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Notions of Order in Ottoman Bureaucratic
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THE STATE'S SECURITY AND THE SUBJECTS'
PROSPERITY: NOTIONS OF ORDER IN OTTOMAN
BUREAUCRATIC CORRESPONDENCE (19TH CENTURY)

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Drawing on the enormous mass of documents available in the Ottoman archives in Istanbul (*Başbakanlık Arşivi*), historians have been able to enhance our understanding of the diplomatic history, economy, social life, military infrastructure and the bureaucratic make-up of the Ottoman Empire. Its intellectual history, however, has been written—logically enough—by drawing on the works of important Ottoman writers, historians and intellectuals. Studies of the development and production of official Ottoman ideology have generally referred to sources such as *fetva* collections or *nasihatnames*. This essay is based instead on documents written in the middle of the 19th century by Ottoman civil servants and military commanders in the provinces on the one hand and, on the other hand, by the central offices of the Ottoman administration—particularly in the chancelleries of the Sublime Porte (*Bab-ı Âli*). It attempts to show that routine Ottoman bureaucratic correspondence can also be an excellent source for understanding the Ottoman political idiom and rhetoric of power.

The political terminology of the Ottoman Tanzimat—a period of reforms beginning with the proclamation of the edict of Gülhane in 1839—has been treated by various authors. Besides purely terminological dictionaries¹ we can find more analytical approaches such as by Ami Ayalon and Bernard Lewis who have not dealt with the Ottoman empire exclusively but nevertheless devoted some attention to Ottoman political terminology.² By focusing on “high” terms of

¹ *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e tarih sözlüğü (deyimler—terimler)*, ed. Necdet Sakaoğlu (Istanbul, 1985).

² Ami Ayalon, *Language and Change in the Arab Middle East: The Evolution of Modern Political Discourse* (New York, 1987); Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago – London, 1988). Helga Rebhan, *Geschichte und Funktion einiger politischer Termini im Arabischen des 19. Jahrhunderts (1798–1882)* (Wiesbaden, 1986), 126, acknowledges the influence of Ottoman on the Arab political language in the second half

power such as *khalife*, *sultan*, *devlet* or *meşrutiyet*,³ Ayalon's and Lewis's work can serve as an elementary guide, yet their elaborations do not enable us to understand which specific situations or challenges elicited what kind of terms and images.

Furthermore, attempts to understand the political agenda and the intellectual universe of elite groups by analyzing their political terminology can be hazardous. Ayalon, for example, intends to show how European institutions and terms were imitated by Arab intellectuals in the 19th century, limiting his analysis to Lebanon and Egypt. Taking a one-dimensional and somewhat condescending approach, Ayalon presents Arabic as a language that has to pass from a stagnant Islamic past to the European-inspired Elysian fields of modernity. What is more, Ayalon believes that the development of Ottoman and Arabic in the 19th century accurately reflect the course of political and institutional change:

To adapt themselves to the new assignments, the Arabic, Turkish and Persian lexicons changed substantially, like the reality whose transformation necessitated their refurbishment. These languages in transition provide a *faithful mirror* of the conceptual changes that brought modern institutions into the Middle East.⁴

However, when attempting to isolate certain key terms of the political idiom as indicators of fundamental political change, we must insist on the disproportionate and erratic nature of change. As Peter Burke rightly points out, settled ideologies tend to avoid more thorough change by preferring minor adaptations until finally the tradition may fall apart in a fundamental intellectual revolution.⁵

Certain terms may serve purposes other than the designation of a clearly specified task or concept. Discussing the ambiguity of the term *vakil* in Iran of the 18th century Christoph Werner points to the quite natural inclination of historians to reconstruct key terms as accurately as possible. Faced with the recalcitrant and chameleon-

of the 19th century, however, the Ottoman political terminology in itself remains outside of her scope.

³ Following terms are treated both by Ayalon and Lewis in their Ottoman context: *devlet*, *divan*, *düstur*, *khalife*, *khan*, *haqan*, *millet*, *padişah*, *qanun*, *re'aya*, *sultan*, *şer'at*, *şeykh*, *teb'a*, *vatan*.

⁴ Ayalon, *Language and Change*, 4; my emphasis.

⁵ Peter Burke, "Stärken und Schwächen der Mentalitätengeschichte," *Mentalitätengeschichte*, ed. Ulrich Raulff (Berlin, 1987), 138.

like character of these terms historians redouble their efforts and continuously enlarge the repertoire of meanings in order to get hold of all the possible aspects of the term in question. The attempt to master an abundance of meanings may lead to nowhere since a term such as *vakil* may indeed have served as a kind of wild card for designating all possible kinds of positions and duties and to cover up the decline of the administrative system in Iran of the 18th century.⁶

Besides the potential opaqueness of terms we may be confronted with the hermetic character of the text as an entity. The speech of traditional authorities tends to be restricted and impoverished and to make use of a socially predetermined reservoir of expressions and images. Formalized speech with its reduced number of variations leads to a predictable chain of arguments and to a diminished choice of possible logical alternatives.⁷ Maurice Bloch's depiction of ritualized forms of speech in traditional societies is also relevant for the Ottoman routine bureaucratic correspondence and the Empire's "everyday language of power" with its high percentage of redundant passages and cliché-like phrases. Ottoman bureaucratic documents in the middle of the 19th century are not uniformly infested by stereotypical formulas. Only the last phrase of each document is regularly reserved for the expression of reverence and obedience to the Sultan. Ottoman bureaucrats were not subjected to strict rules of speech and written exposition but nevertheless they adhered to a codex of representations and formulaic argumentation.⁸

