

A BRITISH INQUIRY MISSION TO BULGARIA (1854)

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Les documents présentés ici concernent une mission que Charles Cunningham, le vice-consul britannique de Galați, a remplie en septembre–décembre 1854, étant envoyé en Bulgarie par l’ambassadeur Stratford de Redcliffe pour se rendre compte de l’«état général du pays», Cunningham a visité Varna, Ruse, Silistra, Aytos, Shumen et Tarnovo. Ses rapports contiennent des renseignements sur les abus commis par les troupes irrégulières de *bachibosuks* contre la population chrétienne, sur la situation religieuse en Bulgarie et sur l’économie de la région.

Key-words: Bulgaria, Crimean War, Charles Cunningham, Stratford de Redcliffe, Turkish abuses.

During his long and remarkable career as British ambassador at Constantinople, Stratford Canning, 1st Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe, was not only the cunning defender of Britain’s economic and political interests in the Near East, but also one of the greatest supporters of reforming and modernising the Ottoman state. Thus, he vested much of his interest and activity in improving the relations between different ethnic and religious groups living in the Empire, especially as the disadvantageous status of the Christian subjects was among the major factors undermining Turkey’s stability and integrity. The province of Bulgaria enjoyed a special relevance in his views, as the abuses of the Turkish authorities and the lawless state of the country were often reported to Constantinople. In a letter sent from Shumen (Schumla¹), in July 1853, Colonel Edward St. John Neale, British consul at Varna, adverted to “the menacing attitude which the Turks have assumed towards the Christians in certain districts of this province”², whereas several months later, with events unfolding quickly in the Eastern Question and with the prospects of the Russian army crossing the Danube, ambassador Stratford de Redcliffe informed the Foreign Office on “the number of crimes committed, particularly in the province of Bulgaria, by Turks suspected of indulging a spirit of fanatical hatred towards the Christians”³.

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¹ The original form of the geographical names is given in parentheses.

² James MacQueen, *The War, Who’s to blame? Or the Eastern question investigated from the official documents*, London, 1854, p. 237.

³ *Ibid.*

The region remained in the focus of Stratford de Redcliffe's attention, and, following the Western involvement in what was to be termed the Crimean War, the excesses of the Turkish irregular troops of *başıbozüks*, always a source of great troubles, were strongly criticised by the British and French embassies in Constantinople. Stratford de Redcliffe was by far the most virulent critic, submitting to the Porte more official notes than all the other European ambassadors put together. Aided by a network of consuls spread out all over the Ottoman Empire, the "great Elchi" was, in certain instances, better informed than the Ottoman ministers⁴. During the first half of 1854, Colonel Neale continuously reported from Varna on the pillaging and atrocities caused by the *başıbozüks*, but it was the decapitation of thirty Mogan shepherds that made the ambassador send a vehement note to the Porte: "Such outrages on humanity are a dishonour to the country where they occur and to the army which allows their perpetrators to cooperate with it. Measures must be adopted to check them, or it will ultimately be found impossible for Christian Powers to act in concert with the Turkish Authorities"⁵. With similar cases reported in different corners of the Empire, Sultan Abdülmecid issued, on April 18, a firman ordering the severe punishment of the *başıbozüks*' unlawful acts. "The perpetrators were to be arrested and sent to army commanders, whose military courts were authorized to pass capital punishment on the perpetrators". However, this decree and similar instructions from Constantinople seem to have had little effect, as complaints from diverse parts of Turkey, duly put down by the British and French consuls, were constantly reported⁶.

With the concentration of the allied troops in Varna, the severe unlawfulness from Bulgaria became a crucial concern for the Cabinets in London and Paris. In late July 1854, Stratford de Redcliffe had "again to perform the painful duty of bringing to the knowledge of the Ottoman secretary of state a barbarous outrage committed by one class of the Sultan's subjects upon the other"⁷. Pressed by Western ambassadors, the Ottoman authorities sent to Bulgaria a commissioner, Medhet Effendi, entrusted with the task of increasing the general safety of the province. Under these circumstances, in September 1854, Stratford de Redcliffe sent Charles Cunningham, vice-consul at Galați (Galatz) since 1836, then in refuge at Constantinople (as the British consular staff from the Principalities had to leave their offices when Britain declared war on Russia⁸), in a mission to Bulgaria, aiming to ascertain the results of Medhet's measures, as well as to "observe the general state of the country". An experienced merchant, with a long residence in the East, Cunningham left the Turkish capital in late September and remained in Bulgaria until mid-December, sending to his superiors about thirty official and private dispatches on his proceedings, which, according to my knowledge, have not been the object of a

⁴ Candan Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853–1856)*, Leiden, Boston, 2010, p. 379.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 384–385.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 386–387.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 389.

⁸ Paul Cernovodeanu, *Relațiile comerciale româno-engleze în contextul politicii orientale a Marii Britanii*, Cluj-Napoca, 1986, p. 160.

historiographic analysis. Most of the documents refer to punctual issues, narrated to the British official by his informants (heterogeneous in terms of origin and social status), intelligence on the basis of which Cunningham drew up several final reports, which will be annexed *in extenso* at the end of this paper, having considered them extremely illustrative for the general state of Bulgaria at the middle of the 19th century⁹. As for this short introduction, the most appropriate approach seemed this chronological, travel like account, with references to those realities which occupied Cunningham's attention and best describe his steps and actions during the three months long inquiry mission in the Ottoman province south of the Danube.

