

I.B. TAURIS

# Religious Reform in the Late Ottoman Empire

*Institutional Change and the  
Professionalization of the Ulema*

Erhan Bektas



# Religious Reform in the Late Ottoman Empire



# Religious Reform in the Late Ottoman Empire

*Institutional Change and the  
Professionalization of the Ulema*

Erhan Bektaş

**I.B. TAURIS**

LONDON • NEW YORK • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY



I.B. TAURIS

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc  
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK  
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA  
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

BLOOMSBURY, I.B. TAURIS and the I.B. Tauris logo are trademarks of  
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain 2023

Copyright © Erhan Bektaş 2023

Erhan Bektaş has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act,  
1988, to be identified as Translator of this work.

For legal purposes the Acknowledgments on p. xiii constitute an extension  
of this copyright page.

Series design by Adriana Brioso  
Cover image: Constantinople, Ottoman Empire, ca. 1895.  
(© Granger Historical Picture Archive/Alamy Stock Photo)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted  
in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying,  
recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission  
in writing from the publishers.

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc does not have any control over, or responsibility for, any  
third-party websites referred to or in this book. All internet addresses given  
in this book were correct at the time of going to press. The author and publisher  
regret any inconvenience caused if addresses have changed or sites have  
ceased to exist, but can accept no responsibility for any such changes.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: HB: 978-0-7556-4547-3  
ePDF: 978-0-7556-4548-0  
eBook: 978-0-7556-4549-7

Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk

To find out more about our authors and books visit [www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com)  
and sign up for our newsletters.

*To my family*



# Contents

List of Figures	viii
List of Tables	ix
Preface	x
Acknowledgments	xiii
List of Abbreviations	xv
1 Introduction: The Decline Paradigm of the Ulema Reconsidered	1
2 The Re-organization of the Şeyhülislam Office (1826–1914)	17
3 Ulema's Educational Career	35
4 Ulema's Professional Career (1880–1920)	57
5 Social Profile of the Ulema: A Prosopographical Study	93
6 Ulema in the Context of Everyday Social Life	121
7 Conclusion	135
Appendices	141
Notes	165
Bibliography	199
Index	209

## Figures

5.1	Distribution of the hometowns of 200 selected Ulema	97
5.2	Professional distribution of 200 selected Ulema	98
5.3	Professions of the father of 200 sample Ulema	102
5.4	Early education of 200 sample Ulema	104
5.5	Regional preferences for education of 200 sample Ulema	106
5.6	Preferences for madrasa education of 200 sample Ulema in Istanbul	107
5.7	Number of Ulema who attended modern schools among 200 sample Ulema	108
5.8	Language knowledge of 200 sample Ulema	110
5.9	Recruitment age distribution of 200 sample Ulema	111
5.10	Waiting period of 200 sample Ulema to enter the İlmiye service	112
5.11	Location of the first appointments of 200 sample Ulema vis-à-vis their birthplaces	113
5.12	Location of the last working assignment of the 200 sample Ulema	113
5.13	Lower and upper limits of the salaries of 200 sample Ulema according to their rank (in Piasters)	115
5.14	Average salaries of 200 sample Ulema according to their professions	115
5.15	Number of wives of 200 sample Ulema	116

# Tables

2.1	New departments under the Şeyhülislam Office	26
3.1	The curricula of Madrasa students	47
3.2	Waiting period (Mülazemet) for appointment to an İlmiye position	55
4.1	Years of education in specialized Madrasas (Medrese-i Mütahassisin)	72
4.2	Wage distribution in Ankara Province in 1914	73
4.3	Wage distribution in the Gediz District in 1916	73
4.4	Wage distribution in the Karamürsel District in 1916	74
4.5	Crimes and punishments	84
4.6	Additional duties	90



## Preface

This book is a portrayal of the formation of professional ulema identity in the late nineteenth century with a specific focus on the educational and professional experiences of the Ilmiye members. It argues that the career paths of ulema in educational and professional life experienced a major transformation after the reestablishment of the Şeyhülislam (chief of the ulema) office at the beginning of the Tanzimat. A number of regulations that allowed for more intervention in the procedures with respect to how members of the Ilmiye were educated, appointed, and promoted were designed by the central authorities to re-identify both their educational and professional practices. From this period forward, the ulema in the nineteenth century was affected because of various dynamics stemming from the transformation; consequently, a professional ulema identity became more apparent. The important steps that constitute the professional ulema identity, the reorganization of the Şeyhülislam Office, and the transformations experienced in the educational and professional life of the ulema are within the scope of this study.

