

ALBANIANS AND TAFIL BOLETINI TRIBAL SCHOOL

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Introduction

Sultan Abdulhamid II's policy to ensure governance in distant regions was rooted in Pan-Islamism, as a counter to Pan-Arabism, Pan-Germanism, and Pan-Slavism. The dispatch of the Qur'an to the Senusi sheikhs and the advocacy for the Tuaregs to rally around the caliph exemplify this policy. In the 19th century, the Western powers' increasing interest in Africa and the Middle East, their imperial advances, and the significant defeat suffered by the Ottomans in the Russo-Turkish War prompted Abdulhamid II to adopt such a strategy. It was believed that the remaining Islamic territories could be safeguarded through this approach. Turkish historian Enver Ziya Karal elucidates the rationale behind the sultan's adoption of this policy through four main points:

- Deterioration of Muslim-Christian relations,
- European intervention in favor of Ottoman Christians,
- The invasion of Islamic territories by European powers,
- The emergence of ideas supporting Islamic unity within the Islamic world (Karal, 1983).

It is essential to explore why Pan-Islamism became the dominant ideology of the Ottoman State, rather than merely examining its meaning. It can be asserted that Pan-Islamism was employed in conjunction with the mission of Islamic unity, aiming to politically consolidate Muslims around the caliph. Furthermore, it sought to establish political solidarity against the major European powers and to unite the populations in exploited regions under the caliph's protection to form a collective strength. During this period, a form of Islamism emerged



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that embraced the technical, military, and modern aspects of the Great Powers, while simultaneously preserving the nation's traditional values (Alkan,2023). Turkish historian Kemal Karpat challenges the classification of the sultan's policy by certain thinkers as "Pan-Islamism." He posits that this ideology could be more accurately defined as Islamism. He argues that this political thought, when instrumentalized in international relations, might appropriately be referred to as "Pan-Islamism." According to Karpat, this dimension of Islamism is not fundamentally significant in the formation of a nation. He contends that the primary purpose of operationalizing Islam as an ideology was to integrate Arabs within the Ottoman framework. In other words, Pan-Islamism can be understood as a tool used by the sultan not to promote Islam but to reinforce central authority within the empire (Karpat,2006).

Sultan Abdulhamid II, recognized as a reformist in Turkish historiography, integrated his educational reforms with the notion of Pan-Islamism, leading to the establishment of schools throughout the country. Graduates of these institutions significantly influenced the subsequent period following Abdulhamid II. The sultan, who regarded education as a priority for development and a fundamental aspect of loyalty to the state, sought to solidify his position and cultivate qualified personnel by opening schools across the nation. Institutions such as the Agricultural School, Veterinary School, and Fine Arts School were established to nurture skilled generations. Additionally, a school named "Aşiret Mektebi" was created for minorities, aiming to foster loyalty to the state (Güler, 2024).

By the late 19th century, it was apparent that innovations within the Ottoman Empire were ongoing. The ruler endeavored to reinforce the concept of centralization derived from the Tanzimat through his policies, striving to enhance the understanding of a centralized state with the institutions he constructed. Ottoman modernization, akin to the modernization movements of France's Third Republic, involved efforts to integrate the public with the state. While the Aşiret Mektebi exhibited similarities to the "Sefogulları School" established by France in colonized regions such as Niger and Senegal, their objectives were not aligned (Bouche, 1974). The Sefogulları School, also known as the "School of Hostages," provided education to the sons of tribal leaders and notable figures captured during wars. Louis Faidherbe aimed to instill French culture and values in the students attending this institution. The strict oversight of the students also aided the imperialists in maintaining the established order. Consequently, the families of these "hostages" distanced themselves from notions of rebellion due to concerns over their children falling into enemy hands. France's objective reflected the necessity for distinguished individuals among the sons of tribal chiefs,

educated in the European manner, capable of serving as intermediaries between Europe and Africa (Bouche: 220).