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Vice-consul Charles Cunningham left for Varna on September 30, probably on board the Austrian steamer to Galatz, and spent several days in Colonel Neale's company, who made him conversant with the local circumstances. As commissioner Medhet, whom he wanted to meet, was not to come to Varna for at least several days, Cunningham started for Shumen and Ruse (Roustchouk) on October 4. During his entire tour, the British official was accompanied by a dragoman, hired at Constantinople, a groom (entrusted with caring the horses) and a Zabtiyie, a Turkish policeman (responsible with the passengers' safety); later on, when he visited the Danubian ports, Cunningham also engaged the services of young Bulgarian, who helped him gather more reliable information for his reports¹⁰.

The insecurity of the roads was noticed from the very beginning of the journey, as the route proved "infested with robbers", with two Armenians readily complaining of having been deprived of their goods near the village of Devina, in a place where the inhabitants stated that "robberies were almost daily committed". Another perilous passage, beyond the village of Tepegios, where only four days earlier "a regular band of robbers" had murdered a traveller, was crossed safely, and the night of October 5 was spent at a khan in the Turkish village of Unisenie. The local aga did not deny that "a band of robbers frequented the vicinity of the village", but explained his lack of action by the fact that the place was out of his district and, besides, he was about to leave his office. A party of Bulgarian merchants, on their way from Kazanlak (Casan) to Varna, also complained that, due to this instability, "they did not venture to travel in smaller parties than twelve", which was extremely inconvenient for their affairs; in the same time, Kazanlak was virtually besieged by the Turks from Kavagios, a neighbouring village, "consisting of about sixty families, all Robbers", who used to seize Christian lads and required significant amounts of money in exchange for their liberty. Cunningham arrived at Shumen on October 6, and the local pasha confirmed the veracity of the situation from

⁹ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Public Record Office, FO 195/444 (Foreign Office. Embassy and Consulates, Turkey, formerly Ottoman Empire: General Correspondence Turkey), Viceconsulate at Galatz and Ibraila, 1854–1855. All correspondence is addressed to Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 333–336, No. 22, Galați, January 31, 1855.

Kazanlak. But there were not many solutions to keep the perpetrators in prison, as “at present the Turks seem to have no means of punishing short of death”¹¹. A good example was provided in another dispatch, when Cunningham mentioned a robber kept in prison at Ruse, guilty of about fifteen murders, whom the authorities “at various times administered one thousand five hundred bastonadoes, some of these on the belly, in the hope of killing him, but the robber was still alive in prison”¹².

Cunningham remained at Shumen until October 9, when he left for Ruse. Although the local pasha acknowledged that robberies were committed in that vicinity, he blamed the Austrian shepherds, who, when arrested by the Turkish authorities, were claimed by the Austrian consul and set free. According to information provided by an Austrian consular agent, another great place for robberies was Razgrad (Rasgrad), where the bandits had been protected by the former governor; however, the reason for so many crimes, which Cunningham detailed in his final report (see *infra*), was that “the Peasantry thereabouts are rich”¹³.

Considering that his mission could not make any further progress for that moment and taking advantage of the fact that the Austrian steamer was ready to leave for Galatz, Cunningham embarked on the vessel and paid a quick visit to his consular residence, so as to assess if his presence was required in the Lower Danubian ports¹⁴. He left Galatz on October 13 and, from Giurgiu (Giurgova), went to Bucharest to meet the British General Consul in the Romanian Principalities, Robert Gilmour Colquhoun¹⁵. After a ten day detour, he returned to Bulgaria and, on October 20, left Ruse for Silistra (Silistria), going along the right bank of the Danube. The area proved rather peaceful and he heard no complaints of robberies (“the Inhabitants say they are too poor to be exposed to robbery”). He arrived at Silistra on October 23 and the following day headed to Tartar Pazardzhik (Tartar Bazardzik), an area where Christian villages had nearly all disappeared. The town of Tartar Pazardzhik was three fourths burnt down, and most of the inhabitants fled, especially to Russia. Those who chose to remain or who returned were in a difficult condition, as they “must suffer great misery during the winter, which must be passed without sufficient food or shelter”. The area was free of significant crimes, from the simple reason, as the inhabitants repeated it, “that there was nothing to rob”. From Tartar Pazardzhik, through a village of Turkish Christians (who “have plenty of Corn, Cattle and Fowls”), the British official arrived at Varna on October 27 and remained in the Pontic port until October 30¹⁶.

His next target was the town of Aytos (Aidos), a region full of robbers, although outside the Ottoman province of Bulgaria. He also intended to go to Nesebar (Messembria) and investigate the case of a Bulgarian, recently abducted

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 262–266, No. 1, Ruse, October 18, 1854.