This book also aims to explore the social origins, careers, social and political networks, and relations among Anatolian ulema who were officially assigned to the Ilmiye between 1880 and 1920 with reference to the archival documents using a prosopographical method. It also responds to a narrative that is far from comprehensively explaining the actual place of the ulema. It thus illuminates the social and professional history of the late Ottoman ulema by bringing their main experiences into focus.

This book is organized into five main chapters and a conclusion. In the first chapter, the historical framework of the institutionalization of the Şeyhülislam Office and religious affairs through a political process as well as the practices of centralized state control over the authority of the Şeyhülislam in the nineteenth century will be outlined. This chapter draws attention to the transformation of the Ilmiye class into professional officials of the state while showing the reorganization of the office of Şeyhülislam over time. After the Tanzimat, the state's new approach towards religion and the positioning of the ulema in the newly centralized state show that the Ilmiye members transformed into state officials who served the imperial center's goal of institutionalizing the office of

Şeyhülislam and helped to create a proper state religion in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The second chapter aims to explore the educational background of the provincial ulema to explain the general rules of becoming an *alim* (scholar) and evaluate the educational quality of the provincial ulema. The ulema's educational path helps to explain the story behind the entrance of the Ilmiye organization with a clear picture of the madrasa (Islamic college) education of an *alim*, the curriculum of the madrasas, and the examination system for both graduation and appointment to the Ilmiye posts. In parallel with the expansion of institutionalized and professionalized demands by the state, the ulema's professional training in the madrasas was a priority for being appointed to a vacant Ilmiye position in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire. In this sense, unlike traditional state structure, the privileges of aristocratic ulema families, their personnel influence over the state system, and patronage were not common in appointments to the Ilmiye positions. There was a definite procedure and criteria to hold the Ilmiye posts in the Şeyhülislam Office that included the madrasa education of ulema candidates.

The third chapter emphasizes the formal stages of the career paths of the Ilmiye members, such as *müderris* (scholar in a madrasa), *kadı* (judge), *naib* (the deputy of judge), and *mufti* (jurisconsult). The professional background of the ulema is one of the main factors that formed the Ilmiye institution, and studying their professional lives allows the exploration of the professional transformation of the Şeyhülislam Office in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire. In this regard, the greatest opportunity in the study of the Ilmiye class and their social, educational, and professional backgrounds is the examination of the personnel records of the ulema in the Meşihat Archive of the Istanbul Mufti's Office. Looking at the personnel registry files of the ulema has guided me to answer the questions about how the Ilmiye members professionalized under the Şeyhülislam authority and how laws and decisions about the Ilmiye members and the Şeyhülislam Office were implemented in practice. Moreover, questions like how ulema actually obtained positions and won promotions in the Ilmiye hierarchy will be explored while studying different professional groups within the Ilmiye system. This study emphasizes the ulema as a group instead of focusing on specific muftis or scholars (*müderris*) in order to reveal the main orientations of the Ilmiye organization as a whole.

In parallel with the importance of ulema biographies, the career paths of ulema will be examined as a prosopographical study in the fifth chapter. The method of this section is twofold. The first is to present profiles of particular

provincial ulema in the late nineteenth century on the basis of their personnel records. The second is to clarify the appointment mechanism of the ulema to the Ilmiye posts. This chapter will deal with biographies of some by considering the social, political, and intellectual conditions of the period. It analyzes the career paths of the ulema and their network of relations in comparison with other members of the state bureaucracy. This part also focuses on the early childhood as well as educational and professional careers of the Ilmiye members working at the Şeyhülislam Office between the years 1880 and 1920. The sample biographies show that the late Ottoman Ilmiye system was much different to how it is normally depicted. The curricula vitae of sample ulema highlight the need to reconsider basic prejudices about the career lives of the ulema in this period.

