

Tyranny illustrated: from petition to rebellion in Ottoman Vranje

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Abstract

This article traces the struggle of the people of Vranje to unseat their governor, Hüseyin Pasha, in the 1840s. It situates this struggle within the context of the Tanzimat reforms, one primary objective of which was to use financial and legal means to bring powerful local governors under the control of the central government. The case of Vranje, this article shows, provides a particularly colorful example to observe the disrupting effects of the center's intervention in the provinces, to investigate the various dynamics and difficulties the center confronted in its attempt to control the periphery, and to understand the ways in which the new political discourse of the Tanzimat shaped local resistance. This article also traces the stages of political mobilization and dissent through the various strategies the people of Vranje employed, from petitioning to armed resistance, in order to fight perceived injustices.

Keywords: *Ottoman Empire; Tanzimat; Vranje; provincial notables; petition.*

A petition arrived to the Porte in February of 1840 from the people of Vranje (Vranya or, more commonly, İvranya), via Mr. Pontif, the Russian ambassador to İstanbul. Written in Serbian, and translated into Turkish by the authorities upon its receipt, the petition was about the district governor (İvranyalı) Hüseyin Pasha's "tyranny" (*zulm ve taaddi*) over the people of Vranje.¹ Submitting petitions about local authorities was a common practice throughout Ottoman times; therefore, as far as the nature of the complaint is

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1 Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives (*Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi*, hereafter BOA) İ.DH, 6-289, 3.Z.1255 (February 7, 1840).

concerned, this petition does not seem to be particularly significant.² Even its submission through the Russian embassy, however unusual it may be, is not of special interest here. What makes this petition distinctive, and perhaps unique, is that it was accompanied with illustrations depicting several men being tortured, hanged, or decapitated in a grotesque fashion.³ In addition to this extraordinary feature—which was what first got me interested in this otherwise ordinary petition—it also marked the beginning of a four-year-long bitter struggle between the people of Vranje and their governor Hüseyin Pasha, which ended with a revolt in 1844. This article focuses on this four-year-long struggle.

Two strands upon which the case of Vranje is built in this article need to be emphasized at the outset. The first is to properly contextualize the struggle between the people of Vranje and the governor Hüseyin Pasha within the politically volatile atmosphere that prevailed throughout the Ottoman Empire after the Tanzimat edict was promulgated in November 1839. The edict promised the guarantee of the security of the life, honor, and property of all Ottoman subjects under due process of law; the elimination of the tax-farming system and, in its place, the implementation of a new and fair system of taxation; and a new system for military service based on the conscription of Muslims as well as non-Muslims. As will be detailed below, the changing forms of tax collection, along with the new penal code of 1840, were the primary means through which the Ottoman state aimed to reorganize the provincial administration and reshuffle the power structure in the provinces. The central government's direct intervention in the provinces through financial and legal means had a powerful impact on the power configuration between İstanbul, local authorities, provincial notables, and the local population, resulting in numerous peasant rebellions and consequently in the destabilization of many regions from the Balkans to the Middle East in the mid-nineteenth century.

2 For a general introduction to the practice of petitioning in the Ottoman Empire, see Halil İnalcık, "Şikâyet Hakkı: 'Arz-ı Hâl' ve 'Arz-ı Mahzar'lar,'" *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 7–8 (1988): 33–51; Suraiya Faroqhi, "Political Initiatives 'From the Bottom Up' in the Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire: Some Evidence for their Existence," in *Osmanistische Studien zur Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte*, ed. Hans Georg Majer (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1986): 24–33; and Suraiya Faroqhi, "Political Activity among Ottoman Taxpayers and the Problem of Sultanlic Legitimation (1570–1650)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 35 (1992): 1–39. For examples of petitions translated into English from the late eighteenth century, see Michael Ursinus, *Grievance Administration (Şikâyet) in an Ottoman Province: The Kaymakam of Rumelia's 'Record Book of Complaints' of 1781–1783* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005). Also see John Chalcraft, "Engaging the State: Peasants and Petitions in Egypt on the Eve of Colonial Rule," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37, no. 3 (2005): 303–25. Due to the near universality of the practice, the literature is extensive. For a useful collection that provides examples from different geographies, see Lex Heerma van Voss, ed., "Petitions in Social History," Special Issue of *International Review of Social History* 46, no. 59 (2001).

3 BOA, I.MVL, 4-63, 7.R.1256 (June 8, 1840).

The implementation of the Tanzimat's new tax reform triggered most of these revolts, but some other rebellions, including the one in Vranje, took place to demand that the new tax regime be brought into towns where it had not been immediately put into effect. In other words, the practice and the vocabulary of the Tanzimat had immense consequences for the turmoil that the Ottoman countryside underwent in the mid-nineteenth century.

For a long time, under the shadow of Balkan and Turkish nationalist historiographies, these peasant insurgencies were treated largely as manifestations of "national awakening" or as the result of abuses by provincial notables acting independently from the fair and just Ottoman central government. The turbulent 1840s has only started to attract interest from scholars in recent years, although much more research is required to even begin to understand the breadth and the depth of the struggles and rebellions that engulfed the empire and to make analytical observations based on comparative case studies of these revolts.⁴ This article aims, firstly, to contribute to the newly emerging literature in the hope that the Vranje case can provide an opportunity to observe the dynamics between center and periphery within the context of the Tanzimat state of the 1840s.

Secondly, the people's struggle with the governor in Vranje also provides an exemplary case to illustrate the dynamics and the stages of mobilization and dissent. As will be detailed shortly, the people of Vranje, albeit with little success, used various strategies—from petitioning to armed resistance—to unseat the governor Hüseyin Pasha. Flexing its muscles in the countryside to subdue local notables and provincial bureaucrats, the Tanzimat state, with its new legal discourse, provided an important impetus in shaping local resistance throughout the empire. This article demonstrates how the resistance in Vranje took shape by invoking different strategies within the established power structure of the periphery and the new political discourse of the center.

Ottoman Vranje and provincial notables

Now located in southern Serbia, the town of Vranje was the administrative center of the district of Vranje. The province had some 6,000 households, and thus a population of perhaps over 20,000 people.⁵ The town itself was inhabited by as many as 8,000 people.⁶ Located at the crossroads of Ottoman

4 Halil İnalçık's early work is an exception; see his *Tanzimat ve Bulgar Meselesi* (Istanbul: Eren, 1992). See also Ahmet Uzun, *Tanzimat ve Sosyal Direnişler* (Istanbul: Eren, 2002); Coşkun Çakır, *Tanzimat Dönemi Osmanlı Maliyesi* (Istanbul: Küre, 2001), 130–40; E. Attila Aytekin, "Peasant Protest in the Late Ottoman Empire: Moral Economy, Revolt and the Tanzimat Reforms," *International Review of Social History* 57 (2012): 191–227.

5 BOA İ.MVL, 42-784, 25.C.1258 (August 3, 1842): 2, 11.

6 C. Mostras, *Dictionnaire géographique de l'Empire ottoman* (Istanbul: Pera Yayıncılık, 1995), 41.

Serbia, Albania, Bulgaria, and Macedonia, it had a mixed population consisting of Albanians, Bulgarians, Serbs, Greeks, and Turkish-speaking Muslims. It was an economically important town with several large agricultural estates (*çiftlik*) and iron mines.

The available biographical information on Hüseyin Pasha is regrettably inadequate. He was an Albanian Tosk who served as the governor of Vranje for nearly three decades.⁷ His conspicuous endurance resulted not necessarily from his administrative skills or from the large and steady annual tax revenue he sent to the treasury, but rather from his status as the descendant of one of the provincial notables (*ayan*) who had been granted by İstanbul *de facto*, and often *de jure*, hereditary governorship over the Balkan provinces.

The rise of *ayans* was intimately connected to the changes in the tax collection and land tenure system that occurred in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁸ The cavalry (*sipahi*), who served as provincial functionaries, had originally been in charge of collecting rural and agricultural dues from peasants as well as being required to provide a designated number of mounted cavalymen for military campaigns. From the late sixteenth century onwards, however, the

7 BOA, İ.MVL, 49-938, 2.Ra.1259 (April 2, 1843): 1. Also see Jovan Hacı Vasiljević, "Ka istoriji grada Vranja i njegove okoline," *Godišnjica Nikole Čupića* 16 (1896): 265–338. I would like to thank Milan Randjelović for providing the reference.

