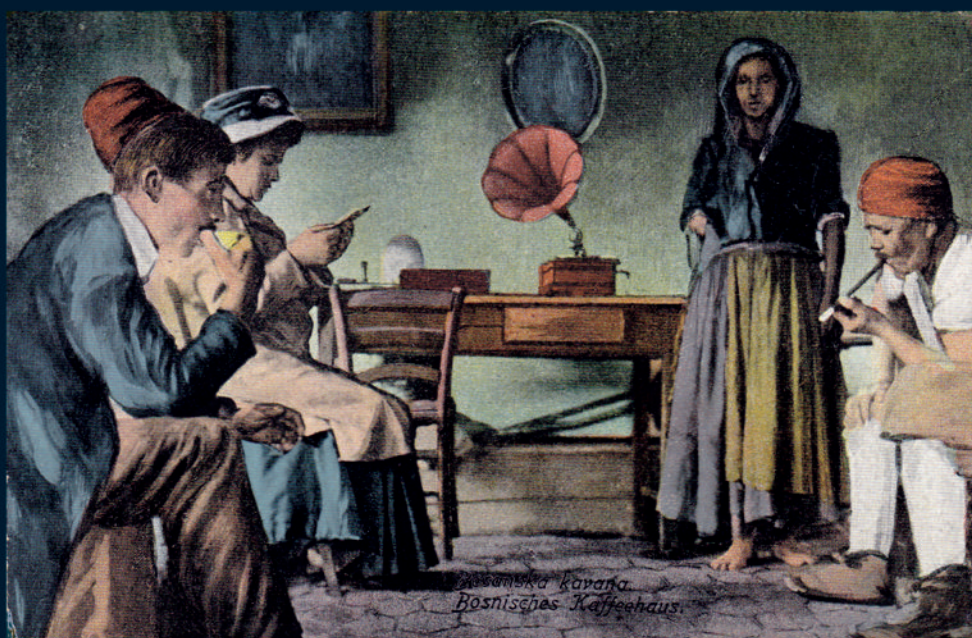


OTTOMAN INTIMACIES, BALKAN MUSICAL REALITIES



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BALKAN MUSICAL REALITIES

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Solemn Songs for the Sultan: Cultural Integration through Music in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1840s–1860s

Darin Stephanov

The purpose of this paper¹ is to draw attention to musical lyrics as a way of moulding the Ottoman non-Muslim populace into loyal imperial subjects from the 1840s to the 1860s.² Even though Sultan Mahmud II (reign 1808–1839) had announced his plans for the cultural integration³ of provincial non-Muslim populations in an edict (*ferman*) read in Morea (the Peloponnese peninsula of Greece) as early as 1829, they were not consistently implemented throughout the rest of his reign.⁴ Moreover, the initiation of annual royal accession (*cülus*) and birthday (*veladet*) festivities across the Ottoman Empire in 1836, a major step in this direction over the long run, did not gain sufficient momentum by Mahmud II's death in 1839. Even Mahmud II's 1837 tour of Rumelia (the European part of the Ottoman Empire)⁵ had only a fleeting effect on a provincial populace utterly unaccustomed to direct contact – be it physical/visual or symbolic/mental – with the centre of power.

The first undertaking to have a real impact on the domestic ruler-ruled equation, especially in terms of eliciting an active local response on a mass scale was Abdülmecid's

¹ This paper draws on a section of my PhD dissertation. For an overview of the entire conceptual framework and the highly diversified body of evidence it rests on, see Stephanov 2012. For an earlier extensive conceptualization of the localized forms of belonging predating ethnonationalism, see Stephanov 2000, 3–10.

² This period, a time dominated by pre-existing microregional (town or village and vicinity) attachments when autocracy still had no viable domestic alternative, is critical for our understanding of the practical, lived dimensions of abstract communal concepts such as *millet* (a community of co-religionists) and, by extension, the gradual formation of national consciousness in the Ottoman Empire. Here I have deliberately rendered the controversial term *millet* as a “community of co-religionists.” This is, in my view, the historically accurate meaning. Today, needless to say, *millet* means “nation”, but such a translation, with reference to a pre/non-national past is simply untenable. If one's starting point and way of historical conceptualization relies on the axiom that nations are primordial entities, an exploration of the kind I attempt here would be impossible.

³ The term “cultural integration” here refers to the mid-nineteenth-century process of active engagement of provincial Ottoman populations with the Ottoman ruler by way of the escalating annual sultanlic celebrations and other novel communal ritual practices at a local level. This continued symbolic interaction was without precedent in Ottoman history. Bypassing, in some key aspects, long standing local intermediaries, it accomplished the central goal of forging a direct mental link between imperial subject and sultan. Over time, the increasingly popular sultanlic ceremonies created ever more numerous and regularized opportunities for imperial populations, near and far, to experience the centre and consciously or not, situate themselves in relation to it, within the fabric of a rapidly changing Ottoman society. Reflected in and amplified by a vibrant, fast-growing, multi-linguistic Ottoman press, these ceremonies brought about a gradual revolution in thinking, creating, for the first time, an imperial public space in the modern (macro) sense of the term and a playing field for communal alignments, which had never been necessary or possible on a macro scale before. Therefore, I argue that modernity and, eventually, ethnonationalism, can be construed as processes of extension of long-standing localized (micro) forms of belonging and their linkage to the centre for a macro form of belonging. According to my research, both were, at least in their early stages, inextricably linked to the ruler.

⁴ Here is an excerpt from this speech: “There will be in the future no distinctions made between Muslims and *re'aya* and everybody will be ensured the inviolability of his property, life and honor by a sacred law (*Şariat*) and my sublime patronage”. See Safrastjian 1988, 74.

⁵ The best source on this tour remains Moltke 1841.