Establishment of the Aşiret Mektebi

The Aşiret Mektebi, established in Istanbul by the order of Sultan Abdulhamid II, was initially intended to educate the children of prominent Arab tribes and facilitate their integration into the state. Subsequently, children from Kurdish and Albanian tribes also enrolled in the school. Following the territorial contraction after the Russo-Turkish War, the Sultan aimed to maintain the unity of the remaining Arab, Kurdish, and Albanian populations. The prevailing ideology in this context was Pan-Islamism (Rogan, 1996). The practice during the Ottoman classical period of educating non-Turkish elements from noble families in Enderun and Acemi oğlanlar schools, which led to their ascension to significant positions within the state, highlights the similarities with the Aşiret Mektebi. The state admitted non-Turkish individuals—namely Arab, Kurdish, and Albanian students—into the Aşiret Mektebi, thus subjecting them to Ottoman educational practices to prepare them for roles within the government. Indeed, this institution has illustrated the principle that “continuity in governance is essential” (Ergin, 1977). Ruhi Can Alkan presents a distinct perspective on the Aşiret Mektebi, viewing it as a manifestation of the Ottoman commitment to educational continuity and an international student policy (Alkan, 2020).

The key features of the Aşiret Mektebi established in Istanbul include:

- Direct control by Sultan Abdulhamid II.
- Grants and favors bestowed upon families sending their children,
- Graduates were expected to assume official positions in their respective regions.

Operating until 1907, this institution was among the most effective policies concerning tribal modernization and the integration of tribes with the state. The Ottoman Empire had approached tribes with suspicion since its inception, as their non-payment of taxes and autonomous structures posed challenges to the state. Consequently, Abdulhamid II aimed to extend state authority into the most remote regions by bringing 48 students from Arab provinces such as Hejaz, Yemen, and Tripolitania to Istanbul in 1886 to receive education at the Military Academy (Eugene L. Rogan, 1996). The existence of such policies prior to the establishment of the Aşiret Mektebi facilitated the subsequent admission of students to the school. The Sultan, who closely monitored the school, sent greetings to the students upon its opening, emphasizing that their enrollment was a privilege (BOA, DH. MKT., 2007/72, Lef: 1, R. 21 September 1308).

The Aşiret Mektebi distinguishes itself from other state schools in terms of its educational objectives, teachings, and goals. Although it was established with a Rüştiye degree for civil and military high schools, this institution was specifically designed for the sons of prominent tribal leaders and is therefore not classified as a regular military school. The state aimed to approach the sons of tribal notables from a political perspective to prevent the development of nationalism among them. Additionally, it sought to counteract imperial dominance over non-Turkish elements and to create an educational model that would address the ignorance prevalent in the tribes. The establishment of a school like the Aşiret Mektebi was part of the implementation of the principle of Islamic unity. This institution reflects the centralization efforts of the Ottoman Empire, which sought to strengthen its administrative level and extend its influence to peripheral regions (Moreau, 2007).

The project for the Aşiret Mektebi, prepared by Osman Nuri Pasha and presented to Abdulhamid II on June 22, 1892, was approved by the Sultan after discussions in the Ottoman Council of Ministers. The contents of several important articles from this proposal are summarized below (BOA, DH.MKT., 1964/79,26 Zilkâdde 1309): “The main purpose of the school, as defined in the above article, is to civilize the tribes living in a state of barbarism through education. Schools opened with this intention functioned not only in the center but also in the provinces. In 1877, boys’ and girls’ Rüştiye schools were established in Beirut; in 1891, the Hamidiye School of Commerce and Industry was founded; and in 1870, five boys’ schools and six non-Muslim schools were established in Akka. The idadi school in Akka opened as a day school in 1894. Additionally, various levels of schools were established during this period in Jerusalem, Haifa, Nazareth, Safed, and Tiberias (Bostancı, 2005). Sultan Abdulhamid II aimed to maintain control over the region by developing more reasonable policies compared to the harsh central measures of the Tanzimat period, utilizing education for this purpose. This can be conceptualized through the “carrot-and-stick” theory. The Tanzimat period can be characterized primarily as a “stick,” whereas Abdulhamid II’s era can be perceived as a “carrot.” The rewards, medals, and honors during this period exemplify this approach. Furthermore, the education of tribal children and their rewards in state positions can also be examined through this lens (Avcı, 2009).

Another audience for the article in Osman Nuri Pasha’s regulations pertains to the administrators of the institution. Abdulhamid II placed importance on this matter and appointed Ali Nazîmâ Bey, a significant educational figure known for his teaching and textbook writing during the Hamidian era, as the director of the school (Kahraman, 2006). The qualifications of teachers and the methods of instruction were explicitly outlined in the Aşiret Mektebi regulations. A

notable aspect is that the backgrounds of the students were not to be overlooked, and consideration of this was required during lessons. For instance, in the 30th article of the section on teachers' duties, it is stated, "Although teachers will primarily express and present in Turkish, they will explain and define the subjects in Arabic when students do not understand the Turkish expressions until exceptions arise, and they will also convey the Turkish meanings of these explanations" (BOA, Y. MTV., 73/99, Lef: 2, 14 Cemaziyülahır 1310). "Students who complete their education will be appointed to teaching positions or other relevant services and positions in the schools established and designated in their tribes when they return" (BOA, DH.MKT., 1964/79, 26 Zilkâdde 1309).