8 It is impossible to provide an exhaustive list here, but some notable works include: İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Meşhur Rumeli Âyanlarından Tirsinikli İsmail, Yılık Oğlu Süleyman Ağalar ve Alemdar Mustafa Paşa* (Ankara: TTK, 2000); Yücel Özkaya, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Âyanlık* (Ankara: TTK, 1994); Yuzo Nagata, *Tarihte Âyanlar: Karaosmanoğulları Üzerine Bir İnceleme* (Ankara: TTK, 1997); Bruce McGowan, "The Age of the Ayans, 1699–1812," in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, eds. Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 637–758; Jane Hathaway, *The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdağlıs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Antonis Anastasopoulos, ed., *Provincial Elites in the Ottoman Empire: Halcyon Days in Crete V: A Symposium Held in Rethymno, 10–12 January 2003* (Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2005); Canay Şahin, "The Rise and Fall of an Ayan Family in Eighteenth Century Anatolia: The *Caniklizades* (1737–1808)," (Ph.D. dissertation, Bilkent University, Ankara, 2003); Dina Rizk Khoury, "The Ottoman Center versus Provincial Power-Holders: An Analysis of the Historiography," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey, Vol. 3: The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603–1839*, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 135–56. Fikret Adanır, "Semi-autonomous Forces in the Balkans and Anatolia," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey, Vol. 3: The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603–1839*, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 157–85; Bruce Masters, "Semi-autonomous Forces in the Arab Provinces," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey, Vol. 3: The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603–1839*, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 186–206; Kıvanç Karaman and Şevket Pamuk, "Ottoman State Finances in European Perspective, 1500–1914," *The Journal of Economic History* 70, no. 3 (2010): 593–627; Robert Zens, "Provincial Powers: The Rise of Ottoman Local Notables (Ayan)," *History Studies: International Journal of History* 3, no. 3 (2011): 433–47; Robert W. Zens, "The Ayanlık and Pasvanoğlu Osman Paşa of Vidin in the Age of Ottoman Social Change, 1791–1815," (Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004); Ali Yaycıoğlu, "The Provincial Challenge: Regionalism, Crisis and Integration in the Late Ottoman Empire (1792–1812)," (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2008).

transformation of warfare toward infantry equipped with firearms made the prebendal *timar* system centered on cavalry increasingly obsolete and inefficient for the training and provisioning of infantry units. Pressured to increase the revenue of the treasury necessary for military reforms, the *timar* system was gradually abandoned from the seventeenth century onwards in favor of the tax-farming (*iltizam*) system, in which individuals who acquired tax-farming rights, usually through auction, made cash payments to the central government in return for the collection of taxes from a certain region or fiscal unit (*mukataa*), agricultural or otherwise. The duration of the contract was typically one year, but was later extended to three years and, at the end of the seventeenth century, to the tax farmer's lifetime (*malikane*). Politically well connected and financially strong, most tax farmers resided in İstanbul or other major urban centers and were thus physically absent from the tax farms they held under contract. This necessitated tax farmers to appoint someone with local ties, almost always a local notable, who had the power to apportion and collect the taxes (*mütesellim*). This subleasing of tax farms served as the most important springboard for the rise to economic and political prominence of the majority of *ayans*.

In addition to being sublessees, the *ayans* also emerged as the owners of *çiftlik*s, which were essentially private or quasi-private property.⁹ The formation of *çiftlik*s was also closely linked to the changing tax collection and land tenure system, and so to the subsequent popular uprisings and brigandage of the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. One important result of the general decline of public order in this period was the conversion of large tracts of land into large agricultural estates, by a variety of means. Some of these *çiftlik*s were created through the reclamation of wastelands or the appropriation of the lands abandoned by peasants due to unrest. More common, and more

9 Ömer Lütfi Barkan, *Türkiye'de Toprak Meselesi, Toplu Eserler 1* (İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları 1980); Bruce McGowan, *Economic Life in Ottoman Europe: Taxation, Trade and the Struggle for Land, 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 121–70; Halil İnalçık, "The Emergence of Big Farms, *Çiftlik*s: State, Landlords, and Tenants," in *Landholding and Commercial Agriculture in the Middle East*, eds. Çağlar Keyder and Faruk Tabak (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991): 17–34; Traian Stoianovich, "Land Tenure and Related Sectors of the Balkan Economy, 1600–1800," *The Journal of Economic History* 13, no. 4 (1953): 398–411; Michael Ursinus, "The *Çiftlik Sahipleri* of Manastır as a Local Elite, Late Seventeenth to Early Nineteenth Century," in *Provincial Elites in the Ottoman Empire, Halcyon Days in Crete V (10–12 January 2003)*, ed. Antonis Anastasopoulos (Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2005): 247–57; Sophia Laiou, "Some Considerations Regarding *Çiftlik* Formation in the Western Thessaly, Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries," in *The Ottoman Empire, the Balkans, the Greek Lands: Toward a Social and Economic History: Studies in Honor of John C. Alexander*, eds. Elias Kolovos et al. (İstanbul: Isis Press, 2007), 255–77; Alp Yücel Kaya, "On the *Çiftlik* Regulation in Tirhala in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: Economists, Pashas, Governors, *Çiftlik*-holders, *Subaşı*s, and Sharecroppers," in *Ottoman Rural Societies and Economies, Halcyon Days in Crete VIIIth, a Symposium held in Rethymno, 13–15 January 2012*, ed. Elias Kolovos (Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2015 (forthcoming)).

consequential in terms of the relations of production, was the conversion of the former *timar* lands (*miri*) on which peasants were actively cultivating. In some cases, *ayans* imposed loans upon the peasants—who were in chronic difficulty for a variety of reasons, such as brigandage, poor harvest, or inflation—so that they could pay taxes or purchase seed, and when they defaulted, as they frequently did, the land on which they worked would be seized.¹⁰ In certain other cases, *ayans* seized the commons of nearby villages, and without these pasturelands, peasants were forced to pay rent, work as sharecroppers, or provide corvée labor.¹¹ Distant and powerless, the central government could do little to reverse such seizures, and thus had to recognize the land grabs, which continued well into the early nineteenth century.¹² In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many large *çiftlik*s appear to have emerged in western Anatolia, along the western coast of the Black Sea, and in the Balkans especially, yet their size, the relations of production they entailed, and the degree of their commercialization remain matters of a scholarly debate in Ottoman historiography.¹³ At any rate, these *çiftlik*s were an integral part of *ayans'* acquisition of power and wealth, and every *ayan* had several of them in his possession. In one extreme case, Tepedelenli Ali Pasha of Janina (Yanya) had acquired up to 900 *çiftlik*s during his tenure.¹⁴

In addition to wealth, power, and the privileges accrued through tax farming and *çiftlik*s, another *ayan* trait was to have a sizable militia force. The personal militia of *ayans*—which was necessary to protect their interests from encroachment by other *ayans*—increased in size in the second half of the eighteenth century, when the central government charged them with the duties of safeguarding their localities from marauding bandits and joining wars along with the Ottoman army. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, these irregular units (*sekbân*) came to constitute the largest segment of the Ottoman army, which inevitably further enhanced the power of the *ayans* in Ottoman politics.¹⁵ Consequently, many of these *ayans* were incorporated into the ruling

10 Zens, "The *Ayanlık* and Pasvanoğlu Osman Paşa of Vidin," 20–24.

11 McGowan, "The Age of the *Ayans*," 686–87.

12 Frederick F. Anscombe, "Albanians and 'Mountain Bandits,'" in *The Ottoman Balkans, 1750–1830*, ed. Frederick F. Anscombe (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2006), 95.

13 Gilles Veinstein, "On the *Çiftlik* Debate," in *Landholding and Commercial Agriculture in the Middle East*, eds. Çağlar Keyder and Faruk Tabak (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 35–53.

14 Hamiyet Sezer, "Tepedelenli Âli Paşa ve Oğullarının *Çiftlik* ve Gelirlerine İlişkin Yeni Belgeler-Bulgular," *Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi* 18 (2005): 335.

15 Virginia H. Aksan, "Ottoman Military Recruitment Strategies in the Late Eighteenth Century," in *Arming the State: Military Conscription in the Middle East and Central Asia, 1775–1925*, ed. Erik J. Zürcher (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 21–39; Virginia H. Aksan, "The One-Eyed Fighting the Blind: Mobilization, Supply, and Command in the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–1774," *International History Review* 15, no. 2 (1993): 221–38.

class through the granting of titles and of accompanying official governing posts in the provinces.

As the Ottoman state's cooperation with and dependence on *ayans* grew in the second half of the eighteenth century, another group of *ayans* emerged: these were, in essence, warlords, mainly ethnic Albanians with thousands of Albanian mountaineers at their disposal. Expanding their power base from Albania toward the east and south of the Balkans, numerous Albanian notables—some of whom owed their status to being members of prominent families, while others had acquired their status through brigandage—seized power, often by force, and acquired wealth through *çiftlik*s and tax farms, ultimately attaining an even more independent status than other *ayans*. They secured a great deal of autonomy and financial security as tax-farming contractors of the provinces they ruled, often with official titles granted in return for providing hordes of Albanian soldiers who were practically mercenaries at the service of the Ottoman army. Tepedelenli Ali Pasha and the Buşatlı family of Shkodër (İşkodra) are well-known examples of such *ayans*—not to mention another Albanian, Mehmed Ali Pasha, who was operating in a completely different geography.¹⁶ Hüseyin Pasha seems to have belonged to this group of *ayans*, although, with 15 *çiftlik*s in his possession and the tax-farm contracts he was awarded for Vranje's agricultural revenue and six iron ore mines, he could be considered a lesser *ayan* as compared to these better-known Albanian figures. Nevertheless, the fact that he, like his father, was granted the provincial governorship of Vranje with the accompanying official title of pasha indicates that the family enjoyed considerable wealth and power in the region it ruled.¹⁷

The central government's pragmatic and largely *ad hoc* cooperation with the *ayans* in matters of tax collection and the military were formalized in 1808, when the newly enthroned Sultan Mahmud II was forced to sign the *Sened-i İttifak* (Deed of Agreement), which laid the ground for a mutual recognition and sharing of power between the sultan and the provincial notables. However, a major janissary rebellion erupted soon afterwards in İstanbul, resulting in the death of Alemdar Mustafa Pasha—the *ayan* turned grand vizier and the chief architect of the agreement—which rendered moot the power-sharing scheme

16 On Tepedelenli Ali Pasha's life and career, see Katherine E. Fleming, *Muslim Bonaparte: Diplomacy and Orientalism in Ali Pasha's Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); on his rise to power, see Dennis N. Skiotis, "From Bandit to Pasha: First Steps in the Rise to Power of Ali of Tepelen, 1751–1784," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 2, no. 3 (1971): 219–44. On Mustafa Pasha's rebellion, see Ahmed Lütfi Efendi, *Vak'anüvis Ahmed Lutfi Efendi Tarihi*, Vol. 3, ed. Yücel Demirel (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1999): 668–83.