Chapter 5 deepens the discussion of the mediatory role of the ulema representing an influential group in provincial areas. This shows how the ulema were perceived both by the government and provincial community by looking at them as mediators, as well as examining the ulema's effect on decision-making processes and their occasional partnership with provincial powers. This part will explain the survival of ulema as both state agents and religious leaders in contrast to the narration of ulema that has largely been on the basis of a decline paradigm. From this point, this section aims to eliminate the state's approach toward religion and the position of the ulema in the newly centralized state. Certain decreases and increases in the educational and professional role of the ulema will be traced by reformulating the ways of thinking about the function of the Ottoman ulema and scrutinizing the centralization of religious affairs.

## Acknowledgments

This book emerged from my dissertation, which was completed at Boğaziçi University in 2019. Many people contributed to the writing of this book. First of all, I would like to express here, my thanks to those whose contributions have been invaluable throughout this dissertation process. I cannot imagine how it would have been accomplished without the various contributions of my Ph.D. supervisor Nadir Özbek of Boğaziçi University. Throughout my graduate study, he has been a source of scholarly inspiration and he has been a model teacher for me. He enriched my historical thinking enormously by reading and discussing my chapters with me.

I thank Cengiz Kırılı, Bilgin Aydın, Abdurrahman Atıl and Umut Türem for their careful readings of the drafts and their constructive criticism. I am wholeheartedly grateful to them for their essential conceptual, theoretical, and historical contributions as well as unconditional help. Their guidance and feedback at different stages renewed my belief in this study. I also have to thank Jonathan Phillips who carefully and patiently copyedited the book.

A number of scholars shaped my thinking and have had an impact on my academic orientation. I am indebted to Zafer Toprak, Şevket Pamuk, Edhem Eldem, Çağlar Keyder, Asım Karaömerlioğlu, Aydın Babuna, and Seda Altuğ for creating an academic environment in their classes.

It has been an honor and privilege for me to have such a distinguished academic circle and colleagues from Üsküdar University, Nevzat Tarhan, Mehmet Zelka, Niyazi Beki, Ümit Taş, Uygar Aydemir, Mert Akcanbaş, Yusuf Teke, Selçuk Duman, Sabri Kazanlı, Hüsna Yıldırım, Eda Yetimoğlu, all contributed to my intellectual growth through their vast knowledge and their valuable contributions.

I cannot express my thanks to my all friends who generously shared with me their intellectual wisdom; I benefited from the sound advice of Ekin Mahmutlu, Alp Kadioğlu, Faruk Yalçın, Turan Keskin, Yener Koç, Gülseren Koç, Sema Yaşar, Gizem Cimşit, Derya Dali, Naz Baydar and Burhan Duymuş.

There are no appropriate words to express my gratitude to Ayda, who provided a loving atmosphere for me with her patience and unforgettable memories. She put in as much effort as I did, spending long hours re-reading the drafts, correcting mistakes, and editing the whole text. She was always ready to help me. I would not have been able to write and finish this book on time without her endless support and assistance.

