ISLAM AND THE AGE OF OTTOMAN REFORM*

Although Ottoman rule was avowedly Islamic in ideology from its very inception, historians have tended to discount the importance of the religion for both state and population during the nineteenth century. Historical accounts of the era dwell upon plans to modernize the empire, which are often equated with an aspiration to westernize, and thus to secularize. Such narratives treat matters of faith that contradict the secularization theme as tainted subjects unworthy of serious study.[1] Ottoman invocations of religion are frequently dismissed as 'reactionary' and 'conservative' (and therefore petty-minded), or as socially acceptable formulae that disguised other interests. Yet assumptions that Islam denoted ignorance or was little more than a tool for political posturing obscure the nature of reform by misconstruing the conflicting pressures driving change. From top to bottom of Muslim society, religion was not only a matter of belief but also vital to personal identity and sense of social order, and Muslims acted when they perceived threats to Islam's well-being.

This article, therefore, challenges the concept of a 'taint' that has precluded consideration of religion in the nineteenth-century Ottoman empire, by means of a reinterpretation of the domestic context of reform. It focuses primarily upon the last decade in the reign of Sultan Mahmud II (1808–39), the ruler heretofore credited with committing the empire to modernization, westernization and secularization. After disastrous losses in wars with European powers, especially Russia, Mahmud and his advisers embarked upon a plan to centralize authority in Istanbul, but their motivation was less emulation of Europe than strengthening

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[1] Arnold H. Green, 'Political Attitudes and Activities of the Ulama in the Liberal Age: Tunisia as an Exceptional Case', *Internat. Jl Middle East Studies*, vii (1976), 209; David Kushner, 'The Place of the Ulema in the Ottoman Empire during the Age of Reform (1839–1918)', *Turcica*, xix (1987), 51, echoing Madeline C. Zilfi, 'The Ilmiye Registers and the Ottoman Medrese System Prior to the Tanzimat', in Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont and Paul Dumont (eds.), *Contributions à l'histoire économique et sociale de l'Empire ottoman* (Leuven, 1983), 309.

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the state's defence of the Abode of Islam (*Dar al-Islam*) against Christian enemies. Their forceful imposition of change on the population, in turn, drove many to take up arms against the state in order to defend what they perceived to be most at risk: the ethos of Islam itself. Muslim disquiet in Balkan, Anatolian and Arab provinces left the centre vulnerable to pressure not only from foreign powers but also from a mere Ottoman provincial governor, Mehmed (Muhammad) Ali Pasha of Egypt, who defied the sultan's authority by seizing control of Syria and part of Anatolia from 1831 to 1840.[2] This Muslim backlash stalled Istanbul's self-strengthening programme and indeed almost cost the Ottoman dynasty its throne.

Modernization after 1839 retained the overriding purpose of strengthening the empire against foreign pressure, but the fissures evident within the Muslim community imposed lasting parameters upon reform. To the end of the empire Muslims constituted the population from which the dynasty drew its legitimacy, much of its wealth and all its military strength, and the turmoil of the 1830s showed that the perceived betrayal of Islamic principles sapped such support. The aim of reforms during and after the Tanzimat ('reorganizations' or 'measures to install order') era, the 1839–76 period most associated with reform, was to strengthen the state only in ways that would prevent a reopening of the rift between it and its core population. Tanzimat measures, later labelled as westernization, were not designed primarily to appease Christian subjects or foreign powers by promoting Europeanization, let alone secularization. Reform was fundamentally shaped by, and for, Muslim interests: healing divisions within the community of believers, reconciling their enduring goals, and concentrating their energies upon defence against external threats.

I

CURRENT VIEWS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Currently — as when the empire was still alive — our perspective on this period is 'European'. Europe's view of the Ottomans developed from the Eastern Question ('What is to become of the Ottoman lands?'), which assumed that the empire must westernize or face collapse. For Europeans, the gauge of liberalization was

[2] See under Section V below.

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the contentment of Christian subjects, who were to have full equality with Muslims while maintaining autonomy over their own communal life. Westerners thought that Ottoman reforms ultimately failed because fanaticism, frivolity and decadence undercut them, rendering modernization half-accomplished because it was undertaken only half-heartedly. This conclusion fits well with modernization theory, which holds that Europe blazed the path for non-western lands to follow, and that failure to emulate the European model of political, social and economic development denotes backwardness. Modernization theory has influenced western interpretations of Muslim lands, with perceptions of the late Ottoman period proving no exception: the dominant view of the era was established by Bernard Lewis and Roderic Davison in the 1960s, the decade of modernization theory's greatest influence.[3] While their assumptions about equating progress with Europeanization might be dismissed as 'orientalist', the scholarly substance of these works set the basic narrative of the reform period.

In standard accounts, irreversible reform began under Sultan Mahmud II, who followed the progressive example of Mehmed Ali by modernizing state and army under European tutelage. He dissolved the main bastion of obdurate conservatism, the janissary corps or regular army, in the hope of regaining mastery over his rival in Egypt and stemming the nationalism stirring Christian subjects such as the Greeks. These needs caused his successor, Abdülmecid I, to issue in 1839 the Gülhane decree, penned by the Foreign Minister Mustafa Reşid, who knew the ways of Paris, London and Vienna and hoped to win support from these capitals against Mehmed Ali, whose armies held Syria and had come to threaten Istanbul itself. The decree promised equality to all subjects regardless of religion, and enactment of new laws to make the state more efficient, more modern, more European. After fitful implementation, and again under foreign pressure during the Crimean War, the promises were repeated and refined in another reform decree in 1856. Westernization accelerated, reaching its peak with the promulgation of a constitution in 1876 — only to be cut short when the reactionary Sultan Abdülhamid II suspended the constitution in 1878. Abdülhamid's short-sighted, Islamist

[3] Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford, 1961); Roderic Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856–1876* (Princeton, 1963).

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autocracy worsened conditions for non-Muslim subjects and accelerated the Sick Man of Europe's slide to inevitable demise.

Later Ottomanists have reworked details of this narrative, but have not altered basic assumptions of modernization theory.[4] Their picture of the late empire shows a dynamic entity making and implementing policy in a fashion resembling European practice.[5] This revised view credits the empire with modernizing itself *in spite of* Europe, rather than being a stumbler along the European path, but the argument that Istanbul generated its own version of western ways challenges neither the belief that change meant Europeanization nor historians' disregard of religion. In so far as religion is addressed, it tends to be Istanbul-centred, institutional in focus, and treated as a political strategy.[6] Kemal Atatürk's adoption of the European model for the Turkish republic founded in 1923 has certainly influenced Ottomanist

[4] The influence of the narrative can be seen in eminent recent works such as Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 2nd edn (London, 2004), and Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2005). Quataert has nevertheless ably criticized modernization theory in Ottoman studies in his 'Ottoman History Writing and Changing Attitudes towards the Notion of "Decline"', *History Compass*, i (2003), ME 038 (Middle and Near East, Aug. 2003). The latest syntheses of the era, M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, 2008), and Carter Vaughn Findley, 'The Tanzimat', in Reşat Kasaba (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, iv, *Turkey in the Modern World* (Cambridge, 2008), add new perspectives but do not fundamentally alter the narrative's direction. The best Turkish study, İlber Ortaylı's *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı* [The Empire's Longest Century] (Istanbul, 1983), is similarly noteworthy for its refreshing views on issues within the narrative, particularly the autocracy of reformist governments. The account most cognizant of enduring Islamic influences in this period of 'Europeanization' is Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1923* (London, 2005), whose author's original expertise is the early modern empire.

[5] For example Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789–1922* (Princeton, 1980); Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London, 1998). Europe's part in complicating Ottoman Christian–Muslim relations has also received attention. European pressure preserved the capitulations system that impaired Ottoman domestic autonomy and brought extraordinary privileges for Ottoman non-Muslims, thereby fostering sectarianism. See Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley, 2000).

[6] Richard L. Chambers, 'The Ottoman Ulema and the Tanzimat', in Nikki R. Keddie (ed.), *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500* (Berkeley, 1972); Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization* (Oxford, 1990); Kemal H. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (Oxford, 2001). A work that discusses Islam well in this context is Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton, 1962).