17 According to an income survey (*temettüat*) from the mid-1840s, Hüseyin Pasha's three sons—Hürşid, Süleyman, and Ataullah—had a combined revenue of approximately 5.7% of Vranje's total taxable revenue; see BOA, MLVRD.TMT.d, 15199. My thanks to M. Erdem Kabadayı and Berkay Küçükbaşlar for making this data available.

of 1808. Successful in suppressing the revolt, and with his grand vizier now out of the way, Mahmud II soon managed to take the decisive steps leading to the empire's recovery from one of its deepest crises. Between 1812 and 1820, he largely succeeded in eliminating most of the *ayans* in the Balkans and Anatolia either by peaceful means—such as interfering with *ayan* elections or exploiting divisions within *ayan* families—or by brute force, with surprising efficiency.

With thousands of Albanian mountaineers at their disposal—who were ferocious mercenaries when put into service and ravaging marauders when unemployed—the Albanian warlords posed a more challenging problem. Mahmud II, however, succeeded in dealing with the most notorious of them as well. A series of calculated moves by the sultan led to a rebellion by Tepedelenli Ali Pasha and his eventual elimination in 1822, and this was followed a decade later by the exile of Mustafa Pasha of Shkodër, the most prominent notable of northern Albania. Emboldened by this relatively easy removal of the most formidable Albanian warlords and frustrated by the “reluctance” of those still in power to provide full support to the Ottoman army during the Greek War of Independence in the 1820s, Mahmud II decided toward the end of his reign on a second wave of assault against the remaining lesser Albanian pashas.¹⁸ When, following the suppression of Mustafa Pasha's revolt, Grand Vizier Reşid Mehmed Pasha advised the sultan to implement “the gradual stationing of troops so as to reform Janina, Monastir (Manastır), and Albania,”¹⁹ the sultan received the advice with great enthusiasm:

I have come to acknowledge that this problem of Albania will get worse if it is left to its own ... It is my desire as well that Albania should somehow be made right through good measures. However, since they [Albanian pashas] are mischievous (*fettan âdemler olduğundan*), I have taken on the matter slowly in order not to let it cause trouble. I wish and pray to God that you be successful.²⁰

The central government's strategy to “reform” Albanian lands was based both on the conscription of Albanian Muslims into the newly established regular army and on the establishment of financial control over the tax revenues of lands ruled by those Albanian pashas with a high degree of autonomy. Intense resistance and extensive revolts by Albanians throughout most of the 1830s, however, forced İstanbul to abandon the conscription project, at least

18 For the relations of Albanians with İstanbul during the Greek War of Independence, see Hakan Erdem, “‘Perfidious Albanians’ and ‘Zealous Governors’: Ottomans, Albanians, and Turks in the Greek War of Independence,” in *Ottoman Rule and the Balkans, 1760–1850: Conflict, Transformation, Adaptation*, eds. Antonis Anastasopoulos and Elias Kolovos (Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2007), 213–37.

19 Lütü Efendi, *Vak'anüvis Ahmed Lutfi Efendi Tarihi*, Vol. 3, 669.

20 Ibid.

“for now,”²¹ leaving the authorities to focus instead on achieving greater control over provincial finances. It was within this context that the central government decided to tighten the screws on Hüseyin Pasha in 1836.

Claiming that the treasury had not been receiving enough tax revenue from Vranje, especially considering the iron production in the town, the central government began an inquiry into how much iron the town was capable of producing annually.²² According to the investigation, there were six iron ore mines in Vranje, which altogether could produce at least 150 tons and as many as 180 tons of iron ore a year. Therefore, excluding manufacturing and transportation costs, an annual revenue of at least 300,000 *guruş*²³ could reasonably be expected from Vranje.²⁴ The amount of the fixed sum Hüseyin Pasha had been committed to pay on being granted Vranje’s tax revenue is unclear. It does seem, however, that Hüseyin Pasha declared a lower amount of iron ore than the 150 to 180 tons that Vranje’s iron ore mines were capable of producing, and consequently the lease was made based on these figures.²⁵ Moreover, Hüseyin Pasha had not been sending any tax revenue accrued from agricultural and other sources of income in the province, “keeping it all for himself.”²⁶ Determined to redress the situation, the government decided to put the deputy lieutenant governor (*mütesellim*) of Sofia, Hüsrev Pasha—who was experienced in collecting taxes from the iron ore mines in his region—in charge of collecting Vranje’s tax revenue, with an estimated amount of around 350,000 *guruş*, and Hüseyin Pasha was appointed to another place.²⁷ However, Zekeriya Pasha—the governor general of Rumelia and thus the highest administrative authority in the region—strongly advised against this decision, sending several letters to İstanbul insisting that Hüseyin Pasha should remain in his post.²⁸ Zekeriya Pasha supported his insistence by citing Hüseyin Pasha’s status as a local dynast who should not be offended without a justifiable reason.²⁹ It is worth noting that Zekeriya Pasha’s persistence on the matter of keeping Hüseyin

21 Gültekin Yıldız, *Neferin Adı Yok: Zorunlu Askerliğe Geçiş Sürecinde Osmanlı Devleti’nde Siyaset, Ordu ve Toplum (1826–1839)* (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2009), 241.

22 BOA, HAT, 29166, 13.L.1252 (January 21, 1837); BOA, HAT 25879-H, 29.Z.1252 (April 6, 1837). These dates in the catalogue are approximate; the actual dates must have been earlier than those indicated here, for the result of the investigation is dated from late 1836 and early 1837, as seen in subsequent footnotes.

23 Between 1836 and 1840, 1 British Pound = 106–108 *guruş*; see Charles Issawi, *Economic History of Turkey, 1800–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 330–31.

24 BOA, HAT, 29016-D, 21.N.1252 (December 29, 1836); BOA HAT, 29166, 13.L.1252 (January 21, 1837).

25 BOA, HAT, 25879-F, 9.Z.1252 (March 17, 1837).

26 *Ibid.*

27 BOA, HAT, 25879-E, 29.Z.1252 (April 6, 1837).

28 BOA, HAT, 25879-A, 29.Z.1252 (April 6, 1837); BOA HAT, 25879-B, 29.Z.1252 (April 6, 1837); BOA, HAT, 25879-F, 9.Z.1252 (March 17, 1837); BOA, HAT, 25879-G, 9.Z.1252 (March 17, 1837).

29 BOA, HAT, 25879-G, 9.Z.1252 (March 17, 1837).

Pasha at his post emerged after the latter paid him a visit in Monastir, the administrative center of the *eyalet* of Rumelia; thus, a collusion between the two seems likely.³⁰ More importantly, however, the *eyalet* governors knew well that they had to be tactful in dealing with such rogue Albanian pashas, because, in addition to the collection of taxes, these governors were in charge of recruiting irregular troops and provisioning the army in times of war, and they could hardly perform these duties without them. In any event, even at those rare moments when Hüseyin Pasha failed to receive the consent of his immediate superiors, İstanbul tended to turn a blind eye to his alleged misdeeds. For example, in 1830, when Selim Pasha, then the governor of Rumelia, sent a detailed complaint to İstanbul explaining Hüseyin Pasha's misconduct—overtaxation and oppression of his subjects as he indulged in “a life of pleasure,” which resulted in the fleeing of a number of families to other regions—and urging İstanbul to replace him, the government took no action.³¹

After several letters, Zekeriya Pasha managed to reverse the decision, and İstanbul decided to keep Hüseyin Pasha as the governor and tax collector of Vranje, but with a substantial increase in the tax revenue: approximately 300,000 *guruş* from the iron ore mines and 50,000 *guruş* from other sources of income.³² This was the same amount of tax revenue initially offered to Hüsrev Pasha. However, Hüseyin Pasha said that he would be unable to afford this amount because the income accrued from Vranje's iron ore mines was less than that of comparable regions due to the lack of qualified labor in his district. Therefore, the iron extracted in Vranje had to be transported to Niš (Niş) for processing, which would significantly increase the cost.³³ After a round of bargaining, Hüseyin Pasha managed to secure the contract for Vranje at less than what the government had offered, and an agreement was reached at an estimated value of 275,000 *guruş*, with 225,000 *guruş* for iron and 50,000 *guruş* for other sources of income.³⁴ İstanbul must have anticipated the adverse effects of the new contract for the people of Vranje, as is evident in the warning that “the poor in Vranje must in no way be oppressed or pained because of [the new agreement].”³⁵

Almost three years later, the first sign of the disturbances that would soon engulf Vranje came via a petition penned by the bishop of the diocese of Skopje and submitted to İstanbul by the Greek Patriarch, in which the bishop asked for the dismissal of Hüseyin Pasha on account of his “tyranny and oppression.”

30 BOA, HAT, 25879-D, 9.Z.1252 (March 17, 1837).

31 BOA, HAT, 31527-F, 16.N.1245 (March 11, 1830).

32 BOA, HAT, 25879-F, 9.Z.1252 (March 17, 1837).

33 BOA, HAT, 25879-D, 9.Z.1252 (March 17, 1837).

34 Ibid.

35 BOA, HAT, 25879-B, 29.Z.1252 (April 6, 1837).

The central government quickly dismissed the diocese's appeal on the grounds that this was a claim only of his own, for no such petitions had been submitted by the Muslims or the Christian subjects of Vranje.³⁶ For this, however, İstanbul did not have to wait long.

