

# **Power and Society in Pleven on the Verge of Two Epochs: the Fate of the Mihaloğlu Family and its Pious Foundations (vakf) during the Transitional Period from Imperial to National Governance**

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*Abstract:* The end of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 and the subsequent decisions taken at the Berlin Congress of 1878 set the beginning of the state-building process of modern Bulgaria. The newly established nation-state quite naturally and purposefully sought an immediate emancipation from its political past and radical breaking with the inherited Ottoman institutions. This particular goal found direct reverberation in the consequent “de-Ottomanization” of Bulgaria during the process of homogenization of the Bulgarian nation. The Ottoman pious foundations (*vakf*) and their vast possessions, whose incomes provided for the maintenance and the functioning of the religious and other buildings, regarded by some as a direct implementation of the Ottoman imperial past, fall at the center of the state-building policies of the new Bulgarian state. The article examines one such particular charitable foundation, namely the vast *vakf* of the Mihaloğlu family in the region of Pleven, during the years after the establishment of the independent Bulgarian state and argues that it could be considered as an emblematic case elucidating aspects of the state-building ideology in the Bulgarian national politics in general and the uneasy process of decisive rupture with the imperial heritage that the new nation-state had to walk through in particular.

*Keywords:* Bulgaria – Ottoman Empire – *vakf* – state-building – 19<sup>th</sup> century – 20<sup>th</sup> century

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building process in modern Bulgaria. While the initial creation of the new state undoubtedly was a result of the Great Powers' decisions (these of Russia, Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, and Italy), it could hardly be denied that it was namely the Bulgarians who built their own national state ideology in the years after the Bulgarian state's secession from the confines of the Ottoman Empire. The newly established nation-state quite naturally and purposefully sought an immediate emancipation from its political past and radical breaking with the inherited Ottoman institutions. This particular goal found direct reverberation in the consequent "de-Ottomanization" of Bulgaria during the process of homogenization of the Bulgarian nation.<sup>1</sup>

The fastest and most visible results of total refutation of Bulgaria's Ottoman past are observable in the elimination of the architectural and material heritage, regarded by many people as a symbol of the imperial power over the Bulgarians. During the years right after the independence of Bulgaria and in the course of the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman architectural monuments (mosques, masjids, inns, caravanserais, covered markets, public baths, etc.), which remained on the territory of Bulgaria, often became objects of purposeful and systematic destruction.<sup>2</sup> Busy with the building of its

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<sup>1</sup> On the fate of the Ottoman heritage and the process of "de-Ottomanization" in post-liberation Bulgaria, which is also characteristic for the other newly founded nation-states established after their secession from the Ottoman Empire, see: *B. Lory*. *Le sort de l'héritage ottoman en Bulgarie. L'exemple des villes bulgares, 1878 – 1900*. Istanbul, 1985; *Idem*. *The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans*. – In: R. Daskalov, A. Vezenkov (eds.). *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*. Vol. 3. *Shared Pasts, Disputed Legacies*. Leiden/Boston, 2015, 355–405; *M. Todorova*. *The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans*. – In: L. C. Brown (ed.). *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East*. New York, 1997, 45–77; *A. Zhelyazkova*. *Osmanlı Mirası ve Balkan Tarihçiliğinin Oluşumu*. – In: K. Çiçek, C. Oğuz (eds.). *Osmanlı*. 7. cilt. Ankara, 1999, 690–703; *E. Stanoeva*. *Interpretations of the Ottoman Urban Legacy in the National Capital Building of Sofia (1878–1940)*. – In: E. Ginio, K. Kaser (eds.). *Ottoman Legacies in the Balkans and the Middle East*. Jerusalem, 2013, 209–230.

<sup>2</sup> *B. Lory*. *Le sort de l'héritage ottoman en Bulgarie...*; *Ö. Turan*. *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria (1878–1908)*. Ankara, 1998; *Idem*. *1877–1878 Osmanlı-Rus Savaşında Filibe'de Yıkılan Osmanlı Eserlerine Dâir Bir İngiliz Belgesi*. – *Kubbealtı Akademi Mecmuası*, 1996, № 25, 241–251; *Idem*. *1877–78 Osmanlı-Rus Savaşı'nın Bulgaristan'daki Türk Varlığına ve Mimari Eserlerine Etkisi*. – In: *Balkanlar'da Kültürel Etkileşim ve Türk Mimarisi Uluslararası Sempozyumu Bildirileri (17–19 Mayıs 2000, Şumnu – Bulgaristan)*. 2. Cilt. Ankara, 2001, 763–771; *A. Koyuncu*. *Balkanlarda Dönüşüm, Milli Devletler ve Osmanlı Mirasının Tasfiyesi: Bulgaristan Örneği (1878–1913)*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Ankara, Hacettepe Üniversitesi, 2005; *Idem*. *Bulgaristan'da Osmanlı Maddi Kültür Mirasının Tasfiyesi (1878–1908)*. – *Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi*, 2006, № 20, 197–243;

own modern state, the young Bulgarian nation perceived the Ottoman architectural heritage as a relic of the past and implementation of the old imperial power. The pursuit for modernization of the towns and cities in the period preceding the World War II and the withdrawal of a big portion of Turkish population from the Bulgarian territories, a direct beneficiary of the Ottoman public buildings, brought about a lack of adequate maintenance and hence huge amount of the Ottoman buildings were neglected and reduced to a ruinous state.

The less visible base of these Ottoman monuments, namely the *vakf* possessions, whose incomes provided for the maintenance and the functioning of the religious and other buildings part of the pious foundations (*vakfs*)<sup>3</sup>, also fell at the center of the state-building policies of the new Bulgarian state. The vast landed estates, property of the *vakfs*, often became an object of expropriation on the part of the authorities and their incomes started to be collected on behalf of the municipalities.<sup>4</sup> The *vakf* administrators (*mütevelli*), most of whom left the territory of Bulgaria, were trying to restore their ownership over their landed property, but the process proved to be long-lasting and ineffective. Several special commissions were formed to resolve the *vakf* question (with Bulgarian and Ottoman representatives) but their work did not lead to adequate

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*Idem.* Bulgaristan'dan Göç ve Türk Varlıklarının Tasfiyesi (1877–1908). – In: A. F. Örenç, İ. Mangaltepe (eds.). *Balkanlar ve Göç / The Balkans and Mass Immigration*. Bursa, 2013, 525–558; *Idem.* Sofya'da Osmanlı Mimari Mirasının Tasfiyesi (1878–1908). – In: XVI. Türk Tarih Kongresi, Ankara, 20–24 Eylül 2010. Kongreye Sunulan Bildiriler. IV. cilt, I. kısım. Ankara, 2015, 113–144.

<sup>3</sup> For details on the *vakf* institution, its legal framework, typological varieties and economic importance see *H. İnalçık*. Autonomous Enclaves in Islamic States: *Temliks*, *Soyurghals*, *Yurdluk-Ocaklıks*, *Mâlikâne-Mukâta'as* and *Awqaf*. – In: J. Pfeiffer, Sh. A. Quinn (eds.). *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East*. Studies in Honor of John E. Woods. Wiesbaden, 2006, 112–134; *B. Мутафчиева*. Аграрните отношения в османската империя през XV–XVI в. – In: *Eadem*. Османска социално-икономическа история (изследвания). София, 1993, 77–128; *Е. Радушев*. Аграрните институции в Османската империя през XVII–XVIII в. София, 1995, 206–220; *Sv. Ivanova*. Introduction. – In: E. Radushev, Sv. Ivanova, R. Kovachev (eds.). *Inventory of Ottoman Turkish Documents about Vakf Preserved in the Oriental Department at the St St Cyril and Methodius National Library*. Sofia, 2003, 11–54; *Д. Борисов*. Вакъфът. Османският вакъф – *modus vivendi* и *modus operandi*. – In: *Историк със съдба на творец и преподавател. Сборник в чест на 60-годишнината на проф. дин Людмил Спасов*. Т. 1. Велико Търново, 2009, 92–107.

