The Late Ottoman Sunni Missionary Project

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Introduction

This chapter[1] is a preliminary overview of a hitherto largely unexplored topic.[2] In it, I explore the late Ottoman missionary project as presented in the form of petitions, found in the Ottoman Archives. I posit my analysis within the framework of "Ottoman orientalism," arguing that the reports and petitions of Ottoman officials and travellers often fall within this framework, as outlined by scholars such as Ussama Makdisi and Selim Deringil. I will also show how the concept of "home/internal mission" is relevant for this case. Based on archives and published sources (chronicles, yearbooks), I analyse how the Ottomans developed and applied the idea of "correction of belief(s)", how they justified this policy, and what the outcome was.

The first example of this policy appears in the eighteenth century, when the Ottoman administration attempted to "civilise," by way of religious education, non-Muslim or nominally Muslim tribes in the Caucasus which it deemed unruly. It continued into the early nineteenth century and coincided with the reign of Sultan Mahmud II (r. 1808–1839) who, in his drive for the centralisation of the state and its modernisation according to European standards, persecuted the internal opposition formed of his elite Janissary troops and the Bektaşi Sufi Order who were their allies from 1826 onwards. During the Reform Period (*Tanzimat*, 1839–1876) attempts at Sunnitisation were military in nature, with the Ottomans trying to establish missionary training in non-Sunni areas in order to inculcate the importance of "unity" among Muslims and to influence those people whose sons would be conscripted as soldiers in the imperial army. The

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Ottoman state and its officials envisaged a Sunni "Missionary Society" (*Dâiler Cemiyeti*) that would, in particular, fight Protestant Christian missionary zeal. This continued into the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909).

Although Sunni Islam of the official Ottoman Hanafi version[3] did not involve active proselytising in the Christian sense of "saving souls," some Ottoman officials promoted a Sunni establishment with preachers and trained teachers/imams in schools and mosques in areas where non-Sunni Muslims lived, and the dissemination of counterpropaganda in response to the beliefs of "unorthodox" groups. Documents in the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul (*Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi*) show that officials from Eastern Anatolia, Iraq and Syria sent reports to Istanbul based on their experiences with non-Sunni sects regarded as "heretical" (*râfizi*), "misguided" (*firak-ı dâlle*), "savage" (*vahşi*), etc. One of their major proposals was to write a "Book of Beliefs" consisting of the doctrines of various non-Sunni beliefs to help in training Sunni missionaries to respond to and write refutations of these ideas. These missionaries should not only be active in Istanbul, but be sent to other Ottoman domains where "harmful sects" were present, and even to distant Islamic and non-Islamic lands in order to promote Islam and "correct the belief(s)" (*tashih-i itikad/akaid*) of those people. The outcome of appointing such missionaries would be a "union of hearts" worthy of Muslims in the Ottoman domains. Abdülhamid II's missionising developed in a context of Pan-Islamism, utilised to consolidate the Empire's Muslim populations at a time when the empire was losing territories, especially in the Balkans, making Christians a prime target. As the final part of this chapter shows, many of these dynamics—in relation both to Christians and to Shi'i Muslims and so-called "nominal" Sunnis, continued into the Young Turk period.

1   'Ottoman Orientalism'

As is evident from the petitions of governors in various provinces (Iraq, Syria, Kurdistan), the Ottoman State commissioned the construction of mosques and religious schools (*medrese*s) as a measure to educate and "civilise"[4] people and

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3   Sunni Islam has four main schools of jurisprudence (sg. *madhhab*) that differ in some opinions, these are the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali Schools (*al-madhāhib al-arba'a*). The Ottoman Empire, like modern Turkey, adhered to the Hanafi School.

4   Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 50, 99, 110.

make them "obedient"[5] and "good"[6] Muslims. Countless official documents at the *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* (BOA, the Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archives, Istanbul), provide evidence both for this enterprise and for the attitudes that underpinned it. These measures, imbued with a notion of the correctness and orthodoxy of the centre in Istanbul, have, especially for the later period of this study, been interpreted by some historians as a form of Ottoman "orientalism"[7] or "borrowed colonialism."[8] It is important to point out, however, that this concept has serious handicaps. As a critic of this concept remarks:

> [T]his concept is based on the presumption that the Ottoman attempts at Westernization resulted in the emergence of Western modes of thinking with regard to the concepts of civilization and the Orient. In other words, according to the defenders of the 'Ottoman Orientalism' argument, the Ottoman search for the adoption of Western civilization consolidated the perception of inevitability of Westernization. Presuming themselves as 'civilized' in Western terms, the Ottomans began to reflect their Orient as an 'uncivilized' region and tried to project their civilizational development over these backward territories in the form of a *civilizing mission*.[9]

This conception is generalising and regards the East as monolithic. Even if one cannot deny the existence of a "quasi-Orientalist" mode of thinking in the writings of some Ottoman intellectuals regarding the Ottoman Orient, these perceptions cannot be generalised in order to maintain that the Ottoman intellectual and bureaucratic elite were entirely Orientalist.

Scholarship on "Ottoman colonialism" is generally based on the conditions in the Arab provinces (Iraq, Syria and Palestine), the Kurdish regions of the empire, and Libya, Hijaz and Yemen. The focus is on the Ottoman elite's use of the "civilising motif" and points out their attitude of "moral superiority", lead-

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5   Ibid, 94.

6   Ibid, 66.

7   Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," *The American Historical Review*, 107, no. 3 (2002): 768–796; for the conversion campaigns, see Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*, 68–92; Selçuk Akşin Somel, "Osmanlı Modernleşme Döneminde Periferik Nüfus Grupları," *Toplum ve Bilim*, 83 (Kış 1999/2000): 178–201; see also Christoph Herzog and Raoul Motika, "Orientalism 'alla turca': Late 19th / Early 20th Century Ottoman Voyages into the Muslim 'Outback'," *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, 40, no. 2 (2000): 139–195.

8   Selim Deringil, "'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': The Late Ottoman. Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 45, no. 2 (2003): 312.

9   Mustafa Serdar Palabıyık, *Travel, civilization and the east: Ottoman travellers' perception of 'the east' in the late Ottoman Empire*, PhD Thesis, ODTÜ, 2010.

ing to a position of "moral distance", and a perception of "them" and "us" among the ruling elite.[10] However, there are also examples of this "civilising mission" for core provinces in the heart of Anatolia, such as the large Konya province, and this shows that these elite feelings amongst the Ottoman administrative class cannot be confined to their deployment in colonial situations in the Arab provinces.[11]

The issue of inculcating Islam as an ideology was not peculiar to Abdülhamid and his officials; the fact that many Alevi villages in Anatolia did not have mosques is not as surprising as it seems. A similar situation was visible in rural Arab areas in Syria and Palestine, as the Arab Ottoman scholar Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulsi (1643–1731) observed on his tour of Palestine in 1690. Of twenty-three villages, he recorded, only three had mosques and two of these were extensions of shrines of saints. As much as research on the Middle East has sought to show that institutional religion prevailed everywhere, the question is how successful it was in imposing itself on the majority of the urban population and peasantry.[12] As James Grehan has argued, the rural population of the Ottoman Empire, and even most city-dwellers without education, effectively practiced a naturalistic "agrarian religion" which blurred the differences between Islam, Christianity and other faiths and for which terms such as "Islamic civilisation" or "Islamic culture" are barely relevant.[13] Abdülhamid II, in his drive to preserve the current order and enable his Muslim subjects—of whatever religious group—to lead a "good life", dispatched itinerant imams or Sunni missionaries (*dâi-misyoner*), trained to propagate the Hanafi version (Arab. *madhbab*, Turk. *mezhep*, i.e., juridical school) of Sunni Islam in replacement of this "agrarian" religiosity. In the wake of the clash with the Shi'i Safavi dynasty of Iran (1501–1736),[14] the Ottomans' archenemy, Hanafi Islam was adopted as the official school of Ottoman Empire, which allowed local officials to recruit

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10 Selim Deringil, "'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery'", 312; Abdulhamit Kırmızı, "Going round the province for progress and prosperity: inspection tours and reports by late Ottoman governors," *Studies in Travel Writing*, 16, no. 4 (2012): 388.

11 Kırmızı, "Going round the province", 390–396.

12 James Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints: Everyday Religion in Ottoman Syria and Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 21.

