

Administrative-territorial structure of Kyustendil and its adjacent areas during the Bulgarian National Revival

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Abstract. The main goal of the present study is to trace the administrative-territorial structure of Kyustendil and its adjacent areas during the Bulgarian National Revival. The analysis of the available source material allows to create an idea of the purposeful activity performed to correlate the region to the individual administrative-territorial units established in the Ottoman Empire at that time, its internal territorial differentiation and the functioning of the institutions and bodies established here and aimed at the implementation of the State policy. It is necessary to conclude that during the reference period, the administrative-territorial structure of Kyustendil and its adjacent areas is characterised by continuity, complexity and pronounced dominance of the principle of centralization.

Keywords: history of Kyustendil during the period of the Bulgarian National Revival

The research into the administrative-territorial structure is mainly limited to monitoring dynamics of a country's territory structuring into separate units and the actions of the administration organized in them aimed at creating optimal conditions for effective life processes in society and the exercise of state power (Stanev, Spiridonova, Dzhildzhov 2006, 8-9; Dokova 2009, 29-31; Botev 2014). In this sense, the research into the administrative-territorial structure of Kyustendil and its adjacent areas during the Bulgarian National Revival is oriented toward creating an idea of the purposeful activity performed to correlate the region to the individual administrative-territorial units established in the Ottoman Empire at that time, its internal territorial differentiation and the functioning of the institutions and bodies established here and aimed at the implementation of the State policy.

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In the beginning of the reference period, the Ottoman Empire continued to apply the system of an administrative-territorial structure imposed in the precedent times. This system was based on the principles of a military service *Sipahi* land tenure and reveals the connection between the distribution of

land and the revenues from it and the hierarchy and management in the army. Evolving towards deepening centralism with regard to this type of structuring and imposing full control over the actions of the local administration, this system aimed to ensure order in the province and to protect the life, honour and property of the population through the unconditional implementation of imperial orders (Georgieva 2016a, 177-180; Grachev 1990, 6; Sereda 2009, 31).

In 18th c., Kyustendil continued to be a centre of a *sanjak*, which made part of the Rumelia Eyalet. There are several reasons why it preserved its status of a main city in one of the largest sanjaks in the Empire. First, what should be noted is the traditions of the city inherited from the previous epochs as an administrative centre. At the same time, it continued to be an important strategic point, but already as a “transitional zone and close rear” in one of the main directions - the northwest - of the military operations undertaken by the Ottoman state in those times. Moreover, the city was accounted for some significant economic functions: it was a cross-point of some of the main trade arteries of the Empire, a centre of a large mining area, a hub of significant production activities and more. Finally yet importantly, what is also noticeable are the favourable natural resources such as the availability of mineral water, good climate, fertile lands, forests and pastures (Paskaleva 1973, 112-118; Ivanov 1906, 149; Harbova 1993, 285-288; Akalin 2015, 1674-1680¹).

In the beginning of the 18th c., the Kyustendil *sanjak* had the following borders: to the north: as far as the middle flow of the South Morava river, to the east: as far as the mountains of Rila and Pirin, to the south: as far as the Doyran Lake, to the west: as far as the mounts of Crna Gora and Babuna, covering an overall area of over 20,000 sq. km. It comprehended the *kazas* of Kyustendil, Radomir, Dupnitsa, Petrich, Melnik, Doyran, Tikvesh, Strumitsa, Radovish, Shtip, Kratovo, and Vranja (Chuzhdi patepisi za Balkanite 1981, 68; Chuzhdi patepisi za Balkanite 1984, 108-110; Draganova, 1996, 5-12; Matanov, 2004, 25-28). In terms of the number of *kazas* being part of its composition and its territorial scope, we should consider the fact that most of the time of the very existence of this *sanjak*, these made a variable quantity. There were some periods of increases both in the number of *kazas* governed by the Kyustendil *sanjakbey* and in the scope of the territory put under his jurisdiction. In the 1730s, the area within the border of this *sanjak* included Sireshtnik, while after the 1740s it also covered the *kazas* of Kriva palanka and Kumanovo, and closer to the 1770s it also covered the *kaza* of Breznik and its merger with the former *kaza* of Znepole (Dorev 1940, 45, 72, 75; Georgieva 2008-2009, 18) (Fig. 1). While part of the above-mentioned *kazas* were aggregated to the *sanjak* after having already been within the borders of the neighbouring sanjaks, others formed territorial units of their own once they swallowed some lands from the *sanjak* itself. There were instances during the analysed historical interval when it would come to falling off individual *kazas* from the *sanjak* and subsequent reduction of its area. Some of them like Sireshtnik, upon mid-18th were dismantled, with their lands being

