

Introduction

In 1906, Homer Davenport, an American who had been deeply interested in the Arab horse for many years, planned a journey from the United States to Syria to obtain Arab mares and stallions of absolute purity of blood that he could trace as coming from the Anizah Bedouin, whose pure-bred horses had worldwide recognition. It was not, however, easy to obtain permission from the Ottoman authorities as the imperial government forbade the exportation of Arab horses. He appealed to President Theodore Roosevelt for help and was granted an endorsement letter, with which he applied to the Ottoman embassy and an *İrade* was issued by the Sultan permitting him to export ‘six or eight’ mares from the Ottoman Empire. Davenport immediately set off on his journey and arrived in Istanbul, from where he took the road for Syria. In Antioch, the vice-consulate assigned an interpreter to him and they departed for Aleppo where they were to meet Ahmed Hafız, an Anizah sheikh and the political and commercial agent of the tribe settled in the city for thirty years who was described by the governor of Aleppo ‘as the smartest and shrewdest Bedouin that the Ottoman Empire had ever known’.¹ Davenport’s intention was to finish his trip in Deir al-Zor on the Euphrates where he might be sure of purchasing horses from the Anizah themselves. Firstly, they visited the bazaar in Aleppo to buy ‘saddles and bridles, and horse trimmings which were used in the desert’. Hundreds of Bedouin were available in the town market for shopping. They also came across an Anizah tribesman in the bazaar who informed them that the Anizah were within ten hours’ ride of Aleppo. Shortly after that they fell in with another Anizah, who told them that Hajim Bey Ibn Mheid, the paramount sheikh of all Anizah tribes, was then in Aleppo paying a visit to Ahmed Hafız. The Bedouin offered to take them to Ahmed Hafız, which meant that they could buy

¹ Davenport, *My Quest*, 185.

their horses directly from the Anizah tribe itself. ‘It was no longer a question of going to Deyr [sic].’²

Ahmed Hafiz told them that Hajim Bey ‘had been his guest for ten days, but had gone the night before, back to his tribe, which was encamped at a distance of ten or twelve hours’ ride’. Prior to Davenport’s visit, Hafiz had been informed about the *Îrade* ‘from the Sultan of Turkey, and letters from the one Great Sheikh of all the Americ[a] tribes’, meaning President Roosevelt.³ Then, Ahmed Hafiz took them to the governor Nazım Pasha and, on their way, they came across the Anizah tribesmen who showed respect to Hafiz and kissed his hand in joy. The pasha presented Davenport with the best horse in the desert called ‘the Pride of the Desert’ gifted to him by Hajim Bey and the latter, in return, sent a cheque as a ‘present’ for 100 French pounds. Following that, Davenport and his translator started their trip in the desert to find the purest-bred of the Anizah horses accompanied by Ahmed Hafiz whose presence, according to Davenport, ‘was more than an army’ in terms of protection.⁴ It seems that it was possible for them to buy horses from the bazaar in Aleppo as the Anizah horses were also sold there, but the desert presumably contained the best quality, which might attract the traveller. They peacefully visited many Bedouin encampments between the vicinity of Aleppo and Deir al-Zor including the Seb’a, Gomussa and Fid’an, met their sheikhs, visited the *mutasarrif* of Deir al-Zor and the members of his administrative council together with some of the Anizah sheikhs and bought the best horses of different kinds from the Anizah sheikhs themselves. Hafiz bargained with all the sheikhs on behalf of his guests and persuaded them to consent to a reasonable price, which most likely comprised part of his mission. The sheikhs, including the paramount sheikh Hajim, put their seals on the pedigree of the horses they sold, which was very important as proof of the horses’ purity. When they reached the limits set by the Sultan, they returned to Aleppo and Davenport returned to the United States together with the horses he had bought.