13 Ibid. 16.

14 Shah Isma'il (r. 1501–1524), founder of the dynasty in Iran, claimed to be the *Mahdi*, infiltrated the Ottoman Empire and mobilised heterodox Shi'is (*Kızılbaş Alevis*) in order to undermine the existing order. Their presence threatened the integrity of the Empire. Although the Ottomans subsequently defeated the Safavis and eliminated a considerable number of Isma'il's followers, uprisings by politically motivated heterodox religious groups under the leadership of a "Mahdi" were a constant threat. Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985), 105–107; see also Sohrweide, "Der

many scholars from different schools to fill some of the positions in the judiciary and educational system, and as muftis (jurists).[15]

The fight against all forms of "ignorance" (*cehalet*) was the aim of Ottoman state during the latter part of the reign of Abdülhamid II, when Sunni Islam was politicised to serve an imperial ideology called "Union of Islam" (*ittihad-ı İslam*, or Pan-Islam). Since the second half of the nineteenth century, the Islamic world outside the Ottoman Empire came under the domination of European states. Muslims favoured a psychological atmosphere that laid the groundwork for the universal expansion of this ideology. Thus, it was envisaged that Muslim countries would unite under the leadership of the Ottoman Empire to escape from the backwardness of modern civilisation and the domination of foreign countries. The aim was to strengthen the position of the sultan as caliph, to preserve the empire from falling apart, and thus stabilise the state structure.[16]

2 The Policy of the "Correction of Belief(s)" before Abdülhamid II (1876–1909)

From early in Islamic history, groups deemed outside mainstream Sunnism, the "internal others," have been called *al-firaq al-ḍālla* ("misguided sects") or *ahl al-bidʻa* ("people of (harmful/blameworthy) innovation" or "sectarians");[17] these are labels that refer to conceptual trends or sects within Islam that were viewed as having deviated from the Sunni consensus. Their conflicting viewpoints were perceived as the origin of *fitna* ("sedition") and as posing a threat to the unity of the Muslim community. The most common term used pejoratively

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Sieg der Safaviden in Persien"; Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Zındıklar ve Mülhidler (15.–17. Yüzyıllar)* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 1998).

15   The Ottomans preserved this system of *madhhab* plurality but placed it under Hanafi supremacy. For the adaptation of the Hanafi School and its development in the Ottoman Empire, see Rudolph Peters, "What Does It Mean to Be an Official Madhhab? Hanafism and the Ottoman Empire," idem. *Shariʻa, Justice and Legal Order: Egyptian and Islamic Law: Selected Essays* (Brill: Leiden, 2020), 585–599, and Guy Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law: The Ḥanafī School in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015).

16   Stephen Duguid, "The Politics of Unity: Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 9, 2 (1973): 139–155; Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990): 9–79; Kemal H. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

17   Maribel Fierro, "The treatises against innovations (*kutub al-bidaʻ*)", *Der Islam*, 69, 2 (1992): 204–246. doi:10.1515/islm.1992.69.2.204.

by Sunnis in general, especially religious scholars (*'ulamā'*), as applied to Shi'i groups and various sects of Shi'ism, is *rāfiḍa/rawāfiḍ*, meaning "rejecter(s)" or "heretics".[18] In the Ottoman Empire, followers of Shi'a Islam and various sects such as the Nusayris (Alawis),[19] Yezidis,[20] Alevis (Kızılbaş),[21] or Druze[22] were called *râfizi/revâfiz*, or *ehl-i rafz*.[23] In the Empire some Sunni tribes and the ultra-Sunni Wahhabi movement were also called *râfizi* in the eighteenth century due their opposition to the state.[24]

Studies of so-called "heretical" religious groups (*fırak-ı dâlle*) in the late Ottoman period discuss the application of "correction of belief(s)" or "rectification of belief(s)" (*tashih-i itikad/akaid*) in groups with Shi'i leanings, and sometimes those who were regarded as Sunni Muslim only by name.[25] This concept,

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18   Kohlberg, E. "al-Rāfiḍa", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, and E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online 18 January 2018 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_6185.

19   The Alawis (Syria, Turkey and Lebanon), also known (pejoratively) as Nusayris, are a gnostic and secretive sect of mainstream Twelver (Imami) Shi'a who believe that the first Imam, Ali ibn Abi Talib, is God or a divine manifestation, and that he is part of a divine triad. For this reason they are called "exaggerators" (*ghulāt*) or "extreme Shi'a". They believe, among other things, in reincarnation during which believers are given a chance to correct their mistakes on earth. Unbelievers are condemned to be reborn as animals or lifeless objects. The Alawis have a complex theology and cosmology.

20   The Yezidis or Ezidis belong to an ancient Kurdish belief system. They live in Iraq, Iran, Syria, Turkey and the diaspora. Yezidism is monotheistic and also believes in a divine triad, one of which is the peacock angel Tawuse Melek. One of the main elements of the belief system is rebirth.

21   The Alevis, also known as *Kızılbaş*, are the biggest and most important religious group in Anatolia, having Turkish and Kurdish followers. Alevism, a mystical and non-conformist branch of Shi'a Islam, worships Imam Ali, the fourth caliph and the first Shi'i imam and teaches that he is the source of divine knowledge. Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli was a Sufi saint and is one of the main spiritual leaders of Alevism. The organised form of Alevism as a Sufi order is called Bektaşism.

22   The secretive Druze faith (Lebanon, Syria, Israel) is also an offshoot of Shi'a Islam and goes back to the gnostic Isma'ili branch. The schism occurred in the eleventh century CE in Egypt in the time of the Fatimid ruler al-Ḥākim bi Amr Allāh. He was seen as a divine figure, a manifestation of God. Like the Alawis, Isma'ilis and Alevis, they have an allegorical interpretation of the Qur'an. Reincarnation is one of the main elements of their belief.

23   Mehmet Zeki Pakalın, "Rafizi", *Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü*, 3 vols., 3:2–5 (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim, 1971–1972); Mustafa Öz, "Râfizîler", *Diyanet İslam Ansiklopedisi* (*DIA*), online: https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/rafiziler (accessed 15 January 2020).

24   Yalçın Çakmak, *Sultanın Kızılbaşları: II. Abdülhamid Dönemi Alevi Algısı ve Siyaseti* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2019), 45 and 95.

25   See Selim Deringil's various works: "The Struggle against Shiism in Hamidian Iraq: A Study in Ottoman Counter Propaganda," *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, 30, no. 1/4 (1990): 45–62; "The Invention of Tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1808 to

derived from *taṣḥīḥ al-iʿtiqād* in Arabic, is not mentioned in the Qurʾan, but is discussed in books on the principles of Islam.[26] It is linked to the Qurʾanic dictum of "commanding right and forbidding wrong," and concerns the rectification of the religious beliefs of the Muslim individual in relation to social and political life.[27]

In the Ottoman Empire of the sixteenth century there had been preachers who incited the people to oppose and attack what they deemed "impious innovations" (*bidʿat*), namely any belief or practice that was outside the scope of the Qurʾan or the prophetic traditions, or did not exist in the time of the "pious forefathers" (*as-salaf as-ṣāliḥin*). One of these was Birgivi (Birgili) Mehmed Efendi (d. 1573) who came to prominence with his fundamentalist views on Islam in the 1550s and 1560s. In his major book *aṭ-Ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadiyya* ("The Path of Muhammad"), written in Arabic, a section is devoted to *taṣḥīḥ al-iʿtiqād* where he puts forth the fundamental beliefs of the Sunnis. Arguing the "practical applications of piety", Birgivi exhorts believers and enjoins them, among others things, to "rectify doctrine" (*taṣḥīḥ al-iʿtiqād*, i.e. correct belief). This is the earliest evidence I found of *tashih-i itikad/akaid* in Ottoman sources.[28]

1908," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 35, no. 1 (1993): 3–29; *The Well-Protected Domains*; "'There Is No Compulsion in Religion': On Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire: 1839–1856," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42 (2000): 547–575; for other similar studies, see Selçuk Akşin Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire 1839–1908* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Edip Gölbaşı, "The Yezidis and the Ottoman State: Modern Power, Military Conscription, and Conversion Policies, 1830–1909", MA Thesis (Istanbul: Boğaziçi University, 2008); "'Heretik' aşiretler ve II. Abdulhamid rejimi: Zorunlu askerlik meselesi ve ihtida siyaseti odağında Yezidiler ve Osmanlı idaresi', *Tarih ve Toplum-Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, 9 (2009): 87–156; "Turning the 'Heretics' into Loyal Muslim Subjects: Imperial Anxieties, the Politics of Religious Conversion, and the Yezidis in the Hamidian Era," *Muslim World*, 103 (2013): 1–23; "'Devil Worshippers' Encounter the State: 'Heterodox' Identities, State Building, and the Politics of Imperial Integration in the Late Ottoman Empire", in *The Ottoman East in the Nineteenth Century: Societies, Identities and Politics*, eds. Ali Sipahi, Dzovinar Derderian and Yaşar Tolga Cora (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016) 133–155; Zeynep Türkyılmaz, *Anxieties of Conversion: Missionaries, State and Heterodox communities in the Late Ottoman Empire*, PhD Thesis (UCLA, 2009), who does not explicitly refer to *tashih-i itikad/akaid*.