(reign 1839–1861) 1846 tour of Rumelia.⁶ This tour was undertaken seven years after the promulgation of the landmark *Gülhane* (“Rose Chamber”) Rescript, which ushered in the reforms known collectively as the *Tanzimat* (“Reordering”) (1839–1876).⁷ According to witness accounts, along the way, the sultan was greeted everywhere with poetic recitations and songs of praise and prayer.⁸ A Bulgar⁹ songbook, published in 1851 in Serbia, contains the repertoire of one welcoming ceremony for the sultan along his tour’s route. This book opens with the texts of two prayers, recited by Bulgar school children to the sultan on his arrival at *Tirnova* on 14/26 May 1846.¹⁰ The first prayer appears in a highly formulaic Cyrillicized Ottoman, a rare and fascinating occurrence in print. This may have been a standard reading at all schools, regardless of faith, across the imperial domains at the time. Such was indeed the case with the second prayer, in Bulgar.¹¹ Its title *Mnogoletstvenno vospevanie* (“A Hymn for Many Years”) unmistakably points to its Orthodox liturgical origins – a familiar and comfortable zone for Orthodox Christian believers; hence, an ideal platform for appealing to their sensitivities and directing their praises to the ruler. The author, Hadzhi Nayden Yoannovich, who witnessed the event, explicitly indicated that the hymn was “used in the *Tirnova* school” (*supotreblaemoe v Ternovskoto uchilishte*).¹² This hymn, as well as the author’s lengthy dedication to the sultan, printed on the book’s first page, contains an unusually high number of references to the ongoing reform process in the empire. The dedication summarizes in substantial detail, according to the author’s understanding, the reform measures, broached by the *Gülhane* Rescript, twice mentioning it by name (*Hatt-ı Şerif*).¹³ This subject matter seems rather unusual for a songbook’s opening lines and must reflect the decree’s profound impression on and

⁶ For a recent study of this undeservedly under-researched tour, see Keleş 2011.

⁷ One of the rescript’s main explicitly stated goals was to establish equality between Ottoman Muslims and Christians and guarantee their lawful co-existence. For an excellent treatment of an early local communal response from *Filibe* (Plovdiv in present-day Bulgaria), see Lyberatos 2010.

⁸ In *Gabrova* (Gabrovo in present-day Bulgaria), the rehearsals, led by the Metropolitan of *Tirnova*’s (*Veliko Turnovo* in present-day Bulgaria) chief singer, lasted for several days prior to the sultan’s arrival (see Burmova 1994, 22).

⁹ I am purposefully avoiding present-day ethnonational markers, since these were not used in a consistent, standardized manner before 1878. In that year, with the creation of the Principality of Bulgaria by the Congress of Berlin in the aftermath of the 1877–1878 Russo-Ottoman War, what had previously been a loose religious (mainly Eastern Orthodox), linguistic (South Slavic) and cultural marker, became firmly ethnic and national. Therefore, for purposes of historical accuracy, I prefer to use the terms “Bulgar” (the Ottoman designation) and “Bulgarian” (the modern nation-state designation), respectively. Along the same lines, I use the terms Helleneminded Rum and Greek to denote group identifications before and after modern nation-state formation, as well as without and within state borders where the frame of reference is centred on the modern Greek nation-state set up in 1832. By insisting on the cognitive merits of such differentiations (in terms of what I call “an archaeology of the mind”), which to my knowledge, do not figure in the existing literature, I hope to avoid the trap of present-day national(ist) superimposition on, and therefore contamination of, the past into which so much historical scholarship still regularly falls. Instead, I aim to initiate a scholarly discussion and invite further research into matters of identity formation with, potentially, far wider implications than the Bulgar(ian)s and Helleneminded Rum/Greek(s) of the mid-nineteenth century.

¹⁰ The date is given in old (Julian calendar) style and new (Gregorian calendar) style, respectively.

¹¹ This umbrella term encompasses a set of regional South Slavic dialects of the mid-nineteenth century. In my view, it better reflects contemporary linguistic realities and respective mentalities. To use the term “Bulgarian” would be to suppose the existence of a standardized literary language and a corresponding prevalent (macro) group consciousness, neither of which was a fact until decades later.

¹² Yoannovich 1851. Nayden Yoannovich (1805–1862) was a Bulgar teacher, poet, publisher and book vendor.

¹³ Here is an excerpt: “[...] May trade be free everywhere [...] and the tax with good measure; may life be lived with a fear of God, without difference among persons and faiths and may all people be equal before the law [...] may everyone keep his father’s faith, without changing it by force [...]”.

popularity among Ottoman non-Muslims. Judging by the hymn's text, this was indeed so. In the text, the Bulgars collectively thank the sultan for the "acts of goodness" (*dobrini*) they received and continue to "incessantly" (*neprestanno*) receive, as well as for the persistent service of justice in "the time of the most resplendent, most serene, most peace-loving and most merciful [...] Tsar and Autocrat". The latter titular phrase bears uncanny resemblance to medieval Bulgar and broader Slavic formulae, as does the prayer's repetitive, incantatory solicitation of peaceful and prosperous "many years" (*mnogaya leta*). It seems that the whole set of such notions was recently dusted off old books and brought back into public usage in the Ottoman Empire of the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁴ It was then married to the discourse of reform.

As a curious 1849 newspaper announcement shows, on the interface of these two main narratives, there was substantial room for improvisation, the expression of local sentiment and the advancement of local objectives. In this posting, the townspeople of Tirnova expressed their gratitude to the sultan for the dispatch of a certain Cemaali Paşa to govern the affairs of their town. The text starts with an exact reproduction of the hymn discussed above, before launching into praise for the above-mentioned bureaucrat's beneficial actions in Tirnova. Through him, the posting focuses on the ruler's upholding of justice, in line with "divine justice" (*bozhya pravda*). In the process, it twice refers to the Tanzimat and once to the rescript itself.¹⁵ This posting helps place Yoannovich's book in perspective. It serves as a preliminary indication that prayer texts such as this one were influential in a number of ways, going beyond the direct, short-term encounter with the ruler, into the realm of the long-term symbolic, with profound inculcating effects on the populace.

What is most remarkable about this book is that it also contains songs, which Yoannovich, inspired by the sultan's visit, composed in its aftermath for the purpose of creatively re-enacting and symbolically framing the encounter. Three of them merit closer attention and add important new dimensions to the interaction between the ruler and the ruled. Two of these songs appeared shortly after Abdülmecid's Rumelian tour in the 1847 Almanac also composed and published by Yoannovich in Wallachia (a region of present-day Romania).¹⁶ They contain what seems to be a largely factual account (with occasional metaphoric touches) of the sultan's visit. The first song explains to the people the purpose of the sultan's tour in the following terms:

May there be peace and love
And no violence
Whoever has a need
May tell him
Give him a complaint

¹⁴ The exact circumstances of this major transformation have yet to be clarified. It remains unclear whether there was an explicit initial order to this effect from the Ottoman centre or whether inspiration came from below in the aftermath of the Gülhane Rescript. Perhaps it was a combination of both. One way or another, this new discourse of the ruler gained prominence in the mid-1840s and lasted for several decades.