¹ Dr. Sezgin Bekir, to whom I would like to express my sincere gratitude, made the translation of the relevant materials from Turkish into Bulgarian.

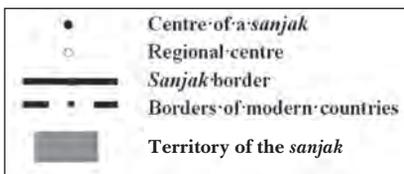
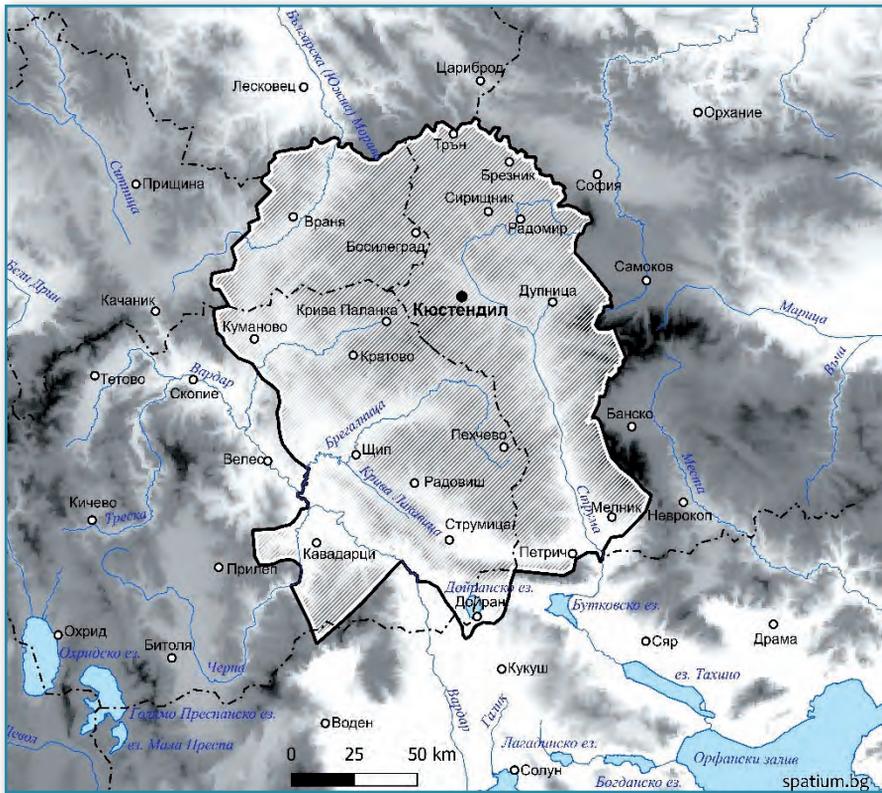


Fig. 1. The Kyustendil *sanjak* in mid-18th c.²

distributed to their neighbouring *kazas*, while others such as Doyran, Melnik, Breznik, and Znepole, in the late 18th c. and the first decade of 19th c. switched either wholly or partially to other *sanjaks*. This would never impede their new inclusion into the borders of the *sanjak*, which happened in 1820s and 1830s (Dorev 1940, 132, 156; Georgieva 2008-2009, 42). As a whole however, no essential changes occurred in the territorial scope of the *sanjak*.