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Davenport’s account sheds light on many aspects of the empire-nomads’ relations in the Arab lands during the modern era and challenges many theories produced about them. A senior Anizah

² Ibid., 79. ³ Ibid., 81. ⁴ Ibid., 94.

representative living in Aleppo and mediating the political and commercial deals of the tribe and tribesmen walking on the streets of the city may even be surprising for those scholars with an expertise in the Ottoman Arab Middle East. It is also striking that the Anizah's paramount sheikh visited Aleppo and stayed there for ten days because he was usually supposed not to have such sophisticated relations with the Ottoman officials. This account shows the strength of the nomadic ties with imperial authorities and the high-level interactions between the urban and the desert spaces, which undermine the prevailing theories that assume an eternal 'state-tribe' conflict and subordination of the tribal communities by the government during the Ottoman modernization. The story may also be interesting as it challenges the 'civilized-nomad' contrast which is supposed to shape the empire-city-tribe relations in the nineteenth century.

This account, however, is only a partial manifestation of the empire-tribe partnership that was established and ripened during the nineteenth century, which the present book analyses. Focusing on the making of this partnership together with its influence on tribal governance, this book analyses the emergence and evolution of the specific strategies and policies employed by the Ottoman Empire to govern, shape and control the Shammar and Anizah confederations in the nineteenth century dispersed across Anatolia, Syria, Mesopotamia, Hijaz and Najd, which resulted in their integration into the regional, imperial and global networks by protecting their tribal structures and the lands they used in the desert and the imperial domains. The key questions it explores are how the empire treated Bedouin tribes under its sovereignty during the imperial modernization initiative, how these tribes reacted to Ottoman policies throughout the Tanzimat, Hamidian and Young Turk periods and how they came to a point of compromise, which defined the empire-tribe relations in many regions for a long time and determined the ultimate outcome.

In the early 1840s, the Ottoman rulers launched a new imperial project – the Tanzimat reforms – to reassert their authority over their lands and subjects which by all accounts produced new socio-political conditions. Their primary purpose was to establish a harmonious centralized bureaucracy to circumscribe the influence wielded by local, secondary and autonomous actors. Collecting taxes regularly and providing security to the imperial lands were considered an indispensable precondition of the maintenance of a centralized state. The nomads

constituted a serious problem for the realization of these aims in many parts of the Arab countryside as they adopted a mobile lifestyle which made their control very difficult. In addition, they collected *khuwwa* taxes (the protection money paid to a tribal chief to shelter the peasants and caravans against other nomads and members of the protecting party) from the peasants of the empire and created a security problem due to their attacks on the caravans and settled regions, as well as fighting between themselves.

The Anizah and Shammar groups maintained a dominance in the great majority of the Syrian and Iraqi countryside and desert, and played an influential role in the social life and governance in the region from the end of the eighteenth century. According to one scholar, ‘until the 1920s about two-thirds of what was to become the Syrian Republic was controlled by Bedouin, with the camel herders of the ‘Anaza [sic] confederation as a hegemonic force among them’.⁵ The nomadic domination over the Iraqi countryside and desert regions was no less in Syria.⁶ Studying their relations with the Ottoman Empire in the modern age will therefore fill an important gap in the socio-political history of the Middle East, and will make a meaningful contribution to the social history of the region as well as the history of the nineteenth century.

This book argues that the late Ottoman period witnessed an unprecedented interaction of state and nomadic groups which evolved from conflict to reconciliation, with a focus on the Anizah and Shammar, the two largest nomadic confederations of the Arab east. The more the empire modernized, consolidated and expanded itself, the further both parties had to interact and negotiate for a cooperated co-existence. During the Tanzimat period the degree of cooperation was lower and not systematized, and state-tribe rivalry, tribal resistance and the imperial ambitions to dominate, subjugate and pacify the nomadic communities determined the nature of relations between the state and tribes in many places. With respect to their relatively late arrival in the region from the Najd and removing many peasants from their lands and villages to use these areas as pastures to their animals, the imperial authorities saw them as ‘alien’ to the region, considering the nomadic groups violators of regional order and obstacles to the proper taxation

⁵ Büssow, ‘Bedouin Historiography’, 163.