<sup>4</sup> *Ж. Назърска*. Българската държава и нейните малцинства (1879–1885). София, 1999, p. 66.

results and was prolonged in time.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the so-called *vakf* question emerged right after the establishment of the new state and constantly accompanied the settling of different problems with the Turkish minority and the Muslim creed in Bulgaria for decades ahead, as to a certain extent it is still a problem of the present day.

To what extent and how the “de-Ottomanization” of Bulgaria is determining for the construction of a state national ideology in the transitional period’s conditions are questions whose answers could successfully be found in the development and subsequent resolution of the so-called *vakf* question at the basis of which lies an institution whose roots are deeply connected to the Ottoman heritage in the new national state. Undoubtedly, an examination of the Muslim charitable foundations under the conditions of independence from the imperial government of the Ottoman state offers a beneficial field which could elucidate aspects of the state-building ideology in the Bulgarian national politics in general and the uneasy process of decisive rupture with the imperial heritage that the new nation-state had to walk through in particular. Moreover, through a thorough study on the fate of the *vakf* properties in Bulgaria in the post-independence period, not only the varied difficulties which the newly established state had to cope with while establishing its own state institutions and ideology, but also the short term policies of the power holders toward the country’s ethnic Turkish community and the Muslim institutions in particular, could be traced out in depth as well.

There is no monographic study in the Bulgarian historiography concerning the *vakf* properties in post-independence Bulgaria, nor a special study on them. The question of the *vakf* properties has fallen in the focus of several collections with diplomatic subject matter, which published documents and international agreements between Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire/Turkey, but even the entire documentation regarding the broken forth “crisis” with its solving is not a subject matter of a separate examination.<sup>6</sup> In the history stud-

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<sup>5</sup> M. *İpşirli*. Bulgaristan’daki Türk Vakıflarının Durumu (XX. Yüzyıl Başları). – *Belle-ten*, 1989, № 207–208, 679–707; N. *Ersoy Hacısalihoglu*. Bulgaristan’da “Müstesna Vakıflar” Sorunu ve 1909 Yılı Komisyon Kararları. – *Tarih Dergisi*, 2007, № 46, 155–176; *Eadem*. Bulgaristan’ın Kuruluş ve Bağımsızlık Sürecinde Vakıf Meselesi. – In: A. F. Örenç, İ. Mangaltepe (eds.). *Balkanlar ve Göç / The Balkans and Mass Immigration*. Bursa, 2013, 515–523.

<sup>6</sup> Б. *Кесяков*. Принос към дипломатическата история на България 1878–1925 г. Т. 1. София, 1925; Е. *Стателова*. Дипломатията на Княжество България: 1879–1886. София, 1979; В. *Китанов*. Принос към дипломатическата история на България: Григор Начович и Българо-турското споразумение от 1904 г. София, 2004; Официалната и тайната бълга-

ies the *vakf* question was touched upon rather sporadically within the overall frame of Bulgarian state's ethnic and minority policies, as the assessments were made over a short time period which impedes from its complex rationalization.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, it is not surprising that the Turkish historiography, which identifies the Ottoman heritage left at the territories of the newly established Balkan states with the Muslim culture, whose bearer the modern Turkish nation is perceived to be, directs its attention toward the study of the Ottoman heritage in Bulgaria as well, including the *vakf* buildings and properties. A product of the Turkish historiography are a number of studies which offer primarily quantitative data on the amount of the Ottoman architectural heritage in Bulgaria from the end of the Ottoman period and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as they give, often in a biased manner, a negative evaluation of the efforts of the Bulgarian authorities for their systematical obliteration.<sup>8</sup> Recently a growing interest of the Turkish colleagues is observable in the study of the *vakf* question during the post-independence Bulgaria in the light of the decisions taken by the bilateral Bulgarian-Ottoman commissions, which were formed to resolve the problem during the period from 1878 to 1909.<sup>9</sup> They, however, accentuate on the factual information and the chronological tracing of a number of diplomatic missions and bilateral committees on the *vakf*

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ро-турска дипломация (1903–1925 г.). Документален сборник. Comp. and ed. В. Кутанов, Ц. Билярски. София, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> В. Стоянов. Турското население в България между полюсите на етническата политика. София, 1998; Ж. Назърска. Българската държава и нейните малцинства...

<sup>8</sup> О. Keskiöglü. Bulgaristan'daki Bazı Türk Vakıfları ve Âbideleri. – Vakıflar Dergisi, 1968, № 7, 129–137; *Idem*. Bulgaristan'da Bazı Türk Âbideleri ve Vakıf Eserleri. – Vakıflar Dergisi, 1969, № 8, 309–322; О. Keskiöglü, Özeydin, А. Т. Bulgaristan'da Türk-İslâm Eserleri. – Vakıflar Dergisi, 1983, № 17, 109–140; S. Bayram. Bulgaristan'daki Türk Vakıfları ve Vakıf Abideleri. – Vakıflar Dergisi, 1988, № 20, 475–482; İ. A. Yüksel. Bulgaristan'da Türk Mimari Eserleri. – Vakıflar Dergisi, 1988, № 20, 467–474; М. İpşirli. Bulgaristan'daki Türk Vakıflarının Durumu...; H. Memişoğlu. Bulgaristan'da Türk Kültür ve Sanat Eserleri. – Vakıflar Dergisi, 1994, № 22, 311–319; *Idem*. Bulgaristan'da Cemaati İslamiye ve Vakıf Kurumları. – Vakıflar Dergisi, 1995, № 25, 297–308; Ö. Turan. The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria...; *Idem*. 1877–78 Osmanlı-Rus Savaşı'nın Bulgaristan'daki Türk Varlığına ve Mimari Eserlerine Etkisi..., 763–771; А. Койунчу. Балканларда Дönüşüm, Milli Devletler ve Osmanlı Mirasının Tasfiyesi...; *Idem*. Bulgaristan'da Osmanlı Maddi Kültür Mirasının Tasfiyesi (1878–1908)..., 197–243; *Idem*. Bulgaristan'dan Göç ve Türk Varlıklarının Tasfiyesi (1877–1908)..., 525–558; *Idem*. Sofya'da Osmanlı Mimari Mirasının Tasfiyesi (1878–1908)..., 113–144.

<sup>9</sup> N. Ersoy Hacısalihioğlu. Bulgaristan'da “Müstesna Vakıflar” Sorunu..., 155–176; *Eadem*. Bulgaristan'ın Kuruluş ve Bağımsızlık Sürecinde Vakıf Meselesi..., 515–523.

problem, as the latter's deep examination practically remains on the agenda of further research.<sup>10</sup>

What certainly remains outside the focus of current research is the very question of the *vakf* possessions, which provided for the Ottoman pious foundations in general and the functioning and maintenance of the *vakf* buildings in particular. It is commonly accepted that the pious foundations were in possession of a substantial part of all landed properties in the Ottoman Empire. Researchers estimate the percentage of the *vakf* possessions in the early period (15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> century), which is overall better studied, as well as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to 1/3 of the entire imperial domains<sup>11</sup>, while the revenues raised from these properties amounted to at least 12% of the total imperial revenues.<sup>12</sup> Despite the commonly accepted scholarly assumption that pious foundations controlled a large portion of the landed properties and that they played a crucially important role in Ottoman economic history, the scholarship to date failed to provide a realistic assessment for the exact size of the *vakf* possession both in imperial and in Bulgarian context.