The fundamental issues in the administrative-territorial structure of the analysed region back in those times had a bearing mostly with the changes being made to the governance of some individual units within its scope and reflected the deep-

² The members of the team headed by Nikolay Dunev, to whom I would like to express my sincere gratitude, made all maps in this work.

ening process of decentralization in this area. The first signs of the nascent aspiration among the local governors toward a gradual release from the patronage of the central government were to be seen as early as in the late 17th c., with all of them gaining momentum as the time passed by. This process was provoked by some phenomena that differed in their core essence. First of all, it is noteworthy that there was an entire sequence of military fiascos accompanying the development of the Empire throughout that period. As a result, the proceeds provided by the local nobility taking part in the military efforts declined drastically and therefore, the financing of the army troops that nobility was supposed to provide allowance to turned into a heavy burden, while the funding needed to cope with it would be ensured at the account of the proceeds dispatched to the central government. At the same time, a number of the Muslims originating from the region and engaged in those war efforts never returned to their homeland. Among these was a significant part of the local Muslim elite, which therefore narrowed the range of the group where the personnel performing the administrative functions was recruited. Moreover, an impact on that process was also caused by the gradual shrinking of the role the region played as a key strategic cross-point and this had a bearing with the changes occurring in the fundamental military and political doctrine applied by the Ottoman State and also with the displacement of the main midpoint of military actions conducted by the Empire to the eastern part of the Balkans. This would limit the central government's focus to the latter region and the purposeful allocation of state funds to it. While there appeared a disequilibrium in the interrelation between the region and the central government, its influence here slowly yet irreversibly declined (Paskaleva 1973, 112-118; Ivanov 1906, 149; Harbova 1993, 285-288; Popov 1973, 93-99; Akalin 2015, 1674-1680; Kunt 2014, 30-36).

Gradually, particularly over the last decades of 18th c., once they took notice of the declining levels of control by the State over their activity, some of the local power holder such as Edip Aga ruling in Kyustendil, the *ayn* of Tran, Kara Feiz, the *bey* of Radomir, Bilyal Aga, and the governor of Dupnitsa, Syuleyman Karagali, proceeded to an independent style of governing the territorial units entrusted to them ignoring the overall state policy. The decentralization, which had started in the region, was accompanied on its way by anarchy and lawlessness and reached its culmination somewhere in the beginning of the 19th c., i.e., when the aspiration of each of those *ayan* (plural of *ayn*, TN) for domination over ever larger territories would provoke internecine warfare demanding the active interference of the representatives of the central government headed by the then-ruling *sanjakkbey*, Syuleyman Pasha (Ivanov 1906, 271-274; Popov 1973, 93-99; Medzhidiev 1969, 178; Akalin 2015, 1674-1680).

Upon the defeat suffered by the troops forwarded by the local *ayan*, and notably upon the death of Edip Aga in 1805, came the pacification of the region followed by the reinstatement of its administrative-territorial structure in its pre-turmoil appearance. Kyustendil continued to be the centre of a *sanjak*, with no essential changes occurring in its status or territorial coverage, at least until the early 1830s. In its position of a *sanjak* capital and together with the lands under its jurisdiction, it was listed in the registers of the administrative units drawn up on the 1831 census conducted in the Empire (Akalin 2015, 1674-1680).

The events taking place around the end of the 18th c. and the beginning of the 19th c. however demonstrated quite clearly that the system of administrative-territorial structure applied until then by the Empire had already exhausted its potential and had fallen into inefficiency. This forced the central government to undertake a number of measures to reform it. The application thereof started as early as the ascension to the throne of Mahmud II and revealed his ideas on the transformation of that system. The main reforms in the administrative sphere were aimed at reinstalling the rule of the central government as a top priority in the provinces affected by the turmoil and at limiting the powers exerted by the local governors by placing the latter under strict control (Grachev 1990, 6). These may be conditionally divided into several groups.