¹² *Ibid.*, 287–289, No. 3, Ruse, October 18, 1854.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 282–286, No. 2, Ruse, October 18, 1854.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 226–227, Private letter, Varna, October 29, 1854.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 287–289, No. 3, Shumen, November 18, 1854.

and liberated in exchange of a ransom of 30,000 piasters. The practise seemed pretty frequent in the neighbourhood, with two other persons carried off and subsequently murdered, whereas two lads, kidnapped in August, were ransomed for 1,200 piasters. The same situation was reported at Karnobat (Carnabat), on November 4, where three Bulgarians were taken prisoners by three Turks, one of them (the father and brother of the other two) being allowed to return and get a ransom fixed at the amount at 30,000 piasters. At Nesebar, where he was on November 2, Cunningham heard the story of a certain Dracos Cardomatie, of the village of Zapoli, taken away from the "Baths of Libra, in open day and from among a number of Bathers, and that he had to pay p. 30,000 of ransome". Another case was brought to his knowledge at Aytos, where the vice-consul also conversed to the local governor. At Sliven (Selimnia), he related the cases to the caimacam, who, reasonably enough, considered that it was "an error to suppose that all the robberies were committed by Turks, that Bulgarians disguised themselves as Turks and robbed also; that he had then in prison a Bulgarian and a Turk who had confessed to having murdered a Christian Bacal". The journey throughout the area continued, with reports of other cases of robberies and murders against travellers or local residents, the chief robber being well-known: "he is called Ballaban Oglu and is of the village of Eskazaar. Excepting the chief, nearly all these robbers belong to the village of Icondukilee near Jumboli"¹⁷.

From the Pashalic of Adrianople, Cunningham crossed to that of Ruse, Caimacamia of Shumen. The array of complaints remained constant, with numerous instances of robberies, abductions and murders. Such a case seemed to have been that reported at Oyman Bayar (November 11), where two Bulgarians named Stoja and Stojano, who had left the town to purchase cattle, disappeared, and "their horses returned with a virile member tied to each saddle". On November 13, Cunningham arrived at Shumen, having by now formed a clearer idea of the state of the country. He wrote to Stratford de Redcliffe "that nearly all the cases cited have taken place within the last two months and all relate to cases which took place on the line of road I passed over or had happened to persons with whom I actually conversed". Since the other towns also displayed the same "catalogue of murders and robberies", the situation was considered "fearful and unsupportable for the Christians, as the Turks were seldom molested"¹⁸. During his stay at Shumen, he also came in contact with the custom of "the price of the blood", presented to him by a woman from Draganovo, whose husband had been killed six months earlier. As the murderer was kept in prison at Shumen, the father and wife of the murdered man had been called for to accept "the price of blood", so that the murderer might be set free. They virtually were in no position to refuse this payment, at a great distance from their village, "having to walk sixty miles to their home, in the very midst of winter without anything to pay their expenses of the way, and probably no food when they returned home"¹⁹.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 291–297, No. 4, Shumen, November 18, 1854.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 278–279, No. 7, Shumen, November 27, 1854. Another story in *Ibid.*, 276–277.

As for the results of Medhet's mission, the commissioner certainly put the authorities on the alert, and they made several prisoners, although Cunningham much feared that "they are seizing insignificant persons and leaving the great and formidable robbers at liberty; at least no robber of note is yet reported to have been taken"²⁰. In quantitative terms, thirty of forty persons, said to be robbers, have been brought to Shumen from different parts of the province and imprisoned, of whom fifteen or twenty were sent to Varna, to be from thence sent to Constantinople. The only person convicted to the capital punishment was a Gypsy (guilty of double murder), who was hanged, a fact interpreted "as a manifesto that they will on no account put a Turk to death for the murder of a Christian". Thus, there was the fear that Medhet's mission, "far from preventing or causing a diminution in the number of murders, will on the contrary cause an increase, as the Turks will now consider themselves exempt from capital punishment for the murder of a Christian, as they have been heretofore". In conclusion, "those with higher expectations have been disappointed and dispirited"²¹. In a confidential letter, he explained that Medhet was not prepared to really do his job, "as he did not want to hit the Caddi and the Mufti over the nose and make them hold it lower", afraid that, once returned to Constantinople, "he might find they had broken his nose altogether"²².

Cunningham left Shumen on November 21, heading to Tarnovo (Turnova), via Razgrad, an area rather free of robbers, although informants narrated about two persons coming from Constantinople attacked by robbers, with one of the travellers killed, or about a Turk that robbed a Bulgarian's horses. Recognised and brought before the Meslise (local tribunal), the Turk was not punished, though fifteen respectable Bulgarians were ready to swear in the petitioner's benefit. On November 26, Cunningham's party arrived at Tarnovo²³, where he was held in great esteem by the local authorities. If previously he was rather ignored by the Turks, the local pasha proved "very attentive and ceremonious"²⁴. Ghalib Pasha's benevolence was related to his disputes with "a party against him in the Meslise", eager to remove him, and to his desire to get Stratford de Redcliffe's influence so as "to maintain him in this post or to obtain him another as good or better should he be removed from this". Cunningham presented him highly: "all the Christians under his authority seem pleased with him and speak highly in his favour", "he appears to be an intelligent and active man and of the advance party of the Turks", in open conflict with "the retrograde Turks", governed by Mustin aga ("the type of the bigoted Turk", Christian

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 291–297, No. 4, Shumen, November 18, 1854.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 268–270, No. 5, Shumen, November 18, 1854. After he left, 17 more robbers accused of murder and robbery had been brought, so that "there were upwards of sixty persons in the prison of Shumla accused of those offences. This state of things must surely fix the attention of the Turkish government. A district must be in a fearful position when eighty robbers can be accounted for, that is sixty in prison in Shumla and twenty sent to Constantinople, without any diminution in crime being perceptible". *Ibid.*, 240, No. 10, Turnovo, November 27, 1854.