26   See, e.g., Abu Bakr Ahmad al-Bayhaqi (d. 1066), *al-Jāmiʿ li-Shuʿab al-Īmān* (Riyad: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2003), 120.

27   See Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001/2004); the abridged version: *Forbidding Wrong in Islam: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). See also Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 29, fn. 8, and 129.

28   Katharina Anna Ivanyi, *Virtue, Piety and the Law: A Study of Birgivī Meḥmedī's al-*

We do not know exactly when the Ottomans first applied "correction of belief(s)" as a political tool with the goal of achieving obedience among peoples they regarded as unruly and so stabilising the political order of the state. The earliest reference in Ottoman sources is when the ulema took an active role in educative measures applied to "disobedient" Abkhaz and Circassian tribes in the Caucasus (*Abaza ve Çerkes*),[29] with "strange beliefs" toward the end of the eighteenth century. Ferah Ali Paşa (d. 1785),[30] governor of the region, was credited with spreading the "light of Islam".[31] An Ottoman chronicle mentions that since then the tribes had entered the fold of Islam and thus "civilisation."[32] Civilisation meant being included in the Muslim community and following Ottoman rule with its official Hanafi Sunnism under the shadow of the sultan-caliph.

In the early nineteenth century, the issue of the conversion of "uncivilised" (*vahşi*, "savage") tribes to Islam, anywhere in the Ottoman Empire, from the Balkans to the Arab Lands but also in the Anatolian heartland, re-emerged. Ottoman representatives took with them imperial orders, along with catechisms or manuals of faith (*ilm-i hâl*, lit. "the knowledge of the situation", i.e., teaching the essentials of Islam such as religious duties and the relationship to God)[33] and instructions to "command right and forbid wrong" and "correct beliefs". Hence, those "uncivilised" people were to be "reformed" by sending muftis, judges and teachers/missionaries from among the ulema.[34]

It is telling that these efforts first occurred during the reign of Mahmud II (r. 1808–1839), who became sultan after a violent power struggle between his predecessor Selim III (r. 1789–1807) and the Janissaries, the elite military corps, as

Ṭarīqa al-muḥammadiyya (Leiden: Brill, 2020), esp. 158. For an English translation of *aṭ-Ṭariqa al-Muḥammadiyya*, see Tosun Bayrak, *The Path of Muhammad: A Book on Islamic Morals and Ethics* (Indiana: World Wisdom, 2005).

29   Circassians, also known by their internal name *Adyghe*, are a mostly Muslim ethnic group from the Caucasus, mainly resident in the Ottoman Empire/Turkey since the nineteenth century. The Abkhaz are an ethnic group from Georgia.

30   Zübeyde Güneş Yağcı, *Ferah Ali Paşa'nın Soğucak Muhafızlığı (1781–1785)*, PhD Thesis (Samsun: Ondokuz Mayız Üniversitesi, 1998).

31   Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi, *Vak'anüvis Ahmed Lutfî Tarihi*, 8 vols. (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi, 1999), 1:170; see also, Kadir I. Natho, *Circassian History* (New Jersey: Exlibris, 2009), 137.

32   Mustafa Nuri Paşa, *Netāyicü'l-Vukū'āt: Kurumlarıyla Osmanlı Tarihi I–IV*, ed. Yılmaz Kurt (Ankara: Birleşik, 2008), 414.

33   Hatice Kelpetin Arpaguş, "İlm-i Hâl", in *DIA*, online: https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ilmi hal (accessed 16 July 2021); see also, Derin Terzioğlu, "Where Ilm-i Hal Meets Catechism: Islamic Manuals of Religious Instruction in the Ottoman Empire in the Age of Confessionalization," *Past & Present*, 220, no. 1 (2013): 79–114.

34   *Vak'anüvis Ahmed Lutfî Tarihi*, 1:170.

a response to military and political reforms to establish a "new order" (*nizam-ı cedid*).[35] In the first half of the nineteenth century, Mahmud II applied *tashih-i itikad/akaid* on a large scale to the Bektaşi Sufi order as part of his reforms. Bektaşism/*Bektaşiyye*[36] was a Sufi order established in Anatolia in the fifteenth century and named after Hacı Bektaş Veli (d. 1270), who was a Sufi saint and is one of the main spiritual leaders of Alevism.[37] Bektaşism, representing the organised form of Alevism, was one of the Muslim movements that mainstream Sunnis, represented by the state, regarded as non-conformist. Sunni clerics depicted it often as "heretical" (*râfizi*). Bektaşism was widespread among Turkish nomadic tribes in central Anatolia that originally came from Azerbaijan and Iran.

Bektaşi dervishes had participated in the conquest and conversion to Islam of Christian domains by the early Ottomans and were involved in the Ottoman army. For unknown reasons, the Janissary (*Yeniçeri*) military corps was placed

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35   Westernising reforms in the Ottoman Empire commenced with the liberal-minded Sultan Selim III (r. 1789–1807). The Ottomans had been defeated several times by European powers during the decades prior to his reign, and in order to compete with them Selim aimed to create an army that would fight on equal terms with them. European armies were technically and tactically more advanced, thus Selim conceived of new armed forces after this model. He realised his ideas by issuing the decree *Nizâm-ı Cedid*, 'the New Order,' in 1793 and trained new troops with the help of French advisors. Although modest in his reform efforts, Selim was opposed by his powerful Janissary (*Yeniçeri*) troops—alongside influential local chiefs such as conservative *derebey*s ("feudal chieftains") and *âyân* ("notables")—who feared they would be substituted and lose their privileges. Selim's reforms were delayed by political crises such as nationalist and separatist movements. When Selim III decided to resume the reorganisation of his troops according to the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd*, the Janissaries revolted and deposed the sultan. He was replaced by Mustafa IV who was incapable and did not pose a threat to their interests (1807). With Selim not in power the *Nizâm-ı Cedîd* seemed to come to an end. However, a year later Alemdar Mustafa Pasha (later grand vizier), an open-minded *âyân* and supporter of Selim III, conquered Istanbul. The Janissaries killed Selim but Mustafa Pasha replaced the newly installed Mustafa IV with his brother Mahmud II (r. 1808–1839).

36   Thierry Zarcone, "Bektaşiyye", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, third edition, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online 9 March 2017 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_24010.

37   Regardless of his Shiʿism and unorthodox beliefs, contrary to Sunni Islam, Hacı Bektaş was revered in the Ottoman Empire and still is held in high esteem in Turkey. It is said that he was a Sunni and later acquired unorthodox "extreme" Shiʿi beliefs. See, Thierry Zarcone, "Bektaş, Hacı," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, third edition, ed. Fleet et al. Consulted online 9 March 2017 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_24009; Markus Dressler, "Alevīs", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, third edition, ed. Fleet, et al. Consulted online 9 March 2017 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_0167; Rıza Yıldırım, "Bektaşi kime derler? Bektaşi kavramının kapsamı ve sınırları üzerine tarihsel bir analiz denemesi", *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli Araştırma Derneği*, 55 (2010): 23–58.

under the spiritual guidance of the Bektaşis (The Janissaries were sometimes called *Ocak-ı Bektaşiyan*, "the hearth of the Bektaşis"). Because of the association of Bektaşis with Janissaries and their protection by the Ottoman state, Bektaşism was considered less heretical than other similar antinomian movements of the period. In fact, the Ottomans were always prejudiced against the Alevis/Kızılbaş because they had supported the Safavids in the sixteenth century and were thus seen as traitors. To tame the Kızılbaş and hence the Alevis in Anatolia, the Bektaşis were given the mission of preventing the Kızılbaş from being heretical and to unite and institutionalise the Anatolian antinomian movements in a single brotherhood. Thus, Bektaşism was domesticated by the Ottomans.[38]

Mahmud II fought to get rid of the Janissaries, the old Ottoman elite troops, prior to the 1826 "Auspicious Incident" (*Vaka-i Hayriyye*), and marginalised and destroyed the Bektaşis, their spiritual leaders and allies. The final decade of Mahmud II's reign generated multiple records that show how Ottoman ulema and administrators sought to arrest former *Bektaşi*s and exile them to strongholds of Sunni orthodox piety (*makarr-ı ulema*), such as Kayseri, Hadim (Konya), Bursa, Manisa, Birgi and other places, thereby "correcting their beliefs" and reintegrating them into the Sunni fold. For example, in a document from January 1828 (1243) one İsmail and a certain Nazif from Üsküdar (Istanbul) are mentioned as having strayed onto the path of "contemporary Bektaşism" (*zamane Bektaşilik*) and acted against the "exalted sharia". In order to discipline them, they were sent to Güzelhisar (Aydın), which was a "stronghold of the ulema" (*makarr-ı ulema*). There the mufti, various ulema, and madrasa teachers taught them the "glorious way" of the Sunna. After being indoctrinated (*telkin*) they left "their heretic path and accepted the straight path" and so "corrected their beliefs". They had also performed their ritual prayers on time with the community of believers.[39] In another case, two Bektaşis were exiled to Bayındır near İzmir, where they had to reside in the *Fetvahane* ("office of the mufti") and were reminded about actions contrary to the shari'a. They remained in exile for about 6–7 years, praying and fasting. Eventually, they gave up their previous beliefs (*itikad-i sâbıkalarından feragat etmiş*), and followed the "path of Sunna and the righteous companions of the Prophet by correcting their beliefs". The mufti of Bayındır, the *medrese* teachers, the ulema, imams, preachers and

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38   Yıldırım, "Bektaşi kime derler?", 37; Zarcone, "Bektaşiyye"; Suraiya Faroqhi, "Conflict, Accomodation and Long-Term Survival: The Bektashi Order and the Ottoman State," *Revue des Études Islamiques LX (1992): 177*–178; Muharrem Varol, *Islahat, Siyaset, Tarikat: Bektaşiliğin Ilgası Sonrasında Osmanlı Devleti'nin Tarikat Politikaları* (Istanbul: Dergah, 2013), 29–30.