Hüseyin Pasha vs. the people of Vranje

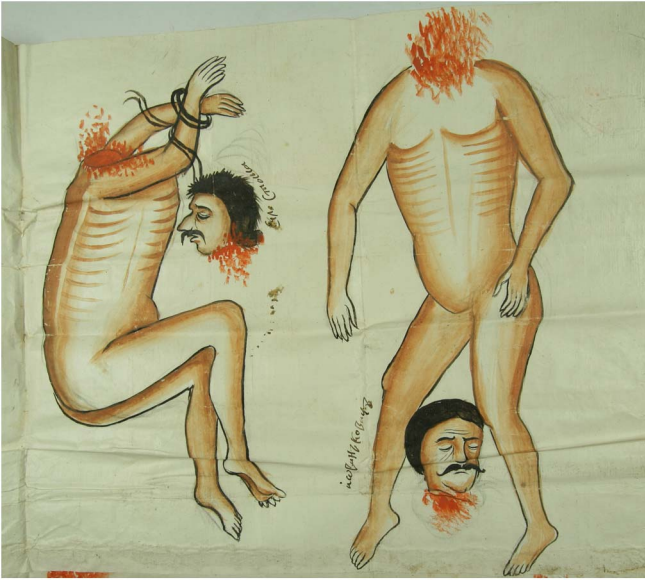
The petition forwarded by the Russian ambassador explained in detail the "oppression" that Hüseyin Pasha had been inflicting on the people, and gave the names of the 12 men who were alleged to have been summarily executed by the pasha, accompanied by illustrations of those executed, as well as the names of 14 notables who were collaborating with the pasha's injustices.³⁷ In their petition, the supplicants claimed that "the governor Hüseyin Pasha's tyranny and oppression have reached such an intolerable level that the people of Vranje had no alternative but to petition to let the almighty sultan hear their pain and save them." To escape Hüseyin Pasha's tyranny, 2,000 families in a ruined state had already moved to other provinces. Hüseyin Pasha, they maintained, collected taxes in the amount of 500,000 *guruş* six times a year, and he did so by force, beating and tying up those from whom he collected. The pasha had 15 *çiftliks* and six iron mines in the province. He would conscript one person from each household as *corvée*, which, depending on the size, amounted to between 100 and 500 *corvées* from each village, whom he would make work in his *çiftliks* and iron mines for the whole year without pay. He collected poll tax in full from Christian children of seven or eight years old as if they were adults. When the sheep-tax collectors came to town, he would instruct the people to hide half their livestock, and then, after the sheep-tax collectors had gathered only half of what they were supposed to and left town, he would send his men to embezzle the taxes for the remaining half. He overtaxed the taverns by between 200 and 1,000 *guruş* depending on their size. He built a palace

36 BOA, HAT, 1627, 29.Z.1255 (March 4, 1840). However, there seems to have been another petition submitted by the people of Vranje about the "tyranny" of Hüseyin Pasha; see Vladimir Stojančević, "Žalbe Srba Vranjanaca protiv Husein-paša 1839–1842," *Leskovački zbornik* 14 (1974): 149–53. In this, a certain Mihailo Stojanović, a Serbian notable and leather cap trader (*ćurči*) from Vranje, appears as the main protagonist, who, soon after the declaration of the Tanzimat, led 30 of his townsmen to İstanbul to present their complaints about Hüseyin Pasha and demand the implementation of the Tanzimat in their district. Although the group was treated with respect in İstanbul, Mihailo was unable to return to Vranje, fearing Hüseyin Pasha's revenge, and instead went to Belgrade, where he established good relations with Serbian authorities and with the consuls of Austria and Russia, becoming the informal representative of the people of Vranje to convey their complaints. Mihailo's name is completely absent in the Ottoman documents. I am grateful to Milan Randjelović for bringing this article to my attention, and to Aydın Babuna for providing the translation.

37 BOA, I.DH, 6-289, 3.Z.1255, 3.

Illustrations of the men who were alleged to have been summarily executed by Hüseyin Pasha.









Source: BOA, İ.MVL, 4-63, 7.R.1256 (June 8, 1840).

for himself with the labor of the poor, who were forced to work without pay for six years. He had killed all the respected Christian notables in the province. To save these humble subjects from Hüseyin Pasha's cruel rule and for justice to prevail, the petitioners wanted him to be dismissed from the governorship of the province and be put on trial in İstanbul.

After detailing Hüseyin Pasha's use of forced labor (*angarya*), extortion, embezzlement, and overtaxation, the next page written in Turkish focuses on the 12 people Hüseyin Pasha allegedly summarily executed, with accompanying illustrations drawn in color on a single large sheet. The petition gives the names of these 12 men, three of whom were Muslims and nine of whom Christians, one of the latter a priest. The suppliants asserted that the 12 men had raised their voices against the pasha's oppression and injustices, upon which some of the province's notables, henchmen of the pasha, informed him. The pasha then had them summarily executed.

Regarding the illustrations, it is difficult to make sense of them, for there is no reference to them either in the petition itself or in the Ottoman documents, apart from acknowledgement of their receipt, along with the petition, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.³⁸ It is obvious, however, that the supplicants hoped to use the illustrations as an abstract representation of the violence and suffering they had experienced, in order to enhance the effect of the petition, although illustrations were certainly an extraordinarily unusual means of doing this. Despite the circumstantial importance of the illustrations to the petition, at least from the perspective of their Ottoman recipients, they are nevertheless remarkable in that there seems to be a deliberate effort to sanctify the executed in the manner of contemporary neomartyrologies.³⁹ While emaciated bodies with prominent ribs and naked figures without genitalia are characteristic of the depiction of saints and martyrs in Orthodox Christian iconography, the presence of an Ottoman Muslim figure torturing a Christian strongly hints at an attempt to make new martyrs of the deceased. It also suggests that the illustrations were drawn by a priest-painter or someone from monastic circles familiar with Orthodox Christian iconography. The pictorial representation of neomartyrs in the context of the petition, however, is misleading, because the religious discourse inherent in the illustrations is conspicuously absent in the petition itself. There is not even the slightest hint in the text of intercommunal strife between Christians and Muslims, and even though the petition was written by Christian subjects, it makes no claim that those illustrated were executed because of their faith. Furthermore, while the inscriptions on the illustrations—written in Serbian Cyrillic and revealing the names of those killed—indicate that they were all Christians, and in particular Serbs, the list of the 12 people summarily executed by Hüseyin Pasha in fact includes three Muslims.

The petition also provides the names of these 14 notables, three of them Muslim and 11 of them Christian, three of the latter being priests. They wanted “the new law”—i.e., the recently promulgated Tanzimat edict that promised to

38 BOA, I.MVL, 4-63.

39 The term “neomartyr” refers to Christians who died for their faith after the emergence of Islam. During Ottoman times, it was used specifically to describe Orthodox Christians persecuted by Ottoman authorities. I am grateful to Tijana Krstić, who generously provided me with most of the insights and interpretations presented in this paragraph. For a detailed account of neomartyrologies in the early modern Ottoman context, see her *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011). See also Eleni Gara, “Neomartyr Without a Message,” *Archivum Ottomanicum* 23 (2005/06): 155–76 and Marinos Sariyannis, “Aspects of ‘Neomartyrdom’: Religious Contacts, ‘Blasphemy’ and ‘Calumny’ in 17th Century Istanbul,” *Archivum Ottomanicum* 23 (2005/06): 249–62. For a collection of neomartyrologies that include those of the nineteenth century as well, see Nomikos Vapori, *Witnesses for Christ: Orthodox Christian Neomartyrs of the Ottoman Period, 1437–1860* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2000).

ensure the life, honor, and property of all subjects, to abolish corvée, and to redress injustices in taxation—to be put into effect in their province as well. Thus, the people of Vranje decided “not to leave the blood feud with the pasha to the Last Judgment,” but rather to take it to the sultan’s justice.⁴⁰

The suppliants initially intended to deliver the petition personally to the Porte. However, having found out that some of his subjects had just left for İstanbul to submit it on behalf of their fellow townsmen, Hüseyin Pasha sent his men to intercept them in an attempt to prevent them from reaching the capital.⁴¹ The suppliants then changed their course, moving toward Belgrade to seek help from the autonomous Serbian rulers, so that the latter might deliver the petition to İstanbul on the former’s behalf. It appears, though, that the Serbs did not want to be involved with this problem. They might have considered this incident merely a minor nuisance and thought that any involvement on their part was not worth offending İstanbul in the middle of a crisis of succession in the autonomous principality.⁴² Disappointed, the suppliants this time took refuge at the Russian consulate in Belgrade, seeking the consul’s help. The consul agreed to send the petition to his ambassador, Pontif, in İstanbul, who, in turn, “unofficially” forwarded it to the Porte. This was a strategic move on his part. On the one hand, he emphasized the unofficial nature of the supplication in an attempt to dispel the impression that the Russian state wanted to directly take part in it. On the other hand, he nevertheless submitted it, so as to demonstrate to the Porte that Russia wanted to keep the affairs of the Ottoman Balkans, however minor they may have been, at arm’s length.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the initial recipient of the petition submitted by the Russian embassy, immediately forwarded it to the *Meclis-i Vala* (Supreme Council), which was as of 1838 the highest executive and legislative body, with judicial functions as well.⁴³ The Meclis immediately began to deliberate the petition, and soon afterwards received another petition from Vranje.⁴⁴ Signed and sealed by over 60 people, this petition declared that the people had been content ever since Hüseyin Pasha came to power, and the document praised him in most flattering terms. From its context, timing, and style, the Meclis immediately recognized that this petition was not the product

40 BOA, I.DH, 6-289, 2.

41 Ibid., 5.

42 Prince Miloš Obrenović abdicated in favor of his son, Milan, in 1839, but the new prince died only a month into his reign and was succeeded by his 16-year-old brother Mihailo. Another possible reason for the indifference of the Serbian authorities was that Miloš Obrenović was on good terms with Hüseyin Pasha, as suggested by Stojančević, “Žalbe Srba Vranjanaca protiv Husein-paša 1839–1842,” 150.

43 For the most comprehensive study on the *Meclis-i Vala*, see Mehmet Seyitdanlioğlu, *Tanzimat Devrinde Meclis-i Vâlâ (1838–1868)* (Ankara: TTK, 1999).

