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Negotiating the Empire in the Middle East: Ottomans and Arab Nomads in the Modern Era, 1840-1914,

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Although the Ottoman-tribal relations has been undermined to the “state-tribe” conflict, it is a sophisticated relation. Çiçek focuses on the Ottoman-tribal relations by shedding light on how the Ottoman governments treated, reacted, and negotiated with the Anizah and Shammar tribes. (These tribes were wide across in the vast geography from the south of Mardin and Urfa in Turkey to the large part of the today’s north and central Syria and Iraq.) Çiçek’s book consists of seven chapters and comprehensively covers the Ottoman state tribal relations from the beginnings of the Tanzimat to the Second Constitutional period (1840-1914). The author examines mainly the forced settlements of the tribes by the state, taxation policies of state and non-state actors, the increasing governmental control of territory and the tribes’ responses to it, the Tanzimat’s centralising and negotiation policies, collaboration, and partnerships of governments with the tribes from the 1870s onwards. Contrary to common belief, Çiçek emphasizes that the relations were not simply dictated by the Ottoman central rule to the tribes, rather it was mostly a negotiation process between the two parties. Çiçek has used the Ottoman, British, French and local Arabic sources, and revealed the changing natures of the policies in different times and places.

The Tanzimat Period (1839-1876) provided a unique opportunity for the Ottoman state to execute policies that infringed upon the autonomy of the Anizah and Shammar tribes. Some of the main objectives of the Tanzimat reforms were to “centralize the state bureaucracy”, “collect taxes regularly” and “provide security” (p. 3). It took several decades to implement these policies and to establish the more mutual relations with the tribes. Before the 1870s “collaboration between tribal chiefs and state authorities minimized hostilities” and both sides “reconciled” their rights on the “land disputes, tax collection, security and justice” (p. 5). Çiçek indicates that the relations between the state and the tribes were not “unidirectional” they were mostly *multidirectional* from collecting the land taxes and security problems. According to the author, the “partnership” may also an appropriate term to use regarding the relationship between the state and the tribes since both sides were part of the “politics of negotiation” by reconciling their rights with their

partners. The sheikhs as tribal leaders were seen as the “partners of the empire” who were playing a significant role to continue the reconciliation process (p. 7).

It can be argued that the Ottoman government did not force the tribes to obey all the Tanzimat legislations. The tribes were “exempted” from some of the duties required by the state such as military service, participating in the censuses and declaring their animal population (p. 6). Particularly, under the reign of the Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909), more pragmatic or flexible policies were followed. Negotiation replaced the “coercion” due to the change in the political climate and derogation of the British-Ottoman relations because of the seizure of Egypt. These circumstances forced the Ottomans to follow the negotiation-oriented policies for the Anizah and Shammar tribes. (p. 8)

The current literature still lacks the details of the tribal and state relations, something which is highlighted in this work. It shows how negotiation between the state and the tribes did not make the tribes impotent but was a balancing act from both sides as conditions rapidly started to evolve during the reformation period. The Ottomans were not a unique empire who attempted to maintain their relations with the nomads within their domains. In the 19th century, many colonial and traditional empires followed such policies to increase their authority to facilitate a process of direct rule. According to Çiçek the French empire and Russians violence and aimed to impose their policy on the tribes by compelling them to admit to their authority, while other empires “the British and the Ottomans” followed policies to establish a middle way rather than using excessive pressure by using “hybrid” approaches (p. 10).