¹⁵ *Tsarigradski Vestnik* (literally, "Tsar City Newspaper") 72, 5 November 1849. The posting is signed "P.D.". "Tsar City" (*Tsarigrad*) is still a widespread nickname for Istanbul (Constantinople) in modern Bulgarian and other Slavic languages. Ironically, it seems to have outlived its Ottoman counterparts in Turkey – *Dersaadet*, *Asitane* and others.

¹⁶ Yoannovich 1846? Perhaps in an intended gesture of added solemnity, both this publication and the 1851 songbook were printed in old Church Slavonic letters, as if these were liturgical texts.

And hope
 That somehow he will receive [it]
 In his time
 Whatever one begs
 The tsar carries in his pocket¹⁷
 Ready to bestow
 And to make good
 For this reason
 He passed here [Tirnova] too
 To see his *reaya*
 To go around his land¹⁸

These poetic lines reveal a close, direct emotional connection between the (Muslim) ruler and the (non-Muslim) ruled, a radically new phenomenon in Ottoman history. The excerpt paints a picture of a sensitive, highly accessible, benevolent and generous ruler, who is also omnipotent. The song continues with a first-hand account of the particulars of the sultan's visit to Tirnova. In the process, the motif of the sultan's larger-than-life stature is given a new dimension through the reverence Christian clergymen display for him. With a gospel in hand, they bow to the ground and stretch their hands up in a prayer to God for many years. The clergymen then accompany the sultan into town, singing songs for many years along the way. Their enthusiasm infects the popular masses who pray to God and perform an animal sacrifice for the sultan's health that evening.¹⁹ In gratitude, the sultan bestows monetary gifts to all, ranging in value from five *piasters* (to boys) to twenty *piasters* (to clergymen).

The second song paints the whole encounter with the brush of folk fairy tales:

We reached golden years
 We saw Sultan Midzhit [*sic*]
 Our fathers have not seen
 Our grandfathers have not heard
 Such a serene tsar (*hrisimo tsarche*)²⁰
 Such a merciful Sultan (*milostivno Sultanche*)

The choice of such an expressive medium and the mythic tone of the narrator's voice may perhaps be attributed to a combination of, on the one hand, the improbability of the above sequence of events and, on the other, the high degree of common fervour it generated. Along these lines, the use of the first person plural seems highly significant, as does the introduction of a temporal component via the blood connection to fathers (*bas-*

¹⁷ This and all subsequent underlinings are the author's own.

¹⁸ The notable lack of punctuation is in accordance with the original.

¹⁹ The Balkan folk practice of *kurban* (in Bulgarian) and *kourbania* (in Greek), from the Hebrew *qorban*, survives even today. Its roots remain contentious. Whether it originated in pagan times or not, this ritual was shared by Muslims and Christians alike, perhaps with overlapping justification. For a lengthy discussion on this topic, see McClelland 1999.

²⁰ The diminutive form *tsarche* can be literally rendered as "tsarlet" or "little tsar". One might think that this is a derogatory term, yet the author's intention here is clearly different. This diminutive form was probably justified by the sultan's young age (23 in 1846) and it shows fondness for the ruler, the sort of gentle attitude one would normally exhibit to a youngster.

hti) and grandfathers/ancestors (*dedi*), and the exponential hyperbolizing deep into the past – the length of time during which the fathers have not seen anything like this pales in comparison to the length of time the grandfathers/ancestors have not heard anything like it. In its natural flow, this extreme popular excitement bridges divides based on strict interpretations of faith and leads to results, which, from our present-day point of view, seem paradoxical. The indications for a trajectory of religious and cultural syncretism, which are more or less subtle, are interspersed throughout the song.²¹ At its very outset, the sultan is compared with a serene newborn lamb as well as a mighty lion.²² Then, in the above passage, another word for “serene” is used (*hrisim*). However, neither these, nor the outbursts of ecclesiastic reverence for the sultan, detailed above, seem to adequately prepare the reader for the song’s closing lines. They convey a popular rapture which can be qualified as nothing less than a personality cult:

Wherever he stepped and sat
 And whichever way he looked
We kiss that place
And commemorate him
 With joy we were all weeping
 And in the trees we were climbing
 And for the sultan we watch
 Whence will we see him again
 Oh, will we prove worthy
For him to twice appear to us
 In the year of 1846,
 He passed through Ternofo [*sic*]
 Most merciful he appeared to us
 Inaugurated the land customs
 God [gave to] us to lord over.

The theme of visibility, the act of visual exchange between the ruler and the ruled, unobtrusively present in all of the above excerpts from this song and elsewhere, carries the gradually unfolding stages of popular embrace of the ruler as the people’s own to such an intense conclusion.²³ As the poem makes clear, the cult of the monarch is centred on the space inscribed by the sultan’s movement and vision. Perhaps most indicative of a cult is the shift from past to present tense, in tune with the shift from the account of the sultan’s visit to an account of popular behaviour afterwards. Whereas the visit is a one-time event, the response is a repetitive occurrence, unbounded in time – “we kiss that place and commemorate him”. Based on this evidence, poetically enhanced, yet largely grounded in reality, it may not be far-fetched to state that the people treat the sultan as they would a saint. This impression is only made stronger by the use of the verb *da se yavya* (to appear) with reference to the sultan. This verb has a mystic, otherworldly connotation and

²¹ For the purposes of this paper, I define *syncretic* as follows: “of a mixed nature, combining heterogeneous, potentially conflicting elements into a seamless harmonious whole”.

²² Serene (*krotuk*) as a lamb / Upon its birth / Strong as an aslant [a profanation of the Ottoman Turkish word *aslan* = lion].

²³ Interestingly, the song has more references to Abdülmecid as “tsar” (seven) than “sultan” (six, including the title).

is often employed in relating supernatural, dream- or vision-like experiences. Thus, this song ends on a high point of ruler sacrality.