44 BOA, I.DH, 6-288 3.Z.1255 (February 7, 1840), 2.

of a spontaneous and voluntary expression of the people of Vranje, but rather had been forcibly written by order of Hüseyin Pasha, who, by that time, must have been aware that the complaint he had tried to prevent from reaching the capital had in fact arrived at its destination.⁴⁵ After deliberations, the Meclis was convinced that the matter was worth investigating further, and decided to call the pasha and the complainants to İstanbul for questioning. But calling the pasha to İstanbul was no easy matter, as the Meclis was concerned, from the very beginning, about the possibility that Hüseyin Pasha might fear this seemingly troubling invitation and escape from the province. Initially, then, the Meclis considered instructing the governor general of Rumelia to call Hüseyin Pasha to İstanbul “quietly and without letting him know the reason, in order not to alarm him,” and to send a temporary lieutenant governor to serve in Vranje in his absence. However, calling him to İstanbul alone would make him suspicious, and so they found a solution under a different pretext. The Tanzimat had just been declared, and such Anatolian provinces as Diyarbekir, Erzurum, and Trabzon and Rumelian provinces like Bosnia and Albania, “due to their distance from the capital,” were not immediately included under the scope of the new tax regime implemented soon after the edict. It was already planned to invite the notables from these regions to İstanbul to discuss the matters pertaining to the implementation of the new tax regime in their regions in the near future. Hüseyin Pasha, along with some other Albanian pashas—notably Hıfzı Pasha, the governor of Skopje (Üsküp), and his brother Abdurrahman Pasha, the deputy lieutenant governor of Gjakova (Yakova)—were to be invited under this pretext. The justification, thereby, was different, and he would not be alone; thus, this constituted the perfect pretext for questioning him in the capital.⁴⁶

Evident even in these small calculations is just how autonomous the Albanian pashas were and how little control İstanbul had over dealing with, much less administering, matters in the region. The decision not to implement the new tax regime in “distant provinces”—in this case a region ruled by an Albanian pasha—may have been one reason, but at the same time the new tax regime was, in fact, immediately put into effect in a number of provinces not very far from Vranje. Indeed, the real reason was the anticipated consequences of the new tax regime in the regions where it was implemented.

The tax reform represented a significant break from the earlier tax-farming system (*iltizam*) in three significant respects. Firstly, the private individuals (*mültezims*) who were in charge of collecting the taxes often from the provinces, were replaced with centrally appointed tax collectors (*muhassıls*). Secondly, in

45 *Ibid.*, 1.

46 *Ibid.*

the *iltizam* system, taxes on a given region were fixed, predetermined, and collectively paid by the community, whereas in the new tax regime the basis of taxation was annual individual income, which, at least theoretically, was subject to change on a yearly basis. Finally, and for our purposes most importantly, the *muhassils*, who were granted significant authority, from the surveying of property to the collection and transfer of taxes, were not subject to the authority of local governors.⁴⁷

The center's direct intervention through *muhassils* was an effective means of fiscal and political centralization, aimed at curbing the political authority of governors in the provinces by seizing their financial autonomy. It is thus important to emphasize that İstanbul was not bold enough to implement the new tax regime of the Tanzimat in the provinces ruled by Albanian pashas, which would have rendered them powerless. The same worry existed for Albanian subjects in general. The Ottoman state considered Albanians, regardless of their mixed religious and ethnic composition, as an unruly bunch, and its discourse about them oscillated between disparaging and abusive.⁴⁸ The probable negative reaction of the Albanians against the new tax regime of the Tanzimat was thus as important a concern as the likely disobedience of the Albanian pashas. Ruled by an Albanian pasha and inhabited by a significant Albanian population, Vranje was destined to remain an exception within the new tax regime.

The spring and summer of 1840 were busy times for the *Meclis-i Vala*. It had just promulgated the new penal code in early May, and the Edirne governor Nafiz Pasha, the İzmir governor Akif Pasha, and the grand vizier Hüsrev Pasha were first dismissed from their offices and subsequently tried and punished only a few months apart for "their corruption and misconduct in the implementation of Tanzimat" according to the new penal code.⁴⁹ By punishing

47 On the new tax regime, see Ayla Efe, "Muhasıllık Teşkilatı," (Ph.D. dissertation, Eskişehir Anadolu Üniversitesi, 2002); Huri İslamoğlu, "Politics of Administering Property: Law and Statistics in the Nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire," in *Constituting Property: Private Property in the East and West*, ed. Huri İslamoğlu (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 276–319; Alp Yücel Kaya, "Politique de l'enregistrement de la richesse économique: les Enquêtes fiscales et agricoles de l'Empire ottoman et de la France au milieu du XIXe Siècle," (Ph.D. dissertation, EHESS, 2005); Mübahat Kütükoğlu, "Osmanlı Sosyal ve İktisadi Kaynaklarından Temmettû Defterler," *Belleten* 59, no. 225 (1995): 395–418; Tevfik Güran, *19. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Tarımı* (İstanbul: Eren, 1998).

48 Erdem, "'Perfidious Albanians,'" 214. See also Anscombe, "Albanians and 'Mountain Bandits,'" as well as various studies by Tolga U. Esmer on the discursive association of banditry with Albanians: "A Culture of Rebellion: Networks of Violence and Competing Discourses of Justice in the Ottoman Empire, 1790–1808" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2009); "Economies of Violence: Banditry and Governance in the Ottoman Empire around 1800," *Past and Present* 224 (2014): 163–99; and "The Precarious Intimacy of Honor in Late Ottoman Accounts of Paramilitarism and Banditry," *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 18 (2014): 2–16.

49 For a detailed account of these trials, see Cengiz Kırılı, *Yolsuzluğun İcadı: 1840 Ceza Kanunu, İktidar ve Bürokrasi* (İstanbul: Verita Yayınları, 2015).

the officials who had for so long occupied the highest positions in the central and provincial administration, the Tanzimat bureaucrats, now in control of the Meclis, were trying to use the new legal arsenal at their disposal to give a message to the entire bureaucracy that the center was to be adamant in flexing its muscles concerning its control of the provinces and of its own bureaucracy. It is a fact that Hüseyin Pasha was not as high-profile a pasha as those who were punished, for he was merely a district governor, but his being an Albanian pasha nonetheless presented a different dilemma for the Meclis. The Tanzimat bureaucrats could not afford to implement the new tax regime in the region. Whether they were up to the task of applying the new penal code to Hüseyin Pasha, and thereby giving a message to the rest of the Albanian pashas, remained to be seen.

In the spring of 1840, Hüseyin Pasha stood before the Meclis-i Vala. Present with him as witnesses were Hıfzı Pasha; Abdurrahman Pasha; and Zekeriya Pasha, the former governor general of Rumelia and now the governor of Diyarbakir, who happened to be in İstanbul at the time. Two Albanian supplicants of the petition, 30–40 Christians and Muslims from the province, and the bishop of the diocese (*metropolid*) were also summoned to the court.⁵⁰

The complainants repeated their claims, and even added new ones during the hearings. For example, the pasha, they maintained, did not have the Tanzimat edict read out to the public, and when an Albanian cried out that “the edict of justice had been issued, and our taxes had been pardoned for seven years,” Hüseyin Pasha had him stabbed to death in the middle of the marketplace.⁵¹ The pasha, of course, refused this allegation as well.

The testimony of Hüseyin Pasha’s long-time ally Zekeriya Pasha was, as might be expected, in favor of Hüseyin Pasha. He said that he had not heard of the pasha’s tyranny as it was being claimed. As for the pasha’s alleged execution of 12 people, he testified that it was untrue. Two people from the province had indeed been punished two years before this allegation, and Zekeriya Pasha claimed that he had been informed about these two criminals by Hüseyin Pasha and consequently issued an executive order for their proper punishment. Moreover, he said that the use of forced labor, now abolished, had been a customary practice in most regions of Rumelia, and thus Hüseyin Pasha should not be singled out and held accountable for it. Hüseyin Pasha, he concluded, was of a local dynasty and thus a “necessary person pertaining to his special status.” The testimonies of Hıfzı Pasha and Abdurrahman Pasha were

50 BOA, I.MVL, 4-63.

51 This rumor was common at the time among the people; see Çakır, *Tanzimat Dönemi Osmanlı Maliyesi*, 104–106. For popular perceptions of the new tax regime based on spy reports, see Cengiz Kırılı, *Sultan ve Kamuoyu: Osmanlı Modernleşme Sürecinde ‘Havadis Jurnalleri’ (1840–1844)* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2009), 68–73.

no different from that of Zekeriya Pasha. Even the bishop's statements were in conformity with those of the pashas, for he raised only the issue of corvée and said that, apart from this, people were content with his administration.⁵²

In his own testimony, Hüseyin Pasha asserted that the two Albanian petitioners present at the Meclis were swindlers who had failed to pay the money they owed him and fled to Serbia a year and a half before, and so they were charging him with these false accusations in order to avoid having to pay. He did not even accept the claim of using corvée, which even the supporters of the pasha present at the court had agreed was true. He also claimed that, indeed, people had been employed in the iron ore mines under his tax-farming contract and on his own *çiftliks*, but that they worked in return for the money they owed him.⁵³ Hüseyin Pasha may have been right in this claim, since there is little doubt that, just as in other regions in Anatolia and the Balkans where *çiftliks* abounded, Vranje's peasants must have owed him money.⁵⁴ Even so, this interpretation on Hüseyin Pasha's part was little more than semantics, given the fact that chronic peasant indebtedness had, since the seventeenth century, been the primary means used across the Balkans to seize and convert into *çiftliks* the *miri* lands cultivated by peasants, who were consequently forced to either pay rent or provide corvée labor, and many *çiftlik* holders deliberately kept peasants in debt for this very purpose.⁵⁵ Just as in the case in Vranje, one of the primary demands of the peasant protests of the mid-nineteenth century was the curtailment of the ongoing and widespread practice of the corvée labor regime—which, according to one government report dated 1850, “reduced the peasant almost to slavery”⁵⁶—in spite of such labor's abolition by the Tanzimat.