The Ottoman state not only considered the education of students but also their post-educational lives, striving to secure the futures of graduates under the program. Students completing the Aşiret Mektebi would further their education at the Harbiye or Mülkiye schools and were employed upon graduation. For example, Ahmed Muin Efendi was appointed to the principalship (BOA, BEO., 3457/25968, Lef: 1, 21 Zilkade 1326), and Abdurrahman Efendi was assigned to the Asir Mutasarrıflığı (BOA, DH. MKT., 2595/94, Lef: 1, 25 Zilkade 1319). Many such graduates were sent to their own regions or to locations designated by the state. The objective here aligns with Sultan Abdulhamid II's mission of integrating individuals into the state.



Fotoğraf 1. Aşiret Mektebi Öğrencileri

Admission of Albanians to the School

Albania is a region that remained under Ottoman control for many years and was influenced by Ottoman culture. In the early 19th century, Albania did not participate in the nationalist uprisings and later formed a front against the centralist policies brought about by the Tanzimat reforms. Local dynasties, not wanting to lose their influence in the region, rebelled against these policies regarding conscription and taxation (Bey, 2006). The issues of taxation and military service that underpinned the Albanian uprisings eventually gave way to rising nationalist movements, paving the way for Albania's separation from the Ottoman Empire. The Balkans, a playground for great powers, witnessed the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, during which Albania declared its independence in 1912. Up until this point, Abdülhamid had taken special care of the Albanian region.

Sultan II. Abdülhamid's Pan-Islamism policy became more pronounced after the 1878 Berlin Conference. As the borders of the state shrank, the majority of the population became Muslim. Looking at the regional distribution of the Muslim population, Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia were targeted by the British and Russians, while the Arab territories attracted significant British and French interest. Albania also served as the Ottoman Empire's gateway to the West. To maintain control over the Kurds, Albanians, and Arabs in these three regions, the Ottoman state devised various policies. For the Kurds, there were the "Hamidiye Cavalry Regiments"; for the Arabs, the "Tribal School"; and for the Albanians, a special guard unit named the "Tüfekçiler," formed from the leading families of the region (Kodaman, 1987). During this period, Albanians were also appointed to significant positions in Istanbul, the most notable being the appointment of Ferid Pasha from Avlona as Grand Vizier from 1903 to 1908 (İnal, 1982). The Sultan's aim in all these actions was to bind these ethnic groups to the state within the framework of Pan-Islamism.

The term "aşâir-i urban" in the founding regulations of the Tribal School was changed to include Albanian students by the decree of the Sultan (BOA, İ. HUS., 98/16, Lef: 1, 22 Rebiyülevvel 1320). The Ministry of Education did not exhibit the same attitude as when accepting Kurdish students and stated that the costs would be covered by the repair budget (BOA, İ. MF., 8/32, Lef: 2, 2 Cemaziyülevvel 1320; BOA, Y.MTV., 233/22, Lef: 1, 27 Temmuz 1318). The Ministry also communicated the conditions for accepting students to the region. Referring to the health problems experienced by students from Libya, Jerusalem, and Syria due to climatic changes, it was emphasized that selected students should be examined by a doctor and avoid immoral actions, being open to education (BOA, MF. MKT. 644/11 Lef 1, 26 Safer 1318). In subsequent days, according to news in the

Tercümân-ı Hakikat newspaper, it was highlighted that Abdülhamid approved the acceptance of students from the Balkans into the Tribal School, specifically noting that students from Kosovo and Manastir had arrived in the capital (Tercüman-ı Hakikat, 24 September 1902, No. 7694: 2).