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views, reinforcing the modernizationist wish to see Turkey's westward, 'secularist' orientation rooted in the nineteenth century.[7] While there were many continuities between the late Ottoman and republican periods, however, Atatürk innovated in adopting a form of secularism.[8]

'Secularism' carries positive connotations of progress and modernity for many but, as in this case, it is rarely defined clearly. Atatürk did not emulate the American model of strict secularism, with a legal separation of 'Church' and government; he followed a general European tendency, embracing the religious establishment so tightly that it could not oppose regime interests (for reasons that this article should make clear). This presented greater challenges than in Christian Europe, because of Sunni Islam's antagonism towards hierarchical clerisy; although the Ottoman empire had shaped a religious bureaucracy long before the nineteenth century, republican secularism innovated by creating a monopolistic institution, a 'Church' for the state to take hold of and dominate. Turkey brought religious training and the mosques under full state direction and dissolved all other bodies, notably the Sufi brotherhoods.[9] Like Kemalism's other principles (republicanism, nationalism, étatism, populism and revolutionism), secularism tightened the new leadership's control over citizens, taking the aim of Ottoman reform — the empowerment of the state — to a higher level. What it did not seek was distance from Islam, and so it created a paradox that still produces political tension: the state nationalized the religion but Islam itself underpins the identity of the nation, with the term 'Christian Turk' remaining an oxymoron.[10] The former part of the paradox

[7] Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*; Justin McCarthy, *The Ottoman Turks: An Introductory History to 1923* (London, 1997); Zürcher, *Turkey*.

[8] Erik-Jan Zürcher, 'Ottoman Sources of Kemalist Thought', in Elisabeth Özdalga (ed.), *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy* (London, 2005), 16–18.

[9] The regime's dominance has forced upon it a religious credential unexpected in a 'secular' state. It not only licenses mosques but also decides the themes and texts of sermons delivered at Friday noon, the most important of the week's prayer meetings. When needed, even Turkish authorities argue that this intimate but unidirectional relationship between state and religion is not secularism but rather *laïcité*. See 'Refah Partisi'nin kapatılması istemiyle Yargıtay Cumhuriyet Başsavcılığı'nca Anayasa Mahkemesi'ne açılan davanın iddianamesi' [Indictment in the Suit Brought before the Constitutional Court by the Chief Prosecutor of the Republic Seeking Abolition of the Welfare Party], 21 May 1997, available at <http://www.belgenet.com/dava/rpdava_idd.html>.

[10] Christian ethnic Turks, notably the Gagauz of the Balkans and Black Sea region, have not been permitted to immigrate into Turkey, in sharp contrast to the welcome

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constituted Atatürk's break with the past, but the latter part remained true to Ottoman precedent. Since the 1950s, however, Turkey's elite have pushed to reinterpret secularism in the American sense of separating religious and state affairs, and many historians have implicitly accepted this by assuming that reform had brought such secularization long before 1923.[11]

Yet the Ottoman state never disavowed its ties to Islam. It did become more technocratic in adapting to accelerating change in its environment, but adaptation did not mean the loss of religion: Islamic scholars adapted to modern conditions simultaneously with political leaders, but it would be nonsense to talk of them as secularizing Islam.[12] Nineteenth-century state schools, commonly described as secular, for example, stressed the teaching of Islamic morals to pupils studying modern subjects.[13] The state recognized that Islam alone was insufficient to ward off all threats, but it also knew that secularism would destroy the vitality of the community that was to use worldly means for self-defence.

II

ISLAM, JUSTICE AND THE FORTUNES OF WAR

Islam endured in Ottoman life because it was the social glue that made the core of society cohere and the ideology that legitimized the state.[14] It was the communal aspect of the faith rather than doctrinal issues of personal belief that influenced the events considered here. Key to understanding the communal importance of

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afforded Muslim migrants or refugees from former Ottoman lands, regardless of ethnicity.

[11] The 1960 military coup against the avowedly Muslim government of Adnan Menderes focused attention on secularism; on the scholarly atmosphere of the time, see Ernest Gellner, *Encounters with Nationalism* (Oxford, 1994), 83–4. The influence of that era's ideas on banning religion from politics is exemplified by Niyazi Berkes's study, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (1964; London, 1998).

[12] The best study of Muslim intellectual developments in the nineteenth century is Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1789–1939*, new edn (Cambridge, 1983).

[13] Benjamin C. Fortna, 'Islamic Morality in Late Ottoman "Secular" Schools', *Internat. Jl Middle East Studies*, xxxii (2000), 369.

[14] Intellectual forerunners of the republic, and Atatürk himself, recognized this: Zürcher, 'Ottoman Sources of Kemalist Thought'. On Islam and secularism in the Republican and late Ottoman periods, see Brian Silverstein, 'Islam and Modernity in Turkey: Power, Tradition and Historicity in the European Provinces of the Muslim World', *Anthropol. Quart.*, lxxvi (2003).

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Islam is the ideal of the just society safeguarded by shari'a. Shari'a is a much misunderstood term: it traditionally denotes not a body of laws (it has no standard text of statutes akin to the *Code Napoléon*) but rather a set of principles and methods by which just solutions to disputes and dilemmas besetting members of the Muslim community can be discovered. Ottoman practice of shari'a could be described as principled pragmatism in the pursuit of justice, drawing not only on the established schools of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence but also on imperial decree and local custom. The ideal that Islam and shari'a, properly observed, ensured peace and justice for the Muslim community was accepted by both rulers and ruled, with the sultans emphasizing their commitment to upholding justice as a means of building legitimacy: the mythic golden age of the empire was the reign of Süleyman I 'the Magnificent' (1520–66), the sultan known to Ottomans as 'the Lawgiver' and adulated as the just ruler who personified the ideal.[15] Representing the marriage of sultanic authority to Islam was the idea of service to *din ü devlet* (the religion and the dynasty or state), the key principle of public life. It legitimized the dynasty's actions abroad, defending the Abode of Islam against infidels and schismatics (the Shi'is of Iran), and at home, upholding justice through application of shari'a.

Consciousness of religious ideals grew in unsettled times and particularly during war, which inflicted upon the community of believers inevitable physical and psychological traumas.[16] Concern for the faith grew among Ottoman Muslims in the powerful mood of existential crisis affecting the empire from 1768 to 1839, when the empire fought a series of wars for which it was ill prepared, losing all but one. It also suffered domestic unrest, including not only the Serbian and Greek revolts but also turmoil among Muslims.[17] Even the Holy Cities were not safe: Wahhabis, themselves a radical movement seeking to enjoin

[15] Haim Gerber, *State, Society, and Law in Islam: Ottoman Law in Comparative Perspective* (Albany, 1994), 181; Christine Woodhead, 'Perspectives on Süleyman', in Metin Kunt and Christine Woodhead (eds.), *Süleyman the Magnificent and his Age: The Ottoman Empire in the Early Modern World* (London, 1995), 164–6.

[16] This period also brought heightened religious sensibilities in Christian Europe, which also experienced much conflict and instability: see Nigel Aston, *Christianity and Revolutionary Europe, c.1750–1830* (Cambridge, 2002). Spain's Carlist wars offer an obvious example of the continued infusion of politics with religion.

[17] Frederick F. Anscombe, 'Albanians and "Mountain Bandits"', in Frederick F. Anscombe (ed.), *The Ottoman Balkans, 1750–1830* (Princeton, 2006).

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strictly pious practice on fellow Muslims, sacked Mecca and Medina. The leaders of the community encouraged popular concern for the religion, as Istanbul relied upon Muslims rallying to the religion to restore broken armies to the field. The sultan's invocation of jihad was not a hollow formula: religious fervour affected Ottoman soldiers from the origins of the empire to its end. Booty might reward those fighting for the cause of 'good', but the Ottomans' surprising ability to keep fielding fresh armies during the draining, futile wars from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries suggests that men did not make war only for the money. Muslims heeded the call to defend the community of believers.

Muslim soldiers had fervour, but incompetence, inexperience and ill discipline crippled the Ottoman military from top to bottom. To explain battlefield debacles, critics have focused upon decadence in the janissary corps; the janissaries were indeed outclassed in combat after 1768, but their shortcomings were simply indicative of deeper financial, organizational and disciplinary problems affecting the Ottoman state.[18] Istanbul permitted the buying and selling of janissary payslips in the eighteenth century, for example, and these tended to accumulate in the hands of commanding officers and other high officials. The money due to those slips had a better chance of being collected than the pay owed to actual janissaries in the provinces. Even if received, a provincial janissary's daily wage in 1800 covered little more than the cost of a cup of coffee.[19] Istanbul's increasing alienation of control over revenues to tax farmers only added to the problems of pay.[20]

Recognizing that it could no longer support a viable standing army, the state relied increasingly upon provincial Muslim militia, paid only for the campaign season instead of the full year.[21]

[18] Cemal Kafadar, 'Janissaries and other Riffraff of Ottoman Istanbul: Rebels without a Cause?', *Internat. Jl Turkish Studies*, xiii (2007), offers a welcome preliminary reconsideration of the established paradigm of the janissaries as the embodiment of obtuse sclerosis.