The heuristic shortcomings of Ottoman routine bureaucratic correspondence are significant. Prevalent social norms and the

⁶ Christoph Werner, "Ambiguity in the Meaning. The Vakil in 18th and Early 19th Century Iran," *Proceedings of the Third European Conference of Iranian Studies*, vol. 2: *Medieval and Modern Persian Studies*, ed. Charles Melville (Wiesbaden, 1999), 323 f.

⁷ Maurice Bloch, *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society* (London, 1975), 4–7, 17–21; see particularly p. 15: "The effect of always comparing particular events to the same general illustrations reduces the specificity of utterances so that all events are made to appear as though they were all alike."

⁸ Texts of strongly formulaic and stereotypical character may be found for example in the introductory lines of the appointments of high-ranking officials: see for example Mühimme Defteri 254, *hüküm* 875 (1842), appointment of Haqqı Paşa as governor of Sayda (Lebanon): "... *ehali ve seknesinin saye-i ma'delet-vaye-i mülukanemde himayet ve siyanet ve asar-ı rencişi ve ta'addiden muhafaza ve vıqayetleri esbabı* ..." Indeed, the analysis of traditional, stereotypic and even mechanically invoked textual units, i.e. formulas or preambles may be particularly rewarding as the *topoi* represent the bone structure of mentalities, see Jacques Le Goff, "Eine mehrdeutige Geschichte," *Mentalitätengeschichte*, ed. Ulrich Raulff (Berlin, 1987), 26 f.

discrepancy between often-bleak realities and positive self-image tended to distort its descriptions, making it an unsatisfactory source for the historian in search of "hard facts." At the same time, however, these very qualities make it a fascinating source for the historian interested in ideological processes. As high Ottoman bureaucrats and military officers were sent out into the provinces by the central administration and were no longer recruited in the regions themselves, we have a large and rather homogeneous elite body sharing a more or less consistent world view. The homogeneity of the source material conditioned by the normative world-view of the bureaucrats allows us to observe the emergence of new terms or new nuances of old terms making it possible to identify and describe ideological transformation.

What is needed, then, is an analysis of the Ottoman political idiom which goes beyond a mere inventory of key words, shows the words in their specific contexts and elucidates the change of meaning these terms have experienced.⁹ The notion of drawing upon the corpus of Ottoman bureaucratic documents in order to understand the ideology of the Ottoman Empire's bureaucratic and military elite is by no means breathtakingly new. Selim Deringil's *The Well-Protected Domains* (1998) is explicitly devoted to an analysis of the ideology and the legitimization of power in the Ottoman Empire from 1876 to 1909.¹⁰ The book "is a deliberate attempt to look at the world from Istanbul. I am interested in how the late Ottoman elite reacted to the world around them."¹¹ The aim of creating a state ideology is achieved by propagating symbols of power, one of them being the symbolism of language in Ottoman official documentation, which are "valuable clues as to how the Hamidian bureaucracy conceptualized such matters as the relationship of the ruler and the ruled."¹²

One qualification may be added at this point: It is (and probably will always be) a controversial issue to what extent the Tanzimat represented an abrupt change in the political culture of the Ottoman empire. Historical evidence seems to suggest that a deep transfor-

⁹ Dietmar Rothermund, *Geschichte als Prozeß und Aussage* (Munich, 1994), 161.

¹⁰ Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909* (London - New York, 1998).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 21. Deringil deals then only in a very short chapter (pp. 39-43) with the aspect of language.

mation did indeed take place in the Tanzimat period but that it was embedded in the venerable Ottoman bureaucratic and political tradition. When discussing the rhetoric of the Tanzimat one must give heed to the persistence of terminology. In order to gauge the changes in the political terminology and rhetoric of the Tanzimat we will in the long run need to obtain a good understanding of the pre-Tanzimat stock of Ottoman rhetorical clichés and phrases. The question will not then be to what extent the Tanzimat drew on this tradition (this may not be doubted), but to what extent the Tanzimat rhetoric remodeled these terms and reinterpreted their meaning. Such a task demands years, if not decades of diligent textual analysis and will not be pursued here.¹³ It seems legitimate in the meanwhile to limit our reconstruction of the Ottoman rhetoric of power to the Tanzimat period exclusively. The Ottoman reform period covers roughly four decades, a period long enough to make the phenomena of persistence and transformation visible and to follow the emergence of a new rhetoric of power and order.

Security and Prosperity

Almost forty years ago Şerif Mardin remarked that the Young Ottomans cannot be understood “if they are not set into the general framework of a deep, genuine and all-pervasive concern for the welfare of the Islamic community.”¹⁴ According to Selim Deringil, Hamidian state policy showed a more secular and utilitarian stance. It aimed at “the institution of a secular foundation for state ideology, but through the use of Islamic vocabulary and ideological tools.”¹⁵ After having sifted a great amount of documents it seems rather that the Ottoman routine bureaucratic correspondence during the Tanzimat period shows, if anything, a kind of secularized “Islamic” vocabulary. References to God and the shari‘a are frequent, but they are not prominent and have to be understood as simple figures of speech.

