

“TO GET RID OF TURKS”.
THE SOUTH-SLAVIC STATES AND MUSLIM
REMIGRATION IN THE TURN OF 1870S AND 1880S¹

Krzysztof Popek

Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Institute of History
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5864-5264

Introduction

The Great Eastern Crisis (1875–1878) led to migrations on an incomparable scale in the Balkan Peninsula. The Russian-Turkish War of 1877–1878 forced about 350,000 Muslims to leave the Bulgarian lands, which we will understand as the area covering the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia. Sanjak of Niš's occupation by the Serbian Army resulted in the exodus of 71,000 Muslims. After the situation in the region had stabilized, the refugees (so-called Muhajirs) wanted to get back to their homes in the newly created Principality of Bulgaria, autonomous Eastern Rumelia (first controlled by Russians and later by Bulgarians), and the lands annexed by Serbia.

The return of war refugees was one of the central problems the South-Slavic states faced in the first years after the Great Eastern Crisis. It led to serious complications, which had various reasons. Among the most significant ones was the logistic deployment of the remigrants in the areas often settled by Bulgarians of Macedonia and Thrace, and by Serbians of Kosovo and Montenegro. Another one was diplomatic disputes between the Sublime Porte and the Great Powers, the latter

¹ Research presented in this article was financed by the grant of the Polish National Science Center: The Balkan Migration Processes in the 19th Century. Cases of Bulgaria and Serbia (2017/25/N/HS3/00576).

exerting pressure on the authorities in Sofia, Plovdiv, and Belgrade for the humanitarian treatment of Muhajirs.

The article presents the problem of Muslim remigration to the South-Slavic states after the Great Eastern Crisis, with particular attention to the states' policies towards that problem. The Bulgarian lands were occupied by Russians from 1877 until June 1879, and the Tsar's representatives led the separate policy in that field. The Treaty of Berlin divided the territory into two parts: the Principality of Bulgaria, as the Turkish vassal; and Eastern Rumelia, the autonomic province of the Ottoman Empire. We will assume that Eastern Rumelia, dominated by Bulgarians, can be treated as one of the South-Slavic states. The formal position of Turks and Greeks quickly turned out to be symbolic. In the case of Serbia, the article only deals with the lands annexed in 1878, that is, Sanjak of Niš.

Back then, there was a fourth South-Slavic state: Montenegro. We will not analyze its situation, however, because in the lands taken over by Petrović Njegoš's Monarchy, the remigration of Muslims caused a marginal problem. Montenegro's open anti-Muslim policy, its critical need for land, and the warfare it led until the beginning of the 1880s did not create favorable conditions for the Muhajirs to return to their homes after the War of 1876–1878.²

In the Balkan Peninsula, Muslims did not form a homogenous group: there were Turks, Albanians, Slavophonic people (Bosniaks, Pomaks, Torbeshes, and Gorans), Roma, Tatars, Circassians, among others. In the 19th century, national identity based on language and ethnic origin was not a widespread concept in the Balkan Peninsula, especially among Muslims. Thus, most Muslims identified themselves through the prism of religion (as ummah) and membership in local communities (except for the Albanians). Most sources used the term "Turk" to mean "Muslim."³

² S. Bandžović, *Deosmanizacija Balkana i Bošnjaci: ratovi i muhadžirska pribježišta (1876.–1923.)*, Sarajevo 2013, pp. 172–173.

³ K. Popek, *Muslim Emigration from the Balkan Peninsula in the 19th Century: A Historical Outline*, "Zeszyty Naukowe UJ. Prace Historyczne" 2019, vol. 146, no. 3: *Migrations, Migrants and Refugees in 19th–21st Centuries in the Interdisciplinary Approach. Selected Topics*, ed. P. Sękowski, O. Forcade, R. Hudemann, p. 518.

Fate of the Muhajirs

Many of Muslim war refugees never wanted to permanently leave their homes. They escaped because their lives were in danger, but they planned to return once the danger disappeared—especially because many of them felt disappointed by living conditions in the areas where they were sent by the Ottoman authorities. The most difficult situation faced those sent to Asia Minor. They quickly began to miss homes, family lands, and former communities. Speaking other dialects of Turkish (Pomaks and Albanians actually did not know the language at all) and being attached to other customs and social norms, Balkan Muslims were often treated as foreign in Anatolia. The newcomers—most of whom came from rural areas—did not understand life in the cities of Asia Minor. A different climate and other agricultural traditions made land cultivation different. Even worse, the Muhajirs often suffered discrimination from the local community; for example, they earned less money for the same work than did the locals.⁴ Hence, not only those Muhajirs who had wanted to return from the very beginning of their exodus, but also many of those who had initially planned their futures in the new lands eventually wanted to return to their homelands.

A return, however, could be as traumatic an experience as the escape itself. When in July 1878 the first groups of refugees returned to their homes, they met with retaliations and protests from their Christian neighbors. Many formerly Muslim estates were either destroyed or taken over by Bulgarians or Serbians. The legal guarantees in terms of land ownership included in the Treaty of Berlin proved to be a dead letter.⁵ Muslims were forced again to leave the lands, sometimes without even being able to sell their estates. Thus, many of them had nothing more than what they had on their backs: Up to 90% of the refugees returning to the Bulgarian lands had no movable property. Many of them were robbed and beaten, some even murdered, often with the consent of local authorities.⁶ Christians who tried to provide help and shelter their

⁴ В. Арденски, *Загаснали огнища. Изселническите процеси сред българите мохамедани в периода 1878–1944 г.*, София 2005, pp. 12–13, 50–51; D. Vasileva, *Bulgarian Turkish Emigration and Return*, “International Migration Review” 1992, vol. 26, no. 2, p. 349.

⁵ *Palgrave to Marquis of Salisbury, Sophia 20.06.1879*, FO 881/3574/87–89; *Draft by Lascelles*, 6.10.1883, FO 78/3527/54; M. Dymarski, *Konflikty na Balkanach w okresie kształtowania się państw narodowych w XIX i na początku XX wieku*, Wrocław 2010, p. 129; Ö. Turan, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria (1878–1908)*, Ankara 1998, pp. 145–147.