[19] Deena Sadat, 'Ayan and Ağa: The Transformation of the Bektashi Corps in the 18th Century', *Muslim World*, lxiii (1973), 212.

[20] Michael Robert Hickok, *Ottoman Military Administration in Eighteenth-Century Bosnia* (Leiden, 1997), 78–112.

[21] The turn to the Muslims in the provinces changed Ottoman social organization. The state traditionally divided the population into *reaya* ('the flock', or the tax-payers) and *askeri* ('the military', or the tax-exempt); with all Muslim males becoming

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In the wars after 1768, militias often did fight well, but again the state's inability to pay its soldiers promptly caused problems. Logistics suffered from similar hardships. Unpaid, ill nourished and threatened by disease, many soldiers deserted or showed poor discipline on the march and in battle. With a future best described as nasty, brutish and short, the surprise is that any troops reached the front and fought at all.

Defence of *din ü devlet* helps to explain the fielding of doomed armies but also the animosities and recriminations that erupted after battlefield failure. Following defeat in another war with Russia, in 1792 Sultan Selim III launched the New Order, the first large-scale attempt to reshape the military along European lines. With the central government appearing to turn upon the provincial and janissary troops who had answered the call, however imperfectly, the fervour stoked by the state triggered a bitter reaction. Selim's programme aroused widespread anger over mimicry of the enemy, the canonically illegitimate excise taxes levied to pay for innovations — and especially the snub to the current order, which the state had not found the resources to support adequately in the field.

In part due to strong Muslim opposition, Selim could not reverse Ottoman military decline, and dissatisfaction with his rule led to his overthrow and eventual murder. His successor, Mahmud II, was to take the offensive against those associated with the old order, aiming to bring both centre and provinces back into clear subservience to sultanic wishes.

III

MAHMUD II

Mahmud's reign marks the transition from the *ancien régime* to the 'age of reform', but it is surprisingly under-studied. Only a few developments receive much notice: the Greek revolt (1821–9), the abolition of the janissary corps and other institutions, and the competition between Mahmud and Mehmed Ali Pasha of Egypt. The first and last events drew European involvement, helping to open the empire to western influence and thereby expanding the

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potential soldiers, *reaya* became a term used almost wholly for non-Muslims by the late eighteenth century.

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Eastern Question. Cast into shadow by these issues, the rest of Mahmud's reign is often ignored. His efforts to break any power independent of his court, however, created turmoil in the provinces, even where his actions had little obvious effect beyond the state seizing a greater part of the wealth of provincial notables while nevertheless leaving to them, or their families, much of their local influence.[22]

Mahmud himself remains something of an enigma. He recognized that the weakness of the Ottoman centre left the empire disadvantaged against more efficient European enemies. His reforms developing the tools of administration were sensible: in the reign of Selim III, the imperial 'bureaucracy' of between one and two thousand people was more a large royal household than the workforce of a modern state. His clarity of vision had been diminished when his eye turned from foreign threats to closer targets, however. Having witnessed the fate of Selim, Mahmud treated ruthlessly those he perceived as not fully loyal to, or dependent on, him. The notion that his subjects accorded him the sobriquet 'The Just' seems to be the result of history rewritten under his successors.[23] His image as the enlightened reformer who first accepted the idea of equality between Muslims and non-Muslims needs qualification, for he mistrusted Christians. His fear of Christian plotters triggered the execution of the Orthodox Patriarch Grigorios V following the outbreak of the Greek revolt, despite Grigorios having placed an anathema upon the rebels. Mahmud also believed that Christians had infiltrated the janissary corps, and not even converts to Islam were allowed into his post-janissary army.[24]

[22] On campaigns against notables and their mixed results, see Yücel Özkaya, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Âyânlık* [The Provincial Notable in the Ottoman Empire] (Ankara, 1994), 294–9; Yuzo Nagata, 'The Role of Ayans in Regional Development during the Pre-Tanzimat Period in Turkey: A Case Study of the Karaosmanoğlu Family', in Yuzo Nagata, *Studies on the Social and Economic History of the Ottoman Empire* (Izmir, 1995); Andrew G. Gould, 'Lords or Bandits? The Derebeys of Cilicia', *Internat. Jl Middle East Studies*, vii (1976), 485–93; Dick Douwes, *The Ottomans in Syria: A History of Justice and Oppression* (London, 2000), ch. 5.

[23] Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 94, depicts Mahmud as 'The Just', dismissing the nickname 'Infidel Sultan' simply as a notion that was promoted by western writings of the time.

[24] Hakan Erdem, 'Recruitment for the "Victorious Soldiers of Muhammad" in the Arab Provinces, 1826–1828', in Israel Gershoni, Hakan Erdem and Ursula Woköck (eds.), *Histories of the Modern Middle East: New Directions* (London, 2002), 193–4.

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Yet Mahmud scorned many Muslims almost as much as Christians, especially those whom he considered 'ignorant', too secure of their status or associated with any institution that he found difficult to control directly. One noted reform of the 1820s, introducing the fez and homogenizing the clothing prescribed for office-holders and religious scholars, attacked sartorial means by which subjects could advertise any status independent of the state. Like converts, groups associated with the old janissary and militia orders were excluded from the new army, which resulted in Turks (peasants from the agricultural heartlands of Anatolia and the Balkans) rather than Albanians, Arabs, Bosnians, Kurds and men from the Caucasus dominating the military ranks. Recruits, however, were treated practically as slaves, facing a minimum of twelve years' service, harsh discipline and no pension unless they served until they were too old or infirm to continue.[25] The summary execution suffered by Patriarch Grigorios was meted out to many Muslims in both Istanbul and the provinces. The sultan's officers were quick to seize the estates of executed or dismissed men, and suspicion arose even in court circles that some were executed only to enable seizure of the victim's possessions.[26] Muslim suspicion of amoral avarice in high circles was intensified by the confiscation of assets of the Bektashi Sufi brotherhood, driven underground in 1826, and by the seizure of pious endowment (*vakf*) funds in the same year.

Mahmud knew that his radical exercise of power would arouse antagonism, and he charged the chief mufti (jurisconsult) of the empire with devising an Islamic theory of total obedience to the sultan. The mufti duly derived an argument that, in times of 'evil and corruption', specific regulations recognized in shari'a could be set aside so that the ruler could re-establish 'civilization'.[27]

[25] Erik Jan Zürcher, 'The Ottoman Conscription System, 1844–1914', *Internat. Rev. Social Hist.*, xliii (1998).

[26] The court historian Ahmet Lutfi notes the suspicion in discussing an Albanian militia leader fighting against the Greeks who was executed by Reşid Mehmed Pasha: *Tarih-i Lutfi* [Lutfi's History], 8 vols. (Istanbul, 1873–1910), i, 243. Even more blatant was the execution of the heads of the three wealthiest Jewish families of Istanbul, whose estates were then confiscated: Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, 438.

[27] Kemal Karpat, 'Ifta and Kaza: The İlmiye State and Modernism in Turkey, 1820–1960', in Colin Imber and Keiko Kiyotaki (eds.), *Frontiers of Ottoman Studies: State, Province, and the West*, 2 vols. (London, 2005), i, 29. Religious leaders were divided over Mahmud's reforms, with the support given by some holders of high office counterbalanced by great hostility shown by figures with humbler profiles. Uriel Heyd, 'The Ottoman 'Ulema and Westernization in the Time of Selim III and Mahmud II',

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So sanctioned, Mahmud's acts might have been borne, had they enabled the regime to fulfil its duty to defend the Abode of Islam. Mahmud failed in this, however, making his readiness to insult, oppress and kill Muslims inexcusable.[28] His methods, in fact, raised a serious question: without justice and the due process of law, what distinguished the Abode of Islam from its opposite, the Abode of War? The very definition of the Abode of Islam is land controlled by a Muslim ruler, since under a non-Muslim government shari'a — and thus justice — cannot reign. When Mahmud no longer enforced justice, Ottoman Muslims began to call him 'Infidel Sultan'. Internal stresses mounted as a result of clashing perceptions and goals, with Mahmud's steps to *preserve* the Abode of Islam triggering Muslim subjects' efforts to *restore* it.

IV

REFORM, RELIGION AND REBELLION

While imperial histories pay little attention to provincial disturbances in Mahmud's reign, local accounts have noted the sense of crisis and upsurge of disorder among Muslims in Ottoman provinces.[29] Such studies tend to assume that discontent was generated by provincial elites concerned about threats to their wealth.[30] Closer examination of unrest in European and Asian provinces, however, shows more complex, religiously inspired reasons for

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in Uriel Heyd (ed.), *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization* (Scripta Hierosolymitana, ix, Jerusalem, 1961), 69–77.