⁶ For a detailed description of the Shammar and Anizah branches in the Ottoman Iraqi provinces, see: Mehmed Hurşid Paşa, *Seyahatname*.

of the eligible subjects living in the regions due to their exaction of *khuwwa* and occasional raids. The nomads' domination itself constituted a question for the determined Ottoman modernizers. The nomads, on the other hand, considered the imperial expansion as detrimental to their interests as they grazed their animals in many areas in the Syrian and Iraqi countryside, and *khuwwa* that they collected from the peasants, agricultural tribes and caravans was a substantial source of income for them. Conflict between the two parties thus maintained itself for about three decades although short-term compromises were reached and tribes came with their flocks to the vicinity of the towns under the imperial control. The frequent violation of the compromise by both sides, however, prevented a final solution to the question. By the 1870s, contributed to by the increase of the Ottoman deployments in the desert frontier and the expansionist policies towards the desert, the systemic change was completed and collaboration between tribal chiefs and state authorities minimized the hostilities. Both sides had gradually reconciled on their rights, responsibilities and duties regarding grazing lands, city markets, *khuwwa*, tax collection, justice and regional security.

This should not, however, be considered as a unidirectional process which resulted in the extension and reinforcement of government authority against the tribal domination in the desert and other areas where the nomads frequented. The process was more complicated than a mere extension of state authority into the tribal areas and frontier regions. In the long run, the tribes also benefited from the process by at least making their temporary achievements – that stemmed from a regional power vacuum from late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century – an established and compromised situation. First of all, only a small, and perhaps negligible, amount of the pasture lands could be colonized by the empire as agricultural lands: besides recognizing the tribal hierarchy and sheikhly authority in the desert and among the tribal societies of their fellow tribesmen in the regions such as Deir al-Zor and Hawran where the imperial bureaucratic rule was extended, the Ottoman government had to acknowledge and guarantee many of the nomadic privileges in the imperially dominated regions such as Aleppo, Hama, Damascus, Urfa, Mosul and Baghdad where a more or less uninterrupted Ottoman rule had continued for more than three centuries. The great majority of the 'agricultural lands' abandoned due to the Anizah and Shammar migrations at the end of the eighteenth and

early nineteenth century had to be presented to the tribesmen to be used as grazing lands by their animals. For the sake of imperial recognition and protection, in some regions, the allocated tribal pastures were also secured from attacks and occupation by rival tribes.

In addition, the tribes were not exposed to the social engineering projects of the modern state formation: while skilfully negotiated and reconciled with the Ottoman government, sheikhs successfully protected the tribal structure, maintained the tribal hierarchy and solidarity, and did not open the way for the conversion of their fellow tribesmen into ordinary imperial subjects as initially envisaged by the Tanzimat statesmen which would supposedly enable the empire to control tribesmen and desert space in a stricter and ‘more effective’ way. As a newly emerging modern state, the Ottomans gave concessions to the tribes from their statehood by exempting them from their duties against the state such as soldiering, and by being flexible about the duties that the tribes had theoretically to perform as the subjects of the sultan. Similarly, they did not conduct a census among the tribes and did not know the number of tribal animals. However, some Ottoman bureaucrats believed that, as in the example of the Cossacks of the Russian Empire, putting all these policies into practice and transforming the nomads into Ottomans would obviously increase the imperial human and material resources in the process of modernization and would make the modernization project more effective.⁷

An important question here is whether not conscripting the nomads or taking censuses of human and animal populations, and not levying all the taxes they normally would have was worth the effort and expense as long as the tribes remained mobile and hard to pin down in those expanses of desert. To put it differently, the question that arises here is about the authenticity of the concessions given by the empire. Given the problems of the Ottoman modernization and post-Ottoman experiences, it seems that the proper taxation of the nomads, their education in the Ottoman institutions and conscription to the Ottoman army would definitely be worth it if the imperial authorities could do it. The increase in number of the Ottoman soldiers by the addition of the nomads – as achieved by Glubb Pasha during the

⁷ For some thoughts by Subhi Pasha, a prominent Tanzimat statesman, on how the nomads’ contribution would increase Ottoman power as in the example of the Russian Cossacks, see: FO 195/995, Damascus, 24 June 1872.