⁶ *Ashburgham to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 22.12.1879*, FO 195/1246/275–279; Ö. Turan, *The Turkish Minority*, op. cit., p. 149;

Muslim neighbors met with critics and harassment from compatriots.⁷ Long after the war, until the second half of the 1880s, the Sublime Porte was flooded with thousands of petitions regarding the difficult situation of Muslim repatriates.⁸ The Balkan governments considered many such petitions untrue and rejected them, even though it required the local authorities to individually verify each case.⁹

Bulgarian Lands under the Russian occupation

Contrary to the opinion widely expressed in the literature, the Treaty of Berlin did not regulate the return of war refugees to the Bulgarian lands. Unlike what many researchers have claimed,¹⁰ the treaty also included no provisions prohibiting the possibility of returning of the Circassian population to the Balkan countries. The only aspect of the return issue the agreement guaranteed was the property rights of the Muslim population in the Balkan countries. During the first months of the occupation of the Bulgarian lands, the Russian authorities received a free hand to act against the remigration of the Muhajirs.

Despite the lack of specific regulations, the war refugees interpreted the Treaty of Berlin as a proof of the stabilization in the region, which gave them a signal to return.¹¹ Before the treaty but after the ceasefire, the first instructions on dealing with war refugees were issued by the Russian Ministry of War on 21st (9th O.S.) March 1878, in reaction to

⁷ [Reade] to Layard, Varna 30.07.1878, FO 913/4/190–195; Dalziel to Reade, Varna 30.07.1878, FO 913/4/329–330; P. Üre, *Immediate Effects of the 1877–1878 Russo-Ottoman War on the Muslims of Bulgaria*, “History Studies” 2013, vol. 13, pp. 166–167; O. Turan, *Turkish Migrations from Bulgaria*, [in:] *Forced Ethnic Migrations in the Balkans: Consequences and Rebuilding of Societies*, ed. E. Popova, M. Hajdinjak, Sofia-Tokio 2006, p. 81.

⁸ *Draft by Lascelles*, 16.06.1882, FO 78/3412/6; *O’Conor to Marquis of Salisbury*, Sofia 14.02.1887, FO 78/4030/139; *Списък на нотите на агентството адресувани до разните турски министерства от начало на 1888 год. до днес и останали без одговор*, Цариград, 9.11.1889, БИА-НБКМ ф. 290 а.е. 164 л. 11–21.

⁹ For example: *От Министерство на външните работи и изповеданията до Дипломатическо агентство в Цариград*, София 28.11.1879, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 8. л. 38.

¹⁰ Cf. Б. Лорн, *Съдбата на османското наследство. Българската градска култура 1878–1900*, прев. Л. Янакиева, София 2002, p. 54; O. Turan, *Turkish Migrations*, op. cit., p. 81; *История на българите 1878–1944 в документи*, т. 1: 1878–1912, ч. 1: *Възстановяване и развитие на българската държава*, ред. В. Георгиев, С. Трифонов, София 1996, pp. 23–25.

¹¹ R. Crampton, *Bulgaria*, Oxford 2007, p. 426.

the first returns of Turks and Tartars returning to the former Sanjak of Tulcea. Circassians were forbidden to return to Bulgaria. The very first thing other remigrants had to do after returning to their homelands was to report to the district authorities. Theoretically, those who had an ownership act were guaranteed to recover their property. Life, however, was not so simple for all remigrants. Many had to face a tragedy that their estates had new inhabitants, of course Bulgarians, and no law would make them leave their new homes. In such instances, the remigrants were located somewhere else, where they would be recompensed with a new house and land. In the case of disputes between Christians and Muslims over property rights, priority was given to the former. When many refugees appeared in a district, the administration would set up a special commission composed of district councilors, who would regulate returns.¹² All in all, these regulations were, relatively speaking, milder than the Russian ones that were soon to come.

For the Russian occupation authorities, refugees quickly became “scapegoats,” which resulted from the deterioration of relations with the Sublime Porte and the Western Powers. Many authors link these tensions to the Pomak Anti-Russian Rhodope Uprising and the Muslim resistance in the Eastern-Bulgarian lands supported semi-officially by the Turkish state. Russians did not like a common opinion formulated in the West that the Rhodope Rebellion resulted from blocking the Muhajirs’ returns; in fact, Russians considered such views attempts to interfere with their interests in the Bulgarian lands.¹³ The reluctant attitude towards refugees was also driven by practical issues: For a country so heavily affected by the war, transportation, food, and accommodations for thousands of remigrants were both a great logistical challenge and a significant cost.¹⁴

After the Congress of Berlin, the Ottoman Empire decided to send back 30,000 war refugees to the Bulgarian lands. At the same time, the Sublime Porte announced the end of the “open door” policy for new Muhajirs from the Balkans.¹⁵ The Russian Commissioner prince Alexander Dondukov-Korsakov called the Ottoman authorities to re-

¹² *Циркулярно Министерство Военно, 9.03.1878, ДА-Варна ф. 717к оп. 1 а.е. 2 л. 2–4.*

¹³ *Report of the International Committee on Rhodopes, 27.08.1878, FO 78/2924 (no pages); И. Ялъмов, История на турската общност в България, София 2002, р. 69.*

¹⁴ М. Думарски, *op. cit.*, р. 129; Ж. Назърска, *Малцинствено-религиозната политика в Източна Румелия (1879–1885), [in:] Мюсюлманските общности на Балканите и в България, т. 1, ред. А. Желязкова, София 1997, р. 122.*

¹⁵ “Витоша” 1879, год. I, бр. 6 (16 юни), р. 3.

frain from mass remigration of Muslims to Bulgaria until the end of the Russian occupation in June 1879. The authorities in Constantinople rejected these demands, however.¹⁶ In response, the Council of the Russian Imperial Commissioner in Bulgaria issued the Edict on Turkish Refugees of 14th (2nd) August 1878. It announced that all Muslim emigrants had the right to return to their place of residence on specific terms. First, they were to fully submit to the new power and law. People who committed the following crimes during the Great Eastern Crisis were forbidden to enter the country: murder, plunder, participation in a robbery group, arson, slaughter, and rape. The edict prohibited carrying weapons, which had to be transferred to representatives of the security forces during the border crossing. The repatriates who fulfilled the above-mentioned conditions were guaranteed the recovery of their real estate and lands lost during the war or. If it was impossible (as discussed above), they were to receive an equivalent in the form of money or other property. Initially, the remigrants were to be located in tents and dugouts near their home villages, with a guarantee of food and money assistance. They were also provided with materials to build a temporary shelter until a court would deal with the return of the property.