39   BOA, C.ZB. 17/843, 21 Cemaziyelâhir 1243/ 9 January 1828.

other Muslims attested at a legal hearing that the two exiles "disciplined them-selves" (*terbiye-i nefs*), followed the way of the shari'a and had left their previous "wretched" condition. As a result, they were worthy to be forgiven and their records in the *Bab-ı Âsafî* ("the office of the prime minister") were deleted. All present in this assembly signed and sealed the petition asking for the release of the two men.[40]

However, after the death of Mahmud II in 1839 these efforts decreased to the point where the *Bektaşi* order was able to quietly re-emerge under the guise of being *Nakşibendi*s, an orthodox Sunni Sufi order, particularly after the latter was placed in charge of many of the former *Bektaşi* institutions. It appears that at this time the Ottoman state did not train Sunni preachers to act as mission-aries.

Even though attempts to modernise and centralise the empire had already begun by the late eighteenth century, it was in the nineteenth century that the Ottomans developed a more centralised administration after they intro-duced the *Tanzimat* ("reordering") reforms in 1839, developed them in 1856, and finally proclaimed the first Constitution in 1876. This introduced a parliament as a reaction to the bureaucratic-authoritarian Tanzimat rule.[41] However, the Constitution was short-lived because Abdülhamid II effectively abolished it in 1878 and established his own style of absolutism. At the same time, the Otto-man state found that its policies of centralisation often inadvertently proved destabilising and attempted to confront this problem by "fine tuning"[42] its pop-ulation. It seems that "fine tuning" became important in times of crisis or emer-gency, the most important aspect being "that it is a process through which the legitimation ideology of the state is promoted and state policy is imposed on society" and thus "the process of making state policy."[43] The Ottomanist Selim Deringil discusses "correction of belief(s)" as part of the "fine tuning" efforts of Abdülhamid II and his creation of a state ideology in a time of crisis. We can also apply this notion to the centralising policies of Mahmud II that took place earlier.

Despite the *Tanzimat*'s atmosphere of proclaimed religious tolerance in the Ottoman capital, the situation in the Eastern provinces was quite different. A

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40 BOA, HAT 512/25094-E, 25 Rebiülevvel 1249/12 August 1833; BOA, HAT 512/25094-G, 27 Rebi-ülevvel 1249/14 August 1833.

41 Robert Devereux, *The First Ottoman Constitutional Period: A Study of the Midhat Consti-tution and Parliament* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1963); Aylin Koçunyan, *Negotiating the Ottoman Constitution, 1839–1876* (Leuven: Peeters, 2018).

42 The idea of "fine tuning" in imperial structures comes from Faruk Birtek; Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*, x and 10, fn. 50.

43 Ibid. 8–10.

major example was the conflict between Sunni Ottomans and their Shiʿi sub-jects in Iraq. Shiʿi clerics were actively proselytising, not only among Sunni tribes but also among Ottoman officials.[44] Despite the European-oriented mil-itary and administrative reforms initiated since the late eighteenth century, "many of the reformers turned at the same time to what they believed to be the Ottoman heyday, the sixteenth century, and its Sunnitisation of the state."[45] Their aim was to indoctrinate "heretical" sects with the "orthodox" doctrines of the Hanafi legal school. This was done through "correction of belief(s)" among those who had inherited their conceptions of Islam from their ancestors, and were considered Muslims in name only.[46]

There seem to have been no tangible efforts at "correcting of belief(s)" on a large scale during the reigns of the sultans Abdülmecid (r. 1839–1861) and Abdülaziz (r. 1861–1876). While until the proclamation of the second Reform Edict in 1856, Sunni Islam was of vital concern for the sultan and the Sublime Porte, in the two following decades, there was an internal ideological clash fostered by European influence.[47] Yet, as much as European ideals became widespread in the Ottoman Empire, a widely felt need for Muslim unity against the Christian "infidels" developed among the ruling class and the ulema. A vital concern during the reign of Abdülaziz seems to have been how to bring about reconciliation among soldiers who belonged to different non-Sunni Islamic sects. Before the Sunni missionary project was proposed and discussed by

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44   Selim Deringil, "The Struggle against Shiism"; Yitzhak Nakash, "The Conversion of Iraq's Tribes to Shiism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 26, no. 3 (1994): 443–463; Meir Litvak, *Shiʿi Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq: The ʿUlamaʾ of Najaf and Karbalaʾ* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 128–134, 140–142; Gökhan Çetinsaya, "The Caliph and Mujtahids: Ottoman Policy towards the Shiite Community of Iraq in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 41, no. 4 (2005): 561–574; Faruk Yaslıçimen, "Saving the Minds and Loyalties of Subjects: Ottoman Education Policy Against the Spread of Shiism in Iraq During the Time of Abdülhamid II," *Dîvân: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi*, 21, no. 41 (2016): 63–108.

45   Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Nearest East: American Millennialism and Mission to the Middle East* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 36.

46   Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*, 68–92 İlber Ortaylı, "19. Yüzyılda Heterodox Dinî Gruplar ve Osmanlı İdaresi", *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, I/1 (İstanbul 1996): 63–68, repub-lished in idem, *Batılılaşma Yolunda* (Istanbul: Merkez Kitaplar, 2007), 156–160; idem, "Alevilik, Nusayrîlik ve Bâbıâli", *Tarihî ve Kültürel Boyutlarıyla Türkiye'de Alevîler, Bektaşiler, Nusayrîler*, eds. İsmail Kurt and Seyid Ali Tuz (Istanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 1999), republished in Ortaylı, *Batılılaşma Yolunda*, 161–169.

47   For Sunni orthodox trends in the Tanzimat Period, see Butrus Abu-Manneh, "The Naqsh-bandiyya-Mujaddidiyya in the Ottoman Lands in the Early 19th Century,", *Die Welt des Islams*, 22, no. 4/1 (1982): 1–36 and "The Porte and the Sunni-Orthodox Trend in the Later Ottoman Period," idem, *Studies on Islam and the Ottoman Empire in the 19th Century* (1826–1876) (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2001).

Ottoman governors of different Eastern provinces, and partly realised in the Hamidian 1890s, the following newspaper article gives details of such a project in 1871, two decades earlier.

In an article titled "Military Necessities" (*İhtiyacât-ı Askeriye*), published in the Ottoman newspaper *Hakayık el-Vekayiʿ* in 1871 in the context of *jihad* ("holy war") against "infidels and dissenters" (*küffâr ve buğât*),[48] the anonymous author highlights that religiously educated persons called *dâi* or "missionary" should be thoroughly trained and sent to those regions where followers of non-Sunni Islamic sects lived. There the Sunni missionaries should teach Sunni Islam, the "sound faith" (*akide-i sahihe*) to the Alevis in Anatolia,[49] the Yezidis in Kurdistan, and the Druze, Nusayris, Shiis, Zaydis and Ismaʿilis in the Arab regions; the author also included the Wahhabis (who were opposed to the Ottoman state, as noted above). The teaching of "true" Sunni Islam, in turn, would eliminate the causes of divisions within Islam and ultimately unite the soldiers. This unity was to be achieved by appointing preachers (*hoca*) well versed in religious sciences who should be taught the intellectual disciplines (*ulûm-i diniyede mahir ve fünûn-ı akliyeden behremend*), and could convince their antagonists (*hısmını ilzama muktedir*) in the regions where the followers of these sects live. In addition, these learned personages called *dâi* would spread the "true faith".

These *dâi*s or "missionaries" from among the religious schools were envisioned as experts and thoroughly trained, acquainted with the books of the respective Islamic sects and able to write refutations (*reddiye*) of them, and well versed in preliminary sciences (*mukaddemât-ı fünun*) such as geography and mathematics. They were to receive a salary during their two years of edu-

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48   *Hakayık el-Vekayiʿ*, no. 416, 6 Ramazan 1288/18 November 1871, 2–3; this is part of an instalment published before and after this issue. I could not find the name of the author.