The first of these groups would encompass the measures undertaken to delimit the governance of the local administrative power from the governance exerted by the local military structures. It was a question of seizure of military functions from the hands of local rulers. According to the new military and political doctrine launched by the Ottoman Empire, in which defensive tactics dominated, with the border checkpoints having become the main strategic centres, the management of the military forces of the Kyustendil *sanjak* was also reorganized. Initially, the troops furnished by the local *sipahi* were placed under the overall command of those several main strategic fortresses where they were deployed. The key strongholds among them were the fortress of Gyurgevo and the forts on both sides of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. Subsequently, with the disbandment of the janissary corps and the brutal confrontation of the then Kyustendil Sandjakbey Ahmed Aga with the janissaries in the region, the regular army recruited in the region moved to Thessaloniki. This is where it was trained, after which the army was housed in various, mainly Aegean garrisons (Akalin 2015, 1674-1680; Kunt 2014, 30-36). In addition, that was how the definitive rupture of the link between the military *sipahi* structures and the administrative governance of the region occurred.

The second group of reforms launched was focused on curbing the widespread corruption among the local administration. One of the instruments used to achieve the targets of the reform was the shortening of the already short-term (1-3 years) mandates of local governors and the administrative employees under their command. That being said, the frequency of their rotation was being accelerated and in many cases would take place even before the term of the respective appointment had expired. At the same time, the establishment of administrative councils began at the local level, which were charged with functions seized from those of the respective governor. The aim of the actions thereto was to minimize the impact on the local authorities exerted by their entourage (Todorova 1980, 57; Kolev 2006, 20; Tafrova 2010, 53-55; Georgieva 2016a, 177-180; Grachev 1990, 6; Safonov 2012, 121; Kunt 2014, 30-36).

The third separate group of actions undertaken by the central government refers to the fragmentation and reorganisation of the administrative units. Initially, they were aimed at reducing the number of *kazas* administered by the Kyustendil *Sanjakbey*, whereby those located in the extreme southern and southwestern regions dropped from its lands in the period after 1831 and through to the mid-1830s. Subsequently, the *sanjak* thus formed was reorganized into a new type of

connections performed by administrative units that were inexistent before. As a result, starting from the beginning of the second half of the 1830s, the Kyustendil *sanjak* was merged into the Üsküp (Turkish for Skopje, TN) *sanjak*. However, the tension between their governors forced the central government to proceed to the next type of measures of this nature, i.e., to the creation of new administrative units, whose centres were different from those of existing ones. As a result, the said merger disintegrated just a year after it had been established and the Kyustendil *Sanjak* was incorporated into the area of the newly established Niš Eyalet (Ivanov 1906, 149; Paskaleva 1973, 112-118; Draganova 1996, 5-12).

This administrative-territorial structure of the analysed area was legalized by some regulations adopted upon the 1839 Edict of Gülhane (Turkish: *Gülhane Hatt-ı Şerif*) (Arnaudov 1871, 1-7; Kolev 2006, 20; Georgieva 2008-2009, 18; Aygün 2010, 35). It was preserved unaltered for almost two decades when, upon the Crimean War, the area of this *sanjak* was enlarged with the accession of the Samokov area (Fig. 2). Given the absence of long-lasting ties between the units

