

AŞİRET MEKTEBİ VE ÖZELLİKLERİ

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Özet: Sultan II. Abdülhamit tarafından, azınlık aşiret ve kabile çocuklarının daha geniş bir politikanın parçası olarak Osmanlı Devleti'ne bağlılıklarının artırılması amacıyla ve devleti daha da güçlendirebilmek için açılmış olan Aşiret Mektepleri devletin "tartışmalı" reformlarından biri olarak tanımlanabilir.

Her ne kadar bu program (okullar) 15 yıl gibi (1892-1907) kısa bir süreliğine devam etmiş olsa da, özellikle faaliyet gösterdiği dönem için eşsiz bir durum arzietmekte ve akademik analiz gerektirmektedir.

Bu makale bu okulların ne zaman, nerede ve niçin faaliyet gösterdiklerini açıklayarak bunların öğrencilerine dini eğitim ve Türkçe öğretimine dayanan programlarının aşiretler üzerindeki etkilerini inceleyerek bu okulların iddia edildiği gibi planlanmış bir sosyal mühendislik sürecinin ürünü olup olmadıklarını analiz etmeyi ummaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aşiret Mektepleri, Aşiret Mekteb-iHümayun, Kabile Mektepleri, Osmanlı Aşiret Mektepleri, Osmanlı Devleti'nin Aşiret Mektepleri.

Aşiret Mektebi And The Impacts

Abstract: The AşiretMekteb-iHümayun, or Imperial School for Tribes instituted by Sultan Abdülhamid II in the Ottoman era which sought to integrate tribal minorities as part of a broader policy to strengthen allegiance to the Ottoman State and to make it more powerful can generally be described as one of the "controversial" reforms of the state.

Even though this program (schools) was short-lived spanning a period of 15 years (1892 -1907), it still presents itself as a unique historical piece especially to its time and therefore needs to be academically analyzed.

This paper analyzes the where, why and when questions relating to this program such as the curriculum which was heavily based on the teaching of religion and the strong emphasis on students learning the Turkish language, assess the impact of it on the tribes as well as deliberate on it as to whether it can be described as a social engineering process.

Key words: Aşiret Schools, AşiretMekteb-iHümayun, Tribal Schools, Ottoman Aşiret Schools, Tribal Schools of the Ottoman State.

In the sixteenth (16th) and seventeenth (17th) centuries, the general Ottoman course of action on the running of fringe areas and tribal units of the Empire was by and large actually similar to that predominant in Kurdistan. The Ottoman organization in the provinces dominated by the Arabs, for instance, validates the fact that the state supported the local personages, with the hope of benefiting from their recognized status in their respective region. Fascinatingly, while the Ottoman statesman still enforced the *iltizam* system of tax farming which in a more general sense led to greater self-government, the *dirlik* system was rather introduced into the region of Kurdistan and it must be noted that, this system favors a more centralized control of activities¹.

The fact that, the Kurdish personages did get help in administering the *dirlik* system, point to the fact that the Ottomans were really cautious in observing the helm of affairs of the Kurdish in this period (the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). On the other hand, it is a severe inaccuracy to contemplate that the Kurds were absolutely passive in their dealings with the state. All the way through history, Kurdish tribes had existed in the fringes of resilient empires and these factually include the Byzantine and Sasanian, and as a result of this developed their expertise in dealing with these neighboring states.

During this period, the confrontation between the Ottoman and the Safavid made the Kurds recognized their status for these two powerful empires. The Kurds therefore devised a strategy to benefit their existence. Swapping their allegiance demonstrated to be the most productive negotiating supremacy for the Kurds and the foundation for their freedoms. Unquestionably, the Kurds did really contributed immensely to the process of change and therefore were not merely passive partners in the formation of their tribes².