¹³ See for a venture in this vein the web-based *Ottoman Historical Dictionary*, to be consulted at <<http://courses.washington.edu/otap/>>.

¹⁴ Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton, 1962), 105.

¹⁵ Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, 14.

At the heart of the Tanzimat political idiom¹⁶ is a state ideology of order *cum* prosperity. Central to it is the term *asayış*¹⁷ (public order, public tranquility; repose, rest).¹⁸ Similar to it, but more narrowly referring to the technical production of security is *emniyyet* (safety, freedom of fear, security; confidence, belief; the police, the law). Security is granted by the state to its subjects, but the state is entitled in recompense to the subjects' complete obedience. The immediate outcome and positive product of *asayış* is prosperity, expressed by the terms *rahat* (ease, rest, comfort, tranquillity) or *istirahat* and *refah* (easy circumstances, comfort, luxury, affluence). The term *refah* is based on the general notion of *mülkün ma'murluğu*¹⁹ (flourishing condition, prosperity) which seems nothing else than the Roman *salus publica* (public wealth) in an Ottoman disguise.²⁰ Prosperity, hand in hand with security, will be of maximum benefit to the state's and society's order.²¹ Although the relationship between the ruler and the ruled is principally reciprocal—balancing the giving (of security) and the taking (of prosperity)—emphasis is laid on the obedience of the ruled subject.²²

Besides the obligation to ensure security, the state is obliged to render justice, i.e. '*adalet* (justice, equity) with variations such as *nısfet* or *haqqanıyyet*²³—to be understood in its original meaning of "bal-

¹⁶ All the following citations given in the footnotes are, if not otherwise indicated, taken from documents in the Başbakanlık Arşivi, Istanbul. The reader may skip over the citations in the footnotes without losing the thread of the argument.

¹⁷ See for example İrade Mesail-i Mühimme 1117, varak 9 (1842): "*hüsn-i niyyet-i seniyye-i mülukane icabınca ehali ve sekene-i memalik-i şahanenin her tarafda istiknal-ı vesa'il-i asayışleri pek aşırı mütezim bulunduğui*"; in official Ottoman documents in French language the respective terms are *tranquillité* besides *calme*, *paix publique* or *ordre*.

¹⁸ All translations of Ottoman terms given in brackets rely on *New Redhouse Turkish-English Dictionary* (Istanbul, 1981⁴). The translations given in Redhouse must not always be assumed to correspond perfectly with the nature and meaning of the term given in the rhetorical figure. This divergence is to be expected as most terms have a wide spectrum of meaning.

¹⁹ The term does not appear in routine Tanzimat bureaucratic correspondence.

²⁰ Hans-Georg Majer, "Wie stellten sich die Osmanen zur Wohlfahrt ihrer Länder?," *Die Türkei in Europa*, ed. Klaus-Detlev Grothusen (Göttingen, 1979), 69.

²¹ See for example Bab-ı Ali Evrak Odası 01-A/73, varak 37, proclamation of Davud Paşa und Bahri Paşa to the Christian inhabitants of Dayr al-Qamar in Mount Lebanon in May 1845: "*Saye-i qudret-vaye-i hazret-i padişahide bi'l-cümle ehali ve teb'anun asayış ve istirahat ve emniyyetlerini müstelzim olur vesa'ilin istihsalı muqteza-yı irade-i seniyye ve muvafiq 'aleyh olduğuna bina'en . . .*"

²² Lewis, *Political Language of Islam*, 91, argues in a religious-essentialist vein when he says obedience is "a religious obligation, defined and imposed by holy law and grounded in revelation. Disobedience is therefore a sin as well as a crime."

²³ The performative term *ihqaq-ı huquq* (establishing justice) although completely

ance" and "equilibrium."²⁴ Thus, *'adalet* may not be misunderstood as referring to the concept of a state that guarantees the rights of the individual.²⁵ The aim is a balanced, but nevertheless complete enforcement of the state's law and prerogatives—be they religiously legitimized or otherwise. Such a stress on public order and just rule as the condition for the general welfare is not at all surprising.²⁶ It is a common feature to the legitimizing rhetoric of all states; one may see for comparison the American constitution of 1787 that stresses the necessity of "domestic tranquility" and "general welfare."²⁷

The state's quest for order and prosperity is motivated not only by the determination to procure justice and equity, but also by the moral obligation to show *merhamet* (mercy, compassion, pity; with slight variations such as *rahm*, *şefqat*, *inayet*, *'atıfet*).²⁸ *'Adalet* and *merhamet* may therefore appear in combination.²⁹ The compound image of the state's obligations and entitlements is often sublimated in the pervasive concept of the state as a "guardian/protector." A variety of terms

absent in bureaucratic correspondence, is of particular importance in treatises dealing with the concept of justice and equity, see for example Christoph Neumann, *Das indirekte Argument: Ein Plädoyer für die Tanzimat vermittelt der Historie* (Münster, 1994), 238.