The Circassian population, however, was forbidden—without exception—to return to the Bulgarian lands.¹⁷ The Ottoman government protested against the edict, accusing the Russians of wording the edict in a way that enabled them to consider *any* Muslim a criminal. According to the government, the Russians did that in order to discourage Circassians from returning. The Sublime Porte also criticized the ban on carrying weapons, which made Muslims defenseless against Bulgarians.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ж. Назърска, *Малцинствено-религиозната политика*, op. cit., pp. 120–121.

¹⁷ *Журналъ императорского Российского Коммисара в Българии*, София 2.08.1878, ДА-Варна ф. 78к оп. 2 а.е. 1 л. 1–6; Ж. Назърска, *Малцинствено-религиозната политика*, op. cit., pp. 121–122; A. M. Mirkova, “Population Politics” at the End of Empire: Migration and Sovereignty in Ottoman Eastern Rumelia, 1877–1886, “Comparative Studies in Society and History” 2013, 55(4), pp. 965–966.

¹⁸ *Писмо от Шум до Бисмарк (Санкт Петербург, 7 ноември 1879 г.)*, [in:] *България в политиката на трима императори 1879–1885. Германски дипломатически документи*, т. 1, ред. Ц. Тодорова, София 2004, pp. 102–103; O. Köse, *The Policies of the Bulgarian State towards the Minorities (1878–1914)*, “Sosyal Bilimler Araştırmaları Dergisi” 2012, 3(6), pp. 229–230.

The Edict of August 1878 prevented the repatriation of people who participated in acts of violence against Christians during the April Uprising in 1876. Up to 80,000 Bashi-Bazouks (recruited mostly from the local population) and Circassians took part in this suppressing, also 10,000 regular soldiers. This had a significant impact on the religious map of Bulgaria. To this day, we can notice analogies between the regions largely inhabited by Muslims and the extent of the April Uprising: The areas where the rebellion took place back then coincide with those where the decline in Muslim population was the greatest. This phenomenon was likely closely related to the fear of retaliation for the crimes committed by the Bashi-Bazouks in 1876. The fear of collective responsibility refrained many Muslims who did not commit any crimes from coming back.¹⁹ They were afraid to return, knowing that in Bulgaria a lawsuit was awaiting remigrants.²⁰ An amnesty declared in December (November O.S.) 1880 did not significantly affect the returns of this group. The participants of the pogroms in 1876 and during the War of 1877–1878 were aware that local communities still remembered their guilt and were only looking for revenge, which even included lynchings.²¹

In a consequence, a significant group of remigrants refused to hand over their weapons. Arms had an important cultural background for Muslims: They had the exclusive right to bear arms in the Ottoman Empire, a symbol of their social position and superiority over Giaours. To bear arms meant to be better. Weapons and pistols often carried sentimental values. No wonder that many Muslims, especially former soldiers from the demobilized Ottoman army, preferred to give up their return rather than surrender.²²

¹⁹ Бележката от заседание на Министерския съвет, 22.11.1883, ЦДА ф. 20 оп. 1 а.е. 186 л. 204; A. Toumarkine, *Les Migrations des Populations Musulmanes Balkaniques en Anatolie (1876–1913)*, Istanbul 1995, p. 41; W. Höpken, *Der Exodus: Muslimische Emigration aus Bulgarien im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert*, [in:] *Osmanen und Islam in Südosteuropa*, hrsg. R. Lauer, H. G. Majer, Berlin-Boston 2014, p. 315.

²⁰ For example: “Витоша” 1880, год. I, бр. 67 (6 февруари), р. 4; “Витоша” 1880, год. I, бр. 68 (9 февруари), р. 4; “Витоша” 1880, год. I, бр. 81 (2 април), р. 4.

²¹ Министерство на вънните работи и изповеданията до Дипломатически агент в Цариград, София 8.08.1880, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 32 л. 26; Видински окръжен съд до Министерство на правосъдието, Видин 24.07.1880, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 32 л. 27–28; R. Crampton, *The Turks in Bulgaria, 1878–1944*, [in:] *The Turks of Bulgaria: The History, Culture and Political Fate of a Minority*, ed. K. Karpat, Istanbul 1990, p. 48.

²² Рапорт от варненски губернатор до Министерство на финансите, 3.10.1879, ЦДА ф. 159к оп. 1 а.е. 33 л. 1–2; *Brophy to Palgrave, Varna 2.07.1879*, FO 195/1246/411–413; R. Crampton, *The Turks*, op. cit., pp. 47–48.

Principality of Bulgaria

When the Russian occupation of the Bulgaria lands ended in June 1879, the new authorities of the Principality continued the earlier policy line, supported by various milieus in the country. Conservative press organ “Vitosha” was very critical of the remigrants. In an article published in June 1879 about a group of 40,000 “Turkish” repatriates heading from Adrianople to Eastern Rumelia, one could read that “no one can guarantee that there are no Turks from Asia and Africa among them”; the “Turkish settlers” were claimed to violate the peace of the Bulgarian lands. The author considered the mass returns of war refugees an action of the Turkish government in order to take control over the Bulgarian lands by a settlement. He wrote that repatriates should be let in under two conditions: that they would return everything that had been stolen during the war, and that they would rebuild all the houses and villages burned “without a cause, but only with ill will.” The author had his own—rather hostile—idea for the remigrants’ future: Instead of returning to their homelands, they should move to Constantinople, Africa, and Asia.²³

In November 1879, the authorities in Sofia refused crossing the border by 18,000–30,000 refugees returning to their homes from Constantinople. The border was officially closed, and the Muhajirs were forced to stay in the ports, in Eastern Rumelia, or at the Western border.²⁴ The Bulgarian government announced that it was unable to control such mass influx of Muslims, who entered the territory of the Principality without any announcement and settled there without any coordination. The administration was completely unprepared for such a process. The government feared that the situation would deteriorate in the forthcoming winter, dangerous for the Muhajirs because of cold, hunger, and lack of shelter. In response, the Sublime Porte demanded the immediate opening of the border for exactly 70,860 refugees heading to the districts of Sofia and Tarnovo.²⁵ It accused Bulgarians of not answering many complaints from the remigrants and ignoring the proposals the Ottoman Empire and the Great Powers presented to solve that problems.²⁶

²³ “Витоша” 1879, год. I, бр. 5 (13 юни), р. 4.