That year (1902), 20 Albanian students from Kosovo, Manastir, Debre, and Yanya were enrolled in the school. In February 1905, the Governor of Kosovo requested from the Grand Vizier to enroll the sons of Ali Zübeyr from Yakova and Hacı Ali Ağa from Mitrovica. The Governor of Shkodra also requested the admission of two students that same year. However, the Ministry of Education rejected all these applications, citing that twenty students from Albania were already enrolled in the school (BOA, MF.MKT., 660/50, Lef: 3, 3 Şaban 1322). Due to the limited student quota, the Governor of Kosovo, Reşad, sent a coded telegram requesting an increase in the number of students (BOA, DH. ŞFR, 289/101 Lef 1, 30 July 1318), but it seems this request was also not accepted in later periods. For instance, the sons of Gülbeyzade Süleyman Bey from the Shkodra elite were also rejected due to the full quota (MF.MKT. 906/5 Lef 2, 24 Kânunuevvel 1321). However, as an exception, the request for one of Süleyman Bey's sons from Yanya to be admitted to the Tribal School and the other to the Veterinary School was approved, allowing the students to come to Istanbul (BOA, İ. MF., 13/9, Lef: 1, R. 27 March 1322). It was decided that the travel expenses and stipends for the students coming to Istanbul would be covered by the Ministry of Education under the orders of the Grand Vizier (BEO, 1925/144308, 11 September 1318). The budget allocated for the expenses of 20 Albanian students, including their salaries, school costs, and clothing, was set at 64,650 kuruş per the sultan's decree. This amount is detailed in the following table.

Table 1: Showing the expenses for 20 students to be admitted to the Tribal School.

Expense Type	Required Coin
Student Salary	7200
Total Expense	7200
Meals	23800
Clothing	13000
Laundry	1400
Firewood and Coal	500
Lighting	250
Miscellaneous and Repair	500

Expense Type	Required Coin
Reserve (expenses for students returning home)	16000
Unforeseen Expenses	2000
Total	57450
Overall Total	64650

The state paid careful attention to the expenses of the students to ensure that those coming from the regions were not disadvantaged. For example, it was communicated that the expenses for students from Yanya would be covered by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, as ordered by the Ministry of Education (BOA, DH. MKT. 567/40 Lef 1, 28 Cemaziyülevvel 1320). Similarly, the Ministry of Education was designated to handle the stipends for students coming from Shkodra (BOA, DH. MKT. 567/1 Lef 1, 22 Cemaziyülevvel 1320).

Graduates from the Tribal School who applied were enrolled in the “tribal class” of the Civil and Military Schools, continuing their education under a special program mentioned earlier. The documents also outlined the future occupations of the graduates in their respective regions (BOA, BEO., 2974/222983, Lef: 2, R. 17 Kânunusani 1321).

The Ottoman state continued to integrate the Albanian students who enrolled in the Tribal School into its educational system after their graduation. Derviş Sabri, the grandson of Malik Pasha from Priştina, had previously registered for the Civil School, but it was noted that his transition to the Military School was facilitated (BOA. MF. MKT. 834/18 Lef 1, 9 February 1320). Graduates of the Tribal School also served as gendarmes in the provinces. Kenan from Debre, Taki from Yanya, and Abbas Efendi from Ilbasan were officially appointed to the rank of Second Lieutenant (Mülazım-ı Sani) by the sultan’s decree (BOA, İ. HUS., 160/50, Lef: 1, 13 Şevval 1325).

Tafil Boletinî

Among Albanian students, there were individuals who would later leave their mark on Albanian history. One of them is Tafil Boletinî, the nephew of the Kosovo chief İsa Boletinî. Members of this family, significant figures in Albanian nationalism, received their education at this school (Clayer, 2014). While Clayer identifies Tafil as İsa Boletinî’s nephew, a document written by the ambassador of Belgrade, Ali, states that he is İsa’s son. The document mentions that İsa and

his sons (Amil and Tafil) had been staying at a hotel in Belgrade for three days and had their princely rifles with them. It also states that Captain Filip Mavranoviç, a committee member, accompanied İsa and his sons (BOA HR. SYS. 151/73 Lef 1, 17 July 1912).

In his memoirs, Tafil Boletinî states that he was born in 1888 in Boletin, near Mitrovica. After losing his father at an early age, Tafil was taken in by his uncle İsa, who never left his side. Growing up alongside significant Albanian nationalists of the time (such as Bajram Curri and Hasan Prîştine), Tafil was introduced to the concepts of freedom and independence from a young age, shaping him into a tireless supporter of his country's independence. He participated in the Mitrovica uprising of 1903 and was subsequently exiled to Istanbul with his uncle İsa (Boletini, 2011). In 1904, he enrolled in a military school (Tribal School) in Istanbul. It is understood that Tafil remained in Istanbul until 1908, after which he returned to Albania and began to take an active role alongside İsa Boletinî following the declaration of the Second Constitutional Era.