49   This is an example of the use of the term "Alevi" for "Kızılbaş" in the late Ottoman period, despite Markus Dressler's assertion that "it is important to emphasize that in the late Ottoman period there was as of yet no necessary connection between the terms Alevi and Kızılbaş established."; Markus Dressler, *Writing Religion: The Making of Turkish Alevi Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). 3. Another much earlier example from the early sixteenth century is when an official Ottoman chronicler mentioned the poet Hayretî as belonging to the "Alevi school/sect (*alevi-mezheb*)"; see Hanna Sohrweide, "Der Sieg der Safaviden in Persien und seine Rückwirkung auf die Schiiten Anatoliens im 16. Jahrhundert," *Der Islam*, 41 (1965): 164, fn. 437, and Mustafa Tatcı, "Hayretî", *DIA*, online: https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/hayreti (accessed 15 January 2020). For a discussion of the use of "Alevi" in late nineteenth century Ottoman dictionaries and encyclopaedias, see Johannes Zimmermann, "Aleviten in osmanischen Wörterbüchern und Enzyklopädien des späten 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Ocak und Dedelik: Institutionen religiösen Spezialistentums bei den Aleviten*, eds. Robert Langer et al., 179–204 (Frankurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013).

cation, and schools were to be built in Istanbul and other regions where they could study the "exalted sciences" (*ulûm-i âliye*), that is, the Islamic branches of knowledge. These Sunni missionaries should not only be active in Istanbul, but sent to Ottoman domains where "harmful sects" (*mezahib-i sakime*) were present, and should even be dispatched to distant Islamic lands and other countries with Muslim communities in order to correct the beliefs of the people, and so safeguard Islam and fortify its pillars (*erkan-ı İslamiyetin hıfz ve teşyidi*). The outcome of appointing such Sunni missionaries would be the "union of the hearts" of Muslims in the "well-protected" Ottoman domains and beyond.[50]

3 The Era of Abdülhamid II: Professionalisation of the "Correction of Beliefs" in the Arab Provinces and beyond

All of the above was reflective of the later era of Sultan Abdülhamid (r. 1876–1909), when the Ottoman state was trying to consolidate its power and political legitimacy through the imitation of Christian missionaries in the empire's "Wild East". Numerous bureaucrats composed and sent "memoranda" (sg. *layiha*) to Istanbul about political, economic, administrative or military shortcomings in the Ottoman domains, while recommending solutions and reforms. These memoranda were observations about the unknown hinterland whose peoples were regarded as "backward." They were concerned with importing central authority or strengthening it among "disobedient peoples" (*ahâli-i gayr-i mutîa*) in the borderlands of the Empire. This was equally true for tribes in the Balkans, the Arab provinces, and the Kurds in the East. Not only should the tribes be settled ("sedentarisation"), as part of the centralisation policy of the Ottomans and to control them more easily, but at the same time, it was necessary to prevent alliances between tribes, weaken the position of their leaders and ultimately abolish their supremacy. According to the "modern" and "rationalist" imperial administration of the nineteenth century that reflected trends in the European empires, the memoranda depicted the social, cultural, economic, and religious conditions of the peoples in those critical regions at the Ottoman "frontier". At the same time, they proposed that "rebellious and savage tribes"

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50 For the use of *ittihad-ı kulûb* among the soldiers during the reign of Mahmud II, see Es'ad Efendi (Sahaflar Şeyhizâde), *Üss-i Zafer* (*Yeniçeriliğin Kaldırılmasına Dair*), ed. Mehmet Arslan (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2005), 11, 46 and 99 (*ittifak-ı kulûb*); and idem, *Vak'a-Nüvîs Es'ad Efendi Tarihi*, ed. Ziya Yılmazer (Istanbul: OSAV, 2000), 574.

needed to be "civilised" (*temdin*), their "savagery abolished" (*izâle-i vahşet*) and their superstitious and wrong "beliefs corrected" (*tashih-i itikad*).[51]

Syria and Iraq were prominently represented in the memoranda sent to Istanbul. Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa (d. 1892),[52] one of the main actors in the deposition of Sultan Abdülaziz in 1876, wrote an extensive and detailed report/petition (24 pages) in 1892 from his political exile in Iraq.[53] It proposed a number of measures to integrate diverse "heretical" groups into the "official" Sunni belief structure—including the Wahhabis, Twelver Shi'is (Usuli, Akhbaris and Shaykhis[54]), Aliyullahis,[55] Yezidis, Sabians,[56] and Babis/Baha'is.[57] Süleyman Paşa offers a breakdown of the complex ethnic and religious elements in the provinces of Mosul, Basra and Baghdad, and comments as follows: "As can be seen …, the elements belonging to the official faith and language of the state are in a clear minority (*akalliyet*), whereas the majority falls to the hordes of the opposition."[58] He remarks that conversion and guidance to Islam through correcting the beliefs of "misguided sects" such as the various Shi'i branches, Yezidis, Babis/Baha'is, and even Wahhabis, is quite easy (*ihda ve*

51   Cihangir Gündoğdu and Vural Genç, *Dersim'de Osmanlı Siyaseti: İzâle-i Vahşet, Tashîh-i İtikâd ve Tasfiye-i Ezhân* (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2013), 11–13.

52   He was the author of *Hiss-i İnkılâb*, a detailed account of the deposition of Sultan Abdülaziz; English by Robert Devereux, "Süleyman Paşa's 'The Feeling of the Revolution,'" *Middle Eastern Studies*, 15, no. 1 (1979): 3–35; for a biography, see Kemal Beydilli "Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa", *DIA*, online: https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/suleyman-husnu-pasa (accessed 18 July 2021).

53   BOA, Y.EE. 9/34, 9 Ramazan 1309/7 April 1892. For the whole issue, see Selim Deringil, "Legitimacy Structures in the Ottoman State: The Reign of Abdulhamid II (1876–1909)," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 23, no. 3 (1991): 348–349; idem, "The Struggle against Shiism," 53–54; idem, *The Well-Protected Domains*, 49; Gökhan Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq* (London: Routledge, 2006), 108–109; for a summary and style of the petition, see Erol Özbilgen, *Osmanlının Balkanlardan Çekilişi: Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa ve Dönemi* (Istanbul: İz, 2006), 264–267.

54   Denis Hermann, "Shaykhism," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 2017 http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/shaykhism (accessed 16 April 2021).

55   Also Ahl-i Ḥaqq or Yaresan, a Shi'i sect in Iran with teachings resembling Alawism, at the centre of which is the deification of Imam Ali.

56   Followers of the ancient religion of Sabianism usually traced to John the Baptist; for the Sabians of Iraq in the late Ottoman period, see Selda Güner, "Irak Sâbiîlerine Dair Bir Asayiş Dosyası (1873–1898)", *Cumhuriyet Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 9, no. 18 (2013): 3–28.

57   For Babis and Baha'is in the late Ottoman Empire, see Necati Alkan, *Dissent and Heterodoxy in the Late Ottoman Empire: Reformers, Babis and Baha'is* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2008).

58   BOA, Y.EE. 9/34, 1: "*İşte bu taksimat devletin mezheb ve lisan-ı resmiyesine intisabı olan fırkaların akalliyet mikdarını ve muhalif gürûhun ağlabiyet nüfusunu nazarlarda pek vazıh olarak tebyin eder*"; quoted in Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*, 49.

irşad ile tashih-i akideleri pek kolay), and presents this as an appropriate and blessed service to the caliph.[59] The remedy would be systematic indoctrination (*telkin*) among these "deviant" religious groups. Süleyman Hüsnü advanced the idea that the Ottoman state should sponsor the writing of a "Book of Beliefs" (*Kitabü'l-Akaid*), consisting of fifteen chapters, each addressing one group. For this, a "missionary society" (*dâiyân cemiyeti, dâi-misyoner cemiyeti*) of well-trained ulema should be formed, and they should scrutinise the "unsound beliefs" (*akaid-i sakîme*) of these sects. After two or three years of training, they would be awarded the title *dâi ilâ'l-hak misyoner*[60] ("missionary calling to the Truth").[61] As Deringil has noted, "[r]eligious uniformity was thus seen as a means by which normative standards of behaviour could be imposed on the population."[62] This was considered an urgent necessity, since those who adhered to the official Sunni Hanafi School were in a minority among the people of Ottoman Iraq. At various times in the late nineteenth century representatives of the Ottoman state in Iraq, religious and secular, sent reports/petitions and drew attention to the "danger" emanating from Shi'ism and its followers. The accelerating spread of Shi'ism needed to be stopped.[63]

Another similar but much shorter petition (two pages) from May 1892 was sent to the Ottoman capital by then prime minister Ahmed Cevad Paşa.[64] Like Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa he proposed measures to thwart the efforts of Shi'i ulema who tried to convert people to Shi'ism.[65]

In Süleyman Paşa's view the cure for the problem of religious heresy was "proper education". All would be saved if the State brought primary and secondary schooling back into the Sunni Hanafi fold:

> The spread of education will instil the love of religion (*din*), country (*vatan*), and nationality (*milliyet*), as well as strengthening the salutary

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59   BOA, Y.EE. 9/34, 1.