²⁴ Ann K.S. Lambton, "Justice in the Medieval Persian Theory of Kingship," *Studia Islamica* 17 (1962), 119: "From both Sasanian and Greek sources came the doctrine of the "mean," which was to be achieved by the maintenance of equipoise, and which tended to express itself in a tendency towards conservatism."

²⁵ On the notion of justice and equity in medieval theories of statecraft which always imply the existence of "an impassable gulf between the ruler and the ruled," see Ann K.S. Lambton, "Quis Custodiet Custodes: Some Reflections on the Persian Theory of Government," *Studia Islamica* 5 (1956), 128, 132. Lambton, "Justice," 93, stresses also the theological foundations of the concept of justice: "The basis of the conception of justice for the Muslim was the keeping of the covenant which God had freely made with His servants, and this meant submission and worship. Thus the *dar al-Islam* was also the *dar al-'adl*."

²⁶ According to Shlomo Goitein, however, the ruler in the medieval Islamic world procured only security and justice. Welfare was the concern of God; *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, vol. 2 (Berkeley, 1971), 349, 404.

²⁷ In the preamble to the U.S. constitution as resolved upon by the constitutional assembly on 17 September 1787; see Harold J. Spaeth, Edward Conrad Smith, *The Constitution of the United States* (New York, 1991¹³), 199.

²⁸ İrade Mesail-i Mühimme 1129, varak 12: Sayda müşhiri Es'ad Paşa on 7 Zilqade 1258/10 December 1842: "*aşîkar olan rahm ve şefqat ve inayet* (of the state)."

²⁹ See for example I. Testa, *Recueil des Traités de la Porte ottomane avec les puissances étrangères depuis le premier traité conclu, en 1536, entre Suléyman I et François I jusqu'à nos jours*, vol. 6 (1884), 91, proclamation of Fu'ad Paşa on 19 July 1860 in Beirut: The bloody confrontations in Mount Lebanon have afflicted the Sultan with grief, "dont la justice et la miséricorde s'étendent à tous ses sujets également et sans distinction."

such as *himayet* (protection, defense, support), *siyanet* and *muhafaza*—besides those mentioned already above—are all expressions of the notion of guardianship.

Successful administration and good government are reflected by the contentment and satisfaction of the population, expressed in terms such as *khoşnud* (satisfied, pleased, contented)³⁰ and *khoşnudiyyet*, *memnun* (pleased, happy, glad, delighted, satisfied) and *memnuniyyet*. They find their matching pair (as obligation towards the state) in the terms *mutava'at* (submitting, yielding, complying, conforming, submission) or *ita'at*, *mütaba'at*, *inqiyad*, all involving the notion of obedience. A major token of obedience is the paying of taxes, all the more so as paying taxes is, according to Ottoman state doctrine, equivalent to the recognition of the state's legitimacy.³¹ Transgressions of and offences against the order are initially treated as an aberration. People have to be treated as "plutôt en enfants égarés qu'en sujets coupables."³² The Ottoman state's view of its people was—on a normative basis—always positively tinged: "The people as a whole were always good, they were occasionally led astray by certain malicious and perfidious elements, but were potentially always capable of loyalty."³³ The classic Ottoman notion of order can thus be summarized in the following words:

The proper order of the world is predicated upon all knowing their place and function and remaining in it, exhibiting no further ambition or aspiration for social mobility.³⁴

If a policy of lenient force and persuasion is of no avail, measures will be applied on a scale increasingly reprimanding and repressive,³⁵ ranging from *istimalet* (a trying to persuade, a gaining goodwill, a

³⁰ See for one example İrade Mesail-i Mühimme 1125, *irade* from 7 Şaban 1258/13 September 1842: "*idare-i hazıra ve 'adileden ibraz-ı kemal-i hoşnudi ve teşekkür...*"

³¹ Colin Imber, *Ebu's-su'ud: The Islamic Legal Tradition* (Edinburgh, 1997), 71. "In Hanafi doctrine, taxation is an element in a reciprocally binding contract between the ruler and people: there is no taxation without protection (*al-jibaya bi'l-himaya*)."

³² Bab-ı Ali Evrak Odası 01-A/90, varak 9 on 2 October 1845, special Ottoman commissioner Şekib Efendi in Mount Lebanon in a letter to the European consuls in Beirut.

³³ Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, 40.

³⁴ Rifaat Abou-el-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State: The Ottoman Empire 16th to 18th Centuries* (New York, 1991), 32.