The present study aims to focus on precisely these *vakf* estates. It will briefly examine the large *vakf* in Pleven (Ott. Plevne) and its adjacent region, while underlining the importance of the big landed *vakfs*, on the one hand, and accentuating on the need of a deeper study on the landed properties of the pious foundations in Bulgaria and their fate in the post-liberation period, on the other. The latter emphasis will also shed light on another significant problem from the post-1878 history of the country, namely – the fate of the members of the Ottoman elite under the conditions set in the newly established national Bulgarian state.

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<sup>10</sup> To date the only attempt for a complex study of the “*vakf* question” during the long time span from 1877 to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is made by *Ö. Turan*. *Bulgaristan'da Türk Vakıfları*. – In: A. Çaksu (ed.). *Balkanlar'da İslam Medeniyeti Milletlerarası Sempozyumu Tebliğleri* (21–23 Nisan, 2000, Sofya). İstanbul, 2002, 199–229.

<sup>11</sup> *В. Мутафчиева*. Аграрните отношения в Османската империя през XV–XVI в. София, 1962; *Eadem*. Основни проблеми в изучаването на вакъфа като част от социално-икономическата структура на Балканите под турска власт, XV–XVII в. – In: *Eadem*. Османска социално-икономическа история (изследвания). София, 1993, 399–434; *Е. Падушев*. Аграрните институции в Османската империя..., 206–220; *Ф. Милкова*. Поземлената собственост в българските земи през XIX век. София, 1970, p. 49.

<sup>12</sup> *H. İnalcık*. *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*. Vol. 1. 1300–1600. Cambridge, 1994; *Д. Борисов*. Икономическа характеристика на българските земи като част от Османската империя. – In: Л. Спасов, Д. Борисов, М. Маринова (eds.). *Стопанска история на България, Европа и света XV–XX век. Ч. I: България*. София, 2016.

The history of the region of Pleven during the period of Ottoman rule is associated with one of the most emblematic aristocratic families of Ottoman military leaders of that time. The forefather of the family was Mihal Beg (end of the 13<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century) – a Byzantine commander and a renegade from Asia Minor who defected to the Ottomans and became one of the close associates of Osman Beg (1299–1323/4), the founder of the Ottoman state.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the centuries the *begs* from the Mihaloğlu (the sons of Mihal) family became hereditary military commanders and leaders of the raider (*akıncı*) avant-guard forces.<sup>14</sup> It was practically they who governed the frontiers of the Empire, as during the early centuries they enjoyed extensive privileges while being appointed as *uc begis* at the bordering regions between the Ottoman Empire and the Christian world. Toward the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and thereafter, when a more centralized Ottoman governmental system based on an imperial ideology crystalized, they still retained their leadership over the borders, though their privileges were reduced and the *akıncı uc begleri* were appointed on the posts of *sancak begleri*, governing on behalf of the sultans smaller regions rotatively for several years.<sup>15</sup> Members of the Mihaloğlu family

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<sup>13</sup> The historicity of Köse Mihal, presented in the Ottoman narratives from the 15<sup>th</sup> century as a companion of Osman Beg, was fully rejected by Colin Imber, who maintains that he is a completely legendary figure, fabricated by the early Ottoman chroniclers in order to create a credible genealogy for the later family members, and thus does not correspond to a real personage from the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. See: C. Imber. The Legend of Osman Gazi. – In: E. Zachariadou (ed.). The Ottoman Emirate, 1300–1389. Halcyon Days in Crete I. A symposium held in Rethymnon 11–13 January 1991. Rethymnon, 1993, 67–75 and *idem*. Canon and Apocrypha in Early Ottoman History. – In: C. Heywood, C. Imber (eds.). Studies in Ottoman History in Honour of Professor V. L. Ménage. Istanbul, 1994, 117–137. On the basis of archival and narrative sources related to the Mihaloğlu family, however, this theory of Imber has recently been definitely refuted. O. Sabev. The Legend of Köse Mihal – Additional Notes. – Turcica, 2002, № 34, 241–252 and M. Kiprovsk. Byzantine Renegade and Holy Warrior: Reassessing the Character of Köse Mihal, A Hero of the Byzantino-Ottoman Borderland. – In: S. Kuru, B. Tezcan (eds.). Defterology: Festschrift in Honor of Heath Lowry. – Journal of Turkish Studies, 2013, № 40, 245–269.

<sup>14</sup> Nüzhet Paşa. Ahval-i Gazi Mihal. İstanbul, 1315 (1896–1897); Y. Gökçek. Köse Mihal Oğulları. İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Mezuniyet Tezi, 1950; *Idem*. Türk İmparatorluk Tarihinde Akıncı Teşkilâtı ve Gazi Mihal Oğulları. Konya, 1998; M. T. Gökbilgin. Mihal-oğulları. – In: İslâm Ansiklopedisi. 8. cilt. İstanbul, 1979, 285–292; A. Kayapınar, Özünlü, E. E. Mihaloğulları'na Ait 1586 Tarihli Akıncı Defteri. Ankara, 2015; *Idem*. 1472 ve 1560 Tarihli Akıncı Defterleri. Ankara, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> M. Kiprovsk. The Mihaloğlu Family: Gazi Warriors and Patrons of Dervish Hospices. – Osmanlı Araştırmaları, 2008, № 32, 173–202.

managed to accumulate a fortune while governing the Ottoman frontier territories. They also obtained large landed properties in full proprietorship (*mülk*) which were granted to them by the sultan as a reward for their military deeds. Subsequently, family members established hereditary *vakfs* for the maintenance of which they bequeathed the thus granted lands and all of their incomes. In such a manner, the family guaranteed not only its right of possession, but also the management of its estates for centuries ahead.<sup>16</sup> The size and the administration manner of these family domains incited some author to refer to them as “states within the state”<sup>17</sup>, and to their owners – as typical representatives of the Ottoman aristocracy, political opponents to the Ottoman dynasty in times of crises and true “territorial magnates”.<sup>18</sup>

The case with the town of Plevne (mod. Pleven) and the surrounding villages is a typical example of a large landed *vakf*, founded by Mihaloğlu Alaeddin Ali Beg (1430? – prior 1505)<sup>19</sup> at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and thereafter transferred in inheritance to members of the family well until the end of the Ottoman rule. As it becomes apparent from the foundation charter

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<sup>16</sup> *A. Kayapınar*. Kuzey Bulgaristan’da Gazi Mihaloğulları Vakıfları (XV.–XVI. Yüzyıl) – Abant İzzet Baysal Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi, 2005, № 10, 169–181; *O. Sabev*. Osmanlıların Balkanları Fethi ve İdaresinde Mihaloğulları Ailesi (XIV.–XIX. Yüzyıllar): Mülkler, Vakıflar, Hizmetler. – Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi, 2013, № 33, 229–244; *M. Kiprovska*. Shaping the Ottoman Borderland: the Architectural Patronage of the Frontier Lords from the Mihaloğlu Family. – In: I. Parvev, M. Baramova, G. Boykov (eds.). Bordering Early Modern Europe. Wiesbaden, 2015, 185–220.