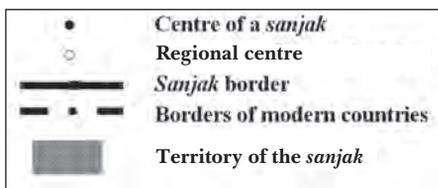
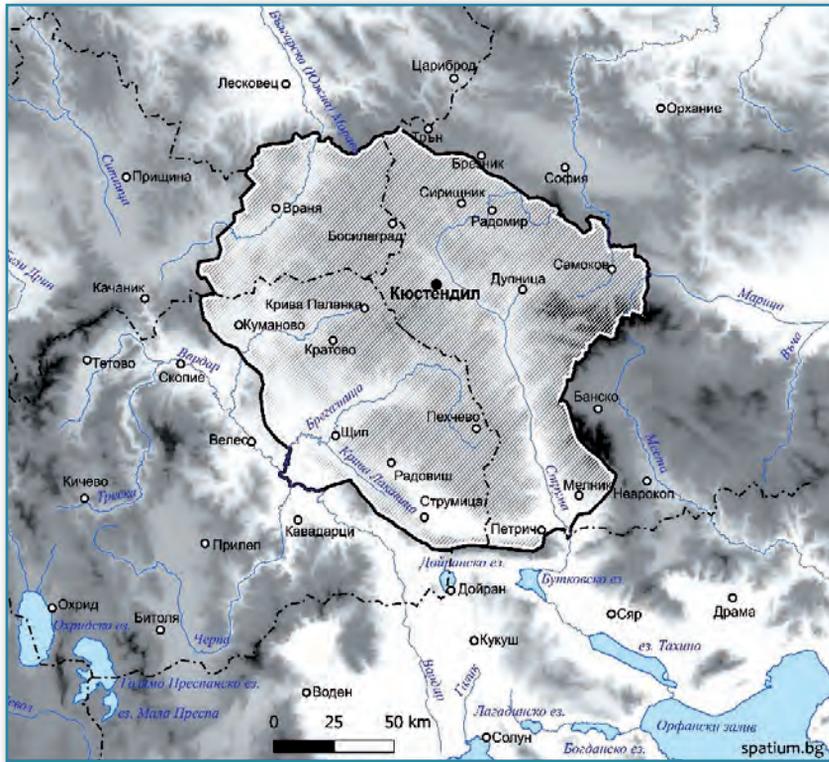


Fig. 2. The Kyustendil *sanjak* in mid-19th c.

that composed it, neither this administrative formation lasted long. It was only a few years later when it disintegrated and therefore, the pre-war situation was restored by the end of the 1850s and in the early 1860s. It survived unchanged until the dismantling of the Niš Eyalet in 1864 and the inclusion of its constituting parts into the Danube Vilayet. The idea of such reforms launched by the central government was to limit the power of their rulers by reducing the size of the administrative units and thus to ensure more effective control over their activities (Paskaleva 1973, 112-118; Tafrova 2010, 53-55; Ivanchev 1996, 26; Atanasov 2017, 48-52).

Kyustendil lost its role of a *sanjak* centre in the newly established Danube Vilayet. Being a constituent part of the Sofia *sanjak*, it remained a centre of a first-rate *kaza* of its (Mihov 1968, 66, 74, 88; Sharkov 1929, 67; Ivanov 1906, 271; Draganova 2005, 25-28; Kolev 2020) (Fig. 3). Being constituted of three *nahiyes* (subdivision of a *kaza*, TN), Polska, Piyanechka and Kraishtenska, this *kaza* was one of the largest in the Vilayet comprising 173 villages (Draganova 1996, 15;

