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DergiPark

Çiçek, M. Talha. *Negotiating Empire in the Middle East: Ottomans and Arab Nomads in the Modern Era, 1840-1914.*

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AHMAD AMARA*

ABSTRACT

M. Talha Çiçek's *Negotiating Empire in the Middle East* discusses the changing relationships between the Ottoman imperial administration and the Shammar and the Anizah tribal confederations, in the regions of today's Iraq, Syria, Arabia, and Jordan, between the Tanzimat Era and the WWI. The book is an essential addition filling several scholarly gaps in the writing of the Ottoman Middle East's social history, the history of the Tanzimat Reforms across the Empire, and that of the Arab Tribal communities, commonly known today as the Bedouin communities.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, Arab Nomads, Middle East, Tanzimat, Tribal Societies.

ÖZ

M. Talha Çiçek'in N*egotiating Empire in the Middle East* isimli kitabı, Tanzimat ile Birinci Dünya Savaşı arasındaki dönemde, günümüz Irak, Suriye, Arabistan ve Ürdün bölgelerinde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu yönetimi ile Şammar ve Anizah aşiret konfederasyonları arasındaki değişken ilişkileri tartışmaktadır. Eser, Osmanlı Ortadoğu'sunun sosyal tarihinin Tanzimat Reformların ve genellikle Bedevi toplulukları olarak tanınan Arap kabile gruplarının yazımında mevcut akademik eksikliklerin giderilmesine önemli katkı sağlar mahiyettedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Arab Bedevileri, Orta Doğu, Tanzimat, Aşiret Toplumları.

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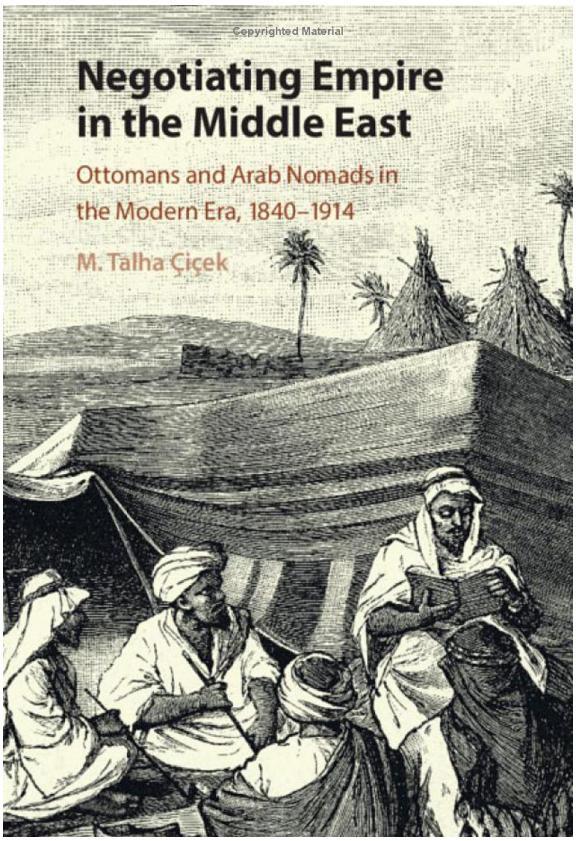

M. Talha Çiçek's *Negotiating Empire in the Middle East* is a significant and much-needed contribution that provides a rich account on the Ottoman-Shammar/Anizah interactions spanning over seven chapters addressing questions of conflict, land settlement, military fortification, taxation, judiciary, and the imperial administrative expansion. Çiçek opens by highlighting the three dominant approaches in the study of the Ottoman Tanzimat and tribal communities: The first is the centralization approach that focuses on the governmental structures, laws, and administration, and less on the peripheries and other non-governmental agents, such as the tribes in our case. Scholars influenced by frontier theories follow the second approach stressing the separation and distance between the frontiers and the imperial apparatus as well as the autonomy of the frontiers and their tribal communities. In the third approach, scholars focus on the Ottoman rhetoric and representation of tribal communities as a colonialist policy within a post-colonial framework. However, this approach fails to contrast mental framings with the actual policies and their implementations on the ground or investigate the reasons behind such constructions.

Commonly, the study of tribal communities and that of the Tanzimat reforms, separately or concurrently, focus on the modernization lens. Whereas the tribes constituted an essential target in the Ottoman reform and modernization approach, the actual implementations and developments differed in practice. The central government strove to make the tribes and their space controllable and legible via their settlement, the demarcation, and registration of their lands and space, as well as the establishment of local administration and bureaucracy, and hoped to do so from the top and through the infliction of force. However, with time, the Ottoman objectives and means have changed for several reasons, and there was an unequal geographical implementation of the reform. Rightly, the book,

> "adopts an 'equalized perspective' on empire-tribe relations... acknowledging and highlighting tribal agency in late Ottoman history. This equalized perspective interprets the Ottoman-Bedouin relations in the modern era as an amalgam of the imperial policies towards the nomads and the tribal strategies in response to them and vice versa." (29-30)

Drawing on a wide range of archival sources from the Ottoman, British, and French archives, alongside the Sharia court records of Hamma, Mardin, and Urfa, as well as private papers, Çiçek provides a rich historical account addressing the changing relationships between the Ottoman administration and the Anizah and the Shammar, and how these relationships made the history of the region between 1840 and 1914. The story begins with the migration of the two large and robust tribal confederations of the Shammar and the Anizah from Arabia to the north to Syria and Iraq, fleeing the rise of Wahhabism and seeking new pasture grounds. Their move created several developments and historical dynamics that needed to be configured by the Ottoman administration, who meanwhile was developing a particular reformist policy targeting the tribes.