³⁵ Imber, *Ebu's-su'ud*, 71. According to Islamic law the ruler has, before resorting to repression, to call the Muslim rebels "to return to the [rightful] congregation, and investigate the cause of the rebellion."

coaxing) via *tehdid* (threat, menace) to *quvve-i cebriyye* (compulsory force).³⁶ Disturbances of the public order can be manifold in their degree of intensity. They may range from any minor turbulence and offence, expressed by the omnipresent and very flexible term *uygun-suzluk* (unsuitability, unseemliness, impropriety, bad behavior) via terms such as *harekat-ı na-marziyye* (unpleasant activities) and *halat-ı reddiyye* (corrupt circumstances) to open sedition and riot. Starting with *gha'ile* (anxiety, trouble, worry, period of disturbance, war) trouble and disturbance can go to the extremes of *fesad* (malice, depravity, intrigue, duplicity, mischief, sedition, disorder) and *'isyan* (rioting, rebellion, insurrection, riot, revolt). *Fesad* and *'isyan* clearly imply that there are instigators and culprits who have caused the breakdown of public order.³⁷ Repression of all forms of disobedience and castigation of the culprits, expressed in terms such as *te'dib* (chastening, punishing for a fault), *guşmal* or *terbiye*, shall not only restore public order, but is also meant to be an *'ibret*, a salutary example and indeed a "terreur salutaire."³⁸

The political idiom and rhetoric used in the routine bureaucratic correspondence during the Tanzimat period does not deviate from traditional rhetorical patterns (an assessment that, as indicated above, will have to be corroborated by an exhaustive study of pre-Tanzimat samples). From the material two images of a cyclical order emerge very clearly. The first is the circle of equity—a well-known notion in Islamic writing on statecraft. Ibn Balkhi describes in his *Fars-nama*, dedicated to the Seljuk Sultan Muhammad b. Malikshah (reg. 1105–1118), the maxim to which had allegedly adhered the pre-Islamic Persian kings: "There is no kingdom without an army, no army without wealth, no wealth without material prosperity, and no material

³⁶ See for a good example of this scale of repression: İrade Dahiliye 10505, 'arz tezkiresi from 16 Rebiülevvel 1265/10 February 1849 on a tribe in Northern Albania: "Mat qazasında ka'in Zoq qabilesinin harekat-ı na-marziyyelerine mebnî muqaddem ve mu'akkhar haqqlarında icra olunan istimalet ve nasihat ve mu'amele-i tehdidin te'siri görülemediginden . . . quvve-i cebriyye ira'esıyle ehali-i merqume da'ire-i inqıyada idkhal olundugu . . ."

³⁷ A fact that is elucidated by the multitude of terms referring to persons having caused sedition and rebellion such as *fasid* (pl. *fesede*), *müfsid*, *erbab-ı fesad*, *'âsi* (pl. *usat*), *serkeş*, *bagi*.

³⁸ Testa, *Recueil*, vol. 6, 274, memorandum of 'Abro Efendi on 4 May 1861 to the European members of the joint commission supervising the restoration of order in Mount Lebanon and Damascus: "Le châtiment dont Damas a été frappé servit d'exemple salutaire à tout le pays, qui, sous la sensation que lui imprimait la force de la main de la justice souveraine, est rentré sans retard dans le cercle de ses devoirs."

prosperity without justice.”³⁹ The circle of equity, a concept to be found in the work of other theoreticians of statecraft,⁴⁰ established itself firmly in the inventory of Ottoman political theory:

... the survival of the state depends on the prosperity of the subjects, in particular the peasantry. They pay the taxes which enable the sultan to maintain the military and the bureaucratic apparatus. The prosperity of the subjects depends on justice and it is the function of the sultan to render justice.⁴¹

From the vast material of Tanzimat bureaucratic correspondence a second cycle can be extracted—one that describes the incessant alternation between order and disorder: The ideal order of security *cum* prosperity is always endangered by negative events and evildoers. By admonition and, in the last resort, by physical violence, order is to be restored. Culprits are chastened and the old equilibrium is regained (see fig. 1: The Ideal Order).

The official announcements of the Tanzimat stressed the quest for enlightened state policy and sought a new basis on which to legitimize the rule of the central power over the polity. However, the standard terminology of the bureaucracy stuck closer to the traditional concepts of order. All the images and terms that have been discussed to this point were in use not only in the early Tanzimat period but also in the later phases which started with the second reform edict of 1856 and were to be enforced even in the empire’s most remote provinces. New concepts—central to the Tanzimat ideology—did not supersede old concepts but only supplemented them, e.g. the confessionally neutral *teb’a* which could be applied for all subjects of the Ottoman state coexisted with the representation of the Christian people as members of the “flock” (*re’aya*). Tanzimat rhetoric and political terminology remained deeply embedded in the traditional Ottoman imagination of a perfect order and society.

³⁹ Lambton, “Justice,” 100.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 106 f., points to Nizam al-Mulk (1018–1092), al-Ghazali (1058–1111) and Kay Ka’us b. Iskandar (11th century), all contemporaries of Muhammad b. Malikshah.

⁴¹ Dick Douwes, *The Ottomans in Syria: A History of Justice and Oppression* (London – New York, 2000), 3.

Figure 1. The Ideal Order

Towards a New and Final Order

From the third decade of the Tanzimat onwards, however, we can observe a fundamental change—the emergence of a new notion of order which partially complements, partially supersedes the old one. Representative of the complementary aspect of the new concept of order is the use of the terms *terbiye* und *te'dib*. Whereas in the early Tanzimat period *terbiye* was used synonymous with *gusmal* (punishing by twisting the ear; rebuke, reproof, reprimand) in the meaning of chastisement,⁴² *terbiye* and *te'dib* carried in the later decades the ambiguous meaning of disciplining (superseding the more straightforward notion of punishment) and education.⁴³ The superimposition character of the new concept is more prominent than the complementary one: the cyclical image of order is completely replaced by a “one-way” concept—instead of being continuously obliged to restore the always-precarious order the Ottoman state and authorities are firmly resolved upon establishing a new and final order. Peoples now have be brought to their senses, once and for all the eternal cycle of order-disorder-order must be broken.