²² *Ibid.*, 230, Confidential dispatch, Shumen, November 18, 1854.

²³ *Ibid.*, 245–246, No. 11, Tarnovo, November 30, 1854.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 228, Private, Tarnovo, November 28, 1854.

despiser and generally pointed out “as the protector of robbers”, on the ground that a Turk should not be punished for a crime against a Christian)²⁵. An as interesting character was the archbishop of Turnovo, earlier accused of exacting money from the Christian subjects and deprived of his bishopric by the Sultan. However, after several years spent at Constantinople, the archbishop managed to return to this post and lived “quietly and economically”, in good relations with the pasha, but with numerous enemies among the local Christian elite²⁶. He was also informed of other crimes, but “as from Turnovo to Sistova and neither on the road nor since my arrival here I heard of a single act of violence”, Cunningham concluded that “the Pashalic of Turnovo may therefore be considered as almost free of robberies”²⁷.

From Svishtov (Sistova), the British vice-consul arrived at Giurgiu on Saturday, December 9, ready to go back to his post at Galați²⁸. Probably in expectation of the Austrian steamer, he reported on December 14 that “the Pachalik of Widdin and all the upper part of Bulgaria from the Danube to the Balkans is in a much worse position as regards murders and robberies than the portion I have visited. There does not appear to be pass over the Balkans through which a Christian, native of the Country can pass without great risk of being robbed or murdered. Part of Rumelia which near the Balkans is in quite as bad a state as regards robberies as any part of Bulgaria”. He also found out that the Christian inhabitants were much more oppressed and ill treated in the Pashalic of Widdin, both by the authorities and the Turkish population, than in the districts situated lower down the Danube²⁹, a similar situation being reported in the district of Sofia. Not least of all, he was informed that seven Christians had been murdered in the town of Plevna (Plevna) a few days before and no inquiry had been made by the authorities, and that a certain Genga, Governor of Oryahovo (Racova), was a great oppressor of the Christians, “a monster of cruelty”³⁰.

In late December, after a mission of 86 days, Cunningham returned to his consular duties in the Danubian port of Galați, with the interest for Bulgaria somehow diminished at Constantinople, after the Western troops landed to Crimea. Nevertheless, Cunningham managed to provide his superiors with additional information on the province, besides the data sent by the local British consuls. Cunningham’s conclusive remarks relative to the situation of Bulgaria result from three reports which he drew up: 1) on the causes of the frequency of the robberies and murders of Christians in Bulgaria and the means of putting an end to them; 2) on the religious state of Bulgaria; 3) on the general (mainly economic) state of the Bulgarian population. By choosing to include these reports as such, without further comments,

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 219–221, Private, Turnovo, December 2, 1854.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 222–225, Private, Turnovo, December 2, 1854.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 248–249, No. 12, Svishtov, December 6, 1854. Other problems (280–281) are reported in No. 9, Turnovo, November 27, 1854.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 256, No. 15, Giurgiu, December 11, 1854.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 232–233, No. 19, Giurgiu, December 14, 1854.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 234, No. 20, Brăila, December 31, 1854.

we consider them important sources for the history of mid-nineteenth century Bulgaria, documents that may be better approached in their chronological, geographical, socio-political, ethnical or religious context by more specialised historians.

Appendix

Doc. 1. Charles Cunningham to Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe, on the causes of robberies and murders in Bulgaria and the means of putting an end to them³¹

No. 14

Giurgova, December 11th 1854

My Lord,

I take the earliest opportunity of making a report on the causes of the frequency of Robberies and Murders of Christians in Bulgaria and the means of putting an end to them.

The causes of these robberies and murders and of their frequency are:

1st. The desire of plunder.

2nd The small esteem in which the lives and property of Christians are held by the Turks, and that no infamy attaches to a Turk for the murder of a Christian.

3rd. The very great chance of not being arrested through a defective police and good protection, and if arrested of not being punished through the same protection.

As the first cause requires no remark I may at once proceed to the second.

My belief, founded on a long residence in Turkey, is that a Turk does not value the life of a Christian at all, not so much as he values the life of a dog, nay I believe that by many Turks it is considered meritorious and not infamous to take the life of a Christian. Persons who have resided in Turkey may say that the foregoing is too severe; that they are acquainted with Turks who, far from killing a Christian, would not intentionally do him harm. This I freely admit, still that same Turk looks on the taking the life of a Christian as a very different matter from taking the life of a Musulman. It is only justice to the Turk to add, that the Christians of Turkey generally, do not consider it a very serious crime to take the life of a Turk. Christians seldom take the lives of Turks because punishment is almost certain, Turks often take the lives of Christians because impunity is almost certain.

When public opinion among the Turks does not place the murder of a Christian in the rank of crimes, and the law seldom punishes the offence, it is evident that no infamy can, in the opinion of a Turk, attach to the murderer of a Christian.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 250–255.

The Turks have, somehow or other, got a great name for honesty; and so far they deserve it that they seldom or never steal clandestinely; but they will take anything openly from a Christian, without force if yielded freely, or by force if opposition is offered; and sometimes they murder the person on taking his property. The Turks will also deprive a Christian of his property by false witnesses or through any other injustice or chicane of their Law. Therefore the Turks are honest in a very limited sense of the word.

