HIST 120
SURVEY OF MIDDLE EAST HISTORY

Short Essay Assignment

Please read the 1870 Ottoman Government decree contained in Akram Khater’s book *Sources in the History of the Middle East*, 19-21 (on e-reserve). This is an example of one of the Tanzimat reforms instituted by the Ottomans in an attempt to modernize their empire. What assumptions does the Ottoman regime make about the nature of civilization and the character of nomads? What purpose was this decree intended to serve? What is the historical context that might explain such a decree?

The essay should not exceed three pages, and is due Friday, December 2 in class.
3. An Ottoman Government Decree Defines the Official Notion of the “Modern” Citizen, June 19, 1870

Derived in part from knowledge about the way the French, British, and Austrian governments functioned, and in part from local needs and established customs, these Tanzimat reforms attempted to extend the reach of the Ottoman government internally while allowing it to face external threats. This document seeks to draw an irrevocable distinction between “primitive” nomadic tribes—Bedouins—and “urban” people who live in cities and villages. It makes strong value judgments about each category and provides a clear-cut recommendation for dealing with the Bedouins. Pay particular attention to the language used to describe each group, and question the characterizations. Think about likely reasons behind the creation of the two categories. Do not assume that the author is describing reality in an objective manner. What ideological motivation do you think lies behind this depiction of the Bedouin way of life?

To the model of proverbs and peers, His Excellency Firhan Pasha Zayd ‘Alwa. It is known that if one compares the tribes and people who live in the lifestyle of Bedouins [nomadic tribes] with those urban people who live in the cities and villages, one will note the complexity in the customs of city-folk. In contrast, it will be noted that in comparison to the original creation of man and his internal self, the way of life of Bedouins is simple. In fact, the primitive and original state of man is most likely the same as that of the Bedouin. However, God has graced human beings with a characteristic that is absent from any other [species]. According to this characteristic, man cannot remain in his original state of creation but should prepare all that is needed for his food, drink, and clothing, and after this he must gather knowledge and develop commerce and other human necessities. He seeks to obtain other necessities as well, and every time he reaches a stage of acquisition, then he sees the need to advance and progress beyond what he had in the past. [...] Thus, it is apparent that even if the first state of man is to be a Bedouin, urbanity is a characteristic that cannot be separated from him. For the human being has become civilized [...] and the virtues of humanity cannot be attained except through the path of urbanization and civilization. Those who surpass their brethren and control all elements of this world, completely or partially, are those who live in the cities and who are civilized.

After proving that this is the case, we would like to explain and specify the reasons those people demand to remain in this state [of being Bedouins]. They remain in this state of deprivation of the virtues of humanity and the characteristics of civilization for several reasons. The first is that these people are ignorant of the state of the world and the nations. Because of their ignorance we have

Ottoman government decree issued to the Amir of Sham, His Excellency Firhan Pasha, June 19, 1870. Ottoman archives of Directorate General of State Archives at the Prime Ministry (Tapu Tahrir Mosul, 1869–1872). Translated by Akram Khater.
found our fathers desiring to stay unchanged in the state to which they were born. Secondly, the basis of the wealth of the tribes and clans is animals—in particular camels—and since it is difficult to manage and raise animals and camels in the cities—where they cannot find pasture—the people remain in their original state of being. [...] The third reason is that the mentioned peoples are like wild animals who enjoy what they have gotten used to in terms of stealing and raiding the property of others of their own people and killing them. This has become a reason for their wildness and their insistence on staying in the state of Bedouinism. It should be obvious that the first reason—which is ignorance and illiteracy—is an ugly and unacceptable characteristic in all the creatures of this world. And the second reason is the subordination [to tradition] characteristic of animals, and it is contrary to the image according to which man was created, for God has created the human being to be the most honorable of all creatures, and He made all breathing creatures subservient to him. He who is a Bedouin has become accustomed to the opposite of this natural order, so that although he used to be over other creatures, he has become subservient.