One case study may help to illustrate what a substantial change Tanzimat political strategies and rhetoric underwent from the 1860s onwards. The Mirdite tribe, situated roughly between Shkodra and Tirana in northern Albania, was one of the numerous Catholic mountain tribes bound to the Ottoman governmental unit of Shkodra. The Mirdites were well known for their “great intensity of feeling of patriotic solidarity.”⁴⁴ Hyacinthe Hecquard, French consul in Shkodra in the 1850s, called the Mirdita (i.e. the region where the Mirdites lived) a “kind of aristocratic republic” and the “most remarkable” of all the tribal entities in Northern Albania.⁴⁵ Strategically situated, as they were, the Mirdites could easily block the roads from

⁴² See for example BEO A.MKT.MHM 01–A 91, varak 2, Şekib Efendi on 24 October 1845, reporting from Mount Lebanon to the Porte: “*ehali-i cebel tarafından tereddüd ve ihtilaf görülerek kuvve-i cebriyye îmalıyle te'dib ve terbiyeleri lazım geldiği halde . . .*”

⁴³ On the ambiguity of *terbiye* see also Akşin Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire 1839–1908: Islamization, Autocracy, and Discipline* (Leiden, 2001), 59.

⁴⁴ Ludwig von Thallóczy, “Türkischer Gesetzesentwurf betreff Kodifizierung des albanischen Gewohnheitsrechtes,” *Illyrisch-albanische Forschungen*, ed. Ludwig von Thallóczy, vol. 1 (Munich – Leipzig, 1916), 484.

⁴⁵ Hyacinthe Hecquard, *Histoire et description de la Haute Albanie ou Guégarie* (Paris, 1858), 228 and 10.

Middle Albania and Kosovo to Shkodra.⁴⁶ The population of the Mirdita must have numbered around 20,000 persons in the middle of the 19th century.⁴⁷

The Ottoman attitude towards the Mirdites was traditionally based on the principle of cooptation signified by the term *istimalet*⁴⁸ (with many variations such as *celb*, *inale*, *tatyib*, *te'lif*, *ülfet* and *imtizac*). The technique of cooptation aimed at a rather loose control of and untroubled and agitation-free coexistence of various ethnic groups. In compensation for rendering military services and being engaged in military campaigns in the European parts of the Ottoman Empire the Mirdites were exempted to a large extent from tax payments and were granted a high degree of autonomy. Their loyalty towards the state was not defined as *mutava'at* as the case would be with regular subjects, but was designated with the standard term *hüsn-i khidmet ve sadaqat* ("good services and loyalty")—very often supplemented with the phrase "from olden times" (*öteden beri*).⁴⁹ In recompense for their services, the state granted the Mirdites privileges (*imtiyazat*), particularly in the form of tax exemptions. However, with the 1860s the picture slowly changes. In the 1850s unruly behavior of the Mirdites was still accepted to a certain extent and only major transgressions were deemed as worthy for punishment.⁵⁰ From roughly 1865 onwards, however, Ottoman

⁴⁶ Even at the beginning of the 20th century the Mirdites were well-known for their habit of sabotaging the telegraph line to Shkodra when their salaries as "street guardians" were not regularly paid; see Edith Durham, *High Albania* (London, 1985 [1909]), 323.

⁴⁷ Hecquard, *Histoire*, his *tableau statistique* attached to the enclosed map enumerates 22,300 inhabitants. An Austrian-Hungarian *enquête* in 1918 counted 16,926 inhabitants, see Peter Bartl, "Die Mirditen: Bemerkungen zur nordalbanischen Stammesgeschichte," *Münchener Zeitschrift für Balkankunde* 1 (1978), 28.

⁴⁸ According to Halil İnalcık, "Empire and Population," *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Halil İnalcık (Cambridge, 1994), 18, *istimalet* was originally a strategy of reconciliation in newly conquered territories.

⁴⁹ For one example amongst many see İrade Meclis-Vala 4407, notice of the *sefasker* (leff 2) from 2 Şaban 1265/23 June 1849 and identically in 'arz tezkiresi on Gurre Muharrem 1266/17 November 1849: "...qabile-i merqumenin öteden beri hüsn-i khidmet ve sadaqatları meşhud olmasına... nazaran..." see also leff 3, Meclis-i Ahkam-ı 'Adliyye from 8 Zilhicce 1265/26 October 1849: "hüsn-i khidmet ve sadaqat ederek bunden böyle uğur-ı devlet-i 'aliyyede cansıparane gayret edecekleri derkar..." for other examples using the *öteden beri*-phrase see İrade Hariciye 6821, 'arz tezkiresi from 21 Zilqade 1272/24 July 1856; İrade Hariciye 11845, *mutasarrıf* of Shkodra, İsmâ'il Paşa, to the Sublime Porte on 12 February 1864.