²⁴ Копие на Циркуларно от Варненски губернатор до окръжните началници и Варненски полицмайстер, 21.11.1879, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 31 л. 103; *Ashburgham to the Marquis of Salisbury*, Sofia 30.11.1879, FO 195/1246/235–236; *Ashburgham to the Marquis of Salisbury*, Sofia 29.12.1879, FO 195/1246/282; И. Ялъмов, *op. cit.*, р. 70.

²⁵ *Palgrave to Marquis of Salisbury*, Sofia 1.11.1879, FO 195/1246/160.

²⁶ *Draft of W. Eshburiham*, 31.12.1879, FO 78/3116/2–3.

The authorities in Sofia firmly rejected the demands of the Sublime Porte and stated that the borders would remain closed until the spring of 1880.²⁷ The Bulgarians explained that the borders had to be closed for security reasons, and so this action was not directed against the refugees but the Turkish bandits active in the eastern areas of the Principality and Eastern Rumelia. According to the Bulgarian government's position, the bandits were largely recruited from demobilized Ottoman soldiers returning to their homes in Bulgaria.²⁸ It is difficult to verify the credibility of this allegation because contradictory claims about this problem were reported. British reports informed that from the beginning of the Russian occupation of the Bulgarian lands until July 1879, approximately 8,000–9,000 Muslim refugees landed in Varna. According to the documents, these were mainly demobilized soldiers, armed and ready to stand up against the Bulgarians. Just after their return to the Bulgarian lands, they joined partisan groups hiding in the forests of Deli Orman.²⁹ Other British reports, however, claimed that women and children predominated on the ships sailing to Varna in June 1879.³⁰ The Ottoman Empire also emphasized the dominant presence of women and children.³¹ Most likely, the truth lay somewhere in between: Among the refugees were both men of arms and women with children. The Bulgarian authorities used the return of demobilized soldiers as an argument against *all* Muhajirs.

However, the Muslim community in Sofia and some Western observers, mostly reluctant to the Bulgarian government, admitted that the local authorities were not ready to welcome and accommodate such a large group of refugees during the winter of 1879–1880. The Sofia District offers an example of such a situation. Most of the houses abandoned during the war were destroyed or occupied by new tenants. There were even no rooms in which the repatriates could stay overnight. In September 1879, this situation along with low temperatures

²⁷ *Palgrave to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 22.11.1879*, FO 195/1246/223–224; *Ashburgham to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 30.11.1879*, FO 195/1246/235–236.

²⁸ *Министерство на външните работи и изповеданията до Дипломатически агент в Цариград, София 13.09.1880*, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 44 л. 102; *Palgrave to Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 27.09.1879*, FO 195/1246/99–101.

²⁹ *Brophy to Palgrave, Varna 2.07.1879*, FO 195/1246/411–413; *Palgrave to Marquis of Salisbury, Sophia 14.06.1879*, FO 881/3574/76.

³⁰ *Palgrave to Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 11.06.1879*, FO 881/3574/65–66.

³¹ *Sir A. H. Layard to the Marquis of Salisbury, Constantinople 13.12.1879*, [in:] *Ethnic Minorities in the Balkan States 1860–1971*, vol. 1: 1860–1885, ed. B. Destani, Cambridge 2003, pp. 423–424.

made 200 Muslim families turn back after returning to Sofia.³² The British emphasized that the dramatic situation of Muslim repatriates was not only due to the ill will of the Bulgarians but also due to insufficient local resources. The authorities in Sofia indeed faced many significant problems related to creating state institutions, dealing with social issues, and repairing war damage. In this context, returnees and their concerns—perhaps apart from the diplomatic aspect of the issue—constituted secondary matters.³³ Although the Western states criticized Bulgarians' attitudes towards war remigrants, some voices coming from the West accused the Ottoman government of cynically using refugees to destabilize the Principality.³⁴

In January 1880, the Bulgarian government informed the Sublime Porte and the Great Powers that it was preparing to open the borders for Muslim repatriates. A Bulgarian-Ottoman committee was appointed to oversee the return.³⁵ In April, the authorities in Sofia decided that only refugees with a month's supply of food would be let into the Principality, a decision explained by its poor economy. Ottoman diplomats responded with pressures that Sofia withdraw from this regulation and allow all Muhajirs to return without additional requirements.³⁶ Meanwhile, refugees were still gathering at the southern Bulgarian border, their situation difficult due to a lack of food and shelter.³⁷ Bulgarian Prime Minister Dragan Tsankov and Ottoman Commissioner in Sofia Nidhat Pasha negotiated the issue. During the negotiations, Sublime Porte's representative introduced a list of 5,827 refugee families preparing to return to the Bulgarian lands, specifying the 2,372 families who were already camping on the border. Tsankov's conditions were as follows: Each repatriate had to (i) specify exactly where he or she was heading, (ii) have some food supplies (30 okkas, i.e., about 39 kg of corn),³⁸ and (iii) express a willingness to reach a compromise with

³² *Ashburgham to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 29.12.1879*, FO 195/1246/282–293; Ö. Turan, *The Turkish Minority*, op. cit., p. 147.

³³ *Draft of W. Eshburuham, 22.04.1880*, FO 78/3116/36–37.

³⁴ *Lascalles to Layard, Sofia 13.04.1880*, no. 14, FO 195/1311 (no pages); E. Стателова, *Източна Румелия. Икономика, политика, култура 1879/1885*, София 1983, p. 46.

³⁵ *Ashburgham to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 11.01.1880*, copy no. 7, FO 195/1311 (no pages).

³⁶ *Lascalles to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 8.04.1880*, no. 55, FO 195/1311 (no pages); *Копие на Циркуларно от Варненски губернатор до окръжните началници и Варненски полицмайстер, 05.1880*, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 31 л. 103а.