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

A.}MKT.MVL.	Sadaret Mektubi Kalemi Meclis-i Vala Evrakı
A.}MKT.NZD.	Sadaret Mektubi Kalemi, Nezaret ve Devair
A.}MKT.MHM.	Sadaret Mühimme Kalemi Evrakı
A.} AMD.	Sadaret Amedi Kalemi
A.} DVN.	Sadaret Divan Kalemi
BEO.	Bab-1 Ali Evrak Odası
BOA.	Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives)
C. ADL.	Cevdet Adliye
C. MF.	Cevdet Maarif
DH. MKT.	Dahiliye Nezareti Mektubi Kalemi
DH. MUİ.	Dahiliye Nezareti Muhaberat-ı Umumiye İdaresi Evrakı
DH. SYS.	Dahiliye Siyasi Kısım
DH. EUM. AYŞ.	Dahiliye Asayiş Kalemi
DH. TMİK. M.	Dahiliye Muamelat
EV.d.	Evkaf Defterleri
EV. BRT.	Evkaf Berat
FTG.f.	Fotoğraflar
HR. TO.	Hariciye Nezareti Tercüme Odası
HR. SFR.4.	Hariciye Nezareti Paris Sefareti
HSDTFR1.	Satın Alınan Evrak Rumeli Müfettişliği
IRCICA.	İslam Tarih, Sanat ve Kültür Araştırma Merkezi
ISAM.	İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi
İ. DH.	İrade Dahiliye
İ. DUİT.	İrade Dosya Usulü
İ. MMS.	Meclis-i Mahsus İradeleri
İ. MVL.	İrade Meclis-i Vala
İ. TAL.	İrade Taltifat
MA.	Meşihat Archive
MV.	Meclis-i Vükela Mazbataları
MF. MKT.	Maarif Nezareti Mektubi Kalemi
ŞD.	Şura-yı Devlet



TDV.	Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı
TS. MA.e.	Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi
USAD.	Ulema Sicill-i Ahval Dosyası (Personnel Records of the Ulema)
Y. PRK. UM.	Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Umumi
Y. PRK. DH.	Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Dahiliye
Y. EE.	Yıldız Esas Evrakı
Y. MTV.	Yıldız Mütenevvi Maruzat
Y. PRK. BŞK.	Yıldız Başkitabet Dairesi Maruz
Y. PRK. ASK.	Yıldız Askeri Maruzat
Y. PRK. AZJ.	Yıldız Arzuhal Jurnal
ZB.	Zabtiye Nezareti Evrak

## Introduction: The Decline Paradigm of the Ulema Reconsidered

The ulema<sup>1</sup> have not attracted much attention by Western or Turkish scholars in spite of their socio-economic, cultural, military, political, and educational effects on society in the nineteenth century. The reason for the lack of interest in the function of the ulema and *the Ilmiye* (learned class) in the official version of Turkish historiography may be the identification of the ulema with backwardness, conservatism, and obscurantism from the Tanzimat Edict (Imperial Edict of Reorganisation) to the mid-twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> However, today's historians are examining the influence that the ulema had on nineteenth-century reforms in order to bring to light such issues as hand secularism, the place of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, and religious education in public schools, which are still unresolved in today's world and are rooted in nineteenth-century reform movements. In the limited current literature, the ulema is generally studied in only one respect: their attitudes against the Ottoman reforms. Nevertheless, the reaction of the ulema towards modernizing reforms has been controversial since it began to be studied by historians.<sup>3</sup> Most studies about the ulema describe it as a reactionary, hardline conservative group standing in opposition to efforts to modernize.<sup>4</sup>

Some historians generally analyze the decline of the influence of religious affairs and the Ottoman ulema in public life as a requirement of modernization and centralization in the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Most authors who study the Ottoman ulema attribute their loss of importance to their anti-modernization attitudes. Those authors are generally encouraged by the idea that the Ottoman government was in decline in the nineteenth century. Advocates of this argument say that the first three centuries of the empire were its expansion years and that the Ottomans experienced their golden age after these first three centuries. When the empire neared its end, stagnation was inevitable, and this regressive period in the empire's history developed into regional contraction and political

corruption. Conventional historians describe the nineteenth century as a period of crises, weakness, and decline that lasted until the empire collapsed in 1922. Aside from this paradigm of decline, some historians interpret the nineteenth century as a period of the formation of a modern state that developed out of new institutionalization efforts. However, approaches that only identify the nineteenth century either as a period of modernization or as a period of weakness, crises, and decline are Eurocentric, Western viewpoints. Particularly “Turkish nationalist” historians who want to draw a line between the Ottoman State and the republican era define the empire in later periods as a state in which officials were unsuccessful at modernizing society. Meanwhile, society was tied to traditions and could not shake the past. This was a different kind of decline paradigm of the empire. But a key fact that doesn’t fit this decline paradigm is that the institutionalization efforts of the nineteenth century, which started in 1789 with the enthronement of the reformist Sultan Selim III, represented a long, multifaceted period. The institutionalization efforts were undertaken to save the empire from European encroachment, not from decline and backwardness.<sup>6</sup> Although the nineteenth century is called “the longest century of the empire,”<sup>7</sup> this longevity or these long attempts at the resistance that resulted from efforts to ensure the empire’s survival by implementing the reforms did not save it from collapse.