<sup>17</sup> *Ö. L. Barkan*. Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Bir İskân ve Kolonizasyon Metodu Olarak Vakıflar ve Temlikler. – Vakıflar Dergisi, 1942, № 2, p. 360.

<sup>18</sup> *H. İnalcık*. The Emergence of the Ottomans. – In: P. M. Holt, A. Lambton, B. Lewis (eds.). The Cambridge History of Islam. Vol. 1A. The Central Islamic Lands from Pre-Islamic Times to the First World War. Cambridge, 1970, 283–286; *I. Beldiceanu-Steinherr*. En marge d’un acte concernant le pengyek et les aqıngi. – Revue des études islamiques, 1969, № 37, 21–47; *C. Imber*. The Ottoman Empire, 1300–1650. The Structure of Power. New York, 2002, 186–188; *P. Fodor*. Ottoman Warfare, 1300–1453. – In: K. Fleet (ed.). The Cambridge History of Turkey. Vol. 1. Byzantium to Turkey, 1071–1453. Cambridge, 2009, 204–205.

<sup>19</sup> Mihaloğlu Ali Beg was a famous Ottoman military commander from the reigns of sultan Mehmed II (1444–1446; 1451–1481) and Bayezid II (1481–1512), under whose direct command were a great part of the *akıncı* troops, known by the name “Mihallu”, i.e. under the leadership of Mihal. For the military deeds of Ali Beg, his military career and the posts he was holding, see: *A. S. Levend*. Gazavât-nâmeler ve Mihaloğlu Ali Bey’in Gazavât-nâmesi. Ankara, 1956, 187–195; *O. Зупојевућ*. Смедеревски санџакбег Али-бег Михалоглу. – Зборник за ИМС, 1971, № 3, 9–27.



(*vakfiye*) of the *vakf*, drown in 1496<sup>20</sup>, Ali Beg possessed large territories in the regions of Lofça (mod. Lovech), Vidin and Plevne, encompassing numerous villages, arable lands, and forests, parts of the income and produce from which were to be spent on the maintenance of the charitable buildings, which the founder of the *vakf* himself had erected in Vidin and Plevne. It is clear that at the time the *vakf* was established, Ali Beg had already built in Plevne a bath-house (*hamam*), a mosque (*mescid*), a dervish convent (*zaviye*), a soup kitchen for the poor (*imaret*), an elementary school (*mekteb*) and a theological collage (*medrese*).<sup>21</sup> Except for the arable lands, forests and rivers, on

<sup>20</sup> A copy of the original Arabic *vakfiye* is kept in the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi in Istanbul: BOA, Hariciye Nezareti, Siyasi (HR. SYS.), dosya 310, gömlek 1, vesika No 51, vr. 1–8. On the request of family members from the Plevne branch of the family during the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Ottoman Poet Zaîfî made its translation from the Arabic original into Ottoman language, which he later included in his *Külliyât-ı Zaîfî*, ms. Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi, Revan 822, fols. 181<sup>a</sup>–184<sup>a</sup>. Cf. R. *Anhegger*. 16. Asır Şairlerinden Zaîfî. – İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Dergisi, 1950, № 1–2, 133–166, 162–163. The content of the document was also reproduced in short by A. S. *Levend*. *Gazavât-nâmeler ve Mihaloğlu Ali Bey...*, 359–360. Its short version is published also by Nüzhet Paşa, himself a member of the family, in his *Ahval-i Gazi Mihal...*, 86–91. The *vakfiye* of Ali Beg is also translated into Bulgarian, apparently following the Ottoman translation of the Arabic original, which was handed by the then *mütevellîs* of the pious foundation to the special commission established to solve the question of the so-called “*müstesna*” *vakfs* (“special” *vakfs* with extraordinary rights) in 1909. Diamandi Ichiev (1854–1913) was appointed as an expert translator to the commission, which had to examine the claims made by the *müstesna vakfs* on the territory of Bulgaria, from where he must have acquired the *vakfiyes* of some of the biggest *vakfs* in the Bulgarian lands, including the ones of Mihaloğlu Ali Beg in Plevne and that of Karloğlu Ali Beg in Karlova. See Доклад и решения на комисията назначена съгласно чл. II на Турско-Българския Протоколъ отъ 6/19 априлъ 1909 год. върху рекламациите досежно вакуфите „мюстесна“. София, 1910, р. 4; Г. *Баласчев*, *Ихчиев*, Д. Турските вакъфи в българското царство и документи върху тях. – Минало, 1909, № 3, 243–255.

<sup>21</sup> Г. *Баласчев*, *Ихчиев*, Д. Турските вакъфи в българското царство..., р. 244. The revenues from the public bath in Plevne, donated for the maintenance of the *imaret* in Plevne, were recorded in the *tapu tahrir defterleri* of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Cf. BOA, Tapu Tahrir Defteri (hereafter: TT) 370 (370 Numaralı Muhâsebe-i Vilâyet-i Rûm-İli Defteri (937/1530) I: Paşa (Sofya) ve Vize Livâları ile SağkolKazaları (Edirne, Dimetoka, Ferecik, Keşan, Kızıl-ağaç, Zağra-i Eski-hisâr, İpsala, Filibe, Tatarbâzârı, Samakov, Üsküb, Kalkan-delen, Kırçova, Manastır, Pirlepe ve Köprülü). Ankara, 2001), p. 522; BOA, TT 382, p. 688. Except for the *imaret*, the *hamam*, the mosque and the *medrese*, the Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi (1611 – 1682) noted that Ali Beg has built in Plevne a *mekteb* as well. It is possible that the “Gazi Mihal” *han*, which Evliya described in detail, was erected by Ali Beg as well. *Evliyâ Çelebi b. Derviş Mehmed Zillî*. *Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*. 6. Kitap: Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi Revan 1457 Numaralı Yazmanın Transkripsiyonu – Dizini. Hazırlayanlar S. A. Kahraman, Y. Dağlı. İstanbul, 2002, p. 96.

the banks of which the numerous *vakf* mills were grinding the wheat for the *imarets* and whose exact borders were defined in the document, Ali Beg donated to his pious foundation the income from twenty villages and the town of Plevne, which were his own private property. Indeed, something about which the endowment deed does not give details, but to which later Ottoman tax records issued by the central administration unanimously attest, is the fact that Ali Beg was the person who actually populated previously deserted land on his estate, re-creating formerly uninhabited villages and thereby increasing both the number of the settlements in his private domain and its revenues. Apparently, sultan Bayezid II (1481–1512) initially granted to Ali Beg three villages (Plevne, Dolna Giriviçe and Kışın) and large plots of empty land with absolute immunity in terms of their financial administration: i.e., the state did not interfere in the management of these lands and gave their owner the right to collect all taxes, including the poll-tax from the Christians – an income, which the central government very rarely renounced.<sup>22</sup> Under these conditions, the *mülk* of Ali Beg, consisting of only three villages at the time when it was granted, was repeatedly enlarged, as in a short time the owner succeeded in increasing the number of inhabited places to twenty-four by attracting and settling on the empty land peasants who had previously escaped registration and who must have found the tax-exemption policy of the landowner truly appealing.<sup>23</sup>

After enlarging considerably the incomes from his landed estates, Ali Beg bequeathed a share of their revenues for the upkeep of his mosque and *imaret* and another share for the maintenance of his *zaviye* in Plevne.<sup>24</sup> During the

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<sup>22</sup> BOA, TT 382 (1555–1556), s. 675. Parts of this register (cited by its old call no. 611), concerning the private properties of the Mihaloğlu family members, were published by Ö. L. Barkan. Türk-İslâm Toprak Hukuku Tatbikatının Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Aldığı Şekiller. III: İmparatorluk Devrinde Toprak Mülk ve Vakıflarının Hususiyeti. – In: *Idem*. Türkiye'de Toprak Meselesi – Toplu Eserler 1. İstanbul, 1980, 256–260, 267–270. Cf. M. Kiel. Urban Development in Bulgaria in the Turkish Period: The Place of Turkish Architecture in the Process. – International Journal of Turkish Studies, 1989, № 2, 108–109; A. Kayapınar. Kuzey Bulgaristan'da Gazi Mihaloğulları Vakıfları..., 172–173; O. Sabev. Osmanlıların Balkanları Fethi ve İdaresinde Mihaloğulları Ailesi..., p. 235.