³⁷ *Lascalles to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 14.04.1880*, no. 61, FO 195/1311 (no pages).

³⁸ *Lascalles to Earl Granville, Sofia 9.07.1880*, no. 107, FO 195/1312 (no pages).

the Bulgarian settlers inhabiting their houses in case such a situation occurred. The Bulgarian side criticized the list of Muhajirs prepared by Nidhat Pasha, the former claiming that many of the names belonged to Adrianople residents, not to war refugees from the former Danube Vilayet.³⁹

Ultimately, in April 1880, the negotiations ended with an agreement. Tsankov accepted Nidhat Pasha's list of Muhajirs and declared that the refugees would be let into the country. In return, the Bulgarian government expected that the Sublime Porte would stop diplomatic attacks against the Principality.⁴⁰ According to Adrianople Vali, in the middle of May 1880, around 3,000 refugees were concentrated on the border between Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia border. Under the April agreements, the authorities in Sofia began to gradually let in the Muhajirs, including large groups that returned to the Kyustendil District.⁴¹

Thus, the conflict between Sofia and Constantinople about the return of war refugees ended in April 1880. At the beginning, the number of remigrants was not as great as that in 1878–1879, since a lot of them had already come back or decided to withdraw and stay in the Ottoman Empire. Later, however, the government in Sofia emphasized that it treated Muhajirs the same as they treated Bulgarian immigrants from Macedonia and Thrace. More often than not, these slogans were only on paper: The first to receive compensation were Bulgarian refugees who were banished and lost their lands in the Ottoman Empire.⁴² In 1881, however, there were cases in which the Bulgarian customs service refused entry to Muslims from the Ottoman Empire, referring to the Bulgarian regulations of November 1879 and April 1880. These isolated cases, however, ended in favor of the Muhajirs, who eventually managed to cross the border.⁴³

³⁹ *Lascelles to Layard, Sofia 13.04.1880*, no. 14, FO 195/1311 (no pages); *Lascelles to Layard, Sofia 19.04.1880*, no. 16, FO 195/1311 (no pages); *Mr. Lascelles to Sir A. H. Layard, Sophia 10.04.1880*, [in:] *Ethnic Minorities*, vol. 1, op. cit., pp. 552–553.

⁴⁰ *Unfinished letter to the Marquis of Salisbury, Sofia 29.04.1880*, no. 69, FO 195/1311 (no pages).

⁴¹ *Lascelles to Earl Granville, Sofia 17.05.1880*, no. 80, FO 195/1311 (no pages).

⁴² “Независимост” 1881, год. V, бр. 38 (31 януари), pp. 4–5.

⁴³ *От Варненско окръжно управление до Дипломатически агент в Цариград, Цариград 7.10.1881*, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 31 л. 101; *От Дипломатически агент в Цариград до Варненски префект, Цариград 29.09.1881*, ЦДА ф. 321к оп. 1 а.е. 31 л. 104.

Eastern Rumelia

Eastern Rumelia's attitude to Muslim refugees was much milder than that of the Principality of Bulgaria. Not only General Governor Aleko Bogoridi was afraid of the perspectives of the occupation of the province by Turkish troops, but also Eastern Rumelia was still under the Ottoman Code on Refugees of 1857. He did not want to provoke the Sublime Porte. There were also the Great Powers' commissioners residing in Plovdiv, who controlled Eastern Rumelia's policy towards Muhajirs. Thus, its government ordered new Bulgarian tenants to return houses to their rightful owners if only the latter have proven their property rights. Until the property was recovered, the repatriates were placed in makeshift shelters and field hospitals. Evicted Bulgarians received monetary compensation.⁴⁴ Similarly, after submitting relevant documents, they could get back their movable property. The action was coordinated by a special commission composed of Bulgarians, Muslims, and representatives of refugees (in a ratio of 2:2:1). The body's responsibilities included also legal support for Muslims as well as the distribution of benefits, food, and agricultural tools among those in need.⁴⁵ At that time, the police were ordered to pay particular attention to the protection of life and property of the returning Muhajirs. Importantly, the Orthodox Church in the province—the Metropolitan of Plovdiv Panaret—along with the Exarchate called for assistance to Muslim remigrants and mercy towards war victims regardless of their religion.⁴⁶

Not everyone agreed with the official line of then Eastern-Rumelian government towards Muslim refugees. Inclined to treat the Muslim population peacefully, Mihail Mudzharov, then a member of the Provincial Assembly and an activist of the National Party, wrote that the ejection of the remigrants would be “natural and fair” and would lead to the expected Bulgarianization of Eastern Rumelia. Treating refugees as a threat to the province's security, he considered it immoral to allow people who had been guilty of crimes in 1876 to return to homes in which their Christian victims lived.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ж. Назърска, *Малцинствено-религиозната политика*, op. cit., pp. 127–128.

⁴⁵ *Mr. Michell to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis 7.04.1880*, [in:] *Ethnic Minorities*, vol. 1, op. cit., pp. 544–545.

⁴⁶ Е. Стателова, *Източна Румелия*, op. cit., p. 129.

⁴⁷ М. Маджаров, *Източна Румелия (исторически преглед)*, Пловдив 2015, pp. 34, 45, 211–213.

Plovdiv’s policy towards remigrants was wrongly put on a par with Sofia’s attitude to this problem. British and Austrian diplomats were able to write in one breath about the tragedy of refugees in the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia.⁴⁸ In April 1879, Western press—including “Daily News,” “Nord,” and “Le XIXe Siècle”—published reports about forced displacement of Turks in the Karnobat, Stara Zagora, and Yambol counties. One of the prominent Bulgarian politicians in Eastern Rumelia, Ivan E. Geshov prepared a series of protest letters stressing that such reports only fit into the Sublime Porte’s propaganda.⁴⁹ In 1880, Konstantin Jireček, a Czech specialist on the Bulgarian topics, criticized Viennese “Neue Freie Presse” for overstating the number of returning Muslim refugees who had been allegedly deprived of their property.⁵⁰