The same two songs appeared in Yoannovich's 1851 songbook, with some highly suggestive changes, including an entirely new segment. The changes touch on several aspects of the relationship between the sultan and his subjects. Whereas in the 1847 version of the first song the sultan carried that which his subjects needed in his pocket, in 1851 he held it in his bosom (*pazva*).²⁴ Thus, the ruler seems to be holding his subjects' needs in greater esteem in 1851. After all, the bosom is next to one's heart, where one might also carry a love letter. This sultan's gesture of good will is then matched by a concession on the part of the people – "Only we should beg and implore him" – another novel addition. The trend towards a more pronounced popular reverence for the ruler is manifested in other ways as well. For example, the students welcoming the sultan in the 1851 text "were sitting dutifully" (*chinno sedyaha*), a remark absent from the earlier version. Whereas the clergymen "were bowing to the ground" in 1847, in 1851 they "all fall to the ground" (*vsi na zemla padat*). The list of animals sacrificed for the ruler's health is longer in 1851. In addition to oxen, cows, lambs, kids and calves, it includes "birds and sparrows, little pigeons". That such an extensive description (a total of six poetic lines) should be included attests not only to the reality of the event of animal sacrifice (*kurban*), but possibly also to the wide range of social strata involved, with everyone contributing what they could afford. Perhaps in recognition of such a broad spectrum of devotion, a line from the 1847 version – "[the tsar] Bestowed gifts on all of them" (*Sichkite dari*) – was sung twice in the 1851 version. More importantly, the first song received an entirely new ending, consisting of two parts. The first relates the sultan's didactic words to a gathering of local notables before his departure from Tırnova:

From the *saray* he looked at them,
 And ordered them,
 To look after the *reaya*
 And not harm it
 To guide it,
 To instruct it
 From the *saray* he descends,
 And says to all:
 Turks of Muslim faith
 Christian *reaya*
 I recognize alike
 And equal honor give
 Both Muslim faith
 And Christian
 Both Armenian
 And Jewish
 I recognize alike
 And equal honor give.

Once again, the visual exchange is prominent. It is a key element in the process of

²⁴ See excerpt cited earlier, entitled "May There Be Peace and Love...".

conveying the will of the ruler to his proxies and ensuring the enforcement of that same autonomous omniscient will for the benefit of the imperial subjects. What is surprising, however, is the protagonist's choice to segment this heretofore faceless, malleable "flock" (*reaya*) of non-Muslims, based on religious denomination. The text is deliberately repetitive in listing communities and insisting on their equal rights. It reveals an intense preoccupation with the Tanzimat's focus on equality. Since Yoannovich was not only an author, but also a publisher and a bookseller, what he wrote was probably in tune with what people thought, felt, wanted to hear/read and were willing to pay for. In all likelihood, the act of naming in this excerpt reflects processes of acceleration of communal events and the gradual crystallization of a communal (*millet*) frame of mind twelve years after the promulgation of the Gülhane Rescript. As the passage immediately following demonstrates, this choice in no way contradicts the overarching paternalistic role of the sultan in the familial metaphor of Ottoman society:

In the coach he sat,
 To the *reaya* he turned his eyes,
 As a father to [his] children,
 That is how he looked,
 Outside of town he came,
 And told all of them:
 I hereby depart,
 To God I thee entrust,
 To God I thee entrust,
 My shadow I leave here,
 So you may not be sad
 And of me grievous

The last four poetic lines contain references to a universalized God and, just as striking, the invocation of the shadow of God (*zil-i allah*) – a profoundly Muslim title of the sultan, in order to keep his Christian subjects from grieving his departure. One would be hard pressed to find a passage which better illustrates the syncretic nature of the integrationist project and the inclusive notion of faith on which it largely rested. This symbolic separation of the shadow of the ruler from his body is an early signal for a trajectory of abstraction in the terms of the glorification of the sultan, which would gradually lead to a full-blown personality cult by the end of the nineteenth century under Sultan Abdülhamid II (reign 1876–1909).²⁵

Despite the protagonist-sultan's call, a final segment of the first song, not quoted here, captures in great detail the shared common sorrow accompanying his departure. Allegedly, the sultan's sheer physical presence gave people joy and allowed them to share their needs with him. Since the same segment also relates factual details of the sultan's departure from Tirnova and the people's return to town after seeing him off, it cannot be easily dismissed as a figment of Yoannovich's imagination.

The second song also displays changes in terms of ruler glorification. Whereas in the 1847 version the sultan, aged 24, is treated lovingly as a youngster (see fn. 20), the 1851 version casts the image of the older Abdülmecid (aged 28) with correspond-

²⁵ See Stephanov 2012, Chapter IV.

ing respect, in a more mature light. There is no trace of the diminutive form “little tsar” (*tsarche*), his mercy is further emphasized (“merciful” becomes “most merciful”) and the “serene” (*hrisim*) marker is replaced by the image of a ruler with some experience, “a good master” (*dobar gospodar*). At its end, the second song has two new lines which serve as a thematic prelude to the entirely new third song “May God continue [his] days and upon us bestow him”. The first of these lines replaces an earlier line “God [gave to] us to lord over”. This change acts to soften the notion of the sultan’s control over his subjects, as imposed from above (God), and instead shifts the emphasis to the theme of the ruler as a gift to the people. Therefore, it serves as a perfect transition to the last song dedicated to Abdülmecid.

The new, third song grabs the reader’s attention from its very title – *Lyubov k sultanu ot poddannicite mu* (“Love for the Sultan by His Subjects”). It includes, in the most overt and intense form yet, the call for individual mobilization in the name of the ruler:

Whoever loves the sultan,
Runs to him,
Loves him from the heart,
Expend labor for him,
Exhausts life,
Does not leave the Tsar,
Does not spare one’s health,
Always praises the Sultan,
For the smallest need
Summons all the strength
Serves him faithfully,
And remembers him.
Prays for the Tsar,
And slaughters *kurban*,
Rams and rams,
And fattened oxen
So good-loving
He is God-loving,
As he does not reject [the tsar]
So the tsar loves him,
(And) whoever hates the sultan,
He enters into sin
(And) whoever thinks ill of him
May God destroy him.