creation of modern Jordan – would not only multiply the effectiveness of the Ottoman army in the region, but also exponentially increase the tax amount collected from the whole region as it would enhance the capability of control for the government and minimize tax evasion. During the 1930s, Glubb Pasha both respected the tribal structure and established the strongest army in the region by conscripting the tribesmen into the Jordanian Army.⁸

It was such ‘mutually concessive’ attitudes that determined the state-tribe relations in the Arab Middle East, with both sides having to give concessions as well as taking advantage of them. Therefore, the present study identifies the state-tribe relations as a ‘partnership’ and argues that it became possible due to a constant ‘politics of negotiation’ by both sides over tribal responsibilities to the state and the government’s concessions to be given to the tribes. The domination of one side over another (the state’s subjugation, for instance, of the Anizah and Shammar) could not be possible. A sense of practical equality – although it was not an official and absolute equality – frequently determined the relations as tribal consent usually remained a precondition of successful government policies regarding the desert and its frontier. Government approval, on the other hand, enabled the nomads to sustain their mobility within the areas practically controlled by the imperial authority. A certain trust had been established between the two parties after the early 1870s as the tribes did not fear government troops’ attacks and local officials were usually confident about tribal raids. The Ottoman government could not act against the nomads as they did against the other urban and peasant societies due to the tribal resistance. Therefore, the relations between the two parties were like ‘mutual recognition’. The two parties respected each other’s interests and, in this way, a reconciliation was arrived at. They also cooperated with each other for the establishment of regional peace which constituted an important aspect of the partnership. The key role here was played by the sheikhs and this is why I describe them as partners of the empire.

To sum up, the Ottomans were compelled to adopt a conciliatory attitude to ‘solve the tribal question’ and to incorporate them into the imperial system of governance as much as possible. There were further

⁸ For an analysis on the creation of the Arab legion, see: Glubb, *The Story of the Arab Legion*.

local, imperial and global reasons for the empire to shift from ‘coercion’ to ‘negotiation’. Locally, the new settlement undertakings (Chapter 2) and newly established administrations in the desert frontier such as Deir al-Zor, Karak, Ma’an and Hawran (Chapters 3 and 4) increased the necessity of developing good relations with the nomads. Imperially and globally, the Tanzimat ideology was abandoned and a more pragmatic policy was adopted due to changes in the global realm during the reign of Abdulhamid II: the Ottomans no longer had friendly relations with Great Britain due to the latter’s occupation of Egypt and its increasing presence in the Persian Gulf which were interpreted by the Ottoman policymakers as a direct threat to their existence in the Arab lands. Therefore, during the Hamidian era, it became a necessity to please the autonomous power-holders in the region such as the nomads, not to cause their rapprochement with other imperial powers. A new notion of solidarity around the image of the caliph based on the idea of Muslim unity was developed and served the state-tribe rapprochement.

The tribes also found the reconciliation beneficial as it would guarantee a secure access for them to the imperial lands, which was crucial for the maintenance of a mobile livelihood, and would protect the pastures allocated to them from being occupied by their rivals. The expansion of the Ottoman rule into Deir al-Zor and the southernmost area of the province of Syria, and fortification of the desert frontier and caravan routes by the imperial army made reconciliation the most reasonable option for the tribes as raiding the villages was no longer a gainful and unriskey method. The maintenance of chaos would presumably have compelled the imperial authorities to make further military investments in the desert and its frontiers which would make their approach to the settled areas almost impossible.