As all the witnesses summoned to the court, from the governors to the bishop, were siding with Hüseyin Pasha, it was obvious that the supplicants stood no chance of deposing him. It was also clear that the Tanzimat bureaucrats were not prepared to cross an Albanian pasha in order to make an example of him, even though those same bureaucrats had no qualms about deposing and punishing even higher-ranking officials during the very same summer, and for allegations not significantly graver than those leveled against Hüseyin Pasha. Moreover, it became evident that the central government was not up to the task of abolishing the practice of corvée, despite the fact that the Tanzimat regime had, in principle, put an end to it. While peasant cultivators

52 BOA, I.MVL, 4-63.

53 Ibid.

54 E. Attila Aytakin, “Cultivators, Creditors and the State: Rural Indebtedness in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Empire,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 35, no. 2 (2008): 292–313.

55 McGowan, *Economic Life in Ottoman Europe*, 72.

56 Quoted in İnalçık, “The Emergence of Big Farms, *Çiftliks*,” 31.

interpreted the abolition of *corvée* as the restoration of their former proprietary rights, and thus made it their primary demand in their protests, *çiftlik* owners vehemently resisted discontinuing the practice. As with the case in Vranje, whenever İstanbul was called to adjudicate on such matters, it often confirmed the rights of the *çiftlik* owners to the land. In this way, the actual reality of the situation flew in the face of the liberal views espoused in the Tanzimat, which, in theory, strove to establish the peasant cultivator as the principal proprietor.⁵⁷ While siding with *çiftlik* owners was motivated by a potential increase in profitability and tax revenue, this approach was also no doubt influenced by the fact that most of the high officials in İstanbul were themselves the owners or tax farmers of *çiftlik*s that had been confiscated from the *ayans* following their removal during the reign of Mahmud II. These confiscated *çiftlik*s were first transferred to the Imperial Treasury and then subsequently either sold to entrepreneurs or farmed out to high officials in İstanbul as compensation for their services. For instance, Mustafa Reşid Pasha, the chief proponent of the Tanzimat reforms, held the tax-farming rights to 18 *çiftlik*s in Trikala (Tırhala) that had been confiscated from Tepedelenli Ali Pasha in the 1820s.⁵⁸

And thus the verdict was reached. Hüseyin Pasha was issued a polite warning regarding the use of *corvée*, and in the near future, after he presented his report on the implementation of the Tanzimat in his region, he would additionally be granted a diamond box worth 10,000 *guruş* as a gift for his loyalty to the empire.⁵⁹ As for the supplicants, they had to be content with a pat on the back:

Your complaints have been heard. These are the things that happened before the auspicious Tanzimat. It is evident that such things will never happen again, as everyone's property, honor, and life are from now on ensured by the Tanzimat. *Corvée* has been abolished across the empire, and justice has been provided on the issue of the poll tax as well. From now on, no subject is to be oppressed and no capital punishment is to be exacted without a proper legal judgment and an imperial edict. Go and pray to your mighty sultan.⁶⁰

Most of the townsmen then left, but two of the Albanian supplicants had to stay, because they were imprisoned for slandering the pasha. After a while, the

57 Ibid., 29–31.

58 Kaya, "On the *Çiftlik* Regulation in Tırhala in the Mid-Nineteenth Century."

59 Reşat Kaynar, *Mustafa Reşit Paşa ve Tanzimat* (Ankara: TTK, 1991), 294. The other two Albanian pashas, Abdurrahman Pasha and Hıfzı Pasha, were presented with a box worth 10,000 *guruş* and one worth 15,000 *guruş*, respectively.

60 BOA, I.MVL, 4-63.

bishop of the Skopje diocese bailed them out.⁶¹ Following their release, they continued to stay in İstanbul: not only were they afraid to go back to Vranje after what had happened, but they were also determined to pursue the case to the very end, and for that they had to remain in order to serve as the main medium between the people of Vranje and İstanbul, by means of petitions. They initially stayed at inns, and later at the house Hacı İbrahim Efendi, the prayer leader (*batib*) of the Murad Pasha Mosque in İstanbul. A local Albanian from Vranje, İbrahim Efendi was a former steward of Hüseyin Pasha's, who had, according to the pasha's account, been sacked due to his corrupt activities. Hüseyin Pasha's claim was that, driven by revenge, İbrahim Efendi was providing shelter and counsel for the two remaining townsmen.⁶² Whatever the case may have been, for the next two years the Porte was flooded with petitions about the worsening conditions in Vranje.⁶³

Having ignored them initially, by 1842 İstanbul had become more attentive to the petitions. What forced the government to look once again into the continuing complaints against Hüseyin Pasha was partly simply the increasing number of petitions, but more importantly the alarming situation in the Balkans, with the tax revolts occurring after the implementation of the Tanzimat's new tax regime, particularly the one in Niš, a neighboring province to Vranje, in 1841.⁶⁴ What is more, Kamil Pasha, the commander in Belgrade, reported that the situation was worsening as the supplications deteriorated into insurgency and the Christians of Vranje came to seek assistance from the Serbian authorities. In addition, the governors of Rumelia and Vidin reported that some bandits were patrolling around the towns of Niš, Leskovac (Leskofça), and Pristina (Priştina), and advised İstanbul that a regiment in Edirne be moved to the region as reinforcements, for fear that the insurgency might spread over an even wider region where the situation had been already tenuous ever since the suppression of the Niš rebellion in 1841.⁶⁵

The new petitions partly repeated the former claims against Hüseyin Pasha and partly added new complaints, but now they were more concrete and better prepared to substantiate the pasha's injustice:

It is the petition of your subjects that because of the intolerable level that the oppression and tyranny of Hüseyin Pasha, the governor of Vranje, have reached, two thousand households have moved to other provinces, and as some among those who stayed were on their way to Monastir to inform the

61 BOA, İ.MVL, 42-784, 7.

62 Ibid.

63 BOA, İ.DH. 68-3351, 14.N.1258 (October 19, 1842).

64 On the Nish rebellion, see Uzun, *Tanzimat ve Sosyal Direnişler*; İnalçık, *Tanzimat ve Bulgar Meselesi*.

65 BOA İ.MVL, 42-784, 13.

governor general of Rumelia of their miserable conditions, Hüseyin Pasha arrested twelve of them, executing them and feeding their corpses to dogs. With the cooperation of twenty men in the town, he has been using the poor as captives at his sixteen estates and six iron ore mines, conscripting 600,000 [working days of] *corvée* from the poor, and, unable to do their own work for doing the pasha's work, they have all become skin and bones. He even sells our daughters as if they are concubines. Annually, he collects 52 *guruş* as poll tax (*cizye*) from each of 20,000 Christians between the ages of 10 and 90, 120 *guruş* as tax (*salyane*) from each of 6,000 houses in the province, 10 *guruş* from each *dönüm*⁶⁶ of 10,000 *dönüms* of vineyards, half a *kise* (250 *guruş*) from each of 100 taverns, and 50,000 *guruş* as toll from the mountain pass (*derbend*). And since, after paying all these taxes, the poor are unable to feel safe and secure, and since we are discontented with the pasha, we ask from our merciful sultan to summon him to the justice of İstanbul, settle our accounts according to the account books in our possession, and stand him on trial at the Supreme Council in order to protect the poor and save all your poor subjects from the pasha's tyranny and oppression. It is our humble wish that Hıfzı Pasha, the governor of Skopje, who is known for his compassion, be given the town administration so that the poor can remain at peace in your exalted domain.⁶⁷

What is here translated as "account books" was a four-page register written in Serbian, with a Turkish translation, that appears to have been prepared by the supplicants in a very detailed manner.⁶⁸ The register included the following lists: the 248 Christian villages in the province, and for each village the name of the Christian notable (*çorbacı*) in charge of collecting the poll tax, the number of houses, and the number of people subject to poll tax in each house; the names of 100 taverns; the locations of 16 estates and six iron ore mines; and the regional distribution of 10,000 *dönüms* of vineyards. Annually, Hüseyin Pasha was collecting 1,040,000 *guruş* as poll tax, 720,000 *guruş* as tax (*salyane*) from 6,000 houses, 25,000 *guruş* as custom duty from taverns, 100,000 *guruş* as custom duty from vineyards, and 75,000 *guruş* from "the sale of girls to bachelors." Furthermore, the supplicants even translated the use of *corvée* into a monetary figure that the pasha was claimed to have unjustly exploited: the people of Vranje had worked at the estates and iron ore mines for a total of 600,000 working days, and, on the basis of a stipend of four *guruş* per day, the pasha owed them 2,400,000 *guruş*.⁶⁹ In sum, according to the petitioners' claims, Hüseyin Pasha had been

66 A land measure equal to about a quarter of an acre.

67 BOA İ.MVL, 42-784, 1.

68 *Ibid.*, 9-12.

69 *Ibid.*, 1.

collecting well over four million *guruş* annually from Vranje, most of it unjustly. Note that this amount was roughly ten times more than the pasha's tax-farming contract of 1837 had stipulated.

The suppliants also claimed that, in addition to overtaxation, Hüseyin Pasha had continued to use physical violence, having had two more townspeople killed simply for entering a vineyard to eat some grapes. As the number of petitions and claims mounted, there was also a thinly veiled admonition to İstanbul:

We have been submitting petitions to seek compassion for your poor subjects for the last three years, but to no avail. We have no one but our merciful sultan. If we are not to receive compassion for the poor, let us send the news to the remaining subjects of the province so that they may move to other provinces and save themselves.⁷⁰

It had been nearly three years since İstanbul received the first petition, and the situation in the province was getting worse every day. The authorities in İstanbul seem to have been convinced that "Hüseyin Pasha had heretofore been administering the province with threats, even though the people of Vranje are not exactly commendable," but they still remained hesitant about taking any radical decision.⁷¹ They decided to once again address the problem by asking Hüseyin Pasha's defense and his superior governors in the region to investigate the claims.

