrative and village councils – the 1864 nizamname for the Danube province (Latin transliteration in Şentürk, Osmanlı Devleti’nde Bulgar Meselesi, 253-71.); for the municipal councils – the regulation (tâlimatname) for their creation in BOA I.MVL. 24362 [24 Cemaziülâhir 1282 / 14 November 1865]. The changes in the number of elected members in 1871 were introduced by the general Law of the Vilayets (DÜSTÜR, 608-24.)
### Stage 1: Initial Delegate List
Electoral commission of ex officio members to the council for which elections are being held drafts a list of candidates – three times the number of seats.

### Stage 2: First Elimination
Elected representatives from the meclises on the lower level (relative to the one that elections are for) eliminate one third of the names on the list.

### Stage 3: Second Elimination
Executive officer of the unit above the one for which elections are being held eliminates one half of the remaining names on the list; the rest of the candidates are considered elected.

#### Electoral Commission:
- **müdürü**
- **kadi**
- **müfti**
- non-Muslim religious leaders
- chief kaza scribe

#### First Elimination:
- By the combined votes of all members of *ittişar meclises* in the villages and town quarters of the kaza.

#### Second Elimination:
- By the *kaymakam* of the *sancak* in which the kaza is located.

#### Electoral Commission:
- **kaymakam**
- **kadi**
- **müfti**
- non-Muslim religious leaders
- *sancak* records office scribe

#### First Elimination:
- By the combined votes of all members of the administrative and judicial *meclises* in all kazas in the *sancak*.

#### Second Elimination:
- By the *vali* of the province.

#### Electoral Commission:
- **vali**
- **müfettiş-i hukkâm**
- **muhasebeci, mektubcu**
- **kadi**, **müfti**
- all members of vilayet-level judicial *meclises*
- non-Muslim religious leaders

#### First Elimination:
- By the combined votes of all members of administrative and judicial *meclises* in all kazas and *sancaks* in the province.

#### Second Elimination:
- By the *vali* of the province.
Figure 3. Structure of the vilayet’s justice system (Black arrows indicate avenues of appeal not provided for in the Statute but observed in practice.

Provincial Appellate Court (Meclis-i Temyiz-i Hukuk-i Vilayet)
- Chair: Müftü-i Hukkâm
- Elected Members: 3 Muslims + 3 Non-Muslims
- Court of appeals for:
  - Civil cases first decided in the District Appellate Courts
  - Civil cases first decided in the Kaza Courts and already appealed in the District Appellate Courts

District Appellate Courts (Meclis-i Temyiz-i Hukuk)
- One in each sancak (7 total)
- Chair: Kadi; Elected Members: 3 Muslims + 3 Non-Muslims
- Court of first instance for:
  - Civil cases first decided in the Kaza Courts (kaza deâvî meclislerinin rü’yet edemeyeceği)
- Court of appeals for:
  - Civil cases first decided in the Kaza Courts

Kaza Courts (Meclis-i Deâvî-i Kaza)
- One in each kaza (originally 45); Chair: Kadi
- Elected Members: 1864: 2 Muslims, 2 non-Muslims
  1871: 3 Muslims, 3 non-Muslims
- Court of first instance for:
  - Civil cases not initiated in şer’î or other religious courts
  - Criminal cases not initiated in şer’î or other religious courts AND not rising above the level of misdemeanors (cünha) or petty offenses (kabahat)

Provincial Criminal Court (Meclis-i Kebîr-i Cinayet or Meclis-i Cinayet-i Vilayet)
- Chair: Müftü-i Hukkâm
- Elected Members: 3 Muslims + 3 Non-Muslims
- Court of appeals for:
  - Criminal cases decided in the kaza courts or the District Criminal Courts

District Criminal Courts (Meclis-i Cinayet-i Liva)
- One in each sancak (7 total)
- Chair: Kadi; Elected Members: 3 Muslims + 3 Non-Muslims
- Court of first instance for:
  - Criminal cases not initiated in şer’î or other religious courts AND rising above the level of misdemeanors (cünha) and petty police offenses (kabahat) – i.e., to the level of felonies (cinayat)

Islamic Courts (Mahakim-i şer’iye); Kadi
- One in each kaza (originally 45); not hierarchically organized (i.e., the Islamic courts in the sancak centers and in Ruse only have jurisdiction over the territory of the kazas of Vidin, Sofia, Niš, Tûrnovo, Varna, Tulcea, and Ruse respectively)
- Court of first instance for:
  - Civil cases initiated by private claimants according to the şeriat
  - Criminal cases (of any degree of seriousness) initiated by victims or victims’ relatives according to the şeriat
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