Older literature on the Ottoman ulema predominantly offers a picture of decreasing power and effect of the ulema in society, especially through the analysis of the reformist policy of the empire. This literature also generally emphasizes the ulema’s attitudes against reform movements and their weakening power. Most of this literature describing the ulema and religious institutions is about how the power of the ulema decreased during the nineteenth century. This is another important problem in the *Ilmiye* literature, apart from the lack of studies on the social history of Ottoman ulema. Although this book is an examination of the Ottoman ulema’s role in the nineteenth century, it differs significantly from earlier studies on the Ottoman ulema’s power with respect to its unconventional approach to the questions and different answers and standpoints vis-à-vis the same questions. Also, previous mainstream studies with a few exceptions generally do not provide data in terms of the social origins, profiles, and functions of the ulema during the reformist era. The narrative shared by these studies is bereft of any analysis of archival documents. The ulema are described as composed of insignificant political actors who disobeyed the reforms. These studies do not appreciate the support of the ulema for reform and their place within the new government bureaucracy.<sup>8</sup> They ignored the ulema’s

adaptation to social, political, educational, and professional life in the nineteenth century. In contrast to the one-sidedness of previous studies, this book aims to depict the roles of the ulema in formal and social life to generate a complex picture of the Ilmiye members.

This book evaluates the prevalent tendency in the current historiography towards the belief in a decline paradigm with respect to the ulema in the nineteenth century. It argues how the ulema adapted to the new situation and requirements by criticizing the paradigm of the decline of ulema institutions in light of first-hand documents. It also offers a different interpretation of claims regarding the decline of the Ottoman ulema's power through an analysis of the educational and professional life of the ulema in various regions during the late nineteenth century. In this regard, the present study diverges from conventional Ottoman historiography in at least two respects. First, it identifies the impact of a new form of government policy on the professionalization<sup>9</sup> of the Ilmiye members and the capacities and activities of the ulema in the Ilmiye office through a study of who the ulema were. Second, it sheds light on the exact processes of their educational, professional, and social missions in detail.

One primary focus of this book is the ways in which the ulema maintained their position in the eyes of the people, especially in the peripheral regions. The functionality of the ulema to the government in developing its infrastructural capacity at the periphery of the empire constitutes the scope of this study. It will also be evaluated how the Ottoman ulema interacted with and influenced the decision-making processes of the empire. This book offers a different perspective on literature that advocates the decreasing role of the ulema in the nineteenth century. In spite of the existence of deficiencies within the Ilmiye institutions, the powerful networks of these institutions and the quality of education and professional experiences of official ulema will be focused on as central and real agents of the administrative structure.

## Major Themes in Studies on the Decline of the Ottoman Ulema

The core of the Tanzimat reforms was actualized in two parts—the first composed of taxation and provincial administration reforms and the second educational and judicial ones. Reforms in education and justice are given as the reason for the declining role of the ulema. The weakening of the ulema's position is considered to be the reason the Ottoman ulema lost their political

significance as legal and educational civil servants with the centralization and bureaucratization that resulted from reform movements. This belief is accepted as fact in conventional historiography.

In this regard, some authors querying the ulema's power in the nineteenth century examine the ulema's attitude towards reforms mainly according to their socio-economic structure. They also observe that the ulema were not a monolithic class and therefore the relationships among different groups of ulema were characterized as an imbalance. They generally divide the ulema's attitudes towards reforms into three. The first group of ulema was the high-ranking ulema and they supported reforms to a full extent because they continued to receive new posts and status in the new system. This group is smaller than the other groups. The second group of ulema was the low-ranking level ulema and they opposed reforms since they were uncomfortable and against the government's political, traditional, and religious reforms. The main concern of this group was to maintain its autonomous position in the public arena. They carried on the values and concerns of traditional religion. By contrast, the third group of ulema constituted the vast majority who did not have a clear opinion about the reforms. They neither supported nor reacted to the reforms.