[28] Mahmud only made the problem of alienation worse by terming the bloody suppression of the janissaries 'the auspicious event' and naming a newly built mosque *nusretiye* (victory) in honour of the occasion. The mosque was foolhardy, marking a lonely triumph over Muslims that looked particularly inglorious in comparison to the victories of predecessors such as Mehmed II and Süleyman the Magnificent, whose conquests in Christian lands had funded the construction of far greater mosques in Istanbul.

[29] Douwes, *Ottomans in Syria*; Dina Rizk Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul, 1540–1834* (Cambridge, 1997), 156–78; Michael E. Meeker, *A Nation of Empire: The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity* (Berkeley, 2002); Ahmet Cevat Eren, *Mahmud II Zamanında Bosna-Hersek* [Bosnia-Hercegovina in the Time of Mahmud II] (Istanbul, 1965); Süleyman Külçe, *Osmanlı Tarihinde Arnavutluk* [Albania in Ottoman History] (Izmir, 1944), 189–99.

[30] Georges Castellan, *Histoire des Balkans (XIVe–XXe siècle)* (Paris, 1991), 316–17, 359; Ali Gökbunar, 'Atçalı Kel Mehmed Ayaklanması: Vergiye Farklı bir Başkaldırı Örneği' [The Atçalı Kel Mehmed Uprising: An Example of an Anti-Tax Revolt], *Yönetim ve ekonomi*, xi (2004), 27–33.

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disquiet. In the Balkans, rebellion grew in Bosnia from the local Muslims' sense that Istanbul was determined to undermine their ability to defend themselves against Christian attacks launched from Dalmatia, Serbia and Montenegro. In other areas, such as Albania, Muslims resented Istanbul's lack of concern for, and appreciation of, their substantial efforts to defend the Abode of Islam on fronts near and far. Viewed from the provinces, Mahmud's regime had become a source of oppression.

Istanbul's view that the goal of preserving the Abode of Islam justified any means explains its attack upon the heartland of the old order in 1829–30. In terms of population and wealth, the Balkans formed the most important region of the empire, but tensions between the centre and the European provinces had been building for years. In the case of Albanians, for example, imperial commanders recognized their value as fighters but had come to distrust their unruliness, and Mahmud and his officers blamed them for military failures in Greece and against Russia in the 1820s.[31] Albanians had their own grievances against Mahmud's regime, which sent an army to capture Ali Pasha, the famous governor of Ioannina, but wreaked havoc on Epirus in 1820–2. Contrary to Lord Byron's image of him as the 'Muslim Bonaparte', Ali was no rebel but rather an officer who had provided the most effective troops available to the sultan for more than twenty years. Ali surrendered in 1822; in contravention of the surrender terms, he was executed and his head sent to Mahmud. His sons had surrendered earlier, also on terms, but they too were executed. The course of the affair created lasting bitterness among Muslims of the region, particularly given the precedence that the effort to break Ali had taken over any campaign to quell the Greek revolt.[32]

[31] Hakan Erdem, '"Perfidious Albanians" and "Zealous Governors": Ottomans, Albanians, and Turks in the Greek War of Independence', in Antonis Anastasopoulos and Elias Kolovos (eds.), *Ottoman Rule and the Balkans, 1760–1850: Conflict, Transformation, Adaptation* (Rethymno, 2007); Anscombe, 'Albanians and "Mountain Bandits"'.

[32] Frederick Anscombe, 'Continuities in Ottoman Centre–Periphery Relations, 1787–1915', in A. C. S. Peacock (ed.), *Frontiers of the Ottoman World* (Oxford, 2009), 236–45; Ziya Yılmazer (ed.), *Vak'a-nüvis Es'ad Efendi Tarihi, 1237–1241/1821–1826* [Court Historian Esad Efendi's History, 1821–1826] (Istanbul, 2000), 711; Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi [Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive], Istanbul (hereafter BOA), Cevdet Dahiliye (hereafter Cev. Dah.) 8876, 1821, and Hatt-i Hümayun [Imperial Rescript] (hereafter HH) 21638, 1829–30.

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Ali had encouraged the Greek revolt as a ploy to save himself, anticipating that his Ottoman enemies would let him loose on the Christian rebels. Mahmud did call upon Muslims to fight for religion and state against the infidel — but only after Ali was killed. Officers involved in the attack on Ali commanded the Greek campaign, and under them served Muslim militia of the Balkans who bore the brunt of campaigning in a vicious war. As in other conflicts, command was flawed, the militia undisciplined and the army ill supplied; the troops fighting the rebels, and from 1828 the Russians as well, were also unpaid. The regime called upon their religious fervour in defence of the Abode of Islam to keep them in the field.[33] Given the abject poverty afflicting regions such as Albania that supplied most of the manpower for the army, however, lack of pay meant that religious duty brought volunteers but only made discipline problems worse.[34] The humiliation of the defeat by Russia and the loss of Greece only exacerbated Mahmud and his advisers' resentment over Albanian demands for pay, causing them to turn on the western Balkans as soon as the war ended.[35]

In effect, Mahmud adopted a policy of reconquest of Albania and Bosnia, assigning its execution to his new grand vizier Reşid Mehmed Pasha, a Georgian among the numerous slaves of Husrev Pasha (an illiterate Abkhaz who served repeatedly as Mahmud's imperial military or naval commander) who were appointed to important posts in Mahmud's government. Reşid had been a senior figure in the expedition against Ali Pasha, commander of Istanbul's land forces sent against the Greek rebels, and a harsh critic of Albanian troops.[36] Albania had no clear geographic, political or social centre, and the marked diffusion of power in the south tempted Reşid to attack there first. He found allies among rival cliques, then named himself governor of the main districts, appointing his local protégés as deputies to act in his stead. These arrangements did not differ notably from established practice and triggered little overt resistance.

[33] For a call to arms in defence of Islam, see Hakan Erdem, '"Do not Think of the Greeks as Agricultural Labourers": Ottoman Responses to the Greek War of Independence', in Faruk Birtek and Thalia Dragonas (eds.), *Citizenship and the Nation-State in Greece and Turkey* (London, 2005), 76–7.

[34] BOA, HH 21634, *c.*1825; *Tarih-i Lutfi*, i, 261–2.

[35] BOA, HH 21414, 4 Oct. 1829?

[36] BOA, HH 21513–G, 1828.

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Reşid then shifted to unexpectedly forceful action, apparently with Mahmud's consent.[37] He invited the notables of the south whom he most despised to a meeting at his army headquarters in Bitola (Macedonia), offering them safe conduct. Staging a ceremonial demonstration of the gunnery skills of his troops, he had the soldiers turn their fire upon his guests.[38] Some of the survivors were sent to Istanbul, but others, who had been wounded, were executed in the town's bazaar as a warning to all that disobedience would not be tolerated.[39] Reşid carried out a similar massacre of Christian notables in Thessaly a few months later.[40] The figure of five hundred killed at Bitola given in Albanian histories is probably inflated in the way that modern accounts of heinous 'crimes against the nation' usually are, but the British consul estimated 120 dead there, with others killed simultaneously in Ioannina.[41] Mahmud's regime never acknowledged the incident, and Ottomanists similarly have overlooked it.[42] Whatever the exact toll, the massacres sent a powerful message across southern Albania and further afield.

In the face of ultimately futile resistance to his further advance, Reşid assumed direct command of the southern districts, displacing his local allies. Control over administration and tax collection passed into new hands, but otherwise Reşid altered little in the established system.[43] Appointing his son to control the south, Reşid turned to the north. Ambushes had rid southern Albania of many of its leaders, but the north posed a greater challenge because it was controlled primarily by one man, Buşatlı Mustafa Pasha, scion of a family that traditionally held the governorship

[37] BOA, HH 21414, 4 Oct. 1829?; BOA, HH 21257–A, 1830–1.

[38] Those who would be useful to Reşid in asserting control over southern Albania may have been warned to stay away from the ceremony: Bedrush H. Shehu, *Çështje Shqiptare në Vitet 30 të Shekullit XIX* [Albanian Affairs of the 1830s] (Prishtina, 1990), 103.

[39] BOA, HH 21518, 24 Aug. 1830.

[40] National Archives, London, Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), Foreign Office (hereafter FO) 78/203, 5–8, 5 Jan. 1831.

[41] PRO, FO 78/193, 196–203, 21 Aug. 1830.

[42] Michael Ursinus, 'Das Qaza Qolonya um das Jahr 1830: ein Beitrag zur Regionalgeschichte des Osmanischen Reiches nach einheimischen Quellen', *Südost-Forschungen*, xxxviii (1979), 13–14, proves the exception, although the local source he uses misses the significance of the incident.