In his defense, Hüseyin Pasha attempted to isolate the people of Vranje from the supplicants in İstanbul and from the rest of the region where rebellious turmoil was still in the air. He repeated his former claim that the two locals who had been petitioning against him over the last three years on behalf of the people of Vranje were criminals, and that Hacı İbrahim Efendi, who had been providing them with shelter and guidance, was acting out of a personal grudge against the pasha. All of these petitions were thus individual endeavors and had nothing to do with his supposed misconduct in Vranje, where the people were very much content with his administration. The obvious evidence for this, the pasha argued, was that the people in the province had never considered taking part in the rebellion in the neighboring towns of Niš and Leskovac.⁷² As for the two men claimed to have been killed by the pasha's soldiers for entering a vineyard, he asserted that the two men had entered the vineyard to take grapes, but when the vineyard's watchman asked them to leave the property, they wounded him with a gunshot, upon which the watchman returned fire, killing one of the men before

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid., BOA İ.MVL, 42-784, 13.

72 Ibid., 7.

he himself was killed by the other man. Subsequently, the soldiers pursued and cornered this man, and during the exchange of fire he killed a soldier before himself being killed.⁷³ All of the pasha's accounts were corroborated by the governors of Rumelia, Vidin, and *Elviye-i Selase* (i.e., the triple districts of Janina, Trikala, and Salonica [Selanik]), who were commissioned by İstanbul to carry out separate investigations.⁷⁴ After three years of petitions and subsequent investigations, it was now obvious to the people of Vranje that Hüseyin Pasha would continue to remain the governor. At this point, they decided to take the matter into their own hands.

The spark that turned the disturbance into a full-blown rebellion in 1844 came with the conscription of the local population for the new army, which had been renamed *Asakir-i Nizamiye-i Şahane* (Regular Imperial Troops) in 1841. After a decade's less than successful endeavor to establish reserve regiments (*redif*) in the provinces based on conscription from the local populace, a new set of regulations was passed in 1843 that set compulsory military service at five years as regular troops and then seven years as reserves.⁷⁵ Although the Tanzimat edict promised a new and orderly military system based on universal conscription, widespread non-Muslim resistance made their recruitment into the new army impossible.⁷⁶ Even earlier attempts in the 1830s to conscript Muslims—in particular Albanians, Bosnians, Kurds, and Arabs—had been largely thwarted, for the potential conscripts rightly perceived that their privileged autonomy was being jeopardized by the centralization efforts of the new order, leaving the new army to depend largely on “*Türk uşâğı*” (Turkish lads).⁷⁷ Determined to expand the conscription base for the regular army following the 1843 regulations, the central government once again attempted to recruit other Muslim groups, including the Albanians. Despite their claim that they were exempted from conscription in return for extra taxes,⁷⁸ Muslim Albanians—who constituted a significant proportion of the population in Vranje and the surrounding regions—were recruited for the newly formed regiments. As they were being

73 BOA, İ.MVL, 49-938, 12.

74 For the report of Yakub Pasha, the governor of Rumelia, see BOA, İ.MVL. 42-784, 5; for that of Hüseyin Pasha, the governor of Vidin, see BOA, İ.MVL, 49-938, 9; and for that of Osman Pasha, the governor of *Elviye-i Selase*, see BOA, İ.MVL, 49-938, 2.

75 The most comprehensive work on the central government's efforts at conscription in the 1830s is Yıldız, *Neferin Adı Yok*.

76 Ufuk Gülsoy, *Osmanlı Gayrimüslimlerinin Askerlik Serüveni* (İstanbul: Simurg, 2000).

77 Virginia H. Aksan, “Military Reform and Its Limits in a Shrinking Ottoman World, 1800–1840,” in *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire*, eds. Virginia H. Aksan and Daniel Goffman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 130. For resistance to conscription in the Middle East, see also Erik J. Zürcher, ed., *Arming the State: Military Conscription in the Middle East and Central Asia, 1775–1925* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999) and Khlaed Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997).

78 BOA, A.MKT, 20-63, 29.Z.1260 (January 9, 1845).

transported to Skopje for training, they revolted.⁷⁹ Having been subjected to Hüseyin Pasha's "tyranny" for years, and following a four-year failed struggle to remove him from the town, conscription was considered by many as insult to injury. Resistance to conscription and the demand to depose Hüseyin Pasha now became interconnected in a full-fledged Albanian revolt that spiraled out over a very wide region. Albanians from Vranje quickly merged with others from Skopje, Tetovo (Kalkandelen), Kumanovo (Komanova), Novo Brdo (Novaberda), Pristina, Kuršumlja (Kurşunlu), and Prokuplje (Ürgüb). They took up arms⁸⁰ and marched towards Vranje crying, "Down with the pasha! We won't have him!"⁸¹

Hearing that nearly 600 rebels were approaching the town, many of Vranje's Albanian Muslims, including some of the pasha's own servants and militia, joined them.⁸² The rebels—whose number with the new additions reached as many as 1,200⁸³—quickly took control of the town, burning down the pasha's mansions on his estates and seizing his livestock.⁸⁴ Along with 500 Albanian Tosk soldiers, Hüseyin Pasha sought refuge in his mansion, avoiding direct military confrontation and waiting for reinforcements from neighboring provinces.

In the midst of the turmoil, Serbs—who from early on had also been suppliants in many petitions to unseat Hüseyin Pasha—took up arms in small bands under the leadership of a certain Mihal from Vranje, who had to escape from the Ottoman authorities to Belgrade in the early 1840s "for inciting people to rebellion."⁸⁵ The Serbian insurgency appeared in a separate,

79 BOA, I.MSM, 58-1697, 4.R.1260 (April 23, 1844), 9.

80 From the report of Osman Pasha, the governor of Sofia, based on the account of İsmail Pasha, the governor of Leskovac; see BOA, I.MSM, 58-1697, 4.R.1260 (April 23, 1844), 17.

81 W.W. Smyth, *A Year with the Turks or Sketches of Travel in the European and Asiatic Dominions of the Sultan* (New York: Redfield, 1854), 95. The author, a British traveler who happened to be in Vranje at the time of the rebellion, made some interesting first-hand observations; see, e.g., 184–209.

82 BOA, I.MSM, 58-1697, 17; BOA, C.DH, 245-12209, 14.Ra.1260 (April 3, 1844). This was because, according to the document, "the subjects and servants of Hüseyin Pasha were relatives and acquaintances of them [the rebels]."

83 Smyth, *A Year with the Turks*, 195.

84 BOA, I.MSM, 58-1697, 2, 17.

85 BOA, A.MKT, 29-12, 12.L.1261 (October 14, 1845). Mihal and several of his men were eventually captured and killed. However, his activities and the circumstances in which he was killed led to the involvement of foreign consuls. According to the official Ottoman version, he was a known troublemaker who had recently returned from Belgrade to provoke Albanians and Serbs into rebellion. As he was being transferred to the army headquarters in Skopje following his capture, he managed to untie his legs and run into the nearby forest. The guard caught up with him and, in the ensuing struggle, the guard, unable to restrain him, was forced to shoot and kill him. The British and the Russian consuls, however, claimed that he was, in fact, executed by order of Osman Pasha, the governor of Skopje, because Mihal had raised complaints about the tyranny in Vranje. For a detailed examination of the matter, see also BOA, I.MVL, 70-1323, 13.L.1261 (October 15, 1845) and BOA, MVL, 42-12, 16.Z.1261 (December 16, 1845). Mihal's vitae makes one think that he could be the Mihailo Stojanović mentioned in footnote 36, but it is impossible to ascertain this.

yet related, movement, and there is no indication that Serbs joined the Albanian rebels.⁸⁶ In fact, the general insurgency deteriorated until it was on the verge of intercommunal violence between Muslims and Christians, with the Albanian rebels pillaging the property of Serbians and Bulgarians in Vranje and the surrounding regions as they advanced and Serbs breaking into Muslim villages.⁸⁷ On another level, however, even though Albanian Muslims and Christians may have taken up arms in separate movements and sometimes against each other, the source of their discontent and their target was ultimately the same: Hüseyin Pasha, perceived as the embodiment of the failure of the Tanzimat regime to keep its promise to uphold justice.

The Albanian rebels declared that “their quarrel was only with the pasha, and that if they could gain redress, they would leave the town.”⁸⁸ Otherwise, it would be “his life or theirs.”⁸⁹ Although the pasha’s removal was the primary goal, the rebels also insisted on the dismissal of Abdurrahman Pasha of Pristina, the elimination of Tosk soldiers, and the abolition of conscription for the Regular Imperial Troops in the region. They vowed that they would not relinquish control of the town until the appointment of new governors of their choosing to Vranje, as well as to Skopje and its subprovinces.⁹⁰

The rebel leaders met with some notables and village headmen from Vranje, and they agreed to once again send a petition to İstanbul requesting the pasha’s dismissal.⁹¹ Signed by 135 people from the town, the petition was sent to İstanbul, and stated that it was the presence of the pasha that was the main reason for the insurgency.⁹² In the meantime, reports by the governors of Rumelia, Skopje, Niš, Sofia, and Leskovac expressed deep concern that the revolt in Vranje might spread to their provinces, asking for military reinforcements and urging the government to take action.⁹³

86 The Albanian insurgents consisted entirely of Muslims. A few years after the events, a collective petition was signed by 37 rebels who had been imprisoned in İstanbul and were seeking pardon; all of the names were Muslim ones. Of the 37, 25 were from Vranje, eight from Mat, two from Peć (İpek), and two from Prizren. BOA, A.DVN, 20-3, 9.Z.1262 (December 28, 1846).