Uriel Heyd's approach to the ulema from a class perspective is one of the most important representatives of the socio-economic approach. According to Heyd, while high-ranking ulema supported modernization, low-ranking ulema were strongly against the reforms. Uriel Heyd says that high-ranking ulema supported the reforms because of the decreasing power of the empire and *raison d'Etat*, the government's hostility to Janissaries, and Bektashis who were important supporters of the ulema.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, high-ranking members of the ulema did not constitute a social body standing against the government's reformist politics, but "many ulema in the lower ranks remained extremely hostile to European innovations."<sup>11</sup> The ongoing struggle between higher and lower class ulema reflected their place in social and political life. He argued that low-ranking ulema had to withdraw from the political scene because of their resistance to the reforms, in contrast to high-ranking ulema supportive of the reforms who preserved their place and importance on the political stage.<sup>12</sup>

Also, Arnold H. Green analyzes the frustration of the lower-ranking ulema with the authorities because of rules and regulations that prevented their advancement in the new government system during the Tanzimat. As a result, they mainly took a stand with reactionaries like the Janissary corps, the Bektashi lodges, and some other popular revolts against the sultan. On the other hand, the higher ulema supported the sultans to protect the continuity of the regime.

Because the high-ranking ulema were part of the ruling bureaucracy, they wanted to protect their position in the system. So they cooperated with the Sultans' reformist policies.<sup>13</sup> In other words, high-ranking ulema were keen on maintaining the stability of the state.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Avigdor Levy says that low-ranking ulema showed hostility towards Westernization reforms and began to lose power in the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Levy also notes that Sultan Mahmud's appointment of low-ranking ulema as *imams* in the newly established army was an exception. Even though low-ranking ulema opposed the reforms, they supported the sultan against the Janissaries having been recruited into the new military system.<sup>16</sup>

Some other studies, however, tend to treat the decline of the ulema only as an indicator of secularism and modernization, like the establishment of modern education and secular courts, rather than as an institutional transformation that requires an explanation in its own right. These scholars argue that all ulema's power began to decrease in the nineteenth century, regardless of their socio-economic positions. Bernard Lewis was one author who said that the *Ilmiye* class started to lose importance at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Lewis argues that in the new government structure of Sultan Mahmud II, the Sublime Porte and the palace expanded their influence to a great extent. The administration of the new bureaucratic structure was left to bureaucrats who were educated in Western values and trained in the Translation Bureau. This group lived isolated from the rest of society. As a result of the modernization reforms during this period, the *Ilmiye* class started to lose power and the ulema turned into a pseudo-ulema. Lewis contends that during the Tanzimat period, the Islamic character of the government was damaged. Secularism gradually expanded to government offices and legislation. Secular laws adopted from the West were applied in many areas, and secular education became popular. This modernization movement affected the relationship between the state and religion. The religious character and Islamic appearance of the state structure started to change progressively. Also, Lewis says of the government's authority over other semi-autonomous institutions within the centralization movement: namely, Janissaries, provincial notables (*ayan*), and ulema affected the distribution of political power by the government. The abolition of the Janissaries, the reduction in the influence of the *ayans*, and the gradually decreasing role of the ulema in politics caused the government to adopt an authoritarian structure.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, Niyazi Berkes argued that the power of the ulema decreased with modernization and the transformation of the bureaucracy. He first states that the *şeyhülislam*, who was the person leading the *Ilmiye* class, was excluded from the