In an unprecedented manner, mobilization unfolds in both prescriptive (“runs to”, “expend labour”, “exhausts life”, “always praises”, “serves”, “remembers”), and proscriptive (“does not leave”, “does not spare one’s health”) lines of reasoning. Therefore, it inscribes a complete moral universe. The individual behavioural model is based on love, though it is a love which is unequal. Of the five references to “love” in this segment, four originate with the individual and flow towards the sultan, and only one proceeds in the opposite direction. Moreover, the roots for “love” in the original – *obich* and *lyub*, a duality which the English translation does not reflect, are also employed in an asymmetric

manner. For example, all of the *lyub* forms, the root carrying the more passionate type of love, are centred on the sultan. However, the most remarkable aspect of this song is that it goes beyond love. The extreme call of popular duty to the sultan transforms what would otherwise be irrational behaviour into normal regularity, thus creating a higher plane of activity (“for the smallest need summons all the strength”). Here, for the first time, the notion of *duty* to the ruler enters the territory of *sacrifice* for the ruler. Once outlined with unusual detail, this higher plane is then taken a step further, into the realm of the divine, which seals its legitimacy; the good-loving (*dobrolyubiv*) becomes God-loving (*Bogolyubiv*). Since Abdülmecid is both “sultan” and “tsar”, each term employed three times, on an alternating basis, he enters seamlessly into a Christian theological reference frame regarding the rightful universal ruler.²⁶ Therefore, actions against the tsar-sultan invoke notions of sin, with the ruler claiming divine protection.

Far from being spurious or idiosyncratic, the themes pioneered by people like Nayden Yoannovich on a micro level drew on parameters set by the macro frame of the Tanzimat. In fact, at least as far as the Bulgars are concerned, Abdülmecid’s 1846 tour of Rumelia gave the vast majority of such works a jump-start.²⁷ Sia Anagnostopoulou and Matthias Kappler cite an anthology of songs in Greek and Ottoman (written with Greek letters) printed in Istanbul in 1847, which also contains prayer hymns dedicated to Abdülmecid.²⁸ If the book was published in 1847, it may not be too far-fetched to speculate that it in part reflects the flurry of sultanic celebratory activities of the previous year. Indeed, the publication of the entire songbook may have been inspired by the 1846 tour.

The mental connection of provincial Bulgarian populations to the sultan, forged single-handedly and vividly by the tour, was perpetuated afterwards by a nascent Bulgar periodical press. Barely a month after the tour, a eulogy for the sultan appeared on the pages of the only Bulgar periodical publication – the monthly magazine *Lyuboslovie* (“Love of Words”) – published by Konstantin Fotinov in Izmir. It was written by Stefan Izvorski, a teacher in Şumnu, Rumelia (Shumen in present-day Bulgaria). The poem was dedicated to Abdülmecid “as an eternal proof” of the good will of “the Bulgar people (*Bolgarskiy narod*) to their August Master and Benefactor”.²⁹

Izvorski was instrumental in the institutionalization of another of the tour’s lasting legacies. Two issues later, in August 1846, *Lyuboslovie* published an account of the local school’s examination ceremonies, held on 11/23 August in Şumnu. The event drew so many spectators that the school building could not contain them and they spilled out all around it. The article explicitly noted that this was “a custom which has never been held in their town, nor have their ancestors for so many centuries proved worthy and able to see it”.³⁰ The entry into the school building was played out as a solemn public procession of the first order. Archbishop Porfiry, surrounded by church singers, led the

²⁶ It is worth noting that this text lacks explicitly or exclusively Christian or Muslim markers of faith.

²⁷ When more evidence of the type evaluated here, which was long conveniently ignored and/or suppressed by national(ist) historiographies, emerges, future research will allow a more complex, multi-communal evaluation of this, in my view, landmark sultanic tour. At present, I have no reason to believe that the effects studied here did not affect all Ottoman non-Muslims in similar ways and with similar force.

²⁸ Anagnostopoulou and Kappler 2005–2006, 65. For a more recent version of this article, see Anagnostopoulou 2010.

²⁹ *Lyuboslovie* 2, 18 (June 1846) 85. Interestingly, this magazine ceased publication a few months later due to, in the words of its editor, “a listless popular commitment” (*narodna sklonnost neuserdna*). See its last issue dating from December 1846.

³⁰ *Lyuboslovie* 2, 20 (August 1846) 125.

way, followed by priests, town notables, merchants, artisans and everyone else. The archbishop performed a sanctification rite and delivered a speech in Ottoman highlighting the importance of education during the reign of Abdülmecid. Porfiriy reiterated the uniqueness of this open-door ceremony. His act was followed by a carefully choreographed song-dialogue between the teacher (Izvorski) and his students. It was a song of praise and prayer for the sultan, capped with religious formulae: “for ages and ages” (*vo veki vekov*) and “amen” (*amin*). Afterwards, Izvorski, in turn, delivered a speech of his own, with education yet again the primary focus. Apparently, this speech had profound effects on the multitude, causing some to fall into “deep silence”, giving others “absorbed looks” or “irrepressible tears”. Finally, all students dressed in white shirts, with little red fezzes, seated in twelve groups of twelve individuals, stood up and began reciting poems of praise. They proceeded in a strict order, group after group, with each student pronouncing four lines. The recital culminated in the turn of a very young child with a strong voice, seated in the sixth group amidst all the students and spectators.

In its entirety, this two-part teacher-student performance was more intricate than anything the sultan witnessed on the tour itself. The theme of education, a central component of Abdülmecid’s “scenario of power”³¹ hereby found some of its earliest grassroots resonance. Rather than an outlier, the Şumnu ceremony is a telling example of the sort of activities which the sultanic tour inspired across Rumelia. *Lyuboslovie*’s very next (September) issue contains an account of a strikingly similar ceremony, involving all five schools of Kotel, a Rumelian town not very far from Şumnu (Kotel in present-day Bulgaria). Moreover, the same Archbishop Porfiriy presided over the event. In this instance, the high cleric’s speech explicitly acknowledged the importance of the sultan’s “people-loving/humane” (*chelovekolyubiv*) wishes with respect to his “flock” (*stado*). Tsarist references proliferate yet again throughout this account, becoming ever more firmly embedded into the contemporary discourse of Ottoman rulership.