[43] Reşid even continued the practice of recruiting irregular troops for a monthly salary, rather than long-term conscription: BOA, HH 21253–A, 26 Apr. 1831.

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of Shkodra. His authority in the region was only part of the problem, however. A particular delicacy attached to ousting him was the awkward fact that he had always been loyal to the sultan. He assisted operations to crush the Greek revolt, to fend off the Russian attack on the Danube, and even to mop up resistance to Reşid's takeover in the south; not an outspoken opponent of reform, he volunteered twenty thousand men to defend Mahmud's new military order against rebellious Bosnian janissaries in 1826.[44] Given Mustafa's demonstrated loyalty, Reşid needed to goad him into revolt, which he accomplished by having the districts around Shkodra transferred from men loyal to Mustafa to Reşid, endangering the governor's standing in the region.[45] Mustafa tried negotiation and simple pleading for revocation of the order, but in vain.[46]

Mustafa raised the banner of revolt in the name of religion. The goal of those who answered his call was neither revivalist (seeking to bring the masses back to the faith) nor theological in the manner of the Wahhabis, who fought for a particular interpretation of how to be a good Muslim; Mustafa and his allies focused rather upon the ethos of peace and justice within the community of believers. In messages urging Muslims to join a coalition formed out of devotion to religion and state, Mustafa asserted that the empire had been brought low by evil associates who were now instigating all sorts of injustices. He urged Muslims to unite in order 'to render good service to our religion and state by annulling the innovations (*bidaat*) which have occurred in contravention of the blessed shari'a and traditional law (*kanun*)'.[47] His call to arms, made in the name of the 'Allied Muslims', met a ready response. Most of northern Albania supported him, as did the majority of the tribes of the south. He had strong support in Bosnia and Bulgaria, where the region of Sofia suffered greatly from a rebel assault.[48] If all of those ready to rise up had been able to join forces, they could easily have destroyed Reşid's army.

[44] BOA, HH 22064, 25 Dec. 1826; BOA, HH 21911, 12 Sept. 1830.
[45] BOA, HH 21472, 1831.
[46] BOA, HH 21412, 1831; BOA, HH 21948–A, 1831.
[47] BOA, HH 21173–D, 15 Apr. 1831; BOA, HH 21173–E, 12 May 1831. *Bidaat* refers to innovation unjustified by Islamic principles. *Kanun* normally refers to law deriving from sultanic decree; in Albania, however, it could apply to local common law, for example the Canon of Lekë Dukagjin (a long-unwritten code of customary law followed in northern Albania).
[48] BOA, HH 21412–B, 1831.

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Success eluded the revolt, but only barely. Before the rebels could unite, Mustafa confronted Reşid in Macedonia. An attempt to assassinate Reşid on the eve of battle killed the wrong man, leaving the rebels mistakenly celebrating his death; they were then defeated by an attack launched to take advantage of the confusion. A rumour that four thousand rebels were summarily executed sapped the will to continue the revolt among Muslims of Bulgaria, as past experience of the regime's readiness to execute Muslims made the rumour credible.[49] Rebels from Bosnia reached Kosovo, where they defeated Reşid's army. Not entirely enamoured of their recent antagonist Mustafa, however, the Bosnians allowed themselves to be bought off by promises about Bosnian affairs that Istanbul had no intention of keeping.[50] Reşid thus succeeded in capturing Mustafa, who benefited from Istanbul's apparent realization that continued ruthlessness would only widen fissures in society that European powers could exploit.[51] Mustafa was sent to Istanbul, and Reşid removed his men from all positions of influence, taking over their assets as he had done in the south. Once the key points of northern Albania were secured, Istanbul's forces moved on Bosnia in a campaign resembling that launched against Albania.[52]

What caused the strength of the revolt? In Ottoman accounts and Istanbul's records there are unusually clear statements of complaints grounded in religious precepts. Insurgents felt that the men appointed by the sultan to 'reform' the empire were devoid of the faith and sense of justice that shaped their image of a properly Islamic world. When a governor in the eastern Balkans heard of the rebellion, he enquired of Mustafa his grounds for revolt, receiving a reply expressing the sense that justice no longer ruled. For years Albanians had served the religion and the state faithfully, and to their own great cost, but their contributions were slighted. Reşid in particular had shown consistent, unjust enmity. Yet now he was given control over all

[49] BOA, HH 21256–A, 7 May 1831.

[50] BOA, HH 21962, 1831.

[51] BOA, HH 21644, datable to 1830; BOA, HH 21519, 15 Oct. 1831.

[52] Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, new edn (New York, 1996), 120–1. Mustafa was settled in a residence in Istanbul that became a salon for a wide circle of religious- and literary-minded friends. After Mahmud's death, Mustafa was rehabilitated and appointed governor of a series of provinces before retiring to the holy city of Medina, where he died in 1860. Mustafa Bilge, 'Mustafa Pasha, Buşatlı', *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, xxxi (Istanbul, 2006), 345.

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Albania and allowed free rein to 'whet his teeth in enmity against the entire community (*umma*) of Muslims' and especially the Albanians. Muslims everywhere felt that they had to band together to protect their lives, families and property from such 'evil'. Emblematic of the rebels' spiritual purity of purpose was their adoption of a uniform reminiscent of Sufi dress.[53] An imperial courier who travelled through Albania and Macedonia confirmed the spread of the sense that no Muslim was safe from the men of the new order. According to his sources, Muslims saw in Mustafa Pasha a loyal servant of the state who had performed his duties well, and yet he was stripped of all his posts — why should anyone else expect better treatment?[54] If loyalty meant nothing to the sultan's officers, then loyalty was no longer owed. And if law and tradition were under assault, then they must be defended.

Such concern was not petty-minded conservatism. The actions of Mahmud's officers in the Balkans reflected the wider assault launched against the Islamic state's old support structure. Empire-wide, the sultan's men — clients, slaves and members of his household — killed or uprooted Muslims by the thousands and consolidated in their own hands control of positions and wealth, including what had been stripped summarily from those out of favour and the revenues of pious endowments. In the Balkans the abolition of the janissary corps affected Bosnia in particular, while a number of devotees of the proscribed Bektashi Sufi order sought refuge in southern Albania. Not yet dominant there, Bektashism probably began its rapid growth in Albania with this influx of Muslim refugees.[55] The Bitola massacre was shocking but conformed to the wider pattern, with Muslims being killed in summary fashion, and the assets of those out of favour being seized by Mahmud's favourites. Reşid did not abolish tax-farming or landed estates; as with political offices, he merely reallocated them to himself, his son or his own political retainers, rather than appointing men by objective

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[53] *Tarih-i Lutfi*, iii, 187–91.

[54] BOA, HH 21412–B, 1831.

[55] Bektashism's growth in Albania probably benefited from resentment of Istanbul's policies. Had Albania already been the centre of the sect, the imperial government would have shown more concern over the Bektashi flight there. Istanbul thought it sufficient to dispatch to the area some Albanian teachers learned in Sunni orthodoxy, in order to make sure that Bektashi refugees did not spread heterodox ideas. BOA, HH 21633, 1827–8.

criteria of merit.[56] It appeared, in short, that the system had not really changed — only the identities of those able to milk it.[57] While Mahmud's clique crushed the Muslims and looted what remained of the Muslim lands, all in the name of improving the state, they had proved themselves incapable of defeating the Christians, be they Greek rebels or the Russian army. The janissaries had been slaughtered, but the new army was led by palace favourites and other officers as untrained and incompetent as the janissaries had been.[58] Surely Mahmud's actions qualified as *bidaat* — had not God rendered a disapproving verdict upon them by denying the sultan victory in his struggles against the Christians?

Mahmud certainly recognized the threat to his legitimacy as head of state and commander of the faithful posed by such rebellions. Muslim unrest in the Balkans and Anatolia generally received no official recognition, being dismissed as simple banditry and lawlessness. Speculation on the empire's conflicts abroad and in the provinces flourished in coffee-house conversation, however, and the movement led by Mustafa Pasha was so powerful that the government could not deny recognition to it or its grievances, making an ideological counter-attack necessary. It sent proclamations throughout the Balkans to counter Mustafa's claims and to rally support for the sultan, stressing that it was a Muslim's duty to obey the commander of the faithful, and that those who sought to divide the community should die the death of the unbeliever, cut down by the sword. The proclamations also noted a legal opinion issued by the chief mufti condemning Mustafa's rebellion as unjust according to the shari'a.[59] The text of the opinion could be taken as legitimation for the idea of fighting against any who oppressed Muslims, however — exactly the point made by Mustafa and others in complaining about

[56] BOA, Cev. Dah. 4454, 25 May 1833.