⁵⁰ Examples of impatience with the Mirdites can be found already in the 1850s, see for example İrade Meclis-i Mahsus 405, leff 4, *tezkire* of the Sublime Porte from

impatience with Mirdite autonomy and anarchy began to grow. The autonomous status of the Mirdita was no longer accepted and the insistence of the Mirdites on their privileges was derogated as unfounded.

From the late 1860s onwards the old privileges that Ottoman documents had confirmed in the 1850s without reservation and even proudly, were now refuted as self-aggrandizing and unfounded Mirdite claims.⁵¹ The Mirdites were characterized in the process as notorious rebels. Particularly noteworthy is that the phrase *öteden beri*, which had been always used in connection with the Mirdites' good services and loyalty, was now linked with an ingrown tradition of Mirdite rebelliousness and brigandage.⁵² The Mirdites were furthermore denounced because of their alleged barbarian character (*vahşi*) and complete ignorance (*cahiliyyet*), both of which were presented as the major reason for their habit of disobedience.⁵³

The necessity to punish and castigate the unruly Mirdites was expressed by the terms *te'dib ve terbiye*,⁵⁴ carrying the meaning of punishment and education. The way to correct the Mirdite corruption was not simply to strike the population and make them obey. The aim was now more ambitious: to make them succumb completely to the new reforms which were prominently embodied by the term *ıslah* (amelioration, betterment, correction; improvement, reformation), and to discipline them through *inzibat* (discipline).⁵⁵

28 Ramazan 1273/22 May 1857. But these rebukes did not yet lead to a basic change of the Ottoman attitude towards the Mirdites.

⁵¹ See for examples İrade Dahiliye 40955, leff 1, Ahmed Es'ad, *vali* of Shkodra, to the Sublime Porte on 24 February 1869; almost identically reiterated in the concluding '*arz tezkiresi* from 14 March 1869: "Merditaluların beyinde lisanında devran etmekde olan imtiyaz ve istisna sözü dahi ortadan qalmaq olacağı . . ."

⁵² See for example İrade Şura-yı Devlet 1218, '*arz tezkiresi* from 8 March 1873.

⁵³ İrade Dahiliye 42799, leff 1, İbrahim Derviş, *mutasarrıf* of Shkodra on 23 May 1870: "*öteden beri tebayı'-i vahşiyye ve 'adat-ı bedeviiyye ile me'luf olan Merdita ehali*si;" İrade Dahiliye 42799, '*arz tezkiresi* from 6 July 1870: "Merdita ehalisinin mine'l-qadim vahşet ve khuşunet-i mizacları iqtizasınca hükümet 'aleyhine nabeca guftuguden khali olmadıkları misillü . . .;" İrade Dahiliye 43198, *mutasarrıf* of Shkodra, İsmâ'il Haqqı on 20 September 1870: "*ehalisinin mübtela oldukları cehaletden tahsil eden vahşet ve khuşunet*;" İrade Dahiliye 43198, '*arz tezkiresi* from 15 October 1870: "Mirdita nahiyesi ehali cehl ve nadanlıqları cihetle öteden beri hal-ı vahşetde . . ."

⁵⁴ *Terbiye* meaning "correcting, chastising, punishing, educating, good manners;" *te'dib* "chastening, a punishing for a fault, a teaching polite manners, moral education."

⁵⁵ İrade Dahiliye 42799, leff 1: İbrahim Derviş, *vali* of Shkodra, on 23 May 1870: "... *ıslah-ı hal ve ta'dil-i efkârları lüzumu* . . .;" İrade Dahiliye 43198, İsmâ'il Haqqı, *vali* of Shkodra, on 20 September 1870: "... *ve nahiye-i merqumenin [= Mirdita] etraf ve*

Figure 2. Towards the New and Final Order

The old concept of the sovereign guaranteeing prosperity and granting security had been superseded by the far more ambitious project to civilize the Mirdites and procure a higher standard of education and living. İsmâ'il Haqqı, *vali* of Shkodra, argued in 1870 that the Mirdites had turned to robbery because of their dire need and poverty. Therefore they would have to be inculcated with the principles of civilization through newly established schools and then be made to adapt themselves slowly to agricultural work.⁵⁶ The relationship between disciplining and civilizing is more than once made clear. In 1873, a memorandum of the state council argues that the installation of local councils and the introduction of the Ottoman administrative system would help to civilize the Mirdites.⁵⁷

In the 1870s Ottoman authorities strove to finally break the resistance of the Mirdites. Şevket Paşa (1843–1873) forced upon the Mirdita the installation of the administrative unit of *qaymaqamlıq* and abrogated officially the use of Albanian customary law. During his second term of office from June to November 1873 his attitude towards the Mirdites stiffened even more and he let several officers and 40 privates of the Mirdite gendarmerie arrest during a visit to Shkodra. When the Mirdites rose in a revolt against the Ottoman authorities a military expedition was organized heading for the Mirdita. Soon after the campaign had to be called off. Şevket Paşa had drowned in the Boyana, the first of the many rivers which had to be crossed on the way from Shkodra to the Mirdita.⁵⁸ The abortive expedition was symptomatic for the overall failure to establish Ottoman

civarı . . . henüz tamamiyle da'ire-i inzibata alınmamış bir takım mahaller olduğundan;" İrade Dahiliye 44244, İsmâ'il Haqqı, *vali* of Shkodra, on 8 July 1871: "(in the Mirdita) bazı mu'amalat-ı ıslahiyye ve inzibatıyye bi't-tedric te'sis etdirilmeğe başlayup . . .;" İrade Şura-yı Devlet 1218, 'arz tezkiresi' on 8 March 1873: "(in the Mirdita) rü'esa ve seknesi kamilen dakhil-i da'ire-i inqiyad olmalarıyla mevaqif-i sa'ire misillii mahall-ı mezburede dahi usul-ı idare ve vesa'il-i ıslahiyye ve zabitenin te'sis ve istihsali . . ."