Nevertheless, the inner forces at work in the Kurdish social order and their support to the course of social revolution are outside the range of this article. It must be emphasized that, in examining the impact of the state as an outer element in determining and restructuring the tribal configuration, it can be argued that, the Ottoman empire, which can loosely be likened to a state, in this period proves undoubtedly how a comparatively sturdier state can become vigorously part and parcel in and chiefly in charge of the restructuring of tribal entities³.

¹ Hakan Ozoglu, 1996, State-Tribe Relations: Kurdish Tribalism in the 16th- and 17th-Century Ottoman Empire, British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 23, No. 1 (May, 1996), pp. 25

² Ibid. p.26

³ Ibid. p.27

The Ottomans, during this period with respect to the above mentioned situation, for instance that of the Kurds swinging their loyalties became extremely distrustful of the tribes which were under their control. Representatives in the provinces as well as the capitals were regular in their usage of reproachful portrayals of these tribes, whom they saw as “submerged in ignorance” and “of wild and uncivilized behavior”⁴.

A review of Ottoman documents establish strongly the fact that, the state saw tribes as demonstrating a more vigorous danger to the empire’s commercial well-being rather than simply trying to evade tax. The documents of this empire, as stated by Eugene L. Rogan (1996) specifically reveal that, these tribes proved to be a liability to the treasury in three main ways:

“Raids against cultivators and townsmen reduced producers’ ability to pay taxes; fear of raids diminished economic productivity by reducing the area under cultivation and restricting trade; and the cost of providing security forces to deter raiding was high, while such forces were only intermittently successful against the more mobile tribes”⁵.

The Ottoman Empire thus sought to rectify these problems by changing the nature and make up of these tribes and this was mainly in the manner of settling them on their apportioned land and to work hard in the form of producing thereby contributing to the revenue of the state instead of the other way round.

Previous Ottoman rulers wanted to accomplish this through the means of involuntary settlement, which was met with mixed outcomes. It is generally argued that, the idea of ruling the tribes successfully by winning their loyalties came under Abdülhamid II. This idea was mainly to try and foster loyalty to the empire and hence the creation of an imperial school for tribes should thus be seen against a context of institutions and creativities to foster tribal commitment to the Ottoman Empire.⁶

Sultan Abdülhamid II is commonly accredited for conceiving the idea of the Asiret Mek-tebi which is generally extrapolated from the above point. It is strong from the written proof that this sultan had great peculiar interest in this tribal school. By instruction, the sultan was known as the patron and symbolic administrator of the school. This is evident from the enormous documents recounting the day-to-day undertakings of the school which

⁴ Source: Eugene L. Rogan(1996), Asiret Mektebi: Abdulhamid II’s School for Tribes (1892-1907) International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Feb., 1996), pp.84

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

was basically bounded for the Palace of Yildiz. Directives were given by the Sultan to one of his aides-de-camp, Osman Nuri Pasa, to prepare a document which will set sailing the establishment of this tribal school. This document was prepared in accordance with the instruction and was submitted on the 21st of June 1892. On 6th of July, the prime minister assigned the Ministry in charge of Education to make the needed arrangements for inauguration this school.⁷

Instructions were sent to the provincial councils to recruit suitable would be students. From this point, everybody was convinced that the plan will definitely become a reality and therefore activities such as the appointment of staff and instructors, the drafting of the course plan and the rules and regulations the will be guiding the conduct of activities in the school and as well as the locating the appropriate location were hurriedly executed. Everything was supposed to be in order under a limited period of three months, as the main intent of the palace was to open this school on 4th of October 1892 which symbolically and significantly represents the birthday of the prophet. This plan actually materialized as the doors of this school was opened on this day.⁸