[57] This pattern was not unique to Albania. For a similar case in a distant province, see Keiko Kiyotaki, 'The Practice of Tax Farming in the Province of Baghdad in the 1830s', in Imber and Kiyotaki (eds.), *Frontiers of Ottoman Studies*, i, 94. For the Muslims of the Balkans, their historical rivalry with Muslims of the Caucasus may have deepened the impression of traditional factionalism, as Mahmud II surrounded himself with men from the Caucasus. On the rivalry, see Metin Ibrahim Kunt, 'Ethno-Regional (Cins) Solidarity in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Establishment', *Internat. Jl Middle East Studies*, v (1974).

[58] Avigdor Levy, 'The Officer Corps in Sultan Mahmud II's New Ottoman Army, 1826–39', *Internat. Jl Middle East Studies*, ii (1971).

[59] BOA, Cev. Dah. 7942, mid Apr. 1831; BOA, HH 21257–A, 1830–1.

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Reşid and his ilk.[60] Although rumours of events such as the massacre of Bitola circulated, the greater tools of propaganda dissemination available to the sultan, including the new official gazette *Takvim-i Vekayı* (its founding a sign in itself of Istanbul's recognition of popular alienation), probably helped to staunch the flow of support to the rebels. Mahmud also undertook a practically unprecedented month-long tour to Edirne and the Dardanelles, the strategic points in Istanbul's European military perimeter; this visit and four others between 1830 and 1837, intended to demonstrate Mahmud's concern for his subjects, were aimed at countering the discontent that alienated people from the regime.[61] Such efforts helped Mahmud to remain sultan until his death in 1839, but control over the provinces left to him remained shaky, in part because of a new ideological enemy.

V

MEHMED ALI

Istanbul's control over the western Balkans had been reasserted by 1832 but rested on an insecure base. The full nature of the danger posed by Mahmud's tenuous hold upon the loyalty of the empire's Muslims became clearer with the rise of Mehmed Ali's challenge to his sultan. Mehmed Ali was an Albanian provincial militia officer in the Ottoman force that entered Egypt when the French army brought by Napoleon withdrew in 1801. Through astute political manoeuvring, he won Istanbul's appointment as governor of Egypt, the richest Ottoman Arab province, in 1805. After consolidating tight political and economic control there, he transformed the local military into a modern army by adopting European-style technology, training and conscription. The new army proved its effectiveness in Africa, Arabia and Greece, and it conquered Syria and part of Anatolia in open conflict with the sultan's forces beginning in 1831. Mehmed Ali had to relinquish control over his Syrian and Anatolian acquisitions in 1841, gaining in return permanent appointment to the governorship of Egypt, which was also made heritable among his descendants.

[60] The *fetva* (fatwa) is reproduced in *Tarih-i Lutfi*, iii, 186.
[61] Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, 440; Cengiz Kırlı, 'Kahvehaneler ve Hafiyeler: 19. Yüzyıl Ortalarında Osmanlı'da Sosyal Kontrolu' [Coffee-Houses and Informants: Ottoman Social Control in the Mid 19th Century], *Toplum ve bilim*, lxxxiii (2000).

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The last of these to govern Egypt was King Faruq, who was overthrown by Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser and other 'Free Officers' in a coup in 1952.

Historians have not appreciated fully the nature of Mehmed Ali's part in the existential crisis that brought on the Tanzimat. His military power alone did not pose the threat, but coupled with his ideological appeal to Muslims, it became a menace to Istanbul. He was the only significant *ancien régime* notable to repel completely Mahmud's assaults upon the power of provincial leaders, although as a military modernizer Mehmed Ali faced religiously inspired resistance in Egypt on grounds similar to those seen elsewhere in the empire.[62] His demonstration of military effectiveness showing that the old system could function under competent command, however, not only limited the domestic problems he faced in comparison to Mahmud's loss of authority among Muslims, but also, combined with his position as last representative of the once-legitimate order and his wider image as a good Muslim and just ruler, enabled him to tap into the disquiet aroused by the harsh methods of Mahmud.

As with Buşatlı Mustafa, part of Mehmed Ali's appeal lay in the fact that, by standards prevailing until Mahmud's reign, he remained a loyal and competent Ottoman provincial governor until the 1830s. His conflict with Mahmud has obscured his earlier use of power to further Istanbul's interests as well as his own. Selim III had lost Mecca and Medina to the Wahhabis, and his successor as 'Protector of the Holy Places', Mahmud, failed to regain them; Mehmed Ali undertook the difficult and expensive task of restoring the sultan's control, liberating the Hijaz and then breaking Wahhabi power across Arabia, not once but twice (1811–18 and 1836–9). He brought Sudan into the empire, and he almost rescued the Ottoman cause in fighting the Greek rebellion. The Greek experience proved a turning point, however, because the unceasing demands issuing from Istanbul suggested that the sultan would not hesitate to exhaust Egypt's resources to further his campaign to reassert control over provinces. And the methodical humbling of provincial leaders such as Buşatlı Mustafa left

[62] Khaled Fahmy, 'Mutiny in Mehmed Ali's New Nizami Army, April–May 1824', in Jane Hathaway (ed.), *Mutiny and Rebellion in the Ottoman Empire* (Madison, 2002), 129–38.

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little doubt that Mahmud would crush him, in turn, once his military might was spent.

Mehmed Ali sent his son Ibrahim to seize Syria in 1831, thereby securing the only practicable invasion route for an army dispatched from Anatolia. He certainly took advantage of the unrest to be seen in Ottoman provinces; he proclaimed that he was establishing 'the just state' in Syria and charged Ibrahim to protect the Muslims as Istanbul had once done but no longer could, which initially led the population to welcome his rule.[63] Ibrahim defeated in succession three Ottoman armies mustered to repel him, and his victory at Konya left Istanbul defenceless before him at the end of 1832. Yet Mehmed Ali refused to unleash Ibrahim upon the capital or to demand recognition of independence from the sultan. His hesitation stemmed from his sense of loyalty to the sultan since, echoing Buşatlı Mustafa, he blamed Mahmud's officers for causing tension between Cairo and Istanbul.[64] Mahmud's vulnerability, however, led the sultan to the previously unthinkable: formal alliance with Russia in 1833, making the most reviled Ottoman foe the protector of the throne and the source of equipment and expertise for military modernization.

Mahmud's Russian alliance was unpopular among Ottoman Muslims, but he had little choice. He had exacted a heavy toll upon the empire's human and material resources in his effort to create an effective army, but the results were disappointing. His new force drew recruits primarily from Anatolia and the settled Turkish-speaking Muslims of the eastern Balkans, and it remained limited in size; when Ibrahim crushed Istanbul's new army, the state had to replenish its forces from the wider pool of fighting-age men: the general Muslim population. But would they fight with commitment? Istanbul discovered at Konya that they would not.

Reşid Mehmed Pasha was still grand vizier in 1832, and in the run-up to Konya he tried to repeat his successes in Albania.

[63] Asad Rustum, 'Idara al-Sham: Ruhuha wa Haykaluha wa Atharuha' [The Administration of Syria: Its Spirit, Structure and Effect], in *Dhikra al-Batal al-Fatih Ibrahim Basha, 1848–1948* [Remembering the Conquering Hero Ibrahim Pasha, 1848–1948] (Cairo, 1948), 107–10, 126; Judith Mendelsohn Rood, 'Mehmed Ali as Mutinous Khedive: The Roots of Rebellion', in Hathaway (ed.), *Mutiny and Rebellion in the Ottoman Empire*, 125; Douwes, *Ottomans in Syria*, 190, 195–7.

[64] Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, his Army and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge, 1997), 67–73, 285–9.

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Mahmud named him governor of Egypt, and Reşid raised a force to drive Ibrahim from Anatolia and Syria. Despite his history in the Balkans, he ordered the raising of seventy thousand troops from Albania and Bosnia.[65] These were allowed to fight under their customary leaders and to wear their traditional clothing rather than the new, European-style uniforms. In order to make sure that they would fight, however, many hostages were taken to Ottoman strongholds in the Balkans.[66] Reşid's rebuilt army outnumbered that of Ibrahim, but when they met on the battlefield of Konya, Ibrahim won decisively, with Reşid himself being captured.[67]

Blame for the defeat came to be pinned upon the Albanians and Bosnians. The commander of the remnants of Reşid's army claimed that some of the Balkan soldiers fled the battle, while the rest fought half-heartedly.[68] There may have been some scapegoating in the charge, since poor officering was an important problem, but it sounded plausible to Istanbul.[69] British reports affirm the credibility of the charge of reluctance to fight for the regime of Istanbul. The consul in Preveza (Epirus) stated that only an exceptionally severe frost and the Ramadan fast postponed renewed rebellion in Albania, while the consul in Salonika reported that Albanian troops who had arrived there en route to Istanbul's defence after Konya attempted to redirect their transport ships to join Mehmed Ali.[70]

Mahmud remained on the throne, courtesy of Mehmed Ali's restraint and the hasty deployment of Russian forces to protect the capital. Mahmud's position remained weak, however, since he could not rely on the support of his subjects. The protection of the Russians earned the sultan nothing but contempt.[71] Mehmed Ali by contrast rode high in the opinion of many Muslims, both within the empire and outside. In eastern Anatolia the advance of Ibrahim towards Konya had encouraged some dissatisfied with

[65] BOA, HH 20330–A, 1833.