87 For the Albanian attacks against Christians, see BOA, İ.MSM, 60-1745, 18.L.1259 (December 11, 1843); BOA, A.MKT, 12-80, 11.Ca.1260 (May 29, 1844); BOA, C.DH, 111-5505, 29.Ca.1260 (June 16, 1844); BOA, C.DH, 245-12209, 14.Ra.1260 (April 3, 1844); BOA, C.HR, 100-4963, 25.Ca.1260 (June 12, 1844); and BOA, İ.MTZ (04), 1-9, 5.S.1260 (February 25, 1844). For the destruction of a church in Vranje by Albanians, see Smyth, *A Year with the Turks*, 203. For the Serbian attacks on Muslim villages and the killing of a certain Ahmed Sipahi in Kurşumlıja, see BOA, İ.MSM, 56-1635, 28.Ra.1260 (April 17, 1844); BOA, C.DH, 110-5500, 3.Ca.1260 (May 21, 1260); and BOA, C.ADL, 37-2201, 25.Ca.1260 (June 12, 1844).

88 Smyth, *A Year with the Turks*, 201.

89 *Ibid.*, 202.

90 BOA, İ.MSM, 58-1697, 2.

91 Smyth, *A Year with the Turks*, 201–02.

92 BOA, İ.MSM, 58-1697, 3.

93 *Ibid.*, 2, 10, 14, 17, 18.

No one had to wait for İstanbul's response. Fearing for his life, Hüseyin Pasha, along with his 500 Tosk soldiers, escaped from the town "without firing a gun at the rebels."⁹⁴ He reached Monastir, taking refuge in the headquarters of Said Pasha, the governor general of Rumelia. Soon after he left, İstanbul ordered Said Pasha and Reşid Pasha, the commander general of the Army of Rumelia, to suppress the revolt.⁹⁵ The army dispersed the rebels, capturing some 150 of them, most of whom perished within a few years under the terrible conditions of the naval dockyard in İstanbul where they were imprisoned.⁹⁶ Hüseyin Pasha died the same year.⁹⁷ Apparently not ready to break the dynasty of Albanian pashas, and with a tacit admission of its failure to bring the region under its own direct control, the government appointed Hurşid Bey, Hüseyin Pasha's son, as the new governor of Vranje.⁹⁸ After Hurşid Bey's death in 1852, the town administration still remained in the family, with this time his brother Süleyman Bey taking over. Hüseyin Pasha's successors inherited not only their father's unpaid debts to the treasury,⁹⁹ but also the income of the town's iron ore mines and agricultural estates as well.¹⁰⁰ Apparently, they also took after their father in terms of "tyranny" and "corruption,"¹⁰¹ for soon afterwards they would find themselves in the very same confrontation with the people of Vranje over charges of extortion, the use of corvée, overtaxation, and unjust capital punishment.¹⁰² Evidently, it was business as usual in Vranje.

94 Ibid, 17.

95 Lütü Efendi, *Vak'anüvis Ahmed Lutfi Efendi Tarihi*, Vol. 7, 1154.

96 BOA, İ.MSM, 59-1715, 27.Za.1260 (December 8, 1844); BOA, C.DH, 275-13728, 25.M.1261 (February 3, 1845); BOA, MVL, 43-19, 15.Ca.1262 (May 11, 1846); BOA, İ.MSM, 60-1729, 6.C.1262 (June 1, 1846); BOA, C.ZB, 68-3364, 14.C.1262 (June 9, 1846).

97 BOA, A.MKT, 16-37, 25.Ş.1260 (September 9, 1844).

98 BOA, C.ML, 391-15969, 29.Z.1260 (January 9, 1845).

99 BOA, A.MKT, 16-37.

100 BOA, C.ML, 678-27842, 4.S.1260 (February 24, 1844).

101 For the charges of bribing Osman Pasha, the governor of Skopje, see BOA, İ.MVL, 67-1281, 6.Ş.1261 (August 10, 1845); for other charges of corruption, see BOA, A.MKT.UM, 165-77, 1.M.1271 (September 24, 1854).

102 For the disputes between the people of Vranje and the governor Süleyman Bey over these issues, see BOA, A.MKT.UM, 152-68, 28.Ca.1270 (February 26, 1854); BOA, A.MKT.MVL, 67-55, 15.Ş.1270 (May 13, 1854); BOA, A.MKT.UM, 164-24, 21.Z.1270 (September 14, 1854); BOA, A.MKT.UM, 177-91, 20.R.1271 (January 10, 1855); BOA, A.MKT.MVL, 76-49, 16.Ra.1272 (November 26, 1855); BOA, A.MKT.UM, 221-23, 6.Ca.1272 (January 14, 1856); BOA, A.MKT.UM, 226-8, 17.C.1272 (February 24, 1856); BOA, A.MKT.MVL, 79-67, 7.Ş.1272 (April 13, 1856); BOA, A.AMD, 80-94, 6.M.1274 (August 27, 1857); BOA, A.MKT.UM, 355-92, 1.Z.1275 (July 2, 1859); BOA, A.MKT.UM, 358-63, 3.M.1276 (August 2, 1859); BOA, A.MKT.UM, 440-92, 23.Ca.1277 (December 7, 1860); and BOA, A.MKT.MVL, 143-33, 22.N.1278 (March 23, 1862).

Conclusion

The four-year conflict between the people of Vranje and their governor Hüseyin Pasha detailed above opens the way for larger inquiries into the nature of the struggle both of the local population against provincial governors and of the Tanzimat regime's quest for fiscal and political centralization. Evident in this struggle was the failure of the Tanzimat state to uphold its promises of guaranteeing justice by due process of law and of implementing a new and fair system of taxation as well as a new system of military service based on universal conscription. When called in by the people via petitions to arbitrate in their struggle with their landlords in matters of *corvée*, overtaxation, and justice, the central government chose to ignore and dismiss the call and, ultimately, to side with the landlord. The new tax regime that aimed to monopolize tax collection and increase fiscal capacity had to be abandoned after only two years in the face of mounting resistance from the provinces. And finally, while it became quickly apparent that the conscription of non-Muslims into the new army was improbable, the expansion of the conscription base into other Muslim groups—such as Albanians, Bosnians, and Kurds—proved to be extremely difficult. Ultimately, this struggle exposed how little influence the Ottoman state had over its provincial bureaucrats and local dynasts, even after it accelerated its bid to bring the provinces into its orbit through the financial and legal means of the Tanzimat. The whole ordeal in Vranje—which was by no means an exception across the Ottoman Empire, and in particular in the Balkans, which witnessed numerous rebellions both before and after the Tanzimat—served as a bitter reminder of the fact that, for the center, extending its control over people in the provinces must be preceded by controlling its provincial bureaucrats. It was a daunting task, one which would be rehearsed throughout the empire during the rest of the century.

These failures, however, should not undermine the fact that the Tanzimat created an entirely novel legal and political environment that provided a different vocabulary of negotiation, contestation, and resistance for social actors. As has been recounted in this study, the people of Vranje responded strategically by pointing to the stark discrepancy between the existing reality and the normative rules set by the Tanzimat, thus mobilizing Tanzimat rhetoric in order to make sense of and resist the perceived injustices. As is evident from their petitions, they had regarded Hüseyin Pasha and his rule in Vranje as unjust long before the Tanzimat reforms were declared, but it was the promises of the Tanzimat that made him illegitimate in their eyes, gave them a sense of entitlement to redress injustices, and guided their attempts to remove him. Throughout their four-year struggle with Hüseyin Pasha, the arguments they deployed and the evidence they presented in trying to

make persuasive appeals to the central government depended on a vocabulary that had only been made available by the Tanzimat's legal-political discourse. The invocation of the language of need and the appeal to the moral authority of the sultan, common in all petitions, accompanied and further reinforced the new vocabulary of negotiation and contestation in this struggle.

However, the repeated failures of the Tanzimat state to uphold the principles of justice also proved the limits of this legal consciousness and set the stage for insurgency. As Ranajit Guha has remarked on the dynamics and stages of mobilization and dissent:

It would be difficult to cite an uprising on any significant scale that was not in fact preceded either by less militant types of mobilization when other means had been tried and found wanting or by parley among its principals seriously to weigh the pros and cons of any recourse to arms. [...] [T]he protagonists in each case had tried out petitions, deputations or other forms of supplication before actually declaring war on their oppressors.¹⁰³

This was the case even for Albanians, the main actors of the rebellion in Vranje, who were portrayed by contemporaries as an unruly mob who frequently had recourse to insurgency. The tribal networks they possessed and their immediate access to violence as a well-armed group certainly played an important role in their mobilization against the central government's efforts to incorporate them into the central rule and recruit them into the new army. And yet, as detailed in this study, the rebellion in Vranje was a desperate one, a last resort act a long time in the making. In the course of their four-year struggle to bring an end to the "tyranny" of Hüseyin Pasha, the people of Vranje invoked the legal discourse to seek justice, appealed to the moral authority of the sultan to seek compassion, and even illustrated the tyranny to demonstrate their suffering, and it was only when all other options were exhausted that they opted for rebellion.

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 A.MKT.UM (*Sadaret Mektubi Kalemî Umum Vilayat Evrakı*)
 C.ADL (*Cevdet Adliye*)
 C.DH (*Cevdet Dabîliye*)
 C.HR (*Cevdet Hariciye*)
 C.ML (*Cevdet Maliye*)
 C.ZB (*Cevdet Zabtiye*)
 HAT (*Hatt-ı Hümayun*)
 İ.DH (*İrade Dabîliye*)
 İ.MSM (*İrade Mesail-i Mühimme*)
 İ.MTZ (04) (*İrade Eyalet-i Mümtaze Bulgaristan*)
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