In this regard, the present study examines the changes made to the initial imperial project to forcibly control the Bedouin, and the subsequent shift in imperial tribal policy from the ‘coercive’ ideal to a more ‘conciliatory’ practice by questioning state-centric paradigms regarding the nature of the Ottoman modernization, challenging the theses on state-society/tribe relations and discussing the results of the expansion of state authority in the desert and countryside. As such, it examines the negotiated compromise that emerged from the empire-tribe relationship, and the impact of such an accommodation on government measures such as taxation, settlement, justice, security and appointment of

the tribal sheikhs. The state-tribe interaction not only affected government policies in the desert and countryside but shaped the whole Ottoman modernization enterprise and order of things in the Arab lands. The failure of the imperial attempts to colonize the desert space by either including or excluding the Shammar and Anizah from the Syrian and Iraqi pastures changed the direction of the Ottoman reforms as the imperial treasury was deprived of a substantial revenue source and human resource. This book therefore makes a very meaningful contribution to extend the scholarly perspectives trying to understand the nature of the Middle Eastern social and political transformations from the Ottoman times to the contemporary era by focusing on the negotiating aspect of the imperial policies due to the very existence of the Bedouin nomads.

Empires and Nomads: A Comparative Global-Imperial Perspective

The Ottomans were not the only imperial power in the modern age to attempt to impose its will on nomadic peoples. Other empires with significant nomadic populations embraced a *mission civilisatrice* ideology, forcibly displacing these groups through expansion and settlement policies. In the early nineteenth century, nomadic communities subsisted by breeding and farming animal flocks that stretched thousands of miles from ‘the southern boundary of the Scandinavian-Siberian-Manchurian forest belt to the Himalayas, the highlands of Iran and Anatolia, and the Arabian Peninsula’. Nomads also occupied lands from the Volga, across swathes of Russia, almost as far as the gates to Beijing.⁹ The bureaucratization of empires and improvements in the techniques of coercion opened the way to more effective control over nomads and their lifestyle. Mobile populations with tribal structures, living in rural and desert areas with a strong sense of group solidarity, showed stiff opposition to the imperial consolidation of power, and often compelled imperial authorities to rethink their methods. The tribes supported resistance movements and resisted the centralization efforts of colonial and traditional empires as well as imperial expansion into ‘waste lands’ to solve critical issues of burgeoning populations and bureaucratic expansion. Both these posed a fundamental threat to

⁹ Osterhammel, *Transformation*, 356.

nomadic lifestyle as they co-opted land used by nomads for pasture of their animals. Force was the primary tool used by empires and enabled them to penetrate the tribal regions, but the tribes maximized the advantage of their mobility, easily escaping from the imperial offensives into the desert and mountainous areas and thereby resisting subjugation. The empires reacted by employing more effective methods. Some developed sophisticated techniques of inclusion and compromise such as negotiation, bargaining and mediation. As such, a ‘middle ground’ was established, ‘in which negotiated compromises, temporary equilibria, and intertwined economic interests – sometimes also cultural or biological “hybridity” – developed between “natives” and “newcomers”.’¹⁰ Through these, the authorities sought to prevent tribal groups from violating the imperial order and to integrate them into the imperial system.

The British and Ottoman rulers conformed to this type as they usually adopted a policy of ‘negotiated conciliation’ towards the tribal groups. The British Empire’s policies towards Indian tribes exemplify such an approach; colonial authorities respected tribal autonomy and attempted to win them over. As a result, tribes along India’s north-west frontier did not feel threatened for a long time after the conquest of Punjab by the British troops. The imperial authorities adopted a policy of ‘Masterly Inactivity’, founded on respect for tribal lifestyle and autonomy. The colonial government forbade their civil and military officers to travel beyond the foothills into the mountains or passes where the tribal zones began, so as not to threaten the tribesmen. The concerns of the Pathans – the name given to the tribal society of the region – were always carefully addressed, and the British adopted a conciliatory stance in their dealings with them. They even offered a subsidy to some of the tribes in return for their cooperation.

The British-Russian struggle in the Great Game, however, compelled the British to embrace a forward policy in the 1890s that required the Indian government to move into the Pathans’ territory. The Indian government signed an agreement with the amir of Afghanistan in 1897, determining their respective spheres of influence along a line that cut through the lands inhabited by the Pathans and neighbouring Balochistan. The two parties neglected to include the tribes in discussions, provoking a large-scale tribal revolt. Although the motivation

¹⁰ Ibid., 323.