<sup>23</sup> BOA, TT 382, s. 675, 714, 717, 723; Ö. L. Barkan. Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Bir İskân ve Kolonizasyon Metodu Olarak Vakıflar..., s. 341, 360–361; *Idem*. Toprak Mülk ve Vakıflarının Hususiyeti..., 256–260, 267–270.

<sup>24</sup> BOA, TT 370 (370 Numaralı Muhâsebe-i Vilâyet-i Rûm-İli Defteri (937/1530)), 521–522; BOA, TT 382, 675–714. Compare O. Sabev. Osmanlıların Balkanları Fethi ve İdaresinde Mihaloğulları Ailesi..., p. 235 and P. Ковачев. Нови османотурски описи за селищата и

16<sup>th</sup> century the revenues from the following nineteen settlements were collected for the maintenance of the *mescid* and the *imaret* of Ali Beg in Plevne: nefs-i Plevne (mod. Pleven); Plevne-i Balâ (vanished); Dolna Griviçe (mod. Grivitsa); Bukovlık-i Balâ (mod. Bukovlāk); Bele Komin, nam-i diğ̃er Plazigız (mod. Yasen); İsmirdin (mod. Inovo); Brestovça (mod. Brestove); Tuçeniçe (mod. Tuchenitsa); Dolna Mitropoli (mod. Dolna Mitropoliya); Gorna Mitropoli (mod. Gorna Mitropoliya); Tırnani (mod. Tărnene); Butova (mod. Butovo); Vuçin Dol (mod. Todorovo); Kraguy (mod. Gortalovo); Begleş (mod. Beglej); Pırdilova (mod. Nikolaevo); Pırçoviçe (unidentified); Laskari (mod. Laskar); İskravit (unidentified). For the upkeep of the *zaviye* the revenues of the following five villages were assigned: Kışın-i Küçük and Kışın-i Büzürk (mod. Kăshin); Novasil, nam-i diğ̃er Jabokirt (mod. Kărtojabene); Kamenіçe (mod. Kamenets); Bukovlık-i Zir (mod. Bukovlāk).

Apparently, the *mülk* of Ali Beg initially encompassed a few more villages, which he donated in full proprietorship to his sons and manumitted slaves.<sup>25</sup> Thus, confirmed in full proprietorship over their own landed properties, the descendants of Ali Beg in their turn secured the right of inheritance for their own progeny and practically guaranteed the ownership of the Mihaloğlu family in the area for centuries. Some of Ali Beg's children and grandchildren also established pious foundations in support of the buildings already constructed in the urban center of Plevne or for the upkeep of those erected by themselves. In the sixteenth century the grandson of Ali Beg, Süleyman Beg (an offspring of the oldest son of Ali Beg, Hasan Beg), sponsored a *mekteb* which, according to Evliya Çelebi, was, together with the *mekteb* of Gazi Ali Beg, the most notable among the seven schools in town.<sup>26</sup> Süleyman Beg was also the patron of one of the most imposing Friday mosques in Plevne, which was known locally as Kurşunlu Cami'i and, according to its dedicatory inscription, was built in 969 H. (11 September 1561 – 30 August 1562).<sup>27</sup> The erection of several

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населението в Плевенско през първата половина на XVI в. – In: 730 години град Плевен и мястото му в националната история и култура. Доклади и съобщения от научна сесия, проведена на 9 декември 2000 г. в Плевен. Състав. и ред. М. Грънчаров. Плевен, 2002, 99–139.

<sup>25</sup> BOA, TT 382, 733–765; Ö. L. Barkan. Toprak Mülk ve Vakıflarının Hususiyeti..., 258–260, 267–271; O. Sabev. Osmanlıların Balkanları Fethi ve İdaresinde Mihaloğulları Ailesi..., 235–237; A. Kayapınar. Kuzey Bulgaristan'da Gazi Mihaloğulları Vakıfları..., 173–176.

<sup>26</sup> Evliyâ Çelebi. Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi, 6. Kitap..., p. 96.

<sup>27</sup> M. Kiprovskă. Shaping the Ottoman Borderland..., p. 205, ills. 10 and 11. For a different dating, calculated on the basis of the dedicatory inscription, see: Ю. Трифонов. История

other small mosques (*mescid*) in Plevne can also be ascribed to Mihaloğlu family members. The sixteenth-century Ottoman registers of the Plevne region testify to the existence of a number of city quarters named after the mosques on which the neighborhoods were centered. Thus, one finds listed the quarter *mescid-i Halil Voyvoda*<sup>28</sup>, whose patron can certainly be identified as a member of the family.<sup>29</sup> At least four more neighborhood mosques were endowed by members of the family, three of them women. It appears that one of the wives of Mihaloğlu Ali Beg, the mother of his son Hızır Beg, was the benefactress of *mescid-i valide-i Hızır Beg*<sup>30</sup> in the city quarter of the same name.<sup>31</sup> One of the daughters of Ali Beg, whose name remains unclear, erected another mosque in town. Her name, as that of her father's wife, rests in the shadow of the prominent men of the family, in this case her famous brother Mehmed Beg, since her own mosque was known as *mescid-i hemşire-i* [sister of] *Mehmed Beg*.<sup>32</sup> The only woman who engraved her personal name on the urban fabric of Plevne was Ali Beg's granddaughter and Mehmed Beg's daughter, Hatice Sultan. Hatice Sultan erected a mosque in Plevne, for the upkeep of which she endowed the income from one hereditary village<sup>33</sup> and which also became the nucleus of a

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на града Плевен до Освободителната война. София, 1933, 44–45; *M. Kiel*. Plewna. – In: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Vol. 8. Leiden, 1995, p. 318, 320.

<sup>28</sup> BOA, TT 382, p. 681.

<sup>29</sup> Halil Voyvoda was a relative, most probably a cousin, of Mihaloğlu Ali Beg's son Mehmed Beg and appears to have ensured the safety of the previously uninhabited village of Ralyova, which had become a gathering place for robbers, by populating it with close to three dozen of his own men, who enjoyed certain privileges in terms of tax-exemption. BOA, TT 382, s. 759; *Ö. L. Barkan*. *Toprak Mülk ve Vakıflarının Hususiyeti...*, 270–271. Barkan read wrongly the name of the village as Dalıka. Cf. *A. Kayapınar*. *Kuzey Bulgaristan'da Gazi Mihaloğulları Vakıfları...*, p. 174.