On the third point – with regard to a defective Police, I will state some of these defects in the words of a person in authority in this neighbourhood. All the Zabtiyies belong to the district in which they act, and consequently have friends and relations all around, and are frequently connected in friendship or interest with the robbers, and therefore will not seize them. When it is attempted to appoint strangers as Zabtiyies the members of the Meslise are opposed, saying that the natives of the district should be provided for.

The Zabtiyies have no uniform and therefore on the road cannot be known for good or for evil. The Zabtiyie not unfrequently acts the part of the robber, stopping passengers and robbing and murdering them; while the robber often assumes the part of the Zabtiyie, stopping passengers on the road under pretext of examining their Tescarets and then falling on them unawares. The robbers also enter the villages under the assumed character of Zabtiyies and obtain lodging and food for themselves and horses without payment and happy for the villagers if the robbers content themselves with this.

Insufficient pay – The pay of a mounted Zabtiyie is one hundred and forty piasters per month, or Twenty two shillings, for which he must provide his horse and arms and feed himself and horse. On my present journey I paid as much as p 8 for Barley for the feed of one horse morning and evening, and nowhere have I paid less than p 3 ½. Therefore supposing the Zabtiyie only to pay the lowest rate p 105 is required monthly for this horse's Barley, leaving p 35 on which to support himself and family for a month. Now this low pay does not permit a Zabtiyie to perform his duty faithfully; he cannot live on his pay and must seek illegitimate means of supporting himself, among which tribute from Robbers and robbery itself may be reckoned. It is true that in the Christian villages the Zabtiyie never pays for his own or his horse's food; the law says he should pay for both, but he has not the means to pay were he willing.

But besides these defects pointed out of the Zabtiyies, it is generally believed that higher officers, even to the Chief of districts prevent robbers from being arrested, either directly, by not taking the needful measures, or indirectly, by their known indifference.

Another great obstacle to the apprehension of robbers is the number of districts into which the country is divided, each with its separate police and authorities, and the officers of one district not being allowed to act in another district. The Zabtiyies of a Pasha can no doubt act all over the Pashalic but cannot enter another Pachalic, but the Zabtiyie of a sub-governor can only act in the sub-district. A robber

therefore has only to retire into another district after having committed a crime, and he is secure from immediate arrest. The Governor of the district wherein the crime was committed must write to the Governor of the District into which the criminal has retired, the Governor written to seldom takes any trouble in the matter, because the crime not having been committed in his district, his reputation does not suffer and perhaps he is pleased that an offence has been committed in the district of his neighbour.

Good protection from arrest & punishment

All persons with whom I have an opportunity of conversing, Christians and Turks, agree that everywhere hereabouts the robbers have protectors in powerful Turks both in and out of office, down to common peasants in every town and village. The motives for giving protection differ in degree, from a partnership with the robbers and sharing the plunder, to a mere desire of protecting the Turk from being punished for an offence against a Christian, and to hinder the late reforms which give protection to Christians from being carried into effect.

In every Meslise and in every district the person is openly named who is the chief protector of robbers. But even when the protectors of robbers are known it must still be difficult to ascertain the motives of each person and in what degree they are influenced by interest relationships & friendship, or the mere hatred of Christians and opposition to reforms for their protection. I consider however that all Turks of the old school, that is those opposed to reforms for the benefit of the Christians, see these robberies and murders of Christians with no unfavourable eye, and if they do not instigate to the committal of these crimes, they at least do all in their power to skreen the criminals from arrest and punishment. This I believe to be the great difficulty to putting down these murders and robberies now so frequent.

But besides the mere hatred of Christians there is a powerful class of Turks in Bulgaria (and probably all over Turkey) who have interested motives for preventing the reforms for the protection of the Christians from coming into force. There are the great landed proprietors who even now in some instances oblige the Christians to cultivate their land, secure their crops without payment. Then there are all the Turks (and some Christians also) who are in the habit of taking the ictistams [?] or Tiths, who at present profit by the unprotected state of the Christians, taking more from them than they are entitled to take and which they will not be able to do once the reforms are real.

How it comes about it is difficult to explain but certain it is that the Christians have got the idea that the Tanzimat is the cause of the great increase of Murders and robberies; whenever I have asked the Christians to what they attributed the great increase of robbery of late, they have always answered me 'to the Tanzimat'. They say that since it was put in force the Pashas and Turks in office have no longer the power to punish robbers and murders and thence the great increase of crime.

With regard to the means of putting an end to the robberies, I will commence by the most important point, although the last in order, that is the punishment of the Criminal. In order that there may be a chance of justice being done the trials must

be taken entirely out of the hands of local tribunals or Meslises, on the members of which local influence, old prejudice, and interest are so strong, and a Commission or Commissions should be sent from Constantinople to judge the Criminals. The sentence of death should be passed in every case of murder, where clearly proved, and in some cases of abduction, and inexorably carried into execution. The manner of execution should be by hanging, and if possible in some cases the body should be hung in chains to render the crime infamous, and to be a memorial to the living. As to leaving the body of the criminal exposed this would not be a novelty but a revival. Twenty years ago, on the borders of Serbia I saw three skeletons exposed on Waggon Wheels on the point of stakes. No person should be condemned to death who had not committed murder or been guilty of cruelty, however large the amount he might have robbed.