60   Deringil misread this as *dâi-ul-hak-misyoner*; see "The Struggle against Shiism," 53, and "Legitimacy Structures in the Ottoman State," 349.

61   BOA, Y.EE. 9, no. 34, 3.

62   Deringil, "The Struggle against Shiism," 53.

63   See, e.g., Y.PRK.MK, 4/80, 27 Şevval 1306/26 June 1889; Y.MTV. 43/114, 23 Şevval 1307/12 June 1890; Y.MTV. 43/114, 27 Şevval 1307/16 June 1890; Y.PRK.MF. 13 Zilkâde 1309/9 June 1892. For an analysis of the "Shi'i problem", see chapter 4 of Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*.

64   BOA, Y.A.HUS. 260/130, 28 Şevval 1309/25 May 1892, mentioned in Faruk Yaslıçimen, "Sunnism versus Shi'ism? Rise of the Shi'i Politics and of the Ottoman Apprehension in Late Nineteenth Century Iraq," M.A. Thesis (Ankara: Bilkent University, 2008), 69–70, 72, 115–116, and 120–121.

65   Ibid. 119–120; see also, Gökhan Çetinsaya, "The Caliph and Mujtahids," 561–574.

allegiance of the people to our Master the Caliph of all Muslims. Whereas the persistence of ignorance will only increase and intensify disunity and disintegration.[66]

It is noteworthy that Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa talks here about novel ideas such loyalty to "country" (*vatan*) and "nationality" (*milliyet*)—at a time of rising European nationalisms extending to the Ottoman Empire and affecting its Christian minorities—at the same time as he invokes the classic Islamic idea of allegiance to the caliph. Moreover, he appropriates the Christian idea of missionary activity at a point when it had become an aspect of political power. According to Deringil, "This was all the more remarkable as Islam does not proselytise [sic], and Süleyman Paşa's vision of a 'missionary society' was clearly a borrowed concept."[67]

It appears that as a result of petitions such as that of Süleyman Hüsnü, it became usual after 1892 that Sunni preachers and missionaries were allowed to practice with a diploma after a four-year period; these individuals were then ready to take their "teaching posts" at schools (*medrese*s) in the provinces, among "marginals."[68] They received a diploma from the Şeyhülislam (the chief mufti of the Empire in Istanbul and supreme religious authority of the state).

Apparently, Abdülhamid II implemented this policy of training *dâi*s throughout his reign. In 1902 the office of Şeyhülislam wrote to the palace, reporting that the latest group of "missionaries" (*dâiyân*) had graduated from their *medreses* and was ready to take up teaching posts in the provinces. The sultan paid one thousand liras out of his own purse to be apportioned among them, alongside a monthly salary of 150 *kuruş* (piasters).[69]

Noteworthy is a report about the Shi'is in Iraq by one Major (*Binbaşı*) Ali Rıza Efendi,[70] who mentions details of the curriculum of those trained students and their qualifications. He first noted reasons for the spread of Shi'ism (*Şi'iyyet*) in Iraq: the holy places of pilgrimage (Karbala, Najaf, etc.), the Atabat, in Iraq were home to thousands of Shi'i clerics and students, and thousands more pilgrims visited them every year. Since most of the Iraqi population were tribesmen and nomads with no proper knowledge of the "bad" aspects of the Shi'a, they were easily converted. The "ignorance" (*cehalet*) of the people and

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66   BOA, Y.EE. 9, no. 34, 4; quoted in ibid.
67   Deringil, "The Struggle against Shiism", 54.
68   Idem, *Well-Protected Domains*, 75–84.
69   BOA, Y.MTV. 231/79, 14 Rebiüievvel 1320/1 July 1902, nos. 1 and 2; cf. ibid, 75–76.
70   BOA, Y.EE. 7/17, no date but Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*, 198, fn. 68 gives "c. 1890–1".

the indifference of Ottoman officials were the main reasons for the growth of Shiʿism. Since it was not to be suppressed by force, and coercion would be damaging to Islam, other measures were needed. The only solution, according to Ali Rıza, was establishing schools: "Under the circumstances, it is necessary to open [modern] primary schools throughout Iraq and to teach the principles of the Muslim religion in order to stop the spread of Shiʿism."[71] Apart from describing the "harm" (*mazarrat*) done by Shiʿism to Islam and the Ottomans in history, he also discussed the situation of teachers, curriculum, and measures other than public schools, such as sending someone who was knowledgeable in religious and political matters and a master of persuasion (*kuvve-i iknâiyyesi gâlib*). Such a personage, a certain Yunus Vehbi Efendi, was previously sent to Elbasan in Albania, where the "curse" (*beliyye*) of Bektaşism had spread and was deemed to pose a "danger" to the people and the state. Through several "good measures", he had forestalled the spread of Bektaşism there.[72]

In order to prevent the spread of Shiʿism, Ali Rıza proposed that the curriculum (*tedrisât*) of the proposed new schools should include the detailed history of the emergence of Islam and of the "rightly guided caliphs" (the first four caliphs),[73] and that the services that they performed for Islam should be "instilled into the minds of the students" (*ezhânı tullâba yerleştirmek*). Moreover, the "futile thoughts" (*efkâr-ı bâtıla*) of the Shiʿis about the rightly guided caliphs should be pronounced in an "appropriate language" (*bir lisan-ı münasible*). As occasion served, the teachers should indoctrinate the children with the religion of Islam by criticising the principles of Shiʿism in "moderate language" (*muʿtedil bir lisanla*).[74]

Ali Rıza continues to state that for these reasons the curriculum to be taught in these schools should be religious (*dinî*) to some extent, since the main purpose of the new schools to be opened in Iraq was to build a barrier against the Shiʿis. Thus, the graduates of the *Darü'l-Fünûn* (University)[75] and the *Muallimîn-i Şâhâne* ("Imperial Teachers")[76] in Istanbul should be assigned to this region due to their persuasive skills and their importance in the science of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*, Turk. *fıkıh*). Teachers should be sent from the

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71 Quoted in Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*, 109.

72 BOA, Y.EE. 7/17, 7.

73 Abu Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthman and Ali.

74 BOA, Y.EE. 7/17, 6.

75 Present-day Istanbul University. Ekmeleddin M.İhsanoğlu, "Darülfünun, Ottoman", in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, third edition, ed. Fleet et al. Consulted online 26 September 2021 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_25894.

76 The students of the *Dârü'l-Muallimîn*, "Teacher Training School", in Istanbul.

centre (Istanbul) as there were few local scholars available. However, considering that 40 per cent of the region's population were Shi'is, and if teachers were appointed locally, this work would do more harm than good. For these reasons, there was no other option, according to the author of the report, but to train students from the *Darü'l-Fünûn* and the *Muallimîn-i Şâhâne* and send them to Iraq. However, no students were trained for this purpose, so, and Ali Rıza argued, students should be trained so that their knowledge could be made use of. In fact, it was clear that not every student who was educated in Istanbul was equipped for this job in terms of skills such as oration. Perhaps, according to Ali Rıza, students should be trained in both institutions in Istanbul with new courses designed to pit them against the knowledge, consciousness and religious forces of the Iranian scholars. The curriculum in the new schools should, by this logic, be organised according to the foundational purpose of the schools,[77] i.e. an emphasis on the essentials of Sunni Islam.

At a time when emphasis on Hanafi-Sunni orthodoxy was pronounced, the Ottoman administration directed its attention to another group, the *Kızılbaş* or Alevis in Anatolia. A local governor argued that these people should be "rescued from their ignorance and shown the high path of enlightenment." For this, he suggested that the administration should appoint preachers and distribute religious catechisms. At the same time, village imams needed to be summoned to the provincial capital where they were to be "trained" in the local secondary school. In addition, Sunni "advisors" (sg. *nâsih*) were to be sent to the villages for longer periods, as "if they are left in the villages for some time they can be more effective in saving these poor pagans who have not had their share of salvation." In keeping with official instructions, efforts were made to establish new style schools in Alevi villages and to train *imams* as instructors. Their aim was to rescue the young "from the pit of sin and educate them into abandoning their fathers' beliefs."[78]

In the words of Selim Deringil, "The enforcement of orthodoxy went together with conversion of heresy."[79] The terminology of the Sunni state and missionaries is ample evidence of how these viewed the so-called "heretics". There was a wide range of concepts and terms used in the Hamidian period to discuss the Ottoman "civilising mission": "correction of beliefs" (*tashih-i akaid*), as it occurs in numerous Ottoman official records, "correction of belief and doctrine" (*tashih-i itikad ve mezheb*),[80] "correction of the religion and change of

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77   BOA, Y.EE. 7/17, 5–6.