⁵⁶ İrade Dahiliye 43198, İsmâ'il Haqqı, *vali* of Shkodra, on 20 September 1870: "ehali-i merqume [Mirdites and the people of adjacent regions] khilaf-ı murzi her ne hareketde bulunmuş ise de muqabilinde terbiye ve te'dibe bedel-i khalas ve serbesti görmüş olmalarıyla fikren ve tavren büsbütün vahşet ve 'adem-i ita'at taraflarına yüz tutar gibi bir hale dökülmüş olmağdan ve bunların vahşet ve khusunetlerini izale ve kendülerini da'ire-i inqiyada celb ve imale için;" repeated in 'arz tezkiresi' of 15 October 1870: "qava'id-i medeniyyeti telqin ile."

⁵⁷ İrade Şura-yı Devlet 1218, Şura-yı Devlet on 26 February 1873: "Merditaların da'ire-i ita'at ve medeniyete alınması . . ."

⁵⁸ Gert Robel, "Bemerkungen zur Geschichte Nordalbanien 1853–1875," *Dissertationes Albanicae in honorem Josephi Valentini et Ernesti Koliqi septuagenariorum* (Munich, 1971), 41.

institutions and control solidly not only in the Mirdita but in many other mountain areas of Northern Albania until the end of Ottoman rule in 1912.

Conclusion

The Tanzimat ideology of order *cum* prosperity as reflected in routine Ottoman bureaucratic correspondence may have been grounded on theological premises but these were not explicitly mentioned. We are faced here not with an intentionally secularized vocabulary, but with a terminology which answers to daily secular needs and supposedly sees no necessity in reiterating how much the paradigms of order are based on unquestioned assumptions anchored in Islamic theology and history.

The distinction between "old" (defined here as the traditional political idiom which to a great extent molded the rhetoric of the Tanzimat period) and "new" (what one might call the attempt to break with the old order of things) can be a matter of controversy. Terms such as *inzibat* (discipline) may indeed attain new meaning when they are used within the context of disciplining, but *zabt u rabt* (orderliness, discipline) for example seems to be constant in its meaning. *Nizam* (order, regularity; law, regulation, system, method), which has a large spectrum of meaning, seems to refer both to the traditional-patrimonial concept of order and the Tanzimat-notion of disciplining. However, the indistinct line between "old" and the "new" also works in the other direction. Terms which seem to embody the reform policy itself, such as *tanzimat*, are often akin to the traditional notion of order.⁵⁹

Tanzimat rhetoric is—also in its later stages—deeply embedded in the tradition of Ottoman patrimonial rhetoric. The traditional stress on obedience, however, is transformed into a quest for control and discipline as reformed variants of obedience. The peripheral societies of the Ottoman empire which had been respected as carrying

⁵⁹ The reforms undertaken by Şekib Efendi in Mount Lebanon are described by Lutfi Efendi as a punitive expedition in "a just manner," Ahmed Lutfi, *Ta'rikh-i Lutfi*, vol. 8 (Istanbul, 1328/1910), 111: "... bir suret-i 'adilane de uygunsuzlugun ve fenalighun önünü almaq 1261-62 tanzimatının esaslarıdır ..."

a certain burden in the service of the state (e.g. service in military campaigns) and therefore had been left to their own devices were redefined as backward societies that had to be reformed and civilized. Late Tanzimat rhetoric leaves behind the idea of cyclical development where order follows disorder—now a new and final had to be established. In this new chapter in the history of the Empire the Ottoman authorities strove to be the *demiurge* of a new society.

The Tanzimat can be understood as the paradigmatic attempt of the state to build up and extend its infrastructural power. The Ottomans' attempt to regain control of their peripheral regions was motivated by the enormous financial needs of a modern state with its steadily growing bureaucracy and its array of self-imposed tasks.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the peripheries of the Ottoman Empire were endangered by the encroaching European imperialism. But all of this aside, historians still tend to interpret Ottoman Tanzimat policy as a completely rational policy and to underestimate its ambiguities. Preliminary inquiries into Ottoman political rhetoric in the Tanzimat period however suggest that ideological motives (e.g., the Ottoman claim to have a *mission civilisatrice* in its own peripheries) should also be brought into consideration. It will be worthwhile to enquire whether the rigidity of many Tanzimat measures and actions are not indications of a specific Ottoman modernity with specific traits of irrationality.

⁶⁰ See for example Eugene Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire. Transjordan, 1850–1921* (Cambridge, 1999), 3 f., who builds his argumentation on Michael Mann's differentiation between "despotic" and "infrastructural" power.