The truth is that this fallen state is an insult to humanity, and accordingly if we investigate the immense harm these tribes cause to each other, we will find that it has no equivalence in magnitude. For the human being has been commanded to protect those of his kind and treat them well, and is not commanded to do the opposite. In fact, all the religions command this [good treatment of others], and in particular the Mohammedan Shari’a. After proving that this is contrary to what has been commanded and is prohibited in all religions and in the Mohammedan Shari’a, then anyone with intelligence will see that harming people and robbing them of their money and their cattle is contrary to humanity and Islam. He who dares to commit that which we have mentioned must be punished. In addition, we see that this implies that since living as a Bedouin [...] leads to these harmful results, then no one should stay in that state of being, especially since we have arrived at a time and epoch [...] where to stay in this fallen and immoral state of existence appears as an ugly habit in the eyes of the world. For these explained reasons, these people cannot stay even for a short period in this state, and these tribes and clans should be settled and gain good human characteristics. It is imperative upon the Sublime Government to facilitate the emergence of these moral characteristics. This is particularly the case since those tribes and clans that have been settled during the past two years have faced difficulties and material needs, and they have remained in their original state because they are deprived of access to agriculture and commerce. Thus, and in order to feed their children, they have dared to attack the fields belonging to the inhabitants of the cities and towns. And in that case the government will have to reimburse the farmers for their losses and to dispatch imperial troops to punish the perpetrators, all of which costs money. Thus, and before matters reach this state, we would advise to give the lands that extend from Tikrit [village in Iraq] to the borders of Mosul [main city in northern Iraq] and that are located east of the Tigris River to the Shamr clan. Furthermore, we recommend that these lands be designated as a Mutassarifiya [provincial gov-
government within the Ottoman Empire] and be named as Sandjak [province] of Shamr, and that they [the clan of Shamr] be settled in these lands until they dig the necessary canals to the Tigris and reclaim the lands and plant them like other people. Once it is apparent that they are settled, then this place should be designated as a Mutassarifiyya, like the Mutassarifiyya of al-Muntafak, and this Mutassarifiyya should be placed under your authority, O, Pasha! [...] Because those [people] are used to being Bedouins, and because it will be difficult to sever those ties all at once, then we should grant some of them with animals a permit to pasture their animals on some of the lands, provided that they return to their places of residence. In order to encourage development of these lands, we should exempt those who reclaim the lands and dig the ditches and canals from all but the Miri tax. [...] Once this Sandjak is formed according to what has preceded, and a Mutassarifiyya is subsequently established, then troops should be sent to keep the peace, and the Mutassarif should be assigned a deputy and a tax collector and all that he requires in terms of government officials. [...] This official Ottoman decree has been issued by the ministry of the Vilayet of Baghdad, and let it be known to all.

4. Mirza Malkum Khan Satirizes Iran’s Central Government and Religious Elites, 1880s

Like some of his contemporaries in Istanbul and Cairo, Mirza Malkum (1834–1898) was a political satirist who skewered existing political regimes and popular beliefs for their irrationality and corruption. Like writers such as Yaqub Sannu (in Egypt), Malkum was well traveled and well educated. Although he was born in Iran, he spent only ten years there. His father was a scion of the Armenian community in Iran, a community that during the nineteenth century was commercially powerful due to its connections to European mercantile interests. Malkum claimed descent from Jean-Jacques Rousseau through a distant grandmother. Malkum’s father was originally Christian; he converted to Islam for personal and practical reasons. Throughout his life, Malkum proclaimed himself a Muslim. However, one scholar (Hamid Algar) argues that this profession was insincere at best and that Malkum used his proclamation of faith as a way to hide and justify his later criticisms and attacks on the Islamic faith.

Malkum’s writings and lectures—some of which were delivered while he was living in England—seem to indicate his interest in an Islamic renaissance. Educated in France at the Armenian school from the age of ten, Malkum went on to study natural sciences and engineering, but his main focus of interest came to be political science. His studies, at least in his own opinion, made him an authority on the foundation of European civilization and on the reforms necessary for “civilizing” Iran. Usually writing from outside Iran, he was an effective critic of practices within the


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