78   Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, 82, quoting from an Ottoman archival source.

79   Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, 76.

80   BOA, DH.MKT. 2012/117, 28 Rebiülevvel 1310/20 October 1892; for an Ottoman "colonial"

the belief" (*tashih-i din* ve *tebdil-i itikad*);[81] "reform of beliefs" (*ıslah-ı akaid*);[82] "purification of the minds" (*tasfiye-i ezhan*),[83] or the "wiping out of savagery (*izale-i vahşet*)",[84] describing the mentality in which these people were the officials used, e.g., "ignorant wickedness" (*faziha-yı cahilâne*),[85] and labelled their beliefs as "superstitious beliefs" (*itikad-ı bâtıla*)[86] or "unlawful path" (*tarik-i gayr-ı meşru*).[87] The Ottoman state used this vocabulary to describe people who needed to be "civilised" or whose religious beliefs required "fine tuning."

Despite the supposedly more secular and egalitarian character of the Young Turk regime after Abdülhamid II, the new rulers and their administration maintained a similar approach and did not necessarily look favourably on non-Sunnis. Neither were Christian missionaries viewed with tolerance.

4 The Young Turk Period and beyond: Between Negligence, Internal Mission and Eastern Orientalism

The approach of the Young Turk government to Protestant missionaries before World War I was ambivalent. On the one hand, it put obstacles in their way; on the other, there were times when Ottoman officials and the government viewed Christian missionary efforts positively. The positive reaction toward the missionaries and their schools was a matter of deep concern to some Muslims.[88] An unnamed observer who travelled through the villages of Latakia (Syria) in 1914 commented on the situation of Muslims in the region.[89] His addressees were the "true religiously learned ones" (*hakîkî ulema*), the theological seminar

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exposé about the Yezidis, see Mustafa Nuri Paşa's *Abede-i İblis* ('The Devil Worshippers'), (Istanbul: Matbaa-i İctihad, 1328/1910); translated into German and annotated by Theodor Menzel, "Die Teufelsanbeter oder ein Blick auf die widerspenstige Sekte der Jeziden: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis der Jeziden", in: Hugo Grothe, *Meine Vorderasienexpedition 1906 und 1907: Die fachwissenschaftlichen Ergebnisse*, vol. 1.1. (Leipzig: Karl W. Hiersemann, 1911), 90–211.

81   BOA, ŞD. 2280/40, 29 Zîlhicce 1310/14 July 1893.

82   BOA, BEO 2250/168719, 22 Şevval 1321/11 January 1904.

83   BOA, DH.MKT 74/10, 8 Muharrem 1311/22 July 1893.

84   BOA, Y.PRK.BŞK 19/27, 27 Muharrem 1308/12 September 1890, and DH. MKT. 1555/58, 12 Safer 1306/18 October 1888.

85   BOA, Y.PRK.KOM. 7/59, 3 Zîlkâde 1307/21 June 1890.

86   BOA, Y.A.RES 51/9, 22 Ramazan 1307/12 May 1890.

87   BOA, Y.A.RES. 60/27, 17 Safer 1310/10 September 1892.

88   See Alkan, *Non-Sunnis in the Late Ottoman Empire*, chapter 4.2.

89   "İstanbul Hakiki Ulemâsı ile Darü'l-Fünûn İlâhiyât Şubesi ve Medresetü'l-Vâizîn'in Genç ve Fedâkâr Talebelerinin Nazargâh-ı Dikkatlerine", *Sebilürreşad* 11:281 (1332/1914): 335–336.

of the *Darü'l-Fünûn* (Istanbul University) and the "young and selfless students" of the School for Preachers in Istanbul. He was surprised to hear from people in Turkmen (Sunni) towns that they regularly visited Armenian villages and had adapted to their lifestyle, something the administration had not noticed. Informing the government of the situation, the author did not know what should be done but urged religious officials in Istanbul to come and see, and send "honourable" persons who would advise the Muslims.

Speaking of the Nusayri population in Syria, the observer wrote that it "is very easy to discipline them", but only if a religious society were whole-heartedly committed. The Nusayris would be "honoured by the glory of Islam." He wondered why this was not an issue, or whether it was, but not acted upon:

> Ah, you respected personages! Come, come, and see! Ignorance abounds. There are no learned men (*ulema*) of action here. Even if there are, some of them are corrupt (*ahlaksız*). They perpetrate the foremost evils. They are not protectors of religion, rather, they are rather traitors of religion (*hâmi-yi din değil, hâin-i din olsalar gerek*).

According to the author, the people should understand in what state the so-called ulema were who did not act upon this urgent matter of disciplining the Nusayris:

> Now it is your duty to leave the environs of Istanbul for the hinterland and work for the welfare of Islam. I beg your pardon but I am honoured to present to you, who are our beloved ulema, my wretched letter. And you should impose it on the true religiously learned ones, the theological seminar of the *Darü'l-Fünûn* and the young and selfless students of the School for Preachers that they may look with fairness and in a god-fearing manner. It is hoped that they will begin to think about a remedy for Islam.

Another critic of the inactive ulema was Samizade Süreyya (1895–1968),[90] a journalist and diplomat. He stated that wherever one went in the Islamic lands

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90   Samizade Süreyya, "Memalik-i İslamiyede Protestan Müslümanları", *Tearüf-i Müslimîn* 1:11, 12 Ağustos 1326/25 August 1910, 177–179. For biographies of Samizade Süreyya (Berkem), see Harun Tuncer, "Samizade Süreyya Bey ve Japonya'dan Alınacak Dersler", *Osmanlı Mirası Araştırmaları Dergisi* 7/19 (2020): 615–625 (online: http://www.osmanlimirasi.net/eng/dergiayrinti/samizade-sureyya-and-the-lessons-to-be-taken-from-japan-pp-615-625_392) and https://www.biyografi.net/kisiayrinti.asp?kisiid=1934 (accessed 29 April 2021). He was the first Turkish journalist to visit Japan in 1914–1915.

the 'confused and abandoned' (*bir tezebzüb ve harâbîde bulundukları*) Muslim 'brethren' (*ihvân*) were in a deplorable state, but no one was willing to save them from their plight, even though everyone knew it. In his opinion, "Each Muslim is compelled to save his coreligionists from the gruesome path (*tarîk-i mezâlim*) they are treading and lead them to the glorious highway of progress (*şahrâh-ı nûr-i terakki*); if not compelled, it is their conscientious responsibility."[91] Even though only the ulema could save degenerated Muslims (*düçâr-ı takahkur olan İslamları*) and lead and raise them to the highest summit of progress (*evc-i a'lâ-yı terakkiye sevk ve is'âd*), they did not appreciate their important and sacred duty and were even not inclined to act. Samizade Süreyya argued that the ulema were the sole reason why Muslims vacillated. According to him, the tolerance (*müsamahât*) of the ulema was the reason for the decline of Islam, and as a result the number of Christian missionaries had increased in Islamic lands, deeply "wounding the hearts" of Muslims. Therefore, the author felt he had to inform the ulema of the impact of Protestant missionaries and alarm them from their "slumber of negligence" (*hâb-ı gaflet*). He argued that the missionaries' goal was nothing less than to spread Protestantism to the entire world, but especially to the Islamic domains, and according to "their vain imagination" (*zu'mlarınca*) after ninety years the whole world would adopt Protestantism. The missionaries were active and had spread the "seeds of Christianity" (*tohum-ı Nasraniyet*), via their schools. Although the missionaries claimed that their aim was to educate Easterners who were deprived of education, protect the religion of the Muslims and their national morality (*ahlâk-ı kavmiye*), civilise and enlighten (*temdîn ve tenvîr*) them, in fact these schools were built to train missionaries and to extend and consolidate Christian politics (*siyaset-i Nasraniye'yi tahkîm ve tevsî'*).[92]

This approach is also attested as late as the early twentieth century around Beirut, when two officials toured the province and reported their observations in two extensive volumes called *Beyrut Vilayeti* ("The Province of Beirut").[93] In these volumes, Mehmed Behcet[94] (Muhammad Bahjat, vice headmaster of the Sultanic school in Beirut) and Refik Temimi (Rafiq al-Tamimi,[95] headmaster of

91   Samizade Süreyya, "Memalik-i İslamiyede Protestan Müslümanları", 177.

92   Ibid. 177–178.

93   Mehmed Behcet (Yazar) and Refik Temimi, *Beyrut Vilayeti*, vol. 1: Cenub Kısmı (Beirut: Vilayet Matbaası, 1335/1917); vol. 2: Şimal Kısmı (Beirut: Vilayet Matbaası, 1336/1918), henceforth *BV*. *Wilayat Bayrut* in Arabic, also two volumes, Matba'a al-Iqbal: Beirut 1917 and 1918; reprint Dar Lahd Khatir: Beirut 1979, henceforth *WB*.