<sup>30</sup> A *vakf defteri* from 1540 (housed in the Bulgarian National Library “St. st. Cyril and Methodius” [hereafter: НБКМ], Oriental Department, call no. OAK 217/8, fols. 34<sup>b</sup>–35<sup>a</sup>) reveals that the mother of Hızır Beg established a pious foundation for the upkeep of her own mosque, and she bequeathed for its maintenance the revenues of six shops, which had to provide for the salary of the *imam* and the repairs of the buildings. See: Турски извори за българската история. Т. III. Състав. Б. Цветкова, А. Разбойников. София, 1972, p. 467.

<sup>31</sup> BOA, TT 382, s. 678.

<sup>32</sup> НБКМ, OAK 217/8, fol. 34<sup>b</sup>; Турски извори за българската история..., p. 467. Or-lin Sabev has suggested that the actual benefactor of the mosque was Mehmed Beg himself. *O. Sabev*, “Osmanlıların Balkanları Fethi ve İdaresinde Mihaloğulları Ailesi,” p. 238. *Idem*. *Osmanlıların Balkanları Fethi ve İdaresinde Mihaloğulları Ailesi...*, p. 238.

<sup>33</sup> *Ö. L. Barkan*. *Toprak Mülk ve Vakıflarının Hususiyeti...*, 269–270; *O. Sabev*. *Osmanlıların Balkanları Fethi ve İdaresinde Mihaloğulları Ailesi...*, p. 238; *A. Kayapınar*. *Kuzey Bulgaristan'da Gazi Mihaloğulları Vakıfları...*, p. 175.

neighborhood of the same name.<sup>34</sup> Mihaloğulları continued to build in Plevne in the following centuries as well. One more mosque was erected in 1663 by a certain Süleyman, son of Mahmud Paşa from the family of Mihal.<sup>35</sup> It was a massive structure but was torn down after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877/8, as were most other Ottoman buildings in the town.

To all the edifices whose benefactors can be identified as members of the Mihaloğlu family, one should add some of the commercial buildings as well. When Evliya Çelebi visited Plevne, he noted the existence of six caravanserais and specifically mentioned that of Gazi Mihal Beg, which had been ruined after an attack by the Wallachian Michael the Brave (1593–1601) at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and was later restored by the family to its previous impressiveness.<sup>36</sup> The name used for the *han* by the Ottoman traveler leaves little doubt that it was originally erected by a member of the family, possibly by Mihaloğlu Ali Beg himself.<sup>37</sup>

Alongside the vast landed properties in the region, which were held by the family members for a period of several centuries, the architectural heritage that they left there also contributed to its elevation to the most significant family domain in the empire.<sup>38</sup> Arguably, the most emblematic edifice which symbolized the family's regional power was the family residence in the town, known up until the 1930s with the name “Saraya”<sup>39</sup>, i.e. “the Palace”. In the seventeenth century it was described by Evliya Çelebi as a quadrangular fortification in the inner part of which the Mihaloğulları had erected a magnificent, many-storied

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<sup>34</sup> BOA, TT 713, p. 155.

<sup>35</sup> Ю. Трифонов. История на града Плевен..., p. 64.

<sup>36</sup> *Evliyâ Çelebi*. Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi, 6. Kitap..., p. 96.

<sup>37</sup> It must have been the very same caravanserai where Felix Kanitz stayed in 1871. It was described by him as an old edifice situated in the very heart of the *çarşı* with a magnificent view of Plevne's most beautiful mosque (i.e. Süleyman Beg), of which Kanitz drew a sketch from his window. *F. Kanitz*. Donau-Bulgarien und der Balkan. Historisch – Geographisch – Ethnographische Reisestudien aus den Jahren 1860–1876. Vol. 2. Leipzig, 1877, 197–198.

<sup>38</sup> Other family estates of the Mihaloğulları were centered around the towns of İhtiman and Pınarhisar on the Balkans, as well as Harmankaya in Anatolia. Cf. *M. Kiprovsk*a. Shaping the Ottoman Borderland...; *O. Sabev*. Osmanlıların Balkanları Fethive İdaresinde Mihaloğulları Ailesi...; *M. Kiprovsk*a. Pınarhisar's Development from the Late Fourteenth to the Mid-Sixteenth Century: The Mihaloğlu Family *Vakf* Possessions in the Area. – In: D. Stoyanova, G. Boykov, I. Lozavov (eds.). *Cities in South Eastern Thrace: Continuity and Transformation*. Sofia, 2017, 183–207; *Eadem*. Byzantine Renegade and Holy Warrior...

<sup>39</sup> Ю. Трифонов. История на града Плевен..., 62–63.

palace where they lived and from where they governed the area.<sup>40</sup> To date only the northeastern and parts of the southern section of the walls that once surrounded the family mansion are preserved, as they are obviously lower than they used to be, since in the early 1930s Yurdan Trifonov (1864–1949) could still see a marble lion's head displayed conspicuously next to the main entrance at a height of 7–8 meters.<sup>41</sup> Apparently, the palatial house was quite ostentatious and, along with the architectural patronage of the Mihaloğulları regional power-holders, should be understood as a token of their absolute supremacy in the region.

The Mihaloğlu family managed to preserve its ancestral domains until the end of the Ottoman rule, although after the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century they had to survive certain periods of perturbations, when the state was trying to get hold of the *vakf* estates' incomes in order to secure more revenues for the central treasury by bringing them under its direct financial and administrative control; after 1826 the *vakfs*' administrative control was centralized and taken over by the newly created *Evkaf-i Hümayun Nezareti*.<sup>42</sup> The revenues from the *vakf* in Plevne were not spared from the central treasury's aspirations as well – the state appropriated the collection of the *cizye* tax from the Christians living on the territory of the *vakf*, which by rights was collected in favor of the pious foundation. After an inspection within the central Ottoman departments was carried out, on July 23, 1823 sultan Mahmud II (1808–1839) issued a *ferman* reaffirming the rights of the *mütevelli*s in Plevne to collect the *cizye* tax from the Christians.<sup>43</sup>

Apparently, the administrators of the Plevne *vakf* not only managed to retain their rights over the charitable foundation's revenues, but accumulated substantial financial resources from their possessions. Illustrative in this respect is the fact that the heir of Alaeddin Ali Beg and a *mütevelli* of the *vakf* in Pleven from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – Mahmud Nedim Beg – bought off in

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<sup>40</sup> „Mihaloğulları çâr-kûşe handaksız bir küçük kapulu kal'a şekilli bir sûr inşâ edüp içinde kat-enderkatsarây-ı azîm binâ etmişler kim ta'rif ü tavsîfden müstağnî bir sarây-ı mu'azzamdır kim içine beşâdem girse yerim dar demez. Cümle Mihaloğlu beğler bunda sâkin olup hük-m-i hükûmât ederler“. *Evliyâ Çelebi*. *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, 6. Kitap..., p. 95.

<sup>41</sup> Ю. Трифонов. История на града Плевен..., p. 63.

<sup>42</sup> В. Мутафчиева. Основни проблеми в изучаването на вакъфа..., 399–434; Е. Радушев. Аграрните институции в Османската империя..., 214–215, 235; Ф. Милкова. Поземлената собственост в българските земи през XIX век..., 45–60; Sv. Ivanova. Introduction..., p. 22.

<sup>43</sup> Г. Баласчев, Ихчиев, Д. Турските вакъфи в българското царство..., p. 260.

1866/67 the auctioned incomes from the ancestral *vakf* (of Mihaloğlu Mahmud Beg) of another family branch in the area of Ihtiman worth 254 093,20 *gurus*.<sup>44</sup> This fact by itself bespeaks of the considerable wealth of the Plevne *mütevellis*, accumulated on the basis of their ancestral *vakf* revenues and of their high standing in the Ottoman society up until the very end of the Ottoman rule in the area.