But besides the actual robbers it would be necessary to enquire for and bring to punishment all their aiders, abettors & protectors, Turks & Christians, and the Commission sent should have special instructions to attend to this. All such as come within the scope of the Criminal law should be proceeded against criminally; and some who had not brought themselves within the scope of the criminal law should still be removed from the district (for a time at least) as perturbators of the peace.

As to the means of taking the robbers, I consider it would be necessary to send a person of standing, with authority both in Bulgaria and Rumelia, and that he should have a special Corps of Zabtuyies with him – the authorities in the different districts to have to assist him in every way, and with the Zabtuyies of the district. But as it is important that the chief robbers should be taken, their names should be ascertained and a liberal reward offered for their apprehension to be paid to Zabtuyies or others who took them, dead or alive. As an encouragement to the Zabtuyies a certain reward should be given for any robber they seized, payable on conviction of the robbers.

No doubt it would be well to reform the local Zabtuyies, by giving them an adequate pay, a uniform, and by employing persons who had no local ties.

The Pashas and other local Governor should have more security of office, and be more protected than they seem to be, against the Meslise or local Council. There is always some person in the Meslise of greater influence than the others, he therefore generally commands a majority in the Meslise; the Pasha or Governor must then either put himself under the protection of this person and do his bidding or the Meslise opposes the Governor in every thing he wishes to do. The consequence then is that the affairs of the district are badly managed and get into confusion, and on this, although caused by itself, the Meslise sends complains against the Governor to Constantinople; at Constantinople there are always many waiting for a vacancy, who eagerly support the complaint and the Governor falls a victim to the influential man of the Meslise. The succeeding Governor enters an office and holds it on condition of conforming to the will of the great man of the Meslise, who thus governs the district to his own profit and without responsibility.

In order to put down the robberies in these parts the persons having the charge must have no expectation or desire of making friends in the locality and they must not be afraid of the enemies they may make; they must be firmly supported at Constantinople; they must have the will and the nerve to do their duty. On these terms robberies will soon be put down, otherwise little or nothing can be done.

But in order to insure that the persons charged do their duty, they must know that full and correct accounts will reach Constantinople. This can only be ensured by Your Lordship keeping agents where necessary to give information.

There can be little doubt that the Christians are sometimes concerned in committing robberies & murders on travellers, but they never do so alone, they only assist Turks, and then they also disguise themselves as Turks. They also feed and shelter Turkish robbers but this they no doubt do often from fear than from love or even interest.

Doc. 2. Charles Cunningham to Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe, on the religious situation from Bulgaria³²

No. 18

Giurgova, December 12th 1854

My Lord,

In Bulgaria there is no relaxation of the old restraints to the celebration of the rites of the Christian religion.

In a large village in the district of Turnovo, composed partly of Christians partly of Turks there is no church. The Christians of the village applied to the Pasha for permission to build a Church which the pasha granted. The Turks of the village however prevented the Church from being commenced and remonstrated with the Pasha for having granted the permission. As the Pasha would not revoke the permission the Turks have sent a complaint against him to Constantinople; and there the affair is at present.

I was well aware that the use of Bells was prohibited but I thought that the use of the sounding board was permitted to Christian churches all over Turkey, the same as in Constantinople; such is not the case however and the use of the board is not permitted in Bulgaria.

Some time back the archbishop of Turnovo obtained a Firman permitting the use of the board in the Greek Churches in Turnovo, but when the Turks learnt this they signified to the archbishop that they would oppose the execution of the Firman; therefore the Christians did not attempt to introduce the use of the board. The Pasha encouraged the archbishop to carry put the firman, but the archbishop refused to do so at the risk of causing a demonstration of the Turks against the Churches and Christians.

³² *Ibid.*, 238–239.

I was informed that two Greeks of a neighbouring town (Plivna I believe) had got a similar firman some time back and were determined to give force to it notwithstanding the menaces of the Turks, the board was accordingly fixed in a small wooden tower; when however the person commenced to sound the board at the dawn of day he was fired on, by several Turks lying in wait for him and shot. Since then the attempt to sound the board has not been renewed.

Doc. 3. Charles Cunningham to Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe, on the general state of the Christians in Bulgaria³³

No. 23

Galatz, February 9th 1855

My Lord,

Having been at the end of last year sent by Your Lordship on a mission to Bulgaria to give information on a specific subject, namely 'the robberies and murders committed by the Turks on the Christians', and having in my letters from various places to Your Lordship communicated all I had observed regarding the special object of my mission, I now avail of the first opportunity the pressing duties of my office here have allowed me after my return to make some remarks on the general state of the Christians in Bulgaria and of the country so far my observation and information permit me.

I must apologise for the very meagre & insufficient report I am about to make, that having a special object for my mission to which in the first place I was bound to give all my attention, and being limited in time, I could not get the full information on other points which I would otherwise have sought for. When I say I was so limited for time, I do not mean that I was limited by Your Lordship, but chiefly by the advanced season of the year, having in fact commenced my journeying with the prospect of not more than one month of good weather before me, but I continued my travels three months, when the roads became no longer practicable.