The Anizah and Shammar tribes were the dominant groups in Syria and Iraq’s social and economic life from the end of the 18th century until the first decades of the 20th century. Their relations with the state would help us to better understand the socio-political and economic life of this part of the Middle East during the “long 19th century”. The Anizah and Shammar were one of the great barriers for the Ottomans to imply the Tanzimat reforms in the Arab lands. By preventing the Tanzimat reforms the nomads not only circumvented the Ottoman strict control but also its taxation policy and military conscription. The Ottomans aimed to keep the Bedouins outside the residential places by organizing military units, employing them to the borders of the Bedouins settlement, the Ottomans would implement Tanzimat legislations and succeed in its modernization policy in the region. However, the situation ended up to contrary of what the state wished, and the Ottomans accepted their authority (p. 66-67). The Anizah and Shammar

gained large sums from the villagers, therefore they would even take the risk to clash with the Ottoman government not to lose the right to collect taxes. The villagers who could not afford to pay the *Khuwwa* to the Bedouins abandoned their villages and were forced to move to other places within the domains. This led to a loss both in the agricultural production and tax collection for the Ottoman state (p. 69-70). Between 1840-1870 under these conditions the Ottoman state aimed to implement a new project to increase its income and make the agricultural production more sustainable. It encouraged the villagers for a sedentary life by protecting them against the attacks of the Anizah and Shammar (p. 72).

In the Deir al-Zor region, on the other hand, the Ottoman Empire aimed to implement strict Tanzimat reforms. However, during the process it was understood by the imperial government that the “idealist modernism” did not work in the region, resulting in the Ottomans using a more pragmatic method to deal with the Anizah and Shammar (p. 99-101). The Ottomans needed to change their modernization policy towards the branches of the Anizahs in Deir al-Zor and the Aleppo region and followed a pragmatic policy and negotiations due to increasing of British influence and authority in the region and the Ottoman war with Russia in 1877-78 (p. 119). It demonstrates that the changes in the Ottoman-tribal relationship was not only related to an internal policy, but also it was affected by the regional and global changes and power struggles between the Ottomans and the Great Powers. The Ottomans particularly under the reign of the Abdulhamid II enhanced the idea of Islamic unity and followed the policy to improve the partnerships with the tribes (p. 181).

It is also important to mention a shift in policy during the reign of Abdulhamid II's which focused on strengthening relations between the empire and the tribes. To have the absolute support of the tribes and “to prevent their collaboration” with the Great Powers Abdulhamid recognized their local autonomy and accepted them as provincial powers. This policy was also supported by the increasing trade permission by the state for the Bedouins between their territory and urban centres. This policy also changed the Bedouin-state relations since the Bedouins became animal providers for the empire itself and for export (p. 129).

To prevent the weakening of Ottoman authority and influence in the region, from the 1870s onwards the imperial strategy comprehensively changed from forceful settlement, modernization and Ottomanization of the tribes to the collaboration and recognition of the tribes and sheiks as partners (p. 200). After the fall of Abdulhamid II, the Young Turk ideology attempted to establish a strong

centralized state. Therefore, they aimed to receive total loyalty from the tribes and create total state control over them from taxation to conscription. However, the Ottoman state did not have adequate facilities and capacities to actualize its aim. Therefore, the efforts to modernize the tribes and impose Ottoman law in the modern age was a failure. Instead, the Bedouins continued to follow their traditional tribal law and Islamic law.

It can be said that the book comprehensively demonstrates that the Ottoman policy has been changed regarding the tribes from forcing them to accept the Tanzimat order and become loyal Ottoman subjects to the negotiating partners of the empire. From 1840s to the 1870s the Ottoman policy was aimed to implement in forcefully, however, from the 1870s onwards the Ottoman policy due to the increasing British and Russian interest in the region, Ottoman recognition of the unsuccessful attempts of the Tanzimat order on the tribes, makes the Ottoman rulers to understand that negotiation and partnerships with the tribes and their sheikhs were the only feasible policy regarding the region. By using the several archival and local sources and analysing the tribal-state relations Çiçek demonstrates that the Ottomans implemented more collaborative and negotiation centred policies at the end of the 19th century instead of coercing the tribes to accept its demands. Çiçek's book fills a gap by exhibiting how the Ottomans accepted pragmatic and multidirectional policies to manage the complex relations between the tribes and the state.

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