Between 1910 and 1912, Tafil served in the councils of Junik, Ferizovik, and Luka, fighting for Üsküp. He became İsa's right-hand man in the struggle against the nationalist armies of Serbia and Montenegro. A part of the 1912 independence movement, Tafil served as vice president of the commission responsible for settling refugees in the homeland and later became the secretary of the commission. In 1913, he fought against the Serbian and Greek uprisings that spread from Lake Ohrid to the Rugova mountains, and a year later, he defended Durres. However, in 1915, when Montenegrins entered Northern Albania, he sought refuge at the French consulate but was ambushed in Shkodra. On January 16, 1916, he lost his uncle İsa and his brothers Jonuz and Halit to the Montenegrin ambush, while he miraculously survived the attack (Boletini, 2011).



2: Soldan Halil Boletini, Tafil Boletini, Misin Bala, Jonuz Boletini

Between 1916 and 1918, Tafil remained in his homeland and served as the deputy president of the Mitrovica region. During this time, he had the opportunity to defend his homeland against Serbian chetniks. In 1918, following the occupation of Kosovo by French and Serbian military forces, he became part of the significant organization known as the “Kosovo National Defense” committee, emerging as a symbol of the Kosovo resistance alongside important figures of the time. This prompted the Serbs to exert extra effort to negotiate with Tafil, offering him money and power in a meeting. However, Tafil rejected all their offers and moved from Mitrovica to Shkodra. From 1920 to 1924, he served as the deputy district governor in Fier and Lushnja. In his attempts to establish democracy in the region, Tafil clashed with local leaders and was ultimately removed from his position due to failure. Taking on active roles, Tafil engaged in farming in Fier from 1925 to 1930. During World War II, he held governor positions in Korça, Elbasan, and Kalkandelen. Known for his democratic character, Tafil gained public sympathy by supporting anti-fascist forces (Boletini, Kujtime, 2011). In 1943, while serving as governor in Elbasan, he showed a positive attitude towards the Jews there and supported those fleeing Gestapo persecution (Boletini M., 2020).



3: 1944 yılında Kalkandelen valisiyken.

After World War II, Tafil settled in Fier, leading a simple life without seeking wealth like many others in prominent positions. In 1946, he was arrested on charges of engaging in activities against the government. Although he was released shortly after, he was re-arrested in 1947 and handed over to Yugoslavia. Regardless of his circumstances, Tafil never wavered from his ideals and anti-fascist stance, fighting for the interests of his nation. During his time in the Mitrovica region, he became a wise figure, mediating blood feuds and attempting to resolve conflicts. In the early 1960s, he fought to prevent Albanians from leaving their homeland under Serbian pressure. Returning from Kosovo to Tirana in 1963, Tafil was warmly welcomed, yet his thoughts remained with Kosovo's independence. Tafil Boletinî died in an accident in 1970, leaving behind a profound spirit of struggle and becoming an important figure in Albania (Boletini, Kujtime, 2011).

Conclusion

Sultan II. Abdülhamid's reforms aimed at establishing a centralized state were prominently reflected in the educational sector. The establishment of the tribal school, designed to ensure the tribes' loyalty to the state, held a distinctive status due to its curriculum, educational program, and the direct interest of the sultan. The prevailing view in the Ottoman Empire that tribes "live in a state of savagery" prompted the state to develop these policies. By integrating Pan-Islamist thought with education, the school aimed to cultivate the children of influential tribal leaders, thus garnering special attention from the sultan. The primary objective of this institution was to foster a generation that was loyal to both the state and the sultan.

Graduates, influenced by Ottoman ideologies, typically enrolled in military or civil service academies. Upon their return, graduates from the Civil Service School often took positions as district governors or sub-district heads, while those from the Military Academy served as first lieutenants. In contrast to their ancestors, these tribal graduates operated within the framework of state authority. As long as the state persisted, these individuals served it; however, with the state's subsequent decline, many became involved in nationalist movements among the Arabs, Kurds, and Albanians. Notably, many young graduates from this specialized Ottoman school either resisted colonial powers or governed the region in collaboration with them. The determination of Albanians to enroll in this institution underscores the efficacy of II. Abdülhamid's policies. Tafil Boletinî, a notable graduate, later emerged as a significant figure in Albanian history, further demonstrating the caliber of students educated in this school.

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