The material position of the Bulgarian Christian Peasantry is probably better than the position of the Peasantry of any country in Europe. Their cottages are sufficiently large and comfortable; it is true they have no furniture in them excepting two or three copper pots for cooking and some quilts for sleeping on and covering themselves with at night. They are well and warmly clothed with home made cloth. They have oxen for the Plough and cows to give milk, besides sheep & abundance of Poultry, Fowls, Turkeys, Geese & Ducks, also wheat flour for Bread. In no place during my late tour did I observe any scarcity of any of these articles. No doubt I was generally lodged in the best and richest house in the village, but still I could see the yards of the other houses equally well stocked. It must also be observed that the country people are all equal, each having his portion of land around the village

³³ *Ibid.*, 337–345.

and cultivating it in families. There are no Gentlemen Farmers and no labourers. No proprietors excepting some Turkish Beys.

I cannot state with precision what taxes they pay or what burdens they bear, and it is the more difficult to learn, that the peasants seldom know that themselves. It is true it would not be difficult to get a list of Taxes they ought to pay according to law but this might prove very different to what they actually pay. They pay

One tenth in kind on all the grain they produce

One tenth yearly on sheep

A fixed tax per head on oxen

A tax on Bee-Hive

On vineyards – in some parts a fixed tax is paid on the measure of ground cultivated; in other parts the tenth of the Produce is given.

The Harach or Capitation tax is still paid, although in some places the name is changed into a house tax.

Besides the above which are paid to the Government a tax is to be paid to the Greek Bishop and the Priest has to be supported.

Whenever I have asked a peasant or a Bulgarian of a town what their grievances were, what they had to complain of, they have always answered ‘Only let an end be put to the robberies and murders, that we may have some guarantee for our lives, and the freedom of movement and all else is bearable and may be remedied in time’. However, when pressed for their other grievance they state them to be that:

The tax gatherer takes more than he is entitled to.

That (in those districts where the tax on vineyards is payable in money) the tax on Vineyards has within the last few years been raised from p 6 a p 16 per Dolum (a land measure)

That Turks still take quarters in their houses (Conak) and do not pay for their own food or the feed of their horses.

With regard to the Tax gatherer, he is welcome nowhere and in no country, but no doubt in Turkey where the taxes are farmed and where consequently all the Tax gatherer can take from the producer is his own gain, he will probably seek more than his own due with more pertinacity than where the tax is collected for account of Government. The best, probably the only remedy is to change the tax into a fixed sum on the extent of land cultivated. The payment of a tax in kind has the disadvantage that the proprietor is not free to harvest his crop until the Tax gatherer be satisfied.

As to the fixed tax on Vineyards it does not appear that there is any just reason of complaint. It appears that the tax of 6 piasters per Dolum was fixed a very long time ago, fifty or sixty years or more. When the tax was fixed p 6 was of greater value than p 16 is now.

I obtain the following information on this question. A Dolum of Vineyard produces 30 vedros of wine (105 gallons) and is sold on the spot at the time of production at 60 paras per vedro or p 45 for the whole produce of a Dolum (7s/2d or 4/5 of a penny per Gallon).

No doubt the tax of p 16 on land producing only p 45 (or 2s/5d from 7s/2d) is rather heavy as a land tax or even as rent but the fact is the production of grapes is too great for the consumption. Every inhabitant of a town so soon as he can afford it, wishes to have his vineyard outside the town, not as a matter of profit but of convenience and as every one produces more than he requires for the use of his family there are many sellers and few buyers. I believe that in consequence of the tax being raised from p 6 a p 16 vineyards are being abandoned, but this is not to be regretted as even were there no tax, the cultivation of the vine is not profitable while wine in selling at the rate quoted.

With regard to Conak or giving quarters to Turks there are no great complaints made by the Bulgarian peasants. The person requiring quarter had to find the Kiaja of the village (a kind of Messenger belonging to the Chourbagees) who assigns the quarters and then he gets the Provisions required from various houses in the village. A demand I believe is always made for the Barley given to the horses but this is seldom paid by the Turks. All over the district I travelled there are no complaints of the Turks ill treating the women and if they sometimes lay a whip over the shoulders of the men they must often either do this or go without supper. I refer only to the Pashalic of Rustchuk. I understand that in the Pashalic of Widdin the Turks often behave very barbarously. When he Peasant knows that the stranger will pay for what he gets there is no difficulty made to receive him into the house and to furnish him with all the requires, and generally from the house in which he lodges without requiring anything from other houses in the village.

There would be some difficulty in putting an end to the Conak system in the present state of the country. In all Turkish villages there are certain 'guests houses' to which all travellers repair at night fall or the master of the 'guests house' has his family house or harem near and there supper is prepared and brought into the 'guests house'. The master and any other grown up males of the family sit down to supper along with the strangers then sleep in the guests house and are free to depart next morning without any charge being made. The master of the house does not refuse a backshish and when he knows he will get it he may even cause a dish to be added to the supper. The feed of the horses has to be paid for. I believe the village or community pays a certain sum for the support of these houses. In Christian villages there is no public house where a person can pass the night. In many villages there is a tavern where wine & spirits bread and cheese is sold but there is no accommodation or room for sleeping. Therefore until some sort of a Public House is provided in every Christian village where strangers may sleep and get something to eat the Conak system must remain.