In a rare demonstration of the pan-imperial, trans-communal nature of Abdülmecid’s image-making policies, the same page of the June issue of *Lyuboslovie* on which Izvorski’s eulogy appeared (see fn. 29) related the story of a choir of 25 (Hellene-minded) Rum schoolgirls greeting the sultan with “God Save the Tsar” upon his exit from Friday prayers in the Bebek neighbourhood of Istanbul. The article explicitly acknowledges the song’s roots – “[...] and there they sung to the Tsar a song, after an English Tsarist song, which began as follows: ‘God save our Tsar Abdul Mecid [*sic*]’.”³² Once again, in less than two lines of text, the tsarist reference appears twice with reference to the sultan. While future research will clarify the exact relationship between Eastern and Western Christian hymns in informing the origins of such celebratory practices among Ottoman non-Muslims of the mid-nineteenth century, one thing seems clear. These practices were part of a broader, two-pronged Ottoman strategy for the consolidation of subject loyalty on the one hand, and recognition by and symbolic reciprocity with the West on the other.³³

An 1851 letter from Razgrad, Rumelia (Razgrad in present-day Bulgaria) relates the visit of a number of local (town and district) dignitaries, including the district (*kaza*) governor (*müdür*), Adil Bey; the religious judge (*qadi*), Mustafa Efendi; and the chief jurist (*müfti*), Hüseyin Efendi, to a Bulgar school on the sultan’s birthday. Much to the

³¹ For this term’s origins, see Wortman 1995 and 2000.

³² “I tamo peyaha na Tsaria pesn’ spored Angliyska Ts. pesn’, koia nachnuvashe taka: ‘Tsaria nashego Abdul Medzhida spasi Bozhe’”. (Capitalization original) *Lyuboslovie* 2, 18 (June 1846) 85.

³³ Note that the second occurrence of “tsar” here refers to the English Queen (Victoria).

guests' delight, upon entry, the students instantly stood up and sang a hymn, entitled "May God give Many Years to the Most Peaceful, Most Serene and most Nobly Born Tsar Sultan Abdul Medzhid [*sic*]"³⁴ As the article made clear, this hymn was sung in schools on a daily basis at that time, in accordance with musical notation. While the article itself contains no musical notation, contemporary Bulgar songbooks do; see Fig. 1 for one such example. Afterwards, the governor delivered a didactic speech to the students. The judge then addressed the town notables with words of advice and guidance, which included the expression of "the tsar's burning [literally, 'hot'] desire for the enlightenment of the peoples in all of His State". That such events did indeed solidify communal consciousness is evident in the manner of this article's conclusion: "this visit is a sign of the prosperity of our town and of the Bulgar kin" (*roda Bolgarskago*).

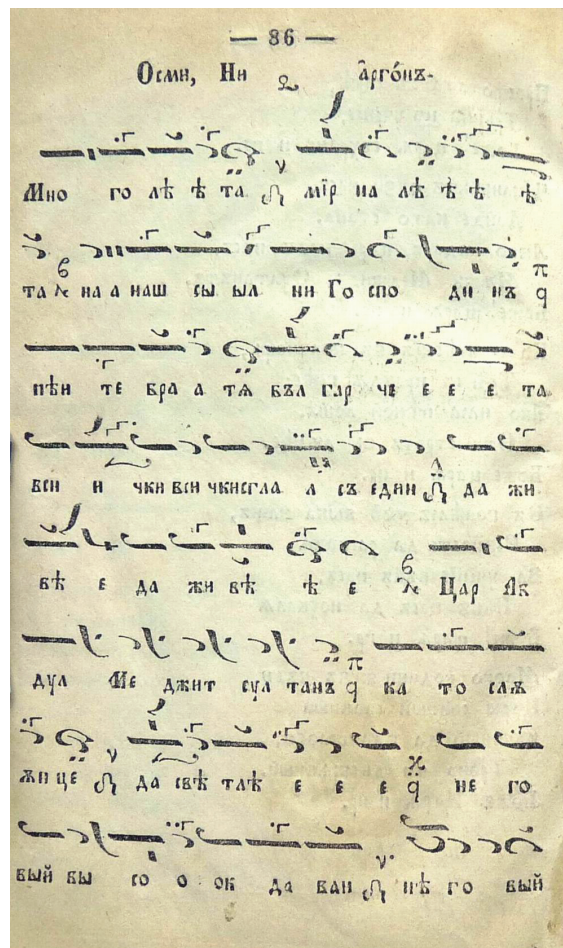


Fig. 1. A page from a Bulgar songbook.³⁵

³⁴ "Tishaishago, Krotchaishago, I Blagoutrobneishago Tsaria Sultan Abdul Medzhida, Bozhe sohrani na mnogoia leta." *Tsarigradski Vestnik* 2, 12 July 1851. This letter to the newspaper editor was written on behalf of Razgrad's Bulgar inhabitants.

³⁵ Belchev 1860.

The theme of the ruler as the conduit of goodness from God to the people evolved further in songs of prayer and praise for the sultan dating from the last years of Abdül-mecid's reign. An 1857 songbook, published by two Bulgar teachers – Spas Zafirov and Tsani Zhelev – contains a prayer song for the sultan, which was clearly composed for the purpose of being performed at Bulgar schools on a daily basis.³⁶

Two of its stanzas are worthy of note:

To our Fortunate Tsar,
Our Father and Lord³⁷
Abdul Mezit [*sic*], oh Lord,
Extend your Protection
Grant [him] extreme health,
Create [protection] for many years.
[...]
Oh, you, Tsar of heaven,
Protect our most kind
Tsar Abdul Mezit [*sic*],
Extend Him many days,
For our prosperity,
And heavenly protection.³⁸

In yet another demonstration of religious syncretism, these lines describe the stages via which divine blessings reach the people. First, the students implore God to extend his protection to the sultan-tsar. Second, the latter's long life and well-being in turn guarantees the people's own prosperity and celestial protection. In this scheme of events, the sultan-tsar is an indispensable link in the chain of bounty descending from heaven to earth. By echoing in period Bulgar eulogistic poetry and polemic prose alike, this notion became a widely held truism. For example, an 1859 *Mnogoletstvie* ("Prayer-Song for Many Years"), allegedly performed "in every Bulgar Church" (*u seka Bulgarska Tsurk-va*), commences by urging "our people" (*nash narod*) to rejoice, glorify God and thank the tsar for its peaceful life (see Fig. 2).³⁹ In the same vein, an essay appearing on the pages of *Tsarigradski Vestnik* in the same year, appeals to God in the following terms: "Glory to You God our Lord, who supports on the throne our Autocrat Sultan ABDUL MEDZHID [*sic*] and pours through him your mercies on us!"⁴⁰

³⁶ Spas Zafirov (?–1885) and Tsani Zhelev (1828–1907) were Bulgar teachers. The songbook was entitled, *Bl'garska Gusla*. The marker of belonging – *bl'garska* – is here purposefully kept in accordance with the original. It reflects the fluid, pre-codified nature of the Bulgar group project. This fluidity, reflected in the equal circulation of a number of terms – *slavenobolgarski*, *bolgarski*, *bl'garski*, *bulgarski*, etc. – ends much later, after the establishment of the Principality of Bulgaria (see fn. 9).