What is the fate of this noble family and its landed estates in the region of Plevne after the independence of Bulgaria? Did these big landowners subsume into the new order of the liberated Principality and subsequently – unified Kingdom of Bulgaria? What exactly happened with the *vakf* landed properties which provided for the pious foundation?

Way too little is known about the fate of the big Ottoman land magnates in the period after the liberation of Bulgaria. It is generally assumed that in the course of the mass immigration of the Muslim population from the Bulgarian territories during and immediately after the Russo-Turkish war of 1877/78, the big Muslim landowners too left the confines of the Principality of Bulgaria. What could be stated with great degree of certainty as concerns the proprietors from Plevne, is that the proclamation of the autonomous Principality of Bulgaria did not change instantly the extant state of affairs. In the case of Plevne one is faced with a situation in which the powerful of the day continued playing an essential role not only in regional matters, but they also integrated successfully into the new state structures. It is hardly a matter of coincidence that amongst the deputies of the Bulgarian Constituent Assembly (held between February 10 and April 16, 1879) in Veliko Tŕrnovo, who drew up and signed the first constitution of the Principality, one finds a representative of the Plevne Mihaloğulları – certain Mihal Beg from Pleven.<sup>45</sup> In the so far known documentation about the *mütevellis* of Plevne, the name Mihal does not appear, which makes it plausible to suggest that his personal name is different, and in the Constituent Assembly's deputies' list the aforementioned was enlisted with his emblematic family name – Mihal. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the administrators of the *vakf* in Plevne were the two brothers Mahmud Nedim Beg and Mehmed Nuri Beg, as in the past the pious foundation was administered by

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<sup>44</sup> В. Мутафчиева. Нови османски документи за вакъфите в България под турска власт. – Известия на държавните архиви, 1962, № 6, 273–274.

<sup>45</sup> Протоколите на Учредителното Българско Народно Събрание въ Търново. Пловдив, София, Русчукъ, 1879, р. XVI.

their father – Mehmed Rifat Beg.<sup>46</sup> It is likely that it is indeed Mehmed Nuri Beg who hides behind the name Mihal Beg from Pleven from the list roll of the deputies in 1879. It is also plausible that Mahmud Nedim Paşa from Samokov from the same list is actually Mahmud Nedim Beg from Plevne, who in the preceding decade bought off the collection of the taxes from the Ihtiman *vakf* of his relatives, which at that time pertained to the *sancak* of Samakov.

The *mütevellîs* from Pleven succeeded in keeping their hereditary rights over the administration of the pious foundation, but their subsequent fate was determined by the policy adopted by the Bulgarian authorities toward the Turkish landed properties as a whole. The significance of the *vakf* estates' issue in post-independence Bulgaria and its central place in the formation of modern Bulgarian institutions were indicated in the preliminary treaty of San Stefano (art. 11) and in the Treaty of Berlin (art. 12) of 1878, which stipulated the immediate appointment of a joint Bulgarian-Ottoman committee which in the course of two years had to resolve the question of the Muslim private properties, including the *vakf* possessions, that remained on the territory of the Bulgarian Principality.<sup>47</sup> Although the landed property of the Muslims was guaranteed by the international treaties, during the Provisional Russian Administration in the Principality of Bulgaria, the *vakf* lands were seized and administered directly by the Russian administration. A number of pious foundations were deprived from their properties and lands, their revenues were assigned to the state treasury, while a number of their buildings were systematically demolished and their incomes – nationalized.<sup>48</sup> The appointed joint bilateral commission (with Bulgarian and Ottoman representatives) whose aim was to settle the property-owning issue began its work in 1880 in Sofia. One of the main problems which the committee had to solve was the fate of the *vakf* estates which remained on the territory of the Bulgarian Principality. It appears that during the first two and a half years the only question that interested the commission's work was the issue of the privately owned lands, and it was only in 1882 when the problem of the *vakf* properties and their ownership was also placed on the

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<sup>46</sup> BOA, Yıldız Tasnifi, Perakende Evrakı, Yaveran ve Maiyyet-i Seniyye Erkan-i Harbiye Dairesi (Y. PRK. MYD.), dosya 10, gömlek 15.

<sup>47</sup> Ж. Назърска. Българската държава и нейните малцинства..., p. 66; N. Ersoy Hacısalihoglu. Bulgaristan'ın Kuruluş ve Bağımsızlık Sürecinde Vakıf Meselesi..., p. 516; Ö. Turan. The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria..., 200–204; Ö. Turan. Bulgaristan'da Türk Vakıfları..., 204–205.

<sup>48</sup> Ж. Назърска. Българската държава и нейните малцинства..., 66–78.



committee's agenda.<sup>49</sup> The Ottoman representatives insisted that the revenues collected from the landed *vakf* properties be paid to their administrators (*mütevellîs*). Accordingly, a process of collecting materials concerning the present condition of the *vakf* estates has started, but meanwhile the *vakf* revenues were appropriated by the state. This process was accompanied by a series of petitions not only on the part of the Ottoman state and representatives of the Great Powers<sup>50</sup>, but the *mütevellîs* themselves complained to the Bulgarian authorities and insisted that their ancestral domains be restored to the proprietors. The *vakf* administrators from Pleven too did not remain indifferent to the process and addressed multiple petitions for restoration of the revenue payments from their ancestral estates. Mahmud Nedim Beg personally wrote petitions to Prince Alexander I (1879–1886) and to the *Vakf* Commission, as in 1884 he even met with Ivan Geshov (1849–1924), then a director of the Bulgarian National Bank, in order to address his claims for restoration of the family *vakf* lands.<sup>51</sup> Evidently, the claims of the *mütevellîs* remained unsatisfied, and the bilateral Bulgarian-Ottoman Commission suspended its meetings in 1885 as it yielded no results in resolving the *vakf* lands' issue.<sup>52</sup>

The *mütevellîs* from Pleven did not give up seeking a solution for the restitution of their rights over the landed *vakf* properties, which remained on the territory of now independent Bulgaria. They sent petitions to various departments of the central Ottoman administration in Istanbul, trying to secure for themselves the backing of the Ottoman government and hoping that through its interference they could eventually restore their rights to collect the revenues from their ancestral domains in the region of Pleven. From these petitions, sent by Mahmud Nedim Beg and his brother Mehmed Nuri Beg, we learn that the landed properties of the hereditary *vakf* whose administrators they were, were “seized” by the Bulgarian state and the *mütevellîs* were not receiving the amounts, payable by the Bulgarian authorities, and their rights of possession were practically taken away.<sup>53</sup> An intriguing feature of these documents is that

<sup>49</sup> Ö. Turan. *Bulgaristan'da Türk Vakıfları...*, p. 207.

<sup>50</sup> BOA, Hariciye Nezareti, Siyasi (BOA, HR. SYS.), 308/2.

<sup>51</sup> Централен Държавен Архив, Ф. 159К (Министерство на финансите), а.е. 186, fol. 7–8, 12–17, 22–23, 48.

<sup>52</sup> Ö. Turan. *Bulgaristan'da Türk Vakıfları...*, p. 208; *Idem*. *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria...*, p. 204; *N. Ersoy Hacısalihoğlu*. *Bulgaristan'ın Kuruluş ve Bağımsızlık Sürecinde Vakıf Meselesi...*, p. 519.