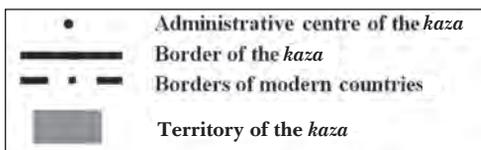
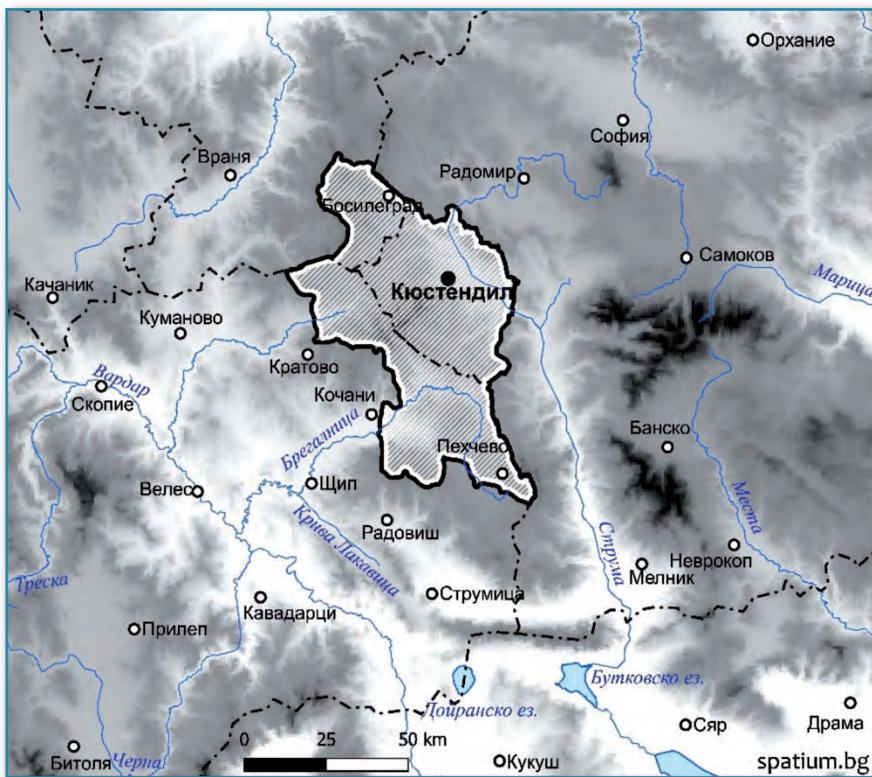


Fig. 3. The Kyustendil *kaza* in 19th c.

Yankova et al. 2004, 293). In the summer of 1876, the Kyustendil *kaza*, being an administrative unit within the Sofia *sanjak*, was bounded to the newly established Sofia Vilayet. However, this change proved short living, too. The Liberation came while Kyustendil *kaza* was a constituent part of the Edirne Vilayet, to which, along with the remaining lands of the Sofia *sanjak*, it was bounded to upon the disintegration of the Sofia Vilayet in 1877 (Muchinov 2015, 144).

The review of the administrative-territorial structure of Kyustendil and the area under its jurisdiction during the reference period testifies to the occurrence of significant changes, especially in terms of its area. At the end of the reference period, the area under the jurisdiction of Kyustendil narrowed significantly, which led to a considerable reduction in the influence and capabilities of its rulers. At the same time, its organization characterized by a sort of a specific flexibility and adaptability to changes allowed it to preserve the ties between the separated units and guaranteed a normal interaction between them.

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What was essential to the implementation of the administrative-territorial structure, which was quite specific for Kyustendil and its adjacent area and introduced as part of the state policy was the functioning of the local authorities.

Throughout the period prior to the reforms initiated by the 1830s, the governance of the Kyustendil *sanjak* was implemented by two relatively independent structures: 1) the military-administrative structure, and 2) the judiciary structure. If the third, i.e., the financial state structure is concerned, no independent agency existed that would function separately from the remaining structures within the *sanjak* administration. A separate unit in charge of financial activities whose head was the *Defterdar* (Turkish for 'bookkeeper', TN), was assigned directly by the central financial office, having only local offices on two levels: Eyalet and Vilayet. The heads of the individual structures were in charge of a variety of functions and were not subordinated to each other while performing mutual control (Georgieva 2016a, 177-180; Grachev 1990, 6; Safonov 2012, 121; Sereda 2009, 31).

The head of the Kyustendil *sanjak* was a *sanjakkbey* assigned by the *vali*, subject to the Sultan's express consent. In the initial centuries of the existence of this administrative unit, the local *sanjakkbey* had a status of the first among the others (*mir-miran*) *sanjakkbeys* in a vilayet, which was certified by a special deed and a standard with two horsetails (Ivanov 1906, 149). He was the military deputy in his ward commanding the army recruited in the province entrusted to him. At the same time, a *sanjakkbey* would also be in charge of some administrative functions by implementing Sultan's decisions in the region, organizing the collection of financial proceeds, defending the local population against wilfulness and violence (Georgieva 2016a, 177-180; Safonov 2012, 121; Kunt 2014, 30-36).