³⁷ Whereas in English, the word "lord" may refer to both God and an earthly ruler, Bulgar has words for both "God/Lord" (*gospod*) and "ruler/master/Lord" (*gospodar*). In this case, both are employed.

³⁸ Zafirov and Zhelev 1857.

³⁹ See Fig. 1. Anagnostopoulou reflects on the same practice in the case of the Hellene-minded Rum school children in the exact same year; see Anagnostopoulou 2010, 88. Her source is "Encomium to His Majesty the Sultan" from *Kalliphonos Seirin* (Georgiadis 1859, 223–259).

⁴⁰ *Tsarigradski Vestnik* 24 October 1859. Capitalization is original; italics are my own. The author's initials – "T.S.B." – most likely point to Todor Stoyanov Burmov. This is the same Todor Burmov, who, at age twelve witnessed Abdülmejid's 1846 tour in his hometown of Gabrova (see fn. 8). Captivated by the splendour and sophistication of the sultan, his retinue and the entire procession, Burmov decided to go to Istanbul and study

The 1850s mark a progressively higher point in the popularity of such conceptual formulations of Ottoman sultanlic authority. The main vehicle for their dissemination remained the songs of praise and prayer. With the above analysis in mind, it becomes easier to situate historically the following statement made by Ivan Vazov, one of the best-known Bulgarian writers, regarded as “the patriarch of Bulgarian literature”: “In the school of my native town [Sopot] one would glorify Sultan Abdul Medzhid [*sic*] in Turkish hymns long before one heard about and glorified the [Bulgarian] Enlighteners Cyril and Methodius...”⁴¹

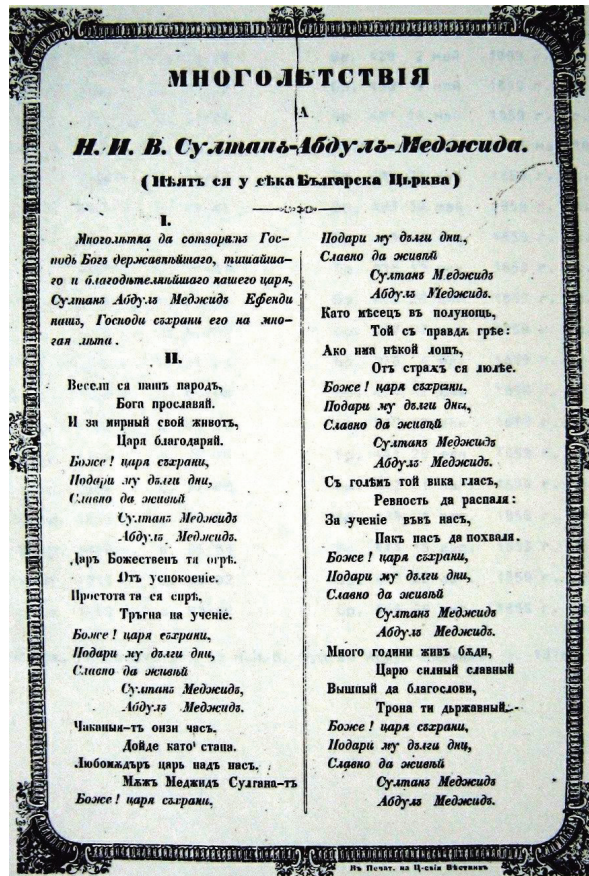


Fig. 2. A Bulgar “Prayer-Song for Many Years for H.I.M. Sultan Abdul Medzhid” from 1859 by an anonymous author.⁴²

When he said this, Ivan Vazov, born in 1850, probably had in mind the late 1850s when he himself was a schoolboy. By the end of the decade, these songs infiltrated a growing number of festive occasions and cultural settings. For example, they were performed at regularized ceremonies for the completion of the annual school exams, such

there, which he indeed accomplished.

⁴¹ See Grannes 1996, 89.

⁴² Addendum to *Tsarigradski Vestnik* 29 August 1859.

as the one in the town of Gabrova in 1859.⁴³ Apparently, that same year they were also an integral part of a large welcoming ceremony for the sultan at Saray Burnu in Istanbul. Worthy of note is the fact that “children from the Muslim, Christian and Jewish schools” all came together to welcome, with their songs and chants, Abdülmecid back from a sea voyage.⁴⁴

The widespread use of songs of praise and prayer as tools of endearment of, and attachment to, the monarch – a dynamic two-way relationship – continued throughout the early 1860s as well. The major new trend was the appearance and accentuation of communal rivalries, expressed through the medium of sultanic glorification. From the outset of the 1860s, the movement for recognition of the Bulgar-minded Rum people as distinct from the Greek-speaking, Hellene-minded Rum, relied heavily on ritual as a venue for open competition on the basis of demonstrated zealous attachment to the sultan. The rise to power of Abdülaziz (reign 1861–1876) created an especially welcome political opportunity in the aftermath of the 1860 Easter incident, which first brought into sharp focus this rift within the Ottoman Rum.⁴⁵ Thus, on his way by boat to his sword girding ceremony (*kılıç kuşanma*) at Eyüp in Istanbul, Abdülaziz was greeted by the songs of Bulgar students and clergy in their Sunday best, neatly arranged around a decorative set facing the Golden Horn in honour of the new sultan. Here is how an anonymous columnist of a Bulgar newspaper reflected on the spectacle: “This very charming decoration was perfect in its execution and unique in its existence, since only the Bulgar people resorted to such a beautiful expression of their love for their master.”⁴⁶