<sup>53</sup> BOA, Iradeler Tasnifi, Dahiliye (İ. DH.), dosya 1295/–6, gömlek 102393 (October 24, 1889); BOA, Yıldız Tasnifi, Perakende Evrakı, Evkaf Nezareti Maruzatı (Y. PRK. EV.),

they were written as private petitions and thus represent the personal vision of the *vakf* administrators. Curiously, the petitions of the *begs* from Plevne – that is how the two Mihaloğlu brothers sign their appeals, for instance, Plevneli Mehmed Nuri Beg – emphasize emphatically on the merits of the family within the Ottoman state as a whole, describing in short the military deeds of the most famous family members starting with its forefather Köse Mihal Beg, who played crucial role in the taking of important strongholds in Bithynia, the birthplace of the Ottoman state, at the time of Osman Beg. Clearly discernable is also the desire of the *mütevellîs* to stress on the role of different members of the Plevne branch of the family in the resettling of the region. They underlined that the founder of the *vakf* in Plevne, as well as his sons and grandsons afterwards, have rendered great services to the Ottoman state while executing efforts in deporting settlers from the territories they have conquered to the villages in the region they governed.<sup>54</sup> The loyal service to the Ottoman sultans and the military merits of the *begs* from the family were plainly accentuated obviously aiming to underline the pressing need of the assistance on the part of the Ottoman authorities in solving the family's property problems. The latter is also corroborated by the fact that to the petitions, which the *vakf* administrators have sent to the Porte, they added an interesting document – a *berat* issued by Bayezid I (1389–1402) in 1390, granting a hereditary right of the heirs of Mihaloğlu Ali Beg to hold the governorship over a *sancakbeglik* province (with no reference to a specific territory) in reward for the latter's loyal service to sultan Murad I (1362–1389).<sup>55</sup> Another peculiarity of the petitions that deserves special mention is the fact that in none of them there is a reference to the *vakf* buildings, the emphasis is rather laid on the landed estates, namely – the 20 villages in possession of the pious foundation, the right of possession over which the *mütevellîs* wished to restore.<sup>56</sup> It is also striking that the Plevne *begs* refer to article 12 of the Berlin treaty, which guarantees the inviolability

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dosya 1, gömlek 90 (December 21, 1890); Y. PRK. MYD dosya 10, gömlek 15 (February 2, 1891); BOA, Yıldız Tasnifi, Perakende Evrakı, Arzuhal ve Jurnaller (Y. PRK. AZJ.), dosya 19, gömlek 26 (May 28, 1891).

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, belge No 5.

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem, belge No 4. The contents of the *berat* (known from several other copies too) were most recently interpreted by H. Lowry. The Nature of the Early Ottoman State. Albany, 2003, 62–63 and at some length by O. Sabev, “The Legend of Köse Mihal.” – Turcica, 2002, № 34, 247–252.

<sup>56</sup> Y. PRK. MYD. dosya 10, gömlek 15, belge No 2.

of the private property of the Muslims, including the *vakf* one.<sup>57</sup> As it becomes apparent from the documents, the Plevne *vakf* administrators have repeatedly addressed their demands to the specially appointed commission in Sofia, entrusted with the resolving of the Muslim private and *vakf* properties' issue, but the problem was never resolved. All the more interesting is the mention that Mahmud Nedim Beg himself was engaged in the solving of the *vakf* issues (most certainly in close cooperation with the Ottoman representative in the commission) both in Sofia and other cities in Bulgaria<sup>58</sup>, as his priority without a doubt must have been the reversion of the ancestral estates to the *mütevellis* from the family. The unwillingness on the part of the Bulgarian state to resolve the question with their hereditary rights over the *vakf* properties, however, must have been seen through by the Plevne *vakf* administrators themselves, since their progeny (in the case – five of Mehmed Nuri Beg's sons), as shown by one of the documents' contents, were already occupying civil servants' positions in Bursa, which could be interpreted as a sign of their lost hopes to restitute their rights of possession over the properties in Bulgaria.<sup>59</sup>

Even the active role of Nedim Beg, however, yielded no results in resolving the matter, since the events from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century demonstrate clearly that the Mihaloğulları *vakf* estates, along with other hereditary *vakfs*, were yet again a matter of examination on the part of a specially appointed commission in 1909, which ought to finally resolve the issue with their ownership. This particular committee was assembled in accordance with article No. 2 of the Ottoman-Bulgarian convention from April 19, 1909, with which the Ottoman Empire recognized the independence of Bulgaria. According to the agreement, Bulgaria was obliged to appoint within a period of three months a commission, which had to finally resolve all claims laid on the part of the so-called “*müstesna/exceptional*” *vakfs* (pious foundations with large immunities in their administration and outside of state control; these were usually *vakfs* of distinguished Ottoman *gazi* leaders from the early period of Ottoman history).<sup>60</sup>

The committee convened twenty six times in the course of one year and examined all claims raised by the “*müstesna/exceptional*” *vakfs*. Amongst them was the pious foundation of “Gazi Ali Beg and Süleyman Beg” in Pleven.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibidem, belge No 4.

<sup>58</sup> Y. PRK. EV. dosya 1, gömlek 90, belge No 2.

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>60</sup> Б. Кесяков. Принос към дипломатическата история..., 1925, 29–35.

It becomes clear that the *vakf* administrators laid the following claims: payment of the *vakf* revenues for the 32-year period, for which they were not received, comprising of the tithes and their interest at the cost of 500–600 thousand Turkish liras; restitution of the villages from which they would continue collecting tithes or a redemption of that right on the part of the Bulgarian government; returning the administering of the charitable institutions under their management; restoration of their ownership over the other profit-yielding estates or the latter's recompensing with other landed properties on Ottoman territory in exchange. All of the claims of the Pleven *mütevellîs* were refuted on the ground that the claimants did not present a sultanîc decree confirming that any sultan ever conceded the claimed rights to Alaeddin Ali Beg, as it was stated that without this initial document the presented testament of the latter from 1496 (in Ottoman translation, but not in original) had no value at all. Furthermore, even if the legal establishment of the pious foundation was proven, the committee argued, it was impossible to recognize the right of collecting tithes and other dues from the populace, since after the establishment of the Bulgarian Kingdom these rights were public and a priority of the new state and therefore could not be assigned to private individuals. As concerns the immovable properties whose ownership the *mütevellîs* wanted to restore, the committee maintained that none of them was in the hands of the Bulgarian state, since part of them were already demolished and others – sold out.<sup>61</sup>

Hence, the decisions of the 1909 commission in practice simply sanctioned an already detected tendency observable ever since the time of the Provisional Russian Administration in the Principality, and thereafter adopted and followed by the Bulgarian authorities as well: this was the unwillingness to meet the requests of the big landed magnates from the time of the Ottoman Empire. What happened with the Pleven pious foundation of the Mihaloğlu family was not an exception and its story could successfully be incorporated within the framework of establishing a modern Bulgarian statehood, a process that started immediately after the end of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–1878, a substantial part of which was precisely the “de-Ottomanization” of the new national state and the breach with its imperial past, whose symbols the Muslim institutions in the face of the charitable foundations, on the one hand, and the representatives of the Ottoman elites, on the other, were generally perceived as. This process continued after the proclamation of Bulgaria's independence

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<sup>61</sup> Доклад и решения на комисията..., 28–36.

and to a great degree was characteristic not only for the internal politics of the country, but also for the bilateral relations between Bulgaria and Turkey throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a distinctive feature of which was the concern for the *vakf* institutions and their preservation within the territory of Bulgaria, but their detailed examination remains a subject of a future study.

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