When in June 1879 the Principality of Bulgaria restricted the admission of repatriates, Eastern Rumelia was preparing to receive 40,000 Muslim refugees who were waiting in the Vilayet of Adrianople for permission to return to their homes.⁵¹ The Muhajirs who came to the province were first directed to the Burgas Department, where they were settled in deserted chiftliks and the Circassian lands; others returned to their old villages. New villages were also created, such as Eni Kioy (“New Village” in Turkish) near Plovdiv, in which 389 people lived in 62 houses. New settlements received help in the form of building materials, debt cancelation, and cheap loans. In the Eastern-Rumelian budget, 600,000 liras—90,000–110,000 per county—were secured for these loans. However, most of the above-mentioned projects were quickly withdrawn, when it turned out that Eastern Rumelia could not afford this type of support for Muhajirs.⁵²

Despite the efforts of the authorities in Plovdiv, returning refugees often encountered many problems and adversities. There have been

⁴⁸ *Consul-General Michell to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis 27.07.1879*, [in:] *Ethnic Minorities*, vol. 1, op. cit., p. 470; Ж. Назърска, *Малцинствено-религиозната политика*, op. cit., pp. 123–124.

⁴⁹ *До архимандрит Методий Кусевич, Париж 26 март / 7 април 1879 г.*, [in:] И. Е. Гешов, *Лична кореспонденция*, ред. Р. Попов, В. Танккова, София 1994, pp. 43–45; *До Евлогий Георгиев, Париж, 4/16 април 1879 г.*, [in:] И. Е. Гешов, op. cit. pp. 49–52; More about the Ivan E. Geshov’s mission in the West: Е. Стателова, *Иван Евстратиев Гешов или трънливият път на създанието*, София 1994, pp. 32–36.

⁵⁰ К. Иречек, *Български дневник*, т. 1: 1879–1881, съст. И. Димитров, Е. Стателова, София 1995, p. 243.

⁵¹ “Витоша” 1879, год. I, бр. 5 (13 юни), p. 4.

⁵² Ж. Назърска, *Малцинствено-религиозната политика*, op. cit., p. 125–128; Е. Стателова, *Източна Румелия*, op. cit., p. 129.

cases of violation of the official political line, resulting from either mistakes or the ill will of the local administration and Bulgarian society. Procedures related to the recovery of property and the eviction of Bulgarian illegal tenants often turned out to be ineffective. In the Karlovo county, some refugees suffered from intimidation, abuse, humiliation of women (undressing in a public place), beatings, assaults, and robberies (of cattle, grains, and agricultural equipment). In Plovdiv, some Muhajirs' houses were set on fire; there were also acts of vandalism and plunder. Refugees even complained about instances of kidnapping Muslim children by Bulgarians.⁵³ Such ill-treatment of refugees resulted in sanctions: Governor of Plovdiv Aleksandar Ekzarh, Governor of Burgas Ivan Hadji Petrov, and Governor of Tatar Pazardzhik Georgi Benev, among others, were dismissed from the office.⁵⁴ These dismissals were likely justified, as illustrated by the situation in Tatar Pazardzhik after the war. A petition prepared in April 1882 by the local Muslim population reads that after the mass exodus from the city, practically half of the refugees decided to return to their homes later. After repatriation, however, they were constantly repressed, by burglary, arson, and the prevention from using forests and pastures. Some complaints were due to persecution by part of the gendarmerie, ignoring discrimination by local authorities, and attacks by armed groups. The Muslims of Tatar Pazardzhik were convinced that the authorities of Eastern Rumelia only represented the Bulgarians. They often heard from their neighbors that "soon all Turks would disappear from these lands." Leaving again seemed to be the only solution to their problems. They stood before two choices: either selling their property at a reduced price or simply abandoning their home and leaving.⁵⁵

The authorities in Plovdiv failed to manage the influx of large groups of remigrants, for both logistical and financial reasons. Initially, the Turkish Governor of Adrianople decided to let only those Muhajirs who had their own food supplies for a minimum of six months. The Sublime Porte would send refugees from Constantinople on condition that their houses in Eastern Rumelia be rebuilt, but only those who

⁵³ *Consul-General Michell to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis 27.07.1879*, [in:] *Ethnic Minorities*, vol. 1, op. cit., p. 470; *Mr. Michell to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis 11.10.1879*, [in:] *Ethnic Minorities*, vol. 1, op. cit., pp. 498–502; *Mr. Michell to the Marquis of Salisbury, Philippopolis 4.04.1880*, [in:] *Ethnic Minorities*, vol. 1, op. cit., pp. 539–540.

⁵⁴ Ж. Назърска, *Малцинствено-религиозната политика*, op. cit., p. 126.

⁵⁵ *Translation of Substance of Petition presented to the Consuls of the Powers at Philippopolis by certain Turks from Tatar-Bazardjik, 24.04.1882*, FO 195/1411 (no pages).

had sufficient food supplies and at least 100 kurushes. The Ottoman authorities agreed to hold people back responsible for crimes committed during the Great Eastern Crisis. Many of these arrangements were not respected, however. In November 1879, British ships transported 8,000 Muhajirs to Burgas without previous permission from Plovdiv's authorities. The remigrants had no food and money, and their homes were not verified before. The Governor of Burgas prevented some passengers from leaving the ships and refused to provide medical assistance. The Sublime Porte decided to give up at the moment, and so during the winter of 1879–1880 only 700 refugees reached Eastern Rumelia. In December 1879, a committee was formed in Plovdiv to help Muslim refugees in the province. The initiative gained the patronage of the Exarch Yosif I as well as of leading Eastern-Rumelian politicians Ivan E. Geshov, Georgi Stranski, Yoakim Gruev, and Todor Kesyakov.⁵⁶

At the beginning of 1880, however, the situation from November 1879 repeated: In the dock of Burgas, 30,000 Muhajirs have landed without previous consultations. Plovdiv's authorities, supported by Russians, protested to the Sublime Porte. Petersburg threatened that they would likely consider such activities as a *casus belli*. In March 1880, Eastern Rumelia closed its borders, admitting that it was unable to accept new remigrants and that the conditions for the return should be re-established. However, overwhelmed by complaints from refugees transferred through Western Consulates in Burgas and Plovdiv and under the Sublime Porte's pressure, it decided to withdraw the decision. At the same time, the local administration was obliged to accelerate the procedures for recovering property by war refugees: All such matters were to be settled by July 1880.⁵⁷