The trope of love, central to Abdülmecid’s image throughout his 22-year reign, was thus carried over as an instant, natural expectation for his brother’s reign. This exuberant show of subject loyalty upon the rise to power of a new sultan was not a phenomenon restricted to the capital alone. Reports in various Bulgar newspapers recount similar events in distant Rumelian locales, such as Sofya (Sofia) and Tırnova, for example. In Sofya, the order of student singing for the Sultan, after the prayers for his health and long life, uttered by the *qadi*, followed the usual communal order of local preponderance – Muslims, Bulgars and Jews.⁴⁷ In Tırnova, however, the popular grief for the deceased ruler and the enthusiasm for his successor reached such levels that a special dual, commemorative-cum-congratulatory service was held in the town church *Sveta Bogoroditsa* (“The Holy Mother of God”). The event culminated in a student performance of *Mnogoletnata Pesen* (“The Song for Many Years”) of the new Tsar Sultan Abdul Aziz [*sic*], joined by priests from the altar! The speech, by a local schoolteacher, which preceded the songs, calls on the townspeople to “pin their hopes” on the new ruler, “unanimously [lit. ‘with one soul’] and with love” (*edinodushno i s lyubov*).⁴⁸

The theme of unity in demonstrations of professed group devotion to the monarch bridged religious distinctions and gradually acquired totalizing implications. One finds it expressed identically in both Bulgar and Ottoman Turkish in Ottoman archival sources

⁴³ *Tsarigradski Vestnik* 18 July 1859.

⁴⁴ *Tsarigradski Vestnik* 25 July 1859.

⁴⁵ The Easter incident, dated 3 April, 1860, originated from the deliberate omission of the Ecumenical Patriarch’s name from the Easter services at the Bulgar church on the Golden Horn in the Balat neighbourhood of Istanbul.

⁴⁶ *Dunavski Lebed* 41, 11 July 1861.

⁴⁷ *Dunavski Lebed* 40, 4 July 1861.

⁴⁸ *Bulgaria* 7, 24 July 1861.

ranging geographically from Halep (Aleppo) in Şam (Syria) to the Rumelian town of Lom (Lom in present-day Bulgaria) on the Danube. Thus, a prayer for the ruler on the anniversary of his first accession, in the former location, was uttered “in one voice” (*bir ağızdan*; lit. “from one mouth”) by a mixed (Muslim and Christian) crowd of some 4 000–5 000 people, whereas the Bulgar students of Lom sang the Sultan’s praises also “in one voice” (*s glas iedin*) on his birthday the following year.⁴⁹ The celebrations of Abdülaziz’s second accession anniversary in Tırnova involved “the students of all the schools in town”.⁵⁰ Whereas in the above-mentioned example from Razgrad in 1851, it was the local dignitaries who visited the students in their schools, in 1863 the opposite took place. The Lom students marched to the local administration building (*konak*) and the Tırnova students to the chief district official’s (*kaymakam*) summer residence (*köşk*), thereby paying their proper homage. Most tellingly, when they sang and prayed, the students in Tırnova did so not only for the monarch, but also for his ministers, finally coming down the ranks to the *kaymakam*, the local representative and embodiment of central authority. Anagnostopoulou and Kappler mention a similar practice by the Hellene-minded Rum on the Aegean island of *Midilli* (present-day island of Lesbos in Greece) during the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz (1870). In that case, one can actually see how the lyrics changed in accordance with the rank of the dignitary being feted.⁵¹

This gradual process of vertical extension of the number of feted celebrities in a decreasing formal ranking order, but in an increasing order of familiarity from the local perspective, illustrates the workings of two opposing processes. On the one hand, it shows a higher degree of cultural penetration and indoctrination of provincial populations and their corresponding activation within certain limits acceptable to the centre. Simultaneously, however, such ceremonies create a host of novel opportunities for intra- and inter-communal interaction, (re-)drawing boundaries and clarifying the nature and essence of group belonging in the process. As the number of ritual settings, conducive to the performance of these songs, became virtually unlimited, they attained pledge-of-allegiance or state-anthem qualities. Thus, throughout the 1860s, the Bulgars also performed these hymns and eulogies at ceremonies of their own making, such as, for example, on 11/24 May, a newly invented holiday celebrating the Cyrillic script and Slavic literature.⁵²

Conclusion

The sultanic songs of praise and prayer created a lasting image of the ruler in the minds of multitudes of ordinary people, where, in most cases, none had existed before. Over time, this image became subject to contradictory influences. On the one hand, its symbolism and level of abstraction grew in the direction of a personality cult; on the other, an equally powerful trend of humanizing the ruler and shortening the distance between him and his subjects was also at work. In this complex repetitive interplay of image, rhetoric and practice, a key factor in the creation of a modern public space, Ottoman subjects developed and reinforced new, more abstract ties of allegiance and experiences of group-ness, both

⁴⁹ A.MKT.UM. 573.88 (22 June 1862) and I.DH. 504.34313 (22 January 1863).

⁵⁰ See *Suvetnik* 15, 13 July 1863.

⁵¹ See Anagnostopoulou and Kappler 2005–2006, 66–67.

⁵² Ceremonial field descriptions from Tatar Pazarcık (Pazardzhik in present-day Bulgaria), Kotel and Izmir in 1866 can be found in *Vremia* 41, 28 May 1866.

real and imagined.

In the case of the Bulgars, the imperial decree (*ferman*) for the establishment of the Bulgar Exarchate, a separate Bulgar ecclesiastical organization, issued on 28 February, 1870 signalled the end of the paradigmatic dominance of Ottomanism in the life of this non-Muslim community and the beginning of the rise of the national idea among its members. Judging by the memoirs of some of the Bulgar leadership in Istanbul, the turn of the 1870s brought a profound shift in the common mood. Political independence soon became a priority, the sense being that it was simply a matter of time.⁵³ The 1870s indeed witnessed a rise in Bulgar revolutionary activity culminating in the 1876 April revolt and the Bulgarian Massacres, and ultimately in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878.

⁵³ See, for example, Balabanov 1910.

Abbreviations

A.MKT.UM. = Sadaret Mektubi Kalemi Umum Vilayet Yazışmalar (Decrees of the Interior Ministry)

İ.DH. = İradeler – Dahiliye (Sublime Porte's Provincial Correspondences)

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