With regard to the question if these Bulgarian Christians have the material in them for self government & of occupying a higher social position than at present hold, I have no hesitation in saying that they have in rather a high degree. And I further say that the task of raising them is not difficult. The Bulgarian is industrious and saving, without which qualities it is difficult to form a nation or community. I certainly do not consider the Bulgarian as intellectual or highly intelligent but he

does not seem to want common sense which is all that is required for governing one self or a small community. Then the Bulgarian is not steeped in miserable poverty but on the contrary is in very good circumstances. Therefore only stay the murdering hand of the Turk and you have a happy and contented man fit for any social duty.

The Bulgarian in towns have generally a certain degree of education and every small town has its school. In the larger towns some attempts are made at a higher degree of education than mere reading & writing but little advance can be made for want of Books. The Bulgarian has a turn for commerce, and manufacturing has made great progress in Bulgaria. No doubt even now many Bulgarians could be found fit to govern even a province or Pashalic with more intelligence and efficiency that is generally found in these offices at present in Turkey.

I have heard strangers resident in Bulgaria maintain that the Bulgarian nation possesses no good quality and no capacity of Governing. That whenever a Bulgarian got into office he was much more oppressive towards his countrymen than the Turks were and that therefore it would be a crime to remove the Bulgarians from under the Turks & to put Bulgarian Christians to govern them. This is easily answered. When a Bulgarian is in office he is put into it by the Turks he is placed there to carry oppression further than the Turks care to do it for themselves and they choose a Bulgarian of bad character for the purpose because a man of good character would not accept of the office nor would he be efficient in it. As to saying that the Bulgarians in general are great liars, that is saying nothing new, the slave has always been a liar.

As to the means of ameliorating the lot of the Christians in Bulgaria and in Turkey generally two things are necessary besides the laws passed or to be passed in their favour and the vigilance of the Ambassador in Constantinople – these are the nomination of Consuls or agents at different points in the interior to watch over and report on the administration of the Laws and to remove all impediments to trade.

With regard to consuls I consider no Englishman should be named to the office without having a sufficient salary allotted to him and being prohibited from trading. A number of Vice Consuls, Consular agents starostes &c without salary and without responsibility are likely to do more harm than good.

But as naming forty or fifty Consuls all over Turkey with adequate salaries would entail a heavy expense on the British Government, perhaps natives of the Country might be found to accept of the position without salary.

I mentioned this my idea to a person holding office under the British Government and certainly did I consider his view of the case as correct I should never recur to the idea again. This person replied that to name Bulgarians as British Consuls would degrade the office, that there was nothing like honesty or honour among the Bulgarians, and that a Bulgarian once holding office under the British Government would do nothing but badger & bully the Pashas and other Turks in office.

In this case as in all others the object sought should not be lost sight of: the question is not to increase British trade, at least directly, or to protect it but to raise the Christian Population of Bulgaria and of all Turkey, and I cannot see why respectable Bulgarians should not be engaged in this work. I propose to name

respectable Bulgarians in certain localities as British Consuls. I say Consuls, not to invent another title. But at same time I do not recommend that these Bulgarians should be invested with all the powers and duties which British Consuls have in Turkey, chiefly because they would not require the powers for the discharge of their limited duties. I would confine their duties strictly to reporting to the Embassy or other British authority all that was necessary to be known for ameliorating the position of the Christians. No doubt these agents would have to keep up certain relations with Pashas and other Turkish officers, but it would be fully impressed on them to observe the greatest caution and moderation in their intercourse with the Turkish authorities. I would by no means recommend that many such agents should be named more especially as Vice Consuls or Consular Agents because as the only reward for the services of these agents would be British Protection and rank, the rank of Vice Consul would probably not be sought after by the most respectable natives. If highly respectable men sought these appointments I do not see that British consuls should feel degraded by holding the same rank, but unless men of the highest respectability seek these situations they had better remain vacant. Such appointments would not only be a dignity conferred on the individual but it would in a degree dignify the whole Christian population. I am not aware that there is any hindrance by treaty for the British Government to name Turkish subjects as Consuls.

The following places in Bulgaria would require Consuls or Agents – Varna, Silistria, Shumla, Rustchuk, Turnova, Widdin & Soffia but to such as promise to be trading stations no doubt Englishmen would be named. However a general plan should be adopted before any nomination be made. Should the Principalities remain in the same position towards Turkey as they are at present then it would be advantageous that the same Consul should have jurisdiction on both sides of the River.

With regard to the trade of Bulgaria certain it is that it does not increase or increases very slowly. Since the Exportation of grain was allowed by the treaty of 1839 fifteen years ago, this trade has made very little progress. I believe the chief cause of its stagnation is a sort of monopoly exercised by the farmers of the ‘dime’ who first receive the ‘dime’ and then insist on purchasing the remainder at a low price. The export duty is also high: 12% which 10% taken in kind forms 22% of duty. The policy of Turkey is in fact bad for Turkey & for foreign trade. Exports pay 12% & imports only 5%. The consumption of Imports would doubtless be greater if Exports paid nothing and Imports paid 10% because without Exports there can be no Imports even at a low duty and with Exports there will be Imports when the duty may be a little higher. There can be no doubt that there is something weighing on the trade of Bulgaria and preventing its development the impediment should be discovered and removed; otherwise the condition of the Christians cannot ameliorate so speedily as it would do were trade flourishing.

The quarantine which was kept up in the Principalities by preventing intercourse with Bulgaria and hindring trade has very much retarded the progress of that Province. At present the quarantine is taken off and it is to be hoped it will never be imposed again. [...].”