Serbia

Among the Muhajirs escaping from the lands annexed by Serbian in 1878, we could distinguish two main groups: participants of the resistance movement who fled in the face of lost battles, afraid of repressions and Serbian revenge; and civilians who did not participate in the fight but retreated with the Turkish army after ceasefire or the

⁵⁶ Е. Стателова, *Източна Румелия*, op. cit., pp. 129–130.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 125–126, 130–131; Ж. Назърска, *Малцинствено-религиозната политика*, p. 127; O. Köse, op. cit., p. 230.

capture of their cities. Albanians and rural population dominated the first group; Turkish-speaking Muslims and townspeople dominated the second.⁵⁸

As in the case of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia, one of the main challenges Belgrade's authorities faced after the war was returns of Muslim refugees. The government did not hide that they were not welcome in Serbia. Prime Minister Jovan Ristić explained that he could not allow to freely return to the Principality those Albanians who were involved in the resistance against Serbs during the wars of 1876–1878 and who were guilty of pogroms and burning of villages.⁵⁹ A similar position was expressed by Prince Milan Obrenović IV, who believed that Albanians lost their right to live in Serbian territories because of assaults organized during and after the war.⁶⁰ All Muslims had to obtain special permission to cross the Serbian border, also those who had not lived in these territories before the war, including merchants.⁶¹ The borders were closed and a military cordon was placed under the pretext of fighting against Albanian bandits. In July 1879, General Kosta Protić said that no Albanian refugee would set foot on the Serbian soil. He expressed his concern that if Muslims were not removed from these areas, the “new lands” could turn out to be as problematic for Serbia as the Caucasus were for Russia. The Sublime Porte and the Western Powers fiercely criticized the actions of the Serbian authorities.⁶² However, we should remember that in Spring 1881, Albanians were still regularly attacking the new Serbian-Turkish border. Serbians

⁵⁸ *Српска војска и добровољци ослобођају Пирот*, [in:] *Други српско-турски рат 1877/78 и ослобођење крајева Југоисточне Србије. Историјска грађа поводом 120. годишњице 1877/1997*, ур. Б. Лилић, Пирот 1998, pp. 188–193; *Опис предаје Ниша српској војсци, 29.12.1877*, [in:] *Други српско-турски рат 1877/78*, op. cit., pp. 206–209; Б. Лилић, *Југоисточна Србија (1878–1918)*, Београд 2006, p. 37.

⁵⁹ *Писмо Началника округа врањског Министару председнику Јовану Ристићу, Врања 30.08.1879*, АС МИД-ПО ролна 52 П/64–67; *Писмо 231., Јени-кеј 19.06.1879*, [in:] *Писма Филипа Христића Јовану Ристићу (1868–1880)*, ур. Г. Јакшић, Београд 1953, pp. 251–252; Б. Лилић, op. cit., p. 31.

⁶⁰ М. Јагодић, *Упади албанаца у Србију 1879. године*, “Историјски часопис” 2004, књ. LI, p. 95.

⁶¹ For example: *Објава, Београд 19.09.1878*, АС МУД-П 1878 ф. XIX р. 253 бр. 6382.

⁶² *Писмо 234., Јени-кеј 3.07.1879*, [in:] *Писма Филипа Христића*, op. cit., pp. 253–254; *Мемоар Ј. Ристића Конгресу у Берлину, 12/24.06.1878*, [in:] *Србија 1878. Документи*, прир. М. Бојводић, Д. Р. Живојиновић, А. Митровић, Р. Самарцић, Београд 1978, pp. 445–450; М. Јагодић, *Насељавање Кнежевине Србије: 1861–1880*, Београд 2006, pp. 134–136; М. Јагодић, *The Emigration of Muslims from the New Serbian Regions 1877/1878*, “Balkanologie” 1998, vol. 2, no. 2, p. 19, <http://journals.openedition.org/balkanologie/265> [Access: 15.03.2018]. op. cit., p. 19.

could not imagine letting in Muslims when there was still warfare with the Albanian groups, in a large part consisting of Muhajirs.⁶³

The Ottoman Empire and Great Britain pressed the Serbian authorities to open the border and let in all refugees under the Treaty of Berlin.⁶⁴ In August 1879, under their influence but against the positions of Prince Milan and the Serbian generals, the government announced that it would allow Albanian refugees to return, but the repatriates would have to meet “specific conditions.” The borders were open in September, but the Muslims fighting on the Ottoman side during the war (both in regular and partisan formations) were forbidden to return. Muhajirs had to comply with the Serbian law, with no exceptions. Since some Serbs were settled in several Albanian villages in the area of Pusta Reka and Golak, returning Muslims had to accept that they would be removed to other territories, for which they would be compensated. Details of the return process were to be established between the delegation chosen by the Albanian refugees and the commander of the Moravian Corps, Đura Horvatić. In the end, such an agreement did not take place: The Serbian army was supposed to coordinate repatriation, but it actually sought to sabotage it in all possible ways.⁶⁵

As a result, the Turkish-Serbian border was practically closed in 1880. In April, 80,000 Albanian refugees in Prizren wanted to return to their homes in the former Sanjak of Niš. Despite the position of Prizren’s municipal authorities, who persuaded to relocate the Muhajirs to other provinces of the empire, groups of them made a desperate attempt to cross the border without the consent of the Serbian authorities. It ended up with a regular battle with Serbian soldiers, in which about 200 Muhajirs died and 2,000 succeeded in getting to the Principality.⁶⁶

The borders were closed until 1882, but then only a few refugees wanted to return to Serbia. Many of the Muhajirs who managed to cross the border did not get back to their homes: They were forbidden to return to places they inhabited before the conflict, and only Serbians were allowed to live there after it. In such cases, they were directed to a few Muslim villages in

⁶³ AC МУД-П 1879 ф. XVI p. 168, *passim*.

⁶⁴ *Sir A. H. Layard to the Marquis of Salisbury, Therapia 6.07.1879, FO 260/12/79.*

⁶⁵ М. Јагодић, *Упади албанаца*, *op. cit.*, pp. 100–104.