government administration by Sultan Mahmud II, who made him an ordinary religious official.<sup>18</sup> In this period, Sharia law's conservative power in government affairs began to evaporate. That *Divan-ı Ahkam-ı Adliye* established the secular justice system in 1868, became another step in the reduction of the power of the ulema.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Berkes argued that during the first constitutional period, the ulema started to be one of the main opposition groups that used pamphlets, meetings, and agitation among madrasa students.<sup>20</sup> For Berkes, all these developments were indicators that the government had begun to lose its theocratic structure and that the scope of the ulema class diminished in the nineteenth century. Berkes also stated that the Tanzimat Edict of 1839 was a significant break with the past in terms of the centralization, rationalization, and bureaucratization reforms of the Tanzimat state. Berkes explains the conventional point of view that the ulema declined as the state introduced centralization and bureaucratization programs in the Tanzimat era that were not supported by the ulema. In the end, the ulema became powerless and lost their sovereignty in most cases. The ulema's supreme aim was the preservation of the traditional order, not change or reform.<sup>21</sup> Also, Berkes said that in the same period, important individuals belonging to the İlmiye class, such as Cevdet Pasha, began to work in bureaucratic positions. İlmiye members expected their position in the government to increase again with these kinds of posts, but these expectations were not met by the government, and the İlmiye members continued their decline, he says.

In describing the main features of the ulema, Richard Chambers indicates that the position of the ulema was relatively stable until the Tanzimat period. At the onset of modernization, when the empire experienced bureaucratization and centralization, both the importance and influence of the office of the Şeyhülislam in particular and the İlmiye group in general steadily declined. Chambers explains the reasons for this decline as mainly their inability to compete with a rising civilian bureaucracy and newly opened educational centers, their lack of military support after the elimination of the Janissaries, and the destruction of their financial resources. Also, he asserts that the influence of the şeyhülislam on government affairs started to decrease with the Tanzimat Edict of 1839 and the Islahat Edict of 1856 by transferring some duties of the şeyhülislam to newly established councils, such as the Supreme Council for Judicial Regulations (*Meclis-i Vala-ı Ahkam-ı Adliye*) and the Supreme Council of the Reforms (*Meclis-i Ali-i Tanzimat*).<sup>22</sup> In the end, Chambers says, the reasons for this decline were increasing secularism, the loss of financial autonomy, the cutting of waqf income for the ulema, and the rise of modern schools as alternatives to traditional madrasa education.<sup>23</sup>

Another author who argues that the power of the ulema decreased in the nineteenth century is Nikki Keddie. For her, given the continued growth of government power as well as the expansion of the army, bureaucracy, and secular education, even in villages, the political power of the ulema probably continued to decline in the nineteenth century as it had in the last half of the eighteenth century. Also, the founding of Western-style schools and the disintegration of traditional madrasa institutions led to the loss of the ulema's position and influence.<sup>24</sup>

Stanford and Ezel Kural Shaw discuss the bureaucratic position of three groups in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. These groups were the *Mabeyn-i Hümayun*, formed by the sultans and some attendants; the *Bab-ı Seraskeri*, representing the military class; and the *Bab-ı Meşihat*, made up of the ulema. The authors say that the weakest in political terms in the nineteenth century was the Meşihat. They began to lose the support of both the government and society with the reform movement. At first the ulema reacted defensively toward reforms. They worried that their privileges would be harmed by the reforms, and they were therefore cautious about the movement. They were worried that they could be abolished or that their influence could be decreased since there was a possibility that centralization would isolate them from the educational and judicial arenas. They were perceived only as religious leaders in the nineteenth century. They lost their influence in jurisprudence and education as a result of the reform movements. The ulema were never as strong as when they had the support of the Janissaries.<sup>25</sup>

According to Carter Findley, the reasons for the decline of the İlmiye class were both the bureaucratization and abolition of the traditional religious education system due to its failure to solve the problems faced by the government.<sup>26</sup> The replacement of religious educational institutions with modern educational institutions changed the education system that was established between the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774) and the Russian invasion of Crimea (1783). Findley says that in the nineteenth century, the ulema's educational concerns were limited to religious matters in contrast with earlier periods when the ulema were trained in a wide range of subject areas—from astronomy to mathematics.<sup>27</sup> As a result, the Ottoman ulema began to be excluded from important decisions made in government institutions starting at the beginning of the nineteenth century, especially regarding reforms in the field of education. Also, Findley argues that much of the money once allocated to religious foundations began to remain in the government treasury in the nineteenth century, especially after the removal of Janissaries (Auspicious Incident, called *Vaka-yı Hayriye*, the Beneficent Event, in Ottoman historiography)