Owning to the symbolic nature of this day and the fact that this inaugural ceremony was going to be covered by the press, the Sultan sought to capitalize on this day to make his agenda clear and also to get to the majority of people as possible. A simple set of rules were drafted and a program of study was designed for the initial two years but the whole idea was that, the years of study of this school will ultimately be five years. This idea was generally accepted by the Council of Ministers during the end of July and therefore letters stipulating this anticipated school were dispatched as per directives to the authorities of the provinces that were the main target for recruitment into this school. These provinces as cited by Eugene L. Rogan (1996) were mainly in Libya (Trablus-garb, Bingazi), Syria (Suriye, Haleb, Zor, Kudiis-i Serif), Anatolia (Diyarbakir), Arabia (Yemen, Hicaz) and Iraq (Baghdad, Basra, Mosul).⁹

The Asiret Mektebi or tribal schools cannot be described a charitable institute intended to train the disadvantaged but rather a political apparatus to advance tribal allegiance. This working notion which was obvious in the communication with the provincial authorities was that the whole tribesmen would have to follow their sheikhs in their freshly nurtured allegiance to

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. p.91

⁹ Ibid. p.86

the Ottoman Empire. The standards for recruiting students were plainly demarcated: According to Rogan (1996), Article 4 of the principles for student recruitment stated that, only the children which are “*descendants of the most respected and treasured families*” should really be selected. This is due to the fact, after graduation, as has already been stated, these students are supposed to come back to their provinces to mobilize support in the form of allegiance to the Ottoman state.¹⁰

One of the main challenges which the administrators of the school faced was to formulate a set of courses over a five year period for students who did not speak any Turkish language at all. Students were projected to learn Ottoman Turkish and classical Arabic and to become master of it. They were also given education of Persian and French which lasted for two and three years respectively. In addition to this curriculum were also the teaching of arithmetic, history and geography and finally Science of Islam. With the hope of preparing the students for higher studies in the military or the civil service, they were given technical training in their final year.¹¹

With respect to the conditions that prevailed in these schools and the day-to-day activities of the students, it must be emphasized that, their contact with the external world was rigorously controlled. Classes were conducted six days in a week with the exception of Fridays which were occupied with a visit to the mosque for prayers basically in the afternoon and later a school assemblage, where the principal evaluates the development of each student.¹²

The exact reasons that led to the closure of the school in February 1907 cannot readily be ascertained as there are different schools of thought relating to it. For instance, while some argues that, the school was closed due to the rebellion of its students apparently due to reasons such as discontent with the general practices of the institution, others argue that, the inability of the authorities in the provinces to recruit the “*suitable*” students for the school as families were unwilling to let go their children led to the closure of the school. But even though the school was short lived, it can generally be argued that, it lived to serve its purpose as majority of the students graduated and went on to hold important public positions where they can foster and draw allegiance of their tribesmen to the Ottoman state. For instance, out of the estimated eighty-students admitted in the first year of the school, forty-five of them graduated and went on to hold reputable positions in the military and civil service such as that of Mehmed Hamza, a Kurd who came from

¹⁰ Ibid. p.87

¹¹ Ibid. p.92

¹² Ibid. p.95

Van. He had a successful career as he was elected to the ottoman parliament in 1912, became district governor in 1914 and was appointed as the governor of the sub-province of Muntefik in 1917.¹³

In fine, as it has been analyzed above, the Asiret Mektebi or tribal schools, even though it did not last for a very long time serve it purpose, the purpose of training students who will then be dispatched to the various provinces, through the holding of influential positions, draw loyalty for the Ottoman empire which was on the brink of losing its sphere of control through the deterioration of the allegiance of its provinces, can be described as a “social engineering” process. The basic assumption of a social engineering process is the decision to influence the behavior and culture of a person or a group of people for the gain of the “perpetrator”. Since this process is negatively connoted as a “cunning” strategy without the foreknowledge of the person or people targeted, hence the usage of the term “perpetrator”. Social engineering processes are noted to impact heavily on societies that go through it with respect to the “infiltration” and “changing” of the basic social and cultural order such as language, religion, etc., and therefore, this can be argued to have happened in the tribes where students were recruited.

¹³ Ibid. p.99