The following administrative offices were also under the direct supervision of the *sanjakkbey*: the office of the *sanjak* run by a secretary and having several scribes and copyists; the tax office headed by a special officer whose activities would be assisted by an assistant, a secretary, a clerk, an accountant and a committee that would take care of the proper distribution of taxes. This department

would also have dedicated divisions for the main types of taxes and having the relevant staff; an accounting office with the required number of accountants, treasurers and cashiers; a public buildings and roads service headed by a single technician who was assisted by several staff. This department would have a forestry usage office, a police office with assigned head officer and police officers; gendarmerie under the command of whose commander would be a company of cavalry and a company of infantry *zaptiyeh* (Turkish: 'gendarmerie', TN).

In the case of the larger sanjaks, such as Kyustendil's, the *sanjakkbey* would be assisted in his activity by the *subashi*, who would perform police functions, control the *sipahi*, monitor the public works in the region and would lead a part of the army subordinated to the *sanjakkbey* during military campaigns.

The governance of the second structure in the *sanjak*, the judiciary, was entrusted to the *kadi* (judge, TN). His main duties would be to apply the Sharia law in the administration of justice here. Furthermore, he would also be in charge of some other activities: tax collection monitoring, surveillance of the local market, drawing up all sorts of contracts, certification of loan contracts, etc. A *kadi* was entrusted with the duty of the implementation of central government's orders and of the actions of the other administrative offices (Sereda 2009, 31; Safonov 2012, 121; Kunt 2014, 30-36).

Under the leadership of the *kadi* would be the judiciary, which at the level of *sanjak* would be divided into divisions according to the nature of justice - commercial, criminal, religious, civil - each with its own chairman, secretary, members, clerks and the necessary support staff.

At the heart of this way of separating the authorities involved in the management of the *sanjak*, among other things, was the desire of the central government to exercise control over local governments, and the effectiveness of these actions would be boosted by the chances created for the representatives of the two separate structures to control each other.

This was the background of a part of the administrative reforms conducted upon the mid-1830s. It is a question of legalization through the issued legal regulations under the requirement to establish an administrative council for each *sanjak*, which, although headed by the *sanjakkbey*, was bound to guarantee representation in the governing structures of all sultan's subjects inhabiting the ward territory. The members of the administrative council would be of two types: members by right and selected members. The first group would include the *kadi*, the *mufti*, and the Orthodox bishop, the bookkeeper in chief and the office secretary, while the second type would be selected among the local Muslims and non-Muslims: two of each confessional group. The election principle applied to the election of some members of the administrative council, however limited in its basis, testifies to one of the directions in which the central government was focused on in its attempts to democratize local government: a trend that was gradually intensifying over time through the expansion of powers. of this governing body at the expense of the prerogatives of the *sanjakkbey* (Tafrova 2010, 53-55; Georgieva 2016a, 177-180; Grachev 1990, 6; Safonov 2012, 121; Kunt 2014, 30-36).

Furthermore, once Kyustendil was transformed into a *kaza* centre, some essential changes occurred in the structure of the government bodies present

here. The administrative authority was implemented by the local *kaymakam*, i.e., the *kaza* governor, whose activity was assisted by the servants at his office and by the *kaza* managing board. The *kaymakam* would be part of this council by rights and he was the one to chair it, also by rights, the council would include the *mufti*, the Metropolitan Archbishop and the secretary of the *kaza*, as well as four elected members - two Muslims and two non-Muslims, with the council's sittings being conducted twice a month. The *kaymakam* was in charge of the direction of the main administrative services needed for the *kaza* governance, i.e., tax, financial, customs, passport, police, health, telegraph and postal offices, the maintenance of roads and road facilities office, the sanitation and hygiene service, the credit institutions service, the forestry service, etc. (Lyubenov 1895, 781-784; Angelov 1900, 45; Ivanov 1906, 271; Georgieva 2016b, 136-140).