[66] BOA, HH 20076–C, 13 Jan. 1833.

[67] For a description of the battle, see Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men*, 160–7.

[68] BOA, HH 20036–F, 23 Jan. 1833.

[69] Levy, 'Officer Corps in Sultan Mahmud II's New Ottoman Army', 37–8.

[70] Consul Preveza to Foreign Secretary, 25 Jan. 1833: PRO, FO 78/230, 5–7; Consul Salonika to Minister Plenipotentiary Istanbul, 28 Jan. 1833: PRO, FO 195/100, 83.

[71] Consul Preveza to Foreign Secretary, 27 Feb. 1833: PRO, FO 78/230, 26–9; Hanioğlu, *Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, 66.

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Mahmud's regime to rise against the sultan's men; only Ibrahim's abstention from aiding the rebels restored a semblance of peace. In western Anatolia, where Ibrahim did have a strategic interest in extending his influence, he found both notables and ordinary Muslims happy to co-operate with him. And in the Caucasus, the seat of the ethnic faction most opposed to Albanians such as Mehmed Ali, the governor of Egypt came to enjoy strikingly strong attachment from Muslims waging a campaign against Russian domination.[72] Mahmud and his officers did not accept the status quo and periodically tried to weaken Mehmed Ali's position; the governor of Egypt, in turn, had effective means of reminding his sovereign of their respective strengths, including playing upon the disaffection among Muslims. When tensions between governor and sultan rose again in 1835, rebellion broke out anew in the sultan's provinces in eastern Anatolia and the western Balkans, at least in part stirred by the perceived or real support of Mehmed Ali.

In Albania unrest started in the main northern city of Shkodra and quickly spread elsewhere; complaints based upon religion and justice again framed the revolt. To detail the *bidaat* to which rebels objected is unnecessary, but two facts are worth noting. Rebel leadership now rested not with notables or tax farmers whose positions were threatened by centralization, but with the traditional spokesmen for the urban population, the guild leaders, merchants and, above all, the religious figures of Shkodra.[73] The other facet to note is that Mehmed Ali's name helped to expand the rebellion. As they spread into neighbouring districts, the rebels declared that they acted with the permission of 'His Excellency the Sultan of Egypt, Mehmed Ali Pasha', who was part of the great alliance of the servants of God. Messages to 'brother believers' across the region urged them to join the alliance and support its religious goals. Revolt thus again spread through the western Balkans.[74] Istanbul eventually managed to

[72] Meeker, *Nation of Empire*, 241–2; Consul Trabizond to Minister Plenipotentiary Istanbul, 5 Apr. 1833: PRO, FO 195/101; Consul Smyrna to Minister Plenipotentiary Istanbul, 20 Feb. 1833: PRO, FO 195/88, 203–4; Gould, 'Lords or Bandits?', 488; Moshe Gammer, 'The Imam and the Pasha: A Note on Shamil and Muhammad Ali', *Middle Eastern Studies*, xxxii (1996), 339.

[73] Details of the revolt are in BOA, HH 21455–N; BOA, HH 21246–K; BOA, HH 21246–J; BOA, HH 21699–G; BOA, HH 21668, 24 June–18 Aug. 1835; Vice-Consul Shkodra to Consul Preveza, 31 May 1835: PRO, FO 78/261, 285–8.

[74] BOA, HH 21246–H, 9 July 1835; BOA, HH 21246–G, 15 July 1835.

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restore some semblance of submission by a mixture of concessions, fostering of divisions within rebel ranks, military force — and by reaching another temporary reconciliation with Mehmed Ali.

Mahmud died in 1839 before learning that the sultanate had once again lurched into severe crisis. The sparring between Ottoman centre and Egypt over the 1830s had taken its toll on both parties, and in 1838 Mehmed Ali first voiced the wish for independence. This brought the struggle to a climax when, shortly before dying, Mahmud ordered another assault on Ibrahim. Again the sultan's army suffered devastating defeat, leaving Istanbul vulnerable once more.

Here Mahmud's inadequate support among Muslims again became a critical threat. Soldiers from Anatolia had deserted from the Ottoman army during the short, lopsided battle.[75] The Ottoman navy subsequently defected to Mehmed Ali. There were few willing to fight on sea or land against the only effective Muslim leader left in the empire. Shortly before Mahmud's death, the British consul in Salonika had asked notables if the sultan could raise thirty thousand Albanian troops to confront Mehmed Ali. The Albanians' reply was striking: 'if the sultan was at war with any Foreign power not 30, but 100 (thousand) men, were ready for him, if he required them, but against Mehemet Alli, he would not be able to raise a single regiment'.[76] Muslims would fight for the Abode of Islam but not to help the Infidel Sultan crush the idealized representative of all that Mahmud had failed to be. Mahmud thus left to his successor a tough challenge: restore support to the throne.

VI

TANZIMAT

Shortly after succeeding Mahmud, Sultan Abdülmecid I issued the 'Rose-Bower' (Gülhane) rescript that inaugurated the Tanzimat. The factor most often cited to explain the shift to more far-reaching modernization was the need to appeal to liberal European powers for support against Mehmed Ali. Far from

[75] Consul Erzurum to Ambassador Istanbul, 13 July 1839: PRO, FO 195/112, 244–5.

[76] Consul Salonika to Ambassador Istanbul, 20 June 1839: PRO, FO 195/100, 403.

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being simply an appeal for foreign aid, the Gülhane decree constituted a vow to the sultan's natural constituency, the Muslims of the empire. Abdülmecid hoped to persuade his subjects not to support Mehmed Ali, the only leader with great prestige across the umma. He therefore promised his sceptical population that he would not rule as Mahmud had but rather in accordance with Islam and the law.

Islam pervades the Gülhane text from beginning to end.[77] Its nature is clear, but modernizationist historians have dismissed its pious content as formulaic window-dressing adopted to protect its supposed author, Mustafa Reşid Pasha, the 'westernizing' foreign minister. The scholar Butrus Abu-Manneh has finally opened the decree to serious analysis on its own terms, although much of his purpose was to show the influence of followers of orthodox Sunni Sufism rather than of Mustafa Reşid.[78] The decree reflects concerns important not only to followers of a particular Sufi path, but also to a wider range of Ottoman Muslims. It opens with the statement that the state had declined because it did not adhere to the shari'a and goes on to promise that the government would act henceforth only in compliance with shari'a and regulations arising therefrom, particularly in matters concerning the protection of life, honour and property. These are exactly the ideals that rebels such as the Albanians and Bosnians took up arms to defend during Mahmud's reign. The decree specifically promises an end to extrajudicial killings and seizure of property. Legal reform was envisaged in setting more just rules for the collection of taxes (especially the abolition of tax-farming) and military conscription.

Contrary to the assumption of both contemporary Europeans and later historians, the edict does *not* promise legal equality to all regardless of religion, but rather that all subjects had the right to be treated in accordance with law and that no one was to be above the law. Legal equality would contravene both shari'a and tradition, which would have nullified the essence of the sacred promises being made. That these promises were indeed sacred in both seriousness and foundation in religious belief was shown by the

[77] *Tarih-i Lutfi*, vi, 61–4; *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East: A Documentary Record*, i, *1535–1914*, ed. J. C. Hurewitz (Princeton, 1956), 113–16.

[78] Butrus Abu-Manneh, 'The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript', *Die Welt des Islams*, new ser., xxxiv (1994). For the more usual interpretation, see Zürcher, *Turkey*, 50–1.

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oaths to uphold them sworn by the sultan, ministers and religious leaders in the Topkapı palace chamber housing the cloak of the Prophet Muhammad.