94   Taner Tunç, "Mehmet Behcet Yazar'ın Hayatı ve Eserleri Üzerine Bir İnceleme", M.A. Thesis (Manisa: Celal Bayar Üniversitesi, 2014).

95   Cyrus Schayegh, "Rafiq al-Tamimi and Muhammad Bajat make a tour", *The Making of the Modern Middle East*, https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674981096-007.

the School of Commerce in Beirut) deal with different religions and sects in what is now Syria, Lebanon and Israel, such as the Nusayris (Alawis), Druze, Isma'ilis, Babis (Baha'is), and others. In addition to the general history and geography of the region, the work also dealt with the history, beliefs, statistics, conditions of the different religious communities and the places where they live.

In this detailed report on the world of Lebanese Muslims, be they Sunni or not, the province is depicted negatively. Houses are untidy and dirty, the people mostly illiterate and ignorant. Observations include the absence of culture and shabby mosques with no minarets. The Muslims of these wretched villages were "like small children, without qualities of spiritual perception, bereft of all light and civilization, mere corporeal beings. One looks at their faces and sees emptiness devoid of all meaning, learning, and experience." Rarely, add the authors, resorting to occidental rhetoric and stereotypes of "the East", did one find this degree of "unadulterated oriental rusticity."[96] The publication was considered a "scientific and civilisational guide" (*rehber-i ilmî ve medenî*) and its purpose "to analyse and study the general condition of our country from the point of view of science and civilisation (*ilm ve medeniyet nokta-yı nazarından*) in order to properly know our holy homeland."[97] *Beyrut Vilayeti* is infused with these kinds of observations to instil in the reader the necessity and importance of "civilisation, progress, enlightenment and science/knowledge" as opposed to "decline, ignorance and tradition".[98]

Though biased, this source provides interesting details about the tour of the two authors, who I would call "missionaries of modernity". They approach and evaluate their impressions and experiences from the perspective of an "Ottoman orientalism": they talk about "we", who are modern and rationalistic and "other(s)," who are not. Yet, despite the "modern" Ottoman state being depicted as strong and progressive, *Beyrut Vilayeti* shows that the power of the state

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96   Michael Gilsenan, *Lords of the Lebanese Marches: Violence and Narrative in an Arab Society* (Berkeley/LA: University of California Press, 1996), 70–74.

97   *BV* 1, *mukaddime* (Preface); *WB* 1:5.

98   For assessments of *Beyrut Vilayeti/Wilayat Bayrut*, see Gilsenan, *Lords of the Lebanese Marches*, 69–76; Avi Rubin, "East, West, Ottomans and Zionists: Internalized Orientalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," in: *Representations of the "other/s" in the Mediterranean World and their Impact on the Region* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2005), eds. Nedret Kuran-Burçoğlu and Susan Gilson Miller, 149–166; Jens Hanssen, *Fin de siècle Beirut: The Making of an Otoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 80–81; Cyrus Schayegh, *The Middle East and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 92–95; see also Tunç, 'Mehmet Behcet Yazar'ın Hayatı ve Eserleri Üzerine Bir İnceleme', 154–157.

had its limits in regions stricken with poverty, famine and ignorance. They criticised the Young Turk government, despite its discourse on the "morality of progress",[99] for failing to provide public education to boost the provincial peripheries out of their assumed backwardness. Ultimately, the authors served the late Ottoman state, which strived to be in line with modern and rationalistic European Powers: as much as there were problems, in the end the rational imperial administration would solve them, they believed. Behcet and Temimi's solution for the "backward" people was proper education in modern schools that could compete with European educations.

The same discourse prevailed after World War I. It was infused with negative observations about non-Sunnis when the Ottoman state, for instance, considered the situation of the Alevis in 1920. In this case, the overall question was how to give Islamic education to the people of seventy villages out of ninety in the district of Keban (Mamuretülaziz/Elazığ) in Eastern Anatolia who were *râfizi*, "heretical", i.e., Alevi. The şeyhülislam at the time, Ibrahim Haydarizade,[100] emphasised the need for trained preachers and imams who should go to those villages, stay there, and "correct the false beliefs" of the Alevis and so draw them closer to the "path of truth". In order to dismiss this "calamity that emerged in some locations in Anatolia and was obviously not congruent with the religiosity and civilisation of the present age (*Anadolu'nun böyle bazı mahallerinde zuhura gelen asr-ı hâzır diyanet ve medeniyeti ile bittabi kâbil-i te'lif olmayan bu beliyyenin*)", the Ministry of Education should provide the means to inculcate Islamic principles through instruction in religious sciences by "able" imams and preachers.[101]

These kinds of efforts fell under the aegis of the *Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiyye* ("House of Islamic Wisdom").[102] It was established in 1918 and was active until 1922 (during the occupation of Istanbul by the Allied Forces after WWI and the Kemalist War of Independence), with the aim of settling newly-emerged religious issues in the Islamic world and to combat anti-Islamic movements that were also active in the Ottoman lands, within the framework of Islamic principles.

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99   Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut*, 80.

100   Mehmed İpşirli and Kemal Beydilli, "İbrâhim Efendi, Haydarîzâde", *DIA*, online at https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ibrahim-efendi-haydarizade (accessed 10 February 2021).

101   BOA, DH.I.UM 19/1, 14 Cemaziyelevvel 1338/4 February 1920.

102   Among those appointed were Haydarizade, Mehmed Şemsettin (Günaltay), Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (founder of the later İslamist Nurcu movement) and Mehmed Akif (Ersoy; poet, writer and author of the Turkish national anthem); see Sadık Albayrak, "Dârü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslâmiyye", *DIA*, online at https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ibrahim-efendi-haydarizade (accessed 4 February 2021), and "Dârü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslâmiyye Hakkında", in: *Sebilürreşad* 17:421–422 (1337/1919): 39–40.

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to show the development of the notion of "correction of belief(s)" that the Ottomans employed to face the question of sectarian difference. It originated in the Quranic order "commanding right and forbidding wrong", first occurring in the late eighteenth century when the Ottoman Empire struggled to bring stability to its borderlands. In order to maintain security in the Caucasus, where some tribes were said to adhere to heretical beliefs, Ottoman officials suggested sending Sunni scholars and preachers to teach the basics of Islam and win over these "unruly" elements. These efforts were followed by the attempts of Mahmud II to fight the Bektaşi beliefs of the "rebellious" Janissaries that culminated in their elimination in 1826. Ottoman administrators and scholars arrested many Bektaşis and sought to banish them to cities regarded as Sunni "strongholds" and so "correct" their beliefs and reintegrate them into the Sunni congregation. These efforts diminished after Mahmud II died, and the Bektaşis were able to hide and re-emerge under the guise of Sunni Sufi orders.

The Tanzimat was a period during which the Ottoman state was more tolerant towards "heterodox" groups; it attempted to unite the various non-Sunni sects for military purposes and "correction of belief(s)" was applied in a broader fashion. Ottoman thinkers, recognising that a significant part of the Ottoman population was composed of different sects, many of whom were considered to be Muslim by name, called for missionary proselytisation. In this regard, the main concern for the Ottomans was military: in its determination to establish and implement standardisation policies, the state wanted to unify all Ottoman soldiers under the umbrella of Sunni Islam in order to improve their effectiveness. It seems that the Ottoman view of sectarian difference was not completely negative; these groups were rather seen as potential allies if they could be persuaded to positions that were more "orthodox". The influence of the Ottoman policy of "correction of belief(s)" was not strong but the Tanzimat, as a project of standardisation, promised equal rights to all "citizens".

Abdülhamid II's response to Christian missionary schools, however, was a systematised policy based on a new ideological approach. The policy of Islamism or Pan-Islamism, which he introduced as the official ideology of the state, was initiated to strengthen the loyalty of Muslim subjects to the state. This policy aimed to strengthen the bond between the state and "heterodox" Muslim groups, which were outside Sunni Islam and were targeted by Western Christian missionaries. However, according to this official ideology relationships with these groups could be established by *ihtida*, conversion to Islam, or by adopting the official ideology of the state through "correction of belief(s)". The

new relations that were to be established with those outside Sunni Islam would be created from this ideological perspective.

Overall, in order to supervise reforms, observe local and regional needs directly, and find solutions to problems and abuses, it was the habit of province governors to "make a tour" in search for prosperity and progress. The reports and petitions of governors contain discussions on modernisation and the "civilising mission" of the regime of Abdülhamid II. Education and, as we have seen, Sunnitisation, were regarded as important tools for affecting society in the "uncivilised" backyard of the Empire.

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