The migration affected the region's local humane and ecological geography as the tribes imposed the khawwa tax on the local communities and caravans to protect them from attacks or plunder by other tribes, which led various villagers to abandon their villages and cultivated lands. The damage to human settlement and cultivation meant not only a loss for the imperial treasury from taxation, but also antithetical to the Tanzimat reform and the new imperial objectives of control, security, tribal settlement, cultivation, land registration, and increased tax collection. As a result, the first Ottoman reaction was to use force to subdue the tribes, push them deeper into the desert away from the settled areas, and stop the khawwa collection or the plunder. However, this was rather Ottoman wishful thinking.

In the first chapter, the author demonstrates the failure of the Ottoman attempts to "eliminate the tribal question" by pacifying and deporting the tribes through force. In the following four chapters, the author outlines a story of change over time and space of the changing relationship between the Ottoman administration and the Shammar and the Aniazh. Roughly, the relationship moved from the use of force (1840-the 1850s) to careful and partial collaboration that was made possible due to the Ottoman fortification of the frontiers (1860s), to be followed a the growing reconciliation and then partnership, enabled by the strength and expansion of the Ottoman administrative infrastructure, like in to Deir al-Zor and southern Syria (1870s onward). As the author adopts a relational approach, the story of change was also determined by the responses of the tribes under the leadership of their sheiks, who appear as central historical actors. The chapters demonstrate that the Ottoman history of the region was not merely a top-down one imposed from the imperial center but was instead born through constantly changing interactions and politics of negotiations by both sides. The local sheiks, like Dahham of the Anizah or Farhan of the Shammar, constituted a strong counter-force, which was at some point equal or even more substantial than the local imperial force, thus forcing the government to change its position and policy on various questions such as taxation, land use, appointments or the use of force. The replacements in the sheikhdom (for example, sheiks Hajim, Jeda'n, and Hafiz, among others) created different opportunities for negotiation and partnerships on several questions.

With the improvement of the relationships between the Shammar and the Anizah and the government, the sheiks, and their tribes, began to be better incorporated and integrated within the growing administration, judiciary, and economy, and assisted the government with the implementation of the reform, including tax collection, land settlement, and the judiciary. Chapter 6 of the book shows the sheiks as imperial agents who adopted the role of tax collec-

tors and more as negotiators who managed to convince their tribe fellows to pay a moderate tax to the government. Like taxation, the legal system and the mechanisms for resolving inter and intra-tribal disputes also emerged, as discussed in Chapter 7, thus demonstrating the radiations of the improved state-tribe relationships. The tribes continued to resolve conflicts within their tribal judicial system, and in parallel, they approached the Ottoman Sharia courts and, at times, asked the Ottoman administration to intervene in inter-tribal conflicts.

Although the author presents the 1870s as the turning point in tribal-state relations of reconciliation and partnership, it is nevertheless important to note that we can talk of tribal integration and incorporation within the state system since the 1840s and the 1850s, as illustrated in the cases of tax payments and conflict resolution and engagement with the Sharia courts. Hence, state formation took different shapes and paces, as the author demonstrates; however, not in sharp turns as hinted at times in the book. Such complex dynamics of state formation, especially in the Ottoman frontiers, were discussed in several recent works (in Ajlun, Karak, Arabia, Beersheba, Jazira, Iraq), which deserved further engagement with these works from the author's side. For example, the author makes an excellent presentation of the plurality of venues for conflict resolution in chapter 7. However, the discussion is missing the framework of legal-judicial hybridity and the interactions that dictated the evolution of particular judicial orders in the different regions. These phenomena include the Ottoman acknowledgment of tribal law, its incorporation within state-instituted tribal courts, the establishment of new Sharia courts in the new *kazalar*, and plans to institute *nizamiye* courts, all within an Ottoman allowing for particular legal deviations from the letter of the *Tanzimat* laws. Finally, as the author discusses throughout the book questions of material and immaterial Ottoman infrastructure (administrative expansion, fortification, railroad, judiciary, taxation system, weaponry), the book would have benefited from a discussion of the literature on Empire and infrastructure.

Negotiating Empire is a vibrant and highly needed book. It is an essential addition to the study of the Ottoman Tanzimat, tribal communities, the Middle East, and state formation and its legacies until the present. The book sheds essential light on questions of land settlement, cultivation, taxation, and border-making, and the history of particular sub-regions like in Deir al-Zor, Mosul, Baghdad, Urfa, Karak, Ajlun, and beyond. It also complicates the dominant narratives of the state-tribe paradigm of separation, isolation, conflict, and hostility. Despite the distance, venues of integration and contact existed. Bedouin plunder, usually highlighted to indicate a state of lawlessness, was partly conducted as a way of political maneuvering via-a-vis the government and not out of savagery. With time, the tribes of the Shammar and the Anizah made a remarkable contribution to establishing a sustained imperial order in the region, an order that evolved through conflict and cooperation and mutual recognition as the interests of both sides became closer to each other. The tribal communities began to operate within the new judicial-administrative units and venues and to make them simultaneously. The story of change is much apparent as the last days of the Ottoman Empire approached, where we could see that the same tribes who fought against the imperial army became enlisted within the same army and fought in its lines with the outbreak of the First World War. M. Talha Çiçek and *Negotiating Empire* tell a bright and articulate imperial story that should be read.