Copies of the Gülhane decree were sent throughout the empire and reportedly were welcomed by the population.[79] Deputations and declarations of thanks for the proclamation came to Istanbul from various provinces; and while it is impossible to gauge precisely how fully these reflected popular reaction, British consular reports suggest that the decree's promises were welcome, although there remained some scepticism about whether they would be implemented.[80] More telling was the practical aftermath, in which Istanbul saw a marked drop in confrontations with rebellious Muslims, most importantly in the continuing struggle with Mehmed Ali. The common view of Mehmed Ali's eclipse is based upon British sources that assert Britain's dominant role in forcing him to relinquish Syria and southern Anatolia, but Mehmed Ali's correspondence with his son Ibrahim shows that he was determined to fight for what he viewed as his by right. Yet Ibrahim's military position collapsed quickly in 1840. The collapse was aided by rebellion in Syria against Ibrahim's rule, but this seems to have been but part of a more debilitating growth of unease over continuing opposition to Ottoman authority. Ibrahim executed or arrested a number of senior military and civilian aides for 'treason', including even Mehmed Ali's son-in-law who had served as governor-general of Syria for eight years but had established contact with the enemy. The tide of desertions also now reversed, with even senior officers deserting to the sultan's forces, a most revealing change in an officer corps that had previously shown marked loyalty to Mehmed Ali.[81]

Changes in attitude and circumstance spread far beyond Syria. In Istanbul Abdülmecid's regime recognized the threat of disaffection and started systematic collection of information about popular opinion, gathering reports of conversations overheard

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[79] Abu-Manneh, 'Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript', 199. Abu-Manneh's suggestion that the decree targeted Syria overlooks the extent of the troubles in the Balkans and Anatolia.

[80] Consul Trabizond to Consul Erzurum, 30 Jan. 1840: PRO, FO 195/112, 444; Consul Preveza to Ambassador Istanbul, 8 Jan. 1840: PRO, FO 195/137.

[81] Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men*, 272–3, 290–1; Abu-Manneh, 'Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript', 200.

by informants in the streets and coffee-houses of the capital. These reports post-date the Gülhane decree but do show some shift in support from Mehmed Ali to Abdülmecid, especially following the latter's dismissal of the hated grand vizier Husrev Pasha, formerly master of Reşid Mehmed and member of the most powerful circles serving Mahmud II.[82] In Albania Mehmed Ali still had supporters, but they felt powerless to act. In Ioannina province Muslims began to volunteer in large numbers for military service — even in Anatolia, the focus of so much demonstrable disaffection in the recent past.[83] Not all turned to peace and quiet immediately, but from 1840 until the introduction of a range of new administrative and taxation regulations in 1845–6, violence perpetrated by Albanians was directed less at Istanbul's representatives than towards other targets, especially Orthodox Christians. Albanian troops were called in to put down a small Christian uprising in Nish province in 1841, and their depredations quickly became a more serious problem than the revolt had been.[84] Unwelcome as such unrest was, it does suggest that the Gülhane decree and its implementation successfully deflected Muslim anger from the regime itself, restoring stability to the dynasty's domestic standing.

Proper recognition of the audience and contents of the decree gives to the Tanzimat a coherence lacking in established accounts that suggest reform was half-hearted westernization or an exercise in public relations targeting European powers. While the course of Tanzimat politics was far too complex to survey here or even summarize neatly, it appears that reform brought lasting change and made the state stronger, provided that it did not stray far from accepted Islamic precepts.[85] This observation only seems to be disproved by the second important edict of the Tanzimat era, Sultan Abdülmecid's reform act of 1856, which decreed that all Ottoman subjects were equal, regardless of religion.

[82] Cengiz Kırlı, 'Coffeehouses: Public Opinion in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire', in Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman (eds.), *Public Islam and the Common Good* (Leiden, 2004), 80–9; Cengiz Kırlı, 'Through the Grapevine', *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 10–16 Nov. 2005, available online at <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/768/sc2.htm#1>.

[83] Consul Preveza to Ambassador Istanbul, 26 June 1840: PRO, FO 195/137.

[84] Halil İnalcık, *Tanzimat ve Bulgar Meselesi* [The Tanzimat and the Bulgarian Issue] (Istanbul, 1992), 30–1.

[85] On this period, see Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, 447–55.

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While this promise signalled a shift from the Islam-centred precepts of Gülhane, it appeared to be worth the risk. At the time of its adoption, the empire was fighting the Crimean War, and its allies Britain and France pressed for such a decree. In return, however, in the Peace of Paris the empire won recognition of its place in Europe, giving it equality in international law with Christian states and a great power guarantee of its territorial integrity. Since every reform effort since 1792 had had the goal of preserving the empire from the Christian powers, this exchange of promises seemed worthwhile. Yet even the supposed 'westernizing' architect of the Gülhane decree, Mustafa Reşid, was appalled, sure that it would outrage the Muslim population.[86] His concern was justified: popular reaction to the decree showed that Islam retained its motivational power in the empire. The war against Russia had rekindled the jihad spirit, and as in Mahmud II's reign the 1856 edict raised anew the question of what point there might be to fighting, if core beliefs about Islamic practice were to be sacrificed. Riots broke out across the empire. Unlike in the time of Mahmud, however, Istanbul relented to limit Muslim alienation, scaling back plans for putting the equality promise into full effect. Mahmud's successors had learned from his experience that personal devotion to the faith did not win the sovereign automatic support from his core constituency for all he did for, and with, the state.

VII

CONCLUSION

Following defeat in the First World War, the Ottoman empire collapsed; in this sense, reform ultimately failed. However, the failure to prolong the empire's life indefinitely does not confirm the modernizationist view that Ottoman reform was shambolic or mere public relations which failed to meet the aspirations of Christians at home or abroad. Understanding of the empire in the nineteenth century depends upon recognizing that Muslim interests shaped the actions of both the state and the majority of the population — non-Muslim concerns, while noted, were secondary. Properly viewed, the reform age did achieve significant results. Following the near-total collapse of Ottoman power and

[86] *Ibid.*, 459.

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independence in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the reforms strengthened the empire immensely, not just reviving it but transforming it into a modern state. This achievement resulted in part from Istanbul's rethinking of Mahmud's assault on the social order, thus allowing local notables to resume their critical mediating role between centre and provincial society, albeit without retaining their old military responsibilities.[87] At a more fundamental level, however, reform achieved much because it preserved the empire as a *Muslim* state, one that the Muslim population supported through taxes, services and blood. Modernizers could not permit efforts to woo Christians to imperil Muslim support, and secularism was never an option; Islam was necessary for defence of the land, even though it was not sufficient in itself, a truth realized by many long before any serious reform was ever attempted. Mahmud II's reign showed that the Muslim population would not accept schemes that brought divorce to the legitimizing couplet of the dynasty: reform of *devlet* (the state) was intolerable if it meant the loss of *din* (the religion).

As did every sultan at times of war, Mahmud II stoked religious zeal to mobilize and motivate the Muslim soldiery during wars with Russia and in campaigns against Christian rebels. The soldiers who answered his call fought on faith — they could not fight for much else, since the state was too poor or disorganized to pay or look after them properly. Mahmud and his clique felt the force of that faith when they denigrated the contribution of blood and effort provided by provincial Muslims — making these, indeed, into the scapegoats for wars lost by the state. His reforms, intended to improve the defences of the Abode of Islam, were imposed harshly, as exemplified by summary executions and seizures of property. In the eyes of much of the population, 'reform' stripped the empire of the very essence of what made it the Abode of Islam: justice. The religious fervour fuelled by the sultan was thus turned against him, and in the contest between the 'Sultan of Egypt' and the 'Infidel Sultan', many Muslims looked to the challenger with a better reputation as a modernizer and ruler. Mehmed Ali's threat was not to Ottoman control of just Egypt and Syria, but to the internal stability of the empire as a whole.

[87] Albert Hourani, 'Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables', in William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (eds.), *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1968); Anscombe, 'Continuities in Ottoman Centre–Periphery Relations', 246.

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Sultan Abdülhamid II learned from Mahmud's mistakes, reacting with horror to calls for Ottoman troops to be sent in 1882 to reclaim Egypt at last and forestall the British occupation. 'Because the sending of troops is most likely to cause great divisions among Muslims note that the demand is most damaging. Let it be repeated once again that there is nothing so harmful to the Sublime State and can have such dangerous consequences as this business of sending troops'.[88]

As the Egypt incident suggests, the spectre of Muslim discord as the greater threat to the Ottoman state shaped the direction of policy from 1839. Judgements of reform that treat the Gülhane decree as a starting point, a *tabula rasa* untouched by preceding events, miss its significance for the intentions of those who implemented the Tanzimat and the expectations of the state's core constituency. For both the reformers and the Muslim population, the interests of the Islamic community had top priority.

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[88] Selim Deringil, 'Aspects of Continuity in Turkish Foreign Policy: Abdülhamid II and Ismet Inönü', *Internat. Jl Turkish Studies*, iv (1987), 45.

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