The judiciary of the *kaza* was in the hands of the local *kadi* and the judiciary council directed by him, which would hold sessions on a daily basis. At Court proceedings in cases where the Muslim confession was involved, two Muslims would constitute the council only, while in all other cases the council's members would be supplemented by two non-Muslims. The *kadi* was in charge of the local judiciary office and would control the activity of any institutions connected with it: police, tax authority, financial, etc. (Angelov 1900, 45; Ivanov 1906, 271).

Upon the reforms conducted in the 1830s, the administrative power was separated from the military power at a *kaza* level with the latter being exercised by a dedicated *kaza* troop commander. His duties would include the recruitment of the military service conscripts and, as needed, the summoning of the reservists who were inhabitants of the region he was in charge of. With insignificant exceptions (in 1861 and 1869), over the period when the Kyustendil *kaza* existed, its territory did not quarter any permanent military units (Angelov 1900, 45; Ivanov 1906, 149).

During that time, a major part of the local administrative offices would have their own rooms in the city *konak* ('official residence', TN). It was a large two-storey house located downtown, counting with over 20 rooms.

It becomes clear that most of the services operating during the times when Kyustendil was a *sanjak* centre were preserved in the city during the period when it was a capital of a *kaza* (Fig. 4). The list would include the offices needed for the *kaza* governance. During the times the city was a *kaza* capital however, there was a drastic reduction in the number of the administrative personnel here. In contrast with the former times when in a specific office belonging to the *sanjak* administration there used to be several departments with dozens of clerks, in the times of the *kaza* governance the administration was performed by one clerk only, which was a situation that would have a positive impact both in terms of improving the organization of the governance itself and through the reduction of the costs in the local budget. At the same time, putting limits to the need for such type of staff forced most of the specialized administrative personnel to leave the city, and the implementation of specific activities was supposed to be performed by officials who, despite of being able to read and write, would not have any special education. This led to a decline



Fig. 4. The central part of Kyustendil in 19th c. with some of the administrative and community buildings (Regional Historical Museum - Kyustendil, B, Archive Fund, inv. no. 174)³

in the quality of the administrative activities being carried out here and to an increase in the time required for their completion, which would generally deteriorate the administrative services provided to the local population.

The city neighbourhoods and the villages with over 20 houses would be administrated by two *muhtars* ('village heads', TN) and by a few *azas* (members of the local administrative council, TN) who were in charge of collecting the taxes and would implement the regional administrative orders and government regulations among the local population. The activities of this type of administration would be supported by municipal councils, usually differentiated on religious grounds. According to the rules of the Kyustendil Orthodox municipality from the early 1870s, the local municipal council would typically consist of 15 people who would be elected from among the various guilds in the city. It would meet on Sundays under the chair of the Metropolitan Archbishop and was supposed to discuss all issues related to the community, with quorum being mandatory for legitimate decisions: more than half in the presence of at least three quarters of the municipality members was needed to vote (Kolev 2006, 7-12). In the minor settlements across the *kaza*, all such activities

³ Lyubomir Zhelyazkov, to whom I would like to express my sincere gratitude, processed the photographs in this study.

were entrusted to one person only, the mayor, who would be elected from among the local dwellers.

The review of the organization and functioning of the existing local governing bodies in the region during the studied period imposes the finding that significant changes were taking place here. Although designed for the development and improvement of this type of governance, they were performed inconsistently, without the potential available for their implementation and therefore they failed to achieve the desired effect. Nevertheless, the reported emphasized continuity in the activity of the existing institutions here allowed their normal functioning and guaranteed the implementation of the state policy in the region.

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Summarizing the information about the administrative-territorial structure of Kyustendil and its adjacent areas during the Bulgarian National Revival, we can say that it is characterized by continuity, complexity and pronounced dominance of the centralized principle. Attempts at reform at the end of the reference period were timid and could not generally change its essence. In this form, the existing links between the individual territorial formations and the organization specific to their management were the basis for the social and economic processes taking place in the studied area.

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