⁶⁶ *Consul St. John to the Marquis of the Marquis of Salisbury, Prisrend 13.04.1880, FO 260/16/182.*

Serbia, such as Gorna Jablanica or Masurica.⁶⁷ In October 1879, 30 Muslim families lived in the latter village; before the war, 300.⁶⁸

The scale of the remigration of Muslim refugees after the Great Eastern Crisis is difficult to estimate. In the middle of September 1878, 170,000 Muslim refugees were in Macedonia and Kosovo, and 70,000 in Constantinople. In November, the number of Muhajirs gathered in the Empire capital increased to 120,000, despite the constant and organized movement of this population to Asian provinces.⁶⁹ Bulgarian historian Valeri Stoyanov assumed that by February 1879, about 100,000 Muhajirs had returned to the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia.⁷⁰ Between Autumn 1879 and Spring 1880, the population of the Bulgarian lands sharply increased: In the Principality of Bulgaria, it increased by 363,721 people, and in Eastern Rumelia by 120,378.⁷¹ Of course, the changes were due to the inflow of the Bulgarian population of Macedonia, Thrace, and Russia to these territories rather than due to the repatriation of Muslim war refugees. We should not forget that a large group of returning Muhajirs did not stay in the Bulgarian lands for a long time, quickly joining the emigrants returning en masse to the Ottoman Empire instead. The situation in Serbia was clearer: In 1873, 95,619 Muslims lived in Sanjak of Niš, in 1879 only 6,567 in the whole Slavic state (2.13% of the population), and in 1884 2,250 (0.63%).⁷² These data show that only a small fraction of the Muhajirs returned to Serbia. Bulgarian demographer Kiril Popov and Polish ethnologist Jan Grzegorzewski rightly noticed that when in other Balkan countries Muslims completely emigrated, the significant

⁶⁷ Извод из писмо књажевског спрског заспника у Софији, 1.07.1880, АС МИД-ПО ролна 55 I/13; I. Blumi, *Ottoman Refugees, 1878–1939: Migration in a Post-Imperial World*, London-New Delhi-New York-Sydney 2013, pp. 53–54.

⁶⁸ Министар председник Јован Ристић Началнику округа врањског, Београд 1.10.1879, АС МИД-ПО ролна 52 II/70.

⁶⁹ Ö. Turan, *The Turkish Minority*, op. cit., pp. 147–148.

⁷⁰ В. Стоянов, *Турското население на Българија и официалната малцинствена политика (1878–1944)*, [in:] *Страници от българската историја. Събития – размисли – личности*, т. 2, ред. М. Босева, Софија 1993, p. 195.

⁷¹ Ж. Назърска, *Малцинствено-религиозната политика*, op. cit., p. 119.

⁷² *Tableau statistique, [1873]*, АС МИД-ПО ролна 46 I/247; М. Ђ. Милићевић, *Краљевина Србија. Нови крајеви, географија, орографија, хидрографија, топографија, археологија, историја, етнографија, статистика, просвета, култура, управа*, Београд 1884, pp. XVII–XVIII; М. Jagodić, op. cit., p. 54.

community remained in Bulgaria, an evidence of a much milder policy in Bulgaria than in Serbia.⁷³

At the turn of the 1870s and 1880s, the return of refugees was one of the greatest challenges facing the South-Slavic countries: Bulgaria, Serbia, and Eastern Rumelia. The scale of this problem may be illustrated by the statement of French traveler and economist Eumène Queillé that in this period there was no foreign ministry in Europe that had not received complaints from a Muslim refugee from the Balkans.⁷⁴ Diplomatic disputes over Muslim remigration, however, expired quite spontaneously. First of all, since 1881, fewer and fewer Muhajirs tried to get back to the Bulgarian and Serbian lands; at the same time, the public opinion was less and less interested in this problem.⁷⁵ Conflicts concerning post-war repatriation between Sofia, Plovdiv, and Belgrade on the one side and Constantinople on the other were often provoked by the Western Powers. Under the pretext of protecting Muhajirs' rights, they interfered in the internal affairs of Bulgarian and Serbian states—to the very irritation of Russians. Important enough, this issue contributed to the severance of diplomatic relations between Sofia and Constantinople in 1881–1882.⁷⁶

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⁷³ К. Попов, *Стопанска България (София 1916)*, [in:] *История на българите 1878–1944*, т. 1, ч. 1, op. cit., p. 144; J. Grzegorzewski, *Za Dunajem. Bułgaria, Serbia, Czarnogóra*, Lwów 1904, p. 178.

⁷⁴ Е. Кейе, *В България и Румелия*, ред. Г. Пеев, София 2006, pp. 125–126; А. М. Mirkova, op. cit., p. 960.

⁷⁵ Ж. Назърска, *Малцинствено-религиозната политика*, op. cit., p. 127.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 123.

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Abstract

The Great Eastern Crisis (1875–1878) led to migrations on an incomparable scale in the Balkan Peninsula. The Russian-Turkish War of 1877–1878 forced about 350,000 Muslims to leave the Bulgarian lands. Sanjak of Niš's occupation by the Serbian Army resulted in the exodus of 71,000 Muslims. After the situation in the region had stabilized, the refugees (so-called Muhajirs) wanted to get back to their homes in the newly created Principality of Bulgaria, autonomous Eastern Rumelia (first controlled by Russians and later by Bulgarians), and the lands annexed by Serbia.

Keywords: Balkan history, Serbia, Bulgaria, Eastern Rumelia, Muslim Minority in Balkans, 19th century

Author

Krzysztof Popiek is currently an assistant at the Institute of History of the Jagiellonian University. He is the author of the monograph "Turecka opończa, belgijska peleryna". *Obraz państwa bułgarskiego w twórczości satyrycznej przełomu XIX i XX wieku* (Kraków 2016) ["Turkish Cloak, Belgian Mantle." *Image of the Bulgarian State in Satires at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Century*]. He is the recipient of the PRELUDIUM 13 and OPUS 20 grants of the National Science Centre in Cracow, POWER 3.1 of the European Social Fund, Scholarship of the Lanckoroński Foundation, and Scholarships of the Polish Minister of Higher Education. Member of the Balkan History Association. He specializes in the political and social history of the Balkan Peninsula in the 19th century.